

DECLASSIFY

Episode 1: Female Experiences and Narratives

Guest: Felicity Wilcox

Host and Transcription: Victoria Pham

Date of publication: 10/08/2020

CHAPTER TIMECODES

0:00 Welcome and Introduction to Felicity

00:54 - Starting out as female composer in the 80s

7:26 - Advocacy work for the Australian Guild of Screen Composers

11:48 – Mentorship Programs for Women

13:32 – Statistics for film music and female representation

15:16 – Hildur Guðnadóttir’s Academy Award for Best Score

16:24 – How important are women-focused programs as a strategy?

21:20 – The Meritocracy Debate and Systemic Exclusion

26:30 - Excerpt of Wilcox’s ‘Secrets Through a Soundglass’ (2018), performed by SON-Ombra

30:05 – Reflections on Representation

32:00 – Parental Support, Primary Careers and Childcare

34:55 – The Issue of Gate-Keepers

35:44 – Orchestral and Opera Programming

39:13 – Social Media and Intersectionality

40:32 – Art that looks and sounds like the world we live in

46:50 – Representing non-binary musicians and composers

49:36 – Balancing domestic and professional life

Intermission II – Excerpt and Wilcox’s ‘People of this Place’ (2016), performed by Jason Noble

56:00 – Raising Films Australia and Care Duties

1:00 – Indigenous Voices at the table, and diverse voices at the table

1:01:09 – CIAM and Felicity’s International Advocacy

1:05:20 – Systemic Issues and Resolutions

1:07:50 – Thank you

SUMMARY

In the first episode of Declassify, join host Victoria Pham in conversation with award-winning composer for screen and concert hall, Felicity Wilcox. Currently a lecturer at UTS, Australia, Felicity is a proactive advocate for gender equity and diversity in Australian Music and is a prolific researcher and speaker at international events concerning the representation of women and non-binary composers in the film and television industries. Listen to their conversation unpacking the nuances of sexism, the relationship between equality in the domestic sphere and a creative working life and professional environments and initiatives aimed towards diversity.

TRANSCRIPT

Victoria Pham (VP): Welcome to the very first episode of Declassify! And firstly, thank you so much for choosing to come and tune in. I have the great pleasure in introducing our first guest. Some of you have probably heard her music before, and in fact, I'm quite familiar with all of her work having also studied with her during my time at the Sydney Conservatorium. I'd like to welcome on board academic and composer Felicity Wilcox. Felicity, who currently lectures at the University of Technology Sydney, is a prolific interdisciplinary composer who has written for a range of ensembles through to the concert hall but most notably she is an accomplished and award-winning screen composer. Beyond this she is a remarkably proactive advocate for gender equity and diversity in music in Australia. In fact, for four years from 2017, she was the chair and co-founder of the gender equity committee of the Australian Guild of Screen Composers. So, welcome onto the podcast, Felicity!

Felicity Wilcox (FW): Thanks Vickie.

VP: Well, I thought a good place for us to start our conversation was to touch on *your* start, which was in the 80s. You started working and training as a composer then. What was it like? And, how has it changed since?

FW: Well, I was really naïve. I started at about the age of 20. And I was lucky that my mum was making documentaries and hired me onto one of her productions, and at the time I was studying composition in a fairly, patchwork kind of way at Sydney University. So, I was studying an arts degree with a music major sort of wangling my way into composition tutes (tutorials) with people like Peter Sculthorpe and Eric Gross. After about a year and a half, this opportunity with my mum came up, and so I pitched for that, and she and the editor thought

they'd give me a go. And I really took to it like a duck to water. It just felt natural to me to be making music for image.

And it was only a few years later, I was getting quite regular work after a few years with independent filmmakers working at the ABC and SBS. And I was accepted into an internship with Peter Miller at Meaningful Eyecontact, which was a studio that made ads (essentially)- really, high-end ads, and video clips for bands like INXS and Crowded House. The ads I works on with Peter taught me a lot because he had an ATARI with Cubase Version One on it, and an AKAI 1000 Sampler and, this is about 1990-1991. By this stage, I dropped out of uni. I didn't finish that degree and I was just working a lot, in studios, and doing film soundtracks and interning on ads.

Then after about 2 years with Peter, I decided I'd just try and get my own studio happening and get my own work, and that coincided with getting my own feature film. So that was about the age of 26 and I had composed the score for Redheads by a director called Daniel Vendramini. The film itself didn't go so great, it didn't get any major accolades as a film, but I was nominated for an AFI award for my soundtrack, and that was in 1992 and I was the first woman ever to be nominated for a best feature score for Australia. So, I made a bit of history there, I didn't win but I was proud to be nominated. And then I just kind of worked solidly really until 2010 and in 2010 I flipped more into more academic work and concert music.

So that's my start, but how has it changed? Oh, my goodness. I would walk in, the 80s, when I was first starting out it was the late 80s, I was just a girl in studios. There were never any other women in studios unless they were the musicians' girlfriends, you know, I would routinely be asked to make coffee in the middle of my own sessions by males who thought that I must be the coffee girl otherwise

why would I be there. I would get comments about my skirts, my hair, my legs... all I wanted was for them to take my music seriously. If I ever had a real conversation with someone about my music, I felt really, really honoured. It shouldn't have been like that, it should've just been a given. But the people who did take me seriously, so the people I met at Trackdown Studios. I've had an association with these people for over 30 years but they took me seriously and they could hear my music and they understood that I had talent and that I was worth supporting. So, on the one hand there were always typical blokey-blokes who would tend to put you down and objectify you, and on the other hand there were really wonderful men who took me seriously and gave me opportunities and mentored me. I didn't really get a lot of mentoring from women, it was mainly men because I just didn't really know any other women who were doing soundtracks at that time. I met some collegially like Sharon Calcraft and Jan Preston. I did go along to the Screen Composers Guild meetings back then but I felt so intimidated by the sheer number of men and the attitudes of the men.

