

The Kaleidoscope of Women's Sounds in Music of the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries

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By

Kheng K. Koay

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INTRODUCTION

This book traces the development of music in the late 20th century by women composers. It investigates their styles/sounds and what factors shaped their music. The study stresses diverse aspects of compositional techniques and styles found in the selected female composers: Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931), Joan Tower (b. 1938), Ellen Taaffe Zwilich (b. 1939), Libby Larsen (b. 1950), Chen Yi (b. 1953) and Judith Weir (b. 1954). Each composer has established her own expressive and intellectual premises. They search for new ideas, sounds and forms in their music. Their approaches to composition help to account for the maintenance of their personal musical styles in late 20th century music.

In the past socio-musical order women composers were assigned a second place. They were mostly excluded from professional positions, with the exceptions of either being born into a musical family or having grown up in a royal family. Societal values were such that women should be a wife and mother and not pursue such professional or artistic activities in the public domain. However, since the 19th century women have challenged gender and sexual inequality. As a result, over time women composers were provided, or took, opportunities to learn and present themselves and their music in public. In most cases their music was poorly funded and promoted. It was not until the mid-20th century that women composers were treated fairly, and had become important and prominent in their creative careers. Yet, their achievements were not without obstacles such as dealing with family matters and a lack of encouragement. Despite many forms of discrimination that have existed both within and outside the music world, women composers have managed to overcome many of the barriers that have been placed in their path. Their music has actively drawn the public's attention and has gradually but significantly been performed in many major concert halls. Indeed, their works have found a place in the world of music and they continue to challenge the possible obstacles that come to them.

A Selection of Composers and their Works

Despite the widespread celebration of these composers' music, very little analysis of their work has been undertaken. Most books about the six

composers largely focus on their biographies and interviews. Other books about women composers include *Women and Music*, edited by Karin Pendle, and *Women Composers* by Diane Peacock Jezic. Both provide a survey of women's activities in different realms of music (eg. conducting, instrumentalist and others) from the time of the ancient Greeks to the late 20th century. *Women Making Music*, edited by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, discusses different aspects of music from 1150 to 1950. *Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction*, by Julie C. Dunbar, is designed as an undergraduate textbook that covers general historical information and world musical styles. *Women In Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to Present* by Carol Neuls-Bates provides letters, diaries, and reviews about composers and performers.

It is not usually wise to generalize about any composer, especially those whose musical productivity has spanned more than 50 years. They experience different musical styles and mature slowly in finding their own voices. Nevertheless, despite some changes in technical procedures, these composers' music reflects their consistency of musical styles. Throughout their creative careers, these selected composers were affected by other compositional styles and composers. The influence of pre-WW II composers, classical styles, American vernacular or ethnic music are found in their music. They incorporated diverse musical styles and idioms of others for their own distinctly personal styles; yet their music shows strong individualism. Indeed, composers of our time, like those in every period of history, have built their personal musical language through musical styles that they have encountered and experienced, which have created strong individual expressions. Therefore, it is crucial that analysis be directed into their music.

Although desirable, it is not possible to compile and analyze all the leading 20th century women composers. Thus, six composers are selected because each composer reveals diverse musical influences in her music. It must be emphasised that the six featured composers are not to be viewed as a unified group or "movement" of any kind. Nor does this selection imply that their music shows the "best" music compositional techniques. Rather than being a comparative analysis, the study seeks to reveal the composers' perspectives toward their compositional techniques and structural construction, and the influences that might lead to our understanding of their music, and thereby, by extrapolation, other women composers' music. These six are perhaps better known artists, and thus their compositions are more readily and widely available and known. While they do not necessarily epitomize or even represent all female composers, they do provide an insight into some of the influences on

women composers, as well as their various strategies and styles in composing music.

Thus, I consider their music from both internal and external perspectives, and examine their diverse musical idioms.

Since the study focuses on the music of the late 20th century, only compositions written after 1980 will be considered. This helps to limit and focus the range of choices in selecting music compositions. Each selection of the individual pieces is based on the composer's matured style and contents that best serve the purpose of my narrative.

Sofia Gubaidulina made a reputation as a leading Russian innovative composer. She is seen as a composer that

will never be caught obeying rules that suppress her emotional instincts. Her music can be simple or complex, dissonant or consonant, contrapuntal or not—just about anything or not—and all within a few bars (Swed, 2011).

The achievements of Gubaidulina in recent years are apparent both in concert performances and recordings. Her music is distinctive and highly individual, and has been promoted especially in the United States and other Western countries. Like many of her contemporaries, Gubaidulina's music has character and individuality, and it is often highly motivated.

Gubaidulina's *Quaternion* (1996) is written for four cellos. This composition not only employs compositional techniques that are drawn from her four quartets, but also Gubaidulina further explores possible techniques in string.

