
REVIEWS

Victoria Rogers. *The Music of Peggy Glanville-Hicks*

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Reviewed by Jillian Graham

Victoria Rogers's monograph is a valuable addition to the existing scholarship about a highly significant Australian composer, albeit one who spent 43 of her 78 years living overseas. Peggy Glanville-Hicks was a fascinating character who, as Rogers points out, 'transcended the gendered expectations of her upbringing and went on to become a fine composer and a highly influential figure in the vibrant musical life of New York after the Second World War' (p. 1). The importance of documenting the work and experiences of women composers such as Glanville-Hicks who have encountered 'additional hurdles and prejudices' (p.2) goes without saying. Composition has not historically been considered an appropriate profession for women; hence it is only in the last few decades that the female of the species has received the encouragement and opportunities to acquire the necessary education to create music, and to gain recognition for it. There is a need to celebrate the achievements of Australian women composers such as Glanville-Hicks who, in my opinion, have written music infinitely superior to and more profound than that of Percy Grainger, about whom endless studies have been published.

Rogers makes the aims and boundaries of her study clear from the outset. She acknowledges and makes good use of other valuable studies, including Deborah Hayes' bio-bibliography, and biographies written by Wendy Beckett and James Murdoch. However, she ensures that she differentiates her own study, pointing out that the story of Glanville-Hicks's life 'has been told in biographies' (p. 1). As the title suggests, her focus is rather on the 'development of Glanville-Hicks's musical language,' which is then 'contextualized within the biographical circumstances and musical influences that helped to define it' (p. 2). Indeed it would be

wrong to ignore Glanville-Hicks's somewhat turbulent personal life completely. A composer's psyche cannot fail to impact on their work, whether it is expressed in the music itself or in the circumstances surrounding its production. The 'denial of her own gender' that Rogers mentions on page 50, for example, is an interesting issue upon which to reflect in the context of Glanville-Hicks's compositional output, although I would argue that this is as much a manifestation of Glanville-Hicks's personal subjective position as it was a means to gain recognition in a male-dominated profession.

Suffice to say that more detail on Glanville-Hicks's life is to be found in those references already mentioned, and in a comprehensive biography currently being written by Suzanne Robinson. It is Rogers's intention, rather, to introduce biographical details judiciously, mostly to explain and enrich her discussions of the music. This is a wise choice, since when such contextual material is completely excluded, there is the risk of descending into a quagmire of tedious musical analysis designed to extinguish the human subject for whom the book—and music itself—is ultimately written.

Thankfully Rogers is not guilty of this hollow misdemeanour. Relevant aspects of Glanville-Hicks's biography and personality colour and pepper the text, and Rogers is skilful in her integration of context throughout the book. In Chapter 1, for example, we learn something of Glanville-Hicks's early upbringing in Melbourne, of the familial environment that fostered her talents, and of the parental influences that helped form her approach to her later career. Chapter 4 is mostly devoted to an exegesis of the composer's evolving musical philosophy. It begins, however, with a focus on Glanville-Hicks's work as a music journalist and arts administrator. This is included not only because it displays the breadth of her career, but because this work helped facilitate the discovery of her own stylistic direction discussed in subsequent pages.

Also contained in this chapter are some fine examples of Glanville-Hicks's sharp and biting wit, strikingly evident in her concert reviews and musical commentary. She was no fan of twelve-tone music, saying that 'you cannot have all 12 sounds—it's like building a solid concrete building with no windows,' leaving no gaps 'around which pressures and pulls and goings-out and returns are possible' (p. 88). A better description of the negative aspects of this method can hardly be imagined. Further down on the same page, her distaste for dissonance is further highlighted in a quote from a review of a concert of contemporary music. To Glanville-Hicks, it was a program of 'uncompromising dissonance' and a 'feast of assorted cacophony.' Beautiful.

Rogers's book is structured chronologically, so that the reader may easily follow the threads of Glanville-Hicks's life and career, during which she produced over seventy finely-crafted works. Naturally not all these works could be covered in detail, and Rogers has carefully selected for attention those compositions that best illustrate the evolution of the composer's musical style, from early English pastoralism to neo-classicism and, finally, to a focus on her 'melody-rhythm' concept influenced by non-Western musics. At the same time, Rogers demonstrates that not all features of Glanville-Hicks's earlier styles are eschewed in the later periods. For example, the four early songs addressed in Chapter 2, while showing the progression from tonality to modality, also form points of reference for later works, in which certain of their stylistic features can still be found. As Rogers points out, 'The four early songs are in many ways a signpost for the later works, and herein lies their significance' (p. 25). One full chapter each is justifiably devoted to the operas *Transposed Heads*, Glanville-Hicks's first

major work based on her melody-rhythm concept, and *Nausicaa*, arguably her most significant achievement.

It should be pointed out that those readers who, like me, are not enthusiasts of in-depth and dry musical analysis, will not find themselves alienated from these parts of the text. Rogers's points of analysis are chosen just as carefully as the biographical elements. The analyses are not divorced from the context in which they were produced, and never do they become self-indulgent exercises purely for their own sake.

Rogers's List of References is well set out, being divided by genre. There are many musical examples used to illustrate points of analysis, and these are clearly listed in a table at the beginning. There is a List of Compositions, as there should be, and Rogers appropriately acknowledges that this list 'is based largely on the enumeration by Deborah Hayes in *Peggy Glanville-Hicks: A Bio-Bibliography ...* with amendments arising from information that has emerged since the publication of the book' (p. 263). An adequate index is also provided.

The organisation and layout of this monograph make it hard to ignore that it is heavily based on Rogers's PhD dissertation, thoroughly researched and engagingly written though it was. In both execution and content, it certainly deserves a place well beyond the limited audience of visitors to the collection of theses held in the library at the University of Western Australia, where Rogers completed her PhD.