Studio culture was very, very gendered and it still is but I think 30 years ago, it was unapologetically biased whereas now it's probably more unconscious bias that women face from men. It was just conscious bias.

VP: They're probably less like to say things out loud or to your face now, although it does happen occasionally. It probably won't be to the same extent you were experiencing in the 80s.

FW: Right, and you can call it out now. You know, you can say 'Hey, that's not appropriate!' Whereas, if you'd done that, like if I had done that in the 80s it would just have been 'Oh, lighten up!' Now at least there's a conversation where people are actually having to engage in, whereas you were just dismissed "oh don't make a fuss." And I was so desperate to fit in because I was the only women

wherever I was that I just didn't make a fuss. If I was asked to make coffee, I would just make coffee.

VP: Exactly. And you have option in that particular scenario of either maintaining your professionalism or standing up for yourself. And you don't want to be placed in a situation in which you feel like you're starting a scene. The environment you were working in was 30... 40 years ago, so I'd like to think that it has changed.

FW: It is a really different world and I feel that women have a long way to go in terms of representation, but in terms of the things we allow men to get away with now, it's a lot less. You know, we've really come out of the shadows in terms of claiming our space and finding our voice, and it's still not perfect but all I do is compare it to when I was 20, and it's just so much easier to be taken seriously as a woman now. There are so many more opportunities targeted towards women now, and hopefully in another 25 years we're going to get to a place where those things aren't necessary because representation will be equal. But we're still very much at the beginning of that journey, and at least we're started on that journey and I'm very proud to have been a part of that.

VP: Well, you've been a significant part of it because not only were you attending all the meetings but since then, you've taken on a very proactive role of being an advocate for the screen guild. It's been, it was four years wasn't it?

FW: Well, I actually founded the Gender Equity Committee of the Screen Composers' Guild, contrary to what you said, I disengaged with the meetings at the guild because I felt intimidated, I felt objectified. I didn't ever feel comfortable. Despite that, I did win awards and I was nominated for awards and I'd go for the odd ceremony but as far as being involved with committees and things, I really disengaged. And then, in 2015, I just kind of went "you know

what”, I looked at the stats, they were still terrible. There were a couple of women who were kicking goals but hardly any and I went “this hasn’t changed in nearly 30 years! I’ve got to do something about it otherwise I’m going to die and there will be women locked out still” and I had a daughter and she was about 14 at that time, and I went “No, I’ve got to do something.”

I got myself elected onto the board on the platform of really addressing gender equity, and already on the board were Caitlin Yeo and Yantra de Vilder, and they both shared my passion for this cause and when I said, look, ‘I’m actually going to implement... most of the things I’m going to bring to the table are going to be gender focused,’ they said “we’ll support you.”

And so, I came up with the idea to run a roundtable, our first gender equity roundtable in 2016. The president at the time was Guy Gross and he knew that change needed to happen as well. Guy and I have been in the industry for about the same amount of time, and Guy had watched the glacial pace of change and was as keen as I was to get things started. We convened an industry roundtable on gender equity. We had a really packed boardroom at APRA and about 3 hours of discussion and a lot of what came out were women’s’ testimonials, like the stories I’ve just told you. Women saying the same thing over and over; young women, older women, middle-aged women. And we realised that there were systemic problems and that there was a real glass ceiling because of those systemic problems in place for women. So, what it did was really galvanise us into investing more time into improving things. We were lucky in that around the same time APRA commissioned a survey with lead researcher Catherine Strong. She produced a report in 2017 which is a really damning document in terms of looking at how the screen industry functions, and what that did was it gave us empirical data that really matched the anecdotal data that came out both through the roundtable and what we knew through our lived experiences as female

composers. So, we had this really nice anecdotal and qualitative and quantitative data set, and then from there I have taken work through the guild – advocacy work – after the roundtable, Yantra, Caitlan and myself along with Amanda Brown set up the Gender Equity committee of the AGSC, and we went about implementing some initiatives that I think have made quite a big difference.

VP: To, the report you mentioned before from 2017 by Dr Strong and Dr Cannizzo, I was having a little read through, and they make a point about the amount of women who are registered on the APRA platform itself in terms of membership at that time was only 21.7%, so we're starting off from a basis in which there aren't many women who choose this profession to begin with. And some of the strategies around encouraging women like initiatives and programs and the such, have been important. In fact, you have quite an important mentoring program. In fact, I think I just saw something recently about a women's mentoring program that you yourself were part of setting up.

FW: Yeah. So, we set up with APRA's help, we set up the APRA AGSC Screen Mentorship Program. It's an annually awarded, paid film music mentorship for women and non-binary composers. And that's been going on since 2017, I believe, no, we set it up in 2017 and rolled it out in 2018. So, it's 18, 19 and 20. And I'm really proud of that because the composer is *paid* a \$4000 fee and over 6 months get to work more closely with a more senior composer.

Last year, I collated a lot of resources for women and non-binary composers which are housed on the AGSC website. We set up a dedicated website about gender equity which contains an acknowledgement, a mission statement and that's a really strong presence for the Guild. We also tied in with APRA so that the AGSC APRA Screen Music Awards have at least 40% female representation for all judging panels and the same quota for female speakers and performers at

the ceremony. And I don't know if this is coincidental or not but after those quotas were implemented but it resulted in a significant upswing of female award winners in 2017. Sadly though, that did dip though last year. So, '17 and '18 the female award recipients were more than double what they had been and then last year they dipped to a disappointing low.

