

Review Article

Reflections on Women in Music

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The Cambridge Companion to Women in Music since 1900, edited by Laura Hamer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. xxx + 325 pp. ISBN 9781108470285 (hard cover); 9781108470287 (paperback)

Women and Music in Ireland, edited by Jennifer O'Connor-Madsen, Laura Watson, and Ita Beusang. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2022. xviii + 249 pp. 978-1783277551 (hard cover)

A Century of Composition by Women: Music against the Odds, edited by Linda Kouvaras, Maria Grenfell, and Natalie Williams. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. xxxi + 437 pp. 9783030955564 (hard cover)

Leah Broad, *Quartet: How Four Women Changed the Musical World*. London: Faber, 2023. 472 pp. 9780571366101 (hard cover)

Four substantial volumes dedicated to women in music, all published within the past couple of years, give welcome indication of the continuing growth of this area of study.¹ Following some general background, I first survey the books, then consider each individually. That I select chapters to discuss in detail does not mean that others would not deserve comparable attention. I can give only a glimpse of the riches these books contain.

I refer in my preliminary observations to two volumes that reflect some fundamental threads running through women's studies in music as they developed during the latter decades of the twentieth century: Lucy Green's *Music, Gender, Education*, and Jill Halstead's *The Woman Composer*, both published in 1997.² Green's fieldwork was done in the contemporary

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¹ For a classic source of critical thinking with special reference to the twentieth-century development of women's studies in music, see Paula Higgins, 'Women in Music, Feminist Criticism, and Guerrilla Musicology', *19th-Century Music*, 17 (1993), 174–92.

² Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); Jill Halstead, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (Ashgate, 1997).

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classroom; Halstead's case studies (also involving much original fieldwork) were of nine female composers, all British, and all born in the twentieth century.³

In her introduction, Green writes (with a sidelong glance at poetic tradition) of women and music, linked, as being consigned to 'a dangerous and marginalised existence on the outskirts of Man's world-sense'. She focuses on how 'history has ceaselessly repressed the musical achievements of women', and the 'active silencing by history, the regulation, the circumscription, the prohibition of women's musical practices'.⁴ She warns (as others have done) that 'any generalising account of the category of women' tends to 'totalise', obscuring 'diversities among and between women of different classes, races, religions'. Balancing this, she alludes to a 'kernel that runs through the history of women in music', and 'some commonalities in women's musical practices'.⁵ Part I of her book draws on a range of literature pertaining to women's musical activity, referring to the work of Marcia Citron, Susan McClary, Karin Pendle, and other early pioneers.⁶ In Part II she 'enter[s] the classroom', to see how 'gendered musical meanings [...] affect the practices and experiences of girls, boys and their teachers in contemporary music education',⁷ uncovering the evidence of dividing lines embedded therein.

As Halstead summed up: 'Many generations of music students have never entertained the possibility that women might have been significant composers, because of their lack of recognition and validation in musicology.'⁸ In *The Woman Composer*, she describes how, in the course of research, she 'became aware of the scepticism and criticism evoked by gender studies in music, not least from women composers themselves', who, she suggests, feel uneasy at any 'special examination of their position' with its undercurrent of excusing 'those who lack sufficient talent and training'.⁹

Halstead's penetrating analysis of critical discourse indicated that 'for most of this century, discussions of women composers and their work have become bogged down in reflections about gender'.¹⁰ She noted, apropos reviews of the Proms performance (in 1989) of the First Symphony by the long silent, later rediscovered, composer Minna Keal, 'there is incredulous wonder that someone of Keal's sex, slight physical stature and age is able to write a large-scale, serious work for many instruments'.¹¹ Halstead aimed to show that 'the issues which surround composers and the status of their music, are connected not only with aesthetics and talent, but also with history, politics, society and above all, power'. Her main conclusion was that 'the low number of women composers and their comparatively low status' arose from 'social, cultural and historical factors rather than biological ones'. This, she asserted, 'is not in

³ Representing a 'highly diverse cross-section' (Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, ix), these were Avril Coleridge-Taylor, Grace Williams, Elizabeth Maconchy, Minna Keal, Ruth Gipps, Antoinette Kirkwood, Enid Luff, Judith Bailey, and Bryony Jagger.

⁴ Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶ See, inter alia, Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minnesota University Press, 1991); and Karin Pendle, *Women & Music: A History* (Indiana University Press, 1991).

