

Dame Ethel Smyth Timeline by historian Lewis Orchard

- 1858** Born 22 April in Marylebone, London, the fourth of eight Smyth children. Family moved to Sidcup, Kent after army officer father returned from India.
- 1867** Smyth family moved to Frimley Green, Surrey when Ethel's father was posted to Aldershot.
- 1870** Ethel introduced to classical music by a musical governess and further encouraged by an army officer friend of the family.
- 1872** Sent to boarding school with her sister Mary. Ethel remained determined to study music in Germany despite her father's strong objections.
- 1877** Finally achieved permission from her father to study music in Leipzig. Dissatisfied with teaching at the Conservatorium there, instead she studied composition with Heinrich von Herzogenberg, a minor composer. Became a close friend of Heinrich's wife Lisl.
- 1882** Injured knee when rock climbing. She went to Florence where she met Lisl's sister Julia Brewster and brother-in-law Henry Brewster for the first time.
- 1883** First meeting with the exiled Empress Eugénie of France, living in Farnborough just a couple of miles from the Smyths' home and friendly with Mrs Smyth. The Empress supported Ethel in her musical ambitions.
- 1884** First public performance of Smyth's compositions in Leipzig.
- 1885** Deepening friendship with Henry Brewster caused a rift with Lisl von Herzogenberg, who felt that Smyth had betrayed her and her sister. Smyth broke off contact with Brewster but her relationship with Lisl ended forever. Smyth remained in England in 1885/86.
- 1887** Returned to Leipzig for winter. People were generally friendly but Smyth was locked out of the Herzogenbergs' social circle. Given Marco, the first of a series of dogs which she kept for the rest of her life.
- 1888** Met Greig and Tchaikovsky who wrote that 'Miss Smyth is one of the comparatively few women composers who may be seriously reckoned among the workers in this sphere of music'.
- 1889** Returned to England to look after her ageing parents as all other Smyth children had left home.
- 1890** First public performance of her compositions in England at a Crystal Palace concert well received. Henry Brewster was present and her friendship with him was renewed.
- 1891** Completed her Mass in D. Death of Lisl von Herzogenberg, no reconciliation having been achieved despite the efforts of friends to mend the relationship. Death of Smyth's mother.
- 1893** Mass in D performed at Royal Albert Hall, London to public acclaim but a lukewarm reaction from critics.
- 1894** Death of father and sale of Smyth family home. Ethel moved to a cottage in Frimley.
- 1895** Death of Julia Brewster. Henry Brewster proposed marriage to Smyth, who rejected him.
- 1898** Premiere of Smyth's first opera, *Fantasio*, in Weimar, with libretto by Henry Brewster (who was to become the librettist for all of her operas until his death). This was the first of six operas composed between the 1890s and 1920s.
- 1902** Premiere of her second opera, *Der Wald*, in Berlin and a successful performance in London.

- 1903** Successful performances of *Der Wald* at the New York Metropolitan Opera, its first (and, for over 100 years, only) production of a work by a female composer.
- 1906** Premiere of Smyth's third opera, *The Wreckers*, in Leipzig.
- 1908** Henry Brewster fell very ill and died, aged 57, at his daughter Clotilde's house in Farnborough.
Staged performance of *The Wreckers* at Her Majesty's Theatre in London.
- 1910** Moved to Hook Heath, Woking to a house built for her opposite the golf course where she loved to play and designed for her by Clotilde, Brewster's daughter.
Awarded honorary degree of Doctor of Music by Durham University.
- 1911** Impressed by Emmeline Pankhurst and the 'Votes for Women' movement, Smyth pledged 2 years of her life to the WSPU. Her 'March of the Women' became the suffragette anthem.
- 1912** Briefly imprisoned in Holloway Prison for participating in an orchestrated window-smashing campaign across the West End of London.
- 1913** 'Flight into Egypt' – Smyth leaves Britain as "my sole hope of struggling out of the suffrage whirlpool and getting back to music".
- 1914** In France with Emmeline Pankhurst (who was temporarily released from prison). All plans for performances of her works in Germany cancelled. Returned to England as war declared.
- 1915** Joined her sister Nina running an ambulance on the Italian front. Subsequently trained as a radiographer and attached to the XIII Division of the French Army as a radiographer at the military hospital at Vichy.
- 1916** Premiere of her fourth opera, *The Boatswain's Mate* (written in Egypt to her own libretto).
Began to write her first book of memoirs while at the military hospital.
- 1918** Returned to England from France in March.
- 1919** First book, *Impressions that Remained* (two volumes), published. This was the first of 10 books that she published in her later years.
- 1920** Death of patroness and friend Empress Eugénie. Deafness severe by this time.
- 1922** Created Dame Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (DBE) for services to music.
- 1926** Awarded honorary degree of Doctor of Music by Oxford University.
- 1927** Completed composition of her double concerto for violin and horn.
- 1930** Last major work composed – the symphonic oratorio *The Prison* to a text by Brewster.
- 1933** Publication of her essay collection *Female Pipings in Eden*, which included a long biographical sketch of Emmeline Pankhurst and chapters on Brewster and Brahms.
- 1934** Concert of her works at Royal Albert Hall in honour of her 75th birthday.
- 1939** Performances of *The Wreckers* at Sadler's Wells Theatre, London.
- 1940** Publication of her final volume of memoirs, *What Happened Next*.
- 1944** Died at her home in Hook Heath, Woking on 8 May, aged 86.