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Three Strikes As Well: Asian, Woman, and Jazz Musician

Theresa Chen

> From the standpoint of a French fan, Marian McPartland might very easily be voted "the musician we'd least like to accept as a jazz artist." She is English, white, and a girl—three hopeless strikes against her from the Gallic angle.[1]

I am a product of two different cultures. I was born in the United States but raised in Taiwan starting at age four. In Taiwan, as an undergraduate majoring in classical piano, I received subtly gendered comments from teachers after semester juries, such as "Romantic works fit you the best!" and "Baroque pieces suit you well."[2] Years later, after pursuing an education and career in jazz in the U.S., I played Ann Ronell's "Willow Weep for Me" during a late-night jam session in Taipei while on summer vacation. After getting off the stage, an older white man in the audience came to me and said, "It still sounds the best when ballads are performed by women." Through these experiences I realized, like Marian McPartland and so many before me, in the eyes of both Taiwanese and U.S. culture, I had three strikes against me.

This article explores the meaning of "three strikes"—an intersectional identity of being an Asian, a woman, and a jazz musician—and its impact on the cases of Asian (American) Pacific Islander women jazz musicians. For the term "three strikes," I draw on the famous jazz critic Leonard Feather's 1951 profile of jazz pianist Marian McPartland in which he described her as having "three hopeless strikes against her" because she was "English, white, and a girl."[3] His assessment captured the unspoken difficulty of women musicians advancing their careers—a challenge that continues today, especially for international and non-white players. In 2018, during McPartland's centennial year, Austrian pianist and scholar Monika Herzig revisited Feather's definition of "three strikes."

[1] Leonard Feather, "East Saw West; Twain Met," *Downbeat*, July 13, 1951, 13.

[2] Romantic and Baroque music are considered more elegant and graceful, traits that are typically gendered feminine.

[3] Feather attempted to make "three strikes" sound affirmative near the end of the article, noting how rare it was to see a female musician leading a small group. Leonard Feather, "East Saw West; Twain Met," *Downbeat*, July 13, 1951, 13

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Reflecting upon her history as a white, Austrian, woman jazz musician who once felt like she was not "being one of the guys" in the band, Herzig recognized McPartland as her role model and was determined to become an active advocate of Jazz Girls Days, "teaching the following generations to overcome their obstacles, pave a path to their careers and get their voices heard."[4]

Recontextualizing Feather's sexist and racially problematic comments, I use the term "strike" as an analytical framework to explore how contemporary women musicians manage gendered as well as racialized bias while still advancing their careers. This study is shaped by three research questions:

1. How did researchers and writers define "three strikes" in the context of jazz and gender?
2. How have "three strikes" influenced A(A)PI women jazz musicians' lives?
3. How do A(A)PI women jazz musicians manage the "three strikes" to advance their careers?

This paper analyzes interviews I conducted with eleven A(A)PI (Asian American and Pacific Islanders) women jazz musicians in order to examine how A(A)PI women jazz musicians experience "three strikes" based on their cultural backgrounds, gender roles, and music experiences. With this research, I advocate for better representation of their experiences in jazz and gender studies while building on preexisting scholarship on A(A)PI jazz musicians.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

No jazz scholarship has clearly defined the category "AAPI Female Jazz Musicians." Social work scholar Lina Y. S. Fong uses "Asian American Women" to describe the group of "immigrant women and their female descendants in America whose ancestry originates from Asia and the eastern Pacific."[5] Fong's definition of the term only refers to the group who obtained U.S. citizenship through immigration with their local offspring. In my research, my informants include those with and without U.S. citizenship. Thus, I will use A(A)PI with the second A in parentheses to include the informants without U.S. citizenship.

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[4] Monika Herzig, "Three Strikes," posted on February 17, 2018, https://www.monikaherzig.com/three-strikes/.

[5] Lina Y. S. Fong, "Asian American Women: An Understudied Minority," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 24, No.1 (March 1997): 91.

