

Towards an Inclusive Jazz Pedagogy: Lessons from Post-Apartheid South Africa

Ulugh Williams and Nishlyn Ramanna

In 2020, the University of Cape Town posted a music video celebrating the institution's annual staff awards. The video captures a monumental shift in one of South Africa's foremost university jazz programs. Framed by looming pillars, the all-women Lady Day Big Band performs on the campus steps against the backdrop of Table Mountain.¹ The University's Head of Jazz Studies, Amanda Tiffin, and fellow vocalists Lana Crowster, Leah Joy Adams, and Anathi Mobo sing in isiZulu, their harmonies perfectly balanced with the band's infectious groove and punchy horn lines. "Ayo Ayo" (music by Tiffin and lyrics by Phatiswa Magangane) heralds a new era in South African jazz: less than a decade ago, the sight of a multi-racial, all-women big band on those imposing steps would have been highly unlikely. Suits, ties, "bro culture", and blistering bebop licks have made way for innovation, inclusion, and a proud celebration of South African culture. The tide is turning.

Across South Africa, women are creating pockets of empowerment in professional jazz spaces, both on the bandstand and in classrooms.² Two women in particular occupy high-profile positions historically held by men: pianist-vocalist Amanda Tiffin is the first and (to date) only woman heading a tertiary jazz program in South Africa (University of Cape Town) while Wits University jazz voice and double bass lecturer Chantal Willie-Petersen is the first woman (and woman of color) to serve as president of the South African Association for Jazz Educators (2022–2024). This article highlights the ways in which Tiffin and Willie-Petersen are transforming tertiary jazz education by moving beyond American-centric conceptions of jazz culture and the canon. More importantly, they use their respective platforms to dismantle systemic patriarchy, misogyny, racism, and colonial narratives that continue to straitjacket jazz education.

¹ Lady Day Big Band, "Ayo Ayo," University of Cape Town South Africa, December 2, 2020, YouTube video, 4:48, <https://youtu.be/ZREc2PZKfVc?si=zwgKTOGUU0XELOiZ>.

² Nomfundo Xaluva and Shannon Mowday have made significant contributions to jazz education in South Africa and abroad. For an overview of their pedagogical interventions and gender activism, see Ulugh Williams, "Beyond Mastery: Jazz, Gender and Power in Post-apartheid South Africa" (PhD diss., Rhodes University, 2023).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF JAZZ PEDAGOGY AND PATRIARCHY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Historically, South African jazz education programs have been modeled after American programs. Darius Brubeck founded the country's first tertiary jazz program at the erstwhile University of Natal in Durban in 1982, and between the late 1980s and early 2000s several other universities followed suit.³ At the first and arguably most recognized of these institutions, the South African College of Music at the University of Cape Town, the curriculum foregrounded the technical mastery of bebop and post-bebop repertoires. This propagated the discourse of jazz as a (largely instrumental) masculine domain, side-lining various other forms of jazz and jazz-adjacent genres. During the 1980s and 1990s, the city's (mostly white) "schooled" jazz musicians—those with the means to afford university tuition—rarely occupied the same professional spaces/stages as jazz musicians of color.⁴ In a country where jazz played an integral part in the struggle against apartheid—and remains inextricably linked to narratives of colonialism, race and class—this disconnect between jazz education and jazz as a social practice is particularly glaring. This disconnect shares some commonalities with international patterns of the institutionalization and classicization of jazz in universities. Dan DiPiero argues that to be recognized as a serious field of study, jazz education became more attuned to the "language, signifiers, and values of European classical music" than its original "aural and/or participatory practices."⁵ According to DiPiero, this institutionalized model of jazz is compliant with a template of legitimacy determined by "white men as its primary practitioners."⁶ Moreover, the prioritization of music theory and aggressive technical displays of power "decontextualizes jazz from sociopolitical considerations, performing a transmutation that attempts to wrest the music into alignment with the way that Western theory has traditionally operated: as pure formalism, centered on 'the

³ Darius Brubeck and Catherine Brubeck, *Playing the Changes: Jazz at an African University and on the Road* (University of Illinois Press, 2024).

⁴ During the 1980s, this divide was largely due to apartheid laws that prohibited racially integrated bands, but it can also be ascribed to the rise of academic, institutionalised jazz. Shannon Mowday describes the chasm between self-taught jazz musicians of color and white male gatekeepers in the Cape Town jazz scene, both during the apartheid era and thereafter (Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 109-110). Amanda Tiffin similarly refers to the dominant, white "bro network" in the city's jazz scene, a phenomenon that remains widespread (Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 170).

⁵ Dan DiPiero, "Race, Gender, and Jazz School: Chord-Scale Theory as White Masculine Technology," *Jazz & Culture* 6, no.1 (2023), 56.

