

Sound Expertise – Episode 8

TRANSCRIPT prepared by Andrew Dell'Antonio

SPEAKERS

Marian Wilson-Kimber, Will Robin, Unidentified 1913 speaker

Marian Wilson-Kimber 00:00

You know, I think the problem with viewing the canon as central, and seeing these women as trying to get into it, perpetuates the sort of misogyny we have in the way we approach all of this. Because while you're saying oh, here's Oh, here's Beach and here's Ruth Crawford Seeger you know, there's a Pen Women's chapter in Knoxville, Tennessee, who over the course of 20 years does pieces by 70 women composers.

Unidentified 1913 speaker 00:28

[Music]

Will Robin 00:49

What is music history? This seems like a pretty straightforward question. If you've ever taken a music history class, you've probably learned about great musicians like Franz Schubert and Guillaume Dufay and Duke Ellington and their lives and their music. But the question is actually a little bit more complicated. For decades now musicologists have continually debated what music history is. Is it the history of music as in the lives and works of great composers? Or is it history through music? What music can tell us about wars and revolutions, the role of music in shaping major historical events? Or is it not about those big composers and big historical events at all? What if music history is a history of how music is consumed and what it has meant, how everyday people listen to and make music in everyday life? There's no one answer, really. Musicologists treat musical history in different ways in classrooms, textbooks, articles, monographs... I teach a different kind of music history to my music appreciation class than I do to music majors, than I do when I give a conference paper, than I do in a book or a journal article. For major institutions like Symphony Orchestras, though there is a clear answer. They are focused on performing the great works of the past. And so they care a lot more about Schubert than they do about, say, the Metternich era of the Austrian Empire, or about amateur musicians who played in their parlors in the 19th century. And so when we make necessary calls for symphony orchestras to diversify their repertoire, to consider programming not just Schubert, but also Clara Wieck Schumann and Amy Beach, we are asking them to elevate women composers to the same status that men have held in the canon for centuries. But again, that's not the only version of music history. Adding a couple more women to our collection of European greats reveals a fuller picture of 19th century music, but the picture is still not nearly complete. Because there were a lot of women making music in the 19th century who never wrote symphonies or even sonatas, many of them instead dedicated significant time and thought to doing something that we not only don't hear in our concert halls, we also don't even learn about in our classrooms: reading poetry aloud, accompanied by music.

This was a practice totally unknown to me until I encountered Marian Wilson Kimber's fascinating 2015 book, *The Elocutionists: women, music, and the spoken word*. I'm Will Robin, your host for Sound Expertise. When I started this podcast I knew I wanted to talk to Marian, a professor at the University of Iowa School of Music, about elocution, and her rediscovery of this fascinating and important chapter in the history of music. Here is our conversation. So you have this really fascinating book from a few years ago called *The Elocutionists*, and I suspect that some of our listeners won't necessarily know actually what this term elocution is. I'm not even sure if I knew what it was before I started reading or hearing about your work. Can you explain what is elocution?

Marian Wilson-Kimber 03:50

Elocution is in the simplest form, just the art of speaking, and it was something people were trained in -- You know, if you if you were male, you would learn to speak in order to be a lawyer or a politician or a preacher. And it enabled you to speak correctly and pronounce things correctly and project in the era before microphones. But women were also trained in elocution as well, because they were supposed to be able to read to their families and help educate their children. So the oral was a big part of 19th century life, you have to think there's no screen time. So people are reading to each other and listening to each other. So speaking is very important.

Will Robin 04:41

And so in the context of your research, what does that mean? Who are the elocution is of your book, because it's not just people learning to read, right? It's all out, it's reading aloud with this kind of musical component.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 04:53

