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Virtuoso Violinist Maud Powell: Enduring Champion for American Women in Professional Music

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VIRTUOSO VIOLINIST MAUD POWELL: ENDURING CHAMPION FOR
AMERICAN WOMEN IN PROFESSIONAL MUSIC

by

Sarah Joy Pizzichemi

A DOCTORAL DOCUMENT

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
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Major: Music

Under the Supervision of Professor Hyeyung Julie Yoon

Lincoln, Nebraska
May, 2015
Maud Powell, the first great American virtuoso violinist, sparked a change in the spirit of the advancement of classical music throughout North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This document addresses gender inequality present in the classical music profession during Powell’s lifetime. It also explores the roles women occupied in the public and private spheres in Western art music of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More specifically, it investigates the life of virtuoso violinist Maud Powell through her activism and interest in American women in professional music.

The document is divided into three parts. After a brief biography of Maud Powell, Part I defines women’s place in Western art music of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of the private and public spheres and women’s place in professional music. Chapter 2 discourses women and the violin with brief descriptions of all the renowned women violinists prior to Maud Powell. Chapter 3 examines women’s music clubs and female soloists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Part II of the document focuses on Maud Powell’s specific contributions to the role of women in professional music. This encompasses her work at
the World’s Columbian Exposition, her encouragement of women as symphony performers, conductors, and composers, how she broke new ground as a chamber musician, and her reactions to sexism. Part III explores Maud Powell’s fluctuating opinion on the suffrage movement. It concludes with current affairs of gender equality in music.

This document provides the historical context for the world in which Maud Powell lived, her navigation of that world as a woman concert artist, and how she implemented her authority as a celebrity and influential figure in Western art music to improve the lives of American women in professional music.
DEDICATION

In loving memory of the most amazing woman I have ever known

my mother Pamela Joy Pizzichemi (1963-2014)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my husband Justin Kurys for his continued support and love during this difficult year and a half while I am processing great personal tragedy and loss.

Thank you to my family for your love and support. To my parents, John and Pamela, for always encouraging me to pursue my dreams and happiness. My dad for your enthusiasm for my progress as a musician and scholar, and my mom for instilling creativity and an inquisitive mind, and for unconditionally loving me and being one of the best friends I could have ever asked for. I will miss your smile and your laugh every day for the rest of my life and I feel your presence and influence always. To my brother Joseph for teaching me to live in the moment and cherish every day; and my brother Timothy for challenging me to think for myself as well as your continued emotional support. My grandparents Edwin and Marcella Shaw for always making me feel like a beautiful genius and loved, and my aunts, uncles, and cousins for loving me no matter what. I also want to thank my cats; Phineas for spending the time I spent writing this document in my lap, and Theodora for watching over me from across the room. A special blessing goes out to my longhaired Chihuahua Romeo for being my therapy dog this last year, and taking me on walks to clear my head.

My teacher and mentor Hyeyung Yoon has transformed my violin playing and always supported me these last three years. I want to thank her and the rest of the Chiara String Quartet for your mentorship and friendship. Thank you to my friend Korynne Bolt for enthusiasm for my project and editing advice and my friends Emily Pietrowski and Sarah Wenger for encouragement. I also want to thank Dr. Richmond and the faculty and
staff of the Glenn Korff School of Music for making it possible for the Skyros Quartet to come to University of Nebraska-Lincoln and helping us along the way.

To my committee: thank you for supporting my scholarly journey. Hyeyung Yoon, Rebecca Fischer, Dr. Christopher Marks, Dr. Anthony Bushard, and Dr. Julia Schleck you are all such incredible mentors and people. I also want to thank Dr. Peter Lefferts for your passion for research and taking hours out of your days to talk to me about the process of writing a document, as well as your interest in my subject.

Thank you to the research efforts and scholarship of Neva Garner Greenwood and Karen A. Shaffer. Without your time commitment to gathering documentation and your unbelievable love of Maud Powell I would not have written this document.

Cheers to Loreena McKennitt Radio on Pandora for providing the soundtrack of amazing women performers to my document writing sessions.

Finally, I want to thank the Skyros Quartet. Justin Kurys, James Moat, and William Braun you are three of the most amazing people I have ever known and I could not have completed this document let alone this degree without you. Thank you for participating daily in fulfilling music making with me. As Maud Powell said, “In ensemble playing, the player is brought face to face with the best composers. In the string quartet, for instance, you find little trash in the whole literature.” It is a pleasure to explore literature old and new with y’all and, of course, our own special creations. The humor with which you three move through life inspires me to lighten up and it improves my mood every day!
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INTRODUCTION

Figure Intro.1: Maud Powell

Maud Powell, the first great American virtuoso violinist, sparked a change in the spirit of the advancement of classical music throughout North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While for the first part of her career she alternated between world-class tours of Europe and North America, her love of her country and the American people inspired a lifelong dedication to pioneering the violin recital around the United States and Canada despite harsh travel conditions and cultural development obstacles. She introduced and championed new music by American composers, including from populations underrepresented in art music, such as African-Americans and women, while expanding violin technique and presenting innovative

programming. She introduced chamber music to wider American audiences and became the first instrumentalist to record for Victor’s Celebrity Artist Series (Red Seal label.) She also participated in breaking new ground for women, opening doors for careers in music that were traditionally closed to them.

This document will concentrate on her direct contributions to the lives of American women in professional music. Because of the nature of artistic women’s lives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the specific challenges they faced, a context for women’s place in art music throughout history will be examined to provide a complete picture of Maud Powell’s own story and the impact she had on her peers and women of the future. There will also be reflections on the current state of women in professional music.

Previous scholarship on Maud Powell includes the extensive research materials gathered by Neva Garner Greenwood [deceased] and Karen A. Shaffer. Their work in collecting resources has resulted in The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education in Brevard, North Carolina, including The Maud Powell Society Archive, www.maudpowell.org, The Maud Powell Signature: Women in Music free online magazine, the 1988 biography Maud Powell: Pioneer American Violinist authored by Karen A. Shaffer, and Maud Powell Favorites, a music compilation and introductory notes and annotations by Karen Shaffer and virtuoso violinist Rachel Barton Pine as editor. Without their work collecting primary sources, including Maud Powell’s scrapbooks with clippings of reviews and her writings from newspapers, journals, and
magazines, this document would not be possible. This document attempts to present a more objective perspective on Maud Powell, avoiding the tendency toward hagiography and hyperbole that is the understandable result of Greenwood’s and Shaffer’s enthusiasm for the topic in their published works.

The biographical information on Maud Powell in this introduction is entirely derived from the original research found in *Maud Powell: Pioneer American Violinist*, and *Maud Powell Favorites*.

Maud Powell was born on August 22, 1867 in Peru, Illinois. At the time, this was considered America’s western frontier. Her grandparents were Methodist missionaries and abolitionists in Ohio, Wisconsin, and Illinois prior to the Civil War. Powell’s father earned a national reputation as an innovative educator and her mother was an accomplished amateur pianist and composer, as well as a close friend of Susan B. Anthony, leader of the women’s suffrage movement. Her uncle John Wesley Powell was a Civil War hero, the first scientific explorer of the Grand Canyon and Colorado River, and primary founder of the National Geographic Society along with Powell’s father.

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Powell began piano lessons at age six, and the violin at age seven. After seeing the great woman violinist Camilla Urso perform in the U.S., Powell’s mother desired her first-born, boy or girl, to become a virtuoso violinist. Powell most notably studied with William Lewis in Chicago, Henry Schradieck in Leipzig, Charles Dancla in Paris, and Joseph Joachim in Berlin. At the age of sixteen she toured Great Britain and performed for the royal family. She made her European debut in 1885 performing the Bruch Concerto in G minor with Joseph Joachim conducting the Berlin Philharmonic. Her American debut was also in 1885, with the New York Philharmonic under the baton of Theodore Thomas.

Maud Powell performed twice with the Exposition Orchestra under Theodore Thomas in 1893 at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. She also delivered a paper on “Women and the Violin” to the Women’s Musical Congress, and premiered Amy Beach’s *Romance* with Amy Beach at the piano.

Powell received international acclaim as one of the virtuoso violinist greats as she toured from St. Petersburg, Russia, to South Africa and Hawaii, performing with all of the great European and American conductors and orchestras of her era. Also, Powell maintained friendships with many great contemporary European and American composers. She gave the North American premieres of fourteen major concerti including those by Tchaikovsky, Sibelius, Dvorák, Conus, Arensky, Lalo, Rimsky-Korsakov and Saint-Saëns. On an international level, she gave world premieres of concerti by Bruch, Coleridge-Taylor, Huss, and Shelley.

Powell dedicated herself to touring the United States and Canada extensively at a time when many critics considered America a cultural backwater and travel was far from safe. She brought violin recitals to communities where great violinists had never journeyed, and always made a point to give special presentations to school students. Through the world of music, she worked actively toward equal rights for women and African-Americans.
As the first instrumentalist to record for Victor’s Celebrity Artist Series (Red Seal label), Powell brought music to countless more people around the world and set an enduring standard for violin playing that can now be enjoyed through a four-disc album set on the Naxos label. She also wrote for numerous publications, newspapers, and magazines and regularly gave interviews. Critics respected her opinions on the musical conditions throughout the American continent, as she accumulated a first-hand knowledge that few possessed. While she never had her own pedagogical studio due to her intensely demanding touring schedule, she wrote pertinent and enduring advice for young violinists in many publications that are still circulated today. Powell died of a heart attack while on tour on January 8, 1920 at age fifty-two. Her legacy lives on in the ripple effect her life had on many aspects of musical culture.

\[5\] Ibid, 33.
PART I: DEFINING WOMEN’S PLACE IN WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC

CHAPTER 1: THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPHERES, AND WOMEN IN PROFESSIONAL MUSIC

Women have always created music, but only a select few women were able to make their living as musicians in the past. Historically, upper class society encouraged them as amateurs, but rarely as professionals. Documentation of women’s role in music is scarce and because the traditions and people important in Western art music are nearly exclusively chronicled by men, the contributions of women are largely disregarded, never published, rarely performed, and lost or forgotten.

While societal pressure relegated many women to enjoyment of musical pursuits within informal settings, there were noteworthy exceptions throughout history in which women worked as musicians or benefactors of music. During the first wave of feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,¹ (virtually entirely during Maud Powell’s lifespan) many women formally studied music at conservatories and entered the mainstream musical profession for the first time.

To gain a better understanding of the legacy Maud Powell inherited of female performers and composers in the professional sphere, this chapter briefly details that heritage.

Before discussing the role of exclusively professional women in music, it is important to define the boundaries between what constituted women’s private and public performance traditions. In many cultures prior to the twentieth century, women of the middle and upper class remained mainly in a private, or domestic, sphere of operation. This concerned activities revolving around family life both inside and outside the home, as well as the wider responsibilities, taken on in relative isolation from men, during proceedings surrounding marriage, birth, and death.\(^2\) Music performed in the home is characterized by its solitary or small-group orientation, and if there was an audience for women, it usually consisted of family, other members of the community who were typically female, and children.\(^3\) This specific genre of music regularly performed in the home setting included monophonic songs for housework, parlor songs (popular piano-vocal sheet music), and solo instrumental music.

In the American middle and upper class during the nineteenth century, girls were expected to learn the piano because it was considered an essential preparation for courtship and marriage.\(^4\) Music in the home was also a way for women to express qualities of piousness, spirituality, and domesticity to others in their social circle. An observance of these virtues was strongly encouraged by American “sentimental novels” written for women, song lyrics, sheet music lithographs, and prescriptive advice literature.


\(^3\) Ibid, 41.

from the mid-nineteenth century. These sources for women’s entertainment and development upheld the prevailing gender norm of separate spheres of operation for men and women and permeated musical behaviors in women.

![Figure 1.1: Two Young Girls at the Piano, 1892 (by Auguste Renoir)](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1975.1.201)

Maud Powell’s family background exemplifies these gender restrictions in mid-nineteenth century America. A family of successful and well-educated merchants in Peru, Illinois adopted Maud Powell’s mother, Wilhelmina “Minnie” Powell, after her parents

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5 Ibid, 59.
died of black cholera. Because of her middle class upbringing, she was educated in music and was an accomplished pianist and gifted amateur composer. Maud’s mother desired to become a professional musician, but because it proved impossible for her, she was an ambitious and determined supporter for her daughter to succeed in professional music.

Until recent history, society considered women involved in the public sphere of performance unique and their performances an exceptional occurrence. While music making was encouraged for women in the home environment great prejudices remained against women in professional music. As women began to perform on instruments and in settings once reserved solely for men, they were not generally accepted as peers to male musicians. Managers and presenters often marginalized professional women by treating their atypical presence in their craft as a gimmick. Women also regularly sacrificed a family-orientated life because they were considered subordinate; their work in the public sphere also segregated them from their communities. The circumstances of women who thrived in public musical life were the model upon which Maud Powell and other successful women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries built their careers. Some of the most prominent concert violinists will be explored in Chapter 2. Their legacy helped make Powell’s vocation a possibility.

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid, 46.
Some of the societal attitudes and limitations for women performers persisted through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Other perceptions began to change with the heralding of the Industrial Era. Following the American Civil War, the increase in demand for women’s rights and progressive change occurred all over the Western world. Gaining an understanding of women’s roles in music of the past helps contextualize the world in which Maud Powell lived, as well as the boundaries that she actively worked to transform.
CHAPTER 2: WOMEN AND THE VIOLIN

The preceding chapter provided a context for the role of music in the lives of women, both in a more private sphere of operation as amateurs, and those who obtained the opportunity of professionalism in a more public capacity. This chapter will focus on the societal constructions regarding gender and instruments with an emphasis on the violin. It will also examine the careers of the limited number of recorded women violinists prior to the mid-nineteenth century when Maud Powell was born, as well as the woman who directly influenced Maud Powell to become a violinist.