⁶ DiPiero, 55.

music itself.”⁷ To this end, not only is jazz constituted as a masculine domain, but also the foregrounding of jazz theory “serves as a white-masculinist technology that performs various functions to reinforce patriarchal jazz cultures and white supremacy.”⁸

This pervasive culture of “masculine competitiveness” and “cutting contests” associated with bebop which DiPiero describes as the “historical pinnacle of jazz practice” is also evident in the South African jazz academy.⁹ Until very recently, women’s experiences of “othering” were firmly linked to their inability and/or unwillingness to participate in aggressive musical displays of power that required the execution of “burning” solos and the ability to “play like a man.” Numerous women have described the mastery of bebop as the musical currency that determined their legitimacy throughout the late 1980s, the 1990s, and 2000s respectively.¹⁰ This phenomenon is closely linked to a more insidious tradition of toxic misogyny and displays of “hyper-masculine ego” as described by Marc Röntsch.¹¹ Others have similarly explored how women have to turn a blind eye to—or conform to—the status quo in order to be accepted.¹²

SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN IN THE ACADEMY (AND BEYOND)

Women have comprised between thirty and sixty percent of jazz student cohorts at six South African universities over the past half-decade but because of the dynamics described above they remain under-represented in the country’s professional jazz scenes.¹³ This is in line with international patterns of exclusion that prevent women from pursuing jazz careers.¹⁴ More importantly, despite the

⁷ DiPiero, 55.

⁸ DiPiero, 53.

⁹ DiPiero, 58.

¹⁰ Williams, “Beyond Mastery,” 227, 263, 269.

¹¹ Marc Röntsch, “Disruption: Gender, Jazz and the Lady Day Big Band,” *South African Music Studies* 40 (2020): 472.

¹² See Ceri Moelwyn-Hughes, “Women, Gender and Identity in Popular Music-Making in Gauteng, 1994-2012” (master’s thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2013); Aimée George, “An exploration of the gender and sexual dynamics for women performers in the Cape Town jazz community” (master’s thesis, University of Cape Town, 2020); Williams, “Beyond Mastery,” 174-179; Gwen Ansell, “South African Music: Time for our Very Own Weinstein Moment?,” *Sisgwenjazz*, 24 October 2017, accessed 5 April 2019, <https://sisgwenjazz.wordpress.com/2017/10/24/south-african-music-time-for-our-very-own-weinstein-moment/>.

¹³ Williams, “Beyond Mastery,” 2.

¹⁴ According to Kathleen McKeage, women “may not be able to connect participation in [high school and college] jazz ensembles with career possibilities” (Kathleen McKeage, “Gender and Participation in High School and College Jazz Ensembles,” *Journal of Research in Music*

repeal of apartheid in 1994, systemic racism and social stratification continue to compound women's experiences of "othering" in professional jazz. Gwen Ansell writes: "Where students of color experience alienation, exclusion and racism, female jazz students experience alienation, exclusion and sexism. Aspiring black female scholars encounter both."¹⁵ Historically, most women teaching in South African tertiary jazz programs have been employed as vocal lecturers.¹⁶ Ansell describes South African jazz faculties as white "boys' clubs" where women are over-represented as singers:

Not only are their faces predominantly white, they are equally predominantly male—even more heavily so when vocal practice lecturers are removed. We still suffer the continuing—and international—assumption that women instrumentalists... still have to prove that they have the "balls" to be authentic jazzmakers. Oh, there are interesting features, sometimes sections, in jazz magazines on women in jazz, but the attitude is often that of *noblesse oblige*, like making sure there are enough blacks on television sitcoms.¹⁷

Education 52, no. 4 (2004): 354). Ariel Alexander's study of women's under-representation in the jazz academy reveals that 52.8% of respondents believed their "choices on classes, combos, private teachers [and] advisors" were limited by discrimination. 56.7% reported further discrimination after graduating and entering professional spaces (Ariel Ann Alexander, "Where are the Girls? A Look at the Factors that Limit Female Participation in Instrumental Jazz" (DMA diss., University of Southern California, 2011), 40-44). Chelsea Wahl and Stephen Ellingson argue that the "relative sterility of academic admissions procedures has changed the way young musicians enter the jazz art world. However, the degree to which these programs actually increase opportunities for women is unclear" (Chelsea Wahl and Stephen Ellingson, "Almost Like a Real Band: Navigating a Gendered Jazz Art World," *Qualitative Sociology* 41, no. 3 (2018): 464). This echoes Robin Desmeules' argument that "[while] it is doubtless a sign of change that there are more women coming through the ranks, this increase in numbers may not point to an actual change in attitudes towards women making jazz." Desmeules found that "post-secondary jazz programs point to many structural aspects of the institutionalization of jazz as being gendered (and misogynistic)" (Robin E. Desmeules, "(Re)Gendering Jazz: Women Instrumentalists in Toronto" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2010), 42).

