

Iva Nenić and Linda Cimardi (eds.)

# **Women's Leadership in Music**

Modes, Legacies, Alliances

**[transcript]**

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*This book is dedicated to our diverse, skillful and outstanding research collaborators, as well as to all the girls and women who bravely chose to assert their passion, beliefs and identity through sound, often defying stereotypes and changing the world along the way. Historically and in the present moment, their cumulative acts help enrich and improve the interconnected societies and cultures around the globe and stand out as a powerful model of cultural leadership.*

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# Winds of Change? Gender Segregation in Music Education and Production in Italy

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Clementina Casula (University of Cagliari)

**Abstract:** *Gender typing of musical instruments is one of the main factors limiting the educational, occupational, personal and social experiences available to women in different music worlds, although today women are formally acknowledged the right to access also educational and professional paths typically associated with masculinity. In practice, however, gender stereotypes in music are still diffused and influent, although to a lesser extent than in the past. This chapter discusses gender typing of wind instruments in contemporary Italy, drawing on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative evidences. In the last decades the traditional association of wind instruments with masculinity has considerably declined in the case of woodwind instruments (to the point of reversal for the flute), while it persists in the case of wind instruments and, remarkably, in the instrumental jazz courses. Gender typing seems to be even stronger in the music job market, where gender segregation persists both at the horizontal and vertical level. Female wind players refer of similar experiences contributing to build self-confidence and leadership in a field still mostly masculine. Those experiences, however, have an occasional character related to the specific path of each musician, while only recently a series of measures are being developed to raise awareness on the issue of gender segregation and promote a greater gender balance in music. Academic research might play an important role in disseminating reliable documentation of past and present activities of female musicians operating in different music worlds and evidence on the persistency of different forms of gender segregation, often hidden behind formal equality of opportunities.*

**Keywords:** *gender typing of musical instruments, gender segregation in education and work, gender balance in music, wind instruments, role modeling and mentoring in music.*

## The Invisible Issue of Women's Segregation within Music Worlds

The gender typing of musical instruments (Abeles and Porter 1978; Abeles 2009) represents one of the main factors limiting the educational, personal and social experiences,

as well as the potential professional paths available to women in different music worlds.<sup>1</sup> The association of instruments either with men or women varies in time and place, as it relates to the socio-cultural construction of features and roles associated to gender in a given context. In modern Western societies musical practices tended to reinforce the socialization and embodiment of the binarism founding the patriarchal order (DeNora 2002), as attested by conduct books, paintings or sculptures referring to music making (Leppert 1995; Steiblin 1995). The musical education of young women, functional to the exhibition of family status and personal appeal, required compliance with the ideals of grace, decorum, discretion, deference, defining the esthetical and moral standards of feminine respectability valued in the marriage market (Loesser 1954). Girls were forbidden or deterred from playing instruments requiring them to adopt postures considered as obscene or provocative for women, or to alter their delicate poises for executive needs, or to manage technologically complex objects (Green 1997). Wind instruments, possessing all the features deemed to be incompatible with femininity, were strongly associated to masculinity.

The persistent influence of those associations in contemporary Western societies is hidden by the fact that today women are formally acknowledged the right to also access those educational and professional paths, typically associated with masculinity, where some of them become legitimated as “exceptions to the rule”.<sup>2</sup> In practice, however, gender stereotypes in music are still diffused and, although to a lesser extent than in the past, significantly limit women’s full participation in music worlds. Research noted how the persistence of gender segregation<sup>3</sup> may discriminate women not only in those music worlds more often displaying sexist cultural narratives, as rock or pop (Reddington 2012; Whiteley 2000), but also in those usually engaged with civil rights and anticolonial issues associated with progressive values, as jazz (Annfelt 2003; Buscatto 2021), or in those where women’s integration is often considered an accomplished process, as classical music (Bull 2018; Scharff 2018).

This chapter brings to the debate on women’s segregation in music the discussion over the gender typing of wind instruments in contemporary Italy. First, it considers gender segregation at the educational level through a detailed analysis of data on students’ enrolments in National Conservatories of music. Second, it considers gender segregation at the occupational level, both in its horizontal and vertical dimension, focusing

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1 The concept refers to Howard Becker’s theory, defining an art world as “the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produce(s) the kind of art works that art world is noted for” (Becker 1982: x).

