

Shifting Identities of Feminism to Challenge Classical Music Canon Practices: A Beginners Guide to Guerrilla Gender Musicology

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Abstract: Gender studies in musicology, a development closely linked to the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s, have actively worked to challenge the near-invisibility of women within classical music historiography, education and repertoire. Though significant advances have been made, canon practices today—as represented by mainstream repertoire, publication and educational norms—remain largely static. This paper reflects briefly on the origins and state of canon practices in terms of their pervasive and problematic gender bias. It then discusses approaches employed by gender studies in musicology since their establishment in the 1980s and 1990s. It examines case studies involving gender interests with respect to persuasion and change—in terms of both feminist aims (ratification of the equal rights amendment and Ruth Bader Ginsburg) and canon concerns (classical music collections and poetry anthologies), juxtaposing more subtle and more overt approaches, and explores the issue of backlash. Findings from research in behavioral psychology are presented, particularly, studies on persuasion focused on relationships between exposure, liking and resistance in regard to new stimuli. Based on these findings, in combination with evidence from the case studies, an alternative approach for rehabilitating canon practices with regard to gender is proposed. This approach, referred to as Guerrilla Gender Musicology, suggests more subtle, subversive, bottom-up methodologies and may be required to enhance and reframe current efforts in order to effectively reshape embedded canon practices with regard to gender bias in the long term.

1. Introduction

In the 1980s and 1990s, a handful of musicologists began to recognize and address the pervasive problem of women's exclusion from the entirety of music history. In 1993, Marcia Citron wrote, "Before the early 1980s, musicology was mainly a positivist discipline [...]. The working, albeit unarticulated, assumption was that the object of study was male and usually undifferentiated as to class, race, sexuality, and other social factors. Yet because these variables were unstated, such studies tended to lay claim to universality. Consequently, important differences were papered

over and other groups marginalized, especially women” (Citron 1993, p. 66). Citron refers to her influential *Gender and the Musical Canon* as “a feminist analysis of those concepts and assumptions in the canon formation of Western art music that have had a direct bearing on women’s position with respect to the canon” (ibid., p. 4). She indicates explicitly that her work’s focus is the interplay between feminism and rising research interest in the works of female composers. Prompted by the women’s rights movement and the concurrent dawn of gender studies in the 1960s, European—particularly German—and North American pioneers Susan McClary, Joseph Kerman and Marcia Citron, building on Eva Rieger’s groundbreaking *Frau und Musik* (1980), extensively critiqued the classical music canon on the basis that it is “partial in its gender composition: it consists almost entirely of works by men” (Citron [1993] 2000, p. 4).

These efforts have since spawned numerous and multifaceted attempts within the field to challenge, rethink and reshape the canon and its related practices. Musicological work has unveiled implicit historiographical practices and challenged narratives including the genius concept and binary thought models around gender, while making explicit the gender bias in standards for inclusion/exclusion including professionalism and difference in spheres of activity (Macarthur 2010; Goehr 2002; Battersby 1989; Bramley n.d.; Holtsträter and Fischer 2017; Rode-Breymann 2007; Mantere and Kurkela 2015; Crowther 2007; Green 1997; Gerber 2016; Heesch and Losleben 2012; Pendle 2001; Schneider and Karbusicky 1997; Unseld and Kolb 2019). These and many others have opened the canon and its practices to critique and provided alternative historiographical narratives. This in turn has enabled the creation of gender studies publication formats, symposia and concert series and has allowed for gender studies programs and institutes within major music universities and *Musikhochschulen*. This has made possible the creation of gender lexica and digital humanities resources for gender studies in North America and Western Europe, including the *Lexikon Musik und Gender* (Kreutziger-Herr and Unseld 2010), *Musik und Gender im Internet* (MuGI) (Borchard and Noeske n.d.), the *Collective Biographies of Women* (Booth n.d.), *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Female Composers* (Tsou et al. 1996) and the *Composer Diversity Database* (Deemer 2019). Publishing houses such as Furore in Kassel have been established, which seek out and publish compositions exclusively by female composers, and on university campuses, gender studies departments, gender studies initiatives and identity-based concert series are now part of the accepted institutional fabric. Their activities often center around offering gender studies-specific lectures, organizing concerts explicitly programming female composers and generally advocating for visibility of female composers and other marginalized groups.

