

Women transforming classical music



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Week 1: How we got into this: barriers, challenges and solutions

Introduction

Research completed by [Donne Women in Music](#) in 2024 found that 92.5 per cent of orchestral repertoire performed worldwide in the 2023/24 concert season was written by men, while music written by women made up just 7.5 per cent. (Donne Women in Music's research was based on an examination of the repertoire presented by 111 orchestras based across 30 countries.) These statistics are a stark reminder of how male dominated the world of classical music is.



This week, you will reflect on how we got into this situation, including the historical exclusion of women composers from the classical music canon and music education, issues accessing scores of their compositions, and financial nervousness around programming works with which audiences might be unfamiliar. You will then turn your attention to how we might change things, covering where to find information and scores, creating new editions, and commissioning new works by women composers, which you will go on to consider in greater detail in Weeks 3 and 4. This week is illustrated by short interview clips with Gabriella Di Laccio, founder and curator of [Donne Women in Music](#),

who discusses her work advocating for greater gender equity within the classical music industry.

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- recognise the historical barriers which have led to the traditional exclusion of women composers from the canon and from music education
- understand the remaining challenges to programming women's music
- appreciate how you/your organisation might approach diversifying repertoire.

1 Considering your own musical practice



You will start this week by reflecting on your own musical practice.

Activity 1

Reflect on the following questions and write your answers in the text box below.

1. How many works by women composers do you regularly perform/does your organisation regularly perform?
2. How aware are you of women composers? How many can you name? How many of their compositions do you know/regularly listen to?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

There are no right or wrong answers here, and your responses will be very personal to you. You might already have an extensive knowledge of women composers and regularly champion their works, or you might be further towards the beginning of your journey to diversify your repertoire.

If you don't currently perform many works by women – or haven't done so in the past – why is this? Has the historical study of women composers formed a large or a small part of your musical education? Did you study/perform any works by women when you were training? If you have been put off performing works by women, what were the reasons? Was it difficult to find scores of their works? Were you worried that audiences would be put

off by hearing works that they might not be familiar with and that this might affect ticket sales? Did you have any concerns about how you might be perceived? For example, did you have any worries about being viewed as tokenistic or trying to be politically correct? In what follows, you will consider the historical barriers that have excluded women composers from the classical music canon, the challenges to performing their works which still exist, and potential solutions to moving towards diversifying the repertoire which you perform.

2 Barriers



One of the biggest factors that has led to classical music repertoire being so male dominated is women composers' exclusion from the classical music canon. Canon comes from the Greek word 'kanon' meaning a standard or rule. Applied to the arts, it means the series of timeless 'masterpieces' which are considered to represent the finest achievements within any given art form. The concept of a canon of artistic masterpieces first developed in literature and was then applied to music. The musical canon developed in the nineteenth century – a time when women had very few rights and were largely excluded from public life – and focused exclusively on male composers, such as Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Mahler.

The emerging classical music canon became firmly entrenched through performance. Public concert life developed rapidly during the nineteenth century, with many new concert halls and opera houses being built throughout Europe. The repeat performance of the composers and works that were gaining their place within the canon enshrined the idea that these were the ones most worthy of attention. Although there were many active women composers during the nineteenth century – such as Clara Schumann, Fanny Hensel (born Mendelssohn), Louise Farrenc, Emilie Mayer, Augusta Holmès, Cécile Chaminade and Ethel Smyth – women often struggled to gain opportunities, within such a deeply patriarchal society, to have their works performed. Consequently, they were then excluded from the canon. This exclusion normalised their absence from classical music repertoire and this problem persists to this day.

Until relatively recently, the canon also formed the bedrock of musical education and training. Women composers were only very rarely included within music history and many music students received a training which meant they never played, studied, or sometimes even heard a single piece of music by a woman as part of their musical education.

Absence is a powerful teaching tool. The absence of women composers from the canon and musical education has caused the ongoing absence of women from the performing repertoire today. These are the historical problems which we need to confront.

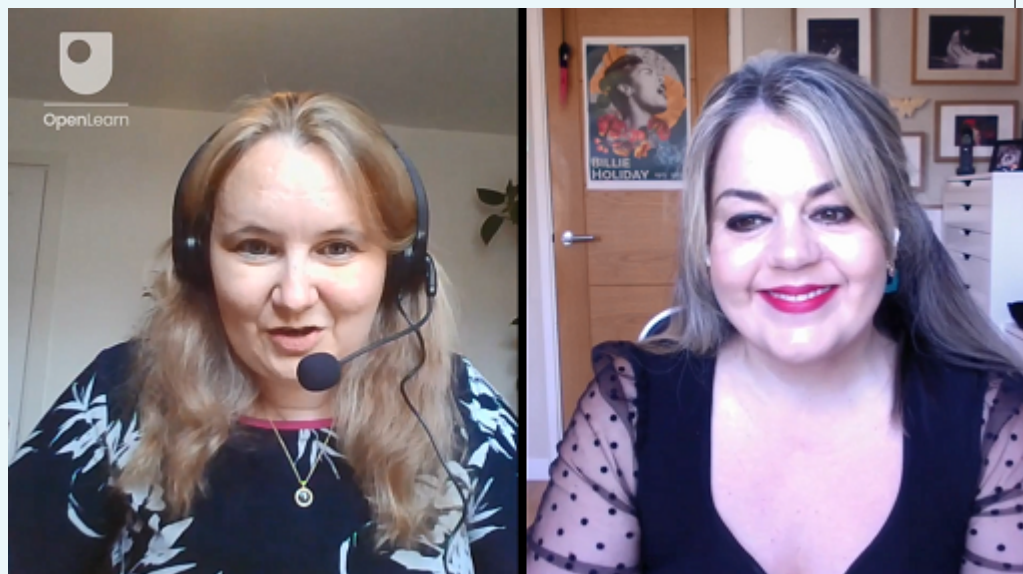
3 Challenges

Women composers' exclusion from the classical music canon has created a set of practical challenges for those who would like to promote greater gender diversity within programming.

Activity 2

Watch the following interview with Gabriella Di Laccio, founder and curator of [Donne Women in Music](#), discussing what she regards as the biggest challenges which those wishing to programme more music by women face.

Video content is not available in this format.



What does she identify as the key challenges that those seeking to diversify repertoire face?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You may have noted some of the following:

- ignorance of the repertoire (you may have found that Gabriella's reflections on how women composers were absent from her own professional training and practice before she discovered Aaron's Cohen's *International Encyclopedia of Women Composers* resonated with your own responses in Activity 1)
- the need to invest time researching women's music
- difficulties accessing scores of women's music or not having a good quality performance edition available
- fear of programming unfamiliar music.