2 As observed by Tucker (2000: 330) the “exception to the rule” logic allows to transgress only temporarily the long-established patriarchal order, presenting women accessing typical male occupations as “perpetual phenomena phenomenon”.

3 I shall here consider gender segregation – which can be generally defined as the unequal distribution of men and women in different social fields – in the educational and occupational fields (Barone 2010; Maestripieri and Insarauto 2020). Within the occupational field, gender segregation is described with reference to two directions: the tendency of women and men to work in different sectors and occupations (horizontal segregation) and the clustering of men and women respectively at the top and bottom of occupational hierarchies.

on two organizational settings for music production: symphonic orchestras and jazz festivals. The discussion integrates the analysis of quantitative data updated for this volume with that of qualitative research previously realized by the author.<sup>4</sup> A final section refers to the resources and strategies helping interviewed musicians to overcome implicit biases and silent discrimination encountered during their educational and professional journey as female wind players. Conclusions point to the relevance of disseminating the results of research on gender and music, offering evidence on the fact that the issue of gender segregation is not an outdated feminist question, but a social concern for democratic societies, to be tackled through specific measures and policies.

## Gender segregation and wind instruments today: the case of Italy

### a) Educational segregation

A useful source to trace the historical evolution of the association between musical instruments and gender is offered by statistical data on students enrolled in Italian National Music Conservatories, the most legitimized institution for music training in Italy. Data are available from the second decade of the twentieth century till today,<sup>5</sup> a wide span of time during which institutes have adapted to significant changes. If in the school year 1926–27 there were only 15 Conservatories counting nearly 4.700 students, eighty years later the number of institutes rises to 78 and that of students to 45.000. For the past twenty years Conservatories underwent a major reorganization, following the implementation of a national law (n. 508/1999), inserting them with other applied arts institutes within the tertiary level of education. In the academic year 2020–21, when the number of Conservatories still was 78, the number of students enrolled in graduate and postgraduate courses amounted to nearly 26.500 units, while pre-academic students – to be gradually allocated to secondary level institutions – were nearly 15.400. The reorganization also led to a widening of the curricular offer, limited to the classic music canon until 1999, to include specialization in a greater variety of repertoires, genres and subjects (from ancient music to electronic, jazz and popular music, from ethnomusicology and traditional music to musicotherapy) offered by each Conservatory according to its size and resources.

In general, Conservatories students' population appears to be gender balanced since the beginning of the twentieth century, when girls' presence almost equals that of boys – differently from other segments of the national system of public education, such as secondary school or university, where equal participation was reached only decades later. This gender balance remains stable, with small fluctuations, throughout the twentieth

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4 The quotes reported in the chapter refer to interviews and focus groups organized for the purpose of research at jazz festivals in Sardinia (Casula and Firinu 2016), an investigation on the reversal of the gender-typing for the flute (Casula 2017), a study on Italian Conservatories of Music (Casula 2018) and a case study on two Italian female brass bands (Casula 2021). The text of interviews was translated from Italian to English by the author. Information on interviewees refers to the time of the interview.

5 Data prior to the 1999 reform were collected from the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), while those following the reform from the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR).



century but, since the 1999 reform inserting Conservatories within tertiary education, the percentage of female students decreases to nearly 40%, especially within postgraduate courses, more directly linked to professional specialization.

The distribution of male and female students attending different courses offered by Conservatories during the twentieth century, however, followed a strong gender typing of instruments. Data on registrations for the school year 1947–48, in the aftermath of the second world war, shows female students segregated within the classes of harp, piano and organ (where they represent, respectively, nearly 98%, 80% and 60% of the overall students), while their presence is also considerable in the classes of singing (35%) and violin (34%). No record of female students is present for the classes of wind instruments (including nearly 500 students), both in the case of woodwinds and brass, remaining an exclusive male dominion.

