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The Other Voice. A Chronological Essay on Women Improvisers in Switzerland, the STV and Beyond

In the early 1970s, the world of Free Improvisation and Free Jazz had very few women among its pioneers. Irène Schweizer was for a long time the only one in Switzerland, as was Maggie Nicols in the United Kingdom. They performed surrounded by men, and imposed themselves in a milieu that was largely dominated by men. Strangely enough, those women are still often forgotten in the canon of free improvisation pioneers.

In Switzerland, when STV opened its doors to improvisers in 1989, there were already a number of acknowledged female improvisers who played a leading role. Personalities such as Charlotte Hug and Franziska Baumann were instrumental in representing improvisers on the STV, where composers and performers were in the majority. Today, many organisations that promote improvised music continue to work towards egalitarian inclusion, notably by setting quotas. This article uses selected examples and interviews to show the growing importance of women's contributions to the field of improvisation, especially in Switzerland and in the bosom of the STV.

Introduction

Free improvisation flourished in Europe and the USA from the 1960s onwards as a result of encounters between different cultural currents, most notably jazz and avantgarde contemporary music. Generally speaking, men were largely predominant among the pioneers of the genre everywhere, whatever their particular field (jazz or contemporary music). The female minority among these pioneers is often neglected in the canon of the most important improvisers. On a global scale, artists as significant as Maggie Nicols, Pauline Oliveros and Joëlle Léandre are regularly excluded from an (almost) all-male canon.¹

Switzerland is no exception. Free improvisation initially emerged in Switzerland among musicians with a predominantly jazz background such as Peter K Frey, Pierre Favre and Irène Schweizer. The last of these was a colossus. She was active in Switzerland and abroad, notably with the Feminist Improvising Group (FIG), which had been founded in London in 1977 by Maggie Nicols and Lindsay Cooper and which Schweizer joined in 1978. Until then, the few women who practised free improvisation were almost always the only woman in an otherwise all-male group. FIG established itself as the first all-female free improvisation group. Its influence was enormous, also among many women improvisers in Switzerland of the following generation.

1 Zorn 2000; Netti et al. 2001; Cannone 2016.

Free improvisation was a marginal phenomenon at the time, and remains so today. The stereotype of a free improvisation concert is often confined to a niche audience with a majority of improvisers. A milestone was reached in 1989, when the Swiss Musicians' Association (in German: Schweizerischer Tonkünstlerverein, hereinafter STV) introduced a radical change to its rules. Until then, it had been exclusively an association of composers, conductors, performers and writers/musicologists in so-called 'serious music' ('E-Musik'), but now it decided to accept new members representing other methods of musical creation, including improvised music. Before this paradigm shift, its statutes of 1984 had stated that "Composers, conductors and choirmasters, soloists, writers on music and music directors of Swiss nationality may become active members",² but the statutes of 2005, after being revised, stipulated that "Persons who are professionally active in the field of contemporary music or in the Swiss music scene, including composers, conductors and choir conductors, performing soloists, improvisers, writers on music and music directors may become active members."³ No new version of the statutes was published between 1984 and 2005 (!), and in 1989 it was decided that changes to the admission criteria should not be recorded in the statutes. The 1989 report of the then President of the STV, Daniel Fueter, stated: "The change in procedure does not have to be laid down in the statutes, nor does it run counter to statutory provisions. It is up to the Committee to make the practical experiment."⁴ The new features included the compulsory presence of an improviser on the STV committee, which some saw as a sign of genuine interest in this practice, but others as the token presence of a representative of a marginal minority. Charlotte Hug, who believed the former, has stated that "composers are really also interested in qualities or in the expertise, in the research of improvisers",⁵ whereas Jonas Kocher has explained that "I was asked to represent improvisation and experimental music. [...] But afterwards, I often felt a bit like a token."⁶ By this time, more women were already active in the field of free improvisation, and some even testified that, unlike previous generations of women, they had meanwhile benefited from a certain amount of preferential treatment for their gender.

This article traces the evolution of women in free improvisation in Switzerland. It is based on numerous testimonials and interviews with influential figures in the field of free improvisation, both in Switzerland and abroad. There have been considerable reciprocal influences between the Swiss and international scenes that have helped to shape the artistic identity of most Swiss representatives of this musical practice. I interviewed several women improvisers as well as several men who have observed the evolution of the female presence over several decades.

2 "Peuvent devenir membres actifs les compositeurs, chefs d'orchestre et chefs de chœur, les solistes, les musicographes et les régisseurs musicaux de nationalité suisse." (STV-St 1984, p. 5). All French or German quotations translated by Raphaël Sudan, if not otherwise mentioned.

3 "Peuvent devenir membres actifs les personnes actives professionnellement dans le domaine de la musique contemporaine ou sur la scène musicale suisse, notamment les compositrices et compositeurs, les chefs et cheffes d'orchestre et de chœur, les solistes interprètes ainsi que improvisatrices et improvisateurs, les musicographes et les régisseurs musicaux." (STV-St 2005, p. 4).

4 "Le changement de procédure ne doit pas être fixé statutairement et il ne va pas à l'encontre des dispositions statutaires. Il appartient au Comité d'en faire l'expérience pratique." (STV-AR 1989, p. 35).

5 "Und so habe ich gemerkt, eigentlich schon sehr früh, dass sich Komponistinnen und Komponisten wirklich auch für Qualitäten oder für Know-how, für Recherche von Improvisatoren interessieren." (Hug 2023, [00:34:16]).

6 "On m'a demandé pour être un peu le représentant de l'improvisation, des musiques expérimentales. [...] Mais après je me suis quand même souvent senti un peu l'alibi." (Kocher 2022, part 2, [00:13:14]).

1. Precepts

a) conceptualising and contextualising

Free improvisation is considered here with one of its fundamental components in mind, namely that it is first and foremost a collective practice. It can mirror a social generality, an egalitarian ideal in which everyone has the same importance, the same place, the same right to speak. As Christoph Baumann, one of Switzerland's pioneering jazz pianists and improvisers, describes it: "Free improvisation is a democratic form. This means that completely different behavioural qualities also come into play."⁷

I shall not dwell here on the different stylistic and geographical origins of free improvisation, as this is already the topic of numerous books. For the sake of chronological understanding, I shall mention that in Europe, the first improvised music groups date from the late 1960s (e.g. Spontaneous Music Ensemble, London 1966; Musica Elettronica Viva, Rome 1966; Instant Composers Pool, Amsterdam 1967). Female musicians are notably absent from these pioneering free improvisation groups.⁸

The period around 1968 is crucial to understanding the issues that saw the emergence of free improvisation (in an overly masculine guise) and the birth of women's liberation movements. The European revolts of May 1968 and the efforts at emancipation from the different forms of subordination of which improvisers complained are not necessarily linked, though it is hardly a coincidence that they took place at the same time. Alan Durant, a lecturer at the University of Strathclyde, has stated with regard to the social nature of free improvisation: "Free improvisation questions how music functions in society, especially in relation to power, to become 'a point of counter-identification against systems of control, hierarchy and subordination'."⁹ That being said, the social and political statements issued by improvisers did not initially address women's issues, as Julie Dawn Smith states in an article on the question of feminism in free improvisation:

Neither free improvisation nor free jazz, however, extended their critiques to include the aesthetic, economic, or political liberation of women. For the most part, a practice of freedom that resisted gender oppression and oppression on the basis of sexual difference was excluded from the liberatory impulses of male-dominated improvising communities.¹⁰

Yet female improvisers were already active at this time: Pauline Oliveros, who began using graphic scores as early as the late 1950s; Maggie Nicols, who made her stage debut as a cabaret dancer and jazz singer and joined the Spontaneous Music Ensemble as a vocalist in 1968, along with John Stevens, Trevor Watts, Johnny Dyani, Derek Bailey, all considered pioneers in the high pantheon of free improvised music; Irène Schweizer, one of Switzerland's most important free jazz pioneers, who in 1968 joined the drummer Pierre Favre, another Swiss free jazz stalwart, and the bassist Peter Kowald, to form the Pierre Favre Trio.¹¹ It is notable that a majority of these female pioneers came from the world of jazz, just like the male pioneers of free improvisation.

7 "Freie Improvisation ist eben eine basisdemokratische Form. Das heißt, ganz andere Verhaltensqualitäten kommen auch ins Spiel." (BaumannC 2022, [01:21:39]).

8 Neeman 2014, pp. 25–33.

9 Durant 1989, p. 270.

10 Smith 2004, p. 229.

11 Schweizer n.d.

The harsh reality is that the few women pioneers of free improvisation were often the only woman in their group, situated in a predominantly male environment and surrounded by other musicians who were raised with the largely male canon of improvisers.

In their testimonies, these women often mention the difficulties they had in finding an equal place with men in these groups. Georgina Born, an anthropologist and former FIG member, has stated that:

[I]n these bands and ensembles, in different ways and to variable degrees, we found ourselves in situations implicitly saturated with gender dynamics – tiny instants or sustained passages of interactive sonic domination in which our musical ‘voice’ was rendered somehow inappropriate, or was overwhelmed and could not emerge or be heard [...].¹²

b) The FIG

A turning point in the history of women and free improvisation came in 1977, when Maggie Nicols and Lindsay Cooper founded the Feminist Improvising Group (FIG).¹³ FIG meant that female improvisers no longer needed to be accepted into a male-dominated group, since the group was made up exclusively of women. Instead, the challenge for the entire group was to find a place for itself in the midst of other, male-dominated improvising groups. The founders and early members of FIG were Anglo-Saxon, but in 1978 they were joined by the Swiss pianist Irène Schweizer.

