

Disturbing Jazz Compositional Canons through a Transdisciplinary Improvisational Approach

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Abstract

In October 2024, Oded Ben-Horin (of Western Norway University of Applied Science) and myself experimented with an improvisatory approach towards jazz research and education at the Voices of Women (VOW) Erasmus+ international training conference. Our format interrogated valorisation resources within the jazz sphere, especially given the lack of women composers represented in canonical jazz materials such as lead sheet compendia. Seeking to challenge pervasive mechanisms by which male jazz artists come to occupy spaces of agency and prestige, we developed a transdisciplinary framework which combined practice-based and historiographic methods. This approach provided space for experimentation with our in-the-moment understanding of disciplines within the VOW project, enabling a connection to the material (e.g. recordings, canons, lead sheets) and the discursive (critical evaluation of such materials) in an integral way. Specifically, we aimed to circumvent existing barriers to canonical status by drawing attention to under-recognized female jazz agents often excluded from jazz educational resources. As a case, we focused upon pianist Lil Hardin Armstrong, and the materials that evidence her many innovations, while also engaging dynamically with the material traces of her career. Our TD, improvisatory approach aimed to integrate study and practice of little referenced materials of jazz women to allow various forms of knowledge to collide; through this, we simultaneously argued that, and practiced how, knowledge and insight do not pre-exist nor mutually exclude those collisions across disciplines. This approach enabled a closer connection to under-recognized voices of women in jazz, especially Lil Hardin Armstrong and her collaborator Mae Barnes as important agents of change for women authors in jazz.

Keywords

Jazz Canons, Lil Hardin Armstrong, Mae Barnes, Transdisciplinarity, Improvisation, Lead Sheets, Terri Lyne Carrington

"We are asking both patrons of the music and musicians themselves, to consider or challenge themselves, to listen differently to be open to another sound aesthetic in the music, that is a really hard one to accomplish because we all grew up thinking this is the sound of jazz, and this is what good jazz is, and everything that has been described as good jazz, for the most part has been created by men...What would the infiltration of this different sound aesthetic created by women and trans gender people and people that aren't moving through the world with male privilege - what does that sound like and how does it affect the music?"

Interview with Terri Lyne Carrington of the Berklee Institute for Jazz and Gender Justice for the JazzFest Berlin 60th Year Edition, 9 September 2024

Our presentation at the Erasmus+ Voices of Women in Music (Vow) conference at the University of Stavanger in October of 2024, sought to challenge entrenched notions of ownership and authorship in jazz composition, recording, and dissemination.¹ To 'disturb' (Brooks 2006) rigid boundaries surrounding processes of canonization within jazz, we enlisted a transdisciplinary approach to research, performance, and education. Our methods included creative improvisation across musical genres and disciplines; consultation of newly available resources and jazz media; and traditional historical studies of musical artists and their extant archives. This transdisciplinary approach aspired to more directly impact and excite younger musicians in their encounters with women in jazz, especially where women occupied roles as lead performers, composers, and collaborators in particular periods, yet their contributions remain under-recognized in educational and performative contexts.

This article proposes a combined historical and practice-based improvisatory approach as one well suited for impacting students of jazz in more embodied and creative ways to effectuate more durable engagement with female jazz authors in performance spaces. The goal is that this improvisatory element will defamiliarize the

seeming normalcy and inevitability of existing jazz canons to inspire alternative views and insights about the jazz past for its creative reanimation in the present and future. As a case study, we have chosen Lil Hardin Armstrong as a pioneer in jazz styles and movements of the early twentieth century, but also as a performer whose improvisatory style evolved to adapt to new media and collaborations after World War II. Finally, we draw upon new resources, especially Terri Lyne Carrington's recent lead sheet edition, 101 Lead Sheets by Women Composers in Jazz, to highlight one of Hardin's under-recognized compositions ("Perdido Street Blues") during our presentation.

Central to the VOW project is the arts-based research method RESCAPE that creates a specific form of engagement with research, education, performance, and materiality. By assembling, studying, and performing historical sources in novel ways, RESCAPE initiates co-creative processes and opens new perspectives on the processes of canonization and shared knowledge about musical heritage. In aiming to contextualize this in our presentation, we relied on Karen Barad's notion of transdisciplinarity, which requires attentiveness to nuances within a given field to enable entanglements across, and a reworking of, disciplinary boundaries. Our backgrounds as performers, educators, and researchers in the humanities enabled us to combine our skills and ambitions across disciplines for greater gender parity and inclusivity, as we seek to valorize and make visible pioneering women, as well as non-binary, and gender queer authors and composers within jazz. Yet we acknowledge our positionality, especially our privilege as white, Western cis-gendered (male and female) academics, with access to financing, resources, training, and networks often denied to the prolific African American performers, band leaders, and female composers of earlier decades who tirelessly toured and performed throughout their lives, often without institutional support and backing.

For our presentation and workshop, we drew inspiration from little examined objects relevant for the life and work of Hardin Armstrong as a border-breaking jazz artist. These included a recently broadcast appearance of

Hardin on American television in the 1960s. We also studied and considered the potential pedagogical advantage of the 2022 lead sheet compendium (New Standards) compiled by drummer and educator Terri Lyne Carrington, founder and director of the Berklee Institute for Jazz and Gender Justice. This source served as our point of departure for enlisting the tenants of RESCAPE to amplify, engage with, and internalize facets of compositions created by prior female pioneers of jazz in the last century. Our workshop sought to move beyond established disciplinary boundaries (e.g. musicology or jazz performance pedagogy) to offer students and performers new ways of researching and learning about the jazz past, with the goal of bringing facets of this under-recognized past (e.g. the contributions of women in jazz) more firmly alive and dynamically performed into the present (more on this later). Hoping to move beyond revisionist approaches, our transdisciplinary approach seeks to inspire young musicians to incorporate performative repertoires and gestures of prior women in jazz, whose contributions have been little recognized or under-valued, into their own performances and body of creative work.

