

The history of women instrumentalists in jazz

Karen van Schaik (B2)

Index

Introduction	2
Prominent female instrumentalists in jazz before 1960	3
Lil Hardin (1898-1971)	3
Musical training	3
Career in music	3
Compositions	5
Childhood and musical training	5
Mary Lou Williams (1910 - 1981)	5
Childhood and musical training	5
Musical career	6
Success as a composer-arranger	7
Mary Lou Williams' role in the emergence of bebop	7
Retreat from music	8
Comeback and conversion to Roman Catholicism	8
Melba Liston (1926 - 1999)	9
Musical training	9
Musical career	9
Lesser-known female instrumentalists before the 1960's and 1970's	12
A Great Day In Harlem	12
Gender association in music	14
More female instrumentalists active before the 60s	15
Trumpet players	15
Saxophone players	17
Bass players	17
All-woman bands and orchestras	17
The position of female jazz musicians throughout the history of jazz	18
Women in jazz today	19
Conclusion	20
Epilogue	21
References	22

Introduction

As a female jazz saxophone player, student at the “Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles” and programmer for a jazz bar, I started to wonder why there are so few female instrumentalists in the jazz scene. The history of jazz in books and also as taught in schools barely mentions any female instrumentalists. Did they never exist, or are we missing out on them? And why are most women in jazz singers? And why are those few female instrumentalists in the history of jazz mostly piano players? Which female jazz musicians can be my examples?

Of course I can and I do learn from the great male players that have paved the road of jazz, and from the ones that are giving direction to the development of the music nowadays. But nevertheless, I would love to find out more about some great female players from the past and present - about their lives, their music and about the challenges they had to face to make a living as a jazz musician in a male dominated work field.

My goal in writing this essay is not to complain about the way things are, but to learn more about some great jazz women of the past and the present. I hope to find some explanations for the unequal ratio of men and women in jazz, to help me find my own way in this male dominated jazz world and to create more awareness of this phenomenon.

Prominent female instrumentalists in jazz before 1960

When I think of female instrumentalists who are mentioned in most jazz history books and courses, there are usually only two or three names that show up:

Lil Hardin Armstrong, Mary Lou Williams and Melba Liston. Who were these women and what were their contributions to the history of jazz? In this chapter I will dig into their biographies.

Lil Hardin (1898-1971)

We know that Lil Hardin was a piano player who had been married to Louis Armstrong, but the fact that she had an interesting career in music herself is usually not mentioned. Let's take a closer look at her personal life as a pianist, bandleader, composer and vocalist.

Musical training

Lil Harden was born in Memphis, Tennessee. She began piano lessons as soon as she went to school, with Miss Violet White. Later she went to Mrs. Hook's School Of Music, graduating in music when she was 11 years old. In 1916 she went to Fisk University in Nashville for 2,5 years¹, where she, for the first time, got a more serious piano training. She later studied at the New York College of Music where she earned a postdoctorate degree in 1929.²

Career in music

In 1918 she moved to Chicago with her mother and her stepfather, where she got a job as a sheet music demonstrator at Jones Music Store. Later she worked with Sugar Johnny's Creole Orchestra and Freddie Keppard's Original Creole Orchestra. After that she became a member of "King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band³." She went to San Francisco with King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band for a six-month engagement in "The Pergola Ballroom." After that the band moved on to Los Angeles, but Lil Hardin moved back to Chicago where she worked in the Dreamland as pianist for the orchestra of Mae Brady. Later King Oliver came back for an engagement in the Dreamland and soon Lil Hardin joined his band again. King Oliver sent for Louis Armstrong to join the band as second cornettist. When Louis joined the band, Lil was not impressed by him. He was wearing clothes and a hair style that she deemed to be "too country" for Chicago, but she worked to "take the

¹ Interview with Lil Armstrong from 1959, recorded at 421 E. 44th Street, Chicago, Illinois.
<http://musicrising.tulane.edu/listen/detail/665/Lilian-HardinArmstrong-1959-7-1>

² Scott Stanton (2003). *The Tombstone Tourist: Musicians*. Simon & Schuster. p. 13.

³ <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/lil-armstrong-mn0000266436/biography>

country out of him" and a romance developed.⁴ They married in 1924.

Lil recognised Louis Armstrong's talent and convinced him to go on his own instead of playing second cornet for King Oliver. In September 1924 Louis accepted a job with Fletcher Henderson in New York City.⁵ Hardin stayed in Chicago with Oliver and later she led a band of her own.

When Louis came back to Chicago, they recorded with "The Hot Five" with Lil Hardin on piano, Louis Armstrong on cornet, Kid Ory on trombone, Johnny Dodds on clarinet and Johnny St. Cyr on banjo.

The pianist Geri Allen says in the documentary "*The Girls In The Band*" about the Hot Five:

*"The Hot Five originally was Lil's group, that she has conceptualised in terms of how the band functions. Louis became the leader, but it was her group first."*⁶

In 1926 Lil Hardin was one of the first women to lead a jazz recording session with her "New Orleans Wanderers" recordings.⁷

In the late 1920's Lil and Louis grew apart. She got Freddie Keppard in her band, who she considered second only to Louis.⁸

In the later years Lil Armstrong lead an all girl orchestra and later a mixed gender big band, which was broadcasted nationally over the NBC radio network.

She became house pianist for Decca records and recorded 26 titles as a leader, mostly as a vocalist.⁹

In the 1940's and 50's she mostly worked as a soloist playing piano and singing.

^{4, 5, 8} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lil_Hardin_Armstrong

⁶ Judy Chaikin and Michael Green (2012), *The Girls In The Band*. 42'04

⁷ <http://musicrising.tulane.edu/discover/people/292/Lil-Hardin->

⁹ <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/lil-armstrong-mn0000266436/biography>

Compositions

Lil Hardin was also skilled composer. She wrote quite a few standards, like “Struttin' With Some Barbecue”, "Don't Jive Me", "Two Deuces", "Knee Drops", "Doin' the Suzie-Q", "Clip Joint", and “Bad Boy.” Her most well know composition is "Just For a Thrill,” which became a major hit when recorded by Ray Charles in 1959. More recently, her composition "Oriental Swing" was sampled heavily in Parov Stelar’s electro swing tune “Booty Swing” in 2012.

Mary Lou Williams (1910 - 1981)

“At the time of her death in 1981, Mary Lou Williams was America’s best-known and most revered jazzwoman.” Few women have equaled her musical accomplishments, a fact that must have imposed a certain isolation along with the honor of being “First Lady of Jazz.”¹⁰

Childhood and musical training

Mary Lou Williams (Born Mary Elfrieda Scruggs) was born in Atlanta, Georgia. Her father left her mother around the time that she was born. When she was about four years old, she moved to East Liberty, a neighbourhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her mother remarried and this marriage had brought young Mary a new name; Mary Burleigh, and 10 half-brothers and half-sisters. She taught herself to play the piano and was encouraged by her stepfather, who gave her pocket money to play his favorite tunes.

Soon neighbours were inviting Mary Lou to play at parties.¹¹ “From the age of six until I was fourteen, I was all over the city playing. I became the “little piano girl of East Liberty.”¹²

From the age of six she was already helping to support her ten half-brothers and sisters by playing for those parties.

The name and skill of Mary Burleigh were becoming known by professional musicians working in and around the Midwest. Chu Berry often dropped by her house and took her along to informal jam sessions, where she jammed with his band “McKinney’s Cotton Pickers,” and other top jazz musicians.

^{10, 11, 12} Linda Dahl (1984). *Stormy Weather, The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. London: Quartet Books. Page 60

She received some musical education from Mrs. Alexander at Westinghouse Junior Highschool, where Billy Strayhorn and Earl Hines also attended classes.

Musical career

Aged 14 she got her first job away from home as an accompanist on the local black vaudeville circuit. By 1925 she was on the road full time, working with a small band that backed comedian Buzzin' Harris. She befriended baritone saxophonist John Williams, who often helped her and fought for her right to play the piano. "Managers and performers were not used to working with a woman player and often refused to do so unless cajoled.¹³"

She married him in 1927 and they settled in Memphis. John started a band with Mary Lou on the piano. However, he got offered a job with Andy Kirk's band in Oklahoma. Mary Lou stayed in Memphis to lead the Memphis band for the remaining tour dates and then joined her husband in Oklahoma. At first she didn't have much work as a musician in Oklahoma. She took a job driving a hearse for an undertaker. But she also often served as a driver for the band her husband played in, by that time known as "Andy Kirk's Twelve Clouds of Joy."

In 1928 "The Clouds" settled in Kansas City. The city was under the control of the corrupt Tom Pendergast, who as a gambling addict himself, allowed alcohol and gambling in his city. As a consequence, there were many job opportunities for musicians. Mary Lou Williams became a much-sought-after pianist in Kansas City.

Musicians travelling the country by train often passed through Kansas City, which was a major railroad terminus. Mary Lou played with the best of them; Ben Pollack, Jack Teagarden, Art Tatum, Tadd Dameron and Thelonious Monk. And Mary Lou Williams was much in demand on the numerous jam sessions that were happening in Kansas City.

"By 1931 Mary Lou had "graduated" as she put it, "to composer, arranger and first-class chauffeur for the Kirk organisation. I was not playing in the band but was doing their recordings for Brunswick Records and sometimes sitting in to try things that I had written."¹⁴ When Brunswick recording supervisor Jack Kapp insisted on using Mary Lou Williams as band pianist on Kirk's dates, she finally became a full-time playing band member.

¹³ Linda Dahl (1984). *Stormy Weather, The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. London: Quartet Books. Page 61

¹⁴ Linda Dahl (1984). *Stormy Weather, The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. London: Quartet Books. Page 64

Success as a composer-arranger

In 1936 a new arrangement of her early composition “Froggy Bottom,” became a big success. Mary Lou became more and more in demand as an arranger and started to arrange for many bandleaders of the swing era: Louis Armstrong, Earl Hines, Duke Ellington, Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman and Jimmy Dorsey.¹⁵ In 36 the Kirk band travelled thousands of miles a week and Mary Lou was writing arrangements in the car by flashlight in between engagements. She was writing for some half-dozen of bands a week. They paid about three to fifteen dollars per arrangement. “I didn’t know about copyrights and lost half of my royalties.¹⁶”

Williams became fed up with the musical constraints engendered by the commercial success of “The Clouds”. In 1942 she left The Clouds and divorced John Williams. Back in Pittsburgh she formed a six piece band with trumpeter Harold “Shorty” Baker, featuring Art Blakey on drums.¹⁷ Shortly after that she married Harold “Shorty” Baker and together they joined Duke Ellington’s band in 1943.¹⁸ She stayed for about six months as a staff arranger and arranged about fifteen pieces for orchestra, including the well-known “Trumpet No End.”

Mary Lou Williams’ role in the emergence of bebop

Still longing for more adventurousness and freedom in her playing and writing, Mary Lou Williams left Duke Ellington’s band and moved to New York, where musicians were busily working out exciting, advanced approaches to playing, without the constraints of commercial music.¹⁹

Her apartment in Harlem became a gathering place for musicians to meet, talk and jam. Many bop players like Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell and arranger Tadd Dameron became Mary Lou’s close personal and musical associates during the forties. She wrote the “Zodiac Suite,” one of the earliest modern jazz symphonic compositions, which was performed for the first time in 1945.²⁰ In the same period she wrote the bebop hit “In the Land of Oo-Bla-Dee” for Dizzy Gillespie.

¹⁵ Linda Dahl (1984). *Stormy Weather, The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. London: Quartet Books. Page 64

¹⁶ Quoted in Regina Weinreich, “Play it, Momma,” *Village Voice*, July 3, 1978

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Lou_Williams

^{18, 19, 20} Linda Dahl (1984). *Stormy Weather, The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. London: Quartet Books. Page 65

Retreat from music

In 1952 Mary Lou travelled to Europe, where she was accorded greater respect by larger and more knowledgeable audiences. But she found that the market mentality also prevailed there, and finally stopped playing completely in 1954. "I was bitter that nobody seemed to care about good music anymore. The club-owners only wanted music that sells good," she explained.²¹ She retreated to the French countryside.

Comeback and conversion to Roman Catholicism

She came back to New York in 1957 where she converted to Roman Catholicism. With income from her record company "Mary Records", she founded the Bel Canto Foundation, which helped needy musicians rehabilitate. Dizzy Gillespie and a priest called Father Pete O'Brien convinced her to start playing for audiences again. She appeared with Dizzy Gillespie's orchestra on the New Port Jazz Festival.

From the late sixties she was a productive composer again, but from then on her compositions were concerned with spiritual and religious themes.

Mary Lou remained an active player and composer up to the final days of her life. In 1981 she died of spinal cancer.

Mary Lou Williams said, looking back at the end of her life:

"I did it, didn't I? Through muck and mud."²²

²¹ Quoted in *Time*, September 16, 1957

²² Linda Dahl (2001) *Morning Glory: A Biography of Mary Lou Williams*. page 379.

Melba Liston (1926 - 1999)

Melba Liston was born in Kansas City, Missouri. She grew up as an only child with her mother, grandparents and some aunts. When she was 6 or 7 years old, she saw a trombone in a shop window and she was mesmerised by it. She asked if she could have it. Her mother wasn't rich but she worked hard to save up money and bought it for her.

Musical training

"Melba was primarily self-taught, but "encouraged by her guitar-playing grandfather," who she spent significant time with learning to play spirituals and folk songs."²³ In school Melba spent a lot of time on music. "Glee club, band class and church music filled her days."²⁴ When she was ten, she moved to Los Angeles to join a musical education program run by Mrs. Hightower. Here she got her musical training and she was put in a band with some other girls, called "The Melodic Dots", among whom was alto saxophonist Vi Redd.

Musical career

As soon as she turned sixteen, Melba left Mrs. Hightower, got her union card and started working professionally. She got a job in the pit band of L.A. Lincoln's Theatre, under Bardu Ali. It was wartime and there were plenty of jobs for young (and female) musicians, because so many men were in the services.²⁵ Bardu often asked her to write arrangements. She then ran back to her schoolteachers to ask about things like how to set up a score. This was Melba's introduction in arranging and most of the instruction she got.

In 1943 she joined Gerard Wilson's big band. In 1945 she cut her first record with Dexter Gordon.

In 1948-1949 she played in Count Basie's orchestra and she played in Billie Holiday's band.

In 1949 Dizzy Gillespie called for her to play and arrange for his band, that included saxophonists John Coltrane, Jimmy Heath, Paul Gonsalves and pianist John Lewis. "For a top-ranked bandleader to sign a woman instrumentalist - much less bring one all across the country - was just about unprecedented."²⁶ The guys in the band were not happy with this:

²³ Erica Kaplan (1999). *Melba Liston: It's All from My Soul*". The Antioch Review, page 57

^{24, 25, 26} Linda Dahl (1984). *Stormy Weather, The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. London: Quartet Books. Page 253 -255

“The first thing all the guys in the band said, “Goddamn Birks, you sent all the way to California for a bitch?” Dizzy said: “That’s right.” He said: “Did you bring the music that I told you to write?” I said: “Yes, sir.” He said: “Pass it out to these muthafuckas and let me see what a bitch you are.” He said: “Play the music and I don’t want to hear no fuckups.” And of course they got about two measures and fell out and got all confused and stuff. And Dizzy said: “Now who’s the bitch!””²⁷

Then tired of the life on the road and the indifference of audiences, she took a job outside music for a few years. In 1956 she rejoined Dizzie Gillespie’s band as arranger and player for tours and in 1957 she recorded with Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers. By then Dizzy’s band was out of work again. An agent called her up because he had a job for her, but only on the condition that she would form an all woman quartet. She wasn’t enthusiastic, but took the job anyway, because she needed work. She formed a quartet with Bu Pleasant on piano, Willene Barton on tenor saxophone and Gloria Coleman on double bass. They played in Bermuda and they were a big success. After that they came back they went to tour all over the East Coast. But then Bu Pleasant got pregnant and left the band. She didn’t find a good replacement and got a man on piano. Then later Willene Barton left the band as well and she got Charlie Rouse instead. So Liston and Gloria Coleman were the only women left in the band. She argued with the agent that she should be able to ask anyone who she wanted and then finally got his approval. In 1958, Melba Liston recorded her only album as a leader, *“Melba Liston and Her ‘Bones.’”*²⁸

In 1959 she went to Europe with Quincy Jones big band and stayed with the band until 1961. And she started collaborating with pianist Randy Weston, for whom she wrote arrangements for mid-size to large ensembles. They recorded several albums including *“Uhuru Afrika”* (1960) and *“Highlife”* (1963). She worked with various bandleaders, like Milt Jackson, Clark Terry, Randy Weston, Gloria Lynne, Johnny Griffin and with the Supremes.

In the 1970s, fed up with all the difficulties she had getting work, she moved to Jamaica to become the director of popular music studies at the Jamaica Institute of Music.

²⁷ Quoted from an interview with Melba Liston. Linda Dahl (1984). *Stormy Weather; The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. London: Quartet Books. Page 256

²⁸ <http://thegirlsintheband.com/2013/11/melba-liston/>

Or as Dr. Billy Taylor says it:

*"I'm a bandleader in many occasions, and it really was a disappointing thing to me to have musicians that are respected, not respected; some of the women I hired..."*²⁹

When she was in Jamaica she kept on working as a freelance arranger, but she didn't play much in public anymore. In 1979 Carol Comer and Dianne Greg, the organisers of the Kansas City Women's Jazz festival, convinced Melba to come to Kansas City and form her all women band "Melba Liston and Company" to play on the festival. This event actually triggered Melba's comeback in the jazz scene as a player, arranger and composer. She moved back to New York and revived her career.³⁰ The "Company" later became a mixed company that included saxophonist Erica Lindsay and pianist Chessie Tanksley among its female players. The band stayed active until 1983.

Unfortunately Melba suffered from severed strokes in 1986, after which she couldn't play anymore. But she kept on involved as an arranger and composer for, among others, Randy Weston. Melba Liston passed away in 1999 but left a phenomenal legacy as a jazz trailblazer.³¹

During her career Melba also worked as a ghost writer. She got paid under the table to complete arrangements of other composers, to whom the work would be contributed. This was common practise in times that racism and sexism were very present.

*"Many of the arrangements found in the Gillespie, Jones, and Weston repertoires were accomplished by Liston. In fact, there is much speculation that many of the television and motion-picture theme songs attributed to Quincy Jones during the late 1950's and 1960's were assisted or completed by Liston in her capacity as a ghost writer."*³²

²⁹ Judy Chaikin and Michael Green (2012), *The Girls In The Band*. 52'27"

³⁰ Judy Chaikin and Michael Green (2012), *The Girls In The Band*. 1h02'32"

³¹ <http://thegirlsintheband.com/2013/11/melba-liston/>

³² Emmett G. Price III (Spring 2014). "Melba Liston: Renaissance Woman". *Black Music Research Journal* 34 (1) : page 163.

Lesser-known female instrumentalists before the 1960's and 1970's

In the previous chapter I spoke about three relatively well-known female instrumentalists from the history of jazz. In this chapter I will talk about some more jazz women who shouldn't be forgotten.

A Great Day In Harlem

When we look at the famous picture "*A Great Day In Harlem (1958)*," we see that there are three women in it. The one on the left of the three men in black in the center (from left to right: Stuff Smith, Bill Crump and Coleman Hawkins), is singer Maxime Sullivan. The two women a bit on the right are Mary Lou Williams and Marian McPartland.

Marian McPartland (1918 - 2013) is mainly known for her radio show called "*Piano Jazz*" that was broadcast on National Public Radio from 1978 to 2011.³³ But she also had a long and impressive career as a pianist, bandleader, composer and educator. "Her integrity and acumen on both the artistic and entrepreneurial fronts of the music business have made her a role model for men and women alike in the jazz idiom."³⁴



³³ The programmes can still be listened to on: <http://www.npr.org/series/15773266/marian-mcpartland-s-piano-jazz>

³⁴ Leslie Gourse (1995). *Madame Jazz, Contemporary Women Instrumentalists*. New York: Oxford University Press. Page 311

Marian McPartland says about this picture:

*“I can't imagine why we were the only women in that picture, because there were many of them around.”*³⁵

Other women that were successful before the 60s and played in mostly male groups were: pianists **Dorothy Donegan (1922 -1998)**, **Hazel Scott (1920 -1981)** and **Lovie Austin (1887 -1972)**, vibist, pianist and singer **Dardanelle Hadley (1917 -1997)** and organist **Shirley Scott (1934 -2002)**.³⁶

In between 1960's and 1970's some more pianists became prominent: **Joanne Brackeen (*1938)**, **Patti Bown (1931 -2008)**, pianist, composer and big band leader and **Toshiko Akiyoshi (*1929)** pianist, composer and band leader **Carla Bley (*1936)**.³⁷

As we can see, all these women, except for Melba Liston, played the keys. In the coming chapter I will find an explanation for this.

³⁵ Judy Chaikin and Michael Green (2012), *The Girls In The Band*. 51'37”

^{36, 36} Leslie Gourse (1995). *Madame Jazz, Contemporary Women Instrumentalists*. New York: Oxford University Press. Page 8

Gender association in music

In 1978, musicologists Susan Yank Porter and Harold F. Abeles conducted various studies about gender association in music.

In one study they asked musicians and non musicians to rate various musical instruments in terms of masculinity and femininity. Both groups rated the flute as the most feminine instrument, followed by the violin and the clarinet. The drums were perceived as the most masculine, followed by the trombone and the trumpet.

In another study they asked parents which instruments they preferred for their son's and daughters. The instrumental type-casting they saw in the first study, exactly reflected the preferences of the parents in their second study: Flute, violin and clarinet for the daughters and drums, trombone and trumpet for the sons.

In a third study they surveyed the attitude amongst children themselves. Very young children showed very little difference in their selections of instruments. But from the third grade, the girls' selections consistently gravitated towards the "feminine instruments," as seen in the first two studies. "The authors note that the way instruments are presented to children (for example, in a picture of the chubby boy "Tubby the Tuba") - that is, the extent to which existing gender associations are reinforced-profoundly influences the sex stereotyping of instruments for the potential players."³⁸

The context of these studies was not specified. "But we may conjecture that if they had asked specifically about jazz, their results would have been somewhat different, showing larger numbers of respondents rating most instruments, except piano and harp, as , masculine. For jazz means improvisation, and the prevailing view, at least until recently, has been that instrumental improvisation means assertiveness means masculinity."³⁹

^{38,39} Linda Dahl (1984). *Stormy Weather; The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. London: Quartet Books. Page 36

⁴⁰ G.E. Britton, "Sex Stereotyping and career Roles" cited in Susan Yank Porter and Harold F. Abeles, "So Your Daughter Wants to Be a Drummer?" page 50 "Music Education's Journal," 65, no. 5 (January 1979): 47-49

Another survey about parents career aspirations for their daughters showed that girls often are steered towards careers in music as teachers, not as bandleaders, conductors or players.⁴⁰

In jazz the only instrument that has escaped gender stereotypes seems to be the piano. Although “Jelly Roll Morton hesitated to take up piano for fear of being called “a sissy.”⁴¹

The piano was, before the existence of record players, radio and television, the most popular form of entertainment in many households. Being so accessible, it has been the instrument of choice for many men and women in both classical music and jazz.

This more or less neutral position of the piano seems to account for the fact that before the 60s, the only female instrumentalists who played on an equal level in the predominately male bands were pianists.

More female instrumentalists active before the 60s

As we saw in the previous chapters, it was more difficult for female horn players to get a job with established male bands. Nevertheless there were some amazing but under-recognised horn players. Some of them, for that reason, were mainly active in all woman bands, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Trumpet players

On trumpet there was **Billie Rodgers (1917 -2014)** who played in Woody Herman’s band from 1941-1943. **Clora Bryant (*1927)**, collaborated with Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Louis Armstrong, Harry James and Billie Holiday. In 1957 she cut her only headlining LP “*Gal With A Horn.*” **Valaida Snow (1904 - 1956).**

⁴¹ Alan Lomax (1950), *Mister Jelly Roll*, pp. 6-8

⁴² Linda Dahl (1984). *Stormy Weather, The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. London: Quartet Books. Page 59

Saxophone players

Vi Redd (*1928) A very skilled bop altoist and singer. She has performed with Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Count Basie, Max Roach, Dizzy Gillespie, Marian McPartland, Richie Goldberg and Earl Hines. Dr. Billy Taylor says about her:

“Vi Redd was a woman that I admired greatly. A lot of people said that she was “the female Charlie Parker.” She wasn’t the female anything. She was a very, very excellent player. She had her own identity that didn’t get a chance to develop so that she could make the same kind of contribution that many of her male counterparts were doing at that time. And that had to be frustrating for her.”⁴²

Peggy Gilbert (1905 - 2007), saxophonist and bandleader. **Vi Burnside (1915 -1964)** tenor saxophonist, one of the best soloists of The International Sweethearts Of Rhythm.

Bass players

Carol Kaye (*1935) Session musician who initially was a jazz player, but who gravitated more towards pop music. She played on an estimated 10,000 recording sessions in a 55-year career.⁴³

All-woman bands and orchestras

All woman bands have existed throughout the history of jazz. The first “Ladies Orchestra” was formed in Chelsea, Massachusetts in 1884⁴⁴ and many all women bands have followed. Because the balance between “making money” and “making music” wasn’t always in favour of the musical quality, these bands were often seen as a novelty act and this didn’t always contribute to the image of female musicians. For these reasons female musicians often avoided playing in these bands as a professional tactic.

⁴² Judy Chaikin and Michael Green (2012), *The Girls In The Band*. 38’16”

⁴³ Berklee College of Music (2000-10-18). *"Berklee Welcomes Legendary Studio Bassist Carol Kaye"*. Retrieved 2007-03-13. *Kaye is the most recorded bassist of all time, with 10,000 sessions spanning four decades.*

⁴⁴ D. Antoinette Handy (1981), *Black Women in American Bands and Orchestras*. Scarecrow Press. page 23.

“Though the formation of all-woman bands and orchestras must also be understood in part as a response to the difficulties of gaining access to the more established- that is- male music groups. In this context women’s groups served the practical purpose of giving players experience and a living wage in their profession, as well as providing the less tangible benefits of group acceptance.”⁴⁵

The most famous all women band was **Anna Mae Winburn’s International Sweethearts of Rhythm**. This band started out as a fund raising effort for the Piny Woods School in Mississippi. It was the first racially integrated all women’s band of the United States. After a while the band started attracting professional musicians. During the 1940’s the band featured some of the best female musicians of the day.⁴⁶

Other all woman big bands from that swing era were **Ina Ray Hutton and Her Melodears**, **Ada Leonard’s All-American Girl Orchestra** and **The Harlem Playgirls**.

More recent all women bands are **Alive!**, **Maiden Voyage**, a big band lead by saxophonist **Ann Patterson (*1950)** and **Diva**, a big band lead by drummer **Sherrie Maricle (*1963)**.

The position of female jazz musicians throughout the history of jazz

As we have seen before, the traditional ideas about gender roles that existed also seemed to apply to jazz musicians. Women were allowed to play instruments, (preferably “feminine” instruments), but they were not supposed to make a career out of it, like they were not supposed to make a career in general. The only exceptions were singers, who could have a career. But they often were not taken seriously as a musician by the instrumentalists. They usually got their success from their popularity with the audience, not from their popularity with their fellow musicians.

During the second world war, there were more job opportunities for women in general and more specifically for female jazz musicians. This was because so many men were in the services, as we already saw in the chapter about Melba Liston. However, when the men came back after the war, they also took back their jobs in the bands.

⁴⁵ ⁴² Linda Dahl (1984). *Stormy Weather; The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. London: Quartet Books. Page 47

⁴⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Sweethearts_of_Rhythm

Since the second-wave feminism in the 60s and 70s, in which women strived for, among other things, equality in career possibilities, things opened up for women in jazz as well.

Women in jazz today

Nowadays women are still not very numerous on jazz stages, but there are definitely a lot more of them than there used to be. I have listed some of today's most influential jazz women per instrument.

Trumpet: **Ingrid Jensen**

Double Bass: **Esperanza Spalding, Linda Oh, Jennifer Leitham**

Piano: **Hiromi Uehara, Geri Allen, Patrice Rushen, Myra Melford, Kris Davis**

Drums: **Terry Line Carrington, Sheila E, Sherry Maricle**

Saxophone: **Ingrid Laubrock, Matana Roberts, Melissa Aldana, Tineke Postma, Candy Dulfer**

Guitar: **Mary Halvorson**

Composers and bandleaders: **Maria Schneider**

Conclusion

Nowadays the position of women in society in general and in jazz specifically has improved a lot compared to in the old days. This is also reflected by the increasing numbers of female jazz instrumentalists. People's attitudes have changed and things have opened up for women.

Patrice Rushen says in the documentary *"The Girls In The Band:"*

*"One of the things that I think is the biggest change, is the women themselves. We don't walk into the situation concerned about somebody else's baggage about whether we can or we can't. Our focus is in being good at what we do. That's not a hurdle we have to deal with anymore."*⁴⁷

This phenomenon, called **Stereotype threat***, indeed is less strongly present today than it used to be. Nevertheless, the risk is still there. Women are still quite a minority in jazz, they don't have many examples in the history of jazz and society still isn't totally equal today.

Melba Liston was less optimistic about the changes:

*"You don't hear it so clearly and you don't see it so clearly but it's nothing changed. And they don't even **know** it. It's not what they intend to do-the brothers would not hurt for nothin'. But this attitude is just a deeply imbedded thing. It's just a **habit**."*⁴⁸

⁴⁷ ⁶ Judy Chaikin and Michael Green (2012), *The Girls In The Band*. 1h13"38

⁴⁸ Quoted from an interview with Melba Liston. Linda Dahl (1984). *Stormy Weather, The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. London: Quartet Books. Page 258

**Stereotype threat is a situational predicament in which people are or feel themselves to be at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about their social group.⁴⁹ Stereotype threat has been shown to reduce the performance of individuals who belong to negatively stereotyped groups.⁵⁰*

Or as Rachel Z. and Stephanie Fauber put it:

“Now it’s all subtle, because it’s not cool to be sexist or racist. It’s all under the table,” says pianist Rachel Z. “It’s more like being left out,” as French horn player Stephanie Fauber, amongst others, describes the way discrimination manifests itself in the music business.⁵¹

I think things have improved a lot, but we still have a way to go.

Being aware of the pitfalls and knowing the history will help us change the future.

In the end we are all equal; we all just want to play!

Epilogue

Jazz could only evolve because so many cultures and musical styles came together, it’s a music of diversity. Unfortunately the story of jazz is also a story of slavery, manipulation and suppression. Therefore Jazz became a music that is all about liberation and freedom, both in it’s history and in it’s execution (improvisation). The music reflects life, society and humankind in all its beauty and in all its ugliness. Hopefully it will continue its way in liberating us from suppression, racism and sexism.

Learning about the stories and the contributions of women in jazz, feels like learning about a missing part in the history of the music. Therefore, I hope that in future a more complete history will be told and that jazz in future will profit even more from its diversity!

⁴⁹ Michael Inzlicht (2011). *Stereotype Threat: Theory, Process, and Application*. Oxford University Press. pp. 5, 141–143.

⁵⁰ Claude M. Steele (1997). "A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance". *American Psychologist* 52 (6): 613–629

^{51, 39} Leslie Gourse (1995). *Madame Jazz, Contemporary Women Instrumentalists*. New York: Oxford University Press. Page 9

References

Books

- Linda Dahl (1984). *Stormy Weather, The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*. London: Quartet Books.
- Leslie Gourse (1995). *Madame Jazz, Contemporary Women Instrumentalists*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wayne Enstice and Janice Stockhousen (2004). *Jazz women, Conversations with Twenty-One Musicians*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Cordelia Fine (2011). *Delusions of gender, the real science behind sex differences*. Icon Books Ltd.
- Claude M. Steele (1997). "A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance". *American Psychologist* 52 (6): 613–629
- Michael Inzlicht (2011). *Stereotype Threat: Theory, Process, and Application*. Oxford University Press. pp. 5, 141–143.
- Alan Lomax (1950), *Mister Jelly Roll*, pp. 6-8
- Berklee College of Music (2000-10-18). "Berklee Welcomes Legendary Studio Bassist Carol Kaye". Retrieved 2007-03-13. *Kaye is the most recorded bassist of all time, with 10,000 sessions spanning four decades*.
- G.E. Britton, "Sex Stereotyping and career Roles" cited in Susan Yank Porter and Harold F. Abeles, "So Your Daughter Wants to Be a Drummer?" page 50 "Music Education's Journal," 65, no. 5 (Januari 1979): 47-49
- Scott Stanton (2003). *The Tombstone Tourist: Musicians*. Simon & Schuster. p. 13.
- Quoted in Regina Weinreich, "Play it, Momma," *Village Voice*, July 3, 1978

Websites

- www.thegirlsintheband.com
- <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/feb/18/local/me-gilbert18>
- <http://www.peggygilbert.org/biography.html>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Cjmg8Jepvw
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second-wave_feminism
- <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/lil-armstrong-mn0000266436/biography>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Sweethearts_of_Rhythm
- <http://www.npr.org/series/15773266/marian-mcpartland-s-piano-jazz>
- <http://musicrising.tulane.edu/listen/detail/665/Lilian-HardinArmstrong-1959-7-1>

Documentaries

- Ken Burns (2000), *Jazz, a Film by Ken Burns*.
- Judy Chaikin and Michael Green (2012), *The Girls In The Band*. (Rented on vimeo, the movie will be available on DVD in november 2015).