

Strength Through Conflict:
Understanding Ruth Gipps, Her Musical Voice, & Her Contributions to Oboe Repertoire

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ABSTRACT

Ruth Gipps was an English composer, performer, and conductor whose unique experiences and opinions shaped her compositional output and the musical world around her. Gipps was a conflicted individual throughout her life, facing challenges as an outsider in almost every area of her professional life: child prodigy turned adult musician, outspoken conservative English composer positioned against a new international style, and woman in a male-dominated space as an orchestral performer and conductor. Perhaps as a result of her many struggles, she developed internal dissonances between her beliefs, her words, and her actions. These inner conflicts, manifesting in her musical voice as well as her work as a conductor, greatly impacted her career and oeuvre. Despite her inner turmoil, Gipps was always passionately and unapologetically expressive of her personality and beliefs, refusing to compromise or change her behavior even when it negatively impacted her reputation and opportunities. It was this intensity and dedication that enabled her to positively impact musicians in her life, whom she deeply cared about, and to communicate with performers and listeners of her compositions. This document reviews the literature about Gipps, which includes two books by Jill Halstead as well as several dissertations. Information from these sources directly addressing Gipps as well as other pertinent literature is used to explore the disconnects and conflicts that characterized Gipps's life and music. A discussion of four of Gipps's oboe family works, *Kensington Gardens Suite*, op. 2 (1938), *The Piper of Dreams*, op. 12b (1940), Oboe Concerto in D minor, op. 20 (1941), and *Threnody*, op. 74 (1990), relates these impactful conflicts to Gipps's unique musical voice and her contributions to oboe repertoire.

DEDICATION

This research paper is dedicated to Dottie Smith, my first oboe teacher and my forever mentor. Your trailblazing in Louisiana made it possible for me to grow up in a nurturing musical environment. Your commitment to your students as musicians and as people changed my life and continues to inspire me as a colleague and teacher. Though I could never possibly thank you enough for your love and support, I will work to pay it forward every day to carry on your legacy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Ruth Gipps (1921-1999) was a talented musician and a multifaceted, fascinating person. She was born to a musical family settled in Bexhill-on-Sea, England. Shortly after she began to speak, she nicknamed herself “Widdy” and insisted that everyone address her as such, becoming known to all as “Wid” even as an adult.¹ Gipps’s musical talent was recognizable from early childhood, evolving into a regular performance schedule as a child prodigy pianist. Her creativity was also applauded as she won awards for her first-ever compositions, beginning at age eight.² After tasting success at such a young age, Gipps set her sights on becoming a professional composer and concert pianist. To pursue these aspirations, she entered the Royal College of Music (henceforth referred to as RCM) in 1937.³ Gipps would study piano, composition, and oboe at RCM, where she met many important friends and mentors. She was always regarded as talented but struggled to transition from child prodigy to regular adolescent student.⁴

It was during her years at RCM that Gipps began to play the oboe, eventually earning a spot in the studio of Leon Goossens. She quickly progressed to a professional level, which allowed her to pursue a career as an orchestral player.⁵ After some delay due to World War II raging across Europe, Gipps was also able to study composition with Ralph Vaughan Williams, who became a valuable mentor and important influence on the

¹ Jill Halstead, *Ruth Gipps: Anti-Modernism, Nationalism and Difference in English Music* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 4.

² *Ibid*, 5-6.

³ *Ibid*, 11.

⁴ *Ibid*, 13.

⁵ *Ibid*, 15.

rest of her musical life.⁶ Upon nearing her graduation from RCM, Gipps married her classmate Robert Baker, a clarinetist. Gipps had pledged never to let marriage interfere with her career, and she stood by this commitment. This was facilitated by Baker's absence due to military commitments for the early years of their marriage. Gipps was able to tour and perform with many professional groups, but it was a lonely life at times.⁷

While Baker was away, Gipps was offered the second oboe and English horn position with the City of Birmingham Orchestra by its conductor, George Weldon, who became one of her closest friends. Scandal soon surrounded their friendship as rumors of an affair flew, ultimately leading to Gipps's resignation from the orchestra. This effectively ended her career as an orchestral oboist.⁸

Baker returned from the war and took the first clarinet position with the City of Birmingham Orchestra, providing the financial stability needed to start a family. Neither pregnancy nor motherhood would slow Gipps down, however. In a classic example of Gipps's determination and drive, she took and passed her Doctor of Musical Arts exam at Durham University while seven months pregnant. This was certainly a shock to her committee, as women of this time were expected to leave their public lives once visibly pregnant. When one of her professors asked when she was due, she responded with her signature quick wit: "Not until after the exam."⁹ Thus, Gipps became one of the first women to earn a Doctorate of Musical Arts. Soon after, she became mother to her beloved son, Lance Baker.

⁶ Ibid, 22.

⁷ Ibid, 24-25.

⁸ Ibid, 26.

⁹ Quoted in *ibid*, 30-31.

It was around this time that Gipps's interest in conducting was sparked. She was given the opportunity to conduct a local group for rehearsals only, so she began conducting lessons with Weldon. When she fell in love with conducting and voiced a desire to do it publicly, Weldon forced her to choose between her friendship with him and a professional conducting career, which he and many others saw as inappropriate for a woman. Gipps committed to her conducting career and never looked back.¹⁰

Opportunities for Gipps's compositional and conducting development were scarce. To solve this problem, she founded the London Repertoire Orchestra, with the goal to provide experience in a one-rehearsal setting for young professional musicians. This created a conducting position for her and also enabled her to program her own compositions as well as others she wished to promote.¹¹ Gipps went on to create the Chanticleer Orchestra later in life and also played roles in several societies such as the Composers' Guild of Great Britain. Her work with the British Music Information Centre was particularly influential. Despite her success and versatility, her compositions struggled to gain public attention, in part due to her complicated relationship with the British Broadcasting Corporation, commonly known as the BBC.¹² The BBC played an important role in promoting composers and works and shaping musical tastes due to its great resources and far reach; Gipps viewed this powerful position as a dangerous monopoly of broadcasting, which she vocally disagreed with.¹³ This risky whistle-blowing, on top of the BBC's evident rejection of the traditional English style for much

¹⁰ Ibid, 31-33.

¹¹ Ibid, 33.

¹² Ibid, 36-37.

¹³ Ibid, 53.

of Gipps's career,¹⁴ likely contributed to the neglect of Gipps's works and performances in public broadcasting as well as in written media. Despite such isolation and exclusion, Gipps continued to compose, teach, and perform until just a couple of years before her death in 1999.¹⁵

Ruth Gipps was an English composer, performer, and conductor whose unique experiences and opinions shaped her compositional output and the musical world around her. Gipps was a conflicted individual throughout her life, facing challenges as an outsider in almost every area of her professional life: child-prodigy-turned-adult musician, outspoken conservative English composer positioned against a new international style, and woman in a male-dominated space as an orchestral performer and conductor. Perhaps as a result of her many struggles, several internal dissonances between her beliefs, her words, and her actions become evident as her life is considered. These inner conflicts, manifesting in her musical voice as well as her work as a conductor, greatly impacted her career and oeuvre. Despite her inner turmoil, Gipps was always passionately and unapologetically expressive of her personality and beliefs, refusing to compromise or change her behavior even when it negatively impacted her reputation and opportunities. It was this intensity and dedication that enabled her to positively impact musicians in her life, whom she deeply cared about, and to communicate with performers and listeners of her compositions.

This document will review the published literature about Gipps, which includes two books by Jill Halstead as well as several dissertations. Information from these

¹⁴ Ibid, 81-82.

¹⁵ Ibid, 39.

sources directly addressing Gipps as well as other pertinent literature will be used to explore the disconnects and conflicts that characterized Gipps's life and music. This section will be followed by a discussion of four of Gipps's oboe family works, *Kensington Gardens Suite*, op. 2 (1938), *The Piper of Dreams*, op. 12b (1940), Oboe Concerto in D minor, op. 20 (1941), and *Threnody*, op. 74 (1990). This exploration of Gipps's compositions will shed light on her unique musical voice and her contributions to oboe repertoire.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

At the forefront of literature addressing Ruth Gipps is Jill Halstead's biography entitled *Ruth Gipps: Anti-Modernism, Nationalism and Difference in English Music*. This book contains two major sections: "Part One: Themes in Life," which chronicles Gipps's life overall with a focus on her career as a performer, and "Part Two: Themes in Music," which addresses Gipps's musical style and features readings of selected pieces that consider specific themes or interests from her life. A complete list of works follows, containing year of publication, opus number, title, instrumentation, duration, and information about dedication and premiers or performances.

In Halstead's own words, "This book attempts to catalogue Gipps's career and assess her legacy as a music-maker."¹⁶ Halstead synthesizes information from a variety of sources, including publicly available records and reviews as well as information directly from the Gipps family and Ruth Gipps herself. Halstead's book provides a wealth of exclusive information gathered not only from Gipps's unpublished autobiography and other personal effects, but also from years of letters, interviews, and conversations between author and subject. Although any person's summarization of another's life and works is bound to present bias in at least some ways, this book contains an incredible amount of objective primary source information, as well as many thoughtfully explained and supported conclusions from Halstead.

¹⁶ Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, ix.

Gipps was not always an easy subject, according to Halstead, who reminisces about a few times her letters to Gipps were returned with corrected grammar.¹⁷ Never one to back down, Gipps was always outspoken and defiant, qualities that Halstead claims to have obscured her legacy as an influential music maker. Halstead writes, “Her career was defined by a sense of perpetual embattlement” as she stood up for herself and refused to change herself or her work to appease others.¹⁸ This incredible power and perseverance in the face of difficulty is precisely what makes Gipps’s output and story so worthwhile. Halstead is sympathetic to these issues, but also analytical and factual throughout the book. It is from this perspective that Halstead weaves the tale of Gipps’s life in Part One and sheds light on her compositions and musical style in Part Two.

Part One is organized chronologically, beginning with important information about Gipps’s family and childhood and proceeds through her education, career and music-making, which continued until her death. Halstead balances Gipps’s own story with important historical context, providing enough detail to impart understanding of the era without getting bogged down with extraneous information that distracts from the narrative. For example, there is a thorough explanation of wartime in England and how it impacted Gipps’s career.¹⁹ Helpful and specific context is provided as Halstead thoughtfully acknowledges the woman conductors that paved the way for Gipps, as well as some of her contemporaries.²⁰ The musical landscape of the time is explained, including the changes in taste that caused serious dilemmas for Neo-romantics like

¹⁷ Ibid, x.

¹⁸ Ibid, xi.

¹⁹ Ibid, Chapter Two.

²⁰ Ibid, 42.

Gipps. An insightful commentary on the persona and public figure of the masculine, heroic conductor is used to explain why the female conductor was expected to serve only as an educator or nurturer.²¹ Halstead tackles the complex and interrelated issues of femininity, female sexuality, the female body, and societal expectations that caused difficulty for woman performers and women in positions of authority.²² Observations and explorations of topics such as these make this book useful to any reader regardless of their experience with music or feminist literature.

