

Women Composers at the White House: The National League of American Pen Women and Phyllis Fergus's Advocacy for Women in American Music

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Abstract

Women composers' concerts, arranged by Phyllis Fergus, were held for Eleanor Roosevelt at the White House in 1934 and 1936. They featured music by members of the National League of American Pen Women—an organization for writers, artists, and composers—and were part of a substantial agenda proposed by Fergus, its music director and later president, to achieve national recognition for its composer members. Drawing on Fergus's scrapbooks and documentation in the FDR Library and Pen Women's archives, this article explores the events that Fergus helped to organize, including concerts in Miami, Chautauqua, and Chicago, the latter played by members of the Women's Symphony Orchestra. White House appearances by Amy Beach helped emphasize the League's professional status, and the nationalistic tone of its publicity, urging audiences to "Buy American" during the Depression, worked to distract from age-old assertions of women's lack of creativity. However, the musicales for Roosevelt, who received the composers socially rather than as paid professionals, reinforced women's domestic position, and financial restraints limited most League programming to the genres typically associated with female composers. Despite its separation from a male mainstream, the NLAPW was nonetheless a significant force in promoting women's music in the 1930s.

The large numbers of women who joined clubs during the Progressive era had a major impact on musical life in the United States.¹ In her book, *The Torchbearers*, Karen Blair has described how women's artistic networks in the 1890 to 1930 period "shaped the context in which professionals marketed their artistic wares."² Women's music clubs served as venues for performers, composers, and writers and speakers on music; club women organized ensembles, funded scholarships, and sponsored concert series, advancing the role of music in their communities. However, Blair finds that the size and influence of women's clubs began to wane in the late 1920s.³ Many in the new generation of women who entered club life during this period lacked the cultural aspirations and impulse toward self-improvement of their Progressive-era forebears; they likewise were less engaged with the social reforms

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¹ See Linda Whitesett, "'The most potent force' in American Music: The Role of Women's Music Clubs in American Concert Life," in *The Musical Woman*, vol. 3, ed. Judith Lang Zaimont, et al. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 663–81.

² Karen J. Blair, *The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890–1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 4–5.

³ Blair, *The Torchbearers*, 200–3.

that motivated the broader women's club movement. The Depression further damaged the previous infrastructure of women's clubs that had supported musical activities, and the perception that women's places in the workforce were needed by unemployed men reinforced their more traditional roles in the domestic sphere.⁴ Such retrogressive forces had a negative impact on women composers of art music, who experienced a backlash with the rise of modernists rejecting the late Romantic style in which female composers excelled, casting contemporary music as a newly "virile and masculine" response to an effeminate past.⁵ Thus, narratives about women composers frequently treat the struggles of individual female modernists, such as Ruth Crawford Seeger or Johanna Beyer, in isolation from club networks of numerous female composers who continued to compose in tonal, more accessible styles during the first half of the twentieth century.⁶

The observation that the Depression was a difficult period for women in music overlooks the activities of the National League of American Pen Women (NLAPW), which continued to support female composers through composition prizes and concerts of their music. Under the auspices of the Pen Women, Chicago composer Phyllis Fergus (1887–1964) worked to promote women's compositions in the 1930s. Fergus endeavored to provide opportunities for the performance of her contemporaries' music and to highlight a continuing tradition of female creativity through celebrating the long, successful career of leading figure Amy Beach (1867–1944). She engaged in a deliberate strategy that attempted to distract potential audiences from any lingering assertions about women's lack of musical creativity through nationalistic presentations of composers from various geographic regions in high profile events, including two concerts at the Roosevelt White House. During a period of increasing populism in classical music, audiences could become attuned to women's compositions through patriotic emphasis on their "Americanness," rather than focusing on the composers' gender. That Fergus's efforts to put female composers on the US map, using a network of personal and professional associations made possible through women's clubs, were ultimately unsuccessful was due to a host of factors, including the primarily literary rather than musical emphasis of the Pen Women and the predominant programming of genres traditionally associated with domestic performance, as well as the musical tastes and Depression-era agendas of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Fergus was nonetheless a central figure within a network of musical women supporting and sustaining each other's compositional efforts.

Phyllis Fergus's professional life as a composer took place primarily within the gendered world of Chicago music clubs, the activities of which have only recently

⁴ Melissa J. De Graaf, *The New York Composers' Forum Concerts, 1935–1940* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 84–85.

⁵ Catherine Parsons Smith, "'A Distinguishing Virility': Feminism and Modernism in American Art Music," in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, ed. Susan Cook and Judy Tsou (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 92–96.

⁶ On Crawford Seeger deliberately resisting membership in Progressive-era women's organizations, see Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 86.

begun to receive scholarly attention.⁷ Beginning in the mid-1910s, Fergus performed her “story poems,” pieces combining spoken word with piano accompaniment, frequently appearing as a “composer-pianist” at the Birchwood Morning Musicals and the Rogers Park Women’s Club. The network of Chicago women’s arts groups not only served amateurs, but also functioned as venues for women like Fergus who aspired to musical careers; several sponsored annual concerts for local composers. Like many other female musicians, Fergus was a member of numerous clubs over the course of her professional life and performed for many others, including the Lake View Musical Society, the Chicago Woman’s Music Club, the Cordon Club, and the Musicians’ Club of Women. Beginning in the late 1920s, Fergus began to assume leadership roles in the groups in which she was involved, refiguring her to rise to national prominence. In 1928, she assumed the presidency of the Musician’s Club of Women, holding the position for two years; the wife of a wealthy steel and iron broker, she was also a board member of Chicago’s Women’s Symphony Orchestra. By the 1930s, an interview with her highlighted how her “gift of making friends” resulted in her offices in “a score of organizations, musical and otherwise.”⁸ Amy Beach described her as a whirlwind of energy, engaging in a “constant spur” of activity.⁹

Fergus had been publishing her compositions, primarily through Clayton F. Summy, since the mid-teens, so she qualified for membership in the National League of American Pen Women. Although many women’s music clubs had a range of members, from professionals and outstanding amateurs to “affiliate” members who were not active performers, the Pen Women consisted of paid professionals. The organization had been founded in 1897 by female journalists excluded from the all-male Press Club in Washington, D.C., and originally included writers and illustrators as well.¹⁰ Some of the earliest musician members appear to have been admitted as authors of music pedagogy publications or articles for magazines such as *The Etude* or *Musical America*, rather than as composers. Eleanor Everest Freer and Carrie Jacobs-Bond joined the League before it officially admitted the musically talented.¹¹ The bulk of the earliest composers were the authors of the

⁷ Fergus’s career and role in Chicago’s clubs are explored in Marian Wilson Kimber, *The Elocutionists: Women, Music, and the Spoken Word* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 191–202.

⁸ Liliane R. Davidson, “Writes Music with Babes ‘On her Neck’” [*Daytona Beach, Florida, News Journal*, 1932], in National League of American Pen Women, Green Mountain Branch Scrapbook, [158], University of Vermont Library Special Collections, Burlington, VT.

⁹ *The Triangle of Mu Phi Epsilon* (February 1933): 85, in National League of American Pen Women, Green Mountain Branch Scrapbook, [152], University of Vermont Library Special Collections, Burlington, VT.

¹⁰ Agnes Hooper Gottlieb, “National League of American Pen Women, 1897–Present (Formerly League of American Pen Women),” in *Women’s Press Organizations, 1881–1999*, ed. Elizabeth V. Burt (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 146.

¹¹ At an early performance in Chicago’s Steinway Hall, Jacobs-Bond appeared as “composer-author” and gave her writings as monologues as well as songs. “Music and Drama,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 28, 1902. The program appears in Carrie Jacobs-Bond, *The Road of Melody* (New York: D. Appleton, 1927), after p. 88.



Figure 1. Phyllis Fergus, author's personal collection.

texts for their own songs and were thus considered poets.¹² By 1921 the Pen Women had fifty composer members;¹³ in 1931 the League claimed to be the largest literary organization with a membership of two thousand women and fifty-three branches, located in almost every state.¹⁴

The Chicago branch that Fergus joined was particularly active, and Illinois musicians came to play a major role in the concerts she organized. The branch contained members from several states beyond the metropolitan area and produced both state and national officers; it also contained a higher proportion of composers than most other regional groups. In November 1931, Fergus founded an additional NLAPW branch with twelve members in New Haven, Vermont, where she resided during the “off season” with her husband, Thatcher Hoyt, and two daughters at their colonial-era family home; she remained affiliated with the “Green Mountain” branch, despite her activities in Chicago.¹⁵ Fergus continued to benefit professionally from her involvement with the League, which provided her with opportunities

¹² The first music committee, established in 1916, featured three songwriters and one author of music articles.

¹³ Mrs. J. Harry Cunningham, “Wanted—A Policy,” *The Pen Woman* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1921): 241.

¹⁴ Laurine Elkins-Marlow, “Music at Every Meeting’: Music in the National League of American Pen Women and the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, 1920–1940,” in *Politics, Gender, and the Arts: Women, the Arts, and Society* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992), 187.

¹⁵ Mrs. [D. L.] Myrle L. Garland, *A History of the Green Mountain Branch of National League of American Pen Women, from Nov. 17, 1931 to Nov. 17, 1949* [typescript], Green Mountain Branch papers, University of Vermont Library Special Collections.

to promote her music and publicity surrounding the prizes she received in the group's composition contests.

