

Encounters with the Émigré Experience:
Discovering the Chamber Music and Songs of Peter Gellhorn

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This chapter retraces the author's journey of discovery during the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded research project 'Exile Estates and Music Restitution – The Legacy of Conductor/Composer Peter Gellhorn' at the Royal College of Music in 2016. Born in Breslau, Peter Gellhorn (1912-2004) studied at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Berlin (1929-34). His father was Jewish, and in 1935 he emigrated to the UK. From 1935 to 1939 he worked at Toynbee Hall, an arts centre dedicated to social reform in East London. Following his internment on the Isle of Man in 1940/41 he worked for the Vic-Wells opera company in London. After the war, he embarked on a successful career as a conductor and chorus master, with tenures at the Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne Opera and the BBC. Around the time of his emigration, at Toynbee Hall, during internment and occasionally after the Second World War, Gellhorn wrote a substantial amount of chamber music, piano music and songs, the manuscripts of which are now in the British Library. In 2016, a team of musicians and researchers at the Royal College of Music (RCM) prepared editions from these manuscripts and performed many of the pieces in workshops, concerts and recordings. This article explores these musical works in the context of Gellhorn's story as a resourceful and influential musician in Britain.

In this article I would like to give an overview of the compositions of Peter Gellhorn, most of which were edited for publication and performed during the AHRC-funded research project 'Exile Estates and Music Restitution – The Legacy of Conductor/Composer Peter Gellhorn' at the Royal College of Music in 2016. Gellhorn's main contribution to musical life in Britain was as a conductor and repertoire coach at the Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne, the BBC and other institutions. He was also an excellent pianist and accompanist. His output as a

composer, while certainly not lacking in quality or originality, cannot rival that of colleagues with larger, better-known oeuvres. His compositions are significant today because they give an insight into his personal and artistic journey as a highly gifted musician who was forced to emigrate and, despite the many difficulties that this entailed, made a significant contribution to the cultural life of his adopted country. These works reflect his musical training in Berlin, his migration to Britain after being excluded from musical life because of his Jewish family background,¹ his work at Toynbee Hall – a visionary educational institution in London’s East End –, his internment as an ‘enemy alien’ on the Isle of Man and, to some extent, his subsequent career as a conductor and coach at the centre of British opera and choral music.²

In a filmed interview in preparation for a concert featuring some of his music at London’s Wigmore Hall in 2002, entitled ‘Continental Britons’, Peter Gellhorn, then aged eighty-nine, related the following story:

A fairy once bestowed three virtues on the German people: Being honest, being intelligent and being a Nazi. However, there was a catch. One could only ever possess two of those at a time. If one was honest and a Nazi, one could not be intelligent. If one was intelligent and a Nazi, one could not be honest. And if one was honest and intelligent, one could not possibly be a Nazi.

This witty tale showed his characteristic response to the Nazi ideology that had impacted his life so much – humour, defiance and a passion for overcoming human idiocy through the arts and education.³ In the same interview, Gellhorn described the atmosphere of fear and denunciation he experienced as a young musician in Berlin after the Nazis came to power. Fortunately for him, in 1935 he received an invitation for a ‘holiday’ in England from two friends of Lotte Reiniger, a pioneering animation film maker for whom he had written a number of scores. This facilitated his escape to Britain, where he would spend the rest of his life.

The Wigmore Hall concert, organised by the Forum for Suppressed Music at the Jewish Music Institute in association with the exhibition ‘Continental Britons’ at the Jewish Museum London, featured Gellhorn’s 1935 *Intermezzo for Violin and Piano*, alongside works by fellow émigré composers Hans Gál, Berthold Goldschmidt, Karl Rankl, Franz Reizenstein, Mátyás Seiber, Leopold Spinner, Vilém Tauský and Egon Wellesz. While most of these

composers had published significant oeuvres and found public recognition, Gellhorn's legacy as a composer was hardly known at all, and, barring a single song ('I want to sing a Song', Boosey & Hawkes, 1949), none of his works had ever been published. The inclusion of Gellhorn's work in this concert, and in the subsequent recording 'The Émigré Composers' on Nimbus Records, highlighted for the first time Gellhorn's contribution as a composer.⁴

I met Peter Gellhorn in 1999, a year after completing my postgraduate singing-degree at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. I auditioned for the opera- and concert agent Helen Sykes and had been asked to present myself at the private residence of one Peter Gellhorn in East Sheen in London, where I would be thoroughly vetted. Gellhorn, already in his late eighties, was extremely welcoming and animated. He seemed to know the accompaniments to all my arias from memory, and his musical ear was infallible. His advice regarding repertoire and vocal matters served me well, even years later.

The interview with Martin Anderson and Betty Sagon Collick was filmed in the same house, full of musical memorabilia, which I had visited less than two years before. It was through this interview that I found out about Peter's compositions. One by one he went through the scores and told the stories of the works he had written in Berlin, during his first years in London, as an internee on the Isle of Man and after the war. Astonishingly, at the age of eighty-nine, he was able to play long excerpts from these works from memory, more than half a century after he had written them. When Martin suggested that they should be performed, he responded with a question: 'What's the next step?'

