

Gender and the Classical Music World: the unaccomplished professionalization of women in Italy

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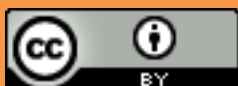
Abstract: The inclusion of women within the music profession is a recent and not fully realized process. This also holds true for classical music, where feminization has been more pronounced than in other music worlds. Building on secondary and primary sources on the Italian case, the paper focusses on some of the main aspects revealing the persistent – albeit steadily reduced – influence of a gendered model in shaping educational and professional paths of classical musicians, making for female musicians harder than for their male colleagues to gain legitimate access and full recognition within the world of classical music.

Keywords: Gender and music; women in music; educational segregation; occupational segregation; classical music profession.

GÊNERO E O MUNDO DA MÚSICA CLÁSSICA: A PROFISSIONALIZAÇÃO INACABADA DAS MULHERES NA ITÁLIA

Resumo: A inclusão das mulheres na profissão de músico é um processo recente e não totalmente consumado. Isso também vale para a música clássica, onde a feminização tem sido mais pronunciada do que em outros mundos da música. Baseando-se em fontes secundárias e primárias sobre o caso italiano, o artigo concentra-se em alguns dos principais aspectos de modo a revelar a persistente – embora firmemente reduzida – influência de um modelo de gênero na formação de caminhos educacionais e profissionais de músicos clássicos, tornando-o mais difícil para as mulheres musicistas do que para seus colegas do sexo masculino ganhar acesso legítimo e pleno reconhecimento dentro do mundo da música clássica.

Palavras-chave: Gênero e música; mulheres na música; segregação educacional; segregação ocupacional; profissão de músico clássico.



Gender and the Classical Music World: the unaccomplished professionalization of women in Italy

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1. The feminization of the classical music profession: a noteworthy but unaccomplished process

When considered from a historical perspective, equal participation in the music profession is a relatively recent process for Western societies, where for centuries musical practices were regulated following principles of stratification, differentiating social groups according to gender, race and social class. In the case of women, social conventions strongly recommended to exclude musical practices deemed to be incompatible with conventional views and images of feminine respectability and to confine allowed musical practices within the private sphere (Steiblin 1995; Green and Ravet 2005; Fine 2007; Green 2007). A professional musical career was thus experienced by women only in exceptional conditions, as those defined by primary socialization within a musical or high-ranking family and by embeddedness within networks supporting musical production (Cusick 1993; Buscatto 2010). From the second half of the 19th century, social inequalities in musical practices become crystallized within the 'classical canon', organising a selection of great works of the past in repertoires defining the summit of Western musical culture (Weber 1992). The estrangement from the professional sphere of female musicians – restrained by bans over bodily exposure and creation – was reinforced by the heroic aura associated to the talent and genius of the musician by the romantic aesthetics of 'absolute music' (DeNora 2000). Celebrated as a source of exclusive authority in musical taste by legitimated institutions for music education and production, such as Music Conservatories or Symphonic Orchestras (Kingsbury 1988; DiMaggio 2009), the classical canon reproduced not only an arbitrary selection of musical products, but also an asymmetrical social order.

Since the end of the 19th century, however, the walls bordering the classical music profession are breached by different ranks of women: as child prodigies and touring virtuosos, as students and teachers within Conservatories, as part of all-women orchestras, female musicians gradually gain visibility within the public scene, getting audiences increasingly accustomed to the image of women's proficiency in a wider variety of musical practices (Steiblin 1995; Macleod 2001). From the second half of the 20th century, women's status as musicians becomes formally legitimized, as in most other qualified sectors: movements of civil and feminist rights succeed in activating a process of removal of legal obstacles to equal integration in education and employment and in diffusing an image of women as socially, economically, sexually emancipated. In practice, however, women's integration within qualified labor proves to be harder than envisaged and easily exposed to tacit but influential forms of inequalities based on gender (such as horizontal and vertical

segregation, discrimination, lower incomes, greater job insecurity) (Coulangeon and Ravet 2003; Buscatto 2007b).

The article argues that this still holds true even in the case of classical music (Ravet 2007; Scharff 2017), where the feminization of the profession has been more pronounced than in other music worlds¹, such as that of jazz, rock or pop (Buscatto 2007a; Reddington 2012; Whiteley 2000). The argument proceeds by focusing on two main periods structuring professional trajectories of classical musicians, namely vocational training and career building, identifying for each period some of the main obstacles encountered by women, on the basis of their gender, on their path to becoming professional musicians: from the persistent influence of societal prescriptions over feminine musical practices, limiting girls' educational choices, to the higher exposure of abuse from music teachers; from the lower chances to access and reach top positions, to the need to come to term to the use of gender stereotypes – positively associated with masculinity, negatively with femininity – to regularly assess the legitimacy of their presence within the profession. Evidence will be drawn from two of my recent research projects, integrating quantitative and qualitative analysis²: a wide-ranging inquiry on Italian Music Conservatories, here allowing us to identify the role played by gender in vocational training, a crucial stage in the making of professionals (Becker et al. 1961; Hughes 1984); a case study on the role of gender in the classical flutist career, a specialisation of the classical music profession experiencing a remarkable wave of feminization, leading to a reversal of the traditional sex typing in the educational sphere.

Conclusions reflect on the fact that institutions, even when formally neutral with respect to gender or other social categories, reveal, in their practical action, mechanisms reproducing social hierarchies naturalized over the centuries, which tend to generate new and old forms of power asymmetries (Bourdieu 2013). Unveiling the gendered nature of institutions – and, in this specific case, of the world of classical music – allows us to recognise inequalities experienced by female professionals not as an individual problem, linked to their personal characteristics, but as a social question, to be tackled collectively.

2. Gender and vocational education in classical music

In Western societies, the presence of women within the musical field was historically regulated by a series of prescriptions and prohibitions: music production could be performed within private settings and only in forms deemed to be appropriate to ideals of grace, decorum, discretion, which were required of 'respectable' women (Green 1997; Fine 2007). A wide range of instruments were thus precluded from female musical practice: those seen as too technologically complex, those altering their graceful image for executive needs or those requiring postures deemed to be licentious or provocative (Steiblin 1995; Green 1997). Ultimately, the only instruments to survive this strict selection were those with plucked strings (harp, harpsichord, spinet, lute, viol), allowing to play sitting straight, with a gentle touch and to accompany the singing during upper classes' domestic music sessions. From the 18th century, the musical education of young girls at the keyboards became a means for bourgeois families to exhibit their newly achieved wealth

¹ I use here the expression of 'music world' following Howard Becker's definition of 'art worlds' as "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produce(s) the kind of art works that art world is noted for" (Becker, 1982, p.x).

² Following a mixed-methods approach (Bryman 2012), both studies integrate documental and statistical analysis of secondary sources with empirical research, based on qualitative and quantitative tools (Casula 2017, 2018).

and status (Loesser 1954, Leppert 1988); while some girls also reached high proficiency levels, the heroic character of the virtuoso soloist diffused during the second half of the 19th century, hardly compatible with the conventions imposed on the public exhibition of the female body, inhibited the feasibility of a career path (DeNora 2000). Girls were however gradually accepted within modern Conservatories of music – institutes for the vocational training of musicians –, although only in appropriate courses (harp, piano, singing) and in the face of strong reluctance from directors, worried about the possible consequences of the intrusion in terms of weakening of the didactic standards and of the austere nature of the institutes (Pierre 1990; DelFrati 2017).

2.1. Gender and Conservatory students' choices: an historical view

A useful source to trace the historical evolution of the relation between gender and the classical music profession is offered by statistical data on students enrolled in Italian Music Conservatories³, from the second decade of the 20th century till today. From the quantitative point of view, students' population appears to be gender-balanced: since the beginning of the century girls' presence within Conservatories almost equals that of boys – differently from other segments of education, such as secondary school or university, where equal participation was reached only decades later – and this gender balance remains stable, with small fluctuations, until today. This fact may be explained by the strong legitimation, in Western modern societies, of music as part of young women's education, although mainly aimed at exhibiting familial symbolic capital and at enhancing girls' cultural capital, to be used in the marital market. As discussed above, female access was thus tacitly restricted to musical practices responding to the criteria of class distinction and conformity to gender roles.

