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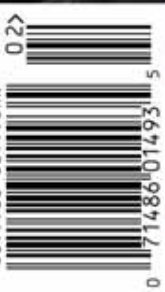
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Terri Lyne Carrington at Power Station at  
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TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON

# 'TRANSFORM THE CULTURE'

BY SUZANNE LORGE | PHOTOS BY JIMMY & DENA KATZ

**What would jazz without patriarchy sound like? It's a provocative question—and one that drummer Terri Lyne Carrington seeks to answer.**

**T**o this end, she founded the Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice at Berklee College of Music, inaugurated at an open house at the Boston campus on Oct. 30. Through the institute, Carrington, who serves as artistic director, and her board of prominent thought-leaders will help to guide select groups of music students across the rocky terrain that lies at the intersection of jazz, gender and our modern culture. No small undertaking.

To start, one must understand that “the work of achieving gender justice is not ‘women’s work,’” said Dr. Farah Jasmine Griffin, author and professor of English, comparative literature and African American studies at Columbia University. In her keynote address at the open house, she stated the case clearly: “Gender justice implies a politic where boys and girls, men and women, cis- and transgender, gender non-conforming and non-binary persons—everyone is valued equally and shares in the equitable distribution of power, knowledge and resources.”

**"There are plenty of guys who would vote for a woman president before hiring a woman in their band," Carrington said.**



Despite the clarity of Griffin's explanation, the phrase "gender justice" might not conjure up ready images for many people. So, in a post-launch interview, Carrington spoke to some common misconceptions about gender justice and how the institute will enact it: No, the institute won't be about all-female ensembles and segregating musicians into washroom categories. But it will be about musicians all along the gender spectrum—female, male, non-conforming and non-binary—working together to create music that rises above social constructs based on seeming biological differences. In large part, this work will be corrective, Carrington said, and a challenge to the basic underpinnings of patriarchy, the system by which women and non-normative individuals are disenfranchised.

"I loved how Farah commented [in the keynote] that we could have said 'jazz without sexism' instead of 'jazz without patriarchy,' except that sexism is really just a by-product of patriarchy," Carrington said.

Patriarchy, a hot-button word in and of itself, is not a topic that often comes up in jazz circles. The omission has puzzled Carrington, given that jazz musicians were at the forefront of political activism during the civil rights era in the States.

"Why is [jazz] so ass-backwards when it comes to gender?" she asked. "Racial justice mattered to many of the people who created this music because it was affecting them directly.

And gender justice may not be as important to the men at the helm of this genre. But all of these [justice issues] are interconnected. I don't see how you can be concerned about racial justice and have no concern about gender justice."

How men in positions of authority treat women—a core issue at the heart of many discussions about patriarchy—came to dominate the national dialogue in late 2017 with the rise of the #MeToo movement, when millions of women globally took to social media to speak out against sexual harassment and abuse at all levels of society. In joining this conversation, several female jazz musicians began to talk publicly about the harassment they had experienced at some of the country's leading jazz schools—Berklee among them. (See sidebar on page 28.)

While the timing of the institute's launch seems propitious in light of the #MeToo movement, Carrington had begun laying the groundwork in 2015. But the galvanizing event that spurred her to action was a meeting of the Women in Jazz Collective in 2017, during which female Berklee students spoke about the same kinds of harassment and denigration that, in the wake of #MeToo, would result in the firings of numerous high-profile men in the fields of politics, media and entertainment.

"What led me to the work [on the institute] were the stories that I heard," Carrington, 53, said about the meeting. "It made me think that I've got

to try to do something. Because I would get angry listening to these young women talk about [their experiences]. ... I thought, I can't rest just because I have a nice career. And it's more than asking, 'What can I do about it?' It may start there. But the problem is so huge."

Carrington, who has a double album set for release in the spring under the banner Terri Lyne Carrington and Social Science, could be accused of modesty when assessing her career. She's won multiple Grammys as a drummer and producer, including one for Best Jazz Instrumental Album—the first woman ever to win in the category—for *Money Jungle: Provocative In Blue* (Concord). She has toured and recorded with legions of jazz luminaries.

Carrington received an honorary doctorate from Berklee in 2003 and currently holds the Zildjian Chair in Performance there. She serves as artistic director for various jazz organizations and continues to record, tour and educate. In truth, it's hard to think of any jazz drummer of her generation who's accomplished as much.

