

16 Women on the podium

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The orchestral conductor stands elevated on a podium commanding the most prestigious musical organization in Western culture. As Elias Canetti observed, “there is no more obvious expression of power than the performance of a conductor.”¹ This display of power conflicts with traditional views of women and may explain why conducting remains “the last male bastion” in musical life.

Like the gendering of genius, the “maestro myth” is male.² Jorge Mester, a conducting teacher at Juilliard when JoAnn Falletta became the first woman to earn a doctorate in orchestral conducting there in 1989, identified “forceful personality and charisma” as key elements, in addition to skill, for a major career.³ These traits are conventionally identified with men and put women conductors in a double bind. Andrea Quinn notes that women conductors “need to get results by persuasion. It’s pointless trying to throw your weight around. Coming from a man, that can be seen as authoritative. From a woman, it’s just considered bossy.”⁴ Despite a host of obstacles, however, women have long been conductors.

Early women conductors

The earliest description of a baton conductor (in 1594) is of a woman, though like many early-twentieth-century women conductors, “the Maestra” at the convent in San Vito in Ferrara leads an all-women ensemble.⁵ Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805–47) conducted a mixed ensemble of men and women, but only in a private setting. Hensel began conducting her own large choral-orchestral works at private salons (*Sonntagsmusik*) in the early 1830s while her brother Felix developed a public conducting career. In a letter of December 28, 1831, Felix commented on his sister’s cautious conducting of her cantata *Lobgesang* (1831) and then chided her about details of the orchestration and text selection.⁶ After attending a Mendelssohn *Sonntagsmusik* in the mid-1840s, Johanna Kinkel (1810–58), a composer, pianist, and conductor, wrote favorably about Fanny’s conducting:

Fanny Hensel’s interpretive skills impressed me even more than the great voices I heard at her house. I was particularly impressed by her conducting. The spirit of a work was grasped in its most intimate texture, pouring forth

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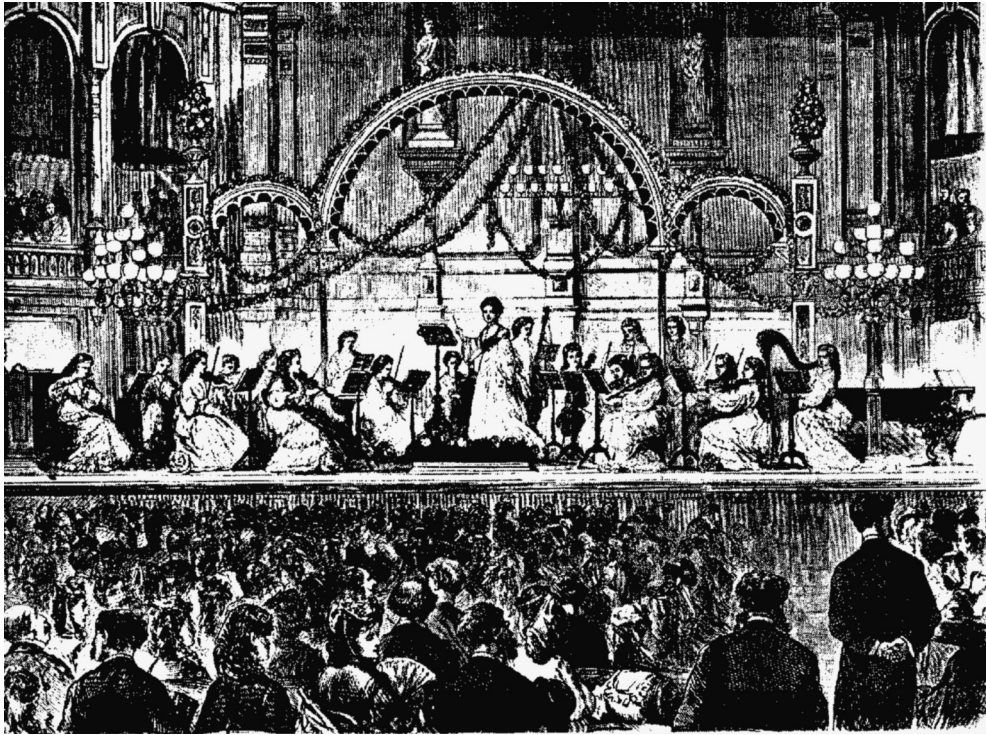