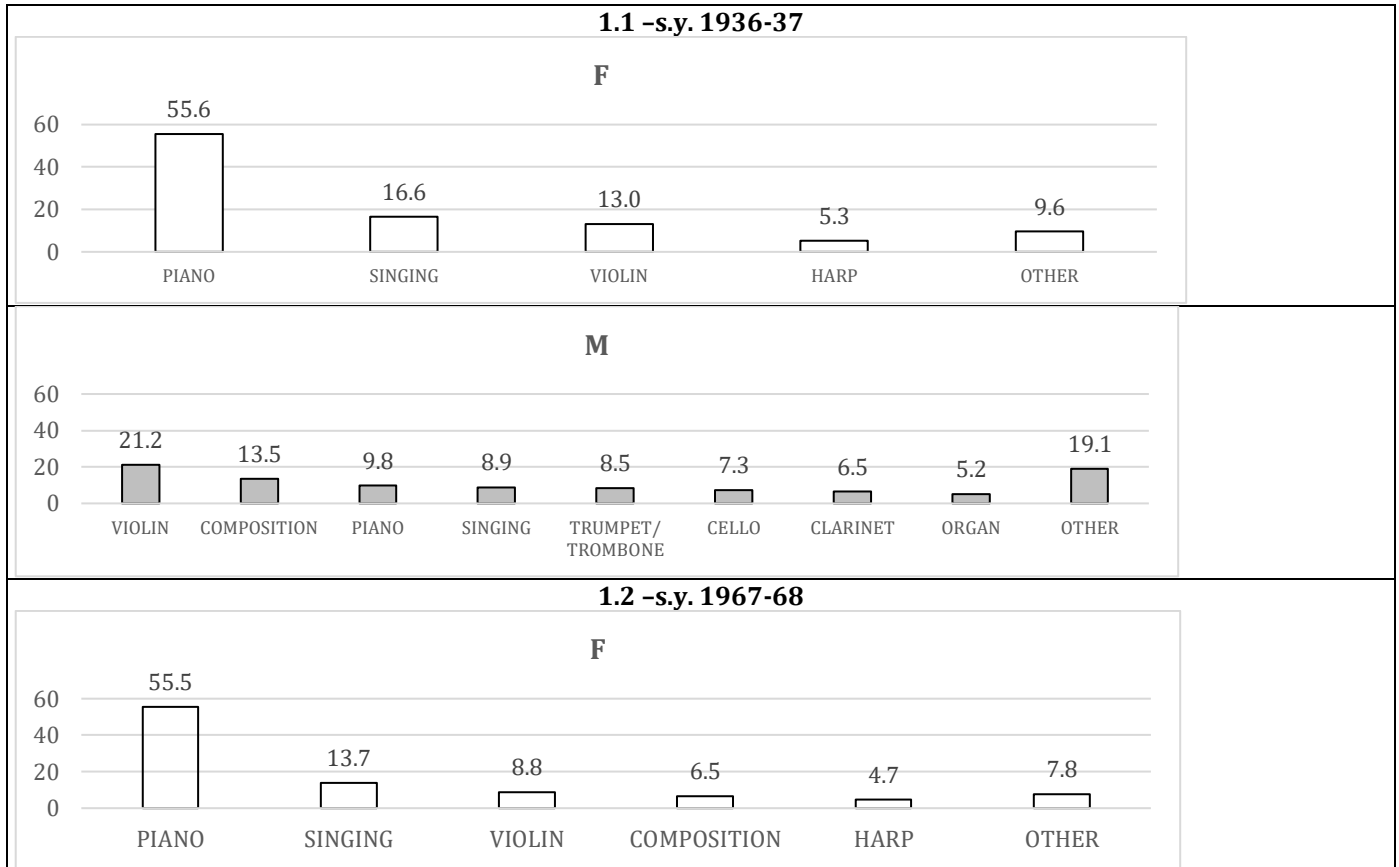
The gendered nature of professional music education emerges in the distribution of male and female students in the different courses offered by Italian Music Conservatories, illustrated in figure 1 for three selected school years. During the mid-1930s (see item 1.1 of Figure 1), with the occurrence of WW2 significantly reducing the number of male students, the 18 national Conservatories register a slight predominance of girls (52% of a nearly 2.800 students population), whose choices appear to be steadily linked to the conventional gender typing of musical practices: more than half of them (56%) concentrate in piano classes, 17% in singing and 5% in harp classes; the new entry into an old club is the violin (receiving 13% of preferences), the first traditionally masculine instrument to become feminized; less than 10% of girls dare to deviate from the conventional model⁴. Male students' choices, by contrast, reveal a greater freedom and a clearer professional orientation: the favourite class is that of violin (with 21% of preferences), offering career perspectives both as soloist, ensemble musician or symphonic orchestra member, as several other courses chosen by male students. Although the most prestigious specialisations of the classical canon still

³ The origin of Italian Conservatories dates back to the 16th century, when religious institutes were founded with the aim of 'conserving' (that is, protecting) poor or deprived children, hosting them and offering them vocational training aimed at their social reintegration (Colarizi 1999). Due to the prestige achieved for the quality of music teaching, the name Conservatory became a synonym for institute for vocational musical training. Today in Italy there are 78 Music Conservatories scattered throughout the national territory: funded by the State or local authorities, they count nearly 47 thousand students and 8 thousand teachers (Casula 2018).

⁴ The 'other' category used in figures 1 and 2 includes courses which reach less than 5% of students' preferences.

obtain recognition (composition 14%, piano 10%, singing 9%, organ 5%), more than 19% of boys enroll in a variety of less common courses.

Thirty years later (see item 1.2 of Figure 1), when societal demands for a wider offer of music education meet an enlarging national welfare system, the number of Music Conservatories nearly doubles, rising to 35. Male presence (57% of a nearly 5.600 total population) declines in courses strongly associated to the classical canon (violin and composition) and expands in others (piano, trumpet and trombone, clarinet) also applicable to new musical genres (such as jazz), as well in a variety of experimental courses, mirroring contemporary changes in youth cultures. Girl's choices, conversely, do not seem to be influenced by these changes and remain anchored to the traditional feminine model: still more than half of them chooses piano classes (56%), 14% singing, 9% violin, 5% harp, while only 8% makes less predictable choices; the only relevant innovation is represented by the appreciation for composition courses (7%), presumably linked to their parallel decrease in boys' preferences. We must wait three more decades (see item 1.3 of Figure 1), when the number of Conservatories increases twofold and the student population grows six-fold, to register relevant changes in the choices of girls (representing 42% of a nearly 31.000 population). Whereas the core of the traditional model still endures, while weakened (with 35% of preferences for the piano and for 9% singing), it is progressively redefined in order to gradually include, within the fully legitimated feminine musical practices, instruments precluded to women in the past: the feminization already observed with the violin is now more noticeable, with the flute becoming one of girls' favourite instruments. Moreover, a significant number of girls (33%) opens to a large variety of less conventional courses, mainly related to specializations of the classical canon with higher rates of insertion on the labour market, witnessing a relative decline in boys' enrolments.