One of FIG’s main ideas, at least in Maggie Nicols’s conception of it, was to give equal importance to feminist activism and artistic practice. What distinguished FIG from the other groups in which its protagonists had previously played (as women surrounded by men) was that FIG’s music sought to embody a certain femininity and to distance itself in part from the high-energy playing of the free improvisation ensembles emblematic of the period. Female musicians here asserted themselves as women, whereas in their previous groups, they were often accepted because their musical playing and attitude supposedly embodied an element of masculinity.¹⁴ Among the elements that set them apart from other groups was their use of humour. This was also used by some men to criticise FIG, as Irène Schweizer explains:

We were not that serious, like men, they play that thing and they think they are the greatest, they take it so seriously but for us it was more fun but I think it was still good music, but we presented it differently. It was the humor that men couldn’t take. The kind of humor we presented was too much for them [...].¹⁵

Women’s struggle for acceptance in a masculine environment chimed with the then currents of socialist feminism, as described by Allan G. Johnson:

The primary goal has been to allow women to do what men do in the ways that men do it, whether in science, the professions, business, or government. [...] It is easier to allow women to assimilate into patriarchal society than to question society itself.¹⁶

12 Born 2017, p. 54.

13 Cf. Smith 2004, p. 227: “escape the confinement of a white-dominated capitalist culture”, see also *ibid.*, pp. 231–245.

14 Cf. Reason Myers 2002, p. 54.

15 Irène Schweizer as quoted in Reason Myers 2002, p. 76.

16 Johnson 1997, p. 13. See also Reason Myers 2002, p. 54.

However, FIG's decision to extricate themselves from this minority situation of women in a male environment in order to militate, not for the acceptance of women in a nonetheless patriarchal society, but for a societal change that placed women, their art, their voices and their differences on an equal footing with men, positioned FIG in line with the values defended by the theories of radical feminism. These theories became current towards the end of the 1960s and rejected an essentialist vision of social gender roles. They were based on the idea that the oppression of women is a social construct, and that denouncing it is the first step towards opposing it and bringing about societal change.¹⁷

I shall not digress here into concepts of femininity, the subjectivity of pseudo-masculine or feminine musical characteristics, or the specific issues at stake within FIG in relation to radical feminism, as I have already covered this topic extensively in another article dedicated to the subject.¹⁸ But it can be useful to summarise a few general concepts in order to avoid any confusion. I here draw on definitions that can be derived from a binary conception of gender and the role of gender – not by omission or negligence, but because feminist activism as conveyed by FIG (and *Feminist Improvising Group* includes the term Feminism) took shape in a binary declension of gender and the inequalities that flow from it.

Peter Barry's book on cultural theories offers three definitions from the period of FIG's emergence that are relevant here, though they are historical definitions that correspond to the time and would not be viable today as they stand:

1. *Feminism* is a political movement. A *feminist* is an actor who defends a specific political position, which consists in advocating real equality between men and women in private and public life.

2. *Female* is a matter of biology which defines the organs of the person given by birth, as opposed to *gender*, which has been considered a social construction in radical feminist theory.

3. *Femininity* is a set of culturally defined characteristics that can largely vary according to cultures and contexts, and that can be applied either to men or women.¹⁹

The feminine or masculine characteristics we attribute to music are therefore cultural constructs. This notion is essential, as it is one of the axes Lindsay Cooper used to bring about change, as she explained in an interview with Valerie Wilmer in 1979:

The problem is that such an approach to women's music, contrasting it with male-dominated music, means – and this is as true for some musicians as it is for listeners – that you accept society's definitions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. If women think their music needs to be 'feminine' in the way these definitions mean, in other words, soft, melodious, etc., they're absolutely not straying from these concepts. I mean, when we hear something 'powerful', 'virile', we obviously associate it with 'masculinity', because it's men who hold the power in our society.²⁰

17 Toupin 2003.

18 Sudan forthcoming.

19 Barry 2002, p. 122.

20 "Le problème c'est qu'une telle approche de la musique des femmes, l'opposant à la musique dominée par les hommes, signifie – et c'est aussi valable pour certains musiciens que pour les auditeurs – que vous acceptez les définitions que la société donne de la 'masculinité' et de la 'féminité'. Si les femmes pensent que leur musique doit être 'féminine' comme le veulent ces définitions, c'est-à-dire douce, mélodieuse, etc., elles ne s'éloignent absolument pas de ces concepts. Je veux dire que quand nous entendons quelque chose de 'puissant', de 'viril', nous l'associons évidemment à la 'masculinité', parce que ce sont les hommes qui détiennent le pouvoir dans notre société." (Cooper/Wilmer 1979, p. 29).

FIG staged a number of improvised performances featuring strong theatrical elements in which women were caricatured in their everyday life and tasks. This was certainly emphasised by Maggie Nicols's background as a cabaret dancer, which also enabled her to experience from the inside the harsh realities of some of the women she spoke out for, through FIG and feminist activism in general. Her ideal was for FIG to place as much emphasis on the artistic aspect of free improvisation as it did on feminist activism and the inclusion of women of all backgrounds and musical levels.²¹

It is essential to understand the historical importance of FIG's existence because it opened the way for other women to explore the field of improvisation. This was one of Maggie Nicols's main objectives: "it was very exciting to introduce improvisation to a whole load of women who might not have gone otherwise because it was so male-dominated."²²

The community approach to improvisation championed by Maggie Nicols was noted by many of the improvisers I spoke to, as she organised 'gatherings' every Monday. Jacques Demierre describes these gatherings as very collective events: "Very social. Very social. Community-based, welcoming people from all over."²³ This shows the extent to which the openness championed by Maggie Nicols had an international impact, not least among Swiss male and female artists, many of whom played with her.

c) Irène Schweizer and Switzerland

When it comes to the history of free jazz and free improvisation in Switzerland, Irène Schweizer is omnipresent in the scholarly discourse. She inevitably represents the first response when asked about the place of women in these circles, as Christoph Baumann testifies: "In Switzerland, women played an important role, because they were there very early. Of course, Irène is the figurehead, isn't she? Then of course there are the singers, Doro Schürch, Franziska Baumann."²⁴

The question of the place of women in jazz and improvised music has been extensively addressed by Marie Buscatto in her book *Femmes du Jazz*, in which she discusses not only the minority of women active in this field in France, but also the way in which their role is segmented. She uses the figures and percentages of active jazzmen and jazzwomen in France given in *Jazz 2004, Le guide-annuaire du jazz en France*, which lists approximately 2,000 musicians, to draw the following conclusions: Among all jazz vocalists active in France, 65% were women, whereas jazz instrumentalists accounted for just 4% of women.²⁵ A quick glance at the list of graduates from the Swiss Jazz School (Bern)²⁶ gives us another corroborating sample. The list of pre-1977 graduates is, however, very vague and does not appear to have been updated, as Thomas Gartmann has observed.²⁷ It includes just one woman, the pianist Marianna Polistena. There are three more women between 1977 and 1993: Antonia Giordano (guitar, 1986), Hermine Fakler (vocals, 1991) and Maru Rieben (drums, 1993). Therefore, Irène Schweizer represents a triple minority: that of a queer female jazz instrumentalist.

21 Georgina Born as quoted in Reason Myers 2002, pp. 78f.

22 Maggie Nicols as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 79.

23 "Très social. Vraiment. Communautaire, qui accueille les gens de provenance." (Demierre 2022, [00:29:39]).

24 "In der Schweiz eine große Rolle, weil sie waren sehr früh dabei. Natürlich Galionsfigur ist Irène, oder? Dann kommen natürlich auch die Sängerinnen, also Doro Schürch, Franziska Baumann." (BaumannC 2022, [01:15:18]).

25 Buscatto 2007, pp. 13f.

26 SJS 2007, pp. 73f.

27 Gartmann 2017, p. 25.

Schweizer undoubtedly acted as a role model for subsequent generations of jazzwomen and improvisers. For the drummer Maru Rieben, Schweizer was exemplary both for women in the world of jazz and for feminist activism in general: “It’s the previous generation and she was a frontrunner. So that is very important”.²⁸ Katharina Weber – pianist, improviser and recent retiree from the Bern Academy of the Arts HKB, where she taught free improvisation – feels the same: “So for me, Irène Schweizer was the great role model. But I also really admired her because she was a woman and so alone on the male scene.”²⁹

Many other female improvisers, such as Franziska Baumann, attest to the importance of Irène Schweizer, also with regard to other aspects of her life that might seem less obvious at first glance, but which were significant to many other female improvisers. One of these is the fact that most female improvisers have emancipated themselves from the role of the mother and have decided not to have children:

In the 90s, I was the only woman I knew in Switzerland who improvised and who had a family. All the other women I knew, Doro Schürch, Irène Schweizer, Joëlle Léandre, Maggie Nicols, all these women who were actually still around, they had no family. [...] Even my colleague, Charlotte Hug, she could never have imagined having a child, because it was simply not possible to combine the two.³⁰

We can put this into perspective, however, by citing a few other female improvisers such as the pianist Claudia Binder (1959) and the saxophonist Co Streiff (1959), both of whom had children. One wonders if the decision to not have children was a conscious one, and if so, whether it was a sign of feminist emancipation, or if those choices were just normal life trajectories? The question is a sensitive one, not least because one would hardly ask such a question of a man, and the deciding issues are too numerous to draw any real conclusions.

Nevertheless, it seems that a significant proportion of professionally active female improvisers at the time did in fact choose not to have children. The new online project “Mothers in Jazz” focuses mainly on the subject of maternity among female musicians. This series, started by the vocalist Nicky Schrire, “shines a light on the very specific role of being both a mother and a performing jazz musician.”³¹ In cultural terms, a woman’s maternal role has tended to take precedence over all other aspects of her personality. Charlotte Hug recounts the reaction of the English saxophonist Caroline Kraabel when she was pregnant and questioned about motherhood: “And when you walk around the city with a stroller, people always come to you [and say], ‘Oh, nice! Is it a boy or a girl?’ So you attract people, but she always played the saxophone. In her interaction with people – she didn’t talk, she played.”³²

28 “Es ist die vorhergehende Generation und sie war eine Vorkämpferin. Also das ist sehr wichtig.” (Rieben 2023, [00:10:35]).

29 “Also für mich war Irène Schweizer das große Vorbild. Ich habe wirklich auch, weil sie eine Frau ist, ganz sicher habe ich sie so bewundert und sie war ja so solitär in der männlichen Szene drin.” (Weber 2023, [00:32:25]).

30 “In den 90er-Jahren war ich die einzige Frau, die ich kannte in der Schweiz, die improvisiert hat und die eine Familie hatte. Alle anderen, die ich kannte, Doro Schürch, Irène Schweizer, Joëlle Léandre, Maggie Nicols, all diese Frauen, die eigentlich noch da waren, die hatten keine Familie. [...] Auch meine Kollegin, Charlotte Hug, die hätte sich nie vorstellen können, ein Kind zu haben, weil das einfach nicht möglich war zu vereinen.” (BaumannF 2022, part 2, [00:14:42]).