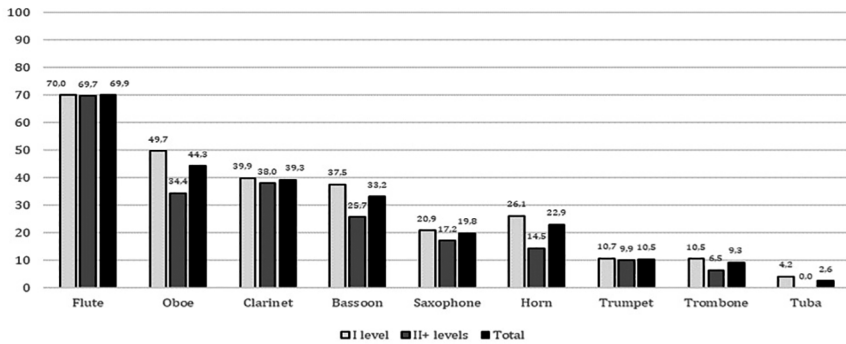
In the second half of the twentieth century, the dynamics of registrations per sex shows a gradual increase in feminine participation to several courses, starting with the instruments of the string family (with the exception of the double bass). Within the wind family, object of our focus, the increase follows two different tracks: a faster track for the classes of woodwind instruments, leading to a reversal of the original gender association in the case of the flute (Casula 2017); a very slow track for brass instruments classes. Figure 1 represents the percentage of female students registered in wind instruments classes of both classical and jazz courses for the academic year 2020–21,<sup>6</sup> per instrument and degree level (graduate and postgraduate courses). As we can see, female students represent the great majority (nearly 70%) of flute students, a significant percentage (respectively 44% and 39%) of oboe and clarinet students and one third of bassoon students. As we shift from woodwinds to brass instruments' classes, the picture changes: if women represent the 23% of students registered in horn classes, their presence declines to almost 20% in the case of saxophone,<sup>7</sup> around 10% in the case of trumpet (11%) and trombone (9%), and to less than 3% in the case of tuba classes. A further element that we can notice is that the percentage of female students declines as the education level rises for all instruments – although for some with a narrow gap – implying a decreased presence of women in those segments of training preparing students' transition to the labor market as professional musicians (rather than as music teachers or amateurs).

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6 Given the relatively recent introduction in Italian Conservatories – only after their 1999 reform – of courses differing from the canonical classical curriculum, the number of wind students enrolled in jazz courses is still relatively low (nearly 360), when compared with the more consistent numbers of the classical curriculum (nearly 4900 students), often including also future musicians in jazz or other music fields. For this reason, I have here aggregated the data on wind students of jazz courses with data on wind students of classical courses.

7 Although the saxophone is technically classified within the woodwind family, because of its use of a single-reed wooden mouthpiece and its initial crafting in wood, it soon was realized in brass and thus became associated with the brass wind family.

Table 1: Percentage of female students enrolled in wind instruments' classes of Italian Conservatories, per instrument and degree level (academic year 2020–21). Source: MIUR-AFAM data (<http://ustat.miuir.it/dati/>) elaborated by the author.



In-depth interviews with students or musicians playing wind instruments allowed us to explore some of the mechanisms favoring the persistence of the gender typing of musical instruments. Women playing brass instruments – as the musician quoted below – seem well aware of the role played by cultural and social expectations in influencing girls' conformity to conventional patterns of musical practices associated to femininity:

Perhaps it's a question of cultural and social conditioning, that we don't know if it is the cause or the effect [of the gender-typing of instruments]. In the sense that a girl grows with expectations upon her: "Will she play the violin? The flute? The piano?". We have to see if she matures a true desire [for an instrument] or if her choice coincides with expectations – but: will she feel comfortable with that [expected instrument]? (Nicoletta, trumpet and sousaphone player, female, 43, focus group, Pula, 2018).

Awareness was acquired by female wind players through their personal experience of the resistances and skepticism encountered given their choice to play an instrument traditionally associated to masculinity, contradicting conventional expectations on femininity. Resistance seems milder within more informal settings for music training – as local bands or public schools – but stronger in the more formal ones – as music Conservatories. In the first of the following quotes, a girl playing the baritone sax within an all-women street band today recalls how at first the music teacher associated her with a recorder, promptly substituted – after her disappointment – with an alto sax. In the second quote, an 18-year-old girl tells us about the double logic adopted in her instrument choice: when enrolling at the Conservatory she followed conventional expectations, choosing instruments conforming with the typical ideal of femininity (piano, violin, viola), while within the local band she felt free to choose the instrument she loves (the tuba), despite the fact it is typically associated to men.