Yeah. So I became interested in elocution, because I was interested in the combination of music and speech and how much speech occurred in 19th century concerts. You know, we think when we go to a concert now, we don't expect somebody to stand up between movements of the symphony and read a poem. That was not that uncommon in the 19th century. So I was mostly interested in how much speech took place in public performance. And I was also interested in how people's voices sounded, because a lot of the reviews I read particularly of actors and actresses talked about how musical their speech was. So I was interested in how they were trained. And then I discovered also that people performed with music, spoken word to music. So I was interested in that as well. And the thing about the late 19th century is there were lots and lots of pieces that were written during this period for, like, piano and speaker or even orchestra and speaker, I was initially very interested in those and then I would go to the press literature or the reviews and I couldn't find people really performing them as much as I wanted to. And I kept ignoring the pieces that people said they were doing with music. Because what turns out is people were not doing these notated pieces, which are long and complicated and require a lot of rehearsal. what people were doing was getting their friend, the pianist to play a popular song behind their poem, or, you know, if a poem says ... refers to a song or a hymn, they would get their friend to play that. So there was a much more informal practice that I tried, as a musicologist trained in notation, tried desperately to ignore. And once I stopped ignoring it, lots of things made a lot more sense to me about how music and speech interacted in the 19th century.

Will Robin 07:03

Interesting. Yeah, I mean, it seems like we all have this tendency to gravitate towards like the musical work. And that means, you know, looking for what the piece is called. And then you discover, I guess you discover basically like, that's not ...these random pieces of speech and music are actually not nearly as interesting as what people actually do, like the doing of music versus the kind of like, score of music. And so what was that practice like? How did that develop, this idea of speaking poetry accompanied by someone playing the piano in some capacity.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 07:37

So it became known as accompanied recitation. And since elocutionists were often on programs with pianists or singers, they... you know, it was very easy to do. And there were particular poems that became standardized poems that you did with music. So... and these were poems that had music in them, right? They ... somebody's singing in the poem or somebody is referring to the song their mother used to sing to them. So it was just natural to do this, to put the music in and give them more sort of ... you're in the moment experience with the music and so you would see this very often, that a particular performer does this piece with music and I see it over and over again. And I ... the problem is then figuring out, okay, well what music did they do it with? And sometimes it's obvious and other times it's not, or it was flexible. So there was a piece called ... a poem called music on the Rappahannock, which is a poem about Union and southern troops standing across the Rappahannock river and playing music to each other, they're... sort of competitively. And at the end somebody ... the trumpeter plays "Home sweet home." And of course, everybody, you know, then weeps. And we... the soldiers are brought together by music. Well, this sounds like it ought to be an easy thing to figure out, right? But there are five different poems that could fit this story, two of which I know get done. And people did them with different music, or they did them in different arrangements. I know one lady who performed with a string orchestra. And ... I know of one recitation book where the lady wrote down what she performed, and the poem is different than what is in other public sources. So it's really more an oral tradition that you're tracing, which is... was hard for me at first, because I'm a kind of old fashioned musicologist who, you know, looks at the score and the composer's letters and ... But there is no composer and there's no score, so...

Will Robin 10:03

yeah, I mean you say these are elocutionists and your book's called The Elocutionists, so who were some of these specific women who were engaged in this practice? Tell me about a couple of the more interesting examples of elocutionists.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 10:17

Well, there are lots and lots of them. And it's often hard to find out about them because they would go to elocution school, there was usually an elocution school in every major American city, at least one, or they could study with ... privately in somebody's home like you do piano lessons now. So a lot of women went off to elocution school and did this for a few years and then got married or went on to other things and just sort of disappeared. Though many women did have real careers there was a woman from Cincinnati named ... well, her original name was Jenny Mannheimer. She came from a German Jewish family, and she used to perform for both Jewish groups and sometimes performed in German for German-speaking groups in Cincinnati, and then around World War... and had an elocution school in Cincinnati, that she ran with her sister. And they even ... at their peak, I think they had enough

women at their school that they opened a women's dormitory. She eventually moved to New York, and she changed her name to Jane Manner, around World War I -- I suspect it was the anti-German sentiment at the time that caused her to do this -- and had a studio in New York, and performed. She often gave entire plays. She gave different kinds of repertoire for different groups; she'd give... for Jewish group she'd give appropriate, culturally sort of appropriate and interesting material for the Jewish groups. And for non-Jewish groups she would give other kinds of texts. But she had a speech studio and taught out of the home in New York, and had students, and published a couple of books of poetry, you know, anthologies of poetry, but she also performed with music, and she performed with pianists, she performed with -- a couple women perform with player piano at the height of people having player pianos. So she, you know, she had a 40-ish year career. And often these women performed for women's groups, because women's clubs were very, very common, and the more wealthy ones could hire people to come in and perform for them or salon settings for the wealthy, sometimes.

