

Teaching Music in the #MeToo Era

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, significant changes in approaches to gender diversity have taken place in the fields of contemporary music and music research. However, women in music are still disadvantaged in terms of income, inclusion and professional opportunities. In Australia, a national approach to improving gender diversity in music has begun to emerge, as once-controversial strategies trialled by four tertiary institutions have become established practices that address these challenges. This article discusses these successful inclusion strategies, including the commitment to balanced programming across all concerts presented at Queensland Conservatorium of Music by 2023, the introduction of mandatory quotas in recital programs at Monash University, launch of mentoring programs for women composers at Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and the development of coursework devoted to women in music at the University of Western Australia, as well as other initiatives that have emerged from them, both within and beyond the institution. The implementation, challenges and impact of each approach is examined in the context of broader global discussions around gender and feminism. The unprecedented public willingness to engage in discussions over sexual harassment, sexual assault and gender discrimination in the workplace that resulted from the #MeToo movement is cited as key in influencing the level of engagement from students and professionals with these strategies, and subsequent influence on performance practices, project development and presentational formats in new music.

Author biographies

Louise Devenish is a contemporary percussionist whose creative practice blends performance, collaboration and artistic research. A passionate advocate of new music and Australian music, Louise has commissioned over 50 works for percussion, and her performances are acknowledged for their ‘dazzling vitality’, ‘stunning virtuosity’, ‘interpretive flair and technical brilliance’. Louise is a core artist with acclaimed electroacoustic sextet Decibel (WA), Australia’s leading percussion group Speak Percussion (Vic), theatre percussion project The Sound Collectors and chamber ensemble Intercurrent. With these ensembles and as a soloist she develops new works exploring graphic notation, post-instrumental practice and collaborative creativity, performing around Australasia, Europe, North America and the UK. Louise is Chair of Percussion at the University of Western Australia Conservatorium of Music, a Churchill Fellow, and recently published her first book *Global Percussion Innovations: The Australian Perspective*.

Cecilia Sun is a musicologist, pianist and lecturer at the University of Western Australia Conservatorium of Music. She is interested in the relationship between scholarship and performance in both classical-era repertoire and post-1960s experimental music. She is also the Co-Artistic Director of Irwin Street Collective, a research project that focuses on historical music and revitalises historically informed performance throughout the Perth community. Dr Sun completed postgraduate studies in the United States at the Eastman School of Music and University of California, Los Angeles, and taught at the University of Sydney and University of California, Irvine.

Cat Hope is a composer, sound artist, performer, songwriter and noise artist. She is a classically trained flautist, self-taught vocalist and experimental bassist who plays as a soloist and as part of other groups. Her music is conceptually driven, exploring the physicality of sound in different media, using graphic scores, acoustic /electronic combinations, aleatoric elements, drones, noise and glissandi. Her work has been discussed in books such as *Loading the Silence* (Kouvaris, 2013), *Women of Note* (Appleby, 2012), *Sounding Postmodernism* (Bennett, 2011) as well as periodicals such as *Gramophone* (2017) *The Wire* (UK, 2013), *Limelight* (Aus, 2012) and *Neu Zeitschrift Fur Musik Shaft* (Germany, 2012). Her works have been recorded for Australian, German and Austrian national radio, as well as range of international labels.

Vanessa Tomlinson is active in the fields of solo percussion, improvisation, installation, site-specific performance and composition. She is currently based in Brisbane, Australia working as Professor in Music at Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University and Deputy Director of the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre. In addition, Vanessa is the co-artistic director of *Clocked Out*—one of Australia’s most important and eclectic arts organisations—as well as artistic director of *Tyalgum Music Festival*, *Easter@The Piano Mill* and the *Listening Museum*. Over the years Vanessa has commissioned, inspired and premiered more than 100 works, worked alongside countless wonderful improvisers, and collaborated with artists across the globe.

Teaching Music in the #MeToo Era

Introduction

Over the past two decades, significant changes in approaches to gender diversity have taken place in the fields of contemporary music and music research. However, women in music are still disadvantaged in terms of income, inclusion and professional opportunities. It is widely known that there is a 50/50 gender balance in music participation amongst primary and secondary level situations, and that this balance disintegrates as students move through tertiary levels study and continues to worsen at the professional level, where the participation rate for women and gender-non-conforming people together is around 20-25%.¹ In some areas of the music industry, such as diverse gender representation amongst composers programmed at international festivals, this statistic is even lower.² A result of the increasing frequency of industry events, public talks and academic conferences surrounding the issue of gender diversity in music,³ it has become clear that in addition to making change at a professional level, a change in tertiary music education practices is needed for meaningful and ongoing change to take place.