After his death in 2004, his family deposited his manuscripts in the British Library. In early 2016, I applied for a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) that would enable me to explore Gellhorn's legacy through this mostly unknown body of unpublished compositions that had not been performed in the UK or elsewhere for many years. Many of my colleagues at the Royal College of Music had worked with Gellhorn at one time or another and praised his extraordinary musicianship, but not one of them knew that he had also been a composer. I was fascinated by Gellhorn's life story and curious what his music might sound like, and I was spurred on by the discovery of pieces written shortly before and after his emigration as well as during his internment as an 'enemy alien' on the Isle of Man, a little known but important episode in British history during the Second World War.

With the AHRC grant we were able to engage Terence Curran as research associate as well as Bruno Bower and a group of RCM student assistants as editors, and we set out to undertake archival research, oral history interviews with Gellhorn's children and colleagues, as well as performance editions of many of these works. This resulted in a substantial biographical essay about Gellhorn, which is now freely available alongside the edition. Importantly, we were also able to engage advanced RCM students and some professional musicians to play many of the pieces in workshops and concerts, and we recorded most of them in the RCM studios. The Gellhorn Edition (RCM Editions) can be downloaded from the 'RCM research online' depository, and the recordings are available on YouTube and through a dedicated website.⁵

Peter Gellhorn was born in Breslau in 1912. By the time he was eleven, his father, a Jewish architect and former officer in the German army, had left the family, and, in 1923, Gellhorn moved to Berlin with his mother and younger sister. His talent was spotted and supported early on, and he was able to earn money for himself and his family by coaching singers while he was still a teenager. Gellhorn entered the 'Staatliche Akademische Hochschule für Musik' at the age of sixteen while he was still a pupil at the Schiller Realgymnasium.⁶ He studied conducting, piano and composition, and for his final concert he was invited to conduct the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.⁷ His conducting-teacher was Julius Prüwer, Furtwängler's assistant in Berlin. Gellhorn's son Sangeet recalls a story that Prüwer made his father read the stock exchange reports aloud while playing Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op 110, and then transpose it up a semitone,⁸ something he is reported to have managed admirably. We know he studied composition with Leo Schratzenholz (1872-1955),⁹ and he attended lectures by Paul Hindemith too.¹⁰ Hindemith is perhaps the main influence in his early compositions, which are among his most ambitious. It is likely that some of Gellhorn's scores from the time were lost, but at least some have survived.

Written in the year when Gellhorn was awarded the Gold Medal of the Preussische Akademie der Künste, Berlin, for his outstanding achievements as a student,¹¹ the *Kleine Suite for oboe and piano* (1932) has a stark and Modernist feel, meandering through the fringes of tonality within accessible rhythms and melodic shapes, comparable in style to neoclassical works by Hindemith and Stravinsky. The faster movements, especially the Präludium (prelude), offer a firework of harmonic surprises in an energetic flow of

unpredictable melodic turns and dense piano chords, while the slower movements give space for lyricism and poetic reflection.¹² Sadly, we have no information about any performances of the piece or for whom it may have been written. However, our recording with Rebecca Watt, oboe, and Lucy Colquhoun, piano, clearly shows that the fourteen-minute suite in five movements offers great contrast and character and is a perfect vehicle for an experienced oboist. The characteristic use of quick harmonic progressions with frequent unpredictable turns can also be found to various degrees in Gellhorn's two string quartets.



Insert Figure 1

Figure 1: Gellhorn's Gold Medal from the Prussian Academy of the Arts for outstanding achievements as a student. Photo courtesy of Catherine Cheung.

While still a student at the Akademie, Gellhorn was commissioned by Lotte Reiniger (1899-1981), a pioneer of silhouette animation films, to write a number of short film scores, namely *Carmen* (1933), *Puss in Boots* and *The Stolen Heart* (1934), and *The Little Chimney Sweep* (1935).¹³ Reiniger had grown up in Berlin before the First World War and developed a technique of painstakingly cutting out her figures and scenery from card and animating it by hand. In 1926 she had produced one of the world's first feature length animation films, *Prince Achmet*. Reiniger and her husband Carl Koch left Germany in the mid-1930s and settled in London after the war.¹⁴ Gellhorn and Reiniger stayed in touch and collaborated again in 1956 with *The Star of Bethlehem*.