⁷ Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 143.

⁸ Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, 147. Marcia Citron recalled the vicious circle whereby 'your colleagues had never heard of your figure, so how important could she be?' Marcia J. Citron, 'A Bicentennial Reflection: Twenty-five Years with Fanny Hensel', special issue, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 4/2 (2007), 7–20 (p. 15).

⁹ Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, x.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

doubt'.¹² It is against the undeniable background of suppression, discouragement and neglect that new work by scholars in the field continues to develop the vital restorative project formed by their predecessors.¹³

Uniquely among the four books reviewed here, Leah Broad's belongs to the genre of collective biography. (It is also unique in having one authorial voice throughout.) A precedent is Rhiannon Mathias's work on Lutyens, Maconchy, and Williams.¹⁴ Among examples pertaining to earlier periods are Ruth Halliwell's volume on the Mozart family, and Hester Grant's account of the Sharp family (its title resonating with Broad's *Quartet*).¹⁵ *Quartet* is unusual in that its four subjects were unrelated in a familial context, nor did they sustain much contact with one another. Broad notes (p. 14): 'Ethel, Dorothy and Rebecca met on a couple of occasions, and Rebecca and Ethel struck up a polite acquaintance, but they were never close friends.' Broad's choice of the four falls into two categories, Smyth and Clarke belonging to a group of historical women composers now quite prominent in the general consciousness, while Dorothy Howell and Doreen Carwithen have not yet received comparable recognition. On the one hand, *Quartet* could bring them more to the attention of the music-loving public; on the other hand, they could be in danger of retreating into insignificance next to the achievements of the celebrated composers with whom they share the book's space.

The other three books form a trio linked by structure and content. All three contain a wealth of material that could help to steer courses on women in music across a spectrum from school students specializing in music to postgraduate study, as well as inspiring further research at a more advanced level. The *Cambridge Companion* particularly would serve well as an introduction for newcomers to the subject. Both *A Century of Composition by Women: Music against the Odds* and *Women and Music in Ireland* originated in a series of important conferences.¹⁶ These two volumes draw attention to cultural life in geographical areas that have not previously gained a niche among the wider musicological community they deserve. In all three books, the editors and authors cast their nets over musical culture beyond the 'classical'.

Like the Cambridge volume, *Women and Music in Ireland* belongs to a well-established series; forming volume 13 of Irish Musical Studies, published by Irish Academic Press and taken over by Four Courts Press, it appears from Boydell as the first in a new continuation of the series, and the first to pay special attention to women's studies. Laura Hamer's volume is the first Cambridge Companion to focus on women composers, performers and conductors. A feature it shares with *A Century of Composition* and *Women and Music in Ireland* is the inclusion of 'first-hand' testimony from contemporary practitioners. Together, these four books, with

¹² *Ibid.*, x.

¹³ The resistance their efforts met in some quarters is beyond the scope of this review to consider; the negation and satirical response it typically featured confirmed the need for continued action towards the project.

¹⁴ Rhiannon Mathias, *Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams and Twentieth-Century British Music: A Blest Trio of Sirens* (Ashgate, 2012).

¹⁵ Ruth Halliwell, *The Mozart Family: Four Lives in a Social Context* (Clarendon Press, 1998); Hester Grant, *The Good Sharps: The Eighteenth-Century Family that Changed Britain* (Vintage, 2021).

¹⁶ For *A Century of Composition* these were 'Women in the Creative Arts' (School of Music, Australian National University, 2017), and 'Gender Diversity in Music-Making' (Sir Zelman Cowan School of Music, Monash University, 2018). *Women and Music in Ireland* grew from a three-part series under that title held at Maynooth University, the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM), and the Music Department of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra (now part of Dublin City University), between 2010 and 2014.

their energy and enthusiasm, their geographical spread, the plethora of musicians and music discussed, and the range of musical genres they cover, as well as their diverse approaches to the subject, are exhilarating to contemplate.

