

Julie Leven Testimonial on Shelter Project

I'm sending some final wrap up from the FANTASTIC Women Composer's Project, funded by the HMA, which Shelter Music Boston has presented during 2017.

I've attached a copy of the final program of the series, which was performed last week. A highlight of the entire project was a visit to the Dimock Center concert by a living and local composer, [Yu-Hui Chang](#). I was thrilled when she accepted my invitation to speak to the Dimock Center audience of women about her creative process, about how she translates her ideas into music, about working with performers (Rhonda Rider performed a work for solo cello by Yu-Hui on the concert) and about how she teaches people to write music. Her words were absolutely perfect for the audience of women seeking tools to remain sober and value their own lives. Yu-Hui told them that everyone has a unique story to tell, with positive and negative parts in it, and to grasp all of that with honesty is the only way to translate one's story into creative work, whether that work is living day to day or writing music. These words could not have been more perfect for that audience if they had been scripted!

Several of the women asked if Yu-Hui could write their life stories in music; we all enjoyed imagining that and remarkably, next month we will be working with the women (and all of our SMB audiences) in workshop format to create a new work of music together. This has long been another of my ideas (as was the Women Composers Project): to work with our audiences to create a piece which will highlight the creative ideas of those who are currently homeless. It is quite an experiment, and complicated as it will have a number of components which will take me a while to collate. Ultimately SMB will perform the new work in shelters and in public concerts. The work will highlight the creativity of those we serve and the collaboration between SMB musicians and homeless individuals which is the result of the past 7 years of delivering concerts to shelters. Along the way, we will provide a dignified interaction with our audiences, in this case in the form of respecting the ideas we elicit from them in the workshops by making these ideas the foundation of the work of music to become the result of the project. This project has been funded by The Boston Foundation, ([more info HERE](#)).

One final detail about the program attached: two living composers were featured. Yu-Hui Chang, as I mentioned, as well as Kaija Saariaho. Along with Ethel Smyth, whose string quartet we performed for SMB audiences this past March, Kaija Saariaho is the only other woman to have an opera performed at the Metropolitan Opera. We spoke with all of our audiences about this, and that we were so pleased to be able to provide the music of these two remarkable women artists to SMB audiences. The day after our final concert I read in the NY Times that both Saariaho and Chang were honored by the [American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2017!](#) (see p. 2)

Thank you again for encouraging this project which will continue to have impact as the music will become part of the SMB repertoire, our audiences have learned a great deal about women artists, and the recordings of our concerts of this repertoire will be available for our audiences to download for free and to revisit.

Warm regards,
Julie