



# Ethel Smyth

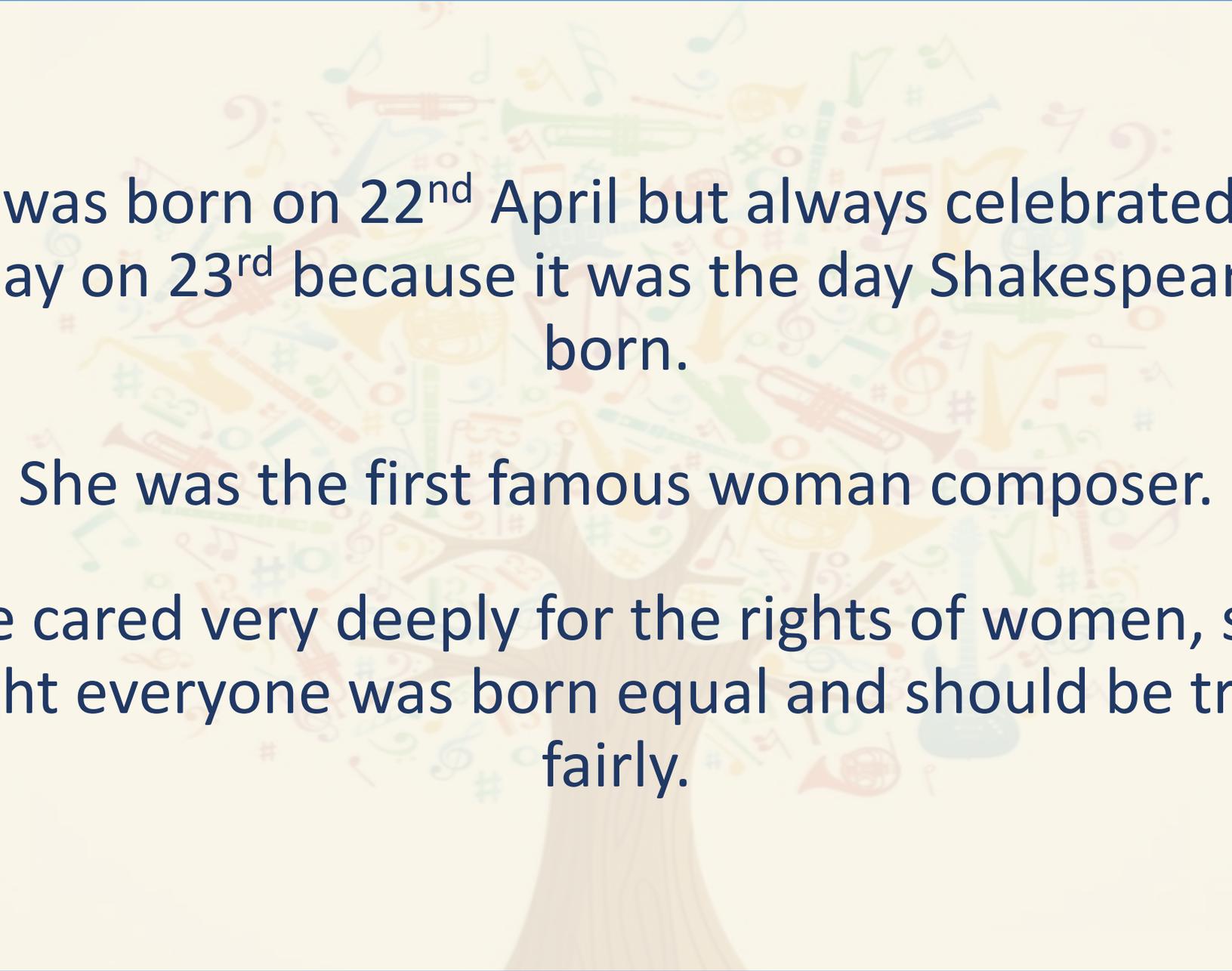
Composer of the Week





Born in Sidcup, Kent in the UK  
on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1858

Died in Woking, Surrey in the  
UK on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1944



She was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> April but always celebrated her birthday on 23<sup>rd</sup> because it was the day Shakespeare was born.

She was the first famous woman composer.

She cared very deeply for the rights of women, she thought everyone was born equal and should be treated fairly.

Her father didn't think being a composer was a suitable job for a woman but despite this, when she was 19, Ethel left for Germany, where she studied at the Leipzig Conservatoire.