Figure 16.1 Josephine Weinlich conducts the professional Vienna Ladies' Orchestra at the old Steinway Hall, New York (1871)

to fill the souls of listeners and singers alike. A *sforzando* from her little finger would flash across our souls like an electric discharge, enrapturing us in quite a different way than a wooden baton tapping on a music stand.⁷

In 1847 Fanny Hensel died while conducting a rehearsal from the piano of her brother's cantata *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* for one of the Sunday *musicales*.⁸

Emma Roberto Steiner (?1852–1929) and Caroline B. Nichols (1864–1939) were the first women conductors in the US to establish and maintain full careers.⁹ Nichols was conductor of the Boston Fadette Orchestra, which she founded in 1888; it primarily toured summer resorts and vaudeville theaters on the Keith circuit throughout the US and Canada. Unlike similar women's groups, the Fadettes and Nichols developed a national reputation and a broad repertoire of six hundred pieces, including symphony movements, opera overtures, popular songs, and dramatic music used for silent films. Nichols claimed the Fadettes, who grew from six to twenty performers during their first decade, gave over six thousand concerts between 1890 and 1920. During a similar period, Emma Steiner toured as a conductor of

light opera companies in the US, performing over fifty different operas and operettas. Heinrich Conried, who managed one of the opera companies she conducted, is said to have wanted to hire her for the Metropolitan Opera when he became manager there in 1903, but did not dare because she was a woman.

“New women” and their orchestras

Although the late nineteenth century included other women conductors, conducting opportunities increased with the all-women orchestras of the 1920s and 1930s, which also brought a shift from lighter music to symphonic repertoire. All-women orchestras played an important role in the careers of Elisabeth Kuyper (1877–1953), Ethel Leginska (1886–1970), Antonia Brico (1902–89), and Frédérique Petrides (1903–83).

Elisabeth Kuyper, a Dutch conductor and composer, founded four women’s symphonies, first in Europe and then in the United States. Each of her orchestras – in Berlin (1910), The Hague (1922), London (1922–3), and the American Women’s Symphony Orchestra in New York (1924–5) – encountered financial problems and was short-lived. The Berliner Tonkünstlerinnen-Orchester, although billed as an all-women ensemble, actually engaged men for brass, basses, and even some woodwinds.

Ethel Leginska (née Liggins), a concert pianist with a well-established international career, began conducting studies to gain insights into orchestration for her compositional activity, but was soon drawn to orchestral conducting. She studied during 1923 with Eugene Goossens in London and Robert Heger in Munich. Using contacts from her concertizing, she arranged guest-conducting appearances in 1924 with major orchestras in Berlin, London, Munich, and Paris. She often included her own orchestral compositions and performed piano concertos while conducting from the keyboard. Her American debut with the New York Symphony at Carnegie Hall on January 9, 1925 was the first appearance of a women conductor with a major American symphony, and in the summer she appeared at the Hollywood Bowl. During the 1925–6 season, she moved to Boston where on at least five occasions she appeared as guest conductor with the People’s Symphony, comprised of former Boston Symphony players. In 1926, Leginska completely abandoned her career as a pianist to pursue conducting. In announcing this shift, Leginska, who was notorious for problems with nerves as a pianist, offered a surprising commentary:

No one knows how I have suffered for the past seventeen years every time I have been obliged to face an audience. I have no regrets. Concert playing may be spectacular, but the great art is in composing and conducting. I am never frightened when I conduct.¹⁰



Figure 16.2 Ethel Leginska dressed to conduct (unidentified newspaper clipping, New York Public Library, Leginska clipping file)

Leginska shared traits with others identified as “new women” during the 1910s and 1920s: bobbed hair, concert attire modeled on men’s formal wear (see Fig. 16.2), outspokenness about feminist issues, and a serious focus on work and career. Reviews of her early concerts were quite favorable.

Unable to secure a position as permanent conductor, Leginska founded the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra of ninety men, which played to large, enthusiastic audiences and received good reviews, but survived financially for only one season (1926–7). By spring 1927, Leginska had accepted a position with the newly formed Boston Women’s Symphony, which made tours of fifty to seventy-five concerts each fall in 1928–30. Beth Abelson Macleod noted that this orchestra was more uniformly praised and suggested that Leginska’s increased success was in part due to frequent rehearsals, and the longevity of working with the same ensemble. She also hypothesized that “the women in the group accepted her as their conductor in a way that many men in other orchestras had not. It is also possible that reviewers felt more comfortable watching a woman conduct a group of women than a

group of men.”¹¹ Leginska also served as conductor of the Chicago Women’s Symphony Orchestra (1927–9), and in 1932 formed the National Women’s Symphony, which performed only one concert. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, she gave particular attention to opera and guest-conducted with London, Havana, and Dallas symphonies. As society became increasingly less tolerant of women in public positions and unconventional careers during the 1930s, Leginska’s opportunities, especially with orchestras of men, faded. In 1940 she moved to Los Angeles to teach piano and did not conduct again during the last thirty years of her life.

