The decapitation of octogenarians might be greeted as a democratic measure on grounds just as logical as womanhood suffrage.

*The Bulletin, 20 Oct. 1900*

Likening women’s suffrage to the decapitation of octogenarians might nowadays seem extreme, but the above quote indicates that such was the mood of the times in *fin de siècle* Melbourne. In a society undergoing rapid change, the Woman Question centred on women’s suffrage but penetrated every area of society. The role of the Woman Question in social, political, and literary debate is well-known, yet it also manifested strongly in the world of music. In fact, music played a crucial role in enabling the ‘New Woman’ to break the confines of the family home and the separate spheres.¹ In this article, I offer some notable examples of such women musicians and address some of the reasons why their work as composers, improvisers, performers, and teachers remains unrecognised and underestimated. Arguments testifying to their profound and lasting legacy are put forward, and some suggestions made for how their work may be restored to its rightful place in history.

¹ See, for example, Christina Crosby, *The Ends of History: Victorians and the ‘Woman Question’* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
This article draws upon my work as a Creative Fellow at the State Library of Victoria from January to August 2016. The aim of the fellowship was to bring to life (through research, performance, and publication) the work of Australian women composers, focussing on late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century Melbourne. This research revealed a hidden network of activity by women musicians, which was fundamental to the cultural life of the city and, as the following discussion will demonstrate, saw the production of a number of high-quality creative outputs.

Setting the context, much of the writing on the topic of colonial culture has judged Australian composers to be rare and their work insignificant. Women composers (if they existed at all) were considered inferior—even in comparison with their generally unimpressive male counterparts. During her own time, the nineteenth-century woman had battles to fight on many fronts, and composing music was a comparatively minor one. She was expected to remain within the feminine sphere of womanly duties as a homemaker and child-bearer at a time when women bore an average of four children in the 1870s (dropping to three children by 1901) and hospital records show that domestic violence was rife. The fertility transition to lower birth rates, taking place across the Western world in the final decades of the nineteenth century, signified a gradual emancipation for women, and this has been described as a ‘quiet revolution’. Alongside this, a quiet revolution was also occurring in the arts, and women composers—though quiet or hidden—were able to develop their art to high levels.

As a composing woman, to venture outside of the feminine sphere took great courage (in many ways as brave as their more militant sisters in suffragette organisations). The following quote from the *Musical Times* in 1882 is a potent illustration of what they faced as composers:

> Forgetfulness of this fundamental rule [of womanly duties] not only wounds decency … but troubles the economy of God’s work. A woman who, when taking a pencil, pen or music-sheet, forgets what are the character and obligations of her sex is a monster who excites disgust and repulsion … They are neither men nor women, but something which has no name and no part in life.

Composing music, especially large-scale, ‘serious’ music, was considered to belong to the masculine realm, making it difficult for women to gain the necessary practical experience in managing the demands of large forces. Despite this, many women succeeded and produced

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2 The performances were part of the ‘Buried Treasure’ concert series that I curated and which took place at the State Library of Victoria on 4, 11, and 21 Aug. 2016. The concerts featured the work of some of the women composers whose music I discovered in the library archives. Due to the absence of a piano in the library, I arranged the songs for harp (played by Jacinta Dennet) with soprano (Merlyn Quaife) and myself on flute. Re-publications of some of the composers’ works are currently in progress.

3 See Geoffrey Serle, *From the Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia 1788–1972* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1973), 79. Serle comments here that: ‘There was no musical composition of significance’ during this period. Also, Thérèse Radic comments that: ‘Australian composers were very rare birds indeed. On the few occasions one was spotted, its colonial status embarrassed listeners’ and ‘a woman composer was as puzzling and as miraculous as a heat mirage in a desert.’ See Thérèse Radic, ‘Composing Women, Setting the Record Straight,’ *Repercussions: Australian Women’s Festival and Conference 1994*, ed. Thérèse Radic (National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, 1995), 52.


an astonishing array of works. If we are to refute the claims about the rarity and insignificance of their work, we need firstly to understand the context in which they lived their daily lives. This leads not only to a discussion of the hidden history of women’s work but also to the very concept of hidden history itself.

It is ironic that the concept of hidden histories has become so pervasive. Histories of less visible or oppressed peoples of different ethnicity, gender, or social class are peppered across academic journals and the popular press. The terminology hints at a desire to fill in the gaps in our knowledge and gain a better understanding of social processes that empower some at the cost of disenfranchising others. An interesting aspect of the paradigm shift from ‘great figure’ historical accounts to the private lives of the less visible or seemingly unremarkable is that it reveals the opposite of what we might expect: the ordinary is revealed as extraordinary. This is certainly the case with the women to be discussed in this article: Emily Patton (1831–1912), Georgette Peterson (1863–1947), and Florence Donaldson Ewart (1864–1949).

The reasons why women’s creative work constitutes a hidden history are complex. In some ways, the act of hiding represents both the problem and the solution. It may have come about through a climate of oppression and inequality, but it also offered a means of protection because by avoiding the spotlight, women could escape the interference of detractors. This cloak of invisibility hid the true value of their work, but it also gave them a measure of freedom with which they could hone their craft relatively unimpeded.

As is already well documented, nineteenth-century feminine etiquette dictated that the graceless poses of on-stage public performance (on instruments such as the flute or cello) and the composing of ‘masculine’ music was inappropriate. Consequently, aspiring women musicians often sought other avenues to develop and express themselves such as: the privacy of their own home as teachers (as Emily Patton did); providing informal entertainment for family and friends; in a select women’s group like the St Cecilia Music Club (discussed below); or, simply composing for the sheer joy of the act of creation itself without realistic hope of public performance or financial recompense (as was the case with Florence Ewart). Sometimes, if a female composer’s work was to be displayed publicly, it was more easily done in the safety of numbers and in the context of womanly duties such as needlecraft and homemaking, as happened at the Women’s Work Exhibition in Melbourne in 1907. Although this was a showcase for women, the large numbers involved created a sense of anonymity for many of the women. Thus, the life of a female composer was full of contradictions.

The context in which a musical event was presented was important because it could provide a sense of legitimacy for women’s work. For example, if, in the nurturing role of a teacher, a woman was to compose pieces for a pupil, this was not seen to be as threatening to society as the more publicly-visible act of having an original orchestral piece performed. In addition to imparting knowledge to one’s pupils, teaching provided an avenue to hone and test one’s compositional skills. In the colonies, the lack of readily-available teaching resources made this a necessity.

