

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **THEIR OWN AGENDA: THE HISTORY,
DEVELOPMENT, AND CULTURE OF
WOMEN’S ORCHESTRAS OUTSIDE THE
UNITED STATES**

Bonnie Eve Alger, Doctor of Musical Arts,
2018

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Women have been active as performers of instrumental music since the Medieval period, and yet their contributions are often overlooked. This dissertation examines the history of women’s orchestras outside the United States, and explores their development, as well as reasons for existing. Several factors regarding their development are taken into consideration, including time period, country, and culture in which the ensemble is present. The birth of the women’s orchestra is traced from the *ospedali* of the 18th century Venice to today. All-female ensembles from England, Canada, Cuba, and Afghanistan are profiled, as well as the Women’s Orchestra in Auschwitz. Two modern-day women’s orchestras – the Allegra Chamber Orchestra in Vancouver, British Columbia, and my recital orchestra at the University of Maryland – were surveyed in an attempt to learn more about the culture of women’s orchestras. This paper seeks to answer the questions “What is the culture of women's orchestras

today, and should they continue to exist?"

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OF WOMEN'S ORCHESTRAS OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts
2018

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Foreword

During the second year of my doctoral program at the University of Maryland, I received links from friends and colleagues to two articles or videos about women's orchestras. One was of a teenage girl leading an all-women's orchestra in Afghanistan. Having lived in the Middle East myself, I found it incredible that a woman there would create an opportunity like this for others in her community, especially given the attitudes in that region of the world towards both women and Western music. The other news item was about a women's orchestra in Cuba. This was when I started wondering if women's orchestras are, or were, a viable type of ensemble, and if so, why? Maybe more importantly, why was this the first I was hearing about them?

A quick Internet search yielded some information on women's orchestras in the United States, but very little on women's orchestras internationally. It was at this point that I decided to explore this subject further, and learn as much as I could about the history, development, and culture of women's orchestras outside of the United States.

My research has entailed reaching back to the roots of women performing as instrumentalists, and tracing their development through the eighteenth century with the advent of the *ospedali* in Venice. From the nineteenth century onward I discovered a multitude of women's orchestras across the world, from Canada to England, all of which had been formed in order to create playing and employment opportunities. In the dark and devastating case of the Women's Orchestra of

Auschwitz, performing music meant living to see another day.

As I read about today's women's orchestras in the Middle East, Cuba, and Canada, I decided to put together my own women's orchestra for a recital. This orchestra and the Allegra Chamber Orchestra of Vancouver, British Columbia were both surveyed about their experiences in their respective all-female ensembles. Their insights are shared here.

Women wanting to support other women is a theme that serves as connective tissue throughout each one of these ensembles. It is my hope that this gathering and surveying of women's orchestral experiences from across the globe sheds some light on the challenges female musicians have faced, as well as rejoices in their shared goal of making music.

The document is in three parts. The first part outlines the history and development of women's orchestras, describing the Venetian *ospedali* as well as notable ensembles from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra and the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz. The second part discusses my recital project – forming a women's orchestra at the University of Maryland – and results from a survey distributed to members of that orchestra and the Allegra Chamber Orchestra in Vancouver, British Columbia. The final section reflects on the role of women's orchestras in contemporary society.

Acknowledgements

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the service of my dissertation committee: Olga Haldey, Edward Maclary, Stephanie Prichard, James Ross, and Janet Wagner. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Prichard for her assistance in helping me put together my survey materials, and to Dr. Maclary for getting me across the finish line.

Thank you to Rose Alon, Livia Amoruso, Rebecca Barnett, Morgan Daly, Samantha Flores, Daphine Henderson, Astrid Jensen, Camille Jones, Molly Jones, Tiffany Lu, Carolina Meurkens, Preetcharn Saund, Jessica Scheuckler, Ava Shadmani, and Erin Snedecor for volunteering to participate in my recital orchestra. Thank you to David Travis, who suggested I create my recital survey using Google Forms and to Michael Jacko, who transcribed the 2nd violin part to the Duval when the part was missing. Thank you, also, to Janna Sailor, who agreed to speak with me about her own women's orchestra, the Allegra Chamber Orchestra.

Thank you to Lauri Johnson, Mark Wakefield, and Emily Sheil, who have been pillars of strength in times of despair and founts of knowledge in times of confusion. Thank you to Eileen Zagone for her calming presence and sage advice. Thank you also to Haley, Kaitlin, Rafee, and Naomi, who have taught me so much about myself and how to navigate challenging situations.

My colleagues at UMD, members of the classical music and cycling communities (including the fabulous Team Flamingo!), and many other friends across the world have cheered me on every step of the way. Thank you to all those, near and far, who have offered encouragement and friendship.

Several professors from my alma maters have been instrumental not only in my completion of this project, but in my choice to become a conductor. I am grateful for their unwavering faith in me, their counsel and mentorship, and most of all, their friendship. Thank you, Rebecca Burkhardt, Andrew Mast, and Phillip Swan: “The best dissertation is a done dissertation.”

And, of course, a big thank you to my family for their continued support of my academic and professional endeavors over the past thirty-three years.

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Chapter 1: Playing to Live and Living to Play – Women’s Orchestras of the Past

The notion of women being discouraged from performing as instrumentalists is not new to orchestras. In the Medieval period Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), one of the earliest female composers we are aware of, was banned from performing her music. Her name survives, while many of her female colleagues remain unknown.¹ In von Bingen’s era, women were often cast in gendered roles, as were men, and both were criticized for overlapping with the other.² Men’s and women’s roles embodied gendered expectations, and going against these drew criticism.³ From a modern perspective, is there a “wrong” path when it comes to music performance? Why should the sex of a performer matter? Why should performance be restricted to some (in this case, men)?⁴

From the Middle Ages on, women had difficulty finding performance opportunities and employment as musicians. While they may not have sought employment for all the same reasons as today’s women, work outside of the home was valued, as it allowed for independence, education, and creativity. Some women were, in fact, allowed to perform for the courts or in

¹ Julie C. Dunbar, *Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 34.

² *Ibid.*, 41.

³ Dr. Lucy Green notes, “Music is a sexually neutral activity in terms of what is needed to achieve compositional goals. Gender, however, has been connected with aesthetic coding for centuries;” see *Music, Gender, Education*, 65-66.

⁴ It is important to denote the difference between *sex* and *gender*. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *sex* as “either of the two major forms of individuals that occur in many species and that are distinguished respectively as female or male especially on the basis of their reproductive organs and structures.” *Gender* is defined as “the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex.”

churches in some places, but their musical tasks were limited.⁵ The first instrumental ensembles without these limitations were comprised of the young women who were at first nuns, and later became members of the esteemed Venetian *ospedali*.

The Ospedali and Early English Orchestral Scene

The four conservatories of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the *Ospedale della Pietà, dei Mendicanti, degli Incurabili, and dei Derelitti* (also known as *l'Ospedaletto*). The conservatories served many otherwise underserved populations, including orphaned boys and girls. In Venice, girls who showed musical talent or inclination were educated, as music performed by children “proved useful to encourage the giving of alms.”⁶ Music had become a staple of all four institutions by the early seventeenth century, each having its own choir and orchestra. Italian composer Antonio Vivaldi and other famous musicians were employed as teachers, and audiences were treated to concerts of both instrumental and vocal music.⁷ It was within the walls of the *ospedali* that the concerto form came to life. Hundreds of concerti were composed for soloists, often women, accompanied by string orchestra and continuo, using almost every instrument of the period (except organ and harpsichord) in solo roles. The performances demonstrated that women could perform on any instrument, in which audience members and visitors took great delight.⁸

⁵ Dunbar, *Women, Music, Culture*, 68.

⁶ Barbara Garvey Jackson, “Musical Women of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in *Women & Music: A History*, 2nd edition, ed. Karin Pendle (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 112.

⁷ Carol Neuls-Bates notes that, in addition to Vivaldi, composers Johann Adolf Hasse and Giovanni Battista Pergolesi also served as *maestri di cappella* at the conservatories, where their compositions were frequently performed by the students; see *Women in Music*, 65-66.

⁸ Jackson, “Musical Women of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” 113.

These all-women's groups, comprised of those who were either self-proclaimed celibates or who were orphans under the care of the church, provided a temporary exception to the issue of women being deemed unfit for playing instruments. The women of the *ospedali* were unrestricted in the instruments they were able and allowed to play, and they performed publicly. The religious bubble of the convent provided a safe space in which to perform, though contemporary witnesses' observations of the group were indicative of the public's conservative attitudes towards women. French government official Charles de Brosses, who sojourned in Italy in 1739-40, remarked that the women and girls at the *ospedali* were able to

sing like angels, play the viola, flute, organ, oboe, cello, bassoon – in short, no instrument is large enough to frighten them... The performances are entirely their own, and each concert is composed of about forty young women. I swear that nothing is more charming than to see a young and pretty nun, dressed in white, a sprig of pomegranate blossom behind one ear, leading the orchestra and beating time with all the grace and precision imaginable.⁹

Audiences were comprised of music lovers from all over Europe. In Venice, the girls of the *ospedali* performed both orchestral music and oratorios for public audiences. Outside of the city in 1678, English charcoal merchant and concert promoter Thomas Britton was holding public concerts in his London loft, which included many women performers. In Paris, the *Concert Spirituel* series included both male and female musicians. Cities around Europe, including Edinburgh and Frankfurt, began featuring concert series which included female musicians.¹⁰

Students participated in the program for ten years, after which the most accomplished could remain at the conservatories as licensed *maestrae*. This gave the most talented women musicians an alternative to marriage: a career performing and teaching outside of the convent.

⁹ Neuls-Bates, *Women in Music*, 66.

¹⁰ Jackson, "Musical Women of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," 100.

Student status at the *ospedali*, however, was not without rules and restrictions. If a musician left the *ospedali* to marry, she had to agree to no longer perform in public in Venice.¹¹

For those who did not continue on as *maestrae*, another option was to remain in the *ospedali* as a member of the *coro* (ensemble) as a singer or instrumentalist. The eighteenth century *cori* ranged in size from thirty to seventy girls and young women. As late as 1807 the Pietà had “thirteen singers, six violinists, three violists, thirteen students of violin, six cellists, five organists, four horn-players, an apprentice vocal soloist, and a copyist.”¹²

By the eighteenth century, the women of the *ospedali* were giving full concerts, often in honor of distinguished visitors at state occasions. Violinists Maddalena Lombardini-Sirmen and Regina Strinasacchi, both of whom trained at the *ospedali* during this time, went on to notable music careers. Women who remained at the *ospedali*, however, lived a contained and restricted life, requiring permission to come and go. In response to this, Charles de Brosses commented that the women at *La Pietà* lived “cloistered like nuns.”¹³

By the mid-eighteenth century, music-making in the convents was reduced to only the necessities required for worship, rather than full orchestra, after which the *ospedali* underwent a slow decline due to a series of rigorous edicts. The *ospedali* finally went bankrupt and ceased operations towards the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁴ However, the fire had been lit for women orchestral musicians, and the start of a new movement in women’s instrumental performance was on the horizon.

¹¹ Ibid., 112-114.

¹² Ibid., 113.

¹³ Neuls-Bates, *Women in Music*, 65-66.

¹⁴ Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 65-66.

As women gained more independence leading into the nineteenth century, women musicians also gained attention, but were still not allowed to play in orchestras alongside men. Positions in most orchestras were reserved for men alone, a situation that prevailed until the 1910s in some of the top orchestras, with others continuing into the 1930s and beyond.¹⁵ Women did not appear as members of male orchestras until the late nineteenth century, and at first only if they were playing harp. Beyond the harp, women appeared on the orchestral stage only if they were professional soloists on either the violin or piano, or singers.¹⁶ Piano was considered the most suitable instrument for women to play, and most orchestras of this era did not include pianists. Historian and writer Paula Gillett states, “As the instrument most closely associated with the home, the piano was seen as the perfect companion for the homebound woman whose life of self-sacrifice, at once an expression of her familial duty and her essential nature, often produced pent-up emotions unsettling in their intensity.”¹⁷ The appropriateness of women on the concert stage was questioned for years.

The practice of music in the nineteenth century, like social and economic life, continued to be sharply divided by gender. The choice of musical instrument, as well as the ability to perform and respond to music, continued to be influenced by gendered connotations and rules. Non-musical questions, such as whether artistic expression was appropriate for women (who were expected to live restrained and unexpressive lives) and whether public performance was too

¹⁵ The Vienna Philharmonic did not accept female members as permanent orchestra members until 1997!; see *More Than Meets the Ear*, 125-126.

¹⁶ Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 66-67.

¹⁷ Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England, 1870-1914: Encroaching on All Man's Privileges* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 4-5.

much self-promotion for a woman expected to become a wife and mother, continued to present roadblocks in women's advancement towards becoming professional musicians.¹⁸

Determined to make careers for themselves, ambitious female musicians sought employment in music anyway. Women in England began to perform in small ensembles in the 1890s that provided entertainment in restaurants and department stores (and later, with the advent of silent films, in cinemas).¹⁹ Guildhall School of Music alumna and prominent musician Rosabel Watson was concerned, however, by the small stipend women accepted for such low-profile performances. Women in all fields were facing the same pay discrepancies, however.²⁰

Watson, a bassist who participated in the first season of the People's Palace, went on to become a professional musician and encouraged other young women to pursue careers in music.²¹ One of Watson's ways of supporting other female musicians was by sending an all-female orchestra from the hostel she and her close friend, pianist Anne Mukle, created for female students at the Royal Academy of Music, to Bethnal Green, London's poorest district at the time. There they performed in a series of Shakespeare plays for the Oxford House Settlement.²² Watson's championship of women in orchestras included performing as both an instrumentalist and a conductor, and organizing events like the Settlement performance. Her outreach laid the foundation for women in England to pursue music professionally and demand the same pay as men. She insisted that female musicians be taken seriously, and found that the costumes some of

¹⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., 190.

²⁰ Ibid., 192.

²¹ The People's Palace was a philanthropic institution that opened in England in May 1887. The goals of the Palace were to "create and scatter pleasure," encourage "rational amusement," and confirm society's belief that "thought must underlie all true enjoyment;" see *Musical Women in England, 1870-1914*, 57.

²² Ibid., 61.

the women musicians chose to wear to be demeaning and undermining of their professional status as players.

