THE WOMEN’S PHILHARMONIC:
ITS HISTORY AND LEGACY

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INTRODUCTION

In 2000, New York oboist Sarah Davol was on tour in Germany. She visited the Anna Amalia Bibliothek in Weimar. Anna Amalia (1739-1807), Duchess of Saxe-Weimar, was an important patron of the arts and an accomplished composer in her own right.

At the Anna Amalia Bibliothek—which housed a million books, as well as thousands of medieval and early modern manuscripts, maps, and original musical scores—Davol discovered a copy of Anna Amalia’s Sinfonia, a previously unknown work. Davol photographed the manuscript pages.

In 2004, a fire tore through the library. Before firefighters could quell the flames, thousands of books from the 16th to the 18th century, oil paintings, and most of Anna Amalia’s personal musical collection—which included her own compositions—were destroyed. Davol found herself in the unexpected position of having the only surviving copy of Anna Amalia’s Sinfonia (Fasick 2008, 6; Grieshaber 2004; Tzortzis 2004).

In my research for this thesis, I found that certain books by women composers in the CSUEB collection were vulnerable too—not to fire, but to culling. In 2014, when I began preliminary research for this thesis, I read American composer Clara Kathleen Rogers’s 1932 memoir, Memories of A Musical Career. When I brought it to the circulation desk, the person working there commented that I was the first to ever check out the book. I wanted to consult it again this year. It was no longer in the catalog, and when I looked for it on the shelf in the library where I remembered finding it, the book was not there.
I spoke to Paula Kapteyn, coordinator of access services at the CSUEB Library. She explained that the CSUEB Library engaged in “an extensive decirculation process” last year, pulling 80,000 books from the collection. Almost certainly, Rogers’s memoir was among them. I wondered what had happened to the culled books. Kapteyn explained that, mandated by California state law, they had been destroyed. She also stated that books were not culled unless they were held somewhere else in the CSU collection, so that researchers could access them through the Link+ system. When I checked that system, I found two circulating copies—one at CSU Fresno; one at San Francisco Public Library—of Rogers’s 1919 memoir, but only one remaining circulating copy of her 1932 memoir—the one I was looking for and that had been part of the CSUEB collection. This copy was also held by the San Francisco Public Library. In fact, the CSU library system had destroyed its only copy of Rogers’s 1932 memoir, basically a sequel to her earlier book. The later volume focused on her married life. For any researcher curious about how women in the first half of the twentieth century combined musical composition with family life, Rogers’s second volume was unique and valuable, its fate as a public resource currently resting in the hands of whomever at the San Francisco Public Library makes decisions about what should be culled or not.

These stories illustrate how tenuously, by a thin, fraying thread, we hold on to the artifacts of women’s musical history. Single copies of sheet music by forgotten women composers lie undigitized in archives, crumbling, ignored, and vulnerable to assaults such as the Anna Amalia Bibliothek fire or simply to the ravages of time. Learning about these works and locating them represent massive research undertakings. And sometimes, even
when their whereabouts are known, acquiring a copy can prove complicated. Musicologist Liane Curtis reports that getting a copy of an edition held in Germany of Louise Farrenc’s *Third Symphony*, written in 1847, is a prohibitively expensive proposition.

And when it comes to addressing the paucity of women composers represented on orchestral programs, we need to acknowledge the role that education plays. Elementary, high school, and university and college music programs—both music history and music performance—have done a flawed job of acquainting youth with the work of women composers, and thus creating expectations that those works will be played and heard. We can reasonably state that, in terms of sheer numbers of historical works, there are many more compositions by men than women. However, we can also honestly state that, at any time in history when humans have been composing music, women have been among them. Such a statement might then reasonably lead to a discussion of social and cultural influences that limited the volume or scope of women’s work. But fine examples of compositions by women exist from medieval times to the present, and should be part of any young person’s musical education.

Contemporarily, we see more and more young women composers, many of them winning top prizes for composition. That these women, many of them living, are so often underrepresented on orchestral programs is deeply unfortunate, and due not only to the apparent symphonic allergy to new music, but also to the propensity of music directors to program male composers vastly more frequently than they do female composers. Here,
too, is another point where music education could go a long way toward acquainting Americans with the varied breadth of musical compositions by women.

My own music education at CSUEB suggests the widespread nature of some of these issues. Until the recent hire of Dr. Danielle Gaudry, assistant professor in the CSUEB department of music, a young woman could come to the CSUEB music department and study music exclusively with male professors for her whole university career. Many of the examples in our music textbooks refer almost entirely to works by male composers. Examples selected by professors to illustrate points of music pedagogy, in my experience, were often composed by men. Dr. Jeffrey Miller’s class on the Analysis of Twentieth-Century Music was an exception, and I was grateful to learn about the work of Sofia Gubaidulina and the ultramodern compositions of Ruth Crawford Seeger in that class.

Having taken both undergraduate and graduate level classes in the CSUEB music department, I observed that my undergrad music classes were about 50 per cent female, while my graduate classes were about 30 per cent female. I also noted that few young women studied composition at CSUEB. That was interesting, as the composition majors I knew did not audition into the program with the intention of studying composition, but switched to that major after their freshman year or later. This suggests that some kind of instructional intervention with music majors during freshman or sophomore year, perhaps targeted to both male and female students who have never considered composition, might increase that percentage.
All of this—our shaky hold on the artifacts that demonstrate women’s involvement in composition; the underrepresentation of historical and contemporary compositions by women on orchestral programs (and the corollary underrepresentation of women conductors); and the music education piece that often leaves out the accomplishments of women—all suggest that the institutional memory of The Women’s Philharmonic (TWP) (1980-2004) offers an invaluable and deeply important resource.

TWP’s history demonstrates the existence and viability of women composers, women conductors, and an all-women musical ensemble. Chapter 1 outlines the organization’s history, but also provides historical context on earlier, similar initiatives that laid the groundwork for TWP to emerge. Chapter 2 explores what made TWP’s programming adventurous and different. It also looks at the canon we’ve inherited in western classical music. Why are some composers in, others out? Specifically, why is the canon composed almost entirely of works by white men? Why do modern orchestras keep recycling the same old orchestral chestnuts, season after season, when so many new works are being generated by living composers? The chapter also acknowledges the important role that storytelling as a force for change played in TWP performances. Prominent narratives that suggest women don’t compose, can’t compose, shouldn’t compose were challenged by stories—shared as pre-concert talks or program notes with audiences—of women who composed anyway, providing a counter-narrative to infrequently expressed but widely held beliefs. Can stories shape new realities? They can certainly open up categories of possibility where no such opening existed previously. A young woman hearing that Fanny Mendelssohn wrote about 500 pieces, including a full-
scale orchestral work, despite great societal and familial pressures to give up composition might begin to think differently about her own possibilities as a composer.

Finally, Chapter 3 reviews the advocacy efforts of TWP, and especially what aspects of those efforts live on, offering a timeless resource for researchers, composers, conductors, and musicians. It also looks at the current projects that build on TWP’s spirit of collaboration and innovation, suggesting a new way forward for those who seek to work in ensembles of any kind.
CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORY OF THE TWP

There is actually a long history of women-only orchestras in the United States. The phenomenon did not spring up spontaneously, but rather the idea’s roots rest in a long period of acclimation to the idea of women performers, composers, and conductors that took place over more than 100 years. Even today, one could reasonably argue that, while women musicians now enjoy significant representation in orchestras, women composers and women conductors continue to be deeply underrepresented. So this period of acclimation is still, in a sense, underway (Levintova 2013; O’Bannon 2015).

Before 1900

During the late 1700s and 1800s, Americans had the opportunity to attend shows of various European touring troupes, which often included female singing actresses. Women soloists—initially vocalists, such as Jenny Lind—also toured the United States. Soon after Lind’s American tour ended in 1852, women instrumental soloists, such as violinists Camilla Urso and Maud Powell, began to perform. Powell went on to found and lead an all-woman string quartet (Ware and Lockard 1980, 119; Block 2001, 194-195; 206-207).

The mid- to late 1800s also saw the importation of all-women ensembles, such as the Damen Orchester (the Vienna Ladies Orchestra), which began a U.S. tour in 1871. In 1884, Boston Conservatory-trained violinist Caroline B. Nichols organized the Boston Fadette Lady Orchestra. The Fadette Lady Orchestra grew to a full, professional ensemble, with women instrumentalists playing brass, woodwinds, and percussion, as
well as strings. They played classical, light classical, and popular music, and the ensemble thrived until 1920—a long life for a professional, all-women’s orchestral ensemble for those times, or these (Block 2001, 208; Ammer 2001, 124).

Caroline Nichols founded the Fadettes so that she and other women musicians would have paying work. Even without explicitly stated rules forbidding women to play in orchestral ensembles, cultural and social pressures were such that most women musicians could not break into the field. Because women were not welcome in established orchestras, they founded a whole parallel world of all-women ensembles. Nichols and other women were excluded from the possibility of conducting male ensembles, because of long-standing, unchallenged cultural biases. All-women orchestras afforded them that otherwise elusive opportunity.

**Early 1900s to Mid-Century**

By the turn of the twentieth century, there were women’s orchestras in numerous large and small American cities, including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Long Beach, San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Cleveland. By 1908, thirty women’s orchestras were actively performing in America, and the same number continued to thrive from the 1920s through the 1940s. While audiences often attended performances for the novelty of seeing an all-female ensemble, many of these orchestras included musically well-educated instrumentalists trained to play to a high standard. Caroline Nichols conducted the Fadette Lady Orchestra, but many of the women’s orchestras were conducted by men, e.g., the Cleveland Women’s Orchestra. Founded in 1935, the Cleveland Women’s
Orchestra is still active today, celebrating its 81st season in 2015-2016. The ensemble’s current music director is a man (Block 2001, 208; Ammer 2001, 125; Neuls-Bates 1986, 350-352; Cleveland Women’s Orchestra 2015).

During World War I, women who had learned orchestral playing through membership in all-women orchestras were tapped to fill in for male musicians at war. They were paid union wages to perform in hotel orchestras, but had to give up their seats to the soldiers when they returned. Later, with the advent of World War II, women musicians gained access into the major symphony orchestras, in addition to opera, radio, movie and recording industry orchestras. Unlike World War I, though, after the war, many women instrumentalists kept their seats. Their presence during the years of the Second World War planted a seed that would eventually grow into acceptance of the gender-mixed orchestra (Block 2001, 208; Neuls-Bates 1986, 363-364).

Three women from the first half of the twentieth century stand out as particularly important historical predecessors for The Women’s Philharmonic: Ethel Leginska, Antonia Brico, and Frederique Petrides. All were conductors who, for at least part of their careers, conducted all-women ensembles. Leginska composed too, and all three premiered the work of women composers with their orchestras. They brought together the trifecta of women’s accomplishments in music that would later characterize the work of The Women’s Philharmonic: women orchestral musicians, conducted by a woman, playing works written by women.

Ethel Leginska was born in England in 1886. She studied piano at Hoch’s Conservatory in Frankfurt, and enjoyed a successful career as a concert pianist in Europe.
In 1912, she came to the U.S. and began successfully concertizing here (Ammer 2001, 127-128). Apparently, Ethel Leginska was an energetic and colorful character. In 1913, Leginska toured as a pianist with modern dance innovator Ruth St. Denis, who described Leginska as “one of the most intense personalities I have ever come across. She was extremely talented….She was one of those who heightened life for anyone who came under her spell” (St. Denis 1939, 152).

Leginska spent the summer of 1918 studying composition with Ernest Bloch, and in the following years, she composed many avant-garde works that reflected the sensibility one would expect from a student of Bloch and a musically astute resident of New York. This was a period of great compositional experimentation, during which various works of Schoenberg, Henry Cowell, Ruth Crawford, and Stravinsky were being premiered (Ammer 2001, 128; Macleod 2001, 106-107).

In the early 1920s, Leginska sought instruction in orchestral conducting with teachers in London and Munich. Leginska worked her contacts from her years as a performing pianist to find conducting engagements in both the United States and Europe. Often, if she got to conduct, she was expected to perform a piano concerto on the program. Leginska’s opportunities to conduct were sporadic and nearly always unpaid. In 1927, Leginska began to conduct the Boston Women’s Symphony Orchestra, but received no fee for her work. She frequently programmed works by women, including Radie Britain’s *Symphonic Intermezzo* and Leginska’s own compositions, such as her *Fantasy* for piano and orchestra. Leginska toured with the orchestra in its second season; they played fifty-two programs in thirty-eight cities. The orchestra folded in its third year.

