

The KS Journal Reader



# THE WOMEN IN MUSIC ANTHOLOGY

Eugene Gates & Karla Hartl

## The Women in Music Anthology



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Edited by  
Eugene Gates and Karla Hartl

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There is a habit of thinking that history will prove the greatness of something. Time will tell. But who is doing the telling? Who is keeping, preserving, writing about, and performing the music? History has been his story.

—Linda Catlin Smith, *Composing Identity*:

*What is a woman composer?*

As long as the entitled and powerful decide what platforms are made available, they also decide what and who is allowed to be heard. It's a form of passive censorship. If there is no platform for women composers, how can we hear what they have to say?

—Michael Haas, *Female Composers: 'Degenerate,'  
'Deviant' or Deliberately Downgraded?*

The exact worth of my music will probably not be known till naught remains of the author but sexless dots and lines on ruled paper.

—Ethel Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats*

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## PREFACE

As open access journals have their life-span and may one day disappear from the worldwide web, the purpose of this anthology is to guarantee a prolonged life to a group of ‘best of’ articles, published in the *Kapralova Society Journal* over the course of sixteen years. They have been revised, some substantially, and updated for inclusion in this book.

Part I of our anthology is dedicated to historical women composers and musicians. It begins with two major essays on the *Woman Composer Question* that explain why, even today, we rarely see women included in music history textbooks, or hear their music performed by symphony orchestras or in major concert halls. The book then continues with chapters that explore, in some depth, the lives and legacies of eight women musicians who made a major impact in their respective fields and communities: Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Clara Schumann, Ethel Smyth, Amy Beach, Agatha Backer Grøndahl, Maude Valérie White, Florence Price, and Vera Lynn. One chapter also focuses on the history of all-female orchestras.

Part II is dedicated to the latest research on Czech composer Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915–1940). For this anthology, we have selected only essays that may appeal to a broader audience; they also address more general issues and/or provide a historical context to the times in which Kaprálová lived and died, and to the Czech musical culture of the period. Several chapters pertain to the intriguing task of reconstructing music from sketches and autograph fragments, and we have selected three examples of possible approaches to tackle such a task successfully.

We hope that the anthology will find its readers not only among students of music history and music performance, but also among adult learners. The women, whose legacies have been portrayed in the following chapters, deserve as much.

*Eugene Gates and Karla Hartl*



## Part I



## THE WOMAN COMPOSER QUESTION: PHILOSOPHICAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

A major topic of public debate in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the so-called “woman question.” A sub-category of this controversial subject was the “woman composer question”—or, as one contemporaneous writer termed it, “the much-vexed question of the woman composer.”<sup>1</sup> References to the woman composer question loomed large in Romantic philosophy, treatises on female education, and music criticism. This chapter examines some of these writings in order to demonstrate their relationship to both the limited content of music education for women throughout much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—specifically, the lack of access to adequate theoretical subjects—and the double standard in music criticism, based on a system of gendered aesthetics that allowed critics to evaluate a woman’s compositions in terms of their appropriateness to her sex.

Pianist/conductor and writer on music Hans von Bülow (1830–1894) expressed the view of many of his contemporaries, when he penned the following condemnation of female creative potential in music: “Reproductive genius can be admitted to the pretty sex, but productive genius unconditionally cannot. . . . There will never be a woman composer, at best a misprinting copyist. . . . I do not believe in the feminine form of the word ‘creator.’”<sup>2</sup>

Writing in the early 1880s, German music historian Emil Naumann proclaimed: “Music is the most masculine of all the arts, for art essentially depends on the creative idea. All creative work is well known as being the exclusive work of men.”<sup>3</sup> In this terse statement of nonconfidence in woman’s creative ability, Naumann too was merely reflecting the prevailing belief of nineteenth-century society at large.

The prejudice against female composers recognized no national boundaries, nor was it confined to the writings of philosophers, educators, critics and music scholars. French author Guy de Maupassant echoed similar thoughts in his 1885 preface to the Abbé Prevost's *L'Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*:

The experience of centuries . . . has proved that woman is, without exception, incapable of any true artistic or scientific work. . . . The attempt is useless, since we have not yet produced the female artist or musician, notwithstanding all the desperate efforts of daughters of 'concierges' and of all the marriageable young ladies in general who study the piano, and even composition. Woman on earth has two parts to play, quite distinct roles, both of them charming—Love and Maternity!<sup>4</sup>

Implicit in such diatribes against female musical creativity is the notion that certain innate intellectual deficiencies render women incapable of achieving success as composers. To trace the genesis of this idea, one need only consult the works of early Romantic and German Idealist philosophers.

### **Complementary Intellectual Abilities**

The theory that men and women are endowed by nature with separate but complementary intellectual abilities first appeared in the writings of Western philosophers around the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), generally thought to be the father of the Romantic movement, believed, for example, that “a perfect man and a perfect woman should no more be alike in mind than in face.”<sup>6</sup> According to Rousseau, the complementary relationship of man and woman resulted in sex-differential styles of intellectual function. In Book V of *Emile*,

his treatise on education, he tells us: "All the faculties common to both sexes are not equally shared between them, but taken as a whole they are fairly divided. . . . Woman has more wit, man more genius; woman observes, man reasons."<sup>7</sup>

It will prove instructive at this point to compare the above passage with the following short excerpt from Rousseau's *Letter to d'Alembert*, for it becomes immediately apparent that his scornful assessment of female creativity is inextricably linked to his theory of complementary intellectual abilities:

Women, in general, do not like any art, know nothing about any, and have no genius. . . . They can acquire science, erudition, talents, and everything which is acquired by dint of hard work. But that celestial flame which warms and sets fire to the soul, that genius which consumes and devours, that burning eloquence, those sublime transports which carry their raptures to the depths of hearts, will always lack in the writings of women; their works are all cold and pretty as they are; they may contain as much wit as you please, never a soul; they are a hundred times more sensible than passionate.<sup>8</sup>

Since Rousseau was convinced that "the search for abstract and speculative truths, for principles and axioms in science, for all that tends to wide generalisation, is beyond a woman's grasp,"<sup>9</sup> it followed that

a woman's education must therefore be planned in relation to man. To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time, and this is what she should be taught while she is young.<sup>10</sup>



In her recent critique of Rousseau's theory of female education, Jane Roland Martin draws attention to the fact that both Emile and Sophie, Rousseau's perfect man and woman, were born with a wide range of intellectual abilities and talents. While Rousseau attributes to nature only those aptitudes and capacities that, in his opinion, should be nurtured, they are not the only ones that *could* be nurtured. In other words, Rousseau is unashamedly selective. He calls "natural," and chooses to develop, only those traits that fit the respective societal roles he has assigned to Emile and Sophie. In so doing, he ensures that Emile's education will equip him for his dual role as citizen and head of the family while Sophie's education will prepare her only for the subordinate role of wife and mother within the context of a patriarchal society.<sup>11</sup>

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) also subscribed to the concept of complementary male/female modes of reasoning. In Section Three of *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, he wrote:

The fair sex has just as much understanding as the male, but it is a beautiful understanding, whereas ours should be a deep understanding, an expression that signifies identity with the sublime. . . . Laborious learning or painful pondering, even if a woman should greatly succeed in it, destroy the merits that are proper to her sex, and because of their rarity they can make of her an object of cold admiration; but at the same time they will weaken the charms with which she exercises her great power over the other sex. . . . [Therefore,] the beautiful understanding selects for its objects everything closely related to the finer feeling, and relinquishes to the diligent, fundamental, and deep understanding abstract speculations or branches of knowledge useful but dry.<sup>12</sup>

Kant's theory of female education followed the general conventions of his era. Being a disciple of Rousseau, he believed that

the only reason for educating a girl was to prepare her for the type of life she would be expected to lead both biologically and socially. Kant saw no purpose in developing her intellect; rather, he advised that educators should concentrate on the formation of her taste and feelings. To accomplish this, he recommended that girls study a little history and geography, and that they be given the opportunity to develop a “feeling for expressive painting and for music, not so much as it manifests artistry but sensitivity—[since] all this refines or elevates the taste of this sex.”<sup>13</sup>

The mere thought that a female might aspire to become a composer would have caused Kant to recoil in horror. In his opinion, the woman who gave herself over to such intellectual pursuits “might as well even have a beard; for perhaps that would express more obviously the mien of profundity for which she strives.”<sup>14</sup> In fact, as the following passage from his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* shows, Kant seriously doubted that there could ever be a truly scholarly woman: “As for the scholarly woman, she uses her books in the same way as her watch, for example, which she carries so that people will see that she has one, though it is usually not running or not set by the sun.”<sup>15</sup>

Despite their negative views of the feminine intellect, neither Rousseau nor Kant regarded woman’s alleged lack of genius and abstract reasoning power as a barren space in the female mind. Nature had compensated for the absence of the cold and analytical modes of thought in women by endowing them with other more appropriately feminine mental traits—feeling, taste, sensibility and practicality. Thus, according to Rousseau and Kant, the complementary characters of male and female together formed a single moral being.<sup>16</sup> As Kant expressed it: “In matrimonial life the united pair should, as it were, constitute a single moral person, which is animated and governed by the understanding of the man and the taste of the wife.”<sup>17</sup>

Although this cumbersome arrangement was supposed to benefit both sexes equally, it seems clear that it was intended to be

especially advantageous for males. However, as Martin's analysis of *Emile* demonstrates, a theory of education based on the notion of complementary intellectual abilities effectively deprives everyone of self-sufficiency. Educated under such a system, Man would ultimately be ill equipped to function as paterfamilias and civic leader because he would be obliged to allow himself to be manipulated by womanly wiles. Conversely, Woman would never be granted the independence of mind that might free her from playing this manipulative role.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, while Rousseau and Kant claimed that their respective theories manifested their adulation of women, these theories were also used to mask conveniently the exclusion of females from many traditionally male professions.<sup>19</sup> One such profession was that of musical composition.

Like his predecessors Rousseau and Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) also believed that females have little capacity for abstract thought. “As a result of their weaker reasoning power,” he wrote, “women are as a rule more affected by what is present, visible and real than they are by abstract ideas.”<sup>20</sup> Their intellectual limitations, Schopenhauer explained, are due to an innate immaturity which is peculiar to the female sex. To him, women were “big children, their whole lives long; a kind of intermediate stage between the child and the man, who is the actual human being, ‘man.’”<sup>21</sup>

Schopenhauer claimed that woman's aptitude for dealing with the present, the real, and the visible not only rendered her incapable of abstract thought, but it also prevented her from creating works of genius. True creative genius, which he defined as “nothing more than the most complete objectivity,”<sup>22</sup> is found, according to Schopenhauer, exclusively among males, and then only rarely.<sup>23</sup> “Women,” in Schopenhauer's opinion, “can have remarkable talent, but not genius, for they always remain subjective.”<sup>24</sup> In his essay “On Women,” which is probably the most extreme example of misogyny in the whole of Romantic

philosophy, Schopenhauer summed up his views on female creativity as follows:

Neither for music, nor poetry, nor the plastic arts do they possess any real feeling or receptivity. . . . Nor can one expect anything else from women if one considers that the most eminent heads of the entire sex have proved incapable of a truly great, genuine and original achievement in art, or indeed creating anything at all of lasting value: . . . the reason being precisely that they lack all objectivity of mind. . . . Women, taken as a whole, are and remain thorough and incurable philistines.<sup>25</sup>

In light of woman's supposed intellectual inferiority, Schopenhauer advocated that the goal of female education should be to train young women to become good housewives: "What there ought to be is housewives and girls who hope to become housewives and who are therefore educated, not in haughtiness, but in domesticity and submissiveness."<sup>26</sup>

Three major themes emerge from these writings of Rousseau, Kant and Schopenhauer: first, that women by nature lack objectivity, and hence both the power of abstract reasoning and the capacity for creative genius; second, that if a woman should possess these "masculine" intellectual traits, it is unwise to encourage their development, since they run counter to her nature (as defined by the aforementioned philosophers), and thus detract from her femininity; and finally, that because of woman's supposedly inherent intellectual frailty, the goal of female education should be to prepare women not for independence within the public sphere of professional life, but rather for subordination to the male within the private sphere of matrimony and motherhood. These three related ideas are deeply embedded in the fabric of Romantic thought. Together, they created a veritable obstacle course for any woman who hoped to make a career in musical composition.

## Music as an Accomplishment

If the tenor of most nineteenth-century literature on the role of music in the education of young women is any indication, the influence of such philosophers as Rousseau, Kant and Schopenhauer cannot be dismissed lightly. One would be hard-pressed indeed to cite even one treatise dealing with female musical education that recommended tuition in music theory. Educational theorists believed that such instruction might tempt a girl to aspire to a career in composition, thus diverting her from the course of her “true destiny”—that of housewife and mother. Writing in 1842, Mrs. Sarah Ellis, author of a widely read book of advice on etiquette and female education, expressed it this way:

So far as cleverness, learning and knowledge are conducive to woman's moral excellence, they are . . . desirable, and no further. All that would occupy her mind to the exclusion of better things, all that would involve her in the mazes of flattery and admiration, all that would tend to draw her thoughts from others and fix them on herself, ought to be avoided as an evil to her, however brilliant or attractive it may be in itself.<sup>27</sup>

However, while music theory was not regarded as an appropriate subject for girls, learning to play the piano moderately well was encouraged as a worthwhile feminine “accomplishment.”<sup>28</sup> “In the modern System of Female Education,” wrote A. Burgh in 1814, “this fascinating accomplishment is very generally considered, as an indispensable requisite.”<sup>29</sup> Educationist Johann Campe agreed that the acquisition of a modest degree of pianistic skill was an essential part of a young lady's education, but thought it necessary to warn women never to flaunt their ability to perform, and especially not when their housewifely tasks had been left unfinished.<sup>30</sup> Friedrich I. Niethammer, another educational theorist,

also recommended the study of piano for girls, but was severely critical of “certain degenerate features in women’s education,” namely, that girls were sometimes being trained to become virtuosi.<sup>31</sup> Mrs. Ellis held a similar view. She wrote: “[Piano playing] ought not to be cultivated as a medium of display, so much as the means of home enjoyment; not so much as a spell to charm the stranger, . . . as a solace to those we love, and a tribute of gratitude and affection to those who love us.”<sup>32</sup>

Judging from an 1883 article by George Eggleston in Harper’s *New Monthly Magazine*, a tolerable level of piano proficiency was still considered an indispensable accomplishment for middle class young women in the latter decades of the century. Significantly, in the passage quoted below, Eggleston chooses to equate “a knowledge of music” with a young woman’s ability to play the piano—a skill that would later enhance her domestic life:

The study of music, and especially the acquirement of practical skill in making music, is . . . well recognized as a necessary part of a girl’s education. . . . When we reflect upon the value of musical skill to a woman as a resource for her own entertainment, as a means of adding to the attractiveness of her home, and more than all, as a refining, softening influence upon children, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that a knowledge of music is as necessary to a girl as an acquaintance with arithmetic is to a boy; and as no boy not an idiot is incapable of acquiring knowledge of arithmetic, so no girl with hands and ordinary mental capacity is incapable of acquiring skill in music.<sup>33</sup>

In short, tuition in music (i.e., piano, and to a lesser extent singing) was thought to be a fundamental constituent of every middle class girl’s education, but for reasons other than the development of musical talent. Arthur Loesser explains:

Being ‘accomplished’ generally was judged to render a girl a more valuable prize in the marriage gamble; her little singing and piano playing was not only an amorous lure, . . . it was also a way of confirming a family’s gentility. A possible candidate for a young lady’s hand was expected to feel pleased to ally himself with a family of such refinement.<sup>34</sup>

It is readily apparent that the tradition of music as a feminine accomplishment—with its emphasis on preparation for marriage and child-rearing—was closely linked to the educational theories of Rousseau and his disciples.

### **Women Composers before 1880**

The “modern system of female education” left its imprint on the musical style of many mid nineteenth-century female composers. Since the vast majority of musically gifted women had received no tuition in music theory, they were ill equipped to produce extended and complex works. They therefore had little choice but to direct their creative energies into writing parlor music, i.e., ‘semi-classical’ piano solos and duets, religious songs and sentimental ballads, composed expressly for amateur performances in the home.<sup>35</sup> Ironically, although a number of women gained fame as composers of parlor music, their success in this field also helped to forge an image of the female composer as a dilettante who could write music according to the standards of feminine accomplishment, but not to those of serious art.<sup>36</sup>

Ignoring the obvious inadequacies of female musical education, critics often cited the relative invisibility of women in art-music composition as proof of woman’s innate creative inferiority. Eduard Hanslick was a case in point. Following in the footsteps of Rousseau, Kant and Schopenhauer, Hanslick claimed in 1854 that women, because of their greater emotional sensitivity, were too subjective to cope with the abstract nature of musical form:

The composer's activity is in its way plastic and comparable to the visual artist's. Just as little as the visual artist should the composer be dependently involved with his physical material, for like him the composer has his . . . ideal to set forth objectively to create pure form. . . . [W]omen, who are by nature preeminently dependent on feeling, have not amounted to much as composers. The cause of this lies . . . precisely in the plastic aspect of musical composing, which demands renunciation of subjectivity. . . . And it is not feeling which composes music, but the specifically musical, artistically trained talent.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly, Hanslick resorted to some rather complex mental gymnastics to arrive at his short-sighted view of woman's creative potential. On the one hand, he acknowledges that a talent for composition requires appropriate musical training to fulfill its promise, while on the other, he links the dearth of important female composers to innate intellectual deficiencies, thus conveniently bypassing the generally inferior musical education of women as the probable cause of their lack of high-level achievement.

Writing in 1861, John Stuart Mill interjected a note of common sense into the continuing literary discourse on the woman composer question. Mill, a great champion of women's rights, pointed out that the absence of female composers of the first rank was attributable to the fact that musically gifted women did not receive adequate instruction in music theory: "Women are taught music, but not for the purpose of composing, only of executing it. . . . Even [a] natural gift [for composition], to be made available for great creations, requires study, and professional devotion to the pursuit."<sup>38</sup> But Mill's words remained unheeded for several years. The exclusion of women from classes in advanced theory and composition had become the norm in the great European conservatories; in most, this practice continued until near the beginning of the twentieth century.



## Female Education in Nineteenth-Century Conservatories

With the establishment of the Leipzig Conservatory by Felix Mendelssohn in 1843, Leipzig became the world's leading centre for serious musical study. Students came from every corner of the globe to work under a faculty that included Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann, Moritz Hauptmann, Ignaz Moscheles, Ferdinand David, and other renowned musicians of the day. All male students were obliged to attend classes in composition and related theoretical subjects; women, however, were taught only an abbreviated theory curriculum,<sup>39</sup> and composition was omitted from their course of study. Although it is unclear exactly how long this policy was enforced, the autobiographies of Clara K. Rogers and Ethel Smyth, two composers who studied at the Leipzig Conservatory, provide some helpful clues. Rogers attended the Conservatory in 1857, but was unable to study composition, for, as she explained, "there was no composition class for my sex, no woman composer having yet appeared on the musical horizon, with the exception of Fanny [Mendelssohn] Hensel . . . and Clara Schumann."<sup>40</sup> Smyth was more fortunate; she was the first woman permitted to join Carl Reinecke's composition class in 1877.<sup>41</sup>

The writings of female composers who studied elsewhere in Germany offer proof that other German conservatories excluded women from advanced theoretical instruction for an even longer period of time. Despite extensive previous training in the subject, Boston composer Mabel Daniels was the first woman to be accepted into a score-reading class at the Royal Munich Conservatory in 1902, and then only grudgingly.<sup>42</sup> In her memoirs, Daniels notes with incredulity that no advanced theory courses were open to female students in Munich until 1897:

You know that five years ago women were not allowed to study counterpoint at the conservatory. In fact, anything more

advanced than elementary harmony was debarred. The ability of the feminine intellect to comprehend the intricacies of a stretto, or cope with double counterpoint in the tenth, if not openly denied, was severely questioned.<sup>43</sup>

American journalist Helen A. Clark also drew attention to this problem in an 1895 article. She observed: "Even within the last decade, the writer has heard of German teachers who absolutely refused to teach women the science of harmony, because, as they declared, no woman could understand it."<sup>44</sup>

As, one by one, conservatories throughout Germany began reluctantly to admit female students into theory and composition classes, conservative critics predicted that the presence of women in such classes would lower the standards of professional study. This would come about, it was said, because impressionable young men would be exposed to various seductive feminine character flaws, those most often cited being superficiality and physical and moral weaknesses. The proponents of this view also maintained that the musical scene would be inundated with the inferior works of women, and that these defective compositions would serve as models for future generations of students.<sup>45</sup> Eugen Lüning, for example, in an article entitled "On the Reform of Our Music Schools," claimed that the admission of women to composition classes would lead to the feminization of music, and thus to a general deterioration of the art.<sup>46</sup>

Educational opportunities for aspiring female composers, though not ideal, were less restrictive in America than in continental Europe. Women had complete access to the resources of all major conservatories in the United States, but when Harvard, Yale, and Columbia Universities added music degrees to their curricula in the late nineteenth century, enrollment was confined solely to male students.<sup>47</sup> The philosophy behind this discriminatory policy was stated as follows: "At its most glorious heights, music is a masculine art."<sup>48</sup>

Since neither Oxford nor Cambridge Universities granted degrees to women,<sup>49</sup> London's Royal Academy of Music became a refuge for those English female musicians who were unable to study abroad. From its inception in 1822, the Royal Academy was coeducational; regardless of sex, all students received the same training.<sup>50</sup> Despite the occurrence of a marked deterioration in the standard of instruction around the middle of the century, the Royal Academy produced several highly competent female composers. Among them were Alice Mary Smith (1839–1884), Rosalind Frances Ellicott (1857–1924), Dora Bright (1863–1951), and Maude Valérie White (1855–1937)—the first woman to win the coveted Mendelssohn Scholarship in composition.<sup>51</sup>

### **From Accomplishment to Achievement**

The last two decades of the nineteenth century marked a turning point in the extent and nature of women's involvement in musical composition. For the first time in history, significant numbers of female composers entered the traditionally male field of art music. This dramatic change was mainly due to the widening of educational opportunities for women in conservatories, i.e., increasing accessibility to theoretical instruction. A second important factor was the influence of the first feminist movement.

The professional activity of female composers escalated steadily throughout this period, and by the 1890s, major performing organizations on both sides of the Atlantic were presenting the large-scale compositions of women to the concert-going public.<sup>52</sup> Reporting on the growing visibility of women in this sphere of creativity, American critic Rupert Hughes observed: "All over the world the woman-mind is taking up music. . . . A publisher informs me that where compositions by women were only one-tenth of his manuscripts a few years ago, they now form more than two-thirds."<sup>53</sup>

The era of the parlor-encased “lady composer” had at last come to an end. It was with justifiable pride in the recent achievements of her sex that Fanny Morris Smith, a writer for *Etude*, proclaimed in 1901 the coming of age of the woman composer:

The first practical entrance of women into music as composers has been within the last twenty-five years. . . . Within this time . . . women dentists, lawyers, clergy, physicians, scientists, painters, architects, farmers, inventors, and merchants have all made their advent. Side by side with them has arrived the woman composer. She has come to stay.<sup>54</sup>

But no matter what advances women made in the realm of composition, the majority of European composition teachers, their perceptions clouded by prejudice, held fast to the belief that nature had not endowed females with the ability to equal males as creators. Since all of the opinions recorded below date from the 1880s and 1890s, it is clear that they represent a protest to the recent “intrusion” of women into the male sphere of art-music composition. Carl Reinecke, chief composition teacher at the Leipzig Conservatory from 1860 to 1892, and official director of that institution from 1892 to 1910, declared that in female composition students he found “scarcely any progress comparable to that of the intelligent and poetic male student.”<sup>55</sup> Similar views were expressed by Norwegian composer Johan Svendsen (1840–1911), and Niels Gade (1817–1890), composition teacher at the Leipzig Conservatory and co-founder of the Copenhagen Conservatory.<sup>56</sup> Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1931) claimed that women, in their misguided attempts to imitate and compete with male composers, allowed their music to become too boisterous.<sup>57</sup> Anton Rubinstein (1829–1894), founder of the Imperial Conservatory of St. Petersburg, stated that women composers “lack depth, concentration, the power of thought, breadth of feeling, [and] freedom of stroke.”<sup>58</sup>

It was also Rubinstein who, in the most telling statement of all, remarked to the sister-in-law of composer Cécile Chaminade (1857–1944): “I hear your relative publishes compositions of her own. She ought not to do that!”<sup>59</sup>

### **Why Are There No Great Women Composers? Some Turn-of-the-Century Theories**

No matter how irrational, firmly entrenched prejudices seldom die easily. Many prominent critics responded to the increasing activity of female composers with hostility and alarm. Believing that this trend would inevitably lead to a weakening of standards in composition, they developed theories to perpetuate the myth of women’s innate creative inferiority. George Upton, music critic of the *Chicago Tribune*, was among the first to do so. His influential book *Woman in Music* was written in 1880; by 1899 it had passed through six editions. The publication of this work gained Upton many followers, but as edition followed edition, the storm of protest from feminists grew in intensity. The controversy raged for nearly forty years, during which time scholarly journals and popular magazines were replete with articles on the much-vexed question of women in musical composition.<sup>60</sup>

Upton formulated his theory around a major contradiction in nineteenth-century thought. Since music was a language of the emotions, and females were known to be more emotional than males, it followed logically that women should excel at composition. But according to Upton, women had failed to create important and enduring musical works because their innate lack of objectivity prevented them from translating emotion into musical form.<sup>61</sup> Music consists of far more than just emotion, he explained:

[It is] mercilessly logical and unrelentingly mathematical. . . . It has every technical detail that characterizes absolute science in

its most rigid forms. In this direction woman, except in very rare instances, has never achieved great results.”<sup>62</sup>

Men, who Upton claimed were more emotionally controlled than women, had, as a consequence, the greater ability to channel emotion into the abstract and logical formal structures of music:

To treat emotions as if they were mathematics, to bind and measure and limit them within the rigid laws of harmony and counterpoint, and to express them with arbitrary signs, is a cold-blooded operation, possible only to the sterner and more obdurate nature of man.<sup>63</sup>

From the excerpts cited above, it is obvious that a major part of Upton’s theory hinges on the assumption that composition is essentially a mathematical process. However, this supposition has no factual basis, nor has any evidence been found to suggest a link between musical and mathematical abilities.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to their lack of objectivity, Upton claimed that other deficiencies in the female psyche prevented women from equaling men as musical creators:

Another phase of the feminine character which may bear on this problem is . . . the inability of woman to endure the discouragements of the composer, and to battle with the prejudice and indifference, and sometimes with the malicious opposition, of the world. . . . Such fierce struggles and overwhelming discouragements, such pitiless storms of fate and cruel assaults of poverty, in the pursuit of art, woman is not calculated to endure.<sup>65</sup>

While he conceded that the demands of housekeeping and child-rearing left women with no time for “the theoretical application

which composition requires,” Upton discounted this as a possible explanation for the absence of female composers of the first rank. History had shown that “[woman] has not succeeded [at composition] when she has had the opportunity.”<sup>66</sup> He therefore concluded: “It does not seem likely that woman will ever originate music in its fullest and grandest harmonic forms. She will always be the recipient and interpreter, but there is little hope she will be the creator.”<sup>67</sup> As if it somehow compensated for her supposed inferior capacity to create, Upton added that woman’s unique gift was her ability to function as a muse to the genius of male composers:

It is no exaggeration to claim that without her influence many of the masterpieces which we now admire might not have been accomplished at all; that the great composers have often written through her inspiration; and that she has, in numerous instances, been their impulse, support, and consolation.<sup>68</sup>

Edith Brower, a writer for the *Atlantic Monthly*, added fuel to the debate with the pronouncement that men were more emotional than women, and that this accounted for the lack of important female composers. The following is a compilation of excerpts from Brower’s article:<sup>69</sup>

Because woman, as the lesser man, is comparatively deficient in active emotional force, she cannot for this reason produce that which, at its best, is the highest and strongest of all modes of emotional expression. (p. 334) Much of what passes in women for true emotion is mere nervous excitability. . . . Hence, . . . however fine her mental equipment, aided by education, may be, she must come out behind man in the long run, when matched against man in the highest spheres of attainment; at least, in those spheres in which the greatest amount of emotional force is required, such as music. For music is emotion;

its conception, its working out, demand concentration not of the intellect alone, but of the very forces of the soul. Women cannot endure this double strain. (pp. 335–36) Woman is not at home in the abstract. . . . [Her] aptitude . . . for dealing with the concrete makes her a good housekeeper and manager of a family. (p. 338) It appears highly probable that, unless her nature be changed, . . . she will not in any future age excel in the art of musical composition. (p. 339)

Amy Fay, the distinguished pianist and teacher, was among the many female musicians who voiced their protests against such theories. While Upton, Brower, and other like-minded writers had attributed the dearth of great women composers to innate psychological and intellectual deficiencies, Fay argued that the explanation was to be found in the differential socialization of the sexes. A feminist, she was little taken with the concept of woman as muse. She wrote:

Women have been too much taken up with helping and encouraging men to place a proper value on their own talent, which they are too prone to underestimate and to think not worth making the most of. Their whole training, from time immemorial, has tended to make them take an intense interest in the work of men and to stimulate them to their best efforts. Ruskin was quite right when he so patronizingly said that “Woman’s chief function is praise.” She has praised and praised, and kept herself in abeyance. But now, all this is changed. Women are beginning to realize that they, too, have brains, and even musical ones. They are, at last, studying composition seriously . . . It has required 50,000 years to produce a male Beethoven, surely one little century ought to be vouchsafed to create a female one!<sup>70</sup>



## The Double Bind of Sexual Aesthetics

Most late nineteenth-century critics were not prepared to grant that “one little century.” Instead, they developed a system of sexual aesthetics—the critical double standard. Based on the Romantic ideology of complementary male/female intellectual and psychological traits, through which men were defined as objective, logical and active and women as subjective, emotional and passive, sexual aesthetics enabled critics to discuss the form, style and emotional range of women’s musical compositions not on their artistic merits alone, but in terms of their appropriateness to her sex.<sup>71</sup>

According to the proponents of sexual aesthetics, “feminine” music, which women were expected to compose exclusively, was delicate, graceful, sensitive, melodic, and confined to the smaller forms, i.e., songs and piano pieces. “Masculine” music, on the other hand, was powerful, lushly orchestrated, and intellectually rigorous both in formal structure and in harmonic and contrapuntal innovation. Operas, symphonies and other large-scale works belonged to this realm.<sup>72</sup> As more and more women began to compose in the larger forms, they were attacked by critics for venturing beyond their supposedly innate sexual limitations, and their allotted space—the parlor.

The following two excerpts from reviews of Cécile Chaminade’s music demonstrate the insidious nature of this form of gendered criticism:

[The *Concerstück* is] a work that is strong and virile, too virile perhaps, and that is the reproach I would be tempted to address to it. For me, I almost regretted not having found further those qualities of grace and gentleness that reside in the nature of women, the secrets of which she possesses to such a degree.<sup>73</sup>

[Her music] has a certain daintiness and grace, but it is amazingly superficial and wanting in variety. . . . But on the whole this concert confirmed the conviction held by many that while women may some day vote, they will never learn to compose anything worthwhile. All of them seem superficial when they write music.<sup>74</sup>

Clearly, sexual aesthetics placed the woman composer in a no-win situation. If she produced music that was strong and rhythmically vital, her work was criticized for lacking feminine charm, and was condemned for its false virility. On the other hand, when she composed delicate, lyrical music, she was accused of not measuring up to the artistic standards of her male colleagues. In short, sexual aesthetics effected not only a double standard, but a double bind.<sup>75</sup>

As I have attempted to show in this overview of nineteenth and early twentieth century thought on women composers, philosophers, educators and critics, imbued with the sexist attitudes of their day, presented a decidedly biased view of female musical creativity. Faced with such obstacles, it is amazing that women composed at all. But fortunately they did, and we are the richer for their endeavours.

Since the 1880s, observers have been claiming that the obstacles in the way of women composers have disappeared. While it is true that the lot of women composers has improved significantly in recent years, there are still impediments to be overcome. Vestiges of the old debate linger on,<sup>76</sup> and the legacy of sexual aesthetics continues to operate in subtle ways. There is still a great need for further progress.

## NOTES

1. See Mrs. Crosby Adams, "Musical Creative Work among Women," *Music* 9 (January 1896): 263–72.
2. Quoted in Pamela Susskind, introduction to Clara Wieck Schumann, *Selected Piano Music* (New York: Da Capo, 1979), vii.

3. Emil Naumann, *The History of Music*, trans. F. Praeger, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1886), 2:1267. Original German edition published 1880–1885.
4. Quoted in James Parsons, “Emerging from the Shadows: Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann,” *Opus 2* (February 1986): 27.
5. Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: “Male” and “Female” in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 75.
6. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Dent, 1984), 322.
7. *Ibid.*, 327, 350.
8. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. d’Alembert on the Theatre*, trans. Allan Bloom (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), 103n.
9. Rousseau, *Emile*, 349.
10. *Ibid.*, 328.
11. Jane Roland Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation: The Ideal of the Educated Woman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 41–48.
12. Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 78–79.
13. *Ibid.*, 80–81.
14. *Ibid.*, 78.
15. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 171.
16. Lloyd, 76.
17. Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, 95.
18. Martin, 64–65.
19. Lloyd, 76.
20. Arthur Schopenhauer, “On Women,” in his *Essays and Aphorisms*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), 83.
21. *Ibid.*, 81.
22. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. Payne, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1969), 1:185.
23. *Ibid.*, 2:384.
24. *Ibid.*, 2:392.
25. Schopenhauer, “On Women,” 85–86.
26. *Ibid.*, 87.
27. Mrs. [Sarah] Ellis, *The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society*,

*Character and Responsibilities* (London and Paris: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1842), 97–98.

28. Other feminine accomplishments included singing, playing the harp or guitar, embroidery, needlework, drawing, making artificial flowers, cutting out paper ornaments, and painting flowers on china buttons. The ability to speak a few phrases in French was also valued as an accomplishment. Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954), 267–68.
29. A. Burgh, Preface to his *Anecdotes of Music, Historical and Biographical, in a Series of Letters from a Gentleman to his Daughter* (London, 1814); reprinted in *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, ed. Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (New York: Schirmer Books, 1984), 335.
30. Johann Campe, *Väterlicher Rat für meine Tochter* (Braunschweig: Schulbuchhandlung, 1789), 120, as discussed in Eva Rieger, “‘Dolce semplice’? On the Changing Role of Women in Music,” in *Feminist Aesthetics*, ed. Gisela Ecker, trans. Harriet Anderson (London: The Women’s Press, 1985), 141.
31. Friedrich I. Niethammer, *Der Streit des Philanthropismus und Humanismus in der Theorie des Erziehungs-Unterrichts unserer Zeit* (Weinheim, 1968; a reprint of the 1808 edition), 351, as discussed and quoted in Rieger, 141.
32. Ellis, 107.
33. George Cary Eggleston, “The Education of Women,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, July 1883, 294.
34. Loesser, 268. See also Rieger, 141.
35. Nineteenth-century parlor music is discussed in detail in the following: Derek Hyde, *New Found Voices: Women in Nineteenth Century English Music*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 65–84; Judith Tick, *American Women Composers before 1870* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), 72–142 *et passim*. Even within the domestic sphere of parlor music, societal forces conspired to render women’s activity as composers invisible. Having been inculcated with the belief that “a lady does not allow her name to appear in the newspapers except when she is born, married or carried to the grave,” many women felt a conflict between their roles as private lady and public composer: when a woman published her compositions she drew attention to herself, and ladies of genteel breeding were not expected to indulge in ‘immodest’ displays of self-assertion. *Ibid.*, 74–75. Some resolved this conflict by publishing

their music anonymously; others used either male or female pseudonyms. Numerous parlor music compositions were published simply as the work of 'A Lady.' Among those who used female pseudonyms were English composers Charlotte Allington Barnard (1830–1869) and Ellen Dickson (1819–1878); they appeared in print respectively as Claribel and Dolores. Mrs. W. J. Rhodes (1858–1936), however, chose to publish her ballads under a male name: Guy d'Hardelot.

36. Tick, *American Women Composers*, 76.
37. Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, trans. from the 8<sup>th</sup> German ed. by Geoffrey Paysant (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), 46.
38. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1986), 78–79.
39. Leonard Milton Phillips, *The Leipzig Conservatory: 1843–1881* (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1979), 128.
40. Clara K. Rogers, *Memories of a Musical Career* (Norwood, Mass.: The Plimpton Press, 1932), 108, quoted in Tick, *American Women Composers*, 271n54.
41. Ethel Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1919), 1:164.
42. Mabel Daniels, "Fighting Generalizations about Women," [excerpted from her *An American Girl in Munich* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1905)], in Carol Neuls-Bates, ed., *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 219–22.
43. Ibid, 220.
44. Helen A. Clark, "The Nature of Music in Its Relation to the Question of Women in Music," *Music* 7 (March 1895): 459.
45. Judith E. Olson, "Luise Adolpha Le Beau: Composer in Late Nineteenth-Century Germany," in Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, eds., *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 291.
46. Eugen Lünig, "Ueber die Reform unserer Musik-Schulen," *Allgemeine Deutsche Musik-Zeitung* 5 (11 and 18 October 1878): 341–43 and 349–51 respectively, as described in *ibid*.
47. A. H. Levy, "Double-Bars and Double Standards: Female Composers in America 1800–1920," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 6 (March/April 1983): 168–69.

48. Ibid., 169.
49. Evelyn Alice Sharp and Emily Ross Daymond, Oxford's first two female graduates, received their degrees in 1921. Elsie Baron Briggs, though she had fulfilled the requirements for the Cambridge B.Mus. in 1915, was not granted the degree until 1927. For an account of women's struggle to acquire university degrees in nineteenth-century England, see Rita McWilliams-Tullberg, "Women and Degrees at Cambridge University, 1862–1897," in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 117–45.
50. Jane E. Bernstein, "'Shout, Shout, Up with Your Song!' Dame Ethel Smyth and the Changing Role of the British Woman Composer," in Bowers and Tick, *Women Making Music*, 307.
51. For an account of White's involvement in the Mendelssohn Scholarship competition, which she won in 1879, see her *Friends and Memories* (London: Edward Arnold, 1914), 70–81.
52. The following are but a few examples of the successes of women composers in the 1890s. Two orchestral works by Ethel Smyth, the four-movement Serenade in D and her Overture to *Anthony and Cleopatra* were played at the Crystal Palace in 1890. Smyth's Mass in D was performed at London's Royal Albert Hall by the Royal Choral Society in 1893, and *Fantasio*, the first of her six operas, was produced at Weimar in 1898. Dora Bright, another English composer, had two works performed by the London Philharmonic in 1892—a Fantasia for Piano and Orchestra (the first woman's composition ever played by the Philharmonic), and her Second Piano Concerto. Three compositions by Rosalind Frances Ellicott, a compatriot of Smyth and Bright, were given at the Gloucester Festival: her cantata *The Birth of a Song* in 1892, an orchestral Fantasia in A Minor in 1895, and another cantata, *Elysium*, in 1889. Ellicott's *Dramatic Overture* was performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1893. German composer Isabella von Grab's opera *Schoen Karen* was produced at Breslau in 1895, and again in Copenhagen four years later. Another opera, *Atala*, by the Belgian composer Juliette Folville, was given a successful premiere at Lille in 1892. The symphonic poem *Geraint's Bridal Journey*, the work of Holland's Cornelia van Oosterzee, was added to the repertoire of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in 1897. The Paris Grand Opera mounted a lavish production of French composer Augusta

- Holmès' four-act opera *La Montagne noire* in 1895. The Boston Symphony Orchestra programmed Margaret Lang's *Dramatic Overture* in 1893—the first orchestral performance in the United States of a work composed by an American woman. Later that same year, the Chicago Symphony played Lang's overture *Witichis*. Amy Beach's Mass in E flat was presented by the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston in 1892. Four years later, her *Gaelic Symphony*—the first symphony known to be composed and published by an American woman—was performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra.
53. Rupert Hughes, *Contemporary American Composers* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1900), 425.
  54. Fanny Morris Smith, "The Record of Woman in Music," *Etude* 19 (September 1901): 317.
  55. Quoted in Louis C. Elson, *The History of American Music* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971; a reprint of the 1925 edition), 293.
  56. Ibid.
  57. Camille Saint-Saëns, *Harmonie et mélodie*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885), 228.
  58. Anton Rubinstein, *A Conversation on Music*, trans. Mrs. John P. Morgan (New York: C. F. Tretbar, 1892; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo, 1982), 118.
  59. Quoted in Elson, 293.
  60. For a sampling of opinions (both pro and con), see the following: Stephen S. Stratton, "Woman in Relation to Musical Art," *Proceedings of the Musical Association* (7 May 1883): 112–46; Fanny Bloomfield-Zeisler, "Woman in Music," *American Art Journal* 48 (17 October 1891): 1–3; Florence Sutro, "Woman's Work in Music," *Vocalist* 8 (May 1894): 161–65; Henry T. Finck, "Woman's Conquest of Music," *Musician* 7 (May 1902): 186; George Trumbull Ladd, "Why Women Cannot Compose Music," *Yale Review* 6 (July 1917): 789–806.
  61. George P. Upton, *Woman in Music*, 6th ed. (Chicago: McClurg, 1899), 18–23.
  62. Ibid., 30–31.
  63. Ibid., 24.
  64. See especially the following: Edwin Gordon, "Intercorrelations among Musical Aptitude Profile and Seashore Measures of Musical Talents Subtests," *Journal of Research in Music Education* (Fall 1969): 262–71;

- G. Revesz, *Introduction to the Psychology of Music*, trans. G. I. C. de Courcy (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1953), 13–14; Rosamond Shuter-Dyson and Clive Gabriel, *The Psychology of Musical Abilities*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), 66–91.
65. Upton, 26–28.
  66. Ibid., 29.
  67. Ibid., 31.
  68. Ibid., 32.
  69. Edith Brower, “Is the Musical Idea Masculine?,” *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1894, 332–39. References to specific page numbers appear in parentheses within the text.
  70. Amy Fay, “Women and Music,” *Music* 18 (October 1900): 506. The quotation from Ruskin is found in his “Of Queen’s Gardens”—an 1865 essay on the complementary natures of the sexes, and the education of women.
  71. Judith Tick, “Passed Away is the Piano Girl: Changes in American Musical Life, 1870–1900,” in Bowers and Tick, *Women Making Music*, 336–38. See also Judith Tick, “Women as Professional Musicians in the United States, 1870–1900,” *Yearbook for Inter-American Musical Research* 9 (1973): 111.
  72. Neuls-Bates, 223.
  73. “Quatorzième concert populaire,” *Angers Revue* [late February 1889], quoted in Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 186.
  74. “Music and drama: Mme. Chaminade’s concert,” *New York Evening Post*, 26 October 1908, 7, quoted in Citron, 187.
  75. For a more in-depth discussion of sexual aesthetics, see Eugene Gates, “Damned if You Do And Damned if You Don’t: Sexual Aesthetics and the Music of Dame Ethel Smyth,” in this publication.
  76. See, for example, Eugene Gates, “Women Composers: A Critical Review of the Psychological Literature,” in this publication.



## WOMEN COMPOSERS: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

The *New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* includes articles on no fewer than 875 women composers. However, very little of that information has found its way into the textbooks used in our schools, conservatories, and universities, for the predominantly male chroniclers of music history have largely excluded women's creative achievements from the historical record. As Dale Spender explains it,

[w]omen have been kept 'off the record' . . . by the simple process of men naming the world as it appears to them. . . . They have assumed that their experience is universal, that it is representative of humanity, and that it constitutes a basis for generalizing about **all** human beings. Whenever the experience of women differs from men, therefore, it stays off the record, for there is no way of entering it into the record when the experience is not shared by men, and men are the ones who write the record.<sup>1</sup>

The historical silence surrounding women composers has led psychologists, both past and present, to conclude that women have not excelled at musical composition because of certain defects in the female nature. This chapter examines critically the psychological literature on women composers, and, in a brief coda, addresses the challenge that such theories present to music education. But first it will be necessary to discuss briefly two key issues: biological determinism and sex-role socialization.

### **The Nature-Nurture Debate**

The notion that women had not excelled as composers because they lacked the power of abstract reasoning runs like a leitmotif

throughout nineteenth-century philosophy and music criticism.<sup>2</sup> Having demonstrated, at least to their own satisfaction, the existence of this deficiency in the female mind, philosophers and critics relegated the task of explaining its supposed biological basis to men of science.

During the early development of experimental psychology, in the latter years of the nineteenth century, the topic of female behaviour was apparently of little concern. The task of this new science was the description of the “generalized adult mind,” and it is not entirely clear whether “adult” was meant to include women as well as men. Around 1900, however, the incorporation of evolutionary theory (with its focus on the evolutionary superiority of the Caucasian male) into psychology gave rise to studies of the supposed biological determinants of sex differences in sensory, motor, and intellectual abilities.<sup>3</sup>

Informed by the assumptions that woman’s relative lack of creative achievement—not only in music, but in other spheres as well—and her subordinate social position were part of the natural order of things, turn-of-the-century research on sex differences was not much of an advertisement for the objectivity of science. Nevertheless, wearing the mantle of science, such research was able to pass as “objective truth.” Reviewing the literature in 1910, psychologist Helen Thompson Woolley fumed: “There is perhaps no field aspiring to be scientific where flagrant personal bias, logic martyred in the cause of supporting a prejudice, unfounded assertions, and even sentimental rot and drivel, have run riot to such an extent as here.”<sup>4</sup>

Regrettably, the search for biological determinants of female inadequacy continues today.<sup>5</sup> Psychologist Carol Jacklin has noted ten ubiquitous methodological problems contained in recent studies of sex-related differences. Among them is the “striking logical error [of] assuming [that] the cause of a sex-related difference is genetic once the existence of a sex-related difference is established.”<sup>6</sup>

But biological explanations for observed social and psychological differences between the sexes are grounded on a false concept of biology, since it is impossible to determine—even theoretically—what proportion of human behaviour might be biologically based.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is well documented in anthropological research that definitions of gender-appropriate behaviour and conceptions of masculine and feminine personality traits vary from culture to culture. A case in point is Margaret Mead's now-classic study of three New Guinea tribes—the Arapesh, the Mundugumor, and the Tchambuli. Reporting her findings, Mead wrote:

We found the Arapesh—both men and women—displaying a personality that . . . we would call maternal in its parental aspects, and feminine in its sexual aspects. . . . We found among the Mundugumor that both men and women . . . approximated a personality type that we in our culture would find only in an undisciplined and very violent male. . . . In the third tribe, the Tchambuli, we found a genuine reversal of the sex attitudes of our own culture, with the woman the dominant, impersonal, managing partner, the man the less responsible and the emotionally dependent person. . . . [These findings suggest that] many, if not all of the personality traits which we have called masculine or feminine are as lightly linked to sex as are the clothing, the manners, and the form of headdress that a society at a given period assigns to either sex.<sup>8</sup>

Anthropologist Ralph Linton points out that the types of occupations assigned to the sexes also vary widely from culture to culture. An activity that is considered men's work in one society is often perceived as women's work in another.<sup>9</sup> Linton further notes that

[m]ost [societies] try to rationalize these prescriptions in terms of physiological differences between the sexes or their different

roles in reproduction. However, a comparative study of the statuses ascribed to women and men in different cultures seems to show that while such factors may have served as a starting point for the development of a division the actual ascriptions are almost entirely determined by culture.<sup>10</sup>

Cross-cultural data such as those collected by Mead and Linton demonstrate the malleability of “human nature” and alert us to the power of socialization—the process through which the behaviours and personalities of the sexes are shaped to conform to their prescribed societal roles.

Sex-role socialization is a major part of the complex process of learning to live in a given society. Depending on the learner’s interaction with various forces in the social environment, personality can be shaped to develop in any one of several directions.<sup>11</sup> Most societies differentiate between the sexes through the assignment of different roles. Through the various institutions, forces, and groups that make up the social system (i.e., the family, school, church and state, adult friends and neighbours, peer groups, and the mass media), and in accordance with prevailing beliefs about the desirability of certain personality traits in males and others in females, societies also promote different patterns of behaviour for boys and girls.

Now, as in the past, females in Western industrial societies are expected to be unassertive, friendly, expressive, attentive to their appearance, and nurturant and caring toward others. Males, on the other hand, are supposed to be physically and sexually aggressive, emotionally tough, independent, and competent. Thus, through socialization, girls are taught to make themselves pleasing so that they can attract a husband and enter into a domestic and nurturant role while boys are encouraged to prepare themselves for careers appropriate to their own individual abilities.<sup>12</sup>

And, socialization does not stop with childhood; it is a life-long process. Adults are constantly made aware of the sanctions

associated with gender deviance and the rewards of gender-appropriate behaviour. Consequently, many women, fearing that they may be considered “unfeminine,” avoid occupations customarily assigned to men.<sup>13</sup> In the past, the sanctions against women taking up “masculine” pursuits were also clearly conveyed to them. Any woman who attempted to make a career in art-music composition, a field traditionally dominated by men, was everywhere reminded of the “inappropriateness” of such behaviour. German writer Johannes Scherr, for instance, penned the following in 1875 about women who strove for professional status in the creative arts: “The contingent of females, who force themselves on the public without being asked, consists of either ugly old maids . . . or of slovenly housewives and undutiful mothers.”<sup>14</sup> The sexologist Krafft-Ebing was even more uncharitable. Writing in 1886, he declared that women who thought, felt, or acted like men exhibited an “extreme grade of degenerative homosexuality.”<sup>15</sup> Clearly, any theory that purports to explain social and psychological differences between the sexes—and by inference, sex differences in creative achievement—without due attention to the effects of socialization is grossly misleading.

### **Sex Differences in Musical Creativity: “Scientific” Theories, 1894–1983**

Havelock Ellis was the first psychologist to attempt a “scientific” explanation for the dearth of important female composers. In *Man and Woman*, first published in 1894, he wrote:

Unless we include two or three women of our own day whose reputation has perhaps been enhanced by the fact that they are women, it is difficult to find the names of women even in the list of third-rank composers. . . . Music is at once the most emotional and the most severely abstract of the arts. There is no art

to which women have been more widely attracted and there is no art in which they have shown themselves more helpless.<sup>16</sup>

According to Ellis, genius was less often manifested in females than in males, and this accounted for woman's relative lack of success in composition. Ellis further claimed that the unequal distribution of genius between the sexes was biologically based. He explained:

Genius is more common among men by virtue of the same general tendency by which idiocy is more common among men. The two facts are but two aspects of a larger zoological fact—the larger variational range of the male. . . . It thus comes about that women . . . possess less spontaneous originality [than men] in the intellectual sphere. This is an organic tendency which no higher education can eradicate.<sup>17</sup>

He also stressed that woman's innate tendency toward average intellectual ability did not imply inferiority; it merely limited her vocational aptitude to the sphere of practical life, i.e., matrimony, motherhood, and the helping professions.<sup>18</sup>

Although Ellis and his followers called their theory the variability hypothesis, it is hardly surprising that some writers have dubbed it "the mediocrity of women hypothesis." Recent evaluations of the relevant data have yielded little support for the hypothesis. Nonetheless, the idea that males are both more clever and more stupid than females persists.<sup>19</sup>

Carl E. Seashore examined a variety of factors—native talent, intelligence, musical precocity, education, endurance, creative imagination, the late emancipation of women, and marriage—as possible explanations for the relative scarcity of successful women composers. While Seashore conceded that marriage might be a contributing factor, he maintained that

[i]t need not be, and should offer no true alibi. The bearing of one or more children should add to normal development of a woman, and marriage under favorable circumstances occasionally brings to the wife more freedom for self-expression in achievement than the husband—the breadwinner—enjoys.<sup>20</sup>

However, this view of marriage and motherhood bears little resemblance to the reality of most women's lives, either historically or in the present.

Having decided that none of the above factors could account for the small number of women composers listed in standard music reference books, Seashore concluded that the full explanation lay in his "theory of urges." According to Seashore, "[w]oman's fundamental urge is to be beautiful, loved, and adored as a person, man's urge is to provide and achieve in a career. . . . These two distinctive male and female urges . . . make the eternal feminine and persistent masculine types."<sup>21</sup>

Grace Rubin-Rabson later formulated a more sophisticated version of the same theory. Like Seashore, Rubin-Rabson asserted that women have not attained lasting eminence as composers because they are not strongly motivated to put forth the effort essential for sustained creativity. This lack of achievement motivation, she explains, is due to innate sex differences; consequently, "with or without liberation, men will remain actively penetrating, women receptive."<sup>22</sup>

By way of proof that sex-related differences in achievement motivation are innate and not culturally conditioned, Rubin-Rabson cites a laboratory study of baby monkeys who were kept together from birth, isolated from external influences. The male monkeys ran, fought and explored, while the females sat and watched.<sup>23</sup> But many social scientists now recognize the error in attempting to explain human behaviour from animal studies. Among them is Miriam Rosenberg, who writes:

The idea behind animal studies is that one might be able to observe 'natural' behavior untainted by the effects of socialization. . . . [The belief] that animals are unsocialized is naive ignorant humanism . . . Animals are socialized according to the needs of their own species' life style . . . they are just not socialized to be humans!<sup>24</sup>

For further "proof" that innate sex differences are responsible for differing interests and motivations, and hence the dearth of important female composers, Rubin-Rabson turns to the work of humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow. She writes:

Maslow reported profound male-female differences bearing on the feminine lack of will to high-level creation. All really serious men, he said, are messianic; women are not messianic. Such males have no intrinsic interest in . . . anything but their mission. . . . A male will neglect his health, risk his life, subordinate all else to his messianic mission. Man's duty is to the three books he must write before he dies. . . . And, he observes, women often do not bother to publish even a good work.<sup>25</sup>

Building on Maslow's observations, Rubin-Rabson claims that because of the feminine nurturant and social proclivities, musically gifted women have always preferred to invest their time and talents in teaching and performance where there is social contact and the rewards are tangible, rather than in the solitary intellectual endeavour that is composition, which too often yields little more than the satisfaction of creation.<sup>26</sup>

The empirical research on achievement motivation does not prove that women are less motivated to achieve than are men. Early studies of achievement motivation in women were both ambiguous and inconclusive, but recent investigators have found that "the structures of men's and women's motivational systems are not



qualitatively different,”<sup>27</sup> and that both sexes seem highly motivated to achieve similar goals.<sup>28</sup>

The most recent theory stems from research dealing with the physiology of the brain. According to the proponents of this view, females’ cerebral hemispheres are less specialized than those of males, and this accounts for the paucity of women in the ranks of the eminent composers. Before examining this theory in detail, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the psychological literature on visual–spatial and verbal abilities, and to outline the concept of hemispheric specialization. Psychologists call this specialization cerebral lateralization or hemispheric asymmetry.

The best starting point for such a discussion is probably Eleanor Maccoby and Carol Jacklin’s pioneering critical evaluation of the literature on sex differences. Two of the sex differences that Maccoby and Jacklin describe as “fairly well established” are (1) that females have greater verbal ability than males, and (2) that males’ visual–spatial abilities—sometimes (though not always) defined as the ability to manipulate visually or to make judgments about the relationships of objects located in two- or three-dimensional space—are superior to those of females.<sup>29</sup> It has been suggested by Lauren Harris that “the ability to recognize and to execute, and above all, to create a melodic pattern is a spatial ability”<sup>30</sup>—hence the association of visual–spatial skills with the composition of music. However, if such a relationship exists, it has yet to be demonstrated.

The research on visual–spatial and verbal abilities has come under close scrutiny since the publication of Maccoby and Jacklin’s book, and there now appears to be little strong support for the existence of sex differences in these two areas of intellectual function. Reviewing the literature on visual–spatial abilities, psychologists Caplan, MacPherson, and Tobin write:

In view of the number and seriousness of concerns about the inconsistency and magnitude of findings, the problems

within individual studies and in both the more and the less theoretically based reviews, the answer [to the question, “Do sex-related differences in spatial abilities exist?”] is “No,” . . . or at least “It is by no means clear as yet.”<sup>31</sup>

Other scientists have demonstrated that the claim for sex-related differences in verbal ability is at best highly questionable.<sup>32</sup>

Having dealt with the research on sex differences in visual-spatial and verbal abilities, we now direct our attention to the topic of cerebral lateralization. One of the most important discoveries of the past fifty years or so has been that the left and right cerebral hemispheres play different roles in the processing of information. Based on research carried out on split-brain patients,<sup>33</sup> and on studies of patients who have suffered brain damage through stroke, cancer, or accident, psychologists now make the following generalizations about the brains of normal, healthy, right-handed people: the left cerebral hemisphere is the seat of verbal, mathematical, and analytical skills, and sequential information processing; and the right hemisphere specializes in spatial skills, musical abilities, and holistic, nonverbal, Gestalt processing.<sup>34</sup>

These generalizations about hemispheric specialization have in turn formed the basis of at least four biological theories to support the claims for both the female advantage in verbal ability and the superiority of males in spatial visualization. According to the most widely accepted of these theories—the Levy-Sperry hypothesis—women’s brains have the capacity to process verbal information in both hemispheres, and this bilateral representation of verbal functioning interferes with the right hemisphere’s ability to perform spatial tasks. Men’s brains, on the other hand (according to this hypothesis), are highly specialized—the left hemisphere confines its activities exclusively to verbal tasks, while the right hemisphere deals only with spatial problems.<sup>35</sup>

The Levy-Sperry hypothesis is very dear to the hearts of those

psychologists who believe that there is a biological basis for the dearth of important women composers. Among them is Pierre Flor-Henry, who writes:

The complete absence of great composers, the relative scarcity of great painters but the very large number of outstanding writers in women cannot be attributed to social pressures alone. It reflects the differential cerebral organization of men and women, a differential organization which hinges on different solutions to problems of cerebral laterality. The paradox is that in women the more bilateral cognitive system, for both verbal and spatial processes, is translated in verbal—linguistic superiority (compared to males) but more precarious visuo-spatial and affective modes.<sup>36</sup>

Lauren Harris holds a similar view. He speculates that “composition involves cognitive skills subserved predominantly by the right cerebral hemisphere and, therefore, like visuospatial skills, [they are] stronger in males than [in] females.”<sup>37</sup> Although Harris admits that “there is no direct evidence of right hemisphere specialization for compositional skill,” he maintains that “there is evidence of right hemisphere specialization for certain elements of musical perception probably critical for composition.”<sup>38</sup>

To illustrate this point, Harris cites several studies from the neuro-psychological literature. One such study reports that performance on the Timbre and Tonal Memory subtests of the Seashore Measures of Musical Talents is depressed by right but not by left temporal lobectomy. However, as Harold Gordon points out:

There is no . . . reason to suppose that comparing pitch qualities, tone strengths or even three- to five-note melodies is the same as processing music. Whereas mental processes required by these tasks may be the same or similar to those required

for music, it is a fallacy to consider these elements to be synonymous with music. Music is an entity far greater than the sum of its parts.<sup>39</sup>

Harris also neglects to mention that musicians tend to process the elements of music differently than non-musicians; non-musicians usually exhibit a right hemisphere specialization for the performance of musical tasks, while musicians show the reverse, or no hemisphere specialization at all.<sup>40</sup> The probable explanation for this paradox is that musicians are trained to approach music analytically, and thus call upon processes generally associated with the left hemisphere.<sup>41</sup> But whatever the reason, the fact that such a paradox exists casts a large shadow of doubt on Harris's thesis.

This theory comes unstuck at several other points as well. Both Harris and Flor-Henry base their assumptions on studies of patients with brain damage, but no one has yet been able to prove that damaged brains function in the same way as those of healthy individuals.<sup>42</sup> Second, there is no evidence that musical skills are localized in any specific area of the brain.<sup>43</sup> Third, as I pointed out earlier, there is no support for the idea that compositional skills and visual-spatial abilities are related. Finally, all that can be said with certainty about the notion that male and female brains are lateralized differently is that the jury is still out on the matter.<sup>44</sup> The literature is riddled with contradictions.<sup>45</sup>

## **Coda**

The preceding examination of the various attempts of psychologists to explain the historical absence of eminent female creators of art music makes clear that biological theories cannot provide an answer to the persistent question, "Why have there been no great women composers?" The answer lies not in biology, but in the circumstances surrounding women's lives—circumstances largely

incompatible with the exacting needs of musical creation. As art historian Linda Nochlin reminds us, the idea that individual “original” talent will emerge against all odds, regardless of the deterrents imposed by time, space or society, does not bear close scrutiny. She writes:

Art is not a free, autonomous activity of a superendowed individual, . . . but, rather, . . . the total situation of art making, both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself, occur in a social situation, and are integral elements of this social structure, and are mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions, be they art academies, systems of patronage, mythologies of the divine creator, artist as he-man or social outcast.<sup>46</sup>

During most of the historic past, most musically gifted women of creative ability were denied access to the theoretical education that would have equipped them for a professional career. It was not until the final decades of the nineteenth century that the great European conservatories finally began to admit female students into advanced theory and composition classes, and then only grudgingly. Moreover, most women did not enjoy the freedom from household responsibilities and child-rearing nor the financial independence that would have enabled them to undertake sustained creative work. And even the few who were more fortunately placed encountered a wall of discrimination and prejudice that threatened to silence them. Faced with such obstacles, the wonder is that women composed at all. But compose they did, often producing works of lasting significance.

There can be no doubt that both the social myth of woman’s creative inferiority in music and the biological argument that seeks to validate this myth are fuelled by the exclusion of female composers’ achievements from most standard music textbooks. As music

educators, there is much we can do to improve this lamentable situation. Those of us who teach music history and music appreciation must ensure that we include material on women composers from all historical periods in our courses. Further, we must exert pressure on the authors, editors, and publishers of music textbooks to produce better, more inclusive works. But it is not enough merely to point out how good the many historically neglected women composers were; we must also insist that the authors of textbooks draw attention to the social factors that prevented creatively gifted women in music from competing with their male colleagues on an equal footing. Only then can we hope to dispel the persistent and damaging myth of woman's innate creative inferiority in music.

## NOTES

1. Dale Spender, *Invisible Women: The Schooling Scandal* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), 24.
2. See for example the following: Eugene Gates, "The Woman Composer Question: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives," in this publication; Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England, 1870–1844: "Encroaching on All Man's Privileges"* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 15–31; Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Derek B. Scott, "The Sexual Politics of Victorian Musical Aesthetics," *Journal of the Musical Association* 119, no. 1 (1994): 91–114.
3. Stephanie A. Shields, "Functionalism, Darwinism, and the Psychology of Women," *American Psychologist* 30 (July 1975): 739–40.
4. Quoted in *ibid.*, 739.
5. An astonishing number and variety of theories to explain the assumed biological basis of sex-related differences in cognitive abilities have come and gone over the past several decades. The popular press heralds the entry of each new theory with brilliant fanfares, but invariably neglects to report when each one in turn is refuted. For a brief summary of such theories, see Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 40–41.

