



VOICES OF WOMEN



KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR THE ERASMUS+
PROJECT VOICES OF WOMEN (VOW)

LILLI MITTNER, LISE MELING, JANKE KLOK, BETTINA SMITH

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Lilli Mittner, Lise Meling, Janke Klok, Bettina Smith

UiT The Arctic University of Norway

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Table of Contents

- Acknowledgements III
- Summary IV
- The VOW – project 5
- Research Infrastructures 6
 - Norway 6
 - 1.1 The Netherlands 7
 - 1.2 Germany 8
- 2 Educating Agents of Change 9
- 3 VOW Approach 1
 - 3.1 Performative Research 1
 - 3.2 Unheard Songs 3
 - 3.3 Cultural Transfer 4
 - 3.4 Feminist Theories 4
- 5 VOW Roadmap 5
- References 7

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Summary

This report builds the knowledge base for the transnational educational project ‘Voices of Women’ (<https://voicesofwomen.eu>) funded by the European Union. The report situates the VOW project within music and gender research in Norway, The Netherlands, and Germany. It argues for the need to educate agents of change and outlines the VOW approach along four pillars: (1) Performative Research (2) Unheard Songs (3) Cultural Transfer and (4) Feminist Theories. The report documents that transformative pedagogies and innovative practices in the cultural sector can build on a broad knowledge base. The next step is to develop novel methods to educate ourselves and upcoming generations to become active and courageous agents of change.

The VOW – project

Voices of Women (VOW) is a transnational educational project funded by the EU program ERASMUS+. The project aims to strengthen and ensure women's rightful place in the historical, contemporary, and future arenas of music production. By bringing the voices of women composers and the voice of those performing or programming art songs to the forefront, VOW aims at raising cultural awareness anchored in historical heritage which has not received its fair share of attention, analysis, interpretation, or performance. This report builds the knowledge base for planned actions within the VOW project period 2022-2024 and beyond. Providing an overview of research on women and music in Norway, Germany, and The Netherlands is crucial to develop knowledge-based education and training programmes. By bringing intersectional perspectives into questions related to 'women and music' it is important to note that research in this field has been primarily conducted by white, middle-class women who had and have access to bourgeois classical music practices.

There is a variety of initiatives and policy documents at the European level that impact both structures and practices within the cultural and creative sector. The European Union Gender Equality Strategy was specifically adapted for the field of culture in 2020, underlining 'the potential of culture to advance gender equality and acknowledge persistent gender inequalities in the sector' (Presidency Conclusion on Gender Equality in the Field of Culture 2020). The following fields of action are specifically highlighted by EU policy (<https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policies/selected-themes/gender-equality>):

1. *equal access to the cultural and creative labour market*
2. *equal payment and representation in creative and decision-making positions*
3. *equal appreciation and recognition of work*
4. *gender stereotyping and sexual harassment and abuse remain major concerns*

The VOW project addresses specifically point 3: *equal appreciation and recognition*. Through initiatives such as [Culture Action Europe](https://cultureaction.eu) or the structured dialogue Voices of Culture (<https://voicesofculture.eu/>), the European Commission supports specifically transnational initiatives on gender equality in the field of culture and promotes the collection and distribution of culture-specific data on gender equality and cultural diversity in Europe. The report *Towards*

Gender Equality in the Cultural and Creative Sector (Menzel et al. 2021) underlines the importance of data and key challenges connected to stereotypes, and the use of culture, media, education, and research are recommended to promote gender equality in society at large. Within the field of music this double function of bringing arts-based knowledge and methods into gender equality work and simultaneously building more gender equal societies through art education (Mittner, Meling and Maxwell, forthcoming) have been addressed by a variety of initiatives across Europe (e.g. [Women in Music](#), [KeyChange](#), [Kvast - The Swedish Association of Women Composers](#)).

Research Infrastructures

The following overview over research infrastructures in the field of women and music in Norway, The Netherlands and Norway is far from complete, but rather a selection of initiatives and projects in the field that are specifically relevant to the VOW project. All learners within the VOW project are expected to familiarize themselves with existing perspectives within the field of music and gender. Thus, mapping the state of the art within the field functions as a tool for self-educating process. The projects listed below are based on a selection made by members of the VOW consortium. Through masterclasses, workshops, lectures, and the creation of other educational materials, we will further draw and expand on that knowledge base.