One of the biggest challenges that performers/organisations who want to perform works by women face is lack of availability of scores. Because women composers historically struggled to achieve public performances of their works, publishers were often reluctant to publish them, as they relied on musicians, ensembles and concert-organising organisations buying them in order to perform them for their revenue. They were very reluctant to publish works that people would be unlikely to perform and, therefore, unlikely to buy. This has become a cyclical problem, as the lack of availability of scores continues to make it difficult for women's works to be performed today. Many pieces by women composers have never been published and still exist only in handwritten manuscript form.

Even when scores of women's works do exist, performers/organisations can be reluctant to programme their music as audiences are often unfamiliar with it. This can lead to fears that programming unfamiliar works and composers will affect ticket sales and, therefore, the financial bottom line. At a time when the classical music industry is under huge financial pressure, it can take real courage to take what can sometimes appear a significant risk by programming women's music. This fresh repertoire – and the associated potential to develop a new specialism – can, however, actually present real opportunities to build new audiences.

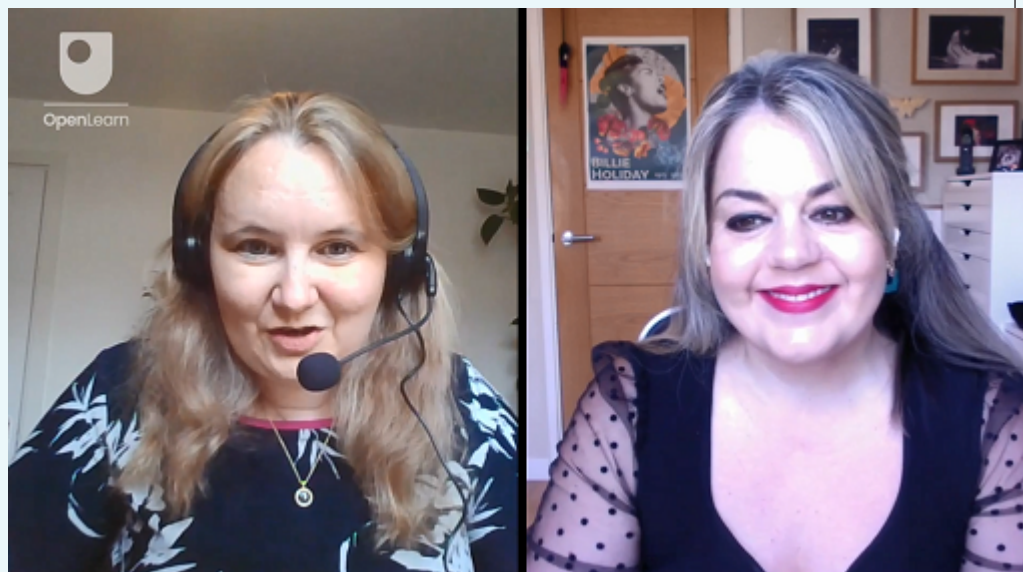
4 Solutions

Despite the significant challenges to performing women's music that still exist, there are potential solutions to overcoming this.

Activity 3

Watch another clip of an interview with Gabriella Di Laccio, founder and curator of [Donne Women in Music](#), discussing potential solutions to performing more music by women.

Video content is not available in this format.



What does she identify as potential solutions?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You may have noted some of the following:

- adding pieces by women to your repertoire
- connecting with organisations that promote women's music
- contextualising the music for audiences
- creative programming, such as including a work by a woman composer alongside more well-known works by a male peer
- developing new audiences
- commissioning new works by women
- creating performance editions of women's works
- researching women composers and their music.

In the following weeks, you will consider further all the potential solutions which Gabriella mentions, including where to start researching historical women composers, how to find scores, creating editions, commissioning new works from living women composers, and building new audiences for women's music.

5 Summary of Week 1



This week, you have reflected on your own musical practice and how aware you already are of women composers. You have considered how classical music came to be so male dominated and the challenges to changing this which remain, including difficulties accessing scores of women's compositions and nervousness about programming unfamiliar works. You have also heard about the work which Gabriella Di Laccio is doing with [Donne Women in Music](#) to challenge this.

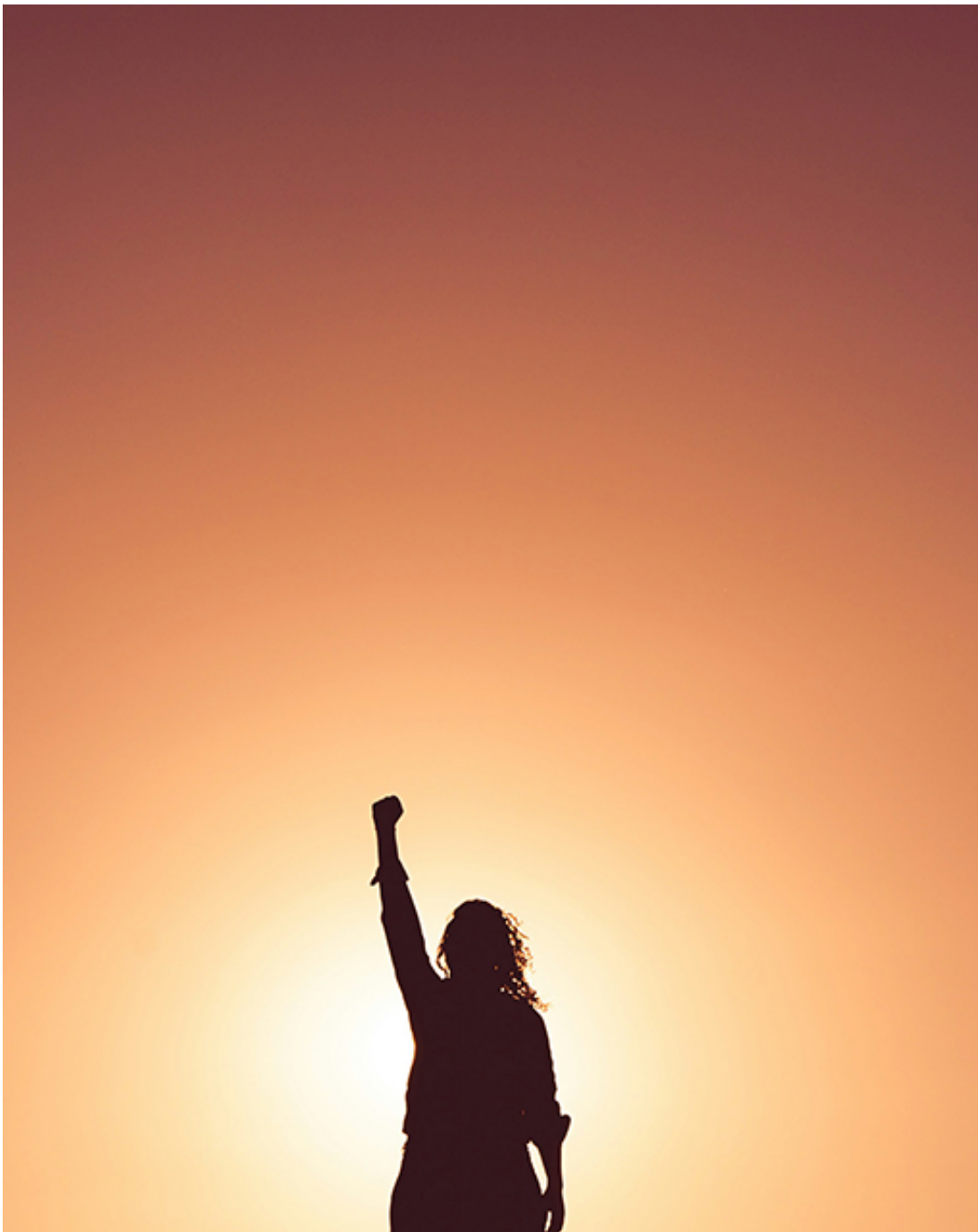
Next week, you will begin to think about how you might go about diversifying your own repertoire. You will also hear from Roísín Maher talking about how she is leading change in this area through her work directing the all-woman [Finding A Voice Music Festival](#).

