# Musicians, Students, Listeners: Women and the Conservatoire in Pre-War Paris and St Petersburg

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**Musicians, Students, Listeners:**
**Women and the Conservatoire in Pre-War Paris and St Petersburg**

The masculine façade of the music Conservatoire belies the extent to which these establishments fostered close relationships between women. This article analyses the student cohorts of the Paris and St Petersburg Conservatoires in the early twentieth century, to show that women made up a formidable presence and created supportive communities within these institutional frameworks. It argues that these relationships not only facilitated women's involvement in public cultural life, but also impacted their private experience of music and listening, as illustrated by the close musical bond between sisters and conservatoire alumnae, Lili and Nadia Boulanger.

**Keywords:** music education; listening; gender history; sensory history

## Introduction

When we imagine the Conservatoire, we likely envisage an imposing rectangular building, where young musicians master their instruments under the stern gaze of a prominently displayed bust of Beethoven. The Conservatoire has long been, and remains, the most prestigious path to a musical career in Europe, and as a formalised public institution, solidified the masculinity of the Western musical tradition. Yet the presence of women within these institutions, at the heart of a city's musical life, is a fact which has often been understated. In this article, I hope to offer a more detailed picture of female conservatoire students and their experiences of musicianship, professionalism, education, and homosociality in the Conservatoire context, with specific reference to the Conservatoires of Paris and St Petersburg, between 1900 and 1914. Through this exploration, I advance two related arguments: firstly, that women's presence at the Conservatoire was far more significant than generally acknowledged in institutional histories and lists of celebrated alumni; and secondly, that this female presence shaped how women listened.

The Paris Conservatoire was, in many respects, the archetypal European music school. Formally established in 1795, it is one of the oldest and most esteemed conservatoires in Europe, and the model upon which many similar institutions were later founded. Indeed, when the St Petersburg Conservatoire was established in 1862, the Paris Conservatoire was a

significant point of reference in the debate about the need to create a culture of musical professionals to rival that of Western Europe, and thereby reduce Russia's reliance on "foreign musicians".[1] For musical elites of the nineteenth century, Paris was the cultural centre not only of France but of Europe as a whole; a city like Petersburg might have seemed provincial in comparison.[2] Yet we should not permit such notions of artistic 'centre and periphery' to go unchallenged. The Paris and Petersburg Conservatoires offer two contrasting vantage points on musical life in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. In juxtaposing these two institutions, not only do we gain a sense of their geographic and cultural idiosyncrasies, but also of the enduring similarities in their structure, purpose, and internal culture. Moreover, the comparison allows us to test the narrative of Parisian exceptionalism by placing the experiences of French students in dialogue with those of their Russian peers.

Much of the scholarly literature on the Conservatoire has focused on their particular institutional histories or biographies of the most famous alumni, although increasingly the Conservatoire also serves as a frame for pedagogical studies.[3] What I offer here is instead a social and cultural view of the Conservatoire from the perspective of the women who studied there. This article concentrates on the years 1900-1914, a liminal period which saw remarkable social change, but which falls just beyond the scope of many wider cultural studies of the nineteenth century or the interwar period. Across both France and Russia, organisations and

[1] Sargeant, Lynn. "A New Class of People: The Conservatoire and Musical Professionalization in Russia, 1861-1917." *Music and Letters* 85, no. 1 (2004): 41.
[2] White, Kimberly. *Female Singers on the French Stage, 1830-1848*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018: 1.
[3] See for example, Hondré, Emmanuel. *Le Conservatoire De Paris : Regards Sur Une Institution Et Son Histoire*. Paris: Association Du Bureau Des étudiants Du Conservatoire National Supérieur De Musique De Paris, 1995; Nekrasova, Elena V. V. "The History, Collections and Activities of the Music Research Library of the St. Petersburg Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatoire." *Fontes Artis Musicae* 53, no. 3 (2006): 130-34; Rubinoff, Kailan R. R. "Toward a Revolutionary Model of Music Pedagogy: The Paris Conservatoire, Hugot and Wunderlich's Méthode De Flûte, and the Disciplining of the Musician." *Journal of Musicology* 34, no. 4 (2017): 473-514. An important exception is Lynn Sargeant's work, which engages critically with the cultural significance of the Conservatoire in Russian music life, and to which I am greatly indebted: Sargeant, Lynn. "A New Class of People: The Conservatoire and Musical Professionalization in Russia, 1861-1917." *Music and Letters* 85, no. 1 (2004): 41-61; Sargeant, Lynn. *Harmony and Discord: Music and the Transformation of Russian Cultural Life*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

individuals campaigned to improve women's education, their access to the professions, and for greater recognition of women's creative potential as artists. Public perception of female conservatoire students and their opportunities and experiences while studying were shaped in part by these wider questions of women's place in public cultural life. I am particularly interested in what the Conservatoire can tell us about women as *listeners*. While women doubtlessly heard music in a variety of locations – in concert halls, salons, cabarets, played on home gramophones, or from singing street performers – the formalised environment of the Conservatoire foregrounded attentive and structural listening as a key component of its educational mission. The trained ear, it was thought, should be capable of perceiving musical qualities like pitch, rhythm, texture, and timbre, while also following larger scale features such as harmonic development, form, and structural logic as these unfold over the duration of a piece of music.[4] For conservatoire students, music listening was closely bound up with music making, and they would be expected to perform and listen critically to their peers regularly. Once admitted to the Conservatoire, students worked and socialised within a stable cohort of peers, establishing a level of familiarity and intimacy impossible to cultivate with fellow concertgoers in the few hours of a single performance. This consistency allows us to examine the importance of relationships and recognise gendered patterns of experience within the institution. Finally, the Conservatoire has always been a prestigious threshold to public cultural life, and attendance conferred a certain degree of musical authority and expertise. Taking seriously the lives and listening habits of female conservatoire students goes some way towards redressing the condescension with which their efforts were so often met in their own lifetimes.

[4] These expectations crystallised in Theodor Adorno's typology of listeners, originally published in his 1962 work, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*. Eric F. Clarke offers a thorough overview of listening styles in his work *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning.* New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, especially Chapter 5, 'Autonomy/Heteronomy and Perceptual Style': 126-155.

Drawing on enrolment and graduation data from both institutions, scholarship records, student personal files, the published programmes of the Parisian *concours du Conservatoire*, institutional regulations, contemporary photographs, press coverage and a fictionalised narrative of the life of a female conservatoire student, this article is divided into three sections. The first describes the demographic composition of the two Conservatoires' student population, highlighting the significant number of women at both institutions and sketching a clearer portrait of their personal circumstances and motivations. The second explores the relationships and networks formed by women affiliated with the Conservatoire, and how these redirected traditional models of femininity, such as philanthropy and motherhood, to support women's musical pursuits. The final section offers a brief case study of the particularly close musical relationship between two composers and conservatoire alumnae, the Boulanger sisters – Nadia and Lili – to illustrate how both institutional and personal factors shaped the first performance of Lili's prizewinning cantata, *Faust et Hélène.*

**Historical Listening and Gender**

The experience of listening has proven elusive for historians and musicologists alike. As Anna Fishzon laments, musical audiences of the past have been frequently mistreated, "presented as anonymous masses … packed into theatre boxes, given lorgnettes… and ultimately abandoned, entombed in concert halls and theatres."[5] However, scholarly attention to audience behaviour and to the historical contingency of listening practices has increased markedly over the past few decades, particularly on the heels of James Johnson's landmark *Listening in Paris*.[6] Recent research into historical listening has stressed the role of the environment – both material and

[5] Fishzon, Anna. *Fandom, Authenticity, and Opera: Mad Acts and Letter Scenes in Fin-de-siècle Russia*. Palgrave Studies in Cultural and Intellectual History. Basingstoke, 2013: 3.
[6] Johnson, James H. *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History*. Studies on the History of Society and Culture. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. More recent examples include Clarke, Eric F. *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, and the contributions to Thorau, Christian and Hansjakob Ziemer (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Music Listening in the 19th and 20th centuries.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

social – in shaping the modes of listening employed. Music historian Katharine Ellis suggests that listening is "both layered and fluid: layered in the sense that not everyone does the same thing, and fluid in that the same person does different things at different times."[7] When musicologists have explicitly considered gender, this has tended to reflect ideas about 'private' and 'public' cultural spheres, with the implication that women most likely engaged in 'intimate listening' in a domestic setting.[8]

Beyond musicology, the question of listening in the past also chimes with the burgeoning field of sensory history. Historians such as Mark M. Smith, Alain Corbin, and Aimée Boutin have shown how aurality and sound shaped urban and rural identities, and how a changing soundscape characterised the onset of modernity.[9] How we listen is inevitably shaped by who we are, and the context in which we are listening - something we know from our own experience. Factors such as performance venue, audience size and social composition, and the medium of sound production are therefore important to our understanding of past listening experiences. More intimate details – uncomfortable attire, prior musical training, whether or not the listener felt at ease in the social setting – are also relevant, and further highlight the potential impact of gender.

