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RESHAPING A DISCIPLINE: MUSICOLOGY AND FEMINISM IN THE 1990S

SUSAN MCCLARY

Feminist scholarship is not new to musicology. Research on women in music began to appear in the 1970s and has increased steadily ever since. Until about three years ago, however, such research circulated primarily within a separate sphere—tolerated, but largely ignored by the discipline's mainstream and little known outside musicology. But recent feminist work concerning music has left its ghetto and broadened its scope to include reexaminations of the canon, standard methodologies, and much else. As might have been predicted, the introduction of such projects into a discipline that has long resisted critical agendas of any sort has provoked widespread, often bitter debates. And although the smoke has not yet cleared, enough has taken place to warrant some sort of report.

Much of what has transpired in feminist musicology during the last decade is rather less controversial than the issues raised by feminist music criticism. Thus, before proceeding into the current flap, I will review some of the unambiguous triumphs in recent scholarship concerning women and music.

RESEARCH ON WOMEN IN MUSIC HISTORY

Prior to 1970 very little was known—or, at least, remembered—about women in music history. Women had vanished; virtually no traces remained on concert programs, on library shelves, or in the textbooks that musicians (more than practitioners in most other fields) absorb as gospel. I remember being told in graduate school at Harvard that if there *had* been women composers, we most assuredly would have been told about them; unfortunately. . . .

The search undertaken by feminist musicologists in the 1970s turned up far more than anyone could have anticipated, and Elizabeth Wood's 1980 review essay in *Signs*¹ explains well the significance of their findings.

But not even Wood's optimistic appraisal prepared us for the explosion of information that has occurred during the past decade. Much of the new work has focused on rediscovering the women who participated in the Western art tradition. To be sure, a few exceptional women had been mentioned in the textbooks (as in art history, almost always because they were related to famous *male* composers). But serious, carefully documented studies of these women now have appeared, along with editions of their music and even some recordings. Clara Wieck Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, for example, are now more easily appreciated as artists in their own right—rather than merely as wives, daughters, or sisters.² More unexpected has been the unearthing of some extraordinary women of the more distant past, including most remarkably Hildegard von Bingen³ of the twelfth century and Barbara Strozzi⁴ of the seventeenth century. Strozzi's music is of the highest caliber, comparing admirably with that of her better-known contemporaries, and Hildegard quite simply has no peers in medieval monophonic composition.

It was not only women of the distant past, however, who had fallen out of sight. The last century has seen an increase in the number of female composers: Amy Beach, Cécile Chaminade, Ethel Smyth, Mary Carr Moore, Florence Price, and Ruth Crawford Seeger were only a few of those who persisted in what was still an inhospitable cultural climate and who attracted considerable recognition during their own lifetimes. Yet they were promptly forgotten again; not even later generations of feminists had heard of most of them. The life and works of these artists—and many others—are now being brought to light in full-length studies.⁵

The relative absence of women from symphonic and opera repertoires has often been cited as evidence of their inability to achieve "greatness." But as we have learned more about the implicit or explicit gendering of the music world, we have come to understand why women do not show up frequently in such repertory lists. For women in music not only have had to overcome the obstacles faced by virtually any artist, but they also have had to contend with performing institutions that regard it as risky to program large-scale works with women's names attached. A few women persevered and managed to get major works performed and even reviewed. But most adopted the strategy of writing music that was guaranteed performers and a clientele; and this often meant composing works that could be presented by the composers themselves or by an extensive network of female musicians who purchased such music for their own purposes (which were usually dismissed as trivial). Thus, the bulk of music by women involved solo voice, piano, or small chamber en-

sembles—genres that do not have the same prestige value as the orchestral and operatic repertoires from which they were usually barred.

As in other disciplines, the more we have grasped such issues, the more we have realized the need to reassess the canon, to explore the historical processes that had resulted in its formation. Most of us used to accept the idea that Mozart, Wagner, or the "3 B's" (Bach, Beethoven, Brahms) had always been revered for self-evident reasons; but studies from other fields and recent research on women composers have motivated us to scrutinize the historicity of that tradition, with some rather surprising results. Marcia Citron initially addressed these questions in 1990 in the first piece of feminist criticism in a major musicology journal, and her forthcoming book on the musical canon and women explores the issues in greater depth.⁶

WRITING THE HISTORY OF WOMEN IN MUSIC

The first contributions in feminist musicology dealt with individual women or with specific historic contexts, and anyone who has taught courses on women and music knows how it feels to hop among those isolated islands of information separated by gulfs of ignorance. But a series of books from the 1980s has begun piecing together more continuous accounts of women in music. Unlike the more traditional surveys that trace a succession of "masters," these new accounts tend to pay attention to many kinds of activities besides formal composition, and they also observe far more closely the social conditions within which musicians have operated. For one of the chief tenets to fall by the wayside with feminist historiography is the notion that the individual artist operates autonomously with respect to context.

The first of these books was not an attempt at narrative history, but rather a collection of documents, Carol Neuls-Bates's 1982 *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present*.⁷ In her collection, Neuls-Bates includes not only excerpts from letters or statements by women but also polemical debates (e.g., on the question of whether women are capable of composing "great" music) and sources concerning women's participation in various musical institutions as performers, teachers, and patrons. Despite its modest size, *Women in Music* contains a goldmine of materials. Moreover, Neuls-Bates's choices and arrangements of documents encourage the reader to observe the contested nature of women's participation in Western music throughout its history.

