

The Rebecca Clarke Society

Newsletter of The Rebecca Clarke Society, Inc.

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Clarke Choral Works to be Premiered

"Philomela" and "Music, When Soft Voices Die" in first known performance

Three of Rebecca Clarke's choral works will be premiered by the Boston area chorus, Coro Allegro, in their concert on February 24, 2002. Psalm 91 (He That Dwelleth In The Secret Place Of The Most High), from 1921, will receive its U.S. premiere; "Music When Soft Voices Die" (Shelley), and "Philomela," (Sir Philip Sidney) will be world premieres. The latter two pieces are among Clarke's earliest compositions (ca. 1907 and ca. 1914) and reflect her interest in choral music, which she developed while a student at the Royal College of Music.

The intense "Music When Soft Voices Die" is rich with overlapping entrances and motives in a thoughtful madrigalian character. It reflects Clarke's study of 16th-century counterpoint, as part of the composition curriculum at the Royal College of Music in London.

She also sang Renaissance music (especially that of Palestrina) in a group she organized, led by Ralph Vaughan

Williams. Like much of Clarke's music from this time, "Music When Soft Voices Die" is highly chromatic and dense with lush harmonies. Compact and focused, it contrasts with her other Shelley setting, the "Chorus from Hellas" (for women's

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Clarke as a student at the Royal College of Music

"Binnorie: A Ballad" featured at Atlanta Conference

The première of "Binnorie: A Ballad," discovered only in 1997, took place at the Boston Public Library, Saturday, October 27, 2001 with Eileen Strempele, and Sylvie Beaudette, piano, sponsored by the Rebecca Clarke Society, Inc. Subsequent performances (by the same musicians) were given at the Brandeis University on Oct. 28 (sponsored by the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University) and at the 2001 National Conference of the American Musicological Society in Atlanta, GA, on November 17,

2001 (sponsored by the AMS Performance Committee).

Setting an anonymous folk text, "Binnorie" reveals Clarke's interest in Celtic mythology, as well as the preoccupation with the drowning female protagonist, both features of one of her best known songs, "The Seal Man." "Binnorie," lasting more than 12 minutes in performance, is more than twice the length of any other song by Clarke. At its premiere, soprano Eileen Strempele observed that its expansive and sectional structure is like that of a secular cantata.

Strempele, who has an extensive background in opera, gave a moving performance of this work of searing intensity. The publication of "Binnorie: A Ballad" has been announced by Oxford University Press, in a song album that will include her settings of "Tiger, Tiger" (Blake), "The Aspidistra" (Claude Flight) and others. To judge by the wildly enthusiastic reception at the recent events, this publication is eagerly awaited. ❁

RALPH P. LOCKE, MUSICOLOGIST AT EASTMAN

The second in our series of profiles of RCS board members; the first was on Laura Macy, editor of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Locke's most recent book is *Cultivating Music in America: Women Patrons and Activists since 1860*, edited by Locke and Cyrilla Barr (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Among Locke's many honors are the 1997 ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for outstanding print and media coverage of music, received for his article "Paradoxes of the Woman Music Patron in America," published in *Musical Quarterly*, 1994.

Ralph Locke admits that teaching musicology at a music school was not his imagined destination. "At first I thought I might become a music critic, because I enjoyed writing and had an unslakeable thirst for attending concerts and opera. I did a fair amount of journalistic writing while in college and soon after, and this included doing published interviews with Michael Tilson Thomas, Gunther Schuller, Elie Siegmeister, and—twice—Aaron Copland. But I kept wanting to explore topics and issues in greater depth than journalistic formats permitted. So I went to graduate school at University of Chicago, where I got exactly the kind of training I had dreamt of."

He traveled to Paris to do research for his dissertation on music of the Saint-Simonians, an early socialist movement in 1830s France. (His study was later published by the University of Chicago Press and also, in French translation, by the Belgian publisher Mardaga.) While there, he applied for "dozens of jobs across the US and Canada," and one institution responded: the Eastman School of Music. "I was curious and anxious, both, since I had done my undergraduate degree at a liberal-arts college (Harvard) rather than a conservatory or music school. But I took the job, and quickly grew to love being in such an intense environment of music making. My one fear was that my piano skills, which I had been modestly proud of at one

point, would seem laughable to Eastman students. But they gave me the job, I closed my eyes and took it, and I soon realized that nobody expected me to give recitals. Twenty-seven years later, I still enjoy playing snippets of pieces in class to illustrate a point."

