

(NO?) Strings Attached: Female guitarists in modern music

By Les Reynolds

*Summer 93 I was driving in my car
When a song came on called "Girls With Guitars"
So I put the pedal to the metal straight to my record store
Grabbed that Wynonna CD baby
And shot right out the door

Well I tore through the house, cranked it up loud
I could hardly wait to take that booklet out
To read the names of the players, imagine my surprise
When all those girls with guitars
Turned out to be a bunch of guys

Where are the girls with guitars. . .*



Laurie Morvan
<http://viewmorepics.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=viewImage&friendID=18055362&albumID=1268709&imageID=22046861>

In 2007, a little-known guitarist from a Los Angeles, California-based blues band released a CD titled “Cures What Ails Ya” (1). Among the songs was a tune called “Where Are the Girls with Guitars?” (2). That guitarist—the tune’s composer, Laurie Morvan—and her namesake band, seemed to be making a statement (or voicing a lament) posed by numerous female musicians for decades previous. Is, or was there, a literal dearth of female guitarists in contemporary music? If so, is it the result of discrimination, simple choice or other issues? This Discovery Guide discusses the significance of this concern, and introduces several female guitarists who are actively advocating for change.

Social Dictates

Discrimination, whether intentional, institutional or otherwise, has played a significant role among musicians for centuries, especially with regard to the upper echelons of music business management and instrument playing.

Bowers and Tick wrote in “Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950” that even in the history books, women have been absent from the conventional mainstream. Not absent from the music itself, but rather, they argued, women were simply not included in the questions musicologists and historians were asking.

The early Christian church allowed for women to sing in worship services; although, as the Church grew, so did opposition to female participation in liturgical rites. Bowers and Tick also found that during the Middle Ages, female troubadours would set courtly poems to song and aristocratic women would sing and play for their own pleasure. As a whole, however, women were excluded from music positions of high status and lacked direct access to most professional opportunities, rewards and authority. And over time, while the situation seemed to improve in some areas, challenges remained. (3)



Victorian music scene, oil painting
http://www.dargate.com/239_auction/239_images/239euart.htm

Some other early references to how society apparently “dictated” to women what was appropriate (or not) for their musical engagements appear in Victorian-era England. In fact, women were “permitted” to play guitar, among other instruments, provided they followed certain protocol and adhered to certain social expectations of their day. Allan Atlas (4) writes that Victorian England held firm convictions about which instruments were appropriate for middle- and upper-class women, whether professional or “well-bred amateurs.” There was even an informal ban on women playing the violin, which only began to loosen around 1870. Until then, only the piano, harp and guitar were deemed suitable. The English concertina, only developed by Charles Wheatstone around 1830, was added to the list of allowable instruments. His clientele, Atlas writes, “reads like a list of Victorian England’s rich-and-famous,” which includes mention of several teachers and instrumentalists—but notes only one guitarist: Madame R. Sidney Pratten.

Gillett (5) examined this issue in greater scope with a study of entrepreneurial female musicians in Britain from the 1790s to the early 1900s to examine how they gained access and advantage from patrons, the public and markets, how their careers differed from males in the same endeavors and what, if any, obstacles the women encountered. A single guitarist, Catherina Pratten (also a composer and instructor) was simply noted. It was determined that the least problematic path for the women in music was in musical production and composing short pieces, singing and teaching. The day’s social norms were once more a key element in limiting choices as well as a long-standing belief in the “intellectual inferiority” of women that placed barriers to their acceptance as orchestral conductors and composers of complex and large-scale works.

Starting early: Some Studies

Gender stereotypes have also been examined among children, and numerous studies have been conducted regarding the “sex stereotyping” or “gendering” of musical instruments and musical instrument choice—which seems to bear out that there are, indeed, social pressures to engage in certain gender-appropriate musical activities.