By her own admission, though, Carrington's experiences as a female musician have been different from those of the young women who study at Berklee today. Her father was a drummer and saxophonist; she started playing saxophone at age 5 before switching to drums. Later, she took private lessons. At 11, she attended Berklee on scholarship. As a preteen, she was



working professionally and had her union card; she'd jammed with trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie and pianist Oscar Peterson, and received mentorship from saxophonist Wayne Shorter, drummer Jack DeJohnette and producer Quincy Jones. Because of her precocity and the benefits of tutoring during her formative years, Carrington was able early on to claim a professional spot in the male-dominated jazz scene, a spot most female musicians are denied at any age.

"It's not that I liked being seen [as one of the guys], it's more that I felt accepted being seen that way," she said. "I didn't feel that I wasn't accepted by that community. I saw it as the way—the primary, maybe *only* way—to have a career. To make sure that you play as well as the next guy.

"For me, that meant that I had to embody everything that I'd heard in jazz, which also meant that [I was] embodying the male aesthetic in some way. ... That's not just about playing louder and faster and busier. It's about a sense of ownership in the music. Meaning, this is *my* music as much as it's the next person's music. It's as much my music as it was for the great jazz innovators. ... I feel that way as strongly as any other person who's ever played [jazz]. I have ownership in it, and I have a stand in it, authentically."

Despite Carrington's legitimate claim to mastery and the backing of several jazz titans, she found that some male musicians would default to stereotypes in their dealings with her (even, surprisingly, when she was on stage as Herbie Hancock's drummer). Some assumed she was a singer or pianist, or perhaps the girlfriend of one of the musicians. Others would challenge her expertise, either unaware of or dismissive of her bona fides, which usually surpassed their own. Carrington was quick to note that these sorts of knee-jerk biases aren't as bad as what some female jazz players have endured. Still, cumulatively, over time, she said, these interactions were exhausting and exacted a personal toll.

"[Bassist] Esperanza [Spalding] articulated it beautifully at a roundtable discussion at Winter Jazzfest [in 2018]. How [as women players] we have this guard up, and how [playing together with the late Geri Allen, the pianist in their trio] was the first time that we didn't have any guard up at all. Fending off a little comment, a slight unwanted advance—they're just small things, but guys don't have to deal with them. Or just having to prove yourself [again and again] or feeling like you're being judged. Working through all those things while on the stage trying to be creative is a lot. It's energy that pulls you away from creativity. People will say that it's just in your own head, but that's not true."

By the time Carrington met Spalding, she'd worked with only a few female musicians of her own caliber—among them Allen (1957–2017), the first regularly gigging female instrumentalist she'd ever met, and trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, whom Carrington befriended after graduating

from Berklee as an undergraduate and moving to New York in 1983. At the time, early in her career, Carrington was solidly entrenched with "the greatest jazz musicians around," all male, and so she eschewed opportunities to play in all-women projects and festivals. "I didn't want to be pigeonholed," she explained.

But the first time Carrington played with Spalding, she had an epiphany that precipitated a shift in her own consciousness regarding female musicians. "The bass and drum connection is so strong, so important ... and I felt [a synergy] from the moment I played with Esperanza," she explained. "She's the first female player that I had this kind of synergy with. There was a joy in it, because it was a piece of the puzzle that had been missing for me.

"I had a gig coming up in Israel and I asked Geri Allen to play, and Esperanza, and Tineke Postma, who is a Dutch saxophone player. When I booked these musicians for this gig, I didn't realize that they were all women. I didn't do it on purpose; it just happened that way. That was for me a signal that things had shifted. Not just for me personally, but also in the music. There were more and more women playing that I just really wanted to play with."

Following this impulse, Carrington decided to use these musicians as the unit for an album that she wanted to produce. "But it wasn't a political thing—it wasn't a statement of any sort, other than celebrating the talent of all of these women I had been playing with," she maintained.

That 2011 record, *The Mosaic Project* (Concord), would go on to earn Carrington her first Grammy and to garner ample media attention. To her chagrin, much of the album's coverage focused on the fact that the performers all were women—before assaying any commentary on their performances. "I think it's a good record, no matter who was playing on it," she stressed.

It was only through discussions with author and educator Angela Y. Davis that Carrington came to see *The Mosaic Project* as a kind of activism in its own right. "A long view of history reveals that musicians and other artists play crucial roles in encouraging social change," Davis wrote in an email from Brazil, where she was attending the Brazilian National Congress of Black Women Against Racism, Violence and For Life. "And jazz has always been linked to quests for justice, sometimes in terms of content, but almost always in terms of form. Jazz always reminds us that we have the potential to imagine something very new."

