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## Integration of Women into the Flute Section of Orchestras from 1950 to the Present (Honors)

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**Integration of Women into the Flute Section of Orchestras from 1950 to the Present**

**Deborah Boersma**

**Honors Research Project**

**20 April 2006**

## *Introduction*

Historically, women were not always expected or even allowed to work outside the home. Even in the twenty-first century, there are some people in American society who continue to discriminate by sex. As unmerited assumptions and presumptions dictate the choices these people make on a daily basis, this affects women's personal and career goals for the future. At the beginning of the twentieth century most women worked in the home.<sup>1</sup> When men left to fight in World War II, however, that changed, as women were needed to take on other jobs in order to contribute to the war effort. In their initial forays into the job market women were driven by the cause of the war and because of the need to put food on the table for their families in the absence of husbands, brothers, and fathers. Regardless of the reason, by being a part of the workforce women began to view themselves differently, and men began to appreciate their contributions.

The progress that women have made in integrating themselves into various occupations is particularly evident in the world of instrumental music. Women have made great strides in becoming part of the elite group of orchestral musicians, a job once considered only appropriate for men, even making their way into the top five orchestras in the United States. For the purposes of this project, these five major orchestras are the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the Cleveland Orchestra. While other American orchestras maintain outstanding ensembles and employ talented musicians, these five orchestras are of the highest caliber and offer some of the most desirable orchestral positions.

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<sup>1</sup> Beth Abelson Macleod, *Women Performing Music* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers: 2001), 3-5.

In the interest of narrowing the field further, this paper looks specifically at the progress within the flute sections of these major orchestras, although much of the data included in this project represents the progress of female orchestral musicians in general. It includes the results and opinions obtained through interviews completed with professional flutists offering their perspectives on what they have encountered in their audition experiences for various orchestras. Also incorporated are their experiences as performers in various orchestras. Embedded in an interest in the integration of women into these top-tier orchestras are the answers telling when these changes occurred and why the changes that took place did at those points in history.

### *The Historical Context*

#### American symphony

orchestras first got their start in the second half of the nineteenth century. Figure 1 shows the founding year for each of the top five major orchestras considered for this research. At that time the only instruments acceptable for a woman

Orchestra	Year of Inception
New York Philharmonic Orchestra	1842
Boston Symphony Orchestra	1881
Chicago Symphony Orchestra	1891
Philadelphia Orchestra	1900
Cleveland Orchestra	1918

**Figure 1: Table of the Founding of Each of the Top Five American Orchestras**

to play in an orchestra were keyboard instruments and the harp. One reason for this, as Lucy Green points out in her book *Music, Gender, Education*, is that these instruments were acceptable for a woman to play because the female player could maintain an elegant posture while playing, not appearing to lesser advantage to anyone who happened to be watching.<sup>2</sup> In 1853, a child prodigy, Camilla Urso, proved she had great mastery of the violin at the young age

<sup>2</sup> Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1997), 52-72.

of eleven. As a result she opened the door for other female violinists to perform in public and for female musicians to perform on string instruments rather than only the harp and keyboard instruments. Urso, however, performed only as a soloist, never as a member of an orchestra.<sup>3</sup>

At this point in history there were ideologies and concerns held by more than a few people about women performing in orchestras. One particular concern regarding women in the orchestra was of having a mixed-sex workplace. Research on this topic, completed by Beth Abelson Macleod, found that wives feared that career women would lead their husbands astray, while husbands might have felt vulnerable if their wives vied for a position in the work place. Moreover, there was considerable debate as to the ability of women to maintain the stamina required to participate in long rehearsals and concerts.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless, women did begin joining orchestras, though not those considered to be among the most prestigious. Despite remaining objections, it is evident that the attitudes of audience members, musicians, and other members of the musical community were beginning to change. For example, in 1916, Leopold Stokowski, conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1912 through 1936, is quoted as describing the exclusion of female musicians as an “incomprehensible blunder.”<sup>5</sup> Following the eventual but reluctant acceptance of female string musicians to major orchestras years later, wind players began to appear as well. The flute was among the first wind instruments to be recognized as suitable for a woman to play. Again, this was because a woman did not lose all appearance of grace as she played so much as with an oboe or trombone, which caused a red and distorted face.<sup>6</sup> As with the string instruments,

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<sup>3</sup> Macleod, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Green, 52-73.

women never played the flute in a major orchestra at first, nevertheless, the initial steps had been taken for women to break into the world of all-male major orchestras in America.

