

LISTEN TO THE GIRLS

by Angelique Poteat

I. We

*We are redheads, brunettes, nerd girls and geeks.
We are adopted, middle children, athletes in contact sports,
or avidly avoiding sports.
We enjoy film, orchestra, anime, art history, dance, math, fashion, and science.*

*We are women: a cultural minority,
but a world equality!*

II. Admirable Women

*Who are the women who shine out to me?
Who are the women who influence the woman I might want to be?
Women who are strong, kind, smart and honest;
who excel and show confidence;
who inspire and change!
Women who fearlessly speak their minds
and stand up for their beliefs;
who let nothing block the way of pursuing their dreams.
Women who are brave and selfless, like mothers and grandmothers;
women who are unusual and defy stereotypes;
I want to be myself.*

III. Doubts

*If I doubt myself, I will most certainly fail.
But if we never failed, we would never learn from our mistakes.
I love myself, most of the time.*

IV. Real Life

*Has anyone reached out to me?
I don't want to miss anything.*

*Online I am happy, I can see the world, swim in the flow of information.
My friends are all there.
So many friends! Look at their pictures!
It's so easy to see what they do, and to stay in touch.
I can even connect with people I don't know in Real Life.*

*I hope my friends like what I post.
I want to be worthy of their time.
Online I can show the Real Me, free from judgement.
Or can I?
If I say it online, does it still count?
I didn't say it in Real Life*

*My friends have so many pictures with other friends,
only pictures with other friends!
I wish I had more time.
Where did it go?*

*No time to be outside, to spend with my family.
Sometimes I feel more alone,
unsatisfied with Real Life.*

*My friends have too many pictures with other friends!
Maybe I should leave out some parts of my life if I want to be cool,
or to fit in with what is right.
No one will mind if I touch up a few photos of the Real Me.
After all, it's not Real Life!*

V. Perfect

*There is pressure, so much pressure to succeed.
In a competitive world,
driven by the need to compare lives, grades, and money,
value is placed on perfection.
But what is perfection?
Expectations from others,
from teachers, friends, media, fathers, and mothers?
Look this way, act this way, feel this way...*

*Who are we supposed to be?
Are we supposed to be attractive, or smart?
Can't we be both?
Why won't people take us seriously?*

*We are not a stereotype!
We are not objects!
We will work even harder to make people accept us for who we are.
Teenage girls need to be told that they are good enough.
Be aware!*

*We are beautiful, intelligent, capable and powerful;
just as good as anyone else, male or female;
perfectly us!*

Program Notes

As the world becomes a more global place, it is increasingly easier to be made aware of issues that influence various parts of society, even on a local scale. An issue that touches a personal note is the representation of young women in media today. We see these conflicting veins that advocate for the overly "idealized", or conversely the "au naturale", but this still comes to the point that our culture seeks to identify how young women should look and feel, certainly more so than young men. I have my own opinions, but I felt it was important to get a perspective on these occurrences from a sampling of young women in my community, Seattle. After writing a questionnaire to prompt open answers and presenting this to a large number of young women, ages 11-18, I was left with an overwhelming amount of anonymous text that was incredibly

insightful and inspiring. The text for this piece comes after many phases of sorting, consolidating, and rewording the questionnaire answers, as well as adding my own words to the ensemble.

The first movement is an introduction to our young heroines. Declamatory in nature and swarming with busyness, it gives a taste of the diversity of backgrounds that interest young women today. The opening four notes in the orchestral tutti are a sort of “strength” motive that recurs throughout the work. The contrasting second movement is dreamier, imagining traits that inspire the girls. The third movement becomes more reserved and conflicted. Venturing toward broadly beautiful gestures, the seed of doubt, represented by the celesta, keeps drawing the music back to a restrained state. This moves without pause into the mechanical fourth movement, featuring an ostinato trumpet figure throughout. A “real life” motive, derived from the earlier “strength motive” is pitted against a cheeky “stereotype” motive played only instrumentally until the last refrain when the sung Real Life blurs into stereotype. Finally, the fifth movement begins in a simmering fashion, eventually exploding at the question of what Perfection actually is. This eventually transitions to a conclusive declaration of strength.