Despite a broadening scholarly approach to listening in the past, a cultural history of listening still largely rests on proxy measures. Without direct access to the thoughts and impressions of the average audience member, we must instead rely on professional criticism and collective action. For example, Johnson's central argument – that Parisian audiences

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[7] Ellis, Katherine. "Researching Audience Behaviours in Nineteenth-Century Paris: Who Cares if You Listen?", in Thorau and Ziemer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Music Listening*, 40.
[8] Fuhrmann, Wolfgang. "The Intimate Art of Listening: Music in the Private Sphere During the Nineteenth Century", in Thorau and Ziemer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Music Listening*, 279-80.
[9] Smith, Mark M. "Producing Sense, Comsuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History." *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (2007): 841-58; Corbin, Alain., and Martin. Thom (trans). *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th-century French Countryside*. London: Papermac, 1999; Boutin, Aimée. *City of Noise: Sound and Nineteenth-century Paris*. Studies in Sensory History. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2015.

"stop[ped] talking and start[ed] listening" over the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century[10] – is grounded in reports of audience behaviour, equating silence with a particular mode of attentive listening. In first-hand accounts, we must decide whether to believe how audience members *claimed* they listened, and as Ellis points out, published accounts were often "written by a critic who cannot be identified or trusted," and who was almost certainly male.[11] In this article, I propose a new, more speculative approach to the ways historical listening was gendered: an approach grounded in the importance of social and material contexts, which also integrates performance practice and composition as indicative of individual listening preferences. This highlights the connection between listening and making music: practising, performing, teaching, and composing music all require concentrated attention to sound production to create the desired aural effect. It also reflects that listening is an activity which takes place on dual levels – the social and the personal. As a musical environment and an educational setting, the Conservatoire combined all of these elements. In recognising that the Conservatoire was not an exclusively male space, we should also diversify our understanding of the kinds of listening which took place there.

**The Conservatoire and its Demographics.**

The attendance of female students at both the Paris and St Petersburg Conservatoires had been an accepted fact since their establishment. Women's admission to the highest level of musical education was in part smoothed by the demands of the operatic canon, which required a ready supply of trained female voices.[12] Even when women's access to other institutions of higher education was intermittent or curtailed, the two Conservatoires remained open to female

[10] Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 1.
[11] Ellis, "Researching Audience Behaviours…," 38.
[12] Kennerly, David. "Debating Female Musical Professionalism and Artistry in the British Press, c. 1820-1850", *Historical Journal* 58, no. 4 (2015), 988-989.

musicians, both vocalists and those pursuing other specialisations.[13] By the early twentieth century, female students at the Paris Conservatoire were numerous enough to draw attention from the more conservative public commentators, who displayed a degree of anxiety about the economic, cultural, and moral implications of female presence within the Conservatoire. In 1904, Arthur Pougin penned an article for *Le Ménestrel,* in which he questioned the wisdom of permitting more than a handful of women into the Conservatoire's violin class, asking whether "the fervour for the study of the violin which has seized women is in their own interest."[14] The prolific music critic Émile Vuillermoz expressed similar ideas in his article 'Le Péril rose', published in *Musica*, in which he lamented the seemingly unstoppable advance of women into the realm of professional music. He protested:

> The Conservatoire, where they [women] already have the majority, will end up remaining their personal property and the classes which we will call 'mixed' will be those where the presence of two or three moustache-wearers will be tolerated… Gabriel Fauré [then the director of the Conservatoire] will have been expelled from his chair by Hélène Fleury or Nadia Boulanger. [15]

Both Vuillermoz and Pougin recognised women's considerable musical talent and the corresponding threat that their success posed to male musicians, especially in fields such as the violin or composition where women had previously been scarce. While not opposed to women's musical education in principle, these articles betray their authors' desire to preserve masculine cultural authority within the context of the Conservatoire. But were they right to be worried? Were women enrolling in Conservatoire classes in droves, outnumbering their male peers, as

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[13] On women's access to higher education in Russia, see Johanson, Christine. *Women's Struggle for Higher Education in Russia, 1855-1900*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987; Stites, Richard. *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978; and for France, Sauer, Marina. *L'entrée Des Femmes à L'Ecole Des Beaux-arts, 1880-1923*. Collection Beaux-arts Histoire. Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts, 1990; Wilkins, Wynona. "The Debate over Secondary and Higher Education for Women in Nineteenth-Century France." *The North Dakota Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1981): 13-25.

[14] Pougin, Arthur. "Le Violon, Les Femmes et le Conservatoire", *Le* Ménestrel no. 14, 3 April 1904, p. 109.

[15] Vuillermoz, Émile. "Le Péril rose", *Musica*, March 1912, p. 45. Translation by Annegret Fauser, "*La Guerre En Dentelles*: Women and the *Prix De Rome* in French Cultural Politics." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51, no. 1 (1998): 83.

these two critics imagined? Not quite, but a closer look at enrolment and graduation records suggests that the margin was closer than we might assume.[16] While the founders of the two Conservatoires might have had in mind 'an ideal image of the (male) professional musician,' this was by no means the profile of the average student.[17]

At the Paris Conservatoire between 1906 and 1911, women represented on average slightly less than half of the graduating cohorts, with an average of 47 percent of the student body.[18] Of the 389 laureates in 1907, 180 were women (46 percent); in 1908, this figure was 188 of 388 (48 percent); in 1909 it was 175 of 396 (44 percent); and in 1911, 222 of 452 (49 percent). As such, women did not represent an outright majority, but the numbers of male and female students were never far off equal, almost achieving gender parity in the graduating classes of 1908 and 1911. On her first day of classes, a young woman would not find herself alone in a sea of male peers. Indeed, for many subjects – music theory, voice, and keyboard classes – the Paris Conservatoire separated its students by gender, meaning her class would be all women, with the possible exception of the instructor. Even in the violin class, she was almost certain to have several female classmates.

[16] The available data on student demographics differs between the Paris and Petersburg Conservatoires. The Paris Conservatoire published a pamphlet of the results of the annual *concours*, which listed laureates and the prizes they received. The Petersburg Conservatoire did not publish a programme of its graduates, but instead kept hand-written records of *vypusniki*, although the record-keeping is prone to inconsistencies. More reliable are the annual accounts of the Imperial Russian Musical Society (IRMO) which provide full lists of all students enrolled in each academic year, although these include only the students' names under the category of tuition they paid.

[17] Sargeant, "A New Class of People," 48.

[18] Data drawn from: *Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation, Année 1907, Distribution des Prix pour le cours d'études de l'année 1907*. Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1907. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, VMB-11678; *Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation, Année 1908, Distribution des Prix pour le cours d'études de l'année 1908.* Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1908. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, VMB-11679 ; *Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation, Année 1909, Distribution des Prix pour le cours d'études de l'année 1909*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1909, pp. 7-16 Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 4-RT-5307; *Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation, Année 1910-1911, Distribution des Prix pour le cours d'études de l'année 1910-1911*. Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1911. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 4-RT-5308. Henceforth, these documents will be referred to as *'Distribution des Prix' (Year),* for brevity.

