

## “Bring Your Identity with You”: Recent Feminist Interventions in Jazz Ecologies

AJ Kluth

As a young man pursuing a master’s degree in jazz saxophone performance in the mid 2000s I noticed something about my university program, gigs, sessions, the scene in general: it was all dudes. Like me, the majority of folks I engaged with in the jazz scene on the North Side of Chicago presented as straight, white, and cisgender men that had moved to the city to study and work. I don’t remember being encouraged to think too much about that over-representation at the time, having internalized the longstanding American ideology of meritocracy wherein anyone could succeed through hard working regardless of their background.

The ideology of meritocracy ignores or diminishes systemic inequity, affirming instead a false narrative of an equitable society for privileged stakeholders less inclined to engage with historical reality and the demands of meaningful reparative justice for those inhibited by generations of identity-based harm.<sup>1</sup> For many Americans invested in that false narrative, the election of Barack Obama in 2008 confirmed that the United States was indeed a post-racial, socially equitable nation. Seeing a Black president fallaciously confirmed for them that identity politics—legislative and social formations that work to address the historical and systematic marginalization of groups and individuals based on identity markers such as race, gender, and class—were a dead-end.<sup>2</sup> Since then, the situation has been further complicated by the bad-faith use of identity politics by those that wish to deny its import while simultaneously deploying it for their own gain. An ongoing breakdown of the public sphere has seen a collapse of consensus reality via polarized media and siloing social media,

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<sup>1</sup> I refer here to the negative outcomes stemming from the historical dominance of patriarchy and white supremacy in all corners of American society.

<sup>2</sup> For a contemporary example, in his second term Trump has issued executive orders that conflate sex and gender, often with the outcome of penalizing gender non-conforming persons. As Kelsey Klotz notes in her letter from the editor that opens this special volume: “If 2016 was the election that revealed the lie of a post-racial America, 2024 will likely be seen as the election that revealed any lie of a post-gender America.” Kelsey Klotz, “State of the Field: Jazz and Gender, Letter from the Guest Editor” *Journal of Jazz Studies* 16, no. 1: 9.

diminishing paths for political discourse. This has resulted in a political landscape in the United States where it has become counter-productive or in bad taste to talk about the significance of identity to equitable social formations.<sup>3</sup>

Add to this a dominant culture of patriarchy that objectifies women and erases gender non-conforming people, and we may begin to understand why spaces of jazz education and performance are dominated by white men. Men—particularly white cismen like me—are accustomed to being “unmarked” or “identity neutral,” as those features that characterize their identity position (from gender to clothing and hairstyles) most often go unnoticed, unconsidered. Thus, in social spaces historically dominated by patriarchy and white supremacy, white men have been tacitly understood as normative, the factory preset for what comprises a rational human.<sup>4</sup> And though Black, creole, and other non-white musicians pioneered jazz, white men have predominantly been its critics and historiographers—and now the majority of its credentialed teachers and performers. In my own development as a jazz musician, I came to wonder about the over-representation of straight, white, cismen like me. Was it because of merit and predisposition? Surely not. Rather, the absence of female, non-binary, and queer musicians is an outcome of the historical hegemony of unmarked patriarchy rather than meritocracy.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it became more apparent to me

<sup>3</sup> This situation is complicated, to say the least. Still, for even more contemporary examples we can look to how the second Trump administration has attacked DEI, including affirmative action hiring practices and considerations of race in college admission. For a nuanced discussion of deliberate misunderstanding and misuse of identity politics, see Wendy Brown, *In The Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (Columbia University Press, 2019), 161-88; as well as Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford University Press, 1997), 100.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the “unmarked” nature of race and gender for men under white supremacy and patriarchy, see Charles Mills, “White Ignorance” in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (SUNY Press, 2007), 28; and Deborah Tannen, “Wears Jump Suit, Sensible Shoes, Uses Husband’s Last Name,” *The New York Times Magazine*, June 20, 1993, 18, 52, 54.

