Women in jazz

Sherrie Tucker

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Women have participated on every instrument, in every style, and in every era of jazz history. Yet, with the notable exception of singers and a number of pianists, female jazz musicians have been continuously overlooked in the most prestigious areas of jazz practice, marketing, and documentation. These include the recording and broadcasting industries, major performance venues, trade magazines, and jazz history books. Also impeding the acceptance of women in venerated jazz roles and on jazz circuits are prevailing definitions of gender that made it appear unfeminine for women to play the most highly valued jazz instruments and styles, to perform in the venues where jazz was heard and where jazz skills were shared and developed, to appear on the stage, or to compete with men. Women’s jazz musicianship throughout the history of the music has persevered despite such obstacles.

In addition to the persistent, if marginalized, presence of women in jazz generally, evidence exists of separate spheres of participation where female players found work opportunities and relative acceptance. These spheres – which constituted different things at different times – have included family bands, all-woman bands, local venues, music education, novelty acts, singing, and playing so-called feminine instruments (harp, for instance, rather than trumpet). Women jazz musicians whose careers followed these paths paid a price of omission, however, as such activities were routinely ignored, trivialized, or considered “not real jazz” by historians, journalists, bookers, agents, audiences, and/or fellow musicians. In a sense, these feminized, devalued spheres simultaneously enabled women’s participation in jazz and guaranteed their erasure from its history. The appearance of a special entry on women in this dictionary is both testimony and corrective to this history.

1. Gender and music.

In assessing women’s activities in jazz history it is important to distinguish between sex as a biological category and gender as a social category, and to recognize that the omission of female musicians from certain jazz activities, instruments, genres, markets, and historical consideration stems not from inherent physical, mental, or emotional differences between men and women but from
culturally produced ideas about masculinity and femininity at particular times and places. Many feminist theorists have pointed out that, even in a single time and place, definitions of gender do not apply in the same ways to all women and men across class, race, ethnicity, and other social categories. Although ideas about gender norms and their effects on music-making vary from culture to culture and are ever-changing, several generalizations can be made that span the course of jazz history.

(i) Gender-coding of instruments.

The division of instruments into those associated with femininity and those identified with masculinity is found in many musics of the world, and jazz is no exception. Throughout jazz history singing has been understood as relatively feminine, or an activity in which women could participate without appearing “abnormal,” compared with the playing of brass, reeds, bass, and drums – instruments typically associated with men. Indeed, singing is the area in which women have received the greatest acceptance and historical acknowledgement in jazz, as evidenced by the large number of recordings by women jazz singers and the not uncommon inclusion of female singers in jazz history books. In addition, the piano, flute, and harp are among those instruments which have been variously associated with women in the USA since the emergence of jazz. Historians of women in jazz have traced this particular gender-coding of instruments to both European and West African musical traditions.

Despite the historical prominence of “piano men” throughout jazz history, there is evidence that men sometimes worried about the ramifications that playing the piano might have on their masculine reputations. The popularity of the piano as a treasured item of furniture and for entertainment in 19th- and early 20th-century homes of white and African-American families who could afford them contributed to the instrument’s domestic connotations. Not only did girls and women in such households have access to the instrument, they were encouraged to play it, though this acceptance did not generally encompass their professional aspirations, particularly in middle- or upper-class families. The Victorian “cult of true womanhood,” a definition of appropriate femaleness available to middle and upper-class white women, included a positive equation of girls’ and women’s musical training with the social status of their fathers and husbands. Although male professional pianists have not historically been perceived as “abnormal” in the same way as have female professional reed and brass players, the acceptability of the piano as “appropriate” for women in an amateur sense did result in a relative public acceptance of the professional musicianship of female pianists when compared with female players of other instruments. The power of gender-coding of instruments is palpable in the numbers of women who have worked as professional jazz pianists.
throughout the history of the music, despite enduring biases against jazz as an appropriate genre. Indeed, many upper- and middle-class, aspiring middle-class, and religious families historically, both white and African-American, have discouraged jazz as a genre for musical daughters. These biases have not held universal sway, however. For many poor and working-class families, particularly African-American families, musical careers in any genre represented a far preferable livelihood to share-cropping, domestic work, and other gruelling and limited labor options.