Fergus became a Pen Woman in 1924, the year that some members of its "composers group" organized the Society of American Women Composers (SAWC); her visit to Washington to attend the League's national meeting that year coincided with her budding association with many women whose works later appeared on the concerts she organized: Amy Beach, Gena Branscombe, and later, Mary Carr Moore, Mary Howe, and others.¹⁶ Adrienne Fried Block believed the formation of a separate society took place due to the low standard required for Pen Women composers, and that prospective members were only required to be able to notate musical manuscript.¹⁷ However, when Iowa composer Louise Crawford was accepted for League membership in 1931, the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* reported that she had to be nominated by current members (in this case, Beach, whom she had met at the MacDowell Colony, and Dorothy DeMuth Watson), and she submitted seven compositions to demonstrate the required evidence of paid publication within the previous five years.¹⁸ Thus, the formation of an independent group may simply have been because composer members felt that there were insufficient opportunities for them within the organization. Early League conferences sometimes contained music merely for entertainment, not as examples of their members' work. For example, the 1927 meeting featured "The Blue Danube," "Dear Old Pal of Mine," and the March from *Aida*.¹⁹

In order to publicize women composers, Fergus adopted the nationalistic rhetoric that sometimes surrounded the Society of American Women Composers; the preamble to its charter began with the idea that members subscribed to "the high standard for American music."²⁰ Amy Beach, who served as the first president, wrote to prospective members that "this Society may come to mean much in the future of American music if we go about the work in the right way."²¹ During the 1920s, Washington concerts of Pen Women's music were likewise treated as particularly "American" in the press. In 1924, the *Washington Daily News* hailed the "American composers, American trained, writing for American musicians in

¹⁶ Thirteen of the twenty founding SAWC members appeared at the 1925 Pen Women's Washington meeting. On the 1924 League recital, see Melissa E. Wertheimer, "Women Composers Hiding in Plain Sight," *In the Muse Performing Arts Blog*, Library of Congress, <https://blogs.loc.gov/music/2018/05/women-composers-hidden-in-plain-sight/>.

¹⁷ Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer, 1867–1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 245–46.

¹⁸ "Selected to National League of American Pen Women," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, July 12, 1931 [photocopy], Louise Crawford papers, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, IA.

¹⁹ *Pearl Jubilee Anniversary of the National League of American Pen Women Yearbook, Authors Congress and Breakfast Program, April 13–16, 1927*, 11–13, National League of American Pen Women Archives, Pen Arts Building, Washington, D.C.

²⁰ Preamble and by-laws, Society of American Women Composers clippings, New York Public Library.

²¹ Beach to Fannie Charles Dillon, September 26, 1925, Dillon Collection, University of California Los Angeles Research Library Special Collections, quoted in Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 246.

English,” and the following year a local publication reported that “Everyone who is interested in the future of American music will want to attend this event, which will undoubtedly go down in history.”²² When the separate Composers’ Society officially disbanded in 1932, reportedly due to financial difficulties stemming from the Depression, composers’ concerts were increasingly sponsored by the Pen Women’s League.²³ Fergus became the League’s National Music Chairman the same year, holding the position for four years (1932–1936) and apparently seeing it as a step towards the presidency of the League;²⁴ however, even with a nomination from Amy Beach in 1934, she lost by the slim margin of twenty votes.²⁵ During Fergus’s term as Music Chairman she organized multiple major events and made a series of trips to encourage the organization of women composer’s concerts in state capitals. Her idea may have been influenced by a 1931 visit to the League’s Pacific Coast Congress in San Francisco, where a concert was sponsored by California’s Governor and the President of the University of California and their wives.²⁶ In her official report to the Pen Women in 1934, Fergus wrote, “The prestige of a governor sanctioning and fostering women composers, the presentation at the Executive Mansion in each state would indeed be a step toward national recognition.”²⁷

Fergus took over the national chairmanship of music at an ideal time. The previous president, Grace Thompson Seton, perhaps in response to the semi-defection of some composers in forming a separate society, worked to enhance opportunities for them. She emphasized the disappearance of dilettantes and the increasing professionalization of women in the arts: “Pink teas and small town horizons cannot entertain, nor hold us. We want to contribute our share to the cultural development of our nation and of the world.”²⁸ Seton recruited “Patron” members who could donate \$200, with the goal of raising \$6000 in all to support contests for all members.²⁹ The 1928 music contest was for best song; the 1930 contest was for best chamber work. In addition, national Pen Women events were henceforth to have at least one concert, though the current Music Chairman, Dorothy Demuth Watson, went far beyond this goal and demonstrated that the Pen Women were capable of hosting large music festivals.³⁰ There were two concerts in Washington in 1929, and in 1932, with Seton’s encouragement,³¹ Watson arranged the sort of

²² Dick Root, “U.S. Musicians Give Concert,” [*Washington Daily News*], [April] 1924, Society of American Women Composers clippings; “Festival of American Composers to Be Notable Event,” *Wardman Park Vista* 3, no. 30 (April 25, 1925): 10, Phyllis Fergus Scrapbooks [hereafter “PF”], no. 3, insert 23; collection of Reynolds Hoyt Clifford, Chicago, IL.

²³ Laurine Elkins-Marlow, cited in Dorothy Indenbaum, “Mary Howe: Composer, Pianist and Music Activist” (PhD diss., New York University, 1993), 194.

²⁴ The Chicago branch endorsed her before the convention on the back page of *The Bulletin* 8, no. 4 (February 1932).

²⁵ Diaries, April 16–17, 1936, Amy Cheney Beach (Mrs. H. H. A. Beach) Papers, 1835–1956, MC 51, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, NH.

²⁶ *Composer’s Concert, Pacific Coast Congress, June 5, 1931* [program], PF no. 1, insert 13.

²⁷ Phyllis Fergus, “Department of Music, Report for 1932–34,” PF no. 5, 17v.

²⁸ Grace Thompson Seton, “The President’s Shop Talk,” *The Bulletin* 7, no. 9 (June 1931): 1.

²⁹ Grace Thompson Seton, “The President’s Shop Talk,” *The Bulletin* 6, no. 13 (July 1930): 1.

³⁰ “Our Women Composers Unite,” *Musical America* (May 17, 1924): 26.

³¹ Grace Thompson Seton, “The President’s Shop Talk,” *The Bulletin* 8, no. 2 (December 1931): 1.



Figure 2. Composer's Group of the National League of American Pen Women, 1932. Louise Crawford Papers, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City. Back row, left to right: Reah Jackson Irion, Margaret McClure Stitt, Pearl Adams, Phyllis Fergus, Bonita Crowe, Marianne Genet, Annabel Morris Buchanan, Helen Matthews De Lashmutt, Josephine Forsyth, Gena Branscombe, and Louise Crawford. Front row: Francesca Vallejo, Amy Beach, Grace Thompson Seton (NLAPW president), Dorothy DeMuth Watson, Mary Carr Moore, Mary Howe, and Dorothy Radde Emery.

multi-concert event that Fergus continued in 1934 and 1936, increasing the music programming to include works by twenty composers heard in fourteen locations, including sacred music in four Sunday church services.³² Publicity before the composers' festival highlighted the appearance of Amy Beach as the group's distinguished senior member and Gena Branscombe as representative of its younger generation, and the title of the article Watson penned for *Musical America* afterwards stressed the League's sponsorship of "Many Native Works."³³

Pen Women Composers at the Century of Progress

The League's 1933 evening composers' concert in Chicago was the first of a series of events that Fergus hoped would create national visibility for US women composers.

³² "Music Festival of Composer Group," *The Bulletin* 8, no. 8 (June 1932): 16. For programming in five other cities under Watson, see Grace Thompson Seton, "National President's Report 1930-1932," *The Bulletin* 8, no. 8 (June 1932): 2.

³³ "American Music Festival," [undated clipping, ca. 1932], G. Perle Schmidt files, folder 3, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, IA; Dorothy DeMuth Watson "American Women Composers Hold Festival in Washington: League of Pen Women Sponsors Hearing of Many Native Works," *Musical America* (May 10, 1932): 20 [clipping], Louise Crawford papers.

The concert was part of the NLAPW's "Mid-Administration Congress," planned to be attractive to members because it coincided with the Century of Progress World's Fair. League members were to be among the forty million visitors to the numerous buildings and exhibits built on Northerly Island to demonstrate the economic prosperity made possible through science and industry.³⁴ The Pen Women's concert would likewise demonstrate American women's artistic progress. In order to locate composers beyond Illinois, Fergus requested that members send her complete lists of their works, and she took out advertisements in music magazines for six weeks.³⁵ According to *The Musical Leader*, "after voluminous correspondence, she constructed the program and presented works by composers recommended by the clubs from many states."³⁶ Thirteen composers representing eleven states had their music performed; most came to Chicago for the Congress.

One of the League's concerts was part of the authors' breakfast, held at the striking Science Building on the Century of Progress grounds, and attended by many leading figures and their wives: the President of the Century of Progress Rufus C. Dawes, Mayor Edward Joseph Kelley, and the Governor of Indiana, Paul McNutt, because the event coincided with "Indiana Day" at the Fair. Music was also heard at the "Radio and Editors" luncheon and at a tea held in a private home. The highlight of the week was the concert and reception held in the North Ballroom of the Hotel Stevens; the room reportedly held five hundred people and was full. Arranged by Fergus, the concert was in keeping with previous composers' concerts by the NLAPW, yet it differed in size and scope, and featured an orchestra made up of eighteen musicians from the Women's Symphony, conducted by Ebba Sundstrom.

