

CG1009 Degree Project, Bachelor, classical music, 15 credits

2018 Degree of Bachelor in Music

Department of Classical Music

Supervisor: Peter Berling Carlson

Examiner: David Thyren

Kristine Nowlain

Collaborative Storytelling through Contemporary Composition

Examining participation in the creation and performance
of meaningful works through Judith Weir's
woman.life.song

Skriftlig reflektion inom självständigt, konstnärligt arbete

Inspelning av det självständiga, konstnärliga arbetet finns dokumenterat i det
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Abstract

Through examining Judith Weir's *woman.life.song* (2000), the work presented in this written reflection is centered on the power of collaboration and context to create meaningful art and music that express important and often underrepresented experiences. Through a musical and sociological analysis of this piece, it is examined how the personal is political and how the creation of music and art are therefore inherently political projects. This paper argues that musicians have a responsibility to consciously select our repertoire: a conscience based upon an understanding of intersectionality. Such consciousness must take into account structures of sexism and racism, which positions music in its socio-political context and actively challenges the concept of "quality" as it is constructed in the art music canon. Placing the composer and authors within their broader socio-political contexts, it is argued that lifting pieces such *woman.life.song* are important contributions of a musician's participation in music. This paper draws upon work in sociology that centers on identity to examine how structures of power impact the voices that are heard and that are represented in the musical canon.

Keywords: Feminism, intersectionality, gender, contemporary music, female composer, chamber orchestra, text, song cycle.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

In this project, I have examined the responsibility we have as musicians and performers in choosing repertoire and participating in today's art music scene. I believe that we have a responsibility to actively and critically analyze how our society is built and understand how the analysis of our context and history are necessary in our participation in art. I will examine the effect of critical and/or analytical thinking when approaching our participation in music. My goal is to bring to light the importance of the individual within a context of artistic expression and the society we live in. I would like to inspire myself and others to collaborate with our contemporaries to create and perform music that reflects and challenges our society, and to take into account racist and sexist power structures when participating in the arts and in music.

1.2 Background

With my background in sociology, I have always had a deep desire to examine how social power structures, identity, ideas, actions, impacts and experiences are interconnected. As an artist and musician, I see the historically and politically situated contexts of a musical piece and the composer as critical parts of my art. I strongly believe that art is never simply "art" and music is never simply "music." It always has a context and is a reflection, reaction or participation in that said context.

As an artist, I strive to connect the art I participate in to something that is relevant to the way our society is shaped and with that in mind I chose music that is relevant to the social justice work I do outside of the practice room. I believe in the impact that each individual has on their surroundings and that each of our choices have significance and connection to the societies we are constantly participating in. I challenge the concept of "quality," as I see how quality is connected to power and the voices in our society that are heard the most. This leads

me to an interest in the contextual details of the music I perform, not simply the musical aesthetic. I have a strong fundamental belief in the importance of recognizing political context in making artistic choices.

What interests me about Judith Weir's *woman.life.song* is the collaborative nature of the piece and how all five people involved – one composer, three authors and one soprano – were participatory in the creation of the piece from start to finish. In listening to, reading and watching various interviews and accounts of the process, I gather a strong sense of camaraderie, trust and appreciation from each of the contributing artists. They were invested in bringing out each other's strengths and wholly believing in the others' success. This process is greatly inspirational to me and represents the power of creating together in order to make art that is meaningful to those who need it most.

As students, we are often presented the repertoire our teachers believe we should learn and perform. Throughout our education we learn of the music included in the musical canon, or what we as members of a culture or society perceive as the “standard repertoire.”¹ This is not in itself a positive or negative process – it is how we as students learn about the music that exists and what we most enjoy to perform. However, due to our necessary participation in a society in which there are imbalances in power and representation, the music that most often is recommended to us is homogeneous. This results in giving little space or transferred knowledge of composers who often fall by the wayside, most often women and people of color. If we do not choose repertoire or organize music events lead by an active and humble analysis of the power structures within our society and in the art music community, then we are instead contributing to the imbalance in the power structures. Angela Davis, a professor, freedom fighter and former political prisoner, has said, “In a racist society, it is not enough to be nonracist – we must be anti-racist.”² She means that systemic racism (not simply individual racism including racial slurs, hate crimes, etc.) cannot be eradicated by claiming to be non-racist. The only way of making a change is by actively resisting. Thus, when participating in music, one way to take responsibility is to carefully considering what music we play.

