

Voices of Women Musicians in the Japanese Music Industry : a survey questionnaire and interview study

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Abstract: This article delves into the experiences and perspectives of women musicians in Japan's music industry, presenting the results of both a questionnaire survey and interviews conducted with women musicians in various roles, such as performers, composers, conductors, producers, and educators. It highlights the challenges the musicians face as women in the industry and their efforts to overcome them through strategies such as self-management strategies and seeking out support from peers and networks. The survey results reveal issues related to job insecurity, low pay, and gender discrimination. The interviews provide a deeper insight into their experiences, insights, and aspirations, including the lack of representation and support for female musicians. Direct quotes from the interviews are used throughout the article to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the women musicians' perspectives. The importance of representation and diversity in the music industry is highlighted, along with the need for more support and resources for musicians.

Key words: women musicians, music industry, Japan, portfolio careers, challenges and coping strategies, representation

Introduction

The music industry is known for its precarious working conditions, which are particularly challenging for freelance musicians (Nørholm-Lundin 2022, 1). While artistic and freelance work provides autonomy, flexibility, and opportunities for self-actualization through engaging work, it is also associated with relatively low wages, job insecurity, and limited opportunities for career advancement (Lorenz, 2017, 9). Studies conducted on women musicians working as professionals in the music industry in the UK and US show that women musicians, especially freelance workers, have unique obstacles to overcome when pursuing a sustainable musical career (see Lorenz, 2017; Armstrong 2013). According to Armstrong (2013), even though opportunities for women in the music industry have progressed in recent years and that women are now more widely represented across various sectors, they still only occupy 32.2% of all music industry-related jobs in the UK. Moreover, they earn less than their male counterparts, often face obstacles that hinder their career progression,

and are more likely to give up their careers prematurely (298).

In the case of Japan, gender disparity in the music industry is also significant, especially in leadership positions. According to an article published by JWCM, even though the majority (73 percent) of students enrolled in major music universities and who graduate are women, less than 40 percent of faculty members in these universities are women. Additionally, women only occupy 10 percent of board member positions for public interest incorporated foundations related to performing arts, and only 6 percent of board member positions for seven orchestras in Tokyo. This gender disparity is a reflection of broader societal norms and expectations that limit women's career advancement opportunities in the music industry, among other fields.

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this small-scale research study is to investigate the socio-economic situation surrounding women musicians working within the contemporary music industry in Japan and to gain a better understanding of their professional lives. Chapter 1 will offer an overview of the questionnaire survey results, categorized by themes and topics, and supplemented with selected quotes from the answers to the open-ended questions. In Chapter 2, an analysis of interviews conducted with several women musicians will be presented, with direct quotes from the interviews used to provide a deeper understanding of their experiences, insights, and aspirations in the music industry.

The research methodology used for this study involved first organizing a questionnaire survey and subsequently conducting follow-up one-on-one interviews with the respondents. The online survey was distributed through Google forms from October 24, 2022 through November 15, 2022. To promote the survey, an online link was shared through email and social media channels to the researcher's and supervisors' contacts who identify as women, have worked or retired from the music industry in some capacity, and are not presently employed outside of Japan. Participants were deemed eligible to take part in the survey upon providing their consent to participate.

The survey received responses from 135 women who work in various roles such as performers, conductors, composers, producers, singer-songwriters and educators within the contemporary music industry of Japan. Nine of the survey respondents who expressed an interest in participating in further discussions were then selected for follow-up interviews. The interviews were conducted in the form of qualitative expert interviews (Flick 2009, 165) to include these nine professionals in the study as representatives of their specific field of expertise. The one-on-one interviews took place online in November, 2022 via video conferencing software and were recorded and

transcribed verbatim with the participants' consent. The recordings were approximately 30-40 minutes.

The questionnaire survey was designed to explore the socio-economic status of women musicians, covering aspects such as their educational background, profession, income, career advancement, job satisfaction, and other relevant factors such as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their careers. The survey also featured several open-ended questions that aimed to delve into the participants' perspectives and experiences on various topics, including mentoring, work-life balance, career obstacles and their suggestions on what is necessary to overcome such obstacles, and additional skills that one might need as a musician in today's ever-changing circumstances. The expert interview questions included a variety of topics, ranging from the participants' career paths in the music industry to their daily routines and practices. The questionnaire survey and interview data, which were initially conducted in Japanese, were translated into English by the researcher. The open-ended text responses and interview data were subsequently coded and organized into specific themes and categories.