Another milestone appeared in 1986: a chronologically arranged series

of essays edited by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*.⁸ These essays examine the participation of women in music at various moments; about one-third of them concentrate on a single composer, and the rest focus on contexts (cloisters, women's orchestras) or time periods. Because of the wealth of information it offers, this collection quickly proved indispensable. It also established a high standard of scholarship for further work in the area of women's music history, for each essay is grounded carefully in historical sources. If the history of women in music is worth researching, it is worth taking as seriously as any other branch of musicology, and Bowers and Tick made that point very well. With *Women Making Music*, they won the discipline's respect.

Although the scholarly study of women in music flourished, the more practical enterprises—pedagogy and performance—faced other difficulties. A great deal of this work has been impeded by the unavailability of scores by women, for until very recently, even some of the foremost research libraries lacked such music. This situation, although still deplorable, is improving. In 1987 James R. Briscoe published the *Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, which offers representative pieces from thirty-five women, from the ninth century to the 1980s. A brief biographical/critical essay accompanies each score, making it an extremely useful volume for classroom use. And in 1991 Briscoe released a series of cassettes so that we now can hear reasonably good performances of the compositions included in the anthology. The samples included in the *Historical Anthology of Music by Women* make one impatient to know more about women one might not even have encountered without the collection. And it has had the effect of spurring on the process of bringing into print much more of this music, which now has an eagerly awaiting audience.

The pedagogical efforts started by Briscoe have been extended by the appearance of a new textbook edited by Karin Pendle, *Women and Music: A History*.⁹ This collection of essays is designed expressly to coordinate with Briscoe's anthology and cassettes, so that a complete package of materials is now available for anyone who wants to teach a course on women and music or to implement a standard course with information concerning women. Although Pendle's book is designed for undergraduates, it is not a watered-down version of earlier research. *Women and Music* begins, for instance, to correct the white, high-art bias that characterized much previous scholarship, for it includes chapters dealing with women involved in traditional musics around the globe, as well as Western women of color or of the working class who are engaged in popular music.

The significance of women to music history suddenly seems far more obvious when our list of long-forgotten classical composers is supplemented by Bessie Smith, Patsy Cline, Billie Holiday, Mahalia Jackson, Ella Fitzgerald, the girl groups of the early 1960s, Janis Joplin, Aretha Franklin, and Holly Near. Further, although there is no chapter in Pendle's book devoted expressly to lesbian issues, the writers integrate information concerning sexual orientation into their biographical sketches and critical comments—and this at a time when the discipline still frowns on any mention whatsoever of sexuality.

In addition to these more comprehensive surveys, studies focusing on specific countries or regions also have appeared (see Judith Tick and Christine Ammer on the United States; Marie Thérèse Lefebvre on Québec).¹⁰ Not surprisingly, the emergence of a history of women musicians has proved empowering to contemporary women composers, as they discover how their predecessors negotiated with social restrictions to become artists. Because of this desire to recover role models and to celebrate—however belatedly—the women of the past, some important contributions to feminist scholarship have also been undertaken by composers.¹¹

Bringing these materials to light has been exhilarating, and the results count among the most remarkable contributions to musicology in the last twenty years. The number of institutions offering courses on women and music is increasing dramatically, and most undergraduate music history surveys now include at least some women's music. We may have seen the last generation of musicians to be trained without some knowledge of women's participation in music history. And that is quite an accomplishment.

WOMEN IN WORLD AND POPULAR MUSICS

Ethnomusicologists have usually included women in their studies as a matter of course, but by far the most dramatic contribution to this field is the collection edited by Ellen Koskoff, *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Koskoff's book contains sixteen essays, ranging from studies of women in the musical cultures of Tunisia, India, Brazil, and Malaysia to ethnographic research on various musics in the United States (hymnody in the 1800s, jazz, women-identified music, musical activities of a New York Hasidic community).¹² In contrast with some of the collections focused on Western art music, these essays deal explicitly with theoretical issues surrounding gender, identity, power, and the role of music in the construction of social realities.

The relatively higher profile of women in popular music and jazz has not meant that they have always received the attention they deserve. For instance, women in jazz have often been ignored, and many histories of pop music treat the rise of girl groups as evidence that the early sixties was a cultural abyss—a dark, interregnum between classic rock 'n' roll and the British Invasion. But the 1980s saw the appearance of a number of excellent studies of women in jazz¹³ and popular music. The work of Daphne Duval Harrison, Hazel V. Carby, and Angela Davis¹⁴ has increased substantially our knowledge and understanding of women's blues—an important cultural site for the development of specifically female articulations of desire and pleasure—and Gillian Gaar's *She's a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll*¹⁵ offers a comprehensive treatment of rock, extending from "Big Mama" Thornton to Queen Latifah and Diamanda Galas.

Until recently, most studies of popular music came from sociology rather than musicology, and they often paid more attention to the commercial aspects of pop culture production than to the music *per se*. They also were more frequently British than American. One of the best of such histories is Charlotte Greig's *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow? Girls Groups from the Fifties On*,¹⁶ which strikes an admirable balance between the women involved in this movement and the complex conditions within which they had to work. Other important studies concentrate rather more pointedly on the victimization of women within the pop music industry.¹⁷

In the last few years, a number of U.S. musicologists, including myself, have begun to address popular music from a rather different viewpoint. We tend to assume although popular music is unquestionably a commodity, it isn't *just* a commodity but is also a public medium that helps shape our notions of self, feelings, gender, desire, pleasure, the body, and much more. Thus, instead of focusing exclusively on the exploitative dimensions of the industry, we also discuss what is being articulated through the performative and musical aspects of the enterprise. Studies by Susan Cook (on Irene Castle), Tricia Rose and Venise T. Berry (on rap), and Robert Walser (on heavy metal)¹⁸ concentrate on the ways music contributes to social formations of gender—despite, or even *by means of*, its commercial mediation.

