

A Journal of Women in Music

Agathe Backer Grøndahl (1847-1907): "A perfectly plain woman?" Camilla Hambro



Special points of interest:

Agathe Backer Grøndahl

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On June 9, 1889, when one of his favourite authors, Henrik Ibsen, made his breakthrough in London, George Bernard Shaw made certain to attend a very interesting *Doll's House* dinner at the Novelty Theatre. Also present was the Norwegian pianist, composer, and piano teacher Agathe Backer Grøndahl. After the event, Shaw gave an account of her participation in a kind of "hidden theatre" at the party, backstage among the props, and the meaning and interpretation of her performance in relation to musical genres and gender expectations.

He entitled it "An Angry Critic and Very Quiet Lady," and published it in his weekly column, where he described Backer Grøndahl as the "neglected" and "unknown" lady at the party.¹ Nonetheless, he reports that he felt she had some indescribable sort of refinement about her, lost her way and found herself in a very questionable circle. After dinner, the whole party went down to the stage and finished the evening in the *Doll's House* set. As Backer Grøndahl went to Helmer's little (theatre) piano, (Nora Helmer is the main character in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*), Shaw prepared himself for the worst, and people stopped talking, more or less. To encourage her, he went to the piano and sat beside her to turn pages, expecting Thekla Badarzewska-Baranowska's *The Maiden's Prayer* or an old-fashioned set of variations on *The Carnival of Venice* (perhaps the ones by Czerny):

After the first two bars I sat up. At the end of the piece (one of her own compositions) I said: "Has anyone ever told you that you are one of the greatest pianists in Europe?" Evidently a good many people had; for without turning a hair she said: "It is my profession. But this is a bad in-

strument. Perhaps you will hear me at the Philharmonic. I am to play Beethoven's E flat concerto there."²

Playing the piano was a very common pastime for young women of the bourgeoisie, such as Nora in Ibsen's drama. It was considered appropriate and important to know how to play, and performing was a good way of getting noticed at parties like the one Backer Grøndahl and Shaw attended. However, it was important not to go too far: a young woman could be seductive but not too sexual; she had to play well but not too well, and she could not appear to be too mannish or put too much emotion into her performance. On the other hand, a woman could put her emotions and double meanings into her own compositions, things she could not express in words.

By telling his readers that he sat up after the first two bars, Shaw could point out how Backer Grøndahl's performance suddenly made him experience her *persona* in a totally "different light." He does not specify what she played, but based on his reactions, it could have been one of her concert studies (op. 11 or 22). Performed outside their primary context, her concert studies would be easily recognizable as "misplaced." In contrast to the superb concert grands that Backer Grøndahl usually picked out at piano factories before her concerts, she had agreed to play some of her own compositions on Helmer's piano as it had never played before. She also showed equilibristic mastery of how (not) to be womanly in appearance and manner and what musical genres were appropriate for different kinds of contexts.

That Norwegian women could play the piano well was not so controversial at the time, but the problem was larger when it came to composing. In those days it was

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surprising that Backer Grøndahl's piano music could be composed by "one so fair and feminine in appearance and manner."³ This "role play" sheds light on the relationship between the event and contemporary music in the domestic sphere. It also makes Ibsen's drama in general and Nora's character in particular rather defamiliarized and anachronistic.

Among other things, Shaw's account shows how intertwined and interrelated Backer Grøndahl's roles as a composer and pianist are and how difficult it is to treat them as separate and distinct categories. Some of her works seem directly connected to her charisma and piano technique, as demonstrated at her concerts. Apparently she gave her own compositions a personal interpretation in the way she worked out the details of her performances. At the end of her career, she presented entire concerts of her own compositions. Thus, the public became better acquainted with her as a composer, and she could prove herself as a pianist, start a performance tradition for her own works, gain experiences as a musician that she could use in her compositions, and, as a result, profit both economically and artistically.

Performing, reading, discussing and writing about Backer Grøndahl's music is part of a process that creates what John Fiske in more modern terms calls "producerly texts," and determines what kind of "texts" her *musicking* produced.⁴ From this perspective, Backer Grøndahl's composition *personas* do not speak her discourses, but discourses, such as Shaw's, speak them. Such discourses create a sense of her listeners and performers.

As the Norwegian composer and music critic Pauline Hall (1890-1969) noted in 1947, Backer Grøndahl has become a banner for Norwegian women composers in Edvard Grieg's era, an inspiration to those who followed in her footsteps.⁵ She acquired an influential position in the Scandinavian countries, both as a composer and as an outstanding performer of apparently exceptional powers. With 150 piano works, an *Andante quasi allegretto* for piano and orchestra (1869), a Scherzo for orchestra, the cantata *Nytaarsgry* (*New Year's Dawn*), arrangements of Norwegian folk tunes, and over 250 romances, Backer Grøndahl's output is a major contribution to 19th century music. In 1893 she even published a hitherto unknown national anthem *Norge* (*Norway*) in the women's periodical *Juleroser*. The "lost" manuscript of her work *Andante quasi allegretto*, which had been thought missing since 1947, also proved rather difficult to find.⁶ Since 1959 it has been in the archives of the Norwegian Music Collection at the National Library in Oslo.

At Backer Grøndahl's performance of the *Andante quasi allegretto* with the Theodor Kullak Neue Akademie der Tonkunst Orchestra in Saal der Singakademie in Berlin, the listeners observed her self-confident, independent

persona at a grand piano occupying most of the stage and drawing attention away from the conductor as well as the orchestra. She also showed much promise as an orchestral composer, and with her considerable piano technique, difficulties melted away. As a composition student, she confronted the rhetoric of the sonata allegro's male metaphors as it appears in Adolf Bernhard Marx' (1795-1866) *Die Lehre der musikalischen Komposition*.⁷ In the description of works in sonata allegro form, the banal predestination of the first subject as "masculine" and the second as "feminine" were common. Based on this gender-loaded aesthetics, listeners and critics formed their "producerly texts" so that they fitted their own social experiences. Thus it was possible to interpret the subjects in the *Andante quasi allegretto* in ways that did not express a maximum of "masculinity" in the first subject as opposed to a "superfeminine" second subject. The effect of these metaphors on listeners and critics must not be underestimated.

The sonata aesthetics generated far more meaning than the *Andante quasi allegretto* could control as an "open text." On the surface lie uncomplicated interpretations of the *Andante quasi allegretto* and the dominant part of the cultural life, within which it and the sonata allegro are situated. When this layer of dominant ideology is removed from the "producerly text," there is excess meaning that can be used to cut off the composition's "masque." Backer Grøndahl chose to use means that tipped the "polarity," "symmetry" or "balance" between the two themes as well as the goal towards which it is supposed to develop in the recapitulation. The highly interesting and virtuosic coda, which presents new material, was not only suited to exhibit her own pianistic skills but also to disturb the "binary" symmetry in the sonata allegro, when the movement's goal is established as the coda.

Musical-historiographical accounts, however, usually focus on Backer Grøndahl as the master of "small" genres performed in private homes similar to the Doll's House. Like her first composition teacher Halfdan Kjerulf (1815-68) and her close friend and colleague Edvard Grieg, she composed primarily songs and short character pieces for piano. These genres were well suited to domestic music-making as well as to concerts; and, consequently, their scores were easy to sell. It was mostly young women who bought such scores and played them at home in the same kind of setting as at the *Doll's House* party.

