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WOMEN OF NOTE

By Diana Ambache

When I began playing the piano professionally I did not even know that there was any music by women; only after some 15 years of performing did I stumble across something. Reading a book about French music, I saw mention of a neo-classical concerto by Germaine Tailleferre and became curious. Such a work for small orchestra might fit my interests, as I ran the Ambache Chamber Orchestra. It turned out to be utterly delightful, and I realised there must be more. It set me on a journey of exploration; I found a substantial and interesting collection of works. This article is one of the fruits of that journey. The repertoire mentioned below comes from nearly a quarter of a century of research, performance and recording; I will describe it from solo keyboard works, via chamber music, through to concertos.

Among the things that surprised me was that women have been composing throughout history. Some are mentioned in books; some have disappeared from view after their deaths. These people are not just occasional sparks; they were a continuous presence through history. Their individuality is also remarkable. They were not merely writing in a formulaic way; while using the language of their period, they spoke with their own accents. There is often an intensity of musical expression, most notably from Fanny Mendelssohn.

The cliché about music by women composers is that they wrote sweet little piano pieces, suitable for playing at home. While such *bonbons* certainly exist, there is a great wealth of more substantial works for solo keyboard which challenge this attitude, not to mention chamber music and concertos. I have been delighted by the discovery of so many pieces, and audiences have also expressed their pleasure in the “new” (old) works. I was pleased to find out that when a woman loved music and wanted to compose, she just got on and did so.

1) Solo Keyboard

These days *Les Pièces de Clavessin* by Elizabeth Jacquet de la Guerre needs no introduction. Perhaps less in the public domain are several sonatas by classical composers. Of these, the person I most admire and envy is Marianne Martinez (1744-1812), as she was a pupil of Haydn and

she played four hand duets with Mozart. When Charles Burney heard her, he said she had “*a very brilliant finger*”. This is needed in her lively G Major Sonata (1769). Her music is energetic, fresh, open and elegant.

Similarly pleasing and stylish is the C Major Sonata by Maria Hester Park (1760-1813). The three movements are respectively bold, poignant and sunny. (I think I found this work in the British Library.) Emilie Julie Candeille (1767-1834) also wrote some fine keyboard works, some of which have (optional) accompanying violin parts. (These are probably in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris.) Although blind, Maria Theresia von Paradis (1759-1824) was blessed in that both Mozart and Haydn wrote concertos for her. Her own music is both lyrical and dramatic. Her two Fantasias (c1807 and 1811) are rewarding in both these arenas. There are other sonatas by Maria Barthélémy (1749-1799), Jane Guest (1765-1814) and Sophia Dussek (1775-1847) with which I am not personally acquainted.

In the early Romantic era, I think the best keyboard works are *Das Jahr* (1841) by Fanny Mendelssohn (1805-47). This is a kind of musical diary of her Italian tour of 1839-40, with each piece describing an experience from each month. If the question of originality in women’s music comes up, I think this work knocks it on the head — who else has written a cycle which features the 12 months in this way? They also illustrate what a tremendous pianist she was, as well as a great composer. I know I am biased, but I find her music more exciting than Felix’s. Then there is *Air Russe Varié*, Op 17 (1836) by Louise Farrenc (1804-75), which Robert Schumann reviewed appreciatively in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* as “so sure in outline, so logical in development that one must fall under their charm, especially as a subtle aroma of romanticism hovers over them”. Of course his wife Clara (1819-96) also wrote a wonderful range of romantic piano pieces, including polonaises, études, caprices, waltzes, variations, romances, and preludes and fugues.

2) Duos

Next come the works for piano and one other instrument. Perhaps the image of domestic music making hovers in the background. However,

when music is published, it achieves a more public profile. The violin appears as the most frequent duo partner. The authorship of the popular *Sicilienne* by von Paradis seems to have been disputed because people cannot quite believe a woman could have written such a beautiful piece! Maria Hester Park also wrote two violin sonatas, Op 13 (c1801), which are very fine duets. The *Andante Espressivo* from the D Major Sonata is a particular favourite of mine; the violin part transfers very well to the oboe, which is my husband's instrument.

Fanny Mendelssohn's Adagio in E (1823) is a real gem: a heartfelt, single movement, which again I much enjoy. The 1853 *Drei Romanzen* by Clara Schumann were written for her to play with her friend Joseph Joachim, and once made King George V of Hanover "completely ecstatic". I think of Clara's music as having a uniquely noble atmosphere, and these three pieces make very effective concert works. One more, lesser known, work is the Sonatine in A Minor for violin and piano (1874) by Pauline Viardot (1821-1910). Due to her special understanding of singing, this has beautiful melodic qualities.