Dr. Locke wasn't entirely unfamiliar with a music-school setting: he had taken piano lessons during his school and college years through the New England Conservatory and the Longy School of Music. Of interest to RCS members is the fact that his piano teacher at Longy was Kate Friskin, sister of James Friskin, the famous Juilliard School piano professor who had married Rebecca Clarke late in their

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respective lives. "So I heard about Clarke from Miss Friskin. She was proud of her sister-in-law, and tried to persuade me that the music was quite fine and distinctive. I put that down to my silver-haired teacher's family pride. Youth has no mercy! But, in recent years, once Clarke's music started to get performed and recorded, I couldn't help but be astonished. I am now eager to do what I can to promote this imaginative and accomplished—and varied—body of work. Miss Friskin, I'm sorry I didn't listen to you sooner!" ❀

Choral works premiered --- Continued from page one

voices, published in 1999 by Oxford University Press), which is expansive, its long phrases gradually building in tension. Psalm 91, the weightiest of Clarke's choral works, features melodic emphasis of augmented seconds, as well as declamatory choral unisons. These add a decidedly exotic flavor and demonstrate both her admiration for the music of Ernest Bloch and her exposure to Hebrew chanting through London's Jewish community. Clarke's diaries document these influences: July 2, 1920, "had a wonderful day rehearsing - all at the Bloch quartet. Nearly 6 hours of it! Then went back to dinner at the Bentwiches. It was their Sabbath and there was much Hebrew chanting. Just like a continuation of the Bloch!"

Clarke never sought performance of her Psalm setting or other choral music. She showed the work to Holst but was discouraged by his response: Mar 23, 1921, "Showed my two finished Psalms to Mr Holst. He was very nice but criticized them very severely. I felt very depressed for the rest of the day, but suppose it is good for me." Clarke's diaries do not mention these works again—apparently shaken by Holst's critique, she put them aside and there they have lain ever since. The only previous performance of Psalm 91 was broadcast on BBC Northern in 1988. The event of Feb. 24, 2002 will indeed be rare and special. ❀

Coro Allegro's Concert will take place on Sunday 24 February 2002, 3 PM, at the Church of the Covenant, Boston. For tickets call the Coro Allegro Office at (617) 499-4868, or the Bostix Outlet in Boston's Copley Square at TicketMaster at (617) 931-2000. Coro Allegro is Boston's acclaimed chorus for members and friends of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities.

See the Coro Allegro website at <http://www.coroallegro.org/>

CD Features first Recordings of Clarke Chamber Works
"Rhapsody," Clarke's third "Coolidge" work, an incredible Discovery



All the music on this disk (of 2001) has rarely been performed, and most remains in manuscript (two works, "Morpheus" and the "Prelude, Allegro, and Pastorale" have been published since the disk was produced). Of the pieces not previously recorded, "Rhapsody" for cello and piano will most profoundly change our impression of Clarke. The works' formal innovation, in abandoning conventional forms in a work of immense length, shows Clarke at her most unflinchingly serious and daring.

"Rhapsody" was commissioned in 1922 by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, after Clarke was runner-up in the 1919 and 1921 competitions sponsored by Coolidge. The commission, for \$1000, was Coolidge's only commission to a woman (she was known to have mixed feelings about the propriety of women composing), and it was Clarke's only commission. It was premiered at the Berkshire Festival on Sept. 29, 1923, by Clarke's friends May Mukle (cello) and Myra Hess (piano). Due to the mixed response to the work, Clarke came to feel it was a failure. She notes in her diary: "Sept. 29, 1923. Very depressed all night. Sept. 30. Still feeling very sad, but can see it is very good for me to have a failure." Despite her enthusiasm for the

work before it was performed, and several excellent reviews, Clarke put "Rhapsody" away and it was apparently never performed again until 1986.

Brooding and dark, the Rhapsody builds in several gradual crescendos to stormy climatic passages. Highly focused in motivic content, and monumental in its conception (at 24 minutes in length) it deserves to be known with Clarke's other Coolidge works, the Viola Sonata and Piano Trio.

Cellist Justin Pearson is robust and energetic in this demanding work, although he never quite reaches the ecstatic soaring quality that the piece sometimes demands. Still, for a piece with no history of recordings, it is a remarkable achievement – we can hope that more cellists will be able obtain the music and perform the work.

Clarke's "Cortège" is also recorded here for the first time. Clarke's only work for solo piano, she dedicated it to composer and pianist William Busch in 1930. Introspective and moody, its vocabulary is more impressionist than "Rhapsody," with the broadly spanned piano chords full of sensual parallelisms; Ian Jones provides an insightful performance of this revelatory work.

In addition to violist and producer Michael Ponder's informative and poignant notes, the CD includes a never-before printed photograph of Clarke and her family, circa 1900 – this photo was discovered by RCS President Liane Curtis in the Estate of Dora Clarke (Rebecca's sister).

Dutton CD (of the UK) CDLX 7105, 2001. The Dutton label hopes to record more of Clarke's chamber music in the future. ❁

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"MORPHEUS" Awakened

Clarke's 1918 work for viola and piano has been published by Oxford University Press, and is now available through OUP or music stores. "Morpheus" was written by Clarke using the pseudonym "Anthony Trent."

