

## Women's contributions to music education and artistic life in Albania (1900-1950)

**Eliona Lici**

Dr., Lecturer of Music Pedagogy, Department of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University "Ismail Qemali" of Vlore, Vlore, Albania and Department of Music Studies, University of Arts Faculty of Music, Tirana, Albania.

Email: eliona.lici@univlora.edu.al ORCID: 0000-0001-5294-2487

DOI 10.12975/rastmd.20241244 Submitted September 11, 2024 Accepted December 29, 2024

### Abstract

Women music educators in Albania are the most important part of development of music education at different levels of education. The purpose of this study is to shed light on women music educators from 1900-1950, which have been active in public and private schools, churches, and community organizations. This study is the first that analysed the women's contributions to music education in Albanian in the year 1900-1950 in the different public and private schools. The aim is to highlight the fundamental contribution of women music educators in a new generation of education and artistic life. It is also important to study this research because it provides historical insights about educational institutions that became cultural hallmarks over time. The article assumes the illustration of women music educators in Albania, the contribution for the development of instrumental-vocal pedagogy-music education and cultural life during the early 20th century, overcoming significant obstacles to pave the way for future generations and leaving a lasting legacy in the field. This research deals with the historical lack of interest of women in Albanian music education and artistic life between 1900-1950. Although women in the performing arts and in educational roles played an important part in this period. The path opened by these artists up for all girls and women to follow the path of teaching and art in Albania in a difficult historical, economic, social and cultural period. The research employs a qualitative (descriptive) methodology that encompasses the use of archival document analysis along with previous scholarship to develop a broad knowledge of the role of women in Albanian music education. The research is based on national programs and documents from the Central State Archive Primary sources are national programs, documents from Central State Archive, personal archive of artists especially of Jorgjia Truja. The results indicate that women educators played an essential role as pillars in the foundations of music education, but also of artistic life in Albania. People like Jorgjia Truja and Maria Kraja were very important in this: people who taught choral and instrumental work, and in a way invented vocal pedagogy. These women overcame significant societal and institutional barriers to create pathways for musical education and left a legacy that resonated long after their passings. Through this study, the contribution illuminate the struggles that brought them to the fore in the long struggle for full recognition of women educators in music. For future studies, it would be nice to go into further details about the contributions of women in Albanian music education and perform this study in other Balkan countries as well. Curricula should also reflect socio-cultural influences as perceived by women educators, fostering gender-sensitive pedagogical practices and mentorship schemes to inspire future generations of female musicians and educators.

### Keywords

*"Femmine Institute", first Artists music educators, "Institute Kyrias", women in music education*

### Introduction

The women musician, composer's development, actually has a history filled with struggles and achievements, shaped thoroughly by their social environment and conditions. At first, society allowed women to fulfill domestic roles and offered them no education or acknowledgment in music. That changed in the 19th century, with

salons and music conservatories, which enabled composers like Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn to become successful.

In the 20th century, the feminist movements of the time challenged not only the status of women in society, but also claimed space and visibility for the works of female composers through the lens of identity

and social justice. The history of women composers ultimately provides a more expansive look at societal changes, but also an important acknowledgment of women composers and their contributions to the arts and future generations (Samson, 1997). In the second half of the 20th century, when European countries celebrated over 100 years of the jubilees of cultural and artistic institutions, Albania, this small country in the southeast of Europe, was timidly taking its first steps. Influenced by historical, political, economic, and social factors, it inherited from the past a significant educational, cultural, and artistic backwardness (Lici, 2024). In Albania between 1942-1944, Dhora Leka the first albanian composer, composed partisan songs, with nearly 50 percent of these songs attributed to her. During the years of the communist regime, she was arrested, imprisoned, and subsequently exiled. After the 1990s, despite her advanced age, Dhora Leka gained recognition for her work during the war years. composed partisan songs (nearly 50 percent of these songs belong to her), while in the years of the communist regime she was arrested and then imprisoned and exiled. After the 1990s, Dhora Leka, although elderly, felt respect for her work during the War years (Tole, 2024). The role of women in music education, as well as artistic life in Albania (1900-1950) is fundamental to understanding historical and cultural dynamics of the period. So for many accomplishments, the role of female musicians and educators remains relatively neglected, especially in the Music education realm. This absence in the literature is surprising, especially considering the significant impact that these four women have made on the direction of music education. Its important to highlight the fundamental role of women music educators for the education of new generations also for the artistic music life between the years 1878 to 1950 because is important historical period, between the and after the second World War. The subject is focused from the first Albanian School directed by two Albanian sisters educators, Paraskevi and

Sevasti Kyrias “Mësonjëtorja shqip the first national public school, in 1922 the two sisters opened Instituti Kyrias one Institution who trained the teacher for general education in 1933 the “Feminine Institute” was the first public institution who developed vocal choral and instrumental education in the meantime Womens like a Singer Jorgjia Truja and Maria Kraja, pianist Lola Gjoka, became the first women musician that played an important role in Education of albanian women also in the artistic life. In Albania from the most recent music studies detect increased attention to feminist orientations in musicology, highlighting the call for hearing women’s voices within discussions of music education. The available evidence also shows that, although the presence of women in the domain of musical education at a time was not on a grand scale, their foray into music education fathered both new generations of musicians and changes more broadly within Albanian society as well. As modern history lessons regarding the accomplishments and contributions of women in music get bigger every year, there’s been just as sharp an increase in the number of books being written about them. (Pendle, 2001)

The significance of this research is the creation of an area of feminist musicology, which has received comparatively less attention, offering a unique geographical and historical context to the field. To a broader, cultural public, the study enriches music history by recognizing women’s essential performances and, in turn, provides a more inclusive historical image. Economically, investing in gender-diverse music education systems leads to innovation. The results also provide evidence that acknowledging women’s participation may encourage more financial support for gender-equity initiatives in the arts.

