

Spring, 2001

Volume 1, Issue 1

The Rebecca Clarke Society

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Clarke Presentations at Toronto Conference

A "mega"-musicology conference, organized by the American Musicological Society and with participation by 15 scholarly music societies, was held November 1-5, 2000, in Toronto. "Rebecca Clarke: Contests and Contexts," a session sponsored by the Society for American Music, included papers by Liane Curtis and Cyrilla Barr. Barr's paper "**Clarke's Sonata for Viola: An 'Also Ran' or Cinderella?**" took a

fresh look at the well-known incident when the balloting of jurors for the second Berkshire competition resulted in a tie between Ernest Bloch and Rebecca Clarke. Based upon diaries, personal correspondence, and official contest documents, Barr revealed the procedure by which the judgment was reached. She also proposed that the element of competition served as a stimulus to Clarke to undertake her

first large, multi-movement, abstract work.

Curtis's paper considered "Binnorie: A Ballad," in her presentation, "**A newly-discovered song by Rebecca Clarke.**"

Curtis serendipitously discovered the song and two choral works by Clarke in the Clarke Estate, pieces that had not been mentioned in any previous guide to Clarke's music. By far Clarke's longest song, at 227 measures, "Binnorie" may date

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Clarke's 'Combined Carols' Brings Holiday cheer to Eastman

By Ralph Locke

On Friday, December 15, 2000, the Eastman School of Music was the scene of a rare performance of Rebecca Clarke's *Combined Carols*, an enchanting piece for string quartet or string orchestra, which was performed several times during her lifetime in New York under the baton of Leon Barzin. The Eastman School

owns the autograph score of this unpublished work --a gift from RCS President Liane Curtis in 1998, who received it (and several other Clarke manuscripts) from Clarke's niece Mrs. Heidi Schulz--and permission for the performance was graciously granted by Christopher Johnson (of Brooklyn, NY).

The performance was part of the annual Eastman "Christmas Sing," which consists of more than just singing: on this occasion, the School's gamelan performed several times, sounding quite clangorous in the School's high-vaulted Main Hall, the Eastman Horn Choir played a rollicking assortment of holiday favorites, and

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RCS President
Liane Curtis

*We invite your ideas
for future projects,
newsletters items,
and any other
suggestions!*

Letter from the President – Dr. Liane Curtis

Celebrating and Honoring Rebecca Clarke's Achievements

Dear Music-Lover,
On behalf of the Board of Directors of The Rebecca Clarke Society, Inc., welcome to the first issue of our newsletter, which will be published twice a year. This is such an exciting time for those who love Clarke's music! Previously unknown music has been performed in world premieres, and some of it has been the subject of study and made available in recordings.

A major publisher (Oxford University Press) will release a collection of Clarke's songs, which will complement the songs reissued by Boosey & Hawkes in 1994. All this is remarkable news for a composer who was literally rediscovered only 25 years ago and who has been known only for a handful of works.

We hope you will support our efforts to continue building

interest in Clarke's compositional output of 90 works. Membership in the Clarke Society starts at only \$10 per year. We invite your ideas for future projects, newsletters items, and any other suggestions!

Liane Curtis

*Women' Studies
Research Center
Brandeis University*

FOCUS on RCS Board Member: Laura Macy

While her scholarly specialty is in music of the sixteenth century, Dr. Laura Macy has taught in virtually every area of music history, at institutions including Williams College, Pennsylvania State University, and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (she received her Ph.D. from the latter institution). While at Penn State, Macy planned and initiated a course in World Musics for undergraduates, which was enormously successful, with enrollment of well over

200 every semester.

In 1997, Macy exchanged central Pennsylvania for cosmopolitan London, accepting a position with *The New Grove Dictionary*. She was part of the editorial staff of the revised edition that was released in January 2001, in 29 volumes. After serving as Publishing Director, she was appointed as Editor in December of 2000, succeeding the legendary Stanley Sadie.

