

## ROSALIND ELLICOTT

David C F Wright DMus

WARNING Strict copyright applies to this article and all of Dr Wright's articles

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.

It may be the fact that her father, the Right Reverend C John Ellicott was the 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. 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 *Fantasie 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 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.



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)

---

Copyright David C F Wright 1996 slightly revised in 2009 to include details of recordings. This article or any part of it, however small, must not be copied, stored in any system, downloaded or used in any way without the prior written authority of the author. Failure to comply is illegal being theft and in violation of International Copyright Law and will render any offender liable to action at law. The author may be prepared to give permission on receipt of a written request.