

The Kapralova Society Journal

A Journal of Women in Music

Feminizing the Stage: Early Lady Orchestras and Their Maestras

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Special points of interest:

Women in orchestras

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In the past twenty years, feminist discourses on gender have increasingly begun to interrogate the centrality of the visual domain in defining Western art music, especially in the presentation of the feminine body. Indeed, considering the visual aspect of performance with our lens turned to the past also allows us to discover many new and interesting aspects of the lives of early female pioneers in the music profession. Since women lived in a world that saw them first as the subjects and objects of male domination and fantasy, female performers often had to present themselves according to what was expected of them in order to be accepted in the public sphere. Sherri Tucker explains that one way of packaging their acts while affirming respectability was to conform to a specific version of “femininity”, that is, a specific femininity born from *The Cult of True Womanhood: middle-upper class, white, domestic, and leisurely*.¹ In this article I offer a brief history of the rise of “first wave” women as conductors and leaders of their own “lady” ensembles (that is, orchestras from the late nineteenth century up to the Second World War). I illustrate how women negotiated normative ideas of femininity in their performances in order to be accepted by the society they lived in and eventually be received as acceptable female performers. After examining the influence of the Cult of True Womanhood on the first all-lady orchestra devoted to the playing of high art music, the Vienna Lady Orchestra, I briefly trace the history of other lady orchestras in North America, and conclude by showing how by the end of the 1930s, a new generation of conductors was beginning to emerge—women who were less concerned with appearances of normative femininity and more interested in the development of their careers as serious performers.

The Cult of True Womanhood (coined by Barbara Welter in 1966) had its beginnings in Victorian society in Great Britain, and emphasized a certain code of conduct for women in white, middle-upper class families in the nineteenth century: domestic, chaste and leisurely. With the surge of immigration from the British Isles, it is not surprising that the groups who most actively promoted

this emblem of conventional femininity in the U.S. and Canada were white Protestants of the middle-upper classes (English, but also German), who also formed the ruling class in most North American societies. In fact, “Victorian” came to represent an ideology, a set of values and practices that delineated the sharp distinctions between class and gender, between the public male sphere and the private female sphere, common throughout Britain and in most parts of Europe.

Class played a major role in encouraging or restraining a girl from pursuing a musical career.² In upper and middle class societies the dimension of time served as an essential parameter for delineating power and prestige, demarcating class differences, and maintaining gender hierarchies.³ Time was “ideologically defined” both by class and gender.⁴ Musical activities, as expressions of stationary time, “were considered *by men* appropriate and important” in establishing gender difference and gender hierarchy insofar as they facilitated “keeping women in the place that men had assigned them.”⁵ By the end of the nineteenth century, leisure had become increasingly connected with domesticity, and domesticity with the upper classes. Kay Dreyfus notes that “the cultivation of music as an (unpaid) accomplishment by the female members of the household became a symbol of leisure and stability for upwardly mobile or upper-class moneyed families.”⁶ By filling in “idle time” musical activities played a crucial role in helping women preserve the four central virtues of femininity: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Though the meaning of the term leisure was fluid and changing throughout the centuries, words such as “pleasure,” “ease” and “solace” were often used to describe this type of experience that especially valorized the nurturing of feminine “accomplishments” in the home.

The need to maintain sharp class distinctions, and the belief that musical activities were antidotes to women’s licentiousness, sensuality and vanity, combined with the ideology that women were intellectually and physically inferior to men, made the music education of middle-upper class women a

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subject of intense concern and debate among male circles. Moralists were often divided on the utility of music in the proper education of girls, for as musicologist Regula Hohl Trillini notes, “music was regarded as one of God’s greatest gifts as well as an enticement to perdition, an object of fear, desire, and prohibition.”⁷ On the one hand, to educate a girl musically meant to invest in her chances of future matrimonial bliss, and a father “risked neither the social shame nor the economic burden of producing an old maid.”⁸ Critics, however, also cautioned against the over-education of girls fearing that too much knowledge would give them a taste of independence and would eventually make them abandon their sanctioned responsibilities. They stressed music as a domestic accomplishment but only insofar as it was *needed* to encourage domesticity and the maintenance of class structure. For this reason, the performance of music by women was not only to be executed in *private* company, among family and friends, where she could remain invisible to society at large, but also with a certain degree of detachment and in a leisurely spirit, with not too much study.⁹

The general ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood were powerful forces in the formation and maintenance of “respectable” women’s music ensembles all over Europe and North America. In her examination of early European all-lady orchestras and ensembles, German historian Dorothea Kaufmann observes that the first female working musicians were driven primarily by financial need rather than a need for personal fulfillment. The main venues of popular entertainment consisted of concert saloons and variety theatres frequented by prostitutes, and associated with moral decadence, drunkenness, and masculinity—a situation that helped to “reinforce the bourgeois moral view that these women were curiosities outside the pale of social convention” and relegated them to the class of prostitutes.¹⁰ Touring complicated matters. Without the protection of union regulations women on the road often found themselves in disadvantaged positions: to work and earn a living they would sometimes be forced to provide sexual favours for their patrons or landlords, but to do so only served to prove the long-held view that music caused “fatal Consequences of Passions” in women, released their unrestrained sexual desires, and harmed men and society in general.¹¹ Such was the fear that accompanied these musical “prostitutes” that sometimes civil authorities would ban all-women musical groups from entering their cities.¹²

However, Kaufmann’s examination of women in lady orchestras as one step above prostitutes has been critiqued by scholars such as Kay Dreyfus and Margaret Myers who show that there were also many lady orchestras which were “superior” because of their “personal and musical qualities” and “were able to sell themselves more or less advantageously.”¹³ Dreyfus, in studying early European lady orchestras, notes that among the first female musicians in the public sphere “were members of a low-income” class, but who “did not necessarily belong to the working classes.”¹⁴ These women were either the wives or daughters of middle-class men who supported their music making for its financial contribution to the family. Other women were part of middle-class musician families where music had been cultivated from generation to generation. The stigma attached to the music making of these women was combated and made more “respectable” by the hyper-feminization of the all-lady ensembles they performed in. One such group was the highly influential Vienna Lady Orchestra.