Antonia Brico went to Bayreuth in the summer of 1927 to study with Karl Muck, and was then selected for the conducting program with him at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik, becoming the first woman and the first American admitted to this prestigious program. After graduating in 1929, she made her professional debut with the Berlin Philharmonic to positive reviews, followed by appearances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and major European orchestras. With the rise of Nazism, she returned and founded the Women’s Orchestra of New York (later called New York Women’s Symphony) in 1934. Performing in Carnegie and Town Halls, this orchestra was a fiscal and critical success. Believing she had proven women were capable musicians, Brico transformed the Women’s Symphony into the Brico Symphony Orchestra in 1939. One of the earliest mixed orchestras, the new ensemble also performed to critical acclaim; however, the board of directors withdrew financial support in opposition to the inclusion of men, and the orchestra disbanded after one season. Brico, who was the first woman to conduct the New York Philharmonic on July 25, 1938, now found even guest-conducting opportunities dwindling. She moved to Denver in the early 1940s thinking she would be appointed permanent conductor of the Denver Symphony but was rejected without audition because she was a woman. She took church jobs to support herself and developed a private studio of conducting, piano, and voice students. In 1947, she was hired to conduct the Denver Businessmen’s Orchestra (later renamed the Brico Symphony) and continued with this amateur group of women and men until 1985. The film, *Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman*,¹² documented her professional disappointments and briefly revitalized her career after its premiere in 1973. Brico was engaged as a guest conductor at Lincoln Center and the Hollywood Bowl, and made her first international appearances in nearly two decades. In 1977 she conducted her final New York concert with the Brooklyn Philharmonic.

Unlike Leginska and Petrides, Brico repeatedly denied being a feminist although she was very aware of discrimination against women. Her conducting style was probably also more conservative than Leginska’s, given the restraint of Brico’s teacher, Karl Muck.¹³ Olin Downes, reviewing for

the *New York Times* in 1933, noted that Brico “proved her knowledge of her scores, her careful study of every detail and her good technical power over the orchestra.”¹⁴ Conductor Kate Tamarkin (b. 1955), who saw Brico conduct the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1975, thought Brico “conducted harder than any man I have ever seen. She beat Beethoven dead.”¹⁵

After conducting study at New York University with John Lawrence Erb, Frédérique Petrides failed to find professional conducting opportunities, which led her to found the *Orchestrette Classique* (later called the *Orchestrette of New York*), an all-women orchestra with a particularly long and distinguished history (1933–43). Petrides and this chamber orchestra of twenty to forty members became known for innovative programming of little-known repertoire by well-known composers, premieres and performances of American works, and occasional performances of compositions by women composers. Premieres and performances conducted by Petrides were important to such American composers as Paul Creston, Julia Smith, David Diamond, and Samuel Barber. Her concerts at Aeolian Hall and Carnegie Recital Hall were well attended, and reviewed in New York newspapers. By 1943, however, women were being hired in formerly all-male orchestras due to the war and most of the all-women ensembles disappeared.

Petrides then developed a series of popular free outdoor concerts. The inaugural concerts in 1956 were given at Washington Square Park with an orchestra of men from the New York Philharmonic,¹⁶ followed by the Carl Schurz Park Concerts (1958–62) and the West Side Orchestral Concerts (1962–77). Petrides founded another orchestra, the *Festival Symphony* (1960–75), for this project and performed the final two summer seasons with members of the *American Symphony*.¹⁷ Petrides’s career was almost exclusively with orchestras she created and for which she did extensive administrative work; however, she was successful conducting women’s, men’s, and finally mixed orchestras. Her conducting was described as “clean-cut”¹⁸ with a “brisk, businesslike beat,”¹⁹ and she was praised as an “able conductor with a musicianly sense for the right tempo.”²⁰