In 1904, J. Cuthbert Hadden invited Watson to contribute to an article he was writing titled “Ladies and Orchestral Instruments” for *The Young Woman* magazine, to which Watson responded

Please advise all women musicians to study hard, become properly qualified, and never accept less than a proper fee. I feel strongly on the subject, and want women to do better work than be dressed up like mountebanks and set to play comic opera selections and jigs. Fortunately many conductors are beginning to realize that some us can do better work, and engage us to help their amateur choral and orchestral societies at the same fee as they would pay male players. The members of my orchestra earn a fair income with professional orchestral playing. The full band numbers twenty performers, comprising string players, wood-wind and trumpets (not cornets only, please note), horn and trombone.²³

The orchestra to which Watson refers is her own ensemble, the Aeolian Ladies’ Orchestra, which was preceded by The English Ladies’ Orchestral Society in 1880.²⁴ Many of the musicians were alumnae of the Royal Academy, the Royal College, and the Guildhall School of Music, and their amateur status turned to “professional” in 1899 when the *Englishwoman’s Year Book* described the ensemble as “formed of both amateur and professional players under a professional conductor.” Unable to maintain a regular roster of wind players, the orchestra disbanded in 1912 or 1913.²⁵

Involvement in professional instrumental music did not guarantee equal opportunity or pay, despite the efforts of Watson and many others. Like other professions, women instrumentalists had to demand opportunities that people in power were reluctant to give.²⁶ The

²³ Ibid., 199.

²⁴ The English Ladies’ Orchestral Society was an amateur group that included both string and wind players.

²⁵ Ibid., 199-200.

²⁶ Dunbar, *Women, Music, Culture*, 199.

response to women's desire to enter traditionally all-male orchestras resurrected the idea of "feminine frailty." Excluding women from playing in orchestras was more a way to protect men's jobs. British conductor Henry Wood broke with tradition when, in 1913, he admitted six women string players into the Queen's Hall Orchestra in London. This remained an exception to the rule. Conductor Sir Thomas Beecham was quoted as saying, "women in symphony orchestras constitute a disturbing element...If a lady player is not well-favoured the gentlemen of the orchestra do not wish to play near her. If she is, they can't."²⁷

As orchestral music was still considered a "masculine form" in the nineteenth century, women turned to each other for support and opportunities to perform.²⁸ During the first decade of the twentieth century *The Englishwoman's Year Book* noted the increase of all-women's ensembles in England, especially those with a female conductor.²⁹ Most of these women had conservatory training, yet their all-women's orchestras failed to garner the same attention and respect that orchestras comprised of men did.³⁰ The idea that women were "fit for nothing more than housekeeping and dress-making" remained, spurring a writer in 1894 for *The Orchestral Association Gazette* to write, "By claiming so-called "equal rights with man," the females of the present era are gradually revolutionizing the old accepted theories of what is "womanly," and we now find them practicing and employed in arts and crafts that a few years ago would have been unhesitatingly termed "unwomanly."³¹

²⁷ Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 67-68.

²⁸ Nancy B. Reich, "European Composers and Musicians, ca. 1800-1890," in *Women & Music: A History*, 2nd edition, ed. Karin Pendle (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 163.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 192-193.

The musicians of London's women's orchestras were often graduates of the city's many music schools and as such, highly skilled on their instruments. Despite the musical successes these women enjoyed in the conservatory setting, the violin was still considered a "risqué" instrument in England due to the posture it requires to play it, and performances by all-women's orchestras were an opportunity to see many female violinists at once. Aware of their own novelty, some women's orchestras wished to enhance their perceived appeal by wearing period costumes and adopting catchy names. Several authors from the time discussed women's orchestras in their novels, referring to their "bare arms and low-cut dresses."³² With this attention to dress and the concomitant distraction from actual music-making, however, comes sexism.

As with other forms of education, the availability of musical training to women depended in large part on their families' attitudes towards the importance of education.³³ Though English women gradually joined university-level orchestras, prominent philanthropists of the time continued to believe that men were superior to women in terms of musical achievement. Nevertheless, the Palace University, among others, included several musical organizations for women, such as Miss Eleanor Clausen's Orchestra of Young Ladies and the Aeolian Ladies' and English Ladies' Orchestras, which were conducted by Lady William Lennox and Lady Folkestone.³⁴

³² Ibid., 114.

³³ Pendle, "Musical Women in Early Modern Europe," 83.

³⁴ Gillett, *Musical Women in England, 1870-1914*, 59-60.

Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra

Across the Atlantic Ocean, conductor Ethel Stark and philanthropist Madge Bowen founded the Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra (MWSO) in 1940. As Canada's first and only all-woman orchestra at that time, the ensemble's goal was to provide training for women interested in careers in music, as well as give women an opportunity to perform when they were not always accepted by male-dominated groups.³⁵

Although women were employed by other orchestras in Canada, such as the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in the early 1900s, female musicians were seated behind their male colleagues. Conductor Frank Welsman seated all women string players on the inside desks so the audience would not notice them. Pianist and champion of Canadian music, Elaine Keillor noted in a 2010 interview that while there were indeed women in Welsman's orchestra, that came to an end in the 1920s when Austrian conductor Luigi von Kunits took over leadership of the Toronto Symphony, and clearly stated that he did not want women in the orchestra. Another Canadian orchestra, the Montreal Orchestra (founded in 1930), also employed women from its start. A program from the orchestra's 1935 season shows that at least three members of the orchestra were women: a first violinist, a bassist, and the harpist.³⁶ While the Toronto and Montreal Symphony Orchestras admitted women from the very beginning, one wonders whether they were hired because of their talent or because there were not enough male performers. What were the experiences of these women? How did the women of the orchestra perceive themselves? When did attitudes towards including women in orchestras begin to change?³⁷

³⁵ K. Linda Kivi, *Canadian Women Making Music* (Toronto: Green Dragon Press, 1992), 44-46.

³⁶ Noriega, "The Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra," 8-9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

Like women's orchestras in other countries, the MWSO was born out of a greater political struggle. The outbreak of World War II changed the social and professional landscape for women in Quebec in terms of the labor force and family life. While prior to the war men were free to move geographically to enhance their education, women, on the other hand, usually led sedentary lifestyles and bore the primary responsibility of maintaining a household. Canada entered the war in 1939, and as men joined the Armed Forces women began to fill those positions left vacant by their departure. The role of women in war time became quite prominent with regard to economic, social, and artistic endeavors: the number of women in the work force more than doubled between 1939 and 1944.³⁸

The weak cultural infrastructure of Canada proved problematic, especially for women. Canadian historian Maria Tippett writes: "Pursuing a professional career [for female musicians] in music usually meant paying an initial fee of fifty dollars to join the Musician's Union and then accepting employment at a 'ladies' college or in a CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] hotel orchestra, where women's salaries would be smaller than men's in order 'to curtail expenses.'" For many Canadian musicians, going abroad seemed the most natural solution to the paucity of career opportunities presented in their own country. Talented young Canadian musicians were encouraged by their teachers to travel to the United States or to Europe to play professionally and full-time. Others chose to stay in the country and turn their attention to chamber music, which offered them both professional playing experience as well as compensation.³⁹

³⁸ Ibid., 24-26.

³⁹ Canadian composer Gena Branscombe is an excellent example of a female Canadian musician who found professional success abroad. Branscombe was revered in the United States when her 1928 "Quebec Suite" was premiered by the Chicago Women's Symphony Orchestra. As an American resident, she also served as President of the Society of American Women Composers. MacLean's Magazine wrote 'without question...the most distinguished woman composer who has gone forth from Canada.'

Despite the lack of paid music-making opportunities available to them, women still had to face the belief that it was inappropriate for them to study overseas alone. Women who did so during this time were often from upper-class families with substantial means. In this sense, Canadian women were very similar to American women. Beth Macleod writes that there were two types of women who went abroad to study music: young prodigies who were serious about their careers, and young women in their twenties who were sent to Europe to finish school. Women in the latter category often ended up studying other disciplines in addition to music, which were all ultimately put aside once they got married.

Canadian conductor and violinist Ethel Stark initially was against the idea of an all-women's ensemble, but changed her mind once her friends reminded her of how difficult it was for them to win positions in symphony orchestras alongside men. She also initially scoffed at the idea of forming an ensemble that was strings only, saying it was not worth her time to conduct an orchestra unless it was a full symphony. Cellist May Fluhmann, the future timpanist of the MWSO, supported Stark's desire to expand the ensemble to include wind players and percussionists. Given the history of women in instrumental music, however, it was going to be a challenge to find women who could play those [woodwind, brass, percussion] instruments. In 1995, Stark recalled, "Most of the women [back then] were young and played strings or piano... There were one or two flute players, but no one for oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, double bass, brass or percussion."

Stark and Bowen found themselves on a mission first to find women who were already musically gifted or proficient on a stringed instrument, and then persuade them to take up a wind or percussion instrument. Fortunately for them, their task was not as difficult as anticipated; it turned out that many women were excited about the opportunity to play in a full symphony

orchestra. Thomas Archer recalled in 1941 that an “[i]nvestigation showed that there were many women musicians in Montreal who preferred playing wind instruments to strings...What they needed was an opportunity to exercise their talents.”⁴⁰

The pair assembled fifty women over the course of ten days to form the Montreal Women’s Symphony Orchestra, with the first rehearsal taking place on January 28, 1940. The MWSO gave its first concert, six months after its first rehearsal, to an audience of 5,000 people, with 2,000 being turned away at the door.⁴¹ Though their first concert was a success, the concept of an all-women’s orchestra remained a novelty for a long time, and the need for recognition as a legitimate music ensemble proved to be an uphill battle. Opportunities for radio broadcasting were very limited in the first few years of the orchestra’s life, and it is hard to say if this was due to the relatively amateur nature of the musicians’ playing. In 1942, however, the MWSO broke through the radio broadcasting door with an invitation from the CBC to perform on one of their March programs. An anonymous critic called this move “a measure of triumph” for an effort that had been an uphill fight for a place in radio (in proportion to the work given to male symphony groups). A radio broadcast and live concert are not the same, however. The broadcast may have been one of the few professional opportunities available to Ethel Stark (and likely to other women) because the conductor and performers were not visible to the audience. For orchestra boards who were nervous about hiring a female conductor, the radio broadcast was a chance for them to make the hire without having to present a female conductor and female musicians to a live concert audience.⁴²

⁴⁰ Noriega, “Montreal Women’s Symphony Orchestra,” 47.

⁴¹ TIME Magazine reported 3,000 people in attendance.

⁴² Noriega, “Montreal Women’s Symphony Orchestra,” 42.

Reception towards the orchestra in New York was mixed. Reports state that audience members were moving around just to get a glimpse of the women, which raised questions about the type of attention the orchestra was receiving: was the audience more interested in hearing them, or seeing them?

In the first several years of its existence, comments regarding the sex of the players were more common than not.^{43 44} While women's orchestras in the United States would often use men as conductors or as members if women were not available, this was never the case with MWSO. When the MWSO performed in Carnegie Hall in 1947, *The New York Times* labeled the MWSO as the only all-women's orchestra on the continent.^{45 46}

Following their Carnegie Hall debut, the women continued to rehearse and grow as an ensemble. On April 12, 1948, the orchestra debuted in Toronto's Massey Hall to a warm audience. Some Toronto critics, however, kept in line with earlier critiques of the orchestra, spending more time commenting on their attire than on their performance.⁴⁷

⁴³ Ibid., 59-60.

⁴⁴ After a 1942 performance by the orchestra with guest soloist Orza Pernel, Paul Molloy called the women "symphony sirens" and their conductor "lovely." Reviewing Pernel's violin playing, Molloy noted that by moving around too much when playing her instrument she diverted attention from the music, but justified it by adding that like the rest of the players in the orchestra, "The girls haven't been long at this sort of thing."

⁴⁵ Kivi, *Canadian Women Making Music*, 46.

⁴⁶ Interestingly enough, when the MWSO made its New York debut, at least one music critic didn't think that women instrumentalists or conductors were a novelty! Veteran music critic Robert Simon stated, "Since we're well out of the era when symphonic playing or conducting by women was so infrequent that it had to be welcomed with generous allowances, the Montreal ladies may be considered simply on their merits as musicians. They're a good orchestra – the string section was fine, especially in Sir Ernest's charming sketches. The conductor of this orchestra is Ethel Stark, who directed with knowing musicianship and crisp animated authority;" see "Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra," 64.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 52.

Due to financial difficulties, the MWSO as a full symphonic ensemble ceased in its regular activities in 1953 and began appearing as The Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra Strings the following year.⁴⁸ The final concert given by the Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra took place in Plateau Hall on December 11, 1965. Whereas in the 1940s the MWSO may have initially had to deal with stereotyping because women were playing 'male' instruments, by the 1960s, an all-woman orchestra looked all "too feminine." As a result, the support that had been built up during the first twenty years of the orchestra's existence began to disintegrate.⁴⁹

Members of the MWSO admired and respected their *maestra* as a leader, but she also inspired them to pursue their own individual dreams, talents, and interests. Similar to the famed conductor and composer Nadia Boulanger, Stark had a reputation for being a confident and caring woman off the podium and a taskmaster on the podium. Mary Machim, a violinist with the MWSO, recalled thirty years after the orchestra's collapse, "It was amazing what she did for us. She was a very fine musician who allowed no sloppiness to go unchallenged. If she heard wrongdoings, she could roar like a lion... Stark knew what she wanted and demanded enough to make you work very hard. Playing under her was a great challenge."⁵⁰

Ethel Stark knew that women had a reputation for being catty, dramatic, and at times mean towards each other, but she refused to let that stop her from creating an all-women's orchestra. She instead chose to see the benefits of such an ensemble, and let music take over the rest. She remarked

⁴⁸ Ethel Stark also founded the Ethel Stark Symphonietta (ESS) in 1954. Unlike the MWSO Strings, the ESS was composed of the core string players of the MWSO, plus some winds/brass, and was also open to men; see "Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra," 53.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 102.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 41.

Had I subscribed however, to the old age-old axiom that women are spiteful and disloyal towards each other, I should have lost little time in refusing the task offered me, preferring to go along with the less-involved career of concert violinist. But I knew – and it remained for the women of the Orchestra to bear me out – that a group of women banded together in common enthusiasm could be willingly regimented to the necessity that there must be a leader, and that the leader’s orders must be law, both in rehearsal and performance. As the conductor of the MWSO, I can give the lie to clichés having to do with the rebellious female, at least insofar as Music is concerned.⁵¹

Women’s Orchestra of Auschwitz

While most women’s orchestras of the twentieth century were centered on giving women opportunities to perform and earn a living, one orchestra had a very different mission: survival. In April 1943, the chief of all the female Nazi wardens in Birkenau, Maria Mandel, along with fellow camp leader Franz Hoessler, founded the Women’s Orchestra in Auschwitz, and it, among uniformly bad options, quickly became one of the camp’s better work assignments. The men’s camp already had an orchestra, so it made sense for the women’s camp to have one as well. Mandel’s love for classical music ensured that the female prisoners in the orchestra were treated better than other inmates, receiving sufficient food and living in relatively cleaner barracks.⁵²

Why the Nazis chose to promote orchestras in concentration camps is a difficult question to answer. Some of them believed that having live music performed would distract the incoming prisoners from realizing they were heading to the gas chambers. Others wanted music for their own entertainment. Dr. Shirli Gilbert, associate professor of modern history at the University of Southampton and author of *Music in the Holocaust*, explains the twisted logic behind the creation of these orchestras: “It became a point of pride that camp commanders wanted to have

⁵¹ Ibid., 74.

