

In Memoriam: Clara Lyle Boone (1927-2015), Publisher, Composer, Educator, Activist

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Clara Lyle Boone was “a woman of surprises” and “one fine teacher” according to Jim Myers, a friend in the Capitol East neighborhood of Washington, DC where she lived. Kentucky born and educated, she embodied the pioneering spirit and determination of her great uncle, Daniel Boone, but in the somewhat deceptive guise of a soft-spoken, white-gloved southern gentlewoman who nonetheless often rode a bicycle on errands around Capitol Hill, even when she was well into her 70s.¹

By the time she arrived in Washington at age twenty-five, she had performed her own music on her senior recital at Centre College in Kentucky, received encouragement and a master’s degree in her studies with Walter Piston at Harvard and later with Darius Milhaud at the Aspen Music School, published her first piece, and begun a teaching career in Kentucky, Michigan, and New York. In her first college teaching job, she encountered a department head who claimed the title of sole composer on campus, an attitude that nearly ended her composing career. Moreover, despite her one publication, she discovered that it was nearly impossible to find publishers who would take a woman composer seriously. Prospects may have seemed dismal, but nothing fazed her for long. “I already knew music publishing and the entire music industry to be male-dominated,” she remembered. To combat the prejudice she encountered, she began using a gender-neutral pen name,² Lyle de Bohun, based on the French spelling of her name, and resolved to establish a music press for women, carefully saving from her teacher’s salary to do so.³

The decades between her arrival in Washington and the founding of Arsis Press in 1974 were dominated by political activism and teaching. In 1956 she drafted revisions to the Copyright Law for her Kentucky congressman and began making proposals for federal aid to the arts to other members of Congress, determined to pursue justice for women on every possible front.

The gender bias has continued for so long without a legal challenge that a whole supporting music industry exists around the concept of all-male concert programs.

This is our inheritance from our European culture. Who should be called to account? Where does one begin? There is no experienced core of attorneys in the Antitrust Division [of the Justice Department]. In fact, one staff member commented, “You need a Ruth Bader Ginsburg!”⁴

Her teaching career continued in 1957, when she assumed a post at the National Cathedral School for Girls in Washington, work that she remembered enjoying, but she also recalled observing less prosperous parts of the city, and she realized that she “wanted to teach poorer children, ones that were suffering from educational neglect.” So in 1967 she began teaching fifth graders at Payne Elementary School in one of Washington’s most beleaguered neighborhoods.

During this time she added civil rights activities to her feminist endeavors, demonstrating at the White House, working on Kennedy’s presidential campaign, and running for Congress in Kentucky’s 4th District on a civil rights platform. Soon after beginning to teach at Payne, she moved to Bay Street on Capitol Hill, and her house became a haven for some fifty boys and girls without a place to go when not in school, leading the local authorities to appoint an outreach leader to help her. She was invited to join, and became secretary of the Southeast Civic Association; she was, to her knowledge, its only white member ever. Her neighborhood was often violent and a sobering number of her former students were murdered, five from one house alone on Bay Street. Her house was burglarized numerous times, and she was robbed on the street another eight times. In an interview by a reporter for America’s Most Wanted, she related that in 1976 she was attacked



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by two men while on her way to church, managed to escape, but was shot while getting away. “I started running toward the fire house, and one shot hit me in the leg. The adrenaline was flowing. I had this bullet in me, but all I felt was a little ping,” she announced, startling her listeners. Due to health problems (unrelated to the gunshot wound), she retired in 1977 from the Payne School, where she had founded the student council and coached annual musicals and even operas with student performers. She continued to live in the neighborhood.⁵

Just before retirement, she realized her long-range plan of becoming a music publisher and founded Arsis Press in 1974 for women only, saying, “I have sworn to create new avenues of expression for the many women who have something essential to share with the world.” The first scores she published were her own, under the name of Lyle de Bohun (as she said, to gain experience publishing her own music to avoid making mistakes on the music of others), followed by two pieces by Ruth Lomon in 1976, and three scores by Elizabeth Vercoe. When the press became an affiliate of the International League of Women Composers in 1977 and the organization announced the relationship in a newsletter, manuscripts began to arrive on a regular basis.⁶ By the tenth anniversary, many new scores were available from Arsis Press composers: Emma Lou Diemer, Harriet Bolz, Nancy Van de Vate, Gwyneth Walker, Jane Brockman, Judith Shatin, Vally Weigl, Ruth Schonthal, Mary Jeanne van Appledorn, Bertha Donahue, Winifred Hyson, Anna Larson, and Clare Shore. And by 2010 there were a total of 150 works by 45 composers in the catalog, including music by Vivian Fine, Ruth Crawford Seeger, and a lone male, John Webber.

