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Women musicians from the Middle Ages to the present: The transformation of the image

Las mujeres músicas desde la Edad Media hasta la actualidad: La transformación de la imagen

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Abstract

The article characterizes the problem of transformation of the image of a woman in musical art from the Middle Ages to the present. The work uses both general scientific methods of research: analysis and synthesis, as well as historical methods. As a result, we consider the formation of women in musical art in the Middle Ages, the problems of salon music-making of the XVII-XVIII centuries, and the problem of transformation of the role of women in musical art at the turn of the XX-XXI centuries is characterized. As a result, it is noted that the music of the Middle Ages was defined by a cappella singing and unanimity. The most famous composer of that time was Hildegard of Bingen, who is considered the probable founder of opera. Women-troubadours - medieval poetesses, songwriters, and their performers - held a place of honor in the music of the time. The basic motifs of their songs were different: some sang the consolation of love, while others sang the suffering of one-sided love. Despite this, until the XX century, the attitude towards women musicians was biased, and the image of music was often used in literature to refer to the "new" woman, i.e., feminist.

Keywords: women, music, history, the transformation of the image, current state.

Introduction

Cultural processes undergo a transformation along with the passage of time. In modern circumstances, female musicians are popular in movies, pop culture, computer games, visual arts, etc. At the same time, such a situation was not

Resumen

El artículo caracteriza el problema de la transformación de la imagen de la mujer en el arte musical desde la Edad Media hasta la actualidad. El trabajo utiliza tanto métodos científicos generales de investigación: análisis y síntesis, como métodos históricos. Como resultado, se considera la formación de las mujeres en el arte musical en la Edad Media, los problemas de la música de salón de los siglos XVII-XVIII, se caracteriza el problema de la transformación del papel de las mujeres en el arte musical en el cambio de los siglos XX-XXI. Como resultado, se observa que la música de la Edad Media se definía por el canto a capela y la unanimidad. El compositor más famoso de esa época fue Hildegard de Bingen, a quien se considera el probable fundador de la ópera. Los motivos básicos de sus canciones eran diferentes: algunas cantaban el consuelo del amor, mientras que otras cantaban el sufrimiento del amor unilateral. Sin embargo, lo que unía sus obras era que la principal protagonista lírica era una mujer que contaba sus propias experiencias y angustias. A pesar de ello, hasta el siglo XX la actitud hacia las mujeres músicas era sesgada, y la imagen de la música se utilizaba a menudo en la literatura para referirse a la "nueva" mujer, es decir, feminista.

Palabras clave: mujeres, música, historia, transformación de la imagen, estado actual.

typical for the times of antiquity, let alone the periods of earlier history, when attitudes toward women were extremely prejudiced. For example, during the Middle Ages, there was a prejudice against women in the arts, which were seen as an

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exclusively male endeavor. However, as the detailed analysis of the problem indicates, this view is too categorical. The relevance of this work lies in the fact that it demonstrates selected biographical sketches of some medieval women musicians. At the same time, the evolution of the image of women musicians in European cultures reflects the whole thorny path that had to pass in the times of freedom in the 21st century, in which, unfortunately, there is still room for chauvinistic outbursts and provocations. This issue has not been the object of special attention in professional academic literature. Researchers have mainly focused on isolated aspects, which had clear biographical or chronological coordinates, and have not conducted thorough summaries. Our study offers a deeper analysis of the problem and the development of certain synthetic generalizations, which can be useful for the study of gender history, musicology, sociology, anthropology of human relations, axiology, etc. In particular, the following problems are foreseen to be considered: peculiarities of the formation of women in the art of the Middle Ages, women in the musical life of the XVII-XVIII centuries, the transformation of the female role in the art of the XIX-XX centuries, the female role in the modern musical life. Consequently, the main purpose of the article is to study the image of women-musicians from the Middle Ages to the present.

Theoretical Framework or Literature Review

The works of contemporary art researchers are significant for this study. In particular, Strohm (2018) characterized musical life in the Middle Ages. He believed that music had influenced both women and men throughout the centuries. Sajsza (2021) studied the influence of women on the development of music. She also characterized how the discrimination of women by men affected the development of women musicians. Mereniuk (2021) examined some aspects of gender roles in the history. Wiley & Rose (2021) characterized the phenomenon of the interaction of the suffragette movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with literature, art, drama, music, and film. At the same time, Mielke & Znorovszky (2020) investigated the position of women in medieval Europe. This study is important for our article because it highlights the circumstances of the formation of the phenomenon of discrimination. In addition, Mielke & Znorovszky (2020) characterized the role of women in the cultural life of Europe in the V-XV centuries. Maude (2021) studied the image of women in medieval literary texts. In addition, Morabito (2019)

described seventeenth- and eighteenth-century music. He focused his attention on the study of Baroque. He emphasizes that this style was widespread throughout Europe and influenced the further development of the art of music (Morabito, 2019). Although the Baroque style is not very popular now, all other researchers identified it as the leading trend in the history of music development. The work of authors exploring contemporary issues in music is also valuable to ours. For example, Sundberg & Thalen (2015) analyzed contemporary trends in music. In addition, they compared belted and neutral types of contemporary singing. Nowak & Bennett (2022) investigated the latest phenomena in contemporary music and characterized its transformative potential.