### **Theoretical Framework**

There are several organizations and institutions working to record and preserve the important contributions women have

made in music. Now days in United States, in 2023 the International Alliance for Women in Music (IAWM) initiated projects to archive women's works and histories in music that will benefit researchers and educators widely (IAWM, 2015). Future generations will also be able to explore the works of female composers, performers and educators that shaped music history thanks to these documentation initiatives. Digital archives have revolutionized access to historical documents and music scores of women composers. These include searchable online repositories among other resources, which are being utilized and becoming more proficient in providing primary-source access relative to the women composing and teaching space. Burt and Barlow (2022) state that Digital archives have a key role to play in excavating women's 'hidden' histories in music—histories that might previously have gone unnoticed due to lack of documentation. Ethnomusicological research has recently unveiled the participation of women in different cultural environments such as-in, community music education or even grass-root movements. As pointed out in these studies, from the most visible artists to women musicians performing every day within communities and educational institutions, it is important domain of research. These contributions are integral to the cultural fabric and identity within communities (Wright & Fleming, 2012)

We need to remember women in music education through history as role models for today. Howe (2009) provides a historical view of women in music education careers and said that in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, music educators, even women had fewer chances to obtain a good tion. They needed support of family and mentors within the profession. As we entered the twentieth century, women benefited from high-quality education offered – often with support from their families and friends. But that access alone was not enough to drive national change in music education; women had to gain increasing access to

leadership within the profession. According to Howe most women participated as national music organization leaders before the Music Educators National Conference was formed, serving as officers, committee members, and presenters in both the National Education Association (NEA) and the Music Supervisors National Conference (MSNC). Although the vast majority of elementary music teachers were women— most public school music supervisors, and many arts organization leaders were women leadership in hierarchical organizations such as MENC overshadowed their influence. (Howe, 2009). But in small Albania in the 20th century it happened differently on the contrary throughout Albanian history women have taught music in their homes and communities, women have taught singing in nursery schools, churches, and public and private schools. In Albania women have directed instrumental ensembles choral and instrumental. They have directed instrumental ensembles, published textbooks, taught college courses, led organizations, and done research. While scholars have begun to write the biographies of some outstanding women in music education, there is no literature on how these women viewed their careers. Musicologists and composers since the year 2000 in Albania have published some books on women lyric singers, pianist, making highlighting women interpreter who were exceptions in their historical period. Music educators need to uncover women music teachers of the past as they are developing feminist theories in music education. This paper look some of successful, productive women music educators as models of success in the pedagogical and artistic career. What does it take for women in music education to become successful leaders and shapers of the profession? Most likely the successful educator came from a supportive family where she learned to play instruments, sang, and performed in encouraging environments. This educator received an excellent post-high school education including general education courses, music study, and teacher training with supportive advisers

and mentors. At some point this educator probably felt a sense of mission or developed a philosophy to sustain a long-term career. As this model educator moved through different stages of a career (teaching various age groups, performing, accepting administrative responsibilities, and writing), there were many mentors plus supportive family relationships.

Women have long been the music teachers of Albania. She has been a vocal coach for ladies, in public and private school. In Albania women singer conduct both the Choral and Instrumental ensembles. They have, created music methods, books with music pieces, taught at the collegiate level and as administrators or researchers. Thus far, scholars have only written biographies of a few exceptional women in the history of music education and there

is virtually no literature about how these subjects perceived their careers. Albanian musicologists and composer since the (year 2000) have published some women singers, pianist study were andreclusions particular females interpreter as rare case were in of their historical period. As music educators are developing feminist theories in music education, they must also dig for women from the past who were teaching music. This paper seeks to investigate examples of successful women music educators who have developed career paths possibly differing from the pattern. How can women so successful in their music education careers forge the path to leadership and help shape the profession that has served them so well? It is likely the educator with success experienced music in her life through family, playing instruments, singing and performing in a positive way.



Figure 1. Alphabet song created by sisters Qiriazi in year 1908

This Hymn written by a woman, calls for the unity of Albanians around the alphabet, with pen in hand. In 1909, Parashqevia wrote "The Hymn of the Alphabet," published a primer with the new alphabet, and founded the national women's society "Morning Star." Later, in America, she published a newspaper with the same name (1917-1920), which dealt with patriotic, cultural,

and educational topics for the Albanian and American context. Almost every issue featured the Albanian alphabet, which was disseminated and made understandable. Until now, it has been speculated that Parashqevia composed the Hymn of the Alphabet herself or that she borrowed it from a French march. However, what is the true origin of this music? (Parashqevi Qiriazi,

1909) This song have played, and still play, an important symbolic role in preparing the Albanian people to face military and political attacks, as well as instilling patriotic feelings. The “Hymn of the alphabet” was written immediately after the First Congress of Manastir, in which Parashqevi Qiriazi participated as the right hand of her brother Gjergj Qiriazi and, officially, as the secretary of the Alphabet Committee. This congress is honored today as one of the most important assemblies in the entire political and cultural history of the Albanian nation, not only for the unification of the alphabet, but also as a great step towards national and political unification (Tole, 2018).

### Research Problem

For the historical treatment of Albanian music education and artistic life 1900 – 1950, this study will focus on how women have been under-represented in Albanian society. Although Paraskevi and Sevasti Kyrias, Jorgjia Truja, Maria Kraja, Lola Gjoka, Dhora Leka, were prominent female educators and musicians. The study aims to investigate the successes of these pioneering women, in order to present a broader picture of Albanian music history. In doing this, it highlights the necessity for gender diversity within music education and its cultural legacy. The research problem of this study is relevant to the gaps in the field of Albanian music education and education history, and focuses on the contributions of women music educators and artists in Albania from 1900 to 1950.

### Method

#### Research Model

For this research is used qualitative (descriptive) method. Apart from literature review, this study employed document analysis methods (archival documents – music as well) and consulted existing research by some other scholars. Photographs, samples of old music works, are used for illustration purposes of music educatos, artists who lived and created and

performed in this period. The examination of the literature surrounding the historical context of music, its educational impact, and its social implications forms the basis for this discussion.

**Historical research method** “attempts to systematically recapture the complex nuances, the people, meanings, events, and even ideas of the past that have influenced and shaped the present” (Berg & Lure, 2012, p.305)

Specifically, the contribution of women music educators for music education and artistic music life in Albania. Vocal first steps of vocal pedagogy, choir and teaching in instrument is described by historical research, offering academic support for later analysis.