Table1. Background information of the interview participants

Pseu donym	Age	Actives	Education	Genre	Instrument
A	26-35	Performance, Teaching (junior/high school)	Master's Degree	Classical	Church Organist
B	36-45	Performance, Music Production, Writer (essays, non-fiction)	Master's Degree	Pop	Singer-song writer
C	46-55	Teaching (voice trainer, chorus instructor), Accompaniment	University Degree	Classical	Pianist
D	56-65	Performance, Teaching (private), Composition and Production	University Degree	Jazz	Saxophonist
E	36-45	Composition, Teaching (university, private)	Doctoral Degree	Classical	Composer
F	36-45	Performance, Music Production, Teaching (private lessons, high school)	University Degree	Pop	Singer-song writer
G	26-35	Performance, Teaching (private lessons)	Master's Degree	Classical	Vocalist (Soprano)
H	36-45	Performance, Teaching (private lessons, middle/high school)	Master's Degree	Classical	Trumpeter
I	56-65	Performance	University Degree	Traditional	Various

Chapter 1. Overview of Questionnaire Survey Results

A total of 135 women working in different positions in Japan's contemporary music industry including performers, conductors, composers, producers, singer-songwriters and educators responded to the survey.

Genre of Music, Age, Education Level

The largest proportion of the respondents (67 percent), belonged to the classical music category. The second-highest group was those associated with traditional Japanese music or *hōgaku*, accounting for 26 percent of the participants. The remaining percentage of respondents were involved in pop and jazz music. Around 16 percent of the women reported their age as between 26 to 35 years, while 23 percent belonged to the age group of 36 to 45 years. The majority of the respondents, comprising 61 percent, were 46 years old or older. More than 90 percent of the participants hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Among them, 84 percent received their degree from a professional music education institution. About 49 percent of the participants reported having children, among whom 22 percent have children under the age of 18.

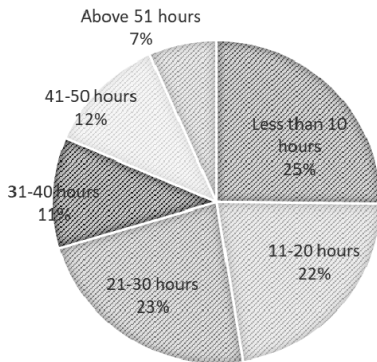
Length of Career, Number of Occupations

The survey results revealed that the majority of the participants (82 percent) had been employed in the music industry for over a decade, with over 60 percent having worked in the industry for over 20 years. Only 9 percent of the respondents reported working in the industry for less than five years. Additionally, the length of one's career differed depending on their employment role. Most of the participants (69 percent) identified their primary occupation as within the music industry. Among them, 83 percent also held a secondary music-related job. Overall, almost all respondents (95 percent) reported having two or more sources of income, regardless of whether their primary occupation was in the music industry or not.

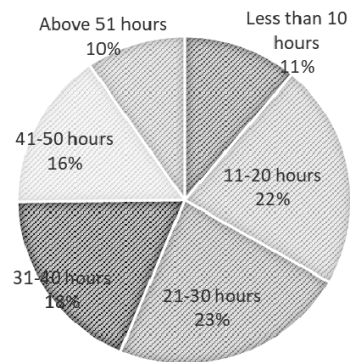
Primary Occupation, Type of Employment, Hours Worked, Income

The survey indicated that the most frequent primary occupation reported by the respondents was in education and teaching (58 percent), with music production (10 percent) being the second most common occupation. Among women who had two jobs in the music industry, the most common combination was education/teaching and performance (self-employed/freelancer), followed by education/teaching and music production/songwriting. The number of hours a week spent working in the industry varied depending on the type of employment. Above a quarter of the respondents (26.7 percent) said that they work less than 10 hours per week in the music industry, excluding any time spent working in non-music-related jobs. This was followed by 24 percent between 11 and 20 hours, 21 percent between 31 and 40 hours, and almost 12

percent between 31 and 40 hours. Only 16 percent work more than 40 hours.

