



Gender in the Canadian Screen Composing Industry

Final Report

Report prepared by Circum Network Inc. for the
Screen Composers Guild of Canada

Written by Benoît Gauthier and Lisa Freeman

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PREFACE



The Screen Composers Guild of Canada (*Guilde des Compositeurs Canadiens de Musique à l'Image*) is a professional trade organization at the forefront of the screen composition industry for over 35 years. Developed in 1980 as the Guild of Canadian Film Composers, the Guild has been a connector, promoting the value and expertise of composers and music for audio-visual productions, creating a place for composers to discuss working conditions, providing professional development training, industry resources, and lobbying for rights and representation for all composers in Canada under the Status of the Artist Act.

In 2013, the *Baseline Study on the Membership and Industry of the Screen Composers Guild of Canada* noted that only 4% of composers who participated in the study were women and as such, the number was not significant enough to extrapolate any findings by gender. This raised the question of why there weren't very many women composers. The SCGC created a Women Composer Advisory Council to look deeper into the topic and identify possible solutions. If there is to be diversity in the screen composing industry, the SCGC must be able to provide support to all members, regardless of gender.

The discussion of gender had already begun to permeate the screen media industry globally. Gender studies in film and television demonstrate a wide disparity in women working across all creative roles, and composers were no different. Statistics gathered from the University of Southern California Annenberg's Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative and the San Diego State University Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film show that there is a small number of women composers working in the industry and those who are working, about 10% in 2014 dropping to 9% in 2015, tend to be employed on lower budget projects such as documentaries and independent film. These numbers are dramatically higher

than the 1-2% of women working as composers on the 250 top domestic grossing films, as reported in *The Celluloid Ceiling* series of reports.

Outside of Hollywood, industry researcher Stephen Follows looked at the gender split of key creative roles on the 2,000 highest grossing films in the USA from 1994 to 2013 and female composers accounted for only 2.3% of the studied films. He also studied 2,336 UK films to assess the gender of their crews from 2009 to 2013 and found that women fared better on UK productions, but at 6.4% of those composers, there's a lot of room for improvement.

How do these numbers compare to composers working in Canada, and more importantly, why is there such a difference between women and men achieving success in the industry? Do women need more or different education? Do women approach business differently? Are there different limiting factors affecting career trajectories? Is gender-based discrimination particularly prevalent? These were some of the questions that we needed to answer in order to determine why there are so few women screen composers.

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Industry reports that 15% of screen composers were women in 2016, yet 5% of the publicly-funded audiovisual productions that were analyzed hired a female composer with an additional 3% hiring teams of both male and female composers. When comparing screen composing specific revenue, the amount that men earned on average from upfront composing fees were 8 times higher than what women earned. Data from The Society of Composers Authors and Lyricists of Canada (SOCAN) for performance royalties from audiovisual sources indicate that the amount of royalties distributed to women were on average 30% of those distributed to men. This indicates that either audio visual productions used less music created by women, were broadcast less, or broadcast on channels/ screened in cinema with smaller audiences. The proportion of royalties received by women compared to men has steadily declined over the past 10 years, and throughout ones career the gender gap in these

types of earnings gets worse as women age. Findings such as these suggest that the need to address gender differences is great and more vital than ever.

The study demonstrates how many women composers are working in screen media in Canada and helps us understand where female screen composers hit a ceiling in hiring practices and career advancement. The study will also serve as a baseline against which future studies can be measured.

Reports by Canadian organizations such as Women in View, Canadian Unions for Equality on Screen and the Canadian Media Producers Association confirmed that gender disparity is as prevalent in Canada in the roles of producer, director, cinematographer, and editor as their international counterparts. These studies contributed to the establishment of hiring initiatives for directors and funding for female-led creative teams via parity commitments from the CBC and NFB, the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television's director apprenticeship program, the Directors Guild of Canada 2x More Initiative, and funding changes to Bravofact and Telefilm.

The SCGC hopes that this research study will allow the organization to better advocate for changes to funding, education and support that will improve the position of women screen composers in Canada and strengthen the profession overall.

Janal Bechthold
Women Composers Advisory Council Chair and Director
Screen Composers Guild of Canada

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The presence of women in the ranks of the Screen Composers Guild of Canada (SCGC) and among professional screen composers is low. This research project aimed to document the particulars of the work of women in the screen composing industry, with emphasis on the presence of women in screen composing, hiring practices affecting the presence of women, and other barriers to entry or access to meaningful work in screen composing. In many ways, our results support earlier observations.¹

The research is based on four sources of information:

- » a basic review of existing research and data;
- » data mining of the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada (SOCAN) royalty payment data bases;
- » an analysis of existing data on Canadian audiovisual (AV) productions receiving public funding between 2012 and 2016;
- » a survey of female and male screen composers.

Based on the review of existing research, four families of factors affecting the professional gender gap in screen composing were identified. They were

- » factors that are specific to the screen-composing industry;
- » factors related to neighbouring cultural industries;
- » wider cultural and sociological factors; and
- » economic factors.

In designing the survey tool, we included questions that could help to confirm or reject these hypotheses, some of which were confirmed and others not.