6. Carol N. Jacklin, "Methodological Issues in the Study of Sex-Related Differences," *Developmental Review* 1 (September 1981): 269.
7. Fausto-Sterling, 8.
8. Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (New York: Mentor, 1950), 205–206. Originally published 1935.
9. Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man: An Introduction* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), 116–18. Originally published 1937.
10. *Ibid.*, 116.
11. Esther R. Greenglass, *A World of Difference: Gender Roles in Perspective* (Toronto and New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982), 35.
12. Juanita H. Williams, *The Psychology of Women: Behavior in a Biosocial Context* (New York: 1977), 171–72; Greenglass, 35.
13. Janet Sayers, *Sexual Contradictions: Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism* (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1986), 27–28.
14. Quoted in Patricia Herminghouse, "Women and the Literary Enterprise in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in *German Women in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Social History*, ed. Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres and Mary Jo Maynes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 84.
15. R. von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), trans. Franklin S. Klaf (New York: Bell, 1965), 262–63, quoted in Sayers, 28.
16. Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman: A Study of Secondary and Tertiary Sexual Characteristics*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., (London: Heinemann, 1934), 353.
17. *Ibid.*, 433–35.
18. *Ibid.*, 436.
19. Recent versions of the variability hypothesis are discussed in John Archer and Barbara Lloyd, *Sex and Gender* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 228–29; John Nicholson, *Men and Women: How Different Are They?* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 76.
20. Carl E. Seashore, "Why No Great Women Composers?" in his *In Search of Beauty: A Scientific Approach to Musical Esthetics* (New York: The Ronald Press, 1947), 366.
21. *Ibid.*, 267.
22. Grace Rubin-Rabson, "Why Haven't Women Become Great Composers?," *High Fidelity/Musical America* 23, February 1973, 49.
23. *Ibid.*

24. Miriam Rosenberg, "The Biologic Basis for Sex Role Stereotypes," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 9 (May 1973): 376.
25. Rubin-Rabson, 49.
26. *Ibid.*, 49–50.
27. Janet T. Spence and Robert L. Helmreich, "Achievement-Related Motives and Behaviors," in *Achievement and Achievement Motives: Psychological and Sociological Approaches* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1983), 41.
28. Nicholson, 110.
29. Eleanor Emmons Maccoby and Carol Nagy Jacklin, *The Psychology of Sex Differences*, 2 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 1:351–52.
30. Lauren Julius Harris, "Sex Differences in Spatial Ability: Possible Environmental, Genetic, and Neurological Factors," in *Asymmetrical Function of the Brain*, ed. Marcel Kinsbourne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 424.
31. Paula J. Caplan, Gael M. MacPherson and Patricia Tobin, "Do Sex-Related Differences in Spatial Ability Exist? A Multilevel Critique with New Data," *American Psychologist* 40 (July 1985): 797.
32. For a detailed discussion of the relevant research, see Fausto-Sterling, 26–30.
33. In cases of severe epilepsy, the corpus-callosum—the mass of nerve fibres that connects the right and left cerebral hemispheres—is severed to control the seizures. After surgery, split-brain patients have two separately functioning brain systems. *Ibid.*, 47.
34. *Ibid.* In left-handed people, the situation is thought to be somewhat more complex.
35. *Ibid.*, 49–50. For a more detailed discussion of the Levy-Sperry hypothesis and related theories, see Susan Leigh Star, "The Politics of Right and Left: Sex Differences in Hemispheric Brain Asymmetry," in *Women Look at Biology Looking at Women*, ed. Ruth Hubbard, Mary Sue Henifin and Barbara Fried (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1979), 61–74.
36. Pierre Flor-Henry, "Mood, the Right Hemisphere and the Implications of Spatial Information Perceiving Systems," *Research in Psychology, Psychiatry and Behavior* 8 (1983): 162.
37. Harris, 421.
38. *Ibid.*



39. Harold W. Gordon, "Music and the Right Hemisphere," in *Functions of the Right Cerebral Hemisphere*, ed. Andrew W. Young (London: Academic Press, 1983), 68.
40. The relevant studies are reviewed in the following: *ibid.*, 76; Antonio R. Damasio and Hanna Damasio, "Music and Cerebral Dominance," in *Music and the Brain: Studies in the Neurology of Music*, ed. Macdonald Critchley and R. A. Henson (London: Heinemann, 1977), 147–48; John A. Sloboda, *The Musical Mind: The Cognitive Psychology of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 264–65.
41. Gordon, 76.
42. Howard Gardner, *Art, Mind, and Brain: A Cognitive Approach to Creativity* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 282 and 312. See also Star, 65.
43. On the lack of evidence for the existence of a "music centre" in the brain, see the following: Gordon, 81–82; Sloboda, 265; Maria A. Wyke, "Musical Ability: A Neuropsychological Interpretation," in *Music and the Brain: Studies in the Neurology of Music*, ed. Critchley and Henson, 166; N. Wertheim, "Is There an Anatomical Localisation for Musical Faculties?," in Critchley and Henson, 282–97.
44. Nicholson, 87–88; Marcel Kinsbourne, "If Sex Differences in Brain Lateralization Exist, They Have Yet to Be Discovered," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3 (June 1980): 241–42.
45. For a discussion of these contradictions, see Fausto-Sterling, 49–53.
46. Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," in *Women in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: Mentor, 1971), 493.

## FANNY MENDELSSOHN HENSEL: A LIFE OF MUSIC WITHIN DOMESTIC LIMITS

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, the elder sister of Felix Mendelssohn, was deemed by her contemporaries to be as musically gifted as Felix. She was not only a superb pianist, but also an exceptionally fine composer. Fanny's compositional style is very similar to that of her more famous brother. Her more than 400 works include *Lieder*, piano and organ pieces, chamber music, cantatas, dramatic scenes, and an orchestral overture. Despite her prolific creative output, however, few of her compositions were published,<sup>1</sup> and, until very recently, historians have limited her importance to the fact that her diaries and letters provide valuable source material for biographical studies of Felix Mendelssohn. This chapter discusses the life and creative achievements of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, and the forces that impeded her progress as a composer: her relationship with her father and brother, her responsibilities as wife and mother, her often debilitating sense of isolation, and her ambivalence about her creative talent.

Born in Hamburg on November 14, 1805, Fanny Mendelssohn was the eldest of four children. Her father, Abraham Mendelssohn (1776–1835), son of Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, was a cultured and wealthy banker who was passionately interested in music. Her mother, Lea Salomon Mendelssohn (1777–1842), was a talented pianist and a good singer; she spoke French and English fluently, could read Homer in the original Greek,<sup>2</sup> and was, by all accounts, a charming and witty hostess. In announcing Fanny's birth to his mother-in-law, Abraham wrote: "Lea says that the child has Bach-fugue fingers"<sup>3</sup>—a statement which proved to be prophetic.

Before leaving Hamburg, Abraham and Lea had two more children. Felix, their first son, was born on February 3, 1809,

and another daughter, Rebecca, was born on April 11, 1811. The Mendelssohn family moved to Berlin the following year, where Paul, their youngest child, was born on October 30, 1813.<sup>4</sup> All four Mendelssohn children were musical, but Fanny and Felix were extraordinarily gifted. They were both musical prodigies.

Hoping to shield their young family from religious discrimination in a less than tolerant society, Abraham and Lea had the children baptized at Berlin's New Church in 1816. While on a trip to Frankfurt six years later, the parents themselves quietly underwent conversion to Protestantism. To ensure that his progeny would not be confused with their Jewish relatives, Abraham changed the family name from Mendelssohn to Mendelssohn Bartholdy, but he was never entirely successful at making the new name stick.<sup>5</sup>

Abraham Mendelssohn has been aptly described as "the very model of the German paterfamilias, his home an absolute monarchy."<sup>6</sup> He valued education above all else, and demanded almost unattainable standards of excellence from his children—academically, musically and morally. Like most fathers and husbands of his time, Abraham believed unconditionally that the only vocation for a respectable young woman was that of a housewife. However, he did not see this as a reason to neglect the education of his daughters; in his opinion, women should be taught to combine knowledge with charm.<sup>7</sup> It was especially important to both Abraham and Lea that Fanny's great musical talent be thoroughly developed.<sup>8</sup>

Fanny and Felix received their first piano instruction from their mother, who had studied music with Johann Philipp Kirnberger, a pupil of J. S. Bach.<sup>9</sup> Lea taught them together in several five-minute sessions per day, gradually extending the length of the lessons as her students' ability to concentrate increased. For several years she supervised every moment of their piano practice. When the Mendelssohns lived for a short time in Paris, Fanny and Felix, then eleven and seven respectively, continued their piano lessons with Madame Marie Bigot, an acquaintance of Haydn and Beethoven.<sup>10</sup>

Upon returning to Berlin, Abraham engaged the finest available tutors to guide the education of his children. Thus, Fanny and Felix studied piano with Ludwig Berger, a pupil of Muzio Clementi and John Field. For theory and composition they worked with Carl Friedrich Zelter, a respected friend of Goethe, and director of the Berlin Singakademie.<sup>11</sup> Their rigorous academic education was supervised by philologist Ludwig Heyse, father of the poet Paul Heyse.<sup>12</sup> Schooling was taken very seriously in the Mendelssohn household. The children's lessons began at 5 a.m.; only on Sundays were they permitted to sleep late, that is, until 6 a.m.<sup>13</sup> Fanny was blessed with a phenomenal musical memory. In 1818, when only thirteen, she played by memory twenty-four preludes from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* as a surprise for her father.<sup>14</sup>

Both for the enrichment of their children's education as well as for their own pleasure, Abraham and Lea Mendelssohn set out to make their home the intellectual centre of Berlin. Their visitor's book read like a 'Who's Who' of early nineteenth-century cultural and intellectual leaders: Leopold Ranke, the historian; Jacob Grimm, collector of fairy tales; writer, composer and critic E. T. A. Hoffmann; the poets Ludwig Tieck, Rahel Varnhagen and Heinrich Heine; the philosopher Hegel—and so the list continues. Musician friends of the family included such luminaries as violinist Eduard Rietz, and composers Ferdinand Hiller, Carl Maria von Weber, Ludwig Spohr, Gasparo Spontini and Zelter.<sup>15</sup>

Sometime around 1822, Abraham and Lea began to hold bi-weekly Sunday concerts in their home, the purpose being to provide their children with an appreciative audience for their musical endeavours. All four children participated in these musicales: Fanny and Felix played the piano; Rebecca sang and Paul played the cello. For each recital Lea issued personal invitations to local musicians and other prominent people.<sup>16</sup> Since, for the first few years, space was limited in the Mendelssohn residence, the audiences were small. However, in 1825, Abraham purchased

an enormous estate at Leipziger Strasse 3, on the outskirts of Berlin. This property, which in later years became the Upper Chamber of the Prussian Parliament, included the family mansion, a smaller garden-house, and about seven acres of beautifully landscaped parks and gardens.<sup>17</sup> This became the new locale of the Sunday musicales, which, under Fanny's direction in the 1830s and 1840s, were destined to assume a major role in the musical life of Berlin.

Even before the move to Leipziger Strasse 3, invitations to the Sunday musicales were much sought after by visiting musicians. It was at one of these concerts in 1824 that Fanny and Felix met Ignaz Moscheles (1794–1870), the most important touring pianist of the time. On first hearing them play, Moscheles recorded the following in his diary:

This is a family, the like of which I have never known. . . . Felix Mendelssohn is already a mature artist, and he is still only fifteen! . . . His elder sister Fanny, also immensely talented, played some of Bach's fugues and passacaglias by heart and with admirable precision. I believe she can justifiably be called 'a good musician.'<sup>18</sup>

Zelter, who began to teach Fanny and Felix in 1819, exerted a profound influence on their musical development. Following his method, they worked first from models, later progressing to exercises in counterpoint and figured bass.<sup>19</sup> From Zelter, Fanny received a thorough grounding in harmony, counterpoint, and composition;<sup>20</sup> in short, she was given much the same musical education as her brother. On October 1, 1820, both Fanny and Felix joined the Berlin Singakademie, where they sang alto in the chorus.<sup>21</sup>

Fanny's first known composition was a song, written as a birthday gift for her father on December 11, 1819.<sup>22</sup> Many other songs followed in rapid succession. Although primarily a Lieder composer

(she wrote nearly 300 songs over the course of her lifetime),<sup>23</sup> Fanny did not, even in her early years, confine her creative efforts entirely to the realm of vocal music. By 1824 she had also written thirty-two fugues,<sup>24</sup> a piano sonata, numerous character pieces for piano, a cadenza for Beethoven's Piano Concerto in C Major, piano duets, chorales and choruses for mixed voices and soloists, a piano quartet and an Adagio for violin and piano.

Goethe was an early admirer of Fanny's music. Felix, who had been taken by Zelter to Goethe's home in Weimar in 1821, introduced the poet to one of Fanny's songs—a setting of his “Ach wer bringt die schönen Tage.”<sup>25</sup> Goethe liked the song so much that he wrote a poem entitled “An die Entfernte” especially for Fanny. Although the manuscript became one of her most prized possessions, she never attempted to set it.<sup>26</sup> She did, however, continue to set other poems of Goethe to music; in fact, she set more of his texts than those of any other poet.<sup>27</sup>

Fanny herself met Goethe in the autumn of 1822, when she and her parents accompanied Felix on his second visit to the poet. Recounting the events of this visit, Lea wrote: “[Goethe] was . . . very friendly and condescending to Fanny; she had to play a good deal of Bach to him, and he was extremely pleased with those of his songs which she had composed.”<sup>28</sup> Thereafter, Goethe maintained a keen interest in both Felix and Fanny, and was kept informed of their musical progress through Zelter. In one of his letters to Felix, Goethe referred to Fanny as “your equally gifted sister,”<sup>29</sup> high praise indeed from a man who once said that “the very best thing that a woman ever did can only be compared to the second-rate performance of a man.”<sup>30</sup>

Because of their common musical pursuits, Fanny and Felix became very close as children, and remained so throughout their entire lives. From the moment they began to compose, each sought and valued the other's criticisms; their letters bear witness to the fact that this practice continued into their adulthood. When they were

children, their mother was once heard to say: "They are really vain and proud of one another."<sup>31</sup>

Fanny seems to have enjoyed the role of musical consultant to her younger brother. In 1822, when she was seventeen and Felix thirteen, she wrote: "I have watched the progress of his talent step by step, and may say that I have contributed to his development. I have always been his only musical adviser, and he never writes down a thought before submitting it to my judgement."<sup>32</sup> But she also readily acknowledged her own dependence on Felix, her most astute and reliable critic. In what is probably the first letter she ever wrote to him, Fanny declared: "Don't forget that you're my right hand and my eyesight, and without you, therefore, I can't proceed with my music."<sup>33</sup>

Felix admired his sister's compositions greatly, and used affectionately to call her "the Cantor"<sup>34</sup>—a reference to J. S. Bach, their musical idol. Felix's letters abound in tributes to her creative ability. The following brief excerpt from a letter of June 11, 1830 is typical: "I tell you, Fanny, that I have only to think of some of your pieces to become quite tender and sincere. You really know what God was thinking when he invented music."<sup>35</sup>

As previously mentioned, Abraham had definite ideas about the proper role of women in society, and being a published composer did not fit his definition of that role. While he was carefully grooming Felix for a musical career, he made it plain that because of her sex, it would be inappropriate for Fanny to aspire to a similar goal. She was indoctrinated by her father to believe that for a woman, music could be no more than a serious hobby.

It is evident from his letters that Abraham seized every opportunity to remind Fanny of the attitudes and activities that he deemed suitable for women. On July 16, 1820, while on a business trip to Paris, he wrote:

What you write to me about your musical occupations with reference to and in comparison with Felix was rightly thought

and expressed. Music will perhaps become his profession, whilst for *you* it can and must only be an ornament, never the root of your being and doing. We may therefore pardon him some ambition and desire to be acknowledged in a pursuit which appears very important to him, because he feels a vocation for it, whilst it does you credit that you have always shown yourself good and sensible in these matters; and your very joy at the praise he earns proves that you might, in his place, have merited equal approval. Remain true to these sentiments and to this line of conduct; they are feminine, and only what is truly feminine is an ornament to your sex.<sup>36</sup>

And on her twenty-third birthday, her father penned these stern words:

You must become more steady and collected, and prepare earnestly and eagerly for your real calling, the *only* calling of a young woman—I mean that of a housewife. . . . Women have a difficult task; the unremitting attention to every detail, the appreciation of every moment for some benefit or other—all these and more are the weighty duties of a woman.<sup>37</sup>

That Abraham spared no expense in developing his daughter's talent, that he encouraged her musical pursuits, only to forbid her the fulfilment of a professional career, seems unreasonable and cruel. However, in light of the deep-seated prejudice against women composers at the time, his attitude, while no less reprehensible, is hardly surprising.

Even without her father's preachings, it is clear that Fanny was well aware of society's negative view of female creativity, for she wrote the following to her future husband, shortly before their marriage in October 1829:



I am composing no more songs, at least not by modern poets I know personally. . . . I now comprehend what I've always heard and what the truth-speaking Jean Paul has also said: Art is not for women, only for girls; on the threshold of my new life I take leave of this plaything.<sup>38</sup>

Fortunately—for her and for us—she found it impossible to carry out this resolution.

Felix shared his father's belief that Fanny should not publish her music. For a 'lady' of her family background and social position, it would not have been considered respectable. He did, however, publish six of her songs under his own name: "Heimweh," "Italien," and the duet "Suleika und Hatem" in his op. 8 (1827); and "Sehnsucht," "Verlust," and "Die Nonne" in op. 9 (1830).<sup>39</sup> This gesture appears to have been Felix's way of encouraging Fanny without going against Abraham's wishes. In any case, he was always ready to admit to anyone who complimented him on these songs that they had come from the pen of his sister.

The songs were greeted with critical acclaim, one of Fanny's contributions to op. 8 being singled out by a critic for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* as among the finest of her brother's works:

The last Duet ["Suleika und Hatem"] . . . appears to us to be the most beautiful of the collection. Moreover, we know the composer of these songs from his larger compositions as a man, who we believe shows great promise, whose fulfilment is not far off.<sup>40</sup>

The ensuing confusion over the authorship of "Italien," another of Fanny's songs included in Felix's op. 8, led to two amusing incidents, the details of which are recounted in his letters to his family. The first occurred at Munich in 1830. Felix wrote:

Yesterday, a noble countess graciously praised my songs, and remarked, interrogatively, wasn't the one by Grillparzer [author of the text of "Italien"] altogether delightful. Yes, I said, and she thought I was conceited until I gave a full explanation by telling her that you were the composer.<sup>41</sup>

The second of these incidents took place during Felix's visit to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at Buckingham Palace in 1842. Knowing that the Queen was an accomplished singer, Felix asked her to perform one of his songs for him. Here is his account of the event:

She very kindly consented; and what did she choose? "Schöner und schöner" ["Italien"]; sang it beautifully in tune, in strict time, and with very nice expression. . . . Then I was obliged to confess that Fanny had written the song (which I found very hard, but pride must have a fall), and to beg her to sing one of my own as well.<sup>42</sup>

On January 1, 1829, Fanny began a diary, which she kept until her death. Her first entry reads: "This year will form an important segment in our family life. Felix, our soul, is going away, the beginning of the second half of my life stands before me."<sup>43</sup> Indeed, 1829 was a milestone year in the history of the Mendelssohn family: on January 22, Fanny became engaged to Wilhelm Hensel, a gifted court painter from Berlin; and on April 10, Felix, with Abraham's blessing, left for England to establish his reputation there as a performer, conductor and composer.

Felix's first trip to England, which lasted six months, was a sort of dress rehearsal for the "great journey" that would occupy him from 1830 to 1832. This grand tour, consisting of a visit to Italy, Switzerland, France, and a second trip to England, was carefully planned by Abraham to launch his son on an international career.<sup>44</sup> Fanny was not given a similar opportunity.

Following a strenuous round of performances and social commitments in London, Felix went to Scotland and Wales for a brief vacation. While in Edinburgh, he met John Thomson, a composer and critic for the *Harmonicon*. When Thomson mentioned his forthcoming trip to Berlin, Felix insisted that he must visit the Mendelssohn family.<sup>45</sup> According to Fanny's diary, Thomson visited Berlin in August of 1829.<sup>46</sup>

On learning that Fanny was the real composer of three of Felix's op. 8 Lieder, Thomson wrote a glowing appreciation of her work. His critique, probably the first published acknowledgment of her creative achievements, appeared in the March 1830 issue of the *Harmonicon*. Thomson wrote:

I possess twelve published songs under Mr. Mendelssohn's name, which he wrote when a boy of fifteen. . . . But the whole of the twelve are not by him; three of the best are by his sister, a young lady of great talents and accomplishments. I cannot refrain from mentioning Miss Mendelssohn's name in connexion with these songs, more particularly when I see so many ladies without one atom of genius, coming forward to the public with their musical crudities, and, because these are printed, holding up their heads as if they were finished musicians. . . . [Miss Mendelssohn] is no superficial musician; she has studied the science deeply, and writes with the freedom of a master. Her songs are distinguished by tenderness, warmth, and originality: some which I heard were exquisite.<sup>47</sup>

On October 3, 1829, Fanny and Wilhelm Hensel were married in Berlin. Fanny's joy on this important occasion was somewhat diminished by the absence of Felix, who, after returning to London from his holiday in Scotland and Wales, had injured his knee in a carriage accident. Confined to bed for the greater part of two months, he was unable to travel home for the wedding.<sup>48</sup> Fanny's

letter to Felix on the day of her wedding attests to the unusual closeness of their relationship:

Your picture is next to me, but as I write your name again and again and almost see you in person before my very eyes, I cry, as you do deep inside, but I cry. Actually, I've always known that I could never experience anything that would remove you from my memory for even one-tenth of a moment. . . . [I] will be able to repeat the same thing to you tomorrow and in every moment of my life. And I don't believe that I am doing Hensel an injustice through it. Your love has provided me with a great inner worth, and I will never stop holding myself in high esteem as long as you love me.<sup>49</sup>

It has long been known that Fanny composed the organ processional for her wedding,<sup>50</sup> but her letters reveal that she composed her own organ recessional as well. A few months prior to his sister's wedding, Felix had agreed to write an organ work for the occasion.<sup>51</sup> He began to compose it during his holiday in Wales, and continued to work on it after he returned to London, but because of his accident he was unable to finish it in time. This work was intended to be the recessional, for in a letter of September 29, Fanny scolds Felix for not having sent her an organ piece to accompany the bridal party out of the church: "My organ piece is finished . . . . If I only had yours! . . . Your letter just arrived and is nice, but the absence of an organ piece is not nice. For who is supposed to accompany me out of the church? The old Bach or I myself? Where shall I find the time to write one?"<sup>52</sup>

By the eve of her wedding day Fanny had still not found a suitable work. Although their prenuptial party was already in progress, Wilhelm suggested that she write her own recessional music. Thus, in the midst of the assembled well-wishers, Fanny began to compose her second and only other known organ piece.

Here is her account of the incident, and a brief description of this work:

Father had suggested the Pastorelle for the recessional, but I couldn't find it. . . . Then, around 9 o'clock, Hensel suggested that I compose a piece, and I had the audacity to start to compose in the presence of all the guests. I finished at 12:30 and don't think it's bad. . . . It's in G major; I already knew the [key] because I had already devised one before you promised to send me one. But the style is conservative.<sup>53</sup>

The Hensels made their home in the garden-house at Leipziger Strasse 3. Their only child, Sebastian, was born in the summer of 1830.<sup>54</sup> Fanny could not have wished for a finer husband than Wilhelm, for he was a constant source of encouragement to her in her creative endeavours. She spoke often, both in her letters and in her diary, of the happiness her marriage and child had brought her. However, her time and energy for composing were severely limited by housewifely duties. As the eldest daughter of the family, much of the responsibility of caring for her aging parents also fell on her shoulders. Not long after her marriage, she wrote: "My husband has given me the duty of going to the piano every morning immediately after breakfast, because interruption upon interruption occurs later on."<sup>55</sup> And a passage from one of her letters a few years later reads: "I haven't composed anything in a long time. Drained!"<sup>56</sup>

In a letter to Madame Kiené, the mother of Marie Bigot, Felix expressed regret over the fact that Fanny had become less prolific as a composer since her marriage, but added that it was both appropriate and good that she now devoted most of her time to domestic matters. He wrote:

It makes me sad, that since her marriage she can no longer compose as diligently as earlier, for she has composed several

things, especially German Lieder, which belong to the very best which we possess . . . ; still it is good on the other hand, that she finds much joy in domestic concerns, for a woman who neglects them, be it for oil colours, or for rhyme, or for double counterpoint always calls to mind instinctively . . . the femmes savantes,<sup>57</sup> and I am afraid of that. That is then, thank God, . . . not the case with my sister.<sup>58</sup>

To create a musical outlet for herself that would not be seen to conflict with her role as wife and mother, Fanny reinstated the Sunday musicales around the beginning of 1831.<sup>59</sup> She arranged the programmes, composed much of the repertoire, played the piano, and organized a small choir which she rehearsed on Friday afternoons.<sup>60</sup> Some of her most ambitious works were composed for these occasions. Among them were the cantatas *Lobgesang* (1831), *Hiob* (1831) and *Choleramusik* (1831)<sup>61</sup> for soloists, chorus and orchestra; *Hero und Leander*, a dramatic scene for soprano and orchestra (1832); and a string quartet (1834). But despite the favourable reception accorded these works, Fanny had little confidence in her ability to compose in the larger forms. She wrote: "My lengthy things die in their youth of decrepitude; I lack the ability to sustain ideas properly and give them the needed consistency. Therefore Lieder suit me best, in which, if need be, merely a pretty idea without much potential for development can suffice."<sup>62</sup>

Her low sense of self-confidence was further eroded by Felix's criticism of her cantatas. He expressed strong reservations about the orchestration of certain passages, as well as about the choice of texts.<sup>63</sup> He also told her that her creative talent did not lie in the direction of sacred music.<sup>64</sup> In view of his contempt for learned women, Felix may have considered it inappropriate for women to compose large-scale works.

While Fanny's Sunday musicales were conceived as entertainments for gatherings of family and friends, her account of two

especially successful programmes given in 1834 shows that they were anything but modest affairs:

Last month (June) I gave a delightful *fête*: [Gluck's] 'Iphigenia in Taurus', sung by Mme. Decker, Mme. Bader, and Mantius: anything so perfect will not soon be heard again. . . . [It was] even more beautiful than 'Orpheus' last year. On the Sunday following I had a full orchestra from the Königstadt theatre, and had my overture performed, which sounded very well.<sup>65</sup>

In November of 1835, at the conclusion of one of these programmes, Abraham declared that Fanny had guided the musicales to such a degree of perfection that they could hardly go on.<sup>66</sup> He died unexpectedly only a few days later, peacefully, in his sleep. The musicales were discontinued for the period of mourning, and it would appear from Fanny's letters that they were not resumed for some time.

The next few years were very difficult for Fanny. Felix, to whom she had always looked for encouragement and musical advice, was now well established in a brilliant career as conductor and composer in Leipzig, and was so busy that he seldom had time to visit her. With the exception of her husband, no one in Berlin seemed to show any interest in her music,<sup>67</sup> and she began to lose confidence in her creative ability.

Fanny's letters from this period betray her dependence on Felix's active interest in her work, and her growing sense of isolation. Among the most poignant is a letter to her friend Karl Klingemann, a young German diplomat attached to the Hanoverian legation in London:

Once a year, perhaps, some one will copy a piece of mine, or ask me to play something special—certainly no oftener; and now that Rebecca has left off singing, my songs lie unheeded

and unknown. If nobody ever offers an opinion, or takes the slightest interest in one's productions, one loses in time not only all pleasure in them, but all power of judging their value. Felix, who is alone sufficient public for me, is so seldom here that he cannot help me much, and thus I am thrown back entirely on myself. But my own delight in music and Hensel's sympathy keep me awake still, and I cannot help considering it a sign of talent that I do not give it up, though I can get nobody to take an interest in my efforts.<sup>68</sup>

She later wrote to Felix in a similar vein: "I scarcely remember what it feels like to be writing a song. Will it ever come back? . . . But what does it signify? I am not a hen to cackle over my own eggs, and not a soul dances to my piping."<sup>69</sup>

In the summer and fall of 1836, after several months of musical inactivity, Fanny composed some piano pieces, and sent them to Felix for his critical appraisal. In that it demonstrates the importance she attached to her brother's approval, Fanny's response to his encouraging remarks about these pieces is of considerable interest. She wrote: "You can . . . imagine how happy I am that you're pleased with my piano pieces, for it leads me to believe that I haven't gone totally downhill in music."<sup>70</sup>

In Wilhelm's opinion, the solution to Fanny's problem was simple: if she could find no audience for her compositions locally, she must publish them for the general public, something he had always wanted her to do.<sup>71</sup> Hoping that Felix might have altered his stand, Fanny first broached the subject to him in a letter of October 28, 1836: "I've frequently been asked, once again, about publishing something; should I do it?"<sup>72</sup> But Felix held fast to his former opinion; like their late father, he did not think it proper for a woman to allow her music to appear in print.

Fanny wrote to him again a month later:



With regard to my publishing I stand like a donkey between two bales of hay. I have to admit honestly that I'm rather neutral about it, and Hensel, on the one hand, is for it, and you on the other, are against it. I would of course comply totally with the wishes of my husband in any other matter, yet on this issue alone it's crucial to have your consent, for without it I might not undertake anything of the kind.<sup>73</sup>

Although Felix stood his ground, Fanny did submit a song entitled "Die Schiffende" to the music publisher Schlesinger. It was accepted, and appeared in a Lieder anthology early the next year. Felix was at first annoyed that his sister had acted against his wish, but when the song met with critical approval, he thanked her for not listening to him. He wrote: "Do you know, Fance, that your song in A major in Schlesinger's album is a grand success here? The new *Musical Gazett* (I mean the editor, who dines at the same hotel with me) is quite enthusiastic about you. They all say it is the best thing in the album."<sup>74</sup> The music journal mentioned in this letter was the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*; its editor, Robert Schumann.<sup>75</sup>

Six weeks later, Felix included Fanny's song in one of his Leipzig concerts, accompanying the singer himself. The following day he wrote: "I must write you about your song yesterday. How beautiful it was! . . . I thank you in the name of the public in Leipzig and elsewhere for publishing it against my wish."<sup>76</sup>

Elated at Fanny's success, Wilhelm and Lea urged her to publish more of her works. In a letter dated June 7, 1837, Lea pleaded with Felix to encourage and assist his sister in such a venture:

Permit me a question and a request. Shouldn't she publish a selection of *Lieder* and piano pieces? . . . That *you* haven't requested and encouraged her to do it—this alone holds her back. Wouldn't it therefore be appropriate for you to encourage her and help her find a publisher?<sup>77</sup>

But Felix stubbornly resisted. His reply echoes the views expressed by Abraham in his letter to Fanny on her twenty-third birthday:

From my knowledge of Fanny I should say that she has neither inclination nor vocation for authorship. She is too much all that a woman ought to be for this. She regulates her house, and, neither thinks of the public nor of the musical world, nor even of music at all until her first duties are fulfilled. Publishing would only disturb her in these, and I cannot say that I approve of it. . . . If she resolves to publish, either from her own impulse or to please Hensel, I am . . . quite ready to assist her so far as I can; but to encourage her in what I do not consider right, is what I cannot do.<sup>78</sup>

Felix's resistance to overcoming his prejudice about "women's place" must have been devastating to Fanny, all the more so because of her own reluctance to invest him with any blame for standing in her way. With the exception of "Schloss Liebeneck," another Lied which appeared in an anthology in 1837, she published no further works until 1846. Instead, she once again made the Sunday musicales her chief focus of attention. These concerts, which had begun a few years earlier as musical entertainments for gatherings of friends and relatives, changed dramatically at this time. According to Sebastian Hensel,

[they] assumed larger and larger proportions, both as regards the performers, the audience, and the character of the music. . . . Many of the visitors were total strangers brought by persons themselves only recently introduced, and the singers could scarcely find standing room, to say nothing of seats, so overcrowded did the rooms become.<sup>79</sup>

The Sunday musicales, which Fanny continued to hold until her death, became very prestigious events, and it was not uncommon for royalty or visiting musical celebrities to be seen in the audience. For example, Franz Liszt and eight princesses attended one of these concerts in 1844.<sup>80</sup> But more importantly, the musicales were also a valuable addition to the cultural life of the city. Berlin had not yet become the important musical centre it is today; its only concert organization was the Singakademie, whose repertoire consisted almost entirely of acknowledged masterpieces from the past. Fanny's recitals at Leipziger Strasse 3 did much to redress this imbalance. Assisted by some of Berlin's finest instrumentalists and singers, and occasionally by visiting foreign artists, such as English soprano Clara Novello and Belgian violinist Henri Vieuxtemps, she presented regular programmes of works both old and new which were then little known.<sup>81</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that she introduced her audiences to many works now in the standard repertoire.<sup>82</sup>

A high point in Fanny's life was the winter of 1840, which the Hensels spent in Rome. There she made friends with Charles Gounod, a recent winner of the Prix de Rome. Gounod had not previously been exposed to German music, and Fanny introduced him to many works of Bach, Beethoven, her brother, and some of her own as well.<sup>83</sup> In his memoirs, Gounod wrote the following tribute to Fanny: "Madame Henzel [*sic*] was a musician beyond comparison, a remarkable pianist, and a woman of superior mind. . . . She was gifted with rare ability as a composer."<sup>84</sup>

Fanny respected Gounod both as a friend and as a musician, and his interest and encouragement meant a great deal to her. She wrote:

I compose a good deal now, for nothing inspires me like praise, whilst censure discourages and depresses me. Gounod is such an enthusiast in music as I have seldom seen. He likes my little Venetian piece very much, as well as one in B minor that I have

composed here; also Felix's duet and Capriccio in A Minor, but above all Bach's concerto, which I have had to play for him at least ten times.<sup>85</sup>

In 1846, the friendship of another fine musician, Robert von Keudell, provided Fanny with the same encouragement and support as had her earlier relationship with Gounod. Of von Keudell, she wrote: "[He] keeps my music alive and in constant activity, as Gounod once did. He takes an intense interest in everything that I write, and calls my attention to any shortcomings; being generally in the right too."<sup>86</sup>

Sebastian Hensel speculates that it may have been partially due to von Keudell's persuasion that his mother decided to publish around this time. She had been approached by two rival Berlin publishers with a view to bringing out more of her works, and Fanny accepted their offers.<sup>87</sup> In July of 1846, she recorded in her diary:

Bote & Bock have made offers to me the likes of which have perhaps never before been given to a dilettante composer of my sex, whereupon Schlesinger even outdid them. I do not in the least imagine that this will continue, but am pleased at the moment, having decided to embark on this course, to see my best works appear in print.<sup>88</sup>

Reluctantly, she informed Felix of her decision:

I'm afraid of my brothers at age forty, as I was of Father at age fourteen—or, more aptly expressed, desirous of pleasing you and everyone I've loved throughout my life. And when I know in advance that it won't be the case, I thus feel rather uncomfortable. In a word, I'm beginning to publish. . . . I hope I won't disgrace all of you through my publishing, as I'm no *femme*

*libre*. . . . I trust *you* will in no way be bothered by it, since, as you can see, I've proceeded completely on my own in order to spare you any possible unpleasant moment, and I hope you won't think badly of me. If it succeeds—that is, if the pieces are well liked and I receive additional offers—I know it will be a great stimulus to me, something I've always needed in order to create. If not, I'll be as indifferent as I've always been and not be upset, and then if I work less or stop completely, nothing will have been lost by that either.<sup>89</sup>

Felix, whose views on professional women composers had not changed, was displeased that his sister had relinquished her amateur status without his consent.<sup>90</sup> A full month passed before he finally extended his congratulations to her. He wrote:

[I] send you my professional blessing on becoming a member of the craft. This I do now in full, Fance, and may you have much happiness in giving pleasure to others; may you taste only the sweets and none of the bitterness of authorship; may the public pelt you with roses, and never with sand; and may the printer's ink never draw black lines on your soul—all of which I devoutly believe will be the case.<sup>91</sup>

On the day she received Felix's letter, Fanny confided the following to her diary: "At last Felix has written, and given me his professional blessing in the kindest manner. I know that he is not quite satisfied in his heart of hearts, but I am glad he has said a kind word to me about it."<sup>92</sup>

With the exception of the previously mentioned six early songs published in Felix's opp. 8 and 9, Fanny's compositions were brought out under her married name. Her op. 1 *Lieder* and op. 2 character pieces for piano were issued in 1846; the *Gartenlieder* (six part songs for a cappella choir), op. 3, and three further volumes

of character pieces for piano, opp. 4–6, were issued in 1847. All of these works were reviewed in the musical press. Overall, the response of critics was favourable. The op. 1 Lieder were praised for their clean harmony, the elegance of the accompanying figures, and “the whole outer appearance,” but the reviewer found them lacking in “inner emotion.”<sup>93</sup> Another critique, an assessment of the op. 2 piano pieces, mentions that they were written by a woman, “whose outward composition betrays no trace of a female hand, but allows rather the supposition of a masculine, serious study of the art.”<sup>94</sup> The most laudatory of these reviews is an unusually long and detailed critique of all four piano collections, which concludes as follows: “We express our sincere thanks to the artist for the publication of these works. They will be welcomed by everyone who cherishes beauty within art.”<sup>95</sup>

Fanny was greatly encouraged by the success of her publishing venture. Her diary entry of February 1847 reads: “It is enticing to have this manner of success at an age when such pleasures, for women who experience them at all, are usually at an end.”<sup>96</sup> Inspired by these pleasures, she began to compose a piece of larger scale—the Trio in D Minor for piano, violin and cello. It was first performed at a musical evening in Rebecca’s home on April 11, 1847, where it “received a generally warm reception.”<sup>97</sup>

One month later, on Friday afternoon, May 14, while conducting a rehearsal by her choir of Felix’s *Walpurgisnacht* for the following Sunday musicale, Fanny suffered a stroke. She died at 11 o’clock the same night at the age of forty-one.<sup>98</sup> Still on her desk was her last song, “Bergeslust,” which she had completed the previous day. A setting of a poem by Eichendorff, its final line reads, “Thoughts and songs ascend to the kingdom of heaven.” This was engraved on her tombstone.<sup>99</sup>

Two men were totally devastated by Fanny’s death: her husband and Felix. Wilhelm, who survived his wife by some fifteen years, went completely to pieces when she died. He lost all interest in

his painting and soon gave it up. Fanny had managed the house, looked after the property, and supervised the education of their son; Wilhelm found himself incapable of dealing with any of these responsibilities. Rebecca and her husband took over the care of Sebastian, then a young man of sixteen, and Wilhelm wandered aimlessly during his remaining years, dabbling in politics.<sup>100</sup>

Already exhausted from overwork, and showing signs of failing health, Felix suffered a death-blow at the news of his sister's demise. He became seriously depressed, and could not even bring himself to attend the funeral.<sup>101</sup> He wrote about Fanny on May 24: "With her kindness and love she was part of myself every moment of my life. . . . I make myself believe that the tragic news will suddenly prove false; yet I know very well that it is all true. I will never, never be able to get used to it."<sup>102</sup> On November 4, less than six months after his sister, he also died of a series of strokes.<sup>103</sup> One of his final acts was to arrange with Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig's most prestigious music publishing house, to bring out more of Fanny's works.<sup>104</sup>

The fact that Schumann and Gounod held Fanny Hensel in high esteem as a composer speaks volumes about the calibre of her music. From the limited number of her compositions available in print and on recordings, it is readily apparent that she was one of the supreme melodists of her age. Many of her *Lieder* bear comparison to the finest of those of Schubert, Schumann and Brahms. Equally impressive are the *Gartenlieder*, op. 3, composed in 1846 for her own choir.<sup>105</sup> Schumann was much taken with these part songs. Shortly after their publication, he ordered copies for possible performance by his choir in Dresden.<sup>106</sup> Hensel's numerous character pieces for piano are similar in style and quality to Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*. An interesting work from the perspective of innovation is *Das Jahr*, a cycle of twelve piano pieces representing the months of the year, composed in 1841. The concept for this work was unique in the history of piano literature, predating Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons* by thirty-four years.

Since all of Hensel's works were created for presentation at her Sunday musicales, it is important to remember that her choice of genres was largely dictated by the performing forces at her disposal. It was also probably determined to some extent by the fact that her brother discouraged her from writing large-scale works. However, on the evidence of such beautifully crafted, extended compositions as the Overture in C Major, the op. 11 Piano Trio, the String Quartet in E-flat Major, and the Piano Sonata in G Minor, one is led to speculate that, given the same encouragement and professional opportunities as her brother, she might well have become his rival as a symphonist.

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel was both a victim and a survivor. In light of her upbringing, it must have taken enormous courage for her to defy convention by making the leap from the private sphere of the salon—her allotted place as a female creator—to the public sphere of the published composer. To borrow the words of a recent critic, “Although no one may have danced to her ‘piping’ during her lifetime, to ignore her now would be a very large loss indeed.”<sup>107</sup>

## NOTES

1. For a list of Fanny Hensel's published works, see Françoise Tillard, *Fanny Mendelssohn*, trans. Camille Naish (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1996), 384–87. The largest collection of Hensel's autograph scores is housed in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Mendelssohn-Archiv, Berlin. Other autographs are held by the Bodleian Library in Oxford, Goethe-Museum and Heinrich Heine-Institut in Düsseldorf, Sammlung Rudolf Nydahl in Stockholm, Musikabteilung of the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and by private collectors in Germany and England. For catalogues of these manuscripts, see the following: Rudolf Elvers, “Verzeichnis der Musik-Autographen von Fanny Hensel im Mendelssohn-Archiv zu Berlin,” *Mendelssohn Studien* 1 (1972): 169–74; Rudolf Elvers, “Weitere Quellen



- zu den Werken von Fanny Hensel," *Mendelssohn Studien* 2 (1975): 215–20; Victoria Ressmeyer Sirota, *The Life and Works of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel* (Mus.A.D. diss., Boston University School for the Arts, 1981), 300–329.
2. Herbert Kupferberg, *The Mendelssohns: Three Generations of Genius* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 94.
3. Quoted in Sebastian Hensel, *The Mendelssohn Family (1729–1847), from Letters and Journals*, 2nd ed., trans. Carl Klingemann and an American collaborator, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1881), 1:73.
4. Kupferberg, 95.
5. Ibid., 99–101.
6. George R. Marek, *Gentle Genius: The Story of Felix Mendelssohn* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1972), 88.
7. Ibid., 82–83.
8. Hensel, 1:88.
9. Sirota, 3.
10. R. Larry Todd, *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26.
11. Founded in 1791 by Carl Friedrich Christian Fasch, the Singakademie was Berlin's leading organization for the study and performance of choral music, and one of the most important art institutions in Germany.
12. Marek, 107–8.
13. Ibid., 82.
14. Hensel, 1:88.
15. Marek, 80–81.
16. Kupferberg, 113–14.
17. Hensel, 1:121.
18. Quoted in Emil F. Smidak, *Isaak-Ignaz Moscheles: The Life of the Composer and his Encounters with Beethoven, Liszt, Chopin and Mendelssohn* (Aldershot, England: Scholar Press, 1989), 34.
19. Susanna Grossmann-Vendrey, *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy und die Musik der Vergangenheit* (Regensburg: Bosse Verlag, 1969), 15.
20. Some of Fanny's composition exercises and contrapuntal studies dating from the years 1820–1821, with corrections in Zelter's hand, are known to exist in a private collection in Germany. Sirota, 8n2.
21. Georg Schünemann, "Die Bachpflege der Berliner Singakademie," *Bach-Jahrbuch* 25 (1928): 151.

22. Rudolf Elvers, *Fanny Hensel: Dokumente ihres Lebens* (Berlin: Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 1972), n.p. [p. 7].
23. Sirota, 186.
24. See Zelter to Goethe, 10 December 1824, quoted in Marek, 124.
25. Karl Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Goethe and Mendelssohn*, 2nd ed., trans. M. E. von Glehn (London: Macmillan, 1874), 24 (hereafter cited by its title).
26. Ibid., 24–25.
27. Fanny's Goethe songs are discussed in Marcia J. Citron, "The Lieder of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel," *Musical Quarterly* 49 (1983): 577–78.
28. Quoted in *Goethe and Mendelssohn*, 35.
29. Quoted in *ibid.*, 50.
30. Goethe's assessment of woman's creative ability is quoted by Ferdinand Praeger, in response to the reading of Stephen S. Stratton's paper "Woman in Relation to Musical Art," *Proceedings of the Musical Association* (7 May 1883): 134.
31. Quoted in Hensel, 1:117.
32. Quoted in *ibid.*
33. Fanny to Felix, 28 October 1821, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, ed. and trans., with introductory essays and notes, by Marcia J. Citron (New York: Pendragon Press, 1987), 2.
34. Kupferberg, 157.
35. Felix Mendelssohn, *Letters*, ed. G. Selden-Goth (New York: Pantheon Books, 1945), 76.
36. Quoted in Hensel, 1:82.
37. Quoted in *ibid.*, 1:84.
38. Quoted in Citron, "The Lieder of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel," 571. Jean Paul Richter (1763–1825) was one of Fanny's favourite writers.
39. Hensel, 2:30–31. Although past and present writers have speculated that her share in Felix's publications may have been more extensive, composer/conductor Julius Rietz, an intimate friend of Fanny and Felix, stated in 1864 that these six songs are the sum total of Fanny's works published under her brother's name. See Julius Rietz, preface to his "Catalogue of All the Musical Compositions of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy," in *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, from 1833 to 1847*, ed. Paul Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Carl Mendelssohn Bartholdy, trans. Lady Wallace (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970; a reprint of the 1864 ed.), 399. See also Hensel, 2:31.

40. "Kurze Anzeigen: Zwölf Gesänge mit Begleitung des Pianoforte, komponiert von Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 29 (28 November 1827), col. 813–15, quoted in Sirota, 27.
41. Felix to Fanny, 11 June 1830, Felix Mendelssohn, *Letters*, 77.
42. Felix to Lea, 19 July 1842, *ibid.*, 307–308. For Queen Victoria's account of this event, see her diary entry of 6 July 1843, quoted in Marek, 293.
43. Quoted in Sirota, 33.
44. See Felix to Abraham, Felix Mendelssohn, *Letters*, 193.
45. Hensel, 1:197.
46. See Fanny's diary entry of 31 August 1829, quoted in *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, 82. See also Fanny to Felix, 2 September 1829, *ibid.*, 80–81.
47. John Thomson [J. T.], "Notes of a Musical Tourist," *Harmonicon* 8 (1830): 99; reprint ed. (London: Gregg International, 1971).
48. Hensel, 1:229.
49. Fanny to Felix, 3 October 1829, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, 90.
50. See Hensel, 1:241. The autograph of this work, a Praeludium in F Major, dated 28 September 1829, and inscribed in German with the words "for the third of October 1829," is housed in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
51. See Felix to his family, 11 August 1829, quoted in *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, 78. For Fanny's reply, see her letter of 25 August 1829, *ibid.*, 77.
52. *Ibid.*, 88–89.
53. *Ibid.*, 91.
54. Hensel, 1:248.
55. Fanny to Felix, n.d. [c. early November 1829], *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, 96.
56. Fanny to Felix, 27 April 1834, *ibid.*, 138.
57. A reference to Molière's play *Les Femmes savantes*, in which he pokes fun at "bluestockings."
58. Felix to Madame Kiené, 1 June 1835, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., quoted in Sirota, 85.
59. Based on Felix's letter of 22 February 1831, in which he congratulates Fanny for having revived this family tradition, the musicales were probably reinstated in January of 1831. See *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy*

- from Italy and Switzerland*, trans. Lady Wallace (Boston: Ditson, 1861), 10–11.
60. Hensel, 1:251–52.
  61. Fanny composed the *Choleramusik* in memory of those who died during the 1831 cholera epidemic in Berlin. Until very recently, because of its expanded dimensions (thirteen movements scored for four soloists and eight-part chorus, and the inclusion of trombones in the orchestration), it was mistakenly thought to be an oratorio. Todd, 151 and 156–57.
  62. Fanny to Felix, 17 February 1835, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, 174.
  63. See Felix to Fanny, 28 December 1831, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy from Italy and Switzerland*, 317–18.
  64. See Fanny to Felix, 4 February 1836, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, 201.
  65. Quoted in Hensel, 1:252. The overture mentioned in this passage is probably Fanny's unpublished Overture in C Major. The undated autograph of this work is in the Mendelssohn Archive.
  66. Hensel, 1:335.
  67. *Ibid.*, 2:31.
  68. Fanny to Klingemann, 15 July 1835, quoted in *ibid.*, 2:31.
  69. Quoted in *ibid.*, 2:38.
  70. Fanny to Felix, 16 November 1836, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, 217.
  71. Hensel, 2:33.
  72. *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, 214.
  73. Fanny to Felix, 22 November 1836, *ibid.*, 222.
  74. Felix to Fanny, 24 January 1837, quoted in Hensel, 2:31.
  75. See Leon B. Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo, 1976), x.
  76. Felix to Fanny, 7 March 1837, quoted in Hensel, 2:30.
  77. Quoted in Marcia J. Citron, "Felix Mendelssohn's Influence on Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel as a Professional Composer," *Current Musicology* 37/38 (1984): 15.
  78. Felix to Lea, 24 June 1837, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, from 1833–1847*, 113–14. The published version of this letter is incorrectly dated 2 June 1837. The date on the New York Public Library autograph is 24 June 1837.

79. Hensel, 2:36.
80. See Fanny to Rebecca, 18 March 1844, quoted in *ibid.*, 2:260.
81. *Ibid.*, 2:36.
82. *Ibid.*, 1:252.
83. Charles Gounod, *Memoirs of an Artist: An Autobiography*, trans. E. Crocker (Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally & Co., 1895), 125–26. See also Hensel, 2:106.
84. Gounod, 125.
85. Fanny's diary, 23 April 1840, quoted in Hensel, 2:101.
86. Quoted in *ibid.*, 2:325.
87. *Ibid.*
88. Quoted in Rudolf Elvers, preface to Fanny Hensel, *Ausgewählte Klavierwerke* (Munich: Henle, 1986), vii.
89. Fanny to Felix, 9 July 1846, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, 349–51.
90. Hensel, 2:325.
91. Felix to Fanny, 12 August 1846, quoted in *ibid.*, 2:326.
92. Fanny's diary, 14 August 1846, quoted in *ibid.*
93. "Liederschau: Fanny Hensel, Op.1," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 26 (1 February 1847): 38, as described in Sirota, 124. Also quoted in Tillard, 330.
94. "Für Pianoforte: Fanny Hensel, geb. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Op. 2," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 26 (11 January 1847): 14, quoted in Sirota, 124. Also quoted in Tillard, 330.
95. "Über die Clavier-Kompositionen von Fanny Hensel," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 49 (1847): 381–83, as described and quoted in Citron, "Felix Mendelssohn's Influence on Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel as a Professional Composer," 16–17.
96. Quoted in Elvers, preface to Fanny Hensel, *Ausgewählte Klavierwerke*, vii.
97. Fanny's diary entry of April 1847, quoted in *ibid.* The piano trio was published posthumously as op. 11.
98. Kupferberg, 225.
99. Sirota, 126. "Bergeslust" was later published as op. 10, no. 5.
100. Kupferberg, 225.
101. *Ibid.*, 226.
102. Felix to General von Webern, 24 May 1847, quoted in Marek, 312.
103. Kupferberg, 230.

104. See Felix to Paul Mendelssohn, 24 August 1847, *Felix Mendelssohn: A Life in Letters*, ed. Rudolf Elvers, trans. Craig Tomlinson (New York: Fromm International, 1986), 282. Four volumes of Fanny's works (opp. 8–11) were eventually issued by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1850. Her family also supervised the publication of several isolated piano pieces and the op. 7 Lieder, issued by Bote & Bock in 1848. Elvers, preface to Fanny Hensel, *Ausgewählte Klavierwerke*, vii.
105. Fanny herself was especially fond of the *Gartenlieder*. She wrote, "I spent some very pleasant time on these pieces and therefore they mean more to me than other of my goodies." Fanny to Felix, 1 February 1847, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, 363.
106. Todd, 357. See also Sirota, 218.
107. James Parsons, "Emerging from the Shadows: Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann," *Opus 2* (February 1986): 31.

## CLARA SCHUMANN: A COMPOSER'S WIFE AS COMPOSER

In an age when musical talent in a female was seldom developed beyond the level of an accomplishment—a means of enhancing her matrimonial prospects—Clara Schumann, née Wieck, received an enviable musical education, and enjoyed a brilliant performing career that kept her before the public for more than half a century. Best remembered today as one of the foremost pianists of the nineteenth century, and as the devoted wife and musical helpmate of Robert Schumann, Clara Schumann was also highly respected during her lifetime as a composer<sup>1</sup>—a fact rarely mentioned in music history textbooks. This chapter examines her life and works, and the forces that impeded her progress as a musical creator.

The details of Clara Wieck's early years are preserved in a diary which Friedrich Wieck, her father-teacher-manager, began for her when she was seven years old. Until Clara reached her nineteenth year, he either wrote or supervised almost every entry—an indication of the extent to which he controlled all facets of her life. The first entry reads:

I was born at Leipzig, Sept. 13th 1819 . . . and received the name Clara Josephine. . . . My father kept a musical lending-library and carried on a small business in pianofortes. Since both he and my mother were much occupied in teaching, and besides that my mother practised from one to two hours a day, I was chiefly left to the care of the maid. . . . She was not very fluent of speech, and it may well have been owing to this that I did not begin to pronounce even single words until I was between four and five, and up to that time understood as little as I spoke. But I had always been accustomed to hear a great deal of piano playing and my ear became more sensitive to musical sounds than to those of speech.<sup>2</sup>

Clara inherited her prodigious musical gifts from both parents. Friedrich Wieck (1785–1873), though largely self-educated in music (he held a degree in theology), was a shrewd businessman and a remarkable teacher of piano and singing. Obsessed with a burning ambition to acquire musical distinction, he was also an opportunist who exploited the talents of his immediate family to enhance his reputation as a teacher.<sup>3</sup>

Clara's mother, Marianne Tromlitz Wieck (1797–1872), was an uncommonly talented singer and pianist. She had studied with Wieck in her childhood and, in compliance with his wish, again became his pupil after their marriage. Marianne appeared frequently as soprano soloist in the Leipzig Gewandhaus Subscription Concerts during the 1816–1817 season, and performed piano concertos by Ries, Dussek, and Field on the same platform in 1821, 1822 and 1823.<sup>4</sup>

Marianne's public appearances were extremely important to Wieck; his prestige as a music educator increased with every concert she gave. But having never aspired to a performing career, it was not without protest that she assumed the role of a concert artist for the advancement of her husband's fame.<sup>5</sup> Her growing resentment eventually led to rebellion. On May 12, 1824, with Clara and infant son Viktor in tow, she fled to her parents' home in Plauen, and arranged for a legal separation.<sup>6</sup> She was granted a divorce the following year. Because the court ruled that Clara must be restored to the custody of her father on her fifth birthday, the child had little direct contact with her mother during most of her formative years.<sup>7</sup>

Even before Clara's birth, Wieck had resolved that if she proved to be a girl, he would mould her into a performing artist of the highest rank. Female concert pianists were then still rare, and he knew that an important one would attract considerable attention. Her success would make him famous as the leading piano teacher in all of Europe. In keeping with his plan for his daughter's life, he named her Clara, meaning 'illustrious.'<sup>8</sup>



Clara's formal musical education began a few days after her fifth birthday.<sup>9</sup> Wieck's goal was to produce a virtuoso pianist who would also be a well-rounded musician, and he believed that "the whole education, from earliest youth, must have reference to this end."<sup>10</sup> In keeping with this philosophy, he supervised Clara's every waking moment. Her academic studies were squeezed into the few hours not taken up by music lessons, piano practice, and the long daily walks that her father prescribed for every member of his household. She attended a local primary school for six months in 1825, and was then sent to the Noack Institute, a larger school, for the better part of a year. Her general education was limited to the time spent at these two schools, and her hours of attendance were shortened to accommodate her music studies. She was taught only those subjects that her father deemed necessary for her future career: reading, writing, and, with tutors, a smattering of French and English—the languages she would need for her concert tours.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to her modest academic background, Clara's musical education was extraordinary by any standard. By the age of seven, she was spending at least three hours a day at the piano—one hour for a lesson with her father, and two hours for practice.<sup>12</sup> Formal training in theory and composition began when she was barely ten. Her instructors for these subjects were Christian Theodore Weinlig, Cantor of St. Thomas Church, and Heinrich Dorn, director of the Leipzig Opera. Other Leipzig teachers taught her violin and score reading. Wieck later sent her to Dresden to study advanced composition and orchestration with Carl Reissiger, and voice with Johann Aloys Miksch. She also worked with the finest instructors in the cities where she toured; while concertizing in Berlin in 1837, for instance, she had counterpoint lessons with Siegfried Dehn.<sup>13</sup>

On November 8, 1830, the eleven-year-old Clara Wieck made her official professional debut in a solo recital at the Leipzig Gewandhaus. Her programme included bravura works by Kalkbrenner, Herz, and Czerny, and two of her own compositions—*Variations*

on an *Original Theme* for piano, and a song, sung by assisting artist Henriette Grabau. The critics had nothing but praise for her work. In the *Leipziger Zeitung*, for example, we read: “The excellent and remarkable performance of the young pianist, both in playing and in her compositions, aroused universal admiration and won her the greatest applause.”<sup>14</sup>

Encouraged by this success, the ambitious Wieck wasted little time in taking Clara on tour. By 1835, she was renowned throughout Europe as a child prodigy. As was the custom in the 1830s, at least one of her own compositions appeared on nearly all of her programmes.<sup>15</sup> When Ludwig Spohr heard her perform some of her works in 1831, he wrote: “Her compositions, like the young artist herself, are among the most remarkable newcomers in the world of art.”<sup>16</sup> Spohr was not the only composer to praise Clara’s creative talent; Felix Mendelssohn, Chopin, Liszt, and Robert Schumann—the man who would later become her husband—were also early admirers of her music.

Robert Schumann was eighteen years old and Clara was nine when they first met at the home of mutual friends in Leipzig in 1828. Enchanted by her playing, Schumann arranged to study piano with her father. In 1830, he took up residence in the Wieck household as a boarder-pupil, and soon became close friends with Clara. Even after he moved into his own quarters, he continued to visit her daily. When Clara was on tour, the two friends corresponded regularly.

Not long after meeting Clara, Schumann had mused in his diary, “It’s amazing that there are no female composers. . . . Women could perhaps be regarded as the frozen, firm embodiment of music.”<sup>17</sup> It was Clara who changed his mind about the absence of female composers. Her first published compositions, *Quatre Polonaises*, written in 1830, were brought out in February of 1831 as her op. 1. The young composer saved a copy especially for “Herr Schumann, who lives with us since Michaelmas, and studies music.”<sup>18</sup> While the

polonaises seldom rise above the level of exceptionally well-crafted salon music, they are highly sophisticated works, for an eleven-year-old.

As the publication of these pieces suggests, Wieck's plans for Clara's future were not confined exclusively to performance, but extended to the realm of composition as well. He was justifiably proud of his daughter's productive talent, and hoped that she might one day emerge as an important creative figure—a representative of the 'new Romantic' school. He alluded to this in a letter to his friend Music Director Riem of Bremen: "I shall have much to say to you when we meet about the new Romantic school in which Chopin, Pixis, Liszt in Paris and several of Robert Schumann's disciples here write (and perhaps Clara promises to write)."<sup>19</sup>

Evidence of Clara's maturing creative powers is already apparent in her *Caprices en forme de Valse*, op. 2, issued in 1832. In the summer of 1833, she composed several other piano pieces and began an orchestral overture.<sup>20</sup> One of her new works, *Romance variée*, op. 3, which she dedicated to Schumann, was published that same summer. Knowing that Robert was already working on a set of piano pieces based on the theme from this composition (brought out a few months later as his *Impromptus on a Romance by Clara Wieck*, op. 5), she wrote:

Sorry as I am to have dedicated the following trifle to you, and much as I wished not to see the variations printed, yet the evil has come to pass now, and cannot be altered. Your able re-casting of this little musical thought will make good my mistakes, and so I beg for this, for I can hardly wait to make its better acquaintance.<sup>21</sup>

As the above passage suggests, Robert and Clara delighted in sharing musical ideas, and sometimes quoted one another in their works.<sup>22</sup> Several years later, in one of his letters to Clara, Robert wrote: "You

complete me as a composer, as I do you. Every thought of yours comes from my soul, just as I have to thank you for all my music.”<sup>23</sup>

The most ambitious composition of Clara’s youth is her Concerto in A Minor, a three-movement work for piano and orchestra, which she began in January of 1833. Robert helped her by orchestrating the third movement,<sup>24</sup> but, based on the surviving evidence, it seems likely that Clara orchestrated the first two movements herself. Assisted by the Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestra, under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn, Clara played the premiere performance of her concerto on November 9, 1835. Although the work received only a lukewarm reception at its premiere, Clara achieved considerable success with it on her concert tours during the next few years.<sup>25</sup> It was subsequently published as her op. 7.

Critical opinions of the A-Minor Concerto were decidedly mixed. C. F. Becker, a regular contributor to the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, offhandedly dismissed the piece, asserting that there could be no question of a real critique “since we are dealing here with the work of a lady.”<sup>26</sup> The most favourable review came from the critic of the *Komet*, who noted that the concerto was “written throughout in a grand style,” and praised it not only for “the interchange of the softest and most tuneful melodies with the fieriest and most fantastic passages,” but for “the poetic unity which governed the whole.”<sup>27</sup>

Bearing in mind that the concerto is the work of a fourteen-year-old who had previously composed only miniatures, it is an extraordinary achievement. In its attempted thematic unity, it foreshadows Robert’s largely monothematic piano concerto in the same key, completed in 1845.

November of 1835 marked a milestone in Clara’s life, not because of the premiere of her concerto, but because it was then that she and Robert confessed their love for one another. When Wieck became aware of the seriousness of their relationship, he flew into a blind rage. Clara was forbidden to see or even communicate with

her lover again. Wieck even threatened to shoot Robert on sight if he attempted to contact her.<sup>28</sup>

Wieck's opposition to Clara's involvement with Schumann cannot be attributed entirely to parental concern. He regarded Clara not only as his daughter, but as his passport to fame. Since he kept all her earnings, she was also his greatest source of income. If he allowed her love affair with Schumann to continue, Wieck knew that he stood to lose a great deal, and he resolved to go to any length to prevent that from happening.

Eighteen long months passed before Clara and Robert dared to contact each other again. Hoping that Wieck might now be more receptive to the idea of their relationship, the unhappy couple agreed that Robert should approach him on Clara's eighteenth birthday, with a formal request for her hand in marriage.<sup>29</sup> But nothing had changed. Wieck brusquely informed Robert that Clara had been groomed to become an artist, not a *Hausfrau*, and that he found the idea of "Clara with the perambulator" too ridiculous to contemplate.<sup>30</sup>

Thus began a three-year battle between Wieck and the two lovers. In his determined efforts to prevent their marriage, Wieck's behaviour became increasingly irrational and vindictive. He even attempted to destroy his daughter's career. Robert and Clara eventually had no alternative but to take their case to court. The legal proceedings dragged on for months, but on August 1, 1840, the court ruled that they were free to marry without Wieck's consent.<sup>31</sup>

Despite her emotional turmoil, Clara toured extensively during this entire period, first with her father and later alone. Audiences in Berlin, Vienna, Paris and other cities thronged to her concerts; she created a sensation wherever she appeared. In keeping with concert practices of the day, she continued to produce new works for her programmes, and publishers competed for the honour of printing them.<sup>32</sup> Several of Clara's piano compositions date from this period: opp. 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11. Opp. 8, 9 and 10 are typical

of the glittering display pieces that all virtuosi of the 1830s were expected to compose for their own recitals, while the *Soirées musicales*, op. 6, and the *Three Romances*, op. 11, are character pieces in the tradition of the new Romantic school.