The publicity for the events stressed, not the gender of the composers, but their "Americanness," and the wider impact of the Great Depression as one source of this nationalistic rhetoric was frequently evident. The press reported that Fergus believed it was time, "with the world in its present chaotic condition, to show that world that America's music is second to none."³⁷ She took out advertisements with the theme, "Buy American . . . Outstanding Women Composers," and listing the names and publishers of several of the women whose works would be heard during the Congress. Music dealer Lyon & Healey hosted a reception in conjunction with a window display of the composers' photos and copies of their pieces, a practice that became typical for the subsequent events Fergus organized.³⁸ In a *Christian Science Monitor* article, NLAPW President Clara Keck Heflebower suggested that the "Buy

³⁴ On women's limited roles in the Fair, see Marilyn Domer, "The Role of Women in Chicago's World's Fairs: from the Sublime to the Sensuous," in *Women's Participation in Chicago's World's Fairs: Past and Future* (Evanston: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1984), 14–26; Cheryl R. Ganz, *The 1933 Chicago World's Fair: Century of Progress* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 7–11.

³⁵ Phyllis Fergus, "Attention: Composers," *The Bulletin* 9, no. 4 (January–February 1933): 5.

³⁶ "Women Composers' Works Presented. National Chairman of Music of National League of Penwomen [sic] Arranges Program," *The Musical Leader* (July 20, 1933), PF no. 4, 16r.

³⁷ "Phyllis Fergus Hoyt Is Guest in City to Attend Music Club's Convention," [*Minneapolis Star*], May 23, 1933, PF no. 4, 4r.

³⁸ Dorothy DeMuth Watson may have been the originator of this practice, which also took place in Washington.

American” campaign was in part a response to the conditions member artists faced during the Depression, as editors, publishers, and music lovers were less “in the market” for the works they had to offer than previously;³⁹ her address to the Pen Women at the convention acknowledged that they were facing “a year of the greatest economic disturbances.”⁴⁰ The League’s approach to publicity also reflected the nationwide campaign instigated by newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, begun in the fall of 1932. Among those Hearst had enlisted to support the purchase of US goods were clubwomen; the president of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, Grace Poole, called on female consumers to support this goal, and a prominent California Pen Woman, Grace Boles Hedge, believed that “self-preservation depends on it.”⁴¹ Herbert Hoover signed the “Buy American” bill, which required the federal government to purchase US products, on his last day in office, March 3, 1933, only four months before the Pen Women’s Chicago gathering.⁴²

Just as Hearst’s economic nationalism had earlier roots in the 1920s, Fergus’s efforts were similar to the “Hear America First” campaign of women’s clubs and may have been influenced by the General Federation of Women’s Clubs’ American Music Week established in the previous decade and similar activities by the National Federation of Music Clubs, though the NLAPW’s emphasis purely on women composers was somewhat distinctive.⁴³ When Ruth H. Ottaway, president of the National Federation of Music Clubs, called for attention to American compositions at the 1932 conference of Music Supervisors in Cleveland, then NLAPW president Grace Thompson Seton announced that she was “in full accord,” adding, “let me put in a special plea for the American woman composer.”⁴⁴ In 1933, the year that Fergus organized the Chicago concert, her musical counterpart at the General Federation, Edna Godfrey, likewise proposed that local clubs present programs on US women composers.⁴⁵

The appearance of the Women’s Symphony Orchestra at the Pen Women’s concert during the period that Fergus was a board member is evidence both of her connections and of Chicago’s productive network of performers and women’s clubs. Under Sundstrom’s baton, the WSO had previously performed works by Beach, Branscombe, Freer, and Radie Britain, all of whom were Pen Women.⁴⁶ The support of numerous women’s clubs was noted in the ensemble’s season programs: in 1930–31 particular concerts were indicated as sponsored by individual groups, and clubs

³⁹ “League of American Pen Women. Women’s Organizations. Written for the Christian Science Monitor,” [July 12, 1933], PF no. 4, 7r.

⁴⁰ Clara Keck Heflebower, “National President’s Address, Wednesday, July 12, 1933,” *The Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (October 1933): 5.

⁴¹ *San Francisco Examiner*, January 7, 1933, quoted in Dana Frank, *Buy American: The Untold Story of Economic Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 60.

⁴² *San Francisco Examiner*, January 7, 1933, quoted in Dana Frank, *Buy American*, 65.

⁴³ Blair, *The Torchbearers*, 70. By 1935, twenty-five states had state music week chairmen, and forty-seven governors and FDR had accepted honorary committee status.

⁴⁴ “American Music Festival,” [undated clipping, ca. 1932], G. Perle Schmidt files.

⁴⁵ Mrs. H. S. Godfrey, “Department of Fine Arts,” *The Clubwoman* 8 (February 1933): 18, quoted in Laurine Elkins-Marlow, “Gena Branscombe (1881–1977): American Composer and Conductor” (PhD diss., University of Texas Austin, 1980), 152.

⁴⁶ Linda Dempf, “The Women’s Symphony Orchestra of Chicago,” *Notes* 62, no. 4 (2006): 867.

that held subscriptions were listed in 1935–36. However, financing the Symphony was an ongoing struggle, and programs sometimes advertised that smaller subsets of musicians, fifteen or twenty-five members, were available for hire, similar to the size group Fergus engaged. Fergus was obviously interested in promoting the Women's Symphony as well as the Pen Women; she had advertised that for a small fee they were available to women composers for a brief reading of their orchestral works during their visits to Chicago.⁴⁷ In addition to a choir of women's voices assembled locally, the remaining artists, some of whom came from outside Chicago with the composers whose works they were to perform, consisted of six vocal soloists, a violinist, and a pianist.⁴⁸

The concert's substantial offerings included excerpts from Mary Carr Moore's opera, *David Rizzio*, and Gena Branscombe's three-movement *Youth of the World* for chorus, soloists, and orchestra, as well as a brief piano concerto and an orchestral Andante. It also included smaller-scale compositions: songs, two violin works, two quartets, and a work for voice, violin, cello and piano. Little on the program was deliberately "American," with the possible exception of Annabel Morris Buchanan's folksong setting, *Come All Ye Fair and Tender Ladies*, which opened the evening; the program noted its origins in the "Southern mountains." Several critics praised the excerpts from Moore's opera, ironically heard in Italian, given the "Buy American" campaign, and wished for a staged performance. *The Musical Leader* found it "exceptionally attractive, well-written, brilliant and melodic" with an "undeniable gift for musical form."⁴⁹ Branscombe's *Youth of the World* was also singled out by the press, as it "sustained her reputation for worth-while creations;"⁵⁰ yet the text of the final movement by the Canadian-born composer took a deliberately international stance, recalling historical battles in Europe and America, and calling for the plague of war to cease. Although reviews of the concert were generally favorable, the writer for *The Music News* admitted, "It is utterly impossible for me, at least, to listen to an entire evening of totally unfamiliar music and to justly appraise each and every composition."⁵¹

The concert was a major financial undertaking, costing almost \$800. Fergus's budget shows she paid Sundstrom and the ensemble \$150.⁵² Advance ticket sales

⁴⁷ Phyllis Fergus, "Women Composers!" *The Bulletin* 9, no. 5 (March 1933): 6.

⁴⁸ The composers represented on the program were Annabel Morris Buchanan, Marie Seuel-Holst, Kathrn Bemis-Wilson, Alma Steedman, Mary Carr Moore, Marjorie Eastwood Dudley, Helen Matthews de Lashmutt, Louise Crawford, Dorothy Radde Emery, and Gena Branscombe. May A. Strong assembled the choir largely from her connections with Northwestern University; they rehearsed at the American Conservatory and the Wurlitzer Company.

⁴⁹ "Women Composers' Works Presented. National Chairman of Music of National League of Penwomen [sic] Arranges Program," *Musical Leader* (July 20, 1933), PF no. 4, 16r.

⁵⁰ E. H. B., "The National League of American Penwomen [sic] Holds Congress in Chicago. Phyllis Fergus Arranged Concert of Works by Composer Members," *The Music News* (August 4, 1933), PF no. 4, 16v.

⁵¹ E. H. B., "The National League of American Penwomen Holds Congress in Chicago. Phyllis Fergus Arranged Concert of Works by Composer Members," *The Music News* (August 4, 1933), PF no. 4, 16v.

⁵² The group was exempt from union rates. "Women Play So Well Unions Demand They Get Paid," October 5, 1937, Women Symphony Orchestra Scrapbooks, vol. 4, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL.

generated about \$240 dollars, and gifts, which covered about \$400, came from individuals, local clubs, and in some cases, the composers themselves.⁵³ The program listed over one-hundred-twenty “Patrons” and thanked some thirty-eight music clubs, schools, and merchants, but the help provided must have been through their publicity or attendance at the concert, rather than specifically financial. Fergus recounted that for the first time in her career she had asked her friends to buy tickets, and she made a substantial contribution herself to cover the remaining deficit—\$178.64—a large amount of money during the Depression.⁵⁴ Her own countless arrangements were unpaid: writing publicity materials, arranging for advertising, having tickets and programs printed, and ordering the drinks for the post-concert reception. In addition, Fergus hosted several of the attendees in her home and had a musicale and barbecue at her house for approximately two hundred people on opening night, July 12.

In spite of the financial loss, many considered the concert to have been a success. Wisconsin composer Marie Seuel-Holst, whose concerto, *In Elfland*, was performed, reported, “There was music, and good music truly, in abundance at every convention luncheon, dinner, breakfast.”⁵⁵ Fergus remained optimistic about the outcome, announcing that publisher Clayton F. Summy had offered the Pen Women the prize of publication of a song, member Helen Matthews De Lashmutt would sponsor one-hundred-dollars worth of composition prizes, and three composers and two performers had received engagements in four states due to their appearances in Chicago.⁵⁶ With the help of Art Chairman Josephine Craven Chandler, Fergus continued her plan to present women composers in state capitals, starting with a concert at the Illinois Executive Mansion in December later that year. The event was held in part because Illinois composers had not appeared on the Chicago program, which had featured only composers from other states.⁵⁷

The White House Musicales and Concerts Across the Nation

Fergus’s original intention was to organize two years of women’s concerts around the country, culminating in a performance in the nation’s capital. However, her meeting Eleanor Roosevelt in 1933 may have accelerated her plans. When FDR was elected, the Pen Women adopted Eleanor, a prolific author and newspaper columnist, as a member, and she graciously accepted their official pin a month after her precedent-setting first White House press conference with female journalists.⁵⁸

⁵³ “Department of Music,” *The Bulletin*, PF no. 4, 17r.