Not surprisingly there are also many expressive cello works, starting with the Serenade by Maria Szymanowska (1789-1831), which ranges from an unassuming opening to later grand gestures. If you want a fine classical sonata, try Helene Liebmann (1796-1835). Her B-Flat Sonata (1806) has a proper duet conversation and includes a splendid set of variations on Mozart's "*La Ci Darem La Mano*" as the finale. As before, I highly recommend Fanny Mendelssohn's Two Pieces for Cello and Piano (c1829), which have her somewhat heightened emotional atmosphere. I have heard of plenty of duet pieces with flutes; but, as I mentioned, since my husband is an oboist, I have looked for but have not found any classical works specifically for this combination; so we have often adapted works for violin.

3) Trios

There are, of course, more piano trios. Helen Liebmann again comes up trumps with her Grand Trio, Op 11 in A Major. It is Haydn-esque in style, with a good, three sided conversation, and has plenty of charm and energy. The Piano Trio in D Minor, Op 11, by Fanny Mendelssohn was published by her family after her death. I believe it is her greatest instrumental work. It is an enthralling piece, with a massive piano part. I do not mean that the piano dominates, just that there is a huge number of notes — her passion pours out in cascades of piano notes against sonorous string melodies. There are two beautiful,

thoughtful inner movements, and the finale is a wonderful combination of influences from Bach to gypsy music.

Many people consider Clara Schumann's Piano Trio in G Minor, Op 17 (1846) as one of her finest big compositions. It combines lyrical qualities with contrapuntal sections. There is an entertaining "Scotch snap" scherzo, and a romantic slow movement.

Louise Farrenc was a woman after my own heart, as it seems she loved playing chamber music with colleagues. As well as two "normal" piano trios (in E-Flat, Op 33; and in D Minor, Op 34, both 1850-55), she also wrote a Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano in E-Flat, Op 44 (1861). She has a lovely feel for the tone quality of the instruments, and the whole is melodious and mellow. Also, her unique harmonic language is evident here, with some intriguing and surprising chord changes. Another unusual combination is exemplified by her Trio for Flute, Cello and Piano in E Minor, Op 45 (1862). She manages to be both bold and subtle. This Trio illustrates her other most distinguishing feature: the effective scherzo which cuts across the female stereotype. Here we have a fiery scherzo, with engaging cross rhythms.

4) Piano Quartets

In the piano quartet group, I must mention Anna Amalia's *Divertimento* in B-Flat for Piano, Clarinet, Viola and Cello (c1780). This is the earliest chamber work including clarinet that I know of, and suggests that the court at Saxe-Weimar was a forward looking place, embracing new developments. The work has two movements, both charming and engaging. "Grand" is a title Liebmann is fond of, and this is found again in her attractive *Grand Piano Quartet* in A-Flat Major, Op 13. Also in A-Flat is Fanny Mendelssohn's Piano Quartet (1822), an amazing demonstration of her virtuosic and compositional skills as a 17 year old. It took quite a lot of work for us to put together for performance, but was worth it.

5) Quintets

More chamber music by Farrenc deserves a mention. Her two Piano Quintets (in A Minor, Op 30, 1842, and in E Major, Op 31, 1851, both with the same scoring as The Trout Quintet) are fine, substantial and tuneful works. However, I would specially like to draw attention to her highly distinctive Sextet for Piano and Winds in C Minor, Op 40 (1852). She must be the first composer to have written for this combination — some 90 years before the better known Poulenc Sextet. She writes well for each instrument, including sparkling piano writing and some bold flourish-

es for the horn. The sensuous serenade-like slow movement contrasts warmly with the dramatic outer movements.

6) Concertos

In the genre of keyboard concertos, I was surprised at how many early ones I came across. Possibly the earliest I have played is the one in G Minor (c1750) by Wilhelmina von Bayreuth (1709-58). It is a buoyant and vigorous piece with an obbligato flute part which might have been played either by her husband, or her brother, Frederick the Great (both pupils of Quantz). Another aristocratic concerto is by Anna Amalia, in G Major. It could be done with a single player to each part, and features some pretty wind solos.

There is a set of 6 Concertos for Keyboard and Strings, Op 3 (1773) by Maddalena Laura Lombardini Sirmen (1745-1818), which I have not played; they were originally for violin, and then transcribed for keyboard. She studied in one of the Venice *ospedale*, and was taught by Tartini. One of the first classical concertos by a woman that I came across is the Piano Concerto in D Major, Op 2 (1787) by Julie Candeille. It has the brilliant character of a classical work in D, and suggests that she knew her Haydn. In contrast, the spirit of Mozart is audible in Maria Hester Park's Piano Concerto in E-flat, Op 6 (c1795). The London *Independent* newspaper commented on its freshness and originality when we gave the modern UK première in 1992. Of the two concertos by Marianne Martinez, I have only played the A Major (c1800), and loved its energy, and her unique combination of decorum and wit. Nanette von Schaden (1763-1834) wrote a Piano Concerto in B-Flat around 1800. Although her husband was a great supporter of Beethoven, this is rather more Mozartian in character. Florid virtuosity characterises the opening movement, followed by a G Minor slow movement of great pathos. There is a light set of variations for the finale.

