

“Forgotten Tales” of Women Composers at London’s Royal College of Music During  
the Interwar Period

By

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## Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	iii
<b>Dedication</b> .....	iv
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	v
<b>Chapter I: Introduction</b> .....	1
Prelude: Coeducation .....	1
Institutional Histories, Microhistories, and Extraordinary Women.....	17
Resources, Methods, and Form .....	23
Cohorts and Bubbles.....	28
<b>Chapter II: Conservatories</b> .....	36
<b>Chapter III: The RCM in the 1920s</b> .....	65
Introduction.....	65
Listening to the RCM.....	70
Scholars .....	78
<b>Chapter IV: The Runaway and the Composer-in-Residence</b> .....	95
Introduction.....	95
Mary Ellen Gilson: The Runaway .....	98
Helen Hunter Glatz: The Composer-in-Residence.....	105
Conclusion.....	129
<b>Chapter V: The RCM in the 1930s</b> .....	131
Introduction.....	131
The Curious Case of the Oboe .....	136
Concerts and Scholars in the 1930s .....	147
<b>Chapter VI: The Wife, the Organist, and the Teacher</b> .....	154
Introduction.....	154
Grace Margaret Meachen: The Wife .....	163
Agnes Joan Arkell: The Organist .....	177

Shanti Seldon: The Teacher.....	187
Conclusion.....	204
<b>Chapter VII: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>207</b>
Next Steps.....	209
Courage and Sincerity .....	211
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>216</b>
Archives and Databases .....	216
Newspaper Articles.....	216
Magazines and Periodicals .....	221
Secondary Sources.....	222

## Abstract

Most scholarship on post-secondary institutions of music education foregrounds individual administrators, funding, and facilities. In this dissertation on London's Royal College of Music (hereafter RCM) during the interwar period, I flip that perspective to bring the RCM's largest student cohort – women, who from the outset outnumbered their male counterparts, yet rarely became professional musicians – into focus.

Two introductory chapters provide context for my historiographical approach and to the position of the RCM in the history of post-secondary music education. From there four additional chapters, drawing on largely unknown primary sources such as the RCM Scholar Register, document student life in each interwar decade, alternating with microhistories that detail the lives of a selection of women who pursued composition as a primary or secondary focus during their time at the RCM.

Through close readings of primary sources, including contemporary newspapers, census documents, institutional archives, and personal interviews, I document the previously unexplored musical lives of Mary Ellen Gilson (1905-?), Helen Hunter Glatz (1908-1996), Margaret Meachen Kirby (1914-1992), Agnes Joan Arkell (1920-1995), and Shanti Seldon (1915-2013). Taken together with the broader context of my analysis of the school's Scholar Register, I argue that these five "forgotten tales," to use Craig Monson's term for microhistories, reveal the profound effect student cohorts at the RCM had on individual students' professional lives. I also demonstrate that women studying traditionally "masculine" subjects like composition and woodwind performance were particularly impacted by the presence or absence of other women in their disciplinary cohort.

## **Dedication**

To my Nana, Evelyn Emma Gaboury, the most extraordinary woman I know.

## Acknowledgements

As is appropriate to its subject, this project could not have been completed without a huge community of support. I will try to list everyone here, but realistically I know I'm just scratching the surface. Susan and Sally have been my number one supporters since I moved to Madison in 2017 and I can't thank them enough. Nadia and Teri are more recent additions to my team but have both been crucial as well. Working on this degree has expanded and deepened my passion for teaching, and I want to thank my teaching supervisors David Crook, Charlie Dill, Luci Mok, and Ilana Schroeder for their valuable mentorship. Though I took a long road to get here I have wanted to call myself a musicologist ever since I first sat down in Sara Ceballos's music history survey class at Lawrence University in 2009. Sara and her LU musicology colleagues Erica Scheinberg and Julie McQuinn have profoundly affected my work for over a decade now. So has LU English professor Celia Barnes, who taught me to love primary sources and read for absurdity. I also must thank the team at the Royal College of Music library for their openness and assistance, and for their herculean efforts digitizing huge troves of institutional archives over the last several years. Without them this research would not have been possible.

I am unbelievably lucky to be surrounded by smart, funny, insightful people in my personal life as well. My college soulmate Anne and her incredible family welcomed me right into the fold as soon as I came to Wisconsin from Maine over fifteen years ago; the many warm and fabulously creative musicians I've worked with in Madison (and Appleton and Dubuque and Lacrosse!) over the last eight years; my students at UW-Madison, Beloit College, the Academy of Sound, and UW-Baraboo; my fandom communities who are always, always there for each other. And of course, since day one, my family. Carole (mom); Tony (dad); Dave (fake dad); Lori (fake mom); Amory (baby sister); a large Catholic family number of aunts, uncles, and cousins; and the woman who should be in charge of the entire world, my Nana.

## Chapter I: Introduction

### Prelude: Coeducation

The two things women needed in the world to-day were courage and sincerity, and it seemed to her that co-education had a contribution to make towards that co-operation without which we should go on making a mess of things, but with which we may instead some day make the world of our dreams.

- "Some Impressions of Coeducation," *Hampshire Telegraph*, 1 July 1938

On a Monday afternoon in late June of 1938, a meeting of the Petersfield Society of Women Citizens filled the small hall on the first floor of the Town Hall in Petersfield, Hampshire. Both the featured speaker and the moderator were women; given that the meeting fell during the workday, it seems likely that the audience was also mostly women. Mrs. Meier, the lecturer, was there to present "Some Impressions of Co-Education." She was qualified to give these "impressions," reported the *Hampshire Telegraph*, because she was the wife of F. A. Meier, the headmaster of the Bedales School. Bedales, founded in 1893 by John Haden Badley and his wife Amy Garrett Badley, became the first coeducational boarding school in England in 1898.<sup>1</sup> The Badleys ran the school for over four decades; Haden Badley officially retired as headmaster in 1935.

Despite her comparatively short tenure at Bedales, Mrs. Meier "had lived all her life in the educational sphere," wrote the paper's anonymous reporter, and was

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<sup>1</sup> James Lewis Henderson, *Irregularly Bold: A Study of Bedales School* (Deutsch, 1978), 25–26.

equipped to present “an objective point of view” on the Bedales system of educating boys and girls together. Also present at the meeting was Amy Garrett Badley, who also shared “some interesting experiences and memories of the early days of Bedales.” Neither Mr. Badley nor Mr. Meier attended Mrs. Meier’s lecture. Following a brief summary of student life at Bedales, where “the two sexes do eat, work and play together,” Mrs. Meier offered her opinion that co-education could lead women to develop necessary “courage and sincerity.”

Both “courage” and “sincerity” are weighted words, especially applied to the question of how the vast category “woman” should behave. Their relationship to the education of girls broadly is explored below. But they are also relevant to longstanding debates about female creativity and, in music, the historically privileged ability to generate original compositions. As this dissertation is an exploration of both education – specifically, conservatory training, using the Royal College of Music in London (hereafter RCM) as my focus – and the professional lives of women composers, Mrs. Meier’s words could not be more appropriate to introduce my theoretical concerns. The coeducational mission of Bedales is also more relevant to the education of women in conservatories than may be immediately apparent. In this introductory chapter, I use “courage” and “sincerity” as a way into a discussion of the history of women’s education in England. Then, I describe my primary sources, my research methods, and previous scholarship that is relevant to my project. A newspaper account of a 1935 performance at Bedales links the preceding sections to two concepts threaded throughout my dissertation: cohorts, and what I call “bubbles.” These are related but

distinct constructions that I argue can be powerful tools for analyzing marginalization in both institutions and professions.

It is important to note that in the following sections and for much of the period this study covers, the categories “woman” and “female student” are implicitly referring to white women. In general, then, when I or sources I reference use the term “women” it should be understood as “white women” unless otherwise specified. Though students of color did seek higher education in Britain during the early twentieth century, their numbers remained small, and very few studied music. Students from the Indian subcontinent, for example, made up just 0.02 percent of the total population of students in tertiary education in the 1930s.<sup>2</sup> The final substantial subsection of my dissertation centers one of these students, Shanti Seldon (1915–2013), who attended the RCM from 1936 to 1940. I chose to focus on Seldon partially because I want to complicate the assumed whiteness of female RCM students in the interwar period. Yes, most of the girls and women in secondary and tertiary education in Britain before the second World War were white, but that fact does not erase the experiences of women of color.

“Courage” seems a relatively straightforward educational goal, especially at a time when women were just beginning to break through into professional work in significant numbers. To be the first, second, or even third woman in any space that was previously the exclusive province of men would require courage. But female courage would not only benefit women. With war in Europe on the horizon once again, Britain

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<sup>2</sup> Hilary Perraton, *A History of Foreign of Students in Britain* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 57.

as a whole needed courage. Women – especially mothers – had a vital part to play in shoring up national strength. Since the twenties organizations like the Women’s League of Health and Beauty had been promoting the idea that women’s health was equivalent to “racial health” because strong, physically fit mothers could birth and raise strong sons.<sup>3</sup> Those strong sons would then serve the Empire on the battlefield; if they were strong and brave enough, Britain’s victory was guaranteed.

“Sincerity” is slipperier. Unspoken in Mrs. Meier’s prescription for women is that men already have “courage and sincerity”; that is why women need to develop these qualities to “co-operate” with men. The idea that women are not innately courageous is common even in our nominally post-feminist society, where female soldiers are still not allowed to serve in conflict in most modern armies. The “insincere” woman trope is subtler, but in some ways far older, going back to Greek mythology and the Old Testament. Enchantresses like Circe and Calypso could bring even the great hero Odysseus under their persuasive power – notably, in Calypso’s case, by her sweet singing – and the Bible is peopled with female betrayers like Delilah, Jezebel, and Salome.

Artifice and coquetry were firmly entrenched feminine stereotypes by the early modern period in Europe. In Frances Burney’s 1778 novel *Evelina*, the widow Mrs.

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<sup>3</sup> Jill Matthews, “They Had Such a Lot of Fun: The Women’s League of Health and Beauty Between the Wars,” *History Workshop Journal* 30, no. 1 (October 1990): 25. See also Chapter VII of Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890–1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

Selwyn muses to heroine Evelina that “coquet’ry” “must be inherent in our sex.”<sup>4</sup>

Conversely, “natural” or “artless” women were held up as the ideal. Burney’s explicit goal in *Evelina*, as outlined in her preface to the novel, was to create for young women a literary role model who was not “unnatural,” but a heroine who was “artless...the offspring of Nature, and Nature in her simplest attire.”<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Selwyn’s declaration that coquetry is “inherent in our sex” offends both Evelina and presumably Burney, who believed that women were just as capable of sincerity as men when given the right model.

When *Evelina* was published the movement to give girls the same educational opportunities as boys, particularly in the secondary and tertiary stages, was in its infancy in England. Education reformer Christina Sinclair Bremner wrote in 1897 that the dissolution of the monasteries (and therefore of the convent schools) under Henry VIII “dealt [women’s] education such a severe blow, that it is no exaggeration to say it passed under a cloud for 300 years.”<sup>6</sup> Bremner traced the “nadir” of women’s education to a full half-century after *Evelina*’s publication when the 1832 Reform Bill “formally disfranchised women” by specifying that “the word person must be taken to mean male person.”<sup>7</sup> However, she did acknowledge that some women with means and

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<sup>4</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina* (1778, reis. Girlebooks, n.d.), 516.

<sup>5</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Christina Sinclair Bremner, *The Education of Girls and Women in Great Britain* (S. Sonnenschein and Co., 1897), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Bremner, *Education of Girls and Women*, 12.

progressive parents could be well-educated privately in that dark age between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Women also often educated themselves; even Burney, whose father was the musicologist and public intellectual Charles Burney, scraped together her own education through self-study and informal contact with her father's intellectual circle. The fact that Frances Burney was denied a systemic, formal education is particularly interesting in light of her father's active campaign to establish a national music school for orphaned and indigent children, which is addressed in the next chapter of this study.

Mary Wollstonecraft argued in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792 that both genders should receive the same education. Though the concept was in circulation through the writings of Wollstonecraft and her contemporaries, the movement to substantially reform women's education did not have much tangible impact until the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> In the 1850s, two pioneering institutions, the North London Collegiate School (founded 1850) and the Cheltenham Ladies College (founded 1854) were established by reform-minded men and women.<sup>9</sup> According to education historian June Purvis, these schools and their imitators had to maintain a careful balance of academic rigor and "adherence to ladylike behavior." Parents would not risk

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<sup>8</sup> June Purvis, *A History of Women's Education in England* (Open University Press, 1991), 73.

<sup>9</sup> Purvis, *A History of Women's Education*, 77, 84.

spending tuition money that would make their daughters “unmarriageable” or “mannish.”<sup>10</sup>

Wollstonecraft’s ideal of coeducational secondary schools took even longer to come to fruition. As noted earlier, Bedales became the first coeducational boarding school in England in 1898. The school’s founding headmaster, John Haden Badley, was a Rugby- and Cambridge-educated socialist reformer; Badley’s wife Amy Garrett Badley, who had herself been a secondary school teacher before her marriage to Badley in 1892, was a suffragist.<sup>11</sup> Some sources name Garrett Badley a co-founder of Bedales, though neither the 1938 newspaper article that opens this chapter nor James Lewis Henderson’s 1978 history of the school identifies her as such.

In fact much of Garrett Badley’s role at Bedales is unclear. She is barely mentioned in Henderson’s account except to introduce her as part of John Badley’s biographical sketch. Her contributions to Bedales are not specifically enumerated. In her *Times* obituary, the anonymous writer states that Garrett Badley “shared the early struggles of this bold venture [founding Bedales]” with her husband, but does not detail her role further.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the *Hampshire Telegraph* article states that Mrs. Meier had “spent all her life in educational settings.” It is not clear what this means, precisely,

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<sup>10</sup> Purvis, *A History of Women’s Education*, 76.

<sup>11</sup> Henderson, *Irregularly Bold*, 16–17.

<sup>12</sup> “Mrs. J. H. Badley,” *Times*, November 16, 1956.

though Henderson characterizes Mrs. Meier as “the indomitable partner of her husband in all his work.”<sup>13</sup>

We do know that Garrett Badley was a musician; according to the same *Times* obituary, she studied at the Frankfurt Conservatorium before her marriage, and Henderson notes that she “contributed her own musical gifts” to life at Bedales.<sup>14</sup> It is not clear if Mrs. Meier had formal musical training, though an obituary for her in the *Littlehampton Gazette* notes that she was an active member of the Littlehampton Gramophone Society.<sup>15</sup> Either way, serious engagement with music was not rare among ambitious young women in nineteenth-century Britain. As far back as the turn of the century, teaching music was one of the very few careers open to “respectable” middle-class women.<sup>16</sup>

Women had access to formal training in music as early as 1823, when the Royal Academy of Music (hereafter RAM) opened in London. Its founders hoped that the Academy would train coming generations of British music professionals. Women and girls were accepted from the outset, though only to study piano, singing, and harp.<sup>17</sup> As I discuss in further detail in the next chapter, the RAM quickly became known more as

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<sup>13</sup> Henderson, *Irregularly Bold*, 86.

<sup>14</sup> Henderson, *Irregularly Bold*, 16.

<sup>15</sup> “Socialist Stalwart Dies,” *Littlehampton Gazette*, February 9, 1996.

<sup>16</sup> David C. Wright, *The Royal College of Music and Its Contexts* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 14.

<sup>17</sup> Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England, 1870–1914: Encroaching on All Man’s Privilege* (St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 80.

place for middle- and upper- class women to attain musical accomplishment than an institution producing professional performers.<sup>18</sup> Though the perception among the male musical establishment was that these RAM-trained women would never be professional musicians, the fact is that many of them did establish themselves as private piano teachers.<sup>19</sup> The “failure” of the RAM to train musicians outside of female piano teachers and amateurs became a sticking point in the 1870s and 1880s, when proposals for a rival institution – which later became the Royal College of Music – began to circulate in professional circles.<sup>20</sup>

I chose to focus on the RCM for this project precisely because anti-amateur, anti-woman sentiment so strongly influenced its founding. Though founded as a coeducational institution, in its first half century stakeholders often openly worried that the presence of women would undermine the RCM’s legitimacy as a site of professional training.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the RCM quickly became Britain’s leading institution of higher education in music for both sexes.<sup>22</sup> These two factors together put the female College student, particularly one who had been awarded a competitive scholarship, in an awkward position. An RCM education undertaken as a funded Scholar (more on this

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<sup>18</sup> Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain Since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 98.

<sup>19</sup> Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain*, 125.

<sup>20</sup> Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain*, 98–99.

<sup>21</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 75.

<sup>22</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 125.

distinction later) signaled that she should be taken seriously as a professional musician; but her very presence at the institution was perceived by some as a threat to the RCM's ability to confer professional status.

Despite these concerns that female students would dilute the College's reputation, during its first five decades women students outnumbered their male counterparts by large margins. Very early on scholarship recipients were also mostly women; however, by the four years immediately preceding the first World War, the balance had shifted to 56 percent male and 44 percent female.<sup>23</sup> In the interwar period this ratio shifted again, and women once again held the majority, making up 55 percent of scholarship recipients.

During these two decades of rapid change, an increasing number of female RCM students began to step outside the usual boundaries for women musicians of the era. Wind instruments and composition were two subjects traditionally considered inappropriate for women, but between 1920 and 1939 over a dozen women received scholarships to study flute, oboe, or composition at the College. Certain instruments and specializations were still informally and formally closed to women, however. Women were specifically ineligible to apply for double bass scholarships until the early forties, and just a single woman received a scholarship to study a brass instrument in the twenties and thirties.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain*; Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 73.

<sup>24</sup> Royal College of Music, *Prospectus, 1940–41*, 38; Royal College of Music, *Prospectus, 1941*, 9, 12.

For this project I have chosen to focus on female composers, profiling five women who won competitive scholarships to the RCM and studied composition there. I am fortunate that there is rich existing scholarship about the challenges, pressures, and obstacles faced by the “woman composer” throughout the history of Western art music. Over the past forty years, many musicologists, especially those in “new musicology” and feminist musicology circles, have made significant headway in excavating the systems that keep music by women out of the mainstream classical repertoire. Investigations by scholars like Susan McClary and Marcia Citron have exposed the ways that critics, teachers, publishers, record producers, conductors, and performers have all contributed to the “suppression of women’s [musical] writing” (to borrow a phrase from Joanna Russ).<sup>25</sup>

More broadly, though, I am interested in women composers for the simple reason that they are still so rare. Is it because the composer is constructed as an omnipotent authority in classical music, with all the assumptions of masculinity that go hand-in-hand with that construction? The rarity of female conductors – also a position endowed with institutional and creative power – is suggestive. It was widely reported in 2021 that the end of Marin Alsop’s tenure at the Baltimore Symphony left the top American orchestras entirely helmed by men.<sup>26</sup> A few months later, Nathalie Stutzmann

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<sup>25</sup> Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing* (1983, reiss. University of Texas Press, 2018). See also Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Anthony Thommasini, “A Trailblazing Female Conductor is Still Alone on the Trail,” *New York Times*, June 11, 2021.

was appointed music director of the Atlanta Symphony; but the fact that a single podium decided whether women were represented as conductors of major American symphonies indicates just how dire the situation is, even two decades into the twenty-first century.<sup>27</sup> Composers arguably have less institutional power than conductors, but their creative authority in classical music is still potent. Music composed by women is massively underrepresented in the repertoire of most professional ensembles.

According to the Institute for Composer Diversity's 2023 Orchestra Repertoire Report, music by women (living or dead) made up just 11.2% of the repertoire of 189 professional American orchestras. Still, the situation is improving. My concern is that this improvement is temporary, though, a bubble that could burst at any moment. From my perspective writing this in early 2025, it looks like the moment of rupture may have already arrived.

The interwar period is one of the first in modern history that resembles our current situation socially and technologically. Women's suffrage in 1918 and the expansion of the vote even more broadly in 1928 propelled the UK closer to today's liberal democracy than any other previous electoral reforms. Backlash against feminist and suffrage movements followed, much as backlash against LGBTQ+ rights has surfaced in the face of increasing legal protections for those groups in today's UK. This period also saw rapid progress in technology – particularly communication and sound

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<sup>27</sup> David Allen, "Nathalie Stutzmann Ushers in a New Era at the Atlanta Symphony," *New York Times*, October 5, 2022.

technology – that created a world where contact across distances was near-instant. Electrical telegraphy, which had allowed very rapid text-based communication to places as distant as the United States and India from the UK in the nineteenth century, was beginning to be replaced by a miracle of sound technology: the telephone. The ability to transmit sound over vast distances, either by wire like in telephony or by air as in radio, shaped both how we communicate and how we experience music today, and the widespread adoption of both technologies can be traced to the interwar period.

In Britain, the technological revolution in sound was led by the British Broadcasting Corporation, which by the mid-thirties was, per Jennifer Doctor in *The BBC and Ultramodern Music*, “the most important music impresario operating in Britain.”<sup>28</sup> The BBC was intimately tied to the Royal College of Music in its staffing and oversight, though relations between the College and the Corporation became strained – mostly over broadcast repertoire – by the end of the thirties. With this new technology of repeatable musical performances reaching a wider audience than ever before came new debates about what kind of music should be played where and when, and how sound broadcasting might help or hurt the ordinary person. Some, like Master of the King’s Musick Walford Davies, rejoiced in the possibilities: “if music can be defined with approximate accuracy as beauty made audible, it is thrilling to think what

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<sup>28</sup> Jennifer Doctor, *The BBC and Ultramodern Music: 1922–1936* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 332.

unheard-of good a wise broadcasting policy may now do," he marveled in 1934.<sup>29</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Constant Lambert thought that radio was more likely to create "lazy listeners" who were no longer interested in hearing anything new.<sup>30</sup> If music became aural wallpaper, listeners would become "inactive."

The BBC's music staff seems to have taken these fears to heart; as Doctor argues, in the thirties the Corporation became an influential champion of the ultra-modernist Second Viennese School. The Corporation chose to emphasize this Continental repertoire with the explicit goal of teaching the British public to appreciate "high art," to "reverse centuries of philistinism and neglect."<sup>31</sup> RCM director Hugh Allen, who served on the BBC's Music Advisory Committee, urged the BBC to instead prioritize performances of works by British composers. Adrian Boult, the Corporation's Music Director, accused his former colleague (Boult's previous position was professor of orchestral studies under Allen at the RCM) of "trying to bully the Corporation into adopting courses of action which they think would be to the benefit of the music profession, but without due regard for the Corporation's programming standards, or for the interest of the listening public." Allen's concern that British artists were being excluded in favor of foreigners, Boult believed, was unfounded. The BBC did broadcast British music – it was just that the "quality and quantity" of British music was lacking.

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<sup>29</sup> Davies, quoted in John Morris, *Music and Politics in 1930s Britain: Raise the Standard High* (Bloomsbury, 2022), 34.

<sup>30</sup> Morris, *Music and Politics in 1930s Britain*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain*, 212.

<sup>32</sup> Boulton's challenge to Allen was clear: if Allen (and by extension, the RCM) wanted more British music on the BBC, the College would have to produce cosmopolitan modernist rather than provincial nationalist composers.

Founded as a national conservatory at the height of the Victorian age, nationalism was part of the RCM's DNA. The so-called English Musical Renaissance was just crystalizing into a movement when the RCM opened in 1883, and several of the Renaissance's paternal figures were involved with the College early on. Most significantly, Anglo-Irish composer Charles Villiers Stanford joined the inaugural RCM staff as director of College orchestras and composition professor. Stanford was one of the earliest British exponents of the idea that any national school of composition must be influenced by folk music.<sup>33</sup> His students Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst codified a folk-influenced aesthetic as the hallmark of a new "British School" of composition in the early twentieth century. Vaughan Williams would succeed Stanford as RCM composition professor in 1919, further entrenching the Renaissance ethos in the British musical establishment.

At the interwar RCM, the situation for women composers was more promising than it had ever been before. The composition faculty welcomed female students, and several women won competitive scholarships to study at the College. In the late twenties there was a substantial enough cohort of female student composers that they

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<sup>32</sup> Doctor, *The BBC and Ultramodern Music*, 304.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Stradling and Meirion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance* (1993, reiss. Manchester University Press, 2001), 32.

formed an informal “Composers’ Club” to discuss and debate new music.<sup>34</sup> The core members of this club, Elizabeth Maconchy, Elisabeth Lutyens, Imogen Holst, and Grace Williams, have received significant scholarly attention in recent years. Rhiannon Mathias’s 2013 monograph *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams and Twentieth Century British Music: A Blest Trio of Sirens* has been a particularly valuable model for my work. Mathias traces her three subjects from their shared time at the RCM through their professional careers, clearly marking the places where their paths converged and diverged and how their connections with each other shaped their lives. It is a stark illustration of the importance of relationships between students developed during post-secondary study.<sup>35</sup> My work explores less well-attested subjects, but shares Mathias’s attention to networks, especially those formed at the RCM.

Lutyens, Maconchy, and Williams found professional success and a likeminded cohort at the RCM. In the decades following the second World War, however, women composers once again disappeared from College life. Between 1929 and 1936, eight women won the RCM’s Octavia Traveling Scholarship for composers; between 1937 and 1970, all Octavia recipients were men. Why was the Composers’ Club such an anomaly? How did the College’s institutional culture contribute to the emergence of the Club cohort, but fail to sustain it?

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<sup>34</sup> Rhiannon Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams and Twentieth Century Music: A Blest Trio of Sirens* (Ashgate, 2013), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams*, 20.

## Institutional Histories, Microhistories, and Extraordinary Women

An institutional history seems the logical place to look for answers to the questions posed above. Unfortunately, institutional histories of conservatories are rare, and few center the student experience. Most literature on institutions of higher education in music can be separated into two broad types. The first is the celebratory history, often commissioned by the institution and/or written by a faculty member and produced for a non-specialist audience.<sup>36</sup> These are usually slim – many are under 200 pages – and sparse on detail and analysis. In comparison, the second category, which I describe as “traditional” histories, are more scholarly in orientation. Scholars writing this type of history engage deeply with institutional archives and consciously ground their narrative in the larger historical context. There are few traditional histories of individual conservatories; as far as I am aware, less than ten have been published in the last three decades.<sup>37</sup>

Traditional histories of conservatories are often told from a narrow perspective that focuses on leadership, faculty, and capital. While this top-down approach can provide a useful periodical structure for a historical narrative, it fails to account for the

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<sup>36</sup> Examples include Dee Hanson, *One Hundred Years of Hartt: A Centennial Celebration of the Hartt School* (Wesleyan University Press, 2020); Peter McCallum, *The Centenary of the Con: A History of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, 1915–2015* (Allen & Unwin, 2015); and Michael Kennedy, *Music Enriches All: The Royal Northern College of Music: The First Twenty-One Years* (Carcagnet, 1994).

<sup>37</sup> See Andrea Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History* (University of Illinois Press, 1999); Frédéric de la Grandville, *Le Conservatoire de musique de Paris sous la Révolution et l'Empire* (L'Harmattan, 2022); and Wright, *The Royal College of Music*.

majority of the institution's population – the student body. Telling the story of the RCM by only listing its directors, major teachers, and famous alumni is like telling the story of Great Britain using only a list of kings and Prime Ministers. Even examining historical curricula, a popular topic for music theorists in recent years, can only tell us the intention of the faculty and administration and provides very little useful insight into the student perspective.

A third way to approach institutional scholarship is modeled by Henry Kingsbury and Bruno Nettl, who published ethnographies of American conservatories in 1988 and 1995 respectively.<sup>38</sup> These studies come closer to accounting for the student experience by treating schools of music as a “cultural system,” as Kingsbury puts it, thus necessarily focusing on the students as the largest constituent part of that system. However, both ethnographies are by nature contemporary, based on observational fieldwork – so how might we bring similar methodologies to a historical study? Musicologist Craig A. Monson's studies of Italian convents – which, as I discuss in the next chapter, are themselves an important part of conservatory history – provide a compelling possibility.

In the introduction to his 2010 monograph *Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art, and Arson in the Convents of Italy*, Monson explicitly aligns himself with “microhistory,” a type of “new history” developed in the 1970s as a corrective to

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<sup>38</sup> See Henry Kingsbury, *Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural System* (Temple University Press, 1988) and Bruno Nettl, *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music* (University of Illinois Press, 1995).

traditional top-down historiography.<sup>39</sup> These were intentionally small-scale, bottom-up histories of “little people” rather than kings and politicians; the concept quickly spread abroad. Perhaps the most famous title in this tradition is Natalie Zemon Davis’s *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983), a detailed account of the trial of a peasant soldier in sixteenth-century France. Microhistories like *Martin Guerre* “search for answers to large questions in small places” by taking seriously the lives and agency of individuals.<sup>40</sup> From his first monograph (1982’s *Voices and Viols in England, 1600-1650: The Sources and the Music*) it is fair to say that Monson has been “fascinate[d] with the particular,” as historian Thomas Cohen put it in a 2017 roundtable on the present state of microhistory.<sup>41</sup> In *Nuns Behaving Badly* Monson presents himself as a “*topo d’archivo*,” an “archive mouse” who spent day after day in the reading room at the Vatican Secret Archive “sifting” through unorganized folders of clerical correspondence for “the odd detail of musical information.” Instead, he found “forgotten tales” of nuns that were “too compelling to consign back to archival oblivion.”<sup>42</sup> I titled my project after this conception of microhistories as “forgotten tales” because it evocatively describes why I

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<sup>39</sup> Craig A. Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art, and Arson in Italy’s Convents* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 22.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Robisheaux, ed., “Microhistory Today: A Roundtable Discussion,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 47, no. 1 (January 2017): 9.

<sup>41</sup> Robisheaux, “Microhistory Today,” 11.

<sup>42</sup> Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly*, 2, 7.

chose my specific subjects. The female composition students who I profile in this dissertation have been “forgotten” – they are not unknown or invisible.

I was not physically present at the RCM long enough to become its resident archive mouse. However, my engagement with the materials I collected there (now aided by the technological marvel known as the smartphone camera) has been distinctly rodential. I have metaphorically chewed on hundreds of pages of student records, finding the slightest purchase in a street name or a birth date or a set of initials. Sometimes my efforts came to nothing, even with all the resources available to me; I could never track down much about a student composer named Constance Spencer, for example, because she shared a name with a competitive swimmer about a decade her junior. But this kind of problem is the price of approaching the RCM from the vantage point of the archive mouse. I could have conducted my research from “without,” finding students who emerged into the public consciousness and tracking them back to the RCM. Instead, I chose the opposite path.

In choosing my subjects I have also been mindful of Gerda Lerner’s admonition that histories of “extraordinary women,” much like traditional institutional histories, do little to advance our understanding of the reality of women in the past.

The first level at which historians, trained in traditional history, approach women’s history is by writing the history of ‘women worthies’ or ‘compensatory history.’ Who are the women missing from history? Who are the women of achievement and what did they achieve? The resulting history of ‘notable women’ does not tell us about the significance of women’s activities in society as a whole. The history of notable women is the history of exceptional, even deviant

women, and does not describe the experience and history of the mass of women.<sup>43</sup>

The women whose lives I study are by some definition “exceptional” simply because they studied composition at the RCM. But even those who had professional careers in music labored in varying degrees of obscurity, during their lives and after their deaths. In his 2019 monograph *The Royal College of Music and Its Contexts*, David C. Wright suggests that these accomplished women Collegians became “hidden” musicians, “conform[ing] to the typical social expectations of their time, confining their career to...local contributions (husband permitting, in the case of those who had married).”<sup>44</sup>

Ruth Finnegan’s ethnography of amateur music in the village of Milton Keynes, *Hidden Musicians*, provides Wright’s terminology here, but her focus is on fully amateur groups like Wolverton Light Orchestra and its “mainly self-taught conductor from the local railway works.”<sup>45</sup> Neither Wright nor Finnegan fully grapple with women who occupied the space between distinguished professional and unpaid hobbyist, or, for that matter, with women who were professionally active but did not receive critical attention for one reason or another.

My project complements David Wright’s College history mentioned above. Where Wright “seek[s] to place the RCM within the wider artistic, educational and

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<sup>43</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 145–46.

<sup>44</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 150.

<sup>45</sup> Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 45.

social contexts that have conditioned its student training,” I look to a specific moment and specific student outcomes to untangle some of the many threads that make up an institution.<sup>46</sup> This is not to say that Wright’s study lacks specificity or attention to students and their experience. His long relationship with the College and its archives make his monograph a rich, meticulously documented study. Though he describes the College archive as “not always...an obliging source of information,” his work in synthesizing this sometimes recalcitrant mass of information is invaluable for smaller, more focused projects like my own.

Wright begins with a description of the RCM building’s facade, one that “looks a place of significance and serious endeavor.”<sup>47</sup> This rhetorical move is characteristic of traditional institutional histories; buildings, finances, and leadership are convenient organizing principles for projects as vast as condensing over a century of history into one monograph. After his introductory comments on the RCM’s physical location, the rest of the history is divided into four large parts (“Building and Consolidating: 1883–1914,” “Renewal and Conventionality: 1919–1960,” “Changing Musical Cultures: 1960–1984,” and “Into Its Second Century: 1984–2018”). Wright includes a full chapter on the students of the early RCM (Chapter 2), but later generations of Collegians are relegated to subsections. As part of my aim with this project is to augment the subsection dealing

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<sup>46</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 21.

<sup>47</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 1.

with scholarship students in the interwar period, Wright's study provides an ideal jumping-off point for my work.

### **Resources, Methods, and Form**

To find my subjects and ground them within their specific cohort, I turned to the RCM Scholar Register. The Register contains a detailed entry for each student who received a full-tuition scholarship to the College, bound in a series of folio-sized volumes with a form for student information on each page. The RCM's Registrar or his assistants filled out these forms by hand; some individuals were more thorough than others in this task. However, the basic information for most students is complete, including birthdate, address, father's name and profession, scholarship name, and course of study. Some entries also include examination scores and diplomas or degrees awarded. I consulted the Register at the RCM Library in London, photographing all entries for students entering the College between 1920 and 1940. After transferring them into a spreadsheet, these Scholar Register entries became the spine of my research. They provide both a bird's eye view of the RCM's student population during the interwar period and a space for granular analysis.

The Scholar Register only includes students who applied for and were granted financial support from the RCM and its associated scholarships and bursaries on the basis of skill. Though some of these awards are more properly called "Exhibitions," I will refer to this funded cohort collectively as "Scholars." These grants were need-blind

and based on auditions and examinations. Some paid for tuition fees only; others included “maintenance,” or living stipends. Many students became Scholars after spending time at the College as paying students, while others were only able to continue their studies by applying for renewal of their funding. Each year the College offered between ten and fifteen Foundation scholarships, open to all students and courses of study, and a roughly equal number of scholarships which drew on outside funding. There were funds specifically for soldiers (the Kneller Hall scholarship), students from Norfolk and Norwich, “girls” studying singing or composition (the Carlotta Rowe Scholarship), and scholarships named after donors like the Savage Club, the Royal Amateur Orchestral Society, and philanthropist Arthur Heywood-Lonsdale.

This choice to limit my study to Scholars means that I am dealing with information about just under 600 students, which allows for both meaningful broad data analysis of information like course selection and place of origin, as well as investigations into individual Scholars’ post-RCM lives. If I were to try to project the lives and careers of fee-paying students as well, I would have more than twice as many names to contend with – and, crucially, my data would be flooded with students who likely had little intention of making music a career. Additionally, these data do take into account students who began as fee-payers and, perhaps discovering that their skill was sufficient to support a musical career, applied for and were awarded funding to further their professional aspirations.

While the raw data about RCM Scholars in this project comes from a source only available in physical form, much of the contextual information that forms my subject

narratives was only accessible to me through newspaper digitization. The existence of searchable digital databases like the British Newspaper Archive (hereafter BNA), Gale Primary Sources, and ProQuest Historical Newspapers made this research possible. Though the text-recognition and thus the power of the search function in these databases is far from perfect, simply being able to browse by date through papers like the *Alton Gazette* and the *Times of India* proved invaluable. It must also be noted that these digital archives cannot and do not provide a complete picture of press activity in the period covered; however, their accessibility and searchability make them a powerful research tool when tackling a multifaceted project like mine.

Similarly, the RCM Library team, by digitizing the full *Royal College of Music Magazine* (hereafter RCMM) archive and making it publicly available on the Internet Archive, have opened up a rich vein of inquiry for any scholar interested in the RCM's culture. I have used the RCMM archive here as supporting material for my biographical studies and to provide a snapshot of RCM concert life in the interwar period, but multiple book-length studies could easily come from engagement with this extensive tranche of information. Concert programs are only a small facet of what the RCMM has to offer; each volume also contains reviews, guest articles on a wide variety of musical topics, and reports on student social life. In other words, the RCMM is not only key to understanding College performance culture but provides valuable insight into the social and professional lives of students and alumni.

Another notable RCMM feature is the "Collegians Abroad" section, which appeared in every issue of the RCMM to detail the post-College activities of alumni.

These alumni updates showed the impact of Collegians on music nationally and locally, reinforcing the RCM's importance as a national institution. The relationship between institutions and students is often discussed in terms of student outcomes, where "successful" alumni as a collective reflect positively on the institution's training methods. What defines success for a musician is hard to quantify, but a functional definition might go something like "a person who has a notable professional career in music." A "professional" musical career is most broadly one where a person earns a living from music in some capacity. They can work as a teacher, a performer, a composer, or – most commonly – some combination of the three. RCM alumni from the interwar period, across identity categories, had wildly varying degrees of success in their professional musical careers, and filled a huge range of roles in those careers. That said, there were, and still are, significant limitations on the kind of professional career a woman can have in music.

But for this project "success" is just one factor. Some of the women I bring into focus are more "successful" than others; however, all at some point fit the parameters of "professional musician." Most importantly, all left some trace in the public historical record. They appear in newspapers, periodicals like the *Musical Times*, and magazines like the *RCMM*. My interest lies in what stories were told about them in these records, and what part their College education played in shaping those stories. Were they identified primarily by their RCM affiliation? A few of my subjects were first covered by the press when they were still College students, and the degree to which that status was emphasized varies. Others only appear in newspapers after graduation, both with

and without mention of their time at the RCM; the significance assigned to their ties to the RCM reflects on the individual and the institution.

