



R O Y A L

COLLEGE

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PETER GELLHORN (1912-2004)

BIOGRAPHY

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RCM EDITIONS

ABOUT RCM EDITIONS

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About the Peter Gellhorn Project

This edition was created as part of the AHRC-funded Cultural Engagement Project “Exile Estates – Music Restitution: The Musical Legacy of Conductor/Composer Peter Gellhorn”, in collaboration with the International Centre for Suppressed Music (ICSM) and the Jewish Music Institute (JMI).

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INTRODUCTION BY NORBERT MEYN

Since 2012, the “Singing a Song in a Foreign Land” project at the Royal College of Music has been exploring the lives and work of émigré musicians from Nazi Europe in the UK and beyond. Performance projects, biographical research, research events and an extensive oral history project have underlined the importance of these musicians for British music. (www.rcm.ac.uk/singingasong)

In 2016, the Royal College of Music was awarded a substantial Cultural Engagement grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which enabled us to engage Dr. Terence Curran. Together with the Gellhorn family and a team of wonderfully talented student assistants he was able to pull together a wealth of information about Peter Gellhorn. I am immensely grateful to Dr. Curran for putting it all into this document, which will provide much needed context information for the chamber music by Peter Gellhorn which is now available for the first time through RCM Editions.

Norbert Meyn



Peter Gellhorn was born in Breslau, Germany (now Wroclaw, Poland) on 24 October 1912. Originally named Hans Fritz Gellhorn, he was generally known as Peter amongst friends and family, formally changing his name to Peter Gellhorn when he became a naturalised British citizen in 1947 (Anon., 1947).

His father, Alfred Gellhorn (1885-1972), was an architect by profession but had also served as an officer in the German army during the First World War. After the war Alfred Gellhorn 'never fully returned to his family' and he and his wife Else (1885-1950) separated and eventually divorced, leaving Peter and his younger sister Anneliese (1914-1978) to grow up with their 'impoverished and embittered mother' (Malet & Grenville, 2002, p. 37).

The family moved to Berlin in 1923 but the absence of his father and the uncertainties of life in the post-war years of the Weimar Republic, including the hyperinflation of the early 1920s, meant that Peter Gellhorn remembered this as a particularly difficult time. Gellhorn's mother reportedly 'lived in very straitened circumstances' and was also unhappy about her divorce and her husband's re-marriage (to the dancer Else Adami). Despite this, Peter received a good education at the Schiller Realgymnasium 'and was able to pursue his musical studies thanks to a combination of grants and generosity' (Malet & Grenville, 2002, pp. 10-11).



Peter, Elsie and Anneliese Gellhorn (from left to right) in the 1920s, Gellhorn family archive

By the age of 16 Gellhorn had enrolled at Berlin's Staatliche Akademische Hochschule für Musik (affiliated to the Preussischen Akademie der Künste), where his teachers included Richard Rössler (piano), Leo Schratzenholz (composition), and Julius Prüwer (conducting). On completion of his piano studies in 1932 Gellhorn was awarded the Akademie's gold medal as one of its most outstanding students, before entering Prüwer's conducting class. He is also known to have attended the lectures of Paul Hindemith, and to have commenced studies in philosophy at the University of Berlin although he was unable to complete his course.



Gold Medal of the Prussian Academy of the Arts "For outstanding accomplishments of Prussian Art Students", Photo Catherine Cheung

Gellhorn completed his musical studies in 1934, by which time he was already establishing his reputation as a conductor, pianist, and composer in Berlin. He had also made significant friendships with musicians including the violinist Maria Lidka, who was a pupil of Max Rostal, and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, both of whom remained lifelong friends.

In 1933, however, the National Socialist Party gained power in Germany and began its persecution of Jews. Gellhorn later commented that Jewish members of staff at the Hochschule including the director,

Franz Schreker, were gradually removed from their posts, and that Jewish students also left. Gellhorn's father, Alfred, was Jewish and had also been linked to socialist groups including the Novembergruppe, so had to leave Germany immediately, travelling to South America. Peter Gellhorn, however, was half-Jewish and as the son of a war veteran was able to stay.

Gellhorn had to apply for membership of the *Reichsmusikkammer*, a musicians' guild established by the Nazis to control who could work as a musician, but although his application was initially accepted it was eventually rejected. His name was also published in *Das musikalische Juden-ABC* (Rock & Brückner, 1935, p. 117), a book listing Jewish musicians, and although Gellhorn continued to work illegally he knew that he would have to leave Germany.