VP: For those of you who don't know, APRA is quite an important organisation. In Australia, they're essentially the organisation that represents and supports creators, and songwriters and composers through their platform.

FW: So, APRA is the royalties collection society for music in Australia. That's their main function. And as a result of that, they're a non-for-profit organisation. They're all about supporting creators and music creators to create more and to create better and to bring in more revenue.

In terms of statistics for female screen composers, and I'll just give you some percentages. So, the percentage of all earning members in the area of audio-visual music, in the calendar years from 2015 to 2019, across those 5 years, sit at around 11%. So, in 2015 it was 11.09% and in 2019 it was 11.73%, so that is the percentage of all composers working in audio-visual music who identify as female. And that's pretty bad. Over the last 5 years, in terms of royalty earnings, it's even worse.

So, the composers who have earned over \$2000 in annual royalties, which isn't a lot. It's sort of like you don't have to be working very hard to be earning over \$2000 in annual royalties, the percentage of those composers earning over \$2000 in annual royalties of composers who identify as being female averages at 7.83% over five years. We're really sitting at a very low number.

Just looking at what happened in the Academy Awards this year, when Hildur Guðnadóttir won best score for *Joker*, she was just the third woman to win that individual Oscar for best score in its 85 year history. What that does is that it translates to women, and men, going women can't compose screen music, they can't do it, they can't do it well enough to get to that top level.

AUDIO EXCERPT FROM THE 2020 OSCARS:

Hildur Guðnadóttir's Acceptance Speech: "... to the girls, to the women, to the mothers, to the daughters, to hear the music opening within, please speak up, we need to hear your voices..."

FW: So those things are borne out by statistics like from the USA, in 2016 women comprised just 6% of composers working on the top 250 grossing films.

VP: So, do you think the initiatives that are opening up, including the mentorship program that you've been a part of setting up, all through to music education programs and competitions that are aimed towards women are going to help change the landscape or normalize us seeing women in these particular roles of creating music for screen or for stage?

FW: I think they're a slow burn solution, and I think they do normalize as you say and I think they amplify women. They fast-track emerging composers and women who may need to re-engage with industry. Those mentorships fast-track that process and foster a more inclusive culture in screen composer, all of which is great, but part of the problem and part of the reasons that women aren't getting cut-through and working in those really high-end areas... Catherine Strong's research really corroborated what we knew as screen composers which is that most women get stuck in documentary, and I'm an example of that. I worked for

years and years and years and years on really high-end docos, feature documentaries and documentary series.

Someone like Caitlin Yeo largely does the same and has spoken about that as well. Amanda Brown is in the same position. And yes, they get feature films here and there. We all sort of bust out occasionally into drama but, very much a glass ceiling. And the reason is that documentary tends to be lower budget, so its lower stakes. Where you get those high budget productions and high prestige productions they tend to go to the same men. And it seems to circulate around the same men, who are tried and true and they've got track record and example of working at that level, so it really begs the question of how do women break through that glass ceiling and get counted in that very limited number, when it is such a risk of an industry? So, these are the conversations that we really need to have, and it's not really viable to have just appeal to film producers' better natures to "take a punt on this women, she's great!" It sadly doesn't work that way.

There are a few initiatives in the screen industry where they've been able to shift numbers, because it's the same for female producers and directors and writers, those percentages have traditionally been really low as well. And it's the same problem of how do you get women into those higher profile productions? And what Screen Australia's Gender Matters initiative has done is to attach funding to quotas which mandate that of the 4 key creative roles, that is lead actor, writer, director and producer, 3 of those 4 roles have to be occupied by female workers in order to attract funding. So, they've tied funding to gender quotas. Another screen industry that did that really effectively was in Sweden, led by Anna Serner. They've also done that in Berlin where 10% for 50/50; so, under that scheme the production and post-production and facility houses and other service providers who have signed up offer a 10% rebate to projects that can demonstrate a gender balance. So, these funding sort of attaching gender quotas to funding has been

really effective in those lead roles and key creative roles. Sadly, what we were hoping as screen composers was that there would be trickle down effect to composers and that if you had a female director, she would hire a female composer. Well, we've tracked the data across the last 5 years and there has not been a shift. So, Gender Matters was implemented in 2015 and in 2018 they did tracking that found that there had been a vast improvement in the number of key creative roles that were occupied by women and it has not translated to an upswing in composers.

So, it's a double-edged sword. It's about giving women the skills, giving women the networks and I think the mentorships do that. It's about normalizing female participation and amplifying talented women and spotlighting them, and the mentorships do that. But until we implement really targeted and aggressive initiatives that collate female composers and money, you know, I don't think we're going to get more women placed into productions anytime soon. We need targeted and specific initiatives to urgently improve our representation.

VP: So herein comes the Devil's advocates question, especially when I'm trying to research this topic and I've come across a lot of the same criticism when it comes to any that is quota-based. A lot of people say that people should be hired by skill, and its tokenistic. I mean, I can't actually think of any other method in which we can shift a system so that different people of different genders or identify with other genders, other than being male, will be represented. With a lot of the conversations I've had with a lot of different people all through classical music from screen to stage, there isn't really an acknowledgement of sexism or the nuances of sexism, or that the perception of certain people, say women, aren't capable of producing higher-scaled works. So, without a quota-based system particularly initially to push representation, I can't imagine how this larger shift

would happen. Because you're right. Relying on the good graces of producers, or directors or conductors is not going to create a change in the culture.