Similarly, MTV has become a critical area of study, for it is crucial to know what images circulate, how they are articulated, and how fans interpret them. The books on MTV by E. Ann Kaplan (*Rocking around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture*)¹⁹ and Lisa

Lewis (*Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference*)²⁰ both approach this medium from a feminist perspective. They arrive at significantly different conclusions (Kaplan is skeptical that MTV can be made to serve other than the interests of those in power; Lewis regards the medium as potentially liberatory for women), but they concur that music videos cannot be dismissed.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In her review essay twelve years ago, Elizabeth Wood presented a survey of what feminists in musicology had achieved up until that time. Despite the wealth of scholarship cited in her review, however, she stated in her closing remarks that

musical scholarship on women will remain conceptually irrelevant to work in other fields so long as it continues some of its contemporary limitations. . . . Above all, what is required are theoretical analyses that link the work of feminists in music to what is emerging elsewhere in the new feminist scholarship. . . . Only then will research on women in music situate itself amid the more theoretically developed work of other feminist scholars and capture a wider audience for itself.²¹

The kinds of work Wood could report on in 1980 fell largely into categories sanctioned by the discipline—archival research, biographies, music editing, compilations of reference materials. As we have seen, many women and men trained within standard musicological methodologies have diverted their energies from the traditional canon to the study of women. Yet for the most part, their publications have continued to address the concerns of other musicologists. Although the *content* of these contributions differs from the predominantly male-oriented work of the discipline up until now, most of them do not challenge explicitly the assumptions and methods that have undergirded musicological research for the past generation.

But along with the rediscovery of this long-buried music comes almost inevitably a difficult set of questions. First, how do we assess the quality of our discoveries? Do we admire them, simply because they were composed by women? Or should we try to find ways of dealing critically with these artists? Second, are the premises of these women composers the same as those of their male contemporaries? Or did women sometimes try to write in ways that differed from what they heard around them? Is it possible, in other words, to write music *as a woman*?

Responding to any of these fairly obvious questions takes us outside the established guidelines of the profession. For although assessing rela-

tive worth was of considerable concern to an earlier generation of musicologists who had to decide what to include or exclude, the canon has now been stable for several decades; most of us simply have internalized the hierarchy as it was given to us as students. To be sure, a musicologist will occasionally advance an argument on behalf of an artist deemed to have been undervalued. But in such instances, the criteria brought forward are usually those that already support the reputations of those labeled as "great."

Such criteria—most of them linked with formal innovation or contributions to the large-scale genres—turn out not to be very useful when applied to women. Consequently, when feminist scholars have held their women composers up to the scrutiny of these criteria, they have sometimes felt pressed to admit that the music might be of lesser quality; or they have tried to claim "greatness," often with little evidence brought forward; or they have deferred the question of "the music itself." This impasse has created a situation that reinforces, in some ways, what the discipline has always said: if there were women composers, they are not worth knowing about. What are we to make of all this music that has been dredged up? Should it have been left at peace with the music that is best forgotten—among the "grateful dead"?

Yet if women's music frequently does not show to advantage under the criteria we have absorbed through our training, then might there be other, more appropriate criteria? For perhaps some of them were not trying to duplicate what they had learned; maybe they were attempting to articulate a different sense of the world. Certainly this position has worked well within literary studies and the visual arts, as feminist critics have identified different goals or priorities on the part of women writers or painters. And such arguments usually hinge on issues of content, with formal design regarded as part of the representational apparatus.

But it is hard to make a case of this kind in music, for music's claim to fame has long been its success in having escaped representation or reference of any kind to the "outside world." It would seem, then, to be impervious to the sorts of interpretative techniques that have permitted feminist critics in other arts to argue for *deliberate* differences, as opposed to unintentional discrepancies (i.e., simple failures to measure up). If music is just music and always is neutral with respect to social categories, then it would seem that many of these women were justly ignored, inasmuch as they do not meet the objective standards honed through the ages.

THE PROBLEM OF CRITICISM AND MUSICOLOGY

As had occurred earlier in other disciplines, the accumulation of information concerning women has begun to affect—directly or obliquely—the assumptions underlying the entire field. For in order for this project to advance any further, there have to be ways of getting at the music itself, such that differences can be understood as something other than mere matters of competence. And this requires that we pass over into the forbidden terrain of criticism.

Criticism—that is, criticism that addresses content and not merely technical proficiency—has long been virtually absent from musicology. This is in part because Romantic idealism still organizes the ways most of us think about music. Since the emergence of wordless instrumental music as the most prestigious of nineteenth-century genres, music has been declared to have transcended not only language but also social signification. Its success at having thus escaped social influence has been envied and emulated by literary figures (e.g., Mallarmé), and even many literary critics continue to regard music as free from the constraints imposed by language or visual representation on the other arts.

But a second reason for the ban on music criticism has to do with the history of this enterprise. The groups who most notoriously brought criticism to musical content were the Nazis and the Soviets, both with the purpose of censoring whatever was regarded as "decadent." Much of what got purged—especially by the Nazis—was music by Jewish composers; but jazz, sexually provocative operas, and modernist techniques were also targeted. In the wake of World War II and the Stalinist episode in Soviet history, many scholars retreated into formalism or (as in the New Criticism) into readings that favor liberal ambiguity.

