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Experiences and challenges Encountered by Clara Schumann as a Female Composer in 18th-Century Europe: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract. In today's situation, women have more and more equal power as men, but back into 18th-century, women were extremely inequal compare with men. This inequity appeared in many different ways, and how women used to be treated differently in music field will be discussed today. In order to narrow the topic, a composer who was representative as a woman composer will be chosen and remarkable in classical music history. In this paper, her career life and how has been a woman affected her career life will be discussed. For the purpose of understanding her dilemma the history background of her era will also be introduced. Even though she met a number of challenges, she was still tough and created abundant of music work. Looking back the history sometimes can let us know more about our life and identity in today.

Keywords: music history, feminism, 18-century women's life

1. Introduction

In the contemporary era, women have more and more equal rights as men, and there are more and more female professional music composers. However, being a woman composer as an occupation was challenging in the 18th century. The female composers of the 18th century, driven by their passion for composition, persisted despite facing challenges and setbacks, ultimately creating many timeless works. In this paper, a French woman composer in the 18th century named Clara Schumann will be discussed. She defied societal constraints in 18thcentury Europe by advocating for her artistic identity and achieving recognition despite the challenges of marriage and motherhood.

2. History background

To understand the life story of Clara Schumann, the introduction should start from the historical background of French women's rights in the 18th century in the following ways: family life, marriage, and occupation. Although women were allowed to work, they did not have the same privileges and rights as men. For instance, they were unable to vote, own property while married, attend universities, receive equal pay, or pursue many professions.1 Similarly, women have fewer rights in the family can be told; they have to listen to their husbands, who are the masters of the

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family. Moreover, even if some women were lucky enough to attend the university, most were educated to find a husband. They had no or only limited economic and social independence; all they had to do was obey their husband and raise children. They couldn't demand a divorce, even if they were suffering from the abuse. “Women did not have the power to make contracts, own property or vote.” [1] Despite there being some jobs for them, they still needed a permit from their husband if they wanted to go to work. Besides that, the salaries between women and men were highly different, despite the fact they did the same job. Furthermore, women in the 18th century were under economic pressure due to the financial realities of the 18th century; this is one of the reasons that the 19th century was a harsh time for women's rights development. In conclusion, in the 18th century, European women still didn't have enough rights to develop their careers or make their own life choices.

2.1. Method

Despite the societal constraints placed upon them, some women were courageous enough to pursue their passions. These women have since garnered the attention of scholars.

For instance,this passage talks about young women composers in the 18th century [2]; the author describes a woman composer's life, which was hard and challenging. The author mentions that the preservation of music scores written by women is not enough; most of them are unable to find. In that case, the author concludes that the quantity of women musical composers started to incline during the 19th century.

This passage discusses a Dutch female composer named Josina Boetzelaer [3]. The record of this lady isn't complete; the year she was born in still remains unknown. Unlike Clara, she was born into a famous family, which had a role of some political power in that chaos temporarily. She got married late and had fewer children than Clara. Her works were published in Paris, which brought her respect and fame. Moreover, she not only had works in music but also some opera and art, and even some philosophical views. In that case, the author considers that she entered a male-dominated field because of her hard work and talents. The author uses half of the passage to discuss and appreciate her work. At the end of the article, the author also states that women were absent from the conventional mainstream history and they are uncared for.

Although scholars have conducted a deep analysis of 18th-century female composers, there is another composer who deserves more attention: Clara Schumann. Even she wasn't multi-domain like Joshia Boetzelaer and wasn't born into a well-known family. She was also a fabulous female composer in the 18th century, and she left an abundant record of her musical

work and life. She was the most outstanding French female composer of the 18th century; even though she had a challenging family life, she still didn't give up on her musical compositions. In her letters to her husband, which include her thoughts, how she persists in composition and piano performance can be clearly found out. So those letters are really essential in order to understand her life.

3. Challenge

Even though Clara is a remarkable composer, she still faces various obstacles in her life. At a very young age, Clara holds contradicting ideas about other women composers. In her diary, she mentions that: “everything that I read about her is ever clearer proof that she is above me, and if this be so, I can hardly fail to be completely downcast."[4]By those words from her letters, we can notice that when she was jealous of a woman composer, she convinced herself that no woman could be an

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awesome composer. Nevertheless, if she really thinks women shouldn't compose, she wouldn't think this way. Therefore, she has two contradictory ideas in her mind can be discovered. These two contradict ideas obviously show that she believes that a woman can compose while she doesn't believe in herself and whether she can do it as a woman. Even in Clara's diary, she was inspired by some female pianist. In other words, jealousy made her realize that women can compose.

Prejudice is the main challenge in her life. In Clara Scumann's letters, she wrote: "I once thought that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose—not one has been able to do it, and why should I expect to?"[4] She struggled with the ideas that she received as a woman in the 18th century while she yearned to compose music. Thus, she started to belittle all women composers and even herself. Despite this, she has a strong interest in composing music. In that case, she wrote down the sentence: "A woman must not desire to compose," [4]which has a sarcastic meaning. This statement can be understood as women can be desired to compose, and people who hold conservative ideas are wrong.

4. Solution

But how did she overcome the negative emotion? After she got married and had kids, she picked up the patio skill again by practicing it every single day and even sought guidance from a teacher. In my opinion, this is because of her passion for music. She used to be skilled at playing piano before she got married and had kids. In some cases, she wants to get back to her old strength. In terms of her husband, he also demands her to be a mother and wife; Those words can be found in their letter: "Clara herself knows her main occupation is as a mother, and I believe she is happy in the circumstance and would not want them changed."[4] However, her husband also shows support for her composition by saying: "She cannot work at it regularly, and I am often disturbed to think how many profound ideas are lost because she cannot work them out." [3] The ambivalent opinions that Clara's husband holds make her more uncertain about the musical creation. Even though her husband asked her to do chores, he still supported her musician career life. In Clara's letters, she wrote: "I am always tired and limp nowadays, and it makes me sad to think that it may be long before I get back my old strength. I want to do so for Robert's sake, for it is terrible for a man always to have a moping wife about the house."[4] As she said, the reason for restarting playing the piano is for her husband cause it's bad for a man to have a wife who only cares about the home. In those words, we can obviously know that she thought she was attached to her husband. Nevertheless, it still made her pick up her patio skills after her marriage. Indeed, her husband asked her to do chores, but he still supported her music career life, and he was relatively open-minded in the 18th century [5].

Ultimately, this strongly supports the continuation of her music career.

5. Conslusion

In conclusion, women composers were all grand and brilliant. It is reasonable for modern people to judge history and learn from mistakes. However, the dedication of those women composers cannot be overlooked; they are brave, persistent, and grand, and them can’t be seen as completely negative examples. They pushed for the improvement of women's rights; even if they didn't do anything, their existence is enough.

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