FW: Yes, so what you're talking about is the meritocracy argument, which is completely flawed. How can you judge a meritocracy when you're excluding vast swathes of the population? When there are systemic barriers to be passed through before minorities and women even get a look in, how can you talk about a meritocracy? How can you talk about quality? And in fact, I think opening up the field to minority composers, to non-binary composer and to female composers, increases the meritocracy because it lets people in. It allows for a wider variety, a greater number of practitioners which is going to increase the pool, which is going to make it more competitive, which is going to that the *really* talented people rise to the top, as opposed to the same middle-ages white men rising to the top, time and time again. So, I actually think the entire meritocracy argument is an entire furfy and it plays very conveniently into a power-base that wants to maintain control.

VP: And also, there is a problem with the argument in that, a lot of the people who are trying to get into the industry through these different initiatives or quota-based systems, they already have the stigma of not being good enough for that role because we haven't seen people like that occupying these roles over and over again through history. So, if we don't have that system, it would impossible to get a foot through the door.

FW: Exactly. There's actually a really good initiative called the 'Institute for Composer Diversity.' They talk about and it's worth getting a look at. The director, Rob Deemer writes "it seems that there's a ceiling of 3 to 8 diverse composers per season [this is for orchestra]. Irrespective of how many works there are in the season, my guess is that there is a perception issue here. Folks see

a handful of composers who aren't white men in a program and think 'that's enough.'”

So, there's kind of a diversity box that gets ticked. And also, you know, they'll pick the same few women or the same few black composers or the same few... you know, and they'll rotate. And I know in Australia, for example, we have the same women that get picked time and time again whenever we are showcasing female composers. So, Deemer writes, “If every orchestra we've looked at limited the number of works from a single composer to two, there would be over 200 slots among 35 orchestras that would have opened.” So, it's this idea that we need to share the benefit around and not just constantly pick the same elite men, or the same elite one or two women or the same elite one or two composers of colour. We actually need to consciously go out and seek new voices.

I ran a concert series in my home for a while (which I'll be doing again after COVID). One of the mandates for the programming was 50% gender split, inclusive of non-binary composers too. Performers would come and say “but all the works I know are by men.” And I'm like, “sorry, go and find one by a woman because we actually have 10 works. And so far, 7 of them are composed by men so we need another 2 composed by women.” And when it was a simply numbers thing, it actually forced the composers to go out and find works that they liked that were composed by female and non-binary composers, and then to learn a new piece. And guess what? That opened up their repertoire to more diverse composers.

It's about being intentional and this whole argument of it lowering the standard. It's actually lifting up the rocks and looking underneath the rocks at the talent that has been lying there and sitting there all along, and just never had the spotlight.

INTERMISSION I

VP: As brief intermission to our conversation into gender equity, here is a small excerpt of some of Felicity's most recent music, her 2016 string quartet 'Secrets through a Soundglass' performed by SON-Ombra.

Follows a 4-minute excerpt of Felicity Wilcox's string quartet 'Secrets through a Soundglass' performed by SON-OMbra (2016)

VP: In fact, I have a fun little anecdote. From when I was in high-school and for anyone else who was from New South Wales, you had to do the HSC which for music has the Australian Music component in it for the examination. And you had to learn Australian repertoire with a focus on contemporary repertoire from the last 25 years. And, in that course, I was introduced to Liza Lim for the first time - a piece for solo cello called Invisibility. I had never heard of her before that point, and I never realised another quite high-profile Australian and Asian woman who was producing music for orchestra and chamber music, and I was kind of surprised because it was that year were I was more comfortable with letting around me know that this was what I was choosing to pursue as a career. And to see another person doing something that I thought was sort of impossible and to be able to relate to that was a really important moment, and I realised how profoundly important representation was that someone existed in this scene, who was doing really well and that I could aspire to do the same thing. So without that series or history of women working in this industry...

FW: It's the "you can't be it if you can't see it."

VP: Yes exactly, you don't know if it's possible.

FW: And to your question about what was it like in the 80s, there were no other women around; black, white, Asian... there were just no women. So, to see another woman doing that is really inspirational. If we don't have and we can't see ourselves successful or people like us, why would we attempt that career path, right? So, these are the really structural issues that I really did want to talk through. These are part of why we're not represented in higher numbers.

Factors that contribute to gender disadvantage, and this is specifically in screen music, but I suspect that it's across most genres of music, are the disproportionate share of childcare that falls to women in screen industries. What we've found in screen music is that there is no structure, and this is the same for most freelance composers, there's no industry structure around parental support, and a survey done by WIFT (Women in Film & Television) revealed that 85% of primary careers identify as female. And that really puts the burden of childcare back onto women and particularly in screen composition where you have crazy deadlines, really late nights, no rhythm to the work and expectation that you're available 24/7 and that you can deliver everything yesterday, how does a woman manage without significant support from a partner? Not all women have that.

In fact, in my career, I had just been nominated for two AFI awards and I was really riding at the top of my game and then my marriage ended and I found myself a single mother of a 4-year-old and an 8-year-old. And I really had to make a decision. I had started my PhD but I really had to make a decision about whether I could physically deliver as a screen composer, you know, whether or not there were enough hours in the day or enough hands to help. And I decided there weren't, and that was when I stepped out of screen composing as my main

focus and decided that I would have to focus on an academic career that would give me more support and stability in order to function as a single mother.

So, these are not family-friendly industries. We've also seen a lot of women dropping off mid-career so they'll sustain exactly the same pattern I had. They'll sustain very positive careers pre-children and then when they have children, they'll be building and then suddenly they'll be out of the game. When we look at very senior women, they're really few and far between. Women over 50 are really poorly represented in screen music and a lot of older women have decided to go into other areas of work. And that is, a very big part of why the glass ceiling remains in place. Just at the point in which our male peers are ascending into the top echelons of the industry, women are falling out and falling behind. So, we really need to address childcare and support for careers and parents. Obviously, there is still sexist attitudes and sexual harassment that disrupt women's wellbeing and career advancement. As we agreed, they're now less acceptable more than they were a generation which is one of the good things that Me Too has resulted in. We're now able to call all that stuff out, but that's still there and we're still hearing it reported by women.

