

Ruth Gipps

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Sir Thomas Beecham once said, 'There are no women composers, never have been and possibly never will be'. He was wrong; Ruth Gipps is a case in point. I will go as far as to say that, in my opinion, she is the only British woman to have composed a first class tonal symphony.

She was born on 20 February 1921 at Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex. Her father, Bryan, was the eighth child of an army officer and studied the violin at Frankfurt Conservatoire where he met a Swiss student, H el ene Johner, whom he married in 1907. Mrs. Gipps pursued a very successful career as a piano teacher; her husband's career was not so fortunate. He was invalided out of the army in 1919 with double pneumonia, worked for the Board of Trade for a while and, at one stage, was reduced to attempting a livelihood with cigarette machines. Ruth was so named because of her mother's religiosity although she was a Christian Scientist who did not believe in pain or any malady, which created many an interesting situation in the Gipps household. Young Ruth was a rebel as soon as she was able to be so; for example she rejected her Christian name, preferring 'Widdy', an invention of her own. To this day, her colleagues and friends call her Wid.



She began piano lessons with her mother when she was four and played a Grieg A minor waltz, untaught, and later that year, 1925, made her d ebut at a concert in the Grotrian Hall, London. In 1928, she went as a weekly boarder to Brickwall School, Northiam. In 1929, she performed her first composition, The Fairy Shoemaker, at a concert in the Brighton Festival. The publishers, Forsyth, bought it outright for a guinea and a half!

Ruth's studies continued. Her second school, The Gables, was a 'prep' school for boys which would take sisters of boys who had been there. This suited Ruth's tomboy demeanour. The next landmark in her career was a d ebut concerto performance with the Hastings Municipal Orchestra then conducted by the temperamental Julius Harrison; the auditions scheme was arranged by Mrs. Gipps, who was secretary of the local branch of the Music Teachers' Association. This notable event took place in March 1931 with the first movement of Haydn's D major concerto. Later that year, the complete work was given and, consequently, many concert engagements followed for this child prodigy. During the latter part of that year, and, in fact, well into 1933, Ruth suffered from the undermining atmosphere of the Bexhill County School where she was now a pupil. It was an establishment ruled by fear: the Headmistress was autocratic, the premises cold, and there was unchecked bullying. Eventually, Ruth left school for medical reasons when she was only twelve and a half years old.

In 1934, the Gipps family moved to a large detached house in De La Warr Road, which later became the Bexhill School of Music. For Christmas 1935, Ruth was given her own baby grand by her brother, Bryan. She had already taken her final grade examinations and won an open concerto class in a North London Music Festival with the first movement of Beethoven's Emperor Concerto. This was remarkable

in the musical climate of those days when the establishment displayed prejudice against youth and, in particular, the female sex. When, for example, Mrs. Gipps put her daughter's name forward for another MTA concert in Hastings, Julius Harrison accused H  l  ne Gipps of 'organising the concerts solely for Ruth's benefit'. However, this girl won the judge's heart with her playing of the Beethoven at the Hastings Festival. When the time came for the public concert, Harrison was ill and the deputy conductor took over.

Another example of this unseemly attitude occurred when Ruth was fourteen and entered for the Performer's LRAM. She was successful with both the paperwork and aural tests but failed the practical. Three months later, the result was the same and, again, the following summer. Each time the same male examiner headed the Board. There is absolutely no doubt that her brother's conclusion that Ruth was failing not through inability but owing to her age and sex, was right. Ruth was very talented, to say the least, but she was too young and, to top it all, she was a girl!

Undaunted, she tried for ARCM and was successful at her first attempt in Christmas 1936. A month later, she entered the Royal College of Music. She had wanted to study piano with the legendary Solomon, but his fee of five guineas a lesson was beyond her means. In any event, at an audition she found the great man extremely rude and condescending. Though her admiration was unabated this only served to compound Ruth's self-assertion with a determination that has never deserted her. She became hardened and was disliked as a result. For some years she must have been difficult to live with, but this was her self-defence against the system of autarchy in which she found herself.

At College she went to R O Morris for composition and theory. Morris was a formidable but quiet man – tall, straight, grey-haired and very kind. On one occasion when his student criticised Rubbra's orchestration of Brahms's Handel Variations, he merely smiled. The death of Harold Samuel meant piano studies were taken with Herbert Fryer. Here she felt she was treated as a child and became understandably angry, frustrated and increasingly bad-mannered. She transferred to Arthur Alexander for piano lessons; joined the choral classes conducted by Reginald Jacques, whose very fine accompanist was an older student, later becoming the outstanding conductor, Charles Groves. Ruth was a workaholic; she composed Mazeppa's Ride Op 1 for female chorus and orchestra and Reginald Goodall undertook to conduct it with his ladies' choir at the College. After fifteen minutes rehearsal, it was abandoned as 'too difficult' and, sadly, Mazeppa has not ridden again.