Other instruments generally considered “appropriate” for women during the span of jazz history have included harp, violin, and flute. However, because these have been less accepted as appropriate jazz instruments, such players as the harpists Adele Girard and Dorothy Ashby and the violinist Ginger Smock have been marginalized in jazz history, despite their acknowledged achievements on these instruments. In addition, African-American men and women who played instruments and repertory associated with Western classical music have been subject to a history of discrimination for crossing what Jon Michael Spencer has called the “essentialist color line,” or for daring to enter the musical terrain of European “high culture” constructed and protected as “inherently” white and upper-class. What gender- and race-coding has meant in terms of jazz history is not that musicians have unilaterally steered clear of instruments considered outside the narrow confines of current gender and race definitions (though for these reasons many, undoubtedly, did), but that when musicians did cross these lines they were often perceived not just as making aesthetic choices but as disturbing social norms, either in threatening, ludicrous, or titillating ways. When women chose careers playing instruments associated with men, their “novelty” potential often overshadowed the likelihood of their being heard as skilled players.

(ii) Effects of gender stereotypes on labor practices, marketing, and audience reception.

Ethnomusicologists studying the musical participation of women in various cultural contexts have noted several trends that may occur when women cross musical gender boundaries by playing instruments, repertory, or styles associated with men. Sometimes the “normal” sexuality of women musicians is called into question; sometimes the music they produce is considered “inauthentic”; and in some cases their participation is perceived as a threat to the social order. Indeed, in many jazz contexts, women who played instruments or styles associated with men were stigmatized, with stunning polarity, as hypersexual or asexual; they were perceived as feminine sex-spectacles directed at titillating men, as ludicrous displays of unexpected behavior (akin to dancing dogs), or as masculine women “trying to be men.” Female jazz musicians and all-
woman jazz bands have been historically marketed and consumed as novelty acts, even when they played the same instruments in the same styles and cultivated the same skills as male musicians of the same periods. Women jazz musicians who played instruments associated with men have often been billed as though they were cross-dressers of sorts: “the female Louis Armstrong,” “Gene Krupa with a skirt.” A comparison of reviews in the mainstream trades and black press indicates that this has been especially true within white cultural circuits. In the entertainment pages of national weekly black newspapers during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, African-American women musicians received a level of respect that was generally not paralleled in the white-owned trades.

Notions of appropriate and inappropriate roles for women and men, depending upon race and class, have not only affected how jazz musicians were perceived, but have also shaped their working conditions, the marketing strategies that would be deployed to draw audiences, and the very impressions that audiences formed of the sights and sounds emanating from the bandstand or stage. Both black and white female instrumentalists have frequently been expected to sing and dance, as well as play, and, in some cases, to circulate among patrons during breaks and double as “B”-girls (i.e. mingling and encouraging patrons to buy drinks). Even women musicians who were able to focus on their playing were expected to exhibit popular representations of female glamor while on the bandstand. This stipulation often caused difficulties; for example, costumes with low necklines were uncomfortable for women wearing saxophone neck straps, the embouchures of brass and reed players were impeded by their lipstick, and high heels complicated the leverage of bass drum pedals for drummers. All of these practices added to the workload of female musicians, but, ironically, also added to the impression that they were not “really working,” and, therefore, not “real professional musicians.”

Historically there has been a tendency for women instrumentalists and all-woman bands to be marketed and consumed as visual rather than auditory attractions. While the femininity of female singers could be captured on a recording, gender difference eluded the microphone when it came to all-girl bands that strove to play in styles undifferentiated from men. Combined with the fact that, as with other industry prizes, opportunities to record carried prestige and benefits more likely to be bestowed upon men than upon women, this must be considered as part of the context for examining the shortage of such opportunities for women jazz musicians. Because jazz historians have traditionally relied on recordings for evidence of historical significance, the dearth of recordings by women who played instruments other than piano, as well as the abundance of recordings of women singers, has contributed profoundly to a historical memory that embraces the pantheon of great female singers and forgets the women who played band instruments. Those female instrumentalists fortunate enough to record were often required to sing as well as play. All-female bands
that received the widest broadcasting and industry support were those whose performances emphasized popular styles of “femininity” as well as musicality. Clearly, historical or musical “significance” is not the only factor that determined who was recorded.