Certain that the music must look as professional as possible, and perhaps a little different to attract attention, Clara Boone carefully oversaw Arsis Press publications: printing the music on good paper of standard music size and reproducing distinctive original art on its covers, art that was chosen to reveal something of the character of the music. On at least one occasion, the art gave the music a new title. A case in point

is my own Duo for violin and cello and the handsome sculpture called “Balance” that gave the piece its new title (see Example 1). In the early years of the press, many of the scores were facsimile editions in the composer’s own hand, although the press took the unusual—and expensive—step of engraving one piece by those composers with multiple works in the catalog. Later, computer-generated copy became the norm. Boone’s personal relationships with engravers, printers, and designers continued over the years. In her annual letter to Arsis composers in June 2007, she wrote of one very personal connection: “We have continued with Otto Zimmerman and Sons Company...and now our direct tie is through the daughter of the house, Jan Jolley. She accompanied the Highlands High School chorus in Fort Thomas, Kentucky, as I did in the forties. Carl Nulsen, father of Carol, my high school classmate, engraved our first publications....”

Because she herself experienced the “comparative obscurity of women composers and the scarcity of their music in retail stores and libraries” in the 1970s, Boone was eager for collections of women’s music to be catalogued as such so that customers could easily find compositions by women. In 1979 the Joseph Patelson Music House in New York bought the complete Arsis catalog and some other stores followed suit, though slowly. Arsis Press was already a member of the Music Publishers’ Association in 1976 when the association presented her with the first three of six Paul Revere awards for excellence in three different categories, more awards than given any other company that year.⁷

From the first, the Arsis Press Catalog was designed, printed, and sent by bulk mail to libraries, music stores, and individuals, often using address lists from the College Music Society. The work was detailed and time-consuming and deliveries were not easy without a car. In a memorandum to Jane Brockman and Elizabeth Vercoe in February 2005, Boone cheerfully recounts the mailing process: “Here I am making it by Metro to Benjamin Franklin Post Office to take care of our bulk mailing of 2005 catalogs. It’s over ice and snow, but I’m staying upright.”

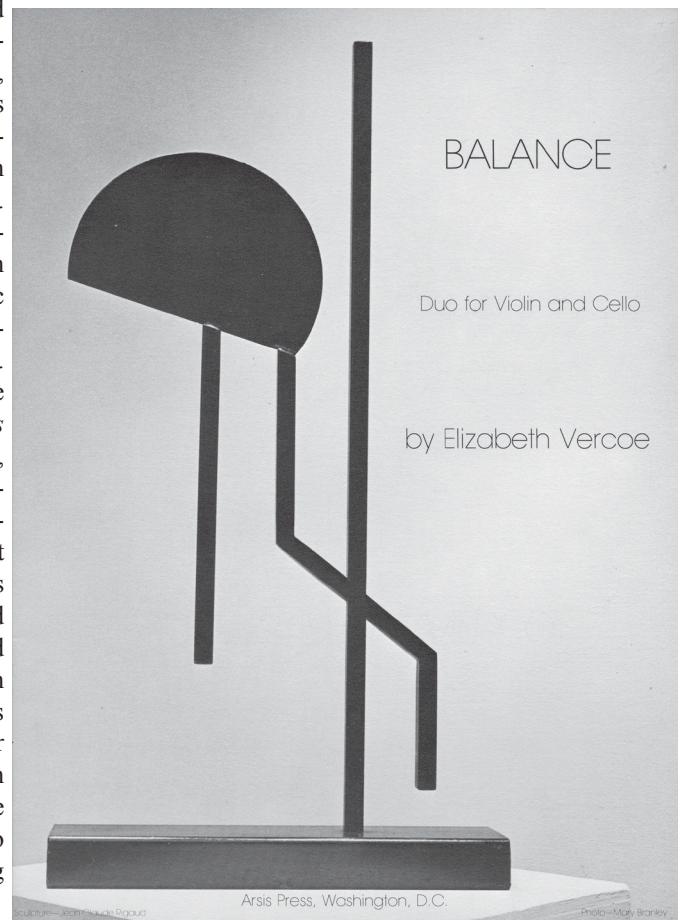
Uncommonly generous terms were typical of an Arsis Press contract. When a composer was published by the press, she received 100 copies of her score and 20%

royalties on sales, both practices unusual in the industry. Even more important, though, was the mentoring that accompanied publication. Composers were encouraged to approach recording companies and other publishers, and were introduced to performers, sometimes with a snowball effect. In one particularly successful example of her advocacy, Boone introduced mandolinist/composer Neil Gladd to several local composers and before long this talented musician found himself with half a dozen original scores by four or five different women, all of whose works he premiered and some of which he took to Carnegie Recital Hall and on tour in the U.S. and Europe.

