

Perceptions of women as composers and instrumental performers in the *Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung* (1841-48)

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This article is based on only a fraction of the contents of the *Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung*, for few women in the fields of composition and instrumental performance received attention in it, except perhaps for concert pianists, of whom performances by some twenty-three women are reviewed. Some details about the journal itself are available and general background on the status of women as musicians in the mid-nineteenth century will serve to put the reviews in context. An introduction to the composer Nina Stollewerk will be presented, for Stollewerk's compositions merited eleven reviews in the *Allgemeine Wiener* between 1844 and 1847, more than any other woman composer mentioned in the journal.

The journal

The *Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung* was founded in January 1841, although the title was changed in 1845 to *Wiener Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung* for no given reason.¹ (It should not be confused with the journal of the same name which was published earlier in the century.) Its founder and editor for all but the last year of publication was August Schmidt, a civil servant who was active as a violinist and conductor.² In *Music and the Middle Class* William Weber suggests that the journal was the first 'solidly professional music magazine' to appear in Vienna,³ and that Schmidt had aimed to represent the interests of Viennese music and musicians in its pages.

It appeared three times weekly throughout the year, each issue consisting of four pages with occasional supplements. Although no information on circulation has as yet become available, the word 'allgemeine' in the title translates as 'universal', hence the *Viennese Universal Musical Paper*. In this period and context 'allgemeine' indicates that the journal was intended for a wide readership geographically, reaching beyond the confines of

Vienna.⁴ This is also evident from the often extensive correspondence section, which includes reviews of concert life in cities all over Europe, from London to Saint Petersburg. In June 1847 a new editor, Ferdinand Luib, took over, whose lack of experience either in music or criticism may have contributed to the journal's closure in July 1848.⁵

Case Study: Nina Stollewerk

Born circa 1825, Nina Stollewerk was a singer and composer of some reputation in Vienna, and indeed her entry in the *Deutsches Biographisches Archiv*, under her married name Rosthorn, lists her only as a composer and states specifically that she was active in composition both before and after her marriage.⁶ She is the subject of some fourteen notices and articles in the *Allgemeine Wiener*. Her works reviewed include performances of several Offertories, two Masses, a six-voice psalm setting, and two orchestral works, and the publication of two sets of Lieder. Her sacred works were reviewed after their performances in the Franziskanerkirche and her songs were published in Vienna and Leipzig. The orchestral concert of her works was held in the Musikvereinsaal, the concert hall of the Society of the Friends of Music which seated 700,⁷ although there is no comment on the audience size or reaction to this concert. Nevertheless, her large-scale works were performed, which is a considerable achievement for a woman in this period.

To give an impression of the reviews, as they indicate an attitude towards Stollewerk as a composer and as a woman, this article examines attributes placed before her name, the implications of her status as amateur rather than professional, and the patronising and didactic tone adopted in referring to her works and in giving her advice on composition. Finally, attention will be drawn to the image of femininity alluded to in these reviews.

The critic who wrote most of the reviews of

Stollewerk's compositions was Ferdinand Peter Graf von Laurencin d'Armond, who wrote under the pseudonym 'Philokales' and was a contributor to several leading music journals of the time, including Schumann's *Zeitschrift für Musik*.⁸

It is important to note that in German one never forgets the gender of the person discussed: instead of the gender-neutral term 'composer', it is always either 'der Komponist' (masculine), or 'die Komponistin' (feminine). Initially Stollewerk is always introduced as the well-known singer, then as the singer and composer, and by the seventh review simply as the 'composer Nina Stollewerk'. But she was also referred to in less simple forms.

There are attributes added to her name, some of which appear in references to women performers in other reviews. She is referred to as talented: 'die talentvolle . . . Komponistin'.⁹ Her talent is often dwelt on, even called a 'beautiful talent', but she is never ascribed anything more than talent, which is typical of these reviews where young artists are concerned, and in this period an important distinction was made between talent and genius. Sometimes her talent is overstated, as if the critic were trying to convince himself of it.