<sup>5</sup> Inequities in university settings spill out onto stages. For more on how university inequities shape jazz scenes, see: David Ake, *Jazz Matters: Sound, Place, and Time Since Bebop* (University of California Press, 2010), 103. Moreover, the distribution of jazz instrumentalists versus vocalists is skewed by gender as is who is encouraged to pursue a career in jazz: Erin L. Wehr, “Playing the Part: A Social-Psychological Perspective on Being a Girl in Jazz,” in *The Routledge Companion to Jazz and Gender*, ed. Michael Kahr, James Reddan and Monika Herzig (Routledge, 2022), 143-155.; Beatriz Nunes, “If Girls Don’t Want to Study Jazz, We Can’t Force Them’: an Ethnography of Gender Balance in a Jazz School” *Journal of Jazz Studies* 16, no. 1 (2025), 122-39. Information from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System demonstrates 82.3% of degree holders in the jazz field to be male. Data USA: Jazz & Jazz Studies: <https://datausa.io/profile/cip/jazz-jazz-studies#demographics>. Attesting further to this imbalance, a recent quantitative study of female identified instructors in university jazz faculties

that jazz was never just “the music itself” as one might apprehend it formally—patterns, licks, recordings, etc.—but rather, a culturally, historically, and politically conditioned social ecology.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, in what follows, I use the term “jazz ecologies” to describe the aforementioned overlapping and mutually constituting spaces of education, performance, and sociality that make up who, how, where, when, why and “so what” of the music.<sup>7</sup>

Jazz ecologies have historically been overdetermined by patriarchy, centering the contributions and experiences of men and boys to the detriment of women and non-binary people in terms of their recognition, respect, safety, opportunities, and more. This demonstrates how, despite popular ideological narratives, our identities are not value neutral. Rather, each of us has a different background that positions us uniquely in the world we have inherited and the world we make. Based on our complex identities characterized by our race, class, gender, etc., we each have different exposures to music and ideas, as well as varied access to instruments and education—both formal and informal. Moreover, how welcome we are and how seriously we are taken in artistic or professional spaces may be conditioned by our identities.<sup>8</sup> So, if jazz ecologies are not meritocracies, and gendered inequities are outcomes of historical and systematic patriarchal domination, addressing the issue and working for gender justice is an all-hands-on-deck situation.<sup>9</sup>

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has found only 15% of jazz faculty to be female-identified and 8% of instrumental jazz faculty as female-identified. Lara Pellegrini, *Jazz Counts: Measuring the Jazz Faculty Gender Gap in Higher Education* (Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice, 2025), [www.jazzandgenderjustice.com/jazzcounts](http://www.jazzandgenderjustice.com/jazzcounts). Finally, racialized and gendered gatekeeping have been part of jazz education since its inception. See Tracy McMullen, “The College Jazz Program as Tradition Making: Establishing a New Lineage in Jazz,” *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender & Culture* 27 (2023): 33.

<sup>6</sup> For more on how social issues of gender and race are obfuscated in favor of formalism in jazz education, see Dan DiPiero, “Race, Gender, and Jazz School: Chord-Scale Theory as White Masculine Technology” *Jazz and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2023): 52-77.

<sup>7</sup> This idea reflects a crucial insight of the “new musicology” and the related “new jazz studies” that recovered music as a social phenomenon, pushing back against received ideologies of aesthetic autonomy that had animated much of music study. The idea of “jazz ecologies” looks to include the significance of the social and material makeup of scenes that are the condition of possibility for the music that’s heard.

<sup>8</sup> In this short article I am primarily addressing gender as an identity marker relevant to identity politics. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that identities are layered, intersectional, and dynamic rather than essential or stable. Significant issues of race are not the focus of this article; its consideration being suspended to allow clearer focus on the issue of gender.