This article offers a transdisciplinary path and multifaceted framework towards innovating research-oriented presentational formats dedicated to valorizing women in jazz, especially as band leaders, composers, and soloists. In the following, we outline this approach, as well as review recent debates in relation to artistic research and transdisciplinary approaches within research and education. Finally, our critical reflection on our process intends to expand the discussion for collaboration and improvisation as viable and critical tools for promoting the important work accomplished by women and women identifying agents in jazz. Here we expand the jazz archive to include not only the jazz recording but other documents such as music video, films, and ephemeral autobiographical materials retrieved from various archives and settings. To bring this transdisciplinary framework to life, we engaged with the work of two trailblazing woman in jazz active during the jazz age through the post-war period, Lil Hardin Armstrong and Mae Barnes. By engaging these

different approaches, and by bringing improvisation into the presentational format through study and interaction with material objects related to Armstrong and Barnes, we hoped to stimulate more embodied and visceral experiences of these women's creativity and innovation. Finally, our juxtaposition of musical media, historical documents, and interactive improvisation in situ enabled a materially oriented, embodied exposure to unique facets of Armstrong's (and Barnes's) dynamic jazz pasts; and ideally this approach inspires more rigorous and frequent engagement with their work by younger jazz performers and composers today who seek to look beyond existing and predominantly masculine-oriented jazz canons and iconic jazz media, mainly the canonized instrumental jazz recording (McGinley 2014, Doktor 2020).

The article develops in three parts. In Part 1, I'll briefly review recent concepts and debates with regards transdisciplinarity and artistic research (through improvisation) as critical tools for researching and teaching about women in jazz. Then, Part 2 highlights recent performance and pedagogical sources, especially new lead sheet compendiums featuring female composers, which effectively challenge or at least complement existing jazz canons. Finally, Part 3 provides an analysis and overview of Lil Hardin Armstrong's life and brief collaboration with multi-instrumentalist Mae Barnes for a 1961 NBC televised musical revue. This section sheds light on the variety of media and collaborations undertaken by Hardin after her appearances with Louis Armstrong in the 1930s. Our TD approach towards these materials is designed to stimulate other performers/researchers to stitch these women's creative legacies more fully into the present, and to motivate creative, multi-mediated, and more inclusive jazz futures through the combined experimentation of performance, composition, and improvisation.

Part 1 - Transdisciplinarity within Music Research

Many approaches to working across the disciplinary divides in music have been promoted in relation to transdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity (TD) resulted as part of the fluid and dynamic

transformation of disciplines and institutions since the nineteenth century and responded especially to the entrenched monodisciplinarity gaining ground in the late and early twentieth century (Somson & van Lunteren 2024, p. 62). Today transdisciplinarity represents a greater degree of integration, but only in the context of this historical ebb and flow of changing epistemes and institutionalized boundaries since the nineteenth century. TD emerged as a concept in the 1970's as critique of knowledge and institutionalization of disciplines in the twentieth century (Turner 2017). This emergence included epistemological questions about the unification of systems. In TD, divisions are unclear, and connections are magnified, enabling new complexities of design. Discipline integration becomes the purpose, not the tool.

Karen Barad reminds us that talking and writing are not the only available discursive practices available for altering the forms of agency within particular fields (e.g. science, nature, performance). She states, "Discursive practices are boundary-making practices that have no finality in the ongoing dynamics of agential intra-activity" (Barad 2003, p. 821). For our presentation, this meant that what was traditionally perceived as music could not exist without the words with which that music is intra-acting, and vice versa. Further Barad advocates for drawing insights and approaches from various disciplines through the concept of diffraction: "Diffractionally reading the insights of feminist and queer theory and science studies approaches through one another entails thinking the 'social' and the 'scientific' together in an illuminating way" (Barad 2003, p. 803). What often appear as separate entities (and separate sets of concerns) with sharp edges don't necessarily entail a relation of absolute exteriority. Like the diffraction patterns illuminating the indefinite nature of boundaries—displaying shadows in 'light' regions and bright spots in 'dark' regions—the relation of the social and the scientific is a relation of 'exteriority within'. Barad posits, "This is not a static relationality but a doing—the enactment of boundaries—that always entails constitutive exclusions and therefore requisite questions of accountability" (Barad 2003, p. 803). Our approach thinks through the

social, the scientific, the historical, and the performative as ways of drawing new insights while activating the body through improvisation to highlight the VOW project's context in relation to women in jazz. Our collaborative improvisations and collective examination of the insights from gender and feminist studies (employing concepts such as intersectionality and bias) as well as historiographic study of how archives come into being enabled a critically engaged discursive interaction between these fields.

