

EPISODE #1: Ingrid Stölzel

Listening To Ladies

www.listeningtoladies.com

Original release date: September 26, 2016

Host: Elisabeth C Blair (**ECB**)

Interviewee: Ingrid Stölzel (**IS**)

ECB: Hello! Just a quick preface-this is a podcast about women who compose contemporary classical music-or what's also known as 'new music'. This first season has been more than a year in the making, and has been done piecemeal, gradually coming together in between all of life's other demands. I've traveled to New York, Toronto, Chicago, and San Francisco to meet some of these women, and some of them I was able to meet when they traveled to Kalamazoo, MI, where I'm located. For many others I was unable to travel and I interviewed them online. My goals with this project are to first of all make it clear that women composers exist, and thrive-and second of all, to give them another platform to both share their music and tell their stories. There are pockets of progress-for example, composer Julia Wolfe just got awarded the MacArthur Genius Grant, and three of the last 7 Pulitzer Prizes have gone to women. But with the Metropolitan Opera about to stage a work by a woman for the first time since 1903, and with last year's symphony orchestra season in the US dedicating just 2% of their programs to music by women, the situation remains pretty dire.

I'll mention this again at the end, but if you are able to help, our crowd funding platform is Patreon. Subscription donations start at just \$1/month. So if you can help, or if you can pass the word along to someone who might be able to help, go to patreon.com forward slash listeningtoladies, or you can find the link on our website, listeningtoladies.com. I want to thank everyone who's been able to contribute to funding this podcast through Patreon, especially Nicholas Stevens, JJ Treadway, Jenny Blair, Nancy Schimanski, and Carla Hartl for their generous donations.

Okay-I hope you enjoy this episode!

I'm Elisabeth Blair, and this is Listening to Ladies.

IS: Ok, I'm Ingrid Stölzel. I'm a composer and I'm also a teacher. I'm originally from Germany and teach at the University of Kansas.

[excerpt of **The More Things Change** plays]

IS: Yeah, I feel lucky I grew up in a musical family. My dad was a musician, he was a tenor and he also conducted several choirs and so music was certainly something that I grew up with and was encouraged to do at an early age.

[excerpt of **The More Things Change** plays]

ECB: You're listening to her chamber piece, The More Things Change, which she wrote for the ensemble she was with for many years, New Ear Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, based in Kansas City.

[excerpt of **The More Things Change** plays]

IS: I was one of those lucky composers that learned on the job, I feel, by being with a new music ensemble and I always encourage young composers to, if you can work with a new music ensemble, even if you volunteer to hand out programs or you know, any way you can volunteer, that's how I started out, I helped set up, I helped production, I helped and then I, over the years, became more in a leadership position. It's an incredible learning experience, of what it takes to put on a new music concert, a professional new music concert.

[excerpt of **The More Things Change** plays]

ECB: In Ingrid's house in Germany, growing up, there was a music room.

IS: And my dad certainly inspired sort of that dedication, he was, you know, always working in that room preparing for rehearsals and things like that, so I think I got a good work ethic from him and definitely a passion for music. My dad's one of those people, you don't even finish saying the sentence, or could you sing a song, he's already in the song, he loves performing so much.

ECB: And her older brother played guitar, so...

IS: I wanted to play guitar as well, so, I was the annoying little sister apparently, now that I think about it.

ECB: So, how young was she when she started composing?

IS: I don't think I really put together, you know, this is what a composer does, and making up stuff. I made up stuff, this is what I thought just people do in music, as a kid. I didn't think I was composing necessarily, it was just playful. I didn't like memorizing music when I had lessons, piano lessons, I would start just, you know, start playing a Mozart and sort of improvise endings and those kinds of things. I do remember this one piece in particular, I grew up close to a Catholic Church, and it's a very annoying bell tower. Now that I don't live there anymore, when I go to visit, it's crazy to me that it bells every fifteen minutes and then on the hour, throughout the night and it used to be 24, so like midnight, on the 24 system, so 11pm, would have been 23 bong, bong....

ECB: They've since changed it so it only rings twelve times now.

IS: But I remember this piece that sounded a lot like Mozart, that I wrote, but it was this idea of the end of the world and I was a kid, it was very playful to start with and happy and then as you got closer to midnight, things would get more frantic, but still sound like Mozart.

ECB: But, despite the fact that she was consciously writing music, she still didn't recognize it as a special activity all its own.

IS: So it was always part of my world, but I didn't think it was composition.

ECB: When she applied to college, she did so as a music theory major.

IS: I just thought that's what you did. You learned theory and then you did whatever else, creatively on the side. Yeah, it really wasn't until my undergraduate that I really seriously thought, oh, people are composers, like where that clicked, like I was always going to write music, that part I never doubted, but

where I really made that connection, this is a profession that people have, that I think first clicked in my undergraduate.