<sup>9</sup> The leadership of the organizations I discuss in this article are all women-identifying and specifically work to promote women’s leadership and to center women and non-binary persons. This does not mean that men are not welcome or present in these organizations or that they

This can be challenging. Happily, there are a number of organizations modeling how to do this work, including the Berklee Center for Jazz and Gender Justice (JGJ), the Women in Jazz Organization (WIJO), and This Is A Movement (TIAM).<sup>10</sup> Each of these organizations creates opportunities for under-represented members of jazz ecologies with a focus on gender justice. In what follows, I offer a brief history of these organizations and accounts of their values and recent activities gleaned through interviews with women in leadership. It is my hope these profiles might inform any interested stakeholder how they might themselves promote diversity and equity initiatives that benefit music making and the sociality of jazz ecologies overall.

#### THE BERKLEE INSTITUTE FOR JAZZ AND GENDER JUSTICE

Since its founding in 2017, the Berklee Institute for Jazz and Gender Justice (JGJ) has been a pacesetter leader for equity in jazz ecologies.<sup>11</sup> Led by founding artistic director Terri Lyne Carrington and managing director Aja Burrell Wood, the organization continues its mission to raise awareness and create paths

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cannot or should not be helping to promote gender justice in jazz ecologies. Identity-based allyship can be challenging and often characterized by contradiction. I am reminded of those contradictions enumerated by Hannah Baer’s graphic “Contradictions for White People in Racial Justice Work” that includes ideas: “racial justice work involves white people giving up or giving away their power ↔ another part of racial justice work is white people strategically using their power rather than hiding it, denying it, or pretending it doesn’t exist” and “white people have specific and critical roles in racial justice movements ↔ white people are a particular liability in racial justice movements.” Racial signifiers in these sentences are easily replaceable with gendered signifiers. Hannah Baer (@malefragility), “Contradictions for White People in Racial Justice Work,” Instagram, Image, June 16, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CBhJwWlmdwh-HW92l65lKa5NmtUsxSkg8kmjM0>. While I am not aware of organizations led by men specifically addressing gender justice in jazz ecologies (there may be some), models for more general feminist organizations led by men include the HeForShe Alliance (<https://www.heforshe.org/en>), MenEngage Alliance (<https://menengage.org/>), and the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) (<https://nomas.org/>).

<sup>10</sup> Other examples not discussed here include: International Women in Jazz (<https://internationalwomeninjazz.org/>), Key of She Jazz (<https://www.keyofshejazz.org/>), Mutual Mentorship for Musicians (<https://m3musicians.org/>), the Women in Jazz Association (<https://womeninjazz.org/>), the Women in Jazz Initiative (<https://walkerwest.org/women-in-jazz-initiative/>).

<sup>11</sup> For more on JGJ, see: Suzanne Lorge, “Terri Lynne Carrington: ‘Transform the Culture,’” *DownBeat Magazine*, February 2019, 24-9; Tracy McMullen, “Jazz Education after 2017: The Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice and the Pedagogical Lineage,” *Jazz and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2021); Robin D.G. Kelley, “Fireside Chat with Special Guests: Berklee Institute for Jazz and Gender Justice,” *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender & Culture* 27 (2023): 62-7.

for racial and gender justice in jazz education, making slow changes in the institutional-to-scene pipeline. New history and performance classes at the Berklee College of Music that center under-represented identities, a new minor in jazz and gender justice, as well as institutional changes related to equitable hiring and healthcare options are complemented by a traveling multi-modal “New Standards” exhibit, all with the aim of creating outcomes oriented toward justice in music scenes beyond the institution’s reach in Boston.<sup>12</sup> In partnership with New Music USA and with funding from the Mellon Foundation, JGJ hosts the Next Jazz Legacy project that offers support and mentorship for up-and-coming women and non-binary artists. Educational panels oriented toward centering women’s and non-binary persons’ experiences and contributions to the field and performances at festivals such as Winter Jazzfest round out their ever-expanding offerings. JGJ deploys Black feminist values to reimagine jazz ecologies explicitly framed by an “Afro-American Value System” that prioritizes collectivity, care, and function.<sup>13</sup>

