

Assignment  
Studio



**Assistance with University Projects? Research Reports?  
Writing Skills?  
We have got you covered!**

**[www.assignmentstudio.net](http://www.assignmentstudio.net)**

**WhatsApp: +61-424-295050**

**Toll Free: 1-800-794-425**

**Email: [contact@assignmentstudio.net](mailto:contact@assignmentstudio.net)**

### **Follow us on Social Media**

**Facebook:**

<https://www.facebook.com/AssignmentStudio>

**Twitter:**

<https://twitter.com/AssignmentStudi>

**LinkedIn:**

<https://au.linkedin.com/company/assignment-studio>

**Pinterest:**

<http://pinterest.com/assignmentstudi>

Musicology has a long list of feminist scholars. Women have, for eternity, played an imperative role in music. Feminist music breaks the sexist archetype and offers a realization of the resistance faced by feminist musicians. Regardless of the immense musical endowment in some women, they faced much struggle due to the strains of a male dominated society. Feminism in music is a non-traditional subject matter, and not a lot of text has been written about it, with only a few women being cited in the theme of arts, and about always due to the verity that they were associated with male composers. The Romantic Period saw a number of women ascend in the world of music and get the status of composers, though there was much resistance against women composers, with only a few women who did not succumb under the weight, and augmented to be historical figures in music. Here a few feminist musician scholars will be discussed, with the prominent ones being Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn<sup>1,2</sup>.

Music takes many forms, and with slight variations, changes its tones. It can be about love, affection and faith, and can speak to people as individuals, or as a group. Music is another language in itself, as observed by Hanslick, *'Working of spirit in material fit for spirit'*<sup>3</sup>. Music has enchanting effects, and during the moments of reflection, it provides a spur to more speculative analysis of the soul, and its relation to music. As Carl Dahlhaus suggested, propinquity is a *'thin abstraction'*, and *'knows nothing of itself'*<sup>4</sup>.

Throughout the history of music, men have dominated the composing world, and women faced a lot of resistance if they desired to come into the premise of arts, specifically, music. There have been many rules and norms that pertained to male composers, and feminist music has been chastised, being believed that it did not match up to the rules, or customs. It was believed that the feminist role in music did not meet the standards laid by the music composed by men, and in the words of Susan McClary, *'The music that has been composed by women (despite all odds) has often been received in terms of essentialist gender stereotypes ascribed to women by masculine culture; it is repeatedly condemned as pretty, yet trivial or- in the event that it does not conform to feminine propriety- as aggressive and unbefitting a woman'*<sup>5</sup>.

The roots of Western arts music can be found in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic Period, where the majority of composers were male, and feminist composers, if any, had to face the ever burdening pressures of society. It was believed that music composed by women lacked the artistic essence, and did not conform to the masculine standards. Feminist movement in music was looked down upon, and even to these days, a hint of gender-bias in musicology can be seen.

Music walked in slower trends than other arts, and people were of the belief, that the music composed by male composers was of the 'pure form', and feminist music lacked certain art and aesthetic property from it. *'Men composers demonstrate their socially- established ability to compel events, whereas women composers inject a more egalitarian perspective into patriarchal discourse'*- Julia Moore<sup>6</sup>. Moore talked about many women composers of the Romantic Period, including Clara Schumann. Clara was a composer and a performer in the Romantic Period, and was one of the rare performers that played from memory. Due to the prevalent negative

---

<sup>1</sup> Clara Schumann: the artist and the woman By Nancy B. Reich, 2001

<sup>2</sup> Fanny Mendelssohn By Françoise Tillard, 1996

<sup>3</sup> Politics, Feminism, and Contemporary Music Theory By Pieter C. Van den Toorn, Pg 275, 1995

<sup>4</sup> Music, politics, and the academy By Pieter C. Van den Toorn, Pg 13, 1995

<sup>5</sup> Feminist aesthetics in music By Sally MacArthur, Page 5, 2002

<sup>6</sup> Sounds and society: themes in the sociology of music By Peter J. Martin, Pg 153, 1995

attitude of those days towards women's skill to compose, Clara gave up composing at the age of 36. But she continued performing and doing concerts despite facing resistance- not only from society, but also from husband Robert, as he did not like touring, whereas Clara loved touring. Due to the building pressure, she had to give up composing at the age of 36. Women of the romantic period faced much struggle, and their work was not recognized as being at par with the work composed by male composers. The term feminism in music was not known at those times, and it was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the feminist movement began, and this concept was later introduced in musicology.