The situation in music was even more sensitive than in literary studies or art history because most of the music of the canon—indeed, the force behind the formation of the musical canon—is German. Since World War I, when England and the United States found themselves on the opposite side from Germany, the German core of the repertory valued by these countries has been a source of tension. Joseph Horowitz has explained how the American cult of Toscanini developed in part because he could give us Beethoven without any German associations.²² Toscanini's performances of the (German) canon "universalized" it, cleansed it of any lingering traces of its origins, making it possible for both Germany and the Allied Forces to use the motto from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as an emblem of nationalist strength during World War II. (It was resurrected yet again on CNN during the Gulf War.)

Beginning in the 1930s, Frankfurt School critic Theodor W. Adorno undertook an ideological reading of the musical canon from his position as a German Jew threatened with annihilation by the culture he had internalized as his own. During the course of his career, he traced the contradictions that had erupted so hideously in the twentieth century back through the nineteenth century, where he found evidence already in late Beethoven of irreconcilable tensions that were finally "resolved" forcibly by Nazi totalitarianism.²³ Focusing on the very instrumental music that presumably had escaped such issues, Adorno argued that it was precisely the "autonomy" of this music, its apparent nonrepresentationality, that created the necessary conditions for composers to play out, in even the smallest musical details, the incompatible desires for both individual freedom and social consensus that eventually exploded. As he presents it, the German canon offers an account of what went wrong with the liberal humanist tradition of Kant, Goethe, and Beethoven: the saga of how the society that gave us the pinnacle of civilization also produced the death camps.

Adorno's is not a pleasant story; nor is it an easy one to follow, because his arguments assume the reader's intimate knowledge of a complex philosophical tradition and hundreds of compositions. Not surprisingly, his account has not been well received in the United States. Nothing less is at stake than the music many of us find most compelling, which we want to hear as beauty and order—not as symptoms of a struggle that would end so disastrously. Because we cannot afford to consider what it might signify, we insist on elevating it above critique, above meaning. Like postwar formalists in poetic theory, we want to hold that a symphony *should not mean but be*.

Consequently, the first tentative steps of feminist music criticism have met resistance not only because they address gender and sexuality (although that certainly has contributed to the hysteria: idealist music had escaped not only language and signification but also the body so dreaded in Western metaphysics). More important, it is the fact that *any* content-oriented criticism violates the prohibition that still protects music from cultural debate. Yet the alternative to practicing cultural criticism—whether Adorno-based or feminist—is to accept without question (and as ultimately meaningless) the works of the canon. Moreover, it is to continue dismissing various kinds of music many of us care about, including not only music by women, but also popular music, non-Western musics, postmodern music, music before 1700, and even music of the last two hundred years that emerged from somewhere (Italy, France,

the Americas) besides Germany. So long as that canon determines the "universal" standards against which all musics are to be evaluated, the others are written off as incompetent or trivial.

As was suggested earlier, it is not solely feminist work that has precipitated this crisis in musicology. Pressures also came from these other directions, as they have in the other humanities disciplines. Many very different constituencies are tired of having African drumming labeled as "primitive," Philip Glass's minimalism castigated as simplistic, Monteverdi damned with the faint praise of being "almost tonal," Charlie Parker dismissed as commercial, Virgil Thomson's collaborations with Gertrude Stein labeled as naive and technically nonprogressive. The canon, which has held its Archimedean position by Othering all the alternatives, suddenly has begun to be regarded (in Paul Ricoeur's words) as an "'other' among others."²⁴ It is now as open to cultural critique as any of the kinds of music it had successfully marginalized for so long.

Yet feminist criticism has been singled out for blame—and for good reason. Although ethnomusicologists have occasionally ventured to address Western high culture, they have concentrated their efforts elsewhere and thus seem comparatively innocuous. Similarly, the study of popular culture has not posed any genuine threats. Because musicology was in part established in an antagonistic relationship with such music, it simply ignores questions coming from those quarters. Moreover, most pop music practitioners tend not to care what is going on in high art. With regard to neglected categories of Western music (early or non-German): because the advocates of those musics have usually been thoroughly steeped in the premises of the canon, they usually aspire to nothing more than having their favored composers included. And the discussion of postmodernism in music is only starting to take shape.

In contrast with most of these other areas, the concerns of feminist criticism address the canon where it lives—in two important senses. First, the women who have composed music throughout Western history have coexisted within the same cultural contexts as their better-known male counterparts. Thus, if we are to understand how they might have operated differently within the same stylistic and syntactical procedures as men, we have to begin unpacking what and how those apparently neutral procedures themselves signify. Second, once we start to regard these procedures as cultural constructs that interact with social values, then questions emerge rapidly concerning whose values are being articulated and what is being constructed. If we permit ourselves to notice gender representation or patterns associated with sexuality, then the canon ap-

pears very different indeed. And no one who has seen the canon in this light—bristling with meanings of all sorts—is likely to retreat quietly back into the obedient position of denial.