Carrington is a Grammy Award-winning composer, producer, drummer, educator, and has been recognized as a National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master. Having famously attended Berklee on a full scholarship at age eleven and being associated with the institution since then, she has an indispensable perspective on the state of jazz ecologies at Berklee and beyond. In my interview with Carrington, she reflected on the necessity and long-term scope of JGJ’s interventions: “I’m not a scholar and never claim to be. I just did something that served the need at the institution I work at. But also, a need in the community.”<sup>14</sup> Continuously recognized for her outstanding activity as a musician, composer and educator, she notes how “the work”—ongoing social and aesthetical interventions in patriarchal domination—is distributed throughout the related spaces of education and performance. She notes how criticism in the academic space is related to practical outcomes on stage, saying, “I think it takes all of it to move the needle. And sometimes, you know, scholarship and certain ideology is

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<sup>12</sup> For more about the traveling “New Standards” exhibit see: <https://www.berklee.edu/berklee-now/news/berklee-and-emerson-college-present-new-standards-exhibition>

<sup>13</sup> Among other things, Black feminism centers care, mutual aid, and coalition building. The idea that: “‘If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression,’ captures the dialectic connecting the struggle for Black liberation to the struggle for a liberated United States and, ultimately, the world.” For more on Black feminism see: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Haymarket Books, 2017), 11. The “Afro-American Value System” is further discussed in Tracy McMullen, “Jazz Education after 2017,” *Jazz and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2021): 5.

<sup>14</sup> Terri Lyne Carrington, interview with the author, conducted via Zoom, August 27, 2024.

great and helps us think more forward about things but sometimes it remains in that space, the academic space. And I’m more focused on the jazz community outside the academic space and the culture in general that needs a major shift.”<sup>15</sup> Stressing the idea that intentional changes in the institutional laboratory environment will make material changes in the scene down the road, she said,

I think it all starts to work together because most people in those other spaces, well, I think the academic space and the performance space work together because most people come from academic spaces. So, the idea is that you keep shifting it in academic space and hopefully that is what continues to shift the culture outside of that space...it’s generational.<sup>16</sup>

Though oriented toward making space for non-male identities, both Carrington and Wood reported that students of all identity backgrounds benefit from their work with the Institute. In my interview with Wood, she reported hearing from cisgendered male students in JGJ that “the space feels better,” that they don’t feel like they have to perform a particular type of masculinity:

Particularly a type of “jazzmasculinity” that Nicole Rustin actually talks about in her amazing book *The Man I Am*.<sup>17</sup> And she’s really looking at Charles Mingus to unpack that. My students haven’t read that but they’re definitely speaking in that way, that they feel...like, no one is telling them out loud, but they feel they have to perform a certain type of masculinity—a jazzmasculinity. And even though they identify as male and masculine, that type of performance feels exhausting to them and they can’t just get to the music...So, in our environment, they’re still male identified and masculine but they don’t have to perform that. And that gives them, I think, a type of freedom that allows them to connect to their musicianship and their artistry that might otherwise be blocked. And, for those who are not male-identified, who are women, femme, non-binary, that environment is going to feel better to them. Now their voices are heard. Now they’re taking up space.<sup>18</sup>

This positive outcome is evidenced by the fact that, despite sometimes having to take on the labor and cost of additional credits for classes to work with JGJ,

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<sup>15</sup> Carrington, interview.

<sup>16</sup> Carrington, interview.

<sup>17</sup> “Jazzmasculinity” as characterized by Rustin-Paschal is complex, recognizing identity as fraught and multiple. She notes this gendered identity is worked out along lines of class, race, and sexuality as well as expectations of anger, fear, discipline, and emotional intensity. Nicole Rustin-Paschal, *The Kind of Man I Am: Jazzmasculinity and the World of Charles Mingus Jr.* (Wesleyan University Press, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Aja Burrell Wood, interview with the author, conducted via Zoom, August 27, 2024.

students of all gender identities keep coming to the program. Moreover, Wood reports that the increase of women in teaching departments has resulted in having to make important practical changes in the institution itself. For example, as Berklee had never had a pregnant person on faculty in the bass department, Wood helped to work out new maternity leave policies related to a faculty member's pregnancy.

