
Journal

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In this issue:

In this issue:
Katherine Hoover
Barbara Harbach
Jennifer Fowler
Cecilia Arizti Sobrino
IAWM News
Reviews
Reports
Members' News

Articles

From Bach to Vivace Press: The Metamorphosis of Barbara Harbach

By Cynthia Green Libby

*A woman's voice and the right to create—and the right to be considered seriously as a creator—is a fundamental right. It is certainly a fundamental American right....I believe it is also a fundamental human right which returns us to the political nature of women's creativity and...the economic, cultural and religious oppression and suppression of women all over the world.*¹ Barbara Harbach (2003)

I have known Barbara Harbach since 1989, when I first approached her to collaborate on a creative project. Her reputation at that time was already impressive: a nationally-known keyboard recording artist and one of the few interpreters of music by women composers. Her dedication and adventuresome spirit soon became evident to me, as she agreed—without ever having met face to face—to premiere my commission of a Libby Larsen work for oboe and harpsichord.² In 1992, *Keyboard Magazine* voted Harbach second only to Keith Jarrett as “Top Keyboard Artist” in the classical division. Today she is recognized as a fine composer in her own right, has launched one of the nation’s foremost publishing houses of music by underrepresented composers, and continues to amass an outstanding body of work, including organizing national symposia, all to support the larger cause of women’s creativity.

How did a young girl whose first performances were on a pump organ in the Appalachian hills of Pennsylvania become this outspoken advocate of a woman’s right to create? Why did she change her focus from the heady international acclaim of keyboard performance to the quiet organization of some of the first women-in-music symposia in the United States? Finally, what motivated her to venture into the precarious world of music publishing?

The Beginning of Advocacy: A Thoughtless Remark

In the early 1980s Harbach recorded her first solo keyboard album, *Harbach Plays Bach* (Gasparo GS-237) on the Schlicker tracker organ at First Lutheran Church in Lyons, New York. While on tour during this period, she had a conversation with a well-known musicologist following one of her frequent performances. She told him about her growing interest in works by women keyboard composers. He looked at her over his glasses and said, “I don’t know any women composers, and if there *are* any, they wouldn’t be any good.”³ That remark only intensified Harbach’s desire to continue her research.

Frankfurt and Herr Walcha

Following her undergraduate work at Yale, Harbach sought to study organ on scholarship with the well-known Helmut Walcha at the Frankfurt Musikhochschule. Only after her arrival did she learn that he “did not believe women belonged on the organ bench,” and he refused to teach her. Forced by the administration to do so, he “always started my lessons off by counting to ten in English, and then laughing uproariously.”⁴ She prepared to take the exam for the *Koncertdiplom*, which is equivalent to a master’s degree in performance in the United States. Walcha told her, inaccurately,



Barbara Harbach, Ellis Recital Hall, Missouri State University, September 12, 2005
(photo by Pearl Yeadon)

that as an American, she did not qualify for the degree. He continued to throw up absurd road blocks. “I had to have two full-length recitals memorized six weeks before the recital date, and one hour before the recital a committee would choose the selections I was to perform.” A day before the recital Walcha told her there would be extra judges, twelve instead of three. She decided to have a tape recording of her audition made—which had never been done before—in case there was ever a question about her performing ability. Harbach did receive the *Koncertdiplom*, but when Walcha died, she was the only American student who was not asked to write a tribute to him.

Leap of Faith: Composition

When asked how she began composing, Harbach told a harrowing tale. “When I was in high school, my organ teacher asked me to improvise a piece for my next lesson. I lavished

my time and attention on the project.” At the next lesson, she played her creation for him, and cautiously waited for his response. “After I finished, there was silence, and then he began to laugh, and laugh, and laugh until the tears ran down his face....It was twelve years before I wrote music again.”⁵ Certainly anyone, particularly any teacher, would find his response not only cruel, but pedagogically indefensible, especially aimed at such a young person.

