

# Ella-Mary Jacob

The Story of a Horn and of a Horn Prize by **Chris Larkin**



Gill Levy's mother, Ella-Mary Levy (née Jacob) was born on 23rd April 1919 but died tragically young in 1952 when Gill was only three years of age, leaving behind a distraught husband and three young children, who never had a chance to thank her or say good-bye. Despite this, Gill says that she has distinct memories of her mother playing nursery rhyme tunes to her on her horn in their Hampstead house. Ella-Mary's family were musical, both her mother and her sister were alumni of the Royal Academy of Music and she herself was a pupil there from 1937 onwards. Her proud mother, Phoebe, recorded that she gained bronze medals in singing, horn and aural training at the 1937 prize-giving. These were followed by more of the same in the two following years.

**When she left the RAM she was described as "the second best young horn player in England" - the best being two years her junior at the Academy, her friend Dennis Brain.**

Both Ella-Mary and her sister, Margaret, became professional musicians – indeed Phoebe noted that Ella-Mary appeared on one occasion with either the London Symphony Orchestra or the London Philharmonic Orchestra and had a career as both pianist and singer. During the war Ella-Mary worked in the censor's department, regularly attending lunchtime con-

certs at the Wigmore Hall with her friend, Ruth Ive, who worked on the telephone line between Winston Churchill and Roosevelt. Ruth often had to tell the Prime Minister to watch what he said because the line might have been bugged by the Nazis.

During her time at the Academy Ella-Mary played second horn to Dennis Brain in the student orchestra and he remained a friend after she had left. The Brain family lived near the Levy family in Hampstead. Here's a picture of her from the Illustrated London News – no mistaking that famous mop of hair to her right (one assumes that Dennis was playing first but sitting the opposite way around as preferred by his father Aubrey).



Gill Levy relates that it had been agreed that Dennis would teach her when she was older. It was always assumed that she would learn the horn, that she never recalled any discussion about it, and always felt that she had no choice - but that she didn't mind as she always loved the sound of the horn. She remembers the somewhat stressful build up to his visit to her father and step-mother in Hampstead. They



repeatedly told her that she had to make a good impression and that she was really lucky that he wanted to teach her. Gill cannot remember meeting him, saying that she was swiftly hurried in and out of the morning room while he was there and that he told her father and stepmother that she was,

**"too small to learn the horn and he would return in a few years."**

She initially heard about his death in the car accident when she was at primary school and felt upset. It was a few days later when it was mentioned at home and she saw a newspaper article.

At the age of twelve, in 1960, Gill went off to boarding school, a co-educational Quaker school in Sidcot, Somerset. It had a good music department and there were several full-time music teachers for piano, singing and string instruments. A visiting part-time teacher, Edward Langley, taught brass. He was a professional trumpet player - a small solidly built man, with dark

hair and a florid face whom, Gill says, always wore a black pin-striped suit with a waistcoat and usually smelled of alcohol and cigarettes. She remembers Mr Langley's horror when he saw her horn. He explained it was probably made in about 1815 in Paris and had become obsolete in about 1937 - the dates stuck in her memory! (Mr. Langley was, in fact, quite wrong - the horn is a lovely Raoux-Millereau, with a Brown valve block, which dates it to sometime between 1885 and 1895).

The horn had to be transported from home to school and back each term in its battered brown canvas case with brown leather straps. Off it went from Paddington to Bristol Temple Meads where teachers then helped pupils to board the train to Yatton, where they would change to the little branch line to Winscombe. Gill recalls the horn falling off an overhead luggage rack and getting a nasty dent. Eventually a solid horn case from Boosey & Hawkes, costing £34, was acquired!

The school had a brass group, which Mr Langley conducted, that got together once a week for about 45 minutes before morning assembly. Gill is the third girl from the left.



Gill goes on to say that the school kept a small stock of second-hand musical instruments for pupils to try out or borrow before their parents decided to buy them their own instrument.

**On leaving school in 1965 she was offered £50 for the horn which she refused (without consulting her parents) as she hoped to continue playing it.**

Eventually she went to southern Africa as a Quaker Volunteer for nearly three years, working in Zambia, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Botswana.

She returned to England in 1971, planning to join a choir and a brass band as she thought this would be a good way of settling back into London life and getting to know new people. However, she was horrified to discover that her hearing had dramatically changed - believed to have been caused by a minor infection which she had not noticed. She could not identify her horn sound when playing in a group and became very sensitive to loud noises, which she found painful. The horn was sadly put on top of her wardrobe for many years.

Last year Gill's brother, Philip, organised a concert with the Mill Hill Music Club to celebrate Ella-Mary's life. After the concert ended, her younger brother, Martin brought the horn on to the stage and asked Jamie Thomas, a member of Horns Aloud, if he would like to try it. The result was stunning. Jamie explained that the horn could be repaired and was likely to be valuable. He advised Gill to take it to Woodhead Horns in West Hampstead, for appraisal and advice, which is where it now awaits a lucky purchaser.

## The Ella Mary Jacob Prize

Gill had thought that the prize at the RAM in her mother's memory had been instituted by her uncle, Alex Jacob, herself and two brothers in the 1960s. In fact it was her father, Sydney Levy who funded the prize in memory of Ella-Mary, not in 1945 as the Academy's list below has it, but after Ella-Mary's death in 1952. The first recipient, in 1953, was Aileen Way, second horn in the Scottish National Orchestra for many years, followed by names that most will know in British horn playing, the last being a certain Michael Thompson in 1972!

### *Ella Mary Jacob Prizes*

*Founded in 1945 by Sydney G. Levy in memory of his wife Ella Mary Jacob.*

<i>Aileen Way</i>	1953	<i>Anthony Ghidell</i>	1963
<i>Betty Edmonds</i>		<i>Elizabeth Bullock</i>	
<i>Ronald Yeowell</i>	1954	<i>John Pigneguy</i>	1964
<i>Horag Noble</i>		<i>Raymond Ering</i>	
<i>David Wilkinson</i>	1955	<i>Terence Johns</i>	1965
<i>David Sewell</i>		<i>Marcia Swindells</i>	
<i>Valerie Smith</i>	1956	<i>David Gripps</i>	1966
<i>Heather Williamson</i>		<i>Gareth Roberts</i>	
<i>Christopher Horton</i>	1957	<i>Philip Box</i>	1967
<i>Trevor Ling</i>		<i>Deirdre Watson</i>	
<i>Valerie J. Smith</i>	1958	<i>Christopher Larkin</i>	1968
<i>Anna Bisazza</i>		<i>Gawain Douglas</i>	
<i>Michael Gonorovsky</i>	1959	<i>Robin Davis</i>	1969
<i>Lally Reiniger</i>		<i>Christopher May</i>	
<i>Ronald Harris</i>	1960	<i>Richard Wakefield</i>	1970
<i>Juliette Bisazza</i>		<i>Paul Pearce</i>	
<i>James Warburton</i>	1961	<i>Edward Chance</i>	1971
<i>Mary Hammond</i>		<i>No Award</i>	
<i>Gillian Essame</i>	1962	<i>Michael Thompson</i>	1972
<i>Elizabeth Barnett</i>		<i>Philip Cartledge</i>	

Note: the second names in each year are, I think, second study singers, Ella-Mary's other passion.

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