

THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN IN MUSIC: AN EXPLORATION OF THE WESTERN
CANON

By

Michelle Olivia Jaluvka

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Approved by:

Reeves Shulstad, Ph.D., Thesis Director

Alexandra Sterling-Hellenbrand, Ph.D., Second Reader

Victor Mansure, DMA, Third Reader

Jefford Vahlbusch, Ph.D., Dean, The Honors College

Abstract

Women composers have been systematically excluded from the Western canon of music since its formation. This is partially due to the structure of society at the time of the canon's formation and throughout its early development. Another contributing factor to women's exclusion is the role of academia and how course curricula as well as music textbooks and anthologies have not evolved rapidly enough to accommodate new discoveries of music by women. The visibility of women in the field of music began improving alongside the rising popularity of the feminist movement, but women still face many obstacles. Not only are women generally excluded, but women of intersectional identities who are members of other marginalized groups face a higher level of exclusion and discrimination. The exclusion of black women composers is due to racial discrimination during the time of canon formation and lack of remediation in academia and performance practices to accommodate for the increased scholarship surrounding this topic. The goal of this research is to present the issue of women's lack of presence in the canon, understand the foundations of why this occurs, and inspire change in future performers and teachers of music in order to form a more inclusive field of study and performance.

The canon of Western classical music has been a pervasive idea throughout the teaching of music history and has persisted through today's culture. The presence of this canon governs the standard repertoire that gets performed in the present day, and it heavily influences the subjects present in academic settings. While the presence of a canon is valuable to artistic fields as an important indicator of influential works or composers that contributed to new ways of thinking, it can just as easily inhibit the potential for growth within the field. Music is a cornerstone of many cultures, but culture is ever-changing and, therefore, our canon should be as well. It is important to question the foundation of our views on music in order to help inspire change for the better within music in Western culture.

Before one can begin examining the canon and questioning its contents, it is important to understand the canon to which we are referring. The term is often used to define both "the standard concert repertoire" and "the music that writers of music histories have decided to treat as canonical" (Seaton 185). William Weber would argue with this usage, however, as 'canon' and 'repertoire' are two separate ideas that are often grouped together within the term (Weber 6). While repertoire is used to describe the body of music that is most often performed, studied, and taught, canon has an added emphasis on the cultural influences of these works. The canon adds a layer to repertoire by refining its body of works to those that have "demonstrably functioned as authority or standard for music—and musicking—within Western culture" (Seaton 187). That can mean the composer or piece was a foundation of a new genre or style, or that the composer had new and groundbreaking philosophical ideas about the function of music in general and inspired later composers. In the following, I will first address canon formation and examine the canon through the lens of gender before going into more detail about the lack of visibility of women musicians and

composers in the canon. I will also talk about the role of academia in perpetuating this invisibility, along with active exclusion, of women in the canon. I will then turn to an examination of race, gender and the canon using current theories of intersectionality. Finally, I will offer solutions for how to make the canon more inclusive in the future for performers and pedagogues.

Origins of the Western Musical Canon

The general presumption is that “the modern musical canon emerged in early nineteenth-century Germany... under the impact of Romanticism,” but it has precedents as far back as the beginning of the eighteenth century in other European countries such as England and France (Weber 7). In early Western culture, music played important roles in religious settings. Sacred services and ceremonies tended to use music from the past, as these sacred works were essential to the worship process. This set one of many precedents of the more regular use of older music in modern performances of eighteenth-century musicians. Over time from the seventeenth to eighteenth century, older works were utilized more frequently until, eventually, they became “the highest standard of taste overall” (Weber 10). This occurred specifically with the works of Jean-Baptiste Lully, Arcangelo Corelli, and George Frideric Handel which “persisted in ways conventional to musical life for centuries” (Weber 10).

William Weber provides a concrete occurrence in his research regarding the origins of the canon that proved indisputably that a canon was forming—the growing use of the term ‘ancient music’ in the nineteenth century (Weber 13). The use of this term was groundbreaking because the “works took on an important intellectual identity” and “the shift from repertory to canon had begun” (Weber 13). The pieces that fell under this umbrella term

were the ones that had evolved into the standard repertory of the eighteenth century and, therefore, were seen as the most popular music of the time. Once these ancient works had been set apart from other repertoire with a concrete term, they took on a more elite status than works outside of the group, which is consistent with the exclusionary nature of today's canon.