⁵² Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2005), 181.

their own orchestra.” Orchestras existed at multiple concentration camps. The suicide rate was higher amongst musicians in comparison to fellow inmates, as they were forced to look on helplessly each day as friends, family members, and other Jews and “undesirables” were sent to the gas chambers. They also had to entertain those who were in charge of the killing. The Auschwitz-Birkenau camp alone had four different orchestras, including the only all-female ensemble.⁵³ Not all qualified musicians were asked to play in the orchestra, though, either because they kept their musical gifts to themselves, or the orchestras already had enough players. Securing a place in one of these orchestras, however, was the key to survival and a priority for many musician inmates.

Forty-year old Zofia Czajkowska, a prisoner and former music and singing teacher, was named the first conductor of the orchestra. By August 1943 the orchestra comprised twelve Jewish and fifteen non-Jewish women musicians from Poland, Greece, Belgium, Germany, and the Ukraine. At first, the women practiced German marches and Polish folk and soldier songs. As the SS began to enable access to orchestral parts, the orchestra’s repertoire expanded to include over 200 pieces typical of the contemporary tastes of the time. The classical pieces were played on Sundays for the SS and some of the women prisoners. Occasionally, these pieces were also performed during private evening concerts for the SS, who would request certain repertoire. The SS personnel would relax and amuse themselves after a long day of ‘selections’.⁵⁴

The demands placed on the orchestra musicians were high. The women’s first performance took place at the camp entrance in June 1943. SS members counted the newly-

⁵³ Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust*, 179.

⁵⁴ Gabriele Knapp, “Music as a Means of Survival: The Women’s Orchestra in Auschwitz.” http://www.feministische-studien.de/fileadmin/download/pdf/fem96_Translation_Knapp1.pdf. (1996), accessed 22 April 2017.

arrived women, who were arranged into five rows, as they walked by in time to the music. The orchestra had to perform at the whim of their tormentors and at all hours, regardless of weather conditions. Beyond the daily arrivals of new prisoners, music became a part of all official events. Most disturbingly, orchestra members had to play when newly-arrived prisoners were sent directly to the gas chambers, when sick prisoners were separated from healthier ones (i.e. no longer considered worth keeping alive to work another day), and when executions were ordered for those prisoners who attempted escape.⁵⁵

Roughly 405,000 people were registered as having been at Auschwitz, one-third of them women. Over 261,000 died because of the conditions in the camp; the prisoners endured traumatic living conditions. The musicians at Auschwitz who survived were permanently scarred by their experiences performing in the camp. They could never forget the macabre role that music, and those pieces specifically, had played.⁵⁶

In August 1943, Austrian musician Alma Rosé was appointed the new conductor of the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz. The Jewish, thirty-seven-year-old violinist was the daughter of Arnold Rosé and the niece of Gustav Mahler. Rosé's fellow prisoners held her in high regard, and the SS treated her with respect, often referring to her as Frau Alma. Rosé was the protégé of Nazi wardens Hoessler and Mandel from the very beginning. They placed an entire barrack at the musicians' disposal for their personal and work use, and Rosé was permitted to exchange old instruments for newer ones of better quality, including a valuable instrument for herself.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Sion Soeters and Hans Vanderwerff, "The Holocaust – Lest we forget - Orchestras," <http://www.holocaust-lestweforget.com/orchestra.html> (2009), accessed 21 April 2017.

⁵⁶ Knapp, "Music as a Means of Survival," http://www.feministische-studien.de/fileadmin/download/pdf/fem96_Translation_Knapp1.pdf

⁵⁷ Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust*, 181-183.

Rosé used her influence in the camp to obtain better living conditions for the members of the women's orchestra. Each woman had her own relatively clean plank bed, and could wash daily and use the provisional toilet. They received the same amount of food as other prisoners, but had the opportunity to obtain additional food or personal items through their contact with the women who worked in the chamber of personal effects. If they performed particularly well, sometimes the orchestra musicians were given more food by their SS guards as a reward.⁵⁸

The SS expected Alma Rosé to form an orchestra that included both amateur and professional players and prepare them for performances. She increased the size of the orchestra quickly. Over two-thirds of the musicians were Jewish, coming from what is now known as the Czech Republic, France, Russia, the Netherlands, and, after 1944, from Hungary. The orchestra was not what would be considered traditional instrumentation; it included mandolins, guitars, and accordions, in addition to violins, a double bass, a cello, and six wind instruments. There were also drums and piano when available, and the orchestra occasionally collaborated with opera and folk singers.⁵⁹

As the most prominent conductor of the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz, Alma Rosé raised the level of the orchestra, as well as herself, in terms of technical proficiency and musicality. The structure she created for the orchestra in Auschwitz resembled the structure of orchestras outside the concentration camp, as much as the non-traditional instrumentation would allow. Rosé was, of course, under great pressure from the SS to make the orchestra perform at the highest level, and Rosé's passion for music, along with her desire to keep the women in the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 181-183.

⁵⁹ Knapp, "Music as a Means of Survival," http://www.feministische-studien.de/fileadmin/download/pdf/fem96_Translation_Knapp1.pdf

orchestra safe, inspired her to work hard. As Rosé biographers Richard Newman and Karen Kirtley wrote

With violin and baton, steely will, and dauntless spirits, she molded a terrified collection of young musicians into an orchestra that became their sole hope of survival. The orchestra women played to please their Nazi captors; in exchange they remained alive. By trusting in music for salvation, by insisting on standards that seemed absurd against the backdrop of the gas chambers and the smoking chimneys of the crematoria, Alma saved the lives of some four dozen members of the orchestra. Most members of the Auschwitz-Birkenau women's orchestra survived the war – not one was sent to the gas.”⁶⁰

Some members of The Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz claimed that their conductor, Alma Rosé, disciplined her musicians and was harsh in her punishments when they played poorly. If an individual player was unprepared, she would react with anger and occasional physical violence, such as striking the musician with her baton. If the ensemble played poorly, she would add evening rehearsals. The orchestra knew, however, that Rosé was on their side, as their ability to perform as an ensemble was what would ultimately keep them from the gas chambers. Most of the survivors of the Women's Orchestra in Auschwitz regarded Rosé as a savior.⁶¹

On April 4, 1944, Alma Rosé died suddenly and unexpectedly, and the pianist Sonia Winogradowa became the third conductor of the orchestra. Winogradowa had limited conducting experience, however, and the quality of the orchestra began to sag. The SS began to show less interest in the orchestra due to this decline in performance standards and adjusted the orchestra's

⁶⁰ Ibid., 17-18.

⁶¹ Knapp, “Music as a Means of Survival.” http://www.feministische-studien.de/fileadmin/download/pdf/fem96_Translation_Knapp1.pdf.

practice schedule accordingly. The female orchestra musicians were forced to do manual labor beginning in the summer of 1944 in addition to their usual music performance duties.⁶²

The SS disbanded the women's orchestra at the end of October 1944. The Jewish women from the orchestra were taken to the Belsen concentration camp while women who were not Jewish were sent on the "Death March" on January 18, 1945 through the Ravensbrueck concentration camp to the camp Neustadt-Glewe, near Schwerin. Amazingly, despite the catastrophic conditions that the women had to endure in the last few months in the camps, most of the musicians lived to see the liberation of the camp.⁶³

Music allowed those who created it to survive the day to day. Prisoners would sing songs to lift their spirits, as well as receive extra food, such as bread, from fellow prisoners of higher social or economic standing. After the war, the existence of the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz was introduced to the public through singer and orchestra member Fania Fénelon's book *Das Maedchenorchester (Playing for Time)* and then through Arthur Miller's play of the same name, in which Fénelon and Rosé are the principal characters. Fénelon was a member of the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz from January 1944 until her liberation in October of the same year and talks about her experience in her memoir. She says that while "she had clean clothes, daily showers, and a reasonable food supply she had to play light-hearted, cheerful music as well as marching music for hours on end while her eyes witnessed the marching of thousands of people to the gas chambers and crematoria." Past members of the orchestra were

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

extremely critical of Fénelon's memoir. They criticized her memory for being selective, and for censoring herself.⁶⁴

In Miller's play, the relationship between Fénelon and Rosé becomes the lens through which the playwright focuses and magnifies his themes: the morality of compromise, the battle of the individual against a corrupt society, the will to survive. A stark, passionate piece of writing, Miller's play cuts to the very heart of the matter – how could the Nazis of Auschwitz find beauty in music and yet behave with such callous disregard for life?⁶⁵

How did the women of the orchestra deal with being forced to perform at Auschwitz, and what meaning did music have in their lives post-war? While there is no accurate count of the orchestra's musicians at any given time, approximately sixty women were members of the ensemble at various points. Three of those women died in Auschwitz, and three died in the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen.⁶⁶

The labor of the women's orchestra in Auschwitz can be separated into two parts - the orchestra's actual employment in the camp, and their practice times where they were mostly unsupervised. The orchestra musicians lived through extreme conditions and sometimes had to expend an enormous amount of strength just to force themselves to play or sing. The musicians were forced to accept both their own role in their fellow prisoners' deaths, knowing that they could not do anything about it. If they did not perform they, too, would likely be killed.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Tim Auld, "How Arthur Miller struck a discord with the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz." <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/mar/06/how-arthur-miller-struck-discord-womens-orchestra-of-auschwitz> (2015); accessed 21 April 2017.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Knapp, "Music as a Means of Survival." http://www.feministische-studien.de/fileadmin/download/pdf/fem96_Translation_Knapp1.pdf.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Being a musician was uncommon, and their statuses as musicians saved most of their lives. The sole cellist, Anita Lasker Wallfisch, was sent to the prisoners' hospital after developing typhoid fever. After being "selected" for the gas chamber, someone recognized her as being the cellist in the orchestra and her life was spared.⁶⁸ While the female orchestra members practiced six days a week, at least eight hours per day, the male musicians in other concentration camp orchestras were assigned to other labor tasks and were only allowed to practice during their "free" time. Unlike the women's orchestra, many of the male music ensembles were solely comprised of professional musicians, and perhaps required less rehearsal time as they were not integrating amateur players into their groups.⁶⁹

Constant stress and difficult hours wore the women down, but when asked what they thought about their work, they responded that they believed they had been given a lighter sentence than their fellow non-musician prisoners. Together, the women at Auschwitz fought their inhumane conditions with their music, and attempted to preserve their self-respect and self-worth. The orchestra work was unique in that the SS gave the women some autonomy when it came to managing and improving themselves as an ensemble. Practicing and rehearsing were not just a job, but a chance to remind each woman of their purpose and worth. Together, the women's orchestra players defended themselves against the world of Auschwitz through their music-making, discipline, professionalism, and bravery.

In a situation where the ability to present a united front and high quality performances could literally be a lifesaver, the women of the orchestra at Auschwitz bonded as an ensemble, as well as formed a close relationship with their conductor. Orchestral work is group work, and in

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

order to produce good music, it is vital that the orchestra members work well with one another. As the women's ensemble was comprised of many personalities forced to live in undignified, cramped quarters, there were naturally conflicts that arose. The ultimate goal of survival - and the need to perform well in the hopes of achieving that - forced the women to set aside any differences. The orchestra helped the women in this way get through their experience living and working in the concentration camp. The Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz members were proud of their achievements, both as an ensemble and as individuals.

Perhaps, in a way, performing distracted from the stresses and terrors of living in the camp. Playing together allowed the women to live in the reality they created through music for short periods of time, and to remember that there was a world beyond the camp. Through the music itself, the women shut themselves off, retreated into themselves, and mentally inhabited another world. Music also filled an escapist function in that it offered protection from conflicts and possibilities for emotional compensation.

Making music allowed the women to hold on to the few remnants of independence and freedom that were still available to them. They worked within a medium where they found strategies for survival that are inherent in the creative process.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Ibid

Chapter 2: In the Trenches – Working with Present-Day Women’s Orchestras

As I was trying to determine an appropriate recital component for this dissertation research project, I turned to two of my committee members, both of whom suggested that I could only consider myself an expert on women’s orchestras if I created one of my own. Creating a women’s orchestra would be an opportunity for me to see how a modern-day ensemble might compare to the women’s orchestras of the past, as well as those that currently exist. I would choose the personnel and the repertoire, mark and distribute parts, arrange the rehearsals, schedule the performance, and observe the workings of this single-sex ensemble. I also decided to survey the ensemble after their rehearsal and concert experience to gain feedback and thoughts on what their time with the group was like. To provide some comparison, I reached out to the Allegra Chamber Orchestra, a newly-formed women’s orchestra in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, to ask if they would be interested in participating in the survey. I wanted to keep the survey relatively small, and chose Allegra because they, like my recital orchestra, are a

small group, and I would be able to communicate with them in English (which saved having to translate the surveys and the resulting responses).

Forming the Recital Orchestra at the University of Maryland – College Park

Looking at the calendar, I decided that late January, right at the start of spring semester, would be an ideal time to have the recital. It was after the winter holidays, but before the semester really began and people's schedules began to fill up. In forming an orchestra of all women, I decided to make the orchestra a string orchestra, as I was concerned that I would not be able to find an entire low brass section of women. I was also concerned that I would not be able to find enough female bassoonists, or female percussionists.⁷¹ A string orchestra seemed more doable, and it is my opinion that the string orchestra repertoire is not performed often enough. I primarily reached out to women with whom I had worked in the University of Maryland Symphony Orchestra (UMSO) and University of Maryland Repertoire Orchestra (UMRO). Those who were unable to participate in the orchestra due to scheduling conflicts or other time constraints recommended other female string players to me, some of whom ended up joining the orchestra. As personnel changed and solidified, members of the ensemble who had committed to the project early in the process suggested colleagues of theirs whom they thought would be a good fit for the group, and who would be able to learn the repertoire quickly at a high level. The ensemble ultimately comprised two UMD alumnae (one with a master's degree and the other

⁷¹ The shortage of women musicians on these instruments continues to be a common issue. I recently attended a concert given by an orchestra from an American women's college where the entire bassoon and low brass sections were male community or guest players.

with a bachelor's), two doctoral students, three master's students, three upperclassmen and five freshmen. The exact personnel shifted right up until the day before the first rehearsal.

Repertoire Selection

Once I decided that the ensemble would be a string orchestra, I needed to select repertoire. It was obvious to me from the very beginning that a women's orchestra concert needed to feature at least one composition by a woman (even though not all women's orchestras play works by women, or make that their focus). I also wanted to include at least one work from the standard string orchestra repertoire. I was looking for a variety of styles, and hoping to find a program featuring works from different eras. The reality of budget also came in to play; most works by women are either 20th or 21st century and therefore rental-only, or are from early time periods and are so difficult to find that they can be cost-prohibitive.

