

## **Frailty, Is Thy Name Woman? A Literature Review**

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## Introduction

This literature review was inspired by a recent event in the classical music world as detailed in the Vulture platform (Frank, 2024). In it, two male members of New York Philharmonic, Liang Wang and Matthew Muckey, were accused of drugging and raping the principal hornist, Cara Kizer, in their rented condo in Vail, Colorado, during the *2010 Bravo! Vail Valley* music festival. Kizer reported the alleged rape to Vail police but the district attorney ultimately decided there was insufficient evidence to press charges. Upon representation by the musician's union 805 against the charges, the men were found not guilty. They were suspended, but not fired, by the New York Philharmonic, a chilling result, while Kizer left the ensemble. This event further sharpened and focused the research question for this review: *How can the voices of female scholars, composers, performers and educators be brought to greater light in the teaching of musicology?*

Musicology is the study of the history and culture of Western art music, known colloquially as “classical” music. I therefore wanted to make a focused review of the specifics of how to lift up the voices of women in this field. I searched the literature to find general information on feminist critique and women's experiences in the classical music world. I then examined the most current research on feminist critique in musicology, which was spearheaded by scholar McClary in the 1980s. I was particularly interested in research that had been done in the last five years; ultimately, I had to expand that range to twenty-five years to collect enough relevant literature. I then sought literature that was specific to the experiences and case studies of female scholars, composers, performers and educators. Within the body of this work and its conclusions, methodologies and suggestions for successful change are addressed, as well as examples of opposing viewpoints in the field of feminist critique.

### **The Problem**

The study and performance of Western classical music carries with it a history influenced by patriarchal structures. These structures continue to hold sway over the way music is studied in higher education institutions, how it is traditionally analyzed in the classroom, and how female scholars, performers and composers are valued in such a world (McClary, 1990). Thus, the problem is one of representation. Whether intentional or not, the field of classical music in the concert hall and in the classroom has been dominated by male conductors, scholars, and performers, leaving out the voices and experiences of women. This literature review aims to solve this problem by establishing its prevalence, tracing the origins of the culture in which it became normative, studying the evidence as related by case studies and research, and providing solutions and recommendations to the research question.

### **What is Feminist Critique?**

Feminist critique is an approach to musicology which takes into account the systemic roles that women were assigned in the literature studied, as well as addressing issues within the study of musicology that discounts the experiences and influence of women (Napikoski, 2020). It challenges traditional approaches to analysis and incorporates gender as an identifier in the study of musical literature. Feminist critique had its beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with author Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who wrote “The Women’s Bible”, an indicator of the first wave of feminism. This later led to second wave feminism in the 1960s, and a resurgence in the 1980s of feminist scholarship. Anthologies of women’s music were published for the first time, as well as essays about women in music and their contributions (Reitsma, 2014). Examples include: *Historical Anthology of Music by Women* and *Contemporary Anthology of Music by Women* compiled by Briscoe, and *Women & Music: A History* by Pendle. Among the musicologists who are known

for their contributions to early feminist critique are McClary, Citron, and Cusick. All have had their views challenged during this feminist resurgence by fine scholars such as Toorn and Treitler, as well as modern feminist scholars such as Donnelly and Schulze. The strength of feminist critique is that it is marked by tremendous diversity of opinion within its own cadre.

### **Feminist Critique in Scholarship**

McClary's unique voice challenged assumptions about "the canon" – an established body of musical literature that is taught at institutes of higher education, played in concert halls, and generally accepted as the most valuable music. Unsurprisingly, given the time, culture and location in which it was written, most of this music was dominated by male composers. McClary's feminist critique of a well-known opera, Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* – The Magic Flute, raised awareness of the constructs of scholarly approaches to analyzing music using gendered language. She references her professors at Harvard using this method, which had a dehumanizing effect on many of the female students in the room. Examples include "feminine" and "masculine" musical keys or cadences in music that imply weakness on the part of the feminine version. Additionally, she addressed the concept of masculine and feminine compositional genres, such as the perceived "masculine" symphony and "feminine" chamber music works (McClary, 1990). The weakness of this argument is that male and female composers composed in both of these genres. Fanny Mendelssohn and her brother Felix are good examples of this. Perhaps the strength of this argument is the perception of masculine or feminine traits on the part of the scholars who analyze the music, not necessarily the composers themselves.

