

Prelude

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BRASS & BRAHMS • NOVEMBER 2-4, 2018

MASTERWORKS #2:

Where are the women? We pull back history's curtain to find the composers in the shadows and introduce you to five women composers who defied convention to be recognized and accepted as musicians.



Clara & Robert Schumann

Behind the music of Robert Schumann stands Clara Schumann, his devoted wife. A widow at age 37, but a brilliant composer in her own right, Clara used her extraordinary musical talents to edit and perform the works of her husband. Given the paucity of women composers as compared to their male counterparts, we wondered: what does it take to be recognized as a great classical composer?

The simplest answer is that you had to be born male. The long history of excluding women from musical training or performance harkens back to the Middle Ages, when women were forbidden to sing or play music in public. There were essentially three main categories of training for women: convent training, court training or training with a musical family.ⁱ

Astoundingly, some women, defying the odds, managed to compose and even perform. The most renowned female court composer in the early 17th century was Francesca Caccini. Born into a famous musical family and trained by her father, Francesca grew up in the Court of Tuscany in Florence. Her opera, *La Liberazione di Ruggiero*, performed in 1625, was the first opera written by a woman.ⁱⁱ During the early Baroque period of the early 17th century, famed singer and composer, Barbara Strozzi, also rose to prominence. Like Francesca, Barbara came from a musical family in Venice and received most of her instruction from her father, Giulio Strozzi.ⁱⁱⁱ

Women were forbidden from attending music academies well into the 19th century, so the only place to learn was in a convent or at home.^{iv} However, even if a woman managed to obtain a good music education, pursuing music as a career did more than just raise some eyebrows. It was impossible to be taken seriously as an artist when everyone assumed you were a prostitute.^v



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart & Maria Anna Mozart

Maria Anna Mozart, nicknamed Nannerl, was every bit as talented as her famous brother, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. In the 1760's, Leopold Mozart toured Europe with his two child prodigies, billed as "wunderkinder."^{vi} Nannerl even received top billing but everything changed when she turned 18. A little girl could perform, but a woman risked her reputation.^{vii} Left behind in Salzburg while Wolfgang continued to perform in the courts of Europe, Nannerl continued to compose, but none of her music survived. Yet we know her talent was unquestioned. Wolfgang repeatedly wrote that nobody played his keyboard music as well as she could. Their father, Leopold, described her as "one of the most skillful players in Europe", with exceptional improvisational skills and "perfect insight into harmony and modulations."^{viii}

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Fanny Mendelssohn

The 19th century brought some minimal improvements for female musicians. Fanny Mendelssohn (1805 – 1847), just four years older than her famous brother Felix, was born into a musical family, and, like Felix, received early music instruction from their parents, Abraham and Lea.^{ix} By 1818, both Felix and Fanny were composing and appearing in public performances. Reports show that 13-year old Fanny's virtuosity on the piano equaled or surpassed the talents of her nine-year-old brother.^x But Fanny's father put a quick end to her aspirations to pursue a career as a performer and composer. An 1820 letter from Abraham told 15-year old Fanny that while music might become Felix's profession, "for you it can and must only be an ornament, never the basis of your being and doing."^{xi} Fanny ultimately married (her husband was the painter, Wilhelm Hensel), but her musical creativity could not be contained. She is credited with over five hundred musical works, including keyboard pieces, songs, chamber music and choral works.^{xii} Fanny died young, but she did live to see a change in attitude towards women: she was



Fanny & Felix

among the first female composers of that era to have her works published during her lifetime.^{xiii} Like Fanny, Nannerl, Barbara and Francesca, Clara Wieck Schumann (1819-1896) was born into a musical family. Friedrich Wieck was a much-respected piano teacher who made sure his daughter, Clara, studied piano, violin and theory with the best teachers in Leipzig, Dresden and Berlin.^{xiv} When Clara was 9, an 18-year old Robert Schumann moved into the Wieck home to study with her father, who planned to transform the talented Robert into a concert pianist.^{xv} Unfortunately, Schumann's obsession with technique resulted in an overuse injury that severely damaged the muscles in his third finger. He turned to composing, and the talented 13-year old Clara, who idolized the 22-year old Robert, began to perform his compositions in public.^{xvi}

