Mother of the BBC

Mabel Constanduros

and the Development of Popular Entertainment on the BBC, 1925-1957

Jennifer J. Purcell

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Bloomsbury Publishing Inc
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA

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First published in the United States of America 2020

Cover design by Eleanor Rose |
Cover photograph courtesy of BBC Photo Library, 1936

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Purcell, Jennifer, author.
Title: Mother of the BBC: Mabel Constanduros and the development of popular entertainment on the BBC, 1925-1957 / Jennifer J. Purcell.
Description: [New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020] | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "Demonstrates the immense influence exercised by Mabel Constanduros and early writers and performers, especially women, on the history of the BBC and popular entertainment" – Provided by publisher.
Identifiers: LCCN 2019050933 | ISBN 9781501346507 (hardback) | ISBN 9781501346538 (epub) | ISBN 9781501346514 (pdf)
Subjects: LCSH: Constanduros, Mabel. | Radio actors and actresses–England–Biography. | Radio authors–England–Biography. | British Broadcasting Corporation–Biography.
Classification: LCC PR6005.O43 Z68 2020 | DDC 828/.91209–dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019050933

ISBN: HB: 978-1-5013-4650-7
ePDF: 978-1-5013-4651-4
eBook: 978-1-5013-4653-8

Typeset by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

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For Rob and Liam
In Memory of Anthea Duigan, Richard Constanduros and Malcolm Down

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Acknowledgements

For a project that spans nearly a decade, much gratitude is owed to many. First, I would like to thank my colleagues and students at Saint Michael's College for their support and assistance throughout this project. Many thanks are due to my colleagues in the history department, Susan Ouellette, George Dameron, Doug Slaybaugh, Kathryn Dungy and Roberto Saba, for their support, friendship and animated discussion; thanks especially to Susan for reading several early drafts of this manuscript. Without the hard work and heroic efforts of our library staff, I doubt this book could have been completed. In particular, I am indebted to Naomi King, Kristen Hindes, Steve Burks and John Payne. I am equally grateful to Saint Michael's College for Faculty Development and Summer Research Grants, which have enabled me to carry out research in the UK. Among my students, I would like to thank Sean Morrissey, whose research and experience contributed much to my understanding of amateur dramatics. The insights, critical questions and discussion imparted by students in the Spring 2018 British Sitcom course were of immense value in developing some of my thinking about situation comedy. Research assistants Casey Fratkin and Winter Royce-Roll have also contributed in important ways to this project. Lucy Curzon, Paul Deslandes, Brian Lewis and Christina Baade have heard many of the arguments set out in this book during annual meetings of the Northeast Conference on British Studies (NECBS). Over the years, members of the NECBS have been gracious with their time and insights, and been endlessly supportive. I owe much to many in the NECBS, and to the National Conference on British Studies (NACBS), for being a nurturing and welcoming intellectual community. I am deeply grateful to Gilli Bush-Bailey for so generously sharing her insights and research on Constanduros, and for her unstinting support and friendship along the way; to Leo Hollis for his endless patience, creative insight and encouragement from the very beginnings of this project; to Marjorie Levine-Clark for her support over the years; and to both Andrea Salter and Jenna Bailey for their continued friendship and moral support. To Claire Langhamer, I am deeply indebted for her wise counsel, sharp insight and sustained support, and for commenting on what must have seemed like countless drafts of this manuscript.

I would like to recognize Professor John Annette, president of Richmond University, the American International University, London, for his generous financial support of the Richmond University Annual Summer Fellows Program, and to extend my thanks especially to Professor Dom Alessio and the 2016 Summer Fellows for their intellectual support at a very critical moment in this project's evolution.

The staff at the BBC Written Archives Centre in Caversham Park have been generously and warmly accommodating throughout this project. In particular, I would like to thank Matthew Chipping for his insightful assistance, and his care and patience through much of this project. I also must thank Jeff Walden for his assistance in the very early days of this work. Louise North and Marion Fallon have been endlessly helpful, welcoming and kind. At the Sutton Local Archives, I would like to thank Kath Shawcross for helping me ferret out details about Constanduros's life in Sutton. Dick Bower graciously shared his history of the Sutton Amateur Dramatic Club (SADC) with me; I am especially thankful for the opportunity to attend a production of the SADC with him in 2016. I would also like to thank Jonny Davies for his invaluable assistance at the British Film Institute. Others who have generously offered their time, resources and/or advice at various junctures throughout the project include Leah Clark, Paddy Scannell, Stephen Laing, Carolyn Scott-Jeffs and Julia Taylor. Many thanks are due to Jonathan Hope and Lucy Marten at Advanced Studies in England for lively conversations on the topic of British sitcom. At Bloomsbury Academic, I thank my reviewers Kate Murphy, Maggie Andrews and Hugh Chignell for their careful reading and feedback, to Mary Al-Sayed for seeing value in this project, and to Katie Gallof and Erin Duffy for their patience, good counsel and support throughout.

