

Femininity in the female music since 1918: views on some smaller musical cultures in Europe

The volume offers thirteen views on the creativity of female composers and the issue of femininity in music. It addresses the femininity in those European musical cultures after 1918 that are usually considered as smaller. Clearly, this smallness of a musical culture should be understood entirely in the relational sense of the word, the bigger musical cultures have been long posing such questions and are offering a series of heterogeneous answers over the years. What is female in the music of female composers is today for many almost superfluous questions: most of the contributions confirm that the composers today prefer to be seen merely as composers rather than women-composers. Today, femininity seems to be hardly an issue in the discourses on musical creativity. Gender is becoming tellingly absent – as it was loudly present in the recent past. What does this turn mean?

Although all contributors grappled with the same question about the femininity of female music since 1918, they did that in different ways. Yet two common aspects may be clearly outlined. The contributions are based on two complementary levels of creativity of female composers. On one hand, they are focused on the cultural-geographical (historical) perspectives. On the other hand, they tackle femininity in music as a theoretical-analytical issue.

From the cultural and geographical point of view, it is interesting to read the contributions as testimonies to the composers' environments, each offering different possibility for comparison with the others. They are all valuable contributions to the understanding the entire culture of contemporary musical creativity as seen from a perspective of modern female composers. Geographically, the views address female composers in all the areas of the (former) Yugoslavia, Romania, Austria, Slovakia, Lithuania and – as a model of the former Russian subculture – Ukraine. Unfortunately, we did not get contributions dealing with many others smaller musical cultures, as we planned initially (one was also the lack of funds since the collection was created without any financial assistance). However, the culturally interesting range of this selection offers, on one side, a comparison of milieus in which musical creativity was connected to the totalitarian regimes, and, on the other side, the situation within a democratic musical culture as prevail today

and has been prevailing in Austria since 1945. At the same time, seen from a historical perspective, the contributions offer interesting cultural dichotomy between north and south: between a pronounced patriarchal arrangement in the south to gender-fluid matriarchal values of the north.

From the theoretical and analytical point of view, the individual readings of the proposed topic regarding femininity in music reveal an interesting range of nuances. The common premise consisting of biological and social gender led some scholars to track the femininity in the general approaches to the oeuvres of individual composers while, some searched the femininity in the aesthetic features, even genres, some in the performing practices. It seems that in spite of the clear problematization of the classical stereotype regarding gender in music, gender remains important at least as an elusive or, rather, *fluid* theoretical category: it either shifts from one epistemological level to another or it merges several. And yet, no one doubts that gender is important at least as a heterogeneous category that lives on a thin line between »no more« and »not quite« of both facets of the gender concept: the femininity appears as »no more« biological issue (although one hardly doubts that it exists also as a simple sex variable) and yet it is »not quite« clear variable on the musicological map of the cultural variables (even though one may hardly doubt that gender does matter in different music practices).

The contributions are introduced by a general overview of the main theoretical positions of the *écriture féminine* by Susanne Kogler from Austria. They are ordered geographically, starting on the South and heading toward North: Julijana Papazova from Macedonia, Vesna Mikić and Adriana Sabo from Serbia, Ivana Miladinović Prica for Montenegro, Alma Bejtullahu for Kosovo, Amra Bosnić from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Elena Maria Șorban from Romania, Martina Bratić from Croatia, co-editors from Slovenia, Elfriede Reissig from Austria, Yvetta Kajanová from Slovakia, Vita Gruodytė from Lithuania and Iryna Tukova from Ukraine. In spite of the theoretical differences in addressing gender, the indicated no-more-and-not-quite role of the gender issue in contemporary music creativity deserves some special introductory attention.

A certain set of gender variables exist: either as an epistemological determinant, as it is elegantly sketched by Susanne Kogler, or as pertaining to concrete compositional and aesthetic features as well as performance practice, as indicated also by Julijana Papazova, Martina Bratić, Alma Bejtullahu, Elfriede Reissig, the co-editors, and especially Vita Gruodytė. Yet, it is also a fairly suspicious concept: for Vesna Mikić and Adriana Sabo, Elena Maria

Şorban, Yvette Kayanova, and Iryne Tukova. Anyways, in spite of the fact that a psychologist could hardly discard the popular credo according to which Sex & Drugs & Rock&Roll are tightly connected to the same experience of *jouissance* – the common physiological triggers of these activities are not disputable –, the gender issue regarding music creativity seems to be rather fuzzily defined. It is torn between a »complex« and »simplistic« view in terms of the opposition gender/sex where the former is a kind of a »stitch« that gathers the differences while the latter is just a simplification of the reality (Kogler), or it is seen as a set of concrete features encompassing the entire musical practice. However, it is exactly from this epistemologically as well as historically informed perspective that gender issue emerges as omnipresent in all aspects of the musical practices and partially also in musical creativity. Thus, it is indicated as a historical process in which the matriarchal culture has been »interrupted« by the religiously (Christian) and politically (communist) conceived practices with clear compositional and aesthetic roots (so charmingly recounted by Vita Gruodytė); or it emerges as an issue of theory of musical forms, where femininity is connected to the »small forms« and social engagement (Papazova); or it emerges as a question of reticence toward »wild innovation« (Kajanová), or simply, emerges as a pragmatic issue of (biological) sex (Şorban, Tukova).

On one hand, a *hesitance*, or *prudence*, prevails in the search for the femininity in musical creativity. On the other hand, gender is, obviously enough, important not only historically, but also theoretically. Thus, in spite of the fact that the contributions do not leave any doubt about the role of gender also in the field of musical creativity, the gender is here addressed as culturally evasive *qualia*. It exists as a compound indicator, as a fairly rich palette of gender constituents. If we simplify the gender/sex concept and sketch the lively relations between the oppositions, one finds helpful to arithmetically schematize *qualia* into the following »music-and-gender« algorithm (of course, here without the conjunctions): $1 + 1 = 2$, or $1 + 1 = \infty$ ($1 + 1 + 1 + \dots$, as it is indicated by the modern lifestyles), or $1 + 1 = 3 \dots 8$ (as the bigger families tend to function), yet $1 + 1 > 2$ (the divorce rates indicate in some part of the world).

The majority of authors may feel echoed in the concluding question-and-reply comment of Elena Maria Şorban:

Is there a feminine specific to be distinguished in the music of women composers from Romania? The answer remains to be given by the listeners.

At the same time, it is difficult to get rid of the impression that this kind of philosophy – a philosophy »leave-it-to-the listener« (or any other interpreter) – is not acceptable without remnants. Namely, the »stakeholders« of the musical-communication process lack even a basic »statistical research« regarding gender in the field of music creation, as Elfriede Reissig points out. What, actually, to say about gender-related issues in other fields of our musical practices?

Our deepest gratitude goes to each author. In many cases, the authors have contributed for the first time a systematic view of female composers in their cultural environments. Their views are but pilot studies, many issues remain out of the sight. Yet, they all testify rather nicely that gender – as many other variables that determine not only creativity (besides performance, of course) but also reception – does matter.

Special thanks go to the translators, who were sometimes faced with difficult decisions, especially in the culture where gender has been rarely addressed in connection with musical creativity.

And a technical comment: all [www](#) links have been tested before publishing this volume at the beginning of winter 2017. Therefore, the details about the access is omitted throughout.

Ljubljana, December 2017

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