JOURNAL of the

VOLUME 31, NO. 2 • 2025

IAWM

INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR WOMEN IN MUSIC

IN THIS ISSUE:

INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR WOMEN IN MUSIC

is looking for Board Members!

We are looking for additional board members who are dedicated to supporting and advancing awareness of women's music. We are excited to have you help shape the future of this organization.

We are interested in working with a diverse team of individuals from a variety of musical disciplines, interests, in various aspects and levels of their careers! As a volunteer board, we are especially seeking board members with skills in fundraising development, marketing, programming, global initiatives, advocacy, membership, digital presentations, and relationship building. The 2025 Conference is in partnership with the College Music Society. The 2025 Annual Concert features the Virago Symphonic Orchestra in Cologne Germany. We are planning multiple opportunities in 2026. **IAWM** is committed to gender equality and inclusion of diverse members of the musical community. See more at https://iawm.org/about-us

The call for nominations closes **July 1st, 2025**. All Nominees must be IAWM members (Click on https://iawm.org/ to join). All we need is one-page resume (PDF) and a 200-word statement (PDF) on why you'd like to join the board and how you can best help women in music. Go to our website page: https://iawm.org/iawm-is-looking-for-board-members/

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INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR WOMEN IN MUSIC

IAWM Membership Information

IAWM membership includes a subscription to the *Journal of the IAWM* (issued four times a year) plus access to past issues on the IAWM website. Membership offers opportunities for awards in ten categories of composition, as well as music scholarship and programming, an education grant, opportunities to participate in annual concerts and IAWM conferences, and opportunities to present webinars. Membership offers increased visibility through IAWM's social media platforms, website, and optional IAWM Listserv; eligibility to run for and hold board and officer positions within IAWM; and connections with a vibrant community made up of members from 30 countries on five continents, sharing, celebrating, and supporting women in music globally. For information on joining or renewing your membership, visit the IAWM website: www.iawm.org/contact-us/.

Help us increase your visibility! Update your image and website information on the Members' page of the IAWM website. Log in, and click on the Members' page to Member Profile. Click EDIT PROFILE, to add your information.

—CHRISTINA RUSNAK

INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR WOMEN IN MUSIC

IAWM is a global network of people working to increase and enhance musical activities and opportunities and to promote all aspects of the music of women. The IAWM builds awareness of women's contributions to musical life through publications, its website, a free listserv, international competitions for researchers and composers, conferences, congresses, concerts, the entrepreneurial efforts of its members, and advocacy work. IAWM activities ensure that the progress women have made in every aspect of musical life will continue to flourish and multiply.

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https://iawm.org/support/

Support The IAWM

Your donations enable IAWM to fulfill its mission and vision. Our awards, grants, and advocacy efforts bring greater equity and awareness of the contributions of women in music. Any amount helps to fund our concerts, conferences, the *Journal of the IAWM*, grants, and all of our member services. To donate:

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Email to: journal@iawm.org

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Christina Rusnak | Photo: Rachel Hadiasher

Message from IAWM's President

Dear Members,

This Issue Celebrates IAWM's 30th Anniversary!

Learn more about the women who fought to combat inequitable treatment of women in music. In 1975, the International League of Women Composers (ILWC), was founded to create and expand opportunities for women composers of music; in 1976, the American Women Composers, Inc. (AWC) worked to promote music by American women composers; and in 1979 the International Congress on Women in Music (ICWM) formed an organizational basis for women in music conferences and meetings. These organizations eventually merged to become the IAWM in 1995. Now, 30 years later, a greater proportion of women are performing in and leading orchestras and ensembles, although performances by women composers remains low. Out of 111 orchestras for the 2023-2024 season, only 7.5% were composed by women. [1]

In March, I traveled to Arkansas for the SHE Festival spearheaded by our own Katey Jahnke and Moon Sook Park. I was so inspired by the music and the scholarship of women from across the country. I presented a workshop on *Connecting to the Wider World*. Board Member Aliyah Danielle was the special guest performer and brought down the house!

I also attended the American Choral Directors Association and the College Band Directors National Association's national conferences in late March. One thing that struck me was how slow the pace of progress of women in music has been over the last 50 years – especially in leadership roles and in higher education. Only 12% of Band Directors from primary school through college are women. But progress is happening. In 2027, Mary K. Schneider, will become the first woman president in CBDNA's 80-year history. *I truly believe that rising tides float all boats.* While the numbers of women composers and conductors programmed at these conferences are still low, a greater diversity of music creators and leaders will enrich music organizations, students and the musical landscape as a whole. I met with the CBDNA leadership team to discuss how IAWM can help them move toward parity. We are hoping for a collaborative IAWM concert at the 2027 National Conference.

Music, Events, and Opportunities

We are excited that over 30 IAWM members will be traveling with 80 College Music Society members to Bogotá and Medellin Colombia June 15-24, 2025 for a joint **IAWM/CMS conference**. The topics and performances look great! If you would like to host and/or partner for our *next* conference in 2028, please send a note to president@iawm.org.

The **2025 Concert for chamber orchestra and mixed chamber works** will take place in Cologne Germany, at St. Cecilia's Romanesque Church, Museum Schnütgen on September 25, 2025, with the opportunity to work with Virago Symphonic Orchestra from Antwerp, Belgium. The 2026 Concert will bring you IAWM's first Choral/Vocal concert in 10 years! Plan now to submit and/or host! The plan is for the concert to take place in North America, probably in the U.S.

In IAWM's last survey, you told us you want more concerts, *more* opportunities to create and perform. We are working to make that a reality for spring 2026. *Nothing is finalized*, but look for more information later this summer and early fall in the newsletter and our social media pages.

Updates & Communication

Many of you have joined the new Google List iawmlist@googlegroups.com, replacing the old listserv. If you would like to be added to the list, please email communications@iawm.org. Update your image and website information on the Members page. Log in, and click on the Members page to Member Profile. Click EDIT PROFILE, to add your information.

IAWM is accepting applications for Fall 2025 Interns. Earn college credit* and a stipend while gaining hands-on experience with the world's leading organization devoted to advocacy for women in music. Please consider applying. https://iawm.org/internship-program-2024/

Please help us advocate for women in music globally. I love to read about the work you're doing, the pieces you're creating, conducting and/or performing, the books and articles you're writing. So PLEASE, don't be shy! Submit your research, your reports, interviews, news and more news to journal@iawm.org.

Last, but not least, your support and donations make our work possible. You can do so directly from our WAYS to SUPPORT page. Donate to fund a musician for our annual concert, an intern for a semester, or for one of the new music awards. IAWM can also manage larger gifts to provide IAWM with a longer legacy. **Consider becoming a BOARD MEMBER. The call for applications are coming soon!**

Thank you all for your membership!

Christina Rusnak

CHRISTINA RUSNAK
President, IAWM

1 https://donne-uk.org/research/

Message From the President

Dear Colleagues:

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the first Journal of the International Alliance for Women in Music.

As most of you know, last year was a busy and momentous one. In addition to maintaining our regular activities and membership services, we negotiated a successful merger between the International League of Women Composers, the International Congress on Women in Music, and American Women Composers, Inc. From these parents, the IAWM was officially born on January 1, 1995.

The move makes eminent sense in times such as ours: it allows us to share information, to eliminate redundancies (such as duplicate memberships), and to focus our energies and plot a common strategy. Divided, our power is diminished; united, it gains enormously in strength and effectiveness.

The IAWM, although newly born, recognizes the importance of continuity. It warmly embraces its multiple heritages and supports all the ongoing projects of its parent organizations. Indeed, its combined services add up to a rich array of benefits for members; too numerous to list individually, these include:

- the IAWM Journal, an invaluable resource for opportunities, networking, topical articles, reviews, and news of professional activities;
- the IAWM membership directory, updated regularly;
- a national office in Washington, D.C. which serves as a clearinghouse for inquiries and information;
- an electronic list and on-line access to IAWM news;
- competitions and awards;
- a library of members' scores, housed at George Washington University;
- several radio broadcast series in the U.S. and abroad;
- a yearly concert at the National Museum for Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., with a program of member works chosen from anonymous submissions; and
- International Congresses on Women in Music, hosted every other year by different cities throughout the world.

At the same time, the IAWM also breaks new ground. The change of name from 'women composers' to 'women in music,' for example, is not merely semantic: it reflects our belief that the work of women composers is best disseminated through regular contact with other musicians, critics, and the public at large. As a result, the IAWM has widened its scope and is actively reaching out to a broader constituency. It invites into its ranks performers — instrumentalists, singers, and conductors — and musicologists; it extends a welcome to men as well as women, and to amateurs as well as professionals.

Our goals for the future are ambitious and wide-ranging; broadly outlined, they are:

- to establish regular links with performing institutions and individual performers, publishing houses, recording companies, and the media;
- to forge closer cooperation with other groups that share our interests and agenda;
- to increase international representation abroad and minority participation in the U.S.;

Stefania de Kenessey

- to become the principal electronic information resource for women-in-music topics by increasing access to on-line services;
- to launch a scholarly journal of feminist musicology and foster research in this area; and
- to create outreach programs in schools, universities, and libraries, and to provide mentorships for young women musicians.

In short, the IAWM aims to become a strong and effective, high-profile advocate on behalf of women in music, whether composers, performers, or musicologists. It seeks to provide financial support, intellectual inspiration, and moral encouragement for all those involved in the struggle for fairness and equality.

For successfully having laid the foundations of the IAWM, I would personally like to acknowledge the hard work and generosity of all our board members, with special thanks to vice president Sally Reid and our new journal editor Sylvia Glickman.

To turn all of our dreams into reality, however, we need your help: we ask that you lend us your talents and energies, your support and goodwill, in building the IAWM. As always, your financial contributions over and above membership dues are a crucial (and warmly appreciated) source of our strength. But we also invite your input and assistance in the day-to-day running of the organization. Whether you are interested in joining our board, volunteering to oversee current activities, or initiating new projects, we want to make sure that your voice is heard.The greater our numbers, the louder our voice will be. **This is a challenge to every current member to bring in one new member in 1995!**

Help us create an equitable future for the generations yet to come. Together, we can do it. With best regards,

Stefania de Kenessey, President, IAWM

Call for Contributions to the IAWM Journal

NEXT DEADLINE FOR JOURNAL SUBMISSIONS: AUGUST 30, 2025

Editors await IAWM members' articles, tributes, reviews, and news!

Guidelines for Contributors

All Contributions: Submit all contributions as email attachments in Microsoft Word to journal@iawm.org. Identify the type of submission in the subject line of the email. The journal follows the *Chicago Manual of Style*, including documenting your sources in footnotes. We use the Oxford comma. Only one space after a period, please.

Articles: Before submitting an article, submit a *proposal* comprising an abstract of about 250 words and your short biography, about 50 words. Send it as an e-mail attachment in MS Word to journal@iawm.org with "Article proposal" in the subject line of the e-mail. The abstract should articulate the thesis of your inquiry (what you will to show), what evidence you will use (how you will show it), and how it relates to the mission of the IAWM (women in music in any period, location, or field). Make clear what is already known about your topic (prior research) and what you will contribute that is new. Estimate the number of words your article will be (1000 to 5000 words, including footnotes, is typical). A short bibliography (about 3-4 reliable sources) is helpful to assess your proposal, as is a short list of musical examples, photographs, or other illustrative material you intend to use. If the proposal is approved, the editor will send more detailed information about your individual submission.

Submitted articles *must be complete for professional publication*. Please proofread your own writing. For musical examples, print-quality pdf files are preferred; high resolution, (minimum 300 dpi) TIFF or JPEG are also acceptable. Photos should be in color and high resolution, and a minimum 300 dpi at the size to be used. Submit minimum 2.5×3.5 for headshots, 5×4 for articles, 5×6 for cover. Submit the completed article with "article submission" in the subject line and submit the illustrations as separate attachments in the same e-mail.

Authors are responsible for obtaining and providing permission to use copyrighted materials. We encourage you to include hyperlinks to sounding musical or audiovisual illustrations or further resources.

Announcements and Reports: To announce new recording releases or upcoming events (conferences, festivals, news items, women-in-music initiatives, etc.), or to contribute a report on a recently past event, email the information as an email attachment in MS Word to journal@iawm.org with either "Announcement" or "Report" in the subject line.

Reviews: To request a review of your book or recording, email the information to journal@iawm.org with "Review Request" in the subject line. Our review editor, Dr. Kathleen Carter Bell, will be in touch regarding next steps. If you wish to review books or recordings for the journal, put "Review List" in the subject line, and the review editor will contact you if she needs additional information to add you to her list. To submit a completed review, send it as an email attachment in MS Word to journal@iawm.org with "Review" in the subject line. Reviews are typically about 900 words. Submit illustrations as separate attachments to the same e-mail. See "Articles," above, for instructions about illustrations.

Members' News: Please send your news and updates as an attachment in MS Word to journal@iawm.org with "Members' News" in the subject line. With quarterly opportunities for submission, news contributions should reflect the past 3-6 months, a paragraph limited to 200 words or less, and include one illustration (see "articles," above, for specifications) or headshot photo and one link to an audio or audiovisual recording.

Helpful resources

Chicago's *Turabian Quick Guide* gives footnote formats for most source types: https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/turabian/turabian-notes-and-bibliography-citation-quick-guide.html

Consult *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* for authoritative definitions and spelling: https://www.merriam-webster.com/

Grove Music Online, which most university libraries and many public libraries subscribe to, is a good place to check facts about music and musicians.

You don't have to wait until the deadline to submit your contribution: the earlier you submit it, the smoother the journal production process.

Proposals received past the deadline may be considered for future issues of the Journal of the IAWM.

IAWM's Founding Mothers: Stefania De Kenessey, Nancy Van De Vate, Jeannie Gayle Pool, and Tommie E. Carl

ELIZABETH KEATHLEY

As anyone can learn from the short articles about the IAWM in *Grove (Oxford) Music Online* or *Wikipedia*, or from a tour around the internet, the International Alliance for Women in Music was founded in 1995 in a merger of several organizations with similar aims. The very first issue of this *Journal* declares beneath its masthead, "Uniting the ICWM, the AWC, and the ILWC."[1] Each of these organizations was founded by one of the women named in the title of this article, and their energy, creativity, vision, and passionate devotion to the cause of women in music shaped not only their original organizations, but also the entity their merger "gave birth" to: the IAWM.[2]

Nancy Van de Vate (née Hayes, 1930–1923) founded the International League of Women Composers in 1975 and edited its newsletter; Jeannie Pool founded the International Congress of Women in Music in 1982; and Tommie Ewert Carl (1921–2015) founded American Women Composers in 1976. Stefania de Kenessey was also active in the AWC and became its president in 1993; she was the first President of the IAWM.[3]

One of the insights at the "birth" of the IAWM was that an organization of women *composers* alone was insufficient to do the deep advocacy work needed to move women toward parity in music professions, histories, and education in the absence of a network of women musicians and allies in many roles, including performers who could render their music audible, musicologists who could tell their stories, producers who could bring their music to the public, and musical institutions and industries, like performing organizations, venues, and schools. The new IAWM set out to be that network, building on the lessons learned and alliances forged by its founding mothers:[4] The IAWM incorporated features of its parent organizations, continuing, for example, the tradition of international congresses (from ICWM), annual concerts at the Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington DC (from the AWC), and keeping some features of the ILWC's journal in the IAWM Journal.

Our founding mothers had done the yeoman's work of developing their organizations, so that by the time the IAWM was formed, they had coherent programs and many members. Jeannie Pool's trajectory toward the founding of the ICWM, for example, began when she was in graduate school at Columbia University and wanted to create an organization comprising scholars, performers, and composers to produce an international conference and festival on women in music. To earn the support of skeptics, she first collaborated with the International League of Women Composers to produce a workshop and conference on 20th-century string quartets by women composers. This well-attended and acclaimed event was repeated, broadcast over NPR, and won awards. Building on this success, Pool organized the First National Congress on Women in Music in New York (1981), which included many international participants.

Jeannie Pool, *IAWM Journal* 1/1 | Photo: Richard Woolf

The following year (1982) Pool had moved to Los Angeles, where she produced programs on musical women for the listener-supported, progressive Pacifica radio station KPFK, and there she finally achieved her goal of organizing the first International Congress on Women in Music, with the assistance of the ILWC. It was at this event that the ICWM was formally founded, and Jeanie was elected its president. Over the next ten years, annual congresses were held in Mexico City, Paris, Atlanta—where African American women composers drew particular attention—and New York; local variations on the congress, workshops, and symposia also took place under the ICWM rubric, and affiliations were forged with international women-in-music organizations, such as Frau und Music (Germany) and Donne in Musica (Italy).[5]

Jeannie hosted KPFK's noon concert from 1981 until it was cancelled (1997). Her show was titled "Music of the Americas," and she programmed the music of emerging talents and "unsung and forgotten" composers, bringing Latin American, African-American, and women composers to the air waves. She produced an event

1 *IAWM Journal* Vol. 1, no. 1 (June 1995), front cover.

2 Stefania de Kenessey used the birth metaphor in her first "President's Message" in the *Journal*: the IAWM was "officially born on January 1, 1995," Ibid, p. 1.

3 Judith Shatin, "American Women Composers, Inc.," in the column "Action Aisle: Histories of the AWC, ICWM, and ILWC," ibid, p. 3. "Action Aisle" was a regular column of the *Journal* that specifically addressed advocacy. See Vol. 1, no. 2 (Oct. 1995) to learn about actions IAWMers were taking with respect to all-male-composer programming, including a letter-writing campaign and correspondence with a U.S. senator. This foreshadowed the IAWM's protest actions against the all-male Vienna Philharmonic (1997, ff); the arguments are familiar.

4 De Kenessey, "President's Message."

5 Stephen M. Fry, "The ICWM Legacy: A Chronicle and Review of the International Congress on Women in Music," *IAWM Journal* Vol. 1, no. 1 (June 1995): 4–8.

Jeannie Pool in 2023 | Photo: Beverly Simmons, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

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— ELIZABETH KEATHLEY


INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR WOMEN IN MUSIC

uniting the ICWM, the AWC and the ILWC VOLUME I, No. 1 JUNE 1995

JOURNAL

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celebrating 100 Pioneering Women Musicians of Los Angeles, which was broadcast over KPFK.[6]

Earning a PhD in Music from Claremont Graduate University, Jeannie more recently identifies as a musicologist and producer: she has researched women in jazz, authoring the book *Peggy Gilbert and Her All-Girl Band* (2008), and she wrote a biography of Zenobia Powell Perry (1908–2004), as well as biographical articles on musical women for *Grove Music Online*. Jeannie also reconstructed and orchestrated Perry's opera, *Tawawa House*, about the underground railroad. Since 1997 Jeannie has been an ASCAP composer and arranger and a music consultant for the film industry, and she was nominated for a film critics' award for her restoration of the original score for the 1927 film *Wings*.[7]

With its emphasis specifically on composers, American Women Composers established a score library, released recordings, and presented programs of music by its members and other women composers in several important venues in Washington D.C. and New York, including the Library of Congress, the British Embassy, and the Bruno Walter Library.

The driving force behind AWC from 1976-1988, founder Tommie Ewert Carl, was a composer primarily of electro-acoustic music, and she used her skills as a record producer to the benefit of the IAWM, for example, she produced two recordings of music by women composers—Laurie Spiegel, Ruth Schonthal, and others—released by the AWC under the Capriccio label. She obtained an NEA grant to celebrate the AWC's tenth anniversary with a dozen concerts around D.C. in locations like the Smithsonian and the Kennedy Center.

The AWC established a recurring annual concert at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (1989), co-sponsored the Bay Area Women's Philharmonic Reading Program (1990), and initiated a national recording award (1991).[8]

Carl was a tireless advocate for women and put her work on behalf of others before her own composition. She observed that women composers remained nearly invisible: although American women were making strides in law, politics, and literature, women *composers* received little recognition from the music establishment, their works were rarely studied or heard, and they were disregarded by music historians.[9]

A number of composers have acknowledged that it was Tommie Carl who launched their careers. For example, Linda Dusman related her experience as a young composer having her song cycle accepted and performed at an AWC concert: "This moment—hearing my music performed by professionals in a professional setting, being interviewed...was the first time that I truly imagined I could 'be' a composer, not just a composition student...I have Tommie Carl to thank for that."[10]

Tommie E. Carl, *IAWM Journal* 1/1

6 Jeannie Pool, "Music of the Americas: Cancelled!" In Broadcast News, Part III, *IAWM Journal* Vol. 3, no. 2 (June 1997): 42.

7 JeannieGaylePool.com. Viewed on 18 April 2025.

8 Judith Shatin, "American Women Composers, Inc.," op. cit., p. 3.

9 Deborah Hayes, In Memoriam: Tommie Ewert Carl (1921–2015), *IAWM Journal* Vol.22, no. 1 (2016): 26–27.

10 Hayes, In Memoriam, op. cit.

Nancy Van de Vate | Photo: American Composers Alliance

Among the founding mothers, Nancy Van de Vate is the best known beyond our charmed circle of Women-in-Music enthusiasts: unlike the other founders, she has a biographical article in *Grove* and is mentioned in several other *Grove* articles about American music.[11] Her death warranted an obituary in the New *York Times*.

Prior to founding the International League of Women Composers, she had attended music programs at colleges and universities in the Northeast and Southeast, earned degrees from Wellesley, the University of Mississippi, and Florida State, and sustained herself (and presumably her three children), by teaching at various colleges and playing viola and piano. She attained a faculty position at the University of Hawaii in 1975, the same year she founded the ILWC, and she chaired that organization until 1982—longer than she kept that academic job. Captivated by the gamelan music she heard in Hawaii, she moved to Indonesia for a time, but in 1985 relocated to Vienna, where she lived and taught music composition at the Institute for European Studies until her death in 2023.[12]

An astonishingly productive composer in all the conventional genres (not that her music is conventional—far from it!) Van de Vate composed modernist music that appeared on recordings with composers like Schoenberg and Penderecki, with whom she is most often compared. Krzysztof Penderecki (1933–2020) of Poland is most famous for his composition *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* (1961), and Van de Vate's orchestral composition Chernobyl (1987) bears some resemblance to it, both musically and ethically: both compositions address nuclear disasters occasioned by powerful governments and suffered by many innocent people. In the same vein, her *Katyn* for chorus and orchestra (1989) commemorates the Soviet Union's mass executions of Polish prisoners of war in 1940, ordered by Joseph Stalin. Van de Vate's anti-war opera *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1997) is a musical interpretation of Erich Maria Remarque's semi-autobiographical novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929). To these weighty topics, Van de Vate brought a range of modern compositional techniques, including serialism and tone clusters, large orchestral and choral forces, and percussive timbres for dramatic effect. She received many commissions, much acclaim, and several prizes for her compositions.[13]

Nancy Van de Vate knew how to share the wealth: she used her own success to support other composers' careers. For example, in 1990, she and her second husband, Clyde Smith, created the non-profit recording label Vienna Modern Masters (VMM), whose primary objective was to record modern orchestral music, including Van de Vate's own, but also gave other women composers the opportunity to have their music recorded and distributed.[14] In 1996, Nancy and Clyde created the Van de Vate Prize for orchestral music, funded the $500 cash prize, and offered to the winner the possibility of recording on their VMM label.[15] Also in 1996, VMM co-sponsored with the Ruse Philharmonic of Bulgaria a concert of six orchestral compositions, three of which were composed by women, followed by a day-long conference, "Music of Our Time," and further orchestral performances.[16] Van de Vate not only had her own composition performed and presented a paper about gamelan at the conference, but she also, with her spouse, oversaw the recording and editing of fifteen orchestral compositions for release on VMM's "Music from Six Continents" series.[17]

Van de Vate was a member of the National Organization for Women and started a chapter of NOW the year before she founded the ILWC: she was in stride with the women's movement of her time, but the field of music lagged behind, and some people criticized her for her unrelenting feminist stance. A pox on those people, and good on her!