Since the 1990s, TD has been applied to complex, global challenges ranging from sustainable development and climate change to social problems such as racism and homophobia, and educational systems' design (Ross 1991). In this century, TD is seen as having potential in solving problems which require creative working methods, stake-holder involvement outside of the academic community, and a socially responsible science (Nowotny et al., 2001). The reliance on monodisciplinary paradigms as a basis for organizing research, development, innovation, and teaching limits the impact of our endeavors, especially as we seek to stimulate greater equity and parity within the music world. Part of the VOW guidelines afforded inspiration for combining approaches from various fields and practices, including jazz historiography, practice-based research through improvisation, and multi-media presentational formats flourishing on digital platforms like YouTube and TikTok. In our proposal, we claimed, "monodisciplinary approaches are not going to achieve any of the sustainable development goals or solve the grand challenges of contemporary society", with sustainability relating to gender and cultural inclusion within the jazz sphere. The old models of separately teaching jazz performance, history and composition betray traces of such a monodisciplinary approach. By combining these approaches in a workshop setting, we offered students and jazz scholars ways to engage with different and changing aesthetics and ideologies in relation to jazz composition and performance practice. During this supportive setting of the VOW international meeting, we took advantage of this open atmosphere as well as transcended the once necessary

ameliorative impulse of prior 'women in jazz' histories (Placksin 1982, Handy 1998), to stimulate greater and more sustainable affective, corporeal, and cultural connections with prior and future jazz women's cultural worlds and their artistic output.

But what did our TD presentational approach actually entail? First of all, we corresponded for several weeks prior to the conference, sharing resources, study notes, and drafts of presentation scripts.

We debated the format and considered how much improvisation and free-play should occupy our twenty minutes. Then we agreed upon specific moments where each of us as performers would respond to the textual analysis presented in our pre-designed script. For example, after an acknowledgement of Hardin's long battle to receive the composer credit for her song "Perdido Street Blues" (away from Louis Armstrong), Odin improvised around various words from our script and from the song lyrics ("Perdido, Goodnight Perdido, I lost Perdido") upon which I interjected short motives on my soprano saxophone within the blues structure of the piece. Then we alternated taking turns interrupting each other's text while cueing up the vital jazz-media showcasing Hardin Armstrong and Barnes in a televised duet as the closing segment of our presentation. Finally, we engaged students in questions about the presentation and shared links to resources relating to Hardin Armstrong and Barnes as well as other media highlighting compositions by women in jazz.

Embodied and Practice-based Approaches to Jazz Research and Pedagogy

One key TD approach towards valorizing women and female-identifying agents in jazz was to adapt elements of artistic practice-led research, especially improvisation and stylistic imitation, to the disciplines of musicology, media studies, and gender and feminist studies. During our presentation, we chose to interrogate processes which elevate forms of musical ownership related to performance practices within jazz such as short form improvisation, the jam session, and the blues form as documented in

jazz media. Our aim was to stimulate our students and peers to interrogate systems of canonization while also adopting some of these techniques to become 'agents of change' within jazz education and performance contexts. We were driven by the notion that knowledge (in jazz) is only a rumor until it lives in the body.

A final motivation for our transdisciplinary presentational approach is a desire to work towards greater integration in the music academy and conservatory for research models will valorize and utilize combinations of contextual, sociological, and embodied research especially practice-based research. Michael Kahr defines artistic research in music as "a multifaceted endeavor which involves practice-based, practice-led and practice-driven approaches" and as "research in and through art, usually conducted by artist-scholars" and differentiated from "more traditional research on the arts" (Kahr xvi). Since the 1990s and following the Bologna Accords (1999), growing calls for artistic research has betrayed the precarious ground upon which many performance programs within music schools and conservatories currently stand (Born 2021). In his historical overview and analysis of jazz education programs, Ken Prouty further contextualizes these trends, revealing how, despite recent debates which suggest the ongoing separation of jazz practice and performance from jazz criticism and discourse, written studies and discourses of jazz culture have always existed parallel with the creative object and performance cultures of jazz (Prouty 2011, p. 71). Georgina Born identified some of the tensions surrounding the emergence of new terminology and frameworks during the last three decades leading to further stratified hierarchies within universities in relation to 'scientific' versus 'artistic' or 'practice based' research. She states: "as a result of this partnering with scientific and technological development, the epistemological status of MR (music research) appears clearer and less in doubt than that of AR [artistic research]. Music, it seems, can get caught up in orthodox forms of technoscientific research in ways that make it relatively obvious and easy to make claims about MR's scientific status leading to a 'subordination-service' mode of interdisciplin-

arity between scientists and composers and musicians" (Born 2021, p. 39). To prevent this subordination-service relation, while advocating for more sustainable forms of transdisciplinarity, Peter Frost-Fadness advocates for the merging of theory and practice (MR) and performance and improvisation (AR) within early instructional encounters for students and professionals "to embrace attitudes of inclusiveness and transdisciplinarity" (Frost-Fadness 2021, p. 74).

Our transdisciplinary approach for this presentation necessarily entailed forms of traditional music research, yet we integrated practice-based research throughout the process, inspired by calls by scholar-performers such as Ellen Rowe and Tracy McMullen who advocate for greater inclusivity, gender parity, and space for improvisation for under-represented groups in jazz. Rowe, a long-time jazz educator, composer and performer, highlights how a lack of representative works by women in jazz ultimately offers the impression that jazz composition and leadership is a skill better undertaken by male-musicians (Rowe 2021, pp. 461-462). McMullen addresses this concern, by interrogating the overall value systems of many jazz training programs, which focus upon the "how" of jazz techniques rather than the "why" and "what it's for." She advocates for a more thorough inculcation of African American values in the process of mentorship and education in contemporary programs (McMullen 2021, p. 86). Our workshop for the Voices of Women in Jazz, takes on Rowe's and McMullen's implied critiques and follows their lead within jazz education in promoting advocacy and mentorship as well as creative artistic approaches as avenues for advocating works by women. We see this approach as one equipped to simultaneously motivate and stimulate young women and women identifying musicians to occupy these roles. This integrated approach will prove more successful as a vehicle for manifesting a different and more inclusive present and future in jazz. As identified by the Berklee Institute for Jazz and Gender Studies in their mission statement, new approaches are needed to do "corrective work and modify the way jazz is perceived and presented, so the future of jazz looks different than its past without rendering invisible many

of the art form's creative contributions" (Berklee, 2021).