In St Petersburg, women conservatoire students were a clear majority, representing between 60 and 63 percent of the student body in the first decade of the twentieth century.[19] This gender split was consistent even as the total number of students at the Conservatoire grew dramatically, ending the decade at almost 2000. Unlike in Paris, there is little indication that the Petersburg Conservatoire separated its students by gender, with the possible exception of the vocal classes.[20] However, the overall proportion of women meant they likely comprised a majority in all of their obligatory courses. Women majoring in violin or the 'theory of composition' were reliably outnumbered by male peers, but only in these specialist classes; their compulsory theoretical subjects and general musicianship classes most likely reflected the overall gender balance. Relationships with female classmates, therefore, should be considered an important feature of the musical training women received at the two Conservatoires.

The ubiquity of women in many of the Paris Conservatoire classrooms was further compounded by chaperoning provisions. In 1816, the official constitution declared 'it is expressly forbidden to allow fathers, mothers, or guardians of students entrance to classes,' but this was revised in 1850 to permit mothers to attend lessons.[21] By 1901, chaperoning mothers in attendance at the Conservatoire seem to have been the norm. The prolific journalist and novelist Auguste Germain published a short piece of fiction – *Premier Prix Au Conservatoire,* serialised in the women's magazine *Femina* – which chronicled the life of a female conservatoire student, pianist-turned-opera-star Mariette Charny. In this novella, Germain

[19] Data drawn from the *Otchety C.-Peterburgskogo Otdelenia Imperatorskogo Russkogo Muzykalnogo Obshchestva i Konservatorii,* for the years 1900-1910, with the exception of the academic year 1905-6, which is missing. The Library of the St Petersburg State Conservatory Department of Manuscripts (O*tdel' rukopisei)*, documents M 0-88ca 18505 – M 0-88ca 18514.

[20] Photographs of groups of students with their teachers, taken in 1912 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Conservatoire, show mixed-gender classes. Central State Archive of Documentary Films, Photographs, and Sound Recordings (TsGAKFFD SPb), documents E 12861, E 12862, E 12863. The notebook (*zapisnaia knizhka*) of Conservatoire Professor of piano Anna Nikolaevna Esipova contains lists of her students each year, with both masculine and feminine surnames. Held in the Library of the St Petersburg State Conservatory Department of Manuscripts (O*tdel' rukopisei)*, document 6992.

[21] Constant, Pierre. *Le Conservatoire national de musique et de déclamation: documents historiques et administratifs, recueillis ou reconstitués*, Paris: Impr. Nationale, 1900. Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris, Cote: 399883, pp. 267, 257.

delights in describing the piano class taking place with a number of the students' mothers present in the room, who occupied themselves with knitting, reading, or dozing.[22] What results is picture of certain Conservatoire classrooms as predominantly female spaces, occupied by young women and their mothers.

The perceived need for chaperones becomes clearer when we consider the demographics of the young women enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire. Female music students in Paris were most likely in their teens or early twenties and were almost uniformly unmarried.[23] In contrast, their Petersburg counterparts were usually in their mid-to-late twenties, with students in their early thirties also reasonably common.[24] Women studying in St Petersburg were more likely to be married – the cohort of 1907 had a particular high rate, with 13 married of the 52 female graduating students, or 25 percent.

The age and marital status of female students show broad trends across the French and Russian cohorts, but we should not let this obscure the individuals who made up the classes. For example, in 1911, the women who sat the Paris *concours du Conservatoire* included pianists as young as 14 (almost certainly accompanied by their mothers), cellists in their late teens, students of counterpoint in their early twenties, and married women approaching their thirties who had enrolled in voice classes.[25] Russian cohorts were similarly varied. In the student register, women usually described their social position with reference to a male relative, either as 'wife' or 'daughter', although the information the women provided paints a diverse picture of the student body. At the Petersburg Conservatoire, a dentist's daughter might study alongside the wife of a university student, and a French widow in the same class as the daughters of a

[22] Germain, Auguste. "Premier Prix du Conservatoire" *Femina*, 15 September 1901. Bibliothèque nationale de France (Arsenal), FRBNF34415871, cote: FOL-JO-1368

[23] Female laureates might be listed as *Mademoiselle* or *Madame* in the published programmes of the *concours du Conservatoire*. All students were listed with their place and date of birth.

[24] Students' dates of birth and social position were recorded in the hand-written records of the Conservatoire's graduates. Central State Historical Archive of St Petersburg (TsGIA SPb), F. 361, op. 4, d. 10-22, "Spiski vypusnikov Konservatorii" for academic years 1900-1913.

[25] *Distribution des Prix (1910-1911)*.

noble man and a Major General.[26] The demographic details contained within institutional records show that the Conservatoire was a space in which women of different ages and social origins mixed, and remind us of the importance of personal circumstance in shaping the both the students' motivations and the modes of listening women employed.

There was undoubtedly a financial dimension to conservatoire study, with the expense of fees, instruments, and books on top of the cost of living in the capital city. Yet we should not assume that all the women who committed to pursuing a conservatoire education were from wealthy, bourgeois families. In both France and Russia, concepts of class were more complex than they first appeared, and social and economic status seldom mapped neatly onto one another. As Sara Maza argues, the French bourgeoisie represented "an inevitable lumping together of everyone from the richest banker through intellectuals and professionals to the struggling neighbourhood grocer."[27] Similarly, in Russia, the legal system of estates did not reflect the financial situation of many families: impoverished aristocrats and upwardly mobile mercantile families were commonplace.[28]

Unlike Paris, the Petersburg Conservatoire did charge tuition fees, but in parallel it operated a complex system of full scholarships, partial stipends, and financial aid.[29] The personal files of students frequently contain letters of appeal from widowed mothers or from the students themselves, requesting leniency for delayed payments or partial scholarships in the form of reduced fees. Ekaterina Frantsevna Daugovet wrote to the Director of the Conservatoire in 1901: "On the advice of my teacher, Professor Lavrov, I humbly ask you to award me a

[26] TsGIA SPb, F. 361, op. 4, d. 10-22, "Spiski vypusnikov Konservatorii" for academic years 1900-1913.
[27] Maza, Sara. *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary 1750-1850*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003: 1-2. As cited in White, Kimberly. *Female Singers on the French Stage*: 12.
[28] For more on the Imperial Russian system of estates – *sosloviia* – see, Alison K. Smith. *For the Common Good and Their Own Well-Being: Social Estates in Imperial Russia*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
[29] The annual account records of the Petersburg Conservatoire list students by the category of fees they paid and include a full list of scholarships on offer and their recipients. *Otchety C.-Peterburgskogo Otdelenia Imperatorskogo Russkogo Muzykalnogo Obshchestva i Konservatorii,* The Library of the St Petersburg State Conservatory Department of Manuscripts (O*tdel' rukopisei)*, documents M 0-88ca 18505 – M 0-88ca 18514

stipend, as I do not have the means to pay for my tuition."[30] Raisa Iosefovna Livschits made a similar request in 1905, claiming, "My life, unfortunately, has developed so unfavourably in Petersburg that I have no possibility now to produce the remaining 125 roubles for the second half of the [academic] year."[31] She did not elaborate on her personal troubles, but asked to be released from all payment obligations in excess of 25 roubles.

It is difficult to generalise about the financial position of conservatoire students; however, most likely came from 'middling' – although by no means homogenous – backgrounds. Female students from either extreme of the social spectrum – the nobility or the working poor – were rare.[32] Kimberly White's detailed study of the lives and careers of female singers in nineteenth-century Paris offers a detailed analysis of their social origins.[33] From records held of the professions the parents of female vocal students studying at the Conservatoire between 1835 and 1843, she demonstrates that "many students had parents with professions that generally indicated economic and class privilege", but hesitates to draw conclusions about their financial resources, noting that the professions listed might include families who were comfortably well-off and those struggling to get by.[34] The variety of 'middling' social backgrounds persisted as the century wore on, so that Albert Lavignac, who taught harmony at the Paris Conservatoire, could write in his 1899 memoirs that his classes might plausibly include "the daughters of the intelligentsia, preachers, eminent artists, and writers, with those whose parents had more modest professions."[35]

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[30] "Daugovet Ekaterina Frantsevna", TsGIA SPb, F. 361, op. 2, d. 1991, l. 9.
[31] "Livshits Raisa (Raitsil') Iosefovna", TsGIA SPb, F. 361, op. 2, d. 3945, l. 17.
[32] This is in contrast to their peers at the Paris Conservatoire of the Dramatic Arts, who were training to become actresses. Lenard Berlanstein has shown that young women from working-class backgrounds were far more common within this institution, making up a significant but diminishing portion of the student body over the nineteenth century, and that the 'embourgeoisement of the student body' represented a cause for concern. Berlanstein, Lenard R. "Cultural Change and the Acting Conservatory in Late Nineteenth-Century France". *The Historical Journal* 46, no. 3 (2003): 583-597.
[33] White, Kimberly. *Female Singers on the French Stage, 1830-1848*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018: "Beginnings", 10-38.
[34] White, *Female Singers on the French Stage*: 12-14.
[35] Lavignac, Albert. *Les gaietés du Conservatoire*. Paris: C. Delagrave, 1899: 6. As cited in White, Kimberly. *Female Singers on the French Stage*: 12.

