Almost Lost to History: Ethel Smyth's Extraordinary *Mass in D*

HONEY MECONI

The ever-growing interest in women composers has drawn increased attention to the music of British composer Ethel Smyth (1858–1944).[1] Glyndebourne and other venues have produced her best-known opera, *The Wreckers*, while the Boston Symphony recently programmed its overture. A complete recording by the BBC Symphony and Chorus of Smyth's path-breaking opera *Der Wald*—the first opera by a woman ever performed by the Metropolitan Opera—appeared in 2023; the premiere recording of her vocal work *The Prison* won a Grammy Award in 2022; and her choral *March of the Women* continues to be the composition most closely associated with the suffrage movement. Also receiving more frequent performance is her extraordinary *Mass in D*, a work that "inspires enthusiasm in the singers,"[2] according to one of its first champions, theorist Donald Francis Tovey. This article explores the history and musical makeup of this challenging and deeply rewarding work.

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Ethel Mary Smyth ca. 1920–25. Bain Collection.
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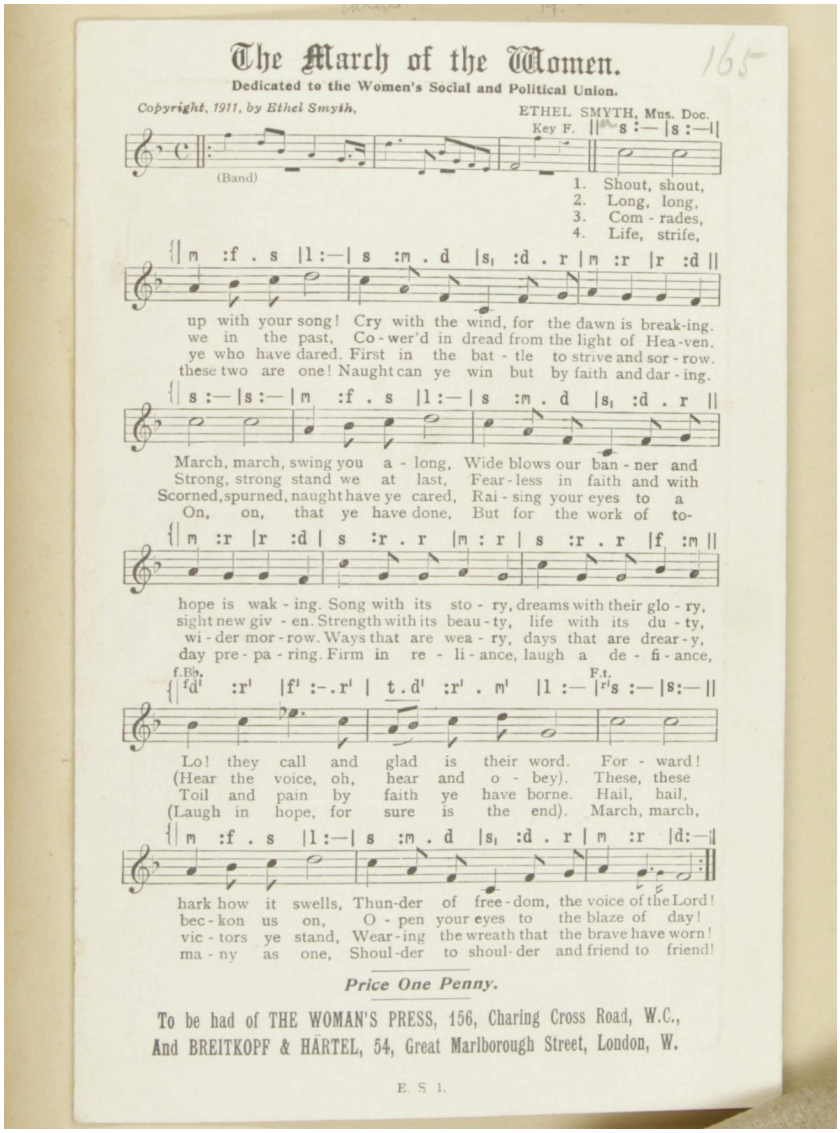
Biography

Ethel Smyth was born into an upper-class British family; her father was a major general.[3] Inspired by a governess who had attended the famed Leipzig Conservatory, she decided at the age of twelve that she, too, would study there. After overcoming her father's objections (women of her social class did not pursue professional careers in music), she enrolled at the Conservatory in 1877 to study composition with Carl Reinecke. Unhappy with her instruction at the Conservatory, however, she switched to private lessons with Leipzig-based composer Heinrich von Herzogenberg, whose wife was a close friend of Brahms. Smyth accordingly met Brahms (and occasionally turned pages for him) as well as numerous other important musicians such as Clara Schumann, Edvard Grieg, and Tchaikovsky.

Smyth returned to England after more than a decade based in Europe, although she continued to travel frequently on the continent. She produced a number of early publications, including her cello and violin sonatas (Opp. 5 and 7, respectively), but her first major composition was the *Mass in D*. She then turned her attention to opera, producing six works in three languages between 1892 and 1924, as well as choral, vocal, chamber, and orchestral works.[4] Nevertheless, her compositional output was less than one might expect from so gifted a composer. A gregarious and outgoing personality as well as a keen sportswoman, Smyth led an active social life to the noticeable detriment of her productivity. External factors affected her composition as well. For a good two years, her main focus was the suffrage movement (Photo 1), after which World War I affected her deeply, making composition almost impossible. Added to all of this was her increasing deafness. The result was that Smyth began a second career as an author during the war, publishing a series of memoirs and other nonfiction books that provide a valuable portrait of musical and cultural life in both Britain and on the continent during her lifetime.


The March of the Women.

Dedicated to the Women's Social and Political Union.

Copyright, 1911, by Ethel Smyth. ETHEL SMYTH, Mus. Doc.

Key F.

(Band)

1. Shout, shout,
2. Long, long,
3. Com - rades,
4. Life, strife,

up with your song! Cry with the wind, for the dawn is break-ing.
we in the past, Co - wer'd in dread from the light of Hea-ven.
ye who have dared. First in the bat - tle to strive and sor - row.
these two are one! Naught can ye win but by faith and dar - ing.