Many people know of the Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op 7 (1833) that Clara Schumann wrote as a teenager, which Robert helped to orchestrate. Less familiar is the *Konzertsatz* in F Minor (1847), dedicated as a birthday present to Robert, and left incomplete. Recently, it has been successfully completed and orchestrated by Jozef de Beenhouwer. It might have been planned as the substantial first movement of a second concerto, and is a highly expressive piece, in Clara's sombre, noble manner.

People have often asked me what women's music is like. Sometimes I think the question implies an assumption about feminine characteristics (as I indicated at the beginning of

this article) – that the music is a bit sentimental and light weight, and may be suitable for a salon concert. My experience has been that it is so much more than that, and what it is like depends on the individual character of the composer.

I am sad that few women have had the chance to learn from hearing their music being played by others (as Haydn and Mozart did), but even so, they created a huge range of works in many different moods, frequently in their own, authentic voice. Those that were lucky enough to be in musical families and receive the relevant education, and who loved music in such a way as to defy social attitudes, achieved amazing and exceptional things, and inspire us all in their creativity. For me the way to change attitudes has been to include these works in concerts and recordings. Slowly, as the music is heard, people's prejudices fall away, and there is a bit more appreciation of what women have achieved.

I am in no doubt that there are plenty more works by women yet to be discovered. They are so challenging and stimulating; I look forward to hearing about them as they come to light. Meanwhile, practical information, such as length, scoring and publisher can be found on my website www.womenofnote.co.uk. The *New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* is endlessly useful, and the internet is a great source of information these days. As well as being surprised how many works by these composers are on YouTube, the best source of scores and further ideas are the following publishers: Hildegard Publishing Company (www.hildegard.com), Furore Editions (www.furore-verlag.de), and ClarNan Editions (www.clarnan.com).

On the next page is a list of recordings.

Recordings

Von Bayreuth, Concerto on Campion Records CB 12005, with Viktor Lukas & Lukas Consort.

Maria Hester Park, *Andante Espressivo* for Oboe Classics (Musical Meze collection) with Jeremy Polmear and Diana Ambache. (See www.oboe classics.com.)

There are some **Anna Amalia songs** on CD, but I have not found any by **Julie Emilie Candeille**.

Maria Barthelemon, *Non Tacete* with the ensemble *Ars Femina*

Sophia Dussek, sonata on *Harp Showpieces* for Naxos with Judy Lowman.

von Paradis, *Sicilienne* has many recordings, including Arthur Grumiaux's Favourite Violin Encores for Philips, and Itzak Perlman's Greatest Hits Vol 2 for EMI Classics.

Helene Liebmann, Cello Sonata on *Mozartiana* for Cello Classics with Sebastian Comberti and for EBS with David Geringas.

Louise Farrenc, Flute Trio, the Sextet and the "Nonet" with Ambache Chamber Orchestra; Nonet and Clarinet Trio on Divox CDX29205 with Dieter Klocker, Peter Horr and Werner Genuit; Clarinet Trio on *Romantic Women Composers* with Ambache Chamber Orchestra. Piano Quintets, ASV CDDCA1122 with Schubert Ensemble, and CPO999194 with the Linos Ensemble. Sextet with Piano Trios on CPO77256-2 with the Linos Ensemble. Cello Sonata for *Eroica* www.eroica.com DT3302 with Iris Van Eck. Violin Sonatas Op 37 & 39 for Integral Classic INT221161 with Gaetane Prouvest and Laurent Cabasso. Op 17 Variations and other piano works on CPO9998792 with Konstanze Eickhorst.

Not surprisingly there is plenty of **Fanny and Clara**; frequently their piano trios have been put together. I think the Dartington Trio were the first to do this, on Hyperion CDS66331. Another regular pairing is **Fanny and Felix** trios. The Australian Seraphim Trio have done that (277600573315), and if you want period instruments, then try The Atlantis Trio on Musica Omnia. **Fanny Mendelssohn's** *Das Jahr* is recorded on CPO999013-2 with Liana Serbescu, for Arabesque on BIS885 with Sarah Rothenberg and Beatrice Rauchs.

Clara Schumann, Complete Piano Works on CPO999758 with Jozef de Beenhouwer. Piano Trio on Philips with the Beaux Arts Trio; and with her Op 7 concerto for Naxos with Francesco Nicolosi and the Alma Mahler Sinfonietta.

Drei Romanzen (oboe and piano version) with music by Robert Schumann for Oboe Classics cc2002 with Jeremy Polmear and Diana Ambache; and similarly a horn recording on Bridge 9164 with William Purvis.

