**She Wrote Songs - Transcript of Talk (Q&A not included)**

Debbie Challis:

So just to say my name is Debbie, I work at LSE library. As I said, we've got a co-host, Maria, who's also based at the library, she's going to be checking the chat. I'm going to hand over to Patricia and Andrea in their house for their a socially distanced performance in a moment. And I'm going to send around, if there's any links that come up, I'm going to send out a link an email tomorrow with a link to Patricia's book, which is what partly what this performance has come from. And if there's anything else that I can also send around links to that too, and tomorrow in an email.

So hope you got the emails from me and Eventbrite with all this stuff was \*, you know, the kind of moderating rules or the questions will be asked on chats. So, Patricia and Andrea will perform for about half an hour, thirty-five minutes. And then if there's if you've got any questions, just put them on chat as they come through, and I'll try and ask you to ask them yourself, so you can unmute yourself to ask a question or if you'd rather me ask it and just say say on chat, you know, ask them this, and I can say who it's come from.

Okay, so I'm going to stop sharing the image as they are. And basically, we will. Okay, great. So basically, um, Patricia approached me about doing this performance at the LSE, the women's library. We would have been doing it tonight in the Shaw Library, which is a fantastic venue in the room, which is very kind of apt room from early 20th century in the new, in the Old Academic Building, I should say. But we decided to try and do this on Zoom anyway. So I think it's the first time we’ve done performance on zoom, but Andrea is an old hand. And we have tested this works with the spacing and with the sound and stuff.

So what I'm going to do is I'm going to hand over to him in a moment, and I'll mute myself so you should only have them so your sound isn't distorted. It is really important because it is a performance not so have any sound on until after the performance. And you can unmute yourselves. Okay.

So, and part of the reason we're doing this today is also because it's 150 years since the married women's property act, Caroline Norton, who's going to feature quite heavily in this performance was a campaigner, and also a writer. And I think if people know about her campaigns, and her marriage, that may be all they know about, if they know anything about Caroline. But actually, she was a prolific poet. And a lot of her poems were put to music. And music was a big part of the Victorian period as well, a big part of what women singing and entertainment in the evenings. So it's really important that we think about that side of her as well. So I'm going to hand to over to Patricia and unmute myself who's going to introduce and basically just sing songs by Victorian women for the next half an hour or so. Thank you. Take it away, Patricia.

Patricia: Thank you. Thank you, Debbie.

Can everybody see everybody see?

Very good.

This is Andrea Kmecova at the piano, and I'm Patricia.

And it always really frustrates me when people say that, you know, we don't have any women composers, that women composers are in the minority. Because a lot of the time people are not counting all the women who wrote domestic song, which was really the only avenue that they had open to them for a very long time. And within that form, there were a lot of very, very excellent and very popular women composers.

And really, the earliest one in the book that I've just written and the CD that we've recorded is Caroline Sheridan Norton for obvious reasons. And also because her songs are very, very nice. They're very pleasant. This one, (the first one we're going to do, we're going to do six songs three of them by her and then three by others from around the same period - Victorian) and this first one is her most well-known one. It's her greatest hit. However, if you get a copy of it - and it was published by many, many different publishers, there were no rules preventing this from happening - they it often says Old Spanish Air and doesn't even have her name.

She wrote it for her son Brinsley, who was ill at the time, this was in 1853 when she had been reunited with her children who she couldn't see for so long. For the reason of, well, most people will know because her husband prevented her from seeing them and she had absolutely no rights at all in the eyes of law. Anyway, at this time she had been reunited with them and Brinsley was ill. So she composed this little piece for him to play on his guitar and for her to sing. And it's called Juanita.

[Song - Patricia sings and Andrea plays the piano.

Juanita lyrics  
  
Soft o'er the fountain,  
Ling'ring falls the Southern moon:  
Far o'er the mountain,  
Breaks the day too soon!  
In thy dark eyes' splendor  
Where the warm light loves to dwell,  
Weary looks yet tender  
Speak their fond farewell!  
Nita! Juanita!  
Ask thy soul if we should part?  
Nita! Juanita!  
Lean thou on my heart.  
When in thy dreaming;  
Moons like these shall shine again  
And daylight beaming  
Prove thy dreams are vain:  
Wilt thou not relenting  
For thine absent lover sigh  
In thy heart consenting  
To a pray'r gone by?  
Nita! Juanita!  
Let me linger by thy side!  
Nita! Juanita!  
Be my own fair bride!

