

## LOUISE TALMA

David C F Wright DMus

Louise Talma is claimed to be the finest American female composer who wrote in a neo-classical style. Some have said that she is the counterpart of Ethel Smyth being a feminist although such claims cannot be substantiated. This claim of Talma being a feminist may stem from her 1990 work, *In Praise of Virtuous Women*.

She seems to generate little interest outside of the USA and her list of works do not contain only a comparatively few major pieces. There is a Piano Sonata of 1943, which won the North America Prize, the oratorio *The Divine Flame* of 1948, a String Quartet of 1954, a Piano Sonata no 2 of 1955, the opera: *The Alcestiad* of 1958 based on the play by Thornton Wilder, a Sonata for violin and piano of 1962 and the cantata *All the Days of my life* of 1965. There are no concertos although there is a Dialogue for piano and orchestra of 1964; there are no symphonies.



However, she did receive some awards winning two Guggenheim Fellowships in 1946 and 1947 and elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1974 where she has studied from 1922 to 1930.

Her mother was French and an opera singer and so Louise studied at the Fontainebleau School of Music in France for thirteen summers from 1926 onwards. She had Isidore Philip for piano from 1926-1927 She studied with Nadia Boulanger and arranged her second tour of the USA in 1937. Later, Talma became the first American to teach at Fontainebleau.

She was a teacher at Hunters College at the City University of New York from 1928 to 1979.

She was born in Arachion, France on 31 October 1906 and raised in New York. She graduated from Wadleigh High School studied at The National Institute of Arts (now merged with the Julliard School). She received her BA in music from New York University and her MA from Columbia University.

Having being inspired by a very great American composer, Irving Fine and his String Quartet of 1952 she tried to write serial music, or twelve note music if you wish to call it that, but this style and discipline was beyond her.

She has the distinction of being the first American composer to have an opera performed in Germany. This being *The Alcestiad* which occupied her three years up to 1958.

The recipient of the Sibelius Medal from the Harriet Cohen International Music Awards, an award for composition, in London in 1963 was an indication of the esteem she enjoyed.

She died at Saratoga Springs, New York on 13 August 1996.

I have only heard a few of her works and therefore cannot make an adequate assessment. Her music is well-crafted but I did not find it memorable. However getting to know her larger works may change all that!