

FEATURES

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Jazz:

In jazz, though it seems a woman's place is behind the mic, female instrumentalists are making headway

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women are becoming key players



Clockwise from above: Singer Lizz Wright, album art for jazz musician Esperanza Spalding's CD *Esperanza*, Ella Fitzgerald immortalized on a US Postal Service stamp, and singer Sophie Milman — just a few of the many female artists who have chipped away at jazz's glass ceiling. PHOTOS: BLOOMBERG

The man sitting in front of me in Ronnie Scott's jazz club got me thinking. I was there to hear the Portico Quartet, but had instead spent the first half listening to the sound of his voice as he chatted to his companion — so I had asked him to be quiet. At the end of the gig he apologized a little too contritely for spoiling my enjoyment. Then he added "Why are you here, anyway? Is your boyfriend in the band?"

The answer was no, but it was the question that mattered. This man may have been a sexist throwback, but I wondered if there could be any basis to his assumption that I could not have been there out of my own appreciation of the music. I looked around the club. The band were all men. Most of the audience were men, except for a group of women whose shouts and whoops made me think they really were with the band. It made me wonder where, and how, women fit into jazz.

The short answer, of course, is at the microphone. Many of the best jazz singers have been, and still are, women — from Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald, to the British singing star Claire Martin, and American stand-up comic and scat maestro Lea DeLaria. Female jazz instrumentalists are a much rarer breed.

All-woman ensembles proliferated on both sides of the Atlantic during World War II, but most of them disappeared shortly after. A number of women instrumentalists have risen to the highest levels — among them the American pianists, composers and band leaders Mary Lou Williams, Carla Bley, and Toshiko Akiyoshi and, more recently, Maria Schneider, and percussionist Terri Lyne Carrington. But many remain best known for their collaborations with more famous men — Williams, for instance, wrote arrangements for Benny Goodman and Duke Ellington, and Lil Hardin Armstrong is more often referred to as Louis Armstrong's second wife than as a composer and bandleader in her own right.

In the early days of jazz, scorn was poured on the very possibility of women as instrumentalists. In February 1938, for instance, an editorial appeared in the American jazz magazine *Down Beat* under the headline *Why Women Musicians Are Inferior*. "The woman musician never was born," it read, "capable of sending anyone further than the nearest exit."

The hugely successful composer Maria Schneider could not, of course, be further from that stereotype. She puts the lack of top women instrumentalists in jazz down to historical precedent rather than prejudice.

"One really can't ignore the fact," she says, "that when jazz began, it wasn't conducive to being a woman at that time. Only a few women did it — Marylou Williams, Lil Hardin Armstrong. They were comfortable in that world somehow. But I don't think many women were, and maybe still are. It's not an easy life."

Pianist Toshiko Akiyoshi, who has earned 14 Grammy nominations in her 50-year career, agrees. "During the big band years, most musicians did one-nighters," she says. "Duke Ellington used to travel by bus. Having a woman could be inconvenient — they only had one bathroom, and then they'd need a separate dressing room for the woman at the venue. So the band leader might shy away from having a woman player."

Even if a woman did get out on the road, she could find herself the object of unwanted attention. One perhaps apocryphal story has the 1920s American bandleader Blanche Calloway, for instance, arrested while on tour for using a toilet in a roadside gas station at 6am.

Attitudes have changed since then — but not as much as you might think.

Guitarist Deirdre Cartwright, whose all-woman group the Guest Stars was one of the most successful British touring bands of the

1980s, is convinced that it's still more difficult for women to get gigs — whether solo or as bandleaders: "In certain jazz clubs they hardly ever book any women musicians. I've been told indirectly that I can't get a gig in a club because they've already got a woman the week before. A woman who is playing a different style of music than me, on a different instrument."

Assumptions about which instruments are "suitable" for men and for women appear to begin with what boys and girls are encouraged to learn at school. An extensive survey of school music lessons in the UK last year found that most girls were learning traditionally "feminine" instruments such as the harp and flute, while boys dominated hugely on the kinds of instruments needed for jazz — guitar, brass, drums and bass. This translates, naturally, into fewer girls going on to study jazz at music college.

Of the 92 jazz students currently enrolled at London's Trinity College of Music, for instance, just 11 are women. Clowes graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in London in 2003 as the only female jazz instrumentalist in her year.