Backer Grøndahl was good at marketing pianos and piano music, and she knew her audience (which consisted of more women than men); and, therefore, she was not willing to risk falling out with her supporters. Their expectations affected the design of the genres she chose for her compositions. Some contemporaneous male critics considered her musical works as idyllic and conventional to the point of



Photograph: Severin Worm-Petersen. The Nordic Women's convention at the Kristiania University Ceremonial Hall in Kristiania (Oslo), July 3, 1902. The photograph was taken minutes before Backer Grøndahl's performance of her cantata *New Year's Dawn*. Reprinted courtesy of the National Library in Oslo.

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being clichés, but to most of the reviewers in women's magazines her works represented something "true," "a safe haven," and "a real alternative" in what they experienced as an aesthetically chaotic time.⁸ Perhaps they also appreciated that from certain perspectives she could be interpreted to question the relation between her small composition designs, pianos and "dolls' houses."

Backer Grøndahl's music composed for domestic performances was probably performed by her concert goers—the only difference being that at home her listeners themselves became performers. What was played at home was important for the development of structures for her public concerts. The type of personal propaganda she made at her concerts was therefore followed up by music publishers and local music shops with intense marketing of her scores. In their reviews, critics often recommended that her listeners buy her music, and informed them about where it could be purchased. In this way, Backer Grøndahl mixed "public" and "domestic" music spheres in productive ways not yet considered in Norwegian musical historiography. To many (male) critics' understanding of her choice of program, the genres of the works she performed, her femininity, and blonde appearance seem both highlighted and intertwined. A few exceptions among Backer Grøndahl's critics exist, however, who note the masculine power and clear logic of her works. Nonetheless, no matter how ingenious women composers were, projected ideals of womanliness and femininity would usually blur contemporaneous Scandinavian critics' judgement of their music.

How did Backer Grøndahl arrange her appearance at the Royal Philharmonic Society concert to which she refers in Shaw's account of the *Doll's House* party? According to her pianist son Fridtjof Backer Grøndahl (1885-1959), she was a good chess player, and one might add that this extends to the game of life.⁹ In a letter to a close friend, the singer Nina Grieg (wife of Edvard Grieg), she asked the Griegs to pave her way to the concert halls of London.¹⁰ She had heard that Edvard was going to be the Lion of the Season and that there was a keen interest in her music. If Backer Grøndahl could perform something with him, she knew her road to success would be secured. Through her songs, she was already a relatively familiar name to Londoners as a composer. She had her biography printed, and her British publisher, Pitts and Hatsfields, wanted to promote her in England. Backer Grøndahl also told Nina that if she thought she would not get anywhere with Edvard, she was not to mention the letter to him.

Backer Grøndahl's letter to Nina Grieg prompted the desired effect. During Grieg's negotiations with the secretary of the Royal Philharmonic Society, he mentioned a quite unknown, "absolutely phenomenal" Norwegian pianist who he "accidentally" knew was planning to come to London. He promised that the Society would not regret inviting such an outstanding pianist pre-eminent in playing all genres of pi-

ano music perfectly: concertos, solo pieces and chamber music.¹¹

Backer Grøndahl scored an extraordinary success with her brilliant and artistic interpretation in London of what *The Morning Post* described as Grieg's "quaint and graceful" A minor concerto.¹² The pianist, whose reputation had barely travelled beyond her native country, was heralded as an instrumentalist of exceptional powers, with a superb technique that added to her rare brilliancy of style and a full rich tone with a singularly delicate, sensitive touch. Backer Grøndahl was thoroughly in sympathy with Grieg's music, and the critics agreed that she captured the composer's fascinating style and demonstrated his capabilities.

George Bernard Shaw reported that he was one of the very few critics in the "unfortunate position" of never having heard Backer Grøndahl play Grieg's concerto.¹³ He was one of the most malicious critics of Grieg's "miniature" works, commenting on their sweet but very common modulations and the composer's lack of ability to create anything but "pretty" short melodies. Agreeing with Shaw on the Grieg matter, Hugh Reginald Haweis (1838-1901) declared Grieg "the Heine of the concert room" in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.¹⁴ *The Monthly Musical Record* also described Grieg as the "Chopin of the North."¹⁵ When Grieg moved on to bigger genres and meddled with Ibsen, one of Shaw's favourite authors, by composing incidental music for *Peer Gynt*, Shaw characterized it as infantile. Understandably, he left the concert before Backer Grøndahl had played the "infamous" A minor concerto.

A few weeks after Backer Grøndahl's appearance at the Royal Philharmonic Society and at the *Doll's House* dinner, Shaw revisited her in the flat she rented in London at Blanford Square to interview her, "ashamed to intrude on her in the ribald character of a journalist." He describes her as a woman of about 40, who has reached "the full maturity of her genius." In what follows, he chooses to address a fantasy woman reader, "Madam Curiosity," whom he expects to be "curious about her *personal* appearance":

Let me make you feel safer still by stating that she is what you would call—observe, what you would call—a PERFECTLY PLAIN WOMAN. Her hair is not golden like yours; it is, I think, almost ashen—you would call it grey. Her figure and style are—well, quiet, slender, nothing in particular, nothing superb or Junonian; how can I tell? Complexion? Quite Norwegian; no cream or coral, nothing to be afraid of there. Eyes? Well, eyes are a matter of opinion; I should rather like you to see them for yourself, they are memorable. A noble brow; but then, as you say, how unbecoming to a woman to have a noble brow! Would anybody look at you if you were in the same

room with her? Ah, there you have me, my dear lady. Frankly, they would forget your very existence, even if there were no such thing in the world as a piano. For there is a grace beside which your beauty is vulgar and your youth inadequate; and that grace is the secret of Madame Grøndahl's charm.¹⁶

Ironically, most of Shaw's readers had had the opportunity to hear and see Backer Grøndahl in London concerts on several occasions. The way the interview unfolds, Shaw lets her situate her professional life safely in the domestic and motherly sphere. He lets an "aggravatingly modest" Backer Grøndahl diminish the work behind her concert triumphs and compositions, and he makes it seem as if it is from her role as wife and mother that she acquires the experience that makes her an artist.