Since 2012, a national approach to improving gender diversity in music has begun to emerge in Australia, as once-controversial strategies trialled by four tertiary institutions have become established practices that address these challenges. This article discusses these successful inclusion strategies, including gender-balanced programming goals within the next five years, the introduction of mandatory quotas in student recital programs, mentoring programs for women composers and the development of coursework devoted to women in music, as well as other initiatives that have emerged from them, both within and beyond the institution. The implementation, challenges and impact of each approach is examined in the context of broader global discussions around gender and feminism. The unprecedented public willingness to engage in discussions over sexual harassment, sexual assault and gender discrimination in the workplace that resulted from the #MeToo movement is cited as key in influencing the level of engagement from students and professionals with these strategies, and subsequent influence on performance practices, project development and presentational formats in new music.

The 'myth of absence': Vanessa Tomlinson

In 2002, Dana L. Reason Myers exposed the 'myth of absence', referring to an apparent lack of female experimental music improvisers, which has been echoed in subsequent scholarship across different music genres; from rock and punk to electronic and contemporary art music (p. 132). The term absence, is a helpful way of navigating through concert programs, newspaper articles, and blog posts alike to ascertain the current state of play. Absence has become increasingly prominent in the professional and pedagogical practice of Queensland Conservatorium of Music Professor Vanessa Tomlinson: examining absent voices in our ecology (Sonic Dreams, 2017) and absence of soil in eroding landscapes accelerated by over-grazing and tree clearing (The Wrong Kind of Beauty, 2018), and the absence of female voices in composition (Amazing Women concert series 2007 – 2016). Absence is difficult to see, easy to avoid and hard to raise as a critical issue. Within the Australian art music context, people have been highlighting the issue of the absence of women's voices for over two decades, however with only limited effect. For example, the four Composing Women Festivals (1991-2001),⁴ were a site to challenge invisibility, with huge local positive impact, but little long-term change (MacArthur et al).

In 2012, Tomlinson and Lisa Cheney engaged in a research project within the Queensland Conservatorium of Music at Griffith University (QCGU) to understand how undergraduate music students perceive issues surrounding gender diversity, and more specifically to gather statistics on how much music by female composers was actually programmed within the Conservatorium. The results of this study showed that in 2012, a staggeringly low 2.37% of music performed in student recitals was by female composers. In addition to influencing programming decisions made by the researchers, this statistic led to many changes in programming within the Conservatorium, and more recently to changes in curriculum design. The 2019 announcement from Queensland Conservatorium Director Professor Scott Harrison announced that the institution is aiming for a 'balanced program in all public facing programs by 2025'.

¹ Cooper, R., Coles, A. & Hanna-Osborne, S. (2017). *Skipping a beat: Assessing the state of gender equality in the Australian music industry*. Sydney, University of Sydney Business School.

² Fure, A. (2016). *GRID: Gender Research in Darmstadt*. Accessed 11 September. 2019 Available at: https://griddarmstadt.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/grid_gender_research_in_darmstadt.pdf

³ Peggy Glanville Hicks address 2018 Hope, 2019 Cheetham etc

⁴ Goh, T. (2019). *From the other side: Feminist aesthetics in Australian musicology*. *Tempo* 292.

QCGU has chosen to approach change from a number of different angles to tackle the problem of an unbalanced program of composers in our concert calendar and in our curriculum. From the perspective of the outward facing concert program, the decision to have a gender-balanced creative contribution across music theatre, opera, orchestra, wind symphony and artist-in-residence programs provides positive leadership across a broad cross-section of the student body and faculty. At the very least this means that no student will graduate without playing music by a female composer, and more positively it will provide a point of change in the education of students which will be a circuit breaker in their own professional teaching and performing lives.

