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A case of identity: rescuing Rebecca Clarke

La grande ligne:
Messiaen in performance

plus Handel and other composers through
towards the millennium the year



A case of identity

Artur Rubinstein called her 'the glorious Rebecca Clarke'. LIANE CURTIS argues the cause of a composer neglected by the British and American musical establishment.

ALTHOUGH she wrote most of her music in the early decades of this century, it is only recently that Rebecca Clarke (1886–1979) has emerged as a prominent British composer. A steady stream of recordings (including eight of one work alone, the viola sonata of 1919), the republication of her powerful Piano Trio of 1921 and two collections of songs,¹ and the recently published *New Grove dictionary of women composers*, (valuable for the near-complete list of her works, a thorough bibliography, and an informative article by Stephen Banfield which draws largely on materials previously published in diverse and obscure places)² have all assisted in making available an important part of her previously inaccessible output. Yet despite this growing swirl of interest, Clarke remains an enigmatic figure: not only does a large part of her output remain unpublished, accessible only with permission of her heirs, but what we know about Clarke herself is sketchy. Although a few stories, like that of the Viola Sonata are well known, there has as yet been little inquiry into the details of her life: my own research (although still in its early stages), reveals her as a fascinating composer, an influential performer, and a warm but complicated personality.

Rebecca Clarke's story, one to inspire us with its heroic achievement, is notable for a number of firsts. From 1907 to 1910 she studied composition in London at the Royal College of Music. While women had been admitted as students from the college's inception, it was rare for them to specialise in composition, and Clarke was the first woman to study with Stanford. Her musical education ended when she quarrelled with her father, who threw her out of the house, forcing her to earn her own way as a violist. She again made history when, in 1912, as one of 'six lady musicians chosen by Sir Henry J. Wood to augment the Queen's Hall Orchestra', she became one of the first women to play professionally in an orchestra.³ Before World War I, she was also a member of a successful all-female string quartet, headed by violinist Nora Clench, and in the late-1920s, of the English Ensemble, a female piano quartet.

During the highpoint of her career, her viola sonata tied for first place in the 1919 competition sponsored by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge as part of her Berkshire Festival of Chamber music. Mrs Coolidge herself broke the tie, naming Ernest Bloch's

Suite for Viola as the winner. The viola sonata, eloquent testimony to Clarke's power as a composer, speaks with directness and authority. In the Coolidge competition of 1921, Clarke was again runner-up with her Trio for violin, cello and piano. Finally Mrs Coolidge awarded her a \$1000 commission for the 1923 festival, resulting in her lengthy Rhapsody for cello and piano. In all of Mrs Coolidge's years as a patron of music, this was her one instance of supporting a woman. Clarke's success in the Coolidge festivals came amidst an extensive period of giving concerts (including a tour around the world in 1922 and 1923) and composing. The Viola Sonata was one of her first publications, in 1921, along with some songs, and these were followed by some shorter instrumental works. In 1924, Clarke returned to England, and settled. While her career as a composer was by no means over, the brief highpoint had past.

Almost 60 years later, Clarke recalled the 1919 Coolidge Festival in an interview with Robert Sherman (of New York's WQXR Radio) conducted in honour of her 90th birthday, in August 1976.

And when I had that one little whiff of success that I've had in my life, with the Viola Sonata, the rumour went around, I hear, that I hadn't written the stuff myself, that somebody had done it for me. And I even got one or two little bits of... press clippings saying that it was impossible, that I couldn't have written it myself. And the funniest of all was that I had a clipping once which said that I didn't exist, there wasn't any such person as Rebecca Clarke, that it was a pseudonym... for Ernest Bloch! Now these people have got it most beautifully mixed – I thought to myself what a funny idea that when he writes his very much lesser works that he should take a pseudonym of a girl, that anyone should consider this possible!⁴

While this is an amusing anecdote, it also reveals some important aspects of Clarke's self-image. She responds to allegations that she didn't exist, not with anger or contempt, but rather with good humour, and even turns this humour into a vehicle for demeaning her own creation, incredulous that someone would confuse her 'very much lesser work' with that of the great Bloch. This stereotypically feminine type of modesty can also be seen as an indicator of

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1. Boosey & Hawkes obtained the rights to Clarke's music originally published by Winthrop Rogers Ltd. The reprintings, with an introduction by Calum MacDonald, include the Piano Trio (originally published in 1928); a song album for medium high voice and piano, containing nine works (originally published in the 1920s); and *Three Old English songs* arranged for voice and violin (first published in 1925).

2. The *New Grove dictionary of women composers*, edited by Julie Anne Sadie and Rhian Samuel (London, 1994; New York, 1995) reinstates Clarke after an unpardonable omission from the *New Grove dictionary* of 1980 (Clarke was included in earlier *Groves*). Clarke's works list was previously published in an article by Michael Ponder in the *British Music Society Journal* no.5 (1983), pp.82–88.

