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Spring 1996

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Clockwise from left: Mariah Carey, Fanny Mendelssohn, Madonna, Amy Marcy Beach, Melissa Etheridge and Sheryl Crow

Feminist Scholarship Review



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Feminist Scholarship Review

is a project of the Trinity College Women's Center

Letter From the Editor

Special Thanks

Trinity College Library: Reviewed Sources

Interview with Helen Wassell

Trinity College Library: Additional Sources

To the Readers of the Feminist Scholarship Review:

Over the years, FSR has focused on topics which contain vast amounts of information: Women and Science, Women and Religion, Feminist Modes of Research and now, Women and Music. In each FSR, we meant to concentrate on resources on the Trinity campus which bore upon the topic at hand, but in no way meant for this to be an exhaustive treatment. In fact, I think we imagined potentially revisiting each of these topics in a future issue of FSR, when new information, resources or points of view surfaced. As we began to put together the current issue on Women and Music, we found more than our usual share of potential contributions and have decided to expand our usual format. What this means is that we will have two issues of FSR devoted to the topic of Women and Music: one in the spring and a second to follow in the fall.

The issue you are holding in your hands will be recognizable in format. We review articles in journals found in our library or Women's Center, include student reviews and highlight other library sources to suggest general readings. In the upcoming Fall 1996 issue on the same topic, we will expand our notion of the term 'resources' to include some of the people on campus with special expertise and knowledge who are willing to contribute their own writings to FSR. We may also include resources that are available in places other than Trinity for those interested in additional investigation on specific topics. We have been fortunate in the past to have faculty contributions to FSR, and we hope to continue to do so. In the upcoming issue, we will feature that resource.

We hope you enjoy your reading of Women and Music, Part I. We're aiming for a great sequel, as well. Watch for Part II in the Fall.

--Deborah Rose O'Neal

In Honor of Linda McKinney

We would like to take this space and time to honor Linda McKinney who is leaving Trinity College at the end of this semester. Since the very first issue of FSR, Linda has been a faithful supporter and contributor to this journal. Linda was a willing participant in what was, in the Fall of 1991, a new and rough-hewn endeavor and has remained a constant resource throughout all of FSR's changes. Whether we needed suggestions for pictures to appear on the cover of FSR, quotations to appear on the final page or articles and information to include in the pages in between, Linda was there for us, as a wholly reliable and genuinely creative resource and friend.

Although we wish her well in her new endeavors, many members of the Trinity community will miss Linda McKinney's presence on campus. Throughout the years, Linda has contributed in many ways to Trinity. Besides contributing to FSR, Linda also worked with the Women's Center to create a visual display about remarkable Connecticut women for Women's History Month. She is well known by all as a helpful and resourceful member of the Reference Department of the Library. Her knowledge of and enthusiasm for her work benefitted both faculty and students alike. Whether training a faculty member on the new computer system or assisting in the research of a difficult topic, Linda treated each individual with respect, patience and kindness. Both her knowledge and her demeanor will be missed.

--Diane Martell

--Deborah O'Neal

Musical Quarterly, 77 (Winter '93) pp. 727-48.

John E. Toews, "Memory and Gender in the Remaking of Fanny Mendelssohn's Musical Identity: The Chorale in *Das Jahr*."

While Marcia Citron, in the article previously reviewed, provides documentation of Fanny Mendelssohn's personal journey through the very personal medium of her letters, John Toews provides the reader with a grand cultural, political and religious context in which to understand the journey of this talented composer. Toews' article begins with reference to a twelve piece song cycle, *Das Jahr* (The Year), composed by Fanny as a retrospective of her 1839-40 Italian tour. He refers specifically to the use of Bach-style arrangements of Lutheran chorales, three of which appear in the cycle. These chorales, Toews says, can be used as proof of Fanny's re-affirmation of her North German Protestant cultural tradition.

