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Rocking against patriarchy: Single-sex solutions for female musicians

ABSTRACT

Opinions on the merits of single sex education are divided, but it is acknowledged that this context for learning offers certain benefits for female musicians. This is particularly true for female rock guitarists and drummers, who are under-represented and rarely achieve virtuoso status. The scarcity of women musicians in rock and heavy metal is noted by various feminist scholars, but solutions to the problem of under-representation are elusive. In order to perform rock music professionally, women must develop initial musicianship skills. However, many girls and younger women report being intimidated, marginalized or excluded in rock bands, making it harder for them to gain experience. This article draws attention to two recent developments – female rock tributes and rock camps for women and girls – presenting them as offering a feminist solution for women who would like to perform metal and rock music with confidence.

KEYWORDS

gender
music
education
rock camps
tribute bands
aspiring female
musicians

1. In the United Kingdom, the term 'single sex' education is commonly used. It is acknowledged that the definition may present issues for those who reject gender binaries.

INTRODUCTION

Opinion is divided on the benefits of single sex education (Jackson 2010; Harker 2000; Smythe 2010).¹ To some observers, the practice may appear old-fashioned and against the current ethos of inclusivity. Nevertheless, when it

comes to learning to play rock instruments and performing with peers, an all-female environment can help women overcome barriers to learning and performing (Abramo 2011). The article does not suggest that this is the only or even the best way to help women with learning, performing or to combat the under-representation of female musicians; rather that it is one way to redress the balance. The article is not the result of a systematic study of rock camps for women and girls or all-female tribute acts; instead, it highlights some of the experiences of women who have benefitted from these environments to demonstrate their potential. Comments from those involved in learning, teaching and performing in these spaces are used to show benefits that women can derive from working in this way.

Primary data were gathered from interviews with female artists on the United Kingdom's tribute entertainment scene as well as tutors and participants at rock camps. Their combined testimonies validate the value of learning alongside, working with or being taught by other women. In order to provide a broader context, the aforementioned data are related to secondary literature from the field of popular music studies and critical thinking on the value of separating girls and women from their male peers within education. Finally, I propose that further research on single sex learning environments might be given serious consideration because of the benefits it appears to offer aspiring female musicians.

ROCK MUSIC: FOR EVERYONE OR STRICTLY FOR THE BOYS?

An appreciation of the value of all-female learning and performance environments cannot occur without some awareness of the context of women's marginalization and under-representation in popular music (Björck 2010; Green 1997). During the 1970s when the rock genre was at its height, Steve Chapple and Rebee Garofalo wrote that, 'Sexism is as pervasive in rock music as in any other form of music. It pervades the structure of the music industry as well as the lyrics and instrumentation of the music itself' (Chapple and Garofalo 1977: 269). Not only do women struggle to find employment in creative roles, they are all too often relegated to low-status administrative and support roles:

Most of the major labels – and indirectly, the independents – probably employ as many women as men, perhaps even more: 'tea ladies', secretaries, receptions, canteen staff, cleaners, and almost anyone servicing the needs of people within the industry will be female.

(Steward and Garratt 1984: 63)

Furthermore, the careers of female artists are typically controlled by men, a point highlighted by Keith Negus:

Most of the decisions about artists over the last thirty years have been made by men, and whilst there is no detailed research available on these decision-making processes, its consequences have been vividly illustrated by the portrayal of women in contemporary popular music.

(Negus 2001: 127)

During the 1970s, only four percent of the 100 top selling US albums were recorded by women (Champ 2004: 12). Their limited presence in the album

charts has influenced their long-term stature as musicians, as Jacqueline Warwick explains:²

With the rise of AOR (album-oriented rock) in the late 60s and early 70s, and especially the phenomenon of ‘concept albums’ [...] albums began to be considered large-scale works of art, central to the notion of rock as serious, important and able to stand the test of time in the same way as classical music.

