

Women Composers Concerts + Feminist Pedagogy = ?

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0 Introduction

People would ask me: “Why Women Composers Concerts? Isn’t that reverse discrimination?” As a socratic educator, I would ask back: “Who are your favorite composers?” If you’re like most people, you probably listed a bunch of dead white men. So let’s rephrase that: “Can you think of even one female composer?”

So that’s why I decided to organize Women Composers Concerts: to raise awareness of women in music, and to showcase the very beautiful (but perhaps unknown) works of women composers. They were a series of nine collage concerts, where there was one and only one rule: “The music must be written by women!” So, starting with this very simple concept, you would think that it would be fairly straightforward, but actually, there is more than meets the eye...

Second Wave Feminism

In the 1960s and 1970s there were great social movements in general: Second Wave Feminism, Civil Rights for racial minorities, Stonewall for gays/bisexuals, etc... For the women’s movement in particular, we have: consciousness raising groups, Women’s Studies departments, Title IX non-discrimination in education, “Roe vs Wade” abortion rights, Second Vatican Council, and many other exciting events.

Women’s movements tend to progress in various stages (like other movements in general). Eg: First Wave Feminism was concerned with winning very basic equal rights under the law: the right to be a human being (not some man’s property), the right to own property and sign contracts, the right to vote. (The Women’s Suffrage movement started at the Seneca Falls Convention, 1848.) Afterwards, building upon this foundation, it becomes possible to focus on social equality/equity.

Among feminists, everyone has slightly different definitions of the various types of

feminisms, Even within her own book *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), Chela Sandoval is not completely consistent. At the beginning of Chapter 2 (“US Third World Feminism: Differential Social Movement I”), she writes:

This study identifies five principal categories around which oppositional consciousness is organized, and which are politically effective means for transforming dominant power relations. I characterize these as the “equal rights”, “revolutionary”, “supremacist”, “separatist”, and “differential” forms of oppositional consciousness. [p.43]

However, later in the same chapter, she writes:

We have just charted our way through a ubiquitously cited four-phase feminist history of consciousness, a cognitive map consisting of “liberal”, “Marxist”, “radical/cultural”, and “socialist” feminisms. We can schematize these phases as “women are the same as men”, “women are different from men”, “women are superior”, and the fourth catchall category, “women are a racially divided class”. [p.50]

Generally, feminisms have broad agreement on the basic terms, although the details might differ. So, for the purposes of this paper, I will briefly define them here (how I personally use them) and illustrate with sample slogans: proto-feminism (concern with numbers and representation. “A woman president! More female faculty!”), liberal feminism (working within the (good) system. “Equality under the law! Women can play the game just as well as men!”), radical feminism (reforming the entire (flawed) system, from the root up. “Equity in real life is not the same as Equality on paper!”), cultural feminism (celebrating or essentializing women’s voices/perspectives, strengths, values. “Different is Good! Don’t behave (badly) just like men!”).

Women’s Studies + Women in Music

In the midst of all this activity, (contemporary) women composers started their own publishing company (Arsis Press 1974), and formed their own advocacy groups (International League of Women Composers 1975, American Women Composers 1976, International Congress on Women in Music 1979). These three groups eventually merged (to form the International Alliance for Women in Music 1995).

In the 1980s there were new currents in musical scholarship, where people were discovering previously unknown works by women composers. Eg: Fanny Hensel composed in secret,

because her father and brother Felix Mendelssohn disapproved (fortunately, her husband was supportive of her creativity), and some of her works were not published until very recently. Da Capo Press introduced a special *Women Composers Series* (1979). and a number of new publishers were born, who specifically publish (historical and/or contemporary) women's music: ClarNan Editions (1984), Furore Verlag (1986), Hildegard Publishing Co (1988), Editions Ars Femina (1991), Vivace Press (1992).

As an academic discipline in its own right, Women's Studies has been around since the 1970s. However, feminist critical theory wasn't applied to music until the 1990s, because the gendering of music is much more subtle than in the other forms of art or literature. ie: There are no pictures/sculptures of women, or written texts about women or (ostensibly) from a woman's voice/perspective (unless you're dealing with songs or opera). Also, it was important to establish the existence of women's music in the 1980s, before feminist scholars could theorize about it in the 1990s: *Women in Music: an Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Carol Neuls-Bates 1982, 1996), *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Susan McClary 1991, 2002), *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Marcia Citron 1993), *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Ruth Solie 1993), *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music* (Susan Cook & Judy Tsou 1994).

Birth of an Experiment

Years ago, back in the (g)olden days of "mp3.com", you could download free .mp3 files. I came across some classical music files by several women composers (Kassiāne, Anna Bon di Venezia, Fanny Hensel, Clara Schumann, Luise Adolpha le Beau, Cécile Chaminade, Amy Beach, "Poldowski", Germaine Tailleferre). I was like: "Omigosh! These pieces/songs are so beautiful! How is it that I've never heard of these composers before?!"