Until recent history, there was a limitation on instruments acceptable for women to play. The sexual stereotyping of most instruments as “masculine,” which began during the Renaissance with the rise of instrumental music, made it socially unacceptable for women to play them.¹ This included wind, brass, percussion, large stringed instruments, and the violin for the majority of its existence. Women were expected to cultivate “feminine” instruments, which required no modification in the facial expression or physical bearing.² Besides the voice, keyboard instruments that could be kept in the home, such as the harpsichord, virginal, spinet, clavichord, and later the pianoforte and piano, were the most popular choices.³ Beyond keyboard instruments, female instrumentalists were largely limited to the viol, (which did not require facial distortion under the chin like its successor the violin,) and lute during the Renaissance and Baroque

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
During the Classical and Romantic periods the harp and guitar essentially took the place of the viol and lute as popular keyboard alternatives. Understanding the instrumental confines for women prior to the twentieth century helps contextualize the choices women made in their musical explorations both inside and outside the home environment.

Figure 2.1: Ladies Making Music on the Terrace at the Park (by François Clodius Cont-Calique)

Until the nineteenth century and even into the mid-twentieth century, many prejudices were sustained against professional female violinists, and even women

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
studying violin in the home. In fact, many considered the violin unsuitable for women because it could not be played in a demure seated position like all of the “female-appropriate” instruments listed above. It was understood as unladylike because of the physical distortion of the chin and arms. In America, due to an influence of early Puritan belief that instruments led to sinfulness, violins were considered instruments of the devil that no self-respecting woman would play. The acceptance of the violin as an appropriate, and even well suited, instrument for women occurred in as little as half a century between 1850 and 1900. The reasons for this soaring transformation will be discussed in more detail below, but a sense of the quickly shifting opinions can be observed through the critics of the time. The famous and highly respected critic John Sullivan Dwight from Dwight’s Journal of Music traveled to Madison, Georgia in 1853 to witness the novel annual performance of one hundred and thirty women from the Madison Female College. He was clearly shocked to see string players on the program and this kind of a program with so many women in general. His exclamation marks and italicized words display his directly proportional astonishment to the size of the instrument. The excerpt below is from his article titled “A Monster Concert by Young Ladies.”

Seldom has it been our lot in sweeping the musical firmament with our telescope, to report a new phenomenon of such entirely strange and formidable size and aspect, as the sign which we have just read in the Southern heavens. We have given our readers a pretty faithful almanac of the motions of the regular planets, of the risings and settings of the fixed stars, the comings and goings of comets, &c, in the universe of music. But neither the blazing “monsters” in England, nor the Great and Little Bears

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9 Christine Ammer, Unsung, 32.
of St. Petersburg, nor Mozart’s “Jupiter” with all his satallites\[sic\]; nor the meteoric Wagners of Germany; nor the far streaming comets of Julliens coming and DeMeyers gone, slaking their horrid hair in wonderful fantasies; nor Sontag and the sweet influences of vocal Pleiades (the queen one of whom is silent since last year); nor, in short, the whole Milky Way of Yankee musical “Conventions;” –can offer anything as novel and as startling as this long chart that just now lies before us.

It is the programme of an annual Concert by the pupils of the “Madison Female College,” in Madison, Georgia, which came off on the evening of July 27th, under the auspices of Prof. G. C. Taylor, “musical manager and director.” And if this is a specimen of the scale on which they “do up” the music in the educational seminaries down South, we would advice our German encomiast, “Hopfit,” to look there rather than Boston, for the “music of the Future.”

Said programme first sets forth the names of each and every performer, to the number of one hundred and thirty, each with the prefix of Miss… These consist of 97 young lady pianists, 11 young lady guitarists, 3 young lady harpists, 13 young lady violinists(!), 1 young lady violist(!!), 4 young lady violoncellists(!!!), and 1 young lady contrabassist(!!!!). The entire programme, reader, would be too much for you…

Another excerpt, from Dwight’s article “A Remarkable Violin School” (referring to Julius Eichberg’s studio at the Boston Conservatory that will be reflected upon in Chapter 3), in Dwight’s Journal of Music in 1877 displays his total acceptance at this point, twenty-four years later, of the violin as a “women’s instrument” as well as a man’s. At this point in his career, he would have heard Camilla Urso, (Maud Powell’s greatest inspiration, who will also be discussed later in this chapter,) the great harbinger of change for women violinists in America, many times in concert. His attitude toward women playing stringed instruments differs remarkably, which highlights the societal change taking place and makes for an interesting back-to-back comparison of the thought progression of this well-regarded critic.

We have always wondered that, in a community where so much attention is paid to music, and where almost every girl and boy is taught to threm[sic] the piano, so few acquire, or even seek to acquire, the art of playing on the violin. The piano, to be sure, is a more representative instrument, enabling one pair of hands to grasp the whole harmony of a composition, or a compendium thereof. But the violin, with the other members of its family, viola, ’cello, etc., is the more social instrument, bringing together groups of kindred spirits who can play parts, and read together the quartets, etc., of the great masters, or play Sonata duos, trios, etc., with the pianoforte. And the string instruments are infinitely the most expressive; their tones lie nearer to the soul, spring more directly from the human breast. They are the heart of the whole orchestra, the most essential part of music, next to the human voice. It is a graceful, manly, healthy exercise to play the violin; if it be very difficult to play it like an artist, so much the worthier of a manly aspiration. If it is often only vulgar fiddling, it is, on the other hand, with those truly schooled, the most gentlemanly of instruments.

And, we maintain, that it is equally the most womanly. We have many times expressed our interest in female violinists. Who that has seen and heard Camilla Urso, or Teresa Liebe, or Mr. Eichberg’s accomplished pupils could fail to feel that the violin seemed peculiarly fitted to the female constitution and capacity. How graceful the attitude and motions of a young woman skillfully handling the bow! Her finer sense of touch, her delicate tact, her instinctive feeling out of the pure truth of tone, give woman a great advantage in this art; and the several examples we have had, from time to time, in the concert of the Boston Conservatory of Music; have shown that this was no mere dream.11

Besides the larger implications of a rapidly changing culture for women and events that led to the rise of the suffrage movement, the primary reason for the change of heart regarding women and the violin were a handful of women violin soloists in both Europe, and the budding classical music scene in America. The tides began to turn prior to the nineteenth century with the Venetian ospedali academy system in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We know the names of very few women violinists prior to the nineteenth century, but four women who came from the ospedali are still known today

because of their virtuosic status: Anna Maria della Pietà, her protégé Santa (Sanza or Samaritana) della Pietà, Maddalena Laura Lombardini (Sirmen), and Regina Strinasacchi (Schlick.) The first true virtuosos prior to Maud Powell were Teresa and Maria Milanollo in the mid-nineteenth century, followed closely by Wilma Norman-Neruda (Lady Hallé), and Maud Powell’s direct predecessor and mentor, Camilla Urso. Teresa Milanollo, Lady Hallé, and Camilla Urso inspired a generation of young girl violinists, including a large number of them in America at the Boston Conservatory thanks to the innovative spirit of instructor Julius Eichenberg.

Some of the most extraordinary institutions in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe were the four ospedali (conservatories) of Venice. The Ospedale della Pietà, dei Mendicanti, degli Incurabili, and dei Derelitti cared for people in need, including orphaned and abandoned boys and girls. Unlike similar institutions in Europe that provided musical training for boys only, the Venetian institutions provided remarkable educations to girls who showed musical talent. It was funded by private donations and also public funds like gondola rental fees and the sale of indulgences. Money from alms collections financed dowries for girls who wished to marry, an outstandingly progressive concern at a time when respectable marriage without a dowry was nearly impossible. The excellence of these institutions became so well known over time that they attracted paying pupils from all over Europe.

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13 Ibid.
Anna Maria della Pietà (circa 1689 to 95-1782) is the oldest recorded famous woman violinist in history. She is referred to in many published documents of leading contemporary European writers during her time as the foremost violinist in Europe. In a chapter of the book *Cecilia Reclaimed* titled “Anna Maria della Pietà: The Woman Musician of Venice Personified,” author Jane L. Baldauf-Berdes describes Anna Maria’s rise to become the most celebrated musician ever produced by the Venetian Ospedale system:

Anna Maria della Pietà began life by entering history through humanity’s backdoor, as one of the many thousand “Figlie della casa, Scaffetta

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Numero ---” in the Ospedale di Santa Maria della Visitazione o della Pietà, the centuries-old home for abandoned children of uncertain paternity, that is, born au naturel…

[She] may be considered one of the central figures in the musical life of sacral Venice during the last third of three hundred years of musical activity inside the historically unique Venetian musical foundations. More important, she personifies ten generations of women who were educated over a decade for the music profession in the cori [music schools], which existed as institutions-within-institutions in the ospedali grandi from 1525-1855.16

Anna Maria chose to remain within the ospedale system her whole life, because she could continue a performing career only by staying as a maestra at the institution. Vivaldi, who was previously one of her teachers, wrote twenty-two concerti for her, and it is likely she performed as many as thirty-one of the solo parts in the orchestral pieces Vivaldi wrote for the coro. Other composers in Italy, including Tartini, also wrote concerti for her, the complexity of which demonstrates her exceptional technical abilities.17

Anna Maria also taught at the coro, and her most prominent violin student, Santa Della Pietà (c. 1725-post 1774) became the director of the Ospedale della Pietà orchestra in 1740. Santa (also known as Sanza or Samaritana) was also a foundling admitted in infancy to the ospedale. She performed at least six of the Vivaldi concerti composed for Anna Maria, and one of her compositions, a setting of the Vespers Psalm cxiii Laudate pueri à 4 in D, survives today.18

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16 Jane L. Baldauf-Berdes, Cecilia Reclaimed, 134.
Traditionally, women of the *ospedale* system had three career paths available to them: marrying with a suitable dowry and running a household, becoming a nun and moving outside of Venice to work in a convent, or staying in the *ospedale* and continuing their performance careers with salaries. However, as the eighteenth century dissolved into the nineteenth, they had a fourth option. They could marry another prominent musician and continue a performance career as long as they did not return to Venice. (This way they would not compete with the women of the *ospedali.*) Two women violinists rose to international acclaim during this time period: Maddalena Laura Lombardini Sirmen and Regina Strinasacchi Schlick.

Figure 2.3: Maddalena Laura Lombardini Sirmen

Maddalena Laura Lombardini Sirmen (1745-1818), born into an impoverished noble family auditioned to be a part of the Ospedale dei Mendicanti *coro* as an apprentice

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and was accepted at the age of seven. Highly accomplished, she remained in the ospedale learning from expert teachers with an outside knowledge of music trends in Europe for the first few years and then continued on performing and teaching younger students for the required ten years.\(^{20}\) During her time at the coro, she was sponsored by the Ospedale dei Mendicanti to study privately with Tartini, who had taken an interest in her gifts of violin performance, ornamentation and embellishment, and composition, on three different occasions in the early 1760s.\(^{21}\) In 1766, she solicited Tartini’s help in finding a husband, as she wanted to continue a more public life as a performer, and also did not want to lose her unusually large marriage dowry.\(^{22}\) She married Lodovico Maria Gaspar Sirmen di Ravenna the following year and went on a world tour. She was hailed as Tartini’s “authentic and worthy descendent,”\(^{23}\) a description that was remarkable considering the stigma against the violin as a masculine instrument. Notably, she also composed and published at least twenty-six works. Leopold Mozart praised her compositions, including six violin concerti with demanding solo parts. Her six string quartets, Op. 3, show a direct influence of Franz Josef Haydn and are among her most progressive works.\(^ {24}\)

Regina Strinasacchi Schlick (c. 1764-1839) received a thorough education in violin and guitar at the Ospedale della Pietà. She left at the early age of sixteen and toured Italy, Germany, and France. She was greatly admired for her appearance and manners as well as her playing.\(^ {25}\) She is most well known as the sonata partner of

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\(^{21}\) Ibid, 95.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Ibid, 96.

\(^{24}\) Ibid.

\(^{25}\) Chappell White, “Strinasacchi, Regina,”*Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Strinasacchi commissioned Mozart’s Sonata in B-flat Major K. 454 for her second concert in Vienna. She married into the artisan class in 1785; Johann Conrad Schlick was a distinguished cellist in the ducal orchestra of Gotha. For the next twenty-five years, the couple made occasional concert tours together.\textsuperscript{26} After marriage, Regina Strinasacchi Schlick broke another boundary as a woman instrumental musician at court and was especially known for her work in chamber music, with special distinction in her performances of Haydn quartets.\textsuperscript{27}

These four women from the Venetian conservatory system were the only recognized women violinists before the mid-nineteenth century, except for an English woman named Sarah Ottey, who, according to a letter in \textit{The Strad} Magazine in 1892, played concerts in public as early as 1721. Very little is known about her besides the fact that she also performed publicly upon the harpsichord and bass viol.\textsuperscript{28}

The three direct predecessors to Maud Powell all had two things in common: they were from the artisan-class with parents who were classical musicians and they all begged to play the violin from a young age. Teresa (and Maria) Milanollo, Lady Hallé, and especially Camilla Urso facilitated and inspired a generation of woman violinists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Strad, “From the archive: Who was the first female violinist?” \textit{The Strad}, March 5, 2014, accessed March 14, 2015, http://www.thestrad.com/cpt-latests/from-the-archive-who-was-the-first-female-violinist./
Teresa Milanollo (1827-1904) and her sister Maria (1832-1848) were child prodigies who toured Europe extensively during the 1840s until Maria’s untimely death. Teresa’s father was a part-time luthier, and when Teresa was four he took her to a funeral ceremony in honor of King Charles Félix of Sardinia. After leaving the church her father asked her, “Did you pray to God, little one?” She replied, “No, papa, I did nothing but listen to the violin.” After this, she persistently demanded her own violin. She received musical training from some of the greatest teachers in Italy at the time, and she was her sister Maria’s only educator. Milanollo solidified her reputation as a great performer while still a child prodigy and therefore unusual entertainment for her audiences around Europe. No doubt her status as a prodigy helped Teresa, along with Maria until her death, succeed as the first true woman violin virtuoso of great acclaim. She all but ended her performance career in sorrow over the loss of her sister and the advent of her marriage, although she formed a concert series for the poor, “Concerts aux Pauvres,” which she carried out in nearly all of the principal towns of France.