<http://www.pianodealersnj.com/>

Pickering (6), in a study conducted at the University of Sydney, Australia, in the 1990s, referred to previous research to argue that despite the growing emphasis on gender equity in society at large, children continue to conform to many traditional gender stereotypes. This research demonstrated that North American children associate gender with musical instruments and these stereotypes influence their instrument preferences. Drums, it was shown, were seen as mostly “male” while the flute, for example, was considered a “female” instrument. This corroborated research by Griswold and Chrobak from the early 1980s, which noted that children assigned masculine character to drums, trombones and tubas; feminine traits to the violin, flute and clarinet; while the saxophone was seen as “neutral.” (7)

A United Kingdom-based study conducted by O’Neill and Boulton (8) within a group of over 150 children age 9-11 found that girls significantly preferred the piano, flute and violin, whereas boys expressed a stronger preference for guitar, drums and trumpet. Further solidifying those findings, it was shown that both groups had similar ideas about which instruments should not be played by members of each sex. Some variation and deviation from these findings has occurred in studies of greater breadth and inclusivity. Zervoudakes and Tanur (9) concluded in their overall results that gender assignment of instruments, perception of those stereotypes and expectations to adhere to certain roles increased in high school and college, although they found far less evidence of this in elementary schools.

In a selective review of existing literature on this subject, Walker (Troy State University study, 10) analyzed over 20 separate studies conducted between 1978 and 2000 to explore both possible biological and cultural/sociological considerations. Some studies argued that music serves a patriarchal society seeking to keep women subjugated, and women who become successful in a “man’s” world do so only by acting like men. They did so by taking on stereotypical male characteristics, being aggressive and competitive and engaging in social motion via hierarchical structures such as business, academia and other professional areas. It was noted, however, that in the scholastic environment, women tended to make up an increasing number (in general) in band programs over the past few decades. This distinguished how scholastic and “real world” environments may have been different for female musicians. Walker also found numerous studies

that validated (or replicated) other research showing gender-assignment of musical instrument selection among students.

The “Real World”

Other notable studies were conducted that bring the issue perhaps closer to a “real world”/practical context.

While still concentrating on the idea of discrimination or social expectations regarding women’s instrumental participation in music, McKeage’s study (11) at a U.S. Midwestern university explored women’s activity in the institution’s instrumental jazz ensemble program in which three graduating high school seniors were selected because of their instrumental ability (for this study, on the bass) and extensive background in the jazz genre. Once they enrolled, however, their experiences were less positive than expected.

McKeage was encouraged to delve deeper following an observation of one of the bassists that there were very few, if any, girls in the band on a particular day. McKeage personally observed that of the 30 musicians and teachers present, the student and herself were the only females.

McKeage counted 13 women of 53 participants in a subsequent jazz concert; but no women in the premier jazz ensemble of student combos—although young women, she notes, are common in high school ensembles. Each year, collegiate jazz programs receive a new infusion of freshman women and a year later, most of them have disappeared.

Once more, McKeage reviewed previous research and found evidence of gender stereotypes linked to specific instruments. Two ensemble directors at the university were interviewed and reported a lack of female role models in professional jazz as the number one reason young women do not pursue careers in this field. One of the directors noted that traditionally, women have simply been unwelcome in the world of jazz. The young women interviewed in the study reported a variety of experiences while in the collegiate program regarding encouragement (or lack thereof) and the creative environment as well as pressure to perform. It appeared that their experiences were overall somewhat negative.

McKeage concluded that while college is the primary training ground for jazz musicians and the teachers of these future instrumentalists, these institutions need to do a better job of mentoring,



Classically trained jazz singer and pianist Blossom Dearie, 1981
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/29108463/>

fostering acceptance of women and creating more constructive types of critique or the genre will remain male-dominated.

Musical genre, upon further investigation, also appears to play a role in gender identification with certain instruments. Once again, the bass, although this time in alternative rock music, was studied by Mary Ann Clawson of Wesleyan University (12). Unlike McKeage's field research, Clawson discovered a plethora of female bassists in a relatively new genre popularly called "alternative rock music." She also surmised that the entrance of women into rock bands via the bass could provide them with new opportunities and help legitimate their presence in a male-dominated site of artistic production and expression. Simultaneously, however, it may work to simply strengthen an already existing gendered labor division and dominant gender ideologies, simply due to the fact that women have historically been "relegated" to the less "glamorous" instruments.