Macy's responsibilities include overseeing the quarterly updates to

the on-line version of the Dictionary. She also believes firmly in improving the Dictionary's coverage of women composers and issues of gender. Said Macy in a recent interview:

"Previous Grove editions gave women short shrift -- their achievements were ignored. So much important scholarship is rectifying that now. Our cutting-edge articles on 'Women in Music' by Judith Tick, and 'Feminism' by Ruth Solie draw upon the full

range of current and innovative scholarship. These articles demonstrate the Dictionary's commitment to recognizing women, which the wonderful, newly commissioned article on Rebecca Clarke does as well. It was so sad that she was cut from the 1980 version – there was no one who advocated for her then. The changes that have taken place have not occurred without a lot of dedicated advocacy as well as first-rate research – it takes

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On the Founding of The Rebecca Clarke Society, Inc.

The RCS was officially incorporated in September 2000, after nearly a year of informal existence and activity.

Immediately following the Sept 25, 1999 conference and concert devoted entirely to Clarke and her music, that was held and sponsored by Brandeis University, musicologist and music critic Liane Curtis and (then President Elect of the American Musicological Society) Jessie Ann Owens met to discuss how to build on the success and interest generated by that historic event. Owens and Curtis had organized this Clarke event, which was sponsored by and held at Brandeis University. Owens and Curtis decided that the interest in the broad range of Clarke's musical language merited the organization of a group that would be devoted exclusively to focusing attention on Clarke and her creative genius. Previous discussions about founding a Clarke Society had taken place with violist and author Daniela Kohonen, who wanted to attend the conference but was unable. At the Sept. 25 concert, Clarke's "Comodo e amabile" for

String Quartet was given its world premiere, and "Poem" for String Quartet and the choral work Chorus for Shelley's "Hellas" (for women's five part

chorus) were given regional premieres. The entire review of the concert published in the *Boston Globe* is reprinted below.



Rebecca Clarke
1886-1979
photo ca. 1920

B6

THE BOSTON GLOBE • TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1999

Rediscovering composer Rebecca Clarke

By Richard Buell
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Music Review

WALTHAM - Some critical statements, even though hedged in with a modifier or two, give off the sound of colors being nailed to the mast. "Almost certainly the best composer of any period to have also been a woman," wrote Malcolm MacDonald in *The Gramophone* of February 1987.

MacDonald was reviewing a Northeastern Records LP, now regarded as a classic. It featured the music of an English-born composer and violist of German and American parentage, Rebecca Clarke, who spent the latter part of her life in the United States, where she was known, if at all, as the wife of a long-time Juilliard faculty member and Bach pianist, James Friskin, whom she had met in 1944.

Two years before, she had been working as a governess in Connecticut. "My fingers are puckered," her journal records, "from all the washing I have to do - self, children, bedding, dishes. Hard to play well that way."

Rebecca Clarke's is quite a story, and it is still unfolding.

That unfolding was the business of Saturday's Rebecca Clarke conference here, culminating in a concert that included some music by Clarke never performed.

MUSIC OF REBECCA CLARKE
(1886-1979)

Presented as part of a conference at Brandeis University commemorating the 20th anniversary of her death
At: Schwartz Auditorium, Brandeis University, Saturday night

What strikes this writer about Clarke's music is, first of all, how tightly composed it is, the point being pressed here on account of how tightly composed a lot of the music of her time and place was not. The songs are pure gold - microscopically sensitive to the pulls, tightenings, and easings of the English language as spoken, yet (and no mean feat this) utterly clear and natural and direct in rendering these into song. In Clarke's songs a person is telling you a story, or is speaking from the very center of where she lives. "Art" never gets in the way. One surprise among many Saturday night (nine songs were performed) was her utterly original take on William Blake's "Tiger, Tiger" - not regular and incantatory but stormy and excitable, as if caught in astonishment from time to time by the intensity of the images. Clarke's narrative pacing here seems close to genius. And what kept writing for the piano (which was not her instrument), and what a harnessing of a tonal language that wasn't boldly "modern" exactly (stopping somewhere around late Debussy?), but that got to do ev-

erything she wanted it to do.