In *Quartet*, Leah Broad's scholarship is lightly worn. The book is evidently aimed at a wide readership. The text, rattling along at a lively pace, is undisturbed by the usual numbered footnote (or endnote) references. Instead, references for quoted excerpts are gathered in the end-matter between the Discography and Index, using the long-established system of giving an incipit to identify the passage of text for which the note supplies the source. The extensive bibliography and list of archives consulted indicate the prodigious amount of research underpinning the fifteen (unnumbered) chapters. Broad's mission, in contributing to the increased recognition women composers have received in recent times, is to encourage an audience for their music. In her epilogue, joining a chorus to this effect among the emergent musicological literature, she notes that BBC Radio 3 has been 'playing more music by women', and adds:

This morning as I write they're playing Doreen's *Bishop Rock*, something that would have been unlikely even a few years ago, and impossible before 1996 because no commercial recording existed. On Twitter people are responding enthusiastically to her music [...] There's a sense of incredulity among posters –

How is this music not better known? Who was this woman? [...] What was she like?¹⁷

Quartet is clearly designed to provide answers to such questions. While Broad sees how much has changed for the better, she voices 'some trepidation' (p.396) as to how lasting the improved situation for women composers might be. Again joining in chorus with others, including contributors to the other books under review here, she laments the gender inequality shown by recently gathered statistics for commission and performance.

The text is punctuated with Broad's encouragements to read on. In Chapter 1, having introduced Elisabeth von Herzogenberg (known as Lisl to friends) to Smyth's life, she declares: 'Lisl would be Ethel's guide, her confidante, her muse – and they would cause each other more pain than they had thought possible to bear from someone they loved' (p. 47). This portentous sentence, coming at the end of the chapter, forms a 'cliff-hanger' of a kind used throughout. In a less dramatic fashion, the author's presence is interwoven with the composers' lives in the comments dispersed adroitly through the narrative. These serve to link the disparate characters, as when Broad observes: 'Unlike Ethel or even Rebecca, Dorothy was never one for self-promotion or taking risks' (p. 211). They provide signposting where she moves from one of the composers' lives to continue recounting the life of another, as: 'While Ethel was wallowing in Victorian splendour, Rebecca's father was taking her to the Paris World Fair' (pp. 92–93). And she uses them to underline what will be demonstrated by a quotation, for instance prefacing an extract from Clarke's enthusiastic description of the World Fair visit ('Never in my life had I imagined anything to compare to the fantastic buildings, the colours') with the comment that 'Fourteen-year old Rebecca couldn't have been more excited' (p. 93). *Quartet* is packed with scenes from the four lives, with a host of vivid detail about matters ranging from teenage angst to the dangers of success inherent in career development, and from the minutiae of domestic routine to the disturbing effects of war, amid much else.

¹⁷ Broad, *Quartet*, 395.

The reading experience is akin to watching a biopic structured in a series of short clips moving among the four subjects. Thus Smyth, allotted her own chapters, 1 'Ethel' and 2 'Serenade', reappears in 3, 'Rebecca' (pp. 71–83), with the focus (from p. 75) on the composition and premiere of her Mass in D 'by the Royal Choral Society at the prestigious Royal Albert Hall' (1893). After the narrative zooms in again on Clarke, quoted as remembering school as 'not a happy time' (p. 80), it continues to swing between the two. Howell's life-story, beginning in Chapter 6, 'Dorothy' (pp. 123–42), is interrupted during her childhood enjoyment of family music making (p. 128) by returning to focus on Smyth, surviving with difficulty in the absence of her only male lover, Harry Brewster. The narrative then returns to Clarke.

When the fourth composer appears in Chapter 11, 'Doreen' (pp. 261–92), the spotlight shifts from Carwithen's childhood (like Howell's, 'steeped in music'), to Clarke, busy with 'an endless reel of concerts, rehearsals and parties' (p. 265). It returns to Howell, 'alone in her little room in Chelsea' (p. 268), thereafter to Smyth and then again to Clarke, before revisiting the original subject. A timeline might have been a useful adjunct at the start of the book, showing the lives in parallel, with a selection of such items as family events, education and training, travels, works produced and performed, and encounters with significant figures, for each composer across the columns. The 'running heads' for chapters (placed at the foot) could perhaps on the even-numbered pages marked simply 'Quartet' have additionally carried indication of dates (or date-ranges).

