

**The Phyllisharmonic:** Fanny Mendelssohn published six of her own songs under the name of Felix Mendelssohn, the brother she idolized, as he did her. As young children, their talents were evident. When Fanny was eleven, and Felix, seven, they had four music teachers. At age thirteen, she could play the entire *Well-Tempered Clavier* by memory, and that year Felix began to perform in public. He was nine. She was a girl. The year was 1818. Her public piano debut did not happen until twenty years hence.

Fanny had received disconcerting disapprovals from her father against performing as a professional musician. And while Felix appreciated her profound composing talents, he was unable to support any publication of her compositions, because she was a woman. Their beliefs were entrenched in the culture of their time.

Without support and encouragement, Fanny waned to promote herself into a public arena that did not welcome her gender, though it appreciated her music, under her brother's name. In 1846 Felix had a private audience with Queen Victoria who liked his songs, especially, *Italien* from his *Op. 8* collection. Felix royally admitted it was not his, but his sister's.

Like the queen, the public's knowledge of Fanny Mendelssohn and her compositions is all but naught. Though she composed 466 pieces, most are unpublished, some in private family archives. Her songs, especially her "songs without words," piano pieces in the style of the Lied, a favorite genre for her brother, who often is credited with its invention, though the credit might be his sister's.

Fanny Mendelssohn died suddenly at age forty-two. Deeply affected, Felix lost consciousness, never fully recovered, and died six months later.

Clara Wieck was twenty when she penned these thoughts. "I once thought that I possessed a creative talent, but I have given up that idea: a woman must not desire to be a composer, not one has done it, and why should I expect to?" The year was 1839.

Clara, a child protégé, was only nine when she performed her first public piano concert. When eighteen, among European pianists, she was second only to Franz Liszt. She had introduced Chopin's music to Germany, and was the first to play Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata in Berlin.

She introduced many of Robert Schumann's works to the public and at age twenty-seven, married him. She bore him seven children in sixteen years and continued to pursue a piano career. While she edited and promoted Schumann's compositions, she also introduced many works of Johannes Brahms to the public. Brahms, who never married, was said to have been in love with Clara. He respected her musical judgment and valued her criticism.

But she doubted her own creative ability and barely composed after her marriage. Her doubts, undoubtedly, rooted in the culture of her time. A leading critic wrote: "Reproductive genius can be admitted to the pretty sex, but productive genius unconditionally cannot. . .there will never be a woman composer. . .I do not believe in the feminine form of the word 'creator'."

Had her culture valued feminist values, she might not have kept her creative talents composed, but might have exponentially composed creative and talented compositions. Clara Wieck Schumann died in 1896.

At the age of four, Florence Beatrice Price performed her first piano recital in Little Rock, Arkansas. At age eleven, her first musical composition was published. After high school, she entered the New England Conservatory where she began to seriously consider music composition.

Receiving her degree in 1906, Professor Price taught music in Arkansas at the Cotton Plant-Arkadelphia Academy, at Shorter College, and at Clark University in Atlanta. In 1912 she taught privately in Little Rock, became active in composition, and married attorney Thomas J. Price. In the 1920's, they and their two daughters moved to Chicago. When her marriage dissolved, Price and her daughters endured difficult financial circumstances.

In 1929 Price composed her first ambitious work for piano, *Fantasia Nègre*. It combines Negro melodies and rhythms with classical European forms and techniques. Price performed competitively as a way to achieve recognition and pay bills. Her four winning categories included the top prize for a symphonic composition in the 1932 Wanamaker Competition.

Frederick Stock, then conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, presented Price's *Symphony in E Minor* for the Chicago World's Fair in 1933. It was the first time a symphony written by a Black woman had been performed by a major symphony orchestra. Critics raved.

Price composed well into her fifties, completing over three hundred works. Her songs and arrangements were performed by famous artists including Marian Anderson. Her symphonies and chamber works were known for the melodies she adapted from Negro spirituals and are considered a vital component of the New Negro Arts Movement. Florence Beatrice Price died of a stroke in Chicago in 1953.

Sources: *Women Composers*, Carol Plantamura; *Women Making Music*, Ed. Jane Boers and Judith Tick; <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/music/enj9/shorter/composers/hensel.htm>; <http://chevalierdesaintgeorges.homestead.com/Price.html>.