Both versions of the works list are apparently based on an unpublished catalogue compiled in 1977 by Christopher Johnson (of New York City) in conjunction with Clarke. Most of Clarke's manuscripts are in the private possession of heirs in New York City. No manuscripts are owned by the New York Public Library, and the Library of Congress (Washington DC) owns only those manuscripts associated with Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge: *Viola Sonata*, *Piano Trio* and *Rhapsody*. The Library of Congress owns a copy of Clarke's *Prelude, allegro and pastorale* of 1941 but it is not in Clarke's hand.

3. Arthur Jacobs: *Henry J. Wood: maker of the Proms* (London, 1994), p.142.

4. I would like to thank Mr Sherman for generously sharing the tapes of these interviews with me, both the material that was used in the broadcast and the leftover portions.

5. For instance, *Women and self-esteem* (New York, 1984) by Linda Tschirhart Sandford and Mary Ellen Donovan; and Peggy Orenstein in association with the American Association of University Women: *Schoolgirls: young women, self-esteem, and the confidence gap* (New York, 1994).

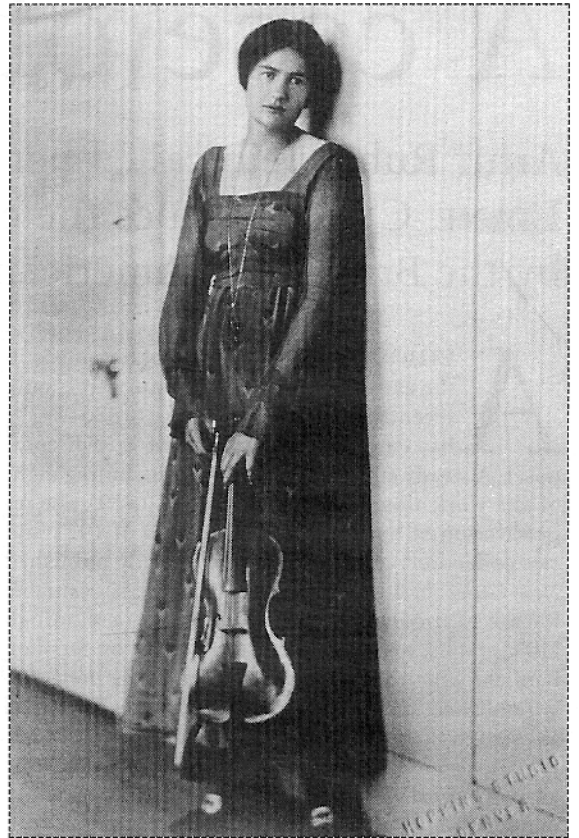
the fragility of her own belief in her creative powers, and of her right to employ those powers. And indeed, in what may be viewed as a case-study of women's low self-esteem,⁵ many of the achievements that I have mentioned were spoken of by Clarke in deprecatory ways. Clarke attributes her success to luck and accident, while failure or negative response is what she felt she deserved. This conflicted identity, of Clarke's desire to compose and her difficulty in believing in herself as a composer, tells us much, I think, about the shape of her career and the pattern of her musical output.

Given the impressive quality of Clarke's music, how then are we to understand her obscurity? The answer to this question is obviously a complex one. Marcia Citron's recent pathbreaking book, *Gender and the musical canon* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), addresses many of the relevant issues, and in my forthcoming book, I shall discuss some of the forces that were obstacles and discouragements to Clarke – patriarchal structures of educational systems and family organisation, and biased attitudes of critics and patrons.⁶ Here I wish to focus specifically on her concept of self: how she internalised the values presented by these outside influences; how obstacles or events influenced her own attitude about her place in the world.

MUCH OF what it takes to be a successful composer is bound up in the ability to sensitively read one's surroundings and to respond to them inventively,⁷ a negotiation with the public sphere that, as a composer, Clarke shrank from. Her readiness to minimise her own achievement – the opposite of self-promotion, conceding to a view of society that rendered women culturally invisible – meant that Clarke's fame in her own lifetime was shortlived. Clues to the origins of her chronic self-effacing modesty can be found in the amazing memoir that Clarke wrote while in her 80s, a coming-of-age document reflecting on the authoritarian power structures within her family in the Victorian era. Even at this late stage in her life she is still trying to effect a reconciliation with her tyrannical and cruel father, who had dominated her childhood, and whose love and acceptance she had so desperately wanted and needed but never attained.