**Documentary analysis** is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents. (Bowen, 2009), The Development of music education in Institute is studied by documentary analysis in this article. The document issued by the Albanian National Archive, Albanian Ministry of Education and the research materials on National Library and personal Archives of Artist Jorgjia Truja

Jorgjia Truja (Lyric Singer) the first music teacher in first half of XX Century in Institution “Mother Queen” “Nana Mbretreshë” (1933-1945)

The Feminine Institute “Mother Queen” “Nana Mbretreshë” (2 October 1933-1945) was conceived and founded by Mirash Ivanaj, Minister of Education in those years, and branched into two profiles, high school “Gymnasial” and Normal school. Through this second direction, the Institute of The Institute includes the pedagogical profile after the Normal School the Female School of Korca City and the Kyrias Institute. It is also in this regard that the similarities of the programs and the important place that music is occupied in both schools. This fact, in one way or another, is proven by almost all the archival documents preserved by

the Institute, but in even more direct form we find it reflected in the 1935 school curriculum and schedule, in which, for the first time, music is encountered according to profiles (gymnasially and normally). While, in the book *History of Albanian education and religious thought* this subdivision has been seen since the opening of the Institute in 1933. (Kraja, 2012, p. 476) From the Royal Institute of Music, the school "Mother Queen" inherited for a period of two years a considerable base of musical instruments. This evidence comes from a document included in the fund of the Institute "Mother Queen", which states: Technical Institute dt. 1.II.935 When the clothes of the Femnuer Institute are transported from the Naim Frashëri building among the new premises, along with them are transported and the musical instruments of the former Institute and today are in the Feminine Institute; Minister Mirash Ivanaj (Central State Archive, F. 387, D. 17, year 1935, pp.1,2)

### **Jorgjia Fiçe Truja and the development of vocal pedagogy (Vocal pedagogy and its roots in public feminine Institution (1933-1942))**



Picture 1. Jorgjia Fiçe Truja (20 January 1907 - 22 June 1994) (Web 1)

Lyric singer, pedagogue, conductor, musicologist, and a remarkable woman like Jorgjia Fiçe Truja represents a complexity of exceptional professional and human values. A powerful asset, with which she

dedicated herself to her profession, Truja became an initiator for the emancipation of young Albanian artists who, through their interpretation of masterpieces of operatic musical art, would influence the cultivation of aesthetic taste and the social emancipation of the Albanian state. From a historical perspective, in addition to being a prominent artist, Jorgjia Fiçe Truja is among the artistic personalities who laid the first foundation stones in the history of music as part of professional Albanian art. The artist's recent contributions to the "Nana Mbretreshë Institute" align with her artistic-pedagogical profile for the development of music education as a necessary component of general education. Jorgjia Truja has also made significant contributions in the musicological field, enriching it with numerous articles addressing issues of education and the development of art in both educational and social contexts. She is recognized as one of the first contributors to the history of theoretical and musicological thought in Albania. Ms. Fiçe created a school choir with students from all grades, establishing a tradition in Albanian choral interpretation, featuring a patriotic repertoire of choral songs from various operas, all translated into Albanian. Singing became a phenomenon for these girls, starting in the classrooms, continuing in the basements and dormitories, and culminating on stage, where they nurtured their talents and transformed it into large-scale performances that deeply resonated with the audience. Regarding the teaching and music subjects at the Institute, we can only judge based on the preserved documents, occasional studies, or the memories recounted or written by students or teachers from those years. Music Education education at this Institute was complete, solfège was taught, which was divided into theoretical and practical classes, as well as the choir, which was a very valuable exercise. It is precisely with the creation of this choir that the beginning of the beautiful tradition of end-of-year concerts, where school holidays were organized, is connected (Bihiku, 1989).

In 1933, the Minister of Education, Mirash Ivanaj, propose to Ms. Filçe to design music programs for all Albanian schools, including the Feminine Institute, the Normal School and the secondary cycle of high schools in general. This data sheds light on the name of the drafter of the Music curriculum in the Ministry of Education, but it is not known if these programs built in 1933 by J. Filçe continued until 1939, since the name of the drafter of the latter is not found in any document. In the book “Muza e pare” [The First Muse]”, (Tole & Truja, 2014) through the memories of the young teacher Jorgjia Filçe Truja, the preoccupation that she had for the task that was assigned to her as a program designer, expressed with the effort to recognize and use the didactic experiences of contemporary Western Italian, is proven. programs of normal schools as well as those of master’s and high school. To create the programs Ms. Filçe was thanking her husband for sending her Schinelli’s<sup>1</sup> didactic musical methods, but in the meantime, as she says, she had also brought with herself other methods, mainly canto, Truja she bought different pedagogical methods for choral singing in the warehouse and started browsing them. From a careful inspection of the covers of these books, it is understood that their content does not represent a mere arrangement of musical parts, but more than that, an advanced theoretical treatment of teaching methods, of professional work with the vocal tract of the production of to the human voice in chorus An example of this would be Filçe’s provision and use of Carlo Certo’s methodical publication, with instructions and details on the vocal cords, larynx, epiglottis, nose, trachea, lungs and diaphragm. This fact takes special importance not only because it speaks of the application of professional methods in the teaching of music that was developed at the Institute, but especially because it paved the way for the rise of vocal pedagogy in Albania. Bearing this issue in mind, it can