Song Stops]

It's quite lovely to do these in a in this parlour setting. I mean it's, it's unfortunate circumstances obviously but these were really meant to be for private enjoyment there's something very peaceful and sacred almost about these songs. Because I don't know if you're researching Caroline Sheridan Norton’s life it's one nasty thing after another. A lot of horrible things that happened I can't, I can't even begin to, we would be here for the whole time just talking about all of them the nasty things that happened to her from the \* and for you know, every time there's something horrible. Her youngest son died of tetanus because she was, she was denied access to him and nobody could, nobody cleaned his wound properly when he fell off his horse. I mean, all of this sort of thing. But then, and you find these books with all these things.

And then finally, if you're looking at the British Library, the British Library, which we can't go in right now. Then suddenly you see these songs, and they're so peaceful. And there's so there's something wonderful about them. It's, it's all the words by women, the music's by women, the dedicated tees are women. And there's something about it where it's very private, you just got the sense that these women did this. In the most private enclaves of their houses for each other, they weren't really commercial enterprises. These songs, although she did make money from them, and didn't get access to that money because of her husband and because of the laws until she changed the laws. And, and so there's something really, really quite lovely about that.

And so now that we're here in our living rooms, it's really I feel that the spirit of the songs’ intimate spirit can sort of breathe. This next one Love Not. The words she wrote in her anonymously published Sorrows of Rosalie in 1829, that was the same year that her first son was born Fletcher. And by that time, already, the the marriage was it, was not in a good way. I mean, he was physically and mentally abusive, her husband. And so, I think that the sorrows Have Rosalie and these words, I think they are quite meant.

[Song - Patricia sings and Andrea plays the piano.

Love Not:  
  
Love not, love not! ye hapless sons of clay!    
Hope's gayest wreaths are made of earthly flowers—    
Things that are made to fade and fall away    
Ere they have blossom'd for a few short hours.    
        Love not!  
    
Love not! the thing ye love may change:    
The rosy lip may cease to smile on you,    
The kindly-beaming eye grow cold and strange,    
The heart still warmly beat, yet not be true.    
        Love not!  
    
Love not! the thing you love may die,    
May perish from the gay and gladsome earth;    
The silent stars, the blue and smiling sky,    
Beam o'er its grave, as once upon its birth.    
        Love not!  
    
Love not! oh warning vainly said    
In present hours as in the years gone by;    
Love flings a halo round the dear ones' head,    
Faultless, immortal, till they change or die,    
        Love not!

Song stops.]

Patricia: It's so strange to silence the silence but the feeling that people are listening it's I've never done this before.

This next one now we're going to go ahead and time quite a bit to 1877 this is Annie for skin Harrison and this song has such a wonderful story. To tell it in fact, if you go to my YouTube, I tell it there, it's got its own its own video, in the glomming in the gloaming. There we are. See, it's wonderful. Another huge smash sensation. This one well I say another because Juanita was very, very famous. The first one. This song, Annie Fortescue Harrison, she was, she was a daughter of an obscure politician from, she was born in Calcutta, actually.

And she spent her time at Hillsborough castle in County Down.

And she fell in love with the son of the castle, the air and his parents disapproved of the match. So she left without a word. She went to, I think London, and she found this poem by metta orange, and metal origins. She wrote these poems, metal It was from 1845 to 1925. Meta Caroline Orred. She wrote poems mostly of a very gloomy and very anguished nature. One of hers is a set of 22 poems called Ave, which is as anguished as anything you'll find in the winterizer. Let me tell you.

And Meta Orred wrote this take on the gloaming poem, and Annie read it and she set it to music and became so popular that the son of the Hillsborough castle, wandering the world, heard it, didn't know who wrote it, thought this song really is exactly what happened to me and Annie and I wonder where she is now. And so he looked up who wrote it just out of curiosity, and what do you know it was written by Annie, his dear Annie, and he found her and they married they had a daughter and lived happily ever after. A true story. So there we are adding Fortescue Harrison. She lived from 1848 to 1944. And this is that song:

[Song - Patricia sings and Andrea plays the piano.