Schneider believes the problem starts even earlier. "To be a jazz musician," she says, "requires a huge amount of alone time. Practicing, being in your own head. Working on your own thing. I don't think that young girls are generally oriented to that kind of thinking. It's very deep-seated."

Cartwright goes even further. She's wary of taking the generalization too far, but admits that jazz, with its emphasis on improvisation and its history of competitiveness between players, could appeal more naturally to men than to women.

"Men have always defined what jazz is about," she says. "Jam sessions, cutting contests, showing somebody else up on the bandstand. I'm not saying that women can't do that, but it's less appealing for the majority of women."

Cartwright has also observed, as I did at Ronnie Scott's, a larger number of men than women in jazz audiences — though she doesn't think audiences are more male for jazz than for any other kind of music, and a 2003 survey of audiences by the information provider Jazz Services had jazz fans down as 56 percent male. But according to jazz promoter John Cumming, director of Serious Productions, the company behind many of the UK's largest-scale jazz concerts, the atmosphere at gigs can still feel definitively male — and obsessive.

"The average audience member is probably male, and is very knowledgeable about jazz — he may even have a certain anorak quality," he says. "Trainspottery, you might say."

Cartwright laughs at this, and concedes that Cumming may have a point. "You could say," she says, "that in terms of the devotion it inspires in some men, jazz is a bit like cricket."

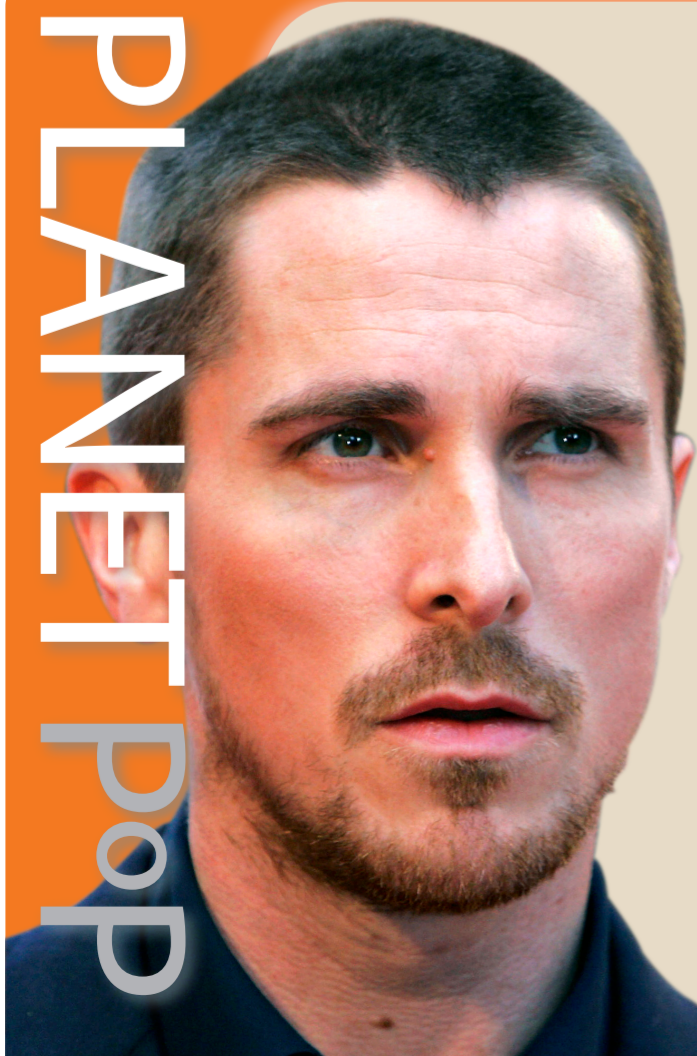
So what, if anything, can be done to encourage more women to get into jazz?

"All you can do is expose girls to lots of different music from a young age," says Akiyoshi. Even Cartwright is unequivocal on this point. "I can understand why women like to play together," she says, "but I don't think the way forward is to encourage all-female groups."

Clowes agrees. "It just attracts the wrong attention. It's not cool."

