



Loeb Music Library reminiscences

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Loeb Music Library Reminiscences

Sara Jobin

MY FIRST CONNECTION TO THE MUSIC LIBRARY at Harvard was as a work-study student freshman year, which was not only a great opportunity to get to know everyone in the department, but also a chance to get to know the layout of the library and browse the collection somewhat while I was reshelving books. In this way, I found a video of Martha Graham dancing "Into the Maze," based on the Medea myth, and watching it was not only my first exposure to her work, but it also provided me with good background when I conducted Samuel Barber's "Medea's Dance of Vengeance" in conducting school, and later, when I led performances of Bellini's *Norma* at San Francisco Opera.

Sophomore year I was the ringleader for a report on women composers in the Renaissance. My fellow students and I did a comprehensive search of everything the library contained on the subject, and found motets written by Maddalena Casulana which we performed as part of an exhaustive presentation in Renaissance Music History class. I remember with amusement that Professor Lockwood gave us a "B" because we presented too much information. It's gratifying to know that so much information is there in the library, waiting to be plumbed.

Toward the beginning of junior year I was sitting at a table in the Spalding Room when a fellow student delivered the news that Bernstein had died. He was my hero; that moment is indelible in my memory.

I wrote a paper on Mabel Daniels, a composer who had attended Radcliffe, and though her papers were housed at the Schlesinger Library, there were related materials, including scores and recordings, at the Loeb. When I finally made it onto a podium senior year, I conducted a performance of her work *Deep Forest*. Although the piece didn't capture my musical imagination much, the experience did illustrate one reason I would eventually decide on conducting: I found I could be an advocate for composers.

My junior paper and senior thesis adviser, Judith Tick, generously gave me the opportunity to write for the *New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* while I was still in school, and through updating several entries I stumbled on the music of Lucia Dlugoszewki, a real discovery. Gerard Schwarz's recording of her trumpet solo *Space is a Diamond* took me to breathless precipices of Zen experience. I don't really know how to describe it, but my powerful reaction to that one recording inspired me to look her up in New York, and eventually to commission an orchestra piece from her at the first opportunity that presented itself. Unfortunately, that piece never got written, because she was hopeless with deadlines, and the advertised premiere had to

Harvard Library Bulletin 95

be cancelled. Most of her compositions were for the Erick Hawkins Dance Company, and she passed away a few years ago. *Fire Fragile Flight* is another of her works in the Loeb collection, an orchestra piece. She gave me a working tape of a string quartet she had written for Baryshnikov, which was to be performed at the Kennedy Center. She was full of passionate inspiration, sometimes almost too much for me to handle when it flowed over the phone line for hours in the middle of the night, but I believe she is an American composer of significance and I still feel I owe her a premiere.

Senior year I wrote my thesis on female orchestral conductors in America, and used numerous reference books and bibliographies housed in the Loeb Library to create a picture of the historical context of women in the orchestral field. The scholarly literature on women in music has been steadily increasing since the 1970s, and even my thesis has been referenced in several other theses since I wrote it in 1992. Each generation of scholars builds on the work of the previous one. As I recall, the library had all the important reference works I needed.

Since graduating I have returned to use the library several times when passing through the area, especially when I wanted to look up obscure recordings or program repertory outside the mainstream. For instance, I performed a beautiful piece by Nigerian composer Samuel Akpabot, published by Oxford, as a result of digging in a reference book about black composers. There was also an interesting exhibit about female opera composers a few years ago, and I believe all the scores are still available in the Isham collection.

Times have changed for women conductors, somewhat, since I was in college; I interviewed Marin Alsop when she was working with the Concordia Orchestra, her own creation, in New York; now she directs the Baltimore Symphony and is an eloquent spokesperson for women in various leadership positions. In all its history, only two women have conducted at the Metropolitan Opera: the late Sarah Caldwell and Simone Young; I had the honor of being the first at San Francisco Opera, followed soon after by Anne Manson who is also a Harvard graduate. Emmanuelle Haïm just broke the gender barrier on the podium of Chicago Lyric Opera in the 2007–2008 season. Hopefully the concept of women's studies in any field, including music, will become obsolete; but until then, I am grateful that there are places where the history of women in the field of music can be amassed and recorded, so that future generations may build on knowledge and the achievements of the past.

The Loeb Music Library had the information I was interested in when I was in college, plus endless additional horizons I wished I could explore; it remains an invaluable resource for performing musicians of every stripe and persuasion.

Contributors

William Bares is a Ph.D. candidate in Ethnomusicology, Harvard University.

Jane A. Bernstein is the Austin Fletcher Professor of Music, Tufts University.

Paul Corneilson is the Managing Editor of *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: The Complete Works*.

Michael Scott Cuthbert Ph.D. '06 is currently Visiting Assistant Professor of Music, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Virginia Danielson is the Richard F. French Librarian, Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library, Harvard University.

Robert J. Dennis is Curator of Recordings Collections at the Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library, Harvard University.

Philip Gossett is the Robert W. Reneker Distinguished Service Professor, Department of Music and the College, University of Chicago.

Mary K. Hunter is the A. LeRoy Greason Professor of Music at Bowdoin College.

Sara Jobin A.B. '92 is a freelance composer in San Francisco where she has recently conducted performances of *Tosca*, *The Flying Dutchman*, and *Norma* at the San Francisco Opera.

Thomas F. Kelly is the Morton B. Knafel Professor of Music and Harvard College Professor, Harvard University.

Lowell Lindgren Ph.D. '72 is Professor of Music, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Charles S. Maier is the Leverett Saltonstall Professor of History, Harvard University.

Lansing McLoskey is Assistant Professor, Frost School of Music, University of Miami.

Robert Mealy A.B. '85 directs the Harvard Baroque Chamber Orchestra and serves as advisor to the Harvard Early Music Society; he also maintains a busy career performing, recording, and touring with distinguished early music ensembles both here and abroad.

Honey Meconi Ph.D. '86 is Director, Susan B. Anthony Institute for Gender and Women's Studies; Professor of Music, College Music Department; Professor of Musicology, Eastman School of Music; University of Rochester.

Carol Oja is the William Powell Mason Professor of Music, Harvard University.

Jesse Rodin Ph.D. '07 is Assistant Professor of Music, Stanford University.

Sandra P. Rosenblum is the Chair Emerita of the Department of Performing Arts, Concord Academy.

Anne C. Schreffler Ph.D. '89 is the James Edward Dotson Professor of Music, Harvard University.

David Schulenberg A.B. '76 is Professor of Music and Chair of the Music Department, Wagner College.

Kay Kaufman Shelemay is the G. Gordon Watts Professor of Music and Professor of African American Studies, Harvard University.

Gregory Smith Ph.D. '83 is Professor of Music History and Musicology, New England Conservatory of Music.

John M. Ward is Professor of Music Emeritus, Harvard University.

Christoph Wolff is the Adams University Professor and the Curator of the Isham Memorial Library, Harvard University.