

JOAN TRIMBLE

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Joan Trimble may only be remembered as one half of the superb piano duo with her sister, Valerie, who died in 1980. It is often forgotten that Valerie was a fine cellist.

Joan was born on 18 June 1915 in Orchard Terrace, Enniskillen in Northern Ireland. Her father, William Egbert, was a journalist and her mother, Marie (nee Dowse) was a musician being a professional violinist. Joan's paternal grandfather was the historian and poet William Copeland Trimble and a cousin of Joan's grandmother was the Irish composer William Vincent Wallace (1812 - 1865) who lived a very exciting life and composed a highly successful opera 'Maritana'.



There was always music at home. Joan learned the violin and played Bach's famous 'Double Violin Concerto' with her mother. It was her Mother who taught her to play both the violin and the piano.

Joan's awakening to music came in the 1920s when she heard the superlative 'Piano Concerto no. 2' by Bartok and, like her friend, Humphrey Searle was bowled over on hearing the first broadcast of Berg's 'Wozzeck'. She also gave an early performance of the 'Piano Sonata no. 2' by Paul Hindemith to the considerable interest of Sir Hugh Allen who was director of the Royal College of Music at the time.

Joan was educated at the Enniskillen Royal School for girls between 1920 and 1932 and won a scholarship to Trinity College, Dublin, graduating with a BA in music in 1936. During 1931 to 1936 she also studied at the Royal Academy of Music in Dublin and was given the opportunity to go on tour with Count John McCormack playing piano solos. In Dublin she heard Heifetz, Kriesler, Paderewski, Tetrassini and Tauber. She also saw Beecham conduct but, understandably, preferred Mengelberg. She also received her LRAM in piano playing in 1935.

In 1936 she went up to the Royal College of Music in London where she stayed until 1940. She received her BMus in 1937. Some of her fellow and later students were Neville Mariner, Anthony Hopkins, Alan Loveday, Julian Bream, Colin Davis and Norman Del Mar as well as the composers Bernard Stevens and Adrian Cruft. The student she most liked was Humphrey Searle. "He was, without doubt, the cleverest student of them all and we used to go to him to solve our musical problems. We could never catch him out", Joan wrote.

On 27 June 1942 Joan married a GP, Dr John Greenwood Gant at St Columba's Church of Scotland in London. They had three children, Nicholas, born 1944, Joanne, born 1948, who is a BMus, and Consie, born 1950 who is an oil executive.

Although British, Joan had strong links with Ireland. She remembers an Irish singer at RIAM singing an arrangement of 'Una Bhan' which moved her deeply. So much of her music is Irish. 'My Grief on the Sea' of 1937 is a translation from the Irish by Douglas Hyde; 'The Humours of Carrick' (1938) and 'The Bard of Lisgoole' (1938), both for two pianos, were given at a recital the Royal Dublin Society in November 1938. Other early works include 'Erin Go Bragh' (1943) for brass band and 'The County Mayo' for baritone and two pianos of 1940, which was commissioned by the BBC. That year also saw the completion of the 'Phantasy Trio' which won the Cobbett prize.

In 1953 she composed her 'Suite for Strings' and in 1967 in response to a commission from the BBC to write the opera 'Blind Rafferty' to a libretto by Cedric Cliffe after Donn Byrne. It is in two acts and lasts about an hour. It was the year that both her parents died. Her father on February 10 aged 84 years and her mother in July aged 80 years.

The outbreak of the Second World War and the death of her sister made an great impression on Joan and she rediscovered the poetry of Rupert Brooke. In May 1983 she received a honorary MA from Queens in Belfast and a Honorary FRIAM from Dublin in November 1985.

Joan would say, "as a composer one has to be true to oneself... one cannot get rid of one's background and upbringing. But in some cases it seriously hindered some composers who could only write music in that style that is merely a reflection of their environment and of their class".

She hated the class distinction divide.

She was concerned that she was sometimes called a miniaturist and labelled as a "folk musician". She once told me, "People who say this know little of folk music and much less, analytically of my music. What may come out of it is sub-conscious as regards any Irish elements. The French influence is there as well. I can be on the same wavelengths as Bartok or Janacek".

She would say that composition is hard work both physically and mentally and that women composers often bear the burden of elderly relatives to care for her husband began a long and progressive illness in 1974..

She was on the staff at RCM from 1959 to 1977 and, from 1960, director, later managing director, of Impartial Reporter in Enniskillen becoming Chairman of the Board in 1992. She has been on the Board of Ulster Television and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland during the 1980s.

All her music is traditional, tonal but very attractive. It may be a little unfair to select specific items but her song 'Green Rain' is a gem and her 'Sonatina for two pianos' should be taken up. Some of her music is now available on MP 8.225059.

She was a fascinating person who, like my friend Gerard Victory could talk intelligently and in depth on a whole range of subjects. We had a long conversation at one time about Carolan, I recall.

She was a modest lady and when I asked her about Irish music she replied, "It is time that Charles Villers Stanford was recognised."

Joan died on 6th August 2000. Her total output of music is probably less than three hours in duration. Her claim to fame must be the many broadcasts and concerts she gave with her sister; and those of us who heard them and have archive recordings of their playing and also knew and loved these two lovely ladies are not going to forget them.

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