Stefania de Kenessey led not only the successful merger of the three parent organizations, but also the development of a comprehensive set of goals for the IAWM, including advancing online communications, reaching out to performers and musicologists in addition to composers, launching a scholarly journal of feminist musicology (*Women & Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*),[18] forging more alliances with organizations who share the IAWM's ideals, increasing international participation, and reaching out to communities often marginalized by the predominantly white, privileged classical music establishment.[19]

While her premieres at Carnegie Hall, multiple ASCAP awards, and glowing reviews speak to her credentials as a composer, de Kenessey has also

11 She appears in the articles on orchestral music, choral music, chamber music, and others.

12 Grove, s.v. "Nancy Van de Vate"; *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*. New York: Schirmer, 2001. Accessed through *Gale in Context: Biography* on April 24, 2025.

13 Her works are published and administered by American Composers Alliance, New York.

14 See J. Michele Edwards's recollection of Van de Vate in this issue.

15 Stefania de Kenessey, "Message from the President," *IAWM Journal* vol. 2, no. 1 (February 1996): p. 1.

16 Margaret S. Meier, "Reports from Ruse, Bulgaria: Taste of a World Without Gender Bias," *IAWM Journal* Vol. 3, no. 1 (February 1997): pp. 32-33.

17 Ibid, and Clyde Smith, "The Women's Muse Conquers Ruse," op. cit., p.33.

18 De Kenessey, "President's Message," *Journal* Vol. 1, no. 1(June 1995), p. 1.

19 Ibid.

Stefania de Kenessey | Photo: Whitney Browne

shown a capacious interest in the arts with a philosophical and sometimes ironic perspective. Her 1997 "Derrière Guard," festival, which she brought to the Kitchen—lower Manhattan's famous locus for the avant-garde—drew attention throughout the art world. De Kenessey argued that the avant-garde had become an orthodoxy limiting the voices of other artistic perspectives.[20]

As Professor of Music (now Emerita) at the New School for Social Research, de Kenessey has composed music supporting the School's cultural projects, including the score for *The Women's Legacy Project*, which honored recently re-discovered women who were crucial figures in the university's establishment.[21] To celebrate the launch of the New School's Gender and Sexuality Studies Institute, de Kenessey was commissioned to compose music for a video performance piece titled *Menstrual Rosary* (2020), which has won thirty-three awards at national and international film festivals. The Dal Sogno Ensemble, one of three ensembles for which de Kenessey is the composer-in-residence, commissioned her cantata *The Names of Woman* (2024), dedicated to unjustly neglected historical women: it was a national finalist for the Charles Ives Award of the American Prize. De Kenessey's 2015 opera *Bonfire of the Vanities* updated and reimagined Tom Wolfe's novel of corruption and greed—still timely![22]

The founding mothers of the IAWM brought their energy, intelligence, musicality, passion, creativity, a sense of justice, and profound humanity to our beloved organization, and each of them pursued creative lives beyond the IAWM as well. We honor them and love them.

20 John Michael Cummings, "The Derierre Garde," *Utne Reader* (16 September 2019; reprint from 1998), www.utne.com/arts/derriere-garde-zm0z9802zhoe, accessed April 2025; Kanchan Limaye, "Adieu to the Avant-Garde," *Reason* (July, 1997); Frank Oteri, "Stefania de Kenessey: 20 Years After Rewriting History," interview in *New Music Box* Oct. 2, 2017. newmusicusa.org/nmbx/stefania-de-kenessey-20-years-after-rewriting-history/ *"Derrière"* means behind, or rear, as opposed to *avant*, which means forward. De Kenessey played on this wording with an emblem comprising a hand modestly shielding a pair of buttocks.

21 The original faculty at the New School were mostly European, predominantly Jewish, intellectual refugees. De Kenessey herself was born in Budapest (1956).

22 From her website, stefaniadekenessey.com/about, retrieved April 2025.

Remembering Nancy Van de Vate

J. MICHELE EDWARDS

I remember well meeting Nancy Van de Vate and her husband Clyde Smith in July 1997 while I was participating in the College Music Society International Conference held at Vienna's Bildungshaus Neuwaldegg: I presented a paper titled "In the Words of Marianna Martines and JoAnn Falletta." The generosity and warmth of Nancy and Clyde were notable in their arrangement and co-sponsorship of a wonderful reception for conference participants at the residence of the American Ambassador to Austria, Dr. Swanee Hunt, and her husband, Dr. Charles Ansbacher Hunt. This reception gave us conference attendees the opportunity to enjoy interacting with each other and with other guests of the Ambassador in the beautiful residential surroundings. In addition to her extensive work as a composer, Nancy van de Vate was Vice-President and Artistic Director of Vienna Modern Masters, a non-profit recording company specializing in the recording, release, and international distribution of new music for orchestra and orchestra with chorus; many of their recordings feature women composers. Clyde was President of the company. Again, their generosity was evident when I received a large box of their CDs shortly after our encounter in Vienna. This gift introduced me to and gave me access to numerous large works by women composers in a genre of special interest to me: the choral-orchestral repertoire.

J. Michele Edwards, conductor and musicologist, is Professor Emerita of Music, Macalester College, earned a doctorate from the University of Iowa, and has held appointments with Macalester Festival Chorale, Calliope Women's Chorus, and Minnesota Center Chorale. Committed to programming women's compositions, Edwards has commissioned new works and conducted their premieres. She is coauthor of Chen Yi (University of Illinois Press, 2020; winner of the 2022 Pauline Alderman Award, Leila Webster Memorial Music Award). Michele has been a member of ILWC & ICWM, and of the IAWM from its inception, serving on the Board of Directors (1997-2006) and as Treasurer (2004-2006).

The Agnes Tyrrell Awakening: An Interview with Jocelyn Swigger

FRANCES FALLING

Frances Falling, M.A. (left) intervewed Jocelyn Swigger, D.M.A. (right) via Zoom, February 2025

Concert pianist Jocelyn Swigger is Professor of Music at Gettysburg College Sunderman Conservatory and on the piano faculty of Interlochen Arts Camp. "An hour of pure musical pleasure"[1] was a Blogcritics review of her album of the complete Chopin etudes, performed with original ornaments on an 1841 Paris Erard piano, tuned to a historically informed temperament devised especially for the works of Chopin. This was followed by a recording of classical art songs by female composers with soprano Susan Hochmiller, released in 2022 by Centaur Records. Her current project involves the music of the late Romantic Czech composer Agnes Tyrrell (1846-1883). In this interview, Swigger talks about her research process and about the importance of this endeavor.

Swigger's work came to the attention of the *Frauenorchesterprojekt* (FOP – Women's Orchestra Project) Berlin, an all-women, semi-professional project-orchestra founded in 2007 that gathers annually for an intensive 3-day rehearsal period, culminating in a performance.[2] Their aim is to discover and perform music by female composers often overlooked in traditional concert programming. The FOP is notably led by conductor Mary Ellen Kitchens, who is also a board member of the *Archive of Women in Music* in Frankfurt/Main, underscoring her dedication to championing the works of women composers. While efforts to diversify orchestral repertoire have gained momentum, disparities remain significant. The 2024 *Orchestra Repertoire Report* from the *Institute for Composer Diversity* found that 22.6% of works performed by U.S. orchestras in 2023–24 were by historically excluded composers, suggesting progress in diversity.[3] However, the *Donne Report* 2024, which analyzed global programming, revealed that only 7.5% of works were by women, with just 1.6% by women from the global majority, and that white male composers—mostly deceased—still dominate, comprising 89.3% of programmed pieces.[4] Some organizations, such as the German Symphony Orchestra Berlin (Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin), have implemented policies requiring at least one work by a woman per concert, but overall representation still lags far behind historical norms for male composers.

1 Jon Sobel, "Music Review: Jocelyn Swigger – "The Complete Chopin Études." *Blogcritics*, July 24, 2018, https://blogcritics.org/music-review-jocelyn-swigger-complete-chopin-etudes.

2 For a complete history, list of works and composers, team members and contact information, visit https://frauenorchester.de/ (in German).

3 Dr. Rob Deemer and Dr. Cory Meals, "2024 Orchestra Repertoire Report," *Institute for Composer Diversity*, accessed April 6, 2025, https://www.composerdiversity.com/orchestra-repertoire-reports.

4 "Equality & Diversity in Global Repertoire—111 ORCHESTRAS—2023/2024 Season," *Donne, Women in Music Research*, accessed April 6, 2025, https://donne-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/DonneReport2024.pdf.

The *Women's Orchestra Project* (FOP) Berlin is among the organizations leading the charge to address these disparities, bringing forgotten voices to the stage. Their latest "workshop concert" on March 9, 2025, featured works by Elfrida Andrée, Grace Williams, Imogen Holst, contemporary composer Ying Wang, and thanks to Jocelyn Swigger's research, Agnes Tyrrell's previously unpublished *Overture in E-flat Major*. The performance of the overture marked the first time the piece had been heard since its premiere in 1879. This revival is a crucial step in increasing the visibility of women composers and improving access to their works within orchestral programming. I had a chance to speak with Swigger a few weeks before the FOP concert took place.

Frances Falling: To start, Jocelyn, how did you discover Agnes Tyrrell?

Jocelyn Swigger: I was flipping through the *Norton Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* and there was an entry that said that she wrote a set of études for which Franz Liszt suggested some fingerings. And I thought, if Liszt practiced this music enough to actually think about what fingering to use, then this is probably pretty interesting piano music. And so, I started googling her every once in a while, just every couple of months, and there was nothing. Then, Kyra Steckeweh, who is a Leipzig pianist and musicologist, released this beautiful edition of Agnes's piano pieces. And I started reading through it, which was difficult because her music is hard, but I just kept swearing because it was so good! I just couldn't believe how good this music was. And that was in the spring of 2022. And since then, I've just been completely obsessed with Agnes Tyrrell. I've visited the archive on Tyrrell a couple of times in the Czech Republic. I've been premiering several of her pieces in the United States. I'm editing those etudes that Liszt liked for *Certosa Publishers* in Germany and I'm learning to play them. They're wonderful. Now I'm just so thrilled that the Frauenorchesterprojekt

is going to be giving sound to this overture. I cannot wait to hear this music played by an orchestra and not by the MIDI keyboard.

FF: That is a great segue to her Overture in E-flat Major that will be performed for the first time since its premiere by the Women's Orchestra Project Berlin (FOP) under the direction of Mary Ellen Kitchens. Tell us about the overture.

JS: This overture is in sonata allegro form, with some interesting modifications. She likes to have a theme from one place that returns in another instrument, so you'll hear things come back in different ways quite a bit. She really has a good time with counterpoint throughout the entire piece. There are so many places where there are wonderful imitation conversations between two parts or more, or a tune will hop around the different parts. And then her coda takes the material that we've heard before and turns it into a Presto. You can see from the manuscripts that her handwriting is absolutely clear and readable. Occasionally there would be a strange chord and I would have to figure out, did she really mean this or is this a mistake? Which is a fun and challenging process. I'm so grateful to my wonderful student collaborator and assistant, Riley Dunbar, who did the typesetting of the score and parts. And I hope we got it right. I'm very aware as a performer that if I make a mistake when I'm playing, it's a mistake: okay, the note is over and maybe the listeners don't even hear it. But if there's a mistake in a score for an orchestra, that could be five minutes of 80 people's time. I hope it won't be too hard for the musicians to play, but I think it will be very fun for the audience to hear.

FF: Could you paint a picture of the general circumstances that Agnes Tyrrell found herself in when she was writing this piece?

JS: We know that it was played in Brno in 1879, so she probably wrote it in the couple of years before that. I believe she wrote this piece with the expectation that it would be played, which is not true of all of her music. She wrote a symphony and an opera, and she wrote all this piano music that she could play but was too sick to perform. Something else she probably knew when she wrote this overture was that she was not going to be alive for very long. She had terrible health for most of her adult life. That's what kept her from touring on the concert stage. I think it's partly why we've never heard of her, because if she had toured like Clara Schumann, we would have heard of her. But she was too ill. And for the last several years of her life, doctors were telling her, "You probably have about a year left to live." I really think that in the last few years of her life, she knew she was sick and probably felt horrible.[5]

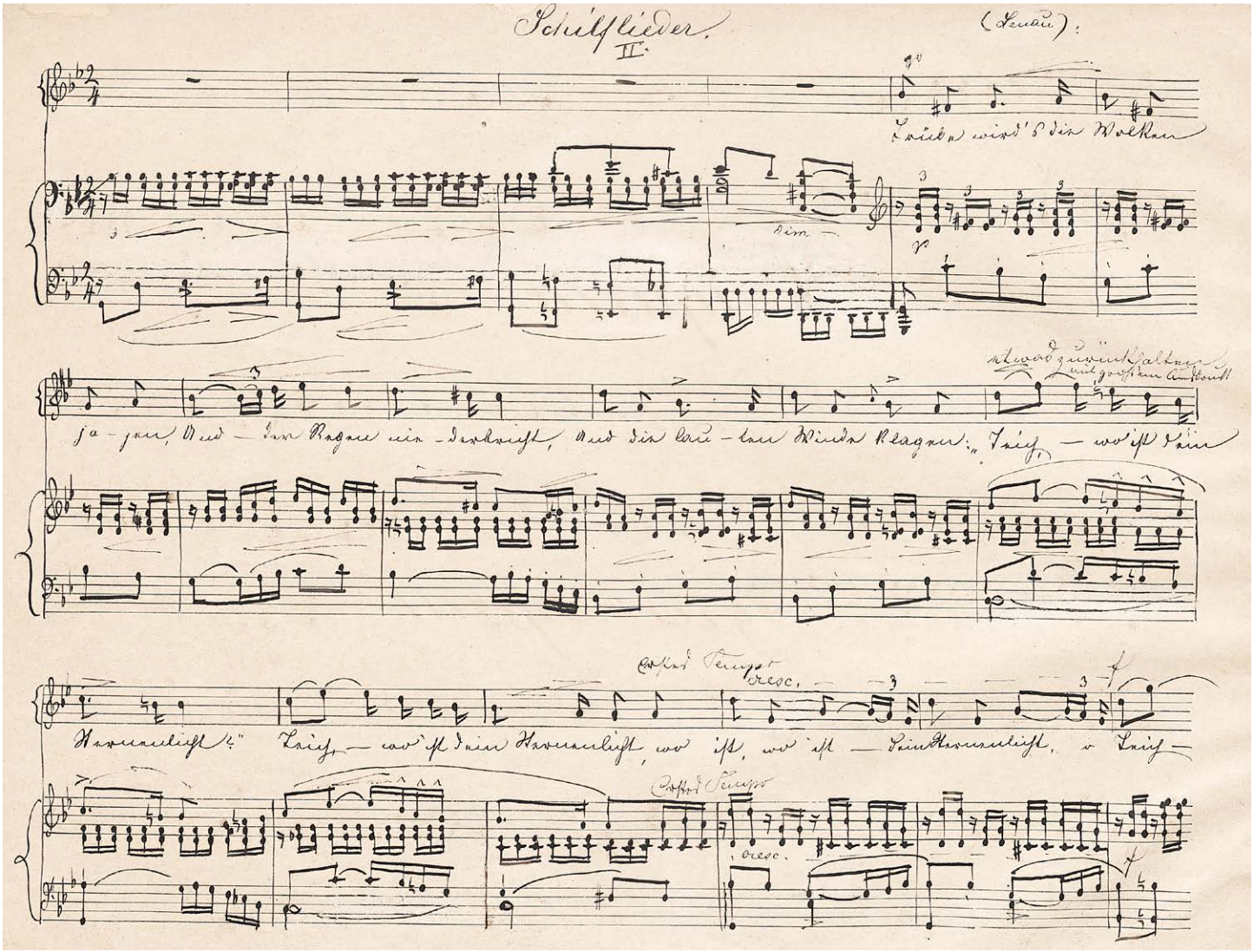
FF: It sounds like she is writing with the shadow of her mortality hanging over her head all the time.

JS: And her music is so full of life and joy and hope! It's just amazing to me. This is not music of somebody who's whining; this is music of somebody who is choosing to get as much out of life as you can and really enjoy it. Interestingly, Agnes once described herself in kind of a joking way, as a "very dear little thing with an ugly face, but as industrious as any living creature." And I love the idea of proudly being as industrious as any living creature.

FF: What was her background? What informed her composing?

JS: She was a child prodigy. When she was 12, she played the Beethoven Spring Sonata in public with a grownup violinist. And the grownup violinist skipped a part, which can happen, and she caught it. So, she was the hero accompanist at age 12. She was an absolute virtuoso pianist. You can tell from her writing that thirds were very easy for her, for example. Sometimes she'll write a piece that is pretty simple, and

5 Although the exact cause of death is unknown, Martina Schulmeisterová notes in her dissertation (see note 8) that during her studies in Vienna, which she began at 16 years of age, her "heart issues" began – one could surmise, chronic heart disease – depriving her from the possibility of a concert career. According to death records cited in Blanka Šnajdrová's thesis (see note 7), the cause of her premature death at 36 was a "heart defect" after "a long and painful illness".



Agnes Tyrrell Manuscript, *Schilflieder*, 1876, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz

then she'll just put a little run of thirds. She also sang. There's documentation of a performance where she was supposed to be a soloist in the Beethoven Ninth Symphony but had to cancel because of ill health. She was a good enough singer that she could have done that. I believe she played viola, but I'm not sure. But I feel like all the best composers who really love inner voices played viola. She studied harmony and counterpoint with Otto Kitzler, who's best known as [Anton] Bruckner's teacher.

FF: How would you describe her composing voice, her music to those of us who have not heard it yet?

JS: I think it's kind of like if Johannes Brahms were [sic] in a really good mood because Felix Mendelssohn just told him a really funny joke.

FF: Were some of her pieces published?

JS: She published a couple of short piano pieces, and she published the etudes that Liszt appreciated. But she couldn't get publishers to take her seriously. And we know why. If her name had been Arthur Tyrrell, we would all have grown up playing her music. And yet, she wrote and yet she composed. It's so amazing to me that she made this incredible body of work even though she had no reason to think that most of it would be heard in her lifetime. I really think she was writing for us in the future. You can just see that she's being so clear and making sure that whoever comes across this piece of paper can really read it. And that to me is incredibly inspiring. She must have had hope and faith that musicians of the future would find her and hear her music. I'm sure she had dark days, but she dealt with them by creating music.

FF: Tell me about your research journey.

JS: It's been incredible to visit the Tyrrell archive at the Department of Music History in Brno, in the Czech Republic. They generously allowed me to take photos of Agnes' manuscripts and gave me permission to perform her music. Something that I've done to learn more about her, which has been so much fun, is I've taken myself on a couple of pilgrimages to places where Agnes had been. For example, it's been very fun to walk around Brno and specifically look at the places that were there, like some of the town squares. The town square near her apartment is still very similar to how it was in Tyrrell's

Frauenorchesterprojekt Berlin, Workshop Concert on March 9, 2025

day. Her apartment building is not there, but there's a music store on the bottom floor of the building that has replaced it, which is kind of cool. I also did a pilgrimage to the castle where she worked as a court musician for a little while.

FF: What other information about Agnes Tyrrell is out there for scholars yet to read through and talk about?

JS: Right now, there is not very much.[6] Blanka Snajdrova did a master's thesis on Agnes in the early 2000s where she was setting and making available Tyrrell's choral music.[7] There is one dissertation in Czech by Martina Schulmeisterová that she very kindly shared with me.[8] I'm probably going to write a book about Agnes someday, but right now I'm really focusing on getting her music heard and learning to play it myself, which is a big project. I write a blog about my adventures practicing and researching Agnes, at jocelynswigger.com/agnesblog.

I'm so grateful to the Frauenorchesterprojekt for making this connection so that this performance of her overture could happen. I think I probably will just be crying the whole time that the orchestra is playing. It's really wonderful.[9]

Attending the Women's Orchestra Project (FOP) 2025 in their 18th year was an inspiring and transformative experience. As I observed the rehearsal process and engaged with some of the 80+ women musicians dedicated to reviving forgotten works, I was energized and impressed by the collaborative effort required to bring these overlooked compositions to life. I can report that the Tyrrell Overture was met with enthusiastic applause and in the case of some audience members, also tears— perhaps the fact sinking in that this vibrant music, hidden in manuscript for over 150 years, had been brought to life before their very eyes and ears.

During the Tyrrell recital which followed the orchestra's workshop concert, Jocelyn Swigger and I had a chance to showcase more of Tyrrell's compositions, as we presented some of her beautiful and humor-filled settings of poems by Goethe, among others, as well as her virtuosic and impressive piano pieces. The audience's response, from moments of thoughtful quiet to laughter at her musical wit, underscored the enduring relevance and appeal of her compositions. More than just a performance, the FOP weekend reinforced the necessity of continued efforts to integrate women composers into the broader orchestral repertoire—a mission that resonates with musicians and listeners alike.

(For readers involved in programming, whether for solo recitals or leading ensembles, resources such as the *Archive of Women in Music*, the *Donne Foundation*, and the *Institute for Composer Diversity* offer invaluable resources, from best practices to searchable databases to repertoire consulting, which help in the process of discovering more unjustly unheard composers.) The success of FOP 2025, driven by the commitment of individuals like Mary Ellen Kitchens and Jocelyn Swigger, underscores the importance of actively seeking out and performing the works of underrepresented composers. As this weekend so powerfully demonstrated, a wealth of exceptional music awaits rediscovery, and by embracing our part in this exploration, we can all contribute to a richer and more representative future for classical music.


Jocelyn Swigger and Frances Falling, Frauenorchesterprojekt Berlin, Tyrrell Recital

American singer and musicologist Frances Falling is working on her PhD about "performing mothers" in the 19th and 20th centuries at the Kunstuniversität Graz. She specializes in Lied lecture recitals featuring women composers. Frances is involved with the Bühnenmütter* (Performing mothers) e.V. Association and works as a research assistant to Mary Ellen Kitchens (FOP).

6 The Kapralova Society has published a biography and list of published works: "The Tyrrell Edition," The Kapralova Society, accessed April 7, 2025, http://www.kapralova.org/Tyrrell.htm.

7 Blanka Šnajdrová, *Agnes Tyrrell. Brněnská skladatelka a její smíšené sbory v ODH MZM / Agnes Tyrrell: A Brno Composer and Her Mixed Choirs in the Department of the History of Music, Moravian Museum* [online], Brno, 2019. Diploma thesis, Masaryk University, Faculty of Arts. Supervisor Miloš Štědroň. Accessed May 4, 2025. https://is.muni.cz/th/y3y0j/.

8 Martina Schulmeisterová, *Agnes Tyrrell, život a dílo / Agnes Tyrrell: Life and Work*, Dissertation, Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts, Faculty of Music, 2011.

9 For Jocelyn Swigger's reaction to the FOP Berlin concert and hearing Agnes Tyrrell's overture performed, read her blog about the event at https://jocelynswigger.com/agnesblog.

Reimagining the Eternal Feminine: Archetypes, Orientalism, and Feminine Voice in Mel Bonis's *Femmes de Légende*

KATHRYN FELT

In 2003, Furore Verlag launched an eleven-volume edition of the complete piano works of French composer Mélanie "Mel" Bonis (1858–1937), dedicating the inaugural volume to *Femmes de Légende*—a set of seven musical portraits of mythological and literary women composed between 1898 and 1910.[1] Edited by Eberhard Mayer and Christine Géliot, the collection highlights a period in Bonis's compositional life that coincided with the fin-de-siècle debate surrounding the "New Woman" in France. While these character pieces might initially seem to echo a tradition of music inspired by feminine archetypes, particularly in opera, their conception as both a piano and orchestral suite sets them apart. Few piano works of the time name women so directly, and even fewer offer such a cohesive and varied portrayal of mythological and literary heroines. Rather than relying on generalized tropes, Bonis's suite is deeply rooted in the aesthetic, political, and gender discourses of her era.

This article argues that *Femmes de Légende* offers more than a collection of evocative character pieces: these works represent a protofeminist reimagining of feminine archetypes in fin-de-siècle France. While her music engages in conventional tropes of Orientalism and mythic femininity, she infuses each portrait with great expressivity and approaches the suite as a whole as a space for feminine transformation and multiplicity. Bonis's decision to later orchestrate three of these portraits—"Salomé," "Ophélie," and "Le Songe de Cléopâtre"—underscores her investment in these figures as more than character sketches: they are part of Bonis's broader dramatic and ideological statement.