With regard to the curriculum numerous strategies are in development to enhance the transformations in the concert calendar. Examining music literature subjects – those that critically explore historical practices in many different contexts and genres of music – from the perspective of absent voices, provides an ideal platform to redesign the curriculum more broadly. Here the absent voices of female composers and female contributions more broadly, provide opportunities to look at pluralistic, collaborative, community-oriented developments, rather than singular, lone historical voices. These transformations in historical subjects support the vision of transforming the concert calendar, but the third leg of transformation – the one-to-one teaching studio – is also vital. Here the focus is on commissioning pedagogical works, or technical studies, for numerous instruments – all by female composers. The rationale for this is that for many instruments, there is simply no diversity when it comes to tertiary level pedagogical texts. This in particular applies to percussion, classical saxophone, first-year jazz and piano and string departments are also interested to explore ways to diversify technical repertoire.

Together these three strategies should combine to provide students with an educational experience that is inclusive of diverse voices across all levels of their tertiary music training. This transformation will move the discussion away from absence, toward critical discussions of the work produced in context.

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‘All music for everyone’: Cat Hope

In the first year of headship at the Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music at Monash University in 2017, Professor Cat Hope introduced quotas for all final year (graduating) Bachelor of Music performance student recitals across all genres covered in the degree: classical, jazz and popular musics, as well as music technology. Each recital program would feature a work by a composer identifying as female or non-binary. This was a component of an overall strategic direction for the department, focussing on music in Australia, equity, collaboration and innovation.⁵ It represents one part of a series of interventions in the way the school addresses gender equity and diversity.

It is important that the students graduating from Monash University were familiar with repertoire that reflects the workplace we aspire to, which includes work by those who identify as women. If students have not been exposed to music not written by men in their degree, they are unlikely to expect it in the workplace, and unlikely to program it themselves when the opportunity arises.⁶ It was important that this familiarity with and expectation for music by composers who identify as women be part of the brand of our graduating students. Universities, as providers of terminal degrees for musicians entering the workforce, create the canon our future musicians use to build their careers. It is important that this canon reflects contemporary practice, and enables our graduates to engage with a range of opportunities in the industry upon their entrance into it – as performers, arts administrators and a plethora of other roles music graduates find themselves in.

A survey of repertoire taught in the school pointed to the inclusion of very little music written by composers identifying as women. After consulting research around the effectiveness of quotas,⁷ they were implemented with approval of the Arts Faculty Dean. The anecdotal response to the introduction varied considerably. Some staff felt they should be preparing students for auditions to postgraduate studies elsewhere, and as such, spending more time on the music that other institutions consider to be key repertoire. Students, on the whole, were supportive and embraced the opportunity by searching further afield and approaching teachers and library staff for recommendations.

When submitting the recital program for approval, students sign a tick box which says they have included a piece by a composer identifying as a woman or as non-binary, and the programs are checked by administration.⁸ Students who identify as female cannot submit their own compositions toward the quota (for example, jazz improvisations). For

⁵ This strategy is outlined in some detail in Cat Hope, 2019, ‘What Can - Should – a Music School in a Modern Australian University Look Like?’ Available at: <http://musictrust.com.au/loudmouth/what-can-should-a-music-school-in-a-modern-australian-university-look-like/>

⁶ Bennett, Dawn, Sally Macarthur, Cat Hope, Talisha Goh, and Sophie Hennekam. ‘Creating a career as a woman composer: Implications for music in higher education.’ *British Journal of Music Education* 35, no. 3 (2018): 238.

⁷ Franceschet, Susan, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo. ‘Conceptualizing the impact of gender quotas.’ *The impact of gender quotas* (2012): 3-26; Born, Georgina, and Kyle Devine. “Gender, creativity and education in digital musics and sound art.” (2016): 1-20; Dahlerup, Drude. *Women, quotas and politics*. Routledge, 2013; Bell, Vikki. *Culture and performance: The challenge of ethics, politics and feminist theory*. A&C Black, 2007.

⁸ There is also a check box for an Australian work, as this is also part of the quota.

music technology students, recital programs should use software, hardware or a plug-in devised by a woman or non-binary person. Recital programs that do not comply with the quota are not approved for examination.