Part 2 - Adopting New Resources and Practices for Amplifying Women's Authorial Voices in Jazz

As performers and researchers, we seek to transform the archive, cognizant of the performing body's role in challenging entrenched hierarchies. Our presentation format challenged the conventions in which this archive has been assembled and passed down to us, redirecting the masculinist phonographic filter from which it was collected. Students, performers, and educators alike may be attached to well-circulated versions of this history, of Ken Burns and Gunther Schuller, which relay the story of Jazz Heroes, of virtuosic soloists, and of new technologies engraved with traces of modernist evolutions (Whyton 20, Katz 2010, Tucker 2000). Jazz's official narratives uphold these recordings as emblems of musical genius; of a resilience against racism and an exploitative recording industry in the early twentieth century. This is an important story, yet we chose to consider artistic worlds as more than their technological reproduction as material objects. If we broaden our lens to consider alternative contexts and other materialities, many collaborative or undocumented, we unsettle the glue which cemented linear frames of this jazz past.

Our presentation recognized music's immediate and material impact upon the body, and especially upon the performatively gendered, raced, and sexed bodies of particular performance cultures. Through time, performances and their documentation congeal into proscriptive maps for future performances, and lived experiences can be mapped from one performer to the next through encounters with this documented jazz past (Rasula 1995). Yet heavy reliance upon jazz recordings of a canonical body of largely, male geniuses (predominantly instrumental) soloists (Gennari 2006, Rustin 2005), has diminished access to myriad resources which could have invigorated knowledge of a different and more feminine jazz past, and especially the visual, biographical, and more intimate ephemera of jazz women's lives.

As jazz scholar Ted Rasula asks, in con-

templating the epistemological status of jazz recordings, is the recording a "conduit, an acoustic window giving access to how the music really sounded, or is it an obstacle?" (Rasula 1995, p. 135). Jazz recordings have provided undo resources for researchers and scholars to immerse themselves in particular jazz moments, as well as provided objects for dissection, imitation, and technical refinement. When considering women active in past jazz cultures, the paucity of recordings poses an obstacle for establishing evidence of the vitality of early jazz women's authorial contributions. The reliance upon jazz recordings betrays their role as 'media of inscriptions' (Rasula 1995, p. 135). But if we limit ourselves to a canonical body of celebrated and revered jazz recordings, we risk obscuring the various intersections and unorthodox acts within jazz culture, especially those not documented in such recordings.

Jazz and intersectionality researchers have long lamented the lack of historical evidence from which to fill archives and stitch together historical narratives (Tucker 2000, Griffin 2001, Brooks 2021).

And the respective prominence of audio(visual) media for women in jazz (McGee 2009), such as films, videos, and photographs would suggest that another historical account and theorization is (still) necessary. Stephanie Doktor, in her study of Florence Mills as star vocalist and Black Feminist leader of the 1920s, undertakes an alternative approach to the jazz archive by positioning non-recording related resources such as interviews and compositions written for Mills (such as by Edmund Thornton Jenkins and William Grant Still) as traces of her perceived cultural and artistic power within the New Negro Renaissance. Prompted by Daphne Brooks, Doktor endeavors to "disturb" enduring stereotypes contained within particular canons; in her rewriting of Mills, she "read[s] against the gendered limits of the archive, locating the alternative ways Black women made their voices audible" (Doktor 2020, p. 455). Paige McGinley too embraces myriad women-centered and often ephemeral archival materials for her study of actress-blues performers within theatrical blues shows in the early twentieth century. Ranging from the study of

costumes and photographs to scenic designs, song lyrics and choreographies, McGinley's history (2014) offers greater understanding of women's connections (especially Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey) to early blues cultures which more fully acknowledge their unique material and artistic contributions as well as critical impact of the emergence of a performative and theatrical blues network for the shaping of a Black public. Each of these examples aligns with VOW's RESCAPE broader conceptualization of the archive, which acknowledges the many ephemeral materials and entanglements reflecting women's authorial voices and forms of creativity. Armed with these more porous and dynamic versions of the jazz archive, we discovered compelling 'new' collaborations and transdisciplinary paths such as those between dancers, vocalists, producers, and comics within vaudeville productions which impacted artists like Lil Hardin Armstrong in her early career. These under-recognized connections reveal the more expansive roles that musicians and performers have played in twentieth century jazz cultures (McGee 2009, McGinley 2014, Brown 2008).

The visual representation of canonical jazz has led to undertheorized assumptions about the makers and dispositions of jazz performers. Ramsey Castaneda and Amanda Quinlan uncover how the prominence of images decorating the covers of prominent jazz records as well as populating the most revered jazz history textbooks can lead to essentializing assumptions about jazz culture. They insist "Just as audio recordings hide many of the physical and social elements of music making that are representative of crucial dynamics of jazz, photographs too, by their careful selection of photographers and textbook editors (and lack of aural and temporal qualities) contribute to how learners and professionals conceptualize this music and its community and history (Castaneda and Quinlan p. 270)." By relying predominantly upon a well-circulated body of recordings and accompanying iconic jazz images on male-authored recordings, we delimit the possible sources of inspiration available to students of jazz. As Rasula reveals, recordings have featured as the media of memory for jazz history, yet their 'seductive menace' precludes archeological curiosity

regarding other types and potentially more culturally and disciplinary diverse documentary sources.