¹ See for example Hayeur and Bissonnette (2016) in Quebec; Carlsson (2004), Follows (2014a) and Lauzen (2017) in the United States; Andrew (2012), Follows (2014b) and Gomes, Follows, and Kreager (2016) in the UK.

Women comprise about

15%

of screen composers.

Men were

twice

as likely to work full-time as screen composers.

Women received

30%

of what men received from SOCAN.

92%

of AV productions hired no female composers.

One important finding from our research is that women comprise between 13 and 17 percent of screen composers in Canada. This is based on the survey data as well as the SOCAN payment data.

Among survey respondents, women were five years younger than male respondents – hence earlier in their career. Women were twice as likely to have completed a graduate program, and were more likely to have studied composition or music formally, yet men were twice as likely as women to have been a full-time screen composer in 2016 (41 percent vs. 19 percent). In both cases the majority worked part-time as screen composers (54 percent of men and 81 percent of women) and wished for more work (two-thirds of both women and men).

Between 2006 and 2016, women received only 6 percent of all royalties distributed by SOCAN to its composer members for performing rights in audiovisual productions. In fact, the average annual payment to women was \$463 whereas payments to men averaged \$1,553: women received on average 30 percent of what men received. Moreover, while in 2006, women received 50 percent of what men received on average, this proportion has steadily decreased over time to reach 21 percent in 2015 and 2016. Otherwise stated, SOCAN AV distributions to women have drastically decreased as a proportion of payments to men over the past ten years. SOCAN itself is not at fault; decreasing distributions can mirror diminishing use of compositions created by women, a lower overall number compositions by women, less music in productions with wide distribution, and/or broadcasting or screening in venues with lower financial compensation.

Of the 1,024 AV productions funded between 2012 and 2016 that were included in this analysis, 92 percent employed no women composers. Only one production in 20 (5 percent) employed an all-women team and an additional 3 percent hired composing teams comprising men and women. This male dominance has remained

constant between 2012 and 2016 and is found in all types and all sizes of productions.

Women's screen composing revenues were

8 x less

than men's in 2016.

Men declared total revenues that were four times as high as women's, while screen composing revenues were eight times higher than women's. Women earn a larger proportion of their screen-composing revenues from front-end income sources than men, and men declare twice as much from back-end revenue sources. Theatrical short- and long-form productions bring proportionately more revenues to women than men, whereas men get proportionately more revenues from television.

Women are

more likely

to be asked to take part in bulk pitches rather than targeted ones.

In pitching for work, women are more often called to submit a demo of previously composed music and to be one of many asked to write a piece on spec without interaction with a client (cattle call). Men are more often called to prepare a quote, to have a meeting with a director to discuss a specific project, to submit ideas for a specific project, or to write a piece on spec after being shortlisted. Both women and men screen composers indicated that they were successful in obtaining the work about once in every two attempts (55 percent for women vs 54 percent for men).

The survey research tended to confirm many of the hypotheses found in our document review with respect to the factors underpinning the gender gap.

Top career barriers for women are related to

**economics
networking
life balance
discrimination**

All barriers to career progression were either felt equally by women and men, or – by far more commonly – felt much more strongly by women. The top barriers for female composers are economic: insufficient compensation for work performed and limited availability of contract work. The inability to access capital to finance larger projects or company growth is also of an economic nature and identified more than twice as frequently by women than men.

Other important barriers are related to connections within the industry: not knowing the right people in the industry,

lack of recognition for past performance, and difficulty gaining access to entry-level opportunities.

The theme of work/life balance is also significant, with associated barriers being the unpredictability and excess of work demands, needing to take time off work for childbearing, and having left screen composing and returning.

61%

of female screen composers witnessed gender-related issues.

Based on survey results, we conclude that discrimination is clearly more of an issue for women than men: gender-based discrimination and workplace harassment are essentially women's issues.

Asked if they have personally witnessed gender-related issues in the screen composing industry, 61 percent of women screen composers and 14 percent of men responded positively. Examples of discrimination offered by women respondents fell into five categories: assumptions regarding technical know-how, gender stereotyping, chauvinism, power structure, and sexual harassment.

Here are a few examples from survey respondents:

“Sexism is often very subtle, and thus, insidious.

It's under the surface and a lot of times people don't even realize that they have a bias informing the choices they are making, including giving female composers the opportunity to pitch and/or monetary compensation for a job.”

“Director and producers seem to feel men are more capable in high pressure situations such as composing under short deadlines. There also seems to be an erroneous perception that women can't score for action or 'testosterone' type of visuals. I was once told the director was not confident I could play the bass part (midi) because that was a masculine sound.”

“The mental image we (as a culture) have of 'composer' is a dude. So, when directors / producers / people with the power to hire go and hire a composer, they are unconsciously or not biased towards choosing a dude, because it fits their mental image.”

“I have noticed that if I am in a social or business setting with a female colleague of comparable experience and ability, she is often treated with less seniority / authority / experience / knowhow as myself – even by other women.”

The full report *Gender in the Screen Composing Industry* is available at:
www.screencomposers.ca/gender-advocacy