¹ Citron, Marcia J. (1990). “Gender, Professionalism, and the Musical Canon.” *The Journal of Musicology*. Vol. 8, No. 1 (Winter, 1990), 102.

² Allred, K. (2017, August 19). Lady Gaga and the Problem with 'Non-Racist' White People. Retrieved March 01, 2018, from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lady-gaga-the-problems-with-non-racist-white_us_59960aeee4b033e0fbdec279

The musical canon is enmeshed with and formed by power structures within our society. Musicologist Marcia J. Citron writes,

Canonicity exerts tremendous cultural power as it encodes and perpetuates ideologies of some dominant group or groups. These exemplary values establish norms for the future...Canons are not intellectually pure but represent a variety of interests, not the least of which are commercial.³

Her argument shows the relationship of power to notions of quality, meaning that our concept of “quality” in music (or art, writing, ideas, thoughts, perspectives) is directly correlated to a normative idea influenced by those voices and people in society who are granted the most power, which in turn allows them to maintain their power. Social and cultural value are attached to this notion of quality, which in turn allows those with the most power to maintain their power.

The canon is seen as a replication of social relations and a potent symbol on their behalf. It provides a means of instilling a sense of identity in a culture: who the constituents are, where they come from, and where they are going. It can imply ideals of unity, consensus, and order.⁴

If we continually question the canon and which pieces we perform within an anti-racist, feminist and historical framework and instead choose music guided by an interest in both social justice as well as musical aesthetic, then we may find our repertoire shifts dramatically.

1.2.1 The work

woman.life.song was composed between 1998-2000 for soprano soloist and a 19-piece chamber orchestra. Composer Judith Weir was far from the only person behind this piece. It all began with soprano Jessye Norman who had a musical idea, knew which composer and librettists she wanted to collaborate with and the venue to sponsor the premier. Businessman and investor Henry Kravis stepped in to finance the piece as a birthday gift to his wife, Maria-Josée Kravis.⁵ Jessye Norman handpicked three of her favorite authors, Maya Angelou, Toni

³ Citron, Marcia J. (1993) *Gender and the Musical Canon*. Cambridge: University Press. 9.

⁴ Ibid. 1.

⁵ Judith Weir. (n.d.). Retrieved January 09, 2018, from <http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/work/1689/2764>

Morrison and Clarissa Pinkola Estés, to write the text and Judith Weir to compose the music for this expansive work.

In an interview with BBC Radio, Jessye Norman says,

There is so little music that I know that talks about a woman's life in the way that these marvelous intellects are able to talk about it...from the beginning of one's experience and to old age, to have that spectrum done by women is most unusual! I mean, most of the time, we women are given to singing [music and texts] about our lives written [by] men.⁶

Later in the interview, she compared the piece to the infamous song cycle by Robert Schumann, *Frauenliebe und -Leben* (Op. 42) – meaning *A Woman's Life and Love* – in which all of the eight movements are about the woman's relationship to her husband. It ranges from expressing the jitters she felt when she first saw her future husband to her exclamation of him being the noblest and highest of all to her utter despair when he dies. Norman speaks of how common it is for women to be represented in relation to a man in art music, and how *woman.life.song* is so wonderful because it shows some of the complex relationships and stages of a woman's life – and only one movement of seven are about her relationship to a man. The piece is about 45 minutes in its entirety and tells of the life of a woman from childhood to puberty to first love to loss to old age. There are seven movements, divided into four sections:

- 1a. On Youth (text: Maya Angelou)
- 1b. Breasts!! Song of the Innocent Wild-Child (text: Clarissa Pinkola Estés)
- 1c. Edge (text: Toni Morrison)
2. Eve Remembering (text: Toni Morrison)
3. The Mothership: When a Good Mother Sails from This World (text: Clarissa Pinkola Estés)
 - 3a. Stave I
 - 3b. Stave II
4. On Maturity (text: Maya Angelou)

woman.life.song premiered on March 22, 2000 at Carnegie Hall with Jessye Norman as soprano soloist with the Orchestra of St. Lukes conducted by David Roberston. It was later premiered in England at BBC Proms on August 6, 2000.⁷ There have only been six public

⁶ BBC Radio: Jessye Norman Interview [Interview]. (2009, July 31). Retrieved November 6, 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1KD5o2MHk>

⁷ Judith Weir. (n.d.). Retrieved January 09, 2018, from <http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/work/1689/2764>

performances of the piece and there are no public recordings, however they may be obtained by special request from the publishers.⁸