Antonia Brico followed on Ethel Leginska’s path. Brico was born in Holland in 1902 and raised in California. After graduating from the University of California at Berkeley, she studied conducting for five years in Germany, both privately and at Berlin’s State Academy of Music’s Master School of Conducting. She was the Academy’s first American graduate. In 1933, Brico returned to the U.S. and conducted two performances of the Musicians Symphony Orchestra at the Metropolitan Opera House. At that point, a baritone with the Metropolitan Opera refused to work again with a woman conductor, and Brico was effectively blocked from further conducting with the organization (Ammer 2001, 130-131).

Realizing that prejudice against women conductors and the dire economics of the Depression made it unlikely that she would secure a position on the podium, Brico founded the New York Women’s Symphony in 1934. Brico worked hard to gain wealthy financial backers, and the New York Women’s Symphony typically performed four concerts each season at Carnegie Hall. Brico’s programming emphasized works by American composers, such as the 1936 premiere of Mills College-educated Elinor Remick Warren’s *The Harp Weaver*, a work for women’s chorus and orchestra (Ammer 2001, 164; Neuls-Bates 1986, 361).

At the beginning of the 1938-39 season, Brico announced that she had successfully proved that women were skilled orchestral musicians, and now she could
reconfigure the orchestra as a mixed-gender ensemble (Neuls-Bates 1986, 362). This was a radical move for someone who had so recently been shunned by a mixed-gender ensemble at the Metropolitan Opera House. This time, it was Brico’s Board of Directors who disagreed; they believed that the orchestra’s strength rested in the novelty of its all-women status, and after three concerts, the new organization disbanded (Neuls-Bates 1986, 361-362).

Frederique Petrides was born in 1903 in Antwerp. She came to the United States in 1923, and founded the all-women Orchestrette Classique in New York in 1932. The Orchestrette included 30 musicians, and focused on performing baroque works that had originally been composed for an ensemble of that size, as well as new compositions by both male and female composers, including commissions and premieres of work by Samuel Barber, Aaron Copland, Ralph Vaughn Williams, Julia Smith, and Gian Carlo Menotti (Ammer 2001, 133; Frederique Petrides 1983; Groh 1991, 3-4; Neuls-Bates 1986, 362).

Petrides added another activity to her to-do list that foreshadowed an important emphasis of The Women’s Philharmonic: a consistent effort to advocate for the acknowledgement and respect of women composers, women musicians, and women conductors. From 1935 to 1940, Petrides published a one-page newsletter called *Women in Music*, which reported on women composers, conductors, and musicians in the world of classical music. Some years, the newsletter appeared quarterly; other years, more frequently. Besides reporting on current happenings among women in the classical music world, with a natural emphasis on all-women orchestras, Petrides sought, through
historical research, to demonstrate that women had been orchestral musicians for a very long time, and that current projects were simply a continuation of a long narrative thread in women’s musical history. For example, in the September 1935 issue of *Women in Music*, Petrides ran a short piece about how Metropolitan Opera harpists had been the first women to be admitted into the musicians union in 1903; an article about the Portland Women’s Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1934 (like Orchestrette Classique) and conducted by Miss D’Zama Murielle; a paragraph about Dr. Nikolai Sokoloff, head of the Federal Music Project for the Works Progress Administration, and his willingness to admit women musicians into his orchestras—a rarity at the time among prominent American conductors; and a piece on the all-female orchestras in eighteenth-century Venetian orphanages. This last article, of course, linked the work of the Orchestrette Classique, the Portland Women’s Symphony Orchestra, and the many other women’s orchestras of the early 1930s to their predecessors centuries earlier (Neuls-Bates 1986, 362-363; Groh 1991, 33).

Orchestrette Classique disbanded in 1943. Many other all-women’s orchestras folded during or shortly after the end of World War II. Women instrumentalists had become more widely accepted into orchestras at all levels. As mixed-gender orchestras became more normalized, there was less need for all-women’s orchestras (Neuls-Bates 1986, 351-364).

A few of the all-women orchestras continued. The Philadelphia Women’s Symphony Orchestra played together until 1952; the Los Angeles Women’s Orchestra, until 1961; the Detroit Women’s Symphony Orchestra until 1971 (Neuls-Bates 1986,
As mentioned above, the Cleveland Women’s Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1935, is still performing today.

But perhaps the many all-women orchestras that optimistically disbanded around World War II, as some women musicians were beginning to be hired by some symphony orchestras, did so prematurely. Equitably mixed, dual-gender orchestras were still a long way off. Of the five highest-ranked orchestras in the United States—the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra—none had more than 12 percent women musicians until about 1980 (Goldin and Rouse 2000, 717). In the 1970s and 1980s, most orchestras in the country introduced a screen into the audition process, designed to conceal the race and gender of the musician from the hiring committee. This was in response to a discrimination lawsuit brought against the New York Philharmonic by an African-American musician in the early 1970s. This new blind audition process resulted in many more women being hired into orchestras. According to Polly Kahn, vice president for learning and leadership development of the League of American Orchestras, “[A]s of 2013, about 50 percent of the league member orchestras, the country’s top 250 orchestras, have got 50 percent women….I think we are close to 50 percent (overall) at this point” (Miller 2014).

In those years intervening between World War II and the 1980s, when representation of women musicians in orchestras began to increase, we can assume that some—if not most—women musicians experienced discrimination because of their gender. Very likely, many women musicians would have experienced discrimination until
much more recently, when orchestra personnel became more equitably representative in terms of gender. The changes in audition processes certainly played a big part in this shift. Another big influence was the habit of critical examination of the status quo that characterized the 1960s and 1970s, whether it meant questioning the position of women and African-Americans in society; the tendency of U.S. foreign policy to lean toward strong-arming and colonial attitudes; or the treatment of the environment. This mood spurred a lot of important projects; one of them was The Women’s Philharmonic.

**The Women’s Philharmonic**

In 1980, Elizabeth Seja Min was studying piano and conducting at the San Francisco Conservatory. She wanted to play a more varied repertoire. “She found some works by women composers, and got very excited about that music,” said Miriam Abrams, one of the founders of The Women’s Philharmonic and the organization’s first executive director (Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015).

Miriam Abrams was studying piano with the same teacher, and was acquainted with Seja Min socially. Both women knew that, in 1978, Kay Gardner—who had studied conducting privately with Antonia Brico in the 1970s—had co-founded the New England Women’s Symphony (NEWS), a Boston-based orchestra, whose main mission was to provide conducting opportunities for women and to showcase the work of women composers. The ensemble had lasted for about a year, disbanding because of lack of funds (Sunn 2003; Ammer 2001, 134). However, they had made a single full-length recording called *Women’s Orchestral Works*. (Antonia Brico conducted NEWS in
Germaine Tailleferre’s “Concertino for Harp and Orchestra” for the album.) On the
record jacket, Gardner wrote about the birth and mission of NEWS:

In researching programs of major professional and semi-professional
orchestras, we noted growth of female personnel listings but little if any
programming of women’s compositions and virtually no evidence of
women conducting with any regularity. NEWS set out to correct this
imbalance by providing 1) a performance vehicle for large-scale
compositions by women, 2) a podium for women conductors, and 3) an
organization to educate the public and performing organizations as to the
existence of women’s orchestral literature and to the existence of female
conductors (New England Women’s Symphony 1980).

These goals would essentially become the goals of The Women’s Philharmonic,
though the longevity of TWP afforded the opportunity to refine and focus them.

When Elizabeth Seja Min expressed interest in founding an all-women orchestra
in the San Francisco Bay Area, Miriam Abrams offered to help. The two women phoned
Kay Gardner, who encouraged them and told them to contact Nan Washburn, who had
played flute in the New England Women’s Symphony and had since relocated to the Bay
Area. Washburn had developed both an interest in conducting and a deep commitment to
researching and performing compositions by women (Washburn, personal interview,
11.23.2015; Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015).

Washburn, who became the organization’s first artistic director, had witnessed
firsthand with the New England Women’s Symphony how expensive and challenging it
is to establish and maintain an orchestra. “Many orchestras that are purpose-driven face
this issue,” said Washburn, of not carefully factoring in and preparing to meet those
costs. For that reason, Washburn was at first reluctant to be part of the project Seja Min
and Abrams were proposing. Washburn insisted that they proceed carefully (Washburn, personal interview, 11.23.2015).

“We took about a year before we performed our first concert. I felt really strongly that we had to have a good sense of our finances,” remembered Washburn. “It was absolutely the most grassroots effort you can imagine. We made a flyer, got twenty dollars, made more flyers, got more small donations” (ibid.).

In summer 1981, The Women’s Philharmonic offered its first two performances, which featured chamber music, including a trio by Louise Farrenc. “We did one performance at the San Francisco Conservatory—it was on Ortega then—and one in the East Bay. All the music on the program was by women composers,” said Washburn. “We had a great turn-out” (ibid.). That fall, they held auditions for orchestral musicians; the first orchestra concert was offered in January 1982 (Washburn, personal interview, 11.23.2015; The Women’s Philharmonic Programs, Stanford University Special Collections).

The organization’s timing was fortuitous. In the 1960s and 1970s, second-wave feminism had gained a lot of momentum. Whereas first-wave feminism of the late 1800s and early 1900s had concerned itself with securing civil rights for women, such as suffrage, second-wave feminists examined and assessed all areas of women’s lives, including sexuality, family, historical representation, and work. For some, feminism expanded into an all-inclusive political theory that criticized the current system that had oppressed women, but also acknowledged that that oppressive system diminished and
degraded men, children, animals, and the natural world as well (Burkett 2015; hooks 2015, xiv; Griffin 1978, xv-xvii).

Two important aspects of the second-wave feminism of the women’s movement were: first, the centrality of the arts and of cultural expression; and second, the role of such cultural expressions in reviving and remembering women’s accomplishments from the past and in celebrating the efforts of women in the present. Consciousness-raising groups allowed small numbers of women to gather and share both personal experiences and observations of how patriarchy had impacted them. First exhibited in 1979, artist Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party—an installation representing 1,038 historically significant women—was widely acknowledged as a seminal feminist artwork that brought the attention of millions to the issue of reclaiming women’s historical achievements and identities. The poetry and prose of Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and others gave voice to women’s concerns about sexism, racism, and homophobia, and also valued and celebrated the interior, private lives of women. Olivia Records was both a women’s music label and an experiment in creating a collectively run company that generated income. Many small publications, ranging from scholarly journals to zine-type periodicals, charted and explored the ideas and direction of the women’s movement, including Sinister Wisdom; Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics; Off Our Backs; Chrysalis; Signs: The Journal of Women in Culture and Society; Hot Wire: The Journal of Women’s Music and Culture; and the Feminist Art Journal (Burkett 2015; Rabinovitz 1980, 41; Lorde and Rich 1981, 713-736; Faderman 1991, 221; Berson, et. al. 1974, 2).
Into this milieu, The Women’s Philharmonic was born. In one sense, this sort of environment provided the perfect incubator in which a project such as The Women’s Philharmonic could gestate and grow. But it also posed an inherent challenge. Because a certain segment of the women’s movement represented a very gung-ho approach and attitude to anything related to women, it was necessary, if one wanted to create a quality product, to remain rigorous in assessing that quality. “There were so few women conductors, and our audiences were very pro-women,” says Nan Washburn. “It didn’t matter if we were any good, they were, ‘Yay, women!’” But Washburn recognized the potential danger in this. “I was a stickler for making it good; it had to be good.” As the organization’s first artistic director, Washburn focused her energies on research and programming. “Initially, we didn’t program exclusively women composers. I felt very strongly that, in order to build an orchestra, you needed to do some traditional repertoire. I chose carefully, with an emphasis on women composers, and on historical women composers. But to me, it was never about just doing women composers in the same old format; it was not a stuffy classical program. Our programs were closely themed, marketed, and packaged in a fun way” (Washburn, personal interview, 11.23.2015).

As a result, The Women’s Philharmonic audience included a lot of people who were not necessarily typical orchestra buffs. Often the audience included a lot of gay women, and the mood was “festive, positive, and fun” (ibid.). “We often felt like we were making history—by performing works from historical women composers, by playing new works by living women composers—and our audience shared that feeling,” said Miriam Abrams. Composer John Adams sat on TWP’s Advisory Board. “After one of
our concerts, John Adams said, ‘I’ve never experienced such a connection between the
audience and the orchestra before.’ It really was unusual,” remembered Abrams (Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015).