Methodologically, this study brings together historical, feminist, and analytical approaches. It draws upon contemporary feminist theory to interrogate archetypal representations of women in music and theater; musicological and cultural history to situate Bonis within her fin-de-siècle context; and musical analysis to explore how harmony, texture, and form articulate character and identity. I examine how Bonis's musical language interacts with Symbolist aesthetics and Orientalist conventions, treating these stylistic markers not merely as sonic decoration but as carriers of cultural and ideological meaning. In addition, this study considers how French women writers and artists of the period were actively reimagining many of the same mythological and literary figures—figures who, while acceptable to conservative audiences, also became coded expressions of changing ideas about womanhood.

Bonis's musical portraits thus participate in a broader early feminist movement, presenting multivalent characters whose reception would have differed across ideological lines. Many of the women Bonis portrays were familiar figures on the opera and theater stage, cultural spaces where femininity, performance, and power were hotly debated. For example, in feminist belle-époque theater, Orientalism functioned as a conceit through which women could embody queens, seductresses, or leaders from the East, slipping between roles and asserting control through performance.[2] In this context, Orientalist musical techniques such as chromaticism, modal color, and languorous pacing, could signal a form of feminine charm, agency, or ambiguity. The first part of this study will therefore situate *Femmes de Légende* within the evolving representations of womanhood in fin-de-siècle art and performance, followed by examples from each musical work. This interdisciplinary framework offers a richer understanding of how Bonis engages with, reshapes, and ultimately complicates the archetypes she evokes.

Mélanie "Mel" Bonis. Painting by Charles-Auguste Corbineau (1877) | © Association Mel Bonis

The Fin-de-Siècle Woman: Between Tradition and Transformation

The final decades of the nineteenth century in France were marked by cultural instability and a growing fascination with femininity as a symbolic site of both societal anxiety and transformation. Following the Franco-Prussian War and the rise of the Third Republic, a renewed focus on national identity coincided with contentious debates about the role of women in modern French society. The figure of the "New Woman," imported from Anglo-American discourse, often provoked unease among French critics, who associated her with androgyny and the erosion of traditional gender roles. German critic Max Nordau captured the cultural unease with the "New Woman" in 1897, describing her as "a hybrid figure, wearing pants, walking in the street with her hands in her pockets and a cigarette on her lips."[3]

In response, French feminists and intellectuals such as Marguerite Durand proposed an alternative: the *frondeuse*, a new model of French femininity

1 Mel Bonis, *Femmes de Légende*, Volume I, ed. Ebehard Mayer (Kassel, Germany: Furore-Verlag, 2003).

2 Emily Apter, "Cleopatra's Nose" in *Continental Drift* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 149-163.

3 M. Saint-Georges de Bouhelier, "Petite enquête sur le féminisme," *Revue naturiste* (France: n.p., 1897), 228-30, quoted in M. Roberts *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago, 2002), 26.

that embodied modern confidence without rejecting traditionally feminine traits. In Durand's feminist newspaper *La Fronde*, writers sought to frame the modern woman as cultured, charming, and socially engaged—not as a masculinized disruptor. A related term, *éclaireuses*, coined by Maurice Donnay in 1913, referred to women who acted as pioneers of the feminist movement: leading the way for others without abandoning their gendered identity.[4] These figures emphasized charm and moral character to reassert femininity as a powerful form of social and symbolic capital.

This cultural project found a complex muse in Sarah Bernhardt, who became an icon of both conventional beauty and radical transformation. Despite claiming not to be a feminist, Bernhardt inhabited traditionally feminine roles while also subverting them through her extraordinary charisma and theatrical reinvention. She played a wide range of characters of both genders, including Ophelia and Cleopatra, Hamlet and Joan of Arc, and was often praised for her ability to embody a multitude of feminine archetypes. As Daniel Lesueur wrote in La Fronde, "She is constantly creating and recreating herself… she perfects the masterpiece that is her personality."[5] Bernhardt's skill lay not only in her performance of a role, but in her power to evoke a symbolic lineage of legendary women.

Writers such as Séverine further emphasized this multiplicity: "C'est Phèdre—C'est Sarah. C'est Posthumia—C'est Sarah."[6] Her transformations were so convincing and continuous that she became a model for what Mary Louise Roberts describes as the "masterpiece of the unstable feminine"—a persona built upon the fluidity of identity and the refusal of a single fixed role.[7]

This aesthetic of multiplicity offered a way to navigate the tension between the essentialism of archetypes and the desire for new feminist representation. Bernhardt was adored not in spite of her shifting personae, but because of them.

Bonis, working within this cultural moment, composes her suite of legendary women with a similar embrace of transformation and focus on maintaining the concept of femininity. Like Bernhardt, she revisits familiar figures not to reinforce their stereotypes but to explore their interiority and expressive potential. Just as the *eclaireuses* recognized echoes of history, mythology, and immortality in Bernhardt's performances, Bonis's listeners are invited to hear her subjects not as fixed types, but as evolving musical subjects.

Mel Bonis: A Composer Between Worlds

Mélanie Bonis's biography reveals the challenges of navigating a patriarchal musical world while developing a voice both artistically confident and culturally engaged. Born into a conservative Parisian family, she entered the Paris Conservatoire in 1876 at the unusually late age of seventeen.[8] Her acceptance into Ernest Guiraud's harmony and accompaniment studio marked a milestone—just two years before women were officially allowed into composition classes. Her entrance notes described her as possessing a "serious pianistic technique," improvising with "assurance, sensitivity, finesse… and wonderful imagination."[9]

4 Monsigny, "Un Mot nouveau," in RFPAE, CR, BNDAS, (no periodical, 1913), quoted in M. Roberts *Disruptive Acts*, 39.

5 Daniel Lesueur, "Nos Idylles," *La Fronde* (1897): 123, quoted in M. Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*, 228.

6 Henry Bauer, "Lorenzacchio," *L'Écho de Paris*, vol. 4 RFCPSB, CR, BNDAS (1896), quoted in M. Roberts *Disruptive Acts*, 172.

7 J.J. Weiss, *Le Théâtre et les Moeurs* (1889): 348-49, quoted in M. Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*, 172.

8 Marie Duchêne-Thégarid, "Sur les bancs du Conservatoire," in *Mel Bonis (1858-1937): Parcours d'une compositrice de la Belle Époque*, ed. Étienne Jardin (Arles: Actes Sud, 2020), 125-154. This essay contextualizes Mel Bonis's studies as a young woman at the Conservatory. According to her research, between 1822 and 1906, 711 musicians were admitted to the conservatory, 59 of whom were women. Female composition students represented 0.42% of students enrolled. See also Florence Launay, *Les Compositrices en France au XIX siecle* (Paris: Fayard, 2006).

9 Duchêne-Thégarid, "Sur les bancs," 128. Notes from Bonis's entrance exams: "une serieuse technique pianistique, elle dechiffre bien, elle joue avec assurance, sensibilité, et finesse, enfin et surtout, elle improvise avec une imagination débordante." Translations from this source are mine.

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At the Paris Conservatoire, Bonis studied alongside peers such as Claude Debussy and Gabriel Pierné, and she briefly audited César Franck's famed organ class. Yet her education was cut short when her parents forbade her marriage to fellow student Amédée Hettich, a singer and writer. Forced to leave the Conservatoire, Bonis conformed to social expectation, marrying the much older Albert Domange, a businessman and widower with five children.

For years, Bonis lived in relative musical obscurity, managing her household and composing privately. Yet with encouragement from Hettich, whom she later reconnected with, she returned to composing in earnest. Her earliest successes came in the form of salon music and competitions. She published under the gender-ambiguous name "Mel Bonis" and soon gained wider recognition: joining the Société des Compositeurs de Musique in 1907 and becoming its secretary by 1910, a rare professional distinction for a woman of her time.

By organizing these portraits into a suite, Bonis offers not only a collection of individual character pieces but a performative framework for exploring feminine multiplicity.

— KATHRYN FELT

Bonis composed prolifically, leaving behind over 300 works in nearly every genre except symphony and opera. Her music blends Romantic idioms with Symbolist color, marked by impressionistic harmony, motivic development, and an evocative sense of mood and character. Although her work remained relatively obscure for much of the twentieth century, a surge of recent scholarship and performance has contributed to Bonis's growing recognition. In addition to Christine Géliot's 2000 biography and Furore's 2003 complete edition of her piano works, the 2020 volume *Mel Bonis: Parcours d'une compositrice de la Belle Époque*, edited by Étienne Jardin, offers a major contribution. Published by Actes Sud and Palazetto Bru Zane, it features a series of essays on Bonis's life and a revised catalogue of her works. However, earlier critical responses to Bonis's music were more dismissive. In a 1988 review of Lemoine's *17 Pièces pour piano*, Roger Nichols described her compositions as possessing "a certain charm," but concluded that "none of them rise above the level of pastiche, sometimes ingenious, sometimes tiresome."[10] The present essay reconsiders this view of Bonis's work as mere "pastiche." Far from imitative, Bonis broke new stylistic ground by reimagining supposedly timeless classical themes—the stories of legendary women—through a modern musical language, transforming them into a means of artistic and cultural reclamation.

Suites, Staging, and the Theatricality of Performance

Bonis's *Femmes de Légende* invites not just listening, but performance in the theatrical sense. While each of the eight character pieces can stand on its own, the suite format offers a deliberate arc: a musical gallery of legendary women drawn from myth, literature, and history. The collection's evolving publication history reflects Bonis's shifting ambitions for the work. During her lifetime, Bonis intended five of her "femmes" to stand as a piano suite. In 1909, she published "Phoebé," "Viviane," and "Salomé" as *Trois Pièces pour piano* with Leduc, and soon after added "Desdémona" in a 1913 edition titled *Quatre Pièces*.[11] In 1925, she revised and expanded the group as *Cinq Pièces* to include "Mélisande," composed earlier in 1898, which she described in the catalog of her published works as her "favorite."[12]

In addition to the suite of five piano pieces, Bonis composed three versions for orchestra which Furore has since published as *Trois Femme de Légende*: "Ophélie," op. 165/2; "Salomé," op. 100/2; and "Le Songe de Cléopâtre," op. 180/2, originally written for piano four hands. These date from approximately 1908–1910.[13]

In many ways, the *Furore Femmes de Légende* edition fulfills Bonis's vision of these portraits as a unified collection. The piano edition also includes "Omphale," op. 86, the Lydian queen who subdued Hercules with her charms. "Omphale," the most technically demanding piece in the collection, was published separately during Bonis's lifetime by Simrock in 1910 after receiving a prize from the Berlin periodical *Signale für die musikalische Welt* in 1909.[14] In considering the broader category of legendary women, two additional pieces could be connected to this cycle: "Écho," op. 89 (1910), inspired by the character in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which was published as part of a diptych with "Narcisse," op. 90; and "Ariel," op. 129 (1925), a spirit from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a role historically played by both women and men.[15]

By organizing these portraits into a suite, Bonis offers not only a collection of individual character pieces but a performative framework for exploring feminine multiplicity. Whether selections are performed as pairs or as a complete cycle, the suite invites the pianist to shift dramatically across emotional registers and archetypes. Bonis's son Édouard referred to these works as her "princesses," implying a cohesive lineage.[16] The characters span centuries and cultures—from antiquity (Omphale, Phoebé, Cleopatra), to the Middle Ages (Viviane, Mélisande, Ophélie), and the Renaissance (Desdémona)—together forming a cross-temporal

10 Roger Nichols, "Mel Bonis 17 pieces pour piano," *The Musical Times* 129, no. 1746 (1988): 410-411. Some of Bonis's works pay homage to Debussy, such as "Cloches lointains," Op. 121, which was clearly inspired by "La Cathédrale Engloutie."

11 Mel Bonis, *Trois Pièces Pour Piano*, (Leduc, 1909); Mel Bonis, *Quatre Pièces Pour Piano*, (Leduc, 1913).

12 Mel Bonis, *Cinq Pièces Pour Piano*, (Leduc, 1925).

13 Mel Bonis, *Trois Femmes de Légende*, (Kassel: Furore, 2018).

14 Mel Bonis, "Omphale," (Berlin: Verlag der Signale für die musikal Welt, Simrock, 1910).

15 Mel Bonis, "Écho," op. 89, "Narcisse," op. 90 (Senart, 1910); Mel Bonis, *Pièces pittoresques et poétiques*, Vol. C, "Ariel," op. 129, (Furore, 2006); Bonis intended to publish "Ariel," and one manuscript is signed "Melas Bonisouffsky."

16 Géliot, *Mel Bonis*,109.

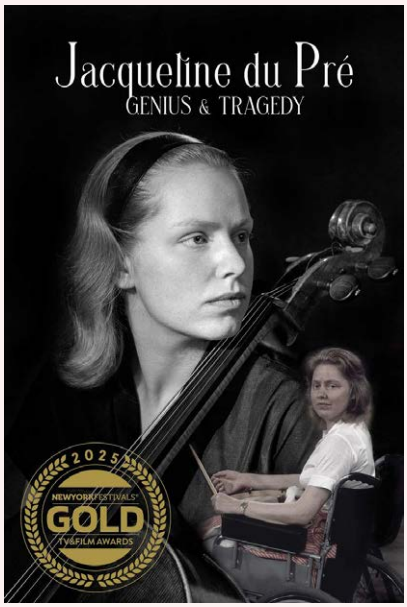
gallery of figures. Although Bonis did not perform frequently, it is known that she presented "Phoebé" and "Salomé" together in concert in 1909.[17] This pairing suggests Bonis did not view these portraits as isolated vignettes, but as parts of a unified, dramaturgical framework.

Bonis enhances the suite's dramatic effect through specific musical devices that emphasize characterization and theatricality. Each piece features strong thematic identity with an emphasis on vocality. The recurring markings *bien chanté* and *cantando* in the primary musical material encourage the pianist to evoke not only a lyrical pianistic tone, but also the imagined voice of the character.[18] For example, in "Phoebé," the tune seems to nearly sound out the character's name as it circles around the note B-flat. These melodies immediately represent the characters' persona or state of mind; in this way, their voice is not only the "lead" voice of the composition, but Bonis effectively spotlights each woman's voice as the core of her identity. In other words, Bonis writes these pieces as if the characters themselves step forward to sing their own plight or passion from their perspective. In "Desdémona," Bonis directly references an epigram from Desdemona's sorrowful "Willow Song" from Maurice Bouchor's *Les Chansons de Shakespeare* from Act 4, Scene 3.[19]

In Symbolist fashion, Bonis generally avoids overt specific programs, yet she frequently employs an array of sonic markers to evoke each character. Figures associated with water—such as Desdémona, Omphale, Ophélie, and Mélisande—are portrayed through rippling arpeggios, trills, and other aquatic gestures. In "Mélisande," these flowing textures also reference her long, shimmering hair; in "Salomé," sinuous motion recalls her dance; in "Omphale," motoric speed reflects her virtuosic spinning.

Yet while these heroines appear to step forward and "sing" their own emotional truths, many of these characters do not possess autonomous narrative arcs. As feminist critic Lee Edwards observes, "we can imagine Hamlet's story without Ophelia, but Ophelia has no story without Hamlet." Ophelia, spurned by Hamlet, drowned; Desdemona is strangled by Othello; Pelléas is murdered by Golaud, drawing Mélisande into tragedy. Even as Bonis amplifies their presence and interiority, the feminine subject remains tethered to a masculine framework. As De Médicis notes, "the murderous threats posed to the protagonist are represented more broadly in the music as a source of tension."[20] Bonis's music seems to acknowledge and counter this narrative dependency by giving each figure a distinctive, lyrical voice and inner life.

Taken together, these compositional strategies highlight Bonis's understanding of the suite not just as a set of works, but as a dramatic structure. The suite as a whole gravitates towards flat key areas, creating a tonal palette that is cohesive. As will be explored later, Bonis establishes a thematic connection between two figures by incorporating a similar Orientalist descending scalar figure in "Ophélie" and "Salomé." The performer, like an actor, is tasked with shifting fluidly between archetypes. Just as Bernhardt was admired for playing a myriad of characters, the pianist becomes a medium for feminine archetypes in all their complexity and variety.



Jacqueline du Pré: Genius and Tragedy

The film *Jacqueline du Pré: Genius and Tragedy* won gold in both the Biography and Music documentary categories at the prestigious New York Festivals TV & Film Awards

Introduced and narrated by grammy-winning cellist Yo-Yo Ma, the film tells the definitive story of the enigmatic cellist, whose career was cruelly curtailed by multiple sclerosis when she was just twenty-eight years old. It is full of candid moments off-stage and in rehearsal, together with powerful concert performances.

The documentary was made for PBS in the US and will also air on Sky Arts in the UK, ARTE in France/ Germany and on other networks across Europe.

The "Sound" of Femininity: Exoticism and Orientalism

Bonis's years of compositional activity coincided with the height of Orientalist fashion in Paris, particularly during the Universal Expositions of 1889 and 1900.[21] *Femmes de Légende* reflects Symbolist innovation through

17 François De Médicis, "La musique pour piano," in *Mel Bonis (1858-1937): Parcours d'une compositrice de la Belle Époque*, ed. Étienne Jardin, (Arles: Actes Sud, 2020), 301.

18 The marking *bien chanté* is in Viviane" (m. 114), "Phoebé» (m. 4), "Omphale" (m. 15), "Ophélie," and "Le Songe de Cléopâtre" (m. 5).

19 Maurice Bouchors, "Chanson de Desdémone," in *Les Chansons de Shakespeare*, (France: L. Chailley, 1896), 77. "La pauvre ame s'assit au pied d'un sycomore, Chantez le doux saule et le saule encore, Une main sur son coeur, le front sur ses genoux, Chantez le doux saule avec nous./ Ses larmes, en tombant, attendrissaient les pierres…/Pres d'elle un frais ruisseau pleurait sur ses malheurs, Saule, doux saule, saule en pleurs./J'approuve ses mépris; que pas un ne le blame…Je l'appelai parjure, et lui se mit a rire; C'est le saule vert que j'entends bruire. J'en ai d'autres? Dit-il. Eh bien! Fais comme moi." Translations from this source are mine.

20 De Médicis, "La Musique Pour Piano," 332. "Tout au plus, le menace assassine qu'un homme fait peser sur la protagoniste est suggérée par la musique." Translations from this source are mine.

21 Géliot, *Mel Bonis Femme et "Compositeur*," 21-23.

its emphasis on color, timbre, and extended harmonic language—elements further expanded in the orchestral transcriptions of "Le Songe de Cléopâtre," "Ophélie," and "Salomé." In several of the suite's portraits, particularly those involving mythic or ambiguous cultural origins, Bonis incorporates musical markers associated with Orientalist style as identified by Derek B. Scott: pedal points, ostinatos, chromaticism, syncopated rhythms, and scales with raised seconds or augmented fourths.[22] These features function as expressive tools that convey sensuality, symbolic distance, and a sense of otherness.

In such "exotic" music, the European listener perceived otherness without needing to learn a new musical syntax. Orientalist artists viewed the East as an "idea rather than reality:" an imaginative refuge from the modern, urban West.[23] Orientalist art was not ethnographic but allegorical. Female sensuality, in particular, became a dominant signifier within this Eastern imaginary, often encoded musically. As Linda Austern writes, "the tonal languages of exoticism and magnetic femininity are strikingly similar."[24]

22 Derek B. Scott, "Orientalism and Musical Style," *The Musical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (1998): 309–35, accessed February 27, 2023, http://www.jstor.org/stable/742411.

23 Ralph P. Locke, "Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East," in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 132-133.

24 Linda Phyllis Austern, "'Forreine Conceites and Wandering Devises':The Exotic, the Erotic, and the Feminine," in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 26-27.

Women's Philharmonic Advocacy Grant Opportunities

The WPA Projects and Events Grants program identifies and facilitates opportunities for broader representation and inclusion in orchestral programming, especially of works by historic women composers. Grant awards will range from $500-$1000. Learn more *here*.

In Orientalist works such as Ravel's *Shéhérazade*, Bizet's *Adieux de l'Hotesse Arabe*, among others by Edouard Lalo, Charles Gounod, Edward Grieg, "the Middle East itself becomes in a sense, female."[25]

This article draws a distinction between "Orientalism" and "exoticism," while acknowledging their frequent overlap. "Orientalism" refers here to specific musical stereotypes associated with the East: augmented seconds, quasi-modal chromaticism, and stylized rhythmic or scalar elements. "Exoticism," by contrast, describes music that more generally "com[es] from or refer[s] to a place other than here."[26] Although musical markers associated with the East are now understood to be distorted and false, Bonis's work consistently uses exotic music to reference distance through the use of Orientalist markers. I argue Bonis's "femmes" are works that meditate on themes of femininity, and "distance" can signal not only an escape from the present time and place, but also reflect the marginalization of femininity within Western art and society.

Bonis's *Femmes de Légende* stands apart from other piano works of the era that use Orientalist or "feminine" tropes, many of which—such as Félicien David's *Mélodies Orientales* or Chabrier's *Mauresque*—offer generalized impressions of the East and often cater to amateur musicians.[27] Even Ravel's *Pavane pour une infante défunte* evokes an imaginary Spanish princess rather than a named figure.[28] In contrast, Bonis recalls specific female characters drawn from mythology, literature, and history—figures that would have been familiar to audiences through opera, theater, or Symbolist literature. Importantly, her focus is almost exclusively on women; across her oeuvre, she shows little interest in depicting male historical or mythological figures.

25 Locke, "Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers," 118.

26 Ralph P. Locke, "Exoticism and Orientalism in Music: Problems for the Wordly Critic," in *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power*, ed. Paul Bové (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 267.

27 Locke, "Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers," 117.

28 Gerald Larner, *Maurice Ravel* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 59.

In Bonis's *Femmes*, Orientalist markers are used not only for characters with explicitly Eastern associations, but also for Western or ambiguously placed figures such as "Ophélie," "Omphale," "Phoebé," and "Mélisande." For instance, in "Phoebé," a Goddess from Greek mythology, the birthplace of the West, Bonis draws on pentatonicism to evoke her ethereal and ancient character. The tonal ambiguity at the opening suggests an Eastern "otherworldly" aura, while Phoebé's association with the moon—long a symbol of the feminine—deepens the connection between gender and exoticism.

Bonis's emphasis on vocality not only highlights each heroine's expressive presence but also contributes to the stylization of femininity throughout the suite. This focus aligns with traditions in Orientalist opera, where the allure of the female character is often channeled through her voice. In pieces such as "Phoebé," "Omphale," and "Le Songe de Cléopâtre," vocal writing intersects with exoticized musical gestures to suggest sensuality, vulnerability, and symbolic distance.

In works such as "Salomé" and "Le Songe de Cléopâtre," Orientalist markers take on a heightened, almost operatic intensity. At times, Bonis appears to knowingly exaggerate the tropes she employs. While musical exaggeration is difficult to quantify, the expressive intensification of Orientalist markers in these portraits echoes the flamboyant stage performances of Sarah Bernhardt, who famously portrayed both figures. Bernhardt, as critics noted, "epitomized yet made fun of French womanhood at the same time"[29]—a paradox a pianist might acknowledge through emphasizing stylized melodic shaping, tempo rubato, or lingering on timbral contrasts. In these "femmes fatales" works, the heroine's voice becomes not just a symbol of power or seduction, but potentially a theatrical device that both dramatizes and destabilizes conventional portrayals of femininity. This performative excess

29 Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*, 187.

also points toward the suite's deeper engagement with fantasy, dream, and symbolic space.