There have been many feminist scholars in musicology, who faced the pressures of society weighed on feminist musicians. Women marked their presence in the field of music in many forms, and this has been corroborated by Eva Rieger in an essay published in 1985. She pointed out that women have contributed in various ways, and various branches of music. Their ways were different from men, and changed over time. Rieger pointed out the variation and flexibility in women's music. There was a similarity in the work of feminist composers of the earlier times, and it has been pointed out by Rieger, as communication was very important to feminist musicians, and they had an exceptional predilection towards functional music.

Listeners get involved in the musical motifs in logically inexplicable ways, as if they are one with the music. In the words of the renowned feminist musicologist, Susan McClary, '*A psychoanalytic model permits the following sort of explanation: music is able to simulate that state when the infant still feels itself to be coextensive with the mother's body, a state in which all sensation appears to be authentic before the alienating social codes of language and culture intervene, before one is even aware of being an individual separate from the mother.*'<sup>7</sup>

But the role of feminism in musicology has also been altercated by many. Rita Felski pointed out that it is obstructive to divide the musicology based on gender differences. According to her, it is not justified to talk of feminism in music, without taking the social conditions into account. Thus the term 'feminist philosophy' is basically uncertain.<sup>8</sup> It can have two different meanings. While the first meaning relates to feminist cultural relics in the fields of arts, the second meaning relates to the feminine body itself- forming a different branch based on the foundation of the female body. The second definition has been adopted by some French feminists, particularly Cixous and Irigaray, who asserted that the textual practices of women and men would be different based on the difference of their bodies.

Another gifted feminist composer of the Romantic Period was Fanny Mendelssohn. She faced much struggle due to the negative outlook of society towards woman composers. She published many of her works using her brother's name. Her struggle can be noted from her quote- '*It must be a sign of talent that I do not give up, though I can get nobody to take an interest in my efforts.*' Fanny wrote several lieder together with the swan song. Like other feminist composers of her time, Fanny's work did not get as much appreciation as her nearest male composer- her brother received.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Music, politics, and the academy By Pieter C. Van den Toorn, Pg 23, 1995

<sup>8</sup> Feminist Aesthetics in Music By Sally Macarthur, Pg 14, 2002

<sup>9</sup> Fanny Mendelssohn By Francois Tillard, 1996

In earlier times, not a lot of credit was given to feminist composers like Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn, but with recent times, a careful scrutiny is being done not only of their life, but also of their work, and they are being known as gifted female composers.

The ratio of women to men in the field of musicology has always been less, and it has been considered as the lack of talent in women of that period, but it is now being understood that women did not appear in such cached records due to the inherent and unequivocal gender biasing in musicology.

Women did not just have to face the struggle that most artists face, but also faced the challenge to be accepted as gifted artists, as the performing institutions hesitated to allow a woman to perform due to the 'inherent risks'. The women, who did cross the barriers, also limited themselves largely to performing, and less of composing, as feminist compositions were chiefly disregarded by the society.

Not only feminist composition, but even the first feminist music criticism faced a lot of struggle chiefly because it addressed sexuality and gender issues. Feminist music criticism took its first steps in Europe in Eva Rieger's *'Frau, Musik, und Manner Herrschaft'*. In her book, Rieger reflects upon the 'genders' in music, and scrutinized the language describing 'ideal forms', like sonata, which suggests that masculine subjects are aggressive, whereas feminine ones are passive. Sonata became an icon of success, though it held on to profound gender associations.

The initial studies on feminist music criticism emerged at the yearly convention of the American Musicological Society. But all the feminist music criticism faced resistance.