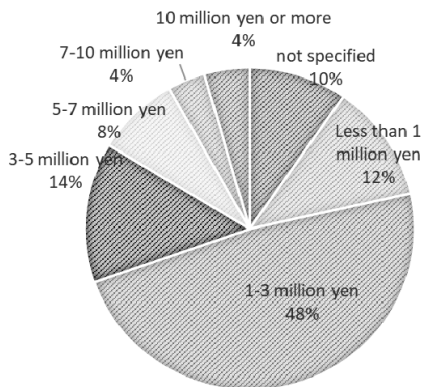


Graph 1: Weekly Hours Worked (general)

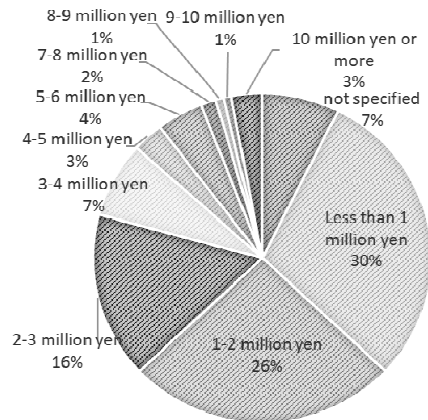


Graph 2: Weekly Hours Worked in Music Industry

Overall, 60 percent of respondents earned less than 3 million yen (app. 20,500 euro) per year including all music and non-music related jobs. Above half of the respondents (55 percent) earned 2 million yen (13,600 euro) or less per year from their music related primary occupation and side jobs.



Graph 3: Yearly Income of Respondents (general)



Graph 4: Yearly Income of Respondents (music-related occupation)

A significant portion of the respondents (36 percent) reported that they are unable to support themselves financially through their work in the music industry alone. On the other hand, half of the respondents (50 percent) stated that they can sustain themselves through their music-related work and their partner's income. Additionally, 21 percent of the respondents reported that they rely on financial support from their parents in order to make a living from their work in the music industry. 45 percent of respondents did not consider themselves to be financially stable as a musician living in Japan, and 41.5 percent did not agree that there were sufficient opportunities to

work and perform as a musician. Additionally, 43 percent of respondents stated that the compensation system had a negative impact on their career. 44 percent of the respondents were satisfied with having a portfolio career that combined various professions within the music industry. On the other hand, 45 percent of the respondents would rather have only one music-related job instead of combining multiple professions.

“It is becoming harder to get by compared to the previous generation because the compensation is much less [...] the times are different from when money was surplus during the bubble economy.”

Vocalist (survey)

“Classical musicians often have to spend money to organize and perform their own concerts. People who can't afford this structure can't continue performing until they have a stable income and known name. [...] The working conditions are impossible. I feel that this cannot be changed unless the government intervenes.”

Vocalist (survey)

Negative impacts of Gender inequality, Work-life balance, Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the survey, 44 percent of respondents believed that their gender had affected their career, with 23 percent saying they had experienced discrimination. A quarter felt that the gender imbalance in their workplace negatively affected their career, and 45 percent stated that their work environment didn't offer adequate support. Meanwhile, 32 percent reported that a poor work-life balance had impacted their career, and nearly 60 percent said the COVID-19 pandemic had had a negative effect on their professional lives.

“Despite the progress made in recent years towards gender equality in the music industry, men still dominate positions of power in the world of composition. The fact that competition judges and grant selection committees are mostly male continues a system of male-centred values and reinforces the notion that only works deemed "good" by male perspectives are worth recognition.”

Composer (survey)

“The number of concerts has been halved due to COVID-19, and even now there are many restrictions at the venues not to mention the hurdle of planning a concert by yourself.”