The College's first orchestra usually had Malcolm Sargent in charge and there were guest conductors such as Goossens and the brilliant Constant Lambert. Its leader was Cecil Aronowitz, a delightful and unassuming man, and in a performance of Bach's B minor Mass, there was a very clever but cheeky seventeen-year-old, Malcolm Arnold.

Wid also met Marion Brough, likewise learning piano and oboe. Ruth's love for the oboe had begun when she attended a Beethoven concert given by the London Philharmonic Orchestra in Bexhill in 1936. Eventually these two students formed a duo; in fact Ruth Gipps took every opportunity to accompany any instrumentalist. So she gained a valuable insight into instrumentation, a marvellous practical experience, the fruits of which are evident in her own orchestral works, such as the Symphony No 2 Op 30 and the superbly-conceived Symphony No 4 Op 61.

In 1938, Ruth 'moved up' to have oboe lessons with the master himself, Leon Goossens, but she was overwhelmed, even afraid of him, so she continued to study this instrument with Harold Shepley. The following March. She went to Durham University and passed the first part of her baccalaureate in music. Six months later, she was successful with part two. It was an eventful year for her. She met her future husband, the clarinettist, Robert Baker, and began composition lessons with Gordon Jacob, a sympathetic and magnificent teacher who, incidentally, curbed his student's tactlessness, largely by treating her as a person, with the courtesy and consideration to which students are entitled. It was he who conducted the tone poem Knight in Armour Op 8 with the College orchestra, a work that was to



take on great significance later. Piano studies continued with Kendall Taylor; in 1940 she won a Cobbett prize with her string quartet Sabrina Op 13; she completed her Clarinet Concerto Op 9 for her fiancé and began studies with Vaughan Williams. Once she took Robert to a lesson to perform the clarinet and piano piece The Kelpie of Cornevreckan Op 5b, expecting some praise. Instead they were advised to 'go out and get married'. In 1949 she met the Chichester-born conductor, George Weldon, then conductor of the Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra. It was suggested that he conduct a concert at Bexhill where Miss Gipps should play a concerto. She offered Brahms's Second. Weldon protested on the grounds that it was a work of overwhelming difficulty for a girl of nineteen. Anxious to please, Ruth offered to learn any concerto in a month. Weldon considered this to be conceit and said if her manners did not improve she would not get anywhere.

Incidentally, she played the Brahms second concerto many times in her career and always with outstanding results. For example, the Shrewsbury chronicle of 9 March 1951 wrote 'the rhythmic drive was compelling and her whole interpretation was according to the best traditions in Brahms playing. Taking everything in her stride and making light of technical difficulties, she brought off a performance which must have been a revelation to every pianist in the audience'.

Ruth Gipps entered for the Caird Scholarship, submitting a wordless Rhapsody Op 18 for soprano and small orchestra. One of the examiners was the much-feared Sir Edward Bairstow who argued that there was no point in writing for the voice and not using language. Should the student remind him that Debussy, Vaughan Williams and Rachmaninov had done so? The scholarship was won but, as it was wartime, travel was restricted and no benefit ensued. Instead Miss Gipps became an ARP warden.

For the third and final part of her B Mus, the Quintet Op 16 for oboe, clarinet and string trio was composed and accepted. It was her first work to be performed before the general public. This was in the Wigmore Hall in 1941; the composer was only 21. In the summer of 1941, she won another Cobbett prize with the Piano Quartet: Brocade Op 17. There were studies of many concertos with Weldon who emphasized what a conductor expects from a soloist and how ensemble can best be achieved. These lessons were about ten days apart and the student had to produce a different concerto from memory each time. That would have been impossible for someone not totally committed or competent, but this student's inexhaustible capacity for work, combined with her technical ability, was equal to the brutal demands made on her. In 1942, she again played the notoriously difficult second concerto of Brahms with the Modern Symphony Orchestra conducted by Arthur Dennington and, that same year, Marion Brough gave a performance of Ruth Gipps's Oboe Concerto Op 20; Kneale Kelly gave the première of the Variations on Byrd's 'Non Nobis' Op 7 at Buxton, but the most notable event that year was the performance of Knight in Armour conducted by Sir Henry Wood at the Last Night of the Proms on 22 August. Wood was so keen to find new composers that he personally visited the various publishing houses. From Max Hinrichsen at Novello's he collected Knight in Armour and ensured a packed house for its performance by putting it in the programme for the last night. It was well received, winning congratulations from Wood, Boult and Basil Cameron. Some of the audience and reviewers referred to the composer as a 'mere girl', forgetting that musical ability or artistic talent is not dependent on sex, age or experience.