Because gender difference could be more easily communicated visually than aurally, women musicians were involved in a higher percentage of short jazz films than recordings, including a number of soundies made between 1940 and 1946. White all-girl bands, particularly those offering a version of femininity popular in other forms of mainstream entertainment, received far more opportunities to appear in such films than their African-American counterparts. This is no doubt partly a result of the ambivalence of white circuit owners concerning how to represent many black women on the stage together playing band instruments, amid Hollywood’s narrow repertory of degrading images of maids, mammies, and exotic sex objects. In addition, if such a film’s entertainment value depended on mainstream audience perceptions that women did not or could not play jazz, then the preference of the white-owned film companies for presenting white women’s bands may be also stem from white cultural ambivalence about whether black women played “authentic jazz” because they were black, or “unauthentic jazz” because they were women. Again, the results of these gender- and race-specific marketing considerations – the emphasis on visual media, the lack of recordings, and the privileging of performances by those women musicians who least challenged dominant stereotypes about jazz and “pretty girls” as nonoverlapping categories – have all been used as justification for the marginalization of women in jazz history. One of the important points raised by historians in the 1980s and 1990s is that the criteria for the inclusion of women in jazz history must be examined and reconfigured if we are to recognize their participation in and contributions to jazz.

(iii) **Spheres historically considered “appropriate” for women.**

While there has been a relative acceptance of women who played instruments considered “appropriate” for their sex, women musicians have also found more acceptance in some jazz activities than others. As with all notions of gender, the jazz practices that have been considered acceptable realms for women’s participation have constituted different things at different times and places for different people. Three general examples that can be traced throughout jazz history are family bands and musical families, music education, and “all-girl” or all-woman bands.

Family bands represent one area in which the need to maximize the talent pool has historically outweighed dominant gender expectations regarding women and music. Many women musicians began in ensembles with both male and female relatives, and many famous musical families included female reed and brass players and
drummers, as well as pianists, singers, and dancers. While they are
often portrayed in jazz histories merely as the homely settings for
the “humble beginnings” of famous male musicians, family bands
deserve further study as unique historical settings for mixed-gender
musical collaboration conducive to the encouragement of women’s
musical development. The saxophonist Irma Young played alongside
her brothers Lester (tenor saxophone) and Lee (drums) in the Young
family band. Marjorie Pettiford is another saxophonist who thrived in
a family band together with her brother Oscar (double bass). The
pianist Norma Teagarden received her music education from her
mother, Helen, a ragtime pianist, as did her brothers, Jack
(trombone), Charlie (trumpet), and Cub (drums). At various times
Jack Teagarden hired all of his siblings, male and female, for his
band.

If the spectrum of what counts as jazz history included music
educators, women would constitute a formidable presence. Sources
such as the black press and oral histories of both male and female
jazz musicians contain much evidence that music education was a
field in which women historically found acceptance, work
opportunities, and respect in jazz circles. The privileging of
recordings and performances, as well as primitivist stereotypes of
jazz musicians as untutored geniuses playing from their hearts, has
promoted the production of jazz histories that overlooked education
as an important aspect of jazz practice. New trends in academic jazz
studies indicate growing interest in how jazz musicians learned their
skills historically, but whether this will result in acknowledgement of
female jazz educators is not yet clear. The mothers of many well-
known male musicians, such as Milt Hinton’s mother, Hilda
Robinson, and Serge Chaloff’s mother, Margaret Chaloff, were
highly regarded music teachers, as was Ray Bryant’s sister, Vera.
Many Los Angeles jazz musicians, among them Dexter Gordon,
Melba Liston, Clara Bryant, and Charles Mingus, received training in
the children’s band led by drummer and music teacher Alma
Hightower. Historians of women in jazz have found that many
women musicians turned from performing to teaching during
periods when female players met with most resistance, for instance
in the years after World War II.