Turning up at her piano recital in Prince's Hall a month later, Shaw made negative remarks in his review of her performance of Grieg with the violinist Johannes Wolff: "I adhere to my opinion that she should have played a Beethoven sonata instead of Grieg's violin sonata in C minor; but if we had no Beethoven we had at least Schumann and Chopin."¹⁷ When Shaw's editor sent him to interview Backer Grøndahl, her earnest admiration for her compatriot Grieg infuriated him, "for she is a thousand times a finer player than he; and I got quite beside myself at the idea of his presuming to teach her how to play this and that instead of going down on his knees and begging her to deliver him from his occasional vulgarity, and to impart to him some of her Mendelssohnic sense of form in composition."¹⁸

Later that summer Backer Grøndahl travelled to play Grieg's concerto at the Trocadero during the world fair in Paris. The French critics too were exuberantly positive about her performance and about Norwegian music in general. In 1890, she returned to London, where she was favourably compared to Clara Schumann, which was a great compliment in London at that time. On her third visit to England, Backer Grøndahl committed the impertinence of yet again playing several of Grieg's works in Shaw's presence. Shaw condescended to stay on and listened:

On Saturday she came to the Crystal Palace in clouds of boreal snow. I should not have minded her bringing the snow if she had left Grieg's concerto at home. I hinted last year, and I now explicitly repeat, that Madame Grøndahl's powers in interpretation are wasted upon a scrappy work like Grieg's. [...] But when you are longing for Mozart in D minor or Beethoven in G, or the E flat over again, the Grieg is an impertinence. The programme, as far as the pianoforte was concerned, would have INFURIATED A SAINT. Madame Grøndahl put Grieg where she should have put Beethoven, and Chopin where she should have put

Grieg.¹⁹

Backer Grøndahl's next appearance was at her own recital in Steinway Hall two days later. She played many of her own pieces as well as works by Grieg and other Norwegian composers. Her performance of one work left Shaw even more exasperated than had her earlier performance of the A minor concerto. She and Alma Haas played Mozart's Fantasia in C minor (K 475), with the additional second piano composed by Grieg. Shaw felt that Grieg's interpolation was impertinent. There was general regret in newspaper and journal reviews about the two pianists deciding to perform this un-Mozartian two-piano arrangement. Still, their reading of this "vulgarized" and "spoiled" Mozart work was considered splendid. *The Musical Times* suspected that some evil spirit had tempted Grieg to write this outrage to good taste, full as it was of "discord and extravagance [...] alien to the spirit of the original music."²⁰ *The Academy* condemned the arrangement as a lack of reverence towards Mozart.²¹ *The Pall Mall Gazette* regretted that Grieg was destroying the Salzburg master as much as possible.²² According to *The Weekly Dispatch*, it was a "disgusting outrage worthy of condemnation in the strongest language."²³ In *The Observer*, Grieg was even called "a farthing rushlight to the sun" for his vulgarizing and spoiling of Mozart's fantasia.²⁴ Shaw, for his part, recommended that Grieg ascertain that "no brickbats or loose and suitably heavy articles have been left carelessly about the room," if ever he was to play it himself to an audience with adequate musical culture.²⁵

In a letter to Shaw, Backer Grøndahl explained her choice of Grieg's "disgusting" arrangement of the Fantasia:

As a novelty and as an experiment I think the Fantasia might interest, but in the reality I am myself of your opinion, if not in the same degree. I reverence Beethoven and Schumann as my musical gods, but there are so many different kinds of beauties in the art as in the world; I think the mind ought to be open to and able to accept every sort of it. Your bad opinion of this Fantasia I understand, but not of the concerto, which for me contains great beauties. But if ever I come to London again, I will try to be only classical, except perhaps in Grieg.²⁶

According to Shaw, a pianist and composer who had earned a high reputation should stick to classics such as Beethoven, Schumann and Mozart *au naturel*. As was the case with Ibsen, Shaw felt that Backer Grøndahl should not be tainted by her association with Grieg, and her respect for Grieg infuriated him even more. What perhaps

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disappointed him most, was her lack of judgement in choosing to play Grieg in general, and his "trivial additions" to Mozart's fantasia, as an indifferent substitute for the orchestra, in particular. Nevertheless, she continued to perform Grieg throughout her career, except for the Fantasia.

In the late 1880s and the early 1890s, when Shaw reviewed and interviewed Backer Grøndahl at the peak of her performing career, questions about women's identity and social situation in Norwegian society were debated publicly. Genius was regarded as a male quality and notions of Norwegianness seem to have had similar connotations. In order to be a representative of the nation-building of the 19th century, it was thought that it was perhaps necessary to be a man. Traditional discussions about women's innate nature and what were considered appropriate vocations for women were intensified. The socio-political climate for women's rights was steadily improving, but contemporary opinions on femininity deviated considerably from those held in the present. At that time most critics were men; therefore, they had the opportunity to publish propaganda based on their own standards. They formed the premises for what was true, valid, and relevant, and they defined what was reality in the realm of public concerts. On the other hand, newspaper reviews probably were based on what their readers expected, although, in turn, what their readers expected was based on what they were accustomed to reading. By virtue of being one of the most reviewed artists in the Scandinavian press and journals, Backer Grøndahl was discussed thoroughly as a woman pianist and composer. Reception materials connected to her pianist and composer *personas* consist of a broad spectrum of everything from fair and balanced descriptions of a woman who masters very demanding and difficult tasks in a brilliant way to reviews which openly state generally negative attitudes towards a woman's ability to compose music and arrange concerts.

Shaw was far from the only critic who wrote "tongue in cheek," almost flirtatiously about women pianists' personal appearance and gestures. In spite of Norwegian women's improved economic and legal status, better educational opportunities, and new career possibilities, deeply rooted negative attitudes towards women composers were voiced in the press, and the ideological climate seemed openly misogynous. Provoked by a crowd of young women fans who were amateur performers, relatively long reviews appropriated refined metaphors from "women's sphere" as sarcasm, irony, and mockery, and commented on Backer Grøndahl's inferior women composer colleagues. This puts the overall judgement that she was number one among Scandinavian women composers into perspective.

The Swedish composer and critic Wilhelm Peterson Berger (1867-1942) is one of the critics who would have liked to place Backer Grøndahl's music performed at public concerts neatly in a Doll's House. In a private home, he wrote, he would be more than willing to listen to her music in

a comfortable chair with a cigar in his mouth, but not in an uncomfortable seat in one of Stockholm's most public concert halls (The Royal Music Academy). To him, she was too blonde and friendly, something that made a whole concert consisting of her own works and performances tiring, and he compared her music to needle work and baking.²⁷ In contrast, as a pianist, Backer Grøndahl was considered among Europe's most outstanding pianists (male or female) and compared favourably to Anton Rubinstein and Hans von Bülow, among others. In such cases she appears to equilibristically balance (wo)manly artistic traits.

Norwegian contemporary discourse on women geniuses was formulated in newspapers by a mother of three, Hilda Torjusen, (1863-?), among others. Torjusen stated that if gifted women chose to develop in other directions than men, they did not achieve renown, and if they followed in men's footsteps, they were accused of not being original. While men's original ideas were cultivated, women's geniality could not be accepted because of society's strong misoneseism.²⁸

Backer Grøndahl became an expert at marketing pianos and her music, and she knew what she could and could not do and say publicly about women's liberation. The young women buying her music would probably not have wanted or been allowed to play her music had she publicly supported the feminist cause. Perhaps it is due to her balancing act that earlier literature has claimed that she was not active in the women's rights movement. It was only privately that Backer Grøndahl spoke of the negative aspects of being a multitasking wife and mother, pianist, educator and composer. She made good use of her time, and neglected nothing. Her health and hearing deteriorated, but Backer Grøndahl did not use either as an excuse for not doing things. In this way, her hard daily work in building a Norwegian musical life grew from small beginnings into something of wider dimensions.