We were all of us whipped, sometimes really painfully. As a rule I well deserved any punishment I got... Bathed in tears, my drawers let down, I had to lean across the hated red Paisley quilt on Papa's bed while he applied the 'steel slapper' – an architect's two foot rule... Hans and Eric [her brothers] of course had their share, but... Eric, even when quite small, seemed able to shrug things off in a way I never could. And being the oldest – as well as the naughtiest – I was punished more often... For years my nails were examined every Sunday morning by Papa; I had started the habit of biting them. And if they were not satisfactory (and they never were) I

Rebecca Clarke c.1917–18



was doomed to another session with the... steel slapper, while Mama waited helplessly outside the door and cried.⁸

Growing up in a household where the act of nail-biting brought a brutal beating, we can understand that Clarke would learn to hesitate at any form of going against the grain – as defined by her father, or later, by the norms of conventional society. Thus throughout Clarke's life we find a conflict – she constructed her identity as a woman in a mainstream way, internalising the widely held views of the limitations of women's role and capabilities, rather than battling against them. So this identity, then, was at odds with her sense of self as a composer. She once said 'I always feel that each thing I do is going to be the last thing I'm capable of doing, it always seems sort of a little bit accidental'.⁹ This surprise at her 'accidental' creativity seems a way of minimising her own agency and adopting instead what she perceived as a more feminine passivity. While Clarke spoke often of the intense pleasure of composing, her desire to compose was frequently repressed because of her doubts in the appropriateness of this drive in a woman. And I think this led to doubt her own talents; a doubt that seems incredible to those of us who know any of her music.

We might contrast Clarke with Ethel Smyth, Clarke's senior by 28 years, who, as a proud suffragette, carried the banner of 'woman composer' high. While Clarke sympathised with the suffragette

cause – she played in a number of benefit concerts on its behalf¹⁰ – she did not become directly involved herself. With no wish to struggle to forge an identity, she shunned militancy and stridency. As a woman her self-image was shaped by Victorian notions of restricted spheres and Edwardian gentility and decorativeness. As a composer her identity was highly conflicted and, for extended periods, completely closeted. Yet Smyth, with her more vocal approach, has fared no better in posterity than Clarke, remembered more as a figure of curiosity and even ridicule than as the inventor of modern British opera (although perhaps the recent performance and recording of her opera *The wreckers*¹¹ will allow her some much deserved recognition).

Clarke, however, wanted to fit into society, thus valuing her femininity and conforming to an ideology that applied rigid stereotypes to the identity of woman. Again and again we find her minimising her own achievement:

I loved the Royal College... It was extremely stimulating to think of all the well-known composers who had passed through Stanford's hands: Holst, Vaughan Williams, Bridge, Butterworth, and a host of others all of whom I ultimately came to know. That I was the only woman student he had accepted was a source of great pride to me, though I know full well that I never fully deserved it.

Memoir, p.154

In the 1976 interview, Clarke recounts how she used a pseudonym – Anthony Trent. She was giving a recital (see illustration on p.18) in 1918 featuring a number of her own works, and felt embarrassed at having her name mentioned numerous times on the programme: 'I thought how silly to have my name on the programme yet again' (I can't think of many male composers who would be capable of making that statement!). Although, she wanted to avoid accepting the attention the piece would bring her, the piece by 'Anthony Trent' actually attracted more notice for which she had not planned. By 1976 Clarke was ready to think that she had been treated unfairly; what she thought in 1918 is more difficult to know.¹²

Clarke's whole involvement in the Coolidge festivals was, in fact, an accident, the result of a visit in 1917 to friends vacationing in Pittsfield Massachusetts, where she became acquainted with the great music patron, Mrs Coolidge, herself summering in Pittsfield. Clarke attended the first chamber music festival, held in September of 1918, and Mrs Coolidge personally encouraged her to enter the 1919 competition for a new work featuring the viola.¹³ The context of a competition was an unusual one for Clarke. After leaving the Royal College, she had concentrated mainly on writing short instrumental pieces or songs, self-contained single-movement works with poetic titles for herself or her friends to play. In contrast, the Viola Sonata and the 1921 Piano Trio stand completely outside this con-

text. In these two pieces she stepped outside her usual feminine identity, adopting a sweeping authoritative stance, a grand public voice, perhaps in order to be competitive or bolstered by the anonymous format. Truly monumental in scope, these are her only mature works to employ sonata form; the individual movements are linked through a cyclic treatment of motives.

In their breadth of conception and rich expansive, post-romantic idiom Clarke would never write anything else to equal them, and following Clarke's third Coolidge festival in 1923, her output slowed, and by the 1930s was intermittent, partly perhaps because a happy accident, such as that of the Coolidge festival, never again occurred, but more likely because, of her decision in 1924, following the death of her father four years earlier and because of her devotion to her mother (who died in 1935), to settle in London. Clarke's years of travel, much of them in the US, had offered her a certain freedom from conventions; a freedom that may have been reinforced by the necessity of supporting herself. These years released her from her desire for social acceptability that, back in England and with a comfortable inheritance, both ordered her life but gradually eroded her drive to compose. While she saw the glamorous career of a performer as acceptable within her desired identity as an upper-middle class lady of society, being a composer – which demanded control, power, and devotion to one's own creativity – was not (at least as Clarke defined it to herself). Clarke performed intensively as a chamber musician throughout these years; but as a composer, her output declined. Although much of her music from this period remains unpublished and thus almost entirely unknown, its quality is impressive.