With the exception of the harpist, membership in professional symphony orchestras remained relatively closed to women in most Western countries where the performance of classical music flourished. Since

many bands and orchestras began as military ensembles, the social and ideological foundations of these groups were geared towards the advancement of men. Thus, membership in symphony orchestras was generally open only to men, and female musicians were excluded for financial, physiological and “moral” reasons. This was even more reinforced in the case of the conductor position, due to its very public status. Responding to this initial exclusion, a group of women in late nineteenth century Vienna began a small chamber ensemble under the direction of a talented female violinist and pianist, Josephine Amann-Weinlich.¹⁵ The Vienna Lady Orchestra was quite possibly the first all-woman symphony orchestra dedicated to the playing of art music to emerge in the nineteenth century. Due to its amateur nature, lack of resources, and its somewhat jumbled collection of instruments consisting of a few strings, a flute, a piano, and an organ, the ensemble’s repertory was limited to light music, marches, and arrangements of dances.¹⁶ In spite of its limitations, it nevertheless publicized its “association with one of the great courts of Europe” as well as its “elegant and highbrow” standing.¹⁷ Josephine Amann-Weinlich led the group much like Haydn or Mozart would have led their own ensembles from the violin, harpsichord, or piano: conducting was intertwined with performing. Gradually, however, as the group expanded its numbers and repertoire, Amann-Weinlich began to take on a more principal role as *maestra* of her ensemble.

Central to being accepted as legitimate performers was assuring a sceptical public not used to seeing so many women on the stage led by another woman that what they were doing was something different from men—something “feminine” and in keeping with “woman’s nature”. Thus, a typical performance by the ensemble incorporated elements associated with femininity: flowers, white gowns, a change of clothing at the intermission, and sometimes other garden ornaments. A *New York Times* reporter describes the debut performance of Vienna Lady Orchestra in New York, 1871, as follows:

The spectacle was certainly a novel one. The platform was changed into a bower, and under the roses were sheltered...a score of blushing maidens attired in purest white...The sight of an organized force of female musicians was, until Monday, never offered in this country.¹⁸

Rather than masculinizing its performances, the ensemble intentionally hyper-feminized its appearance by staging it in a domestic setting, like a garden with flowers and a bower. As women of the middle and upper classes, their performances were really just reflecting their father or husband’s class and social status and wealth, and in doing so, the women became part of the leisure themselves—just as they served as ornaments to men in the home, as distractions from the workplace, as complements to their beautiful surroundings, so did they serve as ornaments here on the public stage. As Anna-Lise Santella notes, “[t]he orchestra sent a clear message with its visual representation: this was not an orchestra of women aspiring to be men.”¹⁹ In other words, the members asserted that neither were they competing with men, nor were they trying to be men. Rather, they wished to adhere to the standards of conventional femininity on and off the stage.

Early Lady Orchestras and Their Maestras

In her discussion of ladies' European orchestras, Margaret Myers observes that since women lived in a society which saw them first as "the sexual objects of men", critics often described their performances according to a system of gendered aesthetics, where the hierarchies in society between men and women were mirrored in the concert hall.²⁰ This is true of this lady orchestra. A music critic in Paris wrote that "Mme Amann-Weinlich is, first of all, entirely mistress of her orchestra," and he continued:

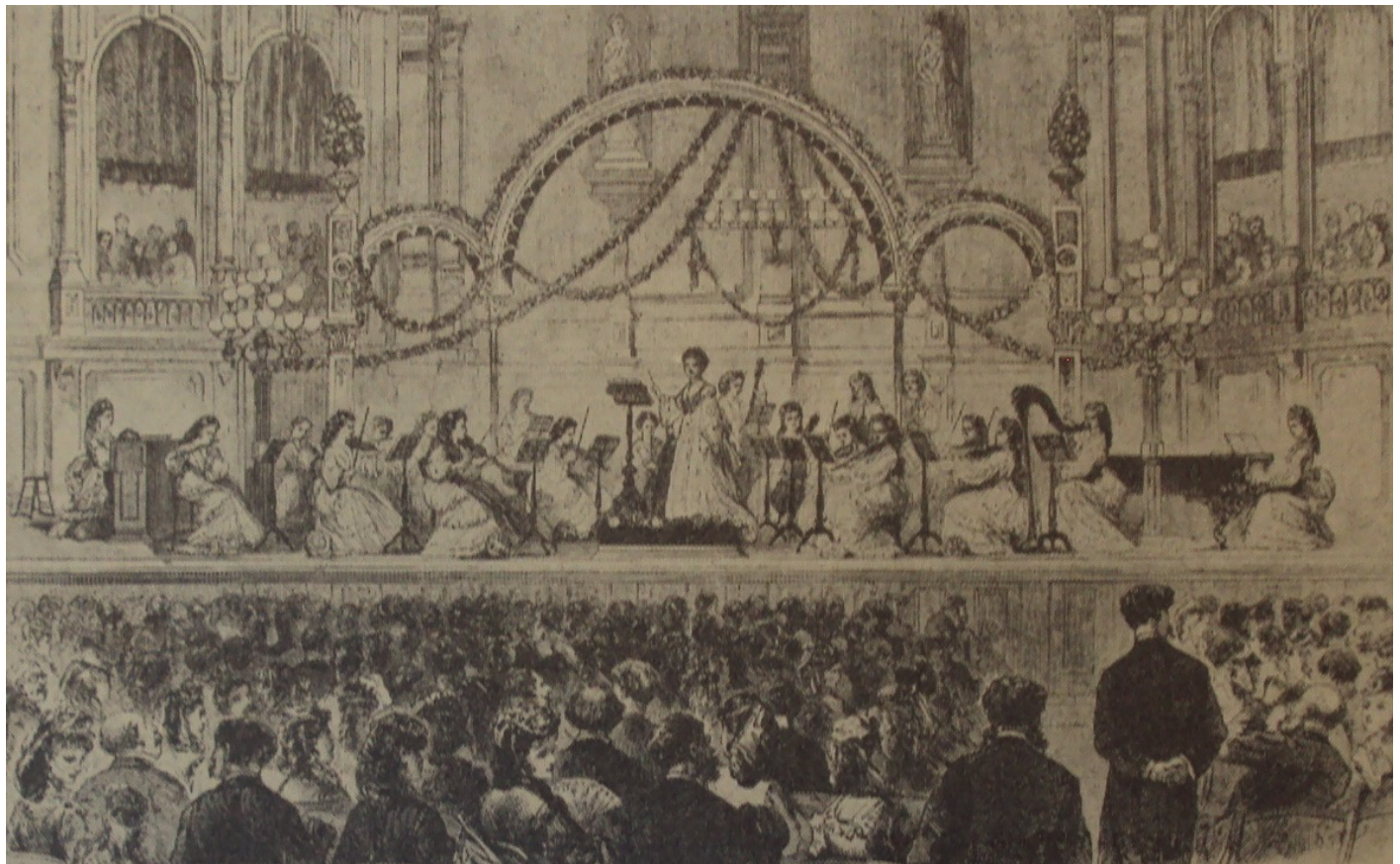
Composer, performer and directress all at the same time, accompanying on the piano whenever it is necessary... As for those around her...Some are very pretty, especially the contra-bassists and the violoncellists; with regard to beauty the first violins take the second place; the flutists are both fine women...sparkling eyes, charming.²¹

How much were the attractive and smiling faces of the musicians responsible for the warm praise they received is difficult to say. This male commentator concentrated on the feminine qualities of the ensemble, as if to approve of their work—although performing publicly was a male activity, they were doing it in a feminine way. In fact, the largely amateur ensemble was not as polished as its publicity had boasted, and

although the Parisian reviewer lamented that "[t]he sonorousness of the string instruments is generally defective...the brass instruments exaggerate the 'forte'," he added that "[t]hese are the only criticisms we permit ourselves to make."²² He quickly glossed over the technical and musical problems of the group by emphasizing instead the physical beauty of its performers. It seems that he was not apt to hand out a stern or "masculine" review on these modest maidens and left the criticism of their unpolished artistry by the wayside.