Women musicians looked for other performing opportunities during the 1920s, as they were not able to become a part of more prominent orchestras. Noteworthy were the all-women's orchestras of the time. These groups encountered many problems, such as lack of low brass and double bass personnel, in addition to major funding concerns. More disturbing, however, was the need to market these groups as "oddities" for unique entertainment, and not as serious musicians with talent. One group that emphasized mixed gender roles was Caroline Nichols' Fadettes Orchestra, whose musicians wore very feminine gowns while playing the entire range of musical instruments. Another group that marketed themselves according to appearance rather than musical talent was billed as "Four Young Women Who Entertain Delightfully" who wore frilly dresses while holding their saxophones.<sup>7</sup>

As time passed women began to attend conservatories and to receive musical educations, creating more pressure to allow them into great orchestras. With the onset of World War II, many men left their musical employments to serve in the military. As there were few musically trained men left, women were hired to fill in the gaps in the orchestras. This was particularly true in regional and local orchestras that did not have the large endowments of the major orchestras.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately for women musicians, their employment in most cases was temporary, and as men returned from active duty, they were reinstated to their former positions within the orchestras. Some women, however, were able to retain their positions. Whether or not they were able to continue performing with an orchestra, women had established themselves

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<sup>7</sup> Macleod, 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 142.

as capable musicians. Both audience members and musicians alike realized that these women were excellent performers who could handle the stress and duration of rehearsals.

By becoming members of orchestras, women had taken a great step forward toward the regular and equal inclusion of female musicians. The attitude of most people in the musical community had evolved from the mentality that no women should perform in orchestras, to the point where women could be in orchestras, though not in principal positions. This was in accordance with the post World War II societal norms where women did not assume leadership roles when both men were present to fill those roles. Women had been voting for several decades now, and with that right came the Women's Bureau of the United States' Department of Labor, formed to collect information about working women and to safeguard good working conditions for women.<sup>9</sup> Despite lingering protests, progress was being made.

Until this point, flutists followed the lead of other female musicians, joining orchestras of various ranks, as they could, but never as a principal in a major orchestra. Following World War II, however, the paths of female musicians began to diverge based on what instrument they played, some instruments being a better vehicle for progress than others. In 1946, Harriet Peacock LeJeune was appointed principal flutist for the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra.<sup>10</sup> Though not considered one of the top five American orchestras at this time, this was a significant sign of the progress women were making in becoming a part of larger orchestras.

Finally, in 1952, Doriot Anthony Dwyer was appointed principal flutist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. This was especially significant because she was formerly the second flutist for the Los Angeles Philharmonic. For a performer to switch from performing as a second player to a first player on any instrument is rarely heard of, even into the twenty-first century, as

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<sup>9</sup> "Detailed Timeline," *Legacy '98*, 2002 <<http://www.legacy98.org/timeline.html>> (10 February 2006).

<sup>10</sup> H.P. LeJeune, "Letters: Dwyer, famous flutist, but not first", *Symphony Magazine* 39, no. 5-6 (1988): 6.

once a performer is assigned a role in the hierarchy of the orchestra, the individual tends to stay in that role even if moving to a different ensemble.<sup>11</sup> Dwyer's appointment, however, neither marked the end of sex biases in American society, nor did it cause a surge of the appointments of women in orchestras. She was, however, the first highly visible principal, appearing on stage and on televised concerts. As in many instances, after this breakthrough, other appointments followed.

### *Data*

Since Dwyer's appointment in 1952, many other changes have taken place to help the integration of women into orchestras. Laws such as the Equal Pay Act in June of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act imposed legal consequences on those who were otherwise unwilling to consider hiring women. Dwyer's appointment also signaled a change in the musical community concerning the acceptability of women in major orchestras. Kurt Loebel, violinist for the Cleveland Orchestra from 1947-1997, offers these thoughts:

For many years the Cleveland Orchestra had only one principal woman player—our harpist. That was then standard procedure all over the country. The Boston Symphony's acceptance of Doriot Anthony Dwyer as first flutist caused a mini-revolution. Perhaps it started a trend. If Boston had a woman first flutist, there was no reason not to have women in the Cleveland Orchestra. Szell was at first reluctant to hire women, but he was intelligent enough to realize if qualified women were catching on in the United States, he should go along with the times.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Deena Rosenberg and Bernard Rosenberg, *The Music Makers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 247.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 259.