Clara Wieck and Robert Schumann were married on September 12, 1840. They settled first in Leipzig, moving to Dresden in 1844 and finally to Düsseldorf in 1850. “We enjoy a happiness such as I never knew before,” wrote Clara in February, 1841. And she continued, “Father has always laughed at so-called domestic bliss. How I pity those who do not know it! They are only half alive!”<sup>33</sup>

Nonetheless, marriage posed serious obstacles to Clara’s performing career and to her work as a composer. The Schumanns had two grand pianos, but since Robert needed absolute quiet while composing, both instruments could not be played at the same time. Many passages in Clara’s diary bemoan “the evils of thin walls,”<sup>34</sup> and her entry of June 3, 1841, complains: “My piano playing is falling behind. This always happens when Robert is composing. There is not even one little hour in the whole day for myself! If only I don’t fall too far behind. . . . I can’t do anything with my composing—I would sometimes like to strike my dumb head!”<sup>35</sup> Although it saddened Robert that “far too often she has to buy my songs at the price of invisibility and silence,”<sup>36</sup> he always took it as a matter of course that Clara would make this sacrifice, and he accepted it unashamedly.

In addition, much of Clara’s time was taken up with running the house, and maternal responsibilities were not long in coming. During the fourteen years she and her husband were together, she bore eight children: Marie (b 1841), Elise (b 1843), Julie (b 1845), Emil (b 1846, d 1847), Ludwig (b 1848), Ferdinand (b 1849), Eugenie (b 1851) and Felix (b 1854). But despite the demands of marriage and motherhood, and the physical strain of multiple pregnancies, she continued to perform. She played at least 139 public concerts between 1840 and 1854, some as far afield as Copenhagen

(1842) and Russia (1844).<sup>37</sup> When time permitted, she also composed.

It is certain that Clara derived much satisfaction from creative work, for she once wrote, “There is nothing greater than the joy of composing something, and then listening to it.”<sup>38</sup> But although her works were well received by concert audiences and praised by other composers and performers, she had little confidence in her creative powers. Numerous passages in her diaries and letters attest to the fact that she had internalized the negative attitudes of contemporary society towards women’s creativity. Her diary entry of November 28, 1839, less than a year before her marriage, is a case in point:

I once believed that I had creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not wish to compose—there never was one able to do it. Am I intended to be the one? It would be arrogant to believe that. That was something with which my father tempted me in former days. But I soon gave up believing this. May Robert always create; that must always make me happy.<sup>39</sup>

On another occasion, she wrote: “Women always betray themselves in their compositions, and this is true of myself as well as of others.”<sup>40</sup>

Robert did not share Clara’s reservations about her creative ability. He admired her music, and constantly encouraged her to produce new works. In December 1840, Clara planned a special Christmas surprise for him. She noted in their marriage diary:

Whenever Robert went out of the house, I spent my time in attempts to compose a song (something he had always wanted), and finally I succeeded in completing *three*, which I will present to him at Christmas. If they are really of little value, merely

a *very weak attempt*, I am counting on Robert's forbearance and [hope] that he will understand that it was done with the best will in the world in order to fulfill this wish of his—just as I fulfill all his wishes.<sup>41</sup>

Robert was delighted with the songs. "They are full of her old youthful ardor," he wrote, "yet [they] show her to be maturer as a musician."<sup>42</sup>

Inspired by Clara's Christmas gift, Schumann proposed that they collaborate on a volume of *Lieder*. During the second week of January 1841, he wrote in their marriage diary: "I am full of this idea of publishing a book of songs together with Clara. During the week to Monday 11th I finished nine songs from the *Liebesfrühling* of Rückert, and I think I have recaptured my own particular style. It is now Clara's turn to set some of them. Do so Klärchen!"<sup>43</sup>

Because her experience as a vocal composer was still very limited, Clara found her share of the work difficult. She confided her despair to the diary: "I have several times sat down to the poems of Rückert that Robert has given me to set, but have been able to do nothing with them—I have not the gift of composition."<sup>44</sup> Eventually, however, she succeeded in producing four songs in time for Schumann's thirty-first birthday, June 8: "Warum willst du and're fragen," "Er ist gekommen in Sturm und Regen," "Liebst du um Schönheit," and "Die gute Nacht die ich dir sage." Robert selected the first three for their joint collection.<sup>45</sup>

The Schumanns' joint *Lieder* collection was published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1841. Its title page reads: *Zwölf Gedichte aus F. Rückert's Liebesfrühling von Robert und Clara Schumann, op. 37/12*—his op. 37, her op. 12. The first copy arrived just in time for Clara's birthday. The authorship of the individual songs was not specified in the printed score. To Robert's and Clara's great amusement, the critics were unable to determine which of the two had composed the various pieces in the set.<sup>46</sup>



Spurred on by her husband's joy in her creative achievements, Clara continued to compose songs. In the summer of 1842, she set Geibel's "Liebeszauber" and Heine's "Sie liebten sich beiden" for Robert's birthday. Five more songs made their appearance during the following summer: "Loreley" (Heine), "Ich hab' in deinem Auge" (Rückert), "O weh, des Scheidens, das er tat" (Rückert), "Der Mond kommt still gegangen" (Geibel), and "Die stille Lotosblume" (Geibel).<sup>47</sup> Commenting on these works, Schumann noted in their marriage diary:

Clara has written a number of small pieces that show a musical and tender invention that she has never attained before. But to have children and a husband who is always living in the realms of imagination do not go together with composition. She cannot work at it regularly and I am often disturbed to think how many profound ideas are lost because she cannot work them out. But Clara herself knows that her main occupation is as a mother and I believe she is happy in the circumstances and would not want them changed.<sup>48</sup>

The compromises that Clara was compelled to make because of her husband's increasing mental instability also impeded her progress as a composer. Intense creative activity almost always led to periods of severe depression, during which Robert was unable to work. He experienced one such episode in February of 1843, and recorded in their marriage diary that Clara, then pregnant with her second child, was nursing him back to health with "tender care."<sup>49</sup> In April of the following year, he suffered a serious nervous breakdown. Neither rest nor medical attention seemed to improve his condition. Hoping that a complete change of environment might bring him relief, the Schumanns moved to Dresden in the early part of December.<sup>50</sup>

But the episodes of depression persisted. Because of Robert's recurring health problems, Clara was forced to take on an increasing

number of responsibilities. A woman of great inner strength, she supported her husband emotionally, artistically and often financially during the five years they lived in Dresden. She also supervised the household, taught piano lessons, carried on with her performing career, bore four more children, and composed her most ambitious works.<sup>51</sup>

Not long after they settled in Dresden, the Schumanns began to work through Cherubini's treatise on counterpoint and fugue together. This daily practice in counterpoint bore fruit in Clara's six fugues for piano, three of which were published as her op. 16. Six other piano pieces probably date from around this time as well: the *Scherzo*, op. 14, *Quatre Pièces fugitives*, op. 15, and an Impromptu.

The greatest proof of Clara's industry during the Dresden years is her four-movement Trio in G Minor for piano, violin and cello, op. 17. Composed between May and September 1846, it is generally regarded as her finest work. Clara's remarks about her trio further demonstrate the extent to which she was influenced by societal attitudes toward women composers. After rehearsing the work for the first time on October 2, she confided to her diary: "There are some pretty passages in the trio, and I think it is fairly successful as far as form goes, of course it is only a woman's work, which is always lacking in force, and here and there in invention."<sup>52</sup> And in September of the following year, she wrote: "I received the printed copy of my trio today; but I did not care for it particularly, after Robert's (D minor), it sounded effeminate and sentimental."<sup>53</sup> Of course it is neither.

With the exception of an incomplete concerto movement in F minor and three choruses for a cappella choir—birthday gifts for her husband in 1847 and 1848—Clara composed nothing else until 1853. During the intervening years, her energy was consumed by family responsibilities, occasional concert engagements, an ever-growing class of piano students, preparing the piano scores of Robert's orchestral and choral works for publication, and

assisting him with rehearsals of choirs he conducted in Dresden and Düsseldorf.<sup>54</sup>

The Schumanns moved to Düsseldorf in 1850, but it was not until 1853 that they found a house in which the rooms were so situated that Clara could practice without disturbing her husband. For the first time since her marriage, she finally had a studio of her own. On January 9, 1853, she wrote:

Today I began to work again, at last. When I am able to work regularly like this, I feel really in my element; quite a different feeling seems to come over me, I am much freer and lighter, and everything seems to me more bright and cheerful. Music is, after all, a good piece of my life, and when it is wanting I feel as if I had lost all physical and mental elasticity.<sup>55</sup>

During the summer months of 1853, Clara resumed her composing. Her diary entry of May 29 reads: "Today I . . . began . . . for the first time in years, to compose again; that is, I want to write variations on a theme of Robert's out of *Bunte Blätter*, for his birthday: but I find it very difficult—The break has been too long."<sup>56</sup> But on June 3, she added, "The work is done. It seems to me that it is not a failure."<sup>57</sup> Inscribed with the dedication, "For my dear husband, for June 8 1853, a weak attempt once more on the part of his Clara of old," the *Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann* were subsequently published as her op. 20.

Between June 10 and 22, Clara also set six poems from Hermann Rollet's *Jucunde*. Noting their completion in her diary, she wrote: "There is nothing which surpasses the joy of creation, if only because through it one wins hours of self-forgetfulness, when one lives in a world of sound."<sup>58</sup> These songs later appeared in print as her op. 23. On June 29, she completed three romances for piano, op. 21, and in July she produced a setting of Goethe's "Veilchen" (unpublished), followed by three romances for violin and piano, op. 22.<sup>59</sup>

The months beginning in September 1853 proved fateful. On September 30, to her great dismay, Clara discovered that she was pregnant again. She lamented to her diary, "My last good years are passing, my strength too. I am more discouraged than I can say."<sup>60</sup> Five months later, Robert's final mental collapse began. Following an unsuccessful attempt to drown himself in the Rhine, he was taken to a private asylum at Endenrich, near Bonn.<sup>61</sup> Because his doctors feared that reminders of the past might heighten his anxiety and agitation, Clara was forbidden to visit him.<sup>62</sup> Two-and-a-half years would elapse before she was permitted to see her husband again.

Grief-stricken though Clara was, her return to the concert stage could not be delayed for long. She had a large family to support and the additional financial burden of Robert's medical expenses. In October 1854, four months after the birth of her last child, she began an arduous round of concert tours. Whenever possible, she made short visits back to Düsseldorf to see her children.<sup>63</sup>

On July 25, 1856, a few days after returning from a three-month tour of England, Clara received a telegram from Robert's doctor advising her that if she wanted to see her husband alive, she must "come with all haste."<sup>64</sup> She saw him for the first time in over two years on July 27. Two days later, Schumann died. Clara could only feel relief that his suffering had finally ended. On July 31, the day of his funeral, she wrote in her diary: "With his departure, all my happiness is over. A new life is beginning for me."<sup>65</sup> Composition did not play a significant role in that new life. Clara produced only three pieces after Robert's death: a cadenza for Beethoven's C Minor Piano Concerto, a march (unpublished), written in 1879 as a gift for some friends,<sup>66</sup> and cadenzas for Mozart's D Minor Piano Concerto.

Schumann's death signalled the beginning of forty-one years of widowhood for Clara. Left to provide for seven young children, it was imperative that she resume her concert career at the earliest

possible moment. Thus, on October 28, 1856, after depositing the children with various relatives, family friends, and in boarding schools, she set out on her first tour of the season.<sup>67</sup> For many years, her life followed an identical pattern: she performed widely throughout Europe and England from September to May, while the summer months were devoted to her family and to preparing repertoire for her next season's concerts.<sup>68</sup>

If Clara had doubts about her composing, she had none about performing. She seems to have associated her feminine identity exclusively with performance. Although she was motivated by the need to support her children, touring represented far more to Clara than merely a means of earning a living; it fulfilled her as an artist and provided a solace for her grief. She explained to her friend Johannes Brahms:

I feel myself called upon to reproduce beautiful works, Robert's above all, so long as I have the strength, and even if it were not absolutely necessary I should still go on tour, though not in the exhausting fashion in which I am compelled to at present. The practice of my art is a great part of me . . . , it is the air in which I breathe.<sup>69</sup>

Health problems forced Clara to slow down somewhat after 1873, but she continued to tour until 1888, tirelessly promoting Robert's music wherever she performed. In 1887, she became principal teacher of piano at the Frankfurt Conservatory, where she played her last public performance in March 1891.<sup>70</sup> In addition to her performing and teaching activities, she prepared a complete edition of Robert's compositions, and an edition of his early letters, transcribed thirty of his songs for piano solo, and made piano arrangements of several studies from his op. 56 and op. 58. Because of increasing deafness, she relinquished her post at the Conservatory in 1892, but continued to teach privately in Frankfurt until her death in 1896.

Clara Schumann's small creative output and the sporadic nature of her composing career may be attributed to the fact that she had absorbed the negative attitudes of nineteenth-century society toward female creativity, and to the many obstacles posed by her marriage. Her father had provided her with a musical education that must have been the envy of many of her fellow composers. But, in devising his plan for her life, Wieck had failed to consider the societal forces that encourage women to submerge themselves in selfless love, a love that leaves little room for the driving ego and singlemindedness of purpose necessary for sustained, high-level creativity.<sup>71</sup> In the early part of her career, she composed to please her father, and because all virtuosi of the time were expected to do so. In the years after her marriage, when it became no longer essential for pianists to include original works on their programmes, her husband's delight in her creative achievements provided her with a reason to continue. After his death, she devoted herself to the promotion of his music and the support of her family, leaving her own creative gifts to languish.

After decades of unjust neglect, all of Clara Schumann's known surviving music has recently become available on commercial recordings, and several of her works (most notably the Piano Trio and some of the Lieder) are beginning to find their way into the standard concert repertoire. What J. A. Fuller Maitland said of Clara Schumann more than a century ago still holds true today. He wrote: "The tiny list of her compositions contains things of such deep feeling, such real power, and such high attainment, that in strict justice no account of German music . . . could be complete without a reference to them."<sup>72</sup>

## NOTES

1. For a complete catalogue of Clara Schumann's works, see Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and Woman* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 297–306.

2. Quoted in Berthold Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: An Artist's Life, Based on Materials Found in Diaries and Letters*, abridged and trans. from the 4th German ed. by Grace E. Hadow, 2 vols. (London and Leipzig: Macmillan and Breitkopf & Härtel, 1913), 1:1.
3. Peter Ostwald, *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), 44.
4. Florence May, *The Girlhood of Clara Schumann: Clara Wieck and Her Time* (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), 13–14.
5. John N. Burk, *Clara Schumann: A Romantic Biography* (New York: Random House, 1940), 14–15.
6. Litzmann, 1:2.
7. *Ibid.*, 1:34–37.
8. Burk, 13.
9. Litzmann, 1:3.
10. Friedrich Wieck, *Piano and Song*, trans. Mary P. Nichols (Boston: Lockwood, Brooks, 1875; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo, 1982), 143.
11. Reich, 44.
12. Litzmann, 1:5.
13. Reich, 44–45 and 73.
14. Quoted in Litzmann, 1:21–22.
15. Reich, 226.
16. Quoted in Litzmann, 1:33.
17. Quoted in Ostwald, 87.
18. Quoted in Litzmann, 1:23.
19. Quoted in May, 87.
20. Litzmann, 1:52.
21. Clara to Robert, 1 August 1833, quoted in *ibid.*, 1:58.
22. For further examples of their sharing of thematic material, see the following: Reich, 225–46; May, 131–32; Joan Chissell, *Clara Schumann: A Dedicated Spirit* (New York: Taplinger, 1983), 26, 43–46 and 66–68; Yonty Solomon, “Solo Piano Music–1: The Sonatas and the Fantasie,” in *Robert Schumann: The Man and His Music*, ed. Alan Walker (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972), 46–51.
23. Robert to Clara, 10 July 1839, quoted in Litzmann, 1:244.
24. Reich, 239–40.
25. May, 156.

26. Quoted in Pamela Susskind, introduction to Clara Wieck Schumann, *Selected Piano Music* (New York: Da Capo, 1979), vii.
27. Quoted in Litzmann, 1:76–77.
28. Burk, 109–12.
29. Reich, 75–76.
30. Alan Walker, “Schumann and His Background,” in *Robert Schumann: The Man and His Music*, ed. Alan Walker (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972), 17.
31. Reich, 102.
32. Ibid., 74.
33. Quoted in Litzmann, 1:318
34. Ibid., 1:313.
35. Quoted in Reich, 110.
36. Quoted in Chissell, 75.
37. Reich, 155.
38. Clara’s diary entry of 2 October 1846, quoted in Litzmann, 1:410.
39. Quoted in Reich, p. 229.
40. Clara’s diary entry of 15 March 1846, quoted in Litzmann, 1:429.
41. Quoted in Reich, 230. The three songs were as follows: “Am Strande” (Burns), “Ich stand in dunklen Träumen” (Heine), and “Es fiel ein Reif in der Frühlingsnacht” (Heine). The first of the Heine songs was later published as no. 1 of her *Sechs Lieder*, op. 13.
42. Robert’s entry of 20–27 December 1840, “The Diary of Robert and Clara Schumann,” ed. Eugenie Schumann, trans. G. D. H. Pidock, *Music and Letters* 15 (October 1934): 291.
43. Robert’s entry of 3–10 January 1841, *ibid.*
44. Clara’s entry of 10–16 January 1841, *ibid.*
45. Litzmann, 1:319–20.
46. Reich, 249.
47. Litzmann, 1:320. Three songs from this latter group were subsequently published in her *Sechs Lieder*, op. 13: “Ich hab’ in deinem Auge,” “Der Mond kommt still gegangen,” and “Die stille Lotosblume.”
48. Quoted in Reich, 228.
49. Ibid., 115–16.
50. Walker, 25.
51. Reich, 123.



52. Quoted in Litzmann, 1:410.
53. Quoted in *ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*, 1:444–45.
55. Quoted in *ibid.*, 2:36.
56. Quoted in *ibid.*
57. Quoted in *ibid.*
58. Quoted in *ibid.*, 2:37.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Quoted in Reich, 140.
61. Litzmann, 2:55–60.
62. Reich, 144.
63. *Ibid.*, 148.
64. Walker, 38–39.
65. Quoted in Litzmann, 2:140.
66. Reich, 304.
67. Chissell, 141.
68. Reich, 180.
69. Clara to Johannes Brahms, 15 October 1868, quoted in Litzmann, 2:260.  
Historians have long speculated that Clara's relationship with Brahms may have been more than platonic. However, based on the surviving evidence and what we know about Clara's psychological makeup, this seems unlikely. For an in-depth discussion of this point, see Reich, 187–207. See also Harold C. Schonberg, "Keeper of the Flame: Johannes Brahms," in his *The Lives of the Great Composers* (London: Futura, 1986), 255–56.
70. Reich, 180–83.
71. Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 100.
72. J.A. Fuller Maitland, *Masters of German Music* (London: Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1894), 228.

CLARA SCHUMANN: NEW CADENZAS  
FOR MOZART'S PIANO CONCERTO  
IN D MINOR — ROMANTIC VISIONS  
OF A CLASSICAL MASTERPIECE

The year 2019 marked the two hundredth birth anniversary of Clara Schumann, the great 19th century pianist and pioneer for women in the professional arts. In honour of the occasion, a little known manuscript by her of cadenzas for Mozart's D Minor Piano Concerto from the collection of the Library of Congress in Washington DC was published for the first time. This is the story of her manuscript, how it was recovered from the library's archives, the circumstances surrounding its composition, its mysterious links with Brahms's cadenza for the same concerto and its dramatic journey to the United States during the chaos of World War II.

### **Introduction**

A few years back, I had the opportunity to give a piano recital at the Robert-Schumannhaus Museum in Zwickau on a piano that once belonged to Clara Schumann. The piano dates to around 1820 and was built by Matthäus Andreas Stein, son of the great Johann Andreas Stein, whose early instruments were greatly admired by Mozart. It is said to have been originally purchased by Clara Schumann's father, Friedrich Wieck, for the public debut of his talented nine-year-old daughter. The piano has a lovely tone, delicate, lyrical and responsive, but it was too early an instrument for the kind of repertoire we normally associate with Clara Schumann, namely the great Romantic works by Robert Schumann, Brahms and others. At only six octaves, it simply lacked the range to accommodate the larger works of the mid-nineteenth century. This was easily overcome for the purposes of the recital by adjusting the program to

include earlier works by Haydn, Mozart and Schubert, but for future projects I wanted to find repertoire that both suited the piano and had direct links to Clara Schumann herself. Mozart's D Minor Piano Concerto came to mind. This great eighteenth century work was perfectly suited to the Stein instrument and was a particular favourite of Clara Schumann's, and she even wrote cadenzas for it. Her cadenzas for the concerto are quite well known, they were composed and published in honour of the one hundredth anniversary of Mozart's death in 1891 and are still in print today. What is not generally known is that there exists another, much earlier set of cadenzas by her for this concerto, which has never been published and only exists in manuscript form in the archives of the Library of Congress in Washington DC.

These unpublished cadenzas came to my attention when I was at the Library of Congress for a concert and some unrelated research. I knew the original autograph of Clara Schumann's published cadenzas was in the library's collection and I took the opportunity to look it up. I was surprised to find not one, but two entries for cadenzas by Clara Schumann for Mozart's D Minor Piano Concerto. The first, as expected, was the manuscript of the familiar 1891 published edition. The other was something different, a second fully realized manuscript of cadenzas by her for the same concerto. The two manuscripts could not have looked more different. The 1891 score is a rough copy full of corrections and adjustments, typical of a document being prepared for publication. The second manuscript is a neatly written fair copy on a fancy paper, with almost no corrections or deletions, and was clearly meant to be used and played. The manuscript is unsigned and undated. On closer examination, we can see clear thematic parallels between the two scores, so there is obviously some kind of connection there, but differences in handwriting and paper type suggest that the unpublished manuscript came from a much earlier time, probably around 1855, just prior to her planned performance of the concerto during the

Mozart Centennial of 1856. The most intriguing aspect of her early manuscript is its striking similarity to Johannes Brahms's cadenza for the same concerto. Brahms wrote his cadenza in 1855, around the same time as Clara Schumann's early score and his autograph score (which only contains a cadenza for the concerto's first movement) is also held today in the Library of Congress. So what we have here are three distinct versions of what is essentially the same cadenza, written at different times by two different authors. Clearly, there is an interesting story here and it all seems to begin with Clara Schumann's unpublished manuscript.

In this essay I will examine Clara Schumann's early manuscript from all sides, starting with a detailed stylistic analysis of the music itself and what it might tell us about her interpretive approach to Mozart's concerto. I will also look into its relationship with Brahms's cadenza to try to determine how their cadenzas came to be so alike. I will briefly discuss the 1891 version and look at some of the changes she made at that time. Finally, I will follow the fate of Clara Schumann's manuscript after her death and, in the process, will uncover the compelling and previously untold story of its connection to the Stonborough-Wittgenstein family and the dramatic journey that would bring the manuscript from war-torn Europe to the United States and, ultimately, into the collection of the Library of Congress.

## **The Romantic Cadenza**

Clara Schumann (1819–1896) is best known today as one of the great pianists of the nineteenth century and wife of the pioneering Romantic composer Robert Schumann (1810–1856). Their passionate love affair and his subsequent descent into mental illness, suicide attempts and an early death in a mental institution has become the stuff of legend. Despite all this personal turmoil, Clara Schumann forged a long and brilliant career as a professional

pianist and went on to become a great pioneering figure in her own right. She single-handedly broke the gender barrier, which at the time precluded the possibility of a woman (much less a widow with seven children) pursuing a serious career as a professional concert pianist, and her achievements did not end there. Over the course of her career, she redefined the profession itself through groundbreaking ideas in programming and in the way she presented herself to the public. She became the key transitional figure between the old mode of public performance (in place since at least the eighteenth century) and the modern type of concertizing we know today.

During the nineteenth century (and long before that), the public expected pianists to present mostly their own original compositions during their concerts and recitals. This was fine if the pianist also happened to be an interesting composer, like Mendelssohn or Chopin, but more often than not, audiences were subjected to an endless parade of vapid showpieces designed solely as vehicles for technical display. Clara Schumann herself began her career this way. During her early years as a young virtuoso, she composed plenty of charming salon-style pieces for her recitals and also played exciting but unremarkable piano pieces by contemporary virtuosos like Pixis and Herz,<sup>1</sup> but over time this type of programming left her unsatisfied. It became increasingly difficult for her to present substandard music to her knowledgeable audiences, especially when so much great music by truly great composers was going unheard. After her husband's death, Clara Schumann reinvented her career. She no longer composed original works for her recitals and instead filled her programs with music by great composers of the past, like Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, whose piano works, surprising as it seems for us today, were rarely performed in public at the time.<sup>2</sup> She supplemented her repertoire with newer works by important contemporary composers like Mendelssohn, Chopin, Brahms, and, of course, her husband Robert Schumann. This sounds very much like the type of programming

we are accustomed to today, but in Clara Schumann's time it was something completely new. Her performances became less about herself and more about the music she played and her comportment on stage reflected this; she became known for her humility and restraint in front of the public (rare virtues in the era of Thalberg and Liszt). The old classics provided plenty of opportunity for technical display and, as a bonus, she could put forth a new skill: interpretation, the art of communicating, in a most personal way, the essence of a great piece of music; and in this, Clara Schumann had no peer, her knowledge and comprehension of the repertoire was unmatched. She became the first exclusively interpretive pianist and her stunning success opened new paths for future generations. Eventually, her way would become the norm.

We have no way of knowing what Clara Schumann's famous interpretations sounded like. Her early original compositions may reflect something of her general playing style, but they cannot reveal anything about her approach to the music of other composers. This is why her cadenzas are such valuable documents for us today. A cadenza is not really an original composition. It is a section of a concerto, usually coming near the end of a movement, where the orchestra pauses and the soloist proceeds with an extended virtuoso improvisation using themes and motives from the concerto itself to display their musical and technical skills. A cadenza is, in essence, an individual performer's re-interpretation of the concerto's material according to his or her personal tastes and abilities, and there can be no better description of Clara Schumann's art than that. Her cadenzas for Mozart's Piano Concerto in D Minor provide some rare insights into her interpretive approach to this famous work and to Mozart's music in general, and despite Clara Schumann's reputation as a rather conservative pianist, dedicated to respecting the wishes of the composer, her cadenzas are as Romantic as they come, far removed from the Classical practices of Mozart's day.

So what makes her cadenza so “Romantic”? Romanticism in music is difficult to describe. Esoteric elements, like hyper-emotionality, personal or poetic references, lavishness, nostalgia, etc., tend to overshadow the more formal structural and harmonic elements that separate the Romantic style from the preceding Classical era. One of the most important of these is the Romantic period’s rejection of the principles of sonata form. Classical sonata form, as perfected by Haydn and Mozart, was the dominant architectural method for almost all instrumental music written during the latter part of the eighteenth century. The form is renowned for its grace, symmetry and, above all, its perfectly balanced tonal scheme, which serves as the foundation for the entire structure.

Briefly described, a movement written in sonata form (of which concerto form is a variant) is built upon three great tonal blocks of more or less equal duration called the exposition, development and recapitulation sections. The exposition broadly lays out the movement’s principal tonality, then slowly moves away from it to establish a new key (usually the dominant or, in the case of a movement in the minor mode, the relative major). This creates a tension (or dissonance) with the principal tonality and will need to be resolved later. The development section reinforces the tension by freely exploring more distant keys; and, finally, the recapitulation section provides resolution by re-establishing the principal key and remaining there until the end to proportionately balance all previous tensions. To achieve this tonal symmetry, it was imperative that there be no further change of key during the course of the recapitulation section and that also applies to the cadenza. A formal cadenza invariably occurs near the end of a concerto movement—during the latter stages of the recapitulation section to be precise—therefore it too, must remain in the principal tonality throughout or risk upsetting the movement’s tonal equilibrium. This is evident in all of Mozart’s own cadenzas. Mozart wrote cadenzas for many of his concertos (although none by him exist for

the D Minor Concerto in question here) and no matter how long or complex, they never deviate from the movement's principal key.

Romantic composers had very different ideas when it came to the harmonic structures of their works. They rejected the long term symmetries and strictly balanced tonal schemes of sonata form preferring shorter, more concentrated works with free and fluid harmonic structures. Romantic composers did not like to stay in one key for too long. A piece written in the Romantic style typically moves away from the principal tonality almost immediately, creating a sense of harmonic tension and ambiguity right from the start. The tension is then maintained for as long as possible by delaying the return of the principal key until very near the end of the piece, and this is exactly what Clara Schumann does in her cadenza. Barely a few measures in, she defies Classical tradition and begins a long and leisurely modulation away from the principal key of D minor to establish a new key, B minor. She even accentuates the move with a *ritenuto*:

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-2) is in D minor (one flat) and features a piano introduction with a *dim.* marking. The second system (measures 3-4) begins with a *rit.* marking and a *a tempo* marking, showing a modulation to B minor (two sharps). The third system (measures 5-6) continues in B minor with an *espressivo* marking. The score is written for piano with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).

**Example 1** Clara Schumann's 1855 manuscript



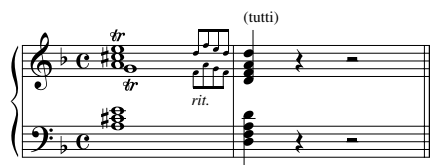
Clara Schumann seems unconcerned, oblivious even, that such an overt change of key might upset Mozart's finely balanced tonal scheme. For her, the cadenza was an independent piece, free from the rules and conventions that governed the concerto. She follows her instincts and writes a cadenza that in every way exemplifies the principles of Romantic style.

Another side of Clara Schumann's Romanticism is on display in the cadenza's lyrical middle section, which she labels *Recitative*. A *recitative* is an operatic term for a highly expressive, declamatory form of singing that mimics the rhythms and inflections of ordinary speech. The accompanied recitative (not to be confused with the less expressive dry recitative, or *recitativo secco*, which is a sort of swift vocal banter with minimal accompaniment, commonly associated with comic opera) was a regular feature of eighteenth century *opera seria* where it was useful for advancing the action during particularly complex or emotionally charged scenes. The orchestra would provide some suitably theatrical accompaniment, menacing tremolos, dramatic accents, mysterious chords and the like. Not surprisingly, Romantic composers were drawn to the melodramatic character of the operatic recitative and often inserted such passages into their purely instrumental works (Liszt was particularly fond of this), and Clara Schumann does not miss the opportunity to include one in her cadenza. For the "vocal line" of the recitative, she borrows an expressive theme Mozart first used to introduce the piano in his concerto (this theme has some recitative-like qualities of its own). Sweeping arpeggios in the left hand provide a mysterious backdrop. With the key changing every few measures, Clara Schumann creates a wistful, dream-like landscape with all the perfume of early nineteenth century Romanticism. It is the Romantic heart of her cadenza.

After the introspective atmosphere of the *recitative*, Clara Schumann must quickly bring things back down to earth, and back to the principle tonality of D minor, before the final wind-up and

the re-entry of the orchestra. Her transition from the recitative is not wholly effective, however. Even with the added syncopations, it fails to generate any real sense of movement or anticipation and only succeeds in halting the flow of the music. Such are the dangers of straying too far from the principal key during a cadenza. But these minor foibles are quickly forgotten once the final wind-up is underway.

The cadenza's close is written more like an ending for a solo section of a concerto rather than that of a cadenza, which is usually more freely conceived, but it is nonetheless effective and exciting. For a final Romantic touch, Clara Schumann embellishes the cadenza's closing trill with a lavish multi-note flourish, complete with a *ritenuto*.



**Example 2** Clara Schumann's 1855 manuscript

Purists will argue that Clara Schumann's cadenza is too Romantic for Mozart's concerto, but this kind of historically correct thinking is only a recent phenomenon. In her day, a cadenza that merely mimicked Mozart's style would have been considered unimaginative and dull. Clara Schumann's cadenza is a reflection of her world, not Mozart's and we should be grateful for it, because it is precisely what makes it such an interesting and personal piece. We certainly would not have much to discuss if she had done otherwise. Then there is the concerto itself. Mozart's Piano Concerto in D Minor is one of the most passionate and emotionally charged instrumental works of all the eighteenth century. It is one of those special works of art, like Athenian sculpture or Mona Lisa, that transcends all boundaries of period and style, which is why it was such a favourite

during the nineteenth century and remains so today. As such, it is well equipped to withstand a little Romantic intrusion. Clara Schumann's cadenza only enhances the concerto's emotional impact and effectively transports it into a new era, the Romantic era, and such is the universality of Mozart's masterpiece that it is only too happy to oblige.

## **Comparison with Brahms**

One of the most curious aspects about Clara Schumann's cadenza is its striking resemblance to the one Johannes Brahms wrote for the same concerto. Brahms's manuscript (which only contains a cadenza for the concerto's first movement) has been dated to 1855,<sup>3</sup> around the same time as Clara Schumann's manuscript, although it was only published in 1926, almost thirty years after the composer's death. The editor of the first edition (as part of the complete works published by Breitkopf & Härtel) was Eusebius Mandyczewski, a Romanian born musicologist who had befriended Brahms late in his life and served as executor of his will.<sup>4</sup> In a subheading to the printed edition, Mandyczewski notes that Brahms's cadenza contains material originally composed by Clara Schumann, but offers no further explanation on the matter.<sup>5</sup> Since the publication of Brahms's cadenza, many have remarked on its similarity to Clara Schumann's 1891 published score, but this comparison gives a false impression of the relationship and will inevitably lead to a dead end. The great changes Clara Schumann made in 1891 mask the true extent of its initial connection to Brahms's work. To properly understand the relationship, we must compare Brahms's cadenza with Clara Schumann's early unpublished version and when we do, we see that they are not just similar, but practically identical. So how did their cadenzas come to be so alike? Which came first? Was there some sort of collaboration? Armed with Clara Schumann's original manuscript, we can now take another crack at these long unanswered questions.

When trying to understand the connection between two very similar things, sometimes the best course of action is to first seek out their differences, as these often hold the key to unlocking the mystery. The first time Brahms's and Clara Schumann's cadenzas differ comes during a short transitional passage near the beginning of the piece. In the ninth bar, Clara Schumann has this:



**Example 3** Clara Schumann's manuscript

The same passage in Brahms's score:



**Example 4** Johannes Brahms: Cadenza for Mozart's Piano Concerto in D Minor, K. 466, m. 9

The differences here seem negligible, merely a slight variation in the distribution of notes in the right hand, but they are quite telling. Brahms's version is clearly superior. It fits more comfortably in the hand, exhibits better voice leading and creates a fuller, more harmonious sound. There's nothing inherently wrong with Clara Schumann's version, Brahms's rendering is simply an improvement and that is just the point. Brahms is obviously making a small correction here and this suggests he was working off an existing text. If Brahms's version had been the original, Clara Schumann surely would not have altered it to her disadvantage. It is an early sign that Clara Schumann's cadenza came first.

The next time the cadenzas differ occurs during the transition to the more lyrical second subject. This time, the differences are more substantial and more interesting, as they concern matters of personal style rather than musical orthography. In the previous section, we discussed at some length how Clara Schumann's romantic approach to the cadenza sometimes conflicted with Mozart's Classical ideals. We singled out in particular her daring modulation to B minor at the beginning of the cadenza as an example of something Mozart would not have done. This modulation also seems to have bothered Brahms. In his version he eliminates it completely, along with the long string of arpeggio-like figures used to transport the music to the new key. In its place, Brahms inserts a short, unmeasured phrase whose sole function is to sidestep the modulation and keep the music firmly in the principal key of D minor.

3 *rit.* ..... *a tempo*

5 *espressivo*

**Example 5** Clara Schumann's manuscript



**Example 6** Brahms: Cadenza for Mozart's Piano Concerto in D Minor, mm. 10–13

A Classically minded composer like Mozart would consider such a change of key during the cadenza disruptive to the movement's overall tonal structure (not to mention to the cadenza's basic function as an extended cadence). Clara Schumann, the arch-Romantic, pays this no heed, but Brahms cannot as easily dismiss the basic rules of sonata form and he sacrifices one of the loveliest passages in Clara Schumann's score to remain faithful to Classical principles. Brahms's deep attachment to Classical forms would be a defining feature of his mature compositional style and it is interesting to see this already manifested here in this little cadenza.

After a few measures, Brahms deftly catches up with Clara Schumann's score once again and their cadenzas continue pretty much in parallel until the end, except for two spots. Brahms spruces up the transition between the *Recitative* and the final section (this was a weak point in Clara Schumann's score) and he replaces Clara Schumann's lavish decoration of the closing trill with a simpler, more Classical and more Mozartean two-note *Nachschlag*.



**Example 7** Clara Schumann's manuscript



**Example 8** Brahms: Cadenza for Mozart's Piano Concerto in D Minor, mm. 80–81

By now it's clear that Clara Schumann's cadenza came first. Brahms's version amounts to little more than a copy of her work, with some small, but significant amendments added along the way. What remains to be determined are the circumstances that led to the creation of these twin cadenzas in the first place and for this, we need to also look at the story through a biographical lens.

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) first met the Schumanns in 1853 when, aged twenty, he travelled from his native Hamburg to Düsseldorf, where Robert Schumann was director of the local orchestra, to introduce himself to the eminent composer. Schumann was famously astounded at Brahms's immense talent and set about enthusiastically encouraging and promoting the young composer. Brahms, in return, idolized his mentor and spent many months in his company learning from the older master. Schumann's influence is very apparent in Brahms's earliest works, but the real sparks during the visit were between Brahms and Schumann's pianist wife Clara. A special bond developed between the two, one that would only intensify over the next few years and then last a lifetime.<sup>6</sup>

A year later, Brahms was back in Hamburg when news reached him that Robert Schumann had suffered a mental breakdown and

after a suicide attempt in February 1854 was to be committed to a mental asylum. He immediately rushed back to Düsseldorf to be with Clara. He moved into a room in the same flat and remained there for the duration of Robert Schumann's two-year confinement, providing Clara with much needed companionship and support running the household, which included seven young children. Not much is known about their personal time together during this period, most of the first hand evidence (letters, diary entries, etc.) was deliberately destroyed at Brahms's insistence, in order to keep the nature of their relationship private.<sup>7</sup> But thanks to our cadenza, we know of at least one thing they did do together, they prepared for their upcoming performances of Mozart's D Minor Piano Concerto during the Mozart Centennial of 1856. Brahms had plans to perform the concerto in Hamburg on January 27, Mozart's hundredth birthday,<sup>8</sup> and Clara Schumann was to play it in her hometown of Leipzig later that year.<sup>9</sup> We can imagine a scenario where Clara Schumann composed cadenzas for the concerto and presented them to Brahms who promptly copied them out, possibly with the intention of using them for his concert in Hamburg, codifying his amendments into a new score, which he then presented back to Clara Schumann (Brahms's manuscript remained in Clara Schumann's possession throughout her life). Sadly, Clara Schumann did not perform Mozart's concerto the anniversary year. Her husband's condition had greatly worsened by then and she was forced to reduce her activities and remain nearby. Initially barred by doctors from visiting him in the hospital (her presence was seen to be too distressing), she was finally allowed to see her husband just days before he died. Brahms accompanied her on this grim visit. On July 29, 1856, Robert Schumann died and Clara Schumann entered into an extended period of mourning. She cancelled her engagements, and the cadenzas were put away. Brahms returned to Hamburg and eventually settled in Vienna. Although they remained in constant contact, they never again lived in close proximity to one another.<sup>10</sup>



If there is such a thing as a connection between an artist's life and work, then these cadenzas must rank highly among Clara Schumann's most personally significant compositions. She wrote little else during her husband's illness and gave up composing almost entirely after he died. As she herself freely admitted, the one bright spot during this dark time was the continuous presence of Johannes Brahms. The cadenzas are, by and large, by Clara Schumann and should be attributed as such, but they have Brahms's fingerprints all over them. He was likely the first to perform them publicly (with or without his alterations) and he made the cadenzas his own by creating a new score with his personal amendments and modifications (and it is not out of the question that there may have been some collaboration during the creative process). If Brahms's companionship was indeed the one bright light during Clara Schumann's darkest days, then these cadenzas are surely a product of that light and an enduring symbol of the friendship that helped her through her life's worst hardships.

### **The 1891 Version**

In 1891, the musical world observed the one hundredth anniversary of Mozart's death. Clara Schumann, now in her seventies and retired from the concert stage, decided to do her part by publishing cadenzas for his Piano Concerto in D Minor. Instead of starting from scratch, she dusted off her old manuscript from thirty-five years earlier and embarked on a whole-scale revision of the piece. The result was a new score, which was published the same year. The changes she made to the cadenzas at this time were substantial and reached into almost every detail of the piece. We only have time here to look at some of the most important examples.

In the first movement cadenza, Clara Schumann rearranges the sequence of the individual sections and adds a new and very grandiose central climax based on a dramatic orchestral passage from

Mozart's concerto. The *Recitative* is given a new harmonic profile and the various connecting passages are extended with more elaborate virtuoso figurations. The 1891 score also exhibits a very noticeable change in tone, everything is expanded and enlarged. The delicate, slightly naïve, early Romantic stylings of the original version give way to something much more grand and imposing, in keeping with the late-Victorian tastes of the day. This largesse also extends to the style of piano writing, which in the 1891 version is much denser, with thicker chords and wider spacing between the voices. Pianos had changed a great deal since the 1850s, when they were still close to the delicate instruments known to Schubert and Chopin. By 1891, the piano had, for all intents and purposes, reached the archetype of the powerful modern concert grand.

The most noticeable change, however, is to the last movement's cadenza, which in the 1891 published score is a completely new piece, unrelated to the one in her original manuscript. At first glance, we assume that the new cadenza for the last movement was freshly composed in 1891 as part of the general revision process, but there is evidence that it was actually conceived at a much earlier date, closer to that of her original manuscript. This evidence comes from Clara Schumann herself in the form of a short note, which she wrote directly onto a blank page of Brahms's manuscript. In the note, signed and dated 1891, she explains some of the parallels between her newly published score and Brahms's cadenza. Her note is full of information and deserves to be quoted in full:

Cadenza by Brahms for the D Minor Concerto by Mozart, which makes use of a cadenza of mine; in the cadenza I published later, I used several passages from Brahms's cadenza, which in the adjacent pages I have indicated with A-B C-D. In the second cadenza, for the last movement, the passage A-B is by Brahms. This comment is for my children, to avoid any misunderstanding. Clara Schumann 1891.<sup>11</sup>

The first sentence tells us something we already know, namely that Brahms's cadenza is largely based on her original score of 1855. She goes on to say that she incorporated some of Brahms's ideas into the published version and is indicating the borrowed passages with the letters *A-B* and *C-D*, which she marks directly on Brahms's score. Her markings are still clearly visible on the pages of Brahms's manuscript.

The next sentence, however, reveals something surprising. She claims to have made similar markings on the pages of Brahms's last movement cadenza, again to indicate the parts belonging to Brahms, but as we have pointed out before, Brahms's manuscript has no cadenza for the concerto's last movement. There can only be one explanation, Brahms's score must have originally included a cadenza for the concerto's last movement, but these pages were somehow later lost, but they evidently still existed in 1891, when Clara Schumann penned her little note. It also tells us that Brahms's (now lost) cadenza for the last movement was related to the one in Clara Schumann's 1891 published score and not to the one in her original manuscript. So her "new" cadenza for the last movement wasn't so new after all. It had to have already existed (in some earlier form perhaps) in 1855, when Brahms created his copy. Her concerns about the original cadenza for the last movement therefore surfaced quite early on, and she decided to replace it soon after completing her original manuscript, perhaps even at Brahms's suggestion. It is not difficult to see why the original cadenza proved unsatisfactory. Its length and complexity hinder the momentum of Mozart's whirlwind *Finale*, sapping its fierce energy at a crucial point near the end. It is also rather over-written and unnecessarily difficult to play. The second cadenza is a marked improvement. Short, swift and simple, it complements the *Rondo*'s vitality and provides a better lead-in to Mozart's thrilling coda. The two existing cadenzas for the last movement should therefore be seen as near contemporaries, with the second one, the one that found its

way into Brahms's copy and then into Clara Schumann published score, as the preferred choice, in keeping with her earliest wishes.

One other difference worth mentioning is that the 1891 score was conceived purely as a commemorative piece. Clara Schumann would not have had any intention of performing the concerto herself at this stage of her life. The earlier version, on the other hand, was written with a specific performance in mind while she was at the height of her powers and is probably a better reflection of the unique pianistic style she was famous for during her prime performing years.

## Epilogue

The most unexpected twist in the story comes after Clara Schumann's death, as we follow the fate of her manuscript into the twentieth century and meet some of the people whose lives it passed through.

When Clara Schumann's died in 1896, most of her personal effects passed to her eldest daughter, Marie. Marie Schumann (1841–1929) eventually settled in Interlaken, Switzerland, a place her father had spent some time during his youth.<sup>12</sup> She bought a plot of land and built the house where she remained for the rest of her life (the Swiss-style home still stands today). She was eventually joined in Interlaken by her younger sister Eugenie and her partner, the soprano Marie Fillunger (they had met through their mutual friend, Johannes Brahms) who together purchased a house nearby.<sup>13</sup> At some point, probably after 1918, the Schumann sisters were paid a visit by American businessman, trained chemist and avid collector of musical manuscripts, Jerome Stonborough. It was likely at this time that he purchased a number of items belonging to their famous mother, among them the original manuscripts of Clara Schumann's cadenzas for Mozart's Piano Concerto in D Minor, both the 1855 and 1891 versions, as well as Brahms's autograph copy.

Jerome Stonborough (originally Jerome Hermann Steinberger) was born in New York City in 1873 to German-Jewish immigrants. In 1905, he married the Viennese socialite and heiress, Margaret (Gertl) Wittgenstein (1882–1958). The Wittgensteins were among the wealthiest and most cultured families in Europe at the time. They were also active members of the vibrant cultural community of turn-of-the-century Vienna. Margaret's brother was the famed philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and her other brother, Paul, was a concert pianist who lost an arm during World War I and commissioned works for left hand alone from the likes of Prokofiev and Ravel. Margaret Wittgenstein's famous wedding portrait was painted by none other than Gustav Klimt. She actively encouraged her husband's collecting, and together they amassed an impressive collection of musical manuscripts which included, besides Clara Schumann's and Brahms's cadenzas, the original scores of Mozart's String Quintet in C Major and Brahms's Third Symphony. They also owned a sumptuous 19th century château in Upper Austria called the *Villa Toscana*.<sup>14</sup>

As the new century progressed, things took a turn for the worse for the Stonborough family. Jerome lost most of his American assets during the crash of 1929 and never fully recovered emotionally from this setback. The couple eventually divorced in 1938. That same year, despondent over the political situation in Europe and with no prospects in America, Jerome Stonborough committed suicide, shooting himself in the hall of his beloved villa just as the Nazis were entering Vienna.<sup>15</sup> Margaret Stonborough remained in Vienna after the *Anschluss* in a futile effort to safeguard the family assets. She was regularly harassed by the Nazi government and jailed several times, gaining her freedom only through bribes and personal connections. Nevertheless, she managed to smuggle a good portion of the family treasures out of the country before the outbreak of war. When war finally came, she sent her youngest son, John, to the United States. Hidden in his suitcases were the priceless musical manuscripts collected by his father.<sup>16</sup>

By 1940, the situation in Vienna had become untenable for Margaret Stonborough. She travelled to Southampton where she boarded the *SS Washington* bound for New York City, but her problems did not end there. Incredibly, the Nazi government continued to pursue her in the still neutral United States, through lawsuits and threats against family members still in Europe, in order to get their hands on more of the family's assets. She paid out a small fortune until they finally left her alone and impoverished. She was forced to sell the very treasures she risked her life smuggling out of Europe in order to raise money. Her husband's collection of musical manuscripts, which included Clara Schumann's and Brahms's cadenzas, was purchased by the Library of Congress in 1941 through a grant from Mrs. Gertrude Clarke Whittall, a long-time benefactress to the Washington institution. After the war, Margaret Stonborough returned to Vienna and managed to recover some of her family's stolen treasures, including the Klimt portrait and the *Villa Toscana*. She died in 1958.<sup>17</sup> Thanks in no small part to the efforts of the Stonborough-Wittgenstein family, Clara Schumann's and Brahms's manuscripts survived the war and are now safely stored together in the archives of the Library of Congress, inseparable it seems even after all these years, which is probably as it should be.

## NOTES

1. Julia M. Neuhaus, "Clara Schumann: Konzertreisen," *Schumann-Portal.de*, accessed 15 February 2019.
2. Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 658.
3. Johannes Brahms, *Cadenza for the Piano Concerto in D Minor by Mozart*, autograph score (c.1856). Gertrude Clarke-Whittall Collection, Library of Congress, Washington DC.
4. Karl Geringer, ed., "Johannes Brahms im Briefwechseln mit Eusebius Mandyczewski," *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 15 (1933): 337.

5. Eusebius Mandyczewski, ed., *Johannes Brahms, Sämtliche Werke Band 15* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1927).
6. José Bruyr, *Brahms* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1965), 21.
7. Ibid., 27.
8. Michael Musgrave, *Brahms: Biographical, Documentary and Analytical Studies*, vol. 2, appendix (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 99.
9. This concert was cancelled due to her husband's death. It was later realized on 27 January 1857. Julia M. Neuhaus, "Clara Schumann: Konzertreisen," *Schumann-Portal.de*, accessed 18 February 2019.
10. Bruyr, 27–28.
11. "Cadenz z. D moll Concert v. Mozart v. Brahms mit Benutzung einer Cadenz von mir. Wiederum benutzte ich in meiner später herausgegebenen Cadenz einige Stellen aus der Brahms'schen Cadenz, und habe diese in den hier beiliegenden Exemplaren unter A-B C-D bezeichnet. In der 2ten Cadenz (z. letzten Satze) ist die Stelle von A-B von Brahms. Meinen Kindern diese Notiz zur Vermeidung etwaiger Irrungen." Clara Schumann, 1891. Translation from Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 328.
12. Gerd Nauhaus, "Robert Schumann Biographie: Schweizerreise 1829," *Schumann-Portal.de*, accessed 7 April 2019.
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14. Alexander Waugh, *The House of Wittgenstein: A Family at War* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008), 19–21.
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16. Ibid., 268–72.
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AGATHE BACKER GRØNDAHL (1847–1907):  
“A PERFECTLY PLAIN WOMAN?”

On June 9, 1889, when one of his favourite authors, Henrik Ibsen, made his breakthrough in London, George Bernard Shaw made certain to attend a very interesting *Doll's House* dinner at the Novelty Theatre. Also present was the Norwegian pianist, composer, and piano teacher Agathe Backer Grøndahl. After the event, Shaw gave an account of her participation in a kind of “hidden theatre” at the party, backstage among the props, and the meaning and interpretation of her performance in relation to musical genres and gender expectations.

He entitled it “An Angry Critic and a Very Quiet Lady,” and published it in his weekly column, where he described Backer Grøndahl as the “neglected” and “unknown” lady at the party.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, he reported that he felt she had some indescribable sort of refinement about her, and had lost her way and found herself in a very questionable circle. After dinner, the whole party went down to the stage and finished the evening in the Doll's House set. As Backer Grøndahl went to Helmer's little (theatre) piano, (Nora Helmer is the main character in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*), Shaw prepared himself for the worst, and people stopped talking, more or less. To encourage her, he went to the piano and sat beside her to turn pages, expecting Tekla Bądarzewska-Baranowska's “The Maiden's Prayer” or an old-fashioned set of variations on “The Carnival of Venice” (probably the ones by Czerny):

After the first two bars I sat up. At the end of the piece (one of her own compositions) I said: “Has anyone ever told you that you are one of the greatest pianists in Europe?” Evidently a good many people had; for without turning a hair she said: “It is my profession. But this is a bad instrument. Perhaps you



will hear me at the Philharmonic. I am to play Beethoven's E flat concerto there."<sup>2</sup>

Playing the piano was a very common pastime for young women of the bourgeoisie, such as Nora in Ibsen's drama. It was considered appropriate and important to know how to play, and performing was a good way of getting noticed at parties like the one Backer Grøndahl and Shaw attended. However, it was important not to go too far: a young woman could be seductive but not too sexual; she had to play well but not too well, and she could not appear to be too mannish or put too much emotion into her performance. On the other hand, a woman could put her emotions and double meanings into her own compositions, things she could not express in words.

By telling his readers that he sat up after the first two bars, Shaw could point out how Backer Grøndahl's performance suddenly made him experience her *persona* in a totally "different light." He does not specify what she played, but based on his reactions, it could have been one of her concert studies (op. 11 or 22). Performed outside their primary context, her concert studies would be easily recognizable as "misplaced." In contrast to the superb concert grands that Backer Grøndahl usually picked out at piano factories before her concerts, she had agreed to play some of her own compositions on Helmer's piano as it had never played before. She also showed equilibristic mastery of how (not) to be womanly in appearance and manner and what musical genres were appropriate for different kinds of contexts.

That Norwegian women could play the piano well wasn't so controversial at the time, but the problem was larger when it came to composing. In those days, it was considered surprising that Backer Grøndahl's piano music could be composed by "one so fair and feminine in appearance and manner."<sup>3</sup> This 'role play' sheds some light on the relationship between the event and contemporary

music in the domestic sphere. It also makes Ibsen's drama in general and Nora's character in particular rather defamiliarized and anachronistic.

Among other things, Shaw's account shows how intertwined and interrelated Backer Grøndahl's roles as a composer and pianist are and how difficult it is to treat them as separate and distinct categories. Some of her works seem directly connected to her charisma and piano technique, as demonstrated at her concerts. Apparently she gave her own compositions a personal interpretation in the way she worked out the details of her performances. At the end of her career, she presented entire concerts of her own compositions. Thus, the public became better acquainted with her as a composer, and she could prove herself as a pianist, start a performance tradition for her own works, gain experiences as a musician that she could use in her compositions, and, as a result, profit both economically and artistically.

Performing, reading, discussing and writing about Backer Grøndahl's music is part of a process that creates what John Fiske in more modern terms calls 'producerly texts,' and determines what kind of 'texts' her *musicking* produced.<sup>4</sup> From this perspective, Backer Grøndahl's composition *personas* do not speak her discourses, but discourses such as Shaw's speak them. Such discourses create a sense of her listeners and performers.

As the Norwegian composer and music critic Pauline Hall (1890–1969) noted in 1947, Backer Grøndahl had become a banner for Norwegian women composers in Edvard Grieg's era, an inspiration to those who followed in her footsteps.<sup>5</sup> She acquired an influential position in the Scandinavian countries, both as a composer and as an outstanding performer of apparently exceptional powers. With 150 piano works, an *Andante quasi allegretto* for piano and orchestra (1869), a Scherzo for orchestra, the cantata *Nytaarsgry* (*New Year's Dawn*), arrangements of Norwegian folk-tunes, and over 250 romances, Backer Grøndahl's output represents

quite a contribution to 19th century music. In 1893, she even published a hitherto unknown national anthem *Norge* (Norway) in the women's periodical *Juleroser*. The 'lost' manuscript of her work *Andante quasi allegretto*, which had been thought missing since 1947, also proved rather difficult to find.<sup>6</sup> Since 1959, it has been in the archives of the Norwegian Music Collection at the National Library in Oslo.

At Backer Grøndahl's performance of the *Andante quasi allegretto* with the Theodor Kullak Neue Akademie der Tonkunst Orchestra in Saal der Singakademie in Berlin, the listeners observed her self-confident, independent persona at a grand piano occupying most of the stage, and drawing attention away from the conductor as well as the orchestra. She also showed much promise as an orchestral composer, and with her considerable piano technique, difficulties melted away like child's play. As a composition student, she confronted the rhetoric of the sonata allegro's male metaphors as it appears in Adolf Bernhard Marx's (1795–1866) *Die Lehre der musikalischen Komposition*.<sup>7</sup> In the description of works in sonata allegro form, the banal predestination of the first subject as 'masculine' and the second as 'feminine' were common. Based on these gender-loaded aesthetics, listeners and critics formed their 'producerly texts' so that they fitted their own social experiences. Thus it was possible to interpret the subjects in the *Andante quasi allegretto* in ways that did not express a maximum of 'masculinity' in the first subject as opposed to a 'superfeminine' second subject. The effect of these metaphors on listeners and critics must not be underestimated.

The sonata aesthetics generated far more meaning than the *Andante quasi allegretto* could control as an 'open text.' On the surface lie uncomplicated interpretations of the *Andante quasi allegretto* and the dominant part of the cultural life, within which it and the sonata allegro are situated. When this layer of dominant ideology is removed from the 'producerly text,' there is excess meaning that can be used to cut off the composition's 'masque.' Backer Grøndahl

chose to use means that tipped the ‘polarity,’ ‘symmetry’ or ‘balance’ between the two themes as well as the goal towards which it is supposed to develop in the recapitulation. The highly interesting and virtuosic coda, which presents new materials, was not only suited to exhibit her own pianistic skills but also to disturb the ‘binary’ symmetry in the sonata allegro, when the movement’s goal is established as the coda.

Musical-historiographical accounts, however, usually focus on Backer Grøndahl as the master of ‘small’ genres performed in private homes similar to the Doll’s House. Like her first composition teacher Halfdan Kjerulf (1815–1868) and her close friend and colleague Edvard Grieg, she composed primarily songs and short character pieces for piano. These genres were well suited to domestic music-making as well as to concerts; and, consequently, their scores were easy to sell. It was mostly young women who bought such scores and played them at home in the same kind of setting as at the Doll’s House party.

Backer Grøndahl was good at marketing pianos and piano music, and she knew her audience (which consisted of more women than men); and, therefore, she was not willing to risk falling out with her supporters. Their expectations affected the design of the genres she chose for her compositions. Some contemporaneous male critics considered her musical works as idyllic and conventional to the point of being clichés, but to most of the reviewers in women’s magazines her works represented something ‘true,’ ‘a safe haven,’ and a ‘real alternative’ in what they experienced as an aesthetically chaotic time.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps they also appreciated that from certain perspectives she could be interpreted to question the relation between her small composition designs, pianos and ‘dolls’ houses.’

Backer Grøndahl’s music composed for domestic performances was probably performed by her concert goers—the only difference being that at home her listeners themselves became performers. What was played at home was important for the development of

structures for her public concerts. The type of personal propaganda she made at her concerts was therefore followed up by music publishers and local music shops with intense marketing of her scores. In their reviews, critics often recommended that her listeners buy her music, and informed them about where it could be purchased. In this way, Backer Grøndahl mixed 'public' and 'domestic' music spheres in productive ways not yet considered in Norwegian music historiography. To many (male) critics' understanding of her choice of program, the genres of the works she performed, her femininity, and blonde appearance seem both highlighted and intertwined. A few exceptions among Backer Grøndahl's critics exist, however, who note the masculine power and clear logic of her works. Nonetheless, no matter how ingenious women composers were, projected ideals of womanliness and femininity would usually blur contemporaneous Scandinavian critics' judgement of their music.

How did Backer Grøndahl arrange her appearance at the Royal Philharmonic Society concert to which she refers in Shaw's account of the Doll's House party? According to her pianist son Fridtjof Backer-Grøndahl (1885–1959), she was a good chess player, and one might add that this extends to the game of life.<sup>9</sup> In a letter to a close friend, the singer Nina Grieg (wife of Edvard Grieg), she asked the Griegs to pave her way to the concert halls of London.<sup>10</sup> She had heard that Edvard was going to be the "Lion of the Season" and that there was a keen interest in her music. If Backer Grøndahl could perform something with him, she knew her road to success would be secured. Through her songs, she was already a relatively familiar name to Londoners as a composer. She had her biography printed, and her British publisher, Pitts and Hatsfields, wanted to promote her in England. Backer Grøndahl also told Nina that if she thought she would not get anywhere with Edvard, she was not to mention the letter to him.

Backer Grøndahl's letter to Nina Grieg prompted the desired effect. During Grieg's negotiations with the secretary of the Royal

Philharmonic Society, he mentioned a quite unknown, “absolutely phenomenal” Norwegian pianist who he “accidentally” knew was planning to come to London. He promised that the Society would not regret inviting such an outstanding pianist pre-eminent in playing all genres of piano music perfectly: concertos, solo pieces and chamber music.<sup>11</sup>

Backer Grøndahl scored an extraordinary success with her brilliant and artistic interpretation in London of what *The Morning Post* described as Grieg’s “quaint and graceful” A Minor Concerto.<sup>12</sup> The pianist, whose reputation had barely travelled beyond her native country, was heralded as an instrumentalist of exceptional powers, with a superb technique, brilliant performing style, full rich tone, and a singularly delicate, sensitive touch. Backer Grøndahl was thoroughly in sympathy with Grieg’s music, and the critics agreed that she captured the composer’s fascinating style and demonstrated his capabilities.

George Bernard Shaw reported that he was one of the very few critics in the “unfortunate position” of never having heard Backer Grøndahl play Grieg’s Concerto.<sup>13</sup> He was one of the most malicious critics of Grieg’s “miniature” works, commenting on their sweet but very common modulations and the composer’s lack of ability to create anything but “pretty” short melodies. Agreeing with Shaw on the Grieg matter, Hugh Reginald Haweis (1838–1901) declared Grieg “the Heine of the concert room” in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.<sup>14</sup> *The Monthly Musical Record* also described Grieg as the “Chopin of the North.”<sup>15</sup> When Grieg moved on to bigger genres and meddled with Ibsen, one of Shaw’s favourite authors, by composing incidental music for *Peer Gynt*, Shaw characterized it as infantile. Understandably, he left the concert before Backer Grøndahl had played the “infamous” A Minor Concerto.

A few weeks after Backer Grøndahl’s appearance at the Royal Philharmonic Society and at the Doll’s House dinner, Shaw revisited her in the flat she rented in London at Blanford Square to

interview her, “ashamed to intrude on her in the ribald character of a journalist.” He describes her as a woman of about 40, who has reached “the full maturity of her genius.” In what follows, he chooses to address a fantasy woman reader, “Madam Curiosity,” whom he expects to be “curious about her *personal* appearance”:

Let me make you feel safer still by stating that she is what you would call—observe, what you would call—a PERFECTLY PLAIN WOMAN. Her hair is not golden like yours; it is, I think, almost ashen—you would call it grey. Her figure and style are—well, quiet, slender, nothing in particular, nothing superb or Junonian; how can I tell? Complexion? Quite Norwegian; no cream or coral, nothing to be afraid of there. Eyes? Well, eyes are a matter of opinion; I should rather like you to see them for yourself, they are memorable. A noble brow; but then, as you say, how unbecoming to a woman to have a noble brow! Would anybody look at you if you were in the same room with her? Ah, there you have me, my dear lady. Frankly, they would forget your very existence, even if there were no such thing in the world as a piano. For there is a grace beside which your beauty is vulgar and your youth inadequate; and that grace is the secret of Madame Grøndahl’s charm.<sup>16</sup>

Ironically, most of Shaw’s readers had had the opportunity to hear and see Backer Grøndahl in London concerts on several occasions. The way the interview unfolds, Shaw lets her situate her professional life safely in the domestic and motherly sphere. He lets an “aggravatingly modest” Backer Grøndahl diminish the work behind her concert triumphs and compositions, and he makes it seem as if it is from her role as wife and mother that she acquires the experience that makes her an artist.