31 LondonJazz News 2023.

32 “Und wenn man nämlich mit dem Kinderwagen durch die Stadt geht, kommen immer Leute: ‘Oh, nice! Is it a boy or a girl?’ Also man zieht Leute an, und sie hat aber immer Saxofon gespielt. Die Interaktion mit den Leuten – sie hat nicht geredet, sie hat gespielt.” (Hug 2023, [01:20:44]).

The panel of female improvisers active in the 1990s includes a constellation of different sexual orientations, both heterosexual and homosexual – or, rather, ‘queer’, since this term, and queer theories, first emerged in the 1990s. The question of nomenclature is important, as some of these terms may have had undesirable connotations for the people in question. Should we say lesbian, queer, or gay? In the biographical book on Irène Schweizer edited by Christian Broeking³³ she is called a lesbian, though she was defined as a queer activist at a 2022 panel at the University of Zurich dedicated to the topic “Culture, Conflict, Commerce. On the Global History of Jazz in Switzerland”.³⁴ As for Maggie Nicols, she describes how her encounter with Lindsay Cooper made her a little nervous on account of his “innocently flirtatious” behaviour, and that she needed to assert herself as a “lesbian feminist” to free herself from her nerves.³⁵

Whatever the term chosen to describe a non-heterosexual orientation, it would be inappropriate to link this to a choice to have children or not. For a queer woman like Irène Schweizer, born in 1941, it would have been possible to become a mother, even if it was much more difficult than today, especially on a legal level. In an interview with Mirella Wepf in 2016, Schweizer said: “I have chosen not to have children.”³⁶ She and women like Lindsay Cooper had to demonstrate a lot of courage when making their choices. If they had wanted to have children, they would certainly have done so. The New York-based queer drummer Allison Miller (1975), for example, lives alone with her two children and manages to have an international career as a performing musician.³⁷ This makes me want to know the real reasons behind the decision not to have children that was common to the vast majority of women improvisers in the 1990s, who instead dedicated their lives to their musical practice.

There is another reality that led most female improvisers to choose between music and parenthood: their material reality as a musician, particularly in a field like free improvisation that generates very little money but that requires a full-time sense of dedication that simply doesn’t leave much room for parenthood. As important as she has been in the world of jazz, free jazz and improvisation, Irène Schweizer admits to having lived very modestly throughout her life.³⁸ Maru Rieben has also explained this: “Even though I’m cis, I don’t have children either [...]. I had to make a choice, clearly. I couldn’t do both [music and parenthood]. And I have decided now for the music.”³⁹ The Seattle-based American saxophonist Kate Olson has also spoken about this: “I don’t have any children, and I don’t have any intention to have any children. So that is something that I think definitely makes my path in music and especially in improvised music where, you know, sometimes you’re traveling a lot for not a lot of money.” Conversely, most men active in improvised music don’t have to make a choice between career and parenthood, as Olson also explains:

All of the people that I know, in Seattle, that are doing touring and are really actively performing as their main career, are men. [...] And most of them have families, most of them have children. And in their family arrangements, the female partner is the one that stays home with the kids, that does the majority of the childcare, that is around at home so that the kids can have a parent

33 Broeking 2016.

34 Fischer-Tiné/Ligtenberg 2022.

35 Nicols 2013.

36 “Ich habe immer bescheiden gelebt und mich wie viele andere Musiker meiner Generation gegen Kinder entschieden.” (Wepf 2016).

37 LondonJazz News 2023.

38 Wepf 2016.

39 “Obschon ich cis bin, habe ich auch keine Kinder, das ist ein Grund. Ich musste mich entscheiden, ganz klar. Ich konnte nicht beides machen. Und ich habe mich jetzt für die Musik entschieden.” (Rieben 2023, [00:31:11]).

around while the male partner is out on tour. [...] The biology kind of dictates that very young children need their mother. Right. And that is something that is kind of ... You kind of can't get around.⁴⁰

There is therefore a set of cultural and biological parameters that place performing female musicians on an unequal footing with men.

The question of eroticism and internal relationships within a musical group may also be another reason why homosexual women have somehow found it easier to integrate into men's groups, as there is no ambiguity involved. According to Franziska Baumann: "As soon as there's a woman in it, there's always the whole eroticism at play with young people. [...] When you're on tour with someone or you're on tour with people, of course those flirtations play into it, and you have to take such a clear stand."⁴¹

Finally, there's the question of femininity, or the feminine attributes that can be associated culturally with a particular musical quality. Irène Schweizer was the first to speak of her own status as a woman in relation to the characteristics of her playing: "I'm a woman, and of course I'm a female jazz musician, but that doesn't mean that I play female music."⁴² In fact, even if we acknowledge the subjectivity involved when talking about femininity and masculinity – the ethnomusicologist Ruth Stone, for example, has said that "definitions of maleness and femaleness may be widely divergent in different parts of the world"⁴³ – it has to be said that in the Western cultural context, Irène Schweizer's appearance, personality and playing convey a set of characteristics that Franziska Baumann has deemed rather 'masculine' according to the stereotypes of the time: "She had this high energetic type of playing, she could easily keep up with the men and she didn't embody femininity on stage so to speak. Short hair, simple clothes, just like the guys."⁴⁴ It is obvious that Schweizer's powerful, virtuosic piano playing, in which she admits the very strong influence of Cecil Taylor, was ultimately very similar to that of her male peers of the same period such as Evan Parker, Han Bennink or Alexander von Schlippenbach, who also held her in very high esteem.⁴⁵

So, without in any way intending to minimise Irène Schweizer's importance in the world of jazz and free improvisation, or her struggle to legitimise the place of women in these spheres, it may be that she simply was unable to provide a model of integration for *all* the women improvisers who followed, and who had to continue their struggle with different degrees of femininity to have access to the same opportunities as men.

Irène Schweizer was never a member of the STV, but she was invited as the principal guest artist to the first Tonkünstlerfest (the annual STV festival) that was dedicated entirely to free improvisation. It took place in La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1994, where she performed a duo set with the French double-bassist Joëlle Léandre. But Schweizer was by no means absent from the official improvisation-related scene in Switzerland. In 1975, she co-founded the Musiker-Kooperative Schweiz (MKS) with Michel Seignier and Peter K Frey. The latter has explained

40 Olson 2022, [00:12:24].

41 "Sobald eine Frau drin ist, es spielt bei jungen Leuten auch immer wieder die ganze Erotik. [...] Wenn du mit jemandem auf Tournee bist oder mit Leuten auf Tournee bist, da spielen diese Flirtereien natürlich auch mit und man muss so klar Stellung beziehen." (BaumannF 2022, part 2, [00:16:31]).

42 Rusch/Schweizer 1991, p. 3.

43 Stone 2008.

44 BaumannF 2022, part 2, [00:19:26].

45 Cf. Reason Myers 2002, p. 76.

how this came about: “We founded the so-called MKS. [...] Michel and Irène and I, we actually gave the initial spark, but others joined us.”⁴⁶

In 1997, the MKS merged with the Verein Improvisierender Musiker in der Schweiz (‘Association of improvising musicians in Switzerland’, V.I.M.S) to form the Schweizer Musik Syndikat/ Syndicat des musiciens Suisses (SMS), whose original board also included Franziska Baumann. Irène Schweizer was also a board member of Intakt Records, a Zurich-based label founded in 1984 that promoted equal rights and advocates for minorities. A milestone took place in 1986 when the Intakt label recorded Irène Schweizer and the South African drummer Louis Moholo as part of protests against apartheid. The current committee of Intakt is almost equally balanced between the sexes, with four men and three women.

Last but not least, as a Schaffhausen native, Irène Schweizer has played an important role in the Schaffhauser Jazz Festival that has also established itself as an advocate of gender equality and of promoting women in jazz. Symbolically, Irène Schweizer gave a solo concert to open the first edition of the festival on May 16, 1990. This took place just a few weeks after the Swiss canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden had voted for the last time against granting women the right to vote. This ironic fact is recounted in the editorial of the programme for the 27th Schaffhauser Jazz Festival of 2016, which took the radical step of programming a vast majority of women as bandleaders, with Irène Schweizer naturally playing a principal role.⁴⁷

2. The STV

a) The Daniel Fueter years

Other associations and institutions such as Geneva’s AMR (Association pour l’encouragement de la Musique impRovisée), founded in 1973, shared similar aesthetic convictions to MKS, namely to “promote improvised and other types of progressive music”.⁴⁸ The WIM Zurich (Werkstatt für Improvisierte Musik) and the WIM Bern were venues that made free improvisation possible. However, this practice remained marginal and overshadowed by the ‘elite’ music promoted and played by member artists of the STV who determinedly distanced themselves from improvisation.

By this time, the barrier between ‘E-Musik’ (*Ernste Musik*, serious music) and ‘U-Musik’ (*Unterhaltungsmusik*, light music, which includes popular and commercial music genres) was very noticeable, especially within the STV. In other words, musicians adept at written contemporary music often had little interest or even disdain for jazz and improvised music, as Hélène Sulzer, general secretary of the STV between 1981 and 1997, testifies:

There was E-Musik. So the term E-Musik was already monstrous. [...] And then there were the others [...]. Let’s just say that the barrier between E-Musik and the others was much stronger for the E-Musik musicians than for the others. The others were much more open.⁴⁹

46 “Dann haben wir aber eine sogenannte die MKS (Musiker-Kooperative Schweiz) gegründet. [...] Michel und Irène und ich, wir haben eigentlich die Initialzündung gegeben. Dann sind aber andere dazugekommen.” (Frey 2021, [00:58:37]).

47 ASJ 2016.

48 “Förderung der improvisierten Musik und progressiver anderer Musikarten” (Meyer 1989, p. 19).

49 “Il y avait la E-Musik. Donc, déjà ce terme de E-Musik, c’était monstrueux. [...] La musique dite sérieuse, en français. Et puis, il y avait les autres, [...]. Parce que disons que la barrière entre la E-Musik et puis les autres était beaucoup plus forte de la part des musiciens de la E-Musik que de la part des autres. Les autres étaient beaucoup plus ouverts.” (Sulzer 2023, part 2, [00:07:24]).

