

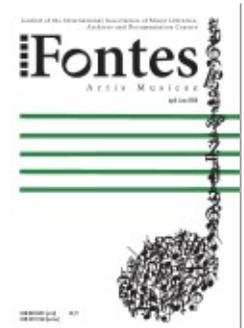


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Peggy Glanville-Hicks: Composer and Critic by Suzanne
Robinson (review)

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Peggy Glanville-Hicks: Composer and Critic. By Suzanne Robinson. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019. (Music in American Life.) [xi, 314 p. ISBN 978-0-252-08439-3. \$30 (paperback), \$110 (hardcover), \$19.95 (e-book)]

The latest contribution to book-length research about Australian composer Peggy Glanville-Hicks (1912–1990) is a welcome update and, in some cases, correction to earlier publications, which include Deborah Hayes, *Peggy Glanville-Hicks: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Wendy Beckett, *Peggy Glanville-Hicks* (Pymble, N.S.W.: Angus & Robertson, 1992); James Murdoch, *Peggy Glanville-Hicks: A Transposed Life* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002); and Victoria Rogers, *The Music of Peggy Glanville-Hicks* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009). Suzanne Robinson, a musicologist at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music who focuses on cultural history and sexual politics, drew on interviews, archival research, and fifty-four years of Glanville-Hicks's pocket diaries in this recently published portrait of the composer and her times. Robinson's access to the diaries constitutes a fresh contribution to Glanville-Hicks research. In *Peggy Glanville-Hicks: Composer and Critic*, Robinson addresses biographical details, the many important relationships in Glanville-Hicks's life, analysis of Glanville-Hicks's music and her musical evolution, and Glanville-Hicks's careers as composer, music critic and journalist, and arts administrator. Additionally, Robinson corrects errors in Beckett's and Murdoch's works. Hayes' and Rogers' works are excellent, but Hayes focuses on bibliography, and Rogers directs her attention to analyzing Glanville-Hicks's music, whereas Robinson intertwines all aspects of Glanville-Hicks's life, providing a context for understanding Glanville-Hicks not present in previous biographies.

Robinson's biography is organised chronologically, each chapter presenting details of Glanville-Hicks's personal and professional lives, including her numerous influential relationships—romantic and platonic—as well as discussion of Glanville-Hicks's music of each time period, examining her musical development and influences. It is a story as much of the

sexism of the times in which Glanville-Hicks lived as it is of her life. Robinson notes that Glanville-Hicks used initials in her reviews, omitted her first name on compositions, and maintained a veneer of independence and autonomy, while in reality, she endured loneliness, illness, poverty, and a 'habit of concealment' (p. 3) of issues such as abortion, affairs, depression, and abuse. There exists a substantial archive of Glanville-Hicks's professional correspondence, completed scores, concert programmes, clippings, and photos, plus her appointment diaries from 1936 to 1990, which detail 'meetings, dinners, phone calls, visits, movies, sexual encounters, travels, concerts, income, the progress of compositions, what she was sewing, airplane crashes, train crashes, midnight conversations, and astrological events' (p. 3). However, almost none of her personal correspondence survives, nor pre-compositional materials or drafts, an indicator of her 'lifelong practice of silence' (p. 2).

Glanville-Hicks, who emigrated to New York City from Australia via England, became a U.S. citizen in 1948 and an expatriate in Greece before returning to Australia in 1975 for the final years of her life. She was strongly influenced by her study with Ralph Vaughan Williams in England, before her 1941 arrival in New York City placed her in the heart of the city's vibrant creative environment of the 1940s and 1950s. Her early time in New York City was primarily devoted to composer and then-husband Stanley Bate. Later in the 1940s she revived her career, thanks in large part to her connections with Paul Bowles and Virgil Thomson, both of whom introduced her to a rarified circle of acquaintances in the arts community. She began copying scores for other composers, publishing music journalism, and composing again. At this time, Thomson enabled her to become a regular critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, where she reviewed for eight years, longer than either Bowles or Lou Harrison. She also contributed numerous entries about U.S. composers to the 1954 edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, as well as articles to *Musical Courier*, *Music & Letters*, and *Musical America*. The connections she made in New York City during this time would serve her for the remainder of her

life. Carleton Sprague Smith joined the forces of Glanville-Hicks's supporters, facilitating her appointment as Executive Secretary of the Composers' Forum, which provided her with invaluable experience in arts management that allowed her to successfully stage her operas in later years. Other important supporters in her life included violinist Yehudi Menuhin, choreographer John Butler, Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe, and author Anaïs Nin. Throughout her life, Glanville-Hicks depended on the support of her many friends to meet both professional goals and personal needs.

Glanville-Hicks considered her greatest successes to be her operas (*A Transposed Head*, libretto by Glanville-Hicks, adapted from Helen Tracy Lower-Porter's English translation of Thomas Mann's novella, *Die vertauschten Köpfe* [1954]; *The Glittering Gate*, libretto by Glanville-Hicks, based on Lord Dunsany's play [1959]; *Nausicaa*, libretto by Scottish poet Alastair Reid and Glanville-Hicks, after *Homer's Daughter* by Robert Graves [1961]; and *Sappho*, libretto by Glanville-Hicks, based on Lawrence Durrell's play *Sappho* [1963]) and her ballets, often composed for the choreography of John Butler. She is also remembered for her promotion of percussion music, her support of the early works of John Cage, and her assimilation of Oriental music into her compositions. Glanville-Hicks was deeply admired and respected by her friends in New York, as well those later in her life in other locations, though she was often described throughout the years as obstinate, arrogant, and prone to representing her life in highly improbable and sometimes dishonest ways, embellishing 'her life's achievements and embroider[ing] its facts' (p. 258).

Robinson does a grand job of analysing Glanville-Hicks' music in the context of her life, conveying the importance of her music and how challenging it was for a woman of her talents to make headway of any sort at the time in which she lived. While Glanville-Hicks was extremely fortunate to have the connections she did, her life was nevertheless quite difficult, for the simple fact that she was female. Her success and productivity (she composed approximately seventy-five works for stage, various instrumental combinations, voice, and film, many of which were recorded and received successful performances during her lifetime) speak volumes to her determination and perseverance, talent, and innovation—both musical and with respect to securing funding. Robinson's book concludes with a selected bibliography, which includes extant compositions by Glanville-Hicks, and indices of the book's general content as well as of Glanville-Hicks's works, both musical and critical. Additionally, the book includes photographs from periods throughout Glanville-Hicks's life that enhance the reader's sense of familiarity with the composer.

Peggy Glanville-Hicks: Composer and Critic is strongly recommended for all collections, academic and public. It is accessible to all. Robinson gives us an understanding of the difficulties through which Glanville-Hicks accomplished an amazing array of achievements—from a career as a music critic to the composition and production of major operas. I have been inspired to listen to Glanville-Hicks's music, which I find captivating. We need to hear more of her music!

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