⁵⁴ The modern equivalent of this amount would be about \$3,000.

⁵⁵ “Mrs. Holst Gives Summary of the Pen Women’s Meet,” *The Capital Times* [Madison, WI], July 23, 1922, PF no. 4, 15v.

⁵⁶ “Department of Music,” *The Bulletin*, PF no. 4, 17r.

⁵⁷ In February 1934, returning from a Washington board meeting of the League, Fergus stopped in Cleveland to try to organize a concert in Columbus, OH.

⁵⁸ Eleanor Roosevelt to Clara Keck Heflebower, May 13, 1933, Eleanor Roosevelt [hereafter ER] Papers, box 577, FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY. On Roosevelt and the press, see Maurine H. Beasley, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media: A Public Quest for Self-Fulfillment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 38–50; and *Women of the Washington Press: Politics, Prejudice and Persistence* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 57–90.

Roosevelt spoke to the Pen Women about education in Washington at a May 1933 program on which Fergus appeared as piano accompanist.⁵⁹ In August, both Roosevelt and Fergus traveled to Marion, Virginia to the White Top Music Festival; Pen Woman Annabel Morris Buchanan was one of White Top's organizers.⁶⁰ Fergus's mother, Mary Fergus, was to perform Michigan ballads at the folk music event. Mother and daughter were invited to lunch with the First Lady, and Fergus must have recognized the degree to which the appearance of Roosevelt, who was attending due to her interest in the country's musical roots, drew increased notice and great crowds for White Top's offerings.⁶¹ Fergus undoubtedly felt that if Roosevelt sponsored the Pen Women's music it would receive the kind of attention she had seen at White Top.

In January, before the League's April 1934 meeting, Fergus wrote to Roosevelt to try to arrange a concert at the White House. The White House tea was a traditional event for the Pen Women's national meetings, originating in 1921 during the Taft administration.⁶² Fergus's request was not the only one Roosevelt received from female composers; her correspondence included frequent entreaties from songwriters to help them promote their work, requests that were regularly declined.⁶³ To Roosevelt, Fergus presented her idea of "a series of concerts in the different State Capitols ending with a concert at the White House in Washington," providing her previous programs in Chicago and Springfield as evidence of past success. She noted that "very few American Musicians have had this greatest of honors" at the White House.⁶⁴ Fergus was referred by Roosevelt's secretary to Henry Junge of Steinway and Sons, who was in charge of organizing White House musicales.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, she persisted in her original strategy, informing both Roosevelt and her staff person, Malvina Scheider, that her intention had been misunderstood; she was requesting that the First Lady would be socially "at home" to the Pen Women composers rather than hire them as professional musicians. To Roosevelt, she made her agenda clear:

This is not a commercial musical or an engagement for a few individuals. My idea, as National Chairman of Music, in asking this favor, is that you will recognize in a group—The American Woman Composer. This gracious gesture—an invitation from you, yourself a fellow Pen Women, and the First Lady of the Land to even show this appreciation of women's creative genius in music, to meet and hear some of my colleagues in compositions of their own writing. Such a departure would give heart and encouragement to this talented group.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ "Mrs. Roosevelt Addresses Pen Women," *The Bulletin* 9, no. 7 (May 1933): 7.

⁶⁰ Phyllis publicized that before the Festival Pen Women could study composition at Marion College with the White Top organizer, composer John Powell.

⁶¹ David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 192–93.

⁶² Gottlieb, "National League of American Pen Women, 1897–Present," 149.

⁶³ For example, Dorothy Radford of Fairfax, Virginia, requested Roosevelt's help in promoting her musical comedy, *Daphne's Debut*, to raise funds for the Washington Symphony. Dorothy H. Radford to Eleanor Roosevelt, ca. 27 March 1935, ER Papers, box 130.

⁶⁴ Phyllis Fergus to Eleanor Roosevelt, January 16, 1934, ER Papers, box 438.

⁶⁵ Elise K. Kirk, *Music at the White House: A History of the American Spirit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 226–28.

⁶⁶ Phyllis Fergus to Eleanor Roosevelt, February 4, 1934, ER Papers, box 1176.

Fergus's next strategy was to inform Roosevelt and Scheider that Amy Beach would be attending the Biennial, and that she hoped to honor the elder stateswoman of their group, linking Washington's famous cherry blossoms to one of Beach's best-known songs: "Mrs. Beach is no longer at our call as she has wont to be. She is older and we cherish the time she comes to us. With the Cherry Blossoms in April—it is easy to think of her great music to the "Year[']s at the Spring."⁶⁷ Roosevelt's permission for a "short entertainment," which Fergus interpreted to mean a half hour, was not granted until April 3, only three weeks before the Pen Women's White House tea.

Fergus obviously recognized that Amy Beach's international stature was important to the Pen Women's visibility. Beach had been an honored guest at national Pen Women's events as early as 1922, and her performances seem to have become an expected musical feature;⁶⁸ her plans to go to France in 1938 were announced in the Pen Women's *Bulletin* as if to alert members that she would not attend the Biennial conference. In 1934 Fergus designed the entire Pen Women's music festival, which lasted from April 21 to 27, to be a "Golden Jubilee" in honor of Beach's fifty years in music. In addition to performing at the White House, Beach also played her compositions on an evening concert; some five other social and musical events during the 1934 convention were in her honor, and she appeared on WMAL's evening radio broadcast.

The publicity for Beach's "Jubilee" continued the patriotic tone; one article reported that Fergus intended to provide Washington with "an unusual 'spring festival' of the women composers of her own land."⁶⁹ The festival was an expanded version of the sort of program that Fergus had organized at the Chicago Congress: as was typical, the Leagues' social events featured musical performances, and there were two evening composers' concerts. Twenty composers from twelve states had compositions heard during the week; sixteen visiting composers were supported by an additional twenty musicians. Dorothy Radde Emery of Maryland and Iris Brussels from New Jersey, winners of the composition contest established in Chicago, attended and had their prize-winning compositions performed. The authors' breakfast at the Willard Hotel featured six songs with texts by Pen Women poets, set to music by League composers, as well as "Home" by Elizabeth Merz Butterfield of New York, which had won Clayton Summy's publication contest.

Large-scale choral and instrumental pieces were heard at two composers' concerts on Sunday and Tuesday evenings, the first at United States Chamber of Commerce Auditorium and featuring excerpts from Eleanor Everest Freer's miniature opera, *Little Women*, performed by "diseuse" Frances Coates Grace, singing all of the parts to piano accompaniment. The bulk of the second concert, in Barker Hall of the Y.W.C.A., consisted of compositions by Beach with the composer at the piano: her *Mirage* and *Rendezvous* for voice, piano, and strings, her cantata *Sea Fairies* for piano, women's choir, and three vocal soloists, as well as four of

⁶⁷ Phyllis Fergus to Eleanor Roosevelt, March 19, 1934, ER Papers, box 444.

⁶⁸ *Program, Silver Jubilee and First Biennial Convention of League of American Pen Women, April 24–29, 1922*, NLAPW Archives.

⁶⁹ "Phyllis Fergus On Club Mission," *Washington Herald*, March 4, 1934, PF no. 5, 7r.

her songs. Tuesday morning the United States Marine Band performed a radio concert through the National Broadcasting System that contained Beach's "The Year's at the Spring" and Fergus's choral work, *Heritage*, publicized as the "marching song of the New Deal."⁷⁰ The highlight of the week for the attendees was not the large public concerts, but the musicale and tea held in the East Room of the White House and the opportunity to meet the First Lady (see Appendix). Some four hundred tickets were provided for Pen Women attendees, and due to the short notice, the concert repeated compositions heard earlier in the week: those by Elizabeth Merz Butterfield, Pearl Adams, and Frances Copthorne, and multiple works by Beach. The Pen Women's *Bulletin* reported that Roosevelt "stayed throughout the program which was surely tribute enough for anyone."⁷¹

The White House concert and Beach's involvement gained the week's events much more publicity than they might have otherwise received. "This is the first time in the history of the country that such a group of composers has met at the White House," reported one newspaper.⁷² Beach's music was praised as "superlative works created with mastery and admirably presented" in the *Washington Herald*, which described how her *Rendezvous* had been met with shouts of "bravo" and had to be repeated.⁷³ The concerts also garnered additional press for their participants back in their home states; articles about the involvement of Freer, Copthorne, Lulu Jones Downing, and others appeared in the Chicago press.⁷⁴ Fellow members' letters to Fergus after the Festival stress the importance of the White House musicale and testify to her ability to organize people in the cause of women's music; several Pen Women wrote that they stood ready to assist her in future endeavors. One wrote, "You have given the League a marvelous week of music and great service in every way, I know hundred[s] appreciate."⁷⁵ Butterfield agreed, writing, "how beautifully you did it all! My, but weren't we all proud of you."⁷⁶

The next few years saw Fergus at the center of several multi-concert women's events. In October, Fergus and Beach attended "American Women Musicians' Achievement Day" at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. Beach's *Gaelic Symphony* was heard on the second of two women composers' concerts by the Women's Symphony Orchestra in the pavilion of Ford Symphony Gardens.⁷⁷ Although this was not a Pen Women's event, Fergus was a member of the committee

⁷⁰ It is not clear if Beach's and Fergus's pieces were arranged for band or in their original forms.