Nazi Rally in Nürnberg, 1934 (photo Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-04062A / CC-BY-SA 3.0, creative commons)

12 March 2016). Gellhorn and Camphausen never met again and Camphausen was killed in the bombing of Dresden in February 1945.

Gellhorn was unable to carry very much when he fled Germany – he was anxious to avoid drawing attention to himself – and had to leave behind many of the scores of compositions written in Berlin. His mother managed to save several and these eventually found their way to Britain but inevitably in the turmoil of the war years others were lost. Those that survive include a string quartet, a suite for oboe and piano, film scores written for Lotte Reiniger, and a large-scale cantata, *Baida der Kosak*.

After arriving in England Gellhorn stayed with Philip Loretz in Ascot before moving to London where he found employment as a ‘resident volunteer’ at Toynbee Hall in the East End of London, working in the music department under John Tobin. During this period he taught piano and harmony, directed chamber groups and a choir, made arrangements for various ensembles, and also wrote incidental music for the theatre players, including music for productions of Moliere’s *Le malade imaginaire* and Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

In 1935 Gellhorn had been introduced to Philip Loretz and Lionel Robbins, English friends of the film-maker Lotte Reiniger, for whom Gellhorn had written several film scores. They agreed that if Gellhorn felt he was in danger he should contact them and they would write to invite him for a ‘holiday’ in England. This duly happened and Gellhorn fled Germany in September 1935, travelling via France to England. In an interview in which he recalled his escape, Gellhorn stated that he visited friends in Saarbrücken en route (Malet & Grenville, 2002, p. 79). Many years later, while on tour with Rhonda Bachmann, Gellhorn disclosed that he had been helped across the border into France by Inge Camphausen, a singer based at the Saarbrücken Opera. Once in France he was able to make contact with Lotte Reiniger, who was by then staying in Paris, before making his way to England (Bachmann, conversation with author,

Gellhorn also conducted his first opera at Toynbee Hall, a production of Gluck's *Orpheus* in a translation by Edward Dent and with decor by Lotte Reiniger, with the performance described by the critic of *The New Statesman and Nation* as 'conducted with understanding and sympathy' (Turner, 1939). Plans to follow up the success of *Orpheus* with a production of Purcell's *Fairie Queene* were prevented by the outbreak of war.



Toynbee Hall before WW2 (photo Toynbee Hall)

Gellhorn was also active as a performer outside Toynbee Hall, giving piano recitals and appearing in various ensembles with Maria Lidka, Dorothy Moggridge, and others. In 1937 he accompanied the Russian tenor Vladimir Rosing on a recording of 20 Russian songs released on the Parlophone label. The review in *The Gramophone* contained the statement that 'in the person of Hans Gellhorn Rosing found his best accompanist' (Nadejine, 1938). Gellhorn also continued to compose after he arrived in Britain, completing his second string quartet, *Capriccio* and *Intermezzo* for violin and piano, and Sonata for Two Pianos, amongst others.

With the outbreak of war in 1939 Toynbee Hall ceased activities and Gellhorn decided to leave London for a while, staying with friends in Devon. In the meantime, the British government commenced a series of tribunals to assess the perceived security risk of the many German and Austrian nationals living in Britain, many of whom had arrived as refugees fleeing from Nazi persecution. At first only those who posed an immediate risk were sent to internment camps but by the summer of 1940 Britain was facing the threat of invasion. As a result, the government ordered the mass internment of 'enemy aliens' and, on a return visit to London, Gellhorn was arrested:

I went back to London to try to collect some of the books I'd left behind and on that visit I was interned. The man was very polite – he even carried my suitcase for me! (Gellhorn, 2002)



Mooragh Internment Camp, Isle of Man 1940 (photo Culture Vannin)

Gellhorn was sent to an internment camp at Warth Mills, near Bury in Lancashire, and from there he was sent to Mooragh Camp, at Ramsey on the Isle of Man. While at Mooragh he met numerous other musicians, including Hans Keller and the pianist Paul Hamburger, and many of them remained lifelong friends. The presence of so many intellectuals in a confined space resulted in a great deal of artistic activity and while he was there Gellhorn gave concerts, directed ensembles and choirs, played the organ in the local church, and composed several works including two studies for violin, written for Sidney Engel. He also wrote two works for string quartet, *Andante* and *The Cats*, and a work for strings and male voices, *Mooragh*, in a setting of words by F. F. Bieber, a fellow internee. Gellhorn was eventually released on 21 January 1941 after intervention by Ralph Vaughan Williams in his role as chair of the Committee for the Release of Interned Alien Musicians.