Will Robin 13:00

Yeah, I want to come back to the women's clubs because I think that's a really interesting context. But tell me a little bit about kind of the social context for these women: what drove them to school in elocution? What drove them potentially to kind of career in elocution? How is this related to kind of ideas of domesticity? What was proper for an American woman to be doing in the mid 19th century?

Marian Wilson-Kimber 13:26

Well, you don't want your daughter to become an actress, because an actress is an immoral woman and to be on the stage suggests that your sexuality is maybe a little more free than it ought to be. So there is this sense about elocution, that it is respectable because it is something that you could do in the home. And that it's literary, that you're transmitting the voice of great literature, and that if you read the proceedings of the Elocutionists' Association, they're always talking about how this is what they do, they transmit great literature, and all elocution schools taught Shakespeare. Now, in reality, when people went out to perform, they had to entertain their audiences. So, you know, they gave selections like "Aunt Doleful's Visit" which is about a relative who complains all the time and it's really comedy; or they gave very sentimental poetry. There was lots and lots of very popular sentimental poetry. And when I talk to English teachers about these poems, they've never heard of them, you know, but it was very commonly known, sort of, standard repertoire for for elocutionists. So women who went into elocution -- sometimes it was just... some of the elocution schools were considered to be, like, ladies' finishing schools and they even said in their catalogs, well, we're not really training you for the stage. We know you're just going to read to your friends and do this well, and there were people like that. There were people who went to elocution school who did aspire to go on the stage. And occasionally people did and became actresses. But there's this place in between where you can teach. Often these women taught, they taught women's colleges, they taught in their own homes. They taught in elocution schools. They toured, they toured church, churches had culture series, lecture series, they would tour churches and YMCAs. They would tour the Chautauqua circuit, which is a tent circuit that went through largely the Midwest but elsewhere in America as well, to rural audiences that didn't get as much culture with a capital C, and they would they would tour those into the 20s...

Will Robin 15:56

How did they manage to do all of this tour and while somehow distinguishing themselves from theater; I mean, because obviously theater has this kind of morally dubious connotation, it's you know there's like, you know, theatrical actresses are seen as prostitutes in some way in the 19th century so like, they're obviously saying like we are not doing theater but like what does that ... does that actually mean anything in practice?

Marian Wilson-Kimber 16:17

It means you're really really careful in your marketing and you never ever call yourself an actress. There are all sorts of contortions that the performers went through, to not call themselves ... you know, you could be a character impersonator, which is not an actress! So, it was very tricky ... and, you know, even on Chautauqua there were people who did wear costumes and they're very, they're negotiating very carefully with conservative rural audiences who are anti-theatre -- and, you know, one reason elocution went away is because theatre became more socially acceptable.

Will Robin 17:00

Oh, interesting. Okay, so almost, it's kind of like this moment where women are, let's say performing their piano, the piano at home, but if they were to perform on a concert stage it would be seen as kind of questionable. This is seen as a.. both kind of in the realm of theater but also still proper in some sense.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 17:18

Yes. It's literary, it's cultural, it's related to the domestic sphere. And you know, there are lots of women operating in a kind of semi-amateur world where they're teaching at home. They might have a family, they're appearing at church, they're appearing for women's clubs, if they're in a big city, they may be appearing for a lot of women's clubs and getting paid. But then they're reported on in the society pages. So there's a kind of under the radar professionalism going on. And it's, you know, it's problematic historically because when you go back to look for these people, they look like society ladies, when they're actually professional performers, some of them, but it's a way to do this... It's a way to be a performer as a woman in a socially acceptable way.

