

WOMAN IN MUSIC

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A GENERAL VIEW OF WOMAN'S INFLUENCE ON MUSIC. — LOVE ATTACHMENTS AND HOME LIFE. — THE FAILURE OF WOMAN IN COMPOSITION. — SOME CONSIDERATION OF REASONS WHY SHE HAS PRODUCED NO ENDURING MUSICAL WORK.

THE special purpose of this essay is to characterize the real relation which woman holds to music; and it makes no more pretentious claim than to be a study of the subject, with such illustrations, drawn from the lives of representative composers, as can be furnished by a musical library. It is intended to be historical and æsthetic, rather than philosophical or dogmatic; and to present facts for consideration by the thoughtful reader, collated from the most authoritative sources, rather than to

attempt to explain all the problems of woman's relation to music.

The subject naturally divides itself into two heads: first, the influence of woman in encouraging the great composers to labor, and inspiring them in the production of their finest works; and, second, the relations of woman to the performance of vocal and instrumental music. The latter branch of the subject certainly does not require special attention in these days of the great queens of song, whose sway is everywhere acknowledged, and, so far as the scope of this essay is concerned, hardly needs more than eulogistic reference. The other branch, however, has been but little considered; and what little is known is, as a rule, incorrect. The attachments of love, the bonds of friendship, the endearments of home, and the influences of society have played an important part in shaping the careers of the great composers, and in giving color, form, and direction to their music. In all these phases of life genius has more than once knelt at the feet of beauty and executed her behests; and more than one immortal work of music may be traced to the steadfast love and thoughtful care of woman in the quiet duties of home life. Few students

of music know the effect of these subtle influences, except through the medium of romances and rhapsodies that have been woven about the lives of composers by enthusiasts of the Rau and Polko school, or of pretty fancies and legends, current in their time, that have come down to us, and are implicitly believed, though they have no foundations to rest upon. There are probably very few persons, even among musicians, who do not firmly believe that Beethoven addressed his immortal love-song, the "Adelaide," to some real inamorata ; that his C sharp minor sonata was inspired by the moonlight ; that Mozart wrote his "Requiem" at the request of a mysterious stranger who was in some manner connected with his death ; that Haydn expired in an ecstasy of joy during the performance of his "Creation ;" that Weber died at his piano ; and that Chopin died of a broken heart, because George Sand, tiring of her passion and his morbidness, flung him away. It is easy for the world to accept and believe such fancies, because it is ready to credit genius with anything that is *bizarre* or romantic, just as it is ready to condone excesses and eccentricities that would not be tolerated in the ordinary plodder.

The study of this subject, however, would not be complete without considering one of its phases which is in the nature of an enigma, and to which no satisfactory answer has yet been given. The writer does not hope to solve the problem, but only to offer such hints as suggest themselves, leaving to others better versed in the mysteries of the female nature and in the peculiar intellectual and emotional qualities necessary to the development of a great composer, to discover the exact reasons why woman has failed to create important and enduring works in music.

At the first glance it would seem that musical composition is a province in which woman should excel. It may be laid down, as a fundamental and indisputable proposition, that music is the interpreter and the language of the emotions. It sounds every note in the gamut of human nature, from ecstatic joy to profound despair. It is "of all sweet sounds the life and element." It wakes "thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." It inspires, enrages, elevates, saddens, cheers, and soothes the soul as no other one of the arts can. It can "swell the soul to rage, or kindle soft desire." It gives voice

to love and expression to passion, lends glory to every art, and performs its loftiest homage as the handmaid of religion. Why is it, then, that woman, who possesses all these attributes in a more marked degree than man, who is the inspiration of love, who has a more powerful and at the same time more delicate emotional force than man, who is artistic by temperament, whose whole organism is sensitively strung, and who is religious by nature, — why is it that woman, with all these musical elements in her nature, is receptive rather than creative? Why is it that music only comes to her as a balm, a rest, or a solace of happiness among her pleasures and her sorrows, her commonplaces and her conventionalities, and that it does not find its highest sources *in* her? In other fields of art woman has been creative. Rosa Bonheur is man's equal upon canvas. Harriet Hosmer has made the marble live with a man's truth and force and skill. Mrs. Browning in poetry, Mary Somerville and Caroline Herschel in science, George Sand, Charlotte Brontë, and Madame de Staël in fiction, have successfully rivalled man in their fields of labor; while George Eliot, with almost more than masculine force, has grappled with the most ab-

struse problems of human life, and though an agnostic has courageously sifted the doubts of science and latter-day cultured unbelief, and plucked many a rose of blessing for suffering humanity from amid its storms of sorrow and pain.

