

The Women's Philharmonic

The following paper is a descriptive and analytical account of the Women's Philharmonic based on a short series of interviews with women affiliated with the organization. This project was a collaborative one with each member of the research team attending the interviews that were most applicable to their specific section of the paper. Interviews were conducted with the following people: JoAnn Falleta (conductor), Terry Baune (concert mistress), Wendy Howe (former cellist for the WP), Lili Byers (Personnel Manager), and Ester Landau (former volunteer coordinator presently functioning as a volunteer). A supplemental interview was conducted with Maggie Payne, Professor at Mills College, in order to better understand the present day position of women composers. The final paper will be separated into three topics of inquiry which are: the history of the Women's Philharmonic as well as a history of previous all woman orchestras, the music of the Women's Philharmonic, and a sociological analysis of group interaction among members of the Women's Philharmonic. The respective authors of these sections are: Katrina Blomdahl, Amy Bohorquez, and Christine Denton.

Historical

The Women's Philharmonic was formed out of a grassroots effort by Miriam Abrams, Elizabeth Nin, and Nan Washburn. As Terry Baune put it, "They took like twenty bucks and printed up a whole set of flyers saying 'would you like to see a women's philharmonic created and for more information'...they started passing around all these flyers and that's how it all got started." Miriam Abrams was the first to notice that there was a need for such an orchestra. She commented in our interview that she did not even hear of women composers until she had reached graduate school. She wanted to create an orchestra that would prize work by women composers, conductors, and performers with a special emphasis on composers. Her intention as stated in the "Mission Statement" of the orchestra is "to change the face of what is played in every concert hall by incorporating works by women composers into the orchestral repertoire." Abrams contacted Nin and then they both contacted Washburn. The three women decided that it was time for recognition of women musicians.

The WP was supported in a different way from most orchestras. Abrams explained that usually an orchestra is formed out of wealth. Baune said the same thing, that normally orchestras are formed out of "big up front money." The WP is different in this respect because it was formed with one ten dollar donation at a time. According to Abrams this

created a more communal atmosphere, there was a "sense that everyone owns a piece of the orchestra." In fact this communal ideal sustained the orchestra through its early years. As Baune put it, "We really depended on them." Apparently, the WP has always had an enthusiastic audience. The very first concert sold out. Lili Byers commented that audience members in the early years stomped their feet, hooted and hollered at the end of every concert. Baune said, "Yes, we often joke about it that we could do anything and they'd still love us." The audience, it seems, has been a true source of support for the musicians, through such tough times as the eighties and early nineties when the arts weren't adequately supported financially by the government.

The task of familiarizing the public with works by women composers is twofold. First of all the performances educate people in the Bay Area about what women have done historically and continue to do right now. Secondly, and probably just as important to the cause is the distribution of materials to other orchestras that are trying to expand their repertoire. This was the job of Nan Washburn before she recently left the orchestra. Originally, Washburn was the real resource center. She kept files and made mental lists of compositions to recommend to other orchestras. The only way to find out information was to ask her. She was sitting on massive archives. Then the job became too encompassing and literally took up all of her time so she decided to devise a way for people to help her. She did this by formulating a formal space for the work to be done. The official construction and naming of the National Women Composers Resource Center was just a formality, the group had been performing the tasks all along. It was a formality, however, that helped bring in grant money because of its inherently designed purpose. The formal naming of the Resource Center helped expand it into a database. It is the only place in the country where one can find a large collection of works by women on one organized place. Often works by women composers that have not been played for a hundred years, or never played at all are discovered by the WP. Contributions by people around the country are sent to the WP and are entered into the database. At the present time, the Resource Center is not as active as it used to be because of the cost of full time staff. The current composer in residence, Chen Yi, still collects scores and returns phone calls, but the former buzz is gone.

The Women's Philharmonic is the only women's orchestra in the country. It is not however, the first in history. "Virtually every large and mid-sized American city had at least one professional women's orchestra between the years 1888 and 1940" (Randall 1990, p.10). It was surprising that the interviewed members of the WP were not aware of their historical counterparts. When asked, "What is your connection to the women's orchestras of the late nineteenth century?" Wendy Howe's response was, "I wasn't even aware of it. I thought that it [the concept of women's orchestras] was a San Francisco or a Bay Area

thing." Other members had similar responses. It seems that not only have women composers been excluded on an individual level, but entire orchestras of women have been left out of the books of music history. Ester Landau commented, "I haven't even seen any literature on it." That WP members are unaware of the historical achievements of women in the past is a strong testimony to their personal perseverance and their commitment to performing women's compositions.