For many fin-de-siècle Western composers, the East was not simply a place, but a metaphor for "collective mystery and ineffable intangibility."[30] Musicologist Ralph P. Locke notes that such exotic markers symbolized "realms of strangeness analogous to the dream world," and Bonis reflects this association in her markings. Both "Salomé" and "Le Songe de Cléopâtre," include passages labeled *en rêvant* ("dreaming").[31] In French operas from this period, exotic heroines often enter the narrative veiled or unseen, their voices heard before their bodies appear. As Jann Pasler observes, these characters frequently emerge near water and their voices are often heard before they are seen (e.g., behind a shadow or veil).[32] Exotic heroines are often first presented near or sing about the water; their music is meant not only to seduce but to bring forth something "illusory, but deeply human."[33]

Bonis draws on this convention while also subverting it: as a piano suite, she presents her femmes without staging, costume, or props, inviting listeners to encounter the characters as sonic apparitions. In doing so, she renders the figures elusive—the focus is on creating a musical, "dreamlike" image of the figure rather than theatrical realism. This sense of veiling is enhanced by recurring associations with water, which in several portraits functions as both a setting and a metaphor for fluidity, the unconscious, and potentially even transformation. Water in these works evokes mystery and liminality, and in some cases, depending on interpretation, may even suggest symbolic rebirth—positioning these heroines at a transitional point between dissolution and renewal. These liminal, submerged figures suggest a kind of symbolic marginality; rather than offering overt critique, Bonis reflects how female characters were often imagined in fin-de-siècle art: powerful yet distant, present yet unreachable.

Character Studies: Archetypes Reimagined

The following sections group Bonis's heroines into three broad archetypal categories: *Femmes Fatales and Rulers*, *Tragic Heroines*, and *Mythic and Mystical Women*. These groupings reflect dominant cultural archetypes of femininity in late 19th- and early 20th-century France—figures who appeared frequently on opera and theater stages, in Symbolist literature, and visual art. While these categories offer a useful framework for understanding Bonis's portraits, they are not fixed: Bonis's music often complicates or subverts the roles her characters traditionally occupy. By organizing the suite in this way, we can trace how Bonis uses musical means—form, texture, harmonic color, and voice—to reimagine feminine identity. Through this lens, the suite becomes not simply a series of character pieces, but a layered engagement with the cultural scripts of womanhood in her time.

Rulers & Femmes Fatales: Cleopatra, Salome, and Omphale

Bonis engages with a lineage of Eastern-inflected female figures—both rulers and femmes fatales—that had become fixtures of *belle-époque* theater and opera. Cleopatra, Salome, and Omphale each embodied overlapping discourses of seduction, power, and exoticism. They were figures both feared and admired, often portrayed by women such as Sarah Bernhardt and Maud Allan who blurred the lines between role and identity. Bonis's musical portraits respond to this theatrical lineage while reimagining these heroines through her own compositional voice. By drawing on Symbolist aesthetics, Orientalist markers, and expressive musical devices, she presents these femmes not as passive stereotypes, but as layered and performative subjects. In the following subsections, I pair historical and theatrical background with close musical readings to examine how Bonis reinterprets each figure.

30 Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 216.

31 Ibid., 216.

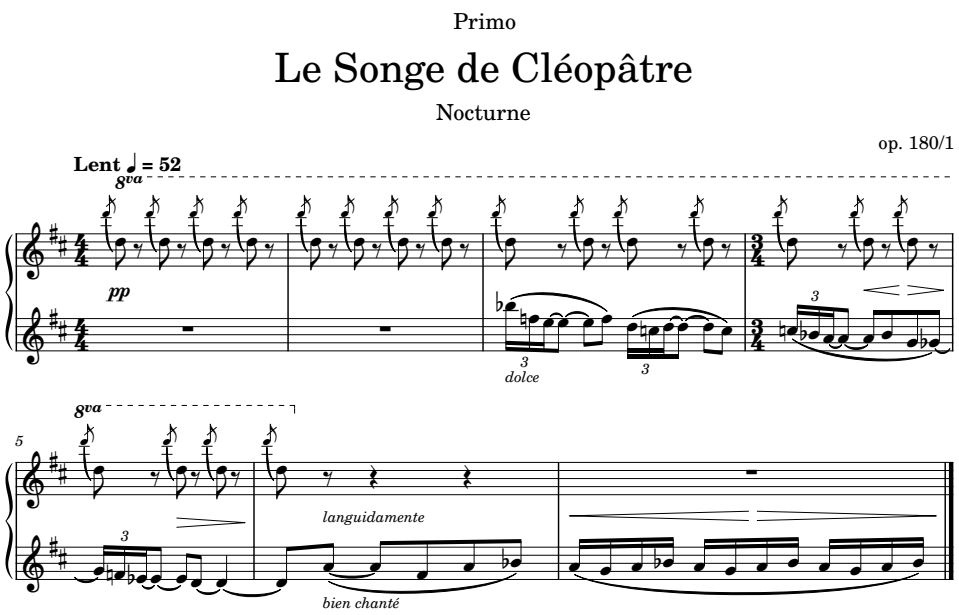
32 Jann Pasler, "Mélisande's Charm and the Truth of her Music," in Elliot Antokoletz, and Marianne Wheeldon, *Rethinking Debussy* (Oxford Scholarship Online Oxford Academic, 1 May 2011), 7-8.; Pasler considers veiled voices, especially when off stage, to be a metaphor for the voice of the composer.

33 Pasler, "Mélisande's Charm," 7.

Cleopatra

In *belle-époque* feminist theater, Orientalism served as a theatrical conceit in which women could embody queens, seductresses, and rulers from the East. These roles offered a form of symbolic power: Orientalism became a costume that could be put on or taken off, allowing performers to slip between identities both onstage and off.[34] Sarah Bernhardt epitomized this fusion of role and persona, especially in her portrayal of Cleopatra. As one critic noted, "everything about her—large and small—the ornamental jewelry she wore in *Cleopatra*, her front drop waist dresses, her unruly red-blond hair, her pencil thinness, her love of tigers and pumas, her cluttered living room—were 'noted, copied, exaggerated by a crowd of worshiping women.'"[35] While male critics dismissed her as eccentric, the *frondeuses* saw her personal and professional life as a rebellion against the restricted roles available to women in late nineteenth-century France. As noted in *Le Figaro*, "It is not Sarah Bernhardt who resembles Cleopatra, but on the contrary, Cleopatra who resembles Sarah Bernhardt."[36] As Aston notes, she "had only to be herself" in the role of Cleopatra; despite rumors that she would "dye her hair black" or darken her complexion, she did not.[37]

Although we cannot know for certain whether Bonis had Sarah Bernhardt in mind when composing her portraits of mythic women, Bernhardt had become a cultural touchstone for reimagining female character types on stage. In "Le Songe de Cléopâtre," Bonis employs a wealth of Oriental musical elements that allow for interpretive flexibility. There is no suggestion in the score that Cleopatra is seducing Marc Antony or cursing him; instead, Bonis conjures an evocative, introspective image of a solitary figure. Christine Géliot describes the work as "the image of a powerful and seductive Cleopatra in her splendid palace."[38] Marked as a *nocturne*, the piece evokes night, and its slow, meditative pace casts a shadowy, sensual portrait of the Queen. To some, this musical language may have read as pastiche; to others, it conveyed a sense of self-possessed power.[39] As Bernhardt's interpretations of such characters demonstrated, feminist revision could emerge as much from the freedom of the performer as from the interpretive lens of the critic.[40]



Example 1. Mel Bonis, "Le Songe de Cléopâtre," mm. 1-8 © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de

"Le Songe de Cléopâtre" is the largest work in the *Femmes de Légende* suite, nearly nine minutes in length, and longer than her two other orchestral transcriptions, "Salomé" and "Ophélie," combined. Bonis uses this extended timescale and the nocturne-like pacing to present a slow, dreamlike portrait of the queen rather than a literal narrative scene. The score opens with shimmering grace-note octaves in the upper register, creating a sense of distant allure and hypnotic repetition. The pacing is deliberately slow; changes of meter between 6/8 and 3/4 glide past one another without drawing attention to metrical shifts, evoking the fluidity associated with Cleopatra's legendary allure. Chromaticism and irregular phrase lengths blur formal boundaries, enhancing the dreamlike state suggested by the title.

The piece's two main themes are marked *Plus lent* and *languidamente*, both stretching out the temporal sense of the piece and resisting conventional rhythmic propulsion. These themes, with their sultry chromaticism and long, curving melodic lines, recall the Symbolist aesthetics that tie femininity to sensuality and mystery. At mm. 68–73, shown in Example 1, the melody follows a sinuous, Hogarthian line of beauty—an emblem of the feminine ideal in visual art. As Saumon observes, there are a multitude of small

34 Apter, *Continental Drift*,149-163.

35 Dani Busson, *Sarah Bernhardt* (Paris: Willy Fischer, n.d.), quoted in Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*, 169.

36 Un Monsieur de l'orchestre, "La Soirée théâtrale: Cléopâtre," *Le Figaro* (24 October 1890), in vol. 2, RFCPSB, CR, BNDAS, quoted in Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*, 219.

37 Elaine Aston, *Sarah Bernhardt: A French Actress on the English Stage*, (Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 1989), 107.

38 Christine Géliot, introduction to *Trois Femmes de Légende*: 'Le Songe de Cléopâtre,' trans. Xchange Language Services GmbH & Co. KG, (Kassel: Furore, 2018), 3-7.

39 The popular perception of Cleopatra as a role in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* was diminishing during the Fin-de-siècle. Symons and Ellis restate "Antony and Cleopatra" as "the story of Cleopatra" in which her psychology "impresses" itself "upon the whole action" in an 1891 production. Out of fourteen illustrations depicting people in the production, twelve featured Lillie Langtry as Cleopatra. Duncan, Sophie, 'The Eternal Suffragette': New Women and a New Century', in *Shakespeare's Women and the Fin de Siècle*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford, 2016; online edn, Oxford Academic, 19 Jan. 2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198790846.003.0006, accessed 26 Feb. 2023.

40 Elaine Showalter, "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism," in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Patricia Parker (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 80, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203414743-12.

motivic ideas scattered throughout the piece. It is as if the excess of musical ideas are Cleopatra's "jewels."[41]

Bonis's treatment of Cleopatra suggests not only a fascination with the historical queen but also an affinity with the mythologized feminine persona. In the fin-de-siècle imagination, Cleopatra was more than an ancient ruler; she was an enduring symbol of female autonomy and theatricality. Many women of the Belle Époque embraced Cleopatra as a model of performative femininity—exaggerated, magnetic, and mutable. Bonis channels that energy into her music, not through narrative depiction, but by constructing a dreamlike portrait. Her Cleopatra is powerful not for what she does, but by the way she is rendered: enigmatic and wholly self-possessed.

Salome

Characters like Salome and Cleopatra embodied a growing cultural anxiety around female influence and political agency; the archetype of the femme fatale emerged in part as a male fantasy of seduction entwined with fear of annihilation.[42] As Susan McClary and others have detailed, many of these great heroines from the East inspired obsession, tragedy, and death on stage.[43] The mezzo-soprano voice itself carried gendered implications: it "implied a kind of worldly wiseness… that in operatic women often comes along with open sexual desire and independence of will."[44] As Pasler notes, heroines in nineteenth-century French opera "foreground the voice as the source of their charm" to elicit desire.[45] The idea of *charm* was closely linked with seduction, enchantment, and ultimately, power. Pasler notes many *Prix de Rome* libretti from the 1880s and 1890s depicted women as seductresses whose value resided in their capacity to "charm."[46] Bonis's portraits of Salomé, Cleopatra, and Omphale engage directly with this performative lineage. In each piece, the character's *voice*, or the illusion of it, is central to their expressive identity.

The Salome figure in particular became a symbol of both patriarchal fantasy and feminist subversion as a wave of *Salomanie* swept Europe and North America during the fin-de-siècle.[47] Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* (1893), first performed by Bernhardt, reimagined the biblical character not as evil per se, but as amoral—self-possessed and threatening to social order. Her dance became a site of emancipation, using sensuality as a form of self-assertion.[48] As one critic observed, Salome's performance uses the dual power of a woman to "reveal" and "conceal:" physical exposure becomes a mask, while covering herself is a gesture of revelation. Onstage, she became "a world unto herself, sexual but unavailable."[49]

Strauss's adaptation of the Salome figure split her character into two; Maria Wittich, the soprano to play the title role, chose to conserve her reputation and have a dancer perform. Subsequently, the Salome figure became a visual icon as well as a musical one.[50] Salome's dual identity was further explored by dancers such as Maud Allan, whose 1907 *Vision of Salome* premiered in Paris just as Strauss's opera was making its debut.[51] Allen's depiction of Salome, similar to other women who took on the role, was potentially transgressive because it violated the supposed polarity between East and West by presenting her, a Western woman, as Eastern. For a time, Allen did manage to achieve both notoriety and respectability. However, Allen's revealing stage attire became propaganda for the women's dress reform movement, and in London, her performance was compared to the militant suffragette movement.[52]

Bonis's treatment of Cleopatra suggests not only a fascination with the historical queen but also an affinity with the mythologized feminine persona.

— KATHRYN FELT

Bonis's portrait of Salome is one of the more theatrically charged works in *Femmes de Légende*, channeling the dualities that defined the Salome figure. In this piece, Bonis draws upon many of the tropes to construct a multi-layered portrayal. She explores the idea of "charm" as a shifting, seductive force that simultaneously reveals and conceals through motivic transformation, timbral blending, and orchestration. Like many Orientalist works of the era, "Salomé" alternates between two musical spheres: a fast, ostinato-driven dance in 3/4 + 2/4 groupings and a slower, dream-like section, featuring a melody in the mezzo range (orchestrated in the evocatively "Eastern" English horn). These two sections are separated by a striking transition marked *en rêvant*, in which Bonis uses descending chords and an exotic scale over an ostinato to simulate a kind of sonic hypnosis.[53]

41 Xavier-Romaric Saumon, "Une musique pour orchestre," in *Parcours d'une compositrice de la Belle Époque*, ed. Étienne Jardin (Arles: Actes Sud, 2020), 435.

42 Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 374.

43 McClary, *Georges Bizet, Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Austern, "Foreign Conceits and Magnetism," 26.

44 Locke, "Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers," 131.

45 Pasler, "Mélisande's Charm and the Truth of Her Music," 3.

46 Ibid., 3. Examples include: *Judith*, libretto by Paul Alexandre (1876), *La Fille de Jephté*, libretto by Edouard Guinand (1878), *Médée*, libretto by Albert Grimault (1879), *Edith*, libretto by Edouard Guinand (1882), *Didon*, libretto by Augé de Lassus, Lucien (1841-1914) (1887), Cléopâtre, libretto by Fernand Beissier (1890), *Antigone*, libretto by Fernand Beissier (1893), *Daphne*, libretto by Charles Raffalli, (1894), Clarisse Harlow after the novel by Samuel Richardson (1895), Melusine, libretto by Fernand Beissier (1896).

47 Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 100.

48 Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression*, 15-55.

49 Ibid., 35-7.

50 Joy H. Calico, "Staging Scandal with Salome and Elektra," in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in* the Long *Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rachel Cowgirl and Hilary Poriss (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 66.

51 Dancers who portrayed Salome in this era include: Ida Rubenstein, Maud Allen, Louise Fuller, Mata Hair, among others.

52 Dierkas-Thun, *Salome's Modernity*, 106. See also the British feminist production of Wilde's Salome by the New Stage Players at the Court Theatre on Feb. 27 and 28, 1911 arranged by a group of feminist actresses, organized by Adeline Bourne.

53 In the orchestral version, this moment is painted in vivid color with English horn, harp arpeggios, muted strings *sur le chevalet*, and soft percussion, creating a mysterious atmosphere.

Bonis emphasizes this seductive ambiguity through careful orchestration. As defined by Kennan and Grantham, a "magical effect" occurs when one instrumental group fades as another emerges underneath. Bonis uses this technique masterfully in the transition at m. 42 in Example 2: a forceful ostinato (power instruments including contrabass, cymbals, trombones) dissolves as the harp, English horn, clarinet, and muted strings emerge (color instruments), ushering in the *en rêvant* transition. This seamless blending evokes Salomé's power to mesmerize and to shift perception through charm. The harmonic drop from E to D♭ (mm. 48-49) and the entrance of an exotic scale (mm. 53-55) further deepen the sense of altered consciousness. Strings marked *sur le chevalet* and the dark timbre of the English horn heighten this atmosphere, casting the music into a suspended, liminal state.

Green = standard instruments

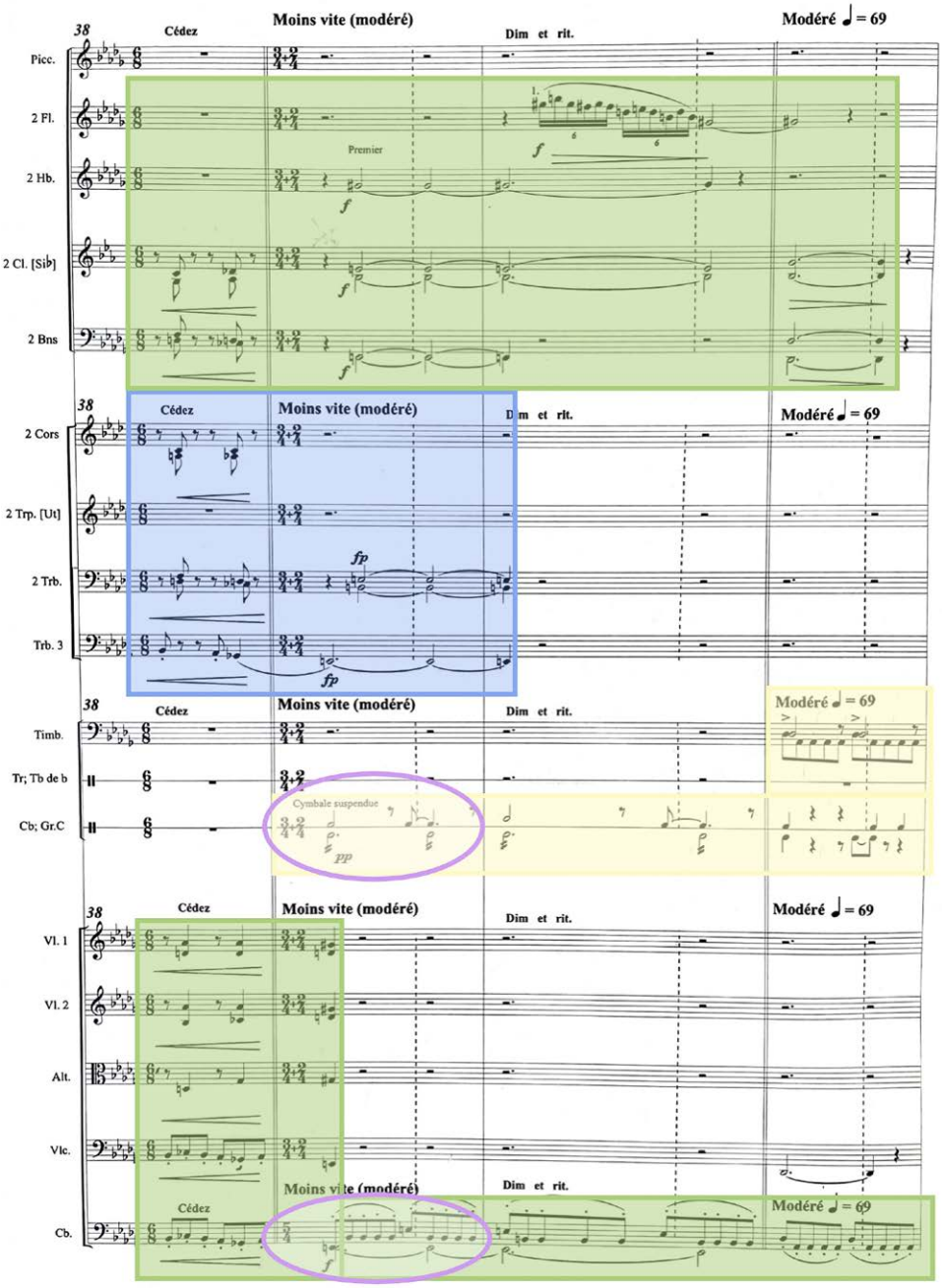
Blue = power instruments

Yellow = color instruments

"Magical effect" is circled in purple.

Transformational changes in timbre suggest a changed scene at m. 42 as if the listener is transported to a dream (marked in the piano score as en rêvant).]

Another strategy Bonis uses to convey Salomé's elusive power is motivic disguise—the subtle transformation and concealment of melodic material through orchestration and texture. In Example 3, a sinuous motive introduced in the bassoon during the fast dance section (m. 19) quietly reappears in the English horn at m. 25, now enveloped in a slower tempo and a dreamlike orchestral color. These two iterations are not immediately recognizable as related due to changes in instrumentation and tempo. This blurring of thematic identity reflects the dual nature of Salomé herself. The effect is not just one of variation, but of mirage: a thematic shadow play that mirrors Salomé's power to charm and destabilize.

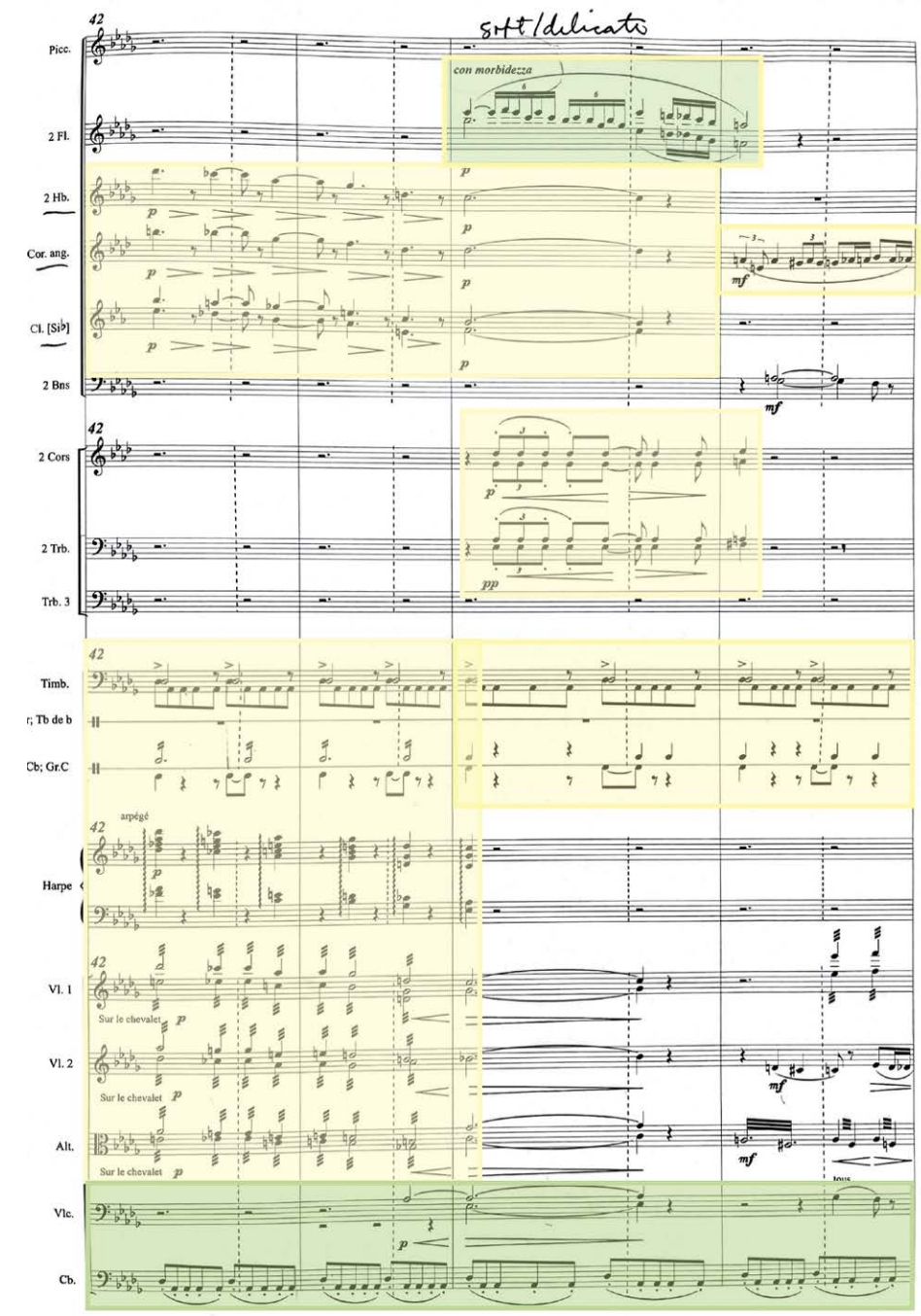


Example 2. Mel Bonis, "Salomé," mm. 38-45 © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de
Green = standard instruments; blue = power instruments; yellow = color instruments; "magical effect" is circled in purple.