For our practice-based presentation at the VOW training activity in Stavanger, we chose to integrate a wide body of historical jazz sources including the jazz recording, as well as other critical media. Seeking to draw attention to female authors and performers of the jazz past, we took advantage of relatively new resources which have documented compositions penned by under-represented women in jazz, especially Terri Lyne Carrington's *New Standards: 101 Jazz Lead Sheets by Women Composers* published in 2022. Next to these lead sheets, we consulted recorded interviews, photographs, music recordings from the 1920s, and music videos recently broadcast on YouTube of jazz pioneers Lil Hardin Armstrong and Mae Barns excerpted from film and television performances during the 1950s and 1960s.

Lead Sheets by Women Composers

In preparation for our TD workshop in Stavanger, we studied the *New Standards 2022* publication compiled by Carrington and others as part of the Berklee Institute for Jazz and Gender Justice. As founder and director of the Institute, Carrington admitted the challenges experienced when searching for works composed by women to incorporate into the Institute's teaching curriculum especially since the so-named *Real Book*, a compendium of some 400 tunes in lead sheet format utilized in jazz education programs throughout the world, contains only a few pieces by women. As Carrington acknowledged, "today, most jazz musicians learn the standards - Thelonious Monk's 'Ruby, My Dear,' for example, or Duke Ellington's 'Five O'clock Drag' - via lead sheets, many of which have been collected into what were once colloquially known as 'fake books' (Carrington in Contreras 2022)." Until the late 1960s, these books circulated informally and were drawn from a relatively small collection of celebrated recordings of 'star' soloists and band leaders. These tunes came to constitute a new performative jazz canon through a long and complex process of circulation, performance, and improvisation in jazz performance and mentoring settings including jam sessions, night

club gigs, university jazz programs, and jazz festivals and their programs. As jazz departments emerged in the US and within Europe beginning in the late 1960s, fake books were formalized into an officially published *Real Book* in the 1970s, but this book contained tunes composed predominantly by male composers, beyond a few by Billie Holiday and Carla Bley. As noted by jazz journalist Ayana Contreras, "as jazz found a home in formal programs at universities across the country, fake books (and their descendants, the legally issued 'Real Books') became ubiquitous in classrooms, and have served as more than merely teaching tools: The inclusions (and exclusions) of various composers' work essentially codified a de facto jazz canon" (Contreras, 2022).

Jazz and Black music scholar Tammy Kernodle reflected upon the dynamic and sometimes exclusionary role of jazz canons, claiming that how they came about was continually subject to change and impacted by intergenerational discourse: "Jazz musicians were always having intergenerational and intercultural conversations with each other" (Kernodle in Contreras, 2022). She reminds us how bebop was initially considered outside an accepted jazz canon, "but its inclusion in early mid-20th century fake books helped solidify the style's standing in the narrative of jazz" (Kernodle in Contreras, 2022). Given the lack of representation of female composers from the twentieth and twenty first century, Carrington, with the help of jazz pianist and composer Kris Davis and others, began compiling a list of prominent and varied tunes from female composers ranging from Lil Hardin Armstrong's work in the 1920s to recent works by contemporary stars including Melissa Aldana and Nicole Mitchell.

The publication features 101 compositions from "acknowledged titans, young visionaries and unsung heroes in jazz" including Mary Lou Williams, Alice Coltrane, esperanza spalding, Geri Allen, Maria Schneider, Cecile McLorin Salvant, Cassandra Wilson, Dianne Reeves, Dorothy Ashby, Nubya Garcia, Nicole Mitchell and many others...² During my interview with Carrington and Davis in 2024 for the 60th Anniversary of the JazzFest Berlin, Carrington considered the *New Standards* book

and subsequent recordings as tools to provide new performance options, as well as sources for new aesthetic inspiration for younger jazz players. Criteria included material which was musically diverse; material spanning a broad time-period (of nearly 100 years), and a selection which represented international artists. When I asked how they selected this list, she stated, "I started with people I knew, and people whose music I played and people I liked." From the *New Standards* publication, Carrington organized a series of performances and recordings in 2023 and 2024 to feature tunes from the book at prestigious festivals such as the North Sea Jazz festival. Davis, who assisted in the compilation of the publication, also drew inspiration from it and choose to highlight women composers in her recent work and recordings, especially her recent album *Run the Gauntlet* (2024 Pyroclastic Records) featuring the works of six female pianists, Geri Allen, Renee Rosnes, Angelica Sanchez, Sylvie Courvoisier, Marlijn Crispell, and Carla Bley. *New lead sheet compendia* provide sources for greater inclusivity, but other approaches are also desired to establish greater equity, especially through mentorship and performance opportunities. In this comprehensive framework, Carrington also directs programs to mentor young female and non-binary artists such as the *New Jazz Legacy* program, which matches young artists with successful jazz musicians and composers, giving them onstage experience as well as artistic and business mentorship opportunities.

During my interview with Carrington and Davis in 2024, Davis identified the critical role of 'thinking differently' about the relationship between improvisation and composition, inspired by musicians including Angelica Sanchez, Tony Malaby, and Ben Molder (Interview: "Dr Kristin McGee with Terri Lyne Carrington and Kris Davis 2024").³ For Davis, these two facets of jazz culture would benefit from better integration and demystification for younger jazz performers seeking to contribute as both performers and composers. Carrington and others reflected upon how the institute and its equity goals impacted the male and gender expansive students who too were seeking a more inclusive and multifaceted form of music making. Today, Carrington as-

pires towards 50/50 male/female ratios. Part of the impact of this ratio at the school was the cultivation of a space where people can 'be their authentic selves,' in a safe space, and be nurtured and develop into better musicians and researchers.