The only people who need help are those who persist with the idea that a woman at a jazz gig can only possibly be there to sing, or to gaze dewy-eyed at her boyfriend on stage. Women instrumentalists, as Schneider puts it, are meanwhile quietly helping themselves — through hard work, determination, and sheer talent: "With women, maybe it's like this. If you're mediocre, you might have a tough time. If you're really good, nobody can deny it."

PLANET POP



Batman star **Christian Bale** apologized Friday for his expletive-laden tantrum during filming of a new *Terminator* film, saying he was "out of order beyond belief."

Bale's meltdown became an Internet sensation after a recording of his rant at a cinematographer found its way on to the Web.

The 35-year-old old British-born actor called a Los Angeles morning show on KROQ radio to apologize for the outburst. "It has been a miserable week for me," Bale told the show's hosts. "I know I have a potty mouth but I was way out of order."

"The thing that I want to stress is that I have no confusion whatsoever. I was out of order beyond belief. I acted like a punk. I regret that and there is nobody that has heard that tape that is hit harder by it than me. I make no excuses for it, it is inexcusable, and I hope that is absolutely clear."

Bale also said he hoped the fallout from his tirade would not deter people from watching *Terminator: Salvation* when it hits screens later this year.

"I'm asking people, please do not allow my onetime lapse in judgment, my incredibly embarrassing meltdown, to overshadow this movie and to have all of those people's hard work [from the film's cast and crew] go to waste."

In the audio clip of the incident, which took place on location in New Mexico in July, Bale can be heard lambasting

cinematographer **Shane Hurlbut** for apparently wandering into the actor's line of vision.

Bale repeatedly calls for Hurlbut to be kicked off the set and threatens to tear down the cinematographer's lighting rig.

Bale's rant is the latest incident involving the actor, who is renowned for his fiercely committed approach to acting.

Bale was arrested in London last year for allegedly attacking his mother and sister. Police later said the actor would face no charges because of insufficient evidence.

Actor **James Whitmore**, famed for his one-man stage shows and an Oscar-nominated turn as US President Harry Truman, died on Friday at age 87.

Whitmore died at his home in the seaside enclave of Malibu, just northwest of Los Angeles, of lung cancer, with which he was diagnosed in November, according to his son, Steve.

Rags-to-riches drama *Slumdog Millionaire* continued its sweep through the Hollywood movie industry awards, on Saturday winning top honors for an adapted screenplay.

The Writers Guild of America honored the film, along with the biographical drama *Milk*, at its annual award ceremony for film writing.

The honor further cements frontrunner Oscar status for *Slumdog*, which is based on the novel *Q&A* by **Vikas Swarup**. The film has collected 10 Oscar nominations.



Above: Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* is gathering momentum.

Left: Christian Bale is sorry that he acted more like a villain than a superhero.

Other films nominated for the screenwriters award were *Doubt*, *Milk*, *Frost/Nixon* and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*.

Slumdog Millionaire also on Saturday won top honors from the Producers Guild of America Awards.

The film is considered a leading contender to collect an armful of gold statuettes at the Feb. 22 Oscars ceremony, including possible best picture honors.

The estate of *The Godfather* author **Mario Puzo** got an offer it couldn't refuse and settled a US\$1 million lawsuit relating to a videogame loosely based on the film, lawyers said Friday.

Lawyers for the Puzo estate had filed suit against Paramount Pictures Corp in June, alleging it was owed profits

from sales and rentals of the game *The Godfather: The Game*, licensed by Paramount in 2006.

But the possibility of a trial was averted on Friday after the two sides reached a settlement, the terms of which were not immediately clear.

"We think it's a terrific settlement," said the Puzo estate's attorney, Bert Fields. "This involved one of the most admired films of all time."

Paramount attorney Hajir Ardebili was not immediately available for comment. In court papers filed in August, the studio denied it owed any money.

Puzo died in 1999.

His best-known novel *The Godfather*, charting the rise of a Sicilian mafia family based in New York, was published in 1969 and became one of the 20th century's best-selling novels, with more than 20 million copies sold.

The book was adapted into an Oscar-winning movie by Francis Ford Coppola, followed by a sequel, *The Godfather: Part II*.

Rockers, rappers and record executives gathered in Los Angeles last night for the annual Grammy Awards, but there was little to celebrate at the music industry's biggest night. Album sales have tumbled for the past decade, last year's viewership was among the lowest ever, and now a recession is generating more layoffs at the major label.