

# Program Notes

## by Allison Voth

It is with great excitement and enthusiasm that the Cantata Singers 2018-2019 Chamber Series features women composers. However, it is with great sadness and regret that the need to present such programs still exists. When concert programmers no longer see the necessity to feature all women composers, only then can we say women composers have found their true place in the field of composition. May that day arrive soon!

We hope that you find delight in hearing, and perhaps discovering, the many women composers, old and new, featured this evening. For every wonderful composer you hear tonight, it must be noted that countless other, equally deserving women could have been programmed in their place.

Our first two German and French groups are a nod to the grand dames of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As musicians, they had the privilege of receiving exceptional education in the arts, and many had the added advantage of marrying gifted artists or wealthy men. In today's times, with such extraordinary talents, they would most likely have successful, independent careers. However, social mores and unbending domestic expectations often forced these brilliant women to put their careers second to that of their husbands. Despite the socio-cultural obstacles, these remarkable women continued to compose and are finally receiving the full recognition they deserve.

The third group of women composers are from the United Kingdom—turn-of-the-century, mid-century, and today's Generation X up-and-coming composers. Some of the turn-of-the-century UK composers had similar opportunities as the French and German composers, but many did not. Our mid-century composers were able to independently pursue a career as social mores slowly shifted, yet they still had to walk along the road of perseverance amidst what was primarily the ivory tower, old boys' composers' club. As for our youngest composers, it is exciting to witness them forging ahead to stake their place in the musical world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are bold and exciting, both in their compositions and how they are navigating their careers. However, they are often still referred to with the added "female" or "woman" modifier beside their *métier* listing of composer, indicating that there is still work to be done to ensure equal footing.

**Clara Schumann** (1819-1896) née Clara Wieck, was considered one of Europe's most revered and celebrated pianists and composers. She most surely inherited some of her musical talent from her mother, whose father was a cantor and grandfather was a flautist and flute maker. However, it was her father who taught and mentored her as a pianist and composer. She fast became a prodigy, and at the height of her career and was referred to as "Queen of the piano." She played for and knew all the artistic greats of her time: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Niccolò Paganini, Franz Liszt, Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn, Louis Spohr, Frédéric Chopin,

Anton Rubenstein, Pauline Viardot and Jenny Lind. Along with Liszt, she helped fashion the traditional solo recital into the format we know today—performing by memory, being the sole performer on the program, and most importantly, through programming past and present compositions by such greats as J.S. Bach, Domenico Scarlatti, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, Mendelssohn and Chopin, leaving the virtuosic improvisations of popular opera arias and themes to other concert performers.

Schumann met her eventual husband, Robert, when he became a student of her father. Despite being 10 years his junior, their emotional and intellectual attraction to each other blossomed over time. Her father forbade them to marry (Robert had no financial stability), but undaunted and fed up with her father's attempts to stop their marriage, he boldly took her father to court for slander and ultimately won the right to marry her.

As a composer, Schumann's *lieder* stands up to any of the other famous composers of the time—Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann, and Schubert. As might be expected, her career took a second seat to Robert's while she took responsibility of their eight children. However, as Robert showed signs of mental illness and was ultimately institutionalized, she quickly re-established herself in a full-time career as concert pianist and composer. After Robert's death, she stopped composing completely, but continued to concertize, teach, and promote the memory of Robert's music, often performing his works, as well as editing and transcribing them.

The title of a recent biography on **Alma Mahler** (1879-1964) by Oliver Hilmes says it all: "Malevolent Muse." Alma Mahler had an insatiable thirst for power and importance amidst the intelligentsia. She primarily attained this status through her many love affairs and marriages to important artists such as Alexander von Zemlinsky, Oskar Kokoschka, Gustav Mahler, Walter Gropius, and Franz Werfel (the latter three she married). She frequented *fin de siècle* Vienna salons, and later salons in California and New York after fleeing Nazi Germany. That said, she came by her own artistic talents through her father, Emil Schindler, a Viennese landscape painter who exposed her to all the arts. After Schindler's untimely death when she was only 13, Alma was mentored by a well-known theatre director, Max Burckhard, and soon after studied composition with Alexander von Zemlinsky. She primarily wrote songs, seventeen of which survive. When married to Gustav Mahler, he discouraged her from composing. However, after he discovered that she was having an affair with the younger Walter Gropius, he suddenly had a change of heart and helped to publish and arrange some of her songs. Alma Mahler's talents later turned to writing, resulting in a two-volume autobiography. The first was an account of Gustav Mahler's life and works, *Gustav Mahler: Erinnerungen und Briefe* (1940), and, the second, about her own life, *Mein Leben* (1960). She also oversaw extensive editing of Gustav Mahler's works, and for decades was considered the foremost authority on Mahler's life and works until scholars began to realize that much of what she wrote and edited was untrue or misleading. Her song, *Waldseligkeit*, is set to a poem by Richard Fedor Leopold

Dehmel (1863-1920). It is a fine example of her penchant for chromaticism and reflects the clear influence of Zemlinsky's teaching.

**Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel** (1805-1847) lived a rich and full musical life. She was born into an erudite family which greatly respected the arts. She was a brilliant prodigy pianist: at age 13, she performed Bach's entire set of 24 Preludes and Fugues by memory for her family. She was also equally brilliant as a composer. According to some scholars, she was more forward thinking in her approach to compositional form and harmonic progression than her highly recognized brother, composer Felix Mendelssohn. Her father overtly discouraged her dream of having a career as a musician, and Felix was also unsupportive in subtle ways. When she was fifteen, she expressed her thoughts on being a professional musician to her father who responded: "What you wrote to me about your musical occupations with reference to, and in comparison with, Felix, was both rightly thought and expressed. Music will perhaps become his profession, whilst for you it can and must only be an ornament, never the root of your being and doing." Though she and Felix were extremely close as siblings and mutually supportive musicians, even he stepped back when their mother asked Felix to help encourage Fanny to publish her compositions. He responded: "I hopefully don't need to say that as soon as she decides to publish, I will spare no effort, to the extent that I can, to find her opportunities. But to encourage her to publish I cannot do, since it runs counter to my views and convictions."

With no choice but to accept the societal mores imposed on her, she continued to perform at her family salons and quietly composed in the privacy of her studio. However, when she married painter Wilhelm Hensel, she boldly began hosting her own salons which she called *Sonntagmusiken*. They were structured like a concert series, and she often presented her compositions, as well as Felix's. The *Sonntagmusiken* salons became all the rage and would often have as many as 200 guests, including royalty and celebrated artists such as Clara Schumann and Franz Listz. Mendelssohn truly came into her own in 1839 when she spent a year traveling and living in Italy with Wilhelm. They spent much of their time in Rome, where they quickly became an inspired part of the social circle at the French Academy at Villa Medici hosted by painter Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. Audience members delighted in her performances and compositions, and she was looked to as an authority on German music. Unsurprisingly, Mendelssohn wrote many compositions while in Italy. Although some of her songs were published under her brother's name prior to her time there, on her return to Germany, she already had many compositions published under her own name. Sadly, she died suddenly of a stroke at age 45. Shortly before her death, she wrote *Berguslust*, her last song set to Eichendorff's *Songs of Travel*. Its light mood and briskly skipping tempo belie her impending death. A line from the song, "Our fantasies as well as our songs rise up until they reach heaven," became the epitaph for her tombstone.

**Pauline Viardot** (1821-1910) descended from a lineage of renowned singers and singing teachers: her father, Manuel Garcia, was the famous singing teacher known

for the Garcia Method, and her mother and siblings, Joaquina Stiches, Manuel Garcia, and Maria Malibran were well-known singers. When her sister Maria died unexpectedly in 1836, Viardot stepped into her shoes as performer and made her debut at the age 16. She had a three-octave range, extraordinary vocal facility, fluency in six languages, and wowed audiences with her expressive and dramatic stage ability. She was an immediate sensation. Throughout her singing career, she composed and often performed her own compositions. In time, she also became a highly respected teacher who, like her father, wrote books on singing and composed songs and operas for her students. Her combined singing and dramatic abilities inspired composers such as Chopin, Berlioz, Meyerbeer, Gounod, Saint-Saëns, Liszt, Wagner and the Schumanns (she often performed duets with Clara Schumann), as well as writer, George Sand.

Viardot did not see composition as her primary career, but her compositions demonstrate considerable skill. She was drawn to the dramatic and expressive possibilities of song and opera and influenced generations of singers through her performing, teaching, and compositions.