I wish to thank the BBC Written Archives Centre for permission to quote BBC copyright material and the BBC Photo Library for permission to reproduce the cover image and Figure 1. Thanks to Getty Images for permission to reproduce Figure 2. Warm thanks to Stephanie Down and Celia Martin, daughters of Denis Constanduros, for permission to print the photograph in Figure 3. I am especially grateful to Stephanie Down and Celia Martin for sharing a photograph from their family collection. I also thank Taylor & Francis, Ltd., for permission to reprint sections of the following articles in Chapters 1 and 3: '"Enthusiasm, Experiment and Gallantry in Action": Developing Light Entertainment on the Fledgling BBC, 1922–1932', *Cultural and Social History*, 15:3 (2018) 415–32 and '"Behind the Blessed Shelter of the Microphone": Managing Celebrity and

Career on the Early BBC – Mabel Constanduros, 1925–57', *Women's History Review*, 24:3 (2015) 372–88, copyright © the Social History Society, reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd, on behalf of the Social History Society, http://www.tandfonline.com.

This book began with a trip to Inverness, Scotland, and a warm reception from Mabel Constanduros's grandchildren, Anthea Duigan and Richard Constanduros. Richard and his wife, Kathleen, generously shared their family archives with me, while Anthea kindly opened her home and shared memories of her grandmother. Through Anthea, I was introduced to the family of Constanduros's writing partner and nephew, Denis. Over the years, Anthea and Stephanie and Malcolm Down have been enthusiastic and generous supporters of this project, sharing family stories, documents and photographs along the way. Members of the Constanduros family, including Robert Constanduros, have also been kind and generous in their time and support. It has truly been an honour and a delight to have been so warmly embraced by Mabel Constanduros's family over the course of my work on this book. I only wish that I could share the finished book with Anthea, Richard and Malcolm Down, and dedicate the book in their memory.

My family is the foundation on which this book rests. To my brother and sister, Bill and Kim, and to Doug, thanks for your encouragement over the years. To my mom, Diane, thank you for unconditionally loving and supporting the three of us no matter what we got/get up to, and to mom and Doug, thanks for being Mummum and Poppop and caring for Liam as I researched and wrote this book. Words are not enough to express the gratitude I feel for my son, Liam, and my husband, Rob, for making my life rich and my heart soar, and for always reminding me what is truly most important. Without Rob and his constant patience, selfless support, love and friendship, this book would never have been possible. Thank you.

Abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBC WAC	British Broadcasting Corporation Written Archives Centre
EFR	*English Family Robinson*
FLF	*Front Line Family*
GFP	General Forces Programme
ITMA	*It's That Man Again*
KF	*Kitchen Front*
MO	Mass-Observation
MOF	Ministry of Food
TIFH	*Take It from Here*
VRC	Variety Repertory Company

Introduction

Sometime in January 1957, Mabel Constanduros wrote to Val Gielgud, then head of BBC Drama, petitioning him to broadcast several plays and adaptations that were accepted by the BBC, but had yet to be produced. Constanduros was in the hospital, recovering from a severe heart attack, and was worried that she would be unable to work while she recovered. She hoped the income from broadcasting her adaptations of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* and Ernest Raymond's *We, the Accused*, as well as an original play she had written, would bridge the gap until she could write once again. Reminding Gielgud that the BBC, and he in particular, had been good to her over a career that spanned more than thirty years, Constanduros humbly apologized at the end of the letter for calling in this favour. This was the final letter Constanduros sent to the BBC. Though friends and family were hopeful about her recovery, Constanduros died in hospital on 8 February 1957.