Known as “all-girl” bands before the 1970s, jazz and swing bands
consisting entirely of women have existed from the turn of the
century through the present day. As early as the 1880s both white
and African-American women’s concert bands, marching bands,
orchestras, and minstrel bands offered opportunities to women brass
and reed players, drummers, and double bass players who had
difficulty obtaining work in men’s bands. In the early 20th century
all-girl bands found work in circuses, carnivals, and tent shows.
Black and white all-female big bands were popular on vaudeville
stages in the 1920s and 1930s; some broke into the lucrative sphere
of ballroom employment during the swing era, and some African-
American women’s bands became popular attractions on the black
theater circuit. During World War II all-girl big bands entertained
the troops on racially segregated USO circuits. A number of all-
female groups survived the postwar years playing in nightclubs, and
some white women found work in all-woman television bands in the 1950s. The tradition of all-female big bands was renewed in the 1970s, during the second-wave women’s movement, with the emergence of new audiences for women performers, new strategies for women’s equality, and new interest in women’s cultural and historical contributions. The reasons for this enduring tradition of all-woman bands vary according to historical context, and range from impresarios cashing in on an abiding American fascination with acts perceived as “novelty” entertainment to feminist agendas of some women musicians to provide career opportunities and skill development for themselves and female colleagues.

2. Historical overview.

Although it is true that women have participated in all historical periods of jazz history, it is also true that historical events have affected women differently from the ways in which they have affected men. Historians have not only painstakingly located historical information on female jazz musicians that was omitted from mainstream jazz histories, but they have also located jazz in a socio-historical context that incorporates changing perceptions of gender (as it intersects with such other categories as race and class) in order to understand women’s participation in jazz. It should be clear from the following sketch that this vast and complex history deserves further study and incorporation in more complete and gender-conscious narratives of jazz history.

(i) History through the 1920s.

African-American women were active innovators and participants in the musical forms that formed the roots of jazz, including work songs, spirituals, gospel, and blues. In the early 19th century, in New Orleans’ famed Congo Square, African-American women participated in the musical traditions that accompanied vodun (voodoo) ceremonies, sometimes serving in prestigious roles as chant-leaders and drummers. The historical predominance of women in black Christian musical traditions takes into account the central participation of African-American women in spirituals from slavery onwards, including the arranged concert spirituals associated with musical messengers from historically black colleges, such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers, as well as in gospel and hymnody. In the late 19th century black female pianists could be found playing in African-American minstrel bands, and in the early 20th century it was not uncommon to find female pianists in ragtime and vaudeville bands. The ragtime piano craze of the early 1900s involved numerous female performers and composers, both black and white. The Kansas City pianist Julia Lee played ragtime early in her career. Among other women who played and/or composed piano rags were Ragtime
Kate Beckham and May Aufderheide. The early 1900s saw female participation, usually on piano, but sometimes on brass, reeds, and rhythm, in circus, carnival, tent shows, and family bands, in both black and white entertainment circuits. Several women served as pianists and directors of orchestras in black theaters in the 1910s and 1920s.

African-American female singers were the primary artists of the earliest blues recordings during what is known as the classic blues era of the 1920s. Historians have noted that the “blues queens,” such as Mamie Smith, Bessie Smith, and Ma Rainey, starred on the recordings that launched the blues recording industry, thus providing settings for many of the earliest recorded jazz solos by such instrumentalists as Coleman Hawkins, Louis Armstrong, and Sidney Bechet.