McClary additionally addressed the stigmatization of "the other" such as the Moorish character Monastatos and the "poor working class" character of Papageno in Mozart's opera *Die*

Zauberflöte. She asserts that the masculine-dominated Enlightenment society espoused rationalism and the mind over the bestial urges of the body, from which, the opera plot indicates, the "working poor" and "the other" cannot ever hope to escape. Challenging societal assumptions such as these is both admirable and prophetic, considering this article was written over twenty years ago. What McClary does not achieve in it is to propose suggestions for inclusion in the canon, or comparisons with music literature written by women that by its nature may be more inclusive – she references longing for Madonna or pop music rather than the canon but does not directly engage with how to shift the literature in the canon to be more inclusive. Given the year, such scholarship may have been emerging, as were modern female composers, whose work would have provided options for this.

Solie provides support for McClary's assertions in her response to the article "Politics, Feminism, and Contemporary Music Theory" (Toorn 1991), with her own riposte, "What do Feminists Want? A reply to Pieter von Toorn". In it, Solie believes that Toorn's use of musical analysis provides immunity to works in the canon from the questions addressed by McClary above. Feminist critique thus demands an ethical and political commitment in the seeing of humans that goes beyond music as a purely aesthetic experience. Toorn wishes for music to remain neutral in its status; Solie postulates that it cannot be. Bodily response to music, personal history with music, and representation must be part of the analytical process (Solie, 1991). Why analysis should be privileged over criticism is another of Toorn's fallacies, she argues. The process of studying, or possession of, works of art is a way of negotiating social spaces and relationships (Solie). Her theory is that no one is an impartial listener, and all project their own prejudices onto music, good or bad. Insisting, as Toorn does, on an individualistic approach and then downplaying the individualistic response of another scholar is in fact, hypocritical. One

could, however, accuse Solie of the same injustice, as she never states what her specific approach is, if not individualism. Ultimately, Solie proposes a middle ground between, as she puts it: “...avoidance of both extremes - on the one hand a solipsism that cares nothing for social values, on the other a tyrannical insistence upon universal experience that hears no dissenting voices” (Solie).

### **Scholarly Debate about Feminist Critique**

Two different feminist scholars, Donnelly and Schulze, push back against the established feminist critique above with their own unique approaches. Donnelly (2016) smartly notes that the entire concept of gender as binary no longer applies in feminist studies and is now seen as a social construct (Donnelly). Thus, the gendered studies of McClary and Citron have less weight in their arguments than in previous years. Donnelly points out that canonic research (that of including female composers into the canon) became less important than feminist critique, which now itself has come under fire as to what feminism truly means. She argues that this has done a disservice to female-composed music because it is unable to stand on its own without the lens of feminist critique to bring it forward. Donnelly quotes Butler in asking if feminine identities are naturally occurring or culturally enforced, and additionally quotes Leo Treitler in his chapter of *Musicology and Difference* that McClary’s discussion of Beethoven’s Ninth is “an exploitation of the *idea* of gender difference in the service of political and ideological agendas for music history and criticism.” (Treitler, 1994). He also discusses the inseparability of concerns of race and sexuality from those of gender (Donnelly). In her conclusions, Donnelly notes that the preponderance of a female-centric “canon” is no better than a male one and neglects other minority groups in its narrow focus. She suggests the answer is in openness to intersectionality in

musicology, and a willingness to be flexible in ever changing times as to what “difference” now means.

Schulze (2021), by comparison, gives a critique of a long-held heroine of the “canon” – medieval composer and abbess Hildegard von Bingen. Schulze’s premise argues that Hildegard, in the critique of previous feminist studies, has been held up as a model of feminism and egalitarianism, when a deeper study of her life and values shows that she was in fact, not what our modern culture would consider a feminist. While Hildegard primarily taught and ministered to women in her convent, this was a socially imposed role by the Catholic Church, as she would not have been allowed to teach men (Schulze). She relied upon guidance from above, and her focus upon virginity and purity of spirit, all values that were taught by the Church, a male dominated atmosphere. My critique of this article includes the knowledge that Hildegard did go against the wishes of the powerful Abbot Kuno, a male authority figure, who did not support her teaching of nuns, and she therefore established her own convents at Rupertstberg and Eibingen. This is not addressed in the article. In some ways, Schulze straightjackets Hildegard by comparing her actions to the modern form of feminism, while not always considering the context Hildegard’s time period and culture. She may not have been a feminist by modern definitions, but she was certainly a powerful force to be reckoned with in her time. While she may have given lip service to the patriarchal structures of her time by saying “for I am uneducated” (Schulze), her actions speak louder than any words could.

