

LIBERAL FEMINIST THOUGHT AND ITS IMPACT ON CLASSICAL MUSIC *

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From the same roots as liberalist theory, which is based on the concepts of liberty, independence, and the natural rights of the individual for development, liberal feminism analyzes female status in society. As an amateur pianist, I respond with sensitivity to the situation of women who have great difficulty becoming recognized and famous artists, a problem that the female gender faces as a result of sexism. Thus, in this research paper, my purpose, in part, is to clarify liberal feminist thought and the case studies on the lives of Ethel Smyth and Amy Marcy Beach. Then, It will be established how liberal feminist advocacy successfully influenced the two female musicians entrance into a traditionally male dominated field. Liberal feminist perspectives have brought a very significant impact on the classical music domain and have given opportunity for capable females to become acknowledged as great musicians.

In order to specify the nature of liberal feminist theory, it is necessary to study the theoretical origins of the natural rights doctrine and the intellectual world of Enlightenment liberalism in which it arose. The period of Enlightenment, the late seventeenth through the late

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eighteenth centuries, is the hierarchical "great chain of being" which ordered the medieval cosmos. This medieval cosmos had been fatally challenged by several discoveries made by such men as Galileo and Isaac Newton. These theorists determined that a few "clear and distinct ideas," known through the "light of reason," provide irrefutable principles of knowledge. Indeed, they concluded the basic principles of descriptive or prescriptive behavior. At the same time, political philosophers developed the idea that certain natural rights are known through the exercise of reason and established one of the most important ideas; each individual has certain inherent or natural rights.

However, these rights did not apply to females as they did to males; therefore feminist theorists in the natural rights tradition sought to apply them to women. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was the earliest feminist whose articulation of liberal feminist theory can be traced to her book, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). This work was considered the first major feminist theory in history. She argued forcefully that women had the potential for full rationality and consequently were as capable as men of complete moral responsibility (Jagger, 1993:117-118). Her theory, developed during the Enlightenment era, was put into practice. She hoped to insure that women would be entitled to the same natural rights as men, such as same opportunity for the same education as men.

Sarah Grimke's (1792-1873) Letters on Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women (1838) presents the most cogent and elegant arguments against women's subordination developed in the liberal tradition. The letters were written during a lecture tour through northern Massachusetts which Grimke had undertaken in 1837 on behalf of the Abolitionist cause. During the tour she had been excoriated for daring to violate the biblical injunction against women speaking in public (Rossi, 1988:306-318).

Since Betty Friedan (1921-) published The Feminine Mystique in 1963, she has become significant in her role as a feminist and has had

great influence in the American feminist movement. By 1966, Friedan had helped to found the National Organization of Women (NOW) and had become its first president. She set herself as a speaker for the women's movement. In her *The Feminine Mystique*, she creates an audience which believes in the "ideal" of androgyny, a rhetorical style which involves two dominant and related personas, one embodying a female voice and the other a male voice.

Other than the above three theorists, some liberal feminists, such as John Stuart Mill⁽¹⁾ and Virginia Woolf⁽²⁾, also played important roles in the liberal feminist thought.

Liberal feminists consider that men's and women's human natures are basically the same: individualistic, rational, selfish, and competitive. However, liberal feminists argue that women are not given the same opportunities as men to pursue their individual interests. Basically, liberal feminists argue that women as a group are fundamentally blocked by both informal and formal discrimination, and also by socialization that prepares women differently than men. Inequality, according to liberal feminists, is a natural outcome of individual differences in human potential and motivation. Yet, inequalities become the dominant reason for concern regarding the proper function of the meritocracy and the potential legitimacy of the order. Liberal feminists also point out that modern capitalist systems tend toward instability and concentration in the marketplace and in wealth distribution. These economic problems can hinder the meritocratic structures such as education, economy, and polity, on which the system of allocation of merits (i.e. income, power, and status) is based and thus can lead to inefficiencies and injustices.