The next attribute is introduced in the third review of Stollewerk's music by Philokales, who still refers to her talent, but adds that she is 'liebenswert', that is, 'amiable' or 'charming'.¹⁰ It should be noted that a woman's personal demeanour is also of some significance to the critic in the performance reviews. In the same review Philokales refers to her youth: 'die jugendliche Componistin', which is reasonable since she would have been around 20 years old, but he also refers to her in the possessive form as 'our composer' ('unsere Componistin'). The latter somewhat patronising usage becomes habitual for Philokales in his later reviews, where Stollewerk appears as 'our talented composer'¹¹ and even 'our talented, charming composer'.¹²

At first Stollewerk is called a 'Dilettantin' (amateur) as opposed to a 'Künstlerin' (artist or professional), and this constitutes another important distinction of this period. Again, in referring to Philokales's third review, of her Mass in F major, he calls her a 'Dilettantin' for the last time:

And so I am pleased to warmly welcome this

Dilettantin who really is talented to a high degree and shows much future promise as a church composer, and to encourage her strongly to continue with her enthusiasm and commendable efforts to improve in the art.¹³

He seems a little unsure of her talent, and his 'welcome' is patronising in spite of his praise. Such a welcome of young talent is however typical of his style, not only in reference to women, but it is worth noting that while he abandons the term 'Dilettantin', he never actually refers to Stollewerk as a 'Künstlerin' as another writer does.

Philokales continually refers to Stollewerk's work in diminutive terms. In the very next review, of a six-voice psalm setting, he uses the word 'Werkchen' or 'little work' ('chen' being a suffix of diminution). Our 'talented charming composer' had composed a work of 'truly religious mood' but Philokales feels that the art of composing idiomatically for voice and choir still eludes her to a great extent. Considerable praise is lavished on this work, and a detailed critical analysis is provided covering some one and a half columns, quite a large space in a journal of this size, yet it is referred to diminutively. The incongruity can be seen in the following quotation: 'A very noble and worthily maintained . . . trio for soprano and two altos opens the *Werkchen* right well and suitably'.¹⁴ Philokales's later reviews, with the exception of his severe criticism of her second mass, concern Lieder and he consistently refers to them as 'Werkchen' or 'Liedchen' (little song).

In keeping with this attitude is Philokales's adoption of a didactic role, perhaps somewhat unusual for a critic. He gives Stollewerk advice in composition, then berates her for not following it. After the detailed criticism of the above-mentioned six-part psalm, he expresses the hope that 'the *Komponistin* will take to heart these tips which are given her with the best intentions and always in view of her truly beautiful talent . . . and not misjudge [his] candour as disdainful, malicious censure'.¹⁵

After hearing the concert which included her *Ouverture fantastique* and *Capriccio für Orchester* his advice takes a more general turn, possibly as a result of the negative import of the following observations:

In fact, is not all that this young composer has as yet offered only instinctive, that is why it is unconscious, lacking in all organic structure, all logic, all schooling, all method. . . . I already knew that Frln. Stollewerk felt quite at home with Lieder, that that particular 'eternal feminine' had swept her away into the realm of melodies and harmonies, and that she had made certain serendipitous finds in these areas. What surprised me was her sense for pleasant instrumental sound . . .¹⁶

Because of his low opinion of her skill, as opposed to her much-mentioned talent, he is effectively saying that anything good she produces is a result of sheer good luck. He found considerable fault with Stollewerk's formal construction in these orchestral works, and thus advised her:

to always strive . . . forwards courageously and without rest, and to make herself quite familiar with musical teaching on composition and form, and with scores of the old masters, then to examine herself carefully, and set herself no artistic tasks too great for her to solve. If she follows this friendly tip, there is much of beauty to be hoped for in the future from this, as I said, significant talent.¹⁷

He repeats almost the same advice in reference to her second Mass in August of the same year, yet declines to review it because he can find nothing good to say about it.¹⁸