Will Robin 18:15

Hmm. And so I mean, it's striking that when we think of kind of, like, I don't know, training in sound or whatever, in the 19th century, we're talking about like music conservatories, but this is also a different way of ... I mean, what did the training look like? How are they engaging with like... I mean, in your book, you talk about notation systems and stuff, but they're not notation systems for music, per se; they're notation systems for speaking.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 18:39

So, you know, some of this is just lost, because so much obviously took place in oral transmission, when you went to the teacher and what the teacher taught you to do. But clearly, in the late 19th century, the kind of speaking that was going on was a much more pitched speaking style and it's ... there's lots of, you know, there's lots of just how to pronounce it in the books, and how to emphasize, you know, how to get the right accent on the right syllable. Right. And you also suspect that this is also a period of heavy immigration in America, and you suspect that some people are improving their

English through elocution lessons as well. But there's a ... there was clearly a highly pitched style because so many times people in the elocution books are trying to notate a pitched style, and you know, speech has a lot of pitch, and pitch that moves in a much more flexible way than music does. So the elocutionists were all very proud to say speech is harder than singing because in singing you just hit those notes and they're right there for you, and when you speak, you have to interpret it yourself, and you have to make the you know, you have to generate the pitch yourself in a kind of trained yet improvisatory way. So, one of the things that took me a while to sort of recognize when I was researching this, because I would go and listen to modern recordings of melodramatic pieces, and there's some wonderful recordings, you know, there's Patrick Stewart, reciting Enoch Arden by Tennyson, with accompaniment by Strauss played by Emmanuel Ax, and they're these wonderful recordings and every time I listen to them I think, but something is just weird, and I just don't -- I'm not enjoying this. Why isn't this working? And I think it's because we've lost the stylized pitch performance practices of the earlier period. And you know, you'll hear you hear this every now and then on early sound recordings. I have a recording from 1913 of Edgar Allan Poe's The Raven, where the speaker is almost singing. There's so much pitch.

Unidentified 1913 speaker 21:09

[end of Edgar Allan Poe's The Raven] And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming, / And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor; / And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor / Shall be lifted—nevermore!

Marian Wilson-Kimber 21:39

And he word paints, you know, he says shall be lifted. You know, or, you know, a speaker could say and they laid him in the grave. So, so we know there's ... there was word painting. We know people made whistling and bugle sounds and baby crying sounds; we know they also imitated natural sounds. And some of this -- boy I would love to have some sound recordings of it! [laughs], but I think we've lost some of that, and when you hear the early sound recordings, first you think -- oh my gosh, this is so weird, and so overdone, and so melodramatic; and then if you go back to hearing modern recitation of poetry, you know, Vincent Price reading the raven now sounds really boring to me. So...

Will Robin 22:40

Yeah, and you've also been performing this yourself. You've taken this up, elocution. I've seen you do a fantastic recital at an AMS conference. So like, how did you get to doing it? And what did you kind of learn in the process of actually becoming an elocutionist?

Marian Wilson-Kimber 22:57

Yeah, so I'm... I've been performing the pieces that come out of this movement, which are early 20th century pieces by women composers, because this is a world where it's predominantly women, not entirely, but predominantly women. There are women composers in the early 20th century who write pieces for spoken word and piano. And that's sort of where the book ends. And after I finished the book, I thought, you know, these are really funny. They're often very comic, they're not the sort of overdone Victorian, overly emotional pieces of the late 19th century. They're more modern, and they're ... I thought, these pieces are still funny. So I had a residency at the Obermann Humanities Center at the University of Iowa, and it came with a little bit of money. And I wrote the grant to hire the pianist.

And I've been working with a wonderful pianist named Natalie Lewandowski. We are a group, we're called Red Vespa now, and so I hired Natalie and said, this is an experiment, we're gonna see if we can make these pieces work, and we will start performing; and audiences loved them, and particularly the audiences that love the pieces are audiences of women. So we often perform for women's clubs. And these are the kinds of audiences that these pieces were intended for. So they still work. I don't perform in a highly pitched style, like I described, I try to perform in a modern style. And I have heard some of the recordings of the composers performing these pieces, particularly Frieda Peycke, who lived in LA, I've heard her recordings, and I don't recite quite like her. Because I have to, I have to sell the pieces to a modern audience. And so my style is a little more contemporary. In fact, I sent... when I first started performing, I sent ... I made some videos and I sent the links to the elderly daughters of one of the composers. And one of the daughters said, this is wonderful you're performing, but don't you think you should get some training, some elocution training? [both laugh]

Will Robin 25:20

And where does one go about getting elocution training?