In addition to her busy activities and glittering career, Backer Grøndahl, together with her painter sister Harriet Backer (1845-1932) and her close friend and colleague Erika Nissen (1845-1903), made it a priority to join the women's suffrage movement in Norway. As a child, she went to school with feminist pioneer Gina Krog (1847-1916), while her famous sister Harriet Backer was a classmate of Ragna Nielsen (1845-1924), both famous Norwegian feminists. Backer Grøndahl's cantata *Nytaarsgry* (*New Year's Dawn*), published in the feminist periodical *Nylænde* (*New Year's Edition* 1901), was dedicated to another feminist pioneer Aasta Hansteen (1824-1908), who saw herself as the Joan of Arc of Norwegian feminism.²⁹ This feminist pioneer was not afraid of offending the bourgeoisie. She felt that the same moral codes should apply to both men and women, regarded men as inferior creatures, and sometimes used a horsewhip (or

an umbrella) to punish them for personal offences and for centuries of female oppression.³⁰

Backer Grøndahl's cantata marked the beginning of what the women's suffrage movement hoped would be the women's century. Gina Krog's text³¹ and its rhetoric are strongly influenced by the semiotic codes for conventional signs and associations of the women's movement in general and Hansteen in particular. For those present at the first performance at the University Ceremonial Hall in Kristiania (Oslo), the cantata became a victory hymn that made them feel that they needed to press forward in their course.³² Hansteen compared the cantata to the women's suffrage movement's use of the Sunflower badge in Kansas and saw it as a symbol of women's right to light and air. She interpreted the cantata as a prophecy that love of women and mothers would save the world and humanity. Backer Grøndahl conducted a women's choir for the premiere of *Ny-taarsgry* at a large Nordic women's rights meeting in Kristiania in the summer of 1902, before 350 women wearing the Sunflower badge (see fig. 1). She also published several musical works in the feminist periodical *Nylænde*.³³ After this first performance of the cantata, *Nylænde* reported: "It evoked a beautiful, solemn tone—like a consecration."³⁴

At the untimely death of his close friend and interpreter, Backer Grøndahl, on June 4, 1907, Grieg made the following entry in his diary: "If a mimosa could sing, it would sound like her most beautiful, intimate melodies." *Nationaltidende* described her in its obituary as "the man" among hundreds of "lady pianists." But, perhaps the greatest tribute to her memory was expressed by Gina Krog, when she said, "Agathe Backer Grøndahl is not dead; she is just a sleeping beauty."

Notes:

1. *The Star*, 21 June 1889
2. Also available in George Bernard Shaw, *Shaw's Music: The Complete Musical Criticism*, edited by Dan H. Laurence, 3 vols (London: Max Reinhardt, 1981), 1: 673–680.
3. *The Monthly Musical Record*, 13 July 1889.
4. John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 94.
5. Pauline Hall, "Intensiteten, lidenskapen kan ulme under den stille overflaten," *Nytt fra Norsk Musikk-samling*, December 1997.
6. The *Andante quasi allegretto* has been recorded by Natalia Strelchenko and the Minsk Chamber Orchestra. They are now working to release all of Backer Grøndahl's piano works on ARENA Records. Three of the CDs have already been released and are available through Amazon, with two more CDs on their way. It is anticipated that the composer's songs will also be recorded.
7. Adolf Bernhard Marx, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition. Praktisch theoretisch* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1837).
8. The signature E. S., in the women's periodical *Urd*, 27 November 1897.
9. Fridtjof Backer Grøndahl in an interview in *Aftenposten*, 20 November 1947.
10. A letter dated 20 February 1888.
11. Edvard Grieg to Francesco Berger, 10 August 1888.
12. *The Morning Post*, 30 March 1889

13. *The Star*, 30 March 1889
14. *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 March 1889
15. *The Monthly Musical Record*, 1 April 1890
16. *The Star*, 13 July 1889
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *The Star*, 3 March 1890
20. *The Musical Times*, April 1890
21. *The Academy*, 8 March 1890
22. *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 March 1890
23. *The Weekly Dispatch*, 9 March 1890
24. *The Observer*, 9 March 1890
25. *The Star*, 7 March 1890
26. *The Star*, 8 March 1890
27. The signature "-t-." in *Dagens Nyheter Stockholm*, 2 November 1901.
28. *Nylænde*, 15 February 1894
29. Kari Vogt, Sissel Lie, Karin Gundersen, and Jorunn Bjørgum, eds. *Kvinnernes kulturhistorie*, 3 vols (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1985-1988), 2: 65.
30. Marie Høgh and Fredrikke Mørck, eds. *Norske kvinder: en oversigt over deres stilling og livsvilkaar i hundredeåret 1814-1914* (Kristiania: Berg & Høgh, 1914), p. 37.
31. *Nylænde*, 1 January 1895 (edited by Agathe Backer Grøndahl).
32. *Nylænde*, 1 August 1901.
33. *Trondhjems Adresseavis*, 2 July 1902.
34. *Nylænde*, 1 August 1902.

About the author:

Camilla Hambro holds a B.A. in music, theatre and literature (University of Oslo), an M.A. in music history (University of Oslo), and a Ph.D in music history and analysis (University of Gothenburg). Her Master's thesis was on Hildegard of Bingen (*Hildegard of Bingen and her Ordo virtutum*) and her dissertation on Agathe Backer Grøndahl (*What smoulders beneath the surface. Agathe Backer Grøndahl (1847-1907), gender, genre and Norwegianness*). Dr. Hambro's articles on the subject of women in music were published in *Studia Musicologica Norvegica*, *Norsk Årsskrift for Musikkforskning*, *Svensk Tidskrift för Musikkforskning*, and various Swedish and German anthologies.

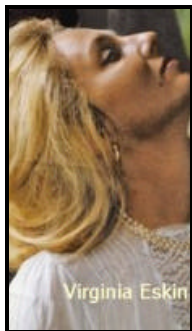
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Jack Sullivan, American Record Guide

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Edith Eisler, Strings Magazine

Kaprálová was one of the major female composers in history, despite her short time on earth; this Koch disc does her music considerable justice and serves as a strong introduction to Kaprálová's music.

Dave Louis, Allmusic.com

I have no doubt that this release will not only please Kaprálová's enthusiasts but also add many others to her following.

Veroslav Nemeč, Harmonie

Add this to your select discography of a composer whose early death deprived Czechoslovakia of a burgeoning talent.

Jonathan Woolf, Musicweb.uk

Contemporary American Women Composers and Their Choral Music: Part II

Jennifer Kelly

The following article is Part II of a two-part article serving as an introduction to contemporary American women composers of choral music. Part I was published in the Fall 2008 issue of this journal. I offer a reprint of the original introduction as it discusses rationale for the study and provides an article overview.

Current scholarship on American choral music remains minimal as we progress further into the 21st century. With notable exceptions, such as reference books by Nick Strimple, Catherine Roma, Evelyn Davidson White, and David DeVenney, the information on contemporary music for vocal ensemble is slim.¹ Slimmer still is the printed scholarship regarding composed choral music of contemporary American composers. Information is almost non-existent when it comes to the contemporary choral music composed by American women.² In the United States, numerous women composers have a wealth of choral music that has yet to receive critical attention. The following article in two parts serves as an introduction to contemporary American women composers of choral music.