The contributors to the four parts of Laura Hamer's *Cambridge Companion to Women in Music since 1900 (CCWM)* include composers, conductors, educators, music historians, and performers (some combining several spheres).¹⁸ The authors apply analytical and critical interpretation to their material, with a variety of research methods and approaches. Chapter 14 develops from fieldwork in the form of a questionnaire issued to 'twenty-four composers, sound artists, instrument-builders, and programmers'.¹⁹ (In parallel with Jill Halstead's diverse choice of composers to survey, the respondents here ranged from 'emerging experimental artists' to 'pillars of academic electroacoustic music'.²⁰) The fifteen survey questions are reproduced in the Appendix, while in the chapter the authors Margaret Schedel and Flannery Cunningham report thematically on the evidence drawn from the individual responses, enabling them to make meaningful generalizations. Their summative point that 'the most important trait' their surveyed artists shared is perhaps 'their unabashed love of the sonic medium' is supported with examples from among the great majority of respondents whose answers conveyed how they were 'drawn to electronics for the expansive range of ways they allow one to manipulate sound'. Mara Helmuth, 'for instance [...] love[s] to work off the performer's unique sounds and set up environments for them to improvise or perform with', and Niloufar Nourbakhsh 'enjoy [s] using electronically produced sounds that would not otherwise be possible with an instrument'.²¹

¹⁸ Parts I ('The Classical Tradition') and II ('Women in Popular Music') each have six chapters; Parts III ('Women and Music Technology') and IV ('Women's Wider Work in Music') each have two chapters.

¹⁹ Margaret Schedel and Flannery Cunningham, 'The Star-Eaters: A 2019 Survey of Female and Gender-Non-Conforming Individuals Using Electronics for Music', *CCWM*, 213–27 (p. 213); *Appendix*, 291–95.

²⁰ *CCWM*, 213.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

Michael Brocken, in Chapter 11 (“The British Folk Revival: Mythology and the “Non-Figuring” and “Figuring” Woman”) begins with two turning-points in his career, stretching from the completion of his doctoral thesis on the British folk revival in the mid-1990s, to his return to the zone in 2014, when BBC Merseyside invited him to present their ‘Folkscene’ radio programme. He charts his awakening to the misogyny he encountered, when preparing his thesis, among participants in the folk scene such as Ewan MacColl, ‘who appeared to hold scant respect for any kind of radical emancipation for women (or anyone else, for that matter)’.²² He proceeds to draw on recent interviews for ‘Folkscene’, including in 2019 with Emily Portman, whom he describes as ‘an integral part of the British folk scene’s “new wave”’. In reply to his question as to ‘what it was like, as a woman on the folk scene in 2019’, she highlighted the value of conversations such as the ‘Women in Music’ panel discussion at King’s Place, London in which she had recently participated. This event had enabled ‘important [...] [folk music-related] issues like the casual objectification of women on stage, and gender imbalance on festival line-ups’ to be raised, and, she added:

I hope that young female performers today won’t face any of the things that myself and other female performers have faced – those over-familiar older male fans (or promoters, or hosts) who insist on hugs, comperes who comment on your appearance rather than your music [how this chimes with the male critical tradition!], or the patronising sound engineers who assume you know nothing.²³

In response to Brocken’s question about tokenism, she reported: ‘It’s a common story for audiences and promoters alike to *still* be surprised when female instrumentalists can actually play as well as their male counterparts! There are some brilliant [female] instrumentalists out there.’ Apropos the evidence that increasingly fewer women were choosing to ‘forge musical careers’, she observed:

Partly it’s to do with visibility and challenging stereotypes [...] I remember when I went to university playing guitar, I looked at all the brilliant male guitarists and felt there was no point in continuing to play [...] it came up on the panel discussion that most of us had lost confidence and given up playing at some point.

We can start countering this early on, with parents and teachers taking care not to lead their child into an instrument because they are a girl or a boy. A lot of instruments are unconsciously gendered.²⁴

Noting a ‘growing awareness in education’, she referred specifically to Lucy Green’s work.²⁵

The four ‘Practitioner Contributions’ (‘In her Own Words’, at the end of each of Parts I–IV) resonate with pre-existing discourses on women’s creativity. Elizabeth Hoffman (who appears also as one of the respondents in Chapter 14, p. 225), in ‘Contribution I’, reflecting on her progress towards becoming a professional composer, conveys how, for her, a sentence from the Introduction to Suzanne Cusick’s ‘intricately researched portrait’ of Francesca Caccini catches a nerve ‘in sympathetic vibration’. Cusick recognized the need to find not so much ‘rooms of our

²² Ibid., 164.