On 19 March, 1942, Ruth Gipps married Robert Baker who had obtained leave from his RAF posting in the Orkney Islands. She also commenced piano studies with one of the all-time-greats, Tobias Matthay, at his home in Haslemere. He was then eighty-five years old and his natural abilities had not abated. Another stroke of good fortune befell her. She was asked at short notice to deputise for the second oboe

at a concert in Brighton which meant that she found herself next to Leon Goossens. Now began a rapport, and private lessons were arranged. Such was the excellence of her playing that Sargent asked her to play the cor anglais in Sibelius's *The Swan of Tuonela* in Liverpool. Such a vote of confidence was not misplaced. The performance was described as 'exquisite and the breath control marvellous'. Sargent also asked her to play the obligato in Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and insisted that she stand after one item. Sargent's courtesy in treating her as a musician in her own right and not as a woman or a youngster benefited her enormously. Another man in the same mould as Jacob and Sargent was Sir Arthur Bliss - about this time he was Head of Music at the BBC and showed her great kindness.

Death on a Pale Horse Op25 is a short tone poem inspired by the apocalyptic painting by William Blake. It was first performed in November 1943 in the Town Hall, Birmingham, by the CBO under Weldon. It has been described as 'one of a countless number of minor nature impressions'; 'truly impressive although not very advanced in idiom'; 'a short but extremely striking work, having shape, some passages being particularly vivid, notably the final dynamic clash as the culmination of a mystic theme accompanied by drum-beats'.

Securing the position of second oboe and cor anglais with the CBO, Mrs Baker moved to that city in 1944. When Kendall Taylor was delayed in traffic Ruth Gipps deputised at very short notice in Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto*. On other occasions she deputised for, among others, Samson François, Nina Milkina and Shulamith Shafir. Consequently Weldon was accused of favouritism and ugly rumours were circulated that while Mr Baker was serving his country his wife and Weldon 'could not have been having a closer association'. When in March 1945, Ruth Gipps was soloist in Glazunov's *Piano Concerto No 1* and then played the cor anglais part in the first performance of her own *Symphony No 1 in F minor Op 22* in a concert conducted by Weldon, Ruth Baker was said by some to be Weldon's mistress and that there was 'an impending divorce'. The facts of the matter are that Weldon was inadequate domestically and a bachelor and Mrs Baker came to his aid; musically she was a versatile and accomplished all-rounder. The only impropriety was the jealousy directed at her.

The symphony is dedicated to Weldon who called it 'lovely music' but such was the jealousy shown to the composer that a member of the orchestra tried to wreck the performance by deliberately making obvious mistakes. It should be remembered that this symphony won an RCM composition prize and that one of the judges was Vaughan Williams. The composer appeared loath to part with the £7 prize - a condescending attitude that showed itself to female students. Many believed that the musical world was a male stronghold. The *Birmingham Post* wrote of the symphony that 'it is not a great work... has traces of Vaughan Williams... the most consistent movement is the arresting scherzo; the most impressive the finale'. The *Birmingham Gazette* reported, 'the first movement is the least excellent, attempting to achieve effect by too much repetition; the second movement is full of many beauties that should be tasted again; the scherzo is a brilliant piece of work and the key to it all lies in the finale, where, having built the solid and sure foundations the composer allows the imagination to roam and seek out new ways'.

Whatever Beecham thought of women composers, he did show courtesy to Bryan Gipps and his sister when they played through to him her *Violin Concerto Op 24*. This dates from 1943 and its first concert performance was given by Bryan Gipps and the *Modern Symphony Orchestra* conducted by Arthur Dennington on 5 February 1944. This work is not a showpiece, but it is agreeable and makes for innocuous listening. One critic said it was a work 'revealing more definite character... of considerable merit... closely woven yet generously conceived'. Another work for a solo string instrument was the *Jane Grey Fantasy Op 15* for viola and strings. It is dedicated to Nova Pilbeam who acted that part in the film *Tudor Rose*. The music is in three sections: Jane as a girl, as a queen, and on the scaffold. It is a work of great interest and worthy of revival. Its first performance with Herbert Lumby as soloist dates from 19 May 1951.

The first work of Gipps's maturity is probably the *Symphony No 2 Op 30*, which was initially conceived