The *String Quartet No. 1*¹⁵ has a harmonic language similar to the *Kleine Suite*, but feels much more unsettled and troubled. Written in 1933/34, just after Hitler came to power, the piece conveys a sense of agony, protest, defiance and pride. The first movement starts with

long passages of interweaving melodic lines without any recognisable tonal relationship. The second movement is a slow theme with variations, culminating in a sarcastic dance. A frantically searching Scherzo is followed by a haunting duet of the first and second violins with a solemn pizzicato accompaniment in the fourth movement. The fifth movement alternates between resolute and desperately yearning passages, punctuated by a recurring motif of four consecutive chords. The piece has many special moments, but it is the almost hypnotic fourth movement that stands out. Overall, the piece, recorded for our project by the Alke Quartet, seems designed to shake up the listener and could certainly not be classified as easy listening. Soh-Yon Kim, the first violinist of the quartet, recalled that Gellhorn's music sounded 'so different from anything we had worked on before, because of the movement of Gellhorn's melodies, his harmonic language and the length of phrases. There were many things that were unpredictable, things you would not normally expect.'¹⁶ Sometimes a similarity with Hindemith, Bartók or Shostakovich was pointed out, but without clear evidence it is hard to pinpoint specific influences. Soh-Yon also remarked that 'listening to one work is not enough, you have to listen to several of his pieces, and then you start to get his style, his sense of humour and his sense of irony. He put so much of his personality into his music, you get used to the kind of man he probably was.'¹⁷

The much lighter *String Quartet No.2* was not professionally recorded but performed in one of our project's workshops. It is dated November 1935, two months after Gellhorn's escape from Germany, where a professional future had become impossible for him. The twenty-two-year-old managed to flee with the help of Lotte Reiniger and some of her British friends. He crossed the border to France on a train, pretending to go on holiday. At the beginning of his time in Britain he stayed with a friend of Reiniger in Ascot. The mood of the *String Quartet No. 2* is a lot less troubled than the first, and the displays of virtuosic energy and mind-bending harmonic shifts seem lighter and more playful. A weight seems to have fallen from the composer's shoulders between those two pieces. The Andante lento in the first movement displays melancholic and surging melodic lines, alternating with more dynamic passages with frequently morphing harmonies. The second movement, marked Andante, creates a sense of melancholy as the drawn-out melodic lines seem to meander. The Scherzo, with elements of folk dancing and bass drones, is another example of Gellhorn's ability to combine traditional pastoral elements and rhythmic frameworks with unexpected harmonic progressions and turns, and the final fourth movement launches into a virtuosic and playful final Allegro molto with a witty and celebratory feel.¹⁸ The quartet is an attractive

work that somehow reflects the more positive outlook Gellhorn felt in Britain, and it certainly deserves further exploration. Sadly, there is no evidence of any performances of either string quartet during Gellhorn's lifetime. It is possible that the manuscripts stayed behind in Germany with his mother (who was not Jewish) and only found their way back into his possession after the war. This may also be the case with the cantata *Baida der Kosak* (1935) for soloists, choir and chamber orchestra. It is clear from the 2002 video interview that Gellhorn was particularly fond of this substantial piece, which sadly has never been performed to date.



Insert Figure 2

Figure 2: Portrait of the young Peter Gellhorn (year unknown). Courtesy of the Gellhorn Family Archive.

Toynbee Hall, 1935-39

Toynbee Hall, founded in 1884 in London's East End by the philanthropists Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, was Gellhorn's first place of employment in Britain from 1935 to 1939. It was set up as a place for future leaders to live and study there as resident volunteers, and to come face to face with the poverty in the surrounding area. It gave them the opportunity to develop practical solutions through education in the arts. Activities included music lessons,

classes, various ensembles, public theatrical performances and even opera. Many of the institution's alumni kept a lifelong connection with the Toynbee Hall and worked to bring about radical social change all over Britain.¹⁹

This must have been a stimulating environment for the young Gellhorn who taught piano and harmony, directed ensembles and wrote music, including incidental music for several plays.²⁰ He also conducted his first opera performance at Toynbee Hall, Gluck's *Orpheus and Euridice*, with designs by Lotte Reiniger. Gellhorn eventually became Director of Music at the hall, and a number of compositions have survived from this productive time. Gellhorn was part of a community and wrote for specific performers and occasions in an accessible style that was clearly aimed at pleasing audiences rather than developing the Modernist style of his earlier pieces.

Among these compositions from the Toynbee Hall years are two beautiful pieces for violin and piano, *Capriccio* (1936) and *Intermezzo* (1937). They were written for two fellow-German émigrés whom Gellhorn had already known during his time in Berlin, the virtuoso performer and teacher Max Rostal (1905-1991) and his pupil Maria Lidka (1914-2013), who remained a lifelong friend. Rostal taught in London during and after the war and famously took the young Norbert Brainin, Sigmund Nissel and Peter Schidlöf under his wing during the war. They would later form the Amadeus Quartet with the cellist Martin Lovett. Lidka was a highly influential performer and became a Professor at the Royal College of Music in the 1970s. The *Capriccio* (two and a half minutes), dedicated to Rostal, is a real virtuoso showpiece. It starts with joyous and surging semiquaver triplet runs in both the violin and piano parts. This is intersected with a more reflective and almost melancholic waltz before the fireworks begin anew. In contrast, the *Intermezzo* (five minutes) is a stunning, more expansive piece with a slow and gorgeous feel. The D minor Andante theme is followed by a humorous *più mosso* with march-like, dotted rhythms. Both pieces are completely tonal, there are no traces of the relentless and challenging shifts of harmony that can be found in the earlier pieces. They were clearly written to appeal to a more conventional audience, and they remain ideal as a crowd-pleasing gems in any violin recital programme.