(Warwick 2007: 96)

Women’s creative output was more likely to surface in the cheaper format of the single record. With a reduced presence in the rock album charts, they were taken less seriously as musicians by those responsible for marketing music – most of whom prefer to present women as solo artists or as vocalists fronting male rock bands. This trend largely continues today, insofar as:

Female artists aren’t marketed in groups like men. If they do happen to be in a band, it’s largely with other blokes in one of two forms: taking a sideline as the keyboard player, or as the entire focus of the band (sorry, ‘the Machine’, but it’s all about Florence). There are exceptions to every rule but the solo female artist is a gold standard in the music industry. Whether we may be better off for it or not, there isn’t a girl equivalent of U2, Coldplay, Radiohead or Kings of Leon.

(Iqbal 2010)

Women’s achievements are also overlooked in mainstream platforms of the canon where, during an eighteen-year period, only three of the prestigious Mercury Prize winners were female. Similarly, in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame’s ‘500 songs that shaped popular music’, only 35 feature the work of female artists.³

Gendering the equipment

The dilemma of under-representation in rock and metal is not helped by the gendering of instruments and equipment, both of which present barriers to female participation (Green 1997). Marion Leonard reminds us how, ‘particular musical instruments, music technologies and sounds have become associated with masculinity and femininity’ (Leonard 2007: 96). Hence those attempting to take on the ‘masculine’ hardware of rock can experience an uncomfortable learning trajectory. For instance, Helene Stapinski, a drummer in the New York band Stephonic, explains how she was ridiculed for admitting to an interest in the drum kit: ‘When I was in high school I would say I played the drums and the boys would laugh at me. It was sort of a joke’ (Longrigg 2004).

The voice is similarly stereotyped along gender lines. In rock and metal, masculinity is upheld vocally, by avoiding ‘pop’ style singing because of its connotations of femininity. Although nervous shrieking and use of the higher falsetto register is a central aspect of (male) rock vocalization, any feminizing connotations are subdued within the contrast provided by gruffer, more ‘manly’ vocals and the harsher timbre and texture of much of the accompanying music. Even in higher education contexts where a greater degree of objectivity might be anticipated, the value of the female voice is often diminished (Smith 2015; Parkinson and Smith 2015). Influential cultural commentator Theodor Adorno

2. By contrast, in Billboard (2013) magazine’s list of the best selling singles of the 1970s, female artists were better represented.

3. The prizewinning females were Speech DeBelle (2009), Ms Dynamite (2002) and P. J. Harvey (2001). Source: ‘Rock and Roll Hall of Fame – 500 Songs That Shaped Rock’, 2004. Web. 28 March 2015, <http://www.rocklistmusic.co.uk/steveparker/halloffame.htm>.

4. Some manufacturers (e.g. Luna) have responded to the need by supplying a range designed specifically for women. See <http://www.lunaguitars.com/>.
5. An equalizer or 'EQ' enables precise control of the sound system. With EQ, adjustments can be made that allow the performer to speak or sing at high volume without experiencing 'feedback'.

disparaged the inherent qualities of female vocalizing, suggesting that, 'Male voices can be reproduced better [in recordings] than female voices' and in his opinion, 'the female voice can easily sound shrill' (Adorno 1990: 54). Similarly Judith Baxter's (1999: xiv) findings on perception of the voice define the male public voice as competitive, ego-enhancing and hegemonic in comparison to the female variant.

Technical and practical issues

Taking the aforementioned observations into account, is it surprising that Hallam et al. (2008: 9) found girls are often reluctant to learn to play rock instruments? The scale of many instruments fails to match female proportions; the classic Dreadnought guitar shape, for example, is unwieldy for many women.⁴ Moreover, from a purely practical perspective, the majority of rock performance microphones are designed to accommodate the EQ range of the male voice and do not do justice to the subtleties of female vocalizing.⁵ Thus, when Whiteley (1997: 37) poses the rhetorical question, 'Where are all the great female electric guitarists?', rather than automatically assuming a female skills deficit in rock musicianship, we should look instead to feminist scholarly research for an answer.