During the launching of the institute, Davis reflected on the notion of unconscious bias in the jazz education and performance world; the idea that men would hire their male students or buddies (who were often men) for gigs and so the cycle would continue, leading to further exclusion of women and non-binary artists and educators. Davis reinforced how this unique dynamic persists: "In Jazz we don't have an HR department, so it is really these grass-roots things that are so important." To eradicate this dynamic, Carrington encourages students and patrons to learn to listen differently, to be open to a new aesthetic,

"We are asking both patrons of the music and musicians themselves, to consider or challenge themselves, to listen differently to be open to another sound aesthetic in the music, that is a really hard one to accomplish because we all grew up thinking this is sound of jazz, and this is what good jazz is, and everything that has been described as good jazz, for the most part has been created by men...What would the infiltration of this different sound aesthetic created by women and trans gender people and people that aren't moving through the world with male privilege. - what does that sound like and how does it affect the music? And I, on my own, have been part of the problem and reinforcing a certain kind of masculine sound to my students, so now I am trying to really think about that and trying to listen differently is difficult, but it is happening. And I'm also wondering what may have been lacking in my own artistly because I had been listening to men my whole life" (Interview with Terri Lyne Carrington, 9 September 2024).

Drawing inspiration from the trans-disciplinarity of Carrington and Davis' inclusive approach towards jazz teaching, mentoring, composition, and performance, we chose one composition from the New Standards 101 Lead Sheet compendium for our transdisciplinary, practice-based approach. We

then studied recently released videotaped performances of Armstrong and Barnes performing together in 1961 on national American television (NBC) as complimentary sources to draw attention to the material contexts from which prior pathbreaking, ingenious women labored, while also reinvigorating their works in new research-oriented, improvisatory contexts consistent with the values and aims of VOW.

Part 3 - Lil Hardin Armstrong as an Agent of Change in Jazz

A young pathbreaker who greatly expanded jazz culture and reflected the range of women's authorial voices and especially for Black women in the United States was Lil Hardin Armstrong (1898-1971), who performed, recorded, and contributed prolifically to the burgeoning blues, jazz, and popular music styles of Chicago in the 1920s through the 1960s. Yet like many

early women in jazz, her musical life and contributions have been largely relegated to footnotes. The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz simply writes: "As a leader Lil Hardin Armstrong (1961, Fantasy OJCCD); As a sideman with Louis Armstrong Hot Fives and Sevens (1925, JSP)" and critics of the time mostly dismissed her talents as simplistic and secondary to the other musicians (especially Armstrong). It is this repetition of her relation to the great man, Louis Armstrong and her role in (his) groups, which for some solidified her small connection to jazz history.

Raised in Memphis, Tennessee, only decades after the emancipation proclamation, Hardin honed her skills in church, experimenting with new styles during services, much to her pastor's chagrin. Like her near contemporary pianist and composer Lovie Austin (1887-1972), she earned her degree in classical music, studying piano performance at the historically Black college Fisk University. With this, she joined a cast of "classically trained pianists that stretched back to the nineteenth century" (Taylor 2009, p. 51).

In the early 1920s, she moved to Chicago, broadcasting her talents within the South Side's Black metropolis and acquiring well-paid gigs for white-owned picture houses and recording companies downtown. She performed

with King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band and later famously with Louis Armstrong after encouraging him to move to Chicago in 1924. Before this reunion, she led her own groups including a mixed-gendered group during the 1930s. Indicative of her role as an exceptional accompanist for leading soloists, listen to Hardin's musicality and unfailing rhythmic drive on the 1926 Decca recording, "Perdido Street Blues" performed by the New Orleans Wanderers (an alternative name for the Hot Five) (Dickerson 2002). Many discographers incorrectly attributed Louis Armstrong as the composer of this song and Hardin fiercely battled for many decades to finally gain the rights to her tune (Dickerson 2002). As Jeffrey Taylor argues, Hardin's unique ability to support instrumental soloists was rarely noticed by jazz critics, and she was often excessively critiqued by early critics such as Gunther Schuller. Yet her open style stimulated superb articulations from the many (now) revered blues vocalists and instrumentalists she accompanied. In this tune, Hardin adapted the heavy left-hand stride of the time, especially inspired by Jelly Roll Morton (Taylor 2009).

"In Satchmo and Me" (a series of interviews from the 1950s), Hardin relays how she met Morton while working as a song plugger in a Chicago department store. She vividly recalled this meeting stating: "So, one day Jelly Roll Morton came in. He sat down and he started playing. Ooh, gee, he had such long fingers. And, oh, in no time at all he had the piano rockin' and he played so heavy and oh, goose pimples are sticking out all over me. I said, 'whoo, gee! What piano playing, and I attribute it to hearing Jelly Roll play'" (Armstrong 1956). This recollection places Hardin in the center of critical jazz networks for the burgeoning new musical styles of Chicago and New York during the 1920s. Yet despite her many collaborations, leadership roles, and compositions, her talents were most often reduced to bolstering Armstrong's career and confidence. Jazz historians rarely mentioned her non-Armstrong performances, yet her name appears frequently in the press, especially with an expanded interest in transforming gender roles embodied by the so-called "new woman" (McGee, 2009). In our presentation, we attempted to redress this lacuna, tak-

ing the head of Hardin's tune "Perdido Street Blues" published in Carrington's New Standards: 101 Lead Sheets by Women Composers. Through embodied engagement with these two sources (recordings and lead sheets), we attempted to create a new, in the moment version for voice and soprano saxophone. We held no pretense that our impromptu performance would match the vitality, technical versatility, and musicality of Hardin's, but by bringing her work into the international classroom, we engaged discussions and delivered corporeal gestures connecting her musical lineage to the jazz past and now present within the academy.