In 1989, during the last year of Jean Balissat's presidency of the STV, the preface to the annual report was signed by Daniel Fueter, newly appointed to the committee as Vice-President following the resignation of Josef Haselbach. This text, entitled "About admission criteria", states that the STV would open its doors to the "the increasingly important fields of improvised music and interdisciplinary activities". It also stipulates that "A number of musicians have been invited by the office to join the Association. These include a large number of applicants who had previously been rejected."⁵⁰ This inclusion of improvisers in the STV was obviously a landmark event for the entire improvising community, which had until then been excluded. A few months later, in his article on free improvisation in Switzerland, published in the STV magazine *dissonanz/dissonance*, Thomas Meyer acclaimed the inclusion of improvisers in the STV:

The STV, with its already highly questionable admission criteria for composers, was totally out of reach when it came to improvisers. Fortunately for them, there is the MKS (Musiker-Kooperative Schweiz), [...] which leaves almost everything open stylistically. In the long run, however, improvisation cannot be completely separated from musical art. Among the young composers, there are quite a few who deal intensively with improvisation, for example Jacques Demierre, Alfred Zimmerlin, Urban Mäder, Dieter Jordi.⁵¹

Thus, following the example of Alfred Zimmerlin and Jacques Demierre, several improvisers who had either been refused membership of the STV or accepted only as 'passive members' were now invited to join. Improvisation thus entered the big league, as it were, while remaining a minority in the STV. Demierre was the first board member who was also recognised as an improviser; thereafter, it was mainly women improvisers who joined the board and thereby influenced the status and development of improvisation within the STV.

b) Improvisers as committee members

Jacques Demierre was elected to the STV board in 1991. His mandate included trying to find new members for the association, though he sometimes encountered a certain reluctance:

If you talked about the STV to people who came from improvised music or jazz, for them the STV wasn't interesting at all. But for composers, it really was! [...] It had to get moving from within, you see, through people who were involved in both practices. I think it was difficult for the 'composer-composers' to accept this.⁵²

Demierre nonetheless drew a positive balance for the integration of improvisers into the STV, even if they always remained somewhat marginalised, benefiting from a certain benevolence on the part of composers but retaining an obvious minority status within an association in

50 STV-AR 1989, p. 35.

51 "Der Tonkünstlerverein mit seinen schon bei Komponisten höchst fragwürdigen Aufnahmekriterien wäre bei Improvisatoren wohl endgültig aufgeschmissen. Zu seinem 'Glück' gibt es dafür die MKS (Musiker-Kooperative Schweiz), die 'die Förderung der improvisierten Musik und progressiver anderer Musikarten' bezweckt – womit stilistisch fast alles offen bleibt. Ganz abgrenzen lässt sich die Improvisation auf die Dauer aber von der Tonkunst nicht. Es gibt unter den jungen Komponisten etliche, die sich intensiv mit Improvisation beschäftigen, zum Beispiel Jacques Demierre, Alfred Zimmerlin, Urban Mäder, Dieter Jordi." (Meyer 1989, p. 19).

52 "Si tu parlais de l'ASM à des gens qui venaient de la musique improvisée ou du jazz, pour eux, l'ASM ce n'était pas du tout quelque chose d'intéressant. Alors que pour les compositeurs, ça l'était vraiment! [...] Oui, il fallait que ça bouge de l'intérieur. À travers effectivement, tu vois, des gens qui sont dans les deux pratiques, mais je pense que c'était difficile d'accepter ça pour les 'compositeurs-compositeurs'." (Demierre 2022, [00:09:18]).

which everyone remained on their own side: “So there wasn’t really a global understanding, because we were each in our own fiefdoms ... Even though there was a lot of goodwill.”⁵³

In 1994, at the end of Jacques Demierre’s term of office, Dorothea Schürch was elected to succeed him as the improvisers’ representative on the STV committee. She was the first woman to hold this position. She too sought to strengthen the number of active improvisers in the STV quickly by inviting them to join the society. Maru Rieben was one of those she invited:

Dorothea Schürch [...] tried to give the STV a few more people from impro. It was all about composition in the STV, the idea that impro or concept compositions could also be seen as composition ... And that’s how I got into it, through her. She tried to bring people into it.⁵⁴

In 2000, Marie Schwab succeeded Dorothea Schürch as the improvisers’ representative and was herself replaced in 2004 by Franziska Baumann. In 2008, Franziska Baumann was replaced by Jonas Kocher, who remained in his post until the STV’s merger to become ‘Sonart’ in 2017. It is thus clear that women were well represented in positions of power in the STV right from the moment that improvisers were allowed to join, with four of the six improvisers’ representatives on the STV board being women.

c) The STV: A woman-friendly environment?

Despite the clear male dominance among the first improvisers who benefited from inclusion in the STV, women began to gain prominence in the discipline. Among them were Charlotte Hug (viola and voice) and Franziska Baumann (voice), who were extremely active. Both travelled extensively, also for artistic residencies, and were highly regarded both for the quality of their artistic practice and for their involvement in associations. Franziska Baumann has described her admission to the STV as follows: “I was very well received, I must say. But that may also have something to do with the board. We were also two women. Sylwia Zytynska was also on the board. And a couple of men. And the general secretary or director was also a woman.” She here means Claudine Wyssa, who was General Secretary of the STV from 2001 onwards. Baumann goes on to claim that “I never experienced any discrimination in the Swiss Association of Musicians as a woman.”⁵⁵

For her part, Charlotte Hug talks about her admission to the STV in these terms: “That has changed a lot over time. In ’98 I was still a ‘satellite’ – but doubly so, not only as a woman, but also as an improviser. It wasn’t so easy to separate the two. And of course, composition is the accepted form of high art, and at that time it was dominated by men.”⁵⁶ Here again, we see two minorities within each other: that of the practice of improvisation, and that of the status of women in this milieu. Hug goes on to say: “I think, as a woman, you are perhaps already a bit

53 “Donc il n’y avait pas vraiment une compréhension globale parce qu’on était un peu chacun dans son fief, comme ça... Même si il y avait beaucoup de bienveillance quand même.” (Ibid., [00:11:56]).

54 “Dorothea Schürch [...] versuchte, dem STV ein bisschen mehr Menschen von der Impro... Es ging ja um Komposition im STV, ausschließlich. Dass Impro oder Konzeptkompositionen, dass das auch als Komposition angeschaut wird ... Und so bin ich eigentlich durch sie reingekommen. Sie hat versucht, da Leute reinzubringen.” (Rieben 2023, [00:48:42]).

55 “Ich wurde sehr gut aufgenommen, muss ich sagen. Aber das hängt vielleicht auch mit dem Vorstand zusammen. Wir waren auch zwei Frauen. Sylwia Zytynska war auch noch im Vorstand. Und ein paar Männer. Und die Chefsekretärin oder Directrice, die war auch eine Frau. [...] Nein, ich habe nie eine Benachteiligung im Schweizerischen Tonkünstlerverein erlebt als Frau.” (BaumannF 2022, part 1, [01:02:37]).

56 “Also ’98 war ich noch so eine Trabantin – aber doppelt, nicht nur als Frau, sondern auch als Improvisatorin. Es war gar nicht so einfach zu trennen. Und natürlich, die Komposition ist die akzeptierte Form von hoher Kunst, damals sehr viel stärker von Männern besetzt.” (Hug 2023, [01:00:51]).

of an exotic in certain places and at the same time that has bonus and malus. [...] I have to say, as a young woman you also have a bonus. I really like working with men.”⁵⁷ Katharina Weber, finally, discusses how she was unsure of herself as a woman for a long time, and how she was welcomed and defended, not least by Alfred Zimmerlin. She also observes that many women have entered the world of improvisation and composition without any solid training, sometimes facing extremely harsh criticism from men who are already firmly established in the field:

In this Tonkünstlerfest in Baden [1999], Alfred Zimmerlin supported me very much. But also Marianne Schuppe performed a piece at that time, and both our pieces were criticised very harshly. [...] Yes, maybe we just went in there naively, without much compositional craft. [...] Similar things happened in WIM, where I also liked to play with people who didn't have a big instrumental craft. And so maybe we were also made fun of.⁵⁸

d) Collège i

In 1997, eight years after improvisers had been admitted to the STV, the committee decided to create sub-groups that would represent the three different spheres of activity as described in the following statement from the annual activity report:

Given the evolution of the Association and the diversity of its membership, the Committee proposes to create two ‘Collèges’ along the lines of the Composers’ Collège, namely a Performers’ Collège and an Improvisers’ Collège. [...] For this reason, the Committee hopes to be able to announce at the next General Meeting the creation of a Performers’ Collège based on the same model as the Composers’ Collège. [...] Dorothea Schürch has launched a similar appeal for the creation of a Collège of Improvisers, improvisers who now join the STV. [...] Ties with the MKS are intensified through facilitated admissions to the STV. Dorothea Schürch appeals to members to help create the nucleus of this Collège as quickly as possible.⁵⁹

In 1997, three ‘Collèges’ were accordingly created to represent different types of activity within STV: Collège i, (Collège des improvisateurs, i.e. improvisers), Collège des compositeurs (composers) and Collège des interprètes (performers). A bilingual nomenclature was refined at a joint session of the STV committee and Collège representatives in 1998, translating the French ‘Collège’ into German ‘forum’: Komponistenforum, Interpretenforum, Forum i. The segmentation of the STV into three ‘Collèges’ was based first and foremost on a distinction of labour practices, union issues, and money distribution. The 1998 annual report stated that the most

57 “Und ich glaube, als Frau, man ist vielleicht schon in gewissen Orten so ein bisschen Exotin und gleichzeitig hat das Bonus und Malus. [...] Ich muss schon sagen, als junge Frau hat man da schon auch einen Bonus. Also ich arbeite sehr gerne mit Männern zusammen.” (Ibid., [01:06:00]).