To support this requirement, the school has worked closely with the library to grow the collection of music composed by women across a variety of styles and formats – scores, recordings, lead sheets and so on. Further, the school is undertaking a process that ensures history and context units include work by women so that the standard ‘canon’ is refreshed and reflects the contributions women have made throughout history.⁹ School ensembles are also growing content by women, but outside of a quota system. The university orchestra features around thirty percent content by women, with an intention to grow this number over the next five years, and fifty percent of externally engaged conductors of the orchestra are women. The school has joined the international ‘Keychange’ initiative, led by the UK’s PRS Foundation, a partnership of institutions and organisations around the world seeking to encourage a gender balanced music industry worldwide.¹⁰ An example of a commitment within the Keychange initiative is working towards 50/50 parity in the make-up of the school’s weekly lunchtime concert series, across performers and repertoire, by 2022.

Changing the narrative: Cecilia Sun and Louise Devenish

In 2018, a review of gender diversity across programming and teaching at the University of Western Australia Conservatorium of Music took place in response to new staff directions, industry changes and student initiatives seeking greater diversity. This commenced with a review of Conservatorium concert programming, which revealed that most ensembles within the Conservatorium exclusively programmed music by male composers. Additionally, students who were in ensembles not playing diverse repertoire, were actively seeking this music and representation through the Music Students Society (MSS), who had been presenting Women in Music concerts and lecture series since 20XX. In 2018, a Diversity Officer position on the School Executive was established, in part to address this issue and Conservatorium-wide changes began to be trialled. For example, in 2019, all large ensembles (i.e. symphony orchestra, symphonic chorus, wind ensemble) were required to work towards a gender balance in programs, conductors and guest artists. After some teething problems and mixed feelings, this was implemented successfully, and the student, staff and audience response was overwhelmingly positive. In 2020, this has been expanded for all ensembles (i.e. quartets, chamber groups), and a bank of online resources for finding material and artists has been compiled in collaboration with the MSS and the music library. At the same time, the implementation of new units, updating of existing units and a number of events designed to raise awareness and connect staff, students and community with current praxis took place. The review of public facing activity revealed a gender imbalance, and also highlighted gaps in gender diversity in internal activities. For example, although some examination of gender in music had existed within the Conservatorium for at least ten years through a small module within honours unit Contemporary Debates, nothing existed at the bachelor level.

In 2018, Dr Cecilia Sun designed and taught the first class devoted to women in music at the University of Western Australia (UWA).¹¹ Sun had come of musicological age at a time when there were two distinctive (and not always mutually exclusive) scholarly paths for those interested in this area. First, the ‘Women in Music’ option, where scholars applied traditional modes of musicological inquiry to women composers. This was the period that produced landmark biographies such as those by Nancy Reich on Clara Wieck Schumann, Judith Tick on Ruth Crawford Seeger, and Adrienne Fried Block on Amy Beach.¹² And second, the ‘Gender and Music’ option: that is, the use of feminist theory to critique the (male) classical music canon. This included the paradigm-shifting scholarship of Susan McClary and Suzanne Cusick.¹³ While acknowledging the importance of scholarship on female composers, the latter option seemed like the more exciting, progressive path. The belated introduction of feminist theory to musicology was part of what many felt to be a necessary move away from an old-fashioned positivistic approach towards what Joseph Kerman famously called music criticism.¹⁴ There was also galvanizing scholarship on constructions of masculinity

⁹ Citron, M. (1993). *Gender and the musical canon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰ “Keychange Manifesto: Recommendations for a Gender Balanced Industry” can be found at <https://keychange.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/1052-keychange-A5-v15-web.pdf>

¹¹ Sun had previously offered classes on some of this material before at other institutions, such as XXXX, however this was the first time offering a class under the title of women in music rather than the broader umbrella of gender and music.

¹² Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer, 1867–1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹³ See, for example, Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Suzanne Cusick, ‘Gendering Modern Music: Thoughts on the Monteverdi-Artusi Controversy,’ *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 46 no. 1 (April 1993): 1–25.

¹⁴ Joseph Kerman, ‘How We Got Into Analysis, and How to Get Out,’ in *Write All These Down: Essays on Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 12–32.