⁷¹ Clyde Burke Millspaugh, "Here and There at the Convention," *Official Bulletin* 10, no. 9 (June 1934): 3.

⁷² "Mrs. T. M. Hoyt Sponsors Musicales at the White House," *The Burlington Free Press and Times*, April 25, 1934, PF no. 5, 13r.

⁷³ Dr. Kurt Hetzel, "Mrs. Beach Wins Honors at Composers' Concert," *Washington Herald*, April 24, 1934, PF no. 5, 16r.

⁷⁴ Freer did not attend, so Fergus sent her a telegram about the success of *Little Women*.

⁷⁵ [Helen de Lashmutt?] to Phyllis Fergus, n.d., PF no. 5, 21v.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Merz Butterfield to Phyllis Fergus, n.d., PF no. 5, 22r.

⁷⁷ The two concerts also included works by Fergus, Grace Burlin, Florence Price, Alice Brown Stout, Eleanor Everest Freer, Helen Sears, Mabel Daniels, Cécile Chaminade, Radie Britain, and Florence Galajikian. On the performance of Price's Piano Concerto by Margaret Bonds, see Rae Linda Brown, "The Woman's Symphony Orchestra of Chicago and Florence B. Price's Piano Concerto in One Movement," *American Music* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 187–91.

that arranged two additional recitals. Fergus also helped organize, along with Mana-Zucca [Gizelle Augusta] (1887–1981), concerts in conjunction with the “Mid-Administration Congress” of the Pen Women’s League in Florida in the spring of 1935 at the Miami Biltmore Hotel. A smaller-scale event than the previous women’s music festivals, the Congress nonetheless featured multiple concerts performed by several of Fergus’s Chicago collaborators playing the music of composers who had appeared on previous programs: Branscombe, Downing, Butterfield, Adams, Josephine Forsyth, and Bonita Crowe. Women whose music was new to Pen Women’s national programs were Louise Ayres Garnett of Illinois, and several Floridians, including Mana-Zucca and poet–composer Grace Porterfield Polk.

In July 1935 Fergus traveled to Chautauqua, New York, for yet another series of concerts, the “Chautauqua Music Festival Honoring American Women Composers,” organized with the help of Butterfield and Grace Boles Hedge. Because the Chautauqua Institute had a full orchestra, the festival was able to feature Amy Beach’s *Gaelic Symphony* and Mabel Daniels’s *Pirate’s Island*, and the Chautauqua Choir sang works by Adams, Butterfield, Britain, and Marianne Genet. In addition, there were two concerts dedicated to the music of the fifteen visiting composers, many of whom were Fergus’s Chicago colleagues.⁷⁸ September saw Fergus in San Diego for yet another Pen Women composers’ concert, sponsored by the California League in conjunction with the San Diego Exposition; this event, not unlike Fergus’s Chicago concert linked to the Century of Progress, was another attempt to associate women’s compositions with constructions of civic good. The concert, which took place at the House of Hospitality built in 1915 for the earlier Panama-California Exposition, featured eighteen California composers, and included so many pieces that the audience was informed that “encores will be impossible.”⁷⁹

The sudden death of Fergus’s husband from heart disease in October 1935 must have come as a terrible shock. Although Fergus became a widow with two small children, this did not slow her activity significantly. On the success of the previous conference’s performance, Fergus arranged a concert at the White House for April 1936, again featuring Beach, but dedicated to Eleanor Roosevelt. Fergus had to reassure the White House staff that the program would not be too lengthy;⁸⁰ nonetheless, the final program featured fourteen works by ten composers culminating with “The Year’s at the Spring” and three of Beach’s piano pieces (see Appendix). The bulk of the remaining pieces were winners of NLAPW prizes: two works for string quartet and six songs. After Beach’s performance Roosevelt reportedly took both her hands and expressed her delight at having “a musician of such distinction” at the White House.⁸¹

⁷⁸ “Woman Composers to Meet,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1935. The other composers were Lulu Jones Downing, Theodora Sturkow-Ryder, and Florence Galajikian of Chicago, Marianne Genet of Pittsburgh, Mary Howe of Washington, Helen de Lashmutt of Baltimore, and Dorothea Bestor of New York.

⁷⁹ The twenty-six pieces included songs and piano music, violin works, and melodramatic readings.

⁸⁰ Phyllis Fergus to Edith Helm, April 14, 1936, White House Office of Social Entertainments, box 13, FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Simons Tilton, *The League of American Pen Women in the District of Columbia* (Takoma Park, MD: Washington College Press, 1942), 244.

At the Biennial, Beach again nominated Fergus for League president, and she became the first musician to be elected to the office. Hereafter, music took a back seat to a job that Fergus's mother afterwards described as "strenuous."⁸² Fergus traveled extensively to attend Pen Women events around the country, and by May 1937 she had visited thirty-one states.⁸³ The Christmas card she drew that year and sent to the White House featured a United States map marked with lines to indicate her routes; next to it was her daughters, one holding a calendar with the month of May marked as when "Mama is ours again."⁸⁴

In 1938, Fergus contacted the White House again, hoping to arrange a third Pen Women musicale. Her plan was to substitute another long-time Pen Woman, prolific songwriter Carrie Jacobs-Bond, then aged 75, as the honoree in place of Beach.⁸⁵ However, Eleanor Roosevelt declined the concert because it was not possible to seat everyone in the East Room, and she felt that thirty minutes was too long for the audience to stand comfortably.⁸⁶ Music Chair Dorothy Radde Emery tried to revive the Pen Women's musicale at the White House in 1940 but was informed there would be insufficient time.⁸⁷ Subsequent music chairmen continued to organize concerts. In 1940 Harriet Ware Krumbhaar requested that members send her suggestions about what she should do for the national meeting,⁸⁸ though the bulk of that year's performances, including the evening composers' concert, were open only to Pen women and their friends. The only public events were the Sunday morning renditions of anthems by "American women composers" at six Washington churches.⁸⁹

The First Lady's Tastes and Obstacles for Pen Women Composers

Eleanor Roosevelt's interest and public approval could potentially have provided the kind of national notice for the Pen Women that Fergus envisioned, and the context for the role that the First Lady played—or rather, did not play—in Fergus's agenda for women composers in the United States is complex. Roosevelt's trip to the White Top Folk Festival had increased attendance to anywhere from twelve thousand to twenty thousand people, who stood along the roadside to get a glimpse of her

⁸² Mary E. Fergus to Mr. and Mrs. John Powell, August 19, 1938, box-folder 14:6, Papers of John Powell, 1888–1978, n.d., Accession #7284, 7284-a, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

⁸³ Phyllis Fergus, "President's Message," 13, no 19 (May–June 1937): 1.

⁸⁴ Phyllis Fergus to Malvina Scheider, 14 December 1937, ER papers, box 884.

⁸⁵ Beach and Jacobs-Bond were both selected by the General Federation of Women's Clubs as "representing the great strides made by women in the last fifty years" in the field of music. "53 Women Named as Leaders of Sex," *New York Times*, May 9, 1941.

⁸⁶ Edith Helm to Phyllis Fergus, February 10, 1938, White House Office of Social Entertainments, box 60.

⁸⁷ Edith Helm to Dorothy Radde Emery, April 10, 1940, White House Office of Social Entertainments, box 85. During World War II, musical events at the White House were significantly curtailed. Kirk, *Music at the White House*, 247.

⁸⁸ "Attention: Composers," *Official Bulletin* 14, no. 10 (January 1940): 6.

⁸⁹ National League of American Pen Women, *1940 Biennial Convention Program*, in Northern Illinois Branch Scrapbook, 1939–44, NLAPW Archives.

driving by.⁹⁰ Her appearance was so influential that one of the Festival's organizers, Annabel Morris Buchanan, begged her to come back and was "stunned" and somewhat bitter when she did not.⁹¹ Buchanan's pleas were but one voice in the midst of the myriad of invitations that Roosevelt received and the countless social demands involved in being the President's wife. She was obligated to be hostess to numerous women's groups like the Pen Women when they came to Washington in April. To put Fergus's request into perspective, Roosevelt later reported that between June 1936 and June 1937 the White House served 4,346 meals, had 22,353 people to tea, and hosted 16,650 people at receptions.⁹² Nonetheless, Roosevelt had accepted membership in the League, and given her ongoing relationship with the female members of the press, some of whom were undoubtedly Pen Women, she sometimes found it worthwhile to try to accommodate their requests. That the League's home was Washington increased her social obligations to them as well, and she occasionally accepted invitations from its local District of Columbia branch.

Eleanor Roosevelt's professional and political interests would seem to have disposed her towards promoting recognition of accomplished women. She was personally more interested in the League for its literary basis than for its music—she read avidly and appreciated poetry—however, her elite upbringing had included piano lessons, and she enjoyed amateur music making.⁹³ Roosevelt apparently attended a musical program by the District of Columbia's NLAPW branch in 1933, inspiring one poet, Evelyn Norcross Sherrill, to describe the scene:

Alone, in an adoring multitude
We caught her unawares once, listening
To melodies with her soul thrown open wide—
Her spirit with the Infinite is strung!⁹⁴

Publically, Roosevelt made several speeches about the importance of the arts and music in particular, as well as about women's successes and achievements, most often women involved in social and political work; but the kind of emphasis on women as creative artists that Fergus envisioned was largely not a theme of her public discourse in this period. Her recognition of women's clubs was as a force for education and civic improvement, rather than any forum for artistic achievement.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Whisnant, *All That is Native & Fine*, 192.