And then I suddenly remembered, when I took a music appreciation course in college years ago, the textbook did mention one woman composer: Clara Schumann. However, they only compared her to her husband Robert Schumann, as an aside. I got the general impression that

Robert was a great composer. and by the way, Clara also wrote a few pieces. And I remember thinking at the time: “Why is Robert’s example piece so complex, and Clara’s so simple? That doesn’t seem fair!”

Historically, music composition has been one of the most male-dominated fields ever. (A quick survey of the music school library gives an estimate of 98% music written by men, and only 2% music written by women.) Even today, while women have been advancing, we are far from reaching parity.

In any case, I vowed to play only women’s music from then on. My friends (older/wiser church members) rolled their eyes and said: “Why don’t you give a concert of piano music by women composers?” Someone (who is a composer himself) suggested: “Actually, it would be more interesting to have a collage concert, with a wide variety of instruments and genres. Then you could get more people involved.”

I discovered the International Alliance for Women in Music online. At the time, they hosted an Annual Concert in Washington DC. (Today, it’s a joint project with Women in New Music, and the venue moves around every year.) There were already many resources available at the University of Michigan Music Library or online, from the actual scores/recordings of women’s music, to feminist critiques of music theory. So I was convinced that it would be feasible to bring the Women Composers Concerts to the University of Michigan. But, I wanted to try an experiment, something radically different. I wanted the entire process to be radical feminist!

1 Beth’s Vision

Beth’s Inspiration = Cultural + Radical Feminism

I was inspired by my graduate level Women’s Studies seminars. In my Feminist Pedagogy course with Andrea Smith, we studied different ways to make the entire learning experience “feminist”. (I’ll explain this in detail in the next section.) We read several useful & interesting books: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Paulo Freire 1970, 2000), *The Feminist Classroom: Dynamics of Gender, Race, and Privilege* (Frances Maher & Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault

1994, 2001), *Training Through Dialogue: Promoting Effective Learning and Change with Adults* (Jane Vella 1995), *No Angel in the Classroom: Teaching through Feminist Discourse* (Berenice Malka Fisher 2001), *Race in the College Classroom: Pedagogy and Politics* (Bonnie TuSmith & Maureen Reddy 2002), *Teaching Community: a Pedagogy of Hope* (bell hooks 2003).

But even in my other Women's Studies seminars, where we didn't explicitly study feminist pedagogy *per se* as the course material, the course structure and operations were still very "feminist". We were able to experience Feminist Pedagogy first-hand, which was much more useful than simply reading about it from a book. As a cultural feminist, I envisioned the Women Composers Concerts as an opportunity for feminist activism as well as feminist pedagogy. Since I couldn't find similar models of organizing collage concerts within the (mainstream) music community, I used my Women's Studies seminars as a guide and extrapolated.

Of course, I also tried to follow Jane Vella's principles whenever possible. In her book *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: the Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults* (1994, 2002), Jane Vella asks five *wh*-questions (why? who? when? where? how?) and lays out twelve basic principles of sound pedagogy:

- 1 Needs assessment: participation of the learners in naming what is to be learned.
- 2 Safety in the environment and the process. We create a context for learning. The context can be made safe.
- 3 Sound relationships between teacher and learner and among learners.
- 4 Sequence of content and reinforcement.
- 5 Praxis: action with reflection or learning by doing.
- 6 Respect for learners as decision makers.
- 7 Ideas, feelings, and actions: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of learning.
- 8 Immediacy of the learning.
- 9 Clear roles and role development.
- 10 Teamwork and use of small groups.
- 11 Engagement of the learners in what they are learning.
- 12 Accountability: how do they know they know? [p.4]

I envisioned the concerts as a learning experience for the audience members (to raise both (conscious/intellectual) awareness of issues regarding women in music, and (subconscious/experiential) appreciation of their beautiful music), as well as for the concert organizers and performers. And the best way for them to learn an alternative radically different method (ie: radical feminist, from the root up) of organizing collage concerts, is by actively doing or experiencing the process. As performers with an interest in the successful outcome of the concert, I expected them to be willing and eager participants. (Actually, most people find the

democratic process to be “too slow” and annoying, but in this case, I think it’s a good opportunity for reflection and questioning assumptions about traditional methods.)

Feminist Classroom = Feminist Concert

There are parallels between the various theories of feminisms and the various manifestations of feminist pedagogies and feminist concert organizing. The course material could be non-feminist (male dominated authors or examples), proto-feminist (some female representation), or feminist (actually discuss women’s issues). The teacher herself could be non-feminist, proto-feminist, liberal feminist, or radical feminist. (If she teaches at a girls’ school or women’s college, she could also be separatist feminist.) The teacher could run her class in a non-feminist, proto-feminist, or feminist manner. Here I think of a continuum between non-feminist (traditional teaching style) and extremely radical feminist (Andrea Smith’s teaching style).

In a traditional “ex-cathedral” classroom: 1 The teacher is an omniscient omnipotent dictator in a hierarchical classroom. 2 The teacher makes all decisions regarding the syllabus, assignments, and grades. 3 The atmosphere is cold/impersonal, full of fear/awe. 4 The teacher stands on an elevated podium, separated from the students. 5 The students listen passively and dare not interrupt/question the teacher. 6 Teacher/students do not share their 1st-hand personal experiences. 7 Only the pre-approved scripted classroom agenda is allowed/important. 8 Knowledge flows uni-directionally from the teacher to the students, who are empty vessels to be filled.

