

Women's Musical Agency and Experiences in Vernon Lee's *Music and its Lovers*

Kristin Franseen

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Article abstract

Among the case studies included in Vernon Lee's last book, *Music and its Lovers* (1933) one finds an intriguing alliance between gender and the experience of listening to instrumental music. A respondent identified only as "The Suffragette" directly ties her feelings about music to her activism, noting that "I recognize in music some definite emotions pertaining to a crowd...the growl I have heard in crowds at suffrage meetings" and later writing about Brahms that "I think I can distinguish in music secondary sex attributes." Lee notes that the Suffragette, while untrained in music, appears perceptive in linking instrumental music to her personal experiences.

While prior research on *Music and its Lovers* (Towheed 2010 and 2013; Mahoney 2015) has focused primarily on Lee's sources and questionable scientific practices, this article examines the repertoire and accounts of listening submitted by some of Lee's female participants. Although Lee's respondents and ultimate theories of musical emotion cut across gender, her lengthy excerpts from her own experiments center women's experiences as listeners with valuable observations into the musical experience. In collecting case studies from within her own social circle of women artists and intellectuals, Lee preserved an important archive of early twentieth-century women's thoughts about specific types of music, especially when it comes to composers traditionally associated with masculinity (Brahms and Beethoven) and sexuality (Tchaikovsky and Wagner).

Women's Musical Agency and Experiences in Vernon Lee's *Music and its Lovers*

Kristin Franseen
(McGill University)

Because I have conducted my own operas and love sheepdogs, because I generally dress in tweeds, and sometimes, at winter afternoon concerts, have even conducted in them, because I was a militant suffragette and seized a chance of beating time to “The March of the Women” from the window of my cell in Holloway Prison with a toothbrush, because I have written books, spoken speeches, broadcast, and don’t always make sure that my hat is on straight, for these and other equally pertinent reasons, in a certain sense I am well known. (Smyth 1936, 288)

This quote derives neither from *Music and its Lovers* nor from elsewhere in Vernon Lee’s voluminous writings. Lee’s acquaintance and contemporary, the composer Ethel Smyth, included it as part of an account of the various reasons for her fame in her memoir *As Time Went On*. The focus on Smyth’s eccentricities and political convictions, however, highlights the ways in which the role of the arts in the activism of the suffrage movement is often conceived by scholars and audiences alike—as either individual radicalism and unconventionality or mass collective action.¹ We don’t tend to think of how one’s political allegiances and commitments

might influence artistic interpretation and response; at least, not when thinking about those kinds of reflections from the early twentieth century. In today’s feminist and queer writings on music, of course, we are familiar with highly personal reactions to different works in scholarly analyses, many quite divergent from what we know of the original creators’ intentions.² Yet conventional reception histories often shy away from considering more idiosyncratic (or even incorrect) readings of music. Vernon Lee’s research into music perception, which dates from around the same time as Smyth’s memoirs, provides an important historical archive of musical agency, conversation, and debate, while raising additional questions around scholarship as a historical source.³

After publishing numerous books and articles on history and aesthetics, Lee sought in her last book, *Music and its Lovers*, to reconcile her personal affective encounters with music and her desire for a scientific understanding of how people experienced listening.⁴ Within the “nearly one hundred and fifty” case studies collected therein (not including the lengthy sections on Lee’s own

¹ The 2018 anniversary of the 1928 Representation of the People Act was an opportunity for both celebration and reflection for many feminist scholars and activists in the UK, especially around contemporary understandings of (moderate) suffragist and (radical) suffragette agents and activities. The recent conference Centennial Reflections on Women’s Suffrage and the Arts, hosted by the University of Surrey (29-30 June 2018), emphasized the importance of recognizing the diversity of perspectives, tactics, and media depictions of pro- and anti-suffrage activists. Of particular relevance here is the work done by Erica Fedor, Marleen Hoffmann, and Angelika Silberbauer on Ethel Smyth’s reception as a suffragette composer in the UK and Germany and her depiction of political activities and arrest in her memoirs. At that same conference, Amy Ziegler and Chris Wiley also explored questions of how and why certain pieces by Smyth composed during and after the height of her feminist engagement might be read as suffrage works.