WHEN SHE returned she found England in a period of backlash.¹⁴ The suffrage movement and the First World War had been a time of progress for women, as they won many opportunities and played active roles in a wide sphere. But in the mid-1920s, retrenchment and a reassertion of traditional roles took place, a situation reflected in many of the reviews of an all-Clarke concert of October 1925.

Rebecca Clarke, whose recital of compositions took place at Wigmore Hall, is, as all women composers, largely reflective of preceding masculine creations. She has, however, real feminine personality in such things as her 'Lullaby' for viola and piano, and a truly feminine bent towards the grotesque and intricate in 'Grotesque' and 'Chinese Puzzle'.

Western Mail, Cardiff

How remarkable it is that our women composers are so much more virile in style than some of our young men. Miss Rebecca Clarke has a strong right arm (We speak figuratively, of course). She can lay down the foundation of a big chamber work like her piano

6. *Exploring the intimate voice: the life and music of Rebecca Clarke (1886–1979)*, in progress.

7. As Philip Brett has recently emphasised. See 'Musicality, essentialism, and the closet', in *Queering the pitch: the new gay and lesbian musicology* (New York & London, 1994), p.19.

8. 'I had a Father, Too (or the Mustard Spoon)', unpublished typescript (1969–73) in Clarke's estate, p.26. Publication of the memoir is planned, edited by myself, with an introduction by Louise De Salvo. De Salvo is the author of numerous books, most notably *Virginia Woolf: the impact of childhood sexual abuse on her life and work* (New York, 1989), which have provided me with innumerable insights into the late Victorian era.

9. 1976 interview with Robert Sherman.

10. *Votes for women* (London, 1911). I thank Elizabeth Wood, who is writing a book on Smyth, for this reference.

11. *The wreckers* was given a concert performance in the 1994 BBC Proms. A recording has been released on the Conifer label (51250-2), with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra and the Huddersfield Choral Society directed by Odaline de la Martinez.

MAY MUKLE'S APPEARANCES
 Many Audiences Welcome 'Cellist During Present Month

May Mukle, the English cellist, scored a veritable triumph in her presentation of an ideally beautiful and unusual program before the Morning Music Club of Ottawa, Canada, recently. Her success in Ottawa was duplicated in Troy, N. Y., on Feb. 9, when she appeared as assisting artist with the Glee Club of the Academy of Girls. The audience was highly enthusiastic and insisted on three encores.

In company with Pablo Casals, 'cellist; Rebecca Clarke, violin, and David Mannes, violoncello, with two other names as yet unannounced, she will be heard in the Brahms Sextet at the Mannes School on Feb. 15. On account of several pending engagements in the East, Miss Mukle will postpone her Pacific Coast tour for one month.

GIFTED ARTISTS JOIN IN UNIQUE RECITAL

May Mukle, 'Cellist, and Miss Clarke, Viola, Win Warm Praise

Assisted by Katherine Ruth Heyman, pianist, May Mukle, the noted English 'cellist, and Rebecca Clarke, viola, gave a joint recital in Aeolian Hall Wednesday afternoon of last week. Their highly interesting program contained Bach's G Major Sonata, for 'cello and piano; Brahms's fine trio for piano, viola and 'cello; Hubert Parry's "Sarabande," Anthony Tans' "Morpheus" and Frank Bridge's Allegro appassionato for viola and piano; a "Lullaby" and "Grottesque" for viola and cello, by Miss Clarke herself, and some short pieces by Schmitt, Locatelli and Goossens for 'cello and piano.

The young artists were very warmly greeted. It is always a pleasure to hear Miss Mukle and she displayed in her every number that fine taste, musical charm and technical proficiency one always expects of her. Both she and Miss Heyman gave a fine performance of the Bach Sonata and later of the short pieces. Miss Clarke, except for a tendency to part from the piece, also showed herself a finished artist. The viola is not monotonous when so played, as a composer the young woman likewise shows. Of the three new English pieces, Parry's "Sarabande" is the most concise and interesting, the "Morpheus" of Mr. Trent lacking originality.



Of the Brahms trio a fine presentation was given, as regards balance and sympathetic understanding.

H. P. P.

Aeolian Hall
 34 West 43rd Street

Wednesday Afternoon at 3.00 **Feb. 13**

RECITAL

MAY MUKLE
 VIOLONCELLEST

REBECCA CLARKE
 VIOLA PLAYER

Assisted by
Katherine Ruth Heyman, Pianist

PROGRAMME

Sonata in G for Piano-forte and Violoncello
 Adagio
 Allegro, ma non tanto
 Andante
 Allegro moderato

Viola and Piano-forte
 a. Sarabande
 b. Morpheus (First performance)

Viola and Violoncello
 a. Lullaby (Ms. D.)
 b. Grottesque

Violoncello and Piano-forte
 a. Allemande (Ms.)
 b. Chant Elegiaque
 c. Chinese Folk Tune (First performance)

Trio for Piano-forte, Viola and Violoncello, Op. 114
 Allegro
 Andante
 Andantino
 Allegro

STEINWAY PIANO USED

Reserved Seats \$1.50, \$1.00, 75c, 50c. Boxes (including) \$12.00
 On sale at the Box Office. Mail orders will be received and tickets sent on receipt of check or money order.
 Checks payable to Florenz G. Jones, Aeolian Hall, New York.