Joan Tower has received wide recognition in the United States. She is often seen as a composer who writes "classical" music. Like many other composers, Tower's music is highly original in character. A music critic, Martin Bernheimer, writes that,

Joan Tower is one of a kind—an independent thinker, a dazzling craftsperson and a composer who steadfastly refuses to toe popular party lines. Her specialties would seem to involve melodic compression, rhythmic vitality, expressive economy and technical intricacy (Bernheimer, 2012).

Tower wrote five string quartets: String Quartet No. 1 "*Night Fields*" (1994), No. 2 "*In Memory*" (2002), No. 3 "*Incandescent*" (2003),

No. 4 “*Angels*” (2008) and No. 5 “*White Water*” (2011). Her String Quartet No. 2 already presents noticeable musical characters typical of Tower’s musical language, and also a more complex musical context than in her earlier quartet. It is thus my intention to investigate the compositional creativity employed in her music.

Like Tower, **Ellen Taaffe Zwilich’s** music also has been frequently performed in the United States and Europe. Her music is often seen as “tonal” and “neo-Classicism”. For example, Rhian Samuel (1989: 311) compares Zwilich’s music to neo-classicism: it

relies heavily on the language and gesture of neo-Classicism, exploiting the orchestra traditionally, with the exception, perhaps, of instrumental range.

Michael Walsh (2005) observes:

On the page her music looks as clear as Brahms’; to the ear it sounds as bold and vigorous as Shostakovich’s or Prokofiev’s. But it always remains her own.

On the other hand, popular musical culture also finds its way into Zwilich’s classical music, for example, her *Millennium Fantasy* (2000), *Clarinet Concerto* for Solo Clarinet and Large Chamber Ensemble or Orchestra (2002), and Quintet for violin, viola, cello, contrabass and piano (2010). Nevertheless, her *Millennium Fantasy* shows nostalgic reminiscence of a folk tune and obscure references to the style of Haydn. Thus, it is intriguing to examine her compositional handling in the music.

Libby Larsen is also one of America’s most performed living composers. She is capable of writing music of striking and sustained interest. Larsen has written many American and jazz inspired compositions, such as *Jazz Variations* for solo bassoon (1977), *Deep Summer Music* (1982), *Four on the Floor* (1983), *Piano Concerto: Since Armstrong* (1992) and *Barn Dances* (2001). Nevertheless, some of her recordings or scores are difficult to obtain. Thus, I have selected *Four on the Floor* for the purposes of my discussion.

Four on the Floor is a short musical composition for violin, cello, contrabass and piano. Unlike Zwilich, Larsen experiments with a different approach to fuse together jazz, pop and art music cultures. The composition is not only inspired by boogie-woogie but also by various styles such as jazz and rock. In it, Larsen introduces interesting texture and

timbre to create sound effects. The repeating pounding of a chord in Jerry Lee Lewis' piano performance manner is certainly one of the musical characters in the composition. The piece certainly offers Larsen a means of expression in popular culture.

Chen Yi is a composer who combines elements from European and Chinese traditions. She explores and expands sonic materials. Many of her compositions employ Chinese musical instruments and folksongs. She has also creatively used Western musical instruments to replace Chinese instruments. Her music certainly challenges listeners in many ways.

Chen Yi says that, in her music, she finds "a way to express myself in a way of real fusion of Eastern and Western musics in my music" (cited in de Clef Piñeiro, 2001). She regards music as

a kind of fusion and merger, a marriage of the consonant and dissonant, the tonal and atonal. It really sounds to me like speaking in Chinese, in a Chinese color, but it's written in a Western music idiom (ibid).

Such musical handling can be seen in her *Ba Yin*. The composition can be seen in the context of the Chinese tradition with a creative use of Western musical instruments.

Judith Weir seeks to employ cultural references as part of her musical ideas and sounds. Her music is seen as "a complex negotiation between old and new, historical and current" (Colton, 2010: 277). Her compositional techniques are often said to make use of "very simple and clear musical ideas with great wit to great effect" (Lister, 2004: 53). On the other hand, Lisa Colton writes that,

By looking more closely at how Weir's music tropes the past, it is possible to see that a range of anxieties about authenticity in contemporary arts and female authorship lie beneath the surface of critical engagement with Weir as a composer (Colton, 2010: 278).

Much of the research about her music focuses on her operatic works, such as Lisa Colton's "*The Female Exotic: Tradition, Innovation, and Authenticity in the Reception of Music by Judith Weir*," and Judith Grant's "*A Compulsive Narrator*" (Grant, 2013).

In a music review, Rodney Lister (2004: 54) wrote that,

Distance and Enchantment, for piano quartet, is based on Northern Irish and Scottish folk songs, worked into a beautiful and compelling instrumental texture.

