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# Two Uncommon Women: Tracing the Evidence of a Female Compositional Tradition in the Lives and Music of Grażyna Bacewicz and Rebecca Clarke

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**Abstract**

As an undergraduate student in the midst of a particularly enchanting music history lecture, music history was allegorized as a sort of pendulum: my teacher postured that, throughout Western history, musical styles and ideas tend to “swing” from one extreme to the next, until chance rediscovery or revival reignites within a culture that particular subtext of musical fervor. Yet in my mind, there is one trend throughout history’s rich musical tapestry which the standard curriculum continues to overlook: the musical contributions and compositions of women. In this endeavor, history’s eyes rarely shone fondly upon the female composer— until the pendulum swung into the 20$^{th}$ century. Suddenly, changing societal attitudes complimented by surges in women’s rights made the female composer permissible, allowing their creative works to appear at the forefront. Still, to truly blaze a trail for other women to follow was no easy task. A brave woman must first fulfill her roles as wife, mother, and a respectable woman of society before she could pursue her art, which was often unduly influenced by global unrest in her country. After that, her work must successfully withstand political restrictions and criticism, and be established as mature and creative as her male contemporaries’.

This paper thus considers two such trailblazers from this time period: Grażyna Bacewicz (1909-1969) and Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979). It provides a thorough overview of each composer's life, while also discussing individual style through analysis of representative works. By considering their personal characteristics, attitudes, and response to social and political pressures occurring around them, it seeks understanding of each woman's compositional style and identity, including factors contributing to establishment within a male-dominated Western canon. Finally, further analysis proposes trends of a compositional tradition that is entirely female by tracing the unique formational presence of Bacewicz's and Clarke's voices in pioneering compositions.

*Keywords:* Women, Music, Gender, 20th Century, Bacewicz, Clarke

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> "Every now and then, in the middle of struggling with some problem, everything would fall into place with a suddenness almost like switching on an electric light. It may sound pretentious … but at these moments, though I had not illusions whatever about the value of my work, I was flooded with a wonderful feeling of potential power---a miracle made anything seem possible. Every composer, or writer, or painter too for that matter, however obscure, is surely familiar with this sensation. It is a glorious one. I know of almost nothing equal to it."
>
> Rebecca Clarke, *I Had a Father Too (Or the Mustard Spoon)*

In all respects, the 20th century was a time of great change, especially regarding the rights of women. The patriarchal ideals of prior centuries had indoctrinated themselves in the mind of society for too long, and unfortunately, in the minds of female composers of prior generations. Centuries prior had long standardized the role of man as the intelligent, dominating head of the household, with women the more subservient, homemaker wife. In the field of music, unless a woman was fortunate enough to be born or marry into significant societal standing, and could adhere to the acceptable status and expectations of a musical woman, a woman's compositions were often discouraged, disregarded, and deemed subservient to the works of man. Often labeled as "revisionary or subversive", societal belief dictated that woman did not possess the intelligence or maturity to write larger, more serious works, and if she did, they could only mimic or copy that of her male counterparts. As a composer, her femininity was viewed as weakness, and thus she was limited to the more feminine and gentle emotion and poetry of art songs. Unfortunately, this attitude largely discouraged many women, leading them to give up their art. There is a significant quote by Clara Schumann, wife of the German composer Robert Schumann, that highlights the unfortunate result of patriarchal mindset on women composers:

> "I once thought that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea: a woman must not desire to compose. Not one has been able to do it, and why should I expect to? It would be arrogance, though indeed my father led me into it in earlier days."[1]

By the 20th century, however, changing societal attitudes accompanied by the surge of women's rights for the first time in history allowed the mindset of the female composer to

1. Litzmann, *An Artist's Life,* 259.

change, providing increased opportunities to more freely concertize and compose. Thus, amid a time of rapidly shifting perspectives, two women composers emerge, each with their own unique character traits and perspectives which would duly influence their success as a composer and musician in their respective society: Grażyna Bacewicz and Rebecca Clarke.

