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Addressing gender inequality in and through music composing studies

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Abstract

Composing remains a male-dominated field within the domain of Western art music. Through analysis of two case studies of composing education schemes in Finland (Equity in Composing/ Yhdenvertaisesti säveltäen), and England (Young Composers Project), this paper seeks to better understand how music education may play a role in addressing and alleviating gender inequality in music composing. Thematic analysis of qualitative data identified three ways in which the two educational projects addressed issues related to inequality in composing, namely by (1) challenging narrow perceptions of “The Composer”; (2) addressing the lack of diverse role models; and (3) introducing diverse pedagogical approaches in composing. The findings illustrate how music education has the potential to challenge narrow and stereotypical perceptions of what it is to become and be a composer, and provide alternative and more diverse narratives.

Keywords: *composing pedagogy, equality, gender segregation, narratives, occupational choice*

Introduction

This article aims to better understand how music education may play a role in addressing and alleviating gender inequality in music composing. The professional field of composing, especially within the domain of Western art music, is arguably one of the most gender-segregated and “masculinised of all the creative artist occupations” (Cooper et al.,

2017, p. 5). It has been estimated that globally only 20% of composers are female¹ (Parsons & Ravenscroft, 2016), with less than 8% of compositions played by orchestras written by women (Donne, 2022). Examples from the authors' own contexts confirm male dominance in composition: In Finland, approximately 13% of professional composers represented by The Society of Finnish Composers are women (Finnish Composers, 2022) and music composed by female composers continues to be strikingly underrepresented in the core repertoire of symphony orchestras (Malkavaara, 2019; Mattila & Hirn, 2022), the historical canon (Välimäki & Koivisto, 2019a, 2019b), and within higher music education studies (Talvitie & Partti, 2023). In the UK, women only represented 26% of the shortlist for the British Composers Awards in 2018, and 33% of BBC Proms commissions in 2019 (Women in Music 2019). As elsewhere in the labour market, gender segregation in the music industry manifests itself in various ways. For instance, according to a Finnish study (Rimpilä, 2017), the highest positions of authority and prestige, such as record company CEOs, artistic directors of music festivals, and chief conductors of symphony orchestras, are largely occupied by men. Another example of unequal representation is *vertical segregation* (e.g. European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016), which describes how, despite relatively equal numbers of men and women in a field, the roles and activities they carry out can be highly gendered. This can be observed in UK conservatoires where the numbers of women studying music outnumber that of men (Green, 1997; Scharff, 2018), but only 36% of composition students identify as female (British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors, 2016). In Finland, approximately a third of students at the university-level composition studies are female (Partti, 2019). Similarly, Scharff (2015) found disproportionately more women working as music teachers, except within music conservatoires.

Although manifestations of gender inequalities can be clearly seen in the professional field of composing, the aim of advancing equality is also a matter of significant concern for music education at all levels (e.g., Bennett et al., 2018). Research has shown that career choice and establishment of career identity lies on the threshold of late adolescence and adulthood (e.g. Ramaci et al., 2017) with the realization of the arts as a genuine professional opportunity typically arising in adolescence, most often in upper secondary school or immediately thereafter (Piispa, 2013). This means that the ways composing is taught in schools and music education institutions really matters. Despite composing in education becoming more commonplace around the world (Devaney et al. 2023), corresponding with the promotion of creativity in education more widely (Eisner, 2002), there remains little guidance and support for ways to teach composing (Savage & Fautley, 2011; Winters, 2012) especially in regards to upper secondary school (Devaney, 2023). Therefore, many music teachers may feel uncertain about teaching composing due to coming from a performance

1 In this article, we refer to studies and statistics which make a binary distinction between two juridical sexes. We acknowledge, however, that the spectrum of gender is much wider.

background (Odam, 2000; Sheridan & Byrne, 2002; Barrett, 2006). A teacher's beliefs and experiences often influence pedagogy (Jenkins, 1992; Soderman et al., 2015); therefore, teachers' outdated or gendered attitudes towards composition are likely to affect how they teach and what kinds of attitudes and presumptions they pass on to their students. Research has found that composing teaching can be heavily prescriptive, centered around technical theory exercises and pastiche composition (Francis, 2012; Salaman, 1988) with specific Western classical composing practices being reinforced, such as emphasis on composing using staff notation (Fautley, 2017; Hickey, 2012), or an individualistic perspective of creativity (Burnard, 2012; Craft, 2006; Devaney, 2023), which may be limiting for students with more diverse musical backgrounds.