It is important to acknowledge here that the rigid distinctions that exist today between composers, improvisers, and performers were far more fluid in the nineteenth century—an

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argument that has been well demonstrated by scholars such as John Whiteoak. If we limit our search to the category ‘women composers’ we exclude all the composing that was done by performers/improvisers and teachers. Furthermore, the modern-day artificial separation between improvisers and composers has led to improvisation being sometimes seen as inferior to that of classical composition or high art, thereby excluding many contenders from the honoured title of ‘composer.’ The art of arranging is also an important aspect of compositional craft that is often overlooked, yet it was an essential skill at a time when printed music and parts were more difficult to come by. If we remain open to all these manifestations of creative activity undertaken by women, then a rich tapestry of creative output begins to unfurl.

There is another important aspect to this background discussion of hidden identities, and this relates to the way social groups function collectively. As individuals, it may seem that women were limited in their ability to influence the world around them; yet as a group, in their roles of mothers and teachers, it can be argued they in fact wielded considerable power, even if it was not overt. This idea was put forward by American feminist historian Gerda Lerner, who argues that the ‘history of the mass of women is just as important as individual stand-outs’ and that a wider perspective (as I have taken in this article) is needed in order to understand the experiences of women, inclusive of different social classes and across generations. An example of this is the broad expectation throughout the nineteenth century (and into the twentieth) that the combined effect of women’s inherently nurturing natures would exert a positive, correcting influence on society. In contrast to the journalist whose satirical statement headed this article, a writer in the Bulletin in 1902 contemplated women’s future role in a more positive light:

The outlook for the Australian character is not bright ... There is strong reason to hope, however, that women, politically enfranchised and reaching in time (no doubt), industrially and intellectually, a very high plane, will interfere to correct any tendency to moral decadence.

The journalist was expressing a commonly-held opinion that the virtuous woman (or women as a group) had the power to morally transform society. This takes on greater significance in a society with brutal convict origins (within a century of living memory at the time) and a seeming indifference to the higher pursuits in life—an aspect of the Australian character that was frequently commented upon by writers throughout the nineteenth century. For example, journalist James Hogan believed that an inherent ‘dislike of mental effort’ meant that Australians would never make significant contributions to literature, science, or art.

Another theme from the earliest days of colonisation was the idea that music itself had a powerful correcting influence. In response to a series of amateur concerts, a reviewer in Sydney commented in 1827:

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12 This way of thinking derives from the philosophy of John Ruskin, whose moral aesthetic was popular in Britain in the mid-1800s. See Richard White, Inventing Australia (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 60.
Melbourne’s Colonial Women Composers

We feel much gratified at the success of this zealous attempt to promote public sociability through the medium of so innocent a recreation as a concert of well-selected music in which, if the accompanying poetry be chastely selected, the minds of men may certainly be softened and subdued.\(^{13}\)

Thus, as a female musician, a woman was doubly endowed to have a positive influence on society, and this was an opportunity that many women seized with vigour because it also provided a means to self-advancement. As Anne Wentzel has shown, the first teachers of piano and harmony in the colonies were women.\(^{14}\) Singing was considered an essential accomplishment for women throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, providing a socially condoned context to develop one’s expertise. From the earliest days of colonisation, women were to be found working quietly alongside their famous husbands, fathers, and brothers, named only indirectly in association with their male relatives; for example, in the families of John Phillip Deane (1796–1849), William Vincent Wallace (1812–1865), Isaac Nathan (1790–1864), and Joseph Gautrot (d. 1854), women helped to found conservatoriums and music academies, run music libraries, teach, and perform. As such, they played a vital role in establishing a concert tradition in the new country.\(^{15}\) Mrs Wallace, for example, co-founded the first music academy in Australia (in Sydney in the 1820s).\(^{16}\) All these women, who remain unnamed and unknown in their own right, are deserving of study; however, for practical purposes, the focus here is on the late-colonial era (1880–1907).\(^{17}\) Reference will be made, nevertheless, to the periods before and after, in order to gain an understanding of the context and long-term legacy of these women.

As evidence of the nature and extent of women’s work, the list of occupations in the *Victorian Yearbook of 1888* (Table 1) shows a clear division of roles and highlights the impact of women as a social group—their ‘mass’ history (as mentioned above in relation to Gerda Lerner). The table shows that from a total population of approximately one million people, women living in Victoria outnumbered men in occupations involved with ‘ministering to education’ (5069: 3334) and ‘entertaining and clothing’ (32,851: 18,534).\(^{18}\) Hence, the number of women working in education and entertainment represents a large and arguably influential cross-section of society (37,920 women). Added to this, Wray Vamplew has shown that between 1872 and 1905, the numbers of women teaching in state and private schools in Victoria also far outnumbered men.\(^{19}\) It is reasonable then to infer from these figures that ‘groups’ of women had the potential to influence the society around them even whilst, as individuals, they wielded little overt power.

\(^{13}\) Anne Wentzel, ‘The First Hundred Years of Music in Australia’ (MMus thesis, University of Sydney, 1963), 15.

\(^{14}\) Wentzel, ‘First Hundred Years,’ 29.


\(^{17}\) The end date of 1907 marks the watershed movement of the Women’s Work Exhibition in Melbourne.

\(^{18}\) The exact meaning of this category of ‘ministering to entertaining and clothing’ is not explained in the Yearbook. It can be inferred, however, that it applies to entertainment in the home (e.g. playing the piano) and maintaining the family’s clothing (e.g. sewing and dressmaking).

Table 1. ‘Occupations of the people about the middle of 1888 (estimated),’ reproduced from Henry Heylyn Hayter (Government Statist of Victoria), *Victorian Yearbook 1888–1889*, vol. I (Melbourne: Government Printer, Sands and McDougall Ltd., 1889), 55.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupations of the people</th>
<th>Mean population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministering to Government</td>
<td>5933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministering to religion</td>
<td>1356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministering to health</td>
<td>2430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministering to law</td>
<td>1582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministering to education</td>
<td>3334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministering to art, science and literature</td>
<td>3277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traders</td>
<td>18,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting in exchange of money or commodities</td>
<td>8363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministering to entertaining and clothing</td>
<td>18,534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic servants</td>
<td>3673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractors, artisans, and mechanics</td>
<td>57,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miners</td>
<td>25,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in pursuits subsidiary to mining</td>
<td>1074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in pastoral pursuits and agriculture</td>
<td>97,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in pursuits subsidiary to grazing and agriculture</td>
<td>4181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in land carriage</td>
<td>18,195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in sea navigation</td>
<td>4125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing in food</td>
<td>17,517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td>30,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in miscellaneous pursuits</td>
<td>1187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives, widows, children, relatives, scholars</td>
<td>209,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public burthen [archaic form of the word ‘burden’]</td>
<td>7911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of no occupation</td>
<td>1526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>19,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>565,065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, by the late 1880s, women’s level of literacy appears to have been comparable to men (although this is not an easy statistic to verify). As an indication, in 1888, the number of people who signed their marriage certificates with a mark (rather than a signature) was 1 in 81 for women and 1 in 72 for men. The number of people who had a level of music literacy (being able to play but not necessarily read) was probably higher again, if we can trust reports at the time regarding the preponderance of pianos in the colonies. Oscar Comettant, the French juror at the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1888, claimed that ‘there is [no country in

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the world] that has more grand pianos per head of population.’21 Many writers—then and now—also noted that it was mostly women who played them. As Thérèse Radic observed, ‘the virtue of the piano-playing girl could literally be heard all over the house.’22 It was for girls such as this, and their families, that Emily Patton wrote her manual on improvisation.