Turning up at her piano recital in Prince’s Hall a month later, Shaw made negative remarks in his review of her performance of

Grieg with the violinist Johannes Wolff: "I adhere to my opinion that she should have played a Beethoven sonata instead of Grieg's violin sonata in C Minor; but if we had no Beethoven we had at least Schumann and Chopin."<sup>17</sup> When Shaw's editor sent him to interview Backer Grøndahl, her earnest admiration for her compatriot Grieg infuriated him, "for she is a thousand times a finer player than he; and I got quite beside myself at the idea of his presuming to teach her how to play this and that instead of going down on his knees and begging her to deliver him from his occasional vulgarity, and to impart to him some of her Mendelssohnic sense of form in composition."<sup>18</sup>

Later that summer Backer Grøndahl travelled to play Grieg's concerto at the Trocadero during the world fair in Paris. The French critics too were exuberantly positive about her performance and about Norwegian music in general. In 1890, she returned to London, where she was favourably compared to Clara Schumann, which was a great compliment in London at that time. On her third visit to England, Backer Grøndahl committed the impertinence of yet again playing several of Grieg's works in Shaw's presence. Shaw condescended to stay on and listened:

On Saturday she came to the Crystal Palace in clouds of boreal snow. I should not have minded her bringing the snow if she had left Grieg's concerto at home. I hinted last year, and I now explicitly repeat, that Madame Grøndahl's powers in interpretation are wasted upon a scrappy work like Grieg's. . . . But when you are longing for Mozart in D Minor or Beethoven in G, or the E flat over again, the Grieg is an impertinence. The programme, as far as the pianoforte was concerned, would have INFURIATED A SAINT. Madame Grøndahl put Grieg where she should have put Beethoven, and Chopin where she should have put Grieg.<sup>19</sup>



Backer Grøndahl's next appearance was at her own recital in Steinway Hall two days later. She played many of her own pieces as well as works by Grieg and other Norwegian composers. Her performance of one work left Shaw even more exasperated than had her earlier performance of the A Minor Concerto. She and Alma Haas played Mozart's Fantasia in C Minor (K 475), with the additional second piano composed by Grieg. Shaw felt that Grieg's interpolation was impertinent. There was general regret in newspaper and journal reviews about the two pianists deciding to perform this un-Mozartian two-piano arrangement. Still, their reading of this "vulgarized" and "spoiled" Mozart work was considered splendid. *The Musical Times* suspected that some evil spirit had tempted Grieg to write this outrage to good taste, full as it was of "discord and extravagance . . . alien to the spirit of the original music."<sup>20</sup> *The Academy* condemned the arrangement as a lack of reverence towards Mozart.<sup>21</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette* regretted that Grieg was destroying the Salzburg master as much as possible.<sup>22</sup> According to *The Weekly Dispatch*, it was a "disgusting outrage worthy of condemnation in the strongest language."<sup>23</sup> In *The Observer*, Grieg was even called "a farthing rushlight to the sun" for his vulgarizing and spoiling of Mozart's fantasia.<sup>24</sup> Shaw, for his part, recommended that Grieg ascertain that "no brickbats or loose and suitably heavy articles have been left carelessly about the room," if ever he was to play it himself to an audience with adequate musical culture.<sup>25</sup>

In a letter to Shaw, Backer Grøndahl explained her choice of Grieg's "disgusting" arrangement of the Fantasia:

As a novelty and as an experiment I think the Fantasia might interest, but in the reality I am myself of your opinion, if not in the same degree. I reverence Beethoven and Schumann as my musical gods, but there are so many different kinds of beauties in the art as in the world; I think the mind ought to be open to and able to accept every sort of it. Your bad opinion

of this Fantasia I understand, but not of the concerto, which for me contains great beauties. But if ever I come to London again, I will try to be only classical, except perhaps in Grieg.<sup>26</sup>

According to Shaw, a pianist and composer who had earned a high reputation, should stick to classics such as Beethoven, Schumann and Mozart *au naturel*. As was the case with Ibsen, Shaw felt that Backer Grøndahl should not be tainted by her association with Grieg, and her respect for Grieg infuriated him even more. What perhaps disappointed him most, was her lack of judgement in choosing to play Grieg in general, and his “trivial additions” to Mozart’s fantasia, as an indifferent substitute for the orchestra, in particular. Nevertheless, she continued to perform Grieg throughout her career, but not the Fantasia.

In the late 1880s and the early 1890s, when Shaw reviewed and interviewed Backer Grøndahl at the peak of her performing career, questions about women’s identity and social situation in Norwegian society were debated publicly. Genius was regarded as a male quality and notions of Norwegianness seem to have had similar connotations. In order to be a representative of the nation-building of the 19th century, it was thought that it was perhaps necessary to be a man. Traditional discussions about women’s innate nature and what were considered appropriate vocations for women were intensified. The socio-political climate for women’s rights was steadily improving, but contemporary opinions on femininity deviated considerably from those held in the present. At that time most critics were men; therefore, they had the opportunity to publish propaganda based on their own standards. They formed the premises for what was true, valid, and relevant, and they defined what was reality in the realm of public concerts. On the other hand, newspaper reviews probably were based on what their readers expected, although, in turn, what their readers expected was based on what they were accustomed to reading. By virtue of being one of the

most reviewed artists in the Scandinavian press and journals, Backer Grøndahl was discussed thoroughly as a woman pianist and composer. Reception materials connected to her pianist and composer *personas* consist of a broad spectre of everything from fair and balanced descriptions of a woman who masters very demanding and difficult tasks in a brilliant way to reviews which openly state generally negative attitudes towards a woman's ability to compose music and arrange concerts.

Shaw was far from the only critic who wrote 'tongue in cheek,' almost flirtatiously about women pianists' personal appearance and gestures. In spite of Norwegian women's improved economic and legal status, better educational opportunities, and new career possibilities, deeply rooted negative attitudes towards women composers were voiced in the press, and the ideological climate was openly misogynous. Provoked by a crowd of young women fans who were amateur performers, relatively long reviews appropriated refined metaphors from 'women's sphere' as sarcasm, irony, and mockery, and commented on Backer Grøndahl's inferior women composer colleagues. This puts the overall judgement that she was number one among Scandinavian women composers into perspective.

The Swedish composer and critic Wilhelm Peterson-Berger (1867–1942) is one of the critics who would have liked to place Backer Grøndahl's music performed at public concerts neatly in a Doll's House. In a private home, he wrote, he would be more than willing to listen to her music in a comfortable chair with a cigar in his mouth, but not in an uncomfortable seat in one of Stockholm's most public concert halls (The Royal Music Academy). To him, she was too blonde and friendly, something that made a whole concert consisting of her own works and performances tiring, and he compared her music to needle work and baking.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, as a pianist, Backer Grøndahl was considered among Europe's most outstanding pianists (male or female) and compared favourably to

Anton Rubinstein and Hans von Bülow, among others. In such cases she appears to equilibristically balance (wo)manly artistic traits.

Norwegian contemporary discourse on women geniuses was formulated in newspapers by a mother of three, Hilda Torjusen, (1863–?), among others. Torjusen stated that if gifted women choose to develop in other directions than men, they do not achieve renown, and if they follow in men's footsteps, they are accused of not being original. While men's original ideas were cultivated, women's geniality could not be accepted because of society's strong misoneism.<sup>28</sup>

Backer Grøndahl became an expert at marketing pianos and her music, and she knew what she could and could not do and say publicly about women's liberation. The young women buying her music would probably not have wanted to or been allowed to play her music had she publically supported the feminist cause. Perhaps it is due to this balancing act that earlier literature has claimed that she was not active in the women's rights movement. It was only privately that Backer Grøndahl spoke of the negative aspects of being a multi-tasking wife and mother, pianist, educator and composer. She made good use of her time, and neglected nothing. Her health and hearing deteriorated, but Backer Grøndahl did not use either as an excuse for inactivity. In this way, her hard daily work in building a Norwegian musical life from small beginnings grew into something of wider dimensions.

In addition to her busy activities and glittering career, Backer Grøndahl, together with her painter sister Harriet Backer (1845–1932) as well as her close friend and colleague Erika Nissen (1845–1903), made it a priority to join the women's suffrage movement in Norway. As a child, she went to school with feminist pioneer Gina Krog (1847–1916), while her sister Harriet Backer was a classmate of Ragna Nielsen (1845–1924), both famous Norwegian feminists. Backer Grøndahl's cantata *Nytaarsgry* (*New Year's Dawn*), published in the feminist periodical *Nylænde* (*New Year's Edition* 1901), was dedicated to another feminist pioneer

Aasta Hansteen (1824–1908), who saw herself as the Joan of Arc of Norwegian feminism.<sup>29</sup> This feminist pioneer was not afraid of offending the bourgeoisie. She felt that the same moral codes should apply to both men and women, regarded men as inferior creatures, and sometimes used a horsewhip (or an umbrella) to punish them for personal offences and for centuries of female oppression.<sup>30</sup>

Backer Grøndahl's cantata marked the beginning of what the women's suffrage movement hoped would be the women's century. Gina Krog's text<sup>31</sup> and its rhetoric are strongly influenced by the semiotic codes for conventional signs and associations of the women's movement in general and Hansteen in particular. For those present at the first performance at the University Ceremonial Hall in Kristiania (Oslo), the cantata became a victory hymn that made them feel that they needed to press forward in their course.<sup>32</sup> Hansteen compared the cantata to the women's suffrage movement's use of the Sunflower badge in Kansas and saw it as a symbol of women's right to light and air. She interpreted the cantata as a prophecy that women's and mothers' love were going to save the world and humanity. Backer Grøndahl conducted a women's choir for the premiere of *Nytaarsgry* at a large Nordic women's rights meeting in Kristiania in the summer of 1902, before 350 women wearing the Sunflower badge. She also published several musical works in the feminist periodical *Nylænde*.<sup>33</sup> After this first performance of the cantata, *Nylænde* reported: "It evoked a beautiful, solemn tone—like a consecration."<sup>34</sup>

At the untimely death of his close friend and interpreter Backer Grøndahl on June 4, 1907, Grieg made the following entry in his diary: "If a mimosa could sing, it would sound like her most beautiful, intimate melodies." *Nationaltidende* described her in its obituary as "the man" among hundreds of "lady pianists." But, perhaps the finest tribute to her memory was expressed by Gina Krog, when she said, "Agathe Backer Grøndahl is not dead; she is just a sleeping beauty."

## NOTES

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EMERGING FROM THE SHADOWS:  
MAUDE VALÉRIE WHITE, A SIGNIFICANT  
FIGURE IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH SONG

Writing in 1903, Arthur Elson reported, “Maude Valérie White takes rank among the very best of English song writers.”<sup>1</sup> Although she is unaccountably neglected today, White played a significant role in the history of English vocal music. When she came to the fore as a composer around 1880, the English vocal scene was dominated by the Victorian drawing room ballad, aptly described in *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as “a composition of the slightest degree of musical value nearly always set to three verses (neither more nor less) of conventional doggerel.”<sup>2</sup> Through her extraordinary musical talent, and her impeccable taste in literature, as reflected in the poems she chose to set, White helped to raise the artistic standard of late nineteenth-century English song. In his widely read historical survey of music in England, Eric Blom paid tribute to her contribution to English vocal literature, noting that she “bridged the gulf between the ballad and the art song,”<sup>3</sup> and Derek Hyde recently pointed out that, in her works, she rescued English art song from “the pernicious clutches of the Victorian ballad.”<sup>4</sup> White’s creative output was substantial. Primarily a vocal composer, she wrote more than 200 songs, several piano pieces, some early choral works, incidental music for plays, a ballet, a few other orchestral and chamber works, and an unfinished opera.<sup>5</sup> In later life, she also penned two volumes of memoirs—*Friends and Memories* (1914) and *My Indian Summer* (1932)—and translated several books. This chapter examines her life and creative achievements.

Maude Valérie White was born near Dieppe, Normandy in 1855 to upper middle class English parents. Her family moved to England before she had reached her first birthday. She spent her childhood in England, Heidelberg and Paris, and it was probably



this cosmopolitan upbringing that awakened her lifelong interest in foreign travel and nurtured her exceptional gift for languages. She was fluent in French, German, Italian, Spanish and English, and chose poems in those languages as texts for her songs.

White's musical education began at an early age with piano lessons from her German governess. She loved the lessons,<sup>6</sup> and continued to study piano throughout her school years with a succession of teachers. Although she had yet to begin the study of music theory, she composed her first song in 1873, at the age of seventeen—a setting of Byron's "Farewell, if ever fondest prayer." Because it sheds light on her method of composing, her account of this important event is especially valuable. She wrote: "I knew the poem well, and improvised the music to the words without the slightest difficulty. It is the way I have composed the melody of almost every song I have ever written, naturally working up the accompaniment and adding many little details afterwards."<sup>7</sup>

Two years later, when she was nineteen, White spent the winter in Torquay with her mother and aunt. While there, she studied harmony and counterpoint with William Smyth Rockstro, a former pupil and personal friend of Mendelssohn.<sup>8</sup> Acting on Rockstro's advice, she continued her theoretical studies with Oliver May in London.<sup>9</sup> May proved to be an inspiring and supportive teacher. In addition to instructing her in counterpoint and composition, he helped her prepare a few of her early songs for publication.<sup>10</sup> Recalling this period of study with May, she wrote: "Never in my life have I ever come across anyone professing to teach composition or the pianoforte who more efficiently or more faithfully fulfilled the task."<sup>11</sup>

As much as she loved her lessons with Oliver May and was devoted to him as a teacher and friend, White eventually decided that she wanted to pursue full-time studies at the Royal Academy of Music with a view to becoming a professional composer. But first she knew that she would have to overcome her

mother's extreme prejudice against women taking part in public life, and that this would be no easy task.<sup>12</sup> In this respect, Mrs. White was a child of her time; her prejudice against women's involvement in public life is a clear indication of the importance she attached to traditional Victorian beliefs about the appropriate role of women in society.

According to one of her mother's more snobbish acquaintances, the chance of Maude attending the Royal Academy raised serious questions surrounding the issue of social class. In one of the most amusing passages in her memoirs, Maude relates that this "sincere friend" took it upon herself to warn Mrs. White of the "appalling dangers" to which her daughter would be exposed if she were allowed to mix with the students of the Royal Academy of Music. Chief among such alleged dangers was the distinct possibility that she "might be obliged to associate with the daughters of tradespeople!"<sup>13</sup> Mrs. White may have held old-fashioned views about the proper role of women, but she was certainly not a snob, and she refused to be impressed by such nonsense. In due course, she reluctantly gave her seal of approval to her daughter's plan.<sup>14</sup>

In the fall of 1876, at the age of twenty-one, Maude became a student at the Royal Academy of Music. The blind composer Sir George Macfarren, who was then principal of the Academy, accepted her into his class for harmony and composition, and she had lessons in piano and sight-singing as well. For a very short time, she also attempted to learn the violin, but had to give it up because holding the instrument for more than five minutes at a time caused severe muscular pains in her arms.<sup>15</sup>

While at the Academy, she composed and published numerous songs—settings of German, French and English texts. But despite her success in this area, Macfarren thought that she should not devote herself exclusively to vocal music, and suggested that she try to compose a concerto. She told him she was absolutely certain that she was incapable of such a thing, but he insisted. In the end,

both teacher and pupil agreed that her attempt to carry out this task had proved disastrous.<sup>16</sup>

In an effort to redeem herself, White decided to try her hand at writing a piano piece, which she called *Rondo Scherzando*. It was a great success. Macfarren liked it so much that he encouraged her to publish it. The piece was also performed at one of the Academy student concerts.<sup>17</sup> Among her many other compositions featured on such programmes during her student years were several songs with piano accompaniment, a setting of Victor Hugo's "Espoir en Dieu" for voice and orchestra,<sup>18</sup> a Benedictus for vocal quartet and chorus, and a Credo for soloists, chorus and orchestra.

In 1879, White gained the distinction of becoming the first woman to win the coveted Mendelssohn Scholarship.<sup>19</sup> The four compositions she submitted to the competition were an Agnus Dei for soloists, chorus and full orchestra, and three songs—"Espoir en Dieu," "Chantez, chantez, jeune inspirée!" (both settings of poems by Victor Hugo), and a setting of "My ain kind dearie O!" by Robert Burns.<sup>20</sup> After the competition was over, she learned that it was the latter song that Sir Arthur Sullivan, one of the judges, had admired most.<sup>21</sup>

White was especially fond of her setting of "My ain kind dearie O!," but the original accompaniments to her songs, including this one, were often more challenging to play than those that eventually appeared in print. In her memoirs, she described the original version of this accompaniment (which is the one she always played) as "a terror," adding that "it was ten times more difficult than the printed one."<sup>22</sup> To satisfy the requirements of her publisher, she produced a more accessible version.<sup>23</sup>

Although previous Mendelssohn Scholars had elected to further their musical training in Germany, White remained in London, where she continued to study at the Royal Academy of Music with Sir George Macfarren. On Macfarren's advice, she also took extra composition lessons from his son-in-law, Frank Davenport.<sup>24</sup>

Winning the Mendelssohn Scholarship was not White's only achievement in 1879. She composed many songs that year, including "Absent yet Present," a setting of a poem by Edward Bulwer-Lytton. It was immediately published and sold better than any other song she ever wrote.<sup>25</sup> The great baritone Charles Santley was so taken with "Absent yet Present" that he decided to perform it along with another of White's songs—"Montrose's Love Song" (text by the Marquis of Montrose)—at one of the celebrated Monday Popular Concerts, and insisted that the young composer accompany him. Santley was a renowned artist, and the Monday Pops, as they were usually called, were considered the most important concerts of chamber music in London, so the inclusion of her music in that series was a major breakthrough for White.<sup>26</sup> Santley held her in high esteem as a composer, and continued to champion her works throughout the remainder of his career. In addition to "Absent yet Present," his name became associated with several other of her songs, including "To Electra" and "To Blossoms"—both settings of poems by Robert Herrick—"When Passion's Trance" (Shelley), "To Althea from Prison" (Richard Lovelace), and "Heureux qui peut aimer" (Victor Hugo).<sup>27</sup>

White's father had died when she was a child, and her mother, who had been suffering from failing health, died in 1881. The loss of her mother left White so devastated that she found it impossible to concentrate on her work. She gave up the Mendelssohn Scholarship, abandoned her studies at the Royal Academy, and went to Chile, where she spent the next ten months with her married elder sister.<sup>28</sup> Because she was in deep mourning, she lived very quietly, but she did teach herself to play the guitar. She also collected a number of traditional Chilean airs and dances, which were published after her return to England in 1882 as *Eight South American Airs* for piano duet. She composed only one song during her stay in Chile, a setting of Shelley's poem "To Mary."<sup>29</sup> It became one of Queen Victoria's favourite songs, and the tenor Ben

Davies always included it on his programme when invited to sing before the Queen.<sup>30</sup>

Soon after returning to London, White received in the mail a poem called "The Devout Lover" by W. H. Pollock, which she set to music that same day.<sup>31</sup> It was one of her most frequently performed works, and was sung by Charles Santley throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.<sup>32</sup>

White composed many other songs that year, and often tried them over with her friend Edith Santley, the eldest daughter of Charles Santley. Edith had a fine soprano voice and enjoyed a brilliant career as a concert singer until she married. One of her greatest successes was the first public performance of White's "My soul is an enchanted boat," which she sang at a Monday Pops Concert.<sup>33</sup> A setting of an excerpt from Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, the song was described in early editions of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as "one of the best in our language."<sup>34</sup> White fell in love with the poem, and felt compelled to set it to music. She later explained in her memoirs: "The ethereal beauty of the words affected me so strongly, they evoked a vision of such ideal beauty, such ineffable happiness, that a burning longing arose in me to capture if only one drop of that essence, to make that one drop my own—my very own. I longed to make a casket to enshrine those words—a casket of music."<sup>35</sup>

In 1883, White spent six months in Vienna studying with Robert Fuchs.<sup>36</sup> After he had seen most of the music she had already written, Fuchs was very encouraging. But, like Sir George Macfarren, he strongly advised her to broaden her scope by writing a large-scale instrumental piece. She spent the next several weeks attempting to compose a concerto, but eventually abandoned the project in despair. When he realized how miserable this assignment had made his student, Fuchs relented and allowed her to concentrate on composing songs. White later wrote that her decision to give up trying to compose the concerto was such a relief that it made

her feel like “a gay and cheerful *soufflé*.”<sup>37</sup> It seems likely that she had internalized the views expressed in much of the philosophical and scientific literature of the time about women’s supposedly innate inability to create large-scale musical works of any significance.<sup>38</sup>

While in Vienna, White composed a good number of German songs, eight of which were published a short time later in her first *German Album of Sixteen Songs*.<sup>39</sup> She also spent countless hours working at counterpoint.<sup>40</sup> A high point of her stay was a concert in which she was invited to participate. When Rosa Papier, one of the principal Wagnerian singers of the Vienna Opera House, heard some of White’s compositions, she asked the composer to accompany her in “Absent yet Present” and “When Passion’s Trance” at a concert. Papier was a much-admired artist, and White was delighted that she wanted to perform her songs.<sup>41</sup>

White was an inveterate traveller who loved to explore foreign countries and experience their cultures. She also suffered from very poor health for most of her life, and often found it helpful to spend time in places where the climate was more congenial. Although she had inherited a small legacy, it didn’t provide her with the necessary funds to support her lifestyle, but she was able to use her musical talent to earn the money she needed. Later, she also increased her income by translating books and plays into English.<sup>42</sup>

Not long after returning to London from Vienna in 1884, White began to supplement her income by giving piano lessons, teaching people her songs, and playing professionally at musical parties. While this work took up a significant amount of her time, it didn’t interfere to any great extent with her composing. She wrote numerous songs during that period, many of which were published in her *New Album of Songs with German and English Words*. She set several poems by the Hungarian poet Petöfi, a few others by Heine, and some Swedish and Norwegian poems as well—the latter, a result of her recent trip to Sweden. She also set several French poems, including Sully Prudhomme’s “Ici-bas.”<sup>43</sup>

Among the loveliest of White's songs dating from the later 1880s is her setting of Byron's "So we'll go no more a-roving"—a treasured remembrance of her first trip to Italy in 1888. In her memoirs, she penned the following description of the moonlight carriage drive to Sorrento that inspired her to compose it:

I shall never forget . . . that exquisite drive along the mountain road, that exquisite view across the dark blue bay that lay spread beneath its canopy of stars! . . . [T]he soft wind blew the delicious smell of orange blossoms towards us—the delicious smell that conjures up visions of the South so magically, and fills the lover of the South with such unspeakable nostalgia! It was after that drive that, some weeks later, shut up in a room in London, I wrote, "So we'll go no more a-roving!"<sup>44</sup>

Some critics regard "So we'll go no more a-roving" as her finest work. It was closely associated with the distinguished tenor Gervase Elwes, who sang it frequently in recital, often accompanied by the composer.<sup>45</sup>

White reached the peak of her success during the 1890s. Her songs were sung widely throughout Britain and Europe by leading singers of the day, including Clara Butt, Robert Kennerley Rumford, Harry Plunket Greene and Raimund von Zur Mühlen. She also began to organize public concerts of her own music, and her works were featured in prestigious concert series.<sup>46</sup> Between 1895 and 1940, for example, her songs were performed at the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts (better known as the Proms) more than 100 times. Although her music has not been heard at the Proms since 1940, she remains the most frequently performed woman composer in the history of that celebrated concert series.<sup>47</sup>

White composed a significant amount of music during the 1890s, including many German, French and English songs, piano pieces, a work for cello and piano entitled *Naissance d'amour*, and

incidental music for *The Medicine Man*—a play by Henry Duff Traill and Robert Hichens which was produced at the Lyceum theatre in London. She also began an opera called *Smaranda* that she worked on at various times between 1894 and 1911, but didn't complete because she encountered difficulties with the orchestration.<sup>48</sup> Among the songs from the 1890s, her setting of Tennyson's poem "The Throstle" is especially worthy of mention. It was written in the south of France toward the end of a seven-month tour of Europe that she took in 1890 with her sister Emmie, and it became one of her most popular songs.<sup>49</sup> Her charming setting of Robert Burns's poem "John Anderson, my Jo'," composed the following year in London, is also of considerable interest. It was often sung by the legendary soprano Dame Nellie Melba, who was then the reigning diva of Covent Garden and a major star of the Metropolitan Opera in New York.<sup>50</sup>

In the hope of finding relief from her chronic health problems, White decided to spend part of the winter of 1901 in Rome and Naples. While en route to her destination, however, she became seriously ill with pneumonia and bronchitis, and was confined to a hospital near Paris for six weeks. Upon her release, she was urged by her doctor to take up residence in Sicily, where the climate might help to restore her health and strength. Heeding this advice, she made the Sicilian town of Taormina her home base, but returned to England almost every summer.<sup>51</sup> She also delighted in exploring other parts of Italy—a country she loved—and continued to travel abroad, often presenting concerts of her own music in the places she visited. On a trip to Egypt in 1905, for instance, she gave a concert at the Cairo Opera House. Assisted by the finest local singers, she performed several of her German, French and Spanish songs, and *From the Ionian Sea*—a suite of piano pieces based on traditional Sicilian melodies that she had collected.<sup>52</sup>

During the early years of the twentieth century, musical styles and tastes were changing, and White's music was beginning to fall



out of favour with the critics, but it remained popular with singers and with the concert-going public. Although her songs were published less frequently than before, she continued to compose. Because of the tragic earthquake that occurred in Messina in 1908, she was forced to abandon her little cottage in Taormina, and went to live with her sister Emmie in Florence.<sup>53</sup>

A visit to southern Russia in 1912 provided White with the inspiration for two very interesting new works. The first was *Trois Chansons Tziganes*, a harmonically bold setting of three Russian poems by Tolstoy in French translation.<sup>54</sup> The second came about because of her introduction to Russian ballet in the town of Usovka. She had never been to a ballet before, and was so delighted with what she saw that she decided to try to compose one herself. The ballet she wrote was called *The Enchanted Heart*, and was based on a scenario of her own creation. She had completed the piano score and much of the orchestration by the summer of 1913. A lavish production of *The Enchanted Heart* was set to take place the following spring before a large invited audience at the British Embassy in Rome, but was cancelled at the last moment because of the death of the Duke of Argyll. To the great disappointment of everyone involved, it was announced that, as the members of the Royal Family were in mourning, no entertainment could be allowed to take place at the British Embassy.<sup>55</sup> The scheduled premiere of an orchestral suite from *The Enchanted Heart* that Sir Henry Wood had asked White to arrange for the Proms in 1915 was similarly ill-fated. It too was cancelled when the board of management of the Proms decided to postpone the performance of all new music in order to attract a wider audience.<sup>56</sup>

Although White abandoned her opera because she encountered problems with the orchestration, she seems not to have experienced any comparable difficulties with her ballet.<sup>57</sup> During the war years (1914–1918), she organized and participated in many benefit concerts for war charities. For one such event in aid of the

Serbian Relief Fund, she enlisted the services of the Queen's Hall Orchestra and its conductor Sir Henry Wood. The programme included excerpts from *The Enchanted Heart*, and five Serbian dances that she had arranged for full orchestra with bass clarinet, double bassoon, and all the percussion instruments necessary to create the desired barbaric effects. Both pieces were well received, and Sir Henry Wood repeated the excerpts from *The Enchanted Heart* the following Sunday at his own afternoon and evening concerts.<sup>58</sup> Among White's other works from this period are two songs written in response to the war—"Le Depart du Conscriit" (text by the composer) and "On the Fields of France" (N. McEachern).<sup>59</sup> She also composed incidental music for *The Law of the Sands*, a play by her close friend Robert Hichens. It was produced at the Coliseum in London in 1916. The great ballet master Enrico Cecchetti liked the incidental music so much that he choreographed a dance to it.<sup>60</sup>

After the war, White continued to live with her sister in Italy for the next several years, but she returned to England for the final few years of her life. Apart from a small number of English and French songs, she wrote very little music during the 1920s, but she continued to organize concerts of her works.<sup>61</sup> One of her very last songs, a setting of William Watson's poem "Leave-taking," was composed in Rome in 1927.<sup>62</sup> It seems to have been around this time that she decided to bring her composing career to an end, for she wrote: "Of late years I have not composed much. When one has nothing further to say, silence is best."<sup>63</sup> During her last years, she wrote the second volume of her memoirs, *My Indian Summer*, and translated a number of literary works into English. Among them were Lili Frölich-Bume's biography of Ingres, the memoirs of Princess Pauline Metternich, a novel called *Uncle Anghel* by the Romanian author Panait Istrati, and a play entitled *The Apostle Play* by the Viennese writer Max Mell.<sup>64</sup> She died in London in 1937 at the age of 82, and was interred in the cemetery of St. Edward the Confessor Roman Catholic Church, Sutton Green, Surrey.

The following brief passage from the writings of the eminent critic and scholar J. A. Fuller Maitland reveals the level of respect accorded White as a musical creator by her peers: "The songs of Maude Valérie White are known and loved everywhere the English language is spoken."<sup>65</sup> But, despite the great success she enjoyed during her lifetime, her music fell out of fashion soon after her death—a result of the widespread rejection of Victorian aesthetic ideals.

While the general reaction against all things Victorian has since peaked and subsided, the prejudice against serious Victorian music lingers on.<sup>66</sup> When and if White is mentioned in standard music reference books today, she is usually described as a successful composer of drawing room ballads. Some of her early songs such as "Absent yet Present" and "To Mary" belong in that category, but they share none of the negative features typically associated with the genre. As Derek Hyde put it, "One is generally aware of the traditions of the art song in her settings, and even her most popular ballad, 'Absent yet Present,' has an attractive flowing arpeggio accompaniment which gives the piece momentum."<sup>67</sup>

White developed her own distinctive musical voice, and was able to adapt her style to capture the essence of each poem she chose to set. One of her most famous songs, her setting of Byron's "So we'll go no more a-roving," illustrates the main characteristics of her vocal writing: sensitivity to the poetic text, lyricism, a sense of rhythmic impetus, and the avoidance of predictable cadences. Her German settings reflect the influence of mid-nineteenth-century *Lieder*,<sup>68</sup> and she chose the German *Lied* as the model for many of her other songs as well. Her indebtedness to the example of Robert Schumann is evident in her accompaniments, especially in the German songs.<sup>69</sup> Most of her French settings such as "Ici-bas" and "Au bord de l'eau" (both poems by Sully Prudhomme) are written in a style not unlike that of Gabriel Fauré (although usually less harmonically adventurous), but "La flûte invisible" (Victor Hugo) and "Le foyer" (Paul Verlaine), composed in the

latter years of her career in 1924, are more impressionistic. The same ethereal style of writing is evident in a few other of her later works as well, including her setting of Gabriele d'Annunzio's "Isotta Blanzesmano."<sup>70</sup> The music that she heard during the course of her extensive travels often helped to shape the rhythm and melody of her own compositions, and she also based several of her works on traditional Swedish, Finnish, Italian and German folk tunes.<sup>71</sup> She was admired by composers of the previous generation, including Sir Arthur Sullivan, as well as by such younger composers as Percy Grainger, Roger Quilter and Ralph Vaughan Williams, and her influence is readily apparent in the songs of the latter two.<sup>72</sup>

Thanks to the revival of interest in the period known as the English musical renaissance (c. 1880–c. 1945), a few music scholars have begun to focus their attention on White and other women composers who were active in England at the time. Of particular interest are the writings of Derek Hyde and Sophie Fuller, whose pioneering research has added greatly to our knowledge of White and her music. Another important contributor to this area of research is the pianist Graham Johnson, who has recorded a number of White's songs with Felicity Lott, Anthony Rolfe Johnson, and Alice Coote.<sup>73</sup> His elegantly written notes on these songs are illuminating.

After several decades of undeserved neglect, Maude Valérie White is beginning to emerge from the shadows. Reviewing her 1905 Bechstein Hall concert in London, the *Times* critic paid tribute to her musical achievements in terms that still hold true today. He wrote:

There are few composers of either sex whose fountain of melodic inspiration has flowed so freely for so long. . . . The secret of her success is that she is at once passionate and sincere, and if her ideas, and the manner of their performance, sometimes suggest the clinging air of a hot-house they have much of its fragrance too.<sup>74</sup>

## NOTES

1. Arthur Elson, *Woman's Work in Music* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1903), 150.
2. J. A. Fuller Maitland, "Ballad," *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. J. A. Fuller Maitland (London: Macmillan, 1910), 1:173. Drawing room ballads were also known as shop ballads or parlor songs.
3. Eric Blom, *Music in England*, rev. ed. (West Drayton, England: Penguin Books, 1947), 218.
4. Derek Hyde, *New-Found Voices: Women in Nineteenth-Century English Music*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 82.
5. For a comprehensive list of Maude Valérie White's compositions, see Sophie Fuller, *Women Composers during the British Musical Renaissance, 1880–1914* (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1998), 337–58. A useful but abbreviated and less detailed list is included in Sophie Fuller, "White, Maude Valérie," *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, [grovemusic.com](http://grovemusic.com), accessed 21 July 2020.
6. Maude Valérie White, *Friends and Memories* (London: Edward Arnold, 1914), 24.
7. *Ibid.*, 106.
8. *Ibid.*, 108.
9. *Ibid.*, 120.
10. *Ibid.*, 126.
11. *Ibid.*, 120. White also studied piano with Oliver May in 1879, while preparing to compete for the Mendelssohn Scholarship. *Ibid.*, 172.
12. *Ibid.*, 136–37.
13. *Ibid.*, 138.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 139.
16. *Ibid.*, 143.
17. *Ibid.*, 158.
18. *Ibid.*, 147. White dedicated this work to the contralto Mary Wakefield. The two women were close friends, and Wakefield sang early performances of several of White's songs. On Wakefield as a singer, and her pioneering work in the competitive music festival movement, see Hyde, 140–62.
19. White, *Friends and Memories*, 179.
20. *Ibid.*, 173–74. The Agnus Dei was later performed at one of the Academy concerts.

21. Ibid., 177.
22. Ibid., 174–75.
23. Ibid., 174.
24. Ibid., 183–84.
25. Ibid., 184–85.
26. Ibid., 195–96.
27. Ibid., 201.
28. Ibid., 205–6; Sophie Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers, Britain and the United States 1629–Present* (London: Pandora, 1994), 331.
29. White, *Friends and Memories*, 217–20.
30. Hyde, 78. Ben Davies made at least three recordings of “To Mary,” the first in 1903 and the last in 1932.
31. White, *Friends and Memories*, 224.
32. Ibid., 227.
33. Ibid., 226–28.
34. Mrs. Edmond Woodhouse, “White, Maude Valérie,” *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. J. A. Fuller Maitland (London: Macmillan, 1910), 5:515.
35. White, *Friends and Memories*, 228–29.
36. Ibid., 255 and 261.
37. Ibid., 264–65.
38. The relevant literature is discussed in the following: Eugene Gates, “The Woman Composer Question: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives,” in this publication; Eugene Gates, “Female Composers: A Critical Review of the Psychological Literature,” in this publication; Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England, 1870–1914: “Encroaching on All Man’s Privileges”* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 15–31; Derek B. Scott, “The Sexual Politics of Victorian Musical Aesthetics,” *Journal of the Musical Association* 119, no. 1 (1994): 91–114.
39. White, *Friends and Memories*, 265.
40. Ibid., 288.
41. Ibid., 265.
42. Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers*, 321–22.
43. White, *Friends and Memories*, 293.
44. Ibid., 327.
45. Maude Valérie White, *My Indian Summer* (London: Grayson & Grayson,

- 1932), 106–207. Gervase Elwes recorded “So we’ll go no more a-roving” in 1911.
46. Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers*, 322.
  47. Cath Sleeman, “The Forgotten Women of the Proms,” *The Long and Short: A Magazine of Innovation, New Ideas and How the World is Changing*, 27 July 2016, <https://thelongandshort.org/society/forgotten-women-composers-of-the-proms>, accessed 25 June 2021. The annual summer series of classical music concerts known as the Proms was established in London in 1895 by the impresario Robert Newman.
  48. White, *My Indian Summer* (London: Grayson & Grayson, 1932), 267.
  49. White, *Friends and Memories*, 354.
  50. *Ibid.*, 359. Nellie Melba recorded “John Anderson my Jo” in 1913.
  51. White, *Friends and Memories*, 372–75.
  52. White, *My Indian Summer*, 134–35.
  53. Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers*, 332–34.
  54. *Ibid.*, 334.
  55. White, *My Indian Summer*, 238–45.
  56. *Ibid.*, 255.
  57. The extent of White’s formal training in orchestration remains unclear, but it is known that she took some lessons in the subject from Sydney Waddington and Herbert Bedford at some point later in her career. White, *Friends and Memories*, 173.
  58. White, *My Indian Summer*, 259–62.
  59. Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers*, 334.
  60. White, *My Indian Summer*, 26–27.
  61. Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers*, 334.
  62. White, *My Indian Summer*, 273.
  63. *Ibid.*
  64. *Ibid.*, 273–74.
  65. J. A. Fuller Maitland, *English Music in the XIXth Century* (London: Grant Richards, 1903), 268.
  66. Nicholas Temperley, “Introduction: The State of Research on Victorian Music,” in *The Lost Chord: Essays on Victorian Music*, ed. Nicholas Temperley (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 5.
  67. Hyde, 78.
  68. Fuller, “White, Maude Valérie,” *Grove Music Online*.
  69. Malcolm Boyd, “White, Maude Valérie,” *The New Grove Dictionary of*

*Women Composers*, ed. Julie Anne Sadie and Rhian Samuel (London: Macmillan, 1994), 493.

70. Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers*, 334.
71. Fuller, "White, Maude Valérie," *Grove Music Online*; Hyde, 80.
72. Graham Johnson, "Maude Valérie White (1855–1937)," liner notes for *The Power of Love: An English Songbook* (Alice Coote/Graham Johnson), Hyperion CD A67888, 2010, 4; Fuller, "White, Maude Valérie," *Grove Music Online*.
73. "So we'll go no more a-roving," "The Spring has come," "The Devout Lover," in *The Power of Love: An English Songbook*, Coote/Johnson, Hyperion CD A67888, 2010; "So we'll go no more a-roving," in *Favourite English Songs*, Lott/Johnson, Chandos CD CHAN 6653, 1990; "Chantez, chantez, jeune inspirée," in *Mélodies sur des poèmes de Victor Hugo*, Lott/Johnson, Harmonia Mundi CD HMA 1901138, 1985; "The Thristle," "My soul is an enchanted boat," "The Devout Lover," "So we'll go no more a-roving," in *The Praise of Women*, Rolf Johnson/Johnson, Helios CD CDH55159, 2004.
74. *The Times*, 4 December 1905, 11, quoted in Fuller, *Women Composers during the British Musical Renaissance*, 209.



DAMNED IF YOU DO AND DAMNED  
IF YOU DON'T: SEXUAL AESTHETICS  
AND THE MUSIC OF DAME ETHEL SMYTH

The last two decades of the nineteenth century marked a turning point in the extent and nature of women's activity as composers. For the first time ever, significant numbers of women entered the traditionally male field of art music composition. This dramatic change was chiefly due to the widening of educational opportunities for women in the great European conservatories, specifically, the reluctant acceptance of female students into classes in advanced theory and composition.<sup>1</sup> Before that time, only three groups of women had access to adequate theoretical instruction: nuns, daughters of noble or wealthy families, and those fortunate enough to be born into a family of musicians who nurtured equally the talents of their daughters and sons.<sup>2</sup>

The increasing visibility of women composers was greeted by turn-of-the-century critics with hostility and alarm. Fearing that this trend would lead to the feminization of music, they developed the double standard of sexual aesthetics<sup>3</sup>—a system of gendered criteria for the critical evaluation of women's music. This essay examines the critical response to the music of English composer Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944), and, in a brief postscript, the legacy of sexual aesthetics as it exists today. As a preface to these endeavours, however, it will be necessary to discuss the nature of sexual aesthetics in greater detail.

Based on the Romantic ideology of complementary male and female intellectual and psychological traits, through which men were defined as objective, logical and active and women as subjective, emotional and passive,<sup>4</sup> sexual aesthetics enabled critics to discuss the form, style and emotional range of a woman's musical compositions in terms of their appropriateness to her sex. On this

view, “feminine” music, which women were expected to compose exclusively, was delicate, graceful, sensitive, melodic, and confined to the smaller forms such as songs and short piano pieces. “Masculine” music, on the other hand, was powerful, lushly orchestrated, and intellectually rigorous both in formal structure and in harmonic and contrapuntal innovation. Operas, symphonies and other large-scale works belonged to this realm.<sup>5</sup> As more and more women began to compose in the larger forms, they were attacked by critics for venturing beyond their supposedly innate sexual limitations.<sup>6</sup>

Camille Saint-Saëns provided a model for the rhetoric of sexual aesthetics when he declared in an 1885 essay that women, in their misguided attempts to imitate and compete with male composers, overcompensated for their femininity by producing music that was too boisterous. “Women,” he wrote, “are strange when they dabble seriously in art. They seem preoccupied above all else with making you forget that they are women and displaying an excessive virility, without realizing that it is precisely that preoccupation which betrays the female.”<sup>7</sup>

Critics throughout the Western world quickly followed suit. American critic Philip Hale, for instance, wrote: “A woman who writes for orchestra thinks, ‘I must be virile at all cost.’ What Saint-Saëns said . . . is true of the sex.”<sup>8</sup> Writing in similar vein, Rupert Hughes discussed music in terms of its “supremely womanly” and “man-tone” characteristics.<sup>9</sup> Like Saint-Saëns, Hughes claimed that women who wrote in man-tone were “seeking after virility.”<sup>10</sup> When a woman composed in the smaller forms, it was said to be proof of her innate inability to think in the larger, more abstract forms; if, however, she wrote man-tone works, it was said that she had betrayed her sexual identity. Put simply, sexual aesthetics allowed critics to attribute both the merits and shortcomings of a woman’s compositions to her gender.<sup>11</sup> It effected not only a double standard but a double bind.

As a woman composer who specialized in operas and large-scale symphonic/choral works, Ethel Smyth was a prime target for the critics' exercises in sexual aesthetics. One of the most colourful musical figures of the Victorian/Edwardian period, Smyth was born into a prosperous military family in Sidcup, near London, in 1858. Inspired by a governess who had studied music at the Leipzig Conservatory, she resolved at the age of twelve to do likewise and become a composer. Against the strenuous objections of her father, an arch conservative who held very traditional views about the role of women in society, Smyth set off for Leipzig in 1877 at the age of nineteen. At the Leipzig Conservatory, she studied composition with Carl Reinecke. Disillusioned with the low standard of teaching, she left after a year, and continued her studies privately with the Austrian composer Heinrich von Herzogenberg, founder and conductor of the Bach-Verein in Leipzig. Her published works include six operas, a concert mass, a double concerto, a choral symphony, songs with piano and orchestral accompaniment, organ pieces, and chamber music.<sup>12</sup>

It was as a composer of chamber music that Ethel Smyth made her professional debut. Among the earliest of her works to receive a public hearing was her dramatic Sonata in A Minor, op. 7, for violin and piano, which was first performed at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on November 20, 1887. The critics found it "devoid of feminine charm and therefore unworthy of a woman."<sup>13</sup> This was Smyth's first encounter with sexual aesthetics; it would certainly not be her last.

Three years later, on April 26, 1890, Smyth's four-movement Serenade was given its premiere at the Crystal Palace in London under the direction of August Manns. Since it was both her orchestral debut and the first public performance of any of her works in her native country, this concert was an important landmark in her career.<sup>14</sup> Hoping to avoid unjust criticism, Smyth attempted to disguise her sex by having her name printed on the programme

as E. M. Smyth. This strategy failed to work. While the Leipzig critics had said that her Violin Sonata lacked “feminine charm,” George Bernard Shaw, then music critic of the *Star*, dismissed the Serenade for its “daintiness”—a supposedly desirable feminine trait. He wrote:

First there was a serenade by Miss Smyth, who wrote the analytic program in such terms as to conceal her sex, until she came forward to acknowledge the applause at the end. No doubt Miss Smyth would scorn to claim any indulgence as a woman, and far from me be it to discourage her righteous pride. . . . [However,] I am convinced that we should have resented the disappointment less had we known that our patience was being drawn on by a young lady instead of some male Smyth. It is very neat and dainty, this orchestral filigree work; but it is not in its right place on great occasions at Sydenham.<sup>15</sup>

Six months later, on October 18, 1890, Smyth’s *Overture to Shakespeare’s Anthony and Cleopatra* was given its first performance at the Crystal Palace, again under the baton of Manns. Shaw also reviewed this concert. Although he had nothing negative to say about the piece, he expressed surprise that such tempestuous music could have come from the pen of a woman composer. He wrote: “When E. M. Smyth’s heroically brassy overture to Anthony and Cleopatra was finished, and the composer called to the platform, it was observed with stupefaction that all that tremendous noise had been made by a lady.”<sup>16</sup>

A far more important work was Smyth’s Mass in D for soloists, chorus and orchestra. It was first performed on January 18, 1893, by the Royal Choral Society under the direction of Sir Joseph Barnby at the Royal Albert Hall. The performance was excellent, and the audience wildly enthusiastic, but Smyth was discouraged by the reviews.<sup>17</sup> She later wrote bitterly that “except as regards

the scoring, which got good marks on all sides, the Press went for the Mass almost unanimously.”<sup>18</sup> Hardest of all for her to bear was the patronizing, sexist tone adopted by many of the critics.<sup>19</sup> A reviewer for the *Morning Post* declared himself to have been amused to see “a lady composer attempt[ing] to soar in the loftier regions of musical art.”<sup>20</sup> A critic for the *Star* was equally backhanded: “Is a female composer possible? No, says your psychologist. . . . With women, however, it is just the impossible that is sure to happen.”<sup>21</sup> Reviewing the performance for the *World*, Shaw wrote:

If you take an average mundane young lady, and ask her what service to religion she most enjoys rendering, she will probably . . . instance the decoration of a church at Christmas. . . . Now I will not go so far as to say that Miss Smyth’s musical decoration of the Mass is an exactly analogous case, . . . [but] the decorative instinct is decidedly in front of the religious instinct all through.<sup>22</sup>

One critic who did recognize the Mass as a great achievement was J. A. Fuller Maitland. He wrote:

This work definitely placed the composer among the most eminent composers of her time, and easily at the head of her own sex. The most striking thing about it was the entire absence of the qualities that are usually associated with feminine productions; throughout it was virile, masterly in construction and workmanship, and particularly remarkable for the excellence and rich colouring of the orchestration.<sup>23</sup>

But, as the above passage shows, not even Fuller Maitland was immune to the all-pervasive influence of sexual aesthetics. In his view, Smyth had created a successful work; therefore, she had composed like a man.

On March 11, 1903, Smyth's opera *Der Wald* gained the distinction of becoming the first opera by a woman to be performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. As the following excerpts from the reviews show, many critics found it impossible to reconcile the energy and vitality of Smyth's music with those traits deemed typically feminine. In the *Musical Courier* of March 18, 1903, we read:

Not as the music of a woman should Miss Smyth's score be judged. She thinks in masculine terms, broad and virile. . . . Her climaxes are full-blooded, and the fortissimos are real. There is no sparing of the brass, and there is no mincing of the means that speak musical passion. In this respect (and it is not the only one) the gifted Englishwoman has successfully emancipated herself from her sex.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, Richard Aldrich of the *New York Times* wrote: "Miss Smyth is very serious, and the opera sounds the note of sincerity and resolute endeavour. She uses the vocal and orchestral resources with masculine energy."<sup>25</sup>

While such evaluations were considered the highest praise a critic could offer a woman composer, they were also seen as proof of the widely held notion that women who succeeded in traditionally male fields such as composition did so at great expense to their femininity.<sup>26</sup> An early expression of this theory is set forth in Immanuel Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. He wrote:

Laborious learning or painful pondering, even if a woman should greatly succeed in it, destroy the merits that are proper to her sex, and because of their rarity they can make of her an object of cold admiration; but at the same time they will weaken the charms with which she exercises her great power

over the other sex. [Such a] woman . . . might as well even have a beard; for perhaps that would express more obviously the mien of profundity for which she strives.<sup>27</sup>

Later writers even claimed that the mental effort required of a woman to excel in such fields as composition could cause her reproductive organs to wither. Paul Möbius, an extremely influential German pathologist, for example, wrote the following in 1898: "If it were possible for the feminine abilities to develop in a parallel fashion to those of a male, the organs of motherhood would shrivel."<sup>28</sup>

Smyth's next opera, *The Wreckers*, generally considered her finest work, was given its premiere in Leipzig on November 11, 1906. It was also produced in Prague one month later. Smyth was then determined to secure a performance of *The Wreckers* in England. When Covent Garden rejected the score, she decided to present a concert version of the first two acts at Queen's Hall in London. This performance, conducted by Arthur Nikisch, took place on May 28, 1908, and was a resounding success. Nonetheless, one patronizing critic felt obliged to describe the work as "a remarkable achievement *for a woman*."<sup>29</sup> There is little wonder that Smyth later wrote resignedly: "The exact worth of my music will probably not be known till naught remains of the author but sexless dots and lines on ruled paper."<sup>30</sup>

Smyth's most popular opera, *The Boatswain's Mate*—a work that includes quotations from traditional folk melodies—was first performed at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, on January 28, 1916, by the Beecham Opera Company. In subsequent seasons, it was frequently presented at Sadler's Wells. Recalling the premiere in her memoirs, Smyth cites an incident that further illustrates the insidious nature of sexual aesthetics. She writes:

On that occasion I had drawn up a list of the folk melodies I had used, and owing to a printer's error 'Lord Rendal' was omitted, with the result that this tune was selected by four or

five critics as an instance of the composer's unfortunate gift for turning out the cheaper sort of music-hall ditty. True, they made up for it by declaring my own tune 'When the sun is setting' (which by the same token had got into the Folk list), to be a perfect example of English melodic genius. . . . My tune really *is* a good one (if I may say so), and in the belief that it was folk, these judges permitted themselves to enjoy it, whereas, taking 'Lord Rendal' for a woman's effusion, they closed their hearts against the charm of what is surely one of the most exquisite folk melodies in the world.<sup>31</sup>

The preceding excerpts from reviews of her works and from her memoirs demonstrate that Smyth's music was seldom evaluated as simply the work of a composer among composers, but as that of a "woman composer." This worked to keep her on the margins of the profession, and, coupled with the double standard of sexual aesthetics, also placed her in a double bind. On the one hand, when she composed powerful, rhythmically vital music, it was said that her work lacked feminine charm; on the other, when she produced delicate, melodious compositions, she was accused of not measuring up to the artistic standards of her male colleagues. And, if her music was deemed a success, she was said to have transcended the limitations of her sex by composing like a man. Clearly, as Judith Tick has said, "such evaluations, whether motivated by good or bad will, ultimately harmed the female composer in their insistence on a correlation between sex and emotive content of a piece."<sup>32</sup>

Although one might reasonably assume that the practice of analyzing women's music in terms of masculine and feminine traits disappeared long ago, this is not so. Consider what American composer Priscilla McLean has to say about two recent experiences:

One noted Midwestern orchestral conductor told me he believed that there definitely was a 'woman's music,' which was



delicate, soft, unctuous in harmonies, organic in form, and so on. I answered by telling him that he had exactly described the music of Debussy, and how did he account for that? Another conversation took place after a two-piano piece of mine called *Interplanes* was played on the radio. Without knowing that I had written the work, a male composer friend of mine who had been researching contemporary music for years remarked that here was a definitely masculine work—strong, forceful, driving, dissonant, and so on—and was astounded to hear that the work was mine.<sup>33</sup>

Ironically, sexual aesthetics has also found its way into the burgeoning new discipline of feminist arts criticism. During the past few decades, the question of whether there is a recognizably female voice in the music of women has become a heated topic of debate in feminist circles.<sup>34</sup> Some academic feminist critics believe that there exists in women's music a specifically female style that differs from that of male composers both in formal structure and in expressive quality, and in some way reflects woman's nature or "essence." Such critics often describe music written by men as "hierarchical," and that written by women as "democratic."<sup>35</sup> One theory stemming from this school of criticism posits that women composers, because of their female nature, should write in circular forms with the climax appearing in the middle. Such forms are believed to parallel the female orgasm.<sup>36</sup> But, because this theory attempts to limit the forms in which women *should* create, it is just as oppressive to female composers as is the original version of sexual aesthetics. Moreover, as musicologist Susan McClary points out, any attempt to define a universal female essence in the music of women is doomed to failure, for "[e]ven though our obsession for classifying all music stylistically might make us want to jump impulsively at the chance to codify the distinctive characteristics of a "women's music," there can be no such single thing, just as

there is no universal male experience or essence [embodied in the music of male composers].”<sup>37</sup>

Canadian composer Violet Archer (1912–2000) held a similar view. In a 1994 interview she said: “I’m thinking of Clara Schumann, who was a very good composer. I’ve heard some of her music and I can’t say I’d call it feminine. It was really [just] Romantic music.”<sup>38</sup> As for the music of today’s composers, Archer added, “I can’t say that there is a difference really, from what I have heard.”<sup>39</sup> Addressing this issue with reference to her own music, Germaine Tailleferre (1892–1983) said in 1982: “My music is neither masculine nor feminine. It is just plain music.”<sup>40</sup> Further to this point, composer Joan Tower, who has served as a juror for the National Endowment for the Arts, observes: “For the grants panels of the National Endowment for the Arts, we tried to tell if scores were written by men or women, and we couldn’t.”<sup>41</sup>

Now that both men and women are composing in a wide variety of styles and genres, perhaps the notion of gendered traits in women’s music will at last be given a decent burial. The time is long overdue.

## NOTES

1. For a discussion of female education in nineteenth-century conservatories, see Eugene Gates, “The Woman Composer Question: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives,” in this publication.
2. Carol Neuls-Bates, ed., *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), xi–xii.
3. The term “sexual aesthetics” seems to have been coined by Judith Tick. See her “Women as Professional Musicians in the United States, 1870–1900,” *Yearbook for Inter-American Musical Research* 9 (1973): 110–16.
4. The notion of sexual complementarity is most famously expounded in Book V of Rousseau’s *Emile*. For a recent insightful critique of Rousseau’s thesis, see Jane Roland Martin, “Rousseau’s Sophie,” in her *Reclaiming*

- a Conversation: The Ideal of the Educated Woman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 38–69.
5. Neuls-Bates, 223.
  6. For a critique of the psychological literature which allegedly supports the claim that women are innately incapable of equalling men as composers, see Eugene Gates, “Women Composers: A Critical Review of the Psychological Literature,” in this publication.
  7. Camille Saint-Saëns, *Harmonie et mélodie*, 3d ed. (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885), 228.
  8. Philip Hale, “Mrs. Beach’s Symphony Produced Last Night in Music Hall,” *Boston Sunday Journal*, 1 November 1896, 2.
  9. Rupert Hughes, *Contemporary American Composers* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1900), 433.
  10. *Ibid.*, 438.
  11. Neuls-Bates, 223.
  12. For further biographical information on Smyth, see the following: Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber, 1984); Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longman’s, Green & Co., 1959); Ethel Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 2 vols. (London: Longman’s, Green & Co., 1919); Ethel Smyth, *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, abridged and introduced by Ronald Crichton (New York: Viking, 1987).
  13. Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 2:162.
  14. *Ibid.*, 2:227.
  15. [George] Bernard Shaw, *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw: Shaw’s Music*, 3 vols., ed. Dan H. Laurence (London: Max Reinhardt, 1981), 2:54.
  16. *Ibid.*, 2:558.
  17. Ethel Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1928), 17.
  18. Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1936), 172.
  19. *Ibid.*
  20. Quoted in Collis, 63.
  21. Quoted in *ibid.*, 64.
  22. Shaw, 2:791.
  23. J. A. Fuller Maitland, “Smyth, Ethel,” *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. J. A. Fuller Maitland (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 4:490.

24. "A New Opera in New York," *Musical Courier* 46, no. 11 (18 March 1903): 12.
25. Richard Aldrich, "Operatic Novelty at the Season's End," *New York Times*, 15 March 1903, 25, cols. 4–5, quoted in Jane A. Bernstein, "'Shout, Shout, Up with Your Song!' Dame Ethel Smyth and the Changing Role of the British Woman Composer," in Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, eds., *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 311.
26. See, for example, Louis C. Elson's comments on this point in his *The History of American Music* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971, a reprint of the 1925 ed.), 305.
27. Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 78–79.
28. Paul J. Möbius, *Ueber den Physiologischen Schwachsinn den Weibes*, 9th enlarged ed. (Halle: Carl Marholm, 1908), 14, quoted in Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 172.
29. Quoted in St. John, 114. Emphasis in St. John.
30. Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats*, 54.
31. *Ibid.*, 13–14.
32. Tick, 115.
33. Quoted in Paul Fromm, "Creative Women in Music: A Historical Perspective," in *A Life for New Music: Selected Papers of Paul Fromm*, ed. David Gable and Christoph Wolff (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 48.
34. For a variety of opinions (both pro and con), see "Is There a Feminist Aesthetic in Music?," *Heresies* 10 (1980): 20–24.
35. Heidi Waleson, "Women Composers Find Things Easier—Sort Of," *New York Times*, 28 January 1990, H27.
36. See Jeannie G. Pool's critique of this and other related theories, in "Is There a Feminist Aesthetic in Music?," 21.
37. Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 131. For a critique of essentialism in feminist arts criticism, see Gisela Ecker, introduction to *Feminist Aesthetics*, ed. Gisela Ecker, trans. Harriet Anderson (London: The Women's Press, 1985), 15–22.

38. Quoted in Owen Jones, "Discussing the Score on Female Composers," *Windsor Star*, 11 March 1994, C2.
39. Quoted in *ibid.*
40. Quoted in Laura Mitgang, "Germaine Tailleferre: Before, During, and After *Les Six*," in *The Musical Woman: An International Perspective, 1984–1985*, ed. Judith Lang Zaimont, Catherine Overhauser, and Jane Gottlieb (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 178.
41. Quoted in Waleson, H27.

## DAME ETHEL SMYTH: PIONEER OF ENGLISH OPERA

"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."<sup>1</sup> When Ethel Smyth wrote these words in the early years of her career, she had little idea of the protracted battle against prejudice that lay ahead of her. Smyth was certainly not England's first woman composer. But while most of her predecessors, because of social circumstances and limited training, had been forced to confine their creative endeavours to the production of parlor music, she set her sights on the conquest of the opera house and concert stage. Her published works include six operas, a concert mass, a double concerto, a choral symphony, songs with piano and orchestral accompaniment, organ pieces and chamber music.<sup>2</sup> Although her compositions won the admiration of many of her fellow musicians—Tchaikovsky, Debussy, Bruno Walter, Sir Thomas Beecham, and Sir Donald Tovey,<sup>3</sup> to name but a few—the record of her creative achievements has been swept into the dark corners of music history. This chapter discusses her life and works, the barriers she had to surmount in order to obtain a musical education, and her prolonged struggle to have her music accepted and critically evaluated on equal terms with that of men.

The fourth of a family of eight children, Ethel Mary Smyth was born in Sidcup, near London, on April 23, 1858. Her parents were Major-General J. H. Smyth, C.B., of the Royal Artillery, and Nina Struth Smyth, a descendent of Sir Josias Stracey, the fourth baronet of Norfolk.<sup>4</sup> In 1867, Major-General Smyth was appointed to the command of the Artillery at Aldershot, and the family settled in the nearby village of Frimley.<sup>5</sup> Since her father had absolutely no talent for music,<sup>6</sup> Ethel always believed that her musical

instincts were inherited from her mother, whom she once described as “one of the most naturally musical people I have ever known.”<sup>7</sup>

Ethel’s general education was typical of that of a middle-class Victorian young lady. After private tutoring at home under the guidance of a succession of governesses, she spent a few years in boarding school at Putney, where the prescribed curriculum included French, German, astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, literature, history, drawing, music and home economics.<sup>8</sup> Very little is known about Smyth’s early musical training. In her memoirs, however, she mentions a governess who introduced her to classical music, and inspired her to set her sights on a musical career. Here is her account of the experience which determined the course of her future life:

When I was twelve a new . . . [governess] arrived who had studied music at the Leipzig Conservatorium, then in the hey-day of its reputation in England; for the first time I heard classical music and a new world opened up before me. Shortly after, a friend having given me Beethoven’s Sonatas, I began studying the easier of these and walked into the new world on my own feet. Thus was my true bent suddenly revealed to me, and I conceived the plan, carried out seven years later, of studying at Leipzig and giving up my life to music.<sup>9</sup>

Ethel immediately announced her plan to everyone around her. The fact that no one took it seriously—least of all, her father, who muttered “damned nonsense!” whenever she raised the topic<sup>10</sup>—did not disturb her in the least. She was confident that one day her ambition would be realized.<sup>11</sup> Fortunately, Ethel was a born fighter and rebel, for her father was an arch conservative who held very traditional views about the place of women in society. Like most men (and many women) of the time, he believed that the only appropriate role for a woman was that of housewife and mother.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, although he knew no artists personally,

he was convinced that they were people of low moral fibre, and the life that his daughter proposed to lead seemed to him “equivalent to going on the streets.”<sup>13</sup>

Ethel always considered the arrival of the governess who played classical music to her when she was twelve as the first milestone on her road. Five years later, when she was seventeen, the second milestone loomed into sight. The composer of the well-known hymn “Jerusalem the Golden,” Alexander Ewing, an officer in the Army Service Corps, was stationed in Aldershot. Mrs. Ewing and Mrs. Smyth soon became close friends. Informed by his wife of Ethel’s musical ambitions, Ewing requested the aspiring young composer to play some of the pieces she had recently written. To the great annoyance of Major-General Smyth, Ewing proclaimed her a born musician who must begin her formal training at once.<sup>14</sup> In Ethel’s words,

My father was furious; he personally disliked my new friend, . . . and foresaw that the Leipzig idea would now be endorsed warmly by one who knew. The last straw was when Mr. Ewing proposed that he himself should begin by teaching me harmony; but on this point my mother . . . came over definitely into my camp. So it was settled that twice a week I was to drive myself to Aldershot and submit my exercises to his inspection.<sup>15</sup>

This happy arrangement worked well for several months. Ewing was a capable and conscientious teacher. In addition to giving his new pupil harmony lessons, he analyzed her compositions and introduced her to the music dramas of Wagner. Inspired by Wagner’s music, Ethel confided to her diary that her greatest desire was to have an opera of her own performed in Germany before she was forty—an ambition fated to be realized at Weimar in 1898.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, Major-General Smyth’s dislike of “that fellow,” as he now called Ewing, had become fanatical. Because of his low



opinion of the moral standards of artists, he wrongly concluded that Ewing's interest in his daughter was more amorous than musical, and the harmony lessons were abruptly cancelled.<sup>17</sup> Since the Ewings had already received orders to leave Aldershot, Ethel did not lose much in the way of harmony instruction. But she did learn a great deal from this incident about the problems she would encounter in overcoming her father's stubborn resistance to the plan that had dominated her thoughts since the age of twelve.<sup>18</sup>

Matters finally came to a head when Ethel was nineteen. One night at dinner, when her parents were discussing which drawing room she should be presented at, she announced that it would be pointless to be presented at all, since she intended to go to Leipzig. Her father was enraged, and shouted melodramatically: "I would sooner see you under the sod."<sup>19</sup> After a period of vain attempts to win him over, Ethel felt she had no choice but to take drastic action. Recalling this period of her life many years later, she wrote:

I not only unfurled the red flag, but determined to make life at home so intolerable that they would have to let me go for their own sakes. (I say 'they,' but . . . I felt that, whatever my mother might say in public, she was secretly with me.) . . . Towards the end I struck altogether, refused to go to Church, . . . refused to speak to any one, and one day my father's boot all but penetrated a panel of my locked bedroom door!<sup>20</sup>

Despite his military training, when it came to warfare of this type, the Major-General proved no match for Ethel, and he eventually had to admit defeat.<sup>21</sup>

On July 26, 1877, with her father's grudging consent, Ethel set off for Leipzig. At the Leipzig Conservatory, she studied composition with Carl Reinecke, counterpoint and other theoretical subjects with Salomon Jadassohn, and piano with Joseph Maas. It did not take her long to discover that the Conservatory was no longer

the great educational institution it once had been. Disillusioned with the low standard of teaching, she left after a year, and continued her studies privately with the Austrian composer Heinrich von Herzogenberg, founder and conductor of the Bach-Verein in Leipzig. Through Herzogenberg and his wife Elisabeth (a fine musician in her own right), Ethel met Brahms and Clara Schumann, and soon became part of their musical circle. While in Leipzig, she also became acquainted with Grieg, Dvořák, and Tchaikovsky.<sup>22</sup>

When Ethel arrived in Leipzig, she had with her several songs she had composed to German texts. They immediately attracted favourable attention.<sup>23</sup> Encouraged by this recognition of her creative talent, she took the songs to the music publishers Breitkopf & Härtel. Ethel's account of her meeting with Dr. Hase, the head of the firm, demonstrates the prejudice that professional women composers experienced at the time. In a letter to her mother, she wrote:

He began by telling me that . . . no composeress had ever succeeded, barring Frau Schumann and Fräulein Mendelssohn, whose songs had been published together with those of their husband and brother respectively. He told me that a certain Frau Lang had written some really very good songs, but they had no sale.<sup>24</sup> I played him mine, many of which he had already heard me perform in various Leipzig houses, and he expressed himself very willing to take the risk and print them. But would you believe it, having listened to all he had to say about women composers, . . . I asked no fee! Did you ever hear of such a donkey!<sup>25</sup>

As soon as she began her studies in Leipzig, Ethel was advised by her teachers to concentrate on writing instrumental and chamber music. She composed many pieces in these categories during her student years, but they are rather academic in style, and bear little resemblance to the powerful, more original works of her maturity.

