

# Gendered Images of Music and Musicians

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RAGNHILD SORIN, DEPARTMENT OF MUSICOLOGY,  
GOTHENBURG UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

CONGRESS ORGANIZER: PROFESSOR PIIRKKO MOISALA. ÅBO AKADEMI, FINLAND  
CONGRESS SECRETARY: PAULINA AHOKAS

The International Council for Traditional Music was founded in 1947, and apart from ethnomusicology, other subjects, such as gender, is also part of its agenda. The music and gender study group was founded in Helsinki, 1985. (Previous congresses have been held in: Berlin (1987), Heidelberg (1989), Turku (1993), Krk, Croatia (1995), Gothenburg (1996), and Washington (1996). The forthcoming congress will take place in Toronto in 2000.)

The study group of music and gender organized this year’s music congress in Järvenpää, near Helsinki, Finland. Set in the Sibelius Academy’s wonderful wooden mansion from the beginning of this century, the days passed quickly with interesting papers by contributors from “all over the world.” The only commonality was “gender” in one way or another. It was indeed a wonderful opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss gender issues. Apart from the interesting papers the participants were treated royally, with an excellent organization and great evening arrangements, such as a “field work” exercise at a Finnish dance restaurant in Helsinki, where we all made analyses of gender behavior through participatory observation. It was a long and inspiring week-end that was highly valued by all participants including myself.

## ABSTRACTS

“OUT OF BONDS: PLAYING WITH IDENTITIES IN VILLAGE INDIA”

CAROL BARBIRACKI, MUSIC DEPARTMENT, HARVARD UNIVERSITY, USA

The song-dance performances of *nacnis* (“dancing women”) of village Biharand Bengal crystallize a play with identities that extends far beyond the borders of the stage. As “non-societal,” “kept” women (concubines) , *nacnis* both define and reverse/subvert

normative gender ideologies, behaviors and power relations with their unorthodox lifestyles and performances in otherwise male arenas. In their continuous embodiment of the goddess Radha, they blur the boundaries of on-stage performance and off-stage life. And in their simultaneous performance of a “female” dance with a “male” song, they mock the gendered village genres they create. The field research process, for this displaced single female researcher/musician, also eventually confused the comfortable illusion of a boundary between researcher and *nacni*. Finally, and inevitably, the borders of our carefully constructed academic paradigms of interpretation become transparent in the face of a tradition so thoroughly out of bounds.

“CAN ONE HEAR IF THE MUSIC IS WRITTEN BY A MAN, OR A WOMAN?”

RAGNHILD SORIN, DEPARTMENT OF MUSICOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG,  
SWEDEN

The “greatest hits” of classical music belong to a canon of a few chosen musical pieces, which consist of no music by women. Why is this so? I have investigated the matter in a socio-historical way partly based on a close reading of Marcia Citron’s (1993) *Gender and the Musical Canon*. Gender and sexuality is also an interesting aspect of canon formation, and Susan McClary’s (1991) *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* is a valuable source of information on that topic. Furthermore Philip Tagg’s (1979) *Kojak: Fifty Seconds of TV-music: Towards the Analysis of Affect in Popular Music* has been helpful as a theoretical framework for his account of gender-based affect in popular music. How do European school pupils face the question of gender in classical music, when considering the fact that European art music is at the core of formation of the canon? In order to find an answer I conducted an empirical study in Cambridge, UK, where twenty-six pupils (aged 14–17) listened and commented on music examples by male and female composers. The study is interesting for another reason too: most of the participants were girls (twenty-two out of twenty-six). It is important to make girls aware of this matter, which may work as an eye-opener, and to make them aware of a possible future occupation as a composer.

“IMAGE VS. REALITY IN THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MUSIC AND MUSICAL LIFE IN EARLY  
HISTORY OF ISRAEL”

JEHOASH HIRSHBERG, HEBREW UNIVERSITY, JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

The waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine under Turkish and British rule (1880–1948) came both from Europe and from the Middle East (mostly from Yemen). Whereas the immigration from Europe, especially from Russia and Poland, was motivated by powerful revolutionary and socialist urge, the immigration from Yemen was purely religious. The highly heterogeneous society known in Palestine, as the Yishuv (“Settlement”) indeed strove to a radical change in the image of the European Jew, turning from petty shop keeping and financial dealings to physical labor and communal life. Yet, recent research has shown that the liberation of women lagged far behind, and it was only thanks to their own continuous organizational and social struggle that they gradually gained equality with men. At the same time the tight Yemenite families endeavored to cling to their traditional way of life despite the radical change in their conditions and status. Musical activity played an important role in the changing image of both European and Yemenite women. Yet, the change was achieved by powerful individualism, whereas institutions such as the newly founded Palestine orchestra were

largely man dominated. Profiles of four women musicians will illustrate the breakthrough in women status reached through professional musical activity.

