

The Rebecca Clarke Society Newsletter

February 2012

Volume 7



Only known photo of Clarke playing the viola, from the mid-1920s

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NEWS FLASH:
EAST ASIAN PREMIERE of the **Clarke Sonata for Viola and Orchestra.** Seoul, Korea, March 5, 2012. Soloist Sun Kyoung Park with performs with the Seoul Philharmonic <http://www.seoulphilharmonic.org/>

From our President, Liane Curtis

Dear Friends and Supporters!

We have not produced a newsletter for some time. That is not due to a lack of news, but rather the opposite! So much has been going on that it is hard to stay on top of everything.

More performances of the orchestration of Clarke's Viola Sonata have taken place - in Bartlesville, OK; Stockholm, Sweden; Eskişehir, Turkey (the *Anadolu Symphony Orchestra* with soloist Esra Pehlivanli), and the Chamber Orchestra of the Springs in Colorado Springs, CO (with Cathy Hanson, viola) and in this newsletter we report on two upcoming performances.

We continue to receive reports of performances of

Clarke's music from all far-flung corners of the globe: Japan, Australia, South Africa, and The Rebecca Clarke Society supported performances and Master Classes featuring her music in China.

Last year we celebrated the 125th anniversary of Clarke's birth, so it seemed important to get a newsletter out and get back in touch with our many supporters (and welcome new ones as well!).

We look forward to hearing your insights, news, and ideas for the newsletter (should we have a newsletter? Or should we just be tweeting???), as well as ideas for the Clarke Society. Please enjoy!

West-Coast Premiere of Clarke's Viola Sonata with Orchestra

The North State Symphony will give the West Coast Premiere of Rebecca Clarke's Sonata for Viola and Orchestra, in Chico and Red Bluff, California, on Feb. 18 and 19, 2012.

The soloist is Melissa Matson, principal violist of the Rochester Philharmonic, faculty member of the Eastman School of Music, and a distinguished recording artist and chamber musician. The soloist returns to her home town of Chico for the performance -- also the hometown of RCS President Liane Curtis!

The North State Symphony (directed

by Maestro Kyle Wiley Pickett) is the third orchestra to perform Ruth Lomon's orchestration of the Clarke. Several ensembles have also performed individual movements.



Violist Melissa Matson



Prof. Michael
Beckerman, of NYU

A Conversation with Michael Beckerman - Part 1, Rebecca Clarke's Violin Sonata in D major.

Edited by Liane Curtis. Editorial comments between [brackets]

Some months ago – OK, three and a half years ago – I sat down with NYU Professor Michael Beckerman to talk about Clarke and her music. While of course I knew Mike as a distinguished scholar of Czech music, we started corresponding through our shared connection with musicologist Ellen D. Lerner. Lerner's 1977-1978 interviews with Clarke are edited in *A Rebecca Clarke Reader*, and Mike had been a classmate of hers in graduate school at Columbia University. When she passed away in 2003, he wrote her obituary for the Newsletter of the American Musicological Society. Mike's interest in Clarke emerged first through reading Lerner's interview, and then from listening to Clarke's music, in particular the chamber music featured on the 2003 CD on the Dutton/Epoch Label. On a beautiful fall afternoon (Oct. 20, 2008), we got together at his home in New Rochelle, NY and our discussion focused on two pieces: the Violin Sonata in D, and the Nocturne for two violins and piano, both early works, written during Clarke's period of study with Sir Charles Stanford at the Royal College of Music (1907-1909).

MB: With these early pieces, it's particularly aggravating to me that they aren't published – because people don't know them like they do the Viola Sonata. And they should! This Violin Sonata, it's a spectacular piece – so why isn't it published? It's an early sonata – it sounds to me like a fully finished piece. Not just finished, of course it's finished, but mature.

LC: *It's not a student piece [although she was a student when she wrote it].* MB: What seems extraordinary to me, first of all, is how authoritative it sounds. You know we're in an election year [2008] – and if somebody decided to say bad things about it, that parts of the piece aren't good, they could get away with it. But to me, what's in there, on the whole, is really extraordinary. The first movement almost starts sort of conversationally, like a pastoral. But it's expressive.


Example 1-- beginning,
Sonata in D, first
movement

And then you have this, where everything stops [going into the second theme], I don't know how one would characterize that, I wish I could have asked her! It's got one of the great second themes of any violin sonata. It's not a Brahmsian piece that much, but there is some Brahms in there. It reminds me of the second theme of the Brahms G major Violin Sonata, not in its trajectory, but in its level of passion.