Boone often attended concerts of Arsis composers whenever she could, particularly performances by the Contemporary Music Forum at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington. More rare were excursions further afield, such as to the Women’s Music Festival held at Tufts University in 1984, where Ms. Boone took strong issue with the *Boston Globe’s* premiere music critic, Richard Dyer, when he remarked in a panel discussion that included her that the cream would always rise to the top and good music by women could not remain unnoticed in today’s world of mass communications. Her experience had shown quite the opposite, and she voiced her opinion in no uncertain terms following boos by a number of audience members. Chastened and duly impressed, Dyer was far more circumspect on a similar panel at the second festival in 1985.

Although Clara Lyle Boone had a vision for the future of the press, she was oddly uncomfortable with technology, uneasily declining to use a computer donated to the press, and heaving a sigh of relief when the monster was removed from the Bay Street house. Nonetheless, she readily allowed others to take advantage of new technologies that could benefit the

press. Thus in 1997 the Arsis Press website took shape, created by Jane Brockman and Elizabeth Vercoe and maintained by them to this day. To honor the memory of the founder of Arsis Press, the home page currently features The Americas Trio by Lyle de Bohun with its distinctive cover, a link to a sample page, and a sound clip of the first movement from a 2014 performance on the West Coast.⁸ In general, each composition on the website is identified just as in the catalog (with composer, title, duration, and instrumentation) except that on the website a description of each piece has been added along with a small photo of the cover and a sample page or two of the music.⁹



Example 1: Cover page, Elizabeth Vercoe, *Balance*

After the website was up and functioning, the two composers put together short biographies and photos of each composer, pages of links and quotes, and a link to a feature article in the Washington Post about the press and its founder.¹⁰ The website also features a link to the correspondence in 1994 between Boone and the Justice Department about Boone’s complaint that the National Symphony violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and acted illegally

to restrain trade under the Sherman Antitrust Act because the orchestra did not play music by women and was thus practicing sex discrimination and preventing publishers of women's music from doing business. Although she did not succeed in her quest, she caused a stir with considerable correspondence between herself and Kentucky Senator Wendell Ford with the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, then under Deval Patrick (later governor of Massachusetts) and was indeed relentless and politically astute in her pursuit of parity for women composers.¹¹

In addition to contacts with the Justice Department, she maintained ties with The Library of Congress from the outset of her publishing venture. The Library now considers the archives of Arsis Press sufficiently important that a directive was issued by the Music Division to retain all correspondence and records of the press. This is no accident but part of Boone's intention to insist women be part of the public record. "We have a contractual obligation with the Library of Congress to preserve our papers. For this reason, we have twenty years of records [in 1994] either in our own possession or already in storage at the Library. We would like to do whatever we can to send a message of inclusiveness to all the federally funded arts monopolies."¹²

Currently, in 2015, the Library of Congress website indicates that the Special Collection of the Arsis Press Archives (now 22 feet in 25 boxes) "contains printer's masters of scores published by the press; correspondence between Clara Boone and various composers, publishers, and business associates; and business trademark papers."¹² Thus primary source material on the history of the press is available to researchers at the nation's library.

Some years ago, as Boone felt the need to plan for a future of the press without her oversight, she made an arrangement with Empire Music to distribute the music in the catalog and then, more recently, arranged that Empire would handle royalty payments as well. In an undated personal note she was philosophical about the effects of aging, saying: "I can walk, but much dependent on my cane of modern design."

In the conclusion of her 1984 article about the press, she writes: "Any notable commercial success for my company is truly beyond my wildest dreams, but I do dream that one day women will think fe-

male, buy female, and perform female until the standard publishing firms can afford to do no less than give the woman composer her due. At that time, Arsis Press would then be appropriately out of business."¹³

Considering the changes in the prominence of women in the world of classical music since Arsis Press was established over forty years ago, it seems that Clara Lyle Boone's dream is showing some promise of at least beginning to come true, and, however many generations it may take for women composers to achieve parity with their male colleagues, there is no doubt that she and Arsis Press have made a powerful difference in the lives of many composers and performers and have left the music world a significant legacy, both personal and professional.

Memories and Tributes to Clara Lyle Boone

Testimonials in honor of the tenth anniversary of the press in 1984 were published by the International League of Women Composers in an insert in the Journal. Additional tributes, occasioned by her passing, bear witness to the profound influence her encouragement had on many composers and performers, the personal interest she took in each composer she published, and the affection the various musicians in her life had for this extraordinary woman. The Arsis Press website posts the complete set of those from both 1984 and 2015. We include a few from 2015 below.