"Ideologies of gendered musical practices" can even be found in primary school music classrooms (Charles, 2004, p. 267). These gendered assumptions can be expected to play a significant role in gender differences in occupational preferences, which continue to be "important drivers of occupational gender segregation" (Seehuus, 2021, p. 2). In a recent study comparing composing teaching practices between England and Germany, Devaney et al. (2021), discovered that the overwhelming majority of composers used by music teachers in the classroom as role models were male, with the top five collectively being: Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, Reich and Cage. The scarcity of role models for women composers even made headlines in England when the A-level syllabus did not include any music by a female composer (Gallagher, 2015). The significant "dearth of female role models and mentors" (Bennett et al., 2018, p. 243) may be a major contributing factor as to why men outnumber women in higher education composing studies (Scharff, 2018, p. 45); as Kerry Andrew argues, "if girls are presented with examples of successful female creators in all genres, they might view composition as a viable profession for themselves" (Andrew, 2012, n.p.). There is, indeed, a long history of linking such attributes as intelligence, profoundness, and natural talent to masculine authority (Koskinen, 2006; Ramstedt, 2019). Green (2002) explicitly found this gendered distinction from music teachers, stating that teachers commonly: "regarded boys as excelling at composition by virtue of being more imaginative, adventurous and creative. Contrastingly, they saw girls as dull and lacking in creative spark" (p. 139). However outdated such understandings of musical creativity may be, they are deeply ingrained in social conventions; and as such serve as reifications or performative acts through which social reality is not only explained, but also constituted.

In this article, we examine two recent composing education projects for young people aged between 14 and 19: Equity in Composing (Yhdenvertaisesti säveltäen) in Finland and Young Composers Project in England. Both projects have an explicit aim of advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion in composing and include educational development and research, led by one of the two authors of this article (Partti in Finland, Devaney in the UK). The study asks: How were issues related to gender inequality addressed in the two projects? Recognizing that "composing is a complex activity, and no single classroom pedagogy can

be considered as universally appropriate” (Fautley, 2004, p. 202), our intention is not to present the projects as models to be copied and applied in other contexts. Rather, we utilize the projects in this study to illustrate the ways it is possible in and through music composing studies to influence and change attitudes about composers and ultimately occupational choice.

How occupational choices are made

Theoretically, this study draws upon narrative research approach and studies on occupational choice. The lengthy and multidimensional process of choosing one’s profession and educational path is influenced by different factors, ranging from individual preferences to social influences. Although individual features, such as personality differences (e.g., Kuckelkorn et al., 2021), leisure activities (Hong et al., 1993), and one’s early experiences of working life (e.g., summer jobs) are significant (Haikkola & Myllyniemi, 2020), studies show that social factors are deeply intertwined in the processes of occupational choice. As pointed out by Haikkola and Myllyniemi (2020, p. 23), it is likely that an individual is not always aware of the various factors influencing their own decisions, such as that of parents’ profession (Ramaci et al., 2017), local educational and employment possibilities (Lahtinen, 2019), social beliefs held by parents and teachers (e.g. Jacobs et al., 2006) or the presence of (and therein lack of) role models that can be presented through channels such as the media and even in children’s literature (Watt, 2009). Furthermore, it is typical that the process of occupational choice is heavily influenced by perceptions of any given professional field. Although gender is not the only influencing factor, studies show that gender beliefs can play a significant role in career aspirations and occupational decision-making processes, especially in adolescence (Ramaci et al., 2017). What is important for this study is that researchers also found that stereotypes held and, often unconsciously, implemented by parents and teachers, play a significant role in guiding “adolescents toward professions deemed appropriate to the belonging gender” (Ramaci et al., 2017, p. 115).