Looking at data for the percentage of women in orchestras, it is clear that progress was still very slow immediately following Dwyer's appointment. In their article, "Orchestrating Impartiality: the Impact of 'Blind' Auditions on Female Musicians," economists Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse examine the rate at which women joined nine orchestras in the United States. Two graphs from their article, shown in Figure 2, show the proportion of women as new hires in the top orchestras, using roster samples obtained from those orchestras.

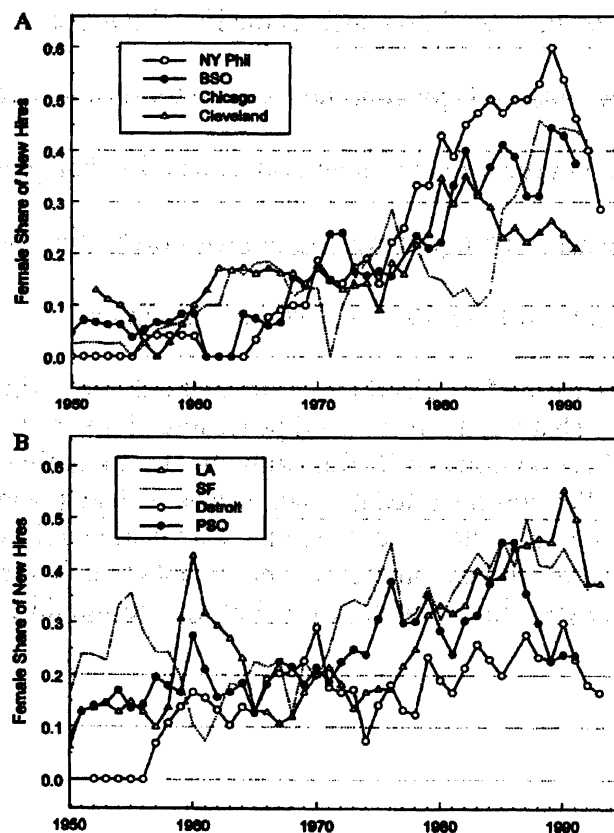


FIGURE 3. FEMALE SHARE OF NEW HIRES IN EIGHT ORCHESTRAS, 1950 TO 1990's  
A: FOUR OF THE "BIG FIVE"; B: FOUR OTHERS

Source: Roster sample. See text.

Notes: A five-year centered moving average is used. New hires are musicians who were not with the orchestra the previous year, who remain for at least one additional year, and who were not substitute musicians in the current year.

Figure 2: Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse, "Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of "Blind" Auditions on Female Musicians," *American Economic Review* 90, no. 4 (Sept 2000): 720.

It is evident that for the four major American orchestras included, the proportion of women remains low, generally less than ten percent through 1960, at which point it begins to rise gradually before a dramatic increase occurs in the mid-1970s. For the other orchestras shown, the increase is less dramatic and occurs over a longer period of time, though achieving the same approximate rate in the 1990s of between thirty and forty percent.

Before these data can be further analyzed, it is important to understand the career path of professional musicians. In the highest-ranking orchestras, groups that have large endowments and stable audiences, positions are highly coveted. Auditions are extremely competitive, particularly for wind musicians where there are only three or four permanent seats per orchestra. Also, there is an extremely low turnover rate for these positions, as once people are in these orchestras, they generally stay there. It is considered a high point of one's career as an orchestral musician to be a part of these groups.

This explains, in part, the slow progress made in integrating women into orchestras—particularly the stagnant zeros seen in the graphs in Figure 2 during the early 1950s. Goldin and Rouse conclude, however, as shown by these graphs, “there is a discernable increase for the group as a whole in the late 1970's to early 1980's.”<sup>13</sup> In seeking possible reasons for this change, they looked for a comparable sudden increase in the number of female music students graduating from music schools. Using data from the Juilliard School of Music, they were unable to find evidence in support of this theory. Though they were unable to obtain data from other established music schools, they assumed there was no reason to suspect that the figures would differ according to the institution studied.