The extent to which women held down the piano chairs in early jazz bands in cities such as New Orleans and Chicago is significant. Jazz band pianists in New Orleans included Dolly Adams, Sweet Emma Barrett, Jeanette Kimball, and Olivia Cook, whereas in Chicago the long list of highly regarded early jazz pianists includes Lil Armstrong and Lovie Austin. Women’s training and professional participation on instruments other than piano (or voice) was less visible, but a number of female cornetists, trumpet players, and saxophonists were celebrated in the black press in the 1920s, among them the trumpet playing mother and daughter Dyer and Dolly Jones (also known as Dolly Armenra or Dolly Hutchinson). Frequently the women who played instruments other than piano in jazz bands of the 1920s did so in the contexts of all-woman bands, usually on vaudeville circuits, but they sometimes performed for dancing. Dolly Jones was a member of Bobbie Howell’s American Syncopators in 1929. Other all-woman bands of the 1920s include Bobbie Grice and the Fourteen Bricktops, the Pollyanna Syncopators, and the Gibson Navigators.

(ii) The Great Depression.

The high unemployment and dire economics of the Great Depression made its impact in all industries and often resulted in the firing of women workers to provide jobs for unemployed men. However, the powerful need of people for diversion in the face of these difficult times, as well as the alternative economic system provided by prohibition-era nightclubs run by gangsters, meant that some facets of the entertainment industry were uniquely stable employers during the 1930s. Indeed the Great Depression was a period during which women musicians participated as pianists in men’s jazz bands, as instrumentalists in all-girl bands, and as featured players of instruments associated with men, especially if such players provide the services of several entertainers for the price of one – perhaps singing and dancing as well as playing an instrument, as did the
“Queen of the Trumpet,” Valaida Snow. Some women, among them the singer Blanche Calloway and the clarinetist Ann Dupont, led male bands.

The tradition of relative acceptance of women pianists continued in the 1930s, most notably, perhaps, in Kansas City, where Mary Lou Williams and Margaret “Countess” Johnson exerted their influence on that wide-open city’s swinging sound. In addition to the two all-female ensembles led by Lil Armstrong, African-American all-girl bands of the 1930s included the popular Harlem Playgirls, the Dixie Rhythm Girls, and the Dixie Sweethearts, out of which emerged many of the great jazz soloists and lead players of the 1940s all-girl bands, such as the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, Eddie Durham’s All-Stars, and the Darlings of Rhythm. Several white all-girl bands of the 1930s gained access to the lucrative circuits of the growing mass entertainment industry, particularly those that communicated visual and musical messages that they weren’t “really” jazz bands. This was especially true in the case of Phil Spitalny’s “Hour of Charm” orchestra, which played primarily light classical music and emphasized a Victorian image of talented “angels of the hearth,” despite a roster of highly trained and experienced professional musicians. Spitalny’s orchestra received unprecedented network radio sponsorships and recording opportunities between 1934 and 1954. While Ina Rae Hutton’s 1930s band played jazz pieces and included improvising soloists, the image of the blond bombshell, popularized by the screen actress Jean Harlow, encouraged an overall presentation of sex-spectacle.

(iii) World War II.

Gender roles drastically shifted during World War II, affecting all fields of labor in the USA, including jazz and swing musicianship. The draft, enlistment, and new flexible definitions for “what is a worker” and “what is a woman,” which accompanied the production boom and labor crisis, all resulted in a transformation of the presence of women in male-dominated civilian occupations as acceptable and even patriotic. As male big bands suffered personnel crises amid an enormous demand for dance music, female big bands acquired a new patriotic image and were even popular entertainers on USO camp show units sent out to entertain military troops. The celebrated International Sweethearts of Rhythm traveled to Germany under the aegis of the USO after black troops launched letter-writing campaigns specially requesting this famous African-American all-woman band. Other black women’s bands which, like the Sweethearts, sometimes covertly broke the color line by engaging white women included Eddie Durham’s All-Stars and the Darlings of Rhythm. The Prairie View Co-eds was a popular black all-female band, composed of college students at the historically black Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, which spent its summers traveling on road tours that culminated with performances at the Apollo Theatre. Among white all-woman bands
of the 1940s were Ada Leonard’s “All-American” Girls, a band that made several USO tours of America, and groups led by the trumpet player Joy Cayler and the double bass player Sharon Rogers, both of which traveled on USO tours to the Philippines, Korea, and Japan. In addition to taking advantage of the expanding opportunities and acceptance women found in wartime all-girl bands, women musicians were sometimes employed in men’s bands. Male leaders responded to war-induced personnel crises by supplementing their ranks with an unprecedented number of teenage boys, male musicians over the age of 35, and women. Woody Herman hired the trumpet player Billie Rogers and the vibraphonist Marjorie Hyams, Gerald Wilson took on the trombonist Melba Liston, and Lionel Hampton engaged the saxophonist Elsie Smith, to name only a few.