Although perceptions related to a career in music may impact the occupational choices of an individual, these perceptions are not entirely fabricated in the individual’s imagination. Indeed, they can be understood as culturally and socially constructed “truths”, or narratives, producing identities and generating “symbolic boundaries around types of social actors” (Loseke, 2007, p. 661). Narratives are generated in our ongoing efforts of negotiating and renegotiating the meanings of the events around us, as claimed by Bruner (1987, p. 33): “a life is not ‘how it was’ but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold”. This is to say, that although narratives serve an individual in their personal quest of giving meanings to events around them—indeed, providing a sense of “having a direction towards what I am not yet” (Taylor, 1989, p. 48)—they are deeply embedded

in social encounters, both “produced and performed in accordance with socially shared conventions” (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. xxi). A further angle to the understanding of the interaction between narratives and experiences is opened when viewing narratives as a kind of a “pool of collective stories” (Saarilampi, 2007), available for individuals in their processes of constructing identities. Collective stories produce and allocate “imagined characteristics” (Loseke, 2007, p. 661). An example of this is the construction of “The Great Composer” which is often displayed in media and/or popular culture as a tortured (white/male) artist with extraordinary talents from a young age, often composing (writing) music in isolation (Laycock, 2005). These narratives embody a cultural reality and model to the individual what is deemed socially acceptable or unacceptable, desirable or undesirable; including (gendered) professional preferences and ideals.

Case studies and research data

Research methods were drawn from interpretivist paradigms with the understanding that participants attribute meaning through interpretations of their own lived experiences (Bryman, 2016; Creswell 2009; Miller & Glassner, 2004). To help understand and observe the complexity of “human action” (Bryman, 2016, p. 28), data were collected “from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118) through the use of semi-structured interviews and observations. This qualitative multicase research study (Stake, 1995) contains two separate educational projects that both offer a specific angle into questions of gender equality in composing. The cases are *Equity in Composing*, EiC (2019–2020) in Finland and *Young Composers Project*, YCP (2013–ongoing) in the UK. Fundamental to both projects is the belief that composing is a practice that can be taught and learnt. We locate the activity of composing within the domain of creativity, defined as the process an individual or group goes through, involving decision-making and revising a piece over time (Burnard & Younker, 2002), with or without the use of notation, in order to create music that is novel (Boden, 2004). Although the projects differ from each other in their context,² including aspects such as structure and length, we found it helpful to use them to promote “opportunities to learn” (Stake, 1995, p. 6) and understand how gender inequality is manifested in the field of Western art music composing, including how it could be addressed in music education. In our venture to obtain insight, we have utilized multiple sources of research material in the data collection within the two projects, as described below.

2 The comparison between Sweden and the UK provided by De Boise (2018) provides helpful insight also to this study, as there are various similarities between all Nordic welfare states along with their music education systems.