be seen that from the Italian publication Songs for elementary courses of any order by Carlo Certo, in the books kept in the Truja family, the songs included in the school repertoire are underlined, but for the year of concretization of these songs in Institute we have no data. Some of them are: “Dove Vai”, “Le Rondini” “Lo Specio” “La Nespola” “Il Circolo” “Tempo Scipato” “A Mosca Scieca” (gioco). In the case of the song “Le Rondini” it is noted at the top of the page that its melody will be sung in Albanian with the text of Filip Shiroka’s poem “Udh e mbarë se erdh pranvera”: “Shko dallendyshe tue fluturue prej Misiri n’dhena tjera fusha e male tue kërkue; n’Shqypni shko, pra, fluturim, shko në Shkodër, n’gjytet tim. [Go, aallow, fly away from Egypt to other lands, fields and mountains, you are looking for; Go to Albania, fly, go to Shkodër, to my Country] In the musical score, this text is placed below the notes alongside the Italian text. The use of Albanian texts, besides serving the purpose of musical education, also contributed to enriching the repertoire of school songs. The songs marked by teacher J. Filçe in the aforementioned book are presented with a simple structure; for example, the song “Dove Vai” consists of two symmetrical phrases, where the first phrase (a+b) cadences on an incomplete tonic, while the second phrase (a1+b1) has two additional cadential measures to conclude with a complete cadence. Their melody moves within the intervals of major seconds, minor thirds, and occasionally ascends to a pure fifth. In keeping with the simplicity of the song, the singer’s range is within the limit of a seventh. “Il Circolo” is a song with professionally demanding requirements, structured in a verse-chorus format based on the principle of contrast, with a range extending up to the eleventh, agile rhythmic figures, and a cheerful character. The scores of the songs are equipped with an accompanying part, primarily in function of supporting the harmonic line of the vocal part, moving within the primary functions of the tonality: T [tonic], D [dominant], and S [subdominant].

<sup>1</sup> Schinelli, Achilles. Theory and practice of choral singing. (1892-1969. Composer of operettas, author of 8 volumes.)

The arrangement of songs in the book used by Ms. Filçe also takes into account the increasing level of difficulty through a gradual transition from one tonality to another. In addition, it appears that the development of interpretative sensitivity also holds an important place in musical education, through the recognition of dynamic markings such as staccato, legato, etc.

Undoubtedly, singing remains the simplest and most fruitful form for teaching music throughout the entire Albanian educational system, from the Albanian school primers to the “Nana Mbretneshë” Institute. Usually, the songs were sung not only in class but also in choral groups, aiming for public performances. By the third decade of the century, relatively difficult vocal pieces extracted from genres such as operetta and opera would be added to this repertoire at the “Nana Mbretneshë” Institute. Through their interpretation, the Institute aimed for the further development of both solo singing practice and choral singing.

It is understood that the first music teacher at the Institute, Ms. Jorgjia Filçe, alongside musical education, persistently aimed to cultivate a tradition of sophisticated school singing, taking a new and bold step in the development of vocal pedagogy in Albanian schools of the time. It must also be asserted that this was a significant qualitative leap for the Institute, as J. Filçe consistently demonstrated a clear goal of referring to the tradition of Italian Bel canto in her teaching, thus becoming the first teacher of vocal pedagogy in Albanian schools. During her years at the “Nana Mbretneshë” Institute, she accomplished this mission with the support of two essential pillars: 1) the use of professional pedagogical methods, and 2) the concretization of musical expressions to enhance interpretative skills in artistic activities, sometimes alongside professional artists.



Figure 2. Example of lessons in “Mother Queen” Institute, Italian Song Dove Vai used with Albanian translation in Feminine Institute (Personal Archive Jorgjia Truja)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>The book is from Italian composer C. Certo. Certo, Carlo Musica e Canto Corale, Antonio Vallardi 1931 Personal Archive from Family of Jorgjia Truja, Her girl, the pianist Takuina Truja has me all the sources of family archive the book is from author Certo C., Musica e Canto Corale. Music and Choral Singing. Lessons for use by RR. Lower and Upper Teacher Training Institutes



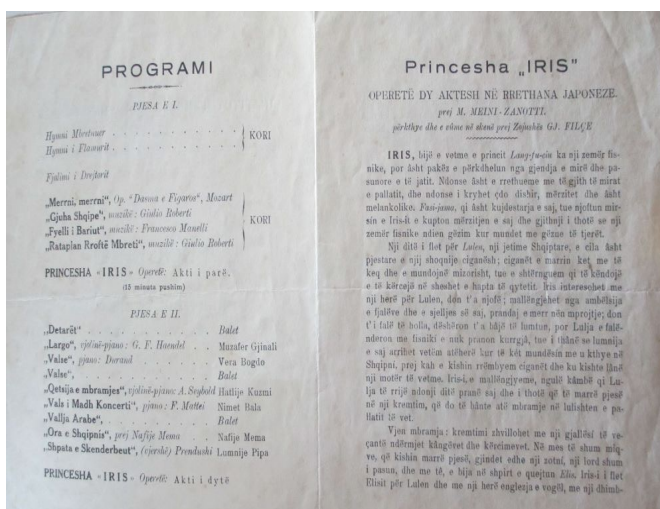


Figure 3. Opereta in two actes “Princes Iris” (Pesonal Archive Jorgjia Truja<sup>3</sup>)

Thus, by working outside the curriculum, the music teachers and voice trainer Jorgjia Filçe created the school choir with students from all grades, thereby establishing a valuable tradition in the direction of Albanian choral interpretation. They sang patriotic songs and choral pieces from various operas, all in Albanian. Singing became a phenomenon for these girls, initiated by Jorgjia, starting in the classrooms, continuing in the basements and dormitories, and culminating on stage, where they nurtured it, transforming it into massive performances that resonated deeply with the soul of the people. (Stringa, 2006). From a quick overview of the contents of this concert program, there are several elements that stand out impressively. First and foremost, it is commendable that, after only three years of studying music, the students were able to meet significant artistic demands arising from the prepared program. In addition to singing choral hymns, they could perform on stage as vocal or instrumental soloists (including piano and violin) with parts from the classical repertoire of composers such as Handel and Mozart. Secondly, it is worth highlighting the broad scope of activity across several fields. Beyond choral and solo singing, the program included instrumental performances, even in the most complex technical and musical genres. The operetta was emphasized as a

notable component. Equally important is the inclusion of two ballet numbers in the program, a fact that undoubtedly holds double interest.<sup>4</sup> As we understand, the establishment of a ballet ensemble at the “Nana Mbretreshë” Institute by Lola Gjoka marks one of the first efforts of its kind in the history of Albanian choreographic art. More significantly, this development reflects the evolution occurring within Albanian society at the time.



