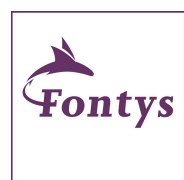


THE FEMINIST AGENDA IN JAZZ

How did the feminist agenda in jazz music evolve between the 1950's and now?



Evelien Slegers
Fontys Academy of the Arts



Introduction

Picture yourself as a jazz musician in search of a new standard to practice. You leaf through *The Real Book*, a collection of hundreds of the most well known and influential jazz tunes. You encounter compositions by legends such as Duke Ellington, Herbie Hancock, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane. Yet, as you peruse its almost 400 selections, a disconcerting realization dawns: only one out of all these jazz standards bears the signature of a woman (Hutchinson, 2022).

When looking and learning about the history of jazz music, the absence of information about female key figures is very striking. The few female musicians that are discussed in jazz history and its literature are all vocalists like Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. Almost never will you come across a female composer or instrumentalist, even though there definitely were gifted women who were performing and writing music and also made significant contributions to the music industry. So why don't we know their names? Were they just not taken seriously? Or is it because of the traditional gender roles that were prevailing in the times those tunes were written? And why is it that even nowadays, when people are much more aware, still jazz music is a male dominated world? These questions are the starting point that led to the main question of this research paper;

How did the Feminist Agenda in Jazz music evolve between the 1950's and now?

To answer this question, the following sub questions will be discussed:

- Why do female jazz musicians play a less significant role in jazz history compared to male musicians?
- What are examples of influential female jazz musicians between 1950 and 2000?
- What does the feminist agenda look like now (between 2014 and 2024)?
- What will the future of feminism in jazz look like?

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Why do female jazz musicians play a less significant role in jazz history compared to male musicians?

Some people might argue that women are just naturally less suited to the particular demands of jazz and improvisation, compared to men. There are a lot of studies done that research the differences in male and female brains during musical activities, and while there were indeed distinct differences in how male and female brains are organized and function during musical tasks, none of the studies found any differences in behavioral performance or improvising skills between male and females. This indicates that both genders perform equally well in tasks, even though their brains may work differently (Healey, 2022).

So, with that out of the way, there must be another reason for this unequal representation in jazz music. It is hard to determine precisely what caused this, because there are multiple aspects that simultaneously occurred that may or may not have led to this inequality.

Let's start by looking at some political and social-cultural events that occurred between the fifties and the seventies, to show the environment that female musicians had to navigate through.

In the fifties, after World War II, the baby boom brought hope for the future, but it also pushed women back into traditional roles as caregivers and homemakers. Despite increasing employment rates for married women in the fifties, they faced discrimination in pay and societal pressure to prioritize domestic duties over career fulfillment. Additionally, the decline of big bands and the highly competitive job market in the fifties limited opportunities for female jazz musicians (Placksin, 1982).

The conservatism of the fifties gave way to social and political upheaval in the sixties, prompting demands for equality from women and other minorities. These protests led to some progressive changes, including the passage of civil rights legislation in 1964, which prohibited employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, and sex.

In music, genres like folk, protest music, soul, and Beatlemania emerged, blurring the boundaries between music, politics, and youth culture. Zooming in on the jazz scene, also a lot was happening. Musicians reacted to the tragedies and violence occurring at the times. For instance, Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra addressed those issues in a very strong and direct way with music partially composed by female composer Carla Bley.

Besides the political aspects, also the music itself started undergoing radical changes. Jazz musicians were exploring new sounds, textures, technical resources and feelings, resulting in new subgenres such as free jazz and fusion. Despite - and some argue because of - these changes, the jazz business declined in the sixties, especially for women. However, this period also drew attention to the challenges women faced, leading to the establishment of support networks in the seventies, reminiscent of early female jazz pioneers. This network provided a platform for women to learn to navigate through these challenges and fostered greater opportunities for their participation and recognition (Placksin, 1982).

Other than social-political events, there are also other aspects that may have caused the imbalance between men and women in jazz. One of them is the predominance of men in shaping the direction and methods within the realm of music. Jazz books and methods were

often authored by men. Also, photographers at concerts and critics were most of the time male, exerting influence over the portrayal of women (Koskoff, 1987).

Besides that, women lacked opportunities to learn from established musicians. According to Alfred Willener (1994), many of the great male players and teachers would just not take the time to train female students. Also, in the mid-1900's, jazz music was not taught in schools and if it was, the members of the college jazz bands often were all male.

