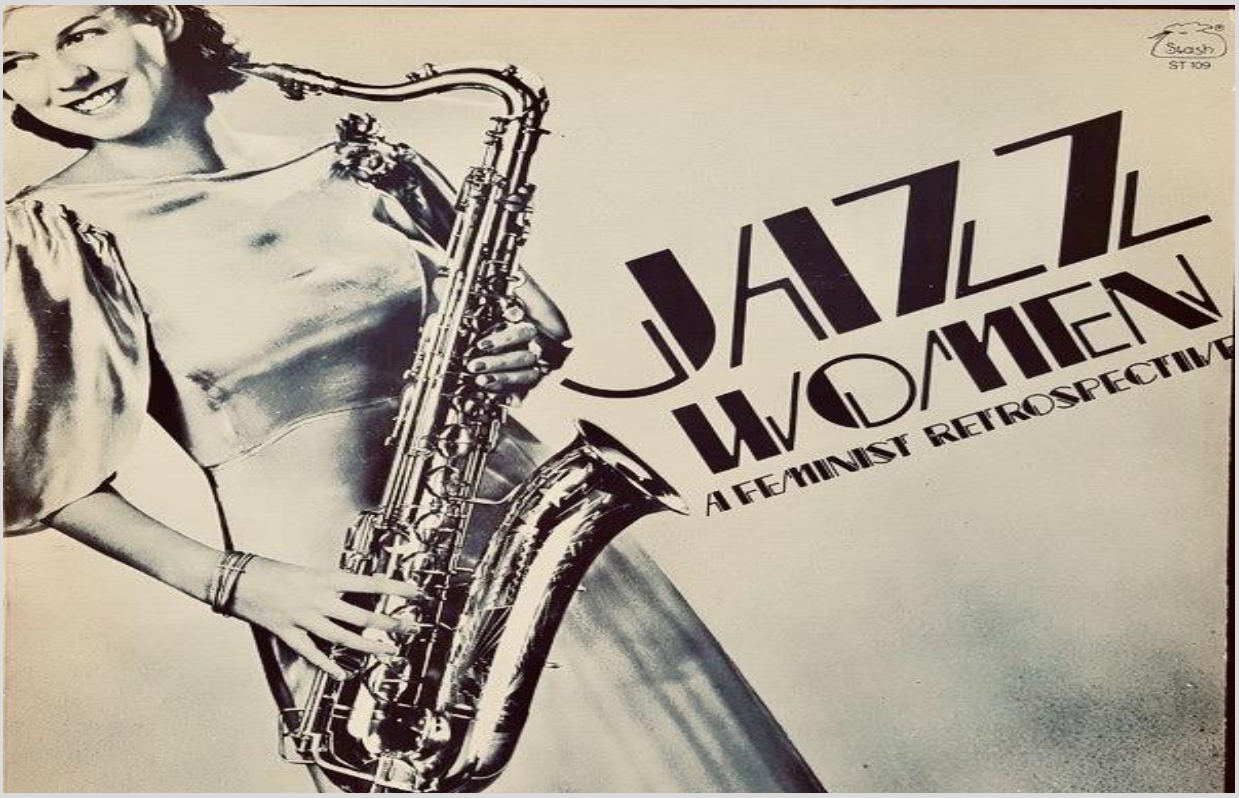
17/05/2021

TOPIC STUDY 2C – JAZZ STUDIES

MUS2063

Module Coordinator: Professor Jeremy Barham

Lecturer: Dr Tom Williams



Written assignment: 3000-word

Topic: Give an account of the contribution made by women to the history and development of jazz, EITHER up to 1960 OR from the 1980s to the present. Refer to specific artists, musical repertoire and aim to balance this with wider socio-cultural considerations.

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The Substantial Women Effect on the History of Jazz Music, against all odds.

From the beginning of the jazz era, the activities of female jazz musicians have been highly limited due to some suggested stereotypes such as jazz being antipole with the *femineity*, *the nature of women* and *the way of work of women's brain*. Some have argued that "Woman's fundamental urge is to be beautiful, loved, and adored as a person; man's urge is to provide and achieve in" as Carl Seashore said in his article which he offered various reasons why the number of accomplished and well-known women composers is so little (Seashore, 1940, pp. 21,88). Some others claimed that the biological structure of women is somehow not convenient for them to be good at music as much as men, or in other words, women are “inherently defective" for having the abilities required by several arts. However, as Seashore also stated, yet there is not any valid evidence to support this statement (Seashore, 1940, pp. 21,88).