Figure 4. The students of Institute “Mother Queen” 1938<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem poster kept in the family Truja, Programme invitation

<sup>4</sup> Personal Found Archive of Jorgjia Truja

<sup>5</sup> Central State Archive, F.387.f.8.1938

Table 1. Created by the Information from National State Archive Albania<sup>6</sup>

Grades	Music J. Truja	Violine Anny Marashi
First grade 2 classes	4 hours	1 hour
Second 3 Classes	6 hours	3 hours
Third one class	1 hour	2 hours
Fourth 2 Classes	2 hours	4 hours
Fifth 2 Classes	2 hours	4 hours
Sixth 2 Classes	2 hours	2hours
Seventh 2 Classes	2 hours	2 hours
Eighth 2 Classes	2 hours	2 hours

From the graphic and the table in different years created from the document received from archive in years 1933-1939 We see that from 1933 until 1939 in the promotion of women to men at the Feminine Institution Mother Queen in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century shows that the music teachers are women and dominate and we can say that they are the founders of musical education. The music teachers were Jorgjia Filçe for Music and Song, Maria Paluca for Music and song, Lola Fjoka for piano and piano accompaniment, Anny Marashi violin, and Ahmet Gashi violin Music education reflected the overall feminization of the teaching profession during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when most public school music was taught by elementary classroom teachers, most of whom were women, and supervised by music specialists, most of whom originally were men (Birge, 1928)

### Jorgjia Truja and her contribution for the development of women's music-artistic life in Albania

In 1939, the fascist aggression of the country, despite the extremely tense situation that the Albanian society was going through, Mrs. Filçe did not stop her mission as a prominent activist of the country's artistic life. In the fall of that year, she prepared the "Artistic Festival of the Albanian Woman", (Tole & Truja, 2014) which was held in the "Gloria" cinema hall on Sunday, April 2, 1939.

As the main organizer of this first major artistic manifestation of Albanian women, J. Filçe was simultaneously the artistic leader, conductor and director. In addition to professional artists, such as singers Maria Kraja and Tefta Tashko Koço, pianists Lola Aleksi and Tonin Guraziu, and these teachers at "Nana Mbretreshë", [Mother Queen] she also included the girls of the Institute in the program.

Most of the numbers included in the artistic content of the Festival refer to the figure of the woman, her feelings and spiritual world, the discriminated position in society, etc. Both main lines of the selected repertoire adhere to this, on the one hand the operatic arias of Butterfly, Manon Lescau (Puccini) or Lucia di Lammermoor (Donizetti) and, on the other hand, Albanian folk songs. Regarding the latter, in addition to the materials (songs) performed by Tefta Tashko Koço and Maria Kraja, the presented program brings an almost new experience or very little studied in the Albanian music of the time, the harmonization of popular songs for a capella choir, placed as a separate group under the designation "*Këngë Pleqërishte*" [Old people's song] (in the sense of old Albanian folk songs) and performed by the choir of the students of the Institute under the direction of J. Filçe, at the same time harmonizing the songs.

<sup>6</sup> National State Archive, Found.387, File, 35, year 1942, pp. 1.

**Lola Gjoka Aleksi (22 May 1910 - 6 October 1985) music educator, pianist in “Mother Queen” Institute**



Picture 2. Lola Gjoka Aleksi (1910-1985) (Web 2)

Lola Aleksi was back in her homeland in 1932. The first concert she gave together with singer Jorgjii Filçe, Llambi Turtulli and violinist Thoma Bezhani that same year in Korça, she focused the attention of the citizens of Korça around her. In 1934, Lola Aleksi would come to Tirana to be employed at the female high school “Nana Mbretneshë”.

As mentioned above, during the first two years of its existence, the female school “Nana Mbretneshë” used the instruments purchased for the Royal Institute of Music.

From a record kept on 21.VII.1934 at 9 p.m., the commission is sent by the Minister of Education under the chairmanship of the Deputy Director of the “Nana Mbretneshë” Feminine Institute, Mr. Ahmet Gashi, it is stated that three pianofortes were left in the corridor in front of the director’s room. The latter had a dual function in the realization of the educational programs: 1) for piano lessons as part of the music curriculum; and 2) for accompanying vocal lessons (soloist or choral).

This fact has a great significance in itself, if we keep in mind the way the music subject is organized in other similar schools in the country. The piano was not only taught as an instrument, but also used to support

the teaching process (for the choir and soloists). And, moreover, a newly opened school used three such instruments, which shows that the Institute from its beginnings was incorporating well-known elements of professional music schools both in terms of method and in terms of organization lesson time. And the results of all this would be reflected very quickly in the artistic life that the school would develop (Stringa, 2013).

**Maria Kraja: Opera Singer (music educator)**



Picture 3. Maria Kraja (1911-1999) (Web 3)

From the documents found in the Central State Archive, it is proven that the number of piano lessons (from 24hours to 28 hours), singing lessons (from 31 hours to 35 hours), and violin lessons (from 20 hours to 28 hours) has increased, and that the pedagogical staff for musical subjects included the soprano Maria Kraja.

According to the author Spiro Ll.Kalemi in the monograph “Maria Kraja” the singer worked in Radio Tirana as a music editor from 1945-1946 . She was a compiler of programs, and also served as a trainer, teaching the singers club while she began to develop her career as a singer as performer. In October 1948, the Arts Committee invited her to participate in the group of artists organized near the People’s Theater in Tirana, to start a very busy work period, she performed the first songs dedicated to the homeland, the war, the country’s reconstruction. With the cessation of activity and the death of Tefta Tashko Koço and her husband Kristaq Koço,

the early group of lyrical artists diminished; At the same time the demand for concert performances increased along with the responsibility of the artists. Together with Jorgjia Filçe Truja and Gjuzepina Kosturi Maria sang for an eager audience, often young and less experienced, but they honored the artists with the sincere and genuine love (Kalemi, 2001).

She was a compiler of programs and also served as a trainer, teaching at the singers' club while she began to develop her career as a performer. In October 1948, the Arts Committee invited her to join a group of artists organized at the People's Theater in Tirana, marking the beginning of a very busy work period for her. During this time, she performed her first songs dedicated to the homeland, the war, and the country's reconstruction.