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1. Although John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was classified as an unitarian, as an early male supporter of women's rights, his book The Subjection of Women (1869) was considered a classic liberal feminist work.
 2. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) in her famous work A Room of One's Own (1929) elaborates that women have two requirements which are economic independence and a private room outside the world of family and community for creativity in any scheme.

The patriarchal sex-gender system and the capitalist class system are not recognized by liberal feminists. The issue is not oppression but the denial of equal opportunity and the freedom of individuals to choose their life course. Therefore, liberal feminists argue that the privileges, rights, and powers that give individuals the opportunity to pursue fulfillment are necessary for women as well as for men. Liberal feminists do not want to change liberal principles of individual freedom; they simply want these principles applied to women and men equally, and they want to free women from gender role oppression (Tong, 1989:28). For liberal feminists, women can be treated equally within the patriarchal society only if the society has open opportunities for the female. To achieve the goal of equality and liberation, liberal feminists encourage women to become more like men, that is, to become more assertive, competitive, and individualistic; this should then enable women to enjoy the same privileges.

Like all other theories, liberal feminism has been criticized on several major points. In "Why Can't a Woman Be More like a Man?" Jean Bethke Elshtain accuses liberal feminists of several flaws (Tong, 1989:32). Also, Alison Jaggar's Feminist Politics and Human Nature is one of the most recent criticisms of liberal feminism. Jaggar states that liberal feminism is a logical extension of traditional liberalism. It totally accepts the traditional liberal conception, such as human nature and the characteristic liberal values of individual station, equality, autonomy and satisfaction (Jaggar, 1988:33). In summary, liberal feminists lacked evaluation of the male perspective on what makes an ideal human being. In other words, the liberal feminists accepted the male norms for what is good rather than setting their own standard. Also, they assumed universal acceptance of liberalism's goals. Finally, they did not give any attention to race and/or class. Nevertheless, liberal feminists perceive both men and women as having essentially the same potential for achievement, and have made some non-threatening positive changes.

One area of change is the fine arts. The equality of men and women

has been hidden, liberal feminists believe, by social conditions that have obstructed women's development. Why are there so few great female artists? Like so many other institutions involved in the feminist controversy, in the area of fine arts women were said to be incapable of greatness. As Tong's summary of Wollstonecraft's liberal feminist thought states, "Kept women are enervated women... Because they are not permitted to make their own decisions, they lack liberty. And because they are discouraged from developing their powers of reason -- given that a great premium is placed on indulging self and gratifying others, especially men and children -- they lack virtue" (1989:14). Since women were required to have a true womanhood⁽³⁾, they were inhibited in the public sphere; they were being cloaked in the Victorian image of submissiveness and purity. Women did not have the same prospect as men to learn and/or perform in public. Also, some fine arts activities were considered non-feminine. For instance, a female playing the violin was unacceptable, since a woman's attractive face was distorted when she pressed her chin into the instrument. Playing the string instrument used to be considered ridiculous, because "it looked unsuitable, ungraceful, and unladylike" (Ammer, 1980:21). Furthermore, most Western classical music was composed by males, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven - all are the great musicians people came to know while growing up. This sexual image forms a male-defined image, so that people have been educated that only male artists have ability to be great, and without little wonder, there were no female musicians (McClary, 1991: 112-31). The fact is that there were many great female musicians; people had just never heard of them due to discrimination against women (Nichols, 1992; Pendle, 1991; Cook, 1994). Because liberal feminists strongly believe women should be able to be recognized for greatness as men are, they aim for a situation whereby women are provided with equal opportunity, which will enable them to reach fulfillment and enjoy normal human privileges.