It was as a composer of chamber music that Ethel Smyth made her professional debut. On January 26, 1884, her String Quintet in E Major, op. 1, was performed at the Leipzig Gewandhaus. Three years later, her Sonata in A Minor, op. 7, for violin and piano was given its first performance in the same hall. Neither of these works was a critical success. The main fault the critics found with the Violin Sonata was that it was “devoid of feminine charm and therefore unworthy of a woman.”<sup>26</sup> This was Ethel’s first encounter with sexual aesthetics—the tendency of contemporaneous critics to evaluate a woman’s compositions in terms of their “appropriateness” to her sex.

One who did not agree with the critics’ verdict was Tchaikovsky, who wrote:

Miss Smyth is one of the comparatively few women composers who may be seriously reckoned among the workers in this sphere of music. . . . She had composed several interesting works, the best of which, a violin sonata, I heard excellently played by the composer herself. She gave promise in the future of a serious and talented career.<sup>27</sup>

It was also Tchaikovsky who brought to Ethel’s attention a serious deficiency in her Leipzig training: she had received no formal instruction in orchestration. Heeding his advice, she immediately began to study the subject on her own.<sup>28</sup> By the end of 1889, she had completed two orchestral works: a four-movement Serenade, and her Overture to *Anthony and Cleopatra*.<sup>29</sup>

On April 26, 1890, Smyth’s Serenade was included on a programme given at the Crystal Palace in London under the direction of August Manns. This concert was an important landmark in her career, for it was both her orchestral debut and the first public performance of any of her works in her native country.<sup>30</sup> While the Leipzig critics had said that her Violin Sonata lacked “feminine

charm,” George Bernard Shaw, then music critic of the *Star*, dismissed the Serenade for its “daintiness”—a supposedly desirable feminine trait.<sup>31</sup>

Six months later, Smyth’s tempestuous Overture to *Anthony and Cleopatra* was given its premiere at the Crystal Palace, again under the baton of Manns. This work fared somewhat better at the hands of the critics. To quote one reviewer, it “showed that she understood all the resources of the orchestra, and that she was no amateur.”<sup>32</sup>

Smyth’s next composition, the Mass in D for soloists, chorus and orchestra, was a far more important work. Completed in the summer of 1891, it was first performed on January 18, 1893 by the Royal Choral Society under the direction of Sir Joseph Barnby at the Royal Albert Hall. But Smyth experienced great difficulty in having the Mass accepted for performance. She spent over a year showing the score to various conductors and musical directors of British choral societies, but to no avail. As she later put it:

I found myself up against a brick wall. Chief among the denizens of the Groove at that time were Parry, Stanford, and Sullivan. These men I knew personally, also Sir George Grove; Parry and Sullivan I should have ventured to call my friends. . . . [Yet] not one of them extended a friendly finger to the newcomer—nor of course publishers.<sup>33</sup>

Eventually Smyth’s aristocratic connections came to her rescue. The exiled Empress Eugénie of France, a close friend and neighbour, not only paid for the publication of the Mass, but aroused the interest of the Duke of Edinburgh, then President of the Royal Choral Society. Thanks to their help and intervention, the work was given its premiere in the most prestigious concert hall in England.<sup>34</sup>

The performance was excellent, and the audience wildly enthusiastic, but Smyth was discouraged by the reviews.<sup>35</sup> She later wrote bitterly that “except as regards the scoring, which got good

marks on all sides, the Press went for the Mass almost unanimously.”<sup>36</sup> Hardest of all for her to bear was the patronizing, sexist tone adopted by many of the critics.<sup>37</sup> “It is but seldom,” said the *Morning Post*, “that a lady composer attempts to soar in the loftier regions of musical art.”<sup>38</sup> The *Star* was equally backhanded: “Is a female composer possible? No, says your psychologist. . . . With women, however, it is just the impossible that is sure to happen.”<sup>39</sup>

Viewed within the context of its time, Ethel Smyth’s Mass in D stands far above the general level of late nineteenth-century English choral works, not only in terms of the originality of the vocal parts, but because of its strength of structure and the richness of its orchestration. Nonetheless, it had to wait thirty-one years for a second performance. During the intervening years, Ethel blamed the ‘old boys’ club’ that dominated the British musical scene for the neglect of her Mass. She wrote:

Year in year out, composers of the Inner Circle, generally University men attached to our musical institutions, produced one choral work after another—not infrequently deadly dull affairs—which, helped along by the impetus of official approval, automatically went the rounds of our Festivals and Choral Societies. . . . Was it likely, then, that the Faculty would see any merit in a work written on such different lines—written too by a woman who had actually gone off to Germany to learn her trade?<sup>40</sup>

In one of her many attempts to have the Mass performed, Ethel went to Munich to consult the great Wagnerian conductor Hermann Levi about the chances of a performance in Germany. Levi was much impressed by the work, and detected in it a natural flair for writing dramatic music which led him to suggest that she compose an opera.<sup>41</sup> She immediately set to work on a two-act

opera called *Fantasio*, based on Alfred de Musset's play of the same name, and enlisted her most intimate friend, Henry Brewster, to collaborate with her on the libretto.<sup>42</sup> Because of the restricted opportunities for opera production in England at the time, Smyth planned from the outset to have the opera mounted in one of Germany's fourteen opera houses.<sup>43</sup>

When Levi was shown part of the score and told of her plan, he cautioned Ethel that a woman composer would have little or no chance of realizing such an ambition, and therefore advised her to submit the opera under a male pseudonym for an international competition which was to take place in 1895. The first prize was to be a lump sum of money, the publishing of the score, a production of the work in one of the leading German opera houses, and the guarantee of a certain number of later performances. *Fantasio* did not win first prize, but was among seven of the 110 operas submitted to be highly commended.<sup>44</sup>

Ethel was now more determined than ever to secure a production of her operatic first-born in Germany. In the autumn of 1896, armed with letters of introduction from Levi, she embarked on a round tour of the opera houses at Karlsruhe, Dresden, Leipzig and Cologne. *Fantasio* was accepted at Cologne, but this decision was reversed shortly afterwards when Hoffmann, the conductor, realized that no singer in his company could do justice to the difficult title role. Undaunted, Ethel embarked on another tour of German opera houses in the early part of 1897. Acting on a chance suggestion, she sought out the appropriate authorities at Weimar, where, after many delays, the premiere of *Fantasio* took place on May 24, 1898. Three years later, on February 10, 1901, it was also produced at Karlsruhe.<sup>45</sup>

Although *Fantasio* was enthusiastically received, Ethel became convinced that it was a flawed work. As she put it, "I think that there is a discrepancy between the music and libretto—far too much passion and violence for such a subject."<sup>46</sup> It is unlikely

that *Fantasio* will ever be produced again, for when in 1916 she received all the remaining vocal scores from the publisher (they weighed over a ton), she made a bonfire of them and threw the ashes on her garden. A famous gardener had once told her that the ash of well-inked manuscript was an even better fertilizer for flowers than soot.<sup>47</sup>

Directly after the Karlsruhe production of *Fantasio*, Ethel returned to England to complete the full score of her second opera *Der Wald*. The story on which it is based was written by the composer herself, and fashioned into a libretto with Brewster's help.<sup>48</sup> Set deep in the forest, with its theme of salvation through death, the work owes much to the influence of German symbolist art. *Der Wald* was first performed in Berlin on April 21, 1902.<sup>49</sup> Three months later, it was produced at Covent Garden with great success. Smyth later described the Covent Garden premiere as "the only real blazing theatre triumph I have ever had."<sup>50</sup>

On March 11, 1903, *Der Wald* gained the distinction of becoming the first opera by a woman to be performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.<sup>51</sup> The composer helped to prepare the American production, and received a ten-minute ovation on the opening night.<sup>52</sup> According to one eyewitness account, she was almost buried in floral tributes.<sup>53</sup> Many critics found it impossible to reconcile the energy and vitality of Smyth's music with those attributes considered "typically" feminine. In the *Musical Courier* of March 18, 1903, for example, we read:

Not as the music of a woman should Miss Smyth's score be judged. She thinks in masculine terms, broad and virile. . . . Her climaxes are full-blooded and the fortissimos are real. There is no sparing of the brass, and there is no mincing of the means that speak the language of musical passion. . . . [T]he gifted Englishwoman has successfully emancipated herself from her sex.<sup>54</sup>

Implicit in such critiques is the notion that Smyth had succeeded as a composer at the expense of her femininity. Indeed, it was a commonly held belief at this time that women who achieved in male-dominated fields such as composition were “unsexed phenomena.”<sup>55</sup>

In the summer of 1903, after a rather unpleasant struggle, Ethel managed to convince the Covent Garden Syndicate to stage another performance of *Der Wald*. Although the work was received with almost as much enthusiasm as in the previous year, it was then dropped from the repertoire.<sup>56</sup> By this time, the composer was hard at work on her third and best known opera, *The Wreckers*.

Generally considered her finest work, *The Wreckers* was inspired by a legend told to Smyth while she was vacationing in Cornwall in 1886. The libretto was written some years later by Henry Brewster.<sup>57</sup> It concerns the inhabitants of an eighteenth-century Cornish coastal village, who wreck and plunder ships through the use of false lights or the removal of real ones. The principal characters are Mark and Thirza,

two lovers who, by kindling secret beacons, endeavoured to counteract the savage policy of the community . . . [They] were caught in the act by the Wreckers' committee—a sort of secret court which was the sole authority recognized [by the villagers]—and condemned to die in one of those sea-invaded caverns.<sup>58</sup>

Completed in May of 1904, *The Wreckers* was first performed on November 11, 1906 in Leipzig. It was also produced in Prague one month later.<sup>59</sup> After several unsuccessful attempts to have the work mounted in various other European opera houses, Smyth wrote: “I have spent years fighting abroad. I have given that up as hopeless. Now I mean to fight for my place in my own country, a place which everyone knows I deserve. But it must be proved.”<sup>60</sup>



It seemed to Ethel that the best way to establish that proof would be to have *The Wreckers* produced at Covent Garden. She therefore submitted the score to the Covent Garden Syndicate, expressing the hope that her opera would be given “fair and sympathetic consideration.” Despite the fact that *The Wreckers* had already been performed at two of the leading continental opera houses, she was informed that in future no opera would be produced at Covent Garden that had not established its success abroad.<sup>61</sup>

Undefeated, as usual, Ethel now decided to make *The Wreckers* better known by presenting a concert version of the first two acts at Queen’s Hall in London on May 28, 1908. Brewster, who had written the libretto, insisted on paying the expenses.<sup>62</sup> According to the press notices, the concert, which was conducted by Arthur Nikisch, was a resounding success. Both the orchestration and the choral writing were praised by most of the critics, one of whom went so far as to write that “the scoring is magnificent.” In his review, this same critic took one of his colleagues to task for making the patronizing comment that *The Wreckers* was “a remarkable achievement—for a woman.”<sup>63</sup> He wrote:

Indeed! Why, no one in this country, man or woman, has written anything to compare with it for the last fifteen years . . . I had been to *Madam Butterfly* the night before the *Wreckers* concert. What a poor, bloodless tricky thing the Italian composer’s popular opera seems by the side of the Englishwoman’s splendidly vital work!<sup>64</sup>

The first London stage production of *The Wreckers* took place in June of 1909, when six performances conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham were given at His Majesty’s Theatre. This production, like many other performances of Ethel’s works, was financed by her benefactress Mary Dodge, an American philanthropist.<sup>65</sup> The royal family attended the final performance.<sup>66</sup> A critic for the *Times* wrote:

The strong passionate music that gripped the attention from the opening strains . . . must have startled the sceptic in his unshakable belief that . . . the English temperament [is] incapable of being dramatic. Miss Smyth, by the choice of her subject and the strength and sympathy with which she has treated it deserves to take her place with the English writers whose theme has been the tragedy of the sea.<sup>67</sup>

The next year, Beecham included *The Wreckers* in his first season at Covent Garden.<sup>68</sup> Discussing this work many years later, he wrote: “[It] is one of the three or four English operas of real musical merit and vitality.”<sup>69</sup>

By 1910, all of Ethel Smyth’s major works had been performed, and in that year she was awarded an honorary Doctor of Music by the University of Durham.<sup>70</sup> She was then fifty-two years old, and just beginning to enjoy the musical recognition for which she had long struggled. But in the midst of this success, circumstances arose which diminished her creative output over the next few years. She was deeply shaken by the death of Henry Brewster—her soul-mate and artistic collaborator.<sup>71</sup> As she put it in her memoirs, “I felt then like a rudderless ship aimlessly drifting hither and thither.”<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, votes for women had become a major political issue, and, no doubt because of her experiences as a woman composer, she decided to dedicate the next two years of her life to the suffragist cause.<sup>73</sup>

Although she joined late, Ethel soon became a key figure in the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU)—the militant branch of the suffrage movement. She participated in demonstrations, made speeches, wrote articles for suffragette publications, and provided shelter for the charismatic leader Mrs. Pankhurst during the notorious cat-and-mouse part of the struggle. But her most important contribution was her “March of the Women,” a song dedicated to the members of the WSPU. Mrs. Pankhurst was so

delighted with the piece that it was immediately adopted as the battle-cry of the movement.<sup>74</sup>

No matter how much she feared the consequences, Ethel felt that she could not keep her self-respect if she did not take the same risks that many other suffragettes were willing to take. So when Mrs. Pankhurst asked for volunteers to break a window in the house of any politician who opposed votes for women, the composer was one of 109 members of the WSPU who responded. She chose the window of the Colonial Secretary, Lewis ("Lulu") Harcourt, who had roused her anger by publicly stating that he might agree to votes for women if all women were as well-behaved and intelligent as his wife. Before the constable who was guarding Harcourt's house could stop her, Ethel's stone found its mark. She was at once arrested and sentenced to two months imprisonment.<sup>75</sup>

Sir Thomas Beecham went to visit Ethel several times during her confinement at Holloway Prison, and left an amusing account of one of his visits. He wrote:

When I arrived, the warden of the prison . . . was bubbling with laughter. He said, 'Come into the quadrangle.' There were . . . a dozen ladies, marching up and down, singing hard. He pointed up to a window where Ethel appeared; she was leaning out, conducting with a tooth-brush, also with immense vigour, and joining in the chorus of her own song ["March of the Women"].<sup>76</sup>

In addition to "March of the Women," Ethel wrote two other works for the suffragist cause—"Laggard Dawn," and "1910." They were included in a concert of her music given at Queen's Hall on April 1, 1911—a benefit for the WSPU. When Beecham was unable to keep his promise to conduct, the composer substituted for him on the podium.<sup>77</sup> In later years, Smyth often conducted performances of her own works.

In the fall of 1913, after fulfilling her two years of service with the suffragettes, Ethel decided it was time to write another opera. Casting around for a suitable subject, she eventually settled on a story by W. W. Jacobs, and fashioned it into a libretto.<sup>78</sup> To avoid the temptation of further political involvement, she retired to Egypt to compose the score.<sup>79</sup> The result was a comic opera entitled *The Boatswain's Mate*.

Unlike *The Wreckers*, a true music drama in the Wagnerian tradition, *The Boatswain's Mate* is a curious hybrid: the first half is ballad opera (complete with spoken dialogue and quotations from folk songs), whereas the second half is music drama—continuous music. Although it has often been criticised for stylistic inconsistency,<sup>80</sup> *The Boatswain's Mate* proved to be Smyth's most popular work. It was first performed at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, on January 28, 1916 by the Beecham Opera Company. Beecham also produced the work at Drury Lane in March of 1919. In later years, it was frequently performed at Sadler's Wells.

In 1913, Smyth began to hear ringing in her ears, and it soon became apparent that she was gradually losing her hearing.<sup>81</sup> She managed to complete only four more major works before deafness brought her composing career to an end. These later compositions consist of two one-act operas: *Fête galante* (first produced in 1923 by the British National Opera Co. in Birmingham), and *Entente cordiale* (first produced in 1925 at the Royal College of Music), a Concerto for Violin, French Horn and Orchestra (first conducted by Sir Henry Wood at Queen's Hall in 1927), and *The Prison*—a choral symphony based on the philosophical dialogue of that name by Henry Brewster (first heard in 1931 at Usher Hall, Edinburgh, under the composer's direction).

When she realized that she was going deaf, Smyth added a second string to her bow—that of writing. Her literary output was substantial. Between 1919 and 1940, she published ten highly successful books, mostly autobiographical in nature.<sup>82</sup> She also

wrote numerous articles for magazines and newspapers on a wide variety of subjects. One issue she championed with particular zeal was that of equal rights for women musicians. She wrote: "The whole English attitude towards women in fields of art is ludicrous and uncivilized. There is no sex in art. How you play the violin, paint, or compose is what matters."<sup>83</sup> In recognition of her work as a composer and writer, Smyth was made a Dame of the British Empire in 1922.

Smyth's friend Virginia Woolf, to whom she dedicated her seventh book, *As Time Went On*, was one of the many literary figures who admired her writing. Although each had long been interested in the other's work, the two women did not meet until 1930, when Smyth paid a visit to Woolf's home. Of their first meeting, Virginia wrote: "[Ethel Smyth] has descended upon me like a wolf on the fold in purple and gold, terrifically strident and enthusiastic—I like her—she is as shabby as a washerwoman and shouts and sings. . . . As a writer she is astonishingly efficient—takes every fence."<sup>84</sup>

Ethel was totally captivated by Virginia, and confided to her diary, "I don't think I have ever cared for anyone more profoundly."<sup>85</sup> Their intense friendship lasted for more than a decade, until it was cut short by Woolf's suicide in 1941. Although Smyth always thought of herself first and foremost as a composer, she was active as a writer and speaker until her death in 1944 at the age of eighty-six.

Ethel Smyth stands out as a major figure in both the history of women in music and the history of English opera. Her music is masterfully crafted, powerful, and more original than that of most of her British contemporaries. No historical survey of British music should be considered complete if it does not include a reference to her two masterpieces—*The Wreckers* (probably the most important English opera composed during the period between Purcell and Britten) and the Mass in D. *The Boatswain's Mate*, the Concerto

for Violin, French Horn and Orchestra, the String Quartet in E Minor, and the chorus *Hey Nonny No* are also among her most distinguished works.

In an age when musically gifted women were expected to confine their creative endeavours to the parlor, Ethel Smyth fought tenaciously for the right to compete with men as a professional composer of operas and large-scale symphonic-choral works. Unlike most of her male colleagues, she belonged to no clique that might have helped to advance her career, and the degree of sexual discrimination she encountered in attempting to get her music performed was formidable. Consequently, much of the time she should have devoted to composing had to be spent in finding ways to circumvent the prejudices of music publishers, conductors, opera syndicates, and the like. She usually had to finance the publication of her music,<sup>86</sup> and performances of her works rarely took place unless they were instigated by and paid for by the composer herself—or, as often was the case, by her wealthy friends, most of whom were women of pronounced feminist sympathies.<sup>87</sup> Three women were especially generous to Smyth in this regard: her sister Mary Hunter, the Empress Eugénie, and Mary Dodge.<sup>88</sup>

Considering the many obstacles Smyth had to surmount, there is little wonder that she once wrote:

As regards chances given, may I say with all the emphasis at my command, that but for possessing three things that have nothing to do with musical genius: (1) an iron constitution, (2) a fair share of fighting spirit, and (3), most important of all, a small but independent income, loneliness and discouragement would have vanquished me years ago.<sup>89</sup>

In addition to the difficulties she encountered in securing performances and publications of her works, Smyth also had to endure the discriminatory practices of contemporaneous critics: her music

was seldom evaluated as simply the work of a composer among composers, but rather, as that of a “woman composer.” Such criticisms worked to keep her on the margins of the profession, and placed her in a double bind. On the one hand, when she composed powerful, rhythmically vital music, it was said that her work lacked feminine charm; on the other, when she produced delicate, melodious compositions, she was accused of not measuring up to the artistic standards of her male colleagues. Commenting on this, she wrote resignedly: “The exact worth of my music will probably not be known till naught remains of the author but sexless dots and lines on ruled paper.”<sup>90</sup>

After many years of undeserved neglect, Ethel Smyth’s music is finally beginning to enjoy a revival. Both her *Mass in D* and *The Wreckers* have recently been heard in major professional performances in Britain, Germany and the United States, and have been commercially recorded. Several of her other works have also found their way into the concert hall, opera house and recording studio. The current renewal of interest on the part of music scholars in the renaissance of English music from the late nineteenth century onwards suggests that the Smyth revival will continue, and that she may yet be accorded her rightful place in the annals of music history.

## NOTES

1. Ethel Smyth to Henry Brewster, 1902, quoted in Ethel Smyth, *What Happened Next* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1940), 210.
2. For a complete catalogue of her compositions, see Jory Bennett, “List of Works,” in Ethel Smyth, *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth*, ed. Ronald Crichton (New York: Viking, 1987), 373–81.
3. Louise Collis, *Impetuous Heart: The Story of Ethel Smyth* (London: William Kimber, 1984), 44; Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), 112; Bruno Walter, *Theme and Variations: An Autobiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 154;

- Sir Thomas Beecham, *A Mingled Chime: Leaves from an Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1944), 84–86; Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, vol. 5, *Vocal Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 235–42.
4. St. John, 1.
  5. Collis, 12.
  6. Ethel Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1919), 1:110.
  7. *Ibid.*, 1:48.
  8. Jane A. Bernstein, “‘Shout, Shout, Up with Your Song!’ Dame Ethel Smyth and the Changing Role of the British Woman Composer,” in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 307–8; St. John, 8; Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 1:95.
  9. *Ibid.*, 1:85.
  10. *Ibid.*, 1:110.
  11. *Ibid.*, 1:85.
  12. Collis, 14–15.
  13. Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 1:124.
  14. *Ibid.*, 1:110–11.
  15. *Ibid.*, 1:111–12.
  16. *Ibid.*, 1:112.
  17. *Ibid.*, 1:112–14.
  18. St. John, 13.
  19. Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 1:124.
  20. *Ibid.*, 1:124–27.
  21. *Ibid.*, 1:127.
  22. Bernstein, 308.
  23. Kathleen Dale, “Ethel Smyth’s Prentice Work,” *Music and Letters* 30 (October 1949): 329.
  24. Josephine Lang (1815–1880) published more than 150 songs during her lifetime.
  25. Ethel to Nina Smyth, April 1878, quoted in Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 1:237. Breitkopf & Härtel apparently had second thoughts about printing these songs; they were subsequently published as her op. 3 and op. 4 by C. F. Peters.
  26. Quoted in Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 2:162.



27. Quoted in Collis, 44.
28. Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 2:168.
29. Bernstein, 309.
30. Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 2:227.
31. [George] Bernard Shaw, *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw: Shaw's Music*, 3 vols., ed. Dan H. Laurence (London: Max Reinhardt, 1981), 2:54.
32. J. A. Fuller Maitland, *English Music in the XIXth Century* (London: Grant Richards, 1903), 267.
33. Ethel Smyth, *Female Pipings in Eden* (Edinburgh: Peter Davies, 1934), 38.
34. Ibid., 38–39. For a fuller account of the circumstances surrounding the launching of the Mass, see the following: Ethel Smyth, *Streaks of Life* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1921), 93–111; see also Ethel Smyth, *As Time Went On* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1936), 167–75.
35. Ethel Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1928), 17.
36. Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 172.
37. Ibid.
38. Quoted in Collis, 63.
39. Quoted in *ibid.*, 64.
40. Smyth, *As Time Went On*, 172–73.
41. St. John, 83.
42. The only passionate relationship Ethel ever had with a man was with Henry Brewster. She also had several lesbian attachments, about which she wrote the following to Brewster in 1892: “I wonder why it is so much easier for me to love my own sex passionately than yours. I can’t make it out for I am a very healthy-minded person.” Quoted in *ibid.*, 9.
43. Eric Walter White, *A History of English Opera* (London: Faber & Faber, 1983), 356.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 356–57.
46. Smyth, *What Happened Next*, 86.
47. Ibid., 175.
48. Ibid., 213.
49. For a detailed account of the Berlin production of *Der Wald*, see Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, 139–205.
50. Smyth, *What Happened Next*, 205.

51. *Der Wald* remained the only opera by a woman composer to be performed at the Metropolitan Opera until 2016, when Kaija Saariaho's *L'Amour de Loin* was given a lavish production.
52. Smyth, *What Happened Next*, 217.
53. See St. John, 104.
54. "A New Opera in New York," *Musical Courier* 46, no. 11 (18 March 1903): 12.
55. Louis C. Elson, *The History of American Music* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971; reprinted from the original 1925 edition), 305.
56. St. John, 105.
57. Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 2:145.
58. Smyth, *What Happened Next*, 234.
59. For a detailed account of these early productions, see *ibid.*, 254–86.
60. Quoted in St. John, 134.
61. Ethel Smyth, *Beecham and Pharaoh* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1935), 24.
62. Smyth, *Female Pippins in Eden*, 41.
63. St. John, 113–14. My emphasis.
64. Quoted in *ibid.*, 114.
65. Dodge also bought Ethel a small house and set up an annuity for her which provided her with a modest income for the rest of her life. Smyth, *What Happened Next*, 279–80.
66. White, 362.
67. Quoted in Collis, 98.
68. White, 363.
69. Beecham, *A Mingled Chime*, 86.
70. Smyth later received honorary doctorates from Oxford University (1926) and St. Andrews University (1928).
71. Bernstein, 313.
72. Quoted in St. John, 131.
73. Bernstein, 313–14.
74. *Ibid.*, 314. Smyth adapted and arranged the melody of "March of the Women" from a folk song she had heard while vacationing in the Abruzzi. When the tune was completed, journalist Cecily Hamilton fitted it with words. St. John, 151.
75. St. John, 154.
76. Sir Thomas Beecham, "Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944)," *Musical Times* 99 (July 1958): 364.

77. St. John, 159.
78. White, 363.
79. Smyth, *Female Pipings in Eden*, 43.
80. See, for example, the following: Beecham, *A Mingled Chime*, 85; Kathleen Dale, "Ethel Smyth's Music: A Critical Study," in St. John, 301.
81. St. John, 162–69.
82. The following is a complete list of Smyth's books: *Impressions that Remained* (1919), *Streaks of Life* (1921), *A Three-Legged Tour in Greece* (1927), *A Final Burning of Boats* (1928), *Female Pipings in Eden* (1933), *Beecham and Pharaoh* (1935), *As Time Went On* (1936), *Inordinate (?) Affection* (1936), *Maurice Baring* (1938), and *What Happened Next* (1940).
83. Smyth, *Streaks of Life*, 242. Smyth's most important feminist writings are found in *Female Pipings in Eden* and *Streaks of Life*, 231–46.
84. Virginia Woolf to Saxon Sydney-Turner, 27 February 1930, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 4, *A Reflection of the Other Person, 1929–1931*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978), 146.
85. Quoted in St. John, 222.
86. St. John, 191.
87. Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats*, 19.
88. Smyth, *What Happened Next*, 279–80.
89. Smyth, *A Final Burning of Boats*, 16.
90. *Ibid.*, 54.

MRS. H. H. A. BEACH:  
AMERICAN SYMPHONIST

Mrs. H. H. A. Beach (1867–1944) was the leading American woman composer of her generation. At a time when musically gifted women were expected to restrict their creative efforts to the production of vocal and piano music for performance in the parlors of cultivated homes or for use as teaching material, she enjoyed an enormously successful career as a composer of large-scale art music. Like most of her contemporaries, Mrs. Beach wrote many songs and piano pieces, but her prolific output also includes a symphony (the first to be composed and published by an American woman), a concert mass, cantatas, a piano concerto, an opera, and several extended chamber works. A devout Episcopalian, she also composed a substantial amount of very fine church music. Included among her works in this category are anthems, motets, a *Te Deum*, a complete Communion Service, and a setting of St. Francis's *Canticle of the Sun*.<sup>1</sup>

A descendent of early colonial settlers, Mrs. Beach (Amy Marcy Cheney) was born in Henniker, New Hampshire, on September 5, 1867. The only child of paper manufacturer and importer Charles Abbott Cheney and Clara Imogene Marcy Cheney, Amy showed signs of exceptional musical talent at a very early age. She received her first musical instruction from her mother, who was an excellent pianist and singer.<sup>2</sup> In a letter to one of her relatives, Mrs. Cheney discussed her daughter's prodigious talent and early training as follows:

She commenced the study of piano with me at the age of six. I was compelled to do so as she played the piano at four years, memorizing everything that she heard correctly in four-part harmony as in the hymn tunes she heard in church, after one

hearing and always in the same key in which they were written. Her gift for composition showed itself in babyhood—before she was two years old she would, when being rocked to sleep in my arms, improvise a perfectly correct alto to any soprano air I might sing. She played, while under my instruction, at a few concerts when seven years old, her repertoire including Beethoven sonatas, op. 19, 1 and 2, Chopin, Waltz in E-flat, op. 18, Handel, *Harmonious Blacksmith* . . . and many other works from the old masters. In response to encores she would play one of her own compositions with the most unconscious manner imaginable.<sup>3</sup>

At the age of four, while visiting her grandfather's farm in Maine, Amy composed her first music: "Mama's Waltz," "Snowflake Waltz," and "Marlborough Waltz." When she returned home and told her mother that she had "made" three waltzes, Mrs. Cheney did not believe her at first, since there was no piano within miles of the farm. Amy then explained that she had written them in her head, and proved it by playing them on the piano.<sup>4</sup>

In 1871, the Cheney family moved from Henniker to Boston. When Amy was eight, her parents had her talents assessed by several of Boston's foremost musicians, and the consensus was that she would be immediately accepted by any of the great European conservatories.<sup>5</sup> However, after careful consideration, her parents decided to send her to William L. Whittemore's private school in Boston to complete her general education. Her piano studies were continued under the guidance of Ernst Perabo and Carl Baermann.<sup>6</sup>

There is little wonder that her piano teachers considered Amy the greatest musical prodigy in America.<sup>7</sup> Gifted with absolute pitch and an extraordinary musical memory, she was able to reproduce accurately an entire Beethoven sonata without ever having seen the score, after hearing one of her fellow students practice it.<sup>8</sup>

The disparity between the tuition Amy Cheney received in piano and her formal education in music theory is of considerable

interest. She studied piano for ten years with the finest teachers in Boston, but her theoretical training consisted of only one year of harmony and counterpoint with Junius W. Hill, in 1881–1882. In 1884, her parents sought the advice of Wilhelm Gericke, the newly appointed conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, about the further development of her creative talent. A recent arrival from his native Austria, Gericke told the Cheneys that Amy should teach herself composition and orchestration by studying the works of the great masters. Such advice, of course, reflected the prevailing belief that a young woman had no need for intensive theoretical training because she would never create music of any significant value.<sup>9</sup>

Against all odds, Amy succeeded in doing exactly what Gericke had recommended. Through diligent and systematic study, she attained a complete theoretical background without the benefit of formal instruction. Many years later, she described how she had mastered the intricacies of fugal composition by memorizing and analyzing Bach fugues:

I learned the fugue form by writing out much of the *Well Tempered Clavichord*, from memory, voice for voice. Then I compared what I had set down with what Bach had written. The points where my voices crossed differently from Bach's, indicated valuable lessons!<sup>10</sup>

She taught herself orchestration in the same way.

I have never gone to a concert hall simply for enjoyment or pastime; I have always tried to study the works, in their structure as well as their interpretation, and to bring home with me something I did not know before. In listening to symphonies, I acquainted myself thoroughly with the individual tone and color possibilities of each instrument; with the effect of these

different colors on the various themes. When I got home, then, I would sit down and write out the themes I could remember, with their proper instrumentation. Then I compared my work with the score.<sup>11</sup>

To assist her study of orchestration, she also translated the treatises of Berlioz and Gevaert, neither of which had yet been published in English.<sup>12</sup>

Amy Cheney's first published composition, a song entitled "The Rainy Day," was issued by the Oliver Ditson Company in 1883, when she was only fifteen. On October 24 of the same year, she made her debut as a professional pianist, playing Chopin's Rondo in E-flat and Moscheles' Concerto in G Minor with an orchestra conducted by Adolf Neuendorff at the Boston Music Hall.<sup>13</sup> The Boston correspondent of the *New York Tribune* reported that "she played with all the intelligence of a master."<sup>14</sup> Other critics praised her superb touch, mastery of the instrument, and artistic finish.<sup>15</sup>

A series of highly successful recitals followed, and on March 28, 1885, she made her first appearance with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. On this occasion, she played Chopin's Concerto in F Minor.<sup>16</sup> Impressed by her performance, a reviewer for the *Boston Evening Transcript* wrote that she played with a "totality of conception that one seldom finds in players of her sex."<sup>17</sup> A few months later, she gained further critical acclaim for her performance of Mendelssohn's Concerto in D Minor with the Theodore Thomas Orchestra at the Music Hall.<sup>18</sup> The fact that she was the first Bostonian to achieve such success as a pianist without European training was a source of great local pride.<sup>19</sup>

On December 2, 1885, at the age of eighteen, Amy Cheney married Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, a wealthy, socially prominent surgeon and member of the faculty of Harvard Medical School, and took the name she used for the rest of her life—Mrs. H. H. A. Beach. A widower twenty-five years her senior, Dr. Beach was an

accomplished amateur singer and pianist who had seriously considered a musical career in his youth. His knowledge of music was comprehensive, and he enjoyed the respect and friendship of many of Boston's most important musicians and intellectual leaders.<sup>20</sup>

Although her childless marriage—which, by all accounts, was a happy one—provided Mrs. Beach with a comfortable life unimpeded by financial worries, it also interrupted the momentum of her concert career. For the next quarter of a century, she gave only a few concerts per season, usually consisting of her own works, and always for the benefit of some charitable cause. Commenting on this several years after her husband's death, she explained:

Dr. Beach was “old-fashioned” and believed that a husband should support his wife. But he did not want me to drop my music, in fact, urged me to keep on, with the stipulation that any fees I received should go to charity. So hospitals, charities, institutions and similar organizations all were the recipients. I was happy and Dr. Beach was content.<sup>21</sup>

Dr. Beach was very proud of his wife's musical achievements, and felt that her future lay in composition.<sup>22</sup> He encouraged her creative endeavours in every possible way, and used the influence of his position to promote her composing career.<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Beach admired her husband's highly developed critical sense, and once said that he and her mother were “the kindest, most helpful, and most merciless critics” she ever had.<sup>24</sup>

In 1885, the year of her marriage, the Boston music publisher Arthur P. Schmidt, a great champion of American women composers, began to bring out Mrs. Beach's works. Given the extent to which the philosophical and scientific discourses of the day were mobilized to discredit women's creative abilities in music, it is fortunate that there were always at least a few critics and publishers who did not share the widely held belief that women were innately



incapable of producing great works. Schmidt was one such publisher. His role as a promoter of American women's music must be viewed in the wider context of his championing of American art music in general, at a time when the American musical scene was dominated by German music and German musicians. His dedication to American music was all the more remarkable in light of the fact that he was German born and trained. Because German music then reigned supreme in the United States, Schmidt's support was enormously helpful to all American composers; but to women composers, who were doubly handicapped by being both American and women, it was virtually essential. Between 1885 and 1944, Beach composed more than 300 works; Schmidt issued over 200 of them.<sup>25</sup>

In 1886, at the age of nineteen, Mrs. Beach began to compose her first large-scale work—the Mass in E-flat, for soloists, chorus, orchestra, and organ—completing it in 1889. Published as her op. 5, the Mass was first performed on February 7, 1892, by the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston under the direction of Carl Zerrahn. Beach joined the choir and orchestra on the stage for the second half of the programme, playing the piano part of Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy*.<sup>26</sup>

The premiere of Mrs. Beach's Mass was an important event in the history of American music for two reasons: the Mass itself is a powerful, beautifully constructed work, and it was the first composition by a woman to be given by the oldest, most conservative musical organization in the country.<sup>27</sup> The performance was an unqualified success, and both the audience and chorus lavished tributes on the young composer. The *Boston Herald* reported:

When Mrs. Beach entered the hall, leaning upon the arm of Secretary Stone, she was greeted with rising honours, in which the chorus and audience generally joined, the ladies of the society waving their handkerchiefs, while the sterner sex made a more noisy demonstration of their recognition of the triumph

of the young composer. Mrs. Beach bowed her acknowledgements in her own gracious fashion, and was subsequently well-nigh hidden from view by the offerings to her genius in the form of elaborate floral tributes.<sup>28</sup>

On the whole, the reviews were favourable. The music critic of *Book News* wrote:

It is certainly a proud feather in Boston's cap that a woman, a young woman too, . . . has succeeded in conquering such difficulties of composition as a polyphonic work of that magnitude involves, and producing a masterpiece of beauty and originality.<sup>29</sup>

The *New York Sun* said: "Mrs. Beach is the first woman in America to compose a work of so much power and beauty."<sup>30</sup> While the quiet, lyrical sections of the Mass were unanimously praised, however, some reviewers complained that the bolder, more vigorous movements were "unfeminine." A critic for the *Musical Herald*, for instance, said that the Mass was "well worth the study of those who decry the ability of women in the field of music," but found the "bold free style" of the *Quoniam* section "difficult to associate with a woman's hand."<sup>31</sup> Rupert Hughes described the Mass as a "work of force and daring,"<sup>32</sup> adding, however, that "when I say that Mrs. Beach's work is markedly virile, I do not mean it as a compliment unalloyed."<sup>33</sup> Like many other critics of the period, Hughes believed that women who wrote large-scale orchestral and choral works were "seeking after virility."<sup>34</sup> In their misguided attempts to emulate men, he asserted, they often produced scores that were overly boisterous.<sup>35</sup> According to Hughes, female composers were most successful when they channelled their creative energy into writing delicate, melodious songs—"such music as women best understand, and therefore ought to make best."<sup>36</sup>

Despite the enthusiastic reception accorded the Mass at its premiere, it did not receive another complete performance during the composer's lifetime. However, it was probably as a result of the initial success of this work that Mrs. Beach received her first two commissions. Mrs. Carl (C. Katie) Alves, who had sung the contralto solos in the Mass, wrote Mrs. Beach a week later requesting that she compose a "grand dramatic aria." A setting of the monologue *Eilende Wolken* from Schiller's *Mary Stuart*, the aria was first performed on December 2, 1892, by Alves and the Symphony Society of New York under the direction of Walter Damrosch. It was the first work by a woman composer to be presented by that orchestra.<sup>37</sup>

Mrs. Beach also received a commission from the Board of Lady Managers in charge of the construction of and events to take place in the Women's Building at the Columbian Exposition (World's Fair) in Chicago in 1893.<sup>38</sup> Two other women were also invited to compose works for the dedication ceremonies—Ingeborg von Bronsart of Weimar, Germany, and Frances Ellicott of London. They both contributed orchestral pieces while Beach wrote, in only six weeks, the *Festival Jubilate*, op. 17. It was performed by a choir of 300, soloists and orchestra under the baton of Theodore Thomas on May 1, 1893.<sup>39</sup> W. Waugh Lauder of the *Musical Courier* said of the work: "It was thoroughly scholastic . . . the success of the afternoon. It made a deep and satisfying impression, and gave official seal to woman's capabilities in music."<sup>40</sup> Comments such as the above show clearly that composing music on a grand scale was still regarded as an inherently masculine province. Indeed, for many, Beach was the notable exception which proved the rule that women could not write successfully in the larger forms.

In January of 1894, Amy Beach began composing her most ambitious and extensive work, the *Gaelic Symphony*, op. 32. Completed in the spring of 1896, the four-movement work was inspired by a collection of Gaelic folk tunes. Beach later explained:

Their simple, rugged and unpretentious beauty led me to try to develop their ideas in symphonic form. The work was so fascinating that I decided to systematize it seriously, and the *Gaelic* symphony is the result. Most of the themes are actual quotations from this collection of folk music and those which are original I have tried to keep in the same idiom and spirit.<sup>41</sup>

The premiere of the *Gaelic Symphony* took place on October 30, 1896, with Emil Pauer conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra. During the next twenty years or so, the work was presented in New York, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Kansas City, Detroit, Buffalo, Minneapolis, San Francisco, Leipzig and Hamburg.

Although concert audiences received the Symphony warmly wherever it was played, the press notices, particularly those of the early performances, were mixed. As was the case with Beach's *Mass*, much of the criticism (both favourable and unfavourable) invoked the double standard of sexual aesthetics—the tendency of critics to evaluate a woman's works not on their artistic merit alone, but on the extent to which they conformed to the prevailing stereotypes of ideal femininity. The *Musical Courier* condemned the Symphony for its false virility, but grudgingly conceded that the graceful second movement was appropriately feminine:

In its efforts to be Gaelic and masculine [Mrs. Beach's symphony] end[s] in being monotonous and spasmodic. . . . Of grace and delicacy there are evidences in the *Siciliana*, and here she is at her best, 'But yet a woman.'<sup>42</sup>

Philip Hale of the *Boston Sunday Journal* was generally enthusiastic about the work, but felt that Beach's orchestration was at times excessively heavy. He attributed this defect to a generalized tendency among women composers: "Here she is eminently feminine.

A woman who writes for orchestra thinks, 'I must be virile at all cost.'<sup>43</sup> A critic for the *Brooklyn Standard Union*, on the other hand, praised the Symphony for its masculine strength and energy, implying that the composer had overcome the limitations of her sex: "This symphony is one of her most ambitious works and is truly able. There is nothing feminine about the writing; all her work is strong and brilliant."<sup>44</sup> Ironically, Beach's friend, the composer George Chadwick, apparently found only feminine virtues in the work. In an article in *Etude*, we read: "When Mr. George Whitfield [*sic*] Chadwick first heard Mrs. Beach's symphony, 'Gaelic,' he is said to have exclaimed: 'Why was not I born a woman?' It was the delicacy and finish in her musical expression that had struck him, an expression of true womanhood, absolute in its sincerity."<sup>45</sup> In sum, whatever the merits or defects of the symphony were thought to be, critics went to extraordinary lengths in their attempts to relate them to the composer's sex.

Amy Beach's next extended work, the Sonata in A Minor for Violin and Piano, op. 34, was composed in the six weeks following the completion of her Symphony. It was first performed in Boston in January of 1897 by Franz Kneisel with Beach at the piano. The same artists played it again in Boston, in New York, and at a university concert in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Beach performed the work several times with other violinists as well. It was also played in Berlin by Karl Halir and Teresa Carreño, in Paris by Eugene Ysaye and Raoul Pugno, and in London by Sigmund Beel and Henry Bird.<sup>46</sup> Most of the reviews were laudatory. William J. Henderson of the *New York Times* wrote:

Mrs. Beach deserves well of her countrymen, for she has proved that it is possible for a woman to compose music which is worthy of serious attention. This cannot be said of many women composers, and in this country Mrs. Beach stands almost alone.<sup>47</sup>

A critic for *Etude* praised the Sonata in the language of sexual aesthetics: "This work is most excellent, feminine in respect to sentiment, but worked out in a broad and masterful spirit worthy of a man in his best moments."<sup>48</sup> It is important to note, however, that the writer of the above review invoked a whole set of gendered criteria that were never used in evaluating the works of Beach's male colleagues.

Despite the existence of a double standard—one for serious musicians, and the other for dilettantes, with women musicians, particularly composers, automatically placed in the latter category—the success of Beach's Sonata and that of her Symphony led to the further acceptance of her works as worthy of performance on their own merit, rather than merely as curiosities.<sup>49</sup> It was also at this point in her career that the critics stopped making Beach the target of sexual aesthetics. It seems likely that the maturity and structural strength of her large-scale compositions had worked toward eroding the deleterious effects of this gender-biased system of criticism. The growing influence of feminism probably played a significant role as well.

In 1898, Beach was invited to become a regular contributor to the women's page of *Etude*, an invitation she declined because she was too busy with her career. She also felt that women composers could do more for their cause by sticking to their craft than through literary efforts. She wrote:

My time is entirely devoted, of necessity, to the exacting requirements of musical composition, with sufficient piano practice to admit of occasional public appearances. This leaves me no time in which to do literary work. . . . In the best interests of those of my sex who are working in the field of musical composition, I believe that they can be advanced more rapidly and with greater certainty, not through their efforts as *littérateurs*, but by solid practical work that can be printed, played, or sung.<sup>50</sup>

In June of that year, Beach's *Song of Welcome*, op. 42, a commissioned work for chorus and orchestra, was performed at the opening ceremonies of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition in Omaha, Nebraska, and in the fall her cantata *The Rose of Avontown* was presented at the Worcester Festival.<sup>51</sup>

In 1900, Amy Beach completed her Piano Concerto in C-sharp Minor, op. 45, dedicated to her friend Teresa Carreño. On April 6 of the same year, Wilhelm Gericke conducted the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the premiere of the Concerto, with Beach as soloist. A showpiece for both piano and orchestra, the four-movement work was a resounding success, and was later performed by Beach in Chicago, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Berlin, Hamburg and Leipzig.<sup>52</sup> Reviewing the premiere, a critic for the *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette* wrote:

It is a most carefully considered and carefully wrought-out work. It is modern in spirit, it is full of striking passages and bold and effective in modulations, and the technical knowledge everywhere displayed is of a high and sometimes of a daring character. . . . The piano part is very difficult, but it was played by Mrs. Beach with grasp, ease, effectiveness and brilliancy.<sup>53</sup>

Historian and critic Louis C. Elson later said of the Concerto: "The finale is powerful enough to make any critic, who does not believe that women can create music, become rather doubtful about his position."<sup>54</sup>

The next extended work to come from Amy Beach's pen was her Quintet for Piano and Strings in F-sharp Minor, op. 67. It was played for the first time in February of 1908 by Beach and the Hoffman Quartet at Potter Hall in Boston.<sup>55</sup> The composer later performed it in New York, München, and various other cities. A critic for the *Musical Courier* said of the Quintet:

While the whole work has strong individuality and reveals features of unusual skill and resource, the second movement . . . stands out especially, its many passages of exquisite beauty, its rich coloring and its absolute control of idiom and tonal effects revealing the hand of a composer of striking and patent attainments.<sup>56</sup>

The death of Amy Beach's husband in June of 1910, and that of her mother seven months later, brought an end to the most productive period of her creative life. She later told an interviewer: "After the deaths of my husband and mother, one blow following the other so soon, it seemed to me as though I could not work, at least in public. Even in private to hear the music I adored wrung my heart for a while."<sup>57</sup>

In 1911, after a year of inactivity, Beach left for Europe to recover from her double loss. Her first year abroad was one of almost entire rest, but in 1912, she gradually began to rebuild her performing career.<sup>58</sup> Writing from Germany, she confided her plans for the future to her publisher Arthur P. Schmidt:

I am not trying to play in a large number of concerts this season, as it is fatiguing, with the necessary travelling, etc. and I am not yet very strong, as the new life is hard and exhausting to me in many ways, as you can understand. But I shall try to make each appearance of benefit to me in future American tours, if I can carry out my present plan of making some of these in coming years. Even a limited number of European appearances will help at home, as you know.<sup>59</sup>

Between 1912 and 1914, Beach gave recitals of her works and those of other composers in several German cities. She also accompanied local artists in Dresden, Breslau and Munich in performances of her Quintet, Violin Sonata, and many of her songs.



With the Berlin Philharmonic, and the orchestras of Leipzig and Hamburg, she appeared as soloist in her Piano Concerto. Her *Gaelic Symphony* was also performed in Leipzig and Hamburg.<sup>60</sup>

Audiences and critics throughout Germany were captivated by Amy Beach both as a pianist and as a composer. The following review of the Hamburg performance of her *Symphony* and *Concerto* is but one example of the many tributes paid to her by the German press. What is striking about this review, apart from its praise of Beach's work, is the fact that it draws attention to the widespread prejudice against women composers that existed at the time. In the *Hamburger Nachrichten* of December 3, 1913, we read:

Should women compose? Are their creative efforts justified by adequate creative gifts? This question may readily be answered in the affirmative. . . . One need only mention the names of Amelie Nikisch<sup>61</sup> and Amy Beach in order to refute this foolish prejudice concerning women composers. Amy Beach came to Hamburg with a symphony and a piano concerto; that is to say, she came before us as a composer of the largest art forms of instrumental music. . . . The works performed here yesterday demonstrated . . . that we have before us undeniably a possessor of musical gifts of the highest kind; a musical nature touched with genius. Strong creative power, glowing fancy, instinct for form and color are united in her work with facile and effortless mastery of the entire technical apparatus.<sup>62</sup>

The success of Amy Beach's works in Germany served to enhance her already enviable reputation in her own country. Beach attached considerable importance to her European experience, and once told a reporter:

The wonderful thing for the American musician going to Europe is to find music put on a so much higher plane than

in America, and universally recognized and respected by all classes and conditions as the great art which it is. There is indeed such a tremendous respect for music in Europe that it is almost impossible to convey this feeling to persons who have never been outside of America. Music is in the air constantly, wherever one goes.<sup>63</sup>

In 1914, Beach returned home with a full schedule of concert engagements already booked, and in 1915 settled in New York. Thereafter, she concertized widely throughout North America during the winter months, and devoted the summers to composing at her cottage in Centerville, on Cape Cod. (The cottage was entirely paid for with royalties from one of her songs—"Ecstasy," written in 1893.) From 1921 onward, she also spent part of each summer at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, where she wrote many of her works.<sup>64</sup> Among them were numerous songs and piano pieces, a String Quartet in One Movement based on Eskimo themes (sketched at the Colony, and completed in Rome during the winter of 1929–1930), the one-act opera *Cabildo* (1932), and her last big chamber work—a Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello (1938). Other extended compositions dating from the second half of her career include the Variations for Flute and String Quartet (1920), and the cantatas *Canticle of the Sun* (1928) and *Christ in the Universe* (1931).

In a letter to John Tasker Howard, Beach discussed the advantages she saw in having a double career as both performer and composer:

I have literally lived the life of two people, one a pianist, the other a writer. Anything more unlike than the state of mind demanded by these two professions I could not imagine! When I do one kind of work, I shut the other up in a closed room and lock the door, unless I happen to be composing for the

piano, in which case there is a connecting link. One great advantage, however, in this kind of life, is that one never grows stale, but there is always a continual interest and freshness from the change back and forth.<sup>65</sup>

A kind and generous person, Amy Beach used her musical and social status to further the careers of many younger artists, and by her example and encouragement, paved the way for other women composers.<sup>66</sup> In 1924, she co-founded and became first president of the Society of American Women Composers—an organization dedicated to the advancement of music written by women.<sup>67</sup> In advising young women who aspired to a musical career, she stressed above all else the importance of acquiring a strong technique:

One thing I have learned from my audiences is that young women artists and composers shouldn't be afraid to pitch right in and try. If they think they have something to say, let them say it. But let them be sure to build a technique with which to say it. The technique mustn't be visible, but it must be there.<sup>68</sup>

Beach's personal views on the status of women composers seem rather conflicted. In a 1915 interview with Edwin Hughes, she said:

I have personally never felt myself handicapped in any way, nor have I encountered prejudice of any sort on account of my being a woman, and I believe that the field for musical composition in America offers the same prospects to young women as to young men composers.<sup>69</sup>

The fact that she was instrumental in founding the Society of American Women Composers, however, suggests that she saw a need for greater performance opportunities for women in the profession.

For her contribution to American music, Beach received many tributes and honours from music clubs and societies, and in 1928, she was awarded an honorary Master of Arts from the University of New Hampshire.<sup>70</sup> She was forced to abandon her concert career in the late 1930s because of failing health, but continued to compose until her death in 1944 at the age of seventy-seven.<sup>71</sup>

When and if Amy Beach is mentioned in music history textbooks, she is linked to the group of composers known as the New England Traditionalists—John Knowles Paine (1839–1906), Arthur Foote (1853–1937), Horatio Parker (1863–1919), George W. Chadwick (1854–1931), and Edward MacDowell (1861–1908)—although she worked apart from them. Her early compositions, with their broadly spun-out melodies, lush chromaticism, rich textures, restless modulations, and complex development of themes, are in the late Romantic tradition. Her harmonic language reflects the influence of Brahms and Wagner, but the lyricism, passion and vitality are unmistakably her own. Although Beach's general style did not change significantly over the years, some of her later compositions—the String Quartet, and the Piano Trio, for example—are somewhat leaner in texture, and suggest the influence of French Impressionism. Several of her instrumental works (the *Gaelic Symphony*, Suite for Two Pianos, String Quartet, and *Variations on Baltic Themes* for piano) draw their inspiration from folk tunes—a popular turn-of-the-century device. She also anticipated Olivier Messiaen by transcribing the calls of songbirds for thematic use. Bird calls are quoted in two of her piano pieces: *A Hermit Thrush at Eve*, and *A Hermit Thrush at Morn*, op. 92. Throughout her career, Beach composed numerous songs and character pieces for piano, but her creative talent was best suited to works of larger scale. She once told an interviewer, “I love to work in the large forms, they are just as easy if not easier for me than the small ones.”<sup>72</sup>

Compared to most women composers of her time, Amy Beach seems to have led a charmed life, for she did not have to struggle

unduly to accomplish her goals. She received abundant emotional and financial support from her parents in her youth, and from her husband during the twenty-five years of her marriage. In later years, another important source of support came from the National Federation of Music Clubs. Founded in the late 1890s, the Federation sponsored concerts, and also promoted the study of works by European and American composers. Beach was nothing less than a heroine to the many women members of the Federation. They chose her works as required pieces for competitions, organized all-Beach recitals, and in some instances even named their clubs after her.<sup>73</sup>

Not only did Beach receive considerable support from other women, but her career was also helped along by the gains of the women's rights movement. As Judith Tick reminds us:

The emergence of the woman composer in the 1890s is directly related to the effectiveness of the women's rights movement in redefining women's place. The movement . . . challenged belief in the creative inferiority of women in music, as it did in other spheres of intellectual life.<sup>74</sup>

Another factor which contributed to Beach's great success was her long business association with Arthur P. Schmidt, a publisher strongly committed to the promotion of American music, and to equal rights for women composers. After she moved to New York, several other firms also began publishing her compositions. Only two of her larger works, the String Quartet and the opera *Cabildo*, remained unpublished during her lifetime—an extraordinary record for any American composer.

But this does not mean that Beach encountered no prejudice because of her sex. Clearly, despite her protestations to the contrary, she did—at least in her student years and during the early part of her career. As a student, she was left to her own devices to acquire

the theoretical training she needed in order to compose—a situation that would probably have been handled quite differently had she been a boy.

Moreover, the question of whether women were capable of creating large-scale works was a hotly debated issue at the beginning of Beach's career, and her first critics seldom let anyone forget that she was a woman. As several of the reviews cited in this chapter show, her largest and most powerful compositions—the Mass and the *Gaelic Symphony*—were frequently judged by the extent to which they were perceived to conform to prevailing stereotypes of ideal femininity. Consequently, she was censured for her 'inappropriate' virility. Paradoxically, when her large-scale compositions were deemed a success, it was often said that she had transcended the limitations of her sex, or that she had written "like a man." Although contemporaneous critics believed that this was the highest praise they could offer a woman symphonist, such evaluations were often seen as proof that women who excelled at composition did so at great expense to their femininity. So prevalent was this notion, that Louis C. Elson—a critic more kindly disposed toward creative women than many of his colleagues—felt compelled to write in 1904: "To those who believe that women who achieve greatness in any art or science must be masculine in mind and manner, unsexed phenomena, we may say that Mrs. Beach is most womanly in all her ways."<sup>75</sup>

Fortunately, Beach did not have to contend with the deleterious effects of sexual aesthetics throughout her entire career; once her success had been firmly established, the critics began to evaluate her music on equal terms with that of her male colleagues. Nonetheless, the early critiques of her large-scale works demonstrate clearly the social tensions that the woman composer encountered on her journey from the parlor to the professional world of music as serious art—a world traditionally dominated by men.<sup>76</sup>

The first American woman to write successfully in the larger forms, Amy Beach is a central figure in the history of women

in music. After several decades of unjust neglect—a performance record that makes no sense—many of her works have recently been revived, and she is at last beginning to be acknowledged as one of the finest American composers of her time.<sup>77</sup> Some modern critics consider her *Gaelic Symphony* to be the first symphony of importance written by any American composer,<sup>78</sup> while others have suggested that her Piano Concerto could become a welcome alternative to those of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff as a repertoire piece.<sup>79</sup> The Mass in E-flat, the *Canticle of the Sun*, the Violin Sonata, the Quintet, and the Piano Trio are also among Beach's most distinguished works. They are beautifully crafted, and can hold their own in any age. When the Quintet was reintroduced by pianist Mary Louise Boehm in 1974, Paul Hume, music critic of the *Washington Post*, wrote:

Where has this music been all its life? Why has it never been heard while performances of quintets that are no better are played annually? If the answer is not that the composer was a woman, I would be fascinated to hear it.<sup>80</sup>

Now that she has been rediscovered, is Amy Beach about to take her rightful place as a major figure in the history of American music? Time alone will tell, but at least—aided by feminism and the rebirth of interest in late Romantic music—she is finally being given her chance.

## NOTES

1. For a complete catalogue of Beach's works, see Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer 1867–1944* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 300–312.
2. Christine Ammer, *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 76.

3. Mrs. Cheney to her cousin Anna, 27 April 1898, quoted in Adrienne Fried Block, "Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer: The Early Years," *Current Musicology* 36 (1983): 42.
4. "How Mrs. Beach Did Her First Composing," *Musical America*, 8 August 1914, clipping file on Amy Beach, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
5. Arthur Elson, *Woman's Work in Music* (Boston, L. C. Page, 1903), 197.
6. *Ibid.*, 198.
7. Louis C. Elson, *The History of American Music* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971; a reprint of the 1925 edition), 298.
8. Arthur Elson, 197–98.
9. Adrienne Fried Block, liner notes for *Our Musical Past*, Vol. 4: *Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, Symphony in E minor (Gaelic)* (Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Karl Krueger), Library of Congress CD OMP-105.
10. Benjamin Brooks, "The 'How' of Creative Composition: A Conference with Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *Etude* 41 (March 1943): 208.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Burnet C. Tuthill, "Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *Musical Quarterly* 26 (July 1940): 299.
13. Block, "Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer," 44.
14. Quoted in *ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 47.
17. Quoted in Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 33.
18. Ammer, 76.
19. Block, liner notes for *Our Musical Past*, Vol. 4.
20. Block, "Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer," 47.
21. H. A. S., "At 74, Mrs. Beach Recalls Her First Critics," *Musical Courier* (15 May 1941), clipping file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Myra Garvey Eden, *Anna Hyatt Huntington, Sculptor, and Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, Composer: A Comparative Study of Two Women Representatives of the American Cultivated Tradition in the Arts* (Ph. D. diss., Syracuse University, 1977), 61.
24. Brooks, 208.
25. Adrienne Fried Block, "Arthur P. Schmidt: Music Publisher and Champion of American Women Composers," in *The Musical Woman: An International*



- Perspective, 1984–1985*, ed. Judith Lang Zaimont, Catherine Overhauser, and Jane Gottlieb (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 146.
26. Louis C. Elson, 300–301.
  27. Eden, 63.
  28. *Boston Herald*, 8 February 1892, quoted in Percy Goetschius, *Mrs. H. H. A. Beach* (Boston: Arthur P. Schmidt, 1906), 68–69.
  29. *Book News*, March 1892, quoted in Goetschius, 63.
  30. *New York Sun*, 18 February 1892, quoted in Goetschius, 61.
  31. Quoted in Ammer, 78.
  32. Rupert Hughes, *Contemporary American Composers* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1900), 427.
  33. *Ibid.*, 433.
  34. *Ibid.*, 438.
  35. *Ibid.*, 425.
  36. *Ibid.*, 434.
  37. Block, “Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer,” 53.
  38. *Ibid.* The Women’s Building at the Columbian Exposition (designed by Sophia G. Hayden, and decorated by leading women artists of the day) was the brainchild of Susan B. Anthony. The members of the organizing committee—women of diverse political stripes—were very concerned that their endeavour would not be tarnished by any hint of feminism or radicalism. Nonetheless, the stated purpose of the Women’s Building was to demonstrate that women’s achievements were equal to those of men. As Maud Howe Elliot expressed it in the preface to the official edition of *Art and Handicraft in the Women’s Building*: “The World’s Columbian Exposition has afforded woman an unprecedented opportunity to present to the world a justification of her claim to be placed on complete equality with man.” The directorship of the Women’s Building was entrusted to Mrs. Palmer Potter, a wealthy Chicago art collector, and her 117-member Board of Lady Managers. Potter herself did not advocate equal rights for women, but believed strongly in women’s creative potential. Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work* (London: Picador, 1981), 322; Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990), 230.
  39. Block, “Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer,” 53.
  40. *Musical Courier* (10 May 1893): 14, quoted in Ammer, 78.
  41. Quoted in Michael Fleming, “Amy Marcy Cheney Beach: Symphony in

- E minor (*Gaelic*)," liner notes for *Beach: Gaelic Symphony* (Detroit Symphony Orchestra/Neeme Järvi), Chandos CD CHAN 8958, 1991, 8.
42. *Musical Courier* 36, no. 8 (23 February 1898): 29–30.
  43. *Boston Sunday Journal*, 1 November 1896, 2.
  44. *Brooklyn Standard Union*, 29 March 1897, quoted in Goetschius, 94.
  45. William Armstrong, "New Gems in the Old Classics: A Talk with Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *Etude* 22 (February 1904): 1.
  46. Louis C. Elson, 301–2.
  47. *New York Times*, 29 March 1899, quoted in Goetschius, 114.
  48. "Musical Items," *Etude* 15 (March 1897): 61.
  49. E. Lindsey Merrill, *Mrs. H. H. A. Beach: Her Life and Music* (Ph.D. diss., Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester, 1963), 8.
  50. Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, "Women's Work in Music, a Letter from Mrs. Beach," *Etude* 16 (May 1898): 100.
  51. Ammer, 80.
  52. The Concerto was last heard during Beach's lifetime in 1917, when it was played by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Karl Muck with the composer as soloist. It was revived in 1976 by Mary Louise Boehm, who performed it with the American Symphony under Morton Gould. Ammer, 81.
  53. *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette*, 8 April 1900, quoted in Goetschius, 120–21.
  54. Louis C. Elson, 302.
  55. Eden, 69.
  56. *Musical Courier* (24 March 1915), clipping file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
  57. Clare P. Peeler, "American Woman Whose Musical Message Thrilled Germany: Shipboard Glimpses of Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *Musical America*, 17 October 1914, clipping file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
  58. *Ibid.*
  59. Amy Beach to Arthur P. Schmidt, 30 November 1912, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Also on microfilm at the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
  60. *Musical Courier* (11 February 1913), clipping file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
  61. Amelie Nikisch, wife of conductor Arthur Nikisch, was greatly admired as a composer of operettas.