In the 1980s, Endres (13) had already undertaken a broad-based examination of sex role standards in popular music, attempting to find answers through popular music lyrics themselves. The popular music of 1960, 1970 and 1980 was chosen for study due to the burgeoning feminism first truly popularized by the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan's groundbreaking book "The Feminine Mystique." A sample of 12 number-one rated tunes, for which the majority of the singers were men, was taken from each decade from "Billboard" magazine. Endres noted that differences attributed to both genders gradually changed over the time under review, until by 1980, the difference gap was quite narrow—although in general, men tended to be aggressive leaders while women were still identified as submissive followers.

ENTER, the GIRLS with GUITARS

Despite the many studies and observations concerning sex discrimination in the music industry, a number of women have chosen to defy social norms, go against tradition and make a career in a difficult business. Some of them, profiled here, are simultaneously paving the way for others.

NO NOVELTY

Laurie Morvan, mentioned at the beginning of this Discovery Guide, has only recently been afforded the recognition sought by so many. Morvan discovered, as did those young women in the collegiate jazz program study, the road was filled with challenges. Some club owners refused to take her seriously, even alluding to the fact that they seldom hire women, let alone female-fronted bands, as Holland wrote in a feature on Morvan in "Modern Guitars Magazine" (14). Club owners and booking agents often view women as a novelty.

An intelligent woman armed with an engineering degree and a brief stint in the aerospace industry, Morvan honed her skills and recorded three CDs while becoming known in the Southern California area for her skill with a guitar and as an entertaining performer. The previously-mentioned tune "Where are the Girls with Guitars?" was an allusion to a song originally written by Mary Chapin Carpenter and sung by Wynonna Judd in the 1990s. In Morvan's song, she writes of buying the Judd CD and being very excited upon hearing the song "Girls with Guitars". The original tune was about a young girl who breaks with tradition and runs away to a big city to

“make it big” as a guitarist. Morvan writes that she was extremely disappointed, when reading the credits, to learn that the guitarists who actually play on that song are all male. Remembering her experience, this prompted Morvan years later to write her own question in the form of a song.

Morvan’s tune, Holland writes, is not so much about non-existence as it is about a call to have a voice and take a rightful place in the music industry. The article goes on to say that while many talented female guitarists are on the scene today, female players in general, especially those in male dominated genres like blues and rock, are still a minority.

Holland asked Morvan if, in her opinion, gender boundaries hinder the effort to become a successful blues guitarist. Morvan replied that, once on stage, it is comfortable for women and music fans appreciate the skill. The difficulties lie in getting past the talent buyers who continue to categorize female guitarists as a novelty.

Morvan, it should be noted, was named Female Artist of the Year for 2006 by the Blues Marketing Network, a group based in Southern California.

ASSISTING from WITHIN

Another female guitarist, working from within the industry, who is promoting her gender on a large scale, is Ottawa, Canada-born guitarist Sue Foley (b. 1968).

Foley, an accomplished guitarist with no less than 10 CDs to her credit, is the driving force behind a triple- (or possibly quadruple-) tiered project called “Guitar Woman.” This encompasses a work-in-progress book currently available only online, a CD titled “Blues Guitar Women” (Ruf Records, 2005), a national tour (often done in segments with select performers from her extensive list) and a possible documentary. The entire project is meant to showcase a wide variety of female guitarists who cut across musical genres. In an article in “Modern Guitars Magazine,” Watson (15) writes that women guitarists are under-represented by music media and that males account for 90% of the guitar-buying market, then alludes to the near total lack of what is popularly called “household names” among female guitarists. What Foley’s web site does (www.guitarwoman.com), the author continues, is to show that a plethora of female guitarists (“goddesses” is used) have made and continue to make large contributions to guitar-centered music. Watson’s article also shows that some male figures are advocating for female guitarists. Thomas Ruf, owner of his own record label and who has a preference for female guitarists, approached Foley and signed her, resulting in the “Blues Guitar Women” release.