Norway

The research tradition in Norway on women in music as a social group reach back to the first half of the 20th century (Lindhjem 1931; Dahm 1987; Herresthal 1993; Lorenzen and Stavrum 2007; Kvalbein and Lorentzen 2008; Mittner 2016; Meling 2014). In addition, there have been several individual case studies on Norwegian composers within music historiography (e.g. Hambro 2008; Haselmann 2018; Kvalbein 2013; Skovdal 2021) as well as a variety artistic research projects (e.g. Rønning and Waagard 2016; Lund et al. 2017; Smith 2021; Sollied forthcoming).

From 2015 to 2018 the research and intervention project *Gender Balance in Higher Arts Education* was funded by the Research Council of Norway and UiT The Arctic University of Norway with 6 million Norwegian kroner to promote gender balance in top level positions in the field (<https://site.uit.no/balanse-kunstfag/>). The project resulted in four research papers (Blix and Mittner 2018; Blix et al. 2018; Mittner and Blix 2021; Mittner et al. 2022), a research

film (Mittner and Bergli 2018) and a variety of creative gender equality measures (Blix and Mittner 2019). The conference “Music and Gender in Balance” initiated the anthology *Gender Issues in Scandinavian Music Education: From Stereotypes to Multiple Possibilities* (Onsrud et al. 2021). A variety of initiatives and campaigns driven by activists have based their action on music and gender research such as for example the national association Balansekunst (<https://balansekunstprojektet.no/>), consisting of about 100 organizations, companies, festivals and other institutions within the art and culture industry working to promote gender equality and diversity in the arts.

1.1 The Netherlands

A lecture given by Marcia Citron at the Seventh International Congress on Women in Music in Utrecht 29 May-2 June 1991 (Citron 1991) sparked various music and gender research activities in the Netherlands (Metzelaar 2002; Boumans 2015). A central player was the Women and Music Foundation (Stichting Vrouw en Muziek) that offers an overview of female composers (<http://www.vrouwenmuziek.nl/en/composers/>). However, since Prof. Helen Metzelaar retired, the foundation is no longer active. More recently there has been a research focus on the music of women within modern, popular music such as the project ‘Women Assistants and Male Executives? Understanding Gender Barriers in the Dutch Music Industry’ lead by Kristin McGee at the Centre for Gender Studies at University of Groningen (McGee 2022). A recent PhD project that begun in 2020 by Maryan Wynia is investigating the gender gap in the Dutch music industries. A major event in music and gender research in the Netherlands was the final Conference *Female Assistants and Male Producers: Exploring Gender Barriers in the Dutch Music Industry* at the University of Groningen in 2019 organised by the KIEM project: *Knowledge and Innovation for the Creative Industry* (<https://www.gendermusicindustry.net/index.php/about-kiem>).

A Dutch female conductor was the focus of the film *...But I was a girl. The story of Frieda Belinfante* (1999), directed by Toni Boumans. This film tells the story of Frieda Belinfante (1904-1995), the first female conductor to have her own symphony orchestra in the Netherlands and later in Orange County, United States. In 2021 a podcast ‘Nooit van gehoord’ (Never heard of her) on forgotten women composers was launched on the Dutch radio, NPO4, by Andrea van Pol and Rae Milford. In short contributions, the podcast presents forgotten female composers by streaming their music. In 2021, the podcast presented 26 female composers. On March 25th, 2022, they started a second series.

1.2 Germany

Germany played a major role in music education and cultural transfer in 19th and 20th centuries and their geo-cultural and political position are still reflected in today's research infrastructure. Within the German-speaking research community, scholarly writing about women and music coincides with the emergence of feminist musicology (e.g. Rieger 1981; Hoffmann 1991; Grotjahn 2002; Borchard 2003; Rode-Breymann 2007). In 2000, the first professoriate in musicological gender research was established in Detmold/Paderborn. The same year, Eva Rieger, a professor in music education, founded together with the German-Swiss patron, Mariann Steegmann, the Mariann-Steegmann-Foundation which is dedicated to the advancement of women in music and the arts. This foundation funds both the Mariann Steegmann Institute of Art & Gender at the University of Bremen and the Research Center for Music and Gender at the Hanover University of Music, Drama, and Media. The *Music and Gender* series have been published annually since 2008 by the German Musicological Society (GfM) subgroup Women and Gender studies. Music and Gender research has been institutionalised within the Research Center for Music and Gender in Hanover (<https://www.fmg.hmtm-hannover.de/de/start/>), the Women Composer Library in Unna (<https://www.komponistinnenbibliothek.de/>), the Sophie Drinker Institute in Bremen (<https://www.sophie-drinker-institut.de/startseite>), and the Online Database MUGI (<https://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/content/index.xml>). Together with a variety of libraries and archives that preserve music-related materials (published and unpublished scores, letters, diaries, reviews etc.), these institutions have built a strong knowledge base and research culture on women and music.