In my subject narratives I closely analyze the language used in press coverage of my subjects. I highlight specific descriptors of my subjects and their music – “pretty girl pianist,” “a pupil of Vaughan Williams,” “neat and unselfconscious,” among others – to voice the unspoken assumptions in how these women’s stories were told during their lifetimes. From this hyperspecific examination larger circles emerge. One level out from language is immediate context: what part of the publication does the subject appear in? Zooming out further, what kind of paper is it? What is its audience? A notice about a charity concert in the back pages of a local weekly is quite a different animal than a featured story in a major metropolitan daily, or a review in a periodical aimed at professionals. Each of these examples has a different circulation, but more importantly they have different legacies. The charity concert notice is easily missed, both at the time of publication and by subsequent preservation and research efforts. A feature, especially in a large newspaper, is often preserved in several different ways. Larger publications invest in their own archives, storing – and now, digitizing – past stories using well-funded best practices. Where relevant to my subject I point out these distinctions in type and visibility of coverage.

My dissertation takes a chronological form. Following a short chapter describing the history of the “national” conservatory, the main body of this work is in two parts. The first part focuses on the 1920s and the second on the 1930s. Both sections are composed of two chapters: first, an overview of the Scholar cohort at the RCM during

that decade, followed by a chapter containing two to three narratives of the lives and careers of individual composition Scholars. The Scholar overview chapters analyze data gathered from the RCM Scholar Register, the RCMM, and contemporary media reports on activities at the RCM. In the narrative chapters, I flesh out the biographies of female composition students who have not previously received focused study.

### **Cohorts and Bubbles**

Though Bedales and the RCM had much in common – both were coeducational, founded in the late Victorian age, and were animated by reformist ideals – a strong connection between the two institutions did not develop until the 1930s. Harry Platts, a former RCM student, became music director at Bedales in 1933, and by the middle of the decade the school's English master, Geoffrey Crump, was staging musical dramas in collaboration with RCM composers and performers. On one notable occasion in March of 1935, a cast of "Old Bedalians" (alumni) performed a one-act original play called *The Lovers*, which Crump had created in collaboration with RCM alumnus and composition professor Patrick Hadley. A small orchestra of RCM students performed Hadley's music. The ensemble was mostly women – of the thirteen string players, just three were men, and even in the traditionally-male wind section women outnumbered their male

colleagues.<sup>48</sup> Few of these performers went on to well-documented professional careers; however, two are pertinent to this dissertation project.

The first notable participant in the Bedales performance of *The Lovers* was Helen Gaskell, listed as the orchestra's sole oboist. Gaskell was never an RCM student, though her early professional success inspired a significant cohort of RCM oboists in her immediate wake. After attending St. Paul's School in Hammersmith, where music master Gustav Holst encouraged her to take up the oboe, Gaskell won a scholarship to study with Leon Goossens at the RAM. By 1927 she was performing with Sir Henry Wood's Promenade orchestra; once the BBC Symphony was established in the 1930s she became a member of that ensemble. She spent the rest of her professional career at the BBC, retiring in the mid-1960s.<sup>49</sup> For much of her tenure she was the only female oboist, and often the only female woodwind player, in the orchestra. The other leading London orchestras were no better; in the thirty years of Gaskell's professional career, less than a handful of women played in the oboe sections of the London Symphony Orchestra or the Philharmonia Orchestra.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "The Union of Drama and Music – Original Play at Bedales," *Hampshire Telegraph*, March 29, 1935.

<sup>49</sup> "Obituary: Helen Gaskell," *Times* (London), October 14, 2002.

<sup>50</sup> See Nicholas Kenyon, *The BBC Symphony Orchestra: The First Fifty Years, 1930–1980* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1981); Stephen Pettit, *Philharmonia Orchestra: A Record of Achievement, 1945–1985* (R. Hale, 1985); and "Former Members of the London Symphony Orchestra," LSO, 2021.

There was a brief period early in her career, however, when Gaskell was not the only female oboist working in a professional London orchestra. Gaskell's teacher Goossens also taught at the RCM, where he found himself training an ambitious and highly skilled group of women in the late twenties and early thirties. These five women, who all studied with Goossens between 1927 and 1935 (Sylvia Spencer, Evelyn Rothwell, Natalie Caine, Margaret Eliot, and Joy Boughton) had their earliest professional experiences deputizing for and assisting Goossens and Gaskell in London orchestras. Caine explicitly cited Spencer, the earliest of Goossens's female RCM students, as an inspiration for Caine becoming an oboist. It seems likely that Gaskell provided a similar model for the entire cohort.<sup>51</sup>

Mrs. Meier implied that girls would learn "courage and sincerity" from direct contact with their male classmates at Bedales. The group of female oboists at the RCM in the thirties also learned the courage to pursue an unusual career from direct contact with Gaskell and Spencer. In other words, Gaskell and Spencer's presence created this small cohort. That said, only Gaskell held a professional orchestral position for a long period. Her colleagues faded from the scene in dribs and drabs over the course of the thirties; Spencer and Rothwell both married and left London, while Caine, Eliot, and Boughton returned to freelancing (especially in chamber music settings) after brief stints with London orchestras.<sup>52</sup> None of them left the music profession entirely. But

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<sup>51</sup> Amanda Karen Dusold, "The Oboe Is a Lady: The Legacy of Britain's Female Professional Oboists, 1920-2000," (DMA diss., University of Maryland College Park, 2020).

<sup>52</sup> Dusold, "The Oboe is a Lady."

they did not have the stable, visible presence that Gaskell had in the BBC Symphony, week after week and year after year.

In the early thirties it might have looked like the oboe was on its way to becoming a “woman’s” orchestral instrument like the harp before it; by the end of the decade, this was obviously not the case. The BBC Symphony had Gaskell, of course, but the principal oboe was a man, as were the oboists of the London Symphony and the Philharmonia. Therefore I suggest that the early thirties cohort of female oboists should be understood as a “bubble” rather than part of an inevitable push toward full inclusion of women in professional orchestras.

Bubbles do not emerge from nowhere; the medium that makes up the bubble must be pre-existing. An injection of force stretches the medium, pushing some of it above the surface for a few moments before the structure collapses, unsupported. The woman oboist bubble could not have happened without the combination of high-level music education for women, which progressive secondary schools and the royal schools of music provided, and the professional example set by Gaskell and Spencer. Just these two actors, however, could not permanently alter the structure of the British professional classical music scene. Without a continuous infusion of support the bubble was destined to pop. To extend the liquid metaphor a bit further, a cohort avoids becoming a bubble when it is sustained by consistent support; it becomes moving water. Once water is in motion it might encounter resistance, but now it has enough mass and force to push past or erode obstacles.

Much as musicologists like Leo Treitler have argued regarding music historiography in general, the story of musical women in Europe can not be accurately represented as a single, forward-moving stream.<sup>53</sup> Before the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, female musicians in the Western world were predominantly performers. They were further restricted by commonly-held assumptions about which musical activities were appropriate for their sex; more often than not singing was the only acceptable form of professional music-making for women.<sup>54</sup> Any type of public performance, however, put the female performer at risk of being perceived as a sex worker.<sup>55</sup> These limitations on women's musical expression created their own kind of bubble, one with a long temporal range but very little impact on the overall musical culture. Because so many professional avenues were barred to musical women, very few received the training to become composers as well as performers. This meant that women produced comparatively few musical works. When they did compose, they were also often limited by lack of access to performing forces, so the music they produced was restricted to "domestic" genres like solo keyboard pieces, accompanied

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<sup>53</sup> Leo Treitler, "What Kind of Story is History?" in *Music and the Historical Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>54</sup> Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, eds., *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950* (University of Illinois Press, 1987), 5, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Bonnie Gordon, "The Courtesan's Singing Body as Cultural Capital in Seventeenth-Century Italy," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (Oxford University Press, 2006), 189.

songs, and educational music.<sup>56</sup> Rather than a time-bound bubble (like the RCM oboe bubble), this one was quantity-bound and genre-bound.

Sitting with Gaskell in the pit for *The Lovers* was violinist-composer Margaret Meachen, who had recently (or would soon – the exact date of publication is not clear) published two songs for voice and piano. In March of 1935 Meachen was in her final term of study at the RCM, where she had won several prizes for both performance and composition. Just twenty years old and already a published composer, she seemed to have the world at her feet. But no further publications followed. By 1941 even Meachen's performance career had faded, and after the War she is nearly untraceable.

Publication, argues Marcia Citron in her 1993 monograph *Gender and the Musical Canon*, was one of the surest ways for a composer to secure their legacy between the mid-eighteenth century and the advent of sound recording. She writes

A published piece of music is a document, a physical object. It can be held, referred to, analyzed, and reproduced visually in an exact form. Moreover, publication offers the work to the public in a way quite different from manuscript circulation or non-circulation: the potential for permanence and for broad recognition.<sup>57</sup>

Reproducibility is the key concept here. Canons are self-perpetuating; they “replicate their encoded values in subsequent exemplars” through performance, publication, and anthologization.<sup>58</sup> Canonization can only occur through a matrix of “cultural variables”

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<sup>56</sup> Diane Jezic, *Women Composers: The Lost Tradition Found* (City University of New York, 1988), 1-2.

<sup>57</sup> Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 109.

<sup>58</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 15.

which “embody the value systems of a dominant cultural group.”<sup>59</sup> In the case of Western classical music, that group was – and still is – white middle- and upper-class cisgender men. That said, published music does not self-reproduce in the absence of other canonizing actors; the music must be generically and stylistically aligned with existing canonic values. As I discuss in my biography of Meachen in Chapter VI, Meachen’s published music apparently did not fit the needs of the canon.

Citron’s exploration of how canons reproduce themselves provides insight into why bubbles are not always indicative of a larger trend or even a reversal in the status quo. A school, group, or style cannot self-perpetuate without the confluence of several factors. Institutional support is critical, especially for creating continuity across generations of students and faculty. Many types of institutional support can benefit marginalized groups like women composers; for example, frequent concert performances of their music, commissions, and radio broadcasts can all perpetuate a composer’s legacy. Publication is also important, as it allows music to be disseminated and preserved beyond the studio and concert hall.<sup>60</sup> Direct mentor-mentee contact between established and aspiring female composers is also vital. Several of the composers interviewed in Jennifer Kelly’s 2013 collection *In Her Own Words* remark on the importance – and in many cases, the lack – of women composers as mentors to

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<sup>59</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 19–20.

<sup>60</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 108.

younger women.<sup>61</sup> If women composers are not hired to teach in institutions of musical higher education, then female composition students will not have the opportunity to form mentorship relationships with their predecessors.

All roads lead back to the institution. Despite the ubiquity of a conservatory education among today's professional musicians, the concept of institutional music education is fairly recent. Schools founded in the nineteenth century like the RAM and RCM are some of earliest examples of conservatory education as we know it. Furthermore, because the RCM was founded specifically as a "national" conservatory, its history is intimately entwined with nationalism and imperialism. In the next chapter, I recount the origins of the national conservatory concept from early modern Italy through the RCM's establishment in late Victorian Britain. This provides further context for the RCM's institutional culture in the interwar period and situates the College in a larger conservatory tradition that continues to the present. In addition to describing the intersections between music education and nationalism, I also expand on my earlier discussion of gender and education. Nationalism, education, and gender, I demonstrate, were all significant factors in the development of conservatories writ large and the RCM specifically.

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<sup>61</sup> See Jennifer Kelly, *In Her Own Words: Conversations with Composers in the United States* (University of Illinois Press, 2013), 17, 19, 131, 299, 396.

## Chapter II: Conservatories

Five years before the Royal College of Music opened in 1883, the editors of the *Musical Times* wrote:

If the proposed "Royal College of Music" is to be another "Royal Academy" or another "National Training School" on a larger scale, we think it will be a failure. Comparing State institutions with private institutions generally each of the two existing schools we have named can only be classified as neither one thing nor the other; and as such, they may both of them work better on a comparatively smaller scale under the immediate supervision of their respective principals. If the promoters of the "Royal College of Music" contemplate any improvement on the Paris Conservatoire, then Sir George Bowyer and his friends who are "startled" at having to pay for the purposes of musical education the fifth part of the price of an ironclad or probably the tenth part of the price of a steelclad of the future, will have yet another grievance of more weight than the one they have pounced upon. Separating the interests of Art from the question of the private feelings of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and dismissing from our minds all ultra-magnificent views, there is not one of us who would not second in every possible way the project of a "Royal College of Music," if the thing is to be truly a State institution well endowed, and not a sham...<sup>1</sup>

The reference to warships is notable. Ironclad and steelclad ships were the heart of British imperial power and thus were symbolic of imperial achievement. Conceiving of the cost of music education as equivalent to "the fifth part of the price of an ironclad" implies that there is something of imperial value in music education. Provoked by Sir George Bowyer's October 1878 missive to the *Times* lamenting that "we are spending 100,000 a year on teaching singing to children in elementary schools," the *Musical Times* editors hit on a longstanding tension in music education: is music education a private

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<sup>1</sup> "Sir George Bowyer on Musical Education," *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 19, no. 429 (1878): 586.

concern or a public one?<sup>2</sup> If it is a matter of public – that is, state – concern, that means that the government is responsible for training its musicians in a national, public system. In other words, would the return on investment in training musicians be the same as the imperial value of an ironclad ship? Continental examples like the Paris Conservatoire, discussed below, suggested the answer was yes. Unspoken in the *Musical Times* editorial, however, was the concern that the people most likely to take advantage of public music education were women.

Until the nineteenth century, music education in Britain had been a mostly private matter. Native British professional musicians, both men and women (though women were scarce), were taught by apprenticeship to music masters, often a family member. Middle class amateur music was primarily the province of women, with wives, mothers, and daughters providing both domestic entertainment for the family and musical education to children. The wealthiest middle and upper class amateurs could afford private music tutors, who were often from abroad.<sup>3</sup> In other words, there were clear delineations between professionals and amateurs that mapped on to well-worn tropes of masculinity/femininity and self/other: “true” professionals were British men (foreigners could be professionals, but they were a threat to the native Britons), and amateurs were foreign-taught women, the archetypal Other. If a public, national school of music were to be established, an existential question had to be resolved: what

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<sup>2</sup> George Bowyer, “Musical Education,” *Times* October 16, 1878, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain Since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 19.

kind of musician should the school train? Was it of national importance to train amateurs as well as professionals, even if they were women?

This question colored attempts to create a national music school in Britain from the late eighteenth century to the founding of the Royal College of Music (hereafter RCM) in 1883 and into the twentieth century. It was still the heart of debates over the future of the institution through the interwar period and beyond. Major changes faced the College in the interwar years: student demographics shifted as access to secondary and tertiary education expanded in the 1910s and 1920s; demand for nationally-recognized credentials increased as professional standards tightened; and musical careers became more and more specialized. As I demonstrate in later chapters, the RCM's reaction to these changes was underpinned by the amateur/professional debate.

The idea of a national conservatory had been in the air for over a century in Britain when the *Musical Times* editors responded to Bowyer in 1878. Music historian Charles Burney had developed a plan for a national music school as early as 1774.<sup>4</sup> He drew heavily on the Venetian *ospedali* and Neapolitan *conservatori*, which trained abandoned girls and boys respectively in music. As the Italian institutions he saw on his travels were part of each city's social welfare network, Burney brought his proposal to the London Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury. Established by philanthropist Thomas Coram and two dozen peeresses in 1741, the Foundling Hospital admitted orphaned or

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<sup>4</sup> Burney visited continental Europe several times; his documented visits to Venice and Naples were in August and November of 1770, respectively. See Burney, *The Present State of Music in France, Italy, and Spain*, 145, 301.

abandoned infants and housed them until they could be apprenticed in a trade as teenagers. Burney began his proposal to the Foundling Hospital Governors by invoking Empire:

At a Time when the British Empire seems to be arrived at its Zenith of Glory & Power: renowned in Arms, flourishing in Commerce, & respected by all Europe for its progress in the Sciences, & encouragement of almost every Useful as well as Ornamental Art, the cultivation of which has done Honour to humanity, it is not easy to account for the Neglect of Music, as a *Profession*, a Profession which not only requires great private application, but Public encouragement, and a well digested System of Education to render its students at once useful to themselves, & an ornament to their country.<sup>5</sup>

For the Empire to reach its full cultural power across all realms, Burney claimed, Britain must cease to “depend upon others for things within our own power.” Instead of employing foreign musicians, who “usually carried [money] *out* of the Kingdom,” Britain should invest in training native musicians, who would keep their earnings within the British economy. The symbolic power of musical achievement was also not lost on Burney, nor was the social utility of a stable “School” of artistic style. In Italy, he argued, the *conservatori* and *ospedali* supplied excellent singers to all public churches, creating an environment where “permanency & duration are given to Style, to Taste, Simplicity & propriety, which caprice & a rage for Novelty, banish from other places.” English church singing was, in Burney’s view, “a disgrace to our Religion & our Country”; a steady supply of systematically-trained musicians would remedy this dire situation. Hearing skilled singers in parish churches across the country would also be

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Burney, “Sketch of a plan for a public music-school,” Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library Osborn c39.

morally improving, instilling in “Every Clown & Country Girl...Taste & Expression” even if only “by mere power of Imitation.”

Burney’s plan followed the Italian model quite closely. Like the London Foundling Hospital, which was granted royal charter but financially supported by aristocratic patrons, the Italian conservatories were essentially religious charities where orphans were trained in a useful trade. Nominally under the control of the secular government, the four Naples *conservatori*, where boys were trained for careers in music, were funded primarily by donations from wealthy citizens and governed by voluntary boards of elites.<sup>6</sup> Everyday life at these institutions was deeply entwined with religious observance; each had an attached church, and most of the teaching Masters were priests.<sup>7</sup> The Venetian *Ospedali Grandi*, which became famous for their female singers, the *figlie di coro*, also had close ties to the Church. All four *ospedali* were modeled after and run as monasteries, following “closer [to] the Rule of St. Benedict than [the] fully-developed medieval monasteries,” as Jane Berdes argues in her landmark study of the *ospedali*.<sup>8</sup> However, Vanessa Tonelli points out that “[a]lthough the *Ospedali Maggiori* followed Catholic paradigms and expected spiritual devotion of their wards, they were

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<sup>6</sup> Vanessa Tonelli, “Le Figlie di Coro: Women’s Musical Education and Performance at the Venetian Ospedali Maggiori, 1660–1740,” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2022), 24.

<sup>7</sup> Michael F. Robinson, “The Governors’ Minutes of the Conservatory S. Maria Di Loreto, Naples,” *R.M.A. Research Chronicle* 10 (1972).

<sup>8</sup> Jane L. Baldauf-Berdes, *Women Musicians of Venice: Musical Foundations, 1525–1855* (Clarendon, 1996), 55.

not monasteries or convents."<sup>9</sup> *Ospedale* residents were temporary inhabitants, not postulants, and their lives were neither as regulated nor as cloistered as nuns'.

Specifically, the *figlie* of the *ospedali* were allowed to perform music in public, a privilege forbidden to Venetian nuns.<sup>10</sup>

The type of training given to boys in Naples and girls in Venice, and the careers they were able to pursue as a result of that training, were markedly different. In Venice, the girls at the *ospedali* were taught musical basics – scales, intervals, and some harmony – for the purpose of performing the compositions of their (male) *maestri* at a high level. Many *figlie* spent their entire lives in the *ospedali*, so their musical education focused on the skills that could best serve the institution: singing and playing instruments. Even those who had access to more advanced educational materials, such as the fifteen pedagogical manuscripts from the *Ospedale della Pieta* discussed in Tonelli's dissertation, would not have been encouraged to use their knowledge for composing original works.<sup>11</sup> The *ospedali*'s fame and fortune lay in their singers, the "absolute nightingales" who drew travelers from all across Europe – like Burney – to Venice.<sup>12</sup> A few might attempt composition, but performance was their primary duty.

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<sup>9</sup> Tonelli, "Le Figlie di Coro," 29.

<sup>10</sup> Tonelli, "Le Figlie di Coro," 30.

<sup>11</sup> Tonelli, "Le Figlie di Coro," 226.

<sup>12</sup> Burney, "Sketch of a Plan," 156.

As is often the case with performers in a world before recorded music, the fame of even the most lauded *figlie* did not last beyond their lifetime; instead, the best-known figure associated with the *ospedali* today is composer Antonio Vivaldi, music master at the *Pieta*. Many students of the *conservatori* have been preserved in the canon of music history, however. Domenico Cimarosa, who later became one of the eighteenth century's most popular composers of *opera buffa*, was just one example.<sup>13</sup> Other notable *conservatori* alumni include Giovanni Paisiello, Nicola Porpora, and Giovanni Battista Pergolesi. These men left behind a written record (their compositions) as well as a public profile as music masters — teachers as well as composers, performers, and conductors. Their musical world was wide; they had the opportunity to write in many genres, travel to foreign countries, and communicate and collaborate with musicians from across Europe. Despite their public performances in Venice, the *figlie* of the *ospedali* led circumscribed, mostly private lives. Unless they married (which could also severely limit their horizons), they would spend their lives either in the *ospedali* or even further enclosed in a convent.

The key difference between the training at the Neapolitan *conservatori* and the Venetian *ospedali* was succinctly summarized by Burney, though he mistakenly uses the term “*conservatorio*” for both types of institution:

There are three Conservatorios in this city, for the education of *boys* who are intended for the profession of music, of the same kind with those in Venice, for *girls*. As the scholars in the Venetian Conservatorios [*ospedali*] have been justly

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Gjerdingen, *Child Composers in the Old Conservatories: How Orphans Became Elite Musicians* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 32.

celebrated for their taste and neatness of execution, so those of Naples have long enjoyed the reputation of being the first *contrapunctists*, or composers, in Europe.<sup>14</sup>

The recently much-discussed *partimenti*, a kind of guided improvisation exercise designed to teach the grammar of counterpoint, formed the better part of boys' musical education.<sup>15</sup> In Naples, boys were indentured to the *conservatorio* (usually for seven to ten years) and were expected to become professional church or court musicians by the end of their studies. Boys who studied *partimenti* gained facility in both improvisation and composition, which were required skills for serving either secular or sacred patrons. This training proved to be so effective at producing competent professionals that parents from across the economic spectrum wanted to have their talented male children educated at the conservatories; so in the mid-seventeenth century, the Neapolitan institutions began accepting paying pupils in addition to orphaned boys.<sup>16</sup> But even the indigent boys like Cimarosa could rise far above their humble origins on the strength of their musical skill.

Despite Burney's attempted Foundling Hospital scheme, no "national" musical training institution was opened in England until 1823. The Philharmonic Society, an

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<sup>14</sup> Burney, "Sketch of a Plan," 303–304.

<sup>15</sup> It is hard to overstate how popular investigations into *partimenti* have become in music studies over the last two decades. Perhaps the most vocal advocate of reviving *partimenti* for music education has been Robert Gjerdingen, who has written two monographs (*Music in the Galant Style*, 2017, and *Child Composers in the Old Conservatories: How Orphans Became Elite Musicians*, 2020) on the subject.

<sup>16</sup> Gjerdingen, *Child Composers*, 21.

association of professional musicians founded in 1813, were developing a plan for a London conservatoire for the better part of 1822, but were “outmaneuvered” by “a group of noble amateurs” under the banner of the Royal Academy of Music, hereafter RAM.<sup>17</sup> This group, led by recently appointed privy councilor Lord Burghersh, brought the conservatoire scheme royal imprimatur, though not government funding.

Burghersh was himself drawn into the RAM plan by French-born harpist Nicholas Bochsa, who Leanne Langley has found “suggested the idea of a ‘Royal’ music academy to Burghersh, and...proposed himself as the best person to run it.”<sup>18</sup> Langley argues that the involvement of the “highly experienced...con artist” Bochsa was the key flaw in the RAM’s early years.<sup>19</sup> “[F]ar from signaling some nascent musical vitality in Britain,” writes Langley, the foundation of the RAM was “so badly executed” that it “struck inside observers with shock and dismay.”<sup>20</sup> Before the RAM even opened its doors in 1823, public reception of this new Academy was skeptical; in September 1822 a *London Magazine* commentator called the administration of the proposed RAM “oligarchical” and likely “to disgust both the public and the profession.”<sup>21</sup> But Boschsa’s professional bonafides seem to have charmed his aristocratic patrons; he was, after all, a graduate

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<sup>17</sup> Leanne Langley, “Sainsbury’s Dictionary, the Royal Academy of Music, and the Rhetoric of Patriotism,” in *Music and British Culture, 1785–1914: Essays in Honor of Cyril Ehrlich*, edited by Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley (Oxford University Press, 2000), 78.

<sup>18</sup> Langley, “Sainsbury’s Dictionary,” 76.

<sup>19</sup> Langley, “Sainsbury’s Dictionary,” 77.

<sup>20</sup> Langley, “Sainsbury’s Dictionary,” 66.

<sup>21</sup> “Report of Music,” *London Magazine* 6, no. 33 (September 1822): 274.

(and a first prize-winner in harmony) of the Paris Conservatoire, the most successful and prestigious national conservatory in Europe to date.

The Paris Conservatoire, instituted by the revolutionary First Republic in 1795, cast a long shadow over music education in the nineteenth century. While many European governments attempted to found their own “national” conservatories, the fact was that the Conservatoire was an institution run entirely on government funding; any government unwilling to take on the full financial burden of training musicians would not be able to create their own Paris, or compete with the original. The Conservatoire was tuition-free for most students, endowed entirely by the French government; public competitions and student concerts also raised revenue and interest in the Conservatoire and its mission. Admission was by competition and examination, and students were subject to a rigorous and highly standardized curriculum.<sup>22</sup> In her study of French music culture in the century before World War II, Katherine Ellis calls the Conservatoire’s “founding rationale” “utilitarian”; it served “as a training ground for musicians whom the state needed for festivals, bands, and theaters.”<sup>23</sup> Just as Burney had hoped that a musical training school would serve the public interest by providing orphans with a “useful” profession that would “ornament” the Empire, the Paris Conservatoire’s graduates were put to use as sonic representatives of the nation.

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<sup>22</sup> Gustave Chouquet, “Conservatoire de Musique,” in *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by George Grove (Macmillan & Co., 1900), 391–394.

<sup>23</sup> Katherine Ellis, *French Musical Life: Local Dynamics in the Century to World War II* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 33.

Both boys and girls were admitted to the Conservatoire (initially in equal numbers), and the first piano professor was the remarkable H el ene de Montgeroult.<sup>24</sup> But Annegret Fauser reminds us that this putative “equality” was cosmetic at best; the prevailing rhetoric in the early Republic relegated women to “Republican motherhood,” thoroughly confined to the domestic sphere.<sup>25</sup> Male and female pupils at the Conservatoire were taught separately (by primarily male teachers), and at its inception women were only allowed to study and compete in keyboard instruments and singing, pursuits suitable for entertaining and raising a Republican family. Other courses for women were added throughout the nineteenth century. A girls’ class in “harmony and practical accompaniment” was instituted in 1813, for example, but women could not study counterpoint, composition, or written harmony until the 1860s.<sup>26</sup> Most significantly for aspiring women composers, women were also excluded from the Prix de Rome composition competition until 1903.<sup>27</sup> This honor, bestowed annually by the Academie des Beaux-Arts, brought winners both public prestige and financial remuneration, though not every laureate went on to high-profile musical careers. Even so, the stamp of approval from the musical establishment and the financial incentive

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<sup>24</sup> Rebecca Dowd Geoffroy-Schwinden, *From Servant to Savant: Musical Privilege, Property, and the French Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 129.

<sup>25</sup> Annegret Fauser, “‘La Guerre en dentelles’: Women and the ‘Prix de Rome’ in French Cultural Politics,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 88.

<sup>26</sup> Fauser, “‘La Guerre en dentelles,’” 89.

<sup>27</sup> Florence Launay, “Les musiciennes: de la pionni re adul e   la concurrente redout e,” *Travail, genre et soci t s* 19, no. 1 (April 2008): 55.

meant that women were eager to become eligible for the prize; several women made attempts to enter the competition in the latter half of the nineteenth century before they were finally awarded entrance in the early twentieth.<sup>28</sup>

Conservatoire education was oriented around individual professors, who were each responsible for a group of about twelve students. This organization of instruction roughly corresponds to the current studio system in force at most public and private university music schools. Unlike our current one-on-one mode of delivering lessons, however, Conservatoire professors taught in small groups, usually of three or four students at a time. Students did receive some private instruction from the professor's assistant, but only in technical studies such as scales, arpeggios, and etudes.<sup>29</sup> These assistants, called *repetiteurs*, were often former students and former prizewinners.<sup>30</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century, several cities in continental Europe established conservatories with curricula based on the Paris model. Even so, a Paris Conservatoire education remained the most sought-after qualification for young musicians, to the point that the Conservatoire at times actively excluded foreign students due to concerns that they were crowding out natives.<sup>31</sup> Conservatories in Vienna (founded 1817) and

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<sup>28</sup> Fauser, "'La Guerre en dentelles'," 90.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Timbrell, *French Pianism: A Historical Perspective* (Amadeus Press, 1999), 29.

<sup>30</sup> See Michael Masci, "Reconstructing the Paris Conservatory's Cours d'Harmonie 1812–1844: Discipline, Sources, Theory, and Method," *Music Theory Online* 28, no. 4 (December 2022) and Timbrell, 40.

<sup>31</sup> Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain*, 83.

Berlin (1822) were, like Paris, supported by national endowment, while a group of Bohemian counts funded a music school in Prague that began operation in 1808.<sup>32</sup> These institutions, though diverse in size and funding sources, retained much of the core mission of their French predecessor: students from all socioeconomic backgrounds could apply and receive a musical education on the basis of skill[s], demonstrated through examination.<sup>33</sup>

The most widely influential of these continental schools was the Leipzig Conservatory, opened in 1843. Initially supported by a grant from a private philanthropist but established “with Royal authority” by King Frederick Augustus of Saxony, the Conservatory admitted students on the basis of an entrance examination and charged a modest yearly tuition.<sup>34</sup> Felix Mendelssohn was the driving force behind this school, applying for the funding to establish it and serving as its first leader.<sup>35</sup> In her dissertation on American students at Leipzig, Joanna Pepple identifies Mendelssohn’s “personality...as the founder” as one of “four main reasons that allowed

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<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that the Conservatory in Vienna suffered financial difficulties, however, and did not receive full financial support from the government until the early twentieth century.

<sup>33</sup> Joanna Pepple, “Americans at the Leipzig Conservatory (1843–1918) and Their Impact on American Musical Culture,” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2019), 71.

<sup>34</sup> Leonard Milton Phillips, “The Leipzig Conservatory: 1843–1881,” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1979), 84.

<sup>35</sup> Mendelssohn never accepted the title of “Director” but was the acknowledged leader of the institution until his death in 1847. See Pepple, “Americans at the Leipzig Conservatory,” 74.

the Leipzig Conservatory to succeed.”<sup>36</sup> Mendelssohn and the Conservatory’s early leaders instituted a curriculum that, like the Neapolitan *conservatori*, placed the “scientific” study of harmony as equal or even superior to applied instrumental performance. On the Conservatory’s inaugural prospectus, an outline of the theory curriculum appears first, which Pepple argues “undergirds the prominence that Mendelssohn and the Direktorium placed upon theoretical instruction.”<sup>37</sup> Besides the “rigorous three-year program of theoretical study,” students could choose a focus in piano, singing, or orchestral instruments. “Private” study, as in Paris, was given in group lessons, a decision touted in the prospectus: “Through participation of several students in the same lesson industry and emulation is promoted.”<sup>38</sup> This statement on group instruction continued to appear on Conservatory prospectuses into the twentieth century.<sup>39</sup>

Group instruction was also the standard operating procedure at the RAM throughout the nineteenth century. The bad blood created by Burghersh and Bochsá’s preemption of the Philharmonic Society’s conservatoire scheme, as well as the school’s lack of public endowment, however, meant that the RAM attracted few distinguished teachers. After an ignoble start where the RAM committee publicly requested – and was

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<sup>36</sup> Pepple, “Americans at the Leipzig Conservatory,” 73.

<sup>37</sup> Pepple, “Americans at the Leipzig Conservatory,” 88.

<sup>38</sup> Leipzig Conservatory Prospectus (1843), quoted in Pepple, “Americans at the Leipzig Conservatory,” 88.

<sup>39</sup> Pepple, “Americans at the Leipzig Conservatory,” 89.

equally publicly rebuffed – by several eminent musicians, most of the faculty were “obscure natives” rather than the “eminent foreigners” courted by the founders.<sup>40</sup> “Absurdly limited” instructional time, again stemming from the Academy’s inability to remunerate teachers properly, was another difficulty facing the RAM. The author of the RAM’s first prospectus, R. M. Bacon, complained that Academy instruction consisted of “two lessons of 18 minutes each in duration per week – about the time (not quite) afforded by masters to the little Misses in the commonest boarding schools.”<sup>41</sup>

Bacon’s reference to “little Misses” points to a discursive trend among late 19th-century musicians that framed female music students as an existential threat, often utilizing a discourse of disease and concerns about public health. As late as 1919 the Musical Association (the earliest British musicological society, founded in 1874 by John Stainer) hosted a lecture by a member of the Association’s board who argued that the mere existence of musical women of any status, professional or amateur, “injure the art.”<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, he claimed that women who believed themselves to be musical were suffering from a mental illness, citing an unnamed “American alienist” who reported “that there is an undue proportion of organists among the [female] patients.”<sup>43</sup> Even in France, where male Conservatoire pupils still outnumbered their female

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<sup>40</sup> “Report of Music,” 273; Frederick Corder, *Royal Academy of Music Centenary Souvenir*, quoted in Ehrlich, 81.

<sup>41</sup> Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain*, 84–85.

<sup>42</sup> J. Swinburne, “Women and Music,” *Proceedings of the Musical Association* 46 (1919–1920): 34.

<sup>43</sup> Swinburne, “Women and Music,” 29.

counterparts in Paris, one regional Conservatoire director worried that the prevalence of female pianists was a “real epidemic [*véritable épidémie*].”<sup>44</sup> Leipzig-educated composer Stanford took the position that while recent developments in British music were promising, an increase in the number of women in the profession was cause for grave concern. Ehrlich summarizes Stanford’s view as such:

An ‘epidemic’ of scholarships had resulted in the profession’s overcrowding, and increasing domination by women, because men are ‘obliged to take to professions which pay or promise a career, and to shun those which do not’. English musical institutions were becoming ladies’ schools, the men “confined to departments for which there is a market and a demand, the orchestra and the organ loft”.<sup>45</sup>

While the use of “epidemic” again invokes the specter of disease, the most intriguing word here is “confined.” “Confinement,” in addition to its literal meaning of imprisonment or forceful marginalization, was also a common euphemism for pregnancy and childbirth well into the twentieth century. Men being “confined” to the orchestra and the organ loft implied that female dominance in the profession was feminizing to the few remaining male musicians.

Stanford found himself in a position to combat this “epidemic” with his appointment in 1883 to the newly-formed RCM. During his tenure he famously refused to teach female composition students, with a few exceptions.<sup>46</sup> Housed in the South

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<sup>44</sup> Ellis, *French Musical Life*, 41.

<sup>45</sup> Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain*, 113.

<sup>46</sup> Violist-composer Rebecca Clarke reported that she was Stanford’s “only girl pupil,” but Liane Curtis notes that he had actually taught two other women before Clarke (Liane Curtis, ed., *A Rebecca Clarke Reader*, 171). Nevertheless, Stanford himself perpetuated the idea that he “always

Kensington complex developed for the imperial Exhibitions of the late Victorian era, the RCM was meant to correct the perceived deficiencies of the RAM. While not itself part of the Exhibitions, the impetus for founding the RCM came from the Society of Arts, which was heavily involved in the planning and execution of the Exhibitions and the construction of the “Albertopolis” complex in South Kensington. Well aware of the Academy’s precarious position, in the 1860s its leaders turned to the Society of Arts for a study on how the RAM might, going forward, be in “a position to realize the hopes of its founders, by subserving the purposes of a National School of Music.”<sup>47</sup> The Society of Arts, founded in 1753 as the “Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacture, and Commerce,” and granted a royal charter in 1847, was a charitable body which supported “the improvement of manufactures, commerce, and arts,” usually through “an improved education.”<sup>48</sup> In addition to their longstanding interest and support of education, member Henry Cole’s successful management of the 1851 Exhibition had boosted the Society’s cultural credibility, so they were a natural choice for a report on how to improve the only national music education institution.

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refused to take female pupils,” which he repeated to Margaret Nosek, who studied with him in 1916. See Margaret Nosek, “From a Destroyed Autobiography (Part II),” *Royal College of Music Magazine* 80, no. 1 (September 1984): 33.

<sup>47</sup> Rosemary Golding, “The Society of Arts and the Challenge of Professional Music Education in 1860s Britain,” *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 134.

<sup>48</sup> Extract from the Charter quoted in the “Address to the First Ordinary Meeting” of 1853–1854 given by Harry Chester, Chairman of Council, *JSA* 2, no. 52 (November 18, 1853): 2, quoted in Golding, “The Society of Arts,” 131.

The results of the Society of Arts report were grim; length as well as breadth of musical study were a major concern. The report's authors also found that the RAM did not require sufficient harmony, counterpoint, and general musicianship courses. Student retention was also a poor; many RAM students stopped their Academy training as soon as they were able to earn money performing, curtailing their musical development and flooding the market with minimally trained musicians.<sup>49</sup> The writers of the report also criticized the physical location of the Academy – in fact, the Society recommended that the RAM apply to move to the South Kensington complex – as it lacked a theater space for opera performances. But the largest problem identified by the Society of Arts remained the lack of direct financial support from the government. This support would not be forthcoming, and the Academy declined to move to the Albertopolis.<sup>50</sup>

The Society of Arts, however, remained interested in promoting a national conservatory, for much the same reasons as Burney espoused in the previous century. When the RAM and its new principal, Sterndale Bennett, remained recalcitrant, the Society took on establishing a new music training institution itself. The Society opened the National Training School for Music (hereafter NTSM) across the street from the Royal Albert Hall in 1876 with composer Arthur Sullivan as principal. After five years, the Society intended to transfer administration of the School to “a grateful

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<sup>49</sup> Golding, “The Society of Arts,” 140.

<sup>50</sup> Golding, “The Society of Arts,” 146.

government;” unfortunately, the NTSM replicated the problems of the RAM, hemorrhaging money and failing to implement a coherent training course, and at the end of the five-year experiment the government was feeling neither generous nor grateful.<sup>51</sup> David Wright attributes the failure of the NTSM primarily to Sullivan’s reluctant and often absentee management of the School.<sup>52</sup> Wright also sees the NTSM’s focus on producing teachers rather than performers as evidence for its inability to replace the RAM, which was itself already turning out plenty of teachers.<sup>53</sup> As at the RAM, piano and voice were the most popular courses of study, which also reflected the number of fee-paying women enrolled.<sup>54</sup> In other words, the presence of amateurs – women – tainted the whole enterprise.

