

Celebrating Women’s History of Month: Judith Lynn Stillman’s “Women of Note” film and concert event



After a positive reception last November, Judith Lynn Stillman will be screening her film “Women Trailblazers in Music” for an encore event in honor of Women’s History Month.

Stillman is Rhode Island College’s artist-in-residence and a professor of music. She’s won numerous awards for her compositions, films, and projects including, most recently, Honored Artist by The American Prize for her work as a pianist and composer. In February Stillman also completed composing and performing the score for a short Hollywood film.

“Women Trailblazers in Music” depicts the lives of extraordinary female composers across twelve centuries and highlights their revolutionary but often overlooked compositions.

The Women of Note event consists of the encore film screening followed by a live concert on March 16 from 12:30 to 2:30 pm in Sapinsley Hall at the Nazarian Center.

“We have several thrilling additions to our concert, including multidisciplinary works spotlighting two brilliant guest artists,” Stillman says.

Bessie Award-winning dancer **Shani Collins**, currently a visiting artist at the University of Ghana, will premiere her newly-choreographed dance to music by Melanie Bonis, an underexposed female composer who wrote during the late Romantic period.

The other premiere performance features **Valerie Tutson**, director of Rhode Island Black Storytellers, in a composition by Stillman for spoken word interlaced with music. "Tutson and Collins are amazing. I'm honored to be working with these remarkably talented artists," says Stillman.

Also performing with Stillman are **Charles Dimmick**, the concertmaster of the Rhode Island Philharmonic; **Steven Laven**, principal cellist of Pro Arte Orchestra; and Rhode Island College faculty members **Michael De Quattro**, **Joseph Foley**, **Ian Greitzer**, **Mary Ellen Kregler** and **Lori Phillips**.

Stillman sees the event as an opportunity to make music with her colleagues, share her film and champion female composers for Women's History Month.

"They were forced to remain in the shadows of men, but they were equally talented," she notes. "Their innovative masterpieces are imaginative, passionate, and heartfelt - and they're a joy to play."

While there have been significant improvements since the times of some of the women highlighted in her film, Stillman emphasizes that the music industry is still rife with systemic inequities for women. In particular, she notes lower pay, harassment, ageism and unfair bias against women, which leads to fewer women finding success in the industry; this is a cycle that results in fewer female role models for future generations.

"It's difficult to revamp earlier periods of music history, but we can shift the paradigm," notes Stillman. "By examining the past, we can hope to change the shape of the future. We need to shine a light on historical gender discrimination and existing problems as well. We're making headway, but systemic challenges remain. I think the best way to effect change is through education."

Her personal connection to the film makes it even more meaningful for her. "My mother and grandmother were extraordinarily talented opera singers," Stillman shares. "Their careers were thwarted due to the politics of their existence, which fostered stereotypical women's roles of the era and expectations that their lives would be a certain way."

Stillman's grandmother was even asked to perform at the Metropolitan Opera as a young woman, but her stepfather forbade her.

Though her mother and grandmother were unable to pursue their musical dreams, they encouraged Stillman. "I was blessed to have their support and encouragement throughout my life and through the development of my career continuously from early childhood onward. It was the dawning of a new era. Many of my compositions are for women's voices, perhaps because I've felt compelled to try to redress the imbalance illuminated by my family's history."

In addition to in-person attendance, Stillman is offering a live stream link to schools, and Anchor TV at RIC plans to show the live concert. The event will also be live-streamed to the University of Ghana.

The "Women of Note" film and concert event is free to the public, but attendees must register in advance and abide by all COVID-19 guidelines. For free tickets, [click here](#).

Attendees must wear masks and present proof of full vaccination (two shots of Moderna or Pfizer vaccines and a booster if eligible) or a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken in the previous 72 hours or a negative COVID-19 antigen test taken in the previous 6 hours. (At-home tests are not accepted.)