Our TD preparatory research led us to a surprising, filmed performance of Hardin Armstrong with other prominent jazz musicians from the 1920s, including vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Mae Barnes as well as established Chicago artists including Red Allen, Pee Wee Russel, Gene Krupa, and Buster Bailey. The variety of media and recordings documenting Hardin's career legitimized the notion that established jazz women not only composed jazz tunes, but as musicians, they performed and recorded tunes covered by other women, a practice typically attributed exclusively to men in citational practices (Kernodle 2022). Hardin Armstrong penned several eclectic jazz tunes including some performed by other 'all-girl' bands especially the participatory dance tune "Doin' the Suzie Q" (Decca 1936) which was popularized by Chicago-native, tap dancer and bandleader Ina Ray Hutton with her Melodears for the Paramount film *The Big Broadcast* of 1936.

Despite Hardin's prolific contributions to Chicago's jazz culture and her many recordings, her role was often side-lined as one facilitating the rise of Armstrong as one of jazz's great soloists in the New Orleans style. Hardin also promoted this image throughout her life, indicated by this oft-repeated statement from the 1950 interview: "I was holdin' the ladder and watchin' you climb. After a while I couldn't reach you anymore." Given the prominence of this narrative, it was tragic that she collapsed performing on stage in a memorial tribute to Armstrong at age

74. Her autobiography which she had been writing for many years was never published.

Lil Hardin Armstrong and Mae Barnes personify Black Female Camaraderie in Jazz

While Hardin was instrumental in launching Louis Armstrong's career in Chicago, she actively performed with many musicians relevant for the early jazz networks including for King Oliver's Jazz Band and for various musical theatrical outfits. She also collaborated with female musicians such as those in her mixed-gendered ensemble in the 1930s, women who were equally multi-faceted in a variety of genres and performance styles such as vocalist, dancer, and multi-instrumentalist Mae Barnes. As a rising entertainer and highly innovative (tap) dancer, Barnes was reported to have invented the Charleston in the 1920s and presented the dance within Black musical shows including the Plantation Revue at the reputable Plantation Club in Harlem, and later for the nationally touring *Runnin' Wild* (1924) Revue (Dr. Jazz Magazine 2010, p. 38). Her first national vaudeville tour was the famous *Shuffle Along* (1921), during which she was touted at the 'the greatest female tap dancer' by Bo Bojangles Robinson (Dr. Jazz Magazine 2010, p. 38). In 1938, her dancing career came to a halt after a car accident fractured her hip. Barnes, undeterred by this tragedy, pivoted her talents towards jazz, blues, and comedy as a multi-instrumentalist and vocalist, playing drums, piano, and singing various popular jazz and blues renditions of the 1920s, 30s and 40s. In the 1950s, as an established entertainer, she embarked upon a European tour with appearances at the Colony and Astor theatres in London. Barnes began performing with a trio, the Three Flames, which garnered the attention of Atlantic Records for whom she recorded fourteen songs, ten of which were released in 1953 as *Fun with Mae Barnes*. In 1958, Barnes was invited by John Hammond to record for Vanguard with Buck Clayton (trumpet), Aaron Bell (bass), Joe Jones (drums), and Ray Bryant and Ray Tunia, both on piano (Dr. Jazz p. 40). In the mid-1950s, Barnes began appearing on television programs along with many established and mature stars of jazz and musical revue, making

special appearances with Lil Hardin Armstrong and others for the 1961 NBC Dupont Show of the Week entitled *Chicago and All that Jazz*. She also appeared in 1959 with Kid Ory's Band on Dr. Jazz TV with Lil Hardin Armstrong and Red Allen and several revered early jazz stars.

For this 1961 "America's Music: Chicago and All the Jazz" television revue, Hardin and Barnes perform two tunes together, "The Pearls" (1926) and "Heebie Jeebies" (1926) as part of the program's finale. Hardin delivers a kind of ragtime style for "The Pearls" during which she sings various riffs and melodies in vocalize, accompanied by Barnes playing snare, with breaks and fills in response to Hardin's riffing, laughing, and short improvisations. Barnes eventually segues to the first verse of "Hebbie Jeebies," then takes two-bar breaks with trumpeter Red Allen and clarinetist Buster Bailey, while Hardin continues to deliver a steady stride left hand with intermittent blues licks interspaced between the three other improvisers. Hardin's stop-time and driving rhythmic pulse effortlessly propel the momentum of the quartet while Hardin and Barnes share a rarely documented comradery between two middle-aged jazz women in a mainstream media outlet (NBC) in the 1960s.

The critical role of collaborating Black women musicians have been under-represented in jazz histories, yet musicians like Barnes, Hardin-Armstrong and later Melba Liston and Mary Lou Williams often strove to secure more performance opportunities for each other and their female peers (Brooks 2021). Black female musicians also forged relationships with other Black women professionals to transform expectations related to women musicians in the jazz world. Tammy Kernodle revisits the 'exceptional woman' thesis to foreground instances where Black women resisted engaging in intense competition with each other and instead developed collaborative relationships such as those between Melba Liston and Mary Lou Williams as they performed and composed together first for the Newport Jazz Festival in 1957 and later as they collaborated to inaugurate the first Pittsburgh Jazz Festival in 1964 in Williams' hometown (Kernodle 2022:

“Musicians, critics, and fans created a spectrum of readings that defined the woman’s role in this culture. The use of the term “woman” was a reference to females who inhabited this space as wives, girlfriends, patrons, or groupies”



Figure 1: Lil Hardin Armstrong accompanied by Mae Barnes on snare for “the Pearls” during the NBC Chicago and All the Jazz retrospective in 1961.