Since the first sparks of jazz, the contributions of female jazz musicians have significantly shaped the entire flow of jazz for many times. However, although women have always been there, many of them had gone invisible along with all their talents, achievements, and contributions to the genre due to the patriarchal system and understanding. That is why there is limited written historical information on female jazz artists (Saur, 2016).

As Tucker described, jazz is generally "thought of and historicized as a *man's world*, sometimes decorated by *girl* singers." (Tucker, 2016, p. 256). Even though there were always female jazz musicians who have participated in every

instrument by playing in every style from the very beginning, undoubtedly, there was a significant injustice in the freedom of choosing the instruments they will have a profession on as female jazz musicians.

Throughout history, musical instruments have often been classified under the categories *feminine* and *masculine* as an unconscious mindset, though not as a written rule most of the time. In their 1978 article, Harold F. Abeles and Susan Yank Porter remark the possible negative effect of this stereotypical division on musicians by this statement: "The sex-stereotyping of musical instruments ... tends to limit the range of musical experiences available to male and female musicians in several ways, including participation in instrumental ensembles and selection of vocations in instrumental music." (Abeles & Porter, 1978, p. 65). It was also the case at the beginning of the jazz era; playing reeds, brass, bass, and drums were not considered *feminine*. The tenor saxophone, for instance, is probably the first instrument springs to mind when jazz is the case, and therefore it has been commonly accepted as the representative of the genre. According to Linda Dahl, the tenor saxophone "is also understood as machismo and having 'phallic or sexual symbolism' " (Dahl, 1996, p. 36), so Jayne Caudwell argues in her article that might be the reason why "women have been dissuaded from playing the tenor saxophone and other so-called 'horn' instruments." (Caudwell, 2012, p. 390).

In early American life, it was believed that women who know how to sing or play the piano had more chance to make a successful marriage since those activities considered *sissy*. Therefore, it was much more acceptable for women to participate in instruments such as piano and voice that acknowledged relatively feminine instruments rather than playing *masculine instruments*.

In his lecture writings about jazz published in 1996, Karl Koenig asked the question of why the number of women pianists were significantly high in the early jazz bands, and Sadie Goodson replied with this answer: "Well, I think it was because they needed pianists. At that time, there weren't as many men playing piano; they wanted to play a trumpet or another wind instrument. It was considered more masculine to play a wind instrument. A lot of women, to be socially accepted, learned the piano as part of their upbringing. The men in the band liked the chords I played. Many of them depended on the chords to be able to play their part" (Koenig, 1996).

Since women were more likely to take piano lessons in the late 19th and early 20th centuries than men, they were also more likely to be more knowledgeable about the theoretical part of music and to be able to read music better than male jazz musicians. As Tucker discusses in her research study, "…when the jazz bands were no longer limited to mobile street units", the bandleaders found themselves in an urgent need for theoretically knowledgeable musicians who could teach the chords to the other members of the band who could not read the music (Tucker, 2004, p. 64). Thus, many women pianists started to get hired by jazz bands, including Lil Hardin Armstrong, Bertha Gonsoulin, Emma Barrett, and Jeanette Salvant. During an oral interview that took place in New Orleans in 1999, pianist and organist Olivia "Lady Charlot" Cook, who used to work as a reading pianist in men's bands, described her situation with this sentence: "They liked that I could read it, but they hated that it was a woman" (Cook, 1998).

Figure 1: King Oliver and his Creole Jazz Band, Chicago, 1923

Given the history of New Orleans, female educators have played an important and influential role in teaching music (e.g., Camille Nickerson, Margaret Kimble, Mercedes Garman Fields). In his study where he examined the role of *jazz mentors*, Al Kennedy particularly addresses trumpet player and public-school teacher Yvonne Busch with these words: "Her legacy as a musical mentor in the public schools is an impressive roster of accomplished musicians. Some broke new ground as avant-garde jazz performers. Others formed the backbone of the New Orleans rhythm and blues explosion that caught the attention of the nation in the 1950s. Still others are preserving the spirit of traditional New Orleans jazz." (Kennedy, 2002, p. 49).

