
Stop, Look, and Listen!

Musical Diversions and Commentary — by Rodney Flora

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Issue 06



FEATURED - FORMIDABLE FEMALES



March is Women's History Month. Now, ordinarily, that wouldn't have driven the focus of this month's issue, but in this case it just happens to coincide with something I've been wanting to do anyway, which is to feature some of the amazing women composers I have stumbled upon in my musical explorations.

Interestingly, this has proven to be quite a daunting task, not because of scarcity but rather because of abundance. A good problem to have you might say, and indeed that is true up to a point, but deciding has been a challenge. However decide we must, and at least that leaves us with plenty of material for future editions.

I have tended to emphasize instrumental music in these newsletters. I admit that I mostly prefer to listen to instrumental pieces despite my once-upon-a-time avocation as a "serious" choral baritone. Perhaps I will do a future edition devoted to vocal music, but for now I'll stick to mostly instrumental.

MOZART - MENDELSSOHN - SCHUMANN



Three of the most famous female composers, those with the greatest "name recognition", are Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn, and Maria Anna "Nannerl" Mozart. Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn left just enough material for us to get a sense of their considerable abilities.

Mozart's sister Nannerl only exists in this canon as a kind of mythological creature. Quite literally, nothing is known of her compositions except a reference in one of Wolfgang's letters to a song she wrote. None of her works have survived. There is nothing we can play or hear. We are left with only speculation and conjecture.

Clara Schumann was an active concert pianist throughout her life and in fact was the family breadwinner during husband Robert's protracted illness. I've already dealt with Clara Schumann fairly extensively in my Brahms newsletter issue and gave links there to her Piano Concerto and Piano Trio. Here is a link to all of her known compositions for solo piano. Lovely stuff! Well worth your attention.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhDFHqOLgeQ&t=245s>



Fanny Mendelssohn, Felix's slightly older sister, suffered sometimes from confusion with her more famous brother as the compositions she did publish often appeared simply under the name F. Mendelssohn, leaving future scholars to try to discern which F. Mendelssohn it was. Recent scholarship has untangled the attribution of more and more of her pieces, or has at least led to more educated guesses.

Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel - String Quartet in E-flat major. The four movements are separate links:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0spsaUdll_I&list=PLkHpoOd9PI4Lw5aGU273fSpT9eIePU2Lu&index=5

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhHxbbHA9-Q&list=PLkHpoOd9PI4Lw5aGU273fSpT9eIePU2Lu&index=7>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZp8AQaojLM&list=PLkHpoOd9PI4Lw5aGU273fSpT9eIePU2Lu&index=14>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RYCVdTjcCk&list=PLkHpoOd9PI4Lw5aGU273fSpT9eIePU2Lu&index=24>

Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel - Easter Sonata. Once attributed to Felix, recent scholarship has revealed it to be Fanny's work. Here is part of that story of discovery.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9asDSXTsko0>

And here is Fanny Mendelssohn's Easter Sonata.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ij8JoTj2JII&t=72s>

Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel - Piano Trio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLhoZxcN8I0&t=1166s>

Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel - Fantasia in g minor for 'cello & piano

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThDCDTKw90Q>

The Romantic Period - The Nineteenth Century

This time, I'll focus on the Romantic period. In a future edition, I'll look further back at women composers of the Baroque and Classical periods.

I'm not entirely sure of the reasons, (although I have my suspicions) but the Romantic period seems to have opened the creative floodgates for both women and men. The Baroque and Classical periods were very much bound by rules that required music to follow a pretty strict prescription or recipe. But after Beethoven, there was a kind of opening that allowed for much freer expression and much greater individuality. Whatever the reasons may have been, we are the beneficiaries of the embarrassment of riches that ensued.

Giving credit where due, please note that the biographical sketches I have provided are quoted extensively from Wikipedia with a just few edits and clarifications of my own.

Louise Farrenc: (1804-1875)



Louise Farrenc easily stands as one of the most productive and versatile composers in this group. She wrote symphonies, concertos, chamber music trios, quartets, and quintets for a variety of instruments both strings and winds, solo piano music, and violin sonatas. In fact, I'm going to really stick my neck out here and say that her music can stand alongside Robert Schumann or Felix Mendelssohn without apologies.

Here is an interesting story of Louise Farrenc striking a blow for women's equality in the workplace.