Interestingly, because "real talent" was believed to be intrinsic to men, a woman who was especially talented would receive high praise by the process of being "masculinized"—i.e., given male traits. Reviews for Mme. Amann-Weinlich's conducting present her as both having a feminine soul, and a rational (male) mind. Consider this review from the concert in Paris referred to above:

Mme. Amann-Weinlich...represents the perfect type of the grand priestess of the musical world. Her glance is comprehensive, her arm vigorous; she knows all the music by heart—so they say—and conducts from memory. Her intelligent face does not disappear behind the pages of a book of music; and one follows with the thousand sentiments which agitate her soul before



The Vienna Lady Orchestra of 1870. Published in Frédérique Petrides, "Women in Orchestras," *The Etude* (July 1938): 430.

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the waves of harmony which unroll themselves at her command to the applauding public.²³

The critic confers male qualities to the *maestra's* conducting style—vigour, intelligence and focus—but also highlights the emotional quality of a woman's soul, and proceeds to describe the total effect of the physical beauty of her orchestra. From the critic's viewpoint, a woman could embody some level of musical (male) talent only insofar as the female body and soul remained feminine. In other words, women had to assert their inner "female souls" outwardly through the representation of their bodies. They did so to assure the public that despite their embodiment of what were believed to be male musical traits, such as strength and intelligence, they were still essentially women. This is what Mme. Amann-Weinlich and her women's orchestra did so well and why they were so well received by audiences in Europe and North America.

The concerts of the Vienna Lady Orchestra, with their strong visual representation of femininity—of a femininity dictated by the Cult of True Womanhood—had a lasting impact on many women in the audience. In the late nineteenth century, various ladies' orchestras in Europe were created under the same name or a variation of it, such as "Viennese Lady Orchestra," or "Vienna Ladies' Orchestra."²⁴ Santella notes that some orchestras had no connections with Vienna. One group, for example, was situated in Berlin rather than in Vienna, and consisted of women string, flute and drum players, as well as male clarinetists. A harmonium replaced the lower brass. Many of these "Vienna Ladies' Orchestras" would return to the U.S. in the years to come, spawning many other small chamber ensembles in the German American communities, and later in other sections of society.²⁵

The influence of the Vienna Lady Orchestra can be noted in the many ways that "lady orchestras"—whether vaudeville ensembles, chamber groups, or full-fledged symphony orchestras, white, black, middle-class or working-class—often presented themselves. Illustrations of the first wave of women's orchestras (ca. 1940) in Europe and North America, regardless of class and race, are strikingly similar in terms of presentation and dress—long evening gowns with many layers of fabric, high necks, long sleeves, usually white, and with some kind of floral decoration. Bows, flowers, sashes and other "girly" jewellery usually accompanies these photographs. The influence of this early European lady ensemble can be traced all the way to Phil Spitalny's "Hour of Charm" orchestra of the 1930s—a striking replica of the Vienna Lady Orchestra, but in the realm of Jazz and popular entertainment—to André Rieu's Johann Strauss Orchestra—a contemporary ensemble of female string and male woodwind and percussion players that makes use of costumes and props during its performances. Several photographs of the first wave of women's music groups between 1900–1920s show musicians wearing closely matching dresses akin to uniforms, erasing all elements of individuality in favour of asserting a unified group identity.

The Vienna Lady Orchestra indeed became the model for other "proper" and "acceptable" lady orchestras and groups in Europe and North America. Santella demonstrates that the Vienna Lady Orchestra's US tour of 1871 initiated a snowball effect of all-women ensembles in North America in the years to come. In 1888, violinist Caroline B. Nichols established The Fadettes Women's Orchestra of Boston to provide employment opportunities for herself and other female musi-

cians. The ensemble started out with six violinists, playing background music for weddings, receptions and other musical affairs, including several functions of women's clubs in Boston. In 1895, seeing that her group had expanded to well over fifty members, Nichols began a serious study of orchestral conducting and developed her group into a larger lady's orchestra with winds and percussion. In 1898, she signed with Redpath and Southern Bureaus for the Chautauqua-Lyceum circuit, and her orchestra appeared in first-class vaudeville theatres all over North America. Nichols went on to conduct the orchestra for over thirty years and trained over six hundred women for professional careers as orchestral musicians.²⁶

Like the Vienna Lady Orchestra, The Fadettes followed the conventions of the time and dressed in billowing white Victorian gowns that covered most of their bodies from the neck to the heel. It is interesting that a publicity photo dating from c1920 shows The Fadettes in a very similar setting to the Vienna Lady Orchestra—the backdrop is that of a garden, and there are plants adorning the stage. Like its European counterpart, the orchestra also performed arrangements of light classical music including marches, waltzes and arias from popular operas, as well as incorporated vaudeville elements into their performances. All of this helped to showcase the women as domestic and leisurely, playing with a certain degree of detachment, for recreation's sake and with no painstaking study. Music, it seemed, was to them a trivial accomplishment and a time-filler to relieve boredom. The reality, however, was quite different.

Another early lady orchestra in this tradition was The Woman's Symphony of Long Beach, California, founded by violin prodigy Eva Anderson in 1925. This was also one of the longest lasting organizations of its kind, and boasted over 100 female musicians. Anderson's background as a vaudeville entertainer with the Redpath Bureau heavily influenced the orchestra. In fact, some critics argued that Anderson "ran her women's orchestra more like a vaudeville show than a classical orchestra."²⁷ Like other all-women ensembles of its time, to maintain credibility the WSLB had to play music to the highest standards possible, but to gain the attention of their public, the women also had to utilize whatever means necessary. In their case, it was beauty, glamorous costumes, and showmanship. Sometimes, flowers would adorn the hair-dos of the women. Exploiting gender stereotypes, "softening" appearances, and embodying excessive womanliness were strategies they used to represent their subversion to conventional norms. Emphasizing sexual difference seems to have been an important key to their acceptance as legitimate performers and even their success in the music profession. In fact, so successful were they in showcasing themselves as feminine—modest, leisurely and domestic—entertainers that unlike other all-women ensembles of its time, the WSLB was funded by taxes from the Recreation department of the City of Long Beach—all to the credit of Anderson, who "had a genuine gift for showmanship and a knack for engendering publicity."²⁸

These "lady" groups were such archetypes of true womanhood set to musical sounds that their presentations, their repertoire, matching outfits, and the carefully designed settings they performed in, both articulated their social and historical context and simultaneously enforced it. Through their comportment, players showed how women could not only lead ensembles but play instruments (including 'manly' instruments) legitimately in the public sphere, and at the same time retain their femininity. Indeed, this hyper-feminization reassured the

critics that women were not there to compete with men, but, as Sherry Tucker observes, they were there to do something *different*.²⁹ The emphasis on difference in their presentation was a successful tactic in the early 1900s. It not only allowed these groups to exist but also to play music and even make minimal wages. Emphasizing difference was vital for women pioneers in the music profession, as appearance became an important way to transmit images of respectability, especially since women's music making was now in the public (and therefore male) sphere.