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13 Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse, “Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of “Blind” Auditions on Female Musicians.” *American Economic Review* 90, no. 4 (Sept 2000): 719.

They next turned to examine the hiring practices of these orchestras. Of primary importance seems to have been the use of a screen during the audition process. The screen “conceals the identity of the musician auditioning, [which] could eliminate the possibility of discrimination and increase the number of women in orchestras.”<sup>14</sup> From the table in Figure 3, Goldin and Rouse draw the conclusion of how much greater the possibility of hire becomes for a woman when a screen is used during the audition process. In this table, they track the statistics of average audition success by musicians who appear more than once in their sample, and for whom at least one audition (or round) used a screen and one audition (or round) did not use a screen.

TABLE 4—AVERAGE SUCCESS AT AUDITIONS BY SEX, YEAR, AND ROUND OF AUDITION

Year	Relative female success		
	All auditions	Completely blind auditions	Not completely blind auditions
All	-0.001 (0.008)	-0.022 (0.012)	0.006 (0.010)
Pre-1970	0.053 (0.115)		0.053 (0.115)
1970-1979	0.001 (0.021)		0.001 (0.021)
1980-1989	-0.006 (0.009)	-0.039 (0.016)	0.010 (0.009)
1990+	-0.003 (0.010)	-0.001 (0.017)	-0.003 (0.013)
Round	All rounds	Blind rounds	Not-blind rounds
Preliminaries, without semifinals	-0.032 (0.019)	-0.048 (0.021)	0.012 (0.040)
Preliminaries, with semifinals	-0.048 (0.016)	-0.052 (0.016)	0.116 (0.228)
Semifinals	-0.030 (0.038)	-0.059 (0.044)	0.071 (0.080)
Finals	0.009 (0.036)	-0.028 (0.102)	0.016 (0.038)

Notes: For the top part of the table “success” is a “hire,” whereas for the bottom portion “success” is advancement from one stage of an audition to the next. The unit of observation for the top portion is the audition, whereas it is the round for the bottom portion (e.g., relative female success in the top portion of the table is averaged across the auditions). Standard errors are in parentheses. “Relative female success” is the proportion of women advanced (or hired) minus the proportion of men advanced (or hired). By hired, we mean those who were advanced from the final round out of the entire audition. Source: Eight-orchestra audition sample. See text.

Figure 3: Goldin and Rouse, 727.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 720-721.

These results are low due to the small chance that a person will actually win an audition. In the table, Goldin and Rouse show the average success a woman will have of winning any audition broken down by year in the top half, and by round in the bottom half. They further break down these data by use of a screen, whether it was used throughout the audition process or if it was used during only part or none of the audition rounds. Through many other statistical procedures, Goldin and Rouse control other variables, such as changes in musical ability by the musicians over time and differing auditioning procedures by different orchestras. Regardless, the statistics unveiled the same results: "...the blind procedure has a positive effect on women's advancement [towards a hire in an orchestra]."<sup>15</sup>

Another change that occurred in the audition process was one regarding the decision-making procedure used in orchestras in general. Rather than being entirely at the discretion of the music director, the selection of new musicians became a more democratized practice.

Current members of the orchestra are now often involved in the auditions and make recommendations for the hire, though the music director generally is present for the final round of auditions and makes the final decision.

Important to recognize in Goldin and Rouse's work is something they acknowledge themselves. They state:

[a] strong presumption exists that discrimination has limited the employment of female musicians, especially by the great symphony orchestras. Not only were their numbers extremely low until the 1970s, but many music directors, ultimately in charge of hiring new musicians, publicly disclosed their belief that female players had lower musical talent.<sup>16</sup>

Despite possible objections to their research, they assert that the weight of the evidence demonstrates that discrimination existed in the hiring practices of orchestras. They further

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 733.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 739.

conclude that the use of a screen during the audition processes, the democratization of the selection process by gathering input from other musicians within the orchestras, and a growing acceptance of female musicians, have been important factors in changing these statistics. To summarize their findings, they state:

We find, using the audition data, that the screen increases—by 50 percent—the probability that a woman will be advanced from certain preliminary rounds and increases by several fold the likelihood that a woman will be selected in the final round. Using the roster data, the switch to blind auditions can explain 30 percent of the increase in the proportion female among new hires and possibly 25 percent of the increase in the percentage female in the orchestras from 1970 to 1996... We conclude that the adoption of the screen and blind auditions served to help female musicians in their quest for orchestral positions.<sup>17</sup>

This supports the information that is displayed in the graph in Figure 4, which is specific to flutists alone. Following a trend among orchestral musicians, female flutists have become increasingly successful in their quest to become recognized as great orchestral flutists.