In the 1830s Farrenc gained considerable fame as a performer and her reputation was such that in 1842 she was appointed to the permanent position of Professor of Piano at the Paris Conservatory, a position she held for thirty years, and one which was among the most prestigious in Europe. Accounts of the time record that she was an excellent instructor, with many of her students

graduating with Premier Prix and becoming professional musicians. Despite this, Farrenc was paid less than her male counterparts for nearly a decade. Only after the triumphant premiere of her Nonet, at which the famous violinist Joseph Joachim took part, did she demand and receive equal pay.

Here is a link to her biographical entry in Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louise_Farrenc

Here is her symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 32 (She wrote two others also worthy of your attention)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3Vw_t2VABU&list=PLr0MsaDpKsY_6q0YmzEsRGBrlvWin3KF3&index=16

This is her Grand Variations on a Theme by Count Gallenberg, for piano and orchestra, Op. 25

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tF8Y1pswlwo>

Her Nonet in E-flat major for Winds and Strings is justly among the most well-regarded and enduring of her compositions.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5r8nujt4UU&list=OLAK5uy_nGR-2-7YZTpjpoIol0IibeTzCAygkAeoE

It will come as no surprise given my past "confessions", that I have a special fondness for her two Piano Quintets. Here is her Piano Quintet No. 1 in a minor, Op. 30

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNZPjPHTDlk&list=OLAK5uy_mUUWCEdrMdY78BsTcbS9KY5lXpcVnD3GI

There is much more of Louise Farrenc to discover and, luckily, much of it has been recorded.

Emilie Mayer (1812-1883)

Click here to see a list of her compositions:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_compositions_by_Emilie_Mayer

And here is more biographical information:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emilie_Mayer

Considering that she wrote so much, and the quality is so high, there is remarkably little available on recordings. That seems to me like an opportunity for musicians and recording companies, especially as the interest in women composers seems to be a "growth industry". Hopefully more recordings will be forthcoming. For example: she apparently wrote 12 'cello sonatas but I can only find one recording of just one of them.



Here is Emilie Mayer's Piano Concerto in B-flat major

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25E53dOuVKo&t=1049s>

This is her Piano Quartet No. 1 in E-flat major

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrffqiReJdQ&list=OLAK5uy_mTkgWICpsBFmlJYDg0cLtg6bDLb1Xs-JI&index=1

And finally her Symphony No. 4 in b minor (she wrote a total of 8 symphonies but a few of them are now lost.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baaoeDNPXVk&list=PLOZDp6uqGhrfyZIdhAJ8Zqi81vPGCFTdx>

Marie (Trautmann) Jaëll (1846 - 1925)



Jumping a generation or so ahead, although remaining firmly in the Romantic era, we come across these four composers whose birth years all cluster around 1850, and whose years of maximum productivity (as composers) was the last quarter of the 19th century. However, in the case of Marie Jaëll she continued to write and publish into the first quarter of the 20th.

Marie (Trautmann) Jaëll (1846 - 1925) was a French pianist, composer, and pedagogue. She did scientific studies of hand techniques in piano playing and attempted to replace traditional drilling with systematic piano methods. Her students included Albert Schweitzer, who studied with her in 1898-99.

Most of her compositions involved piano, but not all of them. Here is her beautiful Cello Concerto in F major:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwepQVfXfX0>

This is her turbulent Piano Concerto No. 1 in d minor:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKqTyLuV5Jg&list=OLAK5uy_molATnxaO3wOg0Njgdk_ZXdQEJ4rqQyHY

If total immersion is your thing, you can start here to immerse yourself in several hours of her solo piano music. There are worse ideas.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YI3kp-BjSE&list=OLAK5uy_l0r6vpEOVJDY9V8aYnR8nDK_5gDZmk_U

Augusta Holmès (1847-1903)



Augusta Holmès (1847-1903) certainly seems to have had a taste for the boldly dramatic, and her *Allegro Feroce* is a good example. She also wrote a symphony called *Roland Furieux*. Indeed, Camille Saint-Saëns wrote of Holmès in the journal *Harmonie et Mélodie*: "Like children, women have no idea of obstacles, and their willpower breaks all barriers. Mademoiselle Holmès is a woman, *an extremist*." Clearly, he did not mean it as a compliment.

Of course, she was composing at the height of late-Romanticism when "nothing succeeds like excess" in the form of unbridled emotionalism and drama was the reigning credo. However, she actually had a wide range as a composer given the prevailing aesthetic, and also produced things like her *La Nuit et l'Amour* and a great many gentle and lyrical songs.

