

The Expansive Canvas

Large-Scale Form in the Music of 19th Century Women Composers

Conference and Collaborative Symposium

Trinity College Dublin
and the
Royal Irish Academy of Music

26–28 August 2025

Trinity Long Room Hub
Arts & Humanities Research Institute

RIAM
Royal Irish
Academy of Music

 Trinity
College
Dublin
The University of Dublin

SMI
society for musicology in ireland
aontas ceoleolaíochta na hÉireann



Composer Discovery

In the following pages we invite you to discover the lives and music of the extraordinary composers included in The Expansive Canvas, and others whose voices deserve to be heard. We have grouped the composers by nationality, and then in alphabetical order.

With each composer, click the icons to discover:



Her Life Story



Her Music

INA BOYLE (1889-1967)

From Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow, Boyle's many compositions were rarely performed throughout her lifetime. Following initial studies in Dublin, she travelled to London for composition lessons with Ralph Vaughan Williams. Her works are gaining more attention in recent years. A fascinating character, she persevered with her composition in spite of isolation.



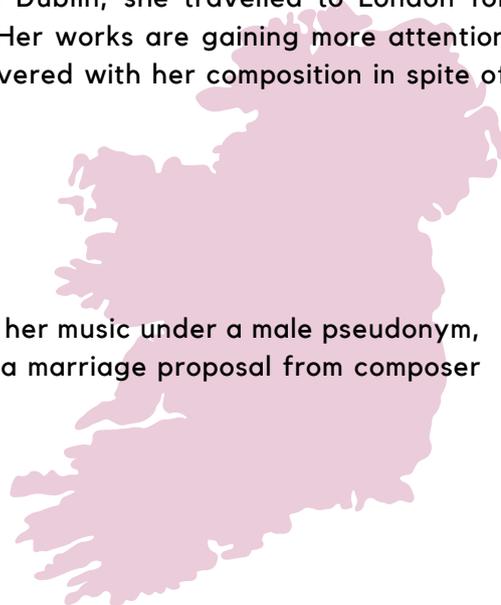
AUGUSTA HOLMÉS (1847 - 1907)

Born in Paris but of Irish descent, Holmés published her music under a male pseudonym, lived life on her own terms, and even turned down a marriage proposal from composer Camille Saint-Saëns.



FANNY ROBINSON (1831 - 1979)

Born in Southampton, Robinson was active as a pianist and composer, moving to Dublin where she took a teaching position in the Royal Irish Academy of Music. Her melodic music was published and performed during her lifetime.



ETHEL BARNES (1873 - 1948)

London born violinist and composer Barnes performed extensively through the UK, eventually co-founding a concert series where many of her compositions were premiered. Her music had some illustrious champions, including violinist Joseph Joachim.



ALICE VERNE-BRETT (1874 - 1958)

Born in Southampton but eventually settling in London, Verne-Brett was one of four pianist sisters. She founded the Twelve O Clock concerts in London, where her own compositions were played, and she became a pioneer in children's music education.



REBECCA CLARKE (1886 - 1979)

Despite her musical studies being interrupted by an unwanted marriage proposal and banishment from the family home, English born composer Clarke went on to compose over 100 works, although only 20 were published in her lifetime.



ETHEL ROSALIE HARRADEN (1857 - 1917)

Pianist, composer and music critic Harraden was born in Middlesex, eventually settling in Leamington Spa where she occasionally composed for the stage, collaborating with her brother.



LIZA LEHMANN (1862 - 1918)

London born soprano and composer Lehmann pursued an active performance career, leaving the stage after she married, to focus on composing, teaching and raising her two sons, one of whom, an inventor, played a key role in the development of radar.



ETHEL SMYTH (1868 - 1944)

Trailblazer and activist composer Dame Ethel Smyth lived her life in defiance of Victorian societal expectations of marriage and monogamy. Although interest in her work waned following her death, in recent years audiences around the world have enjoyed numerous live performances of her music.