Once the canon was developed in a more concrete way, patterns began to emerge among its contents. These overarching patterns are related to the different roles that music filled—the canon is not meant to be comprised of the 'best' works, but rather those that had lasting cultural influence. Causality is the process by which the creation of one thing leads to the production of similar things thereafter, and this concept in relation to composers is a strong determining factor in their appointment to the body of music we refer to as the canon (Huttunen 11). Music history teachings of all levels traditionally cover composers such as Wagner or Haydn because of their immense impact on operas or string quartets and symphonies, respectively. These pieces will then receive the most public exposure in performances because of their strong presence in musical pedagogy. Thus, causality is a strong influence on the canonical selection of works or composers.

Western musical pedagogy also played a role in the formation of the canon. Weber writes that it was not "unusual for musicians to keep using works by a prominent composer in their teaching and their own private study for a generation or even two after his death" (Weber 9). This means that, despite the creation of new works during these generations, new pieces would be overlooked in favor of what was becoming standard repertoire and, as a result, these newer works had a significantly lower chance of ever reaching such a level of prominence. While this was present in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century teaching, a similar

phenomenon has cropped up in present-day musicology courses at the university level. The same composers are taught consistently over the years despite the discovery of older works that were previously unknown or new compositions that are published year after year. Much of the academic exclusion nowadays is perpetuated by the use of standardized anthologies that are not structured to be inclusive, but rather are based on the generally accepted information of which composers and genres are important and which are less relevant.

Today's music courses, specifically those at the collegiate undergraduate level, are often found teaching only the established contents of the Western canon. Music appreciation courses and more in-depth music history courses alike tend to rely heavily on anthologies or textbooks that are already in print and in the school libraries for cost reasons and for ease of not adjusting the curriculum (Karpf 33). This practice results in no new composers gaining exposure, and no newly discovered composers of the past gaining long-overdue recognition either. Because future generations of musicians are the ones receiving training based on these less-than-inclusive texts, the exclusionary cycle of the canon becomes cyclical in nature and these students will eventually go on to teach the same or similar curriculum in the future. Without students who are motivated to question the history of the canon and the selection of standard repertoire, there is little hope to reevaluate the canonical works of Western culture. However, there is slow yet steady progress due to the increasing number of researchers questioning the canon in musicology. The result of academia's current perpetuation of canonical ideals results in a high level of exclusion within the demographics of the canon and the formation of counter-canons which, while they are a step in the right direction, are not the ultimate goal in adjusting the canon.

Because of the deeply rooted historical foundations of the Western musical canon, it is safe to say that the overarching demographic of said canon is white, cisgender males. Society at the time of the canon's formation contributed to this phenomenon, but our present culture upholds it which leads to the exclusion of many different minority groups. Women are found few and far between within the canon, and countless minority races are excluded from the standard repertory of the canon. These excluded groups tend to be grouped together with like composers in a concept Lillian Robinson has coined as a "counter-canon" (Citron 103). This is essentially a canon separate from the overall musical canon that is comprised of these different minority groups. For example, a canon of music exclusively by women composers could be referred to as a counter-canon as they are excluded from the primary canon. The same concept could be applied to any marginalized group such as minority races or those in the LGBTQ+ community. While the efforts of researchers who are passionate about providing exposure for these various excluded groups have led to a helpful emergence of these counter-canons, it is only one step out of many necessary in order to adjust the Western canon. The act of 'othering' these groups into their own separate canon ignores the goal of inclusion in the original and, in some cases, can further isolate composers of these different minorities. The eventual goal is to have representation of all varieties of composers within the Western canon, and there are many researchers who are actively seeking ways to achieve further progress toward this goal.

There are many different minority groups that are excluded from the canon who do not fall under the traditional demographic, but it would be incredibly difficult to do each group justice within this thesis if each were to be written about individually. For this reason, the focus of this thesis will be primarily on two groups of people who are not currently

receiving adequate recognition in the modern musical canon. Women composers have been consistently marginalized within the canon, but the conversation should be taken a step further. Women of varying racial identities have different levels of privilege and, therefore, have a different experience from white women in their struggle to become part of the canon. This form of approach is classified as intersectional because it will examine the intersection between gender and race of black women composers. In examining the reasons for their exclusion, the accomplishments of composers who stem from these identities, and the efforts of those working to include them in the canon, the goal is to contribute toward a more inclusive musical community on a larger scale.

