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## An All Female Jazz Camp – What gives? with Ariane C. Cap

JUNE 1, 2015 BY [ARIANE CAP](#) — 4 COMMENTS



2015 Women's Jazz and Blues Camp | Ariane Cap, Christine Burrill, Liz Waiters, Leslie Betz, Mwamba Blakwomyn, Judy Graboyes, Liz Klute | sitting: Joan Lowden, Julie Lawyer | Photo credit: ©Jane Higgins Spotlight Photography

### An All Female Jazz Camp – What gives?

It is 11.00AM on Monday, March 25th 2015, and the usual saxophone, trumpet and guitar cases are piled up in the hallways of Berkeley California's Jazzschool. As on every Monday, you hear the muffled sounds of bands rehearsing, instructions shouted, occasional laughter. What is not business as usual, however, is that on this particular Monday the participants and instructors are all female. Were they all male with maybe an occasional female singer or pianist, it wouldn't be worth extra mention. But for this week, The Jazzschool is exclusively dedicated to the underrepresented gender in Jazz. For five days, women instrumentalists and singers will hone their skills in ensembles and classes under the guidance of an all-female faculty. There will be a big concert at the end of camp.

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2015 Women's Jazz and Blues Camp | Faculty photo, left to right: first row: Ariane Cap, Jean Fineberg, Nancy Wenstrom-Catania | second row: Jennifer Jolly, Karla Gomez, Daria Johnson | third row: Maddy Duran, Janice Maxie-Reid, Ellen Seeling, Ellen Robinson, Marina Garza | Photo credit: ©Jane Higgins Spotlight Photography

Co-directors Jean Fineberg and Ellen Seeling have been running all-female camps at the Jazzschool since 2009. The first classes were directed at girls. But when the young players' moms, aunts and grandmoms started saying "I wish there had been something like this when I was young," Jean and Ellen said "why not now?" and held the first Women's Jazz and Blues Camp in 2012. Both the Girls' and Women's Camps are now annual events, that have been growing from a strong 35 attendees right out of the starting gate to the maximum capacity the space can hold, which is 62.



Big Bottom Babes | 2015 Women's Jazz and Blues Camp | Photo credit: ©Jane Higgins Spotlight Photography

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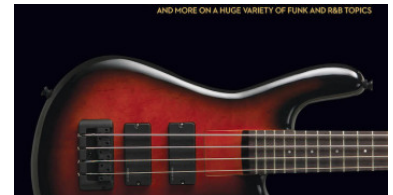
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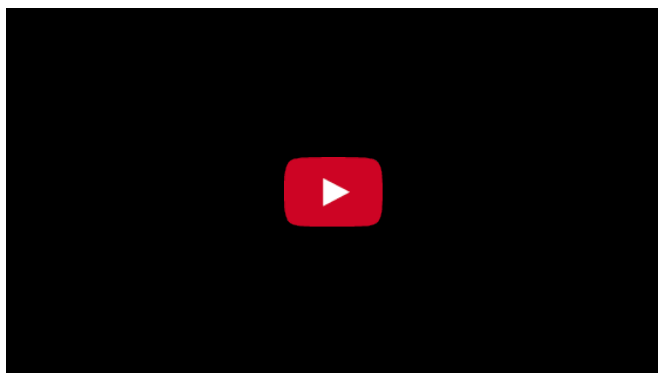
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*The Big Bottom Babes" performing their Reggae – Swing Mash of Mr PC and It's All About that Bass (Traynor/Davis). Featuring Leslie Betz, Liz Waiters, Liz Klute, Julie Lawyer on electric basses, Joan Lowden on upright and vocals, Jessica Gonzalez on drums. Ensemble leader: Ariane Cap | This performance was part of the Berkeley California's Jazzschool event The Women's Jazz and Blues Camp*

*Video participants: Leslie Betz, Liz Waiters, Liz Klute, Julie Lawyer, Joan Lowden, Jessica Gonzalez on drums. Ensemble leader: Ariane Cap | Video editor: Kim Starr-Reid*

This begs the question: Why an event such as an all-female Jazz camp? A multi-instrumentalist and educator, Jean Fineberg, explains that a few years ago she and her partner, trumpeter and band leader Ellen Seeling, researched Jazz camps all across the country and realized that there were 90 percent boys in these camps with a faculty that was at 95 to 100% male. Surely, with this low percentage of female instructors and participants, it is not likely that women and girls would feel like they belonged. So, the idea to create a Jazz camp that was to exclusively cater to girls was born, and it would be taught by an all-female faculty.

The programs were an immediate success. It was palpable how comfortable the girls were among themselves, being with friends, supporting each other, having fun, making music. "One of the biggest challenges for young female musicians", says Jean, "is that they are most often the only girl in the band. While the boys have friends, naturally get together and play or practice or bond otherwise, the girls are often excluded and drop out because of lack of peer support or role models."