Despite this, the problem of the role of women in medieval musical life remains unexplored. This can be explained by the then-biased attitude towards women; hence many chroniclers deliberately circumvented the memory of women in a particular cultural sphere. In addition, this problem is debatable due to the scarcity of sources. Little researched is the problem of the transformation of society's attitude to the phenomenon of "women in art" directly through the mental prism. We will try to address these issues in this paper. At the same time, taking into account the analysis of contemporary female music, the problem of choice is not clear (why female performers choose certain genres of music and are almost not represented in others). We will try to study the latter problem of psychological choice in the last part of this article.

Materials and methods

Methods

The research is based on the use of general scientific research methods. In particular, such methods as analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction were used in the work. The method of analysis involves the study of the object in its division into smaller parts. The method of synthesis influenced on research many smaller aspects of musical art into a single whole. Using a comparativistic method of research it was possible to compare the position of women in music from the Middle Ages to the present time. Also, the axiomatic method of research was used in the work. The latter involves the selection of certain axioms (inviolable statements) based on which specific broad conclusions are drawn. In particular, the work highlights the following specific issues for research: the emergence of

women in music in the Middle Ages, women-musicians in the XVII-XVIII centuries, the transformation of the role of women in the art of the XX-XXI centuries, the modern musical life of women).

It should be noted that the main materials of this research were both historical sources and information from the mass media. In particular, the problem of the position of women in music is illuminated based on the study of medieval literary works. The legacy of women troubadours occupies a notable place in this, quotations from which are partially covered in the results. Based on a comprehensive analysis of contemporary art media, it has been possible to identify current trends in the development of music. For this reason, special attention was paid to the phenomenon of misogyny - the phenomenon of manifestations of hatred towards women.

In addition, our study is based on empirical research. Based on the historical-comparativist research method, it was possible to highlight the participation of women in musical art, in particular in operas during the 19th and 20th centuries. It should be noted that at that time women hardly played important roles in musical productions. To identify popular music genres among women, an empirical study was conducted among 16 women, who ranged in age from 22-30 years old, offered to be subjects. The main task of the singers was to sing the specified songs in the style closest to them. This allowed us to characterize the most popular genres of singing and music for contemporary female singers.

Results and discussion

The Middle Ages: The Making of Women in Music

The music of the Middle Ages covers the time from the fall of the Roman Empire (5th century) to the beginning of the 15th century when the Renaissance began. Key features of this time are the noticeable connection between religion and culture. However, even in those times, multiculturalism was observed in many areas, including culture. (Parshyn & Mereniuk, 2022). In addition, in the musical field preference was given to a cappella singing and unanimity. (Strohm, 2018). The main motifs of the songs of that time had pronounced religious features. Obviously, men at that time had a prominent role in the arts (Mielke & Znorovszky, 2020). However, it was then that the emergence of women in music took place, which is primarily

due to the personality of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). It was this woman who was the first composer whose name is known in history. More than eight of her compositions have survived to the present day. In particular, *Ordo Virtutum* (The Church Force) and *Spēka spēle* (The Game of Forces) are her most famous musical works, pieces about morality. Hildegard of Bingen's works are examples of the first, unique works for female voices with one male part (Strohm, 2018). Predominantly one man played the devil, but because of his disfigured nature, he could not sing in her musical pieces. They were mainly created for religious ceremonial concerts, and the main singers of which were nuns (Maude, 2021). We suppose that the features of such staging in her works served as the basis for what would in the future be called opera. In general, the music of Hildegard of Bingen was monophonic, consisting of a single melodic line. Her works were designed for high soprano and limited instrumental accompaniment.

In addition, women troubadours - medieval poets, songwriters, and their performers - occupied a special place in the music of that time. This phenomenon of women's activity is practically not investigated in historiography. Troubadours created a *canso*, a song consisting of three parts. In particular, the first part (*exordium*) explained the purpose of writing the song (Lee, 2013). The main part told the key plot of the song and ended it succinctly in the form of a *cobla*. The last words were addressed to the patron or mate (they were called *tornado*). Among the female troubadours, the Countess De Dia (1140-1175), still called Beatrice (Sajsa, 2021) in historiography, is well known. She was in love with another troubadour, Rambaut d'Aurenga, so her musical works were dedicated to him. The main theme of her musical works is the illumination of pure love. In addition, Beatrice appeals to feminine virtues: "*Valer mi deu mos pretz e mos paratges*" ("*I must rely on beauty*") (Kay & Sarah, 1990, p. 104)