Gender and the Canon

Women have been collectively treated as inferior to men and, as such, have received fewer professional opportunities. This is no different in the field of music and specifically in composition, and there are many occurrences since the Middle Ages which lead to the inference that women composers were treated unequally in comparison with their male counterparts. Gender was not the only determining factor of a woman's experience, however, as social class and race played large roles as well, but the root of many shared experiences among women in history was gender-based discrimination. The primary goals for young women of the Medieval period, specifically mid-teens, were to either get married and focus on motherhood and being a suitable spouse or to enter a convent (Pendle 59). Because these foci were the foundation of many of these women's lives, they were not often given the opportunity to pursue further education or training in anything including music. The most training women would receive in music would be if they were of noble status either through birth or marriage and needed to fulfill their duty to their class status by possessing

proficiency on an instrument (Pendle). Outside of birth into a noble family or marriage, “creative musicianship for women would depend upon... monastic life” as the Catholic faith was central to many European cultures at the time of the canon’s formation (Borroff 29). This male-centered culture persisted through following musical eras from Renaissance through Romantic and into the 20th century and beyond, and there are still issues to this day with achieving equal representation of works by women in performances and course curricula.

Historical Precedents of Exclusion

During the Medieval period, much of what is known about women in music is primarily speculation. Many pieces from this period are either anonymous or unknown leaving the possibility wide open of their composer being a woman. The most concrete evidence we have to prove women’s involvement in composition during this time period, however, is their role in religion, specifically in the Catholic church. Both men and women were composing religious works for their respective religious monasteries of monks and nuns. There is very little evidence of known names of these women composers, but one of them, Hildegarde von Bingen, has made her way into many music history classrooms despite the obstacles that have presented themselves over many years. She was a prolific composer in her religious community and was also a Christian visionary, writer, and philosopher (Bent). While women composers do not receive equivalent teaching exposure or performance numbers as their male counterparts of the time, there were definitive instances of women composing for their abbesses and, therefore, they should have a place in Medieval curricula to provide a full scope of musical repertoire at the time.

Moving forward, women did not progress significantly in recognition for musical involvement in the Renaissance period as there is still not much extant knowledge about them as composers. The social structure in Europe set women back due to their exclusion from educational opportunities which were becoming more prominent and necessary for successful musicians (Watkins 4). Women could not gain adequate musical experience or exposure as they “yielded their educational equality when they left the monastery or the castle” (Borroff 29). Aristocratic women were encouraged to have performance skills as part of the cultural development of women’s roles in society, but were adamantly discouraged from composing or any educationally-based facet of the field. In early modern Europe as a whole, women of the upper class who were encouraged to be proficient in an instrument were still “expected to limit their music making to home or to court” (Pendle 61). Much of this stems from the presence of monarchies in European countries in which men were in charge and women were used to serve and entertain, but these notions were pervasive through other countries due to this influential foundation as well.

Following the Renaissance period, women in the Baroque and Classical periods had opportunities to participate “in most of the major developments” not only in performance but in composition as well (Pendle 97). The rise of opera’s popularity as a genre did present many more performance opportunities for gifted female vocalists in this period. In addition to performance opportunities, women were becoming increasingly involved with composition in a manner that was more widely accepted by society. While particular women of higher classes were exposed to more training than musical periods prior with regards to composition, they still were not encouraged to publicize their works outside of religious confines (Pendle). There are two specific examples of women composers from the Baroque

period, one being Elizabeth Claude-Jacquet de la Guerre, who frequently appears in music history curriculum and anthologies. She was notably recognized for her suites of dance movements as well as being the first French woman composer to have an opera performed (Pendle 118). Another example who is included in the Norton Anthology is Barbara Strozzi who was both a prolific secular and sacred composer, and was a virtuosic vocalist although a moderately sheltered performer overall (Pendle 105). They are exceptions because their reputations as composers have lasted through to today in musicology and because they were so successful in their lifetimes. While they were not the only successful women of the Baroque era, they are the ones most often discussed in standard college music history courses. In the Classical period, it is not hard to find examples of prodigious women musicians who were soon forgotten as their efforts were not as publicly supported as the men surrounding them. One of these composers is Marianna von Martines, a highly skilled harpsichordist and pianist in addition to being an extremely involved sacred music composer. She was so talented as a performer that “Mozart probably wrote his Piano Concerto in D major (K. 175) for her to perform,” and yet she is not often spoken about in the classroom (Pendle 133). Overall, the biggest difference in these musical periods is that there were fewer restrictions overall on women in composition, although the societal attitude remained, and there was an increase in both quantity and quality of women performers, specifically vocalists in public concerts and operas.