Throughout this section of the book, Halstead includes a wealth of specific information within the larger story of Gipps's life, such as dates and locations of premieres, circumstances of performances, and awards and praise that Gipps received. It is clear that Halstead has closely examined Gipps's works and incorporates information gleaned from them. For example, Halstead is able to address difficult feelings Gipps faced in her youth through a discussion of her semi-autobiographical radio play.²³ Other non-compositional information and documents are presented and examined too, such as a performance poster that Halstead uses to demonstrate Gipps's use of persona and provocative clothing to garner attention.²⁴ Halstead consistently cites these outside sources of information to add weight to her own conclusions, creating compelling arguments around tricky topics.

Perhaps even more difficult for the biographer is presenting information about interpersonal relationships and scandal. When addressing influential mentors, Halstead

²¹ Ibid, 44.

²² Ibid, 48-49.

²³ Ibid, 17.

²⁴ Ibid, 49-51.

provides appropriate detail, context, and commentary, such as her discussion of Gipps's studies with Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gordon Jacob. This effectively paints a picture of their relationships and how their teachings shaped Gipps's musical voice and career. When Halstead addresses drama and rumors, she first presents the scandal as it was seen by the people surrounding the issue. Once known facts of the situation have been established, she changes perspective and provides her own assessment as well as Gipps's, when available, and comments on how it may have impacted her. This approach allows for analysis of these complex situations from multiple perspectives. Halstead's differentiation between fact and opinion is clear and commendable.

While narrating Gipps's life using available information, Halstead effectively illustrates how Gipps was different and why this is important. Specific information, like how long Gipps worked as a collaborative pianist for her classmates, is used to make original conclusions, like Halstead's observation that she only worked for them long enough to become acquainted with their instrument so she could compose for it.²⁵ As the story progresses, Halstead brings themes from as early as childhood to explain patterns in Gipps's life. For instance, Gipps's difficulty with receiving criticism in school is related to her experiences as a child prodigy. Gipps was an outspoken and bold young woman in a sphere where traditional femininity was expected. This was bound to ruffle some feathers. Add to this Gipps's perfectionistic expectations of herself that were established in her childhood as a prodigy, as well as the insecurities of studying music in college, and it all compounds to a much more complex situation than is initially observable through others' statements. Halstead empathetically explains how this created a difficult

²⁵ Ibid, 12.

environment for Gipps, to which she reacted in ways that were often poorly received by those who did not understand her.²⁶

Furthermore, Halstead artfully inserts Gipps's own thoughts and philosophies to discuss important topics. One such topic is teaching; Gipps is quoted saying that she hates teaching. After presenting this bold assertion, Halstead goes on to explain that Gipps thought talented teachers were as rare as talented performers and did not consider herself to be on this plane.²⁷ In the same vein, Halstead does not avoid Gipps's controversial or offensive opinions. For example, Gipps has commented that women are at fault for the relative absence of woman conductors during her time. Halstead follows this bold claim with an explanation of why Gipps would say this publicly and why she may not have actually subscribed to this sentiment.²⁸ Halstead readily includes and addresses valid concerns that conflict with her portrayal of Gipps as a positive role model. Gipps was known for her self-proclaimed "atrocious manners" and instances of these are described; those notwithstanding, Halstead is also able to capture another side of Gipps, highlighting qualities such as her enduring loyalty, friendship, and support.²⁹ Because she presents conflicting information in this way, Halstead is able to show multiple perspectives without muddying her own narrative. Overall, her presentation of Gipps's life and times is detailed, thoughtful, and effective.

Part Two begins with a description of Gipps's compositional voice, placing her style in the context of a larger idiom of English music. Some hallmarks are melodies and

²⁶ Ibid, 61-62.

²⁷ Ibid, 35.

²⁸ Ibid, 53.

²⁹ Ibid, 57.

rhythms inspired by English folk music, harmonies and instrumentation colored by French and Russian music,³⁰ traditional form following genres from the nineteenth century, and explorative and colorful harmonies within these forms.³¹ Gipps's bold statements against modern music are used to explain her own musical values. For instance, she hated serial music because she felt it didn't express any sentiment and didn't communicate with its audience or musicians, rendering it boring and unmusical; she placed high priority on relating to musicians and listeners alike through musical language.³² Hand in hand with this section addressing style is a detailed explanation of Gipps's relationship with the BBC and how this impacted her career and legacy. This first chapter concludes with examinations of each of Gipps's symphonies, describing their general content and layout and explaining how they are unique and expressive of her style.

A chapter discussing Englishness follows. Different idioms within Gipps's output are described, such as whimsical fairy-tale writing and nature-inspired programmatic pieces. Halstead's compelling descriptions of selected pieces explain why they are special and valuable, especially highlighting those that fall within the salon tradition. Halstead briefly addresses Gipps's faith and sacred works in this section as well.

The final chapter examines compositions with the theme of difference in mind. Halstead grapples with the issue of the influence of gender on musical works for the majority of this section. Sexual themes and stereotypes of gender are linked to specific works and related to Gipps's life and struggles. A particularly poignant observation is the

³⁰ Ibid, 78.

³¹ Ibid, 84.

³² Ibid, 79.

exploration and expression of female sexuality in some of Gipps's music. She proclaimed on many occasions that she felt she was an "honorary male" and was generally known to be a tomboy, which is a stark contrast to some of these musical themes and ideas.³³ This section explains major ideas and themes from feminist musicology and relates them to Gipps specifically, making it approachable for readers who are just beginning to explore these topics.

Overall, Halstead's *Ruth Gipps* is successful in achieving its goals. It provides information from many sources and perspectives, which Halstead effectively synthesizes with her own ideas and commentary. This biography is an invaluable resource to anyone who wishes to learn more about Ruth Gipps, English music, or the experiences of professional female musicians.

However, there are a few areas where the organization is confusing. At times, ideas are presented and then left to address later, which sometimes adds repetition and length and at other times obscures the points being made. For instance, Gipps's musical style is briefly described at various times in Part One, with an in-depth section detailing its features following in Part Two. It would be appropriate and perhaps clearer to provide more of this information within the telling of her life's story. Her style evolved throughout her career, as did musical tastes, and this context would add depth to the existent prose addressing reception and subsequent neglect of her music. Another point brought up but not explored is Gipps's faith, which Halstead states was quite important to her. Gipps's concept of inspiration is addressed and some of her sacred works are described, but little else is explained about how Christianity influenced her compositional

³³ Ibid, 154.

voice.³⁴ It is confusing that the topic is broached but then quickly followed by more surface-level analysis of works.

Perhaps the most unsatisfying aspect of this book is its lack of a conclusion. Although the last chapter does present some larger themes, they only appear within the scope of the works Halstead chose to discuss in this section. Throughout the book, Halstead proves that she has made valuable observations and conclusions about Gipps's life and works; why are these not presented together and then elaborated on in a final chapter or section? It would be worthwhile to provide a brief review of themes and conclusions from both parts to relate them to each other, and more of Halstead's overall conclusions would be a welcome addition to this section. The reader has become well acquainted with many of Gipps's strengths, flaws, experiences, musical voice, and compositions. With all this information established, there is much that can be explored further. One such idea is Gipps's persistence in creating opportunities for herself when none were available for her. Gipps paved her own way and refused to back down even when her actions rightfully (or wrongfully) upset others.³⁵ She was outwardly fearless; she would stir the pot if it furthered her purpose. This pattern is introduced in Part One of the book, but it is not further addressed or elaborated on when it can be observed later in the narrative. These kinds of patterns, as well as the many conflicts between parts of herself, her work, and her outward appearance, beg for commentary by an established scholar like Jill Halstead. This project aims to further explore these concepts and relate them to Gipps's oboe music in a way that informs study and performance. There is much

³⁴ Ibid, 112-121.

³⁵ Ibid, 70.

work still to be done in this manner regarding not only oboe music but Gipps's output and influence overall.

Halstead's earlier text, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition*, is currently the only other book to address Ruth Gipps in detail. The purpose of this book is to examine factors that influence the ability of women to fulfill their musical potential. Halstead explains the position of women composers in society and the field of music in order to discuss women's composition and its relative absence from the canon.³⁶ She concludes that "the low number of women composers and their comparatively low public status are due to social, cultural, and historical factors rather than to biological ones."³⁷ Halstead goes on to say that it is important to treat works equally but also to consider the impacts of history, politics, society, and people in power on the perceived "success" of works by women. This book is important because it exposes flaws in the common and naïve notion that deserving compositions by women will eventually be canonized through the same process as works that are already accepted. This misguided belief tends to confirm that uncanonized works by women, past and present, have been excluded for valid musical reasons. Halstead provides alternative explanations for undue marginalization that recognize important contexts.³⁸

The Woman Composer is organized into three main sections: "Part One: Psychology," "Part Two: Education and Social History," and "Part Three: The Gendered

³⁶ Jill Halstead, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 1997), vii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, x.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Politics of Music.” The first part utilizes a scientific approach to explore the psychology of women to either prove or counter arguments against women’s abilities. A variety of sources are used to ultimately disprove the notion that great women composers are absent from history due to a supposed innate and biological inferiority to men. Halstead shows that while there are differences between the sexes, these differences are far less significant than other, non-sex related factors, such as the environment in which a musician is nurtured. This science-based section seems somewhat misplaced in a musicology text, but Halstead is able to relate it to the larger claims of the book.

Part Two evaluates the social, domestic, and educational worlds that women composers live in. The main conclusion of this section is that “The social status and domestic role of women as a group, compared with men as a group, raises many issues which cannot be ignored when examining the cause of inequalities between male and female musical creation and contribution.”³⁹ Furthermore, Halstead argues that despite the development of legal rights to equality, social expectations of women are different from those of men. Even if women are legally allowed to pursue professional music careers, they are often expected to juggle their artistic duties *in addition to* family or domestic duties. This is a challenging and often consuming balance. Competing with men who are not expected to fulfill both roles places many women at a significant disadvantage.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid, 67.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 88.

As evidence for her claims, Halstead presents a case study of nine British female composers that includes Ruth Gipps.⁴¹ She chose a diverse group to move away from common and sometimes misleading parameters of success, such as number of works published and performed. She emphasizes the composers' own experiences from their points of view. The unique perspectives of these women are often presented in their own words, giving a voice to a group that is largely neglected in scholarship. Halstead uses the experiences of these nine women to show the inequalities they faced, such as lack of educational opportunities, and differences in treatment between the sexes. Specific evidence is used to disprove sexist claims from the past and present. One extreme claim Halstead exposes is the allegation that women are "poorer quality orchestral players" due to the absence of one muscle in the arm that is present in males and not females.⁴² This section of the book shines light on discrimination in socialization and education and the baseless claims that perpetuate it. The case studies paint vivid pictures of each composer, her life, and her work. This method is highly effective in identifying issues specific to woman composers and showing patterns across class and history.

In Part Three, Halstead discusses biases in the classical tradition and the role of musicology in silencing woman composers. She identifies and addresses attitudes that are discriminatory and shows how these views have hindered the success of music composed by women. A notable example is the tendency to characterize woman composers as eccentric and unusual, in order to marginalize their works and legacies.⁴³ This attitude

⁴¹ Halstead's study includes Avril Coleridge-Taylor, Grace Williams, Elizabeth Maconchy, Minna Keal, Ruth Gipps, Antoinette Kirkwood, Enid Luff, Judith Bailey, and Bryony Jagger.

⁴² Ibid, 114.