As a teenager, Clara commanded an active performance career throughout Europe. She was one of the few pianists of her time who performed her own compositions but also introduced the works of others, including Domenico Scarlatti, Ludwig van Beethoven and her idol, Robert Schumann. Sixteen-year old Clara was already deeply in love with Robert, but her father, who saw Schumann as "just another composer," forbade Clara to marry him.^{xvii} Under German law, a woman could not marry without her father's consent, and Wieck refused. After legal battles to force her father's consent, Clara, at the age of 21, finally married Robert in September of 1840.^{xviii} Their first child was born in 1841, and by 1842, with Robert by her side, since women could not travel alone, she was back on tour. Undoubtedly, she was the primary breadwinner.^{xix}

In a short marriage, Clara had eight children who demanded her attention. Yet somehow, she managed to perform, compose and teach piano, while supporting Robert and his career. Robert did encourage her composing, but it was clear that his creative work took priority.^{xx} In 1856, at the age of 37, Clara was left a widow, but she resumed her concert tours, advancing the work of her husband and other male composers. Her compositions remained virtually unknown until the 1870's when she became the principal piano teacher at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt.^{xxi}

We hope you will be enticed to explore the music of female composers, including those mentioned in this Prelude. The long list includes Elizabeth Maconchy, Amy Beach, Nadia Boulanger, Hannah Lash and Carolyn Shaw, just to name a few. Women composers including Jennifer Higdon, Anna Clyne, Keiko Abe and Cindy McTee, have been featured on HSO's Masterworks (orchestra) and Intermix (smaller chamber ensembles) series.

Join us!

Please join the Hartford Symphony Orchestra for **Brass & Brahms, November 2 -4, 2018**, as we perform the music of Brahms and Robert Schumann, featuring HSO's extraordinary horn section, Barbara Hill, John Michael Adair, Hilary Lebeduhr and Nick Rubenstein.



WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC WILL SOUND?

Try HSO'S Listening Guide, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Carl Nielsen's Little Suite for Strings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilhufkXFtEE>

Robert Schumann's Concertstück for Four Horns and Orchestra:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3cPOk6f4CE>

Brahms' Symphony No. 3 – the Chicago Symphony conducted by Daniel Barenboim:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAjvP_b0I7E

We urge you to sample the music of Clara Schumann – as well as the unique compositions of contemporary composer Caroline Shaw:

Clara Wieck Schumann Piano Concerto in A minor Opus 7:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4rhHiPUtE>

Clara Schumann Piano Trio:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzTclsluFxU4>

Caroline Shaw's Partita for 8 voices, with Roomful Of Teeth:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDVMtnaB28E>

Try this excellent NPR interview with Caroline Shaw, the youngest-ever recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for music:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2013/04/20/177962358/a-moment-with-pulitzer-winning-composer-caroline-shaw>

And did you know that New Hampshire native Amy Beach was the first American woman to compose a symphony?

<https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/amy-beach/>



Caroline Shaw

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Casey's
Classics

Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program? Coleman Casey, HSO's dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers his recording recommendations of selections featured in our upcoming Masterworks Concert.

Nielsen's charming *Little Suite for Strings* is captured in very beautiful sound in a deft performance by Iona Brown and the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra in a two-CD set also featuring equally engaging string music by Grieg and Britten (VIRGIN).

Schumann's rarely performed, but stirring *Concertstück* for Four Horns and Orchestra, will set your pulse racing in a richly projected performance by John Eliot Gardiner and the Orchestre Revolutionnaire et Romantique (DG).

Brahms's gentle and passionate *Symphony No. 3* has been recorded by every great conductor, but the very difficult score to conduct has been beautifully captured by Guido Cantelli and the Philharmonia (WARNER) and Claudio Abbado and the Berlin Philharmonic (DG), the former in mellow, but lovely, stereo sound from 1956 and the latter in brilliant digital sound from the late 1980s.



REFERENCES

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