It is not the case that women choose to accept their musical subjugation. Instead, Valerie Walkerdine argues, 'we are filled with roles and stereotypes of passive femininity', and moreover, 'femininity and masculinity are fictions linked to fantasies [...] which take on the status of fact when inscribed in the powerful practices like schooling, through which we are regulated' (Walkerdine 1990: xii). Amongst others, Bayton (1998), Björck (2010), Carson et al. (2004), Clawson (1999) and Cohen (1997) have demonstrated how at each stage, from song writing and rehearsal to recording and touring, women are confronted with obstacles. From the outset in childhood, boys are more likely to receive a guitar as a gift from parents, with only four percent being purchased for girls (Schou 2007).

Furthermore, trips to guitar shops can invite unwanted misogynistic or sexist treatment. According to singer songwriter Emily White, 'There were never any women working in them and still rarely are'. When she went on to work in a guitar shop, she found customers did not take her seriously, and writes, '[W]hether you're playing or recording or selling or buying, you always have to prove yourself' (White cited in Carson et al. 2015: 1). Seasoned guitarist, Melissa Bobbitt, explains how during her teenage years, when asking for a Fender Stratocaster, male employees invariably offered her a lighter Squire guitar or one from the girlier 'Daisy Rock' range. She also alludes to a shortage of female assistants with technical expertise, citing how:

At Guitar Centers [in] Pasadena and West Los Angeles the women either handle bag check at the entrance or ring up customers at the register. Nowhere have I seen a female tech, roaming salesperson or luthier at any Guitar Center in my two decades of shopping there.

(Bobbitt 2015)

For many women, it seems that 'processes of skill acquisition interact with the dynamic of early adolescent gender formation to produce an institution and an array of practices that can be termed masculine' (Clawson 1999: 99).

Citing Bourdieu's (2001) concept of 'masculine domination', Hebert et al. (2017: 458) note that this powerful societal force 'exerts and reinforces its

power and normativity in popular music education (PME) through institutionalized processes, curricula, repertoire (canon) and other music industry norms, including the gendering of musical instruments'. As Parkinson and Smith (2015: 110) point out, 'to be authentically gendered in popular music is to be masculine', or is at least to be 'constructed' from the perspective of the heteronormative 'male gaze' (Lieb 2015). Furthermore, Cohen (1997: 81) observes how women playing rock are more likely to be valued for their looks than for their musicianship. As Helene Stapinski points out, 'When Led Zeppelin were playing, whoever said, "The drummer's really ugly?"' (Stapinski in Pearson 2014: xvii).

Women who learn or perform alongside men may find the experience intimidating (Abramo 2011), an experience that hinders the development of skills. This argument is endorsed in an Internet blog on the subject of female guitarists that features the following post:

Put two beginner guitarists together in a jam session, one male and one female. I can almost guarantee the male will try to dominate the session. Men have a natural instinct to overshadow females in the same activity [...] The female does not have the opportunity to do her thing, therefore putting her back, and making her feel insignificant in the session. This doesn't allow her to progress her skills, leaving her stranded on what to do next [...] Believe me, I've had that from constant experiences.

(NewRage 2008)

According to Cohen, other tactics employed by male musicians included sexual intimidation and isolation: 'In the everyday conversation of male band members women are often treated as objects of sexual desire, conquest, or derision, or linked with the domestic sphere of family and home' (1997: 22).