Holmès was born in Paris to an Irish father from County Cork. Her mother seems to be unknown. Despite showing talent at the piano, she was not allowed to study at the Paris Conservatoire, but took lessons privately. At first she published under the pseudonym Hermann Zenta. In 1871, Holmès became a French citizen and added the accent to her last name.

A decidedly unconventional woman, Holmès never married, but she cohabited with the poet Catulle Mendès; the couple had five children, three of whom are depicted in this famous painting by Renoir.

I listened again to her *Roland Furieux* this morning. I think it's a good piece. Brass players will especially like the beginning. It's very "Ride of the Valkyries" with lots of trumpets and trombones.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMJpuENC5RQ>

And this is the *Allegro Feroce*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrTw2wisN5A&t=261s>

Here is her tender and haunting *La Nuit et l'Amour*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQQnmqc4Fus>

She seems to have written relatively little chamber music.



Luise Adolpha Le Beau (1850 - 1927)

Luise Adolpha Le Beau was born Luise Caroline Marie Henriette Adolpha Le Beau on April 25, 1850 in the Grand Duchy of Baden. She was the only daughter of military officer Wilhelm Le Beau and his wife Karoline (née Barack). After William Le Beau's Baden army retirement in 1856, both parents devoted themselves to the general education of their daughter. From her father William, a musician and composer, Le Beau received piano lessons, beginning at the age of five. She composed her first piece of music at the age of eight.



In 1865, Le Beau began to take formal piano lessons. In 1868 she made her debut as a pianist, playing concertos of Beethoven and Mendelssohn. Le Beau applied for piano lessons with Clara Schumann in 1873 to be taken in Baden-Baden. Her studies with Schumann lasted for only one summer, a total of twelve lessons, due apparently to Schumann's teaching methods and personal differences between the two. In her memoirs Le Beau was highly critical of Clara Schumann saying "she possesses no amenities, and says everything so impatiently even brutally that I am unfortunately unable to retain much sympathy for her." She went on to say that Schumann showed "no trace of good will for ambitious young talents" and strove to "deliberately humble" her. It does not seem at all surprising that Clara Schumann might have been a demanding teacher, especially of a pupil as gifted as Le Beau, however Le Beau seems have had difficult relationships with her teachers, as she later had a similar falling out with Josef Rheinberger who had been her composition teacher for several years. She left the concert stage before the age of 40, saying in her memoir that her health was "unstable and unsuitable for touring."

However none of that prevented her list of compositions from being quite impressive:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_compositions_by_Luise_Adolpha_Le_Beau

And she certainly demonstrated her "chops" as a composer producing several large scale orchestral works including a symphony, two piano concertos, an overture, and a tone poem as well as numerous chamber and solo piano works.

Unfortunately, I can't find any evidence that her symphony has been recorded, let alone available on line, however here is her Piano Concerto, Op. 37

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26QTzeOV8Gs>

and her Cello Sonata in D major, Op. 17 (3 movements)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzgmVtyecxQ&list=PLGA7IZDGluK3O6fkhVjHCb67wcvGTvwD&index=21>

and the second and third movements of her very lyrical Piano Trio in d minor, Op. 15

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfHhYrCJ_Qw

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwaAYrpSBuA>

and, finally, her beautiful Piano Quartet in f minor, Op. 28

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVW3bcRYAf&list=PLGA7IZDGluK3O6fkhVjHCb67wcvGTvwD&index=31>

Amy Beach (1867-1944)

Amy Beach was very much the Victorian Lady of a certain social standing. The "rules" that were a condition of her marriage are interesting. Read on.



She was the first successful American female composer of large-scale art music. Her "Gaelic" Symphony, premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1896, was the first symphony composed and published by an American woman. She was one of the first American composers to succeed without the benefit of European training, and one of the most respected and acclaimed American composers of her era.