3. Four characteristics of a true woman are piety, purity, submissiveness, and domestication (Evans, 1989).

Liberal feminists believe women can achieve equality if they eagerly enter areas of the social sphere that traditionally have been dominated by men. Thus, women could become great artists through equal access. Apparently, for the purpose of equality, liberal feminists would declare that the violin is the most manly of instruments, but also equally, the most womanly (Ammer, 1980: 21; McClary, 1991). The women's rights movement was the driving force behind the emergence of a wide range of studies and theories centering on the lives, positions, and contributions of women in society. As in other fields, so in classical music, feminists began to show an interest in the work of half of the world's population that had been ignored in music. For example, in her essay "Why No Great Women Composers?", Carl E. Seashore considered women to be equal to men in talent, intelligence, and education for composition; they do not create, however, because they are by nature passive (Neuls-Bates, 1982: 297). As the result of the liberal feminists' message, specifically, equal educational opportunities in fine arts for women have proliferated.

As early as the turn of the century, Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) achieved international acclaim as a composer of opera. Ethel came from a middle class Victorian family. Her mother could speak five languages, played the piano very well and had a beautiful singing voice, yet, as a traditional woman her proper sphere was limited to the home. Ethel's early education reflected the typical training of the Victorian lady. However, her family was concerned that she was always getting into trouble as a misfit in society and as a rebel against being a true woman. Ethel didn't get serious about music until she was twelve, when her parents hired a new governess who had studied at the Leipzig Conservatory in Germany. Ethel became a fine pianist and had a strong singing voice like her mother. Although women were gaining more opportunities for various educational fields during the time, they were still a rarity in musicology classes. Ethel was one of a few who took the theory and composition course since she was a spoiled child of the family. When

she announced to her family that she intended to be a composer at the age of nineteen, her father thought she had figured out a new way to rebel against him. Her father had good reasons to doubt that Ethel Smyth was serious, because as far as he knew, there had not been any great women composers in any country, ever. Also, England had not produced a great composer since Henry Purcell, a man born almost 200 years before Ethel (Nichols, 1992: 65).

In 1878, Ethel took some of her songs to a famous music publisher. The business manager told her that the only women composers who had ever succeeded were Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel. He added further that Clara was successful only because her music had been published together with her famous husband, Robert. And again, in Fanny's case, her works had been published under the name of her famous brother, Felix. Ethel's rebel personality encouraged her to challenge the obstacles that excluded women from professional positions; she played her songs to the manager anyway. This aggressive characteristic gave her the result that the manager said he would be willing to take the risk of publishing them (Nichols, 1992:72). In 1930, after reading Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own, Ethel met and became a soulmate with Virginia Woolfs. Ethel stands out as a crucial figure in the history of women in music. She was never satisfied with the few performances her works granted during her lifetime. She hoped it could change and wrote:

It amuses me to think that someday after my death, when all traces of sex have been reduced to ashes at the Working Crematorium (so handy!) some will very likely take me up as a stunt... And thus, someday, I may make friends, musically, with those I cannot get at in my lifetime... (Nichols, 1992: 91).

Ethel's rebellion was great influenced by liberal feminist's avocation such as aggressiveness into a male domination file with androgynous

characteristics (i.e. her masculine dress and smoking cigars). Beside her rebellious personality, her pioneering efforts as an outspoken composer who fought for equal rights paved the way for a following generation of women in the field of music. She was also a talented author, and a feminist who played an active role in the violent suffragist movement, which was evidence of her response toward the liberal feminists goal to consider a great deal of women rights in society (Bowers, 1986: 304). Undoubtedly, she was deserving of honor and represented a historical and mythical figure in Judy Chicago's art work, The Dinner Party⁽⁴⁾ (Witzling, 1991: 371).

