

# Nation, gender, and classical music on higher music education institution websites

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## Introduction

Classical music is a cultural practice that, both symbolically and materially, works to constitute and transform European cultural heritage. It is produced and performed in institutions of classical music with historical backgrounds in former European empires (Bohlman, 2011).<sup>1</sup> These institutions seek to represent and reshape this musical heritage. One example of this is the Liszt Museum in Budapest, as discussed by Bohlman (2011, p. 17). The Museum, he argues, aims to construct the music and persona of Franz Liszt as a Hungarian national, even a nationalist. It portrays him as a symbol of Hungarian ethno-nationalism, despite Hungary not existing as a sovereign nation in Liszt's time and Liszt being born in what is now Austria. Besides museums, higher music education institutions, or conservatoires,<sup>2</sup> are important institutions for shaping both ideas about classical music and musical practices in Europe today. Musicians active at other institutions, like orchestras, operas, and national theatres, or who organize international music competitions, frequently teach at a conservatoire. Future musicians study there. At the present time, nationalism and illiberal regimes invoking former empires and conflict lines are on the rise in Europe. These political tensions are noticeable in the three national contexts (Estonia, Finland, and Hungary) selected for this study. Hungarian politics is drawing rhetorically on past greatness while Finland and Estonia are (once again) constructing themselves in opposition to the Russian/Soviet threat. This provides a solid justification for investigating how music in these three countries is co-constructed, with culture, nation and gender.

Returning to the question of the construction in Western culture of a 'we' juxtaposed to 'others', building on European colonial heritage (Bhabha, 1994), we are aiming to understand how higher music education institutions represent nation, gender and classical music in their marketing communication, an aspect of higher music education

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<sup>1</sup> In this article we use 'classical music' as a term including the music taught in music performance programmes in higher music education that was composed in Europe from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The programmes we study focus on classical music, even though these institutions offer teaching in Western contemporary experimental art music and other genres.

<sup>2</sup> While some countries use the term 'conservatoire' as meaning music education for children, we use it here to describe higher music education institutions that award bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in classical music performance.

that is rarely studied. Online presentation on institutional websites is the focus here.<sup>3</sup> In this article, we introduce and present similarities and differences in the presentation of this material across Europe. The justification for a focus on websites, a rather mundane, even ‘old’, online media format when compared to social media, is that websites are the main source of information on education for presumptive and already enrolled students. They are an institution’s window to the world where decisionmakers, administrative and marketing departments aim to communicate an image of the institution.

When discussing gender in higher music education one prominent research area is the gendering of instruments. Higher music education has been shown to promote unequal gender structures that regulate access to music education and careers (Hallam, Rogers and Creech, 2008; Abeles, 2009) and promote understandings of feminine and masculine styles of music (McClary, 1991). Further, research has shown that national ideologies and ideas about the nation and its history are expressed by imagined national styles of playing and how national composers and songs shape curricula and repertoire (Murphy and White, 2001). Policy at the European level of conservatoire collaborations (AEC, 2017) is an expanding area, where conservatoires are being encouraged to promote internationalization, diversify their student body, train for employability, and adapt to EU university standards by developing, for example, gender equality policies and artistic research practices. Classical higher music education in Europe is thus currently positioned between the heritage of classical music as bearer of the ideals of the nation and new demands for internationalization, diversity, academization, and employability posed by EU regulations. With this background in mind, the article asks how nation and gender are expressed in online representations of higher music education institutions.

This article aims to critically describe and discuss how three European higher music education institutions construct nation, gender, and classical music when presenting classical music education programmes on their websites.<sup>4</sup> It analyzes the pictures, structure and texts of these websites and discusses them thematically. For the authors to be able to draw conclusions about the construction of nation, gender, and classical music, a thorough examination of the material was needed. Questions guiding this process were: How is an institution, along with its teachers and students, represented and situated in a national/international context on a higher music education institution website? Who is constructed as the subject of classical music, and what ideas about higher classical music education are constructed? The article focuses on three higher

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<sup>3</sup> This research is part of a wider research project examining conservatoire cultures, which commenced in 2020 and was intended to involve personal visits to the higher music education institutions. Because of the Covid 19 pandemic the authors were prevented from visiting these institutions in 2020 and thus shifted focus to examining online conservatoire cultures. In this article conservatoire websites are seen as policy in practice. Differences between the websites and the actual cultural practices of the conservatoires will be addressed in future publications and based on interviews with teachers and students and field work at the institutions.

<sup>4</sup> This article understands gender as constructed in the material, not as a binary or a given *a priori*. That said, the representations of gender revealed in the material examined in this study support binary ideas about gender, through names, clothes, hair, and make-up.

music education institutions: one from Central Europe (the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, Hungary), one from the Baltic states (the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in Tallinn, Estonia) and one from the Nordic countries (the Sibelius Academy, at the University of the Arts, in Helsinki, Finland). Classical music's heritage is highly valued in all three national contexts; Hungary, Estonia, and Finland have all struggled for national independence and constitute borderlands between Western and Eastern Europe. The analysis presented in this article is part of a larger research project studying classical music higher education's cultural construction of nation and gender in Europe today.<sup>5</sup> The websites are seen as ongoing (thus unfinished and partial) discursive constructions of the institutions' policy in practice, in line with previous studies in music education (Angelo et al., 2021; Moberg and Georgii-Hemming, 2021). They are also seen as places where ideas about institutions' identity and profile are negotiated.

