

**Patricia Adkins Chiti<sup>1</sup>**  
**President**  
**Fondazione Adkins Chiti: Donne in Musica – Italy**

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## **Cultural Diversity-Musical Diversity** **A Different Vision - Women Making Music**

In many parts of the world the oral traditions of a nation are automatically passed on from mother to daughter and history confirms that the transmission of culture depends upon women, even if not faithfully recorded in school and university text books. Allow me to remind you all that the first sound a baby hears is the voice of its mother and in many societies that voice is singing.....

Music is a global phenomenon but each musical system is simultaneously a model of, and a model for, the cultural system of which it is a part. If musical systems are so embedded in cultural difference, so too are other phenomena we consider “normal”, “natural” and the “the way things are”. Gender is not the only category that shapes and or determines one’s musical or artistic and/or individual experience; class, age, ethnicity are also significant and interdependent factors. The universe in which women have existed as musicians and creative artists is far from natural. In fact the musical world and cultural sector, as a whole, is not only constructed from a male perspective, but also simultaneously constituted as a means of perpetuating male cultural hegemony and social control. Until very recently – in almost all forms of musical culture – women could not explore alternative modes of expression even if they wished to since they had to compete with men. Despite having more limited access to musical education, fewer opportunities for publication and

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<sup>1</sup> President of the International Adkins Chiti: Women in Music Foundation, Performing musician and musicologist, she has been recognised world wide as a pioneer in the field of research regarding women in music. She has written 40 books and over 800 scholarly articles about women as composers and creators of musical culture, the history of singers and musical families for publishers in Italy, Europe, Asia, the United States and Latin America as well as preparing critical music editions of works by women in Italy and the USA. She created, directed and produced a long series of television programmes for RAI TV entitled “Women in Music”. Since 1980 she has directed festivals, concert series and study symposiums in Italy and abroad and also works closely as an expert in cultural policies with governments and universities in Europe, the USA and Asia. She was a member of the Italian National Commission for Equal Opportunities when in March 1988, with an invitation from the General Director of UNESCO, she presented her own proposals for women at the World Intergovernmental Conference for Cultural Policies for Development.

performance and less incentive to produce the large scale forms common to Western classical music that were the “unquestioned hallmark of *great composers*” women throughout history have been present in *every* society and in *every* century, composing, performing and passing on *their cultural heritage*.<sup>2</sup> We have a shared *heritage*; not something static, unchanging but something that depends upon transmission from one generation to another, from one country to another and undoubtedly modern technologies can help us greatly in this sense. *Music goes where it will – it cannot be stopped at frontiers*.

Women as creative artists are absent from encyclopaedias, are not mentioned in textbooks and are rarely encountered in school curricula. Yet the first professional artists in the Mediterranean Basin were musician priestesses in the City of Ur. Women conducted the first musical bands in Asia Minor and Egypt as sacred songstresses. Dance, ritual, the sound of voices and of instruments, clothes, jewels, perfume – all of these helped us to celebrate the sacredness of the seasons of life. We sang and danced for birth, lamented for the dead. Our voices accompanied the sowing of grain, harvests, and the arrival of the New Moon and return of men from hunting. We left our prayers and writings on cuneiform blocks and papyrus scrolls – three thousand years ago.<sup>3</sup> Even today countries as different as Sudan, Cuba, Botswana and Korea have women musicians who are recognised as “*shaman*” within their societies: healers of both the spiritual and the physical.

As President of an international foundation working for over 25 years with, and on behalf of, women composers and creators in more than 100 countries together with our 50 affiliate associations for women in music (in 40 countries), I underline and confirm, forcefully, that music programming forgets – or ignores – the contribution made by women to music of all genres in the past and today.<sup>4</sup>

**The Women in Music Foundation** recently completed an international research project, "**Secret Agendas in Orchestral and Festival Programming**", published as part of the European Research Project “**Culture-Gates – exposing professional**

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<sup>2</sup> Patricia Adkins Chiti – Paper presented during Forum Session n° 9 – 1<sup>st</sup> April 1998, Stockholm during Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development with title “Tangible and Intangible – women’s contribution to Music and to Culture”.

<sup>3</sup> “Una Visione Diversa” – Patricia Adkins Chiti, L’Electa Mondadori, Milano – 2003.