In the gloaming

In the gloaming, oh, my darling!  
When the lights are dim and low,  
And the quiet shadows falling,  
Softly come and softly go;  
  
When the winds are sobbing faintly  
With a gentle unknown woe,  
Will you think of me, and love me,  
As you did once long ago?  
  
In the gloaming, oh, my darling!  
Think not bitterly of me!  
Tho' I passed away in silence  
Left you lonely, set you free;  
  
For my heart was crush'd with longing,  
What had been could never be;  
It was best to leave you thus, dear,  
Best for you, and best for me.

Song stops.]

Patricia: So that was that one was hugely popular, hugely popular. It's amazing. Even though they were popular sometimes it never it never was brought to anyone's attention (that) who wrote them, let alone whether they were women or men.

This next we're gonna do now two songs by Claribel, which was the pen name for Charlotte Alington Barnard. And she died at the age of 39 of typhus. She was. Yeah, lots of stories about her but she started along with a friend of hers, Charlotte, another Charlotte, Charlotte Sainton Dolby, who was a composer and a singer in fact, favourite contralto of Mendelssohn. Apparently, she was also a songwriter. She wrote songs and she had a conversation with Charlotte Alington Barnard, also known as Claribel, had a conversation with her publisher Boosey’s, of the famous Boosey’s and Hawkes, because music publishers. And she decided that what would be a really good idea would be to have what was then known as a ballad concert wherein, or a royalty concert, wherein the performer would get a cut of the sheet music sales that would result after a concert. So the publisher would make money, the performer would make money and the composer would make money, which by the because of course you can now by recording.

So if you wanted to recreate a piece of music, you do it in your home. This was back in the 1860s, I believe 1860s. And so she started this. And then most, one of the most popular composers turned out to be her friend, Charlotte Alington Barnard or Claribel, who wrote these ballads which you could play at home, and you could sing and they were well within the compass of the average person rather than the Prima Donna. And you would have thought everybody would be happy, but actually the critics, many of whom had rival publishing companies into them. decided that this was a terrible idea that it would degrade public taste because the pieces of music that were the most easily replicated at home would be the ones that would sell the best. And thus, the simple songs would sell the best and thus the degradation of public taste. And the vitriol they poured out over Claribel, for writing simple songs was really stunning, like they did horrible rude poems, which they print in these satirical magazines. It's just horrendous. And she didn't take it, take it well, it made her ill actually. But anyway, anyway, she was very popular, very popular.

And then this is her most most popular one. It's called take back the heart is written in 1864 Claribelle dates, by the way, are 1832 - 1869 and the words are by Marianne Dennett, who, all we know is she died in 1871. She's credited as being G. Gifford which is Mrs. George Gifford, the first wife of the honourable George Gifford rector of Devon and apparently the first wife. So that gives you a clue as to these words. These words are definitely expressing something.

[Patricia sings and Andrea plays the song.]

Strong words so strong in fact that Claribel denied, and during her lifetime, that this was from the perspective of a woman, interestingly, publicly denied, but definitely it is. There is a record that Ruskin spoke of her coming to his house and playing that piece of music and singing it to Claribel. It's interesting.

It seems that the further back you go with these in the 1830s 40s 50s the words are sad. The music is gently sort of, what would you say? It's gently flowing, glowing, pleasant, pleasant. It's not it's not in a minor key. They're all in the major key. They're not they're not sort of a major key very, yeah. And it's it's sort of almost as if it's genteel and it's resigned. It's like, well, we're in our lovely parlours. And this is what it is, but we're going to be sort of

somehow elegant about it. It's very interesting.

In fact, if you look at Caroline Norton songs and and the songs of her sister, they're all anguished words and you read the music and it's flowing and optimistic sounding interesting juxtaposition. Very interesting. This next one, actually, I just said, the previous one was Claribel's greatest hit. It's kind of tied with this one. When I was growing up, and I collected old sheet music as a child, because it was my parents didn't have much money. And sheet music was a kind of antique that a child could afford with pennies. In fact, you could get it for nothing. If you ask people who'd had old sheet music and they'd say, Here, take it. So that's when I found out that there were a lot of women in music, which I wouldn't have known from my great grade 1, 2, 3 you know, piano exam pieces. I thought, oh, composers are men. And then when I collected old sheet music, suddenly I realised composers are women. too.