1.2.2 Judith Weir, a short biography

Judith Weir was born on May 11, 1954 to a Scottish family and raised outside of London, England. She grew up playing the oboe and was a member of the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. She studied composition with John Tavener as a teenager and later with Robin Holloway at Cambridge University. She taught at Glasgow University from 1979-1982 and was the Guinness Composer in Residence in Glasgow at The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama 1988-1991. She won first prize at the Opera Screen Festival in Helsinki in 1991 for her opera *Heaven Ablaze in His Breast*. She is a returning guest professor of composition at Cardiff University, Princeton and Harvard. She is also a resident composer with the City of Birmingham's Orchestra since 1990 and has written several works for choir and orchestra premiered by Sir Simon Rattle. Weir has written concert works for singers such as Dawn Upshaw, Jessye Norman, Jane Manning and Alice Coote. In 2007, she received the Queen's Medal for Music and was appointed as the Associate Composer to the BBC Singers in 2015.⁹

Her most recent opera *Miss Fortune* was written in 2011. It was premiered in Bregenz, Austria and later staged at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in 2012. Her other operas include *King Harald's Saga* (1979), *The Black Spider* (1985), *The Consolations of Scholarship* (1985), *A Night at the Chinese Opera* (1987), *The Vanishing Bridegroom* (1990), *Blond Eckbert* (1994) and *Armida* (2005). Other than opera, her list of works includes numerous choral pieces, orchestral pieces with and without soloists, art songs for voice and piano, as well as works for smaller chamber ensembles.¹⁰

⁸ Cawlfeld, Heather Drummon. (2015). "Study and analysis of 'woman.life.song' by Judith Weir." *Dissertations*. Paper 14.

⁹ About Judith Weir. (n.d.). Retrieved December 26, 2017, from <http://www.judithweir.com/about>

¹⁰ Ibid.

1.2.3 Jessye Norman, a short biography

Jessye Norman was born in Augusta, Georgia on September 15, 1945. She is a world-famous soprano who has performed on stages from La Scala to The Metropolitan Opera to Covent Garden. She received the National Medal of Arts from President Obama in 2009 and has received 35 honorary doctorates as well as the Kennedy Center Award in 1997. She founded the Jessye Norman School for the Arts in Augusta, Georgia – an after-school arts program for middle school students. Norman is active in the public sphere, serving on the Board of Directors for organizations such as The New York Public Library.¹¹ In 2014, Norman published a memoir titled *Stand Up Straight and Sing!*¹² in which she writes of the people who have meant a great deal to her over the years, her relationship to music and the racism and sexism she has experienced both on opera stages in her everyday life. She writes of how growing up black in the segregated South and events such as the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. impacted her life and work. She also writes of the profound importance another world-famous black opera singer, Marian Anderson, had to her.

1.2.4 Toni Morrison, a short biography

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Wofford on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio to parents who had fled the South when two of their neighbors had been lynched. She began her career as a single mother of two young children as an editor at Random House Books after graduating with a master's degree from Cornell University.¹³ She published her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* in 1970, followed by *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1980) and *Beloved* (1987). She has written a total of eleven novels. Her writing encompasses themes such as identity formation, growing up as a young, working class black girl in a world dominated by whiteness and inequity and experiences of trauma in the aftermath of incest and rape. She has been quoted as saying, "It's very important to me that my work be African-American. If it assimilates into a different or larger pool, so much the better. But I shouldn't be asked to do

¹¹ Cawlfeld, Heather Drummon. (2015). 18-19.

¹² Norman, J. (2014). *Stand Up Straight and Sing!* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

¹³ Ghansah, R. K. (2015, April 08). The Radical Vision of Toni Morrison. Retrieved February 02, 2018, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/magazine/the-radical-vision-of-toni-morrison.html>

that. Joyce is not asked to do that. Tolstoy is not. I mean, they can all be Russian, French, Irish or Catholic, they write out of where they come from, and I do too.”¹⁴

In 1988, a collective of 48 black American writers signed a statement criticizing the publishing industry for not recognizing both Toni Morrison and James Baldwin as crucial cornerstones within the literary and black communities. They wrote,

Despite the international stature of Toni Morrison, she has yet to receive the national recognition that her five major works of fiction entirely deserve: She has yet to receive the keystone honors of the National Book Award or the Pulitzer Prize...It is a fact that James Baldwin, celebrated worldwide and posthumously designated as “immortal” and as “the conscience of his generation,” never received the honor of these keystones to the canon of American literature.¹⁵

