



The Rebecca Clarke Society

Newsletter - Fall 2002 - Vol. 2/2 www.rebeccaclarke.org

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Nothing Less than a Revelation: Choral Music Premiered

Gonville and Caius Choir, April 26, 2002, Cambridge, UK

The full importance of Rebecca Clarke's contributions in the genre of choral music was dramatically revealed in a concert that included the world premiere of no less than eight of the composer's works. While Clarke has become recognized as a composer of several important works for stringed instruments, most of her choral music has been unavailable for performance until this date. This concert was a startling revelation of a remarkable body of music, receiving its first known performance some seventy, eighty and even ninety years after it was composed.

Sensitively performed by The Choir of Gonville & Caius College (Cambridge, UK; Director Dr. Geoffrey Webber) the concert also included several solo songs and instrumental works. Particularly remarkable is Clarke's range of styles –

much of the music is from early in Clarke's career, and even from her student days at the Royal College of Music, and it reveals previously unknown aspects of her compositional interests. But although the techniques vary, Clarke's artistic conception is always brilliantly on the mark.

Her interest in Renaissance polyphony, with its contrapuntal interweaving and overlapping textures, is evident in many of the works. "My Spirit Like a Charmed Bark doth Float" (text adapted from Shelley) was given an insightful madrigalian reading in a performance by a small ensemble. "Come away, Death (A Lover's Dirge -- Shakespeare)" is another work which reveals the composer's interest in the Renaissance Madrigal.

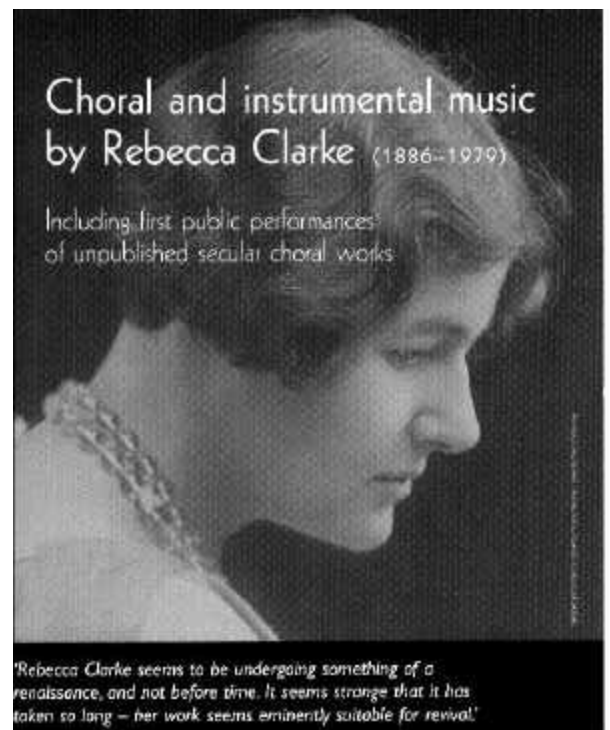
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The Clarke Viola CONCERTO! Composer chosen to orchestrate monumental work!

The lush textures and rich colors evoked by Clarke's Viola Sonata, as well as the monumental size of the work have suggested to many that it would be a wonderful piece to be orchestrated. The Viola Concerto would provide a much needed piece for viola and orchestra - violists who responded to our informal survey of 2001 were enthusiastic about the opportunity to be able to play the Clarke with orchestra.

The RCS has decided to collaborate with composer Ruth Lomon to turn this possibility into a reality. A native of Montreal, Canada, Ruth Lomon (b. 1930), attended the Quebec Conservatory and McGill University. She continued her studies at New England Conservatory and with Witold Lutoslawski at Dartington College, England. Since 1998 she has been a Composer and Resident Scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University. Currently, she has a grant from the Hadassah International Research Institute to complete her oratorio, *Witnesses*.

