

## *Ethel Smyth: A Life of Music and Activism*

As musician Sir Thomas Beecham, friend to Ethel Smyth, walked into the prison yard at Holloway Prison to visit her, he came upon the scene of dozens of suffragettes marching and singing their war-chant, its opening cry:

*Shout, shout, up with your song!  
Cry with the wind, for the dawn is breaking;  
March, march, swing you along,  
Wide blows our banner, and hope is waking.*

Ethel Smyth stood in her jail cell, the voices of the women rising up to her. They were singing her song, *The March of the Women* (words by Cicely Hamilton), composed a year earlier in 1911 as the anthem for the Women's Social and Political Union. Inspired, she stretched her arms out beyond the window bars and, in the words of Sir Beecham, ". . . beaming approbation from an overlooking upper window, beat time in almost Bacchic frenzy with a toothbrush."



Portrait of Ethel Smyth, 1901,  
by John Singer Sargent

The preceding anecdote illustrates the quintessential Ethel Smyth. The feisty, at times radical, activist fought not only for voting rights for women, but also for the equality of women musicians in the male-dominated milieu that was, and is, classical music. (In today's top 20 U.S. major orchestras in 2014, 91% of conductors/music directors and 63% of musicians were male, with men holding 69% of the [higher-paying] principal positions, and 82% of the concertmaster positions while only comprising 41% of all violinists. <sup>[1]</sup> Of the compositions performed by the top 21 orchestras in the 2014 – 2015 orchestral season, only 1.8% overall were composed by women, with 14.8% of living composers' compositions being by women. <sup>[2]</sup>) As a musician, Smyth was very talented and fiercely independent, and she was one of England's most successful turn-of-the-century composers. And yet, she had tremendous difficulty having her music published and performed, solely for the reason that she was female.

Ethel Mary Smyth (rhymes with Forsyth) was born in Kent, England on April 22, 1858, but she always stated it as April 23, the day her family celebrated it as they liked the coincidence with William Shakespeare's birthday. Her mother was French and a descendant of Sir Josias Stracey, the fourth baronet of Norfolk. Her father was a stern Major-General in the Royal Artillery.

Smyth's unconventional and rebellious streak began early. In defiance of the norms of the day, she grew up hunting, hiking, and mountaineering. She also liked the "unladylike" activities of tennis, golf, and most shockingly, bicycling. From an 1891 *Sunday Herald*: "I think the most vicious thing I ever saw in all my life is a woman on a bicycle . . . I had thought that cigarette smoking was the worst thing a woman could do, but I changed my mind." As an adult, Smyth not only bicycled, she smoked cigars. She was eccentric and boisterous, with boundless energy and determination. She loved dogs, especially Old English sheepdogs – one of them a notoriously unruly dog, of whom, Smyth recalled in her memoirs, Tchaikovsky was secretly terrified. While most of her romantic relationships were with women, of whom she freely wrote about in her memoirs, the one exception was an affair with her married philosopher friend and librettist to some of her operas, Henry Bennet ("HB") Brewster. In an 1892 letter to Brewster she wrote, "I wonder why it is so much easier for me to love my own sex more passionately than yours. I can't make it out, for I am a very healthy-minded person."

While Smyth defied many of the social conventions of the day, she was also taught the "ladylike" skills of piano and music theory. Because her father had absolutely no musical talent, Smyth always presumed her musical gift came from her mother, whom she described as "one of the most naturally musical people I have ever known." Smyth recognized at an early age her love of composition. Her first memory of creating music was the addition of seconds to the duets and accompaniments she and her sister performed. At the age of 12, she came to the momentous decision to study composition at the Leipzig Conservatory after hearing a governess, who had studied at the Conservatory, play Beethoven's music. ". . . for the first time I heard classical music and a new world opened up before me. . . . my true bent suddenly revealed to me . . . I conceived the plan . . . of studying in Leipzig and giving up my life to music." This was the catalyst for her campaign to study in Leipzig, a campaign that became a progressive and protracted battle with her father. At age 17, she began to study harmony, composition, and repertory with Alexander Ewing, an Army Service Corps musician. (It was he who introduced Smyth to the music dramas of Wagner. She was inspired by Wagner's music and wrote in her diary that her highest ambition was to compose an opera and have it performed in Germany by the time she was 40, an achievement she realized in 1898 at Weimar with a performance of her two-act opera *Fantasio*.) Major-General Smyth, convinced that musicians were of low moral fiber, erroneously assumed that Smyth's relationship with her teacher was more amorous than musical and abruptly stopped the private lessons. For the last two years of her crusade, Smyth confined herself to her room, refusing to attend meals, church, or social functions until her father relented and allowed her

to study in Leipzig. Smyth was eventually victorious, and in 1877, at age 19, she began her studies at the Leipzig Conservatory. Writing of this period in her life many years later, Smyth wrote:

"I not only unfurled the red flag, but determined to make life at home so intolerable that they would have to let me go for their own sakes. (I say 'they,' but . . . I felt that, whatever my mother might say in public, she was secretly with me.) . . . Towards the end I struck altogether, refused to go to Church, . . . refused to speak to any one, and one day my father's boot all but penetrated a panel of my locked bedroom door!"

At the Leipzig Conservatory, Smyth studied Brahmsian musical composition (the romantic style of lyrical and classical music developed by Brahms), counterpoint and other theoretical subjects, and piano. Her enthusiasm quickly turned to disillusionment because of the low quality of teaching and what she felt was the school "trading on its Mendelssohnian reputation." She left after only a year and began private studies with Heinrich von Herzogenberg, and then later studied with George Henschel, who was a close friend of Brahms. While in Leipzig, Smyth met Dvořák, Grieg, and Tchaikovsky. Through Herzogenberg and his wife, Elisabeth, a superb musician in her own right, Smyth was introduced to Clara Schumann and Brahms. She soon became part of their musical sphere. In her memoirs, Smyth recounts her meeting with Brahms:

"To my mingled delight and horror I learned, too, that Henschel had actually spoken to him [Brahms] about my work, telling him I had never studied, that he really ought to look at it and so on . . . At that time Brahms was clean-shaven, and in the whirl of emotion I only remember a strong alarming face, very penetrating bright blue eyes and my own desire to sink through the floor when he said, as I then thought by way of a compliment, but as I now know in a spirit of scathing irony, 'So this is the young lady who writes sonatas and doesn't know counterpoint!' I afterwards learned that Henschel had left a MS of mine (two songs) with him, that he subsequently looked at them, and remarked to Frau Rontgen that evidently Henschel had written them himself!"

Tchaikovsky's opinion of Smyth's work was more favorable. In a diary-article written a few months after meeting her, Tchaikovsky wrote, "Miss Smyth is one of the few women composers whom one can seriously consider to be achieving something valuable in the field of musical creation." It was Tchaikovsky who encouraged Smyth to find her own voice and brought to her attention the serious deficiency of her training in Leipzig: She had received no formal training in orchestration. "Not one of them can orchestrate," Tchaikovsky said. "What happens," he asked, "in ordinary conversation? If you have to do with really alive people, listen to the inflections in the voices . . . there's instrumentation for you!" Tchaikovsky urged Smyth to immediately begin to study orchestral effects and colors, and to not hold back in her usage of them. Smyth took his advice to heart and began attending concerts with the sole purpose of studying orchestral effects, filling notebooks with her impressions. Thereafter, she was as interested in sound as in sense, considering the two indivisible. This understanding of orchestration is evident in Smyth's later, mature works.

At the beginning of her study at the Leipzig Conservatory, Smyth's teachers encouraged her to focus on composing instrumental and chamber music. While she composed many works of these genres during this time, their style was academic and didn't have the force and originality of the works she later composed. Kathleen Dale, a neighbor of Smyth's in her later years and a musician who studied her works, observed that Smyth's music ". . . mirrors some of the composer's most characteristic personal traits: her love of intellectual reasoning is reflected in persistently strenuous counterpoint; her zest for life, in rhythmic lilt and drive; her interest in the unusual and the exotic, in vivid orchestration; and her passion for 'being herself,' in an obstinately perverse sense of harmony."

Prior to Smyth's arrival in Leipzig, she had composed several songs to German texts. The songs garnered favorable notice in Leipzig and, emboldened by the response, Smyth took her songs to Dr. Hase, head of the firm of Breitkopf & Härtel, the world's oldest music publishing house. Hase's response to Smyth was, predictably, in keeping with the prevailing prejudices of the time against professional women composers. Smyth wrote to her mother of her experience:

"He began by telling me that . . . no composeress had ever succeeded, barring Frau Schumann and Fräulein Mendelssohn, whose songs had been published together with those of their husband and brother, respectively. He told me that a certain Frau Lang had written some really very good songs, but they had no sale. I played him mine, many of which he had already heard me perform in various Leipzig houses, and he expressed himself very willing to take the risk and print them. But would you believe it, having listened to all he had to say about women composers, . . . I asked no fee! Did you ever hear of such a donkey!"