Yet a woman did have one area in composition to which she was suited. It was accepted that the Lied was appropriate. To quote Philokales yet again: 'And does not the sphere of the Lied lie so near the feminine outlook and way of feeling!'¹⁹ To recall the above comment about the eternal feminine: 'I already knew that Frln. Stollewerk felt quite at home with Lieder, that that particular "eternal feminine" had swept her away into the realm of melodies and harmonies'.²⁰ In reviewing her songs of opus 5, Philokales writes:

If I see it correctly, the sphere of the musical elegie is that world in which the beautiful talent of this composer feels quite at home, and therefore moves most happily. Quite naturally! Is not the life of woman a purely spiritual weaving of feeling always sunk in itself, a quiet patience, dreaming and rapture.²¹

In spite of woman's perceived aptitude for

Lieder composition, our critic's review of the *Gartenlieder* by Fanny Hensel declines to treat them critically. High praise is given because of their lack of exaggeration in any form:

true inspiration of the musical muse, tender and heartfelt, I could almost say idyllic . . . in a word, the 'eternal feminine', truly manifested in music Let us rejoice that these wishes and demands are so wonderfully satisfied, and not brood anxiously over the structure, etc. . . . Here is not the place for such reflections. Let us rejoice in a feminine artistic soul, who offers us in beautiful form the content of her own spirit, not at all externally educated by eccentric ideas of emancipation.²²

Women in music

Many of the reviews echo prevailing social attitudes towards women, attitudes which were only beginning to change by the end of the nineteenth century. The reasons for women's limited participation in musical life extend beyond issues of class and acceptable spheres of activity, into questions of emotional and intellectual capacity and simple physical considerations.

From the early nineteenth century, when Europe was still reeling from the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era which followed, to mid-century with its new round of revolutions, certain important social changes began to take place. In music this affected systems of patronage, and although amateur domestic music-making did not disappear, its social position changed with the rise of the professional musician performing in public concerts. This transition had a considerable impact on women's musical status.

After 1815 many of the aristocratic salons in Vienna closed but were replaced by middle class amateur musical life, as the middle class gained in affluence and social status. Music became a social skill for middle class women, not only to improve their marriage prospects but also to provide domestic entertainment. Although permitted access to musical education they were discouraged from taking it too seriously, even when enrolled in the newly opening music conservatories, where women were initially admitted only to studies of perform-

ance and teaching. Fanny Hensel exercised her talents in the domestic arena, at her Sunday musicales; Nancy Reich writes of a serious and prolific composer of professional standard, Marie de Grandval (1830-1907) whose 'aristocratic background and social class doomed her to amateur status'.²³

Romanticism was much influenced by Rousseau, whose ideas on the education of women were restrictive, and placed women in the domestic sphere, acting as inspiration for, and nurturer of, man's creative genius.²⁴ Although with the growth of public concert life music bridged the gap between public and private spheres, it was harder for women to cross over than for men, particularly as public amateur performance began to decline in social prestige towards mid-century.²⁵ Opera singers, for example, were the greatest stars of this period, but to go on the stage was all but impossible for middle class women because it meant automatic loss of reputation, which for a disempowered, disenfranchised and economically dependent group could be tantamount to suicide. Of the women who did achieve professional status, by which I mean those who had their music published and performed, or received money for their work, many came from families of professional musicians.

Musical education for women usually omitted study of composition, unless perhaps under private tuition, and even Clara Schumann had grave doubts about her creative output, while remaining confident about the worth and quality of her performing career. There is a strange conflict between the view of women as creatures of their emotions and spiritual natures, a Romantic ideal, and the opinion of them as incapable of artistic creation, even though this would seem to require just such spiritual tendencies. Hanslick discusses this very issue in his *On the Musically Beautiful*, where he asks 'why women, who are by nature preeminently dependent upon feeling, have not amounted to much as composers'.²⁶ His answer is as follows:

The cause of this lies (apart from the circumstances in general which prevent women from achieving more in the way of intellectual creativity) precisely in the plastic aspect of musical composing, which demands renunciation of subjectivity.²⁷

It was in women's perceived inability to renounce their subjectivity that their incompetence lay, but criticism was easily levelled, for without adequate education women could hardly develop their talents fully and compete with men.

