

Women Composers Concerts + Feminist Pedagogy = ?

Elizabeth R Chen, bethchen@umich.edu
Math (PhD) + Women's Studies (Grad Certificate)

Abstract

Why Women Composers Concerts?

We report on a cultural feminist project to raise awareness of women composers and showcase their beautiful (but perhaps unfamiliar) music. We organized a series of nine collage concerts (2003-2007), where there was one and only one rule: "The music must be written by women!" From such a simple premise, you would expect a fairly straightforward result. However, you would be surprised by the controversies and complexities arising from the differences between radical vs liberal feminisms.

This project is different from other Women in Music Festivals (organized by mainstream music schools), because we were not inspired by traditional classical music concerts. Instead, we drew our inspiration from the consciousness raising groups (of Second Wave Feminism), women's poetry readings and women's folk music concerts, and Women's studies Seminars (taught by feminist professors using the methods of Feminist Pedagogy).

We applied academic feminist theory to real-world feminist activism, and Feminist Pedagogy to concert organizing. We tried to be always self-reflective and vigilant about being as feminist as possible (ie: avoiding replicating patriarchy, involving everyone in the democratic process, etc). Since we draw parallels between various types of feminist theories, operating procedures of feminist movements/groups, ways to organize a feminist concerts, and methods to teach feminist classrooms, our approach is interdisciplinary among the fields of Women's Studies, Music, and Education.