Relations between those within the organization were unusual too. “Nan had played in orchestras, but Elizabeth [Seja-Min, TWP’s first music director] and I hadn’t. I didn’t know anything about orchestral culture,” said Abrams. She continued:

I learned later that most orchestras are very hierarchical, very top-down. Because of our backgrounds, we were all feminists, and we valued a more egalitarian way of operating. We were working together, for the same goals, and we tried to value and respect everyone who was involved. The three of us [Music Director Seja-Nin, Artistic Director Washburn, and Executive Director Abrams] didn’t get paid in the beginning, and the musicians knew that. We always paid our musicians first (ibid.).

Similarly, the work between the conductor and the orchestra was unusually collaborative. Because TWP premiered historical women’s compositions as well as new and commissioned works by women composers, “the conductor never came in with a fixed idea of what the piece sounded like,” said Robyn Bramhall, one of TWP’s first librarians and president of the Board when the organization folded. “The conductor would ask the musicians, ‘What do you think about this passage? What’s going on here?’ When it was a new work, the composer was often there to help shape the piece too,” making it a three-way collaboration (Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015).

This three-way collaboration reflected TWP’s mission, like NEWS’s mission before it, which was also threefold: to promote women musicians and soloists; women conductors; and women composers. The organization realized its mission in various
ways, as needs were identified and as opportunities presented themselves (Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015; Washburn, personal interview, 11.23.2015).

“People from small orchestras around the country would call us for recommendations for pieces by women composers that they could program,” remembered Miriam Abrams. “Nan [Washburn] was spending a lot of time on the phone with them. She’d ask questions about the size of their orchestra, their instrumentation, to find the right piece for them. We saw a real need.” So Abrams and others worked to find money to launch an archive of music by women composers. The Ford Foundation funded the project, TWP hired a staff person to curate it, and the National Women Composers Resource Center was born (Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015).

“Shira Cion was our top administrator in the mid-1990s or so,” remembered Robyn Bramhall. “She took a call one day from a woman who had seen a woman conductor at a classical music concert, something the woman calling had never seen before. She called us to ask how much money it would take to get a woman on the podium of a major American orchestra. Shira said she would have to consult with her colleagues. When she called the woman back, we had decided that this was a million dollar project, to get a woman conducting a major American orchestra. The woman donated the million dollars, anonymously, and that’s how the National Women Conductors Initiative started” (Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015).

There were many needs. Over the years, TWP launched numerous projects to meet them: the Oakland-based Community Women’s Orchestra, an amateur adjunct to TWP; the New Music Reading Sessions, which showcased orchestral works by emerging
women composers; the Lili Boulanger Award for composition; the Women Composers Resource Center and Women’s Conductors Initiative mentioned above; the Composing A Career Symposium to help women composers map out a professional path; the American Women Master Series, an initiative to encourage the programming of American women composers; the Composer-in-Residence Program; and the JoAnn Falletta Conducting Award (Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015; Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015; Washburn, personal interview, 11.23.2015).

In 1986, TWP’s sixth year, JoAnn Falletta became the organization’s music director. “Getting her as our music director was a total game changer,” said Miriam Abrams. She continued:

She was a rising star in the conducting world, and we got taken much more seriously by the established music world when she came on board. She increased the quality of the playing so much, and she had contacts everywhere. Whenever she was interviewed, she would always mention us, and the national media became curious about us, so we began to get national coverage. We got our first recording contracts when JoAnn was music director; her first recordings were with us (Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015).

JoAnn Falletta was TWP’s music director until 1996. That period—the early years through shortly before Falletta’s departure—seem to have been the glory days of the organization. TWP enjoyed robust audience support; a strong, shared purpose among staff and the artists; a belief in the meaning and value of the advocacy projects promoted; and solid funding. Besides the Ford Foundation, TWP’s various projects were funded by many other organizations, including the Rockefeller Foundation, the California Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the San Francisco Arts Commission.
“We had a few major individual donors, but more importantly we had faithful donors that would regularly give $100, $500,” said Miriam Abrams (ibid.).

By the time JoAnn Falletta left in 1996, the organization had already faced serious financial challenges. Miriam Abrams left in 1993, the last of the organization’s original founders to go. “It was a total labor of love. I loved it, but it was sometimes stressful. I wanted to leave while I was still happy, and I did,” she explained (ibid.).

It was after Abrams left that TWP began to falter. As the exiting executive director, Abrams left TWP in excellent financial shape, with some multi-year grants to ease the transition for the new executive director (Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015; Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015). “The person they chose as the next executive director failed miserably,” said Abrams, “and we started to have serious financial problems.” After that person left, Judy Patrick was hired as executive director, and she built up the organization’s coffers again (Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015).

But not without bumps and starts. The financial crisis after Miriam Abrams left was a challenge experienced internally by the organization, but later, these issues took on a more public quality, affecting fans and the orchestra’s musicians. In 1997, Joshua Kosman, classical music critic for the San Francisco Chronicle wrote:

For an organization with a unique mission, the Women’s Philharmonic found itself in an all-too-common predicament two years back. After more than a decade of championing the works of female composers, with good-size audiences and a couple of well-received CDs to its credit, the orchestra was facing a mounting deficit…[Board members] swung into action, canceling the final concert of the 1995 season (Kosman 1997a).
The orchestra remained on hiatus throughout all of the 1996 season—interrupted only for one performance that was recorded live and released on a CD—and resumed in 1997 with a season of three concerts, each conducted by one of the top three candidates for the position of music director left vacant after Falletta’s departure. Apo Hsu won the position (Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015; Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015).

And here a series of factors—some particular to TWP, some broadly societal—began to converge and challenge the organization’s continuance. Whereas the organization, in its early years, had focused a lot of energy on what they called “unearthing and rebirthing”—resuscitating historical works by women composers—by the mid-1990s, TWP was performing a lot of new works. “We lost a lot of audience at that time,” said Robyn Bramhall. “Board members disagreed about how much new music we should do. Some thought that we should focus exclusively on new music and get known for that. Others thought that there were already organizations devoted to promoting the work of living composers, and our mission needed to be broader, to also include continuing our emphasis on research and on finding these historical works by women composers,” said Bramhall (Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015).

This kind of internal difference of opinion saps the momentum of small arts organizations. As long as everyone is pulling together toward excellence, and they have a shared idea of what excellence is, an organization can expand and grow. But when different factions have different ideas about what direction to pull in, a lot of
organizational energy is dissipated in trying to come to agreement. And, as a result of that dissipated energy, forward motion slows.

The women’s movement itself was changing. Second-wave feminism was affected by all the factors that were influencing the rest of society: eight years of Ronald Reagan as president had resulted in an underfunded NEA and gutted social services; a belief that the free market and corporate interest would determine the right direction for the country was widely touted; and an assault on the environment, education, and the arts that would have been unimaginable in the 1960s or 1970s took hold. The expansiveness, experimentation, and collaborative spirit of those earlier decades were replaced by a more contracted, atomized self-interest. Individual women were beginning to look at how they could get ahead, rather than work to move the sisterhood forward. Robyn Bramhall recalled an interview with a candidate for the executive director position at TWP in the 1990s. “We asked if she identified as a feminist, which was pretty central for the rest of us. We were all active, proud feminists. She said, ‘No. I believe that women should have equal opportunities, but I don’t call myself a feminist’” (ibid.). For a lot of younger women, the term had become murky and ill-defined, associated with what they considered an anachronistic naivete that they did not want to be identified with.

Externally, San Francisco was changing too. The late 1990s brought the first dot-com boom to the city. Entrepreneurs and computer professionals moved in. Many artisans, artists, and low-income people were flushed out, as landlords, seeking to cash in, raised rents to new highs, often doubling, tripling, and quadrupling what individuals and organizations had been paying before. Neighborhoods became gentrified as space became
very expensive. The city, which had long been a benign and welcoming place for experiments and innovation—artistic and otherwise—was changing into a more hardboiled and straitlaced place.

In January 2001, Sam Whiting wrote a piece for the *San Francisco Chronicle* listing the arts organizations in the city that were experiencing rent increases. Whiting wrote: “The building at 44 Page Street [home of the Women’s Philharmonic] was sold in the fall. The rent went up by 50 percent on December 1 and will allow the Philharmonic to stay for three years, according to Cindy Hubbard, executive director” (Whiting 2001). (Hubbard’s estimate that the organization could last three more years paying the higher rent would prove prescient: In 2004—the three-year mark—TWP folded.) That May, TWP announced that it would “cancel its entire 2001-02 subscription series because of lack of money” (Kosman 2001). On September 11 of that year, the al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had far-reaching effects. “After 9-11, our donations dropped. Donors went in other directions,” said Bramhall. “I wouldn’t blame 9-11 for everything, but it played a role” (Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015).

People involved with the organization and close observers of it differ on why the organization closed its doors in 2004. Some say it’s because the organization’s work was in large part done—many more women were playing in orchestras; American composer Ellen Taaffe Zwilich was the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for music in 1983; in 1991 and in 1999, Shulamit Ran and Melinda Wagner won the Pulitzer for Music, respectively (though, like today, women composers remained dramatically underrepresented in orchestral programming, and women conductors were unknown in
the top orchestras). Others say the organization had spread itself too thin, working on too many projects simultaneously and thus unable to maintain effective focus on any one of them. Internal disagreements about the direction the organization should take surely played a role. “It’s very expensive to maintain and pay a full orchestra,” explained Robyn Bramhall. “Some of us on the final Board wanted to focus on the advocacy projects and let the performing orchestra go. Of course, the musicians hated that idea. Finally, we decided to end the TWP as we had known it, but to find what we considered good homes for all the advocacy projects so other organizations could build on what we had accomplished, and to continue moving forward with the advocacy work ourselves too” (ibid.). (The organization lives on as The Women’s Philharmonic Advocacy Group, which offers performance grants to encourage orchestras to program compositions by women. This new organization will be discussed further in Chapter 3.)

The decision to cancel the 2001-2002 subscription season turned into a policy, as TWP did not perform again until its final concert on March 7, 2004. “The Women’s Philharmonic slowly faded away like the Cheshire Cat,” said Joshua Kosman (Kosman, personal interview, 11.18.2015). During its lifetime, TWP had presented works by more than 160 women composers, including 134 premieres and 47 commissioned works. The orchestra had received 17 American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers awards, and had won the John S. Edwards Award from what was then the American Symphony Orchestra League (now the League of American Orchestras), a prize that recognized an American orchestra’s commitment to new music during a season. TWP’s second recording, *The Women’s Philharmonic*, received the best classical recording
award from the National Association of Independent Record Distributors (Wiegand 2004).

But Joshua Kosman notes TWP’s biggest achievement. “They helped make very visible an issue that had been subterranean. In its time, it was a very bold voice raising questions that had only been raised in the most circuitous way” (Kosman, personal interview, 11.18.2015). They had drawn attention to the dramatic paucity of women composers and conductors represented in the classical music world in the United States. Astonishingly, more than ten years later, this underrepresentation defines the current state of affairs. Though The Women’s Philharmonic’s work remains unfinished, they unarguably accomplished a great deal and articulated the questions that we still work with today.
CHAPTER TWO: TWP’S PROGRAMMING: GENEROUS, RADICAL, AND UNUSUAL

As mentioned in the previous chapter, The Women’s Philharmonic received 17 American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) awards during its tenure. Many of these awards recognized TWP’s commitment to performing new works and to “adventurous programming.” According to ASCAP, the “adventurous programming” award is given to an orchestra “whose programming indicates extraordinary efforts to expand symphonic repertoire and develop and educate orchestra audiences. Additionally, it honors the orchestra for extraordinary efforts beyond their usual-and-accustomed activity in the area of new music and unusual programming” (ASCAP 2016).

“Adventurous programming” meant many different things over the course of TWP’s lifetime. The ensemble clearly featured compositions by women composers—in and of itself, adventurous. But there was a consistent emphasis on new works, commissioned works, and premieres. Nearly every program included at least one world, U.S., or West Coast premiere. Additionally, the efforts and accomplishments of young and living composers and soloists were showcased. TWP commissioned its first work—Liliana Electral by Joanna Brouk—in 1982, during its first full subscription season. This set the stage for the organization’s practice of commissioning works by living women. By inviting living composers to speak to audiences, TWP created an environment that helped listeners and supporters to encounter, understand, and appreciate new works. By contrast, the San Francisco Symphony, in its 2015-2016 season, which included over 50 performances, commissioned only three works—one west coast premiere, one U.S.
premiere, and one world premiere (The Women’s Philharmonic Programs, Stanford University Special Collections; San Francisco Symphony Press Release 2015).