**Cécile Chaminade** (1857-1944) was discouraged from studying music early on. She persevered, however, and became a prolific composer of piano character pieces (200) and light, charming *mélodies* (125), which were widely published and played. Despite her productive and accomplished compositional output, she suffered the prevailing attitudes towards women composers of the time. Reviews of her light and charming songs were criticized for being too feminine, yet when she dared to be more overtly intellectual in her approach to compositional form, choosing larger instrumental genres, she was criticized for being too virile and masculine. Her songs are beautifully constructed and are full of charm and verve. Without question, they easily stand up against the standard French *mélodies* of her time, including that of Gabriel Fauré.

**Germaine Tailleferre** (1892-1983) was a prolific and versatile composer. She is best known for being the only female composer in *Les Six*, a group of Parisian composers formed in 1919 which also included Georges Auric, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, and Erik Satie. Satie thought she was brilliant and referred to her as his “musical daughter.” She began her musical career as a fine pianist with an impressive memory, but also felt a calling to compose. Her versatility as a composer was impressive. She wrote for all the standard genres: vocal, opera, chamber, orchestral, and ballet, but also for many film scores, which was very cutting-edge at the time. Most characteristic in her writing are light, forward driving, repetitive figures full of vibrancy and *élan*, whether the text be caustic or playful. In her more reflective moments, her songs are full of unexpected harmonic turns. Despite the favorable recognition she received as a composer during the short-lived *Les Six* years, she ultimately never received the recognition she deserved, partly due to her tumultuous personal life (two failed marriages with one almost ending in her murder) and her own insecurity as an artist.

**Nadia Boulanger** (1887-1979) was perhaps the most influential composition teacher of the 20th century. There is hardly a composer who studied composition from the 1920s to the 1950s who did not pass through her studio, including most American composers. She came to composition through her father, who was an established composer and a former recipient of the *Prix de Rome*. Her formal studies led her to the Paris Conservatoire where, among others, she studied with Gabriel Fauré. Right from the beginning, she took chances and played outside of the box.

Like so many other women composers before her, she was a pianist (and organist) *par excellence*. As a composer, she composed primarily for the smaller genres, melodies and chamber music. Her music is highly chromatic and full of modal melody and parallel chordal progressions—a clear influence from Claude Debussy. Nadia stopped composing, however, relatively early in the 20s due to the sudden death of her sister, whom she considered to be more talented than she. From that time forward, she dedicated herself to teaching composition, while also promoting her sister's music. Aside from teaching various theory courses and composition at the *Ecole Normale de Musique*, she founded the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau in 1921 and subsequently became its director in 1948. She taught piano accompaniment at the Paris Conservatoire and became a conductor of note. Her lectures and musical analysis abilities were revered by all. Her influence on American composers is due to her tours and time spent working in the US during World War II. While touring as an organist, she premiered Copland's *Symphony for organ and orchestra*, conducted orchestras such as the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the New York Philharmonic and taught at Wellesley College, Radcliffe College, and the Juilliard School. She taught such American greats as Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Elliott Carter, William Henry Harris, and Virgil Thomson. Among the many awards she won, she is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

**Lili Boulanger** (1893-1919) was hailed as a musical prodigy from the age of two. Due to weak health brought on by an early childhood case of bronchial pneumonia, she never enrolled in formal musical study. Despite this, she won the coveted *Prix de Rome* scholarship at the age of 20. She was socially active and was particularly supportive of war-related causes. During World War I, she founded the *Comité Franco-Américain du Conservatoire National*, an organization which supported musicians fighting in the war. Her compositional output was small due to her continuously weak physical state and her early death, but it was decidedly experimental both harmonically and in instrumental color.

**Dame Elizabeth Maconchy** (1907-1994) remains one of Britain's finest composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. She was once referred to by a critic as "one of the most substantial composers these islands have yet produced." She did not come from a lineage of musicians, unlike many earlier women composers. Instead, she was born to Irish parents and spent her early years in rural Ireland, quietly learning to play the piano and discovering her love of composition at the age of six. She attended the

Royal Conservatory of Music and studied composition with Ralph Vaughn Williams. After winning the Octavia Travelling Scholarship in 1929, she traveled to Prague where she worked with K. B. Jiráček. It was her work with Jiráček and introduction to the music of Béla Bartók that most influenced her compositional style. Although she is best known for her string quartets—thirteen in total—she composed for all genres, for both professional and amateur musicians, and became a very sought-after composer. She was the first woman to chair the Composer's Guild of Great Britain and was the president of the Society for the Promotion of New Music. In 1987, the Queen awarded her the honor of with the title of Dame.