These developments have been invaluable in making information about female composers and alternative perspectives on music history available. There is no

doubt, however, that mainstream canon practices remain heavily gendered, and some point toward a recent backslide. In the words of Sally Macarthur, “In the 1990s, a wealth of research on women’s music became available. The first decade of the twenty-first century, however, saw the early demise of that work.” (Macarthur 2010, p. 1). A quarter century after *Gender and the Musical Canon* was published, a mere fraction of works of female composers are performed in major concert halls, taught in general music history courses, professionally recorded or published in a widely accessible and visible manner (Macarthur 2010, chp. 4). Compared to those of their male colleagues, female contributions continue not to figure prominently in widespread historical narratives. Current and past attempts to present female composers’ works and narratives in classical music practice, educational institutions and historiography—though significant and necessary—have done much for identity but not made major inroads in reforming mainstream practices, which are still largely the domain of white, European, Christian men.

This dominion is particularly evident in repertoire and programming practices in major institutions. Even in the smaller format genres (lied and chamber music) where women were particularly active during the 19th and 20th centuries (Wollenberg and Kenny 2015; Williams 2007; Géliot 2009; Chapter 3.7 “Ernestine de Bauduin” in VanderHart 2016; Beer 2016; Tsou et al. 1996; Sadie and Samuel 1994), it is difficult to find one on a mainstream program. During the 2018–2019 Musikverein season in Vienna, seven “Liederabende” were programmed containing a total of 169 songs, with a single composition by a female composer, Clara Schumann’s “Mein Stern.” This inclusion may itself only have been a nod to the 200th anniversary of her birth; both seasons immediately prior to and following were comprised exclusively of male compositions.

The vast underrepresentation of women is conspicuous in mainstream music history reference volumes regularly used in music education throughout the world today, all of which are continuously republished and reissued, such as *Norton’s History of Western Music*, *The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and the *Oxford History of Western Music*.¹ Within these standard works, not only compositions by women but also their varied spheres of activity including salon culture and other, pre-institutional music production and non-professional composition and publication (Parton 2019; Bartsch 2007; Vezeau 2005) are still largely neglected. The aforementioned dictionaries of female composers (Tsou et al. 1996) are still separated from the main volumes,

¹ Oxford, arguably the most inclusive, includes comparatively brief paragraphs on primarily three female composers, Clara Schumann, Lili Boulanger and Ruth Crawford Seeger in the Early 20th Century volume. Other female composers are mentioned only in passing or relegated to footnotes. In contrast, pages 23–26 are entirely dedicated to a single chord in Mahler’s Unfinished Symphony (Taruskin 2010).

relegated to the role of addendum, and are therefore used only in specifically gender studies and women's studies courses, not in general music survey courses.

Publication practices are likewise exclusive, and accessing publications by female composers is often a difficult task. These works are rarely stocked and then—when printed at all—only generally by small, boutique publishing houses that focus on women's compositions,² making them comparatively expensive and also less present both online and in music stores. Many of those interested in finding the music of female musicians they happen upon or those who want to casually explore will still be limited to antique dealers, major conservatory archives and both public and private music collections, and will have to spend time, energy and money getting otherwise unavailable scores copied, or transforming handwritten manuscripts into readable scores. These are significant obstacles to inclusion. The digital database, The International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP), is of enormous assistance here, making an ever-greater number of works potentially available in the public domain. It does, however, require the user to know what he or she is looking for—there is no casual browsing on this database as there is in a music shop.

Finally, practicing musicians are generally motivated to add compositions to their repertoire to which they have been exposed, via either recording or live concert, and fallen in love with. This is difficult to do without being introduced by teachers or peers at university, hearing works in mainstream concerts or happening upon them on YouTube. Though many universities and gender studies departments offer specialty concert series and lectures, this is a far cry from hearing compositions by female composers performed on degree recitals, in standard concerts or accidentally happening upon quality recordings of female composers³ while browsing the internet.⁴

Some may argue that female composers are not known simply because they are not worth knowing about and would be encouraged to explore the chamber music, instrumental music and song of Lili Boulanger, Louise Farrenc, Amy Beach, Melanie Bonis, Ethyl Smyth and countless other compositions by female composers. But, even if one were to assume that all music by women is universally inferior to that of the male composers who are performed, taught and worth remembering (and to be clear, this is quite a contention), there are still issues with non-inclusion of women and other marginalized figures in our mainstream histories, curricula and concert programs. Inclusion is important beyond the question of quality, itself arguably a matter of subjective personal option. For one thing, ignoring 50% of society's

² Editions Fortin, Furore Verlag, Certosa to name a few.