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Poster from April 26 concert

Clarke's String Quartet "Poem" in World Premiere Recording

"Death and the Maiden" Lafayette String Quartet: Ann Elliot-Goldschmid and Sharon Stanis, violins; Joanna Hood, viola; Pamela Highbaugh Aloni, cello. Music by Schubert, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel and Rebecca Clarke. CBC Records, MVCD 1149, 2002.

In their quest for adventurous programming, the Lafayette String Quartet came across the manuscript parts to Clarke's "Poem" in the U.C. Berkeley library and added the work to their repertoire. As Robert Jordan observes in his notes to the CD, Schubert's work (of 1826), Clarke's of a century later, and Hensel's of 1834 share a feature: they were not published in their composers' lifetimes. Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" was published in 1831, Hensel's Quartet in 1988, and the Clarke "remains in manuscript."

The Lafayette String Quartet engages these works with a passionate seriousness; their performances smolder with intensity. The flaws are slight, as in the cello lacking presence in some more fiery passages (for instance the last variation of Andante of the Schubert), probably a result of the recording rather than of the performance.

The lack of access to an edited edition of the Clarke results in some wrong notes, the most serious of which is four notes from the end.

(m. 134-, from the edition provided by Michelle Dulak)



The Lafayette's violist plays as B-flat, which alters the sense of ambiguity that the work projects with a B-natural – the more chromatic version (which I perceive as correct, from my study of the sources) is hauntingly ambiguous. The piece should end with a question-mark, rather than (as in this recording) with a semicolon. Audio clips from the Lafayette version, and from a 1999 performance by the Lydian String Quartet (giving the version I prefer) are available on our website, www.rebeccaclarke.org.

Reviving "Dead Maidens"

Why is this CD entitled "Death and the Maiden"? It might be argued that there is no larger meaning for

employing the name of Schubert's Quartet for the whole CD. Another possibility finds rich significance in this choice of title. "Death and the Maiden" is followed by two "Dead Maidens," Fanny Mendelssohn and Clarke -- "dead" not only literally, but also (for so many decades) figuratively, as their music lay *completely* forgotten.

Fanny Mendelssohn and Clarke might be paralleled in many ways, most notably in their reception history. Both published only a small part of their repertoire during their lifetimes, and the remainder has remained completely hidden from view until recent years (and in both cases, the materials have been difficult to access, as they have been held uncatalogued and in the private control of obscure family members). The 1980 *New Grove Dictionary* article on Clarke, notoriously dismissive with its single sentence, can be compared with Fanny Mendelssohn's from the same *Dictionary*: her music is assumed (without being seen or heard) to be of little worth.

It is worth observing that this service to "Dead Maidens" is offered by an all-female ensemble, one of a number of examples of such a group feeling a special connection for their musical sisters of previous generations -- although I am certain that male and mixed ensembles would like to play Clarke's music for string quartet, too, if only it were available!

This CD is available for sale on our web-site as well as through usual commercial outlets. ❁

Mrs. Ralph Vaughan Williams supports Clarke Society

Among our members and supporters are a number of prominent musical figures and friends and relatives of Clarke. Earlier this year we decided to write Mrs. Vaughan Williams, telling her about the work of the Clarke Society, and inviting her to join as an honorary member. We received this enthusiastic reply, dated February 4, 2002:

I am of course delighted to accept Honorary Membership of the Rebecca Clarke Society, Inc. It is a splendid idea to remember her in this way and I hope that the Society will flourish and help to ensure that she and her music are not forgotten.

I first met her when I was living in America with my husband, Ralph Vaughan Williams, in the late 1940s. We grew very fond of her and her husband, and Ralph conducted several concerts which included her music, with her friends playing in the orchestra.

[signed] Ursula Vaughan Williams

From our Readers: Maurice M. Rapport remembers Hans Clarke (courtesy of Dr. Nancy Reich)

The article, 'Remembering Beccle' by Rebecca Clarke Evans in the RCS Newsletter of February 2002, was a reminder that there are many ways of remembering. Rebecca Clarke Evans, the niece of the composer, remembered her as a beloved aunt whose music was not appreciated by her father, Hans Clarke. In her article on Rebecca Clarke's 1941 Duet for Clarinet and Viola in the journal, *The Clarinet* (March 2002), Liane Curtis writes about Rebecca Clarke's brother, Hans, an amateur clarinetist who was also a biochemist. Scientists remember him as a leading biochemist who also played chamber music with friends.