In the interim, however, the Prince of Wales had found himself “virtually obliged” to create a new national conservatory due to some ill-timed public remarks. In 1878, the Prince’s brother-in-law Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein initiated talks to merge the NTSM and the RAM as a “Royal National College.” Assuming that this planned merger would come to fruition, the Prince of Wales announced his Presidency of an institution that would provide a “complete course of professional training

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<sup>51</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> David C. Wright, “The South Kensington Music Schools and the Development of the British Conservatoire in the Late Nineteenth Century.” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 130, no. 2 (2005): 246.

<sup>53</sup> Wright, “The South Kensington Music Schools,” 242.

<sup>54</sup> Wright, “The South Kensington Music Schools,” 248.

extended over several years” in July of the same year. When the NTSM-RAM plan fell apart shortly afterward, the Prince was left, as Wright puts it, “uncomfortably exposed.”<sup>55</sup> As the NTSM project wrapped up in 1882, the Prince declared his intention to found a Royal College of Music in South Kensington.<sup>56</sup>

The Prince tasked bureaucrat and dictionary author George Grove with raising the capital for this endeavor; Groves’s success at “making the case for the College” may have also led to his appointment as the RCM’s first Director.<sup>57</sup> However, the fact that Grove was not a professional musician provoked “suspicion that the College was a plaything of its aristocratic benefactors, a finishing school for drawing room amateurs,” Wright argues.<sup>58</sup> Presumably these “drawing room amateurs” were understood by skeptical professionals like Stanford to be women and girls. Perhaps to counter the idea that the College would become a “finishing school,” Grove made what Wright calls “one of his most consequential RCM appointments,” bringing Stanford to the RCM as both composition professor and director of the College orchestra.<sup>59</sup> Stanford’s tenure at the RCM would outlast both Grove and his successor Hubert Parry; he continued to teach at the College through the First World War and into the 1920s.

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<sup>55</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 5–6.

<sup>56</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 5–6.

<sup>57</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 33.

<sup>59</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 9.

Though obliged to take fee-paying students from the outset to balance their budget, the Prince and Grove modeled the RCM's curriculum and governance after Continental examples. They instituted a system of first and second studies, with the most revered teachers like Jenny Lind taking on the first study Scholars only, while more junior professors taught second study pupils.<sup>60</sup> All students were also examined yearly in their first and second studies, as well as musicianship subjects like harmony and ear training. In order for a College education to be considered "complete" a student typically needed a Grade III or higher (the scale was from I-V) in the first study subject.<sup>61</sup> Institutional scholarships, discussed in more detail below, were by default tenable for three years, because it usually took three to four years of in-College instruction to achieve these grades. Some students stayed on much longer, however, either because their scholarships were continuously renewed or because they were able to afford the tuition fees.

Grove set the annual College tuition at £40, and it remained at or slightly below that amount until the late 1930s. Students coming from outside of London would have also needed to find housing, which Wright estimates would cost about £60 per annum, bringing the total cost of an RCM education to around £100 per academic year. These were steep costs for the vast majority of Britons; during the College's first several decades, less than ten percent of the population had yearly income amounting to more

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<sup>60</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 27.

<sup>61</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 80.

than £160.<sup>62</sup> Scholarships, therefore, even ones that only covered tuition, were of paramount importance if the RCM was to be a truly national institution which trained the nation's most proficient and deserving musicians.

From the College's founding through the interwar period, two primary types of scholarships were awarded: "Free Open Scholarships" and "Free Close (or Local) and Special Scholarships." The former guaranteed at least one year of full tuition, and some included maintenance. They were "open to all classes of His Majesty's subjects" and were awarded "by competitive examination only."<sup>63</sup> Close or local scholarships were also awarded by examination and had similar monetary value to the Open scholarships; the main difference between the two was that Close scholarships were funded by private donors who could choose to delimit the kind of student eligible. For example, in 1925 the Royal Amateur Orchestral Society specified that their scholarship, which came with free tuition and £52 annually for maintenance, could only be granted to students who were related to or endorsed by current performing members of the Society.<sup>64</sup> In addition to Open and Close scholarships, the College also offered a variety of other financial awards that current students could apply to tuition. Exhibitions and Special Scholarships were the most remunerative type, usually reducing annual fees by half or

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<sup>62</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 56.

<sup>63</sup> RCM Prospectus 1925–26, 20–21.

<sup>64</sup> RCM Prospectus 1925–26, 31. I am not able to pinpoint the exact date of the establishment of this scholarship, but from *Musical Times* records it dates to at least 1913 if not earlier.

more, but medals and prizes could also be quite substantial.<sup>65</sup> Though technically not a scholarship, the Associated Board Exhibition was comparable to an Open scholarship in that it “provided free Musical Instruction similar to that given to Scholars,” could be awarded to incoming students, and was tenable for multiple years.<sup>66</sup>

The British post-secondary education system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was quite different from the one we are familiar with today. Only a few institutions were empowered by royal authority to grant degrees, including Oxford, Cambridge, and the University of London, and even fewer exercised this power. A 1937 pamphlet designed for overseas students planning to pursue higher education in the United Kingdom provides a clear description of British tertiary education in this period:

The period of study required for a first degree is, in Arts, ordinarily three, in other faculties three to six sessions. Certificates and diplomas are granted after one or more sessions. Examinations are held at periodical intervals. Except in the case of the University of London which grants external as well as internal degrees, attendance at the institution granting the degree, diploma or certificate is required. External students of the University of London are examined by the University but they are free to study privately or to follow a course of instruction in London or elsewhere.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Violists or cellists could defray more than half of their yearly tuition with an Alexander Gift of £21, for example (RCM Prospectus 1925–26, 42).

<sup>66</sup> RCM Prospectus 1925–26, 35.

<sup>67</sup> “Higher Education in Great Britain and Ireland,” (University Bureau of the British Empire, 1937): 33–34.

The example of the University of London is key. London was unusual in that its degree examinations were open to external, non-matriculated candidates. In other words, a recognized university graduate qualification in the UK required several elements: first, the institution had to have and wield degree-granting power; second, students needed to matriculate and study at the institution for some period of time (which varied by student, course, and university); third, the student had to pass a degree examination given by their institution. Though the university was the degree-granting body, constituent colleges within the university set their own courses of study, which could vary considerably. The same pamphlet summarizes this relationship thus:

The function of the Colleges in regard to students is to provide lodging, corporate life and personal tuition, while the function of the University is to provide public instruction by means of lectures and demonstrations, examinations leading to degrees and facilities for research.<sup>68</sup>

Degree examinations were designed to show that the candidate had received what we would now call a “liberal arts” education, with both breadth of knowledge and command of logic and rhetoric. At Cambridge the “Tripos” examination style, developed as early as the seventeenth century and still used today, tested degree candidates in such a way that “no one [could] anticipate a question, for in the course of five minutes he may be dragged from Euclid to Newton...”<sup>69</sup> Both ancient universities – Cambridge and Oxford – “trained mostly future gentlemen, pastors, and civil servants”

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<sup>68</sup> “Higher Education in Great Britain and Ireland,” 7.

<sup>69</sup> William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 131.

for much of their history, according to education historian William Clark.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, a residential university degree was outside the means of the vast majority of the British population because it required not only money for tuition but “leisure” time to study for these comprehensive degree examinations.

Under this system vocational institutions like the RCM would not be expected to grant traditional “degrees” as such. Instead, the College offered “diplomas” by examination. Unlike university degree examinations, diplomas did not require any knowledge outside the student’s professional specialization. Diploma examinations for music, like the “Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music” (hereafter LRAM) offered by the RAM starting in 1882, were narrow and subject-specific. The LRAM test took just half an hour, and any person able to pay five guineas could be examined. Naturally, many more people took the LRAM examination than actually attended the RAM; the same was true of the RCM credential, the Associate of the Royal College of Music (hereafter ARCM) once it was instituted in the 1890s. Diplomas also opened up a revenue stream for the College and Academy; like the LRAM, the ARCM assessed a fee of five guineas for each candidate. Better yet, the profit ratio was much more favorable to the institutions when they only had to pay examiners for the time spent examining candidates, rather than also teaching said candidates.

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<sup>70</sup> Clark, *Academic Charisma*, 132.

In his 2021 monograph *Making the Grade*, education historian James Elwick describes the late Victorian era as the “age of examinations.”<sup>71</sup> This growing interest in academic examinations as barriers to professional status — part of a larger move toward professionalization of middle-class occupations — created both opportunities and difficulties for British musicians as they struggled to define a professional identity. By the late 1880s many diplomas by examination were available for aspiring musicians; in addition to the LRAM and ARCM there were several music diplomas offered by Trinity College, London, and dozens of “diploma mills” with suspect credentials and low standards.<sup>72</sup> It was the latter type that concerned leaders in the music profession the most. They worried that the “legitimate” diplomas offered by the chartered royal schools of music would be perceived as just more letters; composer Sir Frederick Bridge acidly remarked that some musicians “might as well put the whole alphabet after their names.”<sup>73</sup> Under this threat of delegitimization, as well as increasing competition from Trinity College, the two Royal schools formed a unified examining body called the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (hereafter ABRSM) in 1889. Though each institution continued to offer its own professional qualifications (LRAM and ARCM), the Associated Board oversaw nationwide “local” examinations for children and pre-professionals. In this way the Board buttressed the standing of the Royal

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<sup>71</sup> James Elwick, *Making the Grade: Victorian Examinations and the Rise of Standardized Testing* (University of Toronto Press, 2021), 25.

<sup>72</sup> Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain*, 116, 191.

<sup>73</sup> Bridge, quoted in Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain*, 120.

schools of music by creating a systemic infrastructure for measuring progress in music education.<sup>74</sup>

Another worrying trend in music diplomas for leaders in the profession, including Stanford and the editorial staff of the professional journal *Musical News*, was the number of women taking – and passing – these examinations, and thus receiving professional credentials. However, at least in the early years of the RCM, there was still a widely-held belief that these women were not a true threat to male professionals, as most of them would quickly marry and leave the workforce.<sup>75</sup> This perception was not seriously challenged until the first World War – another reason that the interwar period is an especially fruitful focus for study.

Wright asserts that “in the three decades leading up to the outbreak of the First World War, the RCM came to be seen as the musical centre of the nation, and therefore of the Empire.”<sup>76</sup> Both the College’s financial resources and its ties to the “‘great and good’ of British public life” made this possible, Wright argues.<sup>77</sup> Public concerts featuring performances by RCM students also made a positive impression; by the first decade of the twentieth century the *Musical Times* concert critic felt that excellence was to be expected at College performances. “The choral and orchestral concert by the

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<sup>74</sup> For more on the ABRSM, see David C. Wright, *The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music: A Social and Cultural History* (Boydell, 2013).

<sup>75</sup> Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain*, 125.

<sup>76</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 125.

<sup>77</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 121.

students at the Royal College of Music on the 15th ult.," wrote an anonymous reviewer in March 1904, "was as usual most praiseworthy and reflected great credit on both pupils and professors."<sup>78</sup> In just two decades, Grove, Parry, and the RCM Council had succeeded at establishing a musical training institution central to British musical life.

The wartime years represented an anomalous break in the College's overall trajectory, especially when it comes to gender. With most young men overseas fighting or otherwise supporting the war effort, the RCM student body quickly became almost entirely female.<sup>79</sup> Therefore it is difficult to assess the gender dynamics of the student cohort during the war years. The RCM of the interwar era was both firmly established as a national institution and facing massive social and cultural change that directly affected the College and its students. These changes were in many cases catalyzed by the war, but the effects were not apparent for some years after Versailles.

The impact of the Great War on gender relations was especially significant for young Collegians. I spend the introductory section of the next chapter discussing the changes in the status, perception, and concerns of British women – particularly middle- and upper-class white women, who were the majority of RCM students – from the pre-war to post-war period. Then I describe the public-facing institutional culture of the RCM in the 1920s through analysis of College concert programs. In the chapter's final

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<sup>78</sup> "The Royal College of Music," *Musical Times* 45, no. 733 (March 1904): 182.

<sup>79</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 146.

section, I shift my focus to the RCM's Scholar cohort, illustrating how this group was impacted by the larger musical culture, the institutional culture, and their classmates.

### Chapter III: The RCM in the 1920s

#### Introduction

As the College's thirty-year anniversary approached, records show that at least among Scholars, male students were gaining ground. Between 1909 and 1913, men accounted for 56 percent of the entering Scholar cohort. Less than a quarter of the overall student body were Scholars, however, and among fee-payers women outnumbered men by nearly five to one. David Wright argues that this gender imbalance posed "something of an image problem" for the College: the number of women being trained at the RCM "could be taken to suggest that music was more a woman's occupation than a profession suitable for the male wage-earner."<sup>1</sup> The contrast between "woman's occupation" and "male wage-earner" is notable, implying that even if a woman were "occupied" in music, it would not be the professional endeavor of a "wage-earner."

This "image problem" was not remedied by the massive casualties of the first World War, which obliterated male majorities in many places, including among RCM Scholars. Government support for surviving servicemen to recommence their education helped bolster the number of male students immediately post-War, but overall women

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<sup>1</sup> David C. Wright, *The Royal College of Music and Its Contexts* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 75.

Scholars outnumbered their male counterparts throughout the following decade.<sup>2</sup> As I discussed in Chapter I, in the twenties the pre-War margins were essentially flipped – male Scholars averaged about 45 percent of the Scholar cohort, and women 55 percent.

The year 1919 brought two men to the RCM who would have a huge impact on the College’s culture. Hugh Allen became Director that year and appointed more than two dozen new professors, including Ralph Vaughan Williams. This new generation of hires developed at the College what David Wright describes as

a body of staff and students who shared disturbing wartime experiences (Vaughan Williams and Arthur Bliss were notable examples of each category) and this comradeship generated across the RCM a clubbable atmosphere of musical endeavor that was often remarked upon.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the “notable examples” invoked here are both men. What about women? Were they invited to this “clubbable atmosphere”? What about their wartime experiences? As Susan Kingsley Kent describes in her monograph *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Postwar England*, women also had world-altering wartime experiences.<sup>4</sup> Women who were not directly involved in the war effort felt that “a barrier of indescribable experience” was built between them and their loved ones on the battlefields, while women who did work at the front, primarily as battlefield nurses,

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<sup>2</sup> Up to two percent of the UK’s total population died in the first World War; of the six million British men mobilized for the War effort, one in eight were killed. See J.M. Winter, “Britain’s ‘Lost Generation’ of the First World War,” *Population Studies* 31, no. 3 (1977): 449–66.

<sup>3</sup> David C. Wright, “The Home-Grown Composer After the First World War,” in *Vaughan Williams in Context*, ed. Julian Onderdonk (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 209.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 54.

found themselves feeling “a comradeship that overrode all distinctions of gender.”<sup>5</sup> In the aftermath of the war, however, this comradeship transformed into something threatening. Kent writes:

The perceived blurring of gender lines occasioned by war’s upheaval led many in British society to see in a reestablishment of sexual difference the means to re-create a semblance of order... Britons sought to return to the “traditional” order of the prewar world, an order based on natural biological categories of which sexual differences were a familiar and readily available expression.<sup>6</sup>

It seems unlikely, then, that the “clubbable atmosphere” of postwar brotherhood included female students or faculty. That said, musicologist Erica Siegel has argued that Allen and Vaughan Williams had a net positive impact on the College experience for women. Allen’s “progressive views on women and education” saw the number of women studying composition increase.<sup>7</sup> And unlike Stanford before him, Vaughan Williams was both willing to teach female students and believed that “women were not only as capable as men in their ability to compose, but equally entitled to the same professional opportunities.”<sup>8</sup> There is also evidence, further detailed in Chapter IV of this document, that Allen and Vaughan Williams tried to leverage their professional networks in favor of female Collegians.

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<sup>5</sup> Kent, *Making Peace*, 63.

<sup>6</sup> Kent, *Making Peace*, 99.

<sup>7</sup> Erica Siegel, “Women,” in *Vaughan Williams in Context*, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Siegel, “Women,” 41.

The world beyond the College was not so eager to welcome women into professional life. In 1920, Ethel Smyth observed that

[M]en...are combining to prevent women from earning their livelihood in this and that sphere, notwithstanding the fact that if prosperity is to be restored in this country, every ounce of its working power must be utilized.<sup>9</sup>

1919 also brought the Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act, requiring many employers to dismiss or demote wartime workers in favor of returning soldiers – by which Parliament made it clear that the women who had joined the workforce during the war were merely temporary replacements for men.<sup>10</sup> Though Smyth and the radical suffragists she aligned with fought against efforts to push women out of the public sphere, a strain of “defensive” feminism also emerged following the war.<sup>11</sup> Almost single-minded investment in gaining the vote pushed prewar feminists together under a unifying cause, but the pressures of postwar life exposed fractures in the women’s movement.<sup>12</sup> Kent argues that many British feminists moved toward a feminism that celebrated inherent sex differences and sought to “safeguard women’s interests.”<sup>13</sup> Though this form of feminism plays into essentialist tropes, it should be noted, Kent argues, that this movement can also be seen as proto-intersectional, in that the women

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<sup>9</sup> Ethel Smyth, *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth* (Viking, 1987), 344.

<sup>10</sup> Johanna Alberti, “‘A Symbol and a Key’: The Suffrage Movement in Britain, 1918–1928,” in *Votes for Women*, ed. Sandra Holton and Jane Purvis (Taylor & Francis, 2000) 273.

<sup>11</sup> Kent, *Making Peace*, 114.

<sup>12</sup> Alberti, “‘A Symbol and a Key,’” 275.

<sup>13</sup> Kent, *Making Peace*, 117.

involved were asking for recognition that women's lives and experiences were also valuable, even when they were not the same as men's. This proto-intersectional posture also allowed feminists to broaden their base from the middle to the working class.<sup>14</sup> A defining project of these feminists was "family endowment" (or government stipends for mothers), which they believed would increase the power and status of women and close the wage gap as it alleviated economic pressure on men.<sup>15</sup> Rhetoric around this program, however, solidified the identification of women with motherhood and childbearing as the only possible "product" of women in society.

Even if a woman were to take up "arts and professions," wrote suffragist Maude Royden in 1917, "the average woman will generally be in other walks of life not an expert but an amateur." Women's expertise was instead in "human life."<sup>16</sup> Any profession she might attempt would be an occupation rather than a living, inherently secondary to her true profession in the home. This was the social environment facing the more than 130 women who entered the RCM as Scholars between 1920 and 1929. The fact that they competed for and received financial aid in order to hone their musical skills indicates that they intended to enter the musical profession in some capacity; they were not dilettantes.

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<sup>14</sup> Kent, *Making Peace*, 118.

<sup>15</sup> Kent, *Making Peace*, 119.

<sup>16</sup> Kent, *Making Peace*, 126.

## Listening to the RCM

In his first Director's Address of the twenties, given on January 5th, 1920, in the College's Concert Hall, Allen began with a quotation from the Bible.

Those of you who know the Psalms (as all organists of course do, and all who go to church regularly should do) will remember the verse, "Having eyes they see not, having ears they hear not." These words, of course, were said of idols, but they are equally applicable to some people who cannot see what is under their noses or hear what is going on around them. They are particularly appropriate to some people who apply themselves to music most devotedly and yet have not learnt to use their eyes and ears in it.<sup>17</sup>

Using your eyes and ears correctly to understand music – particularly ears, but it is notable that Allen mentions vision as well – was the topic of the rest of his speech. Focused listening, he argued, is "a prime necessity for all performers."<sup>18</sup> The College orchestra and College concerts were vital to training good listening. "Here in the College you have the amplest opportunities of cultivating the listening power. You have concerts, orchestral, choral, and ensemble classes..." Allen told the assembled students.<sup>19</sup> Listening to these College concerts would give students the ability to recognize in music "fine thoughts presented in an endless variety of ways."<sup>20</sup> The implication, then, is that the music that could be heard on College concerts in the 1920s was only that which contained "fine thoughts," only repertoire worthy of focused

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<sup>17</sup> Hugh Allen, "Director's Address," *Royal College of Music Magazine* 16, no. 2: 4.

<sup>18</sup> Allen, "Director's Address," 5.

<sup>19</sup> Allen, "Director's Address," 7.

<sup>20</sup> Allen, "Director's Address," 8.

listening. My analysis of College concert programs reveals that this repertoire of “fine thoughts” closely resembles the Western “classical” canon as we know it today.

Collegians had their first opportunity of the year to practice listening to “fine thoughts” at a College chamber recital a little more than two weeks later, on January 22. The concert opened with Ravel’s String Quartet, performed by a group of male Scholars. Then soprano Scholar Doris Tomkins took the stage to sing two songs by Frank Bridge, followed by Norman Greenwood (also a Scholar) playing two Brahms Ballades. Dove Scholar Edward J. Robinson performed next, singing a pair of songs by Bridge and Hamilton Harty. Another vocal solo (W. A. Aikin’s setting of “Sigh no more ladies”) was given by Gwilym Dowell; then Scholar John Robson performed a “Marche Triomphale” by W. G. Alcock on piano. A set of “Gipsy Songs” by Brahms for vocal quartet made up of Eva McCall, Constance Taylor (Scholar), Archibald Winter, and Walter J. Saull (Scholar) concluded the recital.

The genres, composers, and performers in this recital are indicative of several trends in 1920s College concerts. Chamber recitals during this decade were, like this concert, typically an eclectic mix of string chamber music, piano solos, and accompanied songs. Woodwind and brass instruments rarely appeared, and when they did they were usually part of a mixed ensemble with strings or piano. The performers including the accompanists were all students. It is not clear how performers and repertoire were chosen for these concerts. Rhiannon Mathias suggests that College professors were responsible for recommending their students for inclusion on concerts, at least when it came to student compositions, writing that Lutyens’s teacher Harold

Darke “succeeded in sandwiching her setting of Keat’s *To Sleep*...between Brahms’s Third Symphony and Rossini’s Overture to the *Barber of Seville* at a College concert.”<sup>21</sup> If this was the usual practice for student compositions, perhaps a similar approach was taken for selecting performers. Most importantly, these were public concerts that other students, faculty, members of the general public, and critics all attended. College concerts could get a young performer their first critical notice in a specialist periodical like the *Musical Times*, or in a major newspaper. Scholars, as the students most likely to pursue a career in music and often the College’s most proficient performers, were particularly well-represented at public concerts.

My analysis of official College concerts from the 1920–21 academic year and the 1925–26 academic year shows that the performers were roughly half Scholars and half fee-paying students – meaning that Scholars were significantly overrepresented, considering that they comprised as little as one quarter of the student body. Given that there were at least eight official concerts per term, it would be reasonable to expect most Scholars to perform in one or more of these during their College tenure. RCMM programs confirm this; in the 1925–26 academic year, over 90 percent of current Scholars participated in at least one College concert. Those who played orchestral instruments as a first or second study would probably also be unnamed participants in several orchestral performances.

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<sup>21</sup> Rhiannon Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams, and Twentieth Century British Music: A Blest Trio of Sirens* (Ashgate, 2013), 25.

Singers were least likely to be Scholars, particularly in performances of vocal chamber music such as quartets or madrigals. Conversely, pianists were usually Scholars or at minimum ARCM holders. Voice and piano were the most common specialties for female Collegians, Scholars or not, so the split here is intriguing. When the numbers are parsed by gender, however, a trend emerges. Male singers were nearly twice as unlikely as female singers to be Scholars, implying that the performance standards for female singers was quite a bit higher than for their male counterparts. Female pianists were also apparently held to a stringent standard: almost two-thirds of the female pianists who performed on College concerts were Scholars. String players were fairly evenly distributed both by funding status and gender, though quartets were often gender-segregated, particularly early in the decade. Wind and brass performers were exclusively men, reflecting the deeply entrenched gender imbalance in the wind Scholar cohort, which was more than 90 percent male at the time.

A typical concert alternated instrumental and vocal chamber music. In the former genre, works by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germans were most common. Deceased German composers writ large (though in practice this mostly meant Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Brahms) accounted for a quarter of the music performed. English composers – mostly living – were represented on College chamber concerts largely with songs and other vocal works. Some of these composers, like Bridge and Harty, who appeared on the first 1920 concert, were also known for larger-scale, “serious” compositions, but many wrote primarily or exclusively in smaller genres often associated with amateur domestic performance. W. A. Aikin, who also

appeared on the opening concert, was a surgeon and amateur musician who published a few songs in the first two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup>

Living English composers also included College students and Scholars, though the number who had works performed on College concerts each year was quite small. Over the course of the 24 College concerts given in the 1920–21 academic year, only three student works were performed: Ivor Gurney’s “Five Elizabethan Songs” and two string chamber works by Stanley Wilson. The number of student works per year fluctuated quite widely, though – the next year saw ten student compositions across a similar number of official concerts. Even so, this demonstrates how small a place student compositions had in these public-facing events, implying that the purpose of performing student works on College concerts was not for composers to hear their music, but for their music to be heard by others. College concerts were for the RCM to make its – and by extension, Britain’s – musical image clear to both students and the public.

Competition for composers to have their work performed must have been fierce, making already slim opportunities for women composers vanishingly small. The first woman to have any piece performed on a College concert in the 1920s was Margaret Crichton, whose songs “Brooklyn Road” and “Elizabethan Song” appeared on a July 1922 recital, performed by singer Kenneth G. Solly and pianist Maurice Jacobson.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Aikin’s most significant publication was 1910’s *The Voice: An Introduction to Practical Phonology* (Longmans, Green & Co.).

<sup>23</sup> “College Concerts,” *Royal College of Music Magazine* 18, no. 3: 70.

Nearly four full years passed before another female student would hear her music on an official concert; in March of 1926, Elizabeth Maconchy had three songs performed at a College chamber recital. This landmark event kicked off a streak of performances for Maconchy, who had entered the RCM in 1926 to study with Vaughan Williams. Her *Fantasy for String Orchestra, Flute, and Harp* was performed by the College orchestra on July 23, 1926, and again on December 3 of the same year.

Maconchy's *Fantasy* has the unfortunate distinction of being the only student work by a woman performed at a College orchestral concert between 1920 and 1930. Orchestral concerts during this decade could be as much as 40 percent music by late Germans. The share of living composers – both student and otherwise – was small, often a fifth or less of the repertoire; an October 1920 College concert provides a representative example. The program opened with Mozart's K. 525 Serenade in G major, followed by an aria from Haydn's *Creation*. Kenneth Skeaping then performed the J.S. Bach E major violin concerto, and Donald Mather offered "O ruddier than the cherry" from Handel's *Acis and Galatea*. Elgar's Introduction and Allegro for string quartet and chamber orchestra, featuring an all-male quartet of Scholars, was the only selection by a living composer on the program. The evening concluded with more Handel as John Robson performed the composer's fourth organ concerto. Adrian Boult – recently appointed to replace Stanford – conducted the orchestra.

To an even greater degree than in the chamber concerts, a handful of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germans absolutely dominated the orchestral repertoire performed at the College during the twenties. Programming these dead masters so

often reified their place as the standard necessary for the development of competent performers and listeners. For a national conservatory that employed one of Britain's most celebrated living composers, the College orchestras played shockingly few works by living composers, British or otherwise. Out of 49 orchestral works performed on College concerts in the 1920–21 school year, for example, just eleven were written by living composers, and just seven by living British composers. Of that seven, five were by Vaughan Williams or Elgar, and none were student compositions. The situation for student composers improved in the 1925–26 school year; in addition to Maconchy's *Fantasy*, student Frederic Bontoft's *Lament* and *Cortege* for string orchestra were both performed on a February 1926 orchestra concert. This did not mean that the share of repertoire by living British composers increased that year – in fact, it decreased by three percent, dropping to just six out of ten works by living composers. This trend continued, and by the 1930–31 academic year only three works by living British composers were performed on orchestral concerts.

Meanwhile, another trio of Maconchy's songs were performed on a chamber recital during the Midsummer term of the 1928–29 academic year.<sup>24</sup> 1928–29 was a banner year for female composition students in general; all six student works performed on formal concerts (both chamber and orchestral) that year were by women. About half of these women – Elisabeth Lutyens, Imogen Holst, and Elizabeth Maconchy – would be recognized for their music after leaving the College. The others fell into

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<sup>24</sup> "College Concerts," *Royal College of Music Magazine* 25, no. 3: 79.

varying degrees of obscurity; from Helen Perkin, who had a successful performance career but was never known as a composer, to Lilian Harris, who published a few educational piano pieces in the 1930s and then faded from the historical record.

Maconchy was both the most recognized of this cohort – during her College career and after – and was the group’s center of gravity. Along with Grace Williams she started a mostly-female “Composers” Club” of Vaughan Williams students in late 1926; Dorothy Gow, Imogen Holst, and Elisabeth Lutyens were also members. At weekly meetings they discussed new music, including their own compositions, “much to the pleasure of Vaughan Williams (or ‘Uncle Ralph’ as they called him) who thought he was witnessing a new ‘golden age’ of composers.”<sup>25</sup> However, as members of the Club moved on from the RCM in the early 1930s, the golden age of women composers being heard on College concerts came to a halt. Rather than a promising trend toward equal representation, the Club proved to be a bubble. I discuss the collapse of this bubble in greater detail in Chapters V and VI.

In *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams and Twentieth Century British Music*, Mathias writes that

College life had been an essential training ground for Lutyens, Maconchy and Williams, **one which had been free of prejudice against their gender**. They would find it more difficult, however, to gain a secure foothold in the often treacherous and unpredictable professional music world which lay outside the College.<sup>26</sup> [emphasis mine]

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<sup>25</sup> Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams*, 30.

I want to complicate this claim. The RCM environment in the interwar period was not entirely free of gendered prejudice, though the institution boasted a powerful pair of equality-minded men in Vaughan Williams and Parry. Intentions do not change reality, however, and as hard as Vaughan Williams and Parry fought for their alumni, the RCM's "clubbable environment" was not always welcoming to women who ventured past the piano bench.

In my next chapter I will explore the lives of two women who also studied composition at the RCM in the twenties, but did not achieve the same professional successes as the Composers' Club group. To contextualize these biographies, it is important to understand the shape of the overall Scholar cohort between 1920 and 1929. I have chosen two individuals to represent the "average" male and female Scholar of the twenties. Using their stories, I will explore the demographics of the decade's Scholar cohort; this demographic analysis provides a student-centered background for my biographical narratives. As I argued in Chapter I, cohorts are a crucial and under-examined aspect of both student and professional success. Describing the larger RCM Scholar cohort in each decade allows me to situate my subjects within a very specific institutional context.

## **Scholars**

According to the 1925–26 RCM Prospectus, the College offered about 90 full-tuition scholarships at any given time in the twenties. As described in Chapter II, these

scholarships were broadly divided into “open” and “closed” types. The “open” awards could be granted to any applicant regardless of instrument or focus. “Closed” scholarships had restrictions imposed by the funder, which sometimes included specific fields of study such as “opera,” “piano,” or “strings.” However, the subject-restricted scholarships were a very small portion of the total number. In 1925–26 there were just seven: five for composers, one for singers, and one for violinists. The rest of the closed scholarships were either for applicants from specific locations or who had ties to certain organizations, such as the Royal Amateur Orchestral Society.

In this next section, I introduce the reader to Barbara Francis, a young woman who studied piano and viola at the RCM from 1922 to 1927 on an Associated Board Exhibition, which covered her tuition but did not include a living stipend. Though I do not know the complete details of her biography, the personal information available in the Scholar Register makes her an ideal example of the median female RCM Scholar in the 1920s.<sup>27</sup> To provide contrast, I also profile Leonard Blake, a recipient of the Royal Amateur Orchestral Society Scholarship who began his RCM studies in 1925.<sup>28</sup> Though Leonard was from a much more modest background than Barbara, his RCM education propelled him to a long, stable career as the music master at a prestigious boys’ boarding school. His story is representative of the typical male Scholar of the twenties.

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<sup>27</sup> Unless otherwise noted, personal data on Barbara Francis comes from page 573 of the RCM Scholar Register.

<sup>28</sup> Unless otherwise noted, personal data on Leonard Blake comes from page 648 of the RCM Scholar Register.

For men, the promise that an RCM education would nurture skilled musicians no matter their social or economic background and lead them to remunerative careers in music was broadly true, and Leonard Blake exemplifies that trajectory. On the other hand, female RCM students, even those skilled enough to win funding for their music education, were often from a higher socio-economic class to begin with but did not see any upward mobility as a result of their RCM training.

The majority of the 1920s Scholar cohort were from London and the surrounding Home Counties.<sup>29</sup> Scholars from outside of this area were all from within the Commonwealth, with a slim majority hailing from within the British Isles. The other 15 percent came to London from the overseas Empire. Britain's most "successful" settler colonies – in the sense that the native population was genocidally replaced by white settlers – Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, sent the greatest proportion of overseas RCM Scholars. The rest were scattered across the Empire's outposts and were often the children of imperial officials. Joanna Agnes McLeod, who won an Associated Board Exhibition in 1929, exemplifies this type. The home address listed for her in the Register is the British Consulate, Tunis, North Africa, where her father, Sir James McLeod, served as the Consul General. Though not all overseas Scholars were the daughters of titled gentlemen, most were daughters; only eight men from overseas attended the RCM as Scholars or Exhibitioners between 1920 and 1929. By contrast,

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<sup>29</sup> In the 1920s, 61 percent of all entering Scholars were from London or the East, South, Southeast, or Southwest of England.

Scholars from the “outer” British Isles (anywhere outside of London or the South) were more likely to be men, though not by such a wide margin.<sup>30</sup>

The socio-economic class of Scholars also correlated with their geographic origin. For the majority of Scholars, the Register includes paternal occupation information. I have coded these data using economist Guy Routh’s 1965 monograph *Occupation and Pay in Great Britain, 1906–1960*, which is the most comprehensive treatment of economic class and employment in early-twentieth century Britain currently available. Not only does Routh classify occupations by average pay across six decades, he also provides adjusted comparisons that illustrate the changing status of different job classes. Naturally, the subtle gradations of social class are not perfectly captured by Routh’s classifications, but they can help paint a broad picture of the RCM Scholar cohort.

As previously noted, the mostly-female overseas Scholars were typically the daughters of colonial officials, whose jobs fell into what Routh defines as the “professional classes,” or Classes 1a and 1b. Taken together with Routh’s Classes 2a and 2b (“employers, professionals, managers, and administrators”), these most prestigious and remunerative professions account for the fathers of over 85 percent of overseas Scholars.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Scholars from London and its surroundings, like Barbara, were often from relative wealth; again, just over 85 percent had fathers employed in Class 1

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<sup>30</sup> 56 percent of Scholars from “outer” Britain – in my data coded as Scotland, Ireland, Wales, the East Midlands, the West Midlands, the Northeast, the Northwest, and Yorkshire and the Humber – were men.

<sup>31</sup> Guy Routh, *Occupation and Pay in Great Britain, 1906–1960* (Cambridge University Press, 1965), 3.

or 2 occupations. When we include all non-manual occupations, this number jumps to nearly 90 percent. Outside of London and the Home Counties, Scholars' economic backgrounds were considerably more diverse. The split between non-manual (Classes 1-4) and manual (Classes 5-7) paternal occupations was roughly 3:2, with male Scholars slightly more likely to have a father employed in some kind of manual labor. Scholars from outside the London metropolitan area – with the notable exception of overseas Scholars – were both poorer and, for lack of a better word, *maler*.

Like the majority of her peers, Barbara was born in the Home Counties, in the village of Uxbridge, Middlesex. Barbara's father, Louis Arthur Francis, was a medical practitioner. He was able to support his family on a single salary of about £750 per annum, while his wife was responsible for "unpaid domestic service."<sup>32</sup> She was supported in these domestic duties by two live-in servants.<sup>33</sup> A plurality of female Scholars in the 1920s came from similar socio-economic backgrounds; 55 percent had fathers employed in Classes 1a and 1b, while an additional 23 percent were the daughters of Class 2a and 2b fathers.<sup>34</sup> These Class 1 and 2 occupations earned on

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<sup>32</sup> The median income for a medical practitioner was £756 per annum in 1922-23. See Routh, *Occupation and Pay*, 64. Medical practitioners fall under job category 1a ("higher professionals") of the occupational classification outlined by Routh (3). I have coded the Registrar data on paternal occupation to fit these categories; analysis of these data show that nearly a third of the female Scholars at the RCM in the 1920s had fathers in 1a professions, which also included lawyers, doctors, engineers, and civil servants. The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1939 Register; Reference: RG 101/1338E

<sup>33</sup> Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK, *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911* Series RG14, 1911.

<sup>34</sup> Routh, *Occupation and Pay*, 3.

average a minimum of £200 per annum in Britain in the 1920s, though some of the highest-paid barristers and solicitors made over ten times that amount. The cost of living standard was £180 per annum, so men making average Class 1 and 2 wages (around £460) could comfortably support a family.<sup>35</sup> That said, the RCM annual fees of around £40 were steep even for a man from this class. Few families could afford to spend nearly a tenth of their income on educating a child, let alone a daughter.<sup>36</sup>

Since they were able to afford live-in servants, the Francis family almost certainly owned a piano, which Barbara's mother Ethelfreda likely played at an amateur level. Barbara's earliest music lessons were probably taught by her mother, but by age eight Barbara had been sent to one of London's many private piano teachers, Miss Sybil Fountain.<sup>37</sup> Miss Fountain was from an affluent and cultured background herself and later published several educational pieces for piano.<sup>38</sup> Here is where my narrative must

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<sup>35</sup> Routh, *Occupation and Pay*, 110.

<sup>36</sup> David Wright on the first generation of ARCM diploma recipients is relevant here: "An analysis of ARCM subjects taken by diploma holders between 1886 and 1913 provides evidence that music teaching had become an acceptable female career and that possessing a music diploma enhanced a teacher's standing. The most popular ARCM diploma subject (accounting for 56 percent of the total number of ARCM passes) was piano teaching. Of this successful 56 percent, an astonishing 88 percent were female; however, well under half of these women, only 30 percent, were also RCM students. This statistic underlines just how desirable a commodity a piano teaching diploma was to women as a professional investment. But it also shows that many more intending women teachers (or their families) were able to afford the £5.5s. (5 guineas) entry fee for the ARCM diploma than could manage the £37.16s. (36 guineas) in annual fees to enrol as an RCM student." Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 15.

<sup>37</sup> "Local Musical Successes," *Marylebone Mercury*, August 17, 1912.