Student origins were also geographically diverse. At the Paris Conservatoire, many students were born in the city itself or the surrounding 'Seine' *département*, but there were also a significant number of students from elsewhere in France and from abroad: Germany, Algeria, Tunisia, and Romania were all frequently represented.[36] Russian students had also commonly travelled great distances to pursue musical study in the capital. A small sample of female students enrolled at the Petersburg Conservatoire between 1900 and 1914 includes applicants from as far afield as Ekaterinoslav, Odessa, Kharkov, and Kiev, as well as Vladikavkaz, Novocherkassk, and Sarapul, and Tblisi.[37] Many students – both women and men – gave home addresses within the Pale of Settlement, and this fact, combined with their patronymics, suggests a high proportion of students were Jewish.[38] Their personal files include the internal passports and multiple residence permits needed for the duration of their studies in the capital.[39] As Lynn Sargeant has shown, obtaining a conservatoire diploma also carried with it the legally transformative title of 'free artist' (*svobodnyi khudozhnik*), and therefore represented a path out of the Pale for Jewish musicians.[40] After graduating, many female graduates were meticulous in their adoption of the title of *svobodnyi khudozhnik* in the signatures of their correspondence, and wielded their new status with marked self-confidence. For example, Maria Petrovna

[36] The programme of the *concours* lists only the students' place of birth, not their ethnicity. As such, it is not straightforwardly possible to discern whether students born in North Africa were descended from indigenous people, French colonial settlers, or both.

[37] Questions of race, ethnicity and nationality in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union differed from those posed in Western Europe, but recent scholarship has adopted these concepts as useful analytical lenses. See Rainbow, David (ed.). *Ideologies of Race: Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union in Global Context*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019; Tolz, Vera. *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Given the varied geographic and social origins of the Petersburg Conservatoire students, it is likely that the student body reflected at least some of the Empire's ethnic diversity.
TsGIA SPb, F. 361, op. 4, d. 10-22, "Spiski vypusnikov Konservatorii" for academic years 1900-1913.

[38] The Pale of Settlement refers to a region of the Western Russian Empire from the Baltic to the Black Sea, incorporating territories of modern Belarus, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, and Ukraine. From the late eighteenth century until 1917, the Empire's Jewish population was legally required to reside within the limits of the Pale, unless they had official dispensation to move beyond its limits. For more on Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement, see Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: the Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia.* Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002; Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.

[39] TsGIA SPb, F. 361, op. 1 (Lichnye dela uchenikov) and op. 2 (Lichnye dela uchenits) contain the personal files of male and female students respectively, who attended the Conservatoire between 1862 and 1916.

[40] Sargeant, "A New Class of People": 44.

Townley-Izerchina wrote to the recently founded St Petersburg Musical Institute in 1913, seeking employment:

> Having completed studies at the S. Petersburg Conservatoire in 1899, in the class of Professor Tolstov, holding the diploma of *free artist*, and having experience as a teacher, I present my services to the direction of the Musical Institute in the capacity of teacher, for specialised or obligatory piano classes.[41]

Her letter confidently assumes the identity of a young professional woman, what might in France have been called the *femme nouvelle*. In both France and Russia, studying at the Conservatoire offered women the opportunity to continue their studies, to live away from family in the capital, and potentially to gain formal qualifications and respectable employment.[42]

Contemporary attitudes towards female musicians in public discourse were broadly condescending. As with women's education more generally, critics assumed that young women pursued music to improve their chances on the marriage market or as an occupation in case a suitable husband could not be found.[43] Music was amongst the 'accomplishments' which parents expected girls to acquire, albeit in a mostly ornamental capacity.[44] Undoubtedly, some women from bourgeois backgrounds sought a conservatoire education precisely because it promised a degree of musical proficiency which might prove useful in finding either a husband or employment. White's analysis of the Paris Conservatoire cohort in the mid-nineteenth

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[41] Central State Historical Archive (TsGIA SPb), Fond 430 'The Petrograd Institute of Music in the Management of the Russian Women's Mutual Charitable Society. Petrograd, 1913-1918', Opis 1, Delo 3, '*O rabote priemnoi komissii*', l. 62.

[42] Barbara Engel cites the example of Praskovia Ivanovna Tatlina, an aristocratic woman in the early nineteenth century trapped in an unhappy marriage, who, 'over the vehement opposition of husband, family, and friends… provided her oldest daughter with musical training in the hope that through teaching, the only suitable calling for a noblewoman, the girl might remain independent,' in *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth Century Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 17. For an American example, see Nash, Margaret A. "A Means of Honorable Support: Art and Music in Women's Education in the Mid-Nineteenth Century." *History of Education Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2013): 45-63.

[43] Delamont, Sara. "The Contradictions in Ladies' Education", in Sara Delamont and Lorne Duffin (eds.), *The Nineteenth Century Women: Her Cultural and Physical World*. London: Croom Helm, 1978, 134-163.

[44] Delamont, p. 135; Cohen, Michèle. "Language and Meaning in a Documentary Source: Girls' Curriculum from the Late Eighteenth Century to the Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868." *History of Education* 34, no. 1 (2005): 77-93.

century suggests around two thirds of female vocal students chose not to pursue a professional career, instead going on to marry or become music teachers after their studies.[45]

Yet for a young woman who wished to nourish a genuine passion for music, she could surely do no better than to enrol at the prestigious Conservatoire. When Russian women wrote to the Petersburg Conservatoire, their letters of application employed one of a handful of formulaic expressions, the most common of which expressed a wish for 'a full musical education' (*polnoe muzykal'noe obrazovanie*).[46] Many women chose to study the piano, with voice and music theory also popular across both institutions, whereas the orchestral woodwind and brass instruments were the exclusive reserve of men. Stringed instruments, however, represented more neutral territory, with a growing number of women pursuing advanced study of the violin, viola, and even the violoncello and contrabass.[47] Yet the persistence of the idea that female conservatoire students were primarily concerned with the piano is symptomatic of a tendency to dismiss young women's music-making as 'unserious'.[48] Sargeant asserts that in Russia, young bourgeois women studying the piano 'co-opted the conservatories for their own purposes,' derailing the dual purpose of the Conservatoire's elite founders to nurture masculine creative talent and produce sufficient skilled rank-and-file orchestral musicians to supply the theatres.[49] While there was some truth to the image of the young bourgeois women enrolling in piano classes to stave off boredom, I would argue that many conservatoire women had

[45] White, *Female Singers on the French Stage:* 13-14.
[46] TsGIA SPb F. 361, Op. 2. Letters of application are always the first document in a student's personal file.
[47] Perhaps the most exceptional example was a M[lle] Zénaide Cisin, born in Odessa in 1886, who was awarded a Premier Prix in the Contrebasse ('*Distributions des Prix' 1907:* 49) but the class of 1911 saw no fewer than six women graduate from the cello class.
[48] Solie, Ruth A. "'Girling' at the Parlor Piano", in *Music in Other Words: Victorian conversations*. Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2004: 85-117. See also Burgan, Mary. "Heroines at the Piano: Women and Music in Nineteenth-Century Fiction". *Victorian Studies* 30, no. 1 (1986): 51-76; Leppert, Richard. "Sexual Identity, Death, and the Family Piano", *19th-Century Music* 16, no. 2 (1992): 105-28; and Carnevali, Francesca and Lucy Newton. "Pianos for the People: From Producer to Consumer in Britain, 1851-1914". *Enterprise & Society* 14, no. 1 (2013): 37-70.
[49] Sargeant, *Harmony and Discord*: 120, 85.

compelling educational, professional, economic, and personal reasons for pursuing music at the highest level.