Organization of the book

There are some significant factors that make this present book quite different from others. It not only provides the biographies of the composers, but also their perspectives on music, the reception of their music, the involvement of women composers in modern society, and an analysis of their compositions.

The content of this book is presented in terms of:

- 1) an overview of the social background of the 20th century, a summary of the century's musical thought from the women composers' point of view, and reception of their compositions; and
- 2) analyses of their music, exploring a variety of styles and techniques found in each composer's compositional writings.

Part 1 focuses on the perspectives of the composers, biographical overviews, the aesthetics, and compositional perspectives and subjects that draw on modern society. It can be divided in to two main topics: *Women Composers and Modern Society*, and *Creativity, Reception to and Background of the Composers*.

1. Women Composers and Modern Society discusses how women composers make choices and promote their music. What encouraged them to go against the obstacles they faced? What problems might they have encountered when establishing their creative careers? These questions will be addressed in this chapter. In addition, an overview of the social background of each composer will be provided to contextualize the musical life of women composers in modern Western culture.

The fact that music education became more available led to an increase in the number of women composers since the beginning of the 20th century. Nevertheless, their achievements were attained not without difficulty. Recognizing the pressure placed upon any woman composer makes one appreciate more their music. Thus, this chapter shall explore the experiences and challenges women composers faced during their creative careers.

2. *Creativity, Reception to and Background of the Composers* explores the composers' personal, philosophical and political aspects of their lives, revealing how their music has been shaped externally. Indeed, throughout their creative careers, these composers have encountered social and aesthetic upheavals that have generated their particular compositional styles. This chapter deals with questions more specific to the selected composers: What are the musical aesthetics of these composers? What triggered them to compose in such styles? What are their musical perceptions and attitudes towards music? Indeed, backgrounds and cultures certainly play a major role in their compositional creativity.

Furthermore, it is essential to gain insight into composers' creative processes. Composers often offer and discuss ideas and opinions—in pursuit of their own musical ideals—about their compositional techniques and compositions. They search for musical styles and language that is meaningful to them. This will be included in the chapter.

Finding ways to communicate with their audience has become a major challenge for composers. What techniques they have used to connect their music with the audience also will be discussed in this chapter. In addition, I shall investigate how their music has been generally received.

Part 2 analyses the compositions. This part is further divided into three topic areas:

3. *Bold Sound Colors and Space*

4. *Straddling Classical and American Vernacular Idioms*

5. *The Cross-Over and National Influences*

Each topic is focused on a particular compositional writing, and further subdivided into a group of two composers whose compositions occur chronologically in the same period.

1. *Bold, Sound Colors and Space* provides an insight into the influence of modernist ideals on the music of Gubaidulina and Tower. Their music shows highly individualized ways of organizing musical material. They tend to shift the emphasis of melody to sound colors. In their compositions, the composers use performance mode, texture, rhythmic and dynamic colors to generate the form at the surface level, and to unify the composition. Their music creates a unique and new listening experience for the audience, exposing listeners to one musical development in the 20th century. It is my intent here to investigate structural unification in their compositions.

Some typical Gubaidulina musical idioms are found in her *Quaternion*. The music demonstrates her experimentation with sound colors through exploring different performing techniques of the cello. The composition not only contains a rich palette of new sounds that can be drawn from modernist techniques and ideas, but also demonstrates musical fashions that remind one of Baroque musical idioms. Ideas of opposition can be seen in the composition.

The String Quartet No. 2 by Tower retains a strong sense of her own identity. Diverse elements have been integrated within a carefully organized structural framework. The music suggests influences of early composers such as Beethoven, Igor Stravinsky, Olivier Messiaen, George Crumb, and the Second Viennese School. In addition, her fascination with traditional musical idioms is evident in the music.

2. *Straddling Classical and American Vernacular Idioms* focuses on the influence of jazz/pop and traditional classical art music in Zwilich's and Larsen's compositions. The two composers reject the modernist experimental in favor of musical populism. The American musical elements used in their music have led the two composers to seek out distinctive musical characters and styles. This section explores different compositional means used by the two composers, investigating the possible musical ideas that form the basis of the compositions.

In *Four on the Floor*, Larsen crosses the line between jazz and contemporary "classical" music. She makes striking use of a number of techniques and styles, including boogie-woogie bass-line in the composition. Other influences can also be seen in the composition.

Zwilich introduces a folk theme in her *Millennium Fantasy* in a contemporary presentation. She uses the theme to generate new ideas in the music. At times, the musical handlings may be surprising; one encounters unexpected musical ideas and elements. Indeed, humor is injected into the music. Nevertheless, the composition also provides moments of familiarity that can be associated with traditional musical handlings.