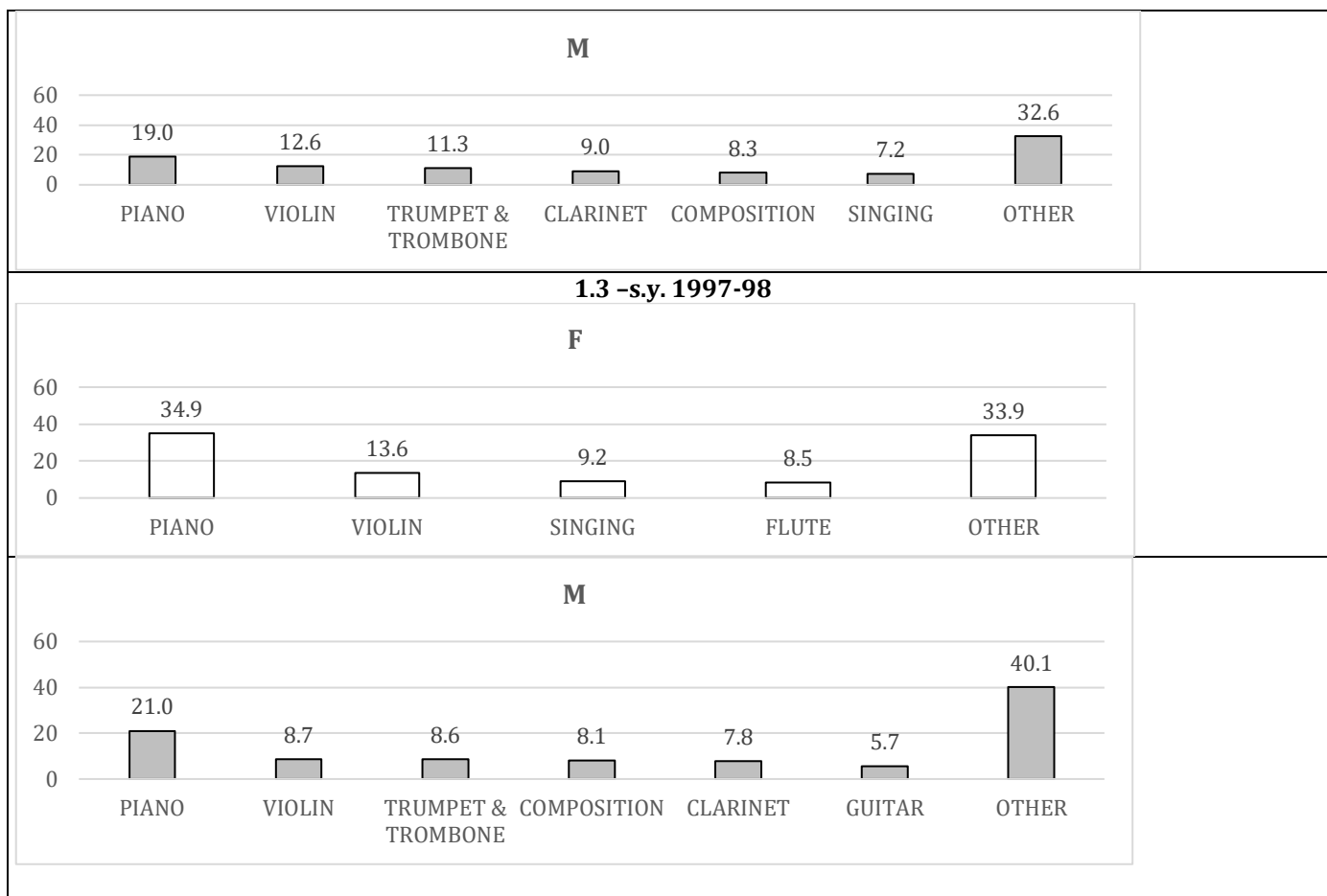


Figure 1 – Distribution of students in courses offered by Italian Music Conservatories during the 20th century, per sex –selected school years – (Source: our elaboration on ISTAT data).

With the reform of higher artistic and musical training (national law n.508/1999) Music Conservatories, along with other national arts institutes, become embedded within the tertiary level of education. The new curricula allows for a wider variety of genres and repertoires and for a professional profile of musicians more integrated within the general education system. Flaws both in the law and in its implementation, as well as the internal resistance to change, however, produce a complex and contradictory picture, witnessing the coexistence of old and new curricula, the creation of informal pre-academic courses, a delayed entrance of graduated music students into the labour market.

What changes, then, are brought about by the reform with reference to gender stereotyping of courses? Figure 2 reports the distribution of male and female students in courses offered during academic year 2014-15 by Italian Music Conservatories, for each type of curricula. In the old curricula (see item 2.1 of Figure 2) – still accounting for ¼ of a nearly 49.000 students’ population – we can see confirmed and reinforced the trends observed for the end of the 20th century: girls’ choices stick to conventional feminine musical practices, but expand them to include a wider variety of courses (after violin and flute, also cello and clarinet); boys’ choices indicate a greater freedom, extending beyond the classical canon. This picture is substantially mirrored in the ‘pre-academic’ courses (see item 2.2 of Figure 2), accounting for nearly 37% of the student population. The ‘academic courses’ (see item 2.3 of Figure 3) – corresponding to the tertiary level of education, with a more direct link to professionalisation – see a relatively lower participation of women (40%, against nearly 48% in the first two curricula): also in this case, girls’ choices mainly converge within the ‘enlarged’ classical canon, while boys’ choices are more varied; similar is the relevance given by male and female students to training courses for music teaching.

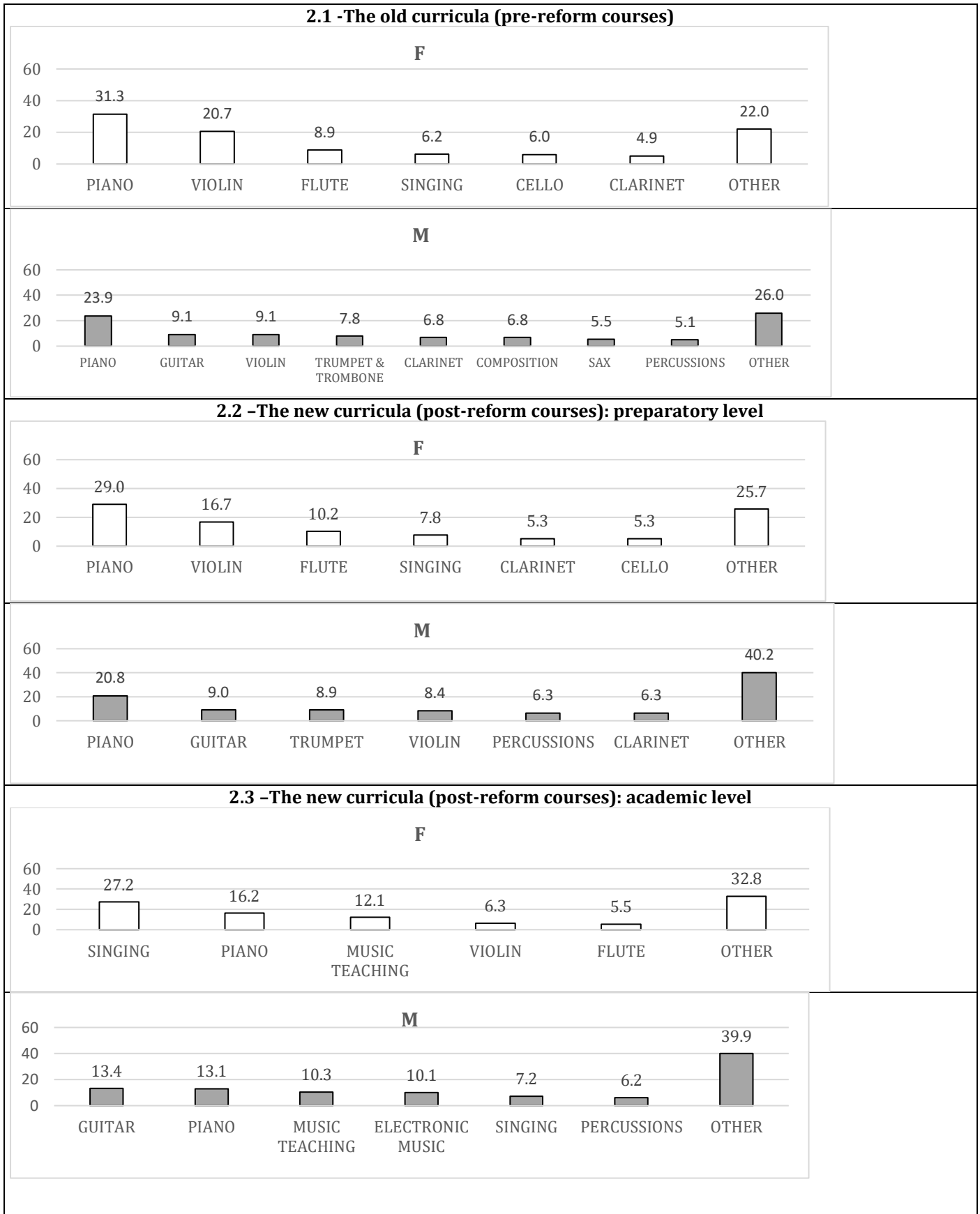


Figure 2 – Distribution of students in courses offered by Italian Music Conservatories after the 1999 reform, per sex – academic year 2014-2015 (Source: our elaboration on MIUR-AFAM data).