March, march, swing you a - long, Wide blows our ban - ner and
Strong, strong stand we at last, Fear-less in faith and with
Scorned, spurned, naught have ye cared, Rai - sing your eyes to a
On, on, that ye have done, But for the work of to-

hope is wak - ing. Song with its sto - ry, dreams with their glo - ry,
sight new giv - en. Strength with its beau - ty, life with its du - ty,
wi - der mor - row. Ways that are wea - ry, days that are drear - y,
day pre - pa - ring. Firm in re - li - ance, laugh a de - fi - ance,

Lo! they call and glad is their word. For - ward!
(Hear the voice, oh, hear and o - bey). These, these
Toil and pain by faith ye have borne. Hail, hail,
(Laugh in hope, for sure is the end). March, march,

hark how it swells, Thun-der of free - dom, the voice of the Lord!
bec - kon us on, O - pen your eyes to the blaze of day!
vic - tors ye stand, Wear - ing the wreath that the brave have worn!
ma - ny as one, Shoul - der to shoul - der and friend to friend!

Price One Penny.

To be had of THE WOMAN'S PRESS, 156, Charing Cross Road, W.C.,
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E. S. 1.

Photo 1. Ethel Smyth, March of the Women, 1911. The British Library, Public Domain

Origin and Reception of the *Mass in D*

Smyth composed the *Mass in D* during a period of religious fervor brought on by her relationships with the wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury as well as the devoutly Catholic Pauline Trevelyan. Reading Trevelyan's copy of *The Imitation of Christ* led Smyth to embrace the Anglican High Church and compose the Mass, which was dedicated to Trevelyan.[5] And that

was the end of any religious ardor. As Smyth later stated, "I was near becoming one [Catholic] myself once. Then I wrote a Mass, and I think that sweated it out of me."[6]

The Mass was finished in 1891, premiering at the Royal Albert Hall on January 18, 1893. The chorus was the Royal Choral Society conducted by Sir Joseph Barnby; the work shared the program with Haydn's *Creation*. Although the hall was packed and the audience enthusiastic, the critical reception varied. The conductor thought the mass was "over-exuberant," and the Archbishop of Canterbury, who did not like Smyth personally, remarked that "in this Mass God was not *implored* but *commanded* to have mercy."[7] George Bernard Shaw, in his less-than-positive review, claimed that "the decorative instinct is decidedly in front of the religious instinct all through, and … the religion is not of the widest and most satisfying sort."[8] The *Daily News* snidely remarked on "the preference shown to this gifted young English lady when numerous compositions by prominent musicians still await a hearing by our premier choral society."[9]

Others were considerably more enthusiastic. Conductor Hermann Levi claimed that "no living German composer … could have written it."[10] He also considered it "the strongest and most original work that had come out of England since Purcell's time."[11] For critic and *Grove Dictionary* editor J. A. Fuller Maitland:

> The work definitely places the composer among the most eminent composers of her time, and easily at the head of all those of her own sex. The most striking thing about it is the entire absence of the qualities that are usually associated with feminine productions; throughout it is virile, masterly in construction and workmanship, and particularly remarkable for the excellence and rich colour of the orchestration.[12]

Theorist Donald Francis Tovey compared it favorably to Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*, calling it "God-intoxicated music" and a "locus classicus" in choral orchestration.[13]

Structure and Highlights

The *Mass in D* is a substantial work, lasting just over an hour and calling for SATB soloists, large mixed chorus, and full orchestra. Smyth's six movements follow the common practice of dividing the Sanctus text into separate Sanctus and Benedictus sections (Table 1). Although the published score follows the liturgical order

Table 1. Structure of the *Mass in D*

Movement	Initial Tempo	Length	Key	Vocal Forces
Kyrie	*Adagio*	263 mm.	dm	chorus alone
Credo	*Allegro con fuoco*	284 mm.	DM	chorus + SATB solos
Sanctus	*Adagio non troppo*	94 mm.	DM	chorus + A solo
Benedictus	*Andante*	80 mm.	CM	soprano/alto voices + S solo
Agnus	*Adagio non troppo*	203 mm.	dm	chorus + T solo
Gloria	*Allegro vivace*	615 mm.	DM	chorus + SATB solos

of Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus, and Agnus, it also contains Smyth's surprising recommendation to sing the Gloria last, since she wished the Mass to conclude joyfully.[14] As it turns out, this reordering is beneficial to the chorus, as it means that the three most choral-heavy movements (Kyrie, Gloria, and Credo) are no longer consecutive.

Smyth begins the Mass with the only movement without soloists.[15] Despite its very short text, this Kyrie is substantial, with almost as many measures as the text-rich Credo. The movement is dominated by its opening motive (Figure 1) that serves as an ostinato for the basses throughout the initial Kyrie but also recurs in all voices throughout the movement and returns at the end. The quiet opening of the movement gives no hint of the faster central section of the movement that will come. This central section concludes with powerful *fortissimo* octave motion in all voices—an exciting moment early on in the Mass—before a return to the *tempo primo* and a quiet conclusion. As an added benefit to singers, the motivic unification throughout this movement simplifies the learning process.

The Credo presents an instant contrast with its fast, syncopated pulse and switch to D Major. The lengthy text presents numerous opportunities for contrast, such as the solo tenor for "Qui propter nos homines," the hushed slow motion of "et homo factus est" appropriately sung by divisi male voices, the descending chromatic twists of the Crucifixus, and the imitative rising motives of "et resurrexit." The movement concludes with the expected fugue on "Et vitam venturi."

The peaceful Sanctus, with its eight-part homorhythmic divisi chorus and alto soloist, is followed by the equally peaceful but very different Benedictus. The

