

A Composer's View

James R. Briscoe.

Historical Anthology of Music by Women.

Bloomington and Indianapolis:
Indiana University Press, 1987.
402 pp. \$29.95.

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Since the early 1970s women composers have banded together in organizations (American Women Composers, International League of Women Composers, Congress on Women in Music) and at festivals (including Opus 1 and 2 at the University of Michigan and the Women's Music Festivals in Boston and New York) to hear music of their peers, share ideas, and encourage each other to continue working despite the continuing unfavorable odds.

A curious fact has emerged from these gatherings: there is a staggering amount of interesting, entertaining, moving, and historically significant music by women that has yet to appear in music textbooks and history courses.

A recent survey by Diane Jezic and Daniel Binder reveals that only one of forty-seven music history textbooks includes an example of a woman's work, and about one quarter do not even mention a woman composer.¹ Similarly, of fourteen music appreciation texts published since 1979, just one has an example of music by a woman and fully half cite no woman composer or only one; furthermore, many women who composed are mentioned only as performers (Clara Schumann) or teachers (Nadia Boulanger). Not even female authorship of the textbook ensures the inclusion of women composers: Edith Boroff discusses just one in *The Music of the Baroque* and Eileen Southern only three in *The Music of Black Americans* (though Boroff includes more women in a new edition, scheduled for publication this year). Jezic and Binder also note that

there seemed to be more interest in the work of women composers a few decades ago than recently: Gustave Reese found two worth a mention in his *Music in the Middle Ages* (1940), as did Manfred Bukofzer in *Music in the Baroque Era* (1947), yet Richard Hoppin's *Medieval Music* (1978) and Claude Palisca's *Baroque Music* (2nd ed. 1981) contain no references at all to women composers.

Women have been virtually excluded from anthologies as well. In *Anthologies of Music: An Annotated Index*, Murray Sterling found that 99.8% of the works were by men and 0.2% by women.²

The problem here is serious. It's one thing for the literary world to argue about what belongs in the canon of masterpieces to be taught in survey courses for budding writers, critics, and future professors of survey courses. Women writers, even if their accomplishments are slighted, still receive a fair amount of recognition. It's quite another to be working in a field where the very existence of a body of works by women is barely acknowledged. It helps to have Arsis Press and ClarNan Editions publishing women's compositions and Leonarda Records recording them, but the survival of these ventures is not guaranteed.

Given this context, James Briscoe's *Historical Anthology of Music by Women* is an important book. It provides a preliminary overview of women's accomplishments as composers and challenges the stereotype of women as miniaturists, writing mainly songs or piano studies. This satisfyingly fat and durably bound volume contains fifty-one compositions by thirty-five composers writing over twelve centuries, beginning with Byzantine chant and ending with a symphony from the 1980s. Roughly half the works were written before 1900. Of particular interest are the first and first modern editions of four works: a sinfonia by Maria Margherita Grimani (1713), a cantata by Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre (1715), the second of nine piano preludes by Ruth Crawford Seeger (1924), and a choral work (*La*

Corona) by Louise Talma (1955).

Also noteworthy are several of the introductory essays: Vivian Fine's on her ballet *Alceste*, and those by biographers (Nancy Reich on Clara Schumann, for example) or authors of books on the composer's music (Adrian Thomas on Grazyna Bacewicz). Although the essays vary in length and content, most provide historical context, pertinent biographical information, some musical analysis, translations of texts, and usually a brief bibliography and discography—valuable information for student and specialist alike.

The scores themselves are, of course, the main point. Wide-ranging in period and medium, the music speaks eloquently for itself, and although one might lament the absence of a particular composer (such as the seventeenth-century Venetian Barbara Strozzi) or favorite piece (Rebecca Clarke's stirring viola sonata), there is a wide variety of chamber, orchestral, and choral music.

Inevitably, many pieces are movements from longer works. Thus the baroque examples include excerpts from Francesca Caccini's opera of 1625, *La liberazione di Ruggiero*, Isabella Leonarda's Mass of 1696, and Maria Margherita Grimani's oratorio *Pallade e Marte* of 1713. On the other hand, Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre's cantata *Semele*, twenty-one pages long, is presented in its entirety, as is Grazyna Bacewicz's equally long second piano sonata. As one might expect, the more important composers are represented by two or three examples: Hildegard von Bingen by a sequence, antiphon, and Kyrie; Amy Beach by a song, piano piece, and symphony movement; and Ruth Crawford Seeger by a piano prelude, orchestral song, and two movements from her string quartet.