As Sir Walter Scott once wrote, “All those who have turned out worth anything have had the chief hand in their own education.” Indeed, Harbach, the composer, emerged in spite of that experience in 1977 when her first piece, *Praise Him with the Trumpet* (SATB/org.), was published by Agape Press. Although she studied composition formally while earning her doctorate at the Eastman School of Music, she



Barbara Harbach (left) with Cynthia Green Libby following their premiere of Harbach's *A Morning Trumpet* for oboe and organ at Missouri State University, September 12, 2005
(photo by Pearl Yeadon)

complained, “no matter what I wrote, it was always altered to sound like the music of the composition teacher.”⁶ Thus she chose instead to trust the composers of the past and present whose works inspired her. These included the North German school of Baroque composers, with J.S. Bach's music as the pinnacle.

Indeed, her music features this complexity, with multiple voices and an emphasis on counterpoint. She says, “I like to play with themes, combine, intertwine and layer.” Her favored approach to form is “like a theme and variation plus rondo form combined.”⁷

Not surprisingly, she would come to draw musical inspiration from a number of women as well: the 11th-century nun composer Hildegard von Bingen, blues singer Billie Holiday, and three of her own well-known contemporaries: Joan Tower, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich and Libby Larsen. Today, she writes in nearly all genres. (See the complete works list which follows this article.) At the time of this writing, her most recent project is a 12-minute modern ballet, *American Solstice*, for dancers and chamber ensemble. The premiere took place at the 2005 Year of the Woman Celebration of the Arts, a year-long interdisciplinary event held throughout metropolitan St. Louis, which she organized.⁸

A Difference in Works by Women?

Harbach's continued study of the music of historical women composers has yielded, she believes, insight into a distinction between works by women and their male counterparts. This is a realm that many prefer to dismiss as impossibly complex.

When asked in 1992 if she noticed any difference, Libby Larsen replied,

Well, I would love to say “no.” But I think I have to qualify my “no.” When words are involved, it's much easier to tell the difference. Because historically, whether it's cognizant or unconscious, women's lyrics have tended to be much more direct, graphic and expressive than men's. Currently in musicology departments, there's a great feminist deconstructionist debate going on....And in music that debate centers around the way music is constructed, the male model being opposing themes which act in a dialectic and come to some kind of conquering climax....Whereas the hope is that women composers would naturally shy away from opposing forces—and create works of music in which conflict and resolution are not the important factor, where, in fact, the circularity of the unfolding of materials are....I'm not convinced...that one is male and the other is female. What I do know is that both *are*, as well as sixteen million other ways to construct a piece of music.⁹

After decades of researching, performing and publishing the music of historical women, Harbach believes she *has* found some gender differences: “Many of the historical women that I champion, such as Marianne Martinez, studied with Mozart or Haydn or other notable composers. The women certainly knew the rules of composing, but sometimes chose to write what they wanted, such as different harmonies and changes of form. A few women wrote ‘out of the box,’ such as Barbara Strozzi, Fanny Mendelssohn and Elizabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, to name a few.”¹⁰

Vivace Press: A Labor of Love

In the early 1980s, as an outgrowth of her research for performance, Harbach prepared a volume of three 18th-century harpsichord sonatas by women. Elkan Vogel accepted the publication, but with several stipulations. The compositions must be edited for piano (meaning many additional dynamic markings and slurs would be added), and only one movement from each sonata would be included. “I now had a dilemma. Did I want this music to be published so that audiences could once again hear it after 250 years, or should I refuse publication to preserve the composer's intent?” She decided to have it published, and it became the first publication of historical keyboard music by women in the United States. “Unfortunately, the publisher put a picture of a de-

mure young woman seated at a harpsichord on the cover.”¹¹ And, best (or worst) of all, the cover was pink!