In a traditional concert: 1 The impresario is an omniscient omnipotent dictator. 2 The impresario makes all decisions regarding the program order, music repertoire, and auditions. 3 The atmosphere is cold/impersonal, full of fear/awe. 4 The performers sit/stand on an elevated stage, separated from the audience. 5 The audience members listen passively and dare not interrupt the performers. 6 Performers/composers do not share their 1st-hand personal interpretations. 7 Only the pre-approved scripted program is allowed/important. 8 Entertainment/energy flows uni-directionally from the performers to the audience, who are empty vessels to be

filled.

A radical feminist classroom is inspired by the consciousness raising groups of Second Wave Feminism: 1 The teachers are (co-)facilitators of a democratic classroom, although they are respected for their knowledge/experience. (In a team-taught course, there could be multiple teachers.) 2 The students have a voice in setting the syllabus, choosing their own assignment topics, and even determining their own grades. 3 The atmosphere is a warm/friendly safe space. 4 Everyone sits in a circle to symbolize equality. 5 Students feel free to participate actively and spontaneously. 6 Teachers/students share their 1st-hand personal experiences. 7 The classroom agenda is fluid and flexible. 8 Knowledge flows multi-directionally among everyone. Even the teacher can learn from the students.

A radical feminist concert is inspired by women's poetry readings, women's folk music festivals, etc: 1 The concert organizers are (co-)facilitators of a democratic committee. 2 The performers have a voice in setting the program order, choosing their own music repertoire, and there are no auditions. 3 The atmosphere is a warm/friendly safe space. 4 Everyone sits on the same level to symbolize equality. 5 Audience members feel free to participate actively and spontaneously. 6 Performers/composers share their 1st-hand personal interpretations. 7 The program is fluid and flexible. 8 Entertainment/energy flows multi-directionally among everyone. Even the performers are part of the audience.

Avoiding Patriarchy

I paid a lot of attention to the historical sociological relationships between women composers/musicians and their societies, because I wanted to avoid replicating patriarchy. Historically, women have been excluded from music conservatories as music students/faculty and from concert halls as composers/performers. Eg: Louise Farrenc, the 1st female faculty member at the Paris Conservatory, was paid exactly half as much as her male colleagues. And until very recently, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra did not have a single full-time female performer. Historically, women's music was performed in informal settings (in the parlor), rather

than formal (in the concert hall). Eg: Cécile Chaminade was considered only a “parlor” musician. Actually, that was really unfair, because they didn’t give her an opportunity to perform her works in the concert hall!

Women did not always write music in sonata form (with a “masculine” 1st theme dominating a “feminine” 2nd theme, culminating in a final masculine victory/ending/cadence), which was considered to be the ultimate musical form to end all musical forms. In her article “Feminist Approaches to Musicology” (from the book *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, edited by Susan Cook & Judy Tsou), Marcia Citron gives a good explanation for this:

In many respects the sonata aesthetic stands as a symbol and product of Western patriarchal values. Instead of reinforcing the notion that women avoided symphonies, sonatas, and chamber music because of some essentialist lack of skill or imagination, I will show how the conventions and subtext of the sonata aesthetic have privileged the masculine and thus held lesser meaning for women. This model enunciates difference, not oppression. Nonetheless, history has judged women composers as lesser partly because they eschewed the sonata style. We should also remember that various social circumstances prevented women from obtaining the education and professional access necessary to succeed in the many structures enmeshed in the aesthetic. [p.18]

In her Chapter 1 (“A Material Girl in Bluebeard’s Castle” from her book *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*), Susan McClary gives a good concise definitions of gendered sonata form and masculine/feminine cadence:

In sonata, the principal key/theme clearly occupies the narrative position of masculine protagonist; and while the less dynamic second key/theme is necessary to the sonata or tonal plot (without this foil or obstacle, there is no story), it serves the narrative function of the feminine Other. Moreover, satisfactory resolution – the ending always generically guaranteed in advance by tonality and sonata procedure – demands the containment of whatever is semiotically or structurally marked as “feminine”, whether a second theme or simply a non-tonic key area. [p.15]

This standard definition makes it clear that the designation “masculine” and “feminine” are far from arbitrary. The two are differentiated on the basis of relative strength, with the binary opposition masculine/feminine mapped onto strong/weak. Moreover, this particular definition betrays other important mappings: if the masculine version is [...] normal, then the implication is that the feminine is abnormal. [...] if the feminine is preferred in “more romantic styles”, then the masculine must be [...] identified with the more objective, more rational of musical discourses. [p.10]

Sometimes, even when women wrote in sonata form, they were frequently bolder in their innovation than men, one reason being that they did not have to worry about peer criticism (because unfortunately, their music was rarely published and usually not widely performed). Women composers wrote many pieces for solo keyboard (sonatas or character pieces), or soprano with keyboard accompaniment (art songs). These were smaller pieces which could be performed in the parlor, and of course every “good girl” was expected to be able to sing and play the piano/harpsichord for guests. As you can expect, certain genres considered to be more “feminine” got less respect from the (male) music critics.