One of the people she studied with there was Brahms. While she was there she also met Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Clara Schumann, and Dvořák.

Her opera **Der Wald** (The Forest), first performed in Berlin, was then performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. This opera made the most amount of money that year and Ethel was the first woman ever to have an opera performed there.

It was very difficult being a female composer at that time.

People said her strong rhythmic pieces didn't sound like a woman's compositions should.

When she composed quieter more tuneful pieces they said she wasn't able to compose like a man.



This is the **overture** to Ethel Smyth's most famous work, her opera, **The Wreckers**.

An **overture** is a piece of music for orchestra alone, which is played at the beginning of an opera, it sets the scene for the drama that is to come. Sometimes it uses themes (tunes) that will be heard later and sometimes it is just atmospheric.

The story is about a Cornish fishing village where, on stormy nights, the inhabitants lure passing sailing ships onto the rugged Atlantic rocks so that the cargoes can be plundered.

Can you hear the sound of the sea and the crashing waves in this music?





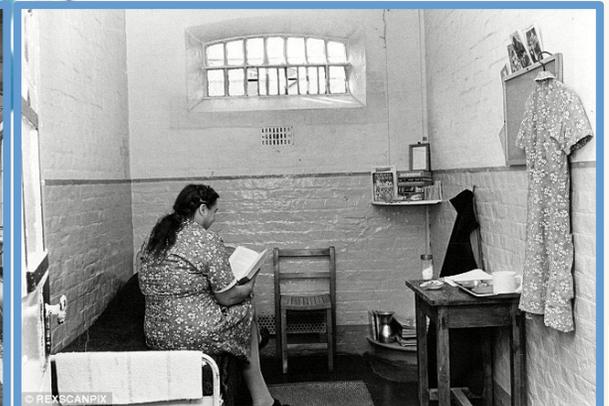
Ethel joined the fight for women to be given the vote and she became close friends with Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. She wrote a song, The March of the Women, which became the anthem of the Suffragettes.

## The March of the Women

Shout, shout, up with your song!  
Cry with the wind for the dawn is breaking.  
March, march, sing you along,  
Wide blows our banner and hope is waking.  
Song with its story, dreams with their glory,  
Lo! They call and glad is their word.  
Forward! Hark how it swells  
Thunder of freedom, the voice of the Lord.

In 1912 she was arrested during a suffragette demonstration and spent two months in Holloway prison with another 100 women.

When one of her friends went to the prison to visit her, he found the women marching around the yard singing, while Ethel was leaning out of her cell window conducting them with a toothbrush.



Bermina & Cheppins Jesse Lang Helen MacRae

Fanny D. Paleyhorpe Edith Hudson

James Smith  
Loyola de Souza Helena de Paiva

Alma Perrele

C 2

Mrs Gordon  
Madie Roberts

Louise Hargrett  
Margaret W. Johnson

Andrew J. Collier

Ellen Gray

Olivia Jeffcoat  
Isabelle Paterson

John MacArthur  
Mary Emily Stewart

Miss Margaret Wright  
Margaret Macfarlane  
Fiona Simmons

Sam Allen  
Vera Southwell  
By R. Jones

Mary A. Aldham  
Albionie Scarlet Post

Isabelle Colley  
Guthrie Long

Fanny Pease  
Katherine Galt

Miss Chappell

James Allan

Isabel M. Lambie

Margaret Howlett  
Rae & Jean Lee

Miss Ross

Miss Guitone

Lilla Lindsey

Miss Barker  
Katie Williams

Mathew Bardoly

E. K. Marshall

Louise Lilly

Burton & Gould

Frances Parkes

Votes for women

Holloway Prison

MARCH 1912

MARY HILLIARD

Miss Maudie  
Catherine Craig  
Miss Stewart  
Miss Stewart

C.C.2

Miss Stewart  
Miss Stewart

Miss Stewart

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In 1922 Ethel Smyth was made a Dame – the first woman composer ever to receive this honour.

When she was 75 years old her work was celebrated by a Festival. The final concert was at the Royal Albert Hall in the presence of the Queen. But, at this moment of long-overdue recognition, Ethel could hear neither her own music nor the applause of the crowds, because she was completely deaf.



Who else do we know that this happened to?



I feel I must fight for [my music],  
because I want women to turn their  
minds to big and difficult jobs; not  
just to go on hugging the shore,  
afraid to put out to sea.

— *Ethel Smyth* —

AZ QUOTES