These may all stand as types of creative power ; but who is to represent woman in the higher realm of music ? While a few women, during the last two centuries, have created a few works, now mostly unknown, no woman during that time has written either an opera, oratorio, symphony, or instrumental work of large dimensions that is in the modern repertory. Man has been the creative representative. Beethoven has shown its depth, its majesty, its immortality ; Mendelssohn, its elegance of form ; Händel, its solemnity and grandeur ; Mozart, its wondrous grace and sweetness ; Haydn, its purity, freshness, and simplicity ; Schumann, its romance ; Chopin, its poetry and tender melancholy ; Schubert, the richness of its melody ; Bach, its massive foundations ; Berlioz, its *grotesquerie* and supernaturalisms ; and Liszt and Wagner, its poetical idealism. In the symphony, in opera, in oratorio, even in the lesser realm of chamber music, woman has either been

silent, or what she has attempted to create has had but an ephemeral existence.

It has been claimed by some writers that the folk-songs of many countries belong to women, though the claim is mere surmise, and by others that the *trouveresses* who accompanied the troubadours upon their tuneful journeys created melodies; but even this is mythical, and history, while it has carefully preserved numerous poems and songs of the Provençal troubadours and German minne-singers, has consigned nearly all that was accomplished by the *trouveresses* to the Lethe of oblivion. Some of their poems that have survived show much grace and tender feeling, but their musical ability was mostly restricted to the singing of their male companions' songs. That there is a natural aptitude among musical women for the writing of songs and ballads is unquestionable; but they are mostly short-lived, and are rarely woven into the fabric of national life. That woman has also ventured into the realms of higher music is equally unquestionable, as the list of female composers in the appendix to this essay will show, and as the songs without words of Fanny Hensel, sister of Mendelssohn, and the piano compositions of Madame Schumann attest; but of

all the works written by these numerous composers, hardly one is known to the lyric stage to-day. And why?

The most palpable answer, and the only one that is fairly indisputable, is that having had equal advantages with men, they have failed as creators. This somewhat Milesian reply is illustrated in Mr. Bulwer's novel of "The Parisians." Isaura Cicagna, writing to her friend Madame de Grantmesnil, informs her that she has consulted Dr. C. upon the subject of writing music instead of entering stage life as a *prima donna*; to which the Doctor replied:—

"My dear child, I should be your worst enemy if I encouraged such a notion; cling to the career in which you can be greatest: gain but health, and I wager my reputation on your glorious success on the stage. What can you be as a composer? You will set pretty music to pretty words, and will be sung in drawing-rooms with the fame a little more or less that generally attends the compositions of female amateurs. Aim at something higher, as I know you would do, and you will not succeed. Is there any instance in modern times, perhaps in any times, of a female composer who attains even to the eminence of a third-rate opera writer? Composition in letters may be of no sex. In that Madame Dudevant and your friend Madame de Grant-

mesnil can beat most men ; but the genius of musical composition is *homme*, and accept it as a compliment when I say that you are essentially *femme*."

Conceding that music is the highest expression of the emotions, and that woman is emotional by nature, is it not one solution of the problem that woman does not musically reproduce them because she herself is emotional by temperament and nature, and cannot project herself outwardly, any more than she can give outward expression to other mysterious and deeply hidden traits of her nature? The emotion is a part of herself, and is as natural to her as breathing. She lives in emotion, and acts from emotion. She feels its influences, its control, and its power ; but she does not see these results as man looks at them. He sees them in their full play, and can reproduce them in musical notation as a painter imitates the landscape before him. It is probably as difficult for her to express them as it would be to explain them. To confine her emotions within musical limits would be as difficult as to give expression to her religious faith in notes. Man controls his emotions, and can give an outward expression of them. In woman they are the dominating