² This is often considered one of the major contributions of the so-called “new musicology” of the 1990s, which emphasized reconstructive projects and alternative readings as challenges to the presumed straight white male hegemony of the Western musical canon. In the United Kingdom, the term “critical musicology” was championed by scholars like Derek Scott, who saw concerns about identity, politics, and culture in musicology as indicating “a concern with critique, including the critique of musicology itself (Scott 2003, 6). Reevaluation of the scope, practices, and terminology of the critical and new musicology are ongoing; one might consider the 2010 special issue of *Filigrane* on “New Musicology: Perspective critiques,” roundtables at meetings of the American Musicological Society and Royal Musical Association on the scholarly impact of works like *Feminine Endings* and *Musicology and Difference*, and the 2013 colloquy on “Music and Sexuality” in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. More recently, debates over the role of the scholar as a human being within their research continue in a variety of discussions around auto-ethnography and “me-search” in the social sciences, the ethics of life-writing, and the emergence of what William Cheng and Suzanne Cusick have termed “reparative musicology” (Cusick 2008; Cheng 2016).

³ Examples of this approach can be found in feminist writings from the time, including Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and Smyth’s *Female Pipings in Eden* (1934), both of which frame prejudice and gendered social norms as the main barriers to women’s intellectual and artistic achievements. Debates over the “woman composer question” in both Britain and the United States dating back to the 1880s tended to frame the question of women’s access to musical education and professional life in terms ability versus opportunity. Judith Tick (1987) identifies a shift in American perspectives of composing as a form of “mental emancipation” during the 1890s alongside the suffrage movement.

⁴ The in-progress bibliography compiled by the International Vernon Lee Society gives examples of her nonfiction books and articles on subjects ranging from visual aesthetics, theatre, ancient and medieval influences on Renaissance arts, to travel writing, psychology, politics, and antiwar writing. For more information, see “Bibliography: Primary Texts by Vernon Lee” (International Vernon Lee Society).

listening habits), one observes Lee wrestling with how the overwhelming amount of “proof” she has compiled in the form of raw data relates to her own experiences and personal sense of what it means to love music. This evidence, reproduced by Lee in the form of excerpts from case studies of respondents and her own listening journals, creates a new set of archival records of what it meant to endorse the position of a music lover in the early twentieth century. She records the frames of references through which she and her contemporaries heard art music—especially symphonic music and opera—including theoretical and historical knowledge, artistic metaphors, and the idea (and ideal) of being able to experience the supposedly pure emotion of the music “itself.” Four main aspects of Lee’s research seem particularly relevant here: (1) her own collaborative processes with other women, (2) the potential for “listening” and “hearing” as contributing to different facets of individual musical experiences when it comes to assigning musical meaning, (3) the meanings assigned to particular composers by her case studies, and (4) the ways in which these answers tap into broader discourses of shared (and potentially communal) forms of musical memory, response, and appreciation. In the lines to come, I propose that these aspects help us consider the ways in which Lee’s reflections are valuable for musicologists understanding non-specialist perspectives on musical reception during this particular moment in history.

Lee’s Methodology

While conducted largely by correspondence in the early decades of the century (and interrupted by Lee’s temporary return to England during World War I), Lee and her literary agent Irene Cooper Willis (who assisted with compiling the survey responses) saw the act of analyzing their data as a very human process that transcended scientific work. She notes in her chapter on methodology that:

Thus I have at last come to possess a gallery of dramatic personae with whom I often feel very intimate, and whose personalities have sometimes awakened feelings of friendship or the reverse. Moreover, in making these analyses, I found myself involved in silent discussions with my Answerers and even more frequently with myself. (Lee 1933, 16-17)