Direction of HAENSEL & JONES, Aeolian Hall, New York

Miss Rebecca Clarke Demonstrates Beauty of the Viola, Instrument Rarely Heard Alone

Miss Rebecca Clarke, who has been heard in a Brahms trio, as well as in solo at Aeolian Hall last week, has given a recital.

Miss Rebecca Clarke demonstrates the beauty of the viola, an instrument rarely heard alone. Her playing was heard in a Brahms trio, as well as in solo at Aeolian Hall last week. The beauty of the instrument, which possesses something of the timbre of the violin, is the property of the viola, was admirably exhibited by Miss Clarke, and set the audience wondering. The instrument could not be heard from this instrument, even if its timbre, mystery of which must be explained, were adopted from male voices, the other instruments.

Miss Clarke's mastery of the instrument, as well as her technical skill, was registered in her interpretation of the most difficult of her program, which was an concerto, by Hubert Parry. Miss Mukle, who has been heard in her proficiency with her 'cello, was assisted by such scholarship and distinguished artists.

The programme contained several interesting pieces by the younger composers of England, among them Hubert Parry, Tans, Hubert Parry, and Miss Clarke herself. The "Sarabande" and "Morpheus" played in appropriate audience.

YOUNG WOMAN PLAYS VIOLA

Miss May Mukle, 'cellist, and Miss Rebecca Clarke, who also last week, in a musical instrument in solo or duet, were joint recital yesterday at Aeolian Hall. Miss Mukle, who has been heard in her proficiency with her 'cello, was assisted by such scholarship and distinguished artists.

The programme contained several interesting pieces by the younger composers of England, among them Hubert Parry, Tans, Hubert Parry, and Miss Clarke herself. The "Sarabande" and "Morpheus" played in appropriate audience.

Miss Mukle fully maintained her high rank as a 'cellist, rivalling her playing and her reputation. The recital was a most interesting one, and was well received by the audience. Miss Mukle, Clarke and Heyman, through their playing, showed that the viola is not monotonous when so played, as a composer the young woman likewise shows. Of the three new English pieces, Parry's "Sarabande" is the most concise and interesting, the "Morpheus" of Mr. Trent lacking originality.

Of the Brahms trio a fine presentation was given, as regards balance and sympathetic understanding.

12. A brief review in *Vogue* (15 April 1918) first considers Anthony Trent and Frank Bridge, mentioning Clarke as a composer only as an afterthought: 'One should not, too, overlook Miss Clarke's own picturesque compositions, the "Lullaby" and "Grottesque" for viola and cello.'

13. Cyrilla Barr presents a broad perspective of Coolidge's influence in 'A style of her own: reflections on the patronage of Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge', forthcoming in *Cultivating music in America: women patrons and activists since 1860*, edited by Ralph P. Locke and Cyrilla Barr (Berkeley & Los

trio heard last night, with all the emphasis of a Liszt and carry on with the sturdiness of a John Ireland or Frank Bridge.

[London] *Star*

The reviewer who remarks on Clarke's strength realises that this complement casts her femininity into question. Thus the writer must qualify the remark – humorously, of course – to emphasise that if Clarke is unladylike in her creative efforts, at least she is still within the bounds of propriety as far as her physical attributes are concerned.

The conservative turn of post-World War I Britain has been memorably described in a recent book, *The female malady: women, madness and English culture, 1830–1980*, by Elaine Showalter, who notes 'the shift of feminist interests away from questions of women's independence to questions of women's relationships with men.' She considers the emergence of what psychoanalysts dubbed the 'masculinity complex', which saw feminists as women who sublimate their desire to be men by 'following masculine pursuits of an intellectual and professional nature', and the influence of Sigmund Freud, whose theories were received enthusiastically in Britain.¹⁵ This backlash to first-wave feminism brought with it, then, the Victorian double bind: that women who worked within the acceptably feminine sphere were considered to be of little value (insignificant, in the lesser genres,

tainted with sentimentality) and that women who strove to go beyond this limited sphere were unnatural (they were trying to be men, usurping a masculine vocabulary that they could only possibly use inauthentically) and were condemned or at best treated with curiosity. It is this curiosity – a polite, distancing, patronising inquisitiveness – that permeates a 1926 review in the *Musical Times* of Clarke's *Midsummer moon* for violin and piano. Rather than consider the aesthetic value of this piece, the critic takes the opportunity to weigh the virtues of an abstracted 'new "woman-composer" ' against the 'old'.