element, and so long as they are dominant she absorbs music. Great actresses who have never been great dramatists may express emotions because they express their own natures ; but to treat emotions as if they were mathematics, to bind and measure and limit them within the rigid laws of harmony and counterpoint, and to express them with arbitrary signs, is a cold-blooded operation, possible only to the sterner and more obdurate nature of man. As I have said, so long as the emotions are dominant, she absorbs music. When the emotions lose their force with age, her musical power weakens. Almost every man who has learned to play an instrument, or to sing, be it ever so poorly, and be his troubles or his cares ever so pressing, continues to play or to sing as long as he has strength. Max Müller, in his "*Deutsche Liebe*," has a neat illustration of this. He imagines one returning to his native village after an absence of many years. As he wanders about the streets he finds a familiar house : "here the old music-teacher lived. He is dead ; and yet how beautiful it seemed as we stood and listened on summer evenings under the window when the faithful soul indulged in his own enjoyment and played fantasies, as the roaring

and hissing engine lets off the steam which has accumulated during the day." The large majority of women drop their music long before the hair grows gray, or at the first touch of sorrow. This may be due partly to the effect of forced and unwholesome practice in these days, when it is thought that every girl, whether she have musical intelligence and ability or not, must learn to play the piano or to sing, and partly to the engrossing demands of household cares; but these causes do not explain what is a general rule: while, in the matter of care, even the pressure of business does not divert man's attention from his music; on the other hand, he turns to it, even in his old age, for rest and solace.

There is another phase of the feminine character which may bear upon the solution of this problem; and that is the inability of woman to endure the discouragements of the composer, and to battle with the prejudice and indifference, and sometimes with the malicious opposition, of the world, that obstruct his progress. The lives of the great composers, with scarcely an exception, were spent in constant struggle, and saddened with discouragements, disappointments, the pinching of poverty, the jealousies of rivals, or the contemptuous in

difference of contemporaries. Beethoven struggled all his life with adverse fate. Schubert's music was hardly known in his lifetime, and his best works were not fairly recognized until after his death. Schumann is hardly yet known. There is scarcely a more pitiable picture than that of the great Händel struggling against the malicious cabals of petty and insignificant rivals for popular favor, who now are scarcely known even by name. Mozart's life was a constant warfare ; and when this wonderful child of genius went to his grave in the paupers' quarter of the churchyard of St. Marx, he went alone,—not one friend accompanied him, and no one has known to this day where he sleeps. Berlioz's music is just beginning to be played in his native country. Wagner fought the world all his life with indomitable courage and persistence, and died before he had established a permanent place for his music. There is scarcely a composer known to fame, and whose works are destined to endure, who lived long enough to see his music appreciated and accepted by the world for what it was really worth. Such fierce struggles and overwhelming discouragements, such pitiless storms of fate and cruel assaults of poverty,

in the pursuit of art, woman is not calculated to endure. If her triumph could be instant ; if work after work were not to be assailed, scoffed at, and rejected ; if she were not liable to personal abuse, to the indifference of her own sex on the one hand and masculine injustice on the other,—there would be more hope for her success in composition : but instant triumphs are not the rewards of great composers. The laurels of success may decorate their graves, placed there by the applauding hands of admiring posterity, but rarely crown their brows.

It is a curious fact that nearly all the great music of the world has been produced in humble life, and has been developed amid the environments of poverty and in the stern struggle for existence. The aristocracy has contributed very little to music, and that little can be spared without detriment. Nearly all the masters have been of lowly and obscure origin, and have lived and died in comparative poverty ; for, with rare exceptions, musical composition has been miserably unremunerative until within the last fifty years. The enduring music has been the child of poverty, the outcome of sorrow, the apotheosis of suffering. Sebastian Bach was the son of a hireling