²³ Ibid., 167, with echoes in a recent case (2023) on the women’s football scene. Words in square brackets are mine.

²⁴ Ibid., 168.

²⁵ Ibid. See also Chapter 15, ‘Women and Music: Pedagogues, Curricula, and Role Models’, 237–53 (p. 246), where Robert Legg traces the patterns of inequality revealed by Green’s research.

own' as 'ways of being [...] that allow us to engage with the often immobilising and silencing effects of gender norms'.²⁶ Hoffman's encounters with such immobilizations at the professional level, experienced as an energy-draining 'norm', have 'fostered her empathy for others', and encouraged her intervention 'in contexts that reinforce in- and out-group formation'.²⁷ Eloquent on what making music (and talking about it) means to her, she concludes with 'positivity', acknowledging the community of awe-inspiring women who are 'vibrant role models' from whom she has derived strength, adding appreciation of her 'countless inspirational colleagues – including male friends and colleagues, and [...] students of all genders'.²⁸

Although not framed explicitly as such, Manuella Blackburn's 'Practitioner Contribution III' provides an answer to the question raised by Marcia Citron in 1993: 'Is there a Women's Style?'²⁹ Not a style, but more deeply, a work of art fashioned in response to an experience unique to women's lives: that of pregnancy, as described by Blackburn, constitutes – at an oblique but important angle to it – an affirmative answer to Citron's question. Blackburn's account of her 2013 commission 'Time will Tell', written during her 'extended malaise with hyperemesis gravidarum' ('non-stop sickness'), traces the work's concept to her 'knowledge that symptoms might ease off in the second trimester' of her pregnancy.³⁰ This focused her mind on the passage of time. She describes the 'luxury' of observing the 'previously unnoticed' ticking of the clocks marking out each day of her 'housebound' existence, as she kept watch on the calendar.³¹ The work was premiered in 2013, when she was four months pregnant.

A Century of Composition is an impressive undertaking, its multifaceted scholarly endeavour (analytical, critical, sociological, historical) mixed with a measure of practical thinking. Following Linda Kouvaras's introduction (Chapter 1: 'Composing Women's (Very) Long 100-Year Fight: Evolutions, Illuminations, Solutions', pp. 1–23), the chapters are divided into three parts conceived along broad lines of enquiry, positioned 'within feminist thinking'.³² The chapters 'bookending' Part I, and Part II, encapsulate the book's breadth of vision, combined with elements of connectivity. At the start of Part I, the composer and music theorist Sabrina Clarke offers analytical observations on a selection of nature-related works by Amy Beach, with special reference to the composer's synaesthesia (colour associations with keys), while in the concluding chapter, Professor of Art History and Theory Susan Best considers arguments as to the validity of categorizing 'women' artists.³³ Rosalind Appleby, at the start of Part II, drawing on her experience 'as an arts journalist keenly supportive of women and diverse composers', offers a letter giving advice on 'how to leverage the media in order to thrive in the music marketplace'. She begins with a business analysis,

²⁶ *CCWM*, 95, quoting from Cusick, *Francesca Caccini at the Medici Court: Music and the Circulation of Power* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), xxiv.

²⁷ *CCWM*, 95.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 98–99.

²⁹ Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), Chapter 4 ('Music as Gendered Discourse'), 'Coda', 159–64.

³⁰ *CCWM*, 231.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Kouvaras (*A Century of Composition*, 5), identifies this, 'in the year 2021', as 'Fourth Wave' feminism or 'even the contentious postfeminism'. Part I ('Creative Work—Then and Now') contains Chapters 2–10, Part II ('The State of Industry in the Present Day') Chapters 11–17, and Part III ('Creating; Collaborating: Composer and Performer Reflections') Chapters 18–22.