### **Feminist Critique in Practice – Methodology and the Classroom**

In terms of feminist critique and how it has been put into practice, Reitsma (2014) gives a very clear methodology of two scholars in her research. After discussing the groundbreaking of feminist critique in the 1970s and 1980s, she then details the work of scholars McClary and

Citron. McClary's primary work was "to see how historically constructed ideas of gender and sexuality have influenced musical procedures from the sixteenth century to the present"

(Reitsma). The methodology for this was carried out in five ways. The first was the examination of gender and sexuality in music, i.e., the "feminine and "masculine" in music. Secondly, she researched certain gendered aspects of music theory; for example, feminine and masculine cadences, third, the idea of gender and sexuality in purely instrumental music, fourth, the idea of gender identity within music (whether a "masculine" or "feminine" pursuit) and fifth, female musician's career developments and trajectories compared to that of their male counterparts. (Reitsma).

By comparison, Citron's methodology also had five key points which carried a good deal of crossover in their narratives. One area of divergence was that Citron "...focuses mainly on the historical gendered aspects of music within her research, while McClary primarily focused on how 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are expressed within music" (Reitsma). According to Citron herself, "The category of gender acknowledges social difference between men and women and allows for analysis of women (and men) and their experiences on their own terms" (Citron, 1994). She does not advocate for comparing women or men's music only to the same gender. Citron's most remarkable methodological accomplishment was her examination of "the canon" and urging of inclusivity for women, asking why they had been excluded in the first place. In her studies of Lili Boulanger, Alma Mahler-Welfel and Ethyl Smith, concludes that societal improvement occurred for women from 1880-1918 and that most women who were able to publish their compositions were affluent, upper class, and made music in a home environment (Reitsma). One could argue that it has always been true that privilege has determined longevity



in the academic world. This source can read as redundant hero-worship unless one is looking for very specific subtleties in approach between McClary and Citron.

MacKinley and Bartleet (2008) take feminist critique a step further by directly discussing practice, and how they incorporated it into the classroom at the University of Queensland, Australia. Both scholars team-taught a class called MUSC2520 - Women and Music, in which they experimented with new approaches to teaching musicology. From their own experience, musicology had not been inclusive towards women, and was a passive learning experience of taking lecture notes and absorbing a professor's narrative (MacKinley and Bartleet). This aligns with how McClary and Solie were taught at their universities as well (McClary, 1990, Solie, 1991). In order to provide an interactive learning experience for the students, the scholars experimented with the following: group free writes on feminist topics, asking the student to relate physical sensations in their bodies to the music they heard, a capstone concert performance of the music of female composers, flipping the classroom so that students researched and taught one another about the day's topics, and relating memories and lived experiences of women's music to one another. (MacKinley and Bartleet). The professors then self-regulated as they reflected on this experience, feeling that they had failed at the feminist aspect of "embodiment" in music by simply talking about bodily reactions. The next time they taught the course, they shared their own experiences with music as well as asking the students to do so as well. I was not entirely convinced this counted as embodiment, but still impressed by their work. In their words:

"It was important for us to let our students know that as teachers we were not, as Kirsten Lanier asserts, "bodiless, spiritless, and without passion" and that we were prepared and involved as teachers to place emphasis on experience and feelings not just

as a subject of knowledge, but as part of the very process of educational exchange and community” (MacKinley and Bartleet).

The scholars ended their discussion by expressing excitement for the continuation of the course, for their abilities to enact new pedagogy, be open to criticism, try, fail and to be vulnerable – in their opinions, one the greatest strengths of women.

In a colloquy titled *Sexual Violence in Opera: Scholarship, Pedagogy, and Production as Resistance*, several scholars at the 2016 meeting of the American Musicological Society were part of a panel addressing the stated topic. They responded to a growing concern over the rape culture of college campuses, and in 2017-2018, the #MeToo movement (Cusick, et al., 2018). Within this series of articles, each scholar performed research and addressed methodology pertaining to the subject. Topics included *Don Giovanni and the Resilience of Rape Culture*, *A Feminist Staging of Britten’s Rape of Lucretia*, and Gordon’s *On Teaching Monteverdi’s Arianna*, which addressed the brutality against women in operatic stage and its concurrence with the college rape culture. Monteverdi’s *Lament of Ariadne* details Ariadne’s reactions after being seduced and abandoned by Theseus once she solved the riddle of the labyrinth and Minotaur for him, and then is abducted by Bacchus, the god of wine, who then marries her. The term “abducted” in ancient texts has been widely translated to mean “ravished” or in modern terms, raped (Cusick, et al.).