While the Conservatoire may have been ideologically masculine, on the ground, at the level of students moving past one another in the corridors on their way to class, women were a significant presence. This raises questions about who the Conservatoire was *for:* who benefitted from its teaching, who felt welcome and socially at ease within its walls. As scholarship surrounding historical listening acknowledges the importance of the environment in shaping modes of listening, we must go one step further and consider how that environment was in turn shaped by gendered expectations and interactions. In the case of the Conservatoire, the institution's outwardly masculine priorities have obscured the ways in which women made space for themselves. I suggest that the higher proportion of women was a crucial factor in shaping the experience of female students attending the Conservatoire and the modes of listening they developed there. When not singled out as the only woman in class, female students could focus their attention on developing their ear, engaging with musical forms, or incorporating critique. Conservatoire records also tell us something about the reasons for which young women chose to pursue higher study in music – from the pragmatic to the poetic – which also affected the focus and purpose of their listening.

**Relationships between Musical Women.**

Such high numbers of women enrolled in these Conservatoires are also testament to the relationships and networks of women who supported female students in pursuing musical studies. While male endorsement of women's musical activities was often a necessity, this generally took the form of tacit approval or of granting permission, whereas practical details – transportation, living arrangements, and finance – were largely attended to by other women. Women actively fostered the musical passion and talent of younger women or girls, reminding

us that even in the 'masculine' world of professional art music, there remained space for alternative models of interaction.

This kind of facilitation is particularly visible in the annual records of the Paris *concours du Conservatoire* – the award ceremonies following the final examinations. In 1907, of the 16 prizes on offer, 13 were established with funds gifted or bequeathed by women and nine specified that at least one recipient must be *une élève femme*.[50] These proportions remained fairly constant in the following years, even as the new prizes were founded in addition to those existing. In 1908 there were 18 prizes, 15 established with funds donated by women and ten intended for female recipients;[51] in 1909, these figures were 16 and ten respectively of a total of 20 awards;[52] and in the 1911 ceremony, 18 of the 24 prizes were established by women, still with ten specifying a female awardee.[53] Even when a class was heavily dominated by women, as the harp class was, donors might still include a clause that the recipient must be female: the *Prix Meunié* – established by M$^{lle}$ Jeanne-Ernestine Meunié in memory of her mother, intended to provide funds for the Premier Prix winner to purchase a new Erard harp – specified 'this award is reserved exclusively for female students, and the amount will be paid to the fund of the Association of Artists and Musicians in the event that no First Prize is awarded'.[54]

Women who founded prizes were frequently listed as 'M$^{me}$ V$^{ve}$' (widows), but as often as not, these women founded the prize in their Maiden name: The *Prix George-Hainl* was established by M$^{me}$ V$^{ve}$ Le Corbeiller, née George-Hainl;[55] the *Prix Milanollo* was established in 1908 by M$^{me}$ La Générale Parmentier, née Térésa Milanollo;[56] and the *Prix Eugénie Sourget de Santa Coloma*, founded in 1911, was a composite of both the married and maiden names of

[50] *'Distribution des Prix' (1907):* 5-12.
[51] *'Distribution des Prix' (1908):* 5-13.
[52] *'Distribution des Prix' (1909):* 7-16
[53] *'Distribution des Prix' (1910-1911):* 6-19.
[54] Ibid.: 13.
[55] Ibid.: 8.
[56] *'Distribution des Prix' (1908)*: 13

M^me^ A. Sourget, née de Santa Coloma.[57] There were also a four instances in which the donor of a particular prize was apparently unmarried, and listed in the programme as *Mademoiselle*: M^lle^ Julie-Claudia Popelin, M^lle^ Gabrielle-Marie-Francoise Tholer, M^lle^ Jeanne-Ernestine Meunié; and M^lle^ A. Rose.[58] The legacies they left were far from insignificant, generating hundreds or even thousands of francs in annuities each year. These women had both the financial means and the personal motivation to make these donations, often with an explicit view to encourage female musicianship: the *Prix Popelin*, *Tholer*, and *Meunié* all specified females recipients.

Prizes also sometimes bore the name of the woman they commemorated, as was the case with the *Prix Rosine-Laborde*, founded in 1908 'in memory of M^me^ Rosine Laborde, former student of the Conservatoire,' and the *Fondation Yvonne de Gouy d'Arsy*, first awarded in 1911 by M^me^ la Vicomtesse Mathieu de la Redorte, née Abeille, 'in memory of M^lle^ Yvonne de Gouy d'Arsy, her daughter', who died in 1910, aged 36.[59] In recognition of her daughter's particular interest in composition – at least one of Yvonne's works was published[60] – her mother specified that the award should be split, with 3000 francs awarded to the recipient of the first prize in fugue, and the remainder to be shared equally between the finalists of the Prix de Rome competition, to defray the costs of a month's stay in the *loge* at Compiègne. The music periodical *Le Ménestrel* published a notice of the creation of the fund on 29 October 1910, in which they relay her explanation to M. Charles-Marie Widor, professor of composition at the Conservatoire:

> …her mother was announced to Mr. Widor, who knew and appreciated the value of the work left by Mlle Gouy d'Arsy and, through her tears, she said: "I would like that my daughter's name should remain tied to the history of French music, that her

[57] *'Distribution des Prix' (1910-1911)*: 17.
[58] Ibid.: 6-19.
[59] *Distribution des Prix' (1908)*: 13; *'Distribution des Prix' (1910-1911)*: 18.
[60] Her composition *Pensée perdue!*, which set poetry by Sully Prudhomme, was published by Poulalion in 1905.

> memory will remain in the recollections of the generations which follow at the Conservatoire, and that it might deserve a little gratitude each year.[61]

While the Vicomtesse did not specify the gender of the recipients, her gesture shows clear support for her daughter's love of music – not only performance, but composition. Although her legacy was not exclusively to benefit women composers, in commemorating her daughter's musical achievements, she underscored composition as an appropriate and viable pursuit for young women.

In Russia, women were also patrons of public musical life.[62] The annual account books of the Petersburg Conservatoire contain a list of scholarships sponsored by members of the imperial family, and while there may have been some degree of personal discretion, it is not clear how selections were made. The scholarships named for Her Imperial Majesty Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna (Personal), the late Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, and the Empress Maria Institutional Scholarship were all awarded to exclusively female recipients between 1900 and 1910, supporting between six and eight women each year, although it is unclear whether this was at the behest of the sponsor or the convenience of the Conservatoire.[63] However, beyond the financial, women's networks in the Petersburg music circle did take on a more explicitly familial quality. Women's interactions within the Conservatoire context were often framed by a language of intimacy and familiarity, and mothers – particularly widows – were closely involved in their daughter's musical education. Barbara Engels has argued for the importance of mother-daughter relationships amongst women political radicals of the 1870s, claiming that 'the support of other women, be they mothers or women comrades,' was crucial

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[61] 'Un Legs Important au Conservatoire', *Le Ménestrel*, 29 October 1910, p. 347.
[62] Two notable beneficiaries include the St Petersburg Conservatoire itself, which was established under the patronage of the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, and the composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, whose career was facilitated by the financial support of the widow Nadezhda von Meck.
[63] *Otchety C.-Peterburgskogo Otdelenia Imperatorskogo Russkogo Muzykalnogo Obshchestva i Konservatorii, 1900-1910.* The Library of the St Petersburg State Conservatory Department of Manuscripts (O*tdel' rukopisei)*, documents M 0-88ca 18505 – M 0-88ca 18514.

to their activism.[64] We can see echoes of such relationships and networks amongst the musically-minded women in the early twentieth century, as the Woman Question in Russia was once again gathering steam.[65]