Because of the precedents set by society in these time periods, there were very few ways in which women could gain musical recognition as composers and even fewer instances of being recognized purely for their talent rather than for outside societal factors. The act of being recognized for religious compositions was less common yet still visible through certain

composers in scattered areas, but what became a fairly common scenario of women who gained recognition was that they were born into families with successful male musicians or families who had otherwise higher levels of societal privilege (Borroff 29). A prime example of a woman who was only allowed moderate success due to the presence of a successful male musician in the family is Fanny Mendelssohn with her brother, Felix Mendelssohn. She was a prodigious composer, but did not get nearly as much attention from the general public as her brother. Because of this, she was led to publish some of her Lieder as well as other works under her brother's name in order for them to gain recognition through performance (Green 2). The Mendelssohns were part of a large group of Romantic Era composers, and certainly not the only pair in which a woman had to lean on a man for assistance getting ahead.

Another composer and performer who was overshadowed by a man despite prodigious talent is Clara Schumann. She was "considered the peer of such keyboard giants as Liszt" and was "dubbed Europe's 'Queen of the Piano'" due to her piano abilities (Reich). She eventually married Robert Schumann who was a well-respected composer, and Clara Schumann often performed his works in concert because he did not perform himself (Reich). Although Clara's works were highly respected by audiences and critics, her husband's "creative work took priority over hers" (Reich). Despite her talents, "she ceased composing after Robert's death" and performed and taught in its place in order to support her family as the woman of the household and the sole living parental figure (Reich). This is another example of a woman's career, while successful in comparison to some of her contemporaries, being dictated largely by the needs of a man who was prominent in the field as well. In general, women were primarily desired to be performers rather than composers as demonstrated by Clara Schumann's experiences. This was a common theme that emerged throughout history,

and it was not until recently that significant strides were made. Even with these improvements, however, women are still lagging drastically behind their male counterparts.

Exclusion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

Our world has developed exponentially with regards to the roles of women in society since the rise of feminist movements. With the emergence of each new wave of feminism, onlookers have seen heavy resistance gradually dwindle to indifference and, eventually, active support of the causes of countless feminist rallies and campaigns. Feminism as a whole is more widely-supported today than it has been throughout much of its development as many of its beliefs have become more commonplace in today's culture, particularly in the United States of America (U.S.A.). Despite this cultural progress, however, the realm of music is still lagging behind the results of feminist movements that are present in other aspects of the U.S.A. today.

Feminism as a term defines "a range of social movements and theories that have discrimination on the basis of gender as their key concern," but there are different efforts within the umbrella term that came about during different periods of history that are referred to as 'waves' (Piller 74). While some feminist scholars break these time periods into additional segments to include fourth and fifth waves, most agree on three main waves of feminism. The first wave came to light in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth- centuries, the second in the 1960's-1980's, and the third in 1980's-1990's (David ix). The main efforts of the first wave were women's suffrage that was "finally achieved by the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920" (Easton 99). The second wave revolved mostly around civil rights and women's rights with "greater equality in education, the workplace, and the home" at its center (Easton 99). The final large wave of feminism was the third wave in which a more

intersectional approach was taken to the movement to remedy the “lack of attention to race, class, religion, and other markers of difference between women” that was present in the first two waves (Easton 99). It was during the third wave of feminism that Susan C. Cook’s writing spurred on important progress in the musicological world toward enhanced scholarship regarding women in music.

As Rodger explains, one of the key points in the rise of gender study’s presence in the field of musicology came from “an important early contribution... written by Susan C. Cook (1989)” (Rodger 214). Cook’s writing outlines an American Musicological Society (AMS) session in 1988 which “initiated a lively discussion that continued through publications in the 1990’s” and continued to be a prominent theme throughout later musicological research and pedagogy (Rodger 215). This session was part of the first AMS conference to call for proposals of research related to gender studies and was certainly a turning point in the foci of musicology in research and pedagogy. The session that served as the subject of Cook’s essay had a long-lasting impact and the panel was comprised of James Briscoe, Susan McClary, and Elizabeth Wood with Susan Cook as the chair. All three of these panelists and the chairwoman had done extensive research in this field and brought unique perspectives on various facets of the ‘women in music’ subject to the session. Briscoe focused primarily on making the inclusion of women musicians in music history courses a more mainstream occurrence. He presented a model of how to successfully integrate women into preexisting history course curricula which was extremely valuable as it was not previously an effort at the forefront of musicology work. Wood centered her comments around feminist pedagogy as well, but focused more on challenging the very basic preconceptions of the terms ‘women’ and ‘music’ and how they are understood in the realm of music pedagogy. She also took an

intersectional approach to her comments including discussing the influence of race and class on women's experiences which was not a prominent piece of the puzzle at that time.