Lee is here creating a kind of “musicological personae” out of each of her respondents’ survey answers. The most dominant “personae” in Lee’s particular approach to musical emotion was her former partner and frequent collaborator, Clementina “Kit” Anstruther-Thomson, whose physical responses to the visual arts influenced Lee’s turn towards

psychological aesthetics and the rarefied experiences of a cultivated elite, a conception of the ideal listener as musically educated and aesthetically sensitive. As David Gramit notes in *Cultivating Music*, “talk about music invokes and constructs social categories” (2002, 3). For Lee, the social categories invoked and constructed in the name of music perception through her categorization of musical appreciation both reflected and obscured her personal romantic and intellectual commitments. Lee’s interest in the emotional pull of the arts—even when couched in psychological terms—had an intensely personal and homoerotic component. Anstruther-Thomson was one of the few respondents whom Lee completely de-anonymized, remarking “there is no need, alas, to put a feigned or abbreviated name to this set of answers, whose importance, indeed, should be greatly influenced by the signature of ‘C.A.T.’” (Lee 1933, 71). While Lee meticulously links “C.A.T.’s” theories to others in the psychological literature, Anstruther-Thomson’s descriptions of music as “calling up embryo emotions” that one feels in both the body and the mind without conscious thought are clearly based on her and Lee’s experiments with the visual arts. Lee cites their collaborative book *Beauty and Ugliness* (1912) several times in *Music and its Lovers*, and Anstruther-Thomson’s accounts of “miming” (feeling one’s breathing, focus, and physical stance change in reaction to a work of visual art) clearly influenced her and Lee’s approach to analyzing musical emotion and response.⁵

In her analysis of Lee’s “sexual politics of aestheticism”, Kathy Alexis Psomiades argues that, whatever Lee may have felt sexually for her partners, she (and Anstruther-Thomson and Willis) “produced a theory of the aesthetic grounded in the congress between female bodies” (Psomiades 1999, 41). She further observes that Lee’s reliance on and fascination with Anstruther-Thomson’s physical appearance and the physical qualities of her artistic and musical responses “has the same effect on Vernon that art is supposed to have [on the individual]” (Psomiades 1999, 34). In a somewhat more critical analysis of the class implications of the Lee-Anstruther-Thomson collaborative process, Diana Maltz, recalling Irene Cooper Willis’s remarks on Lee’s “gallery experiments” with Kit, says that “to tell the story of psychological aesthetics is to tell a love story” (Maltz 1999, 212).

The tensions between a quasi-scientific classification and the personal nature of Lee’s framing of Kit’s personal artistic sensibilities as the pinnacle of emotional response to art and music are equally apparent in Lee’s hierarchy of audience member types. This approach is similar in many ways to the readership assumed by Émile Vuillermoz in

⁵ An example of miming in the visual arts is found in Lee’s and Anstruther-Thomson’s description of Greek statuary: “Now, in looking at Greek statues, we are forced automatically to adjust ourselves to their walk in order satisfactorily to focus on them; and this adjustment to a better balance in ourselves is extremely agreeable” (Lee and Anstruther-Thomson 1912, 220).

his *Musiques d'aujourd'hui* (1923), which, in the manner of Adorno, pitted the “good listener” against the “consumer of culture” in the desire to inspire and create the ideal musical audience (Trottier 2018, 314-315). In the opening chapters of the book, Lee attempts to differentiate between the musical experiences of what she calls “listeners” and “hearers.” Listeners have great technical knowledge of music history and theory, and think consciously about formal and stylistic characteristics when listening to a work. Hearers, meanwhile, are less focused in their absorption of musical details, and let their minds wander to other subjects—“not simply a lesser degree of the same mental activity, but one whose comparative poverty from the musical side is eked out and compensated by other elements”, including “memories, associations, suggestions, visual images and emotional states, ebbing and flowing round the more or less clearly emergent musical perceptions” (Lee 1933, 42). Listeners might also experience extramusical emotions or associations, but, according to Lee, they recognize these as lapses in attention from musical details. Lee uses the concepts of listeners and hearers to consider what emotions and ideas people bring to instrumental music, and what might be innate to “the music itself.”

