

THE JOURNAL

of the ASSOCIATION OF ANGLICAN MUSICIANS



FROM VOLUME 28, NUMBERS 7 & 8 † SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER 2019

AAM: SERVING THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Reprinted with permission from the *Journal of the Association of Anglican Musicians*

Girl Choristers, Invisible Women, and Breaking Through the Inertia in the Music of the Episcopal Church, Part I

SUSAN JANE MATTHEWS, D.M.A.

Introduction

As a young graduate student at the Eastman School of Music, I heard a performance of the *Te Deum* for organ of Jeanne Demessieux (1921-1968), exquisitely played in concert by Christopher Young at the Fisk organ of Downtown United Presbyterian Church, Rochester, New York. I was mesmerized by this music that unexpectedly awoke my soul. In discovering a picture of this legendary French woman organist in a 1992 article by Karrin Ford in *The American Organist* magazine, I glimpsed dimly an image of my own self, another young woman who was passionate about the organ, whose working class family had selflessly supported the best musical training available, and one who had died the very year I was born. Demessieux's music and the story of her life inspired and sustained me through the vocational vacillations of the next twenty years of my life, including a pilgrimage to the 12th Arrondissement of Paris to see the modest two-manual organ Demessieux played, hidden from sight in the balcony of L'Église du St.-Esprit, from 1933 to 1962, until her appointment at L'Église de la Madeleine in 1962.

In the Fall of 2018, a very kind and talented choir member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Burlingame, California, musicologist James Steichen, introduced me to the wedding organ music of Fanny Hensel (1809-1847). I was captivated by her music, which revealed to me the truth of the composer of the organ processional at Fanny's wedding. (Fanny's younger brother, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, never completed the promised processional in time for her 1829 wedding, though in 1845 he reused memories of a sketch for the opening march of Sonata III, Opus 65.) In Fanny Hensel's *Das Jahr* for piano, again I found the musical voice of a woman that gave me life, learning a movement each month, through a challenging year as my mother's health suddenly declined. Though her extensive formal musical training did not include preparations to be a church organist, Fanny incorporated chorales into the months of March, December, and a *Nachspiel*, in turn representing Easter, Christmas, and the presence of the divine through the passing of each year.

Fanny's final version of *Das Jahr* was not published until 2000, some 158 years after its composition. This musical calendar was very nearly lost to the world, since Fanny was counseled by her brother and father to remain invisible, to not publish nor perform publicly as appropriate for a woman of her upper class standing, for which music could only be an "ornament," never a vocation. This counsel she followed, despite the urging of her supportive husband, the artist Wilhelm Hensel, until the last year of her short life when she began to publish. Meanwhile, several of her compositions had been published under Felix's name, the origin of an anecdote recorded in Queen Victoria's journal: Felix had to confess to the queen that her favorite *Lied* (*Schöner und schöner*), published under his name, had been composed by his sister. Fanny funneled her passion for music into private Sunday concerts at the Hensel home in Berlin, *Sonntagsmusiken*, concerts to which prominent European musicians came to hear the music of both siblings, to be inspired by Fanny's performances as a pianist and as director of her own choral ensemble.

It has been a heartfelt joy to share the timeless music of these two composers, to allow the musical voice of these women from twentieth-century France and nineteenth-century Germany to be heard in the twenty-first century. One may glimpse an image of the divine in the profound extant music of these two women musicians, whose life stories form a continuum with those of women musicians in 2019 seeking vocations in the church and publication of compositions. I turn to focus on these women who are a part of my own vocation as musicians in the Episcopal church, girl choristers and invisible women, and identify how we might break through centuries of inertia so that a visible place for women in the musical leadership of the Episcopal Church may be fully seen.

* * *

Girl Choristers, Invisible Women Leadership, and Inertia in the Numbers

In 2019, many choir stalls in Episcopal churches and cathedrals throughout the country are full of enthusiastic, well-trained, and dedicated girls and women. There are two Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) summer training courses for girls flourishing in the United States (Gulf Coast course and the Carolina course) and six more popular courses including both girl and boy choristers. As Richard Seal of Salisbury Cathedral successfully introduced in 1991 a girls' choir in parallel with a boys' choir to sing with professional men singers, and cathedrals followed around England, so too in the United States did Richard Webster at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Evanston, Illinois, begin a girls' choir in 1989 and Bruce Neswick at the Washington National Cathedral in 1997, that have proved beacons for the rest of the Episcopal Church in the United States.