Boulanger

Nadia Boulanger (1887–1979) had no connection with all-women orchestras. Despite having less training than Leginska, Brico, and Petrides, she became the most successful woman conductor to emerge during the 1930s. Within a few short years after conducting her first full program in 1933 at the salon of the *Princesse de Polignac*, she had become

known as an important conductor, making dozens of appearances with Parisian orchestras and becoming the first woman to direct the Royal Philharmonic and the orchestras of Boston and Philadelphia, and one of the very few [women] to direct the New York Philharmonic and the National Symphony. Before the end of the decade she had conducted for radio in France, Belgium, England and the United States, and directed a highly influential recording of works by Monteverdi that is still in circulation.²¹

Jeanice Brooks attributes her remarkable success to “her undeniable musicianship and legendary charisma,”²² along with the projection of an image that reconciled Boulanger’s conducting career with conventional understandings of acceptable behavior for women. This image stemmed initially from an article by Simone Ratel published in 1928, in which Boulanger’s sexuality and gender were erased by comparing her with a celibate male (a priest) and discussing her activities within a framework of service (an acceptable female behavior). Boulanger’s conducting was also characterized as an extension of her teaching: a result of chance rather than of ambition. Accounts of her conducting consistently reference her age, simplicity of dress, her synthesis of male and female traits (androgyny), and her reserved stage demeanor. Her decision to conduct without the potentially phallic baton (originally used only as a symbol of authority, held in the left hand)²³ reinforced this image and helped her career.

Writers in almost every pre-war account of Boulanger’s conducting “avoided the vocabulary of subjective power (choosing, controlling, directing, interpreting) in favor of a vocabulary that stressed self-effacement and restraint.”²⁴ For some critics, of course, these were simply feminine weaknesses.

I will say sincerely what impression I had of weakness and monotony, at the sight of a lady, thin and rigid, raising her arms symmetrically and sempiternally, in a gesture always the same, left and right together, in a very school-mistressy style . . . order, precision: but where were the breath, the enthusiasm, the fire, the power that transports and lifts up?²⁵

The very traits criticized here, however, are the ones that allowed her success in the mainstream.

By defining the role of the conductor as one which did not require traditionally male qualities of leadership, but rather traditionally female characteristics of self-sacrifice and modesty, Boulanger and her public were able to meet narrative expectations in some ways while stretching their boundaries in others. For the most part these are not conscious strategies, but rather gestures of diplomacy aimed at reconciling two apparently irreconcilable ideas: the female gender of Nadia Boulanger the conductor and the supposed inability of women to conduct.²⁶

Boulanger's strategy preserved normative social structures and did little to open a door for subsequent generations of women conductors. On the contrary, Boulanger reinforced a gender ideology that continues to limit opportunities and success for women conductors today.

United States

The presence of women conductors with US orchestras began with Europeans; Frenchwoman Catherine Comet (b. 1944) became the first woman in the principal conducting position of a fully professional orchestra with her appointment in 1986 as music director of the Grand Rapids Symphony. Comet, who at age twelve announced her intention to be a conductor to Nadia Boulanger and then studied privately with her for several years, was also Principal Conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra (1990–2). Iona Brown (b. 1941), born in Britain and trained in Europe, was hired as Music Director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, in 1987. Brown, who often led the orchestra with her bow from the principal violin seat, had already served as director of Britain's highly acclaimed Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields (1974–80) as well as Artistic Director of the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra in Oslo and Principal Guest Director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Not until 1989 was an American woman engaged to lead a regional orchestra: JoAnn Falletta (b. 1954) became music director for the Long Beach Symphony and two years later also music director with the Virginia Symphony.

The situation is clearly improving for women, but participation of women conductors and orchestral musicians is in inverse proportion to orchestra budgets: the bigger the budget, the fewer women are engaged. By 1988, only two women had even been associate conductors with major symphonies; "major" is a category reserved by the American Federation of Musicians for the approximately fifty orchestras with the largest budgets. Comet was again the first, serving with the Baltimore Symphony from 1984 to 1986. In 1985, Falletta became the second, when she was appointed Associate Conductor of the Milwaukee Symphony. Women finally broke into the second tier of the majors as music directors with the appointment in 1993 of Marin Alsop (b. 1956) to the Colorado Symphony.²⁷ In the fall of 1999, two more women embarked on appointments as music directors for second-tier ensembles: Falletta with the Buffalo (New York) Philharmonic Orchestra²⁸ and Anne Manson (b. 1961) with the Kansas City Symphony. No woman has yet held a conducting position with an American "Big Five" orchestra (Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, and Philadelphia).