This vision of "something very new," according to Carrington and her advisors—Davis among them—is what drives the institute, from its name to its mission. "I love the slogan of the institute—'Jazz Without Patriarchy,'" Davis added. "Pushing jazz to imagine what it can potentially become when patriarchal obstacles are removed allows us to think not only about the



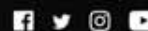
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Sam Spear

## BERKLEE STUDENTS SPEAK OUT

Sam Spear, an undergrad saxophone student at Berklee, walked into the jury room to play for a panel of faculty adjudicators. “You should have done your hair today,” remarked one of the male professors. Rudeness aside, this statement could have violated Spear’s civil rights.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, comments that deride women for not conforming to stereotypical notions of how they should look qualify as gender discrimination under Title IX, the 1972 federal civil rights law that prohibits gender discrimination at educational institutions that receive federal funding.

Spear, who in Spring 2017 went on to co-found the Women in Jazz Collective, a Berklee student club that promotes female students’ participation in jazz events, recalls other derogatory or dismissive comments that she and members of the club have experienced. At the school, she said, people have assumed that she got an affirmative-action pass in admissions or that she’s attending on a scholarship for women. They’ve also underestimated her abilities, expecting her to play quietly, have bad technique or be afraid of improvising. “What do you say to that when you’ve devoted your whole life to learning how to do something?” she asked.

Not all offensive speech is discriminatory, but uncorrected patterns of hostile speech within an institution can create an environment that fosters discrimination and abuse. Berklee was forced to examine its own practices regarding these issues when in November 2017 it became the subject of a Boston Globe exposé on alleged sexual misconduct at the school. The article prompted hundreds of students to march in protest against the school’s handling of the allegations.

Words can hurt, but they also can heal. College President Roger Brown responded at an open forum on the campus, apologizing to all who had been harassed or abused at Berklee. “I am so sorry,” he said to the 1,250 students gathered.

Today, Berklee students have access to expansive resources on the school’s equity and Title IX website. Through its policy statement, Berklee commits to fostering a “safe, supportive, and diverse climate” for its young musicians.

—Suzanne Lorge

benefit to women, but to the entire field. ... [A]chieving gender justice will allow the music itself to become something new. For those who might assume that this quest is to assimilate women into a musical field that remains the same, we need to emphasize that this is about transformation—not assimilation.”

Undertaking cultural transformation at an institutional level can be a daunting task. Case in point: Carrington and the institute’s managing director, ethnomusicologist Aja Burrell Wood, observed just how deeply gender bias colors common perceptions of jazz musicians in the responses they received to a display at the Berklee library. Wood asked students to post the names of their favorite female jazz musicians, and almost all of the posted names were those of well-known singers like Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday and Stacey Kent. Only a few students posted names of female instrumentalists.

“I was bothered by that,” Carrington admitted. “But Aja said that this gives us a good idea [of what we’re facing]. This proves our point. So, let’s ask this question again in a couple of years and see if we have some improvement in looking for female musicians outside of the singer category.”

What the library display demonstrates is that even at one of the most prestigious jazz schools in the country, expected gender roles dictate, even if only implicitly, that men play instruments and women sing, with some exceptions allowed for women who play piano, violin or flute. Gendered instruments is “another thing that we need to move away from,” Carrington asserted. “There are a lot of women who were great singers who also played [instruments], and who knows how they would have developed as players if the culture had been different.”

For the coming generation, the institute will provide that different culture, where all musicians will have the space and structure to develop artistically in whatever direction suits them, even if—perhaps especially if—that direction is against expectations. Bucking cultural expectations in favor of authentic artistic expression is how the institute will challenge what Carrington called the “defined norm”—the standard-bearer against which all others are judged. “The defined norm, as I know it, is white, Christian, male, straight, able-bodied and with resources. That tends to be what we’re struggling against,” Carrington contended, going on to label as “totally ridiculous” the notion that good ideas, musical or otherwise, only can manifest through one gender or race.

In Carrington’s vision, challenging the defined norm at the institute won’t be about limiting any one group, but rather about opening up all areas of jazz to those previously deemed outsiders—not only because it’s the fair thing to do, but to prepare for a rapidly changing world. In a March 2017 Time magazine poll, 20 percent of millennials reported that they do not consider themselves cisgender (aligned with the gender assigned at birth) or straight. Additionally, U.S. Census statistics indicate a gradual decrease in the white population relative to populations of color, such that the white population could be in the minority by 2045—just about the time that current first-year Berklee students will be hitting their mid-career stride.