Equity in Composing

Equity in Composing, EiC (2019–2020) in Finland was a pilot project aiming to have a positive impact in the role divisions, attitudes, and beliefs related to composing. The research-based developmental project offered instruction and mentoring in composing primarily for 15- to 19-year-old female and non-binary participants. EiC was carried out by a team of composing pedagogy experts in close collaboration with a wide network of music and music education stakeholders and organizations. The project was launched in April 2019 with a weekend workshop, organized in collaboration with the Society of Finnish Composers, Music Finland, and the Composition and Music Theory Programme and Junior Academy of the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. During the following year and a half, the student participants were offered individual instruction and mentoring as well as collaborative workshops in composing. The exploration of new ways to advance equality in composing pedagogy took place particularly in the ways the teaching was organized. Rather than following the traditional way of composing exclusively alone and with one's own teacher, the project sought to make learning processes transparent for the whole community of participants to observe and learn from. The first stage of the project was designed to culminate in April 2020 when the works composed within the project were to be performed in a public concert, but these plans were delayed and changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Eventually, one composition per participant was performed (without the audience), video-recorded in December 2020, and the recordings were then published on a YouTube channel. The project leader (Partti) collected research data throughout the project. The research material of this study includes 11 individual and focus group interviews with the student participants ($n = 8$) conducted during coffee and lunch breaks of the workshops; an interview with the project manager ($n = 1$) conducted towards the end of the project; a debrief discussion with the project leadership team ($n = 4$) conducted two months after the final activities of the project; and observation notes from the composing workshops throughout the project. Observation notes, focusing on activities and interaction between participants in the workshops, were conducted and written by the first author. All interviews were conducted in Finnish, audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The direct quotations presented in this study are translated by the first author. The research did not contain factors that require ethical review in Finland (see, Finnish National Board on Research Ethics, 2019). All participants gave written informed consent to take part in the study.

Young Composers Project

Young Composers Project, YCP (2013–ongoing) in England was established at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire at Birmingham City University, by the second author of this paper (Devaney). Having been one of very few female composers on her undergraduate course at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, as well as coming from a state school background, YCP aimed to diminish stereotypes around what it is to be a composer in the

21st Century and offer access routes into composing for diverse young people. A recent report found that only 3.5% of music conservatoire entrants were from the most deprived backgrounds (Daubney et al., 2019, p. 17), and data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency reveals that privately educated students are overly represented at many UK conservatoires, with at least 19% of students being privately educated (Bull et al., 2022). By working closely with local secondary schools from the West Midlands, YCP provides ongoing composing support for between 15–20 students aged 14–19 through monthly workshops at the conservatoire; regular mentoring with a student composer from Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, and a supportive space for young people to experiment with new musical ideas. Each cohort ensures a balance between male and female students, as well as those who identify as non-binary. Each year concludes with a public showcase of all the students' compositions as well as a commissioned piece of music from a past YCP student. All styles of music and methods of composing are welcomed, although some knowledge of Western classical notation is deemed helpful. Over the years YCP has supported young people from a wide range of backgrounds to apply to study composing and music at higher education, and begin to consider a career in music and composition as a possibility. Data collected from the 2018/19 project included three focus groups with a total of eight students ($n = 8$), interviews with past students ($n = 5$) and current composition mentors ($n = 5$) volunteering on the project. Of the five YCP mentors interviewed, two were past YCP students who were volunteering on the scheme. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The focus group interviews with students were conducted by a research assistant at Birmingham City University who was not involved in delivering any workshops, with all other interviews conducted by the project leader. The research was approved through the ethics committee at Birmingham City University before data were collected. All participants and the parents/guardians of those under the age of 18 gave written informed consent to take part in the study.

Data analysis

Employing the theoretical lens of occupational choice and recognizing the role culturally constructed narratives can play in forming identities and career decision-making, data analysis identified ways in which the two educational projects addressed issues related to inequality in composing. We utilized abductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to examine ways the two projects on the one hand may challenge narrow and stereotypical (gendered) narratives of composing, and on the other hand provide alternative and more diverse narratives. The analysis of the data was cyclical. First, both researchers carefully familiarized themselves with the data by reading and making notes on the data set they were responsible for (Partti for the data generated in Finland, Devaney for the UK). This first organization of the data was followed by several (online) discussions between the researchers, during which the initial themes were reviewed and reflected against the

theoretical framework and subsequently (re)organized according to the themes that could be identified in both data sets. Finally, the data were condensed by defining and refining the chosen themes.

It must be recognized that a “researcher’s identity, values and beliefs cannot be entirely eliminated from the process of analyzing qualitative data” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 302). Therefore, as researchers who have some personal investment in the educational programmes, we must recognize our own possible subjectivities. Throughout writing this paper, we were mindful of not solely addressing the successes of the projects, thus presenting only “a victory narrative” (Kenny & Christophersen, 2018, p. 3), but also the challenges of running such educational programmes. Comparing projects from two cultural backgrounds enabled the process of reflexivity, asking us to question potentially taken-for-granted assumptions.