³ Clara Schumann's songs now a thankful exception, having been beautifully recorded and uploaded by Diana Damrau and Helmut Deutsch.

⁴ This could be addressed by the authors' "Counterpoint" initiative detailed later in this article.

contributions is simply out of step with modern consciousness. The canon, according to Citron is “a narrative of the past and a template for the future” as well as “a means of instilling a sense of identity in a culture: who the constituents are, where they come from, and where they are going” (Citron [1993] 2000, p. 1). Canon practices that ignore the production of half of its members are not honest about the identity they are instilling. If, in fact, women are not truly integrated into the mainstream canon practices, we are actively cutting 50% of the population out of these past narratives and future templates, and denying them participation within the identity of their own culture.

Moreover, historical non-inclusion appears stubbornly self-perpetuating. The *Donne Women in Music* project found not only that compositions by men made up over 96% of classical orchestral works programmed in 2018–2020, including performances of new music; the existence of activist groups such as *Gender Relations in New Music* (GRINM) and studies by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra point out extreme gender bias even within the new music scene, where performances of music by living composers still skew to over 85% male, despite the fact that today the percentage of women graduating from major conservatories and music universities with composition degrees is much higher (O’Bannon 2018).

There is clearly a chasm between gender studies’ musicological advances and their dissemination into mainstream music education and programming practices at both the collegiate level and in venerated music institutions. Some might argue that such changes simply take time but, while this is certainly the case, there is also reason to believe that the approach itself is also flawed—or at least incomplete. While publishing or performing specifically around a marginalized group—a primary tactic of university-based gender studies departments and gender studies projects—is powerful, perhaps even essential for creating identity, it is still an isolated space. Women have historically been relegated to the private sphere: parlors, tea rooms and salons, thereby excluded from having a public voice—made invisible (see, for example, Kuster 2018, pp. 217–19). Similarly, giving female composers specific forums, performances and scholarship, while essential for creating identity and making information available to those looking for it, still keeps them localized; they are rendered invisible within isolated spaces. This relegates women and their works to the margins of music history and industry, limiting their reach. Those interested seek out their company, but the mainstream, institutionalized classical music community can easily continue to ignore their existence. At some point, there must be integration or these composers and works will quietly die of consumption in relative isolation.

We propose a shift in technique—or at least an additional line of approach—which we have dubbed *Guerrilla Gender Musicology*, which advocates for a subtle shift in approach for all those interested in weaving women into the very framework of the classical music mainstream in terms of publication, education and programming,

thereby reshaping canon practices. The name of the theory is derived from the term “Guerrilla Warfare”, defined as “a type of asymmetric warfare between opponents of unequal strength” (Tomes 2004, pp. 16–29). Guerrilla Gender Musicology considers itself irregular warfare. It strategically aims to enhance the impact of a small force on a larger, more cumbersome one (Van Creveld 2000, pp. 356–58). Through it, the interests of gender studies and feminism take aim at the status quo, striving not only to topple a tradition and system of canon practices functionally devoid of women, but also to increase popular support for these activities. Guerrilla Gender Musicology should not be understood as lying in opposition to the values and goals of feminist musicology or gender studies practices. Rather, we understand it as its next, necessary evolutionary step.

2. Backlash and Shifting Feminist Identities

Feminist identity has shifted a great deal since the high tide of the second wave, as have attitudes towards it. Substantial successes for the movement during the late 20th and early 21st century, including raised awareness of the pay gap in both Germany and the US, quotas designed to promote fairer gender representation in the workplace and an increased intolerance for predatory sexual behavior from powerful institutional figures have been accompanied by anxiety and pushback. The open, direct demand for change on social, economic and political levels which characterize all broad feminist movement⁵ have been overtly and also subversively challenged.

Pronounced backlash in public policy, legislative protections and societal discourse during the early 21st century is verifiable. A study commissioned by the European Parliament’s Policy Department for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs identified several fields and strategies by which the backlash against gender equality and women’s and girls’ rights in Austria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia has been occurring at multiple levels. According to the report, efforts since 2005 “have decreased the level of protection of women and girls and reduced access to their rights” on a number of fronts (Juhász 2018, p. 1).