Carrington stresses that decentering patriarchy is collective work: "There's so many groups and organizations working toward the same thing and no matter how they're working...it's all contributing. I mean, that's what movements do. It's what has to happen."<sup>19</sup> The job, Wood suggests, is to diminish barriers to entry:

We try to take the dumb stuff out the way.... I can't practice for you... but we can take out the dumb stuff: like, when you walk into a room people aren't judging you because of the body you're in or not listening or judging the sound based on the body it's coming out of. But also, we can be inclusive of your identity. Bring your identity with you, you know?<sup>20</sup>

#### WOMEN IN JAZZ ORGANIZATION

As a saxophonist myself I've always got my ears open for horn players. While living in Los Angeles in the mid 2010s I started hearing about Roxy Coss's projects in NYC. In addition to being a fantastic horn player she also openly engages identity politics in the jazz space, evidenced by her founding of the Women In Jazz Organization (WIJO) in 2017. In a Zoom conversation with President Coss and Vice President Tahira Clayton, both characterized their community as fluid and dynamic. Though Coss has served at a number of institutions since WIJO's founding (she was a Visiting Fellow for the Think Tank at Wesleyan University's Bailey College of the Environment at the time of our interview and is the incoming Director of Jazz Studies at Stony Brook University), WIJO has no permanent affiliation. As they lead the 501(c)3 non-profit charitable organization, Coss and Clayton work with their support team to respond to shifting needs in the overall ecology as they meet it, local and otherwise. And as worlds of music performance, education, professionalization,

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<sup>19</sup> Wood, interview.

<sup>20</sup> Wood, interview. Wood pointed, too, to Toni Morrison's powerful characterization of racism from a 1975 keynote speech at Portland State University: "[T]he function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being." Toni Morrison, 1975, "Black Studies Center Public Dialogue. Pt. 2," Recorded at Portland State University, May 30, 1975. Portland State Library Special Collections, 35:46.

and sociality overlap dynamically, WIJO always has to shift in response to changing context. Especially in light of the then-incoming second Trump administration,<sup>21</sup> Coss reflected on challenges during our interview: “How do we serve our community? How do we serve our members? What that looks like keeps changing drastically with these world events. And even just in the method of serving, right?”<sup>22</sup>

So far this has looked like the creation of mentorship programs for developing musicians that, Clayton suggests, is a great example of an initiative seeing successful outcomes. Regarding the “who” WIJO serves, Coss noted they most often are meeting women and non-binary musicians who need support early in their training or careers, within or outside of institutions. She clarified: “We use the term ‘woman’ to include anybody who self-identifies as a woman. So, that would include trans women. Also, the term ‘non-binary,’ meaning anyone who’s not coming from a binary state of mind.”<sup>23</sup> Clayton noted that, while it’s difficult to gauge outcomes by any hard rubric, “The fact that students keep showing up indicates, if not success, that something’s happening that people find worth their time.”<sup>24</sup> Coss agreed that while progress or “success” is hard to measure,

[V]ibe is a huge part of it for me. Asking: “Does this feel like something we can continue in?” And letting that guide it. Where are we needed? Where is there a path of less resistance?... The mentorship program was something where they (artists) really need it. They really want us (WIJO) and that speaks to the vibe and to where we can serve most efficiently.... [E]ven things that don’t pan out offer experience and direction—things are never linear.<sup>25</sup>

Clayton stressed how their love for the jazz community influences the urgency of their work. She reflected that when WIJO started she would sometimes be asked if they were trying to “burn down” the institution of jazz-as-usual. “Yes,” she said, “in the way that we move, we are burning it down. But the goal isn’t to say: ‘We’re torching this structure because we hate it.’ It’s: ‘we’re torching this structure so we can build it better.’”<sup>26</sup>

Contending that no intervention is linear, Clayton noted how crucial it is that multiple groups address negative outcomes of patriarchy. Despite patriarchal

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<sup>21</sup> About which Coss has previously made musical statements such as “Mr. President” from her 2019 release, *Quintet*.