Similarly, while there has been some scholarship on A(A)PI jazz musicians, none to date has focused solely on A(A)PI women jazz musicians. For example, jazz scholar Kevin Fellezs has written about the challenges A(A)PI jazz musicians faced due to the model minority myth.[6] The model minority myth, first established by sociologist William Petersen in an article published in a 1966 issue of the *New York Times Magazine,* argues that A(A)PIs were able to achieve a high socioeconomic status through hard work and by following a set of cultural values that prioritized discipline, work ethic, and compliance to social hierarchy.[7] "Model minority" status risks erasure through assimilation, and results in further stereotyping. In jazz, the myth leads to, according to Fellezs, both male and female A(A)PI musicians not being considered "real" jazz artists by both white and Black people due to 1) related stereotypes that they are "nerdy" and/or "noncreative"[8]; 2) not being the "right" race for a jazz musician; and 3) the false belief in better socioeconomic mobility for A(A)PI musicians.[9] Fellezs's goal was to compensate for the virtually nonexistent history of A(A)PI jazz musicians; however, the musicians involved were primarily male, with Toshiko Akiyoshi and Hiromi Uehara as the only women included in his study. In a 2023 symposium titled "Asian American Jazz: Past, Present, Future," however, Fellezs recognized more female musicians.[10] Further, while he groups together men and women in his discussion of jazz's racialized limitations, he places a particular spotlight on the stereotypical emasculation of A(A)PI males. Fellezs argues that such racist stereotyping excludes A(A)PI men from the traditionally masculine requirements fulfilled by Black and white jazz musicians. The present article thus builds on Fellezs' work by centering A(A)PI women jazz musicians' experiences through their own words.

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[6] Kevin A. Fellezs, "Silenced but Not Silent: Asian Americans and Jazz," in *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, ed. Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu (Duke University Press, 2007), 70.

[7] William Petersen, "Success Story, Japanese American Style," *New York Times*, January 9, 1966.

[8] Fellez did not elaborate this point of how characteristics of A(A)PI musicians associated with "playing real jazz," but it can be inferred that the "socially embarrassing" quality could relate to body movement (Fellezs, "Silenced but Not Silent: Asian Americans and Jazz," 73). Theo Cateforis's "Performing the Avant-Garde Groove: Devo and the Whiteness of the New Wave" discusses how dance movements relate to body, music, and cultural contexts. Since jazz involves social interactions through a series of dance grooves from Black culture, it is possible for A(A) PI jazz musicians to be seen as not interesting to groove with during performance.

[9] A (perceived) higher socioeconomic status can lead to assumptions that musicians have sold-out or are not "authentic." Fellezs, "Silenced but Not Silent: Asian Americans and Jazz," 73.

[10] Kevin A. Fellezs, "What's at Stake? Considering the Case for 'Asian American Jazz,'" *American Music* 41, No.1 (Spring 2023): 6.

METHODS & DEFINITIONS

I interviewed eleven women from Gen X to Gen Z.[11] The interviewees—comprising vocalists, instrumentalists, and composers/band leaders—are either American-born or expatriates (abb. expats) from their countries, without permanent U.S. residency. Their countries of origin and/or ancestry include Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Vietnam. All except one are active in New York City's jazz scene. Each interview lasted about an hour. I implemented semi-structured interviews with a list of open-ended questions. I attempted to design questions by focusing on the three strikes separately; however, it was difficult to discuss one strike without mentioning others, making each question necessarily intersectional. Thus, my strategy was to isolate events where the negative impacts of the strikes were felt and then develop my interview questions around them. The interview protocol, which received several rounds of revisions, is shown in Figure 1 below.

When conducting the interviews, I expected a wide variety of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences. Therefore, depending on each interviewee's story, my interview questions sometimes expanded beyond those in the protocol.

[11] Generation X (abb. Gen X) refers to the descendants of Baby Boomers (people born between 1946 and 1964) who were born between 1965 and 1980; Generation Y (abb. Gen Y), known as Millennials, were born between the late 1980s and the first half of 1990s; Generation Z (abb. Gen Z) is defined as people born in the late 1990s to the early 2010s.