Women musicians in the era of women's orchestras were affected by "gendered attitudes regarding the appropriateness of particular instruments" (Macleod 1993, p. 296). This led to several complications for women's orchestras. Women were often not taken seriously as musicians. Their participation in music was restricted to particular instruments and styles. Several instruments were deemed unacceptable for women to play, especially those that were large, created facial distortion, or otherwise had a reputation for being "unfeminine". It is for this reason that women's orchestras often had problems staffing certain sections of the orchestra, for example the brass and the percussion. It was not uncommon that a piano would be added in order to compensate for the absence of these instruments. This makes sense considering that the piano was the first instrument in the Western tradition that women played without incurring flingage from the society around them. A possible explanation for this is that women gained a history of playing keyboard instruments through their participation in the church and this led to the social acceptance of piano playing by women. Another possible explanation is that the piano is an instrument that allows the player to maintain an upright and modest position, one that would be praised and encouraged in women performers.

Women were also restricted in terms of style. Women were expected to "express feminine delicacy and other approved virtues in a sentimental love song" (Ammer 1980, p. 74). That perhaps is why the song became associated with women performers and composers. "Even when a writer proudly pointed to the many works produced by women composers, it was usually only their songs that were selected, despite the fact that they wrote in many other forms"(Ammer 1980, p. 74).

The impetus for organizing women's orchestras came out of a lack of employment opportunities for women. There was no place for professionally trained women musicians to go; they were not permitted in existing "gentlemen's orchestras". Women conductors were in a similar situation, if they didn't work for women's orchestras, then they didn't work. A woman conducting a male orchestra was virtually unheard of. In at least two cases a woman conductor formed an entire orchestra just so she could conduct it.

Musical

The music of the Women's Philharmonic is an eclectic collection of music ranging from composers the baroque such as Camille de Rossi (?-?) and Marianne Martinez (1744-1812) to the modern Afro-Cuban sounds of Tania Leon (b.1943). The Women's Philharmonic (WP) popularizes the music composed by women that may have been forgotten and left out of the main stream classical music scene. In researching the topic of women in classical music, many questions arise, including the differences between the music composed by men and by women, why women compose and how they get their support. Part of the goal of this paper is to find answers to these questions.

Recovering Lost Works, Discovering New Works

The responsibility for recovering these pieces of music rests mainly on the shoulders of conductor and musical director, JoAnne Falletta and composer in residence, Chen Yi. According to Chen Yi, compositions are sent to the WP from around the world. It is Chen Yi's job to sort through the pieces and find the ones that are appropriate for the group to perform, then reports back to Ms. Falletta, who makes the final decision. Each piece is then entered into a data base of women composers that is to be shared with anyone seeking information on the music by women composers. Right now the data base contains about 700 works but has been put on hold due to financial difficulties. The WP exposes listeners to the music of women composers in other ways as well.

JoAnne Falletta conducts for a number of other orchestras and is the music director at the Virginia and Long Beach Orchestras. When asked if she brings pieces played by the philharmonic to her other orchestras, she answered with a very adamant "yes". She explained that many of the orchestras request compositions by women, they are just unsure of what to ask for. Many have heard of the group or one of the CDs and use that as a basis. A group in Texas that she is guest conducting requested the Fanny Mendelssohn Overture the women's phil recorded.

Gender Differences: The Players

The Women's Philharmonic differs from coed groups besides being all female. The first hint I received to make me think this group was different was in a short after show discussion with Falletta where she mentioned to me that they were all friends and that was why they played so well together. After hearing a live performance on October 8, 1994, the

truth of her statement was realized. The group playing together sounded not as many musicians playing the same piece, but as one unit playing together as a whole. The kind of unity many professional performers strive for. There was also a great deal of respect and admiration toward Faletta, without a sense of conceit or forced respect. These women seem to think of their conductor as not only their musical leader, but a fellow musician, and as a friend. Falletta herself has been called "one of the brightest stars of symphonic music in America" by the Los Angeles Times and "widely recognized as one of the finest conductors of her generation" by the New York Times. Both of these descriptions are not only very impressive, but they both lack a division of gender. In many of the older pieces performed by the Women's Philharmonic, gender was an issue because of the small numbers of women who were published composers. In the case of Clara Schumann (1818-96), many were surprised a women could compose at all.