Within the walls of the Conservatoire, female students and teachers interacted with one another in ways which mirrored family relationships. In some cases, female students were literally amongst family, and it was not unusual for sisters to attend the Conservatoire in succession. For instance, the Daugovet sisters – Ekaterina, Zinaida, and Lidia – were admitted to the Petersburg Conservatoire between 1900 and 1906, all applying to study piano under Professor Lavrov.[66] Lyudmila and Mariia Subbotina also attended the Conservatoire together from their early teens, and likely continued to live together in the family home during their studies, at 'Apartment 34, No. 18, Malaya Italyanskaya ulitsa' – just under an hour's walk from the Conservatoire.[67] Mothers, and especially widows, frequently corresponded with the Petersburg Conservatoire to secure a place for their young daughters, to negotiate reductions in their fees, and to request documentation of their qualifications upon graduation.[68]

Even when the ties between musical women were not established by blood, there remained a sense of a familial atmosphere, particularly amongst vocal students. In a commemorative volume to celebrate the centenary of the Petersburg Conservatoire in 1962, former voice students – including Sofia Dmitrievna Maslovskaia, Mariia Isaakovna Brian, and Larisa Vasil'evna Kicha – recalled their studies under the imposing matriarchal figure of

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[64] Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*: 201.
[65] In Russia, the 'Woman Question', or 'zhenskii vopros', was an umbrella term used to refer to debates surrounding women's emancipation, education, and legal position within society, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and enduring to the organised campaigns for equal rights and suffrage of the revolutionary period 1905-1917. See Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (second ed.) Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.
[66] "Daugovet Ekaterina Frantsevna", TsGIA SPb, F. 361, op. 2, d. 1991; "Daugovet Zinaida Frantsevna", TsGIA SPb, F. 361, op. 2, d. 1992; "Daugovet (v zamuzh. Mal'ko) Lidiia Frantsevna", TsGIA SPb, F. 361, op. 2, d. 1993.
[67] "Subbotina Liudmila Vasil'evna", TsGIA SPb, F. 361, op. 2, d. 6497, l. 1; and "Subbotina Mariia Vasil'evna", TsGIA SPb, F. 361, op. 2, d. 6498, l. 1.
[68] One such example is Luiza Genrikhovna Abolenskaia, who wrote extensively on behalf of her daughter. "Mariia Vladimirovna Abolenskaia", TsGIA SPb, F. 361, op. 2, d. 8, l. 1.

Natalia Alexandrovna Iretskaia, a senior vocal professor. Through their various memories, a kind of musical-pedagogical family tree emerges: Iretskaia, who was already over 60, was assisted in her teaching by her former students, 'Aktseri, Gladkaia, and Zherebtsova-Andreeva'.[69] Zherebtsova-Andreeva also taught Brian, Kicha, and Danielian during their time at the Conservatoire; Brian and Kicha both taught at the Leningrad Conservatory later in life, making them colleagues as well as classmates. In her recollections, Kicha expressed her gratitude to Zherebtsova-Andreeva, saying "[she] provided me with much help in the form of methodological advice, gave me students, sometimes listened to them, pointing out their deficiencies and praising their strengths, and thus it was she who prepared me for my teaching career".[70]

To a certain extent, this sense of intimacy and lineage may have been deliberately cultivated by the editors of the centenary volume through their choice of contributors and the prompts or direction they gave. Nevertheless, the shared emphasis on a school of vocal performance plays into notions of 'generational' music pedagogy, the difference being that in this instance, all members of the family-tree were women. As female vocal instructors generally taught only female students, voice classes opened up the possibility for a 'matrilineal' passing-on of musical knowledge which would have been impossible in more masculine areas of study.[71] Iretskaia and her artistic descendants are one example of this alternative model, and these recollections engage in a kind of mythmaking of a specifically feminine performance culture. This stands in marked contrast to the more prevalent myth of Russian music – Stasov

[69] Maslovskaia, S. D. in Tigranov, G. G. *Leningradskaia konservatoriia v vospominaniiakh, 1862–1962*. Leningrad: Gos. Muzykal'noe izd-vo 1962: 313; Kicha, L. V. in *Leningradskaia konservatoriia v vospominaniiakh:* 324.
[70] Kicha, L. V. in *Leningradskaia konservatoriia v vospominaniiakh:* 324.
[71] While men might teach female singing students, women seldom taught male students. Kimberly White notes this was also true of the Paris Conservatoire, where female vocal instructors were permitted only female students. *Female Singers on the French Stage, 1830-1848*: 36.

and his Mighty Handful of composers – which in both membership and rhetoric was decidedly masculine.[72]

Interactions between female students and their teachers were remarkably affectionate. Nadezhda Iosefovna Golubovskaia, a student pianist and *repetiteur*, recalls how Iretskaia spoke to students during class: "'My darling [*dushka moia*] – (this is how she usually addressed students, although sometimes it was followed by: My darling, you are an idiot) – … Go on, sing!'".[73] Sargeant also notes the emotional intensity of the connection between teachers and promising students, citing the case of A. N. Amfiteatrova-Levitskaia, a vocal student at the Moscow Conservatory in the 1870s, who "idealized her teacher as exceptionally devoted to her students; many of her pupils, moreover, addressed her as 'mama'".[74]

Consistent across the examples from Paris and Petersburg, and in keeping with this maternal imagery, is the sense of inter-generational support. Older women sought ways to support younger students, either financially or personally, in their pursuit of a musical education. Such gestures speak to profound personal experiences of music amongst the older generation – reflective, perhaps, of their own professional aspirations or unrealised ambitions for musical training – and a desire that musical education be readily accessible to other women. Yet the forms in which this support was offered are also worthy of note. The examples given here largely conform to notions of feminine philanthropy or maternal care, both pervasive – and fundamentally conservative – models of women's contribution to public life.[75] It is

[72] The Mighty Handful (*Moguchaia kuchka*), sometimes referred to as 'the Five', were a group of composers – Mily Balakirev, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin, Modest Musorgsky, and César Cui – championed by the critic Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov in the second half of the nineteenth century as a founding school of Russian nationalist musical style. For more on the influence of this group on Russian music and musical discourse, see Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007; and Richard Taruskin, *On Russian Music.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009.

[73] Golubovskaia, N. I. in *Leningradskaia konservatoriia v vospominaniiakh*: 252.

[74] Sargeant, *Harmony and Discord*: 101.

[75] Johnson, Joan Marie. "And Education for Women Equal to That of Men: Funding Colleges for Women", in *Funding Feminism: Monied Women, Philanthropy, and the Women's Movement, 1870-1967.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017: 108-138; Liborakina, Marina. "Women's Voluntarism and Philanthropy in Pre-revolutionary Russia: Building a Civil Society." *Voluntas: International Journal of*

significant that women's involvement with formal music education still required a veneer of traditional femininity: as 'musical genius' was still widely considered a masculine quality, overt femininity ensured that women's musical success remained palatable to critics.[76] Studies of performers have shown that high-achieving musical women often affected a markedly feminine public persona.[77] This echoes the 'double conformity' demanded of women's education throughout the latter nineteenth century and into the twentieth: in order to succeed within the framework of the 'dominant male cultural system', female students must conform without fault to ideas of 'ladylike' behaviour.[78] Women's networks surrounding the Conservatoire suggest that, as for women's education more generally, this expectation applied as much to the women who facilitated that education as it did to students.[79] By aligning their activities with feminine models of civic engagement, supportive networks of musical women were able to socially neutralise what might otherwise have been perceived as a threat to those men who made their living in the music profession.

What the example of these Conservatoires makes apparent is that women often listened in the company of other women. The intimacy and familiarity of women listening in a Conservatoire classroom still recalls modes of listening which grew out of domestic settings: mothers and daughters at the piano, for instance, or sisters performing duets for a gathering of female friends. As a liminal and semi-public space, the Conservatoire blurred the boundaries between notions of prescriptive or educated listening and more intimate ways of listening, allowing individuals to draw on elements of both to create hybrid listening practices. Listening

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*Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 7, no. 4 (1996): 397-411; Lindenmeyr, Adele. "Public Life, Private Virtues: Women in Russian Charity, 1762-1914." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18, no. 3 (1993): 562-91

[76] Kennerly, p. 988; Ellis, Katherine. "Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in 19th-century Paris." *Journal of The American Musicological Society* 50, no. 2-3 (1997): 353-85.