<sup>38</sup> Miss Fountain's family was more closely connected to "old money" than Barbara's. Though her father's family made their money in trade (they owned a prosperous mill in Middlesex), by the time Sybil was born the Fountains had made several generations of socially advantageous

become more speculative due to the lack of direct sources; we know that Barbara entered the RCM in 1922 on an Associated Board Exhibition Scholarship. Again, this was an award that only paid for tuition, not room and board. In order to get to the point where Barbara could win an Exhibition, Miss Fountain likely guided Barbara through the Associated Board examination grades, and each year Barbara's scores must have become more and more impressive. At the end of her compulsory education at age fourteen, Barbara could choose to leave school entirely, go on to a secondary education institution such as a "high school" or a "college" (boarding school), or seek professional training in a specialization. This last option was the boldest; it would mean she sought to enter the workforce, which was still rare for a person of her gender and class.<sup>39</sup> It was also the most cost-effective option, even if she only received a partial Scholarship; fees for girls' secondary schools could be upwards of £100 per year. So, it seems that Barbara remained at home and continued her lessons with Miss Fountain, hoping to develop enough skill to be accepted as an RCM Scholar.

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marriages. The family's status was high enough in 1914, for example, that Sybil's sister's marriage was covered in the *Gentlewoman* ("Rev. M. Foxell to Miss Fountain," May 2, 1914). Sybil herself may also have been an early love of modernist painter Paul Nash – Nash presented a poem and nativity scene to a Sybil Fountain in 1909 (see "Christmas Poem and Nativity Scene," Discover Bucks Museum, December 27, 2022, <https://www.discoverbucksmuseum.org/keepers-corner-christmas-poem-and-nativity-scene-by-paul-nash-1889-1946/>) and wrote about attending a "Sybil Fountain concert" in a 1913 letter (see Paul Nash to Margaret Odeh, November 5, 1913, Letters and Papers of Paul Nash, Tate Museum, TGA 8313/1/1/53). Oxford University Press published several of Sybil Fountain's elementary piano works in the late 1920s under their "Oxford Piano Series" (see Oxford University Press advertisement, *Musical Times* (February 1927): 185).

<sup>39</sup> Jane Purvis, *A History of Women's Education in England* (Open University Press, 1991), 76-77.

It was more difficult to find a representative “median” male Scholar than it was to identify his female counterpart, because male Scholars came from more diverse economic backgrounds. In the end I settled on an example that demonstrates how male Scholars were slightly more likely to have a father from the labor classes. Leonard Blake was also born and raised in the London area – the family lived in Hendon, an inner suburb of the metropolis – but his father was not a manager or a professional. Instead, Leonard’s father was a boot repairman, a member of Routh’s Class 5, “skilled workers.” His yearly income likely amounted to about £180; enough to avoid the privations of hunger and poverty, but not to build wealth or afford luxuries.<sup>40</sup>

Leonard and his younger sister Edith were probably educated at the local primary school, which may well have been an Anglican school converted to state use by the 1902 Education Act.<sup>41</sup> If it was an Anglican school, that might explain how Leonard came to play the organ; perhaps he showed musical aptitude singing in school services. He joined the Hendon Parish choir by age eight, and was eventually taken on as a pupil by the Hendon Parish Church organist, Mr. Thomas Rimmer.<sup>42</sup> It is important to note that this path, from chorister to apprentice organist, was entirely closed to girls, as most

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<sup>40</sup> Routh, *Occupation and Pay*, 89.

<sup>41</sup> The National Archives; Kew, London, England; *1939 Register*; Reference: RG 101/823B; UK Parliament, *Education Act 1902*, <https://www.education-uk.org/documents/acts/1902-education-act.html>.

<sup>42</sup> “A Promising Musician,” *Hendon & Finchley Times*, May 8, 1925.

Anglican choirs at the time were exclusively male.<sup>43</sup> Leonard appeared frequently as a vocal and piano soloist at church musical functions throughout the early 1920s.<sup>44</sup> By 1924, Leonard – described as a “boy chorister” – was acting as Rimmer’s substitute while the latter was “on the sick list,” gaining a favorable mention in the local newspaper for his “unusual musical gifts.”<sup>45</sup> At some point in his teens Leonard attended the Hendon County School, a local private “college” or secondary school.<sup>46</sup> Given his economic background, he presumably received some kind of financial aid for tuition there. However, as soon as he won his Royal Amateur Orchestral Society scholarship, he left Hendon County and joined the RCM.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Most Anglican choirs were male-only, but not all. Adult female singers were beginning to appear by the late nineteenth century, but this was both rare and controversial well into the twentieth century. See Sydney H. Nicholson, “The Choirboy and His Place in English Music,” *Proceedings of the Musical Association* 70th sess. (1943–1944): 71. As late as 1996 opposition to girls in Anglican choirs was so vehement that a “Campaign for the Defence of the Traditional Cathedral Choir” was mounted. As of 2025 their website is still available but has not been active since 2009.

<sup>44</sup> See “Local Paragraphs,” *Hendon & Finchley Times*, January 7, 1921; “Performance at the Church House,” *Hendon & Finchley Times*, February 24, 1922; “Hendon Paragraphs,” *Hendon & Finchley Times*, March 31, 1922; “Mothers Entertained,” *Hendon & Finchley Times*, February 9, 1923; “Hendon Paragraphs,” *Hendon & Finchley Times*, March 16, 1923; “Hendon Paragraphs,” *Hendon & Finchley Times*, November 30, 1923; “Mr. C Jackaman’s Farewell,” *Hendon & Finchley Times*, December 7, 1923.

<sup>45</sup> Artemus, “Across the Table,” *Hendon & Finchley Times*, February 15, 1924.

<sup>46</sup> “The Mill Hill Festival,” *Hendon & Finchley Times*, April 18, 1924.

<sup>47</sup> Leonard began his RCM studies during the Midsummer term (May 1925), which was a bit unusual. Most Scholars entered at the beginning of the academic year in September (known as the Christmas term). My guess is that either the expenses of Hendon County were too much for his family (if they were paying full tuition fees), or his financial aid there was insufficient.

When she won her Exhibition at seventeen, Barbara was a bit younger than the median new female Scholarship holder, who usually entered the College at age eighteen; but she was certainly not the youngest girl. Some of her classmates were as young as thirteen. The eighteen-year-olds were most likely women who attended high school before coming to the RCM; but Barbara had five older brothers, and her father had probably already spent thousands of pounds educating his boys at boarding schools.<sup>48</sup> Leonard was also on the younger side when he entered the College in May 1925. His Scholarship, worth over £100 per annum, was more than enough to cover both tuition and living expenses. Despite his relative poverty, seventeen-year-old Leonard was probably considerably better-educated than seventeen-year-old Barbara. Furthermore, his apprenticeship to the parish organist and grammar school education had given him the opportunity to develop a public profile as an expert musician before he even began his RCM studies.

Had Barbara not won a Scholarship, her formal education would likely have ended; she would stay home to help her mother with “unpaid domestic service” until she was married. If she did not marry, she might eventually decide to study for the ARCM exam and set up shop as a piano teacher, as many women had done before

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<sup>48</sup> Boarding at an English “public” school (fee-charging, non-state school) could cost anywhere between £60 and £200 per year. The most prestigious of these, Eton College in Berkshire, charged £230 for the 1929–30 school year. See T. J. Jefferis and T. Bedford, UK Independent School Fee Data (Years 1929, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2018), University of Strathclyde, 26 Feb 2024, <https://doi.org/10.15129/6f1f8d5e-ec5a-4dd1-8e4a-edc06be39a83>.

her.<sup>49</sup> However, an RCM education in addition to the ARCM qualification would make her a much rarer commodity, especially since she could boast that she was an Exhibitioner to boot. Her personal connection with the College and her experience there would be an asset to prospective students who wanted to follow in her footsteps. College connections might even get her a job in the Junior division of the RCM or one of the other London music schools.

Barbara's first year at College ran from September to July, divided into three terms (Christmas, Easter, and Midsummer). During this year she took the "Ordinary" curriculum, which included twice-weekly first study lessons in piano, and weekly classes in musicianship, harmony, aural skills and sight-singing, and music history.<sup>50</sup> When Barbara entered the RCM in 1922, first study lessons were still conducted as small group classes of "two lessons weekly (in conjunction with two other Pupils) of one hour each, that is, two individual lessons of twenty minutes each for each pupil," according to the 1925–26 prospectus. It seems, however, that there was a concern that this arrangement might devolve into one-on-one lessons. "All Pupils," the prospectus proclaims in the third subsection under "General Regulations," "must remain in the teaching room for one hour, that is, for 40 minutes in addition to their own individual lesson." However, by 1928 the College had changed its tune, now defining the first study as two individual thirty-minute lessons per week. Though it does seem that from

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<sup>49</sup> Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain*, 105.

<sup>50</sup> RCM Prospectus 1925–26, 16–17.

1928 the norm was to take these lessons individually, the prospectus repeatedly reminds students that they may opt to take these lessons “in conjunction with another pupil” as “two lessons weekly of one hour each” for the first study and “one lesson weekly of forty minutes” for the Second.<sup>51</sup>

The vast majority of the other piano Scholars, likely including the two with whom she shared her first study lessons, were women of her own age and class.<sup>52</sup> This gender imbalance is especially notable when we consider that piano was also by far the most popular instrument at the College – nearly a third of all Scholars chose it as their first study. Scholars in the 1920s were enrolled in sixteen different First Studies: bassoon, clarinet, composition, conducting, double bass, flute, horn, harp, oboe, organ, piano, singing, trombone, trumpet, violoncello, and violin. Piano was closely followed in popularity by singing at 20 percent. Violin was nearly as common as singing, with 19 percent of Scholars taking their first study in the instrument. These three concentrations were true outliers; the next most-studied instrument, the violoncello, had less than half as many enrollees as the violin. Composers formed the next-largest contingent, with just over 6 percent of Scholars – twelve men and four women who began their RCM studies between 1920 and 1929. Taken together, woodwind and brass instruments accounted for roughly 15 percent of the entering Scholars, but when separated by instrument the

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<sup>51</sup> RCM Prospectus 1925–26, 21.

<sup>52</sup> Of the 74 Scholars who took piano as their first study between 1920 and 1929, 78 percent were women.

numbers are vanishingly small: for example, only three Scholars took trumpet as their first study across the entire decade.

Furthermore, the profile of the average woodwind and brass Scholar was strikingly specific. Many – over 35 percent – were the sons of musicians, indicating that their early training was likely via the old system of apprenticeship to the family trade. They were also highly likely to be from working-class families (musical families included); more than half had fathers who were laborers or artisans, including laundrymen, timber workers, and warehousemen. Finally, though the majority were still from London, a significant proportion (over a quarter) came to the RCM from outside of the Home Counties.

On the other side of the spectrum, the piano, singing, and string Scholars also had a profile outside the RCM Scholar median. While women narrowly dominated the Scholar cohort by slightly more than 1:1 throughout the decade, their representation in first study piano, for example, was more than three times that.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, 70 percent of the fifty Scholars whose first study was singing and roughly 60 percent of the 62 string Scholars (encompassing both violin and cello) were female. These numbers, particularly the nearly 4:1 ratio of women to men studying piano, reflect a long history both at the RCM and in the music culture of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Of the 253 Scholars who entered the College between September 1920 and September 1929, 45 percent were men and 55 percent were women.

<sup>54</sup> Many musicologists have written about the explosion of female pianists in the nineteenth century, and how the instrument became not just a vehicle to display feminine accomplishment for girls in and aspiring to the middle and upper classes, but also as a viable career option for

As noted earlier, a young lady with a conservatory education could make a living as a private piano teacher without compromising her social class. The very first allotment of RCM scholarships, reproduced in Ehrlich's *The Music Profession in Britain*, bears this out. Of the seventeen piano scholarships offered in 1883, fourteen went to women and three went to men.<sup>55</sup> In other words, piano Scholars at the RCM were 80 percent women from the foundation of the College through the 1920s.

While women dominated first study piano studios, organ as a first study was the exclusive province of male Scholars. Their numbers were much smaller, too – only ten men entered the College as organ Scholars between 1920 and 1929. Interestingly, none were the sons of Class 1a, Class 1b, or Class 2a fathers, and half were the sons of laborers. This suggests that organists often received their pre-College musical training as apprentices to parish musicians. Leonard took composition as a second study, which, along with conducting, was also common among his organist peers; presumably they chose these combinations to prepare for careers as church musicians, where they would need to write hymn tunes, arrange existing music, and conduct a church choir.

Though a second study was not required, the vast majority of 1920s Scholars opted to add at least one secondary subject.<sup>56</sup> Piano was again the most common choice

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women. See Cyril Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History* (Dent, 1976); Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain Since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History* (Clarendon Press, 1985); and Mary Burgan, "Heroines at the Piano: Women and Music in Nineteenth-Century Fiction," *Victorian Studies* 30, no. 1 (Autumn 1986): 51-76.

<sup>55</sup> Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain*, 110.

<sup>56</sup> 82 percent enrolled in at least one second study; a not-insubstantial number (16 percent) also took an additional second study.

for both men and women – 47 percent of the Scholars who took a second study took piano – though significantly more men than women chose piano as a second study.<sup>57</sup> All other second studies had fairly diffuse popularity. Singing came closest to piano at 13 percent; every other subject had less than 10 percent of the total share. These second study data, particularly the extreme popularity of the piano, paints a picture of a cohort of Scholars who were keenly interested in increasing their job market value. While orchestral instruments might be limited in application, the piano had many uses: as a teaching instrument for music appreciation and harmony, as an accompaniment to instrumental and vocal soloists, and even as underscoring for films and theater performances.

Leonard performed Cesar Franck's organ *Prelude and Variations*, Op. 18, No. 3 on a College Concert in May of 1928.<sup>58</sup> Outside the College, he also continued to serve as deputy organist at the Hendon Parish Church, and in 1926 was appointed organist at All Saints Church in Child's Hill.<sup>59</sup> Barbara, on the other hand, seems not to have performed at the RCM, though she was enrolled for seventeen terms in total. She was not a poor pianist – she reached Grade V and earned an ARCM in solo piano playing – but I have not been able to find any indication that she performed, on either the piano or the viola, in any official or informal College concerts. As noted above, she probably

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<sup>57</sup> Of the 100 Scholars taking piano as a second study, 62 were men and 38 were women.

<sup>58</sup> "College Concerts," *Royal College of Music Magazine* 24, no. 3 (Midsummer 1928), 83.

<sup>59</sup> "A Young Organist," *Hendon & Finchley Times*, June 18, 1926.

did play viola in one of the secondary orchestras, but the RCMM does not list performers in those orchestras so I cannot know for sure. Neither is there any available newspaper or periodical evidence that she performed publicly outside the College. However, like Leonard, she worked during her time at the RCM. According to her registration with the Teachers Registration Council in 1929, Barbara began working as a private piano teacher as soon as she passed the ARCM in 1925. Even so, she continued her studies at the College until 1927. During that time she also worked at Parliament Hill County School, a girls' college founded on the principle that women "should be the equal of men in education," from 1926.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps her multiple teaching positions kept her too busy to rehearse and perform solo or chamber music for College concerts or other public events. Leonard may have been equally busy, but his musical work was entirely public, both inside and outside his College life; and therefore his presence is well-attested in the historical record through concert programs and newspaper stories.

The difference in public presence – especially in newspaper coverage – between Barbara and Leonard is reflected in several of the narratives in this project. It is especially striking in cases where the subject's husband, father, or brother was also a musician. The two women I discuss in the next chapter, Mary "May" Ellen Gilson (1905–?) and Helen Hunter Glatz (1908–1996), did not have male musical relations, but descriptions of their musical and professional lives are disproportionately rare

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<sup>60</sup> "Parliament Hill: Our History," Parliament Hill School, <https://d3giikteahxfyn.cloudfront.net/5f0b4d47-de06-47c2-ad4e-597dce49889a/0b01ae19-911a-4729-bb61-bd9e2a003176>; "Francis, Barbara Ethel Grace," Teachers Registration Council, register number 76196, May 1, 1929.

compared to peers like Leonard Blake. Furthermore, a substantial amount of the press coverage about them concerns incidents in their personal lives. Though I hope that bringing what I can of their life histories together will show that they were more than these specific moments, I acknowledge that the emphasis their personal lives received in the press influences the story I am able to tell. To expose and perhaps counter this influence, I closely examine the language used by the press to describe my subjects.

The very different outcomes that Gilson and Glatz experienced from their RCM training speaks to the shift in the College's environment for women composers precipitated by Maconchy, Holst, and Williams's establishment of the Composers' Club in the latter half of the decade. Gilson was a contemporary of Barbara Francis and Leonard Blake, entering the RCM in 1921 and leaving the College in 1925. Glatz, on the other hand, came to the College in 1928, at the height of the Composers' Club's ascendancy. Unfortunately for the women who followed Glatz in the thirties, these collegial conditions did not continue for long.

## Chapter IV: The Runaway and the Composer-in-Residence

### Introduction

Between 1920 and 1926, twelve Scholars entered the RCM to study composition as their First subject. Every single one of these Scholars were white British men. Of those twelve men, eight went on to musical careers sufficiently notable to warrant their own page on Wikipedia. Six have individual entries in the most recent edition of the *Oxford Music Online*: Percy Whitlock, Edmund Rubbra, Percy Turnbull, Constant Lambert, Howard Ferguson, and David Moule Evans. Not all became famous for their compositional oeuvre, but most enjoyed at least a period of cultural power in British musical life. Several became organists or conductors, while others took up academic positions at universities and exclusive boys' preparatory schools. Even those whose lives were cut short by disease, like Whitlock and Lambert, had influential positions that granted their musical ideas at the very least documentation, if not consistent longevity. Whitlock, who died of tuberculosis at the age of 42, was a church and theater organist in Bournemouth for his entire post-RCM career. These roles made him a central figure in Bournemouth's musical culture, and gave him the opportunity to have his music performed by local ensembles. Similarly, Constant Lambert – killed by diabetes and alcoholism at age 45 in 1951 – parlayed his early success as a star RCM pupil into an appointment conducting the Royal Ballet Orchestra. He was also the author of *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline*, a foundational critical study of modernist British music

where Lambert “[tried] to trace a connecting line between the apparently diverse and contradictory manifestations of contemporary music.”<sup>1</sup> Though his compositional output diminished after he took the Royal Ballet post, it was undoubtedly because of that role that his last ballet, *Horoscope* (1938), was produced by that company.

As discussed in the previous chapter, 1927 marked a major change in the RCM’s composition studio. That year all three entering composition Scholars were women. Two of them, Elizabeth Maconchy and Imogen Holst, would be recognized as some of the leading composers in their generation. The third, Ianthe Dalway-Turnbull, had modest success publishing songs and writing music for children’s radio programs in the thirties, but her professional activity seems to have ended after the outbreak of the second World War. In 1928 Helen Hunter, an ambitious Northumbrian with a passion for Hungarian music, joined Maconchy, Holst, and Dalway-Turnbull at the RCM. A few fee-paying students were also part of this circle; most notably Dorothy Gow, who began studying with Vaughan Williams around 1926, Grace Williams, who funded her education through prizes and part-time teaching, and Elisabeth Lutyens, the daughter of a prominent artistic family. The College experience that these women shared bound them together despite their differing ages and backgrounds, creating a network that would last long past their student days in London.

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<sup>1</sup> Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* (1934, reis. October House Inc., 1967), 29.

Two women did take composition as a second study in the first half of the twenties. Both were teenagers from the Home Counties, and both were first study pianists. Mary Ellen Gilson won a Foundation scholarship in 1921 when she was sixteen; nineteen-year-old Constance Spencer joined Gilson, also as a Foundation Scholar, in 1923. By 1926 Gilson and Spencer had both left the College, having each passed the ARCM in piano. Neither woman ever published any music, nor have I been able to find any record of performances in which they were involved after they left the RCM.

That said, there is extensive press coverage of an incident that occurred early in Gilson's College studies. Even absent her connection to the College this event is a rich text, offering multiple axes of analysis for understanding public discourse about female musicians at this time. The language used to describe Gilson in the press during her brief infamy as the "Missing Girl Pianist" ranges from patronizing to scolding, and at times even edges into fetishization. In my first profile, I summarize the London press narrative of Gilson's February 1923 "adventure." Then I explore the implicit meanings of the press's descriptions of Gilson. Finally, I lay out the available information about Gilson's post-runaway life and speculate on how her escapade may have affected her later career (or lack thereof).

My next composition student profile jumps ahead to the heyday of the Composers' Club. Helen Hunter, later Glatz, had a brilliant RCM career, earning several prizes and eventually winning an Octavia traveling scholarship to study composition in Hungary. Her career seemed to be on the same track as her star contemporaries

Maconchy and Lutyens, but her unique wartime experience as a newly-naturalized Hungarian-by-marriage and her difficult family circumstances after the war derailed her promising profile as a composer. Ultimately, though, her well-placed network of RCM friends was able to find her a fixed position at the progressive education community of Dartington Hall in Devonshire. There she was able to compose, conduct, perform, and teach until her death in 1996.

Together, these biographical sketches reveal key differences in the experience of female Scholars at two different points in the twenties. The social reverberations of Gilson's "escapade" and the tone of the media coverage around it makes clear the precarious situation of the RCM's young female Scholars in the earlier part of the decade. Stepping outside the boundaries of what was considered appropriate for a girl of Gilson's age and class could completely derail a career, especially if that boundary-crossing was done in a very public setting. By the late twenties, however, an aspiring composer like Helen Glatz would find at the RCM a supportive, well-connected network of fellow women composers who were able to help each other push into traditionally masculine spaces. Though this cohort would later prove to be what I have previously theorized as a "bubble," its existence during Glatz's College studies ultimately helped her secure a stable position as a professional composer.

### **Mary Ellen Gilson: The Runaway**

One night in late February of 1923, Miss May Gilson did not return to her family home on Willesden-lane, Acton. That morning May had walked to the Willesden

Junction station, taken the Bakerloo line to Piccadilly Circus, switched to the Piccadilly Line, and alighted at South Kensington.<sup>2</sup> From there she walked to the Royal College of Music, where she was a Scholar of piano performance, with a second study in composition. Though piano was a common study for girls of her class and RCM cohort, composition was much rarer. In fact, May was the first female Scholar in the 1920s to enter the College with a primary or secondary emphasis in composition.

Friends recalled her attending classes on that late February day, and said she was “in her usual happy humour.”<sup>3</sup> Just a few weeks earlier May performed the latter movements of the virtuosic Chopin Piano Concerto No. 1 at a College concert, accompanied by the College Orchestra under the direction of Adrian Boult.<sup>4</sup> In March she was scheduled to appear in a solo recital at Wigmore Hall.<sup>5</sup> But May did not come home; instead, she left a letter for her brother – they were only eighteen months apart, and very close – informing him that she had left by choice.<sup>6</sup>

Days went by with no further word from May. Finally, her family went to the press to ask for the public’s help in securing May’s safe return. Newspapers across the

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<sup>2</sup> The London Transport Museum, Pocket Underground Map 1923, item number 1983/513 <https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/collections/collections-online/maps/item/1983-513>

<sup>3</sup> “Ambitious Girl Musician,” *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, March 1, 1923.

<sup>4</sup> “College Concerts,” *Royal College of Music Magazine* 19, no. 2 (Easter Term 1923): 38.

<sup>5</sup> The first mention of the Wigmore Hall concert comes from identical stories printed in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Westminster Gazette* on February 26, 1923. This is the first article, titled “Vanished Pianist” in the *Pall Mall* and “Missing Pianist” in the *Westminster*, that I have been able to locate. The Wigmore Hall recital was reported by Percival Gilson, May’s father.

<sup>6</sup> “Miss May Gilson and Her Brother,” *Acton Gazette*, March 2, 1923.

country were happy to oblige; the story reached as far as Dundee by early March. May was at once an attractive and sympathetic figure. Just seventeen, she already had a string of musical accomplishments. Not only was she an RCM Scholar and recently featured soloist, she had also won an Exhibition to study piano at Guildhall at age ten.<sup>7</sup> As one reporter wrote, May was “on the threshold of what may be a great artistic career,” and she was ambitious to boot.<sup>8</sup> Another article called May “a self-confident girl who believes that she will make a name for herself on the concert platform.”<sup>9</sup> Her parents worried that she had left home to do just that: “About three weeks ago she played with great success at a college concert, and her mother thinks she may have been approached by someone anxious to secure her services,” reported the *Daily Mail*.<sup>10</sup> The upcoming Wigmore Hall recital was another proposed cause for May’s flight. “She may have gone away with the idea of earning some money to pay for that,” her father told the *Westminster Gazette*.<sup>11</sup>

More than a dozen newspaper articles on May’s disappearance were published between February 26th and March 3rd. But by the time “Miss May Gilson and Her Brother” – the longest treatment of the story yet – was published in the local *Acton*

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<sup>7</sup> “Search for Girl Pianist,” *Daily News (London)*, February 27, 1923.

<sup>8</sup> “Miss May Gilson and Her Brother.” *Acton Gazette*, March 2, 1923.

<sup>9</sup> “Ambitious Girl Musician.” *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, March 1, 1923.

<sup>10</sup> “Missing Girl Musician,” *Daily Mail*, February 27, 1923.

<sup>11</sup> “Missing Pianist,” *Westminster Gazette*, February 26, 1923.

*Gazette* on March 2nd, May was home again on Willesden-lane. Her father had retrieved her from Brighton the previous evening.<sup>12</sup> As it turned out, May had gone to seek her fortune in Brighton, where she had apparently hoped to secure a professional engagement.<sup>13</sup> It is not clear from the newspaper coverage why she chose Brighton specifically. Brighton was a popular seaside resort town with an active concert scene, but most potential engagements there were summer-only. Even a sheltered young woman like May would have known that Brighton was a seasonal resort and unlikely to have any opportunities in February. Her family lived at least part time in Southend-on-Sea, another coastal resort just northeast of London, so she would have been familiar with the social patterns of that type of town.<sup>14</sup> The kind of engagements most common in Brighton were also not the sort that May, with her bourgeois background and her classical training, would have been suited to fill. Most pianists in Brighton were music hall entertainers and movie theater accompanists.

Perhaps May saw an advertisement for a position in Brighton that inspired her move. If such an ad existed, I have not been able to find it or even anything similar in the classified pages of the *Stage*, the *Musical Times*, or any London paper available in the

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<sup>12</sup> "Missing Girl Found," *Daily Mail*, March 2, 1923.

<sup>13</sup> "All's Well - Miss May Gilson Returns After a Brighton Holiday," *Acton Gazette*, March 9, 1923.

<sup>14</sup> May's RCM Scholar Register entry lists her family address as 25 Satanita Road, Westcliff-on-sea. Westcliff-on-sea is a suburb of Southend-on-sea that lies directly on the English Channel. The family's Acton address was recorded but crossed out; however, multiple newspaper accounts state that the family lived in Acton even after May stopped attending College in 1926.

British Newspaper Archive. Additionally, the emphasis her family put on the upcoming Wigmore Hall recital, and their many press interviews, gives pause. Could May's curiously timed "adventure" have been some kind of publicity stunt? The Brighton address where she was found was a genteel boarding house run by Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Simms — a reasonable enough possibility for a place May might rent. But the story's credibility thins when May's physical description is factored in. It is hard to imagine a respectable establishment welcoming an unaccompanied girl without luggage who "look[ed] barely fifteen" and whose "youthful appearance [was] accentuated by the fact that she still [wore] short frocks and [had] her hair down."<sup>15</sup>

Whether or not her "disappearance" was planned, her family quickly regretted the media attention. Coverage in a high-circulation paper like the *Daily Mail* may have been especially troubling. Even a small item buried in the latter pages of the paper would have been seen by some of the *Mail*'s nearly two million daily readers. Just days after the story first broke on February 26, the *Acton Gazette* reported that Mrs. Gilson

expressed regret at the publicity already given to her daughter's foolish escapade, and also the belief that, as she had probably left London for the provinces, additional publicity in the local paper would add to the unpleasantness endured by the family without being helpful.<sup>16</sup>

The "unpleasantness endured by the family," remains unspecified, but the implication is that Mrs. Gilson would prefer that her daughter's "escapade" be forgotten in London.

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<sup>15</sup> "Romance or Adventure: Acton Girl's Remarkable Disappearance," *Ealing Gazette and West Middlesex Observer*, March 3, 1923.

<sup>16</sup> "Miss May Gilson and Her Brother."

The language being used to describe May in the press may also have alarmed her mother. The phrase “eager to make a name for herself” was deployed in several articles, which, alongside headlines calling May “ambitious” would have created a very unfeminine narrative around the young runaway.

The *Acton Gazette*, perhaps in deference to Mr. and Mrs. Gilson, tried to repair May’s reputation in a follow-up article about her return:

Previous accounts of her have rather underestimated her early gifts as a pianist, as she was an exhibitionist at six and a medallist at ten! It was foolish of her to go away so suddenly and let six days elapse without letting her parents know of her whereabouts, but, apart from that, there was praiseworthy enterprise rather than thoughtlessness in her adventure.<sup>17</sup>

Even this valiant attempt to reframe the episode as “praiseworthy enterprise” was rather too little too late, though. The Wigmore Hall recital does not seem to have gone forward, and May quietly returned to the RCM. As far as I am able to confirm, she did not see the concert stage again until 1925.

In 1924, May earned an ARCM in piano performance. Two years after her Brighton sojourn she returned to the RCM stage in March of 1925 to give a solo recital, before leaving the College in 1926 after the death of her father. By the end of her studies she had received a Grade V in piano, harmony, and counterpoint, but a disappointing Grade II in composition. According to the Registrar’s notes, her scholarship was renewed for the 1927 academic year, but she did not take it up and instead left the

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<sup>17</sup> “‘All’s Well’ Miss May Gilson Returns Home After a Brighton Holiday.”

College. Perhaps she had intended to continue composition lessons in order to achieve a higher grade, but was prevented by family obligations once her mother was widowed. She also suffered from a lack of community; there was no Composers' Club during May's time at the RCM. For her first two years May was the sole female Scholar studying composition at the College. She did not have a cohort, let alone the institutional support to become part of a bubble.<sup>18</sup>

The only other concert appearance by a "May Gilson" that I have been able to trace dates to 1932, when "Miss May Gilson" performed at a benefit concert for the construction of a new presbytery at the Catholic Oratory of St. Mary Magdalene in Wandsworth, London.<sup>19</sup> No publications under "May Gilson" have been forthcoming, and I have not been able to discover if she ever married or assumed another name. In some ways, May's 1923 disappearance was the apex of her public life. If it was a publicity stunt to launch her solo piano career, though, it clearly backfired. The way the press described her – headstrong, ambitious, independent – may well have damaged

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<sup>18</sup> Constance Spencer, the only other female Scholar to study composition while Gilson was at the RCM, is a frustrating case. The commonness of her name and that of her father makes it incredibly difficult to find out much about her beyond what is listed in the Register. The only other confirmed information about her that I have at present comes from the RCMM, which records that she performed the Germaine Tailleferre piano concerto on a College orchestra concert in 1926 (RCMM 23/1) and gave a solo recital in March of 1927 (RCMM 23/2). Like May, piano was her first study and composition her second. However, a note in her Register record tells us that she only took three terms of composition lessons, and it does not appear that she was ever examined in composition, as only grades in piano, harmony, and counterpoint are listed. She received a V in each of those subjects, however.

<sup>19</sup> "Wandsworth Catholics' New Presbytery," *South Western Star*, February 12, 1932.

her reputation beyond repair, even as she reached adulthood and her musical skill matured.

### **Helen Hunter Glatz: The Composer-in-Residence**

“I am used to oblivion here,” wrote Helen Glatz (née Hunter) to Sophie Fuller in 1994. This letter, published in a special edition of *Contemporary Music Review* organized by Fuller and Nicola LeFanu (composer and daughter of Elizabeth Maconchy), has been for more than thirty years the sole account of Glatz’s life to appear in a scholarly forum. Though not as well-known as her Composers’ Club friends Maconchy, Imogen Holst, and Grace Williams, Glatz is one of the very few female composition students from the interwar RCM to have had a professional career as a composer. Later in her letter to Fuller, Glatz admits as much herself: “I had many commissions for music of all kinds — these were all paid ones and everything was performed...”<sup>20</sup> She was well aware that this was still rare for a female composer. “Being a composer isn’t an easy thing for a woman to do — it has only fairly recently become accepted,” she told the *Scotsman* in 1961.<sup>21</sup> After she left the RCM in 1933, it took two decades for Glatz to find a stable position as a working composer-teacher; in the interim she was in “extremely difficult circumstances” as she and her husband struggled to support themselves and their

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<sup>20</sup> Helen Glatz, “Helen Glatz b.1908,” *Contemporary Music Review* 11 (1994): 127.

<sup>21</sup> “Anthea Looks At...’Composer’,” *Scotsman*, September 8, 1961.

young son.<sup>22</sup> It took a conveniently-timed job opening and a concerted effort from her circle of influential friends to secure Glatz her longtime base at Dartington Hall. In Glatz's case, then, her RCM connections truly paid off – but only after years of desperation and a shattering personal tragedy.

Born in 1908 to Andrew Hunter and Helen Sinclair Hunter (née Gunn), Helen Hunter Glatz was raised in South Shields, Durham, the youngest of three daughters. Andrew, who later became a land surveyor, was the Durham-born son of quarry manager Joseph Hunter and his wife Isabelle. The elder Helen was also from Durham, though her parents, Hugh and Margaret Gunn, were transplants from the neighboring county of Northumberland, just to the north. Though part of England proper since the 13th century, Northumberland is a long-contested area, with a mix of Anglo and Scots residents and cultures. Glatz considered herself “Scottish by birth,” so both the Hunter and Gunn families must have identified as culturally, if not geographically, Scots.<sup>23</sup>

Andrew Hunter and Helen Gunn had been married for more than a decade and were in their late thirties when Glatz was born; they already had two elder daughters, Margaret and Isabella, who were respectively thirteen and nine years Helen's senior. There is little in her own accounts about Glatz's life before she started studying music seriously as a teenager, first at Armstrong College in Newcastle, and then at the RCM. She wrote to Fuller that she “passed [her] first piano exam and was playing [her] own

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<sup>22</sup> “‘Pathetic Letter’ Read at N. Abbot Inquest,” *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, January 21, 1953.

<sup>23</sup> Glatz, “Helen Glatz,” 127.

tunes by age four,” and that she “began playing the violin a few years later.” This means that the Hunter family would have been middle class at minimum, since they apparently had a piano at home. The 1911 census confirms that Andrew held a managerial position, working as a “Land and Mine Surveyor,” a job he still worked as an aged widower in 1939. The fact that Andrew was still working in 1939 – he would have been in his early seventies – and the fact that census records tell us that the Hunters never employed live-in servants implies that they were just on the cusp of the middle class, financially. The household piano, however, seems to have been an investment that bore fruit for their daughters. The 1939 register also reveals that Margaret, the eldest Hunter sister, lived with her father and made a living as a music teacher. Isabella, the middle daughter, married a civil servant (per the 1939 register, an “inspector of elementary schools”) in 1925 and moved with him to Cheshire. Like many married women, she did not, as far as I am able to tell, work outside the home after her marriage.

By Glatz’s own report, we know that she studied at Armstrong College in Newcastle, then a constituent college of Durham University, where her principal teacher was the composer and Bach scholar William Gillies Whittaker.<sup>24</sup> Her studies with Whittaker fell just after Whittaker had, in the words of scholar Mary Christine Borthwick in her 2007 dissertation on Whittaker, “established his reputation on a

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<sup>24</sup> Glatz, “Helen Glatz,” 127.

national scale.”<sup>25</sup> During the first World War, Whittaker had developed a close friendship with Gustav Holst, who encouraged Whittaker to compose and make folk-song arrangements. Whittaker’s musical values were quite closely aligned with the tastemakers of the British Musical Renaissance, which gained him entrance into those vaunted circles. His move toward conducting cemented his place as a minor local celebrity, but it was his strong ties to Holst, and through him, the London-centered musical establishment, that gave him a national platform.<sup>26</sup> As the head of the local British Music Society (established in 1918 and led by RCM Director Hugh Allen) chapter, Whittaker hosted many nationally-known composers with ties to the RCM, including John Ireland, Armstrong Gibbs, and Vaughan Williams.<sup>27</sup>

By the early 1920s, Whittaker parlayed these connections into an active adjudication schedule, and he became “an energetic advocate of festivals,” according to Borthwick.<sup>28</sup> Despite his frequent travels, he apparently still found time to teach at Armstrong College and make a positive impression on the young Glatz, who called him a “wonderful teacher.”<sup>29</sup> It also seems likely that Whittaker was the first to introduce Glatz to the music of Bartók and Kodály, whose work he was familiar with through his

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<sup>25</sup> Mary Christine Borthwick, abstract from “‘In the Swim’: The Life and Musical Achievements of William Gillies Whittaker” (PhD diss., University of Durham, 2007), [5].

<sup>26</sup> Borthwick, “‘In the Swim,’” 28.

<sup>27</sup> Borthwick, “‘In the Swim,’” 41.

<sup>28</sup> Borthwick, “‘In the Swim,’” 45.

<sup>29</sup> Glatz, “Helen Glatz,” 127.

involvement in the International Society for Contemporary Music.<sup>30</sup> No doubt it was with his connections and encouragement that Glatz was able to secure an RCM scholarship in 1928.

Her RCM scholarship was an open Foundation award to study composition. Glatz joined Vaughan Williams's studio, where a small but active cohort of young women composers were being trained by "Uncle Ralph." Glatz's time at College overlapped significantly with the original members of the Composers' Club, so it seems likely that she too was a member. She also developed friendships with Imogen Holst and Grace Williams that would last for the rest of her life. Like Glatz, the Club members, particularly Maconchy and Grace Williams, were fascinated by Bartók. According to Rhiannon Mathias,

Bartók's music particularly fired their imaginations. Imogen Holst recalled that they were all 'overjoyed when Bartók himself came to London to play his recent Sonata for Pianoforte and Three Open Air Pieces as well as the Rumanian Folkdances from Hungary'. Indeed, club members eagerly rushed to acquire ringside seats in the Arts Theatre Club in London's West End for the live BBC radio broadcast given by Bartók on 4 March 1929.<sup>31</sup>

Given this shared interest in Hungarian music, it seems likely that Glatz was one of those Club members "eagerly rush[ing]" to Bartók's BBC broadcast.

Though she earned an ARCM in piano accompaniment in 1931, Glatz seems to have stopped performing at the College almost entirely after the premiere of her viola

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<sup>30</sup> Borthwick, "In the Swim," 81.