The music teacher in my junior high school loved wind instruments in general (...) Initially he told me: "You'd go well with the recorder". And I [*with a disappointed voice*,

*n/a*: “Well, the recorder, actually...” (...) When I went to the music school [where he also taught] he told me: “I found something for you: here’s the alto sax!”. Thus I started with the alto sax. Then, years later, within the [all women brass] band there was the need of someone at the baritone part and I shifted: more than for the band’s need, for a personal thing: I felt the baritone parts, its sound attracted me, so it was [more] my need... (Morena, alto and baritone sax player, female, 26, focus group, Pula, 2018).

I started to play music during my fourth grade, but the piano (...) [then] I started playing the violin and after a year I decided to enter the Conservatory... last year I switched from violin to viola. At the same time, for passion, I play the tuba (...)  
*C.C.*: *How did you get to the tuba?*

The tuba is... [*she laughs*] a love that I have since I was little, since I was playing the piano... but I saw it as something a bit difficult [to realize] ... instead three years ago, I started too (...) I knew that there was a band (...) I went there and asked how I could start: I did a year with a teacher [of the band] and then I carried on, so now I play there, also... (viola student at the Conservatory, tuba player in the band, female, 18, focus group, Latina, 2014).

Within local bands – music ensembles associated to semi-amateur proficiency quite diffused in Italy,<sup>8</sup> especially in rural areas – girls are today usually assigned all kinds of instruments, according to the mutable needs of the ensemble. Gender equality was however only gradually reached: developed since the eighteenth century, local bands were originally open only to male members, while women were allowed for ancillary services (cleaning rehearsal rooms, rearranging uniforms, preparing lunch or dinner) (Cresti 2006). Since the 1970s, female members have started to be admitted, thus contributing to challenging conventional expectations on their incompatibility with wind instruments.

Italian Conservatories, however, opposed stronger resistance to those winds of change and defended conventional restrictions over legitimated female musical practices, gradually softened annexing those instruments following the harp and keyboards in the social prestige ladder, namely the violin and viola first, the cello and flute in a second step and gradually also other woodwind instruments, but still excluding those at its base, as the double bass, brass instruments or percussions (sometimes labelled within Conservatories as the “agricultural instruments”, see Casula 2018: 183). Older generation of Conservatory teachers often activated social distinction mechanisms, separating the noble path of professionally and culturally legitimated classical musical training offered by their institution, from amateur practice realized in rural communities’ local bands. However, in the last decades, the force of this banning declines in light of the cultural and organizational changes that left their impact on Italian Conservatories: on the one hand, the turnover of classical courses’ teachers leads to the entry of new generations of musicians with a more crossover or a less canonical approach to classical music; on

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8 See Raganato 2020. A website dedicated to Italian musical local bands records more than 2.364 active ones (<https://www.bandamusicale.it/>, last accessed on 19 February 2022).

the other hand, the reform upgrading to the tertiary level of education Conservatories requires them to search for breeding grounds where young musicians are raised, given the inadequate public offer of pre-academic music training in the national system of education.<sup>9</sup> As a result, female students learning to play wind instruments in local bands are increasingly recruited within Conservatories also in brass instruments classes, although mainly of classical courses. Jazz courses, conversely, seem to remain a masculine realm, where women's presence is legitimated only as singers. The persistence of this strong gender segregation within jazz courses is supported by the analysis of both qualitative interviews and quantitative data.<sup>10</sup> In the following quote, a female sax player in her 20s, member of a brass band and enrolled in the saxophone class of the jazz course, notices she is the only woman not only in her class, but in all the instrumental jazz classes offered by her Conservatory, where other female jazz students follow voice classes.

I have started this year [in 2019–20] the class of jazz saxophone at the Conservatory of [X], I'm the only female student of the class, actually of all jazz courses, all the others [female students of the jazz courses] are singers. (Ilaria, baritone and tenor sax player, female, 20, focus group, Fluminimaggiore, 2019).