⁹¹ Annabel Morris Buchanan to Eleanor Roosevelt, May 26, 1934, ER Papers, box 588.

⁹² Interview with Eleanor Roosevelt, White House Entertaining, Pond's Radio Program, June 9, 1937, ER papers, box 1404; see also Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Volume 2: The Defining Years, 1933–1938* (New York: Viking, 1999), 51.

⁹³ Box 4, ER Papers. On Roosevelt, poetry, and music, see Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Volume 1: The Early Years, 1884–1933* (New York: Viking, 1992), 96, 296, 431.

⁹⁴ Evelyn Norcross Sherrill to Eleanor Roosevelt, January 30, 1934, ER Papers, box 184.

⁹⁵ "Women's Clubs an Educational Force," May 29, 1936, ER Papers, speech and article file.

Although Roosevelt's speeches generally supported musical and other artistic efforts, evidence in her papers, such as a 1937 "Memorandum" for her entitled "What Price Music," suggests that some of her speeches about music were created from notes prepared for her by her staff. However, in this case the prose she was given complained that "Too often in America concerts have taken on the aspect of a social function, to the exclusion of their cultural value," in stark contrast to the First Lady's finished speeches, which often stressed the social value of music, such as in choral singing.⁹⁶ Roosevelt did, of course, sometimes advocate for individuals, most famously African American soprano Marian Anderson, resigning from the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1939 when it forbade Anderson from singing at Constitution Hall, leading to her recital at the Lincoln Memorial.⁹⁷ Roosevelt also symbolically lent her name to the list of largely female patrons of Antonia Brico's New York Women's Symphony when informed by its board chairman, Anna Phillips Bolling, that the ninety-four women musicians were "struggling sometime[s] actually starving."⁹⁸ Although Elise Kirk has noted that Roosevelt was "always sympathetic to the plight of women struggling for identities in fields dominated by men," this did not lead to the sort of larger recognition for composers that Fergus desired.⁹⁹ That some Pen Women had sufficient financial resources to fund the League's composition prizes suggests that many of them, like Fergus, were of upper-class status; the pressing needs of countless impoverished citizens during the height of the Depression would have overshadowed their desire for artistic validation.

Eleanor's own tastes and those of the President, tied to Depression-era politics, shaped her musical interests. During the period that Fergus was pushing for recognition for women composers, the First Lady worked proactively to promote folk music. Not only had she attended White Top, but in March, only a month before the Pen Women event, she broadcast a spoken introduction to an NBC radio program about folksongs by composer John Powell, who was also associated with the Virginia festival.¹⁰⁰ Singer and ballad collector John Jacob Niles was a favorite of FDR and was invited to the White House for informal dinners whenever he was in town, rather than for official musicales; he visited the White House the week before the first Pen Women concert.¹⁰¹ The most noteworthy example of the Roosevelts' interest in folk music was the large entertainment organized for the visit of the King and Queen of England in 1939, which, along with singers Kate Smith, Marian Anderson, and Lawrence Tibbetts, featured spirituals, cowboy

⁹⁶ "What Price Music, Memorandum for Mrs. Roosevelt," 1937, ER papers, speech and article file.

⁹⁷ Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Volume 3: The War Years and After, 1939–1962* (New York: Viking, 2016), 32–36.

⁹⁸ Telegram from Anna Phillips Bolling to Eleanor Roosevelt, November 2, 1935, ER papers, box 20.

⁹⁹ Kirk, photo caption, 242.

¹⁰⁰ It seems that Powell's racist political agendas must not have been known to Eleanor Roosevelt. See Alain Frogley, "'The old sweet Anglo-Saxon spell': Racial Discourses and the American Reception of British Music, 1895–1933," in *Western Music and Race*, ed. Julie Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 252–56.

¹⁰¹ John Jacob Niles, correspondence with Eleanor Roosevelt and her staff, March–April 1934, ER papers, box 444. See Ron Pen, *I Wonder as I Wander: The Life of John Jacob Niles* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2010), 171, 186, 210.

ballads, folk songs performed by the Coon Creek Girls from Kentucky, and an Appalachian square dance team.¹⁰² Native Americans danced for the King and Queen when they visited FDR's home in Hyde Park;¹⁰³ African American singers and choirs also appeared at the White House during his tenure. Franklin believed that US folk music spoke to the common man and woman; the program for British royalty described "the voices of miners, farmers, lumberjacks, workers of all kinds, their wives and children . . . a tide of music rich and strange but vital and undeniably American."¹⁰⁴ The President recognized in this music "a National fabric of beauty and strength" and believed the country should "keep the original fibres so intact that the fineness of each will show in the completed handiwork."¹⁰⁵ That the appearance of folk music was also a matter of personal taste, not merely a political strategy, is suggested by Eleanor's personal invitations to folk singers; Kirk has noted how these sorts of musicians were not "genteel" enough for Henry Junge, who handled the regular musicales. In contrast, the Pen Women's offerings of primarily piano pieces, art songs, and chamber music were much closer to the music heard at the events Junge devised.

Musical and economic factors entirely apart from Roosevelt's interests also hampered the Pen Women. In spite of its professionalism, the group's programming helped to perpetuate the stereotypes surrounding women composers due to the preponderance of nonpublic, "musical" events featuring genres with limited scoring. Fergus's notion that concerts could take place in every state was overly ambitious, as even large branches usually only had a small proportion of composers;¹⁰⁶ thus, insufficient organizational infrastructure existed to achieve her aims. The financial limitations of the Depression made the hiring of performers for concerts unrealistic. Hints of monetary difficulties sometimes surface in branch reports; for example, Reno members seemed somewhat apologetic for hosting a "bride tea and art exhibit" to raise the funds for their prizes, adding that it was "due to the failure of our local bank."¹⁰⁷ That many of the League's officers were well to do, which provided them the time and resources to contribute to its efforts, was not perhaps typical of the entire membership, as a discussion surrounding raising the dues during Fergus's presidency reveals.¹⁰⁸ Later music chairmen charged participants a fee to cover the cost of programs and invitations.¹⁰⁹ Most composers who attended the

¹⁰² Kirk, *Music at the White House*, 242–43.

¹⁰³ Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Volume 3: The War Years and After*, 77.

¹⁰⁴ The program is reprinted in the Smithsonian Institution's brochure, *Folk Music in the Roosevelt White House: An Evening of Songs, Recollections, and Dance* (Washington, 1982), 24–28.

¹⁰⁵ FDR to Paul Green, March 2, 1934, quoted in *Folk Music in the Roosevelt White House*, 5.

¹⁰⁶ According to the 1934–1936 roster of members, some nineteen branches had no composers at all. *National League of American Pen Women Membership Register, 1934–1936*, 19–75, NLA PW Archives. During this period the New York City branch had a large membership, ca. 175 women, but only eight of them were composers.

¹⁰⁷ "Reno," *The Bulletin* 10, no. 1 (October 1933): 11.

¹⁰⁸ Phyllis Fergus, "President's Letter," *The Bulletin* 13, no. 7 (March 1937): 1: "Shall the League work be given to members whose financial status enables them to pay all monetary expenditures themselves?" Pearl Adams was sufficiently wealthy to own a vacation home in Florida.

¹⁰⁹ Phyllis Fergus Hoyt, "Music," *The Bulletin* 11, no. 8 (June 1935): 8; "Attention: Composers," *Official Bulletin* 14, no. 10 (January 1940): 6.

Washington biennials were pianists who participated in performances of their own, necessarily smaller works,¹¹⁰ and a few women brought the musicians with whom they regularly collaborated and who had made performances possible in their hometowns. For example, Illinois composer Frances Copthorne, who was not well known, prolific, or much published, regularly accompanied Norma Bosworth in her own songs in order to have them performed; in this respect, Beach was no different, as her later career relied in part on the same sort of arrangement with soprano Ruth Schaffner, who sang to her accompaniment at both White House musicales.

The League's focus on songs more than instrumental genres was due to the Pen Women's literary origins. Early Pen Women rosters more commonly listed women as "songwriters" than "composers"; because they were considered separate categories, a member could appear as both. Not only did the written word dominate the organization over music and art, but many of the League members who composed did so secondarily to their literary endeavors. Women who identified themselves only as composers in the 1934–1936 membership rolls were outnumbered three to two by those who listed "composer" along with one or more other occupations: lyricist, poet, writer, lecturer, playwright, or artist. The League often emphasized poems at the expense of their musical settings, though occasionally the winners of its poetry contests would then be the subject of a songwriting contest. Pen Women Grace Porterfield Polk, Josephine Logan and Blanche Tice devised their own contests to generate settings of their poetry.¹¹¹ In 1931 the NLAPW's Chicago branch formally endorsed the policy that the names of writers of song lyrics should always be included on sheet music and concert programs, and on radio shows; the resolution was forwarded to the national organization and adopted.¹¹² As a result, the listing for Beach's setting of "The Year's at the Spring" on the 1936 White House program placed Robert Browning in the position usually reserved for the composer, before Beach's name. That the culture of songwriting shaped the Pen Women's output is further revealed by the tendency for their concerts to feature musical settings of poetry of the current president and by the ongoing collaborations some composers had with poets. For example, Copthorne set several texts by Francesca Falk Miller, and the two were often featured together in their publicity. This kind of partnership undoubtedly served to better integrate the composers into the League as a whole, but it nonetheless created the perception that songs, a genre traditionally associated with women, were central to the composers' outputs, rather than a broader range of genres.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Many of the musicians in the events that Fergus organized were imported from her own Chicago or Vermont circles, and Grace Porterfield Polk financed the musicians for the chamber ensembles heard at the Miami concerts. Phyllis Fergus Hoyt, "Music," *The Bulletin* 11, no. 8 (June 1935): 8; "Attention: Composers," *Official Bulletin* 14, no. 10 (January 1940): 6.