Tributes to Constanduros underscored her importance as a pioneer radio writer and performer, arguing that her works were the 'forerunners of all of the "air families" in this country', placing her popular radio family, the Bugginses, at the head of a lineage that included the Dales, the Archers and the Groves.[1] Some highlighted her commitment to amateur theatrics and successful forays into the London theatre scene and post-war cinema. She was, however, a 'born broadcaster' and her career was fundamentally entwined with the BBC. Radio critic and close friend Collie Knox argued that she was the first to 'study the then new medium at all seriously', adding that 'her brilliant range of character studies, of whom perhaps Grandma Buggins is the most famous, and her incredible flow of output as a writer for radio, the films and the stage testify to one whose work was her life'.[2] To contemporaries, Constanduros was as important and popular as early radio legends Tommy Handley and Robb Wilton.[3] Yet, while Handley and Wilton are firmly situated in the popular mind – reruns of their performances still air regularly on BBC radio and the two feature prominently in popular and academic histories of the BBC or studies of British comedians – Constanduros rarely achieves notice as a cultural force on par with her male contemporaries. Indeed, within a decade of her passing, even Constanduros's

own family underrated her significance when they made the decision to destroy her personal diaries and documents to save space; by then, they felt her works were old-fashioned.[4] Given her love for writing and the prolific canon she left behind, Constanduros's personal documents must have filled a room – or, more likely, rooms. What remains, however, are scores of published material – novels, children's books, Samuel French acting editions and a short autobiography – along with a few recordings of Buggins family sketches, reams of radio scripts and thick folders filled with contracts, correspondence with BBC staffers and internal memoranda housed at the BBC's Written Archives Centre.

The book that could have been written with her personal documents would have been different than what is presented here. With Mabel's personal reflections at my disposal, this book would have read like a standard biography: intriguing questions that remain about her marriage and working relationships with male collaborators may have been answered. More importantly, Constanduros's personal papers may have given us the opportunity to witness the behind-the-scenes, private struggles and triumphs of a female writer and performer carving out a long and fruitful career at the BBC. What emerges from the extant record is instead a biography of Constanduros's working life, as well as a history of early BBC light entertainment. The history of light entertainment written here is rarely told from the institutional or policy level, as in Asa Briggs's magisterial five-volume history of the BBC or, more recently, in Martin Dibbs's fine study of early BBC Variety, but rather from the personal and relational perspective of a popular, jobbing writer and artist.

David Hendy has persuasively argued that biography can enrich our understandings of the BBC; in particular, he suggests that biography helps us understand that 'the BBC is best conceived as one of Barbara Rosenstein's emotional *communities* – a place where the stress is … more on "systems of feeling," the nature of affective bonds between people, the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate and deplore'.[5] Mabel's correspondence with the BBC reveals these emotional communities, sketching out the network of 'affective bonds' she nurtured with producers, staffers and performers within the BBC and with those outside the institution (like critic Collie Knox), which made it possible for her to entertain audiences for thirty-two years. While broader institutional policy serves to contextualize Constanduros's career, her correspondence provides insights into how both policy and these emotional communities functioned within the BBC to develop programming and to cultivate artists and writers. As Kate Murphy has shown in

her groundbreaking work on women staffers, biography also provides important insights into women's professional experiences at the early BBC. Murphy's reconstruction of the lives of women who worked for the institution in the early days reveals a BBC 'burst[ing] with women';[6] in reconstructing Constanduros's working life, a vast array of women writers and performers lost to the past, but well known to and beloved by audiences at the time, has been further illuminated. While the emphasis of this book is firmly situated in Constanduros's work and correspondence, where her work intersects with other writers, performers and staffers – both women and men – they are worked into the narrative. As with staffers, the early BBC provided numerous opportunities for many women to build a professional life; equally, women writers and artists were essential to the listening landscape of the early BBC.

More research is necessary to understand the full extent to which women writers and artists influenced (and continue to influence) the evolution of BBC entertainment, as well as the opportunities and challenges presented by these women's involvement with the BBC. It is hoped that by delving deep into the working life and art of Mabel Constanduros, this book will demonstrate how important reconstructing the lives and work of women writers and artists on the BBC is to creating a more inclusive, diverse and complex history of the BBC. As Gilli Bush-Bailey has highlighted, the 'patriarchal assumptions about class and gender difference' embedded at the heart of the BBC has resulted in a 'careless masculinity that has made and continues to make histories that marginalise or simply forget women, and forgets their role in laying the foundations of today's broadcasting'.[7] As will be seen, Constanduros pioneered important and enduring entertainment techniques and paradigms for situation comedies and soap operas in Britain. Such revelations contest the standard histories of popular entertainment in Britain, which have argued that both genres are essentially American innovations.[8] Furthermore, reconstructing the working lives, the public performances of self and the cultivation of career in which early BBC women artists and writers engaged offers opportunities to explore women's management of celebrity, their negotiations of professionalism, and the ways in which these performers and writers participated in broader cultural and national discourses.