Research Question	Interview Question
Opening Question	Please briefly describe your ethnicity, family, and musical background.
How have "three strikes" influenced A(A)PI women jazz musicians' lives?	How did your cultural upbringing view music-making as a primary career? What about your family members? What expectations, norms, and standards did they have of you as an A(A)PI woman musician? Describe your first encounter with jazz. How was your transition from being a classical musician (or non-musician) to a jazz musician? Do you think your cultural background and values align with the culture of jazz? How did people (both audiences from your cultural upbringing and Western countries) react when they first saw you performing as a jazz player? Did you feel any difference between working with all-Asian and all-American jazz players? Did you need to change your manners or behaviors to blend well with or fit into both cultural groups? Have you encountered any biases regarding your multiple identity as an Asian woman jazz musician?
How do A(A)PI women jazz musicians manage the "three strikes" to advance their careers?	Based on your stories, what is your definition of "three strikes?" Realizing the negative assumptions coming with the strikes, can you tell me a few instances of things that you've done in response to the "strikes" in your career?

Figure 1. Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

EXPERIENCES OF "THREE STRIKES"

Each musician's interview reflected her experience on the receiving end of the "three strikes"; however, the level of impact among the three varies. For example, one musician may face more barriers due to her race, while another may encounter more challenges because of her decision to perform jazz. Based on my analysis of the narratives of eleven female A(A)PI jazz musicians, the elements that impact the various effects of "the strikes" on the artists are their cultural upbringing and music education, as well as their lack of belonging to the "authentic" ethnic groups of jazz (Black or white American), which also leads to obstacles in these musicians' careers.

Cultural Upbringing

Cultural upbringing, including family relationships and other social environments, influenced the early development of the A(A)PI female jazz musicians in this study. Most interviewees believe their parents, whether or not they are U.S. immigrants, would have preferred that they didn't choose music as their primary career, even if they were outwardly ambivalent about it. Some parents did not necessarily insist on a lifetime career choice and were open to their children studying music. Conversely, others were/are either firmly against their daughter pursuing a career as a musician or view music-making only as a means of enhancing feminine characteristics.

For instance, gender stereotypes play a significant role in Chien-Chien Lu and Malaya Sol's stories. Chien-Chien Lu, an award-winning Taiwanese vibraphonist active in New York who used to tour with trumpeter Jeremy Pelt, explained: "My mom pushed me to study music so that I could marry a doctor or a lawyer. To her, studying music makes me not become a rebel but an elegant, charismatic woman."[12] When her mother learned that her album had been acknowledged by GRAMMY as one of the "10 Emerging Jazz Artists to Watch" in 2023, she was surprised at how Lu had become so serious about her music career.[13]

A similar but slightly different case happened to Malaya Sol, a Filipina vocalist who became a U.S. citizen last year. When speaking of her family in the Philippines, she stated,

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[12] Chien-Chien Lu, Google Meet conversation with the author, recording and translated transcript from Mandarin Chinese, July 22, 2024.

[13] Morgan Enos, "10 Emerging Jazz Artists to Watch: Simon Moullier, Mali Obomsawin, Julieta Eugenio, Jeremy Dutton & More," posted on April 20, 2023, https://www.grammy.com/news/10-emerging-jazz-artists-to-know-in-2023/.

> For them, being a musician should only be a side thing, not my primary career. In terms of social status and prestige, no matter how vital music is culturally for my family or the Philippines or the Filipino culture in general, it doesn't always carry the same level of respect and recognition as other occupations, like my sister, who is a nurse, and my mother, who is a teacher. If it doesn't lead to fame, or if you don't have financial success, it's not something that they encourage.
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> My family put me in an arts program in high school because they knew I loved singing and learning different kinds of music. But when I was in college, they firmly imposed that I go into the medical field in nursing. As an Asian person, you have to follow your grandma. You cannot just be like, "Oh, no, I'm not going to do that." So, I did it anyway. I dealt with hospitals and stuff like that, but secretly, I was gigging around Manila. I even flew to Hong Kong on the weekends to accept gigs. They didn't know because I didn't return to Zambales.

I asked her how her family reacted when they saw her performing jazz on the stage, and she answered,

> People were like, "How did you get to learn all this music?" I don't particularly know their reaction because they were covert, but they were sometimes surprised that a little girl from the Philippines could sing the Great American Songbook. They often expressed things like, "Oh wow! I only hear that from the records, but I've never heard anyone sing that on the spot!" [14]

Lu and Sol's parents eventually accepted that their daughters are independent jazz musicians. However, their narratives still suggest that family values and education immensely affect the early musical development of A(A)PI female jazz musicians. Although most Asian countries have long-standing musical traditions and have developed vibrant music-making scenes with or without state support, it is still possible for these women to experience race and gender strikes in their upbringing.