Female brass students are often a prime target for those male colleagues or teachers still considering their field as a distinctively masculine realm. Our interviewees recall how, during their Conservatory years, they had to endure a repertoire of dirty jokes and lim-ricks about the skills of women working with their lips or comments suggesting their achievements were based more on their appeal than on merit or relegating them in a sort of “second class” ranking for female musicians. Especially in the case of jazz courses, as recalled in the following quote, those strategies contribute to undermining female students' confidence over their possibility to become professional wind players:

In my local band [where I started playing] there were other girls playing wind instruments, so I didn't experience discrimination. That I experienced later, within the Conservatory, and I still experience it today [within the labor market]. That remarking [...]: “For a woman, you are good”. At the Conservatory, quite annoying: “Ok, teachers gave you a mark higher than mine because you are pretty”. It's hard this thing, it's very recurrent, especially in the jazz world [...] I had registered as postgraduate student for the trumpet jazz class, but I couldn't make it: besides the fact that you have to attend regularly – while I also had to work – there it's even harder because all women can do within the jazz world is singing. I really experienced that, I always felt... it wasn't a source of pride – as I think it should be – to be

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9 After the 1999 reform inserting Italian Conservatories in the tertiary level of education the offer of pre-academic music was left to musical lyceums, which however are reduced in number and present a restricted curricular offer.

10 MIUR data on the academic year 2020–21 register nearly 11% of female students for the classes of classical trumpet (76 out of 677 students) while for the classes of jazz trumpet the percentage is to less than 4% (3 out of 76 students, none of the three in postgraduate classes). In the same year female students enrolled in classic sax classes are more than 23% (170 out of 735), but less than in 10% jazz sax classes (24 out of 221).

a woman in jazz, but as something unfeasible. (Leonarda, trumpet player, female, 44, focus group, Pula, 2018).

## b) Occupational segregation

The persistence of gender segregation in music education significantly limits not only the educational experiences available to female musicians, but also their possibility of launching a career as wind players. In what follows I shall discuss the issue of occupational gender segregation, both at the horizontal and vertical level, considering two types of organizational settings for the production of classical music and jazz where wind instruments are widely used.

The first organizational setting is given by the orchestras of the 14 state-funded Italian Lyric-Symphonic Foundations<sup>11</sup>. As shown in the table on the left of figure 2, female players amount to less than a quarter of full-time members in the orchestras (24%). Besides the harp – whose seats, the least numerous with those of tuba, are all taken by women – each section registers a higher percentage of male players. Women represent a significant presence within the rows of flutes (43%) and violins (41%), but a minor one within the wind sections. This is especially the case for brass instruments which, as just seen, are still strongly associated with men already in the educational field; women's presence, however, is relatively low also in the rows of other woodwind instruments (as oboe, clarinet, bassoon), today studied by a significant percentage of female students within Italian Conservatories.

The table on the right of the same figure 2 shows the percentage of female orchestra members assigned a leading role within their row. This indicator can offer us a measure of vertical segregation, clustering men at the top of occupational hierarchies, while leaving women at the bottom. Overall, only 15% of women cover leading roles. With the exception of the harp rows (where, as seen, there aren't male players), women seat much more rarely than their male colleagues as first parts, more prestigious and better remunerated. This holds true even in the case of those sections showing the highest participation of women (as violins or flute), suggesting perhaps a more difficult acceptance of female musicians to stand out against their male colleagues. However, it is interesting to notice that in the woodwind section the proportion of women in leading roles is for some instruments higher than that in all roles, a fact that might reveal the outstanding level of the new generations of female musicians managing to be selected within sections still largely guarded by men.

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11 The Fondazioni Lirico-Sinfoniche are institutions organizing operatic and concert activities related to classical music, largely subsidized by the Italian State on the basis of their recognized contribution to the musical, cultural and social education of the society. Data were collected by the author from each of the 14 Fondazioni's websites, season 2021–22 (accessed 20 February 2022).

