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I'm a composer, not a musicologist, and I'm often surprised when I catch glimpses of the antagonism that so often seems to arise between "new musicology" and "traditional musicology".* Of course context matters, and of course notes matter, and of course the interactions between context and notes matter – as I'm sure everyone here will agree. I often find myself wanting to mediate between random musicologists on the internet!

Although I'm continually arguing for the value of both "new" and "traditional" musicology, I didn't realize until recently the extent to which I had nonetheless internalized the idea that there is some kind of inherent opposition between the music that "new musicologists" might find interesting, and the music that "traditional musicologists" consider worthy of study.

I'm a composer, and a woman, and for as long as I've been a composer – 27 years now – I've been disturbed by the lack of representation of women composers. Of course I have many fantastic colleagues and friends who are women composers. When asked to suggest some interesting living composers, I often find that my list is half women or more – without any intention on my part to preferentially list women. But when it comes to textbooks, to music histories, to the programming of major orchestras, to the cannon, women are almost completely absent. When women are included at all, it will be 3 pages out of 600. Or 2 pieces in an entire orchestral season. The included women usually come from musical dynasties – Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn, Lili Boulanger, Ruth Crawford Seeger. And they are usually women who had their musical careers cut short – as if to say that yes, women can be promising students and rising talents – but they can never gain parity with the "old masters".

Sometimes the texts discuss the dearth of women. I'm old enough to have encountered texts suggesting that women just aren't able to compose; but more recently, they mostly talk about how historically women have lacked opportunity –

* Musicology is the academic study of music (as opposed to the performance or composition of music). "Traditional" (or "positivist") musicology tends to treat music (usually Western classical music) as an aesthetic object, which can be best understood by examination of notes and musical structures, and consideration of how works relate to other historical and contemporary pieces of music. "New" (or "critical") musicology focuses more on the subjective experience of music-making and listening, and draws on tools from a wide variety of fields including feminism, queer studies, post-colonial studies, and critical theory to examine music in its wider sociological context. (Of course actual musicologists may use all of these techniques and more!)

opportunity to study, opportunity for performances outside of the home, opportunity to devote their lives to composing rather than care-giving – and this lack of opportunity is supposed to be why there are no “great” historical women composers.

And I bought it. I believed that, aside from the above-mentioned few, there probably wasn't much good music by historical women. I'm ashamed to say that I didn't even spend much time looking or listening for it: I think I was afraid of hearing music by women that disappointed me. Even as I tried to fill my syllabuses with works by women, I stuck to Schumann and Mendelssohn, and to contemporary composers. Even as I advocated for contemporary women composers, I ignored those of the past.

I went to the Women's Work in Music conference in Bangor this past fall. There were four days filled with talks about and performances of music by women, historical as well as contemporary. And I was amazed by what I heard. So much fantastic music by women of all eras – often very successful in its time – and almost unknown today. It's true that these women faced obstacles that their male contemporaries didn't. They had to make their own educational opportunities, to create their own performances, and to do so while also performing the labour-intensive social and care-giving roles that were (and still are) so often expected of women, wives, and mothers. But they did, and they created music that was every bit as worthy as that of their male contemporaries.

You might think that my belated discovery of all these great historical women composers would make me happy: and it did. But even more, it made me sad, because it made it starkly clear what a powerful force sexism has been: not only in denying women opportunities, but even more so, in erasing women's creativity and success, even when we have been able to overcome lack of opportunities. The most striking statistic I saw at the conference was in a paper by Susan Elliott, who uncovered that the percentage of women composers performed at the proms was actually higher a hundred years ago than it is now. We are continually making progress: and the record and legacy of our progress is continually being taken away from us.

It seems that there's a widespread fear that “new musicology” – the attention to “context” – will cause us to spend time with works that wouldn't hold up to “traditional” musicological standards. I would have argued that this music would have been worth studying and knowing about anyway: I want to know about what the whole of the world does, not just what a particular subset of white European men has done. (And I would still argue that it's important to know about the whole range of human musical activity, not just a few selected works that have been labeled “genius”.) But I realize now that “context” – typically masquerading as objectivity – has actually been working in the opposite direction. “Context” – the largely unspoken cultural belief that only men can be worthwhile composers – has been keeping huge numbers of women composers whose works are interesting not

just contextually, but also in themselves – away from those who like to look at notes, structures, and content. I can only imagine that the same must be true for works that are kept out of the cannon by racism, regionalism, classism, and other contextual prejudices.

I hope we are moving towards a musical world where the interconnection between context and content are taken as a given, and where we freely combine attention to both as we strive to understand all the fantastic music there is before us.