TWP’s programming also reflected a celebration of ethnic and racial diversity, and the varied sounds implied. In the organization’s first ten years, it devoted entire programs to Latin American women composers; Black women composers; and Pacific Rim women composers (The Women’s Philharmonic Programs, Stanford University Special Collections).

So TWP’s “adventurous” programming included, most centrally, the work of both living women composers and neglected women composers from the past; but also experimental music, new music, and works by women of ethnic and racial backgrounds that are often under-represented in today’s classical orchestral programming. What becomes clear when one starts to investigate the exclusion of women composers from the classical canon is that the question is about much more than just the exclusion of women.

Classical music critic Nancy Malitz, the founding music critic at USA Today, is particularly interested in how symphony orchestras exclude and ignore composers based on ethnicity, race, and gender. “We inherited a European, patriarchal orchestral tradition,” she said. “It’s embodied by the Vienna Philharmonic view, i.e., ‘It’s essential to our artistic soul to have an all-male ensemble with a special all-male camaraderie.’ That’s changing a bit now, they’re admitting a few women instrumentalists, but that’s the extreme example of the model we’ve inherited” (Malitz, personal interview, 03.24.2016). Malitz points out that women musicians and composers have actually fared better than composers and instrumentalists of non-European races and ethnicities (ibid.).
While the European patriarchal orchestral tradition surely plays a role in the paucity of women composers represented on modern symphony programs, multiple other factors play a role too. Some are historical—though often with curious and surprising contemporary expressions; others are modern.

The Biological Argument

In the multiple centuries that we have experienced our canon of classical music, various writers and aestheticists have, from time to time, turned their attention to the question of women’s ability to compose music. In 1891, the eighth version of Eduard Hanslick’s *On The Musically Beautiful: A Contribution towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music* was published in Germany. Here are some of Hanslick’s thoughts on women and composing from the English translation:

[There is] the paradox of why women, who are by nature preeminently dependent upon feeling, have not amounted to much as composers. The cause of this lies (apart from the circumstances in general which prevent women from achieving more in the way of intellectual creativity) precisely in the plastic aspect of musical composing, which demands renunciation of subjectivity...no less than the visual arts. And it is not feeling which composes music, but the specifically musical, artistically trained talent (Hanslick 1986, 46).

One appreciates Hanslick’s acknowledgement of “the circumstances…which prevent women from achieving more,” but his analysis rests squarely on the idea that women are feeling creatures, not thinking beings who can control their emotions long enough to write a lied or a piano trio. (Apparently Hanslick never encountered the work of Clara Schumann. Or perhaps he believed she was so anomalous as to be exempt from analysis or consideration.)
While reading such a passage may cause those with a modern sensibility to wince and feel grateful that they live in more enlightened times, when sexism does not monolithically determine talent or its lack, that position may be premature. Art historian, academic, and social commentator Camille Paglia has an idea somewhat similar to Hanslick’s about why there are no great women composers:

Serial…murder, like fetishism, is a perversion of male intelligence. It is a criminal abstraction, masculine in its deranged egotism and orderliness. It is the asocial equivalent of philosophy, mathematics, and music. There is no female Mozart because there is no female Jack the Ripper (Paglia 1990, 247).

Elsewhere, Paglia says that “women cluster at the median point of the intelligence rank. They do not produce great geniuses; neither do they produce…criminals and mass murderers” (Captain Nemo 2015). Paglia is very much a twentieth/twenty-first century figure. Though chronologically modern, her argument, too, falls back on the idea of an inescapable female biology, an inborn inevitability to occupy “the median point of the intelligence rank” (ibid.).

The rigid determinism of the biological argument deeply flaws the theory. Biology is not destiny. That’s why we have Germaine Tailleferre, Ruth Crawford Seeger, Frida Kahlo, and Leonora Carrington in the arts; Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir, Benazir Bhutto, and Hillary Clinton in politics; and social activists such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Dorothy Day.

A more troubling iteration of the biological answer to the question of why we see so few women composers on contemporary orchestral programs was published in the conservative British weekly, The Spectator, on September 19, 2015. Titled “There’s a
good reason why there are no great female composers: Nothing by Fanny Mendelssohn, Clara Schumann, Amy Beach, Ethel Smyth or Judith Weir matches up to the work of their male counterparts,” the piece is unapologetic in its position. The author of the piece, Damian Thompson, writes:

A delicate question lies at the heart of the subject of female composers, and it’s not ‘Why are they so criminally underrepresented in the classical canon?’ It’s ‘How good is their music compared with that of male composers?’ (Thompson 2015)

Thompson then takes us on a little musical tour as he listens to a recording of the piano concertos of both Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck Schumann. He writes:

In track three, I marvel yet again at Robert’s genius. The leaping melody of the finale turns into a fugue and then a waltz, enticed by the piano into modulations that never lose their power to surprise and delight. Then comes track four, the first movement of Clara’s concerto, and within ten seconds we know it’s a dud. The first phrase is a platitude: nothing good can come of it and nothing does (Thompson 2015).

Thompson also comments on Clara Wieck Schumann’s “G Minor Piano Sonata.” It “isn’t a success,” he writes. “I wouldn’t go so far as to call it ‘repugnant’…or ‘horrible,’ but it’s embarrassingly banal.” He then turns his attention to Fanny Mendelssohn: “She, too, wrote a ‘G minor Piano Sonata’ and it’s bloody awful. Whether it’s worse than Clara’s sonata I can’t say, because that would mean listening to them again. But we can be pretty sure that neither of them would have been recorded if they had been composed by a man.”

Thompson weighs in disparagingly on Amy Beach’s and Ethel Smyth’s work, too, before commenting on Elizabeth Maconchy: Her 13 string quartets, he writes, “are distinctively knotty—but when they turn spiky you think of Bartok and her bleaker
moments sound like Shostakovich.” It is difficult to understand precisely what Thompson seeks to communicate here, but one imagines that it is not meant to be complementary to Maconchy.

Thompson continues: “[I]f there are no great women composers, that’s because creative geniuses are rare and, in the past, so few women wrote music….Meanwhile, we’re stuck in a situation where the barriers to women becoming composers have been removed but they’re still honored for being women.”

Notwithstanding the simplistic irresponsibility of waxing poetic about Robert Schumann’s creative work while trashing Clara Wieck Schumann’s compositions, Thompson’s piece casts a wide net. His analysis of why there are no great women composers touches on the biological argument (“creative geniuses are rare”—but they’re not female); suggests that societal factors play a role (“so few women wrote music”); and implicitly raises questions about the canon; about what composers and pieces are most familiar to us; and how that reality shapes what we perceive as good, great, or “bloody awful.”

Thompson’s decision to describe Elizabeth Maconchy’s string quartets as sounding like Bartok and Shostakovich is telling. In his analysis, Bartok and Shostakovich are the standard bearers; Maconchy’s work reminds him of other composers, composers he knows better. (Of course, through his comparison, he also suggests that Maconchy has never had an original musical idea in her life.) It suggests that what we know, what we have heard frequently and ubiquitously since childhood (and for those who did not grow up in classical music-loving households, soundtracks from
cartoons, movies, and other media have surely acquainted them with at least some
traditional classical composers and music) becomes the norm, the standard. In other
words, we like what is familiar.

For Dr. Lucy Green, professor of music education at University College London
Institute of Education, music’s significance is contingent and socially constructed, *not*
universal. She distinguishes between inherent musical meaning—relationships that
listeners construe from sounds interacting with each other—and delineated meaning.
According to Green, delineations in music are the relationships that listeners make
between the sounds heard and the extra-musical world, which can include—among many
other things—memory, fashion and style, and the gender and/or sexual orientation of the
composer. Green writes:

In the dominant discourse surrounding classical music, the delineations of
the music tend to recede, leaving many listeners and devotees with the
idea that classical music has none: that it is universal and autonomous in
its expression of some ahistorical or essential human condition which
mysteriously resides in its formal structures alone. Such an understanding
of music has been implicit, although rarely articulated explicitly, in much
criticism and academic writing. It is also part of many...attitudes toward
classical music (Green 1997, 8).

The assumption that classical music—its canon, its “greatness,” its habit of
including some works, genres, composers and excluding others—just *is*, without
reference to historical context and mores and agendas, is certainly, as Green points out,
both widespread and popular. Can there be a more universally accepted member of the
western classical music canon than Johann Sebastian Bach? And yet, Bach’s talents as a
composer might have been completely lost to us had not Felix Mendelssohn revived
interest in Bach’s works more than 75 years after his death (Library of Congress 2009). If
an acknowledged musical genius like Bach can slip through the canon’s cracks, what else of beauty, interest, innovation, and genius might be out there? TWP’s “unearthing and rebirthing” of historical works by women composers discussed in Chapter 1 often involved tracking down the only copy of a crumbling manuscript in an archive somewhere in Europe. Members of the TWP would then painstakingly hand-copy (this was pre-Sibelius and Finale, two popular music notation software programs) the orchestra parts from that original (Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015; Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015; Washburn, personal interview, 11.23.2015). These were often forgotten, ignored, or unknown works by women composers that might never have been heard had it not been for TWP’s historical resuscitation efforts. Francoise Tillard, Fanny Mendelssohn’s biographer, credits TWP for rescuing Mendelssohn’s 1830 Ouverture—her only full-scale orchestral work—from oblivion (Tillard 1996, 11). Besides being performed on a TWP concert program, the Ouverture was featured on TWP’s second CD.

Clearly, decisions have been made—and continue to be made—about who is in the canon, who is out; who is a big name, who is second tier; who gets programmed, who does not; who is a “genius,” who is not—and they have been made by people; thus those decisions have been, by definition, subjective. There is no shame in this. One could reasonably argue that The Women’s Philharmonic’s success and longevity were due to its overt embrace of its subjectivity.

Every individual human being is a product of his or her environment, opportunities, ancestral inheritance, and unique biography. These elements create a special, uniquely limited perspective. That people in a given demographic group—men,
women; Asians, Africans, Europeans; wealthy, poor—might share some elements of a given limited perspective is reasonable and obvious. Decisions about inclusion or exclusion in the classical canon, about orchestral programming, about whether one’s creative work gets promoted or not, have historically been made by white men of European descent. That those decision makers—writers on musical aesthetics, music critics, orchestral music directors—have largely favored white men of European descent should not be surprising. What is surprising is how long it has gone on, especially as other artistic institutions surrounding classical music have expanded to become more inclusive and eclectic, and how it continues to be defended, touted, permitted as in Damian Thompson’s work for *The Spectator*.

In her book, *Music, Gender, Education*, Green recounts an example of how delineated meanings surrounding gender can affect the reception of creative work. A male Scandinavian music critic, writing in the early part of the twentieth century, wrote very positively about the work of a particular composer. After many of his reviews had been published, he learned that the composer was a woman. He continued to write positively about her work, but the language he used to describe her compositions changed. Green writes:

> His praise ceased to describe the music with words like ‘strident,’ ‘virile’ and ‘powerful,’ and began to include words like ‘delicate’ and ‘sensitive.’ What had happened was that his new knowledge that the composer was a woman…affected the way that he…heard and articulated his opinions of the inherent meanings. One cannot help wondering whether, had he known the sex of the composer all along, he would have found any merit in the compositions to begin with (Green 1997, 102-103).
Green also points out that music critics who were Tchaikovsky’s contemporaries altered their reception of his music when they learned of his homosexuality, introducing language such as “hysterical,” “effeminate,” and “structurally weak” to describe his work) (Green 1997, 103).

Green’s suggestion—that the male music critic might not have found any merit in the woman composer’s work had he known her gender—is provocative. Violist and composer Rebecca Clarke premiered a piece for viola and piano called Morpheus in 1918 in New York. Three works on that concert’s program were composed by Clarke, but instead of listing her own name on one of the compositions, she listed “Anthony Trent” as the composer of her piece, “Morpheus.” “[T]his is one for Women’s Lib,” said Clarke, “because although the piece by Anthony Trent was not particularly good, it had much more attention paid to it than the pieces I had written, I mean in my own name, which was rather a joke” (Curtis 2004, 172).

