

PRESS RELEASE
22 June, 2017

ABO ANNOUNCES FIRST AWARDS FROM NEW 'SIRENS' FUND

The Association of British Orchestras has announced the first recipients from a new fund, 'Sirens', with four awards made to UK orchestras for projects to raise the awareness of historic women composers.

Diana Ambache, whose generosity has made the scheme possible, said:

"The ABO Sirens programme aims to push towards fairness and a richer picture of our musical heritage. Good music is good music, and there's plenty to enjoy, discover and rediscover with this scheme featuring fascinating and beautiful works by women from our history. This will change our musical appreciation to a much fuller experience."

The **Philharmonia Orchestra** will include Maria Antonia Walpurgis's *Sinfonia to Talestri, Queen of the Amazon* in their flagship Key Stage 2 concert and engagement project *Orchestra Unwrapped*. The funding will enable further exploration in schools of the extraordinary achievements of this German aristocrat-musician.

The **London Philharmonic Orchestra** will celebrate the work of Dame Ethel Smyth during its 2019/20 season. The virtuosic Concerto for Violin, Horn and Orchestra will introduce the work of this composer, political activist and suffragette, to a new generation.

The **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra** will perform works by Germaine Tailleferre and Cécile Chaminade in three performances in Liverpool and Preston in 2019, conducted by Jessica Cottis. The project will also include adult learning workshops, work with the Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Company, including a conducting workshop with Cottis and composition workshops with female composers.

Southbank Sinfonia and conductor Rebecca Miller will celebrate Dorothy Howell, whose exhilarating music Henry Wood championed at the Proms, but was then lost to obscurity. Selected pieces will be heard again in an open workshop in Autumn 2018 and consequent Spring 2019 concert, facilitated by access to a new family archive.

SIRENS

The ABO Trust received a generous gift from Diana Ambache in 2016 to run a new fund, Sirens, which aims to raise awareness and appreciation of the music written by historical women from around the world. Annual grants will be allocated according to the range and value of each project. Each year over 10 years up to £19,000 will be shared between 4 to 5 projects for concerts, tours, recordings and education work deemed to be doing most to advance and promote the understanding of music by women.

Orchestras are encouraged to use [The Women of Note](#) website as a resource, which lists orchestral music by historical women composers. The awards panel for the current round of awards comprised Diana Ambache, Gillian Moore, Southbank Centre, Edwina Wolstencroft, BBC Radio 3, Philip Cashian, composer, and Fiona Harvey, ABO.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Claire.willis@elevenths.co.uk Tel: 07951 600362

MARIE ANTONIA WALPURGIS (1724-1780)

To be a female composer in the eighteenth century was an extremely rare occupation, even for an aristocrat, and Marie Antonia's significance is reflected in the fact that her works were published in her lifetime and were successful. She was a member of the Accademia dell'Arcadia of Rome (also founded by a woman; the exiled Queen Christina of Sweden) which was instrumental in the re-development of opera in the 18th century. *Talestri, Queen of the Amazon* is a work which champions women. In addition to the protagonist, two other prominent characters are women: Antiope, Talestri's advisor, and Tomiris, the high priestess of the Greek Goddess Diana. There is speculation that Maria Antonia's depiction of the benevolent, thoughtful ruler Talestri and her coming-of-age as a political leader, is a semi-autobiographical rendering of Maria Antonia herself, as Princess and subsequently Regent of Bavaria.

DAME ETHEL SMYTH (1858-1944)

A significant female British composer of serious music for several decades at the turn of the last century, Ethel Smyth's works commanded great critical acclaim. She studied in Leipzig and during her time there met Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Grieg. Sir Thomas Beecham, Conductor and Founder of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, was also a close friend and champion of her work. Her Concerto for Violin, Horn and Orchestra, composed in 1928, is firmly rooted in the Romantic tradition with rich orchestration and is dedicated to Sir Henry Wood. With echoes of Elgar and Brahms the composition exhibits warm lyricism but also acknowledges a debt to twentieth century composition. A fiery, powerful personality with strong feminist allegiances - she played an important part in the suffragette movement - spending two months in prison for her actions - she composed 'The March of the Women' which became the anthem of the Women's Social and Political Union.

GERMAIN TAILLEFERRE (1892-1983) AND CÉCILE CHAMINADE (1857-1944)

Liverpool Philharmonic will present two works by two composers, both French, who both defied their fathers to pursue their musical ambitions. Germaine Tailleferre was the only female member of Les Six, a group of composers who worked in Montparnasse in the 1920s, and this is evident in the Ballade for piano and orchestra (1923), which combines Tailleferre's feel for orchestral colour, piano virtuosity and *joie de vivre*. This work will be receiving its Liverpool premiere. Cécile Chaminade's Flute Concertino (1902) for flute and piano was later arranged for flute and orchestra. The work is well-known to flautists as an exam piece - it was originally composed for the prestigious Paris Conservatoire Flute Concours (contest), but not familiar to concert audiences and has not been performed in Liverpool since 1988.

DOROTHY HOWELL (1898-1982)

In her lifetime, Dorothy Howell was praised as 'the English Strauss', and Sir Henry Wood ardently championed her, performing her tone poem *Lamia* at the Proms seven times between 1919 and 1940. In 2013, a remarkably-preserved archive of Howell's work was discovered by Howell's aged niece and nephew Merryn and Columb Howell at a family home in Worcestershire. Rebecca Miller will visit the archive to select some of the symphonic scores it contains, and give them their first airing in decades at dedicated workshops in Autumn 2018. Works will be selected for consequent performance in Southbank Sinfonia's free Rush Hour concert series in 2019. Rebecca says "On my first encounter with Dorothy Howell's music I was taken with its quality, the richness of material and its development, and her colourful and imaginative orchestral technique. Though clearly influenced by Strauss and Rachmaninov among others, her musical voice is a distinctive one, coupling her gift for expansive romantic melody with a strong sense of rhythm and accentuation, qualities that were reportedly characteristic of her own piano playing. I know today's audiences would cherish her music which dearly deserves the chance to shine again."

MEDIA CONTACT:

Claire.willis@elevenths.co.uk Tel: 07951 600362