**A Woman’s Work … Is Easily Forgotten**

The life and achievements of Emily Sophia Patton, née Holroyd, are an example of the seemingly ordinary revealing itself as extraordinary. Robin Stevens, in his article ‘Emily Patton: An Australian Pioneer of Tonic Sol-fa in Japan’ describes her as one of the nineteenth century’s ‘outstanding figures in music education.’23

Emily was born in London in 1831, the daughter of Arthur and Sophia Holroyd. Her father was a physician and lawyer who immigrated with his wife and daughter to New Zealand in 1835 and then to New South Wales in 1845, where he was admitted to the bar and later served as a government minister. At the age of 22, Emily married Frederick Terry and they settled in Melbourne in 1855. Her husband died three years later, and Emily became an actress with G.V. Brook’s Theatre Company. She met and married her second husband, Horatio Patton, in 1860. At her husband’s insistence, she left the stage. For the next fifteen years, her life centred on the rearing of her two children, Reginald Holroyd (born in 1864) and Laura Gwendoline (1868–?). Stevens reports that by the mid-1870s, she had re-established herself as a teacher of keyboard harmony and improvised accompaniment.24

One of Patton’s most significant achievements was her book *Harmony Simplified for Popular Use: An Original Method of Applying the First Principles of Harmony to the Object of Accompanying the Voice on the Pianoforte*, published in 1880.25 John Whiteoak describes Patton’s manual as ‘possibly the first colonial publication to deal specifically with improvisation’ and ‘a modest watershed in colonial thinking.’26 Her manual was published by Novello in London and Allan & Co. in Melbourne, suggesting it had wide dispersal. Her method is far more sophisticated than other vamping manuals at the time, yet highly accessible. Her arrangements are well crafted, using simple harmonisations as befits the settings of folk and popular song and as appropriate for her pedagogical purposes. But the great beauty of her work lies in the ingenuity of the system she devised to teach the skills of improvised piano accompaniment.

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21 Oscar Comettant, *In the Land of Kangaroos and Goldmines*, trans. Judith Armstrong (Melbourne: Rigby Ltd, 1980), 136–7. Comettant estimated that 700,000 pianos had been sent from Europe to Australia. Calculating based on the 1891 census, this suggests an average of 1 piano per 4.5 head of population. However, Comettant’s estimation is difficult to verify and his estimations regarding numbers of pianos in different countries have often been criticised. See Emily Alison Kilpatrick, ‘The Language of Enchantment: Childhood and Fairytale in the Music of Maurice Ravel’ (PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 2008), 58. Kilpatrick suggests that Comettant’s figures may have been overestimated.


24 Stevens, ‘Emily Patton,’ 41.


Patton’s system involved an association between the primary triads (of tonic, subdominant, and dominant) and the primary colours of yellow, blue, and red respectively. Minor tonalities were derived from mixing colours. 27 This can be seen in her arrangement of ‘The Last Rose of Summer’ (see Fig. 1). Stevens points out that this system would have held some familiarity for students at the time because of the way the visual arts were taught. 28 Also, to assist students in learning the chords, Patton applied John Curwen’s system of ‘mental effects’ to the harmonies. For example, the blue subdominant was described as ‘representative of all the cool, pale shades of nature,’ whereas the yellow tonic ‘has the same effect on the ear as light has on the eye.’ 29 Using another visual analogy, Patton used drawing of a landscape to explain the concepts of foreground, background, melody, bass, and accompaniment. The frontispiece of her book provides numerous testimonials, including from Lady Bowen, the wife of the first Governor of Queensland.

Patton used the manual (prior to publication) in her private teaching and at Vieuxseux Ladies’ College and Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC), where she taught in the late 1870s. One of her more famous pupils at PLC was Helen Porter Mitchell (Dame Nellie Melba, 1861–1931). During the 1880s, she continued teaching privately at various addresses around Melbourne. Evidence of the dedication and thoughtfulness with which she approached her art is to be found in a booklet she produced in 1882 (two years after the publication of her manual) entitled Practical Remarks on Music Teaching from the Personal Experiences of a Teacher. 30

From around 1875, Patton became interested in John Curwen’s system of Tonic Sol-fa and became an accomplished teacher in this pedagogical technique for teaching singing. Patton’s own teachers, Raphael Benjamin and Samuel McBurney, were themselves students of Curwen, and Patton remained a loyal exponent of Curwen’s method throughout her career. In 1889, after the deaths of her son, husband, and father, she emigrated to Japan, only to lose her daughter a few years later. Despite severe financial difficulties, Patton supported herself through teaching music, dance, and deportment. Stevens credits her with introducing the Tonic Sol-fa method to Tokyo and later Yokohama, where she established the Yokohama School of Music and Dancing. Stevens also argues that as a result of her efforts, Curwen’s Tonic Sol-fa system became widely adopted and this represents ‘the successful transfer of this Western music pedagogy to the Japanese cultural setting.’ 31 Patton possibly helped to popularise ‘The Last Rose of Summer’ (her arrangement appears in Harmony Simplified), which became a favourite with Japanese school children and remains so to this day. 32 She also taught in China at various times between 1901 and her death in Yokohama in 1912. Thus, her legacy stretches across three countries from the late 1800s to the present day.

27 For example, a minor triad was designated as green, derived from a mix of yellow and blue (lower notes of the relative major’s tonic triad and upper notes of the relative major’s subdominant).
28 Stevens, ‘Emily Patton,’ 42.
29 Patton, Harmony Simplified for Popular Use, 1.
30 Emily Patton, Practical Remarks on Music Teaching from the Personal Experiences of a Teacher (Melbourne: Watt & Co., 1882).
31 The music system taught by the well-known educator Luther Mason (1818–1896) in Japan from 1880 was related to but differed from Curwen’s Tonic Sol-fa as taught by Patton. See Stevens, ‘Emily Patton,’ 45.
Patton was not the only woman to compose a manual on harmony and improvisation; they appear to have been very much in fashion. Other authors of vamping manuals include Mrs Russell and another by Mary D’Lacy. The latter’s publication De Lacy’s Book on Vamping for the Piano became the subject of a court case in Adelaide in 1897, with De Lacy making a claim against the publishers, Messers Whillas and Ormiston. The judge concluded that the publishers had pirated her work, unfortunately adding that ‘works like these are intended for tenth-rate minds, not for musicians.’