<sup>31</sup> Rhiannon Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams and Twentieth Century Music: A Blest Trio of Sirens* (Ashgate, 2013), 20.

sonata in April 1930. In total I have been able to confirm four performances of Glatz's works on RCM concerts: the viola sonata in April 1930, a collection of songs ("Down by the Sally Gardens," "Sonnet on the Sea," and "Meg Merrilies") in November of the same year, a *Phantasy Trio* for Strings in November 1932, and a sextet "for the unusual combination of violin, flute, clarinet, trumpet, bassoon and double bass" in July 1933.<sup>32</sup>

Despite her self-reported proficiency on piano and violin, she did not play in any of these performances of her works. Among composition scholars at the time this was not unusual, though it is worth noting who did and who did not present themselves as a "composer-performer." Among her direct predecessors, the composer-performer was a common posture for women, dating back hundreds of years to singing composers like Barbara Strozzi and Francesca Caccini. In more recent memory to Glatz, there was virtuosa Clara Schumann, and Glatz's countrywoman Rebecca Clarke. All of these foremothers used their existing performance careers to self-advocate by performing their own works. Many of Glatz's fellow RCM students, men and women, also performed their own works; during Glatz's time at the RCM, about a third of all student composers performed self-composed pieces on College concerts. In most cases, the composer played the piano part, if applicable. This was especially true for solo piano works, such as the three short solos (*Consequences*, *Sonata in One Movement*, and *Ballade*) presented by Helen Perkin (Foundation scholar, 1926–1930), and Alec Templeton (RCM

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<sup>32</sup> "College Concerts," *Royal College of Music Magazine* 26, no. 2 (Easter Term 1930): 51; "College Concerts," *Royal College of Music Magazine* 27, no. 1 (Christmas Term 1930): 35; "College Concerts," *Royal College of Music Magazine* 28, no. 1 (Christmas Term 1931): 34; "Recital," *Royal College of Music Magazine* 29, no. 3 (Midsummer Term 1933): 101.

paying student, dates unknown)'s *Introduction, Passacaglia, and Fugue*, which the composer performed at an October 1930 concert.

Glatz's performance habits did, however, parallel the College career of her classmate Maconchy. As I discussed in Chapter III, Maconchy was both the first woman to have any work performed on a College Concert in the 1920s and the first woman to have an orchestral work performed on a College Concert during that decade. Though she had a wide range of works performed in College Concerts, from songs to a piano concerto, Maconchy never appeared either as a performer or a conductor of her own compositions.<sup>33</sup> Not performing their own works at College may have been a deliberate posture for Maconchy and Glatz, possibly one meant to mark them as distinct from earlier generations of women composers.

During her time at the RCM Glatz racked up an impressive set of awards: first prize for her *Phantasy Trio for Strings* in the 1931 Cobbett competition, a Carlotta Rowe named scholarship in 1931 and 1932, and a Sullivan Prize in composition, also in 1932. Finally, in 1933 she was granted an Octavia traveling scholarship to study composition in Hungary. The Octavia was one of the RCM's most prestigious composition awards, often granted to young composers who already had a promising public profile. Before Glatz, past Octavia awardees included Maconchy, Imogen Holst, Grace Williams, and Dorothy Gow – all, like Glatz, Vaughan Williams protégés. 1933 saw the Octavia

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<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Maconchy's only solo performance on a College Concert came in 1927, when she played Bartók's Op. 14 Piano Suite. See Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams*, 19.

awarded to a large cohort, including Benjamin Britten, who ultimately chose not to take up the scholarship because the College would not let him use it to study with Alban Berg in Vienna.<sup>34</sup> Later recipients of the Octavia would also go on to successful compositional careers. Humphrey Searle used his 1936 scholarship to study with Anton Webern before becoming a BBC music producer and later a composition professor at the RCM; Michael Finnissy, a student of Searle's, received the Octavia in 1967, studying in Italy with the Romanian-Italian film composer Roman Vlad. Finnissy went on to hold composition professorships at the RAM and Southampton University, as well as the presidency of the International Society for Contemporary Music (1990–96).

According to former Glatz student Lindsay Cooper's unpublished autobiography, Glatz hoped to use her Octavia funds to study with Kodály. Vaughan Williams used his "very slight acquaintance" with Kodály to write a letter of introduction for Glatz, saying that she had "decided talent for composition," but upon arrival in Budapest Glatz found that Kodály only took on students enrolled at the Liszt Academy.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately Glatz had neither the finances nor the desire to become an Academy student. In the *Independent's* obituary of Glatz, Kevin Thompson claims that Glatz spent her Octavia-funded Hungarian sojourn studying with Sándor Végh

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<sup>34</sup> Neil Powell, *Benjamin Britten: A Life for Music* (Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 67.

<sup>35</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams to Zoltan Kodály, November 1933, Ralph Vaughan Williams Foundation Letters Database, <https://vaughanwilliamsfoundation.org/discover/letters/>; Lindsay Cooper, "Budapest" in *The Road is Wider than Long* (n.d.) <https://jstor.org/stable/community.21812010>.

instead.<sup>36</sup> Végh, though mostly known as the violinist of the Hungarian Quartet, had studied composition with Kodály during his own time at the Liszt Academy in the early 1920s.<sup>37</sup> However, Glatz herself does not mention Végh, and neither does Cooper; Thompson's obituary is the only source I have been able to find for this information. What is clear is that Glatz's interest in Hungary and Hungarian music was longstanding and passionate. "I had been interested from childhood in this country [Hungary] and its music," she wrote to Fuller.<sup>38</sup> Cooper affirms this; by her account, Glatz went to Hungary "for no other reason than a passionate love of Hungarian music."<sup>39</sup>

After a brief return to England when her Octavia funds ran dry, Glatz went back to Hungary, where she married Dr. Wolf Glatz just before the outbreak of the second World War.<sup>40</sup> Wolf, son of prominent painter Oszkár Glatz, was a university professor of art history. Later in life Glatz would insist that her father-in-law was the important artist in the family. In her letter to Fuller she called him "Hungary's most famous portrait painter," and Cooper recalled that she dismissed her own accomplishments as

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<sup>36</sup> Kevin Thompson, "Obituary: Helen Glatz," *Independent*, July 10, 1996.

<sup>37</sup> Allan Kozinn, "Sandor Végh, 91, Hungarian Violinist and Conductor," *New York Times*, January 10, 1997.

<sup>38</sup> Glatz, "Helen Glatz," 127.

<sup>39</sup> Cooper, "Budapest."

<sup>40</sup> Her husband's given name is unclear. Newspaper articles about his death refer to him variously as "Farkas Ernst," "Farkas Erik," and "Ernst Wolf," while Cooper calls him "Ernst." The Vaughan Williams letters database, on the other hand, identifies him as "Glatz, Wolf." Finally, the marriage notice for Hunter-Glatz in the RCMM (34/3) reads: "Dr. Wolfgang Glatz to Helen Sinclair Hunter."

“insignificant” compared to those of her father-in-law. While Oszkár Glatz may have been well-known in certain circles in the mid-century, his legacy has not been enduring.<sup>41</sup> According to an RCMM notice, Helen and Wolf had a daughter born in April 1939; tragically, the child died before the end of the war.<sup>42</sup> Their second child, Christopher, was born around 1943. Their small family remained in Hungary through the war, but continuing violence pushed Glatz to flee to England in 1946; she and Christopher were joined by her husband in 1947. Wolf’s flight in particular may have been politically motivated. Vaughan Williams implied as much in a 1946 letter to Ilse Ursell, the Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, where he apologized for “troubling” her with his request to help Dr. Glatz migrate to England.<sup>43</sup> Wolf was in danger, and the matter was “quite urgent” in Vaughan Williams’s telling.<sup>44</sup> Later, a Devonshire newspaper reported that Dr. Glatz had “refused to flavour his teaching with Communism” and had been “run out” of his home country by “the

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<sup>41</sup> Glatz, “Helen Glatz,” 127; Cooper, “Budapest.”

<sup>42</sup> “Births,” *Royal College of Music Magazine* 35, no. 3 (Midsummer Term 1939): 127. By the time Glatz returned to England in 1946 Christopher was her only living child.

<sup>43</sup> Now known as CARA (the Council for At-Risk Academics), the SPSL was founded in the early 1930s to assist academics displaced from or fleeing German universities. By the 1940s, their focus had shifted to academics fleeing SSRs, like Wolf Glatz. See “Our History,” Council for At-Risk Academics (2024): <https://www.cara.ngo/who-we-are/our-history>.

<sup>44</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams to Ilse Ursell, August 6, 1946. This was one of seven known letters Vaughan Williams wrote to the SPSL advocating for academic refugees during the 1930s and 1940s.

Reds.”<sup>45</sup> Though the former statement cannot be corroborated, Dr. Glatz obviously felt that his life was at risk by the middle of the 1940s.

The Glatz family found their economic circumstances greatly reduced once together in England. Sometime before 1950 they settled in the village of Newton Abbot, Devonshire, where Helen and Wolf struggled to scrape together a living through a series of part-time engagements. Wolf lectured at several local colleges and taught night-classes in German.<sup>46</sup> Helen threw herself into conducting amateur ensembles, such as the Kingsbridge Choral Society and the Newton Abbot String Orchestra.<sup>47</sup> She also played piano for local recitals and arranged incidental music for a repertory production of *Much Ado About Nothing*.<sup>48</sup> The Choral Society had particular success under Glatz in 1951, when they took part in two “Festival of Britain” performances in May and June. The repertoire included works that Glatz would have been quite familiar with from her RCM studies: Purcell’s *King Arthur*, Holst’s setting of “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” and Stanford’s *Songs of the Sea*.<sup>49</sup> Though these activities kept her busy and made her name known in the local musical community, money continued to be an issue. Wolf’s naturalization process was stalled “because Dr. Glatz was unable to find the

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<sup>45</sup> “Dead Doctor Had Fled From Reds,” *Sunday Sun*, January 18, 1953.

<sup>46</sup> “‘Pathetic Letter’ Read at N. Abbot Inquest.”

<sup>47</sup> “Appointment,” *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, September 8, 1950.

<sup>48</sup> “Shakespeare Success by Newton ‘Rep,’” *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, November 30, 1950.

<sup>49</sup> “Choral Concert at Kingsbridge,” *Western Evening Herald*, May 11, 1951.

fees.”<sup>50</sup> They were also not able to find permanent housing. “We have had no home since we came here,” Glatz reported at a public inquest in 1953.<sup>51</sup> After spending the war in Hungary “in a cellar...[with] hand-to-hand fighting going on overhead,” their situation in England must have been difficult indeed to provoke the depression that consumed Helen and Wolf during this period.<sup>52</sup>

In January of 1953, Wolf died suddenly. Helen’s obituary in the *Independent* is circumspect about the cause of his death, as is Glatz herself in her letter to Fuller. Contemporaneous newspaper coverage, however, makes it clear that Ernst died by suicide.<sup>53</sup> In a long report on the coroner’s inquest, a correspondent for the *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo* described a letter Wolf left for Helen, where he asked that she “not be too jealous that I went instead of you.” Helen, who was always identified in articles on Wolf’s death as “a concert pianist,” admitted that she had been depressed too, though not “unduly so.”<sup>54</sup> Helen’s situation after Wolf’s death deeply concerned her friends. “I had a letter from poor Helen Glatz,” Vaughan Williams wrote to Grace Williams the week after Wolf died. “I do wish I could do something to help her.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “‘Pathetic Letter’ Read at N. Abbot Inquest.”

<sup>51</sup> “‘Pathetic Letter’ Read at N. Abbot Inquest.”

<sup>52</sup> Glatz, “Helen Glatz,” 128.

<sup>53</sup> Cooper also states that Wolf Glatz died by suicide in her account of Helen Glatz’s background.

<sup>54</sup> “‘Pathetic Letter’ Read at N. Abbot Inquest.”

<sup>55</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams to Grace Williams, January 20, 1953.

Word spread, and the Vaughan Williams and Composers' Club circles seems to have rallied around the newly widowed Glatz. Her professional prospects vastly improved throughout 1953. Vaughan Williams had approved Glatz's string orchestra arrangement of his *Hymn Tune Prelude on Orlando Gibbons' Song No. 13* in 1951, and Oxford University Press finally published it in 1953.<sup>56</sup> She also took over the music course that her old friend Imogen Holst had developed at Dartington Hall. A historic estate originally built in the 14th century, Dartington Hall was the site of owners Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst's "Dartington Experiment." The Elmhirsts, a wealthy couple with ties to Nobel Literature laureate Rabindranath Tagore, purchased the Dartington estate in 1925 as a testing ground for their progressive education and rural restoration ideas. They founded the Dartington Hall School in 1926, and a School of Dance was opened in 1930. In the 1930s projects in forestry, theater, and agriculture were hosted at Dartington. "European artist refugees" were also welcomed starting in 1934.<sup>57</sup> Imogen Holst arrived in 1943 to establish a summer music course.

By the time Wolf Glatz died, the family had already been in Devonshire for five years. From the press records we have of Helen Glatz's musical activities between 1947 and 1953, it is clear that she considered herself a professional musician and was treated as such by her community. We have no way of knowing if Wolf disapproved of Helen

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<sup>56</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams to Alan Frank, November 21, 1951. Frank (director of the Oxford University Press music publishing division) issued Glatz's arrangement in 1953.

<sup>57</sup> Victor Bonham-Carter, *Dartington Hall: The Formative Years, 1925-1957* (Exmoor Press, 1970), 130.

working, but from her testimony during the coroner's inquiry it seems to have been a financial necessity for both husband and wife to earn some income. Imogen Holst's departure from Dartington to permanently join Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears at Aldeburgh was well-timed for Glatz – but what if she had not been widowed at just the “right” time? Would she have not “needed” a full-time position because she had a husband to provide for her? Holst herself was single and never married; the same goes for Grace Williams. Elizabeth Maconchy and Elisabeth Lutyens both had long marriages and did not work “outside the home” in quite the same way as Holst and Glatz, though Lutyens supported her family for many years by composing horror film scores.<sup>58</sup> Certainly these were all personal choices made based on individual financial and familial circumstances, but it is worth noting that the only women in the Club circle who taught for a living were single or widowed. Longstanding prejudice against married women working, particularly in education, may have also influenced each Club member's career choice. The so-called “marriage bar” for teachers was only made illegal by the 1944 Education Act.<sup>59</sup>

Assessing the exact timing of Glatz's Dartington appointment in relation to Wolf's death and Holst's permanent relocation to Aldeburgh is also difficult. According to Holst's biographer Christopher Grogan, she moved to Aldeburgh to become Britten's

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<sup>58</sup> Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams*, 77.

<sup>59</sup> UK Parliament, 1944 Education Act, Section 24, no. 3 reads: “No woman shall be disqualified for employment as a teacher in any county school or voluntary school, or be dismissed from such employment, by reason only of marriage.”

full-time assistant in September 1952.<sup>60</sup> Wolf Glatz died in January of 1953, and at that time the *Sunday Sun* reported that Helen Glatz was “on staff of Dartington Hall, Devon where she lectures on music.”<sup>61</sup> But was this “lecturing” casual or full-time employment? In January of 1953 the Glatz family were still living in Newton Abbott, about twenty kilometers from Dartington Hall in Totnes, but at some point Helen Glatz became resident at Dartington – per the memorial page on the Dartington Trust website, she “lived and worked at Dartington until her death in 1996.”<sup>62</sup>

Though it is not clear exactly when Glatz’s role at Dartington expanded from music teacher to “resident composer,” by the late fifties she was thoroughly entwined in Dartington’s musical life. She was “at last...able to compose and make music again,” at Dartington, which was to Glatz “heaven on earth.”<sup>63</sup> Glatz also continued to perform as a pianist and conductor, both at Dartington and in the surrounding community. One concert review from 1956 praises her for an “outstanding” performance of piano duets with David Edwards and identifies her as “Helen Glatz, of Dartington.”<sup>64</sup> The local press covered her concert appearances regularly; between 1959 and 1980 more than a

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<sup>60</sup> Christopher Grogan, *Imogen Holst: A Life in Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 142.

<sup>61</sup> “Dead Doctor Had Fled From Reds,” *Sunday Sun*, January 18, 1953.

<sup>62</sup> This page (I believe erroneously) states that Glatz took up residence at Dartington in 1950, which is contradicted by the many newspaper reports around Wolf’s death that give an address in Newton Abbot for the family. See “Helen Glatz,” Dartington Trust website, <https://www.dartington.org/helen-glatz/>.

<sup>63</sup> Glatz, “Helen Glatz,” 128.

<sup>64</sup> “Devon Music Fellowship: Choral Festival,” *Express and Echo*, May 7, 1956.

dozen reviews of her performances appeared in two local papers alone, the *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo* and the *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser*. Even so, it is likely that these press records only barely scratch the surface of her activities after she settled at Dartington. Based on her position at Dartington, her connections with Britten, Holst, and Vaughan Williams, and the newspaper coverage that does remain, it is safe to assume that Glatz performed frequently throughout this period.

At Dartington, Glatz accompanied performances by both students and visiting artists. Tenor Wilfred Brown visited in 1959, and Glatz accompanied him on a recital at the estate.<sup>65</sup> Brown had recently premiered Vaughan Williams's *Ten Blake Songs*, of which he was the dedicatee. Though Vaughan Williams died in 1958, shortly before the *Songs* had their first performance, perhaps Vaughan Williams had connected Brown and Glatz before his death. Peter Pears was also a frequent guest at Dartington, though I have not been able to confirm that Glatz accompanied him on any of his recitals.<sup>66</sup> It seems likely that she did perform with him, however, given her position at Dartington and her connection to Pears through Britten, who she remembered from her RCM days "when he used to be Edward B. Britten!"<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Concert advertisement, *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, October 27, 1959.

<sup>66</sup> An advertisement in the *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo* from February 2, 1966, for example, lists Pears and soprano Viola Tunnard as the featured artists on an upcoming Dartington College of Arts subscription concert, but does not list an accompanist for the recital.

<sup>67</sup> Glatz, "Helen Glatz," 127.

Glatz performed in local ensembles in a variety of roles during this period. In early 1960 she was the timpanist in a Torbay Philharmonic Society production of the *Messiah*.<sup>68</sup> Percussion was a late addition to her instrumental repertoire; according to the *Independent's* obituary of Glatz, she began percussion lessons with James Blades after her arrival at Dartington.<sup>69</sup> Blades was a frequent collaborator of Britten's who taught at the Dartington summer music course.<sup>70</sup> Glatz also returned to the violin in July of 1960, when she was part of the orchestra for a performance of young Britten protege James Butt's organ concerto in Torquay.

The orchestra for the concert is a most interesting one as it includes many well-known performers who will be playing instruments not usually associated with them. For example, Kathleen Frazier, recently retired West Region BBC resident accompanist, will be among the violinists as well Helen Glatz, composer teacher at Dartington Hall, while the solo flute will be played by Keith Lovell the viola player in the Dartington String Quartet.<sup>71</sup>

The involvement of so many Dartington figures at this concert may be explained by Butt's own ties to the school; he studied there under Imogen Holst in the late 1940s.<sup>72</sup>

Choral and orchestral conducting also continued to be part of Glatz's musical life through the sixties and seventies. She was the conductor of a community orchestra called the Torbay Orchestral Society for several years in the early sixties as part of the

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<sup>68</sup> "Two Performances of 'Messiah'," *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, February 19, 1960.

<sup>69</sup> Thompson, "Obituary: Helen Glatz."

<sup>70</sup> James Blades, *Drum Roll* (Faber, 1977), x, 218.

<sup>71</sup> "Composer Conducts," *Bristol Evening Post*, June 25, 1960.

<sup>72</sup> "Death of Leading Composer," *Ipswich Star*, March 7, 2003.

Paignton Further Education programme.<sup>73</sup> It is not clear if she maintained her earlier post leading the Kingsbridge Choral Society; I have not been able to find any reports on the group's activities after 1951. Two local papers also covered a 1963 recital in Shaldon, Devon, where Glatz conducted a chamber group called the Kernow Ensemble, which also appears to have been short-lived.<sup>74</sup> Her most frequent appearances as a conductor were at Dartington, though. There she conducted the musicians for the annual Christmas Festival, including a select choir called the John Holland Singers.<sup>75</sup> In her letter to Fuller, Glatz recalled that her only unpaid commissions were those written as Christmas presents for Dartington founders Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst, which were performed for the family "in true mediaeval style" at the yearly Festival.<sup>76</sup>

Glatz's work as a choral conductor and teacher at Dartington led in 1978 to one of the most publicized commissions of her career. Martin Hassall, a former student of Glatz's at Dartington, became the conductor of the Crewe Male Voice Choir in 1976. "The choir is practising twice a week for Blackpool where they will sing a special test

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<sup>73</sup> "A Date for Players," *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, November 17, 1964.

<sup>74</sup> "Recital in Church," *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, July 30, 1963 and "There was a large attendance..." *Express and Echo*, July 30, 1963. The last mention of the Kernow Ensemble I was able to find in the BNA was from the *Torbay Express* on October 14, 1964.

<sup>75</sup> "Devon Festival Will Give TV a Christmas Touch," *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, December 19, 1959; "TV Will Show Devon Christmas Festival Again," *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, December 17, 1960; "Schools Festival at Dartington," *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, December 8, 1961; "Students in 'Pastoral'," *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, February 25, 1963; "Christmas Festival Again at Dartington," *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, December 9, 1964; "S Devon Recital of Christmas Music," *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, December 10, 1965.

<sup>76</sup> Glatz, "Helen Glatz," 128.

choice, called 'Fishermen at Dawn', arranged for them by Helen Glatz," reported the *Nantwich Chronicle* in September of 1978. The choir continued to perform the piece in competition throughout their 1979 season, including in a tour to Crewe's sister town in France.<sup>77</sup>

At Dartington Glatz also frequently provided original music for stage productions, including ballet.<sup>78</sup> These play scores also generated coverage in nationally circulating publications for Glatz for the first time since the thirties. In 1956 the *Stage* reviewed a Dartington production of *Romeo and Juliet* for which Glatz provided incidental music.<sup>79</sup> This would be the beginning of a steady stream of theater commissions for Glatz through the sixties and seventies. Most were for productions tailored to children, though she did write music for a play called *The Mask of Ceinan* staged by the University of Exeter in 1968. According to a *Times* review by Gillian Widdicombe, the music for this play was scored for a mixed chorus with winds and percussion.<sup>80</sup> In 1959 Glatz wrote music for a children's version of *The Dancing Princesses*.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> "Choir Seeks Singers," *Staffordshire Sentinel*, May 24, 1979.

<sup>78</sup> The children's ballet class performances at Dartington were "original story-ballets, often with specially written music by Helen Glatz," according to Lorraine Nicholas, *Dancing in Utopia: Dartington Hall and Its Dancers* (Dance Books, 2007), 144.

<sup>79</sup> "Romeo and Juliet at Dartington," *Stage*, August 9, 1956.

<sup>80</sup> Gillian Widdicombe, "Achievement for Exeter Students," *Times*, March 8, 1968.

<sup>81</sup> Advertisement for "Christmas Productions with a Difference," *Stage*, September 24, 1959.

A decade later, she embarked on a long-term collaboration with a unique theater troupe called the Polka Company of Actors and Puppets. As the name suggests, the group staged works that mixed puppet and non-puppet actors. These works included an adaptation of the *Odyssey* starring three masked actors and “a chorus of puppets,” and *The Animals of Gubbins Farm*, which reportedly played to “packed houses of four- to nine-year-olds.”<sup>82</sup> It is not entirely clear from newspaper accounts how many of the Polka Company’s productions were scored by Glatz, but both the *Odyssey* adaptation and *The Animals of Gubbins Farm* are explicitly credited to Glatz, as well as a work called *The Puppets at the Fair* (1972).<sup>83</sup>

While Glatz’s own performance activities slowed near the end of her life, performances of her music, particularly her chamber works, became more frequent. RCM students Ann Aldridge and Michael Rosewell performed “Two Songs” (no other details provided) by Glatz at an RCM *abendlieder* in February of 1979.<sup>84</sup> Several concerts featuring Glatz’s works were held at Dartington and elsewhere in the eighties and nineties, including “a special concert of her compositions” in Dartington’s Great Hall on May 1, 1983. This recital, held to celebrate Glatz’s three decades of work at the school, featured two unusual compositions: a sonata for violin and harpsichord composed in 1968, and a sonatina for flute and harpsichord. Both pieces were written for organist

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<sup>82</sup> “New Productions by Player/Puppet Co.,” *Stage*, July 24, 1969; Anne Morley-Priestman, “The Animals of Gubbins Farm,” *Stage*, March 23, 1978.

<sup>83</sup> “Actors and Puppets,” *Stage*, August 17, 1972.

<sup>84</sup> “College Record,” *Royal College of Music Magazine* 75, no. 2 (May 1979): 73.

and harpsichordist John Wellingham, an early music specialist also based at Dartington.<sup>85</sup> The Dartington Ensemble advertised a concert of music by Glatz, Imogen Holst, Berio, and Mozart in November 1985. Outside of Devon, the Goldberg Ensemble played at least two concerts of “mainly unfamiliar British music,” including an *Elegy* by Glatz, in early 1989. Their April 1989 performance at a London church was one of the few performances of Glatz’s music to make it into the *Musical Times*, though it was just a notice in that month’s “London Diary” concert schedule rather than a review.<sup>86</sup> The *Manchester Evening News* did offer a brief review of the program when it was performed at the Royal Northern College of Music in February of the same year; their critic called Glatz’s piece “charming.”<sup>87</sup>

“Charming” may seem a strange descriptor for an elegy, but Glatz’s music was often dismissed with similar language. Very few newspaper reports on performances of her music actually engage with it critically; the ones that do follow a clear pattern. Her score for *The Mask of Ceinan* was called “attractive” in 1968; in 1992 Barry Millington of the *Times* called her *Elegy* “old-fashioned.”<sup>88</sup> A *Musical Times* review of one of her

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<sup>85</sup> “Heralder’s Diary,” *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, April 27, 1983; Christopher Monk, “Where the Wind Blows,” *Early Music* 2, no. 4 (1974): 255.

<sup>86</sup> “London Diary for April,” *Musical Times* 130, no. 1753 (April 1989).

<sup>87</sup> “Weekend Reviews,” *Manchester Evening News*, February 20, 1989.

<sup>88</sup> Gillian Widdicombe, “Achievement for Exeter Students,” *Times*, March 8, 1968; Barry Millington, “European Women’s Orchestra/Martinez St. John’s, Smith Square,” *Times*, January 24, 1992.

earliest works, a string quartet performed on a Society of Women Musicians concert in 1937, read:

Helen Hunter's quartet showed real promise and no inconsiderable achievement in its earlier movements. Though invention produced nothing striking in her themes, she made clever use of them and several times seemed on the verge of bringing off a fine climax, yet each time drew back as if afraid to face the issue. This was especially so in the slow movement, which was often really beautiful, but never fulfilled itself.<sup>89</sup>

These tepid descriptions seem at odds with Glatz's lifelong affinity for Bartók and Kodály, not to mention her long association with the Composers' Club members and Britten, who were all to one degree or another modernist in their aesthetic. Millington even acknowledges the "evident" influence of Kodály on Glatz's *Elegy*, though he also claims to hear evidence of Vaughan Williams's tutelage in the work.

Contrary to the *Musical Times's* assessment of her quartet, the *Daily Telegraph* found the work "severe," "as is fashionable these days." The unnamed critic even suggested that "perhaps Miss Hunter's thought [sic] would flow more freely if she were to relax some of her austerity."<sup>90</sup> The *Telegraph* critic's distaste for Glatz's apparently modernist idiom recalls reception of the music of Maconchy and Lutyens discussed in Chapter III. That her music was sometimes received with similar hostility suggests that Glatz's style had at least superficial sonic resemblance to that of Maconchy and Lutyens.

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<sup>89</sup> "Society of Women Musicians," *Musical Times* 78, no. 1130 (April 1937): 365.

<sup>90</sup> "Two Women Composers," *Daily Telegraph*, March 22, 1937.

Further evidence pointing to a modernist bent in Glatz's music comes from critic

Felix Aprahamian:

I went to a chamber concert at the RCM this evening. The only altogether satisfactory thing was a sextet for wind by Helen Hunter whom I identified as the damsel Donald brought to the last Contemporary Centre Concert with him. She is a pupil of RVW and has here produced a worthy work. She should go far.<sup>91</sup>

Even as a very young man – he was just nineteen at the time of this diary entry –

Aprahamian had a strong affinity for new music. He would later become an ardent champion of Messiaen, but in the early thirties his taste leant toward Stravinsky, Delius, and Bloch.<sup>92</sup> Singling out Glatz's sextet as he did suggests that her idiom was at the very least somewhat progressive.

These conflicting accounts of Glatz's compositional aesthetic imply that her work occupied a stylistic middle ground, which could be construed as “too modern” or “not modern enough” depending on the temporal and cultural context. Establishment critics in the thirties, who found Maconchy and Lutyens “too cerebral” to be appropriately feminine, seized on the “austere” elements of Glatz's idiom for criticism. But by the time Glatz's music was being revived in the eighties and nineties, postwar modernity had taken thorough hold of the British “art music” world, and consequently her output became “charming.”

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<sup>91</sup> Lewis Foreman and Susan Foreman, eds. “1933,” in *Felix Aprahamian: Diaries and Selected Writings on Music* (Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 88.

<sup>92</sup> Foreman and Foreman, *Felix Aprahamian*, 14, 51, 78.

It is difficult to independently assess Glatz's style due to extremely limited preserved material. Publication mostly eluded her during her lifetime. Until the early 1990s her only published works were the Vaughan Williams arrangement that had been issued by Oxford University Press at Vaughan Williams's own urging, a *Prelude and Scherzo* for solo flute (1956), and *Here Are the Forests* for flute and soprano (1966). Between 1992 and 2001 several small presses published a dozen of Glatz's earlier works, including the *Sonatina* for flute and harpsichord performed at Dartington in 1983. I have only been able to examine the *Sonatina* in any detail, but its aesthetic fits within my earlier suggestion that Glatz's style lay somewhere between Vaughan Williams and Lutyens. The piece is virtuosic, rhythmically complex, and does not adhere to traditional tonal procedures. However, it is not dodecapronic or serial in any way and does not require extended technique. It is, however, strongly reminiscent of Bartók. An illustrative example comes near the end of the third movement, "Finale":

Fig. III.1: Helen Glatz, "Finale" from *Sonatina for Flute and Harpsichord*, mm. 161-170

The strong quartal and quintal harmonies, ostinato rhythms, and simple imitation recall Bartók's treatment of folk music in pieces like the *Roumanian Dances* and *Sonatina* (both 1915) as well as freer compositions like the middle movement of his second string quartet (1920).

The only extant recording of Glatz's music appears on a compilation called *Music From Dartington* released in 1973; Glatz's "Fanfare" opens the LP. As of this writing I have attempted to purchase a copy of this LP without success, and it is unfortunately not held by any libraries accessible to me through ILL. I hope that this and future projects will bring wider attention to Glatz's extant music and lead to future recordings. In the meantime Glatz's music remains in "oblivion," though her life has now been more thoroughly explored.

## **Conclusion**

The influence of the Composers' Club cohort on the professional prospects of female RCM composition Scholars cannot be overstated. As I have shown in this chapter, the Club was a deciding factor in Helen Glatz's access to stable employment in music even in the face of personal events that could have overshadowed her career. The absence of such a cohort to support May Gilson may have factored into her apparent retreat from professional life, though other pressures unique to women musicians were certainly also in play.

Glatz, however, was the last Scholar to benefit from the Composers' Club's support. In the next chapter, I describe changes in the RCM environment, including the fragmentation of the Club, which negatively impacted female Scholars writ large. After Glatz left the College in 1933 the number of female first study composition Scholars plunged. The Club bubble not only dissolved; it popped.

## Chapter V: The RCM in the 1930s

### Introduction

Though the RCM's Royal Charter gave it the power to confer graduate diplomas from its foundation, the institution did not choose to exercise this right until 1921. That year, the RCM began offering the qualification of "Graduate of the Royal College of Music," or the GRCM. Previously the RCM alone offered a Graduate of the Royal College of Music degree. The GRCM was, in Wright's words, "rather more idealist than practical," requiring four years of College study and two "high honors" ARCM passes. Very few GRCMs were awarded, and the degree was no longer offered by 1941.<sup>1</sup> By that point it had been eclipsed by the Graduate of the Royal Schools of Music (hereafter GRSM), established as a joint credential with the RAM in 1930. Unlike the ARCM or LRAM, which could be earned through examination by any musician regardless of institutional training, the GRSM required matriculation at one of the royal schools of music, followed by three years of training in music and music teaching.<sup>2</sup>

The primary purpose of the GRSM in its early years was to provide teachers with a suitable qualification for registration with the Teachers Registration Council; previously, a personal attestation of the candidate's credentials from the RCM's Director was required. A creation of the 1918 Education Act, the Teacher's Registration

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 169.

<sup>2</sup> David C. Wright, *The Royal College of Music and Its Contexts* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 172.

Council was intended to professionalize teaching, particularly in state-run compulsory schools. By the time the GRSM was instituted, music teaching had been considered a suitable career for women for at least half a century, so it is not surprising that in its first decade the vast majority of GRSM graduates were women. Out of 245 GRSM holders listed in the 1940–41 Joint Graduate Prospectus, 204 had identifiably female first names. The remaining balance of graduates had masculine names (18) or were listed with only initials (28). These numbers are even more striking expressed as percentages: the first ten years of GRSM graduates were over 80 percent women. This trend was clear from the outset of the diploma; in the first year GRSMs were awarded, all 30 graduates were women. The next year, 1932, saw just one man join the cohort. Growth of the degree was slow for a few years after 1931, but between 1935 and 1936 the number of GRSMs granted jumped by nearly 50 percent. After that, numbers remained steady into the forties.

Consequently, a new kind of gender gap opened at the RCM. In the twenties, women – Scholars and fee-payers alike – were siloed into suitably feminine pursuits like piano, singing, and violin. As the thirties progressed, more and more women chose to enroll in the GRSM course. This created a clear division between women who were aspiring teachers and women who were trying to make it in the more masculinized world of performance or composition. Though the GRSM was created during their time at the RCM, none of the Composers' Club members, including Helen Hunter Glatz, chose to pursue the diploma. However, Grace Margaret Meachen, a violinist-composer at the fringes of the Composers' Club group who I profile in the next chapter, did take

the GRSM. So did Shanti Seldon, an Indian pianist-composer who entered the College in 1936 and is my final subject in this project. Agnes Joan Arkell, who also studied piano and composition at the RCM in the late thirties and, as I will discuss in the next chapter, pursued a career as a performer, did not seek a GRSM. Neither did any of the small but well-documented cohort of Australian women who studied composition at the RCM as a first study in the thirties. While specific individual circumstances naturally influenced each woman's decision to pursue or not pursue the GRSM qualification, it is a fairly reliable indicator of how they believed their professional career would or could proceed.

The creation of the GRSM at the beginning of the decade anticipated the professionalizing reforms that would be instituted by the RCM's fourth Director, George Dyson, whose stewardship of the College began in 1938. Because his tenure began so late in the decade under review, his effect on the overall Scholar cohort in the thirties is small. However, his appointment reflected the values and concerns of the RCM's governing board in the years preceding his ascent to the Director post. An organist and composer from a modest Yorkshire background, Dyson was an early RCM Scholar himself. His post-RCM career was carefully engineered by then-RCM Director Hubert Parry, who secured Dyson a job teaching at the Royal Naval College, Osborne. Once Dyson had acquired some experience and "polish" at Osborne, he taught at a

succession of prestigious boys' private schools including Winchester College.<sup>3</sup> A thoroughly practical and professional musician, Dyson was a strong contrast to the College's previous directors, who were genteel, professorial men with Oxbridge educations. He considered himself "what the eighteenth century called a kapellmeister...a musician equipped to both compose and produce such music as is needed in his position or environment."<sup>4</sup>

Dyson was also vocally anti-modernist, a view he publicized in his 1924 monograph *The New Music*. In this short tract, he advocated for "sound taste" and the "power of the best to endure," using Beethoven's fifth symphony and Handel's *Messiah* as examples of "the best." The dissemination of these "best" works among all classes of people, believed Dyson, would then develop "sound taste" nationally.

The village chorus aspires to the *Messiah*. Still more illuminating are the artistic fortunes of that delightfully indigenous institution, the brass band. A score of men in a remote neighbourhood, having apparently no artistic antecedents either individually or collectively, will tackle an array of difficult instruments and, in the intervals of working hard for a living, will make themselves into sound executive musicians. What do they play? In the first place, dances and marches and popular tunes. These are simple in outline, and are to be had in technically easy forms. But soon the 'selection' is demanded; from musical comedy, from light opera, from grand opera. From this latter follows inevitably the desire to attempt overtures and suites, including the best.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 67. Winchester is one of England's oldest and most prestigious secondary schools.

<sup>4</sup> Dyson, quoted in Wright, *The Royal College of Music*, 182.

<sup>5</sup> George Dyson, *The New Music* (Oxford University Press, 1924), 13.

This passage is strongly reminiscent of Hugh Allen's exhortation in his January 1920 director's address, where he lectured Collegians on "the importance of [listening's] cultivation if we are to reap in an adequate way the advantages of living a musical life."<sup>6</sup> As we will see in a later section of this chapter, Dyson's aesthetic conservatism was already characteristic of College concerts before he became Director, but his appointment solidified the increasingly reactionary tenor of the RCM's musical life.

The RCM in the 1920s had rebuilt and thrived under Hugh Allen. This is not to say that there were not significant social and financial tensions undergirding the College's success during the decade. As the previous two chapters show, there were stark divisions in gender, class, and origin among Scholars, and those factors significantly impacted career outcomes for many alumni. While practical reforms like the GRSM made RCM training more attractive to aspiring musical professionals, some of the underlying issues from the twenties spilled into the thirties and intensified. Conservative and reactionary postures became increasingly prominent at the College, culminating in Dyson's directorship, and female Scholars were particularly affected by this backward streak.

In Chapter I, I briefly described the small cohort of RCM-trained female oboists that emerged in the early thirties. The trajectory of this cohort of Scholars parallels and is interrelated with the Composers' Club bubble of the late twenties. It has both similar origins and similar boundaries, which speak to a specific type of female

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<sup>6</sup> Allen, "Director's Address," *Royal College of Music Magazine* 16, no. 2: 4.