**Rebecca Clarke** (1886-1979) was raised in England by a German mother and an American father. She spent equal time performing and composing in both America and Britain, but ultimately became an American citizen. Like many women composers before her, her family encouraged her studies, and she enrolled in the Royal Academy of Music to study violin. Her studies there were brought to an abrupt halt when her harmony teacher, Percy Miles, proposed to her. She then enrolled in the Royal College of Music and became Stanford's first female student. That, too, was short-lived when her father suddenly banished her from the family home. She subsequently supported herself as a violist, and in 1912 became the first female in the Queen's Hall Orchestra. During World War I, she lived and worked in America where her brothers resided. She performed extensively in Hawaii, and in 1923 performed in a round-the-world tour for the British colonies. During these years, she established herself as a composer of chamber music. Clarke returned to London in 1924 where she performed with some of the great musicians of that time, including Myra Hess, and was a regular soloist and chamber musician for BBC broadcasts. By 1930, her focus on composition had waned, perhaps due to the difficulty faced by female composers at that time. After World War II, Clarke returned to America and ultimately returned to composing. While there, she became reacquainted with James Friskin, an old RCM fellow student and friend, who was on faculty at the Juilliard School. They married in 1944. Her works are numerous and consist mostly of chamber works and songs, but only twenty were published during her lifetime.

**Judith Weir** (b. 1954) is of Scottish decent but was raised in London. She was oboist in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and studied composition with John Tavener and Robin Holloway. In 1974 she came to America to study with Gunther Schuller at Tanglewood as a Koussevitsky Fellow. She has composed in all genres, but is particularly known for her operas and dramatic works. Her music did not follow the avant-garde forms and atonalism of her time; rather, she often drew on alternate sources in unique and unexpected ways, such as folk music from various cultures. For her entire career, Weir has strongly felt that music plays an important role in education, as well as in everyday culture and community life. To that end, her music is direct and dramatically expressive. Highly respected, she has been a visiting professor at such storied institutions as Princeton, Harvard and Cardiff. Commissioned works have been written for Jessye Norman, Dawn Upshaw, and Jane

Manning, and her orchestral commissions include works for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, and the London Sinfonietta. Her many awards include the Critics' Circle, South Bank Show, Elise L. Stoeger and Ivor Novello awards, and the prestigious Queen's Medal for Music in 2007. In 2014, Weir was appointed Master of the Queen's Music, succeeding Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, and in 2015 she became the Associate Composer to the BBC Singers.

**Jenni Pinnock**, a young British composer based in Cambridgeshire, UK, is active as a composer, teacher, and arranger in both professional and amateur music circles. Her music has been described as refreshing, imaginative, and "tantalizingly beautiful in smoothness and soul." She studied at Kingston University and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. Primary influences on her compositional style are Javanese gamelan, church bell ringing, composers Debussy and Bartók, and musical theater. Her works have been performed by such ensembles as the Aldworth Philharmonic Orchestra, Red Note Ensemble, the Quangle Wangle Choir, and Equinox Voices. In 2017, along with Graham Palmer, she was awarded an Arts Council *Grants for the Arts* grant which resulted in *Cracked Voices*, an hour-long song cycle based on forgotten characters from the borderlands of Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. This work is now being rearranged for choir. Recent commissions include co-song composer for *Ada Lovelace – The Musical*, and a work for the centenary of World War I, and a suite of weather-related piano pieces. The song featured today, "Bells in the Rain," reflects Ms. Pinnock's love of hand bells.

**Régine Wieniawski** (1879-1932) went by many pseudonyms, with the most well-known being "Poldowski." She was daughter of the famous Polish violinist and composer, Henryk Wieniawski, but was born and educated in Brussels. She spent most of her adult years in London married to Sir Aubrey Dean Paul and ultimately became a British national. She was a pianist and composer who concertized throughout Europe and America. She performed standard repertoire, but also performed her own compositions and works of leading composers of the time. She had several composition teachers including François-Auguste Gevaert, Michael Hamburg, Percy Pitt, and Vincent D'Indy, but she considered herself a free agent and was unwilling to conform to any particular academic form. Her music, however, is clearly influenced by the French school of composers at the time, including Fauré, Ravel, Debussy, and poet Paul Verlaine. Although she composed some works for larger ensemble, she primarily wrote in miniature forms, especially songs. She was famous and beloved for her *élan* and *joie de vivre* in the artistic and social circles of 1920's London, as well as by European and British Royalty. Sadly, she died of pneumonia at the young age of 52.