In the end, Breitkopf & Härtel didn't publish the songs, Hase apparently reconsidering his offer. The songs were later published by the firm C.F. Peters as Smyth's Op. 3 and 4.

Smyth made her professional debut on January 26, 1884 with her *String Quintet in E Major, Op. 1*, at the Leipzig Gewandhaus. In the same venue three years later, her *Sonata in A minor for Violin and Piano, Op. 7*, was performed. Neither work was critically well received. The main criticism of the violin sonata was that it was "devoid of feminine charm and therefore unworthy of a woman." Counter to this criticism, Tchaikovsky wrote in his memoirs: ". . . She had

composed several interesting works, the best of which, a violin sonata, I heard excellently played by the composer herself. She gave promise in the future of a serious and talented career."

Smyth completed two orchestral works by the end of 1889: the four-movement *Serenade in D Major*, and her *Overture to Anthony and Cleopatra*. Included on a programme at the Crystal Palace in the Sydenham section of London, the *Serenade* made its debut on April 26, 1890. This concert was particularly important for Smyth's career for two reasons: It was her orchestral debut and the first public performance of any of her works in her native England. The critics in Leipzig had faulted Smyth's Violin Sonata for lack of "feminine charm," and George Bernard Shaw, at the time a music critic for *The Star*, now rejected her *Serenade* for its "daintiness." Shaw wrote:

"First there was a serenade by Miss Smyth, who wrote the analytic program in such terms as to conceal her sex, until she came forward to acknowledge the applause at the end. No doubt Miss Smyth would scorn to claim any indulgence as a woman, and far from me be it to discourage her righteous pride . . . [However,] I am convinced that we should have resented the disappointment less had we known that our patience was being drawn on by a young lady instead of some male Smyth. It is very neat and dainty, this orchestral filigree work; but it is not in its right place on great occasions at Sydenham."

Completed in the summer of 1891, Smyth's next work was her *Mass in D Major* for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, and was what many called her orchestral masterpiece. In a reversal of opinion, George Bernard Shaw, fascinated by the work, called it an antidote for sexism. In a letter to Smyth, Shaw wrote:

"You are totally and diametrically wrong in imagining that you have suffered from a prejudice against feminine music. On the contrary, you have been almost extinguished by the dread of masculine music . . . It was your music that cured me forever of the old delusion that women could not do man's work in art and all other things . . . your Mass will stand up in the biggest company! Magnificent!"

The *Mass in D Major* premièred on January 18, 1893, by the Royal Choral Society at the Royal Albert Hall, playing to a full house and enthusiastic audience. The almost two years' delay from its completion to première was due to the great difficulty in having the Mass accepted for performance. For over a year as she showed the score to various conductors and music directors of British choral societies, Smyth was repeatedly turned down. She later described her experience:

"I found myself up against a brick wall. Chief among the denizens of the Groove at that time were Parry, Stanford, and Sullivan. These men I knew personally, also Sir George Grove; Parry and Sullivan I should have ventured to call my friends. . . . [Yet] not one of them extended a friendly finger to the newcomer – nor of course publishers."

Smyth's close friend and neighbor, exiled Empress Eugenie of France, came to her rescue. Empress Eugenie paid to have the Mass published and inspired the Duke of Edinburgh, then President of the Royal Choral Society, to also help and intervene. As a result of their help and intervention, the Mass was given its première in the most prestigious concert hall in England, the Royal Albert Hall.

Although the scoring of the Mass received good marks, Smyth was discouraged by the reviews, particularly in their patronizing and sexist tone. "Is a female composer possible? No, says your psychologist. . . . With women, however, it is just the impossible that is sure to happen," wrote *The Star's* music critic. Not all of the music critics were dismissive of the importance of the Mass. Recognizing its achievement, music critic of *The Times*, J.A. Fuller-Maitland, wrote:

"This work definitely places the composer among the most eminent composers of her time, and easily at the head of all those of her own sex. The most striking thing about it is the entire absence of the qualities that are usually associated with feminine productions; throughout it is virile, masterly in construction and workmanship, and particularly remarkable for the excellence and rich colour of the orchestration."