While the presence of female writers and performers from the very beginnings of the BBC does not mean that all of them were engaged in 'domesticating the wireless', research into Constanduros's working life provides insights into the ways in which BBC programming became more female oriented and domestically

focused earlier than has been imagined. Maggie Andrews has argued that the domestication of the BBC took place in the 1930s, but Constanduros's popular comedy sketches and revues of the 1920s reveals that this domestication has roots in some of the earliest BBC entertainment.[9] In her 1925 BBC debut, Constanduros delivered monologues as both working- and middle-class female characters; more importantly, the Buggins family sketches (also 1925) were oriented towards the family, the feminine and the everyday. For over thirty years on air, Constanduros consistently presented the feminine and the family (both middle- and working-class) as sites of humour and popular entertainment.

Considering the ways in which the popular, and in particular the feminine popular, have been discounted, dismissed and denigrated, it is perhaps unsurprising that Handley and Wilton are well remembered while Constanduros is not. Soap opera, which Constanduros has long been credited with introducing British audiences to, has always carried the taint of the feminine and the popular, and has become a cultural shortcut for 'bad drama'.[10] This is particularly significant in Britain, where fears over the creeping emasculation of the national institution that is the BBC have held sway since the 1930s and where the public-service orientation of broadcasting has consistently shunned the popular as mindless, inauthentic, commercial and American.[11] Long-time head of BBC Drama, Val Gielgud, articulated this critical mentality when he traced the origins of soap opera in Britain back to Constanduros and himself:

> How many people remember Mabel Constanduros was lineal predecessor to Mrs Dale when she appeared as the main character in *The English Family Robinson* in 1937? For the introduction of this first of the soap-opera-style serials into British broadcasting I must accept full responsibility, and I confess that it weighs upon my conscience to do so. It was a time when we were perhaps more influenced than we should have been at Broadcasting House by trends and fashions in American radio. … For the soap-opera in the general, and for *The Dales* in particular, I can only blush and bow my head. I made no secret of my opinion that such programmes were aesthetically contemptible and sociologically corrupting. They tied up actors, producers, and writers alike in the equivalent of a chain-gang, offering the bait of security and regular employment, while simultaneously squeezing all virtue out of them by the process of a remorseless routine, demanding neither talent not personality, merely application. In particular, certain actors became so identified with the characters they played that they became almost useless in any other capacity. From the point of view of the listener, the persisting drip-drip-drip of such programmes destroyed

> all possibility of criticism. The audience was gradually drugged into belief in the reality of a dream-world ruled by bogus values, entirely occupied with trivialities.[12]

Here, Gielgud rehearses the usual criticism regarding the destructive, inauthentic, popular forces of soap opera: the 'aesthetically contemptible' drama that corrupted performers, writers and producers; the 'drip-drip-drip' of the popular that 'drugged' audiences; and the essential American-ness of the genre. Gielgud's dismissal of soap opera's dramatization of what he called 'trivialities' is echoed in his criticism of *Mrs. Dale's Diary* that the serial 'was [too] detached from public life, thus lacking social responsibility'.[13] Once the BBC brought in Basil Dawson as a writer intended to develop the 'male angle' in *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, the series shifted focus away from the purely private to include public and current affairs, earning higher status within the BBC.[14] The tension between the popular and the worthy seen in these discourses can be further detected in the BBC's designation of the department most associated with the popular as '*Light* Entertainment' (in contradistinction to *serious* broadcasting).

