

## Statement for “50:50 in 2030”

*I prepared this statement for a panel discussion titled “50:50 in 2030 — Women in Music Related Professions” at the Institut für Kulturmanagement und Gender Studies in Vienna as part of Wien Modern 2019.*

I went to the same Catholic school from 3 to 14 years old. At that school, girls had to wear a pink or white smock, whereas boys could just wear their jeans. During the 10am break, girls were obliged to stay in class, whereas boys could go outside and play football. When I asked a nun why I couldn't join them, the nun responded that boys had more energy than girls, they couldn't stay in class. When I was 16, my father bought me a motor-scooter. At 18, I said to my younger brother that before he could use my scooter, I had to teach him. I said that in front of my uncle, who slapped me in the face and added, “Women don't teach men how to drive” (and I was — and still am — an excellent driver). At school, I studied that since forever men make the rules, men choose (today, still) what women can and cannot do with their bodies, men decide what defines femininity, men establish the criteria to determine which art is valuable. Art history books are full of men portraying women who lack agency or purpose. Most of the books I read when I was young were written by men.

I have always thought that women were somehow less worthy human beings, so, from a young age, I decided I was a boy. I simply did not identify myself with the image I had of women, I wanted to dream big and be able to be whatever I wanted to be when I grew up. And it looked to me, that the only people entitled to choose their future were men. So I stopped wearing skirts, I cut my hair, I would only play with boys, I asked my parents to call me Luke (I was a huge Star Wars fan), and I automatically disliked everything that looked even slightly girly.

Looking back at my-30-years-ago-self, I know I did not want to be a boy; I simply wanted to have access to the systematic privilege that surrounds men. Still today, at 36 years old, at a point in my life at which I think I have proved myself enough to reach a quite stable career, I have to deal with episodes of discrimination that weaken my self-confidence day by day.

In 2017, I was writing an interdisciplinary piece, *skull ark, upturned with no mast*, which involved a heavy amount of electronics. To complete this work, I was offered some time in the electronic studios at the TU in Berlin, so I went there with my partner to have a look. I asked specific, technical questions to the men (there were just men) working there, and although I was the one asking the questions, they kept replying looking at my partner. When I presented this same piece at the Münchener Biennale, a fellow composer who knew me went to talk to my partner asking whether I was the one who really made the piece. A couple of years ago, the brass section of an ensemble I was working with drew penises on the objects I had given them to perform the piece with. The fact I was using ping-pong balls and vibrators should not devalue the musical purpose of those objects. I posted it on social media, and (mostly male) composers

commented, saying that I should have taken it as a funny joke, that that is what happens when you use innuendo objects, that what happened had nothing to do with me being a female composer. But questions about the quality of my music based on my gender are something I have had to — and still have to — deal with constantly. When I was awarded the DAAD Berliner Künstler-Programm residency, my professor said it made sense that I got it, since I was “young, female, and pretty”. And today, with artistic directors pledging that they want to reach a 50-50 gender equality, we doubt ourselves even more. Is it because of our talent that we got that commission, or simply because the artistic director had to check a box?

These are, of course, only a very few examples of the sexism I have experienced, and I am definitely one of the lucky ones. In 2011, I had the luck of having Joséphine Markovits, the artistic director of the Festival d'Automne à Paris, come to the world première of my piece *Aphones*, when I was still a student at the Paris Conservatoire. She actually came because her friend Tito Ceccherini was conducting the concert, but she liked my piece and came to talk to me. A few months later I was selected for the DAAD Berliner Künstler-Programm residency. I did not know at the time, since the DAAD juries are secret, but Josephine was on the jury. Shortly afterwards, she also commissioned me to write my first piece for the Ensemble Intercontemporain, *Intent on Resurrection — Spring or Some Such Thing*, premiered at the Festival d'Automne 2014. That is what it took — a female artistic director, who heard only one piece of mine and decided to risk giving me the best possible platform. I now have the immense privilege of living my life composing, supported by a great number of artistic directors, institutions, musicians, and fellow composers. But the success I have does not make me immune to sexism, and the lack of representation in the new music scene goes far beyond my personal experience and should be acknowledged.

To be fair, I do see a rising awareness of gender above all in the younger generations, and this gives me the hope that our new music community will be more inclusive and diverse in the near future. But institutions are still resistant, and it is frustrating to see that still in 2018, some of the most renowned festivals in Europe featured 90 to 100% white, male composers on their programs.