'Walk Like a Man': Rocking against the odds

A limited number of women have achieved success by joining forces with female peers. For Fanny, the first all-female rock band to be signed to a major record label in 1969, playing live before thousands of fans was a major milestone in the annals of female rock performance.⁶ Another female rock group The Runaways, also enjoyed a strong fan following, likened at the time to Beatlemania.⁷ Moreover, these pioneering female bands did not simply imitate their male counterparts. For instance, American rock band, The Shaggs' unself-conscious ineptitude influenced subsequent grunge and punk artists, yet there are few references to the group in rock histories (Chusid 2000: 1). Likewise, many women played creative roles in the punk movement of the late 1970s, but these examples should not be viewed as symptomatic of gender equality (Green 1997). Indeed, it is argued that some of the manifestations of misogyny inherent in punk made feminism an easy target (Reynolds and Press 1995: 33).

More recently, the Riot Grrrl punk movement of the 1990s embraced feminist thought and activism in the creation of an underground, female-friendly music scene. Here, women were encouraged to represent their own interests, developing and exhibiting their musicianship skills without hindrance from male detractors. Riot Grrrl's contribution to dismantling the male canon is acknowledged by Downes (2012: 216), who claims the movement facilitated an emotionally charged music counterpublic, enabling women to claim cultural autonomy while challenging the status quo.

6. Fanny were signed to Reprise Records in 1969, they toured between 1969 and 1975 and released a number of hit albums and singles, www.fannyrocks.com/.

7. Source: *Edgeplay: A Film About The Runaways* (2004) IMDb.

SINGLE SEX LEARNING: A WAY FORWARD?

If women have the desire to learn how to play rock instruments without the hindrance of either misogyny or sexism, rock camps and all-female tribute bands appear to offer ways forward. In particular, these environments are likely to combat some of the educational issues, such as instruments and associated performance styles being designated as masculine or feminine, and the societal pressure to adhere to restrictive gendered norms (Abeles 2009; Abeles and Porter 1979; Hallam et al. 2008; Sinsabaugh 2005). As Estelle Jorgenson has outlined:

It is a commonplace that music and education are gendered in their historical tendency to exclude women and girls or marginalize them from the mainstream of musical life; to prescribe and proscribe certain musical activities for each gender; and to perpetuate white, male, heterosexual perspectives on music theory and practice in what counts for musical knowledge.

(Jorgenson 2008: 20)

These views are supported by research findings (Bergman 2009 cited in Björck 2010: 48) indicating that girls are less likely to opt for rock instruments at school or exhibit proficiency in performing when competent, due to a reluctance to 'show off' their skills. Girls are also less inclined to take part in more informal after school rock tuition where boys dominate because they dislike the masculinist atmosphere.

By eradicating the presence of male musicians and instructors, rock camps offer alternative environments where women may develop initial skills and exhibit them with greater confidence. By offering inclusive and safe spaces for women at either end of the learning spectrum, both rock camps and all-female tributes provide tangible benefits that might inform the thinking of those charged with providing music education and training. Furthermore, the promotion of single sex education for girls has a sound pedagogic rationale. Jackson (2002) argues that both sexes benefit from separate education since their social and psychological development takes place at a different rate. Adding weight to the argument, Hughes (2006), Mael et al. (2005), Salomone (2003) and Sax (2011) suggest the benefits of single sex education are greater for girls. Moreover, Simmons and Blyth (1987: 153) observe that girls in single sex environments enjoy higher social connectedness and well-being than their female peers in mixed gender settings.

Rock and roll boot camp

Girls rock camps have been around for over sixteen years, following the opening of the first in Portland, Oregon. The United States is host to 44 camps, and the advisory board of the fundraising body Girls Rock Foundation includes a number of high profile artists including Beth Ditto, Kathleen Hanna and Tegan and Sara (Singh 2017). According to Girls Rock Camp Alliance, an organization devoted to promoting rock camps, there are at least 57 such camps worldwide (GRCA n.d.). As a single sex initiative, rock camps are enabling girls to overcome some of the barriers and transcend social structures discussed above. In the words of Vicky O'Neon, who set up the first UK camp in 2016, 'When I started out I didn't feel very confident in a male industry [...] Most female musicians have felt this way. I think if we can in some way help the

next generation not to feel that, that's amazing' (Singh 2017). Her thoughts are echoed by those of a seasoned volunteer at Portland rock camp, who writes:

I do believe that rock camp helps [girls] overcome sexism in order to develop performance skills. The camp does this through pop-culture awareness and self-esteem building, letting girls know that it's OK to be loud and to fully express themselves. Girls are encouraged to take risks and fully supported when they do.