In her study, Tucker refers to a paradox, during the years of jazz's rising, between the ideological imposition of dominant groups of the society and the different living conditions of people from different cultures. According to her, while the general identity of a person typically and indeed, unfortunately, defines his/her hierarchical status in the society, "gender constructions are also common ways by which cultural groups define themselves as different from one another." (Tucker, 2004, p. 66). In other words, Tucker states that while the women who were considered to belong to the *dominant culture/group* had to undertake "the social ‘norms' defined by the dominant culture" by performing the roles given to them by the society which was being "class markers for the men in their family" by accomplishing ladylike tasks, the women who did not belong to the dominant *culture* had to carry the *gender requirements* both given by the dominant culture and their own cultural group (Tucker, 2004, p. 66). This is where the paradox starts because, as Tucker states, during the early 1900s many women needed to work to afford their living even though "the dominant culture may have exerted a strong message that it wasn't ladylike to work for wages” (Tucker, 2004, p. 66). For instance, while playing instruments like trumpets and trombones have not been considered *ladylike* activities in many dominant cultural perspectives, women in the classical music industry were generally more acceptable. However, it was not the easiest thing for an African American woman to find a career in the classical music industry during the early 20th century when black people were highly exposed to discrimination. Therefore, as Tucker expresses in her research study, "playing jazz was considered a viable way to earn a living" among many African American female musicians, even though playing jazz was also considered *not ladylike* in their own cultural group just as the view of the dominant cultural group (Tucker, 2004, p. 66).

In the first part of the three-part TV series, *Women in Jazz*, Marian McPartland expresses the importance of *soloing* for a jazz musician with these

words: "Every time... any jazz musicians take a solo it's like an autobiographical statement, a story about who you are and who you've listened to even about the first time you felt that you had something to say, and that music might be the say it. This is the inner voice that comes through every time you take a solo" (Burrill, 1981). However, the soloing opportunities for a jazz pianist around the 1920s were highly minimal and almost impossible for a **female jazz pianist**! Because, even though the piano had been commonly seen as a feminine musical instrument, soloing on the piano was still not considered feminine. They were not allowed to express themselves by their solos because as Tucker mentioned, " leaders often did not want their pianists to take improvised solos" (Tucker, 2004, p. 67). As McPartland remarks, the formation of all-women bands during The Big Band era was a significant opportunity for the female jazz musicians to be heard adequately because many male jazz musicians were overseas to serve in the military, which was the perfect timing for women jazz musicians to shine. Probably one of the most sensational all-female jazz band of the term was The International Sweethearts of Rhythm. In those years, the number of people who took female instrumentalists seriously was minimal and even less when they play masculine instruments such as drums, saxophone, and cornet. However, in 1937, The International Sweetheart of Rhythm was about to remove this prejudice from the minds of many, prove their jazz playing capacity to the patriarchal jazz industry and the world and encourage many other female jazz musicians who are sick of not getting taken seriously!

Figure 2: International Sweethearts of Rhythm / Hottest Women's Band of the 1940s. [Record cover and phonograph record?]

Arguably one of the most apparent norms they tried to break down, which can be understood by looking at the name of the group, was to be an interracial group. Undoubtedly, there was a strict colour line that was valid for almost all social and economic situations in America of that time. Crossing this line meant to contradict the multiple segments of the society. On the one hand, some white segregationists were defending that different social and cultural norms should separate people from different races; in other words, applying a double standard to the people from races they look down on. On the other hand, many African Americans did not want to be known as the supporters of such interracial group simply because they were beware the possibility of vengeance which would come from white political and economic elites. So, The Sweethearts decided to put "international" to their band's name. Therefore, they could expand their audience circle to the outside the strict racial perception of the Southern parts of America (Benjamin, 2014). The members of the band included "African American, bi-racial, Latino, Asian, and Native American women". They were all great instrumentalists and some of them were professional musicians during the period

(e.g., the trumpeter Ernestine Davis, the alto saxophonist Rosalind Cron, the tenor saxophonist Viola Burnside) (Kernodle, 2013). Presence of white players in the band, also happened to work as a function which created a bridge between the black music and some white audiences. Looking through today's perspective, women instrumentalists like the members of The Sweethearts has also played a significant role in the constant battle of defeating the scepticism about women's abilities. They have paved a career way for better equality and opportunities for both women who belong to their time course and the future musicians by their achievements (Saur, 2016, p. 2). During the 1940s, Sweethearts' live and recorded performances were so successful that this led them to be one of the few predominantly black all-female bands featured in soundies. While their most significant hits included their interpretations as such standards as "Tuxedo Junction" and "Sweet Georgia Brown", their original swing" Jump Children", might be their most popular one.

During the 1920s, the society often canalised women to a domestic lifestyle. Even if they would like to earn their economic liberty, unfortunately, most of the time, they had been hampered because of the popular belief of the period about the gender roles, which was *women's place is in the home*. In the 1910s and 1920s, lawn parties undoubtedly were an irreplaceable part of American social life.

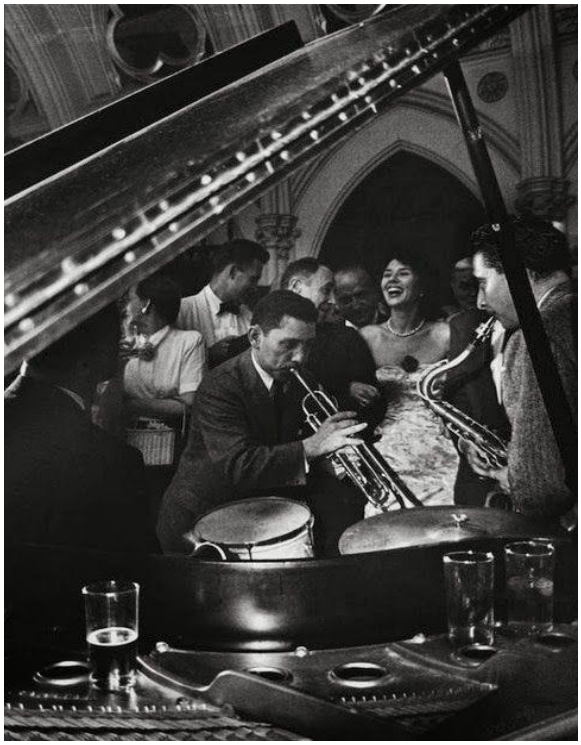

Figure 3: (a representative image for the period's lawn parties)

One of the most essential requirements that hosts needed to fulfil to create a reputation for their lawn parties was the skill of finding and "hiring bands that would draw regular crowds and repeat customers." (Tucker, 2004, p. 68). Even though both women and men had hosted these garden parties, women's contributions were significant in this enterprise. Many women considered the money they had earned by charging admissions as a perfect opportunity to gain their own money without leaving their homes. While these lawn parties they held provided a possible recognition and an opportunity to hold on to the business for the bands that were not yet known [Lizzie Miles, for example, is one of the female musicians who mentioned in an oral interview that her performing career as a blues singer started at a very early age by singing at the lawn parties (Miles, 1951)], they were also providing a steady income opportunity for the favourite bands of the parties, therefore; this enterprise functioned as highly influential in the development and maintenance of the local jazz economy (Tucker, 2004, p. 68).

As Tucker also mentioned in her study, during the early 1910s, Betsy Cole was a female entrepreneur who achieved to secure her place among the bests in this sector. Her lawn parties were so popular that it is highly possible to encounter Cole's name when looking at the biographies or autobiographies of the jazz musician of that era (e.g., Drummer Alfred Williams). One of the main reasons for it was her parties were taking place in Central City/New Orleans, where many musicians lived in the early 1900s, such as King Oliver, Kid Ory and Buddy Bolden (Tucker, 2004, p. 69). Clarinettist Albert Nicholas especially mentions Betsy Cole's name in an oral interview when he talked about his idol, Johnny Dodds, who played with the Ory's Band. In the same interview, Nicholas spoke of Cole's "penny parties", which she organised alongside adult lawn parties, at a much more affordable price, to give young people an opportunity to come and

listen to their favourite musicians and jazz music. Nicholas mentions explicitly that during the years 1912-13, he frequently attended Miss Cole's lawn parties to hear his hero, Johnny Dodds, who played the clarinet with Kid Ory (Nicholas, 1972). As jazz bassist Ed Garland says in an oral interview, the Ory's Band played at Cole's lawn parties for many years, and according to him, Cole liked their music so much that she even asked the band to play at her funeral. Garland even claimed that when Cole died, she happened to be the first woman who had a funeral with music (Garland, 1958). Betsy Cole's parties undoubtedly offered young people significant opportunities to expand their musical circles and visions, just like Albert Nicholas, who later replaced Dodds in King Oliver's band in Chicago, thanks to his talent as well as Cole's experience at parties (Tucker, 2004, p. 70).

These lawn parties and other venues where jazz was played were a remarkable meeting point for the musicians and dancers who inspired each other (Tucker, 2004, p. 68). One of the most remarkable and engrossing examples of a similar matter is doubtless the "Zodiac Suite", released in 1945 by the exceptional pianist performer, arranger, and composer of the early jazz, Mary Lou Williams [who generally accepted as a trace to an entire generation of jazz since she helped train such iconic figures like Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, and more others] (Saur, 2016). In this 12-movement modernistic masterpiece of her [she composed it in 12 movements because according to according to Western astrology there are 12 signs of the zodiac. Therefore, each zodiac sign has a movement in "Zodiac Suite" composed under its name], each movement has been composed inspired by *a musical associate* of Williams. For example, when composing the "Capricorn" movement, Williams was inspired by her friend dancer Pearl Primus, who, like her, performed at the Café Society (Britannica, n.d.).

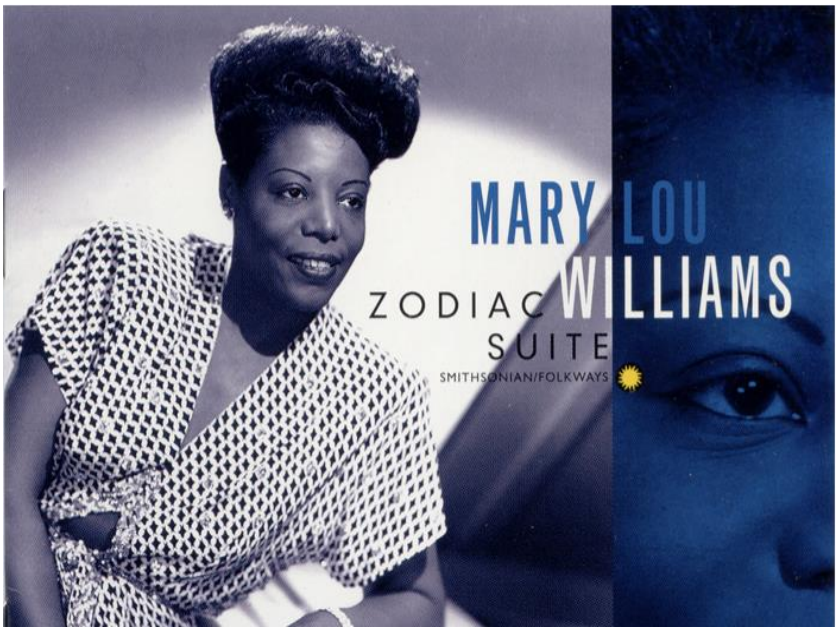

Figure 4: Marry Lou Williams- "Zodiac Suite" (1995, CD cover

In 1958, Williams founded the Bel Canto Foundation, where she hoped to build a facility that would benefit rehabilitate addicted musicians. In this phase of her life, she started to write religious compositions. Her first compositions in this style revealed her evolving composition technique and served as one of the earliest examples of what would later eventually call *music for the soul*. In 1970, she re-recorded her previous jazz mass work by adding new movements and renamed it "Mary Lou's Mass". In 1975, "Mary Lou's Mass" performed at St. Patrick's Cathedral and thus marked its name on the history books of jazz by being the first jazz performance that took place in a historical building (Kernodle, 2014).


The New York Times

$2.5-Million Botanical Garden Project Begins

Mary Lou Williams, at Piano, Leads Her Own Jazz Mass at St. Patrick's

News Summary and Index

Figure 5: Wilson, J. S., 1975. Mary Lou Williams, at Piano, Leads Her Jazz Mass at St. Patrick's. The New York Times, 19 February.

Throughout history, many female jazz musicians have been forced to leave the jazz industry due to the psychological and physical abuse they have been subjected to. Probably, there even have been hundreds of women whose names we do not even know, but who aspired to participate in the jazz industry and had to give up even before trying due to the social influence of patriarchal society, as well. On the other hand, there are also countless talented female jazz musicians whose names either never recognised just because of their gender or became invisible because of opportunity inequality. Nevertheless still, there many (but indeed not adequate) women names which could be list under the title of *legendary jazz musicians* (e.g. Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Melba Liston, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Vi Redd...).

In this case, it is evidentiary that most of the works published so far to demonstrate the contribution of women to the history and development of jazz have devoted ample space to explain the challenges and injustices women have had to face and overcome all time because of their gender.

The conclusion that can be deduced from this is, in order to give a coherent answer to the question "Why are not there more women in jazz?", firstly the question, "What were the obstacles and limitations women [who endeavour to gain a respectable place in the jazz industry] had to (has to?) endure?" should be asked and answered.

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