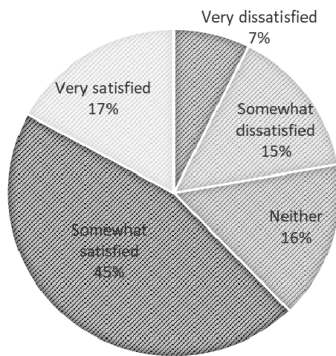
Harpist (survey)

“As I get older, I often worry about how much longer I can actively participate in the music industry.”

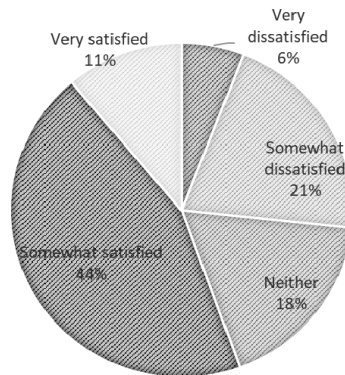
Vocalist (survey)

Career Progress and Job Satisfaction

A majority of the women (55 percent) expressed high levels of job satisfaction despite facing challenges. More than half of women across all income levels reported satisfaction with their primary music-related job. Additionally, 62 percent of respondents felt that they had achieved what they wanted in their careers thus far. Around half of the respondents (50 percent) indicated that they are living a fulfilling life as a musician. The study also found correlations between career satisfaction, career progress satisfaction, and higher income.



Graph 5: Satisfaction with Career Progress



Graph 6: Satisfaction with Music Career

Table 2: Correlations between career satisfaction, career progress satisfaction, and higher income

	Satisfaction with Career Progress	Satisfaction with Music Career	Yearly Income (general)	Yearly Income (music)
Satisfaction with Career Progress		.657** 135	.243** 122	.371** 125
Satisfaction with Music Career			.335** 122	.400** 125
Yearly Income (general)				.750** 122

** $p < .01$

Challenges Women Face Within the Japanese Music Industry

Survey participants were asked to express their opinions on the most significant challenges that women in the Japanese music industry face today. The responses were analyzed and grouped into six categories. The category with the highest percentage was "Childbirth/childcare" at 32 percent, followed by "Gender inequality" at 22 percent. "Low income/wages" and "Poor work-life balance" were cited by 12 percent, and 8 percent of respondents mentioned the "Importance of physical appearances". The remaining responses were divided into "Sexual harassment," and "Lack of Societal Understanding and Support".

“Employment is not stable, especially in the case of freelancers. There are only a few places where you can get a full-time employment, many lecturers and teachers work part-time. I feel that there are many cases where so-called heavyweights have stayed in the few regular positions, positions that have a great influence on the industry. In addition to the unbalanced gender ratio, I feel that the top of the industry is mostly male.”

Vocalist (survey)

“Not being able to have financial stability affects your mental health.”

Pianist (survey)

“Women musicians – especially singers – are seen as sexual objects. It is difficult to maintain a professional distance with the fans on social media”

Jazz Vocalist (survey)

What Women Musicians Need for Sustainable Careers

Survey participants were also invited to share their opinions on what women musicians need in order to have a sustainable career within the music industry in Japan and/or overseas. The responses were analyzed and grouped into five categories. “Support from government/organizations” was highest at 31 percent, followed by “Improving social and professional skills” at 28 percent and “A better childcare system” at 20 percent. “Gender Equality” and “Social Awareness and Understanding” were at 11 percent and 10 percent respectively.

“During the pandemic, I was reminded once again of the fragility of our profession. In Japan, the status of classical music is not as established compared to other professions. [...] I think it is essential to have a compensation system that can maintain a stable standard of living.”

Vocalist (survey)

Mentorship

Half of the respondents received mentorship and a large majority of those who were mentored (86 percent) reported that it had positively impacted their careers. Furthermore, respondents were asked an open question about how mentorship had contributed to their careers, with answers ranging from music-specific skills such as technique and expression to advice on career development and work– (private) life balance. Some women found that the mentoring they received was beneficial for enhancing their performance skills, while others found it helpful for career guidance such as selecting a job or field of specialization, and learning how to book concerts, network, and teach.

“I learned what kind of path to follow in order to pursue my career in the future” Violinist (survey)

Especially for women from the Japanese traditional music, mentoring entailed advice on developing a certain 'mindset' towards their craft:

“By sharing food, clothing and shelter with the master from the very beginning, you learn things that cannot be acquired through technical lessons alone, such as the mental attitude of a performer, the mental attitude of a leader, how to perform, how to behave... I learned how to feel and respond with my eyes, ears, skin and heart, and this is crucial for me as a performer.”
Shamisen player (survey)

Mentors' advice was not always helpful for composers due to the constantly shifting musical landscape and generational differences:

“I am grateful to those who gave me advice, but I feel that the advice of the older generation is almost useless in today's ever-changing circumstances.”

“I received a lot of advice from a senior composer who was my supervisor during my Ph.D. studies. That being said, I feel that there was little applicable advice when it came to finding a paid job.”

Changing Music Industry and Acquiring New Skills

The survey participants were asked in the form of open-text question whether they think that the skills required of musicians had evolved compared to past generations. 80 percent of the participants responded affirmatively and indicated that new skills are now necessary for a sustainable career in the music industry. Five categories were created based on the written responses of the participants. The most significant

category was “Social media skills” at 36 percent, followed by “Advancing professional skills” at 28 percent, and “Entrepreneurial skills” at 24 percent. The remaining 12 percent were equally divided between “Teaching/pedagogical skills” or “Working on one's physical appearances”.

“The skill to plan and manage events has become more crucial than ever before with the increase in independently planned concerts that do not rely on management companies.”

Pianist (survey)

“Vocalists are now not only expected to have good singing abilities but also to look good on stage as they are perceived as celebrities; there is a growing emphasis on appearance in addition to singing talent, especially as new vocalists debut every year.”

Soprano (survey)

“Today's performers need to have the skills to develop their own distinctive style, including an online presence, as a means to broaden their audience reach amidst the rapidly changing world, particularly with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Violinist (survey)

Chapter 2. Analysis of the Interviews: Voices of Women Musicians

The survey results showed that women musicians who are working in the Japanese music industry are managing various types of employment (from being an employee within an institution to working freelance, and from part-time to full-time work) while also juggling multiple jobs and professions. The changing social and cultural environment of music has considerable implications for professional musicians and their work in diverse fields (Smilde 2021, 30). Musicians are now required to operate in diverse cultural contexts and play various roles due to lack of job security and the need for flexible career patterns. This has resulted in an increase in freelance work and need to possess entrepreneurial skills (ibid). Consequently, many musicians today pursue what is known as a "portfolio career," which involves engaging in multiple professional activities and taking on various interrelated roles in order to sustain their professional lives (ibid).

The majority of the respondents have such portfolio careers, they are actively engaged in diverse occupations, often working in more than one occupation simultaneously. Their creative occupations are not restricted to a single workplace or organization and their work takes place across a wide range of locations, including traveling to various

places in Japan and abroad for rehearsals, performances, and workshops. They work in various spaces, including their homes, concert halls, recording and rehearsal studios, churches, and educational institutions.

“E”, a classically trained composer and educator, works at three different universities as lecturer, gives private piano and composition lessons at home and works on her own compositions once a week. Since “E” is a part-time lecturer, she needs to be employed in several different universities to be able to sustain her career:

“I cannot make a living unless I work at multiple universities and have a lot of classes. My colleagues who only work at one university are struggling, and I think the industry as a whole is generally having a difficult time. [...] I got a PhD, but even so, I'm a part-time lecturer and I'm making a supplementary income plan.”

As the survey showed, even though majority of the women (90 percent) are highly educated, more than half of the respondents earn below 2 million yen per year. When asked how she felt about her music-related income, piano accompanist and teacher “C” responded as follows:

“I have graduated from Tokyo University of the Arts, which is said to be the best music college in Japan. I can earn a certain amount of income with my diploma. That being said, the wages that you can earn from performing/teaching classical music in Japan is very low and there is no financial guarantee, so it's not like I earn that much money.”

According to soprano “G”, who is also a graduate of the same university, the main challenge for people who want to pursue a career in music is figuring out how to establish themselves after the university education:

“Unlike other people who work for companies, there is no fixed route for us musicians to become a member of society like becoming a company employee.”