Das Jahr is seen as a political statement when set in the context of the Mendelssohn family background which included an intergenerational debate on several issues. Though the family came from a Jewish cultural heritage, all eventually converted to Christianity. The presence of some members of the extended family who had converted to Catholicism provided a source of tension with the rest of the family who had converted to Protestantism. Though the philosophical framework of the family centered around ecumenical ethical Protestantism, even within their Protestantism, the debate flared. Fanny's parents preferred the music of Haydn which spoke to them of a "natural religion," while the children, Fanny and Felix, responded to the more structured music of Bach which emphasized "human limitation and divine revelation." (p.732). These musical preferences reflected a deeper polarity in generational thinking concerning the nature of God immanent as opposed to God transcendent. Toews' view is that Fanny carried forward the debate through her composition of *Das Jahr* and made a clear personal statement therein.

While Toews' thesis is meant to provide the backbone of this piece, there is a wealth of information on broader subjects which fleshes out the piece and actually gives it its rather significant muscle. Topics such as the musical philosophy of Carl Zelter, the ethical humanist tradition of Abraham Mendelssohn, the application of these contexts to both Fanny's and Felix's compositions and the events of Fanny's life and personal development are explored in some depth. In fact, a careful reading of this article with particular reference to Fanny's father's thinking on the subject of morality and the nature of social institutions will yield a wider understanding of his insistence on his daughter's preeminent role as wife, mother and homemaker over musician and published composer.

Toews' article is complex and wide-ranging in subject matter. Though nominally focused on *Das Jahr*, this article does *not* illuminate that composition musically, but rather returns to reiterate its cultural and personal implications for its composer. Readers who are looking for a thorough musical analysis of *Das Jahr* will be disappointed. However, the article itself is far from disappointing. It is a thorough exploration of a fascinating, well-connected and well-known family and its larger historical context. A reader who is satisfied with such a reward and who is willing to commit some time to the reading, will find much valuable information here, written in a clear and intelligent style.

--Deborah Rose O'Neal

Current Musicology no. 37/38 (1984) pp. 9-17

Marcia J. Citron, "Felix Mendelssohn's Influence on Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel as a Professional Composer"

It is difficult to write about the familial and cultural suppression of Fanny Mendelssohn's musical compositions without allowing a judgmental tone to seep in between words of explanation and description. In this article, however, Marion J. Citron is able to present in an informative yet gentle style, a compassionate portrait of Fanny's complex familial relationships as shown in personal letters exchanged over two decades. These relationships, Citron implies, comprise the source of Fanny's unwillingness to enter the world of publishing.

"At age forty," Fanny wrote, "I am afraid of my brother as I was at fourteen of Father." (p. 11). If Felix indeed had taken over his father's role in Fanny's life, he had heavy, oppressive boots to fill. "Music will perhaps become [Felix's] profession," wrote Abraham Mendelssohn to his sixteen year old daughter, "while for you it can and must only be an ornament, never the root of your being and doing...only what is truly feminine is an ornament to your sex." Most subtle and perhaps most damaging is her father's praise in that it takes this form: "...your very joy at the praise [Felix] earns proves that you might, in his place, have merited equal approval." (p.10).

With such a legacy to overcome, it is not surprising that Fanny showed an aversion to publishing her work. Congruent with the mores of her time, Fanny could compose, and did so prolifically, but could not publish what she had created, since that would have constituted a career in music rather than merely exercising a talent. Fanny's clear dependence on her brother's opinion and Felix's opposition to her embarking on a musical career completed the obstruction begun with her father--an obstruction that proved insurmountable through much of Fanny's life.