Given Lee’s status as an aesthete, it is unsurprising that she views “listeners” as the ideal audiences and argues that listeners and hearers grapple with the question of programmatic music and musical meanings differently, resonating with the discussions of musical meanings regarding Hanslick’s (1854) posture on programmatic issues and musical content. Listeners see musical meaning “in the sense not of a message different from whatever conveyed it, but in the sense of an interest, an importance, residing in the music and inseparable from it” (Lee 1933, 31). Hearers, on the other hand, see musical meaning as a more concrete message for them as individuals, more connected to their “musical day-dream” (Lee 1933, 32), an observation with some ties to the discussion of feelings as “subject-matter” in the second chapter of *The Beautiful in Music*. It is worth noting, however, Lee does not immediately dismiss the experiences of hearers and their more isolated moments of musical contemplation. Instead, she argues that, for both hearers and listeners, the opportunity to either immerse oneself fully in sound or fully in an “inner ambience” of reveries and day dreams, provides a “bath, if not of oblivion, at least of harmonious contemplation” separate from reality (Lee 1933, 33). This ambience belongs to the aesthetic of “contemplation as devotion” analyzed in Chapter 5 of Dahlhaus’ *The Idea of Absolute Music* (1978 [1989]). It is this act of immersion, however it is accomplished, that Lee holds up as the purpose of listening.

Responding to the Canon: Individual Composers in *Music and its Lovers*

While Lee’s musical immersion could be accomplished in theory with any music, the astute contemporary reader will note that the composers and genres mentioned are—much like her male contemporaries in the realm of philosophy of music—largely limited to Western art music from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The only composers mentioned by name in her questionnaire are Bach, Mozart, Beethoven (early or late), Chopin, and Wagner, while other questions focus on symphonies, operas, and the respondents’ training in music theory and counterpoint (Lee 1933, 563-567). This is perhaps another instance of Lee’s personal biases writ large on the entire project, as her own tastes leaned heavily towards Italian Baroque vocal music. When it came to “modern” music, Lee reserved the bulk of her dislike for Wagner and those she viewed as falling too much under Wagner’s influence. In her commonplace book of April-December 1893, she recorded a conversation with Smyth on how “the disintegrative, purely emotional element in Wagner and the moderns. ...does not exist, or scarcely at all, for the real musician.” By contrast, the nonmusical “vast majority will always receive it not actively through the intellect, but passively, through the nerves” (Lee, cited in Towheed 2010, 277). Paradoxically, this antipathy may explain the amount of space in *Music and its Lovers* devoted to Wagner, (im)morality, and the erotic, as Lee biased her results by naming Wagner in a series of leading questions in her survey. While the questions on Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin merely ask how the respondents’ preferences stand, there is an additional question about whether “Wagner [seems] to you to stand in any way apart, appealing to and producing emotional effects different from those of other musicians?” (Lee 1933, 565). The next question, on morality in music, continues in this direction:

- (A) Have you reasons for thinking that music can have a good or bad effect (moral or immoral) on people’s character or actions?
- or
- (B) does music seem to you to be “yon side of good and evil”?
- (C) Can you understand these questions with regard particularly to Wagner? (Lee 1933, 565)

Lee admits in her analysis that the inclusion of Wagner provoked almost all of the commentary on sexual responses to music, observing that

that particular ingredient of Comus’s cup [a Classical reference to sexual excesses of all kinds] is occasionally adverted to; and (unnoticed no doubt because taken for granted by Continentals), has to be remarked upon,

condemned (as pornography) or justified by British Answers barely emerged... from Victorian purity and unsullied by Freudian discussions. (Lee 1933, 301)

Following Lee's implications of musical morality and emotional effects, her respondents largely consider Wagner in terms of sex, even when they are ashamed to admit it or cannot quite put it into words. They frequently disagree about the association of Wagner with immorality, although those with strong feelings on the subject bring up questions of morbidity, debasement, sensuousness, intensity of passions, hysteria, decadence, and physical emotion (Lee 1933, 533-542). Curiously, respondents use these terms to express a wide variety of responses to Wagner's work, whether love, hate, or disapproval. This might suggest that at least some members of Lee's intellectual circle, from which she drew many of her respondents, were familiar with (if perhaps not "sullied by") other psychological and sexological theories about Wagner's music. This concern with Wagner's moral and erotic power over audiences ties into David Trippett's analysis of the nineteenth-century fascination with the physical experience of emotions, including reactions to music. Trippett observes that debates over Wagner's music frequently revolved around the composer as manipulator of musical stimuli to produce embodied responses in listeners (Trippett 2013). Edward Prime-Stevenson, an American expatriate music critic and amateur sexologist present in Florentine Anglophone artistic circles in the early decades of the twentieth century, wrote at length in his *Long-Haired Iopas: Old Chapters from Twenty-Five Years of Music-Criticism* about the fascinating with *Parsifal* among German and English homosexual subcultures and the "sex-seduction" of Wagner's music for the musically illiterate (Prime-Stevenson 1927, 385). Prime-Stevenson was familiar with Lee's other musical writings, and dedicated a chapter of *Iopas* on Chopin and gender to Lee.⁶

