

Conference Report, Gender Relations in Wind Music: From Clichés to Diversity

Oberschützen, 04.-05.05.2023

Is wind music (still) a male's domain? How have gender relations changed since the 20th century in this field? What can music institutions do to foster gender equality in wind music? These questions were at the centre of the discussions at the international conference *Gender Relations in Wind Music: from Clichés to Diversity*, which took place at the Cultural and University Centre of Oberschützen (Kunstuniversität Graz) between 4th and 5th May, 2023. This event brought together scholars, music educators, and musicians from the United States, Austria, Germany, and Luxemburg.

In the opening remarks, Gerd Grupe (Vice-Rector for Research, Gender, and Diversity) and David Gasche (Director of the International Center for Wind Music Research, Institut Oberschützen) recalled some of the fundamental steps related to wind music research, one such step being the establishing of the International Society for Research and Promotion of Wind Music in 1974. Grupe and Gasche stressed that the issue of gender relations and discrimination in wind music has been a neglected field of research up until today; hence, the importance of using the two-day-event as an opportunity to exchange perspectives based on data and experiences collected in a variety of different countries and contexts.

After the opening concert performed by the students of the *Bläserkreis Oberschützen*, musicologist Janina Klassen's (Hochschule für Musik Freiburg i.Br.) keynote lecture started to investigate the little-known terrain of women in wind music ensembles as well as the causes of their insufficient acknowledgement. The lecturer pointed out that (wind) female musicians have been neglected also because music history is not gender neutral, and that they continue to be subjected to prejudices and judgements based on their physical appearance rather than their musical skills. Women are constantly underrepresented in the most prestigious orchestras; furthermore, especially in wind music, they are still asked, both subtly and explicitly, to prove that they are not too weak to play – or even to hold – their instruments. Klassen also provided stimulus for further research in this field, one being the exclusively female brass ensembles that pushed the boundaries of "appropriateness" in wind music during the 19th century in German-speaking areas.

Gender discriminations were also considered in the contributions of the first session under the title *Wind Music, Women and Gender from a Historical, Social and Cultural Perspective*. Musicologist and oboist Rachel Becker (Boise State University) outlined the developing of a new aesthetics in the 19th century concerning musical instruments, which involved the feminization of the flute, the oboe and the violin, while the soprano voice ceased to be associated with a hero or with a high social status,

but exclusively with a woman. Being a result of the gender roles polarization experienced by Western society in that period, the far-reaching effects of these gender assignments would last for two centuries. Becker pointed out that not even the stereotype of the “default musician” as male can be considered completely outdated: the notorious case of the very late acceptance of female musicians in the *Wiener Philharmoniker* (1997) provides just one example of the obstacles that women still face in music.

Starting from the consideration of the role of bands in the 19th and 20th century in stirring patriotic sentiment and shaping gender stereotypes, professor of instrumental music education Timothy Kaiser (Oklahoma Baptist University) held a lecture about the exemplary case of the US leading band conductor, gifted composer, and musician John Philip Sousa (1854-1932). Kaiser focused on how Sousa’s ability of leadership, allegedly pleasant temperament, and virile athleticism were harnessed to build the mythical image of the “marching king”, embodying both flawless patriotism and “masculine grace”. These personal traits were also the focus of the media campaigns which provided him with an unprecedented veneration.

The discussion about the relationship between wind-bands and audience in the United States was continued by musicologist Kari Lindquist (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). Her contribution dealt with the role of the women that took part in the University of Michigan Symphony Band’s Tour in the Soviet Union, Middle East, and Eastern Europe in 1961, namely over a decade before they were allowed to play in the university’s marching band. Even though the diplomatic role of female musicians (27 out of 94 participants) on this tour was barely considered at that time, the fact that women were allowed for the first time to participate in an event sponsored by the Department of State attracted the media’s attention, while contributing to the lowering of the militaristic association with wind instruments. Moreover, the diaries of the band’s women suggest that during this tour the female musicians established a connection with the public, and in particular with the female audience.

In the subsequent lecture, professor of music education Timothy J. Groulx (University of North Florida) tackled the issue of the underrepresentation of women in wind band literature, by illustrating the results of a quantitative study about historical trends in concert band literature both at the US national level and from the Florida perspective. What emerged from the latter was that only nine female composers’ works (1%) have ever appeared on the lists of the Florida Bandmasters Association since the Thirties; approximatively the same percentage applies to African-American composers as well as to the Hispanic ones, whereas a slightly higher rate (2%) is represented by Asian composers.

The next session was opened by the musician Kirsten Lies-Warfield (Arlington Philharmonic, International Trombone Association), who shared her experience as first female trombonist hired by the US Army Band in 1999, and thus the perspective she gained on gender relations in the military. Lies-Warfield also outlined the psychological and sociological concepts that provide a framework for the systematic discriminatory behaviours she was subjected to, and which caused eventually her marginalization in the Army Band and her forced retirement from it in 2019: expectations theory, status construction theory, and implicit bias theory among others.