The exact role of Fanny's well-known brother, Felix, in her failure to publish in her lifetime more than seven of her four hundred compositions has been interpreted in a variety of more and less sympathetic ways. John Toews (article review following) characterizes Felix as quickly assuming the patriarchal position after Abraham's death. "He refused to encourage her to publish her work and severely criticized those of her compositional efforts that extended beyond the appropriate domestic genres." (p.741, article following). Citron has, perhaps, the more complex view. She includes letters from Fanny to Felix which clarify her deep dependence on her brother's opinion, even over that of her husband who did encourage her to publish. Citron states that "theirs was a mutually affectionate relationship" and adopts the subtle view that, while Felix stopped short of *advising* her to publish, he did support her work, not only with positive words, but also by the kind of rigorous criticism which indicates sincere

acknowledgement and respect. Still, Fanny could not move ahead with a career in music until near the end of her life.

The marvel of Citron's article is that this author gently leads the reader to an important realization about Fanny Mendelssohn. The revelation which comes as a warming illumination that grows over the course of the reading is stunningly applicable to everyone's personal evolution. One comes to understand that Fanny's journey to public recognition through publishing is a personal journey that she must make on her own, regardless of others' responses. Through Fanny's letters and Citron's accessibly written framing of those letters in this article, the reader can see Fanny's careful steps along the way to self-approval and respect.

--Deborah Rose O'Neal

African American Review vol. 28 (Summer 1994) pp. 245-257

Robin Roberts, "Ladies First": Queen Latifah's Afrocentric, Feminist Music Video."

Female rap artists have been ignored by both pop culture theorists and feminists since the rise of rap music in the 1980's. Robin Roberts points this out and discusses an example of the feminism that exists in the rap music industry today in his article, "Ladies First". Roberts focuses on Queen Latifah's popular video, but makes reference to other female rappers as well such as Yo Yo, MC Lyte, and Salt n Pepa.

Intellectual discourse on the subject of women in rap music has consisted of critiquing the way women are portrayed as sexual objects in a majority of rap music and videos. However, rarely are the women who defy this message discussed. Roberts argues, however, that Queen Latifah's video, 'Ladies First', will no longer allow this message to be ignored.

Latifah's video defies all preconceived notions of sexism in the rap music industry. Her music links racism and sexism and points out the ways that oppression is interdependent. Roberts discusses how strong her message is in both lyrics and appearance. During portions of her video, she raps about sexism while images of South Africa blaze on the screen. She also celebrates women's important role in African American history through showing pictures of feminists such as Sojourner Truth and Angela Davis. Her dress is also indicative of her message. Throughout her video, she wears Afrocentric dress as well as military garb to project power.

Although Roberts ignores the simple fact that Queen Latifah who, by making it in a sexist music industry, has already projected power and defied the sexual stereotype, his points are accurate ones. In dealing with the general public and the MTV generation who extract their conceptions of sexuality and race consciousness from they images they see, Latifah's video is a powerful one. Roberts says, "'Ladies First' is worth studying because it raises (without resolving) issues of gender and race and it refutes the prevailing notions of certain popular culture forms as misogynist and racist." The title itself is very telling. The chivalrous phrase 'ladies first' is taken out of it's context of female submission and is used to portray Latifah and other women rap artists as powerful and in first place.

--Jennifer McCrary

**Excerpts from an interview with Helen Wassell, host of WRTC's
Psychedelic Road Show and DJ of the *Women's Music Hour***

When and why did you begin the radio show? What were your original intentions and where do you think it has gone from there?