Trio, on Arcobaleno 9361 with The Amati Chamber Ensemble; Trio, in original form, on Onyx 4062 with Philippe Graffin, and single movements for Deutsche Gramophone by Daniel Hope, and on Onyx with Viktoria Mullova and Katia Labeque.

The Romances, plus the Trio and Concerto Op 7 on Tudor 788 with Veronica Jochum' & the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra.

Op 7 concerto (and Robert's Piano Concerto), on Cirrus Classic CRS23 with Lucy Parham & the BBC Concert Orchestra.

Konzertsatz (plus the Fanny Mendelssohn trio, Louise Farrenc's Clarinet Trio, and Marie Grandval's "Deux Pièces") with the Ambache Chamber Orchestra, AMB6004.

Portraits and Free Scores

The first portrait listed is recommended by the author; other references to portraits and scores were provided by the Editor.

1) Marianne Martinez: Haydn Museum, Vienna; photo Museen der Stadt Wien.
see portrait and scores for two sonatas at International Score Music Library:
<http://imslp.org/wiki/Category: Martinez, _ Marianne>

2) Fanny Mendelssohn: portrait by her husband Wilhelm Hensel; Mendelssohn Archiv, Staatsbibliothek, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin. There are a range of her husband's portraits of her at "Mary Kunz Goldman- Music Critic.", Online, accessed 10 July 2011,
<<http://goldmanmusic.blogspot.com/2010/08/portrait-of-fanny.html>>

There is also a portrait by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim at About.com, Online, accessed 10 July 2011,
<<http://musiced.about.com/od/famousmusicians1/p/fmendelssohn.htm>>

For free scores of lieder and piano music online see IMSLP

<http://imslp.org/wiki/Category:Hensel,_Fanny>

Werner Icking Music Archive

<<http://icking-music-archive.org/ByComposer/Fa.Mendelssohn.php#Hensel>>

The Choral Public Domain Library has choral music at

<http://www3.cpdl.org/wiki/index.php/Main_Page>

3) Louise Farrenc: from *L'illustration* 13 Jan 1855, p165, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

For a portrait and scores of two quintets, visit IMSLP

<http://imslp.org/wiki/Category:Farrenc,_Louise>

4) Wilhelmina von Bayreuth, by Anna Dorothea Lisiewska-Therbusch.

To view a portrait Visit "Women of Note", Online, accessed 10 July 2011,

<<http://oboeclassics.com/~oboe3583/ambache/wBayreuth.htm>>

or "Wikipedia", Online, accessed 10 July 2011,

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelmine_of_Pruvia,_Margravine_of_Brandenburg-Bayreuth>

5) Julie Candeille: from *Encyclopédia dello Spettacolo*, Rome: Casa Editrice le Maschere, 1954.

See a portrait at Wikipedia, Online, accessed 10 July 2011,

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julie_Candeille>

6) Clara Schumann: 1878 portrait by Franz von Lenbach, Robert Schumann Haus, Zwickau.

See a portrait at Wikipedia, Online, accessed 10 July 2011,

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clara_Schumann>

A portrait and free scores including her Konzertsatz, Lieder, Preludes & Fugues, etc. at IMSLP

<http://imslp.org/wiki/Category:Schumann,_Clara>

ÉLISABETH-CLAUDE JACQUET DE LA GUERRE

By Pamela Hickman

Élisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre was born in Paris in 1665 and died there in 1729. Her father, Claude Jacquet, from whom she received her first musical instruction, was a harpsichord maker and the organist of the *Église Saint-Louis-en-Île* in Paris, her great uncle was an instrument maker, her brothers Pierre and Nicolas were both organists and her elder sister, Anne, was a protégé of the Princess of Guise. Her mother, Anne de la Touche, had connections with the Daquin family; Élisabeth herself was eventually to become godmother to Louis-Claude Daquin (1694-1772, organist, harpsichordist and composer in the Baroque and Galant styles.)

At the age of five, Élisabeth-Claude performed for King Louis XIV. The Sun King and his court were so impressed by her ability on

the keyboard, as well as by her beautiful voice, that the king took "*la petite merveille*" (the "small wonder", as she was affectionately known), under his wing, supporting her financially. She spent several years in the court at Versailles. She was a favourite of Louis XIV's mistress of the time – Madame de Montespan, who supervised her education – and became a member of her entourage for three or four years. In 1677, a commentator for the French gazette and literary magazine *Mercurie Gallant* wrote of the 12-13 year old Élisabeth: "She sings at sight the most difficult music. She accompanies herself and accompanies others who wish to sing, at the harpsichord, which she plays in a manner which cannot be imitated. She composes pieces, and plays them in all the keys asked of her."¹