“representation” that obscures the larger picture of equity. In the next section, I use this female oboist bubble to set off a discussion of a retrenchment of male Scholars in traditionally masculine disciplines and growing conservatism in the RCM’s performance culture.

### **The Curious Case of the Oboe**

From 1920–1929, six Scholars were funded for primary or secondary study on the oboe. Of these six, four were men and two were women. In the 1930s, the number of oboe Scholars increased by one, but the gender ratio reversed: five women received scholarships to study oboe, while only two male Scholars listed it as their primary or secondary subject. Absent similar trends in other woodwind instruments – flute, for example, remained a resolutely masculine pursuit among Scholars, as did clarinet and bassoon – one would be forgiven for thinking this just an odd coincidence. Admittedly the sample size is small; even so, it is worth considering possible explanations. What set the oboe apart from the clarinet and the flute?

Until the early decades of the twentieth century, very few women played wind instruments in Britain, with the exception of street performers. In her monograph *Musical Women in England*, Paula Gillett notes that in nineteenth-century Britain it was widely considered at best indecorous and at worst taboo for a woman to play an instrument with her mouth in public, as the resultant “facial distortions” were

unbecoming.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, increasing literacy and familiarity with classical sources in nineteenth-century Britain “strengthened the negative associations between women and the flute.” Gillett writes,

Athena, known in mythology as [the flute’s] inventor, was said to have thrown her instrument into a lake or stream upon seeing the reflection of her distorted features as she played it (...) The female flute players of ancient Athens performed at banquets, dancing lasciviously as they played; hence Plato associated the flute with wild Bacchanals and said that “no modest woman could hear the Lydian flute with impunity.”<sup>8</sup>

As discussed in Chapter III, the vast majority of female RCM Scholars in the interwar period came from the rising middle class and were therefore constrained by bourgeois notions of respectability to protect their class status. These were not women who could afford to appear in any way “lascivious” in public.

Furthermore, the scholarship data in the Register show the flute was still strongly associated with military bands, which were of course restricted to men. Male flute Scholars often came from musical or military families, and two were enlisted men themselves. Of the nine (entirely male) flute Scholars at College in the 1930s, for example, three had fathers who were professional musicians, and two were the sons of career soldiers. In other words, the majority were continuing a paternal, masculine profession. By contrast, the single female flute Scholar who entered the RCM in the 1920s was the daughter of a shipping clerk. The all-male interwar bassoon Scholar

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<sup>7</sup> Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England, 1870–1914: Encroaching on All Man’s Privilege* (St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 193.

<sup>8</sup> Gillett, *Musical Women in England*, 194.

cohort had similar demographics to their flautist colleagues; about a third were Kneller Hall Scholars (active military bandsmen), and the majority were from musical or military families.

In the 1920s, seven Scholars took clarinet as their first study – six men and one woman. The men were uniformly sons of musicians or enlisted soldiers, whereas Isobel Carter was the daughter of an Australian schoolteacher. Carter was already 24 when she entered the College in 1929, and had completed a university degree in music back in Australia before she came to England. Her age, origin, and relatively brief stay at the College might explain why her presence did not have much impact on the gender balance of the clarinet studio. No new female clarinet Scholars entered the RCM for the next decade.

Another difficulty for women clarinetists was the increasing popularity of jazz. American jazz's arrival in Britain is often popularly dated to the (all-white) Original Dixieland Jazz Band's London concerts in 1919, but as Catherine Parsonage argues, "jazz had developed a clear and consistent image that was widely disseminated in Britain" long before the ODJB came ashore.<sup>9</sup> Part of that "consistent image" was the instrumentation of the "jazz orchestra," which was popularly understood to include the clarinet.<sup>10</sup> While jazz gained a quick foothold in popular culture, especially as recorded

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<sup>9</sup> Catherine Parsonage, "A Critical Reassessment of the Reception of Early Jazz in Britain," *Popular Music* 22, no. 3 (2003): 316.

<sup>10</sup> Parsonage, "A Critical Reassessment," 320–321.

music became more commonly available, Andrew Blake notes that jazz and other American musics were strenuously resisted

from within and without the British musical establishment on the grounds that these were black or black-derived forms and that black music was dangerous; that it would infect the white 'race' with its open eroticism and its association with illegal narcotic drugs. There was a particular fear that eroticised and narcoticised music would make white women open to the advances of black men, the common fear of 'miscegenation' around which many forms of racism have been organised.<sup>11</sup>

The "danger" of jazz to women in particular would have reinforced the sense among the families of most female Scholars that the clarinet was an unsuitable instrument for their daughters. It is not surprising, then, that no female clarinet Scholars entered the College in the 1930s.

What is surprising is that the oboe had such a surge in popularity among women Scholars at a time when two closely-related instruments were still mostly inaccessible to female players. Several factors may have been at play. First, the oboe itself was steadily gaining popularity as a solo and chamber instrument. In the late nineteenth century the oboe had been considered "too delicate for military music, too difficult for the amateur and too brash for the domestic salon," but by the 1920s the young British oboist Leon Goossens was making a name for the oboe in chamber recitals and concerto performances.<sup>12</sup> Goossens would go on to teach at the Royal College and the Royal

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Blake, *The Land Without Music: Music, Culture and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (Manchester University Press, 1997), 85.

<sup>12</sup> Burgess and Haynes quoted in Jonathan Tobutt, "Reassessing the Impact and Influence of the British Oboist Leon Goossens" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2016), 7; Tobutt, 40.

Academy starting in 1924. Like Vaughan Williams, Goossens was receptive to female students, which has led some to suggest that he alone explains the influx of female oboists in the 1930s. I argue, however, that the oboe's lack of military association ("too delicate") and remove from "dangerous" black music made it far more palatable as an instrument for women than any other wind instrument. Furthermore, the female RCM oboe cohort was briefly able to self-perpetuate, with multiple members joining the oboe studio directly because of the influence of their seniors.

The first stone in this RCM oboe revolution was thrown by Sylvia Mortimer Spencer (1909–1978), the 17-year-old daughter of a school headmistress and a British Museum geologist. Trained as a violinist and pianist at St. Paul's School and the RCM Junior Division during childhood, Spencer won a Foundation scholarship in 1926 and entered the RCM in September of that year, choosing the oboe as her first study. While at College she quickly established herself as a performer, both in chamber and orchestral music. With fellow Collegians John Francis (flute) and Millicent Silver (piano) she founded the Sylvan Trio, which specialized in new music; she was also appointed second oboe in the City Orchestra of Birmingham by then-conductor Adrian Boult.<sup>13</sup>

Spencer's enthusiasm for new works brought her into the orbit of the RCM Composers' Club. She seems to have developed particularly close relationships with Elisabeth Lutyens, who also regularly collaborated with Spencer's elder sister, ballet

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<sup>13</sup> Amanda Karen Dusold, "The Oboe Is a Lady: The Legacy of Britain's Female Professional Oboists, 1920–2000," (DMA diss., University of Maryland College Park, 2020), 12–13.

dancer Penelope Spencer; and Imogen Holst, who wrote two chamber pieces for Spencer in the late twenties.<sup>14</sup> Spencer, Lutyens, Holst, and Composers' Club alumnae Elizabeth Maconchy, Dorothy Gow, and Grace Williams, were all involved in a critically-acclaimed concert series co-founded by Lutyens with violinist Anne MacNaghten and conductor Iris Lemare. This series, known as the MacNaghten-Lemare concerts, ran from 1931 to 1937. Oboist Amanda Karen Dusold writes in her 2020 dissertation on British women oboists that "reports of [Spencer's] playing during this period were unanimously enthusiastic."<sup>15</sup> Just as she was becoming firmly established as one of the leading oboists of her generation, Spencer married. She continued to play professionally after her 1936 wedding, but her marriage took her away from London; she settled in Manchester with her husband and three daughters, where she freelanced and taught for a time at the Royal Manchester College of Music.<sup>16</sup>

Natalie Caine (1909–2008), who entered the RCM in 1928 as a fee-paying pianist, credited Spencer with inspiring her to switch to the oboe.<sup>17</sup> Following in Spencer's footsteps, Caine won a Foundation scholarship to study oboe in 1932. That same year a young oboist named Margaret Eliot (1914–2011) entered the RCM as a fee-paying student; she would later win a Royal Amateur Orchestral Society scholarship tenable

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<sup>14</sup> Rhiannon Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams and Twentieth Century Music: A Blest Trio of Sirens* (Ashgate, 2013), 25; Dusold, "The Oboe Is a Lady," 15.

<sup>15</sup> Dusold, "The Oboe Is a Lady," 14.

<sup>16</sup> Dusold, "The Oboe Is a Lady," 15.

<sup>17</sup> Dusold, "The Oboe Is a Lady," 16.

from 1933–1936. Though Spencer had left the College by this point, another female oboe Scholar was there to welcome Caine and Eliot. Evelyn Rothwell (1911–2008) had received an Ernest Palmer scholarship (for natives of Berkshire) in 1931 and was already making a name for herself as an orchestral player; she had successfully deputized for Goossens a number of times, and had been appointed second oboe in John Barbirolli's new Touring Company Orchestra.<sup>18</sup> Caine and Rothwell became first "firm friends," then duet partners, then flatmates.<sup>19</sup> "We lived and breathed the oboe in our flat together," Caine later recalled.<sup>20</sup> The duo were also the first women to play oboe with the LSO, when they performed with the orchestra for a BBC broadcast in 1934.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, Eliot joined Spencer in chamber orchestra performances at the MacNaghten-Lemare concert series.<sup>22</sup>

A fourth member of their cohort joined them in 1934, when Joy Boughton (1913–1963) entered the College as a Foundation Scholar. Rothwell had left her College studies to tour with Barbirolli and take on other freelance engagements, but she continued to call her flat with Caine home base.<sup>23</sup> Caine was still studying at the RCM, though she

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<sup>18</sup> Dusold, "The Oboe Is a Lady," 18; Harold Atkins and Peter Cotes, *The Barbirollis: A Musical Marriage* (Robson Books, 1983), 25.

<sup>19</sup> Atkins and Cotes, *The Barbirollis*, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Atkins and Cotes, *The Barbirollis*, 23.

<sup>21</sup> Atkins and Cotes, *The Barbirollis*, 55.

<sup>22</sup> Sophie Fuller, "Putting the BBC and T. Beecham to Shame: The MacNaghten-Lemare Concerts, 1931–37," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 138, no. 2 (2013): 398 (n98).

<sup>23</sup> Atkins and Cotes, *The Barbirollis*, 54.

would also soon leave the College as her performance career picked up; Eliot was also still at the RCM. Like her predecessors, Boughton, the daughter of composer and vocal Communist Rutland Boughton, quickly found success as a London freelancer.<sup>24</sup>

After Spencer moved to Manchester in 1936, Caine took her place in the Sylvan Trio; Rothwell continued to freelance and perform with Barbirolli's various orchestras, before she and Barbirolli married in 1939. Sometime before the outbreak of the War, Boughton joined the Sylvan Trio in Caine's stead, possibly when Caine became the LSO's principal cor anglais player in 1937.<sup>25</sup> Boughton would remain with the Trio until her early death in 1963.<sup>26</sup>

Any discussion of women oboists and composers at the RCM must also mention Ruth Gipps, who entered the College in 1937 with a partial bursary to study piano and composition, with oboe as her second study subject.<sup>27</sup> One of her early RCM triumphs was the Carlotta Rowe Exhibition, which she was granted in summer 1938. The Carlotta Rowe is an interesting award. While it entitled the holder to free tuition and some maintenance and was specifically for female students, it also carried the caveat that the

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<sup>24</sup> Dusold, "The Oboe Is a Lady," 21.

<sup>25</sup> Tobutt, "Leon Goossens," 20.

<sup>26</sup> Dusold, "The Oboe Is a Lady," 23.

<sup>27</sup> Gipps does not appear in the Scholar Register that I examined. However, her biographer Jill Halstead asserts that Gipps began her RCM studies in 1937 and "won a bursary for the first two terms of study," so I went back to the RCMM archives to confirm. According to the RCMM, Gipps earned her ARCM in October 1936, and was awarded the Leverhulme Scholarship and Carlotta Rowe Exhibition during the Midsummer term of 1938. Both of these awards were usually recorded in the Scholar Register, so this may indicate that the data there is somewhat incomplete.

honoree be a “composer of Light Opera.” This perhaps unintentionally ghettoized its recipients into both a narrow aesthetic and a “lesser” artistic status, especially after professionalizing and modernizing efforts began at the BBC in the 1930s. In some cases it was awarded after or alongside a Foundation scholarship — as in the case of Helen Glatz, who received it in summer 1931 — but women for whom it was their only award frequently faded into obscurity. Examples of this latter category include Ianthe Dalway-Turnbull and Dulcie Holland, both of whom have only recently resurfaced in scholarship.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Gipps’s compositional idiom was and would remain quite conservative throughout her career. In her “Personal Credo” published by *Composer* magazine in 1975, Gipps wrote that

All so-called music written without inspiration is not music at all, and the people who write it are not composers. Ranging from the super-intellectual to the wildest and woolliest lunatic fringe, we have for years been given performances of worthless nonsense, while real composers have been labelled backward-looking, unenterprising, or ‘unwilling to experiment.’<sup>28</sup>

After studying with Vaughan Williams from 1940–42, Gipps began her professional career as both a solo pianist and an orchestral oboist. This second vocation as an oboist seemed very promising at the outset; in the early forties she performed with the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Theatre Orchestra, the Carla Rosa Opera Company, the National Philharmonic, and the Liverpool Philharmonic.<sup>29</sup> In 1944

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<sup>28</sup> Gipps, “A Personal Credo,” 14.

<sup>29</sup> Jill Halstead, *Ruth Gipps: Anti-Modernism, Nationalism and Difference in English Music* (Ashgate, 2006), 24.

she was appointed second oboe in the City of Birmingham Orchestra. However, Gipps was quickly forced out of this position by salacious rumors about her relationship with the CBO's conductor, Gipps's old friend George Weldon.<sup>30</sup> Her biographer, Jill Halstead, notes that in addition to the gossip surrounding Gipps and the fact that she was by default excluded from the "old boys' club" atmosphere around the male players, she "made little attempt to mix with the female players in the orchestra, reinforcing the women's peripheral status, neither gaining wider acceptance nor able to form their own independent group."<sup>31</sup> Considering the relative success of the Composers' Club circle at the RCM a decade before Gipps entered the College, the suggestion that Gipps's career may have been better served had she cultivated relationships with her female colleagues at CBO is particularly resonant. Her quick exclusion from orchestral playing also meant that there were vanishingly few female oboists in the British orchestral scene to carry on the legacy of Spencer, Rothwell, Caine, and Boughton.

Despite the early successes of the RCM's female oboist cohort, women did not immediately become common in the oboe sections of British orchestras in the next generation. After Rothwell and Caine's stint with the LSO in the thirties, no other female oboist was a full-time member of that ensemble until 2016.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the

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<sup>30</sup> Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 26, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 26.

<sup>32</sup> "Former Members of the London Symphony Orchestra," LSO, 2021.

Philharmonia Orchestra did not have any women in its oboe section into the 1990s.<sup>33</sup> Women had the most success in the BBC Symphony, perhaps due to the long tenure and influence of Helen Gaskell, introduced in Chapter I of this document. Gaskell – also an early Goossens student, though she was at the RAM – was a member of the BBC Symphony from 1932–1966, and Gaskell’s student Janet Craxton (1929–1981) joined her teacher in the ensemble from 1954–1963. Joan Whiting also played with the BBC Symphony for a short period in the late 1970s, and Jennifer Caws joined as principal oboe in 1980.<sup>34</sup>

The ascent of female oboists in the 1930s is not just an outlier in the data; it is a prism that refracts a whole spectrum of ambiguities facing minoritized musicians during the interwar years. It also closely parallels the Composers’ Club bubble discussed in Chapter III, in that it does not represent a trend, but rather a brief set of specific circumstances. Like the Composers’ Club, the cohort of female oboists in the thirties excelled because they were a cohort. While the percentage of male Scholars increased in most other first study subjects – including, significantly, composition – aspiring female oboists saw a crack in the door, left open by their predecessors in the twenties, and pushed through. But without enduring institutional support, the cohort remained a bubble rather than a new stream in professional orchestral personnel.

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<sup>33</sup> Stephen Pettit, *Philharmonia Orchestra: A Record of Achievement, 1945–1985* (R. Hale, 1985).

<sup>34</sup> Nicholas Kenyon, *The BBC Symphony Orchestra: The First Fifty Years, 1930–1980* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1981).

### Concerts and Scholars in the 1930s

The group of female oboists at the RCM in the 1930s was a cohort developed by example. A decade earlier, Hugh Allen had exhorted Collegians to “use their eyes and ears” with “rapt attention,” particularly at official College concerts, which represented the best music played by deserving colleagues.<sup>35</sup> If a College student – or even an aspiring College student – went to a public RCM chamber concert during the 1930–31 school year, the only oboists they would see and hear were Evelyn Rothwell and Natalie Caine. They would also watch two female flautists and a female clarinetist. The majority of pianists, string players, and singers would also be women, by as much as five to one; during the 1930–31 academic year women constituted two-thirds of concert performers. Three women composers – Helen Hunter, Helen Perkin, and Audrey Girling – also had works featured on College chamber concerts. Any student or member of the public who followed RCM performances closely would understand the subtext: women were capable woodwind players and composers. Whether or not this subtext was intentional is irrelevant; by programming these works and performers, the RCM was putting its cultural weight behind them.

Not all the RCM’s cultural cachet was being used for progressive ends, however. The College’s orchestral repertoire showed signs of conservatism even in 1930–31.

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<sup>35</sup> Allen, “Director’s Address,” 4–8.

Despite a massive Elgar concert in June of 1931 where the College orchestras played four of the composer's works, deceased composers still accounted for 80 percent of the orchestral repertoire performed during the school year. Most were German – primarily Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms – with a smattering of nineteenth-century French and Italian composers. While this proportion was about the same as in the 1925–26 academic year, it is telling that the orchestral programming remained so consistent despite progress in other areas. Furthermore, if we remove the Elgar celebration from the statistics, the 1930–31 repertoire is even more conservative than the 1925–26 repertoire, with living composers only receiving 15 percent of the total programming – just eight works out of 52 total.

Five years later not much had changed, at least in the orchestral repertoire. The College orchestras continued to play mostly nineteenth-century composers, though the latter Germans like Wagner and Strauss were avoided, likely due to rising anti-German sentiment. Even so, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms were programmed just as often as in previous years. In chamber concerts the trend toward older music is much starker. During the 1930–31 academic year, a narrow majority of works performed on chamber concerts were by living composers. By 1935–36, living composers' portion had dropped to one third of chamber concert repertoire. Nearly a quarter of the total repertoire performed was by Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, or Mozart, marking a significant swing toward the “classics” in chamber programming.

A regressive turn was also evident in the student performers selected for College concerts. Just five years after women outnumbered men so thoroughly during the 1930–

31 season, in 1934–35 male performers made a significant comeback, now numbering 45 percent of concert performers. It is notable that a majority of these male performers were non-Scholars, particularly among string players and singers. Meanwhile, female performers were 65 percent Scholars. This suggests that women represented – and perhaps were held to – a higher standard of performance than their male colleagues.

The gender makeup of the 1935–36 concert performers also reflects changes in the demographics of the Scholar cohort in the 1930s. From 1927–1937 more women than men entered each year as Scholars. The biggest year for female Scholars was 1927, where they were nearly 70 percent of the Scholar cohort. In 1929 and 1932 female Scholars outnumbered male Scholars by 3:2 or more, and women were more than 55 percent of entering Scholars in 1933 and 1936 as well. Even so, the gender gap narrowed slightly as the number of male Scholars was less volatile than in the twenties, never falling below 40 percent of entering Scholars in any given year, whereas male Scholars fell below 35 percent four times in the twenties. This brought the decade average to 53 percent women and 47 percent men, compared to 55 percent women and 45 percent men in the 1920s. The beginning of the second World War and the announcement of the draft in the fall of 1939 must also be considered; before the 1939 academic year, the number of male Scholars entering the College had steadily risen for three years.

Across the decade, men increased their share of scholarships in six different first study subjects: clarinet, composition, flute, piano, singing, and cello. The first three can be seen as a retrenchment after an anomalous event in the previous decade. Clarinet and flute represent very small numbers – just one female flautist and one female

clarinetist who won scholarships in the 1920s. Both disciplines returned to their all-male status quo in the thirties. The increase in male pianists, singers, and cellists also points to a retrenchment, though one that reaches back much further. Since their acceptance as a suitable accomplishment for young ladies in the early nineteenth century, the piano and singing had been strongly associated with female amateurs. An increase in male Scholars of these instruments, then, indicates that piano and singing were no longer considered primarily amateur pursuits, but now represented a viable path to a professional career.

For both male and female Scholars, family ties to the music profession became rarer in the thirties. In the twenties, roughly 17 percent of Scholars had professional musician fathers. By the thirties that had dipped to just 12 percent. However, in both decades men were as much as four times as likely as women to be following in their father's professional footsteps. Analysis of the Register's paternal profession data for the thirties show that the socioeconomic status of the overall Scholar cohort remained primarily middle and upper class; about 78 percent of entering Scholars were the children of fathers from Guy Routh's Classes 1-3. However, for female Scholars class disparities narrowed significantly, with the number of entering Scholars whose fathers fell into Routh's Classes 4-7 rising by 20 percent from the 1920s. This change likely reflects the continuing effects of the 1918 Education Act, which raised the school-leaving age for all children to fourteen, meaning that women had access to free public education until their early teens. Secondary education would not be mandated for girls

until 1944, however, so even with the increase from the twenties, the numbers of girls from Classes 4–7 remained low, at just 20 percent.

First-study composers were fairly rare in both decades, but comparing the 1920s numbers and the 1930s numbers makes it clear that the Composers' Club bubble was indeed a bubble. A quarter of composition Scholars in the twenties were women, four out of twelve total. Most importantly, all four entered the College in 1927 or 1928. In the thirties, just two women – interestingly, both Australians – were awarded a scholarship to study composition as a first study. Their studies did not overlap; Peggy Glanville-Hicks was at College from 1932–1936, while Dulcie Holland did not arrive until 1938. The departure of the Composers' Club from the RCM certainly played a part in this reversion to the mean. That cohort had moved on to the professional sphere, and the reception they experienced there speaks to the general mood regarding women composers in the thirties.

Maconchy and Lutyens, the most successful members of the Composers' Club in their early careers, both composed in a broadly modernist style, though only Lutyens experimented seriously with ultramodern techniques like serialism. Though trained by the pastoralist Vaughan Williams, Maconchy's idiom more closely resembled that of Bartok or Stravinsky. The press took note, calling Maconchy and Lutyens "remote and superior" "cerebrals" whose music was "grim, intense" and "too formidably clever."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, February 4, 1935, quoted in Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams*, 47; William McNaught, *Evening News*, February 5, 1935, quoted in Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams*, 48.

Critics perceived their progressive aesthetic as outside of what was appropriate for their gender.

In her 2008 article on the reception of female composers in the New York Composers' Forum in the latter half of the thirties, Melissa De Graaf describes a similar situation across the Atlantic. Women who composed in a modernist idiom were met there with "sarcastic" and even sometimes vicious comments from concert audiences. De Graaf attributes this chilly response to the perception that a woman who pursued a "virile" musical style was "abandoning aspects of her femininity" by venturing into "unnatural terrain."<sup>37</sup>

The concept of the new virility demanded a new dichotomy be established. On one side was the old aesthetic: traditional tonality, which was defined as being emotional, feminine, and influenced by mass culture. On the other side was the new virility of modernism, serialism, and atonality, which was variously considered masculine, cerebral, lacking feeling, and part of an elite culture.<sup>38</sup>

The same anonymous author who labeled Maconchy and Lutyens "cerebrals" bemoaned the fact that these young women were not composing on the feminine side of the dichotomy: "Musicians ...are beginning to wonder when a woman composer is going to write some music reminiscent of the sex as it used to be."<sup>39</sup> Contemporary critic Cecil Gray commented archly that "the almost aggressive virility of the string

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<sup>37</sup> Melissa De Graaf, "'Never Call Us Lady Composers': Gendered Reception in the New York Composers' Forum, 1935-1940," *American Music* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 298.

<sup>38</sup> De Graaf, "'Never Call Us Lady Composers'," 288.

<sup>39</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, quoted in Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams*, 47.

quintet of Miss Elizabeth Maconchy was striking and piquant” in a review of a MacNaghten-Lemare concert in early 1935.<sup>40</sup>

The heady, exciting days of the Composers’ Club dissipated by the middle of the decade. Maconchy had removed to Kent due to ill health; Imogen Holst was deep into caring for and working on a biography of her ailing father; Elisabeth Lutyens had married in 1933 and by 1936 she had three young children. Only Grace Williams was firmly settled in London, where she taught at the Camden Girls’ School and the Southend College of Education. Any girl aspiring to train as a composer at the RCM would once again be entering an entirely male space, and her College years would be shadowed by public debate about what type of music she should be allowed to write.

Just two women, Dulcie Holland and Peggy Glanville-Hicks, faced down these less-than-welcoming circumstances as first study composition Scholars. However, five female Scholars did take composition as their second study. Instead of retreading the biography of the two first study composers, I will draw from the second study composition Scholars for my narrative subjects in the next chapter. These women were significantly more involved in performance than composition in their post-College professional career, but press coverage of their activities reveals that they still faced deeply-ingrained misogynistic bias, even in seemingly positive critical notices.

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<sup>40</sup> Cecil Gray, quoted in Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams*, 46.

## Chapter VI: The Wife, the Organist, and the Teacher

### Introduction

This chapter describes the College and post-College activities of three women who entered the RCM between 1930 and 1939: Grace Margaret Meachen (later Kirby, 1914–1992), Agnes Joan Arkell (1920–1995), and Shanti Seldon (1915–2013). None of these three took composition as a first study subject, though Meachen was awarded several composition prizes during her College career. The overall number of first study composers in the thirties dropped significantly compared to the twenties, when two or three composition Scholars entered the College each year. By contrast, in the thirties just ten Scholars took composition as their first study; just two of these ten were women. The number of second study composition Scholars also dropped precipitously. In the twenties, twelve men and three women took composition as a second study; by the thirties that number had more than halved. Of these seven second study composition Scholars, five were women, a complete reversal of the gender ratio in the previous decade. The critical hostility experienced by composers like Maconchy and Lutyens may have discouraged some women from pursuing a first study in composition, but larger shifts in the music profession also had a significant impact.

A possible explanation for the reduction in composition Scholars is that the understanding of the purpose and utility of studying composition at the RCM had changed. In the twenties, many men and women who did not have interest in becoming

a full-time composer took composition as a second study. Male organists, likely in preparation for the wide-ranging musical demands inherent in the role of parish organist, often added composition as a second study in the twenties. Men who aspired to other leadership roles, such as music director at a theater or opera house, or music master at a preparatory school, would also study composition to improve their practical arranging and composing skills. Becoming a “serious” composer of concert music was likely not their desired career; instead, they were preparing to serve as a local “music professor” in the nineteenth-century style.

But by the thirties professional music careers were increasingly siloed into specific roles. This turn is quite starkly reflected in the RCM Scholar Register. Scholars no longer took on multiple First and Second Studies, a common practice in the twenties, and some did not even have a listed Second at all. Especially for orchestral performers, the sudden dominance of the BBC and the emergence of full-time, fixed-personnel orchestras in London strongly influenced this move toward specialized excellence.

Economic historian Cyril Ehrlich explains:

While domestic music-making all but perished, music flooded into people’s homes, the number of radio licenses increasing to 9m. by 1939, seventy-three out of every 100 households in the United Kingdom. Revenue from license fees enabled the BBC to introduce patronage as a major determinant of the country’s musical life. It rapidly became the largest employer of musicians. For composers it provided 35 per cent of the Performing Right Society’s revenue in 1930, rising to 50 per cent by 1945. Competent performers enjoyed a wide range of opportunities. By 1939 the Corporation was employing some 400 orchestral

musicians on regular contracts, and offering several thousand occasional engagements.<sup>1</sup>

Orchestral musicians no longer had to cobble together freelance engagements in a variety of roles; instead, excellence in a single skill – the performance of a limited repertoire of “classical” orchestral music – was the best guarantor of a successful career. “Standards of performance must...be as high as possible,” read the 1933 BBC Yearbook.<sup>2</sup> Hiring of the inaugural BBC Symphony Orchestra was undertaken by newly appointed BBC Music Director Adrian Boult, who had taken over Stanford’s conducting class at the RCM in 1919. The BBC bragged that the musicians selected for the orchestra were the “best players obtainable,” both in the principal positions and in the “rank-and-file.”<sup>3</sup> The professional world’s move toward instrumental virtuosity alone, rather than the university-style liberal arts approach modeled by the RCM’s early Directors, likely influenced the direction of aspiring musicians’ studies.

The position of the composer in this new musical order remained one of power and prestige, but the expected roles a composer might fulfill had shifted. A brief examination of the careers of the eight men who took composition as a first study in the thirties illustrates this change. Four of these men – Stanley Bate, Frederick May, David

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<sup>1</sup> Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain Since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 212.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Jennifer Doctor, *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music, 1922–1936: Shaping a Nation’s Tastes* (Cambridge, 1999), 188.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Kenyon, *The BBC Symphony Orchestra: The First Fifty Years, 1930–1980* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1981), 54.

Cox, and Benjamin Britten – have individual *Oxford Music* entries. Each entry begins with these words: “English composer.”<sup>4</sup> “Composer” is their primary identifier; their other musical activities are mere adjuncts to the title of “composer.” These secondary activities are also more limited than those of their twenties counterparts. Bate and Cox are identified as composer “and pianist” and “and writer on music,” respectively, while May is just a “composer.” Britten alone receives three titles, with “conductor and pianist” following “composer.” By contrast, five out of the six male twenties composition Scholars with an *Oxford Music* entry are described as multihyphenates like “English composer, organist and conductor,” or “English composer, critic, pianist and teacher.”<sup>5</sup> From the thirties onward, “composer” shifted from a practical, professional position to one with aspirations to “great art.”

As Joanna Russ, Marcia Citron, and many other feminist scholars have argued, “great art” has long been associated with men and masculinity through the “Great Man” narrative. Citron writes that “the ‘great composer’ model...is a legacy from the nineteenth century and its idealization of the composer as a divinely inspired genius.”<sup>6</sup> Why, then, did it take until the 1930s for this ideal to permeate British music culture? The most compelling possibility is that by the thirties the English Musical Renaissance’s pastoral school could finally claim itself to be a truly British form of high art, with its

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<sup>4</sup> With the exception of May’s entry, which begins with “Irish composer.”

<sup>5</sup> “Bernard Naylor,” *Oxford Music*; “Edmund Rubbra,” *Oxford Music*.

<sup>6</sup> Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (University of Illinois Press, 1993), 201.

own collection of Great Men in positions of power. Vaughan Williams was training the next generation of British composers at the RCM, while Elgar was feted in his twilight years by influential figures like Boult and Sargent. The RCM orchestra under Sargent performed an all-Elgar concert in June of 1931, with repertoire including the cello concerto and the Enigma variations.<sup>7</sup> Delius was also enjoying a late-in-life revival, with a Delius Festival mounted by the conductor Sir Thomas Beecham in October-November 1929.<sup>8</sup> The model for the next generation of young English composers was no longer the professorial gentleman organist like Hugh Allen or Hubert Parry, who wrote mostly church music and spent more time performing and teaching than composing. Vaughan Williams, Delius, Elgar, and even the dashing young upstart John Ireland had replaced the all-purpose musicians who preceded them. These men were not artisans; they were Artists.

As the “serious” composer became a more specific and elusive career, fewer musicians studied composition at the RCM. This explains both the decline in overall Scholar enrollment in composition study, both at the First and Second level, and the increasing marginalization of women in composition studios. That said, a small group of Australian women – Peggy Glanville-Hicks, Esther Rofe, and Dulcie Holland – did come to the College to study composition in the thirties. Most were already trained in instrumental performance at home in Australia, and made the trip to London

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<sup>7</sup> *Royal College of Music Magazine* 27, no. 3: 106–107.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Beecham, *Frederick Delius* (Severn House, 1975), 201.

specifically to access tuition in composition. All of these women left Britain after their College studies, and the majority never returned. Rather than developing strong ties with the RCM and their fellow students, they focused on absorbing European concert life and establishing relationships with other Australian students. Rofe and Holland both returned to Australia by the early forties, and Glanville-Hicks ultimately resettled there in 1975 after living in Greece and the United States for several decades.

Melbourne-born Peggy Glanville-Hicks entered the RCM in September 1932 and studied there with Vaughan Williams until 1936. Beginning her studies in 1932 meant that while she did not directly overlap with the original Composers' Club members like Maconchy and Holst, she certainly knew Helen Hunter and Eiluned Davies (a frequent musical collaborator for Meachen in the thirties), who were at College until 1933. Though her College community was not the large and stimulating all-female cohort enjoyed by the Composers' Club a few years earlier, Glanville-Hicks did develop a network at the RCM that would shape the rest of her musical life. In 1938 she married her classmate and fellow composer Stanley Bate, to whom she had been close since early in her College career; she also became friendly with Benjamin Britten.<sup>9</sup> Glanville-Hicks later entered into her husband's "vigorous antipathy" toward Britten, who Bate believed "usurped him in London, and had knocked him out of the race" toward recognition as a composer.<sup>10</sup> Whether or not Britten – or Bate, for that matter – had

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<sup>9</sup> Wendy Beckett, *Peggy Glanville-Hicks* (Angus & Robertson, 1992), 22.

<sup>10</sup> Beckett, *Peggy Glanville-Hicks*, 42.

“usurped” any of Glanville-Hicks’s compositional potential was apparently not a concern. Glanville-Hicks and Bate moved to New York in 1941, where both had some musical success.

Glanville-Hicks’s countrywoman Dulcie Holland was also fairly isolated during her RCM years. She arrived in London in 1937 and enrolled at the College on a course-by-course basis for her first two terms, before winning a Blumenthal scholarship in the fall of 1938.<sup>11</sup> Her composition lessons were with John Ireland, who had been Britten’s primary teacher during his years at College. Ireland taught from his home studio in Chelsea, and his lessons “could vary in length from the regulation thirty minutes to three hours.”<sup>12</sup> The mere fact that his students were taught outside of the College and likely without the group instruction component outlined in the RCM prospectuses likely limited any sense of community among them. Holland’s closest relationship with a fellow Collegian seems to have been with Rofe, who came to the RCM in 1933 as a fee-paying student. Rofe, already a professional violinist in Australia before coming to London, focused her RCM studies on theory, composition, and conducting. She was no longer a student when Holland arrived, but was supporting herself in London as a freelance pianist and arranger.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Suzanne Robinson, “Life’s Major Crossroads: Study and Career Paths of Four Australian Women Composers at the Royal College of Music in the 1930s,” *Musicology Australia* 37, no. 2 (2015): 179.

<sup>12</sup> Robinson, “Life’s Major Crossroads,” 179.

<sup>13</sup> Robinson, “Life’s Major Crossroads,” 177–178.

The beginning of the War in 1939 forced both Holland and Rofe back to Australia; Holland in 1939 and Rofe in 1940. At that point Holland had only formally studied at the College for three terms. Upon her return to Australia she married conductor Alan Bellhouse and began a long career as a freelance composer, pianist, and arranger. She was especially well-known for her pedagogical writings; her biographer Jeanell Carrigan asserts that Holland's name "has become synonymous [in Australia] with musicianship and theory tuition as she wrote textbooks for all levels of difficulty."<sup>14</sup>

Though all fascinating figures, I have not chosen Glanville-Hicks, Rofe, or Holland as my subjects. Like Lutyens and Maconchy, the mere fact that they have been the subject of multiple academic studies and have left behind a substantial tranche of published material, places them outside of my criteria.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, most of their

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<sup>14</sup> Jeanell Carrigan, "Dulcie Holland," Australian Composers website (<https://www.australiancomposers.com.au/pages/dulcie-holland>).

<sup>15</sup> In addition to Beckett's 1992 biography and Murdoch's 2002 study, Glanville-Hicks has also been the subject of several other monographs. See also Deborah Hayes, *Peggy Glanville-Hicks: A Bio-Bibliography* (Greenwood Press, 1990); Suzanne Robinson, *Peggy Glanville-Hicks: Composer and Critic* (University of Illinois Press, 2019); Victoria Rogers, *The Music of Peggy Glanville-Hicks* (Ashgate, 2009). Robinson's article cited above provides detailed information on Holland and Rofe. Holland has also been the subject of a biography; see Rita Crews and Jeanell Carrigan, *A Musical Missionary: The Life and Music of Dulcie Holland*, (Wirripang, 2020). Crews also authored a PhD dissertation on Holland and two other Australian composers; see Rita Crews, "An analytical study of the piano works of Roy Agnew, Margaret Sutherland and Dulcie Holland," PhD diss. University of New England, 1994. Though no book-length treatment of Rofe's life and music yet exists, her ballet *Sea Legend* has been discussed in essays such as Emma Townsend, "The 1940s Australian Ballet That 'Far Outstripped ... 'Swan Lake' in Popular Appeal": Esther Rofe's Ground-Breaking Ballet, *Sea Legend*," in *A Century of Composition by Women*, (Springer, 2022); and David Symons, "Interlude: post-colonial echoes and pre-echoes of Jindyworobakism," in *Australia's Jindyworobak Composers* (Routledge, 2021).

careers were spent well outside the orbit of the British Empire and British musical culture. Even Indian pianist-composer Shanti Seldon, who is my final profile in this chapter, maintained strong ties to the RCM throughout her life in Mumbai.

Instead, this chapter describes the musical lives of three second study composers of the 1930s. Like Mary Ellen Gilson and Helen Hunter Glatz, the three women in this chapter have not yet received any substantial scholarly attention. I begin with Grace Margaret Meachen, who studied at the College from 1930–1935, overlapping with Glatz. Meachen, later Kirby, is the only woman in my thirties subjects to have left a publication record and the only one to win any RCM composition awards; however, she appears to have abandoned her musical career almost entirely after her marriage in 1941. Following my profile of Meachen, I discuss child prodigy Agnes Joan Arkell, whose early successes as a pianist were not enough to sustain a full-time performing career into adulthood. She arrived at College the year after Meachen and left after earning her ARCM in piano teaching in 1939. Mumbai-born pianist Cynthia Shanti Seldon also began her College studies in 1936, completing a GRSM in 1940 and returning to India that same year.