Gender Differences: The Composers

Mary Carlisle Howe, a 20th century composer, was quoted saying "no one puts women writers or women painters in a class any more, and they still do so with women composers." Although this quote was many years ago, not that much has changed. In researching this paper, the question of differences between women and men composers was asked to many people of varying musical educations. Music teacher and jazz aficionado Donald Megill of Mira Costa College reminds us that the music between men and women is different, but so is the music between two different women and different men and every composer to date. All music is unique unto itself because it means different things to different people.

If there is no real difference in the music of women and of men, then why do our ears hear predominantly male composers. Why does the canon consist of men? Why then do we have a lack of gender equity in the classical realm, and most other popular styles. In a text book concerning jazz history entitled "Jazz Issues, A Critical History", by Dr. David Megill, the same question arises. In the text he defines history as "a collection of details related to us only through the present ". By using this definition, can we ever understand completely why these women were excluded from their records of history ? With the shift toward social history, historians today seem to be more interested in finding out the "whys" and not just the "whats". With this tend we will hopefully learn more about these peoples daily lives, and with that knowledge we can make assumptions concerning other social standards. So, is it more important that we as scholars include them in teachings of today ?

"..we tend to state only the details of history and hope they speak for themselves without risking the relevant connection to present values..
.. A relevant connection today may be a naive notion tomorrow. What may appear an obvious, relevant connection to our history now may prove controversial in the future."

In a discussion with composer Maggi Payne on the topic of women in music, more specifically as composers, she noted the extensive training of women like Clara Schumann and did consider Schumann to be in, or at least on her way into the musical canon. Yet Payne, herself mentioned that she never felt discouraged or encouraged to compose, to her and the people around her, the fact that she is a woman did not come into play. Payne brought up an interesting point, the possibility that men are more likely to release a work in progress than women. Now we no longer have an audible difference, but a possible difference in values of perfection and quite possibly, a difference in how the composer themselves sees their piece being received. In posing this question to JoAnne Falletta, she suggested that the confidence level of women composers may not be as high when it comes to the performance of a new piece. That possibly they may prejudice their own work before letting others hear it.

Popularizing the Classics

In an attempt to reach a wider audience, the Women's Philharmonic has released two CD's. The first one, "Baroquen Treasures", gives the listener a good grasp of the talent behind the name and an overview of the music composed by the women of the past. Many of the selections are perfect examples of typical baroque style. It is not that these are ordinary in anyway, in fact they are masterfully orchestrated. In an article by Barbara Garvey Jackson, the author notes that women had great influence and participation in the baroque and classic periods. Giving the women's philharmonic good reason to choose this time period to record. After listening, one has to wonder how these pieces were received in their own time and how these beautiful pieces were somehow forgotten.

All pieces are exquisitely written and performed, there is no question on the talent and the training of these women. Of the women composers in this time period, Camille de Rossi composed the largest amount of surviving music along with Maria Margherita yet not much is known about their lives. It is known, however that de Rossi did write for the Viennese Courts. The piece by Rossi, Sinfonia from "Il Sacrifizion Di Abramo" also includes JoAnne Falletta performing a lute solo, displaying her masterful talent as a

guitarist. In comparison with other oratorios of the period, Garvey Jackson explains the lack of choruses and employment of all soloists and orchestra in common with the Sinfonia preceding the oratorio.

The first piece included is composed by Marianne Martinez and is entitled Sinfonia in C. Concert notes by Nan H. Washburn tell the listener the harmonic style is "simple and would be structurally straightforward except for the composer's imaginative and spicy use of different phrase lengths and contours". This upbeat piece encompasses the baroque style by the use of three movements, Allegro con spirito, Andante ma non troppo and Allegro spiritoso.

The CD also highlights the skill of concert mistress Terrie Baune on a piece by Maddelena Laura Lombardini Sirmen(1745-1818) entitled "Concerto No.5 in B-flat for violin", a piece noted for its technical demands on the soloists. This piece also consists of the fast-slow-fast three movement design. A Venetian composer and opera singer, Sirmen had been in training since the age of seven and was the only women composer in the *figlie del coro* to become known internationally.