Nancy Malitz, the classical music critic quoted above, has been a member of the Music Critics Association of North America (MCANA) since 1977. “Of the current membership in MCANA, 23% are women. It tends to fluctuate between 10 and 25 percent,” said Malitz (Malitz, personal interview, 03.24.2016). Though the examples from Green and Clarke of music critics assigning different delineations—to use Dr. Green’s term—to music composed by women come from early in the twentieth century, we know that change comes slowly to an institution like classical music. Given Nancy Malitz’s figures, if even half of the male classical music critics in the U.S. today listen to women’s compositions with a different, more critical ear—and some of the women music critics
may do so too, of course—that could have a substantial effect on the public’s understanding of the value and worth of those compositions.

And, when we look at the major orchestras in the country, only one of them—the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra—has a woman, Marin Alsop, in the position of music director. Traditionally, the music director has a great deal of influence over what pieces get programmed and recorded. According to the orchestra, there may be some input from the organizational side—the CEO, CFO, and Orchestra Manager, e.g.—and major donors can certainly influence orchestral programming with their personal preferences, but artistic decisions and directions are, officially at least, considered the purview of the music director. Since the vast majority of music directors are white men, they may feel less commitment to investing the time, energy, research, and advocacy needed to forward the work of women composers. At any rate, one person—the music director—deciding what a given orchestra performs is an awful lot of power for a single individual to wield over a city’s cultural life.

All these issues—what gets programmed, who gets good press, whose work gets recorded—are tangled together, and, given the predominance of men in the decision-making and gate-keeping roles, they all contribute to a lowered likelihood of hearing the work of women composers. According to musicologist Liane Curtis, president of Women’s Philharmonic Advocacy (WPA) and resident scholar at the Women’s Research Center of Brandeis University, “We see many orchestras routinely programming NOT ONE SINGLE work composed by a female in their entire season of classical orchestral programming” (Curtis 2015). In a blog post, Curtis listed the orchestras guilty of not
including a single work by a woman in their 2015-2016 season: the Cleveland Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Seattle Symphony Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, and Utah Symphony. She continues:

[T]he San Francisco Symphony is based in the city that was the home of The Women’s Philharmonic for all of its 20-plus years. Much of their past extensive fan base is there and would be eager to hear works by women. But one of our WPA [Women’s Philharmonic Advocacy] supporters tells me that the SFS has excluded women composers in 17 of its past 20 seasons. The SFS prides itself for its creative, inventive programming, but to be so emphatic in ignoring women makes one wonder if there is some deep-set misogyny there (Curtis 2015).

Curtis’s observation about the reluctance of many music directors to program works by women composers is borne out by two studies conducted 19 years apart. In 1996, The Women’s Philharmonic surveyed the country’s 23 top-funded orchestras. They looked at the 1,534 pieces programmed during the 1995-1996 orchestral season; three of them were written by women composers, representing .196% of the pieces played that year. Nearly 20 years later, in 2015, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra conducted a similar survey of the 22 biggest U.S. orchestras, and found that women composers accounted for 1.8% of the total pieces performed in the 2014-2015 concert season (Kosman 1997a; O’Bannon 2015).

The change from the 1996 survey to the 2015 survey represented a 1.6% increase in the number of women composers programmed, a tiny .084% uptick each year. At that rate of change, we can all look forward to gender parity in compositions represented on orchestral programs in the year 2586.
The Underrepresentation of New Music

The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra published another survey in 2015. Looking at the same 22 orchestras as in the above-described survey of women composers revealed that 11.8% of the pieces performed in the 2014-2015 season were by living composers (O’Bannon 2015). (Only one woman among the living composers—Jennifer Higdon—had a piece, “blue cathedral,” performed by more than one orchestra.)

This underrepresentation of living composers is deeply entangled with the underrepresentation of women composers. There are certainly many more historical works by women than are programmed; yet, historically, fewer women than men had the opportunity to nurture and develop compositional talents. Thus we have a smaller pool of historical works by women from which to choose.

The field is somewhat more level nowadays, and while men still dominate the world of composition, many women compose now as well. Women have been winning top prizes for composition since 1983, when Ellen Taaffe Zwilich became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for musical composition. Since then, five other women have won the award: Shulamit Ran in 1991; Melinda Wagner in 1999; Jennifer Higdon in 2010; Caroline Shaw in 2013; and Julia Wolfe in 2015. These are definitely not household names, but neither are the names of most living composers.

Why not? Why has everyone heard of Bach, Brahms, and Beethoven, but not Chen Yi and Esa-Pekka Salonen? The answer to these questions is tied up with classical music’s strong aversion to folding new and contemporary music into its canon.
As a result of this aversion, new music tends to be ghetto-ized. In San Francisco, we have the SoundBox series. SoundBox concerts are not included in the San Francisco Symphony season brochure. In fact, SoundBox is not on subscription like the SFS’s concert series in Davies Symphony Hall. Tickets for each performance go on sale about one month before. Fans can sign up for an email list to keep abreast of SoundBox happenings. Performances take place in the Davies Symphony Hall, where the San Francisco Symphony performs, but in a backstage rehearsal space with a different entrance on a different street than the Davies main entrance. One week before performances in the SoundBox space, a sign outside communicates that that door is the SoundBox entrance. But if one were to walk past that door now that the season has ended, it would simply look like a backstage entrance to Davies. Similarly, the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s new music series, Green Umbrella, takes place in a smaller space in the concert hall, with a different entrance from a different street.

The programming in these spaces tends to be eclectic and adventuresome, with a typical program including many, shorter works rather than the three or four longer pieces that characterize a usual symphony program. The February 13, 2015 SoundBox program featured seven different percussion pieces, all by male composers. The March 25, 2016 SoundBox program included eight works with two intermissions. The longest piece was 16 minutes long; five pieces lasted seven minutes or less. Seven composers’ works were performed; none were women. However, if one is going to hear a female composer’s work at Davies Symphony Hall, it will almost certainly be at a SoundBox concert. In calendar year 2015, from January to December, four works by women composers—Lisa
Bielawa, Nicole Lizée, Clara Iannotta, and Laurie Anderson—were performed at
SoundBox concerts. Given the high number of pieces on each SoundBox program, this is
certainly not a watershed in the symphony’s inclusion of women composers. But it is
definitely more than zero (Outre 2016; Sticks and Stones 2015; Kosman 2015).

There is a great deal to praise in performing classical and contemporary works in
more intimate, accessible venues; in including shorter pieces to allow for a broader
representation of what constitutes classical and contemporary music; and in incorporating
visual elements, audience participation, and acoustic effects, such as the SoundBox sound
system, which alters acoustics to match the requirements of the work being performed.

But why do these elements, ideas, and kinds of music need to be segregated? What would
happen if both contemporary and ignored historical music by composers of both genders
and different races and ethnicities shared space on a program with established works
from the canon? Would all the orchestra’s major donors have heart attacks and die?
Would all the money bequeathed to the symphony in wills and living trusts evaporate?
Would audiences riot, as they did at the premiere of *Rite of Spring*?

And while a smaller, intimate space for new music has pluses, composer and
CSUEB Professor of Composition Jeffrey Miller points out that it also limits composers
to creating works that cannot include a full orchestra. The tighter quarters simply would
not accommodate an ensemble of that size (Miller, personal interview, 05.06.2016).

Diversified programming that mixed up contemporary and historical works was
something that The Women’s Philharmonic did frequently; it’s that generous eclecticism
that accounts for their many adventurous programming awards. The January 25, 1997
program included three pieces. Two were U.S. premieres (Dame Ethel Smyth’s 1927 “Concerto for Violin, Horn, and Orchestra” and Elinor Alberga’s “Sun Warrior”); one was composed by a Jamaican woman (Alberga); one was historically significant (Smyth, to the extent that she is known at all, is recognized for opera, not orchestral or chamber works); and one was by the relatively established living composer, Joan Tower. On the November 15, 1997 concert program, the TWP played four pieces; three were by living composers—Janice Giteck, Libby Larsen, and Laura Karpman—and one was from an historical work, two movements from Teresa Carreno’s 1896 “String Quartet in B Minor.” The Karpman piece, “Switching Stations” was experimental, designed to represent the radio soundtrack of a freeway drive (The Women’s Philharmonic Programs, Stanford University Special Collections).

Joshua Kosman, classical music critic for the San Francisco Chronicle, in his review of the November 1997 concert, described the Karpman work as “bland and…numbing” (Kosman 1997c). Kosman described a new work (by composer Kaija Saariaho) on the March 1997 TWP program as even “uglier” than a different piece performed by the SFS that he had heard and hated in the same week (Kosman 1997b).

The point is that not every new sonic experiment or work by a contemporary composer is going to be a home run. It’s also true, as discussed earlier, that the experience of music is subjective and that one person’s meat may well be another’s poison. As The New Yorker music critic Alex Ross writes, “Music is too personal a medium to support an absolute hierarchy of values” (Ross 2010, 3).
People are different. The world is a big, wide, varied place, with room for many
different forms of creative expression. The idea that classical music audience members
are such delicate hothouse flowers that they couldn’t possibly bear anything the slightest
bit outré on one of their programs seems absurd, especially when one looks laterally at
dance and the visual arts.

Some distinctions need to be acknowledged between dance, music, and the visual
arts. Dance and music are temporal arts; one views a performance for a fixed amount of
time and then the experience is over (though, of course, its effects can linger). Also,
because of this temporal quality, the number of works encountered on a given program is
limited. While a dance or classical music concert might have three or four pieces on a
program, a museum or gallery can house literally hundreds of works. Also, paintings,
drawings, collages, sculptures, and all the other media used in the visual arts allow the
viewer to determine the amount of time an encounter with a given work will last. As long
as a gallery or museum is open, a viewer can experience a specific artwork, exclusively,
if he or she wants. The viewer has some control over what he or she will see, while the
dance or music concert-goer is literally part of a captive audience, decisions about what
will be performed having been made by others. Finally, much original visual artwork
survives, giving us a direct line to the artists who created them. Musical notation, too,
allows us to understand with some confidence what composers wanted to communicate
with their work. But while systems of dance notation date from the 1400s, they tended to
be idiosyncratic note-taking and drawing by choreographers, dancers, and composers.
More codified systems of dance notation are a more recent development, concretized
with the very good notation of Russian ballets from the late 1800s and early 1900s (Guest 1989; Guest 2016; Heyward 2015). The more widespread use of musical notation allows a much longer reach back into historical scores, rooting classical music more firmly and confidently in its past.

Having noted these differences, it is still clear that dance and the visual arts have done a much better job of evolving to include the historical and the modern side-by-side than classical music has. In 1913, when Stravinsky and Nijinsky premiered their *Rite of Spring*, the audience reacted violently to both the unfamiliar music and the radically different dance. Today, though, dance fans expect to see classical pieces co-exist on programs with very modern, even avant-garde, works. Somehow, from that shared moment in 1913, the dance world has managed to pull their audiences into the twenty-first century, while classical music remains oddly anachronistic and fusty in its programming. Similarly, museum- and gallery-goers know that beloved classics, some of them artworks and artifacts that are millennia old, will hang or be displayed in the same buildings with experimental and really “out” works. As discussed earlier, the visual art lover can avoiding lingering around what he or she doesn’t want to spend time with, but it would be very difficult to completely shield oneself from seeing and reacting to modern works. They are there, often at the entrance or exit of a museum, and thus, to some degree, unavoidable.

Why can dance and the visual arts allow the old and the new to share time on a program or space in a museum? Art aficionados can love Michelangelo and also Frida Kahlo. Dance lovers can adore George Balanchine’s work and also that of Twyla Tharp.
But fans of historical classical music who also want to enjoy the work of modern, living composers need to attend performances in quarantined spaces, as if contemporary music were the despised stepchild kept in the attic because she causes the family such embarrassment.

Many cite practical considerations when discussing why classical music performances are structured in this segregated way. Orchestras are expensive to run, and it is vitally important to their survival not to alienate wealthy patrons who may love the old chestnuts but not new works. Orchestras are large institutions, and it takes large institutions a long time to introduce change, if it is introduced at all. True and true, but how does one reconcile the fact that classical dance companies and art museums are also large institutions that require a great deal of money to survive, but they have educated audiences to at least remain open to the new?

**The Role of Stereotypes**

A recent, modern example of certain attitudes toward women and their knowledge of and/or familiarity with music received a lot of attention in online media dealing with women’s issues. In 2014, librarian and writer Sarah O’Holla began a project on Tumblr called “My Husband’s Stupid Record Collection.” The project involved O’Holla listening to every album in her husband’s record collection and reviewing each on Tumblr.

