

WOMAN AS A CREATIVE FORCE IN MUSIC

What She Has Accomplished as a Composer Despite the Heritage of Centuries of Restriction—Limited Opportunities for Applying the Results of Her Training and Discipline in Musical Art

By AMELIA von ENDE

SINCE the right of woman to unrestricted intellectual development is no longer as categorically denied as it was some time ago, discussion of the ability of woman as a creative factor in music has become superfluous. Only the future can give a final answer to the question whether woman has the faculty to create original works of music that can stand comparison with the works of any composer regardless of sex.

When woman will have enjoyed for several generations the same intellectual training and the privilege to express herself musically as unrestrictedly as man, then only will it be possible to say whether her creative musical gift is equal to that of man or not. A review of woman's creative ability in music today is, therefore, limited to a historical record of what she has so far accomplished in that line. Of course, such a record suggests psychological and economic conclusions. But the main point is to determine what women have so far done and under what circumstances it has been accomplished.

Heritage of Restriction

In the first place it must be emphasized that the interval which separates the modern woman with her widened horizon, her many interests and her greater professional chances from her female forebears is too small to have enabled her to outgrow the heritage of centuries of restriction. The number of women who have mastered the indispensable theoretical fundamentals of music is still very small. In the majority of women there still survives something of the spirit of their great-grandmothers who looked upon all artistic pursuits as mere accomplishments or, if they were of a practical turn of mind, as investments in the social or matrimonial market.

Music, as the very phrase playing an instrument implies, was to them a sort of pastime. Approaching the study of any art in that spirit is not likely to foster that thorough knowledge and serious devotion and that objective attitude which delves into science and art for their own sake. Only when such seriousness is coupled with a strong creative impulse will the germ of an artistic idea dormant in the brain be quickened into life and, provided other circumstances are favorable, burst into a splendid song, a noble poem or a beautiful picture.

People in general lack a sufficiently clear conception of the nature of the creative process in music to be conscious of its difficulties. They imagine the composer a sort of phonograph recording the sounds that vibrate in his inner ear when the moment of inspiration comes, the divine inflatus. They do not know that making visible by writing a motive that haunts the mind is but a primary step in the creative process. That the linking of motive to motive, theme to theme and the working out of the harmonic structure which gives body to the whole, demands not only creative or inventive power, but a constructive ability as well, and an intellectual discipline men have always enjoyed, while women have only begun to claim it and to receive it, is little heeded by the average audience or by the critic framing hasty conclusions about woman's inferiority in music.

That the majority of women studying music to-day lacks this discipline cannot be denied. But next to the lack of discipline comes the lack of proper environment and atmosphere. The creative process in every art is an intellectual childbirth. The biographies of great composers have acquainted us with the fact how much their work depended upon proper environment and congenial atmosphere. We are told that a minute speck of color on a canvas, if not in harmony with it, kills its vibratory quality. There is little doubt that the human soul



Figures of Distinction in Woman's Creative Musical World: (1) Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, American; (2) Cécile Chaminade, French; (3) Clara Schumann, German; (4) Augusta Holmès, French; (5) Anna Teichmüller, German

is fully as delicate and sensitive to a discord as a piece of canvas, and if the soul of a creative artist can be cut to the quick by a note of antagonism, it is reasonable to suppose that the soul of a woman engaged in creative work in any of the arts is no less susceptible to discordant impressions and influences.

Though woman's opportunities for acquiring a musical education to-day are the same as those of man, the opportunities for applying the results of their theoretical studies in creative work are very rarely the same. When their music study is not conventionalized into a mere attribute of a lovely womanhood, it becomes commercialized into a marketable commodity for the emergency of spinsterhood. Nor must it be forgotten that a man rarely attempts to do two or three kinds of work at the same time. He devotes years to study for his profession and when he sets out to practice it, it is understood that he belongs to his work and in a measure to the world that enjoys his work.