De Lacy’s method was highly simplistic compared to Patton’s, but nevertheless, it suggests that in their role as teachers and through publications

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34 ‘Local Court—Adelaide’, Adelaide Advertiser, 28 Oct. 1897.
such as this, women were at the forefront of passing on these vital aspects of compositional craft (harmony, improvisation, and piano accompaniment) to their students. The popularity of these instruction books hints at colonial society’s thirst for self-education and self-betterment through music, a phenomenon that filtered down to even the youngest members of society, as discussion of Georgette Peterson’s Bush Songs for Children demonstrates.

Georgette Peterson (1863–1947) presents another notable example of a woman making outstanding musical achievements while at the same time contributing to advancements in the women’s movement. Peterson was a painter, composer, singer, and pianist. Born in Budapest, she came to Melbourne in 1901 with her husband, Franklin Peterson, who had been appointed Ormond Professor at the Conservatorium. She brought with her an original painting (her own work): a portrait of the pianist Jan Paderweski, and this painting—restored in 2004—is now displayed in the foyer of the Conservatorium. Soon after arriving, Georgette formed a small women’s choir, who were still performing in 1912 when they participated in a fundraising concert organised by Nellie Melba. This concert was in aid of the building of the hall in the still-incomplete Conservatorium. (The foundation stone of the main part of the building had been laid by Melba on 26 November 1909.) The concert took place on 21 January 1912, and Richard Selleck, in his book The Shop, reports that £1000 was raised. This was matched by a government grant and a lesser amount from the university, enabling the hall to be built. The foundation stone for the hall extension was laid by Georgette Peterson and officially opened on 29 October 1913, named in Melba’s honour.

Peterson conducted a number of choirs including the Women’s Choir of Victoria and the Young People’s Choir. She composed songs for voice and piano as well as choral works and contributed to the Songbook of the University High School Melbourne (1900–1929). She is best known for her children’s songs, which were published in four volumes variously titled on the theme of Australian Songs for Young and Old (see Fig. 2). These books were a collaboration between three remarkably talented women: the lyrics are by the poet Annie Rattray Rentoul (1882–1978) and the drawings by her sister, the well-known illustrator Ida Rentoul Outhwaite (1888–1960). The first book of bush songs was published in Melbourne by Allan & Co. in 1907 (only two years after Banjo Patterson’s Bush Songs was published, indicating a potential influence) and the last in 1934. The fact these songs were republished repeatedly over a period of thirty years testifies to their popularity, and generations of children have since grown up

37 Both choirs appeared under Peterson’s direction at a fundraising concert for the Children’s Hospital in 1910. The music for each song was printed by George Robertson and Co., with the front cover headed ‘Children’s Hospital Concert’ (n.d.). http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-170591631.
39 Australian Songs for Young and Old; Bush Songs of Australia for Young and Old; Australian Bush Songs; and More Bush Songs of Australia for Young and Old. Exact dates of publication of each volume are unknown. Four of the volumes are published by Allan & Co., two more by George Robertson. At least 28 different reprints of Peterson’s bush song series are known to have been published. See http://www.thecollectingbug.com/idarentoulouthwaite-music/explore?
with these songs. They are beautifully composed, exquisite settings of the poems, full of colour and atmosphere and demonstrating a clear gift for melody. At our ‘Buried Treasure’ concerts at the State Library, they were greeted with enthusiasm and nostalgia by the audience, some of whom remembered the songs from their childhood.41

**Figure 2.** Cover of *More Australian Songs for Young and Old*, words by Annie Rentoul, music by Georgette Peterson, illustrations by Ida Rentoul (Melbourne: George Robertson 1917?), Rare Books Collection, State Library of Victoria, JKPF 782.42083 P44A. Reprinted with permission of Stella Palmer.

Peterson was a driving force behind one of the most important events for Australian women since the country had been colonised: the Australian Exhibition of Women’s Work held in Melbourne in 1907 at the Exhibition Buildings over a five-week period (23 October to 30 November). Peterson was on the organising committee and was one of the main conductors at the exhibition. It was no coincidence that the exhibition took place at this time, after decades of the women’s suffrage movement, culminating in the right of women to vote federally and stand for parliament in 1902. By 1908, all Australian states had legislated for women’s voting rights. Hence, the exhibition came at a critical time in the journey towards gender equality and may be seen as both a celebration of achievements and as a way of moving the debate forward.

As president, Lady Northcote (the Governor General’s wife) oversaw the exhibition and Pattie Deakin (the Prime Minister’s wife) ran a crèche for the participants. In recognition of Lady Northcote’s role in the exhibition, Peterson’s *Bush Songs for Young and Old* bear the inscription ‘Dedicated by permission to Her Excellency the Lady Northcote in grateful appreciation of her furtherance of woman’s work and art.’42 The exhibition drew 250,000 spectators to the displays of women’s art, music, photography, craft, cookery, horticulture, medicine and

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41 This was the third and last of the ‘Buried Treasure’ concerts. It took place on 21 Aug. 2016. One elderly member of the audience reported to me after the performance that he remembered hearing these songs played on radio, bringing back happy memories of his childhood.

42 Georgette Peterson, *Bush Songs for Young and Old* (Melbourne: Allan & Co, 1934?), Rare Books Collection, State Library of Victoria, JKPF 782.42083 P44B.
nursing, as well as trade exhibits from shops and companies run by women and displays of women’s inventions. Exhibitors came from Britain, Europe, North and South America, Africa, and India. A woman’s choir and orchestra were featured, and competitions in essay writing and musical composition were held.

Peterson’s first rehearsal with the choir and orchestra was recorded by Punch on 24 October (see Fig. 3). The journalist described her as ‘the little foster-mother of the musical section of the [women’s work] movement, whose marvellous personal magnetism and splendid capability as a conductor are alone responsible for it.’ The fact that the journalist refers to ‘the movement’ suggests the importance such an event held for advancing the cause of women’s rights generally. The exhibition was expanding the realm of women’s work and proving their capabilities across a wide range of skills, thereby helping to shape the persona of the New Woman and pave the way for moving into other domains, such as politics.

Figure 3. The choir of the Women’s Work Exhibition, Melbourne 1907, ‘Women’s Work Exhibition’, Punch, 24 Oct. 1907, 598. Newspapers Collection, State Library of Victoria.