2.2. Structure vs. agency: what guides professional paths in music today?

The issue of gendered paths in the classical music profession can be further explored with reference to my research on Italian Music Conservatories, drawing on the analysis of a questionnaire with teachers and in-

depth interviews with teachers and students⁵. The questionnaire confirms the relevance of precocious education, already shown in the literature (Coulangeon 2004; Wagner 2015), largely influenced by the household context; this is particularly, for the Italian case, where music is assigned a marginal role within standard curricula of the education system. Parental influence, both in the decision to study music, in the choice of the instrument and in the resolution to enter the Conservatory, is more pronounced in the case of female daughters, compared to male children, who seem to benefit from greater degrees of freedom⁶.

The interviews allow us to further specify the relation between structure and agency in the adoption of career paths responding to gendered models of musical practice. In the first excerpt reported below, a Conservatory teacher remembers his participation as a young boy in the village music band as a moment of sociality and aggregation among countrymen and countrywomen of all ages "playing everything"; in the second excerpt a girl studying conventional feminine instruments at the Conservatory is allowed to play the instrument she loves (the tuba, associated to men in the classical canon) only in the music band; in the third excerpt, a female student at the Conservatory recalls her teacher's arguments to convince her to leave the band (where she had started her musical training), considered as an inappropriate locus for the education of professional classical musicians.

Excerpt n.1 [Music Conservatory teacher of trombone, male, 45]:

I really liked to play in the band: first of all, it has a social function, of aggregation. Consider that in [a small village in the South of Italy] in 1983, in those years there wasn't much. It wasn't like today that there is basketball, there is swimming, there is this and that; there was the band and that was all! (...)

C.C.: Were there female players in the band?

Yes, and they played everything, males and females of all ages; it was a large circle of friends. We did tours: the band was quite well known, it supplied services to other villages, for festivals, even for funerals: we went with private cars of the older members, or with a van: [it was] a party!

Excerpt n.2 [Music Conservatory student of viola, female, 18]:

(...) I started to play during my fourth grade, but the piano (...) [then] I started playing the violin and after a year I decided to enter the Conservatory... last year I switched from violin to viola. At the same time, for passion, I play the tuba (...)

⁵ The empirical part of my study on Italian Music Conservatories (Casula 2018) analysed nearly 100 qualitative interviews with Conservatory teachers and students and other informed actors and a questionnaire completed by 1.036 out of a 6.023 population of full-time Conservatory teachers. The article also quotes some of the 10 in-depth interviews with male and female flutists, from my case study on gender and the classical flutist profession (Casula 2017).

⁶ Only 5% of respondents refer to the school context as the original incentive to their music training; most of them point to music listening in the family (19%), the presence of professional musicians among the parents or relatives (14%), the possession of an instrument at home (12%), the attendance to concerts or choirs (20%). Music training was a parental choice for 12% of female respondents, while this was the case only for 5% of their male colleagues (Casula 2018, 157).

C.C.: How did you get to the tuba?

The tuba is... [*she laughs*] a love that I have since I was little, since I was playing the piano... but I saw it as something a bit difficult [to realise]... instead three years ago, I started too (...) I knew that there was a band (...) I went there and asked how I could start: I did a year with a teacher [of the band] and then I carried on, so now I play there, also (...)

C.C.: How did your parents take the choice of the tuba?

Dad used to play in the band when he was young [and living in a village], he played the saxophone; however, when he moved here [in the city] he completely quit; in fact, later, after I started to play in the band, I let him take back the instrument and he started again to play him too...

C.C.: How nice!

Mom is fine [with that]: she is happy, proud...

Excerpt n.3 [Music Conservatory student of flute, female, 25]:

C.C.: While you were at the Conservatory, did you continue playing in the band?

No, because my Conservatory teacher did not want me to... he said that they were postmen, shepherds, who played in a coarse manner, that they could not understand music as a profession... At first, I continued, although sporadically; then I felt almost dirty, impure, when going back to the Conservatory, so I left the band...

The extracts show how bans on girls' musical practices are still present within Music Conservatories, where the conventional restricted list of legitimated female musical practices gradually enlarges, annexing the rungs following in the ladder (as in the case of the violin or the flute), but still excludes those at its base (as the wind instruments or the double bass). Those bans, increasingly challenged by other art worlds – such as that of village music bands, diffused in Italian rural contexts, where instruments are mostly assigned on the basis of the mutable needs of the ensemble – are defended with strategies of distinction by Conservatories, aimed at reiterating their cultural superiority as exclusive legitimate institutions for the professional training of classical musicians, associated to upper urban classes (Hennion 1982; Kingsbury 1988).

The influence of gender stereotypes in music training paths also varies with age: as students grow, the choice of the instrument becomes more guided by their own tastes, rather than on parents' preferences or social conventions. This can be noticed in the excerpts reported below: in the first (n.4), the double bass is refused on the basis of an irrational fear⁷ by a little girl entering the Conservatory; in the latter (n.5), it is selected by a girl in her twenties (after having tried and discarded instruments more often associated to femininity: flute, guitar, piano), despite its low popularity among peers and maternal perplexities on its presumed masculine character.

Excerpt n.4 [Music Conservatory teacher of double bass, male, 60]:

⁷ Fear is often noticed in the case of women having to use technological artefacts symbolically strongly associated to masculinity, such as the car in the past or, more recently, the computer or the interactive whiteboard (Wajcman 1991; Casula and Mongili 2006; Casula and DeFeo 2016).

A little girl showed up, poor girl, last year: [*he reproduces the dialogue with the child, imitating her whining voice*] "They put me in this classroom..."; "Come on, let's try [the double bass]"; "No, Noo!"; "But, look, it doesn't bite: it's an instrument" – I swear to you, she did not even touch it! – "No, no, I want to play clarinet!". Thus, I took her to my [clarinet] colleague: "I don't know, she must have the 'doublebassophobia': she hates the double bass, I cannot keep her in my classroom!"

Excerpt n.5 [Music Conservatory student of double bass, female, 20]:

C.C.: When you told your friends and family that you had enrolled at the Conservatory for the double bass course, what were the reactions?

First, many ask: "Wait, which is the double bass?". There: "The gigantic violin!" always works as an answer... The only one more hesitant was my mother, who said: "Hey, but it's a male instrument!" She wanted me to play the cello or more feminine things, but it doesn't make sense to me, I mean: if you like it...

The interviews seldom registered examples in which gender stereotyping limited male choice of an instrument or a musical vocation: this was the case of some boys abandoning the class of harp or not enrolling in that of flute, because of the association of the instruments' range with the feminine voice. Those stereotypes, however, do not stem from the classical music canon, but rather from teenagers' peer group and concern a much more limited range of musical practices.