The other thing is the question of gatekeepers. So, studio executives, film producers, directors, music producers, agents, publishers, conductors, orchestra board members, curators, still tend to be largely male. The board members of major MPAs and chairs of boards are still overwhelmingly male. Opera Australia, MSO (Melbourne Symphony Orchestra), those kind of big MPAs, males still outnumber women as chairs on boards or being on boards, and artistic directors still tend to be male. So, these are the gatekeepers who are making programming decisions, and unless they're thinking intentionally about bringing female creators in and programming women's music, it's not going to happen. So, we need women in leadership roles and in gatekeeping positions.

Back to orchestras through, orchestras are a bit of a double whammy because a lot of orchestras are not programming living composers' work so for starters it's hard for any living composer to have their work program. But on top of that, women are very poorly represented among those living composers. Looking at the 2018-2019 orchestral season, across 15 orchestras worldwide, just 2.3% of the compositions programmed were by women. That means 97.7% of the music programmed were by men. And the stats in 2020 were hardly improved on that, and that is research done by Donne e Musica, which are a British Collective, that are compiling statistics and looking really closely at the orchestras and holding orchestras to account for their programming.

VP: Orchestras are a special one because I remember at the beginning you were talking about there being a difference between doing work for documentaries and for feature films, and if we were to draw a comparison, I suppose that orchestral repertoire could be kind of the feature film of the classical music industry on stage. There's a huge reluctance in taking, or what's perceived as taking a financial risk, in not only commissioning new music but new music from a woman.

FW: It's really high stakes. There are bigger forces, bigger budgets, more musicians, bigger concert halls, all of that and Opera's about the worst. And I mean, despite there being a really great movement in being more gender and culturally inclusive in Opera, led by people like Sally Blackwood, Liza Lim and Peggy Polias who are working in this area too, so there's a conversation about that, that's really come through in the last 2 years but, I have some stats in front of me.

In 2018, Opera Australia productions feature just 4.7% in key creative roles. So that's not just composer but conductor and director as well, and in 2019 this did improve to 15%, obviously because there was a targeted focus on the issue. And the New York Metropolitan Opera between 1880 and 2016, that is its first 136 years, programmed its first Opera by a woman. So of the 27 operas of its 2018-19 program, including several new productions – so new, original productions by living composers – 0% were composed by women. We really need to look at these appalling percentages and ask ourselves: Why? Why in 2020 is this allowed to continue? are we not calling it out from the rooftops and saying, enough is enough! It's time, it's time we held men to account for these incredibly limiting programming choices they're making and it's just not fair. I'm in my 50s now, and I'm sick of it. It's just not fair. So, that's why I do all the advocacy work, I need to do something.

VP: Well, it's necessary because the first step is to have a conversation and then to have procedures in place to see if there's a result. Obviously, it seems glacial to us but I think the work you have been doing has been pushing for a change.

FW: I've found even in 4 years I've been leading advocacy and being loud about it on social media, I've been getting less trolling. Initially whenever we'd stick out heads out and say something within the Guild, we'd get trolled and someone would shoot us down.

VP: And you'd say it's changed since then?

FW: It's normalizing slowly. It would be really nice if I could get lots and lots of likes from male peers. It's that whole thing about giving up power. And it's confronting, when you've had power, to be challenged to relinquish it. And this goes to white composers opening up the way to composers of colour, women

opening up to non-binary. My take on all of that is intersectionality. We can't complain about being excluded if in our turn, we then exclude. I don't lose anything by spotlighting a composer with disability, for example, it doesn't take anything away from me by doing that. It's the same with being inclusive with people of colour, Indigenous composers, bring it on! Because what it is doing for me is it's breaking down the hegemony and the bastions of power, and if we can just change all that up and bring in more diverse voices, it's going to be a much more interesting scene.

VP: I think so too. To look at how the whole industry is living, because if the people who are creating the music or the ones that hold the power are not representatively diverse as their audience there might be a breaking down of connections or the kinds of narratives that we will be able to express.

FW: Well, exactly. And it also goes to we want art that is like the world we live in. And if I'm looking around and seeing composers like Liza Lim and yourself, Brenda Gifford and people that I see when I'm walking down the street, I want those voices. I want to understand what those stories are. I want to hear what people who aren't like me have to say. I want to hear my own stories echoed by other women in music, I want those diverse stories and sounds. I mean, the project that you're doing with the Vietnamese drum is amazing because otherwise I wouldn't have heard about that. We've got to hear these stories, particularly in Australia, because we are such a multicultural country.

When I get resistance to this from male peers, or worse neutrality, you know, men just not saying anything, not standing with you, not clapping their hands or not engaging because they're scared. They're scared to enter into a conversation where they don't feel like they're not allowed to have a voice, maybe that's why. It's dispiriting, because I would rather they spoke up and have a conversation

with me and acknowledged that they were scared because they didn't know how to handle this conversation. Ask questions and offer support. Share some of your limelight and where you possibly can, program a female composer or a culturally diverse composer, or an Indigenous composer. And it's just like sharing the love around. So, I feel it's really sad when men feel berated, or chastised or silenced when part of what I've tried to do as part of my advocacy work for gender equity in music internationally for the past 2 years is not to be confronting. But to be embracing and to be inclusive of men and if they ask how they can help, to tell them how they can help, not to tell them or scold them, not to say 'you're terrible.' And I think there's a real constructive dialogue we can have with male gatekeepers and leading male musicians and leading male composers that doesn't sideline them. That just shows them that it's about pulling together to create art that is more representative of the world in which we live.