Exhibit A for newcomers should probably be that disturbing masterpiece "The Seal Man," which has been recorded by Sarah Walker, Kristine Ciesinski, and Patricia Wright. Though self-contained almost to a fault, Saturday's account of this last, by Sarah Pelletier, soprano, and Shiela Kibbe, piano, created a hush; people didn't move.

Which leaves, to be described here with unseemly brevity, the "Comodo e amabile" (1926) and "Poem" (1924), which are probably the outer movements of a marvelous and uncompleted string quartet, lovingly scored for instruments and disturbingly (how often one writes this of Clarke) intent on taking the listener into unexpected terrain. The women of *Coro Allegro* did some spot-on singing in an "Ave Maria" and a Shelley chorus that displayed yet further aspects of who Rebecca Clarke was. The late (1941) *Prelude, Allegro, and Pastorale* for clarinet and viola had you wondering if Clarke had been listening to some of the more gorgeously bleak passages in Stravinsky's "L'Histoire du Soldat" and decided to take them farther on.

As must be obvious, there was much to listen to and think about here - an exciting and moving event if ever there was one - and for that, no end of thanks must go to Liane Curtis, resident scholar at Brandeis, whose brainchild all this was.

© Richard Buell

Music History in the Making: 1907-1909 Violin Sonatas Receive World Premiere

The world premiere of the 1909 Violin Sonata in D major and Clarke's single-movement Sonata in G major took place in a series of a radio broadcast (on Boston's WGBH) and two concerts on Sept. 18, 21, and 23, 2000, performed by Boston musicians Joanna Kurkowicz, violin, and Vivian Chang, piano, and organized and sponsored by The Rebecca Clarke Society, Inc. These radiant Sonatas offer a different side of Clarke from that heard in her impressionist-influenced works on which current knowledge of her style is based. She wrote the D major sonata while studying composition at London's Royal College of Music, where she was the

first woman pupil of Sir Charles Stanford (the noted teacher of Vaughan Williams and Holst). In her memoir, she recalls this rewarding time in her studies, and recounts how when she brought the slow movement to her lesson one day, Stanford suddenly got up and left the room, leaving Rebecca sitting alone and confused. "*Later I heard this was a habit of his: when a student brought a piece of work that interested him he would go off and show it to one of the other professors.... I was told I ought to be very flattered; and I was. It was the only time it ever happened to me.*"

This slow movement, marked *Andante quasi Adagio*, begins with the piano's pensive melody evoking a Hungarian Czardas, followed by the violin's inexorable, solemn, scalar accent of more than three octaves; the intensely melancholy and evocative movement made as strong an impact on this listener as it did on Stanford over 90 years ago. The first movement (*Allegro comodo*) is more gently introspective, with its intimate warmth in the interplay of the of the violin and piano in the first theme, and a remarkable direct simplicity in the folk-like second theme. The *Finale Scherzando*

sparkles with the wit of a post-romantic Haydn, full of exuberance, sprightly harmonic twists and exacting repartee between the musicians. Its ending, an expansive series of codas, juxtaposes *gravitas* and play.

The entire Boston *Globe* review is reprinted below. The concert was also named by the Boston *Globe* as one of its "Best of 2000" events (Dec. 31, 2000, p. M7).

The Sonata in D major was given a second performance in a concert at Weill Recital Hall of Carnegie Hall, New York, in a performance by Helen Armstrong (violin) and Kazuko Hiyami (piano), on May 10, 2001.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2000

THE BOSTON GLOBE

Living|Arts D5

Music Review

Concert gives life to mark left by Clarke

By Richard Buell
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

The recent and ever-growing interest in the music of Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979) can't exactly be called a revival, especially because most of her works remain unpublished. The two violin sonatas on this program, from 1909, had never been performed. Given that Clarke has gained recognition as one of the major British composers of her generation, this was a coup indeed. And it would be hard to imagine performances more beautiful than those on Saturday night by violinist Joanna Kurkowicz and Vivian Chang on piano.

Clarke's music is rhapsodic in tone but not (which is rare) in procedure.