Marian Wilson-Kimber 25:24

So ... which says to me I am not performing in a historically authentic style, but it's been a lot of fun to bring these pieces back to life, and to have audiences laugh, because they're pieces that make fun of men, and they make fun of romance, and they make fun of marriage, and women like these pieces.

Will Robin 25:50

What... how did those ... that body of work kind of emerge, these pieces by women composers with poetry attached to them? This is a kind of context of the Women's clubs in this period, or...

Marian Wilson-Kimber 26:01

Yes, women's clubs is a is one place that these pieces would be performed, because there's a whole network of women's clubs across America. And the two women whose works I perform the most, Phyllis Fergus and Frieda Peycke, Fergus lived in Chicago and you know, she could practically go perform at a club every week, you know, she was ... there were so many clubs in Chicago; and Frida Pikey worked in the Los Angeles area, there were lots of clubs; and she also performed for mixed gender clubs, so church groups and businessman's associations, and so any kind of civic group. So there's world where these women can perform.

Will Robin 26:51

Tell me a little bit about the Phyllis Fergus concerts at the White House for Eleanor Roosevelt, right, how did that... I mean, that's kind of at this crazy moment. And they perform Amy Beach's music at the White House in this period too. How did those ... How did that unfold? There was this national...

Marian Wilson-Kimber 27:07

Phyllis Fergus's daughters lent me her scrapbooks. And... in fact they went into the ... one of the daughters' basement and brought out literally laundry baskets of her music for me, and her scrapbooks, and sent me home. They had just met me. They sent me home with their mom's scrapbooks...

Will Robin 27:28

An amazing research opportunity!

Marian Wilson-Kimber 27:30

Yes, I'm so grateful to both of them. So one of the scrapbooks was about a series of concerts in Chicago, a concert in Chicago of all women composers, and there was also a flyer for a series of concerts honoring Amy Beach in Washington DC, ending with a concert in the White House. And Fergus was a member of the National League of American Pen Women. She was at one point, the president; and that was an organization... it was a professional organization. It was not just a sort of local amateur women's club. It was a professional organization for writers and artists and composers that were women. It was started because the women couldn't get into the Press Club in Washington DC, the women journalists, and they founded their own group. And so, there was a national organization of women, and chapters all over the country, and Fergus... they would meet in DC in the spring, that was their annual biannual meeting. And Fergus, they used to go to tea at the White House as part of the millions of people who go through the White House in various contexts over the years. And Fergus decided they should have a concert, and sort of badgered Eleanor Roosevelt and her secretary, they agreed to it. And so they had about a 20 minute, 30 minute... 20 to 30 minute concert in the East Room, two years in the 30s. And then Eleanor Roosevelt decided that there were too many people and they all had to stand for the 30 minutes. And Eleanor Roosevelt thought that that was not okay, that the people were too uncomfortable standing. And that was the end... that was the end of the women composers' concerts at the White House. But it was in honor of Beach, Beach was a Pen Woman, and was getting to be elderly by the 30s. And so they honored her. So they ... always the culminating act was Beach playing her own works.

Will Robin 29:40

You know, it's striking to me how all of these stories have very little to do with what we typically learn about 19th century music, I mean, even 19th century American music and, you know, when we talk about musical life in this period, we're often talking about these kind of high art institutions, the Metropolitan Opera, The New York Philharmonic, and the ways that the European canon kind of comes into circulation in the United States. I'm wondering, like, how does this ... and I know you've been kind of tweeting a little bit about this too, the ways in which like, what is being performed at these women's clubs in the 19th century kind of complicates our notion of how the canon develops or doesn't develop, or kind of moves from Europe to the United States, what does all of this kind of tell us about these kind of canonic discourses in this period? That's a big question.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 30:28