When women did overcome the imposed restrictions on their creative capabilities, and compose or perform, there were still certain areas considered more appropriate than others. Acceptable genres of composition were those associated with domestic private music: Lieder, piano music, chamber music. Lieder were considered particularly suitable, for their relatively simple form did not compete with more complex genres such as the symphony, which were the preserve of male composers.²⁸ Composing orchestral music required skills not available in women's education, and in addition to this, few women would have had access to groups willing to rehearse and perform their works. Their most frequently performed orchestral works were those with solo parts which could be introduced by the composer herself, as did Clara Schumann with her Piano Concerto.

Performers were restricted by age-old beliefs of female beauty—women should not play instruments that would distort their facial features or contort their bodies. So keyboard instruments, the harp, the guitar, and only later the violin, were acceptable. I have found reviews of a clarinettist and in particular a cellist who excited some attention. Correct choice of instrument was not enough, the mode of performance was also expected to be pleasingly feminine. To quote Nancy Reich: 'Indeed, newspaper accounts of the work of successful professional women musicians almost always assured the readers that the musician was not only accomplished but also "womanly"'.²⁹ And this comment is constantly substantiated in the reviews of the *Wiener Allgemeine*, for example in this review by Ignaz Lewinsky of a Paris performance by the cellist, Lise Christiani:

Our times which fancy freaks of all kinds, have produced female flute and clarinet virtuosi, and nonetheless, however strange a woman cellist must seem to us, the use of the cello in lady's hands is not so new as one thinks, for, if we are not mistaken, Saint Philomena was pictured playing a cello, and pictures of angels (female figures) are oft enough seen with such instru-

ments, which seems to prove that it was once handled by the fair sex. That the instrument is not so uneffeminate as it well gives the impression of being, is proved by the external appearance of our virtuoso, who looks picturesque while playing her instrument. This permits a calm seated posture, from which the external appearance of the player only gains, the bowing shows us the wavy line which a beautiful hand can make so gracefully and elegantly, and especially the gentle, elegiac-plaintive, soft tone which speaks to the heart and for which the cello is so suited, to express and reproduce feelings, which find their origins in the feminine breast, in spite of the pitch of the instrument, which sits in approximately the range of a tenor. . . .³⁰

This article has looked primarily at reviews of women's instrumental performances and of women's compositions. These two areas have been the focus of attention to the exclusion of singers because women as singers were viewed very differently from women in the two areas examined here: by the mid-nineteenth century it was no longer questioned that women were professionally active as singers. They were not constantly compared to men, and their performances were judged less on the basis of their gender. Instrumentalists however, were often judged as women first and artists second, as were composers. Another manifestation of prejudice is that errors easily made by a second rate composer are seized upon by some critics as a chance to exhibit their wit by declaring them the result of women attempting composition. In 1848 an unnamed critic reviewed two Lieder by Isabella Behr, her opus 1. It is a short review, and after commending her warmth of expression and singing effects, it continues:

Moreover an opus 1 claims leniency from us, and especially that of a lady, who seems almost totally lacking in talent for musical invention. For these reasons we will observe a pious silence about the second song 'Das sterbende Kind', and only for the reader who craves reasoned criticism will we show how the composer treats the text. The first line reads 'Wie doch so still dir am Herzen ruhet, ruhet das Kind!' The poet had indeed already separated the two appearances of 'ruhet' with the comma, but we know of no example where a comma has ever embarrassed a lady.³¹

Studying the reception of women's perform-

ances and works takes research a step further than just documenting the 'who' and the 'what' of women in mid-nineteenth century Viennese music. As Bowers and Tick suggest in the introduction to the collection of essays *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition 1150-1950*, we must 'consider the effects of women's minority status within music upon their activities and achievements',³² and therefore examine the effect of prejudice and discrimination. These reviews shed light on attitudes towards women in music, and not only the focal points of the criticism, but also the language used to describe their performances and compositions provides further indications of the restrictions within which women musicians had to struggle.