## Nation and gender in cultural narratives

We follow Anderson's (1983) understanding of nations as 'imagined communities,' where nationalism is constructed through descriptions of what characterizes an imagined group, the 'we' of a nation, and that this 'we' is further understood as a good thing to protect. For Anderson the newspaper was an important tool in shaping these communities. Contemporary digital media continue as vehicles of imagined communities today (Bolin and Miazhevich, 2018). Using Yuval-Davis (1997), the discursive constructions of nation and gender in these media representations are seen as interconnected. Yuval-Davis (1997) argues that ideas about gender and 'women' have always been part of the imagining of a nation and of nationalist ideologies. She (1997, p. 45) concludes that gender ideologies are embedded in nationalism in the symbolic form of a woman being seen as embodying the nation or representing it. In this way the female body becomes materially, through childbirth, the future of the nation, and, further, in national imagery, a bearer of the honour of the collective national group. These ideas may account for the shaming of women engaging in inter-racial or inter-ethnic relationships. Furthermore, gender and nation are symbolically connected through ideas about the nation as mother, a feminized geographical entity that cares for its inhabitants (Yuval-Davis mentions 'Mother Russia'). Yuval-Davis employs Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial way of understanding cultures as already hybrid. For Bhabha, cultures - as ways of life and as symbolic aesthetics of signification - are never a given. They do not exist prior to meeting other cultures. When cultures do meet, especially in colonial contexts, they are affected by power. There are no essential national cultures; cultures have always been made through the meeting of ideas and peoples. Yuval-Davis (1997, p. 43) discusses, in the constitution of 'a culture' that is, for example, understood

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<sup>5</sup> The project, called *Conservatory Cultures* (Dnr. S2-20-0010), was funded by The Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies 2021-2023. In the project, interviews with teachers, leaders, and students, as well as participant observations of classes, rehearsals, and concerts, were conducted. In addition, policy documents from the three institutions were analyzed. Classical music performance programmes were the focus of the study, and the aim was to investigate belonging in terms of nation and gender in classical music higher education today.

as European, how cultural institutions are, both structurally and symbolically, shaped by power in terms of class, gender, and sexuality. This includes not only museums but also higher music education institutions. Presently, nationalisms are being re-articulated in Europe; traditional family values as well as anti-gender sentiments form part of some of these nationalisms (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018). As argued by Mulholland, Montagna, and Sanders-McDonagh (2018), gendered nationalisms can take on different forms. Gender equality ideals and the political practices that follow on from them, as well as traditional family values, are intertwined with ideas about national identity in different parts of Europe today (*ibid.*).

When addressing discourses about the nation in cultural institutions, Nagel (2017a, p. 43) writes that ‘inventing the nation is the work of creative, typically militarized nationalism busying itself with the production of heroic narratives, literature, music, art, and artefacts – the his-stories’. For Nagel (2017b; cf. Nagel, 1998), the discursive production of the culture of a nation in, for example, museums is integral to the very invention of the nation and its militarized sovereignty. In her writing, these narratives are gendered male. Classical music, for example, is highly valued around the world. The term often connotes traditional values and an old-fashioned musical culture represented by dead white men. At the same time higher education of classical music, here exemplified by three institutions, is part of the modern world of educating young people. In this article higher music education institutions are understood as cultural institutions of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997), where heroic narratives of masculinity (Nagel, 2017a) are constructed to build the imagined nation. In such cultural stories gender and nation are co-constructed as meaningful. In this article the theoretical discussions about nation, gender and culture are starting points for investigating nation and gender as represented on the websites of European classical music conservatoires.

## **Nation and gender in music education**

In research about gender in higher music education, it is often argued that gender continues to influence participation in music education (de Boise, 2018), and that constructions of gender are part of the formation of longstanding canons and value systems of music (Citron, 1993). According to Minors et al. (2017), a critique of gendered reproductions of power is largely absent from higher music education. They conclude that ‘[u]nsurprisingly, the discourses that interrogate the white, male, middle-class hegemony are largely absent from higher music education’ (Minors et al., 2017, p. 466). Other researchers point out that such conditions result in fewer female musicians inhabiting higher academic roles or being employed in, for example, brass or percussion musicianship and in composing, areas traditionally gendered masculine (Armstrong, 2013). In addition, research regarding choice of instrument, activities, musical styles, and participation in higher music education shows gendered patterns (Welch et al., 2008; Hallam, Rogers and Creech, 2008; Wych, 2012; Wrape et al., 2016; Creech et al., 2008; Gaunt, Creech, Long and Hallam, 2012; Jorgensen, 2010). For example, it has been shown that women dominate upper woodwind and smaller string instrument sections, while men form the majority in brass and percussion sections and play larger string

instruments (Sheldon and Price, 2005; Baker, 2012). The context for these gender differences is described as historical-discursive, social, political, and economic. In the one-to-one tuition format central to the master-apprentice mode of teaching, imitative-passive aspects are emphasized where the apprentice is expected to mirror the style of the master (Kvale and Nielsen, 2000; Hultberg, 2008, 2010). Masculinity has been integral to the position of the master. In addition, research has identified evidence of patriotism and nationalism in classical music education in the selection of composers, pieces/works, and styles, with an emphasis on a country's native productions or on the classical (often German) European repertoire (Bohlman, 2011). Hebert and Kertz-Weltzel (2004) state, through their research on nationalism in music education in Germany, that a conscious *didaktik* approach that demands a responsible teacher is needed to hinder unreflected formations of nation(alism) within music education.