This author recognizes the significant contributions of many more composers than are introduced here, and this article does not attempt to provide complete information on all contemporary American women composers of choral music. It serves as a brief examination of sixteen living female composers, each of whom deserve more in-depth study. It is hoped that this brief examination will inspire further study of both contemporary American women composers and music for vocal ensemble. For the purposes of this article, I am using the definition of American music as music created within the United States. As the world becomes ever more interconnected and musical styles merge, defining musical categories becomes less and less significant. Therefore, this paper will present each composer in alphabetical order and focus on contemporary music for vocal ensemble written in the past 25 years.

Each of these composers is commissioned, and has won numerous fellowships, grants and awards throughout her career. Many are freelance or work as college professors. These women are often advocates for young composers and women in music, as shown in their work on editorial boards, residency programs, and youth programs. The majority of these women are comfortable composing in varied genres, including large scale works for orchestra, ballet, film, opera, chamber music, and solo repertoire. Well-known composers such as Augusta Read Thomas and Judith Lang Zaimont, better known for their instrumental compositions, also compose strong music for vocal ensemble and are presented here.

In alphabetical order, composers to be examined in Part II include: Meredith Monk, Judith Shatin, Joan Szymko, Hilary Tann, Augusta Read Thomas, Janika Vandervelde, Gwyneth Walker, and Judith Lang Zaimont. Part I included: Beth Anderson, Nancy Bloomer Deussen, Emma Lou Diemer, Edie Hill, Jennifer Higdon, Libby Larsen, Mary Jane Leach, and Tania León. What follows is a series of brief synopses focusing on the composers' music for vocal ensemble: their voicings, thrust of choral compositions, publishers, recordings, and brief biographies. To give readers a broader understanding of these composers, the discussion elaborates on select pieces from their choral catalogs. When possible, a current website and/or career position is noted. This article is not the final word on any of these composers or their music, but offers a beginning.

Meredith Monk

Meredith Monk was born in 1942, in New York,³ and graduated from the Sarah Lawrence College. A pioneer in extended vocal technique, Monk received the MacArthur "Genius" Award in 1995, was honored with a three-concert retrospective by Lincoln Center Festival 2000, inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2006, and named a United States Artists Fellow. With over 100 created works, Monk is a composer, singer, and creator of new opera, music theater works, film, and installations. Her avant-garde compositions are often incorporated with movement and staging. This is one reason why she is often referred to as a performance artist, although she refers to herself as "a composer."⁴ Monk's compositional catalog is a wealth of "new" or experimental music dating back to 1965. Founding and performing as Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble since 1978, her works with voice are often scored for six or more voices, with no specific age or gender distinction. In 1968 in New York City, Monk founded The House Foundation for the Arts, a company dedicated to an interdisciplinary approach to performance. As described by the House Foundation website, "Monk creates works that thrive at the intersection of music and movement, image and object, light and sound in an effort to discover and weave together new modes of perception." The House Foundation provides workshop opportunities and community outreach, as well as providing support for Meredith Monk's artistic endeavors.⁵ She articulates, "Combining music (especially vocal music), movement and theater into a unified whole has been a major focus of my work over the years."⁶

Atlas: An Opera in Three Parts (1991): Composed in three large sections, *Personal Climate*, *Night Travel*, and *Invisible Light*, *Atlas* was commissioned by

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the Houston Grand Opera and is made up of nonsense syllables sung by a cast of eighteen and chamber orchestra. In his introduction to the opera recording, Max Loppert explains, "In *Atlas*, travel is a metaphor for spiritual quest and commitment to inner vision."⁷ The story tells of explorer Alexandra Daniels and her traveling companions. Together, they have grand adventures and struggle with inner demons. Guides lead them to their final destination into a realm of pure energy. The *ostinato* accompaniment and frequent driving rhythms give way to floating *a cappella* lines. Without words, color remains in the foreground and a landscaped story progresses forward with painted sound.

Panda Chant II and *Astronaut Anthem* (1983): The earliest compositions discussed in this article, *Panda Chant II* and *Astronaut Anthem* are two readily accessible scores for voices, available through Boosey & Hawkes. Both of these songs are part of *The Games: A Science Fiction Opera* by Meredith Monk with collaborator Ping Chong. Monk composed the music. *The Games* describes a post-nuclear future on an imaginary planet where survivors and their descendants play ritual games to preserve the last of their earthly civilization. *Panda Chant II* occurs in the middle of the opera, as an energetic ritual performed by the whole community. The piece is based on layered textures with voices, bodies, and soloist. *Astronaut Anthem* occurs near the end of the opera and "celebrates the colonization of the planet as well as the spirit of exploration."⁸ The work begins with layers of sustained pitches on closed sounds until the piece opens to "Ah" with a simple melody. The texture thickens as voices evolve from sustained pitch to melody and quick, repeated *glissandi* are highlighted in the soprano. The score contains helpful performance notes for the vocal direction of this contemporary work.

Monk's vocal sound exploration can be found on numerous recordings including *Book of Days* (the soundtrack to her feature-length film), *Atlas: An Opera in Three Parts*, *Mercy*, and the most recently released *Impermanence*. Most of her recordings can be found on the ECM New Series label. Numerous groups throughout the years have also commissioned and/or performed her music. In the New York area, Monk has a program for local choirs providing an opportunity to rehearse with a member of her ensemble combining solo, group, and choral music. The resulting performance is with Monk and Vocal Ensemble with repertory from *Book of Days* and *Atlas*. If a simpler vocal experience is desired, *Astronaut Anthem* and *Panda Chant II* are recommended. The composer's website: meredithmonk.org.

Judith Shatin

Judith Shatin was born in 1949. She studied with Milton Babbitt, Otto Luening, and J.K. Randall, and earned

formal degrees from Douglass College, The Julliard School, and Princeton University. An advocate for contemporary music and women composers, she has been commissioned by such ensembles as the Women's Philharmonic, Ash Lawn Opera, and Kronos Quartet. Her numerous awards include recognition by such organizations as the National Endowment for the Arts, American Music Center, and The Virginia Commission for the Arts. Her inspirations range from myth, poetry and her Jewish heritage to the sounds of the environment that play an increasing role in her music. Shatin's catalog of works includes orchestral, chamber ensemble, choral, solo, and electroacoustic music. Her choral works number about twenty and are composed for mixed chorus (SATB) and treble or women's voices. Shatin uses traditional accompaniment, and also combines the acoustic voice with electronics such as *Four Songs for Treble Chorus and Tape* (1993) and *COAL* (1994), a folk oratorio for chorus, an Appalachian band of banjo, fiddle, guitar, dulcimer, two Appalachian singers, and synthesizer and tape. Her compositions are appropriate for a wide range of ensembles, from youth chorus to university and professional ensembles. An early lover of poetry, Shatin considers her "involvement of texts as part of that original creative well-spring."⁹

Beetles, Monsters, and Rose (1994): A four-movement fourteen-minute work, commissioned by the San Francisco Girls Chorus, and scored for treble voices and electronic playback. *Beetles, Monsters, and Rose* is a setting of four poems: *Click Beetle, Clack Beetle* by Mary Ann Hoberman, *Someone* by Walter de la Mare, *I Am Rose* by Gertrude Stein, and *The Wendigo* by Ogden Nash. Shatin describes in the program notes that the electronic playback was made from processed sampled sounds, such as whispering, a hand-held egg-beater, and "the chinking of a fork on a cup."¹⁰ Each movement stands on its own with contrasting sounds and texture. For example, *Click Beetle, Clack Beetle* is a rhythmically charged combination of descriptive words, clapping, and an array of electronic sounds. *I Am Rose* is a color wash of vocal chords, quick upward melodic strokes, and shimmering electronics.