In this case, the methodology carried out was a live performance of the work, adapted to the modern environment. Students were asked to perform the *Lament of Ariadne* in a way that made sense to them. The updated context of college rape culture was very clear in their setup, with Arianna dressed as a modern college freshman, being dumped by a narcissistic Theseus, with a drunken Bacchus performing an offstage rape, after which the lament is sung (Cusick, et

al.,). In this methodology, the students, as encouraged by their professors, gave voice to voiceless and brutalized women of a masculine dominated society with their final message: Violence must not be normalized. However, in the current winds of change, this might be updated to include all forms of vulnerable “other” such as minorities, gay, trans and non-binary people, who have suffered sexual assault. I also would have appreciated seeing an updated version of a sympathetic angle towards male victims of sexual abuse, as in some of Handel’s operas from ancient Greek history.

### **Women in the Classical Music Profession – Performers and Composers**

Aside from the initial anecdote regarding the treatment of women in the classical music world, examples abound of unfair sexism in symphony orchestras. The infamously traditional Vienna Philharmonic, founded in 1846, did not appoint a female musician until 1997, and even then, harpist Anna Leikes was not acknowledged in the program (Roberts, 2018). When their first female violist Ursula Plaichinger was hired in 2003, the Philharmonic enacted a gag order that refused any interviews with Plaichinger. The Kronen Zeitung reported that Plaichinger “may be allowed to play but she can’t talk” (Burgermeister, 2003).

Casula makes a similar observation with the study from two recent research projects, using both quantitative and qualitative analysis. She argues that the presence of women in the musical field has been historically regulated by societal norms of “respectable” behavior. The instruments considered respectable for women to play were always plucked instruments such as the lute, viol, or spinet (Casula). Instruments must not be technologically complex or require women to twist their faces into unpretty shapes, as wind instruments do. She makes an inquiry on Italian music conservatories in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, where she notes that while gender numbers are equally split, most women majored in harp, piano, voice and violin, an influence of the past.

Thirty years later, the same trends were present, though composition increased by 7%, and after the 1999 conservatory reform, the numbers equalize in all areas of instrument study (Casula). Casula exposes corporal punishment as meted out to male and female students in private lessons, as well as the sexual abuse that was normalized in the conservatory atmosphere. In a case study of the classical flutist career, women reported discrimination and objectification in the workplace, as well as being overlooked for authority roles, such as heads of music conservatories, or conducting roles (Casula). While I appreciated all of this fine research, Casula did not have any advice to give women in navigating this tricky terrain, other than self-neutering in their career lives. Recommendations for future change are needed; otherwise, all of this work seems to imply that “It’s a man’s world!” and women can do nothing to change this.

In contrast, Bennett’s research addresses female composers in the world of classical music (Bennett, et al., 2018). Bennett establishes through quantitative metrics that composition remains primarily a male dominated activity, an influence of Western art music’s trends and culture. Bennett notes an underrepresentation of women’s composed music in higher education curricula, and conducts a survey that focuses on income, work and learning, relationships and networks, and gender. The results of Bennett’s study indicated that indeed, women are disadvantaged in cases such as the following: unpaid work such as commissions from ensembles, playing certain types of music, such as jazz, feeling challenged when networking due to cultural norms, and feeling markedly unprepared for their careers once they had graduated (Bennett, et al.). The only weakness of the survey that I saw was that it was only addressed to females, and having a comparison on these issues from male composers would strengthen it. According to Bennett, the answer lay within higher education, as my initial research question had asked. Recommendations included the following: (Bennett, et al.):

1. Creating more opportunities for female composers to work with performers and showcase their work in masterclasses.
2. Supporting communities for women musicians to mingle and network with one another.
3. Using an inclusive “canon”, that showcases the work of women and marginalized groups.
4. Inviting female scholars and lecturers on a regular basis to showcase successful role models.
5. Providing support and encouragement for women in music technology by hiring females to teach in this field, which is traditionally a male-dominated major in music.

### **Conclusions**

The answers to my initial research question are many and varied. If we wish to lift up the voices of women in these music professions as musicology is taught, the approach must be multi-faceted and holistic. We must know the history of feminist critique in musicology, who its proponents were, and ask what it must be today. When we say “feminism or feminist”, we must begin with an awareness of who this represents, as the answers are clearly more nuanced than twenty-five years ago. We must know what parts of feminist critique are relevant and what must be updated to be inclusive of gay women, trans women and those who are non-binary. We must have an inclusive repertoire in the classroom with engaging activities that encourage sharing of culture, and not a passive learning experience. We must create a musical culture which embraces qualified women in every aspect of the music profession, especially in authority positions, from conductors in the concert hall to deans in the conservatory. We must make our students aware of

sexual violence in premier orchestras, recognize the systems of sexism in the workplace that were allowed to flourish, and fight for further equality. We must use an inclusive “canon” in the educational system, support women’s participation in composition masterclasses, music technology, and as guest lecturers. With these ideas in mind, I feel we can craft a brighter future for the women of tomorrow, by properly educating the women of today.

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