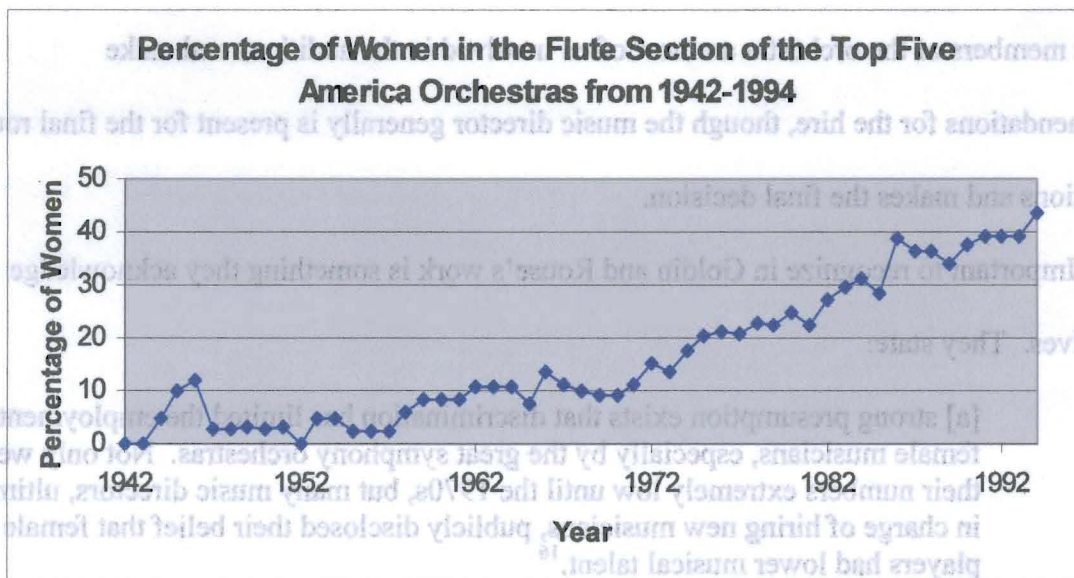


Figure 4: Cecilia Rouse, <rouse@princeton.edu> " Re: 'Orchestrating Impartiality,'" 28 February 2006, personal e-mail, (28 February 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 739-740.

Despite all of the changes that have been made in the hiring of new orchestral musicians, there exists a belief, perhaps a misconception, that women still must make a conscious effort to protect themselves from discrimination in hiring practices. In an article written by Steve Anderson, Lauren Rico (host of Minnesota Public Radio's *Classic 24*) is interviewed, and offers some enlightening strategies for auditions. She suggests using a carpet leading up to the screen, so as to muffle any distinctive sounds that shoes might make on the floor. Female students are advised to wear flat shoes, not to wear perfume, and to use special techniques while breathing as they play to disguise their sex, which could prevent them from getting a job.<sup>18</sup>

### *Personnel Input*

Beyond the integration of women in orchestras, it is also important to consider how women were treated as musicians once an orchestra hired them. For this female orchestral musicians must be consulted. Female flutists who were among the first wind players to be accepted into the fold of the elite major orchestras would have some insights to share about how things were and how they have changed. For purposes of this research, four female professional flutists were interviewed including Professor Katherine Borst Jones, currently on the faculty of Ohio State University, Deborah Baron of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Dr. Kimberly McCoull Risinger, principal flutist for the Illinois Symphony Orchestra and Associate Professor of Flute for the School of Music at Illinois State University, and Doriot Anthony Dwyer, former principal flutist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Although not further cited, Borst Jones and Baron responded to questions that support the views of their colleagues. Additionally, previous interviews with other female flutists were consulted to obtain the results presented here.

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<sup>18</sup> Steve Anderson, "Trial by Footwear." *Inside MPR*. March 2001.

The span of these players' auditions ranges from the late 1970s, through the 1990s. Therefore, their experiences reflect the changes that were taking place in the auditioning process (for American orchestras only). In most cases, American orchestral auditions were found to have had multiple rounds with a screen used for the preliminary round or rounds, but not for the finals. This confirms the scenarios discussed by Goldin and Rouse.

When questioned about encountering biases, these women generally felt they had never encountered any instances of discrimination, and that the opportunities for women and men were the same. Risinger shared her impression of what occurs when there are male flutists at festivals:

Men flutists seem to get instant respect. They draw attention from others because they are uncommon. In addition, the men flutists out there are very good—Galway and Rampal for example. However, once they play [men flutists] then it becomes all about the playing and any preconceived thoughts are done away with.<sup>19</sup>

She also addresses the ramifications of male dominance in the position of music director for major orchestras, and that sometimes conductors have a predetermined choice. Most recently, the hire for principal flutist for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra was a man that the conductor knew previously and particularly liked his playing. This does not imply that the choice was made unfairly as to sex or that the man hired was not the right musician for the job. As sociological studies have demonstrated, particularly those regarding networking, some level of social influence is often involved in hiring practices, as men generally network with other men, while women network more with other women.<sup>20</sup>

Flutist Doriot Anthony Dwyer, the first woman to be appointed principal of a major orchestra, offered valuable insight in this area. Significantly, her audition experience took place before the implementation of the screen or the more democratized system of hiring new

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<sup>19</sup> Dr. Kimberly McCoul Risinger, personal phone interview, 9 February 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, *Women Don't Ask* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 151-153.

musicians to the orchestras, thus her view is different than other flutists considered here. As previously mentioned, prior to Dwyer's appointment with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, she was the second flutist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. Prior to that she was part of a wealthy patron's private orchestra in California. While she was in this position, those close to her were surprised by her desire to become the first flutist with a major orchestra. This curiosity seemed to stem primarily from the fact that it was unusual for a woman to desire advancement of her career or to express her career goals. When Dwyer decided that she wanted to audition for the job in Los Angeles, her colleagues expressed interest, asking her why she was unhappy playing in the private orchestra. While this demonstrates the attitude that women did not usually have careers of their own at that time, it also reflects the concern that people had for her and her happiness rather than a determined oppression of her spirit.

After spending six years with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Ms. Dwyer heard about the opening with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. While she was preparing for the audition, she realized, as many women do, the importance of having male connections to recommend her to the people who would determine who was appointed to the position. The highly respected conductor Bruno Walter, and the world-renowned violinist Isaac Stern, wrote letters to Charles Munch, the new music director in Boston on her behalf. Despite her talent and high recommendations, she approached the audition with the assumption that, as had been the case in the past for principal positions, the music director and administration were saving the job for a European man regardless of how she played. In telling the story of her audition, she emphasized how kind everyone was to her and how much she actually enjoyed the experience because she did not hold back any emotion as she played, intent on playing a perfect audition for herself. Though she mentioned a very personal question put to her by the personnel manager regarding



her life plans should she marry, she was not put off by him, and told him only that it was not any of his business and that he would never ask a man such a question.<sup>21</sup>

As she expected, they did have a man from Europe in mind. When the personnel manager went to the New York musicians' union to get the green card for him, however, the union told him no, they would have to hire whomever they had been auditioning in the United States. When asked what he wanted done, Maestro Munch said, "In that case, I want Doriot." Through this set of unusual circumstances, Dwyer was hired. This sent a wave of shock through the musical community, as it broke a tradition that, though unsound, had persisted for many years. Additionally, this demonstrates the role played by past precedence involving the hire of musicians and the importance of knowing someone and networking rather than strictly musical ability.

When questioned as to whether she had ever encountered any trouble due to her sex during her time with the Boston Symphony, Dwyer again emphasized the positive aspects of her experience. She thought the other musicians were always very nice, but she also tried to stay out of harms way some of the time and give them their space during breaks and other down time. "Not everybody was perfect all the time," she says. Sometimes, "they don't realize some of the things that they are saying," but that it was "an unusual orchestra with lots of European and American gentlemen who were fine players and good-hearted."<sup>22</sup>

Dwyer's sentiments regarding the continual kindness with which she was treated coincide with Risinger's comments about the current attitudes of musicians towards women. Most want to be kind and fair. Attitudes change slowly in the convention bound field of music; however, when talent is present it will eventually overtake prejudice.