O’Holla’s tone in her posts is funny and cute. In a recent post in which she reviewed Crom-tech’s “Slowdime 12,” O’Holla wrote: “This is like Albert Ayler [another artist she reviewed earlier] on a sugar high in another dimension. No thank you….
guitar noise is so stabby. I feel the notes going through my hard skull and into my soft brain and stabbing it” (O’Holla 2015).

The blog went viral. *Flavorwire*’s Judy Berman detected a gender split in reactions to the blog:

[A]s acquaintance after acquaintance—almost all of them men—enthusiastically shared the blog, I noticed a…gendered slant to their appreciation…. [T]he subtext couldn’t have been more clear: The people who love music, are frighteningly knowledgeable about it, and accumulate enormous record collections are dudes (Hess 2014).

Berman goes on to state that she perceives the real problem with O’Holla’s blog is that it “perpetuates the more general, ‘70s-Woody-Allen-worthy idea that heterosexual relationships revolve around men educating women” (Berman 2014). Berman’s point includes the idea that there is no educational reciprocity here: O’Holla wades through her husband’s LPs, record by record, but he is not, for example, reading the books she loves—and presumably knows more about—and posting his novice reactions to them.

Rock music critic Tracy Moore also reacted to O’Holla’s blog:

[W]hat O’Holla is doing fits really perfectly into a very traditional notion about how men impart knowledge to women, especially [about] music. That is, we are cool with dudes teaching women things and we love when they are eager students. We are less cool when women are doing the knowledge-dropping with anything like authority (Moore 2014).

One might assume that rock and popular music, given their relative youth when compared with classical music, should be more dedicated to equality between genders and races, less mired in outdated ways of thinking about men, women, knowledge, and learning. So if these attitudes characterize rock and popular music, why wouldn’t they inform classical music too? Perhaps this idea—that men are on the inside, women on the
outside—is democratically represented throughout the music world? Maybe one of TWP’s most important contributions was the idea that everyone, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity, could be on the inside, as demonstrated by the organization’s programming.

If so, then there is an additional complication with respect to classical composition. A kind of mystique surrounds composition, as if it is an inscrutable practice, accessible only to the uniquely talented chosen. Few women gain entry to this elite, but that is not surprising as few people, period, gain entry to this elite.

Such a mystique may well serve those that occupy the inner circle, but is it accurate that composing is inordinately difficult? A program in the southwestern United States suggests that, no, composition is a learnable skill.

In 2000, Clare Hoffman, artistic director of the annual Grand Canyon Music Festival (GCMF), introduced the Native American Composers Apprentice Project (NACAP), because “there were so few Native American voices in the mix” (Hoffman, personal interview, 07.11.2016; Native American Composers Apprentice Project). The program enables 20 to 35 middle and high school students living on Navajo, Hopi, and Salt River Pima-Marcopla reservations to take part in a three-week composition course. The program’s teachers prefer that participants come to the workshop reading music. During that three-week period, a Native American composer works with the young people so each can develop and notate an original piece for string quartet. They then work with a professional string quartet that performs their works at the annual GCMF. After the performance, each participant gets a professionally copied score and
professionally recorded CD of his or her work. This year, in a special collaborative project with the Arizona Opera, NACAP participants will present micro-operas (unstaged, short works for one or two singers, much like a song cycle) that they have composed for a program titled “The Stories We Tell.” The Native American composers who teach in the program encourage their students to use Native melodies and rhythms in their work, adapting them for non-traditional instruments. The result is contemporary music composed for traditional Western ensembles with a novel sound and great individuality (ibid.).

“A lot of the schools we work with don’t have music programs,” said GCMF Artistic Director Clare Hoffman. “Many of these kids have not had formal music instruction, and they don’t play in band or sing in chorus. They do come with music experience though; they have traditional music, heavy metal, and reggae in their heads and in their ears, and that comes out in their compositions. Especially the traditional music—you hear that rhythmically and harmonically in their work” (ibid.).

This lack of formal musical education can be freeing. “Our students come to us with very little preconceived notions or baggage about what classical music is, what a string quartet is,” said Hoffman. So they are not burdened by having to live up to the example of a Beethoven string quartet. “They’re open, and the result is music that’s fresh and original” (ibid.).

Some of the program graduates continue to compose, and bring back pieces that they’ve written to be performed at subsequent GCMF performances. In 2015, the gender
breakdown of program participants was 50% female, 50% male. In 2014, 18 girls and 13 boys participated (ibid.).

Young people with little or no experience in composition learning to compose pieces for string quartets in three weeks suggests that composition is a learnable skill. And the gender demographics suggest that, when students have access to a program where their success is likely or guaranteed, where the instructors believe in each student’s potential, and where originality and innovation are welcome, they participate in equal numbers.

The Importance of Storytelling

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, TWP received 17 ASCAP awards during its tenure, many for adventurous programming. One of the criteria for the ASCAP adventurous programming award is that the winning orchestra’s programming “indicates extraordinary efforts to…develop and educate audiences” (ASCAP 2016).

Educating audiences was a regular feature of TWP performances, often taking the form of a pre-concert talk, either by one or more composers whose works were on the program, or by the music director or executive director. The idea was always to connect audiences personally, intimately with the works being performed, and to provide information about the piece that would enhance a listener’s experience of it (Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015; Washburn, personal interview 11.23.2015; Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015; Falletta, personal interview, 02.22.2016).
For women audience members, this part of the program could be healing and hope-inducing, as it often offered stories that countered other, more diffused narratives about women and music. Women who were interested in classical music and composition and women’s role in it were sure to encounter certain stories that even the most ardent optimist would find discouraging. Aspects of the biographies of Clara Wieck Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, and Ruth Crawford Seeger—and the artistic sacrifices they made to rear children and comply with familial demands—illustrate this.

Despite the opinion of Damian Thompson expressed in *The Spectator* that Clara Wieck Schumann’s “G Minor Piano Sonata” is “embarrassingly banal,” Wieck Schumann was respected as both a performer and a composer during her lifetime—and since. Her successful career as a concert pianist spanned more than 60 years. However, about half of her oeuvre was composed before her marriage at age 20 to Robert Schumann. She did minimal composing in the first years of her marriage, as her husband’s composing took precedence over her own. After a burst of compositional activity in 1853 and her husband’s death in 1856, Clara Wieck Schumann stopped writing music, except for an 1879 march composed to honor the anniversary of a friend (Reich 2001, 232-233; Reich 1995, 411-413).

In 1841, about a year after her marriage, Wieck Schumann wrote in her diary:

My piano playing is falling behind. This always happens when Robert is composing. There is not even one little hour to be found in the whole day for myself! If only I don’t fall too far behind. Score reading has also been given up once again, but I hope that it won’t be for long this time…. (Reich 2001, 88).
And this was before they added eight children to the mix! Over the years, Wieck Schumann’s ideas about motherhood became complicated. Her diaries and her letters reveal that she was absolutely devoted to her children and their well-being, but also torn about the lack of time available to pursue her own creative projects. When her husband died, she assumed the role of family breadwinner by touring as a pianist, but was haunted that she had to put two young sons in boarding school and leave the two littlest children, ages 5 and 3, with the housekeeper (Reich 2001, 235-236).

These are modern, as much as they are Victorian, dilemmas. Contemporary women wrestle with balancing domestic responsibilities and the need to carve out time for creative endeavors. Likewise, single mothers today fret about imperfect childcare arrangements that allow them to work so they can earn the money their families need to survive. Modern women will recognize the familiar challenges, but they will also mourn the talent that was squandered as Wieck Schumann was never able to really dedicate herself to composition.

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel also experienced a sharp curtailment of her compositional talent. But while Clara Wieck Schumann had had the full support of her father, and to some limited degree, the encouragement of her husband, Mendelssohn Hensel experienced only discouragement from her father and her famous brother. Like Clara Wieck Schumann, Mendelssohn Hensel studied piano, theory, and composition with the best teachers (Citron 1987, xxii; Tillard 1996, 49). Throughout her short life—she died at 42 years old—she composed over 500 pieces, including at least 250 lieder, at
least 125 works for piano, a string quartet, and an orchestral overture (Citron 1995, 324-325).

Virtually none of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel’s music was known or performed during her lifetime, outside the circle of family and friends who frequented her Sunday salons. Her only known public performance occurred in 1838, when, at 33 years old, she performed her brother’s “First Piano Concerto” at a charity event (Citron 1995, 323).

The young Fanny Mendelssohn seems to have exhibited the same musical giftedness and determination that her successful brother Felix demonstrated. Early on, though, both her father and Felix discouraged her from publishing her work or performing in public. In a letter sent to her when she was 16 years old, her father wrote:

What you tell me in one of your previous letters about your musical urges as compared to [Felix’s]…was as well thought out as it was expressed. Perhaps music will be his profession, whereas for you it can and must be an ornament, and never the fundamental bass-line of your existence and activity (Tillard 1996, 68).

Fanny Mendelssohn’s father may have been acting solely as an enforcer of the societal limitations placed on women at that time; but he may have also had concerns about anti-Semitism and assimilation. As the patriarch of a very wealthy and prominent Jewish family, the elder Mendelssohn may have considered a daughter who performed in public, challenging societal mores, to be a liability, attracting attention to how “different” the Mendelssohn family was, just as they were trying earnestly to blend in. Having recently converted to Christianity from Judaism, the Mendelssohn family faced challenges to being fully accepted into German society (Sposato 2006, 3). Fanny Mendelssohn’s father may have believed that one cost of assimilation was toning down
his daughter’s talent and “musical urges.” Whatever the reasons for Mendelssohn to limit and restrict his daughter, modern women hearing Fanny Mendelssohn’s biography will likely focus on what a young, talented woman with strong “musical urges” must have felt when the males in her family tamped her down. As with Clara Wieck Schumann’s story, one is left with a sad feeling that great artistic potential was wasted—simply because Fanny Mendelssohn, as Clara Wieck Schumann, carried two X chromosomes in each of her cells.

Ruth Crawford Seeger’s life offers a more recent, yet similar story, of a woman composer who did not have the opportunity to fully realize her promise as a composer. The young Ruth Crawford was an accomplished pianist who was attracted early on to dissonance. She was very active and accepted in a world of modern and ultramodern composers otherwise populated by men. In 1926, Henry Cowell named Ruth Crawford to the board of his New Music Society. In 1928, she became a founding member of Chicago’s chapter of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM). In 1929, she moved to New York to study composition with musicologist Charles Seeger. In 1930, she became the first woman to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship for composition; she spent her fellowship year in Europe, working on her own compositions and meeting contemporaries such as Alban Berg and Bela Bartok. In 1931, Crawford premiered her best-known and most critically acclaimed work—her “String Quartet 1931”—in New York. Later that year, she married her former teacher, Charles Seeger (Tick 1997, 4-5; Tick 1995, 131).
For the next twenty years, Crawford Seeger worked to preserve American folk music and developed many original arrangements of traditional songs. She also raised five children. Her involvement with folk music was an outgrowth of Charles Seeger’s Marxism and commitment to preserving the folk art of the proletariat (Tick 1997, 194-195).

Domestic responsibilities and the work of saving and advancing American folk music kept Crawford Seeger too busy to compose. Except for a short orchestral arrangement of folk tunes commissioned for Alan Lomax’s folk music radio show, she published her first original composition since her marriage—“Suite for Wind Quintet”—in 1952. Now that her children were older, this was her opportunity to return to developing the compositional language she had moved away from in the 1930s. Invigorated by her renaissance as a composer, Crawford Seeger expressed her enthusiasm in a letter to friends, writing, “I believe I’m going to work again—more. If I live to be 99 as my grandfather did, that gives me 48 more years.” Instead, she was diagnosed with intestinal cancer and died the following year (Tick 1997, 315; 346-350).

Any woman who works in the arts and who has wrestled with the desire to have children and the inevitable sacrifices that entails knows that these decisions are not made easily or lightly. Nor does a young woman entering into life as a wife and/or mother typically have full information about what these undertakings will cost in terms of time, energy, and displaced longings and desires.

These biographies would have resonated with many women in TWP’s audience. Even if an individual audience member was not familiar with the particulars of Wieck
Schumann’s, Mendelssohn Hensel’s, and Crawford Seeger’s biographies, she would be familiar with the nearly archetypal issues represented by them.