⁴³ Ibid, 144.

has clearly affected the portrayal of Gipps throughout her life and after her death. The main conclusion of this section is that artists and performers are expected to be ambitious and competitive, traits that are encouraged in men. On the other hand, the socialization of women generally discourages this kind of behavior.⁴⁴ It can be seen as performative and unfeminine at best. At worst, it can be used to trivialize and isolate outspoken women. Gipps was certainly a victim of this backwards thinking; in turn, it caused her to become more defensive and antisocial. This dissonance creates more barriers for women than men in male-dominated fields like professional music. Throughout this section, Halstead shows that the subsequent exclusion of women further perpetuates the cycle. Low visibility reinforces the belief that there are no great women composers. Overall, this confirms the need for special perspectives on and study of women composers and their works. The importance of questioning society throughout history and today cannot be understated; it is an integral part of evaluating these woman artists.

Part Three contains subsections on each composer from the case study addressing their compositions. Halstead makes astute observations in her comparison of Gipps to her colleagues. Gipps wrote in a variety of genres but tended to work in larger, “un-feminine” genres and forms that could be inaccessible to other women.⁴⁵ Gipps was able to accomplish this at least in part due to her unique domestic situation. Composing in large forms, such as symphonies and other orchestral genres, is very time consuming. Gipps was able to carve out the necessary time by teaching piano lessons in exchange for childcare, a situation most women were not able to access. Writing in popular and serious

⁴⁴ Ibid, 208.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 204.

genres like the symphony allowed Gipps's music to reach a larger audience than that of other woman composers who wrote mostly small-form works that were less demanding of time and training.⁴⁶ Gipps was also viewed as less traditionally feminine than her counterparts because of her conducting career, where she would lead professional or semi-professional groups in public performances of serious works. These positions also gave Gipps the opportunity to rehearse and perform her own works for larger performing forces, which other women rarely had.⁴⁷

Halstead concludes her discussion of Gipps by noting Gipps's tendency to be unsympathetic to other women musicians who faced issues that she was able to work around, such as time-consuming domestic responsibilities. Although this could potentially be isolating, her influence as a role model should not be understated. Halstead writes, "The composing and conducting careers of Ruth Gipps are marvelous examples to other women in many ways, since she consistently refused to be defined and pigeonholed by any 'feminine' stereotypes and has always demanded serious consideration by the musical establishment on its own terms."⁴⁸ The ideas and comparisons specifically dealing with Gipps are a valuable feature of this text.

This concluding statement summarizes Halstead's ideas from this text:

Past inequalities affect the present and the future: it is only by coming to terms with the differences which formed the female composer's experience in the past that women composers of the future will eventually take their rightful place at the forefront of public and private musical life.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid, 205.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 205.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 210.

This perspective is essential to consider in any study of woman composers and musicians. *The Woman Composer* includes valuable information about the women in Halstead's case study and provides explanations of important concepts with sufficient detail to serve as a source for many different types of research and projects. To conclude this exploration of Halstead's books involving Gipps, I invite any who pursue research concerning misunderstood and underrepresented musicians to consider her following statement: "Music, when it lies in the hands of those who hold power and authority, reinforces their cultural superiority; yet when it comes into the hands of those without power, it is rendered of little worth."⁵⁰ Observations like these make Halstead's texts useful tools not only for those interested in Gipps or other woman composers, but for any who seek to understand, write about, or teach the history of musicology.

At the time of writing, there are four published doctoral dissertations that directly address Ruth Gipps in various capacities. Two concern Gipps's compositions for specific instruments, one explores Gipps's works for chamber wind ensembles, and one deals with English oboists from the 1920s to 2000. Each author uses available information to teach their audience about Gipps and her music as it relates to their specific idiom. These documents are valuable additions to the available body of scholarship surrounding Ruth Gipps.

Catherine Satchwell Creasy's "A Guide to the Works For and Involving Horn By Ruth Gipps" includes an introduction with a brief literature review followed by sections on Gipps's solo horn repertoire and chamber music for and involving the horn. Gipps composed a variety of works for horn that were inspired by her son Lance Baker. She

⁵⁰ Ibid, 172.

wrote them throughout his development as a horn player, creating a collection of pedagogically useful horn pieces.⁵¹ Some pieces are virtuosic performance works, like the concerto, and others are intended specifically for teaching. One example of a teaching piece is *A Taradiddle*, which “provides surmountable challenges in a musical and enticing manner” while teaching the student to play in a chamber setting.⁵² In addition to their educational value, these pieces fill a void in the horn repertoire. Many horn concertos and pieces by women are less “tonally accessible,” at times making works by women less frequently chosen by students and teachers. Creasy observes that Gipps’s works “bridge the gap from the Classical and Romantic era works students begin their studies with to the twentieth and twenty-first century works they encounter later.”⁵³

The purpose of Creasy’s dissertation is to create a reference guide of Gipps’s horn works for students, teachers, and performers that includes brief analyses and other useful information in order to promote Gipps’s works and shed light on her unique English style.⁵⁴ A literature review includes Halstead’s biography as well as other sources that address or neglect Gipps’s works among horn repertoire. Creasy also cites available recordings. The brief analyses of horn works highlight important musical aspects of each work and provide helpful information for performance and program notes. This is intended to help establish an understanding of the works individually and Gipps’s style as a whole. These discussions are insightful and well written, addressing important musical characteristics and relating them to Gipps’s experiences and perspective. Creasy’s

⁵¹ Catherine Satchwell Creasy, “A Guide to the Works for and Involving Horn by Ruth Gipps” (DMA Dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2018), ProQuest 10977072, 2.

⁵² Ibid, 86.

⁵³ Ibid, 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 3-4.

discussion of teaching pieces contains valuable observations and suggestions for use. In the conclusion section, Creasy includes extensive remarks about Gipps's effective writing style for horn. She applauds Gipps's commitment to musicians and education through her teaching pieces and calls on performers and teachers alike to bring Gipps's music into its rightful place in the teaching studio and recital hall.

"Beyond Rebecca Clarke: Viola Music by Ruth Gipps and Kalitha Fox," written by Emma Cifrino, seeks to discover "hidden gems" for the viola in light of growing interest in Clarke's works using her life and milieu as a guide.⁵⁵ Cifrino devotes two chapters each to Gipps and Fox, covering biographical information followed by studies of Fox's Viola Sonata and Gipps's *Jane Grey Fantasy* for viola and string orchestra.⁵⁶ She examines their lives and musical contributions in order to speculate on why they have been neglected and what may have happened to cause their exclusion from the canon.

The biographical chapter about Gipps covers important themes discussed previously by Halstead and relates them to her music and the viola repertoire. A particularly useful topic Cifrino introduces is named "false categorizing," a circumstance where women's works are pigeonholed into genres or classifications that are seen as less serious or less valuable in order to deny their artistic value, which ultimately leads to their exclusion from the public eye and the canon. Cifrino observes that "in Gipps's case, because her music was largely tonal in a culture that privileged atonal and serialist styles, it was categorized as 'light classical' and subsequently dismissed."⁵⁷ Giving a name to

⁵⁵ Emma A. G. Cifrino, "Beyond Rebecca Clarke: Viola Music by Ruth Gipps and Kalitha Fox" (DMA Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2020), ProQuest 28148623, 2.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 5.

this pattern present throughout Gipps's career is a valuable contribution to any study concerning her life and works.

A study of *Jane Grey Fantasy* follows, explaining the program of the piece and its possible connections to Gipps's view of herself. Cifrino provides compelling reasons for violists to learn and program this piece, including a comparison of this to a similar, canonized work by Paul Hindemith, *Trauermusik* (1936), and suggestions of other pieces to program with it.⁵⁸ Cifrino points out that the Gipps *Fantasy* wasn't published by 2020 and it remains unpublished, making it largely inaccessible. False categorizing is another reason for its exclusion from standard viola repertoire; it doesn't fall neatly into one genre, making it an "imperfect example" by common standards.⁵⁹ This principle is illuminating when applied to Gipps's music and its absence from various repertoires. Given the unique nature of many of her oboe works, this is a topic that should be explored and will be discussed in the following sections of this project.

In the conclusion of the dissertation, Cifrino states that both Fox and Gipps wrote engaging and idiomatic works for the viola that have value for performers, teachers, and students; "Their only crime has been obscurity, enforced by the lingering effects of gendered assumptions about who can write enduring music."⁶⁰ It is necessary to produce easily available editions of these works to promote their inclusion in the repertoire. Further research and writing, like Cifrino's document and this project, contribute to the accessibility of this music and encourage performance and recording of these works. Cifrino poses a call to action to conclude the text: "Once a piece's associated physical

⁵⁸ Ibid, 50-51.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 49-50.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 9.

artifacts - scores, recordings, scholarship on the composer - are available, the responsibility lies with teachers, particularly artist-teachers at music schools and conservatoires. If viola instructors teach the Fox and the Gipps, they will be played.”⁶¹ This project aims to shed light on Gipps’s works for the oboe in a similar way so that they may be understood and appreciated. It is work like this that delivers important information and tools to teachers and students so that they may be empowered to study and enjoy the beautiful music of Ruth Gipps.

Brittan Braddock’s dissertation “The Chamber Wind Ensemble Music of Ruth Gipps (1921-1999): Composer, Conductor, and Performer” approaches Gipps from the perspective of a wind band player and conductor. Braddock seeks to show the importance and value of Gipps’s wind ensemble music by placing three selected works “into a larger perspective with consideration to her career, the musical culture of London of the 20th-century women musicians, and her wind writing based on extensive performance experience on the oboe, her secondary area of study.”⁶² This dissertation contains information from unique sources, including Gipps’s unpublished autobiography and Braddock’s interviews and correspondence with the Gipps family. Quotations from these resources add depth and detail to existent accounts of Gipps and her life.

The dissertation is divided into four main parts, with the first discussing twentieth-century London and the musical world of its woman performers and composers. Descriptions of important establishments like chamber groups, societies, and concert series provide context to Gipps’s story. Part two summarizes biographical

⁶¹ Ibid, 54.

⁶² Brittan Anne Braddock, “The Chamber Wind Ensemble Music of Ruth Gipps (1921-1999): Composer, Conductor, and Performer” (DMA Dissertation, University of Colorado, Boulder, 2018), 6.

information from Halstead's writing and highlights the variety in Gipps's compositional output. Quotations from Gipps are added to explain important influences in her own words, such as memories of her time studying with Vaughan Williams.⁶³ Braddock does a fantastic job of capturing Gipps's personality while introducing and explaining important contexts and facts.

Part three contains studies of three wind ensemble pieces: *Seascape*, op. 53, *Wind Octet*, op. 65, and *Wind Sinfonietta*, op. 73. Braddock argues that these pieces "deserve to be counted among the best pieces composed for the wind dectet and wind octet instrumentation from 1958 to 1989 and certainly deserve to be performed more often because her compositional characteristics shine through in these three pieces."⁶⁴ Aspects of Gipps's writing that Braddock highlights are her melodies and melodic writing, idiomatic writing for the instruments, enticing and ever-changing characters, and opportunities for individual musicians to shine through with soloistic parts within the chamber setting. Braddock provides ample evidence from the scores of each piece. Each study includes a form chart, a discussion of musical characteristics and program or inspiration, and thoughtful remarks about performance challenges and rehearsal strategy. Such a thorough and supported reading of works encourages further performance and recording; prior to this present project, Gipps's oboe works have yet to receive such treatment in scholarship.

