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‘Always a European’: Edward Clark’s musical work

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IN A MEMORABLE IMAGE, Stephen Banfield compares musical Britain around the time of *Peter Grimes* to the League of Nations: before Benjamin Britten’s opera, goes the metaphor, Britain is just about able to host a musical league of nations; after, it has won a seat on the council.¹ This image implies that the great wealth of music performed in early-20th-century Britain is not worth very much, unless permanent representation of British music comes with it; and this catapults us right into the middle of the longstanding debate over the whereabouts, role and value of British music before, roughly, the 1960s.² In the ‘goldfish bowl’ of British art music, as rebellious dodecaphonist Elisabeth Lutyens would have called it, a number of music critics, conductors and administrators had been working hard on enabling Britain to host such a musical league of nations.³ Edward Clark (1888–1962), conductor, impresario, BBC programme planner, writer and broadcaster, is one of the most important but least known. Yet his aim was to ensure musical Britain represented a part of musical Europe, rather than to win British music a space in a prestigious and exclusive canon. This goal he thought only achievable through promoting contemporary European music as a means of combating the strong isolationist trends in musical Britain. These trends are perhaps best encapsulated in Ralph Vaughan Williams’s comparison of national musics to plants growing best in their native compost.⁴ But the trends predate Vaughan Williams’s catchy metaphor, and keep rearing their heads, like robust wild plants themselves.

For Clark, fostering European music in Britain, and indeed viewing musical Britain as an integral part of musical Europe, never conflicted with his fruitful relationship with British composers and musicians – quite the opposite. Among his acquaintances and collaborators he counted Ethel Smyth as well as Ernest Newman and Alan Bush, and to Soviet audiences of the 1930s he was in fact known as a champion of English music.⁵ But Clark’s legacy is his ‘Europeanism’, which had a deep personal meaning for the performance of his own musical identity. His friends found him ‘always

1. Stephen Banfield: ‘Introduction’, in *The Blackwell history of music in Britain, volume 6: the twentieth century*, ed. Stephen Banfield (Oxford, 1995), p.2.

2. See for example Jennifer Doctor: ‘The parataxis of “British musical modernism”’, in *The Musical Quarterly* vol.91 nos.1–2 (March 2008), pp.89–115.

3. Elisabeth Lutyens: *A goldfish bowl* (London, 1972).

4. Ralph Vaughan Williams: *National music* (London, 1934), various essays, for example pp.10, 17, 19, 108 & 123.

5. Evgeniy Braudo: ‘Angliyskaya muzika na sovremennom etape dva radiovechera’, in *Govorit SSSR* (March 1934),

pp.31–32. I am grateful to Dr Pauline Fairclough (University of Bristol) for the discovery and translation from the original Russian.

6. (1) RE Henderson: 'Edward Clark, a memoir' [typewritten unpublished biographical sketch of Clark], in Moldenhauer Archives (Edward Clark Collection), Repository at Northwestern University, Evanston (henceforth 'Moldenhauer'), folder 6.2, memorial material; (2) 'Perpetrator', in *Sunday Express*, 10 December 1933.

7. Jennifer Doctor: *The BBC and ultra-modern music, 1922–1936: shaping a nation's tastes* (Cambridge, 1999).

8. Jennifer Doctor: 'Clark, (Thomas) Edward (1888–1962)', in *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (Oxford, 2004), at www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40709 (accessed 22 April 2017).

9. Jennifer Doctor: 'Clark, Edward', *Oxford Music Online*, at www.oxfordmusiconline.com/fjk6v8yco533.emedia1.bsb-muenchen.de/subscriber/article/grove/music/45470 (accessed 22 April 2017); Doctor: *The BBC*. See Albrecht Dümmling: 'Brückenbauer und Wegbereiter: Edward Clark, Eislers Freund und Förderer', in *Eisler-Mitteilungen: Internationale Hanns-Eisler-Gesellschaft*, vol. 17 no. 49 (2010), pp. 9–13.

10. Lutyens: *Goldfish bowl*, pp. 93–94.

11. *ibid.*, pp. 314–15. Her expectation that her own archive could be reunited posthumously with Clark's at Northwestern University did not materialise, and her manuscripts, correspondence, and other papers are in the British Library, London, as is correspondence from other persons addressed to Clark.

a European', while his adversaries observed that Clark 'looks foreign, talks foreign, [but] is actually English'.⁶ Either way, both this identity and his ideas clash with the established narratives of a fundamentally conservative English Musical Renaissance. But they also add colour to our perception of the highly influential and changeable contemporary music policies of the early BBC.⁷ Clark's musical work therefore allows us to complicate the superficial impression of an isolated British music business lagging behind the continent; and it also permits a glance at that part of the music industry providing well-researched British music criticism of the early 20th century with constant fodder: music administration.