Wilhelmina Norman-Néruda “Lady Hallé” (1839-1911) was born into a musical family. Her father was her first teacher as “she began to play the violin almost as soon as she could walk.”\textsuperscript{32} Although her parents wished her to become a pianist, she had an innate desire for the violin, like Teresa Milanollo. Her father relented after finding her practicing her brother’s violin in secret at the age of four.\textsuperscript{33} Unlike the fate of many touring virtuosi women, she continued her career after marrying Swedish conductor-composer Ludwig Norman, whom she divorced in 1869. Following her divorce, she performed all over Europe, including in the recitals of Sir Charles Hallé beginning in 1877. They married in 1888 and toured Europe, Australia, and South Africa until his

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\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 650.
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death. In 1899, after the tragic death of her alpinist son in the Dolomites, Lady Hallé settled in Berlin where she taught at the Stern Conservatory and notably performed the Bach Double Concerto with Joseph Joachim and the Berlin Philharmonic. Joachim, arguably the most accomplished violinist of the nineteenth century, wrote to his wife in 1870: “I like her very much, and I think you would, too. Her playing is more to my taste than that of any contemporary-unspoilt, pure and musical.” The other remarkable achievement of Lady Hallé was that she was the first woman in recorded history to be the first violinist of an internationally recognized string quartet whose other players were men, all well known in their day. Lady Hallé’s involvement in chamber music within the public sphere, almost unheard of before this, served as a model for Maud Powell in more ways than one. (These will be elaborated upon in Chapter 6.)

Figure 2.5: Lady Hallé, 1st violinist, The Monday Popular Concerts in St. James’ Hall

35 Ibid.
37 Karen Shaffer, Maud Powell, 143.
While Maud Powell was the first true American virtuoso violinist, a woman immigrant to the United States preceded her and became Powell’s great inspiration to pursue the violin as a career as well as a model in many other aspects of her life. Camilla Urso (1842-1902) from Nantes, France, moved to America as a ten-year-old child prodigy. Born into a family of professional musicians (her father was a flutist and organist and her mother a singer), at the age of five Urso (like Teresa Milanollo and Wilma Néruda) begged her parents for a violin after witnessing concert of a violin soloist in her hometown. Her father initially objected, believing that no respectable girl played the violin. After further insistence, the unorthodox decision to let her take lessons with the concertmaster and colleague of her father in the theatre orchestra inspired extreme gossip; her violin instructor, however, had heard of Teresa and Maria Milanollo and decided to encourage seven-year-old Camilla to audition for the Paris Conservatoire. Although she was a year younger than the minimum age requirement, she was admitted on full scholarship as the first female student at the conservatoire. She graduated just two years later with highest honors.

As the first woman at the Paris Conservatoire, Urso opened many new doors for female violinists. In America, her New York premiere and beginning of a concert series was interrupted by an eight-year hiatus in her parents’ new home of Nashville, Tennessee. She returned to Europe for further study and married the man who became her concert manager. Maud Powell would later repeat this marriage model. This launched a worldwide lengthy touring career that included concerts in Europe, Australia, and South Africa. Urso frequently performed in Boston and in 1867 she received an extraordinary honor from the members of the Harvard Musical Association that proved to be a huge step for women in music. They presented her with a written testimonial that

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43 Ibid.
declared her the equal of the best male violinists.\textsuperscript{44} The testimonial, notated in \textit{Dwight's Journal of Music}, explained that it was their “duty as brethren (who it may be admitted are the more thoroughly capable of recognizing skill in this department of the art)”\textsuperscript{45} to bear witness to Urso’s ability. All sixty-one musicians signed the document, writing “it is not enough today to say that it was a wonderful performance for a woman; it was a consummate rendering, which probably few living men could improve upon.”\textsuperscript{46} Yet, as a woman, she could not play in that orchestra, a discriminatory practice she later confronted and which will be examined again in Chapter 6. However, with this performance in 1867 (the year of Maud Powell’s birth) she set a precedent for Powell’s success as a professional violinist in the United States and many other girls in the Boston area.

Urso’s artistry, abilities, and personality influenced the previously mentioned Julius Eichberg to open string classes to female students at the Boston Conservatory in 1867.\textsuperscript{47} By 1894, \textit{Freund’s Weekly} reported that between 400 and 500 young women were studying violin in Boston and many were beyond the student level.\textsuperscript{48} Several of Eichberg’s pupils went on to work with Joseph Joachim in Europe and later became solo or ensemble players. Some of Maud Powell’s contemporaries like Geraldine Morgan, who played quartets with Joachim, and Lillian Shattuck, who returned to teach at the

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\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 207.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Karen Pendle, \textit{Women & Music}, 207.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Boston Conservatory, formed their own all-female string quartets.\textsuperscript{49} Another Eichberg student, Olive Mead (who was no doubt inspired to play the violin in part by Maud Powell), became the protégée of Franz Kneisel (from the United States’ most famous quartet the Kneisel String Quartet) and enjoyed a distinguished career as a soloist and the leader of the highly regarded all-female Olive Mead Quartet.\textsuperscript{50}

Although there were few recorded women violinists before Maud Powell, each of them were extraordinary in their contributions to Western art music and the progression of women in their field. They set up a precedent that allowed great and dynamic changes into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, making it possible for the great career of Maud Powell and the other women surrounding her pursuing an artistic occupation.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
CHAPTER 3: WOMEN’S MUSIC CLUBS AND FEMALE SOLOISTS OF THE LATE NINETEENTH/EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

The Industrial Revolution heralded an era of progressivism and rapid change for rural and urban men and women in both upper and lower class society as well as the growing middle class. An escape from the Malthusian trap\(^1\) meant that more women belonged to the upper and middle classes and now had time to devote to activities outside of creating a functioning household. Previously, women’s work in the home required immense skill, time, and physical exertion to limit expenses. They essentially formed a second income by producing and processing almost everything needed for the use of their family unit or for trading in the marketplace; all of this had to be accomplished without the amenities and household technology that began to develop in the nineteenth century.\(^2\) Women, whose place was still in the private sphere to a large extent, began engaging in volunteer work and the forming of clubs whose purpose was to improve the larger community in some way.\(^3\)

In America, women’s music clubs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries played a critical role in developing of Western art music and encouraging professional female musicians through their patronage. Legions of women answered a call to become cultivators of musical culture in their communities by joining or beginning such clubs. These music clubs brought solo artists, orchestras, and music festivals to their

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\(^1\) The Malthusian trap implies that for most of human history income was essentially stagnant because technological advances and discoveries only resulted in more people, rather than improvements in living standards, until the Industrial Revolution.


\(^3\) Ibid, 32.
communities.\(^4\) By 1919 there were more than six hundred active clubs with a combined membership of about two hundred thousand women. They were so successful that the National Federation of Music Clubs reported that, beyond large cities, individual clubs managed three-fourths of the country’s public concerts.\(^5\) These clubs also stimulated growth among music students in their communities.

Maud Powell received prodigious amounts of support from women’s music clubs and in return encouraged their causes and led an interactive dialogue with them on the direction of their agendas. Part of Powell’s career ideology included touring the country to give violin recitals at a time when traveling conditions were appalling, and touring was physically costly.\(^6\) Powell was often invited to small towns by women’s music clubs, and their incredible force in the cultural life of America left a lasting impression on her. In every location she stopped, Powell made an effort to meet the local musicians and music promoters and sought to discover the musical achievements of the town. When not playing regularly scheduled concerts, she could be found promoting musical growth through encouraging young students in their studies or meeting and advising local music clubs, many of them women’s clubs, and local orchestras.\(^7\) Through her extensive personal experience with the successes of music clubs around the country, Powell was able to comment on the importance of the formation of these clubs in an article found in the May 1918 edition of *The Musical Observer*:

> It makes such a difference if there is a leading thought in a town. Even one person can do so much. Just suppose you went to stay in some little place,

\(^4\) Ibid, 66.  
\(^5\) Ibid.  
\(^6\) Karen Shaffer, *Maud Powell*, 149.  
\(^7\) Ibid, 148.
quite asleep on the subject of music. You would at once do something to stir them up; it might be a very simple thing at first. You might only call some of the people together once a week to listen to phonograph records. Then you might start a little music club, and before long you would suggest having a few artists come during the season, to play and sing for them. And so the good work begins and goes on…

Maud Powell made a concerted effort to contribute to the development of these organizations by appearing under the auspices of the local music club. Her personal example and encouragement as a magnetic, first-class artist aided in kindling local interest in music more than any other single action. Her dedication to the smaller communities reflected her mission to aid a fundamental change in the scene of American art music, especially for underserved districts and women’s societies. She elaborated upon this dedication in the same article from *The Musical Observer*:

> I like to feel the pulse of a town where I am to play, even if it be quite a small place. How can this be done when one remains but a few hours or a day? It is not so difficult. Soon after I arrive, I go for a walk, for I need fresh air after a night of railway travel. I explore the little town, its shop windows and principal streets. I drop into the music store, too, get acquainted with the proprietors, tell them who I am, ask about the victrola and the records. Then I meet the club people and others whom it is necessary for me to know. By the time the concert is to begin, I have a pretty good idea of the temper of that town and its people. When I go before them, I play as though that were the one concert of my life.

Powell also sometimes guided the work of the women’s music clubs. As a staunch advocate of contemporary American composers, she summoned the women in organized music clubs throughout the country to their aid, imploring:

> Cannot our women, who have worked so nobly and with such wide-spread influence for the advancement of music, extend their field of action in this

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direction, giving the young composer opportunity to hear actually, in orchestral presentation, and not in groping or more often too flattering imagination, the tone-creations of his own brain?\textsuperscript{12}

Maud Powell gave credit to the women actively involved in hundreds of local music organizations as the main source of America’s musical awareness and development. Her belief in their vitality to American musical growth can be observed in an interview with reporter H.F. Peyser from *Musical America* in 1911:

[ POWELL] has been observing the musical growth of the country in a very literal sense. She has made observations on the spot. And after duly noting conditions from Maine to Texas she reports that all’s well. And who is to be thanked for this? “The women,” says Miss Powell, emphatically. “The women are making the musical wheels revolve.”\textsuperscript{13}

At this point, Peyser baited Powell by mentioning how out of alignment this idea was with the Lambertian hypothesis, a scientific theory that was popular; with this comment Peyser most likely implied that Powell was not assessing men and women equally. Powell upheld her opinion in her response, with an acerbic reference to the social atmosphere of New York City:

She smiled blandly and insisted even more firmly that the women of America deserved the largest slice of credit for the land’s musical awakening and advancement. “Maybe not in New York, she said, “but then you know that you can’t judge by this city. As long as women continue to spend their money on those absurd and hideous Spring bonnets one cannot look to them for undivided support of artistic matters. Besides that, New York is full of *nouveaux riches* and is so different from the rest of the country! But get outside of it and you will find that women are not wasting their money on their Spring hats. They deserve a tribute for encouraging not only music but every form of culture.

They have formed their art clubs and societies and in little, out-of-the-way localities, you find that they can discuss the art of Botticelli and have on the walls of their houses reproductions of the great masterpieces of painting rather than the cheap chromos one might be inclined to expect.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid; original concert program from the Maud Powell Society Archive.
\textsuperscript{13} H.F. Peyser, “Women are Making our Musical Wheels Turn, Says Maud Powell,” *Musical America*, April 1911, 2.
They have their musical organizations, they arrange and patronize the concerts of the great artists.  

Because Powell traveled extensively throughout America and spent time with the women’s music clubs in many locations either by being presented in concert through their societies or through her own initiative, she had one of the most comprehensive first-hand experiences with the stimulus they provided for American culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Without the clubs’ persistent work, women such as Powell and her contemporary top American female concert pianist Fannie Bloomfield-Zeisler would not have had the same successes in their performance careers.

Women’s music clubs around the country helped encourage American professional women in performance, but the path for female concert artists was still difficult and, for many women, virtually unattainable. Issues of gender and generalizations about the differences in biological makeup between men and women shaped the nature of their success. The nineteenth century saw the rise of the virtuoso performer, whose most admirable qualities of strength, endurance, force, and assertive power were stereotypically masculine traits. Women were believed to possess less strength and stamina and were considered emotionally fragile. Any sign of stress was diagnosed as a nervous breakdown.

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14 Ibid.
16 Ibid, 24.
17 Ibid, 3.
The first woman to achieve widespread popularity in the United States was the singer Jenny Lind. She made a colossally successful American tour organized by P.T. Barnum in 1850. She created a sensation and the public was gripped by what is called Jenny Lind Mania, the Jenny Fever, and Lindomania. The famous critic George Upton recalled the evening of her 1850 Boston debut:

The usually staid city was in a state of delirium...the crowds, the enthusiasm, the great audience inside, the vastly greater crowd outside wishing it were inside...Her voice was full of volume and extraordinary range...Her high notes were as clear as a lark’s, and her full voice was rich and sonorous.