With the cessation of activities and the death of Tefta Tashko Koço and her husband Kristaq Koço, the early group of lyrical artists diminished. At the same time, the demand for concert performances increased, along with the artists' responsibilities. Alongside Jorgji Filçe Trujës and Gjuzepina Kosturi, Maria sang for an eager audience—often young and less experienced—but they honored the artists with sincere reactions and genuine love.

### **Dhora Leka: the first Albanian woman composer (1923 - 2006)**



Picture 4. Dhora Leka<sup>7</sup>

Dhora Leka was student of Jorgja Truje at the “Mother Queen” Institute, where she developed her skills in culture, music, acting, and dancing. She initially worked at Radio Tirana. Eventually, as a music specialist with professional education, she was sent abroad to study composition. She first attended the Leningrad Conservatory, and for health reasons, she later transferred to the Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky Conservatory, where she trained as a professional composer from 1948 to 1953.

During her studies at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory, her musical creations were included in the performance programs. At the end of her studies in 1953, she composed the “Overture on Two Popular Themes” for choir and symphonic orchestra, as well as the cantata “Albania, My Homeland,” a work that was performed by the choir and orchestra of Radio Moscow on her graduation day in 1953.

In 1939, during the Italian invasion of Albania, Dhora Leka was heavily engaged in promoting nationalistic sentiments. While she was a student at the Nana Mbretneshe Institute, she and several other girls turned the school's theater performance on April 7, 1939 into a patriotic protest in front of the royal palace singing songs. Despite being active in the Albanian Communist Youth, she had been expelled from the Institute when then but returned in 1942.

Between 1942 and 1944, Dhora Leka fought as a partisan against fascist and Nazi invaders, while also composing her own patriotic lyrics. Albania was liberated on November 28, 1944 by the victorious partisans marching in Tirana and singing the songs of Dhora Leka.

On November 29, 1944, in the hall of the National Theater, the partisan choir, led by conductor Konstandin Trako, performed Dhora Leka's partisan songs for the first time in liberated Albania. In 1946, several of her partisan songs were published for the first time, including in the publication *Hymns and Partisan Songs*, which was harmonized by Kristo Kono. This publication was prepared

<sup>7</sup>Tole, V. (2024). Dhora Leka: The first composer. Tirana.

by the Ministry of Press, Propaganda, and Popular Culture. Dhora Leka, who returned to Albania after her studies in 1953, worked as secretary of music in the League of Writers & Artists and later as a lecturer at the Artistic High School in Tirana teaching harmony and musical literature among others. She wrote in most of the genres during the years 1954-1957 other notable realisations being “Idle” (1954), a musical comedy for children, to Kol Jakova’s writings; This Song You Sing (1954); and I Sing For You (1954). (Tole,2024)

The activities directed by the music teacher artists (Jorgjia Truja, Maria Kraja, Lola Aleksii) at the “Nana Mbretneshë” Institute in Tirana in the years 1935-1940:

In the year 1935, the newspaper ‘Besa’ wrote with admiration about the ‘Concert of the Girls’ Choir of the Institute,’ which performed the Anthem of the King and the Anthem of the Flag. In 1936-1937, at the end of the school year, after the performance of the two-act comedy ‘*The Bowl of Diogenes*,’ a choir concert followed. The repertoire included songs such as ‘*Take, take*,’ from the opera ‘*The Marriage of Figaro*,’ and ‘*The Shepherd’s Flute*’ by Francesco Manelli, among others

“In 1936-1937, the operetta ‘Princess Iris’ was staged, which was performed in the dormitory hall of the Institute. It was a successful product of the artistic collaboration between Jorgjia Truja, who translated the text and served as the director and vocal leader of the girls; Lola Aleksii, who accompanied the operetta on the piano and led the ballet troupe; and Sokrat Mihos, who was the stage decorator. On November 28, 1938, during the inauguration of Radio-Tirana, the choir of the Institute— the only three-voice choir in the city of Tirana— sang the Anthem of the Flag.

In 1937-1938, ‘Festa e Gjyshes,’ an operetta defined in the manuscripts of J. Truja as an ‘Operetta with one act for Institutes and Colleges of Education,’ was developed (Tole & Truja, 2014, p. 124).

In March-April 1939, J. Filçe Truja prepared the ‘Albanian Women’s Artistic Festival,’ which was held in the ‘Gloria’ cinema hall. She served as the artistic leader, conductor, and director. In organizing the program, she included the girls and soloist professors of the Institute, such as soprano Marije Kraja, pianist Lola Aleksii, soprano Tefta Tashko, and pianist Tonin Guraziu, featuring popular songs titled ‘*Pleqëriste*,’ a cappella harmonized by J. Truja and interwoven with the poem ‘*Hanko Halla*’ by the poet Ali Asllani. The festival was very successful and received enthusiastic coverage in the press of the time (‘Drita,’ April 2, 1939).”

1940. Concert tour in Bari, Naples and Rome with the girls, with Marie Kraja, Jorgjia Truja and Lola Aleksii.

It is enough to single out the staging of a work of the stage genre, such as the operetta “*Iris*”, from the above programs, to understand that the teaching of music at the Nana Mbretneşe Women’s Institute was not only very advanced, but completely effective in terms of coping of the demands of the artistic life. This complex performance proved the complete musical artistic formation of the girls of the Institute, being at the same time a brave undertaking, since the students were not in a professional music school, and in addition, a fair imposition, melodious sounds and intonation precision were reflected (Diana, 1936).