2 Educating Agents of Change

Existing expert knowledge and practices, long lists of tips and tricks, networks, and communities seem to have had little impact on contemporary heritage practices when it comes to hearing the voices of women. We wonder why and thus explore together with our students what is at stake when music created by women is discussed, performed, enacted, and listened to. A major challenge that still needs to be addressed is a lack of knowledge of the repertoire. Despite huge libraries and databases collecting music written by women and accessible open access to information, a small amount of music composed by women enters the curriculum in music education or is regularly performed on concert stages. A major shortcoming in art education specifically is the fact that time pressures in programming, staging, and practising often leave gender perspectives as an add-on behind more obvious questions concerning style, interpretation, or mastery.

The outspoken need for transformation and change seem to lead to more off-beat action in terms of developments within transformational research such as critical pedagogy, postcolonial studies, and feminist theories. Many training and education programmes still rely on the idea that music education should stick to a given canon, or that performance of art song can be seen as completely separated from contemporary societal issues. There are few educational programmes that question the ‘making of the canon’ and relate cultural practices to notions of power and representation. This applies equally for leaning outcomes. The integration of musical repertoire created by women in music training modules in higher education is still far from completed. There have been individual initiatives, and these have led to long-lasting structural change (Mittner 2018). Most initiatives, however, stay on a local level and seem to have little impact on heritage practices across communities. Thus, we see a need for transnational cooperation which is challenging due to language, national narratives that are still leading in translational communication and last but not least, due to a lack of time, resources, and possibilities to ‘sing and talk’.

Finally, a major challenge in the research field of music and gender is that arts-based practices, arts education, and artistic research are often disconnected, and interdisciplinary communication across languages and cultures becomes difficult. Therefore, there is a need to clarify epistemologies, research methods, ethics, and dissemination strategies within the performative paradigm (Østern et al. 2021).

The VOW project addresses the following needs:

- **The need to provide** arts (e.g. music) training within higher education (conservatoire, etc.) programmes in which art making is enmeshed in the social realities of the modern world. Where the arts have been segregated from the society within which they exist, action must be taken to reverse such segregation.
- **The need to better understand** different national practices, policies, and systems in education and training in our field (women's voices in the arts), thus reinforcing our own cooperation as a consortium and future network.
- **The need to provide increased motivation** and satisfaction in the daily work of VOW researchers and artists, something which will be achieved by contextualizing our work within international research.
- **The need to continuously develop** more attractive, innovative education and training programmes, including new approaches to addressing social/cultural diversity in dialogue with community and private organizations in different fields or in other socio-economic sectors (through multiplier events with policymakers and stakeholders from beyond the arts).
- **The need to develop, implement and assess specific learning outcomes** related to the integration of musical repertoire created by women in music training modules in higher education.
- **The need for transnational cooperation** and the corresponding need for the establishment of an international network, which will be one of the main outcomes of VOW.

3 VOW Approach

VOW aims to educate agents of change. This will occur through masterclasses, concerts, CD releases, interviews, media appearances (for example the Norwegian Broadcasting Service's programme "Spillerom"), as well as theoretical approaches and the evaluation of the repertoire's impact on the agents of change. The VOW project's approach and methodology relies on a mixture of several interrelated activities, including conferences, training courses, lectures, workshops, cultural exchange activities, online-teaching, dissemination, handling historic source materials, implementation actions, evaluation and quality assurance activities, and evaluation seminars. In order to train all learners involved in the VOW project to become agents of change the project addresses the knowledge gaps and needs outlined above through the following interrelated activities: 1) privileging knowledge creation through artistic practices 2) unlocking unknown, unperformed, unsung, unpublished music 3) translating and transferring cultural heritage through interdisciplinary communication 4) training critical thinking practices and feminist wonderings.