Investigations of higher music education institutions' websites found contradictions between ideals of plurality and representations of homogeneity in terms of gender and nation. Moberg and Georgii-Hemming (2021) have analyzed multi-modal expressions on Swedish higher music education institutions' websites and concluded that institutional marketing was contradictory. For example, they argue that the institutions present themselves in a language that signals boundary transgression, openness, and diversity. On the other hand, their analyses show that images primarily portray young, healthy people, embodying ideals of white, Swedish ethnicity. Accordingly, they state that there is a sparse representation of ethnic diversity. The study also states that male composers are referred to in concert programmes a little over two hundred times while female composers are mentioned ten times, and that almost every composer mentioned was born in Europe. In Moberg and Georgii-Hemming's (2021) study the photography on the Swedish websites is dominated by images of music performance, which is in line with what Turner (2004) found when studying conservatoire websites in the US. Parkinson and Muslur Gardner (2020) studied the discursive terrain of music education in Turkey by analyzing website mission and vision statements of 71 conservatoires and music departments. They found that nationalist visions and an emphasis on a European musical heritage were paired with pluralistic ideals. Angelo et al. (2021) examined how music education and music teacher education were represented on the websites of four Norwegian music education institutions that offered a range of programmes at the bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels. They conclude that a discourse about music of the highest value was in competition with a pedagogical discourse. They called for a more nuanced musical terminology, to refine and deepen reflections about music, learning, and teaching. Another Norwegian study (Blix and Weider Ellefsen, 2021) analyzed the gender patterns of websites representing several municipal arts schools. Their results showed that, within this category of music education, musical instruments, musical genres, and musical activities were all frequently gendered. The websites they examined discursively presented possibilities in line with traditional and stereotyped gendered paths of participation at the same time as their policy documents claim diversity as a crucial goal (see also Saichaie and Morphey, 2014).

## Method and material

To analyze the constructions of nation, gender and classical music across the three higher music education institutions' websites, material was collected from the websites in spring 2021.<sup>6</sup> The first page of each higher music education institution's website, the pages describing four classical music instrument programmes – vocals, strings, piano and percussion – and the pages that concern international issues (named differently) were recorded with screenshots. The home pages of the Sibelius Academy, the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, and the Liszt Academy of Music were the starting point. The material consisted of approximately 200 screenshots. The material was selected so as to mirror how the institution welcomes the visitor to the website (home pages), how education in classical music is presented (the classical music programme pages), and how the institution presents itself in relation to international students and collaborations. This final collection area was selected strategically to understand how the national profile of the institution takes on meaning in relation to what is presented as international.<sup>7</sup> The screenshots were collected by the authors between April and June 2021, and field notes were recorded in a table of analysis where, by country and section, the authors systematically described and analyzed the collected screenshots. The findings are therefore valid as a snapshot analysis of website representation on the home page, four classical music department/programme pages (vocals, strings, piano, and percussion) and the international pages of the three selected higher classical music institutions as they appeared in 2021.

The screenshots of the websites were, after the initial content analysis, examined using a discourse analytical methodology inspired by Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Words and images, or signs, that reappeared and around which meaning was organized in the material were considered nodal points of meaning making. Such signs, presented across all three websites, included pictures of the institution's buildings, people symbolizing classical music practice, and textual descriptions of the music education offered in, for example, repertoire, along with examples of course curricula and profiles of the teaching staff. In addition, we use a multimodal discourse analysis approach (O'Halloran, 2004; Machin and Mayr, 2012) where we regard the text, images, layout, and structure of the website as interacting to create meaning around nodal points. With such an approach the meaning in the websites examined in this study was affected by several co-constructing modes. Thus, text and image were examined in their own right but also as placed elements within the networked structure of a website.

## Analysis

When constructing the messages and the marketing of the institutions, all three institutions presented photographs of their physical setting, including their main

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<sup>6</sup> The websites have changed since then, and for copyright reasons we cannot include images in this article.

<sup>7</sup> This material is further explored in a book chapter (Werner and Ferm Almqvist, 2024) focusing on representations of whiteness and employability in higher music education institution websites.

building, residences, common areas and educational and performance spaces, such as practice rooms and concert halls. They also portrayed images of composers, ‘star’ musicians and performers (masters, students, and teachers, dead and alive) who had studied with, visited, or performed for them. These depictions of the milieus and subjects of the conservatoires are, in the following analysis, discussed as nodal points around which ideas of nation, gender and classical music are constructed and on which the value of the institution is built. The description and discussion sections that follow aim to convey the constructions of nation, gender, and classical music that occur on the chosen institutional websites.