All this intensive and dedicated work aimed to ensure a healthy tradition of musical education for future female teachers, but mostly it served as a cultural hearth that enlivened the artistic life, clearly evidencing the talents that would follow further studies in the arts.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the stage artistic experience gained within a few years by the students of the “Mother Queen” [Nana Mbretneshë], Institute, demonstrated the effectiveness of music education developed in the teaching process. At a time when Albania had not

yet managed to establish a tradition with a genuine professional orientation in music education, the training of young students to respond to the needs of the artistic life can be said to have somewhat fulfilled the known deficiencies in this regard. In addition, from the classrooms of the Nana Mbreteshë Institute, several future musicians and music teachers initiated their professional paths, such as Viktori Xhaçka, who pursued studies in singing in Italy, or pianists Zana Bogdo and Vasilika Petrela, who were among the first piano teachers in the professional music system established after World War II.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

The period following Independence, particularly after the 1930s, saw the emergence of new trends in two key areas: Firstly, artistic life transitioned towards a fully professionalized model. Secondly, there was a notable leap in the quality of performances. Albanian musical artistic life during this period was primarily organized through individual initiatives within the framework of artistic societies. Upon returning to their homeland, a constellation of talented musicians—graduates of prestigious Western European institutions, instrumentalists and lyrical singers who had gained recognition on prestigious foreign stages—became promoters of a more active musical cultural movement. This movement infused artistic life in the country with a new vibrancy, both in quantity and quality, fostering a climate that aligned with European professional standards. Numerous tours, often held on improvised stages, were organized as private initiatives across the country. These tours showcased a diverse repertoire, including interpretations of patriotic and civic Albanian songs, arias from world operatic masterpieces, and works by classical and romantic composers. Sopranos Marie Kraja (1911-1999), People's Artist; Tefta Tashko Koço (1910-1947), People's Artist; Gjyzepina Kosturi (1912-1985), Merited Artist; Jorgji Truja (1909-1994), People's Artist; and tenor Kristaq Antoniu (1907-1979), People's Artist, are considered

pioneers in establishing Albania's tradition of operatic lyric art. Their contributions are still celebrated, and they are revered figures in Albanian national culture. Pianists Lola Gjoka (1910-1985) and Tonin Guraziu (1908-1999) were the first soloists on the pianoforte, giving recital concerts that became major events of the time. Their roles were equally significant as concertmasters accompanying lyrical artists and later in the fields of piano and vocal pedagogy. It's essential to acknowledge the multifaceted roles played by Jorgji Truja, Lola Gjoka, Marie Kraja, and Tonin Guraziu in the activities of the Nana Mbreteshë Institute, which was dedicated to the emancipation of Albanian women. The "Mother Queen" Institute was founded in October 1933, along with general lessons, it offered solfège theory for two hours a week, taught by Jorgjia Filçe, and violin lessons for two hours, taught by Anny Marashi. These individuals contributed to a broader social transformation, challenging repressed consciousness and outdated mentalities, fostering a love for musical art, and ultimately empowering individuals through music despite the lack of standardized textbooks, teacher Filçe, drawing on her Western experience, developed the programs herself, carefully selecting and organizing materials to meet the specific needs and levels of the students. However, there were ambitious efforts to establish musical education in Albanian schools, a symphony orchestra, and theaters, which received state support.

This article particularly strived to help identify the first professional woman musician in Albania and also highlight the specific problems which initially affected the delayed appearance of woman teachers in recent years. In the Albanian education system, from the observed data, female singers who teach music attract the class audience with their voices, while also being successful as teachers. According to Carrie Leigh Page, and Dana Reason, a woman singer is acceptable because her body is an instrument, and making music is

an embodiment of her femininity. Stick an instrument in her hands or in front of her face, and it interrupts the impression of a woman as 'sexually available or maternally occupied.' According to Green, the role of composer (and, I would add, producer), the *dux femina facti*, the greatest challenge of all, because it places the woman in control and invites the audience to gaze upon the inner workings of her mind, disembodying the woman entirely (Page, 2018). In Albania women have been the founders of music education as well as for the creation of artistic education heritage to serve for the formation of young generation in schools as well as in the musical life of the country. The number of female music teachers who have contributed to the development of pre-professional and professional music education spans from the eight-year education system of that time to the university level. These were talented musicians who belonged to a generation filled with dreams and a passion for work, coming from Western European universities in the 1930s. Music teachers were involved not only in artistic life but also in the most important institutions of the country, starting from pre-professional music education to professional music education at the "Jordan Misja" Artistic School, the University of Arts, as well as in orchestras, choirs, and as soloists at the National Theater of Opera and Ballet. And precisely today, at the Artistic Lyceum and the Faculty of Music in Tirana, female music teachers make up a dominant number. These women immersed themselves in their musical careers with determination and dedication in Albanian schools and Albanian Institution. Through continued hard-work they developed impressive musical careers and carved out a position for professional women in music. The study results underscore how women helped to actively create the tradition of music education and artistic life in Albania between 1900 and 1950, playing key roles in developing a professionalized music scene that elevated performance quality. However, although the summary of these contributions is good, more critical reflection on what

these findings mean for contemporary forms of music education and cultural practices in Albania would be advantageous.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for Further Research

Hopefully, this study would help to start research of a bigger frame on the contribution of Women in Music Education in Albania, would serve as support by local and international researchers with the intent that it could be enhanced furthermore provide possibilities to shed light into many factors which acted as obstacles for its development but also those who enabled her permanence and enrichment. This paper address the historical contributions that women made to the field as a whole. In the future comparative music educators' studies of women from other Balkan countries in that period may also serve goal as socio-cultural impacts and inform current practices. The socio-cultural context of women in music education, including social norms and political movements that shaped the opportunities they experienced, should be found in curricula designed by educators. Influencing gender-sensitive teaching that acknowledges the contributions of women, and the creation of collaborative learning environments and mentorship programmes can motivate female musicians in the making. Furthermore, supporting community engagement initiatives and establishing accessible platforms for varied musical expressions can acknowledge woman's contributions to music. Engaging in comparative studies of women music educators across other Balkan countries can provide valuable insights that inspire innovative practices within Albanian music education. The study will be expanded in the future by comparing the role of women teachers of music education in the Balkans, mainly in Albania, Kosovo, Greece, and Serbia exploring the socio-cultural impacts of historical women educators on contemporary society through symposiums and discussions, fostering greater awareness.

Additionally, integrating an investigation of the intersections between music pedagogy and political/social movements into curricula can empower students to view music as a tool for activism. It is also crucial to implement gender-inclusive practices, advocate for equitable policies, and encourage research that links music education to broader social contexts. Women in Albania make up a large percentage of music teachers; published accounts of music education in Albanian-speaking countries should be enriched by the powerful contribution of women musicians in Albania as founders of pre-professional and professional music education. Finally, developing programs aimed at introducing young women and gender-diverse students to careers in music education can help cultivate a more inclusive and reflective educational environment. These recommendations collectively aim to nurture an educational landscape that honors the contributions of women and promotes gender diversity in music education. By doing so, we can promote further inquiry into the many overlapping fields between music pedagogy and social movements, as well as encourage policy recommendations.