*Table 2: Percentage of female members in Italian Lyric-Symphonic Foundations orchestras, season 2021–22: all roles and leading roles. Source: author's elaboration of data from Italian Lyric-Symphonic Foundations' official websites (season 2021–22).*

All roles 2022	MF	%F	Leading roles 2022	MF	%F
VIOLIN	365	40,5	VIOLIN	62	19,4
VIOLA	146	28,8	VIOLA	28	3,6
CELLO	118	20,3	CELLO	30	15,4
DOUBLEBASS	88	6,8	DOUBLEBASS	27	11,1
FLUTE	47	42,6	FLUTE	23	21,7
OBOE	52	17,3	OBOE	23	13,0
CLARINET	55	9,1	CLARINET	25	12,0
BASSOON	53	11,3	BASSOON	24	12,5
HORN	74	5,4	HORN	21	4,8
TRUMPET	54	12,5	TRUMPET	26	3,8
TROMBONE	51	0,0	TROMBONE	24	0,0
TUBA	12	0,0	PERCUSSIONS	23	8,7
PERCUSSIONS	55	10,9	HARP	13	100,0
HARP	13	100,0	TOTAL	349	14,6
TOTAL	1183	24,4			

With reference to the second organizational setting, we chose to focus on the last edition of Umbria Jazz Winter. Umbria Jazz is the oldest and most renowned international jazz festival in Italy (Santoro and Solaroli 2013), taking place since the 1970s during the summer and also offering, since nearly three decades, a shorter winter version. At Umbria Jazz Winter #28 women represented less than 6% of all instrumental musicians involved in the main 17 concerts scheduled between December 2021 and January 2022 and none of them played a wind instrument (although wind players represented nearly 37% of the musicians participating to the festival). The presence of women among instrumental musicians was limited in the case of musicians with a supporting role (11%), but almost inexistent among performers with a leading role, where only one woman (pianist, singer and songwriter) was invited to share the stage with the other 41 male colleagues presented by the official program.<sup>12</sup>

12 Information was retrieved from the program presented in the official website of the Umbria Jazz Festival: <https://www.umbriajazz.it/programma-umbria-jazz-winter-28/> (accessed 20 February 2022). On the issue of gender segregation in jazz production in Italy see also the report realized by the association JazzMine (2021).

*Table 3: Number of players at the Umbria Jazz Winter #28 (2021–22 edition): total number and percentage of female participants, per role. Source: author's elaboration of data from UJ website (accessed 20 February 2022).*

Role	MF	%F
Leading	42	2,4
Supporting	28	10,7
All roles	70	5,7

To explore the reasons behind the enduring segregation of female musicians playing wind instruments in organizations for the production of classical and, especially, jazz music in Italy we shall once more refer to our interviews.

When questioned about the issue of horizontal segregation, several female musicians point to the persistent diffusion in the Italian society of the stereotype representing women as “the weaker sex” – related to a gender binary model defining men as the stronger one – deemed incompatible with the technical skills and the stamina required by the musical profession, especially in the case of wind instruments, and ultimately discriminating them in the labor market. Male musicians, in opposition, often start claiming that the structural discrimination of women in music is an obsolete issue and that today their lower presence is rather due to personal choices. In exemplifying those choices, however, they often reveal essentialist views on women's nature, as either mainly fulfilled by an engaging maternal role requiring them to put the career on the back burner (as suggested in the first quote by a flutist working in a symphonic orchestra); or as usually disinterested in certain music genres, such as jazz, designed as a masculine field (as implied in the second quote by a jazz player and expert):

I don't know, maybe it also depends on the woman's nature (...) That's my educated guess (...) but I think it is very important for a woman to find fulfillment on the family front, so to become a real woman, to procreate... so I think this role takes her away a bit of the energy [needed] to achieve her career goals... (flutist, male, 30, phone interview, 2016).

In the past, yes, it was a cultural question, but now it has been overcome. Probably not many of them [female musicians] are interested [in jazz], so that the final result is that in a festival of 100 musicians there are maybe 10 women, because the sector is built in this way. An interesting thing to notice, in my opinion, is that when women are present, they are extremely good, maybe because there is a greater selection at the basis. (guitar player and jazz expert, 55, interview, Berchidda, 2016).