The chief increase in women conductors of professional US orchestras came during the decade between 1988 and 1998 when the number of

Table 16.1 *Top conducting positions with professional orchestras held by women. Compiled from information provided by ASOL*

Old categories	Majors		Regionals		Metropolitans		Totals
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	
1988							
No. held by women	0		2		2		4
1990							
No. of orchestras	22	24	25	28			
No. held by women	0	0	2	2			
Percent held by women	0	0	8.0	7.1			
1998							
No. of orchestras	25	23	28	36	44	96	252
No. held by women	0	2	2	1	2	7	14
Percent held by women	4.2		4.7		6.4		5.6
2002							
No. of orchestras	25	31	27	40	53	111	287
No. held by women	0	3	0	3	3	8	17
Percent held by women	5.4		4.5		6.7		5.9

music director or principal conductor posts occupied by women increased from seven to twenty-eight. Among members of the American Symphony Orchestra League (ASOL),²⁹ the percentage of women remained virtually unchanged between 1998 and 2002. Table 16.1 provides data about the employment pattern for women conductors in the US.

The two most developed American careers belong to Falletta and Alsop, who were each told they could not become conductors. Falletta was told no woman had ever worked as a conductor, and a teacher at Juilliard's Preparatory Department told the young Alsop that "girls can't be conductors." Both, however, had families who supported their musical development. Falletta began musical training at age seven with guitar lessons because her family's New York City apartment was not large enough for a piano. Trips to concerts with her immigrant parents and sister sparked her interest in conducting. Alsop's parents are both string players with the New York City Ballet Orchestra. When her father learned of Marin's interest in conducting, he bought her a box of conducting batons. Both received conducting prizes early in their careers. In 1982 Falletta won the Toscanini and Bruno Walter awards and in 1985 the Stokowski Competition. In 1989 Alsop also won the Stokowski Competition and was the first woman awarded the coveted Koussevitzky Conducting Prize at Tanglewood, where she was a pupil of Bernstein, Ozawa, and Gustav Meier. Under Falletta, the Buffalo Philharmonic has returned to national prominence.³⁰ Alsop is founding conductor of Concordia, a New York chamber orchestra emphasizing jazz and "crossover" repertoire, and has held music director appointments with the Long Island Philharmonic



Figure 16.3 Marin Alsop in action with the Colorado Symphony

(1990–6) and Eugene (Oregon) Symphony (1990–6), as well as the directorship of the Cabrillo Festival and an appointment as the Creative Conductor Chair with the St. Louis Symphony. In 1999 she accepted appointments as Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the City of London Sinfonia, and in 2002 she was engaged as Principal Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Alsop's extensive experience as a violinist has helped create successful interactions with players, and her on-stage concert commentaries are well received by audiences. Both conductors have sizable discographies, broad repertoires that include American composers, and outstanding reviews from major journalists.³¹

Two additional conductors currently based in the United States are Gisèle Ben-Dor (b. 1955) and Keri-Lynn Wilson (b. 1967). Ben-Dor was born in Uruguay of Polish parents; she later immigrated to Israel (1973) and studied at the Tel Aviv Academy of Music and at Yale. She served as assistant conductor of the Louisville Orchestra (1987–8) and the resident conductor of the Houston Symphony (1988–91) before becoming music director of the Annapolis Symphony (1991–7), Boston Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra (1991–2000), and the Santa Barbara Symphony from 1994. Ben-Dor's professional conducting debut with the Israel Philharmonic in Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*, when she was nine months pregnant, led to a reinvitation. Twice

she has stepped in at the last moment with the New York Philharmonic (in 1993 and 1999), conducting without rehearsal or scores; each time she has received complimentary reviews.³² Winnipeg native Keri-Lynn Wilson earned bachelors and masters degrees in flute at Juilliard and then completed a masters degree in conducting at Juilliard with Otto-Werner Mueller. She was a conducting fellow at Tanglewood, worked as Claudio Abbado's assistant with the Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg Festival in 1992, and was the Associate Conductor of the Dallas Symphony (1994–8). Since then she has made guest-conducting appearances with the Berlin Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Vienna State Opera.³³

England

Before Alsop's appointment in Bournemouth, Iona Brown, Sian Edwards (b. 1959), Jane Glover (b. 1949), and Odaline de la Martinez (b. 1949) had already broken the barriers with many of England's leading musical institutions. After winning the first Leeds Conductors' Competition in 1984, Sian Edwards made her London debut with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra a year later, then assisted at the Glyndebourne Festival, and made her American debut with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra in 1988. After declining twice, she accepted an appointment as music director of the English National Opera in 1993, but left rather abruptly after two successful seasons—this was widely attributed in the press to the fact she is a woman. She has been particularly noted for her conducting of Russian music, a specialty gained during her conducting study in Leningrad with Ilya Musin.