In the concluding section, Braddock surveys new interest in the composer, then provides suggestions for promoting Gipps and her compositions. Like other scholarship,

⁶³ Ibid, 15.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 31.

Braddock emphasizes the need for published recordings and proper engravings. She concludes with remarks about the value of studying Gipps:

Her multifaceted musicianship certainly activated her compositional process and resulted in a musical product full of expressive opportunity and challenges. For these reasons, it is important to share this story and to continue performing, recording, and researching Ruth Gipps and her music.⁶⁵

This sentiment is particularly applicable to Gipps's oboe music, which is just starting to gain traction in the double reed community. Examining themes in Gipps's life and relating them to her oboe works will further this purpose.

The final dissertation concerning Gipps is Amanda Dusold's "The Oboe is a Lady: The Legacy of Britain's Female Professional Oboists, 1920-2000." It begins with a consideration of important music colleges in the United Kingdom and their roles in creating independent, empowered British woman oboists. Women were able to attain spots at these schools and were quickly integrated into the professional orchestral scene in the UK.⁶⁶ Dusold's purpose is to discuss these woman oboists and their influence, highlighting not only their work as performers and educators but their role in inspiring, composing, and/or premiering now-canonized compositions.

The first chapter of the document examines Leon Goossens's school of oboe playing. Goossens, unlike many instrumental pedagogues of the time, did not reject potential students based on their sex. In turn, a large number of his protégés were women who formed an influential group that perpetuated the sought-after Goossens style of oboe playing.⁶⁷ Ruth Gipps was a member of this group. Dusold's analysis of Goossens's

⁶⁵ Ibid, 70.

⁶⁶ Amanda Karen Dusold, "The Oboe Is a Lady: The Legacy of Britain's Female Professional Oboists, 1920-2000" (DMA Dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park, 2020), ProQuest 27737294, 2-3.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 4-9.

legacy as a teacher is insightful and can serve as a useful guide to any interested in this influential school of playing. Subsections are devoted to selected former students of Goossens and the compositions that they inspired and championed.

The next chapter deals with the composers of this group, focusing on Mary Chandler and Ruth Gipps. The small amount of biographical information available about Chandler is summarized and three of her works are discussed, followed by a list of all her oboe and English horn compositions. Dusold summarizes Gipps's life as well and introduces selected works, highlighting Gipps's unique musical voice and her contributions to the oboe repertoire. Given the small amount of commentary published about Gipps's oboe works, this is a welcome and valuable perspective.

A third chapter presents information on the generation that followed these oboists. In the concluding section, Dusold proposes that the twentieth-century United Kingdom created a special, supportive environment that nurtured woman oboists who went on to influence today's musical world. Her project shows that these women paved the way for oboists today, and she proclaims the importance of remembering them and recognizing their influence. This dissertation began the work of examining Gipps's place in oboe playing and the legacy of her works for this specific instrument. Dusold imparts important information about Gipps's oboe background and encourages the reader, likely an actively performing oboist, to consider studying Gipps's compositions. Hopefully scholarship like this creates interest in a thorough examination of Gipps as a person and how her experiences shaped her oboe compositions. This project sets out to further explore this area.

Upon reviewing this literature, it can be said that there is sufficient information about Gipps's life and beliefs to propose informed readings of her works. Certain themes of contradiction and dissonance are broached by her biographer and other interested scholars, but many of these conflicts within and around Gipps are not specifically related to her musical voice and compositions. Consideration of this viewpoint when addressing specific pieces can shed light on their meanings and Gipps's style and ideas overall. This approach will help performers and listeners relate to Gipps better and understand her output on a deeper level. Gipps believed that music is meant to express things and speak to its audience. This project aims to explain these works from a new perspective and clarify Gipps's musical voice for listeners and performers to enjoy.

Gipps's oboe works are still relatively unexplored in scholarship and recordings. Fortunately, neatly engraved editions of many of Gipps's works are available for paid download through June Emerson Wind Music online. Though more performers are posting live recordings of Gipps's works to networks like YouTube,⁶⁸ only one commercial recording of any oboe work by Gipps exists at the time of writing.⁶⁹ Research, analysis, and writing are powerful tools when shared with other interested musicians. This project provides such tools for oboists who wish to study and perform Gipps' works. Commentary on valuable features and uses of these works will encourage others to study, teach, and perform them. There is a treasure trove of music for oboists to

⁶⁸ YouTube postings by Stephanie Carlson and Katherine Needleman contributed greatly to this study and to the double reed community's discovery of Gipps's music.

⁶⁹ Ruth Gipps, *Oboe Concerto in D minor*, performed by Juliana Koch and the BBC Philharmonic (Colchester, UK: Chandos, 2022), Spotify.

explore from Ruth Gipps. This document will provide a roadmap to begin the adventure of learning and appreciating it.

CHAPTER 3

A VULNERABLE FIGURE IN A PRICKLY SHELL: UNDERSTANDING GIPPS'S DISSONANCES

A study of Ruth Gipps's life reveals the many ways that Gipps considered herself to be an outsider. Beginning in her student days, according to Halstead, Gipps faced many forms of bullying, criticism, and exclusion. Gipps's reactions to these situations formed patterns that influenced her entire career as well as her compositions. Many woman composers of Gipps's time had to come to terms with feelings of otherness in a world that wasn't created for them and didn't easily accept or validate them. Marcia J. Citron, a groundbreaking scholar and specialist in women's musicology, writes the following about the struggles of women composers with difference in her influential text *Gender and the Musical Canon*:

Yet while outsider status has often worked well with(in) the paradigm of the male composer, the female composer has not generally enjoyed the benefits of professional Otherness. She actually stands as a doubled outsider to society. As one who does not fit the assumption of the male professional she bears an added layer of Otherness. While this can be advantageous in terms of subjective mobility... it can cause serious problems of self-image and identity.⁷⁰

These issues of self-image and identity, complicated by definitions of trailblazing in the male-dominated world of professional music, shaped Gipps in many ways. She considered herself an outsider, an Other, in almost every way: she was an English traditionalist in a new international musical atmosphere of intellectual styles like serialism, a concert pianist turned orchestral oboist, and socially-awkward tomboy amid traditionally feminine women, among many other things. The literature concerning Gipps

⁷⁰ Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 82.

shows that she approached every issue with steadfastness to her principles and refused to change herself to please others. Cifrino observes that “in fact, she behaved just as a male composer fighting for his place in the canon might behave: she forged a stylistic path distinct from her peers, she conducted performances of her own music, and she was an outspoken critic.”⁷¹ Gipps was first and foremost an intelligent and well-spoken musician and composer, but it was her power and perseverance in the face of adversity and discrimination in combination with these musical talents that enabled her to find new opportunities for success and growth.

The inner conflicts of Ruth Gipps often made her feel isolated and attacked, which colored her interactions with the world around her. Despite her seemingly hardened exterior, Gipps’s actions and works show her true dedication to musicians and her desire to communicate and connect with others. Exploring the dissonances within and around Gipps’s persona and musical output will enhance understanding of her as a person and composer. This section will explore Gipps’s otherness as a woman in a male-dominated field, the contrast between Gipps’s stoic and prickly exterior versus her passionate, expressive spirit, the dissonance between her proclaimed desire for isolation and her evident care for communication and connection, and the inner and outer conflicts surrounding her English compositional voice.

These issues are valuable to consider and discuss for a variety of reasons. The present exploration adds perspective to inform readings of her compositions and to shed light on a misunderstood, yet ever-deserving figure. As Halstead writes, “Rather than buckling under the pressure to conform she took strength from her difference, carefully

⁷¹ Cifrino, “Beyond Rebecca Clarke: Viola Music by Ruth Gipps and Kalitha Fox,” 34.

cultivating it into a reputation that would serve as her ultimate defence [*sic*] against personal and professional criticism.”⁷² This tenacity and versatility makes Gipps an important pioneer for subsequent woman oboists and composers as well as any who struggle to find their place and voice in the musical world. Trailblazing women who came before Gipps, such as Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) and Elisabeth Lutyens (1906-1983), were frequently described as eccentric and difficult due to their determination and verve.⁷³ This section serves to explore issues that contributed to a similar portrayal of Gipps. “Surely these women can act as a great inspiration to many, and their ‘unconventional’ lives should in no way limit the respect and admiration due to them. Would we penalize Wagner or Satie similarly?” questions Halstead.⁷⁴ This project seeks to promote understanding of figures like Gipps so that they may be accepted and appreciated in ways that are long overdue.

Gipps’s roles as professional performer, composer, and conductor, paired with her brashness and drive, made her a far cry from what contemporaries would consider a proper lady. In fact, women working in these capacities publicly were somewhat of a rarity. In a male-dominated field, it was impossible for someone like Gipps to conform to society’s expectations while championing her work. The dissonance created by expectations for women’s behavior imposed over necessary traits for success in the professional music sphere is significant. Citron explains, “The principal basis for contradiction is a woman’s socialization in male conventions. Conflict arises when a woman has to identify against aspects of her woman-ness, which she does because of the

⁷² Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 57.

⁷³ Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, 145.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

strong pull of her socialization and its internalized values: what Judith Fetterley has termed ‘immascultation’.⁷⁵ Ambition, drive, and self-promotion are essential qualities in any aspiring professional. These characteristics are nurtured in men and are applauded in many important male figures throughout history. However, ego and drive are often seen as unacceptable when shown by women. The immascultation that women must go through to develop these traits adds another layer of difference that puts women at a disadvantage when attempting to climb the ranks in any male-dominated profession.⁷⁶

It can be observed throughout the narratives of Gipps, Smyth, and other strong women that these otherwise positive qualities were turned against them. For instance, confidence is often characterized as imprudence and stubbornness, used to paint an inflammatory caricature that belittles its subject. Gipps does not shy away from acknowledging her direct and sometimes abrasive nature, which she openly referred to as her “atrocious manners.”⁷⁷ Although this behavior was often poorly received, perhaps her so-called obstinance and tenacity were traits that allowed her to positively influence so many around her. For example, Gipps faced much criticism and disapproval from various piano teachers during her college years when she insisted on playing difficult, serious repertoire stereotyped as “masculine.”⁷⁸ However, this commitment to studying and understanding great music enabled her progress as a professional performer, which led to a variety of experiences that shaped her compositional output.

⁷⁵ Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 192.

⁷⁶ Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, 208.

⁷⁷ Gipps quoted in Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 57.

⁷⁸ Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 14.

Gipps's relationship to traditional femininity is a complicated one. Internal conflict she felt around this issue was almost certainly intensified by the need many woman musicians felt, and perhaps still feel, to distance themselves from being labeled a "woman" composer. This categorization came with many negative connotations that further isolated its subjects.⁷⁹ Perhaps this explains the many instances where Gipps proclaimed that she was not the victim of discrimination, which were sometimes followed by an overt placement of blame on women for their absence in publicly visible conducting and composing roles. Forging her own path in the male-dominated world of music was demanding and isolating enough; she likely said these things to distance herself from undue criticism due to her gender.⁸⁰

Gipps's personality and direct manner further complicated her identification with traditional femininity. From her childhood, Gipps was resistant to many norms for women. Hélène Gipps, Gipps's mother, was a successful music teacher and the breadwinner of the family. This was an unusual arrangement for middle-class families of the time. Additionally, she was ambitious and bold and raised her children to follow in her footsteps. These qualities were viewed as rude and un-English, causing many to perceive the Gipps women as "unrefined."⁸¹ Couple this with Gipps's small stature, awkward nature, and unusual schedule of child-prodigy performances, and it is understandable that she was a perpetual victim of bullying. The young Gipps reached a breaking point while attending an all-girls secondary school, where the bullying became so

⁷⁹ Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, 167.