McClary used her platform to focus on the state of feminist criticism in general and then followed those thoughts with how they impacted the study and teaching of music. Cook then concluded the panel with her own perspective on incorporating feminist pedagogy into her own teaching. The most poignant comment she presented, however, was her discussion of the difficulty of being "a woman in an institution designed by and for men" (Cook 97). This session sparked pervasive conversations in musicology about how to incorporate women further into pedagogical efforts, but also broadened to encapsulate including women in performance repertoire as well. Despite some people's best efforts, however, some methods of including women in the male-dominated canon are not as beneficial overall as people may hope.

A more prominent issue today with considering works by women is not so much that they exist as they definitely receive more publicity than in years past, but rather in how we approach incorporating them into the pre-established concert and educational repertoire. Following the earlier discussion of counter-canon in which a marginalized group is "othered" in efforts to bring recognition to their works, the "add and stir" method coined by Karen Pendle is warned against for similar reasons (Citron 210). This method of incorporation essentially adds works by women to add to the number of works in the canon and increase the frequency of works by women instead of questioning the reasoning behind why they were not present in the canon prior to their addition and why their work is important now. The issue stemming from this method of visibility for women composers is one of the overarching arguments surrounding the lack of women in the canon. This

argument is that male composers, specifically white men, are given extensive time in the classroom and full-length performances whereas while one might play a piece by a woman either in performance or in the classroom, they are not given the same depth of attention. They are essentially treated as a token woman composer rather than an individual of worth with unique musical contributions. Another more current issue is that, if women's works are more heavily performed, it tends to be under the umbrella of an entirely different set of repertoires instead of efforts of incorporation being made in the first place.

The concept of counter-canons will continue to dominate the conversation as that is the primary state that music by women composers and any minority composer is in currently. Rather than incorporating women's works into the classroom and performances in a similar way as musicians treat works by men, they are isolated as a separate concept completely. This practice presents itself in instances such as concerts programming solely works by women and classes that are solely focused on women composers or musicians. Gillian M. Rodger touches on this concept by discussing the progress of the younger generation not seeing "the point of separate classes in which these issues are discussed" and rather desiring "truly intersectional music history" in its place (Rodger 221). While the younger generation demands more inclusive and intersectional approaches to works by women, an issue that arises is whether those in older generations who have developed the outlines for both performance and educational expectations will move away from the standard white male composers. Inclusion of women musicians in these classes or performances is not necessarily a difficult task, but it is one that is uncomfortable for those who have not previously taught in this way. It is also a topic that requires a delicate approach so as not to be detrimental to the cause of intersectional music, but rather supporting the gradual inclusion of marginalized

groups as normal in the umbrella of the Western canon. While there is a marked lack of music by women in both performances and the classroom, an issue unique to the academic side of exclusion is the exclusion of women in textbooks and anthologies.

The Role of Academia

The world of academia is a powerful force to promote fundamental change in the thought processes behind concepts such as the musical canon, but in order for this potential influence to take shape, academic institutions must prioritize curricular reform within their courses. As Juanita Karpf points out, “any reworking of classroom materials costs money and must incorporate a redefinition of the canon,” which complicates the feasibility of accomplishing this goal (33). Regardless, anthology and textbook modifications cannot keep up with current musicology research. In addition, some schools have not spent the money to purchase updated versions of said texts—even these updated versions, however, are still lacking severely in equal representation of various groups and instead lean toward incorporating one or two token names from any given minority classification.

Karpf’s writing went on to detail a study she conducted to see the prominence of women composers in textbooks and anthologies. Overall, “fifty-eight percent of the texts mention fewer than ten women musicians” out of about nineteen textbooks surveyed (Karpf 34). She took frequency a step further, though, and went on to look into the context in which they were mentioned. Within her study, approximately only seven of the textbooks listed in her analysis table seemed to provide more than a sentence or so on women musicians that referred to them as more than performers or relatives and spouses of other famous musicians (Karpf 38-40). Vicki Baker writes about a similar survey conducted by Judith Lang Zaimont that reviewed forty-seven texts, and her results were quite similar. “Twenty-nine mention two

[women composers], one, or none,” and the percentage of texts that mention none is twenty-one out of forty-seven, or forty-five percent (Baker 7). It is evident that there is a severe lack of representation of women in music even with the development of musicological research on the subject, and this is mirrored in the lack of representation of women composers of color as well.

While all of the research surrounding the general foundations of the roles of women in music are extremely beneficial to expanding the realm of musicological research, it is not as inclusive as it could be. As Elizabeth Wood touched on in her 1988 AMS session commentary, women have more identities than solely their gender. Intersectionality is important to consider when regarding efforts toward furthering inclusivity in any given field, and music is certainly no exception. Race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity are just some of the countless identities that can be applied to any given individual. All of these identities work together in individuals to create unique identities, or intersect as the term implies. However, in order to adequately research and analyze an example of an intersectional struggle in musicology, my research will focus only on race in the analysis that follows.