SUSAN SPAIN-DUNK (1880 - 1962)

Composer, violinist/violist and conductor Spain-Dunk studied at the Royal Academy of Music, London where she eventually taught. A noted conductor, she frequently conducted her own works in concert, including performances in the Proms in 1924.



THEOPHANIA CECIL (1782 - 1879)

English organist and composer Cecil succeeded her father as organist at St. John's Chapel, Bedford Row, London. Interest in her works for organ has increased in recent years.



LILI BOULANGER (1893 - 1918)

Born in Paris, Boulanger's musical studies were delayed by illness until she was 16. She went on to become the first woman to win the prestigious Prix de Rome at age 19, before illness cut her life short at age 24. Her sister Nadia was a famed teacher.



CÉCILE CHAMINADE (1857 - 1944)

French composer and pianist Chaminade overcame her father's resistance to her music studies, graduating from composing for her dolls and pets as a young child, to becoming the first woman composer to be awarded the *Légion d'Honneur*.



MARIE CLÉMENCE DE GRANDVAL (1828 - 1907)

Viscomptess de Grandval frequently published her works under a pseudonym, due to her social status. Studies with Chopin and Saint-Saëns eventually lead to her winning the inaugural Prix Rossini. She was a leading member of the Société nationale de musique, which gave performances of music by Debussy, Dukas and others.



LOUISE FARRENC (1804 - 1875)

French composer Farrenc was also a virtuoso pianist, whose childhood was spent in the artists' colony of the Sorbonne. There she met her husband, a flautist with whom she would eventually co-found the successful publishing house Éditions Farrenc. She went on to be the only titled female piano professor at the Paris Conservatory.



ALMA MAHLER (1879 - 1964)

Austrian composer Mahler has cast a long artistic shadow across the musical and visual arts. Initially forbidden from continuing her compositional activities by husband Gustav, a decision he later regretted, she became a celebrated socialite and artistic muse in Vienna and eventually New York, where she was hailed as a cultural icon in her later years.



MARIANNA MARTINES (1744 - 1812)

Viennese composer, pianist & singer Martines enjoyed considerable success, frequently performing for Empress Maria Theresa. In addition to mentorship from the poet Metastasio, she took composition lessons from Haydn and singing lessons from Nicolo Porpora, all of whom happened to live in her apartment building in Michaelerplatz.



JULIE BARONI-CAVALCABO (1813 - 1887)

German Austrian composer Baroni-Cavalcabo was a student of Mozart's son Franz Xavier. She was the dedicatee of Schumann's *Humoresque* Op. 20, and in turn dedicated two of her own compositions to the composer.



FANNY HENSEL (1805 - 1847)

Born in Hamburg, but growing up in Berlin, pianist and composer Hensel displayed prodigious talent, composing over 450 work in her relatively short life. Although overshadowed by her younger brother Felix Mendelssohn, encouraged in her work by her husband, a number of her compositions were published in her lifetime.



JOSEPHINE LANG (1815 - 1880)

German composer Lang showed considerable compositional ability in her youth, attracting mentorship and support from Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann. Following the death of her husband, with the help of Clara Schumann and Ferdinand Hiller, she supported her family and herself through teaching & composition.



HELENE LIEBMANN (1795 - 1869)

A prodigiously gifted pianist, Berlin born Liebmann published her first piano sonata at the age of 15. She received positive reviews of her compositions in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, the reviewer overcoming their initial dread of "ladies" music, to declare that her piano sonatas warranted comparison with those of the great masters.



AMANDA RÖNTGEN-MAIER (1853 - 1894)

Swedish composer and violinist Röntgen-Maier was the first graduate in musical direction from the Royal College of Music, Stockholm. She premiered her own violin concerto to widespread acclaim, and although her marriage curtailed her performance career, she continued to compose. Her salons attracted distinguished visitors including Brahms.



EMILIE MAYER (1812 - 1883)

German composer Mayer, sometimes called the female Beethoven, was encouraged in her compositional studies from an early age. At age 28, following her father's death, she used the financial freedom afforded by her inheritance to continue her compositional career. She consistently secured performances of her music throughout her lifetime by fostering connections with orchestras and conductors.