“G” confesses that she had feelings of intense anxiety and fear because she didn't know how to proceed with her career after graduating. The soprano decided to go abroad to further study and to “delay this feeling of anxiety”. However, the first months were challenging as she struggled to achieve the desired results on the entrance exams for music colleges she applied for:

“I was really afraid of continuing to be neither a student nor a working

member of the society, so I pushed myself to get results in about half a year. There was a time when I fell into a state where I felt extremely frustrated and wondered what I should do.”

“G” expressed frustration that she did not learn the necessary skills to prepare for her career after graduation and to secure employment in the music industry:

“No one has ever taught me what I can do or what I should do to effectively find work. I really wonder why we haven't had the opportunity to learn about these things.”

“A” is a classically trained pipe organ player who obtained her Master's degree in the Netherlands before returning back to Japan. Due to the difficulty of owning a pipe organ and the limited number of places to practice and play the instrument in Japan, “A”'s career has evolved more towards education and choir instruction. She is now employed as an elementary and middle school music teacher and choir instructor at a Christian school with a full-time contract. Since “A” ended up in teaching on a regular basis rather than performing, she acknowledges that she had to learn different skills by doing and self-educating:

“What I am now doing and what I studied for are completely different. Rather than playing my instrument, I often teach how to sing songs and how to sing together. To be honest it would have been better if I had properly studied for a diploma in vocal music or choir accompaniment. Now I'm taking vocal lessons and studying myself.”

“A” states that performers nowadays have to learn all kinds of entrepreneurial skills to have a sustainable career:

“You have to arrange your own concerts, think about your income, and negotiate with the hall. In order to attract audiences, you have to use social media and other means to promote yourself and sell tickets. I don't think I possessed these skills and had the power in me to do all of that. [...] Thankfully, I have a fixed contract with the school which allows me to live on my own. [...] if you don't teach regularly, it is really difficult to make a living just by performing.”

After obtaining her master's degree in Europe, trumpet player and educator “H” returned to Japan like “A”, and faced difficulties in adjusting and finding financial stability in the beginning, but having a network of contacts ultimately helped her find

a more stable situation:

“The first year my work situation was very unstable, but after a while I started reaching out to my contacts – such as my old classmates from the conservatoire and my former teachers and mentors – they helped me a lot with finding jobs and slowly getting on my feet, things became gradually more stable.”

“H” states that as a woman musician there might be moments in your career where you face the danger of “losing it all at once”. This is not only relevant when musicians have to reestablish their professional lives in a new setting. It is especially challenging for women freelance musicians “to find a way back to their work after childbirth”, as “H” experienced it herself after her son was born, and not to leave “a hole” in their careers:

“I had to stop with all my work after childbirth because I really wasn't doing well physically. I had no choice but to take a break. [...] I was very lucky because I worked in places where people opened their doors and waited for me, and that I was able to quickly return. It is very difficult for women in general to balance childbirth and childcare with their careers. That's why the connections you have within the music world are so important. I am trying to connect with others as much as possible and to show that I am an active musician and that I am capable of doing different things.”

The composer/educator “E” argues that gender issues pose obstacles for women musicians in various situations and that it has adverse effects on the music industry:

“At the university where I work, there are 20 faculty members, but when about 17 people gather, I am the only woman. I'm used to that kind of environment, but it's still unnatural. At music colleges, most of the students are women, but most of the teachers are men. I think this environment, like the 17:1 balance, is bad for the music industry as a whole.”

According to “I,” who is a member of a professional all-women hayashi, women have been able to perform on stage in traditional performing arts for the past 30 years, but it still remains a male-dominated field. Despite the increase in women performers of traditional music, men are still considered to have “a higher value as performers”, and that women performers are still seen “considerably inferior” compared to them:

“It's a custom in Japan for men to be on top, and to be honest I think it's

pretty much the same everywhere. However, in the world of classical performing arts, this is particularly noticeable. To put it bluntly, the performance fee is much lower for women, period.”

"I" states that sexual harassment is a significant issue for women in traditional performing arts and argues even some living national treasures deny its existence, perpetuating a culture where it is seen as normal. While younger generations reject this attitude, speaking up about it could still lead to career-ending consequences, and change will only happen if those in power take action:

“Sexual harassment still exists. In an industry that tolerates that, if we put what happened into words and sue the perpetrator, our career might be over. Men openly say that there is no sexual harassment in our world and this put pressure on us. If this were to happen in the general public, of course there would be lawsuits. Unfortunately, there are many great performers in the world of traditional performing arts, such as living national treasures, who live their lives thinking that this is normal. It's really embarrassing. Thankfully, the younger generations think this is no longer acceptable. [...] Unless the people above don't acknowledge this, it will continue.”

As Soprano “G” stated, in auditions for certain opera productions, women vocalists are more likely to be confronted with questions about their marital status, whether they have children, or even if they are pregnant or planning to be. These controversial audition questions make “G” often feel that she is “fighting” in an unjust “arena” against vocalists without family obligations who can concentrate fully on their career:

“If I am at an audition and if they know (from my application) that I am married from my application, they ask me if I have any plans to have children. I do understand that if you are pregnant, it might be necessary for the production team to know since you might need a substitute. That said, I do still find this problematic. Some people might be sensitive to such questions and not be able to answer it with confidence. Also, if a woman cannot go on stage just because she is pregnant, I think that is inherently a problem. [...] the audition side of music industry hasn't improved much and such sexist thinking still exists.”

As both composer/educator “E” and pianist/educator “C” expressed, parental duties and house chores often fall solely on women in addition to their work responsibilities. “E” stated that she is managing her professional work while also taking care of the children and household chores by herself, as her husband's work schedule is simply

too demanding. Having a similar situation herself, “C” expressed that women have to take on multiple responsibilities “no matter what” and regardless of their work situation:

“I had to do all the work with raising and educating my children, as well as other various duties such as cooking and cleaning. My husband is a university professor and he is very busy – even if he wants to help, he often comes back home completely worked out. That said, when I have to take care of all the cleaning, I see my hands getting affected by all the scrubbing and so on, and I find it difficult to play the piano afterwards. It is definitely a challenge.”

A significant proportion of the respondents (32 percent) face difficulty in maintaining a balance between work and life, regardless of whether they have a family or not. This imbalance was also experienced by singer-songwriter “F”, who highlighted the unpredictability of freelance work schedules and unexpected health issues as factors contributing to the challenge of work– (private) life balance:

“When I get a job opportunity like a request to compose or record a song, I create a schedule accordingly, so I don't have a specific day of the week to work on. [...]Work and private time aren't really separated for me. For example, there is no such a thing as “Sunday's off”. It was often so that I carved out my free time to fit new work in my schedule. But the truth is, I have been diagnosed with cancer a while ago and I was feeling quite sick. I am now doing much better but there are times when I have to sleep quite a bit as a side effect of the strong medications that I am taking. I have to consider this as well when making a time-schedule.”

On the other hand, singer-songwriter “B” and trumpet player/educator “H” both stated that having a freelance schedule provides them with a level of flexibility and adaptability in their lives that they may not have with a full-time contract, especially since they have children. “B” expressed:

“Freelance life has a certain flexibility even though the working times are not convenient. I'm not an employee of a company, so me and my daughters have a lot of freedom together in our lives.”

“H” finds that freelance work offers her more agency in making decisions for her career and a more flexible schedule, but she acknowledges that it also comes with its own costs:

“I am most satisfied as a freelance worker. I can work as I please and that is the most important reason. What I am not satisfied with is the income, the wages are often incredibly low.”

As singer-songwriter “F” expressed, there is a common misconception that music is “merely a hobby”, and that a lot of people are not aware that it is a viable profession for many who make a living from it. According to “F”, this lack of awareness leads to a barrier in paying a fair price for music:

“I think that when it comes to culture and arts, especially in the case of music, people think that what you are doing is an extension of your hobby which I believe results in lower wages.”

Trumpet player and educator “H” believes that music and arts are essential and important for the country's progress, and laments the tendency in Japan to undervalue and cut funding for the arts despite their significance:

“People often underestimate the importance of music in Japan. However, if music, art, and other creative endeavors are revitalized, it could positively impact the country. Music is ubiquitous and essential in daily life, and its absence would be greatly felt. Despite this, Japan tends to undervalue art and cut budgets for it. There is a need for greater appreciation and tolerance towards the arts.”