Moving beyond Wagner, some respondents note their sympathy with or antipathy towards the works of particular composers in personal, usually (auto)biographical terms. This is particularly pronounced in the case of Margery, who wrote

I have intense sympathy with the composer [Tchaikovsky] at the time [of listening to the Symphony no. 6]; later a touch of contempt for his lack of reserve and I feel also

that he has been smashed through his inability to get outside himself (Lee 1933, 316).⁷

Lee uses this view of Tchaikovsky's symphony to consider how some listeners construct an "imaginary composer" through a combination of musical and biographical knowledge that may or may not reflect the real person. She notes that,

while Tchaikovsky's Symphony is regarded by one Answerer as evidence of 'a rather feeble ego-centred personality', Beethoven is universally written about not as he is shown in his letters and his Heiligenstadt Testament, but as if he were speaking in the Arietta, the Cavatina, nay [sic], in the chorus (plus the words which are Schiller's) of the 9th Symphony. (Lee 1933, 420)

This comparison of Beethoven as masculine humanist and Tchaikovsky as "feeble" may reflect the psychologically-loaded gossip about Tchaikovsky's homosexuality and rumoured emotional state, for which the Symphony no. 6 was increasingly offered as "proof" in Anglophone music criticism and musicology by the early decades of the twentieth century.⁸ All of these remarks reflect a shared language of musical knowledge rooted in biographical narratives of music history. Indeed, Lee observes elsewhere how preconceived notions about the private lives of different composers may have influenced some respondents' remarks. About a "nonmusical" respondent (identified as a painter) who remarked that a certain prelude by Chopin reminded her of "an old Russian woman in man's clothes", she explained that the listener likely connected Chopin's Eastern European influences with the popular image of George Sand (Lee 1933, 429 and 431).

The potential associations between what a hearer assumed about a composer is also seen in the reaction of one subject (identified only as "the rebellious young Suffragette"), who connected her dislike of a particular Brahms piece with a masculine "lust of life" with which she didn't identify. Oddly, this account is one of the few that mentions the performance as having an influence on emotional reception, as she continues that "some pieces strike one as a woman's or a man's soul, according to player. I think I can distinguish in music secondary sex attributes" (Lee 1933, 531).

⁶ Prime-Stevenson, a New York newspaperman who turned to research on the history of homosexuality around 1900 (self-published under the pseudonym Xavier Mayne), was interested in what he viewed as the "neurotic" qualities of music and sympathetic discourses of forbidden love. While he and Lee were clearly acquainted, it is unclear what impact their views had on one another's views on musical meaning and appreciation. Shafquat Towheed notes that Lee's copy of *Long-Haired Iopas* was uncut, although he did not always read presentation copies of works by authors whom she knew and engaged in person (Towheed 2010, 284). A blurb by Lee, preserved in an advertising circular Prime-Stevenson planned to distribute to bookstores, praises the book's "friendly, alert, humane style, and the good sense of its aesthetics" (Prime-Stevenson 1928, np).

⁷ The name Чайковский has been transliterated from the Cyrillic into a number of different spellings in the Latin alphabet. For the purposes of this article, I have used "Tchaikovsky" and "Tchaikovski" in my text as the forms of the name in English and French used in subject headings for Library and Archives Canada. Within quotes from Vernon Lee's works, I have preserved her original spelling.

⁸ See Judith Peraino's analysis of Tchaikovsky's Symphony no. 6 (2005, 78-92) for an overview of some of the narratives (and potential counter-narratives) surrounding the work in its early popular and subsequent scholarly reception.