Addressing inequality in music composing: Narratives, role models, and pedagogical approaches

In our attempt to address the overall research question (How were issues related to gender inequality addressed in the two projects?), the results of the study are presented by introducing three themes identified in our analysis of the two projects, namely (1) Challenging narrow perceptions of “The Composer”; (2) Addressing the lack of diverse role models; and (3) Introducing diverse pedagogical approaches in composing.

“Am I great yet?” – challenging narrow perceptions of “The Composer”

The significant influence of socially constructed perceptions on composers can be clearly witnessed in the data of this research. When asked participants about the term ‘composer’, they referenced the historical weight that came with the term:

When you say “can you name a composer?” people might say “Beethoven, Mozart”. I’m not saying I’m Beethoven or Mozart, I’m just saying I write music and I enjoy writing music. (S1, Focus Group 2)

Well-established stereotypes and ideological assumptions about composers and how they compose (e.g. Charles, 2004) were held by some of the students on the projects. One of these was the notion of the composer as the “creative genius”. One participant asked, “am I great yet?” (S1, Past Student Interview) due to feeling the pressures, that in order to call themselves a composer, they had to achieve similar achievements to the stories about famous classical composers. Recognizing the potential stigma attached to the word *composer*, YCP aimed to reclaim the word to mean a much broader understanding of musical

creation that all young people can relate to. For those who had benefited from joining the project, the findings suggest that this has been to some extent successful:

Before I thought composer meant somebody who writes music and publishes it and everything. But after YCP ...it re-imagines the idea that a composer is someone that makes music rather than having to put a label on it. You can compose just by sitting at the piano one day and that's called composing. (S1, Focus Group 3)

Although YCP is open to those composing in all styles, one of the challenges of having the word *composer* in the project's name has been to promote and encourage young people to join who might not automatically see themselves as composers. As a result, it has been necessary to work closely with local schoolteachers, even offering workshops, to reach potential students to reassure them that they would be welcomed onto the scheme, however they create their own music.

In EiC, an important aim was to make visible under-represented groups, especially female composers. For many participants, a memorable moment in the project was a lecture about "alternative history of music", which introduced various composers outside the usual "classed, gendered and racialised" (see, Bull, 2019) narrative of "The Composer". By placing the well-established canon under critical scrutiny and discussing the representation of musical histories openly with students, it was possible to take concrete action towards identifying prejudices and challenging the stereotypical narratives of composers. Along with female tutors providing instruction and mentoring in the project, several Finnish composers and musicians, representing gender diversity, visited as guest speakers, thus highlighting the diversity of composers working in the field of Western art music, along with their diverse career paths and approaches to musical creativity.

"There are so many possibilities, after all!" – addressing the lack of diverse role models

As discussed earlier, the lack of diverse role models in composing has been identified in the literature as a major issue in the professional paths of female composers. The origins of both composing projects in this study are closely linked to the realization of the lack of diverse role models in the field and steps were taken in both projects to counteract this.

One of the concrete ways to introduce the heterogeneity of composers in the Finnish EiC project was to invite female musicians and composers to share their professional life-stories. In the interviews, many of the student participants expressed their excitement about future prospects that had opened up to them after listening to the stories by the female musicians of what they had achieved and how they had carried out a professional career in music. This sense of eye-opening inspiration is illustrated in an excerpt from an

interview of two student participants, conducted after a visit by a composer whose career is significantly versatile in terms of styles, contexts, and educational background:

[The visiting composer] was super inspiring and I was simply mesmerized by her speech (...) (S3, Student Interview 2)

(...) Yes! [Her] speech was extremely inspiring and moving and relatable. It was wonderful to listen to! (...) How she talked about that there are so many possibilities, after all. If you look at [her] CV you realize that there's all sorts of things [she's been involved in]. And when she was talking about her 17-year-old-self and how she didn't immediately find her way and didn't get in the school she wanted to. Overall, this point that one should never give up and [it is possible] to find one's own path. (S4, Student Interview 2)