[77] Fauser, Annegret. "*La Guerre En Dentelles*: Women and the *Prix De Rome* in French Cultural Politics." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51, no. 1 (1998): 83-129; Sykes, Ingrid J. "Gender and Musical Performance in Mid-nineteenth-century France: The Case of Juliette Godillon and the Femme D'esprit." *French History* 24, no. 4 (2010): 576-600.

[78] Delamont, "The Contradictions in Ladies' Education".

[79] Ibid.: 145.

is often cast as introspective activity, but the institutional setting of the Conservatoire shows it is also an outward-looking, social and relational practice. The inclusion of these dimensions gives a far more nuanced understanding of the gendered experience of listening.

**(Inter-)Personal Listening: The Boulanger Sisters**

The particular story of the Boulanger sisters – Nadia and Lili – brings together many of the themes of this article: family, musical institutions, professionalism and femininity, and an especially close and supportive musical relationship between two women. The sisters lived in Paris, although their mother Raisa Myshetskaia had met their father while a student at the Petersburg Conservatoire, where he was a visiting professor.[80] Their father, Ernest Boulanger, had a long musical career which encompassed teaching, conducting, and composition, for which he won the Prix de Rome in 1835.[81] His death in 1900, when Nadia was 12 and Lili only six, had a profound impact on both girls and their relationship. The family's musical legacy and personal connections to the Paris music scene ensured that the sisters' talents were recognised and encouraged, both as performers and composers. They audited classes at the Paris Conservatoire from a young age, and also took private lessons with conservatoire professors. Their mother held a monthly salon in their home, known as 'Une Heure de Musique', at which both girls regularly performed, including their own compositions.[82]

Composition remained a difficult career choice for women in the early twentieth century, and those who pursued it tested the limit of what was considered an acceptable feminine occupation. Those who did pursue a musical career in composition were largely steered towards the supposedly more feminine genres of piano character pieces and salon

[80] Potter, Caroline. "Nadia and Lili Boulanger: Sister Composers." *Musical Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (1999): 536; Fauser, "*La Guerre en dentelles*": 120.
[81] Fauser, "*La Guerre en dentelles*": 112.
[82] *Programmes de concerts donnés par Nadia Boulanger : 1902-1920 [Documents d'archives],* RES VM DOS-195 (1902-1910), Bibliothèque nationale de France.

romances, suitable for a domestic setting.[83] Works by women composers were 'repeatedly condemned as pretty yet trivial or – in the event that it does not conform to standards of feminine propriety – as aggressive and unbefitting a woman.'[84] Such vigilant gatekeeping speaks to the male anxiety surrounding the status of music as both profession and art form.[85] The exclusion women composers faced was epitomised by the prestigious annual *Prix de Rome*, which remained closed to women until 1903, when their participation was permitted by the relevant government minister, Joseph Chaumié, against the will of the members of the Académie des Beaux Arts.[86] Nadia Boulanger became the third woman to compete in 1906 – following Juliette Toutain and Hélène Fleury in 1903 – and was awarded a *Deuxième Seconde Grand Prix* on her third attempt in 1908.[87] The following year, despite being 'tipped to win', she received no award; disillusioned, she channelled much of her energy into developing the talents of her younger sister.[88]

In 1913, Lili Boulanger became the first woman to be awarded the *Premier Grand Prix de Rome* in musical composition, receiving 31 of 36 votes in the final round, at the age of only 19.[89] Her winning cantata, *Faust et Hélène*, provides fertile ground to consider how musical space – both sonic and institutional – was governed by gender. The structure of the *Prix de Rome* competition necessarily imposed certain limitations on Lili Boulanger in this work – most notably, her music is corseted by the generic qualities of the cantata, and by the prescribed text. *Faust et Hélène* therefore does not represent what she *might* have written had she been given a carte blanche, but we can instead look for evidence of how Boulanger pushed against those

[83] Potter, "Nadia and Lili Boulanger": 547.
[84] McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002: 19. Such criticism echoes that of virtuosic women performers several decades earlier, as outlined by Ellis, "Female Pianists and Their Male Critics".
[85] McClary, *Feminine Endings*: 17.
[86] Fauser, "*La Guerre en dentelles*": 86-89
[87] Ibid., p. 119
[88] Ibid., pp. 119-120
[89] Ibid., p. 123.

limitations, speaking in a musical voice which is, if not explicitly feminine, not entirely masculine either.

The cantata itself exists in several forms, and as a result encompasses many overlapping layers of potential meaning: textual and musical, but also aural and visual in performance. At its most essential, we might consider the cantata to be the music notated onto manuscript paper and submitted to the competition's jury panel. But there is also an ephemeral version of the cantata which existed beyond the page, in the particular space and time of its public performance – with Nadia Boulanger at the piano, accompanying three vocalists. As per the regulations of the competition, Lili was required to direct her cantata from a podium before the jury, and her physical presence and comportment therefore becomes part of the work as it was premiered, a potential source of meaning which existed in parallel to the musical score.

First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge that in this work, Lili Boulanger does not shy away from using traditionally 'masculine' musical vocabulary. *Faust et Hélène* has been dismissed as "derivatively Wagnerian,"[90] and her musical language bears similarities to that of her contemporaries Debussy, Ravel, and Stravinsky. Additionally, associated as it was with the *Prix de Rome* and the public cultural sphere, the cantata is firmly situated within the framework of the masculine musical establishment. At first hearing, Boulanger's prize-winning cantata would seem to support the idea that, granted equal opportunity, 'women too will emerge as composers, *indistinguishable from their male colleagues*.'[91] Musicologist Susan McClary, however, has been famously critical of the notion that genius should transcend gender, instead imagining a 'feminine' musical analysis which resists the masculine logic of traditional tonality, harmony, and form.[92] Some of McClary's ideas are taken up by Briony Cox-Williams in her

[90] Cox-Williams, Briony. "Helen's Silences: The Gendering of Voice Pitch and Narrative Structure in Lili Boulanger's Faust Et Hélène." *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 83, no. 2 (2014): 114.
[91] McClary, *Feminine Endings*: 114 (emphasis original).
[92] McClary, *Feminine Endings*.

analysis of *Faust et Hélène.*[93] Cox-Williams reads the musical score in tension with the verbal narrative of the text, to highlight Boulanger's compositional choices and the structure of gendered values they imply.[94] Although the cantata falls within contemporary expectations of the genre and of art music more generally, certain aspects of the work offer subtle resistance to normative musical structure.

Cox-Williams offers a compelling reading of the cantata's tonality. Both male roles – the baritone Mephistopheles and the tenor Faust – enter on a sustained F sharp, the dominant of the underlying B major harmony. [95] Hélène's first entry is also an F sharp, but her melodic line struggles against the implied B major harmony, sliding instead towards the subdominant, the relative key historically associated with femininity in music theory.[96] The piece closes in C minor, the key of much of Hélène's music and harmonically distant from the tonality outlined by the male singers' opening melodies. In this choice Boulanger departs from the teleological narrative of traditional harmonic structure, "from a home base (tonic), to the conquest of two or three other keys, and a return to tonic for closure."[97] It is also noteworthy that Boulanger wrote the role of Hélène for mezzo-soprano, rather than the soprano voice more commonly favoured by the genre.[98] At certain points, the mezzo-soprano and tenor sing together at the same pitch, with several passages where the female vocal line sinks below the male.[99] In the dramatic final trio, all three voices begin tightly packed in terms of pitch, heightening the dramatic tension, as the listener must strain to differentiate the vocal lines. These moments of closely-written vocal parts serve to blur the gendered lines established by the musical canon.

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[93] Cox-Williams, Briony. "Helen's Silences: The Gendering of Voice Pitch and Narrative Structure in Lili Boulanger's Faust Et Hélène." *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 83, no. 2 (2014): 113-24.
[94] Cox-Williams, "Helen's Silences": 113-124.
[95] Cox-Williams, "Helen's Silences": 124.
[96] Ibid.
[97] McClary, *Feminine Endings*: 14.
[98] Female voice-types have carried symbolic significance in the operatic canon, which have also carried over into related vocal genres. See Clément, Catherine. *Opera, Or, The Undoing of Women*. Tauris Transformations. London: Tauris, 1997.
[99] Cox-Williams, "Helen's Silences": 124.