Morrison received a Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved* two months after this letter was published and the novel was later made into a movie featuring Oprah Winfrey.¹⁶ In 1993, Morrison received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1.2.5 Maya Angelou, a short biography

Maya Angelou was born Marguerite Johnson in St. Louis, Missouri on April 24, 1928 and spent her childhood in her city of birth as well as Stamps, Arkansas and Long Beach, California. She passed away in 2014 at the age of 86. She was a singer and actor as well as “a celebrated poet, memoirist, educator, dramatist, producer, actor, historian, filmmaker and civil rights activist.”¹⁷ She has received over 50 honorary doctorate degrees and wrote 36 books, 30 of which were bestsellers.¹⁸ In 1950 she joined the Harlem’s Writers Guild, where she began her writing career and befriended fellow writer James Baldwin. She was a life-long activist and worked with both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, but was also a member of the Presidential Committees of President Gerald Ford (1975) and President Jimmy Carter (1977). President Bill Clinton awarded her the National Medal of Arts in 2000 and President Barack

¹⁴ Ghansah, R. K. (2015, April 08).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Cawlfeld, Heather Drummon (2015), ”Study and analysis of ’woman.life.song’ by Judith Weir” *Dissertations*. Paper 14. 21-22.

¹⁷ Biography. (n.d.). Retrieved January 30, 2018, from <https://www.mayaangelou.com/biography/>

¹⁸ Ibid.

Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2010, which is the highest civilian honor.¹⁹

Like most of her works, Angelou's most famous book *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) deals with themes of identity, race, social justice and civil rights. Her writing often discusses themes such as the experience of growing up as a black woman in the deep South of the United States, her experience as a survivor of sexual assault and rape, raising a child as a young single mother, the power of education and grassroots organization to make social change and the necessity of love as a force of power. According to author Carol Neubauer, "Angelou turns her attention to the lives of black people in America from the time of slavery to the rebellious 1960s. Her themes deal broadly with the painful anguish suffered by blacks forced into submission, with guilt over accepting too much, and with protest and basic survival."²⁰

1.2.6 Clarissa Pinkola Estés, a short biography

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D., was born on January 27, 1945. She identifies as a poet, Jungian psychoanalyst, post-trauma specialist and *cantadora*, or keeper of stories within the Latin American tradition. She was born in the United States to Mexican parents of indigenous descent, adopted by Hungarian immigrants and raised in rural Indiana.²¹ She is an activist and has worked clinically as a post-trauma specialist for almost 50 years with people who have experienced war, exile and torture. She served as a psychoanalyst at Columbine High School and for the community after the massacre between 1999-2003 and worked with people affected by the attacks on September 11, 2001.²² She received her Doctorate degree in ethno-clinical psychology, "the study of social and psychological patterns of cultural and tribal

¹⁹ Maya Angelou. (n.d.). Retrieved January 30, 2018, from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/maya-angelou>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Johnson, D. (1993, February 28). Conversations/Clarissa Pinkola Estes; A Message for All Women: Run Free and Wild Like the Wolf. The New York Times. Retrieved January 9, 2018, from <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/02/28/weekinreview/conversations-clarissa-pinkola-estes-message-for-all-women-run-free-wild-like.html>

²² Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés. (2017, June 12). Retrieved January 09, 2018, from <http://www.clarissapinkolaestes.com/index.htm>

groups,²³ with an emphasis in indigenous history. Her most famous book *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*²⁴ (1992) was a New York Times Bestseller for 145 weeks, which was a record at the time.²⁵ As an author, much of her work centers on folklore, lessons learned from the natural world and finding one's own inner strength. Her most recent book was published in 2014 and is called *Untie the Strong Woman: Blessed Mother's Immaculate Love for the Wild Soul*.²⁶