More subversively, the mainstream media have systematically framed feminism as an oppressive attempt to take opportunities regarded as traditionally feminine away from women (McRobbie 2009, pp. 18–22). Women identifying as feminists have been treated in the media as lonely, sexually deviant, potentially threatening and mentally unstable (see McRobbie’s analysis of the 1987 blockbuster *Fatal Attraction* in McRobbie 2009, pp. 35–37). Such characterizations have resulted in a significant percentage of younger women today hesitating to identify as feminist, though they may espouse feminist ideals. Of the 2093 millennial women surveyed by

⁵ Including those who identify as second-wave, third-wave, fourth-wave, radical or liberal.

Refinery29 and CBS News, 54% said that they would *not* consider themselves feminists, though many still value gender equality on principle (Refinery 2018). Feminist identity itself has grown fraught.

Resistance to the gender studies movement has likewise been steadfast in the classical music community where scholarly backlash against more inclusive historiographical narratives as well as canonic expansion is still mainstream.⁶ Having a canon imbued with great influence over time itself gives weight and importance to those works established within it. Literary critic and theorist Barbara Herrnstein Smith indicates that making a work “unquestionable”, canonizing it, gives it specific power. Over time, “it will also begin to perform certain characteristic cultural functions by virtue of the very fact that it has endured [...] and will be valued and preserved accordingly: as a witness to lost innocence, former glory, and/or apparently persistent communal interests and “values” and thus a banner of communal identity [...]” (Smith 1991, p. 33). For this reason, any forceful critique of something as significant as the canon to musicology is perceived by the status quo as an attack on their identity, culture and community. This challenges their basic worldview and therefore threatens their identity, causing anxiety and resistance (Smith 1991, p. 33). Walter’s work illustrates this existential anxiety. He bemoans what he characterizes as the “immoderate expansion of the canon” as a threat to the very existence of musicology. “Whether one holds a lecture on the music of Louise Farrenc or on the music of Ludwig van Beethoven, on the music of Pauline Viardot-Garcia or that of Franz Liszt, is no longer important,” he complains, contending that this has led musicology to the brink “not of an interdisciplinary golden era, but to its disintegration” (Walter 2013, p. 96).

The polarization that occurs around the concept of feminism hinders the efficacy of outright efforts that promote overhauling canon practices. The tactics that gender musicologists have preferred thus far are now polarizing simply because the very words “women”, “female” and “gender” have been politicized. Overtly and purposefully gender-exclusive writing, publication and concert programming and using titles such as *Women in Music: A History* (Pendle 2001), *Sounds and Sweet Airs: The Forgotten Women of Classical Music* (Beer 2016), or *Project W: Works by Diverse Women Composers* (Chicago Sinfonietta et al. 2018) are not likely to incite greater acceptance or increased audience. When branded with the “Gender/Feminism” mark, the audience is automatically limited to those seeking to identify with those groups. Response to such efforts is split along ideological lines, creating backlash as well as support. Moreover, the viewer/listener/consumer is predisposed to assume that the

⁶ As an example, musicologist Michael Walter’s contribution (Pietschmann and Wald-Fuhrmann 2012); (Assmann 2007); (Harold 1994); (Heydebrand 1998) and (Kaiser and Matuschek 2001).

composers featured in gender-driven books, concerts or CDs are presented because they are women and not because their accomplishments are inherently of value.

So, what is the way forward? If identification as feminist or as a proponent of gender studies is problematic, what could an alternative approach be? We look at two instances where women's interests have seen increased representation in other fields. Each case study features both overtly feminist/gender-specific approaches as well as alternative methodologies.

3. Case Study #1: Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the ERA

A feminist icon today, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg used her role during the 1970s as a leading voice in the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) Women's Rights Project's campaign for gender equality and did much to increase women's protections and equality under the law. During her confirmation in 1993, she was characterized as an incrementalist who thought *Roe v. Wade* might have gone too far and considered overcautious by many of her feminist colleagues. Looking back today, however, the impact of her legal achievements outshines those more direct approaches of her fellow feminists and their support for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

The force of the second-wave feminist movement, with which Ginsburg also identified, was primarily focused on fighting for ratification of the ERA—an amendment asserting the equality of women and men under the U.S. Constitution. The ERA, first introduced in 1923 and annually brought to the table throughout the 1940s, did not make headway until the feminist movement of the 1960s. It gained traction and seemed destined for ratification by the late 1960s and early 1970s but, due to heated backlash, it ultimately failed, largely because of conservative Phyllis Schlafly's opposition campaign. Not only did the ERA not meet the number of states required for ratification by its 1979 deadline, but five states that had already approved the amendment ultimately rescinded their ratification. The ERA has still not become a constitutional amendment.