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19 Ibid, 25.
Besides her singing voice, the underlying reason for her unqualified popularity was her capability of projecting on stage the qualities considered suitable for the perfect woman. A mixture of beauty, grace, generosity, modesty, and humility embodied her onstage persona. This contrasted starkly with the attributes the male virtuosi projected to the audience. The values that Jenny Lind embodied on stage, virtues that made the American public fall in love with her, were exactly why many female musicians could not live up to the success that Lind personified. Playing a musical instrument made it difficult to capture the idealized notion of perfect womanhood due to the perceived body distortion required during performance. Early female instrumental soloists presented themselves as straightforward, serious performers as their gender was the necessary element of novelty.\(^{21}\) Unfortunately, as they were a novelty, there were only a handful of prominent women performers at the turn of the century, and managers assumed that there was only room for one per instrument at a time.\(^{22}\) This limited many talented women who deserved virtuoso status but couldn’t compete with the top instrumentalist in their field.\(^{23}\)

The first women to achieve renown as instrumental soloists in America were Camilla Urso from Nantes, France, and pianist Teresa Carreño from Caracas, Venezuela, both in 1853. They were child prodigies, Urso at age ten and Carreño at nine. They had an enthusiastic response from critics, but this acceptance by the elite and the public was clearly helped by their prodigy status.\(^{24}\) It was easier to accept expression of passion and mastery from a child than a grown woman. Camilla Urso became the reigning woman

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
\(^{23}\) Ibid, 28.
\(^{24}\) Ibid, 27.
violinist of the mid-to-late nineteenth century and as her career ended, Maud Powell’s ascended. In the piano world Teresa Carreño made way for Julie Rivé-King, who was replaced by Fannie Bloomfield-Zeisler, who was succeeded by Olga Samaroff and Ethel Leginska. The performers themselves recognized this trend. In her will, Maud Powell left her precious Guadagnini violin “to the next great woman violinist.” Her husband and manager Sunny Turner presented it to virtuoso Erica Morini after her New York début.25

One of the reasons Maud Powell had many of the opportunities she did is that she did not have competition for the novelty spot in American culture as “the Violin Queen,” as Jean Sibelius nicknamed her. There were other great woman violinists, but none were at her level, or they chose a family life with little performing after marriage. Powell also exceeded all expectations with her opportunities, and always acted as a missionary for music. She often braved horrendous conditions to play concerts for the underserved, with no regard for her health.26 Her constitutional fortitude, until her untimely death at age 52, saved her from a diagnosis of neurasthenia, hysteria, or a nervous breakdown that most women soloists of the turn of the century supposedly suffered from. The word “neurasthenia” was coined in 1869 by physician George M. Beard to describe a condition he saw as increasingly prevalent among middle-class urban Americans. This “malady of modern culture,” affecting both men and women, was brought on by what he considered difficulties adapting to the fast pace of industrialized society. For men, physicians attributed it to their increasingly demanding role in society, but in women it supposedly

resulted from their inadequate brain capacity for dealing with complex thought and roles outside of the home.27  

While both male and female soloists dealt with a variety of stresses related to the performance career, articles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century suggest with surprising regularity that a woman musicians’ temporary absence from the concert stage was due to neurasthenia. Prominent male virtuosos also experienced anxiety and exhaustion, but their conditions were generally viewed as situational rather than pathological. Because of this, men were more likely to recognize their breaking points and alter aspects of their professional lives to accommodate their physical or emotional limitations.28 Women musicians were more unwilling to recognize or acknowledge their breaking points, because that was equivalent of admitting to themselves and society, already dubious about women in the public sphere, that they were not up to the task of public performance. The media, clearly biased toward women as unqualified for public life, sensationalized their stories of ill health.29 This is not unlike today’s media obsession with the health concerns of female politicians.  

It seems that almost every woman soloist was affected by the media coverage of her weaknesses. “Teresa Carreño in Stage of Collapse: Great Pianiste Breaks Down Physically”,30 Fannie Bloomfield-Zeisler in a State of Collapse Due to Acute Nervous Trouble”,31 “Mme. Olga Samaroff…Found in New York Hospital After Nervous

28 Ibid, 68.  
29 Ibid, 69.  
Breakdown”;32 “Leginska Ordered to Take Year’s Rest: Buffalo Physicians Find Pianist Suffering from a Severe Nervous Breakdown”;33 these are just some of the articles written about women. Similar articles do not appear about men from this time period.

An anecdote about the reasons behind one of these “nervous breakdowns” displays the complex nature of the situations that were so over-simplified by the media. Pianist Fannie Bloomfield-Zeisler grieved over a devastating personal loss in 1905. After finding out she was pregnant with her fourth child, she anticipated the birth with “almost delirious joy,”35 expecting the child would be her long-hoped-for daughter. She went into premature labor after straining herself closing a heavy sliding door and gave birth to an almost fully developed stillborn girl. She blamed herself for the death of the baby and remained in a state of melancholia for weeks. Upon resuming activities, she had blurred vision and her oculist decided she needed full rest of her eyes to avoid blindness, as he

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believed it was due to the “excitement of public performance.” He prescribed the “rest cure.” The rest cure was extremely popular in America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It developed due to the work of Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, who advised that “hysterical women” could be cured by allowing absolute rest from their lives. Patients were placed in virtual solitary confinement in darkened rooms and deprived of mental and physical stimulation. Fannie Bloomfield-Zeisler was confined for several months to a darkened room with heavy shades so no sunlight could enter. When her doctor also advised that she might need to give up her profession, she told him that she could not imagine a life without her music. He responded that he could not understand why, and when Bloomfield-Zeisler asked how he would suggest she spend the rest of her life, he responded, “Buy a peach farm in Michigan and raise peaches.” This confirmation from a doctor of her neurasthenia reached the press, who sensationalized the event and tried to pin her time of grief on her unsuitability for a career in music performance.

While Maud Powell was never accused of neurasthenia during her lifetime, just one day after her death, the New York Times reported in an article titled “Maud Powell, The Violinist, Is Dead: One of Greatest Native Musicians Suffers Nervous Breakdown at 51 Years” [incorrect age; she was 52]:

UNIONTOWN, Pa., Jan. 8- Maud Powell, the violinist, died in a hotel here today. She suffered a nervous breakdown yesterday and became so ill that her concert last night was cancelled. On Thanksgiving she collapsed on the stage during her concert in St. Louis. For twenty-four hours she was

36 Ibid, 88.
38 Beth Abelson Macleod, Women Performing Music, 88.
said to be dangerously ill, but she recovered and continued her tour. The illness was reported as acute gastritis at that time.\textsuperscript{39}

Their dramatized report was a twisting of the truth, however, as Maud Powell suffered from a heart attack on both occasions mentioned in the article, not a nervous breakdown.

While media plagued the success of women soloists, their personal lives also proved difficult to navigate within the social constructs of late nineteenth and early twentieth century American culture. Whether or not women in music married had an indelible impact on the trajectory of their careers. The women themselves often expressed beliefs that the domestic setting was the appropriate outlet for their talents after marriage.\textsuperscript{40} Articles in late nineteenth century music periodicals reinforced the idea that true happiness lay in abandoning a woman’s music career for domesticity.\textsuperscript{41} In 1898, the Musical Courier wrote, “Are you content, young artistic young woman, to give up your chances of a peaceful home life for the storm and stress of an artistic career?”\textsuperscript{42} Two years later another article titled “Why Artists Should Marry” stated, “We believe that no success in art compensates for the absence of married love and a happy home.”\textsuperscript{43} These attitudes prevalent in media and Western culture affected the way women saw their own role in society, and influenced the decisions they made regarding their careers.

A few of Maud Powell’s solo violinist peers, Geraldine Morgan, Nettie Carpenter, and Arma Senkrah all virtually gave up their careers when they married. Geraldine Morgan was also an American violinist, the exact age of Powell. She was the first

\textsuperscript{40} Beth Abelson Macleod, Women Performing Music, 79.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
American to win the Mendelssohn Prize, made many successful tours of Europe and
Great Britain, most notably performed the Bach Double Concerto with Joseph Joachim,
and founded the Joseph Joachim School of Violin Playing at Carnegie Hall. Following in
Powell’s footsteps, she even formed and led a string quartet with three male members.
After her marriage, she limited performances to once or twice per year in her native New
York. Nettie Carpenter, born in America in 1865 (two years before Powell,) studied at
the Paris Conservatoire and won first prize for violin in 1884. She performed in a circuit
of successful European and American tours and was a favorite of Pablo Sarasate with
whom she studied briefly in Spain. She married an English cellist, and her public career
came to an end and never resumed, despite their divorce. Arma Senkrah, also an
American born in 1864, studied with Massart and Vieuxtemps at the Paris Conservatoire,
and later at the Brussels Conservatory with Wieniawski. She made several European
tours, but retired to private life as soon as she married a German attorney. She gave up a
promising career and later her life at age thirty-five when she shot herself because her
husband was allegedly infatuated with an actress. This pattern of women retiring from
public careers for full time work in the private sphere was overwhelmingly common until
the post-World War II era. Newspapers announcing a woman musician’s plan to marry
were usually accompanied by a notice reassuring the public that she would not abandon
her music, but would shift all performances from the public stage to her private home.

While many women all but gave up their careers after marriage, the most
successful women soloists married their managers and thus continued prosperous careers

44 Christine Ammer, *Unsung*, 47.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid, 48.
with the help of their husbands. Women who toured as solo recitalists generally traveled with at least one friend or family member. Pianists also included a piano tuner and manager in their entourage provided by the manufacturer to maintain the instrument and help the artist with all of the practical details of the trips. Women who married their manager had an advantage of emotional support, companionship, and protection from “predatory” males. It also gave them a respectability that unmarried female performers did not necessarily have, while keeping all of the proceeds of the tour within the family.48

Figure 3.3: Maud Powell, husband “Sunny” Turner, and brother William having fun with photography49

Maud Powell was fortunate with what seems to have been a congenial marriage to manager H. Godfrey “Sunny” (because of his good humor) Turner, whom she met while on tour with the Sousa Band. Before her marriage to Turner at age thirty-seven, she toured with her mother as her escort, insisting she would avoid marriage to focus on her art. She wrote an article for young women who wanted to become professional violinists in an 1891 issue of *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, stressing that marriage was not a suitable option:

> In addition to the fatigues caused by the long hours of practice and study-back of which must be a genuine love for the work-devotion and sacrifice are necessary. Many social pleasures must be denied, and intense must be the application of the girl who would become proficient. And to her who would become a professional *artiste*, let me say with “Punch” when addressing those about to marry—“Don’t.”[^50]

Powell legally kept her name after marriage and emphasized to the press that she would continue with her career, a necessary measure for women in her era. She followed in the footsteps of Camilla Urso, who also had a successful partnership and marriage with her manager. Other women soloists who were married to their manager at some point were Julie Rivé-King, Ethel Leginska, and Teresa Carreño.

For most of her life, Maud Powell believed that she would need to choose between marriage and a career.[^51] She married in 1904, and in 1908 she wrote an article titled “The Price of Fame” for young girls with musical talent. In the article, one can sense her inner struggle with the societal pressures she faced and felt the need to pass on to the next generation of young women musicians in regard to marriage and consistent work:

It is a difficult question-too difficult to answer by a simple yea or nay: - Shall you become a great artist and have the multitude at your feet (if you are lucky), or shall you marry the faithful and honest Dick, live a life of humdrum domestic felicity and suffer ever after with a gnawing sense of defeated and thwarted ambition, a bitter “might-have-been?”…

And tell me, when you are thirty or thirty-five, and one day admit to yourself that you did not know what you were talking about when you declared in your early twenties that you were never, never, never going to marry, but intended to devote your whole life to your art; when your heart and your head and your art cry out for a fuller development-then what are you going to do? Dick by that time will have turned his heart elsewhere, or if not, what right have you to marry him, with your high-strung nerves, your self-centered life of study and travel, your habit regulated to the demands of a critical public and not a bit adapted to a home career?...

I hear you say, “Tell me, has it paid in your own case?” Well, I have lived a rich life, certainly; but I am sure no business man could consider for a moment that the investment has proved a financial success. The reward lies elsewhere than in cold cash. Bear in mind, too, that art was created for the artist and not for the public. And it is a question whether many women would consider it worth while anyway, considering that they lose their childhood, miss the school companionship and social life of early womanhood, and live always a life of training and restriction…

But I would not undo my life, and it is a satisfaction to assert that the professional woman generally keeps her poise, her technic, her memory and her hearing, longer than her masculine rival; and while she may not take the inspired flights of the greatest geniuses, she nevertheless preserves a higher average of excellence. I am often asked how it is that I almost invariably play well, and I believe it is because I am more willing than men are to live as even and quiet a life as possible…

While many women struggled to find a balance between public and private life, the brave few women who persevered forward over the centuries carved a path for the women of the future. Part I of this document created a context for the pioneer work in which Maud Powell engaged in for equality in music. Part II will focus on the specific ways that she led the way forward for the cause of women in professional music in America.

PART II: MAUD POWELL’S SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO WOMEN IN PROFESSIONAL MUSIC

CHAPTER 4: THE CHICAGO WORLD EXPOSITION: MAUD POWELL’S LECTURE ON WOMEN AND THE VIOLIN

Maud Powell played an integral role in the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois as the only female violinist to perform with the great American conductor Theodore Thomas and his Exposition Orchestra, as well as the American representative violinist during the Exposition. She performed with the orchestra twice, once on July 18, 1893, playing the Bruch G minor concerto, and on August 4, 1893 playing the Mendelssohn E minor concerto.¹ She also participated in the World’s Columbian Exposition in another way. She was a member of the Advisory Council of the Women’s Branch of the World’s Congress Auxiliary on Music. Because of her position on the council, she was also involved in organizing the Women’s Musical Congress held during the Exposition.²

The Women’s Musical Congress convened within the Woman’s Building. The Woman’s Building opened on May 1, 1893 with an address from the President of the Board of Lady Managers, Bertha Palmer, who emphasized the importance of proper education for women.³ Adrienne Fried Block, author of the biography *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, described Palmer’s impression:

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² Ibid, 137.
She advanced a program for “the thorough education and training of woman to fit her to meet whatever fate life may bring.” In order to demonstrate women’s competence, Palmer declared that the board had brought together “evidences of her skill in various industries, arts, and professions as may convince the world that ability is not a matter of sex.”

The Woman’s Building was important to the continued development of women in society in many ways. According to Stanley Applebaum, the author of *The Chicago World’s Fair of 1893*, the Woman’s Building was a setting “in which it was shown that women were capable in just about every department.”

The Women’s Musical Congress, summoned on July 4-6, 1893, included lectures from leading performers and educators like Powell, Urso, opera singer Lillian Nordica (who presented on “Women of the Lyric Stage”) and Rose Fay Thomas (wife of Theodore Thomas), as well as recitals of works by women composers. Mrs. Thomas spoke on “The Work of Women’s Amateur Musical Clubs.” Her speech at the Musical

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Congress and enthusiastic work with the clubs eventually led to the formation of the National Federation of Music Clubs. This organization contributed significantly to the growth of musical understanding in America.7

Camilla Urso acted as a model and mentor for Maud Powell in many areas of her life, so the fact that the two of them had similar viewpoints on women in professional music is no surprise. The differences in the tone of their lectures for the Congress, however, demonstrate the disparities in their experiences. At age fifty-one in 1893, Urso had found her life as a solo violinist difficult. She had been reduced to performances in vaudeville shows and had not amassed any retirement funds.8 She recognized that women violinists had limited options: mostly solo playing, a field limited to only the most talented players in the right circumstances, or teaching. In her lecture, she appealed to the idea that women should be allowed to play in professional orchestras. She considered jobs in orchestras to be a much more stable and desirable option for many women who could still live with their families full time, and also provide for their families while fulfilling their aspirations to perform. In her lecture, “Women and the Violin: Women as Performers in the Orchestra” Camilla Urso began by discussing the reasons why women should take up the violin seriously, and a brief history of women who played the violin (i.e. Maddalena Lombardini-Sirmen, Regina Strinasacchi.) She went on to converse on her own development and position as an idol for the current generation of women violinists, and then talked about current affairs of women and the violin:

The development of violin playing amongst women in Europe, America, Australia, is truly prodigious of recent years and a teacher of long date in

7 Karen Shaffer, Maud Powell, 139.
8 Ibid, 140.
New York was saying recently that was it not for his female scholars he would have to retire. The old objection against women playing the violin was that it lacked grace in the appearance and movements of the performer. Until women coming before the foot-lights demonstrated the absurdity of the notion...