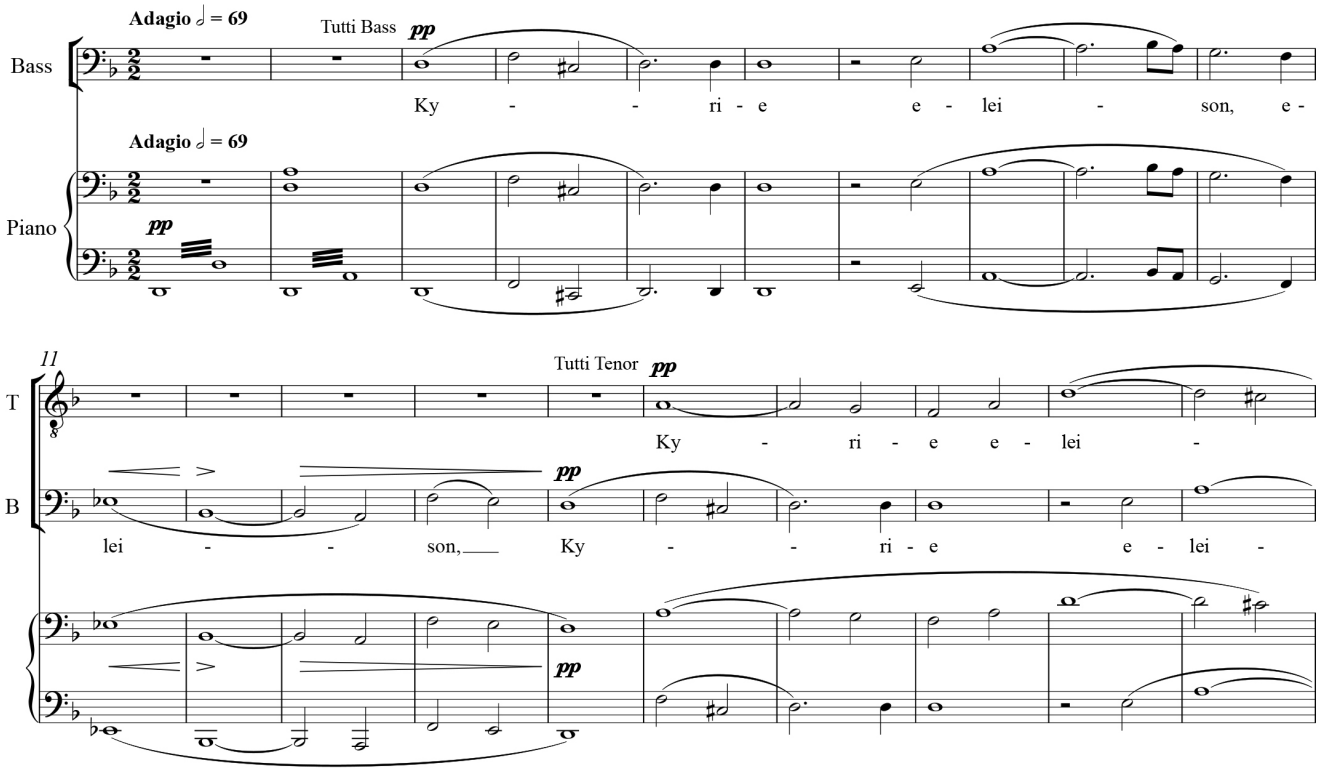


Figure 1. Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D*, "Kyrie," mm. 1–20.
1925, public domain

Benedictus section is frequently a place of choral rest, with the text given to multiple soloists; the chorus would then return for the obligatory repeat of the Osanna text (most often sung to a repeat of whatever Osanna music concluded the Sanctus). Smyth, however, takes an unusual and unexpected approach. She eschews the concluding Osanna text altogether, and the Benedictus is performed by the soprano soloist and chorus women only, the latter mostly in SSA combination but sometimes with a second alto part added. This focus on soprano and alto voices provides an especially compelling sonority for this movement.

The beginning of the Agnus presents a strong contrast to the preceding music. The switch to minor is appropriate now for the brooding plea for mercy; after the extended tenor solo that begins the movement, the powerful attack of the chorus underscores the anguish of the plea. The chorus then provides the quiet transition to the final tranquil "dona nobis pacem" and switch to major. Performers who wish to follow the published score and end the Mass here, rather than using Smyth's preferred Gloria conclusion, will find it an effective and fitting close.

Those who accede to Smyth's wishes, however, will proceed to the exuberant Gloria, where, as in the Credo, the composer changes tempo, meter, mode, and texture as needed to bring out the text, whether it is the brisk homorhythmic opening "Gloria," the slower and softer "Et in terra pax hominibus," or the chromatic minor for "miserere nobis." Especially effective is Smyth's massive buildup as she approaches the close of the movement (and the Mass). This begins with the choral "tu solus Dominus," then shifts to a solo section with an especially moving "cum Sancto Spiritu" by the alto soloist over a poignant reiterated oboe motive (Figure 2), and finally returns to full choral glory for the drive to the cadence. Smyth succeeded brilliantly in her desire for a positive ending to this work.

The Path to Recognition

Overall, the mass is a thrilling, powerful, composition. Working with rich Brahmsian harmonies, Smyth shifts tempos and textures throughout to match the ever-changing text, using a sure hand with the orchestration to maximize the impact. Despite relatively few performances since its premiere, the Mass is in fact one of the major choral/orchestral works of the nineteenth century. It is, therefore, sobering to realize that this piece was almost lost to the world.

The premiere was slow to happen in the first place. Thanks to the dominance of the Anglican Church in Britain and its preference for English texts, little interest existed in the late nineteenth century for Latin works by English composers, especially one, like Smyth, trained in Leipzig rather than at home. Some

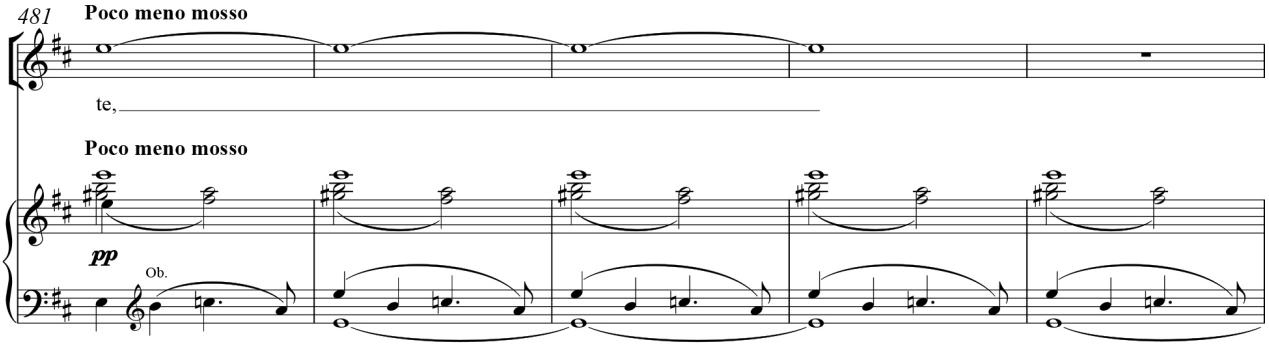


Figure 2. Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D*, "Gloria," mm. 481-485. 1925, public domain

Anglican composers still wrote Latin-texted music, but important figures such as John Stainer and Arthur Sullivan wrote no Latin-texted works at all. Most of the Latin-texted sacred music that did exist used organ or was unaccompanied (e.g., Charles Villiers Stanford's popular Op. 38 motets), although Hubert Parry wrote a *De profundis* (1891) and *Magnificat* (1897) and Stanford a Requiem (Op. 63, 1897) and *Te deum* (Op. 66, 1898) using orchestra. Overall, the amount of Latin-texted music at the time was dwarfed by choral works in English, with oratorios on biblical subjects being especially popular.