The *Trio Suite for two violins and viola* (also 1937) is just under fifteen minutes long and looks back to 18th- and early 19th-century works by Bach, Haydn or Mozart. One might speculate that the work was composed for a particular ensemble at the hall, perhaps comprising Gellhorn's students. Unlike the two violin pieces it does have the 'Gellhorn-twist' with the familiar interweaving lines and surprising harmonic turns, and could therefore be

described as neoclassical, deriving inspiration from Stravinsky and Hindemith, rather than a pastiche of baroque music. The Overture has a Baroque feel, complete with trills, and is followed by a solemn Allemande. The Courante contains many unpredictable turns that take us to the very edge of tonality while ending, surprisingly, with a perfectly tonal resolution. The Sarabande consists of a beautiful melody for the first violin, accompanied by the second violin and viola in calm pizzicato quavers. The Bourrée is a lively dance reminiscent of the first movement of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto no.3. The piece finishes with a Gigue, with the three instruments going off in more and more unexpected directions in long semiquaver runs, coming together after each section in surprising cadences. The *Trio Suite* is a brilliant demonstration of Gellhorn's ability to adopt historical musical forms to his individual style of composition, and I find it both fascinating and entertaining. It would form an effective foil to the contrasting quartets within a concert programme.

Gellhorn also wrote a couple of pieces for the piano duo John Tobin and Tilly Connely. Tobin was Director of Music at Toynbee Hall before Gellhorn took over. The fifteen-minute *Sonata for Two Pianos* was written in 1936. For our project, the piece was recorded by Eleanor Hodgkinson and Jakob Fichert. The first movement with its celebratory, stately feel is followed by a warm and yearning Andante lento, with increasingly expansive chords in the middle section. The third and final movement, Tarantella, is an exhilarating virtuosic tour de force.

The second piece for two pianos, *Totentanz* (Dance of the Dead, 1937), was played in one of our workshops but sadly not recorded. It is dark and almost prophetic in nature. It is reminiscent of Liszt's *Mephisto Valse No. 1*. A cynical dance with a cold, mechanical character is interrupted by recurring devilish off-beat bass chords, evoking disturbing images of an increasingly bizarre demonic bacchanal. This is followed, as an after-thought, by a short, sombre *quiet* section. Both works are highly effective and idiomatic contributions to the two-piano medium, which was popular at that time, less so in more recent years.

Two vocal compositions have survived from the Toynbee Hall years, and both were recorded for our project. The stunningly beautiful and haunting 'Autumn' is a setting of a poem by Walter de la Mare (1873-1956). The poem speaks of the emptiness after a beloved person is gone. The song unfolds seamlessly over just two pages. It builds towards a climax on the words 'Your ghost, where your face was', and the texture is reduced to an unaccompanied vocal line in *piano* on the final words 'silence, where hope was'. The immediacy and power of expression in this song makes one wish that Gellhorn had written more for voice and piano, but sadly there are only two more songs, one dedicated to his

young wife in the year of their wedding (1943), and the other written for his daughter Barbara. Notably, neither of them is in German. The second vocal composition from the late thirties is a setting of a short lament by Racine (1639-1699), *Ah! Par quel*, a duet for soprano and mezzo-soprano.

The manuscripts in the British Library collection also include incidental music to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Le malade imaginaire* by Molière from Gellhorn's time at Toynbee Hall. Overall, this was a productive time for Gellhorn as a composer.

Music written during internment on the Isle of Man

The Blitz invasion of Holland and Belgium in 1940 sent shock waves through British society and stoked fears of invasion aided by a 'fifth column' of foreign nationals. When Churchill decided to 'collar the lot' and intern all German and Italian nationals as 'enemy aliens' in 1940, Jewish refugees and German and Austrian citizens loyal to the Nazis were thrown together in makeshift camps before being shipped to the Isle of Man, which had already been used for internment in the First World War. Fellow émigré composer Hans Gál described this experience in his diary *Music behind Barbed Wire*.²¹ It is a moving account of the many hardships – such as being cut off from relatives, random deportations to Canada and Australia, cramped conditions and monotonous food – but Gál also recounts positive aspects of the story such as the camaraderie and the many educational and artistic activities, including the creation of the bilingual comic revue *What a Life!* in Central Camp in the capital Douglas.²²

Gellhorn spent eight months in internment, first in Warth Mills in Bury near Manchester, and then in Mooragh Camp in the north of the Isle of Man in the excellent company of fellow émigré musicians including Paul Hamburger and Hans Keller. The (slightly older) pianist Ferdinand Rauter describes their joint musical activities in his diary of 1940.²³ Especially for young musicians like Gellhorn, Hamburger or Keller, this was a stimulating environment. Without access to sheet music, Gellhorn was forced to reconstruct and perform entire programmes of piano music from his extraordinary musical memory.²⁴ There were a number of excellent string players at hand, and there was a choir (male only because of the gender segregation) which Gellhorn directed.