(iv) The postwar years.

A side-effect of the wartime acceptance of women workers as “pitching in for the war effort” was that, after the war was over, it seemed natural that returning GIs should reclaim their roles and women should “go back home.” The fact that most women workers had not come from home, but had worked before the war, did not hinder this perception. As with women workers in other fields, women musicians were inundated with messages that they should become full-time housewives and mothers, whether or not it was economically feasible or desirable to do so. In fact, the presence of women in the labor force grew rather than dwindled in the postwar years, and, rather than “going home,” many women welders and riveters moved into “pink-collar” occupations (jobs such as beautician, teacher, and nurse, which had traditionally been thought of as “women’s work”). Accordingly, many women musicians moved into musical fields traditionally considered “appropriate” for women, such as education. Some put down their brass or reed instruments and changed to piano or Hammond organ to take advantage of the historic acceptance of women at the keyboard; such moves were also a response to a postwar musical trend towards smaller groups playing in nightclubs instead of ballrooms, and to the concomitant money-saving maneuver of the clubowners, such as replacing bands with unaccompanied solo, duo, or trio acts that revolved around piano or organ.

Some women from the all-girl big bands of the 1940s formed groups that remained active through the postwar years, including Tiny Davis’s Hell Divers (comprised of members of the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, the Darlings of Rhythm, and the Prairie View Co-eds), and the Vadel Quintet (which emerged from Virgil Whyte’s big band). Some women, such as the trumpet player Clora Bryant, worked as freelance soloists in nightclubs. The emergence of television brought employment for some, in particular those who found work in the white all-girl television bands led by Hutton and Leonard.
Significant women instrumentalists who participated in jazz activities associated with the civil rights movement include the pianist, harpist, percussionist, and composer Alice McLeod Coltrane, who replaced McCoy Tyner in John Coltrane’s group in 1966, and the pianist and organist Amina Claudine Myers, one of the few women associated with the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians in Chicago in the 1960s and 1970s.

(v) The second-wave women’s movement.

The emergence of the second-wave women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s raised public consciousness about issues such as sex discrimination in the workforce. It also raised the consciousness of women about the importance of documenting their lost history and cultural activities, and of creating new theories and practices conducive to women’s liberation from limiting gender stereotypes. Much of this work unconsciously reflected the desires and assumptions of white middle-class women about gender. While the creation of a genre of “women’s music” consisted nearly exclusively of acoustic folk-revivalist music with feminist lyrics, there were, however, effects pertinent to jazz. One was the emergence of a new audience for women’s jazz performances, as well as for recordings of and information about historical women in jazz. Another was the adaption of the success and popularity of “women’s music” festivals to the development in the late 1970s of women’s jazz festivals. The chronology of “women’s music” usually begins with coffee-house performers in the 1960s, the emergence of recordings and record companies in the early 1970s, the first National Women’s Music Festival in 1974, and the first Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival in 1976.

1978 was a pivotal year for the effects of these events on women in jazz. The first Women’s Jazz Festival was held in Kansas City in March 1978 and was followed that June by the Universal Jazz Coalition’s Salute to Women in Jazz, the first of 14 annual New York women’s jazz festivals produced by Cobi Narita. In the same year Stash Records released an anthology of historical recordings and radio broadcasts featuring women in jazz. These recordings were accompanied by Frank Driggs’s informative booklet with its explicit call for more research in the field of women’s historical participation in jazz. In the early to mid-1980s four books on women in jazz were published by D. Antoinette Handy, Linda Dahl, and Sally Placksin. Rosetta Reitz founded a record company (Rosetta Records) dedicated to reissuing historical jazz and blues recordings by women. Two documentary films, by Greta Schiller (1986) and Andrea Weiss (1988), focused attention on the International Sweethearts of Rhythm.