1.2.7 Representation of Composers in Art Music

Examining numbers can be a powerful method to expose disparities in art music around the world. The latest report on the gender of composers represented in Sweden's top orchestras and opera houses was done on the 2014-2015 season by KVAST (Kvinnlig Anhopning av Svenska Tonsättare – or The Association of Swedish Women Composers) and Föreningen Svenska Tonsättare (The Swedish Society of Composers). It shows that in the top eighteen Swedish orchestras, 96.1% of music performed was composed by men and 3.9% was composed by women. It also shows that 11.4% of the music was composed after 1984 and 88.6% was composed before 1984. In the top five Swedish opera houses – The Royal Swedish Opera, Malmö Opera, Gothenburg Opera, Norrlandsoperan and Wermland Opera – 90.2% percent of the music played was composed by men and 9.8% was composed by women. In four of the five opera houses, 100% of the music played was composed by men. Only one opera house, Malmö Opera, programmed a season with 52% music composed by men and 48% music composed by women. 45.4% of the music played in all of the featured opera houses was composed after 1984 and 54.6% was composed before 1984.²⁷ The numbers are worse in the United States, where *woman.life.song* was premiered. According to statistics

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Estés, C. P. (1992). *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*. New York: Ballantine Books.

²⁵ Sylvia Mendoza, *The Book of Latina Women: 150 Vidas of Passion, Strength, and Success*, Adams Media, 2004, p. 221.

²⁶ Estés, C. P., Dr. (2013). *Untie the Strong Woman: Blessed Mothers Immaculate Love for the Wild Soul*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.

²⁷ *Repertoarstatistik över arten orkestrar och fem operahus i Sverige spelåret 2014/15* (Rep.). (2015). Retrieved January 10, 2018, from http://fst.se/sites/default/files/fst_rapport150605.pdf

published by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra from the 2014-2015 season, 1.8% of the music played by the top 22 orchestras in the United States was composed by women.²⁸

The lack of statistical information regarding the performance of music composed by women of color exposes the severe underrepresentation within the art music world. Furthermore, statistics on women of color employed in orchestras around the world demonstrates the glaring lack of their presence on stage. We do know that less than 0.5% of the music played in the top 25 orchestras of the United States is composed by people of color of all genders. Only 4% of performers in these orchestras are black or Latino. In the top 25 major orchestras in the United States, less than 2% in the orchestra are black or Latina women.²⁹ If we compare the fact that 1.5 million black and Latina women live in the city center of Los Angeles, California but there is only one woman of color who currently plays in the Los Angeles Philharmonics, the disparity shows the glaring lack of inclusion of women and people of color on our stages.³⁰

An example closer to home examines our own Kungl. Musikhögskola/Royal College of Music in Stockholm. An annual chamber music festival took place between February 1st and 4th, 2018 at the Royal College of Music titled ClassicAlive. There were 116 students involved in 18 concerts with a total of 49 works performed. Of these 49 works performed, only seven were composed within the last 30 years. Furthermore, only two of these works, four percent, were composed by women: Mélanie Bonis (1858-1937) and Ylva Nyberg Bentacor (f.1967).³¹

In challenging students and teachers to make socially responsible decisions surrounding repertoire, I believe we can slowly change the social geography of the music we hear. Music and art are great formative forces in our society, and it is our responsibility as musicians and artists to critically examine the music we create and how we collaborate in order to make a more just and inclusive world.

²⁸ O'Bannon, R. (n.d.). By the Numbers: Female Composers. Retrieved January 10, 2018, from <https://www.bsomusic.org/stories/by-the-numbers-female-composers.aspx>

²⁹ Banks, S. (n.d.). *Into the Canon: Equity in Classical Music*. Lecture presented at TEDx Northwestern U. Retrieved January 10, 2018, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUmnVSil_S8

³⁰ The Future is Fortissima. (n.d.). Retrieved January 10, 2018, from <https://www.colburnschool.edu/the-future-is-fortissima/>

³¹ Stor kammarmusikfestival som inte känns tidsenlig. (2018, February 03). Retrieved February 03, 2018, from <http://imusiken.se/stor-kammarmusikfestival-som-inte-kanns-tidsenlig/>

2 Method

To frame my central question regarding a musician's responsibility in terms of choosing repertoire, I would like to position anti-racist pedagogy as an important way to approach the central question. In her essay, Juliet Hess contextualizes complex phrases such as “white supremacy,” “racism” and “oppression” using the texts of scholars within the fields of education, critical race theory and anti-racism. She quotes George Dei, who writes that:

...anti-racism is an action-oriented educational strategy for institutional, systemic change to address racism and interlocking systems of social oppression...Anti-racism explicitly names the issues of race and social difference as issues of power and equity, rather than as matters of cultural and ethnic variety.³²

Dei also attributes anti-racism to challenging the invisibility of whiteness and privilege and denounces colorblindness, or the desire to see all people as the same despite the fact that people are systemically treated differently and have differential access to education, institutions, etc. due to their identities and backgrounds.