Willener (1994) stated in one of his books that female performers are sexualised when they enter the male-dominated jazz arena. Essentially, it was not their musical talent and skills but their looks that determined the perceived quality of their performance. To pursue a career in music, women frequently adhered to this stereotype, reinforcing the societal norms where a woman's musical ability was evaluated based on her appearance. The importance placed on the physical appearance of women during performances was merely one element that contributed to the exclusion of numerous women from jazz (Chaikan, 2011).

Lewis Erenberg published a book called *Swingin the Dream* in 1998 in which he quoted a 1940's *Down Beat* magazine: *'women could either be "good girls" or "play like men". The former forced them to emphasize looks over musical ability; the latter used their unexpected musical talent to nullify their sexuality.'* In his book Erenberg also interviews women in the jazz field. Multiple of the interviewees mentioned being told they were 'like one of the guys', when they got along with other band members. This suggests that being a woman and having an equal representation in jazz groups are incompatible (McAndrew & Widdop, 2021).

Another explanation for the inequality could be that jazz is primarily instrumental music, which places women at a disadvantage because of gender-stereotyping of instruments. Backhanded compliments like "You play good, for a girl." are very commonly received by female instrumentalists, according to a panel discussion led by six players from SHEroes. A significant part of the panel also noted that they had experienced bullying and harassment for their choice of instrument (Lorge, 2018). Women were - and still are - encouraged to choose instruments like piano or vocals, instead of instruments that are associated with masculinity like trumpet or drums (Pendle, 2001). According to a study by Abeles and Porter (1978) this gender-stereotyping of instruments has existed for a long time. The study concluded that gender-stereotyping of instruments by parents and teachers has a big influence on children, particularly on those aged between eight and twelve years old. Those children will most likely have a gendered view of instruments throughout their lives if they have experienced gender-stereotyping by their caregivers or teachers.

A survey conducted in a psychology class in 1957, involving 103 women and 86 men, examined how societal expectations of gender roles impact women's aspirations, accomplishments, and self-perception. This brings us to the last reason that may have caused the lack of female representation in jazz music. One of the outcomes of the survey showed that both the men and women in the survey assigned performing and composing jazz music as 'masculine', compared to things that they associated with femininity like reading, ballet, or listening to classical music. When tasked with ranking eight musical activities based on femininity, both men and women perceived jazz as the least feminine, ranking 'listening to it' seventh and 'performing it' eighth. In

terms of musical preferences, men ranked 'listening to jazz' first and 'performing it third', while women ranked 'listening to it' second and 'performing it' eighth. So these women definitely expressed their interest in jazz, but it's evident that active involvement in the music remained a distant prospect for them (Placksin, 1982).

What are examples of influential female jazz musicians between 1950 and 2000?

Influential female jazz musicians and composers have always been around, even in as early as the twenties. This paper focuses on the period between the 1950's until now, so in this chapter some female key figures that made significant contributions to jazz music between the 50's and the 00's will be discussed.

Mary Lou Williams

Starting off with the American Mary Lou Williams, who was already a successful jazz composer in as early as the twenties, but she had a career that lasted all the way until the late seventies. She wrote and arranged hundreds of pieces for different musicians like Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and was a friend and teacher to Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker and many more (Pendle, 2001). Even though she is not often mentioned as one, she was one of the key innovators of bebop. Mary Lou Williams was even using the bebop language years before Gillespie, Parker, and Monk, who are considered to be the founding fathers of the genre (Chaikan, 2013).

Mary Osborne

Also American Guitarist Mary Osborne had a long career, spanning over five decades. She had a significant impact on jazz in the 1940's and 50's, because of her swinging style. With that style she earned validation as one of the early innovators of the genres rhythm and blues and rock and roll music. Osborne headlined performances with Dizzy Gillespie, Art Tatum, Coleman Hawkins and Thelonious Monk, to reviews and audiences that praised her specifically (Vail, Ken, 2003).

Terry Pollard

The following link contains a 1956 performance, that some sources state to be the first national TV performance of a female African American musician performing:

<https://youtu.be/T8z6fwg4ZSE>

The woman was Terry Pollard, a pianist and vibraphonist active in the Detroit jazz scene of the 1940s and 1950s. She is known as a major player who was inexplicably overlooked (Chell, 2007). She was discovered by Terry Gibbs in 1952, with whom she toured with for eight years and recorded five albums with. Pollard performed with legends like John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Chet Baker, Nat King Cole, Dinah Washington, Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald (Akers, 2024).