<sup>22</sup> Roxy Coss, interview with the author, conducted via Zoom, September 17, 2024.

<sup>23</sup> Coss, interview.

<sup>24</sup> Tahira Clayton, interview with the author, conducted via Zoom, September 17, 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Coss, interview.

<sup>26</sup> Clayton, interview.

culture encouraging competition between women, multiple organizations led by women organizers highlight the need for diverse approaches and communities.<sup>27</sup> “We need as many organizations and initiatives as possible,” she said. “TIAM and JGJ are doing their own specific thing, and they’re all needed. I hope in the future we all do an even greater job of working together in our respective lanes.”<sup>28</sup> To that end, WIJO hosted a panel at the Jazz Educators Network conference in January 2025 called “There’s Room at the Table, Women in Jazz Summit” as well as a “Women in Jazz” jam session. “Cooperation is the best outcome,” Clayton notes. Over-representation of resources can only be good for folks being served.”<sup>29</sup>

#### THIS IS A MOVEMENT

This Is A Movement is an initiative based in New York City working to organize feminist-informed interventions in jazz, Black American Music, and creative music spaces, explicitly addressing issues of gender equity and extramusical, social elements that condition jazz ecologies.<sup>30</sup> While their website notes that TIAM coalesced around 2021, several of the organization’s foundational members, Sarah Elizabeth Charles and Caroline Davis, have been working together since the late 2010s to co-teach a course called “Jazz and Gender: Broadening the Scope” at The New School.<sup>31</sup> From this, opportunities for further conversation and representation arose through work with Brice Rosenbloom, founder and producer of Winter Jazzfest. Panels and talks at the annual festival in addition to further collective imagination and labor of several organizers (including Charles, Davis, Rosenbloom and partners Aja Burrell Wood and Niama Safia Sandy, among others) led to more official formations.

When I asked Charles about the “kind” of feminism informing TIAM’s work, she immediately pointed to the crucial influence of the Combahee River Collective (CRC) statement of 1977 and the modality of Black Feminism

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<sup>27</sup> Tammy Kernodle, “Black Women Working Together: Jazz, Gender, and the Politics of Validation,” *Black Music Research Journal* 34, no. 2 (2014), 29.

<sup>28</sup> Clayton, interview.

<sup>29</sup> Clayton, interview.

<sup>30</sup> I have personally benefitted from attending several meetings they have organized to discuss jazz and gender, starting on Zoom in 2020 and later via panels at Winter Jazzfest and elsewhere. Ideas and relationships that started with this community have influenced my own teaching, research, and performance practice in relation to jazz and gender justice but also related to justice and decolonization in institutional and cultural spaces.

<sup>31</sup> In addition to this, Charles and Davis have together developed and co-teach an additional course entitled “New Narratives: Creating Space for Equity in Music” at The New School’s College of Performing Arts.

championed therein. Citing the historical erasure of women’s and non-binary artists’s contributions to the jazz space, she characterized TIAM as a series of interventions oriented toward creating equitable spaces and systems of support for anyone in the jazz/Black American/creative music industry, specifically to support those historically most marginalized.<sup>32</sup> This echoes the CRC in the recognition that we help everyone when we create systems that see and aid those in our communities who have been the most historically affected by interlocking systems of oppression.

In a conversation more than a year earlier about TIAM, Caroline Davis also cited the influence of the Combahee River Collective in her concept of their collective work: “Everything sort of spiraled out from there to include people that I hadn’t known about before. Like Fannie Lou Hamer... Anna Julia Cooper, who was the first person who wrote about intersectionality, but didn’t call it intersectionality.”<sup>33</sup> Beyond this, Davis notes how movements for justice in the music space might spill out into the world; that music might be leveraged to shine a light on reparative justice beyond the musical space, such as in her work that focuses on prison abolition.