⁸⁰ Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 53.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 4 and 62.

severe that she was encouraged to withdraw under the guise of medical difficulties.⁸²

From this early age, Gipps grew to see herself as a misfit among girls. She turned instead to boys for company, becoming a tomboy and a self-proclaimed “honorary male” or “just one of the boys.”⁸³ This tendency to socialize with male colleagues became improper and even scandalous as her career progressed. As in many other situations, Gipps refused to change her behavior even when it had serious professional ramifications.

Despite this turbulent relationship with traditional femininity, Gipps was able to use her otherness as a woman in creative ways to further her career. Although Gipps was known to those around her as a no-nonsense, men’s-clothes-wearing tomboy, she carefully crafted a persona that featured her feminine figure and appearance to draw attention to herself and her performances. Halstead observes:

This juxtaposition of a knowingly sexual, yet active and mindful female body is perhaps the most difficult cultural contortion for a woman to perform, even in the twenty-first century, an era marked by the deconstruction of genders. In the 1950s it would have been perceived as highly provocative.⁸⁴

Gipps emphasized her femininity by wearing flashy, daring dresses when conducting performances or attending events, never shying away from advertising herself by wearing what she wanted.⁸⁵ She was able to use her difference to her advantage, even going so far as to print concert posters with an image of her conducting in what was then considered a flamboyant, revealing dress.⁸⁶ In a musical world where the display of the female body was considered offensive and distracting, Gipps understood the power of performing her feminine persona. Her use of this persona is particularly striking in her role as a

⁸² Ibid, 60.

⁸³ Ibid, 59-60.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 50.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 65.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 50.

conductor. Woman conductors were expected to stay behind the scenes, serving only as nurturers and teachers, never as interpreters, leaders, or performers.⁸⁷ Gipps's bold exhibition of her gender in an un-womanly authoritative role was not only provocative and borderline scandalous; it was effective. Gipps's reactions to gender expectations are important to consider while examining her legacy. Her daring and resourceful nature makes her a powerful example to others who struggle to find their place. Gipps's devotion to music and her own career carried her past barriers that stopped many others; her skill and bravery should be remembered and praised.

Gipps's sense of being an outsider must have been at conflict with a somewhat hidden but clearly present desire to communicate and connect with others around her as a teacher, performer, and composer. She stated many times that she would rather be an unpleasant good composer than a well-behaved bad one. This attitude led her to develop a thorny, difficult presence that created issues in her professional relationships. However, her refusal to relate to others and subsequent withdrawal from many social situations served as insulation against unwanted criticism.⁸⁸ Women composers and conductors of the past often struggled to gauge how much of their true selves and emotions they could display. "Genius" male musicians were praised for being turbulent, emotional, and temperamental, qualities that admirers linked to their sublime creative abilities.⁸⁹ In contrast, women have faced criticism throughout time for being too emotional and therefore irrational despite emotion being a significant component of art.⁹⁰ Gipps was

⁸⁷ Ibid, 44.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 57.

⁸⁹ Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, 125.

⁹⁰ Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 53.

undoubtedly aware of this double standard, and it likely impacted her outward appearance.

Throughout Gipps's life, her position as an outsider caused her to feel like she was constantly at odds with others around her. Halstead observes that "as a result, she developed a personality built on the principle of 'attack is the best form of defence' [*sic*]. Unfortunately, this ensured that few people ever got beyond the well-publicized outspokenness to find a more vulnerable figure motivated by lifelong feelings of alienation and difference."⁹¹ Gipps set out to be inscrutable and proclaimed her preference for isolation: "You cannot be the odd one out when you are alone; and loneliness is something I have yet to experience."⁹² Experiences throughout her life reinforced her belief that she was better off alone. An important example is the situation that arose around Gipps's close friendship with the conductor of the Birmingham orchestra, George Weldon. Weldon and Gipps lived very near each other and spent a lot of time together while Gipps's husband was away at war. Such a friendship between a married woman and a single man was viewed as extremely inappropriate and scandalous. Rumors flew around the city and in the orchestra and tensions nearly came to a head, ending with Weldon insisting that Gipps vacate her oboe position with the orchestra before she could be fired.⁹³ Gipps's previously willful isolation from the other musicians and residents of the town became sinister: "All I knew was that there must be something wrong with me, like a bad smell that I didn't know about; I was a leper. Everyone hated

⁹¹ Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 58.

⁹² Gipps quoted in *ibid*, 60.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 26-27.

me.”⁹⁴ Such experiences encouraged Gipps to continue distancing herself from others, which further grew her sense of embattlement and paranoia.

A different side of Gipps is revealed when she discusses her studies with Vaughan Williams. Prior to this time, Gipps believed that musical greatness necessitated selfishness and isolation, causing her to develop a tangible aloofness towards her peers and professors. Vaughan Williams taught Gipps that music is a living, human medium that is meant to express something and communicate with others.⁹⁵ Gipps said, “It was very humbling. So far as I know he was the only altogether good person I have ever met. This upset my previous theorizing about music before character dreadfully.”⁹⁶

It becomes apparent through Gipps’s works and words that this revelation shaped the rest of her musical life. A great number of her compositions were written specifically for people she cared about. She wrote a variety of teaching pieces for many instruments that students could enjoy that also prepared them for professional careers. Although Gipps stated that she hated teaching, her legacy shows that she deeply cared about supporting young musicians. The groups she founded and conducted provided much-needed experience for students and young professionals, and Gipps was known to build strong, family-like bonds with her pupils.⁹⁷ Furthermore, her programming for these groups demonstrated a concerted effort to bring new works to audiences that could be enjoyed by listeners and performers alike. These programs were significant in their inclusion of underrepresented composers and styles.⁹⁸ Evidence like this demonstrates a

⁹⁴ Gipps quoted in *ibid*, 28.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 22.

⁹⁶ Braddock, “The Chamber Wind Ensemble Music of Ruth Gipps (1921-1999): Composer, Conductor, and Performer,” 16.

⁹⁷ Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 33-36.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 54-56.

keen interest in connecting with players and audiences as well as an enduring commitment to uplifting other musicians. The traditional saying that “actions speak louder than words” sheds light on Gipps’s true intentions. Despite efforts by her opposers to portray Gipps as difficult, cold, and uncaring, her legacy has always shown a deep love for music and those who engage with it.

It is no secret that Gipps’s English musical style became a source of great conflict and difficulty for her public image. The folk music that she artfully incorporated into classical forms caused her to be belittled and ignored by important musical authorities, such as the BBC and news sources that published reviews of performances and new music.⁹⁹ Gipps was often defensive about her English musical style in such situations. This could lead one to assume her relationship to Englishness was uncomplicated. However, this was far from true. Few have commented on the internal conflict that Gipps felt because of her family background. Gipps’s mother, H el ene, was Swiss born, making Gipps only half-English. Gipps remarked that she felt somewhat hypocritical at times, especially considering the bold, defiant personality traits of the Gipps women that others commonly viewed as “un-English.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, H el ene was from a German-speaking part of Switzerland. Her children, whose looks could be associated with German descent, faced harassment while wartime tensions were high due to their perceived heritage. The inner turmoil that this created within Gipps caused her to become staunchly conservative and pro-English, as is evident in some of her intolerant views on topics such as immigration.¹⁰¹ This source of insecurity and pain is certainly a reason why Gipps may

⁹⁹ Ibid, 47.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 123.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 124.

have been so protective and stubborn when it came to her compositions and style. Add to this her continual rejection from British musical authorities like the BBC due to her traditional English compositional voice and it becomes clear that her personal identity and relationship with Englishness likely caused her to lash out and further isolate herself.

Regardless of Gipps's relationship to the English nationality, her style was a natural continuation of the tradition that brought her to musical maturity. Her music followed in the footsteps of great English romanticists such as her treasured mentor, Vaughan Williams. This style was highly regarded during the first half of the twentieth century, a time where national pride and Englishness were heavily promoted. However, this tradition fell out of style when international schools of composition were introduced in Britain. New styles such as serialism were seen as progressive and sophisticated, leading many to believe that these musical languages were key to growing the prestige of English music in an expanding global setting.¹⁰² Those who continued in the neo-Romantic British style were viewed as old fashioned and anti-intellectual, and Gipps fell victim to this growing sentiment. Braddock writes, "Her clinging to the past was to become a constant battle in her composition, conducting, and academic career. Her compositional style and musical preferences remained obstinately pastoral when British compositional trends had turned cerebral."¹⁰³ It is bitterly ironic that Gipps was eventually disregarded for the style that had earned her awards, praise, and promise as a young composer.

¹⁰² Ibid, 78.

¹⁰³ Braddock, "The Chamber Wind Ensemble Music of Ruth Gipps (1921-1999): Composer, Conductor, and Performer," 27.

However, Gipps had her reasons for continuing in her neo-Romantic style. “Gipps’s philosophy remained simple: she was inspired to write music she felt would be enjoyed by a broad audience and also by the players who gave the music life,” writes Halstead.¹⁰⁴ Gipps’s scathing critiques and adamant rejection of new intellectual music often overshadow her contributions to English musical life. She continued to write music that looked back on a simple, traditional English lifestyle, featuring themes of rural life and natural landscapes.¹⁰⁵ This commitment to promoting and writing traditional English music was used to belittle Gipps and her beautiful music. From today’s perspective, her continued musical development and tireless advocacy are brave and commendable. Outdated and misinformed attitudes undoubtedly continue to confirm Gipps’s dumbfounding position in relative obscurity. Her work in composing, performing, and preserving English music should be remembered as a pivotal force in British musical life.

One may wonder why Gipps refused to conform or back down when her pertinacity cost her opportunities and prestige. Through this exploration of Gipps’s struggles, multifaceted issues have been revealed that may have caused her to act this way. Gipps faced many hardships due to circumstances she could not control, like her gender. These hardships and other difficulties she encountered created dissonances within herself that later manifested in her gritty personality and mannerisms. When examined more closely, her abrasive nature and general mistrust for others were caused at least in part by things that any person would struggle with and can likely relate to.

¹⁰⁴ Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 83.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 101.

Though interest has recently grown in Gipps's oboe music, her works have not yet entered the pedagogical canon, and few have been performed and recorded in professional settings. However, live recordings by Stephanie Carlson and Katherine Needleman have greatly contributed to the rediscovery of Gipps's music. Carlson's 2017 lecture recital, available in full on YouTube, uncovered Gipps's life and compositions and shed light on her unique voice through thoughtful biographical presentation sections and inspired performances of selected oboe works. Some reasons why works like *Kensington Gardens Suite* and *Threnody* aren't present in oboe repertoire are outlined in other sources, such as a scarcity of recordings. Recordings like Carlson's and Needleman's provide valuable aural and interpretive guides for students that wish to study pieces that are not commonly performed. Repeated exposure through recordings and performances boosts familiarity with compositions and styles that fall outside of the canon that students encounter in their core musicology and music theory classes. Comfort with diverse compositions and musical languages promotes further exploration and promotion of composers and works that have yet to be canonized.