## Houses of classical music

The buildings belonging to the conservatoires were featured on all three websites. The old Liszt Academy of Music building (completed in 1907) shown on the website’s home page is a *fin-de-siècle* structure in central Budapest on Liszt Ferenc Square. The website displays details of both the façade and the interior of the building. One interior shows a carved detail of the main staircase in the building, another features a room with a grand piano and a coloured stained-glass window, and a third shows the outer façade, which features a large statue by the artist Alajos Strobl portraying the composer and pianist Franz Liszt. The Liszt Academy of Music also conducts teaching in classical music in two other, less grand, buildings but these are not shown on the website’s home page. Bolin and Miazhevich (2018) have argued that the media is an active co-creator when branding the nation. They write (2018, p. 532) that when the nation is branded for commercial ends to attract tourists or, in our example, students, the audience is both international and national. For the national audience, depictions of heritage buildings create a sense of pride; for the international audience they create a desire to visit or study (if accepted). By placing images of their heritage building at the forefront of their website, the Liszt Academy of Music is engaging in a form of nation branding, where uniqueness and historical longevity are stressed.

Although all institutional websites analyzed here have a version in their local languages, we only analyzed the English versions. The home page of the Liszt Academy of Music website describes itself as ‘the only university of music in the world founded by Franz Liszt [...] in 1875’. This presentation highlights the institution’s university status and constructs its founder as meaningful for the kind of institution it is today. The images of uniqueness conveyed by ‘the only’, and those of luxury and exclusivity, by the reference to 1875 when Hungary was part of an empire, are drawn on to construct what the Academy is. Since the website is a media format where the home page is an introduction to the institution, the symbol of Liszt placed here carries more weight than other representations and images presented further down in the website’s structure. The images of the building and the text’s representation of the institution place its origins in the nineteenth-century tradition of classical music in the Austro-Hungarian empire that ended in 1918 with the First World War. Further down on the home page there is an embedded YouTube video of the New Year’s Eve Concert held on 1 January 2019 [!] by Academy students. The video starts with the camera zooming in on the building at

Liszt Ferenc Square, and then showing some views of the streets of Budapest and the statue of Liszt. The video then moves inside, showing the main entrance lobby and, finally, the grand hall where the concert is to take place.<sup>8</sup> The way the concert hall is shown makes it seem festive and contemporary, as a space which connects, through history, an old building and an old city with a lively audience and young musicians.

In contrast to the period heritage invoked by the Liszt Academy of Music's portrayal of the Liszt Ferenc Square building, the Sibelius Academy's home page features a yellow wooden house where their summer school is held. The house is close to Jean Sibelius' summer residence, about one hour outside Helsinki, in Kallio-Kuninkala. The entrance to the Sibelius Academy's main building, the Music Center, a concrete and glass construction opened in 2011 and located in central Helsinki, is also depicted. Two people, presumably students, can be seen carrying instrument cases and walking towards it. There is also an interior image of the Academy's concert hall.<sup>9</sup> The other two buildings where teaching and performance take place are not featured on the home page. It is the new Music Center and the charming, rural wooden house that are represented as symbols of the institution. Textually the Sibelius Academy is described as 'one of the largest' music academies in Europe, thus positioning itself in the now, not in history. The connection to Jean Sibelius, for example, is not spelled out, neither is the date the Academy was founded or any other historical facts. Depicting the Music Center building as a newly built, big and shiny building in central Helsinki works to construct the Sibelius Academy as large and contemporary.

The Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (EAMT) also features its building on its institutional home page, where also two images of the building's interior are found: a staircase and the newest concert hall, the *Suur saal*. The building was originally constructed in the late twentieth century. In 2019 an adjoining extension was opened. The two construction dates are not obvious on the website. The photos portray only the 2019 extension with its minimalist architectural aesthetic. The *Suur saal's* striking interior stands out, both because of the light colours of its wooden elements and the simple but beautiful design of the space. The natural materials of the room evoke Estonia's natural environment, which is itself often featured in the country's tourist strategy as unique. There is no description of the institution on the home page. To read about it, the website visitor is obliged to go to the 'About' page. However, the text there simply states that the EAMT 'is a public university offering higher education in all major fields of music and theater'. The text does not market the EAMT as big or small, old or new. It is only constructed as a public, as opposed to being a private, institution.

Its name, however, includes a national marker with the words 'Estonian Academy'. Prior to independence from the Soviet Union, it was called the 'Tallinn Conservatory'.

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<sup>8</sup> The concert is still on the webpage in 2024 as the second video from the top on this link <https://uni.lisztacademy.hu/videos/our-students-are-playing-120983> (collected 18 March 2024). In the original material, the concert video was on the first page.

<sup>9</sup> The first page has changed since the material for this article was collected. But the photo of two students walking to the entrance of the Music Centre is still the third photo on the first page <https://www.uniarts.fi/en/units/sibelius-academy/> (collected 26 March 2024).



## *Nation, gender, and classical music on higher music education websites*

This use of the term ‘Estonian’, together with references to its ‘public’ stature, indicates that the institution is the property of the country, and that it is not the property of other countries. The building photographed on the home page gives the impression that the institution as it operates now is new and modern. In the international section there is one photo taken in the Arvo Pärt center, one taken of students performing on a tram, and one in the natural moorland setting of Viljani. The visitor is textually told that these portray the Arvo Pärt Center outside of Tallinn, a tram in Tallinn, and Viljani. Settings outside of the capital city center, as represented here and by the Sibelius Academy, connote the relationship to nature in the Finnish and Estonian national imaginations. This relationship to nature has also been articulated musically by composers such as Jean Sibelius and Arvo Pärt, both known for describing in musical terms the natural environment of their countries. That said, the main message of the EAMT home page seeks to portray a ‘cultured’ Estonia by using modern architectural images as well as displaying music practice in urban and rural settings. In previous research Göran Bolin (2006, p. 203) has argued that the visual representation of post-Socialist European countries was re-branded in the twenty-first century. In order to distance themselves from the Soviet era, former Eastern bloc countries like Estonia increasingly used images that presented themselves as ‘cultured’ nations.