There is a way of hearing Lili Boulanger's cantata as audibly inflected by her gender, as refusing harmonic narrative and subversion of gendered hierarchies and systems of meaning; yet the soundworld she created in this work was sufficiently ambiguous that the musical mainstream – here represented by the panel of adjudicators – nevertheless endorsed the piece.

Equally important to how the work was first heard, though, was Lili's physical presence at the work's premiere, contributing another layer of gendered meaning. Composition candidates were required to conduct the performance of their work. This requirement had contributed to Nadia's downfall: her public persona was that of the self-assured *femme nouvelle*, and when required to conduct her cantata, did so with a degree of confidence which some observers – including members of the jury – found to be unfeminine and unacceptable.[100] In contrast, when Lili took the podium in 1913, she stood essentially motionless on the platform, head bowed and hands folded, 'avoiding any gesture that could be interpreted as directing or conducting her musicians'.[101] The critic Émile Vuillermoz – who, as we have seen, was no great supporter of women in the musical realm – described Lili Boulanger's conduct during the performance of her cantata: 'Her modest and simple bearing, her gaze cast down on the score, her immobility during the performance, her absolute abandonment to the will of her excellent interpreters – she did not allows herself even once to beat time or indicate a nuance – all this contributed to her cause.'[102] Two sketches made on the day of the final competition show Lili in this listening posture, dressed in a voluminous white dress with buttons and a lace frill at the neckline.[103] Her diminutive bodily presence included visual cues – her posture, her dress, her stillness – which not only preserved her femininity in the public eye, as Fauser argues, but

[100] Fauser, "*La Guerre en dentelles*": 118-122
[101] Ibid.: 126.
[102] Vuillermoz, Émile. "*La Guerre en dentelles*", *Musica*, August 1913: 153.
[103] One is drawn by M. Flameng, and forms part of the collection of press clippings that make up Lili Boulanger's 'dossier' in the BnF Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra: [Dossier Lili Boulanger] [Document d'archives] : Dossier d'artiste Boulanger (Lili), notice №: FRBNF39689002. The other, drawn by M. Dagnan-Bouveret, was published as an accompaniment to Émile Vuillermoz's article "La Guerre en dentelles", in *Musica,* August 1913: 153.

minimised her role as the composer of the work being performed.[104] Ironically, in her visibility as composer, Lili adopted the pose of the ideal listener. Her self-effacing posture mimicked that of the contemplative, silent, and still concert-goer, as though she – like her audience – was hearing the cantata for the first time.

Fauser has argued that Lili's careful management of her public gender persona emphasised her image as a *femme fragile*, and credits her with the canny decision to do "nothing that could be construed as aggressive, assertive, or arrogant", careful to remain within the prescribed bounds of femininity.[105] However, she does not discuss the possibility that Lili was also guided or supported in this choice by those around her, particularly her sister Nadia.[106] The sisters were both living in their mother's home at 36 Rue Ballu, and it seems very likely that the two would have discussed Lili's performance strategy together, having learned from the backlash which Nadia had faced from her own conducting. With her sister at the piano, Lili could more readily surrender her directorial authority, knowing that her cantata was in safe hands. The dynamic the two created at the *Prix de Rome* performance, the elder sister playing the piano and the younger quietly listening, had surely played out countless times in their mother's living room. The support of her elder sister therefore appears crucial in Lili's *Prix de Rome* victory, not only as a formative musical influence, but also in allowing her the emotional freedom to actively determine how to perform her gender in the public eye.

A close reading of the first performance of Lili Boulanger's *Faust et Hélène* makes visible the significance of her relationship with her sister, and the mutual love and support they showed one another. Lili's dedication of her winning cantata is tribute to this: while it was usual for contestants to dedicate their submission to their composition teachers – in Lili's case, Georges Caussade – she instead dedicated the work to her sister Nadia.[107] As the youngest

[104] Fauser, "*La Guerre en dentelles*": 122-127
[105] Fauser, "*La Guerre en dentelles*": 126.
[106] Ibid.: 123-4.
[107] Potter, "Nadia and Lili Boulanger": 537.

recipient of the *Premier Grand Prix* across all artistic disciplines that year, Lili was required to make a speech at the annual dinner for awardees and their guests, which was held at the Hotel Lutetia on 22 November 1913 (Nadia's name was on the guest list).[108] She was evidently nervous about the task, admitting that since she had learned of the 'old tradition', her excited anticipation had turned to dread and the forthcoming event had become 'a nightmare' for her.[109] In the notes for her speech, Lili wrote:

> I would like to thank my interpreters, Mademoiselle Croize, Messieurs Devriès and Albers, who offered me their talent and friendly dedication in equal measures, and I apologise, being unable to prevent myself, for encompassing in my joy my dear big sister, Nadia, whose tenderness has always watched protectively over my life and who has been to me perhaps more than a sister, but a sort of big brother.[110]

The fact that Lili casts Nadia as having filled the role of her "grand frère" is intriguing, and can be read in a number of ways. The gendered language might be a way for Lili to underline the absolute centrality of her sister to her musical success, to recognise that she had been *so* important that her support was equivalent to that of a man. This would imply that the supportive networks of women I have described were still unrecognised, that the musical mainstream was still incapable of understanding or valuing the ways in which women assisted and encouraged each other. Another possibility, if we consider Lili's speech as a continuation of her performance as a young female composer, is that she is still playing the part of the *femme fragile*, the public persona to which Fauser attributes her palatability and success with the male musical elites.[111]

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[108] Dîner des Prix de Rome [Document d'archives] (1913). Bibliothèque Nationale de France, collection Richelieu – Musique, RES VM DOS-120 (05).
[109] Lili Boulanger. Dîner des Prix de Rome : discours de Lili Boulanger, 22 novembre 1913 [Document d'archives] (1913). Bibliothèque Nationale de France, collection Richelieu – Musique, RES VM DOS-120 (6 ; 1): 1.
[110] Boulanger, Lili. Dîner des Prix de Rome : discours de Lili Boulanger, 22 novembre 1913 [Document d'archives] (1913). Bibliothèque Nationale de France, collection Richelieu – Musique, RES VM DOS-120 (6 ; 1): 6.
[111] Fauser, "*La Guerre en dentelles*": 122-124.

In many ways, the Boulanger sisters epitomise the kind of close connection musical women might have developed in the early twentieth century. Their relationship serves as a window into women's musicality and listening habits, as it lies at the intersection of the institutional and the personal. The sisters took part in the formal structures and networks of public cultural life, aided by their parents' legacies and their Conservatoire education. Yet music was a central part of their private, inner lives too, and the way they expressed themselves musically was doubtlessly inflected by the close personal relationship between the sisters. The premiere of Lili's *Faust et Hélène* represents one instance in which the two dimensions – the internal and the external – were combined, and the rich body of source material around the work and its premiere performance allow us to elucidate traces of a listening culture which owed as much to women's relationships as it did to masculine convention. The work is of course testament to Lili Boulanger's extraordinary personal talent, but it is also, in a sense, the product of cumulative feminine experience: Nadia's own involvement with the Conservatoire and the *Prix de Rome*; their mother's weekly musical salons; Yvonne Gouy d'Arsy and her mother, whose generosity provided two hundred francs to each of the *logistes*, from which Lili would have benefitted; and all the women before her who had determinedly pursued a musical education at the Conservatoire.

**Conclusion**

A closer examination of the social composition of the Paris and Petersburg Conservatoires in the early twentieth century shows them to be spaces where women as well as men pursued musical education and creative passion. Despite an ostensibly masculine agenda, the Conservatoire created pockets of feminine space; homosocial environments in which women learned to listen. Enrolment and graduation records from both institutions show a generation of young women of diverse backgrounds who were motivated to study music for a range of personal and professional reasons, often with the practical support and emotional

encouragement of older women. These relationships and networks of musical women legitimised women's presence and ambition in public cultural life, affecting how women navigated gendered expectations. On a more emotional level, women's musicality and modes of listening were significantly shaped by the presence of other women. Familiarity with cohorts of women conservatoire students, therefore, is not only important to an understanding of women's contributions to public cultural life, but also of how engagement with music was both gendered and deeply individual.