Smyth was not the first modern composer in Britain to write a choral/orchestral Mass, but she was the first of only three composers we now consider of major significance to do so. Smyth's Mass was followed by Stanford's Op. 46 *Mass in G* (completed in late 1892) and Vaughan Williams's *Cambridge Mass* of 1899. Even in this company, Smyth's Mass stands out as different, for Vaughan Williams's work was a Missa brevis composed as an academic requirement and Stanford's work was a liturgical mass written on commission.[16] In contrast, Smyth intended her work for the concert hall from the start.

Ethel Smyth, 1903. Aimé Dupont Studio. www.ethelsmyth.org

Smyth was well aware of musical preferences of the time, writing, "If I had chosen an Old Testament subject—say, Methuselah, or perhaps Joash King of Judah … one of the Three Choirs Festivals might have jumped at it. But, strange to say, the everlasting beauty of the Mass appealed to me more strongly."[17] She also recognized that, since the piece required a full orchestra, large chorus, and SATB soloists, "a huge and complicated choral work is not a convenient item in a choral season."[18] Fortunately, Smyth had the support of both Queen Victoria and the Empress Eugenie, widow of Emperor Napoleon III of France; the latter paid for the necessary publication of the music.[19] The Empress, a personal friend of Smyth's, arranged for the composer to play portions of the Mass during one of the Queen's visits to the Empress. Queen Victoria then invited Smyth to Balmoral Castle to perform still more of the Mass.[20] The patronage of these two monarchs helped make the eventual performance of the Mass a society event.

Despite accolades from leading musicians of the time after the premiere, Smyth still had to wait more than thirty years until the second performance in 1924. Christopher St. John suggests of Smyth:

> She was born at least twenty years too soon for the merits of her music to be immediately recognized by her contemporaries. Its vigour and rhythmic force, its intensely personal character, were something new in English music of the early nineties, and the new … is always feared by the majority.[21]

James Garratt suggested that "the Mass seemingly shakes its fist at the conventionality and isolationism of the British choral tradition."[22] Certainly not much changed in the British choral scene in the early twentieth century, at least in terms of preferred genres. Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912), whose choral works cemented his fame, set nothing in Latin, and the same is true for Frederick Delius (1862–1934), whose *Mass of Life* is based on Nietzsche and whose Requiem uses a text by Heinrich Simon. Vaughan Williams's Mass from 1921 is unaccompanied, while that by Charles Wood uses only organ accompaniment. Holst, Vaughan Williams, and Wood set a few additional unaccompanied Latin texts, but Latin was not the focus of their choral efforts. Only the prolific Stanford wrote a choral/orchestral Mass in this period, the *Mass Via Victrix* Op. 173, as well as three unaccompanied masses and an unaccompanied *Magnificat*.

Accordingly, Smyth's initial attempts to secure a second performance were failures. Despite claiming to be "mad keen" about the Mass, choral societies "all had commitments which prevented a date being fixed for its performance."[23] A friend of Smyth's was told that "at Amsterdam the Committee of the Choral Union were *afraid* of the effect of producing a woman's work."[24] Smyth later wrote about this period:

> I think the slaying of the Mass … not only distressed but honestly surprised Barnby [the conductor]. Yet gazing back … I see that nothing else could have been expected. Year in year out, composers of the Inner Circle, generally University men attached to our musical institutions, produced one choral work after another—not infrequently deadly dull affairs—which, helped along by the impetus of official approval, automatically went the round of our Festivals and Choral Societies, having paid the publisher's expenses and brought in something for the composers before they disappeared for ever. Was it likely, then, that the Faculty would see any merit in a work written on such different lines—written too by a woman who had actually gone off to Germany to learn her trade?[25]

Elsewhere, Smyth wrote that "to squash that Mass and relegate it to limbo for 33 years was a triumph of the art of refusing to see. Will anyone point to the masterpieces of the 'nineties that naturally put its poor nose out of joint? Where are they today?"[26]

Smyth describes the lead-up to the eventual second performance thus:

> In the middle 'twenties, my pre-war musical activities having been staged mainly in Germany, I bethought me … of the Mass, which had never achieved a second performance, which none but grey-beards had heard, and the existence of which I had practically forgotten. A couple of limp and dusty piano-scores were found on an upper shelf, and after agitated further searchings and vain enquiries at Messrs. Novello's, the full score turned up in my loft. In spite of the judgment of the Faculty the work had evidently been appreciated by the mice, and on sitting down to examine it I shared their opinion, and decided that it really deserved a better fate than thirty-one years of suspended animation. But when I consulted the publishers as to the possibility of a revival, the reply was: 'Much as we regret to say so, we fear your Mass is dead.' This verdict stung me into activity.[27]

Thanks to Smyth's efforts, Adrian Boult conducted performances in Birmingham (February 7, 1924) and London shortly thereafter (March 3).

A century later, performances are finally increasing.[28] Recent performances of the Mass have taken place across Britain and in the United States, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and Sweden, sung by a very wide range of choruses, including symphony chorus (BBC Symphony Chorus), professional choir (Voices of the Ascension), cathedral choir (Cathedral Choral Society, Washington National Cathedral), town/gown chorus (Eastman-Rochester Chorus), and community chorus (Cappella Clausura). Still, Smyth's contributions as a choral composer continue to be overlooked in places where they might be expected. She is missing from Chester Alwes's two-volume *A History of Western Choral Music* (2016); she is absent from Stephen Town's

An Imperishable Heritage: British Choral Music from Parry to Dyson (2012); and she appears only in the revised 2022 edition of Dennis Shrock's *Choral Repertoire*, not the 787-page original 2009 edition.[29]

Preparation for Performance

One can offer various reasons for Smyth's slow start in entering the repertoire. The most obvious one is that, even though women composers have been producing excellent music since the Middle Ages, each has been essentially forgotten after her own time. Smyth's book *Female Pipings in Eden* is about precisely the precarious position of women in the arts and her own experiences of prejudice and misogyny; she was well aware of the resistance her music encountered because she was a "woman composer." Only with the advent of second-wave feminism did a sustained attempt to reclaim women's musical history arise.[30] Even today, compositions by women composers receive fewer performances than those by men.