3.1 Performative Research

The method of the VOW project can be categorized within the performative research paradigm (Østern et al. 2021) under the umbrella of artistic practice – other terms could be artistic research or arts-based research. These research methods refer to an open form of research in and through the arts. Artistic research and practice can be viewed as a way of thinking where new and original knowledge is created. In its midst we find the methodology in the middle of the art itself. It explores all its possible relations by means of communicating, reflecting upon, and sharing with others in a process-oriented way. VOW will take as its point of departure an arts-based pedagogy. We believe that through arts-based pedagogy and artistic practices it is possible to upset dominant social norms, train an openness to the unexpected, and challenge binary propositions by privileging the chaos. As many places in society are characterized by inequality, the arts can act as a creative space in which the unforeseen can become possible and where seemingly fixed positions can be negotiated, un-performed, and re-enacted. At the core of arts-based pedagogies is dialogue, where all learners are actively engaged with materials and processes, as well as with each other. By being engaged in social processes, learners can construct new knowledge by combining new and old knowledge and experience. For example,

students can analyse women's roles and the representations of women in classical music, which is a way to encourage social change. Wang, in her article about the socially engaged practices of artists in China, put forward 'the idea of the artist as an intellectual who bears responsibility for cultural critiquing and social change' (Wang 2017, 34).

Music making has the possibility to create meaningful meetings with people, where we share music, musical instruments, bodies, voices, stage, and audience – this can be viewed as a method of participating in and performing a community. It is natural to assume that student knowledge and attitudes are impacted by the lack of exposure to music made by, for example, female composers. The greater the exposure to composers of all genders, the greater the knowledge. Exposure to unheard music, however, does not provide more knowledge of female composers. VOW as a pedagogical approach can therefore create a more inclusive society by showing the breadth of composers, as well as showing that gender need not be even an implicit factor in deciding creativity or quality. The VOW project lays a claim to innovation as it tackles a current societal challenge and cutting-edge developments in the arts to change and establish a more inclusive canon within the classical singing repertoire. This is crucial because there is transferability to other areas of the arts and beyond. In this sense, we are decolonizing the arts in order to understand a) who defines a canon, b) how a canon is created, c) do we need a canon at all and d) what would a broader, more inclusive canon mean so that we can lay the foundation for how other art forms can interact with societal challenges in a system – to a greater extent than they are today.

The Voices of Women (VOW) project will also build upon other artworks created by women and the research and popular literature which explores, documents, and disseminates knowledge about women's artistic processes. As such, VOW will provide a much-needed interdisciplinary space in which higher education institutions and general public can become more acquainted with the rich traditions of women's art (e.g. composition, visual art, theatrical works) and that art's role in the past and future capacities to facilitate the implementations of social equity and inclusion.

In addition to arts-based practices, this task also intersects with feminist practices. It builds on the encounters, conversations, and academic practices that unfold when students and staff from the four participating universities meet. We will conceptualize what feminist and aesthetic perspectives have in common and how they together can put forward the 'women in

music' question. Central to this task will be a situated art intervention approach that allows us to better understand and simultaneously change normative complexities.

3.2 Unheard Songs

One of the project's main goals is to promote women composers and make their music heard: the majority of music they have composed is, as of yet, unheard. The consequence of music not being readily available is that it is not performed. It is important to note the difference between 'unheard' and 'unpublished' music. There is a lot of published music by women composers, but much of it is difficult to access. Some of the repertoire is not for sale. Some of it is in private hands. Even though some of it is available in libraries and archives, it needs to be uncovered and 'found.' Therefore, one has to know what one is looking for, and where, when searching for this music, while it is also true that it is difficult to know where to look. The German publisher *Furore Verlag* plays in that sense a crucial role as it only publishes the work of women composers. Even though some of these composers were already published, and successfully so and even sold extensively in their time (e.g. Cécile Chaminade), it is difficult to get hold of their music today. As we consider music, and the arts more generally, as having the potential to reveal aesthetic experience on the part of both creator and listener, we can conclude that ignoring the performance of music by women composers would ignore the fundamental role that women play in creating aesthetic experiences.

VOW will implement active searches for music in relevant literary and other sources, lectures, distributing music by women composers actively to higher education students, and the development of a higher education course module, 'Voices of Women.' Thus, the project assumes the responsibility of the performer: if we do not do it, then who should? Indeed, would-be performers of this repertoire often encounter refusals on the part of concert organizers, as the latter tend to opt for 'safe' choices in the form of music that audiences are well acquainted with, thereby assuming that audiences are not interested in hearing unknown music composed by women.