“KUNDRY AS ABJECT”

ANNE SIVUOJA-GUNARATNAM, INSTITUTE FOR ART RESEARCH, DEPARTEMENT OF  
MUSICOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI, FINLAND

Kundry is the only female character in Richard Wagner’s last opera, *Parsifal* (1882). Her narrative function is that of an obstacle or test, which the hero Parsifal needs to overcome before the final equilibrium is possible. It is not enough that Parsifal wins the Holy Spear from Klingsor and returns it to the Grail; the Gralian brotherhood has to be purged from Kundry. In fact, in the end of the opera Kundry falls lifeless to the ground. Kundry’s downward-bound orientation is also embedded into the descending *Leitmotif*. Kundry has been invested with several markers or signs that make her dangerous for the Gralian values. These threatening markers deal with sex, race, religion, desire, sin disease, and eventually her musical discourse. These are so horrifying for the Grail community (and possibly to the audience witnessing the *Bühnenweihfestspiel*) that they need to be questioned to assure the existence of the Gralian mankind. She and her values form an inversion for the Gralian ones. Abject is Julia Kristeva’s term for the threatening and disgusting which an individual or a culture must push away, exclude or abject, in order to define its own boundaries and continue its existence. According to Kristeva abject “disturbs identity, system, order.” This is exactly what Kundry does for Grail, also at the level of the musical discourse, because Kundry’s chromatically laughing *Leitmotif* at times interrupts the Grail theme. Wagner has assigned the role of Kundry for soprano. It requires an extremely expanded vocal range reaching for both extreme highs and lows, and also a very solid middle register. The role employs extraordinary vocal expressions, including laughter and screams, and perhaps most notoriously, long silence in the third act after Kundry’s only musical utterance (“Dienen, dienen”). These unusual vocal means confirm Kundry’s position at the border (or limen) of cultured civilization.

“SHAMEFUL AND UNMANLY: GENDER, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE VOICE OF MODERNITY”  
BRUCE JOHNSON, SCHOOL OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, SYDNEY,  
AUSTRALIA

The public singing voice was transformed in the early twentieth century, and the site of that transformation was popular song rather than art music. Aesthetic discourse judged this process to be one of attenuation and decline: the voice of modern pop continues to be widely regarded as a technically deficient instrument of narrow expressive range when compared to art music. This paper suggests that contemporary popular singing styles were evolved out of specific conditions of modernity, including urbanization and technology, which determined the circumstances in which popular music was performed. For this reason those new popular styles of singing actually enlarged the means by which the experience of modernity could be expressed. Furthermore, although the image of pop technology has become masculinized, it was originally a feminized site where women were able to construct a public voice that gave broader and more direct expression to everyday gendered subjectivity, and where men also found ways to project a more nuanced masculinity. The decisive development in this emancipation of the ordinary was the microphone, by which constraints of gender politics could be publicly overcome and private experience could find public expression. The paper will include a

case study of a particular singer, the Australian Barbara James, tracing her pioneering transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century singing voice. The enquiry will include reference to her recordings, to interview material, and to the contexts within which she worked in the twenties and thirties.

“HOW TO KEEP THE BALANCE: TELLING STORIES, CONTESTING THE FATE, OR FEELING  
THE TIME’S FLOW”

ANNA CZEKANOWSKA, UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW, POLAND

The paper presents the result of exploration of two closed women’s groups, similar by the age of performers, and the intensive social and music activity but different by citizenship, religion, language, and the standard of life. The geographical distance between the two places contains about 100 miles. The goal of study is to present the role of contemporary women and their musical activity under pressure of undergoing changes. The author confronts the functions of particular genres, the need for them, the acceptance, and/or the decline of certain genres. The subject of special interest is the function of story-teller traditionally appreciated as the male duty and the function of songs deliberating the human fate traditionally concerned as the female job. One confronts these stereotypes from the point of view different generations taking into account the evident differences between the particular groups. The subject of interest is also the opposition between the genres of particular groups and those addressed “to everybody.” This concerns not only the repertory but basically the way of performance, i.e., the acceptance and/or disregard of repetitions, the auditions of refrains and vocatives, differently viewed by various groups and generations. Indeed, the particular groups have different concepts of genre, its structure and form. The most interesting is the relation to the apparently nonsense words and refrains. Quite different is also tolerance as expressed by different generations. The commonly repeated opinion that youngsters can not feel the time’s flow but they will get this feeling later is the final conclusion of the paper. One discusses the evident changes in the concept of genre, its structure, form and way of its performance. One points to the value judgements as expressed by different generations. This applies to the disregard of some genres of middle generation and to the acceptance of Youth productions as expressed by the elders.

“MUSIC AND DISABILITY IDENTITY”

HANNA VÄÄTÄINEN, DEPARTEMENT OF MUSIC, ÅBO ACADEMY, TURKU, FINLAND

This presentation is a preliminary analysis of an interview I made in December with Maija Salminen, a 27 year old woman and wheelchair dancer. I discuss the role of music in the construction of disability identity with theoretical tools I’ve adopted from disability research, women’s studies, and musicology. I examine disability in relation to gender, sexuality, and place. To be defined or to define oneself as a woman with physical disability does not happen similarly in different contexts. My intention is to show how different kinds of places and musics enable different kinds of disability identities. I’m asking what meaning does a woman with physical disability give to her own body in relation to music and under what conditions does this conceptualization happen. As my work is connected to feminist and disability rights movements, I don’t situate problems in particular disabled or non-disabled women and men, but in hegemonic discourses on women and disability.