THE EMERGENCE OF FEMINIST MUSIC CRITICISM

The earliest instances of feminist criticism in music appeared in Europe, beginning with Eva Rieger's *Frau, Musik, und Männerherrschaft*, best known here through the excerpts published in Gisela Ecker's 1986 *Feminist Aesthetics*.²⁵ These excerpts reflect only a faint glimmer of the power and scope of Rieger's book, but they give notice to English-speaking scholars that feminist music criticism is possible. The book ranges through many different areas of inquiry, as is proper for an initial study of this sort. Rieger examines the various ways musicians have gendered (and thereby assigned value to) their activities, and she was among the first to analyze the language used to describe such "ideal forms" as sonata (in which "masculine" themes are aggressive, while "feminine" themes are passive and in need of resolution).

The second European to influence American musicology is Catherine Clément, a prominent French intellectual well known for her work in psychoanalysis and her collaboration with Hélène Cixous. In 1979 Clément published a book, *Opéra, ou la défaite des femmes*, that sparked widespread discussion in France, yet remained obscure here until its translation in 1988.²⁶ This book proceeds through the central operas of the canon, from Mozart through Schoenberg, offering feminist readings that go against the grain of standard interpretations. In opera after opera, Clément demonstrates how the heroine must die or be subjugated in order for the plot to work (that no one before had even addressed gender with respect to the *stories* of operas indicates how very taboo feminist music criticism had been). Clément's style—attacked as "subjective" in many American reviews—seems to me one of her strongest assets, for she identifies herself as one who adored opera in her youth, who internalized its patterns of love and victimization, and who now returns to those formative works to analyze their power to seduce and betray.

Also in 1988, the first cluster of papers in feminist criticism appeared at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society. This was an unparalleled historic event. Most of us had been laboring in our own isolated cubicles—in touch with feminist work in other fields but largely unaware that there were others out there asking similar questions of music. The 1988 meeting consolidated a community made up of both the

scholars who had been researching women's music history and a new group steeped in feminist theory and critical methods.

At and following this conference, several landmark collections were conceived. My book *Feminist Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*,²⁷ appeared in 1991 and served as the lightning rod for the initial controversy. But I will soon have company: Ruth Solie invited a number of scholars to contribute to a collection called *Musicology and Difference*, and Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou began planning *Cealia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives in Gender and Music*.²⁸ A bit later, Leslie Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (literary critics interested in the uses of "music" in English Renaissance texts) formulated another collection, *Embodied Voices: Female Vocality in Western Culture*,²⁹ which includes a number of musicologists. These are all now in production, and all are eagerly awaited as the first flowerings of a feminist community concerned with music criticism.

This community met for the first time as a constituency in the summer of 1991, when three international conferences focusing explicitly on feminism and music occurred in Utrecht, Minneapolis, and London. As a participant in two of these events, I can testify that I have never seen such energy at musicological gatherings. In session after session, women and men presented their contributions and began making critical connections, building intellectual networks right before one's very eyes. What had seemed a remote daydream a mere two years before was now reality.

OBJECTIONS TO FEMINIST MUSIC CRITICISM

These changes have not occurred without considerable resistance from a number of quarters. Trinh T. Minh-ha has written that it is sometimes difficult for women today to assess their positions with regard to their professions because "sexism no longer expresses itself as blatantly as it once did."³⁰ But we have no such difficulty in musicology. Because the discipline was insulated against feminist concerns for so many years, the cases against them often appear to have been launched from the Stone Age.

Before any feminist music criticism even made it into print, there were already ominous signs of backlash in the discipline. For instance, a prestigious new series published by Prentice-Hall sported the incredible label *Man and Music*. This series released its first volumes in 1989, long after such language had been thoroughly critiqued and abandoned by other fields, and many of us could read the label as nothing other than

in-your-face defiance. After several individuals protested to the publisher (whose representative explained to me that "man" doesn't have the same connotations in musicology as in other fields), the series title was altered to *Music and Society*, but the original gesture remains fresh in the memory.

When feminist criticism actually did begin to appear, the reaction was predictably hostile. In a lead article in the Fall 1991 issue of *Journal of Musicology*, Pieter van den Toorn crowned his extraordinary caricature of my work (the only instance of this new scourge he knew) with:

Women are urged to chart their own course, to shape their own destinies in ways that are independent of men and the MSD [= "Male Sex Drive": *his* term]. But they are to deny themselves the single function—the bearing of children—that separates and distinguishes them unproblematically in this respect. And this function is to be denied in order that they might join the other group (men. . .) from which they wish to distinguish themselves nonetheless.³¹

In most respects, such candor is reassuring: when scholars rant about how women would be better off barefoot and pregnant, one knows pretty well what is at stake. Fortunately, the *Journal of Musicology* had the decency to invite Ruth Solie to respond to van den Toorn, and her article³² presents an elegant, compelling defense of the feminist enterprise within music studies.

But it has become ever clearer that we are introducing feminism into a new discipline at a time when many fields are declaring the advent of "postfeminism," a time when critics such as Christine Sommers (backed by cultural conservatives in the academy and the state) are denouncing feminism.³³ Much of what has occurred in the musicological debate during the past year owes a great deal to this chilling climate. But beyond misogyny and the general backlash that plagues our moment, feminist music criticism faces other forms of opposition more particular to the discipline and its intellectual history. And these need to be articulated if we are to understand why some of the feminist work in music has proceeded as it has.