¹⁵ Gwen Ansell, "Who Should Teach Jazz in South Africa?" *Sisgwenjazz*, August 8, 2016, accessed October 23, 2019, <https://sisgwenjazz.wordpress.com/2016/08/08/who-should-teach-jazz-in-south-africa/>

¹⁶ Between 2017 and 2022, prominent jazz programs at the University of Cape Town, Rhodes University, and Tshwane University of Technology employed women solely as vocal lecturers. Between 2014 and 2018, jazz vocal lecturer Ulagh Williams was the first (and only) woman teaching jazz at Nelson Mandela University (formerly the University of Port Elizabeth) since the program was created in 1994. At the time of publication, most women studying jazz at the institutions mentioned here were vocalists (Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 4).

¹⁷ Ansell, "Who Should Teach Jazz in South Africa?"

Male gatekeeping and gender stereotyping remain prevalent in prominent educational spaces and the wider performance scenes within which they are embedded.¹⁸ By way of example, the UNISA (University of South Africa) Jazz Festival has only included women as vocalists since its inception in 2018, despite the presence of several internationally acclaimed women instrumentalists in the wider Johannesburg area. Obligated by festival organizers to perform in a peripheral capacity with all-male bands, Zoë Modiga (2018), Gloria Bosman (2019 and 2022), and Karen Petersen (2023) have been corralled into perpetuating women's role as "songbirds" or "features" (guest performers, often with limited creative control in the band) rather than leaders (musical directors, composers, or instrumentalists). In 2024, singer-educators Nthabiseng Motsepe (a lecturer at the University of Pretoria) and prolific recording artist Natalie Rungan (who holds a PhD in jazz education and curates jazz festival programs) were invited to perform with the (all-male) big band. Even when women occupy high-profile positions as educators and composers, they can be subjected to gender bias.

WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICAN JAZZ DISCOURSE

Writing about South Africa where jazz formed a powerful soundtrack to the struggle against apartheid, Christopher Ballantine describes the genre as "aspiring to the status of an international musical vernacular of the oppressed."¹⁹ In international jazz discourse, jazz exemplifies ideals of freedom, plurality, and empowerment. Duke Ellington famously stated that "jazz is a good barometer of freedom."²⁰ However, these freedoms are typically blind to, and exacerbate, patriarchal forces; professional jazz is widely acknowledged as a hostile domain

¹⁸ This aligns with Chris Robinson's description of jazz as a male-dominated field: "Jazz critics, journalists, and editors are overwhelmingly male, as are university jazz professors and the ensembles they direct. The music's gatekeepers are, and have always been, disproportionately male. As such, jazz has been shaped by gendered attitudes and privileged those qualities and characteristics conceptualized as masculine" (Chris Robinson, "A Brief History of the Origins of Jazz's Sexism," *Medium*, March 9, 2019, accessed June 10, 2020, <https://medium.com/@CRMUSICWRITER/a-brief-history-of-the-origins-of-jazzs-sexism-3ee4278bcff0>).

¹⁹ Christopher Ballantine, *Marabi Nights: Early South African Jazz and Vaudeville* (Ravan Press, 1993), 8.

²⁰ Quoted in Geoffrey C. Ward and Kenneth Burns, *Jazz: A History of America's Music* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), vii.

for women.²¹ Chelsea Wahl and Stephen Ellingson provide a succinct appraisal of this paradox:

Historically, the jazz art world has followed norms of meritocracy, which promote equality across boundaries of race and class. At the same time a culture of exclusivity, anchored in gendered essentialism, has severely limited female participation.²²

Women have played a significant role in South African jazz history, yet with the exception of a handful of scholars,²³ they have typically been described as oppressed figures.²⁴ Mainstream jazz discourse has paid more attention to patriarchal dynamics than women's success stories; likewise, an earlier generation of international feminist jazz scholarship mostly comprises emancipatory research (studying women's resistance to patriarchal forces) and reparation work (advocating for the inclusion of women in the jazz canon and

²¹ Eric Teichman "Pedagogy of Discrimination: Instrumental Jazz Education," *Music Education Research* 22, no.2 (2020): 201-213; Sarah Caissie Provost, "Bringing Something New: Female Jazz Instrumentalists' Use of Imitation and Masculinity," *Jazz Perspectives* 10, no. 2-3 (2017): 141-157; Jayne Caudwell, "Jazzwomen: Music, Sound, Gender, and Sexuality," *Annals of Leisure Research* 15, no. 4 (2012): 389-403; Christa Bruckner-Haring, "Women in Contemporary Austrian Jazz," in *Jazz, Gender, Authenticity*, Proceedings of the 10th Nordic Jazz Research Conference Stockholm, ed. Alf Arvidsson (2012), 127-143; Cecilia Björck and Cecilia and Åsa Bergman, "Making Women in Jazz Visible: Negotiating Discourses of Unity and Diversity in Sweden and the US," *Journal of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music* 8, no.1 (2018): 42-58; Jasna Jovičević, "Gender Perspectives of Instrumental Jazz Performers in Southeastern Europe," *MUZIKOLOGIJA-MUSICOLOGY* 30 (2021): 149-164; Teresa Maria Marques de Matos Ferreira (Teresa Gentil), "More than Singers: Biography, Gender, and Agency in the Voices of Four Women Singer-songwriters in Contemporary Portugal" (master's diss., Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2017).

