Until late in the 20th century, the history of composers in classical music has been, except for a small fraction, the history of male composers. Women had been actively discouraged, or even barred, from pursuing careers writing music, which was thought to be something only men could, and should, do. But despite this obstacle, women persisted in writing music, and they’ve been doing it for 1,000 years. Their experience mirrors that of women in general. Compare and contrast the lives of women composers with those of other famous women described below who lived at about the same time.

**MIDDLE AGES IN EUROPE**

**Saint Hildegard von Bingen** (1098-1179) is one of the most important woman composers in history and among the first known classical musicians. Not only a composer of some 70 works, Hildegard was a writer and visionary. She was a deeply-learned Catholic mystic, scientist, and the earliest known musical dramatist in Europe. *Ordo Virtutum* is a religious play that dates from the mid-12th century, a story of the struggle over the soul between Virtue and the Devil. The Soul and the Virtues are sung by women, men sing as Patriarchs and Prophets, and the Devil is also a man, but never sings—he only yells because, Hildegard argued, the Devil cannot produce harmony, which is essentially divine. Writing in early polyphony, her own harmony was indeed divine. A portion of her *Antiphonae* will be performed on this program.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VWD9bsy2yg

**Eleanor of Aquitaine** (1122-1204) – the only woman to be both Queen consort of France (1137–1152) and England (1154–1189). She was also one of the most powerful and wealthiest women in Middle Ages’ Western Europe. As the Queen of France, she participated with her husband Louis VI in the Second Crusade. After the annulment of her first marriage, she remarried Henry II, king of England. After the death of Henry II in 1189, Eleonor's beloved son, Richard became king. Almost immediately he left for the Third Crusade leaving Eleonor to rule as Regent.

**Europe from 1800-1950**

**Fanny Mendelssohn** (1805 –1847) was the older sister of Felix Mendelssohn, a very famous composer. A number of Fanny's over 460 compositions were originally published under Felix's name. This ended in 1842 when Felix confessed the deception to Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace. Her biography shows her to be every bit the virtuoso musician as Felix was. She was a prodigy both as a pianist and composer, but while her father famously told her that though Felix might be a professional musician, Fanny should be content with it as a hobby. Fanny’s music is so beautifully made, that one might prefer her pieces to those of her brother. Included on this program will be *Gebet in der Christnacht* (Christmas Prayer).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Jwmj8PupmY
Maria Leopoldina of Austria (1797-1826) was archduchess of Austria, Empress consort of Brazil and Queen consort of Portugal. Daughter of Holy Emperor Francis II and Mary Teresa of Naples and Sicily. In 1816 she married Pedro of Braganza who later became the first Emperor of Brazil. She played an active role in the process of Brazil gaining independence from Portugal. In 1822, Leopoldina was the Regent when her husband was away when she led negotiations in favor of Brazilian independence. Given her role in the process, she was very popular in her country - much more so than her husband. She died in 1826, at age 29.

Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) was born in Sidcup, UK, to a middle-class family, the daughter of a military general. Her father opposed the idea of her studying music formally, but he allowed her to move to Leipzig when she was 18. Her Der Wald was the only opera by a woman to have been produced at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City (in 1903). After arguing with her father over pursuing a music career, Smyth went on to be one of England’s most notable composers in the first half of the 20th century. Smyth was inspired to dedicate two years of her life to the Women’s Suffrage movement. This time of activism inspired her most famous composition, the protest song, “The March of the Women.” The Rockefeller Quartet will perform a selection from Smyth’s Quartet in E Minor, 1st Movement https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQNSKeoh4hQ

Queen Victoria (1819-1901) – Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and Empress of India. She became Queen in 1837 when she was only 18, after the death of her uncle King William IV. Her reign of 63 years was marked by political, scientific and cultural expansion of her country. Despite limited political power, Queen Victoria influenced the destiny of the United Kingdom by playing an important role on the international scene. She helped prevent war and supported democracy by providing secret ballots and easing voting requirements. She was known as “the grandmother of Europe”. Indeed, she gave birth to nine children and treated their marriages as a way to reinforce Britain’s place in Europe through diplomacy. As a result, her 42 grand-children formed part of the royal families of Germany, Russia, Greece, Romania, Sweden, Norway and Spain.