(Leslie Yeagers, e-mail to author, 5 March 2014)

Unhindered by male peers, girls can experiment and experience the freedom to learn unselfconsciously (Abramo 2011). Camps aim to challenge the learned passivity with styles of performance that may feel uncomfortable initially. In the words of one observer:

In some ways, Willie Mae [rock camp] is the opposite of charm school. It's more like a 'be strong' school, where part of the overall lesson is the one they hear in self-defence class. You don't have to be nice to everyone all the time. Don't be scared all the time either. Give the right non-verbal signals.

(Tillotson 2005)

In the words of Clementine, a professional drummer and founder member of Led Zeppelin tribute, Zeparella, 'Being nice is a pop music attitude' whereas 'Metal music is loud and aggressive'. She elaborates, 'When I play, I try to be as big and strong and monstrous as possible. But I am not trying to be a man, just trying to be as big and strong and monstrous as possible' (Clementine, personal communication, 3 March 2007). Clementine's attempts at non-gendered musicking, however, might have been thwarted by the strong gendering of the drum kit – what Monson (1996: 66) identifies as 'cultural coding of the drum set as a masculine instrument requiring both physical strength and endurance'.

Although male volunteers are allowed to help in certain capacities, they are not employed as tutors because the effectiveness of the rock camp's pedagogic practice is amplified by the presence of female staff:

All of the band managers and instrument instructors are women.

Even our 'sound guy' is a gal. The emphasis is on allowing self-expression without judgment. What this does is allow the girls to actually open out without any painful retribution or taunting that so often occurs in our society.

(Pam Barrett, telephone interview, 24 March 2012)

With counselling, martial arts classes and sessions on positive body image available at many of the camps, girls confront and face their fears head on, allowing them to play unselfconsciously, with attitude and conviction:

I think rock camp is an amazing place for a woman to get introduced to a rock instrument that maybe she's always wanted to play since childhood but was told that 'girls don't play drums, electric guitar, or bass'. A woman gets to live out her dream of playing in or fronting a

band without the negative messages she grew up with and with a ton of encouragement and support. She leaves the experience empowered, amazed, and quite possibly dedicated to studying the instrument she played at camp.

(Leslie Yeagers, e-mail to author, 5 March 2014)

Anecdotally, staff report that after camp, women continue with their mastery of an instrument, and the bonds formed can lead the formation of post-camp bands. Also the fast growth of rock camps in the US and beyond suggests that the longer-term benefits will eventually surface as more women and girls participate.

While the girls' rock camp clearly addresses some important issues in PME, the initiatives might be accused of failing to address the root problem of institutionalized sexism. It could also be argued that the move away from integrated gender tuition is a regressive step in cultures committed to stamping out gender inequalities. These arguments are countered by camp staff who see the exclusion of male participants and tutors as an essential step within a longer trajectory towards change. Indeed, a male volunteer at Portland rock camp offered the following defence:

The fact that no other male has volunteered during the four years I've been here is a testament to the necessity of Rock Camp. Many times I have thought, or heard from others, how great it would be if this camp weren't necessary; if girl bands and boy bands garnered equal respect in the musical community; if the genders mixed in music [and] if the differences were respected.

(Anderson et al. 2008: 151)

Elizabeth Venable, a camp tutor also defends the 'girls only' policy on similar grounds:

Because we can't click our heels and make sexism go away, organizations like The Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls are necessary. Rock camp gives girls and women support systems and opportunities they have historically been denied. By making knowledge and information accessible, and providing a safe space for girls and women, Rock Camp is a key element in bringing about necessary social change.