The next section addresses four selected works by Ruth Gipps, presenting an informed reading of each by considering the conflicts that Gipps faced throughout her life that shaped her personality and musical voice. Additionally, suggestions for performance and pedagogical use are made, establishing the value these works add to oboe repertoire. This method provides ample information to any who wish to perform or teach these works. Knowledge is a valuable tool. With it, more musicians may continue the work of performing and promoting Gipps's oboe works. This spark will hopefully ignite a fire of

interest and motivation for passionate oboists to share this wonderful music with new listeners who will certainly enjoy it; this was Ruth Gipps's wish.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION OF SELECTED OBOE WORKS

Kensington Gardens Suite, op. 2, 1938

This short and charming piece for oboe and piano was written for oboist Marion Brough, who premiered it with Gipps at the keyboard. After meeting in their early days at RCM, Brough and Gipps became lifelong friends and continued to collaborate for years to come, with Brough becoming dedicatee of several of Gipps's oboe works.¹⁰⁶

The three movements of the suite, each a miniature character piece, together last for five minutes.¹⁰⁷ Every movement features a part of the Kensington Gardens in London, which has a reputation for fairies and other folklore.¹⁰⁸ Oboist James Turnbull praises the piece in a review, saying “the characters that Gipps brings out are just so clear and immediately engaging,” highlighting Gipps's colorful and approachable style.¹⁰⁹ This work is an example of Gipps's salon-style output, which often features whimsical, fairy-tale inspired characters and atmospheres. Halstead further explains this area of Gipps's output: “In sound and narrative these works are naïve, charming, amusing, and fanciful – not central traits of the English art-music tradition, but rather traits central to a particular brand of English whimsy, found in many areas of the arts from the Victorian period onwards.”¹¹⁰

This piece was composed early in Gipps's musical career, perhaps too early for it to have been specifically intended as a teaching piece. However, it is pedagogically

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 163.

¹⁰⁸ “Elfin Oak”, Atlas Obscura. Accessed October 20, 2022, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/elfin-oak>

¹⁰⁹ James Turnbull, “Ruth Gipps,” *The Double Reed* 45 (2022): 173.1

¹¹⁰ Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 106.

valuable for many reasons. Each movement features various compound and simple meters, which sometimes alternate in rapid succession. The student is also introduced to less commonly used meters such as 5/4 and 6/4, which rarely appear in pedagogical oboe repertoire. Although the piece features the oboe as a soloist, the oboe appears in dialogue with the piano through many duet sections, cultivating collaborative playing and communication. Gipps employs nearly the whole range of the oboe, encouraging comfort with both high and low notes in various contexts. Overall, *Kensington Gardens Suite* teaches the student oboist how to use tone, phrasing, articulation, and dynamics to portray several different characters throughout the piece. Few other pieces of short, accessible length encourage students to explore contrast in such an engaging and musical way.

This suite is useful for the student and the experienced oboist alike for performance. Its short length, imaginative program, and dynamic characters make it a welcome addition to nearly any recital. Additionally, it could be useful for educational outreach programs. The program is easy to understand and can be aided visually by projecting images of the Elfin oak, a fat pigeon, and chestnut trees as their respective movements are performed. Furthermore, the piece utilizes the full range of the oboe and much of its expressive ability, making it a great introduction to the instrument for a variety of audiences.

Movement I: “Elfin Oak”

This movement is inspired by a sculpture made from a hollow oak trunk in the Kensington Gardens. Created by Ivor Innes in 1930, it features intricate carvings of

fairies, elves, and animals that appear around the trunk.¹¹¹ This playful, charming movement follows a ternary form, as outlined in Table 1.

Section	Content
Section A: mm. 1-36	1st Theme
mm. 1-11	<i>Allegro vivace</i>
mm. 12-22	<i>Allegretto</i>
mm. 23-36	<i>Allegro vivace</i>
Section B: mm. 37-47	2nd Theme
Cadenza: mm. 48-55	1st Theme material
Section A': mm. 56-76	1st Theme
mm. 56-65	<i>Allegro vivace</i>
mm. 66-76	<i>Allegretto</i>
Coda: mm. 77-end	1st Theme fragments
mm. 77-80	<i>Allegro vivace</i>
mm. 80-85	Piano interlude, new material
mm. 85-86	Oboe interjection with 1 st theme

Table 1.
Structure of Mvt. 1 of *Kensington Gardens Suite*, op. 2, with primary sections in bold type.

The A section presents the first theme in two settings. The first, marked *allegro vivace*, is sprightly and jumpy with a *staccato* character that flits playfully between 2/4 and 3/8 meters, as shown in Example 1. It conjures the image of a game of chase between clumsily flying fairies like those pictured on the oak, skipping around with the oboe following the piano downwards.

¹¹¹ “Elfin Oak,” The Royal Parks. Accessed October 20, 2022, <https://www.royalparks.org.uk/parks/kensington-gardens/things-to-see-and-do/memorials-fountains-and-statues/elfin-oak#:~:text=The%20Elfin%20Oak%20is%20a,Memorial%20Playground%20in%20Kensington%20Gardens.>



Example 1. *Kensington Gardens Suite*, op. 2, Mvt. 1, mm. 1-5.¹¹²

The next subsection features the same theme in an *allegretto* setting in 3/8, with an off-kilter waltz quality established by the distinctive grace note blips in the piano on beat two of every measure, pictured in Example 2.



Example 2. *Kensington Gardens Suite*, op. 2, Mvt. 1, mm. 14-17.

The *allegro vivace* returns with a playful, wandering dialogue between oboe and piano. The B section introduces the second theme in 5/4, a lyrical, espressivo modal melody. It glides energetically up and down in a circular-feeling way, perhaps like a butterfly, floating through several tonalities. A brief cadenza sounds like a false start of a new A section, which then leads into A'. The first and second subsections are repeated, but the final return of the *allegro vivace* stops short for a fanciful, elegant piano interlude, like the sun setting on a fun-filled day. The joke is not quite over yet; the oboe butts in with a

¹¹² For this and all subsequent musical examples, I consulted scores published by June Emerson that are cited in Resources.

quote of the first theme, followed by a calm open fifth in the piano that looks forward to the adventures that still lie ahead in the garden.

Movement II: “Fat Pigeon”

This humorous depiction of a waddling pigeon is through-composed. The first section in 2/4 is marked *Unhurried*; the pigeon is walking around, surveying its territory. This theme is almost stately except for the pigeon’s interrupting pecks as it searches for food, depicted by stabbing accents on the last eighth note of measures 3, 6, and 9, as in Example 3.



Example 3. *Kensington Gardens Suite*, op. 2, Mvt. 2, mm. 4-6.

The pigeon begins chirping in conversation with another in measure 16 as the oboe plays a short canon with the piano. A change to 12/8 meter marks the beginning of a more graceful flying theme as the pigeon attempts to take flight. Its gliding is playfully interrupted by duple, grace-note-glissando-esque squawks in the oboe, pictured in Example 4.



Example 4. *Kensington Gardens Suite*, op. 2, Mvt. 2, mm. 25-26.

The pigeon comes to a rest with more two tired squawks, followed by a comical D major chord in the piano.

Movement III: “Chestnut Trees”

The final movement of the suite is another ABA’ form. It begins *Lento* in 6/4 meter, establishing a broad character reminiscent of stately chestnut trees, with the oboe playing a lilting theme as branches sway over majestic chords in the piano, pictured in Example 5.



Example 5. *Kensington Gardens Suite*, op. 2, Mvt. 3, m. 2.

A new, energetic second theme appears suddenly in the *Piu mosso* section. Perhaps some of the playful characters from the elfin oak have come to explore the chestnut trees. The A’ section returns to *Tempo Primo* with a final look at the gently swaying trees, a peaceful conclusion to the garden visit.

The Piper of Dreams, op. 12b, 1940

Gipps based this four-minute-long piece for unaccompanied solo oboe on the painting of the same title by British woman artist Estella Canziani (1887-1964).¹¹³ Canziani was known for her detailed and realistic tempera and watercolor paintings that were often inspired by folklore from various places and peoples. *The Piper of Dreams* is considered her most famous painting.¹¹⁴ The painting features a solitary figure leaning against a tree trunk in what appears to be a forest. A bird perches on the small figure's foot and a chipmunk sits beside them as the figure plays a small flute or whistle. Faint fairy silhouettes dance around the piper. A blue hat with a peacock feather hides most of the figure's visage, leaving the viewer to wonder if this is a fairy being or a human.

There are few canonic unaccompanied oboe works written in accessible tonal language. The modal, folk-tune inspired style of *The Piper of Dreams* makes it a desirable addition to this repertoire. This piece encourages the performer to tell a story with expressive playing through its sophisticated use of melodies and themes that unfold and intermingle organically. *The Piper of Dreams* is short and requires no additional performers, making it versatile for many programs and settings, such as church service interludes.

Rather than dividing this piece into formal sections as standard analysis would, it is better served by an exploration of melody. Each melody and musical character is introduced in its own section, but it is the mixture of these themes that tells the story. This interaction of tuneful, characterized melodies is a fantastic example of Gipps's

¹¹³ Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 166.

¹¹⁴ E. F. Coote Lake, "Estella Canziani," *Folklore* 75 (1964): 206-207. Accessed October 20, 2022. JSTOR.

organic and engaging development. Each character explores range and tonalities without becoming lost or unrecognizable. Instead of moving definitely towards a cadence or goal tonality, the themes gently unfold and grow with a sense of togetherness. This is a strikingly human and communicative quality of Gipps's unique musical voice. Rather than adhering to typical form and harmony, Gipps explores atmosphere and characters through graceful storytelling. The folk song inspired melodies, program based on a fairy-lore inspired painting, and lack of rigid, formal structure in this style likely contributed to this piece's false categorization and subsequent neglect. The piece is successful in its storytelling and engaging for both the performer and the audience. It creates a beautiful sound world and characters using only a solo oboist. These characteristics should set *Piper of Dreams* apart in solo repertoire; it shines through as a uniquely delightful piece.

The piece opens with a singing, *andante* melody characterized by graceful stepwise movement followed by ascending intervals of the perfect fourth and fifth, closing with descending minor thirds suggestive of a sighing emotion. Its beginning is shown in Example 6.



Example 6. *The Piper of Dreams*, op. 12b, mm. 1-3.

This song-like melody could portray the piper from the painting as they play their tune and explore its simple rhythms and intervals. A new musical character is introduced in measure 22, where the tempo changes to *poco piu mosso*, perhaps as the fairies join the piper and swirl around them in a dance. Example 7 shows this entrance. This theme is

active and joyful, featuring playful leaps that center around the pitches C and G. Intervals of fourths and fifths also characterize this theme. In contrast to the previous theme, the perfect fourths and fifths are now descending as opposed to ascending.



Example 7. *The Piper of Dreams*, op. 12b, mm. 22-25.

A third musical character, distinguished by large leaps and varied articulations, joins in measure 34, a fragment of which is pictured in Example 8. Accents and staccatos give this melody a chirping, birdlike quality, recalling the small bird perched atop the piper's foot.



Example 8. *The Piper of Dreams*, op. 12b, pickup to mm. 39-40.

In measures 42 through 46, all three of the musical characters are presented together in order, serving as a small recapitulation of the characters that have appeared thus far. A distinct *allegro* theme follows, wandering gently but with energy and forward motion, like the chipmunk has joined the small audience, shown in Example 9.