while on holiday with her husband and George Weldon at Holywell Bay. The work, given its first performance on 3 October 1946 in Birmingham with the CBO under Weldon, is in one movement but having several sections. The opening *Moderato* is broad and almost heroic; the following *Allegro moderato* has a long violin melody and the music retains a leisurely pace; tutti are well-judged since they evolve from the natural progression of the music. A second theme is accompanied by the harp with telling effect and the music heads towards a climax. The *Andante* has a relaxed pastoral feel and contains some serene music above a lilting background; a strong *maestoso* section precedes a march introduced by piccolo and snare-drum which then builds up tremendously. The music subsides into an *Adagio* with a simple string version of an earlier theme. Another *Allegro moderato* begins with a second theme of the first movement but transposed down a tone. Again the music is leisurely and needs more rhythmic drive and variety to gain structural integrity. Perhaps the music loses its way here before the final *Allegro* begins in restrained fashion. The closing pages are outstanding for the way in which the composer displays her evident communicative skills at their best, and this, along with the obvious expertise in orchestration, are features of this fine work. These features are developed further in the *Symphony No 4*. For some, however, the worrying feature of several of Gipps's works is the lack of contrast in tempi which does not show the composer to best advantage. She once told me that she neither writes music that is very fast or very slow. Music that is merely of a leisurely pace, as in the case of certain composers of long symphonies, sometimes uses the definition *Allegro*, thus concealing its composer's inability to write or maintain quick music, and so manifests a serious fundamental weakness in compositional skill. When Haydn wrote an *Allegro* it was one! However, of the *Symphony No 2*, the *Birmingham Gazette* wrote that the composer 'handles one-movement form convincingly though one feels that the material is too derivative and immature; there is no positive sense of urgency about her utterance despite its pleasantness'. The *Birmingham Post* reported 'this short, complex and highly original work has something positive to say... it is finely wrought in texture and design. The key-plan is wholly satisfying despite its long desertion of its nominal tonality. The sharp, brief contrast of frivolous scherzo and restful *adagio* as a central dramatic turning point is very telling; and the thematic material is decisive and characterful' The *Birmingham Despatch* appreciated the skilled economy of the writing but regretted that the musical ideas were 'not quite expansive enough'. The *Birmingham Mail* complained that the work left 'an empty feeling in the air'. Others commented on its 'distinct style' and declared that the piece 'brims over with exultant youthful gaiety and, at times, reckless abandon'.

In March 1947, Ruth Gipps passed the first part of her Music Doctorate at Durham University. Two months later her son, Lance, was born. For the final part of her doctorate she began work on the substantial cantata, *The Cat Op 32* for contralto, baritone, chorus and orchestra. In February 1948, the university accepted the work and Mrs Baker, not quite twenty-seven years old, was a Doctor of Music. By every standard that is some achievement both academically and, in view of the cruel opposition of jealousy and hostility shown to her, emotionally. The establishment certainly did not approve of 'an impertinent young woman' who had obtained a Durham D Mus by examination. Despite Ruth's repeated requests over many years to have her qualifications placed against her entry in the *Oxford Dictionary*, this was not done. *The Cat* is a very beautiful piece of music born of a genuine and entirely unwhimsical devotion to the subject of cats. It is a truly fresh and likeable work; not in a contemporary idiom and there is no complex vocal polyphony. There are some wonderful and tender moments, rich in effect. The skilful use of voices and orchestra and a conviction and warmth that may have been lacking in earlier works'. So wrote one Birmingham paper after the first performance on 20 February 1952 at the Birmingham Town Hall with Edith Hack and Stanley Mason as soloists and the composer conducting. The *Prelude* had been given separately and earlier in October 1948 in a concert in which the gifted Australian pianist, Noel Mewton-Wood, had performed the *Bliss Piano Concerto*.

That same year Mrs Baker completed her *Piano Concerto Op34* which was an instant success. It was written for her mother who 'asked for it'. The *Birmingham Post* was not over-reacting when it wrote 'given a chance this work would prove acceptable to the Grieg-Tchaikovsky public. The war-horse first movement is followed by a truly delightful set of miniature variations and a playful playbox

chinoiserie which mainly colours the finale. The work is strong and in a late-romantic style fortunately free from obvious clichés and padding and loose-jointedness. Its matter is alive; its orchestral and keyboard writing admirable; its appeal is immediate but none the worse for that'. The present writer would go further; it is probably the best piano concerto written by a female composer and that is not a condescending remark; with the concertos by Searle, Apivov, Rawsthorne and the masterpiece by Bliss it stands its ground. A really fine work!

Many interesting and advantageous innovations came into being during and immediately following the Second World War. The Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) was founded by three women - Seymour Winyates, Mary Glasgow and Gladys Crook. Mary Glasgow was its first president. CEMA organised chamber concerts for artists who had passed their audition procedure; Dr Gipps was engaged for a single concert which attracted a fee of five guineas plus expenses. During some weeks of the war there were concerts, some starting at midnight, in factories to boost the morale of the work-force. For a week's work in such a venture the usual fee was about £17 plus hotel accommodation. Later, when CEMA was transformed into the Arts Council of Great Britain, the three women who had so marvellously pioneered the work were somewhat summarily replaced. Incidentally, Ruth Gipps once gave a recital with a then-unknown contralto, Kathleen Ferrier.

These three wonderful women in CEMA were wrongly sacked to give way for Britten appears to take over. They had cowardly fled to the USA to escape the War but when the USA said that they would call up everyone in the country Britten and Pears returned to England. I have seen and handled all this correspondence including Britten's venomous letters and therefore what I say is true.