### **Acknowledgment**

A special gratitude to the state Archive, National Library, who have gave me the right to use their archives, documentation and the interviewers who gave me the right to use their personal archives, books documentation and the photos.



## References

- Besa. (1935, July 2). Festimi i bukur shkollor [*The Beautiful School Celebration*], Besa Newspaper. Tirana, Albania.
- Besa. (1933, September 20). Besa Newspaper, Tirana, Albania .
- Berg, L. (2023). *Feminist ethnographies: Methodological reflections in gender research*. Umeå Centre for Gender Studies. Umeå University.
- Bihiku, Z. (1989). Nëntori (November) (Vol. 12). Tirana, Albania.
- Birge, E. B. (1928). *History of public school music in the United States*. Boston, MA: Oliver Ditson Company.
- Page, C. L. (2018, July 19). Playing like a girl: The problems with reception of women in music. *New Music Box*. <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/playing-like-a-girl-the-problems-with-reception-of-women-in-music/>
- Central State Archive Albania, 1939, Fund Institute “Mother Queen”, 387 file.8, pp.27.
- Central State Archive, Fund 387 “Mother Queen Institute” file.23, 5.
- Central State Archive, Fund Ministry of Education, Fund,195, file.12, 1938, pp.1.
- Central State Archive Albania, 1935, Fund “Mother Queen”, 387, File 17, pp.3.
- Central State Archive Albania, 1935, Fund “Mother Queen”, 387, File 17 pp.12.
- Central State Archive Albania, Fund 195 Ministry of Education, File 12 , pp. 1 .
- Certo, C. (1934). *Music and choral singing: Ordinary music and singing at the Royal Institute of Education “Vittoria Colonna,” Rome, Italy*. Librisaggi.
- Lune, H., & Berg, B. L. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Pearson.
- Diana. (1936, July 30). *Diana Newspaper*. Tirana, Albania.
- Gazeta e re, [The New Newspaper]. (1928, February 28). *Gazeta e re*, Tirana, Albania.
- Gogaj, I. (2001). Punëtorë të shquar të shkollës shqiptare, [*Distinguished Workers of Albanian School*]. Eurorilindja Publishing House.
- Howe, S. W. (2009). A Historical View of Woman in Music Education Careers. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 162-183.
- Interview with MS. Takuina Truja Adami (2020).
- Kalemi, S. Ll. (2001). *Maria Kraja Paluca*. Tirane: OMSCA-1.
- Lalaj, M. (2014). *Women’s Institute ‘Nana Mbreteshë’*. Tirana, Albania: Skenderbeg Books.
- Lici, E. (2021). *Albanian music pedagogy (1878-1945)*. Vlora, Albania: Triptik Press.
- Lici, E. (2024, May 24-25). *The development of music life in Albania in the Years (1900-1965) looking from the historical and educational perspective*. 40th International Conference on Multidisciplinary Studies, Brussels.
- Pendle, K. (2001). *Women & Music: A History*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Stringa, H. (2006). “Endrra dhe realitete”, [*Dreams and Realitie*].s. Tirana, Albania: Toena.
- Stringa, H. (2013). *Lola Gjoka: “Një jetë mbi tastierë” [A life on the piano]*. OMSCA 1.
- Tole, V., & Truja, T. (2014). “Muza e parë” *The First Muse*. Tirana, Albania: Albas.
- Tole, V. (2024). *Dhora Leka: The first composer*. Tirana.
- Wright, A., & Fleming, B. (2012). *The impact of women in music education: Critical approaches and perspectives*, Routledge.

## Web sites

**Web 1.** [https://upload.wikimedia.org/Jorgjia Filçe Truja\\_](https://upload.wikimedia.org/Jorgjia_Filçe_Truja_)

**Web 2.** [https://upload.wikimedia.org/Lola Gjoka](https://upload.wikimedia.org/Lola_Gjoka)

**Web 3.** [https://gazetavatra.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/marije\\_Kraja.jpg](https://gazetavatra.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/marije_Kraja.jpg)

## **Biodata of Author**



Lecturer Dr. **Eliona Lici** currently serves as lecturer for Music in Education and Special education, Department of Education, School of Humanities, University of Vlora “Ismail Qemali”, Vlora, Albania & University of Arts, Tirana, Albania. She has a doctoral degree (Music Education in Albania in first half of 20-th Century” She holds Master of Arts in Performace (Canto) from Faculty of Music. Lici teach in field in University of Arts Tirana (Albania) like external lecturer of applied music pedagogy, music in special education, development of music curricula. Her literary activities include the Academic textbook Monograph “Music Pedagogy in Albania (1878-1945)”. Dr. Lici was part of Scientific Committee of Conference organized by the Musicology and Cultural Heritage Students Association of the University of Pavia. For 2 Years Mrs. Lici was for two years National Coordinator of Albania in European Association for Music in Schools. Besides she is interested in the European Integration through Music Cultures and Education Projects. Dr Lici also has been the organizer of varius events artistic projects in education and special education. Actually, is trainer of Continuing professional development in Music education Creativity for music teacher, Primary, Pre-primary and Special educators and trainer of the Module “Music teaching for children with special needs” for teachers in Music Schools and PROJECT COORDINATOR of research Project founded by AKKSHI (NASRI) with theme “The study of music education and its impact in the field of special education”.

**Affiliation:** Department of Education (Lecture of Music Pedagogy), Faculty of Humanities, University “Ismail Qemali” of Vlorë, Vlorë, Albania. Department of Music Studies, University of Arts Faculty of Music, Tirana, Albania.

**Email:** [eliona.lici@univlora.edu.al](mailto:eliona.lici@univlora.edu.al)

**ORCID:** 0000-0001-5294-2487

**Google Scholar:** <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=Qh4TdBmy-vEC&hl=en>

**Researchgate:** <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Eliona-Lici>

**AcademiaEdu:** <https://independent.academia.edu/ELici>