So, keeping all this in mind, and aiming for maximum inclusiveness, we can now answer these questions: Who can be the audience members? Everyone! (There should be no admission fee, in order to welcome even the poor/homeless to join us.) Who can be the performers? Everyone! (There should be no auditions, in order to welcome even amateur/popular musicians to join us. Some people may feel intimidated by the thought of having to endure auditions or a formal concert hall.) Who can be the composers? Women only! (That was the one and only one rule, which was the whole point of this experiment.) Who can be the organizers? Everyone! (At least, everyone who considers themselves feminist, or supports this project.)

Safe Space

My friend Maia Dedrick (whom you’ll meet later) was a music student, but I was not. As an insider, Maia could take the liberal feminist perspective and work from within the system (ie: use the facilities at the School of Music, or take advantage of her connections to music faculty and other music students, as well as her music sorority sisters at Sigma Alpha Iota). As an outsider, I didn’t have such access, to either the facilities or a music school or music sorority network. So Maia was able to start a student group Women Composers Concert Organizers, but I pretty much went in there alone, and tried in vain to get people to join me.

Fortunately, I was a member of a (very liberal feminist) nearby church, and they graciously allowed me to use their facilities without charging the usual \$100 building use fee. And in fact,

people there were very supportive of my experiment. They provided free food, ushering, even (amateur) musicians, when we had trouble finding performers for the concerts. This was very important for me, because I was basically doing most of the work. (Of course, I did try to involve many other people, whenever possible. But unfortunately, most of the responsibility fell on me, as the facilitator/coordinator.)

The venue was a safe space. I was inspired by women's poetry readings and women's folk music concerts, which take place in friendly accessible environments. It seems that today, many women prefer the warm cozy "feminine" parlor, rather than the cold impersonal "masculine" concert hall. (Just like today, many women also appreciate "women's music". But, is this replicating patriarchy? Or are feminist women reclaiming their space, their voices?) Everyone sits on the same level to symbolize equality. The performers are accessible, actually part of the audience, not hidden away in the wings, waiting to make their awe-inspiring entrance on an elevated stage. The atmosphere is more like Show and Tell, where there's reduced pressure, because you're performing for your friends. The type of people who come to these concerts won't judge you, even if you mess up. In fact, they will be very supportive and encouraging. (I know from personal experience, because I always get severe stage fright.) I wanted the musicians (and especially composers, if present) to talk about their music, 1st-hand and personally, for the human interest factor. For me, these concerts embodied feminine and feminist ideals of welcoming, inclusive, nurturing, friendship and sisterhood.

Murmurs of Discontent

Unfortunately, not everyone shared my vision of radical feminist concerts. Some people (especially from the music school) had higher standards, so they complained about the extreme informality of the concerts, and the lack of quality of the (amateur) performers. (Certainly, most of them would not have qualified for the music school, if they had auditioned.) Also, the (upright) piano wasn't totally in tune, and it certainly wasn't a Steinway. (Of course, I also wished those aspects could be improved, but overall I was very happy with the way things turned

out. Maybe we have a different set of values? After all, not everyone there is a radical feminist like me.)

I was inspired by the (radical feminist) consciousness raising groups of the 1960s and 1970s, where everyone is equal, and decisions are made by consensus. As the facilitator/coordinator, I tried to involve as many people as possible, in the democratic process. Actually, I had thought that people would be happy to have more agency, more say in making decisions, but I was wrong. People were annoyed with the slowness (and many emails involved) in the democratic process. They would prefer that I just make decisions for them, and let them know. (There was a semester when we had 2 concerts, because there was not a single date which worked well for everyone who was interested. I must admit, that was a huge mess, but I was trying very hard to be inclusive of everyone.)

Of course, as much as I wished we could all be equal, I did retain some moral authority as the founder of the concerts. And like the teacher of a classroom, I was respected as an “expert” on women composers. Sometimes musicians were interested in participating, but they didn’t have any music, or even know of any women composers. So I needed to help find/arrange music for them. Sometimes, women would volunteer their music to be performed, and then I needed to gather together musicians to play their music, or serve as an accompanist (but of course, I tried to ask other people to accompany, whenever possible). On occasion, I’ve even had to transcribe music aurally (because we couldn’t find the score), or lead ensemble rehearsals and help undergrads learn their parts (because their music professors weren’t helping them).

People have very traditional notions of what it means to be a “good/strong” leader. I was criticized for showing “weakness”. Studies have shown that female professors get lower teaching evaluations than male professors. And those who use a feminist pedagogy teaching style, get lower teaching evaluations than those who use a traditional ex-cathedral teaching style. This also ties in with Marcia Citron and Susan McClary’s analysis of masculine vs feminine endings. In traditional standards of music theory, “good” music must always have a strong masculine ending. (See the above section “Avoiding Patriarchy”.)

People were really uncomfortable with the lack of direction. As musicians, they're used to blindly obeying their authoritarian music teacher/professor, orchestra conductor, or opera impresario. Eg: When they asked me about the time limit for their piece, I told them that there was no time limit, that they should decide that for themselves. But some people still insisted that I give them a ball-park figure.