Adonai R'oi (1995): A short four-minute statement for mixed voices written in reaction to the 1995 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel. *Adonai R'oi* is the Hebrew text of Psalm 23. This remembrance is presented in simple, homophonic fashion meant to comfort. Written as a lament, the close harmony in parallel movement keeps the text in the foreground.

Judith Shatin is currently the William R. Kenan Jr., Professor of Music and Director of the Virginia Center for Computer Music, which she founded at the University of Virginia in 1987. Shatin's choral music can be found through Arsis Press, Colla Voce Music, E.C. Schirmer, and

self-published through Wendigo Music: *judithshatin.com*. Recordings of her instrumental music can be found on various labels. *Adonai R'oi* was recorded on New World Records by the New York Concert Singers, Judith Clurman, conductor.

Joan Szymko

Joan Szymko was born in 1957, and has spent the majority of her career in the Pacific Northwest. Her formal education includes the University of Illinois and the University of Washington, Seattle. Her music is frequently performed at national conventions of the American Choral Directors Association, and she has received a number of commissions and fellowships to support her compositional work. Her large catalog of choral compositions and arrangements includes work for three and four part women's ensemble and treble voices. In addition to this significant contribution to the body of literature for women's voices, Szymko also composes chamber music, art song, works for the stage, and choral music for mixed voice and male ensemble. Illuminating text is her highest priority. With a number of secular works in her catalog, Szymko considers her music "bent" toward the sacred and "toward the great mystics." She explains the importance of "illuminating the illusion of separateness."¹¹ Examining her choral catalog, one also finds a number of works emphasizing women and peace as poetic themes. These themes support the mission of the *Aurora Chorus*, of which she is Artistic Director.

It is Happiness (1998): A three-movement twenty-minute work for women's voices and chamber ensemble featuring the poetry of Mary Oliver. Three accessible and contrasting movements, *The Summer Day*, *Sunrise*, and *Wild Geese*, explores the theme of one's search for meaning and place in this grand world. *The Summer Day* opens as an easy waltz with major chords, long phrases and an open feel. *Sunrise* is a slower contrasting piece beginning with open fifths and layering sound creating the "sunrise." *Wild Geese* completes the trio that begins with a madrigal-like sound using imitation in the voices and chamber ensemble. As a three-movement work, *It is Happiness* embraces long phrases and dynamics and is written in duet between voice and chamber ensemble.

Nada te turbe (2000): A single-movement four-minute piece for cello and four-part treble voices with *divisi*. A second version of *Nada te turbe* exists for mixed voices. Saint Teresa of Avila, Spain wrote the sacred text in the sixteenth century. Mixed meter follows the rhythm and easy flow of the text as it moves between Spanish and English. The accompanying cello is written in contrasting styles of *pizzicato* arpeggios and *arco* lines. The combination of open chords, clusters, language, and changing meters adds sophistication to a simple melody.

Joan Szymko is a freelance composer, Artistic Director for *Aurora Chorus*, and resident composer with *DO*

JUMP! Movement Theater. Her music is available through several publishers including Santa Barbara Music Publishing, Treble Clef Music Press, Yelton Rhodes Music, and the composer. Various choirs have recorded her music, including Belle Voci Women's Vocal Ensemble and the San Francisco Girls Chorus. The all-Joan Szymko CD, *Openings*, released on Virga Records, is also a good sampling of her choral music. The composer's website: *joanszymko.com*.

Hilary Tann

Hilary Tann was born in 1947 in the coal-mining valleys of South Wales, United Kingdom. Her formal education includes degrees from the University of Wales at Cardiff and Princeton University. She has received several awards and commissions from the United States and her native Wales. Her music is influenced by her love of Wales, her strong identification with the natural world, and a deep interest in the traditional music of Japan. Her catalog includes works for orchestra, chamber ensemble, soloist, vocal, and choral music. Tann came to choral music later in her compositional career. Until recently, she considered poetry a different language from music. She explains, "I've always been involved with poetry but it was always separate, because I considered music to be so much more eloquent."¹² In the past ten years, however, she has come to realize that the music and the word are intertwined, as in the Welsh, *Cerdd*. To date, Tann has about a dozen choral pieces in her catalog, written for mostly mixed choir and treble voices. Tann's poetic choices are inspired by nature and by her native land. She chooses pastoral poetry and often combines the poetry with passages from the Psalms. Her choral music is lyrical and accessible, often peaceful. She explains, "I am melody-based. I like to landscape melodies."¹³ Tann's connection with Wales is evident by her use of subject matter, imagery, landscape, poetry, and quoted melodic lines. Within her choral music, Tann's connection with traditional Japanese music and haiku can be heard in pieces such as *That Jewel-Spirit*.

Paradise (2008): Composed for a *cappella* mixed choir with *divisi*, *Paradise* is Tann's most recently completed piece. *Paradise* is taken from Welsh poet George Herbert's poem of the same name, which begins, "I Bless thee, Lord, because I grow/Among thy trees, which in a row/To thee both fruit and order ow."¹⁴ Tann interprets the poem to be about pruning. The piece begins with three rather dense, almost complete phrases, followed by a "pruning", as the music develops into narrative melody. A second inspiration for the work is the word "paradise," deriving from the image of a walled garden. She composes a walled garden of sorts, framing Herbert's poetry in Vulgate Latin Psalms. *Paradise* is a mixed meter piece with pulse groupings of two, three, and five, and yet it

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sweeps easily. As the trees in the poem grow and produce fruit, the music swells, eventually intertwining with the Psalm. Her garden is pruned to a bell-like figure in the voice designed to let in spiritual and peaceful light.

Contemplations (21,22) (2005): A five-minute work for a *cappella* treble voices, *Contemplations (21,22)* is a complex piece using a wide range of the soprano and alto voice. This piece infuses lines from Psalm 98 with passages from a 17th century poem by Anne Bradstreet. Tann connects Bradstreet's phrase "O happy Flood," with "Let the floods clap their hands," from the Psalm. Once again, nature reigns in Tann's music as the melodies paint the images of rivers and streams. Moving easily between mixed meters, recitative passages of poetry give way to lively Psalm verses.

Hilary Tann is currently the John Howard Payne Professor of Music at Union College in upstate New York. Rowanberry Music, Brichtmark Music Inc., and Oxford University Press publish her music. Tann's instrumental music has been recorded on a number of compact discs. Although her choral music has been given repeat performances both in the United States and in Wales, the greater body of her music for vocal ensemble has yet to be professionally recorded. The composer's website: hilarytann.com.