³³ Chapter 2, 'Synaesthetic Associations and Gendered Nature Imagery: Female Agency in the Piano Music of Amy Beach', 27–51; and Chapter 10, 'Is the Category of the "Woman" Artist Still Helpful?', 191–205.

surveying the status quo, with its disappointing statistics, and assessing initiatives for change introduced in recent years, as well as the potential for future change.³⁴ At the end of Part II, Cat Hope (Professor of Music at Monash University, and among the composers contributing to the project featured in Chapter 7, discussed later) reports on the situation for women in the workplace, as well as giving consideration to gender and the canon in Australian educational and cultural contexts.³⁵

As with revisionist scholarship on gender and the canon, so also the relationship between gender and genre forms a recurrent topic in the literature on women's musical creativity. With far-reaching relevance for the formation – or reforming – of genre hierarchy, Johanna Selleck, in Part I, presents a compelling argument for the importance of music written for children, with reference to the illustrated first volume of *Bush Songs* produced by the triumvirate of the chapter title.³⁶ Their book went through more than fifty editions during at least five decades following its launch in 1907 at the First Exhibition of Women's Work in Melbourne. As Maurice Saxby (quoted by Selleck) observed: 'These books were familiar on pianos in kindergartens across Australia well into the first half of the twentieth century.'³⁷

The Australian *Bush Songs* emerge from Selleck's analysis as having multi-layered significance, not only for genre hierarchy, but also for national history and identity, ethnomusicology, child psychology, and analysis of song with special attention to the relationship of words and music, allied to visual art. As Selleck writes: 'Because the three women were creating art for children, the importance of their work beyond a pedagogical purpose appears to have been overlooked and relegated to the realm of "hidden histories".'³⁸ The chapter belongs to a recent trend arguing for the significance of work in genres hitherto considered of negligible importance, spearheaded by Scott Messing's work on Schubert's 'Marche militaire'.³⁹ The Rentoul/Peterson *Bush Songs* are mesmerizing. 'Gobble Wobbles' (Figure 3.5), lending itself, as Selleck notes, to semiotic analysis, resonates with the Lieder of Hugo Wolf in humorous mood.⁴⁰ Selleck finds that 'Autumn Wind' (Figures 3.1 and 3.2) achieves the 'phenomenon of "tension" caused by ambiguity that Nodelman identifies with high art'.⁴¹

While that chapter exemplifies the rewards to be gained from in-depth study of a slice of repertoire, several chapters in Parts I and II focus in detail on a single work by a contemporary woman composer, bringing out the variety of sources from which they draw inspiration, each work inhabiting its own expressive sphere. As Gabriella Smart relates in Chapter 7, she commissioned twelve Australian and German composers, each choosing a historic piano as starting-point for their contribution to her 2018 performance project, 'Broken Trees and

³⁴ Chapter 11, "Dear Women Composers in Australia (and Beyond)": (A Letter from a Music Critic)', 209–23.

³⁵ Chapter 17, 'Working towards Gender Equality and Empowerment in Australian Music Culture', 307–23.

³⁶ Chapter 3, 'Australian Bush Songs as Multimodal Discourse: The Remarkable Collaboration of Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, Annie Rentoul, and Gerorgette Peterson', 53–77.

³⁷ 'Australian Bush Songs as Multimodal Discourse', 54.

³⁸ Ibid. The songbook's subtitle is *Music for Young and Old*.

³⁹ Scott Messing, *Marching to the Canon: The Life of Schubert's Marche militaire* (University of Rochester Press and Boydell & Brewer, 2014 (Eastman Studies in Music).

⁴⁰ 'Australian Bush Songs as Multimodal Discourse', 66 (the song's title caught out the typesetter occasionally). In Figure 3.5, bar 9: LH upper part, note 3 should probably have a natural sign.

⁴¹ Ibid., 59, quoting from Perry Nodelman, *Words about Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books* (University of Georgia Press, 1990).

Elephant Ivories'.⁴² The instruments, all dating from the colonial era, included the poet and novelist Robert Louis Stevenson's upright piano, shipped to Apia, Samoa, where Stevenson, a 'passionate pianist', had settled with his family in 1890. (Stevenson 'wrote passionately about the destructive elements of colonialism that he witnessed in Samoa'.⁴³) After his death, the piano was sold at auction and shipped to New Zealand, eventually resurfacing in Sydney, where it featured at an exhibition of historic instruments. This instrument, now in a museum, was selected by the composer Catherine Milliken for her work *Steel-True Gold-Sole* (Sounding Robert Louis Stevenson). Her use of music and words, in a sonic combination of grand piano, sampled colonial piano, voice spoken and sung, and flageolet (an instrument Stevenson also played), produced an 'intimate and mysterious' piece reflecting the fascination Stevenson's piano held for her, as did its original owner and his work.⁴⁴