3. *The Cross-Over and National Influences* examines the music of Chen Yi and Judith Weir. Both composers show a broad eclectic range of sources in their music; they adopt different music from different cultures. Thus, this chapter explores how the two composers manipulate and employ pre-existing materials in their compositions.

In *Ba Yin* Chen Yi challenges the line between Chinese and Western musical cultures. Her music often plays with ideas derived from Chinese

music culture. She employs musical references to China. It is interesting to investigate Chen Yi's attempt to create music that imitates ethnic instruments. She has an ongoing interest in her own musical culture and this is reflected in her music.

In her *Distance and Enchantment* Judith Weir draws inspirations from two folk themes from her native country, Scotland, exploring new effects to present her music. In the composition, tonality is hinted, though it is never confined to the traditional ways. The music is a blend of both familiarity and the new. Despite the fact that contrasting textures are employed, different musical ideas are used to connect the entire composition. Similarity in melodic contours plays a major role in the music. Contemporary compositional techniques are also used to create musical effects. Although throughout the composition the music seems less idiomatic, the music is enlivened by a clear and convincing thematic and structural design. Indeed, the composition never fails to show the musical styles of Weir.

Thus this book contributes to an understanding of musical language of late 20th century women composers. It gives an insight into the creative acts of the selected composers, aiming to provide valuable information to those who perform their music, to young musicians learning and trying to understand their music, and to the listener-reader seeking a wider knowledge of contemporary music by women composers.

PART I

CHAPTER ONE

WOMEN COMPOSERS AND MODERN SOCIETY

Historically, women have been encouraged to marry early and have had fewer career opportunities. Women were seldom provided with an adequate education and thus their achievements could never parallel that of men. This has traditionally applied to music. Betty W. Atterbury (1992: 25) argues that,

Although women have [since] gained equal access to music education through public schools, obstacles still block their paths to success as professional musicians and music educators.

Nevertheless, changes have happened, albeit slowly; the labor force participation of women in various professions greatly expanded during the 20th century; and in the realm of Western art music, in particular composing, the focus is no longer exclusively focused on men. Indeed, since the mid 20th century there has been a discernible increase in the number of women composers who have been more widely active and acknowledged than ever before. Not only are more performance opportunities given to their music, but also more women composers receive commissions for writing music and are offered teaching positions in composition in music colleges. In addition, each year more material becomes available on the subject of women in music. Women composers have made significant achievements and great contributions in the development of Western art music.

This chapter, therefore, explores how female composers, and in particular the six selected composers, have taken up opportunities in their composing careers, and what obstacles they have faced in establishing their careers. Also, women composers and their supporters such as academies, organizations and patrons have focused attention on the inequities such composers faced and have sought to dispel prejudices. Publications on women's music became more common beginning in the late 20th century. Thus this chapter will also discuss what has contributed to the encouragement and support of female composers, and what music programs developed that have helped to promote their music. It will also

reveal what other musical aspects have detracted from opportunities and promotion which may have been given to women composers since the mid-20th century.

The following discussion is divided into four sections: Discrimination and Acceptance, Achievements and Personal Encounters, Promotions, and Other Issues.

Discrimination and Acceptance

Women's contributions as composers were largely overlooked for centuries prior to the 20th century. Many of their names and creative products were either lost without much trace or excluded from the music history literature. A Chicago music critic, George Upton (1996: 206), points out what might have been the attitude in the past toward women composers:

There had been, throughout the nineteenth century, a large number of women composers in the realm of popular music, amateurs mainly, writing parlor songs and dance music for piano. Their activity was seemingly deemed acceptable, or so lack of comment in the contemporary literature would indicate.

Indeed, only a small number of compositions by women composers survived, and they were of the "less important" genres.

The fact is that female composers were discouraged from presenting their music in public and not many of them dared to break this unreasonable tradition.

Many women prior to the twentieth century wrote pieces in the so-called smaller genres for performance in small, domestic spaces, as opposed to large-scale genres like symphonies and operas that are performed in large, public places. Most women did not have access to the public world (Marcia Citron, cited in Neuls-Bates, 1996: 368).

Despite the fact that not much performing opportunity was given to female composers in the past, they never quit their desire to pursue a music career and often battled against prejudices. Susan McClary (2000: 1283) points out that,

Until the 1990s, few music-history textbooks so much as mentioned a single woman. Although feminist scholars have now brought to light earlier moments of female creativity in European art music, these artists had faded from memory over the centuries, and our new

biographies of these female composers reveal over and over again the exceptional tenacity demanded of women who attempted to participate in public arenas of music making.

Since the early 20th century there have been renowned women composers such as Lily Boulanger (1893-1918), Amy Beach (1867-1944), Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901-1953), and many others, who have made outstanding contributions to the development of music. Nevertheless, in discussions of recent composers, women are depicted as having had to continuously fight and struggle to obtain equality in music with men; indeed, contemporary women composers still are not promoted enough and there is less interest in their music.

