

ROSALIND ELLICOTT

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During the lifetime of Rosalind Frances Ellicott (1857-1924), a woman composer was regarded as a freak and an intruder into a male preserve. The criticism of her choral works, made by mainly male critics, but not exclusively so, was that they were not masculine or strong enough for the subject matters she chose.

Rosalind's father, Charles John Ellicott was a distinguished English Christian theologian, academic and churchman. He briefly served as Dean of Exeter,[1] then Bishop of the united see of Gloucester and Bristol,

Born in Whitwell, Rutland on 25 April 1819, he was educated at Stamford School and St John's College, Cambridge He married Constantia Ann Becher at St Marylebone Parish Church, London on 31 July 1848

Following his ordination into the Anglican ministry in 1848, he was Vicar of Pilton, Rutland and then Professor of Divinity at King's College London and Hulsean Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. In 1861, he was appointed Dean of Exeter. Two years later he was nominated the bishop of the united sees of Gloucester and Bristol on 6 February and consecrated on 25 March 1863.

In 1897, he resigned the bishopric of Bristol, but continued as Bishop of Gloucester until resigning on 27 February 1905. He died in Kent on 15 October 1905, aged 86.

Works

- Destiny of the Creature, 1865
- Historical Lectures on the Life of Christ, 1870
- Modern Unbelief, its Principles and Characteristics, 1877
- Spiritual Needs in Country Parishes, 1888
- Sacred Study
- An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers, 1897 (Editor)
- A New Testament Commentary for English Readers, 1878
- Our Reformed Church and its Present Troubles, 1897
- The Revised Version of Holy Scripture,

It may be the fact that her father who was the distinguished Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol from 1893 that enabled Rosalind to have works performed at The Three Choirs Festival held in rotation at Hereford, Worcester and Gloucester.

She was also a very determined and ambitious person. In 1883, the year of Wagner's death, her song To the Immortals was encored at Gloucester. In September 1886, her Dramatic Overture was performed there as well. Earlier that year, her Overture to Spring had been performed elsewhere. Elysium for soprano, chorus and orchestra was the first of two large-scale cantatas to be heard in Gloucester in 1889 and, three years later, The Birth of Song for soprano, tenor and orchestra was



premiered. The influence of church music is evident in these works and yet, curiously, her father was not at all interested in music. Her mother was a singer and a member of the Handel Society which served as an encouraged to her talented daughter.

Parry admired her orchestration and told many of this.

The Cheltenham Festival premiered *Radiant Sister of the Dawn* in 1887 and *A Festive Overture* on 1893 the year she toured the USA encouraged following a successful performance of her part-song *Bring the Bright Garland* at the Bristol Madrigal Society in 1890, she was elected to membership of the Incorporated Society of Musicians. In 1895 a *Fantasia in A minor* for piano and orchestra was given its first performance at Gloucester and repeated at the Crystal Palace the following year, and then at the Westminster Orchestral Society concert in 1897.

From the turn of the century, Ellicott turned her attention to chamber music very little of which has survived such as the *String Quartet in B flat*, although this had been written in 1883-4, two *Piano Trios*, the second of which is available on Meridian CDE84478 and was dedicated to the cellist Alfredo Piatti, and first performed on 6th December 1895 at a British Chamber Music concert at the Queen's Hall with Agnes Zimmerman (piano) Emile Sauret (violin) and Charles Ould (cello). A *Sonata for violin and piano* and a *Piano Quartet* were first given in London in May 1900. A *Sketch for violin and piano* and a *Reverie for cello and piano*, which was dedicated to A H Brewer, the latter also available on a CD, appeared with Schotts and Novello respectively along with *Elysium* and *The Birth of Song*. This change of direction was probably prompted by the Philharmonic Society in London rejecting her orchestral works. Having only seen three scores I can say that thankfully her music is devoid of Elgarian pomposity and tedious sequences but, sadly, may bear a few resemblances to the Edwardian style. After all, she was a contemporary of Elgar and her music is in the 19th century British tradition.

To give the details of her life, Rosalind was born in Cambridge on 14th November 1857. She entered the Royal Academy of Music in 1874 studying the piano for two years (1874-6) under Frederick Westlake and then had composition lessons from Thomas Wingham until 1881. He had been a pupil of Sterndale Bennett. At the same time she was enjoying some early success with her own works. In 1896, she gave a series of highly successful concerts of her music in the Queen's Hall, London and established her own series of chamber music concerts in Gloucester in the early 1900s. She lived in London until the early 1920s and then moved to the seaside in Kent. She died in Seasalter, although some say London, on 5 April 1924 aged sixty six. She is buried with her parents in the churchyard at Birchington on Sea.

Works

"The sweet blue eyes of springtime". (Die blauen Frühlingsaugen.) Song; poem by H. Heine. English translation by C. Rowe (1881)

"From my sad tears are springing". (Aus meinen Thränen.) Song; poem by H. Heine. English translation by C. Rowe (1881)

"To the Immortals". Song; words by D. F. Blomfield (1883)

A *Sketch for violin with piano accompaniment* (1883)

"Verlust": solo song; words by Heine, English Translation by J. Troutbeck. [In C minor and D minor.] (1884)

"I love thee". Song; words by R. S. Hichens (1887)

"Sing to me". Duet for Soprano & Tenor; words by R. S. Hichens (1887)

"Radiant Sister of the Day". A Four-part Song; words by Shelley (1887)

"Peace be around thee". Four-part Song; words written by T. Moore (1888)

A *Reverie for Violoncello & Pianoforte* (1888)

Elysium: for soprano solo, chorus, and orchestra (1889)

"Bring the bright Garlands". Part-Song; words by Moore (1889)

"A Dream of the Sea". Song; words by R. S. Hichens (1889)
Two trios for pianoforte, violin and violoncello (1891)
Six Pieces for Violin and Pianoforte (1891)
The birth of song: a cantata for soli, chorus and orchestra (1892)
Henry of Navarre: a choral ballad with orchestral accompaniment ad. lib. (1894)
Fantasia for piano and orchestra (1895)

It was largely due to the activities of Rosalind Ellicott, Ethel Smyth and Ruth Gipps that established equality for women composers and there are some women composers who have more than proved their worth. But there is a need for such a pioneer as Rosalind Ellicott to be heard and admired through the availability and performances of her music.

[*Piano Trio No. 1*](#) (link opens score in new window)

[*Piano Trio No. 2*](#) (link opens score in new window)

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