Foley, in the interview with Watson, explained why she believes more women are taking up guitar—and why they traditionally did not. She believes the guitar, even among women, carries a masculine imagery, and most women who choose this instrument are somewhat more masculine in character. Even the instrument’s origins (Middle East, Africa, Portugal and Spain), she explains, denotes masculinity because of the primarily patriarchal social structures in those regions. Foley believes that women have not only been long-term victims of discrimination in the performance arena, but in literature as well. Her book is an attempt to correct that situation.



Sue Foley performs at the Heritage Blues Festival, Wheeling, West Virginia, August, 2007

Photo by Les Reynolds

And while Foley will encourage young women to follow their dreams of becoming guitarists, she contends that gender issues will never disappear because the music industry, notably the guitar, is a male's domain. Reasons for each sex choosing to create music with a guitar, she says, are likely nearly identical where creativity is concerned. However, women's experiences and the way they are perceived will be different—something Foley believes to be biological. Foley's belief is that many guitar magazines do not write much about female guitarists, nor do they reach out to female audiences. She says over 90% of the guitar magazine buyers are male—something she does not see changing until the editors of these magazines reach out to entice female buyers or until a female guitar hero becomes so big that they simply can no longer ignore females.

GENDER, and GENRE, BENDING

Boston, Massachusetts-based singer-songwriter Patty Larkin (b. 1951) is yet another female musician turning the spotlight onto others in her arena. She founded a project, and produced and performed on a CD, called "La Guitara: Gender Bending Strings" (Vanguard) (16). She also produces a wide-ranging production of

performances by female guitar instrumentalists (17). In fact, as Dan Ouellette writes in "Acoustic Guitar", Larkin, also a skillful instrumentalist in her own right, had no idea just how far her project would go. Her vision, however, seemed clear as she expressed in the CD's liner notes her belief that women guitarists of the past played a part in the instrument's evolution and their story is largely untold—and present-day guitarists are actively changing preconceptions about gender and guitar "heroes."

On a related note, the article's side-bar reports that Larkin's original idea was partly inspired upon seeing an exhibit of guitars in 2001 at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts related to the book "Dangerous Curves: The Art of the Guitar" in which only a few women were represented. She thought back over all the female guitarists she'd seen over the past 20 to 25 years, and noticed none of them had been truly showcased, with stories left untold. She decided to act.

In a "Boston Globe" article (18), Larkin explains that, despite the growing numbers of female guitarists, her project is necessary to expose people to their music rather than allowing them to remain marginalized.

In a review of one of Larkin's showcases held in Troy, New York, in April 2006, Ellen Geisel wrote that the performance represents an "enormously pleasing step to realizing the depth and breadth of women guitarists' contribution to music." (Dirty Linen, 19)

SHOWCASING—IN REVERSE?

The first woman to win the National Fingerpicking Guitar Championship (20), Muriel Anderson, based in Nashville, Tennessee, perhaps has nothing left to prove—to men or women—in the music industry. Anderson is a long-time composer and publisher of works for guitar, voice and orchestra who was mentored by the late Chet Atkins, legendary among country guitarists. She is also the founder and director of the Music for Life Alliance (MLA, which procures instruments for underprivileged children), and the host of her own All Star Guitar Night (ASG) concert series, which originated in 1993. This series brings together some of the world's most talented guitarists—predominantly male—in an effort to support MLA. In an informal atmosphere, ASG has begun offering smaller touring shows to find new audiences around the world.

PIONEERS

Anderson's showcase of mostly male guitarists arguably points to her own skill level and confidence, as well as her total acceptance in a male-dominated area. In some ways, she could be seen as a pioneer. However, two others who preceded Anderson by decades can be labeled true pioneers: Sister Rosetta Tharpe (1915-1973) and Jessie Mae Hemphill (1923-2006)—both African Americans.