### **Masters of classical music**

The Sibelius Academy and the Liszt Academy of Music are named after famous Finnish and Hungarian composers, respectively. These two ‘masters’ of classical music symbolically hover over the music education that takes place at their respective institutions. Liszt is invoked both as a statue and in name, while Sibelius is referenced in name only. The importance of masters in classical music education has been confirmed in previous studies (Holmgren, 2020a, p. 115). A master is defined as someone who excels in music and teaches others; the master is, for example, presented as the teacher of master classes on the websites. A master can be a musician who does not compose, but the great masters of classical music are often both performers and composers. Franz Liszt, for example, is represented as a statue on the front of the Liszt Academy and in a photo on the home page of the Academy’s website. Liszt is sitting on a chair in the center of the façade of the Academy’s main building and looks out over Liszt Ferenc Square. Below him is the main entrance. Symbolically, the statue is materializing the master heritage of the institution by overlooking everyone who approaches the front doors. On the ‘international’ sections of the EAMT website, where international students from 2019 are portrayed in the Arvo Pärt Center, there is also a photograph of two international students with Pärt himself. Pärt, the most famous contemporary Estonian composer, is still alive. An alumnus of the institution, he poses on the website as a father figure welcoming international students to Estonia and to the music center carrying his name.

In contrast to these depictions of Liszt and Pärt, Jean Sibelius is missing from the website of the Sibelius Academy. His absence makes him a ghost, present only in the name of the institution. If a website visitor did not know who he was, there would be no

way of finding out from visiting the web pages included in our material. Representations of other named masters can, however, be found on the international pages of the Sibelius Academy website. At the time of our data collection, the visiting professors at the Academy were all white and male. A photograph, with a biography, of each of them was listed at the top of the web page describing the conservatoire's international visitors. These professors were: Emmanuel Caysson, presented as having worked in New York, Paris and London; Daniel Dohlan, presented as having worked in England (London and Surrey); Neil Heyde, presented as working in London; Robert Levin, presented as working in Boston; Andreas Schmidt, presented as working in Germany (Dresden and Munich); Lars Ulrik Mortensen, presented as having worked in Copenhagen, Salzburg and New York; and, finally, Franco Bianchini, presented as working in Hull. The language used in their biographies describes these men as world-class talents, bringing the best in music to the Sibelius Academy. It is therefore striking that they are all white males and that the countries they represent only include Western Europe and the US. Masters are, on this website, through both images and texts, closely connected to the male European heritage of classical music by selection. No Finnish masters were present at the Academy at the time of this study.

The repertoire described on the three websites is not predominantly national. Rather, it is heavily dominated by composers that are/were European, white, and male. For example, composers highlighted on the Liszt Academy of Music's website include Leif Segerstam and Cary Ratcliff, described as composers for percussion, and Zoltán Kodály, a Hungarian composer, described as a composer important for students of voice. Bach and Mozart are also suggested for voice students. Bach is also mentioned on the voice department page of the Sibelius Academy. As composers recommended for strings, Bach and Mozart dominate in Hungary and Bach and other male composers dominate in Estonia, where Segerstam and Ratcliff are also mentioned. When it comes to the pages for the piano or keyboard departments, Bach, Schubert, and Chopin are named on the Sibelius Academy website under the page for study programmes with piano as the main instrument. On the piano pages of the EAMT website, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, Stravinsky, Saint-Saëns, Debussy, Prokofiev, and Ligeti are named. The content of the undergraduate piano course at the Liszt Academy of Music describes works by Scarlatti, Bach, (additionally Byrd, Couperin, Rameau, Händel, Ph. E. Bach), Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann (Robert), Chopin, Liszt, Brahms (additionally Mendelssohn [Felix], Grieg), Debussy, Ravel, Scriabin, Rachmaninoff, and Bartók (additionally Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Dohnányi, Kodály, Kurtág). Summing up these findings, the Hungarian and Estonian conservatoire websites include references to their respective national composers, but these individuals do not dominate the taught repertoire. On the website of the Finnish conservatoire, a national canon of composers is completely missing. By evoking the subjectivities of so many white, male, and European composers, the Finnish conservatoire reconstructs a classical music heritage that is European rather than national. The Estonian and Hungarian institutions do both; their websites construct a

canon composed of both European masters and national musicians. Women, composers born outside of Europe, and living composers are missing almost entirely.<sup>10</sup>

