

# Women in Art and Music

## Art

By S. VICTORIA MARIE FORDE

Although art academies were founded in the early 1800s, women were not admitted until mid-century, and even then never allowed to attend anatomy lectures, let alone art classes with models.

Despite all the barriers, American women artists by the 1850s were being recognized internationally. Taught by fathers, husbands, friends or tutors in America or Europe, women created works now treasured in collections, city squares and public buildings.

In 1869 the coeducational Art Academy of Cincinnati was founded with women on the faculty. But earlier than that Lilly Martin Spencer (1822-1901) was known as the outstanding female genre painter of the Golden Age (1800-1876). This prodigy, at 17, covered the walls of her home with charcoal murals. When she opened her first exhibit, Nicholas Longworth, wealthy financier, offered to be her patron. Inexplicably, she refused. During her marriage she became the breadwinner for her growing family of 13 children and husband. Moving them all to New York, she took night classes and painted by day to feed them.

Sarah Miriam Peale (1800-1882), the leading portrait painter

of the day, was probably the first professional woman artist. Taught by her father, James, and her famous uncle, Charles Wilson Peale, she supported herself for 60 years with great success.

*During the 150th anniversary year each issue of Intercom has focused on a particular ministry or cultural area, highlighting Sisters who were pioneers in the field, and some who continue their rich history of caring and excellence.*

A strange exodus of American women sculptors to Rome occurred at mid-century. Among them was Harriet Hosmer (1820-1908), the most famous sculptor of the nineteenth century. Fighting for success, Harriet joined the women's group in Rome, where in 10 years she had her own palatial studio and a staff of Italian stonecutters.

Perhaps one of the most important legacies left by these courageous women is the declaration of Harriet Hosmer who did not think of herself as "a woman artist" but rather as "an artist" who was "female by accident of sex."

## Music

By S. DOLORES JOHNSON

In the middle of the 19th century women composers and performers were limited to a home situation or a local community. Music was an important part of a woman's education, but only to enhance her accomplishments. Instruments such as the clavichord, recorder, flute, violin, dulcimer and pianoforte were available and used for entertainment in the home.

Louise Farrenc (1804-1875) and Clara Schumann-Wieck (1819-1896) were two women who were able to compose and have their works appreciated in their locales. Even now recordings from these times are being discovered that reveal that women are capable of giving life to music that is creatively beautiful.

Since music is so closely linked with the spiritual aspect of life, it comes as no surprise that St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and Mother Margaret George appreciated and encouraged the musical development of the Sisters and the students they taught.

## The Pioneers

S. Ernestine Foskey

"It was in Albuquerque that I began to develop my talent as an artist," S. Ernestine Foskey relates in her memoirs. After serving on several other missions, this young Sister was sent to St. Vincent Academy from 1888 to 1896 where, besides having her own

classroom, she taught art for two hours each afternoon. "I had no formal lessons," she recalled, "but all I did was accomplished by reading and experimenting."

This changed, however, when she attended the Cincinnati Art Academy from 1910-12. Here she studied under such notable teachers as Frank Duveneck and Clement Barnhorn.





This round-faced, rosy-cheeked Sister spent the rest of her days in her art studio at Mount St. Joseph where she was prolific in her production of oils and watercolors. She painted several portraits of Elizabeth Seton as well as those of the Mothers and S. Anthony O'Connell. She also did three large "Angels of the Battlefield" paintings and many natural life compositions.

While working in her studio she welcomed everyone with her sparkling eyes and delightful smile. Those who knew her spoke of her simplicity, her cheerfulness, and her boundless energy.

#### S. Agnes Eppley

Music was part of the Eppley family home in Springfield, Ohio. Each of the eight family members, including the parents, played a musical instrument, and the Eppley orchestra played for local

events and performed at weddings. Two of the daughters, Agnes and Agatha, became Sisters of Charity and shared their musical talents during their long careers.

S. Agnes Eppley spent 40 years teaching music at the Academy and College of Mount St. Joseph. After several brief stays she was assigned to the Mount in 1915 and remained there until her death in 1952. Besides teaching the academy and college students S. Agnes conducted the Sisters' choir and was a prolific composer. She is known for the many hymns she composed, as well as for her Masses in honor of St. Joseph and the Sacred Heart.