The most substantial and original of the compositions from the Isle of Man is *Mooragh* for a four-part male choir (or four soloists) and strings, dated August 1940. It is a setting of a poem by F. F. Biber that had been published in the camp newspaper, the *Mooragh Times*.²⁵

Beyond barbed wire
The sea,
And the sun's last fire
Burning up a tree
And a cottage on the green hill.
Gulls idle on the beach,
Then rise into the air and cry.
The field across the bay we cannot reach,
We can but pace our cage and let our hungry eye
Take in far loveliness which will remain.
Beyond our sadness and beyond despair,
Beyond our stubborn hope, beyond our fair
And puzzled sense of justice.
They will stand,
This bay, this pier, this beach, this sea,
This distant friendliness of wooded land –
To bid farewell to us when we are free.

This moving and powerful piece starts with a slowly rising bass line and gently syncopated string chords. It builds towards the moment when the gulls 'rise up in the air and fly', followed by a violin solo full of longing and melancholy. The piece, which is generally tonal but makes use of subtle and interesting harmonic shifts, continues in a subdued atmosphere with wistful harmony and occasional outbursts of despair. Eventually a calmer, more consoling feeling prevails in the certainty that the internees will be freed eventually. There is no evidence that the piece was performed during Gellhorn's internment or indeed his lifetime. However, since the creation of an edition at the RCM in 2016, the musical group Ensemble Émigré has performed this powerful and engaging work on several occasions in London, Manchester and on the Isle of Man, and a live recording from Mooragh Town Hall in 2017 can be found online.

Gellhorn also wrote two pieces ‘for strings without double bass’ for players in the camp. With the absence of other sheet-music they were probably written on the spur of the moment so people had something to play. *Andante* (four and a half minutes) is constructed as a fugue and has a lyrical, quasi-religious atmosphere. *The Cats* (November 1940, approximately two and a half minutes) is a caricature with quirky rhythms and slurs, evoking images of bendy felines. There must have been cats roaming around the camp, presumably unimpeded by the barbed wire, unlike the unfortunate internees. Manx cats are known to have very short or no tails, which makes them particularly interesting. One of the violinists in the first performance of *The Cats* was Hans Keller, who later became an influential writer and broadcaster.²⁶

After his release from internment in 1941, Gellhorn eventually found employment as an assistant conductor and musical coach for the Vic-Wells opera company, where he met his future wife, the singer Olive Layton, a member of the chorus. On the evening of their wedding, he conducted a performance of *La Traviata* with a cast including Joan Cross and Peter Pears.²⁷ In the same year he wrote both the words and the music of a beautiful love song, ‘I Want to Sing a Song’, in popular style. It is dedicated to Olive and was published in 1949 by Boosey & Hawkes. It is the only composition by Gellhorn that was published during his lifetime.



Figure 3: Peter and Olive Gellhorn on their wedding day in 1943, courtesy of the Gellhorn Family Archive

Towards the end of the war, Gellhorn was assigned war work in an electrical factory in London. Then, from December 1945, he was engaged by the Carl Rosa Opera company,

where he conducted a total of 115 performances in the following year. This brought him to the attention of David Webster, the manager of the newly formed company at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and a fellow émigré, the experienced Austrian opera conductor and composer Karl Rankl (1898-1968), who had been chosen as music director in 1946. In her biography of Rankl, Nicole Ristow places their first meeting in Leeds, where Webster and Rankl were auditioning singers for the chorus.²⁸ It is likely that Gellhorn was at least aware of the older colleague from his student days in Berlin, where Rankl had worked as chorus master and conductor with Klemperer and Zemlinsky at the Kroll Oper (1928-31) and also conducted performances at the Städtische Oper in 1932. In 1947 Gellhorn joined the Covent Garden company as Head of Music Staff. There he helped to develop the company into the first full time opera company in Britain and conducted a total of 260 performances over seven years (at Covent Garden and on tour).



Figure 4: Peter Gellhorn on a London street in 1951, courtesy of the Gellhorn Family Archive

In 1954, Gellhorn left Covent Garden and started to work at Glyndebourne, the company in Southern England which had been revolutionising and internationalising opera in Britain with a team including many émigré musicians from Germany and Austria, led by the conductor Fritz Busch and the director Carl Ebert. Gellhorn worked there, first as a coach and then as chorus master. Between 1956 and 1961 he also conducted thirty performances at Glyndebourne, mostly of operas by Mozart, the company's core repertoire. Mezzo-Soprano Janet Baker, who sang in the chorus at Glyndebourne, admired his 'relentless search for excellence' and the way he made the singers work to achieve it.²⁹ Another member of the chorus, Laura Sarti, remembers that he played the piano like an orchestra: 'He knew all the