First, there are the ideological objections to music criticism of any stripe. As discussed above, critical discussions of content in music are still associated with the abuses of totalitarian regimes, and some detractors still compare feminists with Nazis or Stalinists, without distinguishing between a context of state-imposed interpretations and one in which readings may be freely debated and contested. Others object on grounds that one's reactions to music ought to be kept private and personal, uncontaminated by verbal mediation. This position obviously owes a great deal to Romantic mysticism, even though it has been reworked by late-

twentieth-century modernists, and it refuses to accept that cultural artifacts (including music) are always already multiple mediated.³⁴ Still others wish the canon to be above criticism—exempt even from work that merely addresses signification. When many feel that to interpret a piece by Bach, Mozart, or Schubert—however affirmatively—is to do irreparable damage, then how much greater the hysteria when a critic actually takes issue with a passage in a canonic work!

A second group of objections come from music theory—a discipline that can trace its roots back to Pythagoras in the sixth century B.C.E. and prides itself on its ability to deal with music in "purely musical terms." As Joseph Kerman³⁵ has argued, music theory is the branch of musicology that fills the place occupied in literary studies by criticism, except that instead of producing critical readings of works, it offers self-contained formal analyses purported to be the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth. To be sure, the technical dimensions of musical construction demand that we have some specialists who focus on structure and syntax. But theory monopolizes the discussion, effectively blocking all questions of social signification. Many of the attacks on feminist criticism follow from basic disagreements about what a piece of music is and what we might want to know about it.

Another theoretical obstacle has to do with the discipline's long-standing investment in positivistic methods, whereby one is either right or wrong. As can be imagined, such attitudes have severely stunted the development of intellectual dialogue of any kind in music studies: the multiple readings that characterize literary studies are virtually nowhere to be found. Because musicologists are not accustomed to entertaining divergent interpretations (we want either to find one meaning that can be unambiguously documented or to allow none at all), an alternative reading is deemed sufficient to discredit a whole argument. Perhaps one day we will be able to regard multiple readings as cause for celebration rather than dismissal (we are dealing, after all, with extremely rich cultural texts). But the debate right now, unfortunately, is littered with gleeful counterreadings designed to demonstrate the impossibility of meaning, *tout court*.

Still another criticism launched at feminist readings is that they fail to deal with the music in adequate detail. In some cases, such objections are warranted. If a reading is not grounded at least in part in the notes, then the arguments may well be concerned with something other than the music (lyrics, video images, etc.). Yet what such critiques often demand are analyses that account *systematically* for every pitch, that pay at-

tention to musical details alone. Sometimes one can only make an important point by digging deeply into the technical details of the music, in which case the critic certainly has the responsibility to deliver the goods. But sometimes the connotation of a passage is relatively easy for any nonspecialist to explain, and requiring the critic to interrogate all the other formal dimensions of the score in question is pure obfuscation. It pulls the discussion away from the social contexts within which the piece acquires meanings and mires it again in music defined as a self-contained, totalizable entity.

Finally, there also have been some attacks from the Left—or at least from those who argue from the position of knowing something about current literary and/or feminist theory. Some come from the vantage point of deconstruction, which has called into question the whole issue of representation. At a time when critics of literature or film are concerned with revealing the artificiality of texts, it may seem quite embarrassing that musicologists should be trying to argue *for* meaning in their medium.

Without question, deconstruction has had a salutary effect in many areas of study. Because many readers have regarded writing as transparent, they often have acted as if there were some reality in or behind the text; reading involved simply reaching through to grasp the meanings manifestly there. But over the last fifteen years, literary theorists have turned to examining how texts are constructed through the ramshackle apparatus of language. Sentences that formerly had seemed unequivocal were revealed as clusters of words and rhetorical devices, each resonating promiscuously with infinite numbers of other texts or spiraling off through puns to far-flung associations. Centered, unambiguous speech was revealed as illusory.

Because musicians have been restricted to formalist explanations for so long, we do not *think* we need this lesson, for we learned to deny meaning in our chosen medium long ago. Thus it is relatively easy for new projects dealing with signification in music to be discredited by those who "know" from the latest French theories that meaning can never be present in human artifacts. And such arguments—despite their rather suspicious continental pedigrees—are quite welcome in the discipline, because they maintain the *status quo* whereby questions concerning signification are quickly dismissed.

But skepticism with respect to meaning is only part of deconstruction. More important, critics such as Jacques Derrida also have revealed how discourses are grounded in assumptions about the world that often

remain invisible, albeit transmitted indefinitely through cultural transactions. Thus, another aspect of the deconstructionist project is to make us aware of how language—in both our habits of speech and our literary texts—participates in producing and reproducing a particular kind of social world. And this second, more political aspect of deconstruction—the uncovering of the ideological apparatus that structures discourse—is overdue in making its appearance in music.

For as Lawrence Kramer,³⁶ among others, has begun to argue, music no less than literature is organized according to structures we overlook because we regard them as "natural." Yet before we can begin taking these apart, we have to demonstrate how they operate in a medium that has long claimed to have transcended representation and signification. If meaning seems too immanent in literature, it has been too absent from music studies. Thus, in order to achieve the same kinds of results as in contemporary literary criticism, we first have to reconstruct historically grounded social meanings . . . in order to deconstruct them, that is, to expose the ideological premises of the most basic procedures and to open the possibility of multiple readings. Yet this particular concern with signification is not the old metaphysical quest of earlier eras but almost its opposite. It focuses on how human societies have produced meanings for themselves through music.