Rebecca Clarke was born in 1886 in Harrow, England, as the eldest child of Joseph Clarke and Agnes Helferich into a household with staunch Victorian values. From the beginning, her relationship with her father was most troubled; based on her unpublished memoir, he has been described by musicologist Bryony Jones as a "complex and domineering character capable of moments of appalling cruelty." [2] Clarke began music lessons on the violin at a young age, and went on to study violin and harmony at the Royal Academy of Music (RCM) from 1903 to 1905 where she received two prizes in composition, until a marriage proposal from her harmony and counterpoint teacher, Percy Hilder Miles, caused Clarke's father to withdraw her from the course. In 1907, she became the first female composition student of Sir Charles Stanford, who encouraged her switch to viola. She remained there until 1910, when an argument with her father resulted in Clarke being thrown out of the family home and, no longer able to finance her education, she accepted a place as a violist in the Norah Clench Quartet—one of many professional chamber ensembles she would perform with throughout her career. For the next two decades, she supported herself as a violist in many orchestras and ensembles in London, including the Queen's Hall Orchestra under the direction of Sir Henry Wood: one of the first conductors to allow women in his orchestra. She also cofounded the English Ensemble, a pianoforte quartet with Marjorie Hayward (violin), May Muckle (cello), and

2. Jones, *Rebecca Clarke*, 295-97.

Kathleen Long (piano), and twice received second place in a composition competition held as part of Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge's annual festival of chamber music held in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Her first submission was in 1919 when her Viola Sonata tied with Ernest Bloch's Suite for Violin and Piano. As there could only be one winner, Mrs. Coolidge herself chose the Bloch piece as the deciding vote; however, the jury insisted the runner-up's name be divulged, and were surprised to discover the piece was composed by a woman. In 1921, Clarke again submitted a composition, this time her Trio for piano, violin and cello, where she lost a second time, this instance to the work of English violist and composer Harry Waldo Warner. The most expansive works by far of her career, the Viola Sonata and Trio are the crowning achievements of Clarke's musical legacy and have kept her name alive—both now and during the period she was absent as a composer.

In 1944, Rebecca Clarke married American pianist and composer James Friskin, a former classmate from her time at RCM. They settled in New York, and even though he encouraged her to compose, she stated feel "unable" for various reasons, and her compositional output gradually slowed until her last completed work in 1954. At this point, Clarke placed her viola in a closet and instead pursued an active schedule as a teacher, lecturer, and writer. An intelligent writer, she contributed essays on "Bloch" and the "Viola" in *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*. She died in 1979 at the age of ninety-three. Overall, her entire musical *oeuvre* boasts 24 instrumental works, as well as 58 songs and part songs, with the remaining majority of works chamber music.[3] Today, her work is promoted by The Rebecca

3. Curtis, *Rebecca Clarke.*

Clarke Society, whose primary mission is to support and honor the life and works of the Anglo-American composer. In *A Rebecca Clarke Reader,* the society precludes the book with one of Clarke's most exclamatory quotes which followed program notes she wrote for a performance of her Viola Sonata in 1977 : "I take this opportunity to emphasize that I do indeed exist…and that my Viola Sonata is my own unaided work!".[4]

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909-1969) was born in Lódz, Poland to a family of musicians, many who performed semiprofessionally in a string quartet. She was a violinist in a local orchestra by the age of twelve but had already decided by then that she would be a composer. Bacewicz studied first at the Lódz School of Music, and later composition with Kazimierz Sikorski at the Warsaw Conservatory, where she pursued additional formal studies in philosophy, literature, and world affairs, finally receiving two degrees in violin and composition. These additional studies are speculated by musicologist Judith Rosen to have "enriched" the young composers "musical expression", and at the urging of fellow Polish composer Karol Szymanowski, Bacewicz continued her education with Nadia Boulanger in Paris from 1932 to 1933. She then began some world travel as a concertizing violinist, which allowed her to further her violin studies: first with André Touret, and in 1934, with Carl Flesch. She joined the Polish Composers Union and began teaching at the Lódz Conservatory in 1945.[5]

By 1949, Bacewicz became the principal violinist with the Polish Radio Orchestra, and in 1951 was married, had a child, and was concertizing her works—much like Rebecca Clarke—to much positive reception and acclaim, all while additionally composing her String Quartet No.

