

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Still a Long Way to Go

By Kathy Canfield Shepard

Why are there more female musicians playing in the classical concert field than on Broadway?

That's a question I asked myself last year, when I read the March 2007 issue of *Allegro*.

In that issue, there was a chart showing how many female and male members play various kinds of union jobs.

(You can check it out by going to www.Local802afm.org, clicking on "Local 802 News," then "Publications and Press Releases," then "March 2007," then "The Beat on the Street.")

According to the article, 25 percent of musicians working on Broadway were women, working as regulars or subs. (Although, from the way the data was presented, it is hard to know how often they actually worked.)

Other percentages of working women were: 21 percent in club dates, 39 percent in steady classical engagements, 43 percent in freelance classical and 21 percent in recording.

I was surprised at how there were more women working in the classical field than on Broadway.

It is clear that with shrinking orchestra sizes on Broadway has come a shift in musical genres presented: there are many more rock and pop shows. There is also a trend of hiring

people who double on more than one instrument – largely reed players – and the moving of most of the string parts to synthesizers.

It could be argued that this is a reason for fewer women being hired – that more women play the instruments that have been eliminated, and few play the brass and rhythm instruments or double on reeds.

But one does have to wonder why, over all of Broadway, more than just one or two women in some cases could not be found in some of these instrument groups.

Although these areas were most extreme, men also outnumbered women very significantly in almost every other area.

With all of the contractors being men, as well as most of the conductors, how much of an effort is being made to find more women for these jobs?

(There are, of course, cases where musicians must be on stage playing a specific character of a specific gender on stage, but taking this into account does not significantly increase this low percentage.)

A female colleague recently pointed out to me that in some cases women do not want to step into high-pressure situations on Broadway (playing a lead chair as a sub, for example), and that this could contribute to some decisions to hire men

for the regular jobs.

However, I know that many women are in fact eager to step into these leadership positions but for various reasons are not considered.

It is not surprising that the numbers for women in the recording and club date fields are also low, as some of these same issues probably do apply.

While there has been great progress increasing the numbers of women in the classical field, we must now address what can be done to make sure that women who want to work in areas other than classical are given every opportunity to do so.

Traditionally, formal auditions are rarely held for jobs other than most classical jobs (something I have never quite understood), and one has to ask if this could be contributing to the inequality in these areas.

Could some kind of audition process be used? Every other job I know of, whether music-related or not, has at least some kind of interview process.

Some have argued that there is just less work for everyone in all areas of music, but this does not explain why the percentages of women themselves are so low.

As a result of there being less work, I do see more women (as well as some men) finding or making their own

performance opportunities.

For every group or organization cutting back their number of musicians or performances, there seems to be another group starting up. With the creation and evolution of these new groups, we could see a rise in the number of women musicians in all areas of music, as we are seeing more women business leaders in the corporate world with women starting new businesses at three times the rate of men.

As we look to the future for women in music, it is important that the union and we as individual performers continue to find ways to equalize the opportunities for women in all areas of the music profession. By supporting and fostering new opportunities for women in existing union jobs as well as young, newly established groups, we will not only increase and benefit the union's membership, but also greatly strengthen the structure of the union itself. □

Kathy Canfield Shepard is owner of Canfield Design Studios (www.CanfieldDesignStudios.com), a graphic and Web design firm which specializes in helping artists, nonprofit organizations and small businesses to promote and market themselves and their projects. She is also a Local 802 member and works as a freelance French hornist in New York City.