Music Education

Many of the A(A)PI female musicians I interviewed were in musical environments that emphasized classical music, lacked jazz role models, and/or had limited resources in their jazz education. Despite these challenges, most interviewees, especially those who did not grow up in the U.S., expressed their curiosity and even had a strong interest when they first encountered jazz at a

[14] This and the above quote are from Malaya Sol, Google Meet conversation with the author, recording and transcript, June 11, 2024.

young age. Tomoko Ohno, a Japanese pianist who became a regular pianist in the Diva Jazz Orchestra around the 2000s, recalled, "I used to be a fan of British rock and played guitar for a while. The chords sounded so good that I was trying to figure them out without knowing their structure since I could not access and study chord charts then."[15] After graduating from law school at Rikkyo University, Ohno worked as an electric keyboard demonstrator for the Yamaha company. At that time, she developed an interest in jazz piano and theory. After she took some private lessons, she realized, "To get the answers quickly, the only way was to go to the U.S. and attend jazz schools there." Regarding role models of Asian female jazz musicians, Ohno added, "Because of Toshiko Akiyoshi's early presence, many female jazz musicians moved out to the U.S. I remember reading a newspaper in the early '90s saying that more than thirty were in the New York City area." To Ohno, Akiyoshi's life as a musician, dealing with her own three strikes around the same time as Marian McPartland, is unbelievable and inspiring to her. Akiyoshi created a legacy that motivated her, and other Asian female jazz musicians, to pursue careers like hers.

Since the 1920s, jazz has been widespread and well-developed in Japan. However, in Taiwan, where the jazz scene only began to flourish before and after World War II, the ability to study jazz posed a more significant challenge for female musicians. As the only Asian country with 1-12th grade professional classical musician programs since 1962, but no formal jazz education programs until 2015, Taiwanese female musicians often faced problems when transitioning from classical musicians to jazz musicians in the U.S. Rei Wang, a bassist who gigs and teaches in Oklahoma, underwent intensive double bass training in the Taiwanese classical music education system. She expressed,

> In classical music, you always have what is written before you. The structure is there, and you have to interpret the music, even small, tiny details, in a certain style the composer expects you to do. Jazz is the opposite. There's not much information before you. Imagine I have to switch from one mode of reading and playing the music, breathing, following the conductor and the concertmaster's lead to another, like, "Hey! That's all we have for now. You're in charge of time now." It's such a huge difference. So when I just started playing jazz, I was shocked by two things: I didn't know what to play when I saw the slashes on the piece of paper, and I couldn't get used to the time feel.[16]

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[15] This and the following quotes in this paragraph are from Tomoko Ohno, Google Meet conversation with the author, recording and transcript, June 18, 2024.

[16] Rei Wang Bowen, Google Meet conversation with the author, recording and translated transcript from Mandarin Chinese, June 22, 2024.

Wang's thoughts reveal her experience moving from Western classical music, a practice heavily embedded in and indebted to white European culture, to jazz, a form of music not studied in Taiwan at the time. This may have been an experience of a racial barrier. As Philip Ewell writes, focusing on Western classical music over jazz can reveal anti-Blackness in the curriculum.[17] This can compound further into an authenticity complex for A(A)PI musicians.

Authenticity Complex

A few interviewees shared that they used to struggle with their (perceived) precarious relationship with "jazz authenticity." Jazz and Japanese historian E. Taylor Atkins has argued that jazz authenticity has historically been defined by "the possession of certain qualities—educational background, life experience, ethnic heritage, motivations, or artistic visions—which confer upon an artist the right not only to work without being challenged in a particular medium but to establish the standard by which all others working in that medium will be judged."[18] When musicians perform works of other cultures and ethnicities, they may face invisible pressure of being seen as "authentic" or "inauthentic" depending either on how closely they stick with artistic standards embedded in the "original culture" behind the music, or how closely their stage appearance and performance practices match the specific experiential, ethnic, or motivational qualities of the "original's" creator.[19] Under these circumstances, A(A)PI female jazz musicians, seemingly and stereotypically not the "authentic" people who play jazz, may have different opinions of how culturally far away they are from jazz, even though they perform in the U.S., where jazz originated.