62. Dr. Ferdinand Pfohl, *Hamburger Nachrichten*, 3 December 1913, clipping file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
63. Edwin Hughes, "The Outlook for the Young American Composer: An Interview with the Distinguished American Composer, Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *Etude* 33 (January 1915): 13.
64. Ammer, 85.
65. Quoted in John Tasker Howard, *Our American Music*, 3rd ed. (New York: Crowell, 1946), 312.
66. Block, "Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer," 55–56.
67. Ammer, 84.
68. Quoted in *ibid.*
69. Quoted in Edwin Hughes, 14.
70. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 250.
71. Eden, 82–83.
72. Harriette Brower, "A Personal Interview with Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *Musical Observer* 12 (May 1915): 273.
73. Block, "Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer," 54.
74. Judith Tick, "Women as Professional Musicians in the United States, 1870–1900," *Yearbook for Inter-American Musical Research* 9 (1973): 106.
75. Louis C. Elson, 305.
76. Judith Tick, *American Women Composers before 1870* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), 232.
77. See, for example, David Mason Greene, "Beach, Mrs. H. H. A.," *Greene's Biographical Encyclopedia of Composers* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1985), 896.
78. Coral Paglin and Mary Louise Boehm, program notes for Michael May's Carnegie Hall performance of Beach's Mass in E-flat, 28 October 1984.
79. Dean Elder, "Where Was Amy Beach All These Years? An Interview with Mary Louise Boehm," *Clavier* 9 (December 1976): 16. See also Arthur Cohn's review of the Concerto, in his *Recorded Classical Music: A Critical Guide to Compositions and Performances* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1981), 138.
80. Quoted in Elder, 14.

## FLORENCE PRICE AND THE POLITICS OF HER EXISTENCE

Platform, opportunity, and time are by no means the only elements that influence the construction of legacies, but to interrogate these man-made constructions is to recognize that they determine not only the trajectories of historical figures in real time but also the extent to which such figures are recognized in the present day—if at all. This is evidenced by the discrepancies in the posthumous visibility of men and women composers. The myth that women did not compose “back then” is perpetuated in the contrasting treatments of legacy, which fail to recognize the historically limited platforms for women composers to elevate their works. The myth obscures how the opportunities for such composers may have varied greatly for different practitioners during their lifetime—opportunities to access these often exclusionary, yet influential spheres, find mobility in such spheres, and act in resistance to stereotyped expectations of gender and race. It both ignores and exemplifies the fact that a woman composer’s time, particularly concerning that which she has committed to the mastery of her craft, receives an (under)valuation that is undoubtedly shaped by the politics of her existence.

On the fifth of July 1943, the American composer Florence Price (1887–1953) wrote to the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Serge Koussevitzky. She closed her letter with the question, “will you examine one of my scores?”<sup>1</sup> However, the question was not as straightforward as it appeared, for the letter began:

My Dear Dr. Koussevitzky,

To begin with I have two handicaps—those of sex and race.

I am a woman; and I have some Negro blood in my veins.

Knowing the worst, then, would you be good enough to hold in check the possible inclination to regard a woman’s composition

as long on emotionalism but short on virility and thought content;—until you shall have examined some of my work? As to the handicap of race, may I relieve you by saying that I neither expect nor ask any concession on that score. I should like to be judged on merit alone.<sup>2</sup>

Price was not simply asking Koussevitzky to examine her scores; she was requesting that he do so without sexist or racist judgment. She recognized that she could not escape the stereotypes of her gender or race, and so she took it upon herself to foreground the politics of her existence—describing herself as a woman with some Negro blood in her veins—and then to consign her handicaps to the background so that her music could take centre stage, as should ideally have been the case. The late Rae Linda Brown puts it succinctly: “Price tackles the issues of gender and race up-front by mentioning, then dismissing them.”<sup>3</sup> In doing so, she encourages Koussevitzky to follow suit.

Price’s letter exemplifies the ways in which her desire to elevate her work on a prestigious platform, access this traditionally white male territory, and invest greater time in cultivating her craft was also controlled by what these ideas meant for a woman composer of African descent in early mid-twentieth-century America. Furthermore, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the limitations imposed by prejudicial notions about gender and race have lingered on long after Price’s death in 1953. As William Robin notes in a 2014 *New York Times* article on the role of race in concert music, “the Boston Symphony has yet to play a note of her music.”<sup>4</sup>

The concepts of platform, opportunity, and time can certainly shape much wider discourse concerning historical women practitioners, but the discourse becomes even more enriched when it is applied to the complex intersections that constitute a single person’s life. In this chapter, I focus on certain questions that have surfaced in my research on Price’s compositional voice and its

place and reception in contemporaneous efforts to create a “national” sound. Key questions include: how did Price negotiate the obstacles of gender and race in her contributions to American music? How did she navigate her way around the hostilities in this territory to find opportunities within it? And how did she cultivate an aesthetic that is distinctly and intrinsically American? The answers to all these questions are entangled with the politics of her existence.

My research has identified four key phases in Price’s life, defined by her location, activity, and community. The first includes her early years in Arkansas (1887–1903); the second is marked by her studies at the New England Conservatory of Music (1903–1906); the third follows her return to the South (1907–1927); and the fourth covers the Chicago years (1927–1953). These periods are used to structure a deeper exploration into how the factors of platform, opportunity and time—that are so central to the development of any composer—materialized in the context of Price’s life and circumstances.

### **Early Years in Arkansas (1887–1903)**

Florence Beatrice Price, née Smith, was born in Little Rock, Arkansas. Her father, Dr. James H. Smith, was a dentist, and her mother, Florence Irene Gulliver, was an elementary school teacher. They married in 1876 and had three children: Charles, Gertrude, and Florence (the youngest).

Dr. Smith was born in 1843 to free parents in Camden, Delaware. He studied dentistry in Philadelphia and later established his own practice in Chicago during the 1860s. His practice, however, did not survive the Great Chicago Fire, and this prompted him to move to Arkansas. There, his Little Rock practice catered to an affluent and interracial clientele that included the Governor of Arkansas.

Dr. Smith's biography is not representative of most African American lives during this time. In fact, in an era defined by the polarity of black and white, Dr. Smith's position within the black elite of a cultured professional class afforded his family privileges and prospects that would remain out of reach for much of the black population. The Smiths belonged to a sociological minority called the Talented Tenth, a term coined by W. E. B. Du Bois in an eponymous essay that promoted the notion that social change was instigated by the leadership of the few who could apply their privilege and education to the cause of uplifting the race. In his seminal work, Du Bois illuminated his vision for racial uplift and the role to be played by an African American intelligentsia:

Education and work are the levers to uplift a people. Work alone will not do it unless inspired by the right ideals and guided by intelligence. Education must not simply teach work—it must teach Life. The Talented Tenth of the Negro race must be made leaders of thought among their people.<sup>5</sup>

Contextualizing Price's upbringing in the ideology of the Talented Tenth not only breaks down any misconception of a monolithic African American community but also emphasizes the interplay of intersecting identities within. Price's class privilege, coupled with a notable racial ambiguity, enabled her greater potential for agency compared to poorer African Americans trapped in post-slavery subjugation. Her lighter skin complexion was a product of her mixed ancestry—"French, Indian and Spanish" on her mother's side and "Negro, Indian and English" on her father's side.<sup>6</sup> Her skin tone, coupled with her extensive education and her mode of speech, granted her the possibility of distancing herself from a black racial identity. Yet, this was not the path she chose. Price embraced all aspects of her heritage; and, as a composer, she cultivated an aesthetic around her belief that "a national music very

beautiful and very American can come from the melting pot just as the nation itself has done.”<sup>7</sup> Though Price’s circumstances did not offset the gender expectations or racial bias of her milieu, there is no doubt that her familial background helped foster the favourable conditions for her to emerge as the first American woman of African descent to achieve national and international recognition as a composer.

Price’s musical education began at the age of three with piano lessons from her mother. Her education extended to the integrated Allison Presbyterian Church in Little Rock, where she regularly heard the sacred works of Johann Sebastian Bach, Felix Mendelssohn and Ralph Vaughan Williams.<sup>8</sup> Her academic growth outside of music was supported by the instruction of Charlotte Andrews Stephens at the segregated Union School. Stephens was the first African-American teacher in Little Rock. Though born into slavery, she recognized that her trajectory had been heavily influenced by what she called the “peculiar privileges” of her upbringing.<sup>9</sup> Stephens’ father, though enslaved, was committed to the task of educating fellow slaves as well as free men and women. Stephens’ mother further provided for the family through her laundry business, even during her enslavement. Education and enterprise were certainly characteristic of Stephens’ upbringing and the path that followed. Her teaching career spanned seventy years; it began in 1869 when, as a fifteen-year-old, she stepped in to cover the class of her white teacher who was away with sickness. She retired in 1939, by which time she had pursued higher education at Oberlin College, Ohio, taught from elementary to high school level, served as a principal twice, and had a school named in her honour.

Price was one of the many students to benefit from Stephens’ passion and dedication. Another student was William Grant Still, a family friend of the Smiths who would go on to be known as the Dean of African-American composers and a key actor in the Harlem Renaissance. Records do not confirm Stephens’ specific



role in the musical education of Price or Still, but Barbara Garvey Jackson postulates that Stephens most likely would have encouraged their musical inclinations and gifts.<sup>10</sup> Stephens was known to have catered to the need for recreational outlets in Little Rock by organizing communal entertainment in the form of skits, concerts and games.<sup>11</sup> Whether or not Price and Still participated in these events is, again, unconfirmed, but this detail certainly lends support to Jackson's theory.

Like Stephens, Price's circumstances were advantaged by her own set of peculiar privileges; and, like Stephens, Price set about devoting her time, energy, and resources to pursuing the path for which she seemed so destined. Stephens and Price were both sixteen years of age when they entered the academic worlds of Oberlin College and the New England Conservatory of Music, respectively. However, it must be recognized that Stephens was raised in the era of slavery and committed to the uplift of her race as a direct result of her experiences. In contrast, Price was raised in a generation that had moved somewhat beyond its predecessors' experiences. Price's relative privilege meant that there was a degree of freedom in her decision to immerse herself in African-American culture. Indeed, Price's trajectory can be seen as a variation on the themes of education and enterprise that were so prevalent in Stephens' life and so redolent of Talented Tenth ideology, long before the term even came into existence. Thus, despite the parallels in their lives, there was a great disparity in the circumstances that encased the politics of their being.

### **The New England Conservatory of Music (1903–1906)**

Price's pursuit of musical study at the New England Conservatory was by and large determined by which institutions would accept ethnic minority candidates; but even so, Price was encouraged to exercise caution in her own application. In an act of preservation,

Price's mother presented Pueblo, Mexico, as Price's hometown.<sup>12</sup> The New England Conservatory did include African-American students in its admissions policy, but such a policy could not overturn centuries of social conditioning and ensure Price's protection from her contemporaries' derivative attitudes. Price's mother capitalized on her daughter's racial ambiguity and, in doing so, etched a less stigmatized identity for her. Still, Price never forgot her heritage; and, as a composer, she would return to the New World Africanisms of her ancestors.

Price graduated with the highest honours, earning a double major in piano pedagogy and organ performance. She studied organ under the instruction of Henry M. Dunham, and she had clearly proven herself as an accomplished organist because on the fourteenth of June, 1906, Price closed a concert featuring members of the graduating class with the first movement of her professor's *Sonata in G Minor for Organ*.<sup>13</sup> Her studies in instrumental performance and pedagogy were accompanied by courses in composition and counterpoint with George Whitefield Chadwick, (director of the New England Conservatory), Frederick Converse, and Benjamin Cutter. Under Chadwick, Price began to explore black folk idioms as source material for serious composition.<sup>14</sup> This concept had, however, been brought to mainstream attention a decade before Price enrolled at the conservatory.

In 1893, Antonín Dvořák's "New World" Symphony had shaken the American musical landscape, as had his controversial yet highly progressive statements about the establishment of an American school of music. In an article called "The Real Value of Negro Melodies," Dvořák is quoted as saying, "I am now satisfied that the future of this country must be founded upon what are called the negro melodies. . . . These beautiful and varied themes are the product of American soil. They are American."<sup>15</sup> Dvořák's assertions were not widely embraced, but they certainly permeated the consciousness of many American composers.

However, the real roots of Price's compositional identity can be found in a long history of diasporic African composers who integrated vernacular styles with classical models. Hildred Roach traces this history back to "the earliest days of colonialism."<sup>16</sup> She notes that "while some composers were treated as curiosities, others were recognized ever so slightly, thereby causing wide gaps in the documentaries of many."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the lack of documentation of early African-American composers certainly problematizes any attempt to construct an ancestral history and to establish a cohesive and representative canon. Instead, what emerge are intermittent dots in time; but it could be argued that these dots portray, in the words of Roach, composers whose "musical creativity and gifts were so monumental that history could not entirely ignore their lucent manifestations or loud exclamations."<sup>18</sup>

Harry T. Burleigh (1866–1949) was one such composer. Burleigh was part of the first generation of post-slavery composers, who imbued their compositional voices with ancestral folk references and whose aesthetic could thus be viewed as nationalistic.<sup>19</sup> Burleigh was best known for his contributions to art song and especially his arrangements of Negro spirituals for solo voice. He wrote of his approach: "My desire is to preserve them in harmonies that belong to modern methods of tonal progression without robbing the melodies of their racial flavor."<sup>20</sup> Burleigh's influence was far-reaching; his approach was embraced by subsequent generations of African-American composers, including Price, but he also inspired a tradition of African-American concert singers to include arrangements of Negro spirituals in their repertoire, from former student Abbie Mitchell to Roland Hayes, from Marian Anderson to Jesse Norman.

Burleigh studied with Dvořák at the National Conservatory of Music in New York and sang spirituals for the Bohemian composer, who encouraged his hybrid style.<sup>21</sup> Yet Burleigh, unlike Dvořák, represented a more emic relationship with vernacular traditions.

For Dvořák, and Chadwick, the sound-world of the black slave was a foreign one that could be visited through musical excursions, but their perspective was more akin to that of the tourist than the local. For Burleigh, however, this was a sound-world that had been passed down by his grandfather who would sing to him songs from the plantation, songs whose themes of uplift and freedom still had contemporary relevance. With Price emerging as part of the next generation of African-American composers, she was further removed from Burleigh's experiences with black folk culture, and her privileged position augmented her distance from them. Still, the themes of the plantation songs reverberated even in Price's lifetime, which heightens the meaning of her decision to shape her compositional voice around European and African heritages; it was as though she were recognizing, even realizing, the politics of her existence in the nature of her aesthetic. Therefore, while Price may have enrolled in the New England Conservatory under the guise of Mexican nationality, as a composer thereafter, she aligned herself with the legacy of Burleigh and his predecessors.

### **Return to the South (1907–1927)**

Price returned to Arkansas in 1906 and started her teaching career. As previously mentioned, education was the central tenet of Talented Tenth ideology; therefore, it is not surprising that teachers were often regarded as the pillars of their communities.<sup>22</sup> Teachers historically came from middle-class backgrounds, and so the fact that Price turned to music education upon her return to the South perhaps reflected her awareness of the maximum opportunity available to a well-educated, middle-class, African-American woman in the era of Jim Crow.

Price first taught at Cotton Plant–Arkadelphia Academy in Cotton Plant, Arkansas. She then joined the music faculty at Shorter College in North Little Rock, before assuming the role of Head of

the Music Department at Clark University in Atlanta, Georgia. As dictated by segregation, all of these institutions catered to a black demographic.

Price built a solid profile as an educator. She also provided private instruction in organ, piano, and violin and often composed her own material to suit her students' needs. Still, Price's qualifications and experience could easily be nullified by the colour of her skin. When she applied for membership of the Arkansas State Music Teachers Association, she was rejected because of her race. In a spirit of enterprise, however, Price established her own platform and founded the Little Rock Club of Musicians; this enabled her to program and perform her own compositions.<sup>23</sup>

Price remained in the South until the late 1920s, but her counterpart and childhood friend William Grant Still had moved to Harlem in 1919. His move coincided with a cultural movement driven by African-American thinkers and visionaries that spanned the 1920s and 1930s. The Harlem Renaissance was "a moment of hope and confidence, a proclamation of independence, and the celebration of a new spirit exemplified in the New Negro."<sup>24</sup> The goal to restore the dignity and assert the humanity of African Americans, both past and present, has been a consistent thread in the tapestry of this narrative. However, interpreting the first half of the twentieth century through the motivically dominant notions of rebirth and revitalization allowed new generations to continue this thread and weave it into their own definitions of modernity. Thus, if the turn of the century was epitomized in the Talented-Tenth ideology, the interwar years belonged to the philosophy of the New Negro. As influential Renaissance figure and New Negro exponent Alain Locke wrote, "the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses, and under the very eyes of the professional observers is transforming what has been a perennial problem into the progressive phases of contemporary Negro life."<sup>25</sup>

Out of this climate emerged important platforms for artistic and intellectual expression. *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* was founded in 1923 and lived up to its name, offering a medium to African-American artists and authors who had traditionally been met with silence by mainstream avenues.<sup>26</sup> Wealthy Harlem resident and businessman Casper Holstein donated \$1000 to *Opportunity* for the Holstein Prizes, to be awarded to composers and their winning submissions. Though Price never ventured to Harlem, news of the contest reached her nonetheless; and in 1926, Price was awarded second place in the Holstein competition for a piano suite called *In the Land O' Cotton*.

This suite evokes images of rural antebellum life by evoking plantation music and dances. "At the Cotton Gin" opens the suite with a strongly pentatonic flavour in the key of A-flat, grounding the music in folk influences. Open-fifth chords, provided by the tonic and dominant, reinforce the strong beats of the duple time signature, while quartal harmonies formed by the third and sixth degrees of the scale skip between the downbeats in playful syncopation. A simple melodic theme emerges after two bars, and even when the supporting harmonies become more chromatic, the melody never loses its simplicity. This piece is in ternary form and uses the key of E major to emphasize the contrasting middle section. Herein, a new melodic idea is accompanied by a left-hand pattern that calls to mind the "oom-pah" rhythms that would have been created by slaves using alternating foot taps and claps.

The bittersweet nostalgia is amplified in the second movement, entitled "Dreaming." Price marks the piece *andante con espressione*. As expected, this languid movement consists of a lyrical melody steeped in impressionist-leaning harmonies. The broken chord pattern that persists through much of the left-hand writing is very harp-like in its conception, and Price's use of whole-tone and chromatic colour reinforces the character of this reverie. The third movement, "Song without Words," possesses a hymn-like

quality in its use of chordal homophony and organ-inspired pedal points. It is as though Price, like Burleigh, has arranged a spiritual for piano and solo voice; but in the absence of words, Price leaves her listener to draw meaning from its poignant melody.

*In the Land O' Cotton* closes with the lively "Dance." This piece in rondo form is based on the Juba dance, which evolved as a New World manifestation of the African *Djouba* and the Caribbean *Majumba*.<sup>27</sup> In *Twelve Years a Slave*, Solomon Northup describes the patting actions of the Juba from his first-hand experience on the cotton plantations of Louisiana. He begins by explaining how the dancing would continue through the night and into the next day:

It does not cease with the sound of the fiddle, but in that case they set up a music peculiar to themselves. This is called "patting," accompanied with one of those unmeaning songs, composed rather for its adaptation to a certain tune or measure, than for the purpose of expressing any distinct idea. The patting is performed by striking the hands on the knees, then striking the hands together, then striking the right shoulder with one hand, the left with the other—all the while keeping time with the feet and singing.<sup>28</sup>

Price alludes to the Juba dance with an accompaniment that largely falls on the offbeat and a jaunty pentatonic tune that matches Northup's account of the light-hearted role of the melody. Few first-hand accounts of the Juba exist, but the style survives through derivative forms such as the cakewalk and ragtime; and the connections can certainly be heard in this closing movement.

David Mannes, who judged the 1926 Holstein competition and was an active musician, conductor and educator in New York, observed: "For the second prize I would choose (No. 22), entitled 'In the Land O' Cotton' four pieces for the pianoforte, charming compositions, simply and effectively written, especially the Dance."<sup>29</sup>

Price also achieved second place in the 1927 Holstein competition with a composition called *Memories of Dixie Land*.<sup>30</sup> Around the same time, she had also been attending summer courses at Chicago Musical College. There, she studied composition under Carl Busch and Wesley LaViolette and also enrolled in La Violette's orchestration classes.

Like Still and the Harlem Renaissance, it seemed Price's compositional voice would emerge most fully in the energies of a socio-cultural movement, one that she would not find in Arkansas. Although her submissions to *Opportunity* linked her to the activities in Harlem, Price was to become an esteemed figure in the burgeoning cultural revolution that has come to be known as the Chicago Black Renaissance. It was not until Price moved to Chicago in 1927 that she would bring into more profound alignment a platform for promoting her works, an opportunity for access, mobility, and agency, and the dividends of the time she had spent honing her craft.

### **The Chicago Years (1927–1953)**

Price had met and married a lawyer called Thomas J. Price while teaching in Atlanta. Their family grew upon returning to Arkansas: together they had three children: Tommy, Florence Louise and Edith. Sadly, Tommy died in infancy, and with racial tensions escalating in Arkansas, there was further reason to fear for the lives of the two daughters. The murder of a twelve-year-old local white girl had left many white residents seeking commensurate retribution. The lynching of an African-American man called John Carter, who was suspected of assaulting a white woman and her daughter, was no doubt another catalyst in the move to Chicago.<sup>31</sup> Carter's torturous death was perhaps all the more harrowing to Florence because of its close proximity to Mr. Price's office. And so, in 1927, the Price family joined the Great Migration in a mass exodus that



saw huge numbers of African Americans leave the southern states and head north and west.

Darlene Clark Hine notes that to Chicago came “both old settlers and new migrants, energetically engaged in the challenging work of community building, economic development, political engagement and the production of a new expressive culture giving voice and form to their New Negro, urban/cosmopolitan identities.”<sup>32</sup> Helen Walker-Hill shows how “upon her arrival in Chicago, Price was welcomed into a vital and nurturing community.”<sup>33</sup>

Estelle C. Bonds was a pivotal figure in building a new Chicago community for African Americans. Her home was a cultural hub for artists and intellectuals alike. She was a gifted musician, and her daughter, Margaret Bonds, was instilled with the same passion. The young Bonds later rose to prominence with her own works and performances and came to represent the next wave of African-American women composers in Chicago. Both mother and daughter became cherished friends of Price; and through these friendships, Price's circles grew to include composers such as Will Marion Cook, performers such as Abbie Mitchell, and poets such as Langston Hughes.<sup>34</sup> Her community also extended to organizations such as the R. Nathaniel Dett Club, the Chicago Music Association (CMA) and the Club of Women Organists.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, there were the networks that she would have established during her pursuit of further musical study at the Chicago Musical College, Chicago Teachers College, Chicago University, Central YMCA College, Lewis Institute, and the American Conservatory of Music.<sup>36</sup>

African-American women composers thrived in this cultural climate, and they included the previously mentioned Margaret Bonds. Bonds' compositional output consisted of solo piano pieces, arts songs, and chamber and orchestral works. As a composer, she filled European forms with spiritual melodies, blues harmonies, and jazz rhythms. Irene Britton Smith, a Chicago native, also composed during this time and knew both Price and the Bonds family.

She studied music theory and composition with professor Stella Roberts at the American Conservatory, continued her studies with Vittorio Giannini at Juilliard, and eventually became a student of Nadia Boulanger during her time at Fountainebleau Conservatory in France.<sup>37</sup> Smith's available works are small in number, but reveal neoclassicist interests. There is also an inclination to explore other modernist trends, such as post-tonal techniques. Smith's work makes it evident that there were other women composers during this time and that their activities were not isolated events, but rather very much consistent with the active role that women in both continental and diasporic African and European cultures have always played in music-making.

A more prominent name in the Chicago Black Renaissance (as well as a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance) was Nora Douglas Holt.<sup>38</sup> Holt was a composer, but her output of over two hundred works has been lost, and what remains of her published works is a single piece called *Negro Dance* for solo piano. The composition pays tribute to the Juba. Holt was also a music critic for the *Chicago Defender* in the years leading up to the Chicago Black Renaissance. Her documentation of African-American musical achievement was another example of the various and essential acts of community building. Holt co-founded the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM); the CMA was its first branch. The NANM takes on a greater significance when understood in the context of the restrictions faced by practitioners of African descent. The reinforcement of segregation prevented many black composers entering certain concert halls, let alone having their works programmed, published or promoted on the more mainstream platforms; thus organizations such as the NANM provided a crucial service.

These profiles of Bonds, Smith, and Holt demonstrate the diversity of Chicago's artistic communities and the significance of contributions by African-American women during this era. Women, in fact, occupied positions of leadership: Estelle Bonds had been the

president of the Chicago Treble Clef Club, with Price acting as director. Estelle had also been the president of the CMA, as had Holt and Neota L. McCurdy Dyett. The NANM saw three women presidents in succession between the years of 1930 and 1938: Lillian LeMon, Maude Roberts George, and Camille L. Nickerson. George had also presided over the R. Nathaniel Dett Club. Through the leadership and active involvement of numerous women, the community built artistic platforms. These platforms elevated the musical expression of African-American women composers, and therein provided significant opportunities for the creators.

The patrons of Chicago's artistic communities were Americans of African and European descent. They shared the belief that the advances of black men and women in the arts could dismantle white supremacy; their artistic achievements, they believed, would prove their vast intellectual and emotional capacity and validate the case for true liberation.<sup>39</sup> The Wanamaker family, guided by Rodman Wanamaker, though strongly associated with northern philanthropy and white patronage, centred on empowering suppressed communities, from the homeless in Philadelphia to the dwindling Native American population. Rodman's sympathy for African Americans and his interest in their music spawned the Rodman Wanamaker Music Contests. These provided African-American composers with opportunities for greater recognition and operated in partnership with the NANM.

Price entered the 1932 Rodman Wanamaker Music Contest. This was a national competition offering a total of \$1000 in cash prizes and was on a much grander scale than the Holstein competitions that she had entered a few years earlier. Price placed first in the piano composition category with her Sonata in E Minor and was awarded \$250. She also won the symphonic category and received \$500 for her Symphony No. 1 in E Minor.

Sonata in E Minor, for solo piano, consists of three movements: Andante-Allegro, Andante and Allegro. The sonata (and

the symphony) is as much rooted in classical music as it is inspired by vernacular idioms. This is evidenced by an array of influences, from the Beethovenian thick chordal textures and dotted rhythms that open the first movement to various melodic themes throughout that draw on the stanzaic form and meter of plantation songs. Price's Symphony No. 1 in E Minor comprises four movements: Allegro ma non troppo, Largo, maestoso, *Juba Dance* and Finale. Her use of an extended percussion section that included large and small African drums, wind whistles and cathedral chimes showed that Price was certainly thinking beyond a conventional compositional framework. Price alludes to the sound-world of the spiritual in "Allegro ma non troppo" by means of a resolute-sounding pentatonic theme in E. Sacred overtones seep into the "Largo, maestoso," recalling Price's "Song Without Words" in its solemn religious tone. "Juba Dance" brings the musical sounds of the plantation to life with imitations of fiddles, banjos and "patting" rhythms. The "Finale," though the most conventional of all the movements, also employs folk idioms such as call and response patterns and lively syncopations.

Price's Wanamaker wins were a huge achievement, and they led to another momentous opportunity. Price's symphony had caught the attention of the German composer and conductor Frederick Stock, the music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, who had been looking for appropriate works to perform at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. On June 15, 1933, Stock and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra premiered Price's symphony at the World's Fair; and at that moment, Price became the first African-American woman composer to have a symphonic work performed by a major national orchestra. The symphony performance, underwritten by Maude Roberts George, was a great success. In subsequent months, Price's compositions found their way into the World's Fair Century of Progress Exhibitions and also into events held by the International Congress of Women and the National Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).<sup>40</sup>

Price's successes were tangible evidence of social progress that resonated deeply in black communities. Eileen Southern explains how composers such as Price were essentially "race symbols, whose successes were shared vicariously by the great mass of black Americans that could never hope to attain similar distinction."<sup>41</sup> When black composers and musicians succeeded in a climate that had been conditioned to suppress their achievement, a demonstrable step had been taken towards improved race relations.

However, in the culture of Western classical music, Price was more a representative of her race. Achieving success in a culture that was not only racialized as white but also gendered as male made her into a symbol for those whose identities and experiences were shaped by preconceptions attached to either race or gender—or both. The dual nature of Price's accomplishments was certainly not lost on the African-American composer and author Shirley Graham DuBois who, in 1936, wrote the following: "Spirituals to symphonies in less than fifty years! How could they attempt it? Among her millions of citizens, America can boast of but a few symphonists. . . . And one of these symphonists is a woman! Florence B. Price."<sup>42</sup>

In 1951, Price received a call from Sir John Barbirolli, the music director of the Manchester-based Hallé Orchestra in England. He wanted her to compose an orchestral work based on traditional spirituals. Price completed the score, but could not make the performance due to persistent heart problems. Her name and reputation had reached Europe but she, unfortunately, would not. In 1953, she prepared for a trip to Paris, where she was to receive an award; but her heart problems resurfaced and on June 3, 1953, Price passed away at St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago.

Sixty-four years after her passing, it is fair to say that in the widely accepted accounts of Western music history, Florence Beatrice Price simply does not exist. She does not fit the linear progression perpetuated by this history; and to complicate matters further, the politics of her being and the features of her style warrant an

altogether different kind of framework for understanding—one that does not “Other” or marginalize her experiences and achievements. Price’s legacy lies in accounts that are just now emerging, accounts that reflect the plurality of human expression. A commitment towards more diversified narratives can ensure that our present era affords women composers of the past—albeit posthumously—a much-deserved platform for their musical output and access, mobility, and agency in spheres that once excluded them from opportunity. Steps in this direction cannot change the circumstances experienced by such women, but recognize, at the very least, that for those who lived unapologetically and composed passionately, now is surely their time.

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## FEMINIZING THE STAGE: EARLY LADY ORCHESTRAS AND THEIR MAESTRAS

In the past twenty years, feminist discourses on gender have increasingly begun to interrogate the centrality of the visual domain in defining Western art music, especially in the presentation of the feminine body. Indeed, considering the visual aspect of performance with our lens turned to the past also allows us to discover many new and interesting aspects of the lives of early female pioneers in the music profession. Since women lived in a world that saw them first as the subjects and objects of male domination and fantasy, female performers often had to present themselves according to what was expected of them in order to be accepted in the public sphere. Sherrie Tucker explains that one way of packaging their acts while affirming respectability was to conform to a specific version of “femininity,” that is, a specific femininity born from *The Cult of True Womanhood: middle-upper class, white, domestic, and leisurely*.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I offer a brief history of the rise of “first wave” women as conductors and leaders of their own “lady” ensembles (that is, orchestras from the late nineteenth century up to the Second World War). I illustrate how women negotiated normative ideas of femininity in their performances in order to be accepted by the society they lived in and eventually be received as acceptable female performers. After examining the influence of the Cult of True Womanhood on the first all-lady orchestra devoted to the playing of high art music, the Vienna Lady Orchestra, I briefly trace the history of other lady orchestras in North America, and conclude by showing how by the end of the 1930s, a new generation of conductors was beginning to emerge—women who were less concerned with appearances of normative femininity and more interested in the development of their careers as serious performers.

The Cult of True Womanhood (coined by Barbara Welter in 1966) had its beginnings in Victorian society in Great Britain, and emphasized a certain code of conduct for women in white, middle-upper class families in the nineteenth century: domestic, chaste and leisurely. With the surge of immigration from the British Isles, it is not surprising that the groups who most actively promoted this emblem of conventional femininity in the U.S. and Canada were white Protestants of the middle-upper classes (English, but also Germans), who also formed the ruling class in most North American societies. In fact, “Victorian” came to represent an ideology, a set of values and practices that delineated the sharp distinctions between class and gender, between the public male sphere and the private female sphere, common throughout Britain and in most parts of Europe.

Class played a major role in encouraging or restraining a girl from pursuing a musical career.<sup>2</sup> In upper and middle class societies, the dimension of time served as an essential parameter for delineating power and prestige, demarcating class differences, and maintaining gender hierarchies.<sup>3</sup> Time was “ideologically defined” both by class and gender.<sup>4</sup> Musical activities, as expressions of stationary time, “were considered *by men* appropriate and important” in establishing gender difference and gender hierarchy insofar as they facilitated “keeping women in the place that men had assigned them.”<sup>5</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, leisure had become increasingly connected with domesticity, and domesticity with the upper classes. Kay Dreyfus notes that “the cultivation of music as an (unpaid) accomplishment by the female members of the household became a symbol of leisure and stability for upwardly mobile or upper-class moneyed families.”<sup>6</sup> By filling in “idle time” musical activities played a crucial role in helping women preserve the four central virtues of femininity—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Though the meaning of the term leisure was fluid and changing throughout the centuries, words such as “pleasure,” “ease”

and “solace” were often used to describe this type of experience that especially valorized the nurturing of feminine “accomplishments” in the home.

The need to maintain sharp class distinctions, and the belief that musical activities were antidotes to women’s licentiousness, sensuality and vanity, combined with the ideology that women were intellectually and physically inferior to men, made the music education of middle-upper class women a subject of intense concern and debate among male circles. Moralists were often divided on the utility of music in the proper education of girls, for as musicologist Regula Hohl Trillini notes, “music was regarded as one of God’s greatest gifts as well as an enticement to perdition, an object of fear, desire, and prohibition.”<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, to educate a girl musically meant to invest in her chances of future matrimonial bliss, and a father “risked neither the social shame nor the economic burden of producing an old maid.”<sup>8</sup> Critics, however, also cautioned against the over-education of girls, fearing that too much knowledge would give them a taste of independence and would eventually make them abandon their sanctioned responsibilities. They stressed music as a domestic accomplishment, but only insofar as it was *needed* to encourage domesticity and the maintenance of class structure. For this reason, a musically accomplished woman was expected to perform only in *private* company, among family and friends, where she could remain invisible to society at large. She was also expected to choose works that didn’t require too much study, and present them in a leisurely manner, with a certain degree of detachment.<sup>9</sup>

The general ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood were powerful forces in the formation and maintenance of “respectable” women’s music ensembles all over Europe and North America. In her examination of early European all-lady orchestras and ensembles, German historian Dorothea Kaufmann observes that the first female working musicians were driven primarily by financial

need rather than a need for personal fulfillment. The main venues of popular entertainment consisted of concert saloons and variety theatres frequented by prostitutes, and associated with moral decadence, drunkenness, and masculinity—a situation that helped to “reinforce the bourgeois moral view that these women were curiosities outside the pale of social convention” and relegated them to the class of prostitutes.<sup>10</sup> Touring complicated matters. Without the protection of union regulations, women on the road often found themselves in disadvantaged positions: to work and earn a living they would sometimes be forced to provide sexual favours for their patrons or landlords, but to do so only served to prove the long-held view that music caused “fatal Consequences of Passions” in women, released their unrestrained sexual desires, and harmed men and society in general.<sup>11</sup> Such was the fear that accompanied these musical “prostitutes” that sometimes civil authorities would ban all-women musical groups from entering their cities.<sup>12</sup>

However, Kaufmann’s examination of women in lady orchestras as one step above prostitutes has been critiqued by scholars such as Kay Dreyfus and Margaret Myers, who show that there were also many lady orchestras which were “superior” because of their “personal and musical qualities,” and “were able to sell themselves more or less advantageously.”<sup>13</sup> Dreyfus, in studying early European lady orchestras, notes that among the first female musicians in the public sphere “were members of a low-income” class, but who “did not necessarily belong to the working classes.”<sup>14</sup> These women were either the wives or daughters of middle-class men who supported their music making for its financial contribution to the family. Other women were part of middle-class musical-artist families where music had been cultivated from generation to generation. The stigma attached to the music making of these women was combated and made more “respectable” by the hyper-feminization of the all-lady ensembles they performed in. One such group was the highly influential Vienna Lady Orchestra.

With the exception of the harpist, membership in professional symphony orchestras remained relatively closed in most Western countries where the performance of classical music flourished. Since many bands and orchestras began as military ensembles, the social and ideological foundations of these groups were geared towards the advancement of men. Thus, membership in symphony orchestras was generally open only to men, and female musicians were excluded for financial, physiological and moral reasons. This was even more reinforced in the case of the conductor position, due to its very public status. Responding to this initial exclusion, a group of women in late nineteenth century Vienna began a small chamber ensemble under the direction of a talented female violinist and pianist, Josephine Amann-Weinlich.<sup>15</sup> The Vienna Lady Orchestra was quite possibly the first all-woman symphony orchestra dedicated to the playing of art music to emerge in the nineteenth century. Due to its amateur nature, lack of resources, and its somewhat jumbled collection of instruments consisting of a few strings, a flute, a piano, and an organ, the ensemble's repertoire was limited to light music, marches, and arrangements of dances.<sup>16</sup> In spite of its limitations, it nevertheless publicized its "association with one of the great courts of Europe" as well as its "elegant and highbrow" standing.<sup>17</sup> Josephine Amann-Weinlich led the group much like Haydn or Mozart would have led their own ensembles from the violin, harpsichord, or piano: conducting was intertwined with performing. Gradually, however, as the group expanded its numbers and repertoire, Amann-Weinlich began to take on a more principal role as *maestra* of her ensemble.

Central to being accepted as legitimate performers was assuring a sceptical public not used to seeing so many women on the stage led by another woman that what they were doing was something different from men—something "feminine" and in keeping with "woman's nature." Thus, a typical performance by the ensemble incorporated elements associated with femininity: flowers, white gowns, a change

of clothing at the intermission, and sometimes other garden ornaments. A *New York Times* reporter describes the debut performance of Vienna Lady Orchestra in New York, 1871, as follows:

The spectacle was certainly a novel one. The platform was changed into a bower, and under the roses were sheltered . . . a score of blushing maidens attired in purest white . . . The sight of an organized force of female musicians was, until Monday, never offered in this country.<sup>18</sup>

Rather than masculinizing its performances, the ensemble intentionally hyper-feminized its appearance by staging it in a domestic setting, like a garden with flowers and a bower. As women of the middle and upper classes, their performances were really just reflecting their father's or husband's class and social status and wealth, and in doing so, the women became part of the leisure themselves—just as they served as ornaments to men in the home, as distractions from the workplace, as complements to their beautiful surroundings, so did they serve as ornaments here on the public stage. As Anna-Lise Santella notes, “[t]he orchestra sent a clear message with its visual representation: this was not an orchestra of women aspiring to be men.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, the members asserted that neither were they competing with men, nor were they trying to be men. Rather, they wished to adhere to the standards of conventional femininity on and off the stage.

In her discussion of ladies' European orchestras, Margaret Myers observes that since women lived in a society which saw them first as “the sexual objects of men,” critics often described their performances according to a system of gendered aesthetics, where the hierarchies in society between men and women were mirrored in the concert hall.<sup>20</sup> This is true of this lady orchestra. A music critic in Paris wrote that “Mme Amann-Weinlich is, first of all, entirely mistress of her orchestra,” and he continued:

Composer, performer and directress all at the same time, accompanying on the piano whenever it is necessary . . . As for those around her . . . Some are very pretty, especially the contra-bassists . . . with regard to beauty the first violins take the second place; the flutists are both fine women . . . sparkingly eyes, charming.<sup>21</sup>

How much were the attractive and smiling faces of the musicians responsible for the warm praise they received is difficult to say. This male commentator concentrated on the feminine qualities of the ensemble, as if to approve of their work—although performing publicly was a male activity, they were doing it in a feminine way. In fact, the largely amateur ensemble was not as polished as its publicity had boasted, and although the Parisian reviewer lamented that, “[t]he sonorousness of the string instruments is generally defective . . . the brass instruments exaggerate the ‘forte’,” he added that “[t]hese are the only criticisms we permit ourselves to make.”<sup>22</sup> He quickly glossed over the technical and musical problems of the group by emphasizing instead the physical beauty of its performers. It seems that he was not apt to hand out a stern or “masculine” review on these modest maidens, and left the criticism of their unpolished artistry by the wayside.

Interestingly, because “real talent” was believed to be intrinsic to men, a woman who was especially talented would receive high praise by the process of being “masculinized”—i.e., given male traits. Reviews for Mme. Amann-Weinlich’s conducting present her as both having a feminine soul, and a rational (male) mind. Consider this review from the concert in Paris referred to above:

Mme. Amann-Weinlich . . . represents the perfect type of the grand priestess of the musical world. Her glance is comprehensive, her arm vigorous; she knows all the music by heart—so they say—and conducts from memory. Her intelligent face does not disappear behind the pages of a book of music; and

one follows with the thousand sentiments which agitate her soul before the waves of harmony which unroll themselves at her command to the applauding public.<sup>23</sup>

The critic confers male qualities to the *maestra's* conducting style—vigour, intelligence, and focus—but also highlights the emotional quality of a woman's soul, and proceeds to describe the total effect of the physical beauty of her orchestra. From the critic's viewpoint, a woman could embody some level of musical (male) talent only insofar as the female body and soul remained feminine. In other words, women had to assert their inner "female souls" outwardly through the representation of their bodies. They did so to assure the public that despite their embodiment of what were believed to be male musical traits, such as strength and intelligence, they were still essentially women. This is what Mme. Amann-Weinlich and her women's orchestra did so well, and why they were so well received by audiences in Europe and North America.

The concerts of the Vienna Lady Orchestra, with their strong visual representation of femininity—of a femininity dictated by the Cult of True Womanhood—had a lasting impact on many women in the audience. In the late nineteenth century, various ladies' orchestras in Europe were created under the same name or a variation of it, such as "Viennese Lady Orchestra," or "Vienna Ladies Orchestra."<sup>24</sup> Santella notes that some orchestras had no connections with Vienna. One group, for example, was situated in Berlin, rather than in Vienna, and consisted of women string, flute, and drum players, as well as male clarinetists. A harmonium replaced the lower brass. Many of these "Vienna Ladies' Orchestras" would return to the U.S. in the years to come, spawning many other small chamber ensembles in the German American communities, and later in other sections of society.<sup>25</sup>

The influence of the Vienna Lady Orchestra can be noted in the many ways that "lady orchestras"—whether vaudeville ensembles,



chamber groups, or full-fledged symphony orchestras, white, black, middle-class or working-class—often presented themselves. Illustrations of the first wave of women’s orchestras (ca. 1940) in Europe and North America, regardless of class and race, are strikingly similar in terms of presentation and dress—long evening gowns with many layers of fabric, high necks, long sleeves, usually white, and with some kind of floral decoration. Bows, flowers, sashes and other “girly” jewellery usually accompany these photographs. The influence of this early European lady ensemble can be traced all the way to Phil Spitalny’s “Hour of Charm” orchestra of the 1930s—a striking replica of the Vienna Lady Orchestra, but in the realm of Jazz and popular entertainment—to André Rieu’s Johann Strauss Orchestra—a contemporary ensemble of female string and male woodwind and percussion players that makes use of costumes and props during its performances. Several photographs of the first wave of women’s music groups between 1900–1920s show musicians wearing closely matching dresses akin to uniforms, erasing all elements of individuality in favour of asserting a unified group identity.

The Vienna Lady Orchestra indeed became the model for other “proper” and “acceptable” lady orchestras and groups in Europe and North America. Santella demonstrates that the Vienna Lady Orchestra’s US tour of 1871 initiated a snowball effect of all-women ensembles in North America in the years to come. In 1888, violinist Caroline B. Nichols established The Fadettes Women’s Orchestra of Boston to provide employment opportunities for herself and other female musicians. The ensemble started out with six violinists, playing background music for weddings, receptions, and other musical affairs, including several functions of women’s clubs in Boston. In 1895, seeing that her group had expanded to well over fifty members, Nichols began a serious study of orchestral conducting and developed her group into a larger lady’s orchestra with winds and percussion. In 1898, she signed with Redpath and Southern Bureaus for the Chautauqua-Lyceum circuit, and her

orchestra appeared in first-class vaudeville theatres all over North America. Nichols went on to conduct the orchestra for over thirty years, and trained over six hundred women for professional careers as orchestral musicians.<sup>26</sup>

Like the Vienna Lady Orchestra, The Fadettes followed the conventions of the time and dressed in billowing white Victorian gowns that covered most of their bodies from the neck to the heel. It is interesting that a publicity photo dating from ca. 1920 shows The Fadettes in a very similar setting to the Vienna Lady Orchestra—the backdrop is that of a garden, and there are plants adorning the stage. Like its European counterpart, the orchestra also performed arrangements of light classical music including marches, waltzes and arias from popular operas, as well as incorporated vaudeville elements into their performances. All of this helped to showcase the women as domestic and leisurely, playing with a certain degree of detachment, for recreation's sake, and with no painstaking study. Music, it seemed, was to them a trivial accomplishment and a time-filler to relieve boredom. The reality, however, was quite different.

Another early lady orchestra in this tradition was The Woman's Symphony of Long Beach (the WSLB), California, founded by violin prodigy Eva Anderson in 1925. This was also one of the longest lasting organizations of its kind, and boasted over 100 female musicians. Anderson's background as a vaudeville entertainer with the Redpath Bureau heavily influenced the orchestra. In fact, some critics argued that Anderson "ran her women's orchestra more like a vaudeville show than a classical orchestra."<sup>27</sup> Like other all-women ensembles of its time, to maintain credibility the WSLB had to play music to the highest standards possible, but to gain the attention of their public, the women also had to utilize whatever means necessary. In their case, it was beauty, glamorous costumes, and showmanship. Sometimes, flowers would adorn the hair-dos of the women. Exploiting gender stereotypes, "softening"

appearances, and embodying excessive womanliness were strategies they used to represent their subversion to conventional norms. Emphasizing sexual difference seems to have been an important key to their acceptance as legitimate performers and even their success in the music profession. In fact, so successful were they in showcasing themselves as feminine—modest, leisurely and domestic—entertainers that unlike other all-women ensembles of its time, the WSLB was funded by taxes from the Recreation department of the City of Long Beach—all to the credit of Anderson, who “had a genuine gift for showmanship and a knack for engineering publicity.”<sup>28</sup>

These “lady” groups were such archetypes of true womanhood set to musical sounds that their presentations, their repertoire, matching outfits, and the carefully designed settings they performed in, both articulated their social and historical context and simultaneously enforced it. Through their comportment, players showed how women could not only lead ensembles but play instruments (including ‘manly’ instruments) legitimately in the public sphere, and at the same time retain their femininity. They did so to assure the public that despite their embodiment of what were believed to be male musical traits, such as strength and intelligence, they were still essentially women. Again, this hyper-feminization reassured the critics that women were not there to compete with men, but, as Sherrie Tucker observes, they were there to do something *different*.<sup>29</sup> The emphasis on difference in their presentation was a successful tactic in the early 1900s. It not only allowed these groups to exist, but also to play music, and even make minimal wages. Emphasizing difference was vital for women pioneers in the music profession, as appearance became an important way to transmit images of respectability, especially since women’s music making was now in the public (and therefore male) sphere.

There were many other all-women orchestras prior to 1940 that used dress, decorations and mannerisms as important signifiers of

their domestic roles, despite their appearance on the public stage. However, by the late 1920s, it was becoming evident that women were no longer interested in simply “fitting in”—those early pioneers of the past had already created an acceptable image of women on the stage. A new generation of conductors was beginning to emerge, and these women were less concerned with fitting into the norm and more interested in the development of their careers. The performance of conventional femininity and respectability had been central to women’s acceptance as musicians in the past, but now that women performing on the stage was no longer a taboo, these young musicians of the 1930s were more interested in playing “serious” art music, and looked down on the elements of vaudeville. Some examples include Elena Moneak, founder and conductor of the Chicago Women’s Symphony Orchestra, and Elizabeth Kuyper and her New York American Women’s Symphony Orchestra. In 1926, Ethel Leginska founded Boston Women’s Symphony Orchestra, which she conducted for several years. In the 1930s, Frédérique Petrides gathered a group of talented students to create the Orchestrette Classique of New York, and with the financial assistance of an affluent upper-class lady, Antonia Brico founded the New York Women’s Symphony Orchestra in 1934. And in 1940, Ethel Stark created Canada’s first all-women’s symphony orchestra, the Montreal Women’s Symphony Orchestra. The goal of these conductors was no longer to appease the public, but rather to train other women for careers as “serious” orchestral musicians. Their repertoires no longer consisted of light dance music and marches—markers of leisure and domesticity—but of the standard works played by major symphony orchestras.

The outbreak of World War II brought about a drainage of male talent in many orchestras all across North America. As men joined the war effort, women took on new positions in factories, businesses, and even in symphony orchestras. After the war ended, many women once again found themselves unemployed;

but instead of returning to their segregated groups, they began to lobby for change. A breakthrough finally happened with the inclusion of the screen during auditions. By the late 1960s, segregated women's orchestras were outdated, and yet it was by emphasizing their womanliness that early pioneers had navigated the values of the Cult of True Womanhood and had succeeded, to a large degree, in making women's music making in the public sphere so acceptable. Far from simply being "submissive feminine ladies" without any agency, without individual autonomy to choose new identities, these women used the performance of conventional "femininity" as an emancipating strategy. In doing so, they created possibilities for themselves, and eventually, for others.

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## DAME VERA LYNN: VOICE OF A GENERATION

On March 23, 2012, I had the great pleasure of having a telephone conversation with Dame Vera Lynn. Dame Vera, as she prefers to be called, is now 95 years old and shows no sign of her age save an excellent first-hand memory of the past 70 years. Our conversation centered on her voice and her career, and was in many ways quite provocative. In her autobiographies and in our interview, there is an undercurrent of class struggle: Dame Vera was a working class girl, and her style of singing was considered to be less sophisticated than that of her classically trained peers. She has never had a voice lesson. She has never learned how to read music. She never warmed up before a show. She does not know that she used something now called a “belt voice.” Despite this, and more importantly, because of this, she is worth our attention. Take a moment and listen to one of her many recordings. Unexpectedly and despite all odds, here is a real, finished, polished artist. Her phrasing and her text treatment are delicate, refined and thoughtful. Her instinctive use of her belt mechanism uses perfect technique and is a model for healthy singing. Her signature, her calling card, if you will, is something that cannot be learned: perfect and genuine sincerity of delivery. A natural and astute business woman and a singer with a firm handle on what repertoire suited her style and voice, Dame Vera is a model for young, contemporary singers today.

### **A young performer**

Vera Lynn was born in 1917, in East Ham, London to a working class family. Her mother was a dressmaker, her father did odd jobs, and the whole family were enthusiastic, untrained singers. By the age of seven, she was singing professionally in local clubs,

and had very little playtime or time to herself. She was considered a “descriptive child vocalist.” This meant she was expected to act out the text to her songs in a broad, gesticulating manner, in the British Music Hall tradition. Her voice was distinctive already, and she was billed as “the girl with the different voice.”<sup>1</sup> In her latest autobiography, she says:

[M]y voice was of a rather unorthodox pitch for a little girl . . . As a matter of fact everything we sang at school was pitched too high for me . . . The school disliked my singing voice so much that ironically I was only allowed in the front row of the choir because I opened my mouth nice and wide and it looked good.<sup>2</sup>

She would sing in the large halls of the men’s clubs that provided entertainment. The club chairman and committee of the club would sit in the front row, where they would gauge the audiences’ applause, and decide whether or not the singer could perform an encore. This was key. An encore ensured not only an extra shilling and sixpence, but also a probable future engagement at that club.

Even then, Vera had a clear idea of the repertoire that appealed to her: she was drawn to the uncomplicated ballads. She would haunt the publishing companies in Charing Cross Road to find songs that suited her voice, which was “loud, penetrating, and rather low in pitch for my age.”<sup>3</sup> It was an era when publishers’ offices would give music to singers they knew were performing publicly. She would then take that music to a transposer, who would give her just the treble portion of the piano part. This could then be handed to any of the accompanists in the clubs; all of them could create an entire accompaniment from that, and most could transpose on the spot, as needed. By the age of twelve, Vera was an established singer providing much needed income for her family; in some weekends she would earn in two nights what her father earned in a week. Although she didn’t gain much enjoyment from



singing during those years, she never questioned that she needed to earn as much as possible for her family.

## **Class and popular music**

*My voice and the sort of singing I was doing were much looked down on.*<sup>4</sup>

Class structure in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain was extremely stratified. In 1940, the British author George Orwell wrote: “England is the most class-ridden country under the sun. It is a land of snobbery and privilege, ruled largely by the old and the silly.”<sup>5</sup> The class of the vast majority of Englishmen could be determined by a glance at their clothing, mannerisms and accent. Dame Vera, who spent her singing career trying to minimize her Cockney accent, was a product of the working class, both in her immense personal work ethic and in the style of music she was exposed to as a child. She did not sing in a classical children’s choir, instead she sang in Madame Harris’s Kracker Kabaret Kids, a paid juvenile troupe that specialized in tap, ballet and acrobatics. The club circuit her mother placed her into was not the venue of the upper-class, and the style of singing she had to adopt to be heard over the noisy patrons was almost certainly a penetrating belt voice rather than the cultivated light mechanism used by classical singers. Even her East Ham primary school was disapproving of the type of clubs she provided entertainment in during the evening hours.

Although we now see a clear demarcation between classical and popular song, the gap between the two genres was not very wide in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Schubert and Schumann’s lieder, though later recognized and appreciated by discriminating audiences, existed easily alongside the parlor songs of the day. Beethoven was equally as fluent with symphonic material and folk song arrangements. The shift to a real divergence and demarcation of style happened with the rise of serious opera in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Audiences for

a Wagner opera were expected to sit quietly and applaud only at appropriate moments, while audiences for a Johann Strauss Jr. concert were allowed to converse, socialize and clap during the music, much as audiences behaved during Haydn and Mozart symphonies 100 years earlier. Audiences further diverged as vaudeville and operetta sprang forth in direct response to the seriousness of heavy opera. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century's Tin Pan Alley and Charing Cross publishing companies widened the chasm between cultivated versus vernacular, classical versus popular. Art song of this time, such as the work of Fauré and Wolf, was precisely notated and written for singers and pianists of great skill. In contrast, the popular song composers were aiming for as many sales as possible, with the primary aim being entertainment and accommodation of amateur singers and pianists.

This demarcation was clear in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain, where classical music was finding large new audiences as the War years approached. The BBC had begun their own choral group, called the Wireless Singers (later the BBC Singers) that performed the works of the most renowned composers of the day. They also employed guest conductors such as Sir Edward Elgar, Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg. Operatic soloists like Nellie Melba had enjoyed huge popularity at Covent Garden, and oratorios, performed by singers such as Scottish soprano Isobel Baillie, were drawing large audiences. The BBC Symphony performed frequently, and the classical pianist Dame Myra Hess had begun a series of acclaimed concerts at the National Gallery. Popular musicians existed alongside their classical peers, but there was an underlying current that they were “second class citizens,”<sup>6</sup> despite their popularity and commercial successes.

### **The cultivated belt voice**

Vera Lynn had left school by age 14, and by 15, she was doing a cabaret spot at a local club. She was also about to try out her first

microphone; Dame Vera calls it a pivotal point in her singing career. As a Descriptive Child Vocalist, she had been employing the broad gestures and facial expressions so common to early 20<sup>th</sup> century popular music singers, but her success on the club circuit had led to a successful audition as the singer for a dance band. The performance practice was quite different for a band singer: she had to stand still, use a microphone and nothing but the emotive powers of her voice and face. In describing her experience using a microphone, she says:

It was the microphone itself, however, that was the revelation. I'd sung in some big places without one—none of our cinema gigs with the juvenile troupe, for instance, had ever involved a microphone—and had developed a pretty piercing sort of delivery. I learned very quickly to lower my volume, but I found out at the same time that also meant lowering the pitch: as I reduced the pressure on my voice, so it simply dropped into a lower key.<sup>7</sup>

In order to project her voice to the back of a noisy club without amplification, it seems likely that she had been using a full belt-voice as a child vocalist. With the change of her technique to accommodate a microphone, she seems to have modified her sound into a mixed belt voice you can hear in her early recordings. If she had maintained the same keys she used as a full frontal belt voice singer, the reduced pressure would have forced her into her head voice on the higher pitches. This was not the cohesive sound she wanted, so she had to lower the keys.

The mixed belt voice Dame Vera cultivated with the microphone is a voice of great warmth, color and expression, and it is one she developed independently; she was a completely untrained and intuitive singer. When asked about her vocal training, she laughs and describes her one and only voice lesson, where a teacher, after

hearing her sing, told her disdainfully that she was using a “freak voice,” not her “true voice,” and it was “against (her) principles to train a voice of that type.”<sup>8</sup> Her “freak voice,” was, of course, a belt voice. Her wartime recordings, the time this aborted lesson would have occurred, show a singer with a clear, very beautiful light belt. It is mixed, not a full-frontal belt sound. In our interview, she says this:

I always felt that people with my kind of voice were the poor relations . . . Did it stop me? . . . No, not at all. No, I refused to change my voice, and, because I was doing very well with what I had, and people seemed to like it, and they always recognized me if they heard me on the radio, they would know who I was immediately.<sup>9</sup>

The class distinction that existed between classical and popular singers is quite clear here, both in Dame Vera’s words and in the story she relates of the voice teacher: belt voice singing was low class.

There was a name given to Vera’s type of singing: she was a “crooner.” This was a derogative term used to describe popular singers who sang with dance bands. It was not an uncommon sentiment, and was even conveyed in the press. *The Radio Times* wrote in 1941: “I do not as a rule care for crooners, and have learned after due trial to avoid listening to them.”<sup>10</sup> *The East Ham Echo* wrote “To many people “crooning” has become an insidious word relative to immediate action in switching off the wireless, walking out of the cinema or smashing up the gramophone.”<sup>11</sup>

These sentiments didn’t deter her, or alter the career path she had been on since she was a child. She also didn’t take singing or repertoire advice from anyone, not even the band leaders who employed her: “I wouldn’t allow anyone to tell me how to sing a song. I would just stick to my own way and my own phrasing and my own diction . . . I wouldn’t allow anyone to change my natural way of singing.”<sup>12</sup>

I think it is here we have the true reason for Vera Lynn's success. Dame Vera modestly attests that she was simply lucky to be singing things that resonated with the era in which she was performing. This is one element, but perhaps more important was her quiet determination to maintain her vocal style, controlling her repertoire to things that suited her emotionally and technically. On top of this, she was an instinctive businesswoman, showing good sense and making smart choices. It was common practice then for singers of her caliber to take "plug money" from publishers' houses in exchange for singing one of their tunes on the air. Vera never accepted these offers, as she saw them as ethically dangerous, and a poor long-term career bet: singing songs that didn't suit her voice for a short-term payoff would hurt her in the long run.

By the age of 18, she was working her way up the popular band ladder very quickly, always maintaining control over what she would sing. She began broadcasting with Charlie Kunz, then with the Bert Ambrose band, known as the best dance band in England at the time. She was well liked by these band leaders not for her sense of performance, which was still unsophisticated, or for her musicianship skills. Indeed, she was unable to read music at all. What these musicians respected and hired her for were her impeccable pitch, her diction, and her unique style.<sup>13</sup> This is a sentiment that she brings up again and again; though her voice might sound conventional to our modern ears, at the time, it was considered different, unique. She says:

So, what did I have? A voice which gave the impression of being higher than it actually was; arising from a need to have most songs transposed down into unusual keys, which automatically gave them a "different" sound; a very accurate sense of pitch, which apparently I'd been born with; clear diction, which might have been my way of compensating for what I knew to be a rather cockney speaking voice; and a genuine

respect for simple, sentimental lyrics which I could sing as if I believed in them because I DID believe in them.<sup>14</sup>

Historically, popular singers who preceded Vera Lynn were either full belters, or strictly head voice/crossover artists. Most had come from the same Music Hall tradition as Vera Lynn, and had cultivated a piercing belt voice that would then transition abruptly, if at all, to a lighter mechanism. Her closest contemporary, Gracie Fields, did a great deal of head voice work, as well as some full-frontal belt singing. Ms. Fields's singing in some of her most popular wartime songs, such as "Wish Me Luck as You Wave Me Goodbye," show a voice that is either in full belt voice, or as she sings higher, in a clean head voice with a more classical execution. It's no wonder then that Vera Lynn's voice was considered "different." She intuitively and without training mastered a beautiful, warm, light mixed belt voice. Combined with her instinctively sensitive text treatment and a commitment to delivering a sentimental message without irony, Vera Lynn was an irresistible commercial singer.

## **Singing through the Blitz**

Her genuine love of sentiment was to serve her well as World War II broke out across Europe. She was becoming a true success: she was earning enough money to purchase and learn to drive her own car (highly unusual for women at the time), and she bought a house. She was not quite twenty years old.

Britain declared war on Nazi Germany in September of 1939. This was the same year that Vera Lynn met her husband, Harry Lewis, a clarinet player in Bert Ambrose's band. With most of the band, including Harry, enlisting in the army, she found herself pushed into becoming a solo act for the first time. It was during this period, as she frequented the publishers' houses, that she came

across the song that was to become her signature tune, “We’ll Meet Again.” She says:

Its lyric seemed to me to be a perfect example of what you might call the greetings card song: a very basic human message of the sort that people want to say to each other but find embarrassing actually to put into words. Ordinary English people don’t, on the whole, find it easy to expose their feelings even to those closest to them.<sup>15</sup>

In our conversation, she professes that the lyrics were the first thing she looked at when choosing a song. If the lyric didn’t suit, it didn’t matter how beautiful the melody was, she would not sing the song. Once again, her instinctive way of preserving her distinctive style drove her to success. She fiercely defended her choices of songs, often deemed overly sentimental even at the time. On being called “sincere,” she says this:

On the whole—and it was certainly true in 1941—a popular singer uses other people’s words, and she hasn’t necessarily been through the experiences she’s describing . . . So she has to use her imagination, which is not a matter of sincerity so much as conviction . . . If she can believe in the song, it doesn’t matter how trite it is as a piece of literature: its message will come across.<sup>16</sup>

Vera was performing frequently in and around London during the War Years, driving herself to gigs with a little helmet on the passenger seat of her car in case the Air Raid Siren went off. She and her fellow performers would keep singing, even as bombs dropped nearby, and it became second nature to ignore the deadly assaults. As always, she was actively pursuing repertoire that suited her voice, and it was during this time that she found a Latin

American tune set to English lyrics that appealed to her. The song was called “Yours,” and was to become one of her biggest hits, and an inspiration for the title of her controversial radio program for the troops.