The United States

In the past few decades, ensembles and orchestras often neglected to include music by women in their performance lists. It is believed that in the 1990s “many available recordings by female composers were not being listed in major catalogs” (Henken, 1997). Jane E. Palmquist and Barbara Payne write that,

Although there have been thousands of women composers, their music is rarely represented in the programs of school instrumental music ensembles (1992: 52).

In 1981 the founder of the International League of Women Composers, Nancy Van de Vate, observed that, generally, women composers have been regarded as having no ability in composing:

Many men in the music field itself regard all women composers as amateurs or possibly upgraded amateurs, with a few startling exceptions such as Barbara Kolb, the first woman to win the Rome Prize...Around New York and on the East Coast in general, women can claim to be professional composers with much more credibility than elsewhere in the country, except possibly on the West Coast (cited in Neuls-Bates, 1996: 323).

Indeed, not all women have had an equal opportunity to pursue their music careers. Larsen remembers her years of graduate study in the 1970s:

The little kinds of support that men received from mentors were withheld from women because there was genuine doubt that women could think compositionally (cited in Waleson, 1990).

Other women have commented similarly: “I don’t know that there are that many more opportunities available to women than there were when I was 17,” said Deborah Drattell (*ibid*). “It’s just now becoming a possibility for women to have this be their life’s work. Until then, it is ridiculous to say, ‘Why aren’t there more women composers?’” Zwilich asked (cited in von Rhein, 1991).

Tower remembers when she attended a class which was taught by Nancy Reich in Bard College in 1991-1992:

When she [Nancy Reich] brought in music by women composers for flute and asked if we had any flute players, I realized that most of the performers in our department never played music by women. I am not apologizing, but the fact of the matter is that when I was coming up in the 1960s and 1970s I simply wasn’t aware that there were very few women composers on the scene and the whys behind that. It never occurred to me that the piano music I was performing was by men only. And at Columbia I was reading all the standard history books by Gustave Reese, Bukofzer, Grout, and others that didn’t have any women in them. I thought this was the way the world was (cited in Neuls-Bates, 1996: 355-356).

In general, women have not been fully integrated into all aspects of musical activities. For example, male dominated symphony orchestras still existed in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse (2000: 715) note:

Until recently, the great symphony orchestras in the United States consisted members who were largely handpicked by the music directors. Although virtually all had auditioned for the position, most of the contenders would have been the (male) students of a select group of teachers.

Joshua Kosman (2004) also asserts that “the San Francisco Symphony announced its 2004-05 season, with a schedule featuring music by only male composers, led by male conductors.” Tower also claims that,

I would note that when I travel to universities around the country, I rarely meet another woman composer on the faculty; the ratio of male to female composition students—I can attest—is still very wide, and I find that orchestral audiences are usually unaware that they hear music by woman composers only infrequently (cited in Neuls-Bates, 1996: 357).

In 1990, Heidi Waleson reported that many faculty positions were still not available to women. Women are still under-represented on composition faculties: of tenure-track jobs in 1986-87 only 8.6 percent were held by women, according to the College Music Society's report, *Women's Studies/Women's Status*. Even at the San Francisco Conservatory, where Elinor Armer is the chairperson of the composition department, only 4 of the 14 composition students are women. That is still a better percentage than that at the Eastman School, where Mr. Schwanter teaches; he reports that of the 25 or so composition students, only "three or four" are women—in a school where 50 percent of the students are women (Waleson, 1990).

One possible reason for fewer female composers on composition faculties is because of what Nancy Van de Vate describes: "faculties in academe are no more willing to absorb them [professional women composers] than they were ten or fifteen years ago" (cited in Neuls-Bates, 1996: 326). The other reason is that many composers tend to make their living composing music, instead of holding an academic post. Libby Larsen, for example, asserts that,

If I were affiliated with an academic institution, I am afraid that in my decision-making process, I would be inclined to make more theoretical and less practical decisions. Theoretical decisions are extraordinarily interesting and really feed my imagination, but I want to have my music performed in the professional concert hall (cited in Mangan, 1995).

Similarly, Gubaidulina has never been affiliated with an academic institution; since 1964 she has worked primarily as a free-lance composer. During the period 1969-70, Gubaidulina worked at the Moscow experimental studio for electronic music. Later, from 1975 to 1981, she was a member of the Astrea improvisation group with Viktor Suslin and Vyacheslav Artyomov, and from 1991 with Suslin and his son Aleksandr.