In reading Miss Rebecca Clarke's 'Midsummer Moon' our first impression is one of relief and gratitude: for the new "woman-composer" is at least free from the cloying sentimentality of the old. ... May nights and moonlight are no longer the source of gushing platitudes. The modern woman looks upon these things with the detachment of a scientist. She has an eye for the picturesque, but it is an eye undimmed by a rising tear. She is too keen, too determined and too interested to be easily moved; her ecstasy is of the mind rather than of the emotions. This is all so much pure gain. At worst she can only leave us cold; the others, when they really tried could be loathsome. With the instinct for change and variety, with the flair for fashions which is woman's own gift, she reaches the goal while the more cautious male hesitates and counts the cost. In the

end, perhaps, some males may strike deeper, but there is surely a good deal to be said for dashing brilliance and frank unconventionality.

Musical Times, 1 September 1926

While this reviewer believes he is being progressive in his recognition and praise of the 'new "woman-composer"' he is actually restating the restrictions of the traditional double bind – the older type of woman composer wrote music of loathsome sentimentality; the new woman instead provides scientific detachment and superficial brilliance; it is still only the male composer who is capable of depth. Unconsciously conforming to this ideology, Clarke, then, avoided the masculine pinnacle of musical achievement: she wrote no orchestral music, focusing instead on the so-called 'lesser' genres of chamber music and songs. Her largest works, as I have noted, were written as part of competitions to which works were submitted anonymously, which perhaps encouraged her to ignore the confines of her femininity. That Clarke felt more psychologically comfortable working with smaller scale pieces is, however, demonstrated by her return to single-movement works after the Coolidge festivals. I point this out as a pattern, and not to minimise the artistic achievements of her creations. Clarke, I suggest, tried to resolve her conflict with the masculine associations of composing by giving feminine attributes to her identity as a composer, rather than by trying to fit into the masculine world of composing – the male-defined ethos of what a composer and what genius was.¹⁶ Indeed, her diary entry of 16 January 1924 illustrates this feminising context and her view of composition as an ornamental part of her identity:

Had rather fun ... going with [her sister] Dora to buy some pearls! I am adding a few to the middle of my necklace with the money I have just got as royalties from my songs. My pearls are to be all out of my compositions!

While on the one hand we might simply say Clarke is buying the pearls to celebrate the success of her compositions, on the other, its use for a luxury emphasises what she is *not* doing as a composer – she is not earning a living. Clarke's words bring to mind what Fanny Mendelssohn's father wrote her in 1820 – 'for you it [music] can and must only be an ornament, never the root of your being and doing',¹⁷ a quote which, whilst without equating the values of 1820s Berlin with those of 1920s London, reminds us of the long tradition of music as an ornament, a decorative hobby for women. A viewpoint for Clarke as she strove to create an identity as a composer that would be compatible with her feminine sensibilities was thus readily available. Indeed, the act of composing itself is, in her diary, often found among distinctly ladylike activities. In 1924, she wrote of composing *Midsummer moon*: 'Started a fiddle piece using some old scraps'. (16 February 1924) Once we

know that Clarke was an avid sewer, the metaphor can be identified as one of quilting. In fact, 'composing, sewing, etc.' (24 February 1925) is a frequent entry, as is 'shopping, composing, etc.' Composing, then, while always important to Clarke, was seldom her primary activity.

This attempt to be a composer in a way that would conform to her identity as a woman, was often difficult. For Clarke, the act of composing involved complete self-absorption – a devotion to one's own creative worth, which meant some loss of identity, a giving up of everyday order in deference to an unmeasurable internal power. Clarke writes of this experience in her memoir:

... especially as a child, [I] often had the sensation for no particular reason of being jolted right out of my identity, to return almost instantaneously with a sort of bump and a sense of surprise at finding myself the same person as before. Even when grown up, a period of intense concentration – such as composing, lovemaking or anger – could bring on a return of the same feeling.

And, of studying at the Royal College:

It was a happy, ecstatic time. My work was improving – slowly, but improving ... Every now and then, in the middle of struggling with some problem, everything would fall into place with a suddenness almost like switching on an electric light. It may sound pretentious, ... but at these moments, though I had no illusions whatever about the value of my work, I was flooded with a wonderful feeling of potential power – a miracle made anything seem possible. Every composer, or writer, or painter too for that matter, however obscure, is surely familiar with this sensation. It is a glorious one. I know of almost nothing to equal it.