You can now go to [Week 2](#).

Week 2: Building gender diverse programmes

Introduction

On International Women's Day (8 March) in 2017 sisters Róisín and Clíona Maher founded the [Finding A Voice Music Festival](#) – an annual festival celebrating music by women composers – in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary (ROI). Now the sisters have built up such a strong audience for women's music that up to 700 people attend the festival in this small Irish town every year.



In Week 1, you learned how classical music repertoire came to be so male dominated, what some of the challenges are to changing this (including access to scores of women's compositions and nervousness around performing works with which audiences might be unfamiliar), and what some of the potential solutions to these challenges might be, such as researching and playing works by historical women composers or commissioning new works from living ones. This week, you will consider how you can go about building gender diverse programmes, or programmes which are even more diverse if you are already working in this area. This week is illustrated by a short interview with Roísín Maher, founder and director of the [Finding a Voice Music Festival](#) in the Republic of Ireland, who discusses her work running an all-woman music festival and advocating for greater gender equity within the Irish music industry.

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- know some of the strategies which you could use to create gender diverse programmes, such as all-women concerts or themed programmes
- be aware of some of the issues which are important to consider when developing gender diverse programmes, including the timing and placement of women's works
- understand some of the practical considerations which you'll need to take into account when developing gender diverse programmes, including funding, audience engagement and outreach, and getting performers on board.

1 Potential strategies for building gender diverse programmes



Figure 1 An illustration of the composer Fanny Hensel (born Mendelssohn), sketched in 1829 by Wilhem Hensel.

There are a number of different ways that you could start to think about developing gender diverse programmes.

All-women programmes

You might want to go all out and curate a programme consisting entirely of works by women composers. This could bring together a range of works by women from across a broad historical spread or might focus on women from one particular historical period or one musical tradition. Unless you already have a lot of knowledge about women composers' music and good access to scores, this might be the most challenging approach to take – particularly to start out – as it will involve a lot of research and a lot of learning of new material.

Themed programmes

An alternative and possibly slightly more straightforward way to start programming works by women (or more works by women, if you already do) is to incorporate women's music into concerts alongside compositions by their male peers. A good way to start doing this is to think about starting to include women's works into themed concerts. For example, if you are planning a recital of German Romantic Lieder, why not perform some songs by composers such as Clara Schumann or Fanny Hensel (born Mendelssohn) alongside works by their famous male counterparts, such as Franz Schubert or Robert Schumann. Or, if you are working on a programme of orchestral film music, why not play some scores by Rachel Portman and Natalie Wiseman, alongside those of John Williams and Danny Elfman.

2 Important issues to consider when developing gender diverse programmes



Figure 2 An illustration of the composer Clara Schumann, from an 1835 lithograph.

Once you have decided how you want to include more works by women in your programming, there are some important issues to think about.

Activity 1

Part 1

When works by women are included on mixed programmes (i.e. incorporated alongside those of their male peers), they tend proportionally to make up a much smaller part of the programme.

[An analysis of the 2023 BBC Proms undertaken by the ISM \(Independent Society of Musicians\)](#) found that less than 7 per cent of the music performed was by women, and that the duration of the works by women that were included took up less time. The average duration of women's compositions was 11.5 minutes, whereas for men it was 28 minutes. Why do you think that this is problematic?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Giving significantly less time to women's music within programmes enforces the idea that their works are less worth listening to. Including a very short work by one

woman on a programme which is otherwise entirely made up of men's works can also look tokenistic (whether intentional or not), which may lead to criticism.

Part 2

In addition to taking up less time within overall programmes, when works by women are included within classical music festivals or concert series, they are often included as part of lunchtime concerts or other 'fringe' events, rather than as part of the main or evening concerts. Why is this also problematic?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Not including women's music in main concerts also sends the message that their works are less worthy listening to and less worthy of showcasing.

3 Practical considerations



As you start work on diversifying your programming, there are a number of practical considerations which it can be useful to bear in mind. These can be a bit different to what you'd usually be thinking about when preparing a programme of all-male composers.

Funding

Although you'll be used to applying for funding regularly, you might want to consider any additional support which you could apply for to programme women's work. You will also need to think through any additional costs which you might have, such as hiring fees for parts, the costs associated with preparing a new edition, or extra rehearsal fees.

Some potential organisations which you could consider applying to are the various Arts Councils across the UK and Ireland (depending on where you are based):

[Arts Council England](#), [Arts Council of Wales](#), [Creative Scotland](#), [Arts Council of Northern Ireland](#), or [The Arts Council](#) (ROI). The [Association of British Orchestras](#) (ABO) administers the [Sirens Fund](#), which awards grants to support the performance of historical women composers. [Women's Philharmonic Advocacy](#) also awards [grants](#) to support the programming of orchestral work by women in the US and internationally.

You might also want to consider signing up to [Donne Women in Music](#)'s mailing list, as their regular newsletter often includes details of funding to support the performance of women's music. Additionally, the [ISM](#) maintains a good list of [funding opportunities available to composers and performers](#).

Audience engagement

One of the principal reasons people often give for feeling reluctant to programme women's music is that they are concerned that audiences will be unfamiliar with the works, and that this will affect ticket sales. There are steps that you can take, however, to help build audiences for this music.

You could commission a music researcher with a specialist interest in the particular composer whose work you are performing to write some programme notes or even consider tasking them to write a longer piece, which you could host on your website. You can find music researchers by using a search engine to search for people working on the composer which you will be performing. Many music researchers have active online presences. You could also consider hiring a researcher to deliver a pre-concert talk or even (if you have sufficient funding) to do some outreach or educational work with local schools and/or community groups interested in classical music.