The Composers Guild was founded shortly after the end of the war by such distinguished figures as Bliss, William Alwyn and Guy Warrack with Vaughan Williams as its first president. Warrack was the highly accomplished conductor of the BBC Scottish Orchestra for many years, broadcasting a very wide repertoire and being allowed to choose his own programmes. Many years later, in the 1960s, he initiated the idea of a British Music Information

Centre having visited such centres in other countries and realised their tremendous value and obvious potential. There was no hesitation in inviting Dr Gipps to be a member of the Composers Guild of Great Britain and she represented it in the Midlands with the unremitting zeal with which she always applied herself. She served for two separate periods of five years, each on the Executive Committee in London. In 1966, her friend and fellow composer, Adrian Cruft, was Guild chairman and she succeeded him in 1967. Cruft's keen business acumen eliminated the Guild's debt of £3000; he raised a Gulbenkian grant which enabled the BMIC to open in November 1967, the ceremony being conducted by Lord Goodman.

Returning to 1948, with the completion of the splendid Piano Concerto, Dr Gipps became chorus master of the City of Birmingham Choir with its financial reward of £120 per annum; she was also conductor of the Birmingham Co-op Amateur Orchestra with a salary of £150 per annum; she enjoyed several concerto engagements a year at fifteen guineas a time and wrote programme notes at ten and sixpence each effort. There were also the many unpaid tasks: for example the conductorship of the CBSO Listeners' Club Ladies' Choir and the editorship of the CBSO magazine. In addition, her husband was the principal clarinet in the CBSO so this meant that for about three years things were settled and going well. Of course, there were snags. Anthony Lewis of Birmingham University and others gave her no work whereas unprejudiced persons would have welcomed with open arms the employment of such a competent and versatile individual. Envy showed itself in other ways. She was told it was 'bad form' to be called Dr Gipps when she was conducting. She ignored these comments, and rightly so. Finances were restricted particularly when the Bakers took out their first mortgage. Then, sadly, things began to go wrong. George Weldon was sacked as conductor of the Birmingham Orchestra although the official statement indicates that he was asked to resign. Sir John Barbirolli was understandably furious at the despicable treatment dished out to Weldon and, consequently, made him associate conductor of the Hallé. Weldon was always a popular conductor and very able. For example, although

not in sympathy with the music, he conducted the first performance of Humphrey Searle's Piano Concerto No 2, which Barbirolli said was 'technically beyond him' [personally], at the Cheltenham Festival in 1955. Dr Gipps was not even considered to succeed Weldon as conductor of the City of Birmingham Choir; a woman conductor was thought 'indecent'. David Willcocks, who was always against Gipps and often viciously so, got the job and he certainly did not need a chorus master – least of all a woman. Undaunted, Mrs Baker applied for a post with BBC Midlands but was told in the clearest possible terms at the interview that she could not have the job because men would not, and could not, be expected to work for a woman. However, she did secure part-time lecture-recitals for Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy in the North Midlands and Oxford areas which paid £4 a time, though this meant driving about 500 miles a week.

By the time she was thirty-three, her right hand, injured in a bicycle accident when she was twelve, completely gave way. For a pianist this is the ultimate fear and after some indecisive and painful days, Dr Gipps decided to concentrate on being a conductor. Music was her life, her joy and her natural gift; it could not possibly be abandoned or sacrificed, and although her own musical compositions and her inexhaustible contribution to music is shamefully neglected today, this indomitable lady kept going. Herbert Howells once described her as 'go-getter Ruth'. Her go-getting was never selfish. The list of young musicians given *début* concerts and other encouragements by her generosity and kindness is extensive.

It was Adrian Cruft who landed Mrs Baker her first opportunity to conduct a professional band - the Boyd Neel orchestra in September 1954. He was then the orchestra's sub-principal double bass. In those days a conductor had to pay for the first conducting date. Cruft provided his friend with the funds, £50, as Dr Gipps had no spare monies. The concert took place in Birmingham Town Hall with an all Mozart programme: symphonies 39 and 40, Piano Concerto No 23 with a young pianist, Dola Harris, and Robert Baker playing the sublime Clarinet Concerto. Some months earlier another act of kindness enabled Dr Gipps to conduct the Co-Op Orchestra in a concert of modern music in that city. This was her first occasion conducting a complete concert, although the difficulty of Vaughan Williams's scherzo from Symphony No 5 caused its omission. The financial backer was Jack Gratty, a violist in the orchestra, who handed over his wage packet from a week with the Ballet Rambert.

In 1953, Dr Gipps completed *Goblin Market* to words by Christina Rossetti. The work is scored for two soprano soloists, three-part female choir and strings or piano. The piece is a warning to girls not to talk to strangers even should they be fascinating goblins. The music has a wonderful simplicity and innocence. While it needs careful preparation to ensure a good performance, it is a work that could, and should, be taken up by professionals and amateurs alike who would derive much satisfaction from it.