When asked about her relationship with jazz authenticity and culture, Korean pianist Dabin Ryu replied,

> Honestly, every time I played, or every time I went to see a concert, or even like being in class, I felt so embarrassed. I felt like I still didn't know anything, even though I had learned and played jazz for almost 20 years. The more I studied, the more I realized the lack of cultural engagement or knowledge about the history of jazz. It's more like the history of America. You have to know all those racial issues, understand what happened, why this music was made this way, and how it started. I didn't know about it at Berklee because I couldn't speak English. Learning the language took a few years, and now I'm slowly understanding that this music is not just about

[17] Philip Ewell, *On Music Theory, and Making Music More Welcoming for Everyone* (University of Michigan Press: 2023), 221 and 226.
[18] E. Taylor Atkins, *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan* (Duke University Press, 2001), 24.
[19] Atkins, *Blue Nippon*, 24.

> how good you are at playing this instrument. You have to understand the culture, the artists, and the relationship between them.[20]

To Ryu, playing with a good swing feel, having a good feel for harmony, and improvising are relatively minor issues. Instead, not fully living in the performing and social environment of jazz circles, as well as the challenges of being a non-native English speaker, could sometimes distance her from the music and the musicians. Ryu, like other musicians in this study, recognized language as a barrier to entering the jazz community. Furthermore, their reference to language can further refer to challenges of cultural expectations or histories. Even though they have mastered English, acquired musical elements of jazz, and comprehended the historical and cultural associations of the genre, they may still face struggles and stress due to being perceived as "not the right person" for the genre. Thus, the authenticity complex could matter immensely when formally and musically blending into the stereotypically established community.

However, some interviewees have found it easier to relate the history of their country of origin to the history of jazz. Vietnamese-American vocalist and composer Mỹ Tâm Huynh (aka Mitamu) commented,

> There are things about jazz culture that I am still learning to understand, but I've sensed in Vietnamese music sometimes that there is a deep sorrow. This is a country that has been invaded multiple times throughout history by the French, the Americans, and the Chinese. I admire and take a lot of pride in the fact that we are a group of people who have always stood their ground, which I think many people who came to America, specifically the African diaspora, could resonate with. The core of the blues could be seen obviously, for it is the music of struggle and overcoming.[21]

In Huynh's statement, she recognizes parallels between communities that have been colonized and oppressed, and the ways some Vietnamese music and the blues can be employed to express the sadness and sorrow, as well as the resiliency, that can arise from these conditions.

I asked my interviewees if they encountered any challenges while working with musicians who had similar or dissimilar cultural backgrounds, including adapting their mode of communication and behavior in a way that made them feel like they were not themselves. Fortunately, most of them told me that they did not have to do so and could be themselves—that they did not let negative

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[20] Dabin Ryu, Google Meet conversation with the author, recording and transcript, July 16, 2024.

[21] Mỹ Tâm Huynh, Google Meet conversation with the author, recording and transcript, July 23, 2024.

feelings interfere with their performance. However, many felt a massively different comfort level when playing with all-Asian (usually a mixture of Asians and Asian Americans) bands and non-Asian bands. Naomi Nakanishi, a pianist who had a Japanese father and a Korean mother and was born in Nevada, expressed, "When being in the bands that are primarily white and male, I felt invisible, not being included in the hang, and often judged whether or not I played authentically. Not offending the owners of this cultural genre, I needed to prove myself to deserve better respect, treatment, and recognition in the circle. Such pressure creates a lot of burnout for me."[22] In contrast, being in all-Asian bands, as Huynh said, "I felt safe, my voice became more confident." Surrounded by people with similar backgrounds who are understanding and kind to each other, they feel like they are part of the community. Hyunh continued,

> When I started playing with more Asian musicians, I noticed that nervousness started to go away. About a year ago, when I started playing with the A(A)PI Jazz Collective, my singing began to sound very different from how it used to be... If I make a mistake, they're not pointing out nor questioning the authenticity of my creativity. It's quite supportive. Another amazing thing about the group is that the community here also includes more women and non-binary people on the bandstand. I don't think it's necessarily because we are Asian, but many of us know what it's like not to be included, so we make sure to make room for all of us.[23]