2.3. The greater exposure of female students to teachers' abuses of power

The paths of professional classical musicians studying privately are strongly marked by the figure of the teacher, chosen by parents on the basis of reputational criteria as sole legitimate authority on children's musical training (Wagner 2015). A strong centralisation of legitimate authority in musical training is also a feature of Italian Conservatories (particularly prior to the 1999 reform). The pivotal role of the teacher in pupils' education resumes the tradition of the ancient 17th century Italian Conservatories, based on the imitative learning model of renaissance studios (Sennet 2008), and adapted it to the professional specialization required from the virtuoso since the 19th century (Kingsbury 1988). The technical excellence needed to manage a virtuoso repertoire is thus built on the basis of experience and reputation of 'the master' (*il maestro*) and his school, which the pupil contributes to strengthen and carry on throughout his/her career (Wagner 2015). The peculiar nature of this didactic model, based on the undisputed authority of the master, the young age of the pupils, the individual mode of the lessons (one-to-one), the emotional and affective involvement developed in the long and exclusive path of study, accentuate the typically asymmetric character of the teacher/student relationship. The absence of forms of evaluation of teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills, during both their recruitment and their service, explain the recurrence of episodes of abuses of corporal or psychological nature, whose frequency seems to diminish, in front of cultural changes investing new generation of teachers and students (Casula 2018).

These episodes seem to affect female rather than male students more severely for different kinds of reasons. The first is related to the different reaction of students, according to their gender, to the same type of mistreatments experienced with their *maestro*: both physical and psychological abuses more often traumatically strike girls, less accustomed than boys to educational models based on corporal sanctions and authoritarian rules, but rather used to derive gratifications and praise from their dedication to study. In the

excerpt n.6 a girl studying flute recalls her teacher's recourse to corporal punishments to correct her wrong postures as an intolerably unjust humiliation; among the interviewees sharing the same experience, most females seem to have lived punishments as a quite disturbing event, while most males seem to contemplate them among the prerogatives of teachers' paternal role. In the excerpt n.7 physical punishments are accompanied by a piano teacher with harshness in display of authority, indifference in front of students' improvements, strong pressure over performance, in order to reach the discipline and self-denial needed to achieve excellence as a professional soloist. The effect of this method in the case of the interviewee, however, was the development of feelings of anxiety turning into symptoms of physical malaise strongly associated to the moment of performance and ultimately precluding her a career as a solo pianist (Kingsbury 1988; Wagner 2015).

Excerpt n. 6 [Music Conservatory student of flute, female, 25]:

I didn't know what to do (...) There was a period, in the first years of the lyceum, I came out from the flute lesson in tears, I tell you with the heart in my hands... I remember, for instance, that to teach me the diaphragmatic breathing [my teacher] used to give me a punch in the stomach, or to hit my fingers on the nails with the pencil (...) even for unmotivated things...

Excerpt n.7 [Musicologist, female, 35]:

The piano part [at the Conservatory] was a nightmare: I had a very harsh teacher (...) One of her problems was that she stomped [students'] hands (...) a very unpleasant thing... in fact I will always remember that once I had taken away my hand and she glared at me, because I dared to escape the punishment (*laughing*) (...) I suffered from panic attacks on the days before piano classes: I was feeling sick, I somatised a lot, so that sometimes I skipped the lesson because of a strong stomach ache... Then came these piano recitals [within the Conservatory] which were hell, because there were two months in which you did nothing else [besides preparing for the recital], with a very strong emotional pressure (...) [My teacher] taught me a lot, but this aspect related to the moment of the performance was so emotionally frustrating, devastating, that as an adult I realized that [being a solo pianist] could not become my profession, because before going to play – for two years [after the diploma] I really tried to do concerts, I also managed to earn a little – but the days before [the concert] I hoped to be hit by a car in the street: can you understand that this is not feasible?!

A second reason concerns the higher frequency with which female students are exposed, in comparison with their male colleagues, to a specific kind of (typically male) teachers' misconduct, namely sexual abuse. The issue, also present in other educational sectors, is particularly relevant in the case of music teaching, because of its peculiarities: one-to-one lessons, the young age of students, the artistic aura and authority of the master, bodily aspects of learning and emotional involvement in playing/singing music. Discussed in the last decades at the international level, the issue has often led institutions for music education to define teaching conducts avoiding sexually disturbing practices and to adopt specific formal measures to safeguard students (Stuff 1997); however, it remains a taboo in Italian Music Conservatories, where the question is often

dismissed as personal and seldom considered as a collective matter⁸. In the younger generation of teachers, however, there seems to be a new awareness of the delicacy of the problem and of the need to manage it within a respectful formative relationship.

The following quotes from the interviews with a female and a male teacher of a Music Conservatory confront two perspectives on the issue, mainly seen as either a moral or a legal matter. While the former teacher, recalling the adoration felt for her own *maestro*, charges on male teachers the moral responsibility – if not as men, as educators – not to exploit the pupils' vulnerable condition (excerpt n.8); the latter, instead, puts the blame on the seductive nature of young female students⁹, considered up until they come of age as a dangerous psychological threat for middle-aged male teachers (excerpt n.9).

Excerpt n. 8 [Music Conservatory teacher of singing, female, 45]:

I was in love with my teacher [at the Conservatory], I went to classes just for him; not in love in the sense... I had an adoration for my *maestro*, which went beyond the music (...) But there have never been misunderstandings... (...) I think that when these things happen, among female students and professors, I think that it is a sort of immaturity of the professor, because in any case, much as the music, much as the situation, etcetera, nevertheless you must keep a restraint – or, if you cannot keep it as a man, keep it as a teacher.

Excerpt n. 9 [Music Conservatory teacher of piano, male, 55]:

There are many [cases of harassment] because it's a situation where you are really at risk, because you are always alone [in the classroom], moreover there is this very close relationship [between teacher and student]: men of a certain age enter that phase and girls between 18 and 25-26 represent a very strong psychological danger (...) the professor might not have the maturity to resist, and then disasters happen... This is for the traditional [curriculum]; at the academic [curriculum] it is different, because they [female students] are legally adult: usually they [teacher and student] become a couple, they [the teachers] divorce their wife...

The experience of sexual harassment in the personal and professional path of female students can be more or less troublesome, according to the intensity of the molestation and the maturity of the student. In the following excerpts, we see how a thirteen-year-old student, paralyzed from fear and shame, resolved to leave the class, without telling anyone about the episode (excerpt n.10); referring about harassment is not easy even for an attentive adult girl, because of teacher's caution in avoiding to present 'tangible evidence' of his intentions (excerpt n.11); other times teacher's misbehaviour with female students restricts to forms of flirting or sexual objectification often not intended to result in a sexual relation, but nevertheless detrimental to girls' personal dignity and education (excerpt n.12).

Excerpt n. 10 [Music Conservatory teacher, flutist, female, 55]:

⁸ Of the teachers participating to the questionnaire more than half (51%) declared they had knowledge, either directly or through reliable sources, of episodes of harassment, abuse or discrimination, perpetrated by teachers on students (Casula 2018, 224).

⁹ The age of the girls seems deliberately augmented by the interviewee, to discard the case as not prosecutable by law; students, however, still mainly enrol in Italian Conservatories during early adolescence.

At that time, it unfortunately often happened that male professors seduced female students (...) It did not happen to me: actually, I went through an attempt from the professor of the organ course, which (...) I ended because of this. He tried to lay hands on me during the lesson; I left and never went back. Of course, I didn't find the courage to tell my mother, because I was about 13 years old...

C.C.: Nor to tell the director of the Conservatory?

No, no: because they are clever, they do it with the girls who remain paralyzed at the very idea: I couldn't even tell my mom, though I had a family [who were open minded]... When I look back at it I say: if I had been only three years older, I would have made a fuss! Even because I started early with politics, with students and feminist organizations...

Excerpt n. 11 [Music Conservatory student of flute, female, 25]:

I would say he was 60-65 years old... He was discreet: because the very bad thing they do at the Conservatory is that they put you in a situation where you can't denounce them, you can't go and tell: "They are harassing me!" because it is so veiled, that you feel something is wrong and bothers you, but you can't report it, because actually they aren't doing anything to you. So, when I went to have a coffee with this teacher (...) and maybe he lightly touched my hand like that [*lightly touching the researcher's hand*] it could also be a mistake, do you understand? I couldn't go [to the director] and tell: "He touched my hand!"

Excerpt n. 12 [Symphonic Orchestra member, flutist, male, 50]:

[*My maestro*] has never behaved incorrectly, but he has often had a little obsessive attitude towards his women pupils. He came out with things like: "But who are you dating, that stupid guy? Now you can't become a flutist anymore, because you have a boyfriend!" or: "Ah, this perfume you have today, I preferred that of the other day..."