While her piano playing was highly praised by many, her skill on the vibraphone was particularly influential. Her swinging bebop style and technique influenced other vibraphonists and added a unique dimension to the jazz ensembles she played with. As an African-American woman, Pollard's success helped pave the way for future generations of women in jazz.

Carla Bley

The Canadian Carla Bley is an iconic figure in the realm of jazz music. From her early beginnings tinkering on the piano to her groundbreaking compositions and arrangements, Bley's career spans over six decades, leaving an indelible mark on the genre.

Bley's compositions are characterized by their innovation, blending elements of jazz, avant-garde, and classical music into a distinctive and captivating style.

Throughout her career, Bley has collaborated with many esteemed musicians, including her former husband, pianist Paul Bley, vibraphonist Gary Burton, and bassist Charlie Haden. These collaborations have resulted in a rich tapestry of albums that showcase her versatility and mastery as both a composer and performer. Over the years, Bley has garnered widespread recognition and numerous awards for her contributions to jazz music, including accolades such as the NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship and the Danish Jazzpar Prize. Her enduring impact continues to inspire generations of musicians and listeners alike, ensuring her place as one of the most influential figures in the history of jazz (Whittaker, 2023).

Melba Liston

Melba Liston was the first female trombone player in the 40's and 50's to play in big bands that weren't specifically all-female groups. This accomplishment is remarkable given the era's racial and gender barriers (Taylor, 2022).

Liston worked with many jazz legends, including Dizzy Gillespie, Quincy Jones, Charles Mingus, and Randy Weston, both as a performer and an arranger. Her arrangements were notable for their complexity, blending innovative harmonies with traditional jazz elements. She played in Gillespie's big band in the 1940s and 1950s, and later collaborated extensively with Weston, contributing to some of his most acclaimed recordings (Nashville Jazz Workshop, n.d.)

Liston's style can be characterized by a blend of bebop and post-bop, with a strong command of big band and modern jazz idioms. She was very good in combining traditional jazz elements with innovative, modern ideas and her arrangements often included layered textures and polyrhythms (Louise, 2018)

Alice Coltrane

Alice Coltrane (1937-2007) was a highly influential jazz pianist, harpist, and composer from North-America who emerged as a significant figure in the 1960s jazz scene. She was an accomplished musician who initially played with Terry Gibbs before marrying John Coltrane in 1965. After her husband's death, she continued to develop her own musical voice.

Alice Coltrane's contributions to jazz are notable for her incorporation of Eastern spiritual influences and the use of the harp, an unusual instrument in jazz. Her albums from the late 1960s and early 1970s, such as "A Monastic Trio" and "Journey in Satchidananda", are celebrated for their innovative blend of modal jazz, Indian classical music, and spiritual themes. These works helped to expand the boundaries of jazz and introduced new textures and ideas to the genre (Lorge, 2023).

Alice Coltrane's legacy is marked by her profound impact on the spiritual and experimental dimensions of jazz, influencing countless musicians with her unique approach and visionary compositions. (Weyhrich, 2021).

Norma Winstone

Norma Winstone, born in London in 1941, is a celebrated British jazz vocalist known for her unique approach to improvisation and interpretation. She began her career in the 1960s, gaining recognition for her collaboration with the influential British jazz group, the Michael Garrick Sextet. Winstone's impact on the jazz world stems from her innovative approach to vocal improvisation, blending elements of jazz, folk, and avant-garde music. Her ethereal voice made her known as one of the most distinctive vocalists in contemporary jazz.

Throughout her career, Winstone has collaborated with renowned musicians such as Kenny Wheeler, John Taylor, and Ralph Towner, contributing to a rich and diverse body of work. She has released numerous albums as a leader and has been featured on recordings by other artists, showcasing her versatility and adaptability across various musical contexts (ECM Records, 2024). Her enduring legacy lies in her ability to push the boundaries of vocal jazz while maintaining a deep respect for its traditions (Matrix Music, z.d.).

Irène Schweizer

Born in Switzerland in 1941, Irene Schweizer was a key figure in European jazz, particularly renowned for her pioneering work in avant-garde and free jazz. Schweizer's impact on the jazz landscape was profound, as she played a crucial role in shaping and defining European free jazz. Her fearless and inventive approach to improvisation has left an indelible mark on the genre, influencing musicians worldwide.