NOTES

¹James Deaville, ed., *Répertoire International de la Presse Musicale: Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung 1841-1848* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI, 1990) I, p. ix. Hereafter referred to as *RIPM*.

²*RIPM*, I, p. ix.

³William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1975), p. 125.

⁴I am indebted to my father, Mr. G.A. Kertesz, formerly of the Department of History, Monash University, for this information.

⁵*RIPM*, I, p. ix.

⁶Bernard Fabian, ed., *Deutsches Biographisches Archiv* (Munich: Saur, c. 1982), 1057: 457-58. Hereafter referred to as *DBA*.

⁷L. Botstein, *Music and its Public: Habits of Listening and the Crisis of Musical Modernism of Vienna 1870-1914* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1985), p.262.

⁸*Deutsches Biographisches Archiv* 744: 70.

⁹*Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung*, 28 May 1846, p. 256. Hereafter referred to as *AWMZ*. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁰*AWMZ*, 30 July 1846, p. 362.

¹¹*AWMZ*, 9 March 1847, p. 120.

¹²*AWMZ*, 6 October 1846, p. 482.

¹³Und somit freue ich mich, die wirklich in hohem Grade talentvolle Dilettantin als eine für die Folge vielversprechende Kirchencomponistin herzlich willkommen zu heißen und sie recht nachdrücklich aufzufordern, in ihrem Eifer und ihrem anerkennungswürdigen Streben nach dem Besseren in der Kunst fortzufahren! *AWMZ*, 30 July 1846, p. 363.

¹⁴Ein sehr edel und würdevoll gehaltenes, in 8 Takte gegliedertes Trio für Sopran und zwei Alt, leitet das Werkchen recht gut und passend ein. *AWMZ*, 6 October 1846, p.483.

¹⁵Möge die Componistin diese, in der besten Absicht und mit stetem Hinblick auf ihr wahrhaft schönes Talent und ihr würdevolles Kunststreben, die ihr gegebenen Winke

beherzigen, und meine Offenheit ja nicht als schnöde böswillige Tadelsucht verkennen! *AWMZ*, 6 October 1846, p. 483.

¹⁶ Ist nun freilich wohl Alles, was uns diese junge Componistin bis jetzt geboten hat, ein nur Instinktmäßiges, daher Unbewußtes, aller organischen Gliederung, aller Logik, aller Schule, aller Methode Ermangelndes . . . Daß Frln. Stollewerk im Liede sich schon recht heimisch fühle, daß jenes 'ewig Weibliche' auch ihre Seele hinangezogen habe in das Reich der Melodien und Harmonien, und daß sie in diesem Gebiete einhergehend, manchen glücklichen Fund gemacht habe, wußte ich schon früher. Allein was mich überraschte, war ihr Sinn für instrumentalen Wohlklang. *AWMZ*, 27 March 1847, p. 150.

¹⁷ So strebe . . . nur immer muthvoll und rastlos vorwärts, und mache sich nur ja recht vertraut mit der musikalischen Compositions—und Formenlehre, und mit den Partituren älterer Meister, prüfe sich selbst genau, und stelle sich keine größeren Künstlerischen Aufgaben, als sie zu Lösen vermag. Folgt sie diesem freundlichen Winke, so läßt sich von ihrem, wie gesagt, bedeutenden Talente, in Hinkunft noch viel des Schönen hoffen. *AWMZ*, 27 March 1847, p. 150.

¹⁸ *AWMZ*, 10 July 1847, p. 381.

¹⁹ Auch liegt ja die Sphäre des Liedes der weiblichen Empfindungs—und überhaupt geistigen Anschauungsweise so nahe! *AWMZ*, 24 November 1846, p. 574.

²⁰ *AWMZ*, 6 October 1846, p. 483.