²² Wahl and Ellingson, "Almost Like a Real Band," 445.

²³ There are two notable studies that focus on women's resilience and self-empowerment in South African jazz and popular music. Lara Allen highlights the subversive strategies of the country's most celebrated (and maligned) women in the early jazz and popular music industry (Lara Allen, "Representation, Gender, and Women in Black South African Popular Music, 1948-1960" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge 2000). Carol Ann Muller and Sathima Benjamin provide rich descriptions of Benjamin as an empowered woman navigating a career as a jazz musician, composer and record label owner (Carol Ann Muller and Sathima Benjamin, *Musical Echoes: South African Women Thinking in Jazz* (Duke University Press, 2011)).

²⁴ South African studies exploring patriarchal forces in jazz culture include: Christopher Ballantine, "Gender, Migrancy, and South African Popular Music in the Late 1940s and the 1950s," *Ethnomusicology* 44, no. 3 (2000) 376-407; Ceri Moelwyn-Hughes, "Women, Gender, and Identity in Popular Music-making in Gauteng, 1994-2012" (master's diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 2013); Nishlyn Ramanna, "Experiences of Belonging and Exclusion in the Production and Reception of Some Contemporary South African Jazz: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," *South African Music Studies* 34, no. 1 (2015): 22-289.

historiography).²⁵ This article draws on a more recent wave of jazz scholarship rooted in feminist post-structuralism (as described by Joan Scott), that deals with plurality and difference.²⁶ Sherrie Tucker (arguably the most prolific scholar in this tradition) deliberately resists grouping women together as a sisterhood sharing universal experiences of exclusion and oppression.²⁷ To this end, this article does not only aim to document similarities between the educational practices developed by Amanda Tiffin and Chantal Willie-Petersen but also the unique lived experiences that shaped each woman's approach to teaching.

AMANDA TIFFIN (BORN 1972)

When Tiffin enrolled in jazz studies in the early 1990s, the fledgling program at the University of Cape Town only provided instrumentalists with specialized tuition and mentorship in jazz improvisation. Whilst there was no shortage of role models for (predominantly male) instrumental students, Tiffin did not have access to a jazz vocal lecturer. She was compelled to major in jazz piano but resisted her lecturers' suggestion to choose a more convenient option than singing as a second instrument. Her determination and the support of a woman who lectured in Western classical voice allowed her to develop as a singer on her own terms:

[They] didn't want me to [major in jazz voice] because there was no jazz singing teacher at that time. There was no jazz voice program at all, so I had to take classical singing lessons... They were trying to convince me to take guitar [as a second instrument] because they had a jazz guitar teacher and I already played a little bit of guitar. And I *insisted*. "No, I want to *sing*." Eventually they said, "Okaaaaaay!" and let me do singing. Thank God. I did classical singing all the way through varsity [and] the [jazz and pop] singing thing, I kind of figured out by myself a lot.... I went through a few different teachers and then I was given a teacher, Hanna van Schalkwyk

²⁵ See Sally Placksin, *American Women in Jazz, 1900 to the Present: Their Words, Lives, and Music* (Seaview Books, 1982); Robin E. Desmeules, "(Re)Gendering Jazz: Women Instrumentalists in Toronto" (master's diss., Carleton University 2010); Linda Dahl, *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen* (Limelight Editions, 1996 [1984]); Leslie Gourse, *Madame Jazz: Contemporary Women Instrumentalists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

²⁶ Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Post-structuralist Theory for Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 33.

²⁷ Sherrie Tucker, "Bordering on Community: Improvising Women Improvising Women-in-Jazz," in *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation and Communities in Dialogue*, edited by Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble (Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 246.

and she was the first teacher I had that never tried to make me into something that I wasn't.²⁸

Tiffin actively sought out the mentorship of influential women working in the popular music industry. In this context she was able to work as a pianist, bandleader and arranger, roles that, at the university, were reserved for her male classmates:

I've heard... when other female musicians said, "I didn't get the job opportunities because of my gender. I was good at what I did, so I made my own projects, I made my own bands, my own work and I was the one booking the men." That's how I built my career. I made my own work and built respect from doing that, because I was *leading* all the time and I did well. [During] my student days, there were people forming bands and projects and stuff, and I was just not included in that. Never. It was never even entertained that I would be included... I mean, my first instrument was piano, but I was seen as "the girl singer." [It] was fine because I got a lot of work out of it, but at the same time I also wanted to be taken seriously as a musician and it just wasn't the case. So, one just gets on with it and do what you do and create the work for [yourself].²⁹

Her growing success as a bandleader, pianist, singer and arranger allowed her to work across various genres including musical theatre and popular music, a professional choice that was frowned upon by institutional gatekeepers. Tiffin believes that her hybridized style later contributed to her repeated exclusion from the Cape Town International Jazz Festival during the 2000s:

I wasn't "in" with the hip cats, you know? I think [it was] the fact that I had done a lot of pop and tribute shows in my career, and hadn't dedicated my career to *only* being a jazz musician... That's the thing that really used to bother me about some of the individuals... definitely in Cape Town certain individuals had this real purist approach. But the thing is, jazz has always *been* about hybridization, that's how it came to *be*. It's hybridization of all kinds of things and every new style of jazz that came out was always about incorporating new sounds and influences from what those musicians were hearing around them at the time.³⁰

In 2018, Tiffin co-founded the all-women Lady Day Big Band. In addition to playing instruments, all the band members also sing at times, blurring the gendered lines between instrumentalist and vocalist. As a musical director, Tiffin

²⁸ Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 167.

²⁹ Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 168.

³⁰ Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 220.

is committed to showcasing compositions by women (including her own) and contributing to the diversification of the South African jazz canon. Tiffin is devoted to projects that empower women and girls to pursue jazz careers:

I think there's still a perpetuation of the gendering of instruments in some school environments... but that's one of the main drives for the Lady Day Big Band... there are a lot of amazing schoolteachers that are encouraging young female learners to take up whatever instrument they want and encouraging them to take it seriously, and then teaching them.... I think it's very important that young women see other women modelling what's possible. This is what's *possible* for you, you know? You can be a drummer, a saxophone player, a bass player, and be a successful professional musician... and do interesting and exciting things!³¹

In 2018, she was thrust into the spotlight as the first woman to direct the Standard Bank National Youth Jazz Band, the flagship ensemble of the country's most prominent jazz development program:

The fact that I was the first female national bandleader was outrageous in 2018—*outrageous*—and it was mildly annoying that I had to be branded like that. It wasn't just, "Here's the next National Youth Band director." Rather, "First female, first female." Which is good in some ways because it highlights the problem, but at the same time you just want to be chosen or booked for that job because you are good at what you do.³²

Nevertheless, she acknowledges the impact of the #MeToo movement on South African jazz culture:

I accepted a lot more [as a student] than I would accept *now*... and I think it's taken the younger generation to highlight that stuff and make me realize in retrospect that there was so much that was dysfunctional... and that one just went along with it, because what *else* would you do? If you wanted to work, that's how you had to operate... looking back, I think there were definitely a lot less opportunities offered to me. It was only really in recent years, with the whole bubbling up of the #MeToo movement, that I really started to become a lot more educated. And it was my students, my younger generation students, who were discussing these things and talking about this... and some of my younger friends. And... it sort of woke

³¹ Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 171-172.

³² Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 170.

me up... I looked around and [I realized], "I'm in a position of authority now, where I can actually make *changes*."³³

Tiffin is confident that her work is making an impact and that her jazz students are being equipped to affect change:

I see how much of a difference I'm making even in a few years... modelling a way of leading and a way of interacting for younger colleagues and students that is new and different and more consultative, more collaborative... I think there's a hell of a lot of people... who are still perpetuating the "bro" network. There's still a lot of that. *A lot*. But the students who are graduating now and going off into the professional space are the ones that are more woke and more aware, and more interested in equality in terms of whom they work with.³⁴

She also believes that inclusivity is on the rise in the music industry:

I see the shifting of the media focus to some extent, [towards] artists that are...not only male jazz artists. [Women's visibility is] still a lot less, but there is more focus, more exposure, more opportunities. I do see things changing in the industry. I see it changing in terms of when you see a new project coming up, there's a mix of gender... because those young people decided that they want to work together.³⁵

Tiffin's own experiences have motivated her to develop an educational culture where excellence can be achieved without misogyny and toxicity. Her commitment to "cleaning up" jazz education has been met with strong resistance:

There has been pushback... you know you're doing something right when people push back. I'm sure that there are labels for me now... labels that say I'm a man-hater or whatever, because I've laid down a line... particularly where this kind of [sexist] behavior is *not* okay anymore. In the past, it would've just been swept under the rug or laughed off as "boys will be boys," or "a lecturer can be a bully, because they're in a position of authority" and that kind of thing... Some of the lecturing staff left, because they don't like..., to quote one person, he said, "I don't want to teach in a place where the tail is wagging the dog." Which is fine. That's okay. You can take your bullying tactics elsewhere. It's not a healthy place for young people to learn.

³³ Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 171. For more on the #metoo movement, founded by Tarana Burke, visit the following website: me too., <https://metoomvmt.org/>.

³⁴ Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 170-171.

³⁵ Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 173.