58 “Ja, in diesem Tonkünstlerfest in Baden: Alfred Zimmerlin hat mich sehr gestützt, aber auch Marianne Schuppe hat damals ein Stück aufgeführt und unsere beiden Stücke sind sehr hart kritisiert worden auch. [...] Ja, vielleicht sind wir einfach naiv auch, dort hineingegangen, ohne großes kompositorisches Handwerk. [...] Es ist vielleicht eine ähnliche Frage, wie mit der WIM, wo ich auch gerne mit Leuten zusammengespielt habe, die kein großes instrumentales Handwerk hatten. Und so sind wir vielleicht auch belächelt worden.” (Weber 2023, [00:45:32]).

59 “Compte tenu de l’évolution de l’Association et de la diversité de ses membres, le Comité se propose de créer deux Collèges, à l’image du Collège compositeurs, un Collège des interprètes et un Collège des improvisateurs. [...] De ce fait, le Comité souhaite pouvoir annoncer à la prochaine assemblée générale la création d’un Collège des interprètes construit sur le même modèle que celui des compositeurs. [...] Dorothea Schürch lance un appel similaire pour la création d’un Collège des improvisateurs, improvisateurs qui joignent maintenant l’ASM. [...] Les liens s’intensifient avec la MKS par des admissions facilitées à l’ASM. Dorothea Schürch fait un appel aux membres pour que le noyau de ce Collège puisse aussi se créer rapidement.” (STV-AR 1997, p. 24).

recent Tonkünstlerfest in Geneva had provided representatives of the three collèges an opportunity to meet representatives of the copyright management companies, SUISA and Swissperform, in order to give specific groups of STV members access to detailed information of direct concern to them. In a letter dated 19 December 1997, the STV General Secretary Jacques Lasserre wrote that “The Collège i(mprovisers) is an offshoot of the Swiss Musicians’ Association.”⁶⁰

By observing the activities and the list of members of the Collège i, we can delve deep into a microcosm in which women played a leading role, first with Dorothea Schürch and then mainly with Franziska Baumann.

The STV archives contain an entire file of correspondence and activities of Collège i, testifying that its field of activity has changed over the years, but also that several important aspects remained central during all of its existence. Collège i was always a platform for reflection and discussions on improvised practices. In a letter dated 5 November 1997 in its French version, and 7 November 1997 in its German version, Dorothea Schürch and Daniel Mouthon call the members of Collège i to a third meeting with an agenda that above all invites joint reflection, particularly on themes that could lead to a public performance: “it’s a question of seeing if we manage to formulate the subject ‘IMPROVISATION, ELEMENT OF A MODEL OF SOCIETY’ in a way that is practicable and comprehensible for the general public”.⁶¹ In the invitation to the December 1998 meeting of Collège i, signed by Leo Bachmann, the following point is mentioned: “Collège i is interested in the nature and place of improvisation, particularly in relation to composition. The idea is to take this discussion beyond music, and to consider improvisation as a valid working method for all.”⁶² Then, in the agenda for the meeting of 30 May 1999, signed by Franziska Baumann, she says: “The aim is to discuss the various forms of representation of improvised music: notation with development possibilities, imitation, interactive score, visual sources of inspiration, electroacoustic samples as structuring playing elements, live electronics, spatial scores using sensors, etc.”.⁶³ It’s interesting to note that the invitation concludes with the statement “Collège i is open to everybody”.⁶⁴ She will again insist on this point in the 1998 annual report published later: “Collège i is designed as a place for practice-oriented exchanges, and remains open to all.”⁶⁵ This willingness to open collaboration – including with composers and even non-musicians – was also a constitutive element of Collège i, as Franziska Baumann had already mentioned in the STV’s 1997 annual report: “During our group’s discussions, the idea emerged of showing the interested public the place of improvisation in the arts, science and society through a research centre, an orchestra and other

60 “Le soussigné atteste que le projet ci-contre jouit du patronage de l’Association suisse des musiciens, dont le Collège i(mprovisation) est une émanation.” (Lasserre 1997).

61 “Unser Ziel ist es, abzuklären, ob das Thema IMPROVISATION – EIN ASPEKT IN EINEM GESAMTGESELLSCHAFTLICHEN MODELL von uns denk-, formulier- und durchführbar und für eine Publikum erkenn- und wahrnehmbar werden könnte.” (Schürch/Mouthon 1997).

62 “Das ‘college i’ befasst sich mit Wesen und Stellung der Improvisation, insbesondere im Bezug zur Komposition. Es ist dabei ein Anliegen, diese Auseinandersetzung über das Musikalische hinaus zu führen und die Improvisation als allgemein gültige Arbeitsmethode zu betrachten.” (Bachmann 1998b).

63 “Ziel ist Austausch über unterschiedlichste Darstellungsformen für improvisierte Musik: Notation mit Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten, Imitation, interaktive Partitur, visuelle Inspirationsquellen, elektroakustische Sampsels [sic] als strukturgebende Spielelemente, live Elektronik, Raumpartituren mittels Sensoren etc.” (BaumannF 1998).

64 “Das collège ist für alle offen.” (Ibid.).

65 “Le collège i se conçoit comme lieu d’échanges orienté sur la pratique et continue à être ouvert à tous” (STV-AR 1998, p. 34).

actions and presentations.”⁶⁶ This report concludes the first year of existence of Collège i. Baumann then mentions that

[d]uring the first three kick-off sessions, the improvisers present took stock of the current situation. The various discussion groups questioned, discussed and studied the different points of view on improvisation, and then envisaged new playing perspectives. The first concrete result is the submission of a project for Expo.01, where the Collège i hopes to take an interdisciplinary look at the phenomenon of improvisation in all areas of work and life.⁶⁷

Once again, the discussion about the different conceptions of improvisation is central, but there is also mention of a specific project in the context of the Swiss national exposition Expo.01 (later postponed to 2002 and renamed Expo.02), which had been at the heart of Collège i's concerns almost since its inception.

When it was created, Collège i, like the Collège des interprètes, was supposed to be a subdivision of the STV. However, it never numbered more than about twenty members, and many STV improvisers were absent. In addition to its initial designated role of representing improvisers in discussions concerning the distribution of public funds, and in parallel with its activity as a pool for reflection on the nature of improvisation, the collège i functioned as a working group focused on selected projects. Expo.01 would quickly become Collège i's main focus, with multiple twists and turns. The e-mail correspondence⁶⁸ between Leo Bachmann of Collège i and Jacques Lasserre – the STV's General Secretary – shows that both the STV and Collège i submitted a project for Expo.01, each without the knowledge of the other. The confusion created by this situation reveals a lack of communication between Collège i and the STV's board, though matters were resolved at a meeting of the latter on 25/26 December 1998, where the issue was placed on the agenda. The minutes for this meeting state: “The only decision taken for the moment is to fully support the Collège i project.”⁶⁹

Franziska Baumann states, in the 1998 annual report, that “in 1998, Collège i was mainly concerned with drafting a project for Expo.01. Unfortunately, this project will not be carried out”.⁷⁰

However, as Hermann Bühler explains in the STV's Annual Report 1999,⁷¹ the project was relaunched as an improvisers' orchestra. The STV's 2000 annual report indicated that the national exhibition had been postponed for a year and would therefore be named Expo.02.⁷² STV President Roman Brotbeck said that the “Committee still hopes that the *Klangspielhaus* will be

66 “Au cours des discussions de notre groupe, l'idée s'est dégagée de montrer au public intéressé la place de l'improvisation dans les arts, la science et la société au travers d'un centre de recherche, d'un orchestre et d'autres actions et présentations.” (STV-AR 1997, pp. 31 f.).

67 “Au cours de trois premières séances de lancement, les improvisateurs et improvisatrices présents ont fait l'état des lieux. Les divers groupes de discussion ont mis en question, discuté et étudié les différents points de vue sur l'improvisation, puis envisagé de nouvelles perspectives de jeu. Le premier fruit concret est la soumission d'un projet pour l'Expo 2001, où le 31 Collège i souhaite se pencher de façon interdisciplinaire sur le phénomène de l'improvisation dans tous les domaines du travail et de la vie.” (Ibid.).

68 “Wir vom ‘collège i’ haben über den STV ein Projekt für die expo 01 eingereicht. Das ‘collège i’ hat bisher keine Antwort darauf erhalten! Uns ist bekannt, dass der STV den Auftrag erhalten hat, im Rahmen der expo 01 ein Projekt zu realisieren Ist das Projekt des ‘collège i’ ein Bestandteil davon???? Oder gibt es bezüglich unseres Projektes tatsächlich noch keine Antwort von der expo 01??? Soll ich direkt in Neuchatel nachfragen???” (Bachmann 1998a).

69 “La seule décision prise pour le moment est d'appuyer à fond le projet du Collège i.” (STV-CM 1998, p. 8).

70 “En 1998, le collège i s'est préoccupé surtout de rédiger un projet pour l'expo.01. Malheureusement, ce projet ne sera pas réalisé.” (STV-AR 1998, p. 34).

71 STV-AR 1999, p. 18.

72 STV-AR 2000, p. 38.

realised at Expo.02 and that the STV will be able to present itself for a few days in its own right”.⁷³ The 2001 archives make no further mention of the Collège i project, neither in the STV annual reports nor in the specific Collège i file. It was therefore necessary to search the archives of the RTS and Expo.02 to get more information about how the project was continued and realised. For a project did in fact take place thanks to Andres Bosshard, with the realisation of a sound tower – *Klangturm* – in Biel. Despite his affiliation with Collège i (the proof of which can be found in an e-mail from Franziska Baumann to Jacques Lasserre of 7 March 1999),⁷⁴ Andres Bosshard seems to take full credit for the STV’s presence at Expo.02, leaving the collective peregrinations and endeavours of the Collège i behind him.