A choir of 1500 women and a symphony orchestra of over one hundred women regaled an audience of around fifteen thousand people for the opening ceremony of the exhibition (Figure 3), and a letter to the editor of the Argus informs us that at least nine months of rehearsals took place in preparation, suggesting that a substantial pool of talent was readily available to draw upon. A composition competition for a ‘prize-winning ode’ was held, and Georgette Peterson and another local composer, Florence Donaldson Ewart, were selected as the two finalists. Ultimately, the judges awarded first prize to Ewart’s setting of the ode ‘God Guide Australia,’ and this brought to the fore some rivalry between the two composers and their

43 ‘Women’s Work Exhibition,’ Punch, 24 Oct. 1907.
44 Argus, 3 Dec. 1907. The letter to the editor was by Carrie Crozier, President of the Women’s Orchestra.
opposing camps of supporters. In addition, a disagreement over publishing rights occurred with the author of the words to the ode, Annie Rentoul. Peterson supported Rentoul and Ewart sided against her. Unfortunately, the high-profile husbands of both women became involved in defence of their wives (both husbands having appointments at the University of Melbourne). Causing further dissent, the choir went on strike over a disagreement concerning choice of a soloist. Predictably, the press pounced on the opportunity to discredit the women involved, as discussed by Catherine Wilson in her thesis on the exhibition. It was proof, for some commentators, of the dangers of the ‘New Woman’.

The presentation of the exhibition within the context of homecraft and feminine accomplishments provided legitimacy to the entire endeavour and to activities, such as composing for orchestra, which in isolation might have stirred controversy. Despite providing a valuable opportunity for women, at the same time it reinforced models of domesticity. Overall, however, the exhibition can be seen as a landmark achievement as women were striving to perfect their skills as artists, musicians, and writers (as well as homemakers) and to achieve some recognition. Yet the exhibition’s underlying importance seems to have been lost on most observers at the time:

The Great Exhibition … has drawn attention to the fact that Fair Australia is no mean competitor amongst the Women of the World. There appears to be no reason why Australian girls should not in the future assume a supremacy in the arts and crafts similar to that held by ‘Our Boys’ in the sports and pastimes.

The words ‘arts and crafts’ minimise the immense significance of the array of professional activity that was being showcased. In very pragmatic terms, the Argus also summed up the exhibition: ‘It speaks well for the future of our race … since every participant in its expression is either a mother or a potential mother of Australian children.’

Florence Maud Donaldson Ewart (1864–1949), Peterson’s rival at the Women’s Work Exhibition, was a formidable figure as a composer, performer and conductor. She was born in London and made her debut on violin at the Royal Albert Hall at the age of fourteen. She attended the Institute of Arts and Literature and was awarded a scholarship to London’s National Training School for Musicians (a forerunner of the Royal College of Music), where she studied with Arthur Sullivan. She attended the conservatoria of both Leipzig and Berlin, and her teachers included Joseph Joachim and Adolph Brodsky. In Leipzig, she became acquainted with Brahms and played with the renowned Gewandhaus Orchestra. Thus, she was working at the pinnacle of her profession. She married Alfred Ewart in 1989 and moved with him and their two sons to Melbourne in 1906, where he took up the position of Professor of Botany at the University of Melbourne. They divorced in 1924, and following this Florence made a number of trips to Europe where she studied under Ottorino Respighi and Giacomo Settacile. During this time, she was reported to compose for up to ten hours a day, rising at 5.30 in the morning. She was totally dedicated to her work as a composer.

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Florence Ewart dared to compose works considered to be in the ‘masculine’ realm. These included six operas, a symphonic poem, five works for voice and orchestra, numerous chamber works, choral works, a prelude for organ, a ballet, as well as works for solo piano, and forty-six songs. The large-scale works were often composed knowing they may not ever be performed. She composed her first opera *Ekkart* in 1909 and travelled to Europe in an unsuccessful attempt to have it produced. However, she did receive a number of commissions and performances, including *An Empire Pageant Opera*, which was performed in 1912. Her third opera, *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, was performed in 1931 and excerpts were broadcast on radio 3LO. She was a regular contributor to concerts of the Musical Society of Victoria and the British Music Society (in Australia), and she had works performed by the Shakespeare Society, the Institute of Arts and Literature, and at the University of Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. She also taught at the People’s Conservatorium in Melbourne (founded in 1918 by the composer Anne Macky).

At the ‘Buried Treasure’ concert on 11 August 2016, we performed her song ‘I Love Thee’, for which Ewart had chosen a text by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a poet known for using her poetry to challenge the traditional roles of women.

The only composition of Ewart’s that was published was her prize-winning ode for the Women’s Work Exhibition. Some vital preliminary work has been done on Ewart by eminent scholars such as Faye Patton and Thérèse Radic, but the challenge, as with all women musicians from this period, is to give their work wider exposure and scrutiny in the public arena. An important step in this direction is the recent publication by Jeanelle Carrigan of the *Australian Heritage Collection*, containing scores and recordings of piano music by women composers including Florence Ewart.

Seeking Refuge: Private and Public Spheres of Women’s Lives

The Women’s Work Exhibition is just one example of women working together in the pursuit of higher learning and public recognition. On a smaller scale, groups such as the St Cecilia Musical Club performed a similar role, providing a sense of refuge. The club setting ensured women’s work would remain partly hidden, but it also created an environment where they must have felt supported and confident to express themselves. The St Cecilia Musical Club appears to have operated for at least ten years between 1895 and 1905. The photo in Figure 4 was taken at the homestead ‘Holly Green’ of the journalist Sidney John Webb, in Narre

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51 For more information on the Macky and the People’s Conservatorium, see Selleck, ‘Australia’s Pioneer Musicians’, 43–63.


55 St Cecilia Musical Club, Box 1715/13, State Library of Victoria.
Melbourne’s Colonial Women Composers

Warren, Victoria. Mrs Webb and her daughter Anne appear to be key figures in the Club and are pictured in the photo. The Club produced an annual syllabus and held monthly meetings at which a member was appointed to give a lecture on a chosen topic. The press clippings in the archives of the State Library of Victoria testify to regular concerts featuring the most well-known performers and composers in Melbourne at the time, such as Alberto Zelman junior (1874–1927), the founder of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. The formalisation of women’s groups such as the St Cecilia Musical Club was an important aspect of the female journey to creative independence and finding their own voice. Other examples include the Austral Salon (founded in 1890), Lyceum Club (1912), Netty Palmer’s literary group of ex-PLC girls, known as the Ex-Rays (dates unknown), and the Sandringham Ladies’ Reading Circle (1903).