In Chapter 8, Jaslyn Robertson considers the Barbie™-doll opera by the Irish composer Jennifer Walshe (2003) with special reference to the function of art as social commentary on issues of contemporary concern, here toxic gender stereotypes as conveyed by the Barbie-doll protagonists. Besides singers and instrumentalists, the chamber-sized performing group includes two puppeteers, recalling the traditional genre of marionette opera. Robertson cites critical reaction to Walshe's work (Justin Haigh, for example, largely displaying uncomprehending repudiation), and Laura Battle's interview with Walshe, featuring the composer's own comments on it.⁴⁵ Seeking to fathom the role of satire and horror in the work, Robertson refers to an interdisciplinary range of sources, including Adorno's *Minima moralia*, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, and film and television studies.

As the general editors of the 'Irish Musical Studies' series, Lorraine Byrne Bodley and Harry White, observe in their Preface to *Women and Music in Ireland (WMI)*, the distinguishing feature of the volumes published before this one was that 'all of them, with the exception of the Bach volume, addressed topics that had hitherto received little or no previous scholarly attention'. They see *Women and Music in Ireland* ('likewise a pioneering collection') not only as possessing 'an Irish inflection of purpose and scholarly enquiry', but also as achieving 'a decisive retrieval of the role of women in shaping the complexion of Irish musical life from the eighteenth century to the present day'.⁴⁶ The book's value is augmented by its editors' approach to Ireland's colonial history, as set out in their Introduction: 'Regardless of politically constructed borders in Ireland, this book is concerned with women and music across the island.'⁴⁷ They note that some of the women studied in the book followed the general pattern whereby Ireland's 'peripheral' situation as an island nation led many of its musicians to pursue careers internationally. Among other career patterns, they cite an example of commitment as 'creative practitioner and academic', with the added dimension of a historical focus, in the work of pianist Una Hunt: 'As a performer, recording artist, editor and radio broadcaster, Hunt has

⁴² 'Of Broken Trees and Elephant Ivories: The Revivification of the Colonial Piano Manifested Through a New Work by Catherine Milliken', 143–56.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁴ 'Of Broken Trees and Elephant Ivories', 151.

⁴⁵ It is also discussed in *CCWM*, 57–58; further on Walshe see *Women and Music in Ireland*, *passim*, esp. 192 n. 6, 194, and 196 n. 23.

⁴⁶ *WMI*, xvii. The book's editors specify that while women's studies in music 'had been established elsewhere in anglophone musicology by the mid-1990s, this volume is the first book to appraise the field as it pertains to Ireland' ('Introduction', 2).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 'Introduction', 1.

contributed to preserving the legacy of women such as nineteenth-century composer Fanny Robinson and her twentieth-century counterpart Joan Trimble'.⁴⁸

The four parts containing the book's chapters are organized variously along the lines of such factors as chronology, musical tradition, and modes of discourse.⁴⁹ The chapters forming Part III demonstrate the rewards of studying a single figure in depth. The stories of Alicia Adélaïde Needham, Mary Dickenson-Auner, Joan Trimble, and Rhoda Coghill illuminate their individual experience as women musicians, as well as the aspects of their lives that reflect familiar tropes embedded in women's history. As the editors observe, highlights of Coghill's 'decades-long' career as a performer included 'a prestigious appointment as Station Accompanist at Radio Éireann in 1939 and a string of solo concert appearances', and yet 'her work was minimised in the historical narrative and subjected to gender-coded commentary'.⁵⁰

Chapters 2 and 4 in Part I offer the chance, respectively, to learn about musical households in the upper echelons of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish society, and to encounter an example of family life helping the gifted daughters of working musicians to embark on professional careers in nineteenth-century Dublin.⁵¹ Karol Mullaney-Dignam, in Chapter 2, quotes Lady Louisa Augusta Connolly, née Lennox (1743–1821), who, while on a visit to her ancestral home at Goodwood in 1772, wrote to her husband that the musical men there were 'all very obliging' and sang songs 'not worthy of them to please my bad taste in music'. As Mullaney-Dignam points out, it is significant that she nevertheless 'dutifully attended operas and instrumental concerts in Ireland and England'; and that 'motivated more by social and philanthropic concerns than enthusiasm for the music, she brought the young ladies in her care to hear music at churches such as St Werburgh's in Dublin'. The chapter throws valuable light on 'the sounds of elite daily life', an area that she notes has been less investigated than other historical aspects of country house life in Ireland.