<sup>4</sup> In 1978 **Donne in Musica** (Women in Music) burst onto the music scene as a grass roots movement promoting and presenting music composed by women, in all times, parts of the world and in all genres and became an international foundation in 1996. **Donne In Musica** organises festivals, concert series, exhibitions, musicological research projects, conventions, possesses a vast library and archives pertaining to music by women (more than 28 thousand scores, CDs, videos, books, lithographs etc). The Foundation collaborates with music institutions and research centres worldwide and coordinates a network of women composers, performers, teachers, researchers and associations in over 100 countries. **Donne in Musica** works to ensure the participation of women composers in the formulation and implementation of cultural policies at all levels and to encourage, safeguard and further female creativity, production, musical and cultural diversity.

**gate-keeping processes in Music and the new Media Arts”.**<sup>5</sup> We investigated the programming of major orchestras and festivals in member countries of the European Union, plus those of three Eastern European nations, Australia and North America, thereby discovering and confirming the way in which current music programming bears no reflection upon actual and real cultural and musical diversity. Less than 0,05% (half a percent) of programming time and finance is devoted to works created by women. By the non-performance of contemporary works by women we are losing part of our heritage; by the lack of recordings of our oral traditions in other parts of the world we are losing our past.

Is this what we really want?

We all agree that the continuing strength of any species is dependent upon its genetic/biological diversity and that the music composed by women is part of all cultural and musical diversity. Any form of music composed depends upon many different factors: age, race, religion, the country or geographical region in which the artist is born and that in which she is educated, the aesthetic canons that have been passed on through history and the teaching and specific training received, as well as many outside influences – popular culture, economic conditions, climate, biological age.

In 1995 the report of the UNESCO World Commission for Culture and Development underlined that the relationship between gender and culture as an important contribution to sustainable development was a priority area for exploration.<sup>6</sup> It claimed that gender – as a societal rather than sexual construct – is one of the most sensitive issues within periods of economic and cultural transformation. More specifically, women are most closely linked with notions of cultural distinctiveness and are generally identified as the “*bearers and signifiers of their culture*”. Action toward gender equality is inextricably linked to questions of identity and power.<sup>7</sup>

Strong forces – political and commercial – counteract the growth of cultural diversity, to impose uniformity. The status of women musicians and composers is constantly under threat. Awareness of the dramatic changes experienced by women across the world has not been translated into corresponding levels of their participation and

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<sup>5</sup> “Culture Gates” – ARcult Media –ERICArts – Bonn, 2003

<sup>6</sup> Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development “Our Creative Diversity”, UNESCO Publishing, France 1995

<sup>7</sup> Note from “women and cultural policies” background paper for the UNESCO Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural and Media Policies for Development prepared by the European Research Institute for Comparative Cultural Policy and the Arts (ERICArts). Danielle Cliché, Ritva Mitchell, Andreas Joh. Wiesand

influence in public life, or into recognition that women's civic participation and hence cultural presence in the mainstream is severely constrained by the marginal and under-sourced nature of their organized activities.<sup>8</sup>

A painting can be seen, a theatrical work can be read, handicrafts and many forms of visual art used, but music remains a mysterious form of art that only comes to life when an intermediary reads and gives breath and sound to a series of conventional symbols on a page (in Western, Asian and Arab traditions). If there is no performance – and this includes that of the music that is "created" in public in many cultures (including Asian, African, Indian and indigenous) - then music is not perceived to exist and this problem is common to ALL music production. Public performances depend upon a complicated system of funding, patronage, decision-making and power play: it was so in the past and with less money being made available for the artist, is still the case today.

There are many important questions that we should be addressing when we discuss *Many Musics*: What is the real status attributed to women working in the world of music? How do they see themselves? Might it not be possible to envisage clearly and loosely designed networks between women in decisional making positions and those creating culture and art, and those working in the related industries? What can be done to avoid a double marginalization of women artists – first as women and then as artists?

### **Policies for Culture and Equal Opportunities**

Following in the wake of the first Beijing Conference, the Amsterdam Treaty (1998) has underlined that equality between men and women is one of the principal objectives of the European Union. Therefore, within Europe at least, subsidies for the maintenance, activities and promotion of symphony orchestras and festivals should, if we read the Treaty of Amsterdam correctly, be used to give visibility equally to men and women composers, creators of contemporary music and sound. But they are not. Why are our governments allowing public money (at least 50% of which comes from women tax payers and contributors) to be used to maintain, promote and underwrite projects that continue to project male musical aesthetics and canons?