3. Women's access and career development in the classical music profession

As discussed in the previous paragraphs, the second half of the 20th century witnesses a growing legitimisation of women's participation to the classical music profession in Western societies, following the wider process leading to the removal of legal obstacles to citizens' equal rights in education and employment. The trend of enrolments in Italian Music Conservatories during the 20th century shows how girls' choices – initially strongly segregated within the narrow borders of conventional prescriptions on musical practices – gradually extend to a wider variety of courses of the classical canon, associated with greater professional opportunities. However, as we shall see in the next paragraphs, the feminization of vocational training paths, while enhancing women's participation to the labour market, still clashes with the structurally asymmetric gendered nature of its organizations.

3.1. The persistency of horizontal and vertical segregation

A first indicator of the persistence of segregation in the classical music profession is offered by data on the presence of women in the teaching staff of Italian Music Conservatories. Observing fig.3, reporting the evolution of the population of Conservatory teachers during the 20th century, we notice that while in the first few decades female teachers are only about 13%, their proportion doubles during the 1970s, to

represent 30% of the total teaching staff. In the following decades, however, this threshold remains stable, despite the significant increase in the overall teacher population. Gender segregation can also be observed at the vertical level, when considering the number of women at the head of the institutions: there were none in the first half of the 20th century, yet today they still are a tiny minority (9% of the total number of Conservatory directors during the academic year 2016-17).

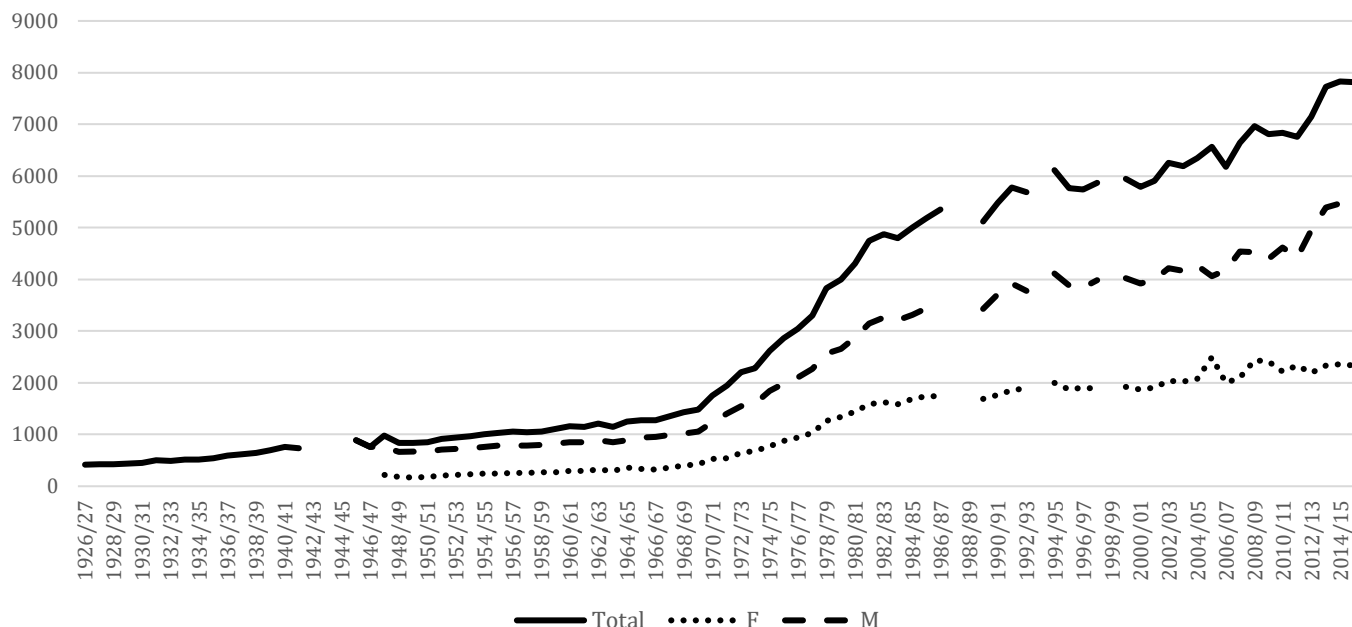


Figure 3 – Italian Music Conservatories: number of teachers, total and per sex (s.y. 1926/27-2015/16) (Source: Our elaboration on data from the Italian national institute of statistics (Istat) and the Italian Ministry of university and research (MIUR).

	N° (M&F)	%F
VIOLIN	384	39,6
VIOLA	158	29,7
CELLO	122	21,3
DOUBLEBASS	89	4,5
FLUTE	54	29,6
HAUTBOIS	55	16,4
CLARINET	52	9,6
BASSOON	52	7,7
HORN	78	5,1
TRUMPET	49	8,2
TROMBONE	66	0,0
PERCUSSIONS	51	5,9
HARP	15	100,0
TOTAL	1225	23,6

Figure 4 – Fondazioni Lirico-Sinfoniche: total number of stable orchestra members and percentage of women per instrument – year 2016 (Source: Our elaboration from data collected from each Fondazione’s website).

A second indicator of the persistence of segregation in the classical music profession is offered by data on the presence of women within major State funded Italian Symphonic Orchestras¹⁰. As shown in figure 4,

¹⁰ The Fondazioni Lirico-Sinfoniche are institutions organizing operatic and concert activities related to classical music, largely subsidized by the Italian State on the basis of their recognised contribution to the musical, cultural and social education of the society.

female players in the orchestra number less than a quarter of full time members (24%), besides the harp – whose seats, the least numerous, are all taken by women. Other sections register a quite limited female presence, that even at its peak (violinists) does not exceed 40% of the total and that remains extremely limited within traditionally male instruments. As for vertical segregation, with the exception of the harp (where, as seen, there aren't male players), women seat much more rarely than their male colleagues as first parts, more prestigious and better remunerated, even in the case of most 'feminized' sections¹¹.

3.2. Negative stereotypes of women musicians

Among classical music professionals, the issue of gender segregation is known, but explained recurring to different reasons. Of the women interviewed, those who are middle-aged offer more often well-supported arguments, relating their personal experiences to a wider problem of gender inequality in the society. In the first of the following excerpts (taken from two interviews with female flutists in their fifties, teaching at a Music Conservatory, with stable careers as performers, mostly in solo or with different ensembles), the first flutist (extract n.13) recalls when, as a young member of an orchestra, she had to confront the stereotype on women's inability for practical or technical activities, also diffused in other traditionally masculine occupational fields (Wajcman 1991; Bruni et al. 2000; Vicarelli 2007); what she identifies as distinctive of the artistic profession is the negative stereotype of women exposing themselves to the public, while the same activity assumes a positive meaning when performed by a man¹². The flutist in the second excerpt (n.14) reads the problem of vertical segregation in the world of professional classical music as related to a wider social problem – defining careers not on the basis of merit, but on recruitment mechanisms founded on an asymmetric gender order – to be redressed through positive action (as with a quota system).

Excerpt n. 13 [Music Conservatory teacher and flutist, female, 55]

(...) I believe that in work that has more to do with things, which is more practical, [gender discrimination] is a little worse; because men, or society in general, has this thing that women can't do practical things (...): to play an instrument, to resist the stress of the stage, is considered a thing for which women are too fragile, too weak. In my professional life I met men very good at playing, but who couldn't show up in public for problems of excessive anxiety (...) Surely there is this [stereotype], but I think this is found in all types of work. What (...) I think is different [in the musical profession] is (...) that a man who is not a musician is afraid of a woman musician, meaning that he's afraid of the fact that she is able to stand on the stage and somehow to get naked, in the psychological sense of the term (...) If you think about it, most women [musicians] have husbands, partners who are musicians too (...) I think men have more difficulties in accepting a woman artist in general, [since] everyone looks at you: because men are not at all emancipated, they are very conservative in couple relationships: while, for the same reason, for non-musician women the male musician on the stage is super-charming, because he's able to unveil its being before the public....