Yeah. Well, it is. And it's certainly something I've thought about a lot since I've done this work, because I feel like I fell into an alternative universe when I started to work on elocution. And, you know, as I said, I resisted it, you know, at first and then I just went with it. And, you know, the alternative universe I have fallen into is more female, less urban. You know, less about New York and Boston and these cultural centers. Though it is more about Chicago, which was where a lot of the Chautauqua acts came out from. So, it's more about really what went on regularly all over America in not New York and Boston. And it seems to me that ... and it is a period, the late 19th century and the early 20th century are a period where people really are very pro classical music and they're very, they're all about improving

themselves and about making high art and... but what they think high art is, is not necessarily what we think high art is. So if you're in a woman's club with a pianist, and a singer and a violinist and if you're lucky a cellist and a reciter, you're not doing Beethoven string quartets, or even really Beethoven sonatas, because they're difficult and long, and you've got an hour over lunch on Wednesdays once a month. So it seems to me there's a body of repertoire that was the sort of standard repertoire for America that we would now call middlebrow. I'm not sure they would have called it middlebrow. So character violin pieces, you know, the sorts of things that Fritz Kreisler played. There's a huge song repertoire by women and by Americans and other people, that seems to me to have been pretty standard in the early 20th century that we now have no knowledge of. And so, I feel like because we're dealing with a few men in New York and Boston, that really limits our view of what the whole world is, and I -- you know, a plug for digitization of newspapers, it's an amazing thing to be able to see in the newspapers really what people are really playing and singing with great frequency in a way that you couldn't 20 years ago.

Will Robin 33:16

It's really interesting. And I mean, this also, I'm very interested in ... when I was kind of reading up on you, your own arc as a scholar, because it seems striking that your dissertation is on Felix Mendelssohn, music for piano and orchestra and then you move, I guess, towards Fanny Hensel and more towards feminist biography, and then you move towards this kind of wider world that really goes away from composer studies entirely. How do you kind of conceptualize that that shift in your own work? Yeah, I mean, it's a drift, I guess, along with our field, but it's also very specific.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 33:55

Yeah. Um, I have always been interested in gender issues. My very first publication was actually about the way that Mendelssohn's wife is portrayed in his biographies.

Will Robin 34:08

Okay, interesting.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 34:08

And you know, it's in an obscure little 19th century interdisciplinary journal. So I have always been interested in gender issues. And since I think my third job I taught American music. I had a series of -- I had three one-year jobs and then the third one I got the American music course and kind of had a revelation. So that fits in there, and that's a while back. But I do think that doing the work on the elocution book really did transform the way I see everything. And, you know, and Mendelssohn is one of those people in those clubs, right? I mean Mendelssohn's music is there, so it's not like it's not like I have abandoned him. And doing *Midsummer Night's Dream* with Mendelssohn's music as a solo act was a standard thing for elocutionists, and in some sense, that's how I got here, too. But I do joke now that I no longer believe in the canon. And I no longer believe in the work [laughs] as a thing, you know, I mean, obviously, I deal with the work but I do think a lot about performance and performance practices and, you know, also way in my background is playing early music, and playing gamba. So performance practice issues are maybe not immediately evident in my early scholarship, but it's certainly part of my training and my background to think about that and think about... but I take performance way more

seriously than I used to because of this project, and the way that lots of performance can happen even in Western art music that we don't even see as a work or see as a performance.

Will Robin 36:13

I mean, it's one thing that was interesting to me when I was reading this book and some of your other work is how you see a project like this kind of tracking alongside some kind of feminist notion of music history where... you know, you kind of point out that women's musical clubs are primarily viewed as a kind of backdrop for the emergence of these kind of like, iconic classic figures like Ruth Crawford Seeger. And you know, we've elevated figures like Crawford Seeger, because... to grant women similar kind of status in the canon as men. And so I'm wondering like, how do you kind of ... do you still see this kind of foregrounding of these individual great creators even if they're male or female versus an understanding of the larger kind of role of music in everyday life in these historical periods