Dr Gipps claims that her professional life in her middle years were dull. She was a professor at Trinity College, London from 1959 to 1966, followed by ten years at the RCM teaching the syllabus both for B Mus and GSM. In addition, this workaholic maintained her two orchestras - the London Chanticleer Orchestra free, as there simply was no money to pay her. The origin of her first orchestra, which came into being in 1955, lies in her marvellous capacity and friendship for young people and students who adored her. Whereas some older people resented her magnificent musicianship and were patently envious of her stupendous abilities, the young ones, free from all such prejudice and pernicious guile, discovered in her a warm and unfailing friend whose judgments were always right. When Dr Gipps asked young orchestral player: what was missing in their training they replied that they had no opportunity for sight-reading and repertoire study. One would have thought that someone would have resolved this problem long before, but it was Ruth Baker who advertised and subsequently founded the One Rehearsal Orchestra, later renamed the London Repertoire Orchestra, in 1955. Her second orchestra, the Chanticleer Orchestra, she also founded in 1961. This was a professional body making itself available in London and the provinces. Dr Gipps gave *débuts* to such performers as Iona Brown, Julian Lloyd-Webber, Alexander Baillie, Philip Fowke and Neil Jenkins, and at every concert of these orchestras there was at least one work by a living composer including, in 1972, the first London

performance of the Cello Concerto of Bliss - Julian Lloyd-Webber's professional début. As well as Vaughan Williams, Elgar, Holst, Bax and Ireland, other composers, whose names may now be totally forgotten, were represented at her concerts: Colin Arenstein, William Bardwell, Alan Bullard, Gaze Cooper, Alfred Corum and many others. Between 1971 and 1979 she was a principal lecturer in music at Kingston Polytechnic. One can hardly believe that her life was dull.

Composition continued. The Concerto for violin, viola and small orchestra Op 49 was completed in 1957 and first performed by Bryan Gipps and Cecil Aronowitz on 30 January 1962 at St Pancras Town Hall with the Chanticleer Orchestra conducted by the composer. This double concerto has had a sad history and highlights one of the vagaries of the BBC. According to the Corporation, this was a 'passed if offered' work. Several attempts were made by the composer and musicians to obtain a broadcast. Colin Sauer and Keith Lovell with the Bristol Sinfonia under Sydney Sagar duly offered it. The BBC said that the offer did not count as it had to be offered by a staff conductor of the BBC. Yet the Bristol Sinfonia had performed Paul Patterson's Trumpet Concerto which was also a 'passed if offered' work!

Of all her choral works perhaps her Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis Op 55, written in 1959 for Sir William McKie and the Westminster Abbey Choir is her best. The Symphony No 3 Op 57 dates from 1965 and is cast in four movements, lasting around thirty-five minutes. The first movement has a tension brought about by a conflict between two modalities based on C sharp and D respectively. Features of sonata form are retained within a melodic style. The second movement is a Theme and Variations and the Scherzo, employing with great effect an ostinato figure on the harp and glockenspiel. The finale begins without a break and contains a substantial rhythmic and brilliantly conceived fugue, though the audience response will be emotional rather than cerebral. For her son, Dr Gipps wrote her Horn Concerto Op 58 in 1968. He gave the first performance with the composer conducting. The first broadcast in December 1982 should have been entrusted to its dedicatee although Frank Lloyd coped far better than the BBC Welsh Orchestra under George Tzipine. The horn writing is of restrained mellowness and calls for sensitivity and interpretative skills.

Far greater rhythmic interest is found in the Symphony No 4 Op 61 which dates from 1972. A large orchestra is used but even its size is upstaged by Symphony No 5 Op 64. The fourth is surely a masterpiece even by the most exacting standards. A Moderato section precedes an Allegro molto with its resolute string theme; a horn tune is varied on the violin; the music has a modal but not banal flavour. The recurring woodwind chords of the interval of a second give the piece a satisfyingly eerie effect. The movement subsides into Poco meno mosso with a rich viola theme snatched by the violins. The music is pleasant and, happily, devoid of sentimentality. A very brief Allegro molto gives way to the Moderato, as at the beginning with some solo work from the tuba; there is a ravishing moment when divided violins and harps create an ethereal aura. The Allegro molto returns strongly and the music reaches a climax before the Moderato material returns to draw the music to a close.

The second movement is as good an Adagio as you could wish for. The cor anglais theme with harp glissandi provides a tremendous atmosphere. A solo violin transforms this before the expressive oboe sings above trombones and tuba. There is a continuous flow and, just before the end, a soaring violin theme before the opening is recalled.

The third movement is a Scherzo marked Allegretto and depicts a unicorn hunt seen on a tapestry. The music is restrained yet boisterous in character. The Finale alternates Andante (with a splendid trombone tune) and an Allegro molto containing moments of breathtaking exhilaration. No less a person than Bliss admired the work not merely out of a sense of gratitude, being its dedicatee, but out of genuine regard and appreciation of the undeniable greatness of the score. It is arguably the best symphony written by a woman composer and with the Piano Concerto deserves to be acknowledged as a milestone not only in British music but in music composed by women. The first performance was given by the London Repertoire Orchestra conducted by the composer at the Royal Festival Hall on 28 May 1973.

Ten years later it was broadcast in a performance by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under the late Sir John Pritchard but the evident lack of rehearsal afforded to the players precluded a true realisation of the marvels inherent in this rather special score.