The present article addresses central aspects of Clark's elusive and sometimes janus-faced character and musical life. In her *Oxford national dictionary of biography* entry, Jennifer Doctor, one of Clark's few current champions, claims that 'Clark's passion for new music, innovatory programming schemes, and positions in leading new music organizations, particularly the BBC during its formative years, had a profound impact in shaping British music-making of the twentieth century.'⁸ Doctor, the only English-language scholar to have engaged with Clark in depth, is indeed correct to make this bold claim, but establishing the particulars is a tricky business.⁹ Among the many reasons for this challenge, the overall loss of Clark's own voice in his archive looms large – not least because many of his ventures ended in failures, and his administrative abilities (in the widest sense) were notorious. To all appearances he was a lazy correspondent and a chaotic bookkeeper, leaving us comparatively few ego-centred documents such as letters, diaries and writings; and after his sudden death from coronary thrombosis in 1962 it fell to his widow Lutyens to organise his archive and keep his legacy. Even she complained that asking Clark about his life was like 'getting blood out of a stone. [...] He never told a simple, straight, chronological story, once and for all.'¹⁰ Finally, her somewhat spontaneous decision to give the larger part of Clark's papers to the pianist, collector and Anton Webern specialist Hans Moldenhauer was unconventional, since this meant that the archive of the quintessentially British Clark would leave Britain, even Europe. Defending her defiant choice to entrust Moldenhauer with the papers, Lutyens jibed: 'How many years should I wait for England to show the slightest interest?'¹¹ While we could argue that history has proven this frustrated exclamation somewhat right, Clark's curious failure to convincingly and consistently tell his own story, be it in written or spoken form, has proven at least as fatal for his legacy as the physical removal of his papers. Extracting basic facts and a critical evaluation of his multifaceted career, for example, is possible only by drawing upon a comparatively small combination of primary sources: on the one hand, a short and not always reliable autobiographical sketch leading up to the year 1930, which

exists among the somewhat idiosyncratically structured documents in his Moldenhauer papers; and on the other hand Lutyens's autobiography *A goldfish bowl* and other writings on her life and works.¹² These core sources are complemented by a host of literature on British composers and musicians that mention Clark in passing. But in this group, Clark functions as an 'accessory rather than an agent', as Jeanice Brooks has observed for another prominent 'enabler' of the early 20th century, Nadia Boulanger.¹³

IN 1888 Thomas Edward Clark was born into a house of active amateur musicians in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The son of a coal exporter, music lover and active musician James Bowness Clark and his wife Elizabeth Thirlaway, he attended Newcastle Royal Grammar School, and was also given piano, harmony and counterpoint lessons by a local teacher. In his autobiographical sketch Clark complains that these lessons failed to 'convey to me anything of the true matter' (meaning perhaps that he was given a standard course of sol-fa, with the lessons neglecting modern harmony).¹⁴ Indeed, his music lessons frustrated him to the degree that he asked his 'distressed' parents to discontinue them. In this little anecdote Clark alludes to what he perceived as his inborn ability to distinguish 'good' from 'bad' music, but the anecdote also conveniently hides the fact that Clark never became a distinguished musician. Notwithstanding these unpromising beginnings, he claimed to have been 'in closest touch with the most vital musical movements in Europe since about the year 1900'.¹⁵ Again, since he would have been a mere 12 years old at this time, this claim is rather bold. In the sketch, Clark bolsters it by gesturing towards the extraordinary musicality of his father, who, apart from being an organist and choir master in several Newcastle churches, acted as the Secretary of the Newcastle and Gateshead Choral Union and president of the Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra – affiliations which brought Henry Wood, Hans Richter and possibly even Edward Elgar and Granville Bantock to James Clark's house, which his son describes as 'a chief centre of musical activity'.¹⁶ This quintessentially English musical childhood and the fascinating personalities of the first generation of internationally acclaimed British conductors and composers ('the gods of my youth') laid the foundation for Clark's understanding of his own role in music: his strength, he felt, lay in recognising and fostering musical genius, talent and innovation when he heard and saw it; his weakness, we can deduce, lay in his abstention from practical music making (apart from his controversial conducting), and his inability to tolerate musical activity that he did not consider first-rate – such as his early piano lessons.

12. Edward Clark: 'E.C.' [typewritten carbon copy of unpublished autobiographical sketch, undated], Moldenhauer 6.2. The MS is not fully reliable because, for example, Clark even fails to give his own year of birth correctly; Lutyens: *Goldfish bowl*; see Susie and Meirion Harries: *A pilgrim soul: the life and work of Elisabeth Lutyens* (London, 1989).

13. Jeanice Brooks: *The musical work of Nadia Boulanger* (Cambridge, 2013), p.8.

14. Clark: 'E.C.'.

15. *ibid.*

16. *ibid.*