At that point, Harbach decided that no matter what it took, she was going to have artistic control over her publications. By 1989, Vivace Press was born. Its first publication was released in 1990, and at the present time its catalog lists over 200 titles with composers and editors from all over the world. Distinct from other publishers, Vivace Press not only specializes in women composers but also underrepresented composers: African American men and women, Mexican, Ukrainian and historical composers who have been neglected by mainstream music history. Amazingly, Harbach does all the typesetting, every single note! Jonathan Yordy is co-owner and editor, and student office workers assist with mailings, filling orders and various staff duties.

Women of Note Quarterly

Co-editors Harbach and Yordy started the journal, *Women of Note Quarterly*, in May 1993. What compelled them to increase an already prodigious time commitment with Vivace Press to push the envelope and launch a journal? Again, dedication to the subject matter fueled this project. They would often receive information pertaining to a Vivace Press publication that needed a forum beyond the scope of the score itself. For example, the first issue of the journal contained an in-depth article on Helene Mountergoult, a composer they had recently published. The fact that they already had a printing press in place for Vivace Press made the project cost-effective. Next, Yordy and Harbach built a subscription base by sending out thousands of free issues to libraries and music departments throughout the United States; most remain loyal subscribers. Today, *Women of Note Quarterly* receives submissions on a wide variety of topics, not only scholarly articles but compact disc reviews, profiles and features from the worlds of jazz, country, contemporary and alternative genres of music.

Three Centuries of Historical Connections

Harbach’s metamorphosis follows interesting historical precedents. Previous eras went a step further to initiate the salon or Sunday musicale. These were important private performances of new music, which gave women the opportunity to influence the musical tastes of the time. In the 18th century, Fanny Itzig, a pianist and friend of Beethoven, gave large musical soirees in Vienna and organized benefit concerts, which eventually led to the founding of the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde*.¹² During the 18th and early 19th centuries, cultural salons were present in most major cities in Europe, led by “highly cultured, wealthy women and attended by other members of the fashionable, wealthy class.”¹³ Only in the Berlin salons did a true interaction among social classes exist. Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel held such musicales in her home in Berlin from 1822 until her death in 1847, and hers became a center for performance, replete with visiting artists as well as her own performances.¹⁴

Women in Music Symposia

Today in the United States, the function of hosting specialized musical gatherings has moved to academic settings. Composer Alex Shapiro recently stated in the *LAWM Journal*, “I am not convinced that all-women concerts do anyone—composers or audiences—a favor. When presenters limit the selections to a smaller, particular pool of entries, there is a greater chance that the quality of the concert suffers, ironically at the risk of doing female composers a disservice.”¹⁵ Why, then, did Harbach initiate the first of several Women in Music Symposia at State University of New York (SUNY)-Buffalo starting in 1987? Is what critics call self-segregation actually a good thing?

When I presented this argument to her, she did not hesitate. Harbach believes that the playing field is not level, and she easily cites the facts to prove it, such as the American Symphony Orchestra League statistic that only 1.9% of symphonic music presented last year in this country was composed by women. She believes women in the arts still require extra support, the same reasoning given for the policy of equal opportunity. Alan Riding of the *International Herald Tribune* agrees:

In the lonely ritual of artistic creation, there is no intrinsic difference between the sexes—except in how their work is received.... Today across the West, women are well-represented in art, architecture, music and film schools and they account for a majority of students attending literature and creative writing courses at college. Yet, while women no longer regard the creative arts as a male province, when it comes to winning or even making the short list of prizes in fiction, poetry, art, architecture and music, they still fair poorly. Why? Are professional women artists less talented than their male colleagues or are women simply being denied equal opportunity?¹⁶

Riding suggests that women’s arts prizes—and one concludes, women’s music symposia—spotlight talent that might otherwise be overlooked.

But Harbach’s purpose for bringing together women composers and performers to present concerts and panel discussions is not entirely altruistic. She admits self-serving motives as well, such as personal fulfillment and validation of her own identity as a composer.