Besides her musical influence, she also was a committed activist for the equality of women in art and society. She made a strong case for the artistic and economic autonomy of female artists and stood up against gender discrimination, origin and sexual orientation (Schray, 2021).

Throughout her extensive career, Schweizer has collaborated with many avant-garde jazz icons, including Evan Parker and Han Bennink (Landolt & Intakt Records, 2021).

Toshiko Akiyoshi

Toshiko Akiyoshi is a Japanese-American pianist, composer, and bandleader who made significant contributions to jazz from the 1950s onward, with her impact being particularly notable in the 1980s. Akiyoshi was known for her big band arrangements that fused traditional Japanese music with jazz. Her work with the Toshiko Akiyoshi – Lew Tabackin Big Band during the 1980s received multiple awards. Akiyoshi was also the first woman to win DownBeat magazine's Best Arranger and Composer awards (Toshikoakiyoshi.com, n.d.).

All-female groups

Lastly, there were also a lot of all-female bands, especially between the forties and sixties, for instance The International Sweethearts of Rhythm. This all-women group was one of the most famous big bands during the 50's (Tucker, 1999). They also set the stage for a lot of other

all-women bands, such as the Ingenues and The Prairie View Coads, who were drawing inspiration out of the Sweethearts (McGee, 2008). A few other all-female jazz bands emerged around the same time the civil rights movements in the 50's and 60's occurred, like Maiden Voyage. They were a 17-piece band that earned the respect of many, including Leonard Feather who stated: "...*not just the best orchestra of its sex, but one of the most rewarding bands on the present scene*" ("Maiden Voyage with Ann Patterson", n.d.). Ann Patterson, and Peggy Gilbert, leader and members of Maiden Voyage were able to convince the musicians' union to remove sexist language from contracts and they made them review their sexist policies (Pool, 2008).

Even though they offered a safe space for women to play great music, away from male dominance, all-female bands also led to further isolation, by accentuating its members' femininity, instead of their musical skills (Koskoff, 1987).

What does the feminist agenda in jazz look like now (between 2014 and 2024)?

Today, the inequality between men and women (and other minorities, such as non-binary and transgender people) in jazz is still present. This chapter discusses the current jazz landscape and some statistics and studies that show the still existing disbalance. Besides that, initiatives and projects that help tackle the imbalance, and some examples of feminism in music will be discussed too.