Ita Beausang (keynote speaker at the 2010 conference), in Chapter 1, provides another well-chosen quotation giving insight into the role of music in elite Irish society. This is from Sydney Owenson, later Lady Morgan, who studied (as did her sister) with John Field's teacher, Tommaso Giordani. Writing to her father, she quoted Mrs Featherstonehaugh of Bracklyn Castle, who interviewed her for a governess post on the recommendation of M. Fontaine, *maître de ballet*:

I am much prepossessed in your favour by all that our good Fontaine has told me of you, and your being so merry and musical, as he tells me you are, is very much in your favour with us for we are rather dull and mopy [*sic*].⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁹ They are: Part I: 'Establishing a Place for Women Musicians in Irish Society of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' (Chapters 1–4); Part II: 'Women and Practice in Irish Traditional Music' (Chapters 5–7); Part III: 'Gaps and Gender Politics in the History of Twentieth-Century Women Composers and Performers' (Chapters 8–11); and Part IV: 'Situating Discourses of Women, Gender and Music in the Twenty-first Century' (Chapters 12–15).

⁵⁰ 'Introduction', 9.

⁵¹ Karol Mullaney-Dignam, "No Accomplishment So Great for a Lady": Women and Music in the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Elite Irish Household', *WMI*, 29–39; Mary Louise O'Donnell, 'Family, Filial Bonds and Forging Careers as Female Musicians in the Nineteenth Century: The Story of the Glover Sisters', *WMI*, 54–67.

⁵² 'Daughters of Hibernia: Seen and Not Heard?', *WMI*, 13–28 (p. 18).

Beausang's 'thumbnail sketch' of Owenson's life conveys her continuing attachment to music after becoming a successful novelist (purchasing an Irish harp from her first earnings): Thomas Moore, frequently – and Paganini (the latter performing in 1831 at the 'Grand Dublin Musical Festival') – were among visitors she entertained at her marital home.

Women and Music in Ireland is altogether a treasure-trove of information and enlightenment on subjects that (to borrow Jennifer O'Connor-Madsen's words) have been 'rarely discussed'.⁵³ It offers models of scholarship on local history of music, and national tradition (the minstrel, the harp – an instrument closely associated with women – and the fiddle in Irish history: Part II), illuminating the functions and practices of music in Irish society and the role and treatment of women in relation to those functions and practices.

Part IV provides space for contemporary developments, including 'Current Thoughts on Women and Electroacoustic Music in Ireland', explored by Barbara Jillian Dignam in Chapter 14. In Chapter 12, Nicola LeFanu (who also gave a keynote, at the 2014 conference and who was a pioneer, with Sophie Fuller, in the early phase of women's studies in music),⁵⁴ shares her thoughts on progress towards equality of opportunity for women working in the musical profession, and on the patterns she perceives of recognition and neglect of women composers' works.⁵⁵ This final part is rounded off by Tes Slominski's analysis, in Chapter 15, of the Irish traditional music scene, with its 'rigid gender binaries'.⁵⁶ Her conclusion ('A New Road'), posits that 'fighting oppression should be everyone's job'. She emphasizes the importance of 'examining the role of social norms in perpetuating oppressive systems', and lists her recommendations in response to the question that – 'as someone who has spent the past decade pointing out exclusions and inequities' in the music she 'so dearly' loves – she has often been asked: 'how to begin this work'.⁵⁷

Leah Broad, in *Quartet*, concluding her epilogue, expressed optimism, fired by signs of continuing interest in music by women composers. Given the evidence of commitment to the subject shown in the publications discussed here, we can feel encouraged to look to the future of women's studies in music with hope.

⁵³ Chapter 3, 'The Development of the Female Musician in Nineteenth-Century Dublin', *WMI*, 40–53 (p. 45).

⁵⁴ See their *Reclaiming the Muse: A Select Bibliography of English Language Writing on Women and Music* (Music Department, King's College London: published and printed by Nicola LeFanu and Sophie Fuller, 1991).

⁵⁵ 'Women and Composition: Fifty Years of Progress?', 175–81.

⁵⁶ 'We Buried the Heteropatriarchy and Danced on its Grave: Towards a Liberation Movement for Irish Traditional Music', 206–19.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.