Getting performers on board

Sometimes performers can initially be a bit reluctant to programme music by women, if they are unfamiliar with the music. This is often due to the time necessary to learn the new repertoire and the additional rehearsal time. The work can be challenging and take a lot of time to master. You need to think about incentivising this. For example, by offering some additional paid preparation time. An advantage, once the repertoire is learned, is that the performers will then have mastered new and unusual repertoire, which might help them to specialise and be able to offer different, less commonly heard, works within a competitive industry.

4 Sharing good practice: the Finding A Voice Music Festival

As you learned at the beginning of this week, the [Finding A Voice Music Festival](#) was founded by sisters Róisín and Clíona Maher in 2017. Each year they present a festival celebrating music by women composers around International Women's Day (8 March) in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary (ROI).

Activity 2

Watch the following interview with Róisín Maher, co-founder and director of [Finding A Voice](#), discussing her work organising the festival.

Video content is not available in this format.



Then consider the following questions:

1. How has Róisín approached building an audience for women's music in Clonmel?
2. How has she secured funding for the festival?
3. What is her approach to curating programmes?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Róisín includes the following approaches:
 - including different musical genres on the festival programme
 - contextualising the music by inviting performers to talk to the audience, composer interviews, pre-concert talks and post-concert Q&As
 - partnering with local cultural providers.

2. Róisín explains that the festival is supported by lots of diverse funding streams, including:
 - [The Arts Council of Ireland](#)
 - local county council arts funding (Tipperary County Council)
 - commercial sponsorship
 - support in kind from [RTÉ](#) (the Irish national television and radio broadcaster)
 - ticket sales.
3. Róisín suggests the following:
 - including as many different genres as possible
 - trying to avoid creating an alternative canon of women composers
 - considering the extent of the performers' experience performing women's music
 - focusing on significant anniversaries (such as the Clara Schumann Bicentenary in 2019)
 - promoting the work of Irish women composers
 - ensuring that works by composers from different races and ethnicities are included.

5 Summary of Week 2



This week you have learned about different approaches to programming women's music and considered the various issues and practicalities that you'll need to think through when developing gender diverse programmes. You have heard from Roísín Maher discussing her work with the all-woman festival, [Finding A Voice](#).

Next week you will consider how you can go about programming works by historic women composers, including where to find scores and resources and how to start making your own performance editions. You will hear from Tim Parker-Langston talking about his work developing [Hensel Songs Online](#).

You can now go to [Week 3](#).

Week 3: Programming historical women composers

Introduction



Figure 1 A photograph of Jeanne Leleu.

Reviewing the 1947 production of [Jeanne Leleu](#)'s ballet *Nautéos* in Monte Carlo, an anonymous music critic proclaimed in the French newspaper *Le Monde* that: 'France possesses in Jeanne Leleu its most talented female composer' (cited in Hamer, 2018, p. 83). Although not often performed today, Leleu was a highly regarded composer during the earlier twentieth century. She won France's famous composition competition, the *Prix de Rome* in 1923, pursued a successful career as both a composer and a pianist, and taught at the Paris Conservatoire.

Far from being an exception, many women composers pursued active and successful careers in the past. As you learned in Week 1, many of their names and works are not currently well known, however, as they have been excluded from the musical canon, from musical education, and consequently from the classical music repertoire which is still most often performed today.

This week, you will consider how to go about programming works by historical women composers. This week is illustrated by a short interview with Tim Parker-Langston, founder of [Hensel Songs Online](#), who discusses his work raising the profile of [Fanny Hensel](#) (born Mendelssohn), preparing new editions of her songs, and making these available to other performers for free.

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- have an understanding of historical women composers and where you can start researching them and their music
- be aware of where you can find scores of works by historical women composers
- understand how you might go about creating new editions of unpublished works by historical women composers.

1 Uncovering historical women composers



Once you have committed to diversifying your repertoire by programming more music by women, you will need to decide which to include. As you learned in Week 2, there are different approaches which you could take to building more diverse programmes. You could go all out and organise a whole concert of works by women composers, or you could add works by women into a themed programme.

If you are planning to add works by women into a themed programme, you will find [The Big List of Women Composers](#), which has been compiled by Donne Women in Music, an invaluable resource. You can search this by musical period, genre, or country; so, you will be able to find multiple suggestions for women composers to add to your programme, whatever the theme. The Big List of Women Composers contains entries for more than 5,000 women composers. Entries provide basic biographical information and links to further resources.

The [Composers](#) section of the [Women By Music website](#) also brings together information on a wide range of historical women composers, including biographical information and lists of suggested reading should you wish to find out more about them. Additionally, the [Boulanger Initiative](#) also offers an extremely valuable open-access [database](#) of works by women and gender-marginalised composers.

Doing further research

When you have chosen which women composers to include and discovered some basic biographical information about their lives and careers, you may find yourself feeling curious about them and the musical cultures and contexts within which they worked, and eager to find out more. The academic study of women composers – which is often called Feminist Musicology or Women in Music Studies – has grown to be a relatively well-established field since music scholars and performers started to explore composers who have been excluded from the conventional music canon in the later twentieth century.

Below is a list of suggestions of accessible books about women composers which you might like to have a look at. If you have access to a local library or to one within a

university or conservatoire, these titles should be available or (if they are not) you could ask the librarian or library team to arrange an inter-library loan for you:

- Judith Bowers and Jane Tick (eds) (1986) *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- James R. Briscoe (ed.) (2004) *New Historical Anthology of Music by Women*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Julie C. Dunbar (2011) *Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Sophie Fuller (1994) *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers: Britain and the United States, 1629–Present*. London: Pandora Books.
- Laura Hamer (ed.) (2021) *The Cambridge Companion to Women in Music since 1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Karin Pendle (ed.) (1991) *Women & Music: A History*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Julie Anne Sadie and Rhian Samuels (eds) (1994) *The Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*. London: Macmillan.

To find out more about your chosen women composers, you could also consider reaching out to a music researcher working on them. As you learned in Week 2, many music researchers maintain active online profiles and you will be able to find them through doing an internet search. As suggested in Week 2, if you reach out to a music researcher for advice, you might want to consider inviting them to write programme notes, present a pre-concert talk, or even involve them in some outreach work to help build your audience for the new work which you have chosen to programme.

2 Finding scores of works by historical women composers



Although, as you learned in Week 1, finding scores of women composers' music can still prove challenging – because much less of it has been published compared to the work of men – a growing amount is easily (and often also freely) available online.

The [International Music Score Library Project \(IMSLP\)](#), which is also known as the Petrucci Library, is an extremely valuable resource for finding music scores online. It brings together a huge collection of music scores which are within the public domain. It is searchable by instrument, composer, nationality, and musical period, and includes a very large amount of women's music (alongside that of other composers). You could even consider becoming a contributor to the collection yourself.

Specifically bringing together scores and music by women composers for free online, [Music By Women](#) also offers a large dedicated collection of works and music examples written by women. You will also find this extremely useful within a teaching context if you are involved in music education. The [Women Composers Collection](#) database from the Hathi Trust is another useful online resource.