The above statements address musicians' feeling of authenticity, which was often at odds with audiences' perceptions of the musicians' authenticity, both in terms of race and gender. When I asked my interviewees how audiences in Asian countries and America reacted when they saw them performing as jazz musicians, there were multiple responses. At times, especially in the U.S., they felt like the manner, expression, and style of their performances were being questioned and judged, receiving comments such as "Leave the samba to the Brazilians and salsa to Afro-Cubans."[24] At other times, the audience misunderstood their role based on their appearance and perceived them as someone's partner or part of the stage crew—not as jazz musicians.[25] There were

[22] Naomi Nakanishi, Google Meet conversation with the author, recording and transcript, July 22, 2024
[23] Mỹ Tâm Huynh, July 23, 2024.
[24] Malaya Sol, June 11, 2024.
[25] Wen-Ting Wu, June 12, 2024.

also occasions when female audiences approached them, showing their appreciation, curiosity, and admiration for their career successes.[26]

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE STRIKES

Given the "strikes" A(A)PI female jazz musicians continue to face on the jazz scene, how do these musicians explain their positionality in the jazz field? Faced with this question, Chien-Chien Lu responded,

> We, as an Asian female[s], look like having no right to vocalize and find it difficult to do things, but if we try to think from a different angle, we have good people around us. To make each solid step in the current industry, you need to work on relationships with them. No one teaches you that. Making music is not about yourself. It's about how you empower people around you. If I want to extend my territory, I need to empower them so they can help me. I would use music to invite people to join the creative process, building a space for everyone to stand out and creating an environment for us to grow rather than focus on the disappointing sides of life.
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> Because of the pandemic, people have become more aware of minorities, even women and non-binary people. This is a perfect time to recognize who you are and what you can do and leave what you can't do to people who can help you. You don't need to carry so much burden to make it happen. Instead, we all should think, "Heck yeah! I have those strikes on me, and I get all the attention. I want to empower people around me to do the same."[27]

For Lu and other interviewees, empowerment is key, and that empowerment stems from 1) speaking out about gender and racial injustice; 2) community building; and 3) musical presentation.

In places where the majority of the population is white, Rei Wang has a higher chance of encountering the impact of race and gender strikes: "In Oklahoma, I often get comments from the audience once a week like 'You're such a good girl bass player.' I used to be frustrated, but as I get older, my reply will be, 'Oh! What other female bass players have you listened to?' Now I'm more like a smart ass and becoming aware that what kinds of comments—especially those coming from people intending to compliment but do not know how—are forgivable and understandable."[28] By throwing another question back to the

[26] Stephanie Tateiwa, Google Meet conversation with the author, recording and transcript, July 25, 2024.
[27] Chien-Chien Lu, July 22, 2024.
[28] Rei Wang Bowen, June 22, 2024.

audience, Wang's response to biased and stereotypical comments provides an instant platform to educate and encourage people to explore more performances by female jazz players. At the same time, she has compassion for them and understands that their history and communities have impacted the image they expect from jazz musicians, even if it is not as open-minded as she would like.

The rise of A(A)PI and women in jazz organizations, institutes, and programs has benefited many young musicians and communities of belonging. As Naomi Nakanishi points out,

> There is no shortage of a community including people who hold our values and look like us. I've had great success doing presentations and been asked to speak on panels on gender and jazz. I've participated in group discussions before. There's more awareness of it nowadays. It's not that people don't want to talk about it. It's just that somebody has to step up. Thus, the positive is that some people are eager to see somebody who looks similar succeeding in this field and talking about their experiences, so I always go in with that mindset.

As an alum of the Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice within the Berklee College of Music, Nakanishi added, "The biggest thing I've learned about the [Berklee] program is that it's so expansive. It's like a lifelong journey to learn about your culture and how music became a vessel of human activities and has been shaped in various cultures. Race does play a crucial facet in music in terms of the experiences of the marginalized and the oppressed during times of wars, depression, and tragedy."[29]

Having devoted herself to fostering the A(A)PI jazz community through organizing programs and volunteering at the annual A(A)PI jazz festival since last year, Mỹ Tâm Huynh feels she is contributing to a space where people work towards change. She is delighted to witness the community growth:

> We are working towards trying to be seen by other Asian audiences and the whole jazz community. We're trying to tell our community members, "Hey, if you look like us, there's a safe space for you here." Jazz is a great vehicle for incorporating ourselves within the aesthetics of music. We've been doing things like playing re-imaginations of our childhood songs from our culture or even the Studio Ghibli nights… ultimately retelling the stories that our community resonates with. That's also what makes this community so powerful. Knowing jazz is supposed to be a lived experience, we're allowing our community to have that experience.[30]

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[29] Naomi Nakanishi, July 22, 2024.
[30] Mỹ Tâm Huynh, July 23, 2024.