Amy was married in 1885 to Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, a Boston surgeon twenty-four years her senior (she was eighteen at the time). Her name would subsequently be listed on concert programs and published compositions as "Mrs. H. H. A. Beach." The marriage was conditioned upon her willingness "to live according to his status", that is, function as a society matron and patron of the arts. She agreed never to teach piano, an activity widely associated with women" and regarded as providing "pin money." She further agreed to limit performances to two public recitals per year, with profits donated to charity, and to devote herself more to composition than to performance (although, as she wrote, "I thought I was a pianist first and foremost.") Her self-guided education in composition

was also necessitated by Dr. Beach, who disapproved of his wife studying with a tutor. Restrictions like these were typical for middle- and upper-class women of the time: as it was explained to a European counterpart, Fanny Mendelssohn, "Music will perhaps become his [Fanny's brother Felix Mendelssohn's] profession, while for you it can and must be only an ornament."

There is every reason I should like Amy Beach's music. She was a New Englander born and bred, spent much of her life around Boston. She wrote a large number of works in many of the major musical forms, and was clearly a formidable talent, and yet, I find that I want to like her music more than I actually do. There is something about her aesthetic that just doesn't quite work for me. I find her music too dense, too weightily atmospheric compared with the more open, classically informed romanticism that I prefer. I find some of Beach's music rather cloying and even claustrophobic. So although this newsletter largely reflects my opinions and choices, she is such a significant composer I felt I had to put away or at least de-emphasize my personal taste so as to include her here. (But, as you can see, I still feel free to comment.)

These are her two most famous pieces, and the ones I like the most of what I've heard.

Symphony in E minor, Op. 32 "Gaelic"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmLU1CfHcJw&t=449s>

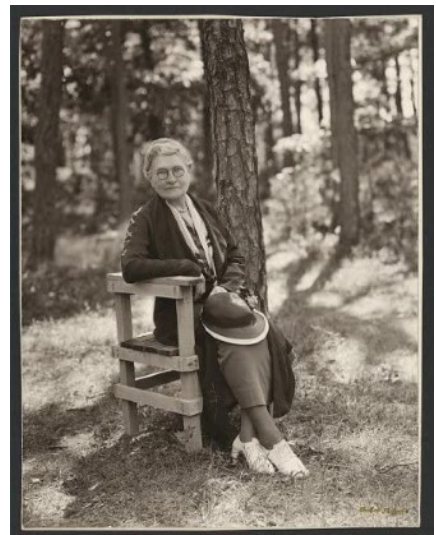
Piano Concerto in C-sharp minor, Op. 45

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKYBhHK5Zh4&t=918s>

Just for perspective, here is one of her works that I don't like so much, but perhaps you will like it better than I do.

Piano Quintet, Op. 67

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2kcscrnGJg&t=53s>



Florence Price (1887 - 1953)



Florence Price was born in 1887 in Little Rock, Arkansas, one of three children in a mixed-race family. Despite racial issues of the era, her family was well respected and did well within their community. Her father was the only African American dentist in the city and had patients of both races. Her mother was a music teacher who guided Florence's early musical training. She gave her first piano performance at the age of four and had her first composition published at the age of 11.

Obviously very bright, Florence graduated high school at the age of 14 as valedictorian of her class. She later enrolled in the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston with a major in piano and organ. At the Conservatory, she studied composition and counterpoint with composers George Chadwick and Frederick Converse. Also while there, she wrote her first string trio and her first symphony. She graduated in 1906 with honors, and with both an artist diploma in organ and a teaching certificate.

Smith returned to Arkansas, where she taught briefly before moving to Atlanta. There she became the head of the music department of what is now Clark Atlanta University, a historically black college. In 1912, she married Thomas J. Price, a lawyer. She moved back to Little Rock, Arkansas, where he had his practice. After a series of racial incidents in Little Rock, particularly the lynching of a black man in 1927, the Price family decided to leave. Like many black families living in the Deep South, they moved north in the Great Migration to escape Jim Crow conditions, and settled in Chicago.

There she studied composition, orchestration, and organ with the leading teachers in the city. She published four pieces for piano in 1928. Financial struggles and abuse by her husband resulted in Price getting a divorce in 1931. She became a single mother to her two daughters. To make ends meet, she worked as an organist for silent film screenings and composed songs for radio ads under a pen name. During this time, Price lived with friends. She eventually moved in with her student and friend, Margaret Bonds, also a black pianist and composer. This friendship connected Price with writer Langston Hughes and contralto Marian Anderson, both prominent figures in the arts.