However, as at Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral of London, likewise in the United States there are very visible Episcopal churches and cathedrals in 2019 where there are no opportunities offered for a girl to become a chorister in the choir. There is not a woman applying for a Director of Music post in the Anglican communion in 2019 who can list on their résumé that they were a girl chorister in the prestigious choir of St. Thomas, New York City, or of Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, the latter the same cathedral where one may trace the first steps of women's ordination in the Episcopal Church to the recognition of Phyllis Edwards there as a deacon in 1965.

In *The Hymnal 1982*, in the pew of most Episcopal churches, among the 720 hymns one may find nine tunes by seven women composers and thirty-three texts by twenty-six women poets. In sum, twenty-nine women are represented in *The Hymnal 1982* in thirty-eight hymns with an original tune and/or text by a woman, five percent of the hymns.

In 2019, the gender ratio of AAM membership has remained stable for the past twenty-five years at seventy-five percent men and twenty-five percent women. Seven women have served as president of AAM, including the current president, Marty Wheeler Burnett, women representing seventeen percent of AAM presidents.

Affiliate membership of RSCM America hovers similarly at seventy-four percent men and twenty-six percent women. In the 2019 RSCM summer course training brochure, one viewed the pictures of nine male conductors directing the nine courses, the listings of eight male organists and one woman organist (organist Janet Yieh at the Rhode Island RSCM course), and online could further note seven male chaplains and two women chaplains.

College students majoring in organ in the Fall of 2019 identifying as female constitute the following percentages of these five prominent organ departments: Yale twenty-seven percent, Eastman thirty-four percent, University of Michigan forty-one percent, Indiana University forty-eight percent, and St. Olaf fifty percent. From a 2014 survey, the American Guild of Organists (AGO) membership identifies as forty percent women and sixty percent men. However, in *The American Organist* magazine one finds in the advertisements of the two most visible concert organ management agencies

that women organists still only represent seventeen percent of the roster at Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists and twenty percent at Karen MacFarlane Artists.

In a survey by Lyn Loewi of websites of the 100 churches and cathedrals of the Episcopal Church with the largest average attendance in 2017 (ranging from 415 to 1,889 people), she found:

- 7% Deans/Rectors are women
- 75% Clergy staff include at least one woman
- 10% Directors of Music are women
- 0% Cathedral Directors of Music are women
(sixteen cathedrals are in this top 100 listing)

Considering all Episcopal cathedrals in the United States, fifteen percent currently have a woman as the Director of Music. While girls and young women visibly appear in excellent training programs as choristers and organists, women disappear from the lists of visible composers, professional organizations, concert organists, and from the leadership of music in large Episcopal churches and cathedrals.

Reflections of Directors of Music in the Episcopal Church

To present a broad spectrum of perspectives on girl choristers and the visibility of women in leadership in music in the Episcopal Church today, I asked for reflections on a set of questions from directors at twelve Episcopal churches and cathedrals, the course managers of the two 2019 RSCM summer courses for girls, and also from alumni of chorister training programs.

For the purposes of this article, the chorister training program of a given Episcopal church or cathedral may be placed broadly into one of three categories:

1. Girls' Choir (with also separate training of boys)
2. Boys' Choir (with **no** separate training of girls offered)
3. Co-ed Chorister Training

Due to space limitations, what is quoted below is only a sampling of the thoughtful and detailed responses of directors. The music staff person quoted is indicated by a *.

Reflections of Directors of Music in the Episcopal Church: 1. Girls' Choirs

In each of the four outstanding choirs included in this study, girl and boy choristers separately receive first-rate musical training and performance opportunities to sing the treble (soprano) line with professional adult singers singing alto, tenor, and bass. Websites detail the innovative scheduling that allows all singers to flourish and to offer various models for study, as a church seeks to introduce chorister training inclusive of both girls and boys. See the bibliography, which will appear in Part II, for a 2015 dissertation on the introduction of girl choristers in English cathedrals by Amanda Mackey for eleven more models. This section also includes reflections from the course managers of the two 2019 RSCM summer courses for girls.

