

Works for Horn and Piano by Female Composers: An Annotated Guide

by Lin Foulk

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This guide celebrates the horn and piano compositions of female composers. It is one of three documents that I have created to this end and is intended to be a resource for horn students and performers, as well as composers of horn music.¹ My hope is that these documents will encourage horn players to study and perform these works and further encourage female composers to write for the horn.

As with many professions, women have been actively discouraged from composing music because of past biases against all women. A quotation that reflects typical attitudes towards female composers in the nineteenth century is: “All creative work is well-known as being the exclusive work of man; the totality of woman’s labours [sic] being, comparatively speaking, *nil*.”² In the twentieth-century Sir Thomas Beecham said, “There are no women composers, never have been and possibly never will be.”³ And recently a colleague said to me, in response to my own work on horn music by women, that women’s works are not performed because they are not good.

Studies show that women’s works are in fact rarely performed. Deon Price, in her article for the *International Alliance for Women in Music Journal*, interviewed fifteen major American orchestras and found that in the 1997-98 season, only four had

¹ The other documents include a full-length compact disc and a website at www.linfoulk.org, which currently lists over 900 works with horn by female composers.

² Emil Naumann, *History of Music*, vol. 2 (London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1886), 1267.

³ Sir Thomas Beecham, *Vogue’s First Reader* (New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1942), 416.

performed a single work by a woman.⁴ Works composed by women for horn in a solo context are performed even less. Major competitions with specific repertoire lists for horn virtually never include works by women, and I have rarely heard works by women performed at the six International Horn Society Symposia that I have attended since 1993.⁵ Yet, even though works by female composers are rarely performed, thousands of women have composed music.

Music performers and scholars are currently in the process of rediscovering and encouraging performances of works by women. Several festivals of women's works are held every year, there are classes taught exploring women in music, and organizations have been formed to support female composers, including the International Alliance for Women in Music. Additionally, there are repertoire lists and major studies of women's works for several instruments, including flute, guitar, violin, and keyboard. But there are no studies that focus specifically on the horn repertoire of female composers. I hope this research project will give horn students, performers, and composers of horn music the necessary resources to become actively involved with works for horn by female composers.

A brief history of women as composers

Women have been writing music alongside men in all musical genres throughout history.⁶ One of the earliest known female composers is Sappho, a Greek lyric poet from the seventh century B.C., who is known to have composed her own music as well as poetry. Other female composers are known from this time as well, but it was not until the

⁴ Deon Nielsen Price, "1997-98 Season Programming of Women Composers by Major U. S. Orchestras," *International Alliance of Women in Music Journal* 4/1 (Winter 1998) : 21.

⁵ Number of solo and chamber works composed by women at IHS Symposia based on program booklets: 1993, 5 works; 1994, 3 works; 1996, 2 works; 1998, 1 work; 2001, 1 work; 2003, 1 work.

⁶ *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* (1994) includes 875 female composers and Aaron Cohen's *Encyclopedia of Women Composers* (1987) lists over 6,000 female composers.

medieval era that women composers are found with any frequency. German abbess and mystic Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) wrote chants and poetry, in addition to scientific treatises. Her music has been revived in recent decades, and celebrations, musical groups, and a music publishing company honor her today. Additionally, several female troubadours and trouvères are well-known, including Beatriz de Dia, who was active around 1160. It is also important to mention that many works from this time are attributed to the gender-neutral “anonymous.”

In the Renaissance, society placed restrictions on women in the creation of the “home” and woman’s proper place within it, and this seriously limited their compositional creativity and productivity. Women were also forbidden from playing certain instruments and from receiving serious musical training.⁷ Proper musical education for women was generally available only to women with the following backgrounds or experiences: service in a monastery, birth into a musical family, or birth into a noble family who could afford private tutoring. Francesca Caccini (1587-died after 1638) is a famous Italian female singer and composer who was born into a musical family. A child prodigy, Caccini performed in the premiere of *Euridice* by Peri when she was 13 years old and is known to be the first woman to compose opera.⁸ Later in the seventeenth century, harpsichordist and composer Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre (bap. 1665-1729) was another child prodigy born into a musical family. She is regarded as the first major female composer of instrumental music.

⁷ Howard Mayer Brown, “Women Singers and Women’s Songs in Fifteenth-Century Italy,” in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 62-89. Also see *Women in Music*, ed. Carol Neuls-Bates (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 37-39: “..she should choose instruments suited to her purpose. Imagine what an ungainly sight it would be to have a woman playing drums, fifes, trumpets, or other instruments of that sort; and this is simply because their stridency buries and destroys the sweet gentleness which embellishes everything a woman does” (quoted in Baldesar Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier*, which was first published in 1528).