4. Curtis, *A Rebecca Clarke Reader*.
5. Rosen, *Grażyna Bacewicz*, 386-88.

4 which won first prize in the International Composers' Competition. A year later, she completed her Piano Sonata No. 2, and being no meager pianist, premiered it herself. Politically, her country had recently suffered through Nazi occupation in World War II, and was now undergoing a difficult transition as the Soviet Union gained increasing control of many aspects of life, including art institutions. To provide context, works of the Second Viennese School were banned in Poland until 1956 after a revolution of the Polish working class, likely since the more modernist approach to music was viewed as a both radical and highly degenerate form of art, both during World War II and the years following.[6] Thus, the revolution of the Polish working class marked a shifting period of musical development for the composer for Bacewicz, as for the first time, she was exposed to the freedom and experimentalism of the Western avant-garde, including music by Oliver Messiaen (1908-1992), Karlheinz Stockhausen (b. 1928), and Pierre Boulez (b. 1925). As evidenced by her 1958 work, Music for Strings, Trumpets and Percussion, Bacewicz embraced the changing political atmosphere, and began to exchange traditional forms for a greater degree of experimentation with more extended techniques. As Glickman and Schliefer explain in their book,

> Bacewicz, like so many others of her generation, was initially encouraged by the blossoming of organizations devoted to reevaluating the Polish artist's place in twentieth-century art and society. However, the debates soon devolved into state-issued denunciations of absolute music. All we know is that she managed to avoid

6. *Everyday Life,* The Weiner Holocaust Library.

condemnation, perhaps due to her relatively tonal harmony and frequent use of folk references. [7]

In other words, because of her ability to meld, evolve, and balance her compositional style with distinct Polish elements and a fraught political climate, Bacewicz's music avoided censure, allowing her to continue experimenting and developing her musical style, although not to as much acclaim as before. As musicologist Adrian T. Thomas notes in Briscoe's *Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, Bacewicz "struggled to accommodate the avant-garde trends sweeping through contemporary music," and as such, "her music of the 1960's is fraught with inconsistencies." Thomas goes on to surmise that "the absence of clearly defined thematic hierarchies and an over-reliance within an atonal context of the very gestures that had so suited her tonally oriented music of the postwar decade suggest that it is her earlier music…that will survive on the concert platform." [8]

Overall, Bacewicz has been referred to as Poland's Ruth Crawford Seeger as, like Seeger's modernist music held greatly influenced composers in America, she was the first woman to achieve lasting fame in her country as a "truly modernist composer."[9] As Judith Rosen states, Bacewicz did not view herself as a "woman" composer, and neither did her colleagues. Rather, "her achievements encouraged and validated a generation of women who followed her", and "the number of women in Poland who have continued the tradition of

7. Mueller, *6. The Twentieth Century*, 217-91.

8. Thomas, *Grażyna Bacewicz: Chamber and Orchestral Works,* 298.

9. Sadie and Samuel, *2. Women's Music: A Twentieth-Century Perspective,* 13-17.

composition is extensive".[10] However, it is also important to note that, while the music of Bacewicz's early period may appear more conservative than Seeger's, her early "quasi neo-classicism" was a brave and highly radical approach in a country that was just beginning to acknowledge its cultural isolation. When asked later in life about the nature of her more contemporary works, Bacewicz stated,

> "The diversification of today's music and the tempo of its growth is inspiring… I disagree with those who maintain that once a composer develops her own style, she should stick to it. I find such an opinion totally alien; it impedes further development and growth. Every composition completed today, will belong to the past tomorrow. A progressive composer should not repeat herself. A composer should not only deepen her creation and improve upon it, but should also expand its scope. I believe that in my music, even though I do not consider myself an innovator, a certain trend of progression is discernible." [6]

Overall, Bacewicz composed many works for various solo instruments, including voice, piano, violin, and woodwinds, as well as chamber ensembles, larger scale concertos, and orchestral works. Additionally, she was awarded many prizes during her lifetime, including the National Prize, Warsaw Prize for her humanitarian and artistic efforts during WWII, and third prize in 1960 at the International Composer's Tribunal of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for her 1958 work of Music for Strings,

10. Bacewicz, *Desire: A Ballet by Grażyna Bacewicz,* 11-12.

6. *Everyday Life*, The Weiner Holocaust Library.