The home page of the Liszt Academy of Music website displays a rotating list of musical quotes. The quotes are from different male masters of classical music, such as Sir Georg Solti and Franz Liszt. The home page constructs the quotes as symbols of Hungarian music culture. Several of the quotes themselves are concerned with music, quality, and nation. Georg Solti is quoted as saying ‘Music was and is an essential part of daily life in Hungary’. Franz Liszt is quoted as saying ‘Taste is a negative thing. Genius affirms and always affirms’. The placement of these quotes at the top of the website’s home page contributes to the construction of the Academy as embedded in a master tradition that is national, based in Hungary and represented by men. The quotes on the website function as statements that discursively define the institution and its music. On the EAMT website, the descriptions of Arvo Pärt as an individual, and as the name of a music center, portray him as the living embodiment of the national male master both physically *and* symbolically. However, Pärt’s connection to the EAMT, not explained in the sections of the website analyzed here, is complicated. He was educated at the EAMT during the Soviet era when it had a different name. For many years he lived in exile in Germany and returned to live in Estonia only in old age. His personal history gives meaning to the twentieth-century history of Estonia. His symbolic linking to the EAMT recreates the traumatic history of Estonian national freedom: it was free, then it was occupied before becoming free again.

The white male masters are given prominent positions on the websites, as national masters who teach, as international ‘star’ musicians, and as ‘fathers’ of classical music in the form of composers whose music is expected to be played and learned. In other words, meaning is given to the masters as a subject position invoking a classical music heritage and history. This can be compared to Holmgren’s (2020a, 2020b) studies, which have shown how the masters of classical music are central to the reproduction of education in classical music. By representing and giving voice to the masters of classical music who are white and male, these websites silence other, non-white, non-male, voices (Ramstedt, 2019; Moberg and Georgii-Hemming, 2021).

The institutional logotype of the Liszt Academy of Music is a lyre, a strong symbol of classical (religious) music (Odam, 1995). A tuning fork functions as the logotype for the EAMT, which places an emphasis on choir singing, which in turn connects the Academy to the strong heritage of Estonian choir singing. The Sibelius Academy, on the other hand, has an ‘X’ as its logotype, a symbol that it shares with the larger University of the Arts Helsinki of which it is a part. The X is a symbol that says little about music in particular, but in this context it is used to signify rebellion or subversion. On the home page of the University of the Arts website the X spins while words like ‘turning point’ and ‘crossroads’ are shown, describing multiplicity. These words suggest that the

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<sup>10</sup> Revising the classical music canon to include female composers and questioning its Western bias has been attempted in research and music practice alike. Here we are not able to cover such efforts. Rather, our study strongly suggests that they have had little effect on the representations of classical music within higher classical music education.

university provides students with multiple ‘destinations’. The X is thus signifying multiple futures and places. This theme of diversity, an aspiration of the larger institution of which the Sibelius Academy is a part, is further highlighted by the portrayal of photographs of multi-ethnic young people on the University of the Arts Helsinki home page.

## Performers of classical music

The photographs portraying classical music practice are similar across all three websites. These images include orchestras performing and soloists and chamber music groups giving concerts. They also feature images of training sessions in musical rooms with a small number of participants. Distinguishing between what is performance and what is practice can be done by looking at the milieu and the performers’ clothing. Everyday clothes and cluttered rooms provide the backdrop practice, while formal dresses and suits on concert stages are used to invoke performance. Teachers and leaders are often portrayed as holding instruments, both in photos of the teaching situations of institutional life and in their profile pictures.

On the home page of the Liszt Academy website there is a photograph of a male teacher instructing a female violinist who is possibly part of an ensemble which is out of sight. He is constructed as the teacher by his age – he is older than the violinist – and by his hands, which are conducting the music being performed by the violinist. Both are smiling. The picture contains an embedded link to the institution’s study programmes, which also helps to construct the image as a learning situation. The home page further displays a photo of an opera performance, where a sitting woman is surrounded by five standing men, all dressed in eighteenth-century costume. The photo has an embedded link to the institution’s departmental pages. Another photo on the home page depicts the president of the institution at the time, Dr. Andrea Vigh, standing by a grand piano in a suit jacket with an embedded link to the institution’s teaching staff pages. She is not named here as the president, but for those who recognize her the meaning is clear. This is a greeting. She is welcoming visitors to the institution she leads. The sample material from the other two institutions do not display images of their leaders.

On the home page of the Liszt Academy there are also quotes from former students about their studies. These present traditional gender-related instrument choices: one male student talks about music theory, another male student describes the viola, and one female student describes singing. Gendering voice as feminine and music theory as male seems typical; the choice of a male to represent the viola is, however, less obvious. Viola is not an instrument that is typically coded masculine. The selected quotes have the male students talking about the outside world and the female student talking about the Academy’s concert hall. The gender of these students is deducted from their names. The gendering of instruments, as shown in other studies (Hallam, Rogers and Creech, 2008; Blix and Weider Ellefsen, 2021), is also reflected in the overarching presentation of musicians and their instruments on all three conservatoires’ websites, where males are associated with percussion, double bass, bassoon, and brass instruments, and females with flute and kantele. Cello, violin, oboe, clarinet, and piano are constructed as gender

neutral. They are depicted in photographs on the websites as being held by musicians of different genders. The depiction of master classes on the Liszt Academy home page shows a male teacher teaching a female student the clarinet.<sup>11</sup>

On the EAMT home page the study programmes in classical music are accompanied by a photograph of two male musicians performing on stage in suits. At the top of the home page of the Sibelius Academy website, a photograph of a student group is presented instead, where a number of young people are sitting on the floor with their instruments, seemingly improvising in a relaxed way and laughing together. When the websites describe the study programmes, male names and pictures predominate, both when depicting teachers and students. In Hungary most courses are presented as given in English, which implies that international students are welcome. The same goes for the other two websites. On the other hand, minority languages (Saami in Finland, Romani in Hungary, and Russian in Estonia) are not mentioned in the written text about the study programmes, although Swedish is mentioned on the Sibelius Academy website.