The deep cultural disdain that exists in Britain towards middle-class suburbia is another significant reason for the minimization of Constanduros's efforts to dramatize the everyday, domestic world of middle-class suburbia in *English Family Robinson (EFR)*. Orwell's searing invective on middle-class suburban life in *Coming Up for Air* (1939) is but one example of a cultural and intellectual phenomenon that has considered suburbia and suburban domesticity, in particular, to be 'stultifying and degrading'.[15] Andy Medhurst has observed similar strains in his exploration of the depiction of suburbia in twentieth-century British cinema and television: suburbia in these genres is often portrayed as 'a trap, offering nothing but drab conformism and frigid respectability'; further, women are usually implicated in this state of affairs, creating, accepting or representing the domestic 'routine and rut' from which men feel compelled to escape.[16]

Further deepening Constanduros's perceived irrelevance to British culture are her comedic works, which also trade in the female and the domestic. Women's humour has a long tradition of being sidelined, especially in Britain. J. B. Priestley's famously pompous retort that Jane Austen's humour amounted to little more than 'small potatoes', Regina Barreca has argued, 'illustrates the accepted critical position with regard to women's humor … a view so traditional and so unenlightened as to be of help in determining why women's comedy had gone unrecognized'.[17] The insidiousness of this assumption has played out in the ways in which women have traditionally been typecast as 'straight (wo)

men' to 'funny men' in British situation comedies, where, for instance, Prunella Scales's acerbic Sybil counterbalances the zany antics of Basil in *Fawlty Towers* (1975, 1979) or Dandy Nichols's near silence as Else Garnett plays up Alf's verbal tirades in *Til Death Us Do Part* (1966–75) – or more recently played out in the relational dynamics between Barbara (Sue Johnston) and Jim (Ricky Tomlinson) in *The Royle Family* (1999–2012). Frances Gray has noted that women in British sitcom typically represent the 'status quo, providing a commonsense context in which (male) eccentricity and anarchy can bloom'.[18] This situation is further exacerbated by the dearth of female writers of British situation comedy – a genre in which only a few writers, such as Carla Lane, Victoria Wood, Dawn French, Jennifer Saunders, Caroline Aherne and Miranda Hart, have managed to leave an impression in the popular British mind – and then only since the 1970s.[19] Women writers of comedy represent significant transgressions against the cultural norm, for, as Barreca reminds us, 'women are not meant to give utterance: when they do, they "step out of their function as sign". When they create comedy, they are stepping out of their "destined communication" and are deviating from it in order to transform their position'.[20] Long before Carla Lane's *Liver Birds* (1969–78, 1996) and *Butterflies* (1978–83) debuted on television, Mabel Constanduros's radio and stage works privileged the perspective of women and the feminine laughter of their everyday struggles.

Finally, Constanduros's early contributions to BBC entertainment were largely lost in the wake of the Second World War. As Val Gielgud reflected in the 1960s,

> One of the effects of Hitler's War was to make much of what happened before it blurred, unreal, or simply forgotten. I am surprised, looking back at the records, to find that so much which was hailed as original in post-war broadcasting had already appeared in slightly different forms between 1932 and 1939.[21]

Further complicating the recovery of interwar BBC history and the contributions of early radio pioneers is what Lance Sieveking called 'the ghastly impermanence of the medium', in which early live performances were literally lost to the ether and recorded performances were often erased to enable the recording of subsequent programming.[22] Exacerbating the ephemerality of early radio is the fact that documents were rarely preserved before the establishment of BBC Written Archives in 1932.[23] Perhaps the greatest force wiping away much of the interwar BBC, however, is the advent of television. Artists and writers who did not manage the transition to post-war television, such as Constanduros, seem to

be further relegated to the shadows of broadcasting history. Thus, this is a work primarily of recovery: the recovery of Constanduros's contributions to British popular culture and of the development of popular ('light') entertainment in the pre-television era. It is, however, an incomplete recovery that necessitates further research into early BBC programming, the emotional communities of the BBC and of the vast contributions women have made to the listening (and viewing) landscape of BBC entertainment. A review of *Radio Pictorial* and *Radio Times* in the interwar period will demonstrate that women entertainers and writers were not the rare, 'one-off' exception to the assumed rule that only men can deliver quality entertainment (especially comedy).[24]

'Secret ambitions – heaven knows where they came from'

Mabel Constanduros was born in South London in 1880. Born to Richard and Sophia Tilling, she was the eldest daughter of seven. Richard was the son of Thomas Tilling, who started the Tillings Omnibus Company in 1850 and was famous for revolutionizing bus service by introducing timed schedules.[25] Mabel grew up in Peckham, South London, and attributed much of her later radio Cockney characterizations to her experiences there. In a 1929 *Radio Times* article, she explained that from an early age, she enjoyed listening to and imitating her grandfather's employees, the children she met while volunteering in Lambeth and the colourful characters she met in the streets. She also drew inspiration from the Dickens novels that the family read aloud and performed for enjoyment.[26]