An Introduction to Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a concept used to discuss theories of identity in various facets of people's lives. The term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw and has “had a long-standing interest in one particular intersection: the intersection of race and gender” (Nash 2). This is particularly prominent in studies of women and African-Americans and how people who share these identities experience their lives. Many of the foundations of intersectionality came from black feminist advocates who felt “that black women's interests were not represented in either black movements or women's movements in the United States”

(Gopaldas 90). In intersectional discussions now, the concept has evolved to encompass significantly more marginalized identities such as age, education, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and others similar to these concepts (Gopaldas 91). It is important to note this inclusivity of the term itself as its efforts are based in cultural inclusivity of people who share multiple identities who are discriminated against, but for the purpose of this paper the intersection between race and gender as it relates to black women will be explored further.

Race, Gender, and the Canon

Gender disparities are present within the Western musical canon as presented earlier, but racial disparities present themselves as well. Eurocentric composers are the ones most often mentioned, and this is evident even when looking at the few women that did receive recognition in textbooks. Lucius R. Wyatt writes that “the key to understanding American music is understanding black American traditions in music” (Wyatt 241). There are unique advantages to working toward a higher overall rate of inclusion of black composers in music if efforts are made in a beneficial way for the group as a whole. The music of African-American composers is “often found to include musical elements that are genuinely of American origin” (Wyatt 241). This has to do with the many blues and jazz influences that can be found in music of this origin that are trademarks of both the black experience and American music as a whole. One particular composer, William Grant Still, included blues elements in his works, his *Afro-American Symphony* for example, which gives it a distinct American sound, and yet this work is not often included in music history studies or performances (Wyatt 241). Black composers certainly face a stark lack of recognition across the board when compared to the frequency of discussion and performance of their European counterparts, but black women in music fill a unique role that is drastically underrepresented.

Black women shared challenges with women of the Medieval and Renaissance periods as they did not have easy access to formal training unless they were either extremely lucky or highly skilled. Until the twentieth century, there were only four ways in which an Afro-American woman could receive musical training: “through private instruction in metropolitan centers,... through private instruction abroad,... through instruction at a few American conservatories of music after the 1860s, and... through instruction at private Negro land-grant colleges” (Wright 2). There were many societal obstacles in place that kept women from success such as where they were living and their financial status, but some women did find success despite these odds. Overall, however, it was not until at least the 1860’s that black women slowly began to be accepted into educational institutions for music. These were mainly conservatories in the North, but the land-grant colleges in the South provided increasingly valuable education as well. One of these colleges in particular, Fisk University, provided excellent music education and was known for its vocal ensemble, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, who were known primarily for their performances of spirituals (Walker-Hill 3). While black women did begin to receive more opportunities as time went on, it took them significantly longer than white women to progress in the field and the lost time results in little being known about the music of many black women composers without in-depth research.

Due to the distinct efforts to inhibit African-American women from moving forward and upward in their musical endeavors, it takes a marked increase in effort to discover their works and their individual histories when compared with women of higher privilege, namely white women composers. Despite what is typically presented in music history books and anthologies, “black women composers have been active in the United States since at least the

mid-nineteenth century, and several have gained national and international recognition during their lifetimes” (Walker-Hill 1). The several that receive such recognition are certainly not in the majority, but they are indeed the lucky individuals of their intersectional identity community. African-Americana as a whole in the early 1900’s would tend to write in similar styles to those popular in current classical music, but negative “remarks were typical of American reviewers at the time who generally censured black composers for writing in European classical forms” (Walker-Hill 2). This was largely due to the active efforts to ostracize African-Americans from the activities of white people in the U.S.A. in a time when racial tensions were high. It was not until the 1920’s and 30’s where composers drawing from the European symphonic form were met with favorable reviews, including William Grant Still and Florence Price (Walker-Hill 2). These are two names that have become prominent in musicology overall, but both certainly still faced obstacles in their journey to receive such positive recognition. In addition to these two composers, Margaret Bonds has emerged as a notable face of black women composers in the realm of music history.

