

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 12 March 2024  
1.00pm

## Women and the Piano - a History in Fifty Lives

Susan Tomes piano

Marianne Martínez (1744-1812)	Allegro from Piano Sonata in A (1765)
Hélène de Montgeroult (1764-1836)	Etude No. 30 (?1820) Etude No. 106 (?1820)
Maria Szymanowska (1789-1831)	Caprice sur la romance de Joconde (pub. 1819)
Fanny Mendelssohn (1805-1847)	Abschied von Rom (1840)
Clara Schumann (1819-1896)	Romance in G minor Op. 21 No. 3 (1853-5)
Teresa Carreño (1853-1917)	Un bal en rêve Op. 26 (pub. 1869)
Amy Beach (1867-1944)	Dreaming from 4 Sketches Op. 15 (1892)
Adele aus der Ohe (1861-1937)	Melodie Op. 4 No. 1 (pub. 1897) Pastorale Op. 14 No. 2 (pub. 1906)
Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944)	Guitare Op. 32 (pub. 1885)



Our Audience Fund provides essential unrestricted support for our artistic and learning programmes, connecting thousands of people with music locally, nationally, and internationally. We rely on the generosity of our audience to raise £150,000 each year to support this work. Your gifts are, and continue to be, indispensable.  
To donate, please visit <https://wigmore-hall.org.uk/audiencefund>

*Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.*

*In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.*

*Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.*

*Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.*



*Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.*

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838  
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • [Wigmore-hall.org.uk](http://Wigmore-hall.org.uk) • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG  
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



All the music in today's programme was composed by women. Almost all of it was unknown to me until a couple of years ago, when I started writing about the history of women playing the piano. As I did my research, I also tried to find out whether any of these interesting women pianists had written music of their own. It turned out that many of them had. I started to look at it and gradually realised that a whole side of my repertoire had been missing.

All the historical women represented here today were performers – some of them in domestic settings or in private circles, others on the public stage. Many of them had to overcome great obstacles – such as family opposition or social expectations – in order to pursue their dreams of performing at a high level. Even if they did manage to get concert engagements, their playing was often judged against the yardstick of men's. If women played strongly, they were complimented as having 'masculine' authority. If they played gently, critics noted that they did not have 'masculine' strength. And of course women were expected to prove themselves by playing music written by men (with men's hands in mind). Women pianists' looks and outfits were constantly commented on – a form of scrutiny that male pianists rarely have to endure.

Women composers did not always have the same access to music lessons as men did. At college level, women were not admitted to music conservatoire courses until the late 19th Century. Even then, they were only eligible to enrol in basic courses. Advanced classes were reserved for men. As late as 1939 the composer Ernst Krenek, teaching in New York, was

told not to bother teaching women the theory of 12-note composition because most women were amateurs and would have no use for such sophisticated information. Female composers such as Amy Beach often had to make up their own composition courses, studying whatever scores they could get their hands on.

It was difficult for women to get their music published. Even when it was published they had difficulty in getting it performed, especially if it was large-scale music which required conductors, orchestras and promoters (male) to agree that it was worth the risk. Consequently many woman pianist-composers concentrated on writing music they could perform themselves, or which could be played by other women.

All the women in today's programme were admired both for their playing and for their compositions. Until recently, only the names of Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn were at all well known, and that was partly because they were associated with famous men. Why are the other women not better known? The short answer seems to be that most music historians have until fairly recently been male, and chose to prioritise the achievements of men. Fortunately, a new breed of historians and a new generation of players are alert to the fact that there is a lot of women's music to discover and celebrate.

I have found it touching to get to know the music of these women who, despite the barriers put in their way, were determined to express themselves in music. To my ears, their music often has a sense of liberation.

© Susan Tomes 2024

*Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.*