Indeed, we can assume that these reasons stray not so far from those of Fanny Hensel, whose “competence and versatility as a composer, pianist, conductor and coordinator, combined with her interaction with the major figures in German culture establish her as one of the foremost musicians and one of the most fascinating women of the first half of the nineteenth century.”¹⁷ I suspect that future historians may say this about Barbara Harbach of our own time.

Notes

1. "Snapshots of Advocacy," Address presented at the 25th Anniversary Symposium, *The History of Herstory: Finding Our Voices, Breaking the Silences*. University of Missouri-St. Louis, October 2003.
2. Libby Larsen, *Kathleen As She Was* for oboe and harpsichord. Boston: Schirmer, 1989.
3. "Snapshots of Advocacy."
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Telephone interview with the author, July 13, 2005.
7. Ibid.
8. For information on the events, see Barbara Harbach, "Women in the Arts—St. Louis," *IAWM Journal* 11, no. 2 (2005): 59-61.
9. C. Green, "Interview with Composer Libby Larsen," *International League of Women Composers' Journal* (June 1992): 24.
10. Telephone interview with the author, July 13, 2005.
11. "Snapshots of Advocacy."
12. Meg Whalen, "Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's Sunday Musicales," *Women of Note Quarterly* 2/1 (February 1994): 11.
13. Nancy Reich, "The Power of Class: Fanny Mendelssohn" in *Mendelssohn and His World*, ed. Larry Todd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 90.
14. Whalen, 10.
15. Alex Shapiro, "Compose, Communicate, Connect," *IAWM Journal* 2/1 (2005): 8.
16. Alan Riding, "The Gender Equation and Artistic Recognition," *International Herald Tribune*, June 23, 2005.
17. Whalen, 18.

WORK LIST

Orchestral Works

Rhapsodie Jardine for Oboe and Strings, 1996; Arcadian Reverie for String Orchestra, 2004; Veneration for Orchestra, 2004; One of Ours: A Cather Symphony, 2004; Emanations of the Sacred Harp for Concert Band, 2005; Frontier Fancies for Violin and Orchestra, 2006.

Chamber Music

Daystream Dances for Oboe and Piano, 1996; Frontier Fancies for Violin and Piano, 1996; Four Dances for Two for Oboe and Violin, 2004; American Dialogues for Flute and Piano, 2004; Rhapsody Ritmico for Brass Quintet, 2004;

Rustic Scene for Viola and Piano, 2004; Perambulations for Trumpet and Piano, 2004; Emanations from the Sacred Harp for Cello and Piano, 2004; Fantasy and Fugue on Swing Low, Sweet Chariot for Woodwind Quintet, 2005; American Solstice for Chamber Ensemble, fl, cl, pf, 2 vn I, 2 vn II, 2 va, 2 vc, db, 2005; A Morning Trumpet for Oboe and Organ, 2005; Forces at Play for Chamber Ensemble, fl/pic, cl, pf, vn, va, vc, perc, 2005; Transformations for String Quartet, 2005.

Film Scores

Making an American Citizen for String Quartet, 2004; A House Divided for Chamber Ensemble, fl/pic, cl, pf, vn, va, vc, 2005; How Men Propose for Chamber Ensemble, fl, cl, pf, vn, va, vc, 2005.

Keyboard Music

Spaindango for Harpsichord, 1992; Fanfare and Toccata on "Lasst Uns Erfreuen" for Organ, 1993; Tres Danzas Para Clavecin for Harpsichord, 1993; A Suite of Holiday Trios for Organ, 1994; Summershimmer for Organ, 1994; Phantasy and Phugue for Piano, 1995; Suite Alternatives for Piano, 1995; Easter Toccata for Organ, 1996; Toccatas and Fugues on American Hymns for Organ, 1996; Swing Low, Sweet Chariot for Organ, 1997; Toccata on "All Hail the Power" for Organ, 1998; French Suite on "Adeste Fideles" for Organ, 1998; Toccata and Variations on "The Lord's My Shepherd" for Organ, 2000; Suite on German Chorales for Organ, 2002; On our Way Rejoicing – A Collection of Organ Music, 2002; Festive Proclamation for Organ, 2002; As We Gather – A Collection of Organ Music, 2003; Toccatas and Fugues on Hymns by European Women for Solo Organ, 2003; Toccatas and Fugues on Hymns from the Sacred Harp for Solo Organ, 2003; Christmas for Organ, 2004; Hosanna, Loud Hosanna: Organ Settings for Lent and the Passion, 2004; Fantasy and Fugue Frantique for Solo Harpsichord, 2004; Gloria! Organ Music for Advent and Christmas, 2005; Fantasy and Fugue on a Hungarian Melody for Organ, 2005.