Clara was a wonderful champion of music by women, and a fine composer herself. How sad that she is gone. But her legacy remains with us forever (Emma Lou Diemer). Her publications provided a springboard for many composers; her friendship and advice were priceless. Thank you, Clara, rest in peace! (*Clare Shore*). Daniel Boone would be as proud to have this pioneering musician, teacher, publisher, and community activist as his descendant, as she was to call him her forefather (Jane Brockman).

Clara became one of the first advocates for my music by publishing my choral music. I knew that I could trust Clara's musical perspicacity, since she seemed to read my musical mind so effortlessly. A fierce proponent and champion for lesser-known women composers, Clara did not suffer fools gladly! Her contribution to the music of today resonates mightily and the

musical seeds she has planted will continue to sprout (Elizabeth R. Austin).

From her very first response to an audition cassette that I sent to Arsis in 1988, Clara has always stood out in my mind as an exceptionally humane and encouraging publisher. Arsis Press was the first publisher to respond to my young and inexperienced inquiries, and brought out my "Eternal Life With Thee" that same year. I will always be grateful for her warm welcome to the music-publishing world (*Carol Barnett*).

Clara was always so sweet to me; she went out of her way to acquire rights to one of her favorite paintings for the cover of my Clarinet Sonata (Carolyn Bremer). Although I never had the pleasure to meet her in person, she impacted my life and so many other women composers immensely. What a wonderful legacy to leave in this world (Ingrid Stölzel).

Clara Lyle Boone believed in women composers when most people could not even imagine that such exotic creatures walked the earth! And she not only believed, but also devised a plan to support our work through beautifully designed and thoughtful publications. She was a woman of powerful determination, as well as one with a sense of humor and a twinkle in her beautiful blue-grey eyes. When I read comments by numerous, especially young, women today, and even by some at the time, who believed that there is/was no issue to address, Clara immediately leaps to mind. In my own life, while I have seen some important changes in the possibilities for women as composers (and performers), I still see how much remains to be done. Clara helped steer many of us on our paths, and gave of herself in a remarkably selfless manner. She will live on in the beautiful music that she fostered and in our multitude of memories (*Judith Shatin*).

NOTES

¹ Jim Myers, "My friend Clara Lyle Boone," Archive: Voice of the Hill, Washington, DC, (September 2008), <http://www.zoominfo.com/p/Clara-Boone/1307566619>

² For those who might find the idea of using a gender-neutral name quaint and unnecessary, an enlightening article on the website Jezebel might be instructive. See Catherine Nichols, "Homme de Plume: What I Learned Sending My Novel Out Under a Male Name," Jezebel, <http://jezebel.com/homme-de-plume-what-i-learned-sending-my-novel-out-und-1720637627> (accessed August 4, 2015).

³ Myers.

⁴ Clara Lyle Boone, "All-Male Program-

ming: An Antitrust Violation?" (Journal of the IAWM 1.2, October 1995): 2-4.

⁵ Myers.

⁶ Boone, "Women Composers' Upbeat: Arsis Press," *The Musical Woman: An International Perspective*, vol. 1, ed. Judith Lang Zaimont, Catherine Overhauser, and Jane Gottlieb (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984): 98-104.

⁷ Boone, "Women Composers' Upbeat: Arsis Press."

⁸ Broadcast on NW Focus Live, Classical King FM's in-studio broadcasts on March

28, 2014 before a Second City Chamber Series concert in Tacoma, Washington called "The Artistry of Women." <https://soundcloud.com/search?q=clara%20lyle%20boone>

⁹ <http://www.instantweb.com/a/arsispress>

¹⁰ Gayle Worland, "Clara Boone's Scales of Justice: Based in Washington, Her Arsis Press Seeks Fair Play for Female Composers," *The Washington Post* (March 9, 1997): G4. The *Post* article also appeared in the June issue of the *Journal of the IAWM* in 1997 with the addition of photos of the covers of Boone's choral piece *Meditation*, and Diemer's Toccata for

Piano and the engraved first page of the score of Vercoe's *Fantasy for Piano*.

¹¹ Boone, correspondence and commentary, "All-Male Programming: An Antitrust Violation?"

¹² Library of Congress website, information on Arsis Press: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awmusic8/special_music.html; <http://www.loc.gov/item/scdb.200033794>; <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ahas/loc.natlib.scdb.200033794/default.html>

¹³ Boone, "Women Composers' Upbeat: ArsisPress."