Some musicians are so used to having certain types of music denigrated (by the mainstream music establishment) that they sheepishly asked me: "Is theater music (show tunes) acceptable?" "Is jazz allowed?" "I know a woman composer, but she's only a popular/folk singer. Is that OK?" I had to reassure them that we were welcoming/inclusive, not judgmental. Of course, I was thinking of historical women composers, who weren't considered "real" composers/musicians. Eg: Cécile Chaminade was considered only a "parlor" musician. Carrie Jacobs-Bond's music was considered "popular" songs, not "art" songs. At one of the concerts, a folk musician remarked in her introductory speech: "I feel really fancy today. Usually, I'm just a songwriter, but today I'm a composer!"

2 Maia's Vision

Maia's Inspiration = Cultural + Liberal Feminism

As an "outsider", I did most of the facilitating by myself, and I was getting really burnt out after five concerts. So I was very happy when Maia Dedrick took over. Because of her "insider" connections with music students and faculty at the music school, and with her music sorority sisters at Sigma Alpha Iota, she was able to start a student group Women Composers Concert Organizers. However, Maia also felt it was too way much work. So after facilitating a concert by herself, we both co-facilitated the last three concerts together.

Maia was inspired by liberal feminism. She wanted women's music and concerts to get just as much respect as the traditional men's music and concerts. So she moved the venue to the formal concert hall, in the music school. (As a music student, she had access to music school facilities.) She also switched to written program notes, instead of having performers and

composers speak about their music before playing.

Since people complained about the lack of quality of the (amateur) performers, Maia wanted to require auditions. Actually, I convinced her that it wasn't feasible, because we had very little faculty support/involvement. Who would serve as judges? What criteria would we use to determine who was "good" enough? And we always had trouble finding barely enough musicians to play in our concerts anyway. We couldn't really afford to send anyone away. As it turns out, auditions were unnecessary, because the formality of the concert hall was intimidating enough to scare off all of the amateurs. Everyone who performed (except me) was in the music school, so there was already a minimum level of competency.

For the most part, the concerts did become much more formal. They were just like traditional concerts, except that all of the music was written by women. However, there were some cultural differences. Eg: I certainly didn't encourage performers/composers to speak about their music before playing (as I had done earlier, at the informal concerts). But some people did speak anyway (spontaneously), especially composers who were there in person, or performers playing women's folk music. And when women performed "popular" music, the crowd still spontaneously cheered and clapped, just as they would at a women's folk music concert.

So, I'm not really sure why this occurred, despite the formality of the venue?... Perhaps it's impossible to treat women's music concerts just like traditional men's music concerts. After all, if we emphasize the works of women composers, people might be more likely to assume some emphasis on human interest, or gendered themes/issues. Or perhaps the type of people who would participate in these concerts (surely feminists) would be more likely to deconstruct the status quo, and feel empowered to take control of the situation. Or maybe they're simply more used to women's folk music concerts, which are more informal?

Women Composers Concert Organizers

Maia started a student group (Women Composers Concerts Organizers). We formed committees to handle all of the tasks involved in organizing a collage concert. Her music sorority

sisters at Sigma Alpha Iota helped out a lot, for the concert that she facilitated by herself. (And eventually, they got me to join SAI, as well.) For the last three concerts, Maia was able to recruit other young undergrad music students to join WCCO. (I don't know how she did it?) It was so nice to see the young women with so much energy, working together cooperatively, and they had a lot of great new ideas. Basically, everyone believed in democracy. Surprisingly, I didn't witness any fighting or power trips (but I guess the stakes weren't really so high).

WCCO Teams

women composers concert organizers

mission statement

- *educate the public and showcase the wonderful works of women composers.*
- *counteract sexism in the field of music.*
- *make friends and create a support network of women musicians/composers.*
- *have fun performing beautiful music and producing fabulous concerts!*

visionary/political team

- *anyone who has visions/ideas for the direction/growth of the group is welcome to offer their input. there are no special officer positions or rankings by seniority. no one has special privileges.*
- *ideally, decisions should be made by consensus, through dialogue. arguments shall be weighed carefully, to achieve balance. (theory/practice, long term/short term, group solidarity/individual rights, etc.)*
- *everyone has an equal voice, except when there is an unresolvable conflict, then the perspectives of traditionally oppressed groups shall be given more weight. (gender, sexual orientation, race, class, academic rank, etc.)*
- *we are all accountable to each other! feel free to move around various teams and help out with tasks.*

scheduling/funding team

- *find good concert dates (at least one formal and one informal concert every semester). check calendars for conflicts. get input from musicians/composers. give consideration to graduating seniors, new performers, people with a high level of interest.*
- *reserve performance venues and equipment (music stands, electronics).*
- *set deadlines for audition tapes, decisions, program notes, dress rehearsals, etc.*
- *get funding from MSA, and keep registration up-to-date.*

publicity/recruiting team

- *recruit musicians/composers and help them form ensembles.*
- *recruit audience members.*
- *recruit more organizers and helpers, including faculty for the auditions team.*

