

# Introduction

## The Eras

Since Eve piped a tune on a hollow reed, women have been *performing* music. From earliest recorded history women have been *writing* music. Between the two disciplines it is logical to assume that women also *conducted* music and wrote historical references about it.

All through the ages, creative women have made valuable contributions to the esoteric world of music. As civilizations, cultures and social mores changed, much information on these ladies became buried during—there is no other way to phrase it—*centuries of male domination*. As women *re-establish* more equal roles in modern society, much research is being done in the sphere of feminine musicology with most enlightening results.

Discoveries of important women in music range from as far back as Mesopotamia and the Princess-Priestess **Enheduanna** (c 2500 BC)—believed to be the first woman to leave written records—to the egalitarian societies of ancient Egypt and Greece, especially Sparta and Lesbos where the great lyric poet **Sappho** penned immortal odes around the turn of the 6th century, to the cloisters of the Dark and Middle Ages when the visionary **Hildegard of Bingen** (1098–1179), wrote literature, poetry, history, music and texts on medieval medicine. The 1990s witnessed a remarkable surge of recognition and popularity of this original “Superwoman,” resulting in the flowering of von Bingen societies, books, theses, dissertations, CDs of her chants, and worldwide celebrations of the nine hundredth year of her birth, 1998.

In the next major societal era, the emergence of the **renaissance**, with its doctrine of freedom of expression, ironically marked the beginning of the decline of women’s voices, figuratively and literally. Craftsmen’s Guilds now barred women. (In 1321, there had been eight women in the thirty-seven member Paris Musicians’ Guild). The Catholic Church, via the 1563 Council of Trent, forbade women to sing religious polyphonic music. While this edict was directed at nuns, there is ample evidence that many convents continued clandestine chorusing.

Despite these barriers, several names managed to make their mark in musical history during this period. Even the ill-fated **Anne Boleyn** (c 1507–36) composed a hymn in the Tower of London before losing her head. In Italy, then composed of city-states, the Duke of Ferrara established the first *concerto delle donne* (women’s musical ensemble) in 1580, the success of which had the courts of Mantua, Florence and Venice vying with each other to also hire the finest female singers and musicians. Prominent women of the time were **Maddalena Casulana** (c1540–90) and **Francesca Caccini** (1587–1640), whose work crossed the bridge into the **Baroque Period**. Caccini was followed by **Barbara Strozzi** (1619–64), **Antonia Bembo** (1643–1715), and **Elisabeth Claude Jacquet de la Guerre** (1666–1729), the latter important enough to have France’s Louis XIV strike a medal in her honor after her death.

During the following **Classical Period**, when Gluck, Haydn, Mozart and a young Beethoven held sway, respected women composers emanating from the nobility or well-connected musical families numbered **Princess Anna Amalia** (1723–87), youngest sister of Frederick the Great, her niece **Anna Amalia**, Duchess of Saxe-Weimar (1739–1807), **Maddalena di Lombardini Sirmen** (1735–1818), **Marianne von Martinez** (1744–1812), and the blind prodigy **Maria Theresia von Paradis** (1759–1824), godchild of the Empress Maria Theresa, among significant others.

In the Golden Age of Music, the **Romantic Period**, more women forged their names on the roster of composition. In Germany, **Louise Reichardt** (1779–1826), **Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel** (1805–47), sister of Felix, and **Clara Wieck Schumann** (1819–96), wife of Robert, were well known. In Poland, the music of **Marie Szymanowska** (1789–1831) was the inspiration for young Frédéric Chopin, while France produced **Louise Dumont Farrenc** (1804–75), **Pauline Viardot Garcia** (1821–1910) and **Cécile Chaminade** (1857–1944) who lived through WWII. England's contribution, **Ethel Smyth** (1858–1944), whose *Mass in C* was favorably compared to that of Beethoven, hobnobbed with musical giants like Liszt, Brahms and Dvořák.