Trumpets, and Percussion.[9] These are all outstanding accomplishments for any composer, and an overwhelming testament to the unique position of respect and national acclaim Bacewicz held amongst a predominately male group of Eastern European composers in a country undergoing great political change and unrest. That all this was done while simultaneously fulfilling her roles as a wife and mother, and publicly concertizing her works on violin and piano, is equally commendable. It strongly affirms the qualities of her character that led to her success: an unbreakable, indomitable spirit of determination and adaptive, creative personality coupled with an unrelenting, enthusiastic drive applied to all aspects of her life. When asked about the unique position she held, Bacewicz stated:

> "I have always hated…the same questions repeated by some silly male journalist which run: Can a woman be a composer? Can a woman be a full-blooded composer? Should a woman composer get married? Should a woman composer have children?... I will tell you: a woman endowed with creative powers can be a composer. She can get married, have children and travel extensively all over the world giving concerts. There is only one little essential needed: "motorek" [short for *"ma motorek w dupie,"* loosely translated, "inexhaustible energy and drive"] ---without it don't bother. [9]

And thus, history presents us with two inimitable women, each with their own unique identities and compositional styles that provide for an intriguing study when both comparing and contrasting their compositional styles. Grażyna Bacewicz's Piano Sonata No. 2, written in 1953, is an example of the composer's compositional prowess in her "heyday". Historically, it

9. Sadie and Samuel, *2. Women's Music: A Twentieth-Century Perspective,* 13-17.

refers to the music of Karol Szymanowski, her fellow Polish composer, mentor, and friend from her time at Warsaw Conservatory; particularly his Twelve Studies for piano, Opus 33, 1916, and his 1932 Symphonie Concertante finale for piano and orchestra, Op. 60.[11] It is composed in a folk-derived idiom and infused with a rich blend of neoclassical style in the most rhapsodic way possible. The piece, though entitled as a sonata, does not follow the strict guidelines of classical form, as Bacewicz was "no lover of formulae," and preferred to meld her compositions with the freedom of her own interpretation. It contains three movements: a vigorous *Maestoso---Agitato*, followed by a more lyrical *Lento*, and completed with an animated, energetic *Toccata*. In the first movement, a prime example of Bacewicz's balanced style at the height of her compositional maturity, she is praised for her work as a rhapsodist, "constantly reshaping her materials through the developmental association of motivic ideas."[8] Of particularly great interest in this movement is the introduction of the second theme's (poco meno, m. 44) inherent folk-like quality, even though the accompanying lines are marked by severe chromaticism and dissonance. It is after the presence of this theme that Bacewicz breaks from the sonata form by refusing to cadence, instead allowing an obscured, unimposing melody to develop and dominate the movement, a compositional choice that has been described by musicologist Judith Rosen as "the composer's giving good ideas to their head rather than forcing them into too strai[gh]t a sonata jacket."[11]

11. Rosen, *Grażyna Bacewicz: Her Life and Works,* 1984.

8. Thomas, *Grażyna Bacewicz: Chamber and Orchestral Works,* 298.

11. Rosen, *Grażyna Bacewicz: Her Life and Works,* 1984.

This idea of a domineering, overlaying melody is utilized once more in the *Largo*, except it now appears in the Dorian mode, its security only momentarily threatened by the presence of a fugato that begins in m. 50. The movement promptly ends with a recap of the introductory folk melody, and after the fermata, stuns the listeners by flying into a largely pentatonic-based toccata. It is interesting to note the sharp contrast this final movement provides from the others: it is a prime example of the composer experimenting with more neoclassical elements, such as tone clusters, atonality, and athematicism all brilliantly stacked within a whirling stream of chromatic and pentatonic scales. Form-wise, it is most comparable to an oberek: a fast-moving, muscular dance that is a cousin of the mazurka; although in this instance, the “muscular folk dance” is set as brilliant keyboard writing. When considered in relation to the sonata’s entirety, the toccata reveals Bacewicz’s refined ability to perfectly achieve compositional balance in a way that explores new compositional ideas of her period while also avoiding political censure. For example, the *Largo* concedes with the “socio-realist” requirement for musical relevance set in place by the Polish government.

To give context, Socialist Realism under Joseph Stalin’s regime was primarily centered in embodying the vision of a triumphant Soviet order and future, and thus, all art, including music, needed to meet four requirements: it had to be proletariat, typical, realistic, and partisan. While the point could be posed that these specifications were more restrictive to the visual arts, it would be a travesty to dismiss the suppression of culture and creativity, and thus music style and expression, such regulations had on the output of composers—especially a female composer. In a time when “bold music” appears to have been more well received,

as it "depict[ed] the country's strength and wealth" and "prompted workers to action."[12], it would not be remiss to conclude that Bacewicz's music avoided criticism from the Stalinist ideology, unlike many of her male counterparts', because her unique fusion of neoclassical and Neo-Baroque style created music that met all the "required socio-realist criteria" or could otherwise not be deemed in opposition to communist ideals. In her Piano Sonata No. 2, we observe a musical work that fully explores the possibilities of the piano, and contains many folk-like themes and traditional Polish dances that would have been easily recognized by the proletariat, or common people. Intermingled with a powerful, energetic composition that is unmistakably bold, the melodic intent and structure is clear, direct, and realistic, losing little to none of its expressive character from deftly infused polytonal and atonal material and colorful harmonization choices.