Significantly, though, the *Mass in D* has been considered difficult: Christopher St. John, Smyth's first biographer, noted this, as did Tovey.[31] In writing about a different choral work by Smyth, no less a figure than Gustav Holst, a superlative composer for choirs and a choir director himself, said, "Why, oh why is *Hey Nonny No* so hard!"[32] In fact, *Hey Nonny No* is in many ways far easier than the Mass.[33] The work's rhythms are straightforward, its text underlay is overwhelmingly syllabic, and its texture lacks any contrapuntal artifice. It is only the harmonic writing that makes *Hey Nonny No* challenging. In discussing Smyth's vocal writing in general, Elizabeth Wood states, "Her music challenges an untrained voice, for it requires great strength and agility; even trained singers have complained of its technical risks."[34]

The *Mass in D*, however, is no more difficult than other major choral/orchestral works, although conductors choosing to program the work should be aware of certain things to watch in preparation for performance.[35] First, until recently, the orchestral parts for the Mass were error ridden, a fact that hardly made performance more enticing. Fortunately, the parts were redone in 2020, eliminating one performance challenge.[36] But choruses still must use the one choral score available, Novello's revised piano/vocal score from 1925. Like many older scores and even some recent ones, it lacks measure numbers and employs not-especially-appealing fonts for both text and music.[37] Stems are occasionally missing for some notes (e.g., the first soprano pitch at Letter T on p. 79). More significant is the use of the old-fashioned quarter-note rest that is a mirror version of the eighth-note rest. Conductors will likely need to point this out to singers so that they can make the adjustment to an unaccustomed notational practice as quickly as possible. For this article, Figures 1, 2, 3, and 6 have been re-inscribed, but Figure 4 is reproduced directly from the score that singers would use in performance, thus highlighting the very different look of this earlier score.

The following musical examples highlight various elements of Smyth's typical musical style in the Mass that especially deserve conductors' attention.

Smyth shows a striking tendency to begin motives or long notes on weak beats in a measure. Figure 3 on the next page, from the Credo, shows an example of such unexpected rhythmic placement. The soloists are concluding their section in cut time with an Andante tempo. The music then switches to common time and "allegro energico." The imitative choral entries on "Qui cum patre" are all on weak beats, however, with the rhythmic displacement compounded in the alto part in the first measure of the bottom system by the commencement of a whole note on beat two. The same unexpected rhythmic layout is found earlier in the movement in the "Dominum et vivificantem" section. Conductors need extreme clarity in their beat and cues at such points.

Figure 4 on page 16, taken from the Gloria, shows multiple tendencies in Smyth's writing (page 31 of the vocal score; note the missing quarter rest in the final measure of the bass). We see again Smyth's use of weak-beat entries. At the beginning of the bottom staff, the sopranos have an extended high $g^{2\flat}$ that begins on the weak beat of the measure (the meter here is 2/2). It is far more common in choral writing to begin extended notes (i.e., whole note or longer) on the strong beat of a measure, most often the downbeat. This practice has a venerable tradition dating back to the fifteenth century, where the tactus provided strong and weak beats in the musical pulse. Smyth goes against that practice in numerous places throughout the Mass. Conductors

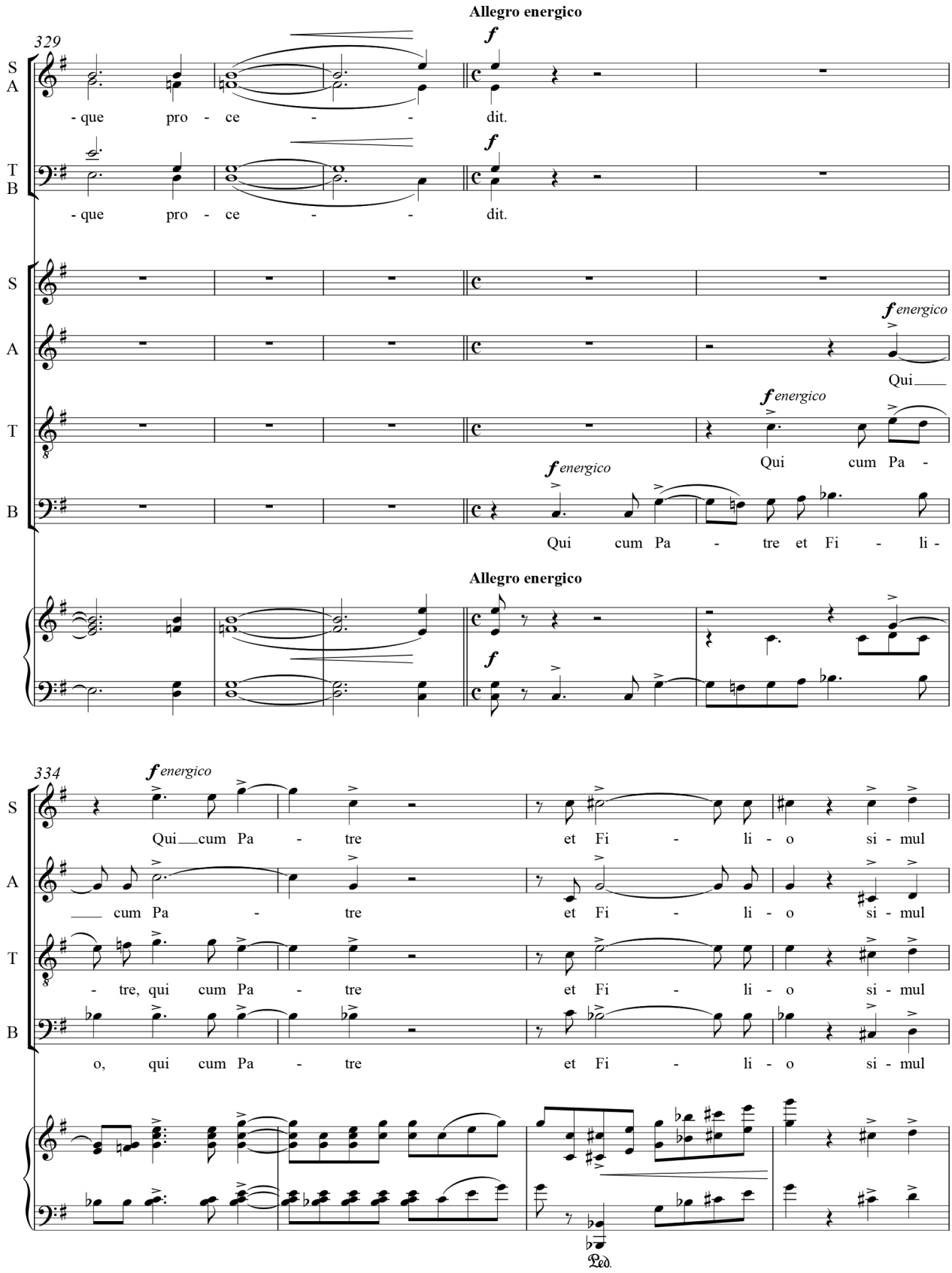


Figure 3. Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D*, "Credo," mm. 329–337.
1925, public domain