Augusta Read Thomas

Augusta Read Thomas was born in 1964, in New York. Her formal education includes Northwestern University, Yale University, and the Royal Academy of Music in London. Her formative teachers include Oliver Knussen, Jacob Druckman, Alan Stout, and Bill Karlins. Thomas was a professor of music at Eastman and then Northwestern University until she resigned to devote her time exclusively to composition. She was Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (1997-2006), and was recently Chair of the Board of the American Music Center. Thomas's compositional catalog includes a body of work for orchestra, band, chorus, and chamber ensemble. A composer with numerous awards, residencies and commissions, Thomas' work has been programmed by some of the most respected conductors and orchestras in the Western world. In 2007, her composition, *Astral Canticle*, was one of two finalists for the Pulitzer Prize in Music. She currently has over a dozen commissioned works for choir, including a new work, commissioned by the San Francisco Girls' Chorus, which premiered in October 2008. Her choral compositions are written for varied ensembles including mixed (SATB), children's chorus, and women's and men's ensembles. The works are composed *a cappella* or with accompaniment by large and chamber orchestra. The thrust of Thomas' text settings includes classic poets such as Emily Dickinson and Alfred Lord Tennyson. Her music is lively, intriguing and engaging, at times humorous, at times intense, combining quick rhythmic motives with sus-

tained melodic thick-textured lines, and non-traditional chordal resolutions.

Love Songs (1997): A fifteen-minute work consisting of seven songs for 12 *a cappella* soloists. The text is taken from lines of classic poetry by Alexander Pope, Edward Coate Pinckney, William Sharp, Samuel Rogers, Lord Byron, William Shakespeare, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The voices are composed instrumentally without imitating the sound of instruments. The voice often presents itself as a modern string quartet or chamber ensemble. Embracing modern harmonies, each movement has a very distinct color, feel, texture, and mood. The music is often playful, such as in "Alas, the love of women!" where laughing is composed into the song through rhythmic syllables and actual laughter. Sensuous color is composed into other epigrams such as "All mankind love a lover," where sonorous long tones are made rich with major sevenths and flat nines. *Love Songs* is a varied selection of advanced songs commissioned by Chanticleer and composed for their specific timbre.¹⁵

The Rub of Love (1995): A short, two-minute modern madrigal again commissioned by Chanticleer. The text was taken from an anonymous Greek poem. It begins, "The rub of love. Eros tickles me!" A clever and witty composition, word painting abounds on words and phrases such as "tickles," "dipped him in the wine," and "drank him down." This challenging and contemporary madrigal remains light and playful.¹⁶

Augusta Read Thomas is currently a freelance composer in Massachusetts. Her work is published exclusively through G. Schirmer, and numerous recordings of her instrumental music exist by various artists on a variety of labels. *The Rub of Love* and five movements of *Love Songs* can be heard on Chanticleer's Grammy award winning disc, *Colors of Love*, on Teldec. The composer's website: augustareadthomas.com.

Janika Vandervelde

Janika Vandervelde was born in 1950, in Wisconsin. She holds a Ph.D. in music theory and composition from the University of Minnesota, where her teachers included Eric Stokes and Dominick Argento. Vandervelde has been named a Bush Artist Fellow, a McKnight Foundation Composer Fellow, and is the recipient of numerous awards, fellowships, and commissions. A great supporter of young composers, she designed a composition curriculum using music technology, *Music By Kids For Kids*, through the American Composers Forum. Vandervelde has also provided the score to *Adventures of the Black Dot*, an innovative and well-received choral storybook for the young about actively creating music. In addition, her *Genesis II*, for piano trio, was the subject of a chapter in musicologist Susan McClary's 1991 book *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*.¹⁷ Vandervelde has written over ninety works

for choir, orchestra, stage and multimedia, opera, solo, and chamber ensemble. The thrust of her catalog is choral music, with nearly forty compositions for mixed ensemble and treble voices. Vandervelde's music is reflective of her interest in world cultures and includes piano and handbells, orchestra, Latin percussion, Native American flutes, hammered dulcimer, and percussion. In addition to the sounds and colors represented in the accompaniment, her interest in cultures is apparent in her seven languages of text settings.

Adventures of the Black Dot (2003): A multi-movement thirty-five minute work scored for narrator, mixed voices and chamber ensemble (accordion, cello, harp, percussion). Vandervelde composed this piece as a companion to Judy McGuire's children's book titled *Adventures of the Black Dot: The Island of Music*. The Black Dot is the pupil at the very center of a little girl's eye. As the little girl sleeps, this particular Black Dot grows restless and longs to travel.¹⁸ Composed in three parts, the multi-movement work takes the audience on a journey as the Black Dot sails to an island populated by clans of other dots who teach her how to create music and the harmony of working together. The narrator reads the story as Vandervelde's score leads the choir and chamber ensemble through the narration in song and sound effect.

Cancao de Embalar (2000): A single-movement two-minute piece for a *cappella* mixed voices. The poetry is a combination of phoneme syllables and Portuguese text. *Cancao de Embalar* is written as a lullaby and consists of two pentatonic scales a half step apart, like the black and white keys of a piano. Opening with women's voices and adding tenor then bass, the music employs parallel motion, homophonic texture, and mixed meter as the voices move up and down the pentatonic scales.¹⁹

Janika Vandervelde currently teaches orchestration at the University of Minnesota and serves on the faculty of the Perpich Center for Arts Education, "a state-wide, innovative arts high school with a cutting-edge, composition-based music program."²⁰ Her works are published through Earthsongs and self published through Hothouse Press. *Adventures of the Black Dot* is on Innova Recordings and performed by the Minnesota Chorale conducted by Kathy Saltzman Romey. The composer's website: janikavandervelde.com.

Gwyneth Walker

Gwyneth Walker was born in 1947, in Connecticut. She holds degrees from Brown University and the Hart School of Music, where she studied composition with Arnold Franchetti. In 1982, she resigned as a faculty member of Oberlin Conservatory to pursue a full time career as a composer. In 1988, Walker helped found the Consortium of Vermont Composers and was awarded the 2000 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Vermont Arts Council in addition to her numerous awards and commis-

sions. Her compositional catalog includes over 180 commissioned works for orchestra, band, and chamber ensemble, and nearly 100 works for choir, mostly mixed chorus, women's, and children's voices. A text-driven composer, she most often sets to music American poets such as E.E. Cummings and May Swenson. Walker strives to be egalitarian in her compositional texts and commissions, writing for soloists and ensembles of varying skills and experience. With inspiration from her Quaker roots, she writes music of peace and spirituality, not music for religious service. "Everything about me comes out in my music...probably because I started writing before somebody told me that I couldn't express myself. Nobody told me not to put myself into my music until it was too late... I decided...if I could only write one kind of music, it would be choral, because people have always sung and always will sing. That is universal."²¹

Songs for Women's Voices (1993): An approximately fifteen-minute work, *Songs for Women's Voices* is made up of six songs for women's voices and piano, featuring poetry by May Swenson. Walker states in the program notes that the poems address a variety of topics such as feminism, God, romance, and death, "yet they speak with one voice, one style, and one life-affirming philosophy. The musical settings are intended to present these poems in a simple and straightforward manner which seeks to portray the beauty, humor, and passion of the words."²² Unlike many composers, Walker also suggests that the poems be read to the audience before the performance of each song. The songs are composed to provide clarity of text with a frequently homorhythmic texture. When the infrequent melismas occur, they usually highlight descriptive words such as the descending line on "diamonds" in *Love is a Rain of Diamonds* or the minor third oscillating skips on the word "motion" in *Women Should Be Pedestals*.