The [Piano Music She Wrote](#) project, curated by pianists Sandra Mogensen and Erica Sipes, brings together a large collection of piano scores by women composers.

Activity 1

Although a lot of women's music is now available online, quite a lot of it is still in handwritten manuscript form. Consider the following questions and write your answers in the text box below.

1. Why might it be difficult to perform from a digitised copy of a handwritten manuscript score?

2. How might you make such a piece easier to perform?

Provide your answer...

.....

Discussion

1. The composer's handwriting could be difficult to decipher; depending on the historical period from which the piece dates, the score could include old-fashioned musical conventions (e.g. unusual clefs or symbols) which are no longer in common use; and the quality of digitised materials (depending on the source material) might be low quality and difficult to read from.
2. You can make it easier to perform this music by making your own, up-to-date copy of the work, using modern clefs and musical notation, and using a music notation software package to set it. By doing this, you would effectively be creating your own new performance edition of the work.

3 Creating new editions

If you are investing time in researching and learning new repertoire by women composers, you might want to consider creating a new performance edition, which will make it easier for you to perform from. Once you have created your own new performance edition, you might also want to consider making it available to other performers too.

Activity 2

Watch the following interview with Tim Parker-Langston discussing his work raising the profile of the music of Fanny Hensel, creating new performance editions of her songs, and making these available to other performers via [Hensel Songs Online](#).

Video content is not available in this format.



Then consider the following questions:

1. Why did Tim choose to focus on Fanny Hensel.
2. How has Tim gone about this work?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Tim describes himself as 'shamedly' discovering Fanny Hensel just before embarking on his PhD and reflects on the shock of this, given his training and professional experience as a singer. (You might have found that his comments resonated with your own experiences, which you reflected on at the start of Week 1.) He also shares that he chose to focus on Hensel because he found her music emotionally visceral, distinct from her contemporaries, and was particularly struck by how different it was to that of her brother's (Felix Mendelssohn).

2. Tim explains that he used the high-quality scans of Hensel's manuscript songs which the [Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin](#) had already made available online. He focused on producing practical performance editions which would be clear, easy to read, and user-friendly by removing the elements that a modern musician might find it difficult to read from. He then used Sibelius engraving software to create PDFs (including versions in different keys), which are hosted on [Hensel Songs Online](#).

For another excellent online resource dedicated to Fanny Hensel, see [Hensel Pushers](#).

4 Summary of Week 3



This week, you have learned about how you can start researching historical women composers, where you can find scores of their music, what resources are already available for free online, and why you should consider creating your own performance editions. You have heard about Tim Parker-Langston's work raising the profile of Fanny Hensel, creating editions of her songs, and making these available to other performers. Next week, you will consider how you could diversify your repertoire by playing more music by living women composers or even commissioning new works. You will also hear from Stephan Meier, Artistic Director of [Birmingham Contemporary Music Group \(BCMG\)](#), talking about BCMG's approach to commissioning new works from living women composers and how they are working towards gender balance within their programming. You can now go to [Week 4](#).

Week 4: Programming contemporary women composers

Introduction



In 2014, [Dame Judith Weir](#) became the first woman to be appointed Master of the King's Music (originally Master of the Queen's Music), serving until 2024. Often considered broadly equivalent to the Poet Laureate, the Master of the King's Music is a state musician post within the British Royal Household. The holder generally composes works to commemorate important royal events. During her tenure in the role, Weir composed music for the state funeral of Queen Elizabeth II and the coronation of King Charles III. Her appointment to such an important public musical role symbolised how fully accepted women composers had become within contemporary British classical music by the early twenty-first century, and how far things had moved on from the days when they were excluded from the musical canon (which you read about in Week 1).

This week, you will consider how to programme and more generally promote the work of contemporary women composers. This week is illustrated by a short interview with Stephan Meier, Artistic Director of [Birmingham Contemporary Music Group \(BCMG\)](#), talking about BCMG's work promoting the work of contemporary women composers and working towards gender balanced programming.

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- know how you can approach and work with living women composers
- be aware of a range of approaches you could take to promote the music of living women composers
- understand how you could go about working on projects with living women composers.

1 What is a 'composer' in the early twenty-first century?



You are going to start this week by reflecting on what we mean by the term 'composer' in the early twenty-first century.

Activity 1

Reflect on the following questions and add your answers to the text box below.

1. What do you understand the term 'composer' to mean today?
2. Are there other types of 'music creators' whose work might also be considered to be a form of contemporary composition?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

There aren't any fixed right or wrong answers to these questions, and how you responded will be personal to you and your particular musical tastes and interests. For question 1, you might have responded that a composer is someone who composes or otherwise creates new works of music. Question 2 invites you to consider people creating music today more broadly and uses the term 'music creator' to reflect this. Some music creators today who work with different forms of sound or electronics, prefer to refer to themselves as 'sound artists', 'sonic artists', 'music programmers', 'sound engineers', 'electronic music producers', or even

'instrument builders', though others prefer the term 'electroacoustic composer'. You might also have broadened the term out to include songwriters.

When programming contemporary music, it is important to be aware that people producing music today might refer to themselves using different labels. Given the large part which electronics and electroacoustic composition has played in the development of art music since the later twentieth century, it's also important to bear in mind that women creating sound-based works might not necessarily call themselves 'composers'.

2 Working with living women composers



Working with living women composers removes many of the barriers of programming works by historical ones. They are alive, they can advocate for themselves, and they can provide copies of their own music (whether this be in the form of scores or sound art for diffusion).

There are lots of women composers and other types of music creators active today. Many maintain their own websites with lists of their works and contact details. There might already be works by particular women which you have heard and want to perform, or you might know women working in composition/music creation who you want to work with.

If you want to search for other women composers, you will find the [F-List Directory of UK Female+ Musicians](#) an invaluable resource. The F-List was created by [Vick Bain](#), who is a leading campaigner for gender equity within the UK music industry. The F-List is a fully searchable directory of a large number of UK-based female+ musicians, songwriters and composers. The F-List defines itself as female+, as it is inclusive of transgender and gender diverse musicians. You can search for artists – including [composers](#) – by categories of musical role, genre, instrument and location. It is also an excellent resource if you want to search for other women musicians, such as local performers. The F-List also produces an extremely informative newsletter, which you might want to consider signing up for.

3 Ways of working with and promoting living women composers



Depending on your interests and resources (you might be a solo performer, an amateur ensemble, or a professional music organisation), how you choose to work with and promote living women composers/music creators will vary, and it's possible to mix and match a number of the different options suggested here.

Programming pre-existing works

One of the simplest ways of including music by living women composers/music creators is to programme works which they have already produced. If you're doing this, it can be a nice idea to reach out to her to let her know and/or to invite her to your concert (if appropriate).