Marian Wilson-Kimber 37:00

Yeah. I mean, I do think that this context can sometimes tell us about what's going on with these larger figures because, you know, Bartók is touring pro-musica clubs in America, and some other male composers are writing pieces that get done by women's choruses in... And I mean, I've even found operettas for women's voices written, that there's a whole sort of alternative market that can shape what sort of standard professional composers are doing. At the same time, I think composers sometimes also recognize that because this is a woman's world that it can hurt them and someone has pointed out to me, a reviewer once pointed out to me that Ruth Crawford Seeger deliberately stayed away from the women's clubs circuit because she wanted to be taken seriously in this sort of "the male world." So it's tricky, because there are women who are very, very successful in this women's world and mostly we haven't heard of them. You know, people have heard of Ruth Crawford Seeger they probably haven't heard of Gena Branscombe. Beach I think manages to balance, you know, Beach is also part of this women's clubs world while she also has large scale genres, and is accepted as "one of the boys." But that's a tricky place to be. I don't think there are a lot of women who are successful in that. So I think, you know, I think the problem with viewing the canon as central and seeing these women as trying to get into it, perpetuates the sort of misogyny we have in the way we approach all of this, because while you're saying, oh, here's Beach and here's Ruth Crawford Seeger, you know, there's a Pen Women's chapter in Knoxville, Tennessee, who over the course of 20 years does pieces by 70 women composers. They do a women composers' concert every year, they do 70. And in Iowa, the women's clubs network, both the National Federation of Women's Clubs members, and the General Federation of Women's Club members for 20 years, promote Iowa composers all over the state and -- you know -- there are over 100 concerts of music by Iowa composers in Iowa. it's Iowa! it's rural! And they're not just promoting women. They're mostly promoting men. But here's this network in the middle of nowhere, you know, it's Iowa, right? It's not New York or Boston, and they're promoting art music. So I think we should ... historically we underestimate women at our peril of, sort of, really missing what's going on. You know, I mean, early on, I was researching Phyllis Fergus and I couldn't really figure out... is she, you know, is she a "real composer" or not a "real composer", because she's a woman and she's playing these clubs and it's in the society pages and I said to her daughters, well, did she get paid? And they said, Oh, yeah. Oh yeah, she did. Of course, she got paid. Now, sometimes if she felt the club couldn't afford her, she'd donate the fee back, because she was a well-off upper-class Chicago, married to a steel broker.

Will Robin 40:36

It's so funny that you're saying, you know, what she a real composer, did she get paid, because, you know, we have all these famous composers, you know, like, whatever, Charles Ives where it's like, he's a composer because he couldn't afford to make a career.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 40:47

Yeah. So um, you know, Phyllis Fergus, her output is not huge, but she helped support her mom on the royalties from it. So it can't have been nothing. And you know, you've never heard of her, right? Nobody's ever heard of her before I did the work on her. And so I think -- I suspect there are more Phyllis Ferguses out there and it's because our view of what a composer is so limited. I mean, the one other thing I will say is, when I was researching the book, I went to a lot of schools that had had elocution schools as part of them, or started as elocution schools and that are still extant as colleges. And one of the places I went was the New England Conservatory of Music, which you know, we think is sort of a bastion of, obviously, it was run by Chadwick. But he based it on European models, and it's this sort of place to study European art music in America, but it had an elocution school early on, and it went away. But the other thing I discovered by looking at the early papers of the NEC is that huge, huge numbers of the students of the early NEC were in fact women. So, you know, as we're talking about, you know how European art music comes to America, women are a huge, huge force in that. And somebody had to give all those male composers their first piano lessons. So I, you know, I worked on Mendelssohn and I worked on Fanny Hensel. And there's always this sort of...

Will Robin 42:31

I was about to ask about the Fanny Hensel project!