Finally, in the STV 2002 activity report,⁷⁵ Marie Schwab announced a concert that was to be held at the Expo.02 *Klangturm*, which, as we will see, was almost the end of the Collège i. With this concert, free improvisation had the opportunity to make an appearance in the world of very large audiences and to pass – momentarily at least – from a niche audience to millions of people. In the booklet of the 2002 Tonkünstlerfest, which also took place in Biel, President Roman Brotbeck summarised the history of the STV’s candidacy for the national exhibition by saying that

[o]riginally, the STV was planning a project at Expo.02 with sound towers and masts. But the project was not selected. The festival will take place in the city of the exhibition where the great tower of sounds (*Klangturm*) resonates for the duration of the exhibition; moreover, the concerts of the festival of the STV will be partially retransmitted to the tower.⁷⁶

The other activities of Collège i included an involvement in the CD series ‘Série expérimentale’, as is first mentioned in the 1998 annual report: “Rainer Boesch [by this time the vice-president of the STV] outlines plans for a new, experimental CD series, designed to operate outside any commercial circuit and provide a snapshot of contemporary production. The plan is to release three CDs in 1998 and six in 1999.”⁷⁷ Gertrud Schneider, from the Collège des interprètes, was also enthusiastic about this new series, whose aim was explained in the 1999 STV annual report:

Conceived as a complement to the Grammont portrait series [of CDs] edited by the Communauté de travail for the promotion of Swiss music, the new ‘Série expérimentale’ has already released 7 CDs devoted to improvised music, conceptual music, areas on the borderline between jazz and variety, and ‘composed’ programmes.⁷⁸

73 “Le Comité espère toujours que le Klangspielhaus sera réalisé à l’expo.02 et que l’ASM pourra s’y présenter pendant quelques jours dans sa spécificité.” (Ibid., p. 39).

74 BaumannF 1999.

75 STV-AR 2002, p. 21.

76 “A l’origine, l’Association Suisse des Musiciens pensait réaliser un projet à l’expo.02, avec des tours et des masts sonores. Mais le projet ne fut pas retenu. La fête se déroulera néanmoins dans la ville de l’expo où la grande tour des sons (*Klangturm*) résonne pour toute la durée de l’exposition; d’ailleurs les concerts de la fête de l’ASM seront partiellement retransmis dans la tour.” (STV-Pb 2002, p. 6).

77 “Rainer Boesch expose le projet de la nouvelle série expérimentale de CD, destinée à fonctionner en dehors de tout circuit commercial et à donner un aperçu instantané de la production contemporaine. Il est prévu de publier trois CD en 1998 et six en 1999.” (STV-AR 1998, p. 24).

78 “Conçue comme un complément de la série des portraits Grammont éditée par la Communauté de travail pour la promotion de la musique suisse, la nouvelle série expérimentale a déjà sorti 7 CD consacrés à la musique improvisée, à la musique conceptuelle, aux domaines à la limite du jazz et des variétés, enfin aux programmes ‘composés.’” (STV-AR 1999, pp. 6f.).

The first disc in this experimental series featured a pool of improvisers from WIM Zurich in a compilation of improvised events broadcast on Radio Lora entitled “WIM Radio Days 1998: Un kaléidoscope de la musique improvisée”. The list of artists represented here includes WIM regulars such as Peter K Frey, Irène Schweizer and Alfred Zimmerlin, but only a few women and a few members of Collège i. Maru Rieben is nevertheless present, and was later given her own solo album in this series: no. 10, *cooking the lovers*. The second disc of the experimental series was dedicated to Charlotte Hug, an influential member of the Collège i, though this album contains no improvisations as such, but rather compositions realised and recorded in unusual places with particular acoustics.

In the 2002 report, we learn that managing the experimental series was the responsibility of Dorothea Schürch, a member of Collège i.⁷⁹ Between 1999 and 2008, the series released a total of 32 discs that featured many of Collège i’s leading personalities. These include Franziska Baumann on disc no. 18: *Stimme und Elektronik*, and Marianne Schuppe in a trio with Alfred Zimmerlin and Sylwia Zytynska (who were not members of Collège i, but members of the STV) on album no. 29, *Eine Art Hörspiel*.

Among the other things that Collège i was working on, it is also important to mention the “Marguerite de Reding Prize”. The STV’s 1996 annual report explains that: “In accordance with the wishes of Marguerite de Reding, thanks to whom the Foundation’s capital has increased considerably, a ‘Marguerite de Reding Prize’ is to be awarded at least every three years. This prize may or may not be awarded on the basis of a competition for young professional musicians aged 35 or under. By the end of the year, the Committee will have decided what form this competition should take.”⁸⁰ In the 1997 annual report, the committee decided that for the following years, the prize would be awarded exclusively to performers.⁸¹ The STV’s 2000 activity report then mentions the satisfaction of Collège i members upon learning that the 2001 “Marguerite de Reding Prize” would be devoted to improvisation.⁸² The STV’s 2001 report discusses this competition,⁸³ which saw prizes awarded ex aequo to four groups, two leaning more towards free jazz and two towards contemporary music. Two of those bands featured women: Babels Besen, with Margarete Huber, and Trio Marguerite, with Ingeborg Poffet. The competition was organised in partnership with the Lucerne University of Music and Performing Arts, which was already renowned as an important venue for improvised music. It is also interesting to note that the jury for the prize included a number of women, including Marie Schwab as the STV’s representative, and Joëlle Léandre and Lauren Newton as international guest members. In 2002, Lauren Newton was appointed a professor in Lucerne.

Finally, the 2002 activity report⁸⁴ is the last to mention Collège i’s activity. This seems to mark the end of Collège i, which also organised thematic meetings, discussion forums and one-off events with external speakers, as in 2000, for example, with “Internet and music” featuring

79 STV-AR 2002, p. 6.

80 “[S]elon la volonté de Marguerite de Reding, grâce à qui le capital de la Fondation a considérablement augmenté, un ‘Prix Marguerite de Reding’ doit être attribué au moins tous les trois ans. Ce Prix peut être donné sur la base ou non d’un concours destiné à de jeunes musiciens professionnels d’au maximum 35 ans. D’ici la fin de l’année, le Comité aura défini sous quelle forme aura lieu ce concours.” (STV-AR 1996, p. 28).

81 “[L]e Comité a décidé de réserver ce Prix pour les prochaines années exclusivement au groupe le plus représenté dans l’Association, à savoir les interprètes.” (STV-AR 1998, p. 24).

82 STV-AR 2000, pp. 40f.

83 STV-AR 2001, p. 19.

84 STV-AR 2002, p. 21.

Peter K Frey and Ernst Thoma. However, the visibility of Collège i’s activities was always limited, as the singer Ursula Wick already mentioned in the 1999 report.⁸⁵

Among the documents in the archives, one item seems worthy of detailed investigation: the first list of Collège i members (Tab. 1).⁸⁶

Matthias Arter, Zürich	Dagmar Reichert, Zürich
Leo Bachmann, Zürich	Margrit Rieben, Bern
Christoph Baumann, Wettingen	Dorothea Rust, Zürich
Franziska Baumann, Spiegel b. Bern	Margrit Schenker, Zürich
Hermann Bühler, Zürich	Marianne Schuppe, Basel
Hans-Eugen Frischknecht, Muri/BE	Dorothea Schürch, Zürich
Christoph Gallio, Zürich	Martin Schütz, Biel
Charlotte Hug, Zürich	Bruno Seibat, Genève
Gerhard Layer, Reinach	Daniel Studer, Zürich
Franziska Lingg, Luzern	Pierre Thoma, Grand-Lancy
Daniel Mouthon, Zürich	Valentin Vecellio, Zürich
Susanna Nüesch, Zürich	Susann Wehrli, Effretikon

Tab. 1 List of members of Collège i in 1997 (STV-Ci).

This list is obviously only a small sample of the improvisers active in Switzerland in 1997, but it nevertheless allows us to make several observations and pose certain hypotheses. A large majority of the members on this list originally came from classical and/or contemporary music, but fewer from jazz, in contrast to the initial protagonists of free improvisation in Switzerland who were mainly jazz musicians. Does this constitute a paradigm shift? We cannot be at all certain, partly because many important improvisers active at the STV were not members of Collège i, and partly because other associations existed in parallel, notably the SMS. Some STV members, like Maru Rieben, were also members of the SMS, which was sometimes even more important to them than the STV, due to the different nature of its activities and its less ‘solemn’ approach. It could be that improvisers who were inclined towards the aesthetics of contemporary music felt closer to the STV, while those more inclined towards jazz felt closer to the approach of the SMS or the AMR. And as Jacques Demierre mentions,⁸⁷ the STV included several members who were involved in both improvisation and composition. So we should remain cautious about assuming the stylistic inclinations of Collège i members since this group was not representative of all the improvisers present at the STV. Many important improvisers, such as Alfred Zimmerlin, are notably absent from the list.

A second observation is that a very small minority of Collège i’s members was from French-speaking Switzerland. For example, Jacques Demierre does not feature. On the other hand, a high proportion of improvisers from the Bern and Zurich regions is included. One possible explanation of this divide is simply that many regional improvisers’ groups existed at the time, and that the original members of the Collège i formed a nucleus among themselves that was supposed to expand. However, as we shall see, the existence of this Collège i was probably not widely known, and it would eventually disappear into oblivion.

85 STV-AR 1999, pp. 6 f.

86 STV-Ci.

87 Cf. note 52.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the subject of this article, while gender parity had not yet been achieved, there were still a significant number of female improvisers within Collège i. The fact that Collège i was led by such an influential, dynamic figure as Franziska Baumann certainly played a role in the commitment to it demonstrated by women, as did the proactive recruitment of Dorothea Schürch, who was on the STV committee when Collège i was founded. Overall, the relevance of personal contacts and relationships should not be underestimated, for these certainly had an influence on whether or not people joined the STV.

These last two observations reflect, in a way, the twofold difficulty that the STV committee had to face during Fueter's presidency: fighting for the adequate representation of all the linguistic regions and for gender inclusivity. Martin Derungs assumed the presidency after Daniel Fueter and experienced the same difficulties. He had in the past already worked hard to integrate improvisers into the STV, to the point of organising a joint Tonkünstlerfest between the MKS and the STV in Zofingen, back in 1982.⁸⁸ While he deplored the fact that women were rarely present at Tonkünstlerfeste during his presidency, and that "women composers were very rare at the time", he also notes that specifically promoting women "was not a point on the programme."⁸⁹ However, it was under his presidency, and perhaps also thanks to the impetus of Daniel Fueter, that the number of women on the STV board increased. Trying to keep an equilibrium between the genders and the linguistic regions remained a balancing act, as Maru Rieben put it very well in a comment on this Collège i members list: "there is not only the gender gap, but also the language gap".⁹⁰

As mentioned earlier, Franziska Baumann was in 2004 elected to the STV board as a representative of the improvisers. From 2003 onwards, no more mention was made of Collège i, which had presumably ceased to exist. Ironically, when Jonas Kocher succeeded Franziska Baumann in 2008, he had no idea that Collège i had ever existed, "because I was never told about it. And I was never, as they say, given the file. So that's what your predecessors did, what line you're on. Yes, it was really ... You're on the committee and you'll see how it goes. And they didn't tell me anything."⁹¹ The vagueness surrounding the existence of the Collège des improvisateurs is also perceptible in the testimony of other members, such as Maru Rieben, who no longer recalled belonging to any sub-group within the STV. Collège i's almost ephemeral existence seems not to have left a lasting impression.