How do you learn when people are shouting and screaming at you? *You don't*. You just shut down, and that dysfunction is not okay.³⁶

She believes that many women in the South African jazz scene are reluctant to tackle patriarchy head-on:

If they're seen to be advocates or seen to be vocal about being a feminist and advocating for gender equality, [they feel] that they won't get booked in the men's spaces... and it's true. They won't. But for me... I don't care. I'm in a position where I've made my own work, I have my own projects, I'm in a great job, so I'm not dependent on anybody else... I can create the work that I want to create and work with the musicians that I want to work with, without fear. I have the luxury to be able to speak out without it affecting my bottom line. [Some people really shy away] from having any part in the whole gender activist movement in music and in jazz and being on panels and things like that... because of that pushback. Because [they] play so much in male spaces and [they] don't want to be seen as the angry, loud, shouting woman. I just have the luxury of not really giving a toss about that anymore. I'm old enough not to care. I'm not starting my career.³⁷

Tiffin embraces being older and more experienced, and is committed to providing mentorship and support to those starting out in the field:

There were certain people in my career who have mentored and encouraged me, so it's nice to be able to pass it on. It makes a difference to people, having someone in their corner... I'm almost always the oldest in the room these days... I still remember being the youngest! People see you in a different light, so they treat you a different way. There's a measure of respect [that comes with my job] so they expect me to take a leadership role even if it's not necessarily my project alone, or something like that. People look to you for guidance.³⁸

In terms of the curriculum, Tiffin's students are encouraged to embrace musical hybridity and cultural "difference." After years of side-lining popular music to gain recognition as a "serious" jazz musician, she has reclaimed pop music as a powerful tool for musical learning, storytelling, and social commentary. More importantly, she has disrupted the narrative of jazz as a field where men lead, and women follow:

³⁶ Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 172.

³⁷ Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 174.

³⁸ Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 171.

[Jazz is] about pushing boundaries and envelopes and experimentation and exploration... let's try to change the [old] framework, let's improvise over different sounds and try some different things. [When men do this] they're so innovative, they're breaking boundaries!³⁹

Thanks to the legwork done by Tiffin over three decades, young jazz musicians (regardless of gender or race) in South Africa have greater access to role models, development opportunities, and a more even playing field than their predecessors.⁴⁰ As a white, Zimbabwean-born woman who started her musical career as a classical pianist and aspiring popular music composer, Tiffin followed an untraditional path towards her current position as a highly regarded jazz educator. She has embraced her own musical hybridity and inspired others to move beyond outdated notions of jazz mastery that favor masculine dominance and perpetuate outdated models of legitimation.⁴¹

CHANTAL WILLIE-PETERSEN (BORN 1978)

In contrast to Tiffin, Willie-Petersen's experiences of "othering" as an undergraduate student at the University of Cape Town were tempered by a changing political and social landscape in the late 1990s and early 2000s; whereas Tiffin was isolated and vastly outnumbered by her male counterparts during the 1990s, Willie-Petersen teamed up with her twin sister Denay to form an all-women vocal group, circumventing the hostility experienced by Tiffin. The group provided a safe space where she could develop her jazz skills and agency as a musician: "We had a *communion* in the ensemble... that joy with the other vocalists... That was tremendous, because it also opened doors and we played with really good musicians and learned different things."⁴²

Willie-Petersen was a classically trained pianist, and unlike fellow students who had been involved in jazz programs since high school, she found the transition to jazz piano challenging. However, performing as a gospel singer and piano accompanist in church since childhood provided her with a solid foundation for improvisation and ensemble work. She also decided to take up the double bass, a new instrument she was determined to master:

³⁹ Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 220.

⁴⁰ In addition to her education outreach work with the Lady Day Big Band, Tiffin has acted as curator and director for various women-empowering festivals in South Africa, including the Artscape Jazz Masters Concert Series and the Artscape Youth Jazz Festival.

⁴¹ By way of example, Tiffin's former student (and later colleague at the University of Cape Town) pianist/vocalist Nomfundo Xaluva, is an award-winning jazz composer and recording artist who fights publicly for women's rights in the music business.

⁴² Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 181.

I knew *nothing* about the repertoire, the composers, arranging, but...I give tribute to my schoolteachers... I had some skill in understanding how to internalize a new genre and what needed to be done, although the practice base was different. I had to really use my ear and transcribe, and not only focus on notation. I had to understand, “What is a lead sheet? Where do I improvise?” It was a *steep* curve, the first year... I already had an interest in musical direction, arranging and composing... I used my [piano playing technique] to get through voicings, get through the rubrics. [I had to] make sure that the time I had put in since I was six or seven... was [transferable] and beneficial to the *other* subjects that were not so easy for me to acclimatize to... I was at six to eight hours [of piano practice] a day to try and make up for not having [a jazz] background. Then I started studying double bass... because I really loved the instrument, and I always knew that at some point I was going to make a switch.⁴³

After one year, Willie-Petersen accepted a scholarship in Belgium where she completed master’s degrees in both jazz voice and double bass. Exposed to a more diverse curriculum, she soon gravitated towards hybridized music projects, ranging from traditional big band and avant-garde compositions to film and folk/jazz crossover music. Between 2003 and 2007, she toured and recorded with the all-women Belgian supergroup, Zap Mama, the epitome of creative freedom and empowerment:

With Zap Mama, it wasn’t jazz, it was world music. It had a jazz approach because there was improvisation and the music was at a very high level, but it wasn’t... bebop. And it wasn’t the Brussels Jazz Orchestra. And it also wasn’t that third stream [of jazz] that you find in Europe... it was just *different* and beautiful.⁴⁴

Since her return to South Africa in 2009, she has been active as a performer, bandleader and festival curator. A stalwart in jazz education circles and church music, her work has been described as “jazz cosmopolitanism,” often fusing jazz with indigenous African music traditions, gospel music, and hip hop.⁴⁵ Willie-Petersen is currently on the jazz faculty at Wits University in Johannesburg, where she teaches jazz vocals and double bass. She leads with care: the qualities that typically marginalize women on the bandstand—being too feminine or soft or not aggressive enough—are at the core of her identity as an educator. She

⁴³ Williams, “Beyond Mastery,” 181.

⁴⁴ Williams, “Beyond Mastery,” 240.

⁴⁵ Examples include the SA/Ghana collaborative Jazz Cosmology, The Cape Town Goema Orchestra, and the USA/SA jazz collaborative, the Soweto-Englewood Exchange, led by American saxophonist and composer Ernest Dawkins.

believes that being more mature and being a mother has changed the way she approaches her teaching and how she is perceived by her students:

I've heard from the students that the space was very paternalistic before I arrived and that outside of the teaching, I have brought a very maternal presence... Everybody assumes it's mostly women [who sing or teach singing], so there are these genderized spaces already... that bring preconceived perceptions that need to be changed. I happen to be in a department with more women than men... there's a real mentoring that happens, which is also emotional and psychological.⁴⁶

Willie-Petersen is deeply committed to showcasing women's compositions and contributions to jazz. In tandem with her current PhD research, she regularly leads seminars, workshops, and performances on issues of colonialism, gender inequality, social justice, and music education. In 2022, the world premiere of her composition, "Kloppe Roep - Calling Bells"⁴⁷ for carillon bells was performed at the University of Michigan.⁴⁸ Commissioned as part of a project interrogating colonialism and patriarchy in music, the piece forms part of the first collection of carillon works by Black South African composers.⁴⁹ The composition draws heavily on jazz harmony and is particularly symbolic: the only playable carillon in South Africa—and on the African continent—is in Cape Town where Willie-Petersen was born. As an inheritor of various layers of oppression herself, she dedicated the piece to "the enslaved women at the Cape."⁵⁰ This refocusing on the social rather than what DiPiero describes as "paper-based concerns" (the decontextualization of jazz in favor of white, "masculinized," and "technocratic" music theory practices when analyzing bebop), is a vital step towards transforming jazz education in South Africa.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Williams, "Beyond Mastery," 185.

⁴⁷ The Dutch title, "Kloppe Roep" (Calling Bells) is a reference to Dutch colonial Cape Town during the 1600s. It is also the language Willie-Petersen needed to learn whilst studying in Belgium.

⁴⁸ Tiffany Ng, "Your Rhythm is Rebellion: Ringing in Postcolonial Carillon Solidarity," University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre and Dance, April 1, 2022, YouTube video, 38:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4U7TyydbFVQ&t=275s>.

⁴⁹ University of Michigan African Studies Center, "Your Rhythm Is Rebellion': Ringing in Postcolonial Carillon Solidarity on the Sixty Bells of the University of Michigan Carillon Tower," *umich.edu*, September 3, 2022, accessed December 30, 2022, <https://ii.umich.edu/asc/news-events/news/search-news/your-rhythm-is-rebellion.html>.

⁵⁰ University of Michigan African Studies Center, "Your Rhythm Is Rebellion': Ringing in Postcolonial Carillon Solidarity on the Sixty Bells of the University of Michigan Carillon Tower".

⁵¹ DiPiero, "Race, Gender, and Jazz School," 56.

SOCIAL AWARENESS, ADVOCACY AND JAZZ EDUCATION

The foregrounding of social awareness and activism is central to feminist pedagogies. Paula Grissom-Broughton writes that “when feminist pedagogy is activated in an engaged classroom, educators become agents of social change, and students are empowered through their presence and contributions to the learning process.”⁵² For Grissom-Broughton, feminist pedagogy “offers an instructional approach for a more democratic and diverse curriculum and pedagogy.”⁵³ Black feminist pedagogy, in turn, offers a “more specialized instructional approach for underrepresented populations in education.”⁵⁴ It is also a framework for “broadening and minimizing the assumed norms and stereotypes—regarding not only gender but also race and class—within any learning environment.”⁵⁵ Grissom-Broughton adds that “what should matter to (jazz) music educators is not only *who* and *what* we teach but also *how* we teach this art form.”⁵⁶

Willie-Petersen, for example, draws on her own lived experiences as a woman of color to inform multiple aspects of her pedagogical practice, from curricular design to the creation of nurturing learning spaces both within and beyond the classroom. Like Tiffin, Willie-Petersen encourages a culture of camaraderie and collaboration rather than competition and technical wizardry. They have not sacrificed excellence but rather foregrounded the qualities that have historically side-lined them (and women more generally): self-expression, sensitivity, and “otherness.” As educators, they empower their students to experiment without fear of being marginalized or viewed as inauthentic jazz-makers. Central to both women’s work is reclaiming the voice (women’s voices in particular) as a powerful instrument, rather than an inferior medium of musical expression. They and their students sing jazz in local languages and boldly infuse traditional jazz styles with elements of gospel, pop, and indigenous genres.