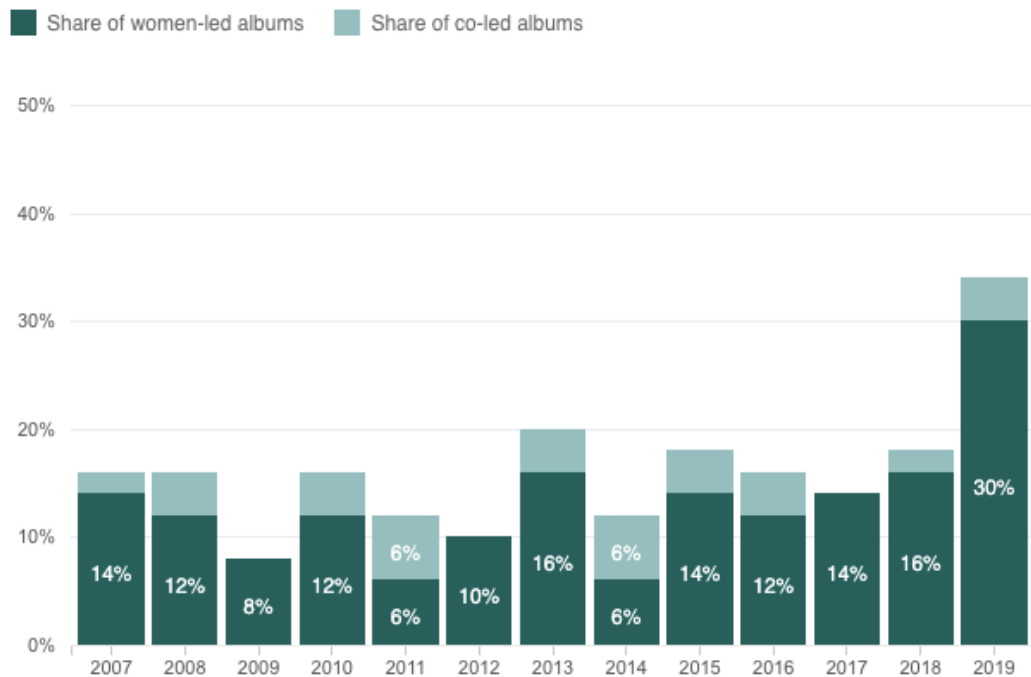
The current jazz landscape

To start off with some numbers; A poll of Australian and US programs showed that the number of female applicants in jazz academy programs was way lower than the number of male applicants, and it seems that this is a finding that specifically applies to jazz programs. In a study from a university in the United States, McKeage (2014) found that in the overall total of music education majors, women represented 60% of its students. But when zoomed in on jazz, only 20% of the participants were female. Women are well represented among music students overall, but they just participate in jazz programs at much lower rates. From these findings, it seems like jazz as a genre might have its own gender balance problems.

Numerous concerning statistics highlight the disparity of women in jazz nowadays, particularly as instrumentalists. A 2019 study in the UK revealed that women made up just 19% of jazz artist rosters and 26% of solo artists, but only 8% in groups (Hutchinson, 2022).

NPR Music and independent reporters examined the NPR Jazz Critics Poll between 2007 and 2019. They found that from 2007 to 2019, the percentage of women-led projects in the top ten of the poll has fluctuated between 0% and 50%, with no consistent upward trend. Over the poll's lifetime, women-led projects in the top 50 poll ranged from 8% to 20%, until a notable rise to 34% in 2019, possibly influenced by #MeToo and a strong year for women's recordings.

Despite this higher percentage in 2019, the overall participation of women in jazz remains low. The total number of projects led by women in the poll between 2017 and 2019 was between 18% and 22%. They also found that a few women consistently appear in the poll (persistent bias), suggesting that a broad acceptance or equal participation of women in jazz is not yet reached, because it only repeats the recognition of some exceptional female talents (Pellegrinelli, 2021).



(Top 50 albums poll. source: NPR Music Jazz Critics Poll)

Regarding recording music, a clear and consistent gap can be seen between the number of records made by male and female musicians. Even when taking into account training, instrument choice and period of birth, women face structural limitations in getting recorded. According to McAndrew and Widdop (2021), this is because male musicians tend to be selected to record in preference to female musicians, and because of the fact that female musicians overall have shorter careers.

Also in today's jazz audiences, a clear inequality can be seen. A survey from the American government showed that more men reported attending jazz concerts than women. This gap was smaller in other genres, such as rock or classical music. Therefore, female jazz musicians primarily face audiences that are male dominated, and rely on those male audiences to buy their music too (McAndrew & Widdop, 2021).

Finally, McAndrew's and Widdop's research (2021) showed that both male and female musicians are more likely to play with men than women. This shows that even though there are and have been celebrated female-led and female-only bands, women still depend on men for their musical careers.

On the other hand, there are also some notable improvements for women in jazz, especially in the last decade. According to Miller (2022). In 2012, women made up roughly 9% of jazz musicians, while in 2021, that number had increased up to almost 27%. These statistics don't suggest that the gender imbalance has been solved, but they do show that the jazz community is slowly improving its acceptance around female musicians (Jazz Empowers, z.d.).

Despite there clearly still being a disbalance today, since the 1990's, more and more people have become vocal advocates for more equality in the jazz world. Especially since the #MeToo movement, there has been a shift in consciousness. The #MeToo movement initially emerged in 2017 to provide acknowledge and support women who had faced sexual harassment or assault. It has since evolved into a global campaign advocating for justice and equity for all women. With the rise of the #MeToo movement, women have increasingly spoken out for equal treatment. A founding member of DIVA, named Sherrie Maricle, mentioned that if she had been part of the #MeToo generation, she likely would have been more vocal, as she often ignored harassing comments directed at her. The #MeToo movement has empowered women with a stronger voice, leading many to recognize that gender discrimination and degrading comments are unacceptable and should not be overlooked (van Vleet, 2021).

Initiatives and projects

To challenge the inequality between men and women in jazz, different initiatives and programs have been founded, as well as musicians integrating feminism into their music.