Mozart operas by heart, including the instruments!³⁰ Then, in 1961, Gellhorn became the Director of the BBC Chorus, later known as the BBC singers. With them he prepared countless performances for broadcast and for the BBC Proms, and he collaborated with leading conductors of the time. He also championed the music of contemporary composers such as Messiaen and Berio. After his retirement from the BBC in 1972 he continued to work as a guest conductor, for instance at the opera school of the Royal College of Music from 1981-88, in addition to giving masterclasses and teaching privately. One of his many pupils was the young British composer George Benjamin.³¹

Gellhorn did return to composition on a few occasions, writing a few smaller chamber music pieces and some piano music for children. In 1956 he wrote another score for a film by Lotte Reiniger, *The Star of Bethlehem*.³² This was then performed as a separate piece for small string orchestra and chorus by the Barnes Choir and again by the BBC Singers. It is a 'global' Christmas cantata and features Christmas carols from many nations, including the English carol *The First Noel*. The use of songs from many nations as a way of affirming a universal rather than a national perspective is significant in the context of Gellhorn's experience as a refugee and migrant who moved from one cultural context to another. We can find similar approaches amongst the work of other émigré composers. For instance, émigré pianist Ferdinand Rauter and the singer Engel Lund made a feature of this in their polyglot programmes of 'Songs from many Lands' in the 1930s and 1940s, which they toured all over Europe, Scandinavia and the United States and presented in the National Gallery Concerts in London during the war.³³ Mátyás Seiber (1905-1960), who had developed an interest in Hungarian folk music during his studies with Zoltán Kodály in the 1920s and became an influential teacher of composition in Britain, also arranged folk songs from many nations.

In 1972 Gellhorn was commissioned by the Richmond Festival to write a cantata for solo voices and wind instruments, *Aucassin & Nicolette*. The piece is based on a 12th- or 13th- century French love story about the relationship of a nobleman with a socially inferior woman.³⁴ Finally, in 1992 he wrote a stunningly beautiful song for his daughter Barbara, 'Aedh wishes for the Cloths of Heaven', a setting of Yeats's famous love poem that finishes on the words 'tread softly, because you tread on my dreams'. It is a completely tonal, exquisitely crafted miniature in F Major, written in a gently pulsating three-quarter rhythm, perhaps stylistically reminiscent of early 20th-century Viennese songs. It was performed a few times by Barbara, who was a semi-professional singer, and recorded for our project by

soprano Louise Fuller and pianist Lucy Colquhoun. This seems to have been his final composition.

Conclusion

In a Covent Garden Programme from 1948, Gellhorn's biographical note reveals that he considered composition to be an important element of his career and mentions that in the last few years of his studies in Berlin (1932-34), he 'concentrated on composing and, among other things, wrote music for the Silhouette films of Lotte Reiniger'.³⁵ Later programmes, for example one from the Inverness Choral Society in 1958, also identified him as a composer: 'Gellhorn (...) is known, not only as a conductor and pianist, but as a composer.'³⁶ However, Gellhorn's musician-son Sangeet believes his father did not ultimately have the inner drive to express himself through composition, although he could do it beautifully and immaculately when he chose to.³⁷ Sangeet also felt that his father remained emotionally rooted in 18th- and 19th- century music, in the music of Bach and Mozart in particular.³⁸ In his roles as a conductor, pianist-performer, and musical coach he could live this passion and pass it on to others, and he found fulfilment in working towards the highest possible standards of performance. Mezzo-Soprano Janet Baker made the point that the sheer commitment to musical performance she learned from Gellhorn and other émigrés helped her and her generation of British musicians to move 'from a national to an international world'.³⁹ His lifelong friend, the émigré violinist Maria Lidka, with whom he gave many recitals, once called him 'Der beste Musiker Englands' (England's best musician).⁴⁰



Figure 4: Peter Gellhorn at St. James's Palace, 1984, courtesy of the Gellhorn Family Archive

Gellhorn's compositions allow us to engage emotionally with the reality of forced migration, demonstrating a fragmented journey across multiple environments with different priorities. These led him from the dynamic creative environment of 1930s Berlin, the thriving crucible for musical Modernism, to the social and educational ambitions in a radically different context at London's Toynbee Hall, the experience of internment as a so-called 'enemy alien', and the increasingly international music scene in Britain after the Second World War. Debates about migration and its impact on culture are at an all-time high today, but our intellectual and emotional understanding of the cultural and personal implications of migration are still limited. Gellhorn's compositions spanning nearly seventy years, whilst smaller in scope than the oeuvres of better-known composers, are significant in the context of his story. Gellhorn's music and story are evidence of the dynamism and inspiration that refugees and immigrants can bring to their adopted society, as well as the challenges and

opportunities that migration creates for the individual.⁴¹ They lead us into a realm where music and politics overlap. The joke at the beginning of this article shows that Gellhorn himself maintained a keen interest in politics and human rights throughout his life. His daughter Mary called him ‘quite a humanitarian’ and remembered that after his death she found his bank account full of standing orders to charities like Practical Action and Amnesty International.⁴² It is my hope that the performance editions and recordings produced through our project at the Royal College of Music, set into the context of Gellhorn’s life story, will both inspire more performances and a greater understanding of Gellhorn the composer. For, alongside his contribution to music in Britain as conductor, teacher, coach and all-round musician, as I hope I have shown, his compositions shed a unique light on his individual émigré experience and the broader relationship between migration, music and culture.