3. Today

a) Women in free improvisation today

Even today, there is a disparity in the number of active male and female improvisers. The discipline is still male-dominated, but many women have nevertheless managed to carve out a place for themselves, including in academic spheres where they are recognised not only for their importance and artistic contributions to improvised music, but also for their pedagogical qualities. In Bern, for example, Franziska Baumann is an improvisation teacher at the Acad-

88 Cf. Doris Lanz's article in this volume, pp. 371–386 (Lanz 2025).

89 "Na ja, Komponistinnen waren damals noch sehr rar. [...] Ich glaube, das war kein Programmpunkt." (Derungs 2022, [00:06:45]).

90 "Es gibt nicht nur den Geschlechtergraben, sondern auch den Sprachengraben." (Rieben 2023, [01:03:11]).

91 "Mais parce que moi on ne m'en a jamais parlé. Et puis on ne m'a jamais, comme on dit, retransmis le dossier. Voilà, c'est ce que tes prédécesseurs ont fait, dans quelle ligne tu te retrouves. Oui, c'était vraiment... Voilà, tu fais partie du comité et puis tu verras bien comme ça se passe. Et on m'a mis au courant de rien du tout en fait." (Kocher 2022, part 2, [00:17:15]).

emy of the Arts HKB, while Katharina Weber is a fresh retiree who also worked as an improvisation teacher there, in a pool of teachers that was nonetheless predominantly male. In Basel, the Master in Free Improvisation – which has evolved into a Master in Open Creation – counts Andrea Neumann (female) as its main improvisation teacher, after a long period during which Alfred Zimmerlin and Fred Frith taught in tandem. However, Alfred Zimmerlin relates that when he was hired as an improvisation teacher at the Basel Academy of Music, there were also women among the applicants. In his words: “They could have already taken a woman there. And certainly not a bad one!”⁹² Fred Frith himself insisted, during his last year of teaching, that it would be important that a woman would take over.

In Lucerne, where Lauren Newton is a fresh retiree, Magdalena Mayas and Charlotte Hug are both still on the staff for improvisation in an otherwise male-dominated teaching pool.

This female presence in teaching free improvisation at a high level will hopefully have the merit of sensitising students to consider musicians as human beings in the first place, and not to establish – consciously or unconsciously – gendered hierarchies stemming from habit or relics of the patriarchy that are still highly perceptible today.

As an example, in March 2023, I observed an improvisation class given by Katharina Weber at the HKB, in which a group of young improvisers proposed musical concepts and then put them into practice. It was a heterogeneous group: a few boys, including a cellist and a percussionist, and a few girls, including two flautists. It was abundantly clear from the social attitude that the cellist was somehow taking ‘responsibility’ for the musical proceedings, initiating all the changes made necessary by the ‘piece-concept’ paradigms they presented, and that the girl flautists followed his lead. It is impossible to say whether the musicians were aware of the social stereotype that this situation summed up, as it was not mentioned in the ensuing discussion. Casey Sokol, male pianist and former professor of improvisation at York University (Toronto), has discussed making the same kind of observations in the improvisation classes that he has taught:

You get a group of three together [...] and decide on the form of an improvisation together. [...] Just talk to each other. And sometimes you see in that talk, the women is set aside, the men have the ideas and the women might have a very good idea, but it’s an expression of passivity or reciprocal appreciation of something that the men don’t really want to put value in.⁹³

Casey Sokol is careful about addressing this topic directly: “Once they know me, I can say ... I can just direct them: ‘You have to listen more to the women who are playing flute’, or whatever. But usually, I won’t singularise with women, I just say: ‘you have to really listen to the quiet instruments.’” This approach is very interesting because he does not address the gender issue, but subtly shifts the focus to that of powerful versus softer instruments. However, the tendency to associate women with soft instruments itself reveals the existence of a stereotype. This can also be contradicted by numerous examples of women playing loudly, or playing powerful instruments, but which seem rather to be exceptions in the aforementioned examples. This male tendency to reduce women to a secondary role in music is something that Casey Sokol relates to a general attitude: “Even if they are not so chauvinistic, is there a hidden chauvinism or is there a hidden sense that females are not as qualified? ‘We don’t have to give them room

92 “Sie hätten dort schon eine Frau nehmen können. Und sicher keine schlechte!” (Zimmerlin 2023, part 2, [00:31:54]).

93 Sokol 2022, part 3, [00:30:39].

to play.”⁹⁴ These statements have to be investigated. Casey Sokol speaks of a form of unconscious chauvinism among men, the consequence of which – despite a lack of awareness of sexism – is nonetheless to unknowingly devalue the skills of their female peers. This represents an involuntary but present, observable form of masculine thinking that can be translated as *if women were as competent as men, we would not need to make room for them in an improv collective so they could express themselves musically. They would do it on their own*. And so, in the collective unconscious of a predominantly male group of improv students, there remains a way of stifling the female voice and an underlying thought that *if they don’t play or play little, it’s because they don’t have much to add musically*, instead of having a simply more curious, inclusive attitude towards the musical discourse that could be possible if it were given the necessary space.

Those field observations can be an illustration of a certain reality that still permeates our society. Maru Rieben comments on this social-cultural behaviour, noting that change is underway while pointing out the educational origin of behavioural differences between boys and girls:

The boys tend to have to distinguish themselves more. Early on, the whole idea of competition and faster, higher, better. [...] I also tend to notice that men often need more space. Quite literally on the bus. How wide-legged they sit there, and you can only wonder in a narrow bus. [...] in a bus when it’s narrow, and they’re not afraid to sit like that. In this sense, I think, things are changing now a lot.⁹⁵

b) Intentions and quotas

It’s also interesting to note that today, interdisciplinary academic training opportunities that include the practice of improvisation seem to appeal to many female students who decide to follow this path. The Basel Academy of Music Master’s degree in Open Composition is a clear example of this. And yet, in the radical practice of free improvisation, awareness of the disparity between men and women is extremely strong today, and there are many debates to continue the effort to achieve quasi-parity. Programmers and artistic directors are often under pressure to organise mixed and inclusive programmes. The AMR, for example, is currently in the midst of discussions on the application of female quotas, not only on the AMR committee but also in programming, as evidenced by the minutes of the 2019 AMR General Assembly, in which discussions on quotas are at the heart of the debate aimed at “encouraging women to play jazz. That they be encouraged to practice something other than singing and playing the piano.”⁹⁶ This brings us back to Marie Buscatto’s observation about the unequal distribution of genres according to instrument and function in a jazz ensemble. Claude Tabarini, one of the founders of the AMR, raises the question of quotas with a certain scepticism: “We have a little problem at the AMR with quotas. [...] there’s a bunch of chicks asking, so they start asking for

94 Ibid., part 3, [00:29:59].

95 “Wie wir hier aufwachsen, ist es schon so, dass tendenziell die Jungs sich mehr profilieren müssen. Schon früh, das ganze Wettbewerbsdenken und schneller, höher, besser. [...] Tendenzuell nehme ich auch wahr, dass Männer oft mehr Platz brauchen. Also schon ganz wortwörtlich im Bus. Wie breitbeinig sie dasitzen und man kann sich nur wundern in einem engen Bus. [...] in einem Bus, wenn es eng ist, und die scheuen sich nicht so zu sitzen. In diesem Sinn finde ich, ist sich sehr viel am Wandeln jetzt.” (Rieben 2023, [00:16:59]).

96 “que les femmes soient encouragées à pratiquer le Jazz. Qu’elles soient encouragées à pratiquer autre chose que le chant et le piano.” (AMR 2019).

quotas for concerts and so on. Or that there should be a certain number of women playing per year”.⁹⁷

The WIM Zurich is also calling for gender and sexual orientation to be mentioned when submitting concert proposals, in order to promote diversity. Franziska Baumann quips:

I have to define myself as a cis-hetero woman in the WIM Zurich so that I can register for a concert at all. [...] I find that categorisation again, if you ask me, creates the opposite of inclusion. It makes this separation again. [...] But I see myself a little bit pushed into the corner of cis-straight woman. [...] So in the past you weren't allowed to be a woman, you had to be masculine, and now you actually have to be queer or trans in certain circles.⁹⁸

Quotas are often seen in a negative light, as they are once again a form of compartmentalisation. Maru Rieben admits that she is fundamentally opposed to quotas, but that they are sometimes the only solution: “In general, I was always against quotas. But now I think that nothing changes without quotas [...], the last decades have shown that.”⁹⁹

It seems that in Switzerland, quotas and representativeness in the eyes of national institutions are a twofold matter, as we saw earlier: gender, and linguistic regions. But looking at what is happening in the USA and Canada informs us that there is a need not just to include men and women, but also whites and Blacks, which takes us back to the social context of jazz's origins. Questions of gender and racial representation are often treated on the same basis, as is reflected in the following statement by Ed Sarath, professor of improvisation at the University of Michigan and founder of ISIM (International society for improvised music): “You know, in the jazz program, we did that incoming class, we didn't have one single female student this year. It's even harder to find. And as you noticed, there was not one black student last night. And we're working on that right now.” For him, the question of quotas is above all a question of visibility and representation that can serve as an inspiring example for generations to come:

One of the only things, when it comes down to [it], is identity empowerment. And this leads back to the question of, say, the young black child needs to see black people on the board. You know, or the heads of universities and all the other things we were talking about. [...] The young girls, the same thing.¹⁰⁰

A similar observation is made by Casey Sokol in relation to the fact that students need to have an inspiring example to whom they can refer in their chosen field. Unlike Ed Sarath, who teaches free improvisation in the context of the jazz curriculum, Casey Sokol assumes that in the collective consciousness, free improvisation is an offshoot of European academic music, which is why few Black students and few jazz students enrol in his free improvisation course:

97 “on a un petit problème à l'AMR avec les quotas. [...] il y a une série de gonzesses qui demandent, alors elles commencent à réclamer des quotas pour les concerts, etc. Ou qu'il y ait tant de femmes qui jouent par année” (Tabarini 2023, [00:42:46]).