In the *Largo* alone, Bacewicz precisely structures a repetitive chordal accompaniment with an overarching folk-derived idiom. She plays with dynamic extremes, and steadily gains momentum and energy as the texture prepares to become more polyphonic. The fugato provides a surprising twist of polyphonic writing, but not even thirty measures later, returns to the first theme at the end of the movement. It could be argued that this particular movement, considered in the scope of the entire sonata, most directly represents the composer's "modern" style. With its overall clarity, direction, and ability to build maturely on themes combined with sharp, contrasting moments of harmonic opulence and instrumental color that can best be compared to the style of Maurice Ravel, the work blends

12. Levrier-Jones, *History of Art in the Soviet Union: Propaganda, Rebellion, and Freedom in Socialist Realism.*

interwar neoclassical and Parisian Neo-Baroque gestures within a loosely structured form that gives the composer flexibility to experiment and surprise. Thus, Bacewicz's sonata provides a shining example of style, experimentation, and political balance, as well as promise of future compositions displaying the composer's prominence with avant-garde technique.

When we analyze and compare the lives of these two women, it is remarkable that they never crossed paths. Each composer showed great promise from a young age, and equally underwent their own unique set of experiences that over time formed their attitudes towards their own work. However, the instruction in composition they both received was primarily French, so some underlying comparisons can be drawn between their individual styles and that of their male counterparts. Yet while Bacewicz appears to have retained some inkling of the French impressionistic style sweeping Paris in her own compositions, likely from her time studying under Nadia Boulanger and the influence of Szymanowski, Rebecca Clarke was more directly influenced by composers frequenting her social circle in her own works. Based on interviews conducted with her later in life, it appears she held the unique position of knowing Ravel quite well, so much that she considered him a "dear friend," along with English composer Vaughan Williams, whose music she admired greatly. In fact, she herself notes that her Viola Sonata was in part influenced by the style of Vaughan Williams, although she names the style of Debussy as a more prominent influence.[4]

Like Bacewicz's Piano Sonata No. 2*,* Clarke's Viola Sonata is comprised of three movements, and makes use of modes and folk song influenced melodies. However, while this similarity emphasized connections to Polish nationalism for Bacewicz, with Clarke it is more

likely the result of her British background and study at the RCM, where Vaughan Williams also studied. The first movement of the Viola Sonata begins with a modal introduction: an E Dorian improvisatory line in the viola is held over a piano chord, and only continues to evolve from this point, albeit in a more polite and conservative way than seen in Bacewicz's writing. In relation to Debussy, Clarke makes use of whole tone and octatonic scales as expressed in her two motives: the first motive is introductory and militant with dotted rhythms and a beginning interval of an open fifth, and her second motive with its whole tone sonorities is a direct quotation from Vaughan Williams's "Bredon Hill" from his song cycle *On Wenlock Edge (1909)*.[2] The first motive is recalled in the third movement, and its presence is marked by repetition and a cyclic form as well as the presence of other repeated material from the first movement to culminate the sonata. In both movements we can see the influences of Vaughan Williams, Debussy, and even Swiss composer Ernest Bloch, whom Clarke also held in high esteem.[3] A summary of Bloch's stylistic traits includes: "frequent changes of tempo and key, modality, cyclic form, and propensity for open 5ths and 4ths," a definition that can also be applied to Clarke's music.[13] However, as Liane Curtis states in *A Rebecca Clarke Reader,* Clarke's musical language "combines principals from different tonal systems: diatonicism, modality, chromaticism, whole-tone writing, and octatonicism … without ever seeming forced or unnatural. Clarke knew a great deal of music … it is most likely she subconsciously re-created