¹¹ Women are around 5% within the double bass, horn, percussion sections and absent in the trombone section. Including the harp section, only 12% of the principal chairs among full-time orchestra members are women (data drawn from the 14 Fondazioni's websites, year 2016).

¹² These considerations are coherent with the professional homogamy observed for female professional musicians, described by the literature also with reference to their easier access - through their partner - to professional networks which were otherwise male-dominated (Coulangeon 2004; Buscatto 2007b).

Excerpt n. 14 [Music Conservatory teacher and flutist, female, 50]

This is the famous social problem... As it happens at the university, as it happens in all working sectors: girls are the best, they graduate with the best grades, but as there is the ascent to the higher powers, they always get overtaken by men... This is unfortunately a social problem, for which if quotas [for women] are not guaranteed, on higher levels choices are made in a certain way...

Among the men interviewed, gender segregation in the classical music profession is sometimes dismissed as an obsolete issue, or rather explained with reference to specific feminine attributes, making women 'naturally' less suitable for a musical career (Osborne 1996). The following quotations are from two interviews with male flutists working in Symphonic Orchestras, but also performing, as soloists and with ensembles and involved in teaching activities. The younger one (excerpt n.15) explains gender segregation with reference to traditional stereotypes about women and work: their physical weakness, making them less professionally performative than their male colleagues; the procreative vocation of their nature, leading to a condition of motherhood depriving them of the energies needed to build a career. In the second excerpt (n.16) the older flutist reconfigures the event of motherhood in the career of female musicians as a positive occurrence, allowing women to reach a more sensible balance between personal and professional realization.

Excerpt n. 15 [Symphonic Orchestra member, flutist, male, 30]

Well, I think [a reason could be] the physical strength: because the flute is an instrument that needs a certain physical presence, an energy, for instance with breathing, muscles (...) This can be a reason, even if there could be many others (...) I don't know, maybe it also depends on the woman's nature (...) I'm guessing an hypothesis (...) but I think it is very important for a woman to find fulfilment on the family front, so to become a real woman, to procreate... so I think this role takes her away a bit of the energy [needed] to achieve her career goals...

Excerpt n. 16 [Symphonic Orchestra member, flutist, male, 50]

I haven't noticed [gender] discrimination, at least in my [working] environment... I have noticed that for women, at a point, different priorities arrive (...) For someone like me music is my fulfilment, absorbing, my thing (...) Instead I see many [female] colleagues, friends, amazing, who at some point say: "Yes, but it is not the most important thing in the world, there are others". I don't want to say that it's motherhood, because otherwise we fall back into the argument that after a woman becomes a mother there's nothing left. But it is a fact that, at some point, they have, you [women] have the rationality to understand that [the profession] is an important thing, but it is not a priority, it's not the one thing that absorbs all your energy...

The reconciliation of work and family is recognised by the literature as one of the main hurdles hampering women's full participation to the labour market, especially in countries – such as Italy – where the scarcity of care-giving services is accompanied by a strong gender asymmetry in the distribution of domestic unpaid work (Saraceno 2003). In the interviews with female musicians the issue emerges with different shades,

related to the phase or the type of career pursued: in the first phase of the career, maternity projects are usually postponed and later reconciled with a stable paid employment or never realised; in the case of most competitive careers, however, maternity seems to be excluded from the start, following the ideology seeing the role of caring mother as incompatible with an artist's life (Buscatto 2010). In the case of male musicians interviewed, the tension between work and family emerges as an economic issue, respondent to their role of breadwinner within the household, rather than as a matter of time reconciliation. In the latter sense, family time does not seem to be an issue when the partner is not a musician; when the partner is a musician, the issue is resolved either through the choice of not having children or with a downscaling of women's career, a sacrifice often required to female artists with children (Pasquier 1983; Coulangeon and Ravet 2003; Buscatto 2007b).

Stereotypes over the seductive power of women negatively affect female musicians not only in their private sphere, but also in their professional life. In the following excerpts, two female musicians in their thirties members of different Italian Symphonic Orchestras, describe how their working life as young female musicians is subject to a constant objectification as targets of male sexual desire, denigrating their professionalism and negatively affecting their career and personal dignity. In the first excerpt (n.17), a female flutist, after having referred to the harassment endured from some of her male colleagues, normalizes it as a typical experience for women working in male-dominated organizations, faced since she was young through her participation in the village musical band. In the second excerpt (n.18), a piano accompanist (*maestro accompagnatore*) recalls how, despite all efforts made to show that her career was based on her merits – dressing in a sober way, self-limiting her access to networks valuable for professional prospects, learning how to handle unwelcomed advances – she still has to deal with allegations reporting it to sexual availability with powerful directors: limitations and outrages hardly experienced by her male colleagues.

Excerpt n. 17 [Symphonic Orchestra member, flutist, female, 30]

C.C.: [As a woman] have you ever felt discriminated at work?

Yes, a lot (...) In the Symphonic Orchestra [YZ] (...) at times it was awful. Not all colleagues, but some colleagues (...) were really exhausting. But then, anyway, it's an orchestra made of men, so when you're a woman they do nothing but making jokes, looking at you because you have tits: in some environments it's very much like that! But, in general, if you [already] played in a band you know that in the orchestra, only at a higher professional level, (...) there are many males and you are all together to rehearse, to joke, to travel: you know it's a job also made of pleasure (...) so you have to know what you're running into...

Excerpt n. 18 [Symphonic Orchestra member, pianist, female, 35]

C.C.: As a woman, did you ever feel discriminated against in the orchestra?

Mostly, you perceive that some mean people justify the fact that [as a woman] you start young to do your job –because I started quite young – with the rumour that... [you slept with someone] (...) Also because at the beginning I always worked with males: director of choirs, conductors (...) I have worked as assistant to conductors, men, with whom I went to other theatres and I have always tried not to go to dinner after the concert, to avoid being seen with them, which is something that influences you unfavourably, because obviously it occurred to me to think: "But why should I limit myself, if there's nothing wrong?". (...) [A]t twenty you are very young, sometimes you don't understand situations of danger. Then, growing up, I learned how to handle them, situations of embarrassment,

of ambiguity, jokes... [At first] I became purple and I didn't know what to answer: that, for sure, I think that a man hardly proves it...

3.3. Women's strategies to gain professional recognition in classical music

The female musicians interviewed did not tell us about cases of unlawful harassment, which some of them hypothetically declare to be ready to denounce (excerpt n.19), a resolution that seems however trickier when the harasser is in a higher position of power or prestige (as usually in the case of a theatre manager or conductor), or when the victim is a self-employed musician. The strategies defined by women musicians to cope with a working environment still dominated by men seem to vary according to their different degree of vulnerability (and thus to their age, the stage of their career, their occupational condition, the types of resources they can access). A strategy often described by the interviewees consists in neutralising their sexual identity, mostly 'turning off' their seductive power as women (Buscatto 2010), either self-limiting their exposure in social events or displaying an irreprehensible dress code and behaviour with colleagues or superiors (excerpts nn.19-20).

Excerpt n. 19 [Symphonic Orchestra member, flutist, female, 30]

I also work in the Symphonic Orchestra [XY], and there's one of the first flutes that quite irritates me, because he's a bit ... heavy!

C.C.: With heavy you mean that he makes sexual advances?

He doesn't make any advance, or else I would denounce him (*smiling defiantly*), I would tell the supervisor... But he's heavy: always noticing how you're dressed... So, I gave up wearing skirts or leggings, because I know that even if they are leggings they [male colleagues] look at you more, do you understand? Instead of putting a nice shoe or an ankle boot with heels I wear the ugliest sneakers. Small choices that make you say: "Ok, I know, I have to sit next to him all day: I avoid it!". As I think that is in all other working environments, only we are in closer contact with those we have to work with, so that you know you also have to present yourself in a certain way...