¹¹¹ *The Pen Woman* 1, nos. 2 and 3 (1920): 155; "Denver," *Official Bulletin* 13, no. 16 (April 1938): 12.

¹¹² *National League of American Pen Women, Chicago Branch, 1931–32 Yearbook* 28, Chicago History Museum.

¹¹³ On the huge numbers of songs by women, see Christopher Reynolds, "Documenting the Zenith of Women Song Composers: A Database of Songs Published in the United States and the British Commonwealth, ca. 1890–1930," *Notes* 69, no. 4 (June 2013): 671–87.

Some members felt that musicians and artists had a secondary status compared to that of the League's literary members, perhaps due to the sheer numbers of the latter. In spite of the historic appearance of women composers at the White House, the poetry division's report stated that the *poets* were a large factor in the 1934 conference's success,¹¹⁴ and the Chicago Branch's president hoped that "there would be more *literary* events in the future."¹¹⁵ In 1937 Fergus confessed to Roosevelt, that when she became the first composer president, "the authors trembled at my election,"¹¹⁶ and writers, rather than musicians, continued to dominate the organization.

The concerts at conventions that were more for attendees than for the general public perpetuated the idea of women as composing and performing pieces only as part of an amateur salon culture. A *Washington Post* interview with Beach in 1934, unfortunately titled "No Feminine Beethovens Says Woman Composer," seemed to deny that women would ever achieve the status of their male counterparts, despite Beach's assertion that composition was not merely a "pastime" but was now a "profession" for women, as the concerts at the NLAPW convention were meant to demonstrate.¹¹⁷ As was typical for the period, most Pen Women's activities appeared in the society pages, rather than among arts reporting. One Winnetka, Illinois, press clipping about Copthorne's visit to Washington merely noted that she was able to see the cherry blossoms, not that she had had a composition performed at the White House.¹¹⁸

Songs and piano works dominated Pen Women's programming, suggesting they were unable to compose in larger genres. Beach's *Gaelic* Symphony, heard at Chautauqua, was the work that represented the pinnacle of women's efforts, but a full orchestra was rarely on hand. The League's earlier programming in the 1920s, seemingly under the influence of the Society of American Women Composers, occasionally featured more serious instrumental works, which positioned some of these concerts farther from gendered stereotypes.¹¹⁹ The Chicago NLAPW concert had featured Branscombe's multi-movement choral work and Moore's opera excerpts; however, as Fergus widened her outreach to include as many composers as possible, the events she organized were increasingly dominated by music for voice and piano in traditionally domestic genres that linked them to longstanding feminine stereotypes. Moore aptly described, "So long as a woman contents herself with writing graceful little songs about springtime and the birdies, no one resents it or thinks her presumptuous; but woe be unto her if she dares

¹¹⁴ Inez Shelton Theyler, acting poetry chairman, in "Echoes of the Biennial," *The Bulletin* 12, no. 8 (May–June 1934): 8. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁵ NLAPW Chicago Branch Minutes, May 11, 1934 [Typed Copy 2], 104, NLAPW Archives. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁶ Phyllis Fergus to Eleanor Roosevelt, stamped February 7, 1937, White House Office of Social Entertainments, box 60 [emphasis original].

¹¹⁷ Hope Ridings Miller, "No Feminine Beethovens Says Woman Composer," *The Washington Post*, April 24, 1934, PF no. 5, 15v.

¹¹⁸ "Home from Washington" [clipping], Frances Copthorne Papers, folder 24, Sibley Music Library, Eastman School of Music, Rochester, NY.

¹¹⁹ *The American Women Composers First Festival of Music* [program], PF no. 3, 1v.

attempt the larger forms!”¹²⁰ The NLAPW sponsored contests for the best chamber works, where the prize was a performance; a contest for large-scale compositions such as orchestral works could have suggested what kind of achievement was possible by women, but the reward of a performance would have been difficult if not impossible for it to offer. Probably due to financial restrictions, the number and type of the League’s composition contests did not remain consistent. In spite of the Pen Women’s use of outside judges for their contests, that some of the prizes were funded by the members themselves for their colleagues rendered them considerably less prestigious.

The Pen Women’s generally tonal, conservative styles sometimes prevented them from being taken seriously in an increasingly modernist environment. As late as the 1940 composers’ concert in Washington, one critic wrote, “From the program, as a whole, one gathers that women composers are conservative. Only two heard last night ventured into the modern vocabulary.”¹²¹ The celebration of Beach in both White House musicales, repeating favorite songs that were over thirty years old, hearkened back to an earlier era. In spite of her stature, Beach was consistently presented as the “Dean of American Women Composers,” not a leading composer, male or female, of her generation. The songs of Carrie Jacobs-Bond, another regular attendee, represented mawkishness to Nicholas Slonimsky, who in 1929 stated he would rather have musical tastes governed by younger sophisticates than by Jacobs-Bond.¹²² Some of the Pen Women’s songs, did, in fact, suggest the stereotypes that Moore described—from Butterfield’s brief sentimental song about “Home” to Beach’s often heard “The Year’s at the Spring.” The second White House musicale was literally dominated by “springtime and birdies,” including Persis Trimble’s “Fairy of Spring,” and Beach’s “The Humming Bird.” In her tiny piano concerto, *In Elfland*, programmed at the NLAPW Congress in Chicago, Wisconsin composer Marie Seuel-Holst attempted to simultaneously write in a recognized larger genre and to capitalize on women’s reputations as excellent miniaturists; that the technically unchallenging work was designed for young players would have helped to present women composers more as pedagogues than creative artists.¹²³ The League contained many accomplished composers—such as Beach, Branscombe, Moore, and Howe—yet some of the women whose pieces Fergus featured published very little, and many compositions heard at the White House remained unpublished or are no longer extant. Pen Women also produced patriotic or regional music that fit into Fergus’s nationalistic agenda, but these were almost

¹²⁰ Mary Carr Moore, “Is American Citizenship a Handicap to a Composer?” *Musician* 40 (September 1935): 5, 8, quoted in Catherine Parsons Smith and Cynthia S. Richardson, *Mary Carr Moore, American Composer* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 173.

¹²¹ Glenn Dillard Gunn, “Composers Among Pen Women Heard in Varied Concert,” *Times-Herald*, April 25, 1940, PF no. 3, insert 10.

¹²² Quoted in Carol Oja, “Women Patrons and Crusaders for Modernist Music: New York in the 1920s,” in *Cultivating Music in America: Women Patrons and Activists Since 1860*, ed. Ralph Locke and Cyrilla Barr (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 251.

¹²³ “‘Tiniest in the World,’ Mrs. Holst’s Unique Concerto Published,” *Madison Wisconsin State Journal*, March 6, 1938, in *Women’s Symphony Orchestra Scrapbooks*, vol. 4.

always brief songs.¹²⁴ With the possible exception of the 1935 San Francisco Pen Women's Congress that celebrated local pride through including several compositions related to California, the League's concerts remained women's concerts primarily featuring domestic genres rather than programs of overtly "American" music for patriotic citizens.¹²⁵

The Pen Women's contests were occasionally designed to encourage the composition of larger genres, but they frequently required members to compose text-based works, such as choral music or an ensemble for voice and two to four string instruments. The 1931 contest for a large-scale work for chorus and orchestra did not have sufficient applicants and was extended a year; it was temporarily replaced by a contest for a conceivably more manageable genre, the suite.¹²⁶ In spite of this, Grace Thompson Seton noted how successful the contests had been in bringing in composers, and Fergus herself appears to have been inspired by them, temporarily abandoning her typical spoken-word compositions in order to produce chamber works in 1930–31.¹²⁷ Branches such as those in Atlanta and the District of Columbia sometimes offered composition prizes to their own membership, and on occasion national prizes were presented cooperatively with other music organizations, such as Mu Phi Epsilon or Sigma Alpha Iota, relieving the Pen Women of using their own presumably limited funds. In 1938, the League awarded the largest number of musical prizes it ever had, sixteen prizes in six categories, not including honorable mentions. However, in 1940, four years after the second White House musicale, the League sponsored only one music contest, for a song; perhaps the financial pressures of the Depression had come to have an impact.¹²⁸ That some Pen Women were not capable of producing larger works is suggested by the organization's publications from the 1940s, which sometimes addressed the need for their members to play instruments other than the piano and to learn orchestration,¹²⁹ and later articles concentrated on commercially viable music, stressing songwriting for radio and pedagogical materials for students over art music.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ For example, Grace Porterfield Polk wrote "Hoosier-land" and "Florida"; Grace Warner Gulesian and Clara Endicott Sears produced the "Massachusetts Tercentenary Hymn" in 1913. Gertrude Thomas and Margaret Zender Beaulieu wrote "Minnesota All Hail!" (Minneapolis: Northwestern Music Press, 1930), NLAPW Minnesota Branch, Papers and Scrapbooks, 1927–1958, Minnesota History Center, Minneapolis, MN.

¹²⁵ *California League of American Pen Women, Composer's Day, Sept. 21, 1935* [program], PF no. 5, 36r.

¹²⁶ Dorothy DeMuth Watson, "Music," *The Bulletin* 8, no. 2 (December 1931): 6.

¹²⁷ Fergus received first honorable mention in 1931 for *Wings* for string quartet and baritone and second honorable mention in 1930 for *To the Top of a Star-Swept Hill*, for flute, oboe, clarinet, viola, cello, and piano.