The closing sentence of the second quote refers to a comment shared by both male and female interviewees: those women that manage to establish themselves as renowned wind musicians in their respective music world are usually “super-talented” artists. In the process of gaining full recognition in a field where men remain the aspirational model of reference and the main source of legitimation, “super-talented” female musicians are often labeled as “masculine” – with reference to their sound, their way of playing, or even their

persona – by male teachers, colleagues or commentators. In the case of “ordinary artists” (Perrenoud and Bois 2017), however, most female wind musicians experience a harder time than their colleagues in building a musical career.

Female interviewees note how the segregation experienced by female musicians is not different from those experienced by women in other working sectors, commonly described with the “glass ceiling” or “sticky floor” metaphors (the first one referring to the invisibility of obstacles hampering women’s ascent to the higher rungs of the career ladder, the second to the mechanisms gluing them to the lower ones). Again, male interviewees tend to explain the lower presence of female wind players in the higher professional levels pointing to issues related to femininity, rather than to structural gender asymmetries. In the following quote, a principal flutist of a symphonic orchestra observes how talented female musicians often refigure their priorities after motherhood, indirectly implying that this hinders them to reach the highest standards in the profession, requiring a total dedication incompatible with caring duties:

I have noticed that for women, at a [certain] moment in life, different priorities arrive (...) For someone like me, music is my fulfilment, [totally] absorbing, my thing (...) Instead I see many [female] colleagues, friends, [who are] amazing, who at some point say: “Yes, but it is not the most important thing in the world, there are other [things]”. I don’t want to say that it’s motherhood, because otherwise we fall back into the argument that after a woman becomes a mother there’s nothing left. But it is a fact that, at some point, they have, you [women] have the rationality to understand that [the profession] is an important thing, but it is not a priority, it’s not the one thing that absorbs all your energy... (flutist, male, 50, interview, Rome, 2016).

Indeed, the balance between work and family represents one of the main factors influencing women’s participation in the labor market. In Italy, where the scarcity of caregiving services is accompanied by a strong gender asymmetry in the distribution of domestic unpaid work, balancing costs are mainly borne by women (Maestripietri and In-sarauto 2020: 30).

### **c) Becoming a female wind player**

Female musicians interviewed for my research are those that have managed to overcome most of the obstacles that, as just seen, still pave the way of female wind players in Italy. An interesting aspect to investigate are thus the resources and mechanisms that enabled them to overcome those obstacles.

Role modeling and mentoring emerge as two crucial aspects for women to live the association between gender and instrument as unproblematic. This happens in the case of girls coming from musical families, used to see wind instruments at home, or those from villages with a local band, where nowadays female members are fully integrated, or those who happened to meet open-minded teachers, avoiding gender-typing in music. The girl of the following quote felt attraction for the sax because her female cousin played it, besides the fact she liked the glittering appearance of the instrument:



My idea was to enter [the band] playing the sax because my cousin had it: I liked the fact that it was golden [*the other girls of the band laugh, n/a*] and that she played it! (Adele, tenor sax player, female, 18, focus group, Fluminimaggiore, 2019).

Role model may be seen at work both in terms of seeking other examples of female wind players or in looking at oneself as such, as in the case of those players “pioneering” in more secluded domains (Nenić 2015: 149, Wehr 2016: 481). This was the case, for instance, of the sousaphonist of an all-female marching band, seeing her performances as a sort of “double mission”: the mission to assert the reality of a female sousaphonist and, at the same time, to disclose to others “the possibility that a woman can make it”:

I don't know if there are other female sousaphonist in Italy (...) for me to play it, [means] that if a woman looked at me thinking: “Wow!” and she would feel the desire to play, I would be extremely pleased. I feel it as a sort of “mission”, both the mission to play it and also the mission to disclose the possibility that a woman can make it. (Nicoletta, trumpet and sousaphone player, female, 43, focus group, Pula, 2018).

Another factor contributing to make female wind instrument players feel comfortable in their role is the normalization of the experience of playing wind instruments within organizational settings offering a comfortable and familiar environment, where learning takes a collective dimension based on cooperative relations between members. This was the case of musicians who started their journey in the local band of their village, or who participated to more or less stable ensembles touring together. As in the experience reported in the following quote, the collective dimension of learning may take an inter-generational depth, if linked to the exchange of knowledge between a more experienced and a younger member, the latter motivated from the supervision of the former, at its turn rewarded from the recognition of the proficiency achieved:

For example, in the last concert I was [playing] close to the little girls and I really liked it, eh, because you feel proud of your journey, since you understand how much they, from my [point of] view, needed attention from someone older, playing better: from their point of view I am really good, [I represent] something to strive for... and this is a beautiful thing! (Adele, tenor sax player, female, 18, focus group, Fluminimaggiore, 2019).