Not so woman. Woman as homemaker has a variety of duties thrust upon her that complicate her life as an artist. Even the woman of means and leisure who is not forced to commercialize her musical gift, as a means of earning her livelihood, is unable to devote herself to its unrestricted development. To reconcile the duties of an artist with those of a wife or mother is a problem that has caused many an unwritten tragedy.

Rubinstein's Opinion of Women Composers

When Rubinstein in his old age, soured by unfortunate experiences that clouded his outlook upon life, wrote the little book on "Music and Musicians," he, too, said some bitter things about woman. He found that women composers lack depth, concentration, thinking power, largeness of emotional horizon and freedom of line, and he dwelt with evident satisfaction upon the fact that women have not even composed what by their very nature they should have been prompted to do: a love duo and a cradle-song typical of their kind.

One might retort with the question, what composer has given us the sonata, the opera typical of their kind, and many a learned musician or critic might be embarrassed by that question.

But let me give a concrete example from a woman composer's life to suggest why she does not give us the love duo or the cradle-song typical of their kind. Supposing she has reached that momentous period when her maternal tenderness experiences a climax and her soul vibrates with the most exquisite lullaby. Is it not likely that the insistent little voice coming from the cradle will silence the still inner voice that sings this lullaby before it has been preserved in writing? The essential obstacle to a woman's creative activity in music, now that educational opportunities are no longer denied her, seems rather the lack of per-



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spective due to her domestic environment, unless she chooses celibacy.

The wonder is not that women have accomplished so little in that line of work, but that they have been able to accomplish anything at all under circumstances most harrowing to the man or woman with the creative gift. For music, far more than any other art, is imperiously exacting and does not suffer us to worship other gods beside her. Yet these are adventitious circumstances, not inherent conditions, and they seem to explain far more clearly and convincingly than physiological and psychological hypotheses why women "lack depth, concentration, thinking power, largeness of emotional horizon, freedom of line, etc."

Where Are the Great Women Art Creators?

A question repeated until it has become very tiresome to hear is frequently employed as an argument whenever woman's ambitions and accomplishments in letters, art or music are touched upon. It is the question: "Where is the Shakespeare among women poets, the Raphael among women painters, the Beethoven among women musicians?" In the light of history, statistics and common sense such questions sound like so many jokes, for the number of women creatively active in any of the arts is still disproportionately small compared with that of men. One might with more justice exclaim: "See, so many poets trod the earth and yet there is but one Shakespeare! So many painters, and but one Raphael! So many musicians, and but one Beethoven! What have been done with their gifts and their opportunities?"

But such arguments are as undignified as they are unprofitable. It is far more instructive to glance at the historical records and to learn what women have attempted and what they have accomplished as composers, handicapped as they were and still are. In those records can be read the whole history of woman in music. The sixteenth century gives only four names, three Italians and one French woman, who composed madrigals and sacred music. In the next century the number is doubled, for when the boys that sang the female parts in the earliest operas were replaced by women, the opportunity which opened before women as vocal interpreters and performers stimulated their ambition and increased the number of women that took up the serious study of composition. Of those eight women composers of the seventeenth century five were Italians, two French and one German. Among the Italian women was Francesca Caccini, who had an opera performed in 1620; among the French was Mme. de la Guerre, the author of an opera performed in 1694, and the one German composer was Anna Margarete Meistertin, who enjoyed a great reputation for her chorals. The great outburst of song from the throats of women in the eighteenth century was accompanied by a corresponding rise of the creative impulse. Of the thirty-three composers of Italy, France, Germany, England and Holland recorded in that century, at least half a dozen acquired such prominence that their fame survived two centuries.

The voice and the violin reigned supreme on the concert platform of that time. Maddalena di Sirmen, a pupil of Tartini and rival of Nardini, was herself a remarkable violinist, a singer and a composer for the violin highly esteemed by her contemporaries. Lucile Grétry, the daughter of the French composer of that name, had written two operas, one of which could not have been entirely devoid of merit, since it found favor with Germany's severe critics and was performed in that country, when death prematurely called her away at the age of fifteen. Sophie Haessler, the wife and pupil of Johann Wilhelm Haessler, one of Germany's most famous musicians of that period, was a composer for the piano