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ABSTRACT

Women, Gender and Identity in Popular Music-Making in Gauteng, 1994 - 2012

A dissertation submitted for the degree of Master of Music in the Wits School of Arts, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand

by Ceri Moelwyn-Hughes

This thesis offers an ethnographic study of the professional lives of twenty-eight women musicians working in Gauteng and their experiences in popular music-making in post-apartheid South Africa. The study is based primarily on interviews with a spectrum of women working as professional musicians, mostly as performers, but also in varied roles within the music industry. I focus on various aspects of women musicians' personal reports: identify patterns of experience in their formative years; discuss seminal relationships that influence their music-making; and note gender stereotypes, identifying and commenting on their effect on individuals. Feminist, cultural, post-colonial, musicological and ethnomusicological theory informs the empirical research and is used to interrogate meanings of identity, stereotypes about women on stage and strategies of performance that women adopt.

The experiences of these twenty-eight women demonstrate that gender both positively and negatively affects their careers. Women are moving into previously male-dominated areas of contemporary music-making in South Africa such as jazz and playing certain instruments, both traditionally considered to be in the ‘male’ domain. However, despite women’s rights being well protected under current legislation, women in South Africa do not access legal recourse available to them in extreme situations of sexual harassment in the music industry. This study provides an imperative for anthropological methods of enquiry to be applied to popular music to interrogate individual and social meanings in music. It suggests practical ways of improving the lives of women in professional music careers by improving access to legal aid and educational training for women musicians. I suggest possible ways this knowledge can impact positively on the broad redefinition of gender roles in South Africa in the post-apartheid era, such as more sensitive media reporting and whistle-blowing on sexual harassment cases.