Another woman troubadour was Castellosa of Auvergne, whose work dates from the 13th century. She predominantly used the male system of expressing feelings. Her works are dominated by the theme of suffering and death. At the same time, the phenomenon of suffering is translated to the physical level in the symbolic form of illness. In particular, her song says: ("*Sievieta nomirs no slimibas, ja vīrietis to nepieņems*") ("*A woman dies of illness when she is not treated by a man*") (Kay & Sarah, 1990, p. 104). Consequently, in her songs, the "healing powers" are possessed by the man. Poor plots are not

typical for the work of troubadours. So, as we can see, despite the typical perceptions of “domestic” women of the Middle Ages, still women found time for creative development and self-expression in the then (primarily with religious canons) art. The trends under study were widespread throughout medieval Europe, including outside the “Latin” West. For example, a similar attitude towards women was inherent in Kievan Rus' (Merenuk & Parshyn, 2021). Although in some socio-cultural aspects women had relatively equal rights with men, which allowed them to engage in self-realization and protect their rights (Merenuk, 2021).

Women Musicians in the XVII-XVIII centuries.

The artistic life of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries took place in numerous salons, which set the tone of cultural life across Europe. Modern art historians believe that the life of France in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries created the foundation for the so-called “salon music” (Sajsa, 2021). At the same time, the harpsichord was invented as a special musical instrument designed for women. It was believed that it manifested the refinement and sophistication of women's nature. Consequently, harpsichordists enjoyed widespread popularity during the period in question. In particular, Marguerite Antoinette was the first court harpsichordist, and she also taught the instrument to the daughters of Louis XIV (Morabito, 2019). Hélène de Montgerie (1764-1836) was an eighteenth-century virtuoso pianist, composer, and teacher (Morabito, 2019). The person in question was a notable figure in European music at the time. At the age of 21, she was admitted to the National Music Institute. She wrote a theoretical work for her students entitled *The General Piano Method*. At the same time, Therese von Paradis (1759-1824) also became one of the most famous figures among eighteenth-century composers in Austria. Although she lost her sight as a child, it influenced her work. The parade was able to perform with the best male musicians primarily because of the favor of Empress Maria Theresia. Women's music was widely used in the music of the eighteenth century: more than 150 names of women composers are known in the history of the music of that time. Countries like France (45 female representatives) and England (44) took the lead. In Italy there were 27 women composers and singers at the time, in Germany - 24, in Austria - 10. There were isolated figures of women musicians in the Netherlands, Denmark,

Belgium, Bohemia, Poland, etc. (Wiley & Rose, 2021).

Despite this, there was still prejudice against women musicians at this time. Even the German Enlightenment had no effect on eliminating such societal attitudes toward women in music (Philips, 2011). The mentioned fact, first of all, explains the limitation of creativity of these authors to the genres of popular songs. At the same time, the main purpose of a woman in the ideas of that time was reduced to three things: to be engaged in motherhood, to be a wife for her husband, and to be the mistress of the house. Consequently, activities in a closed environment of educated musicians were not considered too popular.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the image of women musicians also belonged to certain symbols of the feminist movement (McPherson, 2021). This can be witnessed in some literary works, in particular, *False melancholic* by the Ukrainian writers XIX-XX centuries. They greatly expanded the idea of the problem of women in Eastern Europe at the time, repeatedly actively opposing the traditional male perceptions of the other sex.

The transformation of the role of women in music at the turn of the XX-XXI centuries.

The majority of composers listed in textbooks of classical music, and whose pieces are frequently performed in the regular repertoire for concerts compose males, even though there have been a significant number of female composers throughout the period of classical music. The musicologist Marcia Citron has inquired «why is the music written by female composers not included in the classical repertoire that is standard?». The author argues that in the 1890s, female composers usually composed art songs to be performed in small recitals, not orchestral symphonies that were intended to be performed by the orchestra inside a big hall, and the latter being considered the most important genre for composers. because women composers didn't compose a lot of symphonies, they were not considered to be significant as composers (Skowronek, 2010).

Note that in the past, professionally-run orchestras have been largely or completely made up of male. So, previously only men were participated in the work of orchestras. It is not only about the position of the conductor, but also about ordinary performers. In some conservative groups, the only role a woman was allowed to

play was that of a harpist (O'Bryan & Harrison, 2014). In particular, in the Vienna National Orchestra in the 20th century, this situation existed for a long time. It is obvious that this orchestra was in the leading positions in the world of classical music. Women did not work in the Vienna Philharmonic until 1997 (Björkner, 2008). The situation changed only after the American tour. Women's organizations in the USA actively called for a boycott of the performance of the Viennese musicians, because there were no women in their group (Solis & Nettle, 2009).