I was interested to learn that TIAM very intentionally calls itself an “initiative” rather than an “organization.” Charles said: “We’re not an organization... we’re not even a collective, necessarily.... It’s really just an initiative trying to catalyze equity by cultivating spaces and bringing people together through this Black Feminist lens.”<sup>34</sup> This kind of organizing relies on a non-hierarchical structuring of their work, wherein participants step up or step back as life demands—an approach that she admits can pose challenges, but still foments more intentional relationships. In 2023 this resulted in the “Collective Imagining” initiative that created working groups that connect artists and offer them room and support to do just that: conceiving new methods, spaces and ways forward toward a more equitable scene.

In addition to the working groups mentioned above, TIAM offers ongoing support for musical mentorship and development and interventions for education in the jazz space, such as a recent panel at Winter Jazzfest in January 2025. Moderated by Sarah Elizabeth Charles, “Nurturing Children and Creativity” featured Adi Oasis, Martha Redbone, and Kim Kalesti as they discussed the challenges of parenting as a working musician, sharing their experiences and offering recommendations. Supported in a network of partnerships with institutions and allied organizations, TIAM remains

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<sup>32</sup> Sarah Elizabeth Charles, interview with the author, conducted via Zoom, January 14, 2025.

<sup>33</sup> Caroline Davis, in discussion with the author, Brooklyn, NY, June 13, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Charles, interview.

independent. In addition to Winter Jazzfest and The New School, TIAM continues to cultivate mutually supportive relationships with non-profit organizations Mutual Mentorship for Musicians (M<sup>3</sup>), the Berklee Institute for Jazz and Gender Justice, and Jazz at Lincoln Center.

#### CONCLUSION

From my conversations with leaders and organizers at JGJ, WIJO, and TIAM, it became clear they all operate from similar logics of communitarian and non-hierarchical organization to support artists and communities working from vulnerable and historically oppressed identity positions. The jazz ecologies they seek to cultivate do not exclude men or other gender identities but rather celebrate anyone interested in doing the work of making our world more equitable.

Personally speaking, as a straight white cisman saxophonist, scholar, and fan invested in this music, I am convinced that I stand to benefit from doing whatever I can to foster more just and equitable jazz ecologies. This can only result in safer, more supportive communities that nurture and celebrate our diversity, resulting in more and richer music. This is equally true in each of the overlapping spaces of performance, education, and sociality. Celebrated feminist author bell hooks reminds us that, “When men embrace feminist thinking and practice, which emphasizes the value of mutual growth and self-actualization in all relationships, their emotional well-being will be enhanced. A genuine feminist politics always brings us from bondage to freedom, from lovelessness to loving.”<sup>35</sup> This agrees with Paulo Friere’s teaching that, while maintaining the status quo may feel comfortable and easier than having to intentionally make change, knowingly benefitting from the domination of others can only diminish one’s humanity.<sup>36</sup> Hierarchies and unequal power dynamics based upon identity are not worth perpetuating and it is incumbent upon those who benefit from them in any way to fight them. At their best, jazz ecologies are relational, non-hierarchical, and characterized by collectivity. The kind of intentionality and care demanded by that kind of being-together is a reminder that “we got us,” that no one is safe until we’re all safe, both on the bandstand and in life. These feminist interventions, then, are an invitation to consider how we might look out for each other, regardless of who we are and how we identify.

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<sup>35</sup> bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (Atria Books, 2004), 114.

<sup>36</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (Continuum, 1970), 56.

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#### ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

AJ Kluth is a musicologist interested in issues of aesthetics, identity, and ethics in contemporary global popular and experimental musics. His publications appear in the *Journal of Jazz Studies*, *The Journal of the Society for American Music* (forthcoming), *The International Journal of New Media, Technology, and the Arts*, and *DownBeat Magazine* and he has presented research at conferences throughout the United States, UK, and Europe. He teaches at Case Western Reserve University where he leads courses related to popular music, experimentalisms, social justice, and aesthetics. As a saxophonist he has worked in American and European scenes and has been a teaching artist for the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz.