

Local 4 Music Fund's *She Scores*: Round Three

by Mike Telin



When the Institute for Composer Diversity analyzed the 2019-20 seasons of 120 American orchestras, it found that just eight percent of all pieces performed were composed by women. For Amber Rogers, artistic director of the Local 4 Music Fund, that statistic was a call for action. “The idea of concerts featuring female composers isn’t new, but I didn’t see anything quite like this in Cleveland,” Rogers told *ClevelandClassical.com*’s Stephanie Manning in June of 2021.

On June 2 and 3 at 7:00 pm and June 4 at 4:00 pm at Cleveland State University’s Drinko

Hall, *She Scores* 2023 will feature nineteen compositions by fourteen composers. Emily Laurance will present a pre-concert lecture 45 minutes prior to each free performance. Visit our [Concert Listings](#) page for composer names, composition titles, and performers.

“We are adding one piece to the June 3rd concert to honor the late composer Dolores White,” Rogers said during a recent telephone conversation. “Eric Charnofsky met with Dolores’s daughter Dianna and she gave him a couple of scores to pick from. We talked about them and looked at our instrumentation, and Eric and Drew Hosler are doing a piece for saxophone and piano.”

After the call for scores was announced, Rogers said that between 40 and 50 compositions were received, which were then passed on to the composition panel who evaluated each of them. “Everyone did their own preliminary evaluations and then we all got together and talked,” Rogers said. “I was the only one who knew who wrote what — the compositions were all anonymous to the panel. I was just there to moderate and I

didn't get a vote. But it was a very entertaining discussion, especially with Theresa May, Margaret Brouwer, Mike Frazier, Tim Beyer, Ellen Ruth Harrison, and Frank Wiley all in a room together.”

In the 2023 class of composers, 30% are women of color, 15% identify as non-white Middle Eastern or North African, 40% are emerging composers ages 20-30, 25% are early-to-mid career composers ages 30-40, and 35% are established professional composers ages 40-70.

Regarding the compositions, Rogers said that this is the first year that electronics or elements of electronic music have been included. “It’s not particularly novel in new music — it’s just the first time we’ve had the opportunity to feature pieces that include those elements. There are a couple of pieces that involve either prepared piano or playing the insides of the instrument. That’s always fun and the performers are having a good time. It’s really a piano-heavy year, but I have three standout pianists in Eric Charnofsky, Megan Denman, and Randy Fusco.”

Rogers is pleased with how the funding community has embraced *She Scores* — this year Cuyahoga Arts and Culture, Gund Foundation, Bascom Little Fund, Ohio Arts Council, and Arts Midwest/NEA have all funded the project. “We’ve been really fortunate to have the grant and community support as well as the support from within the new music community.”

Why do programs like *She Scores* remain important? “There are a number of reasons,” Rogers said. “I think it is sort of the worst-kept secret that female composers have had a rough time being admitted into composition programs. It’s getting better, but still not fantastic. And I don’t need to go into the various scandals, but what bugs me about all of that is that it’s blatantly sexist. I think we’re losing out and have lost out for decades, and we will continue to lose out because we’re missing some crucial voices that should be there.”

In more practical terms, Rogers noted that *She Scores* provides an opportunity for young composers to have their compositions workshopped and performed at a professional level in a live concert. “Being able to interact both with the musicians and the audience is important, and then being able to take away a professional recording to use in applications is *super* important. So the program also has a professional-development component.”

Looking at the most recent report by the [Institute for Composer Diversity](#) — which only covers American orchestral programming — the amount of music by women and composers of color programmed has increased from 4.5% in 2015 to 22.5% in 2022.

But looking specifically at female composers of color, the numbers are a dismal 0.4% in 2015 to 6.1% in 2022. “The numbers are more grim, across the board, when looking at international reports,” Rogers pointed out. “Works by female composers are still below 8% internationally, according to a study by [Donne: Women In Music](#).”

While there is still work to be done, Rogers is excited about the community that *She Scores* has built between composers and musicians. “Everybody’s excited, everybody’s working overtime to put all this quite difficult music together in a short period of time. It’s just inspiring and joyous to be around. In terms of the audience, this is part of their living culture right now — it belongs to them. This is in Cleveland. All of the musicians live here and a good chunk of the composers are from Cleveland or have Cleveland or Ohio ties. And the audience is every bit as much a part of the relevance as the composers are. I’m really excited to share it.”

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