Other times, as in the next quote, the collective dimension of learning concerns the crossing over of technical or interpretative skills requiring members to pool knowledge derived from their different individual training paths or to adopt a “mutual aid” approach to performance, conceived in terms of teamwork towards which they share responsibility. This collective dimension of music making allows to define skills not in terms of inborn talent of exceptionally gifted individuals, but as a proficiency to be patiently developed through practice and shared experience. Similarly, leadership is not defined in terms of superiority or control over other members: the saxophonist quoted below, who guides an all-female street band, describes leadership in terms of a responsibility shared with the other band members, sometimes needing only a gaze or a breath to coordinate their ac-

tion, each acknowledged specific assets constitutive of the specific character of the band as a whole:

I am the leader, but it is right to decide together who makes the solos, who plays the [main] themes, then we alternate one section with the other. For instance, within the saxophone section I've always done classical music, Tatiana does jazz, so she's great with solos. So, it's also a matter of managing ourselves: "Hey, don't worry, two bars before the solo, take a rest" ... But it is more a management internal to the sections, rather than dictated by me; even a look, a breath, sometimes, during a choreography: "Hey, I'm tired". Sometimes there are also quarrels [*mimicking a riled dialogue between two band members, n/a*]: "Hey, I told you I was tired!"; "But I didn't look at you!" [*the other girls laugh, n/a*]. (Ylenia, tenor sax player, female, 25, focus group, Pula, 2018).

## Conclusions

In contemporary Western societies, the participation of female musicians to music worlds, although formally granted, is still limited by a series of stereotypes, social expectations and tacit rules defined according to the old patriarchal order, creating gender-segregated educational and occupational paths, although to lesser degree than in the past. Our discussion has shown that in the last decades the traditional association of wind instruments with masculinity has considerably declined in the case of woodwind instruments in Italy (to the point of reversal for the flute), while it persisted in the case of wind instruments and, remarkably, in the instrumental jazz courses. Gender typing seems to be even more persistent in the musical labor market, where we have observed the persistence of gender segregation both at the horizontal and vertical level, in organization of musical production, again more striking in the case of jazz.

The female wind players interviewed for my research, although presenting different educational and professional profiles or belonging to different generations and contexts, point to similar experiences contributing to build self-efficacy for successful participation in a field still mainly associated with masculinity: the intergenerational encounter with role models or mentors, the participation to organizational settings based on cooperative – rather than exclusively competitive – relations between musicians, the adherence to a leadership model not defined in terms of superiority or control, but as a responsibility role shared with the other players.

Those experiences, however, have an occasional character related to the specific path of each musician (and thus refer to factors such as family background and territorial origin, personal resources or chance encounters), more than to collective change towards greater equality within music worlds and society as a whole. A series of measures, pilot projects and networks have been developed<sup>13</sup> in the last several years in Italy, often along

13 To give a few examples collected during my participation to the panel *Diversity, Inclusion and Gender Equality* of the National Conference on *The Future of Music Education* (CNSI, Conservatory of Florence, 25–26 May 2022): in order to promote a greater equality both in music education and the music industry symphonic orchestras are gradually introducing anonymous audition rounds

the lines of what has already been launched in other Western countries, in order to raise awareness on the issue of gender segregation in music and to offer female musicians, as well as organization for music education and production, a series of tools and resources, promoting a greater gender balance in music. For the same purpose, academic research on gender and music might reach a wider audience and scope, disseminating reliable documentation of past and present activities of female musicians operating in different music worlds and evidence on the persistency of different forms of gender segregation, often hidden behind formal equality of opportunities.

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in their recruitment procedures, while music associations and organizations are joining international projects (as the *Keychange* initiative or the *PRIfhME* partnership) or creating national networks (as *Equally*, *Curating Diversity* or *JazzMine*).

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