Music of Rebecca Clarke

Presented by the Rebecca Clarke Society

At: The First and Second Church, Boston, Saturday night

Sometimes she presents you with a folk song outright, sometimes merely glancing off it. She also has a penchant for wandering keyboard arpeggios that briefly come to rest on a trill — or rather a kind of rest, for the effect can variously be elusive, unstable, or even menacing.

The D Major Sonata contained these and other elements in masterful equipoise.

The first movement — vaultingly ambitious in scale, bewilderingly

variable in tone of voice — might well have stood on its own. The one-movement G Major Sonata started off with a deep cold plunge into the thick of things, into the intense concentrated matter at hand. And Clarke has so structured it that, when that folklike tune comes around again, you're entranced rather than otherwise. One was often reminded that Clarke was herself a highly accomplished string player; writing for the violin, she was obviously on terms of the deepest intimacy.

For the rest, "Chinese Puzzle"

(1921) amounted to an exercise in chinoiserie that was altogether uncondescending, seemingly

Clarke's two violin sonatas on this program, from 1909, had never been performed.

based on Clarke's experience (as a violist, she toured the Far East) of the real thing. "Midsummer-Moon" (1921) delivered what its title promised. In the Three Old English Songs (1924), soprano Sarah Pelletier, joined by Kurkowicz, sounded at her best. Finally, some breaking news — on GMCD

7208, Guild has at last reissued Patricia Wright's radiant performances of the songs.

Not to be missed!

© Richard Buell

Clarke Presentations at Toronto *continued from page 1*

from the 1940s. With its dark narrative about a drowning girl, it can be compared to Clarke's "The Seal Man." "Binnorie" offers unique insights into Clarke's compositional method, as this is the only surviving material

to contain extensive revisions. Combined with Clarke's description, in taped interviews, of how she composed, this study offered a rich understanding of her creative process.

The session was

followed by a concert of Clarke's music. The abstracts for the session may be found on the web-site of the American Musicology Society:

<http://www.ams-net.org/a-fri1.pdf>



Rebecca Clarke
1976

Clarke's 'Carols' Performed
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so on. In this context, Clarke's subtle interweaving of several Christmas tunes offered a moment of repose, mixed with some witty displays of contrapuntal dexterity. The performers were an ad hoc (but well-rehearsed) string orchestra comprising of the Ying Quartet (resident quartet at the School) and the several freshman string quartets that they coach (plus double bass). Violist Philip Ying helped focus the attention of the hundreds of listeners with some brief remarks about the piece, not least pointing out Clarke's own humorous subtitle for the piece: "Get 'em All Over at Once."

Macy New Editor
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nerve to point out that so much of the past construction of music history has been distorted through its omission of women." The New Grove Dictionary is available on-line at www.grovemusic.com.

The Clarke Viola *Concerto* ???

Several violists are thrilled about our idea for the **orchestration** of Rebecca Clarke's 1919 Viola Sonata, and interest in this project has been shown by several leading conductors of both US coasts as well as influential composers.

Should Clarke's best-known work be turned into a CONCERTO? Let us know your ideas and opinions – we will air them in our next newsletter.
E-mail to: info@rebeccaclarke.org.

OUP Announces Publication of Clarke's Songs

Oxford University Press (New York) has announced the publication of an album of Rebecca Clarke's songs, including eight songs (some of them among her most striking works) held unpublished by her estate, in addition to the songs published by Oxford University Press in the 1920s, but that have been out of print for decades.

The previously unpublished songs

include one of Clarke's last (if not the last) completed compositions, "Binnorie: A Ballad," (see article on Clarke Presentation, p. 1), and some songs which are available on the recording recently re-released on the Guild label, including "Tiger, Tiger" (Blake), "Lethe" (St. Vincent Millay), Psalm 63, and "The Donkey" (Chesterton). In making these significant works

accessible, OUP is taking an important step in allowing a broader understanding of Clarke's creative achievement.

OUP is also re-issuing Clarke's set of "Three Irish Country Songs" (which has been out of print), and her arrangement for voice and violin of her own song "Down by the Salley Garden."