While Fuller-Maitland did recognize Smyth's great achievement, he still couched his review in the sexual aesthetics prevalent at the time.

The quality of the *Mass in D Major* was by far and away beyond the typical late 19th-century English choral work due to the vocal parts' originality, the strength and structure of the Mass, and the richness of its orchestration. Yet, despite the work's superiority and its première to a full and enthusiastic audience, it was not performed again until 31 years later, on February 7, 1924, for which Smyth blamed the "old boys' club."

One of Smyth's many efforts to have the Mass performed took her to Munich where she showed the work to the great Wagnerian conductor Hermann Levi and asked about the chances that a performance could be arranged. Levi was impressed with the work and saw within it Smyth's gift for writing dramatic music, leading him to suggest that she compose an opera. Enlisting Henry Brewster as her librettist, Smyth composed her two-act opera *Fantasio*. From the start, Smyth's intention was to mount an opera production in Germany as the opportunities to do so in England were

restricted. Upon learning of Smyth's plan, Levi warned that a woman composer would have little or no chance of mounting an opera production. He advised that she submit her opera under a male pseudonym for an upcoming 1895 international competition. While *Fantasio* didn't win first place, it was among 7 of 110 operas submitted to receive "highly recommended."

Determined more than ever to have a production of *Fantasio* in Germany, Smyth, along with introduction letters from Levi, toured the opera houses in the autumn of 1896. *Fantasio* was finally accepted at Cologne, but the offer was later rescinded when the conductor realized that no singer in the company could adequately perform the difficult title role. Early in 1897, on a chance suggestion during another tour of opera houses, Smyth contacted the authorities at Weimar and, after many delays, *Fantasio* premiered on May 24, 1898. It was again produced 3 years later on February 10, 1901 in Karlsruhe. While *Fantasio* was enthusiastically received, Smyth felt it was a flawed work. She stated, "I think that there is a discrepancy between the music and libretto – far too much passion and violence for such a subject." In 1916, Smyth received all of the remaining vocal scores from the publisher, which weighed over a ton. Making a bonfire, she burned all of them and fertilized her garden with the ashes.

Smyth returned to England after *Fantasio*'s Karlsruhe production to finish the full score of her second opera, *Der Wald* (The Forest). She was determined to get it produced – if not for herself, then for the women who would follow. In a 1902 letter she wrote, "I feel I must fight for *Der Wald* because I want women to turn their minds to big and difficult jobs, not just go on hugging the shore, afraid to put out to sea." Smyth wrote the story of *Der Wald* and, with Henry Brewster's assistance, she wrote the libretto. *Der Wald* premiered in Berlin on April 21, 1902, with some hisses being heard from the audience. The opera's production three months later in London's Covent Garden was a great success and broke attendance records. Describing the Covent Garden premiere Smyth said, ". . . the only real blazing theatre triumph I have ever had." On March 11, 1903, Smyth had the singular distinction of being the first woman composer to have an opera (*Der Wald*) performed by the Metropolitan Opera in New York. It would be 113 years before another opera composed by a woman was produced by the Met. On December 1, 2016, the opera *L'Amour de Loin*, by Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho, was performed; the orchestra was conducted by Susanna Malkki, only the fourth woman to conduct in what was, at the time, the Met's 136 year history.

The Met's production of *Der Wald* was a hit, and was the highest grossing production all year. *The New York Times* wrote, "When the curtain fell, the audience roared their unyielding approval for 10 to 15 minutes. Smyth took seven curtain calls and left the stage . . . [with] flowers by the cartload." The reviews were mixed, with most critics rejecting the opera, stating the music was too muscular for a woman composer. "This little woman writes music with a masculine hand and has a sound and logical brain, such as is supposed to the especial gift of the rougher sex. There is not a weak or effeminate note in *Der Wald*, nor an unstable sentiment," wrote *The Telegraph*. *The New York World* took it even further, "Her work is utterly unfeminine. It lacks sweetness and grace of phrase." Dissenting from the mainstream, the *Daily Mail* wrote, "The charm and quaintness of it will appeal more than its attempt to mirror intense human emotion and to this extent it is feminine, according to all tradition."