I've been doing radio since I was 16. I got my license between the summer of my junior year and senior year of high school. I always knew I wanted to be in music. I originally got hooked when I was 10. The first rock and roll band I ever fell in love with was an all female band I wanted to be a rock and roll guitar player. Then I realized, listening to the radio, that they weren't playing women and this was the mid-70's. I said, "Ok, well if they're not gonna do it then I'll do it." So my mom threw out this bone if you will and said to me, "If you go audition at this broadcasting school in the area and if you get in, I will pay tuition." Well, that was way too easy to pass up so I went down. I auditioned and they day that they were supposed to get back to me to say you made it or you didn't make it, it snowed. I was really on edge, so I called. I pretended to be my mom because I thought it would be really weird to call and say did I make it?. So I called and said, "I'm Mrs. Wassell. My daughter auditioned about a week and a half ago and I'm calling to find out if she made it." They were like "Oh yeah, she did", and I was like "YES!". The reason I got into radio was because I wanted to hear women artists. I wanted to hear Fanny, I wanted to hear Cris Williamson, I wanted to hear Bonnie Raitt and I wasn't hearing it on commercial radio. So I started out at the age of 16 over at the University of Hartford at WWUH. That lasted all of a week and a half, basically because they had me doing 3 in the morning to 6 in the morning. You had a 16 year old getting up, not driving and taking a cab over to West Hartford to do a radio show. It got to be too much. At that time I was working at a record store which I eventually managed, so that's how I started, just out of wanting to hear what I had at home on the radio.

What are your goals for the program as a whole? What do you hope to give to your listeners?

A sense that not all the music that they hear on the commercial stations is all that is out there. Some of the best phone calls I get are people who call up and say. "I like what you just played, what was that?" and it was a Native American artist or a rap group and they go out and buy it. That is the best thing that could possibly happen is to open the listeners minds and say this is what's out there. My goal is to open doors, knock down stereotypes and make people see that there is more to it than just the surface.

What do you think are the qualities that define women's music, if there is such a genre?

If we were to look at the surface of women in music today, you'd see Melissa Etheridge, K.D. Lang and many others. A lot of women-fronted bands. We would tend to be led to believe that everything is hunky-dorey and that women are finally making that stride and getting the recognition. I have a slight problem with that. I think that the next generation of women have to be careful not to be lulled into this common place of comfort where we think we've had it easy because we haven't. We have to be careful not to get a false set of guidelines because we trip over Melissa Etheridge every time we turn on VH-1. They are just the tip of the iceberg and, as the next generation of women coming up, we have to make people aware of the women who came before. That's where it came from. It came from Cris Williamson who is a god, or goddess, to me. It came from Tret Fure, it came from women like L.A. Jones and Diane Lindsay and all these women who were brave enough in the seventies to kick off that feminist women's movement thing. Let me use the line that Cris used. She said that it's kind of like blazing a trail and leaving little marks like bending a twig or leaving a rock for others to follow. We have to be very careful not to destroy that path.

Do you find that there are any trends or certain qualities that carry over?

No. Nothing at all. I think we should do away with the term women's music because it doesn't mean the same thing anymore. When I say 'women's music' to straight friends they think lesbian feminists or feminist lesbians. That's what it means to a lot of people and it means folk music. The women coming up now, they either don't know the history or don't want to be associated with it and for whatever reason are grabbing more onto the punk like Bikini Kill.

What effects has women's music had on music in general? Has it filled a void?

I think it has added a woman's voice to an area that has been male dominated since day one, and a very important voice at that. We have a long way to go. I think that women's music has been greatly underrated and underappreciated for all that it has given music. I think what has to happen is that, talking about the next generation of women coming up, we have to pull together. If we want people to know how we're doing and what we're doing we have to do it ourselves because the major record labels are not going to do it for us.

-- Descera Daigle

Library resources support the study and performance of women composers' music at Trinity

Last year marked the 25th anniversary of co-education at Trinity, and the Library celebrated this through a series of exhibits that focused on women. Because last year also marked the introduction to the music curriculum of a new course designed by Dr. Gail Woldu on women in music, a perfect opportunity to highlight Library resources through an exhibit with this theme presented itself. *Poco a poco ... Broadening Perceptions of Women in Music History* sought to illustrate the obstacles that were faced and overcome, albeit posthumously, by women musicians and composers such as Fanny Mendelssohn, whose music is now being more widely published, performed, and recorded, and whose life is being re-examined and studied in college-level courses such as Dr. Woldu's.