I have tried to show that as an “art d’agrément,” the violin is perfectly within the ability of women and “en rapport” to their tastes and I will approach the subject of its utility to many students who could turn an honest penny by their acquired talent. But few can become virtuosi and many really good players must stay at home, who were they given an opportunity, would be glad to help their family and themselves.

Why leave all this talent go for nothing and not utilize it in the orchestras? Women as a rule play in better tune than men. They play with greater expression, certainly, than the average orchestral musician. In Dublin, in Melbourne, I have employed lady violinists to reinforce my orchestra. They performed their part very well and with great attention to details. They were quick to understand, prompt at rehearsals, obedient and attentive to the conductor’s remarks and not inclined to sneak away under a pretext or another if the rehearsal was a trifle long; they gave good work for the money paid them. If such an incentive as paid employment in this way was given to the many female violinists now doing nothing, what a benefit it would be to many of the theatres!! The scratching to be heard in some of these is enough to excuse our gentlemen escorts to leave their seats between the acts.

I know in advance the objection that will be brought out against my proposition: and what of the household duties of these women? It would be too easy to enumerate the thousands of comediennes that are in public every day; but I shall point that in most orchestras the place of harpist is supplied by women. This admitted, why should not [other] ladies be employed in the same orchestras??

It is clear that Urso found women to be more than capable in professional orchestral settings from personal experience; however, her stance was a revolutionary one at the time as women were virtually barred from playing in professional orchestras (besides harpists if a male harpist could not be acquired). There is no doubt that Maud Powell was greatly influenced by Urso’s viewpoint on women in orchestras, which will be discussed.

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in Chapter 5. Urso felt passionately that women should be allowed to play in theater orchestras, which she proclaimed outright in her address. Theater orchestras were by far the biggest employer of musicians in the United States before the days of movies, radio, and television. Urso felt that work in orchestras, if it could be opened to accept women, was the best chance at a career in professional music performance for females. According to her, there were few that made it to soloist status, and it was virtually unheard of for chamber music.

Maud Powell had a more expectant viewpoint of the prospects of future women violinists in her lecture, believing that as long as they possessed a desire to work for their talents, they could make it as a concert artist and teacher. Her talk was reproduced in print in the February 1896 edition of *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, where it is split into seven sections. The speech was a rare occurrence of a concert artist setting forth a thorough prescription to be followed by anyone desiring to engage in serious violin study and performance. Powell demonstrated with her violin at certain points during her lecture. The second through sixth sections of the paper in *The Ladies’ Home Journal* focus on the discipline and devotion needed to become a violinist, along with advice on teachers and instrument maintenance. The first and seventh sections, copied below, exhibit Powell’s deep belief in the advancement of female instrumentalists, especially violinists:

> There is no good reason why women should not play the violin, it having been proved that they are capable of attaining as high a degree of proficiency in that accomplishment as are men. Women are especially qualified by nature to be interpretive musicians. They are endowed with

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10 Christine Ammer, *Unsung*, 40.
fine sensibilities, have keen intuitions and are subtly sympathetic. They, therefore, have a special faculty for discerning a composer’s meaning and spirit, and for merging their own individuality in an interpretation according to his idea.

The reasons for the choice of the violin as an instrument for women are many. It is not only the most perfect of all instruments, ranking second only to the human voice, but it is also the most graceful, both in itself and its manipulation. That the proportional number of successful women violinists is small is not because woman is not endowed with a poorer quality of talent than man, or that she is inferior to him in talent or equipment, but is rather due to the fact that she rarely takes up the study of the violin with the intention of making it a life work. She regards it usually as a temporary occupation to be abandoned whenever she shall assume the duties of wifehood and motherhood. This means a lack of earnestness and thoroughness, and of intensity of purpose, essential to the achievement of success and vital to its accomplishment...

Women are daily becoming more serious in their motives, more earnest in making their studies something to outlast their girlhood. It is to be expected that the near future will see them availing themselves more and more of the opportunities which are before them as violinists. The concert stage is as open to them as to women singers. The field of instruction is naturally theirs, as they possess, moreover, an intuition maternal in its nature, in the treatment of young minds and in the imparting to them the rudiments of any art or science. Their art opens, thus, various professional doors. For those women to whom it is merely a delightful accomplishment their art may be of as perfect proportions and development as is their love for it. Thus they may not only secure the selfish pleasure of enjoyment but also give to others many moments of exquisite delight while adding perceptibly to the music and musical atmosphere of their country.

The value of amateur musicians and their work was never more evident than at present. Already scores of towns in the United States have their music clubs of amateurs who, meeting fortnightly or monthly, study and interpret the works of the great composers. Generally a desire to hear better performances than their own leads to the engagement of artists, who give vocal and instrumental “recitals,” and thereby open the minds and stir the intelligence of their listeners, still further raising their standard and increasing their enjoyment and appreciation. They, on their part, encourage the artists by their interest, inspire them with their attention, and by their patronage make their art existence possible. They create musical centres which are far-reaching in their influence, and which promise much for the future development in our country of the divinest of all arts—music.12

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Maud Powell mentions the importance of “the concert stage” and “the field of instruction” being open to women more and more, but does not yet talk about women in the disciplines of orchestra or ensemble playing. It is clear she had not yet engaged in the pioneer work she would take up in those fields. Camilla Urso’s main platform at the Exposition of allowing women in professional orchestras was a new concept as well, so undoubtedly Maud Powell took up ideas from Urso’s work after she had time to process it. Powell’s involvement with orchestra and ensemble playing will be discoursed later in this document.

Although she was the young age of twenty-six during the World’s Columbian Exposition, Powell still made a huge impact on girls around the world. Not only was her example as a great performer and her rousing words of encouragement inspiring countless girls to take up the violin, she also motivated American composers with her actions as a collaborator and supporter of new music in America.
On July 5th, the second session of the Women’s Musical Congress, Powell joined Amy Cheney Beach in the premiere of Amy Beach’s Romance, Op. 23. Beach composed the work for the congress, and dedicated it to Powell. While Powell had been an active member of the Composers Club of New York City since 1889 to connect with new composers, in many ways her collaboration with Amy Beach set a precedent for her continued interest and support in premiering works by up and coming American composers, including women composers, and also gave her exposure as a collaborative artist.

The World’s Columbian Exposition became a platform upon which Maud Powell initiated her interest in promotion of women in professional music through many platforms. Her encouragement of women’s musical clubs, published writings on women

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13 Sylvia Glickman and Martha Furman Schleifer, eds., *From Convent to Concert Hall*, title page.
15 Ibid, 22.
in music through many magazines, newspapers and periodicals, and her support of
women composers and other professional women forging forward in a difficult career all
gave Powell purpose throughout her career. It is possible that these new endeavors helped
drive Powell forward in her passions and convictions. During 1893, Powell was just
coming into her own as her business began to blossom and she began establishing
connections. She wrote later about her early years:

The unhappiest period of my life was perhaps after I returned from my
studies abroad. I missed the student life, the sound of music all about me,
the talk of music and comparing of ideas with fellow-students…I was only
[eighteen] but had made my bow as a professional violinists with some
distinction under Theodore Thomas’ baton at the New York Philharmonic,
so must henceforth stand on my own feet artistically.

Many were the time when I longed to seek advice in both a musical and a
business way, but I was morbidly shy and foolishly proud, so I pegged
away alone, often wondering if I were on the right track. These years of
uncertainty were six or eight. I practiced and studied a good deal. All the
time I tried to keep a level head. I sought inspiration wherever I could find
it and tried to cultivate taste.

I read more than I have ever had the time to read since. People thought me
cold. But despair was in my heart, and I wondered constantly if I was a
fool to keep on. I doubted my talent (at times), I doubted my strength and
endurance, I doubted the ultimate reward of my labors. Yet I kept on,
simply because of the “something” within that drove me on…And so I
passed through the dark years and gradually came into my own.16

Maud Powell’s appearances at the Women’s Musical Congress were soon after this
period of indecisiveness and uncertainty of direction in her career. Following the
Exposition, her work became heavily involved in the betterment of American art music.

Her experiences at the Exposition and thought processes she put into preparing her paper

16 Maud Powell, “Struggles Which Led to Success: Distinguished Musicians Tell of Their Battles for Fame
and Prosperity; Miss Maud Powell America’s Most Distinguished Violinist,” The Etude,
October 1911.
for the congress were early contributors for her career that included advancement for American women in professional music.

Figure 4.3: Maud Powell in the 1890s.17

CHAPTER 5: MAUD POWELL’S ENCOURAGEMENT OF WOMEN IN SYMPHONIES, AND WOMEN AS CONDUCTORS AND COMPOSERS

The rise of women in orchestras and as conductors and composers in America was slow and arduous. It required a major shift in the mentality of society. Maud Powell, who achieved the status of top female virtuoso violinist, was in many ways fairly untouched by the struggles women faced around the country as professional musicians. This could lead to a naiveté on her part as to the true battles these women faced. However, her status also placed her in a unique position as an ambassador for change with an ability to reach thousands with her platform as a popular writer for periodicals, magazines, and newspapers, as well as her professional activities. Powell’s encouragement and interest in the professional development of individuals and organizations helped some women overcome their situational circumstances and achieve more in their art forms.

Figure 5.1: Fadette Women’s Orchestra of Boston, ca. 1897.¹

¹ Wikipedia, “The Fadettes, ca. 1897,” in Fadettes of Boston, accessed March 31, 2015,
The segregation of symphony orchestras and the notion that men and women could not coexist in the orchestral workforce was propagated well into the twentieth century. The formation of professional all-women’s orchestras in America began with the Fadette Women’s Orchestra of Boston (or the Boston Fadette Lady Orchestra) in October 1888. It was founded by one of Julius Eichberg’s former pupils, Caroline B. Nichols. The Los Angeles Woman’s Orchestra was founded in 1893, and other orchestras such as the New York Ladies Orchestra, the New York Women’s String Orchestra, and the Ladies’ Elite Orchestra of Atlantic Garden gained momentum so that by the twentieth century, many of these female ensembles were performing standard repertory.3 Previously, they received pressure to perform “light” repertory deemed appropriate for women. In fact, half of the Fadette’s concerts were as headliners in first-class vaudeville theatres.4 Many more were founded all the way into the 1940s and by the 1930s there were more than thirty professional all-women orchestras. The novelty of these ensembles enticed audiences, and in her article “Passed Away is the Piano Girl,” Judith Tick writes that “they exploited the prejudice that made them oddities, since the curiosity value of women playing cornets or double basses could attract audiences on that basis alone.”5

However, female musicians wanted to be recognized and paid equally with their male counterparts. Women were not fully accepted into the Musical Union until 1904, because the Musical Union in New York became affiliated with the American Federation of Labor in 1903 and in so doing was compelled to accept qualified women musicians as


4 Ibid, 331.

5 Ibid, 329.
A woman named Ada Heinemann, a player in the orchestra at the Atlantic Garden Music Hall had this to say about joining the Musical Union:

We never go there [i.e., to the Musical Union’s headquarters]. In fact, we should feel very much out of place among the men, and even though our membership in the union entitles us to vote, we do not take advantage of this privilege. However, we do anticipate some good from it in the near future. The chances are that we will be called upon to take men’s places when we can do so, and this means a broadening of our field. If I had a chance to substitute for a man I should do so in a minute. By accepting them [i.e., substitute engagements] women gain a foothold in the orchestral world, and that is what we are ambitious for. Now we are limited to concert work or to organizations composed entirely of women. I am sure a great many of us could hold our own with the majority of men; all we need is the chance to show them what we are capable of and willing to do. There is no reason why an orchestra leader should not engage a woman cornet player or a violinist, if she is good, just as quickly as he would a man. Sex should make not a difference whatsoever, if the woman can play an instrument well.7

Their struggles to become members of major symphonies continued, as women’s bodies were considered distracting and a nuisance, managers worried about how to maintain moral standards on tours, and it was still questioned whether women had the stamina for long work hours.

Men who were not drafted during World War I resented working with any women hired as substitute players. However, women’s abilities were proven during the war, and by the 1920s and 1930s, some orchestras with smaller budgets began to become more flexible and allowed women into their ranks. All thirteen major American symphonies still barred women from entering the organizations as members, which did not change until after World War II.8

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7 Ibid, 204.
Maud Powell made a meaningful contribution to the plight of women in orchestral playing through her outspoken support, but her written prose on the subject demonstrates a lack of understanding of the situation highlighted above. To a large extent, her life was removed from the world of women’s orchestras and the struggles of orchestral integration. Nevertheless, her words of encouragement helped spur on the future generation of women who began to enter the field post-World War I, and in force post-World War II. Her published thoughts on the matter added to the growing literature of women in support of orchestral equality. In the October 1911 edition of *The Delineator*, Powell stated:

…But what chance, you may ask, have women in the orchestral field? Just as much chance as they choose to make for themselves. The girl with the fiddle-box no longer excites comment. Women’s place in the violin field is firmly established. Over a decade ago, Nora Clench sat at the first violin desk in the Buffalo Symphony Orchestra. The Women’s Symphony of Los Angeles has been in ambitious and honorable existence for sixteen years.

Several women play in the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, and we have the well-known Fadette Women’s Orchestra of Boston and the Aeolian Ladies’ Orchestra of London. If we have no women violinists in the New York orchestra, we have had women harp players in the New York Symphony, the Russian Symphony and the Metropolitan Opera House.9

The examples that Powell points out were the exception to the rules rather than the general occurrences in 1911. As was already pointed out, ladies orchestras were still inferior and the idea that women were firmly established in the world of violin was tentative at best. Women were studying the violin more than ever, and beginning to teach and perform where they could, but overall it was still a limited field. In *The Etude* of July 1909, Powell exhibited both her optimism and her inexperience with orchestral work when she affirmed:

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The field of orchestral playing is open to women. I see no reason why women should not be regularly employed if they wish to be. They have qualities that are necessary for the work. American women, especially, have a good sense of rhythm. They are imitative, adaptable and conscientious, with endless patience for detail. They are quick to seize the trend of another’s thoughts and have marvelous powers of carrying out other people’s ideas. If women really want orchestral work, they will get it.\textsuperscript{10}

While Maud Powell may not have perceived the whole picture when it came to the reality of women in professional orchestras, as a great performer who earned respect from both men and women in her field she still influenced thought that could manifest change after further development of societal norms. She most likely also wanted to make a statement about equality between men and women in ability potential.