⁸ Excerpts and arrangements from her opera *La liberazione di Ruggiero dall’isola d’Alcina* exist in brass quartet and quintet form in *Treasury of Brass Music by Women Before 1800*, published by Editions Ars Femina.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, music became a social accomplishment for women, along with needlework and embroidery. Women of the Victorian Era were encouraged to sing and play the piano because it elevated the social status of the family, passed away the time, and helped the younger woman attract an appropriate suitor. A musical education was encouraged for women only to the extent that it supported their roles in the home. To illustrate, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's (1805-47) father wrote in 1820 (comparing her with her brother Felix), "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." In 1828, he states it more clearly, "You must...prepare more earnestly and eagerly for your real calling, the only calling of a young woman—I mean the state of a housewife."⁹ Clara Schumann (1819-96), who provided for her family as a professional pianist and an editor for almost 40 years after her husband Robert's death, also composed music. But the discouraging climate led her to write in her diary in 1839, "I once thought that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose—not one has been able to do it, and why should I expect to? It would be arrogance..."¹⁰

The first wave of feminism at the end of the nineteenth century helped develop a more favorable climate for female composers. English composer Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) studied privately with Heinrich von Herzogenberg and met Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms as a result. She wrote several orchestral works and operas before taking a break from composition to serve the suffrage movement. In 1927 she wrote *Concerto for Violin, Horn, and Orchestra*, one of the earliest large-scale works with solo horn by a woman.¹¹ An active composer from the early twentieth century, Amy Beach

⁹ Sebastian Hensel, *The Mendelssohn Family (1792-1847)*, 2 vols., trans. Carl Klingemann (New York: Harper Brothers, 1881), in *Women in Music*, ed. Carol Neuls-Bates (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 144, 146.

¹⁰ Berthold Litzmann, *Clara Schumann: An Artist's Life Based on Material Found in Diaries and Letters*, 2 vols., trans. Grace E. Hadow (London: Macmillan, 1913), in *Women in Music*, ed. Carol Neuls-Bates (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 154.

¹¹ See Janiece Marie Luedeke, "Dame Ethel Smyth's Concerto for Violin, Horn, and Orchestra: A Performance Guide for the Hornist" (DMA diss., Louisiana State

(1867-1944), is known as the first American woman to compose a symphony. In 1925 Beach became the president of the newly founded Society of American Women Composers, a sign that sensitivity to female composers was rising. Another early twentieth century American composer, Ruth Crawford-Seeger, was the first woman to receive the Guggenheim Award in 1930.

The two world wars put women in the work force and later back in the “home.” It was not until the 1960s that women became more active as composers. Additionally, the second wave of feminism in the 1970s created an even better environment for female composers. Noteworthy public achievements include Ellen Taaffe Zwilich (b. 1939), who in 1975 became the first woman to receive the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the Juilliard School, and in 1983, the first woman to receive a Pulitzer Prize in music for her *Symphony No. 1*. In 1976, Thea Musgrave conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra in a performance of her *Concerto for Orchestra*. Societies of female composers continue to be formed and in 1975, Nancy Van de Vate founded the International League of Women Composers. Currently, laws against discrimination have helped women gain access to professorships, residencies, commissions, organizations, and awards, giving women more freedom to compose music and choose for themselves a profession and life most suitable to their own talents, temperaments, and needs for living satisfying and fulfilling lives.

Women as composers of brass music

While many factors have discouraged female composers in the past from writing music, other factors have discouraged them from writing specifically for brass instruments, such as the history, technique, and roles of brass instruments within musical and non-musical contexts. Carol Neuls-Bates states that “until the nineteenth century, the roles of composer and performer were totally intertwined. . . Typically these women wrote the kinds of music that fit into their professional situations, which were more limited than men's.”¹² Three important factors deterred women from writing for brass instruments: first, women were excluded from participating in important ensembles and

University, 1998) and *Ethel Smyth: Concerto for Violin, Horn & Orchestra and Serenade*, Chandos Chan 9449, 1996, compact disc.

¹² Carol Neuls-Bates, ed. *Women in Music* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), xiv.

organizations of brass instruments; second, women did not have access to large-scale public venues for performances of their compositions, where brass instruments were more likely to be displayed; and third, women had generally been discouraged from playing brass instruments.

Historically, brass instruments were primarily used as signaling devices in military, hunting, field, court, and other daily activities. Brass performers were employed through these activities, which excluded female participation. For example, trumpet players were part of a powerful all-male guild that severely restricted the playing and performance of high brass instruments so that the wages and status of the organization remained high. This guild, The Imperial Trumpeters' and Kettledrummers' Guild, survived a long tenure from 1623-1810.¹³ Because women were excluded from such organizations, they did not have the opportunity to experiment with or write for brass instruments.