Concurrently, Ginsburg and her colleagues at the Association for Progressive Communications Women's Rights Programme (WRP) were interested in similar rights for women but, instead of marching and direct lobbying, used a more nuanced approach. Realizing that the judges and general legal structure were formed and dominated by men who would not easily recognize gender-based discrimination against women as it was not a factor in their own experience, they chose male as well as female plaintiffs to make the case that gender discrimination against both men

and women was problematic enough to warrant “strict scrutiny.”⁷ The turning point occurred in 1976:

Ms Ginsburg helped develop the legal strategy for *Craig v. Boren*, a case brought by a freshman at Oklahoma State University. The young man took issue with an Oklahoma law that permitted 18-year-old women to buy 3.2%-alcohol beer . . . while delaying this honour for men until their 21st birthdays. [...]. Most notably, for the first time, a majority of the court elevated gender above the lowest level of review. (The Economist 2018)⁸

Although the court did not raise gender discrimination to strict scrutiny, they did grant it “intermediate scrutiny”, a major step forward. This raised level of review then served as a Trojan horse for passing women’s rights legislation. Methodically strengthened by precedent over the next decades, it steadily changed the playing field for gender equality under United States law by assuring that legal and administrative sex-based rulings were subject to a higher standard of judicial review. More importantly, it has not yet directly met the same level of violent—sometimes permanent—backlash as has often greeted more public, politicized wins.⁹

4. Case Study #2: Poetry

While the body of canonized classical composers is nearly exclusively male, one area of art that has a greater semblance of equality in terms of gender representation is poetry. Anthologies of poetry today include a significantly higher proportion of women than recordings or digital collections of classical music. A comparative survey of popular poetry anthologies and “Best Of” classical music compilations illustrates this nicely. In the book *100 Best Loved Poems* (Smith 1995), published by Dover Publications in 1995, 5 out of 55 poets listed are female. While representation just below 10% may feel like tokenism, the anthology in question includes multiple poems by certain poets. Emily Dickinson, therefore, ties for second place with William Shakespeare for the greatest number of featured poems. In the 2013 collection published by Amazon, *Poem Collection—1000+ Greatest Poems of All Time* (Chityil 2013), 379 poets are featured. Of those dating prior to 1700, 3% of the

⁷ Strict scrutiny under the law had been the standard for racial discrimination since the *Korematsu v. United States* case in 1944.

⁸ The article is online and The Economist has a policy of not naming their authors, as detailed here: <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2013/09/04/why-are-the-economists-writers-anonymous>.

⁹ “While suffragists won the vote in 1920, the following decade experienced a conservative reactionism similar to that of the Reagan era...” (Marshall 1991, p. 52). We refer as well to the consistent, strengthening backlash to the landmark 1973 “*Roe v. Wade*” decision which is currently coming to a head in the USA.

poets featured are female (4 out of 127). However, in the category of poets after 1700, 21% of poets featured are women (53 out of 252). Additionally, the book cover depicts a selection of poets, 5 out of 16 of whom are female. These books are not marketed in any gender-specific manner but rather combine male and female poets, ostensibly on the basis of talent and the significance of their contributions. In contrast, the CDs *100 Classical Hits* (Various Artists 2003) and *The Classical Album: The World's Greatest Composers, The World's Greatest Music* (Various Artists 2016) sold on the same platform feature a grand total of zero female composers.

Female poets have been integrated with comparative success into the canon, and the treatment of their work has differed from that of their musical counterparts. Emily Dickinson's first large-scale publications date from 1890 and 1891, 4 and 5 years following her death. They were overwhelmingly successful, with several editions reprinted within the next few years. One reviewer in 1892 claimed, "The world will not rest satisfied till every scrap of her writings, letters as well as literature, has been published" (Buckingham 1989, p. 295). These initial editions, titled simply, *Poems: Emily Dickinson*, presented Dickinson as a poet and an artist. This pattern is not unique to Dickinson; Maya Angelou's first major poetry publication, a collection nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, titled *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiie* (Angelou 1971), and Sylvia Plath's *The Colossus and Other Poems* (Plath 1967) enjoyed similar outcomes. As these poets were presented as individuals and artists, focus was not drawn primarily to their gender, but rather to their work.