• Christ Church Cathedral, Lexington, Kentucky

www.ccclex.org

*Erich Balling, *Canon Musician*

Kathleen Balling, *Music Assistant*

Lisa Hall, *Assistant Organist*

Choir of Men and Boys founded: 1962

Girls' Choir founded: late 1960s. *Under the direction of Bruce Neswick, they were the first girls' choir to sing for a full week at Westminster Abbey.*

Choir of Men and Girls founded: 2006

Do alumnae of your girls' choir work as professional musicians and as musicians in the Episcopal Church? *We have sent several very gifted girls to music schools over the years. At present, they are not among our church music colleagues. They are teaching and performing in other venues.*

• Grace Church, New York City

www.gracechurchnyc.org

*Patrick Allen, *Organist & Master of Choristers*

Hannah Cen, *Organ Scholar*

Choir of Men and Boys founded: 1894

Girls' Choir founded: 1994

In the Episcopal Church, are women as visible as men as choir directors, organists, and composers? If your response is no, what are some of the reasons? *In my own personal experience, women leaders, teachers, and colleagues have been a big part of my life and I am grateful for that. The United Methodist church where I was a child had women clergy and the music director was an amazing and talented woman—all this in the late 60's early 70's. Many were pioneers in their vocations and careers.*

• Trinity Cathedral, Columbia, South Carolina

www.trinitysc.org

*Jared Johnson, *Canon Organist and Choirmaster*

Brent TeVelde, *Associate Organist and Choirmaster*

Katie Gatch, *Chorister Program Manager and Assistant Choirmaster*

Joe Setzer, *Fellow in Church Music*

Choir of Men and Boys founded: 2009

Choir of Men and Girls founded: 2009

Prior to 2009, all choristers sang together.

Most Episcopal chorister programs are now co-ed. What have you seen as the benefits for your girls, your boys, and your cathedral choir ministry at large, in having your girls and boys rehearse separately? *In our chorister program, the separate schedules are meant to benefit everyone. It helps us to reconcile age differences, to teach well in smaller groups, and to provide cohesive choirs for all of the Cathedral services. Our boys are ages 8-13, and our girls go right up to age 18. We also work with "young men" in their own separate rehearsal with a voice coach. In the beginning of my tenure here, I worked with them all together, and two things were difficult: retaining the oldest and most outstanding girls in a group with young boys; and recruiting new boys into the same group with mature and brilliant girls. The boys would despair and shrink, and the girls would be held back from their full stature. It makes for a big-scale operation with many separate rehearsals, but it serves the church and gives us the best chance to teach each chorister well.*

• Washington National Cathedral, District of Columbia

www.cathedral.org

*Canon Michael McCarthy, *Director of Music*

Tom Sheehan, *Organist*

George Fergus, *Assistant Organist*

Brian Glosch, *Chorister Program Manager*

Elissa Edwards, *Music Outreach Officer & Voice Instructor*

Choir of Men and Boys founded: 1909

Choir of Men and Girls founded: 1997

In the Episcopal Church, are women as visible as men as choir directors, organists, and composers? If your response is no, what are some of the reasons? *I do not believe that women are as visible in leading roles in the Episcopal Church. The church has, for centuries, fostered the tradition of music leadership in the church through intensive and rigorous education of the young. Unfortunately, for centuries this opportunity was only really available to boys. With a greater equality today, the opportunity to find a vocational "spark" in our budding church musicians, regardless of gender, is our work as mentors.*

• Carolina RSCM Summer Training Course

www.carolinarscm.org

*Matthew Brown, *Course Manager*

Jared Johnson, *Director*

Do you think girls have equal opportunities to sing in the great choirs of the Episcopal Church? *I am consistently amazed at the high retention rate of returning choristers at the RSCM Carolina Course for Girls and Adults each summer. Our enrollment frequently reaches capacity by mid-March, and we often have a waiting list of girls wishing to attend. In some cases, it appears girl choristers are more often than not sustaining many parish music programs across the USA.*

In the Episcopal Church, are women as visible as men as choir directors, organists, and composers? If your response is no, what are some of the reasons? *I owe so much of my career to the strong inspiration of several women. Three in particular come to mind: Marie-Madeleine Duruflé, Margaret Mueller, and Dame Gillian Weir... As a male manager of a girls' course, I am always mindful for our girls to witness women in leadership roles as often as possible.*

What unique benefits are offered by the RSCM courses for girls as distinct from the co-ed offerings? *From my experience, there is a strong sense of community and esprit de corps developed at a course with one gender... I believe our younger girls ultimately excel and rise above some personal challenges and insecurities at the start of our week together by observing the leadership of our older, more experienced Choristers. Their experience each summer is only heightened when our staff includes a female chaplain, music director, or organist.*

• Gulf Coast RSCM Summer Training Course

www.rscmgulfoast.org

*Anna Teagarden, *Course Manager*

Walden Moore, *Director*

The Gulf Coast RSCM course included some wonderful repertoire by women this summer. Do you think that it was important to the girls to sing music composed by women? *Yes, our girls especially enjoyed singing works by current students and sisters, Maggie and Katie Burk, who grew up going to RSCM courses and still participate in the courses. That was especially*

inspiring. We had a composition activity which the girls loved! I would like to see more encouragement of girls for composition. It seems to me that there is an uneven balance toward a push to performance [for girl choristers].

