



## ELISABETH LUTYENS (1906–1983)

*Brian Elias*

ELISABETH LUTYENS has left a vacuum which will not be easily filled. Her single minded and highly idealistic devotion to her art gives us all a standard to which to aspire, and although her ideals sometimes made her embittered with the musical world, her accurate observation and criticism of changing values made her a latter-day prophet who did not always cry wolf. And yet, as we all know, she was by no means a reactionary.

She achieved that very difficult thing—to become the famous daughter of a famous father. She deliberately chose a career in which her family would have no say or influence. She forged everything for herself, from her early and solitary experiments with serialism to the highly refined, essential, and very pure sounds of her later music.

While the memory of her extraordinary personality is still strong, many will find it easy to relegate her to the pigeon-holes she abhorred, amongst them ‘miniaturist’, ‘woman-composer’. She wrote several major orchestral works, many of which remain to be performed and which belie the label ‘miniaturist’. It was not her sex that first attracted attention—it was the music she wrote, always professional and often very rare, fine and powerful enough to be unforgettable and unforgotten.

Her prolific output is only one indication of the tremendous generosity which inspired her ceaseless commitment to new music and young composers, which included the co-founding of the MacNaghten Concerts in 1931. Her exacting standards of professionalism and integrity which never wavered made her a truly exceptional teacher who communicated not merely technique but an all-embracing attitude to composition as the humble service of the art of Mozart and Beethoven.



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