Maurice Rapport, a scientist who worked with Dr. Clarke, read the two articles cited above, and was moved to write the following: *"I am surprised to retain such a sharp image of Hans Clarke more than 50 years after spending two years in his Department of Biochemistry at the Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons. Clarke was greatly admired as a chairman for two reasons. One was that he had fashioned the finest research department in the country in biochemistry by generously helping to recruit and accepting a number of brilliant refugee biochemists from a Europe in travail. I recall the names of Karl Meyer, Rudolph Schoenheimer, Zacharias Dische, Erwin Chargaff, David Nachmanson, Heinrich Waelsch, and Erwin Brand.*

The other reason was, that in editing their research papers, he performed a heroic service in maintaining a high scientific standard and in preserving the King's English. I am personally grateful to him for his help with a paper I had prepared identifying the chemical structure of serotonin. He suggested that some of my evidence was unnecessary, and in this he was quite correct. I remember Clarke as a tall, handsome man with the kind of English reserve unusual in a city like New York."

Dr. Maurice Rapport, Professor Emeritus of Biochemistry, Columbia University and Visiting Professor of Neurology, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, rappor@aecom.yu.edu ✻

Review of Daniela Kohnen's book **Rebecca Clarke: Komponistin und Bratschistin** ("Rebecca Clarke: Composer and Violist"), Deutsche Hochschulschriften 1157, Egelsbach: Hansel-Hohenhausen, 1999.
By Dr. Eva Rieger

Our website often receives inquiries about Clarke, and several have asked about Daniela Kohnen's book published in 1999. Released (in German) by a small academic publisher, Kohnen's book is not easy to obtain. Also it is a problematic work. To address those problems we asked Dr. Eva Rieger if we might publish a translation of her review of Kohnen's book. Dr. Rieger was happy to agree, so the translation (by Christine Ammer) is printed below. The review was first published in Die Musikforschung 53/2 (2000), p. 218.

When a biography appears in a series entitled German Academic Writings, one has certain expectations regarding the quality of the language, form, and research. These expectations were not fulfilled. The writing is halting and full of awkward metaphors: "Clarke created her own inner life"; "[she] felt a strength streaming from her"; "her violistic goals sank into the background". The descriptions are gray and useless. The bibliography lacks both dates and places of publication. One does not learn the sources of her biographical information. Errors exist throughout: Clarke was not "one of the first internationally recognized women composers," but rather was relatively unknown; Sir Charles Villiers Stanford was not "more than any other musician responsible for the great resurgence of musical life in England," but at best the equal of Charles Parry, then director of the Royal College of Music; Anne Boleyn

was not a composer, and Wisconsin is not "a small town," but one of the U.S. states. It is not true that before Clarke there were no women composers of large works; what about Beach, Bronsart, Holmes, Meyer, and the many others? The love life of various peripheral figures is discussed (Clarke's father's, Rubinstein/Draper, Casals/Suggia).

The few interpretations concerning Clarke's life and dealings are sporadic and eclectic; the same can be said for her music. The whole issue of feminist theory is not touched upon, so that one might think one is reading a book from the early 1980s. This simply is not a scholarly publication. Also doubtful is the propensity for publishers to market a student thesis, especially since nowadays it seldom leads to a position as Lecturer. *Eva Rieger, December 1999* ✻

J.S. Bach Concerto for violin and viola – arranged by "Friend Of Clarke," Charles Chandler

Charles Chandler, a retired violist now living in Lexington, MA., remembers his meetings with Rebecca Clarke and her husband James Friskin, and dedicates his Bach arrangement to Clarke's memory.

Please see our website to download the arrangement (in PDF format) – Mr. Chandler has transcribed the second violin part for viola.