The Symphony No 5 dates from 1982 and is dedicated to Sir William Walton. It is scored for a large orchestra including quadruple woodwind, six horns and two harps. The first movement, as one might expect from this composer, alternates two contrasting tempi. At the second appearance of the Allegro vivace there is some highly colourful orchestration in which the glockenspiel, celesta and two harps predominate. The penultimate section, Maestoso, includes some breathtaking horn writing. The slow movement, Andante, maintains the same pulse throughout and is wholly successful. The Scherzo is restrained whereas the Finale, entitled Mass for Orchestra, has many moments to cherish. It depicts seven clearly defined sections of the Roman liturgy. For example, there are festive trumpets and rushing woodwind in the Gloria with its finely woven string work; the Hosanna has a jolly swagger punctuated by woodwind; its repetition after the Benedictus is most welcome; the Dona Nobis Pacem contains a stately trombone passage and, later, all the brass are involved. The largo of the opening Kyrie ends the piece.

One can only conjecture about the significance of this orchestral essay following her holiday the year before in India and Nepal as a sixtieth birthday present from all her orchestral players and soloists. This touching and worthy tribute was one of many expressions of the very high regard in which she was held. Yet, for all this, which she values tremendously, she would desire most to see professional performances of her symphonies and other major works and to be at the helm for such projects. Apart from her music she considers that her life is of little value to the world. She lives in a carapace but would wish to be remembered as someone whose music is loved by musicians. She has never given up and began to play the organ when she was sixty-five. She acknowledges courtesy shown to her and prizes the memories of the past, including friendships with such people as Adrian Cruft who died on her birthday in 1987. He was the same age; they had much in common and Dr Gipps regarded him as her musical twin. She wrote a short orchestral work, Ambarvalia Op 70 in his memory.

Dr Gipps has, at times, been outspoken in her views which, usually, turned out to be correct. There could never be any doubt about her integrity. She has dealt competently with awesome individuals as if they were merely complicated orchestral scores. Her own music is always stylish and practicable and the fact that it may not take a hundred performances to appreciate some of it is perhaps the highest compliment one can pay - after all, composers surely aim above all to communicate. Not all succeed. This one does. She is a complete musician - and that is far rarer than one might be led to believe. She has a distinguished academic record; she is a major composer despite being undervalued and ignored. Indeed one might expect so thoroughly capable, efficient, knowledgeable and determined a person to be unbearably bossy, self opinionated and ruthless, but with all her capabilities she does not need these disagreeable qualities, nor does she have them. She is determined and efficient but thoroughly human; always ready to appreciate things that others miss, and as young in spirit as one half her age. In fact, she will never be old. She is still held in high regard and affection by many for these lovely qualities. An outstanding musician indeed.

When Ruth Gipps was diagnosed as having cancer she bravely underwent an operation. Slowly she began to recover and, although remaining weak, still talked with many of us about music and other subjects that interested her. Then she had a serious stroke and lost her power of speech. Her last year or so was both difficult and frustrating for her and she died in an Eastbourne Nursing Home on 23 February 1999.

Almost completely ignored by the British music establishment in her lifetime, this tireless servant of music was neither honoured nor acknowledged by the BBC after her death. Perhaps the recent CD of her Symphony No 2 will pave the way to make widely known the music of this exceptional woman.

She was a very good friend, a kind and knowledgeable person always helping young musicians without personal reward. She was an excellent correspondent and, although she could be outspoken his comments were accurate and justifiable,

Since writing this article the Piano Concerto has been recorded by Angela Brownridge on Cameo Classics C9046CD.

I edited the score and Elizabeth Bowden of Nymet Music typeset it.

Catalogue of works:

- Op 1 The Fairy Shoemaker for piano 1928
- Op 2 Mazeppa's Ride for women's chorus and small orchestra 1937
- Op 3 Kensington Garden Suite for oboe and piano 1938 also orchestral version
- Op3a Pixie Caravan for flute and piano
- Op 3b Sea Shore suite for oboe and piano 1939
- Op 3c Chamois for two violins and piano
- Op 3d Honey Coloured Cow for bassoon and piano
- Op 4a Heaven for soprano and piano
- Op4b Four Baritone Songs
- Op 5a Oboe Sonata no. 1 in G minor
- Op 5b The Kelpie of Corrievreckan for clarinet and piano
- Op 6 The Temptation of Christ for soprano, baritone, SATB and small orchestra
- Op 7 Variations on Byrd's Non nobis for small orchestra 1939
- Op8 Knight in Armour 1940
- Op9 Clarinet Concerto
- Op10 Trio for oboe, clarinet and piano
- Op 11a Songs of Youth for tenor and piano
- Op 11b Two songs for soprano and piano
- Op11c Safety (Psalm 91) for soprano and piano
- Op 12a Rowan for flute and piano 1940
- Op12b The Piper of Dreams for solo oboe
- Op12c Sea Weed Song for cor anglais and piano
- Op 12d Suite for two violins
- Op12e Elephant God for clarinet and drum
- Op13 Sabrina (String Quartet in one movement) 1940
- Op 14 Ballet Sea Nymph for small orchestra or two pianos 1941
- Op15 Fantasy Jane Grey for viola and strings or piano
- Op 16 Quintet for oboe, clarinet and string trio 1941
- Op17 Brocade Piano Quartet in one movement
- Op 18 Rhapsody without words for soprano and small orchestra
- Op 19 Ducks for soprano, flute, cello and piano
- Op 20 Oboe Concerto in D minor 1941
- Op 21 Flax and Charlock for cor anglais and string trio
- Op 22 Symphony no. 1 in F minor 1942
- Op 23 Rhapsody for clarinet and string quartet 1942
- Op 24 Violin Concerto in B flat 1943
- Op 25 Death on a Pale Horse for orchestra 1943
- Op 26 Porphyria's Lover for baritone and piano
- Op 27a Rhapsody for violin and piano
- Op27b Billy Goat's Gruff for oboe, bassoon and horn 1943
- Op 28 Overture Chanticleer 1944
- Op 29 Suite The Chinese Cabinet