IN 1933, the same year that Freud completed his final essay on penis envy, Clarke completed a song, a setting of Blake's 'The tiger', her darkest and only truly frightening work, bordering on the expressionist. For the previous five years, the obsessive reworking of that song had been almost her only compositional effort. Perhaps in the wake of the preoccupations of feminists and psychiatrists, as well as the overall social climate of retrenchment of traditional values concerning women, Clarke's interests had been drawn to questions of relationships with men. More precisely, Clarke had an unhealthy secret relationship with a married man, the baritone John Goss. Eight years younger than Clarke, Goss was well-known in London, and closely associated with the composer Philip Heseltine, better known as Peter Warlock. Clarke wrote 'The tiger' for Goss, and many of her songs of the 1920s were premiered by and dedicated to him. The kindling of this romance in 1927, however, coincided with a drop in Clarke's output. (Her diaries end in 1933 so it is impossible to know the conclusion of the affair.)

Angeles, 1996). I thank Professor Barr for sharing her research with me in advance of publication.

14. Susan Faludi's *Backlash: the undeclared war against American women* (New York, 1991) convincingly describes how women's efforts to win equal treatment have always produced cycles, with advance followed by reactionary repression.

15. *The female malady: women, madness and English culture, 1830–1980* (London & New York, 1985). pp.195–203.

16. Christine Battersby's *Gender and genius* (Bloomington & Indianapolis 1989; London, 1989) examines the gendered status of genius.

17. *The letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, edited by Marcia Citron (Stuyvesant, 1987), p.xl.

18. As some writers have generalised, for instance, Citron: *Gender and the musical canon*, p.92; and Diane Peacock Jezic: *Women composers: the lost tradition found* (New York, 1988), p.159.

19. Letter from Eric's wife Beryl stating that Rebecca was not going to spend the summer with them (Spring 1942).

20. Interview with Christopher Johnson (January 1994).

21. He taught there for 52 years.

22. For instance, her diary, 18 February 1920: 'Went up to the Mannes School at 4:30 to hear trios played by Mr and Mrs M[annes] and Casals. Casals, who played very badly indeed last night, played most beautifully today. Sat with Friskin and talked a lot with him, queer, shy thing that he is. Nothing in the evening.'

23. These letters are among the few that survive in Clarke's estate. They remain in the 'Tall Gals' shoe box (size 11) that she stored them in.

24. Clarke and Friskin were married on 23 September 1944 (marriage certificate in Clarke's estate). Joseph Clarke died on 23 September 1920, as documented in Rebecca's diary and *Stamtafeln der Familie Ranke* (Cologne, 1976), p.20.

Clarke had first dedicated a song to Goss in 1922. This was 'The seal man', a long prose text by John Masefield, based upon Celtic legend, the narrative of which strikes me as an eerie prediction of what would happen to Clarke in her later romantic entanglement with Goss. The story is a gender reversal of the Greek legend of the Siren: a maiden of the Scottish highlands falls in love with a seal (disguised as a man), and follows him out onto the sea, where 'she was drowned of course, drowned, drowned'. Read in conjunction with Clarke's diary from later in the decade and the early 30s, with its relentless series of rendezvous, recriminations, break-ups and make-ups, it is easy to sense that some part of Clarke herself is drowning in these years; certainly the composer part seems deeply submerged.

In her 1976 interview, she is asked why she didn't continue to compose.

I wanted to, but I couldn't. I had lots of sketches of things. I know and I miss it, because there's nothing in the world more thrilling – or practically nothing... But you can't do it – at least I can't – maybe that's where a woman's different – I can't do it unless it's the first thing I think of every morning when I wake and the last thing I think of every night before I go to sleep – I've got to have it in my mind all the time and if one allows too many other things to take over one is liable not to be able to do it, that's been my experience.

So Clarke's impulse to compose was submerged but not gone. In 1939 came another accident – not a happy one for Clarke or for anyone, but it did effectively separate her from the distractions that kept her from composing – World War II.

As relatives tell the story, Clarke was visiting her brothers in the US during the summer of 1939 when Britain declared war. Since London was being evacuated, she decided to remain with her brothers and their families. These years, 1939–42, were a remarkable compositional efflorescence, and Clarke's final period of musical creativity. There was ultimately friction in both families as the wives saw Rebecca as attempting to usurp roles of leadership within the family, and she saw her brothers as taking on the cruelty of their father. It was a very unhappy time for Clarke, but unlike her unhappy involvement with John Goss, it was musically productive. In this way, with Clarke living within the confines of her family, there might be some parallels to the years when, as a teenager still cowering before her father, Clarke had first started to compose.

The ten pieces from this period include a broad range of styles – particularly striking is the *Prelude, allegro, and pastorale*. Here the lyrical breadth and rich, developmental thematic treatment of her earlier music is replaced by a tautness, contrapuntal agility, crisp melodic style, and an energetic use of asymmetrical rhythms that suggests comparison with the neo-classical Stravinsky. This piece was one of 35 works included in the 1942 meeting of the In-

ternational Society for Contemporary Music (held in Berkeley, California). Its acceptance by the Society cheered Clarke; it was the only work by a woman, and one of only three by British composers. The reviews of this piece were positive, yet Clarke never showed it to any publishers.