South America in the 1800’s

Teresa Carreño (1853–1917) was a child prodigy, virtuoso pianist, composer, and opera singer, Venezuelan-born Carreño was a very independent creative spirit who made her way in a man’s world for eight decades. She was one of the most accomplished pianists of her time, energetically performing all around the world. She composed about 40 works for piano, 2 for voice and piano, 2 for choir and orchestra, and 2 as chamber music. Though she concentrated on pieces for the piano, she also wrote a string quartet (which will be featured on this program https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUG9sBWLpe0), a serenade and a book titled “Possibilities of Tone Color by Artistic Use of Pedals.” A majority of her works were published and they remain in great demand.
Manuela Saenz (1795-1856) – revolutionary heroine of South American independence and a feminist symbol of this period. She was the wife of Simón Bolívar for 8 years until his death in 1830. After saving his life in 1828, she received the title of “Liberadora of Liberator” (Liberator of the Liberator). After the death of Bolivar, Saenz was obliged to flee to Jamaica. Despite her active role in the revolution, Saenz’s role was minimized until the second half of the 20th century. Nowadays Saenz’s memory has been restored thanks to books, movies and representations in popular art.

United States from 1800-1950

Amy Beach (1867-1944) was the great pioneer for American women composers — for all intents and purposes the first of her kind in “serious” music in this country. She initially appeared as a leading pianist, soloing in front of orchestras as a teenager. Beach’s first prominent composition was a mass, and while her large-scale music is fine, and her songs are currently her most popular works, it’s her body of piano music that is the most important to the history of American music. A piece featured on this program is Theme and Variations for Flute and String Quartet https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jWXCWHZqhY

Susan B. Anthony was born 15th February 1820 in Adams, Massachusetts. She campaigned against slavery and for women to be given the vote. She was the co-founder of the Women’s Temperance movement which campaigned to tighten up laws on alcohol. She played a significant role in raising the profile of equal rights for women. Anthony retired from active political activity in 1900 and died of heart disease and pneumonia in New York, in 1906. Fourteen years after Anthony’s death, women’s right to vote was guaranteed by the Nineteenth Amendment (1920), and Anthony is granted much of the credit for laying the groundwork for passage of that law.

Florence Price (1888-1953) was born in Little Rock, Arkansas and spent her professional career in Chicago. Due to her musical talent and her family’s wealth, Price enrolled at the New England Conservatory in Boston, where she majored in organ and piano. Facing the double prejudice against both women and African-Americans in classical music, Price wrote four symphonies that incorporate traditional American music, especially from African-American culture. She skillfully used European symphonic forms infused with spirituals and blues melodies — the first movement of her wonderful Symphony No. 4 blends in “Let My People Go” — and her prize-winning Symphony No. 1, premiered by the Chicago Symphony, was the first piece from an African-American woman played by a major American ensemble. Featured on this performance will be a portion of Swing Low Sweet Chariot from Price’s Five Folksongs in Counterpoint for String Quartet https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBdEPlvOolQ.
Sojourner Truth (1797–1883) gave herself this name in 1843 after she became convinced that God had called her to leave the city and go into the countryside “testifying the hope that was in her.”

She was called to Washington DC and met with President Lincoln to talk about her experience.

**Sojourner Truth: Ain’t I a woman? Look at me**

Sojourner Truth was the slave child Isabella, born in the last years of the 18th century, sold at auction at the age of 10, emancipated in the 1820s. Her name she took on becoming free, as she wanted to keep no trace of her former bondage. She became a crusader for women, for Blacks, for the cause of anti-slavery, and in time one of the most inspired speakers ever of that Civil War era of magnificently simple oration. She gave this famous address to a meeting in Akron, Ohio, in 1852.

The man over there say a woman needs to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches and to have the best place everywhere Nobody ever helped me into carriages or over mud puddles or gives me a best place . . .

Ain’t I a woman?
Look at me Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns and no man could head me . . . And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man — when I could get to it — and bear the lash as well and ain’t I a woman? I have born thirteen children and seen most all sold into slavery and when I cried out a mother’s grief none but Jesus heard me . . . and ain’t I a woman? That little man in black there say a woman can’t have as much rights as a man cause Christ wasn’t a woman. Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with him! If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down, all alone together women ought to be able turn it rightside up again.

**Vocabulary**

- **composer** – a person who writes music
- **composition** – written music
- **deception** – something told that is not the truth
- **dynamics (in music)** – how loud or soft the music is
- **harmony** – a musical term for notes that serve as background for the melody
- **melody** – a long passage of music forming a theme that you can recognize as in a song
- **obstacle** – barrier in the way of getting somewhere
- **persisted** – overcame barriers through strong effort
- **prominent** – one or a few of many that stands out
- **rhythm** – movement in music bases upon the length and speed of the notes being played
- **texture (in music)** – the way the melody, rhythm and harmony combine in a composition
- **virtuoso** – exceptionally talented
- **visionary** – one who sees the future accurately

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