One piece is a suite from the ballet "Les Genies" by Mlle. Duval(?-1769). Again, not much is known of Duval, including her first name. Because of the dedication page of the ballet, we know she was a member of the Paris Opera. For this piece, Nan H. Washburn notes that the beginning of the piece uses "standard 'French' Overture" with "dotted rhythms answered by a quick allegro in triple meter."

The last piece is composed by Elizabeth Jacquet de la Guerre (c.1664-1729) entitled Cantata No. 4 "Jonas" . Guerre was one of the most successful French composers of her time. Considered one of the foremost female musicians of the world, de la Guerre was a child prodigy who grew up in a musical family and even caught the attention of the Sun King, Louis the XIV. The Cantata is the fourth in a six-book series. Washburn's comments on this piece suggest the composer wanted a mixture of instruments to accompany the soloists. Now knowing of these highly acclaimed, famous musician, composers, one wonders why much of the popularly performed music is written by men and why there were not more women in the field with these role models.

Outside encouragement seems to be the most important influence on the success of women in classical music. The groups other CD, entitled the "Women's Philharmonic Recordings", contains works by Lili Boulanger, Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn and Germaine Tailleferre. Many of these women came from musical families, but not all were encouraged to perform or compose, as was the case for Fanny Mendelssohn. Despite the thoughts of her father and brother discouraging her from venturing into the public eye, her mother and husband helped her gain the self confidence to publish her works. Many

mothers play a large role in these women's lives. Tailleferre was also discouraged by her father and encouraged by her mother. Lili Boulanger had the wonderful support of her sister, Nadia, who is more noted for her affects on the male American composers she instructed for supporting her sisters efforts. Lili went on to be the first woman to win the Prix de Rome for her composing. Repeatedly, in researching the topic of women in music, a composers encouragement by her family in particular seems to be of great importance.

Women Composers of Today

At the most recent concert of the Women's Philharmonic, two west coast premieres were included in the program. The composers attended the performance and were interviewed before the performance by JoAnne Falletta in a pre-concert discussion. "Para Viola y Orquestra", the piece by Tania Leon, included guest viola player, Rozanna Weinberger. To Leon, "the first section is a landscape of sounds, filled with slow-moving, shifting colors". Incorporating these ideas, the piece covered a wide range of styles. In the second section, the passages vary from full and active to sections where the orchestra "remains static" and the viola is the dominant instrument. The fury of the viola was complimented by the orchestra behind her. Leon used the third section to display brightly her afro-cuban roots. Together the sections did not always use a consonant basis, but the music was not unpleasant to the ear. In fact, it was very engaging on every level. Leon's use of movement seemed to be a great factor in the emotional involvement of the audience with the music.

"Para Viola y Orquestra" ended the first half of the performance and the work of Elizabeth Vercoe started the second half. "Changes: A little music for Mozart" for orchestra was commissioned for the Pro Arte Orchestra in 1991. "Changes" refers to the harp in the opening of the piece. Specifically, the "oscillating figure" that "recurs with notes in different order". The Mozart part of the title is in reference to sections of Don Giovanni Overture and other sections of his works that Vercoe used selectively "hidden and dispersed among various instruments". The rest of the program included "Overture to Der Schulkandidat" by Maria Theresia Von Paradis (1759-1824), "Sand" and "Stars" by Mary Howe and "Four Sea Interludes" op.33a by Benjamin Britten. The occurrence of a male composer is not uncommon. If a piece is found that fits into the program well, it will be included regardless of the gender of the composer.

In a general, informal survey, the WP CD was played for various people of varying musical knowledge and all are Mills students. The listeners were not told the pieces were composed, conducted and performed by women until after hearing them. Once they were

told, the majority of the listeners commented that the music "sounded different", after they knew the composers were women. There were remarks concerning the tone of the pieces, light and more upbeat were common. Many remarked that they didn't know women composed music in that era. After hearing the CD, many stated that they liked the music more knowing women were responsible for it. One may consider that having a female audience judge these works may be biased or is it an explanation for the audience they attract.

