



[*Loud and Clear: A Guide to Levelled Piano Music by Women Composers in the 20th and 21st Centuries.*](#) By Olivia Adams.

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During the 1990s, music by women composers gained attention among music educators. Equity gaps began to be identified through data collection and qualitative research; then equity measures began to gain traction in the performance programs of universities and conservatories.

The pace could be very slow. For example, in 1996 at Wilfrid Laurier University, a requirement was added to the piano curriculum to learn one piece by a female composer during the four-year BMus degree. At the time, this was a ground-breaking innovation in North America. In that same time, the last Indian Residential school in Canada was closed.

Since the 1990s, a plethora of gender equity initiatives have begun across Canadian music institutions. Meanwhile, the Canadian government's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has given music educators clear Calls to Action to reconcile with Indigenous Peoples. However, to this day, piano instructors struggle to access adequate resources to assign sheet music by women, especially BIPOC [Black Indigenous, and People of Colour] women, suitable for the particular needs of each student. This problem of access is one of many reasons why, as piano teacher and clinician Olivia Adams points out in *Loud and Clear: A Guide to Levelled Piano Music by Women Composers in the 20th and 21st Centuries*, women composers still represent just 13.1% of all composers in Canadian conservatory piano syllabi. Adams also presents some alarming statistics on the lack of progress, as of 2021, to integrate women composers of colour into conservatory syllabi. Adams has therefore taken on the enormous research task of cataloguing and grading the available resources, then curating them in a format familiar to instructors working with conservatory syllabi. This resulting

¹ I write this review from my home in the unceded territory of Mi'kmaki, with gratitude towards the Mi'kmaq Peoples and All Our Relations on this land. I acknowledge my privilege as a White person of settler origin who is a recently retired keyboard professor, to be given space to write the following review. I acknowledge my personal bias of hope that collective efforts towards gender equity in music education will bear fruit. I am grateful to the BIPOC colleagues recently hired in my place at Laurier, including the wonderful Indigenous female composer Barbara Assiginaak, who has written new piano music too recent for inclusion in the guide under review. Wela'lin, or "thank you" in Mi'kmaq, to all readers for making this space in your own day.



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publication will surely be received with gratitude by piano instructors across Canada. It will come as no surprise that the publisher of this first edition is Debra Wanless, who for decades has been a stalwart leader in bringing women composers to attention.

When first paging through the text, “Composer Spotlight” sidebars draw the reader into the catalogue layout. These informally introduce some composers, while also serving to showcase the guide’s relevance by featuring current well-known clinicians such as Afarin Mansouri and Indigenous composer Beverley McKiver. Alongside are Adams’s carefully graded lists of thousands of compositions. Those experienced in teaching music by women composers will be delighted to find a wealth of less familiar works in addition to favourite pedagogical pieces. Established Canadian composers such as Alexina Louie or Martha Hill Duncan appear alongside younger compatriots such as Emily Doolittle or Anna Höstman. International Black artists from Eleanor Alberga to Pamela Z appear alongside emergent BIPOC composers, from film composer Chanda Dancy to Juno winner Vivian Fung. Though the emphasis is on Western classical genres, some other genres, such as jazz music by Mary Lou Williams or Brazilian *choro* music by Chiquinha Gonzaga, are also represented.

The 21st century has brought a sea change in ideas about music education. Movements towards Indigenous reconciliation, decolonization, equity, diversity, and inclusion have proliferated. In Canadian university music programs, data is being collected, curricular transformations discussed, training on anti-racist instruction offered, and major efforts made to hire diverse new faculty. Institutions such as the Canada Council and the major orchestras have similarly been formulating new strategies. By comparison, however, there is a regrettable lack of data about Canadian piano teachers, who are the target for the lucrative mainstream conservatory examination market in general and for this independent publication in particular. This partly has to do with the fact that the mainstream Canadian conservatories focus on examining students rather than hiring teachers. Anyone may teach piano in Canada using conservatory syllabi. Meanwhile, the Registered Music Teachers associations regulate teacher qualifications; however, theirs is a voluntary, paid private membership whose roster reflects only a fraction of active piano teachers. Thus, it is a daunting prospect to identify avenues to address equity among private Canadian piano teachers, or even to draw a clear picture of the demographics of such teachers. Absent relevant market data, Adams, when addressing her target audience, must navigate a minefield about which too little is known. Given this formidable task, it would be helpful in future editions for Adams to provide a self-reflective statement in which one could better understand her own positionality and potential biases. A territorial acknowledgement would also be a relevant addition in this regard.

Adams has written a final chapter on “Becoming an Ally and Co-conspirator in the Music Studio” (p. 98). This could well be moved upfront to the Introduction or near it, and perhaps co-written with members of BIPOC music communities. In this chapter, Adams writes, “As music teachers, we must elevate the music and work of BIPOC composers through performing their works, purchasing their music, and attending their workshops” (p. 98). Adams employs the pronouns “we” for music teachers and “their” for BIPOC composers. However, as institutions decolonize, crossovers

between composing, performing, and teaching are rapidly developing, challenging colonial conservatory standards. A Canadian piano teacher may well be a BIPOC composer herself.

There is an inherent structural paradox in the practical need to grade and evaluate women's and BIPOC repertoire in alignment with the highly culture-specific grading systems of a colonial piano education establishment. Every piano instructor and music institution struggles with this paradox. For that matter, the Canadian government is in a similar position, as it attempts Truth and Reconciliation within such colonial structures as the Indian Act and Crown Lands. Adams locates herself within this massive struggle by writing in the Introduction, "Our goal as educators is not to 'add diversity' but to interrupt systems of harmful, colonial pedagogy designed to keep certain people out... With this syllabus, I hope to do a small part in weaving women back into the music history that, for centuries, kept them out." Adams's concise and helpful descriptions of her grading method, placed before each new level, do accurately reflect current standards. They do provide the means to weave in new repertoire. Two questions occur. How inclusive is Adams's "we"? And will the diverse student populations of today demand greater structural change?

Additions to future print editions that would be useful for piano instructors would include a ring binding, a paginated index of composers, a chronological index of all listed composers, and enhanced photo resolution and graphics. Statistical graphs could include any future data on piano instructor demographics. Composer dates embedded within the lists would be much appreciated. A forthcoming e-book could facilitate a myriad of other potential uses of this catalogue yet to be identified.

As the first guide to women piano composers targeted to Canadian piano instructors, *Loud and Clear* is a major contribution to the keyboard education literature. It is the kind of research for which public funding should be made available for future revised and expanded editions. The comments in this review about this welcome new resource would hopefully facilitate its expansion in future editions.