One reason that gender-specific publications are unlikely to effectively reshape canon practices is because of their relative isolation and limited audience. According to Amazon statistics, the best-selling gender-specific anthology of poetry is *Modernist Women Poets* (Hickman 2014), ranked number 327,000 in the library of books available for purchase on Amazon. Poetry anthologies that do not include exclusively female works but both male and female poetry enjoy better rankings, even those that specify a nationality. Such anthologies range in rankings between 22,000 and 25,000. Though fewer female poets are included within such collections, they reach a far greater number of readers, exposing more individuals to poetry penned by women. This indicates that if a parallel approach were to be applied to female composers (i.e., increased inclusion in gender neutral concerts, digital compilations, books, etc.) it may likewise increase exposure to the compositions by females compared with gender-specific approaches.

Both cases illustrate that employment of more subtle, subversive approaches have historically proven more successful and less prone to opposition than explicitly "feminist" strategies. These advances have proven robust, withstanding the test of time. The place in the poetry canon of Emily Dickinson and Maya Angelou is as secure as ever. Though the recent shift to a markedly conservative majority and bias within the U.S. Supreme Court with the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh may

very well seriously curtail the progress made by Justice Ginsburg and her colleagues, it will take enormous effort to undermine the integrity of decades of legal precedent and systematic progress.

This evidence suggests that gender musicologists may benefit from expanding their tactical arsenals in light of both changing conceptions of and opposition to overt feminism. As justified and reasonable as feminist demands for equality in representation are throughout scholarship, as well as in legislation, politics and social attitudes, the reality is that employing a Trojan horse when possible may be more effective long term than overt, explicit approaches. Quotas, however well-intentioned, inevitably incur backlash and do not alone solve the underlying issues.¹⁰ In other words, instead of demanding that music by women has a fundamental right not to be ignored in public performance and scholarship because of the value of women, it may be more effective at times to instead encourage its acceptance through more subversive means. One key to acceptance, psychologists have indicated, is exposure.

5. The Mere Exposure Effect

How can we generate acceptance without inciting backlash? Psychology indicates that acceptance, or “liking”, is directly linked to recognition and familiarity, which in turn is produced by exposure. The Mere Exposure Effect, an observation that “the liking for a stimulus increases on repeated exposure to that stimulus” was first recognized by Robert Zajonc in 1968 and has been reaffirmed by numerous publications between 1978 and 2016 (Montoya et al. 2017, pp. 459–498).

Related research specifies that conscious recognition to exposure is not necessary to promote liking. On the contrary, “the presence of recognition acts only to reduce liking via hastening the effects of satiation” (according to Ye and van Raaij, Montoya et al. 2017, p. 461). The Mere Exposure Effect is most effective when the recipient is exposed to a stimulus repeatedly in small doses, without being consciously aware of the exposure. If conscious recognition of the exposure remains low and relatively unstable, the recipient associates recognition with a liking of the stimulus. If the stimulus is presented more frequently and for longer durations, to the point that the recipient has a strong conscious awareness of the stimulus, liking decreases (Montoya et al. 2017, p. 462).

Zajonc and many other experts who have henceforth studied this effect, therefore, propose, “supraliminary exposed stimuli, relative to subliminally exposed stimuli are associated with activated cognitive processing that ‘dilutes’ the influence of effective

¹⁰ See (Leibbrandt et al. 2018) and (Krook 2015). This is not new—see (Morantz 1978) for a reflection of systematic eradication of women from the medical profession around 1900 as part of a backlash movement.

processes, resulting in greater positive effects for subliminal than supraliminal presentations” (Montoya et al. 2017, p. 462).

Conclusions regarding the presentation type of new stimuli and its impact on liking are likewise helpful. Stimuli can be presented homogeneously—i.e., the same stimulus presented repeatedly, or heterogeneously, where “stimuli are intermixed as they are presented”. Research indicates overwhelmingly that heterogeneous approaches are more effective (Montoya et al. 2017, p. 463).