In the interview with the project manager towards the end of the project, she acknowledged that ideally the visitors' professional profiles and backgrounds could have differed from each other even more in order to exemplify "... how it is possible to do things in different ways and still be an active agent, and that there can be different kinds of routes and paths" (Project manager interview). Nonetheless, and as the student participants' enthusiastic comments reveal, inviting professionals to speak about divergent and even unusual ways of becoming and being a professional musician was important, as it provided more opportunities for role models to relate to.

At YCP, the mentors who worked with the young people were current composition students of Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, therefore potentially only a few steps ahead of the young people in terms of their composing progression. Some of the mentors were even past YCP students, therefore acted as positive role models; potentially offering attainable and realistic routes to becoming professional composers. In the data, students talked about viewing YCP as a gateway into studying music and composition at higher education, with the project being an important part of their future "decision-making" (S2, Past Student Interview).

"Here ... it is never wrong" – introducing diverse pedagogical approaches in composing

EiC and YCP took differing approaches in their pedagogical activities, but central to both projects was the aim of supporting the creative process of composing, and to allow students to explore their own musical voice.

One of the motivations for establishing YCP was to provide school-aged students with a space to explore their own musical creativity away from the restrictions of what was required as part of the English music examinations (Devaney, 2018). Data from the interviews detailed different pedagogical approaches students experienced between composing in their own schools and composing at YCP. Students talked about not feeling they were "allowed to

be creative” (Past YCP student) when composing in school due to the pressures of focusing on “what’s going to get me the most marks” (YCP student) in their exams:

In school it is very limiting...I want to go outside of it [the assessment requirements] but obviously you can’t [because] you have to stick to the [examination] brief.

(S1, Focus Group 1)

By offering freedom, including the choice to compose in any genre of music, and a supportive platform with regular mentoring to experiment with new musical ideas, students felt that they could compose away from concerns of their music being assessed according to a fixed marking scheme. As expressed by one student: “Here with our mentors, it is never wrong... everything is a suggestion” (S2, Focus Group 1).

In EiC, the collective composing days and weekends, in particular, provided opportunities for sharing and collaborative learning. In the interviews with student participants, these opportunities were regarded as positive and helpful experiences, especially by those students with limited possibilities to access composing teaching and/or a community of peers with similar interests:

I live...in the middle of nowhere. That’s why I have nobody else there other than my teacher. Nobody else composes music, or even makes music arrangements there. (S8,

Student Interview 1)

The collaborative learning sessions also enabled discussions on composing and peer-support in ponderings about the career choices:

[EiC] provides an opportunity to] meet others and get inspired by others and receive new viewpoints from new teachers, and ... tips and ideas as I’m considering whether I want to keep [composing] as my hobby or pursue a professional career, or what. (S3,

Student Interview 1)

Being taught by several teachers during the project, provided versatile viewpoints and opportunities to “delve deeper than the surface” (S3, Student Interview 1) in composing. The young composers especially enjoyed the opportunity to hear the musical ideas of their peers and expressed how their own learning was enhanced even by merely listening to the feedback and suggestions given to others.

Discussion and concluding remarks

Our results demonstrate the importance and ways of addressing gender inequality in composing pedagogy by consciously seeking to challenge the “static and singular view of