<http://www.rebeccaclarke.org/bach.html>

The page also includes Chandler's reminiscences of Clarke and Clarke's own thoughts about playing the Bach Concerto, drawn from her unpublished memoir. ✻

Choral Music premiered – continued from p. 1

"Weep you no more sad fountains," (John Dowland) a work newly discovered in the Clarke estate, is one of the most stunning works that this concert brought to light (Clarke also wrote a version of this piece for solo voice and piano published by Oxford University Press earlier this year). Clarke dedicated this piece to her sister Dora (circa 1912), and we might wonder if its compassionate text might be a reference to their difficult childhood. The setting evokes a sense of resilience and hope: after the reserved opening, the third phrase ("Look how the snowy mountain!") expands, opening up soaring new sonic horizons.

"Daybreak" for solo voice and string quartet (setting a text by John Donne) was given a moving premiere by soprano Alexandra Kidgell. It is a compressed and dramatic work, rich in modal flavor, revealing the influence of Clarke's friend Vaughan Williams. "When Cats Run Home" (Tennyson's "The Owl") is a playful and convivial part-song, with quirky turns of harmony, but very much in a conventional 19th-century choral

vocabulary. Also in a lighthearted vein, one of two settings for all male voices, "Now Fie on Love" (setting a 17th century text) seems nothing short of an ebullient drinking song, with the insistent repeating notes (and the words "now fie") bouncing from part to part. This is yet another side of Clarke so different from that heard anywhere else!

The Choir's performance was exquisite, ranging from energetic and outgoing to nuanced and sensitive. This is music without a performance tradition, which made their job a challenging one. Not a single work of Clarke's choral music was published in her lifetime. And only very recently has any of it been made available, the two works for women's chorus published in 1998 ("Ave Maria") and 1999 (Chorus from Shelley's *Hellas*) by OUP. Apart from these pieces, only three of the choral works had been performed before (see our February 2002 newsletter), so the remaining choral works were, as far as can be known, world premieres. The Gonville and Caius Choir will release a CD of Clarke's choral music in March 2003 (on the ASV label). ❀

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The Viola CONCERTO, continued from p. 1

Recent compositions include a trumpet concerto, *Odyssey*, commissioned by the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, and *Songs of Remembrance*, a song cycle on poems of the Holocaust written while a fellow of the Bunting Institute. A CD of this work was released by CRI in 2002, and received an enthusiastic review in *Fanfare* magazine. Other recordings of Lomon's work include her Bassoon Concerto, and *Terra Incognita* for orchestra, both on the MMC label. More information on Lomon may be found on our website.

Sponsor a measure!

The viola sonata is a big piece, and we need your help to pay for the copying and proofreading of the score and parts, and the for orchestral premiere. Fund your favorite measure(s) at \$10 each. Sponsorships of specific instrumental parts are also available. See our web-site or send your check to the RCS. Thank you! ❀

"Lost Clarke?" -- Viola Pieces Now Published

A plaintive message on the viola discussion list AMviola@yahoogroups.com with the subject line "Lost Clarke?" asks "Does anyone know how I could obtain some of Rebecca Clarke's unpublished works? I know she wrote several Lullabies as well as several other short pieces, but she never published them."

Some of these pieces have long been circulating among a devoted viola underground, but the Clarke Estate is now permitting more of her music to be made available. Oxford University Press has recently released Clarke's "Shorter Pieces for Viola and Piano," including "I'll Bid my Heart Be Still" (an arrangement of a Scottish tune that she gave as a courtship gift to James Friskin in 1944), two works titled "Lullaby," and an untitled work written around 1917. The edition can be purchased through music dealers or by calling OUP sales at 800-451-7556 ❀

A very special **THANK YOU** to pianist Virginia Eskin and violinist Joanna Kurkowicz. Their Sept. 22 benefit concert was a wonderful event and raised more than \$1400 for the Rebecca Clarke Society, Inc. and the Women's Studies Research Center of Brandeis University!