Appendix : Complete list of works (prepared by Terence Curran in 2016 for RCM Editions)

Pieces in bold are available as free PDF Downloads (RCM Editions) through the RCM’s Research Online depository: <https://researchonline.rcm.ac.uk/id/eprint/69/>

BERLIN

1928: *3 kleine Klavierstücke*

1932: ***Kleine Suite for oboe and piano***

1933: *Carmen* [film score for Lotte Reiniger]

String Quartet No. 1

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]

LONDON, TOYNBEE HALL

Baida der Kosak, cantata

String Quartet No. 2

Stück für Violoncello und Klavier vierhändig

1936: *Minuet für zwei Blockflöten*

Polonaise für Flöte, Horn und vier Geigen

Skizze zur Klaviersonate [unfinished/lost]

Capriccio für Violine und Klavier

Trauermarsch für vier Blockflöten

Sonata for two pianos

1937: ***Intermezzo für Violine und Klavier***

Trio-Suite for two violins and viola

Dance of the Dead for piano duet

Novellette for piano [copy of published edition held in BL main collection]

1938: ***Autumn for voice and piano***

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

INTERNMENT ON ISLE OF MAN

1940: ***Mooragh for male choir and strings***

Andante for string orchestra without double bass (or string quartet)

Two studies for unaccompanied violin

The Cats for string orchestra without double bass

Serenade for string orchestra without double bass [unfinished/lost]

LATER WORKS

1943: *I Want To Sing A Song*, for voice and piano [published edition, 1949]

1948: *String Quartet [unfinished/lost]*

1952: Miscellaneous pieces.

1953: Ten short pieces for children, for piano

1954: ***The Linnet for mixed choir***

1956: *The Star of Bethlehem*, music for the film by Lotte Reiniger

1958-1960s: 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

Appendix 2: Timeline

1912 Born in Breslau as the first child of architect Alfred Gellhorn and his wife Else
 1923 Moves to Berlin with his mother and sisters
 1933 Completes his studies in Berlin
 1935 Emigrates to Britain
 1935-39 Works at Toynbee Hall, eventually as Director of Music
 1940-41 Interned at Warth Mills in Bury and on the Isle of Man
 1941 Becomes assistant conductor with Sadler's Wells Opera (then based in Burnley, Lancashire)
 1945 Becomes conductor of the Carl Rosa Opera Company
 1947-53 Head of Music Staff and assistant to Karl Rankl at Royal Opera House. (Rankl resigned in 1951 and was followed by a series of guest conductors.) Gellhorn conducted at ROH and on tour.
 1954-61 Working at Glyndebourne as conductor and chorus master
 1961-72 Becomes conductor of the BBC Singers (renamed BBC Chorus under Gellhorn but reverted to BBC Singers in 1972). Retires when sixty years old.
 1967 Co-founder and conductor of Opera Barga in Italy
 1970 During the 1970s and 1980s, Gellhorn works variously as a coach, teacher and conductor at the National Opera Studio, Dartington, Guildhall School of Music & Drama and Trinity College of Music.
 1973-2000 Conductor of the Barnes Choir
 1981-88 Coach and conductor at Royal College of Music's Opera School
 2004 Dies in London aged ninety-two