Some of the strategies employed by Tiffin and Willie-Petersen mirror those of multi award-winning American drummer, Terri Lyne Carrington, who leads

⁵² Paula A. Grissom-Broughton, “A Matter of Race and Gender: An Examination of an Undergraduate Music Program through the Lens of Feminist Pedagogy and Black Feminist Pedagogy” (DMA diss., Boston University College of Fine Arts, 2015), 50.

⁵³ Grissom-Broughton, “A Matter of Race and Gender,” 160.

⁵⁴ Grissom-Broughton, “A Matter of Race and Gender,” 160.

⁵⁵ Paula Grissom-Broughton, “(Re)Imagining Jazz Education through the Lens of Black Feminist Pedagogy: (Presented at the 2021 Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Studies),” *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 27 (2023): 55.

⁵⁶ Grissom-Broughton, “(Re)Imagining Jazz Education,” 57.

the Berklee College of Music's Institute for Jazz and Gender Justice.⁵⁷ Tracy McMullen argues that Carrington's approach to jazz education expands "beyond the technicality of jazz into the effort to make the world better."⁵⁸ McMullen explains how the institute

connects innovation and creativity in jazz with social awareness. It is a broad definition of artistic awareness that includes social, ethical, and historical cognizance and responsibility, aspects that need to be woodshedded just like tone production and altered dominant scales.⁵⁹

Jazz programs can no longer afford to be out of touch with current social and ethical developments; according to McMullen, Carrington "understands jazz as an ethics passed down through mentorship, and her commitment to work for social justice is indistinguishable from her identity as a musician."⁶⁰ Even without the level of established institutional support enjoyed by Carrington and her colleagues at Berklee, Tiffin and Willie-Petersen have succeeded in opening the field of jazz through activism and progressive educational styles. Their agendas of empowerment are often met with resistance, yet they are central to their identities as musicians and educators. Like their counterparts at Berklee, they too are committed to the provision of mentorship by women role models; the collection, distribution, performance, and recording of compositions by women; engagement in school outreach projects; and collaboration with other institutions dedicated to ethical practices and equality.⁶¹ Tiffin and Willie-Petersen's work reflects McMullen's notion of jazz as an ethical practice: "We are moving away from a world where a masculinity based on power over others is prized... to be the nurturer, the one to help heal the trauma rather than to continue to pass it on, is jazz."⁶²

CONCLUSION

It remains important to acknowledge the challenges women face in jazz education and in wider jazz culture, but it is even more crucial to document

⁵⁷ Terri Lyne Carrington, "Sexism in Jazz: Being Agents of Change," *Huffington Post*, April 10, 2017, accessed on October 1, 2024, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/sexism-in-jazz-agents-of-change_b_58ebfab1e4b0ca64d9187879.

⁵⁸ McMullen, "Jazz Education after 2017: The Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice and the Pedagogical Lineage," *Jazz & Culture* 4, no. 2, (2021): 34.

⁵⁹ McMullen, "Jazz Education after 2017," 34.

⁶⁰ McMullen, "Jazz Education after 2017," 28.

⁶¹ McMullen, "Jazz Education after 2017," 28.

⁶² McMullen, "Jazz Education after 2017," 44.

success stories. South African jazz scholarship about women (and indeed undertaken by women) has long been aligned with compensatory research traditions, with very little focus on the impact of empowered individuals like Tiffin and Willie-Petersen. Documenting their stories will broaden and enrich jazz discourse in South Africa and contribute to growing international scholarship that moves beyond long-accepted narratives of patriarchy and colonialism. This article offers a starting point for South African jazz scholarship that is more in tune with current social dynamics and that highlights the value of (feminist) pedagogical practices.

As DiPiero states, “[It] is worth paying attention to humility, curiosity, and other noncompetitive/nonmasculine cultural values in conversations about what feminist jazz pedagogy *could* look like.”⁶³ Willie-Petersen and Tiffin have democratized the jazz curriculum, shifted classroom power dynamics, and created music that celebrates inclusivity and innovation. Their astute self-presentation, dedication to mentoring, and the genuine ethic of care that defines their teaching practices prove that jazz education in South Africa is transcending narrow aestheticism and its long legacy of exclusion.

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⁶³ DiPiero, “Race, Gender, and Jazz School,” 67.

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