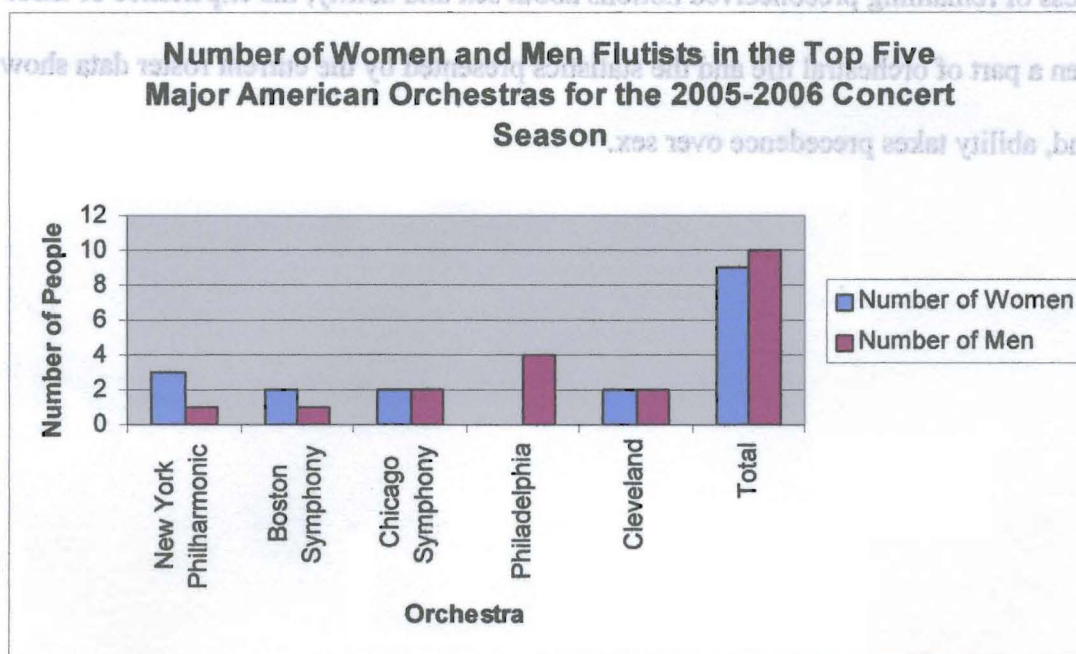
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<sup>21</sup> Doriot Anthony Dwyer, personal phone interview, 18 February 2006.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

*Conclusion* These articles continue to question the propriety, the

At the start of the 2005-2006 concert season, each of the top five major American Orchestras had posted rosters that produced the sex distribution displayed in the graph in Figure 5. Of the nineteen elite positions shown by the graph, just under half are currently held by women. From these data alone, the progress female flutists have made in changing the face of orchestras is remarkable. However, only one of these five orchestras has a woman as principal



**Figure 5: Number of Women and Men Flutists in the Top Five Major American Orchestras for the 2005-2006 Concert Season**

flutist. This is an indication of changes still to come, and of lingering attitudes about leadership roles in any social context that will continue to evolve with time.

As the goals of women in society have evolved, the perceptions of what they are capable of doing for society have changed. Articles were published as late as 1982 debating women working in the public sphere. One such article was entitled, "Women in Orchestras: The

Promise and the Problems.”<sup>23</sup> These articles continue to question the propriety, the legitimacy, and the right of women to perform with an ensemble of talented musicians. Fortunately, enlightened public opinion continues to grow entering the twenty-first century. The concept of the career woman is neither novel nor is it unique to a few women with no other choice, but is something that is expected of women in all segments of society, including music. Women will continue to make their presence and their talents known to an ever more receptive world. Regardless of remaining preconceived notions about sex and ability, the experience of those who have been a part of orchestral life and the statistics presented by the current roster data show that in the end, ability takes precedence over sex.

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<sup>23</sup> Phyllis Lehmann, “Women in Orchestras: The Promise and the Problems,” *Symphony Magazine* 33, no. 6 (December 1982): 11-15+.

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