Gellhorn initially returned to London but later went to stay with Jo Hodgkinson and his wife, Winnie, in Burnley, Lancashire. Hodgkinson had been deputy warden at Toynbee Hall but was also a theatre director and was by then working as manager of the Vic-Wells (later Sadler's Wells) Company, which was based in Burnley for the duration of the war. Through Hodgkinson, Gellhorn was introduced to Lawrance Collingwood and Joan Cross, the directors of the Vic-Wells Opera. Recognising his experience as a vocal coach, they invited Gellhorn to join the company as a répétiteur and assistant conductor. He had some difficulty in obtaining a work permit from the Ministry of Labour but Gellhorn subsequently toured with the company, gaining invaluable experience. Through the company he also met Olive Layton, a member of the Chorus whom he later married. On the evening of their wedding at Caxton Hall, London in May 1943 Gellhorn was invited to conduct a performance of *Traviata*, with Joan Cross and Peter Pears singing the lead roles.

Gellhorn continued to work for the Vic-Wells Company until he was called up for war work in October 1943. He was assigned to an electrical factory in London, working as an inspector overseeing the production of aircraft parts, and worked there for two years. During this time he maintained his musical skills by giving piano recitals occasionally and conducting with the Vic-Wells Company if it was performing in or near London. Living in London at this time was not without risk and Gellhorn later recalled one lucky escape:

I lived in Marsham Court during the war when I worked in an aircraft factory – I used to cycle to Acton every morning. Once I was on night watch and was due to be relieved at 7am but they were late – I was furious. As I cycled home, Vincent Square [near the Horticultural Halls in Victoria] was covered in splintered glass – there had been a bomb – and if they had been on time I would have had it.

(Gellhorn, 2002)



Wedding day, 1943, Gellhorn family archive

By the time was Gellhorn discharged from war work in November 1945 he and Olive had started a family (they would eventually have two sons and two daughters) and he needed work. Fortunately a mutual friend introduced him to H. B. Phillips, director of the Carl Rosa Opera Company, who engaged him as conductor. Gellhorn made his first appearance with the company on 6 December 1945, conducting Gounod's *Faust* at the Wimbledon Theatre, and over the course of the next 12 months conducted a total of 115 times, in performances of *Faust*, Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman*, Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, and Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*.

TONIGHT'S CONDUCTOR



PETER GELLHORN

RESIDENT CONDUCTOR

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE — COVENT GARDEN

Born in Breslau, in 1912, Peter Gellhorn began his study of music there at an early age. His family moved to Berlin and at 16 he entered the Academy of Music as a pianist. He also went to the Berlin University to study musicology, philosophy and art-history. He passed with high distinction his final examinations, in 1932 as pianist, and 1934 as conductor. During these last few years he concentrated on composing and wrote, among other, music for the silhouette films of Lotte Reiniger. The advent of Hitler and his doctrine of hatred to all of "non-Aryan" descent caused Mr. Gellhorn much hardship. In 1934, he accepted the invitation of friends to come to Britain and start afresh.

Until 1939, he was attached to the music school at Toynbee Hall, teaching piano, harmony, counterpoint and lecturing on opera. He also conducted the opera course and eventually became Director of the music section. He became a répétiteur and assistant conductor with the Sadler's Wells Opera Company during the war, and remained there until in 1943 he gave up music temporarily to undertake war work—for two years he was attached to an electrical motor factory. Following the war he joined the Carl Rosa Company and conducted one hundred and fifteen performances with them in just over a year. In December, 1946, he became a member of the newly formed Covent Garden Opera Company and is now one of the conductors. Since he came to England he has conducted performances of *Rigoletto*, *Magic Flute*, *Faust*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Tales of Hoffmann*, *Traviata*, *Barber of Seville*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, *Rosenkavalier*, *Salome*, *Meistersingers*, and others.

He is now a British subject and in 1943 married Olive Layton, then, a member of the Sadler's Wells Opera Company.