Women in America also came out of the parlor to enter conservatories and write orchestral music. One of the most celebrated of her day was **Amy Marcy Cheney Beach** (1867–1944), whose *Piano Concerto* and *Gaelic Symphony* defied the listener to determine the gender of their composer. Bridging the centuries, there emerged what is known as the *Second New England School* with Beach as their leader—the first (school) having originated in the 18th century with early American male composers.

The 20th century brought modern trends into music, especially after WWI. The 1920s saw the blooming of *avant-garde* styles on both sides of the Atlantic taking such forms as *aleatory* or *atonal* music, *serialism* and experiments with twelve tone scales. Music notation, too, literally went off the charts, some doing away with the familiar staff. In Europe, **Lili Boulanger** (1893–1918) and **Germaine Tailleferre** (1892–1983) enhanced the palette of French Impressionism, while across the English Channel **Elisabeth Lutyens** (1906–83) and **Elizabeth Maconchy** (1907–94) were pushing through the tonal “envelope.” Women explored these new fields and then threw themselves into the next phase: multimedia, electronic and computer music, with Americans like **Wendy Carlos** and **Pauline Oliveros** coming into prominence. After the '70s the pendulum began swinging back to what has come to be called *neo-romanticism*, which reverts to more structured versions of tonality, harmony, and meter, yet still utilizes freer forms. This is reflected in the music of women composers of the 1980s and '90s and on into the new millennium. On this wave came such firsts as Pulitzer Prize winners **Ellen Zwilich**, **Shulamit Ran** and **Melinda Wagner**.

Meanwhile, behind the former “Iron Curtain” forged by the communist regimes of Eastern Europe after WWII, many creative women were able to take advantage of the equality status of education, especially in music. Some, like **Violeta Dinescu** and **Adriana Hölsky**, escaped to the West, while others like the Russians **Sofia Gubaidulina** and **Elena Firsova** had to wait for history to roll over and rust away the barriers before their work was known to the rest of the world. In Red China, women survived hard labor camps, practicing and writing music secretly. In a niche of their own, a nucleus of African-American women composers triumphed over the double bias of skin color and gender. Pioneer **Florence Price Smith** (1888–1953), whose music is enjoying a vital rebirth, blazed the trail for her followers.

By the close of the 20th century there were more opportunities for women in composition, as a younger generation emerged, led by such talents as **Augusta Read Thomas**, **Melinda Wagner** and **Dalit Warshaw**.

## Conductors

Women on the podium have had—and continue to have—a different set of challenges. From the time nuns directed their cloistered choirs, women conductors have been shunted either into choral directing or onto the podia of their own gender. Women's orchestras proliferated from the turn of the century until World War II, to accommodate the slew of female musicians pouring out of conservatories only to find positions in established all-male symphony orchestras closed to them. Some women conductors established their own aggregations, such as **Gena Branscombe** (1881–1977) with her Branscombe Chorale, **Antonia Brico** (1902–89), the Brico Symphony, and **Frédérique Petrides** (1908–83) with her Orchestrette Classique. In Europe, pioneer spirits **Ethel Leginska** (1886–1970) and **Ethel Smyth** left their homes in England to study on the Continent where they received more recognition. Leginska went on to guest conduct major orchestras on both sides of the Atlantic, while Smyth gained directorial respect by virtue of conducting her major compositions. France's **Nadia Boulanger** (1887–1979), besides being the most honored teacher to a generation of composers, guest conducted the Boston Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, National Symphony and New York Philharmonic.