What unique benefits are offered by the RSCM courses for girls as distinct from the co-ed offerings? *I have seen it year after year where girls return to old friends and relationships. It is a very safe space for them to BE girls, whatever that means to them exactly, without judgment or pressure, to just be... We also encourage them to be supportive of each other. ...there is very little competition, but instead an environment where girls are "pulling for" girls... sharing in their success and supporting in their shortfalls.*

Reflections of Directors of Music in the Episcopal Church: 2. Boys' Choirs

These three Choirs of Men and Boys have offered internationally-renowned training to the boys of their prestigious choirs from the late 1800s and early 1900s to the present. They have not yet been able to find a way to open their doors to girl choristers, aside from a nine-day summer course for girls hosted by St. Thomas Choir School in New York City, offered since 2005.

- All Saints' Episcopal Church, Ashmont, Massachusetts
www.allsaints.net/
Andrew Sheranian, *Organist and Master of Choristers*
Ross Wood, *Associate Organist*
Michael Raleigh, *Associate Choirmaster*
Choir of Men and Boys founded: 1887

Do you think girls have equal opportunity to sing in the great choirs of the Episcopal Church? *In the past fifty or so years, the majority of male choirs in the church have been disbanded, giving way to girl choirs or choirs with boys and girls. This is a good thing. Ashmont is certainly an outlier in this respect. We have a relationship with a local civic choir which tours internationally, and we encourage girls to sing with them and to stay involved with church through altar serving and Sunday school.*

In the Episcopal Church, are women as visible as men as choir directors, organists, and composers? If your answer is no, what are some of the reasons? *Women are not even close to as visible as men in Episcopal church music. Why? I imagine it's the same reason we still haven't had a female president of the USA. The histories of the church and the government are filled with the exploits of men. This needs to change. I can't begin to explain it.*

- Grace Cathedral, San Francisco
www.gracecathedral.org
*Ben Bachmann, *Canon Director of Music*
Chris Keady, *Assistant Director of Music*
Men's Choir founded: 1906
Choir of Men and Boys' founded: 1913
Cathedral School of Boys founded: 1957

Do you think girls have equal opportunity to sing in the great choirs of the Episcopal Church? *Certainly there are more girls' choirs in large parishes and cathedrals making music to a high standard than there were say, thirty years ago. I do think that the flourishing of girl chorister programs in this country has done a great deal to help keep the Anglican choral tradition alive.*

Where would you recommend girls sing in your community to have an experience equal to the one you offer to the boys? *San Francisco has one of the largest choral programs for girls and young women in the country. It has programs for a wider range of ages than our cathedral choir and has the added advantage of not being attached to a religious institution, thereby having more Sundays "off," which is an asset in this very secular city. That has been very appealing to parents seeking singing opportunities for sisters of choristers.*

What advice would you give to a girl who aspires to be a musician in the Episcopal Church? *There is nothing I can think of specifically geared toward young women that doesn't apply equally to young men. Practice always and learn all the repertoire you can. Vary your skills and musical interests. Hymn playing is as important as literature. Playing Bach is important, playing from figured bass and lead sheets is important. Sight reading is very important. Improvising is crucial. Be nice to people, and avoid thinking that your work is a ministry, even if it is.*

- St. Thomas, Fifth Avenue, New York City
www.saintthomaschurch.org/
*Jeremy Filsell, *Organist and Director of Music*
Benjamin Sheen, *Associate Organist*
Nicholas Quardokus, *Assistant Organist*
Choir School for boys founded: 1919

The Saint Thomas Choir School is the only boarding school solely for choristers in the United States, and one of only three schools of its type remaining in the world today.

Girl Chorister Summer Course founded: 2005

The Choir School hosts a nine-day choral experience in sacred music to outstanding middle and high school girls, ages 12 - 19, with excellent music and social skills. <https://choirschool.org/girls-choir.html>

Do you think girls have equal opportunities to sing in the great choirs of the Episcopal Church? *Yes. It is clear that there is also a terrific opportunity... to consider founding an equivalent St. Thomas-style experience for girls specifically. Equivalent chorister programs, which used to exist, could be revived with the similar financial and visionary input instituted here 100 years ago. It would be great to see a corresponding program for girls. We also know how tough it is to get boys to sing at a young age and opportunities for them to do so on their own terms are rare. In our vital efforts to provide similar opportunities for girls, we should remain aware of what we could conceivably lose, for boys are easily discouraged. We hope to feel justified in allowing boys to thrive, offer and learn music for this tiny window of childhood opportunity in their lives.*

Reflections of Directors of Music in the Episcopal Church: 3. Co-ed Choristers

The following five choirs represent stellar examples of the most common structuring for chorister training in the Episcopal Church today, in which boys and girls rehearse and sing together.