Another famous female composer that was influenced by liberal feminism was Amy Marcy Beach (1867-1944), known throughout her long career as Mrs. H.H.A. Beach. From a historical view, a major breakthrough for women in music was in 1896 when the Boston Symphony Orchestra premiered Amy Beach's Gaelic Symphony, the first symphony by an American woman to be performed. Amy became the first woman in the United States to have a successful career as a composer as well as a pianist. Amy was the only child of her parents and her parents contributed most directly to her intellectual and musical development. Like Ethel Smyth, many believed Amy's musical inheritance came from her mother who was an excellent amateur musician and who very early recognized her daughter's gifts. Before the age of two, Amy's precocity became apparent. At seventeen months she sang both soprano and alto parts of over forty songs correctly. She had absolute pitch, always singing the songs in the keys in which she first heard them. Beginning at age four, Amy revealed exceptional talent for musical composition. However, her mother withheld over emphasizing her accomplishments. In this manner, Amy's talents

4. The Dinner Party consists of a huge, three-sided dinner table adorned with place settings constructed of diverse women's arts and crafts representing 39 various recognized women. There are 999 other women's names are embedded in the tablecloth and table base (Sapiro, 1990:200).

evolved naturally without outside interference or self-consciousness (Eden, 1987: 37).

Many female musicians have had a hard time getting male musicians and publishers to take their work seriously. However, Amy fought a different kind of prejudice which is that of Europeans against Americans. Europeans believed that the United States was a nation of savages and laborers whose people lacked intelligence, sensitivity, or education to be accomplished musicians. This snobbery caused many American musicians to suffer an inferiority complex. Amy was one of the first American concert pianists and composers to be trained entirely in the United States, because she believed that American training would get her where she wanted to go (Nichols, 1992: 94). In 1885, Amy married Dr. Henry Beach, who was almost twenty-five years older than she. Dr. Beach was a surgeon who taught at the Harvard Medical School, and was an amateur musician who greatly admired Amy's talents. He believed a husband should support his wife totally, and did everything he could to promote and encourage Amy's composing. Amy was one of very few composers in all of history who never had to worry about money. Also, unlike many female musicians, she was never kept from her composing by the duties of motherhood, because her marriage produced no children (Bowers, 1986: 342-345).

Amy said herself that she had never felt limited as a woman and had encountered no prejudice; she believed the opportunities for men and women were equal. In 1924, Amy became president of the newly founded Society of American Women Composers. She was active in the women composers' group for the next decade because of her inspiration by liberal feminism which believed that female musicians should all join together for the push into male-dominated professional music field. Like feminists organizations have promoted female public professional advancement, Amy regularly arranged for performances of female composers' works, indicating a perceived need for more performance opportunities. In 1940, Amy was honored at a dinner in New York's Town Hall Club, attended by more than

200 musicians. "Although women were handicapped in music, Amy had not faltered in courage and had set an example to her personally, as well as to many other women." said in Samaroff's speech on the occasion (Ammer, 1980: 84-85).

Through this brief illustration of the lives of Ethel Smyth and Amy Marcy Beach, several points can be concluded about how the previously male dominated classical music field has opened up the space for female musicians. First, feminism swept through the Western area during the on going period when women benefited from many social changes. From the social viewpoint, industrialization allowed women to enter the labor force and fill male jobs left vacant during the war time. Although after the war, women were asked to give their jobs back to men, women had experienced how to make themselves visible in the public sphere. At the same time, liberal feminist ideal on equal opportunity and the freedom of individuals right shaped the female liberty during the era of social change. Secondly, much liberal feminist's literature such as Emily Dickinson's and Virginia Woolf's works animated female artists. This brought raised consciousness among female musicians. By way of illustration, female conductor Frederique Petrides's newsletter Women in Music aimed to encourage female musicians to keep on working in professional field (Groh, 1991). Through their efforts, female career possibilities and achievements increased with expanded educational equality and more opportunities to access into the male-dominated field. Thirdly, liberal feminists strongly accept the traditional liberal interpretation on human nature and equality.

They put much energy into breaking through limitations of the proper female sphere because they argue there is no evidence that one sex possesses more capability than the other. Without their strong beliefs, female musicians with talent like Ethel Smyth and Amy Beach would not be able to have their public life during their time. Other than those individual female musicians being recognized in public, liberal feminism also influenced orchestras in the society, as Jane Bowers notes that "American women [sought] recognition as orchestral musicians and to

create the so-called 'mixed' orchestra made up of men and women chosen based on ability" (1986: 349). These liberal feminist views established women's involvement in the public scope; in other words, both women and men fulfilled their human potential, so that liberty and equality enabled female musicians from the private amateur to the public professional. Finally, to liberal feminists, marriage and motherhood seems likely be a form of prohibition for women involved in the public sphere for it keeps women from professional careers by the natural duties of womanhood. Yet, Ethel Smyth and Amy Marcy Beach seemed never to have faced these problems in their careers.