Figure 4. The St Cecilia Music Club. Sitting front right: Nell Hart. Leaning against pillar on right: Mrs Sidney Webb. Seated front left: Anne Webb, daughter of Sidney Webb. Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. MS 13264, Box 1715/14.

Women authors were experiencing similar trials and successes to their fellow women composers and there are many links and parallels to be found. In relation to women writers, Anne Vickery and Maryanne Dever have observed:

Following their 1890s predecessors, many women writers of the early twentieth century combined what were considered more ‘serious’ artistic endeavours with ‘bread-and-butter’ work such as writing for popular journals, book reviews, and children’s literature.

The effect of this association with the ‘less serious’ genres led to a critical devaluation of their work, according to Vickery and Dever. The populist movement expanded with the advent of publications like Women’s Voice (1894–1895) and many others that followed, and these had

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57 Vickery and Dever, Australian Women Writers, 2.
the effect of ‘extending and authorising women’s presence beyond the private realm.’ At the same time, however, they created an impression that women were superficial in nature, and their output light-weight and not to be taken seriously.

A similar phenomenon was occurring with women composers who were publishing music to cater for the public’s insatiable appetite for popular song. This appears, however, to have started even earlier than with women writers. According to Prue Neidorf, published music started to be produced in Australia as early as the 1830s. The first music publisher and printer in Melbourne, Joseph Wilkie, set up his business in 1850 and women’s names, though rare, appear among the first published composers. Women started to appear more frequently under the labels of publishers such as Allans and Suttons, culminating in the early twentieth century with *The Famous Australian Songwriters Series*, which appears to have focussed almost exclusively on women composers. Many of the names are not known to us today, for example, Vera Jurs, Olive Green, Nellie Hennessy, Aileen Corrin, Mabel Shiers, and Joy Rettigan. It is possible that female song composers underwent a kind of renaissance coinciding with a flowering of women’s creative writing in the early decades of the 1900s, as seen in the work of authors such as Winifred Maitland Shaw, Zora Cross, and more well-known names such as Katherine Susannah Pritchard.

For women composers (to a greater extent than their literary sisters, it seems), their association with popular forms seems to have sounded a death knell in the minds of influential historians as illustrated in this comment in 1967 by Roger Covell:

Shameful as it may be … the drawing room ballad must be counted as one of the major influences, if not the major influence until recently on the bulk of Australian compositions … Australia must have produced more bad songs in proportion to its population than any country on earth.

The drawing room was mostly the realm of women, and was used for playing, composing or improvising, and entertaining their families. Covell’s comments were in part a reaction to Oscar Comettant’s observations in 1888 that these drawing room songs were ‘pale and insipid’ and ‘these banalities are sung with delight at family gatherings by mother, daughter, sons and even by father when he is in a good mood.’ This clearly links the genre with the sphere of women. To then apply the word ‘shameful’ is reminiscent of the moralistic judgements of past centuries. Covell goes on to say, ‘the alacrity with which the drawing-room ballad naturalized itself and bred beckons parallels with the notorious fecundity of Australian rabbits.’

Of course, Covell does not specifically mention women in his statement, but the implications of his comment give some insight into why any sense of the worthiness of women’s work is

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60 This series was published by the Australian Songwriters and Music Publishers’ Agency, Adelaide, Box 2117/10, State Library of Victoria.
61 See Vickery and Dever, *Australian Women Writers*, for more information on these authors. The music of the composers mentioned here can be found in the Neighbour Collection, MS9232, Box 2117/10, State Library of Victoria.
63 Commetant, *In the Land of Kangaroos and Goldmines*, 200.
often condemned before it has a chance to prove itself. The main form of composition open to
women was song-writing and it is likely that most published popular song was composed with
women in mind because they represented such a large and profitable market. Nevertheless, if
it is true (as Covell claims) that the drawing room ballad must be counted as one of the major
influences if not the major influence on the bulk of Australian compositions, then women can
be considered a vital part of this influence (arguably more so than men). This hints at the great
importance of their legacy: a proud, rather than a ‘shameful’ one.

There are many examples of women writers of art song who were held in high regard by
their own peers. One such composer was Bessie Delves (1894–1926). Delves received glowing
press reviews of her music, and the well-known conductor Alberto Zelman wrote a highly
complimentary letter regarding her song, ‘Love’s Triumph,’ praising her music as being
‘thoughtful and sweet’ and ‘daringly harmonised.’ Delves’s elegantly-crafted ‘Ave Maria,’
performed at the ‘Buried Treasure’ concert series, is fully deserving of a place in present-day
concert repertoire.

There were also many examples of successful women composers of popular song, including
Aileen Neighbour (d. 1934), who was a close friend of the famous singer Peter Dawson
(1882–1961), for whom she wrote a song, ‘Just for Today.’ Dawson spoke in glowing terms
about the song in a letter to Neighbour, held in the State Library archives. Neighbour’s songs
were published by at least four different music publishers including the International Music
Publishing Company and she was paid regular royalties. She enjoyed a flourishing career as
a singer, teacher, and composer, having studied at the Albert Street Conservatorium in East
Melbourne. After marrying, she travelled to Canada with her husband where she established
the Guild Hall School of Singing and Guild Hall Orchestra. In boldly claiming her heritage,
she named herself ‘Madame Auslia.’

**Negotiating Separate Spheres: The Need for a Wider Perspective and New Methodologies**

At this point, it is helpful to consider the idea that as societies evolve, different art forms are
continually tried, tested, and developed over time. It is inevitable that through this group process
(returning to Gerda Lerner’s notion of mass histories and maintaining a broad perspective)
much work of average standard will emerge, and furthermore, without this, nothing can be
judged to be excellent. The large component of mediocre work provides the essential foundation
upon which some individuals can rise to greatness and become acknowledged as masters of
their art form. Great creative thinkers are formed through collaborative processes, an argument
that is well supported by research into creativity, for example, the work of Vera John-Steiner in
her book *Creative Collaboration.* This is a much more inclusive way of understanding creativity,
and it moves away from the isolated ‘genius’ model, which has excluded so many women.

Understanding the collaborative nature of creativity also helps to break down the rigidity
of certain concepts and definitions, such as the word ‘composer’. This points to the need for
a wider conceptual framework and new methodologies that keep pace with developments
in the social sciences. In a similar vein to John-Steiner, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

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65 Letter from Zelman to Bessie Delves, 17 Dec. 1900. Bessie Delves Collection, MS 14481, Box 4220/1, State Library of Victoria.
66 Neighbour Collection, MS9232, Box 2117/9, State Library of Victoria.
has explored models of creativity and developed methods to study the processes by which an individual’s creative output becomes recognised or validated by society.\textsuperscript{68} Understanding how or why a creative individual’s work is judged to be superior or inferior is arguably as important as examining the creative output itself, and in regard to this, the social sciences have much to offer, yet are a comparatively untapped resource in regard to music.