The Rebecca Clarke Society

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Newly opened Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University now the home of the Rebecca Clarke Society

With a November 19, 2000 gala celebration, the Women's Studies Research Center officially opened its doors. The afternoon festivities included speeches by Brandeis President Jehuda Reinharz, WSRC Director Shulamit Reinharz, and Dean of Arts and Sciences (and Musicologist) Jessie Ann Owens. The festivities included performances by cellist Yehuda Hanani,

Klezmer clarinetist Eileen Stahl, pianist Katherine Kraft and dancer Susan Dibble, and a dramatic reading by Annette Miller from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. The 10,000 square foot facility (within the renovated Epstein Building) houses the WS Scholars Program, the Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women, and smaller organizations including

the Clarke Society, the Ernestine Rose Society, and *Mistabra* (devoted to activism based on Jewish texts). In addition to providing display space for contemporary art, the Center hosts a lively series of events, including scholarly presentations, interactive discussions, concerts, and readings by creative writers, all focusing on women's lives or gender issues.

<http://www.brandeis.edu/centers/wsrc/scholars/>

Announcing New CDs

JOIN The Rebecca Clarke Society and learn about our members-only discounts on selected CDs!!!

The Cloths of Heaven -- Songs and music for Violin by Rebecca Clarke.

"The songs are pure gold" stated the Boston Globe in 1999. Clarke's sensitive treatment of the English language, and remarkable range of expression is demonstrated on this disk. Some of these works are soon to be published by Oxford University Press. The texts include mainstream poets, including Yeats and Blake, and works by women who were her personal friends, including Ella Young and Anna Wickham. Patricia Wright, soprano; Jonathan Rees, violin; Kathron Sturrock, piano. This newly re-released CD (originally recorded in 1992) includes liner notes by Liane Curtis. Guild Music, GMCD 7208. Available from www.amazon.com.

"Midsummer Moon" Chamber music by Rebecca Clarke

This new CD features first recordings of some of the unpublished works that remain the privately-held property of Clarke's estate, including the monumental "Rhapsody" for cello and piano, that Clarke wrote as a commission for Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge in 1923 (it was premiered by cellist May Mukle and pianist Myra Hess). Also includes "Morpheus" for viola and piano, which Clarke wrote under the pseudonym of "Anthony Trent." Lorraine McAslan, violin; Michael Ponder, viola; Justin Pearson, cello; Ian Jones, piano. Dutton CD (of the UK) CDLX 7105. Available from www.amazon.com

Piano Trios by Rebecca Clarke, Felix Mendelssohn, and Ping Jin

Performed by the Newstead Trio. Michael Jamanis, violin; Sara Male; cello; Xun Pan, piano. Clarke's passionate Piano Trio is, along with the Viola Sonata, her best-known work. This is a radiant debut recording by these young musicians. The ensemble's patron, Joan Newstead, was a close personal friend of Clarke's as also were the parents of violinist Michael Jamanis. Prince Productions, 1998. <http://www.princeproduction.com>.

"The Eternal Feminine." Four songs by Clarke included in recording by Susanne Mentzer (mezzo-soprano) and Craig Rutenberg (piano). Other composers include Libby Larsen, Alma Mahler, Clara Schumann, and Lili Boulanger. Koch International Classics KIC 7506. 2001. Available from www.amazon.com.

Rebecca Clarke -- Music for Viola -- Northeastern NR212-CD

Sonata for Viola and Piano; Prelude, Allegro and Pastorale for viola and clarinet

Two Pieces (Lullaby and Grotesque) for Viola and Cello; Passacaglia on an Old English Tune for viola and piano. Patricia McCarty, viola; Virginia Eskin, piano; Peter Hadcock, clarinet; Martha Babcock, cello. "A revelation...splendid performances and beautiful sound...a composer I now believe to have been one of the very best of her time" -- *Gramophone*. "A recording now regarded as a classic" -- *Boston Globe*. Available from <http://hometown.aol.com/pmcarty/index.html>