When I discovered that I could rent Judith Lang Zaimont's *Elegy* on my own, I decided to build the rest of the program around that work. The Zaimont is slow and lush, at times discordant and dark, but ultimately ends on a C major chord. Zaimont is a contemporary composer so I had my 20th century work, as well as a work by a female, covered, but I was still hopeful I would be able to add another piece by a woman to the program.

The Mendelssohn *Sinfonia in B Minor* was the next piece I selected for the program. I spent a lot of time searching for short string orchestra works by major composers. I considered Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 6* (the only one of the Brandenburgs for strings only) as well as the Mozart divertimenti. It was at that point that I remembered Mendelssohn had written several string symphonies, and I was familiar with none of them. I chose the *Sinfonia No. 10 in B*

Minor because it was the only string symphony in one movement, I liked that it was in a minor key, and I felt it could make either an excellent opener or closer.

Mademoiselle Duval's Suite from *Les Génies* fulfilled my desire to have another work by a female composer on the program, as well as diversified the program with music from another era (the Baroque period). The piece was unfamiliar to everyone in the orchestra (to my knowledge, this piece has not been recorded and released).

As a closing piece, I selected Grieg's *Holberg Suite*. It is a work standard to the string orchestra repertoire, nearly every member of the ensemble had performed it before, and it is well-loved among classical music audiences.

The Recital Orchestra in Process

As the conductor of the orchestra, it was important to me to get to know the members of the ensemble while also maintaining an outsider's lens of the members' interactions with each other. Guests were not invited to observe rehearsals, and I tried to keep the environment free of men whenever possible to encourage a true women-only environment. At fifteen string players, the small size of the group also allowed for more vital interaction within the ensemble.

My experience with this ensemble felt different than any others I have been a part of, both as a conductor and as a player. While it is not possible to quantify my feelings, there were various events that took place that, when I reflected on them later, made me question whether they would have happened had the group not been all women. There was a palpable sense of camaraderie right from the start. Maybe the gender of the orchestra's members had less to do with their behavior, but the small size had more to do with it. Maybe it was the performance experience level of the orchestra's members, or the fact that all of them attended the same school

and many of them already knew each other from having played together in orchestra at Maryland. Maybe the freshmen felt flattered to have been invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation project. It is hard to say.

The First Rehearsal

The first rehearsal began half an hour late. The fire alarm went off in The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, the rehearsal (and ultimately performance) venue half an hour before the rehearsal was supposed to begin, leaving everyone who was in The Clarice at the time to exit the building and stand outside in the cold of January for half an hour. Not having the phone numbers of all the orchestra members with me, I attempted to e-mail the orchestra from my cell phone, fingers freezing, to let them know that we would be starting late, and that if they arrived early they would probably end up waiting outside too. While standing outside I also ordered pizza from a local establishment for the group to be delivered at lunch time.

When the alarm and the search of the building stopped and we were given the “all clear” to go back inside, I went to the School of Music office to retrieve a key to the band room, a rehearsal space to which I do not normally have access. The office had not yet re-opened post-fire alarm, so I proceeded to the band room, where I had hoped to leave my belongings and tell any orchestra members who might already be there that I would return shortly with a key. To my surprise, the room was already unlocked and set up for the orchestra. At least one orchestra member had arranged chairs and stands for everyone, as well as a stand for me. I needed to do very little once I arrived. Despite the initial chaos of the morning, the initiative taken by the orchestra members set a calming tone for the first rehearsal.

Women's Orchestra Week

Despite interruptions and circumstances beyond everyone's control, rehearsals went relatively smoothly. The musicians all came prepared. Due to the shifting personnel, some players had been moved onto new parts with very short notice, but they all rose to the occasion and put forth their best efforts. I watched as more experienced players helped less experienced ones, both by leading by example from within their sections, and by spending time with them during rehearsal break or after rehearsal to work out a difficult spot or put in a fingering for a tricky passage.

Even though the rehearsals themselves were productive and pleasant, the period leading up to the first rehearsal was fraught with all sorts of issues. I had started asking women to participate in the recital two months earlier, coincidentally on Election Day. The energy at that time was positive; many of the American citizens among us had just cast our vote for whom we thought was going to be the country's first female president, and there was a definite sense of excitement and "girl power." When the next day came and we realized the dream many of us had of a woman president was to be deferred, the recital itself took on a different tone. While forming this orchestra was not intended to be a political statement, several people commented that the timing of it lent it political meaning. The recital itself took place exactly one week after the American Presidential inauguration, and six days after Women's Marches worldwide. Had I formed this orchestra in part in response to the political atmosphere? I had not, but many women in the orchestra did reflect on this in their survey answers and in their personal comments to me.

Though I have performed in many concerts, and have given several recitals as a student, no other recital compared to the stress level of this one, my doctoral recital. In addition to the fire alarm incident, a violist had to be replaced less than 24 hours prior to the first rehearsal due to an

overlooked travel conflict and the concertmaster was in a car accident less than two hours before the performance was to begin. Despite these stressful events all happening in a short period of time, the ensemble came together and rallied, putting aside personal challenges or whatever lay beyond their control and focused on creating the best musical product possible.

Giving birth to an organization tests the mettle of all. My experience putting together my recital orchestra was not unlike some of the challenges Camerata Romeu (a Cuban all-women's orchestra that will be discussed in detail later in this document) experienced with their big concert in their documentary *Cuba mia*. Like our orchestra and virtually every other performing ensemble, the final days leading up to a major performance often present last-minute crises. In their case, one musician burned her concert attire while ironing. Another's child got sick and she had to figure out who would care for them while she was performing. One musician injured her finger by accidentally slamming it in a van door, while the sound post on one violist's instrument collapsed and needed emergency repair. As if that was not enough, the electricity went out in their concert hall, the Basilica, right before they were about to begin, delaying the start of the performance. Like our women's orchestra at Maryland, the Camerata pulled it together and gave a successful concert.

Allegra Chamber Orchestra

The Allegra Chamber Orchestra (ACO) was formed in Spring 2016 by Saskatchewan native Janna Sailor. After a year of auditioning for conducting positions across North America, Sailor decided to put together her own orchestra, stating that she was “disenchanted with the industry and how political everything was.” Her initial impulse was to gather a group to give a

benefit concert for Music Heals, a Canadian charity focused on music therapy and run by one of Sailor's friends.

Maestra Sailor put out a call to musicians in her community, asking who would be interested in putting on a concert for charity. Everyone who responded was female. Sailor says of the women respondents, "They were so excited...it [the women's orchestra] had a lot of energy around it." It occurred to her that, if they could get a timpanist and a couple of trumpet players, they had almost enough musicians to do a Beethoven symphony. The concept of the orchestra was so intriguing to the community that they already had been hired for two more concerts prior to even performing their first one.

Sailor says that while other, co-ed orchestras she's played in (as a violinist) have had "sticky" and "competitive" environments, "this orchestra [Allegra] has an energy of its own." She is passionate about leading an orchestra that dedicates itself to social change, and believes in creating a safe place. "A couple players have come to me and said 'We really love having a safe place to come and create and play all together,'" remarked Sailor. There is a mentorship program within the orchestra, where more experienced players are paired with up-and-coming players, creating "a very different feel" within the ensemble.

Despite the positive mission of the ACO, Sailor reports that not all attention on the orchestra has been positive. She shares that there has been a lot of tension in the Vancouver community, even though the orchestra donated its time and talents for their first concert. Comments about it being a "girls only" orchestra and other demeaning and dismissive comments were made online and in newspapers. "Even people in my own community here were pretty vocally opposed to it," shares Sailor, "which was pretty interesting...it seems to have died down now because we're actually doing what we set out do. We've done it consistently and we've

raised a lot of money. It's all professionals and we find a way to both pay ourselves and make sure that something is going back to the community in each collaboration that we do."

One positive outcome of the community's initial unhappiness is that it has sparked a dialogue about gender inclusivity. Sailor says, "It seems to have struck a nerve in a lot of ways and I don't even quite understand it...I was getting blow back from feminist groups saying I wasn't programming enough female composers. I was getting blow back from the gay and lesbian community saying that we didn't adequately represent them in the orchestra." When I asked Sailor if she felt that people's feelings of frustration with the orchestra came from the fact that men and women play alongside each other successfully in many countries in the world nowadays, including in her native Canada, she responded with, "I had to keep reiterating my mandate, which is 'women helping women.' Once it was out there and once it was successful, all these men were like 'Oh, do you need a stage manager?'" She said that people who were skeptical or dismissive of the orchestra at first became interested in being a part of it once they saw its success.

"There's enough room for everybody," says Sailor. "There's space for everyone to create what they want to create...it's not that we're taking away things." Vancouver used to be a city of three professional orchestras and now has only two, so Sailor believes she is filling a void in the community by creating work for orchestral musicians. A core group of professional players is used for each concert, and the orchestra is considering moving some towards of informal hearing process to add new players to its roster. Sailor thinks the traditional audition process is flawed and disrespectful, and does not always yield the "right player."

Maestra Sailor and I agreed that it is important for a women's orchestra to have its own leadership style and to be confident in it. ACO has its own players' committee that helps Sailor

run the orchestra in a collaborative and creative fashion. Sailor also employs women on the orchestra's board.

Methodology: Surveying the Women's Orchestra at UMD and Allegra Chamber Orchestra

To gain an understanding of what it is like to be a musician in an all-women's orchestra, I sent a questionnaire to the members of my recital orchestra and to the Allegra Chamber Orchestra, based in Vancouver. Both chamber orchestras are solely comprised of self-identified women, and were both were formed within the past year. Like myself, the conductor of Allegra, Janna Sailor, is also in her early thirties.

The women were asked eighteen questions on the survey based on their experiences playing in a women's orchestra. Ten of the questions had sub-questions, depending on how the initial question was answered. A total of twenty-two women (thirteen from UMD and nine from Allegra) completed the survey, which was distributed online through Google Forms. Google Forms allowed a link to be created in which participants could access and answer questions anonymously.

The survey asked the participants demographic information such as their gender (as all participants had to self-identify as female), sexual orientation, and age (all participants also had to be at least 18 years of age). The second portion of the survey asked participants for information about their level of formal education in music and the types of orchestras and other music ensembles they have performed with. The third section asked the participants if they were currently living and working in the country of their citizenship and if they or their parents were immigrants.

The women in my recital orchestra and the Allegra Chamber Orchestra were asked if they had played in orchestras under both male and female conductors and if they had performed in any otherwise all-female ensembles where the conductor was male.

The second half of the survey focused on the specific experiences these women had as musicians, and as players in women's orchestras. The women were asked what kind of support they had received as a developing or professional musician, if they felt their status in any ensemble had been affected by their gender identity, if they had received any sort of preferential treatment due to being female, and what their professional goals as musicians were.

The final portion of the survey asked for the women to elaborate on their experiences in their respective orchestras, and to compare their experiences in women's orchestras with both their experiences in other all-female music ensembles (such as women's choruses) and with mixed-gender orchestras. I was most curious to hear what the musicians thought about the existence and purpose of single-sex orchestras, and if they thought women's orchestras should continue to exist. Would they choose to play in an all-women's group as opposed to a traditional, mixed-gender ensemble? Would they play in a women's orchestra in addition to other groups?

As "sex" and "gender" are two different things, the idea of a modern-day women's orchestra raised a lot of questions as to whom a single-sex ensemble is comprised of. For the purpose of this study, I chose to open the survey to those who identify as women, including both those assigned as female at birth, and those who consider themselves female but who were assigned male at birth. Survey participants were not asked to share how they present, nor were they asked to disclose their title or pronoun preferences. I reached out to friends and colleagues of mine who identify as women for their participation in this orchestra. Maestra Sailor was not initially seeking an all-women's group; hers became one by happenstance.

Prior to distributing the survey to participants, I answered the questions myself to gauge how long it would take to complete the form. I also shared the survey with a professor on my dissertation committee, Dr. Stephanie Prichard. Upon receiving Dr. Prichard's recommendations and suggestions, I revised the survey and submitted it to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Each member of the UMD orchestra and Allegra Chamber Orchestra were asked to complete the survey via e-mail. A letter was shared with each orchestra member at the beginning of the process, detailing the parameters of the project and assuring anonymity.

The survey was designed to be completed as easily as possible, with most questions having multiple choice options, and a few giving survey responders an opportunity to share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences in greater detail. The short length and straightforward questions were designed to encourage a high participation rate for the survey. The online format was chosen to make it easier for participants to submit their responses and for me to collect and analyze them, particularly the ones coming from Canada.

Response for the two orchestras were separated into individual groups and coded based on key words. Trends in answers were identified by those words, and comparisons in the approach and function of the two ensembles was taken into consideration while analyzing the data.

To distribute the survey, my project first had to gain the approval of the IRB. The IRB requires multiple steps to be accepted as a viable project through the university. My IRB packet consisted of an initial application, which provided a detailed description of the project as well as information governing laws and best practices in both the United States and Canada. As part of my IRB application I submitted an abstract, information on recruitment, eligibility criteria,

rationale, and enrollment numbers. I laid out the procedures for participation, as well as the benefits and minimal risks involved.

The IRB application included a copy of the recruitment letter sent to survey participants, as well as the survey itself. I also included a consent form. Prior to gaining IRB approval, I completed a training program through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI).

Survey Results from the UMD Women's Orchestra: Demographics

All participants surveyed are female, and all but two identified as heterosexual (those two identified as bisexual or chose to not answer that question). Just over half the orchestra members are between the ages of 23 and 28 years old, with most of the remaining being between 18 and 22; one player is between the ages of 29 and 35. These numbers are not surprising, given that my recital orchestra was composed entirely of undergraduate and graduate students, and recent university alumni.

Music Education and Professional Goals

All members of the UMD Orchestra are currently pursuing, or already hold, a degree in music. None of the women surveyed hold doctorates in music. All but two surveyed received private lessons as part of their musical training prior to college. All participated in school or community music programs prior to pursuing music in higher education or becoming professional musicians. All but two women received financial support of some kind to pursue their music studies, whether it was in form of having lessons funded, or being awarded grants, scholarships, or fellowships in order to study. 69.2% reported receiving emotional support, and being encouraged to pursue their musical goals by friends, family members, and teachers.

These numbers show a high level of support and preparation for the women who participated in this orchestra at the University of Maryland. While it is safe to assume that many music majors in the United States receive support in similar ways, I would be curious to see what other factors may play into a musician's ability to reach their goals. Does the community they grow up in play a role? Different universities offer different incentives for their music majors depending on the size of their program, their endowment, and their program's needs. The number of UMD students in this project who reported receiving emotional support for their music studies is lower than other forms of support they received, which leads to other questions: Did the families and communities of some of these musicians not support their choice of music as a formal study and profession? If so, why? Or, did their communities not believe emotional support was necessary for these musicians to succeed?