Alice Alvarado, in her article on historiography and the contribution of Mary Ritter Beard, makes a similar point to my arguments here.\textsuperscript{69} She states that the study of gender and domestic issues helps us to understand the processes of distinguishing ‘the important from the unimportant, the brilliant and the derivative.’ Also, given that women have mostly been relegated to the unimportant and derivative, this leads Alvarado to ask: ‘why would male historians purposely erase women from history?’\textsuperscript{70} Part of the answer was that this allowed men to focus on areas they controlled, such as politics.\textsuperscript{71} She argues that ‘men did not perceive their domestic lives as central to their work, therefore they were able to step back and write from a differing viewpoint—their lives were separated from history.’\textsuperscript{72} The domestic sphere, the world of women, was of lesser importance, therefore any work emerging from this context was also seen as less important. However, for women attempting to write books or music, domestic life often framed the boundaries of their lived experience.

There is much evidence to suggest that the many insipid and bad songs (as referred to by Commetant and Covell) being sung in Australian homes were in fact performing an important role in culture building. Furthermore, if we widen our perspective, the advent of the modern printing press in the mid-1800s must be taken into account here. The power to mass-print publications encouraged a democratisation of knowledge and, importantly, an emphasis on authorship. This meant knowing who, why, and when a work came into existence, and this immediately put women at a disadvantage and gave more reasons for rejection (given notions of domesticity and what Alvarado describes as the male preference for ‘the meat and potatoes of history (i.e., war, politics, leaders).’).\textsuperscript{73} Music literacy was also in its infancy, and increasing opportunities to learn music brought about the proliferation of different forms of amateur music, of which parlour music was only one. However, because more people were actively involved and learning to make music, this should not lead to the conclusion that there was a lack of talent. In fact, the possibility of some excellent work being done by a few is made all the more possible by activities of the many lesser examples.

Another important genre to which Australian women have made influential and high-quality contributions (often overlooked by mainstream scholarship) is that of folk song. Due to the intrinsic nature of folk song as an un-notated oral tradition, it is difficult to identify individual ‘composers/improvisers’. This presents another example of Gerda Lerner’s histories of the ‘masses of people’, as distinct from high-profile individuals, and it provides a pertinent example of how useful this broad methodological approach is on account of its inclusiveness.


\textsuperscript{69} Alice Alvarado, ‘Left Out: Women’s Role in Historiography and the Contribution of Mary Ritter Beard,’ \textit{Saber and Scroll} 1, no. 2 (2012): 89–103.

\textsuperscript{70} Alvarado, ‘Left Out,’ 91.

\textsuperscript{71} Alvarado, ‘Left Out,’ 94.

\textsuperscript{72} Alvarado, ‘Left Out,’ 91.

\textsuperscript{73} Alvarado, ‘Left Out,’ 91.
Evidence of the worthiness of folk song as a topic for study can be found in the work of researchers such as Warren Fahey, John Meredith, and Jennifer Gall. The output of these authors attests to the astounding history of folk traditions in Australia.\textsuperscript{74} Meredith’s study of folk artist Sloane Sloane (born Eunice Evelyn Frost, 1894–1982) reveals a woman possessing the skills to interpret and embellish songs that were handed down to her through four generations of her maternal forebears, transforming the songs into something unique and personal. Such highly creative acts are characteristic of many musical traditions, including classical and jazz.

Folk music is arguably the first music composed (improvised) by newcomers to Australia; for example, female convicts taunted their captors ‘by composing songs ridiculing the authorities’ in 1842.\textsuperscript{75} Also, as a vehicle for challenging notions of gender, Female Warrior Ballads became a powerful tool and a perfect disguise in which to live out fantasies of freedom via an assumed masculinity.\textsuperscript{76} Hence, folk song was another avenue through which women were transforming the way they thought about themselves (as with the Women’s Work Exhibition), and internal transformation is arguably the first step to external change: it was part of the journey to the ‘New Woman.’

**The New Woman**

Returning to the broader context, women writers and composers fed into the debate regarding the New Woman, who was often looked upon with trepidation and compared to the less noxious ideal of the Coming Australian or Coming Man. The latter had been part of social discourse since the 1850s and was sometimes depicted as a noble character and other times as selfish, secular, irreverent, unambitious and ‘unable to appreciate the merits of a sterling book.’\textsuperscript{77} In contrast, the New Woman, propelled into public consciousness by the suffragette movement, was consistently portrayed in a negative manner (see Fig. 5). Women writers addressed these issues in their books and poetry, shaping nascent notions of the New Woman and her more congenial manifestation in the Bush Girl. In doing so, they were contributing to the re-assessment of gender roles that was taking place in Australia and throughout the Western world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Books such as Lilian Turner’s *An Australian Lassie* (1903) had their counterparts in songs composed by women, which explored similar themes of womanhood, the Australian bush, love and romance, and patriotism, for example, Ewart’s song setting of Dorothea MacKellar’s ‘My Country: A Song for the People.’

Vickery and Dever suggest that society’s attempts to address the Woman Question, aided by the increasing visibility of women in the literary marketplace (and I would add the music marketplace), gave birth to the modernist movement itself.\textsuperscript{78} Arguably, this puts women at the centre of one of the biggest social and cultural upheavals in the past one hundred years.


\textsuperscript{75} Joy Damousi, *Depraved and Disorderly: Female Convicts, Sexuality and Gender in Colonial Australia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 61.


\textsuperscript{78} Vickery and Dever, *Australian Women Writers*, 2.
Figure 5. ‘The Coming Man,’ *Melbourne Punch*, 13 May 1858, 133; and ‘The New Woman,’ *Bulletin*, 25 Oct. 1902, 13.

Legacy and Lineage

It is possible to track a musical lineage from the first generation of the New Australians to the present day. However, given that women’s work is largely a hidden history, it is not surprising that the links between women, in the form of an historical legacy, are also partly hidden. The historian Mary Ritter Beard (1876–1958) argued for the importance of this legacy, and what she calls the ‘long history’, which was taken up by Gerda Lerner and influenced her ideas about the history of ‘the mass of women,’ as discussed above. In her arguments for a ‘long history’ approach, Beard emphasised that ‘the study and writing of history could change the path of history.’ Hence, we need to look back in order to move forward.