VP: I think that's really at the heart of it, or at the heart of representation and diversity, in that we are hoping to engage with people from a wider base through the stories that we can tell. I mean, I'm glad that we're having this conversation now because it hones in on the point that diversity whether through gender or cultural diversity, and how different industries tackle this question of representing women and people of colour, diversity shouldn't be perceived as a threat.

I mean, we were talking before about the stats and how in orchestral programming the amount of women represented is just under 3%. And I know what you're advocating for is complete equal representation being 50/50, and that feels like a long way off for orchestral programming where it's about 3%. So, through the initiatives being set up for concert music and orchestral programming, I would love to see that double. So really in the next year to 3 years to see that 2.8% turn into 5%. It's still shockingly low, but what you said before about it being sad about there being a lack of engagement from people who feel really threatened

by this, honestly number-wise, really miniscule changes to the landscape as a whole. And yet, we require these small minuscule through initiatives like programs for women and women mentoring programs in order to even shift a 1% change in the landscape. It's really important that we have these initiatives because without them, that tiny change in which to normalise a profession which is an art form, so an audience sees this representation of our society on stage, it won't change without these little steps here and there, that will result in a cumulative effort.

FW: And that we can't do it on our own. That we need men to help us and we need people in power to help us, to promote us and to support us, and to facilitate networking for us and to offer us pathways, to put initiatives in place, to include us in conversations, to put us in boardrooms, and to put us at the table to champion us. We need that.

VP: We need the realisation that the idea of diversifying anything, either from the creative base or at the table, as you say, doesn't mean that there is a narrowing of the power. Because I think that some people hold the perception that if we change it too quickly, or if we kind of give roles out to different people all at once that somehow the powerbase is going to narrow, whereas, I think it's widening the stories, and you say, we're sharing the love, as you say. Rather than some people potentially feeling like they're losing their power, we're sharing it, not stripping it away.

FW: Yeah, and I haven't met one woman or one non-binary composer or one culturally diverse composer who wants to dominate and steal the limelight of anybody else. It's more about, let's just do stuff and let's include everybody and share the love – exactly as you say. One thing I'm a little bit frustrated by is the lack of data about non-binary musicians and composer. I've recently edited a

book about screen composers, female-identifying screen composers where we do include trans composers in that. One thing that I found frustrating is that there was a lack of empirical data about that discrete cohort. There's data about, that lumps women and non-binary composers in together, and data that excludes non-binary composers and focuses on women. So, one thing I'm really keen to do and I'm hoping to do this through research via my university role is to actually get discrete data sets for non-binary composers in art music so we can find out who's doing what and what their scenes are and who's involved in those scenes, and if there is any common ground in an art music practitioner who is non-binary and an art music practitioner who identifies with being female. I just want to understand that world better as a focus, and hopefully with the dialogue opening up around non-binary individuals and that community identity really opening up publicly, I'm really hoping that we can spotlight that group and bring that group into this discourse around gender diversity. Because gender equity and diversity isn't just about a binary female or male base. If we talk about gender diversity, we've also got to look at all of the expressions of gender that lie in between those two binaries.

VP: And it's important in understanding the diversity of diversity.

FW: Right, and you know, yes biologically cis gendered women have a specific set of concerns and issues and life experience, so do trans women, so do non-binary women, so do trans men. Let's try and understand a little better, let's not minimize someone's identify and say you're not a woman because you're not cis gendered. So I think these conversations are really yielding fascinating depth, and detail and nuance, and I'm really glad that we're talking about it.

VP: And I'm really glad that I'm having this conversation with you. I remember studying with you and you were already talking about the advocacy then and it

was really amazing to see at the time. It was when I was first starting out in composition, in 2015 when I studied with you so it coincided. Actually, that year, I had gone to study composition in a summer school – at the Gondwana National School – where they had that small composition course. And it’s funny, you mentioned childcare before, as one of the composition mentors that year, who was male, during one of our little sessions, turned to the girls in the class and asked about whether or not we were considering having children and whether or not that would change our creative process, because his wife had been a writer and it altered everything for her (having children). And I was 19 and had never thought of that before.

FW: Wow, and he could ask you so immune to the problem. We’ve found – Caitlin Yeo and I were sitting at one of the awards. These guys stood up and they claimed their award, and the first thing they did as they clutched their trophies is they thanked their wives who they never see for keeping the home fires burning while they’re in the studio day in and day out. Caitlin and I just looked at each other and rolled our eyes and went we hate that. It’s just saying it’s ok to delegate the childcare and make it a female problem or a wives’ problem. Where are our wives? Who’s doing that for us? And it really does explain why women are being locked out, and why women aren’t getting to those higher levels. We need to question the assumption that men have that women will do that work. Fortunately, the younger men I talk too like men in their 30s are going “well, we know we have to pull our weight, and we know it’s not fair to let our wives do that,” and there is an awareness of that, but I do think that it’s still in the minority. And I would say, I think they’re the first generation of men who are really taking that on board. It’s sad that that guy was feeling so entitled to ask what you ladies were going to when you had children because it’s all your problem.

VP: It was a really odd moment. And I remember thinking vividly about Virginia Woolf's *A room of one's own* where she talks about the experience of being woman and of being a creative woman. One of the key quotes being "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write." And it really brought forth this idea of having to balance your home with your creative and working life, because she goes into depth about balancing the responsibilities of requiring financial independence and time, lots of time, away from domestic duties in order to produce the work. And that was all the way back in the late 1920s, so it's been a long time coming.

