This course will explore the fascinating intersection of the issues of gender and Western classical music. Although the field of composition has been overwhelmingly dominated by men, we will explore the moments in history when women composers flourished. We will discuss the strong gender associations with particular instruments, how these change over time, and those times when performers cross the gender barrier in their choice of instruments.

We will investigate the anxiety around music (especially classical music) and masculinity. Can a “Real Man” be a musician or music lover? How has musicality been associated with homosexuality or effeminacy in the popular imagination and how have men combatted or embraced this stereotype. Next, we will explore the rise of women conductors in recent years. How have strongly gendered images and ideas about conducting prevented women from joining the ranks of the great conductors in the past?

Our last two sessions will be devoted to the multiple ways in which gender issues impact and are impacted by opera and the human voice. We will examine the phenomenon of castrated males performing male roles in high vocal ranges. We will discuss women playing male rolls in opera. We will also discuss the way in which gender disguise is used as an important plot device in opera. We will explore the question of how a singer’s gender affects the way in which we perceive her/his performance.

Throughout this course we will listen to numerous examples of recorded music, watch video presentations and engage in lively discussion. At the last session, we will be privileged to have Elliot Franks, a female to male transgendered singer, share his unique journey and perspective on many of the issues we will have discussed throughout the course.

Week 2. Gender and musical instruments: Who plays what?
Week 3. Is he “Musical?” Anxiety around music and masculinity
Week 4. Women conductors finally taking their rightful place.
Week 5. Gender, Opera and the human voice
Week 6. Gender, Opera and the human voice continued.