I Thank You God (1998/2002): This four-minute setting of E.E. Cummings' poem "i thank You God for most this amazing day," was commissioned for the American Choral Directors Association by the Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission. Originally for treble voices with piano, Walker later composed a version for mixed voices. Setting the stage to create the vastness and grandeur of E. E. Cummings' poem, the piano introduction is marked "Slowly unfolding with wonderment," and explores the range of the keyboard before the voices enter. Once the voices join, it is clear that the piano is more of an equal voice than strict accompaniment. This setting of the popular Cummings poem does not set the text from beginning to end but fragments the lines between the parts so that the whole ensemble is needed to express the poem. With repeated textual lines such as "I thank You God" and "I who have died am alive again today," the score describes the work as "an expression of the rebirth of the soul with each 'amazing day.'" The piece begins in C minor, and the final chord for

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both piano and singers is C major.

Gwyneth Walker is a freelance composer living in Vermont. One of her current undertakings is to create orchestral accompaniments for many of the choral and vocal works in her catalog. Most of her choral scores can be found through ECS Publishing, and there are over a dozen choral recordings featuring Walker's music. Her comprehensive website is an excellent source of information for recordings, musical insight, etc. The composer's website: gwynethwalker.com.

Judith Lang Zaimont

Judith Lang Zaimont was born in 1945, in Tennessee, but was raised in New York. Her formal education includes the Julliard School, Queens College, Long Island Institute for Music, and Columbia University. Her formative teachers include Hugo Weisgall, Jack Beeson, Otto Leuning, and André Jolivet. A recipient of numerous awards and fellowships from organizations such as the NEH, NEA, Guggenheim, Bush Foundation, and Minnesota Composers Forum, Zaimont has also been the subject of articles, book chapters, and dissertations. She was also editor-in-chief of the highly respected three-volume series *Musical Woman: An International Perspective*. Her compositional catalog includes solo pieces and a wide variety of music for orchestra, winds, keyboard, choir, and chamber ensemble. She has composed about 20 works for vocal ensemble including a chamber opera, oratorio, and cantata. Piano, synthesizer, or orchestral instruments often accompany her choral compositions.

Life Cycle (1994-2001): An ongoing project for women's voices with texts by women. To date, there are four settings in the cycle, spanning the years 1994 to 2001. The cycle includes "Friends," text by Doris Kosloff, "They Were Women Then," by Alice Walker, "Kneeling in the Big City (Demeter, Persephone)," by Elizabeth Macklin, and "The Habit of Anger (when I'm alone)," by Elizabeth Macklin. Each movement's score of *Life Cycle* explains that the project was "co-commissioned by several women's choirs, to present various stages of a woman's life, from young girlhood to senior years, using the words of women poets."²³ Each movement expresses its own timbre and emotion, from the youthful energy of "Friends" to the performance noted "Jazzy" confidence that comes from an older generation in "They Were Women Then." Although composed often years apart, the modern harmonies, rhythmic emphasis, and dynamic lines link the songs beyond their poetic connection.

Meditations at the Time of the New Year (1997): A two-movement thirteen-minute work for soprano and mezzo-soprano soloists, and mixed choir with *divisi* and percussion. The texts, in English, are drawn from meditations that accompany the Rosh Hashana liturgy in many Reform synagogue services. *Meditations at the Time of the New Year* is an uplifting work of optimism and renewal,

two central themes of the Jewish New Year. "Dawn" presents itself with modern harmony punctuating traditional bells. "Hope" is an uplifting movement beginning with bells calling all to sing, "Glory!" A deliberate and lovely declaration of "There will be peace," is followed by a reverent "Amen."

Retired from teaching, Judith Lang Zaimont is now a freelance composer and masterclass clinician. Her music has been featured on numerous recordings and is currently on the Naxos label through the American Classics series. Her published scores can be found through Subito Music Corporation. The composer's website: jzaimont.com.

Notes:

1. The following books are noted resources: *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century* by Nick Strimple, *The Choral Music of Twentieth Century Women Composers: Elisabeth Lutyens, Elizabeth Maconchy and Thea Musgrave* by Catherine Roma, *Choral Music by African-American Composers* by Evelyn Davidson White, and *Source Readings in American Choral Music* by David DeVenney.
2. Information on individual American women composers of choral music can be found in the archives of such journals as *Choral Journal*, *Journal of the International Alliance for Women in Music*, and *The American Choral Foundation Research Memorandum Series*.
3. William Duckworth, *Talking Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995), p. 345. Although Monk's place and date of birth have been noted differently, New York 1942 is also confirmed through *Women & Music: A History*, edited by Karin Pendle.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 345.
5. The House Foundation, "Meredith Monk: Biography" <<http://www.meredithmonk.org>> (13 December 2008).
6. Meredith Monk, "Process Notes," CD liner notes, *Atlas: An Opera in Three Parts*, ECM New Series 1491/92 437 773-2, 1993.
7. Max Loppert, "An Introduction to Atlas," CD liner notes, *Atlas: An Opera in Three Parts*, ECM New Series 1491/92 437 773-2, 1993.
8. Meredith Monk, *Astronaut Anthem* (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1983).
9. J. Michele Edwards, "Judith Shatin: Talking Music," *Journal of the IAWM*, 10, no. 2 (2004).
10. Judith Shatin, "Compositions: *Beetles, Monsters and Roses*," <<http://www.judithshatin.com>> (29 January 2009).
11. Information about Judith Szymko comes from email correspondence with the composer, July 2008.
12. Direct quotes from an interview with Hilary Tann, conducted by the author at Tann's home, October 2008.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Hilary Tann, *Paradise*, original text by George Herbert (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
15. Augusta Read Thomas, "Love Songs: Program Notes," <<http://www.augustareadthomas.com>> (16 December 2008).
16. Augusta Read Thomas, *The Rub of Love* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1995).
17. Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
18. Judy McGuire, *Adventures of the Black Dot: The Island of Music* (Minneapolis: Sleeping Pea Press, 2003), p. 3.
19. Janika Vandervelde's *Cancao de Embalar* is published through Earthsongs in a paired publication with Dale Warland's *Boyo Balu*, based on Valdervelde's melody.
20. Janika Vandervelde, "Self-portrait: Biography," <<http://janikavandervelde.com>> (13 February 2009).
21. Vicki Lynne Burcher, "The Choral Music of Gwyneth Walker:

An Overview." (DA diss., University of Northern Colorado, 2003), pp. 9-15.

22. Gwyneth Walker, "Love is a Rain of Diamonds," *Songs for Women's Voices*, original text by May Swenson (Boston: ECS Publishing, 1995).

23. Judith Lang Zaimont, "They Were Women Then," *Life Cycle*, original text by Alice Walker (Verona, NJ: Subito Music Publishing, 2001).

About the author:

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