None of these women received the same level or type of professional recognition from the musical establishment as their predecessors like Helen Hunter Glatz or Imogen Holst. Specialist publications rarely if ever mentioned them, and their careers were mostly confined to small, local music communities. Even so, their musical careers, and how their specific life experiences affected their musical careers, are worth exploring. Neither are they “hidden” musicians; all three enjoyed press coverage of

their public musical lives, though to varying degrees and at different times in their lives. The most well-attested is Seldon, whose concert career in Mumbai was extensively documented in reviews in the *Times of India*. Both the *Musical Times* and the RCMM followed Meachen's immediate post-RCM career closely, though after her marriage coverage ceased. Agnes Joan Arkell's musical life was at its public height before her College years, when she was the young prodigy daughter of a prominent London musician. Conducting a public life as a woman in the mid-twentieth century was still a difficult road, and the differences in when, how, and why each of these women were covered in the media illustrates just some of the challenges facing female musicians. Their lack of contact with each other – and with RCM classmates generally – is indicative of how much bubbles like the Composers' Club relied on cohorts and the networks they established.

### **Grace Margaret Meachen: The Wife**

Assembling a timeline of Grace Margaret Meachen (later Kirby)'s life has been challenging. Her early life is well-documented: according to census records, she was born in 1914 in Islington, London, to Dr. George Norman Meachen and his wife Mabel E. Meachen (née Ries), who were married in 1913. Her father was both a respected medical doctor – an expert on tuberculosis, he published *A Short History of Tuberculosis* in 1936, as well as several other articles in the medical literature on the disease – and an active organist. During her time at the RCM, Grace decided to go by her middle

name, Margaret, and published and performed as Margaret Meachen until her 1941 marriage to John Kirby. Beyond her marriage, however, the historical record goes remarkably cold. Leaving the workforce after marriage, as Meachen did, was not unusual at the time. What I have discovered about her early life and College career, though, casts her choice in a different light. Margaret Meachen Kirby was raised in an unusually progressive environment, associated with the professionally-minded women of the RCM Composers' Club during her time at College, and had just reached a career milestone with her appointment to the faculty of the Dragon School in Oxford when she married Kirby. Nevertheless, her professional music career was effectively over as soon as the wedding was solemnized.

The Meachen family was financially comfortable enough to send Margaret to Alexandra College in Essex for her secondary education. Alexandra was something of an anomaly; it offered both a "thorough Modern Education on High School Lines" as well as a "training school in music."<sup>16</sup> Originally established in 1892 as "Brightbe College for Girls," its co-headmistresses were Miss Elizabeth S. Bannester, who held a bachelor of arts from London University, and Miss Rose Brown, a member of the Incorporated Society of Musicians. Advertisements indicate that from its inception the school also housed a kindergarten, which was run on a "Frobel System by Trained Mistres [sic]."<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Froebel, the progenitor of the kindergarten movement, was a

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<sup>16</sup> Advertisement for Alexandra College, *Southend Standard and Essex Weekly Advertiser*, May 12, 1908.

<sup>17</sup> "Brightbe College," *Southend Standard and Essex Weekly Advertiser*, December 17, 1891.

nineteenth-century education philosopher who later in life focused on training women as schoolteachers.<sup>18</sup> Their interest in Froebel shows Bannester and Brown to have been deeply and regularly engaged with progressive educational philosophies, and their invocation of Froebel's "system" in their early advertisements hints at the type of family they intended to attract: those who wanted their daughters to receive the same education their sons might at a "Public High School." Clearly, the Meachens fit this profile.

An intriguing fact about Bannester appears in the brief notice the *Chelmsford Chronicle* published to mark her death in December 1914: she was Southend's "first and only Lady Town Councillor."<sup>19</sup> Her election was reported in the *London Evening News* in November of 1910.<sup>20</sup> Local notes in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies newsletter *The Common Cause* indicate that she was involved in the suffrage movement, serving as meeting chair at an event in Westcliff-on-Sea in January 1914.<sup>21</sup> The name she gave her institution, "Alexandra College," may have also been a nod to the pioneering women's school Alexandra College, Dublin, whose principal, Henrietta White, was a frequent lecturer on women's rights. Though Bannester passed away long before

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<sup>18</sup> Daniel J. Walsh, Shunah Chung, and Aysel Tufekci, "Friedrich William Froebel," in *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education*, ed. Joy Palmer, Liora Bresler, and David Cooper (Routledge, 2001), 97.

<sup>19</sup> "Court and Social," *Chelmsford Chronicle*, December 11, 1914.

<sup>20</sup> "To-Nights Items," *London Evening News*, November 2, 1910.

<sup>21</sup> "Eastern Counties Federation," *The Common Cause*, February 27, 1914.

Margaret attended Alexander, Bannester's co-founder Rose Brown was likely still teaching when Margaret was there in the late 1920s, as she lived until 1944.<sup>22</sup> A more elusive figure than Bannester, Rose Brown's first appearance in press records dates to 1900, when several of her students passed the Incorporated Society of Musicians piano examinations.<sup>23</sup> Her students also obtained ABRSM certificates in 1901.<sup>24</sup> As for her suffragist bonafides, I have not been able to trace any mention of her in suffragist periodicals; however, an account of Bannester's funeral in the *Southend Standard and Essex Weekly Advertiser* notes that Bannester's "ideals have been, and are, fully shared by her partner, Miss Rose Brown...and the school will continue under her supervision."<sup>25</sup> It is not clear if the "partnership" between Bannester and Brown was personal as well as professional, though some of the language in the *Southend Standard* article is suggestive.<sup>26</sup>

At the culmination of her studies at Alexandra, Meachen passed the Cambridge Local Examinations with distinction in music in 1930.<sup>27</sup> That same year she entered the RCM as an Associated Board Exhibitioner studying violin and composition. There she

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<sup>22</sup> "Wills," *Chelmsford Chronicle*, July 21, 1944.

<sup>23</sup> "Brightbe College for Girls," *Southend Standard and Essex Weekly Advertiser*, July 26, 1900.

<sup>24</sup> "Brightbe College," *Southend Standard and Essex Weekly Advertiser*, May 9, 1901.

<sup>25</sup> "Death and Funeral of Miss E. S. Bannester," *Southend Standard and Essex Weekly Advertiser*, December 10, 1914.

<sup>26</sup> "Death and Funeral of Miss E. S. Bannester," *Southend Standard and Essex Weekly Advertiser*, December 10, 1914.

<sup>27</sup> "Local Successes," *Chelmsford Chronicle*, September 12, 1930.

met Eiluned Davies, who would become Meachen's most frequent artistic collaborator for the next several years.<sup>28</sup> Davies, the daughter of a Welsh dairyman, had entered the RCM in 1929 on a Foundation scholarship to study piano and viola. Though the College register did not record composition as a first or second study for Davies, she did take composition lessons with Gordon Jacob.<sup>29</sup> This interest in composition, along with her willingness to learn and perform new works, is likely what brought Davies into the Composers' Club circle. She seems to have been particularly close to her fellow Welshwoman Grace Williams, who later wrote a left-hand Sarabande for Davies when Davies suffered a broken arm in late 1957.<sup>30</sup> Davies also gave the Welsh premiere of Williams's *Sinfonia Concertante* (1941) with the BBC Welsh Orchestra in 1947.<sup>31</sup> Meachen's ongoing working relationship with Davies suggests that she was probably also part of the Composers' Club network, if a bit closer to the edges than Helen Glatz. She and Davies were several years younger than the core Composers' Club group, and Meachen's College studies did not overlap with those of the Club's founding members (Maconchy, Grace Williams, Gow, and Imogen Holst).

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<sup>28</sup> See the *Royal College of Music Magazine* 30, no. 1, 31, no. 1, and 31, no. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Nicola LeFanu, "Eiluned Davies b. 1913," *Contemporary Music Review* 11 (1994): 79.

<sup>30</sup> Grace Williams to Elizabeth Maconchy, January 10, 1958, in *Music, Life and Changing Times: Selected Correspondence Between British Composers Elizabeth Maconchy and Grace Williams, 1927-77*, ed. by Sophie Fuller and Jenny Doctor (Routledge, 2020), 168.

<sup>31</sup> Rhiannon Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams and Twentieth Century Music: A Blest Trio of Sirens* (Ashgate, 2013), 144.

Though she was not in Vaughan Williams's studio at the same time as her Composers' Club predecessors, Meachen's brilliant RCM career followed closely in their footsteps. In addition to her Associated Board Exhibition, she also won the Howard Prize for violinists in 1935, a Cobbett Prize for her performance of Lilian Harris's Phantasy Trio in 1932, an Octavia Travelling Scholarship in 1935, and a GRSM (also in 1935). She also appeared frequently in formal and informal College concerts. In the Christmas term of the 1933–34 academic year alone she performed twice on official chamber recitals (playing John Ireland's second violin sonata with Davies in October, then a Buxtehude cantata arranged for soprano and string quartet in November), an evening student recital, and two lunch-hour recitals (again with Davies) at London University's Great Hall.<sup>32</sup>

A *Musical Times* review of a 1934 recital with Davies at Grotrian Hall called Meachen's playing "neat and unselfconscious." Though the reviewer's account was generally positive, his tone suggests mild bafflement:

An unusual programme put forward by Margaret Meachen and Eiluned Davies was carried through with a modesty and genuine regard for music that won sympathy for the young players. Sonatas by Delius, John Ireland, and Pierne, with van Dieren's Tema con Variazioni for pianoforte solo, and three movements from Bach's D minor Sonata for violin alone, were a bold choice, especially the latter.<sup>33</sup>

The reviewer does not make it clear what he finds so "unusual" about this program. It is also not clear which Ireland and Delius violin sonatas were performed (both

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<sup>32</sup> *Royal College of Music Magazine* 30, no. 1 (Christmas Term 1933): 15, 32, 33, 36.

<sup>33</sup> "Chamber Music of the Month," *Musical Times* 75, no. 1101 (December 1934): 1130.

composers wrote two). The idiom of both Ireland and Delius sonatas is fairly modernist, however, and Ireland's second violin sonata in particular is quite assertive. Perhaps the reviewer found it "unusual" that two women would present such a "vigorous" program. The van Dieren is also acerbic and strongly dissonant, likely made even more strident by its pairing with the Bach violin sonata.

Also in 1934, Meachen's "Three Sketches for piano, violin, and viola" was performed at a concert at the Tottenham Music Society.<sup>34</sup> Clearly she was making a name for herself; primarily as a violinist, though the Octavia Scholarship indicates that her RCM teachers considered her a promising composer as well. It is not clear where Meachen chose to travel with her Octavia funds. The trend among Octavia Scholars at the time was to either tour the continent, as Imogen Holst did in 1930, or to go to Vienna and study with Egon Wellesz, like Grace Williams and Dorothy Gow (in 1931 and 1932 respectively).

In addition to her active performance career in the thirties, several of her song settings were published by Augener and two were reviewed in the *Musical Times*.<sup>35</sup> In fact, between 1935 and 1939 I have only been able to trace Meachen by her publishing record. In 1935, Augener published her setting of "Chimes" by Alice Meynall and a setting of Mary Webb's poem "To Life." The latter was poorly reviewed by the *Musical*

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<sup>34</sup> "The Royal Collegian Abroad," *Royal College of Music Magazine* 30, no. 2 (Easter Term 1934): 48.

<sup>35</sup> See *Musical Times* 77, no. 1116 (February 1936): 129; and *Musical Times* 79, no. 1146 (August 1938): 598.

*Times's* critic in 1936. Though the critic calls her composition "blameless," he spends most of the review dispensing a "homily" about how Meachen's setting is "a typical example" of uninspired songwriting "these days."

...the art of song-writing is viewed more lightly – or rather it is replaced by the practice of devising music to which a piece of verse can be sung instead of being recited or read or felt. This is the easiest form of musical composition. You need never be stumped. At any momentary check to the inspiration all you have to do is to take the next group of words and set them to a declamatory phrase... Leave it to the singer to mouth the words sternly and the awkward point is passed. This sort of thing does not belong to the art of composition, but it helps you to get into print.<sup>36</sup>

While this diatribe is not explicitly gendered, the language the critic uses to excoriate Meachen is at the very least patronizing. It also plays into well-worn tropes about female creativity. Women's art is "light," they lack "inspiration," and vanity is more important to them than their "art" ("helps you to get into print"). In *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, Johanna Russ calls "the moving of art object X from the category of 'serious art' to the category of 'not serious'" "the single most virulent false categorization ever invented" in order to sideline the work of marginalized creatives.<sup>37</sup> The *Musical Times* reviewer not only makes it clear that Meachen is not a "serious" composer; he uses her setting of "To Life" to discourage any other "unserious" composers from attempting to set a "fine utterance" like Webb's poem.

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<sup>36</sup> "Songs," *Musical Times* 77, no. 1116 (February 1936): 129.

<sup>37</sup> Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983, reiss. University of Texas Press, 2018), 64.

A similarly lukewarm review of Meachen's song "The Vagabond," also published by Augener in 1938, appeared in the same journal two years later.

Margaret Meachen's setting of Drinkwater's "The Vagabond" is obviously the work of a good musician, but is a clothing of the words phrase by phrase rather than an original and whole musical concept. Miss Meachen must be credited with sensitive handling of detail, and with a respect for word values, but the detail, in particular the cadences at line-endings and the ritornel between the verses, suffers from repetition.<sup>38</sup>

Again, the descriptors the critic uses are worth examining. He perceives that Meachen is a "good musician," but finds her music "unoriginal." Since the Romantic period the "great" composer has been constructed as "an individuated creator, who must establish his authority through separateness, difference, and by extension originality." This is, according to Marcia Citron, an "Oedipal relationship" wherein a male creator must kill his artistic forefathers in order to become a truly great artist. Women, on the other hand, have no foremothers to kill.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, originality is not "natural" to female composers;<sup>40</sup> a woman may be a "good musician" who is "sensitive" and skilled at manipulating "detail," but she has no ability to create a "whole musical concept."<sup>41</sup>

The focus on detail and craft in this review also has gendered implications. As art historians Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock theorize in *Old Mistresses*, critics have long relegated women's art to the realm of "domestic craft." To illustrate this rhetorical

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<sup>38</sup> "Augener," *Musical Times* 79, no. 1146 (August 1938): 598.

<sup>39</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 69.

<sup>40</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 186.

<sup>41</sup> See also Gillett, *Musical Women in England*, 26–27.

move, Parker and Pollock quote one *Spectator* critic from 1978, who accused female painters of having a “needle-threading eye and taste for detail.”<sup>42</sup> Several musicologists, including Marcia Citron and Judith Tick, have applied this gendered hierarchy to the reception of women’s music. Citron interprets the “art-craft division” in music as one of genre hierarchy, where small “domestic” genres like the piano character piece or the accompanied vocal solo are associated with women and “craft,” whereas the larger genres (symphonies, operas, and other long, complex forms) are seen as masculine “high art.”<sup>43</sup> The fact that both of Meachen’s published compositions are songs is symptomatic of this division. By drawing attention to elements of Meachen’s music that mark it as “small” – the invocation of “detail,” the implication that her ideas are not “whole,” the “repetition” that suggests a lack of invention – the *Musical Times* reviewer further marginalizes and domesticates Meachen’s work.

Unfortunately, as I mentioned in Chapter I, I have not been able to access copies of Meachen’s published songs due to the October 2023 cyberattack on the British Library. When I visited the Library in May 2024, most piano-vocal scores were not available for viewing and I have been unable to travel there again since. The BL also does not participate in digital lending through Interlibrary Loan, so that avenue is closed to me as well. Tantalizingly, the critic who reviewed “To Life” in the *Musical Times* reproduced a three-measure excerpt of music.

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<sup>42</sup> John McEwan quoted in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* (Pantheon, 1981), 7.

<sup>43</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 129–130.



Fig VI.1: Unknown excerpt printed in *The Musical Times* 77, no. 1116 (February 1936), 129

However, the text is not from Mary Webb's poem "To Life," but from John Milton's ode "Upon the Circumcision." To add to the confusion, there are no extant musical settings of "Upon the Circumcision." Is this excerpt indeed part of Meachen's setting of "To Life"? Did she combine Webb's text with Milton's in some way? Or were these three measures invented from whole cloth by the reviewer? If the former, then Meachen was doing something much more interesting than the critic implies in his review; if the latter, why? Either way, Meachen's musical voice remains out of reach.

Meachen's next major career milestone was her appointment in 1939 to the faculty of the Dragon School, an elite boarding school in Oxford.<sup>44</sup> The Dragon School's in-house magazine *The Draconian* indicates that she was "strongly recommended by Sir Hugh Allen, Mus. Doc., an ex-parent, who has always been interested in and helpful to

<sup>44</sup> *Royal College of Music Magazine* 35, no. 3: 122.

the School.”<sup>45</sup> A recommendation by the former RCM director himself testifies to Meachen’s success while at College. The 1939 Register confirms that she moved to Oxford that year; she is listed there as a “Music Teacher” and resident of the Dragon School campus.<sup>46</sup>

In Oxford, Meachen quickly became acquainted with local violinist John Kirby – who appears to have some connection to the Dragon School, as he performed on a concert at the school in March of 1939<sup>47</sup> – and left her teaching post upon her marriage to Kirby in 1941.<sup>48</sup> The language used in the *Draconian* is ambiguous as to whether this was an enforced departure or a voluntary one; the magazine just states that Meachen “is leaving us...to be married to Mr. Kirby.”<sup>49</sup> As Mr. and Mrs. Kirby they continued to give recitals at the Dragon School through February 1944, but I have been unable to find any indication that they performed there after that year. I am also not sure if they had children; based on a single letter to the editor from the *London Picture Post* in August 1946 that appears to match John Kirby’s details, I suspect that Kirby had children from a previous marriage, as in the letter he states that he has “three children aged nine to twelve.”<sup>50</sup> However, I have not been able to confirm this through genealogical records

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<sup>45</sup> *The Draconian* 155 (August 1939): 9384.

<sup>46</sup> The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1939 Register; Reference: RG 101/2184D

<sup>47</sup> *The Draconian* 154 (April 1939): 9307.

<sup>48</sup> *The Draconian* 161 (August 1941): 9575.

<sup>49</sup> *The Draconian* 161 (August 1941): 9795.

<sup>50</sup> John Kirby, “Child Delinquency: Fault of Adults,” *London Picture Post* August 17, 1946.

or newspaper archives. If Kirby did have children, his involvement with the Dragon School may have been as a parent.

Very few mentions of Margaret Meachen Kirby as a concert performer are extant; after 1940 I am aware of just three. According to the Oxfordshire weekly the *Banbury Guardian*, “Mr. and Mrs. Kirby” were the musical entertainment at a December 1954 party hosted by the Oxfordshire Federation of Women’s Institutes.<sup>51</sup> In 1955, the RCMM reported that Margaret Kirby was one of the violists in the first performance of Hubert Parry’s string quintet in E-flat (1884) at Exeter College, Oxford.<sup>52</sup> Finally, an October 1972 recital at the Congregational Church in Buckhurst Hill, Essex, featured Margaret Kirby on piano and John Stephens on violin.<sup>53</sup> This last example is slightly unusual in that Kirby usually appeared in concert as a violinist or violist. However, we do know that she was a proficient piano accompanist from her time at the Dragon School. During her short tenure there she played the piano on several school concerts, and was described in the school magazine as “almost as good a pianist as a violinist.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore I think it is safe to assume that the Margaret Kirby who performed in Essex in 1972 is the same Margaret Kirby who taught at the Dragon School.

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<sup>51</sup> “Musical Evening at Tew Park,” *Banbury Guardian*, December 16, 1954.

<sup>52</sup> *Royal College of Music Magazine* 51, no. 2: 45.

<sup>53</sup> “Forthcoming Events,” *Musical Times* 113, no. 1556 (October 1972).

<sup>54</sup> *The Draconian* 156 (December 1939): 9490.

The paucity of reporting on Margaret Kirby's performance activities stands in stark contrast to the comparatively voluminous coverage of John Kirby's concert career. Though the 1939 Register records that John Kirby worked in local government and no available information suggests that he was a full-time professional musician, his work with local orchestral societies was frequently noted by the press. He appears to have been particularly involved in musical life at the University, where as early as 1934 he played in the violin section for an Oxford University Opera Club production of Rameau's *Castor et Pollux*.<sup>55</sup> In the fifties Kirby was often mentioned in newspaper coverage as the concertmaster of an ad-hoc orchestra convened to accompany amateur choral society performances.<sup>56</sup> The composer Gerald Finzi knew Kirby as the leader of a quintet at Essex College who wanted to perform Parry's quintet in Oxford, as Finzi discussed in letters with Lady Ponsonby in 1954;<sup>57</sup> this exchange presumably led to the 1955 performance that involved Margaret.

If John Kirby's Exeter College quintet was one that performed regularly at the University and Margaret was a permanent member, then Margaret likely played on

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<sup>55</sup> Susan Wollenberg, "The Oxford University Opera Club," in *Music in Twentieth-Century Oxford: New Directions*, ed. Susan Wollenberg and Robin Darwall-Smith (Boydell & Brewer, 2023), 162.

<sup>56</sup> "Banbury Choir Sings Messiah," *Banbury Guardian*, December 24, 1953; "This Requiem Was No Act of Sabotage," *Banbury Guardian*, December 23, 1954; "Banbury Choir Sang Messiah," *Banbury Guardian*, January 11, 1956; "Co-Op Choir Gives Concert," *Banbury Guardian*, April 19, 1956; "Large Audience to Hear Elijah," *Banbury Guardian*, March 6, 1958.

<sup>57</sup> Gerald Finzi to Lady Ponsonby, June 22, 1954, in *Gerald Finzi's Letters, 1915–1956* (Boydell & Brewer, 2021), 896.

many more Oxford recitals than I have been able to confirm via newspaper records. Part of the issue is that both the *Oxford Times* and *Oxford Mail*, major local papers since the late nineteenth century, have not been extensively digitized at this date. Archives between 1911 and 2007 are exclusively on microfilm at the Oxfordshire History Centre, and due to limited research funding I have not been able to access these resources. Another possible resource would be the Exeter College Musical Society archives, since it seems that John's (and, by extension Margaret's) musical activities were centered around that particular College Society.

Available newspaper accounts of John Kirby's Oxford performances dry up after the late fifties. Public records of John and Margaret between John's participation in a performance of *Elijah* in 1958 and Margaret's death in 1992 have also proven elusive. According to probate records, Grace Margaret Kirby died at her home on Divinity Road in Oxford in 1992. Her husband John Thomas Kirby died, also in Oxford, in 1998; they are buried together at Holy Trinity Church, Headington, Oxford (also home to the "Narnia Window" and the burial site of C.S. Lewis).<sup>58</sup>

### **Agnes Joan Arkell: The Organist**

Agnes Joan Tracy Arkell received her first critical notice just a month after she turned twelve, in October 1932. The headline in the *Richmond Herald* read "Clever Child

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<sup>58</sup> "John Kirby," Find A Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/226847230/john-kirby>.

Violinists," and the accompanying article described a demonstration-performance given by John Hullah Brown and his young pupils. After a surprisingly technical account of Hullah Brown's teaching methods, the anonymous author singles out three violinists for praise: June Saunders, June Dennison, and Joan Arkell. The two Junes drew attention for their "delicacy" and "neat little style," respectively, while Joan was notable "for her facility and refinement."<sup>59</sup> Joan's "facility" was likely the result of her home environment, where she and her brother had been trained in music by their organist-educator father since infancy. Before her twelfth birthday she was already proficient on both violin and piano; in June of 1932 the *Herald* had called her "a talented pupil of her father" for her performance of a Chopin waltz. The same paper also reported in April 1933 that the "clever" Miss Joan Arkell had won a two-year piano scholarship to Trinity College of Music.<sup>60</sup> That same year she received a special commendation in a RAM Junior Division competition,<sup>61</sup> and in 1934 she performed a prizewinning violin solo at the fourth Richmond and Twickenham Music Festival.<sup>62</sup>

Leonard William Tracy Arkell, Joan's father, was born to a modest Middlesex family. Her mother Lilian (née Mellor) was 34 when she married the 27-year-old Leonard Arkell in 1919; other details of her background are unclear. In 1922, Leonard

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<sup>59</sup> "Clever Child Violinists," *Richmond Herald*, October 29, 1932.

<sup>60</sup> "Rumours and Facts," *Richmond Herald*, April 26, 1933.

<sup>61</sup> "Academy and College Notes," *Musical Times* 74, no. 1080 (February 1933): 165.

<sup>62</sup> "Twickenham Musical Festival," *Richmond Herald*, May 12, 1934.

Arkell secured a post as the organist and choirmaster at the Anglican parish church in Bletchingley, Surrey, with a concurrent appointment as the conductor of the Bletchingley Choral Society.<sup>63</sup> Further career advancement came in 1925, when he passed the exam to become an Associate of the Royal College of Organists,<sup>64</sup> and the next year he became the choirmaster and organist at the Twickenham parish church.<sup>65</sup> Twickenham was a prosperous London suburb, which gave Leonard Arkell access to the greater London musical community. This also allowed him to build up a significant profile as a music educator. By 1929 the local paper was lauding Leonard as “largely instrumental in organizing” the inaugural Richmond and Twickenham Music Festival,<sup>66</sup> and the *Musical Times* explicitly identified him as the festival’s author.<sup>67</sup> He continued to serve as the festival’s honorary secretary throughout the 1930s. Additionally, he conducted several local choirs, including the parish choir of men and boys and a mixed choir called the “Twickenham Amateur Operatic Society.”

Both Joan and her younger brother Arthur took piano and voice lessons from their father, but only Joan intended to make music her career. Though he too was a frequent prizewinner in children’s music competitions in the 1930s, Arthur ultimately

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<sup>63</sup> *Musical Times*, (November 1922): 800.

<sup>64</sup> *Musical Times*, (February 1925): 141.

<sup>65</sup> “Church and Organ Music: Royal College of Organists,” *Musical Times* 67, no. 1000 (June 1926): 543.

<sup>66</sup> “At York House...” *Richmond Herald*, March 2, 1929.

<sup>67</sup> “Competition Festival Record.” *The Musical Times* 70, no. 1034 (1929): 348.

chose to study engineering rather than following in his father's footsteps as an organist. Since women began entering the music profession in Britain in large numbers in the late nineteenth century, the parish organ loft had remained resolutely male. Stanford considered this a marginalization of men, but in fact it meant that the core institutional power in music stayed in male hands well into (and beyond) the twentieth century. Consider the career of early RCM student and church composer Charles Wood. Wood was a favorite of Stanford, who despite his post at the RCM retained the title of Professor of Music at Cambridge. Through his Cambridge connections Stanford was able to arrange for Wood to receive an organ scholarship at one of the university's colleges, which gave Wood both work experience as a church organist and teaching opportunities to support himself.<sup>68</sup> Wood remained at Cambridge for the rest of his life, eventually taking over Stanford's Professorship in the early 1920s. The RCM's second and third Directors, Hubert Parry and Hugh Allen, were Oxbridge organ scholars themselves, as was Stanford.

Women were neither explicitly barred from becoming organists nor from studying at the ancient universities, but the barriers they faced were still high even when Joan reached adulthood in the late 1930s. Oxford only began to allow women to matriculate and take degrees in 1920, the year Joan was born, and the majority of its constituent colleges did not accept women until the 1970s. The situation at Cambridge

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<sup>68</sup> David C. Wright, *The Royal College of Music and Its Contexts* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 67.

was similar, though women were not allowed to matriculate there until 1948, when Girton College was granted full membership into the University. These restrictions on female students meant that women like Joan were unable to compete for the organ scholarships that had served as the backbone for many men's musical careers for centuries. Organ was also one of the few instruments that retained its firmly masculine association long after women started to enter the musical profession. Like woodwinds and brass, the organ was considered physically unsuitable for women, the footwork and full-body movement necessary to play the instrument "distracting and masculine."<sup>69</sup> As noted in Chapter V, women rarely entered the RCM as organ Scholars; between 1930 and 1939, only three women took up organ scholarships there, and in the 1920s there were none.

The association between the organ and composition also contributed to the exclusion of women. Organ was a "serious" instrument, after all; the center of parish life, the so-called "King of Instruments." A parish organist was expected to regularly compose, arrange, and improvise. In addition to the physicality of organ-playing, these were intensely technical skills often coded as "a stereotypically masculine field of knowledge (engineering, mechanics, technology)," as organist Anna Stepler writes in a 2024 journal article. Stepler continues:

...while its connections to the church, and the various canonical (male, European) composers occupying prized positions in the recitalist's repertoire, also serve to keep women out of the frame. The organ's connection to religion,

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<sup>69</sup> Anna Stepler, "Cecilia's Instrument Reclaimed: A Woman's Seat at the King of Instruments," *Women and Music* 28 (2024): 129.

and the development of attitudes toward women within the church, raise a host of further questions beyond the scope of a small paper but have undoubtedly contributed to the present situation. The last century has seen an increasingly visible number of women making virtuosic careers as organists and composers for the instrument, but without conscious effort, even in the twenty-first century, the organ can still appear inherently antiquated (and masculine) in musical outlook.<sup>70</sup>

Though she did study composition at the RCM, Joan Arkell did not seek formal qualifications in organ-playing until 1969, when she passed the examination to become an Associate of the Royal College of Organists (hereafter RCO).<sup>71</sup> It is hard not to wonder if she would have joined the family business much earlier, though, had she been a son rather than a daughter. Her career might then have resembled Leonard Blake's, or Percy Whitlock's. Like Blake and Whitlock she had a public performance profile by her early teens, and won an RCM scholarship not long after. If a church organist position – perhaps even a Cathedral or University one – had been a viable path for her, she could have taken advantage of the existing network of professors and Old Collegians to secure herself an appointment that used all her skills: performance, composition, and teaching.

In fact, beside the absence of the organ itself on her Scholar Register record, the bare facts of Joan's College studies fit the profile of someone preparing to serve as a parish organist. Her first study was piano, for which she received the inaugural Verne scholarship, named in honor of the recently-deceased RCM professor and Clara

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<sup>70</sup> Stepler, "Cecilia's Instrument Reclaimed," 126.

<sup>71</sup> "RCO Examination Results," *Musical Times* 110, no. 1513 (March 1969): 307.

Schumann-protégé Mathilde Verne. For her second study she chose violin and composition. When she took the ARCM in 1939, she sought not a piano solo qualification, but one in piano teaching.

After earning the ARCM in 1939, Arkell took a job as a staff pianist for the Women's League of Health and Beauty, later known as Flexercise. Founded by health reformer Mollie Stack in 1930 as the "Build-the-Body-Beautiful League," the WLHB was "designed for business girls and busy women to enable them to conserve and improve their physique."<sup>72</sup> Stack was particularly interested in promoting maternal health, arguing that her program of exercise could "root out the weeds of self-seeking, misunderstanding, and hatred, which lead to war."<sup>73</sup> Music became a part of the League's work as a means to synchronize public demonstrations of their methods; Stack believed that in order to create a "precision performance" for these public events "our exercises must be standardised and set in sequences to music, so that they could be learned off by heart like poetry."<sup>74</sup> Former chorus line ballet mistress Peggy St. Lo took over the performance aspect of the WLHB after Stack's death in 1935, bringing an even more dancelike tone to the League's demonstrations.<sup>75</sup> Intriguingly, it seems that the

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<sup>72</sup> Jill Matthews, "They Had Such a Lot of Fun: The Women's League of Health and Beauty Between the Wars," *History Workshop Journal* 30, no. 1 (October 1990): 25.

<sup>73</sup> Stack, quoted in Matthews, "They Had Such a Lot of Fun," 25.

<sup>74</sup> Stack, quoted in Matthews, "They Had Such a Lot of Fun," 32.

<sup>75</sup> Matthews, "They Had Such a Lot of Fun," 32.

music used by the WLHB was generally popular rather than classical.<sup>76</sup> This implies that Arkell was comfortable in that idiom, a skill that would not have been part of her College training.

Like many women her age, Arkell joined the armed forces during the second world war. According to service records, she enlisted in the Royal Air Force Women's Auxiliary some time after March of 1939. Other information about her war service is not yet public. The next evidence of Arkell in the public record comes from 1946, when she appears on a London Electoral Register for Twickenham East at 24 Stafford Road alongside her mother and father.<sup>77</sup> 24 Stafford Road is the same address Arkell and her parents were listed at on the 1939 Register, so presumably this was the family home.<sup>78</sup>

Press accounts of Arkell's performances for the rest of her life are fairly sparse. Even if the number of engagements were doubled it would not be remunerative enough to support even a single woman. Though she was still listed at 24 Stafford Road on the 1947 Electoral Register, it appears that she may have settled for a time in the Midlands; she appeared in a solo recital in Lincolnshire in 1947, then a series of concerts in Coventry in the 1950s. She received positive notices in the local press for these performances. The *Coventry Evening Telegraph* praised her "bracing and exciting"

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<sup>76</sup> Prunella Stack, *Zest for Life: Mary Bagot Stack and the Women's League of Health and Beauty* (P. Owen, 1988), 130. See also Matthews, "They Had Such a Lot of Fun," 50.

<sup>77</sup> London Metropolitan Archives; London, England, UK; *Electoral Registers*; Reference: Mr/Per/C/0722

<sup>78</sup> The National Archives; Kew, London, England; *1939 Register*; Reference: RG 101/931F

performance of a Bach clavier concerto in May of 1952,<sup>79</sup> and October of that same year noted that she performed the Turina *Rapsodia Sinfonica* with the Warwickshire Symphonic Society “with style and some spirit.”<sup>80</sup>

The most detailed account of a performance in which Arkell was involved revolved around an amateur choral group founded by her brother in Knebworth, Hertfordshire. Arthur Arkell settled there in 1955 with his wife, and by late 1957 had begun a small madrigal singing group. The *Hertford Mercury and Reformer* reported:

“The main object of the choir is for the practise and singing of madrigals, motets, and part songs, privately,” said Mr. Arkell, but last April the group gave a concert at St. Martin’s Hall, Knebworth. Soloist at that concert was Miss Joan Arkell, sister of Mr. Arkell, who is a professional pianist. ... The singers recently competed in the Hitchin Music Festival, mainly to give them confidence, said Mr. Arkell. Practices are held in his front room, and Mrs. Arkell is one of the members. She was a student of Mr. Arkell’s father, and that was how she and her husband met. Later she studied at the Royal Academy of Music under Mr. Norman Allin, but settled for family responsibilities rather than a professional singing career.

I quote this excerpt in full because it raises several interesting questions, though I do not have answers for most of them. The paper does not specify Arthur Arkell’s profession but nevertheless makes it clear that he is not a professional singer by contrasting his musical activities (“practise...privately”) with those of his wife (who gave up “a professional singing career”) and his sister (“a professional pianist”). What was Arthur Arkell’s social and economic standing in Knebworth? He must have been relatively prosperous, since his house had enough space to hold rehearsals “in his front room.”

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<sup>79</sup> “The Schools Festival,” *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, May 26, 1952.

<sup>80</sup> “Capable Soloists,” *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, October 31, 1952.

Was he wealthy enough that any artistic activity must be seen as dilettantism rather than a professional undertaking? Joan Arkell and her status as a “professional pianist” seems to be included in the article to give artistic legitimacy to her brother’s group; so why is there so little detail about her own “professional” career?

Between 1958 and 1970 I have not been able to document any other performances by Joan Arkell. At some point before 1960 she moved to Alton, Hampshire.<sup>81</sup> In December of 1970 she performed a piano recital in the Alton Parish Church as part of its 900th anniversary celebration.<sup>82</sup> As Alton was also where she took the RCO examination in 1969, it seems likely that she was permanently settled there by the late sixties. Her late-in-life marriage to Colin Pooley also took place in Alton in 1972, and she died in neighboring Petersfield in 1995. Her widower lived at least into the early 2000s, still in Petersfield, though I have also not been able to find many public records about him due to his quite common name.

The 1970 Alton Parish Church recital is the last public performance by Arkell that I have been able to confirm, but her involvement with the Anglican church in Hampshire seems to have gone beyond that single concert appearance. As early as 1960 the *Aldershot News* identified “Miss A. J. T. Arkell” as a member of a “New Church

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<sup>81</sup> A classified advertisement on page 193 of the March 1962 *Musical Times* reads: “BECHSTEIN GRAND Piano, Model B; 6 ft 8 in; black case. Carefully maintained and has exceptionally good tone. £175 or near offer. Arkell, 'Chelstoke', Station Road, Four Marks, Alton, Hants (Medstead 2359).” See also the May 1960 *Aldershot News* article cited below.

<sup>82</sup> Advertisement for the “Parish Church St. Lawrence Alton 900th Anniversary Celebrations,” *Musical Times* 111, no. 1523 (January 1970): 12.

Development Committee” organized by the Fleet Parish Church in Fleet, Hampshire, a town about 25 kilometers north of Alton. This tantalizing glimpse of Arkell’s sparsely documented later life, combined with her decision to test for RCO associateship in 1969, suggests that she may have taken up the family business of parish organist after all. A future research trip to Hampshire may be able to confirm this hypothesis.

### **Shanti Seldon: The Teacher**

Shanti Seldon was born in 1915 and died in 2013 at the age of 98. Seldon was an Anglicization of the Portuguese Saldanha, her original surname. Later, while studying at the RCM from 1936–1940, she would use the English first name Cynthia in place of Shanti. It is not clear if Cynthia was her birth name or an Anglicization adopted along with Seldon. All available evidence suggests, however, that the rest of her family continued to use Saldanha, though many in Seldon’s generation were given or used Anglicized first names. For example, Seldon’s younger sister was christened Phoebe, and her first cousin – and later London flatmate – was named Hilton (Gonsalves). In this way, Seldon’s choice to use her Indian first name Shanti rather than the Anglicized Cynthia made her stand out among her peers, along with her new surname.

While the Constitution of India defines all people of mixed European and Indian heritage as “Anglo-Indians,” the Saldanha family, as implied by their last name, came from a distinct subset of that community: Luso-Indians, or the descendants of

Portuguese men and local Indian women.<sup>83</sup> Luso-Indians are one of the oldest Eurasian communities in India. They originated from an official Portuguese policy of intermarriage meant to deepen the roots of Portuguese Imperial colonization as early as the fifteenth century.<sup>84</sup> The goal of this policy, writes historian Charles Dias in *The Portuguese in Malabar*, was to “form a population which should be at once loyal to Portugal and satisfied to remain in India for life.”<sup>85</sup> During Portuguese control of Cochin and several other port cities, the mixed Luso-Indian community served an important intermediary role, especially in trade.