Maud Powell’s recital work and interest in all of the towns she visited inspired the formation of a number of symphony orchestras, including those in Seattle (formed in 1903) and Bellingham, Washington (1912), St. Paul (formed in 1908) and Minneapolis (1903). Her enthusiasm for performing with novice orchestras such as these helped attract public attention to the orchestras’ work and invigorated the musicians to aspire to higher program standards.

One of these orchestras, the Bellingham Symphony Orchestra, was formed under the leadership of Mary Davenport-Engberg (1880-1951), and managed by her husband Henry. Davenport-Engberg, who was born in a covered wagon outside of Spokane, Washington to pioneer parents, studied and performed on the violin in Berlin before returning to her home state. The Bellingham Symphony Orchestra arose when an announcement was made that Maud Powell would be coming to the town of then 30,000 people to perform in 1912. Mary Davenport-Engberg and Maud Powell were already friends from her work in avidly promoting a violin recital Powell gave in Bellingham in 1910. At the time, Powell encouraged Davenport-Engberg to fulfill her dreams. One of the most remarkable aspects of the symphony was it was a mixed ensemble of both men and women. It was the first mixed orchestra to be conducted by a woman. Bellingham was difficult to travel to, as the highway from Seattle north to Bellingham was still full of virgin timber. Few artists braved the hazards of travel to get there but Maud Powell, who delighted in the challenges of voyaging “off the beaten track,” made the trek more than

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12 Karen Shaffer, Maud Powell, 290.
13 Sondra Wieland Howe, Women Music Educators in the United States, 149.
14 Elizabeth Juliana Knighton, “Mary Davenport Engberg,” 34.
A year after the historic performance with the symphony, Maud Powell described the drama surrounding the event in *Musical America*:

Fancy a place so remote having an orchestra! Well, it is due entirely to the efforts of Mrs. Davenport-Engberg and it has been in existence more than a year. When Mrs. Engberg understood I was to play there last year she set about establishing an orchestra, her own violin pupils a nucleus. She had no easy task before her. At that time not a soul in Bellingham had any idea what a viola was. Mrs. Engberg industriously set about teaching some of her pupils the viola. Gradually other instruments were secured. A flutist was found and in order that his sojourn in Bellingham would be assured the resourceful organizer of the orchestra procured him eleven pupils. Picture to yourself a town of that rank with eleven people busily learning to play the flute!

Well, they rehearsed ceaselessly. As the time drew near they practiced the piece I was going to play with them. Their concertmaster played the solo part. Nervousness was naturally aroused to a high pitch when I appeared to rehearse with them. “Now if you make a single mistake at the performance,” Mrs. Engberg flatly told her players, “I solemnly vow to run right out through the door at the back of the platform.” “Very well,” answered a voice in the orchestra, “but you won’t be able to get through for the crowd!” But the concert went off most creditably.16

Powell ended up having an integral role in the development of Davenport-Engberg’s career. According to Davenport-Engberg’s son Paul, Maud was “such a lovely person—graceful and considerate.”17 She formed a true friendship with Davenport-Engberg after their first meeting. When Powell sensed the weight of the years of work in the remote Pacific Northwest for Davenport-Engberg and Davenport-Engberg sought her aid through their letter correspondence, she encouraged her to keep pursuing her dreams. Paul Engberg detailed their relationship:

To show you how good she was—when my mother deprecates the work she was doing, and not being able to follow her career out in the ‘sticks’ M.P.

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17 Karen Shaffer, *Maud Powell*, 293. (Paul Engberg related the relationship between Maud Powell and Mary Davenport-Engberg to Neva Garner Greenwood on August 22, 1979.)
[Maud Powell] said, “I’ll trade places with you.” Ten years later my mother became the first woman conductor of a major professional orchestra, the Seattle Symphony, and she attributed her long conversations with M.P. for her perseverance in the face of discouraging odds.\(^\text{18}\)

As Paul recounted, Mary Engberg-Davenport moved to Seattle where she became a conductor of the Seattle Symphony, also a mixed ensemble of male and female members, and founded the Seattle Opera with her son.\(^\text{19}\) Her contributions to the arts in Seattle were numerable. Her success was in part due to Maud Powell’s support and friendship.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Mary Davenport-Engberg\(^\text{20}\)}
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\(^\text{18}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{20}\) Ibid, 34.
Powell supported women’s musical clubs, women in orchestras and female conductors. She also inspired and collaborated with women composers, something that was rare at this time for many first-rank concert artists. Amy Beach and Marion Eugénie Bauer were two of her most prominent female collaborators.

Amy Beach (1867-1944) made her professional debut as a concert pianist at the age of sixteen. After her marriage in 1885 at the age of eighteen to a prominent Boston surgeon (Dr. H.H.A. Beach,) she limited her solo appearances to charity concerts and focused on composition. She returned to professional public performance after the death of her husband in 1910, touring Europe and America.21 She received serious public recognition after a performance of her earliest large-scale work, Mass in E-flat Major, by the Handel and Haydn Society in 1892. This brought a commission for her highly acclaimed *Festival jubilate*. Her *Symphony in E minor, Op. 32 “Gaelic”* was the first symphony composed by an American woman.22

Born just two weeks apart, Amy Beach and Maud Powell maintained a close friendship throughout their lives. Their first collaboration at the World’s Columbian Exposition was followed by consistent communication and collaborative spirit. Beach composed few works for violin and piano, but those she did compose she sent to Powell to review and for feedback before they were published.23 Powell performed Beach’s *Mazurka* from her *Three Compositions, Op. 40* for violin and piano for a New England Society concert in 1898.

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22 Sylvia Glickman and Martha Furman Schleifer, eds., *From Convent to Concert Hall*, 182.
23 Ibid.
Powell also formed a strong bond with composer Marion Eugénie Bauer (1882-1955). Bauer was born in Walla Walla, Washington, and received her training with American composer and pianist Henry Holden Huss in New York City, as well as Nadia Boulanger in Paris who exchanged English lessons for composition lessons. Bauer believed that she was the first of Boulanger’s American students. Marion Bauer aspired to be a leader in the American school of modern composition. In 1920 in an interview with The Musical Leader, she declared:

Too many people had expressed the opinion that American composers are not serious—that they are not artists, and I felt that I wanted to be one to build for a high standard in American music. At first I wrote only a few little things and never took myself seriously as a composer, but I did start out with the idea of trying to write the best I could, not to write for an audience or for singers, but because I wanted to express deep moods and also those in lighter vein.

25 Ibid, 104.
Maud Powell aided Bauer in her quest to become one of the greats of American composition. She demonstrated a great confidence in her ability, and encouraged her in her pursuits. She also championed the work Bauer wrote for her in one of her seasons.

In 1912 Bauer and Powell lived in the same building in New York, and thus formed a friendship as they were both musicians. Bauer reflected on the nature of their camaraderie in *The Musical Leader* 1920 interview:

> Maud Powell lived across the hall from us [Marion and her sister Emilie, a music critic and composer] a few years ago, and we became very good friends. She had great faith in my ability and often said, “I want you to do for the American composer what I have tried to do for the American woman violinist.” She always urged me to write something for her, and I always demurred, saying, “Wait until I have the inspiration.”

Powell was fifteen years older than Bauer, but the two women had similar outlooks about gender and success in music; Bauer exclaimed that she would not “listen to the sly remarks of intolerant men regarding women composers…if given a reasonable chance for development, an individual talent, regardless of sex, can progress and grow.” It is evident that Powell had a “great faith” in Bauer’s abilities as a composer by the exchange over the piece that Powell commissioned from Bauer, *Up the Ocklawaha* for violin and piano.

In February 1912 while on her Florida tour, Maud Powell undertook an intriguing steamboat trip up the Ocklawaha River to view Silver Springs, the largest natural artesian spring formation in the United States. This was a popular tourist activity since the 1870s, and the image of swamp forests of gaunt giant cypresses cloaked in Spanish moss created

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27 Ibid.
an eerie scene that haunted Powell. She wrote a poem about her experience, titled *Up the Ocklawaha (An Impression)* that was published in December 1912 in the *San Francisco Examiner*. Her description of the river is visceral:

A stream of bark-stained waters,
A swift and turgid river.
A restless, twisting, tortuous river,
Bankless, through a cypress swamp,
Escaping to the sea.
Through Florida’s mighty inland swamp,
Rank, dark, malarious, fearsome,
(Hell’s Half Acre hidden within)
Where noble trees of giant estate
Stand knee-deep in the noisome ooze…

After her trip, Powell depicted the experience to Bauer. Bauer recounted the visit that inspired her creativity in *The Musical Leader*:

She [Maud Powell] described it with such earnestness that I was deeply impressed with the picture which had been forming itself into the musical images in my mind ever since she had begun to talk. I went to my rooms and immediately set to work at the piece, having a theme knocking insistently at my head. And so, a few hours later, I went back to her and showed her the almost completed sketches. There were tears in her eyes when she handed it back to me and said, “It is just as though you had been there.” So she played it and it was really hers.

Powell was pleased with the composition, and observed that she had “never experienced a more remarkable expression of color and picture drawing in music than in this work.”

She included it in many of her programs in her 1912-1913 season with positive reviews, especially from fellow musicians.

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Bauer went on to become the New York editor and music critic for *The Musical Leader*, co-authored three books on music history with Ethel Peyser, wrote two more books herself and contributed articles to music reference works and music journals. She also became the first female member of the music faculty at New York University, where she taught music history and composition. She also taught at the Juilliard School and the New York College of Music.\(^{34}\) Her early connection with Maud Powell, an established first-rank artist at the time of their friendship, contributed to the success of her career.

Maud Powell’s interpersonal connections with women leading the way for Western art music in America inspired generations of women following in their footsteps. Her attempts at expressing her convictions about equalizing the field between men and women in orchestral performance did not truly come to fruition during her lifetime, but likely had positive repercussions in the following decades. Powell used the worldwide respect she garnered and her reputation as a first-rank artist to raise the fortunes and opportunities of the women around her. Her active involvement with women of different backgrounds and specializations around the country became a vital part of the progression of American women in music.

\(^{34}\) Ibid, 104.
CHAPTER 6: MAUD POWELL BREAKS NEW GROUND FOR WOMEN AS A TOURING CHAMBER MUSICIAN

The previous chapters focused on ways that Maud Powell made active efforts to connect with women and advance the causes of women in music. This chapter highlights one of Powell’s greatest achievements for breaking new ground as a female concert artist: her work as a chamber musician.

![Image of the Maud Powell String Quartet, 1894-1895](image_url)

Figure 6.1: The Maud Powell String Quartet, 1894-1895

In 1894, Maud Powell formed a professional string quartet, the Maud Powell String Quartet, with three male colleagues. The only other woman known to have led a

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quartet of men before her was Lady Hallé in England, who stepped in as leader to Ludwig Straus’s already established quartet. Prior to Powell, the Eichberg Ladies String Quartet, formed in 1880 by female pupils of Julius Eichberg, were the only women who performed chamber music publicly in America. A concert in the Musical Review (January 1, 1880) declared that a “regular string quartette of ladies is an unusual phenomenon: Boston really has something we can not match.” The Maud Powell String Quartet was therefore the first American chamber ensemble with mixed genders, and the first in the world formed by a female of first-class soloist caliber.

The quartet was made up of Joseph Kovarik, second violin, Franz Kaltenborn, viola, and Paul Miersch, cello. The ensemble went on a worldwide tour. Powell was unique in that few violin virtuosos of her caliber devoted themselves to chamber music; Lady Hallé and Joseph Joachim were notable exceptions. Professional string quartets were also rare in America up until this time period. One of the earliest quartets was the Mason-Thomas Quartet, which was led by Theodore Thomas in the early part of his career. The most notable professional quartet, besides the Eichberg Ladies String Quartet, was the Kneisel Quartet in Boston, formed in 1885; however, they played mostly in large musical centers throughout the United States. Powell was able to fulfill two of her goals by forming her string quartet: sharing classical music with a broader spectrum of Americans, and performing what she considered “the most beautiful literature of all.”

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3 Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, eds., Women Making Music, 329.

4 Christine Ammer, Unsung, 44.

5 Karen Shaffer, Maud Powell, 143.

6 Ibid, 144.

7 Maud Powell, “Maud Powell to the Editor,” Musical America, May 25, 1918.
Powell’s belief in the importance of studying chamber music can be observed in her writing for *The Music Student*:

In ensemble practice, the player is brought face to face with the best composers. In the string quartet, for instance, you find little trash in the whole literature. And with this continual association with good music, involving in its performance the highest qualities and the most expressive niceties, the student has the greatest opportunity for the development of his own artistic taste. He may become a connoisseur, to a degree, -at least come to the point where he can distinguish between good and bad in music, false and true, serious and shallow.\(^8\)

While Powell was able to engage in chamber music literature study, she was also able to reach out to audiences outside of large cultural centers. The quartet was formed with the backing of an organization called *Redpath Lyceum Bureau*, (a prominent nineteenth-century forum for adult education offering small urban/rural communities lectures, debates, concerts, and other forms of educational and cultural activities that would otherwise not be available to them), and they enjoyed five weeks of booked concerts wherever lyceums were to be found throughout the United States.\(^9\) The Quartet’s season ended in March or April of 1895, although some sources indicate the Maud Powell String Quartet existed until 1898.\(^10\)

Powell’s experience in the Maud Powell String Quartet prepared her for another foray into quartet playing when she was invited to lead a quartet for the Saturday Popular Concert in London, England on February 8, 1902.\(^11\) For British musicians, virtuosity was not enough to establish an artist as a great musician. The true test of merit was the ability

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\(^9\) Karen Shaffer, *Maud Powell*, 144.

\(^10\) Ibid, 146.