As the sole extended mention of Brahms in *Music and its Lovers*, the Suffragette's case study raises questions about what she meant by "secondary sex characteristics" and how much a particular experience of a composer might influence one's gendered experience of music (as well as, potentially, one's own sense of self). This idea of a Brahms's piece as having "a man's soul" resonates with contemporary discourses on music and gender. Prime-Stevenson argued for a masculinist view of Brahms's instrumental music, noting in his music criticism that Brahms "had as much to say *to a man*," but only "particular types of women seem convinced admirers of this composer" (Prime-Stevenson 1928, 32, emphasis original). Ethel Smyth's love of Brahms, was noted by her colleagues, including Tchaikovsky, as evidence of her eccentricity alongside her unconventional behaviour and gender presentation.⁹ While the Suffragette attributes the Brahms piece "itself" with masculinity, she also connects these categories more directly with the performer than with the composer. This opens potential for finding and explaining greater gendered and sexual meanings in music that do not always neatly map onto biographical readings. The Suffragette—like Smyth and Prime-Stevenson—is both reacting to what she knows (or has absorbed) about Brahms and what she perceives in the act of listening.

Considering how many of these utterances, discourses and ideas refer back to well-known composers, we might ask how the musical canon is constructed and perceived in Lee's work. While most respondents, whether classified as Listeners or Hearers, engage with established works and composers, their musical experiences are highly informed by perceptions of what this canon means, both to them as individuals and with regard to broader biographical knowledge of certain composers. The twenty-first-century listener might well assume that still-popular nineteenth-century composers like Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner, Chopin, and Tchaikovsky all constitute a unified "Romantic canon." For Lee's respondents, however, their understanding of these composers as "canonical" was complicated and fractured by a variety of factors, including (but not limited to) musical education, gendered or sexual associations with a given composer or work, popular biographical tropes about a specific work, and broader discourses about instrumental music and emotion. The Suffragette's association of Brahms with masculinity reflects not only her individual political commitments but also the same cultural perspectives of Brahms's music as masculine (often in contrast with Wagner or Tchaikovsky) that informed Smyth's and Prime-Stevenson's reactions to his symphonies. Allusions to Tchaikovsky's "emotionalism" or Chopin's music invoking

the image of Sand replicate shared biographical knowledge through a given respondent's response to what they might otherwise see as the music "itself."

The fact that musical canons are culturally constructed to reflect certain values is of course nothing new in musicology. Scholars have long observed the exclusion of certain figures, styles of music, and types of information from the construction of the Western art music canon. One recalls Philip Brett's speculation that Tchaikovsky's homosexuality was allowed to be discussed because the language of decadence and emotional excess could be more easily mapped onto his status outside the German artistic pantheon (Brett 1994, 15). In a similar manner, Marcia Citron analyzes how "male modes of discourse" in professional music criticism have shaped what kinds of musical values form and proliferate in the reception of individual works and composers and the broader construction of musical canons (Citron 1993 [2000], 181). Although Lee's respondents by and large accept these discourses, they are not wholly passive in their musical reactions. The Suffragette's observation, for instance, that a work of Brahms might strike her as masculine or feminine depending on the performer, reveals the often-unacknowledged role of performance in shaping the musical experience. Someone who is sympathetic to what they know of Tchaikovsky's biography and/or engaged by his symphonic music will react to the perceived emotionality of the *Pathétique* differently from one possessing a more disapproving perspective. While they are heavily engaged (overtly or otherwise) with discourses of musical canons and emotional meaning, the bulk of Lee's respondents appear completely removed from the world of contemporary politics and debates over women's place in society, making the Suffragette's pseudonym and presence in the book a strong reminder of the context in which Lee, Anstruther-Thomson, and the respondents existed. Were it not for the Suffragette and occasional, infrequent mentions of Freudian analysis and the Great War, much of *Music and its Lovers* could well have been written decades earlier.