Looking more closely at the representations of nation, gender, and classical music on the pages of the piano studies programmes, from their hair, clothes and demeanour, the musicians in the pictures on the EAMT website portray both male and female musicians. Of the staff listed as members of the keyboard department at the EAMT, about a third were female. A similar proportion is noted at the Sibelius Academy. Of the quotes cited from successful former students as an incentive to study piano at the Sibelius Academy, five are from men and one is from a woman. The impression that women play smaller string instruments and men larger ones is confirmed by the photographs on the string programme pages on all three of the websites. On the Sibelius Academy website six out of fifteen teachers in the string department have female names. Nation is not prominently displayed on the string department programme pages, although, on the EAMT website, the Estonian kantele (or kannel), a traditional stringed instrument, is depicted being played by a woman with an East-Asian appearance. Apart from her, white people, both men and women, dominate the pages of the EAMT string department. Looking at the programmes in voice education, its traditional gendering as female is challenged. On both the EAMT and the Sibelius Academy websites, singing is primarily represented by men, although women dominate among the voice teachers. For all three institutions, only white people are shown on the voice departmental pages. Men dominate in the pictures representing percussion. On all three websites, all of the percussion teachers are male, a finding that supports previous research about percussion as a masculinized instrument (Armstrong, 2013). On the Liszt Academy website, one student in French horn and on the EAMT website one bassoon student had an East-Asian appearance. These two students were the only non-white faces to be depicted in the brass and woodwind pages.

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<sup>11</sup> The whiteness of the subjectivities constructed on the websites and the tension that appears when East-Asian subjects are depicted on the international/guest/visitor pages has been analyzed in a book chapter (Werner and Ferm Almqvist, 2024) and is not discussed here. In recent years, a critical whiteness studies perspective has been used in debates on classical music and canon (ibid.).

The analysis of the representations of classical music on the three websites shows that the traditional gendering of instruments and roles in higher music education mostly persists (de Boise, 2018; Citron, 1993; Armstrong, 2013). Students are gendered through instrument choice, and teachers are most often men. Moreover, musicians not appearing as white and European are mostly missing. There are instances where these patterns are challenged, such as when a voice department is represented by male students, or when the female teacher and institutional leader of the Liszt Academy Andrea Vigh is depicted on the institution's home page. The potential for women to occupy a music teaching career (Blix et al., 2019), or to be a professional player of percussion, double bass, brass, or larger wind instruments, is not part of the construction of classical music on these websites. As teaching in higher music education is also an important part of classical musicians' work (Bull and Scharff, 2021), this is significant for female students in two ways: their route to becoming a musician as well as a teacher. It should be underlined that the representations of classical musicians on the websites examined here do not tell the full story of the three higher music education institutions.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, earlier studies of similar website materials in Sweden (Moberg and Georgii-Hemming, 2021), Turkey (Parkinson and Muslur Gardner, 2020) and the US (Turner, 2004) also show a lack of diversity and gender-biased depiction patterns.

## Conclusion

While national his-tories have long been challenged in music by feminist activists and critical researchers, they have also been challenged within the institutions of higher music education investigated here, in particular the social media communication of the Sibelius Academy on Instagram.<sup>13</sup> Still, the websites of the three higher music education institutions can be seen to represent national (and European) his-tories of nation, gender, and classical music. These results matter, we argue, in a time when Europe is being re-nationalized and re-militarized. Nagel's (2017a) theorization of heroic narratives of masculinity as reconstituting the nation and the subsequent promotion of ethno-nationalism and militaristic ideals, warns of the inherent danger behind the use of such symbols. We argue that the images on the higher classical music education institution websites that represent their education, were located in a national/international and gendered discursive framework (Yuval-Davis, 1997) and built on an image of classical music located in national capitals as central discursive and physical places of classical music. Besides the home page, other pages of the websites are dominated by the networked meanings of a national male master heritage and gendered depictions of white musicians, students, and teachers. Looking closer at the images presented on the institutional websites, we argue that higher music education is presented using symbols of national pride. Further, gendered patterns of instrument use and the emphasis on the

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<sup>12</sup> In the research project *Conservatory Cultures* that we draw on here, interviews and participant observations complicate these results.

<sup>13</sup> Instagram was not part of this study but @sibeliusacademy posts, unlike the website, often highlight equality issues and feature diverse ages, genders and ethnicities.

institution's male founding fathers were both supported and contradicted across the three institutions.