Another attack that announces itself as coming from a position of greater theoretical sophistication is one in which the dreaded word "essentialism" is held up like a crucifix to ward off vampires. The debate concerning essentialism has been one of the most divisive and yet productive to have emerged in feminism in the last ten years, and we have all benefited from having to rethink our very most basic assumptions concerning gender, sexuality, and even identity.³⁷ When we bring feminist concerns into a new discipline, we want to avoid repeating the same mistakes. In particular, it is important not to assume too quickly that we know what we mean by "women," especially when the result is the marginalization of women who differ from some white, middle-class, heterosexual "norm."

But many of the charges of "essentialism" in musicology are misuses of the term. The problem seems to be the issue of "difference." Many musicologists want to declare that difference (whether articulated along lines of gender, sexual preference, race, or ethnicity) ought to be—in fact *has been*—transcended. The idea that anyone might want to *claim* a position of difference is seen as astonishing and ludicrous.³⁸

Yet, as Drucilla Cornell has argued so cogently, to adopt the "univer-

sal" position is to accommodate, to collude in self-erasure.³⁹ Accordingly, it is not essentialist to identify oneself professionally as a woman and one's work as feminist; it is, rather, to make a political choice—not to submit to some notion of biological determination. Nor is it essentialist to research the ways in which repertoires of past and present cultures have operated according to essentialist assumptions, for if we ignore the codes according to which "masculine" is represented as aggressive or "feminine" as passive, then we fail to grasp how these constructions helped to regulate lives in the past and still continue to affect us today in the music we hear. It is not even essentialist for women to compose in ways that deliberately construct alternative articulations of the body from those offered by the male-dominated canon, even if doing so risks reinscribing the age-old association of "woman" with "body." Inasmuch as body metaphors already permeate musical procedures, certain artists (e.g., Laurie Anderson, Pauline Oliveros) treat this as a crucial site for producing counterimages.

Admittedly, the tactical zone between accommodation and essentialism is difficult to negotiate, which is why so much recent cultural theory (feminist, queer, postcolonial, etc.) focuses on these issues. But the problem never has been difference *per se*, but rather intolerance of difference. And it is this same intolerance, albeit in liberal disguise, that has lifted buzzwords from the debates within feminism in order to shut down the enterprise of feminist music criticism before it gets started.

Yet despite the ferocity of such responses to feminist music criticism, too many scholars—men as well as women—have now entered into this prohibited terrain for the old *status quo* to return. Musicology's foundations have shifted; the discipline will never be the same again.

VARIETIES OF FEMINIST MUSIC CRITICISM TODAY

In the very few years since feminist music criticism first burst on the scene, a wide range of projects has begun to unfold, quickly creating a field of extraordinary heterogeneity. Some of this work examines music of the European tradition but with a more critical eye/ear than has previously been the case. Ruth Solie's reading of Schumann's *Frauenliebe* songs, for instance, reveals a musical articulation of the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity; Jeffrey Kallberg has researched attitudes toward the genre of the nocturne and has found how "the feminine" was projected on to that repertory, the composers who wrote such pieces, and even the piano itself; Suzanne Cusick has discovered a possible instance

of a woman composing *as a woman* in the early seventeenth century; Lawrence Kramer has produced studies concerning gendered power relations in Liszt, Strauss, and others; Carolyn Abbate has analyzed constructions of heroines and patriarchs in Wagner; Caryl Flinn has interrogated the gendered ideologies underlying music composed for classic films; and Linda Austern and Richard Leppert have investigated how gender has influenced musical production and performance in various moments in Western music history. My own work has been concerned with discerning how historically constituted ideas of gender, sexuality, and the body have informed even the most basic of musical procedures from the sixteenth century to the present.⁴⁰

Parallel with the growth of feminist music criticism has been the emergence of research and theoretical work on gay and lesbian issues. The individual most responsible for securing a space for such work within musicology is Philip Brett, who—despite the express disapproval of many of his peers—began hosting gay/lesbian cocktail parties at disciplinary meetings in the mid-1980s, organized the first panel on gay musicology in 1990, and serves in general as the patron saint of newsletters, caucuses, and much else within the discipline. Brett's work on Benjamin Britten⁴¹ courageously insists on the relevance of the composer's sexuality to his music. Elizabeth Wood has been the center of lesbian work in musicology, because of both her work on Ethel Smyth and her talks that introduced a very different style of speaking into our stuffy academic context. Brett, Wood, and Gary Thomas have compiled a collection of essays on lesbian and gay musicology,⁴² *Queering the Pitch* (a pun on a British technical term). This area is too rich for me to do it justice here, but some of the projects currently underway in gay/lesbian musicology include work on specific artists (Handel, Katherine Phillips, k.d. lang, and Schubert) and on lesbian and gay reception.⁴³

The recent turn in feminist theory to "performativity" would appear crucial to the work that lies before us in music criticism, for it is the actualization of music through real bodies and real voices that brings it down from the stratosphere to participate in everyday practices. The work being done at present by Suzanne Cusick explores what it is like to perform and listen by means of a lesbian body.⁴⁴ By locating herself in the nexus between seemingly abstract procedures and hands, feet, lungs, and sites of erotic pleasure, she breaks open the barrier that has blocked listeners/performers methodologically from their own responses. And Barbara Engh has examined that vulnerable organ, "the ear" (the orifice that cannot be closed), as it is defined as a threshold of both pleasure and

anxiety in Nietzsche, Adorno, and Derrida.⁴⁵

Other areas of music have similarly opened up to questions of gender. As was mentioned earlier, ethnomusicology has always been concerned with this dimension of musical activity, although recent events have increased the concentration on women's issues in world musics.⁴⁶ Music education, which has long been populated mostly by women under male supervision, has begun to rethink philosophical premises and revise curricular planning.⁴⁷ Perhaps most surprising, given the insular nature of their area, a number of music theorists too have started developing ways of dealing with gender.⁴⁸