The rise in visibility of women and people of color in other professions—law, medicine, politics—suggests that the defined norm is shifting, but “a lot more quickly than in the jazz field,” Carrington observed, noting that compared to most other professional schools, music schools are behind the curve when it comes to diversity and inclusion.

In 2016, the most recent year information was available from the National Center for Education Statistics, 56 percent of undergraduate students in the U.S. were women. According to the 2017–18 Berklee Factbook, of the college’s 6,282 undergrads, 38 percent were female. Only “Male” and “Female” were listed as responses in each data set.

Through initiatives like the Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice, Berklee is trying to address the relative shortcomings of music institutions head-on, Carrington said. And she has firm ideas about how music organizations—both academic and professional—might follow suit.

First, assumptions about female musicians being inferior to male musicians or unable to play what traditionally have been perceived as male instruments have to stop. Female players should not have to be exceptional to be given the same opportunities granted to male players. To bring this about, music educators need to take a long, hard look at the messages they send to young female musicians, Carrington said.

“A large responsibility is with the band directors. A lot of them are problematic,” she opined, noting that bias among band directors shows up at the high school level, and even more critically, in middle schools, when children first are learning to play. “I’ve heard some pretty bad stories about band directors saying things like, ‘I’ve never met a good female jazz musician’ or ‘I’ve never played with a good one.’”



Even among those who “say the right things” about gender equity in music, the follow-through still can be lacking.

“I’ve said to some of these people, ‘When was the last time you mentored a woman? This is what I’m asking you to do: See some potential in a young woman and mentor her—whether in your opinion she’s as good as the guy next to her or not.’ Because you can’t just care about gender equity in other fields and not [in jazz]. And I do think that people care about gender equity. I also think that there are plenty of guys who would vote for a woman president before hiring a woman in their band.”

Finally, Carrington said, female jazz musicians are just as deserving of radio airplay, coverage in the press and grant money as male jazz musicians—and should receive it. The disparity both troubles and confounds her. “When you can drive for two hours and not hear one female musician on the radio, how do you not see something wrong with that?” she asked. “Music is an expression of life, and you can’t have life without women. If [life is] what we’re expressing, then women’s voices have to be part of that expression.”

Much of the institute’s corrective work will be to fill the holes in the jazz narrative where women’s voices should have been. The plan, according to institute managing director Wood, is to dig into jazz history to unearth information on the lives of female jazz musicians and build out the organization’s archive with both physical and online resources on these overlooked historical figures. In addition to documenting the lives of historical women in jazz, the archive also will chronicle the ongoing careers of living female jazz artists. Lastly, the library will catalog music by female jazz composers, a small, but sorely neglected, group of artists. “Almost every song that Geri Allen wrote should be a standard. She wrote amazing music,” Carrington said. “That’s just one example, and there are others.”

If all goes according to plan, within a few years the library at the Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice could be the most definitive archival resource on women in jazz in the world. “I don’t think that anything like this exists for women in jazz,” Carrington professed.

Within this environment, Carrington envisions a new classroom dynamic for all students, regardless of their gender or sexual identity (two different things, she emphasized). All students will take Wood’s class on “Jazz, Gender, and Society,” which will present the cornerstone teachings of the program. None of the ensembles will be male-dominated. Students from all disciplines—engineering, therapy, performance and more—will be welcome. And the institute’s classrooms will be spaces for musical experimentation “where you can learn how to play the music without having your guard up,” she avowed.

Carrington also hopes to create an educa-

tional program for young musicians to help redress systemic gender bias in middle schools and high schools. “We could make the curriculum ... feel more inclusive,” she said. “Maybe something along the lines of beginner’s books [as part of] an outreach that can be both local and, eventually, national.”

In the end, the institute will grant students the space to develop their musical identities, free from pressure to meet gender-based societal expectations—and through this process, perhaps, to develop ownership of the music in their own right.

“[The institute] is about freedom, searching for freedom within the constructs of society,” Carrington said. “Freedom is a big part of why I play—I’m the freest when I’m being creative and expressive. If I feel this way, I imagine that a lot of other people feel this way, too.”

That said, Carrington knows that gender equity is neither a passing trend nor an easy win. She grasps the magnitude of the challenge before her: “This is a journey for the rest of my life.”

So, the question remains: What would jazz without patriarchy sound like? Carrington looks to the future for the answer. **DB**

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