Although statistical information available in Europe, North America, Asia and in many parts of Africa tells us that women are more highly trained than men throughout the cultural sector, we are in fact to be found in subordinate positions in almost every cultural or artistic field

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<sup>8</sup> World Commission on Culture and Development. *Our Creative Diversity*. UNESCO, Paris, 1995.

where a hierarchical structure exists. The rights of women artists and creators are consistently subjected to various forms of gender based discrimination and even the absence of information about our contribution to history from school and university textbooks (and courses) shows that the world's current artistic and creative education is by no means multicultural, nor does it respect the guidelines laid down in Article 27 of the "Declaration of Human rights" nor articles 25 and 29 of the "Recommendations for the Status of the Artist".

Generally speaking creative activity and its complex relation to society is today poorly recognized and accommodated by cultural policy. And if this is the case even for so called mainstream artists and composers (who are seen to be mostly male) we can all understand why the necessity to help and encourage women creative artists is even less recognized by those in decision-making positions.<sup>9</sup>

The Action Plan for Cultural Policies (Stockholm 1998) states that "cultural policies should promote creativity in all its forms, facilitating access to cultural practices and experiences for all citizens regardless of nationality, race, sex, age, physical or mental disability, enrich the sense of cultural identity and belonging of every individual and community and sustain them in their search for a dignified and safe future." Article 8 of the same document states that "cultural policies must respect gender equality fully recognising women's parity of rights and freedom of expression and ensuring their access to decision making positions".

As taxpayers worldwide we are usually unaware of how much of the State income in our individual countries is used to finance the arts and culture. We often have no idea of how much money is being distributed by national, regional and local bodies for music and what it pays for – conservation, research, commissions, representation, education, international projects, salaries, rental payments? In Asia, Latin America and Africa where more women than men teach music in university and college programmes, how much money is really made available for women's culture, why do curricula still ignore the contribution made by women?

When women creator-performers, musicians, and composers are interviewed they complain that their work is subject to "*quality control*". Within the world of music where, inevitably, artistic directors or single administrators define 'quality', one can see that only a minority of women achieve their objectives. "*Promotion*" or "*career progress*", "*commissions*", "*performances*", "*programming*" depend

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<sup>9</sup> Preparatory notes for the World Intergovernmental Congress on "Cultural Policies for Development", UNESCO, Stockholm 1998.

upon that magic word – "quality". When a woman is never considered for any of the above one hears that a "*woman would have been invited if they had had the same qualities as a man*". Interesting when one remembers that "quality" is more often defined by men than by women.<sup>10</sup>

There are barriers, hurdles, gates and moats to be passed through and across and the gatekeepers are above all men who talk about "quality" and not about the wheels behind the scenes that help them take and make their decisions: the old boys network, party politics, industrial finance, investments from publishers and record companies, special friendships including sexual discrimination. A well-known English composer told me that she had personally heard some powerful "movers and shakers" in the music world express the opinion that women are incapable of being good composers. A few men are strongly prejudiced. Most probably are not, and are surprised when imbalances are pointed out. Thus the activity of pointing this out can help in the long run.

*"It is a universal human right to make and have ones own music."* Not apparently for the "gatekeepers" who decide what the public wants, what will be programmed and who are to be considered "composers". They have their own "secret agendas" which are very rarely discussed publicly. According to the programming figures (and it is only by seeing what has been programmed that we can have any idea as to the "musical aesthetics" in vogue) the European public prefers music composed by men (preferably white, bearded and long dead) and works that they have been listening to for the last five generations. Even in countries where women composers are visible – they teach composition in conservatories and universities, run music organisations, sit on boards and commissions and have success in middle level music organisations – the figures for their inclusion in top level programming is far lower than anyone could have imagined.

One of the big "secrets" behind much of the entire issue is the question of financing. Current market philosophies tend to value products only in terms of their commercial appeal. As less State funding is available, and alternative funding seems to be lacking, so the range of challenging musical experiences in the community is diminished. Music promoters must, therefore, find alternative ways of financing their activities and one of these is the upgrading of ticket prices. In order to sell out a performance it is essential to present something (music) or someone (conductor, soloist, composer) that the ticket paying public are prepared to come and hear. It is obviously

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<sup>10</sup> Patricia Adkins Chiti, "Una voce fuori del coro" in Danielle Cliche, Ritva Mitchell and Andreas Wiesand (eds.), *Pyramid or Pillars, Unveiling the Status of Women in Arts and Media Professions in Europe*, ARCCult Media, Bonn, 2000.

financially safer to continue to programme the famous works of the past most of which would appear to have been composed by men and not women.

The rather visible lack of women's works in music programmes at all levels and of all kinds has not caused sleepless nights for the artistic directors, administrators, music-going public and journalists. Even though most music ventures are directly or indirectly publicly funded in some way, to date, no public administrator, Member of Parliament or equal opportunities officer has thought that it might be useful to see why public money was being used only for works composed by men.

