During the last two decades of the twentieth century there has been an increasing interest in the scholarly evaluation of women in music. The issues are varied and complex, and studies ranging from psychological biographies of well-known women musicians—such as Nancy Reich’s biography of Clara Schumann—to cross-cultural studies of women in music such as Ellen Koskoff’s recent book, *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, have resulted. Historically, women in most aspects of music have been ignored and neglected. As a result there is a noticeable lack of information on and understanding of the musical history of women.

This dissertation is an attempt to illuminate the life of a woman whose name, though well-known to aficionados of the harpsichord, is little-known or understood as a pioneering female musician. An effort is made to discover the extent of Wanda Landowska’s role in the revival of the harpsichord and to analyze the course of events that enabled her to contribute to this revival at a time when women were not encouraged to be music professionals. To demonstrate the unique circumstances and achievements of Landowska’s life I have cited the lives of other musical women, women who were perhaps equally talented and ambitious but were not afforded the opportunities or respect that Landowska repeatedly received and earned. By virtue of the fact that they did not succeed, their names are not known. I also discuss briefly the lives of some women who did succeed in music. To this, I add commentary from authors and critics of the period regarding what they consider the “proper” role for women in music.

In the course of the study, I bring to light several of Landowska’s previously unknown compositions and list the scholarly writings that Landowska contributed to the field of musicology. I also discuss her teaching career and the lives of several of her most important students. I then outline the course of her recording career and relate new facts regarding its unfolding at the end of her life. Throughout, I chronicle highlights of the history of the revival of the harpsichord, beginning in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and weave through the fabric the progression of events that led to Landowska’s recognition as the foremost harpsichordist of her time. This recognition is demonstrated with newspaper reviews and periodical articles as well as the testimony of her friends and admirers from around the world over a sixty year period.
The conclusion summarizes my position regarding Landowska’s contribution to the revival of the harpsichord as a performing instrument. There is also a summary of my reasons why the gender issue did not seem to have a negative effect on her. Finally, I list her specific contributions to the revival of the harpsichord and to early music in general, and acknowledge her importance as a role model for aspiring musical pioneers.