Prior Orchestral Playing Experience and Future Professional Goals

All but one musician performed in a youth orchestra prior to the women's orchestra. All but two have also been members of community orchestras, and nine of the thirteen UMD orchestra members maintain active careers as freelancers or participants in pick-up or one-off orchestras (the remaining four are all current undergraduate students, signaling that they have perhaps not lived in the region long enough yet to have built a professional musician's network, do not yet have enough requisite playing experience, or are ineligible for certain gigs until they have completed their bachelor's degrees). 61.5% have been or currently are members of regional or per-service orchestras, and three women (all at least 23 years old) have performed as musicians with full-time professional orchestras. All respondents have played under both male and female conductors. Nine women ultimately wish to be, or already are, professional orchestral

musicians. Those whose goal is not to be a professional orchestral musician expressed a desire to concentrate their musical efforts on chamber music or teaching, and one listed a profession completely outside of music: computer science!

Gender and Music Ensembles

A little over half of the UMD recital orchestra musicians have performed with single-sex ensembles beyond this orchestra. From that group, five women have performed with all-female chamber ensembles, an equal number have sung in women's choruses, and one performed in an *a cappella* singing group. While all the women have performed in women's orchestras where the conductor was a woman (the leaders of the two ensembles surveyed for this project are both women), only two women surveyed said they have also performed in ensembles where the conductor was male, despite it being an otherwise all-female group. Over half of the UMD women did not feel that their gender identity had any impact on their status or treatment in any music ensembles. The remainder felt that it had, or were not sure. As we will discover later when examining results from the Allegra Chamber Orchestra musicians' responses, this is in stark contrast to answers from the members of that ensemble. Given that the UMD orchestra members are, on average, younger than the Allegra members are, is their collective experience with gender identity significantly different based on age? Is it possible that, growing up primarily in the 1990s and early 2000s, the UMD women have not been subjected to the same sorts of gender biases in classical music that their older colleagues have? Or, does the country in which they were raised pose a greater influence here? While I would not presume there to be a large difference in the treatment of women in orchestras between the United States and Canada – two developed, North American countries – it is possible that that is indeed the case.

Not all of those who responded “yes” or “unsure” to “Has your status or treatment in an ensemble been impacted by your gender identity?” answered how or why. It is possible that they simply did not want to answer, but it is also possible that they were unable to articulate exactly what they felt was different about their treatment in the group. From those who did respond with clarifying comments, one woman remarked that the instrument they play is traditionally identified with men, or that more men than women play it, and that the stigma attached to the instrument was that it was too large for a woman to play well. One woman remarked that she felt she was “expected to be more accommodating, more supportive, less leading” because of her gender.

The question of being granted opportunities in music due to being a woman is a double-edged sword. While there are certain scholarships, grants, or recognitions set aside for female applicants (as there would be for members of any other typically underserved group), the question of a woman being as qualified as a man is raised. If women are equally capable as men of winning orchestral jobs or other positions in music, why are separate categories created for them in terms of funding, positions, or employment? The majority of UMD survey participants said they felt they had not been given opportunities in music due to their gender that they would not have otherwise had, which is the complete opposite of the response garnered from the Allegra women. Out of the two women who responded affirmatively – that they had been granted opportunities based on their gender identity – one acknowledged that “minority groups” and certain orchestras have welcomed them. The other woman, commenting on her non-orchestral music experiences, said “I believe I have gotten more shows as rock musician and chamber [musician] because I am an outgoing woman.”

Women's Orchestra Experience

Only one of the women surveyed said that she had attended a rehearsal or performance of a women's orchestra other than the one she is a member of. When asked about her experience, she said, "It is a different experience than what I'm usually used to. The group as a whole has more of a personal connection, and it shows with the music."

In the questionnaire, I asked the musicians to elaborate on their experiences as members of women's orchestras. I asked that they discuss the rehearsal setting, repertoire, performance standards, the relationship among the musicians, and anything else they felt was relevant to their experience. I also asked that, if they had experience performing as part of another all-women's ensemble (such as a women's chorus) to contrast that ensemble involvement with that of the women's orchestra.

A few suggested that their experience as a member of a women's orchestra was not much different, if at all, from those in their co-ed orchestras. One woman directly said that she did not find any difference between single-sex and mixed-gender orchestras.

However, most women did note some differences, even if they were slight, in their experiences between all-female and coed orchestras. One said she felt a greater "sense of acceptance and less hierarchy" in the women's orchestra, noting that "principal players had little need to assert themselves (comments were merely observational, more constructive)" and that the conductor's role was viewed as more facilitative than anything else. Another said she felt that "bonding with other women through music there seems to be this shared positive (feminine) [*her word*] energy." Along those same lines, another musician said that "the environment was welcoming, everyone was very friendly, and the vibe was very positive."

There were multiple trends that kept popping up in response to this question. Words such as “unity,” “comfortable,” “natural,” and “positive” kept making their way into the players’ answers. Several players commented on how “comfortable” they felt playing in the women’s orchestra, and how the ensemble seemed to have a different “vibe” from coed orchestras they had performed in, even if they did not define what that “vibe” exactly was.

Several respondents had experience singing in a women’s chorus in addition to playing in a women’s orchestra, and compared the two ensemble environments. One said that in both ensembles she felt “a sense of unity and a relaxing lull. Everyone can relate in some way to one another and it is a comfortable environment.” Another woman noted that while her experience in playing in a women’s orchestra was “new and fantastic,” her background in women’s choirs helped highlight the different between performing in a single-sex environment and a co-ed one. She feels that a single-sex ensemble “has a different vibe altogether” from that of a mixed-gender group.

What exactly is that “different vibe” that so many women stated they felt? Is the energy fundamentally different in a room full of women, or have we encouraged ourselves into believing it is because we are aware that we are in a single-sex environment?

Several players commented on the ease with which the women’s orchestra accomplished their musical goals. One said that she did not feel the ensemble had “to work hard to achieve musicianship and musicality in the repertoire. Many of the nuances and phrasing were felt without actually talking about it, sort of like everyone was on the same page...making music was more natural (enjoyable?) [*her word*] than with a mixed ensemble.” Multiple women commented on the friendliness of the other players, the positive vibe in the room, the shared positive energy, and a feeling of acceptance. As conductors of these ensembles, Janna and I agree that there is a

sense of safety in a women's orchestra, which allows players to be open, vulnerable, creative, and collaborative.

While most women surveyed were enthusiastic about the single-sex orchestra experience, some did not find it to be much different from their other orchestral experiences. One woman said that, because she grew up attending school with mostly other women, it was not a big change for her to play in a women's orchestra now. Another stated that the absence of men was not something she was consciously aware of. On the negative end, one woman suggested that "performance standards were likely limited due to lack of available personnel. If the orchestra had been open to men, it would have been easier to find more advanced players." It is hard to prove that assertion true or false. The personnel available for this project was not solely limited to the sex of the players. Many women who were asked to participate in the orchestra were unavailable due to prior commitments, and others due to the time of year the project was taking place (end of winter break into first week of spring semester).

Survey Results from the Allegra Chamber Orchestra: Demographics

Like the UMD orchestra, all participants surveyed are female, with all but one woman identifying as heterosexual (the one outlier identifies as lesbian). A third of the women are between the ages of 29 and 35, with remaining survey participants equally split among the 36 to 45, 45 to 54, and over 55 age groups. This demographic is entirely older than my recital orchestra, as it comprises women who, for the most part, are working professionally as musicians and have already obtained their university degrees.

Music Education and Professional Goals Among Allegra Musicians

Only two of the Allegra Chamber Orchestra musicians chose to conclude their formal music education with bachelor's degrees. The rest of the respondents earned master's degrees and/or Artist Diplomas, with at least one pursuing doctoral work. Similar to the UMD students, none of the women surveyed hold doctorates in music. All received private lessons as part of their musical training prior to college. Most participated in school or community music programs prior to pursuing music in higher education or becoming professional musicians, which is slightly different from the UMD orchestra where all had been members of their school or community ensembles at a young age. The group was almost evenly split when it came to receiving financial support for their music studies. With financial support also came emotional support. Given that the ages of the Allegra musicians are older than the UMD musicians, it is of interest to speculate if the era in which they were raised had any effect on the relationship between financial and emotional support for study in the arts. For example, a family raising children in the 1960s or 70s may have supported their children in one or two extracurricular activities as opposed to several, the result of which may have encouraged a greater sense of focus, participation, and commitment on the family's end regarding their children's musical studies. In the twenty-first century, many music students tend to be involved in other activities (athletics, dance, foreign language study, additional academic teams, etc) which may lead to their resources and attention, both financial and emotional, being divided among many different interests.

While support was generally high for the music education and preparation of the Allegra Chamber Orchestra members, it is somewhat different from the experience of the UMD students, and I am interested in exploring why that is. Are the differences more age-based – do they reflect

the era in which the musicians grew up? What role do their communities play in their music education, and ultimate careers as professional musicians?

Prior Orchestral Playing Experience and Future Professional Goals

Almost all of Allegra's survey participants have played in the full gamut of orchestral ensembles: youth orchestra, community orchestra, college/university/conservatory orchestra, regional or per-service orchestras, full-time professional orchestras, and freelance or pick-up orchestras. This is a wider and deeper range of experience than that of the UMD orchestra, but these women also all are older, have completed degrees, and therefore have had more years of playing experience, which has likely led to their increased playing opportunities and exposure to a wider variety of orchestral performance experiences. Out of those respondents who have not performed in every type of orchestral ensemble listed, a third had not performed with a full-time professional orchestra, and one of those musicians had also never been a member of a community (volunteer) orchestra. Unsurprisingly, all respondents have played under both male and female conductors. Given the level of playing proficiency self-reported by the players, it is also unsurprising that two-thirds of the respondents aim to be professional orchestral musicians, or already are. Two of the musicians who said that their goal is not to be a professional orchestral musician said they prefer to maintain their freelance orchestral playing careers. One explicitly stated that she balances her freelancing with teaching school, expressing that she "find[s] the combination rewarding and a good challenge." While I did not survey either the Allegra musicians or the UMD students about their experiences in teaching music, I would not be surprised if there are several more musicians in each orchestra whom also teach, either privately or in a classroom setting. Even for those without music education degrees or teaching

certification, teaching often becomes a large part of a musician's career, freelance or otherwise, and sometimes a significant part of their income.

Gender and Music Ensembles

All but two Allegra respondents surveyed have performed with single-sex ensembles other than the Allegra Chamber Orchestra. Of that group, approximately half have performed with all-female chamber ensembles and a couple had also performed in women's choruses. The remaining women surveyed have performed in a spectrum of music ensembles across several genres of music, including a contemporary band and a mariachi band. One woman is also a saxophonist, and performed as a member of a saxophone quartet! Only one woman surveyed reported having performed in an all-female ensemble where the conductor was male. While that information is quite different from that of the UMD orchestra, it makes sense considering the non-orchestral all-female ensembles these women have been in have largely been self-led and not required a conductor. The only ensembles that may have used a conductor at all would have been the women's choruses, where there are both male and female conductors in large numbers.

The women were split in their response to "Has your status or treatment in an ensemble been impacted by your gender identity?" A third of those surveyed said they didn't feel their treatment had been impacted by their identity as a woman, and one said she was unsure. Those who responded "yes," however, had strong reactions and reasons for their answers. One woman stated that "more men than women play my instrument," implying that her minority status in her own instrument section has made her stand out among those who play the same instrument as her. This particular respondent did not share how this status or treatment made her feel, so while the connotation of "difference" may be perceived as negative, it is also possible that her position

as a musician on a “male-dominated” instrument may have been a positive one for her. Perhaps her identity as a woman has led to scholarships or special recognition for women who play and excel at her instrument. Maybe she has been the first woman in her community to have a notable career on her instrument.

On the negative side, one woman reported that she has been “treated like [she] didn’t know what [she] was doing” due to her being female. Along those same lines, another woman, a brass player, said that she felt that men in her section were given preferential treatment. She said that, in her experience, “people seem to believe men will be more competent and/or be better leaders.” In casual conversation with an American woman who has been a professional musician for over twenty years I was alerted to the fact that she, too, had been flat-out told by a (male) conductor she had once worked with that she had been passed over for promotion because “men [were] natural leaders,” implying that she would never be considered for the position she was working towards simply because she was a woman. This person’s experience shows that the experiences of the women in Allegra are not limited to female musicians in Canada, but have a wider geographic reach. One Allegra musician noted that she “can’t exactly be sure” if her gender identity has made an impact on her treatment in music ensembles “but gender biases exist and inform how people are treated, so I’m sure it’s happened.”

In stark contrast to the UMD orchestra, most of Allegra’s survey participants reported that they have not been given opportunities in music due to their gender, implying that their experiences with female identity and its impact on their ensemble participation have been more negative than positive. One of the two women who did report what they considered to be benefits of their female status noted that they had been hired by an all-female orchestra (Allegra) and that they had also been hired for a female-specific role in an opera. The other woman reported that

she is a recipient of a scholarship from the Canadian Fellowship of University Women. These comments all lead me to wonder, are these “opportunities” truly that, or are they a way for men and women to continue to separate themselves from one another? While a man would not be eligible for a scholarship from the Canadian Federation of University Women, one must consider that such a scholarship was created to help women pursue higher education. Are Canadian men more likely to attend college than women? Are Canadian male musicians more likely to land professional gigs than their female counterparts?

Canadian Women’s Orchestra Experience

None of the Canadian orchestral musicians surveyed said that they had attended a rehearsal or performance of a women’s orchestra other than the one she is a member of. This speaks to the Allegra Chamber Orchestra’s distinct place in the Canadian classical music landscape as being one-of-a-kind, and providing an outlet for women that does not otherwise exist. It also highlights the fact that, if a highly-developed country like Canada does not have more than one women’s orchestra, what are the chances that other, less-developed countries have them? Does a country’s economic status have bearing on the opportunities available to women?

The Allegra Chamber Orchestra musicians repeatedly referred to the sense of “camaraderie” they feel when performing as members of the ensemble. While the camaraderie was presented as a positive attribute to membership in the group, it was not highlighted as a defining factor in their involvement. One woman noted that her experience in same-sex ensembles is “limited,” but that she has “found that it is a less competitive atmosphere.” Another woman felt similarly, stating that performing in Allegra was a “more supportive atmosphere” (this same respondent, however, also said that she did not sense any other difference in her all-

female orchestral experience than in her co-ed ones). Two women noted that the level of players in Allegra is “professional” and “very competent,” but that they were not convinced that was special to Allegra or simply a general expectation of high level orchestras. In one special case, an Allegra musician shared that one orchestra she performed in presented works which were all composed by women!

