



**EU Conference : Women in arts and in media**  
**« Gender equality in french permanent orchestras »**  
**by Clémence Quesnel**

French orchestras are convinced that we can't neglect half of the human race. Gender equality is not a recent concern for our association : we study the proportion of women among our musicians since the founding of the association, twenty years ago. In 2017 and 2018, it became a priority because the french republic president launched a plan for the equality of women and men. This state policy acted as a catalyst in raising awareness and in building momentum.

First, we decided to base our action on solid statistical data and not just informal data. So, we launched a study on the proportion of women among our musician in 2017 and the result was 38% of women for 62% of men. This percentage in itself doesn't seem so catastrophic, although there is room for improvement. But inequalities appear when you do focus on each section : for example, there is only 5% of women in brass section and only 15% of men in harp section.

**Our charter**

On the strength of these data, we had given consideration to take action. This led us to elaborate our charter, which was a way for us to both make a public commitment, with very concrete proposals and to think about how and with whom we could work.

The Charter is divided in several subsections :

- One about collecting solid data on a regular basis ;
- one about artists' vocational and professional development for conductors, musicians and composers ;
- one about orchestras' communication and what image do we portray to public about woman in the orchestra and in classical music (visibility of women in orchestras' communication) ;
- one about collective bargaining and legal and regulatory framework ;
- one about partners.

We created a committee on equality (2 women and 2 men, all orchestras/opera houses managers), which is in charge of supervising the implementation of the charter.

**Where are we today ?**

Two years is a really short period of time for this major challenge but much has already been achieved.

**Regarding collecting data**, we published 2 studies in 2019 :

- one about women in 2018-2019 programming (all occupations included)
- one about visibility of women in orchestras' communication materials.

We also observed that 6 major orchestras in France are run by women (managers): Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre national d'Île-de-France, Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg, Cité Musicale de Metz, Orchestre national de Lyon, Opéra Orchestre de Montpellier

We are actually running behind the statistics because of the Covid-19 lockdown but here are some of the actions we launched :

**2018-2019 were particularly dedicated to women conductors.**

We organised many events : several public masterclasses for young women and one bigger event that we called « tremplin jeunes cheffes » (meaning springboard for young women conductors) at the Philharmonie de Paris. In this event, 6 young women conductors were selected to conduct a rehearsal and a public concert, accompanied by a panel of professionals conductors and orchestras managers.

In 2019, we observed that many major orchestras hired women conductor as principal assistant conductor.

In 2019, Déborah Waldman was the third women to be hired as music director and principal conductor of a permanent orchestra.

**2020-2023 are particularly dedicated to women composers.**

Our work about women composer is based upon 3 objectives :

- to rediscover the works of women composers who have been unjustly forgotten (or sometimes even erased of musicological researches and publications)
- to promote contemporary works of women composers
- to encourage vocations and overcome common misconceptions and/or psychological barriers.

To achieve these goals, we aim to :

- provide musical materials for our music legagy and financial supports for contemporary music
- raise awareness among audience, professional sector and potential artists through a strong communication campaign in 2022-2023.

Gender equality in orchestras, as long as in society, is a long-term goal and we know this will take years to build. It will take a sustained effort, over years, to raise awareness on these issues. And we need time, meaningful partnerships and budget to deconstruct persistent prejudice concerning women's role in music.

But it has to be seen as a great opportunity for us, as human being obviously, but also as music professional because gender equality leads us to think about repertoires, recruiting policies, artists careers etc. and to reshape our organisations.