[Aside: And what was I saying? Andrea: Oh my husband, he was just looking for a shirt. Patricia: Yeah, he look he's allowed to have. Andrea: Sorry. I said, No, no, no, it wasn't clear it was it was me getting lost in my childhood all of a sudden, which is always a mistake.]

But no Claribel when I saw her name, I thought that it I thought that it was it was a county in Ireland. I thought Claribel must have been it must be folk song because the one that I saw mostly other than ‘Take back the heart’ is this one which is called come back to Erin Lavalle and you think it was an Irish folk song. In fact, many women's songs are often credited as folk songs, including of course the first one. It's often says Spanish folk song on the old sheet music but this is makes you wonder how many folk songs were actually written by women. something for someone to study. Anyway, this has come back Claribel Charlotte Alington Barnard.

[Patricia sings and Andrea plays a song.]

[Song Stops].

Admittedly it would sound more like an Irish folk song if it if it had a different kind of accompaniment, you can imagine that. In fact, you can imagine a lot of these tunes with different accompaniment sounding all sorts of different ways of trying to alter them. So yes, you are doing everything is so simple, yeah repetitive. So yes, you it's it's expected in those days it was expected that the printed word, I mean the printed note, the printed note was kind of a guideline and that you could you could add arpeggios or you could do what you like that it was a starting point.

Anyway, we've come to our last one This is Forget Me Not by the honourable Mrs. Norton inscribed to Mrs. \*, there's a name. They're all inscribed to all of Caroline Sheridan Norton's are inscribed two different other women, some of them very interesting women. In fact, that could be also a subject of some sort of study is the dedicated tees of Caroline Sheridan Norton’s songs. So ‘Forget me not.’ It's actually when I came back from the British Library with a whole bunch of these scans of Norton songs, most of which I would be very interested. I don't think anybody's recorded Forget Me Not. I don't think anybody's recorded or even performed any of them but the first and perhaps the second one, we did one each has been done a few times. But really, anyway, so I brought this big stack and I showed them all to Andrea And this was the one that is Andrea’s favourite,

Andrea: I know I think I like the title. I think I found it quite symbolic that we're doing music by these women that are forgotten. And here is a song called forget to me not No, I think is quite symbolic.

Patricia: So it's kind of beautiful. It really is so and her and the poem. Actually, I had to write it out rather than you know, there was no copy and paste available for this one from any Google Books or anything like that I had to write out because .Nowhere is it reproduced on the internet. Not that I rely on the internet for my research, by the way, I rely on books. But you know, when you when you're sending in text, you kind of go like I write it all out. Should I just, I should just copy and paste just just for the text, but I couldn't find this one anywhere. So interesting. You're getting it first from me, you're getting it from the LSE for the first time, written for shareable format, Forget Me Not and thank you so much for coming. This is so intimate and lovely from Andreas parlour. Our parlour to your parlour.

[Patricia sings and Andrea plays a song. The lyics are below].

Forget Me Not:  
  
Forget me not, tho others fairer   
Come round to tempt thee day by day;   
Tho thoughts of me grow faint and rarer  
And I am banished far away!  
  
Tho many a young bright face be near thee  
Oh still my loved and lost recall  
The Smiles that used of old to cheer thee,   
The heart that loved the best of all,   
  
Oh! Forget me not.   
  
Remember still, the Summer bowers  
Where side by side we oft reclined,   
Tho there all wildly droop the flowers,   
Which never more my hand may bind!   
  
Remember still, by rose briars scented,   
The pathway where we two have been  
Tho' o'er that path, no more frequented,   
The grass and moss are growing green,   
  
Oh! Forget me not!  
  
For me no more shall passion woo me,   
Nor flatt'ry soothe my lonely ear  
When tender words are spoken to me,   
I weep, for then thy voice I hear.   
  
Still, still thy smile my heart is haunting,   
Tho here no more its light may shine,   
Thy love unto my Soul is wanting,   
Oh! let me dream it still is mine.   
  
Oh! Forget me not.

[End of talk / performance]