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- ¹ Gellhorn was listed among Jewish musicians excluded from the Reichsmusikkammer, the musician's guild under the Nazis, on 14 September 1938. Source: Bundesarchiv Sign.: R 55/21302, see <https://www.lexm.uni-hamburg.de/object/lexm_lexmperson_00003455#> [accessed: 4 February 2021].
- ² See Terence Curran and Norbert Meyn, 'Peter Gellhorn (1912-2004): Biography', *RCM Editions*, 2017, available as a free PDF download from RCM Research Online <<https://researchonline.rcm.ac.uk/id/eprint/2091/>> [accessed: 29 July 2022].
- ³ Peter Gellhorn, *Video 1, Interview with Geraldine Auerbach and Martin Anderson on 9 January 2002*, time code 0.21.00 (video available on request from the author through the RCM Library).
- ⁴ CD, *The Émigré Composers*, Nimbus Records, NI 5730/1, 2004.
- ⁵ 'Peter Gellhorn: The Musical Legacy', <www.petergellhorn.com> [accessed: 27 April 2020].
- ⁶ Marian Malet and Anthony Grenville (eds.), *Changing Countries* (London: Libris, 2002), 10-11.
- ⁷ YouTube, 'Interview with Mary Gellhorn about her father, the conductor and composer Peter Gellhorn (1912-2004)', *RCM*, 14 April 2016, time code 0.48.30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CIH_T5q7kM>, [accessed: 5 September 2021].
- ⁸ YouTube, 'Interview with Sangeet Gellhorn about his life and his father Peter Gellhorn (1912-2004)', *RCM*, 21 April 2016, time code 0.32.00, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=474THKtTAJU>>, [accessed: 27 April 2020].
- ⁹ Peter Gellhorn, *Video 1*, time code 0.14.00.
- ¹⁰ YouTube, 'Interview with Sangeet Gellhorn', time code 0.07.00.
- ¹¹ Curran and Meyn, 3.
- ¹² The movements of the *Kleine Suite for oboe and piano* are: Präludium (Alegretto vivace), Lied (Andante non troppo, lento), Harlequin (Alegretto non troppo, Capitano (Alegretto alla marcia) and Finale (Allegretto vivace).
- ¹³ Curran and Meyn, 'Peter Gellhorn', 15.
- ¹⁴ Pamela Hutchinson, 'Lotte Reiniger: animated film pioneer and standard-bearer for women', *The Guardian*, 2 June 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jun/02/lotte-reiniger-the-pioneer-of-silhouette-animation-google-doodle>>, [accessed online: 22 November 2021].
- ¹⁵ The movements of the String Quartet Nr. 1 are: I: Allegro Moderato, II: Thema mit Variationen, Andante, III: Scherzo, Allegro vivace, IV: Intermezzo, Andante Lento, V: Rondo, Allegro.
- ¹⁶ Soh-Yon Kim speaking in YouTube video: YouTube, 'Peter Gellhorn – The Musical Legacy', *RCM*, 22 November 2016, time code 0.11.35, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjyzieuGq0I>>, [accessed: 27 April 2020].
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, time code 0.11.55.
- ¹⁸ A workshop recording of the String Quartet Nr. 2 can be made available to researchers on request through the Royal College of Music Library.
- ¹⁹ See 'Our History', website of Toynbee Hall, <<https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/about-us/our-history/>>, [accessed: 22 November 2021].
- ²⁰ Curran and Meyn, , 4.
- ²¹ Hans Gál, *Music Behind Barbed Wire*, English translation by Eva Fox- Gál (London: Toccata Press, 2014).
- ²² Hans Gál, *What a Life!*, RCM Editions 2021, sheet music edition by Norbert Meyn and Louis Stanhope, with full score, parts and introductory materials, available for free download from RCM Research Online.
- ²³ Peter Gellhorn, *Video 1*, time code 0.36.00.
- ²⁴ Ferdinand Rauter's 1940 diary, written in Gabelsberger shorthand, can be found in the Music and Migration collection at the University of Salzburg. It has been partially transcribed and then translated into English by Ferdinand Rauter's daughter Andrea Rauter, who kindly shared this information with the author.
- ²⁵ Sadly, it has not been possible to find further information about the author of the poem. Images of the newspaper are available online: Edward Victor, 'Isle of Man', <http://www.edwardvictor.com/Holocaust/2005/isle_of_man_main.htm>, [accessed:2 January 2020].
- ²⁶ Peter Gellhorn, *Video 1*, time code 0.12.00.
- ²⁷ Curran and Meyn, 6.
- ²⁸ Nicole Ristow, Karl Rankl: *Leben, Werk und Exil eines österreichischen Komponisten und Dirigenten* (Neumünster: von Bockel Verlag, , 2017), 292.
- ²⁹ YouTube, 'Interview with Dame Janet Baker', *RCM*, 21 September 2014, time code 0.30.32, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvAKsMtCHhQ>>, [accessed: 28 April 2020].
- ³⁰ YouTube, 'Interview with Laura Sarti', *RCM*, 13 July 2014, time code 0.56.00, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKmzINq-iQM>>, [accessed: 15 April 2021].
- ³¹ Gellhorn eventually introduced George Benjamin to Messiaen in Paris, where he continued his studies. See YouTube, 'Interview with Sangeet Gellhorn', time code 1.18.00.

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- ³² Peter Gellhorn, *Video 1*, time code 0.48.50.
- ³³ See CD, *Engel Lund's Book of Folk Songs*, Nimbus Records 5813/14, 2010.
- ³⁴ See Hermann Suchier, *Aucassin und Nicolette: Kritischer Text mit Paradigmen und Glossar*, 10 edn., (Paderborn, 1932, X-XVI).
- ³⁵ Covent Garden programme for *The Magic Flute*, 1948 season, <www.petergellhorn.com>, [accessed: 20 April 2020].
- ³⁶ Gellhorn's artist biography in a concert programme of the Inverness Musical Society (26 November 1958). The programme is available on <www.petergellhorn.com>, [accessed: 20 April 2020].
- ³⁷ YouTube, 'Interview with Sangeet Gellhorn', time code 0.42.00.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, time code 1.15.00.
- ³⁹ YouTube, 'Interview with Dame Janet Baker', time code 0.54.20.
- ⁴⁰ Conversation with Jutta Raab Hansen in 1992, reported to the author in January 2020.
- ⁴¹ For a philosophical exploration of this theme, see Vilem Flusser, *The Freedom of the Migrant* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).
- ⁴² YouTube, 'Interview with Mary Gellhorn', time code 0.49.40.