### **Sincerely Yours**

*Dear boys . . . it used to be very easy to answer your letters, because what most of you used to say was, “Please send me your autograph.” But since I started my Sunday broadcasts you’ve written to me very differently—as though you know me well, and as though I’m your friend.*<sup>17</sup>

Vera Lynn’s radio show, a 30-minute spot that would be like a letter to the servicemen, was titled “Sincerely Yours,” a play on her newest hit song. Vera would speak as if she were sitting by her fire at home,<sup>18</sup> and sing the songs she loved best, “Yours,” “We’ll Meet Again,” “The White Cliffs of Dover,” all sentimental, all delivered with her signature honesty. She would also travel to hospitals to visit servicemen’s wives who had just had babies, then deliver the news of their births on the air. Unsurprisingly, the response from the troops was overwhelming. She received thousands of letters a week from soldiers, with the message that her simple songs about better times were giving them moments of great joy.

The BBC, however, felt differently. Minutes from one of their meetings said, succinctly: “‘Sincerely Yours’ deplored, but popularity noted.”<sup>19</sup> She faced a barrage of complaints from MPs and retired military personnel that she was making the troops soft and sentimental; more martial fare would be far more appropriate than the crooning about home that was her stock in trade. The BBC went even further by forming an Anti-Slush committee to regulate what was appropriate to broadcast to troops fighting abroad. This committee was meant to eliminate programming that was “slushy in sentiment,” “insincere performances by female singers,” and



“numbers based on tunes borrowed from the classics.”<sup>20</sup> As Dame Vera says, “some of the critics of my type of singing were very hurtful at the time,”<sup>21</sup> and the unspoken class distinction between her classical peers and a crooner such as herself was completely clear. Despite the unwelcome scrutiny, the British public had spoken: over Bing Crosby, Judy Garland and Deanna Durbin, she was voted the British Expeditionary Force’s favorite singer. Vera Lynn was the Force’s Sweetheart, and a huge commercial success.

After the War, Dame Vera heard from hundreds of people from Occupied countries such as Norway, Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands. They told her stories of how they would huddle over clandestine radios to hear the news from London, then risk their lives to stay tuned and listen to her sing and send messages of home and regular life to British soldiers. Having been told by the Germans that London was in flames and England nearly defeated, her simple radio show gave them hope that things were not as bad as the Germans had reported.

### **Entertaining the troops**

*Sometimes I think that I never quite got over that period of my life. My memories of the wartime years are strongest when I think of Burma.*<sup>22</sup>

In 1944, Vera spent five months visiting the troops in Burma, a trip both harrowing and fulfilling. She travelled with one pink performance dress, her accompanist and a piano that was so jolted about on the back of trucks that its case fell apart. At each performance, soldiers would volunteer to hold it together while they performed. She stayed in grass huts and endured mosquitos, snakes and jackals. She bathed every morning by dumping a bucket of water over her head, and recalls the horror of visiting injured soldiers in a hospital in Dimapur, the smell of gangrene so overpowering she could hardly breathe:

At one point, suddenly sickened by the smell of gangrene, disinfectants and the sense of desolation at the thought of life ebbing away all round me, I was overcome by it all, and sat down on somebody's bed, feeling weary and ill and futile. I asked for a glass of water. "We've no drinking water," someone said gently.<sup>23</sup>

She performed in hospitals, for groups of thousands soldiers without the aid of amplification of any kind, for soldiers returning from jungle missions that first had to be de-loused and cleaned and on improvised stages made from crates. Beetles as large as birds would fly into her hair as she sang, and she wore no make up at all, as it would just pour off with perspiration as she performed. She performed up to three times a day, with jungle travel in between. She says of that time:

I find it difficult to imagine the young woman I was then: twenty-six years old, barely married, never travelled anywhere and suddenly in the middle of the jungle in Burma, a stone's throw from the fighting. It was a strange and wonderful experience that has lived with me for the rest of my life.<sup>24</sup>

## **Post War efforts**

Vera Lynn returned home soon after D-Day, and settled back into a steady routine of performing. She and her husband Harry bought a large, rambling house in the Sussex countryside, and her only daughter, Virginia, was born shortly after the end of the war. She took a short break from performing, then attempted a return to recording. Here she encountered difficulty with the changing times: she was told by the Head of Variety at the BBC that she would have to change her style and her "sob stuff" repertoire if she wished to do any more broadcasting. Dame Vera's response was true to character:

I didn't see why I should have to switch over to completely different material—which wouldn't fit me—at the whim of a man who just happened to be responsible for the hiring and firing of entertainers. He was simply not interested in engaging me and, having rationalized his dislike, he added a final, patronizing insult: he had a programme he could put me into—somebody else's—in which I would be allowed to do “one bright song.” The interview didn't last long after that. As I say, I don't often get annoyed, but in effect I told him what he could do with his one bright number, and walked out.<sup>25</sup>

Her commitment to knowing her own voice and sticking to repertoire that worked for her shows remarkable foresight and bravery. It paid off: Vera left the BBC and started broadcasting with Radio Luxembourg, which led to a regular guest spot on Tallulah Bankhead's American radio program, *The Big Show*. In 1950, she had the biggest hit of her career, a sentimental tune called “Auf Wiederseh'n, Sweetheart,” recorded with soldiers, airmen and sailors singing the chorus. After topping the charts with that song, both in the UK and in the United States, she fielded numerous offers from American broadcasting companies, all of which she turned down. The BBC had finally come around, and signed her for a two-year radio and television contract.

By the late 1960s, she was about to begin a new television series, and, for the first time, found herself adapting her repertoire to suit an audience that had just been introduced to *Star Trek*, David Bowie and the Woodstock music festival:

[T]here had been an improvement and a new type of song had come in, which, while it was quite different from what I had been used to singing, at least had the virtues I was familiar with—strong melodies and lyrics that had some logic to them . . . the metre of the new songs was different, and the

construction of the lyrics less formal: they were much more like prose poems. The types of story the new songs told were different, too, and very varied, and I had to be careful that they were right for me . . . I had to know how far I could “lean out” from my old self.<sup>26</sup>

By 1984, she had recorded and released twenty original albums, three of them charted. She slowly began focusing on charity work rather than her performing career, especially her charities involving breast cancer research and cerebral palsy in children.

Her last public performance was at the age of 78, in 1995, at the Golden Jubilee of VE Day at Hyde Park. At the age of 92 she re-released many of her classic songs in the album: *We'll Meet Again—The Very Best of Vera Lynn*, which reached number one in the UK. She says that she never sings now, as her voice is not the same as it was. Her legacy, however, withstands the test of time: sing repertoire you connect with that suits your voice, work hard and wait for the right opportunities. These are ideals that work for performers of all genres, and continue to be applicable to singers today.

I came from a time that was so much more innocent. I think people looked at me as one of them—an ordinary girl from an ordinary family with a voice that you could recognize. It's that simple.<sup>27</sup>

Known primarily as the voice that defined wartime Britain, Dame Vera has, for many years, languished in our collective memories as a sentimental singer of World War II era ballads. Pleasing, but simple: a singer of uncomplicated melodies with lyrics that resonated with the people of a very specific time and place. She was certainly that singer; she took great care in selecting that repertoire, songs that suited her temperament and her technical skills, but she was also so much more. In an era where classical singers were considered

socially elite, Vera Lynn was a passionate singer of popular music, utilizing a contemporary vocal technique, solely in charge of her repertoire choices, and a young business woman, far ahead of her time.

## NOTES

1. Vera Lynn, *Some Sunny Day: My Autobiography* (London: HarperCollins, 2009), 50.
2. Ibid., 40.
3. Ibid., 35.
4. Ibid.
5. George Orwell, "England Your England," in *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, eds. T. R. Fyvel and George Orwell (London: Secker and Warburg, 1941), section I.
6. Vera Lynn, phone interview with the author, 23 March 2012.
7. Lynn, *Some Sunny Day*, 58.
8. Ibid., 143.
9. Vera Lynn, interview.
10. Vera Lynn, *We'll Meet Again* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989), 127.
11. Lynn, *Some Sunny Day*, 59–60.
12. Vera Lynn, interview.
13. Lynn, *Some Sunny Day*, 90.
14. Ibid., 143.
15. Ibid., 120.
16. Ibid., 140–41.
17. Lynn, *We'll Meet Again*, 128.
18. Lynn, *Some Sunny Day*, 145.
19. Ibid., 147.
20. Ibid., 148.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 193.
23. Ibid., 187.
24. Ibid., 193.
25. Ibid., 232.
26. Ibid., 276.
27. Ibid., 305.

## Part II



## THE POWER OF ADVOCACY IN MUSIC: THE CASE OF VÍTĚZSLAVA KAPRÁLOVÁ

The Kapralova Society celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2018—an opportune time to evaluate the work the society had done over the years in re-defining Kaprálová's place in the history of twentieth-century Czech music. As I look back, those twenty years emerge as a wonderful and eventful ride which culminated in a frenzy of activities during the composer's centenary in 2015, more than a hundred of them in all. Among the most important were a two-day international symposium in Basel dedicated to the composer,<sup>1</sup> a five-hour radio program on Kaprálová produced by BBC Radio 3,<sup>2</sup> and a seven-day Kaprálová Festival in Michigan<sup>3</sup>. None of them would have been possible without laying the groundwork first, as the scores had to be published to make them available to performers, and a large volume of music had to be recorded in order to be broadcast. Much rigorous research went into these activities over the years as well. Indeed, I would argue that a sure sign of artistic vitality is the presence of international research directed toward a particular composer. How many Czech composers, either historical or contemporary, have been the subject of a foreign-language scholarly publication? Yet there have already been three such studies dedicated to Kaprálová: one in English,<sup>4</sup> one in French<sup>5</sup> and the other in German<sup>6</sup>.

Kaprálová's music alone should have been enough to spark the interest of inquisitive minds who like to venture beyond the boundaries of a typically conservative concert repertoire, but there has also been her story. We tend to become fascinated by the lives of artists who die young, ever curious about their artistic promise cut short. Youth and beauty, charisma and talent, each alone would have been a strong attraction, and Kaprálová had them all. The story of her brief but intense life has intrigued and continues to



intrigue fiction writers, playwrights and screenwriters, all of whom want to portray their version of it, to solve the mystery of their elusive Muse.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Kaprálová's music has survived these exploitative efforts unscathed, and continues to live its own life, as it should.

Music is a highly competitive field, and even more so for women. True, some women composers did receive attention and even recognition during their lives, but their names and music usually disappeared from the collective memory relatively soon following their death. Music history is a very conservative discipline, and women composers have virtually had no place in its annals. "There is a habit of thinking that history will prove the greatness of something. Time will tell. But who is doing the telling? Who is keeping, preserving, writing about, and performing the music? History has been his story," wrote American composer Linda Catlin Smith in 1997,<sup>8</sup> and her words still ring true more than twenty years later. Gender bias is as much present in music education today as it was back then; as a result, it continues to impact on performance and broadcast, opera and symphony orchestra programming, even the selection process at many new music festivals.<sup>9</sup> The matter has yet another level, however. Take for example the irrefutable musical giant Johann Sebastian Bach, whose position is indestructible today; yet there was a time when his music would have languished in obscurity were it not for the revival efforts of Felix Mendelssohn;<sup>10</sup> or the case of Verdi who benefitted from Werfel's literary championing. But why advocate for Kaprálová?

As soon as we begin to explore Kaprálová's musical career, we discover a formidable artist whose brief but full-lived creative life was distinguished by many outstanding accomplishments, some of which will be mentioned within the context of her captivating life story that follows. Although she was regarded once as one of the most promising composers of her generation, her music was given less and less attention during the years following her death,

so that it was all but forgotten by the end of the twentieth century. And yet when it began to infiltrate our awareness again in the twenty-first, there was no doubt that her music had withstood the proverbial 'test of time,' proving its relevance to new generations of musicians and music listeners. It should be noted that Kaprálová's legacy is not just a mere torso of 'what could have been,' for her well-balanced catalogue includes about fifty compositions, among which there are many remarkable works in all categories of musical literature: piano, chamber, orchestral and vocal music. In fact, her list of works contains as many compositions as that of her composer father who lived thirty-three years longer. Given that Kaprálová was granted only nine creative years in total, the amount and quality of the work she managed to produce in such a short time is truly astonishing.

Kaprálová's creative development began in the 1930s in Brno, the regional capital of Moravia. She grew up in a cultured middle-class family and its circle of friends, among whom were some of the finest musicians and scholars of the new Czechoslovak Republic. She also benefitted from the musical offerings of her native town, which in many respects measured up to those of the country's capital, Prague. Her talent was recognized relatively early and nurtured by her musician parents. Kaprálová's mother Vítězslava (born Viktorie Uhlířová, 1890–1973) was a qualified voice teacher; her father Václav Kaprál (1889–1947) was a pianist, teacher, choirmaster, music editor and one of the few alumni of Janáček's teaching who emerged as composers (besides Kaprál there were only four: Vilém Petrželka, Osvald Chlubna, Jaroslav Kvapil and Pavel Haas). Kaprál played a particularly important role in his daughter's early musical development, later also becoming her somewhat self-appointed but nevertheless indispensable agent.

While today Kaprál is basically unknown outside the Czech Republic, during his lifetime he was one of the most respected Czech composers of his generation because he was perceived as

having been able to “reconcile Novák’s technical precision” and appreciation for form “with Janáček’s innovation and emotional-ity.”<sup>11</sup> He was also an outstanding teacher who never stopped educating himself throughout his life. Although his own private music school, which he founded in 1911 in Brno, grew in reputation and continued to attract generations of aspiring pianists throughout the twenties and thirties, he still found it necessary to perfect his pianistic skills with Alfred Cortot in Paris in 1924 and 1925. He also honed his craft as a composer under Vítězslav Novák, who was to become in due time also the teacher of choice for his daughter. Throughout the 1920s, Kaprál devoted much of his time to piano performance: together with his friend Ludvík Kundera, they promoted four-hand repertoire and also performed in concert as a two-piano team. In addition to his performing career, Kaprál worked as a lecturer at Brno’s Masaryk University, and, beginning in 1936, also as a tenured teacher at the Brno Conservatory, where he taught composition.

Music was therefore a natural part of Kaprálová’s life since childhood. She was only nine when she started composing, and only twelve when she wrote her *Valse triste*, already an accomplished piece written in a generic romantic style reminiscent of Chopin. It was her mother’s influence, however, that led to Kaprálová’s lifelong passion for song. In vocal music Kaprálová combined her deeply-felt identification with the singing voice with her love of poetry; she not only had a penchant for selecting high-quality poems to set to music but also wrote good poetry herself.<sup>12</sup> Kaprálová’s contribution to the genre is indeed significant, and her songs represent one of the late climaxes in the history of Czech art song.

While Kaprálová’s parents were generally supportive of their daughter’s interest in music, they had rather practical plans for her—she was to take over their family’s private music school. Yet, Kaprálová had her own plans. She had already set her mind on a career in composition and conducting, and it was this double major program that

she chose for her studies at the Brno Conservatory when she enrolled there at the age of fifteen. She was to become the first woman in the history of this institution to graduate from the program.

## **Brno Conservatory**

What kind of institution was the Brno Conservatory? Founded in 1919 as a successor to Janáček's organ school, the conservatory had a wide range of programs: it included an elementary music school, six-year and seven-year programs for various instruments, a senior high school (which included the double major program in composition and conducting that Kaprálová attended), a program for music teachers, and a special five-year program for singers. Until 1928, the institution offered graduate studies in composition and piano interpretation at its own Master school. By the time Kaprálová studied there, however, the master classes were no longer offered, so if she wanted to advance her studies at a university level she had to go to Prague and continue at the Master School associated with the Prague Conservatory (as she later did).

At the Brno Conservatory Kaprálová studied composition with Vilém Petrželka, harmony with Max Koblížek and Jaroslav Kvapil, orchestral conducting with Zdeněk Chalabala (who later moved to Prague on the invitation of Václav Talich to become conductor at the National Theatre), choir conducting with Vilém Steinman, instrumentation with Osvald Chlubna, music history with Gracian Černušák (an esteemed Brno musicologist who wrote many reviews of Kaprálová's music), aesthetics with Ludvík Kundera (who premiered her Piano Concerto of 1935 and *Carillon Variations* of 1938) and piano performance with Anna Holubová.

Kaprálová wrote quite a few compositions during her studies at the conservatory. One of the earliest, from 1931, was a piano suite, which already shows a seriousness of purpose and emotional maturity as well as posing considerable technical challenges for

the performer; its colourful harmonic language at times evokes an almost orchestral sound. Kaprálová must have been aware of this quality when she decided to orchestrate it four years later under the title *Suite en miniature* and assign it a first opus number. Other noteworthy compositions followed: Two Pieces for Violin and Piano, op. 3 (1932); the song-cycles *Dvě písně*, op. 4 (Two Songs, 1932) and *Jiskry z popele*, op. 5 (*Sparks from Ashes*, 1932–1933); and the remarkable song *Leden* (January, 1933) for higher voice and flute, two violins, violoncello and piano, set to a text by Vítězslav Nezval.

Among the finest compositions Kaprálová composed in Brno, however, were the virtuosic two-movement Sonata Appassionata, op. 6 (1933) and the Piano Concerto in D Minor, op. 7 (1934–1935), her graduation work. The composition convincingly displays the versatility of Kaprálová's musical talent, with its typical energy and passion, lyricism and intelligent humour, and spontaneity as well as discipline. Its performance at Kaprálová's graduation concert received highly favourable reviews not only in the regional newspapers but also in major dailies, including the German *Prager Tagblatt*, whose reviewer expressed his disappointment over the conservatory's decision to present only the first movement of Kaprálová's Piano Concerto. In his opinion, it attested to an extraordinary talent: "Es is zu bedauern, daß die Veranstalter nur den ersten Satz des Werkes aufführen liessen, doch auch diese kleine Probe zeigt eine erstaunlich temperamentvolle musikalische Begabung."<sup>13</sup> The concerto's last movement already anticipates the composer's new creative period which was to blossom under the guidance of Vítězslav Novák at the Prague Conservatory.

## Prague Conservatory

In the fall of 1935, Kaprálová was accepted into the Master School of the Prague Conservatory, where she continued her double major studies, this time with the best teachers she could find in her

own country: composition with Dvořák's pupil Vítězslav Novák, and conducting with Václav Talich, chief conductor of the Czech Philharmonic and music director at the National Theatre in Prague. It is worth mentioning that in the academic year 1935–1936, when Kaprálová began her studies in Prague, Talich's master class was opened to only eight first-year students; Novák's class was even more competitive, with just five students.<sup>14</sup>

The Master School and the musical scene of the country's capital provided a stimulating environment for Kaprálová, in which her natural talent, coupled with her strong work ethic, continued to thrive. She joined 'Přítomnost' ('The Present'), a new music society chaired by avant-garde composer Alois Hába, and she regularly participated in Silvestr Hippmann's musical 'Tuesdays' of Umělecká beseda (Artistic Forum), exposing herself to new contemporary music, both Czech and international. The two societies later also became important platforms for premiering Kaprálová's works.

During her studies at the Prague Conservatory Kaprálová composed some of her best-known music, namely the song cycle *Navždy*, op. 12 (*Forever*, 1936–1937) and the art song *Sbohem a šáteček*, op. 14 (*Waving Farewell*, 1937), which she later orchestrated in consultation with Bohuslav Martinů in Paris. Other noteworthy creations of Kaprálová's 'Prague period' include her maliciously witty *Groteskní passacaglia* (*Grotesque Passacaglia*), the splendid String Quartet, op. 8 (1935–1936) and her most popular work for piano solo, *Dubnová preludia*, op. 13 (*April Preludes*, 1937), a work she dedicated to Rudolf Firkušný, who brought it to international attention several years later by his masterly performance in Paris. But one composition in particular brought her public recognition: the *Vojenská symfonieta*, op. 11 (*Military Sinfonietta*, 1936–1937), Kaprálová's graduation work, which was premiered by the Czech Philharmonic under the baton of the composer on November 26, 1937 in Prague. It was with the *sinfonietta* that Kaprálová achieved not only wider recognition at home but also abroad when it was

performed on the opening night of the 16<sup>th</sup> International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) Festival in London on June 17, 1938. The British première of the *sinfonietta*, in which Kaprálová conducted the excellent BBC Orchestra,<sup>15</sup> was shortwaved to the United States, where it was rebroadcast by CBS<sup>16</sup>. According to a reviewer of *Time* magazine, Kaprálová not only fared well in the international competition at the festival, but she also became the star of the opening concert.<sup>17</sup> Among all the reviews mentioning her performance, Kaprálová would probably have cherished most that of her colleague Havergal Brian, who in his festival report for *Musical Opinion* wrote: “The first work played and broadcast at the recent festival, a *Military Sinfonietta* by Miss Vitezslava Kapralova of Czechoslovakia, proved an amazing piece of orchestral writing; it was also of logical and well balanced design.”<sup>18</sup> But it is unlikely that Kaprálová ever read it.

## Paris

Kaprálová travelled to the ISCM festival in London from Paris, where she had lived since October 1937. She arrived in the French capital on a one-year French Government scholarship to advance her musical education at the *Ecole normale de musique*, initially hoping to continue her double major studies: conducting with Charles Munch and composition with Nadia Boulanger. However, her knowledge of French was not good enough to study with Boulanger, so she decided to enrol just in the conducting class, because with Munch she could communicate in German. She also accepted an offer of private consultations with Bohuslav Martinů, who was by then established in France and well-respected both in Paris and in his native Czechoslovakia. Kaprálová knew Martinů from Prague—they first met on April 8, 1937, during his short visit to the capital, where he arrived to discuss with Václav Talich the details of the première of his new opera *Julietta* at the National Theatre.

In Paris, Martinů became first Kaprálová's mentor, later also her friend, and in the end her soulmate. From the very beginning he was generous with his contacts and time, and, besides hours of free consultations,<sup>19</sup> he opened quite a few doors for Kaprálová. Soon after she arrived in Paris, Martinů introduced her to a circle of composers who were members of Triton, a Parisian society for contemporary music whose concerts Kaprálová diligently attended. He also entrusted her with the task of conducting his Concerto for Harpsichord and Small Orchestra on June 2, 1938 in Paris, just two weeks before her well-received ISCM Festival appearance. In addition, he facilitated the publication of one of her compositions, which he admired greatly, the *Variations sur le carillon de l'église St-Etienne-du-Mont*, op. 16 (1938), by La Sirène éditions musicales in Paris.

In the fall of 1938, Martinů spent much time and effort to secure another stipend for Kaprálová so that she could return to France. His anxiety over the rapidly worsening political situation and over his separation from Kaprálová found its way into his Double Concerto for Two String Orchestras, Piano and Timpani, whose score he finished on the very day of the Munich Agreement. During the same time, Kaprálová continued to work back home in Moravia on her Partita for Strings and Piano, op. 20 (1938–1939), in which Martinů, as he wrote in his reminiscence published by editor Pražák in 1949, “interfered more than he would have liked but both (*he and Kaprálová*) looked at it as a learning exercise (*for Kaprálová*).”<sup>20</sup> However, he did not interfere in her *Suita rustica*, op. 19, commissioned by Universal Edition London, which Kaprálová composed in just three weeks during late October and early November of 1938, nor did he interfere in her Concertino for Violin, Clarinet and Orchestra, op. 21 (1939), whose last movement and incomplete orchestration Kaprálová later set aside and did not finish. Thanks to the efforts of Brno musicologists Miloš Štědroň and Leoš Faltus, who completed the orchestration in 2000, there is now a published performing edition of the work.



The Triton concerts and the thought-provoking discussions with Martinů were some of the stimuli of Kaprálová's new environment that accelerated her creative development. During the two years she lived in Paris, she produced almost as much music as she had during the five years in Brno and her two years in Prague. The highlights of her first Parisian period, from October 1937 to May 1938, include the cantata *Ilena*, op. 15, the previously mentioned *Variations sur le carillon*, op. 16, and her delightful (but unfinished) reed trio.

During her second Parisian period, from January 1939 to May 1940, Kaprálová became even more productive. Soon after her return to Paris in January 1939, she composed two pieces of chamber music honouring the memory of Czech writer Karel Čapek, whose passing on Christmas Day of 1938 was mourned by the nation: the *Elegy* for violin and piano, and the melodrama *Karlu Čapkovi* (*To Karel Čapek*) for reciter, violin and piano on a text by Vítězslav Nezval. On March 15, 1939, German soldiers marched into the streets of Prague. Devastated by the occupation of her homeland, Kaprálová sought solace in her music. The result was Concertino for Violin, Clarinet and Orchestra, op. 21, which reflects much of the composer's mental state during the worst period of her life. She scribbled 'Job 30:26' on the score, a telling reference to a passage from the Book of Job: "Yet when I hoped for good, evil came; when I looked for light, then came darkness." With its bold ideas and modern musical language, the concertino was to be Kaprálová's last major work; only two more high points were to follow: the song cycle *Zpíváno do dálky*, op. 22 (*Sung into the Distance*, 1939) and the *Deux ritournelles pour violoncelle et piano*, op. 25 (1940), her last composition.

The German occupation of Czechoslovakia changed Kaprálová's life literally overnight. As returning home was not an option, she now faced the arduous task of earning her own living. She no longer received financial aid from home (as financial transactions

were subjected to new, strict rules), nor her stipend. During the final year of her life she spent much of her precious time on small commissions in an effort to support herself. One of them was the lively *Prélude de Noël* (1939), an orchestral miniature that Kaprálová composed for a Christmas program of the Paris PTT Radio. Throughout the spring of 1939, she tried to obtain a scholarship to study at the Juilliard School so that she could relocate to the United States (in the company of Martinů). Nothing came of the plan, however, and by the end of that summer, she depended entirely on the assistance of several of her friends and a few benefactors.

Lacking regular income, Kaprálová joined the household of her young artist friends who found themselves in a similar position and decided to pool their resources to get through hard times. One of these friends was her future husband Jiří Mucha. She also joined the efforts of the Czech community in Paris that organized activities for and around the newly-formed Czechoslovak Army. Soon she became heavily involved, from founding a choir and writing reviews for the exile weekly *La Cause Tchécoslovaque* to composing music for the radio, the stage (she collaborated with Martinů on stage music for a theatre project directed by Karel Brušák) and even the screen (most possibly a commission facilitated by Kaprálová's friend, film actor and director Hugo Haas).

In the final months of her life, Kaprálová also resumed her studies at the Ecole normale, adding to her already busy schedule. In April 1940, less than two months before her death, she married Jiří Mucha. In early May, she exhibited the first symptoms of her terminal illness. Since Paris was threatened by German invasion, she was evacuated on May 20, 1940 by Mucha to Montpellier, near his military base in Béziers. By then Kaprálová was already seriously ill, and, following several weeks of suffering, she succumbed to her illness on June 16, 1940.<sup>21</sup>

## Founding of the Kapralova Society

My personal discovery of Kaprálová began in 1997, when I encountered her name in a Martinů monograph. I was truly intrigued by the mention and immediately became curious about her music—how did it sound? Was it similar to that of Bohuslav Martinů, or did she find her own voice? Commercial releases of Kaprálová's music were no longer available by then, so I had to do a bit of research. Luckily for me the Brno Studio of Czech Radio kept several recordings of her music in its archives. I still remember the moment when I first listened to a tape that was mailed to me from Brno and how impressed I was by the sophistication of that music. Soon afterwards I took the tape to a small independent label, Studio Matouš, hoping that its owner and his musician brother would listen to it and hear what I heard—music that is bold and fresh, tough in fibre, both passionate and tender, emanating youthful energy, and abounding with ideas and humour: this was music of a remarkable, well-rounded musical personality. To their credit they did, and together we started raising funds so that they could release a first compact disc entirely dedicated to Kaprálová. The Studio Matouš release was just one of the long series of Kaprálová releases that followed at regular intervals, many of them initiated and financially assisted by the Kapralova Society which I founded soon after, in 1998, in Toronto.

Helping to release recorded music was only one of the efforts of the Kapralova Society. Simultaneously we focused on making this music available in print. The timeline became tighter as time progressed, for some of the autographs were already fading in Brno's Moravian Museum, but we were fortunate to collaborate with several publishers who acted more or less promptly—and today, thanks to them and the Kapralova Society's assistance, and often with its substantial financial support, all of the Kaprálová scores are in print and available to performers.

From the very beginning, the society also actively supported Kaprálová research with the aim of laying the groundwork for solid scholarship. The *Kapralova Society Journal*,<sup>22</sup> which to date has reached 20 volumes, has played an important role in this process, as did our website, created in 1998. A true milestone, however, was the first English-language book on the composer, published in 2011 in the United States.<sup>23</sup> Some of the finest Kaprálová scholars contributed to this collective monograph, and it was gratifying to see it shortlisted for the Award of the F. X. Šalda Foundation,<sup>24</sup> which nominated the book in the category of outstanding editorial efforts in music history and criticism. The publication immediately generated more interest in the composer, thanks to its accessible language and wide distribution to college libraries, and it even opened the door to research in other languages. In 2015, a first French-language monograph on the composer was published in Paris, followed two years later by a German-language collection of research papers on Kaprálová, printed in Zürich.<sup>25</sup> Between 2015 and 2020, the Kapralova Society published a multi-volume anthology of Kaprálová's correspondence, hoping to encourage a more in-depth research on the composer in her homeland.<sup>26</sup>

Also, very early on we promoted Kaprálová's music through radio programming, in partnership with national and public broadcasters. We collaborated with quite a few over the years, beginning with a fifty-minute documentary on the composer, produced by CBC Radio 2 in 2001,<sup>27</sup> and ending with a five-hour program for the *Composer of the Week* series, produced by BBC Radio 3<sup>28</sup>. Here Kaprálová joined a distinguished group of Czech composers who have been featured by this radio series over the years since 1943, when the program was first aired.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, as one of the Kaprálová scholars, Judith Mabary, wisely observed, "establishing an enviable reputation in the classical tradition continues to be hard won. There is much against which to

compete.”<sup>30</sup> And so, despite the progress we have made, I am fully aware that our advocacy work is not finished, that we must continue to draw attention to Kaprálová’s music in live performances, new recordings by professional musicians and in scholarly research, and invest considerable energy in bringing her music to a wider sphere of potential supporters, both in her native country and abroad. The future of Kaprálová’s music depends on it.

## NOTES

1. The symposium ‘Vítězslava Kaprálová in ihrer und unserer Zeit – zu Einfluss und Rezeption ihres Schaffens’ was organized by the ForumMusik-Diversität (Forum for Diversity in Music) in Basel, Switzerland on 27–28 November 2015.
2. *Composer of the Week: Vítězslava Kaprálová*, 12–16 October 2015, BBC Radio 3. Episodes: I: ‘The young artist’; II: ‘Brno’; III: ‘Prague’; IV: ‘Paris’; V: ‘The war years.’ Host: Donald Macleod. Guest: Karla Hartl. Producer: Johannah Smith (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2015). Listen to an abbreviated version of the program online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p035d3gh>, accessed 26 June 2021.
3. The festival, which presented almost all Kaprálová compositions and included six world premieres and eight North American premieres, took place on 20–27 September 2015 in Britton Recital Hall at the University of Michigan School of Music and in Hill Auditorium in downtown Ann Arbor, Michigan.
4. Karla Hartl and Erik Entwistle, eds, *The Kaprálová Companion* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).
5. Nicolas Dorny, *Vítězslava Kaprálová. Portrait musical et amoureux* (Paris: Le Jardin d’Essai, 2015).
6. Christine Fischer, ed., *Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915–1940). Zeitbilder, Lebensbilder, Klangbilder* (Zurich: Chronos Verlag, 2017).
7. These included novels by Jiří Mucha and Jindřich Uher, a screenplay by Natalia Borodin, a radio play by Hana Roguljič, and a stage play by Kateřina Tučková.
8. Linda Catlin Smith, “Composing Identity: What is a woman composer?,” 16 October 1997, available online at <http://www.catlinsmith.com/>

- writings/composing-identity-what-is-a-woman-composer/, accessed 25 June 2021.
9. See the new music festival gender data by New Music Report, available online at <https://www.newmusic.report>, accessed 25 June 2021, and the gender and symphony orchestra programming data by Donne [http://www.drama-musica.com/stories/2019\\_2020\\_orchestra\\_seasons.html](http://www.drama-musica.com/stories/2019_2020_orchestra_seasons.html), accessed 25 June 2021.
  10. Library of Congress, “Felix Mendelssohn: Reviving the Works of J.S. Bach,” available online at <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200156436/>, accessed 25 June 2021.
  11. Jindřiška Bártová, “Kaprálová in the Context of Czech music,” in Hartl and Entwistle, *The Kaprálová Companion*, 17.
  12. Kaprálová’s early song cycle from 1931 and the orchestral song *Smutný večer* [*Sad Evening*], from 1936, are believed to be set to her own texts.
  13. W. H. (Walter Hasenclever), “Konzerte,” *Prager Tagblatt*, 20 June 1935, 6.
  14. *Výroční zpráva Pražské konservatoře za školní rok 1935/36* [*The 1935/36 Annual Report of the Prague Conservatory*], 64.
  15. Today’s BBC Symphony Orchestra.
  16. Columbia Broadcasting System.
  17. “International Egg Rolling,” in *Time* magazine, 27 June 1938. Unsigned review. Available online at <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,759885,00.html>, accessed 25 June 2021.
  18. Havergal Brian, “The Nature of Modern Music. Contemporary Music Festival,” *Musical Opinion* 62 (1938): 858.
  19. Kaprálová’s parents bartered the lessons for a summer vacation at their family retreat in the village of Tři Studně.
  20. Přemysl Pražák, ed., *Vítězslava Kaprálová: Studie a vzpomínky* [*Vítězslava Kaprálová: Studies and Memories*] (Prague: HMUB, 1949), 127.
  21. The latest research into possible causes of Kaprálová’s death suggests that she may have died of typhoid fever. I am indebted to Dr. Philip Mackowiak, professor emeritus of University of Maryland School of Medicine, for making this educated guess as to the etiology of Kaprálová’s fatal illness, which is based on Kaprálová’s original medical record from Saint-Eloi clinic in Montpellier, France. See also Karla Hartl, *Kauza Kaprálová* [*The Kaprálová Case*] (Prague: Nakladatelství Klíč, 2021).
  22. *Kapralova Society Journal. A journal of women in music*, available for free download at [kapralova.org/JOURNAL.htm](http://kapralova.org/JOURNAL.htm), accessed 25 June 2021.

23. See note 4 for details.
24. This is a private foundation associated with Charles University in Prague.
25. For details of the two publications, see notes 5 and 6.
26. The following four volumes of the five-volume collection of correspondence have been made available to the public: Vítězslava Kaprálová: *Dopisy domů* [*Letters Home*], ed. Karla Hartl (Toronto: The Kapralova Society, 2015); Vítězslava Kaprálová: *Dopisy láskám* [*Letters to Loves*], ed. Karla Hartl (Toronto: The Kapralova Society, 2016); Vítězslava Kaprálová: *Dopisy přátelům* [*Letters to Friends*], ed. Karla Hartl (Toronto: The Kapralova Society, 2017); and Karla Hartl, *Vítězslava Kaprálová: Tematický katalog skladeb a korespondence s nakladateli* [*Thematic Catalogue of the Works and Correspondence with Publishers*] (Toronto–Prague: The Kapralova Society & Czech Radio, 2021).
27. *In performance: Vítězslava Kaprálová*, 3 May 2001, CBC Radio 2. Host: Eric Friesen. Guests: Karla Hartl and Antonín Kubálek. Producer: Denise Ball (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2001).
28. See note 2 for details.
29. In 2015, the list of Czech composers included Jan Dismas Zelenka, Jan Ladislav Dussek, Johann Baptist Vaňhal, Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák, Zdeněk Fibich, Vítězslav Novák, Josef Suk, Leoš Janáček and Bohuslav Martinů.
30. Judith Mabary, “Vítězslava Kaprálová and the Benefits of Advocacy,” *Kapralova Society Journal* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 1–6.

## KAPRÁLOVÁ AND THE MUSES: UNDERSTANDING THE QUALIFIED COMPOSER

We cannot deny that Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915–1940) was a female Czech composer, but qualifiers may be more harmful than helpful. Mike Beckerman has noted in his studies of Czech music<sup>1</sup> that qualifiers are a way to define what something is not. Kaprálová was neither male, nor western European—she was an outsider. Ideally, we would examine her works from some kind of level playing field free from qualifiers, but none exists in the writing of history. The qualifiers attached to Kaprálová will naturally direct us towards specific strands of inquiry and compel us to highlight certain qualities over others as we examine her oeuvre. A closer unqualified look reveals a richer picture. What began as an inquiry into the nature of musical muses and Kaprálová's part in it, became an exploration of a composer who lay outside paradigms often used to understand the phenomenon of a woman composer.

Part and parcel of Kaprálová studies is the mention of her affair with Bohuslav Martinů, a Czech composer twenty-five years her senior. It is well documented that she served as a muse for the composer. But before examining this relationship, I will provide a short *précis* of how muses have served their creators in Western history.

Since antiquity, the female Muse has served as an important helpmate to creative artists of all kinds. In early Greek culture, the muses were erotic and beautiful beings who induced an irrational state in men, a condition that favoured creative acts. In the *Ion* by Plato, Socrates remarked, “a poet is a delicate thing, winged and sacred, and unable to create until he becomes inspired and frenzied, his mind no longer in him; as long as he keeps his hold on that, no man can compose or chant prophecy.”<sup>2</sup> In another Platonic dialogue Socrates classified this process as “possession and madness



from the Muses, seizing a tender and untrodden soul, arousing it and exciting it to a Bacchic frenzy toward both odes and other poetry.”<sup>3</sup> Plato warned that men be wary of the Muse’s powers which created a state of possession and thereby might interfere with matters of state: “If you admit the Muse of sweet pleasure, whether in lyrics or epics, pleasure and pain will rule as monarchs in your city, instead of the law and that rational principle which is always and by all thought to be best.”<sup>4</sup>

In the Christian Middle Ages, classical muses were conceived of as passive sources of inspiration rather than forces that overtook their artists. However, the erotic imagery of the Muse and the link between sexual desire and poetic genius would remain an important aspect of her character well into the Renaissance. Whether exalted by troubadours or Elizabethan poets, the Muse was a beautiful font of creative potential. The spiritual aspect of the Muse surfaced at this time and served as an alternate means of interpreting her power. The cult of the Virgin Mary or Dante’s adoration of Beatrice is proof of the notion that the Muse was a means to bring the artist closer to God. Much later, with the advent of Romanticism, a third aspect of the Muse emerged: her inherent connection to nature, her natural creative force, and her ability to help man reconnect with the lost paradise.

Through history, the Muse has assumed several guises: as an erotic or sexual being, as a spiritual channel to God, or as a vital force of the natural world. Whether configured as pure Virgin or as Mother Earth, all muses share certain characteristics. All are objectified by the artist; captured images for his use. She is the ideal, unattainable woman, the beloved; he the subject and lover. He becomes whole by incorporating her feminine creative powers into his own sensibilities.

There are several examples of composer-muse relationships, such as Peter Tchaikovsky’s correspondence with the widow Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck, affording the composer a confidante from

a safe distance. As he battled self-doubt and anthropophobia and struggled to compose his Fourth Symphony, her presence was of great importance to him. Other composers, such as Alban Berg, captured the beloved through symbols and hidden messages in musical compositions. For example, in the famous D-Minor Interlude at the end of his opera *Wozzeck*, Berg attributes the inspiration to the powers of his Muse, his future wife Helene. “The Interlude at the end I owe to you and you alone. You really composed it, I just wrote it down.”<sup>5</sup> It is not surprising that references to his beloved Helene as Muse virtually disappear once the couple married. Part of the allure of the Muse is that she is unattainable and holds illusory powers. Marriage affords neither. Later, Berg found another muse, Hanna Fuchs-Robettin, and references to her are embedded in his *Lyric Suite*. Because her presence is encoded, Berg prepared her a specially annotated copy that detailed where she and Berg symbolically appear in the work.

There are at least three Czech composers whose works are indebted to muses: Zdeněk Fibich (1850–1900), Leoš Janáček (1854–1928), and, as already mentioned in connection to Kaprálová, Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959). Fibich treated his muse Anežka Schulzová as the subject of his most notorious composition, *Nálady, Dojmy a Upomínky* (*Moods, Impressions, and Remembrances*). This work, a cycle of 376 small works for piano, represents musical reminiscences of their love affair, while some are explicit descriptions of the beloved’s body. Janáček’s relationship with Kamila Stösslová famously served as the impetus for four operas (*Káťa Kabanová*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *The Makropulos Affair*, and *From the House of the Dead*) as well as several chamber works. Janáček, 37 years her senior, was fascinated by Kamila’s vibrant personality. Theirs was a bizarre relationship; highly erotic yet apparently unsummated, intimate and painfully honest, yet with few personal contacts. While he penned several hundred letters to her, she replied infrequently. This condition, strikingly similar to Franz Kafka’s

correspondence with Felice Bauer, made for the perfect artist-muse relationship. Before his acquaintance with Bauer, Kafka had yet to produce any major piece of work. She served as an inspiration, as helpmate, and as an idealized creative force for him all the while at the safe distance in Berlin, away from Kafka's Prague.

Unlike Kafka or Janáček, Bohuslav Martinů's relationship with his muse Kaprálová was not generally conducted from a distance; rather the two composers were collaborators who spent a great deal of time in one another's company. The professional and personal relationship between the two began in Paris in the fall of 1937. It is known that they had a romantic affair and for a time, Martinů even considered leaving his wife for Kaprálová. Mucha would later pen an autobiographical novel that included details of his wife's affair with the composer.<sup>6</sup>

There are obvious ways in which the relationship between Martinů and Kaprálová suggests that she served as Martinů's Muse. For example, even short spans of physical distance spurred creativity. It was during their first significant separation from September to December 1938 that Martinů penned numerous letters to her. In these, he refers to her by pet names, such as "little song," or "fairy-tale." In one letter he expresses his longing for her: ". . . tell me, tell, my Little Song, would you like to be always with me? Keep telling me that, will you? . . . I have been expecting you for a long time, my Little Fairytale, I knew that one day you would appear in my life and bring me strength and happiness."<sup>7</sup>

Capturing one's Muse through letter writing was a common means to identify the female figure as a source of idealized love and creativity. In this sense, Martinů saw Kaprálová as a muse. When the two were apart during two instances in 1938, Martinů composed two works associated with his beloved: the Double Concerto and the String Quartet no. 5 which carried extra-musical meaning for the composer and features musical symbols associated with Kaprálová throughout all four movements.

To date, the most compelling evidence of Kaprálová's role as Muse to Martinů comes in the way in which the composer reused motives and harmonic gestures from his opera *Julietta*, a surreal love story where the two lovers Julietta and Michel may only be together by existing in a dream world without real memories. Unlike most musical works inspired by muses, *Julietta* was written before the composer had even met Kaprálová, some nine months before their initial meeting, but for both of them the opera would have held symbolic significance. In the opera, *Julietta* is unreal and therefore cannot be Michel's in any true sense, much as the creator sees the muses as unattainable, uncanny figures.

As stated previously, muses are imaginary figures that the artist is drawn to but can never have. *Julietta's* story is a strong parallel for both the real affair between the two and what could have been if Martinů had not been married and/or if the couple were not in exile under extraordinary circumstances. Erik Entwistle has made a compelling case for Martinů's use of the so-called *Julietta* three-note motive and accompanying chords as a symbol of an idealized Kaprálová, and has examined their continued use in Martinů's works following her death.<sup>8</sup> Works by Martinů that prominently feature musical symbols associated with his beloved include his *Tre Ricercari*, Concerto Grosso, Fantasy and Toccata, and *Memorial to Lidice*. Musical symbolism is used more pervasively and more insistently after Kaprálová's death, no doubt in part due to the grief suffered by Martinů, but also because of the palpable absence of his beloved—with her physical absence she could truly become a muse.

Unlike that of Felice Bauer and Franz Kafka, or Leoš Janáček and Kamila Stösslová, Martinů and Kaprálová's relationship was atypical of the roles of creator and muse. Musical muses are almost always non-musicians and often intellectual inferiors whose image, rather than abilities, inspire. Kaprálová was an accomplished and recognized composer in her own right: at the 1938 Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) in London,

where she was slated with Béla Bartók, Benjamin Britten, Aaron Copland, Karl A. Hartmann, Paul Hindemith, Ernst Křenek, Olivier Messiaen, and Anton Webern, she presented her *Military Sinfonietta* as the festival opening work. And rather than simply serving as a passive source of inspiration, Kaprálová collaborated with Martinů on works such as the *Tre Ricercare*, and her opinions and compositional skills in writing what he called “our little ricercars” were clearly respected: “And do you know that our little ricercars were a great success in Venice, . . . and rightly so, as it was my Little Song who was helping me, and it would be indeed sad if two such talents would not be able to put together something substantial.”<sup>9</sup> The pair was also to collaborate to produce music for a series of folk plays, although the project never came to fruition due to the War.<sup>10</sup>

While Kaprálová clearly inspired Martinů, it is more difficult to characterize his role as a source of inspiration for her because the notion of female creativity is paradoxical by definition. In Antiquity, Plato’s mind–body split led to other gendered dualisms such as culture–nature and the mental–physical, and thus categorically exempted woman from any creative role save childbearing. Rousseau was unconvinced of woman’s creative potential and Renoir considered women artists as “merely ridiculous.”<sup>11</sup> However it was defined and argued, creativity remained a male privilege, though not one that ignored the female entirely. By the 19th century, a true creator was a biological male with a feminine psyche, a condition succinctly defined by French critic Edmond de Goncourt: “There are no women of genius; the women of genius are men.”<sup>12</sup> The female creator, on the other hand, was faced by a double-bounded notion of creativity that “denies or misrepresents either her sexuality or her artistry.”<sup>13</sup> She could not be both woman and creator and when she attempted to do so, she either became androgynous, a monster, or an artistic fraud. As more female authors and visual artists gained prominence in the 19th century, all creative

acts, whether high art or mass culture, were coded respectively as male and female domains (consider, for example, the 19th century novel). All great art remained male, even though the creative act itself is feminine in nature: "Creativity is a complex and subtle form of power, one that involves sensitivity, patience, and other qualities that seem feminine."<sup>14</sup>

Despite the ambivalence faced by the female creator and obstacles placed in her way, many succeeded; in the early twentieth century Kaprálová was one such artist. Rather than allude to a distant, unattainable love, her musical inspiration was a dialogue of sorts between herself and Martinů. She shared a kind of compositional reciprocity with him by using musical symbols from his opera *Julietta* in her own works, perhaps as a way to openly acknowledge her love affair with her mentor and collaborator. For example, she used *Julietta* materials in a re-setting of a love song that Martinů had set himself, as well as in other works such as her *Partita* and the *Variations sur le carillon de l'église St-Etienne-du-Mont*.

What, then, was Martinů's relationship to her creative work? The literature configures his role as mentor and lover, but not as Muse. This is hardly surprising since men by definition cannot be muses and female creators rarely identify muses as inspirational vehicles. It is clear though that when life events separated the two, whether it was through physical separation or with the separation brought by Kaprálová's marriage, she alluded to Martinů's unseen presence in her compositions. For example, five days following her marriage to Mucha she penned a song *Dopis* (Letter) based on a text by Petr Kříčka. The text is an epistle by a man who mourns a lost relationship. On the back of the French version of the song, Kaprálová wrote the following paraphrase of the original Czech text:

A young man responds to his love. You said "no." So be it! It was fate that separated us; I regretted it but I can see that you

are happy and that's why I am also happy. I don't want to judge who's to blame, whose loss is bigger. Just the other day, there were two paths; today, there is only one. Perhaps, you will return one day. For the Lord God is a great artist and no one knows his plans.<sup>15</sup>

Paradoxically, Kaprálová served as Muse, as valued collaborator, and at times relied on a male helpmate/Muse in several of her works. There are other ways in which she lies outside of the norm of what we expect of women composers; she wrote in large scale genres and in an abstract modernist language, and enjoyed notable successes early in her career. How was she afforded such opportunities? Traditional scholarship might be tempted to assign her successes to pure luck (passing fame), since women composers are secondary figures at best in standard music histories. In fact, there were several factors that led the way to her early critical acclaim and allowed her to develop her natural talent and skills as a composer and conductor. These include the role of mentors and supporters and advocates, her access to the academy and other institutions, her decision to move to Paris to study with Martinů and Charles Munch, and her large body of works in small-scale genres, though she was equally productive in large-scale orchestral works.

Support and advocacy by her father, by Martinů, and others gave her opportunities and opened doors for her. Martinů noted such support in a letter to his biographer Miloš Šafránek, referring to his desire to take her to America with him: "She is very energetic and has been lucky, someone influential in the music circles has been helping her."<sup>16</sup> Research about the development of female creative endeavours in the arts notes the importance of mentors and familial support in successful creative women. Often fathers become a model of ideals, and parental encouragement is key; although in Kaprálová's career that was not the case at first—Václav Kaprál had reservations about her choice of career as a conductor and

composer, but he was to become one of his daughter's staunchest supporters.

Kaprálová's decision to leave Czechoslovakia to study in Paris may well have encouraged her as a young composer, since that city was a vibrant locale that encouraged exchanges between art, literature, and music and one that was open to expatriates both male and female, a place that embraced American jazz, and a city in the midst of the heady days of early modernism. Kaprálová would have found an atmosphere that would allow female creators to express themselves.

Unlike the case of many female composers, her reception history is one that does not privilege genres historically coded as feminine. It is possible, however, that by choosing to write also piano works and art songs, some of the most performed works of her oeuvre, Kaprálová may have helped to ensure that her music would be favourably received. From the 19th to the early 20th century, these two genres were seen as the most appropriate musical media for female expression. Women composers' concentration on them arose in part from the Romantic emphasis on amateur piano studies for young women and the growth of amateur singing. Genres are hierarchical; novels, for example, associated with females were of lesser substance than biographies, associated with male authors. Such critiques were not limited to females who chose these "lesser" genres. Composers such as Chopin who wrote in these genres were often considered as feminine or as outsiders.<sup>17</sup>

Female composers were often compelled by the practicalities of the music industry in their choice of genre rather than by aesthetic preferences. Sonata form and large scale genres were the epitome of true creativity, and those that were absolute music were even better. Small genres, on the other hand, were more likely to see a live performance, albeit in intimate rather than concert settings; thus a female composer who wanted to hear her works in her lifetime was wise to concentrate on such *gemütliche* genres. When



Kaprálová was urged by an early love and fellow student in Brno Ota Vach to abandon high art for that which would appeal to the masses, Kaprálová was guided by principles rather than practicalities: “Even if the times worked against me, if everything tried to stop me, nothing will uproot me and steer me away from my path. I don’t care for your ‘utility ends,’ they are not for me and I would not consider them, as no truly committed musician would. Such a musician is too idealistic—almost simple—but courageous.”<sup>18</sup> In the end, such principles served her well. Many of her most successful and critically acclaimed works are large scale genres such as *Military Sinfonietta*, Partita for piano and strings, and the *Suita rustica*.

Unlike music by many twentieth century female composers, much of Kaprálová’s music is abstract and thoroughly modern. Modernism associated with female creators often relied on the discourse of Romantic notions of genius, thereby excluding the modernist female composer from contemporary musical developments. Had Kaprálová relied on earlier stylistic approaches, she would have reinforced the notion that she was a female composer. Despite that fact that she chose to focus on large scale works, highly abstracted musical language, and eschewed consistent musical and topical references to her homeland, her works received high praise and serious recognition both at home and abroad; in this way she is outside the paradigms commonly used to understand the female composer.

Even if we could somehow negate her gender and choice of genre in our estimation of her works and remove her from the category of Other, Kaprálová would remain an Outsider to the Western art tradition. She remained, and will always remain, a Czech composer, despite her international training and cosmopolitan musical style, just as her compatriots Dvořák and Janáček. Despite any musical style that Czech composers will adopt, they will always be referred to as “Czech” composers, as if one must qualify their successes.

Such a qualifier directs our attention at what works should represent that composer and what works might be included, if at all, in standard histories of Western music. In order for Dvořák to gain favor with Viennese audiences, for example, he wrote folk-like Slavonic Dances; he would eventually enjoy wider success as a composer but would always remain a Czech composer. Embracing the folk style paid off, since Brahms was able to arrange for an influential connection with the music publisher Simrock.

As with her compatriots, Kaprálová's works that refer to political events and social climate of her country were well received because they support the image of a "Czech" composer; however, these would not become typical of her musical output. She did not achieve recognition as a Czech composer by writing music that fit the image of the peasant composer (à la Dvořák). Her many successes, however, do not trump her modifiers. For example, when she appeared as composer and conductor at the 16th annual ISCM Festival in London, the correspondent for *Time* magazine referred to her as a "good looking Czechoslovakian girl," while the other composers (all male) were given no physical description by the review's author.<sup>19</sup> A review of the same performance by a London newspaper described her as a "little girl conductor."<sup>20</sup> While her works and her conducting were well-praised, they were as qualified as those by a young attractive woman, an anomaly to be noted.

The field of musicology still privileges the male and the Western European despite significant advances in the last thirty years; history textbooks have come a long way, but there is still much road to cover. For the female composer, the challenges remain as well. Seven decades after Kaprálová's debut as conductor with her *Military Sinfonietta* the qualifier is still a significant part of the music of the female composer and her works. The flimsiness of the claim that the gender barrier has been broken in classical music is shown nowhere better than at a concert of pieces composed by women. Even now at the start of the 21st century, decades after the dawn of the

contemporary feminist movement saw a rise in women's orchestra's and gender-based musicological studies, and long after the inclusion of a single piece by a female composer on a concert program has ceased to be remarkable, a whole concert of music by women, performed by women, still feels unusual. It remains an exception to the classical music norm, which is a concert of music written entirely by men.

As historians, we should step back in an effort to understand how qualifiers (woman, Czech, Jewish, African American) have shaped the creation and reception of works by composers so qualified. Such a critical assessment allows us to better understand the challenges that composers such as Kaprálová faced as they made their way in the world. Despite her short career, Kaprálová achieved a great deal; one cannot deny the quality and size of her compositional output, her highly favourable reception at home and abroad, her ability to successfully master an abstract modernist compositional style in large and small scale genres. These are facts that compel us to conclude with the unqualified reality: Vítězslava Kaprálová was a remarkable composer whose work defies those paradigms traditionally used to understand the female composer, and her work and life deserve further scholarly attention.

## NOTES

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5. Alban Berg, *Alban Berg: Letters to His Wife*, ed. and trans. Bernard Grun (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), 19.

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8. Erik Entwistle, “‘To je Julietta’: Martinů, Kaprálová and Musical Symbolism,” *Kapralova Society Newsletter* 2 (Fall 2004): 1–15.
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15. Hartl, “Chronology,” 152n90.
16. Bohuslav Martinů to Miloš Šafránek, 18 March 1939, quoted in Hartl, “Chronology,” 148n66.
17. Jeffrey Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 30–61.
18. Vítězslava Kaprálová to Ota Vach, n.d., quoted in Hartl, “Chronology,” 142n17.
19. “International Egg Rolling,” review of Kaprálová’s performance of *Military Sinfonietta*, *Time* magazine, 27 June 1938, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,759885,00.html>, accessed 12 July 2021.
20. Quoted in Bohuslav Martinů, “Mezinárodní festival v Londýně,” *Lidové noviny*, 28 June 1938, 7.

**SAD EVENING, GREAT DISCOVERY:  
BRINGING TO LIGHT A NEW SONG  
BY VÍTĚZSLAVA KAPRÁLOVÁ**

I will never forget the time I first came across the music of Vítězslava Kaprálová. While researching Czech vocal repertoire for my book *Singing in Czech* in 1999, I received permission to play through stacks of music at an upright piano in the store Opus Musicum, which used to be on Chopinova Street in Prague. I was delighted to find many gems by Petrželka, Novák (two of Kaprálová's teachers, it turned out), Suk, and various others, but when I came across the song "Navždy" by Kaprálová I was stunned. The atmosphere of the opening . . . the unusual harmonic vocabulary . . . the passion of the middle section—the music was so exquisite and the personality of the composer so strong that I had to discover more about her. Soon after, I found my way to the Kapralova Society and discovered that its founder, Karla Hartl, had laid the groundwork for me just a year before, and so I was on my way to embracing the many achievements of this largely forgotten composer. For Kaprálová's songs, some milestones to follow, after much research and well-received performances (some of them world premieres), were the recording with Supraphon of most of the songs with soprano Dana Burešová and myself in 2003, the beautiful edition of the songs with Amos Editio in 2005, a proliferation of dissertations and articles on the songs as others responded to this phenomenal composer, and—more and more performances of this exquisite music by students and professionals, worldwide. In 2009, another beautiful recording of the *Navždy* cycle appeared on the Centaur label in the album *Women of Firsts* with tenor Daniel Weeks and pianist Naomi Oliphant.<sup>1</sup>

With this chapter, we celebrate another milestone, the publishing of a previously unknown song by Kaprálová, *Smutný večer*/*Sad*

*Evening*, with Amos Editio in 2011, and the world-premiere recording of the song by soprano Hélène Lindqvist and Philipp Vogler in 2013, at *The Art Song Project*. This song was able to materialize from virtual obscurity thanks to the team effort of Kaprálova Society founder and head Karla Hartl, Amos Editio chief music editor Věroslav Němec, myself, and my undergraduate assistant at the University of Michigan, Nicholas Skorina.

I received an exciting email from Karla Hartl in 2006, in which she asked me to look at what appeared to be a previously unknown orchestral song by Kaprálová in the Moravian Museum archives in Brno. Until Karla Hartl discovered it in April of 2006, this song had somehow been overlooked, not only by us, but also by Kaprálová's Czech biographers and other sources, as it is mentioned nowhere. Karla Hartl's persistent research led her to a list of works that was attached to a CV prepared by Kaprálová at the request of Alois Hába for the 1938 ISCM Festival brochure. (Kaprálová conducted her *Military Sinfonietta* with the BBC Orchestra at the ISCM Festival in London in 1938.) The list was sent to Hába in Kaprálová's letter dated February 3, 1938.<sup>2</sup> The list does not specifically mention the song *Smutný večer*, but it does mention a collection of unnamed orchestral songs. It is possible that the collection was a project that Kaprálová later abandoned, since it is never mentioned again in any of her correspondence and lists of works that followed.<sup>3</sup> That proposed orchestral song collection would most certainly have included Kaprálová's 1938 orchestral version of *Sbohem a šáteček* / *Waving Farewell*, most likely *Smutný večer*, and possibly the version of *Navždy* / *Forever* for orchestra and voice-band (chorus of reciters—in Kaprálová's work two sections of reciters). This *Navždy* was unfinished<sup>4</sup> and, except for Čarek's poetry, is completely different from the 1937 version of "Navždy" for voice and piano.

There are no dates on the manuscripts of *Smutný večer*, but somewhere around 1936 seems about right.<sup>5</sup> The orchestral

writing is masterful, and the quasi-impressionistic writing brings with it subtle echoes of Kaprálová's wonderfully decadent song *Leden* for small chamber ensemble from 1933; of the passionate, romantic outbursts of the early "Jitro" from 1932; but also of the intricate writing of later songs from the cycle *Jablko s klína*, from 1934–36, the *Navždy* songs from 1936–37, and *Sbohem a šáteček* from 1937.

Much time was spent in searching for the author of the song's poetry, as Kaprálová did not indicate a poet for the text. University of Michigan Professor of Czech Language and Literature Zdeňka Brodská, a native of Brno, found the poem to be reminiscent of the poetry of Karel Hlaváček (1874–1898) or Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic (1871–1951), two leading proponents of a late nineteenth-century "decadent" style of Czech poetry. These and countless other sources came to naught, however. At first it was thought that the poem was too masterful to have been written by Kaprálová herself, but in the end, this possibility is feasible.<sup>6</sup>

The poem and my translation follow:

### **Smutný večer**

Studený večer hle v tichu zní dávný pláč.  
Vzpomínka bloudí po čele jak tajuplný zaklínač.  
Je večer hořkých slz,  
bez slunce v čase těžce zkvětí  
mé slzy studená oblaka přší  
mé slzy na přání jež nikdo neproněsl.  
V šeru vždy klíčí semena touhy, touhy,  
však květů nezná,  
květů nezná tichý samotář.  
Z krystalu ticha  
přede spánek úzkostí lehce bledý.

## Sad Evening

Cold evening,  
there in the silence is the sound of weeping from long ago.  
Memory wanders across my forehead  
like an otherworldly conjurer.  
It is an evening of bitter tears,  
without the sun it blossomed in time uneasily,  
cold gray clouds are raining my tears,  
my tears on wishes which no one proclaimed.  
In twilight, there always sprout seeds of desire, of desire;  
however, he doesn't know about blossoms,  
doesn't know about blossoms, he, the quiet recluse.  
From the crystal of silence spins a sleep,  
lightly pale from anxiety.

What exactly did Karla Hartl discover in the Moravian Museum in April of 2006? Under the number A29.725 there are three manuscripts:

- (A) A two-page piano sketch of 43 measures, the complete song.
- (B) An orchestral draft, with 31 complete measures, plus three more measures with sporadic scoring. The orchestration calls for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, celesta, cymbal, and strings.
- (C) A final orchestral score with 24 complete measures.

The manuscript of the final orchestral score is beautifully prepared in ink in Kaprálová's best handwriting, and the last measure goes to the end of the page, ending at the words *mé slzy na*. However, this is only the twenty-fourth measure, and even the orchestral draft has seven more complete measures. Thus, it was clear to me that Kaprálová had most likely completed all the orchestration,



but we were missing some pages. If we add the additional seven measures from the orchestral draft, then we are missing thirteen final measures. (Because Kaprálová added one opening measure to the orchestra manuscripts, then the total number of measures for the song is 44.) The question is, then, “can the final thirteen measures of orchestration be reconstructed from the complete piano sketch?” This was, in fact, my immediate goal, to reconstruct the missing orchestration.

If the final (incomplete) orchestral score represents some of Kaprálová’s most beautiful notation, the piano sketch is an example of her worst. It is, after all, a sketch, with crossed-out notes and scribbles, and, unfortunately, the final measures are the most difficult to decipher. Also, unlike the first version of *Sbohem a šáteček*, clearly written for voice and piano, and only later orchestrated, this sketch of *Smutný večer* reveals that Kaprálová meant for the song to be orchestrated from the beginning. There is one staff for the voice and mostly three staves for the piano, with quite a few parts of it unplayable for a pianist as written. Even calling it a “piano sketch,” then, is not quite correct. In order to reconstruct the missing orchestration, however, those final measures had to be deciphered, and one key to making sense of those final measures in the sketch lay in accounting for *all* of the notes in the sketch. Comparing certain questionable pitches and accidentals to known markings among the various manuscripts would hopefully allow me to decipher the ending.

At this point, I was fortunate to be granted the assistance of an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, Nicholas Skorina, as part of the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP). Armed with the latest version of Finale, his job has been to transcribe the orchestral score into printed notation, and to create orchestral parts. His work and observations have been extremely helpful. This project is still ongoing, and will finish with my reconstructed orchestration.<sup>7</sup> If *Smutný večer* were in a simple ABA form, then the

completion of the orchestration would not be so challenging, but the form is through-composed. Still, the mood and texture at the end of the song are reminiscent of the opening, so that a return to some of the orchestration at the beginning of the song seems to be called for. In the “piano” sketch, Kaprálová wrote *Celeste!* over the final measure, indicating she planned to use the celesta here, which had first entered at m. 10. However, since the context is completely different from the other places in the orchestral score where Kaprálová used the celesta, and the remaining orchestration is missing, it is impossible to conjecture what notes she might have written for the instrument in this measure. My goal is to come as close as possible to the orchestral colors that the end of the song evokes, based on the rest of the song and on other orchestral works by Kaprálová, as well as the song *Leden*, a chamber piece with its own evocative colors and decadent poetry. The plan is to have this ready for its world premiere by sometime in 2015, the centenary of Kaprálová’s birth, followed by a publication of the orchestral score.<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime, a playable piano transcription needed to be made. As with orchestral songs by Ravel, Elgar, and many others, most performances would be with piano, and even if the song were to be sung with orchestra, singers would need to first learn the song with the piano. For this, my many hours of poring over Kaprálová’s song manuscripts at the Moravian Museum, learning to decipher her shorthand, prepared me for the final measures of the “piano” sketch, my most difficult challenge. In this respect, Karla Hartl’s discovery of the *Smutný večer* manuscript came at exactly the right time, so that after much deliberation, I feel that I was finally successful in deciphering the music in Kaprálová’s sketch. Also, my years of experience playing orchestral transcriptions came to the fore as I worked to create a playable piano transcription that reflected Kaprálová’s beautiful orchestration. (Except for the final measures, instruments are marked in Amos Editio’s score, so that performers may be aware of the orchestral colors.)

After completing the piano transcription, the next step was to perform the work for a receptive audience. The occasion presented itself just as Amos Editio was in the final stages of preparing the piece for publication. The event was a song recital in the Weidner Center, Fort Howard Hall, at the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay, on November 19, 2011. The recital itself served as the opening of a larger event, the 11<sup>th</sup> International Czech & Slovak Voice Competition, held in Green Bay and Montreal every two years. The world premiere of *Smutný večer* with piano was with soprano Kimberly Haynes and myself. As with the body of Kaprálová's works, the audience's response was enthusiastic.

In *Smutný večer*, Kaprálová simply marked *Canto* for the voice part in her manuscripts. The range is:



It is suited, then, for soprano, tenor, and some mezzos, like the majority of Kaprálová's songs. *Smutný večer* exhibits all the hallmarks of Kaprálová's style. The composer captures the decadent, sad, vague, dream-like, yearning, and anxious qualities of the poem with a palette rich in orchestral colors and a beautifully declaimed vocal line that follows the natural inflection and emotions of the words. After a unique atmospheric opening section, the middle of the song expands to a more tonal, more Romantic section, and the song returns to a wistful, sad, and tonally vague section reminiscent of the beginning. This is similar to the ABA songs "Navždy," "Píseň tvé nepřítomnosti," and others, but in *Smutný večer* the writing is thicker, more layered, never quite leaving its anguished feeling, and *Smutný večer* does not fall into a simple ABA pattern.

Kaprálová preferred to write through-composed songs unified by simple motives that are tied to key words, with the ABA structure being her next favorite form. *Smutný večer* is similar to *Sbohem a šáteček* in that both are through-composed, both are unified by

simple motives (the interval of a second for both), and both bring back material and feelings from the opening, giving the song an overall feeling of ABA'. The motivic use of a second is further evidence that Kaprálová may have been planning at one time a collection of orchestral songs, with all of them sharing this motive. *Smutný večer* establishes the motive of a falling second with the clarinet's opening trill (shown at sounding pitch, as in the piano transcription):



**Example 1** *Smutný večer*, opening measure

The opening of *Sbohem a šáteček* also establishes the motive of a falling second, immediately joined by the voice with the word *sbohem*/farewell:

**Example 2** *Sbohem a šáteček*, opening measure

Seconds—and, thus, *farewells*—permeate *Sbohem a šáteček*. Even the opening of the unfinished voice-band version of *Navždy* opens with a second in the flute, this one ascending, but then descending, after a small drum sets up a rhythmic pattern:<sup>9</sup>

Andante tranquillo

**Example 3** Voice-band version of *Navždy*, opening measures

The use of seconds in all three songs, however, is very unique to each song, so that there is no real sharing of material. If Kaprálová had originally planned for *Smutný večer*, *Sbohem a šáteček*, and the voice-band version of *Navždy* to be performed together, each song would have also featured its own special orchestral instrument, each a part of the same family—the celesta in *Smutný večer*, the piano in *Sbohem a šáteček*, and the harp in *Navždy*.<sup>10</sup>

Seconds, mostly falling, occur throughout *Smutný večer*. Right after the opening clarinet trill, we hear them in the horns:

**Example 4** *Smutný večer*, opening measures with horn chords

Horns have traditionally symbolized distance, and here, combined with the unstable harmony and suspended trill, they depict the

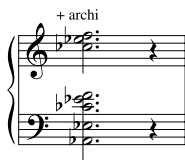
*sound of weeping from long ago*, sung soon after. The top line of the horns even vaguely recalls the twelfth-century Czech *Wenceslaus Chorale*, namely the four notes (in the example below C-B-G-A) on King Wenceslaus' name, *Václav*, the great Czech king who was murdered by his brother. It has been quoted in the works of other Czech composers, such as Pavel Haas:<sup>11</sup>



#### **Example 5** *Wenceslaus Chorale*

The intervals are not exact, but still suggestive, and certainly add to the feeling of vague, distant, sad memories from somewhere deep in one's being. The horns also utilize the interval of a third, also a recurring motive throughout *Smutný večer*, although not as pervasive as the interval of a second.<sup>12</sup> We soon associate all the opening seconds with weeping, as the first time that seconds appear in the vocal line is in the first sentence with the words *v tichu zní dávný pláč*, literally *in silence there sounds a long-ago weeping*. The celesta also enters for the first time with these words, playing the same chords of the horns.

As heard in the opening chords of the horns, harmonies throughout the song tend to be based on the pervasive seconds and thirds, as well. An especially striking chord occurs on the second phrase of the text with the words *Vzpomínka bloudí po čele jak tajuplný zaklínač* / *Memory wanders across my forehead like an otherworldly conjurer*, where the chord repeats on the downbeat of every measure while the vocal line abounds in falling seconds, and the violins and violas enter for the first time:



**Example 6** *Smutný večer*, “Memory” chord

This exact chord returns at the very end of the song, on the words *úzkostí* / *with anxiety* and *bledý* / *pale*, in the sentence *Z krystalu ti-cha přede spánek úzkostí lehce bledý* / *From the crystal of silence spins a sleep, lightly pale from anxiety*, and forms the very last sounds of the song with the voice, suggesting that the memory, bound up with long-ago weeping, is fading with the singer into sleep.<sup>13</sup>

Before the third sentence of the poem, there is a short or- chestral interlude rich in seconds. A solo violin enters with its own weeping seconds just before the singer sings *It is an evening of bitter tears*. The celesta, with its weeping chords, enters again to underscore the text *cold gray clouds are raining my tears*, along with a viola solo. The word *slzy* / *tears* expands to the interval of a third, and the voice line soars to a G at the word *řání* / *wishes*. Along with the text’s description of *blossoming* and *sprouting*, the full orchestra blossoms into an impassioned Romantic passage rem- iniscent of the early song “Jitro,” beautifully melodic while still based on seconds and thirds. When the voice enters, its intervals expand, as if trying to break free of the sad and weeping seconds and thirds. A new height is reached, a high A-sharp, on the word *touhy* / *of desire* (so, from *wishes* on a G to *desire* on an A-sharp). At *tichý samotář* / *the quiet recluse*, however, the seconds from the earlier solo violin passage return, along with thirds, and the voice part moves back mostly to its sad intervals of seconds and thirds, as the opening horn chords return at the words *from the crystal of silence*. After the voice descends to its lowest note of the whole song, on the word *úzkostí* / *with anxiety*, it ascends and floats away

to a C-flat above the final chord of distant memories, mentioned above (Example 6). The final chord, however, has one extra note, a B-flat, clashing with the C-flat of the voice and the chord. For Kaprálová, this note can be no accident—the B-flat, enharmonically an A-sharp, is an echo of the voice's high A-sharp, the pitch expressing *touhy / of desires*. Desire now melds with vague memories and a sleep grown pale with anxiety.

There is one instrument that I could not account for in the piano transcription—a cymbal. It plays from the very first measure, *pianissimo*, on the third beat, and continues to play on the third beat of every measure through m. 9, just before the celesta enters for the first time. Surely the cymbal, and the celesta, must be part of the *crystal of silence* mentioned in the last sentence, and surely the cymbal will find a place near the end of the song in the reconstructed orchestration, along with the celesta that Kaprálová noted in the last measure in her first draft.

With the encouragement and financial assistance of the Kapralova Society, and under the direction of editor Věroslav Němec, Amos Editio in Prague published their beautiful edition of *Smutný večer* with my piano transcription in early December 2011.<sup>14</sup> The song is about 3½ minutes long.

Pairing *Smutný večer* with *Sbohem a šáteček*, even with just piano, would make for very interesting programming! No matter the programming, however, *Smutný večer* has proven to be yet another beautiful gem to stand alongside Kaprálová's other outstanding works, and alongside all the great works of the art song repertoire. I look forward to performing it again, to hearing many others perform it, and to hearing the orchestral version, all in the coming years.

## NOTES

1. The Supraphon CD *Vítězslava Kaprálová: Songs* can be ordered as a download in MP3 format at [supraphonline.cz](http://supraphonline.cz), where there is also the option of



purchasing the informative original CD booklet (FLAC + MP3); or as an MP3 download at *amazon.com*, *amazon.co.uk*, etc. The *Women of Firsts* album is on the Centaur label, available through *centaurrecords.com* and *prestomusic.com*.

2. Vítězslava Kaprálová to Alois Hába, 3 February 1938. First printed in Tereza Horlitz, “Vítězslava Kaprálová jako Hábova žačka?,” *Opus musicum* 38, no. 4 (2006): 12.
3. Karla Hartl, “Vítězslava Kaprálová: An Annotated Catalog of Works,” in Karla Hartl and Erik Entwistle, eds., *The Kaprálová Companion* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 183n7.
4. Twenty-one measures are completed (through “někdo odejde a zas se”), and although about forty-one more measures are sketched, they cannot be reconstructed.
5. Hartl, “An Annotated Catalog of Works,” 166.
6. Kaprálová had not only a great taste for poetry but she also wrote poetry herself. One of her poems, *Podzimní* (from 1932) is somewhat similar in mood and style to that of *Sad Evening*.
7. (At the time this article was selected for the present anthology, the reconstructed orchestral version, published by Czech Radio, had become available from Schott at *en.schott-music.com*. A world premiere CD recording by Nicholas Phan and University of Michigan Symphony Orchestra conducted by Kenneth Kiesler was released by Naxos on 25 June 2021.—eds.)
8. (The score was published in 2016 by the Czech Radio Music Publishing House in Prague—eds.)
9. The interval of a descending second also found its way into the now well-known piano and voice version of “Navždy,” although it does not begin with that interval.
10. *Sbohem a šáteček* also adds two trumpets and timpani to its orchestration; the voice-band *Navždy* would have omitted violas and double bass.
11. See Haas’s *Four Songs on Chinese Poetry* in which the four-note motive occurs throughout the cycle, from the very first measure.
12. See the thirds in the voice-band version of *Navždy*, Example 3.
13. Compare this chord with the chord in the opening measure of *Sbohem a šáteček*, Example 2, with its fifth in the bass and the intervals of a second and third at the top of the chord.

14. Libraries can order it through the distributor Harrassowitz. Individuals can order from the publisher, *amoseditio.cz*. A world premiere MP3 recording of the piano version of the song appeared in 2013 with the wonderful performance by soprano Hélène Lindqvist and pianist Philipp Vogler. It can be listened to at *theartsongproject.com*.

## KAPRÁLOVÁ'S TRIO FOR OBOE, CLARINET AND BASSOON

During the period of December 18, 1937 through February 1938, Vítězslava Kaprálová worked on a trio for oboe, clarinet, and bassoon. The trio remained a fragment, however, as Kaprálová left behind only a fair copy of the two-page autograph score. In 2011, the work was reconstructed by Stéphane Egeling and given its world premiere by Trio Lézard on June 22, 2011, at the *Mitte Europa* (Central Europe) Festival at the Děčín Castle in the Czech Republic. The reconstructed score was published in October 2011 by Egge Verlag in Coblenz am Rhein, Germany.

### Paris 1937

From May 25 to November 25, 1937, a world fair was held in Paris whose theme was quite special: the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*. The message of the fair was clear: art and modern technology, beauty and function, do not oppose but rather complement each other. The exposition, with threateningly counterbalanced pavilions of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, and Picasso's painting 'Guernica' (Spain had been immersed in civil war since 1936), dominated the city on the Seine in 1937. Modern technology was also taking an ever larger place in classical music: the introduction of new condenser microphones allowed more precision in recording, which could be heard worldwide over the radio (the transatlantic broadcasts were a true sensation) or on shellac 78s in the living room at home, where one could listen to them as often as one wished. While today we take the omnipresence of music recording for granted, in the 1930s the improved standard was an unprecedented revelation.

## **Fernand Oubradous (1903–1986)**

In 1937, Paris also saw an unusual artistic personality receive a ‘Grand Prix du Disque’: Fernand Oubradous was awarded the prize for his benchmark recording of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major; not as a conductor, however, but as a bassoonist. This was remarkable in many respects: for one, the prize was awarded to a wind player; and, furthermore, not to a flautist but a bassoon player! *The bassoon*—hardly a prima donna of the woodwind family!

The thirty-four-year-old Oubradous was also a child of his time. He realized that he could utilize the new media of radio and condenser microphone for himself, and in 1937 alone he recorded over eighty shellac 78s. Thus, the ‘Grand Prix du Disque’ for the Mozart Bassoon Concerto was given to him in recognition of this absolutely extraordinary achievement as well.

Most of Oubradous’s 1937 recordings were made with his “Trio d’anches de Paris” (Paris Reed Trio), which he formed in 1927. Here Oubradous again set new standards. Virtually out of nowhere, he created a new genre of chamber music: a trio of reed instruments comprising oboe, clarinet, and bassoon. Before 1927, works for such an ensemble did exist but it was entirely Oubradous’s accomplishment to turn an *ad hoc* genre, in which musicians would group together for a single piece, into a standard instrumental formation, something Haydn did before him with the string quartet and Reicha with the wind quintet.

### **Two reed trios before 1927**

Fernand Oubradous was the son (and successor) of the principal bassoonist of the Paris Opera, and was raised in the milieu of the Société des Instruments à Vent, founded by flutist Paul Taffanel in 1879. The Société was dedicated to two goals: the advancement

of French music and a rebirth of wind chamber music after the example of the 18<sup>th</sup> century *Harmoniemusik*. The most prominent woodwind players of Parisian orchestras as well as professors from the Paris Conservatory played in the Société des Instruments à Vent. It was still quite active in the 1920s, and encouraged many composers to compose works for woodwind instruments.

Such was the origin of the most important work for reed trio (a term coined by Fernand Oubradous): the Trio for Oboe, Clarinet, and Bassoon by Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887–1959), composed in 1921 in Rio de Janeiro. This work, heavily influenced by the music of Stravinsky and making enormous demands on technical ability, had its world premiere at a concert organized by Jean Wiéner at the Salle des Agriculteurs in Paris on April 9, 1924. The musicians were no less than Louis Gaudard (oboe), Gaston Hamelin (clarinet), and Gustave Dhérin, the famous bassoonist of the premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps* (and a colleague of Oubradous Sr.). All were members of the Société. Fernand Oubradous attended the concert. A further work, which inspired Oubradous to establish his own genre of the reed trio, was the Divertissement for Oboe, Clarinet, and Bassoon, by Erwin Schulhoff. Schulhoff was so impressed by the abilities of the members of the Société after his visit to Paris that he composed a number of works for woodwinds, including his ‘Divertissement’ of 1927. Today, this trio, like that of Villa-Lobos, is a standard work of the reed trio literature (the French title ‘Divertissement’ can be understood as an homage to the Société).

### **Trio d’anches de Paris**

From 1927 until 1944, Oubradous (who after the Second World War rarely played the bassoon, having become a well-known conductor and pedagogue instead) formed many reed trios in the chamber music classes that had been especially established for him at the Conservatory, thus contributing to the rapid dissemination of the

genre across Europe. His own Trio d'anches de Paris, which he founded with oboist Myrtil Morel and clarinetist Pierre Lefebvre, is historically significant, since nearly all of the works composed for reed trio in the 1930s and 1940s appeared as a result of the direct or at least indirect influence of that important ensemble.

How did Oubradous achieve this? For a composer it has always been very important to know that his or her work is given wide exposure. The worldwide financial crisis of 1929 caught up with France at the beginning of the 1930s, and also had an impact on composers. Large, expensive works had little chance of success, but a trio, especially in this novel instrumental arrangement, showed much more promise. Those, who would compose for Oubradous, could expect a publisher (L'Oiseau Lyre, Éditions Selmer), numerous and highest quality performances of the work in many countries, radio concerts, and, to top it all, the prospect of shellac recording!

### **Pierre-Octave Ferroud (1900–1936)**

The Trio d'anches de Paris performed at concerts of all chamber music societies in Paris of the 1930s: La Sérénade, Triton, La Spirale, the Société Nationale de Musique, and the Société de Musique Indépendante. It also performed throughout Europe at conferences on contemporary music, and played live on the radio. Especially important for the Trio d'anches de Paris was making the acquaintance of composer and music critic Pierre-Octave Ferroud, who in 1933 composed a trio ("Trio en Mi") for Oubradous and his ensemble and made every effort to give it wide exposure. In 1932, Ferroud founded the chamber music society 'Triton,' which quickly became one of the most modern and most important music organizations of its kind in Europe. He fostered close ties with other European chamber music societies; and, in contrast to other Parisian organizations, he promoted new French chamber music by programming

music from other countries as well, especially Eastern Europe; in return, befriended European music societies and radio stations discovered, performed, and broadcast the newest works from Paris.

In 1933, representing Triton and with music for reed trio in his luggage, Ferroud travelled to Florence's Maggio Musicale, the ISCM Festival held in Amsterdam, the Salzburg Festival (Oubradous made an arrangement for reed trio of five Divertimenti for three basset horns by W. A. Mozart, published and recorded it—a full sixty minutes of music—on shellac 78s), Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Bratislava. In 1934, he travelled to Prague, Vienna, Salzburg, and Winterthur; in 1935, his itinerary included Prague, Budapest, Zagreb, Cannes, Monte Carlo, Florence, Salzburg, Prague again (ISCM Festival), Vienna, and Budapest. In 1936, Ferroud went on another trip as representative of Triton, but it was to be his last: on August 17, he died tragically in a car accident in Debrecen, Hungary.

Ferroud's activities were a blessing for the spread of the new genre of reed trio, as its repertoire grew and was performed by newly established ensembles throughout Europe.

### **Bohuslav Martinů and Vítězlava Kaprálová in 1937–1938**

In 1923, Bohuslav Martinů came to Paris to advance his musical studies. He took lessons with Albert Roussel, and eventually settled in the capital, which he would leave for the United States only with the invasion of German troops in 1940. Back in 1937, he was already a well-regarded composer when, at the initiative of Fernand Oubradous, he composed his reed trio *Quatre Madrigaux* (Four Madrigals). Martinů's teacher Albert Roussel began composing a reed trio at about the same time, but could only complete the first movement (Andante) before his death. The premiere of *Quatre Madrigaux*, performed by the Trio d'anches de Paris, took place in 1938 in Paris.

Following five years of study at the Brno Conservatory, Vítězslava Kaprálová enrolled at the Prague Conservatory in 1935 to study composition with Vítězslav Novák, a pupil of Antonín Dvořák, and conducting with Václav Talich. Soon after her arrival in Prague, she became a member of the local society for new music, the “Přítomnost” (The Present). Alois Hába, Karel Reiner, and Karel Ančerl were also members. There she made first contacts with the culture of Paris (and may have met Pierre-Octave Ferroud, who arrived to Prague for the ISCM Festival).

In 1937, Martinů travelled to Prague to begin the preparations for the premiere of his opera *Julietta* (which took place in Prague the following year) with Václav Talich (the conducting teacher of Kaprálová). On this occasion, he met Kaprálová and encouraged her to move to Paris to study composition with him. With the help of Otakar Šourek, she received a one-year scholarship to study at the École normale. By the end of October 1938, she was in Paris and began her studies with Charles Munch (conducting) and with Bohuslav Martinů. Within a few weeks she had already been introduced to all major Parisian composers.

### **Reed trio by Vítězslava Kaprálová**

In December 1937, Kaprálová began composing her *Trio pro dechové nástroje* (reed trio). What led her to this combination is unknown,<sup>1</sup> although it can be presumed that Ferroud promoted the genre heavily in Prague. Two other Prague composers followed his lead: Iša Krejčí composed his reed trio in 1935, and Klement Slavický in 1937; both trios were also broadcast. Iša Krejčí even paid a musical tribute to Ferroud's Triton chamber music society: his trio, based on a motif of a fourth, opens its first movement with a tritone, presented unison.

When Kaprálová and Martinů met in Prague, he could have told her of his latest compositions, including the *Quatre Madrigaux*.<sup>2</sup> We could assume that Kaprálová began her own reed trio in the hope it



would be performed by the famous Trio d'anches de Paris. There was also the possibility that it might be broadcast on the radio or even recorded on shellac 78s—the brightest prospects for a young composer! Why she ceased working on her trio after February 1938, however, we can only guess. One likely explanation is that she was so busy with her move to Paris, the renewal of her scholarship, performances of *Military Sinfonietta* (she conducted performances in Prague and London) that she just did not have any time left for the trio.

### Reconstruction of the fragment score

Allegro

Ob.

Cl. in B $\flat$

Fag.

*f*

*più f*

*Solo*

**Example 1** Vítězslava Kaprálová, *Trio pro dechové nástroje*,<sup>3</sup> mm. 1–8

In principle, Kaprálová made the construction of her trio clear: she composed it in a rondo form. Sections A (measures 1–18), B (19–33), and C (34–40) were all finished in her autograph score. At the top of the second page of the autograph, (which is located in the Music Department of the Moravian Museum in Brno under the shelf number A 29 758a), Kaprálová sketched a further motif. In my reconstruction, I have used this fourth motif, beginning in measure 74, for the closing rondo section D. From measure 41 (the end of the autograph score) to measure 73, I extended Kaprálová's section C by 10 measures and, after a rhythmic bridge, I repeated and combined sections A and B. Thus the following construction has been created: A, B, C, B', A', D.

In order to develop the trio to a full-fledged composition, I have added two more movements to this completed first movement. I took the last two of the four *April Preludes* for piano, composed in Prague in 1937, and arranged them for reed trio. The two movements are similar to the original trio movement both in terms of style and motifs, and together they become a homogeneous, novel, and independent work, which will surely find inclusion in the reed trio literature and on the concert circuit.

## NOTES

1. See "Kaprálová as a Composer of the Week," 327, in this publication.
2. Ibid.
3. Vítězslava Kaprálová, *Trio pro dechové nástroje*. Rekonstruktion nach dem autographen Fragment & opus 13: Stéphane Egeling (Coblenz am Rhein: Egge-Verlag, 2011).

VÍTĚZSLAVA KAPRÁLOVÁ: TWO DANCES  
FOR PIANO, OP. 23 (1940). AN ATTEMPT  
AT RECONSTRUCTION OF THE AUTOGRAPH

In 2016, while I was working in Brno (Czech Republic) on a vocal cycle of Bohuslav Martinů, I was provided with a scan of a sketch of Kaprálová's op. 23 dances by the local Moravian Museum Department of Music History. When I attempted to play the score directly from the manuscript, however, it became very clear that this would lead nowhere and that I had to approach the score differently. The manuscript was written in small, almost illegible notes; moreover, from measure 90 to 101, the notation consisted primarily of an illegible, multilayered sketch.

I therefore decided to use a method which served me well in the past—the method of gradual, measure by measure, re-writing of the score with a computer notation program, while playing and replaying the transcribed parts on the piano. This method gave me the best possible results in the reconstruction of the songs by Bohuslav Martinů, for example. In fact, the case of Martinů's songs was in some respects worse, as there were large parts of the left hand accompaniment missing and the text in the voice part was often only partially written out, so that it was necessary to search the internet for the songs' lyrics.

After my first attempts at transcribing the sketch and playing it on the piano, a particular logic of rhythm and harmony, so typical of Kaprálová, began to emerge. Even when I was working with a partially illegible chord, I tried to keep these characteristics in mind as much as possible in order to avoid a natural impulse to "fix" the chord so that it sounded less dissonant.

It should be noted that I did this work with the intention of arriving at a usable version of the composition so that it could be recorded on a compact disc, which was to be released by Grand Piano

(Naxos) in 2017. I therefore did not proceed in a purely musicological fashion to recreate the work like a pure “photograph,” as this approach would not have been practical; such work I leave to future researchers. What helped me most during this process was the fact that I had already recorded much of Kaprálová’s solo piano music prior to reconstructing the piece, so I was very familiar with the composer’s style and way of thinking.

The title “2 Dances for Piano” on the score was an issue, however. Could it be that a thick bar line written midway in the manuscript actually separated TWO dances? After transcribing the score on the computer, it became very clear that this could not be the case. The characteristic elements and the development of the composition continued throughout the length of the autograph score, and, in my opinion, *de facto* ruled out that it was two different scores, for measure 109 and the several measures that followed almost literally took over from measure 16 and the few following measures.

A big problem arose in the most complex part of the composition, between measures 90 and 100; in these places I had to select the most likely version from among the clusters of notes, which as such were simply unplayable. This is also the only place (except for a few small corrections of little importance) where I had to re-compose an utterly illegible notation. Even here I tried not to depart from the characteristic style of the composer. From measure 102 to the end of the score, the situation improved considerably, and the final measure 119 confirmed unambiguously Kaprálová’s intention to finish the composition in this way.

After my experience with Martinů’s songs “Kráčím, kráčím” and “Jaškova zpěvanka,” which Halbreich mentions as two independent songs, but which in fact are two versions of the same song, it can be safely assumed that the definitive version of the first dance of op. 23 would sound somewhat differently. However, this reconstruction is our only possibility to preserve the composer’s last composition for piano, which would otherwise be unusable and “lost” to us.

As for the probability that one day the second dance of op. 23 will re-surface, this is indeed something that we cannot completely rule out. If I can use yet another example of the Martinů case: some of his compositions, long considered lost, eventually re-surfaced in various family archives, whose owners often did not know what they actually contained. The history of collaboration and exchange of music between Martinů and Kaprálová gives this hypothesis some hopeful probability.

Piano

6

11

16

21

**Example 1** Vítězslava Kaprálová, *Dance for Piano*,<sup>1</sup> mm. 1–24

## NOTES

1. Vítězslava Kaprálová, Dance for Piano (from Two Dances for piano, op. 23), arr. by Giorgio Koukl (2017), published in *Kapralova Society Journal* 18, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 9–12.

## KAPRÁLOVÁ AS A COMPOSER OF THE WEEK: THE BBC INTERVIEW

On October 12–16, 2015, BBC Radio 3 made Kaprálová its *Composer of the Week*. I had the privilege of participating in the development of the script, and was interviewed for the program. Not all of this material was used in the broadcast, however, and I always regretted that some interesting questions were skipped; so here is the full interview.

*Where/when did you first discover Kaprálová? What grabbed you about her?*

In 1997, I found her name in one of the monographs on Martinů. I was intrigued and became very curious about her music. There were no commercial releases of it available at the time, so I had to do a bit of research. And then I found it – in the Brno Radio archives. I still see myself, sitting on the floor of my rented apartment in Prague, listening to a tape that was mailed to me from Brno, and remember how astonished I was by the ingeniousness and sophistication of her music, as well as impressed by the fact that it was so different from that of Martinů. Her music offers a wealth of interesting ideas, it never bores. It is bold and fresh, passionate as well as lyrical. The piano music in particular conveys all sides of her well-rounded musical personality – the energy, the passion, lyricism, the humour, the discipline as well as spontaneity.

*Kaprálová was one of the very few women to conduct the BBC (Symphony) Orchestra – how did the invitation come about?*

She was selected by an international jury as one of four Czech composers (namely Iša Krejčí, František Bartoš, Viktor Ullmann and Kaprálová) to represent contemporary Czech music at the 16<sup>th</sup> ISCM Festival in London in June 1938. Kaprálová was the opening

night attraction, conducting the excellent BBC Orchestra and apparently giving a great performance of her *Military Sinfonietta*. It must have been quite a sight for the festival audience to watch the bright young woman conducting her rousing composition. The concert was short-waved to the United States and rebroadcast by CBS. According to a reviewer from *Time* magazine Kaprálová not only fared well in the international competition<sup>1</sup> at the festival, but she became the star of the opening concert, and so “to composer Kapralova, who conducted her own lusty, sprawling composition, went the afternoon’s biggest hand.”<sup>2</sup> Among all the reviews mentioning her performance, Kaprálová would probably have cherished most that of Havergal Brian, who in his festival report for *Musical Opinion* wrote: “The first work played and broadcast at the recent festival, a *Military Sinfonietta* by Miss Vitezslava Kapralova of Czechoslovakia, proved an amazing piece of orchestral writing; it was also of logical and well balanced design.”<sup>3</sup>

*Kaprálová did not speak English – how did she communicate with the BBC Orchestra?*

We are fortunate to have a record of it in one of the letters Kaprálová wrote to her parents. We learn from it that Kaprálová had two rehearsals at her disposal; one was 45 minutes long, the other was even shorter – 30 minutes. The first took place at the BBC Maida Vale building on the day before the concert, the second at Queen’s Hall on the morning before her concert on Friday, June 17, 1938. Her communication with the orchestra had to be aided by two interpreters: one was Miss Wanda Jakubíčková – a friend of Martinů from his hometown Polička who was at the time staying in London; and the other was Hubert Foss, music editor at Oxford University Press that co-organized this edition of the ISCM Festival. Jakubíčková translated Kaprálová’s instructions from Czech to English for Foss, and he further interpreted them for the orchestra. Kaprálová was by no means a passive participant



in this conversation; she would sing the more problematic parts of the score to the orchestra.

*But let's return to the very beginning, starting with her parents' marriage and Kaprálová's childhood.*

Kaprál was one of the few of Janáček's alumni who emerged as composers.<sup>4</sup> He was also an outstanding teacher who never stopped educating himself throughout his life; he perfected his skills in composition under Vítězslav Novák (who was to become in due time also the teacher of choice for his daughter) and in piano interpretation with Adolf Mikeš in Prague and Alfred Cortot in Paris (with the latter in the early 1920s). In 1911, he founded his own private music school in Brno, which grew in reputation and continued to attract generations of aspiring pianists throughout the twenties and thirties. In the 1920s, Kaprál devoted much of his time to piano performance: he and his friend Ludvík Kundera performed in concert as a two-piano team. The two were also instrumental in founding the Moravian Composers' Club in Brno in 1922, an important platform for presenting new works. In addition to his career as teacher and concert pianist, Kaprál worked as music editor and critic, as lecturer at Brno's Masaryk University (from 1927), and as tenured teacher at the Brno Conservatory, where he taught composition (beginning in 1936). While today he is basically unknown outside of the Czech Republic, during his lifetime Kaprál was one of the most respected Czech composers of his generation.

Kaprálová's parents married in 1913, and she was born two years later, on January 24, 1915, in Brno, the regional capital of Moravia, which was at that time still a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. She was an only child growing up in a musical family: we have already mentioned Václav Kaprál, and Kaprálová's mother Viktorie<sup>5</sup> was a qualified voice teacher who studied with Kristýna Morfová,

a soloist at the National Theatre in Prague. It was clearly the mother's influence that led to Kaprálová's lifelong passion for art song; it was also her mother who gave Kaprálová her first piano lessons at the age of five.

Six months after Kaprálová was born, Kaprál was conscripted into the army and stationed in Albania until the end of the war. Viktorie moved with her daughter to live with grandparents in the village of Medlánky,<sup>6</sup> today a suburb of Brno. Upon Kaprál's return in November 1918, the family lived in Brno-Královo Pole, in an apartment just above the family's music school on Metodějova Street.<sup>7</sup>

Music was therefore a natural part of Kaprálová's life since childhood. She was only nine when she started composing, and she was only twelve when she wrote her *Triste valse*, already an accomplished piece "inspired by her father's *Mazurka* of 1909, and written in a generic romantic style reminiscent of Chopin."<sup>8</sup>

*Was she later also influenced by Janáček?*

One would expect that Kaprálová would not have been able to escape his influence, since she was growing up in the family of one of his students, during Janáček's lifetime and the period of the greatest successes of his music.<sup>9</sup> In a way, she would not – Janáček's influence was already present in the music of her father, and his music was in turn influencing hers. She undoubtedly understood Janáček's importance and was intrigued by some of his ideas, but was not tempted to follow them. We should also understand that Janáček was then perceived by his contemporaries as a highly original composer whose creative legacy was too inaccessible to be carried on. He also alienated his students with his highly unorthodox pedagogical principles and teaching methods. In comparison, the creative personality of Vítězslav Novák, who was based in Prague, seemed to be more 'modern' as well as more comprehensible to his

contemporaries than that of Janáček.<sup>10</sup> It also helped that Novák was an excellent teacher, and as such became a cult figure – most of Janáček's former students, including Václav Kaprál and Vilém Petrželka, Kaprálová's teacher at the Brno Conservatory, advanced their composition studies under Novák's guidance.

*What can you tell us about her family life – were they comfortably off?*

They were certainly not wealthy, although they achieved a reasonable standard of living. In the beginning the only regular family income was generated through their private music school,<sup>11</sup> but Kaprál's later appointments at Masaryk University and the Brno Conservatory must have enhanced the family income. In the early 1930s, with some financial help from Kaprál's brother Jan, they were able to build a summer retreat in the countryside, which also became an important source of family income, particularly for Kaprálová's mother. She rented some of its rooms to vacationers who were referred to her by family friends. I would consider them a middle-class family. They could not support their daughter in all of her endeavours, however, and this is why she always seemed to be applying for bursaries, scholarships and stipends, and competing for prizes and awards.

*Could you explain the 'separation' of the parents and what you have found out about it through your research?*

Kaprál's parents in fact did not separate, although their marriage did break down and they officially divorced. However, they kept this private and continued to live in the same household until World War Two. It helped that Kaprál travelled a lot and that during the thirties Kaprálová's mother lived for most of the year in Tři Studně (their 'summer' retreat was habitable all year round), so that this way they spent as little time together as possible. Kaprál had a life-long soulmate, lover and companion in Otýlie Humlová; she sang in a choir he led as choirmaster around 1920 (at the time they

met she was only seventeen). Yet he decided to stay with Kaprálová's mother. I suspect this was not only out of concern for his daughter so that the family breakdown would not damage her societal future, but also for economic reasons, as Kaprál could not afford to maintain two households.

*What was the reputation of the Brno Conservatory at the time Kaprálová was studying there?*

Founded in 1919 as a successor to Janáček's organ school, the conservatory had a wide range of programs: it included an elementary music school, a six-to-seven-year program for various instruments, a senior high school (which included the double major program in composition and conducting that Kaprálová attended), a program for music teachers, and a special five-year program for singers. Until 1928, it also made graduate studies in composition and piano interpretation possible at its own Master School. By the time Kaprálová had studied there, however, the master classes were no longer offered; so if she wanted to advance her studies at a university level, she had to go to Prague and continue at the Master School associated with the Prague Conservatory.

Kaprálová enrolled at the Brno Conservatory at the age of fifteen. She chose the double major program in composition and conducting as the first woman in the history of this institution to do so. Out of four students (her three classmates were all male) who started the program together in 1930, she was the only one to finish it. Her teacher of composition was Vilém Petrželka (who, as mentioned earlier, studied as her father had with Janáček). She also studied harmony with Max Koblížek and Jaroslav Kvapil (who was also an alumnus of Janáček), orchestral conducting with Zdeněk Chalabala (who later became dramaturg and conductor at the National Theatre in Prague at the invitation of Václav Talich), choral conducting with Vilém Steinman, instrumentation with

Osvald Chlubna (yet another alumnus of Janáček), music history with Gracian Černušák, an esteemed Brno musicologist and music critic, aesthetics with Ludvík Kundera, and piano with Anna Holubová.

*Kaprálová was a successful student, wasn't she?*

Her compositions were programmed in the conservatory recitals – an important acknowledgment in itself – and they were always favourably received by both the public and the critics. With her graduation work, the Piano Concerto in D Minor, op. 7, Kaprálová won the František Neumann Prize. Neumann was chief conductor of the Brno Opera and music director of Brno's National Theatre. Kaprálová's teacher Zdeněk Chalabala was his student.

*Did she come to the notice of anyone in particular?*

Yes, her music impressed quite a few people, some of whom played an important role in Brno's musical life. One of them was Gracian Černušák, who wrote many reviews of Kaprálová's music very early on. Another was Ludvík Kundera, her teacher at the conservatory; he loved to perform her music, and he premiered her Piano Concerto and *Variations sur le carillon de l'église Saint-Etienne-du-Mont*, op. 16, among other works. She was also deeply respected by Vladimír Helfert, one of the foremost Czech musicologists. He mentioned Kaprálová in his groundbreaking study on Czech modern music, published in 1936.

*She graduated with the Piano Concerto, didn't she?*

Yes, and it was her first orchestral composition. The solo piano part did not present any problem for Kaprálová, but orchestral writing was an entirely new challenge, although she did have some experience with the orchestra as a student of conducting. In addition to consulting with her teachers at the conservatory she discussed the concerto's instrumentation with Theodor Schaefer,

a composer friend who was known to have a great deal of expertise in this area. She could not get much advice from her father, for Kaprál had about the same experience with orchestration as she had. He was, after all, primarily a composer of piano, chamber and vocal music.<sup>12</sup>

With the Piano Concerto Kaprálová officially graduated both as composer and conductor. Her performance of the concerto's first (and longest) movement – the full work was not programmed at the graduation concert for lack of time – more than amply demonstrated that she was able to meet the formal and technical requirements expected of a conservatory graduate. The performance took place in Brno on June 17, 1935. The soloist was Ludvík Kundera. Reviewers were duly impressed, especially with her “confidence and surety with which she controlled such a complex orchestral apparatus, as well as with her wonderful sense of orchestral colour.”<sup>13</sup> It was also noted that “the work's fluent diction serves the elegant invention with such ease that the piece rises considerably above the average level of works of this kind.”<sup>14</sup> Another review reads as follows: “V. Kaprálová guided the orchestra in this work, which is in all respects demanding, with admirable composure, energy and a strong sense of purpose, and contributed with assured conducting gestures to an overall positive impression of her composition.”<sup>15</sup> A review of the performance was also published by *Prager Tagblatt*, a German-language newspaper based in Prague, in which the reviewer underscored as particularly regrettable that the presenter showcased only the first movement of the work; but “even this fragment reveals a remarkable musical talent.”<sup>16</sup>

*She received a lot of encouragement, especially from a family friend, musicologist Vladimír Helfert?*

Yes, he wrote her a beautiful letter on the night of the concert. It begins with this wonderful encouragement:

Today is a day particularly significant for your entire life. You are meeting the public as a mature, accomplished artist, as well as a professional interpreter. I will be with you in my thoughts.<sup>17</sup>

He then continues:

I recall how it all began. I still have one of your childhood compositions—your waltz. I was already intrigued then by the freshness and wealth of your ideas. And so I began to watch you to see, at least from a distance, what fills your soul, how it lights up with the divine spark of music—that wonderful blessing that is given only to people as the greatest gift. And again and again I saw a new expression of your so young yet already delightful talent. And now—you are graduating! Just think about it: from a waltz to a concerto! How much life, how much of an inner, beautiful development is in it. How much your soul grew in those years, how rich it has become!<sup>18</sup>

At the end of his letter he urges her to

always pursue the ideal of truth and artistic profundity. To be honest in your art! These are the very internal struggles, without which one cannot live a rich inner life . . . to soldier on, not to give in to temptation, to be faithful to the ideals of beauty and truth. This often requires sacrifice and great courage. Without them, however, there is not great art. For this journey, I wish you, on this day, much mental strength for the rest of your life!<sup>19</sup>

*We also get a tantalising glimpse of Kaprálová's personal life here, as she falls in love with a fellow pupil – what can you tell us about Ota Vach and that relationship?*

Ota Vach was born in 1912, so he was three years older than Kaprálová. They met at the Brno Conservatory; he enrolled in the same

class (composition and conducting) and studied there for the first year. He dropped out the following year, but continued to study law and later also engineering. He was Kaprálová's first love – their relationship began in the late fall of 1930 and continued on and off until 1937; they then stayed in touch by correspondence until November 1939.

It was also Vach who in 1946 played an important role in bringing Kaprálová's ashes home from France. He was entrusted with the task by Kaprálová's father. Vach had to identify her remains at exhumation, which must have been both painful and gruesome. He also oversaw their cremation in Paris and personally brought the ashes to her parents.<sup>20</sup> He remained loyal to Kaprálová and never married. It was his rather tragic error that he did not realize how much her music meant to her. It alienated her from him when he failed to support her aspiration to become an independent artist. And not only that, in fact, he tried to steer her toward a career in commercial music, although she detested the idea to the point that she wrote to him resolutely from France – and that letter is worth quoting:

Even if the times work against me, if everything tries to stop me, nothing will uproot me and steer me away from my path. I don't care for your "utility ends," they are not for me and I would not consider them, as no truly committed musician would. Such a musician is perhaps too idealistic – almost naïve – but courageous.<sup>21</sup>

*What can you tell us about Kaprálová's favourite country retreat?*

Tři Studně is a village and municipality in Žďár nad Sázavou District, about an hour's drive northwest from Brno, in the beautiful Bohemian-Moravian Highlands, not far from Martinů's hometown of Polička. Today the municipality has a population of 93.



Kaprálová visited it in 1931, and she fell in love with the place and surrounding countryside. She persuaded her parents to build a house there as their country retreat (it was finished in 1934). She considered the place her real home. She also sketched a few of her compositions there, her *String Quartet* among them.<sup>22</sup>

The Kapráls' 'country retreat' is really an urban villa, resembling the functionalist style so popular in Czechoslovakia in the 1930s. The story goes that it was designed to Kaprálová's specifications. Amidst its rural surroundings it looks rather out of place with its flat roof, large windows and modern urban appearance. The house has an interesting history; after the war, Kaprálová's mother, in order to prevent its confiscation by the communist state in the early 1950s, offered it to the Czech Composers' Union for recreational purposes as a sort of bequest in trust (the Union was to own the house after her death). When she died in 1973, the house became the property of the Czech Music Fund, and served as an artist-in-residency facility for composers, musicians and musicologists until the early 1990s.

*How much chamber music did Kaprálová write?*

Three violin and piano pieces, or four, in fact, if we include Kaprálová's melodrama *To Karel Čapek*, composed in memory of the beloved Czech writer who passed away on Christmas Day of 1938.<sup>23</sup> Then there is a song for voice and instrumental quintet (fl, 2 vn, vc, pno), a string quartet, a ritornel for cello and piano, two flute miniatures and an unfinished reed trio. Chamber music is, perhaps, the least represented category in Kaprálová's catalogue, but the works are strong, especially the string quartet and ritornel. Kaprálová's choice of mediums is well-balanced overall, perhaps with some bias towards song, Kaprálová's most beloved genre.

Chamber music was actively supported by composers' clubs and contemporary music societies that operated in Czechoslovakia in the interwar period. In Prague it was namely Přítomnost (The Present) and Umělecká beseda (Artistic Forum) that organized many chamber music concerts. Among these, particularly well-known was Silvester Hippmann's concert series entitled 'Tuesdays' (as the concerts took place on every Tuesday), in which Kaprálová regularly participated. As it was much easier for the composers to secure performances of chamber music rather than orchestral works, the genre must have been very popular. Nevertheless, Czech critics and music historians, and perhaps the general public too, have always tended to assign higher value to orchestral works, so that is what Kaprálová focused on, to prove herself a serious composer who could write in the larger forms.

*In your research, did you come across quite a few unfinished projects?*

Yes, I did. One of them is a trio for oboe, clarinet and bassoon, on which Kaprálová worked for about two months, from December 18, 1937 to February 1938. The idea to write a piece for reed trio came from Martinů, who was working at about the same time (from December 1937 to January 1938) on his *Four Madrigals* for reed instruments. He dedicated it to Trio d'anches de Paris. Kaprálová and Martinů planned to have their trios performed side by side at one of Triton's concerts.<sup>24</sup> Martinů originally wanted to offer both their compositions to Universal Edition in Vienna (in the end, his trio was published by Eschig instead), but while Martinů finished his work, Kaprálová only completed most of the first movement of her trio.

*Do you know why it wasn't finished?*

While she seemed to have been happy with its musical ideas, she found writing for reed trio quite a task; she thought she needed more experience in writing for those instruments, and eventually abandoned the project.

*Why was it felt significant enough to warrant the reconstruction? What does the reconstruction add to our knowledge about Kaprálová?*

It is a clever, witty composition, revealing Kaprálová's playful side, and apparently "in a very Parisian style of the period," according to Stéphane Egeling who reconstructed it.<sup>25</sup> Stéphane is the first oboist of Sinfonieorchester Aachen and a musicologist who is particularly interested in the reed trio repertoire. It is thanks to him that we can enjoy this work in some form, and he is confident that the trio will eventually become part of the reed trio repertoire.

*You have also discovered a previously unknown composition written by Kaprálová – Sad Evening – is that correct?*

Yes. I found it in 2006 at the Moravian Museum, guided by a mention of it in an old card catalogue. It had been overlooked until then because the song had not been mentioned by any of Kaprálová's biographers,<sup>26</sup> and we don't find it mentioned in Kaprálová's diaries, correspondence or lists of works. We were unable to identify the author of the text; however, based on my knowledge of Kaprálová's own poetry, I am inclined to believe that she set the song to her own text. It also seems feasible that Kaprálová planned it to be a part of a cycle of orchestral songs.<sup>27</sup> This cycle is mentioned in a list of works<sup>28</sup> attached to a CV written by Kaprálová at the request of Alois Hába, chair of the Czechoslovak section of ISCM, for the 1938 ISCM Festival brochure. It is clear that the cycle was one of the projects Kaprálová later abandoned, since it is never mentioned again in her correspondence or in any of the lists of works that followed.

*Another of her works, Variations sur le Carillon, was much admired by Martinů?*

Yes, indeed. When the work was published in Paris in late November of 1938, he announced it to Kaprálová with great pleasure in the form of a rhymed letter. Each variation received a witty commentary from Martinů, especially the final coda:

[O]ne must have strong hands for the end of this masterpiece and the Andante maestoso must be *fffortissimaso* [!] and that is what's beautiful about it; let's sacrifice the piano, let's go and cut the piano to small pieces, it must have the breadth as if all the bells of Paris were ringing, as if something were happening and the earth were shaking; and thus let's get to it, let's not restrain ourselves, it is short, just two lines, and in that passionate playing it is disappearing into the distance; and just at the moment you became really excited, the *poco ritardando* orders you not to rush so much but bring it slowly to the end, and it will retreat more and more into the distance and then the main theme comes back and after that is *subito* and that's it, although there is still a *semplice*, and I regret it so much because in that distance it was so beautiful but we have already arrived at the cover of the score.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, although the title refers to a carillon of St-Etienne, the bells were probably rung in the adjacent tower that used to be a part of the no-longer-standing Ste-Geneviève church.

*Martinů was clearly conflicted over his affair with VK. Still married, he appears to have been unable to leave his wife?*

When Kaprálová arrived in Paris in 1937, Martinů had been married to Charlotte Quennehen for about seven years. She was a good woman, loving and immensely loyal to Martinů. But Kaprálová brought passion to his life – she was full of life, charismatic, intelligent, incredibly talented and passionate about music. They would spend hours discussing and arguing over the tenets of composition. Furthermore, she was his compatriot – someone who could grasp and relate immediately to all cultural references in their conversation. And, with the war imminent and their homeland in danger, they had yet another deep connection, one that Charlotte could not compete with. Of course Martinů was conflicted over the matter,

but so was Kaprálová. After all, her childhood had been affected by the breakdown of her parents' marriage, and she was never able to accept fully her father's love for Otylie Humlová. And so it was in fact Kaprálová who tried to break up with Martinů – first in the fall of 1938 and then a year later in the fall of 1939, this second time successfully due to her relationship with Jiří Mucha.

*Can you give us more details of the breakup of Kaprálová's relationship with Martinů?*

When Martinů visited Kaprálová in Tři Studně in the summer of 1938, her parents grew concerned, as they realized the true nature of their daughter's relationship with her mentor. They were unhappy about it. During the fall, Martinů did all he could to bring Kaprálová back to Paris on scholarship; he even made her a sort of marriage proposal in one of his letters, and hinted at wanting to have a family with her, since he knew that having children was important to her. By that time, Kaprálová was consciously distancing herself from Martinů, and just around Christmas 1938 she wrote to him that she had decided to become engaged to a young engineer whom she had met during his stay in Paris, and whom she was now dating in Prague. Martinů urged her not to make any rushed decisions until she saw him. But Kaprálová was becoming conflicted about her return to Paris as well and postponed her departure, although she had already received her stipend. She did leave eventually in January 1939. In Paris she found a bitter, resentful Martinů. What brought them together again, and this time more strongly than ever, was the German invasion of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939. During that difficult time, they found solace in each other. Eventually they started to plan their future together, and Kaprálová broke the news in June of 1939 to her parents.

*When Kaprálová told her parents that she and Martinů were making plans to live together, do we know what they thought about it?*

Yes, we do. They objected to it, especially Kaprál, and Kaprálová valued her father's opinion immensely. In one of her letters, dated June 14, 1939, she tried to appeal to him:

You know too well, Daddy, how it feels to live with someone only because of family responsibilities and social conventions, even if the other person is as good as Mom or Kopec (her fiancé). Kopec – a good husband, children, a household. Martinů – love and true understanding. Age difference never bothered me. . . . And should Martinů become naturalized, I would be able to move freely across the border, to visit the two of you. Yet these are such problems that my head is spinning; it is all about the two of you, how much happiness I would bring you with that decision.<sup>30</sup>

*What do you see as the reasons behind the breakup?*

Consideration for parents was the most important one. Other reasons? For Kaprálová having children was very important, and she must have sensed that Martinů was not really interested in parenting. Their age difference, which was one of the concerns of her parents, did not seem to bother her much – she tended to date men who were older, sometimes much older, than herself. Did she perhaps also worry about her independence as a composer, about Martinů's influence being too strong? That is what Jiří Mucha thought, but I doubt it, because, except for two or three works, one cannot find much evidence of his influence in her music. I believe that she was strong and independent enough to be able to learn from her mentor without being overpowered by his music.

*Soon after the occupation of Czechoslovakia, she began to compose her op. 21, Concertino for Violin, Clarinet and Orchestra?*

Yes, the Concertino was primarily her response to the occupation of Czechoslovakia, although it also echoes some of the turmoil that

she went through in her relationship with Martinů. She quotes his 'Julietta motive,' their calling card, in the first two movements. Kaprálová began writing the Concertino on March 18, 1939, and she sketched the first two movements and started the third one during the months of March and April. She wanted to finish it and orchestrate it at Augerville de la Rivière, where she stayed during July and August 1939 at the castle as a guest of the owner. This was arranged for her and several other Czech students by the wife of Czech ambassador Stefan Osuský. But she was unable to focus on the piece there, and later she could not find time to finish it.

*Do you know why she did not finish it?*

The German occupation of Czechoslovakia changed Kaprálová's life almost overnight. Since her return home was now out of question, she faced the arduous task of earning her own living; she no longer received her stipend nor financial aid from home, as financial transactions were subjected to new and very strict rules. In the fall of 1939, having no regular income, Kaprálová joined the household of her artist friends who found themselves in a similar position and decided to pool their resources to get through hard times (one of these friends was her future husband Jiří Mucha). As a result, she spent much of her precious time on small commissions in an effort to support herself. She even complained to her parents in one of her letters that she could not get back to her 'own' music because she was busy composing occasional compositions, all commissions. One of those that she did like was the lively *Prélude de Noël*, an orchestral miniature which Kaprálová composed for a Christmas program of the Paris PTT Radio. The piece was featured in a broadcast to occupied Czechoslovakia.

Let's not also forget that this was the time when Paris started preparing for war. Kaprálová joined the efforts of the Czech community in Paris that organized activities for and around the newly

formed Czechoslovak Army. Soon she became heavily involved: from founding a choir and writing reviews for the Czech exile weekly *La Cause Tchécoslovaque* to composing music for the radio, stage (for a Czech theatre group, a commission on which she collaborated with Martinů), and the screen, reportedly for films co-scripted or acted in by Hugo Haas.<sup>31</sup> It is not known if the music was used or even finished. In the last months of her life, Kaprálová also resumed her studies at the Ecole normale (she was receiving her stipend again), adding to her already busy schedule.

*And Martinů during this period – what was happening there?*

They grew closer again after the invasion of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939, as I have already mentioned, seeking solace in their relationship; yet they parted during the summer: Kaprálová stayed alone in Augerville de la Rivière and Martinů at Vieux Moulin where he had a small house that his wife had inherited. Kaprálová was always on Martinů's mind, however, and during that summer he composed his deeply personal work that is clearly connected to her, the *Czech Madrigals* for mixed voices based on Czech folk poetry. He intentionally selected the poems to make references to their relationship.

*Can you say at what point Kaprálová started to contemplate marriage to Mucha? And why?*

In the early months of 1940. And why? I suspect that it must have been more of a pragmatic decision at first. Let's not forget the times Kaprálová lived in (these were the initial years of the war) and what her situation was; at this point she was in exile, she was a refugee, without means, and a young woman in need of protection from the ravages of war. Mucha was undoubtedly in love with her, and as Alphonse Mucha's son, he was well connected. In addition, he was fluent in several languages (a skill that Kaprálová admired greatly, as she merely got by with her German and French), and



was resourceful, self-confident and good-looking. She really liked him and gradually grew dependent on him. But she was conflicted about the wedding and, according to one of her friends who witnessed it, she cried the night before, still unsure if she was making the right decision.<sup>32</sup> Her friends kept assuring her that she was, that she could not stay on her own in war-torn Europe. Yet, according to Martinů's biographer Šafránek, she spent the morning before her wedding with – Martinů. And a few months later, when she was dying in a little storage room that was vacated for her at Montpellier's university hospital, her alleged last thoughts were with Martinů, if we are to believe the testimony of Jiří Mucha.<sup>33</sup>

*Can you describe Kaprálová's personality, what did she look like? Was she popular?*

She was very petite, not even 160 cm in height, but did not look fragile. In fact she was quite muscular, for she loved recreational sports: swimming and playing volleyball in summer, cross-country skiing and ice skating in winter. She had voluminous, dark brown hair with chestnut brown highlights, steel blue eyes,<sup>34</sup> and a pleasant face with good bone structure. In terms of personality, she was allegedly very charismatic. Kaprálová seemed to be able to attract people and make a lasting impression on them. She was full of life, energetic, smart, spontaneous, passionate and compassionate. She had a melancholy side to her as well, but was never depressed for very long. She was a strong, naturally confident person, an organizer, a born leader, ambitious and extremely hardworking.

*When an artist dies young there's always the question about what might have been – what didn't she have time to turn her attention to and finish, for example?*

The reed trio, the last movement of Concertino, op. 21, the second of the *Deux Ritournelles pour violoncelle et piano*, op. 25, the second of Two Dances for Piano, op. 23. We do know at least what they

may have sounded like. But one work in particular remains a complete enigma: Kaprálová's opus 24, which has never been found.

*And what about her relationship with Martinů – has that got in the way of her being considered as a composer in her own right?*

Not really, although some people may still see her as living in his shadow. But that is no longer true. Not after her music has been made available and almost all of it published, recorded and programmed in numerous concerts over the past two decades. In fact, we have to be grateful for that love story of Kaprálová and Martinů. Without it, her name might well have been forgotten by now. Anyone who loves Martinů's music and reads about him will encounter her name, will become intrigued by her and will look for her music, as I once did. In light of Martinů's deep respect for Kaprálová's music, I know that he would have been pleased that he could be helpful to her once more. He believed in her talent, and always, and very generously, supported her music. And now it is finally out there.

## NOTES

1. The opening night concert also included Josef Koffler's *Symphony no. 3*, conducted by Hermann Scherchen, Lennox Berkeley's *Domini est terra*, conducted by Arnold Fulton, Anton Webern's *Das Augenlicht*, conducted by Scherchen, Manuel Rosenthal's symphonic suite *Jeanne D'Arc*, conducted by the composer, Julian Bautista's *Tres ciudades*, conducted by Scherchen, and Igor Markewitch's *Le nouvel âge*, conducted by the composer.
2. "International Egg Rolling," *Time* magazine, 27 June 1938 <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,759885,00.html>, accessed 12 July 2021.
3. Havergal Brian, "The Nature of Modern Music. Contemporary Music Festival," *Musical Opinion* (July 1938): 858.
4. The other composers were Kvapil, Chlubna, Petrželka, Haas and Harašta.

5. Viktorie was Kaprálová's mother's name at birth; shortly after the declaration of the Czechoslovak Republic, however, she adopted a Czech version of her name (Vítězslava) and used it in both official documents and personal correspondence until her death.
6. The address was Medláňky č. (no.) 61.
7. The address was Metodějova ulice č. (no.) 6. The building was destroyed in 2014 to make room for new construction.
8. Erik Entwistle, "Kaprálová's Piano Works," in *The Kaprálová Companion*, ed. Karla Hartl and Erik Entwistle (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 28.
9. Jindřiška Bártová, "Kaprálová in the Context of Czech Music," in *The Kaprálová Companion*, 15.
10. Ibid., 16.
11. Both Kaprálová's parents worked at the school: Kaprál taught piano, Kaprálová's mother voice.
12. With the exception of the larger cycle *Uspávanky* for voice and small orchestra, Kaprál's orchestral catalogue includes only two small-scale orchestral works: *Wedding March* and *Two Idylls*.
13. From a review by Gracian Černušák for *Lidové noviny*, 20 June 1935, 9.
14. Ibid.
15. From a review signed by initials -mf-, *Moravské noviny*, 19 June 1935, 4.
16. From a review signed by initials W. H. (Walter Hasenclever), *Prager Tagblatt*, 20 June 1935, 6.
17. Vladimír Helfert to Vítězslava Kaprálová, 17 June 1935. The letter was published in Vítězslava Kaprálová: *Přijátá korespondence 1934–1940*, ed. Karla Hartl (Toronto: The Kapralova Society, 2017), 19–20.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid. English translation is by Lida Hatrick.
20. When Kaprálová's remains were reinterred officially in the Brno Cemetery Honorary Site in 1949, Vach was asked by Kaprálová's mother to carry the box that contained them. It must have been a bit awkward, as Kaprálová's former husband Jiří Mucha was also present at the funeral, but by that time he had already remarried (his new wife was Scottish composer Geraldine Thomson). For the story of Kaprálová's posthumous repatriation and reburial, see Karla Hartl, *Kauza Kaprálová* (Prague: Nakl. Klíč, 2021).
21. Lenka Vojtíšková Papers, Czech Museum of Music.
22. Specifically the quartet's first movement.

23. Karel Čapek (1890–1938) is considered by many the greatest Czech writer of all time. His books have been translated into many languages, and his pre-war futuristic novels are often compared to those of H. G. Wells.
24. Triton was a French society for contemporary music, founded by Pierre-Octave Ferroud in Paris in 1932. It was active until 1939.
25. This comment was made to the author before the premiere of the reed trio (performed by Trio Léžard) in Děčín, Czech Republic, on 22 June 2011.
26. Přemysl Pražák, ed., *Vítězslava Kaprálová. Studie a vzpomínky* [*Studies and Memories*] (Prague: HMUB, 1949); Jiří Macek, *Vítězslava Kaprálová* (Prague: Svaz čs. skladatelů, 1958).
27. Besides *Smutný večer* [*Sad Evening*] the cycle might have included Kaprálová's *Sbohem a šáteček* [*Waving Farewell*].
28. The list of works does not give details of the individual songs.
29. Erik Entwistle, *The Kaprálová Companion*, 64.
30. This passage is also quoted in *The Kaprálová Companion*, 149–150n73.
31. Hugo Haas was a Czech movie star and film director who managed to escape to France from occupied Czechoslovakia. He was a brother of Czech Jewish composer Pavel Haas who, unlike him, was unable to leave Czechoslovakia and later died in Auschwitz.
32. Author's interview with Maria Bauer, née von Kahler, on 18 January 2014. It should be noted, however, that Kaprálová's letters to Mucha, written during the final weeks of her life when she was already gravely ill, attest to deep feelings for him.
33. He wrote in his autobiographical novel *Podivné lásky* [*Strange loves*] that her last words were "To je Julietta" ["It is Juliette"]. Jiří Mucha, *Podivné lásky* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 1988), 431. *Juliette* was the name of Martinů's surrealist opera. The so-called 'Juliette motive,' three descending notes used abundantly in the opera, was quoted in many works by both Martinů and Kaprálová. Mucha's testimony should be taken with much caution, however, as he masterly fuses fiction with non-fiction in his book.
34. *The Kaprálová Companion*, 140n1.



## EDITORS' NOTES

Each chapter of this anthology is a revised and updated version of an article previously published in the *Kapralova Society Journal*. The original versions appeared in the following issues of that journal:

"The Woman Composer Question: Philosophical and Historical Perspectives," vol. 4, no. 2 (Fall 2006); "Women Composers: A Critical Review of the Psychological Literature," vol. 3, no. 2 (Fall 2005); "Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel: A Life of Music within Domestic Limits," vol. 5, no. 2 (Fall 2007); "Clara Schumann: A Composer's Wife as Composer," vol. 7, no. 2 (Fall 2009); "Clara Schumann: New Cadenzas for Mozart's Piano Concerto in D Minor. Romantic Visions of a Classical Masterpiece," vol. 17, no. 2 (Fall 2019); "Agathe Backer Grøndahl (1847–1907): 'A Perfectly Plain Woman?'," vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring 2009); "Emerging from the Shadows: Maude Valérie White, a Significant Figure in the History of English Song," vol. 18, no. 1 (Winter 2020); "Damned if You Do and Damned if You Don't: Sexual Aesthetics and the Music of Dame Ethel Smyth," vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 2006); "Dame Ethel Smyth: Pioneer of English Opera," vol. 11, no. 1 (Spring 2013); "Mrs. H. H. A. Beach: American Symphonist," vol. 8, no. 2 (Fall 2010); "Florence Price and the Politics of Her Existence," vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring 2018); "Feminizing the Stage: Early Lady Orchestras and Their Maestras," vol. 14, no. 1 (Spring 2016); "Dame Vera Lynn: Voice of a Generation," vol. 11, no. 2 (Fall 2013); "Kaprálková and the Muses: Understanding the Qualified Composer," vol. 10, no. 2 (Fall 2012); "*Sad Evening*, Great Discovery: Bringing to Light a New Song by Vítězslava Kaprálková," vol. 12, no. 1 (Spring 2014); "Kaprálková's Trio for Oboe, Clarinet and Bassoon (1937–1938)," vol. 9, no. 2 (Fall 2011); "Vítězslava Kaprálková: Two Dances for Piano. op. 23 (1940). An Attempt at Reconstruction of the Autograph," trans. by Karla Hartl, vol. 18, no. 1 (Winter 2020); and "Kaprálková as a Composer of the Week: The BBC Interview," vol. 17, no. 1 (Spring 2019). "The Power of Advocacy in Music: The Case of Vítězslava Kaprálková" will be published in vol. 20, no. 1 (Winter 2022).

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The *Women in Music Anthology* begins with two major essays on the *Woman Composer Question* that explain why, even today, we rarely see women included in music history textbooks, or hear their music performed by symphony orchestras or in major concert halls. The book then continues with chapters that explore, in some depth, the lives and legacies of nine women musicians who made a major impact in their respective fields and communities: Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Clara Schumann, Ethel Smyth, Amy Beach, Agatha Backer Grøndahl, Maude Valérie White, Florence Price, Vera Lynn and Vítězslava Kaprálová.

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