Applying conclusions drawn from research regarding the Mere Exposure Effect to musicology may explain why overt attempts have not successfully altered repertoire or canon practices. Firstly, the negative effects of supraliminal exposure to stimuli—the negative response to conscious recognition of stimuli—have a parallel in consciously gendered approaches attempting to modify taste and the canon. Attempts to fundamentally change something as weighty as the canon involves persuading a significant group to accept that much of what they understand and believe is fundamentally flawed and that there is a pressing need to adjust their practices accordingly. When persuasion is openly attempted with any thrust, an inevitable result is resistance or backlash. According to psychology, communication science and marketing research, humans are motivated to resist persuasion. They do not want to be influenced and are reluctant to change. In the face of persuasive efforts, individuals commonly recognize persuasion as a threat to their freedom or power. They develop a multitude of strategies to resist overt persuasion, including avoidance, passively ignoring persuasion attempts, contestation, where they actively challenge the message, messenger or methodologies used, and bias-processing where they selectively understand the message in such a way that it reinforces their original attitudes and behavior (Fransen et al. 2015, p. 1201).

The Mere Exposure Effect implies that acceptance of a stimulus may best be gained by subversively and incrementally influencing exposure without overtly drawing attention to specific aims. The result is increased “liking” i.e., acceptance, instead of resistance. The recipient does not then feel intellectually obligated to alter preferences or feel like he or she is being coerced, both of which inevitably result in backlash and limiting change. An ideal approach involves exposing recipients to new or foreign stimuli in small doses over a large period of time, preferably heterogeneously mixed with an already well-known, already accepted stimulus. In this way, the recipient not only is disposed to eventually like and accept the stimulus but, additionally, will attribute the feeling of liking to an own decision and preference instead of outside coercion.

6. Introduction to Guerrilla Gender Musicology

How can the Mere Exposure Effect be applied to classical music canon practices? Could these principles be used by scholars and musicians to fundamentally shift norms in such pervasively conservative institutions?

Guerrilla Gender Musicology is focused on normalization and advocates for adding a bottom-up approach to top-down institutional attempts at change. It advocates for consistent and—most importantly—integrated exposure, utilizing the empirically proven psychological principles laid out in studies of the Mere Exposure Effect. This perspective contends that the integration of women into canon practices requires moving away from primarily presenting female composers in contexts where attention is brought to the gender of the composers.

This can be achieved by reframing, such as moving away from calling these disciplines “gender studies”, which is still strongly associated with the “women’s studies” from which it emerged (Stromquist 2001), and renaming them Power Studies¹¹ or Studies in Hegemony. Within musicology and music practice, it further advocates for women being presented the same way as male canonized composers are presented, not because they are male or female, but because they are composers. Rather than pushing particularly for the creation of publications, performances and spaces marked explicitly by “gender” categorizations, our long-term aim should be advocating for male and female, known and unknown composers and their gendered practices to be systematically integrated into textbooks, publications and concert programs, steadily increasing exposure of unknown works and narratives in combination with accepted ones.¹² Without further comment, the assumption is, then, that their compositions are worthy of study and performance. The goal is neither denial nor abdication of these composers’ identities as female, but instead a shift away from it being their primary identity. Guerrilla Gender Musicology maximizes Mere Exposure Effect, mirroring similar successful tactics in recent history.

Approaches adopted by Gender Studies or Feminist Musicology have focused almost exclusively on “top-down” approaches, i.e., challenging power structures within institutions, setting quotas for inclusion of works and faculty in institutions and devising winning arguments to change the minds of scholars—all efforts which need to continue. That being said, back in the 1990s, Susan McClary pointed to

¹¹ This term was proposed by Dr. Marie-Agnes Dittrich at the conference *Compositrices et interprètes en France et en Allemagne: approches analytiques, sociologiques et historiques* in Vienna in June, 2019 at the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien. Dittrich contended that she is regularly confronted by male students and occasionally even faculty who do not feel Gender Studies have any application to their lives, despite their being human and therefore in possession of gender. This underlines how conflated in perception Women’s Studies and Gender Studies continue to be.

