

Salvatore Martirano, 1927-1995

As a gas-masked "politico" squeals Lincoln's Gettysburg Address through helium, films flash by of a man masturbating, and a toy tank driving over a woman's naked torso. These were among the more provocative images from *L's CA*, the 1968 multimedia classic by Salvatore Martirano, salty renegade of the University of Illinois music department. That piece may have been Sal's most outrageous transgression, but he made a career drawing outside the lines. Two decades before style collage became a Downtown cliché, he mixed serialism, jazz, and nightclub music in his *Ballad and O, O, O, O, That Shakespeherian Rag*. In recent years his work became more introverted, and he pioneered a live computer-improv system, called the *Sal Mar Construction*, so complex no one seemed to understand it. With one foot in 12-tone music, one in jazz, and a third in the stratosphere, he was one of those great Midwestern originals that the coasts routinely overlook. And he died November 17 at 68.

-K.G.

Improper Ladies

Women Composers Shatter the Glass (Ceiling)

BY KYLE GANN

While Clara Schumann was a historically important pianist, she never realized her potential as a composer. She's in the textbooks as a token, though, and I told my Intro to Music class that I refused to pretend she wrote great music; instead, I would tell them about the dozens of excellent women composers

that the texts don't mention. In fact, poor Clara strikes me as a sort of red herring tossed in to avoid dealing with all the women who pose a challenge to today's classical-music establishment. So, using no other reference than my CD collection, I made a list of more than 80 women composers whose work I enjoy and played as many as I could in 80 minutes.

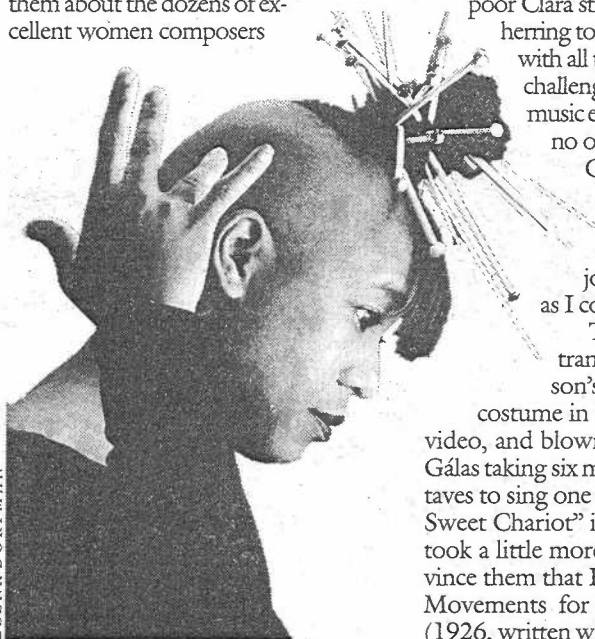
The class was entranced by Laurie Anderson's sound-producing costume in her *Home of the Brave* video, and blown away by Diamanda Galás taking six minutes and several octaves to sing one verse of "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" in her *Plague Mass*. It took a little more explanation to convince them that Ruth Crawford's Two Movements for Chamber Orchestra (1926, written when she was 25) was a precocious achievement. Janice Giteck's

Om Shanti, its harmonies swirling in place, seemed to make a good impression, and it's always fun describing the eccentric Maryanne Amacher's labyrinthine, ear-blasting noise installations. Students were charmed by Laetitia Sonami's computer-triggering narratives, as well as by Eve Beglarian's cynical description of New York over a noisy, rock-pounding sampled background in *No Man's Land*. More people than I expected recognized the source of the opening growl in Annea Lockwood's seminal tape piece *Tiger Balm*—it's an amplified cat's purr.

Given today's uptight campus atmosphere, I was nervous about playing a snippet from Maria de Alvear's *Sexo*, an hour-long monologue in which, over intense orchestral chords, the composer harangues about sex in four languages; luckily, the risqué passages weren't in English. And I didn't point out what seems obvious about Laurie Spiegel's fizzlingly sophisticated electronic textures, that they seem to follow the momentum of the female orgasm. (In my experience, college students resist accepting how pervasively sexuality configures the outer world.) Susan Parenti's tape pieces exposing the rhythm of women's self-deprecating speech patterns may have sped

a few listeners on the road to social enlightenment, and for a good, conservative orchestral colorist I played Nancy Van de Vate's *Journeys*. Dozens giggled profusely at Pamela Z and the Qube Chix singing "I Want a Bald Boyfriend": "I want a man who's well behaved/who's neat and clean, whose head is shaved." I wanted to impress on them that there are women today writing relevant, accessible, infectious music, and I think I did.

At the end I pulled maybe a dirty trick: to demonstrate what it takes for a woman to get accepted by the establishment, I played excerpts by the two women Pulitzer Prize winners. After Galás's maniacal intensity and Meredith Monk's stunning vocalese, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's Concerto Grosso sounded like a washed-out and decades-late rehash of Stravinsky, while Shulamit Ran's *Hyperbolae* was indistinguishable from a thousand other prickly 12-tone pieces. The academic-classical establishment can't accept originality coming from a woman, I explained, and rewards only those composers who feebly imitate their male teachers. But the disappointment on students' faces as they listened showed that the music had made the point more eloquently than I could. ❖



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