Even if they had written for brass instruments, women had little or no access to public performances of their works and brass instruments are typically not considered appropriate for small-scale chamber playing in the home. In addition, the fairly standardized brass ensemble that we enjoy today (2 trumpets, horn, trombone, tuba) is a recent phenomenon with original compositions and arrangements for brass quintet mostly created since the late 1950s. Therefore, writing for brass chamber ensemble was not as probable as it would have been for the string quartet, of which many established ensembles have existed since the eighteenth century. Because women in the past were expected to stay at home, they tended to write music suited to that performance space.

Finally, we have already discussed the instrumental restrictions placed on Renaissance women (see footnote 8) and these restrictions have continued to be felt by women throughout history. Gustave Kerker, musical director at the Casino Theater in New York, said:

¹³ Edward Tarr, *The Trumpet* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1988), 94-98. It is important to note that, especially in the Baroque Era, trumpet and horn parts are sometimes interchangeable between the two instruments, so the comparison to trumpeters is quite appropriate.

Nature never intended the fair sex to become cornetists, trombonists, and players of wind instruments. In the first place they are not strong enough to play them as well as men; they lack the lip and lung power to hold notes which deficiency makes them always play out of tune...Another point against them is that women cannot possibly play brass instruments and look pretty, and why should they spoil their good looks?...¹⁴

Why deliberately include works by female composers in horn study and performance?

Horn study and performance in the United States focuses almost exclusively on a select list of compositions for the horn. This list generally does not include works by female composers. Even though women have been discouraged from writing for brass instruments, several did anyway. By deliberately including works by women in horn study and performance, musicians and listeners become aware of women's involvement as composers in music history, role models are provided to women, and works by women are given a voice, which enables a better assessment of their works.

Studying and performing the music of female composers creates a more complete picture of music history. Noted musicologist James Briscoe says Hildegard of Bingen's work illustrates the music of medieval monasticism while the music of Elisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre gives us a clearer picture of music in the court of Louis XIV, where she received encouragement and employment as a performer and composer in her youth.¹⁵ Studying the horn and piano music of Odette Gartenlaub and Yvonne Desportes further illuminates our understanding of the Paris Conservatory jury pieces while Jane Vignery's *Sonata* is one of only a few major works for horn and piano in an impressionistic idiom. Adding works by women does not necessarily mean the elimination of treasured

¹⁴ "Opinions of some New York Leaders on Women as Orchestral Players," *Musical Standard* 21 (London: 2 April 1904): 217-18, in *Women in Music*, ed. Carol Neuls-Bates (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 203. Also read about the current hiring practices of the Vienna Philharmonic and the Munich Philharmonic at www.buzzarte.org

¹⁵ Susan Cook, "Women, Women's Studies, Music and Musicology," *College Music Symposium* 29 (1989) : 95.

standards; it just enhances our understanding of music history.¹⁶ I agree with Sophie Fuller, who wrote in *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers*, “Remembering and acknowledging their many achievements can only enrich our understanding and bring us a clearer picture of the past.”¹⁷

Inclusion of women in curriculum and performance also gives female musicians and audiences role models. Musicologist Eugene Gates wrote, “The historical silence surrounding women composers deprives musically gifted women of the awareness that they are part of a long tradition of female creativity in music, and also prevents them from learning from the past so that they can refine their own heritage--something that male composers, with their 'great men in music' role models, have always been able to do.”¹⁸ Remembering the quotation above from Clara Schumann, it may be hypothesized that had she known about the hundreds of women before her who did compose music, she may not have considered herself arrogant for trying to break through stereotypical ideas that music by women lacked creative talent or worth. It is important for the self-esteem and creativity of young women to know that there is a full list of women who have composed music. This knowledge of women in music history may not only encourage future women to compose music, but it may encourage all females to pursue full-time professions in whatever their calling. They may know that at least on a subconscious level they do not have to defy or challenge societal expectations to be whomever they desire to be—there is a rich history of women who have already liberated women from those expectations.

Inclusion of works by women composers also gives a voice to compositions overlooked by the telling of music history. Since women did not have the professional opportunities that many women have today, it is important to revive and study their

¹⁶ See Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 200.

¹⁷ Sophie Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers* (Great Britain: Pandora, 1994), 11.