- *put announcements in newspapers (ann arbor news, ann arbor observer, michigan daily).*
- *design and produce flyers, programs, other necessary/helpful documents (guides to help students to create successful presentations and program notes, invitations for unsuccessful auditionees to perform at informal concerts).*

auditions team (for formal concerts) [faculty only]

- *hold auditions and act as judges. to prevent conflict of interest, you may not both perform and judge for the same concert.*
- *the only criteria are musicianship and technical skills. it is not our place to make judgements based on genre, instrumentation, length, etc.*
- *if performers don't pass, invite them to play for an informal concert.*
- *ideally, decisions should be made by consensus, through dialogue.*
- *everyone has an equal voice, except when there is an unresolvable conflict, then the perspectives of traditionally oppressed groups shall be given more weight.*

programming/resource team

- *familiarize yourself with women composers and resources (music library, interlibrary loan, internet).*
- *help musicians find music and help them form ensembles.*
- *keep track of program length, including speaking time (for human interest).*
- *if we have more musicians than time permits, reschedule them or add another concert.*
- *decide the order of performers. get input from musicians/composers. find a balance between aesthetics/flow and individual preferences/needs.*
- *collect biographical information, lyrics, program notes, etc.*
- *design and maintain our group's website "<http://umich.edu/~wimusic/>".*

serving (and food, woohoo!) team

- *set up, clean up, usher, transport large instruments.*
- *decide on the menu, and order food.*

outreach team [alumnae and others who are leaving the UM community]

- *start women composers concerts in other places.*
- *be the shining light that you are, as a talented woman musician/composer. best wishes to you!*

WCCO Constitution

Women Composers Concert Organizers

We establish this constitution in order to further the cause of women in music.

A. Name

Our organization will be called "Women Composers Concert Organizers".

B. Mission Statement

- 1. We will educate the public and showcase the wonderful works of women composers.*
- 2. We will try to counteract sexism in the field of music.*
- 3. We will make friends and create a support network of women musicians/composers.*

4. *We will have fun performing beautiful music and producing fabulous concerts (at least one concert every fall and winter semester).*

C. Membership

1. *Anyone who is willing to make a positive contribution is welcome to join our organization. There are no membership fees or exams.*
2. *A member may enter or leave our organization at any time.*

D. Officers and Committees

1. *All members are encouraged to contribute positively to our organization, and to take leadership roles.*
2. *There are no pre-established officers or committees. At the beginning of each semester, the members should get together and decide (by consensus) how to organize themselves into committees as they see fit.*

E. Decisions

1. *All members have equal standing.*
2. *Major decisions should be made by (a good faith effort towards) consensus. If consensus is not possible, then we will try voting or mediation, trying to balance the wishes of the majority vs the rights of traditionally oppressed minorities.*
3. *Minor decisions can be made by a quick vote, or at the discretion of the relevant committee members.*

F. Amendments

Constitutional amendments can be made by consensus at any time.

G. Conflicts

1. *Conflicts should be resolved by (a good faith effort towards) consensus, with respect and fairness towards all members involved, and with intelligence and common sense in finding a solution. If consensus is not possible, then we will try voting or mediation.*
2. *A member can be removed from a committee (or the organization), if there is consensus that it is in the best interest of the committee (or the organization) to do so.*

H. Finances

We are a non-profit organization. We will rely on grants, donations, or fund-raisers.

I. Compliance

We agree to abide by all University of Michigan rules and regulations. We understand that our organization's registration is contingent on acceptance of these policies. We will renew our registration in a timely manner.

4 Controversy

Hostility

As one of the perks of organizing the Women Composers Concerts, we had opportunities to

(legitimately) spam the entire music school several times a semester, to solicit composers/performers. Out of over 1000 people, you can expect some hostility, from anti-feminists or non-feminists. One male student (I'll call him "Joe", because that is his name) wrote: "wouldnt it make more sense to have a concert where the music selection is based on QUALITY rather than WHETHER OR NOT THE COMPOSER HAS A VAGINA?" Evidently, some people don't understand affirmative action. These concerts were really a mixture of political activism and affirmative action. Our aim was to showcase the beautiful (but perhaps unfamiliar) music of women composer, in order to level the playing field for women, not to exclude men. Men were welcome to join us as audience members, performers, and organizers. And since women historically faced much higher hurdles to write/publish music, the ones who did manage to overcome social pressure must have been especially talented and gifted, compared to the general population of male musicians (who could write/publish music at will).

However, I was surprised by the lack of support, or even hostility, from music faculty! I did get some moral encouragement from faculty members, but most were too busy to get involved. Only a few music faculty members actually helped us, either by offering advice (participating in the democratic process of organizing concerts), or by encouraging their students to participate. Music students have so much repertoire they need to learn for their music courses, it's difficult to find time for extracurricular activities. (Although fortunately, there were some students who felt passionately enough about the need for Women Composers Concerts, that they supported us and participated anyway.) So only a few faculty members assigned women's music as part of their students' homework. And only a few faculty members actually came to the concerts.