From that time, women began to actively participate in the activities of large orchestras of national importance (Lohman, 2021). There's been many talented singers throughout the years, but the most talented female singers have distinctive voices and personalities that guarantee they can compete against their male counterparts (LaFleur, 2020).

Note that we conducted a small sociological study with 16 young female performers between the ages of 24 and 36 who had been involved in the musical arts for at least 7 years. They were allowed to choose a style of song performance at will. The vast majority of them chose a genre of pop music, generally reflecting and confirming current musical trends. These trends are dictated by the globalization and multiculturalism of music (Lee, 2013). A significant part of pop music defines ideas of global spaces, national equality, and multicultural society. Therefore, women composers around the world choose this genre most for development, although we also note the popularity of rock music, jazz, and blues. While there used to be a surge in the popularity of rap music, now although this style is popular, it is still giving way to other new styles. It should be noted that the trend of ethno-music, which is actively implemented by female performers in Eastern Europe, is widespread now.

Note that among the many contemporary issues that are relevant to female performers is the problem of misogyny in rap music (McPherson, 2021). Hip-hop performers are probably not the biggest fans of misogyny in the world, but this particular musical trend is a kind of maximum quintessence of hatred for women. More than once experts have paid attention to selections of the most resonant music videos and lyrics, in which this hatred is dispersed. In fact, every famous and successful rapper has "distinguished himself" by an extremely biased panchnic toward the other sex. The rap aesthetic is full of descriptions of "bitches" and "hoes" who are

greedy, treacherous, totally hypocritical, stupid, etc. In music videos such lyrics of a woman (not in the image of a mother or wife) are perceived as an attribute - the same as a luxury car, bundles of dollars, or chains made of gold. So, the attitude towards her is formed as an object (Walker, 2019).

Certainly, machismo is only part of playing to the public, a kind of tribute to fashion, like teeth encrusted with diamonds. Misogyny is not an indication that the performer is a potential rapist (Sajsa, 2021). The real scandal was one of Eminem's first known albums, *The Marshall Mathers LP*, where 11 of the 14 songs sow hatred of women. One of the tracks ("Kim") was dedicated to the rapper's wife and is still considered a model of misogyny towards one, specific woman. At the same time, the distance between word and deed is high, so no one has made any real claims against the rapper. At the same time, the sentiments broadcast by hip-hop artists affect the mass consciousness and affect the understanding of women around the world. To a certain extent, these are the laws of the genre. Bias against women did not appear out of thin air. In the case of rap culture, it is related to the "voice of the street," which values authenticity and the truth of life as much as ostentatious videos with luxurious lives (Sajsa, 2021). Pervasive poverty, street crime, drug addiction, early pregnancy (whose rates have only relatively recently begun to decline in the African-American community in the United States), and racial bias form a kind of social "order" from which hip-hop lyrics sprout (Borch et al., 2011).

At the same time, a new generation of female performers in rap was supposed to form a renewed perspective, but this has not happened. Many popular female performers (Young M.A., Lil' Kim, and others) have been much more willing to adopt machista rhetoric, using it as an elementary and practical way to fight their female rivals.

Conclusion

So, the image of women musicians has undergone a long evolution from the Middle Ages to modern times. The music of the Middle Ages was generally defined by a cappella singing and unison. The main motifs of the songs of that time were religious. Hildegard of Bingen was the first composer whose name is known in history. She wrote plays about morality, perhaps founding the genre of opera. At the same time, women troubadours - medieval poets,

songwriters, and performers - held a place of honor in the music of the time. The troubadours created a song consisting of three parts. As it turned out, the main motives of these songs were different. Some women sang of consolation from love, others sang of suffering from one-sided love. What united their works, however, was the fact that the main lyrical hero was a woman recounting her own experiences and anxieties.

Throughout the XVII-XVIII centuries, the salons set the tone for cultural life throughout Europe. French life in the late XVII and early XVIII centuries laid the foundation for the so-called "salon music". At the same time, the harpsichord was invented as a special musical instrument for women. It was believed that it manifested the refinement and elegance of women's nature. Despite this, the attitude towards women musicians did not get any better, and the image of music was often used in literature to define the image of the "new woman". Even in the XX century, professionally managed orchestras were largely composed of men. So, in the XIX-XX centuries, only men participated in orchestras. It is not only about the position of a conductor, but also about ordinary performers. For example, women did not work in the Vienna Philharmonic until 1997. The situation changed only after the American tour. Women's organizations in the United States actively called for a boycott of the Viennese musicians. Since that time, women have been active in major orchestras of national importance. At the same time, today women musicians freely participate in pop, rock, jazz, and blues bands. On the other hand, misogyny in rap music remains a problem. And female singers often use machismo and other trappings of rap in figuring out relationships with other female singers.

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