

Introduction for “Her Voice”
Ronen Chamber Ensemble
October 2, 2007

I am delighted to introduce a program of music by composers who are women. Women have been making music with instruments and voices since humans first acquired language. But in the western world—just as in the realms of art and literature—their voices have not always been heard. Many obstacles have confronted women attempting to study and make music. During the Renaissance, for example, female musicians performed behind a barrier lest the promiscuous eye of the public compromise their respectability. Not only have the performance aspects of music been veiled, but too many compositions by women—because they were women—met a silent fate. They remained buried under the heavy dust of history—until some enterprising student recovered them. The 19th-century composer Louise Farrenc (whose Quintet in A Minor we will hear this evening) is one whose music was not played after her death, despite its beauty and the composer’s sterling credentials. (She and Mendelssohn studied with the same teacher.) Like women barred from other professions, Farrenc was not allowed into the composition classroom, nor was she allowed to have male students, because her mentors believed that it was unseemly for women to endure criticism. This prescriptive preservation of feminine delicacy is, quite ironically, the very thing that taught persistence to women seeking careers in music.

The voice of music is indeed gendered, but it does not follow that music conceived by women is delicate or tentative. When women speak musically, their voices are as diverse as those of men. We will surely experience a rich range of moods and tonalities on the program this evening, beginning with Jennifer Higdon’s “Rapid Fire”—a piece that Ingrid Fischer Bellman has called “an urban cry.” We are also extraordinarily fortunate to have the world premiere of our own Becky Archibald’s innovative quartet, “Seriously Blue.” I hope you will join me in thanking the Ronen Chamber Ensemble for assembling this program on “Her Voice,” and as you listen, celebrate the transformation of what was once a very personal and private medium into public space.

Prepared by:
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