In a 1995 interview, Tower said that, despite the increasing prominence of women musicians, music by women composers has not been significantly promoted:

Women are becoming more active in the field, not only in terms of musicology, but in theory and composition... Still, the composing world is pretty awful. It's better now than it was 15 years ago, but I read tons and tons of listings of radio programs or Carnegie Hall events and events at other halls—scanning to see how many women composers are on. It's amazing how few there are. At Carnegie Hall, there were two one year, and at Lincoln Center, one. I'm taking about

a whole year of concerts. When you start looking at those numbers, it's pretty dismal (cited in Pasles, 1995).

In 1991, grants and awards were given to fund composers under the *Meet the Composer/Reader's Digest Commissioning Program*, an organization that is devoted to contemporary music, including jazz. Among the 43 art music composers and commissioning consortiums 9 women composers received commissions. They were Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Pauline Oliveros, Joan La Barbara, Maryanne Amacher, Mary Ellen Childs, Vivian Fine, Janice Giteck, Brenda Hutchinson and Lois Vierk. The "1991 share of these awards is the largest that women have so far received" (*Deseret News*, 1992).

Similarly, the National Endowment for the Arts announced 39 fresh grants under its New American Works program for fiscal year 1989. This program supports the creation of new operas and musical theater works. Among the companies and composers receiving grants (ranging from \$5,000 to \$65,000) were: The American Music Theater Festival (Lalo Schifrin), the Brooklyn Academy of Music (two commissions: Scott Johnson and Elliot Goldenthal), Los Angeles Music Center Opera (Thea Musgrave), Lyric Opera of Chicago (William Bolcom), Metropolitan Opera (Philip Glass), Minnesota Opera (two commissions: Meredith Monk and Libby Larsen), the Opera Guild of Greater Miami (Carlisle Floyd) and the Walker Art Center (Paul Dresher) (Cariaga, 1989).

The perception that a composer must be male is only slowly changing. Despite the acceptance of women in the field of music having improved since year 2000, Tower notes that there are still some women composers who feel passive about their music career and lack of encouragement, and are thus tempted to give up composing:

There's a problem with women because they don't have a lot of role models certainly, especially among dead composers, and they don't have enough of a support system within their own community saying, 'Hey, do this. We want you to do this.' So they have to forge their way very much by themselves and some of them just don't have the strength to do that (cited in Duffie, 2006).

In the past, women were met with discrimination if they chose to compose or conduct, and their music careers were denied. Many people believed that women should not be in a career of composing. Promoting their music may have been only dimly desirable. For example, in the 1990s, a musicologist, Susan McClary (cited in Henken, 1997) said:

I work in universities, and women are still discouraged from composition. It's better than it was ten years ago, but this is still necessary work. Just look at the Vienna Philharmonic—it's hard to imagine a group like that rushing out to perform music by women. Some kind of support group and advocacy is needed.

Larsen (cited in Kessler, 1999) claims that,

While I see great artistry and vigor with many young women composers, I think it's going to continue to roll until there is a critical mass of women who are also in administration positions and the power positions. We've got to see many more women on the podium. There are a number of really fine women conductors who ought to be considered for major positions.

Women composers are often faced with criticism and sarcasm when establishing their music careers. For example, some of the most renowned concert organizers and conductors, at one time or another, underestimated women composers. Waleson (1990) writes:

Ms. Larsen has had to contend with remarks from conductors like, 'So much sound from such a little girl.' Deborah Drattell, who was composer-in-residence at the Denver Symphony before it went out of business last year, reports even more insidious behavior. 'There are a lot of male chauvinist pigs out there,' she says. 'I was told that one conductor said that if I'd sleep with him maybe he'd perform my music.'

Nancy Van de Vate once said that she used only her first initial and surname when submitting her music to be considered for a performing opportunity and to avoid unnecessary gender discrimination:

When I started composing, before the new women's movement, I sent off my compositions under my first initial and last name. I remember the very first was an orchestral work that a major symposium accepted, and were they amazed when I showed up for the performance! I followed the same procedure several times, always with an orchestral work... (cited in Neuls-Bates, 1996: 330).

Miriam Abrahams recalled that,

When we started [The Women's Philharmonic], the conversation was about why there are no great women composers, the idea of a woman being the music director of a major orchestra was simply

unthinkable—the assumption was that players wouldn’t stand for it (cited in Kosman, 2004).

Larsen shares her college experience:

In my last graduate composition seminar, I brought in a symphony to discuss with my fellow composers. One of the composers said, ‘You can’t write that piece.’ I was confused, because I thought ‘Did I miss something?’ So I said, ‘Why can’t I write it?’ And he said, ‘Because you’re a woman and you can’t think in large structures.’ It hit me like a ton of bricks. Whenever a woman’s ability to think in large, abstract structures or mathematical equations is called into question, that is just simply mythology. But it is very deep-rooted. It is changing little by little, although it’s changing more outside of America than inside America (cited in Huebner, 2009).

