

Sample Essay for Chapter 6

What is the “great composer” narrative, and how does it impact perceptions about women in music?  
Use Classical Era examples to provide sufficient detail.

STOP and write your essay before scrolling down.

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Musicology is the study of music, and historically, the field has focused its work on telling the story of composers and their works. Written **narratives** that chronicle musical stories of the past could include many types of musical activity, but this has not been the case in musicology. As such, the important work of women in music has often been lost in historical accounts, often leading readers to believe that “classical music” was a man’s world.

The “**great composer**” narrative celebrates the composer as genius, and often ignores the intersection of compositional output with other aspects of music, including performance, distribution, instrument development, and financial sponsorship. In the Classical era, for example, narratives tend to focus on a few select composers such as Mozart. Musicologists typically drill down on biographical details

regarding these individuals, and then spend time providing detailed theoretical analyses of select works. This focus not only erases the work of non-select composers such as Marianna Martines, but also negates the fact that “great composers” would not have been able to function without sponsors, performers, printers, instrument builders, and others who were engaged in the world of music during a given period.

In Classical-era Vienna, for **example**, women were very engaged in the musical life of the city. Marianna Martines not only composed, but was an important sponsor who supported musicians by providing performance space in her private salon. The Empress Maria Theresa financially supported many musicians, including court composers who created highly regarded works. Given that there was no way to record music during the period it is understandable that performers are not given their due today, but it also perpetuates stereotypes that women were not involved in art music during this period. In truth, vocal performers such as the Weber sisters and pianists such as Maria Theresa von Paradis drew large, appreciative audiences, and brought to life the written music created by composers like Mozart. **(further examples can be added, depending on the length of the required essay). Conclude with summary statement.**