¹²⁸ Elizabeth Merz Butterfield, "Report of Music Contest," *Official Bulletin* 13, no. 17 (June 1938): 11–12; Grace Thompson Seton, "Report of National Chairman of Awards," *Official Bulletin* 14, no. 10 (January 1940): 8.

¹²⁹ Grace Warner Gulesian, "National Chairmen of Creative Groups," *Official Bulletin* 16, no. 5 (October 1941): 26–28; and several articles of the Music Forum in *The Pen Woman* 20, no. 6 (March 1946): 13–27.

¹³⁰ Annie Laurie Trousdale, "New Light on Music Markets," *Official Bulletin* 18, no. 1 (October 1943): 22.

Even though Phyllis Fergus was unable to inspire national recognition for the place of women composers in US culture in the 1930s, the National League of American Pen Women did provide important opportunities for its members. In addition to contests and national events, some regional branches, including those in Tucson, Boston, and Washington, hosted concerts made up entirely of compositions by Pen Women composers, and others such as the Cincinnati branch frequently gave programs that included both music and poetry. Branches in which composers rose to the position of president (Bonita Crowe in Atlanta and Grace Warner Gulesian in Boston), also tended to feature music on their programs. The Chicago and Northern Illinois branches continued to be musically active, even after concerts decreased at national meetings; in the mid-1930s the combined groups had approximately thirty-five composer members, almost one-fifth of the composers in the League. The Knoxville branch, which had few if any composers, nonetheless presented a concert of Pen Women's music every year, organized for them by University of Tennessee professor S. L. Mayer, whose wife Lilian was a member.¹³¹ Mayer expressed his amazement at "the beauty of ideas contributed by the women composers to musical thought,"¹³² and in 1931, he proudly announced that the pieces of sixteen Southern Pen Women composers were issued by Schirmer and other major music publishers.¹³³ In 1944, the Knoxville branch reported that over the course of twenty years, some seventy composers had had their music performed.¹³⁴ Fergus also noted the "benefits materializing from musical contacts among professional musicians" that the concerts created. For example, violinist Elena de Sayn, who performed Louise Crawford's *Fantasia Erotique* in Chicago in 1933, provided "incentive and inspiration" for the Iowa composer.¹³⁵ After the opera singer Sonia Sharnova sang one of the songs of Ohio member Louise Snodgrass in Chicago in 1933, President Heflebower had the Women's Republican Club buy out an entire performance in gratitude when the singer appeared in Cincinnati.¹³⁶

The events Fergus organized were deeply meaningful to those involved. Many Pen Women were inspired by meeting Eleanor Roosevelt. Beach wrote to the First Lady that her "exquisite courtesy" to her and her colleagues "was one the most beautiful experiences of my life," and she treasured the autographed photo of Roosevelt she was sent after the first White House concert.¹³⁷ Pearl Adams wrote to Fergus: "I am very deeply indebted to you for the many lovely appearances—principally the White House Tea. . . . There are some things, thank God, one cannot place a money value upon—and this lovely thing you did

¹³¹ The 1935 musicale consisted of Indianist compositions by men, but the following year's returned to women composers' music.

¹³² "Knoxville," *Official Bulletin* 10, no. 2 (February 1934): 13.

¹³³ "Knoxville," *The Bulletin* 7, no. 7 (April 1931): 18.

¹³⁴ "Special from Knoxville," *Official Bulletin* 16, no. 1 (March 1944): 23.

¹³⁵ Louise Crawford to Elena de Sayn, May 7, 1932, quoted in Deborah Anne Hawkins, "Louise Crawford (1890–1973): Her Life and Works" (MA thesis, University of Iowa, 1982), 51.

¹³⁶ Phyllis Fergus Hoyt, "Music," *Official Bulletin* 10, no. 2 (February 1934): 3.

¹³⁷ Amy Beach to Eleanor Roosevelt, [April 24, 1934], ER Papers, box 873; Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 261.

for the composers is one of those lovely things.”¹³⁸ In 1937 Frances Copthorne, who had come to composition relatively late and had limited formal instruction, sailed for France.¹³⁹ The trip was ostensibly for her daughter to receive musical training, yet while abroad Copthorne contacted the renowned pedagogue Nadia Boulanger for lessons and on her return presented concerts featuring her new compositions.¹⁴⁰ It seems the White House concert gave Copthorne additional impetus, and it was mentioned numerous times in reports about her in the Winnetka press.

Phyllis Fergus, as both a patron and organizer of the National League of American Pen Women’s activities as well as a composer member, defies the stereotype surrounding women patrons described by Kathleen McCarthy as validating their cultural positions by working on behalf of male artists; due to Fergus’s place within an all-women organization, she fits the category of “separationist,” even though her publicity reported that she had larger aspirations.¹⁴¹ In October 1933 an article in Pittsburgh’s *Musical Forecast* entitled “Woman’s Progress in Music,” provided the sort of acclaim for the Chicago NLAPW concert for which Fergus hoped and calling it an outstanding example of “the progress women have made in the world of music, both as interpreters and composers.” The writer found the compositions presented “elaborate in form and content,” and the concert made “one wonder where women will be found in the world of music at the end of another century.”¹⁴² But the author was Edith Bane, herself a Pen Woman, and thus her article, like the League’s composition contests, reflected its separation from a male musical mainstream.

Unlike other women’s organizations with a musical mission, members’ creativity was at the very core of the National League of American Pen Women, the purpose of which was to encourage the creation of art rather than merely the performance or consumption of it. Its artistic products, published and performed, *could* potentially reach a wider audience, and the way in which Fergus and the Pen Women constructed their musical events as “American” further attempted to position them within a public context, not merely a feminine domain. Although Fergus’s concerts were associated with important national locations such as the White House, a long-standing gender division remained. Her means of gaining access for women composers to the White House was not through its musicales that showcased professional musicians, but via the social setting of a tea. The events that were intended to bring national recognition for female genius could not quite achieve this aim, because they took place in a setting constructed as feminine and domestic, Mrs. Roosevelt “at home.” In the midst of the Depression, Roosevelt’s own musical aims reached beyond

¹³⁸ Pearl Adams to Phyllis Fergus, May 10, 1934, PF no. 5, 22v [emphasis original].

¹³⁹ See Virginia Franklin Campbell, “Frances Copthorne: A Life of Musical Engagement Paved the Way for Others,” *The Pen Woman* 90, no. 8 (Spring 2014): 9, 31.

¹⁴⁰ Herman DeVries, “Music in Review,” and other clippings, Frances Copthorne Papers, folder 25.

¹⁴¹ Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women’s Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), xiv.

¹⁴² Edith Bane “Woman’s Progress in Music,” *Musical Forecast* [Pittsburgh, PA] 26, no. 2 (October 1933): [1], Women’s Symphony Orchestra Scrapbooks, vol. 2.

upper-class women with sufficient resources to compose. Ultimately the concert's location, as prestigious as it was, prevented the Pen Women from challenging the longstanding image of women's salon culture. Fergus's concert promotion was nonetheless part of an ongoing musical network in the United States that provided significant support for her colleagues, and it allowed Pen Women's compositional endeavors to be heard in a period sometimes portrayed as one of decline for women composers.

Appendix

National League of American Pen Women Composers' White House Programs

Musicale—East Room

Monday, April 23, 1934, 4 pm

Mrs. H. H. A. Beach

Mirage (poem by Bertha Ochsner)

Rendezvous

Ruth Schaffner, soprano

Evelyn Scott, Elsa Raner, violins

Mabel Duncan, violoncello

Composer at the piano

Frances Copthorne

"On My Last Day" (poem by Francesca Falk Miller)

Marie Sidenius Zendt, soprano

Violin, violoncello, and piano

Dorothy Emery

Duet from *Tropic Suite* (poem by Grace Seton Thompson)

Evelyn Randall, soprano

Harlan Randall, baritone

Violin, violoncello, and piano

Composer at the piano

Elizabeth Merz Butterfield

Prize Song, "Home"

Pearl Adams

"Lancaster Road Song" (poem by May Folwell Hoisington)

Harlan Randall, baritone

Pearl Adams, piano

Mrs. H. H. A. Beach

"Ah! Love but a Day"

"The Year's at the Spring"

Ruth Schaffner, soprano
Composer at the piano

**Composer Members Original Composition Program
Friday, April 17, 1936**

String Quartets (Bonita Crowe Prize Awards, 1926)

Margaret McClure Stitt

Ballerina

Radie Britain

Bondage

Linda Sool, Miriam Hadley, violins

Sarah Shatz, viola

Lillian Pringle, violoncello

Charlotte Caldwell

Soliloquy

Ruth Miller, soprano

Charlotte Caldwell, piano

Mary Howe

Melody at Dusk

Linda Sool, violin

Mary Howe, piano

Songs (Grace Porterfield Polk Awards, 1936)

Grace Warner Gulesian

“Life Comes Like a Pattern”

Bonita Crowe

“The Low Branching Lime”

Persis Heaton Trimble (lyric, Grace Porterfield Polk)

“Fairy of Spring”

Mrs. Crosby [Juliette] Adams (lyric, Edith Hope Kinney)

“Spring”

Grace Boles Hedge (lyric, Dorothy Terrel)

“To a Singer”

Lulu Jones Downing (lyric, Josephine Hancock Logan)

“Weep My Soul Away”

Robert Browning [*sic*]

“The Year’s at the Spring”

(Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, Dean of American Women Composers)

Ruth Shaffner, soprano

Mrs. Beach, Reminiscences—MacDowell Colony, Peterboro, New Hampshire

Mrs. H. H. A. Beach
Scherzino, A Chipmunk
Birches
Humming Bird
 Composer at the piano

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