Four Centuries of Women's Musical Salons: A Cross-Cultural History, edited by Jacqueline Avila and Rebecca Cypess. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2026. 452 pp.

> Did your darling Liberty drive out my household gods and the spirits of my family, that she might establish herself in what was virtually a captive's dwelling? What is more sacred, what more inviolably hedged about by every kind of sanctity, than the home of every individual citizen?
>
> —Cicero, *De domo sua*

Jewish archetypes of female power begin in the book of Genesis. Sarah's divinely blessed rule over the denizens of Abraham's tent, Rebecca's costume-shop manipulation of her elderly husband's choice of successor, and Rachel's displacement of her father's idols all belie the extent of women's power to form (and even birth) societies beyond the vision of their partners or guardians. Rachel's story, together with Cicero's oft-quoted passage above, especially reveals women's critical agency in shaping society's center of sanctity, supplanting the gods of the past and welcoming new liberty.

In *Four Centuries of Women's Musical Salons,* Rebecca Cypess and Jacqueline Avila successfully contour the global impact of the musical salon as an expansive tent for women's social, political, and artistic liberty and agency in early modernity and modernity. The book comprises twenty-five articles by twenty-five contributors, inviting the reader into diverse salon cultures across Europe, the United States, and Latin America over the course of 400 years. This unique perspective reveals the salon as a vibrant, cross-cultural practice of musical and social cultivation, percolating down from aristocratic circles into emergent bourgeois classes. Within this world, women cultivated agendas and opportunities for artistic, professional, social, and political change, dissolving distinctions between "public" and "private" space and shaping broader trends in music and society.

Readers will find within the editors' salonnière kaleidoscope a brilliant viewfinder for women musician-hosts from diverse backgrounds. The breadth of salon studies spans centers like Paris, Rome, Venice, London, Madrid, Berlin, Vienna, Warsaw, Amsterdam, and Prague, with such European salons comprising half of the book's articles. The other half lean heavily into New World contexts, including Mexico, Colombia, Chicago, New Orleans, New York, and Norfolk (Virginia), plus salon histories from Constantinople, North Africa, and the contemporary Internet. Jewish and African-American experiences are also highlighted, revealing underexplored worlds of artistic cultivation and cultural influence emanating from minority cultures. While chapters are presented chronologically and can be amply appreciated

individually, the volume well demonstrates the interconnection of women's musical salons as, like voices of the Talmud, in cross-generational dialogue.

The first of many shared functions that can be gleaned from this study is the role of the musical salon as a time-tested incubator for the rise of women's musical professionalism. The book demonstrates this across cultural lines and eras, from the launching of Barbara Strozzi's career in the seventeenth-century Italian academies of Catholic Venice (Wendy Heller) to the Black Chicago Renaissance and its incubation in the salon of Estella Bonds (Elizabeth Durrant and Rebecca Dowd Geoffroy-Schwinden), the role of transnational salon networks in the career of pianist Maria Szymanowska in Eastern Europe (Halina Goldberg), and the role of women's musical clubs leading up to the 1893 World's Fair (Emily C. Hoyler O'Hare). A well-textured picture emerges across the volume of how women, as conveners, composers, and performers, created the organizational infrastructure for shifting communal norms around women's musicking—among other issues—across time and place.

If "the personal is the political" sounded as a novel feminist slogan in the mid-twentieth century, this book demonstrates it to be historical truth rather than contemporary truism. Women's musical salons consistently demonstrate the conversion of private, personal spaces into cosmopolitan crucibles for emerging social movements. Readers of the book will discover the regular engagement of British women in antislavery songs in late eighteenth-century gatherings preceding the success of the abolitionist movement (Julia Hamilton-Louey); women's *tertulias* in nineteenth-century Mexico and their role in women's construction of Mexican national identity (Yael Bitrán Goren); Amalie Beer's family salon and its incubation of Reform Jewish aesthetics in Berlin; and the jazz salons of mid-twentieth-century New York which "nested" both Black women's art and broader political consciousness (Tammy L. Kernodle). Such new expansions in women's agency were often bounded by prejudice, religion, and/or communal expectations around traditional gender roles and spheres. This paradox of agency and restriction is embodied in the etiquette-book-style salon

literature of Colombia (Juan Fernando Velasquez), such as this buttoned-up directive by the Countess of Tramar in *El trato social* ("Social Etiquette"):

> **The government of the salon:** The salon is the woman's kingdom, a reign that she must lead with an energetic and light hand. She must provide to any *soirée* the luxury, brightness, and charm it requires; her inventiveness must make even minuscule details perfect. The [room's] decoration will depend on her good taste, and she must please herself by finding the harmony of forms to create a bright whole, not leaving anything to random chance.[1]

The definition of "salon" in *Four Centuries* is extended beyond its aristocratic paradigm to encompass broader gatherings. The harem (Elizabeth Weinfield), ZOOM room (Rebecca Cypess), and diasporic women's repertoire itself (Vanessa Paloma Elbaz) are enlisted with other nontraditional contexts into the genealogy of the women's musical salon, aligned as these contexts are with the salon's classic functions of fostering female creativity, cultivating cosmopolitan social circles, curating national culture and identity, and advancing political objectives.

This volume stands as a necessary massage of the fascia of many musicological narratives, releasing "stuck" places by contributing to a holistic picture of musicking and social transformation, facilitated in multiple registers by women's voices, artistic ambitions, and agendas. Its articles, all of modest length but great depth, will be of profitable utility in academic settings, both in dialogue with each other and in the broader literature. Finally, the full collection presents an admirable and convincing demonstration that the salon was not merely a "woman's kingdom," but a mimetic practice of global impact, worthy of appreciation as a polyvocal vector of women's agency, creativity, and influence.

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[1] Quoted in Juan Fernando Velasquez, "Producing a World of Meaning: Music, Gender, and Collective Identity in Salons of Nineteenth-Century Colombia," in *Four Centuries of Women's Musical Salons: A Cross-Cultural History*, ed. Jacqueline Avila and Rebecca Cypess (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2026), 201.