musical creativity” (Burnard, 2012, p. 9), as well as “the discursive gendering of ‘musical genius’ as masculine” (Werner et al., 2020, p. 638). Despite advancements in creativity research highlighting creativity as universal (Amabile 1996; Craft 2006; Eisner 2002), the findings from the study suggest that the narrative of the “great” and “gifted” composer, often reinforced via portrayals of composers in media as well as in education policy and political discourse (see, e.g., Department for Education, National Curriculum in England Music Programmes of Study, 2013), remains prevalent in the minds of young people. This was also found by Weisberg (2010) and Devaney (2018, 2023). Importantly, this study shows that the low proportion of women in music composing cannot be left as a concern solely for the professional field. The study highlights that through carefully designed education work with equality, diversity, and inclusion at the core, steps can be taken to dismantle potentially outdated and gendered beliefs about who composers are and what they do, and also have an impact on perceptions that play a role in occupational choices made by young people. The two projects illustrate how music education, instead of maintaining and renewing the unequal social reality, can take up resistance by *doing things differently*. In the projects, this resistance took place in many ways, such as by offering alternative examples of composition role models to the young people, encouraging the young people to take ownership of the word composer and even consider and pursue a career in composing.

As the study has focused on two specific education initiatives, in which the authors are closely involved in, being aware of the limitations and shortcomings of the programmes is also important to share. At times, due to external realities (such as funding, institutional arrangements, and the global pandemic), compromises had to take place. For example, with EiC, due to a lack of time, there was a strong emphasis placed upon the final compositions of students, rather than allowing more time for the creative process. The same dilemma was also raised by Fautley et. al (2014), who gets us to question *who* the final performance is really for. Another limitation raised by EiC was how students were constrained in terms of aesthetic style, with staff notation being used as the main/only musical language used to convey musical ideas, and how to support students from non-western classical musical backgrounds. Both issues raised by EiC have also played a factor in the reflections and revisions within YCP. Being based in a multicultural city and in light of the resurgence of #BlackLivesMatter of 2020, YCP continues to reflect not just on the representation of women composers, but also composers of color, and musicians from diverse musical heritages, as well as disabled, neurodivergent and non-binary music creators.

Regardless of their limitations, by focusing on the two educational projects, we have aimed to highlight the crucial role music education can have in addressing the wider issue of the genderedness of the composing profession. As in all sectors of society, gender-segregation in music is detrimental to both individuals and the wider labor market. Highly

gendered occupational fields restrict everyone's choices, and the loss of creative potential may also cause the field to stagnate (Brook et al., 2020). On a larger scale, segregation also provides a breeding ground for broader inequalities in society (Julkunen, 2009). Our specific interest has therefore been bringing forth the ways composing pedagogy can either reproduce and re-establish gendered musical ideologies and taken-for-granted privileges, or can actively challenge them. In the wider field of music education, the alleviation of gender inequality is likely to call for a heightened understanding of "music as a social act and social fact [...] a fundamentally ethical undertaking" (Bowman, 2007, p. 109). The matters of social injustices, such as gender segregation, are not separate or peripheral from "the seemingly neutral concept of the music" (Bennett et al., 2018, p. 238), but, indeed, integrated in and enacted through musical, pedagogical, and curricular choices made. An example discussed in this study is the teaching of the canon through which it is possible to reinforce or critique "the power relations that define what music deserves to be included" and performed (Werner et al., 2020, p. 640; see also Talvitie & Partti, 2023). While supporting women in their efforts of pursuing diverse careers in music is necessary, gender inequalities are tackled primarily by confronting institutional discrimination and the structures enabling exclusion rather than by urging women to better compete in masculinist environments and gendered aesthetic traditions (De Boise, 2018).

Finally, we recognize the need for further research around the complex issue of gender inequality in the educational and professional fields of music. The focus of this study has been in discussing gender-segregation from the viewpoint of supporting girls and women in pursuing a career in composing; however, an intersectional understanding of gender is necessary in future research. Although being beyond the scope of this study, socio-economic factors, class, and ethnicity continue to prevent opportunities for participation particularly in higher music education (De Boise, 2018) and especially when these factors intersect with gender. As stated by Werner et al. (2020, p. 645), "[g]ender equality cannot be pursued without addressing power dimensions of for example social class, racism and trans- and homophobia in music practice". Ultimately, it is crucial for further research and music education institutions to critically reflect and systematically address the accustomed narratives, prejudiced attitudes, and exclusive practices in order to advance the agenda for equity, diversity, and inclusion in the field of music.

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Author biographies

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