Programme booklet, Royal Opera House, Gellhorn family archive

Gellhorn's work with the Vic-Wells and Carl Rosa companies had increased his profile as a conductor and, although he may not have known it at the time, Gellhorn had been under consideration for the role of conductor of the newly formed English Opera Group in 1945 – nominated by Benjamin Britten himself – although the post was eventually given to Reginald Goodall (Mitchell, Reed, & Cooke, 2004, pp. 151-153). He had also come to the attention of David Webster, who had been appointed as general administrator of the newly reopened Covent Garden opera house and had recruited Karl Rankl as music director.

In 1947 Webster invited Gellhorn to join the staff at Covent Garden as Head of Music Staff and assistant to Rankl, and he gave his first performance at Covent Garden on 7 June 1947, conducting Mozart's *Magic Flute* (Gellhorn, 1991). His records show that over the course of seven years he conducted over 260 performances, at Covent Garden and on tour, of operas including *Carmen*, *Magic Flute*, *Rigoletto*, *Boris Godunov*, *Rosenkavalier*, *La Bohème*, *Fidelio*, *Marriage of Figaro*, *Peter Grimes*, *Meistersingers*, *Il Trovatore*, *Lohengrin*, *Tosca*, and *Billy Budd* (Gellhorn, 1925–2004).



Glyndebourne House and Theatre, 1959 (Guy Gravett / Glyndebourne Productions Ltd / ArenaPAL)

In the meantime, there had been other developments in Gellhorn's life and on 6 August 1947 he became a naturalised British citizen, as published in The London Gazette of 19th September 1947 in which he is listed as 'Gellhorn, Hans Fritz (known as Peter Gellhorn); Germany; Musical Conductor, Pianist and Composer' (Anon., 1947). Gellhorn clearly still regarded composition as part of his musical identity but, although he had continued to compose both during and after the war, the number of new compositions gradually decreased as he focussed on building his career as a pianist and conductor.

In 1951 Olive gave birth to the second of their two sons but in the same year she contracted tuberculosis and was hospitalised for several months, leaving Peter to maintain both home and family while also working at Covent Garden.

In 1954 Gellhorn began working at the Glyndebourne Festival. He was already known to Glyndebourne as John Christie had taken an interest in the work being done at Toynbee Hall in the 1930s and given Gellhorn an open invitation to attend rehearsals. However, in the early 1950s Gellhorn returned to Glyndebourne to accompany a singer for an audition. As he later recalled:

She didn't pass the audition but they asked what I was doing and later that summer I was invited to join the music staff. So in 1954 I joined, first as a coach, then they asked me to take on the chorus, and two years later I conducted my first performance in Glyndebourne. (Gellhorn, 1991)



Music staff meeting l to r: Paul Hamburger, Bryan Balkwill, Paul Sacher, Martin Isepp, Howard Wicks (music librarian), Jani Strasser, Ellen Morganthau (regulating secretary), Peter Gellhorn, (Guy Gravett / Glyndebourne Productions Ltd / ArenaPAL)

His first performance as conductor at Glyndebourne took place on 29 June 1956, in a production of Mozart's *Die Entführung*. Between 1956 and 1961 he conducted a total of 30 performances at Glyndebourne, mostly of operas by Mozart (*Die Entführung*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Don Giovanni*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and *Idomeneo*), as well as performances of *Cenerentola* and *Alceste*. However, letters at the British Library suggest that Gellhorn became frustrated by the lack of opportunities to conduct at Glyndebourne and so in 1961 he joined the BBC as Director of the BBC Chorus (later known as the BBC Singers). His tenure coincided with that of William Glock, who was both Controller of Music and Controller of The Proms at the BBC. Glock encouraged the programming of a wide variety of repertoire, including contemporary music, and Gellhorn also collaborated with a series of leading conductors including Antal Dorati, Colin Davis, and Pierre Boulez. The BBC's then policy meant, however, that he was forced to retire at the age of 60 in 1972.

In the years following his departure from the BBC, Gellhorn remained active as a conductor, working regularly with various groups including Morley College Opera, London Opera Players, and the Barnes Choir, as well returning to Glyndebourne as conductor and chorus master in 1974 and 1975. As a pianist he continued to give recitals and to work with singers and chamber groups, touring in a piano duo with Margaret Bruce and with the soprano Rhonda Bachmann, amongst others. He also taught extensively, both privately and at institutions including the National Opera Studio, Dartington, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and the Royal

College of Music, where he conducted the RCM Opera School's production of *Ariadne auf Naxos* in 1981. Amongst his better known students is the composer George Benjamin, who commenced lessons with Gellhorn in 1976 and who Gellhorn introduced to Olivier Messiaen in Paris, but many singers also acknowledge their indebtedness to his teaching.