Like Angela Davis, Hess argues for the necessity of being anti-racist in practice rather than passively non-racist.

The constant presence of white supremacy necessitates taking an “anti-stance” in order to begin the process of working against these structural hierarchies. An “anti-stance” deliberately works in opposition to established norms – in this case, global white supremacy. It is action-oriented and strives toward equity and equality.³³

She also makes note of the importance of differentiating between social or political structures and individuals.

In arguing that global white supremacy is the overarching political structure, it is not to say that all white people are racist. On the contrary, this argument actually emphasizes the importance of understanding systems and structures of oppression rather than attributing systemic racism to the acts of individuals.³⁴

³² Dei, G. J. (2000). *Power, Knowledge and Anti-racism Education: A Critical Reader* (A. M. Calliste, Ed.). Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood. 27.

³³ Hess, Juliet. 2015. Upping the “anti-”: The value of an anti-racist theoretical framework in music education. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 14(1): 66–92. act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Hess14_1.pdf. 70.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 69.

Although a crucial argument in Hess' piece is that change must happen on a systemic level, it is still important to acknowledge the importance and support the power of individual actors working within systems to shift the power and change structures.

We can begin to work towards such systemic change through greater understandings of the workings of power as it interlocks with identity formation, especially with regards to race and gender. The concept of *intersectionality*, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides a way to understand power within sociological systems. During an interview Crenshaw states, "There are many, many different kinds of intersectional exclusions — not just black women, but other women of color. Not just people of color, but people with disabilities, immigrants, LGBTQ people, and Indigenous people."³⁵ She notes that some people encapsulate all of those identities at once, whereas some claim only one or two. She points out that disempowerment or discrimination is more complicated for people who experience multiple forms of exclusion or discrimination. "The good news is that intersectionality provides us a way to...put on glasses to...broaden our scope of how we think about where women are vulnerable, because different things make different women vulnerable."³⁶ Drawing upon the tools of an anti-racist framework and the concept of intersectionality, we can begin to examine the contributing factors of why we hear music by the same composers again and again and form a greater interest for the context of the music we perform.

Crenshaw addresses the need for using an intersectional framework in all we do. "Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated."³⁷ The exclusion of people of color and women from the musical canon not only reflects but also reproduces their subordination and marginalization. By understanding this, we can intervene and consider our artistic choices more carefully.

³⁵ Miller, H. (2017, August 11). Kimberlé Crenshaw Explains the Power of Intersectional Feminism in 1 Minute. Retrieved February 01, 2018, from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectional-feminism_us_598de38de4b090964296a34d

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Crenshaw, K. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. 140.

3 Analysis

By forming a space for Norman, Weir, Morrison, Pinkola Estés and Angelou to create collaboratively, *woman.life.song* is a positive example of how we can be intersectional in the creation of art. In this section, I will focus on the movement titled *3b. The Mothership, Stave 2* with text by Clarissa Pinkola Estés. This movement is set apart from the rest of the piece because it features only two cellos accompanying the soprano soloist, as opposed to the complete 19-piece chamber orchestra. In this movement, the woman is grieving her mother who has recently passed away. She is coming to terms with a life without her mother and regaining control after the tumult of loss. She addresses the importance of carrying on the work and knowledge of the mothers who have come before her. This movement shows an alternative form of non-romantic love, which is not as commonly represented in art music as romantic love. This is crucial, as showing love that is autonomous from men from a feminist perspective represents women's lives much more fully, as opposed to love often represented in the current musical canon as only romantic and between a man and a woman.

The whole movement stays in the key of C-minor with no clear harmonic progressions, mostly harmonic areas and chords. Throughout, there are hints of C-minor, G-minor and F-minor but also a quick flirt with the blues scale, reminding us of the old Negro Spiritual from the times of slavery in the United States, *Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child* which also speaks to the pain of being forcibly separated from one's mother through slavery.

The movement begins with the composer's note: "Reflective, relaxed, conversational." The two cellos begin in unison and suddenly divide into the dissonance of a major second at the end of the first measure. The phrase is repeated and slightly altered when the voice enters: "When I say, 'my mother has died,'/ I mean my 'most beloved.'/ Leave me to myself now,/ for I am a ship who's lost her riggings;/ suddenly/ come unmoored." The dissonance could portray sighing or crying, but also the dissonance of losing someone important.