CLARA SCHUMANN (1819 - 1896)

Schumann enjoyed a highly successful performance career as a pianist. Her marriage to Robert Schumann, against the wishes of her father, slowed down her compositional output, as the care of their eight children occupied her time. In 1854, the year she met Brahms, she composed 16 pieces, but her compositional activity waned again after this.



ELFRIDA ANDRÉE (1841 - 1929)

Swedish organist, composer and conductor Andrée was appointed organist at Gothenburg Cathedral in 1867, remaining in the position until her death. Among other works, she composed four symphonies and an opera, founding a series of affordable folk concerts in collaboration with Gothenburg's Workers Institute.



INGEBORG BRONSART VON SCHELLENDORF (1840 - 1913)

Finnish-Swedish and German composer Bronsart Von Schellendorf was lauded in her lifetime as successful composer of opera. A former student of Liszt in Weimar, she continued to compose, despite ceasing her performance career after marriage. Her husband was general manager of the Royal Theatre in Hanover.



LAURA NETZEL (1839 - 1927)

Finnish born Swedish composer Netzel was active as a pianist, composer, conductor and concert organiser. Following her marriage, which curtailed her performance activity, she organised and conducted numerous benefit concerts for children and workers in Stockholm, composing for many years under the pseudonym N. Lago.



AMY MARCY BEACH (1867 - 1944)

US composer Amy Beach was a prodigiously gifted young musician. Her compositional studies were supplemented by a course of thorough self study, equipping Beach with the unique compositional voice that produced her popular *Gaelic Symphony*, the first to be composed and published by an American woman.



MARIA SZYMANOWSKA (1789- 1831)

Polish virtuoso pianist and composer Szymanowska had a very successful performing career, playing all over Europe in the years following her separation from her husband in 1820. She eventually relocated to St. Petersburg with her three children, where she hosted a celebrated salon and served as court pianist to the Empress of Russia.



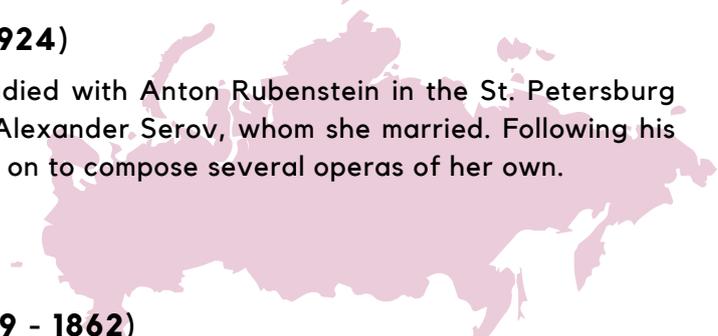
LEOKADYA KASHPEROVA (1872 - 1940)

Russian composer and pianist Kashperova composed in secret for much of her life. Dismissed by her former student Igor Stravinsky as "antiquated and a blockhead", in recent years her music has gained an audience, with her *Symphony on B minor* receiving increasingly frequent performances.



VALENTINA SEROVA (1846 - 1924)

Russian composer Serova initially studied with Anton Rubenstein in the St. Petersburg Conservatory, before studying with Alexander Serov, whom she married. Following his death she completed his opera, going on to compose several operas of her own.



ZINAIDA VOLKONSKAYA (1789 - 1862)

Volkonskaya enjoyed a varied life as singer, composer and lady in waiting to Queen Louise of Prussia. Her celebrated salon in St. Petersburg was frequented by Pushkin who immortalised her as "the queen of music and beauty".



HILDA SEHESTED (1858 - 1936)

A woman of considerable means, Danish composer Sehested's studies took her to Copenhagen and Paris. The death of her fiancé before their wedding shocked her into compositional hiatus, but she eventually returned to composing.



STEFANIA TURKEVYCH (1898 - 1977)

Ukrainian composer Turkevych composed symphonies, ballets, operas and choral works, among smaller scale compositions. While living in Berlin she studied with Schoenberg before travelling to Prague and eventually settling in the UK

