
Recreation of music talent: Female Spanish performers during the 19th century

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Résumé

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The conquest of an assigned chair in an orchestra, the fight for acquiring an equal music education for men and women, the possibility of choosing an instrument without prejudices or the opportunity of developing a career, all these items have been analyzed from a gender point of view. The biography and the artistic relevance of female players, conductors and composers have enriched the knowledge of the cultural construction in History. Great female musicians, talented women focused on their careers or amateurs who just played at home, all of them produced music in their own way. Virtuouse, noteworthy players or honest dilettanti created a dense texture of music practice at concert halls and theatres, but also during their soirées. Their intentions and purposes can be examined through references at Memoirs, journals, letters and music learning methods that show a specific way of living. This paper analyzes the significance of those women who possessed a remarkable music talent known at a certain area, social and private, at their halls through Spain, Italy and France during the 19 th century. Their soirées included music practice. Professionals and amateurs used to play together for an audience formed by family and friends. They were portrayed performing, or just being accompanied by their musical instruments. These drawings and paintings are documents of their cultural interests. The abilities of these musicians provided them the admiration of writers such as Marcel Proust, painters such as Dominique Ingres and composers such as Isaac Albéniz. Sometimes music was only for a small audience, playing just for enjoying their time and expressing their gifts. For a Spanish young woman, knowing French or English or playing an instrument were elements of social prestige exhibited at those gatherings. Music education, even modest, was considered a reference of cultural and social status. The female identity was suggested through images of women surrounded by instruments that could appear as a reference of the musical competence, but also as an adornment for a portrait. These instruments could also be part of an idealization of the role assigned to women. For example, the harp could be included as an elegant ornament, exhibited for its beauty and for its iconographic meaning. Canvas and drawings showed many music images in different ways, such as a significant performance or quotidian music practice, a musician relevance, or a key to show the musical talent or taste that the painter, or the sitter, wanted to include as a symbol of status. These masterpieces allow us to analyze the representation of music as a significant recreation of female identity and its cultural and social significance.

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