In her 1946 autobiography, *Shreds and Patches*, Constanduros remembered her thrill in entertaining others, even as a child. As early as seven years of age, she wrote and acted in plays for her family and learned to recite various rhymes and poems. Her 'stock piece' was Lewis Carroll's 'The Walrus and the Carpenter', which she played 'very dramatically with different voices for the Walrus, the Carpenter and the oysters'.[27] When she grew older, she spent her days writing, organizing and performing in plays and variety shows with friends and siblings. The pages of her 1899 diary, when she was nineteen, are crammed with efforts to put on a variety show at the Surrey Masonic Hall and the ecstasy of being told that well-known opera singer Iver McKay thought highly of her acting.[28]

She dreamt of nothing else than to train as an actress, but her parents refused to pay for her to attend dramatic school; they felt it was a 'craze' of all young girls

that passed when the 'Right Man came along'.[29] Her father offered to send her to Girton instead, but her mother insisted she stay at home to help with the family. 'Poor Mother!' Constanduros wrote in *Shreds and Patches*, 'She wanted to make me into a pattern housewife like herself, but I had secret ambitions – Heaven knows where they came from.'[30] Young Mabel remained at home acting as her father's secretary – a job she preferred to domestic work – until she married. Mabel married Athanasius ('Ath') Constanduros in 1907 and moved to Sutton, in London's burgeoning suburbs.[31]

Shortly after their marriage, both Mabel and Ath joined the Sutton Amateur Dramatic Club (SADC), where the two seem to have been active members for over a decade. Places in productions were purportedly competitive, and early veterans of the Club include Leslie Howard, Gladys Young (whose brother, William co-founded the Club), Helen Haye and Jack Warner.[32] Mabel and Ath often appeared together on stage during that period, but it was Mabel who was cast in the significant roles and it was Mabel who tended to receive notice in reviews of the productions.[33] They also appeared on stage together in a Lloyd's Dramatic Society production of *French Leave* in 1922. Mabel's last SADC productions were in 1925, after which, there is no record of her association with the Club until the 1950s when she became honorary vice-president along with other star SADC veterans.[34] Ath continued to appear on stage after his wife's departure until his death in 1937.[35]

At some point in 1919, Mabel sought out voice training with Elsie Fogerty at the Central School for Speech and Drama. With Fogerty, Mabel honed her writing and monologue skills, and found her voice. A student at CSSD remembered how Fogerty's work with Constanduros transformed a 'little woman … who struggled with lovely lyrics, which her strangely husky voice just did not suit' into a 'great little artiste [who], once in command of her own voice' had the students 'helpless with laughter' or 'could reduce us to tears just as easily'.[36] Further evidence of Fogerty's mentoring exists in the fact that her 1920s SADC appearances warranted far more positive and substantive reviews than she had received previously.[37] It is unclear who specifically encouraged Mabel to audition for the BBC – most accounts mention someone who saw her perform and urged her to try out – but Mabel does credit Fogerty for giving her the 'courage to go through the door of Broadcasting House'.[38]

When Mabel Constanduros began her acting and writing career on the BBC in 1925, the BBC was less than three years old and was in search of its identity and relevance within British culture. It was an institution in the making;

specializations had yet to crystalize, and opportunities abounded for enterprising individuals to develop material and techniques specific to the new medium, as well as to influence the evolution of programming. Constanduros first appeared on the BBC at the age of forty-five, as an actress in the First BBC Repertory Company, and was still performing and writing on radio thirty-two years later, long after the BBC had established its credentials as a national institution.

Spanning such a long and critical period during the history of the BBC, Constanduros's lengthy career offers superb opportunities to view BBC's institutional and programming history not from the top-down institutional, departmental or policy documents, but rather bottom-up, through the lens of the performer/writer. This methodology affords us different perspectives through which new insights are gained into the evolution of popular entertainment from its early beginnings on the BBC. Additionally, the 'star' status that Constanduros enjoyed from her earliest solo performances on the BBC opens up spaces for the analysis of the social, cultural and performative aspects of radio celebrity, from the beginnings of radio in the 1920s to its eclipse by television in the 1950s. The performance of female celebrity also brings up the ways in which gender impacts the exploration of what is knowable in the historical record, and emphasizes the essential silences that were cultivated by women as they sought to carve out a career while negotiating their public identities in the early to mid-twentieth century.