Jazz saxophonist “D” states that the pandemic has highlighted the insufficient appreciation for arts and culture in Japan. “D” argues that this lack of cultural understanding results in a lack of support or subsidies, even from organizations like the Japan Foundation. This makes it difficult for artists like “D” to have a sustainable career and make a living through music:

“I am envious to hear that other countries provide subsidies for their musicians, including living expenses. [...] Our band was invited to a festival in Buenos Aires, Argentina. If we could have been there it would have been the first time a Japanese jazz band would perform in that festival. We prepared everything for the funding application, but the very last minute, they let us know that it wasn't approved [...] It feels like there is no support at all. It is hard to accept not being able to earn money as a musician.”

Subsidies and funding are scarce for not only jazz and classical music but for the traditional performing arts as well. As “I” stated, the lack of financial support causes

concern for the future of traditional arts in Japan, which has seen a decrease in audience numbers since it is becoming less popular among younger audiences:

“The Agency for Cultural Affairs has been providing a subsidy called 'Artist For The Future' to help artists hold events for the past year, but it will end at the end of this year. Our traditional performing arts world is very small – there aren't many aficionados, and unfortunately today's younger people aren't very interested in it. [Because of the pandemic] more and more people seem to be afraid of gathering in a concert hall so there isn't much of an audience. Without the subsidy, concerts may not be possible. The situation seems dire.”

"I" is driven to prevent the disappearance of Japan's traditional music and performing arts, as the fear of their loss has instilled in her a sense of purpose and dedication:

“I feel a strong sense of crisis that Japan's traditional music and traditional performing arts will disappear unless we do something about it. In that sense I am very proud of being a part of a something that fights against this – I am doing my best.”

Composer and educator "E" shares a similar perspective as "I" when it comes to finding inspiration from the challenges faced in their respective fields. "E" strongly believes that representation is crucial in inspiring future generations, especially women. As one of the co-founders of the "Japanese Women Composers Meeting," a research collective that delves into the intersections between musicians and society, "E" actively advocates for the importance of having diverse role models. Through this group, she helps to organize research and discussions on issues surrounding women composers in Japan. In addition to "E," soprano "G" has co-authored a book aimed at helping aspiring musicians navigate the music industry. The book covers practical advice such as preparing for music college entrance exams and setting career goals after graduation. By offering helpful tips and advice, "G" hopes to empower and guide future generations of musicians towards success.

Conclusion

The women's stories highlighted their remarkable commitment and hard work, even in the face of various obstacles and ongoing challenges. The dedication for their craft seems to play a crucial role in preserving their professional identity as musicians and producing high-quality work. All interview participants showed a strong motivation for their work and a desire to continue developing themselves. As soprano “G” expressed beautifully:

“There are many things that make me glad that music is my life. I find immense joy in making music and being able to connect with people from diverse backgrounds through its power. My travels to Europe and America have only reinforced my belief that even when language barriers exist, music has the ability to evoke emotions and foster connections. It fills me with happiness to know that I can continue to pursue music as a lifelong passion.”

The interviewed women musicians had aspirations and desires for their future, ranging from creating an opera piece, rearranging their songs for an orchestral performance, performing in large concert halls for an international audience, to achieving greater support from their families, finding a better work-life balance, and increasing societal recognition and appreciation for musicians and music in general.

In conclusion, the experiences of the women musicians interviewed in this context highlight the dedication, resilience, and passion needed to pursue a career in music, particularly for women who often face systemic challenges and biases. Despite the challenges of feeling invisible and facing difficulty in gaining recognition and opportunities, women musicians are taking action by creating events, forming collectives, and mentoring younger generations. Some are also sharing their experiences by writing books and providing guidance to aspiring musicians. The importance of representation and diversity in the music industry is evident, as well as the need for more support and resources for women musicians. It is essential to acknowledge and support the contributions of women musicians and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for them to thrive. Ultimately, the music industry will be richer and more diverse if women's talents are recognized and appreciated.

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