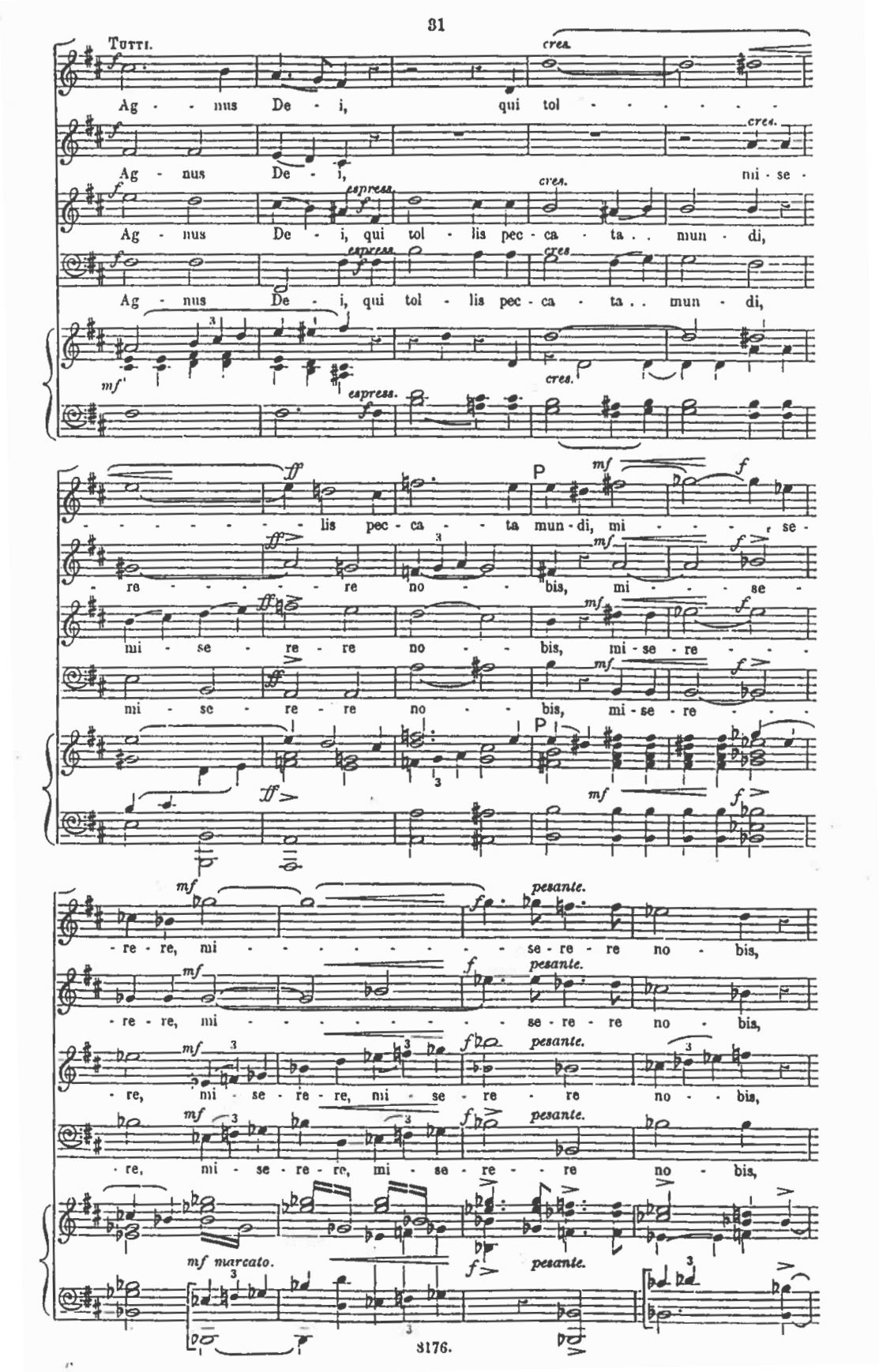


Figure 4. Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D*, "Gloria," mm. 317-330.
reproduction of 1925 score, public domain

should encourage singers to use whatever will help them keep their place when longer notes enter on the "wrong" beats, whether that is numbering beats in a measure or adding hash marks.

Figure 4 also shows some of Smyth's harmonic tendencies. Even though the overall harmonic plan of the Mass is quite straightforward—with the exception of the C Major Benedictus, all movements have D minor or D Major as their home key—Smyth frequently shifts the harmonic focus within movements, rapidly and not always to closely related keys. The excerpt shown here begins in B minor, but by the end of the page the key has shifted to the distant E flat minor. Such unexpected modulations and Smyth's extreme fondness for harmonically unstable seventh chords (and other extended harmonies) can generate melodic lines that require special attention in rehearsal.

The *Mass in D* presents some challenge in the ranges required for the singers. Figure 5 shows that these are extensive for every voice part: close to two octaves for altos and second tenors, two octaves precisely for first sopranos, first tenors, and first basses, and more than two octaves for second sopranos and second basses. Further, Smyth is not always sparing in her use of registral extremes. The low D in the second bass part—a pitch normally avoided in choral writing—is found in every movement, and it is held for four full measures in the "pax hominibus" section of the Gloria. Sopranos, meanwhile, hold high a^2 for four measures right before the end of the Credo, and at letter S in the same movement their a^2 extends for five and a half measures. The most striking use of extreme ranges is found in the Benedictus, however.