Example 9. *The Piper of Dreams*, op. 12b, mm. 47-48.

It explores the area around the piper with curiosity, stopping suddenly with a major 3rd leap in measure 58. Maybe the chipmunk has returned to its nest in the tree.

A coda begins at measure 64 in *tempo primo*. The piper's theme returns in measures 59 to 63, followed by the melody of the fairies in measures 64 through the downbeat of measure 66. The piper and friends dance as characteristics of their themes appear simultaneously. The piper's song begins in measures 66 to 67, followed by rhythms of the bird's theme with the fourth and fifth leaps from the fairies' theme until the final measure. The final measure inverts the leaping end of the chipmunk's theme, now a high F to a low D. The energy gradually dissipates through this exploration of melodies as the tune and dancers wander into the distance.

Oboe Concerto in D minor, op. 20, 1941

Gipps's Oboe Concerto is a robust and enchanting work that showcases many of her strengths as a composer through its three contrasting movements. This is the longest work examined in this study, with a duration of about twenty minutes. It is an engaging and challenging piece for both oboe and orchestra or piano.¹¹⁵ Idiomatic writing for the wind instruments is featured in many chamber-like sections that feature duets and

¹¹⁵ Piano reduction written by Ruth Gipps and published by June Emerson.

conversations between the solo oboe and other instruments. The characters and moods are ever changing, demonstrating the versatile nature of the oboe. English folk-inspired melodies and motives are presented in various engaging contexts, intertwined with each other and exploring a variety of harmonies. Gipps also ventures boldly out of her English musical style, exploring the blues in the third movement. This oboe concerto is a delight to play, study, and listen to. As a natural continuation of the beloved English style of composers like Vaughan Williams, it is a wonder that this concerto was not discovered and embraced by the oboe community sooner.

This piece is no easy feat for the oboist; it is technically demanding, requiring facility with speed and extended range. Because the piece develops melodies by placing them in contrasting settings, the oboist must call upon many tone colors to bring these statements to life. Long, arching melodies require endurance and support as well as nuanced rubato and dynamics. This work is also unique in its use of melodic patterns associated with the blues style, which is rarely found in oboe repertoire. The oboist explores this special style of playing in expressive, passionate solos. There is no shortage of quirky and fun musical jokes, either. The far-reaching styles and emotions in this piece make it a treasure for any oboist looking to explore a substantial, challenging, and engaging concerto.

Movement I: *Allegro Moderato*

Much like *The Piper of Dreams*, this movement comprises several modally inspired melodies that are presented and combined in various contexts. Though the movement has distinct sections, the restatement and elaboration of these themes is used to create momentum and development, rarely settling definitively in one key or tonality for

more than a few beats. Creasy describes this aspect of Gipps's compositional style eloquently: "The saturation of motivic fragments creates a rich continuity within the movement...the cohesive integration of these motives creates the impression of one continuously evolving melodic statement, that unfolds organically."¹¹⁶ Gipps presents four distinct melodic ideas throughout this movement, then combines them and features them in various contexts that create new atmospheres and emotions. Their unfolding is aurally engaging. When studying the oboe part or the score, the ingenious settings of these ideas are delightful to unwrap and express.

A brief orchestral introduction begins the movement, culminating in an *ad lib* oboe solo that launches into the first theme area. The oboe plays this first motive in measures 51 through 67. It is a tuneful, singable melody that emphasizes intervals of major sevenths and minor seconds. The end of this motive is marked by a major seventh leap upwards followed by a minor second in measures 65-67. The *leggiero* indication begins the second theme area, with the oboe presenting a new motive in measures 70-81. This theme is characterized by leaping staccato figures followed by virtuosic 16th-note motives. It moves around a few keys before settling back on D minor. A brief connective section follows, exploring characteristics from both the first and second themes, with a statement of the first theme leading into the next section. The third theme appears in a *grazioso* section, presented by the oboe in measures 101-109. This theme moves up and down in a circular-feeling way through several tonalities. The unsettled, pointillistic fourth theme begins to appear in measure 134, with fragments building tension through speed and dynamic power to the climax beginning in measure 153. This section, marked

¹¹⁶ Creasy, "A Guide to the Works for and Involving Horn by Ruth Gipps," 27.

presto possibile, fully explores this fourth melodic idea with flashing brilliance and speed. It stops suddenly and is followed by an uncertain cadenza-like section.

A recapitulation-like section rounds out this weighty and complex movement. The first theme appears again at measure 178, but this statement of the theme varies from its appearance in the beginning. Most notably, the concluding figure in measures 201-203 begins with a major seventh as it did in its first statement but ends with a major second instead of a minor second as it did before. This creates a striking but brief moment of respite and peace. The second theme material is repeated but modified by combining it with the fourth theme material beginning in measure 217. The third theme material is also recapitulated and joined with the fourth theme in an organic way. The oboe explores various facets of each motive and several tonalities, gradually coming to rest on D once more. The orchestra ends the movement with a D minor chord in root position, a definite tonal conclusion in contrast to the modally wandering nature of this movement.

Movement II: *Andante*

The second movement of the concerto is a simple, yet elegant experience after the brilliant, technical first movement. Its lilting, peaceful melodies are songful and nostalgic, perhaps looking back on a simpler way of life before wartime tensions overtook the world around Gipps as she composed this piece. The melodies are pastoral, sometimes almost wave-like in motion. One can imagine Gipps yearning for the peaceful shores of Bexhill, her hometown. This movement is neither triumphant nor melancholic; it is simply serene and beautiful.

A modal, songlike melody, shown in Example 10, begins this movement in A-flat major, with the oboe floating above the orchestral accompaniment and gently activating it.



Example 10. Oboe Concerto in D minor, op. 20, Mvt. 2, mm. 1-3.

This theme gracefully winds around some chromatic exploration within a pentatonic frame, nearly always staying within *piano* or *mezzo piano* dynamic levels. The second melody is introduced beginning in measure 30, shown in Example 11. This melody is differentiated by its fast-paced nature, with sixteenth-notes adding energy and activity as it moves quickly through its pentatonic tonality.



Example 11. Oboe Concerto in D minor, op. 20, Mvt. 2, mm. 30-33.

It works its way towards a musing, melismatic moment in measures 52-53. This is followed by a recapitulatory section where the first theme returns. The first theme adopts the energy and pacing of the second theme, also exploring swirling melismatic figures that move back towards its original chromatic nature for a few dramatic forte climaxes. Having exhausted its energy, it sighs downwards, becoming pentatonic once again before coming to rest in a peaceful, nostalgic, and sweet return to an A-flat major sonority.

Movement III: *Allegro vivace*

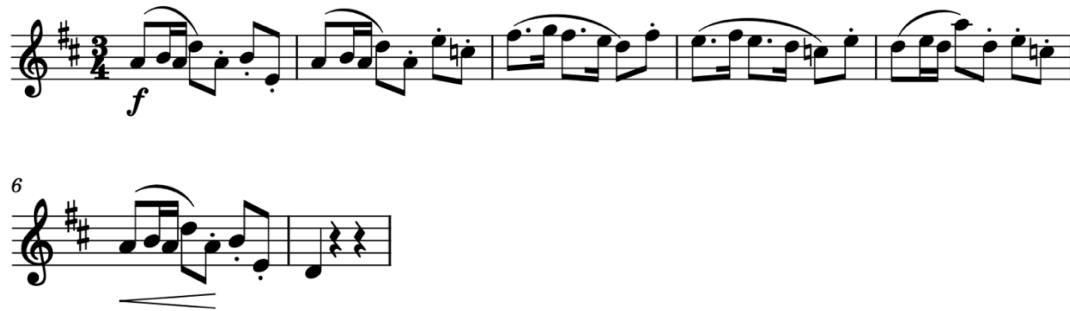
The final movement of the concerto, a sonata-rondo form, juxtaposes sprightly, folk-music inspired themes with espressivo sections that feature the use of blues sonorities through various flattened scale degrees. This versatility of style creates breathtaking moments filled with passion. Lighter A sections wander into dark, foreboding B sections. By the third B area, the oboe's previously painful, plaintive blues melody has transformed into a major one, indicating that it has overcome its struggle. Rather than concluding with a heroic, victorious recapitulation of the A themes, Gipps challenges expectations by ending in an unassuming and perhaps humorous way. The thematic material of each section is detailed in Table 2.

<u>Section</u>	<u>Content</u>
<u>Section A: mm. 1-63</u>	<u>1st and 2nd Themes</u>
Subsection a: mm. 1-49	1st Theme area, 3 motives
mm. 1-14	1 st motive
mm. 15-23	2 nd motive
mm. 24-44	3 rd motive
Connective area: mm. 44-49	Orchestra reminisces on 1 st motive
Subsection b: mm. 50-63	2nd Theme area, 2 motives
mm. 50-57	1 st motive
mm. 58-63	2 nd motive
Connective area: mm. 64-70	Orchestra plays primary theme moving into Section B
<u>Section B: mm. 70-94</u>	<u>Meno mosso area: D minor blues</u>
<u>Section A': mm. 95-115</u>	<u>Tempo primo: brief mixture of A themes</u>
<u>Section B': mm. 116-142</u>	<u>Meno mosso area and cadenza</u>
mm. 116-142	<i>Meno mosso</i> area: B minor blues. Leads into cadenza.
mm. 143-157	Cadenza
<u>Section A'': mm. 158-208</u>	<u>1st and 2nd Themes</u>
Subsection a: mm. 158-199	1st Theme area, 3 motives recapitulated
mm. 158-165	1 st motive
mm. 166-174	2 nd motive
mm. 175-194	3 rd motive
Connective area: mm. 195-199	Orchestra reminisces on 1 st motive, recapitulated
Subsection b: mm. 200-208	2nd Theme area, only 1st motive recapitulated
<u>Section B'': mm. 209-229</u>	<u>Meno mosso area: A major blues</u>
<u>Coda: mm. 230-258</u>	<u>1st Theme</u>

Table 2.

Structure of Mvt. 3 of Oboe Concerto in D Minor, op. 20, with primary sections in underlined and bold type and subsections in bold type.

This movement begins with a statement of the first melodic motive of the A section, pictured in Example 12. It is lighthearted and energetic as it activates the accompaniment.



Example 12. Oboe Concerto in D minor, op. 20, mm. 1-7.

A second motive appears, followed by a restless, leaping third motive. These three ideas form the primary theme. The accompaniment reminisces briefly on the first motive as it slows into the secondary theme area, which contains two motives. The first motive is graceful and gentle, while the second reenergizes the oboe into the return of the primary themes at measure 64.

This return is brief. Suddenly, the mood changes and the accompaniment slows down to the *meno mosso* of the first B section. A D minor tonality creates a foreboding, murky atmosphere with flattened third, fifth, and seventh scale degrees that imply a hexatonic or minor blues pitch collection. The melody in the oboe is unsure as it soars over a rumbling eighth-sixteenth accompaniment, shown in Example 13.

Example 13. Oboe Concerto in D minor, op. 20, mm. 73-78.

The oboe eventually falls, sinking to a low D. The accompaniment crawls chromatically to a stop. Suddenly, a new A' section begins. The quicker tempo returns and a confused mixture of primary themes is short lived. Blue notes begin to appear in the oboe, leading to a *diminuendo* as the orchestra becomes caught in another *meno mosso* section.