Excerpt n. 20 [Symphonic Orchestra player, pianist, female, 35]

C.C.: Does this fact [the occurrence of sexual objectification] also affect the way you dress?
Yes: I've always been very careful! At work I never went with short skirts or short dresses or pants (...) Always trousers, *longuette* skirts, not too low-necked: always, always, always! (...) Out of work I wear miniskirts, I love shorts, but I can differentiate [the setting] (...) [I]t happened to me very often [to be harassed] and this in the work setting is delicate: because afterwards you have to work with them... So, if you go dressed in a serious way, they understand that you are a serious person; if you go dressed in a certain way, you attract them...

Through strategies to neutralize their sexuality, female classical musicians seem to be able to reduce the stress deriving from the management of unwelcomed behaviours and relational ambiguities denigrating their professionalism and jeopardizing the delicate balance of a work based on individual cooperation to collective action (Becker 1982; Sennet 2008). Some working contexts, however, might even require female musicians to engage in a re-gendering process towards a professional habitus dovetailed on a conventional

masculine identity. As a sign of recognition of professionalism, female musicians are in fact often credited by male musicians (colleagues, teachers, critics) with attributes symbolically associated to manhood by the aspirational and legitimating professional model (Gherardi 2014). This can be still noticed in the musical professions currently feminized – as that of flutists (excerpts nn.21-22)-, but holds particularly true for those still largely male dominated – such as that of conductors. In the latter case, pressures facing women musicians to re-gender their behaviour according to masculine attitudes, in order to gain professional credibility and authority among co-workers, may lead them to overplay an austere and detached posture, giving the impression of a humanly distant and cold personality, unsuited to musical sensitivity (excerpts nn.23-24) (Ravet 2003; Buscatto 2010). This, paradoxically, may end up breathing new life into old negative stereotypes on the unsuited nature of women as professional musicians (excerpt n.24).

Excerpt n. 21 [Music Conservatory teacher, flutist, female, 55]

The [German] woman whom I consider to be my teacher (...) came to Italy very young, perhaps in the Seventies. [During Master courses] a famous Italian flutist (...) told her [and other German colleagues]: "Ah, but these German women, they sound like men!", He thought he was complimenting them, while they were very offended by this thing... He thought he was complimenting them because to be like men is better [than to be like women]...

Excerpt n. 22 [Conductor and flutist, female, 50]

With a trio of female flutists, we toured Italy with a repertoire of Italian, American and French women composers. Paradoxically we were complimented because we performed the pieces in a 'virile' manner!¹³

Excerpt n. 23 [Symphonic Orchestra member, pianist, female, 35]

C.C.: In your opinion, what mainly explains male dominance [in the conductor profession]?
(...) Oh my gosh, I worked with only one female conductor: good, absolutely good, but very masculine from the point of view of the character: she had nothing sweet or feminine, probably because she had to struggle to make a career. But I think that, as for all jobs that were born as male jobs, it takes a loong time before [the career] opens to the feminine world and, above all, I think that, as already said, men are in places of power – 99% of the Symphonic Orchestra managers are men – and who is in power decides [who to recruit]...

Excerpt n. 24 [Symphonic Orchestra member, flutist, male, 30]

C.C. From the technical point of view, did you notice something different in women conductors in comparison to male conductors?

There weren't big differences... with those four or five [women conductors] with whom I collaborated I saw a certain rigidity from the expressive point of view, which then flows into the gesture, this strictness, little fluency [*he searches for another term*]... but I can't tell for all [of women conductors]...

C.C.: They seemed detached?

¹³ Interview with Antonella De Angelis, *Pescara online*, 23/11/2016 (last consulted on 1/12/2017).

Exactly: that's just the right term! I mean, the woman does not live what she interprets... or maybe she lives it in her own way...

A further, radical strategy adopted to assert their presence within the classical musical profession by some of interviewed female musicians – mostly those with an already launched career and with dense professional and personal networks – is that of transgression (Buscatto 2010): transgression of the limits and rules historically placed to repertoires (promoting the works of female composers; combining different musical styles, genres or artistic forms); of the rituals of performance (defining new places, spaces, times for musical practice); of the aspirational career model (creating female ensembles or refusing a stereotyped gender role). In the last excerpt (n.24), the interviewee suggests that the greater difficulties proved by male artists in performing less stereotyped gender roles (perhaps due to the social stigma associated to the loss of a dominant position) offers women artists the possibility to widen their musical capabilities, considering gender identity as an open, creative, experimental research process, rather than a reiteration of prior, ready-made realities (Butler 1990).

Excerpt n. 24 [Music Conservatory teacher and flutist, female, 55]

In my opinion a woman who is not, or tries not to be, a victim of these stereotypes – I don't know if I manage – once you try, you realize that your expressive possibilities as an artist double, compared to those of a man. The issue could take hours but, said in two words: I have no qualms to try – at least to try, then probably something different comes out – to do a stuff considered to be masculine, aggressive or all the features generally associated to masculinity; but I realize that a man has much more resistance to do so-called feminine things. So, for me, therefore, to be able to overcome this thing enormously widens the expressive and interpretative capabilities with music, so this is what I reach for...

4. Conclusion: Unveiling gender in the classical music world

In 1952, after being awarded, as first woman, principal chair for a major U.S. orchestra, flutist Doriot Anthony Dwyer declared in an interview to a local newspaper: "Gradually, during my life, I've got used to the idea that I'm a woman" (Durgin *apud* Kean 2007, 86). We do not know if Dwyer was or not an affectionate reader of Simone de Beauvoir – whose *Le Deuxième Sexe* was published three years earlier in French and a year later in its English translation – but the flutist's quote impressively recalls the well-known philosopher's one: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". Both quotes refer to a concept of gender as a social construct, "an aspect of identity gradually acquired" by the subject (Butler 1982, p.35), and thus of gender inequality as culturally defined by an order placing, in the case considered, men in a position of dominance over women (Bourdieu 1998). The life and work of both women contributed to the lengthy process leading Western societies, in the second half of the 20th century, to recognize equality of rights under the law. Institutions and organizations, however, even when adopting rules formally neutral with respect to gender or other social features, reveal in their action embodied mechanisms of reproduction of cultural models naturalized over the centuries, producing and reproducing, in new and old forms, asymmetries of power (Bourdieu 2013).

This is the case with the world of classical music, historically structured according to a series of hierarchies, among which a binary gendered order excluding women from musical practices addressed to the public sphere or in contrast with the ideal of feminine docility, gracefulness and technical inability corresponding

to their condition of submission to masculine domination. Despite the significance of improvements registered through the centuries on the path leading women to access the world of professional classical music, educational and work organizations shaping the careers of classical musicians still reveal the persistent – albeit reduced – influence of a gendered model, more often disadvantaging female musicians, *vis à vis* their male colleagues, on their way to achieve full professional recognition.

The difficulty in proving this claim resides in the fact that nowadays this model is hardly explicitly declared, and seldom even perceived by social actors, who normalised it through the deep-seated narratives, repertoires, teaching methods, role models, shaping practices of interaction and organizational cultures within the classical music world and defining the professional habitus of classical musicians: naturally talented and creative, physically and psychologically strong, focused on their artistic career and detached from any other endeavour (DeNora 1995; Green 1997; Buscatto 2010). Social research, however, allows to unveil the gendered nature of this professional model, symbolically associated to conventional masculine identities, and its mechanisms aimed at defending the dominant positions of men within the professional field. This is realised through tacit rules and prescriptions orienting female musicians towards less viable or less prestigious careers; through the use of stereotypes challenging their self-confidence; through mechanisms of sexual objectification, harassing their personal dignity and jeopardizing their professional careers.

Individual strategies adopted by female musicians interviewed in order to safeguard their wellbeing and professionalism vary: from adaptation to the androcentric paradigm, by neutering their sexual identity or re-gendering it according to conventional masculine models; to a personal transgression of that paradigm, conceived within a wider project aimed at redressing or deconstructing the hierarchical foundations of classical music. The recognition of the structural origin of the differences shaping educational and professional paths of female and male musicians, however, calls institutions to take collective responsibility in adopting adequate measures (ethical codes, mentoring initiatives, blind auditions) aimed at undoing gender inequalities in music worlds.

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