98 “Ich muss mich in der WIM Zürich als Cis-Heterofrau definieren, damit ich mich überhaupt anmelden kann für ein Konzert. [...] Ich finde diese Kategorisierung wieder, wenn du mich fragst, erzeugt das Gegenteil von Inklusion. Es macht wieder diese Separation. [...] Aber ich sehe mich so ein bisschen in die Ecke gedrängt von Cis-Heterofrau. [...] Also früher durfte man nicht Frau sein, man musste maskulin sein, und jetzt müsste man eigentlich queer sein oder trans in gewissen Kreisen.” (BaumannF 2022, [00:26:37]).

99 “Also jetzt ganz allgemein über Quoten war ich eigentlich immer dagegen. Finde jetzt aber, es ändert sich einfach nichts ohne Quoten [...], das haben die letzten Jahrzehnte gezeigt.” (Rieben 2023, [00:25:59]).

100 Sarath 2022, [00:13:37] and [00:18:18].

For a long time, I said ‘where are the black students?’ And then I thought maybe this whole free improvisation is basically a kind of white inheritance. [...] At the beginning, there weren’t that many jazz players coming into the free improv course. And I thought, why not? I was guessing it was because they see free improvisation as an outgrowth of white European academic music, musique concrète, twelve tone music, experimental music ... How many black musicians were there, throwing dice or yarrow stalks, or ... It just didn’t happen.¹⁰¹

In all these cases and examples, it seems to me that there is a desire for a company or an association to give an inclusive image, especially with regard to known minorities, and to show that they now have a place. However, this is sometimes perceived as a kind of tokenism, as Jonas Kocher points out: “There are efforts being made, but it’s always It’s almost like, ‘Oh, we need a black American so we can put the cross in the box and check: we’ve done it’. So, after that, it’s always one or two people who suddenly find themselves in all the programs.”¹⁰²

Conclusion: have we already entered an era that makes this kind of reflection obsolete?

In conclusion, I would like to draw on the words of Marie Buscatto in her book *Femmes du Jazz*, as this can be applied to the sphere of free improvisation: “The marginalisation of women has often been denounced by men, who consider it contrary to the spirit of freedom of free improvisation, but who have nevertheless been its protagonists, albeit unwillingly.”¹⁰³ This obviously mirrors a broader societal aspect, namely the socio-cultural norms that often dictate the place of people according to their gender. But it would not be unreasonable to question the validity of such a statement nowadays. Indeed, research involving gendered and binary classification is bound to be controversial for a number of reasons.

The first is that the gender of the author of the research, both in the writing process and in the interviewing and information-gathering process, can greatly influence its results. To quote Ruth Stone: “because the researcher is part of the social situation of fieldwork, the researcher’s gender and orientation to gender become relevant issues, specifically the researcher’s own interpretation of self.”¹⁰⁴

The second reason lies in the binary conception of gender, as opposed to queer theories that imply an unlimited number of genders, or even a dissolution of the notion of gender itself. In this sense, and today more than ever, a separation under the binary male-female regime loses its significance and sidelines a growing proportion of people who feel non-binary and who may feel hurt by what is known as gender dysphoria. This is particularly true of Yoan Marti, who defines himself as a male/female jazz drummer. In the AMR journal *viva la musica*, they talk about their journey as a student at HKB, and the efforts they had to make to be considered as they wished in terms of gender:

I had to explain to every teacher [...] and classmate how best to address me to avoid triggering my gender dysphoria [...]. The problems were mainly caused by a minority of people refusing to use language adapted to my gender identity, despite my repeated and energy-consuming expla-

101 Sokol 2022, part 3, [00:33:09].

102 “Il y a des efforts qui se font, mais c’est toujours... C’est presque, ça devient : ‘Oh, il nous faut un black américain pour qu’on puisse mettre la croix dans la case et cocher : on l’a fait’. Donc après, c’est toujours une ou deux personnes qui tout d’un coup, se retrouvent dans tous les programmes.” (Kocher, part 1, [00:22:59]).

103 “Cette marginalisation est d’autant plus étonnante qu’elle est dénoncée par les professionnels eux-mêmes, qui la jugent contraire à l’esprit de liberté et de créativité du jazz.” (Buscatto 2007, back cover).

104 Stone 2008, p. 145.

nations. [...] This lack of consideration for a basic demand concerning the teacher/student relationship caused me a great deal of discomfort [...]. It was therefore all the harder to consider the remarks concerning my playing when, without realising it, they were perpetuating a form of oppression against transgender people.¹⁰⁵

People who identify themselves as non-binary are de facto mostly absent from this article, not inadvertently and even less because of stigmatisation, but above all because this kind of discourse is relatively recent and does not correspond to the struggle waged by pioneering women to be acknowledged in a field dominated by men. Indeed, queer theories first emerged in the USA in the 1990s, whereas the pioneering women mentioned in this article, who were sometimes straight and sometimes lesbians and defined themselves as such, were active as early as the 1970s. However, there is a growing sensitivity to non-binarity, as evidenced by the recent recommendations of the City of Zurich's parent advisory office to stop using the terms 'dad' and 'mom' and replace them with 'parent' or 'tutor',¹⁰⁶ in order to raise awareness of gender-neutral language and avoid gender dysphoria. On 11 May 2024, the Swiss artist Nemo won the Eurovision Song Contest with his song *the code*, in which he openly discusses his non-binarity, opening the debate with the authorities about the possibility of official recognition for a third gender.¹⁰⁷ This victory in a popular, public competition gives the issue even greater visibility in wider social circles. It will therefore be interesting to reconsider the same question at some point in the future: does research based on binary gender classifications still make sense?

Finally, the discourse on women's roles is seen as necessary for some, but as stigmatising for others. Indeed, during interviews conducted by myself and my colleagues as part of our research on the STV, several women were rather annoyed by these targeted questions on the place of women, like Maru Rieben, who questions gender equality by posing the question of reciprocity: "And why don't you ask the men that? Why don't you ask in a male band: is it a coincidence that you are only men? Did you intend it that way? Even today, you know, 30 years later, the questions always come to the women and the men are not asked that."¹⁰⁸ Claudine Wyssa, former General Secretary of the STV, also reacted negatively to questions focused on the place of women. To the question '*How did you experience the treatment of women at STV?*', she replied: "Women are human beings too", before making the connection with society in general: "It was probably as usual in society. Before, it was mostly gentlemen, men who were active, and in the committee, so in my time, it was quite mixed. [...] We used to talk less about this subject than we do now."¹⁰⁹

It has to be said that in Switzerland, issues concerning women's place in the civic sphere are still relatively recent, since at federal level, women were granted the right to vote in 1971, and

105 "J'ai dû expliquer à chaque professeur [...] et camarades comment s'adresser au mieux à ma personne pour éviter de déclencher ma dysphorie de genre [...]. Les problèmes ont surtout été causés par une minorité de personnes refusant d'utiliser un langage adapté à mon identité de genre, malgré mes explications répétées et coûteuses en énergie. [...] ce manque de considération d'une demande basique concernant la relation enseignant/élève a provoqué chez moi un grand sentiment d'inconfort [...]. Ce fut d'autant plus dur de considérer les remarques concernant mon jeu alors que sans s'en rendre compte ils perpétuaient une forme d'oppression contre les personnes transgenre." (Marti 2023).

106 Bonvin 2023.

107 Fontannaz 2024.

108 "Und warum fragt man das nicht die Männer? Warum fragt man nicht in einer Männerband: ist das Zufall, dass ihr nur Männer seid? Habt ihr das so beabsichtigt? Sogar heute noch, weißt du, 30 Jahre später kommen die Fragen immer an die Frauen und die Männer werden das nicht gefragt." (Rieben 2023, [00:14:11]).

109 "Frauen sind auch Menschen. [...] Wahrscheinlich war es wie sonst in der Gesellschaft. Früher waren es hauptsächlich Herren, Männer, die aktiv waren, und im Vorstand, so in meiner Zeit war es ziemlich gemischt. [...] Man sprach weniger darüber als jetzt." (Wyssa 2022, [00:12:56]).

in Appenzell in 1990, following a ruling by the Federal Court.¹¹⁰ For a long time, Switzerland was seen as a poor pupil compared with neighbouring countries such as France, which granted women the right to vote in 1944. So some of Switzerland's pioneering female improvisers like Irène Schweizer began their careers in a country where they didn't have the right to vote, and where they experienced consistent improvements in the position and rights of women.

The question remains, however, both nationally and internationally: have we reached an egalitarian era in which it would no longer be necessary to talk about the place of women? Kate Olson's answer expresses the hope that an egalitarian era may lie ahead: "It's disappointing to me that we still have to have this conversation. [...] I would love if we never had to talk about this ever again. Right? But I think until that happens [...] I'm not sure it'll happen in our lifetimes. I think we need to keep talking about it."¹¹¹

In Switzerland, the outcome of the vote on AHV 21 on 25 September 2021 saw the retirement age for women raised in a bid to achieve gender equality without equal pay conditions, provoking a wave of indignation and ire from feminist circles, and virulently reigniting discussions on the place of women in society. This situation clearly demonstrates that discussions about equal opportunities based on gender, whether binary or not, are far from obsolete.

Artistic spheres are sometimes a mirror of civic society, but they can also take the opposite view in marginal ways, occasionally going to the extreme opposite of majority political and societal trends. This does not preclude, microscopically or macroscopically, noting the evolution of the place of women in the microcosm of improvised music, and the progress that remains to be made before we can finally render such a discourse unnecessary.

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Since 2024, the archive of the Schweizerischer Tonkünstlerverein (STV) has been held, as the Fonds de l'Association Suisse des Musiciens, in the Archives musicales de the Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire – Lausanne (for an overview of the archives see <https://patrinum.ch/record/275706>). Holdings from the STV archive are identified below by the respective signature, starting with ASM-.

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