Commissions

If you have the resources, you might want to consider commissioning a new work from a living woman composer/music creator. Unless you have unlimited resources and are able to give your commissioned composer/music creator a totally free brief to create whatever they want, it's really important to consider the fit of the composer/music creator to the purpose of your commission and any other parameters which you need to work within (e.g. length of piece, the forces available to realise it, and any financial restraints). You will hear Stephan Meier talking more about commissioning new works a little later this week.

Artist residencies

If your organisation is big enough and you are able to afford it, you could consider employing a living woman composer/music creator as an artist in residence. In addition to

performing her music, you might want to invite her to be involved in outreach and/or education work with your local community or school(s).

Special projects

If you are working with a specific woman composer/music creator, and you have the contacts, you might also want to consider creating a new work as part of a special project with an education provider (school or university), community group, or community music ensemble. Depending on their input into the new work, the groups and communities which you work with might even become co-creators. Special projects such as these could be a commission and/or happen as part of an artist residency.

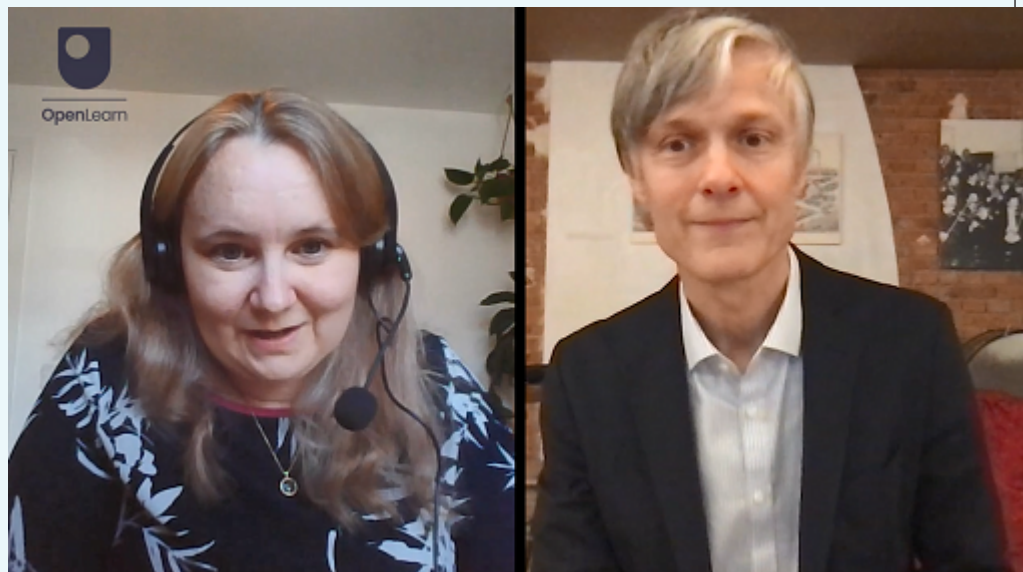
4 Towards gender balanced programming

In this section you are going to hear from Stephan Meier talking about [BCMG's](#) work championing contemporary women composers. BCMG was founded in 1987 by musicians from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. They are one of the world's leading specialist ensembles dedicated to contemporary music.

Activity 2

Watch the following interview in which Stephan Meier discusses BCMG's work promoting the work of living women composers.

Video content is not available in this format.



Then consider the following questions:

1. How does BCMG champion contemporary women composers?
2. What is BCMG's approach to commissioning new works and composers and how are they working towards gender balanced programming?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Stephan discusses BCMG's mission to find high-quality contemporary music. He also talks about the importance of finding gender balance and outlines some tactics to support this, including:
 - programming UK/Birmingham premiers of new works
 - giving new works a second performance
 - commissioning new works
 - contextualising new works
 - the importance of their education and outreach work.

2. Stephan again highlights BCMG's commitment to seeking high-quality contemporary music. He discusses the importance of making this a meaningful experience for the performers, composers, and the audience, and underlines the importance of careful planning to bring all this together. He outlines some of the strategies which BCMG have used to work towards gender balance including:
 - open calls for new works
 - anonymous calls
 - ensuring a gender-balanced selection process.

You will also have heard Stephan acknowledging that anonymous calls for new works are controversial. You will learn more about this debate in Week 6.

5 Summary of Week 4



This week, you have reflected on what the term composer/music creator can mean in the early twenty-first century. You have considered how you can work with contemporary women composers/music creators, including performing pre-existing works, commissioning new ones, engaging women as artists in residence, and working together with them and others on special projects. You have learned about how you can use the [F-List Directory of UK Female+ Musicians](#) to search for composers and other female+ musicians. You have also heard Stephan Meier discussing [BCMG](#)'s work championing women composers and working towards gender balanced programming.

Next week, you will reflect on how you can draw everything you have learned over the last four weeks together to start diversifying (or further diversifying) your own repertoire. You will hear [Angela Slater](#) discussing her work with the ensemble [Illuminate](#), which exclusively promotes the work of women composers and performers.

You can now go to [Week 5](#).

Week 5: Presenting gender diverse programmes

Introduction



[Keychange](#) is an international movement which aims to encourage music festivals and organisations to commit to a 50 per cent representation of women and gender diverse people across their programming and staffing. Keychange 50:50 was originally set up in 2018 by Vanessa Reed, during her time as Chief Executive of the [PRS Foundation](#), with the aim of achieving a 50:50 gender balance in music programming by 2022. [Keychange](#) is now led by the [PRS Foundation](#), [Reeperbahn Festival](#), and [Musikcentrum Öst](#), and supported by [Creative Europe](#) alongside a wide range of international partners. Although the initial target of 50:50 by 2018 was not met, an ever-growing number of organisations remain pledged to this goal, which has become an international project. By committing to diversifying your own programming, you too are joining a large movement working towards gender equity within the music industry.

This week, you will consider how to bring together everything that you've learned so far. You will build your own toolkit to help you start diversifying your own programming (or diversifying it further if you are already working in this area). Additionally, you will hear from [Angela Slater](#), composer and founder of [Illuminate](#), talking about her work directing

an all-woman ensemble which specialises in presenting work by historic and contemporary women composers.

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- bring together everything that you have learned so far about what the challenges are around building gender diverse programmes, how you can contribute to making positive change, and strategies which you can adopt to perform works by historic and/or contemporary women composers
- create your own toolkit to help you start building your own gender diverse programmes.

1 Recap



You will start this week by refreshing your memory on all the key learnings about diversifying programming which you have covered so far.

Activity 1

Part 1

Thinking back to what you learned in Week 1, consider the following questions:

1. What were the historical barriers which led to women's music not being included within the classical music repertoire as much as men's?
2. What can some of the challenges to performing more works by women composers be?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Women composers were excluded from the classical music canon which formed during the nineteenth century. Because their works weren't included within the canon, they were left out of how the story of music history was told and their works weren't included within music education or training programmes.
2. Historically, less music by women than by men has been published. This can make it challenging to access scores of their works. Sometimes performers/organisations can be reluctant to programme works by women composers, as

they are nervous that audiences will be unfamiliar with their works and that this will affect ticket sales.