Sociological

In our interviewing process, we discussed the concept of the musical canon and how different people within the orchestra related to the "big names" in music. Since the Women's Philharmonic almost never plays music that is in the musical canon because there are currently no females in the canon, how do they relate to the canon? Do they agree with it? Do they think that it should be changed, and if so, how? We received various answers to these questions. We discovered in our interview with Abrams, that the orchestra was started by her and Elizabeth Min because they were disappointed with the little amount of music that they had seen by women composers, even as grad students in college, yet they knew that the music had to be out there. When they found this music, they felt that it should be known, but instead of presenting along with the other current members of the canon, they presented it separate from everything else, in an attempt just to get the music out there, instead of an attempt to integrate it with other members of the canon. Landau, however, seemed to prefer the "mix and stir" method of adding people to the canon; that is, everyone who is good enough to be in the musical canon should be, regardless of gender, or how they have been previously viewed. Terry Baune believed that the orchestra felt that the reason that they play women's music is because it has been ignored for so long, just on the basis that the person who wrote the piece happened to be female, not because of a difference in quality, and they wanted to present a balanced view of composers. In a discussion with Wendy Reid, I discovered that she, as a composer, did not want to be regarded as a woman composer, she felt that she was a composer, and she was a woman, but that those two things had nothing to do with each other and that she would have been offended to be considered a "great woman composer." It is obvious, however that the Women's Philharmonic is succeeding in its goal to present more women's music to the world; the database receives numerous requests every day for more and more women's music, to be performed in

programs that are not "women's music" programs. The Women's Philharmonic is succeeding in expanding every one's ideas of what the musical canon should be.

The Women's Philharmonic has had a very different reaction from the community than most orchestras. In interviewing Miriam Abrams and Terry Baune, they both said that orchestras were usually started with lots of money, yet the Women's Philharmonic started with just an idea. Abrams explained that they started with barely any money, and the organization was built out of "lots of \$10 donations." This has caused the orchestra and the audience to feel that they are more of a community. There is really a sense that "everyone in the audience owns a part of the orchestra." and this is very evident when you attend one of their concerts. An audience is what keeps an orchestra going, but the audience for the Women's Philharmonic is different than other major orchestras. Ester Landau pointed out that the audience that is at the women's philharmonic concerts are there not only because it is a musical association, but also because they are supporting the concept of an all-women's organization, and that these are people that would probably never go to any other orchestra's concerts. But when we interviewed Miriam Abrams, she said that she felt that there was no need to make the generalization that there was a difference between the musical and the political aspects of the group. She felt that "the musical aspects of the orchestra fueled the political parts" and although they both existed, they really was no separation between the two, for both the orchestra and the audience.

The orchestra is very important to the people in it. The performers have been on payroll since the beginning, even when the budget wouldn't allow for it, and the founders and organizers were going unpaid. Joann Falletta said that one of the reasons that the orchestra plays so well together is simply because "we're all friends." Wendy Howe also mentioned that the biggest difference between this orchestra and other orchestras was the amount of communication between the office and the orchestra ensured that everyone would have a clear idea of what the orchestras goals were. When we attended the orchestra rehearsals before their California tour, we got a strong sense of unity from the group, that doesn't exist with other groups. Wendy Howe mentioned that this could be a problem at times. "Really being honest, sometimes it just not hard enough on the players. Because of the community feel, there is a sense of forgiveness that isn't there in other orchestras.

From Ester Landau, we got a sense of how the orchestra is seen from the audience's point of view. At times, people not familiar with the orchestra, get mistaken impressions about the orchestra. Some feel that because the orchestra is all women, they

must hate men. She related to us a postcard that they received from a male who claimed that he “would have encouraged all of his friends to go and see the women’s philharmonic” but he soon realized “the error of his ways” when he received the season’s brochure, and he realized that the women were “obviously man hating.” In looking at the brochure, the only clue that they got as to why this man felt this way was because of the picture of JoAnn Falletta conducting the orchestra. Why does this seem to strike such terror into the hearts of men? Traditionally, the role of the conductor has been a male position. Why is that so hard to change? The role of the conductor is seen as such a powerful position, with lots of control, and it seems that some people can not deal with a role that has *always* been male suddenly being female. Women traditionally are not encouraged to conduct anything but minor groups; amateur orchestras, high school bands, etc., and so it upsets people when they see a women in charge of a major orchestra. This is also seen in another story that Ester Landau related to us. A man called the women’s philharmonic to request concert information, and after receiving the normal information about prices, times and pieces to be performed, he asked “Is JoAnn Falletta going to be wearing a man’s tuxedo tonight?” Because some people feel that gender and gender roles are important in an orchestra, the orchestra can be viewed as political because they are trying to change those stereotypes.