- Op 30 Symphony no 2 1945
- Op 31 Four 16th century songs (believed lost)
- Op 32 The Cat for contralto, baritone, double chorus and orchestra 1947
- Op 33 Song for orchestra 1948
- Op 34 Piano Concerto 1948
- Op 35 The prophet for speaker, baritone, soprano. chorus, children's chorus and orchestra 1950
- Op 36 Conversations for two pianos 1950
- Op 37 The Song of Narcissus for soprano and piano 1951
- Op 38 Virgin Mountain ballet 1952
- Op 39 Cringlemire Garden for string orchestra 1952
- Op 40 Goblin Market for two sopranos, female choir and string orchestra 1953
- Op 41 Coronation Procession for orchestra 1953
- Op 42 Sonata for violin and piano 1954
- Op 43 In Other Worlds for mezzo and piano 1954
- Op 44 Pageant Overture :The Rainbow 1954
- Op 45 Sonata for clarinet and piano 1955
- Op 46 Lyric Fantasy for viola and piano 1955
- Op 47 String Quartet 1956
- Op 48 Evocation for violin and piano 1957
- Op 49 Concerto for violin, viola and orchestra 1957
- Op 50 Three Incantations for soprano and harp
- Op 51 Prelude for solo bass clarinet 1958
- Op 52 An Easter Carol SATB with piano or organ
- Op 53 Seascape for ten wind instruments 1958
- Op 54 A Tarradiddle for two horns 1959
- Op 55 Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis SSATB and organ
- Op 56 Sonatina for horn and piano 1960
- Op 57 Symphony no. 3 1965
- Op 57a Theme and variations from above for piano
- Op 58 Horn Concerto 1968
- Op 59 Leviathan for double basson and chamber orchestra 1969
- Op 60 Triton for horn and piano 1970
- Op 61 Symphony no. 4 1971
- Op 62a Service and Gloria for choir and organ 1974
- Op 63 Sonata for cello and piano 1978
- Op 64 Symphony no. 5 1982
- Op 65 Wind Octet 1983
- Op 66 Sonata for oboe and piano no. 2 1985
- Op 67 The St Francis Window for alto flute and piano 1986
- Op 68 Scherzo and Adagio for solo cello 1987
- Op 69 The Riders of Rohan for tenor trombone and piano 1987
- Op 70 Ambarvalia for small orchestra 1988
- Op 71 The Ox and the Ass for double bass and chamber orchestra 1988
- Op 72 Opalescence for piano 1989
- Op 73 Sinfonietta for ten wind instruments and tam tam 1989
- Op 74 Threnody for cor anglais and piano 1990
arrangement for cor anglais, strings and harp by David Wright
- Op 75 The Pony Cart for flute horn and piano 1990
- Op 76 A Wealden Suite for four clarinets 1991
- Op 77 Cool Running Water for bass flute and piano 1991
- Op 78 Pan and Apollo for two oboes, cor anglais and harp 1992
- Op 79 Lady of the Lambs for soprano, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and horn 1992
- Op 80 Sonata for alto trombone (or horn) and piano 1995

There is also music for radio ;

Phosphorus (1944)
The Story of Aluminium (1945)
A Man called Luke (1946)
Oak, Ash and Thorn (1946)
The Walls are Down (1946)
Silent Wings (1946)
The Fifty six days (1946)
The Boy who found out why (1946)
The Flying Ship (1947)
The Village School (1947)
The Story of Robin Hood (1948)
The Silver Bowl (1948)

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(Photographs 1 and 2 are of Ruth Gipps aged 20. Photograph 3 was taken at the first performance of her First Symphony on the 25th of March, 1945. The dress shown was worn to play Glazunov's F Minor Piano Concerto and a black velvet dress to play the cor anglais in both Capriccio Espagnole and the symphony