²¹ Sehe ich recht, so ist die Sphäre der musikalischen Elegie jene Welt, in welcher sich das schöne Talent dieser Componistin recht eigentlich heimisch fühlt, daher auch am glücklichsten bewegt. Ganz Natürlich! Ist ja überhaupt das Leben des Weibes ein rein seelisches, ein stets in sich selbst versunkenes Gefühlsweben, ein stilles Dulden, Träumen und Schwärmen. *AWMZ*, 22-25 May 1847, p. 250.

²² Wahre Eingebungen der Tonmuse, zart und innig, fast möchte ich sagen idyllenhaft . . . mit Einem Worte, das in Tönen treu verkörperte: 'ewig Weibliche'. . . Freuen wir uns daher, diese Wünsche, diese Forderungen so herrlich befriedigt zu finden, und grübeln wir nicht ängstlich über Struktur u. dgl. . . Hier ist nicht der Ort zu solchen Reflexionen. Freuen wir uns einer weiblichen Künstlerseele, die uns in schöner Form den ihr eigenthümlichen, nicht etwa durch verschrobene Emanzipationsideen nur äußerlich angebildeten Gemüthsinhalt bietet! *AWMZ*, 29 May 1847, p. 259.

²³ Nancy B. Reich, 'European Composers and Musicians ca. 1800-1890,' *Women and Music: A History*, ed. Karin Pendle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p.

107.

²⁴ Reich, 'European Composers', p. 98.

²⁵ Botstein, *Music and its Public*, p. 279.

²⁶ Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, trans. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), p. 46.

²⁷ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, p. 46.

²⁸ Reich, 'European Composers', p. 102.

²⁹ Reich, 'European Composers', p. 99.

³⁰ Unsere Zeit, welche sich in Abnormitäten aller Art gefällt, hat weibliche Flöten—und Clarinettvirtuosinnen hervorgebracht, und dennoch, so fremdartig uns eine Violoncellistin erscheinen mußte, so dürfte der Gebrauch des Cello's in Damen Händen nicht gar so neu sein, als man etwa zu glauben versucht wäre, da, wenn wir nicht irren, die heilige Philomena ein Cello spielend, abgebildet wird, und Engelsbilder (weibliche Figuren) mit derlei Instrumenten oft und genug zu sehen sind, was zu beweisen scheint, daß diese einmal von dem schönen Geschlechte gehandhabt wurden. Daß das Instrument nicht so unweibisch ist, als es wohl den Anschein hat, beweist schon die äußere Erscheinung unserer Virtuosin, welche sich, ihr Instrument spielend, malerisch ausnimmt. Dasselbe läßt eine ruhige, sitzende Haltung zu, bei welcher das äußere Ansehen des Spielenden nur gewinnt, die Bogenführung zeigt uns die Wellenlinien, welche eine schöne Hand ganz graziös und elegant machen kann, und vollends der sanfte, elegisch-klagende, weiche, zum Herzen sprechende Ton eines Cellos ist ganz geeignet, Empfindungen auszudrücken und wiederzugeben, welche ihren Ursprung in einem weiblichen Busen haben, trotzdem die Klangstufe des Instrumentes, welche ungefähr auf der Höhe des Tenors steht. *AWMZ*, 17 May 1845, p. 234.

³¹ Ein Opus 1. hat überdies bei uns gegründeten Anspruch auf Nachsicht und vollends das einer Dame, denen bei allen ihren sonstigen Vorzügen das musikalische Erfindungstalent fast gänzlich zu mangeln scheint. Aus eben angeführten Ursachen wollen wir über das 2. Lied: 'Das sterbende Kind' ein frommes Stillschweigen beobachten, und nur dem Leser, der gerne motivierten Tadel begehrt, die Art und Weise bezeichnen, wie die Komponistin mit dem Texte umgeht. Gleich Anfangs hieß es nämlich: 'Wie doch so still dir am Herzen ruhet, ruhet das Kind!' Der Dichter hat doch schon durch den Beistrich die beiden 'ruhet' getrennt, aber wir kennen kein Beispiel, daß ein Beistrich je eine Dame genirt hätte. *AWMZ*, 1 June 1848, p. 259.

³² Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, eds, *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition 1150-1950*, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1986), p. 11.