ECB: She did her undergraduate studies at the University of Missouri in Kansas City, and it was there that she was first exposed to the fact that women composers existed. Composer Joan Tower visited the campus and met with the composition students.

IS: And she was just so cool. I mean there were many levels, yes, it was the first woman composer I met, but she was also so approachable and so wonderful. I went to the orchestra concert and she saw me in the audience and she remembered me from the composer thing and she made a point of saying hi and I was just like wow, you know, it was pretty impressive. And to me, it was just so impressive, because I was so intimidated, from the writing for orchestra part, which I'd never done, to just wow, she is rehearsing with this big orchestra, it seemed totally out of reach for me. And I think, there is something that maybe, not so much on a conscious level for me clicked, oh a woman composer, it was more I felt supported in a way that I couldn't put my finger on it. She also was amazing, she would say, "Oh, when you have something new, send it to me," and she would give me comments and stuff. And I think being now in a teaching position, I feel like there are many people along the way that, in my education, that sort of went the extra step. I hope that I do that with younger women composers, and really all composers, but I think there's a lot to be done still, so I hope I'm in it also, in a supportive role now.

[excerpt of **The Road is All** plays]

ECB: You're listening now to her piano trio, *The Road is All*.

IS: I had gotten to a level in my music, where I felt like I needed to break through this emotional barrier that I created for myself. I wanted to write music that really, truly connects with people and I felt like I was writing music that I wouldn't let myself go all the way there, because I had all these hang ups still about writing melody and you know, maybe I'm not that, I'm a more light composer, because I love melody and all that, I had all these hang ups, but ultimately I wanted to tap into a new kind of way for me to write music, connect with myself, and then also authentically then somehow make an emotional connection with the audience.

[excerpt of **The Road is All** plays]

IS: I have to say, that to me, it still holds a very special place in my repertoire, because I felt like for the first time, I really just let myself be vulnerable, and that meant also really stripping down a lot of the stuff that I was hiding behind, like I was hiding often behind grooves, and not that there's anything wrong with groovy music, but I wanted to maybe go back to my roots of growing up in Germany and counterpointing and how some of those things can create an incredible emotional connection because the way the music kind of creates a tension and release. And I think that *The Road is All* is the first piece that I feel like I accomplished that in.

[excerpt of **The Road is All** plays]

ECB: For most people, a career in composition needs to be coupled with teaching. Ingrid had worked as a composer as well as holding many music-related jobs through the years before she went back to get her doctorate. In 2015 she began a position as Assistant Professor of Composition at the University of Kansas. I asked her how she felt about this composer-teacher duality, and about teaching in general.

IS: At some point I realized how much I love teaching. I would go to these festivals, I would give lessons and master classes and, I was like, oh, I wish I could mentor this student, or I could live with their music with them for awhile, that desire to do that grew. And I also, this other feeling came up that I didn't have before, which was I actually felt like I could mentor somebody or I could have something to teach. I think earlier in my life, I just didn't feel like I have enough experience to teach and I don't separate the teaching from the creativity. I think teaching is incredibly creative. My students inspire me on a daily basis and they blow my mind. And it's also so wonderful if I feel like, oh i just blew their mind a little bit, you know, I introduced them to something or something they hadn't thought about and you can see something is turning and it's such a wonderful experience and it feeds me. I don't feel like teaching is separate from composing to me.

[excerpt of **The Best Thing in the World** plays]

IS: This was a commission by an incredible choir in New York City, Khorikos. They really just told me I could pick any poet or anything I wanted, so it was very clear to me that I was going to pick a woman poet.

[excerpt of **The Best Thing in the World** plays]

IS: I actually didn't know a lot by Elizabeth Barrett Browning and a lot of her poems are not as joyful as *The Best Thing in the World*, which I think she wrote after her son was born and I think there was a certain amount of just idealism about the world and life.

[excerpt of **The Best Thing in the World** plays]

IS: You know, memory that gives no pain.

[excerpt of **The Best Thing in the World** plays]

IS: It's so amazing, I get goose bumps with those words. When it was premiered, the singers I felt like they were so joyful and grateful to be able to live with the peace, and there's nothing better to me than to have that response from performers. Oh, I had it stuck in my head, you know, why not have something joyful stuck in your head, that's a good thing.

[excerpt of **The Best Thing in the World** plays]

ECB: Before the interview started, Ingrid told me a story about an experience she had of being the only woman composer invited to a conference. I asked her to tell me her thoughts on experiences like this.