March Recital in Boston to feature recently published Clarke works

A Recital with Virginia Eskin, piano; Elisa Birdseye, viola; and Chester Brezniak, clarinet will take place on March 7, 2002; 2 pm, Rabb Lecture Hall, Boston Public Library, 700 Boylston St. The program features Rebecca Clarke's "Morpheus" for Viola and Piano and the "Prelude, Allegro, and Pastorale" for Viola and Clarinet; as well as Gordon Jacob's "Trio" and Mozart's "Kegelstatt" Trio.

Clarke's Trio in "Thwarted Voices" Concert

Vienna Piano Trio (Wiener Klaviertrio) performed Clarke's Piano Trio in the "Thwarted Voices – Suppressed Music" Events held in London on November 25, 2001, at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. They also recently performed the Trio at the Staatstheater Darmstadt, Germany.

German and Korean Articles Spread the Word

An article in German about Rebecca Clarke has recently been published in *Annäherung XII – an sieben Komponistinnen*, published by Furore-Edition (Kassel), edited by Clara Mayer. Including a full list of works and a discography, the article is an updated version of one by Liane Curtis published in *The Musical Times*, 1996.

Further international news: Curtis's article on Clarke's "Prelude, Allegro, and Pastorale," published in *The Strad*, October 1999, was translated into Korean and published in the Korean version of *The Strad*.

Remembering "Beccle" *Rebecca Clarke Evans, niece of the composer,* *introduced by Liane Curtis*

Our honorary Vice-Presidents include most of Rebecca Clarke's closest surviving relatives. I first met Rebecca Clarke Evans in September of 1994, together with her cousin Ann Thacher Anderson. I was interviewed them both and was very moved by their vivid recollections of their aunt, who meant a great deal to them. They affectionately call her "Beccle": in a family where the given names are passed down from generation to generation, nicknames are an important means of keeping track of different family members, as well as of showing warmth and intimacy.

Rebecca Clarke Evans was born in April of 1923 in Rochester New York, where her father, biochemist Hans T. Clarke was working for Eastman Kodak (carrying on the family tradition – Joseph Clarke, Hans' father, was a friend of George Eastman and worked for him as well). Hans was a dedicated amateur clarinetist, and his wife Frieda played the violin. Rebecca Clarke (the composer) dedicated her "Prelude, Allegro and Pastorale" for clarinet and viola (1941) to them.

Rebecca Clarke Evans was named for her aunt, but because her aunt was on her round-the-world concert tour, she did not learn of the news until several months later, as recorded in her diary: "*June 7, 1923 -- Started early for our drive to Tokio. Stopped at Cook's for letters. I got one telling me of the birth of a little girl to Hans and Frieda, to be named after me. Much thrilled.*"

Little Becky grew up to travel extensively herself, but she stayed in touch with her aunt and has been dedicated and enthusiastic in encouraging my research and the work of the Rebecca Clarke Society. Her remarks below are drawn from several letters she wrote me in 1999. *Liane Curtis*

I adored Beccle, she was my favorite aunt. She was a sympathetic friend to me, and I never really felt she was valued enough by my parents. I think they were very conservative and thought of her as a woman who should have married instead of pursuing a musical life. Neither parent was impressed by her compositions. When we were children, my sister Heidi and I used to "play Beccle" by sitting at the piano (when our parents were out) "composing." We banged away on the piano, playing what we thought of as "Beccle music."

My parents were disturbed by the seemingly endless visits that Beccle made to our homes during World War II. At one point, when our guest room was occupied, I was asked to give up my room for her. I was delighted. I'd come in every morning before going to school with the excuse that I needed some socks from my chest of drawers. (I really came in to chat with her because she was wonderfully warm and entertaining). She told me much later that she enjoyed my visits. I was surprised by that, because

she used to sleep later than the other grown-ups and I always felt somewhat intrusive when I visited her to get my socks. Of course, in later years, I came to lean on her as my "mother confessor" because she was so understanding.

Both aunts, Beccle and Dorcle (Dora, Rebecca's sister) married very late in life and never had children. My own life mirrored theirs in that respect, but paradoxically I was a great disappointment to both my parents because I didn't have a "meaningful" profession. Both my aunts were human, both were easy to confide in, both were great fun. It was Beccle I turned to when I needed a temporary place to stay in April 1978 when I returned to New York from an overseas assignment. I valued that year and a half before her death. I saw her often and was with her when she died. Apart from being a great dressmaker, Beccle was also a great cook -- my favorite recipe of hers is a dessert pancake.

What a surprise it has been to see not only the gradual

rediscovery of my aunt's best-known music, but also to learn how much music she wrote which none of us children knew existed! While she never encouraged any of us to take an interest in her music or promoted her own works in any way that I recall, I'm sure that she would be pleased to see the respect and admiration her compositions are now earning. ❁

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