1

When I say, "my mother has

38

Throughout the text, Pinkola Estés uses sailing ships as a metaphor for the many layers of grief, loss and the process of moving on. Her ship has become unmoored and lost its riggings, meaning she has lost her way and her means of navigation. On the word “unmoored,” the texture shifts very slightly and introduces movement in triplets, possibly suggesting feeling lost in the disorder of grief. The cellos then play descending quarter notes, suggesting sighs and accentuating the repetition of the text “My mother has died.”

15

Oh, my mother has di - ed, my mother has di - ed: she has earned her rest-ing

39

In measure 27, the cellos suddenly play a figure of eighth-note triplets, most frequently with a minor third, a perfect fourth or a perfect fifth between them.

³⁸ Weir, Judith. “The Mothership: Stave II,” mm. 1-5.

³⁹ Weir, Judith. “The Mothership: Stave II,” mm. 15-18.

27

I, - the daugh - ter, mend my mo-ther's sails now;

40

Here, the woman expresses with resoluteness that she will take care of what her mother left behind and continue the work her mother has done, but in her own manner. The triplets then shift to sixteenth-notes accompanying the text: “The sails of the mother/ are fitted to the daughtership;/ raised up on the mainsail,/ and the final touch, /the red ragged flag, hers,/ will be flying at the topmast of my ship.”

37

The sails _____ of the mo-ther are fit -

41

The sixteenth-notes shift to sixteenth-note quintuplets as she sings “I’ll be let down into the waters,/ I, the daughter, will glide again,/ but this time...” and then to triplets: “under the sails/ inherited from my mother,/ and all the mothers/ before her.” The shift to quintuplets then to triplets seems to increase the intensity, while emphasizing the idea that the woman

⁴⁰ Weir, Judith. “The Mothership: Stave II,” mm. 27-29.

⁴¹ Weir, Judith. “The Mothership: Stave II,” mm. 37-38.

will always be “under the sails inherited from [her] mother.” She will always carry her mother with her.

In measure 63, the cellos are suddenly silent and the singer continues a cappella with the instruction “Più mosso: freely, colla voce.” Here she addresses her mother and asserts that she has learned to navigate the open night-sea with the help of her mother: “Ay, Mother, let me tell you/ my treasured dearie-dear,/ one thing I have learned/ from your spirit passing through me,/ as sparkling shadow passes darkening shadow,/ on this open night-sea journey:” She sings “Ay, Mother, let me tell you” on a C-minor descending scale and a cappella, which suggests a resoluteness and creates a dramatic break. Just as she is about to say what she has learned, the cellos enter again with a dramatic tremolo. “I am learning to navigate/ by the mysterious farthest stars,/ the ones that the great wake of your passing/ has revealed to me.../ for the very first time...”

In measure 82, the tremolo is replaced by a new theme that is hopeful and upbeat. She sings, “I will see you in the new morning, I say/ my sweet little mother, my most excellent *omah*,/ ‘I will see you in the new morning,’ I say,/ to someone who is weeping.../ *Muchísimas gracias, mi mama*,/ Be with the Aeternal Mothers now,/ I will see you in the morning, I say,/ ...just/ ...one/ ...tiny/ ...bedazzle/ ...from/ ...now...” This idea is comforting both for the woman herself but also possibly for the spirit of her mother who worries for the daughter she left behind. The woman refers to her mother and thanks her in the Spanish language, reflecting Pinkola Estés’ heritage.

The final three measures remind us of a theme we heard in the beginning, with sweeping long notes and major second dissonances. Here she sings to finish of the movement, as if in prayer to send her safely through the after-life: “*Sanctu, Sanctu, Sanctu.*”

Pinkola Estés’ text speaks to important themes that are not often expressed in the context of art music. The use of two languages, Spanish and English, within the same text acknowledges migration and speaks to the complexity of being raised in a bilingual and bicultural home. It also encourages celebrating one’s roots and defying a tendency to erase one’s heritage in order to blend in. She refers to the depth and power of knowing that we are connected to generations of mothers before us and the mothers that will come after us. She reminds us that

we exist today only because of the struggles that have been carried on by generations of women and immigrants before us.