Born Rosetta Nubin in the small hamlet of Cotton Plant, Arkansas, Sister Rosetta Tharpe began performing at the age of only four (21). Over the ensuing years, she crossed the line between secular and sacred music by doing what many held to be unthinkable—performing inspirational music in nightclubs and concert halls backed by big bands and a witty stage presence. Her style offended the more conservative religious people of her day, although she remained loyal to her gospel roots. In fact, Rosetta was propelled during her formative years by her mother, Church of God in Christ (COGIC) evangelist Katie Bell Nubin, who played mandolin and preached at tent revivals across the South. A later move to Chicago allowed Rosetta to play blues and jazz in private while performing gospel in public. Honing her guitar skills, the young performer bent notes in the manner of jazz artists and picked strings in the style of Memphis Minnie. In the mid-1930s, she married a COGIC minister by the name of Thomas Thorpe (from which it is believed Tharpe was eventually misspelled). After she moved to New York City, her career blossomed. She continued to be both loved and hated, depending on the audience and style of music. The year 1944 marked Tharpe's first successful break into Billboard's "race records" Top Ten chart with the first gospel record ever to do so (22). In fact, she would accomplish this several more times in her career. (23) An attempt at recording blues songs in the 1950s, all the while remaining with the church, proved a career downturn, however. Retreating to Europe, Tharpe gradually returned to the gospel circuit, although at nowhere near her former celebrity. A stroke in 1970 lost her the use of her legs and she died three years later at age 58 after another stroke. Her influence on notable musicians of pop music fame, such as Elvis Presley and Keith Richards, is legendary. Tharpe was inducted in 1997 to the International Gospel Hall of Fame and Museum (24).



Sister Rosetta Tharpe
<http://rosettasisister.wordpress.com/2008/10/31/sister-rosetta-tharpe-my-journey-to-the-sky-2/>

Jessie Mae Hemphill (b. 1923) was yet another pioneering electric guitarist who combined her skill with songwriting and a vocal style specializing in the primal, northern Mississippi hill country blues tradition of her family and regional heritage. (25)

Hemphill's earliest field recordings, made by blues researcher George Mitchell and ethnomusicologist David Evans during the years 1967-1973, were not released. The first high quality field recordings of her music were eventually made in 1979 in Memphis, Tennessee, after Evans came to teach at Memphis State University (now called the University of Memphis). The school then founded its own recording label, High Water, to promote interest in indigenous music of the South. Hemphill's recordings on this label launched her recording career in 1980.

Hemphill was considered unique in country blues as a woman who was going against tradition by singing her own material while accompanying herself on an electric guitar and playing tambourine with her foot.

Hemphill played an electric guitar in open D or open G tunings, preferring open D because of its versatility within the blues structure.

As Barbara Flaska writes in her article "The High Water Mark Keeps Rising,"

Her playing ignores the standard 12-bar blues progressions and relies instead on the open chord tunings and repeated riffs typical of the folk blues of her native Mississippi. Hemphill's guitar style is often described as idiosyncratic. Her open tunings are rhythm-powered and enhanced by an occasionally hypnotic drone. Her guitar style is overdriven, a little roughed-up and coarsely textured, but very natural sounding. There's not too much in the way of turnarounds or doubling back. Her songs are driven by a relentless rhythm, powered by a fierce strum - with a slide up one string and down the next for accent. Hemphill plays way up the neck, with both barred and fingered chords, and bends a string when the mood strikes her. The stomping guitar parts act as a rhythmic echo to the words and percussion. (26)

Due to the remoteness of her native North Mississippi region, much of this music had yet to reach a mainstream audience. Although folklorist Alan Lomax had recorded several of the Hemphill family members in the '50s, in addition to "Mississippi" Fred McDowell, most of the musicians of this region would remain unnoticed for years to come.

Hemphill suffered a stroke in 1993, which left her paralyzed on her left side. Her career was basically ended then, although she did manage a few appearances over the next decade as a singer and tambourine player. She died in 2006 from complications due to an ulcer.