A few suggested that their experience in their respective women’s orchestras was not much different, if at all, from those in their co-ed orchestras. One woman said directly that she did not find any difference between single-sex and mixed-gender orchestras, and another said that besides everyone being able to share a dressing room, she did not find there to be significant demarcations between women’s and co-ed orchestras.

A Women’s Orchestra Experience...or A North American Orchestra Experience?

Between the two orchestras, 81.8% of those surveyed reported that they currently live and work in their country of citizenship. 22.7% are the children of immigrants, or are immigrants themselves. As both orchestras included in this survey are North American, it would make for an interesting future study to see if those with roots from other cultures experienced a significantly different musical upbringing from those who do not share that background. Would their experiences be more similar to those of some of the other orchestras and countries discussed in this paper (Camerata Romeu in Cuba, for example, or the Zohra Orchestra in Afghanistan), or are they more in line with those in the Canadian and American orchestras they are currently members of?

Chapter 3: The State of the World – Women’s Edition

Where do we go from here? In a world seemingly filled with “equal opportunities” for women and men, are women’s orchestras necessary? Do single-sex ensembles fill a void? Do they meet a need in our communities, in our society? Do they provide women with experiences they will not find elsewhere? Given the move towards gender equality in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, should women’s orchestras exist at all?

The Way Forward

When I began working on this project in 2016, Barack Obama was completing his second and final term as President of the United States and former Secretary of State, New York State Senator, and First Lady Hillary Clinton was running for President on the Democratic ticket. Had she won the electoral college, she would have been the first female President of the United States. However, Clinton came up short, and the reaction to her opponent’s election and subsequent assumption of office has spurred a worldwide discussion on several sensitive and important issues, the most far-reaching and public being women’s rights and equality.

It was never my intent to write a political dissertation, or to touch on politics much at all. However, given the current state of the world, the region in which I am living and working on this degree (the Washington, DC metropolitan area) and the obvious connection of world events to my topic, it feels not only right but necessary to take a brief look at how women in today’s world are viewed, and the challenges they face.

Post-Second Wave Feminism and Classical Music

John Kalbfleisch suggested in an article for Montreal's *The Gazette* in 2003 that not only are women's orchestras unnecessary, but also undesirable in the post-second wave feminist generation. Referring to Ethel Stark's Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra, he says, "Perhaps it was time for the finale [of the MWSO] no matter what the state of its bank account. Women were well on the way to establishing themselves without apology throughout the world of music: in symphonic orchestras and other ensembles, as soloists and with the baton. Thanks in part to Ethel Stark, an all-woman orchestra would be far more freakish today than it might ever have been in 1940."⁷²

According to the results of the survey distributed to my recital orchestra and members of the Allegra Chamber Orchestra, most women responded that they were "unsure" as to if women's orchestras should continue to exist, a surprising result given that their experiences performing in their respective all-women ensembles was positive. When asked why they were not sure if women's orchestras should exist, the overwhelming response was that now that women and men play alongside each other in orchestras, a single-sex experience no longer serves a purpose, and at the worst is another step farther away from achieving gender equality in symphony orchestras. How close is the orchestral world to achieving this equality, though?

Sophie Drinker, in 1948, wrote in her book *Music and Women: The Story of Women in their Relation to Music* that women still had an "uphill fight to secure a desk in a professional orchestra." She lists the excuses given for the exclusion of women, including home "duties" and the eye-rolling assertion that women might flirt with the patrons! Drinker notes that "these difficulties are overcome by managers of theatrical and ballet troupes because girls are essential

⁷² Noriega, "Montreal Women's Symphony Orchestra," 116.

to the success of their business. Orchestral music can be performed without women. Hence, excuses are made to exclude them.”⁷³ While these factors would not be given as reasons today for excluding women from symphony orchestras in many parts of the world, there are still places where women’s roles in society are distinctly different from men’s, and doing the same work that men do is frowned upon. In Mexico, women’s participation in concert music has only emerged in the past century, due to *malinchismo* (inferiority complex) and *machismo* (an exaggeration of masculinity and male pride) that have discouraged women from careers as performers and composers.⁷⁴

Has the orchestral world advanced to the point where men and women are considered on par with each other in terms of musical and technical performance, and, if so, does that eliminate the need for a single-sex musical experience? American violinist Camilla Urso (1842-1902) believed, as did many of her female contemporaries, that women should be allowed to play alongside men in orchestras. She claimed that women “play in better tune than men” and with “greater expression.” She praised her female colleagues’ level of preparation for rehearsals, as well as their attention to details and willingness to follow the conductor’s instructions.⁷⁵ Along similar lines, another musician stated that Mozart himself declared that women had a more “natural gift for stringed instruments than males” citing their “delicacy of touch” and “readier access of a conductor to their emotions.”⁷⁶ Given these assertions, are women truly afforded fair chances to become orchestral musicians? If they are, why are there still fewer female orchestral

⁷³ Drinker, *Music and Women*, 239.

⁷⁴ Edwards, “North America Since 1920,” 367.

⁷⁵ Neuls-Bates, *Women in Music*, 200-201.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 284-285.

musicians than male, and why is the number of female orchestra conductors still far behind those of males?

“Phrases such as ‘woman conductor,’ and ‘female musician,’ suggest that ‘real’ musicians, by default, are men,” says Julie C. Dunbar. She goes on to remind us that, “Women remain banned from many instrumental ensembles throughout the world, and in other ensembles they still receive undue attention due to their sex, particularly when they take leadership roles.”⁷⁷

An all-women’s orchestra in North America may serve a different purpose than one in the Caribbean, or one in the Middle East. It is difficult to generalize about the role a women’s orchestra plays when cultures across the world can be so vastly different from one another.

When I surveyed my recital orchestra, I was interested in knowing how many players were from other countries, or whose family members were raised elsewhere. Working with my orchestra and communicating with the Allegra Chamber Orchestra in British Columbia has given me a very North American lens of the women’s orchestra situation, as most survey participants were Canadian or American. As we know, though, music plays different roles in cultures around the world, and many cultures continue to assign relationships between gender and instruments.

Dunbar says

Music, along with literature and visual art, has long played a role in communication about cultural values regarding sexuality – it establishes understanding about gender roles and power, and is connected to arousal and desire. Whereas art, literature, and texted music overtly address sexuality, instrumental music’s connection to sexuality is not as obvious...people sometimes fail to see how culture mediates gendered meaning in instrumental music. If we think about it, however, sexual symbolism is present in instruments throughout the world. Parts of instruments are named for human body parts: the head, the neck, the belly, the throat. In many cultures, instruments are connected to gender-specific spirits, and in other parts of the world instrumentalists bestow a human name on their instruments, usually a name of the opposite sex.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Dunbar, *Women, Music, Culture*, 195-196.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 196-197.

This assertion is not something North Americans necessarily think about or are conscious of, but in many other cultures these attitudes are much more prevalent and not always hidden by those who feel this way. Even among the members of my recital orchestra and Allegra, however, there were reports from the players of having experienced sexist comments towards their choice of instrument and their ability to play it at a high level from those outside the women's orchestras.

When asked if they would choose to perform in another all-women's orchestra, 68.2% of survey respondents said "yes," while the rest said "maybe." Almost all of those who responded "yes" said they would consider playing in women's orchestras in addition to co-ed ensembles. One woman remarked that "it would go against the idea that orchestras should be equal if we didn't work together in mixed gender orchestras." Another woman noted that when one of her male colleagues in a co-ed orchestra first heard about the Allegra Chamber Orchestra, he heatedly declared, "There's soon going to be an all-men orchestra in town!" This woman shared her experiences and challenges as a female musician with him and concluded with, "You have every right to start an all-male orchestra, but please don't do so just to spite the existence of an all-women orchestra." Even in the twenty-first century, a lack of understanding of the challenges women face, and subsequent bias against women's attempts at empowering themselves, continue to exist.

It is maybe for this reason that women's orchestras still have a place in classical music. A place such as the Middle East may seem like a more obvious region of the world to form and promote single-sex ensembles. Women and men there are still often separated in most public places, from busses to hospital waiting rooms to schools. Performing Western classical music is still discouraged in many Middle Eastern countries, and women are often expected to fulfill traditional roles, such as wife and mother, as opposed to having their own careers. Highly

developed countries such as Canada and the United States, though, also benefit from single-sex organizations, and a women's orchestra is no different.

One woman who has been a member of multiple women's music ensembles said, "Each all-women's music ensemble that I participate in gives me a different experience and teaches me something new with each individual ensemble. It inspires me to spread that type of knowledge and experience to other women like myself." Another points to the "different dynamic" felt in a single-sex setting, and the "natural" feeling of playing alongside other women. Several respondents simply stated that the all-women's experience was fun for them, and that they had a "wonderful time making music with a room full of strong female musicians!"

As Carol Neuls-Bates reflects in her book *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present*,

To me one of the curious facts in life is how slowly things move. Think how long it took the powers that were, including even a shrewd woman like Queen Victoria, to understand that by and by women have to be reckoned with... To take the bull by the horns; the chief difficulty women musicians have to face is that in no walk of life do men like to see us come barging in on their preserves. Every woman who has to work for her living in trades that were once male monopolies knows this, and luckily a good many feel with me that after all it is only natural; consequently that it is as foolish of us to resent the inevitable as it is of men to deny the obvious. But whether we take it philosophically or resentfully, this is the determining factor in the position of Women...⁷⁹

Like everything else, the classical music world is slow to change. With the advent of blind auditions in most major symphony orchestras worldwide, more women are winning orchestral positions. With the creation of programs like the Dallas Opera's Institute for Women Conductors and Marin Alsop's Taki Concordia Fellowship, more women are afforded opportunities to pursue orchestral conducting careers. However, gender equality has not yet been reached.

⁷⁹ Neuls-Bates, *Women in Music*, 289-291.

But Where's the Proof?

A scientist commented to me once that it is often not possible to prove or disprove things. We can all think of examples of this, though the one that probably comes to most people's minds first is the question of religion and the existence of God. There is no "proof," per sé, that God exists, however, those who believe in God (some scientists included!) will point to various factors that confirm God's existence. These could include a (usually positive) event happening to themselves or someone close to them – such as a promotion or the birth of a child. "Proof" of a higher power's existence may come in the form of good health, an escape from a difficult or dangerous situation, or general contentment with one's life. There is no physical proof of God's existence, though. Nobody knows what God looks like, what form God takes, or how God makes decisions. Lack of physical proof, though, does not deter people's beliefs in a higher power. We cannot prove that God exists, but we cannot disprove God's existence, either.

It may seem like a stretch, but in a sense, the same can be said for the claim that a single-sex environment is the way forward. Nobody can "prove" that a single-sex work or learning environment, particularly for women, is better than a mixed (male and female) one, but it cannot be disproved, either. We can point to examples of women's colleges, all-girls' schools, women-owned and women-led businesses, and survey women who are active participants in these places. We can make connections between their income, their successes, and their overall happiness and the single-sex communities in which they are members, but we cannot prove that being in a single-sex environment is a direct correlation to any of the aforementioned items. Similarly, their connection cannot be disproved. All we can say is if a connection is likely or not.

While women's orchestras today may not serve the same purpose that single-sex music ensembles of previous generations did, they are still relevant and valuable. Feelings of

empowerment and safety amongst one's colleagues may not be measurable in a scientific sense, but they exist nonetheless, and are not to be ignored. Women's orchestras from North America to the Caribbean to the Middle East, and likely to many other areas of the world, encourage women to achieve musical greatness, and inspire the world to take notice.

Women's Orchestras Around the World in the 21st Century

While the election of the 45th President of the United States has awakened the world to a myriad of issues and injustices, the disparities between women and men in the workplace, and in society in general, are nothing new. They are certainly getting more attention now, but these issues have been part of our world's fabric for a long time, as discussed in the first part of this dissertation. It can be argued that a single-sex environment is no longer needed, because women have more rights and opportunities today than they used to. While this is mostly true in a lot of places, it is not true worldwide, and women are still not on equal footing with men in a wide variety of fields.

The field of classical music is a large institution formed over the course of many generations and like any other institution, is slow to change. There are more women conductors today than there were when I was born, but there is still only one woman leading a major American orchestra (Marin Alsop with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra). There are more women performing in orchestras, but there are some orchestras around the world that did not admit women into their ranks until the late 20th century, such as the Vienna Philharmonic! And, the number of women on university music faculties in the United States certainly does not represent the number of women entering the classical music field.

That being said, the existence of a single-sex ensemble - a women's orchestra - seems to have its place in our 21st century society, especially in parts of the world where women continue to be at a disadvantage due to traditional gender roles, lack of access to resources, or lack of education. Though women's orchestras are no longer common in North America or in Europe, they continue to exist.

To support the need for women's orchestras in today's world, I have included brief profiles on two such ensembles – Camerata Romeu in Cuba, and the Zohra Orchestra in Afghanistan. Both ensembles are currently in operation and both were formed during my lifetime. For the women in both ensembles, these orchestras provide a powerful space for them to excel, communicate, and create.

Camerata Romeu (Cuba)

Camerata Romeu was founded in 1993 under the auspices of La Fundación Pablo Milanés, “an independent cultural project”⁸⁰ by conductor Zenaida Castro Romeu, who felt that Cuba, despite its status as a small, low socio-economic status country, had something more to offer the world.⁸¹ Romeu was the first Cuban woman to graduate from Havana's music conservatory, and her personal example in Cuba has helped attract Cuban women of great musical talent to the ensemble.⁸²

⁸⁰ Mauricio Vicent, “The Pablo Milanés Foundation dissolved in Cuba,” http://elpais.com/diario/1995/06/10/cultura/802735206_850215.html (1995), accessed 31 March 2017.

⁸¹ Mark Johnson and Whitney Kroenke, “Camerata Romeu.” <https://playingforchange.com/musicians/camerata-romeu/> accessed 4 March 2017.

⁸² Anastasia Tsioulcas, “Meet Cuba's All-Female Orchestra,” <http://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2016/03/26/469944530/meet-cubas-all-female-orchestra> (2016), accessed 4 March 2017.