Roehampton Festival, 1977, Gellhorn family archive

Gellhorn also returned to composition, writing *Aucassin & Nicolette*, for solo voices and wind instruments, as the result of a commission from the Richmond Festival in 1972. Over the years there followed a further four works, ending with 'Aedh wishes for the cloths of heaven', a setting of a poem by W. B. Yeats for voice and piano, written in 1995 for his youngest daughter, Barbara, and described by him as 'the best thing I ever wrote' (Gellhorn, 2002).



St. James's Palace, 1984, Gellhorn family archive
Peter Gellhorn died at Kingston Hospital, Kingston-upon-Thames, on 13 February 2004.



Gellhorn workshop at the Royal College of Music, April 2016, photo Catherine Cheung
 f.l.t.r. Ingrid Pearson, Barbara Gellhorn, Janet Hilton, Jakob Fichert, Eleanor Hodgkinson, Sangeet Gellhorn,
 Catherine Gellhorn, Norbert Meyn, Phillip Gellhorn, Stefan Fichert, Ursula Price, Terrence Curran

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PETER GELLHORN – COMPOSITIONS BY YEAR (NOT INCLUDING ARRANGEMENTS)

You can download and print the scores of pieces marked
RCM EDITIONS from: <http://researchonline.rcm.ac.uk/69/>

- 1932 Kleine suite for oboe and piano **RCM EDITIONS**
- 1933 Carmen (film score for Lotte Reiniger)
String Quartet No. 1 **RCM EDITIONS**
- 1934 Puss-in-Boots (film score for Lotte Reiniger)
The Stolen Heart (film score for Lotte Reiniger)
- 1935 The Little Chimney Sweep (film score for Lotte Reiniger)
'Baida der Kosak' – cantata for soloists, choir, and chamber orchestra
String Quartet No. 2 **RCM EDITIONS**
Stück für Violoncello und Klavier vierhändig
- 1936 Minuet für zwei Blockflöten
Polonaise für Flöte, Horn und vier Geigen
Skizze zur Klaviersonate [Draft score only – unfinished or final MS lost]
Capriccio für Violine und Klavier [Published by Augener, 1938] **RCM EDITIONS**
Trauermarsch für vier Blockflöten
Sonata for two pianos **RCM EDITIONS**
- 1937 Intermezzo für Violine und Klavier **RCM EDITIONS**
Trio-Suite for two violins and viola **RCM EDITIONS**
Dance of the Dead (Totentanz) for piano duet **RCM EDITIONS**
Novelette for piano [Published by Augener, 1938 – no MS]
- 1938 'Autumn' for voice and piano (setting of text by Walter de la Mare) **RCM EDITIONS**
- 1939 'Romeo and Juliet' – incidental music to the play by Shakespeare
'Le malade imaginaire' – incidental music to the play by Molière
'Ah! Parquel' for vocal duet and piano (setting of text by Jean Racine) **RCM**

- 1940 'Mooragh' for male choir and strings (setting of text by F.F. Bieber) **RCM EDITIONS**
 Andante for string orchestra without double bass (or String quartet) **RRCM EDITIONS**
 Two studies for violin alone
 The Cats for string orchestra without double bass **RCM EDITIONS**
 Serenade for string orchestra without double bass [unfinished/lost?]
- 1943 'I want to sing a song' for voice and piano [Published by Boosey & Hawkes, 1949]
- 1948 String Quartet [Draft score only – unfinished or final MS lost]
- 1952 Miscellaneous pieces.
- 1953 Ten short pieces for children, for piano
- 1954 'The Linnet' for mixed choir (setting of text by Walter de la Mare) **RCM EDITIONS**
- 1956 The Star of Bethlehem – music for the film by Lotte Reiniger
- 1958-60s occasional arrangements for various ensembles, including 'Il Seraglio' (1958),
 music by Mozart arranged for chamber ensemble for the film ballet by Lotte Reiniger
- 1972 'Aucassin and Nicolette' – a tale for solo voices and wind instruments
- 1976 Thoughts on a Chinese Tune for 2 clarinets and piano duet
- 1977 Dialogue for violin and viola with string orchestra
- 1982 Trio Suite for Children for pianoforte, violin and violoncello
- 1995 'Aedh wishes for the cloths of heaven' for voice and piano
 (setting of text by W.B. Yeats) **RCM EDITIONS**



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