Voice and Instruments

Pioneer Women: From Skagway to White Mountain, sop., cl, pf, 2003; Cherish-Caress for Soprano and Cello, 2004; Pleasure Flow/Tender Mist for Soprano and Piano, 2005; Light Out of Darkness, SSA, pf, 2005.

Choral Music

Praise Him with the Trumpet, SATB, kb, 1977; The Christmas Babe, SATB, org, 1990; Infant of Light, SATB, kb, 1990; Sing, Alleluia, SATB, kb, 1990; There's a City on a Hill, SATB, kb, 1990; We Proclaim the Wondrous Glories (arr.), SATB, org, 1990; What is the World to Me (arr.), SATB, org, 1990; Our Christmas Gift, SATB, kb, 1990; Sing! Christ is Born!, SATB, kb, 1990; This Night in Bethlehem, SATB, 1990; Praise Him with the Trumpet, SATB, org, 1990; He Will Care For Me, SATB, kb, 1991; Of Christ's Dark Cup, SATB, kb, 1991; As Sun Disperses the Mourning clouds, SATB, kb, 1991; To Kindle Every Frozen Heart, unison vv, kb, 1991; Bathe My Soul, SATB, 1991; Rolled Away (arr.), SATB, kb, 1991; Luther Cantata, SATB, kb, 1991; Audible Light, SATB, kb, 1992; Love has Opened Wide the Door, SATB, kb, 1991.

The IAWM Congratulates Barbara Harbach

Barbara Harbach was selected to receive the Missouri Arts Award for 2006, the state's highest honor in the arts. Governor Matt Blunt presented the award to her and four other recipients on February 3, 2006.

Musicals

Daniel and the Beastly Night, youth choir, kb, 1991; *A Page from the Christmas Story*, youth choir, kb, 1991.

Note: Harbach's many editions for organ, piano and harpsichord are not listed. She served as editor of *Women of Note Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1 through Vol. 9, No. 1; and as Arts Editor of *Women on the Move* in 2005.

DISCOGRAPHY

Solo Compact Disc Recordings

Twentieth-Century Harpsichord Music, Kingdom Records, 1988 (Now available on Gasparo); Women Harpsichord Composers of the Eighteenth Century, Kingdom Records, 1989 (Now available on Gasparo); Eighteenth-Century Women Composers, Volume II, Gasparo Records, 1990; Contemporary Organ: Samuel Adler / Dan Locklair, Gasparo Records, 1990; American Hymn Preludes, Gasparo Records, 1990; Contemporary Harpsichord, Volume III, Gasparo Records, 1990; Contemporary Harpsichord, Volume II, Gasparo Records, 1990; Karl Höller, Gasparo Records, 1990; Goldberg Variations, Gasparo Records, 1990; Art of the Fugue, Gasparo Records, 1990; Women Composers for the Organ, Gasparo Records, 1993; Sonatas by Elizabeth: Elisabetta de Gambarini / Elizabeth Hardin, Hester Park, 1995; Eighteenth-Century Women Composers: Music for Solo Harpsichord, Volume I, Gasparo Records, 1995; Classical Prodigies: Elizabeth Weichsell Billington / Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Hester Park, 1995; Summershimmer: Women Organ Composers, Hester Park, 1996; Bach & Handel: Music for Two Trumpets and Organ, Gasparo Records, 1999; Pachelbel Canons, Gasparo Records, 1999; Contemporary Harpsichord, Volume IV, Gasparo Records, 2000; Goldberg Variations for Harpsichord, Gasparo Records (Gallante), 2002; Sonatas of Anna Bon for Harpsichord, Hester Park, 2005.