¹⁸ Eugene Gates, “Where Are All the Women Composers?” *Canadian Music Educator* 35/5 (Spring 1994) : 18.

works before they are lost forever. Through all of my research and study of music by women, and in my conversations with several horn professionals, I know that works for horn and piano by female composers are not played simply because horn players do not know about them. In the preface to *Women Making Music*, Jane Bowers and Judith Tick express: “As one noted women’s historian has asserted, the first questions to be asked of all subjects that have suffered historical neglect are compensatory. They require fundamental fact-finding to establish what women have actually done, experienced, and achieved.”¹⁹ It is my hope that this guide, CD, and website on horn music by female composers will present the necessary facts to help this music become better assessed and, when appropriate, included in standard repertoire lists, in horn studies, and in horn performances across the world. My project has unearthed several worthwhile works that can only enrich music-making for future students, performers, and audiences.

But is it *quality* music?

Much of the music that I have been studying for this project is what I would call “high-quality,” in that there is a noted amount of inspiration, deliberation, skill, craft, purpose, and knowledge of the musical and technical possibilities available to the horn and the piano. Determining the value of a work is highly subjective, and such subjectivity is just starting to be discussed in music history courses and textbooks. Labeling works by female composers as valueless has led to their exclusion from music history and to their receiving of harsh, biased criticism.

Because women's works lacked value, according to early scholars who created our music history curriculums in the nineteenth century, they were not included in history. Dale Spender explains in her 1982 article, “Invisible Women: The Schooling Scandal” that “Women have been kept 'off the record'. . . by the simple process of men naming the world as it appears to them. . . Whenever the experience of women is different 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

¹⁹ Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, ed., *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 10.

write the record.”²⁰ Again, deliberately including music by female composers diversifies our performances and clarifies our understanding of music history.

Expectations of the kinds of music women should write have strongly influenced the value that music writers, such as critics, placed on compositions by women. Women were expected to fulfill homemaker responsibilities within the “private sphere” while men were expected to make a living for the family in the “public sphere.” These roles have changed dramatically in the past thirty years, but were accepted by the majority for over five centuries and are still imbedded in our subconscious today. These private and public roles had very real implications for the types of music men and women were expected to compose. Women were expected to write music that was immediately pleasing and small-scale in form. Additionally, women generally only had permission to compose for the voice, piano, or chamber ensemble. Men, as music professors and conductors of symphony orchestras, had access to larger ensembles that were comprised of a variety of instruments. They also had the opportunity to write music for formal, serious, high-profile occasions. Women were sharply criticized for composing music for the male-dominated public sphere. For example, a critic stated, “[Ms. Smyth’s *Violin Sonata in A Minor*, op. 7 is] deficient in the feminine charm that might have been expected of a woman composer.”²¹ Another critic said, “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.”²² A review of Amy Beach’s “*Gaelic*” *Symphony* states: “Occasionally she is noisy rather than sonorous. Here she is eminently feminine. A woman who writes for

²⁰ Quoted in Eugene Gates, “Where Are All the Women Composers?” *Canadian Music Educator* 35/5 (Spring 1994) : 18.

²¹ Sophie, Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers* (Great Britain: Pandora, 1994), 290.

²² 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 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 304.

orchestra thinks, 'I must be virile at any cost.'²³ Placed in a no-win situation, women were criticized for writing in any style, be it light and lyrical or forceful and aggressive. Marcia Citron addresses the concept of musical value and its relationship to gender in *Gender and the Musical Canon*. In this work she asserts that value can mean familiarization and familiarization does not necessarily make a work high-quality.²⁴ Works that receive value result from a general consensus among music critics, scholars, historians, professors, performers, and audiences on what should (and therefore should not) be studied and performed. Another musicologist Susan McClary states: "meaning is not inherent in music. . . [it is] kept afloat only because communities of people invest in them."²⁵ Most musicians want to perform high-quality, meaningful works, and it is important to realize that these categories of value are fluid and subjective. There is a myth that history "sifts out" great works, and if women composers wrote "good" music, then we would have heard of it by now.²⁶ In "Old Prejudices, New Perceptions," Betty Atterbury says it concisely: "Omission is a powerful teacher."²⁷

When I began researching music by female composers, I had no idea that I would discover such a rich history of music-making by women. Despite the challenges women composers faced, many were able to compose meaningful, powerful works. I hope this project will educate musicians and encourage the further study and performance of these works. Then musicians will be discouraged from making uninformed judgments such as the one I heard recently from a colleague: women's works are not performed because

²³ *Women in Music*, ed. Carol Neuls-Bates (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 224.

²⁴ See Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 203.

²⁵ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 21.

²⁶ June Boyce-Tillman, "Women's Ways of Knowing," *British Journal of Music Education* 10/3 (November 1993) : 154.

²⁷ Betty Atterbury, "Old Prejudices, New Perceptions," *Music Educators Journal* 78/7 (March 1992) : 26.

they are not good. Women's works are rarely performed because we are only now learning about them.