2. Jones, *Rebecca Clarke*, 295-97.

4. Curtis, *A Rebecca Clarke Reader.*

4. Curtis, *A Rebecca Clarke Reader.*

13. Kennedy, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music,* 3rd ed., 78.

in her music sounds that she had heard in the music of others."[4] In other words, Rebecca Clarke was no mere musician: if anything, her Viola Sonata portrays composition maturity and balanced blending of the many tonal techniques at her disposal in a way that uses the colors, harmonic opulence, and strengths of both instruments in an intelligent and poetic way. Unlike Bacewicz, Clarke was a very amateur pianist, a fact she reiterates in an interview from the '70s, but her understanding and technical prowess on viola is evident in the way she writes the sonata: she makes full use of the broad range of colors and timbre, as well as other technical writing for strings, including fingered and open harmonics, pizzicato, block chords, string crossings, and other devices. After a four-measure introduction, her first movement obediently follows the formula of sonata form, her second movement sparkles with energy and harmonic colors, and the third movement recalls the folk-like melodies from the first through a cyclic system of repetition and recall.

Thus, for the purposes of this analysis, with Clarke it is best to note the sources and contemporaries that influenced her work and consider the presence of her unique voice. As many biographical sources reveal, Clarke greatly struggled to understand her identity and worth as a composer, so much so that for much of her life, her compositional output appears meager to almost nonexistent. In fact, she claimed that after her marriage to James Friskin at the age of 58, she composed very little, even though her husband did not discourage her from doing so. Prior to her marriage, Clarke explains feeling "awfully homesick" for England, but was denied a visa from the British Consulate as she was an "unproductive mouth" and too old to benefit the war effort, and so she settled in New York, marrying shortly

4. Curtis, *A Rebecca Clarke Reader.*

after.[4] During the revival of her work in the 1970s , she finally began to realize the importance of her identity as a composer; yet even then, she maintained her polite, humble demeanor, belittling her music to three pieces: “The only things of any length I did were the Viola Sonata, the Trio, and the Suite for clarinet and viola,” when her estate has in fact uncovered hundreds of unpublished compositions. Prior to this, her attitude towards herself appears most deferential, and interviews conducted with her later in life reveal that she was most sensitive to the criticism she received from her male counterparts.

For example, Clarke once met with Gustav Holst for an interview, where she showed him two pieces she had been working on. She describes the experience as “quite unnerving,” and that Holst was “very nice but criticized them very severely.” She also explained that Holst invited her to study composition with him, but she declined as she was on a round-the-world trip and completing a commission for Mrs. Coolidge. Unfortunately, by the time she completed this, Holst had died. This, however, appears to be an excuse, since both her interview and commission were in 1923, and Holst did not die until 1934. Even though Clarke paints Holst’s personality in a positive and admirative light, she appeared to have not wanted to study with him. The reasoning behind this decision remains unknown, whether this decision was the result of lack of confidence, avoidance of further criticism to which she was so highly sensitive, or her own deferential frame of mind (there is some evidence from Clarke’s own direct testimony which suggests that Clarke may have suffered from dysthymia, or persistent depressive disorder (PDD), can only be speculated. Yet Clarke’s own views of her identity and work remain consistent, an as Liane Curtis goes on to sadly explain in length, many of the statements we

4. Curtis, *A Rebecca Clarke Reader.*

have from her show a bright, young composer's "acceptance of her erasure from music history." The following is written:

> The large body of music, unknown and unpublished in her lifetime, would languish for two more decades in her estate. That she made no mention of her music in her will, and made no provision for the care or promotion of her music after her death, is a sad testament to the weakness of her identity as a composer; at the time of her death she was only beginning to reestablish her belief in herself. Throughout the interviews and her writings, her self-deprecating attitude toward her music is a recurring theme, which makes our task to understand her true significance as a composer more difficult.[4]

This same difficult task continues today, just as it does for so many other composers of the past, but in the case of women composers, historical odds seem stacked against them. It is the culmination of how they overcame these odds, combined with the fortitude of their own merit and personality, that speak to how we may fully appreciate, rediscover, and reimagine their identities as composers of the 20th century.

Such a challenge can only result in increased understanding and social enlightenment, but also poses a question in and of itself: within the context of a male dominated Western canon, why are the works of women composers, such as Bacewicz and Clarke, as well as those compositions of other minorities, not better represented, or held to the same esteem, as those of their white male counterparts? If one facet of any well-rounded musician's education requires extensive study of the musical ingenuity in works by Bach, Mozart, Schumann, and Beethoven, why not also in works by women? If the seed planted in a musician's education

4. Curtis, *A Rebecca Clarke Reader.*

grows into an art that expressly represents their culture's experiences and values, what might that imply about ourselves? Why is the music of women, particularly the works discussed in this paper and lauded at their conception, just as quickly forgotten? While no definitive answer can be given, it is with closer examination of the audiences, or diverse members of society, in any given culture that we may stumble across the truth.