¹² Understanding of course, that convincing decision-makers in this field to do so is a challenge in and of itself. These changes begin with the likeminded.

embedded institutional—particularly educational—issues which reinforce the canon through its various practices. She indicates in “Reshaping a Discipline” that, “most of us simply have internalized the hierarchy as it was given to us as students” (McClary 1993, p. 406). Despite the aforementioned strides made by gender studies movements and efforts since the 1990s, how much can we say that our mainstream, institutional canon practices have really changed with regard to the inclusion of women composers in mainstream histories, performances and repertoires since that time? There is a clear disconnect between the advances made in musicological thought and gender musicology (with regard to breaking the binary, deconstructing notions of authorship, questioning concepts of value, genius, network and agency and de-marginalizing historiography and how burgeoning musicians are instructed and influenced.

We assert that there are still top-down, fundamental changes called for, including reshaping the books intensively used throughout a music student’s education (moving away from the binary attitudes of history/herstory, i.e., female composers belong exclusively in women’s studies classes, and only there) as well as music programming. The works presented to students as worthy for study and inclusion on their exams and for performance in their final recitals need diversification. Instructors should be offered opportunities to be further educated and provided with accessible, alternative repertoire options in line with modern attitudes towards diversity and inclusion.

All of this is no easy task and will inevitably meet with resistance. The key to minimizing this resistance may lie in focusing on college students at an impressionable age, when they are building and deepening their views on classical music. Guerrilla Gender Musicology advocates for focusing particularly on younger generations of musicians whose tastes and biases are more flexible.¹³

The authors presented one potential practical application of this approach, entitled “Counterpoint”, at the conference *Compositrices et interprètes en France et en Allemagne: approches analytiques, sociologiques et historiques* in Vienna, in June 2019. In brief, “Counterpoint” promotes the “radical de-hierarchisation of music” (Macarthur 2010, p. 161) through the creation of an interactive, millennial-oriented, audio-visual YouTube channel. Here, chamber music and lieder compositions, with a heavy weight on marginalized composers, are freely mixed with works established in the canon. The idea is to promote subtle exposure to “unknown” stimuli—here, musical works—combined with known stimuli—here, canonized repertoire—thereby increasing liking without drawing attention to the Otherness of marginalized compositions. It does not aim to appeal to decision-makers, but instead

¹³ The likelihood of changing the minds of established musicologists with an ingrained, differing worldview, such as musicologist Michael Walter, is slim. The chance of influencing the tastes of musicians and young audience members who are exposed to repertoire via the internet as much as from peers and teachers today is significantly higher.

to quietly begin reshaping a major part of the modern musical world, fundamentally influencing the next generation of musicians and audiences in terms of repertoire awareness. If students are exposed to a more balanced mix of music during their formative years, the chances of them being more motivated to establish the kind of top-down institutional shifts still required when they—in a generation—are making those sorts of decisions, are arguably increased. If they like and are familiar with quality music of currently marginalized female composers, they may advocate for—or at least be open to—creating space for them in history books and lexica, performing their work in mainstream concerts and including them and their compositions in the history courses and recital/exam repertoires of the next generation of students.

A shift in mindset from overt to subtle integration may also increase prospective audiences while striving for equality. While gender equality is a generally agreeable concept today, many disagree on the details. Some believe that women should be equally represented in the canon, and others feel that female composers should be included purely on whatever they define as merit-based standards. A concert dedicated exclusively to female composers is appealing only to those who believe that we should actively strive for a more representative canon, but those who feel that gender should not influence inclusion will have objections. A concert that happens to include women without explicitly advocating a feminist cause leaves the audience with the implicit understanding that interest in the composition, not the gender of its creator, was the primary motivation for its programming choices. In other words, the former appeals to those who value equal gender representation but may repel those who see gender studies or feminism as problematic or distasteful. The latter has a chance to appeal to everyone.

Quotas, gender-specific literature and events and publications have all been valuable steps towards the legitimization and availability of scholarship around marginalized composers. They have, however, also experienced pushback and have their limitations. If over half of millennials espouse feminist values but dislike being identified by the term feminist (Refinery 2018) and if gender studies and feminist musicology are subject to backlash, it is time to rebrand and evolve our standards of how gender is packaged and presented. It is time to shift and multiply our approaches. Our feminist strategies for increasing gender equality must continuously evolve in order to more effectively involve women in classical music canon practices. Avoiding the language of feminism/gender in certain circumstances and focusing on emerging musicians and audiences, not merely on decision-makers in the classical music community, may grant this subtle approach to integration more long-term success than frontal offensives. If less consistently overtly linked to feminism, these efforts may also be more effectively guarded from common reactions of strawmanning and resistance.

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