(Anderson et al. 2008: 151)

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT THEM, JOIN THEM: PLAYING IN A FEMALE TRIBUTE BAND

Although public performance opportunities are presented in-house at rock camps, if women want to exhibit their skills publically, they need to be able to go beyond the confines of the camp environment. Claiming a feminist space for women to explore and learn is not by itself sufficient. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. Cecilia Björck argues that, 'If the act of "claiming space" is thought of as simply being seen and being heard – being "onstage" – without considering what comes before and after, we are mistakenly simplifying the act' (Björck 2010: 69). Women may wish to attract a paying audience or play for pleasure to an audience beyond the camp's supportive environment.

In these circumstances, paying homage to classic male rock and metal bands is one solution to the dilemma. An analysis of leading entertainment industry website Tribute City (www.tributecity.com) indicates that there are 109 tributes to the iconic rock band AC/DC. By comparison, there are only two tributes to Joan Jett and none to either The Shaggs or Fanny. Launching a tribute is a risky activity, and musicians need to secure the largest possible fan base. As Coulangeon et al. (2005: 365) observe, female performers already command lower earnings and have less occupational stability. By performing 'men's rock', women can hope to redress the balance somewhat by securing employment because, as Fournet (2010: 20) reminds us, being female in a male-dominated field provides a unique selling point. At the time of writing, a search of Tribute City website reveals that amongst the growing legion of tributes to AC/DC, there are currently only five all-female ensembles: AC/Dshe, Girls Got Rhythm, Thunderstruck, Whole Lotta Rosies and Hell's Belles.

The efforts of female tribute artists serve to inspire others. In a website dedicated to bass playing, Wanda Ortiz of the Iron Maidens is described as 'an inspiration to anyone who feels the bass is too big for them' (Burbridge, 2007). This inspirational perspective is echoed by Aja Kim, a former member of Iron Maidens:

I want to blow misconceptions out of the window and help other women see that for themselves and I do feel a sense of purpose in modelling behaviour that may perhaps help others give themselves permission to do the same. I always feel a strong connection to other women when I perform and the continued reaction is one of support. I know that seeing a physically powerful looking woman is really inspiring to other women.

(Aja Kim, e-mail to author, 24 October 2013)

According to Krenske and McKay (2000: 287), the forceful presence of men and the power relations on the scene have required women to 'do gender on men's terms', but if we use Burke's (1950: 227) classic concept of identification, it is easy to see how a deeper sense of female connection is forged through the gender role reversal of female tribute acts. Burke suggests connection can occur through a process of *consubstantiation*, whereby a fusion of the essence of each person enables them to transcend their uniqueness and difference. Assuming the identity and repertoire of male performers effectively disrupts and subverts conventional audience expectations at the rock concert, showing that loud and abrasive music is not inherently macho or exclusive to the masculine domain. In the words of one seasoned performer:

I think up until the last few years, music has been primarily a man's world so to speak. Women musicians were sort of a novelty [...] but that has changed tremendously in the last few years, and it's still changing. For spectators, I think some come to the shows out of curiosity, and some come out because they like to see a woman up there rocking like it's no one's business. There is an indescribable potency in that.

(Mandy Reed, e-mail to author, 28 October 2010)

Women's performance also opens up opportunities for alternative expressions of sexuality. For example, the AC/DC song 'Mistress for Christmas' fantasizes

about impersonal sexual relations with anonymous, objectified women in lines such as

Easy come, easy go
Have a good time with lots of dough
Slippin' up high, slippin' down low
Love 'em and leave 'em, on with the show
Listen, I like female form in minimal dress
Money to spend with a capital 'S'
Get a date with the woman in red
Wanna be in heaven with three in a bed.

(AC/DC 1990, 'Mistress for Christmas', Atco Records)

By re-presenting these lyrics, female artists create the 'gender trouble' identified by Butler (1990), who argues that rather than being a given, masculinity and femininity are sociocultural constructs, perpetuated through continual re-enactment. Hence the active and assertive presence of female tribute artists offers a corporeal challenge to the heteronormativity of rock music, as well as the subjugation of women more generally under patriarchy.