Jane Glover, whose debut came a decade earlier, appears regularly at the Glyndebourne Festival, English National Opera, the Proms, and Britain's leading orchestras. Glover served as Artistic Director of the London Mozart Players (1984–91); she has an even longer association conducting the London Choral Society and continues her work with the Huddersfield Choral Society as Principal Guest Conductor. She made her debut in the United States in 1994, leading the Orchestra of St. Luke's with soprano Jessye Norman at Lincoln Center, and returns regularly to Glimmerglass and the New York City Opera. She wrote a doctoral thesis on Cavalli and early Venetian opera at Oxford, but she conducts Baroque to contemporary repertoire. Mozart remains a strength with "rigorous attack, beautifully nuanced and artfully shaped phrasing and attention to the inner workings of the score."³⁴

Cuban-born Odaline de la Martinez became the first woman to conduct a BBC Prom Concert in 1984. She has since worked with major orchestras

in Britain and abroad and is conductor of the European Women's Orchestra and her own Lontano chamber ensemble. Based in London, she has conducted in Columbia, New Zealand, and Canada, and served as director of the Cardiff Music Festival in 1994.

In a younger generation of British conductors are Wasfi Kani (b. 1956), Julia Jones (b. 1961), and Andrea Quinn (b. 1964). After a decade of designing computer systems, Kani took up professional conducting in 1986 and later founded Pimlico Opera, a small company which performs in unusual locations, including prisons. Jones has largely advanced through various posts in Germany from répétiteur to Principal Conductor of the Staatstheater Darmstadt (1995–7). After her highly praised 1996 interpretation of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* was compared favorably with that of Arturo Toscanini, she was engaged as Chefdirigentin with Oper Basel in the 1998–9 season.³⁵ Quinn, who became music director of New York City Ballet in 2001, worked previously at the Royal Ballet (1998–2001) and the Birmingham Royal Ballet. Her rather short tenure with the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden stemmed from criticism by orchestral players that she was not fully prepared. She apologized and then led well-regarded performances. According to Norman Lebrecht, “that would have been the end of the matter had she been a man. There is no shortage of male conductors who turn up with a half-read score and get away with a self-deprecating grin and a round of drinks. But with a female conductor, orchestras are less tolerant.”³⁶ Quinn tendered her resignation in February 2000 and has stayed silent about the matter.

Europe

JoAnn Falletta has been the first woman on several European podiums, including that of Belgium's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 1992, but confirms the prevailing notion that European orchestras are eager to have women as guest conductors, although they are still reluctant to consider them for music director positions.³⁷ In 1997, Germany reported only six women conductors for its 163 symphonies.³⁸ Sian Edwards sees the shift towards a more co-operative relationship between conductor and orchestras as an opportunity for women conductors; however, these new women conductors “are misunderstood and mocked or ridiculed either as a goddess or a hysterical teenager.”³⁹

Swiss conductor Sylvia Caduff (b. 1937) became the first woman to hold a principal conductor position in Germany with her appointment in the late 1970s as Chefdirigentin with the orchestra in Solingen.⁴⁰ Not until two

decades later did a native German woman hold a similar post; Romely Pfund (b. 1955) became Chefdirigentin for the Neubrandenburger Philharmonie in 1987. A resident of Dresden, Pfund's achievements may be partially due to the woman-friendly educational system of the former GDR. After guest appearances in the US, Russia, Europe, and Japan, Pfund became music director of the Bergische Symphoniker in 1998, which serves the cities of Remscheid and Solingen. Another Swiss conductor, Marie-Jeanne Dufour (b. 1955) became the first woman General Music Director of a German state theatre with her appointment in Meiningen after working with the Zürich and Hamburg opera houses as well as in Wiesbaden.