The ensemble serves a dual purpose in Cuba: it champions works by Cuban and South American composers (in addition to performing standard repertoire by composers such as Mozart, Grieg, and Vivaldi) and provides a place for young women in the early stages of their professional music careers to perform.⁸³ The ensemble performs completely from memory. They are based at the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi, a beautiful old church in the heart of Havana.⁸⁴ The Basilica is packed for the Camerata's concerts, often drawing standing-room-only audiences. Their biggest concert of the year is held each December, which they prepare in honor of their year's work. The orchestra's members believe that this year-end concert also gives them luck for the new year.⁸⁵

Romeu first thought of forming in the orchestra in 1992, but since Cuba was going through an economic crisis in the early 1990s she chose to form a chamber orchestra as opposed to a full symphony. The orchestra musicians are generally students at the Higher Institute of Art in Havana – a four-year institution - and join the ensemble around age 20, inspired by the opportunity to collaborate with other women. For many of these women it's their first experience playing in a professional orchestra, and like any professional orchestra, they work very hard to gain admission. One young musician remarked that it has “always been a dream to play in the Camerata.”⁸⁶

Family and spirituality are important in Cuban culture, and the women of the orchestra are usually encouraged by their family members and neighbors in their musical pursuits (which,

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ One Camerata Romeu member states, “Playing by heart [memory] is part of our image;” see “Auditioning for the Camerata Romeu” in *Cuba Mia: Portrait of an All-Woman Orchestra* (Arkadia Entertainment Corporation, 2005).

⁸⁵ *Cuba Mia: Portrait of an All-Woman Orchestra* [2005], DVD, Arkadia Entertainment Corporation 72002 (2005).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

for example, is not usually the case in the Middle East, as will be discussed later). Romeu is an example of this familial pride and emphasis on music education, as she was encouraged to begin taking piano lessons at age five by her mother. Another example is the young cellist Yescenia Fates, whose mother prayed to Santa Barbara (a venerated saint in Cuba) on the day of her audition so that she might present herself successfully.⁸⁷ Bassist Caridad Zaldivia says it is hard to balance being the mother of a small child with their work in the Camerata. Although she often needs to leave him in day care, the baby is often cared for by her father and sister. Zaldivia remarks that when rehearsals are twice a day or a big concert is coming up it is especially difficult to balance professional life with motherhood. She listens to recordings of the music they are learning while doing housework at home to help her learn the music. Her practice time is limited. “When I get to rehearsal, everything is peaceful for me,” she says.⁸⁸ Violinist Yadira Cobos’ grandfather says the Camerata is “a great spiritual satisfaction” and her grandmother says that Cobos’s participation in the orchestra is “not a sacrifice, but it’s an obligation.”⁸⁹ The mother of violist Yohima Fernandez sums up the thoughts of many Camerata musicians’ families: “Having a musical child means giving up a lot. It’s a long and hard career that needs the support of a family.”⁹⁰

Concertmaster (“Concertino”) Dayren Santamaria first worked in the Symphony Orchestra of Havana (another professional ensemble) and joined the Camerata after four years there. She started off in the Camerata’s first violin section before ascending to the principal role. Commenting on her position in the orchestra and her level of preparation, she says

⁸⁷ Saint Barbara is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers.

⁸⁸ Caridad Zaldivia, “Caridad’s Story,” *Cuba Mia*.

⁸⁹ Yadira Cobos, “Yadira’s Story,” *Cuba Mia*.

⁹⁰ Yohima Fernandez, “Yohima’s Story,” *Cuba Mia*.

...the work in the Basilica isn't enough. After rehearsals, I try to practice as much as I can. Usually, I practice here on this balcony in the building where I live. I practice many hours without stopping, but especially like now, when we're preparing for a big concert. Fortunately, the neighbors have gotten used to it. Some even say they like to hear me play.⁹¹

Visitors to Cuba may request to attend performances of the Camerata Romeu as part of a cultural tour. As the Internet is still nascent in Cuba, the orchestra's website and Facebook page are out of date, but video recordings of the ensemble's performances may be viewed and downloaded online.⁹² The orchestra has also recorded several CDs, including *La bella cubana*, *Cuba mía*, *Danza de las brujas*, and *Te Amaré*.⁹³ Camerata Romeu maintains an active performance schedule across Cuba and throughout the world. They have performed alongside the Chicago Children's Choir and have been visited by Former Second Lady of the United States Jill Biden. The orchestra has toured Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, France, Mexico, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United States.⁹⁴ Additionally, many composers have written specifically for the orchestra, including Roberto Valera, with whom they have a special partnership.⁹⁵

In a single-sex environment, members of women's orchestras claim to feel a different atmosphere from what they experience in mixed-gender ensembles. Principal 2nd violinist of Camerata Romeu, Yadira Cobo Rodriguez, says there's a special energy to the all-female

⁹¹ Dayren Santamaria, "Dayren's Story," *Cuba Mia*.

⁹² Kelly Holman, "Cuba: Camerata Romeu – Havana's fabulous all women string ensemble," <http://the-hopeful-traveller.blogspot.com/2015/06/cuba-19-camerata-romeu-havanas-fabulous.html> (2015), accessed 4 March 2017.

⁹³ Lisa Paravisini-Gebert and Ivette Romero-Cesareo, "Cuba's Camerata Romeu, An All-Woman Orchestra," <https://repeatingislands.com/2012/06/17/cubas-camerata-romeu-an-all-woman-orchestra/> (2012), accessed 4 March 2017.

⁹⁴ Johnson and Kroenke, "Camerata Romeu," <https://playingforchange.com/musicians/camerata-romeu/>

⁹⁵ *Cuba Mia: Portrait of an All-Woman Orchestra*.

ensemble: "Men have more strength, and women, you have a different feeling. It's more angelic, more comfortable."⁹⁶ This feeling of comfort is especially important to the ensemble when they are on a national or international tour. One orchestra member says, "When we're on tour, we're closer. We help each other." Another corroborates, "We all get along, we're like a family. And since we're all women, we know each other's problems, and know how to help each other, professionally as well. I don't know how it is with men, I've never worked in an orchestra with men, but we women are more direct, and know how to help each other without offending each other." A third Camerata member affirms, "The girls in the orchestra have a very good relationship. We're very close for a group of women. We rarely fight, and we do help each other out. We're really good friends."⁹⁷

The nature of a single-sex ensemble leads itself to a collaborative effort that is not necessarily found in a mixed-sex situation. In an orchestra like Camerata Romeu, obtaining the necessary resources is often challenging due to its island status as well as political situation. For example, finding and keeping good strings in Cuba is difficult because the humidity destroys them. The strings break easily and new ones are needed frequently to keep up with rehearsals, concerts, and personal practice sessions. Romeu reaches out to her friends and family for help with getting good strings for their concerts.⁹⁸

In present-day Havana, Camerata Romeu principal violist Anonlan Gonzalez sleeps next to her viola and rises early every morning so she can review the material she worked on the day before and prepare for the day ahead. A third-year student at the Higher Institute of Art of Cuba,

⁹⁶ Ian Holubiak, "Cuba's All-Female Orchestra, Camerata Romeu, Has 'Something to Share.'" <http://www.classicalite.com/articles/40147/20160331/cubas-female-orchestra-camerata-romeu-something-share.htm> (2016), accessed 4 March 2017.

⁹⁷ *Cuba Mia: Portrait of an All-Woman Orchestra*.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Gonzalez comes from a musical family; both her father and grandfather were professional musicians, and understand and support her desire to excel in music. The violist takes her leadership role in the orchestra very seriously, and wants to be prepared at the highest level for each rehearsal.⁹⁹

The more experienced members of the ensemble take on more leadership responsibility. When prospective members audition for the orchestra, a panel of section leaders and the conductor is convened to listen to the new player and provide feedback. Much like other modern-day orchestras, the decision to accept a new member lies with the audition panel, rather than the conductor alone. This makes for more of a collaborative effort among the women, and gives members of the ensemble a say in the creation of the group and its future.

Maestra Zenaida Romeu gets up at dawn and enjoys being awake early as no one disturbs her; it is her time to be creative. She listens to music, works on arrangements and chooses new pieces, as well as plays through works on the piano and sings along. She says, “Sometimes people ask me absurd questions. They ask me if I pick the girls because they’re pretty. Well, what I do between 9 and 1 everyday has nothing to do with pretty women, but with women musicians, because my relationship with them is professional.”¹⁰⁰

Romeu attended National Music School post-high school to continue her music studies and fell in love with choral music. She says her attraction to choral music came from her belief that “voices are the perfect instrument – the ideal for music is singing.” Through her study of choral music she discovered that “orchestra conductors can also be creators.” She began studying conducting with a Hungarian professor who lived in Cuba at the time, Agnes Kralowski.

⁹⁹ *Cuba mia.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Kralowski encouraged Romeu to make orchestra conducting her career. Romeu said, “It was a little terrifying to go into that career because historically, it’s been a male career. But I listened to her, and became the first female student [in Cuba] to study orchestra conducting.”

As conductor of Camerata Romeu, Romeu is well-loved and highly praised by the musicians in the orchestra. Gonzalez’s colleague Yescenia, a cellist, says, “Zenaida is a very famous conductor, and the orchestra is very prestigious.” Another Camerata musician agrees with Yescenia’s assessment, stating, “Zenaida is very demanding, which I applaud, and which we should all applaud, because that’s how good musicians are made.” Orchestra members point out that Romeu is quick to help out members of the orchestra if something personal is going on with them, such as a child’s illness or work conflict, even if she is stressed out herself. Romeu is portrayed as a giving and generous person, while maintaining enthusiasm for the music and a drive to make things happen.¹⁰¹

Zohra Orchestra (Afghanistan)

The Afghan Women’s “Zohra” Orchestra began in 2014 when a young trumpet player named Meena went to Dr. Sarmast, the director of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM), and inquired about the possibility of forming an all-female ensemble, a configuration that had never existed before in Afghanistan. One of ANIM’s foci is on girls’ education, so the proposal to begin this sort of orchestra fit with the mission of the school. The Zohra Orchestra began with fewer than ten players.

Twenty-year-old Negin Khpalwak from Kunar is one of the current leaders of the all-women’s orchestra which was formed in response to the period of Taliban rule, when playing

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

instruments was banned. Music-making continues to be frowned upon by conservative Muslims today, but that has not stopped Khpalwak or her friends from pursuing their passion for classical music.¹⁰² Khpalwak began learning music in secret before eventually confessing her involvement to her father, who was supportive. The rest of her Pashtun family, however, was not as encouraging.¹⁰³ Her brothers and uncles threatened to beat her up for appearing in a performance on television, claiming that she should not have the right to play music, since they are from a tribe where men do not have that privilege.¹⁰⁴ Her uncles cut off ties with her father. Says Khpalwak, “They told him he is not their brother anymore. Even my grandmother disowned my father.”¹⁰⁵

The Zohra Orchestra, an ensemble of thirty-five women, plays on both Western and Afghan instruments. Khpalwak’s connection to ANIM began when she was sent to live at an orphanage in Kabul by her father, who worried for her safety in Kunar, the family’s home province where Taliban militants are still active.¹⁰⁶ The ensemble rehearses twice a week, and is comprised of young women in Grade 6 and up. The musicians (as opposed to the conductor) choose their own repertoire, and the older, more experienced players mentor the younger players. In their short time together, the Zohra Orchestra is already a featured ensemble on a CD, “The Rosegarden of Light,” which was released on the UK label Toccata Classics.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Mirwals Harooni, “Afghan teenager braves threats, family pressure to lead women’s orchestra,” <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-orchestra-idUSKCN0XF00X> (2016), accessed 22 August 2016.

¹⁰³ Pashtun is the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.

¹⁰⁴ Harooni, “Afghan teenager.”

¹⁰⁵ Karim Sharifi and Rahim Faiez, “First Afghan women’s orchestra tries to change attitudes,” <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/33f4544f5eae4be1804029cecb4cb511/first-afghan-womens-orchestra-tries-change-attitudes> (2017), accessed 3 April 2017.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ “Ensemble Zohra – Afghan Women’s Orchestra,” <http://www.anim-music.org/girls-ensemble/>, accessed 3 April 2017.

The Zohra Orchestra is led by female conducting students, who in turn are supervised by Kevin Bishop. Bishop, an American who holds degrees in viola performance from University of California – Santa Barbara and The Hartt School, oversees the orchestral program at ANIM and teaches violin, viola, and orchestration. He calls ANIM a “pioneering program” and comments on the Zohra Orchestra being the only ensemble of its kind in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁸ Similar to the Montréal Women’s Symphony Orchestra, the orchestra is considered “an important step in providing opportunities for female musicians to unite in solidarity, deepen their commitment to music, and develop their skills as collaborative musicians.”¹⁰⁹

The Zohra Orchestra was invited to performed at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland in January 2017. For many of the women, this was the first time they performed on their instruments outside of Afghanistan. In an interview with Cassandra Garrison for Reuters, Khpalwak talked about receiving death threats from members of her community for her work with the ensemble, but expressed her commitment and pride at being a part of this pioneering ensemble. Her colleague, co-conductor Zarifa Adiba, was excited to share music as a member of the orchestra with the outside world, as a reflection of the positive things that are going on in Afghanistan. She remarked that the media’s portrayal of Afghanistan often focuses on the Taliban, ISIS, and violence against women, but that the Zohra Orchestra is a bright light amidst the negativity.¹¹⁰ Like Khpalwak, Adiba has had to keep her involvement in Zohra, and in music

¹⁰⁸ Sophia Olsen, “Kevin Bishop M’13 is Helping Restore Music to Afghanistan and Its Children,” <https://www.hartford.edu/news/press-releases/2016/07/Alumnus-restore-music-in-afghanistan.aspx> (2016), accessed 3 April 2017.

¹⁰⁹ “ANIM Ensembles,” <http://www.anim-music.org/anim-ensembles/>, accessed 3 April 2017.

¹¹⁰ The Taliban is a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist political movement. From 1996 to 2001, the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, enforcing a strict interpretation of Sharia law. ISIS stands for “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria,” and is a jihadist militant group that follows a fundamentalist doctrine of Sunni Islam.

in general, secret from many people in her life (“My mom and dad are the only ones who know...I am playing music”), but she says that, even though she has now performed internationally and been interviewed on television, she is not scared of potential adverse consequences to her music-making. Adiba says, “I am really confident. Music is nothing bad that I should feel shy of. Music is my profession and music is something beautiful. I should be proud of being a musician.”¹¹¹

The Role of Women’s Orchestras in 21st Century North America

The women’s orchestras in both Cuba and Afghanistan fill a need for both countries. Cuba’s continued low socio-economic status, as well as island environment, make it difficult for women to obtain the resources they need to have the careers they want. The comparatively small population size of the country means fewer orchestras in which to play, and the lack of modern performance venues (as well as recent natural disasters) limits the number of places in which musicians can perform. Since Cuban culture is very family-based and women are expected to fill the traditional gender roles of wife and mother, men are more likely to take the few orchestral opportunities that are available, and have the freedom to move elsewhere should they wish.