\(^11\) Ibid, 187.
to exhibit musicianship in string quartet playing.\textsuperscript{12} Joseph Joachim still performed with the quartet annually, so Maud Powell’s performance would be directly compared to her former teacher. Powell’s performance received a review in the \textit{London Times} two days after the event:

Miss Powell has long been favorably known to concert-goers as a highly accomplished violinist of the modern school, and though her reputation as a soloist is high, it is not every first-rate soloist who makes an efficient quartet leader. Save for a slight want of decision in attack, which might easily have come from a lack of sufficient experience in playing together with her colleagues…and an equally slight deficiency in quantity of tone, there is nothing but praise to be said of her performance. None of the charming freshness of Haydn’s quartet in D from opus 64 was lost, and her share in the combined practical exposition of Dvorák’s theories on the use to be made of what he imagines to be Indian and negro melodies as propounded in his so-called American quartet in F, op. 96, would surely have satisfied the theorist himself.\textsuperscript{13}

The Popular Concert was one of the best attended of the season, and also included a review from the \textit{London Musical Courier}, reporting that Powell asserted herself as an artist of “unmistakable talent and power…she displayed the necessary qualities for a leader-firmness, excellent tone, and, wherever expedient, delicacy and restraint.”\textsuperscript{14} The fact that Maud Powell’s skills as a chamber musician received considerable positive feedback at a time when mixed gender chamber ensembles were virtually unheard of forged a path for future women in chamber music.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
In 1908, Powell once again formed a chamber ensemble: the Maud Powell Trio consisted of Powell and two English sisters, cellist May Mukle and pianist Anne Mukle Ford. The trio toured the American continent from coast to coast for one season. Powell and her husband Godfrey “Sunny” Turner were the first to persuade the young cellist May Mukle to visit the United States. After playing in concert with Maud Powell, critics heralded May Mukle as the “Maud Powell of the Cello,” and her association with and endorsement by Powell helped raise her to first-rank virtuoso status.

The Maud Powell trio received high praise, as all three women were fantastic performers. Their tour around the country included sixteen concerts on the West Coast in

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16 Christine Ammer, *Unsung*, 45.
18 Ibid, 257.
the span of a month, where no two programs were exactly alike. The Maud Powell Trio was probably the first or one of the first ensembles of its caliber to visit many of the more undeveloped cities throughout the country, and most of the cities along the West Coast.

Maud Powell’s pioneering spirit included a fearlessness venturing into unknown territory as one of the first women in professional chamber music at a time when it was virtually unheard of. Her example, sadly, was not standardized practice until the post-World War II era, but no doubt her groundbreaking efforts made way for women in the latter twentieth century.

Figure 6.3: Maud Powell promotional photo

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19 Ibid.
20 Ibid, 198/1.
CHAPTER 7: SPEAKING OUT AGAINST SEXISM

Professionally, Maud Powell was relatively untouched by the gender divide present for most women in the public realm of Western art music. She was accepted among musicians and by her audiences as the greatest American violinist without any reference to her sex.\(^1\) Despite her fortunate circumstances, however, she often faced sexism in reviews and the way she was presented in advertisements. She also faced the same discrimination toward appearance and personal dress as other women in public performance and entertainment.

![Maud Powell Advertisement](image)

Figure 7.1: Maud Powell Advertisement\(^2\)

Although Maud Powell felt strongly that her artistry should not be compared with male violinists, she allowed her advertisers to use the sensationalism of that perception to her advantage. For example, one English critic described Powell’s playing as “the arm of a man, the heart of a woman, and

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\(^1\) Karen Shaffer, *Maud Powell*, 278.

the head of an artist.” Powell used this phrase throughout her career on advertisements and business cards. The idea that she was advertised as possessing masculine, feminine, and genderless “artist” qualities is a provocative one, especially at a time when women were upheld for feminine merits and a demure disposition in the public sphere.

Another of Powell’s advertisements was derived from a review by the critic Walter Anthony from the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “Maud Powell’s Art is not that of Mere Man or Woman---but Genius.” This advertisement is curious in that it both removes all sexuality from Powell, and seems to elevate her status to something above the usual human experience. Manipulation of the consumer mindset using gender and sexuality, especially for females, is something that is still prevalent throughout society.

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4 Ibid, XXIV.
While Powell utilized gender distinctions in her advertisements, she disliked being referred to as a “famous woman violinist” by critics. In her opinion: “it seems to imply that there is something unusual in a woman achieving distinction of any kind.”

It is important to remember that gender differences were discoursed by both men and women regularly, with both parties believing there were psychological and emotional inequalities between them due to societal norms. Nevertheless, many male reviewers and

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5 Ibid.
6 Maud Powell, *St. Paul Dispatch*, April 15, 1918.
critics spoke of Powell in relation to her gender with bias toward what they perceived as masculine or feminine energy and the regular assertions of her attaining the “top female violinist” status. The reviews below are just a sampling of the regular gender comparisons present in the hundreds of reviews of Maud Powell:

[Henry T. Finck, *New York Evening Post*]…Her playing is intensively feminine, yet it does not lack the big qualities that the great violinists among men have been noted for. Once more Miss Powell has proved that she is the woman highest up in the violin world.7

[The Oberlin Review]…Her programs are always choice and full of novel and varied elements, her personality most charming, and her playing that of a finished artist. In fact, as a recital giver, it is doubtful if she has a superior among resident American violinists…There is never a hint of feminine lack of vigor, and her ability to sustain her energy through a long and arduous program is a constant source of surprise to those who hear her…8

[Cleveland Leader]…Madam Powell stands as a remarkable mistress of the violin. I would prefer to call her a master of the instrument, but I recall that a critic once said that to say Maud Powell’s violin playing is like a man’s is to flatter all mankind.9

[Portland]…her playing is of an electric precision and bold coloring, at times sweeping to soul-stirring dynamics, not masculine but grandly feminine, and again portraying an underlying poetry that is charming and individual.10

[New York Times]…Maud Powell was regarded by both American and European critics as the foremost woman violinist in the world and she is entitled to rank as one of the greatest musicians ever produced in the United States.11

[The Cosmopolitan]…no woman either of this or any other country has exhibited genius in violin-playing in addition to high execution. Miss Powell, however, is the greatest violinist America has produced, and is the foremost girl-violinist of the world today.12

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8 “Miss Powell’s Violin Recital,” *The Oberlin Review*, May 31, 1895.
9 *Cleveland Leader*, November 18, 1916.
While Powell always asserted herself as first and foremost an artist regardless of sex, she had strong opinions on critics’ negative biases toward women performers that she was not afraid to share. The below is a heated published response in *The New Music Review* (Powell was a friend of the editor and sent him a letter containing the writing below), from Maud Powell to a male violinist who said he liked the playing of only one female violinist, and this was because “she fascinated him and compelled his admiration and respect, because she played like a woman and did not attempt to be virile, did not anxiously strive to ‘play like a man.’” Powell retorted:

> Why these cavillers confine their criticisms to fiddlers is more than I can understand. Is Mme. Carreño [pianist] a Rubinstein or Mme. Bloomfield-Zeisler [pianist] a Paderweski? Methinks not. Furthermore, Mme. Carreño doesn’t try to be virile–she obeys the inner pulse. Mme. Zeisler doesn’t try to be electric–she just *is*. Mme. [Urso, violinist] was the sincerest of artists–and never tried to ape “mere man.” No one would have admitted sooner than she that she was not a Joachim; but she could play a downward scale without his flop in changing positions and she could draw a steadier bow than he. Moreover, her ear remained true to the last…

> What we women lack in art is that infinite and wonderful tenderness that speaks through the tone of Ysaïe and Kreisler. We mother the whole race, our children, fathers, brothers and husbands–and with quick intuition the stranger at our door–but the quality does not as yet express itself in art. The lack, however, is not in the fiddling tribe alone, and why should we bear the brunt of that everlasting and overworked criticism? It would be a lark if the men could occasionally read our innermost thoughts when they are chanticleering around. I certainly think we are more clearly aware of our shortcomings than they are. And oh! Our sorriest wail! The question of health and physical endurance! They little know how much more it costs us in will power to achieve than it does them. And then the discomfort of our clothes, and time and trouble it takes to keep oneself looking respectable, etc., etc., etc.

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14 Ibid.
Powell also seemed to feel the negative prejudice against women concert violinists that was still prevalent as opposed to female concert pianists and singers.

Another complicated aspect of the female public sphere experience is appearance. The standards for men and women were different both then and now for women in performance. Maud Powell was opinionated about this aspect of her on stage persona. Victorian women commonly wore multiple layers of fabric, including three or more petticoats that could weigh anywhere from ten to thirty pounds. Powell recalled a “bright red plush skirt, quite full, over which was draped a much-shirred yellow silk ‘drop’ with a square collar, an imitation décolletage neck, and bits of lace in every imaginable spot,” which she was certain had contributed to one of the worst performances of her career. She experimented with ways to make her concert gowns allow more liberty of movement and contrived a set of “cleverly hidden weights and heavy cords” that fastened a train to her gown. She demonstrated how important she found this aspect of performance as a woman by writing an entire article on concert clothing for *Musical America* titled “How Fashion Invades the Concert Stage.” The excerpts below demonstrate the elaborate means by which, with caution and some inconvenience, a female virtuoso of Powell’s time could craft a publicly acceptable image:

…dress plays almost as important a part in the concert as the talent itself and becomes, as the season progresses, a veritable “Old Man of the Sea.”

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16 Ibid, 31.
The professional woman owes it to her public to dress fashionably, for the simple gowns of former years have passed into obscurity and with the increased importance of dress in everyday life, it has spread into all professions, until the carelessly dressed woman or one whose clothes are hopelessly old fashioned has no place in the scheme of things…

There is no place on the stage where clothes are more on exhibition than on concert tours, for the brilliant lights bring out every line and show the defects of one’s costume…and there is often no background or scenery of any kind, so the musician stands out alone. For this reason her dress must not be too conspicuous or it will detract from the recital, which is not a dressmaker’s exhibition, but a programme of classical music and nothing she wears should be too brilliant or inharmonious with the hangings of the hall…I could write a book on experiences in my career that have been connected with dress. Some are ludicrous and others almost pathetic.¹⁷

As observed in her text, a delicate balance needed to be maintained between on stage brilliance while still preserving decorum and subtlety. Women today are still walking a fine line between the two, and still find that their appearance garners commentary. An excellent recent example of this media commentary involves conductor Barbara Hannigan and will be discussed further in Chapter 9. This aspect of so-called “beauty culture” is on full display in art music, and has been for women in the public realm for centuries. Today, solo women artists’ ads for their concerts and covers for their albums often stress feminine sexuality.¹⁸ Second-wave feminism emphasized that the negative stereotype that Woman=Body existed and that it needed to be combated actively,¹⁹ but this did not change the societal constructs that beauty often plays a part of success for many women in performance fields. The choices between ignoring the “display” and “decorative” aspect of performance entirely, choosing to appear sexy, or modest yet sophisticated plagues many female performers today, as it did during Powell’s era.

¹⁹ Ibid.
Despite the fact that Maud Powell enjoyed relative freedom from the restraints of many women performers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, her success came with a price to “look the part” and advertise herself in provocative ways. She also endured blatant sexism regularly in reviews and magazine articles. Her fragile balancing act to counteract these inequalities in her own way was a start in speaking out against sexism in music that would grow in momentum throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
PART III: ADVANCEMENTS IN THE POSITION OF AMERICAN WOMEN IN PROFESSIONAL MUSIC

CHAPTER 8: MAUD POWELL AND THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

While Maud Powell was a passionate force for change when it came to women’s rights in music, she did not actively campaign for the rights of women outside of performance. She never claimed to be a part of the Women’s Rights Movement, although her family were deeply involved the suffrage movement. Powell’s aunts Ellen Powell Thompson and Mary Powell Wheeler were nationally known suffragettes who worked closely with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.¹ Her mother was also an active member during Powell’s youth, and intellectual equality was an important principle of the Powell family. Her aunt Emma Dean Powell explored the Grand Canyon and Colorado River with her uncle Wesley Powell and was the first woman to climb Pikes Peak. Her father was an innovative educator who valued equal opportunities for girls and boys and both of her parents rejected gender stereotypes and actively engaged their children in healthy development of the whole being physically, intellectually and psychologically.² Perhaps it was her unusual upbringing in a household without the standard prejudices applied to most girls that made her more immune to the struggles of many women throughout the country, but Powell’s support of the vote for women did not come until after World War I, near the end of her life. At first glance, this seems incongruent with Powell’s consistent cry for equality for women in professional music. Below is an investigation into the reasoning behind her fluctuating viewpoint on the vote.

¹ Karen Shaffer, Maud Powell, 137.
² Ibid.
Powell’s only constant view on equality for women throughout her life was that women can and should have careers in performance. Her views on the suffrage movement fluctuated throughout her career. Some of this may have been a diplomatic move on her part to avoid isolating audience members and critics, a large number of whom were men. Her marriage to H. Godfrey “Sunny” Turner, who was her greatest supporter and willingly subordinated his personal life to the demands of Powell’s career, may have also weakened her sense of the injustices other women faced.\(^3\) Turner was against the activities of the suffrage movement that existed in his home country of England, which also most likely had an impact on Powell’s own opinion of the right to vote. While their marriage was progressive for the early twentieth century in many ways, it still unmistakably bore the societal norm of the time that wives should publicly agree with their husbands on matters of politics, even if in private they felt otherwise. In an interview with a reporter, Turner denigrated the women’s suffrage movement in England, implying that they were merely a collection of unattractive spinsters. Powell recounted her own experiences:

“I grew up in the suffragette atmosphere. My mother and her friends, I already knew then, had the best husbands that there were. They were chivalrous and supportive in every way but on this point, they differed. The three suffragettes liked to discuss these matters very much while their husbands were present (Susan B. Anthony who was single was able to say whatever she wanted to without any husband to consider) which made me very upset when I was a young woman. It bothered me so much that a lot of the nice evenings that could have been so pleasant were ruined by these bloody debates and this is the first reason why I am not for women’s right to vote.

And then I also think about it this way-what can a woman gain by voting? What can the country gain? To answer the second question first, if the good votes win, the bad votes will win too. So why make a bad thing worse? The woman herself does not need the right to vote. Please

\(^3\) Ibid, 282.
understand me right, the urge for the woman to get out of her present sphere into a simple humanity does not require the right to vote. We have not yet in the whole East of America the right to vote for women, although there is so much which has changed in her favor.