Bonis closes *Salomé* with a sudden tutti chord, preceded by muted string tremolos—a jarring, theatrical gesture that disrupts the hypnotic state. This rupture may represent the execution at the end of Wilde's play—*Tuez cette femme!*—transforming musical climax into symbolic violence. Through these effects, Bonis reveals her acute attention to theatrical pacing and sonic drama. *Salomé* emerges not as a mere evocation of sensuality, but as a richly performative figure whose charm is both entrancing and lethal.

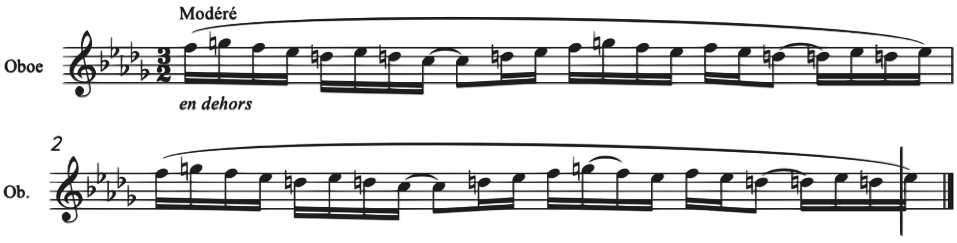
Omphale

Bonis's choice to include Omphale in *Femmes de Légende* further complicates the gendered politics of power and performance. The most well-known musical portrayal of the Lydian queen came from Camille Saint-Saëns, who depicted her in his 1872 *Le Rouet d'Omphale*, a programmatic orchestral work that allegorizes gender reversal and moral strength. The printed program for the premiere performance of *Le Rouet d'Omphale* described the work



Example 2. Mel Bonis, "Salomé" © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de
Green = standard instruments; blue = power instruments; yellow = color instruments; "magical effect" is circled in purple.

Example 3a. Mel Bonis, "Salomé," mm. 19–22 © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de



Example 3b. Mel Bonis, "Salomé," mm. 25–26 © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de

as portraying "feminine seduction, the triumphant struggle of weakness against force. The spinning wheel is only a pretext chosen merely from the perspective of the rhythm and the general character of the piece."[54] Critics have interpreted this final sentence as Saint-Saëns's effort to emphasize the music's formal integrity while distancing himself from its allegorical content. As Pasler argues, the spinning wheel operates as a pretext for exploring the symbolic power dynamics between Omphale and Hercules.[55]

In the myth, Omphale forces Hercules, her enslaved consort, to exchange clothing with her and perform traditionally feminine tasks such as spinning wool, while she dons his lion skin and adopts his outward symbols of strength. Saint-Saëns thus encourages his listeners to reimagine the boundaries of gender and power, placing a woman in a position of public dominance rather than domestic containment. During this period of national recovery, *Le Rouet d'Omphale* may have functioned as a metaphor for France's own identification with the "feminine," signaling a reimagining of resilience and virtue.

Although the work remained in the concert repertoire into the fin-de-siècle, its political and symbolic edge gradually diminished. On November 3, 1901, Charles Lamoureux programmed it alongside Beethoven's *First Symphony* and *Violin Concerto*, Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony, and Berlioz's *Marche Hongroise*—a sequence that visually and sonically framed *Omphale* between two "masculine" works, subtly reinforcing gendered musical hierarchies.[56] That same year, however, the comic opera *Les Travaux d'Hercule* by Claude Terrasse, with a libretto by Robert de Fler and Gaston de Caillave, featured Amélie Diéterle in the role of Omphale.

54 Jann Pasler, "Cross Dressing in Saint-Saën's *Le Rouet d'Omphale:* Ambiguities of Gender and Politics," in *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 191.

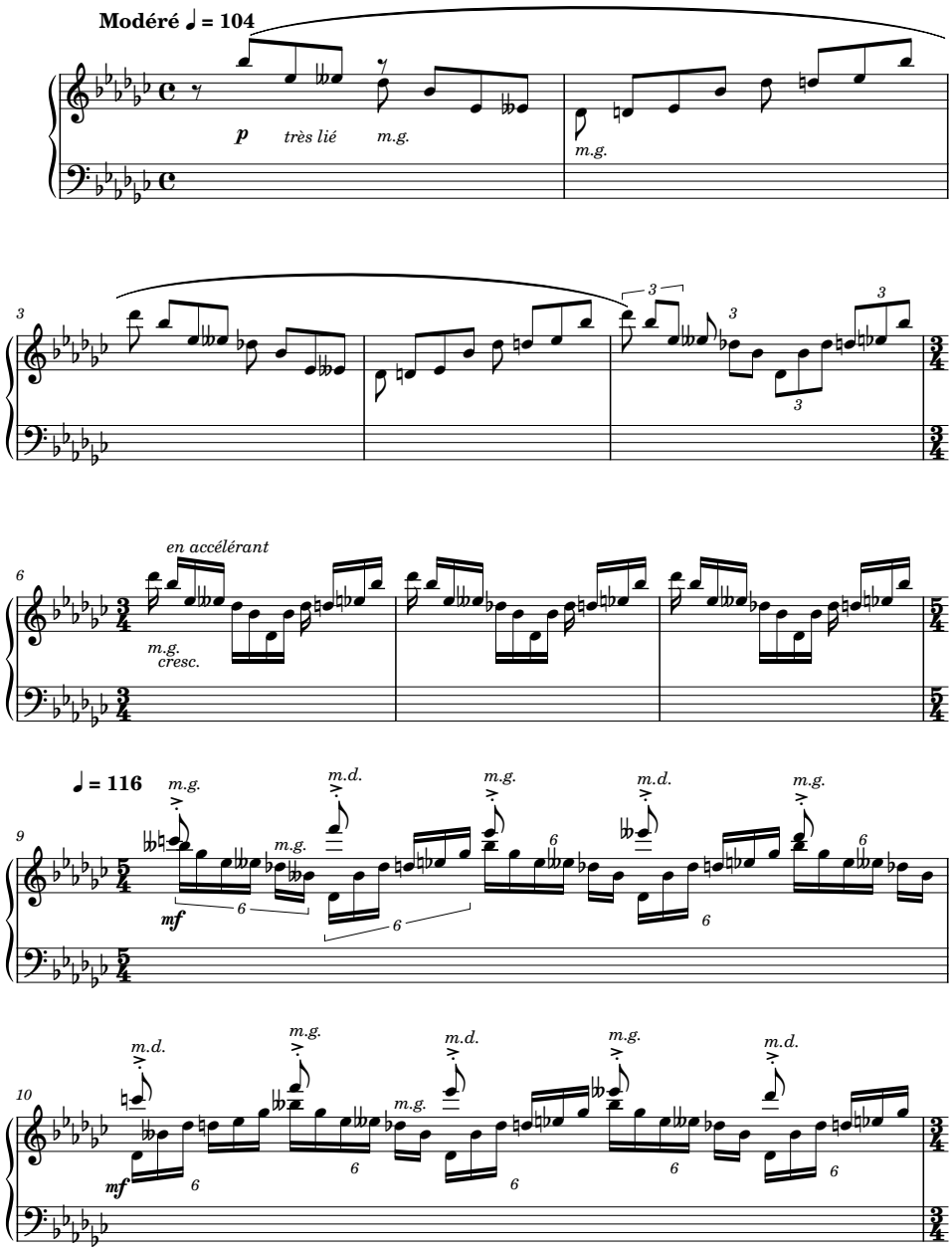
55 Pasler, "Cross Dressing in Saint-Saëns' in *Le Rouet d'Omphale*," 192.

56 Ibid., 210.

Her performance achieved overnight acclaim, reintroducing Omphale to the public imagination as a commanding and theatrical icon of feminine power.

Bonis's "Omphale" centers around a four-note motive that undergoes continuous and virtuosic variation, mimicking the spinning wheel and its circular motion. In this piece, Bonis's depiction of the wheel foregrounds the theme of feminine creativity; furthermore, in combining this spinning wheel imagery with Orientalist markers, Bonis enhances Omphale's "powers," both masculine and feminine. The work is formed from a single, chromatic motive or "thread" that is spun out through continual variation and textures. The technical display (hand crossings, quick arpeggiations, and rapid accompaniments) emphasizes the dazzling brilliance of a distinctly feminine art. On the first page in the Furore edition, Example 4, an *accelerando* mimics the image of a spinning wheel gaining momentum; the four-note motive is repeated, first in duplets, then triplets, sixteenth notes, and sextuplet sixteenths.

Many of the same "spinning" features share characteristics with Orientalist devices; for example, sliding chromaticism, a familiar Orientalist marker, could represent the twisting motion of thread or the sinusoidal shape of the spinning wheel. Other Orientalist markers also emphasize virtuosity: irregular, rapid scales; an abundance of trills and dissonant grace notes (suggesting playfulness); and the juxtaposition between energetic passages and slower, lyrical melodies. The emphasis on presenting the motive in various guises also allows the music to appear "masculine" at times (e.g., m. 59 *lourd*) and "feminine" (e.g., m. 15 *dolce*, *bien chanté*) at others—suggesting that Bonis is not merely portraying Omphale or Hercules, but rather interrogating the fluidity and performativity of their roles within the myth.



Example 4. Mel Bonis, "Omphale," mm. 1-10. © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de

Tragic Heroines: Shakespeare's Ophelia and Desdemona

In contrast to the seductive power and theatrical glamour of Bonis's femmes fatales, the portraits of "Desdémona" and "Ophélie" explore the feminine archetype of the tragic victim: figures whose stories are shaped by suffering, self-sacrifice, and loss. Within 19th-century theatrical and artistic culture, these characters were often idealized as sanctified emblems of virtue, but they also became sites of emotional and aesthetic complexity. Bonis's musical settings reflect this duality: in "Desdémona," tonal choices evoke emotional remoteness and moral strength, while allusions to Shakespeare's "Willow Song" deepen the work's introspective tone. In "Ophélie," chromaticism, Orientalist gestures, and aquatic imagery evoke madness and transformation, drawing upon theatrical conventions and symbolic associations with water. Bonis's portrayal of these heroines resists passivity and instead emphasizes interiority, longing, and expressive agency. Though tethered to their literary fates, Bonis reimagines them not merely as victims, but as richly voiced subjects within her broader suite of legendary women.

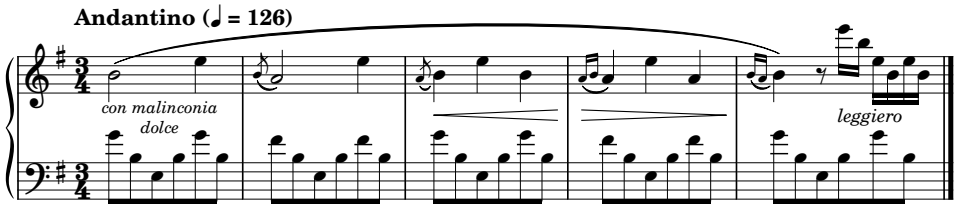
Desdemona

During this era, many counter-images recast female "victims" like Desdemona or Ophelia as "inspiring, even sanctified emblem of righteousness."[57] The actress Helena Faucit's interpretation of Desdemona leaned into the character's anguish and quiet moral strength. In her 1880 study on Shakespeare's heroines, Faucit pushed back against conventional readings:

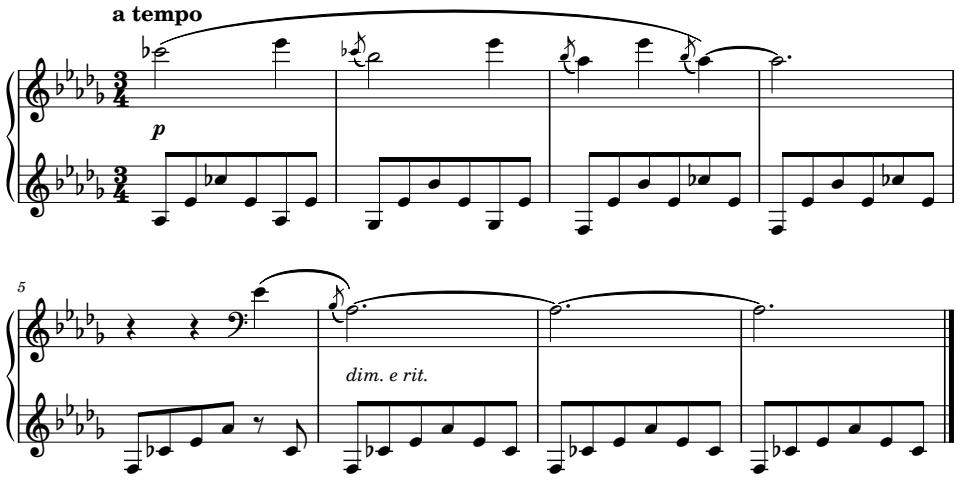
"Desdemona is usually considered a merely amiable, simple, yielding creature... That she should, in the midst of this frightful death-agony, be able not only to forgive her torturer, but to keep her love for him unchanged, was a height of nobleness surpassing that of all the knights and heroes I had ever heard or read of... Juliet, Cordelia, Imogen, Hermione, suffered as they were, had no such suffering as this. For hers was the supreme anguish of dying."[58]

Bonis's "Desdémona" echoes this depth of feeling and invites reflection on the character's moral resilience. Musical features such as open fifths and spare cadences establish a sense of emotional and temporal distance. These gestures suggest a folk-like simplicity that simultaneously evokes historical remoteness and the character's profound isolation.

Uniquely set in E minor, "Desdémona" is the only piece in *Cinq Pièces* that avoids predominantly flat key areas, amplifying her musical and psychological separation from the others. In the transition to the A' section, the music briefly passes through measures marked *animez* in D-flat major—flashes of unexpected brightness that recall the harmonic palette of the suite's other heroines. In m. 56, Example 5, the theme returns in A-flat minor and a higher register, creating a fleeting sense of expansion or freedom before returning to the subdued opening material. The atypical move from ♭IIo7 to i, bypassing the dominant, heightens this feeling of unresolved emotion.



Example 5a. Mel Bonis, "Desdémona," mm. 1-5 © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de



Example 5b. Mel Bonis, "Desdémona," mm. 56-59 © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de

Bonis is slightly more programmatically inclined in this piece than in others. She prefaces the score with an epigram drawn from Desdemona's "Willow Song," translated by Maurice Bouchor in *Les Chansons de Shakespeare* (Act IV, Scene 3):

"The poor soul sits at the foot of a sycamore, Sing all a sweet willow and the willow again."[59]

Bouchor's version paints a mournful portrait of a woman seated by a stream, hand on her heart, brow resting on her knee, her tears softening the stones beneath her. In Shakespeare's play, Desdemona sings this ballad while preparing for bed, anticipating her death. Bonis marks the opening melody *con malincolia*, *dolce*, evoking a sigh or melancholy through melodic intervals of fourths and fifths. Repeated high Es and a quiet pedal point suggest an unrelenting sadness, while also echoing the textual refrain, "willow and willow again." Cascading arpeggios in mm. 5–6 and mm. 29–30 may symbolize her falling tears.

Ophelia

Like Desdemona, Ophelia is a sympathetic "victim" figure from a Shakespearean play; however, Bonis's musical portrait of Ophelia exhibits many overt Orientalist traits. These gestures appear throughout the *Femmes de Légende* orchestral works and suggest a deeper link between the concept of "femininity" and the image of the "Eastern woman." In Ophelia's story, water is a crucial element—both literally and symbolically—just as it is for many Orientalist operatic heroines who sing by or disappear into water. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia's descent into madness and subsequent drowning is caused by Hamlet's betrayal. Gaston Bachelard, in his phenomenological reading of the "Ophelia complex," describes drowning as

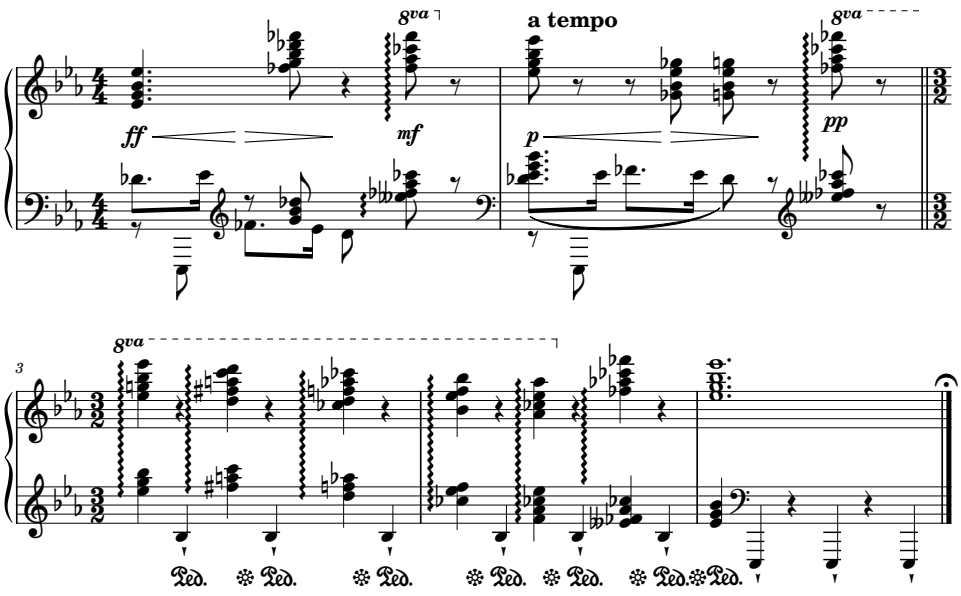
57 Showalter, "Representing Ophelia," 89; See Henrietta Rae and Mrs. F. Littler's paintings of Ophelia; Sarah Bernhardt's bust of Ophelia; See also: Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996). Lewis analyzes Orientalist images by women painters including Henriette Browne, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë.

58 Helena Faucit, "Desdemona," *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 57-58.

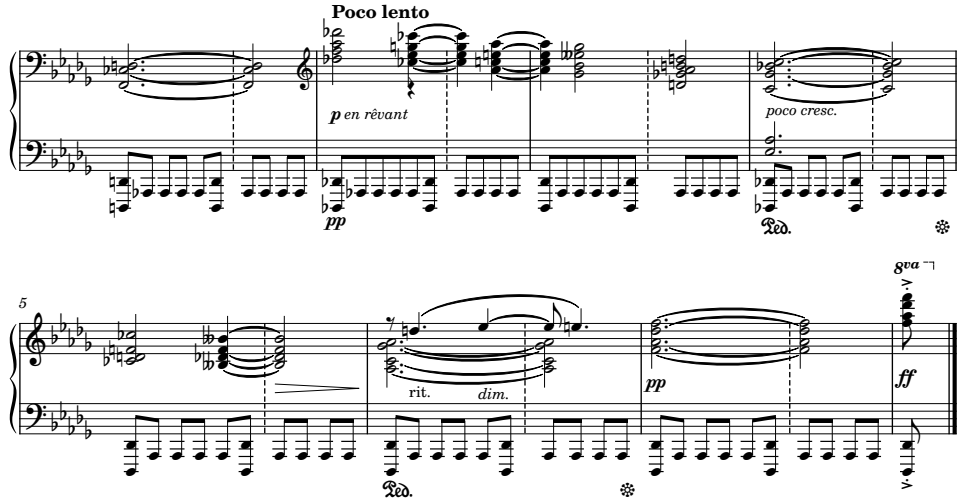
59 Maurice Bouchors, "Chanson de Desdémone," in *Les Chansons de Shakespeare*, (France: L. Chailley, 1896), 77. "La pauvre ame s'assit au pied d'un sycomore, Chantez le doux saule et le saule encore, Une main sur son coeur, le front sur ses genoux, Chantez le doux saule avec nous./ Ses larmes, en tombant, attendrissaient les pierres.../Pres d'elle un frais ruisseau pleurait sur ses malheurs, Saule, doux saule, saule en pleurs./J'approuve ses mépris; que pas un ne le blame...Je l'appelai parjure, et lui se mit a rire;C'est le saule vert que j'entends bruire. J'en ai d'autres? Dit-il. Eh bien! Fais comme moi." Translations from this source are mine.

the "truly feminine death" in theatrical literature; it is an emblem of emotional excess and symbolic return to the feminine element.[60]

In Bonis's "Ophélie," the motif of water is immediately apparent. The piece opens with a revolving progression of three chords (I6, V65/iii, vii°7), whose motion imitates the flow of water. Contrasting textures reinforce this aquatic imagery; shimmering, arpeggiated chords in the upper register are offset by deep pedal tones in the bass, evoking the surface and depth of a stream. This fluid opening motive later transforms. Rather than repeating three times as in the first measure, it begins to descend more freely and gradually morphs into a double-harmonic "Oriental" scale, first at mm. 55–56 and again at mm. 66–68, Example 6. A similar scalar gesture appears in "Salomé," marked *en rêvant* in the piano score. The differences are minor: Ophelia's scale is an octave higher, and Salome has an ostinato to create rhythmic tension. These gestures suggest a kind of sonic portal—perhaps a dream or transformation. The two descending lines in "Ophélie" and "Salomé" share a striking contour and instrumentation: both feature harp and winds, which evoke a mysterious, exoticized sound world. The harp in particular carried associations with femininity and domesticity as the "feminine archetype of charm."[61]



Example 6. Mel Bonis, "Ophélie," mm. 64-68 © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de



Example 7. Mel Bonis, "Salomé" mm. 122-133 © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de

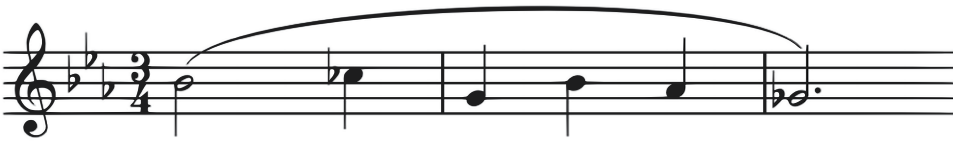
This recurring scale suggests that Ophelia, often viewed as a pure victim, may share more with the "femme fatale" figure of Salome than previously assumed. If interpreted archetypally, the scale may symbolize the "divine" in Ophelia and the "seductive" in Salome. Its appearance at the end of both pieces can be heard as a theatrical transformation between characters, echoing the kind of role metamorphosis associated with Sarah Bernhardt.

A comparison of the descending scalar gestures in "Salomé" and "Ophélie" reveals their shared contour and instrumentation, despite differences in register and rhythmic setting. This visual parallel further supports the idea of a thematic bridge between archetypes.

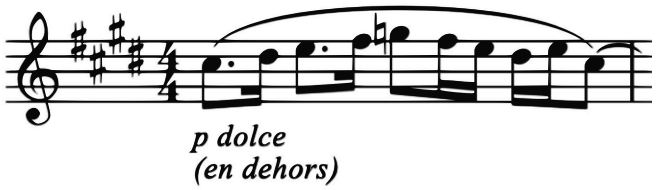
There are three distinct themes in "Ophélie" (Example 8) marked *cantando* and/or *très en dehors* that seem to reference Ophelia's voice and her childhood recollections of nurse's song. These melodic fragments float in and out of the texture, surfacing unanticipated and incomplete. Their appearance evokes Ophelia's fragmented consciousness, as if these tunes were snippets from an imaginary longer melody. Rather than suggesting narrative cohesion, Bonis renders her unraveling mind with lyrical ambiguity. The effect is one of memory dissolving in real time: the listener hears the traces of a self slipping away.