Throughout Smyth's career, sexual aesthetics again and again permeated the reviews of her music. If she created a successful work, then she had, therefore, composed like a man, with the implication being that her success came at the expense of her femininity. A widespread belief of the time was that women who achieved in male-dominated fields were "unsexed phenomena." From the *Musical Courier's* March 18, 1903 review of *Der Wald*, ". . . Not as the music of a woman should Miss Smyth's score be judged. She thinks in masculine terms, broad and virile. . . . The gifted Englishwoman has successfully emancipated herself from her sex." Present-day music critic and professor Dr. Eugene Gates writes:

"Smyth's music was seldom evaluated as simply the work of a composer among composers, but as that of a "woman composer." This worked to keep her on the margins of the profession, and, coupled with the double standard of sexual aesthetics, also placed her in a double bind. On the one hand, when she composed powerful, rhythmically vital music, it was said that her work lacked feminine charm; on the other, when she produced delicate, melodious compositions, she was accused of not measuring up to the artistic standards of her male colleagues."

Commenting on the dichotomy of the perceptions of her music, Smyth wrote, "The exact worth of my music will probably not be known till naught remains of the author but sexless dots and lines on ruled paper."

Begun in 1903 during her struggle to arrange another performance of *Der Wald*, Smyth's third and best known opera, *The Wreckers*, was completed in May 1904 and premiered on November 11, 1906 in Leipzig. A second production was performed a month later in Prague. Smyth tried to mount the opera in other European opera houses, to no avail. She wrote, "I have spent years fighting abroad. I have given that up as hopeless. Now I mean to fight for my place in my own country, a place which everyone knows I deserve. But it must be proved." To obtain her "proof," Smyth submitted *The Wreckers* to Covent Garden, hoping the opera would be given "fair and sympathetic consideration." Instead, Smyth was

informed that, in future, no opera would be produced by Covent Garden that had not established its success abroad, ignoring the fact that *The Wreckers* had been produced at two of the leading continental opera houses. Undaunted, Smyth decided to make *The Wreckers* better known by presenting the first two acts as a concert version at Queen's Hall on May 28, 1908. The concert was an unqualified success, with the choral writing and orchestration being praised by the majority of critics. Even so, one critic's patronizing comment was, ". . . a remarkable achievement – for a woman." The first London production of *The Wreckers* was six performances in June 1909 at His Majesty's Theatre, and was produced by Sir Thomas Beecham. The next year, *The Wreckers* was included in Beecham's first season at Covent Garden. Many years later, Beecham wrote, "[It] is one of the three or four English operas of real musical merit and vitality."

By 1910, all of Smyth's major works to that point had been performed. That year the University of Durham recognized her with an honorary Doctor of Music and, in 1926, Oxford University also gave her an honorary doctorate. In 1922, Smyth became the first female composer awarded the Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire, the female equivalent of a knighthood, bestowed because her compositions were of the highest quality achieved by a woman.

As Smyth was beginning to garner the musical recognition that she had for so long strived, she experienced a several years' decline of her creative output due to outside circumstances. The 1908 death of her lover and artistic collaborator, Henry Brewster, profoundly affected her. Writing in her memoir, "I felt then like a rudderless ship aimlessly drifting hither and thither." Women's voting rights had become a major political issue and Smyth decided to devote two years to the cause. In 1910, she joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a militant branch of the suffrage movement. The founder of the WSPU was Emmeline Pankhurst, with whom Smyth had fallen in love. Although late in joining the suffragettes, Smyth became a key contributor, participating in demonstrations and civil disobedience (for which she received a two-month prison term for throwing a rock through a politician's window), made speeches and wrote articles, but most importantly, composed *The March of the Women*, which the WSPU adopted as their battle-cry. Smyth adopted the WSPU colors to add to her eccentric wardrobe, not caring what anyone thought. Recalled Sylvia Pankhurst, a leader in the suffrage movement:

" . . . Wearing a small mannish hat, battered and old, plain-cut country clothes . . . she would don a tie of the brightest purple, white and green, or some hideous purple cotton jacket, or other oddity in the WSPU colours she was so proud of, which shone out from her incongruously, like a new gate to old palings."

In an ironic coincidence, the fate that had afflicted the composer of music that had drawn Smyth to devote her life, now became her fate. At age 54 in 1912, Smyth began to hear ringing in her ears, which gradually progressed to the loss of her hearing. In a special concert of her music in 1934, Smyth was unable to hear the music or ovation, just as Beethoven had been unable to hear the performance of his Symphony No. 9 and its applause. Before deafness brought to a close her life as a composer, Smyth was able to complete only four major works, feeling silenced by what she called a "death grapple."