A happy, welcoming person who bounced as she walked, S. Agnes loved to share her musical ability with others. Although a stickler for both theory and expression, this teacher was revered by her pupils.

#### S. Marie Concetta Papania

For 55 years, from 1931 to 1986, S. Marie Concetta Papania devoted her life to music.

Teaching others to appreciate music was part of the fiber of her being. In addition, she directed choirs of novices and postulants,

served as diocesan music supervisor, and composed. Besides sacred music, she published *Sing, Dance, and Play*, a collection of songs for primary grades with accompanying teachers' editions and study guides.

Most Sisters recall the long hours they spent learning S. Marie Concetta's *Missa Solemnis* and the times the composer would exhort them: "Sisters, stop at all the bars and hold onto your men!" (when singing the A-men). But the long practices turned into exultant experiences when they sang this Mass in a chapel bursting with the sound of hundreds of voices raised in this vocal prayer.

"Music was my aunt's road to God," remarked her niece, S. Marie Re. "She prayed it, she lived it." And she carried this spirit of God's presence into her relationships with others.



#### S. Augusta Zimmer

During S. Augusta Zimmer's early years as a classroom teacher in Chicago she shared her gift of drawing by helping her co-workers with their classroom boards. As a result she was told to attend summer art classes until, in 1928, she got word that she was to be missioned to the College of Mount St. Joseph to teach art. Horrified at this prospect, Sister wrote to Mother Irenaea Fahey who was a musician, telling her, "If you had been allowed to play the piano for a couple of hours on Saturday or for three or four weeks in the summer time, would you feel equal to teach college music students?"

S. Augusta was then given the green light to attend classes at the Chicago Art Institute. The budding artist won a competition awarding her a fellowship to study abroad. She spent 15 months in Europe, the Middle East and Egypt. Upon her return S. Augusta began her 33-year career at the College of Mount St. Joseph. One of her student's spoke for many others when she remarked, "S. Augusta's dedication, animation and expectations have made my life so much fuller."

In addition to being an extraordinary teacher, S. Augusta was prolific in her own artistic productions. As amazing as the number and quality of her works are, so are the types of media in which she produced. This gifted woman saw life as beautiful and embraced everything as a gift from God. And this spirit flowed into everything she created with her art.





## The Followers

**S. Anna Maria Ahl**

Last Christmas a perceptive friend sent me a beautifully designed card of a Native American proverb: "The Great Spirit Gave Us Each a Song."

Life forces us to learn many songs — some to survive, some to



contribute to our social group or to meet others' expectations, and some just for fun. In fact, we all carry many tunes quite competently in our

baskets, all in the prescribed keys, mostly on pitch, and in harmony with others. Yet, none may be our Spirit-given song, the song through which the Mystery wishes to incarnate its Creativity in us.

So how do we discern which of the several competencies we've developed is that song? Isn't it the one that fills our deepest being with life-generating joy?

In the Community, because I can draw, people have asked me to do innumerable greeting cards, program covers, flyers and other pieces. I even did two sets of Stations of the Cross. For two years I tried doing Christmas cards for Abbey Press and book illustrations for St. Mary's Press. In all these endeavors, doggedly doing my best resulted in adequate products that satisfied the requesters. But the inner spark was missing.

One assignment, however, though difficult and time-

consuming, did stir that spark — the composition of two, long Advent programs in blank verse.

During all this time I have privately expressed deepest thoughts and feelings spontaneously, in words, in poetry, or even once in little musical pieces. Significantly, not once did I turn to graphic art. As we grow older and wiser we acquire the freedom and courage to drop from our basket many of the inauthentic tunes that have become hopelessly discordant, even though they may still ring true for others. This allows our Spirit-given song to emerge clearly as the dominant theme. And, in my case, it's word-smithing.

**Alice Ann M. O'Neill,**  
affiliate

J.S. Bach is quoted as saying, "The aim and final reason of all music is for the glory of God." J.S.



Bach is my favorite composer and his statement clarifies the reason why I am a cellist. I believe music is a gift from God and is given to me so that I can give

for God.

My ministry at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, involves music and people. Teaching the cello has been and continues to be a great joy for me. About nine years ago, I began studying the Suzuki Method. "Nurtured By Love" is how Dr. Suzuki believes every person can learn, achieve his or her fullest potential, and develop a beautiful heart. I use the cello as a

tool for these goals. I teach cello to children as young as two years of age through high school and college students.