Marian Wilson-Kimber 42:34

oh, if only Fanny Hensel had, you know, blah blah blah... [sighs]

Will Robin 42:39

Well, this idea I mean, I think it's important to lay out, is this kind of common biographical trope that -- which I think we see a lot now not even about Fanny Hansel, but just about women composers prior to, I don't know 1990 or something -- that they are suppressed, needing ... in need to be rescued, marginalized unsung heroes who are only now being kind of kind of rediscovered ... so sorry, and now go ahead and tell us about why that's wrong.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 43:06

Yeah... well, I mean, I won't say it's entirely wrong, because a lot of work needs to be done on lots and lots and lots of historical figures. And I think, you know, in the 80s, there was lots of work being done. And then in musicology, we all decided we would work on gender instead. And people stopped sort of doing women's history, not everybody, but it became less fashionable in musicology to do kind of traditional women's history. The thing is, if you work in the late 19th century, in the early 20th century, it's a really active and a fertile period. And you know, Judith Tick said this a long time ago, but you can pick up, you know, sort of books about early 20th century American music, some of the sort of, you

know, here's American music and they're full of women. And so I think my question is, you know, what happened between 100 years ago and now?

Will Robin 44:08

And that's the case with Fanny Hensel in a way too, right, which is that she was not nearly as "suppressed" during her lifetime as we often kind of portray her as.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 44:19

Yeah, so Fannie Hensel's son published her letters after her death, and of course, he, was very selective about what he published. And he shaped them in certain kinds of ways to make her look socially respectable for the time, but her letters were widely circulated. And, you know, I often find when I'm looking at women's clubs' programs, her name on it; now, they don't have her scores. They're not performing her necessarily, but they know who she is. And she's written up a lot in various sources. Now, she's written up as Mendelssohn's sister. But she was certainly recognized as having musical talent and as having been a composer. And you know, the story of rescue makes *us* the hero. We want to be the hero and musicologists don't get to be heroes. So, you know, we found them in the dusty archives, and we rescued them. And yeah, it's great. I mean, in some sense, I'm doing that too. I mean, I've rescued these spoken word performances, and I'm, you know, getting people to perform them now. So, yes. But at the... if we tell that story over and over and over and over and over, we, the women never get rescued. They're always being rescued. And they're never the default mode. That you know, like, one of the great moments for me was after the book came out is Danielle Fosler-Lussier assigned it to her class at Ohio State. And I saw the syllabus, it was an amazing class I wanted to take her class and not for my book, for all the rest of it. And when you got to the part of the syllabus where my book was, the subject heading of the class period was "Taking Women Seriously," you know, taking women seriously in what they are doing as opposed to what they're not doing that's our model of what they ought to be doing, which is getting the traditional training that men get and writing the pieces like men write, and ... this is not to say that I don't think, you know, I'm really happy with Amy Beach's Gaelic Symphony, that's a wonderful thing. And I'm really really happy with Fanny Hensel's Das Jahr, I mean, when women write big, amazing pieces, that's a great thing. But I think we should also take seriously when they write little comic pieces that are spoken word and that made whole rooms full of women laugh. That's important too.

Will Robin 47:08

Well, I think that's a wonderful place to leave it. Thank you so much. This was really fascinating. I appreciate it.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 47:13

Thanks. Great fun.

Will Robin 47:22

Many thanks to Marian Wilson Kimber for that great discussion. You'll definitely want to read her book The Elocutionists: Women, Music, and the Spoken Word. As always visit soundexpertise.org for links to Marian's writing and other show notes. You can follow me on twitter @seatedovation and the work of my producer D. Edward Davis over on Soundcloud at [warmsilence](https://www.soundcloud.com/warmsilence). Next week I'll be speaking with the

scholar Timothy Taylor about music and capitalism. To close out today, let's listen to a bit of elocution. Marian Wilson Kimber accompanied by pianist Natalie Landowski performing Dame Fashion by Frieda Peycke. Enjoy.

Marian Wilson-Kimber 48:02

Who is Dame fashion? Nobody knows, or where she comes from, or whither she goes, she simply says presto go on through your clothes. And we all obey her. Why? Nobody knows. She's always a ruler without any throne. She comes in a breath in another she's gone. I know I despise her and so too do you; we scold and abuse her, but follower her too! She looks at your dress, she says it won't do! It's simply too... too... oh it's simply too. Too what? Doesn't matter. Too why? I can't say. Dame Fashion decreed it, that makes it OK! Your hat is too fuzzy, it ought to be plain... [fade]