When the Dutch forced out the Portuguese in the seventeenth century, however, Luso-Indians were pushed out of the ports and persecuted for their Catholicism. Their fortunes reversed with the arrival of the English in the eighteenth century, and they began to intermarry with English settlers.<sup>86</sup> Over the next two centuries, many Luso-Indians Anglicized, either through marriage or cultural assimilation or some combination of both. This process can be traced in the names of Shanti Seldon’s immediate ancestors. Her great-great-grandfather was the Portuguese sailor Antonio Saldanha (ca. 1770–1832), who married an Indian woman named Gori Bai. Their children were all given Portuguese first names (Martha, Cayetan, Aloysius, Miguel).

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<sup>83</sup> Charles Dias, *The Portuguese in Malabar: A Social History of Luso-Indians* (Manohar, 2013), 17.

<sup>84</sup> Dias, *The Portuguese in Malabar*, 93.

<sup>85</sup> Dias, *The Portuguese in Malabar*, 94.

<sup>86</sup> Dias, *The Portuguese in Malabar*, 116–117.

However, Miguel (Shanti Seldon's great-grandfather) and his wife Helen Vas began to incorporate English names into their family as early as 1840, when they named their first child Joseph Salvador Saldanha. Their second son, Tashildar Joachim Lawrence Saldanha, was Shanti Seldon's grandfather through his firstborn son, Camillo Jerome Timothy Saldanha.<sup>87</sup> The mix of Portuguese, English, and Indian names incorporated into these later generations indicates the growing advantage of being perceived as Anglo-Indian rather than simply Eurasian. Shanti Seldon, by jettisoning her identifiably Portuguese surname but retaining her Indian first name, thoroughly claimed the identity of Anglo-Indian. A former student, Priyal Shah, noted in a Zoom interview that Seldon's accent was "more British" than most, and that she only heard Seldon speak Hindi to domestic staff. However, Shah was unaware that Seldon had ever used the Anglicized name "Cynthia," and characterized "Shanti" as "a very Indian name."<sup>88</sup>

Shanti Seldon's musical education began around 1922, when she started piano lessons with a Mrs. Fairfield at the Convent of Jesus and Mary on Clare Road in Mumbai. As Catholics, Luso-Indians had a long tradition of Western classical music; Dias tells us that the first (portable) organ in India arrived as early as 1500.<sup>89</sup> "In most parishes," Dias writes, "children were taught the rudiments of Western music, in the

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<sup>87</sup> Adil Ferris, "Saldanha Gadiagar Family of Mangalore," Ferris Encyclopedia of Mangalorean Families, 2025, <https://genealogy.x10host.com/SaldanhaAntonio/index.htm>.

<sup>88</sup> Conversation with the author, October 17, 2024.

<sup>89</sup> Dias, *The Portuguese in Malabar*, 188.

church or in schools attached to the church.”<sup>90</sup> Therefore, it is likely that Seldon grew up hearing Western classical music even before her lessons at the convent began, and it is not surprising that her first studies were at a Catholic school. It is also not surprising that Western classical musicians in India were (and still are) often of Luso-Indian descent, given the strong Catholic church music tradition in their communities. Results of ABRSM and Trinity College music exams published in the *Times of India* in the twenties and thirties are filled with Portuguese names like Pinto, Oliviera, and Fernandes.<sup>91</sup>

At age 20, Seldon won an Associated Board Exhibition at the RCM and traveled from Mumbai to London in 1936 to take up her scholarship. This award covered her tuition at the RCM but did not include maintenance, which means that her family was able to cover her traveling and living expenses while in the UK. Though overseas students were not uncommon at the RCM, Seldon was one of only six Indian or Sri Lankan scholars at the College in the thirties. Most of the 58 overseas scholars who came to the RCM between 1930 and 1940 were from the majority-white Commonwealth nations – Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Even the small group of Indian-born scholars were mostly from white colonial families; as far as I have been able to ascertain,

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<sup>90</sup> Dias, *The Portuguese in Malabar*, 189.

<sup>91</sup> “Music Exams,” *Times of India*, September 26, 1927; “Trinity College of Music Exams,” *Times of India*, August 11, 1927; “Music Exams,” *Times of India*, December 29, 1925; “Associated Board Royal Schools of Music,” *Times of India*, January 16, 1933.

only Seldon and Silloo Panthaki, a pianist who entered the College in September 1939, were of partial South Asian descent.

Though Seldon was thousands of miles away from her parents back home in India, she did have some family close; according to the 1939 Register, she and her maternal first cousin Hilton Gonsalves shared a flat at Redcliffe Gardens in Kensington.<sup>92</sup> Gonsalves was also in London to study; his occupation on the Register is listed as “University student.” Like Seldon, he also returned to India, where he married Iris Vas in the early 1940s before dying at age 42 in 1959. His profession is unclear, though his death notice in the *Times of India* indicates that he worked for Hindustan Aircraft.<sup>93</sup>

Nor were Gonsalves and Seldon the only Indian students in London at the time; by 1931 there were as many as two thousand Indians studying in London. However, due to Indian government technology scholarships, most pursued engineering and related subjects (as Gonsalves likely did, given his later employment) or studied for the bar at the Inns of Court, and most were male.<sup>94</sup> Others, also largely male, were attending elite universities like Oxford and Cambridge to “[seek] their final polish,” in imitation of the English upper classes. These men would go on to become the ruling

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<sup>92</sup> The National Archives; Kew, London, England; *1939 Register*; Reference: RG 101/311D

<sup>93</sup> “Deaths,” *Times of India*, February 21, 1959.

<sup>94</sup> According to Dias, mechanical and engineering professions were and remain common among Luso-Indians. See Dias, 185; Hilary Perraton, *A History of Foreign of Students in Britain* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 57.

elites of colonial successor states, like Soloman Bandaranaike, Prime Minister of Ceylon, and Jawaharal Nehru, Indian Prime Minister.<sup>95</sup> The military academies also hosted Indian students (and others from across the Empire), again often the children of wealthy or noble families in India.<sup>96</sup> Female students, like Seldon and Panthaki, were present in the dozens, rather than the hundreds.<sup>97</sup>

That said, Seldon and Panthaki did have a few notable foremothers: for example, Dorothy Bonarjee, winner of an Eisteddfod at Aberystwyth University in 1914 and the first female law graduate from University College, London, in 1917.<sup>98</sup> Even before Bonarjee there was Cornelia Sorabji, the first woman to study law at Oxford, and, like Panthaki, a Parsi from Maharashtra.<sup>99</sup> Indian students, both male and female, faced formal and informal segregation well into the 1930s. White Britons were particularly concerned, writes education historian Sumita Mukherjee, about “familial and sexual relationships between Indian men and white British women,” leading to “colour bars” at dances, restaurants, cafes, and other places where students might socialize.<sup>100</sup> “Colour bars” were also common in lodgings, even for the most prominent Indians in

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<sup>95</sup> Perraton, *A History of Foreign of Students*, 61.

<sup>96</sup> Perraton, *A History of Foreign of Students*, 66.

<sup>97</sup> Sumita Mukherjee, “Mobility, race and the politicisation of Indian students in Britain before the Second World War,” *History of Education* 51, no. 4 (2022), 561.

<sup>98</sup> Mukherjee, “Mobility, race...,” 572.

<sup>99</sup> Perraton, *A History of Foreign Students*, 151.

<sup>100</sup> Mukherjee, 569. See also Rosina Vizram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (Pluto Press, 2002), 276.

Britain, marking Seldon and Gonsalves's Kensington flat as a minor coup for the students.<sup>101</sup>

Outside of students, between five and six thousand additional Indians lived in the UK – with up to three thousand in London alone – in the interwar period. Most were still from the professional class like Seldon, Panthaki, and Gonsalves, but Rosina Vizram notes in her monograph *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* that working class Indians were beginning to migrate in significant numbers as well. Again, this contingent of Indians were mostly men, and furthermore were from quite different cultural and religious backgrounds from the mixed-heritage Seldon. Vizram highlights the particularly large contingent of manual laborers who came to Britain from Punjab – often, reflecting the demographics of northwestern India before Partition, Sikhs or Muslims.<sup>102</sup>

While at the RCM Seldon studied piano with Kendall Taylor and Kathleen Long as her first study, and composition with R.O. Morris as her Second.<sup>103</sup> In 1939 she received the RCM's Raymond Ffennell prize for teachers and earned a GRSM.<sup>104</sup> She was the first Indian woman to graduate with the latter qualification, which had been established in 1930 as a joint diploma for matriculated RAM and RCM students (see

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<sup>101</sup> Vizram, *Asians in Britain*, 277.

<sup>102</sup> Vizram, *Asians in Britain*, 254–255.

<sup>103</sup> “Western,” *Times of India*, June 15, 1990.

<sup>104</sup> Raymond Ffennell was a philanthropist and chairman of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (1928–1938). See Wright, *The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music*, 259.

Chapter IV). Despite these achievements, Seldon is curiously absent in the RCMM and other contemporary London publications. She did not perform on any College concerts, or, as far as I have been able to discover, any public recitals at all during her time in England. She is not named as a participant in any student activities at the College, either. The single mention she received in the RCMM was the announcement of the Ffennel prize in the Midsummer Term 1939 edition.<sup>105</sup>

Passenger manifest records show that Seldon returned to Mumbai (then Bombay) in 1941. In 1946, she married Mark Robinson, a fellow pianist.<sup>106</sup> Due to his quite common name it has been difficult to find and confirm public records about Robinson, though I can say with some confidence that he was born in Bombay to Clement and Evelyn Robinson in 1921.<sup>107</sup> His parents, both born in England, were married the previous year in London.<sup>108</sup> The Robinsons' reasons for migrating to India are not clear, but according to the 1939 Register Mark and his parents were back in the United Kingdom, now in Surrey, by the late thirties.<sup>109</sup> Though they were both in England at the time, it is also not clear if Seldon and Robinson met there or in India. All that is certain is that in 1947 Mark and Shanti Robinson welcomed a son named

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<sup>105</sup> *Royal College of Music Magazine* 35, no. 3: 145.

<sup>106</sup> Parish register transcripts from the Presidency of Bombay, 1709–1948, Ref # N-3-175, folio 190.

<sup>107</sup> Parish register transcripts from the Presidency of Bombay, 1709–1948, Ref #N-3-130.

<sup>108</sup> *England & Wales Marriages 1837–2005*, Vol. 1A, 142.

<sup>109</sup> 1939 Register Ref: RG101/1399D/003/32 Letter Code: CNNJ

Howard in Bombay. The birth was announced in the May 28, 1947 edition of the *Times* in London.

Marriage did not slow Seldon's burgeoning professional career in India. She quickly established herself on the concert scene there, appearing in recitals by late 1943. Most of her performance career was devoted to chamber music; as early as 1951 the *Times of India* called her "Bombay's best chamber pianist today."<sup>110</sup> In February of 1948 Seldon and her RCM classmate Panthaki played together on a recital they shared with Robinson. The *Times of India* music critic wrote that Panthaki and Seldon's partnership was "admirable," and their "playing of the lovely Delius Sonata" "gave particular pleasure." The critic also noted that the two women performed a Beethoven sonata "with vitality and sensitivity that allowed the music to speak for itself." "Sensitivity" and "vitality" were common descriptors of Seldon's playing, "sensitivity" often deployed to describe her as a chamber musician and accompanist.

The *Times of India* critic's praise of Robinson, however, took a much different tenor:

Mark Robinson is a pianist of redoubtable technical powers whose command of his instrument at his two appearances was never in doubt. But Mr. Robinson is more than a mere technician; his phrasing and control of dynamics in Chopin's "Barcarolle" and a group of Preludes were all that could reasonably be desired. His performance of the Liszt sonata showed that he also possesses a vigor which can produce great volume of tone.

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<sup>110</sup> "Chamber Music Concert," *Times of India*, July 7, 1951.

Where Seldon and Panthaki are “sensitive,” Robinson has “vigor,” “control,” and “volume,” which he marshals to “command his instrument.”<sup>111</sup> Across her long career, many concert reviewers characterized Seldon’s playing style as flexible, elastic, and supple. While these are all desirable qualities in a chamber musician, it is telling to see these feminine-coded attributes contrasted with this unmistakably masculine account of her husband’s playing. Similarly, the reviewer of a 1953 concert Seldon gave with Parsi violinist Mehli Mehta (1908–2002, father of conductor Zubin Mehta) wrote that Seldon’s

graceful playing, range of dynamics, and singing quality of tone showed greater power and a more matured development, her suppleness lending itself ideally to the subtlest nuances and shades.

Meanwhile, Mehta’s

firm bowing and fine tone, great technical dexterity, and feeling for dynamics, marked him out as a veteran performer with poise and exceptional musical perception.<sup>112</sup>

Again, Seldon’s finest attributes were those which made her an attractive and even yielding duet partner, while Mehta was praised for strength, technique, and experience.

Mehta was a longtime collaborator of Seldon’s, even as his career took him overseas with greater and greater frequency. In 1944 she made her first appearance with Mehta’s Bombay String Quartet, an ensemble she collaborated with often over the next decade.<sup>113</sup> Between 1944 and 1955 Seldon played at least fifteen concerts with the

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<sup>111</sup> “Violin & Piano Recital,” *Times of India*, February 18, 1948.

<sup>112</sup> “Piano & Violin Recital,” *Times of India*, July 20, 1953.

<sup>113</sup> “Chamber Concert,” *Times of India* April 4, 1944.

Bombay Quartet, and often collaborated with the musicians of the quartet – Mehta, Wilfred Forbes, Rusi Mody, and George Lester – in other recitals. She appeared most often in duo configurations with Mehta and Lester. A Chopin centenary concert in 1949 saw Seldon and Lester perform Chopin’s cello sonata in what the *Times of India* music critic called a “fine rendering.”<sup>114</sup> With Mehta she frequently performed duets at Quartet concerts. Their repertoire was mainly conservative and overlapped significantly with the canon of works Seldon would have encountered at the RCM. In the fifties they performed both the Franck and Lekeu violin sonatas at least twice; other repertoire included sonatas by Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, and Grieg. Written in 1892 and premiered by Ysaÿe in 1893, the Lekeu was the “newest” work Mehta and Seldon performed together. Even so, the *Times of India* critic felt they had to excuse the “almost atonal effect” of Lekeu’s rapid modulations, which was “more than made up by the brilliance of the ending in each movement.”<sup>115</sup> This caveat implies that the audience for Western classical music in Mumbai at the time – 1955 – would not be receptive to anything more contemporary in aesthetic.

As far as I have been able to discern, the only pieces by a living composer Seldon ever performed were a piano concerto written by the Mumbai-born, RAM-trained Vanraj Bhatia, and a violin sonata by Bhatia’s composition teacher, Seldon’s fellow

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<sup>114</sup> “Chopin Centenary Music Concert,” *Times of India*, October 18, 1949.

<sup>115</sup> “String Quartet Concert,” *Times of India*, August 3, 1955.

Collegian Howard Ferguson.<sup>116</sup> Seldon premiered Bhatia's concerto with an orchestra directed by Howard Boatwright; the *Times* critic praised her for "[taking] the trouble to understand the work" despite its blend of Indian and Western elements.<sup>117</sup> Much of the review focused on a performance by Italian-British violinist Alfredo Campoli's performance of the Bruch concerto, however, which prompted Boatwright to write a strongly-worded letter to the editor. Among other perceived deficiencies of the review, Boatwright accused the critic of unduly emphasizing Campoli's part in the performance and minimizing Seldon's, "who spent an enormous amount of time and effort in memorising and perfecting her playing of the concerto."<sup>118</sup> Boatwright's strong defense of Seldon's "time and effort" suggests that the "challenging contemporary work"'s idiom was not one that came easily to her.

Seldon's partnership with the Bombay Quartet seems to have dissipated by the sixties, perhaps due to Mehta's more permanent relocation to the United States in 1955, where he played with the Curtis String Quartet and later directed the University of California-Los Angeles orchestra from 1964-1976.<sup>119</sup> From this point on Seldon's musical identity shifted from chamber musician to accompanist. This may have been because she lacked steady collaborators in Mumbai; most of her concert appearances

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<sup>116</sup> Dalal Navin, "From My Musical Sketchbook," *Times of India*, May 4, 1952.

<sup>117</sup> "Fine Recital by Campoli," *Times of India*, February 20, 1960.

<sup>118</sup> Howard Boatwright, "Campoli's Concert," *Times of India*, March 3, 1960.

<sup>119</sup> Jeet Thayyil, "Mehli Mehta, father of Zubin, dies at 94," *India Abroad*, November 1, 2002.

from the sixties through the eighties were with touring artists from abroad. During the sixties alone she performed with Finnish bass Kim Borg, French violinist Blaise Calame, Hungarian violinist György Pauk, and Australian violinist Ronald Woodcock.<sup>120</sup> Over the next decade she added violinists Bijan Khadem-Missagh (Iranian-Austrian), Hyman Bress (Canadian), Brigitte Huyghens de Beaufond (French), and Wanda Wiłkomirska (Polish) to her list of international collaborators, as well as Swiss cellist Kurt Hess, Canadian bassoonist George Zuckerman, and Chinese soprano Siew-Tuan Loh.<sup>121</sup> In most critical notices about these concerts Seldon is barely mentioned except as “an ideal partner.”<sup>122</sup>

Seldon did maintain some of her old musical relationships into the seventies, however, and developed a fruitful partnership with Parsi violinist Cowas J. Jeejeebhoy, who she performed with in her last recital documented by the *Times of India* in 1990.<sup>123</sup> Decades after their time at the RCM, Seldon performed with Silloo Panthaki in 1973,

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<sup>120</sup> “A First-Rate Basso,” *Times of India*, August 17, 1961; “Something New to Say,” *Times of India*, September 22, 1963; “Warm-Hearted Playing,” *Times of India*, April 13, 1965; “An enjoyable concert,” *Times of India*, March 8, 1968.

<sup>121</sup> “Dazzling Display by Young Iranian Violinist,” *Times of India*, December 19, 1976; “Spirited Recital by Violinist from Canada,” *Times of India*, January 31, 1973; Classified advertisement, *Times of India*, February 2, 1970; Classified advertisement, *Times of India*, August 12, 1969; Solie Petit, “Hess – Refinement, Control and Faultless Taste,” *Times of India*, February 10, 1979; “Entertaining Recital by Vassoonist [sic],” *Times of India*, May 1, 1969; “Talented Soprano in Wide Range of Art Songs,” *Times of India*, February 16, 1977.

<sup>122</sup> “Warm-Hearted Playing.”

<sup>123</sup> “Music: Western,” *Times of India*, June 15, 1990.

1975, and 1976, sometimes with former Bombay Quartet cellist George Lester.<sup>124</sup>

However, her personal and musical partnership with Mark Robinson appears to have ended by the mid-fifties; by 1950 they no longer appeared in concert together. An oblique reference in a concert review to a trip to England in 1952 led me to passenger manifests that confirm that Seldon, Robinson, and their son traveled to the UK and back to India that year. Seldon is listed in those records as “Cynthia Robinson,” so they were presumably still married at that time. Their trip may have been the result of Robinson’s father’s death in March of 1952.<sup>125</sup> Robinson stopped appearing on recitals or radio broadcasts in India in 1954, so it is possible that he returned to England or migrated elsewhere abroad at that time. The fact that Seldon’s later students also were not aware that she was ever married or had a child is suggestive – perhaps Robinson took Howard with him. Howard died in London in 1985, which is admittedly slim evidence to this hypothesis, but does support it.<sup>126</sup>

In 1990 Seldon turned 75, and appears to have retired from performance entirely. Her musical activity did not slow, however. This long third act of her life was devoted to teaching, first out of a studio, and then at her home, which she shared with her paternal first cousin, Patrick Saldanha. A 2000 *Times of India* profile called her “Mumbai’s oldest piano teacher” at 85, and she was still teaching as late as 2007,

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<sup>124</sup> “In the City Today,” *Times of India*, August 30, 1973; “Entertainment: Dance, Drama, Music,” *Times of India*, January 8, 1975; “In the City Today,” *Times of India*, February 21, 1976.

<sup>125</sup> England & Wales Government Probate Death Index 1858–2019.

<sup>126</sup> England & Wales Deaths 1837–2007, Register 1285, London, volume 13, page 1851.

according to former students.<sup>127</sup> Early evidence of her teaching dates to the fifties, when her student Renee Ferriera passed the Trinity College of Music senior theory exam with honors, then received Trinity's associateship qualification.<sup>128</sup> According to former students, English was her language of instruction, and even in the early years of the twenty-first century the majority of her students were from Catholic or Parsi families. Priyal Shah, who studied with Seldon from the age of nine until Shah went to music school abroad in 2007, recalled that Gujaratis like herself were less than half of Seldon's students. Seldon also maintained strong ties to the RCM and the British musical establishment through her curriculum, which her students report was almost entirely focused on passing through the Associated Board graded exams.

Though I have not been able to find any evidence that Seldon published compositions, or even reviews that suggest she performed her own works, her student Reewa Rathod recalls that composition and mastery of composition techniques were foundational to her approach as both a teacher and a pianist. In an email to me in November 2024, Rathod wrote,

Indeed, she conveyed to me that she had a background in music composition. She meticulously elaborated on the compositional style of each piece we studied, imparting valuable insights that enriched my understanding of music. Her teachings included in-depth discussions on the concept of Ostinatos [sic], where she clarified the significance of repeated musical passages and their role in enhancing the overall composition.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Conversation with the author, October 17, 2024.

<sup>128</sup> "Trinity College of Music," *Times of India*, August 5, 1950; "Trinity College of Music," *Times of India*, December 21, 1950

<sup>129</sup> Reewa Rathod, e-mail communication with the author, November 16, 2024.

This focus on specific compositional style and repetition shows the influence of Seldon's composition teacher at the RCM, R.O. Morris, who is most known today as a theorist. His expertise was in sixteenth-century counterpoint; his book on the subject, *Contrapuntal Technique in the Sixteenth Century*, was published by Oxford in 1922. A graduate of Harrow and Oxford, Morris was a gentleman scholar whose own compositions were in an "aloof and astringent style" that emphasized contrapuntal technique over emotional appeal.<sup>130</sup> Gerald Finzi, in an obituary published in the RCM, characterized Morris as a musician who approached music "from the angle of craftsmanship."<sup>131</sup> Based on Rathod's account, Morris appears to have imparted this approach to Seldon.

This is not to suggest that Seldon was an unemotional performer or teacher, however. Both Shah and Rathod described Seldon's insistence that her students play expressively at all levels of skill. Seldon herself told the *Times of India* in 2000 that "you have to convey the spiritual quality of the sound." Much like Morris, who advocated that students of historical counterpoint "approach...with humility" and "take [historical counterpoint] just as we find it," for Seldon, expression came from the music, not from

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<sup>130</sup> Gerald Finzi, "Obituary: R. O. Morris," *Royal College of Music Magazine* 45, no. 2: 55.

<sup>131</sup> Finzi, "R. O. Morris," 55.

the performer's own emotions.<sup>132</sup> "Your emotion is subject to what the work demands," she told the same *Times* reporter, "it is not about what you feel."<sup>133</sup>

Several of Seldon's students have gone on to have notable careers as pianists, including Fali Pavri, currently the head of the keyboard area at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Unsurprisingly given her long teaching career, her students span generations. Lolita Mayadas, who served as principal of the Calcutta School of Music from the mid-1960s to 1975, was also a Seldon student, as was the young pianist Chelsea D'Souza, a current Steinway Artist and doctoral student at the Shepherd School of Music in Houston.

Upon learning of Seldon's death in late 2012, Goan physician and pianist Luis Dias posted an in-memoriam for Seldon on his blog. Dias, self-identified as a relative of violinist Vere da Silva, visited Seldon shortly before she died. He described her as "extremely gracious, and was quite amused by my interest in her life story." "I was gobsmacked," he wrote, "that so little was known about such an eminent doyenne of the piano, in her home city, and even by many of her former students."<sup>134</sup> But it is now clear that this was typical of Seldon. While her career as a pianist and teacher was very public, she kept her personal life extremely private, and demurred recognition for her extraordinary accomplishments.

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<sup>132</sup> R.O. Morris, *Contrapuntal Technique of the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, 1922), 4.

<sup>133</sup> "Zubin Mehta Was Her Page Turner," *Times of India*, August 13, 2000.

<sup>134</sup> Luis Dias, "In Memoriam: Shanti Seldon," January 5, 2013, <https://luisdias.wordpress.com/2013/01/05/in-memoriam-shanti-sheldon/>.

A final poignant record of Seldon's long life can be found on YouTube, where a former student posted a video titled "Me playing Piano age 5 in Mumbai - with Shanti Seldon - 1999." In this grainy footage, Seldon and a small child sit in matching chairs in front of a small brown upright piano. A window with a fanciful iron grate stands open to their left; the horns of passing cars provide a steady counterpoint to the sound of the instrument and Seldon's soft-voiced instructions. Seldon wears a brown cardigan and her hair is collar-length and soft gray. After she and her pupil play a stumbling rendition of "Oh Christmas Tree," she strokes the child's hair and says "very good."<sup>135</sup>

## Conclusion

Publicity, as we saw in the case of Mary Ellen Gilson, could be a double-edged sword for female musicians. This remained true during the careers of Meachen, Arkell, and Seldon. Seldon, who spent the longest time in the public eye, followed Helen Glatz's example of self-deprecation. Even when she was the acknowledged Grand Dame of classical piano teachers in Mumbai in her mid-eighties, a *Times of India* reporter called her "unbelievably modest about herself." For Meachen, marriage to a fellow musician — though he was technically an amateur — was the end of her professional presence in music. After her 1941 marriage to John Kirby, most public performances Meachen gave were in support of her husband's musical endeavors. Thus removed

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<sup>135</sup> GogoMusic, "Me playing Piano age 5 in Mumbai - with Shanti Seldon - 1999," YouTube, [https://youtu.be/JZF5\\_ZYt6oQ?si=\\_LKQWD3aEDtkXYc](https://youtu.be/JZF5_ZYt6oQ?si=_LKQWD3aEDtkXYc).

from the public discourse, Meachen did not have to publicly express her humility to temper her image.

Marriage also affected each woman's career differently. Seldon's brief marriage to fellow pianist Mark Robinson certainly did not derail her professional performance career, and may even have helped it, considering the overwhelmingly positive reviews they both received from the *Times of India*. Arkell's later-in-life marriage to Colin Pooley does not appear to have impacted her career in any significant way, though by the time of their marriage she seems to have already stopped performing for the most part.

Like the Great War before it, the second World War profoundly affected the RCM and its students. It strikes me that of my subjects only Helen Glatz and Joan Arkell had significant firsthand experience with the War; Glatz as a civilian in Hungary, and Arkell as a servicewoman.<sup>136</sup> As Glatz and Arkell had very different careers, I am left wondering if further study of their lives and of the lives of other female musicians involved in the War effort might reveal unifying threads I have yet to find.

My concluding chapter identifies similar lingering questions raised by this work. I also suggest possible paths for expanding my five biographical narratives into longer treatments of these "hidden" musicians. Helen Glatz in particular practically demands further investigation, possibly even a book-length study; similarly, Shanti Seldon's legacy deserves greater attention. Even so, I remain mindful of Gerda Lerner's

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<sup>136</sup> As citizens of Britain, all five of my subjects were of course touched by the War. However, most did not experience Axis attacks on Britain due to their location. Seldon was in Mumbai by 1940, when the German Blitz bombings of London began. Kirby moved to Oxford in 1939, which was not bombed during the War.

prescription against centering “extraordinary” women. This project remains rooted in the “ordinary,” most clearly represented here by Gilson, Kirby, and Arkell. The fact that there is likely enough extant material to support longer studies of Glatz and Seldon also does not mean that they were “extraordinary.” They may have been more well-attested than the other three, but their legacies remain largely, in Glatz’s words, “in oblivion.”

## Chapter VII: Conclusion

I briefly alluded in my first chapter to parallels between the present challenges facing higher education in music and the challenges the RCM confronted in the interwar period. A little less than ninety years ago, near the end of the 1930s, Sir Hugh Allen stepped down as director of the RCM. He was replaced by College “Old Boy” George Dyson, an organist and composer from working class origins.<sup>1</sup> Reading Dyson’s first address as director, given in early 1938, is deeply uncanny from today’s vantage point. “[I]n my opinion,” Dyson told the assembled Collegians, “what was good enough for students in this place 30 years ago is nothing like good enough for you now.”<sup>2</sup>

When UW-Madison was hiring a new School of Music Director in 2023 I attended each finalist’s presentation. They were asked to speak on their vision for a twenty-first century school of music; all three emphasized diversity, equity, and inclusion. The topic struck me as both promising and bizarrely out of date: why were we talking about the twenty-first century when we were already two decades into it? More troubling to me, though, was the fact that two of the three finalists were men, and all three were white. If the music school of the future is one where diversity, equity, and

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<sup>1</sup> In his first director’s address he repeatedly calls himself an “Old Boy” – meaning that he studied at the College himself – which is a fascinating choice considering that most of the students he was addressing were women.

<sup>2</sup> George Dyson, “Director’s Address,” *Royal College of Music Magazine* 34, no. 1 (Easter 1938): 12.

inclusion are major priorities, why not show commitment to those priorities in the choice of leader? What was good enough three decades ago, like promises that the *next* leader or the one after that will reflect the diversity of the student body, is nothing like good enough for now.

In the preceding chapters I have brought two interrelated understandings of the music school environment into focus. First, I have demonstrated that cohort “bubbles” are a phenomenon distinct from a forward stream of progress toward equity. The circumstances that create these bubbles can be harnessed to further inclusion, but they must be sustained by long-term institutional support. Second, I have shown that RCM students’ post-College careers were shaped more by fellow students than by the institution itself. This may seem to contradict my first point. If classmates matter more than institutional culture, why do bubbles require institutional support? My project demonstrates that there is no contradiction. The clearest way to avoid bubbles, I argue, is to center student experience. Not in the neoliberal sense of “the student is the consumer,” but on a deeper level – institutions need to nurture cohorts beyond the bubble stage.

A more complete understanding of how bubbles, institutions, and the student experience interact will come from investigating other student cohorts. My brief biography of Shanti Seldon could be extended into a project centering Indian and South Asian students at the RCM. Have there been bubbles or long-term cohorts of South Asians at the RCM? In my analysis of the Scholar Register I also found that a few black

or mixed-race Jamaicans studied at the College in the thirties. An interesting further study might focus on black and brown students at the RCM post-Windrush.

American conservatories – both private, independent schools like Juilliard and Curtis, and public university music schools – could be the subject of similar studies. It would be particularly interesting to see how student cohorts at a publicly-funded institution like the UW-Madison Mead-Witter School of Music compare to counterparts at a private conservatory like the Lawrence University Conservatory of Music, located just ninety miles north of the UW campus.

### **Next Steps**

To complete this dissertation I took advantage of the vast expansion of digital archives over the past decade. That said, there are still several undigitized collections that would be key to further study of the people and institutions discussed in this project. The physical archives at Dartington Hall, for example, will be essential for anyone wishing to study Helen Glatz, particularly when it comes to her musical output and her teaching at Dartington. My hope – and my suspicion – is that some of her manuscript scores are housed there. Similarly, the Exeter College Musical Society archives should provide considerable detail about John and Margaret Kirby's musical activities in Oxford. Due to limited digitization of local Oxfordshire newspapers, particularly the *Oxford Times* and the *Oxford Mail*, the Oxfordshire History Centre microfilm archives of both papers will also be instructive.

The parish church archives at Alton and Fleet may hold further information on Agnes Joan Arkell's later life. As mentioned in Chapter VI, Arkell served on a committee working to build a new church in Fleet in 1960 and became an Associate of the Royal College of Organists in 1969. Taken together these two facts suggest that she was actively involved in parish life in Hampshire from at least the early sixties and may have been either a permanent or substitute organist at one of the Alton-area churches. The parish churches of Alton (St. Lawrence and All Saints), Fleet, and Petersfield (where Arkell lived at the time of her death), should help clarify her role in the Anglican church despite the lack of newspaper coverage of her activities.

As Shanti Seldon has several prominent living students, I reached out to about a half dozen for whom I was able to find contact information. I was ultimately able to interview two, Reewa Rathod (via email) and Priyal Shah (via Zoom). Further interviews with Seldon's students, especially those who studied with her before the 1980s, would also be illuminating. The two interviews I conducted for this project were younger students; finding older former students will likely require considerable time and resources, including engaging a facilitator in Mumbai. A possible avenue for continuing research on Seldon would be a collaboration with one of the two former students I have already spoken to; though both live outside of India now, their connections to the Mumbai community and personal experience with Seldon could result in a rich and textured treatment of Seldon's musical life.

Next steps for tracing Mary Ellen Gilson into her later life are less clear to me. Visiting the areas where she grew up, Acton and Southend-on-Sea, will probably prove

the most fruitful. The Ealing Council (Acton lies in the London borough of Ealing) maintains a Local History Centre that holds a variety of archival material, including club and council minutes, journals, and diaries written by former residents. Similarly, Southend-on-Sea's Central Library and Museum both have extensive local archives ranging from council minutes to telephone directories.

As a classmate and close contemporary of several of my subjects, Benjamin Britten's collected correspondence is another important resource. Online catalog records indicate that the Britten-Pears archive holds letters between Britten and Joan Arkell, as well as Britten and Margaret Kirby. There are also more than a dozen letters in the Britten-Pears archive related to Dartington College between 1950 and 1974 which I would like to examine for any references to Helen Glatz. I would also be curious to see if any of the correspondence between Britten and Imogen Holst in the late forties or early fifties mentions Glatz, as Holst was at that time preparing to leave Dartington for Aldeburgh and have Glatz take on increased responsibilities at Dartington. Clarity on the exact timeline of Glatz's appointment at Dartington, as well as anything Britten and Holst might have had to say about Glatz, would be extremely illuminating. The Britten-Pears archive also lists 49 letters between Britten and the Elmhirsts, Dartington's founders, between 1948 and 1974; these could also contain valuable information about Helen Glatz at Dartington.

### **Courage and Sincerity**

I began this dissertation with Mrs. Meier's prescription for "courage and sincerity," and I will end it by trying to be courageous and sincere myself. This next section is the prose equivalent of a trust fall. It is significantly more personal and less formal than other parts of this document; I must trust that by this point the reader is ready to follow me.

Before I started thinking about this project nearly a decade ago, I struggled to see myself as anything but a skilled performer, a translator of notation to sound. One of the stickiest things anyone has ever said to me was "you're an excellent mimic." For years I wondered if that was a compliment or a criticism, and more often than not felt it was the latter. If I was just "an excellent mimic," was I an artist? To be an artist is to create something new, surely. Teachers and coaches told me that my technique was great, but I should try to sound more like "me." What I was missing, apparently, was courage and sincerity.

It took me until my thirties to understand that this entire way of thinking is and was completely absurd. Nothing I do, in my everyday life or as a musician, is free of external influence. Everything is derivative. When I play the viola, listeners hear me; and I am made up of thousands of hours of listening to my teachers, my peers, my father, and that one crackly CD transfer of Lillian Fuchs performing the Bach cello suites someone gave me in 2005. Perhaps this is why my hackles are so raised by discussions of originality and authenticity in music. Criticism of art so often hinges on these qualities. If art is original and authentic, then it is good. If it is not, it is lacking. Again, this construction strikes me as absurd, and its prevalence has pushed me to

adopt the somewhat belligerent position that “is it good” is the wrong question to ask about any kind of art.

In 2021 I gave a paper on the 1934 death of composer Kalitha Dorothy Fox (1894–1934) at Bangor University’s Women’s Work in Music Conference. At the end of my presentation, which focused on the intersection of the rising anti-noise movement and press coverage of Fox’s suicide, one attendee asked me a question I should have anticipated: “is her music any good?” I was totally unprepared to answer. “I like it,” I said. My memory of the rest of my response is a little muddled, but I think I also told the audience that Fox’s music sounds a bit like Rebecca Clarke’s (1886–1979), and that I thought Fox’s viola sonata would be a good preparatory piece for students who wanted to perform the more technically challenging Clarke sonata. And what would it have meant to the person asking the question if I said Fox’s music was “good”? If “good” to them implied “original,” then saying Fox’s music is “good” would be misleading. But maybe they meant “pleasant” – a subjective quality, certainly, but one I could pretty confidently affirm. Fox’s music *is* pleasant: mostly tonal, melodic, and adheres to familiar formal procedures.

I do not think that most classically-trained musicians would say that Fox’s viola sonata is “good.” They might call it pleasant, or tuneful, or even worse, “charming.” Those familiar with Clarke’s sonata might notice the similarities and compare them, likely to Fox’s detriment. To me this is especially ironic because the Clarke sonata is what led me to research Fox – and ultimately to this dissertation project. Violists love to talk about how we almost “lost” the Clarke sonata. Composed in 1919, it was

rediscovered in the late seventies. At the time, Clarke was an elderly widow living in New York City; she had not published a composition in decades. A classical music radio host, planning a program to honor pianist Myra Hess (1890–1965), was informed that Clarke had played with Hess back in England before the second World War. He interviewed Clarke and discovered in the course of their conversation that Clarke was a composer. Just months later Clarke’s viola sonata was performed on the same radio program, igniting a “mini-revival” of her music.<sup>3</sup>

When I first heard this story as an undergraduate I was enthralled. There must be more lost music out there, I reasoned; Clarke’s rediscovery was too coincidental. We could not rely on that kind of chance to uncover other lost music – we had to figure out why it had been forgotten, and where to find it. So I went looking, starting with the royal schools of music in the early twentieth century; the milieu that had produced Clarke. For my M.Mus thesis I analyzed a 1945 viola sonata by RAM-educated composer Pamela Harrison (1915–1990), and in my D.M.A. document I wrote about viola works by Ruth Gipps (1921–1999) and Kalitha Fox. Both projects feel in retrospect like the “compensatory history” that Gerda Lerner warned against forty years ago. Essentially, I was arguing that Harrison, Gipps, and Fox were *important*, and that the specific pieces I was championing should become part of the repertory canon because they are *good*.

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<sup>3</sup> Liane Curtis, *A Rebecca Clarke Reader* (The Rebecca Clarke Society, 2005), 157–158.

I am not arguing any such thing about May Gilson, Helen Glatz, Grace Kirby, Agnes Arkell, or Shanti Seldon. Instead, I am simply acknowledging that these five women were composers. Even if I have no specific evidence of compositions by Gilson, Arkell, or Seldon, and limited examples of music by Glatz and Kirby, the Scholar Register tells me that at some point each one of them told the College Registrar "I am a composer."

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