This period of productivity was ended, not by her marriage to James Friskin,¹⁸ but rather by her taking on a position as a governess in Connecticut in early 1942.¹⁹ The job was gesture of independence to her brothers, but in her writings she expressed surprise – and despair – at finding herself, nearing the age of 60, in exhausting, non-musical employment for the first time in her life. Her writings from this time are not the meticulous diaries of earlier years, but rather, long undated lists of observations, written in a large hand with blunt pencil on legal pad. She is clearly struggling to keep up her spirits, as a few poignant quotations attest. These writings, labelled 'Observations', are numbered but not dated:

53

Funny to have to use the back door instead of the front.

58

I can understand Hitler when I see boys playing in sand-box: 'It's mine' 'No, it's mine.' I fear war will always exist.

69

My fingers are puckered from all the washing I have to do – self, children, bedding, dishes. Hard to play well that way.

102

Difficult to realise that the sun still shines in London as much as it ever does.

152

Unreal experiences seem quite natural while they are present. But one sometimes thinks even at the time: I shall not believe I have ever done this. We are adaptable creatures.

172

Letter from England – mirage-like effect switching me away from this hour's failure.

188

I compose them [the children] to sleep

214

Strange that an absent-minded moody musician should be doing this!

Clarke's chance meeting on a Manhattan street with pianist James Friskin in early 1944 was described as 'rain in the desert'.²⁰ They had been students together at the Royal College, with Friskin studying composition and piano. He had given up composition on accepting a position at the Juilliard School.²¹ They had also known each other during

Clarke's American visits of the early 1920s²² but they had not seen each other for a considerable period, and their meeting came at a time when it made them both particularly happy. Their surviving courtship letters brim with intense warmth and enthusiasm.²³

Clarke to Friskin:

Did I tell you, James, that I love you?! Do you know that, more and more, I feel – just as you told me you did – that all my life has been a kind of preparation for you?

24 August 1944

Friskin to Clarke:

I want to tell you again, specially for your birthday, that I love you as I had thought it had not been given to me to love any woman. I knew there was such love, but I had made up my mind that I must be content without it. So perhaps you can imagine what these recent weeks have meant to me.

25 August 1944

Friskin can be cleared of any notion that he played a Gustav Mahler role towards Clarke's composing. Her next-to-last composition was written for him, a setting of a Scottish melody, and he reacts to it positively, suggesting they show it to publishers.

After looking again at the last twelve bars for your little viola piece, which I find very moving, it seems to me that you ought to start off again on something larger – I'd almost be willing to bet it's there if you'd only let it come out. What about another viola sonata? Please try.

24 July

Clarke does not respond to this directly (or at least none survives). Instead, her letter of 20 August includes a traditionally feminine token of devotion: 'Will you someday let me knit something for you?' Surely some part of her conscious or unconscious mind was aware that her wedding took place on the anniversary of her father's death.²⁴ At last Clarke had found a man who gave her a sense of deep satisfaction and equilibrium. Clarke and Friskin were both 58 when they married. Apart from one last song, and some revisions of earlier works, Clarke would not compose for the rest of her life, 35 more years.

Rebecca Clarke remained active and mentally agile until her death at 93. Documents such as her fascinating memoir, which she started writing after her husband's death, reveal her reflections and revelations on events decades earlier. Thus writing in the 1960s, she contemplates that she grew up in a sexually repressive age, and in her memoir and in the interviews finally observes that, as a woman composer, she was occasionally treated unfairly. During the course of her long life, Clarke touched a great many lives with her deep love of chamber music, the compelling voice of her compositions, and also her warmth and charm. She taught extensively, but, to my knowledge, entirely privately, viola, violin, theory and composition. Even those who knew her only late in life speak of her energy and lively wit. And

Dumka for violin, viola and piano

Artur Rubinstein summed up the opinion of many of the luminaries that she, before World War II, worked with on a regular basis, when he called her 'The glorious Rebecca Clarke'²⁵

By recognising that Clarke's identity as a composer clashed with her identity as a woman, I do not mean to portray Clarke as weak or as victimised but simply to recognise some of the forces that shaped her – we all have to balance the tensions that pull our lives in different directions. This is certainly part of her appeal as a figure – her self-doubt makes her a figure of empathy, giving her a human warmth that so many of her male contemporaries in the panoply of 'great' composers lack. Her entire mature life, Clarke held onto to her identity as a composer but she also constantly struggled with this identity. Our century has seen many changes, great upheavals in the nature and definition of music, and with them changes in the identity of what a composer is; the roles defined for women have changed as well. While today obstacles remain it is encouraging and uplifting that Clarke lived into an age in which women could be more honestly accepted as composers. She lived to see that the artistic worth of her music was being rediscovered, a process that continues today.

25. Letter from Rubinstein to Clarke (10 February 1966), quoted by Christopher Johnson in notes to the North-eastern recording of Clarke's viola music (LP 1985, CD 1989).

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