In the case of women composers such as Bacewicz and Clarke, their greatest challenge lied in establishment. At the peak of their compositional success, they were acknowledged most enthusiastically by their audiences and their peers, yet posthumously, have been forgotten to the public. In the Norton Grove Dictionary of Women Composers, the following observation regarding women composers of the 20th century is made:

> The move to unearth women artists, in music as in any other art, is not a neutral act, any more is their previous neglect … For instance, in the past, to compose, let alone be heard, a woman has needed to conquer social restriction and taboo. While her domestic life has often limited practical opportunities for composing, even when she has managed to find the time and space for this activity, she has been far less able than her male peers to enjoy valuable interaction with orchestras and opera companies and to develop her technique. Her success … particularly before the present day, should be seen as doubly significant.

Because of this, the authors explain that many women have "pragmatically … preferred to turn to smaller forms, in which the eyes of critics have been less prestigious."[9] When a

9. Sadie, and Samuel, *2. Women's Music: A Twentieth-Century Perspective,* 13-17.

woman writes music of a larger form, or 'serious' music, particularly in the 20th century when great emphasis was placed on innovation, the "response of a woman composer to a male-dominated world" has frequently been seen as "subversive or revisionary rather than pioneering."[9] We see evidence of this trend in the early works of Rebecca Clarke: being quite fond of poetry herself, she began composing with shorter works for voice and piano based on poetry, including poems of W. B. Yeats, John Masefield ("The Seal Man"), and her friend Anna Wickman ("The Cherry Blossom Wand"). Since women mostly wrote in smaller forms, with the exception of a few brave individuals, a woman's achievement was often considered of a "different order from a man's" and the crucial component of establishment, which had measured the success of many a male composer in the past, created "an unreliable yardstick for the success of women composers." In order for a creative woman to succeed as a composer in a man's world prior to and during the 20th century, even with the revolutionary awareness of women's rights, she had to transcend or reject "the qualities that are usually associated with feminine productions" and become an "honorary male." [9]

Bearing all these observances of Clarke and Bacewicz in mind, as well as general consideration of other 20th century female composers, there are a few distinct, predominant trends from this period of history which suggest the evolving female voice in composition, and that have evolved to the present day. First, women began to write in larger, more 'serious' forms. We see this in Bacewicz's Piano Sonata, as well as Clarke's Viola Sonata. The important difference to note between the two was at their release, Bacewicz's was reasonably well-received, yet Clarke's caused a minor uproar; it was inconceivable to some that a woman could have written such a significant work without the help of a man, as it adhered to the larger form

of a Classical sonata and was composed in an intelligent, thoughtful way. Clarke's work also maintains a semblance of feminine grace; her incipit of poetry at the beginning of the sonata and highly lyricized voicing in the viola throughout contrast greatly from the discordant and heavily veiled folk themes in Bacewicz's sonata, which may have prevented Clarke's work from being considered on the same threshold as a man's. In Bacewicz's case, there is little trace of femininity within her compositions; her daring, experimental style transcends and liberates her from societal expectations of her gender, allowing her unique ideas and compositional identity to freely develop. Both women's compositions reveal they were remarkably brilliant, yet on different sides of tradition's framework, thus only one's compositional abilities are truly beheld and appreciated. As John Stuart Mill remarks in his treatise *The Subjection of Women:*

> That is a subject on which nothing final can be known, so long as the only people who can really know it—women themselves—have little to say about it and the little that they do say is mostly suborned, by which I mean that women are usually under pressure not to tell the truth about their own mental abilities. [14]

Next, women composers in the 20th century become more experimental, working with a broader range of materials at their disposal, using folk instruments, and creating new mediums beyond the scope of traditional orchestral instruments. In Bacewicz's later works, we see her experimenting with serialism and the avant-garde after being exposed to the works of Boulez, Messiaen, and Stockhausen following a revolution of the Polish working class in 1956, which prompted her 1958 work Music for Strings, Trombone and Percussion. Other notable