Today, several maestras have reached prominence in America: **JoAnn Falletta**, music director of the Buffalo (New York) Philharmonic, guest conducts all over the world; **Victoria Bond** completed eight seasons with the Roanoke Symphony in 1995, and three with Opera Roanoke; **Karen Keltner** has been associate conductor of San Diego Opera since 1982, and has also led New York City Opera and other orchestras; **Kate Tamarkin** was associate conductor of the Dallas Symphony; **Barbara Yahr** assisted Lorin Maazel at Pittsburgh; **Marin Alsop's** talented baton directed the Colorado Orchestra, 1993–2003, going on to the Bournemouth (UK) and Baltimore Symphonies; and **Gisèle Ben-Dor**, director of Boston's Pro-Arte, Israel Chamber and Santa Barbara Symphony (1994–2005), has ably led the New York Philharmonic on several occasions.

In England, names like **Jane Glover**, **Anne Manson**, **Sian Edwards**, **Odaline de la Martinez**, and the late **Iona Brown** are well-known. Australian **Simone Young** enjoys a fantastic career ranging from her native land to the Paris Opera. In Israel, **Dalia Atlas** has been called the “First Lady of the Baton.” Middle Europe, Germany, and France still hold to ancient prejudices, therefore the ratio of female orchestral musicians versus men is minuscule, and women conductors still have to create their own groups like the Amadeus Orchestra of Polish **Agnieszka Duczmal**.

## Performers

As to **performers**, women vocalists had the easier task, having been accepted for their talents early in history in convents, courts and as courtesans. By the first part of the 18th century they were gradually replacing countertenors and *castrati*—men who had traditionally sung female roles since the inception of opera. It took another hundred years for prima donnas to become the pampered stars of society.

**Instrumentalists** had, and in many cases still have, far harder barriers to surmount. First there was the original connotation as to which instruments were considered “ladylike.” This confined women mainly to the keyboard: harpsichord, clavichord, and then the newly invented piano which, as it became a household instrument, was a considered a “must” to complete a young lady's education. Public performance was not encouraged, although young girl prodigies were accepted. A few women, notably **Clara Wieck Schumann**,

**Teresa Carreño**, and Americans **Julie Rivè-King** and **Olga Samaroff**, were among the pioneers of international keyboard virtuosity. **Fanny Mendelssohn**, an excellent pianist, was confined by her family only to *private* performance.

Organists received early sanction and even (underpaid) employment as more churches acquired organs, while several major orchestras let down the portcullis of prejudice when it came to the harp. “Lady violinists” had a much tougher breakthrough because holding this instrument under a dainty chin was not considered complimentary to the feminine facial configuration. It was not until 1875 that Czech-born **Wilma Normann-Neruda** (1838–1911) and French-born American **Camilla Urso** (1842–1902) achieved recognition equal to the foremost male violinists of their time, such as Scandinavian **Ole Bull**, Frenchman **Henri Vieuxtemps** and Hungarian **Joseph Joachim**. In Urso’s footsteps came American-born **Maud Powell** (1868–1920) and other stalwarts to turn the page into the 20th century. In the hiatus between the two world wars, Viennese emigrée **Erica Morini** (1904–95) and Polish refugee, prodigy **Ida Haendel** stand out in the 1930s and ’40s—the latter still active in her career. It has taken until the late ’80s and ’90s, with the influx of many Asian prodigies, **Midori**, **Akiko Suwanai**, **Anne Akiko Meyers**, **Chee-Yun**, **Tamaki Kawakubo**, and **Sara Chang**—plus Caucasians **Leila Josefowicz** and **Hilary Hahn**—for the ratio of female soloists to start equaling their brother artists.

The cello, a *really* ungracefully-positioned instrument, was not (literally) embraced by women until the late 19th century. From Boston, home base of America’s principal cello teachers, **Lettie Launder**, **Laura Webster**, **Georgia Pray Lasselle** and **Lucy Campbell** made names for themselves, as did Swiss **Elsa Rügger**—although none achieved the international stature of Urso and Powell. Englishwoman **May Mukle** (1880–1936) and Portuguese-born **Guilhermina Suggia** (1885–1950) were well-known in Europe. The all-too-brief star of **Jacqueline DuPré** (1945–87) stands out with **Sharon Robinson**, **Wendy Warner**, **Allison Eldredge**, **Nancy Green**, **Shauna Rolston** and **Alisa Weilerstein** among soloists in today’s cello sphere.