“LOVE, HOPE AND REMEMBRANCE IN THE ORAL TRADITION OF TWO ETHIOPIAN  
COMPOSERS: ASNAKECH WORKU AND NURIA AHMED SHAMI KALID A.K.A. SHAMITU”  
CYNTHIA TSE KIMBERLIN, MUSIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE, CALIFORNIA, USA

These two individuals born during the 1930s, represent Ethiopian female artists pursuing musical careers in this century. Although both are well known today as musicians, they are not well known as composers outside their milieu because of their sex, nationality, and the fact that their compositional methods and techniques appear to follow no formal school of composition recognized internationally. Collectively, their compositions span thirty-four years and include a range of musical styles, subject matter, and performance contexts. A tiny sample of their music is presented here where performances of their vocal compositions provide chronological evidence of their technical and artistic development. The melodies, song format, and instrumental accompaniment are traditional, but the lyrics in the Amharic, Adare, and Oromo languages are contemporary. Five musical examples composed and performed by Asnakech Worku and three musical examples composed and performed by Shamitu are discussed. Since field recordings of Shamitu were made in 1972, and 1996, her compositions and performance style of these two periods are compared. Because Asnakech was recorded numerous times, four versions of one song, recorded in 1962, 1982, 1995, and 1996 are compared. In addition a 1995 video clip depicts Asnakech singing another song in the role of an actress. And finally, Asnakech's and Shamitu's lives and music as they relate to gendered images are considered, showing how their private and public spheres are inextricably bound.

“WOMEN, MEDIA AND THE 1995 SIBELIUS VIOLIN COMPETITION”

TARU LEPPÄNEN, DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC, UNIVERSITY OF TURKU, FINLAND

The Sibelius Violin Competition is an international Music Competition which takes place in Helsinki once every five years. It started in 1965 and the last one was held in 1995. The one in 1995 was regarded by the Finnish media to be more significant and important than the previous Sibelius Violin Competitions for many reasons. Maybe the most important of them was that the winner was a Finnish violinist for the first time in history of the competition. In this paper, my interest is focusing on the following question: What kind of stories does the media (newspapers, TV-programs and radio-programs) tell about people in the competition? The gender system in the competition is represented in a very traditional and stereotypical way. By what means would it be possible to find the mechanisms by which this asymmetrical power relationship between men and women is produced, reproduced, and negotiated?

“FANNY HENSEL'S MUSICAL ROLES 1829–1847”

MARJA MUSTAKALLIO, DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC, ÅBO ACADEMY, TURKU, FINLAND

My starting point has been breaking the prominence of composer as author. This is also critic toward history of women in which “great women” are brought into our consciousness. And in musicology “great women” have mostly been “forgotten composers.” Fanny Hensel (1805–1847) was known in her time primarily as “Felix Mendelssohn's talented sister,” “excellent pianist,” or “organizer of concerts of high quality.” In the 1980s the focus has been the composer who has been left in “the shadow of her brother.” I've been interested in how Fanny Hensel herself sees her activities in the field of music. Also what did she think, was she the composer, pianist, or what? Sources for my research have been Fanny Hensel's two diaries (1829–1834, 1834–1844) and her

150 letters to Felix Mendelssohn (1829–1847) which have been published by Marcia Citron (1987). From her texts I constructed her four different musical roles: musician (playing piano or singing alone, in small circles, at home, in Sunday musicales, in concerts), organizer of Sunday musicales and other concerts which mostly connected with anniversaries, birthdays, etc., music writer who reported musical life in Berlin to her brother and discussed esthetic issues, and finally composer who didn't write much of the compositional work. The four musical roles appear differently in different times of her life. Playing the piano with other musicians or playing to present society mostly at her home were her prominent roles in the engagement year 1829 and again in 1840 when they stayed in Italy. When she was a young wife and mother she concentrated on conducting so called Sunday musicales and other gatherings at her home, Leipzigerstrasse 3. Writing about esthetic issues and reporting musical life in Berlin appeared in letters from the middle of the 1830s after Felix Mendelssohn had settled down in Leipzig. During the whole period she writes something about her compositions. But the amount is very tiny if we compare it with the fact that she composed about 400 pieces. She composes all the time (only two years are without pieces) but she doesn't construct herself as a composer. And when she writes about her composing there is always questions about the performances of her compositions. One could say that there is no role for a composer without performance. There is also no oppress (Angst) of artist of genius. Composing is a natural part of everyday life. The musical roles of Fanny Hensel are depending on her roles in a cultural bourgeois family. In that role it was not acceptable to be a composer. The other roles were more suitable. Very well fitted her the role of music organizer, in this role she strengthened what was the most important in women's lives: the place of family. From Fanny Hensel's writings one could also see a life story where a woman grows independent from her father and brother and don't ask them what to do any more. But still it doesn't mean emphasizing the role of the composer.