Florence Price was “the first black woman composer to gain widespread recognition” which is no small feat given the challenges discussed prior (Walker-Hill 3). She grew up in Arkansas alongside William Grant Still which is an interesting connection between two of the most prominent African-American composers in Western repertoire (Jackson 33). While she spent her childhood in Little Rock, she moved from Arkansas to Chicago to avoid racial tensions and threats of Ku Klux Klan violence, something which was highly prevalent during her lifetime. She spent the rest of her time in Chicago where many black composers flourished, and she was no exception. Her music was received well, in part perhaps because she composed in many genres in a late Romantic style which was familiar to those used to

Eurocentric music. She also followed the advice of Antonin Dvořák to use native influences in her works such as “idiomatic Negro rhythms and melodic intervals” which gives her music a distinct American and, specifically, African-American sound (Walker-Hill 3). Her composition student, Margaret Bonds, also made great strides with regards to her level of musical recognition. Bonds’ mother’s home was actually a haven for black artists and musicians which included Florence Price (Jackson). Margaret Bonds began as an organist and was a concert pianist in addition to her compositional career later in life. Her works were composed in “a fusion of classical techniques, jazz and popular idioms” (Walker-Hill 3). She also made sure to include in her works “her strong sense of ethnic identity in their use of spiritual materials, jazz harmonies and social themes” which served as activist efforts for black composers as a whole (Jackson). These are only two of many talented black women composers, but wonderful examples of women who have flourished under the intense challenges placed upon women of color in a Eurocentric field. They are lucky enough to be included in select pedagogical texts, but there are still many black composers who are not as lucky, and some texts that do not recognize them in the first place.

The efforts to include music by white women in music pedagogy are met with high resistance already, but there is a unique set of challenges presented when trying to include women of intersectional backgrounds in the classroom. The work it takes to revise a curriculum takes time and money that many institutions either are not able to or do not want to dedicate. It is hard to discover information on many of the pieces and composers due to how long the composers were silenced, and it takes time to figure out how to incorporate them into lesson plans without removing the classics of the canon, namely white male composers. Another limitation is the number of courses any given music program is provided

for their music history track. While some faculty have the best intentions in their efforts to make their classrooms more inclusive, it is “impossible in [a] very full program that remains committed to an eight-semester baccalaureate degree program” as many music degrees are (Wilkinson 262). When additional classes or a revised curriculum are not considered or do not appear to be options, the curators of the courses are faced with the challenge of whether to further perpetuate the exclusive canon in favor of the academic precedents or to expend excess resources on revising it as a whole. While an increasing number of faculty and students are in favor of a more inclusive curriculum and canon as a whole, “publishers seem reluctant to develop alternatives based upon multicultural perspectives” in anthologies (Wilkinson 263). This reluctance places great limitations on the work of committed faculty who might wish to create a generalized inclusive curriculum but do not have a standardized diverse anthology or text to provide the resources for the class.

As music history courses are a large part of the training of future music educators and performers, teachers of music history have arguably one of the most active roles in how the canon will be treated in future performances and classrooms. This means it is important to make strong efforts of inclusivity as we live in an ever-changing and growing society in which social justice is at the forefront. This inclusion seems to disappear when the Western Eurocentric canon is involved. Resources for improvement are not scarce, but the willingness to change the historical precedents of curriculum and performance repertoire is. When those involved in the musical field say they strive for a diverse musical community, a large component of “cultural diversity is that no single tradition epitomizes music and therefore that contemporary culture cannot be defined with reverence to just one tradition” (Wilkinson 267). Without musicians and historians who possess the willingness to not only include

works by those of marginalized identities, but to delve into their contextual past as a whole in order to teach the foundations of their exclusion and aim to make efforts toward reducing it, music as a field cannot evolve. In the case of black women composers, “any perspective that that ignores the social context in which African and African-American musics have been created and performed automatically distorts the truth about both” and this goes for other groups as well (Wilkinson 265). Improvements have certainly been gradually made over the years, but there are still undoubtedly needs for further efforts in the inclusion of not only music by women but that of black women composers in the Western canon.

Personal Experience

As an active musician of eleven years and counting, I have encountered a wide array of music over the course of my time playing the clarinet. Despite beginning serious musical involvement in sixth grade, however, I did not encounter music by a woman until my freshman year of college when the Appalachian Symphony Orchestra at Appalachian State University performed *Blue Cathedral* composed by Jennifer Higdon. An important point to note is that the conductor, Dr. Mélisse Brunet, is a woman and women who are fortunate enough to have positions such as this are essential in re-directing the canon. Following this performance, I began to slowly be exposed to the concept of women in music history as we learned about Hildegard von Bingen in Music History I as well as other women in following courses such as Elizabeth Claude-Jacquet de la Guerre, Fanny Mendelssohn, Clara Schumann, and, more recently, Joan Tower. I did not play a work by an African-American composer until my third year of college when the orchestra performed *Danse Nègre* by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, and, while this was great for publicizing a composer of color, it still did not address the need for performances of intersectional composers such as black