My own career might be an example to my way of thinking. I earned a name for myself and a fortune through my playing even if I am of the weaker sex.

In the world of art and everyday life, the concept of male and female changed drastically in favor of the woman. Both concepts are important in terms of marriage, career and emotional thinking and have become indispensable.”

After a little pause, Maud Powell said, “Maybe my point of view is not authoritative. I was very lucky in my life-lucky as an artist and lucky in marriage.”

In a whispered tone, so he [her husband] who was in the other room could not hear it—“Really, I have a jewel of a husband-made for an artist. The husbands of a lot of women who forget the meal because of study and practicing could learn from Mr. Turner. He is never upset about it. He never reproaches me. He never nags. He shares my love and enthusiasm for music. He is my best advisor, my best friend. That’s why my life is so complete and happy.”

The important take-away from this rare look at Powell’s struggle with her own thoughts on a complex subject was her observation that her point of view is not authoritative, and that she was lucky in her upbringing, career, and marriage. The entire quote describes her personal experiences, which she tried to extrapolate for all women. This isn’t the first time Powell used a blanket statement regarding her own understandings in an interview or published writing. It was noted in Chapter 5 that she did not have personal involvement with orchestral playing and the challenges women faced, and while she had their best interests at heart, she gave advice without knowledge of their experiences.

By 1912, Powell’s views on the suffragettes of England, whom she originally found abhorrent when they introduced militant methods under the leadership of

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Emmeline Pankhurst and the Women’s Social and Political Union (founded in 1903), were slightly softened. Instead of disparaging the suffrage movement, she sympathized with their struggles. When an interviewer asked her if she would join the Suffragettes on her next trip to London that year, she replied:

I think it’s a form of obsession with English women, but the laws are so abominably unjust it’s no wonder they lose their heads. Oh, I believe in equal opportunities for women, co-education and all that…I know that women musicians receive less pay than those of the opposite sex although they are often far superior. I confess injustice like that is most annoying, but personally I am too busy to do any suffragetting!6

The next year she yet again expanded her opinion on the right to vote. When asked if she was opposed to women’s suffrage in the New York Evening Sun, she replied:

Certainly not. I don’t have any particular desire for the vote, but the withholding of it seems unfair. It is true that many women are not ready for it. But many men are quite as unfit.7

Her complete transformation regarding women and the vote transpired during the events surrounding the First World War. Her lifetime until this war was an era of relative peace for America, if discounting the numerous wars against Native American Nations. Powell observed what she saw as the true nature of women, who necessarily were involved in almost every aspect of the war effort. Powell herself was immersed in the war effort. She was an initial member of the board of the Music Service League of America, which worked to provide hospitals, prisons, and army camps with phonographs and records.8 She tripled her schedule by taking on all of Fritz Kreisler’s cancelled engagements, and by giving concerts in all the camps and armed services hospitals

5 Karen Shaffer, Maud Powell, 281.
6 Gladys Livingston Olmstead, “Maud Powell,” The Lyre of Alpha Chi Omega, April 1912, 220.
7 “Miss Maud Powell at Home.” New York Evening Sun, October 21, 1913, 19.
8 Karen Shaffer, Maud Powell, 386.
throughout the country and many in Canada. Powell declared, “Since I can’t knit on account of having to be careful of my fingers and hands and am never long enough in one town to do Red Cross work, my chief joy in life is playing for the soldiers.” In an article from 1917 titled “What the War Showed Maud Powell,” she explained her belief in the importance of the vote for democracy, while also summarizing in her own words some of the prejudices she fought as a woman concert artist:

Raised in an atmosphere charged with the then radical spirit of woman suffrage it is perhaps surprising that I did not come sooner to a realizing sense of the importance of the question…As I grew older my studies absorbed my time and strength. Yet, through my girlhood years there persisted an undercurrent of thought that urged me ever onward-to try to prove that a woman could do her work as thoroughly, as capably and as convincingly as a man. Indeed throughout long years I fought my battle against prejudice, even as Camilla Urso-revered be her memory-fought the battle before me. In my early days, the names of Mrs. Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were household words. I remember with affection the gentle, honest nature of that good woman “Susan B.” who took a real interest in my future career, even giving me my first nest-egg, a gold sovereign, toward buying a “Cremona” violin. Both women wanted the little American girl to show the world that a woman could “fiddle as well as a man.”

Years passed. The battle of life and the persistent struggle toward an ever higher artistic goal consumed my energy. Curious as it may seem, a public life was foreign to my nature. It seemed to take all my courage to pursue my own little path toward recognition, leaving no surplus vitality to be devoted to the big general cause of “women’s rights.” I honestly felt that I was doing my share toward advancing the cause by developing to the utmost the talents that nature had given me. I believed that sheer force of example would raise standards and fire enthusiasm in other girls, and that on the heels of equipment and efficiency, success would follow. I knew that equal suffrage was right; but that other women had greater gifts of speech and of disposition to work actively in the cause than I, I felt sure.

Then came the war. The women in England, including the hysterical suffragettes, faced the situation squarely and bravely. They gave up their men-folk, and turned heroically to the tasks that hitherto had been performed chiefly by masculine hands, masculine brains. They

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9 Ibid.
10 Saint Paul Pioneer Press, April 15, 1918. [fragment; The Maud Powell Society Archive]
commanded the respect and admiration of the whole world. I, for one, reversed my judgment of that same hysterical element, and forgave.

And what is it we are working for, paying for, our men fighting for? A world democracy, to be sure. But the word democracy gives the woman suffragist pause, for it is borne in upon her consciousness of right and justice that democracy is not altogether what it purports to be when such a large proportion of the adult population has no voice in the conduct of the government—is denied representation in fact. Now this representation and all it implies should be thrust upon us as a matter of duty, not handled over in gingerly spirit as a mere privilege. Then we must be educated to our new responsibilities. We must learn, learn, learn, in order to meet intelligently new conditions arising out of this frightful world-upheaval. By the way, talk with almost any Englishwoman and with all her pretty, feminine ways, one is abashed before her knowledge of state affairs. With new duties, new emergencies we shall acquire undreamed of strength and prowess. For such is woman’s nature. And we shall be the better mothers, the better home keepers for our larger vision and wider capabilities. We shall bring up better men children, demanding from them, as from our husbands, higher ideals and cleaner activity. Goodness knows, the world of politics need a house cleaning. Let us live up to the proverb of the new broom. Moreover, let us not fail to renew the broom whenever it shows the least sign of wear.

Thus it is that the war and some of its consequences have brought about my complete conversion to woman suffrage. Women are fitter than some of us thought. There is no turning back now, for we are being swept onward by a great tidal wave of world change, a change that makes for bigger thought, deeper feeling and more rugged action.11

Thus, Maud Powell became involved in the suffrage movement toward the end of her life and demonstrated courage to admit, all while in the public eye, that she had been wrong about her earlier published opinions on the vote. When New York State granted the right to vote for women, Maud Powell went to the polls. A picture of her casting her first ballot was prominently displayed in newspapers. Powell died in 1920 before ratification of the national right to vote on August 26, 1920.

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The suffrage movement and her own personal experiences impacted Maud Powell’s thoughts about equality for women in differing and sometimes surprising ways throughout her lifetime. While evolution toward equality was slow, and is still in progress, gaining the right to vote and the activity that surrounded the suffrage movement were contributing factors to the advancement of women in every profession including music. While Powell did not always support this viewpoint, it is important to note she recognized in her later life the greater implications the right to vote would have for women and became an outspoken supporter of woman suffrage.

12 Karen Shaffer, Maud Powell, 382/5.
Figure 8.2: Statue of Maud Powell in Peru, Illinois\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13} Photo courtesy of Susan O’Riordan.
CHAPTER 9: REMAINING GENDER INEQUALITIES FOR WOMEN IN PROFESSIONAL MUSIC

Gender integration in professional instrumental performance has proven to be a long and difficult process. While women performers of Maud Powell’s era broke ground for many women of the future, women have still not reached equality in professional music in America. The professional orchestral field is particularly rife with sex-bias. Women comprised the majority of the nation’s music student population in 1925, and still do today.\(^1\) If observing the data of professional orchestras, however, it is clear that men are still the majority of the body of performers. It is estimated that about half the players in urban and community orchestras who are either not paid or paid on a per concert basis are women. By contrast, the nation’s twenty-five largest orchestras contain around thirty percent females.\(^2\)

In 1976, a Symphony News article stated that the use of blind auditions greatly increased the number of women hired. However, inconsistent practices with screening still exhibited gender bias. In 1976, one-third of all major orchestras used a screen for preliminary auditions. Only three orchestras of those top one-third used a screen in their final auditions, which directly resulted in a higher percentage of women players with contracts. Even today, although the forty-seven largest orchestras in America reported they used a screen for preliminary auditions, only about a dozen do so for final auditions.\(^3\) Even more disparaging is the gap between men and women’s equality in principal players. In Suby Raman’s article from November 18, 2014, Graphing Gender in America’s Top Orchestras, he uses graphs of data to depict that within the top twenty

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2 Christine Ammer, Unsung, 258.
3 Ibid.
orchestras in America, every single principal position is predominantly male except for the harp. For example, eighty-two percent of concertmasters are male, leading a fifty-nine percent population of female violinists. He also points out that among the top twenty orchestras, Marin Alsop is the only female music director.

Women conductors are still sensationalized and marginalized. As professionals, they make up a tiny percent of the population as music directors and conductors of symphonies and operas. They also still create headlines just for being women, like this one from The Guardian on March 12, 2015: “Barbara Hannigan: no jacket required: Who says women can’t be conductors? Well, quite a lot of men. So what has the famous soprano Barbara Hannigan learned since she picked up the baton-and started waving it in

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a (shock!) sleeveless dress? This article also proves that appearance is still a topic of conversation and debate among the public and for women performers, with Hannigan mentioning that critics always remark on her attire (she prefers sleeveless dresses to the traditional black suits many female conductors wear) and the fact that she leaves her hair down. Another prevalence evidenced in this article is men making gender claims based on biology. Hannigan states:

Public discussion of gender issues is so loaded. Sticky. I even hesitate here and begin to censor myself. Vasily Petrenko, the conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and Bruno Mantovani, head of the Paris Conservatory, have set the bar high regarding the top 10 lame comments on women conductors; even my own teacher, Jorma Panula, made disparaging comments on TV a day or two before I was to conduct at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. Even though his comments weren’t personal, I felt terribly hurt. We’d been working intensely together on Stravinsky, Schöenberg and Ligeti, and here he was criticising musicianship and skill based on gender, claiming that women should only conduct “women’s music”, such as Debussy and Fauré. “It’s not a problem,” he said, “if [women conductors] choose more feminine music. Bruckner or Stravinsky will not do, but Debussy is OK. This is purely an issue of biology.”

I wonder if he regrets what he said. We spoke about it the following day, but he didn’t take it back, even though he must have known how much it hurt me and many other people, men and women alike. Some friends suggested maybe it was a “trick” – that he said it to spur on women conductors who had studied with him. Who knows? Wishful thinking, probably…

Conducting is one of those few final frontiers in which there is a dearth of women. For me, though, the issue is much more complicated than a call of “We need more women conductors!” It is musicianship, psychology and technical skill all bound together in a rare type of leadership that is elusive. It is neither male nor female. Convention has kept the field dominated by men. Convention and, of course, some everyday sexism – because before a woman gets on the podium, she needs to get into a

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conducting class at university, and before that even, she needs to see the career as a viable option, something I didn’t as a child.

A friend’s young daughter saw me conducting on TV the other day, and said: “Mommy, I didn’t know women were allowed to be conductors.”

![Barbara Hannigan](image)

**Figure 9.2: Barbara Hannigan**

**Issues of gender inequality in music are not just limited to the orchestral field; however, existing statistics are difficult to pinpoint for chamber musicians and concert artists. More research needs to be addressed especially in chamber music to trace the history of women in small ensemble work and the state of gender and minorities in this field today. While equality between men and women in professional music is not yet a reality, great strides forward have been made since Maud Powell’s era. Hopefully with new platforms that open dialogue about gender inequality such as the trending HeForShe campaign and the widespread and rapid changes taking place in the Information Age, gender equality in music will soon be an actuality.**

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
CONCLUSION

This document explored the roles women have played in Western art music in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It also addressed gender inequality, then and now. More specifically, it investigated the life of virtuoso violinist Maud Powell through her activism and interest in women in professional music, especially American women.

Women in professional music before the Industrial Revolution were rare as most women only created music in a private sphere setting. The impact of the most notable women in performance and composition created a ripple effect of change and gradual improvement in circumstances for future generations. Successful early female virtuoso violinists were the exceptions to what was ultimately a male-dominated field. With the advancements for the freedom of women in the first wave of feminism, the violin became a more viable option for women as a suitable instrument. The romantic period was the golden age for the concert soloist and women vocalists, pianists, and a handful of violinists were able to forge a career despite stigmatization against their bold public sphere personas.

Maud Powell, as the top female violinist and American favorite, was able to stir serious change for women in professional music. She worked closely with Women’s Music Clubs around the country, and encouraged fellow female concert artists. Her lecture on “Women and the Violin” and performances at the World’s Columbian Exposition gave her worldwide exposure and a platform for speaking out on behalf of
women. Powell wrote for publications extensively, and regularly encouraged gender equality in symphony orchestras and for conductors and composers. She also was a musician of many “firsts,” including the first American woman to perform in a mixed gender chamber ensemble, and the leader of a highly acclaimed all-female piano trio. While she was fortunate in her upbringing, career, and marriage, Powell still recognized and spoke out against sexism she encountered on a regular basis as a public figure.

While Maud Powell did not always support the women’s suffrage movement, she eventually backed the right to vote completely and participated in efforts in the movement by lending her voice as a celebrity in publications. Powell’s life no doubt influenced change for women in professional music. While gender equality is still not a reality, improvements are consistent and there is hope for the full realization of Maud Powell’s dream that women will become fully integrated into the professional world of Western art music.

Conclusion: Maud Powell official logo

1 Karen Shaffer and Rachel Barton Pine, eds., Maud Powell Favorites, XXIV.
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