With her stint with WSPU having ended, Smyth decided in the fall of 1913 to compose another opera. In an effort to cope with her hearing loss, and to avoid further temptation from political involvement, Smyth toured Egypt and composed her comic opera *The Boatswain's Mate*. As one of Smyth's most revolutionary works, the opera is a hybrid: the first half is spoken dialogue and music, and the second half is entirely instrumental. The opera premiered on January 28, 1916 in London, and has proved to be Smyth's most popular work. Per one critic: ". . . [*The Boatswain's Mate*] is one of the merriest, most tuneful, and most delightful comic operas ever put on the stage." Smyth's view on composing comic opera:

". . . what I try to do in my comedies is to bring out the human side, pathetic or funny as the case may be, just as it comes along in our twentieth century; not dressed up, either, but in its ordinary workaday clothes . . . my object is to set life to music as I myself have seen and overheard it, in trains, in buses, in my own village, on my own golf course."

Smyth's final major composition was *The Prison* (1929–30), a work she called a "symphony" (in lower case) to denote an ancient Greek idea of "concordance" of sweet sounds, not the orchestral form. Based upon Henry Brewster's *The Prison: A Dialogue*, it is a discussion between the Prisoner (Bass) and the Soul (Soprano) on the imminent end of life and how best to prepare for it. Smyth conducted the world première of *The Prison* on February 19, 1931 at Usher Hall in Edinburgh. Neville Cardus wrote in his review in the *Manchester Guardian*:

". . . Dame Ethel's genius goes beyond music; it is a genius of character, and it expresses itself in all the ways of her life. . . . *The Prison* is one of the most remarkable works of our time. The beauties of it are not common. Dame Ethel writes from convictions not shared by the crowd. She measures her art against big subjects. Not for her the male pipings which nowadays are to be heard in too many British works that apparently cannot run a dozen bars without making a noise like a cuckoo."

It was in 1930 that Smyth, age 71, met and fell in love with Virginia Woolf. Writing in her diary, "I don't think I have ever cared for anyone more profoundly." Of their first meeting, Woolf wrote, "[Ethel Smyth] has descended upon me like a wolf on the fold in purple and gold, terrifically strident and enthusiastic – I like her – she is as shabby as a

washerwoman and shouts and sings . . . As a writer she is astonishingly efficient – takes every fence.” Their love affair lasted until Woolf's suicide in 1941.

Smyth advocated "creative acceptance" as the best attitude for one to have in later life. "If you find your former activities impossible, you must not be passively resigned to that, but find other activities that are possible." Smyth had always developed her interests and talents. Deprived of the ability to compose, she now took up writing. During the period between 1919 and 1940, Smyth published ten highly successful books, which were mostly autobiographical, and wrote numerous articles and essays on a wide variety of subjects for magazines and newspapers. One subject she passionately championed in her writings was that of equal rights for women musicians. She wrote: "The whole English attitude towards women in fields of art is ludicrous and uncivilized. There is no sex in art. How you play the violin, paint, or compose is what matters."

Throughout Smyth's life, she steadfastly fought for the right of women to compete equally with men as professional composers, and the degree of sexual discrimination to which she was subjected would have thwarted others. Regrettably, the time she spent circumventing the prejudices of music publishers, critics, conductors, and opera syndicates could have been devoted to composing. Smyth once wrote:

"As regards chances given, may I say with all the emphasis at my command, that but for possessing three things that have nothing to do with musical genius: (1) an iron constitution, (2) a fair share of fighting spirit, and (3), most important of all, a small but independent income, loneliness and discouragement would have vanquished me years ago."

Nevertheless, she persisted.

On May 8, 1944, Smyth died at age 86 of pneumonia. Her musical body of work encompasses orchestral and chamber music, operas and librettos, concertos, piano and organ works, chorals, and vocal pieces. Most notable of her works are *The Wreckers*, *Mass in D Major*, *Concerto for Violin and Horn*, *String Quartet in E minor*, and the chorus *Hey Nonny No*. A resurgence of interest in Smyth's music is taking place after years of undeserved disregard. Her *Mass in D Major* and *The Wreckers*, in addition to several of her other works, have recently been performed in major professional performances in Britain, Germany, and the United States, and have been commercially recorded.

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1. Statistics from Suby Raman's website article, [Graphing Gender in America's Top Orchestras](#), November 18, 2014.

2. Statistics from Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's website article by Ricky O'Bannon, [By the Numbers: Female Composers](#).