To summarize, the theory of liberal feminism examines the quality and quantity of rights and privileges granted to both female and male, and seeks to create equality of opportunity. Indeed, the liberal feminist agenda is to bring to women all the rights that men have regarding education, employment, politics, and freedom in the public sphere. It is clear that even today the barriers that obstruct women's advances into the professional field still reflect the biases of the appropriate role of women in society⁽⁵⁾. Music, like any other discipline in the curriculum, is not exempt from the myths which are recognized as a significant problem in society. Having done the study of liberal feminist theory as well as Ethel Smyth's and Amy Beach's lives, It is believed women would be able to be recognized for greatness if provided with equal opportunities. In fact, women do not have to have androgynous characteristics to enter the professional field, rather, the professional field can adapt to draw women and take advantage of the talent and abilities of women. Through liberal feminist thought, people might treat women and men equally, if people could remove sex/gender bias and respect the differences. The impact of liberal feminism, undoubtedly, has effected the recognition of more female artists in the area of fine arts in the society.

5. The three major types of barriers that women are more likely to fight are internal barriers, such as gender role socialization; support availability barriers, such as financial resources; and structural barriers, such as pay inequities (Kelly, 1991: 55).

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自由派女性主義思想及其對 古典音樂界的影響

謝 若 蘭^{*}

(中文摘要)

自由派女性主義者認為女性與男性的人性本質在基本上是一樣的，例如個別化、理性、自主、競爭性等等。不過，女性主義者們認為人們並沒有給予女性同等於男性的機會去發展與追求個人的興趣。基本上，自由派女性主義者視女性為弱勢團體，因為一般社會化過程導向是使女性不同於男性，而女性們又被一些有型或無型的歧視給限制著發展空間。自由派女性主義者確信所有一切給與“個人”的優越及權勢應不分性別，一律平等且自由的發展。自由派女性主義者因之鼓勵女人應該像男人一樣去發展其個別化、競爭性及果斷性來達到真正平等的人權，而這個目標的達成便能提供女性亦享有由男性慣有的特權優勢。

筆者於本文中將先介紹自由派女性主義的思想發展、提倡及爭取的目標、以及其缺失。然後藉由兩位古典女音樂家的生平研究來探討自由派女性主義的提倡如何影響她們進入原先被父權所掌控的古典樂界。

關鍵詞：自由派女性主義、人本天性、公共/私人領域、平等權利

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LIBERAL FEMINIST THOUGHT AND ITS IMPACT ON CLASSICAL MUSIC^{*}

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(ABSTRACT)

Liberal feminists consider that men's and women's human nature are basically the same: individualistic, rational, selfish and competitive. They argue that women are not given the same opportunities as men to pursue their individual interests. Basically, liberal feminists view women as a group primarily blocked by informal and formal discrimination, and also by socialization that prepares women differently from men. They believe that the privileges, rights, and powers that give individuals the chance to pursue fulfillment are necessary for women as well as for men. To achieve this goal, liberal feminists encourage women to become more like men, that is, to become more assertive, competitive, and individualistic; this should then enable women to enjoy the same privileges.

This paper will illustrate the sources, major focuses, goals, and shortcomings of liberal feminist thought. Then through brief case studies on the lives of Ethel Smyth and Amy Marcy Beach, I will attempt to interpret how they successfully entered a traditionally male dominated field through liberal feminists avocation. The impact of liberal feminism, undoubtedly, has effected the recognition of more female artists in the music field.

Keywords: liberal feminism, human nature, public/private sphere, equal opportunities.

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