musician. Beethoven's father was a dissipated singer. Cherubini came from the lowest and poorest ranks of life. Gluck was a forester's son. Lulli in his childhood was a page, and slept in palace kitchens. Haydn's father was a wheelwright; and his mother, previous to marriage, was a cook in the kitchen of Count Harrach, the lord of his native village. While on his death-bed, Beethoven called Hummel's attention to a picture, and said: "See, my dear Hummel, the house in which Haydn was born; to think that so great a man should have first seen the light in a peasant's wretched hut." Mozart's father was a musician in humble circumstances, and his grandfather a book-binder. Händel was the son of a barber and surgeon. Méhul was the son of a cook. Rossini's father was a miserable strolling horn-player, who led a wild Bohemian life. Schubert was the son of a poor schoolmaster; and his mother, like Haydn's, was in service as a cook at the time of her marriage. Cimarosa's father was a mason, and his mother a washerwoman. Schumann was a bookseller's son; and Verdi, the son of a Lombardian peasant. Weber's father was a strolling musician and actor. Wagner, the musician of the future, was born in humble circumstances; his

father having been a petty municipal officer, and his stepfather an unpretentious portrait-painter, who at one time had also been a very poor actor. Among all the prominent composers, but three were born in affluence, — Auber, Meyerbeer, and Mendelssohn. With these three exceptions, they developed the grandeur, the sublimity, the passion, and the majesty of their music out of the storms of life, the pangs of sorrow, and the hard battle with fate. In this sphere of life, where music seems to have had its origin, the lot of woman is bounded by homely but unintermitting cares. Her existence is mainly devoted to the same tedious routine of labor from the rising to the setting sun, which has few intervals of relaxation, certainly no leisure for musical effort. Its demands are so exacting that she has neither time nor disposition for the theoretical application which musical composition requires.

But even assuming that woman had the disposition and the leisure to devote to musical composition, would she *then* succeed? The bluntest answer to this is that she has not succeeded when she has had the opportunity. But there is another way, perhaps, of arriving at an answer. Woman reaches results mainly by intuitions. Her susceptibility to

impressions and her finely tempered organization enable her to feel and perceive, where man has to reach results by the slow processes of reason. So far as music is a matter of emotion, she is more immediately sensitive to it than man ; she absorbs it more quickly, if not so thoroughly ; she discriminates with more nicety, and often judges with more impartiality ; she recognizes what is true and what is false more quickly. If music were only an object of the perceptions or a matter of instinct ; if it simply addressed itself to the senses ; if it were but an art composed of ravishing melody, of passionate outbursts, — of the attributes of joy, grief, and exaltation, and vague, dreamy sensations without any determinate ideas, — woman possibly would have grasped it long ago, and flooded the world with harmony as she has with song : but music is all this and more, for these are only effects. It is not only an art, but an exact science, and, in its highest form, mercilessly logical and unrelentingly mathematical. Its mastery requires long years of patient toil and continuous application. The imagination does not have a free flight, but is bounded within the limits of form. The mere possession of the poetical imagination and the capacity to receive music in its

fullest emotional power will not lead one to the highest achievements in musical art. With these subjective qualities must be combined the mastery of the theoretical intricacies, the logical sequences, and the mathematical problems which are the foundation principles of music. It has every technical detail that characterizes absolute science in its most rigid forms. In this direction woman, except in very rare instances, has never achieved great results. Her grandest performances have been in the regions of romance, of imagination, of intuition, of poetical feeling and expression, or in those still higher duties which call for the exercise of religious "faith and works."

For these and many other reasons growing out of the peculiar organization of woman, the sphere in which she moves, the training which she receives, and the duties she has to fulfil, it does not seem that woman will ever originate music in its fullest and grandest harmonic forms. She will always be the recipient and interpreter, but there is little hope she will be the creator.

However this may be, there is a field in which she has accomplished great results; namely, her influence upon the production of music. She has done so much *for* music

that it is not exaggeration to claim that without her influence many of the masterpieces which we now so much admire might not have been accomplished at all ; that the great composers have often written through her inspiration ; and that she has, in numerous notable instances, been their impulse, support, and consolation.

What music owes to her I shall try to show by reference to the lives and labors of Bach, Händel, Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Schubert, Weber, Chopin, and Wagner, — eleven of the representative names in the highest forms of composition, — and thus establish the first branch of the general subject that was laid down in the beginning of this essay.