87, 107-09). In relation to Liston and Williams’ long-standing partnership, Kernodle describes how their spirit not of rivalry or exceptionalism, but of friendship and mutual respect lifted each other up, while helping to sustain their careers. Their collaboration provided a model of jazz friendship not often illuminated in histories of women in jazz. For Kernodle, “The professional trajectory of Liston uncovers how the homosocial networks created by black women musicians stimulated knowledge acquisition and the development of wisdom.” Kernodle argues for a renewed understanding of the term women in Black jazz contexts claiming:

“Musicians, critics, and fans created a spectrum of readings that defined the woman’s role in this culture. The use of the term “woman” was a reference to females who inhabited this space as wives, girlfriends, patrons, or groupies. All of these roles positioned women

as being diametrically “outside” of the culture, on the periphery, but comprising central networks that supported the creative activities of men. Most importantly, these “women” did not disrupt the work or camaraderie of the men, but enabled it” (Kernodle 2022: 90-93).

Given the intersectional complexity of the various roles proscribed for the supporting agents of jazz spaces and careers, acknowledging how those few women who did manifest performance opportunities for others in a spirit of creativity and comradery reveals a radical departure from the gendered and cultural scripts of the highly competitive and egotistical white male or even many Black male band musicians or bandleaders.

During our presentation, we showed part of this documentary, especially the riveting duet between Hardin

Armstrong and Barnes on the tune “The Pearls.” Before this screening, we began our own joyful yet admittedly tentative (daunted by these women’s immense skills) improvisatory interactions. Our interjections were inspired by the melodic trading, laughter, and blues riffs of the duo’s second tune, “Heebe Jeebies” (composed by Joe Atkins in 1926 and performed famously by Louis Armstrong). We aimed not to overshadow the technical mastery (how could we!), but rather to allow for more embodied discursive engagement with this historical document, promoting it into the present as a source for study and reverence as well as new inspiration and training within jazz, unbound by masculine expectations and exclusionary mechanisms prohibiting collaboration and impromptu improvisation for gender diverse and inclusive jazz.

After interweaving historical, multi-mediated, and improvisatory elements meant to draw attention to the musical legacy and compositional artistry of Hardin Armstrong and Barnes, we played out the last bit of the 1961 duet, giving these 'legendary' female artists the proverbial last word before opening the room to questions, impressions, and comments from the students and peers.

Coda (and hopefully an encore)
Given that transdisciplinarity, practice-based research, and open-ended improvisation currently feature as key practices and perspectives relevant for more inclusive and equitable forms of jazz pedagogy and valorization; our presentation/workshop "Challenging Boundaries of Musical Ownership through Improvised Performance Practice" in Stavanger for the Unheard Voices of Women international training activity on October 10th, 2024, sought to adapt these approaches for our study of key agents of change within jazz, namely Lil Hardin Armstrong and Mae Barnes, as multifaceted pioneers within early jazz cultures. Through a process of diffraction and embodied connection the material and ephemeral objects documenting Hardin's enduring jazz career, we sought to bring her ingenious and vigorous musical creativity as a multifaceted author/composer/accompanist/soloist

and collaborator dynamically into the present. We understand the racial ideologies and privileges which enabled us to access these archival materials and to experiment with them in this educational and research context. Yet our improvisatory approach was intended to honor the innovation, verve, and collaboration of Armstrong and Barnes, as groundbreaking African American women, and as inclusive collaborators who supported myriad musicians (black and white and of various genders) within myriad jazz and popular music contexts (dance, musical theatre, jazz clubs, and musical revues). Fortunately, some of these have been documented in a variety of media (recordings, interviews, television, photographs) throughout the twentieth century.

We hope that our modest interweaving of various methods and disciplines stimulated the desire to engage with their work in ways which disturb and challenge the entrenched boundaries of jazz canons for more inclusive and representative jazz futures. In this future, women of color feature as "legends" and "geniuses", but also critically as collaborators and supporters of other women's careers. Further, through a process of diffraction and in the moment improvisation and corporeal gesturing elicited by study of these materials, we attempted to

elevate these little examined objects as viable sources for study beyond the 'menace' of the jazz recording as the only acceptable historical artefact. Our historical approach led us to unexpected but compelling and productive materials which shed new light on the musical verve and comradery of early jazz women and illuminated the unconventional ways in which they forged exciting jazz careers, through dance, comedy and multi-instrumentalism. As we studied, played with, and improvised around one prodigious and well-known tune, Hardin Armstrong's "Perdido Street Blues," a tune often mistakenly attributed to Louis Armstrong, but since rectified and reclaimed within Carrington's *New Standards: 101 Lead Sheet by Women Composers*, we became aware of how such a process of rewriting entailed more than words and historical narratives, but a dynamic flow of imitation, riffs, and unfinished musical conversations. The study and apprenticeship with these materials culminated in our TD presentation and workshop and hopefully inspired younger jazz musicians to engage collaboratively with the fascinating and ever dynamic materials documenting the ingenuity and creativity of these pioneering women in jazz.

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