Although by the mid-20th century women were allowed to receive a proper education, many theory and composition classes in conservatories were not open to them. There were also many prestigious colleges that refused to accept women students. Nancy Van de Vate recalls:

When I applied to college, I could not have attended Harvard, Princeton, or Yale because of being female, and so I went to one of the Seven Sister Colleges, Wellesley. No one then suggested there was anything ignoble about separatism, or anything ignoble about women doing things for themselves, or anything inferior about the caliber of education we were receiving at a women’s school. The questions were never raised, and it bothers me very much that *now* people think there is something wrong with women composers acting as advocates in their own behalf—which is what the League [the International League of Women Composers] is doing. As women we simply have not had access to the same opportunities as men (cited in Neuls-Bates, 1996: 325).

Despite the fact that more women composers have been given career opportunities, to many, the gender bias continued to exist into the late 20th century. For example, in 1999, Richard Kessler (1999) pointed out that:

Take a look at the data put out in the last five or ten years by the American Symphony Orchestra League. I believe also, some things you see about chamber music. Take a look at catalogs. Take a look at our membership. You’ll see that there are more men than women. It used to be this way in many fields. But you’re seeing some remarkable changes in rock. You’re seeing remarkable changes in country music. I know many talented young-to-mid career women composers, but

we're still looking at a predominant number of performances coming from male composers. You're probably still looking at a predominant number of teaching positions held by men.

On the other hand, not all women musicians faced obstacles due to gender discrimination in the mid-20th century. Some of them were given an opportunity in the 1960s. Zwilich remembers:

I started working for Stokowski in 1965. Just a couple of days ago I saw a clip of him conducting the Chicago Symphony in 1962. I'd know the gestures anywhere. But there was not a woman in sight. I mean the harpist was a man. This was the norm. There was an occasional woman here or there. I think Orin O'Brien was already in the Philharmonic and occasionally there'd be a woman in a symphony orchestra, but not very often, and a very, teeny, teeny, teeny, tiny minority. When Stokowski started the American Symphony which was about that same year as this program I saw, he opened the door to not only women, but Asians. You didn't see Asians in orchestras, and now you know, look at the women and Asians in orchestras. We had blacks in the orchestra, we had Asians, and we had a large contingent of women. So this was available to me when I moved to New York (cited in Oteri, 2011).

Indeed, acceptance of women composers has increased over time. For example, Michael Steinberg (1928-2009)—artistic adviser at the Minnesota Orchestra, a music critic for the Boston Globe and who had been working with many major symphony orchestras—showed encouragement to women musicians. Minnesota Orchestra historian Mary Ann Feldman sees Steinberg as “a mentor and friend who taught her much about communicating with audiences” (cited in Mador, 2009). Steinberg once said that “people are still saying, ‘Show me the female Beethoven,’ but they’re no longer saying, ‘Women can’t compose’” (cited in Waleson, 1990).

Moreover, there have been more equal opportunities given to women in the late 20th century. The fact that women are just as good musicians as men is shown in awards that have been given to female composers and the growing list of them in the music realm. Some fifteen years ago Susan McClary (2000: 1283) claimed that,

More women than men have earned the highest prize offered by the music industry in the past ten years...women in the field of music today feel unusually optimistic—more so than at any previous time in Western history. Many even deny the need for what they regard as the special pleading of feminism.

Renowned performers, directors and conductors have adopted and valued some great music by women composers, as well; for example, Leonard Slatkin, music director of the St. Louis Symphony, champions Tower's music and often performs it when he guest conducts Waelson, 1990). The Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BOMP) of 2013, conducted by Gil Rose, featured music by Chen Yi and other composers (Eichler, 2013).

Similarly, Larsen recalls her experiences as a professional composer:

I do lots of residencies, and even today I'm usually approached by the chairman of the department, who says that it would be very interesting for the women in the department to be around a woman composer. He doesn't mention the men (cited in Waleson, 1990: page).

In an interview Larsen also stressed that,

It [gender bias] was an issue in the 1970s and early 1980s, when the issue was being framed. Things are better than they used to be. I can't say it's 50-50, though. It was the music historians who began to look around and say, 'what part of composing history belongs to women?' In my work in the past 35 years, I have not found it an issue, very often. From time to time, I have found challenges to my intellectual rights to think and act in certain ways (cited in Huebner, 2009).

According to Terry Morris (2011),

While New York Times critic Anthony Tommasini listed only men—Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert—on a debate-provoking list of the top 10 composers of all time early this year, he named Larsen among the women who would deserve consideration on a similar list of living composers. Others included: Kaija Saariaho, Sofia Gubaidulina, Judith Weir, Joan Tower, Chen Yi, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Augusta Read Thomas and Jennifer Higdon.

Despite the fact that there are more opportunities for male musicians in the music world, John von Rhein (1991) believes that women are beginning to find a door to their music careers:

Although you won't find any women conductors among the music directors of the Big Five U.S. orchestras of Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, Philadelphia and New York, women are finding doors open to them in classical music.

In most cases, music by women composers is always paired with composers in past periods. For example, in a 2009 music program held at the 92nd Street Y, the world premiere of Zwilich's Septet for Piano Trio and String Quartet was paired with Boccherini's String Quintet in E (Op. 11, No. 5) (Schweitzer, 2009). In a 2008 Carnegie Hall concert music program, the conductor, James Conlon, paired both Mahler and Zwilich by introducing their Symphony no. 5 (Smith, 2008). In a 1994 concert, the Cleveland String Quartet grouped works by Beethoven, Brahms and Larsen in a music concert in Schoenberg Hall at UCLA (Pasles, 1994).

There are also music festivals featuring contemporary music by both male and female composers. For instance, a 2007 music festival called *Generation of '38* performed compositions by John Corigliano, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Joan Tower, Olly Wilson, Philip Glass, Paul Chihara, Alvin Curran, Frederic Rzewski, David Del Tredici and Charles Wuorinen (Kozinn, 2007).

The executive and artistic director of Carnegie Hall, Judith Arron, before her death in 1998, had planned as one of her projects—suggested by the composer Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, the hall's first resident composer—"The Carnegie Hall Millennium Piano Book," a collection of commissioned works by 10 composers. Chen Yi's *Ba Ban* was included in the program (Kozinn, 2000). Indeed, as Judith Shatin (b. 1949), a composer and president of American Women Composers, puts it, "in the arts, there are many situations where personal contacts make things happen. Until women are included, nothing will change" (cited in Waleson, 1990).

A 1999 new-music festival, *Summergarden*, was directed by Joel Sachs and focused on female composers. Among the composers were Chen Yi, and Karen Tanaka (b. 1961), a Japanese composer (Kozinn, 1999). Zdenek Macal, the Grant Park Symphony's principal conductor, also chose to include Zwilich's *Celebration* (1984) in the opening program of the 53rd Grant Park Concerts season (von Rhein, 1987).

In 1995 Timothy Mangan (1995) noted that,

Larsen's commissions (she fulfills only five or six a year) come from all levels, from localized groups like the South Coast Chorale to the nationally recognized Los Angeles Master Chorale, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and Cleveland String Quartet.

Outside the United States

Claire Polin (1990: 34) once claimed that "Great Britain and the Soviet Union [are the] two countries where gender prejudice has not encroached upon creative output." In London, music by women composers

became prominent and their music was included in the Royal Albert Hall Proms. For example, in Season 1988, out of 69 Proms, Prom 2 performed Alison Bauld's (b. 1944) *Mad Moll*, Prom 22 performed Judith Weir's *The Consolations of Scholarship*, and Prom 38 performed *Symbolon* by Zwilich. However, there were more compositions by male-composers included in each season.¹

Composers such as Gubaidulina, who was raised during the Soviet regime, faced a different music career faith. Unlike the women composers in the United States, Gubaidulina has been praised and acknowledged for her musical talent. For example, in 1988 the Secretary General of the Soviet Composers' Union, Tikhon Khrennikov, praised that "we have many gifted composers, above all Sofia Gubaidulina" (cited in Heikinheimo, Khrennikov and Parson, 1990: 19).

Alexander Ivashkin (1990: 305) said, "Russian art has never been art for art's sake but always had subject matter drawn from everyday life; it has always been *engagé* and moralistic." Its purpose was to close the gap between art and the masses. There was not much discrimination against women establishing their music careers in the Soviet Union. "My older sister is a doctor; the second sister is a pianist and a teacher. For a long time she taught at the Kazan Conservatory of Music," said Gubaidulina (cited in Lukomsky, 1998: 17). A Soviet composer, Elena Firsova, also asserts the role of women composers in Russia. She said:

Soviet life favours the man—as everywhere—except for unmarried women or those without children. Yet there seems to be an almost equal number of women in the arts here (cited in Polin, 1984: 13).

The fact is that the selection of music to be performed was based on the "quality" of the work. "Some composers are not performed on radio or television at all, not because of discrimination based on sex, but because they are considered to be avant-garde," said Firsova (cited in Polin, 1984: 14). Gubaidulina provides a different perspective on music between men and women: "men work at music as a business, but women have to create their own publicity to be recognized" (ibid).

In China, Chen Yi comments that,

Up until the first half of the 20th century, there were only a very few professional women composers in China. But this fact was never an obstacle or challenge for me because I had never thought that composition was something that only men could do (cited in de Clef Piñeiro, 2001).