Chapter 1 looks at Constanduros's experiences on the early BBC and considers how the fluid nature of the early institution opened up spaces for amateurs, such as herself, to not only become professionals but also impact the entertainment offerings of the BBC. The chapter sketches out a picture of the BBC in its exciting and uncertain beginnings, following staffers and performers in their efforts to understand the medium and to provide a service worthy of the lofty values set out by its first general manager and later its first director general, John Reith. This discussion demonstrates how – much as the start-up tech companies of today – early staffers found themselves wearing numerous hats in order to learn the business, develop and understand the technology, and keep the organization – and its limited set of programmes – running. Beyond the frenzied excitement and hectic working schedules of the staffers, decisions made by programming executives underscore the exciting possibilities of sound, firmly situating the early BBC within the larger societal context which saw increased popular interest in spiritualism and unseen phenomena, as well as popular psychology, in the wake of the First World War.

During its first decade, the BBC faced numerous challenges in attracting well-known stage professionals to the microphone, not least because the microphone required them to adapt visual stage acts for an aural medium. As a result, the BBC had to turn to amateurs to provide talks and entertainment. Amateur performers, like John Henry (the first popular comedian of BBC radio) and Constanduros, proved willing to adapt their material to suit both the medium and its domestic audience. The innovations developed by these early radio entertainers became important seedlings for popular entertainment on both radio and television.

Chapter 2 introduces the Buggins family as a case study for understanding the origins of situation comedy on the BBC. During the first year of her work on the BBC, Constanduros experimented with bringing staged monologue and duologue to the microphone. Unhappy with these forms on radio, and anxious to distinguish her work from other early radio comedians, Constanduros created comedy that was centred on the day-to-day domestic intrigues of a working-class Cockney family. Moving away from the popular cross-talk routines of early radio variety, Constanduros crafted short situational sketches more theatrical in style than the typical music hall turns found on radio at the time, thus eschewing direct forms of audience address by introducing the fourth wall into radio comedy.[39] At the same time, the Bugginses became the first comedic family in Britain, beating out America's first radio family, the Goldbergs, by a year. In creating the first radio family, Constanduros provided a foundation for situation comedy that has proved remarkably enduring and popular.

Analysis of early Buggins radio sketches in the second chapter also reveals how writers and artists experimented with, and learned to craft, entertainment which exploited the aural medium in order to successfully engage the imaginations of their listeners. Further, the chapter considers audience responses to the Buggins sketches, demonstrating the ways in which listeners interacted with and interpreted early radio programming. Finally, the humour of the Buggins family sketches is analysed within the context of early twentieth-century British history and the ways in which the working classes were represented on early BBC radio are discussed.

Chapter 3 addresses the evolution of radio celebrity in the interwar period, beginning with an analysis of Constanduros's radio appearances in the 1920s and the 1930s. Set within the context of rapid technological innovation at this time, the analysis reflects on the ways in which listeners negotiated the programmatic landscape without the aid of seriality or fixed-point scheduling in order to shed

light on the ways in which listeners became familiar with popular programming and entertainers. Fan magazines, such as *Radio Pictorial*, were also integral to the construction of celebrity in this period. Expanding beyond these considerations, I explore the contours and experiences of early BBC radio celebrity, especially as it relates to gender, and consider how celebrities cultivated silences and carefully constructed a publicly consumed private life.

Chapter 4 discusses the evolution of BBC Variety entertainment in the 1930s, and how artists like Constanduros responded to the shifting landscape of radio entertainment in the period in order to advance their careers at a time when other early radio humourists, such as Helena Millais, were rapidly becoming obsolescent. The chapter also demonstrates how Constanduros used her celebrity to open up opportunities that expanded her reach beyond the microphone; in particular, I look at her unsuccessful foray into music hall, her more successful attempts at writing and acting for the 'legitimate' and amateur stage, and the translation of her radio families and their worlds into novels. Here we can perceive how BBC writers and performers engaged in the cross-fertilization of multiple media in ways that both strengthened career opportunities and enhanced audience experience.

Because Constanduros sought to represent both working- and middle-class life, and because the classed profile of listeners changed so drastically during her career (from a largely middle-class audience in the 1920s to a more representative listenership by the mid-1930s), we can also analyse crucial dimensions of class in the representation of national identity through popular media. Constanduros's lengthy career and expansive oeuvre affords insights into the manner in which the BBC sought to represent the nation and appeal to listeners at critical moments across the mid-twentieth century. Further, through her efforts to cultivate her radio career and broaden her cultural reach, we can also consider representations of family and nation on the stage, in literature and in the cinema. This attempt to reach beyond radio also reveals intersections that existed between these media in the era before television became the primary cultural medium.