The B' section is darker yet, with chords in the accompaniment creating a heavy, off-balance waltz feel. Flattened thirds, fifths, and sevenths within the B minor scale are featured again to suggest a minor blues sonority. The oboe solo is dramatic and full of

lament and features crying, soulful figures that lead to an intense downwards slide to low B. The oboe has arrived at a virtuosic, dynamic cadenza that moves from the blues tonality to a more definite B-flat major sonority. It leaps to high F and tumbles back to A, which launches the A'' section. A recapitulation of the primary and secondary themes moves along until the orchestra slips into *meno mosso* once more for the final B type section, B''. Unlike the dark, minor B sections before, this section implies a major blues tonality with flattened third scales degrees within the key of A major, moving to the dominant key of the entire work. The *espressivo* oboe is decisive and forward-looking, having transformed into the major sonority after overcoming the dark, minor blues of the past. This section eventually stalls after some beautiful, singing oboe lines. Once again, as in the beginning of the movement, the oboe uses the primary theme to launch the orchestra back into action for a coda.

The triumphant transformation of the B section followed by the return of the primary theme may lead the listener to expect a typical boisterous, heroic ending to this journey as in many other concertos. However, once the A section themes are briefly recapitulated, the orchestra wanders into uncertain tonal territory as it dies away to a stop. The oboe interjects suddenly with a final, triumphant statement of the first theme, followed by a humorous, declamatory D major chord in the accompaniment to end the piece, pictured in Example 14. Gipps's final trick is an effective joke; there is no doubt that she enjoyed having the last laugh.

Example 14. Oboe Concerto in D minor, op. 20, mm. 255-258.

***Threnody*, op. 74, 1990**

After Gipps turned sixty-five, she was legally forced to retire from her conducting position. Determined to continue making music, she took up organ playing and held a few positions at local churches.¹¹⁷ *Threnody* was likely inspired by her organ playing, her involvement in church music, and her Christian faith. This seven-minute piece is written for *cor anglaise* (English horn) and organ or piano. Its program reads: “Wandering alone in a churchyard, the mourner finds some consolation upon hearing the church choir singing Psalm 121: ‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills.’”¹¹⁸ This piece features through-composed sections filled with free-flowing melodies and two sections reminiscent of chant that include written text to indicate speech-rhythm that is to be played but not literally sung by the performer.

¹¹⁷ Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 38-39.

¹¹⁸ Ruth Gipps, *Threnody*, Op. 74 (Ampleforth, UK: Emerson Edition, 2020), 1.

Threnody begins with a brief, *espressivo* introduction marked *andante*. This leads into the first major section in measure 9, indicated by the *piu mosso, ma doloroso* instruction. The English horn plays a reflective, wandering theme as the mourner walks alone in the churchyard and considers their loss. Their suffering and pain reach a climactic outcry as the English horn climbs to a forte high D flat in measure 31. After this outburst, a few quiet sighing figures lead to a new section that forges onward. It is quiet as the mourner approaches the church and falls silent as they begin to hear the church choir in the distance, portrayed by the organ or piano in the *andante religioso* section, measures 47-55.

The *senza misura* instruction marks the beginning of the first chant-like section. The text from Psalm 121 of the Holy Bible printed under the English horn line is meant to indicate speech rhythm but is not to be sung, only played. This section reads:

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord: who hath made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: and he that keepeth thee will not sleep. Behold, he that keepeth Israel: shall neither slumber nor sleep.¹¹⁹

The mourner lifts their eyes as they hear the singing and perhaps quietly joins along. This whole section is played in a subdued *piano* dynamic. Beginning in G minor, the chant melody moves through several keys and lands finally on a G major chord that concludes the section on the downbeat of measure 63.

The next section, marked *andante*, has a reflective quality. Jarring dissonances create the impression of crying and pain, building to an *appassionato* section beginning in measure 71. This is perhaps a surge of questioning and anger; why would God put the

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 5-6.

mourner through such pain? A new inflection begins with the *piano* dynamic marking in measure 76. The mourner begins to realize that their faith may help ease their pain. This leads to a solid and definite *lento* section. The mourner has found the resolve to carry on and stay strong in their faith.

The final section of the piece is a second *senza misura* passage with the following words:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen, world without end. Amen.¹²⁰

This passage, unlike the first chant section, is triumphant and forte. The mourner has become faithful once again, trusting that life will go on and they will someday heal. The section begins in G minor and moves to G major once more, landing on an imperfect authentic cadence upon the first “amen” in measure 96. A *piano* echo follows for the second “amen,” with the piano or organ this time tonicizing a C major chord, forming a I to IV “amen” cadence. The mourner remembers the pain of loss and acknowledges that their life is forever changed, but their faith gives them the strength to carry on.

This piece is strikingly beautiful and moving. The full range of the English horn is used effectively and expressively, achieving a large variety of emotions. *Threnody* is versatile, given its short length and sincere content. It can serve as a meaningful musical tribute for a memorial service or a tender, unique ending to an oboe recital.

Commonly performed repertoire for solo English horn and piano is limited, and it is doubtful that many works for English horn and organ exist. The English horn’s

¹²⁰ Ibid, 10.

melancholic qualities are captured beautifully alongside flowing, virtuosic passages, something rarely experienced in its solo repertoire. Gipps's musical voice and passionate personality shine through in this musical expression of her faith. With its unique chant sections and graceful melodies, *Threnody* is a gem that deserves a place in the oboe family canon.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This examination of published literature addressing Ruth Gipps identified several patterns of behavior that shaped Gipps's interactions with the world around her. A deeper analysis of conflicts that may have influenced Gipps's persona and compositions revealed a vulnerable and misunderstood figure. Beginning in her childhood, Gipps felt like a perpetual outsider. Many experiences throughout her life reinforced her paranoia and subsequent defensiveness and isolation. Identifying specific situations and factors that may have impacted her sense of self as well as her relationships with others shines light on why Gipps was perceived as a difficult person. Approaching Gipps's struggles with curiosity and compassion reveals important perspectives that develop a nuanced understanding of her musical voice and legacy.

Rather than allowing conflict to define and belittle her, Gipps faced challenges with bravery and resourcefulness, using her difference to her advantage in admirable ways. In a world where women had few professional conducting opportunities, Gipps created her own ensembles and leadership positions. Instead of succumbing to limitations enforced on women by the male-dominated field of professional music of her era, Gipps used her femininity to her advantage and created a provocative persona that drew attention to her work. Despite feeling hated by so many around her, Gipps used her power and talents to engage with musicians and audiences by dedicating works to her friends, writing teaching pieces, composing and programming works that place a premium on communicating with listeners, and establishing ensembles that provide meaningful professional experience for talented young performers. When her traditional

English style fell out of fashion, Gipps refused to change her musical voice to appease others. She continued to develop as a composer and created a vast repertoire of English music filled with themes of nature, fairy tales, and folk music. Gipps's contributions to this beloved style of music were made possible by her daring attitude and strength in the face of limiting societal and musical expectations. Through this exploration of various dissonances, it is made clear that conflict brought out the very best in Ruth Gipps.

Approaching these struggles and issues with empathy allows Gipps's voice to be heard and understood. It is through this perspective that Gipps's contributions can be truly appreciated for their meaning and power. Halstead summarizes this poignantly:

She was a woman who dared to confront the stereotype, an impresario courageous enough to make her own opportunities, a musician prepared to go out on a limb. She worked to ensure the diversity of English musical culture at a time when it was highly unfashionable to do so. Her enthusiasm for music-making was immense, and her passion for bringing audiences a range of music she believed they would enjoy was matched only by her enthusiasm for promoting young musicians.¹²¹

Gipps was persistent in the face of adversity. She tirelessly defended her values and style, composing in a way that was true to her artistic voice. Furthermore, she was fiercely loyal to her fellow musicians and loved ones. Her intensity and dedication throughout all areas of her life is truly commendable. Sharing her story and promoting her legacy are important steps towards making her music accessible to all who deserve to enjoy it.

The exclusion of Gipps's music and projects by broadcasting and publishing entities such as the BBC led to a general ignorance of Gipps's works that caused their absence from the canon. The subsequent neglect of her music and legacy is unfounded.

¹²¹ Halstead, *Ruth Gipps*, 56.

Regardless of her contrarian attitude towards musical institutions and her difficulty accepting criticism, Gipps's work as a composer and conductor is significant and impactful. What is yet more dangerous than ignorance is the creation and perpetuation of harmful narratives that render positive characteristics of Gipps, such as her tenacity, as reasons to belittle or dismiss her. These portrayals of Gipps must be analyzed and questioned. When confidence and bravery are described in backhanded ways, marginalized groups will continue to be misunderstood, discouraged, and isolated. When we explore difficult figures such as Gipps in writing, teaching, discussion, and performance, we validate artists who struggle with difference and discrimination. This work expands our musical world to encompass a fuller representation of human life and diversity. Everyone deserves access to wonderful music that speaks to them, regardless of if it adheres to a stereotypical standard of artistic value.

This discussion of Gipps's music demonstrates its worth without following a typical rubric of analysis and formal structure. As Citron writes, "What these queries suggest is that music as lived practice represents much more than style, formalism, and a succession of great names and works."¹²² By investigating Gipps's struggles alongside a discussion of her works, performers and listeners are able to enter their musical journey through her compositions from a place of deeper understanding. Knowledge is power; inspired and informed performances will demonstrate that this kind of work is sincerely worthwhile and fulfilling for students, teachers, players, and listeners.

Gipps's oboe family compositions stand out within the repertoire because of their pedagogical value, engaging musical language, folk-inspired English style, and organic

¹²² Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 223.

use of melody. The unique programs of pieces like *Kensington Gardens Suite* and *Piper of Dreams* create charming, enjoyable characters within approachable genres. The style and depth of expression in the Oboe Concerto and *Threnody* exhibit the power of the oboe and English horn as solo instruments. By performing and teaching these works, we experience new worlds within oboe playing.

Sincere thanks are due to Jill Halstead for her work in telling Gipps's story and contextualizing her compositions, contributions, strengths, and weaknesses. Without Halstead's biography, this project and many others could not exist. In the biography, Halstead voiced her wish that the text would ignite interest in Gipps in hopes that she will someday take her rightful place in history and in musician's hearts. Dedicated researchers like Creasy, Cifrino, Braddock, and Dusold have shed light on Gipps's value to several communities. It is my hope that this project takes further steps towards promoting Gipps, her legacy, and her compositions, especially for oboists.

Addressing conflicts and struggles with empathy is essential to unwrapping who Ruth Gipps was. All musicians can agree that it is important to do what is necessary to better understand music, be it formally analyzing a concerto or reading a biography. Considering these factors when reading Gipps's compositions encourages a more thorough understanding of their content, making such studies worthwhile for performance alone. However, it is important to continue questioning the narratives surrounding misunderstood figures like Gipps for many more reasons. A deeper examination of Gipps shows that her incredible ability to turn what others saw as weakness or Otherness into strength makes her an inspiration to all who battle discrimination and insecurity. Those who dared to stand up for themselves played an

important role in paving the way for women and other marginalized groups to study music professionally. Learning from these examples prevents history from repeating itself and continues the work of empowering those who struggle to be seen. Thus, it is vital that we recognize the adversities overcome by pioneers like Ruth Gipps and uplift the progress they have enabled through their bravery.

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