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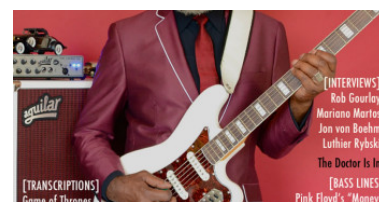
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#### Jamaaladeen Tacuma – Bass Musician Magazine, April 2015 Issue



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Bassist Julie Lawyer | 2015 Women's Jazz and Blues Camp | Photo credit: ©Jane Higgins Spotlight Photography

Not only in the world of Jazz education are women and girls severely underrepresented, according to Jean, whose resume includes names such as David Bowie, Melba Liston and Chic. In the professional world she has often observed gender bias as well. For example, all other things being equal, usually the male player would get first chair in a big band. She also observes that male musicians tend to not want to send a female substitute at times, for fear of being perceived as weak. Bandleaders need to be educated, she explains, and suggests a remedy that has helped this problem in orchestras: mandatory blind auditions. Since the introduction of blind auditions in the classical world in 1975, the percentage of female instrumentalists has risen from 5 percent to more than 45%.

Women need to look at their own gender bias as well, says Jean. She recommends that female players seek out other women mentors and peers, but she warns them to avoid those who are not supportive of other women. Some, she says, want to be the only woman in the band. Others do not want to play with other female players for fear of appearing weak.

## Musician Magazine, March 2015 Issue

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Her advice to aspiring female musicians is: "Brace yourself, because rejection is going to happen. Be strong emotionally, because you will often be the only female in the room. Associate with successful women who support you, and keep your eyes on the prize."



2015 Women's Jazz and Blues Camp | Photo credit: ©Jane Higgins Spotlight Photography

Back at the Jazzschool, the last period is underway and everyone is shuffling around chairs, sheet music and music stands. One ensemble sticks out for its unusual instrumentation – it is an ensemble of seven bass players and a drummer. The group explores non-traditional sounds and roles on the bass. On the agenda – a nod to a famous bass player – is the Coltrane standard Mr. PC in a reggae version, which will take a turn into double time swing, and, as a climax, will break into one of the participants, upright bassist Joan Lowden swinging her "boom boom" right next to her double bass singing a few chorusses of every bassist's favorite: "It's all about that bass" by Meghan Trainor (in the version of upright bassist Kate Davis of course).

If saxophonists, trumpet players, flutists and pianists are underrepresented in Jazz, rhythm section players such as guitarists, drummers and bass players can especially relate to the feeling of being the only woman in the band. The bass players range from beginners, to hobbyists to semi professionals, from young adults to seniors. Julie Lawyer, 75, who carries a tank of oxygen on her back right next to her bass gig bag, is attending for the third time in a row. Joan Lowden, a busy upright player and vocalist who started playing in her forties and who now manages and plays in several busy bands, says she much appreciates the all women environment and the small size of the camp: "I am usually the sole woman in my bands and when I go to jams (singers excepted). It is refreshing to play with women. We need a place to be supported and empowered with our peers. Many female players need a place to gain the confidence before they take their place in open (and more competitive) settings."

Leslie Betz, who picked up the bass just a little over a year ago, agrees: "I loved the non-competitive and nurturing environment. No pressure other than the self inflicted!" (which, she adds, "is enough for us!"). Other than girl scouts, this was her first all female camp experience. Joan goes on: "I think that females tend to nurture others, which makes us good band leaders. We tend to think 'ensemble' more than 'individual'. Also, many of the most 'musical' people I know are female."

Judy Graboyes a percussionist and drummer, who picked up the bass two years ago, says: "Having been a drummer and Latin percussionist, I got a lot of skepticism from men. Often men would say 'Let me feel your hands!' to see how calloused they were. I guess 'real' drummers, in their eyes, have hard, calloused hands. I have also been in classes where men walked out because women were being taught Afro-Cuban rhythms that traditionally are not supposed to be played by women." What retort does she have for critics who say all-female

camps are excluding male campers? "I would say that male campers have thousands of camps to go to. They haven't had the experience of being told that they can't play certain instruments because they are only for boys. There is a very advanced high school big band that meets at the jazz school before my lesson. It is a huge group and there are no females in the entire room. I would show the critics a picture of that band. One picture is worth a thousand words."



2015 Women's Jazz and Blues Camp | Photo credit: ©Jane Higgins Spotlight Photography

Judy goes on to say: "I was in an all female band in the 1980s called the *Blazing Redheads*, and we won a NAIRD award, and people would say that we were a gimmick band. When we would go on tour in a van and a pick-up truck, and we would all pile out, people would stop and stare and ask us where we were going."

"I recently went to a jam session with my bass, and although I was one of the first people to sign up, I wasn't called up till it was almost over. I was the only female instrumentalist. People don't understand that discrimination still exists against women and girls. When discrimination and inequality exists, there is a need for the targets of the discrimination to be able to gather on their own for support. As a white person, I would never tell an African American or Latino person that I feel excluded from their gatherings. They have every right to gather for support without white people there. That doesn't mean that they hate white people. Similarly, women need separate space sometimes to support each other. It doesn't mean that we hate men. The men who challenge that are the very reason that it is needed."



