Koivisto Nuppu

***Salons, conservatories, variety shows: Finnish women musicians and cultural institutions, 1850–1918***

In this presentation, I shall address the complex question of musical institutions and professional Finnish women musicians during the late 19th century. As previous research by e. g. Nancy B. Reich (1993) and Marja Mustakallio (2003) has suggested, female performers tended to remain in the margins of public music-making in 19th-century Europe because of gendered prejudices. However, women’s activities were a vital part in different aspects of institutional musical life such as the salon, the conservatory and the variety show. My aim here is to examine the diversity of this theme by presenting three case studies on four women musicians in the late 19th century. Even though all of them were born in Finland, their musical careers extended well beyond national borders. First, I shall present the story of the sisters Sahlman – Fredja, a violinist, and Miriam, a cellist – both of whom studied at the Helsinki Music Institute and forged a career in the European variety scene. As the sisters came from modest economic conditions and belonged to the Jewish community, their case offers interesting insight to the policies of inclusion and exclusion within the variety culture of the era. The second and third examples, in turn, concern the upper classes of Finnish society. The pianist and composer Laura Netzel was born to an aristocratic Finnish family and grew up in Stockholm, where she actively participated in musical soirées and salons. These networks allowed Netzel to publish music and to continue her education in France even after she was married. The fate of the composer Alexandra Zheleznova-Armfelt was somewhat similar, except that she spent her life in St. Petersburg, where she studied with well-known local figures such as the composer Mily Balakirev. My key argument will be twofold. First, the career choices of the four musicians demonstrate the manifold ways that women from different social classes could use to study, create and perform music “inside, outside and in between” cultural institutions. Secondly, these cosmopolitan cases accentuate the international mobility of musicians within the institutional context of 19th-century European musical life.

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