Figure 6 on the next page shows the second choral entrance in the Benedictus, with some slightly unexpected melodic writing and, most striking, the tessitura of the alto part when the texture is for three voices. It is normal when writing for three-part women's voices for the alto line to lie somewhat lower than usual. But Smyth takes this tendency to the extreme. By the end of the page the alto line has descended to g sharp below middle c^1; it moves to g natural at the top of the next page, and elsewhere in the movement it sinks to the f sharp a fifth below middle c^1, a half step lower than the recommended limit for basic alto part-writing. Now, many alto parts go below middle c^1, and sometimes indeed down to low f sharp or even f. But in most part writing, the alto line usually stays at middle c^1 or above, and when it goes below that, it tends not to linger there. In contrast, the alto part in Benedictus, when the writing is in three voices, spends most of its time below middle c^1. The part contains 153 notes,[38] of which only 53 are middle c^1 or above and 100 are below middle c^1. I know of no alto part anywhere written for women's voices that spends that much time in the lowest range of the alto voice.[39] Smyth's unusual emphasis on this low tessitura makes for one of the most effective sections of the Mass.

The *Mass is D* was only Smyth's second choral/orchestral composition; her earlier work, *The Song of Love* (Op. 8), is a cantata from 1888.[40] Although Smyth was evidently a compelling solo singer, she was not a choral singer. But that did not prevent her from writing an impressive work. One is reminded of John Adams and his first choral work, *Harmonium*. In his memoir, Adams candidly acknowledges that:

> The choral writing was full of unreasonable difficulties, the result of my inexperience in composing for voices … Singers continue to blanch at the challenges to their voices and my requirement that they count bars as if they were rivets in a stadium roof.[41]

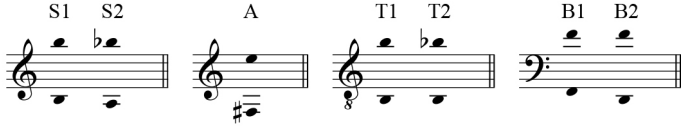
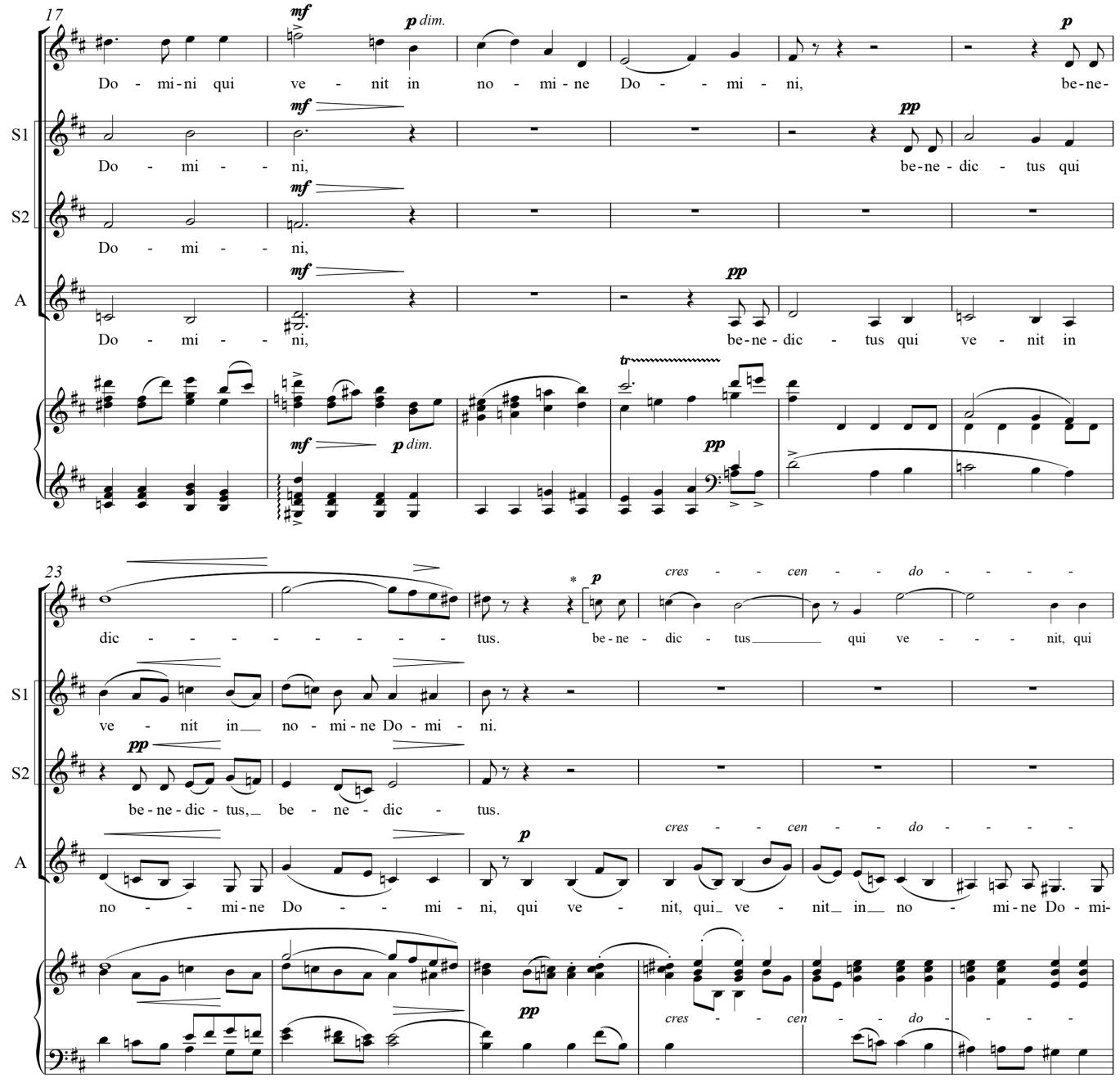


Figure 5. Choral ranges in Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D.*



*The passage in brackets is only to be sung when this number is performed without Chorus.

Figure 6. Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D*, "Benedictus," mm. 17–28.
1925, public domain

But Adams then continues: "Once they learn to perform it, rarely will chorus members communicate to me a lingering resentment over the work's challenges."[42] The same is true for the *Mass in D*. Tovey noted long ago that the Mass "inspires enthusiasm in the singers."[43] And in writing about the Mass, Smyth herself said, "I see that…I shall never do anything better!"[44] Like every challenging piece of music by a good composer, music that seems unexpected when one is first learning it comes to feel "just right" once performers master their parts.