Audience appeal

From a commercial perspective, female tributes bands are able to attract more women to concerts; when asked who attended Iron Maidens gigs, the core audience was described as follows:

Mostly male ages 13–45 but we are seeing a lot more women in the audiences and hope to see more. They're almost all hardcore Iron Maiden fans (or in the case of the kids, become fans after being exposed to this music) and are very accepting and appreciative of what we do. Things are really changing – and there are many, many more women who listen to hard rock and metal music today than when the music of Iron Maiden first became popular in the 1980s.

(Aja Kim, e-mail to author, 24 October 2010)

Some female fans feel sufficiently empowered to enter the area just below the stage, known as the 'mosh pit', where pushing, 'slamming' and aggressive shoving are ways in which male fans traditionally express their identification with the music. In the words of two Iron Maidens fans:

We don't normally risk going in there and getting, you know, touched up [...] but when we went to see The Maidens it was cool – nobody tried to touch me up or beat the crap out of us when we were moshing. It was just amazing – but without all that macho stuff going on. There was a frenzy going on in there but it was all about the music – not trying to show you can beat the hell out of everyone.

(Kayleigh and Rochelle, in person interview, 1 November 2015)

Aja Kim suggests that many of the male fans go to see the all-female bands primarily out of curiosity or doubt that women are capable of performing the music:

We get a lot of people who can't believe women are playing this music and who have their doubts initially that we can pull it off. But once they experience our show the doubts dissolve and they completely accept and respect us, because they see and hear that we are serious musicians with serious chops who are also fans and love this music as much as they do.

(Aja Kim, e-mail to author, 24 October 2010)

It would be easy enough to criticize the women for performing another artists' work rather than their own, but many of the female musicians on the tribute scene are engaged in other projects such as original song writing, which they fit around their jobs and leisure pursuits as tribute artists. Finally, for anyone posing the question as to why, rather than writing their own music, the women choose to uphold the repertoire of the male pantheon, Leigh Westee, a member of the Kiss tribute Goddess of Thunder, responds as follows:

We get that a lot 'why copy someone else's music? Why not create your own?' Well, our answer is, that this is a hobby [...] Sure, we could start our own band, in fact most of us ARE in original bands also, but the KISS tribute is SO much fun and so near and dear to our hearts that we'd never give it up! We never really thought about 'Oh we're girls and KISS are guys so we can't do this'. We feel like we have the same right to show our love for KISS by forming a tribute band. And we do as much as any guy band would do, from costumes to fire breathing! We feel like we probably have to work twice as hard to prove ourselves and be taken seriously because we're girls.

(Leigh Westee, e-mail to author, 3 March 2012)

CONCLUSION

More research is clearly needed to establish long-term benefits as well as any negative consequences associated with single-sex music education. However, initial observations suggest that, at the very least, this style of learning provides girls and women with basic materials to gain sufficient confidence to perform rock and metal music. Although the key issues of gaining recognition and attracting an audience are only partially resolved, paying homage to the work of classic male artists allows women to gain respect for their musicianship – a situation that may appear counter-intuitive, as it somewhat contradicts the finds of other studies (e.g. Smith 2013: 145–46) that have found the dearth of female role models (and resulting reliance on male rock icons) to diminish women's credibility or confidence in the masculine domain. The ability of all-women groups to claim a stake, or to 'claim space' (Björck 2010) in the tribute entertainment scene makes them more appealing to many promoters. By subverting the hegemony of male virtuosity, new ways of experiencing rock music are provided, which challenge the conventions of gendered spectatorship and the assumption that only men can play 'men's' music. As full participants in the production of rock music, the single-sex solution allows women to enjoy the liberating experience of working alongside one another in a supportive and productive manner.

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