And then there are the more personal stories. Former TWP Board Member Robyn Bramhall was in UCLA’s music department in 1979 as a graduate student:

I was in a music history seminar. There were eight of us in the class. I asked the professor, ‘Are we going to be studying any women composers?’ The professor said to me, ‘What do you mean? Mrs. Ha Ha Beach? No, we won’t.’ I was amazed that he would say this to me in a public place. It gives you a sense of how much he thought it was OK (Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015).

Bramhall also tried to get together a thesis committee of three UCLA faculty members. She wanted to research the work of women composers. “One faculty member told me, ‘I’ll be on your committee if you can find two others to be on it.’ I couldn’t find two others. I ended up with three-quarters of one committee member.” Bramhall left UCLA (ibid.).

In 1982, she entered University of Washington as a graduate student in the music department. “I wanted to look at the sociology of women composers in the music world. In my thesis, I wanted to examine how attitudes toward women drove how much women composers were covered in university courses.” Her graduate advisor opposed the idea. “He told me, ‘You’re threatening to expose academia and that’s not OK.’ I had sold my Steinway to pay for the tuition.” Bramhall left University of Washington too (ibid.).

For women involved in the world of music, these stories are familiar. Thus the alternative stories told and offered by TWP provided an opportunity to recalibrate their expectations to a more optimistic setting, with greater possibilities available to women. The over-arching narrative, of course, was that women could initiate and sustain an
organization that was dedicated to researching and resuscitating forgotten works by women composers as well as celebrating the work of living women composers; that those works could be performed to a high standard by an all-women ensemble; that women could successfully conduct the ensemble; and that this women-run, independent arts organization would survive for 25 years.

That’s already quite an influential story! But TWP offered concert-goers other important alternative stories. For example, the May 13, 2001 TWP program, titled “Happy Mother’s Day!,” featured compositions by Lili Boulanger; Melinda Wagner, who had won the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for composition; Libby Larsen, who, at the time, had recently won an Academy Award for lifetime achievement; and Molly Luther (The Women’s Philharmonic Programs, Stanford University Special Collections).

Molly Luther was a composer with a master’s degree from the Manhattan School of Music whose work had never received attention during her lifetime. As a single mother, she devoted as much time as she could to composing, but she also had to earn money and care for her daughter. Years of trying and failing to gain traction as an artist left her depressed. She began to drink. She destroyed many of her scores, and killed herself in 1980 when she was 52 years old. Her only child, Meg Luther, was 19 (Mistiaen 2001; The Women’s Philharmonic Programs, Stanford University Special Collections).

Years later, Meg Luther found a box containing some of her mother’s music that had not been destroyed, as well as reel-to-reel tapes of the elder Luther’s work made at the Manhattan School of Music. Meg Luther knew about TWP and contacted the organization to introduce them to her mother’s compositions. Musical Director Apo Hsu
liked what she heard and included Molly Luther’s *Variants* for Orchestra on the May 2001 program (Mistiaen 2001; The Women’s Philharmonic Programs, Stanford University Special Collections).

This story was recounted in the program notes, and in Hsu’s introduction to the piece. How could this story *not* resonate deeply with audience members? A woman composer, dedicated to her craft, assesses her life at some point and experiences—what exactly? desperation? a vast sense of her hard work being thoroughly underappreciated and unacknowledged? helplessness to be who she wants to be and survive financially? deep sadness? Whatever combination of emotions she experienced, it was sufficiently burdensome and hopeless to cause her to take her own life.

And yet, in 2001, 21 years after her death, her music was being performed and heard by others. For women who have researched compositions by women, there can be a great sense that, historically, much of their output has been ignored, destroyed, composted, or used to line somebody’s bird cage. To have a work such as Molly Luther’s *Variants* for Orchestra resurrected feels close to miraculous, and provides a small sense of healing. Meg Luther was interviewed after the TWP premiered her mother’s piece:

> All the years of rejection and invisibility seem magically reversed….The first acceptance of her work gives me hope for a life beyond her physical death, a life that would hopefully allow her to live in the way she most wanted, through her music (Mistiaen 2001).

Of course the performance would be healing for Meg Luther. But it also suggests that the forgotten works of women—as long as they survive in some form—can be brought to life. In this, there is a broader, more widely felt experience of healing, even for those who were not personally connected to Molly Luther.
Another important story that TWP offered their audiences had a much broader historical scope. Fanny Mendelssohn wrote over 500 works, but only one full-scale symphonic work: her *Ouverture* of 1830. The piece was performed twice with pick-up musicians during her family’s Sunday salons, but had never been performed publicly (The Women’s Philharmonic Programs, Stanford University Special Collections).

Through research, TWP members learned that copies of the score were held at the Mendelssohn Archive in Berlin. The organization did not have the resources to fund a trip to Germany, but when TWP Board Member Judith Rosen traveled there, she visited the archive and arranged for the release of a copy of the score, and permission to perform and record the work. The program notes from the concert stated:

As is the case with many historical works rescued from obscurity by the Women’s Philharmonic, this manuscript, written in Fanny Mendelssohn’s own hand with numerous corrections, smudges, and other ambiguous markings, required extensive reconstructive work prior to its first Women’s Philharmonic rehearsal (The Women’s Philharmonic Programs, Stanford University Special Collections).

TWP violinist Ann Krinitsky spent numerous unpaid hours reconstructing the score and copying it into parts for each orchestra member to read. The program also included a quote from Fanny Mendelssohn: “I have composed absolutely nothing this winter (1837). I no longer know what one feels when one wants to compose a song. What does it matter anyway? Nobody takes any notice in any case and nobody dances to my tune” (The Women’s Philharmonic Programs, Stanford University Special Collections). Later TWP staff had a poster made with this Mendelssohn quote on it and a final added line: “Fanny was wrong” (Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015).
At that May 9, 1992 performance of Mendelssohn’s *Ouverture*, both Executive Director Miriam Abrams and Musical Director JoAnn Falletta gave pre-concert talks about the historic nature of the show that was to follow. Between the talks and the program notes, the audience knew they were participating in something very unique. At the end of that concert, JoAnn Falletta fanned out the pages of the score and, holding it out in front of her as if it were Holy Scripture, she walked through the audience. “People in the audience were crying and cheering,” said Miriam Abrams. “They knew they were there for a historic moment” (*ibid.*).

“It was all I could think to do at the end of that performance,” said JoAnn Falletta, explaining her spontaneous decision to carry the manuscript through the audience. “I held up the music over my head and I said, ‘This is what we’re all about.’ And to think that that piece—it’s a beautiful piece—almost never saw the light of day. It was very moving, very important for all of us” (Falletta, personal interview, 02.22.2016).

TWP went on to record the Mendelssohn *Ouverture* under the direction of JoAnn Falletta. It remains the only recording of the work, which is not available on Spotify or iTunes, though TWP’s version was posted a year ago on Youtube by musicologist Liane Curtis.
CHAPTER THREE: TWP’S ADVOCACY AND LEGACY

During its tenure, TWP initiated and sustained many projects to forward the presence and success of women composers and conductors. As discussed in Chapter 1, the National Women Conductors Initiative (NWCI) was begun in 1998, funded by a million-dollar gift from an anonymous donor. When TWP disbanded in 2004, the organization passed the administration of the program on to the League of American Orchestras (LAO), along with $500,000 of seed money. That money was spent within five years. Now the League offers support to the Taki Concordia Conducting Fellows (TTCF) Program. Founded by Marin Alsop in 2002, TCCF’s mission “is to promote, present, and encourage talented women conductors at the beginning of their professional careers” (Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015; Personal Communication with LAO, November 25, 2015; Taki Concordia Conducting Fellowship).

TWP also worked to encourage other orchestras to program repertoire by women composers. Administrators and volunteers would assemble packets with a recording of a work composed by a woman and performed by TWP, bundled with reviews of its performance that had appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle or Examiner. These packets would go out to conductors of orchestras around the country. The idea behind this initiative was that, if conductors could just hear the music and imagine a way that it could fit into their programming in a given year, more women composers would be played and heard around the U.S. (Abrams, personal interview, 11.23.2015).

JoAnn Falletta, TWP’s second music director and currently music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, pointed out that many highly trained conductors have
little or no knowledge of the works of women composers. She remembered when Nan Washburn approached her to consider becoming TWP’s musical director:

[Nan] explained that she was the artistic director for the Bay Area Women’s Philharmonic [TWP’s name in its earliest phase]. She explained that they were playing music by women composers. I remember my ignorance. ‘What women composers?’ I asked her! They arranged a concert for me; the Amy Beach symphony was on the program. They showed me their music library. I was hooked! I was overwhelmed by this wealth of music that people did not know about, that I did not know about. My conducting training was very traditional—all male composers. I began to feel that it is truly terrible that people do not know about all this beautiful music by women composers (Falletta, personal interview, 02.22.2016).

Women’s Philharmonic Advocacy (WPA), a nonprofit “dedicated to ‘leveling the playing field’ for women in classical music, especially composers,” was founded in 2008 by musicologist Dr. Liane Curtis, who serves as its president (Women’s Philharmonic Advocacy). Curtis was a TWP Board Member during the organization’s last two years. “We wanted to keep the mission going, because there’s clearly more work to do,” explained Curtis (Curtis, personal interview, 06.16.2016).

WPA awards annual performance grants to U.S. orchestras—broadly defined as an “ensemble of 10 or more including bowed string instruments”—that program two works by women, one of them a historical work, in a single season. Applicants are encouraged to develop “creative and interactive ways to provide information about the music and the unique features of women’s lives to their audiences.” The $20,000 of available funding is typically distributed in amounts ranging from $500 to $1,000. (Women’s Philharmonic Advocacy 2016; Curtis, personal interview, 06.26.2016).
As demonstrated in Chapter 2 by the survey results showing how infrequently works by women composers are played by major orchestras, despite the decades-long efforts of TWP and WPA, few inroads have been made with respect to the inclusion of the work of women composers by major symphonic orchestras. And similarly, notwithstanding the work of NCWI and TTCF, Marin Alsop remains the only woman conductor of a major U.S. orchestra.

JoAnn Falletta, in considering all the work done by TWP to improve the lot of women conductors and composers commented:

What happened? We did everything we could think to do. We thought we were making inroads. But that forward progress stalled when the Women’s Phil stopped. We were on a mission to get other orchestras to place this music. We were really disciples of this stuff, but we couldn’t get others to do it (Falletta, personal interview, 02.22.2016).

In a way, of course, Falletta is right. But in another sense, certain aspects of the kind of advocacy that TWP engaged in are timeless and thus endlessly valuable. And certain aspects of the working spirit and idealism of the organization are reincarnating in new and promising projects and ensembles.

**Timeless Advocacy**

A major undertaking of TWP, discussed in Chapter 1, was the unearthing and rebirthing of historical works by women composers. Many of these works were forgotten; meticulous research turned up their whereabouts in far-flung archives and libraries. After retrieving what was often the only copy of a crumbling score, many hours of volunteer effort resulted in hand-copied orchestral parts.
When TWP disbanded, this entire archive became part of the Edwin A. Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, the largest lending library of orchestral music in the world, and a part of the Free Library of Philadelphia. “The catalog is searchable, and includes 70 or 80 pieces—scores with parts—that were performed by TWP,” said Liane Curtis. There is a small handling fee to borrow scores and parts ($25-$250, depending on the size of the work). Not every piece TWP played is included in the Fleisher collection. First, living composers kept control of their works. “And some pieces that had editorial work done,” said Curtis, are not part of the collection. “For example, Nan Washburn made some cuts to the Beach symphony, and she has her own edition of Louise Farrenc’s Third Symphony.” Nan Washburn took those scores with her when she left TWP (Curtis, personal interview, 06.16.2016; Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015).

However, what remains is an archive of music by historical women composers, available to any music director, or teacher or student of orchestral music. This is available forever, a resource that scholars can access and utilize, cold, hard proof that there are historic works by women composers, all of which have been heard by U.S. audiences. This is advocacy with a long reach into the future.

Similarly, the five recordings made by TWP have a long reach, which, of course, is the nature of recordings. Some are more easily accessed than others. Baroquen Treasures, TWP’s first CD, is out of print, but copies in both cassette and CD form are available on Amazon Marketplace. TWP’s second CD, titled The Women’s Philharmonic, includes Fanny Mendelssohn’s Ouverture of 1830, and is available on the WPA web site. The Music of Chen Yi is available as an MP3 or to stream in Prime Music
on Amazon. *Uses of Music in Uttermost Parts*, a collaborative fantasy work with story written and read by Ursula LeGuin, original music by composer Elinor Armer, and the score played by TWP is hard to find, but copies of the CD are available on Amazon Marketplace. TWP’s final recording, and the only one conducted by Apo Hsu (all others were conducted by JoAnn Falletta), *Florence Price*, is sold on the WPA web site and as an MP3 on Amazon. Liane Curtis is in conversation with representatives from the League of American Orchestras about how to generate playlists of works by women using various platforms, to further increase the reach of this music (Curtis, personal interview, 06.16.2016; Falletta, personal interview, 02.22.2016; Bramhall, personal interview, 11.28.2015).