Solo Recordings (Record or Cassette)

Harbach Plays Bach, Gasparo Records, 1983; American Hymn Preludes, Gasparo Records, 1985; Harbach Modern Harpsichord, Gasparo Records, 1985; Harbach Harpsichord Baroque Recital, Gasparo Records, 1985; Harbach Plays Hymns, Gasparo Records, 1986; Music for Trumpets and Organs, Gasparo Records, 1987; Harbach Plays More Bach, Volume II, Gasparo Records, 1987.

Ensemble Compact Disc Recordings

American Voices I, Bay Cities, 1990; American Voices II, Bay Cities, 1991; Contemporary Harpsichord Ensemble, Albany Records, 1991; The Chamber Music of Gardner Read, Northeastern Records, 1995; Hanson Conducts Hanson, Citadel, 1996; Music of Leo Sowerby, Albany Records, 1997; An American Voice: The Music of Randall Thompson, Albany Records, 1999; Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Prayers My Grandfather Wrote, Naxos American Classics, 2003; Samuel Adler, organ, Naxos American Classics, 2004.

Ensemble Recordings (Record or Cassette)

Music of Richard Donovan, CRI, Composers Recording Incorporated; Jewish Choral Music, Transcontinental Publications; Jewish Organ Music, Transcontinental Publications; Anthems from Christ Church, Christ Church, 1981; Beautiful Dreamers, Popular Music from the Revolution to the Civil War, 1982; Music for Flute, Clarinet and Piano, Mark Records, 1982; Let There be Light! A Hanukkah Celebration, WXXI Recordings, NPR, 1982; Birthday of the World – A High Holy Days Celebration, WXXI Recordings, NPR, 1982; To Freedom! A Passover Celebration, WXXI Recordings, NPR, 1982; Day of Joy! A Sabbath Celebration, WXXI Recordings, NPR, 1983; Motets of Anton Bruckner, Roberts Wesleyan College, 1983; Americana: Choral Masterworks of American Composers, Roberts Wesleyan College, 1985; Choral Anthems by the Rochester Singers, Vivace Press, 1990

Cynthia Green Libby is professor of music (oboe) at Missouri State University and is principal oboe of the Springfield (MO) Symphony Orchestra. She studied at the Hochschule für Musik in West Berlin, the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts and earned the DMA and Performer's Certificate from the Eastman School of Music. Over 20 oboe works have been written for her by such composers as Libby Larsen, Joan Tower and Gwyneth Walker. Her articles have been published in The Double Reed, Journal of the International Double Reed Society, Midwest Double Reed Society Journal, IAWM Journal, Women of Note Quarterly, New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians and New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers.

History of Western Music Now Online

Items from Moldenhauer Archives, the richest composite gift of musical documents ever received by the Library of Congress, are now available online at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/moldenhauer>. They contain approximately 3,500 items documenting the history of Western music from the medieval period through the modern era and include materials from the most important figures in Western music, including composers, performers, conductors and writers. As a memorial to his wife, Hans Moldenhauer (1906-87) established a directive and provided funds for the Library of Congress to publish "The Rosaleen Moldenhauer Memorial: Music History from Primary Sources: A Guide to the Moldenhauer Archives" in 2000. The online presentation features more than 130 items (many complete works) from the Archives. Also available are a series of essays by musicologists discussing individual items. Born in Mainz, Germany, Hans Moldenhauer emigrated to the United States in 1938 to elude the rising tide of Nazi oppression. He eventually settled in Spokane, Washington, where he founded that city's Conservatory of Music in 1942. He began amassing his archives of primary source material shortly after World War II, and his wife, Rosaleen, a former student and a musicologist, assisted him.