Frenchwoman Claire Gibault (b. 1945), particularly noted for her performances of French music as well as opera, was conductor of the Lyon Opera Orchestra and director of the opera workshop at the Opéra de Lyon (1990–8). At seventeen years of age, she was the first woman to win first prize for orchestral conducting at the Paris Conservatory, and by the late 1980s had conducted most of the major French orchestras. Her appearance with L'Orchestra del Teatro dell'Opera di Roma in 1986 made her the first woman conductor to appear in Italy in a professional orchestral concert. This was in a series of concerts called *Podio Donna* (literally "Woman and the Conductor's Podium") sponsored by the Commission for Equality. Gibault, who was also the first woman to conduct members of the Berlin Philharmonic (1997), makes regular guest appearances at La Scala, Covent Garden, Glyndebourne Festival, Edinburgh Festival, and both the Opéra-Comique and Opéra-Bastille in Paris. While in Lyon, Gibault has commissioned several contemporary works, including two operas, which have both toured extensively under her direction. In 2000 she returned to Italy as music director of Musica per Roma, leading opera performances there as well as making subsequent appearances at the Teatro Comunale in Bologna and at Rome's Teatro Nazionale during the following two years.

In 1997, Anu Tali (b. 1972) co-founded the multinational Estonia–Finnish Symphony Orchestra with her twin sister, Kadri, who handles the business aspects of the orchestra. Her debut recording with the orchestra paired Estonian composer Veljo Tormis with Sibelius and Debussy to very positive reviews.⁴¹ She trained with Ilya Musin in St. Petersburg and has conducted the Estonian National Symphony, Moscow Symphony Orchestra, and Finland's Vaasa City Orchestra. Russian Veronika Dudarova (b. 1916) was Chief Conductor of the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra from 1960 to 1989 and founded the State Symphony Orchestra of Russia, where she continues as its Chief Conductor. Agnieszka Duczmal from Poland was the first woman to conduct at La Scala and conducts the Amadeus Chamber Orchestra in Warsaw.

Australia, Asia

Australian Simone Young (b. 1961) made her debut with Australian Opera in 1985 and later became the first woman to lead at the Vienna Volksoper, the Vienna Staatsoper, the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich, and the Paris Opéra-Bastille. Young has conducted at Covent Garden and the Metropolitan Opera. Anthony Tommasini noted that “even the crusty, all-male Vienna Philharmonic has taken to her balletic conducting style and alert musical intelligence.”⁴² Seeking to elevate their prestige and improve their performance standards, Opera Australia engaged Young as music director for three years beginning in 2001. In a surprise move that was unpopular with the public, they announced in late 2002 that her contract would not be renewed because they could not afford her artistic vision.⁴³ Nicolette Fraillon (b. 1960), who was the first woman to conduct the Australian Ballet has now been appointed music director and chief conductor of the ballet company for 2003.

As in the US, Asian pioneers have often worked with all-women ensembles. Since winning first prize in the Concours International de Jeunes Chefs d’Orchestre in Besançon, France in 1982, Matsuo Yōko⁴⁴ (b. 1953) has developed a substantial conducting career, primarily in her native Japan. She has conducted the well-respected Ladies Orchestra Japan and Nagoya’s Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra (since 1998) as well as making guest appearances with most of Japan’s major symphonies.⁴⁵ China’s first woman conductor, Zheng Xiaoying (b. 1932), was educated in China and at the Moscow Conservatory of Music. In 1989 she founded the Ai Yue Nu Philharmonic Society, an all-women orchestra playing both Western and Chinese music. Later she was Chief Conductor of China’s Central Opera Theatre, and in 1998 Zheng was invited to form the Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra.⁴⁶

Barriers

The obstacles for women conductors are often concrete – symphony management, boards, donors, artist agents, critics, and teachers – but the reasons are often cultural or ideological. Orchestra boards, for example, often question a woman’s ability to maintain discipline. Tim Page, of the *Washington Post*, admits that “It’s silly to say that a woman cannot conduct an orchestra, but orchestras are [or] can be notoriously temperamental places; and if you have a few sort of entrenched sexist, who aren’t going to play for a woman, that’s going to be a problem.”⁴⁷ By 2001 the three largest agencies in North America represented seventy-seven conductors, but still only four women.⁴⁸ The reason given, that it is hard to market women conductors, is another self-perpetuating myth.

The language of music reviews also tends to reinforce the common myths. Praise of women conductors often uses patronizing vocabulary. Rave reviews and articles about men frequently use terms such as “virile” and “muscular” – words that tend to exclude women – while women are described as “enthusiastic” – not a comparable term. Even the frequent use of “rare” or “unusual,” even in women’s own publications, reinforces the notion that women conductors are outside the mainstream.