Welsh-born composer, **Rhian Samuel** (b. 1944), divides her time between Wales and London. Her large orchestral works have been performed both in the US and Britain, including the PROMS. She has won such awards as the ASCAP-Rudolph

Nissim Award, 1<sup>st</sup> prize at the Greenwich Festival, the Glyndŵr Medal for services to the Arts in Wales, and an Honorary Doctor of Music from the University of Wales. She writes for both large and small ensembles, as well as for voice and choir. Over 120 of her works are published, many of which have been performed and recorded by leading artists. She has taught composition both in England and the US and is currently teaching part-time at Magdalen College, Oxford. She is also Professor Emeritus at City University London. Notably, she was co-editor of the *Norton/New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* published in 1994.

Born in Sussex, England, **Florence Aylward** (1862-1950) was primarily known for her vocal writing. She was the daughter of vicar Brede Augustus Aylward and often played organ in her father's church. She began composing songs at the early age of 12 and studied both piano and composition at the Guild Hall School. Publisher Boosey & Hawkes recognized her talent early on and published her first song in 1888 when she was 26. Over 150 of her songs were ultimately published, many of which were ballads. Although married with one child, she held an organist post in St. Leonard's for many years and in 1893 was touted by *The Magazine for Music* as "one of the finest accompanists of the day."

**Emily Hall** (b. 1978) is an extremely active composer who writes primarily for voice. Her music meshes popular, electronic, and classical styles. She has composed five operas in the course of her young career, one of which is a site-specific opera installation composed for the 5-star Corinthia Hotel in London after a month-long residency. She has written three song cycles with librettist Toby Litt: *Befalling*, about unrequited love, *Life Cycle*, about motherhood, and *Rest*, about death. The song, "Stillborn," featured in this concert, is from *Life Cycle*. Ms. Hall has written works for the London Sinfonietta, the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Symphony, NOW, the Brodsky quartet, Opera North, London Chamber Orchestra, the Hungarian Radio Choir, and Aldeburgh Music. Awards include the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award for Artists, the Genesis Opera Prize, the Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Award, and Corinthia AIR.

**Charlotte Bray** (b. 1982) is one of Britain's finest young composers today. She composes in all genres, and her music is full of intense expressivity and lyrical beauty. Born in Birmingham, she studied at the Birmingham Conservatoire with Joe Cutler and received her Master's in Advanced Composition with Distinction from the Royal College of Music, studying with Mark Turnage. She participated in the Peter-Pears Contemporary Composition Course with Oliver Knussen, and later, at Tanglewood, where she studied with John Harbison, Michael Gandolfi, Shulamit Ran, and Augusta Read-Thomas. Many internationally acclaimed ensembles have performed her works, including BBC Proms, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, London Sinfonietta, Britten Sinfonia, London Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Festivals that have featured her work are the BBC Proms, West Cork, and the Copenhagen and Tanglewood Summer Festivals. Her awards are numerous,

including the Lili Boulanger Prize, Critic's Circle Award for Exceptional Young Talent, and the Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Prize. She has served as Composer-in-Residence for the MacDowell Colony, the Liguria Study Center in Bogliasco, and Aldeburgh Music.

**Thea Musgrave** (b. 1928) has her place as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's foremost composers. Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, she first studied at the University of Edinburgh and then at the Conservatoire in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. When she returned to Britain, she became a primary player in the British music scene. In 1970, she was invited to be a guest professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she quickly established herself in the American music scene. From that point, she has remained living in the US. From 1987-2002 Musgrave was a distinguished professor at Queens College, City University of New York, where she has taught and influenced many young composers. She twice received a Guggenheim Fellowship and has several honorary doctorates, including from the New England Conservatory of Music. In 2002, she was given the honor of C.B.E. (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) on the Queen's New Year's Honour List. Her works have been performed by major ensembles large and small all over the world, as well as at major festivals worldwide, including Florence Maggiore Musicale, Edinburgh, Warsaw Autumn, Venice Biennale, Aldeburgh, Cheltenham and Zagreb. In 2014, a celebration of her works was presented in three concerts on one day at the Barbican in London. She has composed many large works, including ten operas. Her music often carries a strong sense of drama and is powerfully moving and expressive. When asked about being a "woman" composer, she replies, "Yes, I am a woman; and I am a composer. But rarely at the same time."