This pioneering anthology might be integrated into survey and analysis courses in numerous ways. A study of ornamentation could be enriched by Francesca Caccini's two vocal works—both with her own embellishments fully notated, as well as by la Guerre's harpsichord suite, which begins with

the elaborately decorated *La Flamande* followed by its even more virtuosic *double*. One might compare variation technique in a 1707 chaconne by la Guerre with other works of the period or with Clara Schumann's *Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann*, completed in 1854. One might also contrast the handling of sonata form by Clara Schumann, Louise Farrenc, and Rebecca Clarke in the first movements of their piano trios, or the operatic writing of Caccini, Ethel Smyth, and Thea Musgrave. Any of the continuo parts could serve as the basis of new figured bass realizations.

There are some disappointments. A

minor one is that for the most part the music has been reprinted from other editions, resulting in a mixture of editorial styles. The printing is occasionally so light that note stems and staff lines fade. Also, longer works are often printed lengthwise, so that one must turn the book on end to read them. It's frustrating to try to read Clara Schumann's piano trio at the keyboard—one attempts to turn pages with the book propped while suffering from eyestrain because the print is so faint. Fortunately, the keyboard pieces are printed conventionally.

A related problem is the inclusion of hand-copied scores. While it is re-

warding to study the autographs of contemporary composers, it is not always possible to tell which manuscripts fall into this category. The handcopied transcriptions of earlier music present other difficulties. Recurrent symbols in a song by the Contessa of Dia lack any explanation. Many copyists fail to distinguish editorial additions. Some even notate the music incorrectly, placing augmentation dots below instead of above the line and putting slurs—which are too short—above instead of below a note at the bottom of the staff. In other inexperienced copies the notes are crowded or not rigorously aligned. Even printed works contain obvious mistakes. The madrigal by Maddalena Casulana, which is otherwise lovely to look at, transcribes the mezzo-soprano clef into bass clef—giving us a part that, except for two notes on the staff, is a mass of ledger lines. In the continuo realization of the first Caccini song, leading tones are often harmonized with a diminished triad, when a first inversion on the dominant seems called for.

Fortunately, most of the music is well edited and clearly reprinted from engraved originals. The exceptions simply underline the problem of finding women's music, especially early music, in good modern editions.

Now that we have such an excellent collection, there is no longer any excuse for excluding this splendid material from music courses. Briscoe's anthology helps bring women's music out of the archives and into the classroom, and thus should help to bring women's music into everyday American concert life as well.

Composer Elizabeth Vercoe has been active in the women's music movement as a board member of the International League of Women Composers and director of the Women's Music Festival/85 in Boston. Her monodrama on Joan of Arc, Herstory III, will be issued on compact disc this summer.

Notes

1. "A Survey of College Music Textbooks: Benign Neglect of Women Composers?" In *The Musical Woman: An International Perspective*, vol. II, ed. Judith Lang Zaimont (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), 445-69.

2. Detroit: Information Coordinators, Inc., 1987.

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ANDREAS RAUCH - *Musicalisches Stamm-buechlein* (1627). Budapest, 1983. \$19.50

FRANCESCO GASPARINI - *Il Bajazet*, drama per musica (reggio 1719). Hrsg. von Martin Ruhnke. Henle Verlag, 1981. \$119.50

ANTONIO IL VERSO - *Madrigali a Tre e a Cinque Voci*, con sei madrigali di Pomponio Nenna, Tiburtio Massaino, Ippolito Baccusi e Giovan Battista Bartoli. Olschki, 1978. \$39.00

FRANCESCO SOTO - *Il Quarto Libro delle Laudi a Tre et Quattro voci* (1591). Bologna, AMIS, 1971. \$27.00

MAURIZIO CAZZATI CORRENTI - *Balletti Galante a 3. e 4.* Bologna, AMIS, 1971. \$39.00

NICOLAUS ZIELENSKI - *Offertoria Totius Anni.* PWM, 1966. \$24.50

LAUTENBUCH DES IOANNES ARPINUS (Jan Arpin). Faksimileausgabe nach dem handschriftlichen Codex Ms. 115.3 der Ratsschulbibliothek Zwickau. Zentralantiquariat, 1983. \$56.00

HEINRICH SCHUETZ - *Italienische Madrigale il Primo Libro de Madrigali, Opus 1.* 18 madrigals for 5 voices and one double-choir madrigal for 8 voices, mixed choir a cappella ed. by S. Schmalzriedt. Haenssler Verlag, 1984. \$30.00

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