

## **"Sisters, the poor and friendless need you" Ethel Smyth's Songs of Sunrise**

The English composer, conductor and writer Ethel Smyth (1858–1955), who persevered throughout her life to assert herself in the male domain of "serious music", set her own career goals temporarily aside in 1910 and dedicated her skills for the causes of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). She is one of six female musicians whose estates and biographical writings are compared and examined with regard to their specific structures and contents in the FWF-funded project "The Musician's Estate as Memory Storage" (P33110-G). Smyth had paid no special attention to the suffragette movement until she met the leader of the WSPU, Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928). Pankhurst's propagated civil disobedience and direct actions not only impressed Smyth on a political level, she also formed a strong emotional bond with her (i. a. Lumsden 2015). As a musical output, three songs were published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1911 as "Songs of Sunrise". The first of these songs is "Laggard Dawn", which had personal significance for Smyth, followed by "1910" and "March of the Women". Made the anthem of the WSPU in January 1911, the march was already very popular by the time "Songs of Sunrise" was published. While "1910", dealing with Black Friday also won popularity among suffragettes, "Laggard Dawn", dedicated to those who died through police violence, hardly found its way into the repertoire of suffragettes.

This paper seeks to investigate why, of these protest songs, only the "March of the Women" has taken its place in the collective memory in the long term. In order to answer this question, also with consultation of Ethel Smyth's life writings, the history of the creation, publication and reception of "Songs of Sunrise" until today will be examined. In this context, also the significance of the WSPU commitment shall be reflected in terms of recent debates.

### **Short bio & Contact**

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