

Exhibition “Music Made by Women” – MusicaFemina

By Irene Suchy and Clarisse Maylunas

Vienna, of all places, hasn't hosted a major exhibition on the subject of Music, in any shape or form, in nearly twenty years. Now, in this most timely project, one of its great art-halls is to focus on the significant role that women have played in the making of music throughout the centuries.

At first sight, you might not know these personalities, who contributed significantly to European music-life – however after visiting our exhibition the striking experience will let you know what you have missed.

From five different perspectives, in five specially-designed rooms, this Exhibition will most artfully highlight the substantial contribution that women have made both in the fields of composition and music-making too. From Hildegard von Bingen to Olga Neuwirth, women's hitherto unrecognised profile in the history of music will be seen in a wider political context now that efforts have been made, both in Europe and internationally, to create a more gender-balanced world. Indeed Austria's Foreign Ministry, for its part, published a book focusing on women's music for the first time in 2009.

Though the Exhibition will naturally enough focus on Austrian female composers it will properly look as well at all the great women composers from past ages and other countries. Designed in concept to astonish and fascinate, the Exhibition will have interactive features and altogether it will be highly approachable.

Following its opening in Vienna, our aim is for it to tour worldwide, both to music festivals and art institutions that present a feminine agenda.

Each of the Exhibition's five rooms will be entered through standing caryatids:

Room One: 'The Room of the Composers'

Nine very different types of women composers will be profiled: the religious (incl. Hildegard von Bingen); the aristocratic (incl. Wilhelmine von Bayreuth); the scholarly;

the performer-composer; the rebel-suffragette (incl. Ethel Smyth); the femme fragile (incl. Lilly Boulanger); the femme fatale (incl. Madonna); and the patroness (incl. Alma Mahler). The specially-designed figures will have an integrated sound-hood beside them which tell their individual stories of oppression and the obstacles they had to overcome in their eras to be able to create their oeuvres.

Room Two: 'The Room of the Female Conductors'

A Tree of Hands, each a genuine actual mould, of contemporary female conductors, surrounded by audio and video evidence of their work.

Room Three: 'The Room of the Crunched Scores'

Where History is turned into Her-story.

Room Four: 'The Room of Belongings'

Exhibits of personal objects, private and professional, of both women composers and conductors; including oil portraits, batons, clothing, instruments, even pillow-cases and contemporary paraphernalia such as a bicycle, hiking equipment etc.

Room Five: 'The Room of Listening'

Designed for concentrated focus on specific audio recordings.

The Exhibition will provide a venue for female musical, artistic and political discussion. A concert series is planned for Vienna, a catalogue is prepared and discussions are on-going with music institutions interested in cooperating and a possible CD publisher, and with radio stations which are interested.