14. Mill, *The Subjection of Women.* Edited by Jonathan Bennet, 2009.

creations are Laurie Anderson's tape-bow violin; Annea Lockwood's "glass concert" of objects to be struck, rubbed, snapped, or shaken; and Sofiya Gabaydulina's use of the bayan in her *Seven Last Words* (1986).[15] Along with a great deal of creativity, an attitude of invention and experimentation is fully embraced with societal stipulations, and an appreciation for cultural and folk traditions becomes more evident. This increased interest in folk music is a prominent trend even today, as musicians have begun to celebrate works that incorporate their own culture's folk materials or draw inspiration from the cultures of others. The works of Fanny Price, for example, provide a perfect sense of what is sometimes termed a "musical cultural identity"—a trend that has become a mainstream "buzz word" for many performers, young musicians, and conservatory curriculums. Author Sylvia Glickman states it best:

"A portrait of a civilization is painted with many brushes---depicting its history, geography, politics, sciences, religion, and arts. When a significant portion of the population is omitted, a skewed picture emerges."

Glickman seems to know that society will never fully aspire to its greatest potential without the contributions of all its members, and that the presentation of skewed pictures only multiplies the difficultly to understand our civilizations and culture. Instead, omitting part of the population from the pages of history only provides us with pieces of a civilizations puzzle, and speaks great volumes to the audiences and values governing that society rather than geographical importance or scholarly pursuits. Glickman also references the Ottoman Turkish writer Namîk Kemal's quote from 1867 regarding women's rights in the Middle East:

15. Fairouz, *Women Are Great Composers Too, Why Aren't They Being Heard?*

> Our women … constitute half and perhaps more than half of our species. Preventing them from contributing to the sustenance and improvement of others by means of their efforts infringes the basic rules of cooperation to such a degree that our national society is stricken like a human body that is paralyzed on one side.[7]

And so, a question arises from the rusty scaffolds of past inequity and the domineering constructs of societal frameworks: why study these women, and women composers in general? Beyond more recent studies regarding the concept of an innate woman's voice and an increased societal awareness and interest in musical compositions by women, does the absence of their works from our educational institutions and concert halls truly signify a great loss to our musical development? What portrait of our understanding does this paint for our students, children, and the generations to come? To the extent of my current knowledge, the study of these women is immensely relevant because in them, we see evidence of an evolving compositional tradition that is entirely female: the formational presence of a woman's voice that is neither hindered nor sapped by inconsistency or social doctrine of current society, nor abused and overshadowed by the advantages of a man's historical and societal standing. Her compositions are pioneering and personal ideology and style entirely her own—no longer limited to the threshold of a man's compositional works or deemed revisionary and subversive, as works of many women in the past centuries before her were.

In conclusion, as we view the social biases and expectations subjected upon women of the past, and observe the injustices to their freedom of expression, art and creativity, with newfound empathy, we can hopefully move towards recognizing and including them in our

7. Mueller, *6. The Twentieth Century,* 217-91.

homes, schools, and personal education as respectful, well-versed musicians. If we consider music a celebration of life, it is important to celebrate composers of all genders, backgrounds, nationalities, and styles—knowing their combined experiences render the modification of our own perspectives, and thus the overall betterment of our humanity. Together, we must move to include and embrace all of our society's brushes, especially the oft overlooked contributions of the female artist, as the unilateral sharing of ideas, thoughts, and interpretations paints our own picture of the greatest work we will ever do as artists, musicians, and teachers. The importance of including the female composer in our musical study offers many benefits, including inspiring better solutions, ideas, and the increased ability and appreciation of the oft rejected art of collaboration. Finally, the importance of studying, playing, and teaching about women composers resonates with a formerly listed quote by Bacewicz which phrases it best:

> "Every composition completed today, will belong to the past tomorrow. A progressive composer should not repeat herself. A composer should not only deepen…creation and improve upon it, but should also expand its scope." [6]

If what we do today belongs to the past tomorrow, we must fully consider what paths we create that others may follow in. Replace the word "composition" or "composer" with "musician", "scholar", "society", or "civilization", and Bacewicz's words remind us of an undeniable truth about ourselves: that too often, we get stuck in the same repetitive cycles of past ideas, rather than seeking to deepen or allow the ideas of others to inspire new ones. Perhaps to truly progress, it is time to remedy the repetitive omittance of the female composer, artist, and scholar from our history's pages, and seek to recognize works by women alongside

6. *Everyday Life*, The Weiner Holocaust Library.

the works of men. Then we may create clear paths for others to follow in, and whether in our generation or the next, allow history's pendulum to swing once more in the right direction.

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