60 Gaston Bachelard, *L'Eau et les Rêves* (José Corti: Paris, 1942), 109-25, quoted in Showalter, "Representing Ophelia," 81.

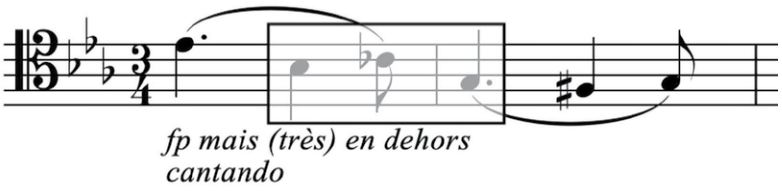
61 Chelsea Lane, "The Feminine Harp as Feminist Tool: Early Professional Footing for Women in Mid-Twentieth-Century America," (Order No. 29167428, City University of New York, 2022.), quoted in Robert Adelson and Jacqueline Letzer, "'For a Woman When She is Young and Beautiful': The Harp in Eighteenth-Century France," in *History/Herstory: Alternative Musikgeschichten*, ed. Annette Kreutziger-Herr and Katrin Losleben (Cologne, Germany: Böhlau Verlag, 2009). Letzer and Adelson state that the harp was not always a feminine symbol and it's feminization occurred in mid-18th century. For a discussion surrounding Bonis's fascination with harp-writing, see: Hélène Cao, "Les suites de Mel Bonis," 393-407, in *Mel Bonis (1858-1937): Parcours d'une compositrice de la Belle Époque*, ed. Étienne Jardin. (Arles: Actes Sud, 2020).



Example 8a. Mel Bonis, "Ophélie", m. 9: Motive A © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de



Example 8b. Mel Bonis, "Ophélie", m. 13: Motive B © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de



Example 8c. Mel Bonis, "Ophélie", m. 26: Motive C with Motive A incorporated (see box) © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de

In the 19th century, Shakespeare's Ophelia became one of the most frequently represented tragic heroines in theater and visual art to demonstrate "male fantasies of feminine dependency."[62] Though a minor character in *Hamlet*, she came to symbolize the sacrificial woman, hopelessly in love and undone by emotional excess. In essays on Bonis's "Ophélie," both Géliot and Saumon invoke this Romantic ideal. Saumon describes her as *la beauté virginale* and associates the music's aquatic imagery with water nymphs.[63] Géliot references Rimbaud's 1870 poem, "Ophélie," which depicts Ophelia with "sweet innocence."[64]

Géliot reflects on the poem:

"Ophelia flows musically along the river that leads her to God. Like the image of endless time on this mystical course, one could say that this music never truly finishes."[65]

However, by the late 19th century, depictions of Ophelia began to shift. Madeleine Lemaire's 1880s painting broke with male artistic conventions by presenting a partially unclothed Ophelia, who "leers with the glowering light of the vampire in her eyes," suggesting a sexual dimension to her madness.[66] Sarah Bernhardt, whose stage and sculptural representations left an indelible mark on French cultural memory, famously appeared as Ophelia in the graveyard scene—shifting the spotlight from Hamlet to her own "freshly dead" body.[67] Her marble relief bust of Ophelia (Salon de Paris, 1881) portrays death not as a tragedy but as sensual transcendence: the heroine's parted lips, bare shoulders, and serpentine neck (modeled after Bernhardt's own) evoke both eroticism and serenity. Unlike Millais's Pre-Raphaelite painting, in which Ophelia is submerged within the natural landscape, Bernhardt's version dominates the frame. In Millais's iconic work, Ophelia is both a victim and a siren ("mermaid-like"), but the "division of space between Ophelia and the natural details…reduces her to one more visual object."[68]

Bonis's Ophélie similarly emphasizes a sensuous, interiorized portrait through the use of her Orientalist vocabulary. The double-harmonic scale at the climax evokes an exotic, "magical" sound-world, yet its quiet resolution implies peace. The layering of nostalgic motives near the end of the work (m. 57) seems to recall distant childhood songs, lending the piece an elegiac tone. This moment unfolds seamlessly from the Oriental scale in m. 55—in contrast to its abrupt entrance at the beginning of the piece—suggesting acceptance or transcendence. At m. 52, a variation of the opening motive returns three times, mirroring the piece's first three measures. This time, it accelerates with a chromatic accompaniment and *crescendo*, building emotional intensity. Read through a feminist lens, these *serrez*, chromatic moments (mm. 52, 64) might express the emotional strangulation many women experienced in fin-de-siècle culture, where madness often served as the only permitted expression of female interiority.

As Elaine Showalter has argued, Ophelia may ultimately signify the impossibility of representing femininity within patriarchal discourse—forever relegated to incoherence, madness, fluidity, or silence.[69]

Mythic and Mystical Women: Phoebe, Melisande, and Viviane

In the final archetype category, Bonis turns toward figures whose power lies not in overt theatricality but in mystery, introspection, and transformation. "Phoebé," "Mélisande," and "Viviane" each evoke a different dimension of feminine otherness: lunar, Symbolist, and enchanted. These portraits use modal ambiguity, cyclical form, and

62 Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 42.

63 Saumon, "Une Musique Pour Piano," 430-431.

64 Arthur Rimbaud, "Ophélie," *Poetica*, access date 24 February 2023, https://www.poetica.fr/poeme-1034/arthur-rimbaud-ophelie/."Sur l'onde calme et noire ou dorment les étoiles, La blanche Ophélie flotte comme un grand lys Flotte très lentement, couchée en ses long voiles…"

65 Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 111. "Ophélie coule musicalement au long du fleuve qui la conduit a Dieu. Comme l'image du temps sans fin de ce cours mystique, on disait que cette musique n'est pas vraiment finie." Translation from this source mine.

66 Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 44.

67 Alan Young, "Sarah Bernhardt's Ophelia" in *Borrowers and Lenders* III, no. 1 (2013): 1-19, accessed 24 February, 2023. Later, in her theatrical interpretation of Ophelia, Bernhardt rejected the use of a coffin in the graveyard scene and chose to be carried on stage as a dead Ophelia. This interpretive freedom turned the spotlight on to Ophelia's fresh corpse rather than Hamlet. Though it was shocking for audiences at the time, other late-19th century productions adopted this practice. Bernhardt was also famous for sleeping in her own coffin which was a way for Bernhardt to promote her own eccentric image.

68 Showalter, "Representing Ophelia," 85.

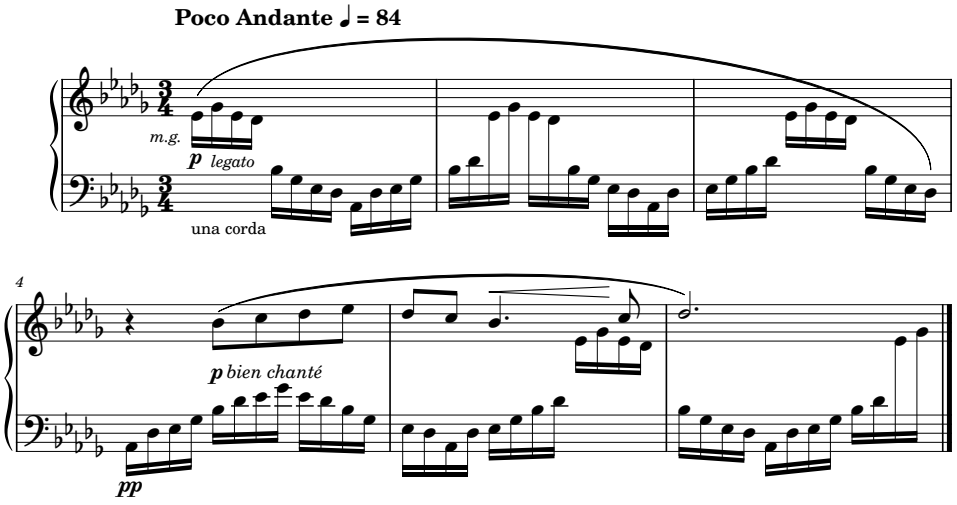
69 Showalter, "Representing Ophelia," 89

tonal suspension to suggest interiority, fluid identity, and symbolic distance. Rather than relying on seduction or tragedy, Bonis uses these figures to expand the emotional and psychological scope of her suite, offering alternative expressions of feminine agency. Together, they affirm Bonis's investment in portraying women not as fixed types, but as shifting, poetic presences.

Phoebe

The 1925 Leduc edition of Bonis's *Cinq Pièces* begins with "Phoebé," a lunar goddess, and ends with "Mélisande," a character loosely associated with the moon. By opening the suite with "Phoebé," Bonis foregrounds femininity and womanhood as overarching themes. In mythology, Phoebe came to be part of a lunar trinity with Diana (or Artemis) and Hecate (Phoebé's granddaughter), collectively symbolizing the feminine in its phases and mysteries. These goddesses embodied not only lunar qualities but also a pervasive cultural belief: that women were mere "reflectors," lacking inner light or original creative force.[70] As Dijkstra explains, "[as] moon and mirror of nature, 'woman' was a simple reflection of the world around her. She existed in and for what she mirrored, and unless she mirrored the world of man, she mirrored brute nature, the world of woman, herself. Thus, paradoxically, as long as women lived among women, she lived alone, completely self-contained."[71] At the turn of the century, such circular symbolism took on new cultural resonance. Artists began to portray women not merely as reflected light, but as figures of *uroboric* wholeness—self-enclosed and cyclical, like the snake eating its tail.[72]

Bonis's "Phoebé" engages directly with these themes. In this portrait, she explores not only reflection and



Example 9. Mel Bonis, "Phoebé," mm. 1-6 © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de

distance, but also self-containment and suspended subjectivity. Shown in Example 9, the melody's round contour—opening and closing on B♭—suggests the moon's circular shape, while its expressive character (marked *bien chanté*) imbues Phoebé with a distinct vocal identity. The central pitch, B♭, also emphasizes the second syllable of her name, anchoring her voice in the musical texture.

Bonis further enhances this symbolism through circular phrase structures and harmonic ambiguity. The introduction (mm. 1–17) unfolds in ternary form: an opening A section (mm. 1–12) in A♭ mixolydian with whole-tone accompaniment, a contrasting B section (mm. 12–15a) built on an E diminished octatonic collection over A♭, and a return of A material (mm. 15b–17) marked *cédez, poco più f* and transposed an octave lower. The piece's overall structure is similarly ternary, but rather than restate the opening theme, the return at m. 56 revisits the B section's octatonic material, eventually resolving in m. 62 to the A♭mixolydian/whole-tone environment. This cyclical pull echoes the gravitational and rhythmic patterns of the moon, reinforcing Phoebé's identity as a symbol of feminine reflection and return.

The moon also signified woman's symbolic distance from man, who was associated with the sun—Phoebe's brother, Phoebus. The opening whole-tone harmonies lend the piece an "otherworldly" quality that 19th-century listeners would likely have found novel and exotic. The symmetry of the whole-tone and octatonic scales—with their self-reflective intervallic structure—evokes the mirror-like image of the moon. Because the whole-tone scale avoids goal-directed motion, it has often been interpreted in gendered terms as "feminine."[73] Here, Bonis's modal ambiguity—suggesting both D♭ and A♭ as tonal centers—and the unresolved harmonic thirds in the final bars (mm. 68–70) create a suspended effect that suggests lyrical self-sufficiency. This alternative to tonal closure aligns with Symbolist notions of the feminine as diffuse, radiant, and internally complete.

Melisande

Melisande, the heroine of Maurice Maeterlinck's Symbolist play *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1893), is a figure shrouded in mystery—childlike, elusive, and associated with water, silence, and unknowable desire. In the play, she arrives without explanation, her past unknown, and becomes the object of love and obsession for two brothers, ultimately entangled in a tragic love triangle. Her fragmented speech, moonlike associations, and ethereal presence made her a quintessential Symbolist figure,

70 Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 122,

71 Ibid., 132.

72 Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*,129. The use of circles creates a sense of "wholeness" and "feminine weightlessness," as seen in "Woman" by an anonymous artist (1896) where a woman is surrounded by a circle and is suspended in air.

73 Kenneth M. Smith, *Skryabin, Philosophy and the Music of Desire* (London: Routledge, 2016), 87. For example, in Scriabin's *Vers La Flamme* (1914), Kenneth Smith reads the work as a division between the whole tone chord (feminine) and the tonal sections (masculine).

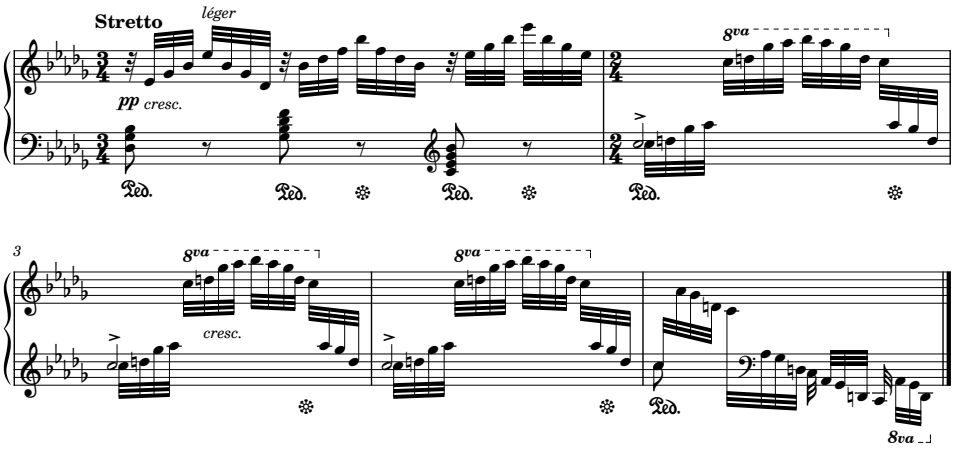
representing femininity as something intangible and ungraspable. Mel Bonis composed her piano portrait of Melisande in 1898, five years after the play's debut and a few years before Debussy's opera premiered in 1902, suggesting her early engagement with the character as a symbol of elusive femininity and modern psychological depth.

In "Mélisande," Bonis draws on Symbolist aesthetics and exoticist textures to depict a character defined by ambiguity and an elusive presence. Her musical portrait features irregular and long phrase lengths and melodies that drift in and out of tonal clarity. These features mirror Maeterlinck's Melisande, whose fragmented speech, evasive responses, and mysterious origins resist interpretation. Bonis mimics this evasiveness musically: melodies enter unpredictably and move in contrary motion, cadences are deferred or avoided entirely, and hands cross over registers, creating an unstable, flickering texture. In mm. 18–19, a harmonic "question" and surprising "answer" gesture reflects Melisande's hesitant speech; in mm. 22–28, two intertwining melodic lines never fully synchronize, emphasizing her resistance to fixed identity.

Bonis's aquatic gestures evoke both water and Melisande's famously long, luminous hair. In Act III of the play, Melisande lets her hair fall from a tower as she sings to Pelléas, who likens her voice to a siren's: "Your voice seems to waft across the sea in springtime!"[74] De Médicis interprets the cascading passage in mm. 46–48, Example 10,—an incomplete scale—as a musical image of Mélisande tossing her ring into the fountain.[75] One might also read it as her "wild" hair falling through space. At this moment, Bonis evokes Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau* (mm. 47–50), not as direct quotation but as meaningful echo, linking her musical portrait to Debussy's Symbolist sound world.

74 Maeterlinck, *Maeterlinck: Pelleas et Melisande*, 32. "On dirait que ta voix a passe sur la mer au printemps!"

75 De Médicis, "La Musique Pour Piano," 329-330.



Example 10. Mel Bonis, "Mélisande," mm. 45-49 © Furore Verlag, Kassel/Germany, www.furore-verlag.de

Melisande's hair, like her voice, becomes a vehicle for ambiguous power. Gitter notes that in Victorian iconography, a woman's hair could signify both innocence and seduction: "When she was saintly... the gold on her head was her aureole... But when she was dangerous... her gleaming hair was a weapon, web, or trap."[76] Bonis captures this duality through whole tone figurations that momentarily lift the piece into a freer, floating harmonic realm. Although the gesture resolves to D♭ major, it lingers in an Orientalist tonality—weightless and unresolved. In this moment, Melisande's music resists definition. She is neither femme fatale nor victim, but something more elusive: a Symbolist siren whose power lies in suggestion, transformation, and withholding.

76 Elisabeth G. Gitter, "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination," *PMLA* 99, no. 5 (1984): 936–954, accessed February 23, 2023, https://doi.org/10.2307/462145.

Viviane

Viviane first appeared as a fairy queen in 13th-century French chivalric romances, including Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot, the Knight of the Cart* and Ulrich von Zatzikhoven's *Lanzelet*. In these tales, she plays a benevolent, fairy-godmother figure who guides and raises the hero Lancelot. In the *Lancelot-Grail* cycle (also known as the Vulgate Cycle), Viviane resides in an enchanted realm hidden beneath a lake, where she nurtures and trains Lancelot for his future heroic deeds. Elsewhere in the *Vulgate*, particularly in the *Merlin* section, she takes on a more ambivalent role as a powerful sorceress who ultimately entraps Merlin. These divergent portrayals led authors to distinguish between versions of the character by name—Viviane, Nimueh, or the Lady of the Lake.[77]

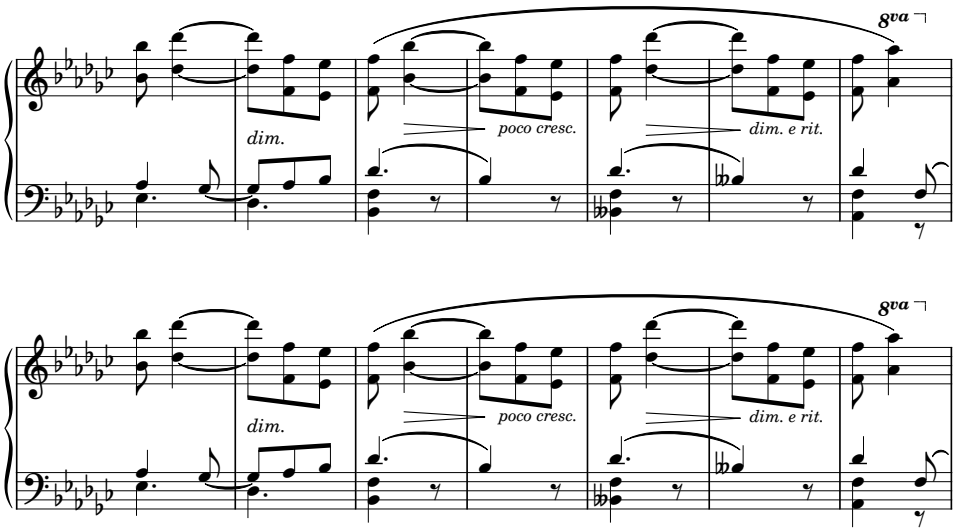
77 For example, in Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of* the King, Tennyson distinguishes between "Viviane" and "Lady of the Lake."

Even the more "dangerous" versions of Viviane could carry positive connotations. Ernest Chausson's *Viviane* (1888), a symphonic poem dedicated to his fiancée Jeanne Escudier, dramatizes the love between Viviane and Merlin. Though Viviane eventually enchants and ensnares him in a hawthorn bloom, the work's glowing love theme implies that Merlin's surrender is neither tragic nor destructive. Despite the piece's success in Paris, Chausson later dismissed it as "descriptive music" and relegated it to juvenilia—perhaps reflecting anxieties around the feminine or fantastical in serious art music.[78]

In Bonis's "Viviane," it is unclear which version of the character she intended to portray, or whether she envisioned a particular episode. Musically, however, Bonis offers one of her most conventional portraits. Rather than relying on exoticized tropes or ambiguous tonalities, she emphasizes classical clarity and grace. The piece unfolds in a straightforward rondo form, with waltz-like rhythms, lyrical melodic lines, and whimsical gestures (e.g., mm. 136–137) that evoke charm and delight. Unlike other "femmes" in the suite, Viviane's power is expressed through lightness, elegance, and form.

The return to the rondo's A section can be heard as the shimmering illusion of the lake itself—appearing, vanishing, and returning. In the central C section (mm. 74–168), Example 11, Bonis marks the melody *bien chanté*, suggesting that we have finally arrived at Viviane's voice: the source of her wisdom and enchantment (mm. 114-123).

By withholding Orientalist markers and instead drawing on classical form, motivic play, and transparent textures,



Example 11. Mel Bonis, "Viviane," mm. 107-121

Bonis expands her vision of femininity to include figures of gentler authority. "Viviane" stands as an important counterexample within Femmes de Légende, demonstrating that enchantment could be light-bearing and positive.

Conclusion

In *Souvenirs et Réflexions*, a posthumous collection of Bonis's writings compiled by her children, the composer openly critiques the hypocrisies of bourgeois life and the rigid roles assigned to women.[79] She despised the corset, citing it as a cause of health disorders and fetal malformation: "Misery! And we think we are civilized," she wrote. "The animas and femmes sauvages are less beastly."[80] Her account of the Steinheil trials—an infamous 1908 scandal in which Marguerite Steinheil, the widow of a prominent painter, was accused of poisoning her husband and mother—further reveals Bonis's frustration with entrenched misogyny. "I find the time-old contempt of man for woman," she observed. "He does not at all ask her to be his companion, but to serve as his toy."[81] Against this backdrop, Bonis's *Femmes de Légende* can be read as part of her broader effort to foreground the interior lives of women and critique the limiting roles society imposed on them.

The figures Bonis chose for her suite were not obscure or idiosyncratic; they were cultural touchstones of her day, and their images and stories circulated widely in the theater, visual art, and consumer culture. Even the facial powder "Poudre Ophélie," marketed in 1890 as a "talisman of beauty," capitalized on the fragile, pale allure of Shakespeare's heroine.[82] Bonis was clearly attuned to these cultural currents. Like the frondeuses and éclaireuses—female pioneers who, at the turn of the century, asserted a new kind of femininity rooted in charm, intellect, and artistic self-invention—Bonis reclaims these iconic women not to preserve their myth, but to revise and animate it. She invites us to encounter them not as static archetypes, but as fully realized voices.

Her musical portraits, rooted in familiar myths and literary figures, refuse to settle into fixed interpretation. Instead, Bonis offers a method of feminist reimagination grounded in suggestion, multiplicity, and interiority. Through subtle manipulations of harmony, form, and texture, she endows each character with expressive agency and psychological depth. This is not

78 Mark Seto, "Ernest Chausson's Viviane, 'Déwagnérisation,' and the Problem of Descriptive Music," *19th Century Music* 41, no. 1 (2017): 48–74, accessed February 23, 2023, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26348903. Chausson wrote, in 188 to his friend Robert Godet, "This Viviane is really irrepressible. It's a hit in the provinces and abroad. And now it's caught on again in Paris!" "If you go to Lamoureux's concert on Sunday, please excuse Viviane's program. It is a work from my youth that I have redone in its entirety, in its composition and orchestration, but the core couldn't change. Allow it for this one time; I will not write any more program music." Translation from this source by Seto.

79 Mel Bonis, *Souvenirs et Reflections*, (Paris: Nant d'Enfer, 1974), 14-19.

80 Mel Bonis, *Souvenirs et Reflections*,15. "Misère! Et on se croit civilisé! Les bêtes et les femmes sauvages sont moins bêtes." Translations from this source are mine.

81 Ibid., "Au fond cell est bien triste…Je retrieve la l'antique mépris de l'homme pour la femme. Il ne demande pas du tout a celle-ci d'être sa compagne mais de lui servir de jouet." Translations from this source are mine.

82 Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 46.

INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR WOMEN IN MUSIC

EDITOR OPPORTUNITY

The International Alliance for Women in Music (iawm.org), dedicated to fostering the activities of women in music, is seeking applicants for Editor of its quarterly publication, the *IAWM Journal*. The Journal, for members and libraries internationally, contains research on historical and contemporary women in music, book, performance and recording reviews, member news, and information about IAWM's awards, grants and more.