It is clear that the myriad of organisations throughout the world working to promote women composers, render their music tangible and their creativity visible, merely by continuing to bring society's attention to the musical diversity of women, can contribute to the empowerment of those who are the main players in exercising and creating diversity in music in our societies: composers, musical organisations and institutions, governments and other decision-making bodies, the "gatekeepers", responsible for musical culture and hence, musical diversity.

We, who live today, responsible as we are for the culture we pass on to the next generations, must nurture and sustain women's creativity in the context of cultural diversity. How can we change the actual *status quo* for women in music without throwing the baby out along with the bathwater?

Firstly through the systematic documentation of women's contribution to music in the past and present: this documentation should include oral and popular traditions as well as the hundreds of other genres that are part of our world music culture. There is a need to raise the gender consciousness of teachers and university professors through special training courses - given their importance as facilitators. Students' consciousness concerning gender-related-issues is low and would require similar efforts.

Role models in schools, universities, academies and conservatories are keys to help promote students as they enter working life. In this context, the present composition of the teaching staff in many music schools, academies and universities is generally unsatisfactory and in some cases nearly scandalous! This situation is expected to persist because courses in certain fields continue to be taught almost exclusively by men, for example in subject areas of multimedia, electronic music, composition, jazz, film scoring, conducting or in some specific musical instruments. Mentoring schemes for emerging talents similar to those programmes existing for scientists in some universities

could be useful to help young women obtain access to professional networks and visibility within their chosen field.

## **Conclusion**

I am now going to read the **Top Ten complaints** that I have collected from women composers and creators of music around the world active in the fields of traditional music, classical European and Arabian music, popular music, hymn writing, television and film soundtracks, jazz, crossover, contemporary and multimedia forms – practically all fields of human endeavour within the music sector, be this public, private, commercial, non profit, extemporaneous or as one of our African women composers puts it, “singing for God in church on Sundays”.

1. The decision makers are mainly men: they say they know nothing about women composers, either historical or actual and don't believe that there are many.
2. Men don't appreciate concerts with only women composers' pieces, but have no objection to all male composer concerts.
3. The public-conscious programmers and organisers continue to think of composers as men in the same way surgeons or judges are thought of as men – programmers tend to try to meet public expectation. Committees have little knowledge of women composers whether historic or contemporary.
4. Women creators of music are still not included in the texts used for music students and courses on women and music are not taught as part of school and university curricula.
5. Programming depends on “back scratching” and women do not or cannot cope with this.
6. Many composer-organizers only promote their own students or composers who offer them programming opportunities elsewhere. They will often not consider works representing different musical aesthetic. Women composers face discrimination/envy from men-composers who are artistic directors.
7. Many directors are where they are because of political influence, backing by record companies or publishers, prestige in fields other than music, old boys network Some are not trained musicians, cannot read scores and must, therefore depend on others for decisions: administrators and artistic directors do not realise that there must be an adequate representation of women at all levels and in all institutions. <sup>11</sup> “Equal Opportunities” is not a subject that they know anything about.

8. In countries with a tradition of Western Classical music the amount of contemporary works being programmed is less than it was thirty, fifty and even seventy years ago so lack of possibilities for new works forces women composers in particular to write for smaller ensembles, thereby finding themselves “out of the running” when a promoter is looking for larger scale works.
9. Many women conductors, directors, school music directors, choral leaders etc never present music by women for fear of being considered “feminists” and are as ignorant as men are when it comes to repertoire.
10. Many countries have no-organisation to help or “champion” women creators of music – very often the women musicians lack the funds to even form a network or pay for an email connection.

**Tangible** is applied to things that are clear, definite, real and that can be perceived by sight and touch; **Intangible** is applied to that which is spiritual rather than physical, to the sound of music that envelopes us and then passes on. A melody has no material form yet remains in our hearts and minds.

Music knows no barriers: it crosses all frontiers, lives on from one generation to another and goes where it will. The world and humanity would be poorer without women’s contribution to both the tangible and the intangible: and this includes our music.

**The IMC has promised to:**

- Empower musical artists in all cultures to sustain and enhance their musics
- Empower and assist music educators in all cultures to celebrate the musics of their own culture as well as musical diversity
- Inspire and assist musical institutions to increase awareness with regard to musical diversity and the demands musical diversity put upon the infrastructure of a culture

**I believe that a “Different Vision of Women making Music” has a place within Many Musics – let us include “gender balance” as one of the questions that we should be finding answers for – and may the IMC include the empowerment of women within their objectives.**