4 Final Reflection

While we as students prepare for a career as freelance musicians, we must use our years in school to learn repertoire and prepare ourselves for a quick-paced job market where only the best and most ambitious can make a decent living. It is just as important to remind ourselves of why we spend such a significant amount of our time with music and how we as musicians can make change and meaningful music. My experience is that collectively as young musicians we are often told or shown that there is no or very little music composed by women or people of color. This is simply untrue. A quick look back in history reveals that women have always been an active part of music and composing, in spite of their obstacles or hardships. What instead seems to be the case is that women and people of color have been given very little credit, not taken seriously, not believed and not documented or archived as great composers. Recently, however, there has been a publishing wave of anthologies of music composed by women, which deeply challenges the idea that there have historically been few female composers. Some examples include: *New Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, edited by James R. Briscoe,⁴² *Gömda Skatter: sånger av kvinnor från fem sekler*, compiled by the organization Evterpe⁴³ and *Women Composers: A Heritage of Song*, edited by Carol Kimball.⁴⁴

There are also ensembles, organizations and artists who are working hard to make an impact in the musical world. Some are dedicated specifically to music by women, others to composers and musicians of color, and yet others seek to play music composed by living composers. *The Ambache Ensemble*, based in London, England and founded in 1984 by pianist Diana Ambache, plays music primarily by W.A. Mozart and by female composers.

⁴² Briscoe, J. R. [ed.]. (2004). *New Historical Anthology of Music by Women*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

⁴³ *Gömda Skatter: sånger av kvinnor från fem sekler* (1st ed.). (2010). Stockholm: Evterpe.

⁴⁴ Kimball, C. [ed.]. (2005). *Women Composers: A Heritage of Song*. Hal Leonard.

Their ensemble ranges from 3 to 40 musicians, depending on the piece. They have recorded works extensively appearing on the labels Meridian, Naxos, Virgin Classics, Chandos and Signum Classic.⁴⁵ A collective of female composers called *Konstmusiksystrar*⁴⁶ has made great progress in organizing primarily young female and trans composers in Sweden. They support each other and provide courses and a variety of programming in concert halls and art museums. *KVAST* (Kvinnlig Anhopning av Svenska Tonsättare, or The Association of Swedish Women Composers) is a Swedish organization “...that works to bring music by women composers to a wider audience.”⁴⁷ *Sphinx* is an organization based in Detroit, Michigan with a mission to “...transform lives through the power of diversity in the arts” through rigorous music education programs for young Latinx and black classical musicians as well as competitions for young soloists, scholarships, professional orchestras, chamber groups and a choir, all with a focus to highlight the artistry of the black and Latinx musical community.⁴⁸

I am inspired by the many organizations and individuals who participate in music as a way to understand, challenge, connect and transform. As a young musician, this process of examining *woman.life.song* and the work of the five contributors to the piece has allowed me to strengthen my sense of meaning within the music world. In my earlier years of studies, the pressure to follow the stream of the “traditional” canonical works has often led me to feel I must sing a certain type of repertoire. This ultimately inhibited me from feeling a sense of the importance of the work I was doing. When I was able to connect my vision and experience of the world with the repertoire I wanted to sing, I suddenly felt inspired, a sense of vitality and much more in control of my own artistic power and strength. I feel the huge importance of finding meaning in the music we participate in.

I see how the research and processing I have done surrounding my final project at KMH is groundwork for future projects. I dream of creating and touring Sweden with a new children’s opera in collaboration with a young composer, librettist and another singer colleague. I also

⁴⁵ Lewis, U. D. (n.d.). *Ambache Chamber Ensemble – Biography & History*. Retrieved February 21, 2018, from <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/ambache-chamber-ensemble-mn0002164538>

⁴⁶ *Konstmusiksystrar*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2018, from <http://konstmusiksystrar.se/>

⁴⁷ *KVAST*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2018, from <http://eng.kvast.org/>

⁴⁸ *About the Sphinx Organization: Our Vision and Mission*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2018, from <http://www.sphinxmusic.org/>

dream of creating a chamber music group that plays culturally relevant music and collaborating with other inspirational musicians and thinkers.

Apart from future musical projects, I consider this as just the beginning of my process in examining whiteness in art music and how my whiteness plays a role in how I participate in and see the world, especially within the art music community. The piece *woman.life.song* also provides an avenue through which to explore the power and privilege encapsulated within whiteness. It is a topic that I had intended to include in my work surrounding *woman.life.song*, considering both Judith Weir and I are also white, however the lack of scholarship surrounding whiteness and art music is profound. Critically engaging my own positionality as a white musician, I aspire to continue dissecting the impacts of racial power structures through an anti-racist framework. Ultimately, I believe that critically reflexive practices in our thought and work can be a powerful means to incite systemic change.

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