- Church of Heavenly Rest, New York City
www.heavenlyrest.org
*Mollie Nichols, *Director of Music*

Lydia Saylor, *Youth Choir Assistant* (an alumna of the chorister program of Heavenly Rest)

Do you think girls have equal opportunities to sing in the great choirs of the Episcopal Church? If not, please reflect on this. *It is moving in that direction. Some choirs are mixed and some separate boys and girls for vocal or educational reasons. Boy choir schools have a long and excellent tradition doing what they do. I would encourage other same sex Episcopal boarding schools to actively offer a similar program for girls and an excellent mixed choir program at other Episcopal schools where that is appropriate to their student attendees.*

What advice would you give to a girl who aspires to be a musician in the Episcopal Church? *Build your skills to be as proficient as possible and develop as broad a variety of musical skills as you can. Be knowledgeable about the past and open minded, creative, and inquiring about the future. Be collegial and organized in your work and view your work as a vocation.*

• Cathedral of St. John, Albuquerque, New Mexico

www.stjohnsabq.org

* Canon Precentor Maxine Thevenot, *Director of Cathedral Music and Cathedral Organist*

Edmund Connolly, *Assistant Organist-Choir Director*

Do you think girls have equal opportunities to sing in the great choirs of the Episcopal Church? If not, please reflect on this. *As the view from the pew changes and more women are placed in highly visible roles in the church, be it in the pulpit, at the altar, at the organ, or in front of the choir, this can't help but inspire those younger members of the congregation and choir alike to aspire to be in like positions should they feel called. My hope is that it will be only a matter of time before the funding will be in place for girls' choirs to be started in places which currently only have a choir of men and boys, to best afford equal opportunity and encouragement to work in what was once known as a male-only field. I must confess that, while I am grateful for the opportunities I had when I was younger, I wish I had had the great fortune of growing up a chorister in a choir of some skill, where the exposure to the music of the established "great" composers would have surely sped up the process of becoming a well-rounded, educated musician!*

In the Episcopal Church, are women as visible as men as choir directors, organists, and composers? If your response is no, what are some of the reasons? *As a visible minority in church music leadership, it is imperative that we advocate strongly for those boys and girls to pursue their goals and dreams, and to do everything in our power to enable them to become the organists, choral conductors, and composers of tomorrow. It is not enough to simply encourage one sex over the other. Encouraging a young teenage boy is as important as it is a young teenage girl. In that way we will encourage sympathetic musical leaders, who in turn will, hopefully, do the same.*

• Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, New York City
www.stjohndivine.org

* Kent Tritle, *Director of Cathedral Music and Organist*
Raymond Nagem, *Associate Director of Music and Organist*
Bryan Zaros, *Associate Choirmaster*
Choristers include students in grades 4-8 from the Cathedral School, since the founding of the school in 1901.

In the Episcopal Church, are women as visible as men as choir directors, organists, and composers? If your response is

no, what are some of the reasons? *This is a tough question. A dear friend really struggled through a generation of male-dominated church music direction. She worked with marvelous people, from John Bertalot to Jim Litton; they were not the problem. The problem was that as a woman, she had to work doubly hard to be sure her labors would be respected beyond the church yard, by other church musicians.*

What advice would you give to a girl who aspires to be a musician in the Episcopal Church? *Go for it! And find a program that really works for you. Accept nothing less than equal opportunity!*

• Trinity Cathedral, Portland, Oregon

www.trinity-episcopal.org

* Bruce Neswick, *Canon for Cathedral Music*
David Boeckh, *Organ Scholar*

Do you think girls have equal opportunities to sing in the great choirs of the Episcopal Church? If not, please reflect on this. *Most of our churches with boy treble lines also now have girl treble lines. Those that don't will catch up eventually. My principal worry is with churches that don't have choral provisions for trebles of either gender.*

In the Episcopal Church, are women as visible as men as choir directors, organists, and composers? If your response is no, what are some of the reasons? *It's not that women aren't as visible as men in these areas, it's that their numbers don't equal. We need to do a better job at recruiting women into these professions.*

• Trinity Church, Copley Square, Boston

www.trinitychurchboston.org

* Richard Webster, *Director of Music and Organist*
Colin Lynch, *Associate Director of Music and Organist*
While boy and girl trebles rehearse together at Trinity, boy trebles all sing Decani and girls all sing Cantoris.