And then there were a few faculty members who expressed their disapproval of the Women Composers Concerts. They said that women composers might have been a hot topic back in the 1980's, but now they are passé. Evidently, the University of Michigan School of Music found it uninteresting and old-fashioned (this was 2003-2007). On the other hand, Eastman School of Music recently started (in 2005) an annual Women in Music Festival, which is a week-long official departmental (ie: faculty supported) event. Similarly, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

also recently started (in 2002) an annual Festival of Women Composers.

We were even more surprised that one of our opponents was Susan Botti, a woman composer herself! Why would she not support Women Composers Concerts? She was a trailblazer, the 1st female composition professor at the University of Michigan. Evidently, the news media always continued to refer to her as a “woman” composer, even today, after she has established her credentials, and is clearly just as good as any other composer out there (male or female). So she eventually grew sick and tired of the label, as if she was just stuck in a specialty niche, and not able to compete on equal terms with men, in the mainstream. So that’s why Susan Botti actively discouraged her female composition students from participating. (Fortunately, not everyone listened to her. Lena Nietfeld has been one of our loyal participants, and as a composition student, she’s always able to bring in many performers.)

Post-Feminism

Why should the University of Michigan school of music feel that women composers concerts are passé? UM is usually at the vanguard of cutting edge research, and this might (conceivably) have applied as well to women composers, feminist music criticism, etc back in the 1980s and 1990s, when these were hot topics. So today, from an academic intellectual perspective, of course this is old hat. However, from an activist perspective, we feel it’s important to educate the public. Perhaps it’s because the University of Michigan is such a research-oriented institution, the faculty doesn’t care nearly enough about education/pedagogy (whether towards exploited undergrads, or the public at large).

Ever since the neo-conservatives took over in the 1980s, we’ve been living in a post-feminist society. Today people think that the feminist struggle has already been won, so it’s time to move on. (But unfortunately, discrimination really hasn’t disappeared. It has simply become more subtle.) The new F-word “feminism” has become a dirty word, thanks to the news media portrayals of militant separatist feminists. It’s not so cool any more to talk about women’s rights. People don’t understand affirmative action. They think that discrimination against women,

minorities, gays/bisexuals is equivalent to reverse discrimination against men, whites, heterosexuals, because they don't take into account the underlying currents of societal oppression. (Paddling downstream vs upstream are two very different things.) A whole bunch of states have recently passed anti-affirmative action laws (through the legislatures or the courts), including the misleadingly misnamed "Michigan Civil Rights Initiative" (Proposition 2, 2006).

On the other hand, perhaps the University of Michigan isn't "too cool" or "way ahead of the game" just yet. Maybe we're actually "not cool enough" and "far behind the curve"? After all, the music composition faculty still has only one woman today. (The current assistant professor is only the second ever female faculty member in the UM music composition department.) And women's music has still not been incorporated into the standard music curriculum (with the possible exception of pedal harp repertoire, which is a female-dominated instrument).

5 Statistics

We welcome ethnic minority women composers, but we had only a few: Bessie Mae Smith (black), Ilza Nogueira (brazilian), Min Hui-fen (chinese), Rachael Yamagata (partly japanese). We welcome gay/bisexual women composers, but we had only a few (that I know of): Ani DiFranco (bisexual), Björk Guðmundsdóttir (bisexual), Jennifer Knapp (lesbian), Rachael Yamagata (bisexual?), Tori Amos (bisexual?). The issue of transsexuals never came up. Perhaps it would be logical to allow works by female-to-males written/published before transition, or works by male-to-females written/published after transition. Of course, the emphasis shouldn't be on personal identity, but rather on social privilege. Maybe we should examine each case individually and ask: "Did this F-to-M ever gain male privilege? Did this M-to-F ever lose male privilege?"

Because of lack of departmental faculty support, the vast majority of pieces are solos (possibly with an accompanist). If you want bigger ensembles, you really need institutional support. ie: Convince the large group conductors or ensemble studios to include women's music in their repertoire. The only exception to this is when composition students contribute their

pieces. As part of their program, they have to find musicians to play their pieces anyway, so it's not too much extra work for them. Out of 84 total pieces, 35 are solos, and 30 are duets or solos with accompanist.

Also, as you can expect, women who write their own pieces have more incentive to participate. (Thanks to our most loyal student composers Lena Nietfeld and Nicole DiPaolo for contributing many pieces!) Out of 84 total pieces, 26 were written by the composer herself (who was present at the concerts), and 5 were written by a composer whom the performer(s) knew personally. Not including those 31, the vast majority of pieces were written by contemporary women born in the 1900s or women born in the 1800s. Eg: Not many people can play early music, because you have to be able to read/improvise figured bass.