A mentor is an essential ingredient for a conductor’s success and while some women (Comet, Young, Alsop, and Manson, for example) have had male mentors (Slatkin, Barenboim, Bernstein, and Abbado respectively), the lack of active women role models has been a liability. The enrollment of women in a dozen of the top conservatories and conducting programs in universities shows about the same number of women today as ten or twenty years ago, and none of these institutions has a woman teaching orchestral conducting.⁴⁹

Few women conductors want to discuss gender in the press, but women have of necessity had to adjust to what remains a male environment. When Nadia Boulanger faced a Boston Symphony Orchestra which was “disruptive, inconsiderate, [and] inattentive,”⁵⁰ her strategy for reestablishing order was to appeal to the men for the sake of the music, rather than complaining about their behavior. Falletta credits Jorge Mester at Juilliard with helping her learn to avoid apologizing for making appropriate demands on musicians. “The more I got into conducting the more I had to come to terms with how I was raised as a young Catholic girl. We were taught to be supportive, nurturing, gentle, kind.”⁵¹ As long as orchestras and management remain dominated by men, cultural conditioning about leadership will pose liabilities for women on the podium. Just before her Carnegie Hall debut with the New York Philharmonic in 1939, Boulanger told a journalist, “A priori, a man has more authority over a body of men . . . If men were perfectly frank I believe they should say they prefer to be led by men.”⁵² Symphony decision-makers need to move beyond their conventional comfort zone to create space for talented women.

Women have achieved greater success in choral music and opera. American conductors noted for their choral work include Gena Branscombe (1881–1977), Eva Jessye (1885–1992), Margaret Hillis (1921–98), Elaine Browne (1910–97), and Amy Kaiser (b. 1945). Canadian women Morna Edmundson and Diane Loomer are codirectors of Elektra Women’s Choir. In opera, the conductor works in the pit rather than in the spotlight and this may have been more acceptable to audiences, orchestras, and even conductors. Jane Glover admits, “Maybe that’s why I like it because I’m out of sight.”⁵³ Further, the route to opera conductor often begins with rehearsal pianist and coach, a position frequently held by women at least in

the US, and one more consistent with conventional roles for women: nurturing backstage. Many women have worked predominantly in opera: Sarah Caldwell (b. 1924), founder of the Opera Company of Boston in 1957 and first woman to conduct an opera performance at the Metropolitan Opera in 1976; Judith Somogi (1937–88), whose career was centered in Europe with the Frankfurt Opera (1981–7) after early success at the New York City Opera; and Eve Queler (b. 1936), who has received international acclaim for her concert versions of rarely performed operas presented by her own Opera Orchestra of New York.

Future

Is it really just a matter of time until women conductors are more visible and are hired as music directors for top orchestras? Even with the large number of music director vacancies in major American orchestras during 2000–2, Gwendolyn Freed reported that “knowledgeable sources say that no woman made the secret shortlists of candidates” for Philadelphia, New York, Cleveland, and St. Paul, nor subsequently at the Boston Symphony or Minnesota Orchestra.⁵⁴ In 1936, Petrides wrote “that the day is not far distant when the sight of women conductors will no longer evoke feelings of curiosity and surprise.”⁵⁵ While the novelty of all-women ensembles did soon evaporate, so did the women conductors. Women orchestral players gained opportunities in mixed orchestras during World War II, and orchestras in the United States finally began to hire American music directors during the 1940s and 1950s, but only men. The situation has improved slightly since the 1930s, but conducting remains more resistant to women than almost any other field.⁵⁶

Tim Page suggests that:

What needs to happen for women conductors in general is one person must come along who has the amazing charisma and star quality and, of course talent – but talent is assumed – to break down the barriers once and for all. With all due respect to some wonderful musicians out there, I don’t think that yet we have had that sort of a figure come along who just galvanizes everything she touches. I’m sure it will happen, and I’m looking forward to that day.⁵⁷

To move toward that day more quickly, we need to increase public awareness of women conductors, and promote broad social and cultural changes to help dismantle the bogus rationalizations for not hiring women conductors. Women also need to support other women; for Opera Australia’s 2002 season Simone Young hired women for three out of five guest spots. In

1999 Young engaged Karen Kamensek (b. 1970), an American, to assist her at the Bergen Philharmonic, and this helped pave the way for Kamensek's debut with the Vienna Volksoper, where she has now conducted more than sixty performances, and her appointment as General Music Director of the Städtischen Bühnen Freiburg beginning in 2003. Although Young resists identifying herself as a role model, she is helping talented women conductors build careers with her direct actions, as well as through her own pioneering career on many podiums.