

# Repertoire Notes

## Moneta Eagles and Dulcie Holland

By RJ Stove

The present magazine's June issue included a detailed discussion, by Dr Robin Batterham, of Christopher Willcock's achievement as an organ composer. It so happens that the two musicians treated in this issue are, like Willcock, Australian. Neither Moneta Eagles (1924-2003) nor Dulcie Holland (1913-2000) wrote much organ music; but what they did write is distinctive and fresh, meriting far more frequent exposure than it has received.

If one aimed at a thoroughgoing feminist history of musical composition, one could make a good case for arguing that women composers have, on a *per capita* basis, abounded more in Australia than anywhere else. (Gordon Kerry, in his book *New Classical Music* [2009], equates this development – perhaps correctly – with Australia's early leadership, alongside New Zealand, in female suffrage.) Quite apart from Eagles and Holland, we need merely consider Margaret Sutherland, Miriam Hyde, Mirrie Hill, Esther Rofe, and the long-expatriate Peggy Glanville-Hicks, all old enough to have emerged during and after World War II; Anne Boyd, Helen Gifford, Moya Henderson and Jennifer Fowler, among those who came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s; and, among younger figures, Liza Lim, Elena Kats-Chernin, and Mary Finsterer. Both Eagles and Holland found themselves alike

debarred from the influential surveys of Australian music by Roger Covell (1967) and the late James Murdoch (1972). *Australian Composition in the Twentieth Century* (1978), by Sir Frank Callaway and David Tunley, made fleeting references to both ladies, but without enthusiasm or any discernible suggestion that they might be any more than epigones of other, more flamboyant artists. As so often with such cavalier dismissals, simple ignorance of the music involved played a vital part, although both Eagles and Holland were granted respectful and systematic treatment in Larry Sitsky's *Australian Piano Music of the Twentieth Century* (2005). The Summer 2003 number of *Australasian Sound Archive* carried an article specifically devoted to assessing Eagles and Holland in tandem.

Seven Eagles organ pieces – not all of them solos – can be found in the National Library of Australia's catalogue. Of these, maybe the finest is her 1963 *Fanfare*, which Melbourne's Gordon Atkinson once performed in Birmingham, Alabama. This *Fanfare* should indubitably be known to any player who wants a suitably attractive, unhackneyed, rugged recessional for a wedding or other such grand occasion. It has been, in fact, anthologised in the widely available 1990 collection *The Best of Wedding Music for Organ*. Even if it had a different title from *Fanfare*,

or no title at all, the invocation of trumpet calls to arms would still be obvious from the very opening.

The atmosphere at the start somewhat resembles that of (while never directly imitating) Walton in coronation – or *Henry V* – mood, but quickly gives way, at the end of Bar 3, to a sequence suggestive of Richard Strauss. Bars 4 and 5, like a milder version of certain *Elektra* passages, exemplify what Dr Johnson would have termed 'the most heterogeneous concords yoked by violence together'. The effect, as with so much Strauss, is of a harmonic edginess much greater than the abstention from outright dissonance would indicate. It is an effect which returns at Bars 21 and 22, the rest of the work reverting to the Waltonian spirit, very effectively handled. Whatever practical considerations governed the writing, one of the *Fanfare's* most obvious virtues to the performer is how idiomatically every phrase has been conceived for the instrument. So idiomatically, indeed, that the pedal part almost plays itself. A two-manual organ will serve; and while the 1990 published version supplies no clues as to stop choices (only general dynamic indications and changes from Great to Swell), any bold, classical-sounding, 'glassy' tonal combination of Open Diapason with reeds and mixtures should be successful.

# FANFARE

MONETA EAGLES  
(1963)

**Moderato**

Man. *ff* Gt. Ped.

4 etc.

The opening to the *Fanfare* by Moneta Eagles

Whereas Eagles's composition eschews any specific genre, Holland's *Tuba Tune* – also wholly suited to a two-manual instrument – is in the direct and legitimate line of descent from the identically named miniatures by England's Norman Cocker (1889-1953) and the New-Zealand-born Craig Sellar Lang (1891-1971). Substantially easier on the player than Lang's piece and much easier than Cocker's, Holland's production is no less appealing than these, and, like them, is more generously endowed with clues to registration than is the Eagles work. In lieu of an actual tuba stop, any decent trumpet stop – or even an unusually gruff oboe stop – will suffice for the main melody, which begins and ends in an assertive G major.

Like Eagles, Holland (true to the briskly logical attitude that governs her numerous theoretical textbooks) avoids awkward pedal figuration, the main technical challenge of her *Tuba Tune* being the repeated need for prompt and smooth changes of manual in mid-bar. While the tonic key is never seriously in doubt, the modulations along the way are much less predictable than might be supposed from the principal theme, and Holland saves her cleverest stroke till the end: an abrupt A flat major chord before the final reaffirmation of G.

Both the church and the concert hall are suitable venues for the Holland, as for the Eagles. At the very least, these compositions warrant the occasional outing in circumstances where *The Prince of*

*Denmark's March*, for instance, has overstayed its welcome through excessive use. Both fit on two printed pages each; neither lasts for more than four minutes. If you have not encountered them yet, you should give them a try. Meanwhile, cordial gratitude must be shown to Rhys Boak, chief organist at St Michael's Uniting Church in central Melbourne, who very courteously assisted *Organ Australia* by putting the relevant musical extracts into Sibelius software.

(The opening of *Tuba Tune* by Dulcie Holland is on the following page)

# Tuba Tune

1978

Dulcie Holland (1913-2000)

**Moderato**

Solo Reed.

Organ

Gt.

*f*

Pedals

5

3

3

etc.

Org.

Ped.



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