Meet the Composer - Ethyl Smyth

Born: April 22, 1858
Died: May 9, 1944

British composer Ethyl Smyth was born in Sidcup, Kent, which is now in the London Borough of Bexley, into an upper middle class military family. She was the fourth of eight children. Her father, a Major General, was opposed to her wish to pursue a career in music. After a long battle she was finally allowed to study at the Leipzig Conservatory. She only stayed for one year but during that time she met such famous composers as Dvořák, Grieg and Tchaikovsky. She continued her study of composition privately, meeting Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms. She published songs, numerous chamber pieces, two symphonic works, six operas, a mass, and a choral symphony. She was first noticed through her Mass in D completed in 1893. Her most famous work was the opera The Wreckers first performed in 1906. It tells a story of villagers in Cornwall who lured passing ships onto the rocks so they could plunder the cargo.

In 1910 Smyth joined the Women’s Social and Political Union, a suffrage organization, devoting herself for the next two years to the cause of securing the right to vote for women. Her "March of the Women" (1911) became the anthem of the movement.

During the First World War Smyth worked as an assistant radiologist in a French military hospital from 1915 to 1918. During this time she learned she was gradually becoming deaf. In spite of several distinguished awards and recognitions, she continued to have difficulty getting her music published and performed because of her gender. She ultimately gave up her music career due to her increased hearing loss and she instead focused on writing her biography and other works.

Smyth never married. She enjoyed horse riding, tennis and especially golf. In addition to her compositions she wrote ten books, and numerous plays and essays. Smyth died in England in 1944 at the age of 86.
Timeline of Events during Ethyl Smyth’s Lifetime - Ethyl Smyth lived a long life of 86 years and saw many changes in the world she lived in, including two world wars, the development of airplanes and women gaining the right to vote.

1858 - Ethyl Smyth is born near London
1861 - US Civil War begins at Ft. Sumter, SC
1863 - London Underground opens, first underground railway in the world
1865 - Lee surrenders to Grant, ending the US Civil War
1887 - First print appearance of the character Sherlock Holmes
1893 - Smyth writes her Mass in D
1900 - Galveston hurricane in Texas
1901 - Queen Victoria dies in England, Teddy Roosevelt becomes President of US
1903 - Wright Brothers flight at Kitty Hawk
1906 - First performance of Smyth’s opera, The Wreckers
1912 - The Titanic sinks
1914 - Great Britain enters World War I, the Panama Canal opens
1918 - Some women given the vote in England, Worldwide flu epidemic
1919 - Women in US given right to vote
1927 - Charles Lindbergh’s first solo nonstop transatlantic flight
1929 - US stock market crash begins Great Depression
1933 - Franklin D Roosevelt inauguration, New Deal enacted
1937 - American aviator Amelia Earhart disappears
1939 - British enters World War II
1941 - Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, US enters World War II
1944 - Ethyl Smyth dies
Activities

1. Listen to *The Wreckers Overture* - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maozbZsiK0c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maozbZsiK0c)

2. Make a timeline of changes and events that have occurred in YOUR lifetime. Create a timeline for one of your parents, grandparents, or an older friend.

3. British Trivia Quiz - Look up the answers that you don’t know.
   
   a. What is the highest mountain in Great Britain?
   b. Which of the following British cities is the furthest north: London, Liverpool or Manchester?
   c. Which 13th-century Scottish warrior did Mel Gibson play in the 1995 film Braveheart?
   d. What is the capital city of Scotland?
   e. Who was the first monarch to use Buckingham Palace as their official residence?
   f. Who was the first female Prime Minister?
   g. What is the capital city of England?
   h. What do the British call cookies?
   i. What river flows through London?
   j. What do the British call French fries?

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**The March of the Women**