In the Episcopal Church, are women as visible as men as choir directors, organists, and composers? If your response is no, what are some of the reasons? *NO! The principal reason, as I see it, is inertia. "We've always done it that way." A second reason is that, to change a culture, though not impossible, is extremely difficult and painstaking. It's interesting that the place of women clergy in leadership positions (bishops, deans, cardinal rectors) has shifted dramatically, while the presence of women in prominent musical posts lags behind.*

What advice would you give to a girl who aspires to be a musician in the Episcopal Church? *Do not take no for an answer. Don't let anyone tell you what you may or may not do, or what you can and cannot do. Claim your rightful place. Challenge your male colleagues at every level. Raise consciousness 24/7. Never give up!*

The conclusion of this article will be published in the October issue. This second part reflects on the invisibility of women composers in most Episcopal choir libraries, includes poignant insights from seven young musicians on their experiences as choristers in the Episcopal church, and the transformative impact on their lives of seeing women in the roles of directors, organists, and composers. Closing remarks address breaking through the inertia of a stained glass ceiling for the music of women in the Episcopal church, to a movement that sings in seeing and hearing one another fully.

Girl Choristers, Invisible Women, And Breaking Through the Inertia in the Music of the Episcopal Church (Part II)

SUSAN JANE MATTHEWS, D.M.A.

Invisibility of Women Composers in Episcopal Choir Libraries

As directors surveyed reflected on their choral music lists, I repeatedly read of a startled regret in an awareness, in most cases a very new awareness, that they had included only a very few women composers amidst the lengthy lists of music sung in a season. Jared Johnson, Canon for Music at Trinity Cathedral, Columbia, South Carolina, was a notable exception as he included choral repertoire by ten women composers over two seasons. I commend Lyn Loewi's article in the September issue of the *Journal* as a resource ("Women Anglican Composers"), Hildegard Publishing, Furore Verlag, who both specialize in publishing music by women, and a new three-volume anthology of sacred choral music by women composers found at www.multitudeofvoices.co.uk/. Yes, women have been composing as long as men have been composing for the church; against all odds there is an abundance of sacred choral music by women from the past and present, resources are proliferating quickly to make scores available, and countless individual women composers have compositions available online on their own websites. In a dramatic departure from the repertoire lists of past RSCMA summer training courses, seven of the nine 2019 courses included music by women composers, music that will be highlighted in the Fall RSCMA newsletter. There is a treasure of sacred choral works by women awaiting the musicians of the Episcopal Church.

* * *

The Voices of Chorister Alumni, the Young Musicians of the Episcopal Church

Seven young musicians reflect on their experiences as choristers in the Episcopal Church, and the transformative impact of the presence and absence of seeing women in the roles of directors, organists, and composers.

Genevieve McGahey, alumna of the Washington National Cathedral Girls' Choir; Professional Soprano; www.gensings.com/.

I think, probably like many women in many fields, I tended to focus on the fact that I was being given an opportunity to learn and perform at a high level (something that would have never happened without the incredible efforts of Bruce Neswick in establishing the girls' choir program at the National Cathedral and Mike McCarthy in continuing to develop and support it!) ... I will say very definitively that the lack of female role models when it came to conductors left me convinced that that was not a viable career path for me. I had many wonderful role models in my voice teachers, male and female, but the concept of exploring composition or conducting seemed completely foreign to me, even if there were parts of my personality and abilities that seemed like those pursuits might suit me very well.

Lauren Bodenlos, alumna of St. Paul's Choir School for Boys and Girls, Burlingame, California, and Senior at Agnes Scott College, Decatur, Georgia, religious studies and gender studies major.

One thing I remember from being a chorister was our first trip to Grace Cathedral, San Francisco... I remember seeing the choir of men and boys, and seeing all the male directors and feeling like I didn't belong—like I wasn't supposed to be there. I didn't understand why boys' choirs existed and why a cathedral especially would support a system that makes being up at the altar celebrating through music inaccessible to girls and women.

I didn't think that composition was a thing that women did when I was little. Seeing man's name after man's name on piece after piece worked to instill in me a deep sense of internalized misogyny. I don't remember singing many pieces by women growing up, but I do certainly remember singing Howells' "A Hymn for St. Cecilia" [text by Ursula Vaughan Williams]. I think of God as a feminine figure, and this piece gave a feminine face to holiness in a way that my tiny self really appreciated, though I could not articulate it at the time. Singing about someone named Cecilia, someone who may have sounded like me, or looked like a future me made me feel seen in music and in the church as a whole in ways that other pieces did not.