INTERMISSION II

VP: And for a second intermission is a piece by Felicity for solo bass clarinet called 'People of this Place.' Felicity Wilcox would like to acknowledge the Gadigal People of the Eora nation to whom this piece is dedicated and pays respect to all Aboriginal elders, past, present and emerging as the traditional owners of the lands that inspired it. She also wishes to thank the performer Jason Noble, whose contribution was invaluable

Follows a 4:30 excerpt of Felicity Wilcox's work for solo bass clarinet called 'People of this Place' performed by Jason Noble.

FW: One of the things I'm doing now is I'm on the advisory board to Raising Films Australia, and that's an initiative brought out from the UK by women in film and television here in Australia, and so Raising Films Australia is looking at this issue of caring and the vast responsibility still falling on women, and trying to bring in more structural support in the screen industry for careers. It's not just women or men with children or primary careers, it's also for people caring for

disabled partners or parents or elderly parents. So, bringing things like film shoots having creches on set. I'm trying to get them to think about post-production, how composers, sound editors and people involved in post can get a bit more support for the long hours we're required to put in. And that might be something for composers more generally to think about, given that a lot of us have to compose around our day jobs often involving night-time, dinnertime and weekend, how do we get those support in place so that our children are being looked after and so that we can have the families we want to have? And I think that's a really being question, and it really goes to the glass ceiling effect. There's no point in giving emerging women or young women all this support to come into industry if at 30, 35 or 40 we're going to lose their talent. So I think that women of all ages and stages of their careers need to be supported. I think that's what we really need to address to see women leading, of any culture and of any colour, non-binary, cis gendered or otherwise. We really need to see more women at the top because they are the inspiring leaders that our field is really lacking. Of course, we need collegiality amongst senior, emerging or mid-career level, we need numbers of women at those levels too but we really need to see women right at the top.

VP: I suppose I have an anecdote for that. It's not related to music but it relates to the idea of a glass ceiling which, as we know, is everywhere in society and in every possible field – in your home through to professional work. There was interview of Melinda Gates, and she talks at length about two aspects of gender inequality. Firstly, that it needs to start in the home if you have equality in the home in terms of duties, domestic duties and childcare, you would both have the chance now in contemporary society in which to pursue your individual careers, because women are no longer tied to the home as they were in the 50s. And then she talks about the workplace and her example being if the investor or people at the table are not a diverse range of people, there will be a disconnection between them and what they're trying to produce whether it be music, creative output or

a product. And her example was that she had invested herself into a business that was owned by an African-American woman that was for a certain type of hair extensions which is a huge market in America. But, the woman had previously gone to several other investors, all of whom were white men and couldn't understand the purpose of these hair extensions, and so they went home to their wives who were white women to ask if this was necessary and they all went 'no.' So, without someone at the table who understands or represents all these diverse perceptions, we won't have stories or productions that are as diversely represented on screen and stage for audiences. It's a similar kind of model.

FW: Exactly, there's nothing like lived experience to enhance understanding.

VP: Or understanding the value of something that is different or unexpected within a structure.

FW: And we see this with our Indigenous population just not being at the table. The Uluru Statement from the Heart is just a no brainer. We have to have Indigenous voices at the table when we make decisions that concern them. And right now, I'm just frustrated. It's like you say. If people are making decisions about your community or about you and about your cohort, how are they going to make the right decision unless they hear from you. Just stop and listen, and if you listen you're not going to learn and the world isn't going to change. And you know, I guess where I've been doing my gender advocacy I'm really grateful that I really do feel like the men are honestly listening. You get a sense of which ones are honestly listening and they want to hear and they want to make change, and the ones that are tolerating your presence as a box ticking exercise and just want things to go back to normal quickly.

VP: I mean, there needs to be a degree of representation at every level in order for any change or the normalisation of diverse representation be maintained.

FW: I've been really encouraged by doing work for CIAM (the International Council for Music Creators) and they're a sort of overarching umbrella society that bring together all the collection societies from around the world. And CIAM invited me to join their Gender Equity and Diversity group in 2019, and so they brought me along to quite a few high-level industry forums. So, I spoke to groups in Mexico City, in Budapest and in Tokyo, and they were largely groups of men. The male leaders of these societies. I spoke to them about how you need to give women a voice in your board rooms, at your decision-making tables, and in your executive committees and I was really thrilled that interestingly two of the Asian societies. So, the Indian screen music society representative came up to me and said, "Do you know what? I have never thought about the female screen composers in our industry." In Bollywood, a really lucrative industry. So here is a man of colour coming to me and saying that 'we have shamefully low numbers of women in our industry and I'm going to do something about this.' So, this was in Tokyo in May last year and then we saw each other again six months later in November in Budapest. And in that 6-month period, he had gone away and reached out to the one star female screen composer in Bollywood, set up a chapter within the Screen Composers Guild, set up a female chapter and invited 91 members who identified as being female to join that chapter, and he had appointed a female chair for that chapter. So, he had really begun this really fantastic networking initiative for female screen composers in India and he had done that in 6 months. And I just felt so grateful that he had opened up such strong pathways for women to mentor each other, to support each other and to grow. And then I knew that they would then, in the same way that we had in Australia, make a difference within the Indian Screen Music Industry which is a very big one.

And then the other leader of the Indonesian Music Society and said to me ‘we don’t have any female on our executive and this is really bad,’ and I had met him in Mexico City in November 2018. By the Tokyo meeting by May 2019, he too had gone away and appointed a female chair and a female co-chair and another female board member for the Indonesian APRA equivalent, from 0 women. Suddenly we had 3 women on the executive. And I thought it was really interesting that the not first-world, European, white countries were the quickest to hear the message that I was bringing.