women in music. These experiences were the first times that I became astutely aware of the lack of women in common historical study as my collegiate professors and classmates were more socially aware of the discrepancy than teachers and students in my prior institutions. My clarinet professor for the first three years of my undergraduate program, Dr. Andrea Cheeseman, was an extremely passionate advocate for the publicization of music by women and was the first mentor to introduce me to the possibility of including repertoire by women in my individual performance work. This sparked my own interest in exploring the role of gender in music in a general sense which, eventually, led to me pursuing this research in a more specific and inclusive manner.

Moving Forward

All of this information has been presented in order to showcase the apparent systematic issue of exclusion of women and, specifically, black women in music, but without using this information to promote change, the research is all in vain. There are many ways musicians and consumers of music can contribute to the efforts of diversifying the canon and giving publicity to composers of marginalized groups. The proposed courses of action for all consumers of music will be presented first and be followed by ways active musicians can involve themselves in efforts of diversity and intersectionality within the field.

Anyone who interacts with ‘classical’ music in general can have an extraordinary impact on what becomes mainstream and higher in audience demand. Those who appreciate music but may not be actively involved with it on a daily basis can use their voices to promote change, especially if their voice comes from a point of privilege. Anyone who is willing and able to speak out for change in the field should do so, but those who come from a privileged background should be inclined to use that privilege to provide a platform for those

with diverse backgrounds who are not as lucky in the Western culture of the past and present. This can be done through actively questioning the foundations of how people as a whole interact with music as they move throughout their daily lives. If people outwardly question why certain canonical pieces or composers are canonical in the first place, it serves as a foundation to promote change as it will become more culturally accepted to question the foundations of the canon. This change can be accomplished through starting discussions about concert programs regarding the diversity of repertoire, pushing for musical diversity on social media platforms, and actively purchasing and listening to music of non-canonical composers in order to promote their works. Those are more general steps that can be taken for change in music, but there are more specific things that active musicians can do as well in order to apply the information from this research to their careers.

There are many different facets of musicianship with which people engage in their careers, and there are ways to incorporate and promote diversity in each of them. In the field of music performance, it is extremely important to look at repertoire choices and include a balanced number of canonical and non-canonical, diverse repertoire in order to normalize the inclusion of those works with works of the canon. In addition to the performance of works by minority composers, it is beneficial to provide program notes or biographical information on the piece and composer as non-canonical works are less likely to be widely known and this will help contextualize under-performed music. Music educators have arguably one of the largest platforms to promote change through their teaching and repertoire selections for young musicians. If teachers seek to incorporate at least one non-standard work in each concert cycle, it gradually exposes students to diverse music compared to what they would typically be performing from the canon. These efforts also open up the possibility to teach

about the history of the composer and the work in class while studying the piece in order to contextualize the music, and this could be expanded to a short lesson each week on a diverse composer in order to broaden the students' knowledge of non-canonical musicians. In the field of music therapy, music from diverse backgrounds could be incorporated into the various experiences they organize in order to appeal to clients from similarly diverse backgrounds. Music industry personnel may strive to represent clients whose music is typically under-recognized or under-performed and may also seek to provide strong public relations information in order to increase the chances of their music being received by a large audience. In addition to these field-specific proposals, any musician can attend conferences with sessions regarding diversity in order to learn more about the subject and gain information on other researchers' calls to action. They can also participate in research on diversity-related topics that they are passionate about and apply to present at said conferences. In addition, they can incorporate their own research into their daily work in the field of music in order to normalize efforts for increased diversity in music.

These suggestions are certainly not the only ways that musicians can be actively involved in fighting for greater diversity in the Western canon, but they are achievable starting points for those that may be questioning how to begin their involvement. The process of fighting for wider inclusion of marginalized groups, specifically women and black women composers, in the canon and the standard repertoire alike is not a one-step process in the slightest. It will take a significant amount of time to normalize the inclusion of works by marginalized composers and incorporate their music into the canon, but this cannot happen without each musician taking small individual steps to initiate change. The first step for everyone, however, is to speak up about the subject at hand and start conversations

surrounding this research. With active and consistent conversations in place, the subject of diversity in music can become normalized and people can use these conversations as platforms for more concrete activist efforts. The music of women is important to the field as a whole, and in a world that already silences women in their day-to-day lives, musicians have the opportunity to provide them a voice through musical performance if they are willing to think outside of the canon.

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