The Editor in Chief is responsible for the journal's content and its publication. This volunteer part-time position with a small honorarium begins January 2025. Applicants have a distinguished record of achievement in some aspect of music. Previous journal editorial experience is preferred, but not required. Applicants need strong organizational, management and personnel skills, and a commitment to publishing high quality, relevant, and engaging writing.

The editor's responsibilities include:

- Solicit, curate, review, and make final decisions on submissions
- Appoint and collaborate with assistant and associate editors on the editorial board
- Manage the review and publication process, including editorial assignments and processes
- Work with the IAWM President to establish Journal priorities

Assistant and Associate Editors opportunities with more limited time requirement are also open.

Applicants should email a letter of interest including a description of their qualifications and a current CV to: journal@iawm.org with "Journal Editor" in the subject line.

a polemical feminism, but a quietly radical one—feminine not in submission, but in the refusal to resolve, to define, or to close. In this way, *Femmes de Légende* serves as a model for how music can engage symbolically with gender and identity: not by rejecting traditional narratives outright, but by inhabiting and reshaping them from within.

In Bonis's suite, femininity remains an open-ended abstraction. Her use of Orientalist markers, modal ambiguity, and expressive lyricism does not define womanhood—it gestures toward it. By presenting many characters in one cycle, Bonis encourages the listener to reflect, compare, and inhabit each portrait. Some may even find echoes of themselves in these figures. Bonis's connection to the suite is deeply personal. She shares her name—Mel, Mélanie—with Mélisande and *mélodie* alike, and called "Mélisande" her "favorite."[83] This intimate connection between composer and character becomes especially vivid in a photograph taken in 1888, where Bonis appears dressed as Cleopatra. While many women of her time posed in such costumes for staged portraits, Bonis's choice resonates more deeply given her musical engagement with the queen. The image of Bonis as a poised, regal, and theatrical Cleopatra serves as a symbolic gesture of identification, as if she were stepping into her own gallery of femmes.

Mel Bonis as Cleopatra (1888) | © Association Mel Bonis

Across Femmes de Légende, Bonis reconfigures traditional archetypes into complex, layered, and often contradictory women. Her music explores the many meanings of "charm"—as seduction, as grace, as musical elegance, and as "the quality of the French spirit."[84] Ultimately, Bonis offers not just a collection of character pieces, but a feminist aesthetic: one that resists confinement, encourages reflection, and honors the enduring multiplicity of the feminine.

Kathryn Felt is a pianist, writer, and educator dedicated to highlighting underrepresented voices in classical music. She holds a DMA from Rutgers University, where her dissertation explored the music of Mélanie Bonis, and she is currently a Lecturer there. As a dedicated performer, she has performed as a soloist at venues including Koerner Hall in Toronto and the Zimmerli Art Museum in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Her writing has appeared in The New York Classical Review and W.W. Norton's The Avid Listener. She is also the Founder and Artistic Director of the Wild Muse Concert Series, which presents nature-inspired and women composers' works in an outdoor setting among floral installations.

83 Géliot, Mel Bonis,109.

84 Pasler, Mélisande's Charm, 2.

Sofia Gubaidulina. July 1981. Sortavala, Republic of Karelia, Russia | Photo: Dmitri N. Smirnov, CC BY-SA 3.0. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/, via Wikimedia Commons

Sofia Gubaidulina (1931–2025)

JOAN TITUS

Sofia Gubaidulina, a composer renowned for her explorations of the spiritual in sound, left a rich musical legacy traversing multiple places and ideologies when she passed at age ninety-three She was one of the first women to be prominently discussed in histories of twentieth-century Slavic music, and one of the few to be canonized in Western music histories today. Because of her Tatar background, training in major Russian cities, and later study of Christianity and Western European cultures, Gubaidulina has been described as a composer who bridges the East and the West.

Born in the culturally diverse region of Tatarstan (at that time an autonomous republic of the Soviet Union and currently a republic of Russia), she began her training at Kazan Conservatory near her hometown, Chistopol. She completed her musical training at the Moscow Conservatory, where she studied with Nikolay Peyko and Vissarion Shebalin. After her graduation in 1963, she worked in electronic music and was a member of the improvisational group Astrea, which researched and performed Eastern and Transcaucasian folk musics and instruments.

She believed that music "connects the finite and infinite," is inextricably linked with faith, and goes beyond the usual conventions of musical style.

— JOAN TITUS

Historically, Gubaidulina is often grouped with two other contemporary unofficial Soviet composers of the 1960s in the generation that followed Dmitry Shostakovich: Alfred Schnittke and Edison Denisov. The famous story of Shostakovich supporting her after she was publicly criticized—advising her to "continue on her mistaken path"—suggests how her "unofficial" compositions were received domestically.[1] She was openly denounced with other avant-garde composers in 1979 for her non-conformist musical ideas, and she struggled thereafter to have her work performed and published. She was further challenged by being the sole woman in this group of composers. Yet she persisted undaunted, often seeking the spiritual in her art.

Her early works include *Introitus* for piano and chamber orchestra (1978) and *In Croce* [On the Cross] for cello or bayan and organ (1979). Her violin concerto *Offertorium* (1980) was taken abroad by its dedicatee and her early advocate, violinist Gidon Kremer. His advocacy of new music helped to launch her international career. After the fall of the Soviet Union (December 1991), Gubaidulina moved to Germany (1992) and remained there until her death.

Simliar to other Soviet composers of her generation, which includes the Ukrainian Valentin Silvestrov, Gubaidulina was concerned with the eschatological. In the case of her colleagues, this was sometimes characterized as "the end of music history," but in Gubaidulina's, case her focus was on the spiritual. She believed that music "connects the finite and infinite," is inextricably linked with faith, and goes beyond the usual conventions of musical style.[2] In her interviews, she explained that the relationship between one's inner state and the beyond was her concern, and music was a "sacred act."[3] She was preoccupied with mysticism, metaphysics, Christian symbolism, and belief systems, and later converted to Russian Orthodox Christianity. An avid reader, Gubaidulina was equally interested in literature, Greek philosophy, and the work of Immanuel Kant and Carl Jung as she was in religious ideas.[4]

Dichotomous oppositions, such as light and dark, or humanity and the divine, often lay at the center of her musical thinking. Her *Rejoice* (1988) for violin and cello, canonized in Western music history textbooks, is one example of her interest in the divine, as are her aforementioned works.[5] Her later works continued to focus on endings. *The Light of the End* (2003), which she composed for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, was performed again in 2021 alongside her third violin concerto *Dialogue: I and You* (2018).[6]

1 Gerard McBurney, "Sofia Gubaidulina Obituary," *The Guardian*, March 20, 2025. See also Tom Huizenga, "The Fearless Musical Philosophy of Sofia Gubaidulina," *National Public Radio—All Things Considered*, November 18, 2021.

2 Boosey and Hawkes, Press Release, March 2025. In one interview from 2012, she refuses to use the word style to describe her work. Nolan Gasser, "Sofia Gubaidulina Exclusive Interview: March 27, 2012," *Classical Archives*, https://www.classicalarchives.com/feature/gubaidulina_interview.html.

3 Ibid. See also Valentina Kholopova, "Gubaydulina, Sofya Asgatovna," *Grove Music Online*, accessed March 28, 2025.

4 Vera Lukomsky, and Sofia Gubaidulina. "Sofia Gubaidulina: 'My Desire Is Always to Rebel, to Swim against the Stream!'" *Perspectives of New* Music 36, no. 1 (1998): 5–41; and Vera Lukomsky, and Sofia Gubaidulina. "'Hearing the Subconscious': Interview with Sofia Gubaidulina." *Tempo*, no. 209 (1999): 27–31.

5 See for example Peter J. Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, Tenth edition (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019).

6 Boston Symphony Orchestra, "The Light of the End," accessed March 28, 2025, https://www.bso.org/works/the-light-of-the-end.

Like her Soviet colleagues, Gubaidulina also composed for the screen. Films about children's lives, such as *Scarecrow* (1984) and animated features were her main foci in this genre, though she also composed for documentary and feature films. Film scoring was a place she could experiment musically—she could work out musical ideas in these scores, following the example of her predecessors like Shostakovich and mirroring contemporary colleagues like Schnittke. She often regarded film scoring as separate work, and it provided stable income, especially early in her career when her concert works were considered unacceptable. She occasionally composed for film after she left Russia; and her concert music, like that of her contemporary Arvo Pärt, has sometimes been used in cues for recent films, including Yorgos Lanthimos's *The Killing of a Sacred* Deer (2017).

Prolific in her work, Gubaidulina has left a musical and philosophical legacy that questions what it means to be human in the world. In this endeavor, she has fully shared herself through sound. She maintained a firm belief, according to her most recognized quotation, that "there is no more serious reason for composing music than spiritual renewal."[7]

7 Kholopova, "Gubaydulina, Sofya Asgatovna."

CONFERENCES, CONVENTIONS AND FESTIVALS

SUMMER 2025

International Double Reed Society Conference
Jun 10-14, 2025 | Indianapolis, IN
https://www.idrs.org/conference/future-conferences/

League of American Orchestras
Jun 11-13, 2025 | Salt Lake City, Utah
https://leagueconference.org/

Tokyo Sinfonia International Conductor Workshop
Jun 21- Jul 1, 2025 | Tokyo, Japan
https://www.tokyosinfonia.com/

International Tuba Euphonium Association
Jun 23-25, 2025 | Valencia, Spain
https://iteaonline.org/conferences/itec-2025/

57th International Horn Symposium
Jun 24-28, 2025 | Harrisonburg, VA
https://www.hornsociety.org/events/57th-international-horn-symposium

New Interfaces for Musical Expression
Jun 24-27, 2025 | Canberra, Australia
https://nime2025.org/

New Directions Cello Festival
Jun 26-29, 2025 | Northampton, MA
https://newdirectionscello.org/

Festival dei Due Mondi
Jun 27- Jul 13, 2025 | Spoleto, Italy
https://www.festivaldispoleto.com/en

Bowdoin International Music Festival
Jun 28- Aug 9, 2025 | Brunswick, ME
https://www.bowdoinfestival.org/

American Guild of Organists
Jun 30- Jul 3, 2025 | Fort Worth, TX
https://www.agohq.org/

Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival
Jul 1- Aug 18, 2025 | Santa Fe, NM
https://santafechambermusic.org/

Blossom Music Festival
Jul 3- Sep 7, 2025 | Cleveland, OH
https://www.clevelandorchestra.com/attend/seasons-and-series/2025-26/blossom-25/

Sound and Music Computing Conference
Jul 7- Jul 12, 2025 | Graz, Austria
https://smcnetwork.org

ICA ClarinetFest
Jul 9- Jul 13, 2025 | Fort Worth, TX
https://clarinet.org/clarinetfest-2025/

Valley of the Moon Music Festival
Jul 12- Jul 27, 2025 | Sonoma, CA
https://valleyofthemoonmusicfestival.org/

World Saxophone Congress
Jul 26- Jul 31, 2025 | Harbin, China
https://www.saxophonecommittee.com/

Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music
Jul 27- Aug 10, 2025 | Santa Cruz, CA
https://cabrillomusic.org/2025-season/

The National Flute Association
Aug 7- Aug 10, 2025 | Atlanta, GA
https://www.nfaonline.org/convention/2025-convention-atlanta-ga

The São Paulo Contemporary Composers Festival
Aug 8- Aug 17, 2025 | Sao Paulo, Brazil
https://csghq.com

Jordi Savall Festival
Aug 11- Aug 17, 2025 | Tarragona, Spain
https://festival.jordisavall.com/en/program-2025/

Presteigne Festival
Aug 21- Aug 25, 2025 | Presteigne, Wales
https://presteignefestival.com/

Composer panel reviewing new works by UArk composition students. | Photo: Charity Morrison

SHE: Festival of Women in Music

CHARITY MORRISON AND
CHRISTINA RUSNAK

The SHE: Festival of Women in Music is an annual event hosted by the University of Arkansas's Department of Music with the purpose of celebrating, supporting, and promoting women in the field of music. Established in 2019, the conference is concurrent with Women's History Month each March, offering a platform for performances, lectures, workshops, and masterclasses highlighting the artistry, contributions, and concerns of women and non-binary musicians in the industry. In its 7th year, the 2025 SHE Festival took place from March 14-16 at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, with several IAWM members in attendance as participants, presenters, and performers.

Performing the conference's opening night concert was horn player, singer, composer, and producer Aliyah Danielle, accompanied by her all-women band playing on keys, drums, and bass. The featured artist centered her deeply evocative and reverent program around the idea of legacy, presenting songs and interview clips from women whose contributions have been particularly formative to her artistic and personal development. Those highlighted included Nina Simone, Billie Holiday, Whitney Houston, Laura Mvula, Chaka Khan, Alanis Morrisette, Viktorija Pilatovic, Amália Rodrigues, säje, Tori Kelly, and Lianne La Havas, as well as works commissioned from composers Shanyse Strickland and Richard Parris Scott. Aliyah Danielle currently serves as IAWM's Global Initiatives Chair.

In total, the SHE Festival presented twenty-eight individual recitals and four group recitals, as well as another featured concert on Saturday night presented by the University of Arkansas Wind Ensemble. The breadth of pieces performed on this program spanned the centuries with an emphasis on living composers. Diverse and genre-bending, the pieces ranged from traditional Western music, works from the Asian hemisphere, improvisational jazz with electronics, and pop-influenced works. All fit into the theme of "Bridging Differences," a focus of the music department in their programming. Alan Gosman, music chair of the University of Arkansas, stated, "By spotlighting the contributions of women musicians, we can make connections that allow us to better appreciate all the music has to offer." It was exciting to hear newer works such as Alexandra Gardner's new consortium commission *Time Unfolding*, a concerto for alto saxophone and wind ensemble inspired by NASA James Hubble Telescope imagery. The recitals also opened my [Rusnak's] eyes and ears to performers and composers I was completely unaware of, including a riveting performance by Sara d'Ippoliata Reichter, who played 20th and 21st-century classical guitar works from composers around the world.

The SHE Festival also featured eighteen presentations and seven lecture recitals, in addition to educational panel sessions, such as one offering an interactive feedback session for student composers from two established composers featured at the conference. Olivia Phaneuf's "Diversifying Recitals through Thoughtful and Intentional Programming" presented opportunities for curating more women composers into concert performances. Alexandra Zaccarella's two presentations on

Opening night concert performed by Aliyah Danielle and band; photo of Nina Simone seen on screen | Photo: Charity Morrison

Charity Morrison presenting on community-oriented programming. | Photo: Charity Morrison

"A History of American Military Band Conductors in WWII," and "Exploring the Historical Landscape of Pioneer Women Conductors" were eye-opening in delivering an understanding of women conductors not as a rare occurrence in this context but rather a fact often excluded in the annals of music history and scholarship. At the intersection of music, social change, and entrepreneurship, Vivienne Aerts' "How Music and Regenerative Chocolate Contribute to Female Empowerment and Climate Change Solutions" served as a reminder that we as both women and artists can create independent, creative, and non-traditional paths in music.

Outside of conference sessions, attendees shared conversation, encouragement, thought-provoking lines of questioning, and further networking connections during breaks and over meals. Events like the SHE Festival are invaluable spaces for strengthening alliances of women in music through the exchange of research and ideas, disseminating new or lesser-known diverse repertoire in performance, and establishing points of connection between artists in the field who may find themselves encouraged in their efforts to more effectively collaborate and create by drawing on their shared identities and experiences.

LunART 2025 Report

KEELEY BROOKS

From May 28 to June 1 in Madison, Wisconsin, LunART brought its bold mission to promote, support, and celebrate women in the arts to life through its annual festival. This year's powerful theme, "Her Legacy, Our Voice," resonated across a dynamic week of programming, including a thought-provoking panel discussion, three vibrant chamber music concerts, and an intensive professional development program for emerging composers led by award-winning composer Dr. Chen Yi.

I was first drawn to the festival last summer while interning with the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison. As a college violinist at Yale, I was fortunate to study with Professor Dawn Dongeun Wohn from the University of Wisconsin School of Music for the summer, and I was looking for ways to meet fellow musicians. I was instantly drawn to LunART's mission and asked if they would need a volunteer. Attending the "Art and Motherhood" panel, part of the 2024 season theme *Rebirth*, felt like stepping into a space I hadn't realized I'd been longing for as an artist. Panelists frankly discussed the challenges of balancing life as a mother and continuing to pursue their craft. I was deeply inspired to hear topics that affect the real lives of women artists, and yet are so often not discussed. When I was offered the opportunity to continue as an intern with LunART throughout the year, I knew it was a team I wanted to be a part of.

This year's panel discussion, also titled "Her Legacy, Our Voice," welcomed the 2025 Composer in Residence Dr. Chen Yi, 2025 Artist in Residence Desere Mayo, and mezzo-soprano Adriana Zabala for a discussion led by Madison-based artist and activist Kelly Parks Snider. The panel established the ethos for the entire weekend of performances: a commitment to care for their craft, their fellow artists, and the broader community. Panelists discussed what it means to be courageous with their craft, how to sustain inspiration and acknowledge moments when it stalls, and, most importantly, how to build support both among fellow artists and for the next generation. When Mayo's goddaughter told her, "I draw because of you," she reflected, "My legacy and her voice and in the future it will be her legacy and another one's voice."

Image of the 2025 LunART Team (from left to right): Founder and director Iva Ugrčić, Operations Manager and Intern Madelyn Stewart, Public Relations Intern Keeley Brooks, Educational Program Manager Marie Pauls, Marketing and Communications Intern Emma Bijelic | Photo: Beth Skogen

On Friday, May 31st, LunART presented the first of their two gala performances, "Her Legacy," a night of celebrating female artists and acknowledging the role of women throughout history. The concert opened with Eugenie Rocherolle's lyrical Sonata No. 1 for flute and piano, performed by LunART's founder and director, Dr. Iva Ugrčić (flute) and her long-time collaborator, Dr. Satako Hayami (piano). The second piece was *Dance Unleashed* by Lingo Ma, one of the 2025 LunART Call for Scores Winners. Each year, three compositions are selected out of hundreds of entries to be performed at the festival. The first half concluded with Composer in Residence Dr. Chen Yi's exciting work *Qi*, the first of three pieces by Dr. Chen to be performed throughout the weekend. I was left deeply inspired by the range of textures, rhythms, and emotions shared throughout these pieces.

LunART was fortunate to collaborate with the Wisconsin Historical Society to display banners highlighting the history of women voters in Wisconsin in the lobby outside the performance hall. This display paired perfectly with the second half of Friday's program, Mark Kohn's dramatic song-cycle *The Trial of Susan B. Anthony*, masterfully presented by mezzo-soprano Adriana Zabala.

Saturday's concert, "Our Voice," included a breathtaking commissioned piece for flute, viola, cello, and piano by Sato Matsui. The piece, *La Suite Entranger*, is Matsui's homage to France, her new and welcoming home since 2019, and its rich tradition of dance music. This suite takes inspiration from four of the popular dance forms of that early period (Allemande, Courante, Pavane, and Gaillarde), honoring their traditional meters, characters, and phrasing while revisiting them with a fresh spirit of today.

The concert also highlighted our two other Call for Scores Winners, Jennifer Margaret Barker and Stella G. Gitelman Willoughby, with their compositions, *Ocean of Glass* and *The Air Around Us*, respectively. The concert included Dr. Chen Yi's *Distance can't keep us two apart for four voices*, alongside works by historical women composers, Rebecca Clarke and Louise Farrenc.

An audience member who attended both gala concerts wrote, "I was so wowed by both concerts. I just can't say enough about the incredible talent, richness, and energy that LunART brings forth. Deep bows."

Sunday's concert showcased another vital aspect of the LunART Festival programming, the Composers Hub Cohort. Each year, six early-career composers are selected to participate, receiving mentorship and coaching from the Composer-in-Residence as well as workshops on business by Dr. Iva Ugrčić and copyright law by Beth Russell, rehearsal time with musicians, and a high-quality live performance recording of the Sunday concert. This year's cohort included Shengran Jin, Soeui Lee, Yunmeng Wang, Megan DiGeorgio, Kei Wing Chan and Yilin Wang. Dr. Chen's *Romance for Hsiao and Ch'in* joined the program of their six exciting works with instrumentation ranging from pieces for solo instruments to mixed ensembles.

All three weekend performances were held at the Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra Building (WYSO), a beautiful space that served as the perfect home base for the festival and a collaboration that LunART hopes to continue building. On display in the lobby throughout the weekend were not only the Wisconsin Historical Society banners, but work by the 2025 LunART Artist in Residence, Desere Mayo. Mayo's detailed and moving pointillism images of three historical female composers, Florence Price, Clara Schumann, and Amy Beach, were proudly on display, in addition to a poster designed by Mayofor the festival. Notecards with the images of the three composers were for sale, as well as raffle tickets for prizes generously donated by the Madison community.

Engaging with LunART has always felt like a community affair, whether I was volunteering or attending concerts last summer, or now working on the team. Sitting in the audience in WYSO's beautiful wood-lined recital hall, I was struck not only by the incredible creativity and breadth of emotions that the composers and performers were presenting, but by how real the experience felt. It was a joy to get to know the composers and performers throughout the week, and that collective joy and excitement at being in a space where we were all working together to create art shone through on stage. Chamber music has the potential to be both deeply personal and uniquely collective, and the LunART festival was a prime example of how both can hold true simultaneously.

Group image of the composers and artists involved in the 2025 LunART festival. | Photo: Beth Skogen

LunART consistently pushes boundaries, strives for excellence, and continually expands its impact. Next year marks an exciting new chapter as LunART launches the very first conference, a major milestone in the journey to empower and elevate women in the arts. The Call for Proposals/Presenters, Call for Scores, and Composers Hub applications will be announced soon, so stay tuned! To learn more and stay up to date, visit lunartfestival.org and follow us @lunartfestival.

24th Annual Women Composers Festival of Hartford

MEL FITZHUGH

Composers and musicians flocked to Connecticut for the 24th annual Women Composers Festival of Hartford, 28 February–1 March, 2025.

A scholarly symposium honoured the cultural diversity of contemporary women composers. One highlight was Sydney Elise Passmore's presentation about how the works of Rhiannon Giddens offer new ways of understanding American folk music in the context of diversity, race, and racism. Composer-in-residence (CiR) Dr. Leah C. Reid concluded the symposium with a discussion of her life and works.

At the composition workshop, the audience enjoyed performances of new works by three composers—Rebecca Farmer, Bonnie Cochran, and Hannah Moore—which were read and commented upon by the Ensemble-in-Residence (EiR) Excelsis Percussion Quartet. Each of the composers received guidance and encouragement from workshop mentor Dr. Jessica Rudman. A marathon of music performances celebrated women composers through history, from the Renaissance/early Baroque (e.g. Maddalena Casulana and Vittoria Raffaella Aleotti) through the 18th (e.g. Juliane Reichardt), 19th (e.g. Chiquinha Gonzaga and Alice Mary Smith), and 20th (e.g. Irene Britton Smith and Lauma Reinholde) centuries to the 21st (e.g. Emma Lou Diemer and Binnette Lipper, as well as living composers including Dace Aperāne, Jihyun Kim, and Laura Nevitt).

Sydney Elise Passmore

Dace Aperāne (left) and Benita Rose (right) | Photo: Vice President of the Board of WCFH, Ruth Sovronsky

EiR Excelsis opened their feature concert with the pieces that won the competitive call for scores: *#@&%!* (expletive deleted)* by Andrea Reinkemeyer, *Pinned Butterflies* by Inga Chinilina, *Sideways* by Cara Haxo, and *The Night at the Canyon* by Wenxin Li. The exciting world premier of *Clatter*, newly commissioned by CiR Dr. Reid, anchored the program. For a complete list of participants and the online programme, please go to the WCFH website: www.womencomposersfestivalhartford.com/2025-festival.

The calls for participation for the 2026 Festival will be announced over the summer, so stay tuned!