MODERN PIONEERS

Musical trailblazers can be called pioneers for any number of reasons, and Ani DiFranco (born Angela Maria DiFranco, 1970) is a Grammy Award-winning singer, songwriter and guitarist, who is widely—and most importantly—celebrated as a feminist icon. (It is for this reason she is listed here ahead of other women, who were more noted for guitar skill). The Buffalo, New York musician is also known for starting her own record company in 1989, Righteous Records (renamed Righteous Babe Records in 1994). While her strongly political lyrics, also often controversial and socially observant, are her most identifiable and discussed traits, DiFranco's guitar style is also critically acclaimed. On over 15 studio and nearly an equal number of live albums, her guitar style has been characterized as staccato and percussive, combined with rapid fingerpicking while utilizing numerous alternative (open) tunings. (27)



Ani DiFranco performs in Buffalo, New York, September 12, 2007.
Chuck Myers KRT Photos

While pioneers may assist future generations by “blazing trails”, fame and becoming a household name also provides a path for those who aspire to success in that same field. Bonnie Raitt and Joni Mitchell, both considered icons in music, could be said to have paved the way for DiFranco and others like her.



Musician Bonnie Raitt at "We the Planet" concert, San Francisco, California, April 20, 2003.
Tim Mosenfelder/Getty Images

Raitt (b. 1949), could arguably be called the only “household name” in music among women known for their guitar skills. In fact, she has even been lauded as an “institution in American music,” (28) with nearly 20 albums to her credit in a “legendary” body of work.

Born into a musical family, Raitt is the daughter of Broadway singer John Raitt and pianist-singer Marge Goddard. With her background and upbringing in Los Angeles, California, in a climate of respect for the arts, Quaker beliefs and social activism, Raitt has observed these ideals throughout her life and made them part of her performance and recording career. She committed herself to full-time music after three years in college, soon finding herself immersed in blues as she learned from the blues legends of her day—some of whom were quite elderly by that time. In between sessions, Raitt has continued to devote her voice and celebrity to an array of causes (peace, social issues, safe energy, the environment and women's rights). She continues to use her influence to affect the way music is perceived and appreciated around the world—including a mid-1990s

initiative with the Boys and Girls Clubs of America to encourage underprivileged youth to play music. Raitt has won multiple Grammy Awards and was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2000.



Joni Mitchell performs in Vancouver, Canada, May 14, 1998
H. Ruckemann, UPI Photos

Another artist who has influenced countless musicians as a female guitarist is the Canadian singer and songwriter Joni Mitchell (b. Roberta Joan Anderson in 1943). Beginning as a key part of the folk rock movement sweeping the musical landscape, once she settled in California in the late 1960s (29), Mitchell's guitar—and even piano—arrangements were seen as intelligent and complex. She was influenced by jazz while melding her style with pop, folk and rock on several of her earlier albums. (30)

In a 2002 interview with “Rolling Stone” magazine, Mitchell—following a lengthy career—stated she would make her final album due to her disgust with the music industry. She expressed her desire for more control over the content and distribution of her music. (31) And in fact, her recordings were infrequent and sporadic after that time. Her last recording was in 2007, titled “Shine” (32) released on Starbucks' Hear Music Label.

Guitar skill, however, is arguably Mitchell's most lasting influence, notably due to her complex arrangements and penchant for open (non-standard) tuning. She was harmonically highly innovative in her early work (1966-1972) and used a variety of techniques. (33). Mitchell's music was originally considered to be folk, but after her initial success she began to grow in a jazz direction. Her collaboration with saxophonist and band leader Tom Scott produced the album "Court and Spark," one of the most popular and influential jazz-influenced albums of all time. Mitchell worked closely with jazz great Charles Mingus on his last project. She did several albums with jazz bass player Jaco Pastorius, and several more with her second husband, musician and sound engineer Larry Klein

Mitchell's guitar and songwriting influenced numerous songwriters who followed, including Prince, Elvis Costello, George Michael, Madonna, Sheryl Crow, Morrissey, Seal, Beck, Cassandra Wilson, Diana Krall and a great many others.

Mitchell was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1997.