There were many other all-women orchestras prior to 1940 that used dress, decorations and mannerisms as important signifiers of their domestic roles, despite their appearance on the public stage. However, by the late 1920s, it was becoming evident that women were no longer interested in simply "fitting in"—those early pioneers of the past had already created an acceptable image of women on the stage. A new generation of conductors was beginning to emerge and these women were less concerned with fitting into the norm and more interested in the development of their careers. The performance of conventional femininity and respectability had been central to women's acceptance as musicians in the past, but now that women performing on the stage was no longer a taboo, these young musicians of the 1930s were more interested in playing "serious" art music, and they looked down on the elements of vaudeville. Some examples include Elena Moneak, founder and conductor of the Chicago Women's Symphony Orchestra, and Elizabeth Kuyper and her New York American Women's Symphony Orchestra. In 1926, Ethel Leginska founded Boston Women's Symphony Orchestra, which she conducted for several years. In the 1930s, Frédérique Petrides gathered a group of talented students to create the Orchestrette Classique of New York, and with the financial assistance of an affluent upper-class lady, Antonia Bricco founded the New York Women's Symphony Orchestra in 1934. And in 1940, Ethel Stark created Canada's first all-women's symphony orchestra, The Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra. The goal of these conductors was no longer to appease the public but rather to train other women for careers as "serious" orchestral musicians. Their repertoires no longer consisted of light dance music and marches—markers of leisure and domesticity—but of the standard works played by major symphony orchestras.

The outbreak of World War II brought about a drainage of male talent in many orchestras all across North America. As men joined the war effort, women took on new positions in factories, businesses, and even in symphony orchestras. After the war ended, many women once again found themselves unemployed; but instead of returning to their segregated groups, they began to lobby for change. A breakthrough finally happened with the inclusion of the screen during auditions. By the late 1960s, segregated women's orchestras were outdated; yet it was by emphasizing their womanliness that early pioneers had navigated the values of the Cult of True Womanhood and had succeeded, to a large degree, in making women's music making in the public sphere so acceptable. Far from simply being "submissive feminine ladies" without any agency, without individual autonomy to choose new identities, these women used the performance of conventional "femininity" as an emancipating strategy. In doing so, they created possibilities for themselves and, eventually, for others.

Notes:

¹ Sherry Tucker, *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Bands of the 1940s* (Durham,

NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 89.

² Kay Dreyfus, *Sweethearts of Rhythm: The Story of Australia's All-Girl Bands and Orchestras to the End of the Second World War* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1999), 13.

³ Richard D. Leppert, *Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology and Socio-Cultural Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 28–29.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Dreyfus, *Sweethearts*, 13.

⁷ Regula Hohl Trillini, "Like Perfect Music unto Noble Words: Gender Metaphors and Victorian Music Poetry," In *Dichotomies: Gender and Music*, ed. Beate Neumeier, 147–162 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2009), 148.

⁸ Leppert, *Music and Image*, 29.

⁹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁰ Dreyfus, *Sweethearts*, 29–30.

¹¹ Leppert, *Music and Image*, 30.

¹² Dreyfus, *Sweethearts*, 30.

¹³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴ Ibid., 13–14.

¹⁵ Anna-Lise Santella, "Modeling Music: Early Organizational Structures of American Women's Orchestras. In *The Birth of the Orchestra: History of an Institution, 1650–1815*, ed. John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, 53–77 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 59.

¹⁶ Ibid., 60.

¹⁷ Ibid., 57.

¹⁸ Ibid., 58.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Margaret Myers, "Searching for Data about European Ladies' Orchestras, 1870–1950," In *Music and Gender*, ed. Pirkko Moisala and Beverly Diamond (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 23.

²¹ John Sullivan Dwight, ed., "Concerts de la semaine: Le nouvel orchestre féminin," in *L'Art Musical* (France, Dec. 4, 1873), printed in *Dwight's Journal of Music: A Paper of Art and Literature*, vol. 33–34 (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1875): 159–60.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Santella, "Modeling Music," 60.

²⁵ Spitzer and Zaslaw, *The Birth of the Orchestra*, 62.

²⁶ Mary Brown Hinely, "The Uphill Climb of Women in American Music: Performers and Teachers," *Music Educators Journal*, vol. 70, no. 8 (April 1984): 33.

²⁷ Jeannie Gayle Pool, *Peggy Gilbert and Her All-Girl Band* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press 2008), 29.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Tucker, *Swing Shift*, 82.

About the author:

Maria Noriega Rachwal is a music teacher, performer and musicologist living in Toronto, Ontario. She has lectured on women in music throughout the country and has written articles on the subject. Her research on the Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra was first featured on the CBC Radio documentary, *It Wasn't Tea Time: Ethel Stark and the Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra* (2012). Her new book *From Kitchen to Carnegie Hall: Ethel Stark and the Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra* was published in 2015 in Toronto by Second Story Press.

The *frauenkomponiert* Project: Interview with Jessica Horsley

I met Jessica Horsley at Forum Musik Diversität's conference on Kaprálová in November 2015 in Basel, and was immediately drawn to her charismatic personality, her openness and intelligence. When I learned that she was the major force behind the frauenkomponiert project, I was not surprised. We agreed to talk more about it but her prior commitments and the tight conference schedule prevented us from a more substantial encounter—so I was delighted when Jessica agreed to answer my questions long distance for the readers of this journal. Here you have it—some valuable insights into the world of orchestra and women.

KSJ: Jessica, where did you study conducting and with whom?

JH: I first studied conducting with Arturo Tamayo at the conservatory of Lugano, in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, specializing in modern and contemporary repertoire. It was a great study program, one of the few where you conduct advanced students and professionals on a regular basis, and the repertoire was incredible: we started with Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (!) and moved on to works like Pierre Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître* (1957) and Schönberg's *Erwartung* (1909). After completing the program in Lugano, I wanted to broaden my conducting repertoire to include the major works of the nineteenth century, so I studied with Kirk Trevor (CZ/US) and Tomáš Netopil (CZ/D) in beautiful Kroměříž and with Sasha Mäkilä in Mikkeli, Finland. Another important person in my development as a conductor was and is Swiss conductor and composer Thüning Bräm, who coached me in preparation for Lugano and with whom I still often discuss scores and conducting. (We met when Thüning wrote a piece for me for solo baryton.) Now in his 70s, Thüning has amassed amazing knowledge and experience of music, conductors and conducting over the past half-century, and there are few people with whom I can discuss my passion on that level.

KSJ: Did you have a particular role model?

JH: I think the whole question of role models is a bit of a difficult one for a woman conductor. On the one hand, I always found good conducting inspiring; on the other, the conductors I was watching when I was young were (very nearly) all men—and even now, women conductors are exceptional. The subliminal or not so subliminal message was always that this is man's work, and we still have a long way to go. That said, in my early years I found Sir Simon Rattle particularly stimulating, as probably many English conductors did. Now I would say that certain conductors inspire me for a particular repertoire or for some of their qualities—the sound, the line, the entries for the woodwind, the perfectly-gauged accelerando, their interpretation—whatever. And I think women conductors are inspiring in general—Simone Young, Marin Alsop, Karen Kamensek, Andrea Quinn—because even now, seeing a woman on the podium is an event. Many of the musicians I encounter have never before worked with a professional woman conductor.

KSJ: Can you tell us something about the *frauenkomponiert* project and how did you come up with its idea?

JH: I was preparing some scores—Prokofiev's fantastic Fifth Symphony and some Beethoven, I think—when it occurred to me that I'd rather like to conduct something by a woman some time. Whether there was anything...? I'm still amazed that I didn't know the answer to that question, despite having studied and worked in many countries. I'm also still amazed that I hadn't asked myself the question before, despite the fact that gender issues were not at all new to me—and that shows how ingrained the whole system is. When I tell people I meet socially that I'm a conductor, most of them *realize for the first time* that they've never seen a woman conductor in action. Similarly, many audiences never even realize that they've never heard a work, or at least certainly not an orchestral work, by a woman composer. With "*frauenkomponiert*", we set out to change that by performing great orchestral works by women—and there are many! In our March 2015 program, the music was new not just to the audience: every single member of the orchestra had never played any of the works before. Whilst I think that it would be far preferable in the long run to perform works by men and women in the same program, given that, for example, not a single orchestral work by a woman is being performed in the 2015–16 concert season in Basel outside of *frauenkomponiert* (and this simply reflects standard practice), the all-women programs we present are desperately needed as a counterweight. The name *frauenkomponiert*, incidentally, is a made-up German word combining "Frauen" – women – with "composed". The equivalent in English would be something like "woman-composed" and we use it (with the stamp of the logo) as a sort of seal of approval. Like "made in Switzerland, or "top quality", you can also have "*frauenkomponiert*".

KSJ: Does that then fit in with the mandate of your orchestra, *L'anima giusta*? What does its name mean, actually?

JH: The Italian *l'anima giusta* means something like "the true or just spirit (of things)". When we were looking for a name for the orchestra, we wanted to get away from the "philharmonias" and "symphonies" and looked for something that embodied a spirit of change and the orchestra's remit of introducing more "justice" into orchestral concert programs. There are also echoes of getting away from the competitive dog-eat-dog atmosphere, which is rife in the music business: working together we can all reach our full potential and create

something fantastic.

KSJ: How did you discover Vítězslava Kaprálová? What impressed you about her most?

JH: The leader of *L'anima giusta* is the Czech violinist, Jiří Němeček, who now lives in Basel. He's not only an outstanding violinist and musician but also a wonderful person, and the orchestra (and this conductor!) benefits enormously from his presence. We had a coffee some time fairly early on and I told him my theory that every country—I use the word “country” advisably of course—had a least one outstanding female composer in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. (I have a lot of international friends and it's happened a few times now that I've found out about another interesting figure by throwing out that remark.) Jiří told me about Kaprálová and I started digging. It was relatively easy to gain access to her works because of the pioneering work of the Kapralova Society, the few recordings available, and the Czech radio editions (although negotiating the website in Czech might have daunted less polyglottal spirits!), so following up on her was far easier than some of the other women composers I've come across. Kaprálová is without doubt one of the most impressive composers I've encountered so far. The orchestral works are outstanding and the fact that she composed so many large-scale works of such quality despite dying so young is amazing. From her works it's obvious that she was a phenomenal pianist too, but she interests me even more, of course, because she was obviously also a very fine conductor. She conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra (of my country!) at an age that would be a sensation even for a man, even today. And she just got up there in a man's smoking jacket and did it! Now that is inspirational and empowering.

KSJ: Kaprálová was on her way to becoming a major Czech composer of her generation; yet could she have really made it as a woman conductor during her time? Your thoughts?

JH: I think that most musicians can understand such choices. If you've got real talent as a conductor, you're likely to find the baton more appealing than your violin, say, in the long run. Likewise, even if you're an excellent conductor, you're likely to opt for composition if you have an individual voice and something to say. Even the most inspiring conductor is interpreting the works of others, even in some contemporary music with a great deal of autonomy for the conductor (and players), although the borders can start to blur there. That said, given both her incredible early success and the fact that composers often enter into conducting because they're conducting their own works, I find it quite plausible that Kaprálová would have continued to conduct too. Given her immense talent and self-assurance—she absolutely must have had the latter in order to stand up in front of the BBC SO—coupled with the fact that she did so much as a composer, pianist, and conductor in such a short space of time, having had a second



Photo: Peter Schmetz

string to her bow or a later phase as a conductor had she lived longer, seems to me to be eminently possible. But of course we'll never know what might have been. If by “made it” you mean “earning a decent living conducting” though, I find that unlikely, because no woman managed that until much later.

KSJ: How do you see the role of women conductors then and now?

JH: Women have a great deal to offer to the conducting world and some people are beginning to realize this. We're natural organizers and born multi-taskers: that's perfect for the podium. We've also moved away in general from the model of the conductor as tyrant who has *carte blanche* and wipes the floor with the orchestra (male “genius” justifying abysmal behaviour)—although there are still throwbacks to the old regime. The role of conductors generally has changed, and for the better. The role of woman conductor “then”, didn't exist. A letter from the Hessian Broadcasting Corporation to Swiss conductor Hedy Salquin in 1955 reads: “Dear Mr. Salquin, Although you are a woman, we address you as Mr. In addition, we have no use for you.” What did exist were exceptions, incredible women who, despite all the stereotypes and the incredulity at their audacity—I'm also thinking of figures like Nadia Boulanger, Ethel Leginska, Antonia Brico, and Elisabeth Kuyper—got up there and did it. The same applies to women composers of course, although women composers started making general headway before women conductors

The 'frauenkomponiert' Project

(women composers needing, at the very least, a piece of manuscript paper and women conductors, at the very least, an orchestra). Now there are women who are conducting major orchestras, but of course they make up only a fraction of conductors overall, and the “top” orchestras remain exclusively male—some amongst them the well-known bastions of maledom that will probably be making a last stand to keep women out even into the 22nd century. Many players have still yet to play under a woman conductor. Just imagine how the musical landscape would change if conductors had to retire at 67 and we inserted 50-50 quotas for men and women! I mean, even the pope retires these days. (It's worth pointing out that there has actually been a woman pope—although just one, so far—whereas many orchestras have yet to be conducted by a woman.) Amongst the top women conductors, we're still at the stage of proving that we can conduct Brahms and Wagner, and have not yet reached the stage of promoting women composers (fighting one battle at a time). It's understandable—if you're out on a limb as a woman conductor, then trying to promote unknown repertoire (by anyone) cuts off your limbs at the same time—but regrettable. To be honest, it would be great if

we could get away from the idea of “roles” altogether. We still have a long way to go.

KSJ: *You have been planning to program Kaprálová's art song Waving farewell for higher voice and orchestra this programming season. Why did you choose this particular work?*

JH: Programming always involves some practical considerations. You need to use more or less the same basic orchestral group and make sure the second piccolo doesn't have to turn up just to play three notes, for example. Double woodwind instrumentation (2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons) is the standard size for an orchestra, and you don't want one short piece in the program that suddenly requires twice as many people. (It's generally unsatisfying for the players and expensive.) Generally, Kaprálová's works are scored for large orchestra—triple woodwind forces, for example—which is one reason why they are not performed more often. So the practical answer is that the song fits in well with the rest of the program. The more interesting part of the answer is that something touched me profoundly in the piece. It's both brilliantly written and incredibly moving. Every note and colour is wonderful and it's so imaginative. I'm not Czech but I do live in a foreign country (Switzerland) and know what it's like to leave home—as do so many other musicians and, given the terrible world situation, so many thousands of other human beings at the moment. I just have to hear “Sbohem” (*farewell*), with that beautiful augmented harmony and the suspension, and my soul melts. When we perform the work in March, it will be a homecoming for everyone. I'll be surprised if there's a dry eye in the house—and even male footballers are allowed to cry in public these days...

KSJ: *Today's audiences want conductors to take risks with unknown repertoire much more than most presenters and music directors would like to think... Thank you for giving your audience the opportunity to experience something new; and thank you for this insightful interview.*

Jessica Horsley (jessicahorsley.com) is a British conductor currently based in Switzerland. Her highly acclaimed conducting debut in Basel took place in the Stadtcasino in March 2015, with a pioneering program of orchestral music by women composers (frauenkomponiert.ch). She specialises in conducting music from the late nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries. **L'anima giusta** is made up of men and women musicians from the leading Basel orchestras and freelance musicians from in and around Basel. As an informal inter-orchestral alliance, *L'anima giusta* puts collaboration above competition—performing in the true spirit of music. The orchestra performs unknown works by women composers past and present.

Emilie Mayer
Sinfonie Nr. 5 F-Moll

Junghae Lee
poema ritmico für Klavier und Streichorchester (CH-UA)

Ethel Smyth
Konzert für Violine, Horn und Orchester

Vítězslava Kaprálová
Sbohem a šáteček für Gesang und Orchester

Konzert zum Internationalen Frauentag in der Martinskirche Basel
Dienstag, 8. März 2016, 19.30 Uhr

18.30 Uhr: Podiumsgespräch mit Benjamin Herzog (Radio SRF2 Kultur/Moderation), Prof. Regina Wecker (Universität Basel), Daniela Dolci (Musica Fiorita), Prof. Thüring Bräm

Orchester **L'anima giusta** Konzertmeister **Jiří Němeček**
Klavier **Stefka Perifanova** Violine **Adelina Oprean**
Horn **Olivier Darbellay** Sopran **Olga Pavlu** Leitung **Jessica Horsley**

Vorverkauf: Kulturhaus Bider & Tanner, 061 206 99 96; ticket@biderundtanner.ch

Foto: Susanna Drescher

Vítězslava Kaprálová in ihrer und unserer Zeit: zu Einfluss und Rezeption ihres Schaffens
Kaprálová Conference, November 27–28, 2015, Basel, Switzerland

Basel in late November is beautiful. The temperature is somewhat cold, snow is possible, and the Christmas market is up and running in the Münsterplatz. The lofty cathedral overlooks all as the Rhine flows gently by. Next to the cathedral is the entry door to the offices of the Allgemeine Lesegesellschaft, the meeting place last November for the conference and performances to honor Vítězslava Kaprálová on the 100th anniversary of her birth. At the end of the square is the Paul Sacher Stiftung, where remnants of Bohuslav Martinů's life, along with those of many other musical greats, are housed. All in all, an invigorating setting for discoveries about a young woman composer from Moravia, who many allege with more time would have gained a position among the greatest of the Czech composers and who, despite her tragically short career, contributed an enviable body of work to the repertoire, deserving of but not always heard in performance.

Organized by Dr. Christine Fischer and Dr. Daniel Lienhard under the sponsorship of the *ForumMusikDiversität* / Forum for Diversity in Music, the conference was an unqualified success. Contributions by researchers attending from a variety of countries (Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, and, of course, Switzerland), combined with performances of Kaprálová's works by musicians based in Prague and Basel, resulted in a well-rounded inquiry into the life and works of this phenomenal young artist.

Topics addressed by those presenting papers on the first day of the conference consisted of: Kaprálová's response to her teachers in Prague

and Brno, notably Vilém Petrželka, Vítězslav Novák, and the earliest, her own father Václav Kaprál (Nicolas Dorny, Brussels); her wind trio fragment for oboe, clarinet and bassoon in the context of Czech and French chamber music for winds during the period 1900–1950 (Daniel Lienhard, Basel); analysis of the highly virtuosic *Sonata Apassionata* within the context of Kaprálová's other works for piano written during the early part of her career in Brno, a European center of contemporary music at the time (Alice Rajnohová, Olomouc); and performance requirements of Kaprálová's music, notably her Piano Concerto, op. 7, the *Military Sinfonietta*, op. 11, *Suita rustica*, op. 19, Partita, op. 20, and the incomplete Concertino, op. 21 (conductor Olga Pavlů, Basel). The concluding presentation by Karla Hartl (Toronto) took the form of an overview of Kaprálová's legacy and repertoire and of the contributions to preserving that legacy by the Toronto-based Kapralova Society via publication of her music in both scores and recordings and of making scholarly viewpoints on her life and music available in printed form. Hartl's own role in this promotion is no secret to those familiar with the history and current state of Kaprálová research; her singular and tireless efforts have brought the composer/conductor's name and her music to the forefront of subjects to be researched and creations to be performed.

For a few of us attending the conference, the evening held a most welcome light and opportune dessert to conclude the formidable meal of the first day's presentations—a marionette performance of Mar-



Photo: Olga Pavlů, soprano, Alice Rajnohová, piano. November 28, 2015, at Allgemeine Lesegesellschaft, Basel, Switzerland.

Conference Report

tinů's *Kdo je na světě nejmocnější? / Who is the most powerful in the world?* In a small theatre perfect for such a performance located a few doors from the venue for the day's gathering, the *clair-obscur* Saxophone Quartet from Berlin provided the musical accompaniment and certain vocal interjections in a quite effective adaptation by Christoph Enzel, the tenor saxophonist for the Quartet. The context for such a rare performance: Basel's 21. *Festtage Martinů*, running from November 15 through 29. The roster of events was most illustrious, with additional local performances by the highly esteemed Hagen Quartet as well as an opening concert by the London Symphony, conducted by Tomáš Hanus.

The second day of the conference opened with presentations directed to unraveling certain myths about Kaprálová that have proliferated from letter excerpts, long presumed authentic, that were published at the conclusion of Jiří Mucha's historical novel *Podivné lásky / Strange Loves* (Thomas Svatos, Abu Dhabi); followed by an examination of gender stereotypes in terms of the manner by which Kaprálová negotiated such preconceptions (Christine Fischer, Basel) and the reciprocal influence of the personal and professional relationship between Kaprálová and Martinů on certain of their musical works (Judith Mabary, Columbia, Missouri, USA).

With paper presentations concluded, several attendees visited the Christmas market, finding lunch opportunities with traditional food options (potato pancakes with applesauce) among the booths devoted to crafts and indigenous holiday culture. In the afternoon, we were treated to a recording for television of Pavel Blatný's *Podivné lásky*, a cantata for soprano, tenor, baritone, and orchestra based on Jiří Mucha's novel, followed by a public screening of the documentary *Poslední concertino / The Last Concertino*, directed by Rudolf Chudoba (2000), which also featured a performance of Kaprálová's incomplete Concertino, op. 21. The penultimate event for the day was a public concert presented by Alice Rajnohová (piano) and Olga Pavlu (vocalist). The program was well-chosen to present a cross-section of some of Kaprálová's best works: for piano—the *Variations sur le Carillon de l'Église St-Étienne du Mont*, op. 16; *April Preludes*, op. 13, and to conclude the concert, the *Sonata Appassionata*, op. 6, complemented within by Kaprál's Sonata for piano, No. 3 and Martinů's *Three Czech Dances*. The vocal portion of the program featured *Zpíváno do dálky / Sung into the Distance*, op. 22 and Kaprálová's most well-known song *Sbohem a šáteček / Waving Farewell*, op. 14. In a word, the entire concert was: STUNNING.

With such a first-rate performance as the penultimate event, what was in store as the final activity of the day? A short walk to the Restaurant Centro for a wonderful evening of pasta, salad, and dessert. In a most kind gesture, the organizers presented attendees with wine with their meal and a box of chocolates each, made by a local chocolatier. You can't leave Switzerland without some chocolate!

As several of us made our way back to our hotel, it was, as they say, bittersweet. This unique experience with Kaprálová and like-minded and several newly-met colleagues was almost at an end. At this point, a few words about the hotel itself are in order. What a memorable and fine experience – call me a romantic. Located at Im Lohnhof 4, opposite the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and Music Academy, once the private residence of Paul Sacher (could this have been planned?), the Hotel au Violon graces a lovely, quiet cobblestone courtyard entered through a pedestrian archway. Once a monastery,

Programm

Freitag, 27. November

- Allgemeine Lesegesellschaft, Münsterplatz 8, 4001 Basel
 11:00 Uhr Begrüssung und Einleitung: Christine Fischer, Daniel Lienhard
 11:15 Uhr Nicolas Dery (Brüssel), *De Brno à Prague: une musicienne sous la Première République Tchèque*. Vítězslava Kaprálová et Vilem Petřelka, Vítězslav Novák, Václav Kaprál
 12:00 Uhr Mittagspause
 13:30 Uhr Daniel Lienhard (Basel), *Vítězslava Kaprálová's Bläsertrio-Fragment und die tschechische Kammermusik für Bläser 1900–1950*
 14:15 Uhr Alice Rajnohová (Brünn), *Sonata Appassionata by Vítězslava Kaprálová: One of the Main Piano Sonatas in the Czech Music of the First Half of the 20th Century*
 15:00 Uhr Pause
 16:00 Uhr Olga Pavlu (Basel), *Kaprálová aufführen*
 18:30 Uhr öffentlicher Abendvortrag, Karla Hartl (Toronto), *The Centenary of Vítězslava Kaprálová: Looking Back, Looking Forward*

Eintritt frei, Kollekte

Samstag, 28. November

- Allgemeine Lesegesellschaft, Münsterplatz 8, 4001 Basel
 09:30 Uhr Thomas Svatos (Abu Dhabi), *On Kaprálová's Literary Reception*
 10:15 Uhr Christine Fischer (Basel), «Der Tod und das Mädchen» oder «die unerreichbare Julietta» – zu Kaprálová-Bildern
 11:00 Uhr Pause
 11:30 Uhr Judith Mabary (Columbia), *Kaprálová and Martinů: Reciprocal Inspiration in Time of War*
 12:15 Uhr Mittagspause
 14:30 Uhr Pavel Blatný (*1931), *Podivné lásky* (Die komischen Lieben), Kantate für Sopran, Tenor, Bariton und Orchester nach dem gleichnamigen Roman von Jiří Mucha (1989), Fernsehaufnahme mit einer Einführung von Daniel Lienhard. Im Anschluss Abschlussdiskussion
 17:00 Uhr öffentliche Filmvorführung, *Poslední concertino* (55 Min.), Regie: Rudolf Chudoba (2000), Film über Vítězslava Kaprálová (tschechisch mit englischen Untertiteln)
 19:00 Uhr öffentliches Konzert, Alice Rajnohová (Klavier), Olga Pavlu (Gesang) Vítězslava Kaprálová, *Variations sur le Carillon de l'Eglise St-Etienne du Mont* op. 16 für Klavier (1938)
 Václav Kaprál (1889–1947), *Sonate für Klavier* Nr. 3 (1925)
 Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959), *Trois danses tchèques* für Klavier (1926)
 Vítězslava Kaprálová, *April Preludes* op. 13 für Klavier (1937)
 Vítězslava Kaprálová, Lieder: *Sbohem a šáteček* (Zum Abschied Winken) op. 14 (1937); *Zpíváno do dálky* (In die Ferne gesungen), Zyklus op. 22 (1939): *Píseň Tvé nepřítomnosti* (Lied Deiner Abwesenheit); *Polohlasem* (Unter jemandes Atem); *Jarní* (Frühlingslied)
 Vítězslava Kaprálová, *Sonata appassionata* op. 6. für Klavier (1933)

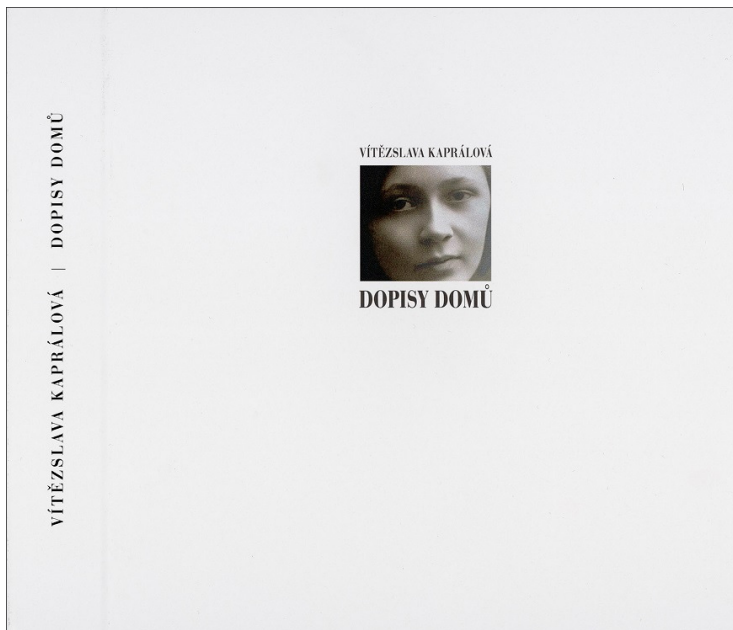
Eintritt frei, Kollekte



then a prison, now remodeled to serve curious guests and traveling business professionals, the building presents a unique brand of old-world charm. For those of us who are only able to experience such settings rarely, it was the perfect environment to conclude a brief visit to the history and music of the more recent past.

As we gathered in front of the hotel at the close of the evening and, for several of us, the final day of the all-too-brief sojourn in Basel, I for one was experiencing simultaneously the exhilaration such focused gatherings invoke along with the sadness felt when they come to an end. Of the many discoveries the conference had made possible, they had all coalesced into the realization that the nature and vigor of Kaprálová's continuing legacy would be in no small part up to us. Let us not fail to accept the challenge.

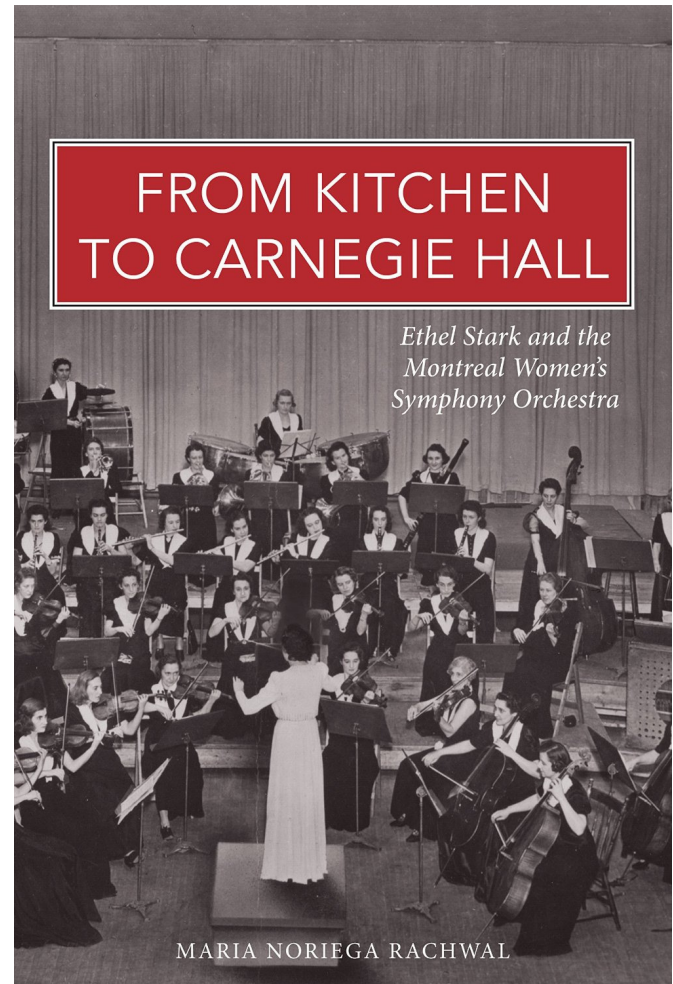
Judith Mabary



The first edition of largely unknown and unpublished correspondence *Dopisy domů* (Letters home) documents the last five years of the life of one of the most interesting personalities of Czech Modernism—the composer Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915–1940). The book (in Czech) was published by The Kapralova Society in 2015 on the occasion of the composer's birth centenary.

Maria Noriega Rachwal. *From Kitchen to Carnegie Hall: Ethel Stark and the Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra.* Toronto: Second Story Press, 2015. 192 pp.

Maria Noriega Rachwal's *From Kitchen to Carnegie Hall: Ethel Stark and the Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra* documents the little-known history of the first Canadian all-women's full symphony orchestra. The Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra was formed to fulfill a need, at a time when female musicians were almost entirely excluded from sym-



phony orchestras, and generally discouraged from taking up such "masculine" instruments as the double bass, trombone or bassoon.

The brainchild of two extraordinary women, socialite Madge Bowen and gifted violinist and dynamic conductor Ethel Stark, the Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1940 and graced the Canadian musical scene for nearly thirty years. From its inception, the orchestra was open to music-loving women of all social classes, races and religions, both professionals and devoted amateurs. Cooperation, inclusiveness, and hard work were the ingredients that Ethel Stark believed would lead to their success.

She was right. Despite incredible challenges—a shoestring budget and rehearsals held at first in members' kitchens, living rooms and drafty, rat-infested store basements—within seven months, the orchestra was able to present its first public concert. The critics were favourably impressed. Success followed success, and in 1947 the Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra became the first Canadian orchestra to perform in Carnegie Hall—to rave reviews.

From Kitchen to Carnegie Hall is meticulously researched and written in an engaging style. It is a valuable contribution to both the history of women in music and the history of Canadian music.

Eugene Gates

Nicolas Deryn

Vítězslava Kaprálová - Portrait musical et amoureux

Nicolas Deryn

Vítězslava Kaprálová

Portrait musical et amoureux



Le Jardin d'Essai

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