The orchestra in Afghanistan provides a place for young women to explore and grow that is not otherwise encouraged in their communities or in their religion. While its recent public success has made involvement in the orchestra potentially more dangerous for some of its participants, membership in the single-sex ensemble gives the women a sense of pride,

¹¹¹ Cassandra Garrison, “Zohra is Afghanistan’s first women’s orchestra. Many of its members have overcome ridicule,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aONOb7UXNc_ (2017), accessed 3 April 2017.

accomplishment, and strength. As their religious background frowns upon male and female interaction, and women are expected to conform to strict gender roles (should they wish to avoid severe repercussions), the Zohra Orchestra provides a place for the musicians to learn from each other and develop a skill and potential career that would otherwise be hidden from them or repressed.

What about countries where women are less expected to fill typical gender roles, have greater access to education, and are encouraged to apply to jobs that were, at one time, exclusively held by men? Are women's orchestras needed across Europe? Do they offer an experience not found elsewhere in Canada and the United States? What is the appeal, the benefit, to establishing all-women's orchestras in places where women are already "equal players" in the workplace?

This brings us back to the state of the world today. We as a global society are waking up to the fact that women are still not considered equal to men – not in places like Cuba and Afghanistan, nor in places like Canada and the United States. There are certainly a greater number of visible efforts to include women in North American workplaces than elsewhere, but inequalities still exist in terms of opportunities available and pay, not to mention the biases and discrimination women face every single day, simply for being female.

I personally would love to think that the need for women's orchestras is a thing of the past, that the Montreal Women's Symphony served its purpose and that now that women are allowed to play alongside men in orchestras that we don't need them. I would love to think that, with the necessary resources, the Camerata Romeu women would all be welcomed as competitive players not only in the Cuban orchestral community, but on the world's orchestral stages. Having lived in the Middle East for two years immediately prior to starting my doctoral

studies, I want to believe that every Afghani girl is afforded the same opportunities I was and that their music studies will not only be tolerated, but encouraged and celebrated. However, those things simply are not true – at least, not as I write this. We as a global community have a lot to examine if we are going to make the world a better, safer, more loving place for everyone, and that starts with giving attention to half of the population – women.

When I surveyed the members of my recital orchestra and the Allegra Chamber Orchestra, I discovered that many of the women had been members of other single-sex ensembles. I, too, have been in other single-sex music ensembles. Among other groups, I have been a violinist in an all-female string quartet, and a singer in a women’s choir. Both experiences provided their share of challenges, but they also both enriched my life, both musically and personally, in ways that other ensembles I have performed with cannot match. For most people who pursue music professionally, music performance is often a deeply emotional and vulnerable experience. The greatest music ensembles in the world are not those who deliver performances of stunning technical facility, but those which take the next step and add those feelings of commitment, dedication, and openness to the music, audience, and each other. A string quartet whose members may individually be terrific players but whom do not get along with each other may present a good performance with attention to the composer’s instructions and possibly free of technical errors, but it will likely lack the cohesiveness of a performance where the relationship between players is more amiable. How can musicians, even the very best ones, give a heartfelt performance and take their listeners on an emotional journey if they have not allowed themselves to be open, vulnerable, and emotional with their collaborators?

Women are often viewed as being more “emotional” than their male counterparts. At the very least, women generally are not punished for showing or sharing their emotions from a

young age the way men are. However, the “permission” granted to women to be their authentic selves as children is typically discouraged as they become adults. Oftentimes, displays of emotion in adult women, especially in a professional setting, are interpreted as “unprofessional,” “weak,” or “for attention.” While a woman’s ability to be compassionate and empathetic should be viewed as a strength, those very traits are used at times to accuse women of being “too emotional,” “sensitive,” or otherwise fit to hold a position of authority or power. Yet, aren’t these the very traits the world could use right now? Couldn’t we use more empathy, compassion, and willingness to understand and connect with one another?

Women, of course, do not “need” to be in groups of their own for these qualities to manifest. However, these qualities may be more easily recognizable when women are together. Women’s orchestral ensembles may be seen less frequently in North America due to earlier mentioned advances in equal rights than other same-sex music ensembles: women’s choirs, chamber ensembles, etc. As these other ensembles are perhaps more established and “accepted” than women’s orchestras, they can provide a model for what single-sex orchestral ensembles should strive for.

Choral conductor Phillip Swan’s research in his book chapter “The Y Factor in an X Chromosome World” acknowledges the differences between men and women in listing “three specific challenges” he has experienced while working with women’s music ensembles – in his case, women’s choirs. The first he lists is “the awareness of a heightened emotional barometer.” The second is women’s general ease with expressing themselves. The third is “frequent struggles with self-image and self-worth.”¹¹² Swan’s observations on women’s choirs can apply to any

¹¹² Phillip A. Swan, “The Y Factor in an X Chromosome World,” in *Conducting Women’s Choirs: Strategies for Success*, ed. Debra Spurgeon (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 2012), 140.

women's music ensemble or, truly, any women's environment. Women's abilities to experience and outwardly express emotion, including their struggles with self-image and self-worth, has many advantages in music performance. If an all-women's ensemble gives women a place to safely explore and share each one of these aspects of their experience as women, why would we as a community not support environments where this is possible?

The political landscape throughout the course of my paper has shown that women are stronger together. Women are running for political office, forming organizations to support other women, and highlighting abuse and discrimination through the "Me, Too" movement. Women are rallying together, speaking up, and garnering the support of those around them to advance themselves to ensure that they are given the same opportunities as men.

The Power of Pink

As with any organization, a music ensemble is at its best when it is comprised of musicians who are healthy, empowered, and accomplished. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Women's orchestras provide women (and the men who work with and support them) numerous opportunities to excel and develop in ways that would be less frequently possible in a mixed-gender setting. A women's orchestra has the great opportunity and privilege to give its members the same advantages that musicians in a women's choir, all-women's chamber ensemble, or any other non-music organization enjoy: a place to communicate and express emotions in an uninhibited, supportive environment, a space where heightened feelings and connection to expression serves the music, and a team that supports each other through image and esteem issues.

Closing Thoughts

As a woman who has participated in both all-women's and mixed-sex music ensembles as a singer, instrumentalist, and conductor for over twenty years, my feelings on the existence of all-women's orchestras around the world was initially admittedly mixed. My early research took me through feelings of sadness, anger, and horror as I learned about the first women's orchestras internationally. My direct work with my recital orchestra, as well as interview with Janna Sailor and subsequent survey of both my recital ensemble and the Allegra Chamber Orchestra, re-introduced some of those feelings, but also added a sense of empowerment, strength, and positivity. As I wrap up this part of my research, I am struck by a sense of hope, community, and commitment to the ongoing women's movement. As a musician, I have a responsibility to take listeners and audiences on an emotional journey. Music encourages thoughts and feelings. It makes a statement. It leaves an impression. It is impossible to ignore my "woman-ness" and be my true self as a musician.

Women together are a powerful force and comprise half of the world's population. Given the chance to strive, they will thrive. While surveys, anecdotal evidence, and feelings may not be able to "prove" anything, it is safe to say that women's orchestras not only have a place today in the larger fabric of classical music performance, but they are essential to the field for their contributions to making society safer, smarter, and more empathetic not just for women, but for everyone.

Appendices

APPENDIX I – Survey invitation

April 2017

Dear Fellow Musician,

My name is Bonnie Alger, and I am a doctoral candidate in orchestral conducting at the University of Maryland – College Park. I am writing to invite you to participate in a survey about your experience as a member of an all-women’s orchestra, as my dissertation focuses on the history, development, and culture of women’s orchestras.

My dissertation examines the history of women's orchestras internationally, as well as the environments and communities created in present-day women's orchestras. While there is some work published on women's orchestras in the United States, there is very little published on women's orchestras outside of the USA. I am interested in discovering the purpose of women's orchestras today as they compare to women's orchestras of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, as well as define the role they play in their respective countries and cultures. I am also comparing the experience of women's orchestras outside of the U.S. to similar ensembles in the U.S.

I am aiming to increase the awareness of the history of women in symphony orchestras, and the culture of single-sex ensembles, and share their experiences.

Participation in this survey is **voluntary**. Your responses will be combined and reported with others people’s responses. You are not required to provide personally identifying information or to answer any questions which make you feel uncomfortable.

Your **honest** and **complete** answers are crucial to making sure survey results represent the experiences of women in single-sex orchestras. This survey will take approximately **10-20 minutes to complete**.

If you have additional questions before or after your participation, please e-mail Bonnie Alger at balger@umd.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time!

All the best,

Bonnie Alger, DMA Candidate

University of Maryland – College Park

APPENDIX II - Survey

- 1) Do you identify as female? Circle one (this survey is only open to those who identify as female): Yes No
- 1a) If “yes,” circle which you most closely identify with: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, transgender woman, transgender man, other
- 2) Age: 18-22, 23-28, 29-35, 36-45, 45-54, 55 and over
- 3) Do you have, or are pursuing, a degree in music? Yes No
- 4) What is your highest level of formal education in music? Current undergraduate, bachelor’s degree, current master’s student, master’s degree, current doctoral student, ABD, doctoral degree
- 5) What kinds of orchestras have you performed with? Circle all that apply: youth orchestra, community orchestra, college/university/conservatory orchestra, regional/per service orchestra, full-time professional orchestra, freelancer
- 6) Besides orchestra, have you performed in any other single-sex ensembles? Yes No
- 6a) If “yes,” what kinds? Circle all that apply: women’s chorus, rock/pop/blues/folk band, jazz band, chamber ensemble, wind ensemble, other
- 7) Are you currently living and performing in the country of your citizenship? Yes No
- 8) Are you or one of your parents an immigrant? Yes No
- 8a) If “yes,” circle as many as apply: I am an immigrant, one parent is an immigrant, both parents are immigrants
- 8b) If you and/or your parents are immigrants, what is the role of orchestral music in your culture?
- 9) Have you played under both male and female conductors? Yes No

- 9a) If “no,” please circle one: only men, only women
- 10) Have you performed in any all-female ensembles where the conductor/leader was male?
Yes No
- 11) What kind of support have you been offered as a developing/professional musician?
Circle all that apply: private lessons, financial support, emotional support,
school/community ensembles, other
- 12) Has your status or treatment in an ensemble setting been impacted by your gender
identity? Yes No
- 12a) If “yes,” how so?
- 13) Have you ever been granted opportunities in music because you identify as a woman
(examples may include scholarships, grants, preferred seating placement/parts, etc)? Yes
No
- 13a) If “yes,” please elaborate.
- 14) Is your goal to be a professional orchestral musician (or are you already one)? Yes No
- 14a) If “no,” what is your professional goal?
- 15) Please elaborate on your experience as a musician in an all-women’s orchestra. Discuss
the rehearsal setting, repertoire, performance standards, relationship among the
musicians, and anything else you find relevant about your experience in a single- sex
setting. If you have also been a member of another single-sex music ensemble (ex:
women’s chorus), please compare your experience there with your orchestral experience.
- 16) Have you ever attended a performance of a rehearsal of a women’s orchestra (other than
the one you are in)? Circle one: Yes No
- 16a) If “yes,” describe your experience.
- 17) Based on your experience playing in an all-female orchestra, and given in that many
countries men and women now play alongside one another in orchestras, do you believe

women's orchestras should exist? Yes No

- 17a) If "yes," why, and what purpose do they serve?
- 18) Given the opportunity, would you choose to perform in another all-women's orchestra, or other music ensemble? Circle one: Yes No
- 18a) If "yes," why?
- 18b) If "yes," would you play in an all-women's ensemble to the exclusion of mixed gender orchestras, or in addition to them?
- 18c) If "no," why not?

APPENDIX III: Degree recital program

University of Maryland School of Music

Friday, January 27, 2017

8 p.m.

Gildenhorn Recital Hall

The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center

Bonnie Alger, conductor

Tiffany Lu, Livia Amoroso, Ava Shadmani, Jessica Schueckler, Carolina Meurkens, Camille Jones,
Astrid Jensen, violin
Rebecca Barnett, Rose Alon, viola
Molly Jones, Preetcharn Saund, Erin Snedecor, Samantha Flores, cello
Morgan Daly, Daphine Henderson, bass

Program

Sinfonia No. 10 in B Minor (1823)

Felix Mendelssohn
(1809-1847)

From *Symphony No. 2* (1998)
II. Elegy

Judith Lang Zaimont
(b. 1945)

Suite from Act IV of *Les Génies* (1736)
I. Passepied I and II
II. Passacaille
III. Tambourin I and II

Mademoiselle Duval
(1704-1769) or (1718-1769/75?)

INTERMISSION

Suite "From Holberg's Time," Op. 40 (1884)
I. Prelude
II. Sarabande
III. Gavotte
IV. Air
V. Rigaudon

Edvard Grieg
(1845-1907)

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the degree Doctor of Musical Arts.

Notes on the Program

Often regaled as a child prodigy, Felix Mendelssohn wrote a series of twelve string symphonies between the ages of 12 and 14, all which preceded his five full symphonies. Influenced by the music of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, these early symphonies were mainly written for performance in the privacy of the Mendelssohn household and were not performed publicly until after his death. While all are short, Sinfonia No. 10 in B Minor is the only one to be performed in one movement. The piece follows the standard form that one would find in the outer movement of a Classical or Romantic era symphonic work: a slow introduction, followed by a fast exposition and concluding with a presto coda.

Born in 1945, former Peabody Conservatory professor Judith Lang Zaimont has composed works for orchestra, opera, wind ensemble, chamber groups, and solo instruments and voices. The *Elegy* heard on tonight's program is the second movement of her three movement Symphony No. 2, subtitled "Remember Me." Dedicated to the memory of her aunt, the composer says, "In [Symphony No. 2], I've tried to mask nothing, and speak purely in every moment." As an educator, Zaimont actively promotes other female composers, and has been operative in the effort to introduce more music written by women into university music programs' repertoire.

Little is known about French composer Mademoiselle Duval, including her first name, her exact dates, and her true identity. An accomplished harpsichordist, Mlle Duval is best known for being the second woman to ever have an opera performed at the Paris Opera with the premiere of *Les Génies* (The Geniuses) in October 1736. The opera-ballet features a libretto written by Fleury de Lyon. While the Bay Area Women's Philharmonic released a recording of selections from *Les Génies* in 1990, it does not include these movements from Act IV. It is possible that Mlle Duval is the same person as French composer Louise Duval (and indeed, this is what the conductor's score indicates), but their dates do not exactly match up so it is unclear.

Edvard Grieg's *Holberg Suite* is a much-loved staple of the string orchestra repertoire. Originally conceived as a piano piece in 1884, the composition was adapted a year later by the composer himself for string orchestra. The five movement suite, based on 18th century dance forms, was written to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Danish-Norwegian playwright and philosopher Ludvig Holberg. Well-educated and well-traveled, Holberg believed that the first goal of education should be to teach students to use their senses and intellect, stating that intellect is what binds society together. Grieg himself was not particularly dedicated to his studies, however, and it was only with encouragement from his classmates that he was able to graduate (with honors!) from the Leipzig Conservatory before moving back to his native Norway to pursue his career as a composer.

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