Together, Price and Bonds began to achieve national recognition for their compositions and performances. In 1932, both Price and Bonds submitted compositions for the Wanamaker Foundation Awards. Price won first prize with her Symphony in E minor, and third for her Piano Sonata, earning her a \$500 prize. (Bonds came in first place in the song category, with a song entitled "Sea Ghost.") The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Frederick Stock, premiered the Symphony on June 15, 1933, making Price's piece the first composition by an African-American woman to be played by a major American orchestra.



Price wrote other extended works for orchestra, chamber works, art songs, works for violin, organ anthems, piano pieces, spiritual arrangements, four symphonies, three piano concertos, and a violin concerto. Price made considerable use of characteristic African-American melodies and rhythms in many of her works.

Even though her training was steeped in European tradition, Price's music consists of mostly the American idiom and reveals her Southern roots. At the urging of her mentor George Whitefield Chadwick, Price began to incorporate elements of African-American spirituals, emphasizing the rhythm and syncopation of the spirituals rather than just using the text. Her melodies were often blues-inspired and mixed with more traditional, European Romantic techniques. (Adapted from this Wikipedia article on Florence Price: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence_Price)

Here are the two works that won those 1932 prizes earning her that premiere of her symphony by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Florence Price - Symphony in e minor

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9s4yY_A2A2k&t=301s

Piano Sonata in e minor (in 3 movements)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dRAYQOD-TQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zAsAUXRAiw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-btkika8ncc>

I'd never heard of The Symphony of Northwest Arkansas before, but this group of musicians plays superbly here. Not only that, but I think this is my favorite Florence Price work and, but for the fact that it was posted it on YouTube as recently as Feb. 25th, I might never have heard it!

Florence Price Piano Quintet in a minor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFMgDI5CEd0>

That is also true of this performance that was posted on March 19th.

Florence Price - Five Folk Songs in Counterpoint for String Quartet (Advance to 14:35 to skip the pieces that precede it.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugncEQ-7k-U>

There is an interesting documentary movie about Florence Price which you can preview here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93BYQ7Cex7M>

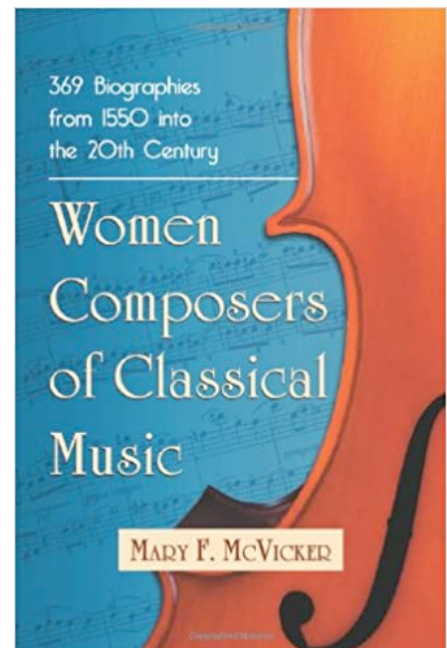
If you would like to see the whole movie, you can borrow it from the Witherle Library in Castine.

RECOMMENDED READING

Women Composers of Classical Music - 369 Biographies from 1550 into the 20th Century

by Mary F. McVicker

Perhaps "recommended" is a little strong. This is not so much a book to read as a reference work for those with a particular interest in the subject. Also being a bit of a "specialist" topic it is fairly expensive for a paperback. (I think I paid around \$40 for my copy.) I also have come across a few omissions from the book, but I suppose, as more women composers are being discovered and researched every day, that is bound to happen. However, if this is a particular interest of yours, and if you would like a ready reference on the subject, in concise form, this might be something you would like to have on your bookshelf. I have found it useful.





For our travel video this time we're going to indulge in a little time travel. *Stitch in Time* is a wonderful 6 episode series where experts accurately re-create period costume from an historic painting.

This episode is especially interesting:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSDDJrIJukM&t=22s>



For more about the story of Dido Belle check this out:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgSe6IEed9w>

There is also a movie about her called Belle. Here is a link to the movie trailer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Qx90wdRD2I>

We watched the movie one recent evening and enjoyed it a lot. I cannot vouch for the historical accuracy in every detail, but we thought it was quite well done.

I borrowed it through the Maine Libraries Minerva system that provides for inter-library loan.

Please send me your opinions and reactions to this newsletter and its contents. Also please share your own discoveries. You can reach me at

enigmavars1899@gmail.com

Note that any reply you might receive from my gmail account will say it's from Edward Elgar, but that's really me.

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