Example 2--
second theme,
Clarke Violin
Sonata in D, first
movement

Michael Beckerman, continued.

Example 3, 2nd theme from the 1st Mvt. of Brahms' Violin Sonata in G maj.

You have this expressive character already in this movement. And she writes it [the second theme] five different ways, because the theme appears twice in each iteration, and then there's a coda. That's also very Brahms or Dvořák, that you don't have literal repeats – she makes changes so there is a sense of artifice there. It's also kind of a perpetual motion theme. That sort of gesture is right out of the Russian school [sings: ]. You've got things that sound like they're moving but it's sort of a modal oscillation.

And [as the 2nd theme repeats] then it's sort of Schubertian, they're never-ending themes. They could go a hundred times and each iteration is going to be more passionate. So it all is repeated, and here [we listen to a continuation of the 2nd theme] it's practically a violin concerto in a way.


Example 4,
Violin part only,
Clarke Violin Sonata
in D maj, Mvt. 1,
mm. 77-84.

This is a moment that's interesting to me, too, sort of a coda.

Example 5, Violin part, from m. 93

With the Klein, [Beckerman's research on the music of Gideon Klein] I'm working on this issue of middles, and how one thinks of middles. Is what is in the middle [the material that] isn't important enough to go at the beginning? Or is it what's too important to go at the beginning? Is the middle simply a foil so that it's clear what the piece is about, or IS the middle what this piece is about? Dvořák has these pieces where he calls the first movement a Prelude. So there *are* ways of composing where the real themes are in the middle. This seems to be a piece like that, and for me, a little bit of additional proof is that it [the second theme] is played twice, not only in typical sonata form fashion, but it also takes over the coda.

Courageous may be too strong a word, but I don't think, as a composer, she worried about whether this is too passionate or not; there's an honesty about the emotional level of the piece. It may sound like special pleading, but it is not, it is just to remind people that the technical facility is always there – the passion is not at the expense of technique.

Either she's a person with an extraordinarily rich and vibrant emotional life -- or she's even more of a magician. If she's not living that world, of the emotional vocabulary of the writing, then it's even in a way more remarkable, to be able to convey that emotion. 

Audio clips corresponding to the examples are found in the online version of this Newsletter at <http://rebeccaclarke.org/pdf/jan2012newsletter.pdf>

TO BE CONTINUED Next time, the interview with Beckerman continues with a discussion of Clarke's Nocturne (for two violins and piano) and other issues.

Clarke's Music Reaches China



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Three musicians based in the UK joined with a Chinese violist to bring the music of Clarke and other British Composers to China. Andres Kaljuste (violin), Sophia Rahman (piano), and Robert Plane (clarinet), joined Su Zhen (Viola) in presenting concerts and masterclasses in May 2010. Their tour took them to three Chinese

cities, Guang Zhou, Xi An and Beijing, where they worked with students at music conservatories, and gave well-attended concerts. Clarke's Dumka for Violin, Viola and Piano was featured on all the concerts, and was received with great enthusiasm! The Rebecca Clarke Society was happy to help sponsor these events.

ENGLISH ROMANCE
浪漫英伦
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Andres Kaljuste Sophia Rahman Robert Plane 特邀：中提琴演奏家苏贞

Free Expression Policy Project Article Examines Clarke Estate Problems

Readers of our 2004 Newsletter <http://www.rebeccaclarke.org/pdf/fall2004newsletter.pdf> will recall the issue of censorship by the manager of Clarke's estate. A 2009 article, *Silencing Music Through Copyright Law: The Case of Rebecca Clarke* (by Liane Curtis), considers those issues in more detail. <http://www.fepproject.org/commentaries/rebeccaclarke.curtis.html>
The *Free Expression Policy Project* was founded by Marjorie Heins, who is also its director. She is a law professor, noted authority on First Amendment issues, and a widely published author.

We're on the Web! www.rebeccaclarke.org

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We're on Facebook! <http://www.facebook.com/RebeccaClarkeComposer>

The Rebecca Clarke Society is incorporated as a 501-c-3 non-profit organization, EIN 04-3532546. Our goal is to honor the life and work of composer and violist Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979) by promoting interest in her and her music. We encourage and support performances, recordings and publication of her music, and scholarship concerning Clarke and her music