Conclusion

Early in her career Ethel Smyth declared, "Oh what a Mass I will write one day! *Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi*. What words! What words!"[45] In the time between the first and the second performance, when the latter seemed unlikely, she also presciently wrote, "But if, even after one's own death, anyone thinks it worth producing, it will not have been written in vain."[46]

Ethel Smyth's *Mass in D* was certainly not written in vain; it is an extraordinary work in multiple ways. It is extraordinary that it was composed at all in a musical climate with small interest in the genre. It is extraordinary that the score was not lost and that Smyth never gave up on her attempts to garner a second performance despite many obstacles and an unsupportive publisher. And it is simply extraordinary as a dramatic and exciting piece of music that has a powerful impact on both performers and listeners. The Mass is a deeply rewarding sing, and it deserves to take its place in the pantheon of choral works that are known and beloved by all. CJ

NOTES

[1] A partial listing of recent performances and recordings (as well as much other information on Smyth) can be found at www.ethelsmyth.org; website content curated by Smyth specialist Dr. Amy Zigler.

[2] Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis* (Oxford University Press, 1937), V: 236.

[3] The three full-length biographies of Smyth are Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1959); Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (William Kimber, 1984); and Sulamith Sparre, *"Man sagt, ich sei ein Egoist. Ich bin eine Kämpferin"*: *Dame Ethel Mary Smyth (1858–1944)*, *Komponistin, Dirigentin, Schriftstellerin, Suffragette*, Widerständige Frauen 10 (Verlag Edition AV, 2010). St. John (birth name Christabel Marshall) was Smyth's literary executor and friend who first met the composer in 1911. Smyth herself left six memoirs: *Impressions that Remained: Memoirs*, 2 vols. (Longmans, Green, 1919); *Streaks of Life* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1921; 2nd ed. 1922); *A Final Burning of Boats Etc*. (Longmans, Green and Co., 1928); *Female Pipings in Eden* (Peter Davies, 1933; 2nd ed. 1934); *As Time Went On...* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1936); and *What Happened Next* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1940). An extensive bibliography appears at www.ethelsmyth.org. All biographical information in this article comes from these sources.

[4] For a detailed list of works with information on available editions, visit www.ethelsmyth.org.

[5] On the composition of the Mass, see *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, ed. Ronald Crichton (Viking, 1987), 164, as well as Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, 47–50.

[6] St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, xvi.

[7] Barnby's assessment as "over-exuberant" is found in *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, 194. The Archbishop's comment appears in Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 172.

[8] George Bernard Shaw, *Music in London 1890–94: Criticisms Contributed Week by Week to the World*, 3 vols. (Vienna House, 1973), II: 244.

[9] Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, 64.

[10] Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 50.

[11] Elizabeth Wood, "Lesbian Fugue: Ethel Smyth's Contrapuntal Arts," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (University of California Press, 1995), 183.

[12] J. A. Fuller Maitland, "Smyth, Ethel," in *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1911), 490.

[13] Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, V: 235–236.

[14] The score reads "N.B.—It is recommended that in performing this work, the numbers be given in the following order: *Kyrie, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei, Gloria*. E.S." In fact, this order follows the Book of Common Prayer.

[15] Several recordings of the complete Mass are available on YouTube. An excellent one by the BBC Symphony and Chorus can be followed along with the score at www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVSpw3srMbc.

[16] The commissioner was Catholic convert Thomas Wingham, the musical director of Brompton Oratory. The Oratory

was one of the few venues in Britain championing orchestral masses at the time. See Jeremy Dibble, *Charles Villiers Stanford: Man and Musician*, rev. ed., Irish Musical Studies 15 (The Boydell Press, 2024), 278.

[17] Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, 102.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Collis, *Impetuous Heart*, 60.

[20] Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, 90–102.

[21] St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 87.

[22] James Garratt, "Britain and Ireland," in *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music*, ed. Donna M. Di Grazia (Routledge, 2013), 357.

[23] St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 91.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 172–173.

[26] Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats Etc.*, 17–18.

[27] Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 173. The original autographed full score was thought to have been lost again after 1924 but was located by Dr. Lisa Colton in March 2025; see www.womensongforum.org/2025/04/30/discovering-the-original-manuscript-of-ethel-smyths-mass-in-d/ The full manuscript has now been digitized at https://digitalheritagelab.liverpool.ac.uk/ethel-smyth-mass-in-d. A new edition to be published by Breitkopf und Härtel is underway.

[28] A partial list of recent performances (since 2008) is found at www.wisemusicclassical.com/performances/search/work/10017/. Probably because Smyth was famed as a suffragist, the most performances took place in 2018, the centennial of the Act of Parliament that first granted the vote to British women, though only propertied ones over the age of thirty.

[29] Dennis Shrock, *Choral Repertoire* (Oxford University Press, 2009; rev. ed. 2022); Chester L. Alwes, *A History of Western Choral Music*, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 2015–2016); Stephen Town, *An Imperishable Heritage: British Choral Music from Parry to Dyson* (Ashgate, 2012).

[30] See, for example, the pathbreaking *Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Indiana University Press, 1986) and the essay collection *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (University of Illinois Press, 1987).

[31] St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 85, wrote that for the premiere, "Chorus and orchestra were intensively rehearsed, and they needed to be, as Ethel's score made demands on their technique to which they were unaccustomed." Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, 236, calls the vocal writing "somewhat difficult."

[32] St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 152.

[33] The score can be found in the Choral Public Domain Library.

[34] Elizabeth Wood, "Sapphonics," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2006), 45.

[35] Conductors contemplating performance are encouraged to follow the score online; see note 15. Practice tracks for parts of the Mass are now beginning to appear online; for example, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4NCPtmQreM.

[36] I am grateful to Dr. William Weinert for providing information about the orchestral parts.

[37] Ethel Smyth, *Mass in D for Soli, Chorus, and Orchestra*, revised edition (Novello, 1925). All references are to this score.

[38] That number does not include the few instances where the music splits into four parts.

[39] Parts designated "altus" or "contra" in Renaissance music frequently have a low tessitura, but they were sung by men. Perhaps anticipating vocal difficulties for the choir, Smyth writes in the Benedictus score "Can be sung as Solo, without Chorus" (p. 88).

[40] Earlier choral works, all unpublished, are unaccompanied.

[41] John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 114–15.

[42] Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 115.

[43] Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, 236.

[44] Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, 103.

[45] St. John, *Ethel Smyth*, 58.

[46] Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, 103.