Collection development in the area of women in music has become an exciting venture, as scholarship activity has increased significantly during the last 10 to 15 years. While standard music history texts and score anthologies still seriously under-represent women, calls are being made in steady frequency for a reconsideration of women's place in the history of western music. Publications such as Cecilia reclaimed: Feminist perspectives on gender and music, edited by Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou (ML82 .C42 1994), acknowledge the role that gender has played in defining musical culture and through its ten essays supports the cause for rethinking and reviewing the history of music, or for the *reclaiming of Cecilia*, who the editors suggest was more the *patronized*, rather than the patron saint of music.

Perhaps the most significant contributions of recent scholarship are the publication of textbooks such as Women and Music: A History, edited by Karin Pendle (ML82 .W6 1991), and the score publication Historical Anthology of Music by Women, edited by James R. Briscoe (M1 .H664 1987). These important resources and many others which now exist to validate and support the academic study of women's music are critical foundation pieces. Women have been mainstreamed into few academic music curricula, but resources such as these and the continuing proliferation of scholarship support and strengthen the validity of this aim. The Winter 1993 issue of The Musical Quarterly is indicative of what might further evolve as the focus of research broadens. It devotes itself in large part to the presentation of recent Mendelssohn scholarship, represented by a series of essays appearing under the heading *Culture, Gender, and Music: A Forum on the Mendelssohn Family*. In his introduction, Michael P. Steinberg stresses the importance of these essays in advancing and redefining Mendelssohn scholarship with more of a focus on cultural and gender issues.

Student research endeavors will be enriched by two very recent additions to the

Library reference collection. The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers (ML105 .N67 1995) is long overdue. Editor Stanley Sadie, who is known best as the editor of the most widely acknowledged multi-volume English language music reference work, The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, forthrightly states in his Foreword that the aim of this new dictionary is not to emphasize a separation of men and women composers, but rather to address the deficiency that currently exists. Women and Music: A Selective Annotated Bibliography on Women and Gender Issues in Music, 1987-1992, by Margaret D. Ericson (ML128 .W7 E75 1996), provides for the first time, not only a depth and scope that are absent in standard music bibliographical sources, but important representation for the more recent scholarship in the field.

Students enrolled in the Music Department's private lessons and chamber ensemble programs may benefit from a growing collection of vocal, piano, and chamber music by women in performance score editions. In fact, members of the Trinity community will be able to hear a performance of the first movement of Fanny Mendelssohn's *Trio for piano and strings, op. 11, in D minor*, at the Music Department's student recital, to be held on May 5th, at 3:00 p.m., in the Austin Arts Center's Garmany Hall. The score used by the performers is part of the Library collection.

Listening is, of course, critical to the study and understanding of music, and the music of women is well represented in the Library's sound recording collection, housed in a branch location in the Austin Arts Center (AAC-110). Important recent acquisitions include compact disc recordings of the complete piano music and lieder of Clara Schumann; several recordings of the music of American composer Amy Beach, including her *Grand Mass in E-flat major*, several chamber works, piano music, and art songs; and numerous recordings of the music of Fanny Mendelssohn, including major choral compositions like the *Oratorium nach Bildern der Bibel*, as well as lieder, chamber works, and the complete piano music. To appreciate the full range of recorded offerings available in the Library, one may consult the extensive compact discography featured in the August 1994 issue of the journal Women of Note Quarterly, available on request from the Music and Media Services Librarian. Many titles from this listing are represented in the collection in either LP or compact disc format.

Those interested in engaging in exploration may benefit from some helpful hints. Subject searching in the CTW online catalog for women's music resources may be used to yield listings representing materials that speak collectively to the subject of women in music (i.e. general historical accounts, bibliographies, recorded and score anthologies). Library of Congress subject headings that apply are *Women composers' music*, *Women composers*, and *Women musicians*. Resources specifically relating to and representing the music of individual composers and musicians are found by doing subject and author name searches. Enjoy!

--Suzanne Risley

*“The music soars within the little lark,
And the lark soars.”*

--Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861)