

Prima Donna

Women's role in music has evolved across century

BY SUSAN OVERCASH
The Battalion

At the 41st annual Grammy awards, a wealth of women stepped forward to receive golden statues. Women like Madonna, Celine Dion, Patti LaBelle and Shirley Horn all went home with shiny monuments for their talents and abilities.

Through the years, women such as LaBelle and Dion have changed the face of music. This year's Grammy Awards is simply the most recent indication of the effect women have had on the public's perspective of women musicians.

This week, Aggies will have the opportunity to experience a variety of music composed by women, as well as learn more about their lives. Today, the conclusion of a film festival depicting the lives of women in films is playing in 417 Evans Annex.

Also, a concert of women composers is scheduled for Thursday at 12:30 p.m. in the MSC Forsyth Galleries, featuring Penelope Kosztołnyk's newly composed music for the Aggie Player's production of "Twelfth Night."

Dr. Laurine Elkins-Marlow, a lecturer in the Department of Music and coordinator of the event, said in the past, women have been denied access to public performances showcasing their talent.

"There are performers who have been so excellent all along, but not given the education or allowed to perform in public," Elkins-Marlow said. "This century, things have come together to allow women access to music education."

Elkins-Marlow said female musicians, such as British-born Dame Ethyl Smyth, helped change the early 20th-century attitude that women should not perform publicly.

"[Smyth] went to Germany on her own, to study music," Elkins-Marlow said. "She wrote excellent operas, which

at the time was a male domain. Many of them were performed in Germany. Eventually, one of her operas was the first women's opera to be performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York."

Local artist Ruthie Foster said women such as Aretha Franklin, Etta James and Ella Fitzgerald have all influenced her music because of their courageous style.

"People like Billie Holiday, who sing from their toes up — you can hear their whole life story in the tone of their voice, and they loved what they did," Foster said. "They didn't die rich, but they loved what they did."

"People like Billie Holiday ... you can hear their whole life story in the tone of their voice"

— Ruthie Foster

"There are companies like Olivia Records and Lady Slipper who have catalogs of women's music, all types, from all around the world," Elkins-Marlow said. "This has started as a grass-roots, word-of-mouth type movement that got institutionalized."

Foster, who is part owner of a local production company, Full Circle Productions, said she started her own company after working for major label Atlantic Records.

"I started Full Circle because I was owned by a major label, not recording or writing what I wanted to," Foster said. "I wanted control over my music. I like to handle it myself, the business side. It's fun, and I have a good time."

Foster said women musicians such as Sheryl Crow and Ani DiFranco, who exercise control over their music, bring their own signature to the music industry.

"For example, Ani DiFranco owns her own independent label," Foster said. "Many women have done that, gotten backstage and run their own business, put the right people in their circles."

Today, music festivals such as Lilith Fair combine a showcase of women's talent with charity, raising money for women's shelters and victims of domestic violence. Artists such as Sarah McLachlan and Natalie Merchant have performed at the festival, and helped raise over \$800,000 last year alone through ticket sales and \$150,000 through corporate sponsors.

Carrie Cardon, a member of Century Singers and a senior information systems major, said she has been influenced by women performers such as McLachlan because of her distinctive voice.

"She doesn't cover her voice up," Cardon said. "She just uses simple accompaniments like acoustic guitar. Women in the industry make music reach out to more people."



HAZING IS LEARNED:

A learned activity, hazing is often taught at an early age. Hazing is not just a Greek or Corps problem but it is a problem for most student groups and associations. Many times, students arrive at college already taught that hazing is acceptable. According to 1995 statistics, 85 percent of high school boys and nearly 70 percent of high school girls have experienced some sort of hazing. Often that hazing is approved or condoned by an adult—a coach, a teacher, a parent.

Communities must be cognizant of what hazing is and what the consequences are for participating in hazing activities. Hazing is not part of joining an organization but instead degrades and insults members in the name of that organization.

-adopted from Mr. Hank Nuwer

For incoming students, often away from home for the first time, the need to fit in with a group, to be liked and accepted, increases their dependence on peers. At Texas A&M University, shouldn't we be providing our new students with a collegiate experience, not repeating the high school one? As a community, let's teach our new students that hazing is not an Aggie value.

To report hazing, contact one of the following offices:

The Department of Student Life
Student Conflict Resolution Services:
Call 847-7272 to report any incidents of hazing.

The Department of Student Activities:
Call 845-1133 to report hazing involving members of a recognized student organization.

The Office of the Commandant:
Call 458-1341 to report hazing involving members of the Corps of Cadets.

University Police Department:
Call 845-2345 to report any incidents of hazing.

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