2015 Women's Jazz and Blues Camp | Photo credit: ©Jane Higgins Spotlight Photography

Bassist Liz Klute, who has a degree in music, joined the camp because she wanted to be in an ensemble with an excellent drummer. She says: "After having this experience I feel that every female musician should have this opportunity. I was taken seriously as a musician. It felt like everyday I was there to get some important work done. I had a vital role in every ensemble I played in and people were depending on me." On the question of gender bias she offers: "Gender inequality in music is a serious issue that affects all of us, not just women. Women need the experience of being included and taken seriously to get past the tendency to hang back. Not that all women hang back, but it seems that in general they hang back more than men." Remembering her experiences as a young aspiring musician, she realizes there were missed opportunities because she was a woman. "I wasn't really aware of it at the time. I just thought that I wasn't good enough. I hung around mostly male musicians in college, but I was never invited to a jam session, or asked to join a band. I dropped out and went back years later to have a similar experience studying classical guitar."

As for these camps, they may just be addressing what's needed, for young girls and never-too-old-to-learn women alike:

Christine Burrill, a busy LA filmmaker, has been playing the bass for two years and is very serious in her endeavor. Since she was looking for an opportunity to play with others in a band for the first time without feeling intimidated, the all female camp seemed like a great fit. She is glad she took the trip: "Other than my wedding this was the most fun experience of a decade!"

For information on the Jazz School's events, please visit [cjc.edu](http://cjc.edu)

*Photos Courtesy of @Jane Higgins Spotlight Photography*

*Visit Ariane Cap online at [arianecap.com](http://arianecap.com), [stepupmusicvallejo.com](http://stepupmusicvallejo.com), and [oonband.com](http://oonband.com).*



Photo, Tue Nam Ton TNT Photography



### About Ariane Cap

Ariane Cap is a busy electric and upright bassist, educator and author. She has been featured in major bass magazines for her innovative six-string tapping techniques and solid bandmanship, including Bass Musician Magazine. She is the Director of Step Up Music Vallejo and teaches at the Berkeley Jazz School (AKA The California Jazz Conservatory). Her main project is the critically acclaimed duo OoN with Jazz Bassoonist Paul Hanson and the Disco sensation Generation Esmeralda. She has been on faculty of the above mentioned camps since their inception. The all-bass ensemble was added for the first time this year at her urging and practiced under her guidance. Her websites are [arianecap.com](http://arianecap.com), [stepupmusicvallejo.com](http://stepupmusicvallejo.com), and [oonband.com](http://oonband.com).

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**ONE-OF-A-KIND DESIGNS**

## Comments



**Debbie Bonkowski says**

JUNE 1, 2015 AT 3:44 PM

I am so glad my sister Chris and her partner Nancy invited me to attend these camps. It has given me the incentive to go to jazz and blues meetups and really work at this craft. This was a wonderful article and it brought it all back to me how much I love this camp. As I live in North Carolina this is a long trip well worth taking! Thank You Ariane for a wonderful article!



**Mary Arnold says**

JUNE 1, 2015 AT 4:59 PM

Yes indeed! This is a very nice article. I can attest to the wonderful support that women experience at this school. I would encourage anyone who wants to learn in a supportive, fun, environment, to consider this school first! You won't be disappointed. Go there!

Ariane was one of my instructors and I am forever grateful to her for sharing her knowledge and support with me in my quest to pursue my second career; my first love....music!! And oh, what a really beautiful photo!

Thank you Ariane and thank you California Jazz Conservatory!



**Sheila Welt says**

JUNE 2, 2015 AT 11:19 AM

What a wonderful write-up. I took beginning string (banjo) lesson from Ari. I am still playing

Banjo with the East Bay Banjo Club. Thanks Ari for your support when I first started Banjo.

Julie that is a great picture of you.

Sheila



**Mary Burnley says**

JUNE 11, 2015 AT 2:44 PM

What a wonderful article about the serious discrimination that women musicians encounter in every genre. Until becoming disabled and unable to play, I was a professional, full-time bassist, hand percussionist and singer in the Bay Area, and I can tell you that the constant skepticism and BS from (most) male players was exhausting and infuriating. It didn't stop me, but it unquestionably limited my opportunities. The comment "wow, you're pretty good for a woman" was commonplace, as became my response "I never saw anyone play bass with their genitals." I'm thrilled to see so MANY more women playing now, and I regard that as a reward for my stubbornness and persistence, as well as that of other women players of my generation. Projects like the Women's Jazz Camp are an essential part of that continuing process. Bless you, Jeannie and Ellen and the rest of the faculty! And to all women musicians, YOU GO, GIRLS!! Be strong, be solid, and don't let the the crap you encounter get you down. It's a hard road, but, personally, I wouldn't have walked any other.

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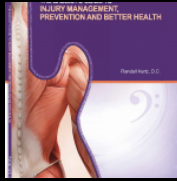
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