The websites displayed a number of similarities including the portrayal of the subjects of classical music teaching as younger as opposed to older teachers. Almost all teachers were depicted as white and European, thus supporting ethno-nationalist ideas. The majority of teachers in percussion and piano were depicted as men, although this was less common in pictures of voice and strings. The gendering of instruments is sustained by the material analyzed for this article. The conservatoire websites continue to construct instrument choice as guided by differences rooted in femininity and masculinity. A national repertoire was represented in Estonia and Hungary, but the bulk of the repertoire taught at all three institutions was much the same: German composers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continued to dominate, thus perpetuating the shared ideal of present-day Germany as the bedrock of classical music. Other similarities include the centrality of white male (mostly European) masters on the websites, as represented by founders, guest professors, and alumni. They multimodally construct classical music as part of a white male European (and, in one case, American) heritage through photos and their text captions. The presentation of the master differs across the three institutions. The Sibelius Academy stands out in its depiction of the guest professor programme as giving it an international profile.

The Liszt Academy website creates a tension in the material by continually constructing itself within a nineteenth-century and Hungarian classical music continuum. The constitution of nation and gender for this institution relies heavily on a lineage of Hungarian male masters like Liszt, Solti, Kodály, and Bartók. The institution is constructed as a place celebrating the traditional tropes of nation and gender in Hungarian classical music. The Hungarian-ness depicted on the Liszt Academy website is overtly constructing Hungarian history and heritage. It is presenting the institution as a continuation of this tradition. Branding the Liszt Academy with a Hungarian ethno-national heritage does not imply a homology with those who are attracted to study there. This profile may attract students that are not white, Hungarian, or male. In fact, it may aim to do so. As Bolin and Miazhevich (2018) have concluded, the symbolical links to nation are meant to attract both national and international audiences. Still, we argue that this sort of profile emphasizes a romanticized image of the gendered nation and provides a role for classical music that symbolically supports nationalist ideology.

The Sibelius Academy website, on the other hand, emphasizes modern and international values. The EAMT website lands somewhere in between the other two. Differences between the Hungarian and Finnish institutions are also in line with the political developments taking place in the two countries over the past decades. The Sibelius Academy's online image thus represents an ambiguous relationship to nation, gender, masters, and tradition. While not foregrounding a masculine or traditional interpretation of music (they could have, for example, used Sibelius' romantic nationalism as a symbolic opening), the Sibelius Academy, in some respects, as the X symbol suggests, fits into the branding of the Nordic countries as tolerant, modern, and with world-leading figures on gender equality (Larsen, 2021). Such gender equality ideals

are also branded and bent in media discourse (Einarsdóttir, 2020), much like cultured nationalisms (Bolin, 2006). Thus, we argue that the Sibelius Academy is creating ideas about what Finland is: inviting, equal, and modern. This is done without presenting much that is specifically Finnish; rather, the site highlights its international professors. This way of presenting a nation does not emphasize sovereignty (Anderson, 1983) but rather moral superiority over ‘the rest’ by being inviting and inclusive (Mulholland, Montagna and Sanders-McDonagh, 2018). Perhaps surprisingly, the white masculine gendering of the ‘equal’ nation prevails when the programme of visiting professors lacks women and non-white teachers. The composers presented as representing the canonical repertoire at the Sibelius Academy are still European, male, and white; they are just not Finnish. Accordingly, it seems crucial to challenge the national his-tories of classical music portrayed by all three institutions. Given classical music’s importance in contemporary cultural life, and for the benefit of the young musicians training in these classical music programmes, the constructions of nation and gender in the images of higher music education should be problematized. Our results illustrate how the online presentation of classical music education in Europe today continues to rely on national and masculine traditions despite being part of the contemporary European Union higher education initiatives around internationalization and gender equality.

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### **Abstract**

Classical music is an artform that can, symbolically and materially, construct ideas about nation and gender. Higher music education institutions are central to classical music production and shapes in particular the gendered nature of music and musicianship by gendering instruments and constructing notions of feminine and masculine styles of music. Further, the repertoire performed in higher classical music education has displayed elements of patriotism and nationalism. The aim of this article is to investigate how three European higher music education institutions – the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, Tallinn, Estonia; the Sibelius Academy at the University of the Arts, Helsinki, Finland; and the Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest, Hungary – represent nation, gender, and classical music on their websites. The material analyzed here consists of selected multimodal pages from the institutions' websites: video, text, links, and pictures. They are analyzed in a discourse-theoretical manner focusing on the construction of nation, gender, and classical music. Conclusions discuss the (white) male European master as integral to the heritage of classical music on the websites as well as differences in how the institutions present themselves as 'national'. The article illustrates how contemporary classical music higher education in Europe relies on representations of national and masculine traditions despite being part of current European Union higher education initiatives promoting internationalization and gender equality.

**Keywords:** higher music education, gender, nation, websites, discourse, classical music, masculinity.

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Ann Werner's research interests are in gender, power, music and media, and she has published widely on for example streaming and algorithmic culture, and gendered uses of music, drawing on feminist theory. Her articles include 'Organizing music, organizing gender: algorithmic culture and Spotify recommendations', *Popular Communication* (2020), and her latest book is *Feminism and gender politics in mediated popular music* (2022, Bloomsbury Academic). She is a senior lecturer in musicology at Uppsala University and an associate professor in gender studies at Södertörn University, Sweden. She is currently the PI of two research projects: *Conservatory Cultures* (2021-2024), examining the construction of nation and gender in European classical music higher education, and *Culture of Silence* (2022-2025), examining sexual harassment and preventive measures after #metoo in the Swedish performing arts.

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