Performing is intertwined with teaching for me. I am a better teacher because I perform, but I am a much better performer because I teach. I love to play chamber music, play in symphony orchestras, and perform cello recitals. Playing the cello is a form of prayer for me. It is my voice. When preparing to perform on the cello, I pray, "Lord, please open my heart and allow Your light to shine through me." With this prayer, I hope that God will use me as a tool for reaching out to others.

**S. Mary Agnes Saffer**

Music has always been an important part of my life. Both my parents were professional musicians and many of our relatives were also. Everyone played or sang something. As early as the second grade I went to the Cincinnati Symphony concerts at Music Hall with my Mom. I remember sitting in the side gallery of that packed hall — watching, listening. I was one excited kid!



Church music was always part of the family. At one point we numbered five organists. Mom was an organist and soon I was, too. I have spent a huge part of my life in a choir loft, either playing the organ or directing the choir. Even today that's where I feel at home, in the choir loft at the Motherhouse.

For over 60 years I have been



privileged to share my love for making music in many ways; with many people young and old, rich and poor; in rural areas like Georgia and Kentucky and in cities like Cleveland and Detroit; in schools grade through college; in homes and in nursing facilities; even in the dining room at Mount St. Joseph. It has been exciting to watch others learn to share this God-given gift of expression, to see faces come alive in sheer joy as they learn to make music together.

For me what is most important is the fact that music is the superb means of uniting one's whole being with God. And that has been my life, helping others discover this deep form of prayer. As a child I watched my mother work with the boys in her choir and saw her faith inspire others. It was contagious. That was a gift, and hopefully, I learned from her.

### S. Terry Thorman

Music is often for me a language without words, a "right brain" event. Not an eloquent public speaker, I am able to

often the straightest distance between others and their feelings. I've been privileged to witness this as I've worked as a music therapist with people suffering spiritual and physical distresses and death. Acknowledging feeling and "letting them be" can lead to healing. In fact, music and healing have been intimately connected since ancient times. All people access music for celebrating, relaxing, energizing, healing and praying.

Music brings diverse people together to share something special. We become "music friends." I see this in my working with music groups and, most especially, in our SC music ministry.

Music is prayer. In fact, I recently learned that the revised parts of the General Instruction on the Liturgy ask us not to celebrate Sunday Mass without music!

Since my first piano lesson at age seven I've thought of myself as a musician. In recent years I've even dared call myself a composer, as God is gifting me with notes and words of my own and a willing audience of SCs to receive them. Music is the possession of musicians, but it is a gift to be shared.

### S. Roberta Westrick

When a dear friend lent me two Santos by the acclaimed santero Charles Carrillo, little did I know what God had in store for me.

I've had various hobbies throughout my life, as I've always felt a need for some type of creative outlet. So when my friend

brought me the two saints, I soon found my apartment filled with books on Santos. I read about the history, folklore and artistic technique used to create this delightful art form. I fell in love with this simple, almost childlike art known as "Icons of the Southwest" and thought I would try my hand at it. I began painting Southwest Santos in fall 1993.

Santos (holy images) originated during the period in history 1740-1860, before plaster art came to the Southwest. The only way a person living in the isolated mountain regions of New Mexico could possess a devotional object in their home or for the morada (prayer house of the Penitentes) was for an itinerate artist, called a santero (saint-maker) to visit the village and, after bartering, make the holy images.

Ten years have now passed and I've painted over 350 Santos for home devotional use and juried art shows. What began as a leisurely hobby has turned me into an artist, leading me into the world of art exhibits, galleries, markets and awards.

I'm a firm believer that if you honor the God-given creative urges within you and say "yes" to those little whispered hunches and ideas that flash like comets through your mind, God will lead you to create as She creates. It takes one to places one would

never expect to go, bringing beauty, joy and delight into one's own life, as well as the lives of others. It also brings warmth and good energy into a sometimes cold and harsh world. ☩



communicate best with the wonderful power of music. I use instruments to speak with their own voices, bring life to the composer's feelings and words.

Music is the straightest distance between me and my feelings, bypassing words. I feel most joyful or confident when music enhances a thought or event. I am able to cry most easily when music accompanies a sad or moving experience. Music is also