Part 2

Thinking back to Week 2, answer the following questions:

1. What are some different approaches that you could take to programming women's music?
2. What are some of the issues which it's important to bear in mind when including women's music?
3. What are some of the practical considerations which you need to think about when programming more music by women?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. You could curate an all-woman programme or alternatively you could add pieces by women into a mixed programme, which might be themed by historical music period or musical genre, etc.
2. When including works by women on programmes, it's important to think about timing and placement and to avoid your inclusion looking tokenistic.
3. When programming more music by women, it's important to consider funding, audience engagement, and how you will get performers on board.

Part 3

Thinking back to Week 3, what are some of the benefits of making a performance edition of a previously unpublished work by a historic woman composer?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Some of the benefits of making a performance edition of a previously unpublished work by a historic woman composer are that it will make it easier for you to read and play the piece yourself. If you choose to make your new performance edition available to others, you will also be increasing the amount of music by women which is easily available to be performed.

Part 4

Thinking back to Week 4, what are some of the different ways of working with contemporary women composers/music-creators?

Provide your answer...

.....
Discussion

You could programme pre-existing works. If you have the necessary resources, you could also commission a new work, engage a woman composer/music-creator as an artist in residence, or work with them on a special project (which might include local community groups or education providers).

2 Sharing good practice: Illuminate

[Illuminate](#) is an all-woman music ensemble founded by composer [Angela Slater](#) in 2017 to promote the work of historic and contemporary women composers.

Activity 2

Watch the following interview in which Angela Slater talks about her work with Illuminate.

Video content is not available in this format.



Then consider the following questions:

1. What is Angela's vision for Illuminate?
2. What is her approach to programming?
3. How does she ensure the financial sustainability of the project?
4. How does she approach building new audiences for women's music?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Angela talks about having lots of different missions within Illuminate:
 - educating audiences, performers and composers about historical and contemporary women composers through their concerts, [blog series](#) and recordings
 - repeating performances of works beyond their premier to embed them within the canon
 - providing opportunities to composers from different backgrounds and ensuring that concerts take place in different parts of the UK.

2. Angela discusses the need to strike a good balance between showcasing historical and contemporary women. She mentions practical considerations: works being written for particular ensembles and score availability. She also talks about adapting programmes depending on the audience, placing unfamiliar works on programmes with familiar ones, 'sandwiching' contemporary music between historical works, and maintaining dialogue with the performers.
3. Angela talks about making regular grant applications and explains that [Illuminate](#) have previously received funding from: the [Hinrichsen Foundation](#), [GEMMA Classical Music Trust](#), [Vaughan Williams Foundation](#), [Arts Council England](#), [Creative Scotland](#), and the [Marchus Trust](#).
4. Angela discusses how she has built new audiences for women's music through:
 - [Illuminate's blog series](#) where audiences can learn more about the composers
 - working with the concert series, venues and promoters that [Illuminate](#) are presenting their concerts with (you will have heard here highlighting her positive experience with [BCMG](#), who you heard from in Week 4).

Angela also talks about her belief that audiences are underestimated and that in her experience audiences are often actually curious to hear new works.

When Angela introduced herself, you will also have heard her talking about how women composers were absent from her entire musical education, as was also the case for Gabriella Di Laccio and Tim Parker-Langston. In her discussion of her approach to programming, she also mentioned the issue of class privilege within classical music. This is an issue which you will hear more about in Week 6.

3 Building your toolkit



You are now going to complete an activity designed to help you think through the things you'll need to consider when diversifying your repertoire. You will then be able to use this as a practical toolkit, which you can apply to diversifying your own repertoire. Think of this like a checklist to help you work through key stages of the process

Activity 3

Imagine your ideal concert including or consisting entirely of music by women. Fill in the blank sections of the toolkit below of the steps you'll need to work through to bring it all together.

A Word version of the toolkit is also available if you would prefer to work in that way:
Toolkit

Unfortunately the Word version of the Toolkit is not available in this format of the course. Please refer to the live OpenLearn course to access the Word version of the Toolkit.

Practical considerations

What is the venue?

Provide your answer...

What is the date and time of the concert (if known)?

Provide your answer...

Who is your likely audience (list all likely people/groups who might attend)?

Provide your answer...

Who will be performing?

Provide your answer...

Funding

What are your sources of funding?

Provide your answer...

Are there any particular sources of funding that you can apply for? (Remember to think about organisations which specifically promote the performance of women's music.)

Provide your answer...

Do you have additional costs? (For example, will you need to factor in additional rehearsal time for performers to learn new works? Will you have to pay for someone to prepare a new performance edition? Will you need to hire a music scholar as consultant?)

Provide your answer...

Planning your programme

Are you going to present an all-woman concert or are you going to add works by women into a mixed programme?

Provide your answer...

Where are you going to source your scores?

Provide your answer...

Do you need to prepare/commission a new performance edition?

Provide your answer...

Do you need to identify a specialist music scholar to work with?

Provide your answer...

Are you commissioning a new work?

Provide your answer...

Building your audience

Who is going to write your programme notes?

Provide your answer...

Are you going to offer a pre-concert talk to offer more contextual information about the woman/women whose music you are performing?

Provide your answer...

Are you going to undertake any outreach/education activities?

Provide your answer...

Who is going to help you build your audience? For example, do you need to identify and work with a music scholar? If you are presenting the work of living women composers/music-creators, do you want to involve them? Will you be reaching out to and working with local community groups and/or education providers?

Provide your answer...

4 Summary of Week 5



This week, you have recapped all of your key learnings on the course so far and have considered further how you are going to embed them into your own practice to diversify (or further diversify) the repertoire which you perform. You have completed your own toolkit to support you starting work on building your own gender diverse programmes. You have also heard from [Angela Slater](#) talking about her week leading [Illuminate](#).

Next week, you will consider how to support inclusive practices beyond gender. You will also hear from [Deborah Keyser](#) discussing her work as Director of [Tŷ Cerdd/Music Centre Wales](#).

You can now go to [Week 6](#).

Week 6: Developing inclusive practices

Introduction



In Week 1 you learned that research completed by [Donne Women in Music](#) in 2024 found that 92.5 per cent of orchestral repertoire performed worldwide in the 2023/24 concert season was written by men, while music written by women made up just 7.5 per cent. (Donne Women in Music's research was based upon an examination of the repertoire presented by 111 orchestras based across 30 countries.) Of this 7.5 per cent, 5.8 per cent was composed by white women, while music written by women from the global majority made up just 1.6 per cent of all orchestral music performed. These figures highlight that gender is not the only important factor to bear in mind when seeking to diversify programming, as composers have also been excluded from the performing canon along the lines of race, ethnicity, class, disability and/or neurodiversity, religion, and sexuality/sexual identity.