Blind auditions

Never have had a single full-time female member, in 2016, the Lincoln Center Jazz orchestra decided to start doing blind auditions. Jennifer Reisch, Legal Director of Equal Rights Advocates, states that this was an important and historic step towards increasing women's representation in jazz. According to her, the implementation of new selection procedures are super effective to bypass gender bias. The concept of blind auditions actually started after classical orchestras saw a 25 to 46 percent increase in likelihood that a woman would be hired when blind auditioning, compared to when they applied through regular auditions (Equal Rights Advocates, The Liu Law Firm P.C., Outten & Golden LLP, 2018).

Women in Jazz Organization (WIJO)

Saxophonist Roxy Cross founded the Women in Jazz Organization in 2017. It addresses issues of discrimination, harassment, unequal opportunities, and underrepresentation faced by women and non-binary individuals in jazz. The organization seeks to create a more inclusive and equitable jazz community, empowering everyone to contribute equally to the art form, thus enhancing its richness, diversity, and success. WIJO provides mentorship, organizes concerts, maintains an active social media presence, and participates in events such as the 2018 NYC Women's March (WIJO, n.d.).

Geri Allen Jazz Camp

Following the passing of pianist, composer, and educator Geri Allen, Regina Carter took on the role of director at the Geri Allen Jazz Camp, which was formerly known as the New Jersey Performing Arts Center All-Female Jazz Camp. The camp offers a one-week intensive camp to provide young women with a safe environment to refine their jazz skills, boost their confidence, and build a community with other aspiring female or non-binary performers. The camp includes various workshops throughout the week, such as the Sister to Sister talk, where students can discuss uncomfortable or frightening experiences they have encountered (van Vleet, 2021)

Terri Lyne Carrington

Drummer, composer and educator Terri Lyne actively promotes gender equality within the jazz community. Through various initiatives, she works to create more inclusive environments and opportunities for women and non-binary people in jazz. For instance, Carrington Founded the Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice. This institute at the Berklee College of Music addresses gender inequities in the jazz world and provides a platform for female and non-binary musicians to receive mentorship, education, and performance opportunities.

In 2022, together with Berklee College of Music, she published a book called 'New Standards', containing 101 lead sheets of music by female composers, giving an alternative for the 'Real Book'. The pieces in the book cover nearly a century of music, ranging from Lil Hardin Armstrong's 1922 compositions to songs by recent institute graduates from 2021. The collection features compositions from a diverse array of jazz legends, emerging talents, and overlooked artists, including Mary Lou Williams, Alice Coltrane, Esperanza Spalding, Geri Allen, Maria Schneider, Dorothy Ashby, Nubya Garcia, Nicole Mitchell, among many others. In conjunction with this book, Carrington released the album 'New Standards vol. 1', in which she recorded a few of the pieces from the book. Her goal is to record every one of the 101 tunes the book covers (Hutchinson, 2022).

Feminism integrated in jazz music

Esperanza Spalding - Girl Talk

In these video's the standard 'Girl Talk', composed by Neal Hefti, is performed by Esperanza Spalding. The lyrics of the song are written by Bobby Troup, a female jazz pianist, singer and songwriter. The words are in itself very chauvinistic, but bassist and vocalist Esperanza Spalding made a feminist interpretation out of them, by not even changing the words of the song, but just in the way she performs it together with pianist Fred Hersch. The two video's show similar ways of her feminist interpretation.

The first link leads to a performance from last year at the North Sea Jazz Festival, the second to a performance at Jazz at the Cabaret series from The Cabaret in Pennsylvania.

In each of the performances, spalding approaches the lyrics of the song as a tool for women to communicate about very important matters, without men understanding. By appearing to be talking about something stereotypical girly, like make-up or social media, men would not be intimidated by their conversation and stop listening to the 'girl talk'. But according to Spalding, the women having the girl talk, are actually talking about big problems in the world and plotting their plan for equal rights, veiling it in "a cloak of metaphor". It is a very humoristic way of feminism, but still touches some very strong subjects.

<https://youtu.be/vIziK-VzhDI?feature=shared>

<https://youtu.be/wMNPaQL1RbE?feature=shared>

Cecile McLorin Salvant - Mélusine

Jazz vocalist Cecile McLorin Salvant made an entire album in 2023 titled Mélusine that explores feminism through history and myth. Each song on the album tells a feminist reinterpretation of the European folkloric legend of Mélusine. The tale is often seen as a symbol of the mysterious

and dual nature of women. The legend explores the enigmatic nature of female power, the dynamics of trust between partners, and the consequences of violating boundaries. Salvant reinterprets the story by incorporating its European origins alongside similar tales from other cultures, such as the Haitian voodoo narrative of Damballah and the spirit Ayida-Wedo. The album is “an ode to solitude, and self-reliance and being adaptable” according to Salvant herself.

https://youtu.be/hhXwTzj3FaY?list=OLAK5uy_IGUhKi_dYyV87jAMMeMLejcwKQUhOr6jl

What will the future of feminism in jazz look like?