The concept of feminism had not yet been coined, and anything that seemed rebellious to the traditional ideas was opposed. Hence, the concept of feminist music faced a lot of criticism in the early times. While later, the idea became more common, and people openly discussed on the issues of feminism and related them to music. Yet, there were much difference in the way feminist music was perceived, and the way it was distinguished from other forms of music.

Occasionally, it is difficult for a woman to review her position. According to Trinh T. Minh-ha, *'sexism no longer expresses itself as blatantly as it once did'*<sup>10</sup>.

With this, it is important to reflect on what Sally Macarthur wrote in her book, *'Feminist Aesthetics in Music'*- music composed by women is called 'women's music', while that composed by men is simply called music. In this sense, 'women's music' is not music, but a variation of music, which is unfair for feminism. She also argues on the term 'woman composer', whereas men composers are always referred as simply 'composers.'

The field of music was dominated by men, and the standards laid in the field of musicology had also been made by men, and thus women had always been criticized of not meeting those standards. These standards marked the difference in masculine and feminine music.

*'The codes marking gender difference in music are informed by the prevalent attitudes of their time. But they also themselves participate in social formation, inasmuch as individuals learn how to be gendered beings through their interactions with cultural discourses such as music. Moreover, music just not passively reflects society; it also serves as a public forum within which*

---

<sup>10</sup> Reshaping a Discipline: Musicology and Feminism In The 1990s By Susan McClary, Pg 411, 1993

*various models of gender organization (along with many other aspects of social life) are asserted, adopted, contested, and negotiated.'* – Susan McClary<sup>11</sup>.

Feminist music was not just meant to be for women audience- it relates to both genders, including the women, who are not 'feminine'. This music was not just the music created by females, but also the music that restated the views people had regarding feminism. The struggle faced by women of the Romantic Period in the world of music is eminent, and only a few women were able to make a name in the arts. Though in modern times, musicology is evolving and showing notable increase of appreciation of feminist compositions, yet the history has not always remained kind towards the women folk. Many women composers such as Clara Schumann, and Fanny Mendelssohn faced negative criticism not just from the society, but also from the family, and were noted in the historical and musicological text, as they were related to famous male composers. Many other feminist composers of the time could not be noted as they were struggling on their own. The reason why there were only a few feminist composers is that there were only a few who were able enough to break the barriers of social negativity for feminism and its relation to music.

---

<sup>11</sup> Feminine endings: music, gender, and sexuality, Part 1 By Susan McClary, Pg 7, 1991

## Reference List

Macarthur Sally (2002) Feminist Aesthetics in Music [Online] Available from <http://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=G-ejso2hfv4C&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=feminism%20in%20music&ots=Qb5XCct9rT&sig=j9cgTJLWRTcs9dkG70GugvbP7fl#v=onepage&q=&f=false> [Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2010]

Martin Peter J. (1995) Sounds and society: themes in the sociology of music [Online] Available from <http://books.google.co.in/books?id=D5zHaa2WGqUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Sounds+and+society:+themes+in+the+sociology+of+music&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false> [Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2010]

McClary Susan (1993) Reshaping a Discipline: Musicology and Feminism In The 1990s [Online] Available from <http://www.en-derin.com/feminist-3.pdf> [Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2010]

Oliveros Pauline, Maus Fred (1994) A conversation About Feminism And Music [Online] Available from <http://www.en-derin.com/feminist-1.pdf> [Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2010]

Reich Nancy B. (2001) Clara Schumann: The artist and the woman [Online] Available from: <http://books.google.co.in/books?id=MQdciNQVkXsC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Clara+Schumann:+the+artist+and+the+woman&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false> [Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2010]

Tillard Françoise (1996) Fanny Mendelssohn [Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2010]

Van den Toorn Piter C. (1995) Politics, Feminism, and Contemporary Music Theory [Online] Available from: <http://www.en-derin.com/feminist-2.pdf> [Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> March 2010]

Van den Toorn Pieter C. (1995) Music, Politic, and The Academy [Online] Available from <http://books.google.co.in/books?id=1pfqrBXxxbcC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Music,+politics,+and+the+academy&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false> [Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> March 2010]