(for example, Robert Walser's 1991 book on heavy metal) and queer theory (including Philip Brett's ground-breaking studies of Benjamin Britten, and the publication of *Queering the Pitch* in 1994) that defined the field of music and gender.¹⁵

At the time this new unit at UWA was in development, the #MeToo movement had yet to gather steam, but the changing global political climate around issues of women's rights made it seem urgent that the Conservatorium has at least one class devoted to women in music when most of the others are *de facto* units on men in music. The title of this unit does run the risk of ghettoizing women who are already marginal, and may seem old-fashioned given our current understanding of the fluidity of gender and gender roles, but the hope was that it would compensate by providing the overwhelmingly female student body important role models. Another prime motivation was to discover what different kinds of music histories can be told when women are placed at the centre of that history. With this in mind, the Women in Music unit is not just about women composers. This is not because there are not enough worthy candidates to fill twelve weeks—there are—but women's contributions to music expand far beyond composition. This was an opportunity to attempt to construct a class that moved away from the traditional Great Man/Great Work model. In rejecting the assumption that the 'history of music is the history of composition', David Schiff offered an alternative:

Until recently, of course, women have played very little part in composition. ... But women have long played a great role in performance, patronage, and pedagogy. Imagine twentieth-century music without Wanda Landowska, Nadia Boulanger, the Princess de Polignac, Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge and Betty Freeman, or Rosina Lhévinne and Dorothy DeLay. If performers were given their rightful place in the history of music, it could easily be shown that Callas exerted a far greater influence on the course of opera in the past forty years than any composer did. Might not feminist musicology profitably shift the focus away from a male-controlled cultural product to a female-centred cultural process, and celebrate these areas of real feminine dominance? Our notion of music would be appropriately challenged and enriched.¹⁶

Further, it became clear that the overwhelmingly female student body who enrol in this unit are looking for more than just a history lesson. Some are also finding possible role models and inspiration. As mentioned above, this unit ran along the larger ongoing UWA initiative to perform more pieces composed by female composers. As a result, the students were able to write a review for one of their assignments about an on-campus UWA concert that included at least one piece by a female composer. In 2019, this meant they had a choice of fourteen out of a total of twenty-six concerts. This assignment would not have been possible the previous year.

The gender imbalance in the students who enrol in this unit has remained consistent in all the iterations of this class: perhaps due to the title of Women in Music, the unit is overwhelmingly taken by women students. What is significantly different in 2019 is a more politicized student body. This is due in part to the post-Weinstein-scandal culture of greater openness and awareness, and perhaps also the result of iconic figures in popular music such as Taylor Swift and Beyoncé publicly embracing feminism. When once students were reluctant to even associate themselves with the label 'feminist', now it is not uncommon to encounter many well-versed in 4th-Wave feminism and the importance of intersectionality.

The most interesting question—and one of the reasons for teaching this unit—is the historiographic one: What does the consideration of this music teach us about music history that a male-dominated narrative doesn't? The spotlighting of gender within the study of music has seen this question resonate across the Conservatorium and an increase of student research projects focussing on gender and music, particularly in opera and in popular music has emerged at honours and postgraduate level. It has also highlighted awareness that gender diversity is far from the only form of diversity that needs addressing in our work, and in tertiary music institutions globally.

Creating 'structural luck'

The initiatives mentioned in this article are by no means the only ones present within Australian institutions. For example, in 2017, at the first iteration of the Gender Diversity in Music and Art conference, Professor Liza Lim spoke of the 'structural luck' that has contributed to the gender imbalance in music in Australia.¹⁷ Creating structural luck or

¹⁵ Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993); Philip Brett's essays on Britten have been collected and published in the posthumous collection: Philip Brett and George E. Haggerty, *Music and Sexuality in Britten: Selected Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, Gary Thomas, eds., *Queering the Pitch* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁶ David Schiff, 'The Bounds of Music: The Strange New Direction of Musical Criticism', *New Republic* (3 Feb 1992): 36.

¹⁷ Lim, L. (2017). *Luck, Grief, Hospitality: Rerouting power relationships in music*. Available at: https://lizalimcomposer.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/1-final_lim_rerouting-power-anu-keynote.pdf

structural opportunities has formed part of Lim's work at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, most significantly in her mentoring of women composers. The 'National Women Composers Development Program' was established by Matthew Hindson in 2016 offering four women composers opportunities to work with high profile professional ensembles and artists. In 2018, this was developed by Lim to include the two-year 'Composing Women' program, facilitating opportunities for composers to work with organisations including the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Chamber Opera (with NIDA), Sydney Dance Company, Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, Musica Viva, ABC Classic FM, APRA AMCOS, the Australian Music Centre and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, as well as with flautist Claire Chase. Together, all of the initiatives offer some suggestions for changing the narrative.
