

'The great Imogen Holst machine'



Imogen with Steven Isserlis and the score of *The Fall of the Leaf*. Isserlis played the piece in a concert to mark her seventieth birthday in 1977. Isserlis later suggested that she write the *String Quintet*.
Photograph: Nigel Luckhurst.

Composer

Imogen had won composition prizes as a student at the Royal College of Music, but in the 1930s she turned away from original works in favour of arranging folk-song and dance.

The peaceful setting of Dartington Hall inspired a return to original composition. In 1943, a well-reviewed concert at the Wigmore Hall – premiered three substantial works written that year: the *Serenade*, *Suite for String Orchestra* and *Three Psalms*.

Her own composing was put aside during her time as Britten's music assistant. However, in later years she began to write major works again. Towards the end of her life, seeing her 1982 *String Quintet* in print, Imogen commented, 'I feel like a real composer at last!'

Imogen conducting the Kneller Hall Band at Framlingham Castle, 1975.
Photograph: Nigel Luckhurst.



Imogen rehearsing for the inaugural concert of the 1967 Aldeburgh Festival, celebrating the opening of Snape Maltings Concert Hall.
Photograph: Brian Seed.

Conductor

One of the peaks of Imogen's time at Dartington was the performance she conducted in 1950 of Bach's B Minor Mass.

Her conducting skills were soon noted by Britten and Pears, and she often took the podium during the Aldeburgh Festival.

In 1975, she conducted the band of the Royal School of Military Music (Kneller Hall) in an open-air concert at Framlingham Castle. On the programme was her father's *Suite in Eb*. Audience-member Hester Agate later recalled:

In spite of the wonderful spectacle, the evening was a little lacklustre (mainly due to a persistent drizzle) until a diminutive figure in a special scarlet dress – 'to match the stripe down the soldiers' trousers' – took the conductor's baton. The band was transformed and played Holst's Suite as it can never have played it before – for Imo.

Teacher

The music department that Imogen set up at Dartington was way ahead of its time, but in fact she was consciously following the earlier example of her father, particularly at Morley College in London.

Her commitment to developing musicians at all levels continues to benefit today's students of the Britten-Pears Programme at Snape Maltings, who can use the extensive library that she donated in memory of her father.

Early music pioneer

Imogen's interest in early music was awakened at the Royal College of Music, where she became aware that standard editions of composers such as Bach had been heavily edited in the nineteenth century. Her influential editions and performances sought to bring modern audiences closer to the original sounds intended by early composers.



Imogen with Peter Pears and HRH Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother at the opening of the Britten-Pears School, which includes the Gustav Holst Library, in 1979.
Photograph: East Anglian Daily Times.



Imogen conducting 'Music on the Meare', at Thorpeness as part of the 1955 Aldeburgh Festival.



Imogen with Britten, Pears and the Purcell Singers at Blythburgh Church in 1956. As their name implies, the Purcell Singers, under Imogen's direction, included much early music in their repertoire.

Community musician

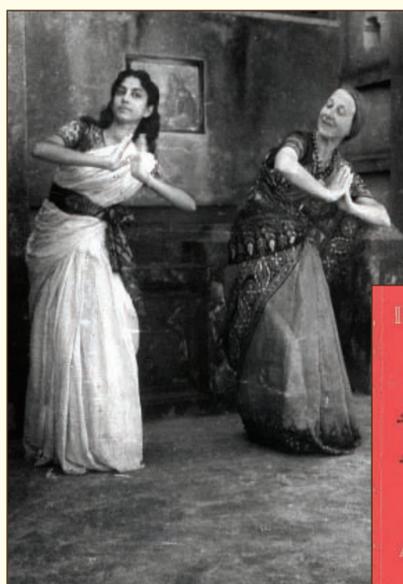
Imogen's enthusiasm for working with amateur singers and players made her a much-loved part of the Suffolk music scene. She was particularly associated with Aldeburgh Music Club, the Aldeburgh Festival Choir and Woodbridge Orchestral Society. The Music Club's open-air concerts on the boating lake at Thorpeness – became a popular feature of the Aldeburgh Festival.

Ethnomusicologist

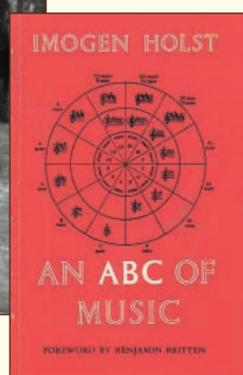
Imogen's fascination for folk-song and dance was not confined to English traditions. Typical of her wide interests was the brief sabbatical she took in India towards the end of her time at Dartington. She spent two months at Santiniketan University in West Bengal.

Writer

Imogen was a perceptive writer on music. As well as biographies of her father and Britten, she wrote introductory books about Bach and Byrd, and a popular *ABC of Music* 'to encourage livelier singing or playing, and livelier listening'.



Imogen learning a folk dance during her visit to West Bengal in the winter of 1950-51.



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