

Social Justice: Gender Equity in Concert Programming

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Introduction

The Ignatian Mentoring Program facilitated dialogue with Dr. Wood and reflection on teaching, which led directly to changes in my programming for Xavier's Symphonic Wind Ensemble. I was aware of the gender equity issue facing classical music, but not until I examined our 2015-2017 repertory did I fully realize that I had a potent opportunity and responsibility to be part of a social justice solution. Xavier University shares with the Society of Jesus "commitment to a faith that does justice through . . . a creative engagement with culture."¹ I accepted this as an invitation to purposeful action, creating an approach to programming as an issue of social justice.

The Problem

Male composers have long dominated classical music in the Western tradition. In spite of general trends towards gender equity in the workplace, female classical composers have encountered continuing resistance. In 2015, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra surveyed the repertory of twenty-one major orchestras in the United States and found that only 1.8% of works performed were written by women.² Noted musicologist and New York Times writer Alex Ross drew attention to this issue in January of 2018, when he tweeted "Number of female composers programmed by the Chicago Symphony and the Philadelphia Orchestra for the 2018-19 season: 0"³

Based on my experience with the wind band field, I believe our programming is as inequitable as that of symphony orchestras, if not more so. Recommended repertory lists by leaders in the field, including Mallory Thompson and H. Robert Reynolds, among others, feature male composers almost exclusively. My programming with the Symphonic Wind Ensemble from 2015-17 reflected a similar inequity.

Reconsidering Programming

Course Objectives:

- To achieve high standards of musical performance
- To encourage student growth through artistic experiences which challenge individuals musically and technically
- To expose students to compositions of the highest quality
- To seek an understanding of the intersection of music and other disciplines
- To create relevant, engaging performances

Musical Selections Determined by:

- Quality of composition
- Cultural/historical significance
- Appropriateness of difficulty and instrumentation
- Context of concert program, seasonal offerings, etc.

Goals:

- Improve gender equity in music programming for the Xavier University Wind Ensemble.
 - Research, discover, and study new music by women composers.
 - Present a concert showcasing female composers and arrangers.
 - Feature female composers throughout the 2017-18 season.
 - Incorporate biographical information on women composers through the concert cycle.
 - Engage living, female composers in artistic dialogue.

Challenges

In pursuing gender equity in concert programming, a number of challenges arose. Because there is less existing music written by women, it follows that there is less *good* music written by women. Being selective about quality is difficult when one has already committed to being selective about gender. Compounding this problem, music by women has been performed and recorded less frequently, an issue that makes finding and evaluating potential pieces more difficult.

Select programs from the 2017-18 academic year (women composers and arrangers are in bold):

Awakenings

November 2, 2017

Jodi Blackshaw: *Terpsichorean Dances*

Fauré arr. **Anne McGinty:** *Sicilienne*

Joni Greene: *Moonscape Awakening*

Rheinberger, arr. **Shelley Hanson:** *Abendlied*

Kimberly Archer: *Awakenings*

RITMO!

February 23, 2018

Penella arr. **Shelley Hanson:** *El Gato Montés*

Shelley Hanson: "Seis Manuel" from *Islas y Montañas*

Tania León: *Alegre*

Clifton Williams: Symphonic Dance No. 3 "Fiesta"

Leonard Bernstein: "Mambo" from *West Side Story*

The Best of All Possible Worlds

April 19, 2018

Leonard Bernstein: Overture to *Candide*

Joseph Kreines: *Sicilienne*
Chen Yi: *Spring Festival*
Robert W. Smith: *Encanto*
Gustav Holst: First Suite in E-flat

Assessment

- Improved gender equity in music programming for the Xavier University Wind Ensemble.
 - Discovered and studied a wealth of new music by female composers, while gathering resources for future research.
 - Presented a concert showcasing female composers and arrangers.
 - Featured female composers throughout the 2017-18 season.
 - Engaged in artistic dialogue with living female composers, shared with students during rehearsals.
 - Performed music by women from Australia, China, Cuba, and the United States.

Future Growth

I plan to continue pursuing gender equity in concert programming. Our successes this year in the Symphonic Wind Ensemble were very gratifying first steps. We will continue to perform and promote music by female composers. It seems foolish to pursue a statistical goal as a measure of success—I prefer to believe that we have achieved our goal when marginalized voices are heard, when our music tells more stories.

The Xavier University Dept. of Music is currently in discussion with Ohio-based composer Jennifer Jolley to commission a new work based on the writing of St. Francis of Assisi. Such an undertaking will require a consortium of several institutions and individual donors. This commissioning project directly addresses some of the issues identified this year: it will foster new music by a female composer, promote the work of a female composer, and create a collaborative network in support of a female composer. This is the next step in our commitment to a faith that does justice through a creative engagement with culture.

¹ [The Jesuit Catholic Mission of Jesuit Colleges and Universities](#) - AJCU, 2010

² Anne Midgette, "Female Composers Making Great Strides, but Classical Music World Isn't Helping Them," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 24, 2018.

³ Alex Ross, Twitter Post, January 31, 2018, 12:40pm.

<https://twitter.com/alexrossmusic/status/958741910935371778>