REVIEWS

RECORDING REVIEWS

Preludes and Fugues for the Modern Pianist

Lynette Westendorf: *Preludes and Fugues for the Modern Pianist* (Printed and Recorded Works)

CAROL ANN WEAVER

Pianist and composer Lynette Westendorf has produced an epic compendium of work, titled *Preludes and Fugues for the Modern Pianist*, which consists of three volumes of music for piano solo, with a total of 24 preludes and 24 fugues. These 48 compositions occupy 198 pages of musical scores and are supported by her extensive commentary, analysis, and her own excellent recordings of these works. This project, which may well serve as the apex of Westendorf's career, was created in tribute to J. S. Bach and his famous *Well-tempered Clavier*, which also includes 24 preludes and 24 fugues.

These compositions, which were started in 2016 while Westendorf was in Weimar, Germany on a "Bach pilgrimage," and completed in 2019, travel through varied terrain, unified by frequent, expected and almost predictable textural and melodic changes. The music comments on an array of sounds, places, memories, and events, including bird song, church bell chimes, cows in the countryside, cricket sounds, "Magical Creatures in the Woods" and "The Deep Forest" (subtitles), effects of human illness, and tributes to departed friends, with the final piece responding to the tragedy of Chernobyl. The work, dedicated to those who died during the COVID-19 pandemic, has the copyright date of 2024, revealing that the entire project took some eight years to complete.

Accompanying the compositions is her 29-page commentary, including a brief history of her compositional process and a short glossary of contrapuntal/fugal terms. Her largely pedagogical analyses of each of the 48 pieces, punctuated by details of how and where they were composed, attempt to cajole pianists into embracing the work. Most significantly, Westendorf's clean, nuanced, superb recordings of these 48 pieces, each from four to five minutes long, result in a three-hour magnum opus from start to finish.

The music, intended for advanced-level music students or professional pianists, travels by circle of fifths through all major and minor keys. The pieces are imminently pianistic; musical patterns fall readily into playable formats consisting of neo-classical harmonic, accompanimental, and textural shapes. Octave textures frequently occur, as well as quartal, tritonal, open fifth, and major/minor chords. Various dissonances result from seconds and sevenths, as frequently found in contemporary classical music. Repeated note-figures, modified Alberti bass patterns, single-note or octave-doubled melodies, con-rhythmic chordal textures, and instances of canonic or imitative work abound throughout. However, the music often seems to be composed more from a kind of stream-of-conscious sensibility than from classical procedures of either prelude or fugue.

Among the 48 pieces, her preludes, at times containing whimsical, texturally unified, playful, pensive, mystical, or haunting qualities, generally seem more idiomatic to the form than do her fugues. Afterall, a prelude is usually an open-ended, free-style type of composition, often developing a single idea or melodic theme, usually held together by a common texture. Templates created by the likes of J.S. Bach, Frederick Chopin, Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Dimitri Shostakovich, George Gershwin, Francis Poulenc, and many others continue to shape our musical thinking today.

Westendorf's fugues are certainly more rhapsodic than "fugal," though at times they contain taut, driven, playful, compelling subjects, and certain instances of canonic imitation. The highly disciplined, contrapuntal, imitative characteristic of classical fugues is basically eschewed within these pieces whose predominant textures are homophonic rather than contrapuntal, displaying a kind of uniformity of textural changes, as mentioned above, in which musical gestures change continuously within a single piece. Possibly this trait stems from how she composes music for documentary film where music constantly changes to match action or moods on screen. Thus, it could possibly be more accurate to call these pieces *rhapsodies* or *fantasies* than *fugues*. At times her commentary suggests that a fugal subject recurs or reappears at a certain place, though it appears as melody within a chordal, non-contrapuntal texture. One gets the feeling, on listening, that the composer sat down, allowing her hands and fingers to find patterns that made sense pianistically but often seem to meander into a series of homophonic, con-rhythmic and non-fugal regions.

This project, which may well serve as the apex of Westendorf's career, was created in tribute to J. S. Bach and his famous Well-tempered Clavier, which also includes 24 preludes and 24 fugues.

— CAROL ANN WEAVER

While intriguing moments exist within this three-hour opus, only a few representative pieces can be featured here. One of her more intriguing pieces is "Prelude No. 1 in C Major," which she wrote "after [her] first day of bicycling in Germany during [her] Bach pilgrimage."[1] The piece consists of crisp left-hand, two-note repeated patterns above which a melody emerges with unexpected, tasteful harmonic changes and syncopations. However, the paired "Fugue No. 1 in C Major," begins with alluring octave and grace note figures which only become fugal briefly and well into the piece, as other kinds of busy scalar and chordal textures overtake the sense of fugal intrigue.

A rather intriguing pairing of prelude and fugue is the "No. 8 A Minor" set, which starts with a spare, quirky, solo left-hand pattern in the prelude, going elsewhere as the prelude enfolds. The "Fugue No. 8 in A Minor" begins as one of the more dense, chromatic, and compelling pieces in the work, though it "fades away" (as the score indicates) without continuing to pursue its acrobatic and probing beginning.

The "No. 9 in E Major" prelude/fugue pair contains a pleasing, sustained, slow, and attractively short prelude, which is paired with an upbeat, gigue-like, two-voice, lilting fugue in 6/8, which returns to the opening character after travelling through varied and less dance-like regions.

Other note-worthy moments occur within "Prelude No. 17 in A-flat Major," which begins with a minimalistic, tasteful start-and-stop manner, before resuming her typically varied, thicker textures. "Prelude No. 18 in G# Minor" begins in a mystically spacey mode which returns at the end, and "Prelude No. 19 in Eb Major" is possibly the finest, most consistent piece in the entire work, with minimalistic repeated notes and interspersions of enticing bits of melody.

Particularly arresting is "Prelude No. 22 in B-flat Minor" with slow, dark qualities, written as a tribute to an Austrian friend, and containing brief references to the German folk tune, "Du, Du liegst mir in Herzen" ("You, you lie in my Heart"). The following "Fugue No. 22 in Bb Minor" is more closely tied to its preceding prelude than any of the other paired pieces in this entire opus. She refers to the fugue as "Egon's Journey," with the music reflecting the sadness of her friend's passing. The somber fugal beginning to this piece segues into varied textures, though the fugal entries recur close to the end. Notably, the final piece in this extended work, "Fugue No. 24 in F Minor," written with Chernobyl in mind, ends with a sustained, pianissimo tone cluster which is slowly repeated four times as it moves into virtual silence.

While Westendorf departs from truly classical formats of both prelude and particularly fugue, she finds resonance in alluding to these formats in order to express her travelled and imagined terrains, as well as her mindscapes, whimsies, passions, pains, and joys.

This work is available in hard copy or via download, with the recordings available on conventional CD, or MP3, Flac, and electronic other formats, all of which can be ordered here: https://lynettewestendorf.bandcamp.com/album/preludes-fugues-for-the-modern-pianist.[2]

Carol Ann Weaver is an American/Canadian composer/pianist and writer whose genre-bending music is heard internationally, and on nine CDs. With a Doctorate from Indiana University in composition, theory, and piano, she is Music Professor Emerita at University of Waterloo, Canada, Vice Chair of Canadian Association for Sound Ecology (CASE), http://www.soundecology.ca, and recent Chair of Association of Canadian Women Composers (ACWC), http://www.acwc.ca. She has written for and co-edited books about music, culture, and the environment. www.carolannweaver.com

1 Unless otherwise indicated, all quoted material is derived from her own commentary, described above as part of the larger work.

2 Westendorf's main website https://www.lynettewestendorf.com/aboutlynette contains biographical info and composition lists while her personal website http://lwmusic.com/ includes both an art gallery and a quilt gallery showing her colourful visual art works and imaginative quilt-making. Both sites refer to her avid outdoor activities and her rock collecting.

Kaleidoscope: Contemporary Piano Music by Female Composers from Around the World

Isabel Dobarro: *Kaleidoscope: Contemporary Piano Music by Female Composers from Around the World*

JOHN MICHAEL COOPER

Pianist Isabel Dobarro released the album *Kaleidoscope: Contemporary Piano Music by Female Composers from Around the World* (Grand Piano GP944). Dobarro, who in 2016 joined with mezzo-soprano Anna Tonna to found the Women in Music Project, which is devoted to promoting music composed by women from around the world, programmed this album as a stylistically eclectic anthology of works by Dobrinka Tabakova, Gabriela Ortiz, Nkeiru Okoye, Suad Bushnaq, Yoko Kanno, Tania León, Carolyn Morris, Karen Tanaka, Claudia Montero, Julia Wolfe, Caroline Shaw, and Carme Rodríguez. This is the world-premiere recording of the final work on the album titled *Alalá das paisaxes verticais*, meaning "Beyond Vertical Landscapes." This work by Rodríguez is dedicated to Dobarro and written as, in her words, "a thrillingly evocative musical portrait of my home region of Galicia in northwestern Spain, where tradition and contemporary meet as compellingly as they do amid the tracks of this album." The works were all written between 2000 (Julia Wolfe's glistening and hypnotic *Earring*) and 2022 (Nkeiru Okoye's "Dusk," from her

African Sketches), and their expansive stylistic range fully justifies the choice of *Kaleidoscope* as the title of this album. The 22-page booklet includes biographical notes on the composers (these mostly taken from their websites), as well as a note on the music by Grammy-awarded composer, producer, and ethnomusicologist Manuel Garcia-Orozco (Boston Conservatory at Berklee), a Foreword by musicologist Patricia Kleinman, founder and director of the initiative Proyecto CompositorAs, and concluding reflections by Dobarro herself.

There is much to say about this remarkable album – more than space allows for here. I personally am dazzled not only by the album's stylistic breadth, which ranges from understated intimacy to explosive virtuosity and reflects cultural influences from all over the world, but also by Dobarro's marvelous technique and sensitivity to the timbral potentials of the piano as an instrument that gives expressive voice to these diverse cultural influences. Most significant, though, is the album's larger contribution to the musical landscape of the early twenty-first century. As Kleinman explains: "*Kaleidoscope* rises to the challenge [of engaging new audiences, encompassing a spectrum of generations and social backgrounds] by extending an invitation to prospective audiences who may feel excluded by a musical program that too narrowly represents gender, geography, culture, and history… [contributing] to the cultivation and dissemination of professional role models and icons for new generations of women composers, especially (although not only) from countries that have traditionally been left out of the classical Western canon." For these reasons, the album, together with other initiatives that center on Women's musical contributions, will take "a fundamental step toward both gender equity and the enrichment of contemporary music."

Let us hope that Dobarro and her team will provide us with a *Kaleidoscope II* sooner rather than later.

John Michael Cooper (Professor of Music, Southwestern University) is the editor of thirty-five scholarly editions of previously unpublished works by Margaret Bonds and 140 scholarly editions of music (most of it previously unpublished) by Florence Price. His book *Margaret Bonds: "The Montgomery Variations" and Du Bois "Credo"* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2023, and his book-length biography of Bonds was published by Oxford University Press in March 2025. He is the author of seven other books and numerous other editions, articles, and book chapters about music.

Untangled

Nicole Murphy: *Untangled*

KYLIE STULTZ-DESSENT

Nicole Murphy's *Untangled* EP offers a striking addition to modern chamber repertoire, showcasing the composer's distinctive musical voice. Across the recording, Murphy explores musical texture, timbre, and rhythmic nuance with sophistication, shaping a compositional language that is both welcoming and intricately crafted.

The first track on the album, "Exchange," is a rhythmically driving piece for clarinet and piano, characterized by its cheerful, exuberant spirit. A descending two-note motive moves through the various registers of the clarinet and provides interplay between the clarinet and piano. The buoyant style of the composition is perfectly captured by clarinetist Dayna Johnston and pianist Anthony Chen. Contrasting the effervescent character of "Exchange" is the first movement of Murphy's work for two guitars titled "Isa." A serene and mellow first movement — which feels almost improvisatory in nature — is juxtaposed with a rhythmically charged second movement, performed brilliantly by guitarists Andrew Blanch and Vladimir Gorbach.

"Untangled," a sextet for flute, clarinet, vibraphone, piano, violin, and cello, was inspired by Lorrie Moore's text portraying a dreamscape of hidden rooms and restless movement that unfolds to stillness. The opening of the work is texturally sparse. A pulsing quarter note in the piano creates the effect of ticking time, evoking a quiet urgency in the music. Gradually the texture thickens as the cello and violin emerge with long, lyrical lines. Around the two-and-a-half-minute mark, the woodwinds make a vibrant entrance in a flourish of moving notes, adding new energy to the soundscape. The lines of the various instruments ebb and flow in and out of the texture, occasionally accompanied by repeated quarter notes in the piano and vibraphone. After a series of long notes, the music fades to a shimmering piano line to end the piece. This tranquil work is performed with great sensitivity by the musicians, who beautifully capture its dreamlike quality.

Closing the EP is Murphy's quintet for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, titled "Surfacing." The title, echoing a novel's imagery of "surfacing" as a blend of dreaming and drowning, captures the dual-emotional nature of the work. The glimmering texture at the start is characterized by a twinkling piano line and animated, articulated notes in the clarinet

and flute. As the music unfolds, it gives way to an extensive cello solo at the center of the work, almost resembling a recitative in its expressive freedom. Throughout the piece, pairs of instruments — strings and woodwinds — engage in a vivid musical dialogue, reacting to each other's gestures. "Surfacing" moves between contrasting moments: passages of joyful, active rhythms that give way to stretches of stillness, marked by long, held notes.

Overall, *Untangled* showcases Nicole Murphy's exceptional ability to craft chamber music that is both emotionally resonant and structurally refined. Throughout each piece, Murphy demonstrates a keen sensitivity to instrumental timbre and texture, creating a unique soundscape for listeners.

Clarinetist Kylie Stultz-Dessent is a versatile artist with a varied career as an educator, soloist, chamber musician, and orchestral performer. She serves as Assistant Professor of Music at Purdue University Fort Wayne. Kylie has performed at numerous prestigious conferences and festivals, such as the Festival of the Sound in Parry Sound, Canada, the College Music Society National Conference, ClarinetFest, and the American Single Reed Summit. As a sought-after pedagogue and educator, Dr. Stultz has presented sessions at the Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic and the Texas Music Educators Association Convention. In 2014 she co-founded the Indiana Clarinet Experience (ICE), a week-long clarinet institute that she directs on the Purdue Fort Wayne School of Music campus each June. She serves on faculty for the Indiana University Summer Music Clinic, is a member of the International Clarinet Association's Pedagogy Committee, and serves as an audio reviewer for The Clarinet Journal. Kylie is a Selmer Performing Artist and holds degrees from Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music (BM and DM) and the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music (MM).

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What Did the Blackbird Say to the Crow

Rhiannon Giddens New Album Release, Tour, PBS Show, and Book Collaboration

Rhiannon Giddens and Justin Robinson's collaborative new album *What Did the Blackbird Say to the Crow,* is out on Nonesuch Records. The eighteen-track collection draws directly from the Black string band tradition of North Carolina, where both artists were raised and musically shaped–and eventually became two-thirds of the Carolina Chocolate Drops (alongside Dom Flemons). A new video for the album track "Rain Crow" is also out and you can watch that and seven other performance videos from the album *here*.

Produced by Giddens and Joseph "joebass" DeJarnette, the album features Giddens on banjo and Robinson on fiddle, with the duo playing eighteen of their favorite North Carolina tunes: a mix of instrumentals and tunes with words. Many were learned from their late mentor, the legendary North Carolina Piedmont musician Joe Thompson; one is from another musical hero, the late Etta Baker, from whom they also learned by listening to recordings of her playing. Some tunes were learned from Evelyn Shaw of Harnett County, who learned from her father Lauchlin Shaw. Giddens and Robinson recorded outdoors at Thompson's and Baker's North Carolina homes, as well as the former plantation, Mill Prong. They were accompanied by the sounds of nature, including a roaring chorus of cicadas, creating a unique soundscape.

"'Come to our porch, sit down, have some tea, and we're just going to play some tunes,'" says Giddens. "We wanted to record that feeling."

"Rain Crow" is what Giddens calls "a great example of a tune that is exactly the sound of Piedmont fiddle and banjo music. Time and place snaps together and the very soil under our feet understands what the blackbird said to the crow."

Giddens recently announced new dates on her Rhiannon Giddens & The Old-Time Revue tour.

Giddens's PBS show *My Music with Rhiannon Giddens* is back for a third season, this time in Ireland with musicians who live there. Episodes will be posted online weekly on Thursdays starting May 1 in the US (on PBS.org) and on Fridays starting May 2 in Canada, the UK, and Australia / New Zealand (on Prime).

Rhiannon Giddens has also collaborated with banjo scholar Kristina R. Gaddy and University of North Carolina Press on a new book of Black music from the 1600s to 1800s called *Go Back and Fetch It: Recovering Early Black Music in the Americas for Fiddle and Banjo*. *Go Back and Fetch It* explains the significance of early Black Atlantic music and how the patterns of tunings, melodic lines, and lyrics shed light on the impact that Black American music has had on nineteenth-century popular music, early country, old time, and bluegrass. Each tune pairs with an engaging essay on its historical background and how the tune transformed over time, as well as information about the collector. Deeply researched and carefully approached, this essential source restores the roots of Black music to the musical canon.

MEMBERS' NEWS

News items are listed alphabetically by member's name and include recent and forthcoming activities. Submissions are always welcome concerning appointments, honors, commissions, premieres, performances, and other items. The column does not include radio broadcasts; see Linda Rimel's weekly "Broadcast Updates." Awards and recent publications and recordings are listed in separate columns. We recommend that you begin with the most significant news first and follow that with an organized presentation of the other information. Due to space limitations, information such as lengthy descriptions, lists of performers, long websites, and reviews may sometimes be edited. Send Members' News submissions to journal@IAWM.org with Members' News in the subject.

Roberta Mantell

Judith Markovich

Submissions are always welcome concerning appointments, honors, commissions, premieres, performances, and other items. Deadlines are November 30, February 28, May 30, and August 30.

—DR. AMY ZIGLER
MEMBERS' NEWS EDITOR

New IAWM member **Roberta Mantell** released her novel, *Angels' Blood: Murder in the Chorus* on April 24 through Indies United Publishing House. The novel features a forgotten 19th century female composer (fictional) who is rediscovered in the 21st century. However, she is soon vilified as a plagiarist when her famous rumored lover is considered the true composer of the 1899 Requiem bearing her signature. Moreover, an arts reporter is investigating the composer's possible posthumous link to two recent murders in a prestigious New York chorus. http://www.robertamantell.com

American composer **Judith Markovich** was one of 60 composers out of 840 to be represented at the 2022 International Composers Festival in Sussex, UK. She took her first composition lesson at 65 and her work has since been premiered, recorded, and/or broadcast in the U.S., Canada, Argentina, Paris, Belgium. In March, harpist Rachel Talitman and violist Pierre-Henri Xuereb of the Paris Conservatory released "When Words Fail" on an album of all world premieres called *Viola and Harp Recital: Women Composers*. Markovich's latest commission, *Oh, my son…*, was composed as a prophetic siren blast. Based a poem by David Stern about the loss of his son, this intense, programmatic work breaks the silence surrounding the hidden epidemic of suicide and need for increased efforts toward prevention. Renowned clarinetist Franklin Cohen, his family, and tenor/narrator Dominic Armstrong will perform the world premiere of this tribute this summer at ChamberFest Cleveland on June 20, and at a later date, esteemed clarinetist Charles Neidich on NYC's WA Concert Series. A fierce advocate for women musicians, Markovich continues to empower musicians through her non-profit for the arts and the newly established P.U.R.E. Music program for songwriters.

West Coast Brazilian Jazz Collective

Kerry Politzer was awarded a RACC grant for her all-woman West Coast Brazilian Jazz Collective project. This grant brings acclaimed flautist and Brazilian music expert Rebecca Kleinmann, percussionist-educator Ami Molinelli, and bassist Tomoko Funaki to Portland for a series of workshops and concerts.

Deon Nielsen Price

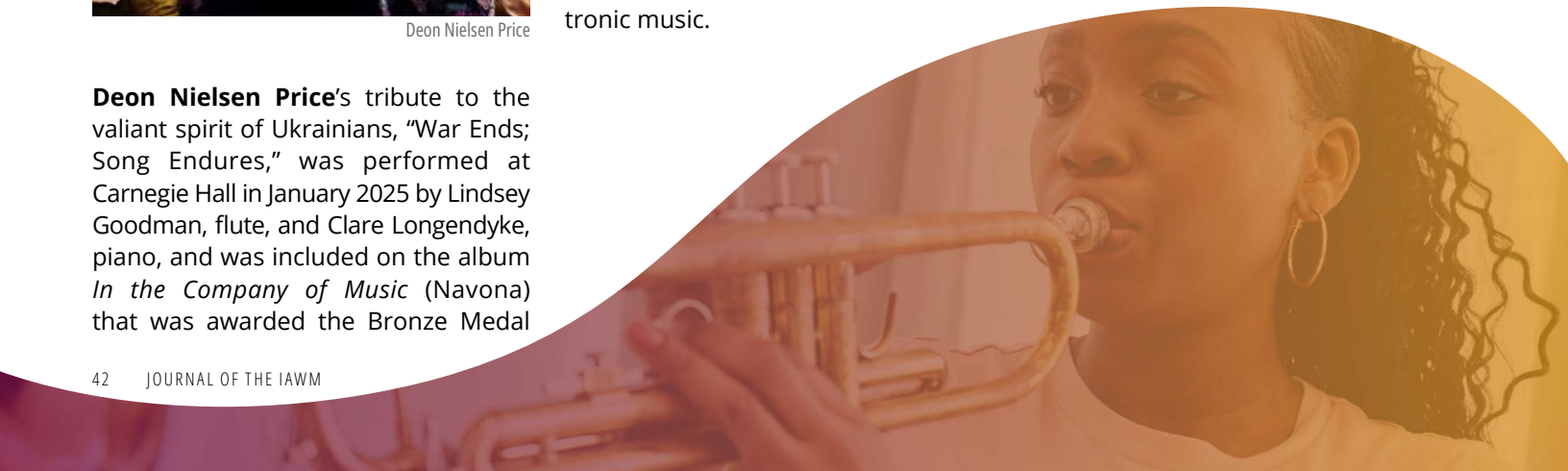
Deon Nielsen Price's tribute to the valiant spirit of Ukrainians, "War Ends; Song Endures," was performed at Carnegie Hall in January 2025 by Lindsey Goodman, flute, and Clare Longendyke, piano, and was included on the album *In the Company of Music* (Navona) that was awarded the Bronze Medal in the 2024 Global Music Awards. Further north during the same week "Becoming Screenland" was premiered in Scarborough, Toronto, Canada by the Odin Quartet with Kaye Royer, clarinet. Also in January 2025, on the other side of the continent, her *Behind Barbed Wire*, song cycle *To the Children of War* on poetry by Maya Angelou, as well as, the premiere of *Kizuna* (empathy, bond) were performed at the Clark Center for Performing Arts in Arroyo Grande, CA by the Opera San Luis Obispo Grand Orchestra with soloists, countertenor Darryl Taylor, saxophonist Chika Inoue, and pianists Mary Au and Deon Nielsen Price, on the multi-media commemoration: *Behind Barbed Wire: A Glimpse at Central Coast Japanese-American Life in World War II*.

Anna Rubin

Anna Rubin released on May 15 a double-CD entitled *Powehi*, featuring both acoustic instrumental and electronic music.

Rain Worthington

Pianist Amy Wurtz featured **Rain Worthington**'s piece *"Always Almost"* for Day 12 of her month-long "Women's History Month" YouTube series. Amy also included "Always Almost" in her final concert at the Epiphany Center Arts in Chicago to wrap up the Women's History Month 2025 project. (Supported in part by a New York Women Composers Seed Money Grant.) Pianist Ana Cervantes performed Rain's piece *"Hourglass"* at multiple concerts in Mexico during the month of March. Pianist Marcia Eckhardt and violinist Lynn Bechtold perform the NY premiere of Rain's work *"Balancing on the Edge of Shadows"* in May. (This work was originally commissioned and recorded by NY Phil violinist Audrey Wright, with pianist Yundu Wang for her PARMA Recordings album "Things in Pairs.")



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