This week, you will start to consider how you might begin to diversify your programming beyond gender and how you can promote inclusive practices more broadly. You will also hear from [Deborah Keyser](#) discussing her work fostering inclusive practices as Director of [Tŷ Cerdd/Music Centre Wales](#).

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- have an understanding of the concept of intersectionality and how it has affected marginalisation within classical music programming
- think about how you can start to diversify your programming beyond gender, and what resources are available to help you
- have an awareness of how you can ensure equity of opportunity for those seeking to work within the classical music industry.

1 Thinking intersectionally



Women composers are not the only group who have traditionally been excluded from the classical music canon. Composers have also been excluded along the lines of race, ethnicity, class, disability and/or neurodiversity, religion, and sexuality/sexual identity. When thinking about developing more diverse programmes, it is really important to think intersectionally and not to focus exclusively on gender.

[Intersectionality](#) is a theory used within sociology and cultural theory. It was coined by US Civil Rights activist and prominent critical race theory (CRT) scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. It describes how the overlapping or intersecting of marginalised identities (such as gender, race and class) contribute to discrimination and oppression.

Activity 1

How might intersectionality affect composers?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Certain composers can find themselves doubly marginalised. For example, because of their race and because of their gender, or because of their class background and because of their disability status. The intersectionality between their different and various characteristics can make it even harder for some composers to have their music heard.

While you are thinking about including more works by women composers, ensure that you also consider including works by composers who have been excluded from the traditional classical music performing repertoire for other reasons. As you move to including more works by women, try to ensure that you are not just focusing on middle-class, able-bodied, white women, but also thinking about including as diverse a range of different women composers as possible. In Week 2 you heard Róisín Maher talking about how she always tries to include non-white composers on the programme for [Finding A Voice](#) and in Week 5 you heard Angela Slater discussing the issue of class privilege within classical music and how she tries to ensure that composers from different educational backgrounds are represented on her programmes with [Illuminate](#).

2 Thinking about diversifying programming more broadly



As you have learned, women composers were not the only group who were excluded from the classical music canon. Historically, many composers were also excluded because of race, ethnicity, class, disability and/or neurodiversity, religion, and sexuality/sexual identity. The classical music canon was (for a very long time) dominated by the music of middle-class, white men. When you are thinking about diversifying the repertoire which you perform, it's important to think about this intersectionally.

Beyond including more works by women, you could also think about diversifying your programmes more broadly, ensuring that you also perform music by composers from other groups who have historically been excluded. This section suggests a number of resources that you might find useful as you start to approach this.

The [Institute for Composer Diversity](#), based at the School of Music at the State University of New York at Fredonia, brings together a range of extremely useful resources, including a number of databases of composers and works from historically excluded groups. The [Resources for repertoire: composer diversity](#), pages brought together and hosted by the Julliard School, brings together multiple suggestions for essential online resources and suggestions for diversifying repertoire. [Music by Black Composers](#) is an extremely important resource for music by Black composers, including a range of [repertoire directories](#), which also offers valuable pedagogic materials. [plainsightSOUND](#) is a research project focused on the stories of classical performers and composers active in Britain before 1970, which also includes a valuable [database](#).

It is also important to think about fostering inclusive practice more generally. In the next section, you will hear [Deborah Keyser](#) discussing her work promoting inclusive practices at [Tŷ Cerdd/Music Centre Wales](#).

3 Sharing good practice: Tŷ Cerdd/Music Centre Wales

[Tŷ Cerdd/Music Centre Wales](#) promotes and develops Welsh music and supports musicians based in Wales.

Activity 2

Watch the following interview in which Deborah Keyser discusses her work as Director of Tŷ Cerdd/Music Centre Wales.

Video content is not available in this format.



Then respond to the following questions:

1. What sorts of barriers do people face which make it difficult for them to participate – or to participate fully – in the classical music industry?
2. What can we do to mitigate these barriers to make access to the classical music industry more inclusive?
3. How can we make application processes for opportunities within the classical music industry fairer?
4. What sorts of adjustments can be appropriate, reasonable and helpful to consider?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Deborah stresses that the barriers that people can face are multiple and often intersectional, including:

- class (which she sees as the lack of free music education in schools now exacerbating)
 - socioeconomic
 - disability
 - gender
 - caring responsibilities
 - cultural.
2. Deborah reflects on how complex this can be and discusses various ideas, including:
- paying people to participate in opportunities
 - positive action to support music-creators with particular characteristics, such as Tŷ Cerdd's [Penguin Pebbling](#) pathway to support neurodivergent music creators
 - avoiding talking too much about specific genres and making opportunities open to people who have not had a formal music education and might be unable to read music notation
 - being very clear and more enabling.
3. Deborah comments that this is a really big question and outlines various ideas, including:
- making applications free
 - paying people for their time and covering expenses
 - ensuring accessible formats and simplifying the process
 - accepting video and/or audio applications
 - not asking for specific qualification levels
 - focusing on asking music creators to describe their practice
 - naming panel members
 - being clear about the process
 - not using anonymous selection.
4. Deborah explains that reasonable adjustments can be as broad as the different people who we are working with. She talks about several, including:
- having a safe, quiet space that people can use
 - working flexibly and being open to discussing people's needs with them
 - accepting that adjustments will be different for different people
 - having named contacts people can talk to
 - providing support workers
 - making it possible for people to bring babies if they need to
 - helping to cover caring costs
 - thinking through wheelchair access and making physical adjustments to spaces.

In Week 4, you heard Stephen Meier discussing the positive experiences that [BCMG](#) has had using anonymous selection, although he acknowledged that this practice is controversial. In this video clip, you have heard Deborah outlining what the issues with using anonymous selection are.

Ensuring equity of opportunity: Fair Access Principles

You heard Deborah Keyser discussing Tŷ Cerdd's commitment to [Sound and Music's Fair Access Principles](#). These have been devised as a code of best

practice for open and inclusive artist development programmes, competitions and awards. You can read the full principles, which you might like to consider signing your own organisation up to if you aren't already, [on the Sound and Music website](#).

4 Summary of Week 6



This week has moved beyond focusing primarily on gender to consider the need to diversify programming more broadly. You have been introduced to the concept of intersectionality and explored some key resources which you can use to help you diversify your programming further. You have also heard [Deborah Keyser](#) discussing her work with [Tŷ Cerdd](#), who have signed up to [Sound and Music's Fair Access Principles](#).

Where next?

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Week 2

Images

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Figure 1: Fanny Hensel (born Mendelssohn), sketched in 1829 by Wilhelm Hensel; https://www.library.yale.edu/musiclib/exhibits/mendelssohn/edited/FannyMendelssohnHensel_adjusted.jpg

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Week 3

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