We've always had participation by student composers (which we encouraged), throughout the nine concerts. It was nice to see the young women grow more confident over time. For some reason which I can't really explain, only the first five concerts had early music (baroque, classical), and the last four concerts had more modern pop music. Perhaps, as the concert series matured, people felt they had "exhausted" the repertoire of classical women's music, and were ready to play what they really enjoyed. (Or perhaps, they felt it was time move on? And so, like all good things, the concerts came to an end.)

concert date	ensemble size (number of performers)							total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2003.1102	4	3	0	0	3	0	0	10
2004.0201	3	3	1	0	2	0	0	9
2004.0404	3	6	1	0	1	0	0	11
2004.1107	7	2	0	1	0	0	0	10
2005.0313	4	3	2	1	0	0	0	10
2005.1106	5	4	0	1	0	0	0	10
2006.0313	3	1	1	0	1	0	1	7
2006.1119	3	7	0	0	0	0	0	10
2007.0401	3	1	1	1	0	0	1	7
total	35	30	6	4	7	0	2	84

Table 0. Number of pieces, ordered by ensemble size (number of performers).

concert date	composer		composer birthdate (century)					
	herself	friend	1900	1800	1700	1600	1500	total
2003.1102	2	2	1	4	1	0	0	10
2004.0201	2	1	4	2	0	0	0	9
2004.0404	3	1	2	4	1	0	0	11
2004.1107	3	0	3	3	0	1	0	10
2005.0313	4	0	2	3	1	0	0	10
2005.1106	5	0	3	2	0	0	0	10
2006.0313	1	0	4	2	0	0	0	7
2006.1119	2	1	4	3	0	0	0	10
2007.0401	4	0	2	1	0	0	0	7
total	26	5	25	24	3	1	0	84

Table 1. Number of pieces, ordered by composer (whether the composer herself attended the concert, or the composer knew the performers personally). If neither case applies, then ordered by composer birthdate (century).

Overall, we had a very good mix of genres and historical vs contemporary women composers. Some other Women in Music Festivals are very heavily slanted towards contemporary women composers (especially the ones which are really competitions for new music). But we aimed for diversity of genres and instruments. We include the complete set of program notes, and flyers. (See Appendix A)

6 Conclusion

What have I learned from all this? Lessons in feminist leadership and group sustainability.

We had a good core group of committed organizers, but not enough to keep the group going indefinitely. And even though everyone was feminist, there were still some misunderstandings. Eg: People perceived my radical feminist democratic leadership style as “weak/indecisive”. Maybe it’s not enough to merely lead an experiential process of radical feminist organization? Perhaps we need to have some seminar-style discussions about feminist theory or feminist pedagogy, so people can get a better grounding of the theory behind it all? But I’m not sure this would work, because unfortunately, most people are really not very interested in Women’s Studies as an academic discipline, so they might get bored or annoyed.

In the future, if I ever get a faculty position, I might try to organize Women Composers

Concerts again. I think it would be easier, as a faculty member. But I would definitely seek out an existing student group (perhaps a feminist group, or an arts group), and try to sell them on the idea, instead of creating my own group. And of course, it's better to have several committed point people, rather than a single visionary. We want the group to take on a life of its own, in order to ensure that it survives in the long term, even after the founders leave.

It also helps greatly, if the music school would officially sponsor the concerts. I would try to create a course on Women Composers (and team-teach it with music faculty). If students officially register for this course, they will have an external incentive to participate in Women Composers Concerts, to earn course credits. The students might also take it more seriously, because of the officially sanctioned legitimacy. And the concerts would have institutional memory to enable long-term survival. (Some music schools have similar courses on Black Composers, etc.) Here are some other ideas (thanks to Maia): outreach to jazz musicians who might be more interested in identity and challenging social norms, asking to give many recruitment presentations in various classrooms, and getting other feminists from around campus to support the work we were doing in music.

In Ann Arbor, there are two annual events for young pianists: the Bach Festival (in autumn) and the Sonata/Sonatina Festival (in spring). Maybe we could add a third Women Composers Festival. Towards this goal, I have compiled a list of Keyboard Works by Women Composers, as part of my projects when I was taking Piano Pedagogy courses at the music school. (See Appendix B) Actually, I once looked into it, but there wasn't enough interest. But who knows? Perhaps in the future, there might be some young feminists who are just full of energy, and crazy enough to pull it off...

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Appendix A

Programs & Flyers

Flyer (2003.1102)

Announcements (2004.1107)

Program (2003.1102)

Program (2004.0201)

Program (2004.0404)

Program (2004.1107)

Program (2005.0313)

Flyer (2005.0313)

Announcements (2005.1106)

Announcements (2006.0313)

Program (2005.1106)

Program Notes (2005.1106)

Flyer (2006.0313)

Program (2006.0313)

Program Notes (2006.0313)

Flyer (2006.1119)

Program (2006.1119)

Program Notes (2006.1119)

Flyer / Program Cover Page (2007.0401)

Program (2007.0401)

Program Notes (2007.0401)

Appendix B

Keyboard Works by Women Composers (born after 1700)

•=unknown

composers:

birth·death· names (first, middle, maiden, married1, married2, married3, etc)

pieces:

written/published· [opus] title. subtitle. tempo

(key) uppercase=major, lowercase=minor, +=sharp, -=flat

{time} c=common, ¢=cut

numbers:

“piano7h”=piano piece for 7 hands

“6 sonatas”=a collection of 6 sonatas

“5 sonata (B-)”=the 5th sonata, in B flat major

“4 (f+) {9|8}”=the 4th movement, in f sharp minor, in 9/8 time