Bryan Zaros, alumnus of Church of the Transfiguration, New York City, Associate Choirmaster of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City.

With the oldest men and boys choir in the United States, it would seem that Church of the Transfiguration, "Little Church around the corner," on 29th Street and 5th Avenue in New York, would hold onto this all-male tradition without change, but in the great wisdom of their current director of twenty years, Dr. Claudia Dumschat, a girls' choir began several years ago to great success. Being an alumnus of this choir as a boy chorister, head chorister, and then assistant choirmaster in my teenage years, I couldn't be any more proud than to see a girls' choir flourishing in this parish known for its venerable Men & Boys Choir.

Joey Blundell, alumnus of St. Paul's Choir School, Burlingame, California, Senior at University of Southern California, computer engineering major.

I think that women have had a tremendous impact on my choral education... the mentoring I have received has contributed to more than just choral success, but to my success in life thus far as a whole. These women [director and singer colleagues] taught

me how to sing. But beyond that, interacting with them every week also taught me how to communicate with adults and to be a confident and driven young man. As a chorister, I found myself not necessarily looking up to the men in the choir, but to the women who sang the same voice part that I did. As I settled in as a countertenor, this trend continued.

I can personally reflect specifically on singing music written by Elizabeth Kimble. Singing a piece of music that has been sung for hundreds of years is really cool, but there's something very special about knowing the composer of a piece of music and being able to perform it with her. It was a fantastic opportunity to premiere a piece for a female composer, especially one that could set the groundwork for her future works. I can only hope that women continue to gain the recognition they deserve in the sphere of sacred repertoire.

Elizabeth Kimble, alumna of the Choir of St Anne's Episcopal Church, Annapolis, Maryland, composer of *Preces & Responses* featured at the 2019 Boston AAM Conference reading workshop; www.elizabethkimblemusic.com.

Growing up attending and then singing in church, I often felt that the music and liturgy were meant for other people besides me. I didn't connect to it or see how it was relevant to my own life or time. However, the first time I sang "Jesus Christ the Apple Tree" by Elizabeth Poston, I felt like I had found the music that was meant for me. I was around twelve years old, and never before had heard a piece in church before that spoke so directly to my life and my experiences. It was the first time a piece of art had expressed the emotions I hadn't been able to express myself. Even today I have a special place in my heart for that piece.

Katie Burk, alumnae of the Cathedral Choristers of Grace Episcopal Cathedral, Topeka, Kansas, compositions featured at the 2019 RSCM Gulf Coast summer training course, graduate student in organ at Indiana University.

A huge majority of notable full-time cathedral or large parish organist/music director positions are held by men, so looking at the wider landscape of our profession, we as a church lack female role models in high-visibility positions.

It's time for more women to be hired to lead well-regarded church music programs or to be clinicians at events like the RSCM courses, both of which inspire so many girl choristers.

Excellent leaders inspire the people they lead; if more women could be seen and heard doing high-level work in Episcopal churches (or in settings such as RSCM courses), I think more girls might be empowered to continue into leadership roles in church music because they might better be able to imagine themselves in those roles.

Maggie Burk, alumnae of the Cathedral Choristers of Grace Episcopal Cathedral, Topeka, Kansas, compositions featured at the 2019 RSCM Gulf Coast summer training course, graduate student in conducting at University of Michigan.

I voraciously devoured CDs of the great British cathedral and collegiate choirs; a sound world developed in my head, and a love of music ministry developed in my heart. I remember quite vividly learning that, because of my assigned sex, I would not have been allowed to sing in those English choirs—and I absolutely could not fathom why the leaders of the Anglican musical/liturgical

tradition would not consider me a valid contributor to its continuation. I vowed to live my life in a way that would open doors for young women, and that fire continues to burn in me today. Several programs with the most influence, social power, and musical clout still exclude girls, and I hope they thoughtfully consider their attachment to a tradition that tacitly symbolizes the systemic disempowerment of women in church music... Women are drastically underrepresented in the musical leadership of the Episcopal Church. Growing up at RSCM summer courses (which I love and continue to serve on staff for), I never experienced a female music director, and only twice did I ever sing for a female housemaster. In a world that is tacitly male, female representation is absolutely critical; girls need to SEE women in charge, leading worship as conductors, organists, and composers... This same principle of representation applies to all groups traditionally disenfranchised by establishments in power: people of color, LGBTQ+ people, etc. As a child, seeing someone who looks like you leading a room full of people is a powerful moment—the greater diversity of representation we can cultivate as a church, the healthier our future will be.