The Suffragette's only other appearance in *Music and its Lovers* presents a picture of how Lee viewed extramusical factors (including politics) as influencing Hearers' responses to music. In response to Lee's questions about finding emotions and meaning in instrumental music, the Suffragette notes that, while she cannot determine purely musical emotions, she has strong reactions towards individual pieces that recall her political commitments and experiences as an activist:

⁹ Tchaikovsky described Smyth's obsession with Brahms in his travel diaries as one of the "originalities and eccentricities" one had to allow Englishwomen, alongside her love of large dogs and hunting (Tchaikovsky, translated in Newmarch 1900, 194). He later wrote to her that "I passed an entire day with *your idol* JOHANNES BRAHMS!!!" (Tchaikovsky, reproduced in Smyth 1919, 265-266).

I can recognize that music REPRESENTS varieties of human emotion and (i.e. but) the music wouldn't touch me in consequence. This abstract recognition without participation doesn't often happen. It's (i.e., it happens) when music represents an ATTITUDE I HAVE NO SYMPATHY WITH, alien to my nature and sex. The music that appeals most to me is the rebellious sort. It's because I'm a Socialist! I recognize in music some definite emotions pertaining to a crowd, the uproar, the surge, the growl I have heard in crowds at suffrage meetings. (Lee 1933, 211)

Lee's analysis continues:

And, no doubt she feels in herself, whenever she recognizes it in music, the emotion with which she once faced an anti-suffrage crowd, since she tells us that when she does participate in the music's expression, "my emotion is often accompanied by bodily sensations: if it's defiant, my head goes up." (Lee 1933, 211)

While the Suffragette conflates the respective roles of the composer, piece, and performer within the meanings she finds in Brahms, her account of musical collectivity is also tied to what Elizabeth Wood refers to as "the sonography of women's suffrage." Wood views figures like Ethel Smyth as "[bearing] the mark of the suffrage body for and within which it [music] is produced—its noises, pleasures, sufferings, and liberating desires, whose movement in turn her music fuels" (Wood 1995, 615).

Conclusions: Towards Listening and Politics

By moving this analysis beyond music written by suffragists such as Smyth to the musical experiences of non-musician activists, such as the Suffragette in Lee's case study, I want to ask how these kinds of records might serve as source material in music research. As we saw above, even if Lee's work might be contextualized in the interwar period and show some affinities with the audience categories coined by critics like Vuillermoz and Adorno, it also represents some novel contributions to the literature on musical reception. As a work of music perception or ethnography, Lee's study is heavily flawed by current standards, full of leading questions, self-selected participants of generally the same social class, cultural context, and intellectual interests as the researcher, and a highly limited sample wildly extrapolated to theorize how humans understand and respond to music. Yet, as a primary source for evidence of certain kinds of conversations about music, gender, and sexuality, Lee's research is invaluable. While a great deal of research has

been done on gendered language and the erotic in published writings on Brahms and Wagner during this period (see, for example, Dreyfus 2010 and McManus 2011), much of their sources are unsurprisingly by men with more formal training in music theory and composition.¹⁰ Lee's project, however, demonstrates that these sorts of conversations also took place among women—including the musically untrained—and that received knowledge about music's social meanings should be an important consideration for further work on the role music has played in early twentieth-century understandings of gender, sexuality, and feminism.

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¹⁰ Prime-Stevenson's and the Suffragette's comments about Brahms's masculinity are fairly representative of the sort of gendered language found in discussions of the masculine and feminine in nineteenth-century instrumental music. As far as the authors of such analyses, McManus's dissertation, "The Rhetoric of Sexuality in the Age of Brahms and Wagner" (2011), has a lengthy section on German Wagnerian analyses by men aimed at female audiences. Most sexological analyses of Wagner, such as those promoted by Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Oscar Panizza, and Magnus Hirschfeld, are likewise by (and largely aimed at) a medically educated male readership.

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Adresse postale : Société québécoise de recherche en musique
Département de musique de l'Université du Québec à Montréal
Case postale 8888, succursale Centre-ville
Montréal (Québec) H3C 3P8

Adresse physique : Département de musique de l'Université du Québec à Montréal
1440, rue Saint-Denis, local F-4485
Montréal (Québec) H2X 3J8
Téléphone : 514-987-3000, poste 4075
info@sqrm.qc.ca

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