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM MUSICOLOGY TO FEMINIST THOUGHT

All of us working in these new areas have been heavily influenced by feminists from other disciplines. Yet feminist musicology has now reached a stage where it can begin paying back the debt, for many cultural issues can be addressed more thoroughly if music is factored into the equation. Because music specialists have long held themselves aloof from interdisciplinary discussions, most scholars in other fields have learned to overlook music in their theoretical and historical studies. But feminist musicology promises to change this situation by making issues involving music accessible *and* relevant to the community at large. As Hayden White writes:

What literary theory and criticism can contribute to musicology and music criticism is insight into the nature of discourse in general. It would follow that musicology could profit from this exchange only insofar as music could be considered as a form or mode of discourse. And in that case, the exchange would run both ways, for if music were a form or mode of discourse, then literary theory would have as much to learn from musicology as music criticism has to learn from literary studies.⁴⁹

The projects now emerging in feminist music criticism offer several angles that ought to be of interest to ongoing and new debates. As music leaves the elevated, mystified realm it has occupied, it becomes identifiable as a cultural practice, a discourse that participates heavily in social formation. This may seem unlikely at first glance: because many people cannot label the elements they hear, they often accept the specialists' verdict that they "don't know anything about music" and thus assume that music cannot affect them.

Yet those who produce music (for film, advertising, popular *and* classical repertoires) know that individuals who have grown up within a given culture respond with remarkable accuracy to musical stimuli. They can

discriminate among affective, dramatic, rhetorical, and rhythmic devices and react by experiencing sorrow or surprise or by dancing as the music suggests. Music helps shape our internalized ideas about feelings, the self, gender, the body, pleasure, and even models of social organization. The fact that many cannot account for these reactions only makes it all the more powerful. Music pushes our buttons with impunity.

Those of us engaged in music criticism today seek to uncover the ways music achieves these effects. Instead of focusing exclusively on music's formal integrity, we try to understand how it arouses desire, provokes anxiety, or transmits its seductive narratives. Such work is clearly relevant to students of film or video, who risk missing crucial parts of the apparatus if they ignore music. But it also concerns the casual listener who absorbs—without quite knowing how—various models of subjectivity or of the body, simply by switching on the radio or watching a movie with a John Williams score.

Like all cultural media, music has a history, and it is possible to trace how the principal aims of music change from period to period, from group to group, and how its various "structures of feeling" compete for dominance. As polemicists from Plato to Allan Bloom make clear, nothing less is at stake in musical styles than social order. Music is far too important for any of us to ignore, especially those who want to examine how gender, subjectivity, or the body are historically constituted.

The specificity of musical scores—even while they appear to be non-referential—can tell us in great detail how feelings were felt or how the body moved in various moments in history. I do not mean to imply that we can hear straight through the music to former realities, for music is an artificial construct that relies no less than does language on displacements, analogies, and deferrals of meaning. Yet its patterns offer invaluable insight into how the body is understood, how emotions are experienced, how gender is organized. As theorists in other areas begin to explore the historicity of the body, subjectivity, gender, desire, or pleasure, the contributions of musicologists should prove indispensable.

This is one reason why the excavation of women's music throughout history is so crucial. If music is engaged in transmitting such vital aspects of social reality, then we need to listen closely to those voices from the margins that may be articulating different versions. Of course, before we can discern properly what is going on in compositions by women we have to have a better grasp of the conventions of musical representation long denied within the discipline. And we have only

begun that task—largely, however, thanks to questions raised by feminist studies.

In addressing finally why music has tried to seal itself off from the cultural world we run headlong into the metaphysical apparatus that deconstruction has been busy dismantling. For far more than literature or the visual arts, both of which have obvious referential ties to the "outside world," music has a venerable history of associations with mathematics and ideal form. Yet this history is riddled with gendered associations—metaphors that serve to make musical/metaphysical concepts more comprehensible but also to naturalize existing gender hierarchies. At the same time, music has often been identified as the most "feminine" of the arts, because of its relative vagueness, its fluidity, its apparent "handmaiden" relationship to lyrics, its ability to arouse, its connections with dance, and even its resonances with memories of coextension with the mother.

Because of its claims of transcendental order, on the one hand, and imputations of its ties to material existence, on the other, music serves as an ideal site for examining the always-gendered struggle between mind and body that has characterized Western culture from its beginnings. Even our reluctance to study its effects can be traced to this set of attitudes. We confer metaphysical status on this medium and yet denigrate it as trivial because it is so closely bound up with complex desires. That music conjures up feelings that escape precise linguistic translation cannot be denied. Yet it is, for all that, no less culturally mediated and socially constructed. It might even be said that music holds the dubious honor in the West of being the essentialized Other that guarantees language.

In 1980 Liz Wood could point proudly to musicological research on "women worthies," while lamenting the absence of work that might attract the attention of other feminists. A mere twelve years later, the situation has changed beyond our wildest hopes. Not only is our picture of women in music history now filled out in ever-increasing detail but those cross-disciplinary conversations are happening on a regular basis. The benefits are no longer confined to musicology alone, for many in other fields are taking advantage of questions that had remained unasked or only half-answered until music entered the discussion. It is anybody's guess what will have transpired by the year 2000, but this much is clear: musicology has been permanently transformed by its encounter with feminism.

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