By introducing future generations to music by women composers in the same manner as we introduce them to male composers' music, our hope is to make the question of the composer's gender less relevant, rendering male composers and their female counterparts as equals in all senses. We hope that music by women composers will gain its deserved place in the canon and in concert halls, opera houses, and festivals worldwide.

3.3 Cultural Transfer

VOW will *inter alia* disclose and manifest the workings of artistic women that through their art became agents of change and cultural transmitters (Broomans and Klok 2019). The field of cultural transfer thus becomes an important area of research. The project examines how musical and music educational exchange in Europe appeared to have been a contact zone for women artists and transmitters, be it composers, performers, teachers, conductors, or writers. Examining this contact zone within cultural transmission– including biographical research – will disclose networks of artistic women, how they influenced each other and as such became agents of change in Europe. An interesting aspect in this regard is how the crossing of national borders – for example from Norway and the Netherlands to Germany and vice versa – often meant a renewal of the cultural and musical scene on both sides of these borders. The large group of Norwegians, often very young and eager women, sought and found a musical education in Germany that they could not get in Norway, for example, changed the educating staff at the institutions in Berlin by becoming the first women teachers, while they on the other hand established quite a progressive musical landscape in Norway when they returned. With their performances in Paris, London, Leipzig, and Vienna (among others) they paved the way and became models of new possibilities for women artists in the countries they visited.

In examining the field of cultural transmission, biographical research is an important tool in the process of disclosing. To share the results of this research, and to engage with colleagues and students in the works of these artists, RESCAPE developed the method of ‘dramatic assemblage,’ a form of creative research based on ego documents (journals, letters, postcards, notes etc.), non-fictional texts, compositions, poems, stories, and other art-related forms (Haselmann, Klok, Mittner 2019, 2021). In the VOW-project the RESCAPE method will be practised and developed. The artistic works of women, their networks, together with other results from both examining the contact zone for women artists and transmitters and the RESCAPE method, will be described in the VOW-roadmap for the promotion of Voices of Women.

3.4 Feminist Theories

A set of theories can help to make sense of why curriculum transformation and social change in general happens so slowly (Valian 1998, Ahmed 2017, Fraser, 2020). Feminist research in general and feminist musicology in particular indicate the very heart of the unbalanced power

relations and problematic cultural practices that resist social change. If the voices of women are to be heard, someone needs to listen (Björck 2011). For the VOW project this means that audiences play a crucial role. To become part of the collective memory, music composed by women needs to be performed on stage and alongside a discussion of ‘what we listen to, how we listen to it, how much we listen to it and what the messages are’ (Hilde Blix in Mittner and Bergli 2018).

As we work together with our students, critical pedagogies, feminist values, and theories (the self, the curriculum, the learning community, and broader social change) are at the heart of the project. ‘Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions.’ (O’Sullivan et al. 2002, 22). Feminist work on transformative learning provides the tools for encounter frictions, unpredictability, normative complexities, but also resistance, confrontation, and unlearning. Thus, the VOW project creates space for transformative learning in the sense of the ‘tentacular classroom’ (Branlat et al. 2022). Feeling and sensing what happens when previously legitimate knowledge is questioned and grappling with theoretical frameworks and transformative pedagogical practices need the time and trust within musical contact zones that the VOW project will enable.

5 VOW Roadmap

Based on the knowledge we have so far, and the VOW approach outlined above, we have drafted the following roadmap for the coming three years. We envision creating musical contact zones that enable us to become agents of change, refining new repertoire, and building an international VOW network (including researchers, artists, teachers, policymakers, activists etc.) based on knowledge exchange and cultural transfer.



Fig. 1: VOW Roadmap and planned activities for the project period 2022-2024.

The project incorporates the following activities:

1. **Performing** repertoire created by women composers in 19th and 20th century in Europe.
2. **Familiarizing** higher education students, music and art audiences, and the general public, with musical works created by women.
3. **Training** students and others to become active agents of change.
4. **Creating** a roadmap to curriculum transformation and social change in arts education.
5. **Establishing** a network of artists, researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders who would like to contribute to ensuring women’s rightful place in the historical, contemporary, and future arenas of artistic production.

By developing and providing higher educational material based on art experimentation, VOW will implement interconnected, international, inclusive, and innovative training of higher education students. VOW is based on the idea that to provide social innovation, we need to educate agents of change who can act towards more gender equal societies. VOW will provide research-based opportunities for professional development for all who are interested in exploring performative, theoretical, analytical, social, managerial, and educational impacts of gender equality.

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