In the woodwind family, as documented in ancient Sumerian, Egyptian and Greek drawings and writings, women were playing flute-like instruments. The early Christian edicts forbidding women to sing in churches also extended to the playing of instruments, which left the legacy to courtesans, female troubadours (*trobairitz*), and peasants. Renaissance enlightenment reclothed with respectability flutes, virginals (early harpsichords), viols, lutes and the like, for ladies of the aristocracy. The esteemed Italian singer-composer **Tarquinia Molza** (1542–1617) organized her own women’s orchestra. The orphan conservatories of 16th century Venice trained all-girl ensembles. Yet in the 19th century, lady flutists were still considered a novelty. Despite this, in France a Madame Rousseau and Mademoiselle Lorenzine Meyer rose to prominence around 1830, and Venetian Maria Bianchini was praised by renowned Austrian critic **Eduard Hanslick** in 1880.

Brass instrumentalists appeared as ladies’ orchestras proliferated. American cornetist **Anna Berger** was said to have “electrified” audiences at the London Promenade Concerts where, in 1889, she played fifty nights in succession. Unique, even for men, was the saxophone on which, in 1909, virtuoso **Elise Hall** became the first amateur ever to play with the Boston Symphony.

Women had long been told they were not strong enough to play heavy instruments, thus double bassists, tubists and percussionists emerged only with the growth of women’s ensembles and orchestras at the turn of the 20th century. In these could be found musicians playing other instruments regarded as “too difficult” for ladies: oboes, clarinets, bassoons, trombones, etc. Today, there are prominent women soloists on most instru-

ments, albeit piano and violin are still in the majority. The orchestral ratio of men to women is still barely five to one, but in this country in the last two decades the union-required “blind audition”—behind a curtain (*when it is adhered to*)—is making opportunities for qualified women professionals somewhat fairer. This cannot yet be said for Europe.

### In Academics and Out in the Business World

The field of **Musicology**, long the eminent domain of men, now has a firm entrenchment of women, especially in the academe. Writers and teachers are enjoying productive careers in universities and conservatories, contributing greatly to our knowledge of women in music.

**Women in the Business of Music**, the fifth enlightening section of this book, once again proves women rising to the top in what they do best—NURTURING! Thus, these ladies are experiencing unprecedented success as agents, orchestra and opera company managers, running recording and publishing companies, plus myriad other positions involved in dealing with *people*.

Not to be forgotten are the women **philanthropists** who have given generously of their own and/or their husbands' wealth, helping to found orchestras, underwrite the building of concert halls, creating outdoor venues and, in general, helping to sustain fine music.

For those keeping their fingers on the pulse of feminism in general, and the vast field of classical music in particular, as this Introduction indicates, we are now ready to delve into this intriguing world, a world which is being uncovered, rediscovered and brought to the forefront where it belongs: The WORLD of *WOMEN in Classical Music!*

### Postscripts

1. Gentle readers are asked to keep in mind that ONE person cannot possibly cover, *uncover* or *discover every woman* involved in classical music . . . thus I offer apologies to anyone missing herein and ask that you enjoy the glimpses into the lives of those gone before us, and the many who came into my life over the last decade to be part of this landmark book!

2. In the course of the eleven years it has taken to complete this book, I have “gone around the world” five times (via phone, fax, e-mail, etc.) in the effort to keep up with the living. There is obviously a limit to this gargantuan exercise and the author asks that you take for granted that composers will keep composing, conductors continue leading orchestras, singers keep singing, instrumentalists keep playing, musicologists continue teaching and writing, and women in the *business* of music will either remain in their positions, or move on . . .

Therefore, in order for me to get this unique tome out into the world, I must now enter “***The End.***”