* * *

Breaking Through a Silencing Inertia to a Singing Movement

It has been a joy to explore the tremendous offerings today for girl choristers throughout the Episcopal Church that have been founded and successfully nourished in the past thirty years, to correspond with the directors whose dedicated ministry have given voice to girls in the Episcopal Church, and to listen to the poignant insights and vision of chorister alumni, the young musicians of the Episcopal Church.

We have made heartening strides in offering first-rate training and opportunities to girl choristers in the Episcopal Church, with a few notable churches that have lagged behind in welcoming girls to a place in their choir stalls. However, the Episcopal Church has not broken through the inertia of a stained glass ceiling for the music of women. Professional women musicians are not yet fully seen to be worthy as equal partners with men in the musical leadership of the Episcopal Church. As Jeanne Demessieux and Fanny Hensel also received first-rate musical training as girls, the history of women who are not visible as church musicians and composers continues, and a cycle perpetuates in which girl choristers do not see women role models for themselves in these vocations. For those talented and highly-trained girl choristers who are called to a vocation in music, most find it in music communities outside the Episcopal Church as they do not see a place for them within the church's walls as professional women musicians.

At the 2019 AAM Conference in Boston, with sincere thanks to Richard Webster and Colin Lynch, there were many encouraging firsts for women, for us all: a choral reading session for the first time included at least fifty percent women composers, a provocative presentation on including choral music by women composers in Episcopal liturgies by Lyn Loewi received a standing ovation, and a woman may have

attended the very first AAM reception for women. The Rev'd Erika Takacs, in her 4th of July sermon at the closing Eucharist of the conference addressed our call as musicians in the Episcopal Church, our call to break the inertia that silences women musicians: "God has called on us to be a movement, and God has called you to make this movement sing... of eternal life, abundant freedom, and the discovery of true joy. God is calling you to help us sing so that we may make this into a land of promise for all people, a nation dedicated to the proposition that all human beings were created equal and beloved." May our song truly move us to see and hear one another fully.

* * *

My sincere thanks to all who generously contributed their voices to this article, and to Lyn Loewi for her companionship throughout the journey of this past year. My heartfelt gratitude to all musicians in the Episcopal Church who have passionately dedicated themselves to the training of young choristers, and for the community of the Choir School of St. Paul's, Burlingame, California.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Christine Amner. *Unsung, A History of Women in American Music*. Portland: Amadeus Press, 2001.
- Pamela Darling. *New Wine: The Story of Women Transforming Leadership and Power in the Episcopal Church*. Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1994.
- Karrin E. Ford. "Jeanne Demessieux." *The American Organist*, 26, no. 4 (April 1992): 58-64.
- Amanda Mackey. *The New Voice: The Patterns and Provisions for Girl Choristers in the English Cathedral Choirs*. Ph. D. diss., Bangor University, 2015. [www.research.bangor.ac.uk/portal/en/theses/new-voice--the-patterns-and-provisions-for-girl-choristers-in-the-english-cathedral-choirs\(4008cb60-df90-44a3-88d9-f557e89180e7\).html](http://www.research.bangor.ac.uk/portal/en/theses/new-voice--the-patterns-and-provisions-for-girl-choristers-in-the-english-cathedral-choirs(4008cb60-df90-44a3-88d9-f557e89180e7).html).
- Bruce Neswick. "The Girls' Choir in Washington: Capital Addition to an Anglican Tradition." *The Journal of the Association of Anglican Musicians*, 6, no. 8 (October 1997): 4-5.
- Judith Tick and Judy Tsou. *Women in American Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- R. Larry Todd. *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.



Since October 2005, Susan Jane Matthews has been Director of Music at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Burlingame, California, where she is organist, director of the Chancel Choir, and founding director of the St. Paul's Choir School for boys and girls (2007). She has directed the choir in two recordings, *Sweetly singing in the choir* (2014) and *Searching for stars, to be released for Christmas 2019*. She previously served as Director of Music at St. Michael's Episcopal Cathedral, Boise, Idaho, and as Principal Organist of Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, where she has recorded two solo organ CDs for the Gothic label. Dr. Matthews completed a Bachelor of Arts Phi Beta Kappa at Haverford College, and MM and DMA in organ at the Eastman School of Music. She has performed and presented choral and organ workshops at AAM Conferences and AGO Conventions and chapter programs, including several lecture recitals on the life and organ works of Jeanne Demessieux. She is on the Board of Directors of the RSCMA and has served as an assistant director at the Pacific Northwest RSCM training course, and as organist and junior girls headmaster at the RSCM training course at King's College in her hometown of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.