Carole D. Reinhart's (University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna) lecture ended the first day by presenting a captivating retrospective about her long career as a trumpeter. Her international success as soloist and in prestigious orchestras and television programs was challenged but fortunately not threatened by the prejudices which characterise typically male-dominated wind music. During her academic activity in Vienna, Reinhart also took an interest in gender-related issues, as her dissertation dealing with women brass musicians and the International Women's Brass Conference shows.

The second day of the conference began with the session *Transformation Processes and New Perspectives*. Jazz researcher Christa Bruckner-Haring (Kunstuniversität Graz) explored the challenges that concern female instrumentalists in jazz, by referring to three studies that had women in jazz from Austria and Europe in general as subject. The author investigated the issues related to the deep-rooted characterization of jazz as a male-dominated genre, such as the low number of female teachers, the struggle with combining professional and family life, and the discriminations that female musicians experience in jazz venues. Bruckner-Haring concluded that, despite the lack of significant changes in the direction of gender balance in jazz education, recent data about jazz festivals and venues show an encouraging increase of women's participation both in the audience and as leaders of jazz ensembles.

Musicologist and clarinettist David Gasche (Kunstuniversität Graz) outlined the current state of research concerning women in wind music, arguing that – unlike what can be seen in anglophone countries – this specific area of research still struggles to break through in German-speaking countries. Having recalled the important contribution of institutions for gender studies (Centre for Gender Studies and Diversity of the Kunstuniversität Graz, Department of Cultural Management and Gender Studies of the University of Music Vienna among others), the lecturer suggested some possible areas of research concerning women's ensembles in wind music, like the so-called "Damenkapellen". Gasche also summarized some of the issues connected to the type of sources available today, for instance the scarcity of recordings providing the names of the musicians that participated in ensembles.

Another stimulus towards innovative areas of research was provided by professor of music education Julia Wieneke (Mozarteum University Salzburg, Innsbruck Department) in her reflection about social justice in music education contexts. Having considered several definitions of social justice and their compatibility with such settings, the lecturer proceeded to look at specific aspects concerning rehearsing and working within ensembles. Wieneke referred to data drawn from recent studies (Benedict et al. 2015, McPherson et al. 2022 among others) to demonstrate how social interactions in ensemble contexts play a central role among young people. Moreover, such data provided a basis for addressing the question of how it is possible to foster social justice in the context of rehearsals, especially in the interactions between conductor and musicians. Practical examples of possible strategies aimed at fostering a more democratic teaching environment were also presented by Wieneke.

In a poster and oral presentation, musicologist Dijana Popović (University of Vienna) presented the results of her research on implicit and explicit gender associations in the context of musical instruments. Following the definition of associations as "the linking of two events on the basis of implicit attitudes", Popović described two experiments she conducted at the MediaLab of the Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies, combining eye tracking and the IAT (Implicit Association Test), the results of which indicate the persistence of implicit associations between gender and instruments. Professor of music education Margaret Flood (Florida Southern College) introduced the topic of intersectionality of gender and power in the first lecture of the session *Band Leader and Identity*. The author discussed the results of two qualitative studies that investigated the linguistic and behavioral manifestation of code-switching. Starting from the definition of code-switching as "the adjustment of one's style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression in ways that will optimize the comfort of others in exchange for fair treatment, quality service, and employment opportunities", Flood illustrated how the analysis of the behavior of two secondary band directors revealed the intersectionality of gender and power. The female band leader considered manifested code-switching tendencies that were aimed at being accepted in a male-dominated profession; alternatively, the code-switching behaviors of the male participant were related predominantly to his teacher role and identity, and not to his gender.

Ethnomusicologist Janine Tiffe (Kent State University, Glauser School of Music) continued the reflection on the role of band conductors by considering Jane Copenhefer's commitment in shaping the Licking County-4-H Band (Ohio) as a positive band environment through inclusion of queerness. Interviews conducted with the musicians indicated how this band was central to many participants' identities, because this environment was perceived as overall positive and emotionally supportive.

Flood argued that Copenhefer's leadership disrupted the US band world's norms, with the aim of the betterment of her band and community.

In the final round table, musicologist Christa Brüstle (Kunstuniversität Graz), professor of trombone and Head of the Institute of Wind and Percussion Instruments Thomas Eibinger (Kunstuniversität Graz) and professor of music Damien Sagrillo (Luxemburg University, since 2016 president of the International Society for the Promotion and Research of Wind Music, IGEB) shared their personal experience as teachers and researchers and further discussed the possible strategies that institutions and organisations can put into practice to foster women's participation in wind music contexts.

The two-day conference ended with a final concert by the *Bläserkreis Oberschützen*.

The event, which was also broadcast via Zoom, was organised and funded by the Institute 12 Oberschützen, the Centre for Gender Studies and Diversity, and the the Pannonische Forschungsstelle Oberschützen of the Kunstuniversität Graz. The event also received funding from the Burgenländische Landesregierung - Kulturabteilung.

Clara Sersale, Graz – 28.06.2023