One thing that I was able to do that I was proud of in the 12 months that I worked with CIAM, was that I convinced as they were having their executive council elections in November in Budapest, with the support of the president Eddie Schwarz and the others on the executive council we asked every collection societies to nominate women if they could. To identify potential leaders and ask the women to nominate for election onto the CIAM executive council. And from that we got two women stepping forward who were unanimously elected onto the council. We went from 1 out of 12 to 2 out of 12 in the time that I was there. I just had a lot of productive conversation with men who hadn’t thought about this as an issue, it wasn’t on their radar. Of course, I got pushback from men who didn’t want to change up the status quo. That was the interesting thing, the difference between the men that took on board the message and understood that it was about inequity, that is was about social inclusion and social justice.

VP: Well I think we’re heading in the right direction, just having these conversations and broadening them at every level in this industry is going to start some change. And you can’t address systemic inequality without systematically addressing or diversifying representation either through who they employ at a higher level all through to the composer and creators they choose to put on stage.

FW: That's so right. And that's essentially what it's about. It's about naming it as systemic. Naming these inequities as systemically generated, naming exclusion as a power-based dynamic, so it doesn't really matter if the power is racial or gender-based. It's about questioning power and letting in under-represented groups whatever their shape or whatever their size. Once you apply that general approach, you can adapt it to whatever is needed to open it out and to open the discussion.

VP: And to recognise that diversification isn't a threat.

FW: Looking at it as it's about our relationships, it's about our mental health, it's about a sustainable future, it's about best practice, it's about social justice. And when you step back and come from that place. As a white woman, I'm open to indigenous voices, I'm open to racially diverse voices, I'm open to non-binary voices. So if you come from a place that's about let's open this out, and let's share the love, and let's create art and music that sounds and looks more like the world that we live in, you're on the right path I think. And so that's what I've learnt, is not to be defensive, not to be turf, not to play the exclusion game in my turn, and then I think you have these really productive conversations where you learn so much.

And then you can question yourself without defence and without fear. And part of the journey is that we're questioning ourselves. And it can be scary to be challenged and to have your privilege called out. But if you put social justice front and centre, it just makes it easier because it's not about you. It's about raising up the next group.

VP: Exactly, it's about raising up the next generation of creators and musicians and women in these roles. So, I'd just like to say a huge thank you to you for talking with me about the nuances of your advocacy and your experience as a composer. It's been really thought provoking and extremely helpful for me and I'm sure to anyone who is listening.

FW: You're really welcome, and it's been an absolute pleasure and I love what you're doing with the podcast, and you have a really interesting program ahead.

VP: So once, more thank you to you Felicity [FW: Thanks Vickie] for having this really important conversation about female representation in the music industry. On some other notes for our listeners, everything Felicity and I have spoken about from stats, articles, reports and initiatives will be provided in the podcast description and transcript so you can have access to all the resources. Felicity has a book being published very soon through Routledge called Women's Music for Diverse Narratives in Sound. It's definitely something I myself will be looking forward to reading when its published.

Thank you to all of you who are listening and catch you next week with some more Declassify.

DECLASSIFY is a podcast available for listening and subscription on Spotify and Apple Podcasts. It is hosted and produced by Victoria Pham.

RESOURCES

Felicity Wilcox

<https://www.felicitywilcox.com/>

Edited book by Wilcox, Felicity. (upcoming in 2021). *Women's Music for Diverse Narratives in Sound*. Routledge: New York.

'Felicity Wilcox: Collected Concert Works'-(currently untitled)- upcoming CD of concert music, featuring the pieces I sent through and others commissioned by ensemble Offspring, Ironwood and the Australia Ensemble. Upcoming for release in 2021. Funded by the Australia Council.

[GEC Chair Felicity Wilcox represents the AGSC and screen composers for gender equity and diversity at international talks in Tokyo](#)

APRA AMCOS Mentorships for Women in Music:

<https://apraamcos.com.au/news/2020/march/apply-now-for-mentorships-for-women-in-music/>

ASGC Gender Equity Committee

<https://www.agsc.org.au/gender-equity>

[Article on risk taking and hiring women in film](#)

CIAM (the International Council of Music Creators):

<https://www.cisac.org/What-We-Do/Creators-Relations/CIAM>

[Gender Equity and New Generations at CIAM, 2018](#)

[GE&D Report from CISAC](#)

DONNE in Musica (UK)

<http://www.drama-musica.com/Donne.html>

Hildur's acceptance speech for the Oscars, Best Score for *JOKER*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKeUKan00ec>

Gates, Melinda. Interview on *My Next Guest Needs No Introduction with David Letterman*, Netflix.

Gates, Melinda. 2019. *The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World*. Macmillan USA.

Living Music Report Australia (2018-19): A Study on Orchestral Programming and MPA Programming (Frame 2020)

<http://livingmusic.report/>

[Manifesto Pledging to Address Gender Imbalance in Music Business Arrives in European Parliament](#)

PRS Foundation: Keychange

<https://prsfoundation.com/partnerships/international-partnerships/keychange/>

Raising Films Australia:

<https://wiftaustralia.org.au/raisingfilmsau>

Screen Australia Gender Matters: <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/sa/new-directions/gender-matters>

Strong, Catherine & Cannizzo, F. 2017. 'Australian Women Screen Composers: Career Barriers and Pathways,' Research Report. RMIT University and APRA AMCOS. Accessed <https://apraamcos.com.au/news/2017/july/apra-amcos-leads-music-industry-toward-gender-parity-aims-to-double-new-female-members-within-three-years>

Woolf, Virginia. 1929. A Room of One's Own. http://seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/PikliNatalia/Virginia_Woolf_-_A_Room_of_Ones_Own.pdf

WIFT (Women in Film and Television):

[WIFT Raising Films report](#)

10% for 50/50:

<https://10percentfor5050.com/>

[1200 Years of Women Composers: A Free 78-Hour Music Playlist That Takes You From Medieval Times to Now](#)