The women discussed in this paper have succeeded in passing on an important legacy through the generations. Only a few have been named here, but there are many more that we know little about, and others are waiting to be discovered. Far from being mere receptors of cultural change, women were instigators. It is due to their predecessors in the nineteenth century that women in the twentieth century had the opportunity to be the first voices heard on gramophone recordings (Florrie Forde [1875–1940] and Nellie Melba), or improvising on piano for silent films (Carmen Naylor, working between 1910 and 1929 in Bathurst), and on piano-roll recordings (Edith Pardey [1896–1963] and Laurel Pardey [1897–1974]). Our predecessors have paved the way for the present generation, for example, Mona McBurney (1862–1932), Margaret Sutherland (1897–1984), Linda Phillips (1899–2002), Meta Overman (1907–1993), Peggy Glanville-Hicks (1912–1990), Dulcie Holland (1913–2000), Miriam Hyde (1913–2005), and Moneta Eagles (1913–2005). This lineage, dating from the 1800s to the modern era, is an example of the ‘long history’ described by Mary Ritter Beard. Present-day composers are the living legacy of this impressive lineage of women, yet very few of us have studied their work seriously as part of our mainstream education. Instead, we are continually inculcated with the works of male canonic composers.

79 Alvarado, ‘Left Out,’ 93.
Nellie Melba provides some clues as to how the links in the ‘long history’ are created. Melba was a skilled improviser, particularly in the use of ornamentation (early Australian opera had a history of improvised elaboration).80 Just as Emily Patton had done, Melba wrote her own compositions for the purposes of teaching, and these were published in her book, The Melba Method (1922).81 At the ‘Buried Treasure’ concerts, Merlyn Quaife performed Melba’s lyrical ‘Vocalise in A flat’ (printed in her Method), revelling in its soulful lyricism and demonstrating its worthiness as a concert piece in the twenty-first century.

Creating a connection to my own work as a flautist and composer and further illustrating the idea of ‘long history’, Melba enjoyed performing duos with flute, in particular, with Australian flautists John Lemonne and John Amadio. Lemonne became her close friend and business manager, and his student, Leslie Barklamb, was my own flute teacher. Barklamb himself performed in orchestras accompanying the diva. Melba’s most famous duo with flute is surely the cadenza (composed by her teacher Mathilde Marchesi) from the Mad Scene, Act III of Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor.82 In the State Library archives, I discovered a manuscript of another set of cadenzas composed by Marchesi, written in Melba’s own handwriting and intended for Act II, Scene I of Meyerbeer’s Les Huguenots. Building on this set of serendipitous circumstances, I arranged the relevant sections (with cadenzas) for flute, harp and voice. In addition, I composed another cadenza in the style of Marchesi’s cadenza for Les Huguenots and added this into the arrangement, which was performed at the ‘Buried Treasure’ concert on 11 August 2016. Hence, a sense of ‘heredity of influence’ became apparent.

The links to our predecessors can also be felt in less obvious ways, such as the connection to our land and country. Today, as a teacher, I walk the same hallowed halls of the University of Melbourne and Presbyterian Ladies College as did many of the women discussed above. This is our shared heritage. I live in Upper Ferntree Gully only a few miles from Lysterfield, where William Lyster, the opera impresario, built his home 1867, and close to Narre Warren where the St Cecilia Musical Club met in 1895. Nearby, in Emerald, Katharine Susannah Prichard and Nettie Palmer lived and worked. The Heidelberg school painted here and Florence Donaldson Ewart spent time in Olinda, searching for quiet inspiration to compose an opera. I look at the very same trees that they saw, and I feel the same sense of inspiration from this land, our common ground.

Looking to the Future

This article has looked to the past for reasons why the work of Australian women composers has been hidden and often undervalued. With the aim of ensuring that their work is given due regard in future, the research presented here culminated in a series of live performances (the ‘Buried Treasure’ concerts). These concerts highlighted the importance of scholarly research

80 This was often mentioned in reviews: for example, Melba’s use of strophic embellishment is mentioned in Whiteoak, Playing Ad Lib, 8–11. For early opera as an improvised art, see Harold Love, The Golden Age of Opera: W.S. Lyster and his Companies (Sydney: Currency Press, 1981).
82 This was first performed by Melba accompanied by Paul Taffanel on flute in a performance of the opera in Paris in 1889. For history of the cadenza, see: Romana Pugliese, ‘The Origins of Lucia di Lammermoor’s Cadenza,’ Cambridge Opera Journal 16, no. 1 (2004): 23–42. Taffanel was one of the founders of the French Flute School of playing, which has been enormously influential worldwide and has shaped the way the flute is played and taught in Australia today.
translating into practical performance outcomes. It is only by bringing these works to life in the public arena (through performance and publication) that they can be fairly assessed.

A central theme of the discussion above has been that women’s lives were played out on many stages, private and public. The picture is often fragmented and unfolds over many different trajectories making it difficult to piece together. This was evident in the lives of each of the women discussed here and it is part of the reason why their work was ‘hidden’: their lives do not reveal themselves to us in a linear pattern, as occurs in more conventional great-figure histories about canonical (male) composers. Whereas men were able to focus on their work with other areas of their lives (such as family) falling neatly into second place, the creative work of women such as Emily Patton or Florence Ewart forms a more diffuse spectrum across their lives. For women, to place work above womanly duties was considered aberrant and consequently their talents were forced underground, channelled into more socially-acceptable outlets, such as teaching. But through these secondary avenues they were nevertheless able to attain high levels of creativity.

Thus, women’s work as composers was enmeshed across a broad range of activities in their roles as parents, daughters, wives, teachers, performers, and composers. This realisation has crucial implications for present-day historians, who must cast a wide net if they are to understand the complex lives and personalities of women like Emily Patton. For this reason, the methodological approach in this article has drawn upon the social sciences (for example, the work of Vera John-Steiner) using a broad conceptual framework (described by Gerda Lerner) from the perspective of a ‘long history’ (as proposed by Mary Ritter Beard). To an extent, this article has put these methodologies to the test and in doing so has revealed the identities of the women studied here as being fluid, emergent, and multiple (rather than ‘fixed’ entities). These qualities suggest a potential connection with Deleuzian models of enquiry (as in the recent book *Music’s Immanent Future*), which could be explored in future studies on the work of women composers.

This article arguably represents a form of self-reflection conducted on a societal rather than an individual scale (consistent with Lerner’s idea of the history of the ‘mass of women’). This process of ‘societal reflection’ helps us to connect the past, present, and future; yet, ultimately, women’s ways of working (largely imposed on them by society) meant they were destined to fly under the radar of historians—yet to be born—who judged them as insignificant. However, women’s work in colonial Melbourne and into the twentieth century provided a foundation on which the country could grow and flourish. Their legacy, both as individuals and collectively, was monumental, and deserves to be acknowledged as such.

**About the Author**

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