In this case, performing childhood songs and Studio Ghibli nights arranged in jazz styles helps make jazz music more accessible to Asian communities. [31]

A few of my interviewees created original compositions that not only reflected their Asian identity, implicitly or explicitly, but also reflected the process of seeking their identities. While reflecting on her Taiwanese background, composer/band leader Tracy Yang shares her concern over the instability and chaos of society and her personal experience of transitioning from sadness to forgiveness, unity, and prosperity through her big band works, such as the *Scene Taiwan Collection* and *MMXXI Suite.*[32] Dabin Ryu's first album, *Wall,* is a sweet fruit she bore after striving to overcome her fear of playing in front of people and self-doubt about being ready to become a jazz musician.[33] Naomi Nakanishi's debut EP for her graduate thesis project, *Hear Me Speak,* is a gradual reconstruction of her musical identity—"the one who values the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and social aspects that go into music, and the one who is open and vocal about intersectionality." When speaking of the project's purpose, Nakanishi added:

> I also wanted people to know about my struggle with confidence in finding my real identity and being accepted into a group based on how I look, even though I am a descendant of immigrants. That's kind of where the idea of the music video came from. The traditional Japanese theatre/kabuki-themed makeup symbolized all of these different facets and expectations that people had for me. The smudging of the makeup around my face represented the real me. There's an air of ambiguity because I don't speak my parents' native language but look Asian.[34]

Thanks to the #MeToo and Stop Asian Hate movements before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, plus the surge of social media, these A(A)PI jazz musicians can now use various platforms to embrace and reclaim the "three strikes" they often face. By educating live audiences when dealing with biases and stereotypes, there is more mutual understanding and respect toward musicians outside the U.S. Black/white racial binary within both music and non-music communities. Community building plays a vital role for these musicians

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[31] Studio Ghibli, Inc. is a Japanese animation studio based in Koganei, Tokyo. Founded in 1985 by Hayao Miyasaki and Isao Takahata, the company has been notable for many animated films such as *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), *Princess Mononoke* (1997), *Spirited Away* (2001), *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), *Ponyo* (2008), and *The Boy and the Heron* (2023).

[32] Tracy Yang, Facebook voice message to author, translated transcript from Mandarin Chinese, July 27, 2024.

[33] Dabin Ryu, July 16, 2024.

[34] Naomi Nakanishi, July 22, 2024.

because it helps maintain a healthy performing environment, creates a sense of belonging for young A(A)PI female musicians who begin their careers, and offers a platform to expose themselves to diverse audiences. Presenting originals and arrangements of Asian music numbers, with or without folk elements, allows these musicians to explore, reflect upon their cultural backgrounds, and invite listeners to join their journey. Witnessing their continuous growth and recognition in the jazz field, these three strikes, I hope, will not become a lifelong barrier, but rather an inspiring source of motivation as they musically advance in the years to come.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Theresa Chen is a keyboardist, composer/arranger, pedagogue. She currently serves as an Assistant Professor of Jazz Studies at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. She holds a DMA and MM in Jazz Performance from Eastman School of Music. Her research interests include women jazz instrumentalists,

historical improvisations, jazz in Asia, pedagogical methods of jazz/commercial music, and jazz music applied in Christian liturgies. Her writing can also be found in Jazz Education in Research and Practice (2023 and 2025). She has released her first jazz album "Whispering to God" in 2022. She shared the stage with notable jazz musicians such as Gary Smulyan, Ingrid Jensen, Dave Liebman, Bria Skonberg, Boris Kozlov, Allison Miller, Chien-Chien Lu, Will Lyle, Gerry Gibbs, and Scott Wendholt, and performed in Texas Jazz Festival, South Texas Jazz Festival, and Rochester International Jazz Festival.