It is also as important and essential that gender balance is implemented within institutions of higher education. Nowadays, most university job advertisements end with a statement about equal employment opportunity, but how many positions have been assigned to men and how many to women every year? All the people I studied with were men, with the only exception of Chaya Czernowin, who was my professor in composition at Harvard University. I was 31 years old when I met her. When a female composer spends most of her educational years taught by men, studying principally works written by men, taking part in a community which represents predominantly male composers, it is likely that she will doubt whether this is a career that she can seriously undertake.

I think that above all with the #MeToo movement and after Darmstadt 2016, the underrepresentation of female composers has become a hot topic. In almost every interview I have given, at least one of the

questions concerned gender balance, I have attended many discussions on this matter, and like today, I have been invited to participate in lectures in which women are asked to talk about their personal experiences and their position on this matter. It is mostly women who are asked to take time off from composing to write statements, articles, discussing a subject which unfortunately some people still see as questionable. And although sharing our experiences is important to at least try to awaken awareness about male privilege and gender injustice — and to help build solidarity with our colleagues, letting them know they are not alone with their challenges — I think it would be worth gathering a group of men to ask them what they are doing and how they can change it. After all, most artistic directors, most professors — and generally most people in power — are men.

But if you do want to have my opinion, here are a few points that I think should be addressed in order to make our field more inclusive and diverse:

1. The lack of representation in the new music scene, encourages above all the younger generations of composers to rely on online platforms such as Soundcloud or Bandcamp to connect with and discover a broader array of artists who still struggle to find their presence in the most renowned festivals. But despite the success and contribution of those online platforms, most artistic directors mainly go to concerts to choose the lineup of their next festival, relying on a small circuit of other festivals and concert series. Music is a live experience, so there is a logic to this, but when this circuit is managed and directed by a group of mostly men, themselves choosing unrepresentative and unbalanced programs, we can see how this situation might continue. To do the work required to research and support diverse artists takes time and takes different perspectives. I think that one thing we can do is to have diverse *teams* working on programming, not assuming that the direction of a festival needs to be about the vision of a single person. Big festivals could also consider inviting guest curators to expand the vision of their regular team, but it is important that this does not lead to a two-level system in which we see white men with permanent contracts enriching their programs with the input of others in precarious short-term employment. The same considerations apply for anyone organizing a jury — for example for job applications, competitions, or university entrance exams.
2. Statements about gender justice can be helpful in that they tell us about the standards that an organization thinks it should be held to. But equally, with or without such statements, organizations should be judged based on what they do. Even if an institution does not make a claim to be addressing these issues, we still have every right to set our own standards and to expect what we believe is just from them. And we judge their success not based on whether or not they make the right noises and policies, but if their programming, environment, pay gaps, and opportunities match up to what we want from them. Sponsors and funding bodies can do the same: take the initiative and tell the institutions you support that your funding depends on them doing better.

3. Pledging a 50-50 equality is problematic because it reinforces the gender binary model — that there are only male and female and no other genders. This discriminates against transgender, non-binary, intersex, and a whole range of gender identities that should be acknowledged and supported. Too many times we see application forms on which candidates are asked to declare whether they are female or male, forcing them to identify with one of only two given options. I do understand that above all in pedagogical contexts (for example, masterclasses, workshops, etc.) you want to address gender balance and in order to do so you need to collect this information, but you can make that field as flexible as possible, giving them more options (such as female, male, other, prefer not to say). There are online resources that can help to normalize this process and give you ideas on how to make your application form more inclusive. A small amount of thoughtfulness can go a long way to making people feel welcome. This applies as much to your marketing and administrative departments as it does to your artistic planning.

These are just a few ideas among many possibilities, but hopefully they show that there is a lot of work to be done. This work is mostly not for the female composers and musicians to do and the most important work will not happen in discussions like we are having today. The work needs to be done on a level of funding bodies and institutions in everyday situations. The work happens during program meetings, contract negotiations, grant applications. Perhaps unfortunately, we rely partly on the men who hold the power today, to realize that part of the solution is for them to hand over their power — partially or entirely — to share it with a larger group of people, and to make changes which will redistribute that power. This might seem difficult to them, but it is what we need to guarantee a fair and equal community for the future.

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