A SHORT LIST OF OTHERS

Provided here is a short list of female guitarists who have contributed in some significant way to paving a path for others, or simply through ability and perseverance have played a large role in raising awareness of female talent on the guitar:

CINDY CASHDOLLAR: (b. 1956), steel and lap slide guitarist. First female lead guitarist for the previously all-male Western swing band Asleep at the Wheel—a position she held for eight years and for which she received five Grammy awards. (34)



Cindy Cashdollar
<http://www.cindycashdollar.com/images/gallery/master/cashdollar-inhell-closeup.jpg>

RORY BLOCK: (b. Aurora Block, 1949), American female blues guitarist and singer, a preserver and notable exponent of the country blues style. She learned her craft in the 1960s in her father’s New York City shoe shop due to the folk singers and rediscovered Delta bluesmen who gathered there. (35)

ANA POPOVIC: (b. Belgrade, Serbia, 1976),



Ana Popovic performs at the Heritage Blues Festival, Wheeling, West Virginia, August, 2005
 Photo by Les Reynolds

was first introduced to the blues through her father’s extensive record collection and sessions hosted in the family home. Popovic, a quick study, founded her first serious band at age 19 and was playing outside her country in less than a year. She has relocated to the Netherlands (originally to study jazz guitar), although she remains a fixture on the European blues scene (due to her skill on slide guitar) and has toured several times in the United States. She is noted for her diversity and ease in switching from one style or genre to another. (36)

SHARON ISBIN: (b. 1956 Minnesota). She has been called a “brilliant virtuoso,” “classical guitar’s reigning diva” and “one who plays with mesmerizing finesse” (quotes from the London Times, Dallas Morning News and Los Angeles Times). The Grammy-Award winning artist has been acclaimed for her lyricism, technique and versatility, with over 25 recordings spanning Baroque, Spanish/Latin and 20th century to crossover and jazz-fusion. (37)

LILY AFSHAR: Along with Isbin, this Iranian-American is noted as one of the world’s best female classical guitarists, having been critically acclaimed by numerous organizations and won multiple awards. She was in 1986 among the 12 international guitarists selected to play for Maestro Andres Segovia in his Master classes at the University of Southern California, in which Segovia praised her skill. Afshar teaches classical guitar at the University of Memphis. (38)

NOTE: Afshar’s date of birth is difficult to find—it’s as if there’s a purposed attempt to not supply that information anywhere.

ORGANIZATIONS and OTHERS:

Various individuals and organizations currently advocate for female musicians.

Former musician and music industry veteran Carla DeSantis has focused on rock music, founding and publishing the groundbreaking and award winning ROCKRGRL Magazine, which ran from 1994-2005 as the only national publication strictly for female musicians. She also created and produced two successful and critically acclaimed ROCKRGRL music conferences, held in Seattle, Washington in 2000 and 2005. Today, DeSantis lectures throughout the country and abroad on the topic of gender disparity in rock and is a panelist at various music industry events. (39)

Fair Music is the first global initiative for fairness and justice in the music business. The organization has an extensive agenda, including advocating for female artists. (40)

Indiegrrl works to create networking, educational, and showcasing opportunities for women as an international members' organization that supports women in the arts regardless of race, religion, or sexuality. It was founded in 1998 by Seattle, Washington-based musician Holly Figueroa (now Figueroa O'Reilly) as a forum for information, networking, and conversation about independent music from a female perspective. Indiegrrl is now more than a networking group of women singer/songwriters and is committed to bringing on new members and new sponsors for the growth of supporting independent women singer songwriters, groups, and female fronted bands. (41)

CONCLUSION:

Gender discrimination in the music industry is a long-term, ongoing issue. Research suggests that some of this has its roots in social mores as well as socialization differences beginning at an early age. Representation of women in performing with certain instruments and in certain genres (i.e., jazz and guitar) remains imbalanced—although this appears to be changing. Present-day concerns point more to overcoming marginalization as opposed to outright rejection. Widespread social trends, however, may be countering this marginalization. Finally, several female leaders have undertaken advocacy efforts to ensure that the marginalization and under-representation of female guitarists in modern-day music becomes less of an issue in the future.



Classical Guitarist Xue Fei, London, England, April 27, 2004
Stuart Franklin, Magnum Photos

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