All-woman groups and big bands returned to popularity in the 1970s, this time with the support of a new type of audience that was enthusiastic about the nontraditional accomplishments of women.
and critical about modes of representation that objectified women’s bodies or trivialized their labor. Notable all-woman groups founded in this decade included Sisters in Jazz (based in New York, 1974–7) and Maiden Voyage (Los Angeles, 1979–).

(vi) Women and jazz in the early 21st century.

While women continued to play jazz in all styles and on all instruments available to men, it would be naive to suggest at the end of the 20th century that women were simply accepted for their musical abilities. While many well-respected female musicians keep on blazing the trail on brass, reeds, and drums, as well as on instruments traditionally considered “feminine,” they also persist in raising eyebrows when they mount the bandstand. Women musicians continue to experience different kinds of expectations than do their male colleagues, from their employers, from male co-workers, and from audiences. These range from a disproportionate interest in what they will wear, rather than what they will play, to assumptions that they will not play aggressively enough and a resentment that their presence may disrupt established social patterns of rehearsals, performance, and travel. The press continues to respond to the existence of female musicians as though they were just now appearing on the scene. Although recording opportunities are common for such women pianists as JoAnne Brackeen, Marilyn Crispell, and Geri Allen, and appear to have significantly improved for other instrumentalists (as evidenced by multiple releases by such contemporary jazzwomen as the drummer Cindy Blackman, the saxophonists Jane Bunnett and Jane Ira Bloom, and the trumpet players Rebecca Coupe Franks and Ingrid Jensen), there is still overwhelming evidence that women jazz musicians do not receive the same encouragement or opportunities as do men of comparative skill. Contemporary efforts to correct these persistent inequalities include programs such as the Sisters in Jazz mentorship program of the International Association of Jazz Educators. In 1995 the need for organizations that would support and promote women’s jazz musicianship was still great enough for Cobi Narita in New York to found International Women in Jazz, Inc. In 1996 the Smithsonian Institution and 651, An Arts Center produced a symposium on women in jazz, and the Kennedy Center presented the first Mary Lou Williams three-day jazz festival.

3. History and criticism.

On the steam of the second-wave women’s movement and the accompanying interest in documenting and celebrating the nontraditional accomplishments of women in the past, book-length histories of women in jazz began to be published in the 1980s. Among these, D. Antoinette Handy documented hidden histories of black women musicians and located her findings in an African-
American social-historical context in two important works: *Black Women in American Bands and Orchestras* (1981) and *The International Sweethearts of Rhythm* (1983). Handy’s volumes, along with Sally Placksin’s *American Women in Jazz, 1900 to the Present* (1982), and Linda Dahl’s *Stormy Weather: the Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen* (1984), and other histories of women-in-jazz provide indispensable groundwork for studying women’s participation on all instruments and in all eras of jazz (not exclusively as singers).

The fact that “universal” jazz histories (in which women exist exclusively as singers) continued to appear subsequent to the publication of these distinguished volumes indicates that dominant assumptions about gender not only affect jazz practice, but permeate the ideological frameworks through which information is circulated and filtered, affecting the practices of writing, reading, and thinking about jazz history as well. Though the histories of women in jazz are increasingly included in footnotes and bibliographies of supposedly “gender-free” jazz histories, the reconfigurations of what counts as jazz history developed and utilized by Handy, Dahl, and Placksin have been all but ignored in these works.

The emergence of academic jazz studies, influenced by contemporaneous trends in cultural studies, musicology, and ethnomusicology, has produced new work that focuses on interrelationships between historically specific ideas about masculinity and race in jazz. Although these works have tended to ignore all over again the participation of women in jazz, this interest in jazz masculinity, ironically, may actually bode well for the development of approaches to jazz studies that acknowledge gender as an active ingredient of jazz history.

**Selected recordings**

*(all anthologies by various artists)*

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See also

Women in music
Women in American music