Of course, only time can tell what the future will really look like, but the best way to predict the future is by looking at the past. Taking into account what has been stated in this paper before, some optional solutions for shrinking the gender-gap are being discussed in this chapter.

As stated in the before, jazz audiences are predominantly male and on the old side, compared to other genres, like for instance classical music or hip-hop. For this reason, this older, male group is also the main funding source for concerts, festivals and recordings. Their musical preferences matter, so bookers and programmers have to take their taste into account. Because of this, the assumptions about what the audience wants tends to portray the male-dominated world of jazz. The role of the audience is therefore very important in tackling these assumptions. By supporting and investing in young, female jazz musicians, audiences could change the inequality in jazz greatly. So the challenge for a more equal and progressive jazz world is for those with agency (audiences, but also others with power, like producers) to change what they want. (McAndrew & Widdop, 2021)

To do this, a change in the way the media addresses jazz can help. Movies like 'La La Land' and Whiplash, present jazz as existing in an almost entirely masculine realm. In the entire movie 'La La Land' all the jazz instrumentalists are male, with only one exception. As so in Whiplash, only two of the many musicians in the movie are female, with one of them being sexualised by the director in a scene (Koltz, 2017).

In female sports teams, a similar thing can be seen. According to a research conducted in 2023 by WOMEN Inc., only 16 percent of photographs of women in sports are action photos. They are mostly portrayed hugging, smiling or just standing still, in contrast to male sporters, who are portrayed with action photographs 56 percent of the time. Also in the titles of female soccer players their sex is emphasized in 97 percent of the cases, while journalists don't reference male sporters as being male. Even though these examples seem far away from jazz music, they are more closely related than one might think. The portrayal of female musicians in media is similar, focusing on their appearance rather than their talent and expressive performance. Female artists are frequently depicted as beautiful and smiling, and the way they look on stage is something that is often something that is talked about, rather than their musical skills. This contrasts sharply with the more diverse and expressive images of their male counterparts, who are more often shown sweating, with intense facial expressions (Borrett, 2021).

So, changing the way jazz is portrayed in the media, for instance in promotional posters, photographs, social media and movies, may lead to a shift in the gender-bias of the public.

The initiative of blind auditions which was discussed earlier in this paper, could also be implemented more, as it turns out to be a great unbiased way of selecting applicants according to the previously mentioned sources. In the classical world, this initiative is used way more often than in jazz contexts, and as stated before, the classical music world has a more equal divide in male and female musicians in it. Of course, the blind auditions are not the only reason for that, but according Jennifer Reisch (2018), it has made a lot of impact on the way musicians are being selected. If these blind auditions were to be integrated more in jazz contexts, it could have a great impact too.

Conclusion

The journey towards gender equality in jazz has made notable progress over the past decade, yet significant challenges remain. The percentage of women in jazz rose to nearly 27% in 2021, up from 9% in 2012, reflecting a growing acknowledgment of their contributions. However, female representation among jazz instrumentalists is still very low, with only about 5% being women.

Historically, jazz has been dominated by men, and women faced cultural barriers that limited their participation, due to things like gender-stereotyping around instruments, sexualisation and social-political events. Despite these obstacles, initiatives founded to promote women in jazz have emerged, providing platforms for skill development and professional growth. These initiatives and projects offer valuable opportunities for women to connect, learn, and inspire each other. Organizations dedicated to empowering women are helping to break down long standing barriers and ensure that women's contributions are recognized. However, more work is needed to address biases and create a level playing field for all musicians.

In conclusion, while there has been progress in increasing the representation of women in jazz, the journey toward true equality continues. Sustained efforts to support female musicians and promote inclusivity are essential for the genre's future. By embracing diversity, and changing the portrayal of jazz in the media, jazz audiences can benefit from a richer tapestry of talent, celebrating the contributions of both women and men equally. The ongoing commitment to gender equality will ensure that jazz continues to grow and thrive, representing all its artists.

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