The point is that these recordings and the collected, archived scores live on. For teachers and students wanting to hear what an ensemble of all-women musicians playing works by women composers and being conducted by a woman sounds like, these examples are available. Their availability offers much more than simply an occasion to engage in novelty, to wave a banner for women playing classical music just because they are women. Rather, the availability of these scores and these recordings offers an opportunity to hear women musicians, composers, and conductors writing and performing to very high standards.

**New Incarnations**

Every woman interviewed for this thesis who was involved with TWP commented on the collaborative spirit of the organization, the sense that they were
engaged in something purposeful. “The Women’s Phil offered a musical experience that went a great deal beyond the music,” said JoAnn Falletta. “We made a statement without sacrificing quality in any way. The women in the orchestra were so supportive of each other. Mixed [gender] orchestras, on the other hand, were often much more competitive” (Falletta, personal interview, 02.22.2016).

That spirit of a larger, common, shared goal uniting musicians, composers, conductors, and administrative staff seems to have resurfaced in other ensembles. Some are smaller ensembles, headed by women with a vision, but one is a major, mixed gender, U.S. orchestra.

Two women—composer and soprano Kate Soper and flautist Claire Chase—stand out as current exemplars of new ways of performing and collaborating. Both have thought beyond the symphony orchestra or the opera house or the traditional music venue in creating situations and collaborations in which they can pursue their individual musical vision.

Soper writes pieces that defy neat categorization. In a video about her time at the MacDowell Colony, she discussed her work “Here Be Sirens,” which originally began as an opera for a Guggenheim Foundation commission:

I decided I would write the libretto myself….As I worked more, it became clear that I was really…writing a play. I went with that….now I’m adding music to it, so it’s really turned into a music theater play with music (The MacDowell Colony 2013).

A March 2015 program brought Soper together with the Mivos Quartet, a new music ensemble that performs and champions the work of contemporary composers. The program included music by Renaissance composer Carlo Gesualdo, twentieth-century
composer Alban Berg, and living composers Soper and Clara Iannotta (Kate Soper and the Mivos Quartet 2015). This clearly addresses one of the questions raised in Chapter 2 about older classical music co-existing on a program with new works. It can be done!

Founding artistic director of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) Claire Chase describes the ensemble as “a community of artists.” She discussed the original idea behind ICE:

[We set out to] create an organization that could eventually be as important and as relevant...in the cultural life of great cities as institutions that preserve history: museums, symphony orchestras, opera companies...We needed to develop a new business model and we needed to be able to exist simultaneously in different cities....It’s exciting to me to see that contemporary music has this kind of reach and relevance. I think this is a special moment in which the artist can be her own producer, perhaps for the first time, certainly with the kind of fluency and efficiency that we have with the technologies that are available...[T]hat’s a tremendous power—to not have to go through an intermediary, whether it’s a record label, a manager, or an agent (MacArthur Foundation 2012).

A recent MacArthur Fellowship recipient, Chase, with ICE, plays new works by living composers. But in her solo programs, she plays works from the Renaissance to today, “illuminating unusual connections and counterpoint between traditionally disparate eras, styles, and aesthetics” (Claire Chase 2015).

Both Soper and Chase perform in non-traditional spaces, such as warehouses. All of this—unusual performance spaces, contemporary composers and artists banding together to perform works that might not otherwise gain a hearing—is not new. As composer and CSUEB Professor of Composition Jeffrey Miller points out, “Contemporary music has been marginalized for as long as it wasn’t synonymous with popular music—which is to say, for a very long time. Copland and other composers, out
of necessity, created their own spaces for performing their works” (Miller, personal interview, 05.06.2016).

What Soper and Chase are doing, though, is different in one important way. As musicologist Susan McClary wrote:

Women have rarely been permitted agency in art, but instead have been restricted to enacting—upon and through their bodies—the theatrical, musical, cinematic, and dance scenarios concocted by male artists (McClary 2002, 138).

Soper, in her compositions, speaks for female ideas. Chase, as the artistic director of ICE, establishes an artistic and business presence that is integrally connected to who she is: a young, female musician. They both express agency, in spades.

Chase has become an important proponent of artists formulating new business models. Anthony Tommasini, reporting in The New York Times on Chase’s June 2013 graduation speech to students at Northwestern University, quoted her:

[F]ar from dying, classical music is ‘just being born,’ Ms. Chase said, with ‘new performance practices that put creators, interpreters, historians, educators, theorists in the same entrepreneurial spaces.’ What this means, as she explained, is that emerging artists of the new generation, instead of occupying a single existing position, as in the old days, will fashion a lively career from multiple pursuits. ‘Our calling,’ she said, ‘is to create positions for ourselves and others, to improvise and blow the ceiling off of anything resembling a limitation’ (Tommasini 2013).

Communities of artists, creating unusual opportunities, and using new ways of working together: These phrases clearly apply to TWP and to Soper and Chase’s work, but they apply too to a more traditional ensemble: the Minnesota Orchestra (MO).

In 2012, the Minnesota Orchestral Association (MOA)—the business and management side of the orchestra—presented the MO musicians with a proposed contract
with more than 250 changes to their previous contract, including a nearly 30% cut in base salary, and the expectation that the artists would pay more for their benefits. The proposal was unacceptable to the musicians. A standoff ensued, resulting in management locking out the musicians. The orchestra’s 2012-2013 season was cancelled, and much of 2013-2014. Over time, it became clear that the MOA had grossly mismanaged the organization’s funds, cannibalizing its endowment and keeping all its financial woes secret as it simultaneously fundraised over $100 million, much of it earmarked for the renovation of Minneapolis’s Orchestra Hall. Management’s view of the musicians also emerged: They were essentially perceived as interchangeable units that could easily be substituted by analogous units willing to be paid less, rather than valued individual artists who, together with their music director, Osmo Vänskä, had developed deep, mutual, musical understanding and synergy as an accomplished ensemble. A year into the lockout, Vänskä resigned in solidarity with the musicians (Hogstad 2012; Allen 2016; Woolfe 2016).

During the lockout, the musicians themselves staged concerts. This kept them rehearsing and performing together, but it also solidified their relationship with their audience. Nearly every concert they gave was sold out (Hogstad 2012; Grow 2014).

The lockout finally ended in February 2014. Osmo Vänskä returned as music director in April of that year. As part of the agreement struck, the musicians were guaranteed more involvement in the orchestra’s artistic decision making, made concrete by the inclusion of musicians on the artistic committee. The CEO who had favored the lockout was forced to resign. Kevin Smith, an arts administrator with a 20-year history
with the Minnesota Opera and a very different, more collaborative and democratic, management style took his place. Post-lockout, musicians sit on governing committees that include board members and staff (Grow 2014; Royce 2015; Woolfe 2016; Allen 2016). Minnesota blogger and violinist Emily Hogstad described an important post-lockout development:

At every concert now, a musician from the artistic committee will do a quick, pre-concert announcement. After an introduction, the musician will invite the audience to share their impressions – what they liked, what they didn’t like, what they’d like to hear programmed—with the musicians. After the concert, musicians come into the lobby in their tuxes and formal wear with name tags so they’re easily identified. The point is they’re creating spaces for dialogue about programming with the public. This is the only major orchestra that does this (Hogstad, personal interview, 05.02.2016).

The lockout, while undoubtedly painful for those that experienced it, seems to have given rise to a more inclusive model, where the different groups that make up an orchestra—business and management; musicians and music director; audience—have a greater appreciation for one another and for the role that each plays in the success of the organization.

The new model is more nimble than its prior incarnation. In December 2014, President Obama announced that the United States would restore full relations with Cuba. When CEO Kevin Smith heard that, he decided that the Minnesota Orchestra would be the first to play in Cuba. It would be good for Minnesota, but especially good for the orchestra, and would signal to the outside world and orchestra members themselves, “We’re back!” Smith has helped to make MO more flexible and more responsive, demonstrating how important that agility is in today’s world for a big entity such as a
symphony orchestra. In so doing, Smith and the MO elbowed out other, more traditionally run, top-down orchestras such as the Chicago Symphony (which announced in January 2015 that it would be the first North American Orchestra to perform in Cuba since relations warmed) to win the honor of playing on the island (Allen 2016; Kerr 2015). Kevin Smith was interviewed about what made the Cuba trip possible:

Getting to Cuba required a whole lot of rule-breaking and working outside the contract. What we want to do moving forward is try new things….If we collectively decide we want to do something, let’s not let anything stop us (Espeland 2015a).

In a separate interview, Osmo Vänskä weighed in on how the organization had changed:

Things are always changing, [whether] we agree with that or not. It’s better to be involved and try to lead those changes in a direction that works better for you….I wanted the players to…be involved in all kinds of decisions: what we are playing, where we are playing, how we are playing. If they are not involved in those decisions, then this is a place where people come to work, don’t care, and go home. But if they are involved, they are more committed and it’s their own orchestra….We are finally able to do things differently (Espeland 2015b).

It is easy to imagine that such a working environment would be energizing and vitalizing for those involved, and for the audience members who come to hear what they create. And while the Minnesota Orchestra clearly experienced a “near-death experience,” in the words of Kevin Smith, it is still an orchestra with all of the challenges of an orchestra, and all the many, many individuals that make up an orchestra. I.e., it’s still a very big project, but somehow this Minnesota model has introduced a more democratic way of being an orchestra that allows for daring and, by corollary, exciting undertakings (Allen 2016). By agreeing to communicate clearly, to respect and value
each other, the Minnesota model allows margins in which mistakes can happen, yes, but so can great opportunities. The question remains: Does an orchestra need to go through the sort of crucible experience that MO did? Or is the model exportable?

The foundational element necessary to replicate this more democratic model or something similar to it would be individuals—musicians, a music director, CEO, board members, staff—that want to work more democratically. Many former TWP members cite the collaborative nature of that project as one of the most important parts of its legacy. But not everyone wants to work democratically with others, and not every music director wants to share power and influence in the way that Osmo Vänskä describes above.

Allegra Chamber Orchestra

On June 26, 2016, a new ensemble—the Allegra Chamber Orchestra—launched in Vancouver, British Columbia. All the musicians, as well as founder and conductor Janna Sailor, are women.

For the past year and a half, Sailor has documented on social media her experiences auditioning for conducting positions in Canada and the U.S. Sailor was the runner-up for the position of assistant conductor at both the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra and the Calgary Philharmonic. Women following her narrative on Facebook became invested in her quest—there are so few women conductors; she got so close!; and she lost out, in each case, to a man (Fisher 2016; North by Northwest 2016).
To prepare for her conducting auditions, she would invite musicians she knew to reading sessions so she could practice. “[Some of those musicians] approached me afterwards and said, ‘We really enjoy working with you. If you ever want to create an orchestra, we’d be happy to be involved,’” said Sailor. “It occurred to me that all those people were women” (Fisher 2016; North by Northwest 2016).

Sailor decided that, by founding an all-women ensemble, she “could create an interesting way for women to come together. I was starting from nothing. I had no framework, I had no funding. I really had nothing to offer but my idea” (North by Northwest 2016).

But enough women musicians liked the idea to coalesce into a chamber orchestra. Concertmaster Carolyn Cole discussed what attracted her to the group. “The idea of the collaborative spirit is very important to me, and working together to achieve a greater good. Janna is tapping into my search for other ways to use my music” (ibid.).

For their first concert, the group played four Handel arias (sung by a guest soprano) and contemporary Canadian composer Jennifer Butler’s “And Birds Do Sing” (ibid.).

The collaborative spirit cited by Cole, the commitment to working together to “achieve a greater good,” the showcasing of a work by a living woman composer, a woman conducting an orchestra she founded, and the will and determination to create an ensemble where there was none in order to create space for these possibilities echoes the work of Ethel Leginska, Antonia Brico, Frederique Petrides, and all the women involved
over the years with The Women’s Philharmonic. As long as the traditional orchestral world does not allow space for all of this, women will continue to create such ensembles.
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