IS: I think for many years it was just so normal to be the only woman composer at a festival. I think, because I'm gay, somehow, I could roll with the boys pretty well. You know, I wasn't a threat, somehow, it's weird, you know, when they, let's say, you know, they are married or they had girlfriends, they could say, "Oh, I'm hanging out with Ingrid, oh but she's gay," like there wasn't any weirdness and I'm actually

very grateful for that, but it was certainly an experience where it was more frequent, I would say it was mostly my experience to the only woman than it was...Like when I would meet, I have a very good friend, we met at a festival, and I remember we were like, "Oh!", when there was another woman composer it was almost surprising. Now to me the opposite is happening, when I am the only one, I'm very aware of it, because today that is I think is unacceptable, because we have come a long ways and because there are more women getting advanced degrees and opportunities. There's no reason at a festival or conference to not have a good representation of women composers. I was very touched to find out that one of my composer colleagues, Forrest Pierce, who runs the New Music ensemble at KU is so conscious, like every new music concert he programs is 50/50. And I think, if we just do more of that, it just takes that, for then students in the audience to hear those pieces and then maybe they'll program them on their recitals and so on and so forth. I think it just takes a conscious effort and I include myself in that. I think I was not conscious, even as a woman composer. I was not conscious of the things I can do to change the cannon, let's say. So I've started including much, much more repertoire by women in my beginning composition syllabus, like they are reading, listening lists, score study list. And we can all do that. I think it doesn't take that much and it will make a huge difference I think.

ECB: I asked her what she does when she finds herself in a position where she is the only or one of the only professional women included.

IS: I don't know if complaining actually will do something, because people get defensive and when the emotion of like defense comes up, they shut down and they don't listen and they act from their kind of reptilian part of their brain, right? I was at a festival just recently at the University of Southern Florida and I noticed how well balanced the concerts were. And my approach is, I made a point of talking to each of the organizers and thanking personally and I said, "I just want you to know I noticed this and I thank you for it." And that's been I think my approach, instead of complaining about the conference or festival that's not doing it, I'm giving mad props at those ensembles and those festivals where I'm involved where I notice, wow, the balance is awesome and look at all these women composers that are here that I'm meeting. I make a point of really encouraging them to continue and also to tell them, "Hey, I noticed this and I will spread the word." So I don't know, I'm sure as listeners will have opinions about that, I also I am so impressed when people like really stand their ground, just for myself I had to decide what feels just in line with the way I live my life and encouragement I think is the one that feels more authentic to me, for me.

[excerpt of **Genius Loci** plays]

ECB: This is Genius Loci, a piece for orchestra.

[excerpt of **Genius Loci** plays]

IS: It means the spirit of place. When you're impacted by a place, sometimes it leaves this emotional residue.

[excerpt of **Genius Loci** plays]

ECB: She had been thinking about composers who wrote about place-Dvorak's New World Symphony, Mendelssohn's Italian symphony.

IS: So those pieces were really something i was thinking about how those composers were treating place in this really abstract manner, which is music. But for me, it was the spirit of place was really organic to music, because you can set something up in the beginning of a piece that almost feels like home. You know, and composers have done that many times in traditional forms, where they come back to something at the end.

[excerpt of **Genius Loci** plays]

IS: But to me, I use that word place and home just in a much broader sense, but it was something that, you know, sort of just more of a emotional connection, maybe the physical aspects of it are not that important, but the emotional connection it has with, you know, like going home for me to Germany, or something like that.

[excerpt of **Genius Loci** plays]

ECB: I asked her if she had any advice for women who want to become composers.

IS: I think mentors are so important and my advice would be, you know, just search for a mentor, where ever, it could be what we have now is incredible resources, you could live in a tiny, tiny town somewhere where there is absolutely no woman even performer, and you could reach out to somebody you admire, maybe just their music, or you read an article or you heard a podcast and reach out to them, and I know that I've had that happen in my life, where people, not in my city, not in my town, were willing to be mentors on all kinds of levels. And I think sometimes we just need to reach out and say, "You know, what you said here, or what I read in this interview here, impacted me here, would you take a look at this?" And reach their idols, like if there is someone they absolutely adore, contact them, you never know, that might just be what they need to hear and what they need at that moment. Because mentoring is a two way street, you know, it goes yes, you are mentoring and giving advice, but often the mentor himself, herself gains an incredible amount, so it goes both ways and I say reach out.

ECB: Details for each of the recordings featured in this episode can be found on the show notes page at listeningtoladies.com, just click on the link to the podcast. You'll also find videos, Soundcloud links, the poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and links to some of the people Ingrid mentioned. This podcast is 100% a labor of love, and although we are continuously applying for grants, we are not yet receiving financial help from any other source but the Patreon crowdfunding page. So if you feel able to give, it is a subscription donation service and it starts at \$1/month.

I'm Elisabeth Blair. Thank you for listening.