Chapter 5 looks at the efforts of both Constanduros and the BBC to entertain audiences during the Second World War. Alongside the wartime history and development of BBC popular entertainment, this chapter discusses Constanduros's efforts to remain relevant during the Second World War. Using programming information, scripts and contracts, it specifically details the early efforts of the BBC to respond to the conflict and to present popular entertainment to the nation.

The majority of this chapter focuses on the way in which People's War rhetoric drove artists and writers like Constanduros to participate in the war effort through their art. In particular, I focus on the Ministry of Food's (MoF) relationship with the BBC to analyse the ways in which both the Corporation and the artists supported governmental propaganda efforts. Taking the immensely popular Buggins family *Kitchen Front (KF)* sketches as a case study, I analyse wartime scripts and correspondence with the BBC to discuss the role of popular entertainment on the *KF* programme. Further, detailed analysis of the scripts provides insight into the evolution of propaganda on the programme; specifically, I chart how Buggins family characters evolved over the course of the war, especially in their relation to the societal expectations of the People's War. This analysis will also demonstrate the propaganda value of the Buggins family wartime sketches and will consider the ways in which the Buggins family represented wartime working-class interests, thus creating possibilities to draw the working classes into the national fold.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the BBC-constructed version of an 'ordinary' British family as depicted by *English Family Robinson* (*EFR*) (1938). I then follow the programme (which is considered the first British soap opera) into wartime, as the Robinsons hold up a mirror to the nation and help redefine the 'ordinary' during the People's War. In addition to tracing the evolution of *EFR* through the 1940s, I also discuss the ways in which Constanduros continued to write 'ordinary' families, both dramatically and humorously, in wartime through fruitful collaborations with her nephew, Denis Constanduros, and with Howard Agg. Exploration of *EFR* and these collaborative ventures outlines the early developments of realism particular to British soap opera and comedy, as well as to British cinema.

Additionally, the chapter analyses the ways in which both gender and class were represented on the BBC in the 1930s and the 1940s. Specifically centring on Constanduros's radio writing and correspondence with the BBC, the analysis not only unpicks popular depictions of gender and class on radio but also illuminates how societal assumptions about gender might be deployed behind the scenes at the BBC in efforts to build a successful career on radio. In particular, Constanduros's leverage of gendered assumptions illustrates how she became the mother of the BBC in her promotion of numerous actors' and writers' careers on the BBC.

In Chapter 7, I follow the complex cultural shifts evident in the reconstruction of a national sense of the 'ordinary' as the nation moved from a wartime to

a peacetime footing. The main part of this analysis will be reflected through consideration of the Robinsons (from *EFR*) on stage in *Acacia Avenue* (1943) and in its cinematic adaptation, *29 Acacia Avenue* (1945), as well as the changing onscreen fortunes of the Huggett family, another Constanduros creation. After their first appearance in the hit post-war film *Holiday Camp* (1947), the Huggetts (starring Jack Warner and Kathleen Harrison, as well as a young Petula Clark) featured in three further films and spawned a popular radio series in the 1950s. Both movie families (produced by a famous cinematic couple, Sydney and Muriel Box) not only offer fascinating insights into the post-war reconstruction of the 'ordinary' British – in particular the 'ordinary' British family – but also enable fruitful examinations of the intersections between radio and cinema. The chapter continues the overall framework of the book by situating Constanduros's career within the broader history of the changing BBC, charting challenges presented by major shifts in audience expectations and experiences brought on by wartime experiences and the rising fortunes of television.

The book concludes with Constanduros's efforts to remain relevant and to nurture her career in the final years of her life. In these endeavours, Constanduros continued to foster relationships with staff on an ever-shifting BBC, adapting novels, appearing on nostalgia programmes and becoming a regular contributor to the popular post-war programme *Woman's Hour*. Constanduros also tried her hand at television, but she remained firmly a radio professional, and thus the chapter considers the ways in which radio pioneers and professionals, such as herself and Val Gielgud, regarded the advent of television. Finally, I reflect upon the ways in which the Second World War and television have rendered many early radio pioneers largely invisible in histories of the BBC and British entertainment, and underscore the vital importance of women as writers, staffers, producers and performers in the BBC since its very inception.