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The Evolution of Gendered Female Roles in Phonograph Culture

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The gramophone, or the record player since 1940, was originally a device for reproducing sound for simple recordings and music. Later, the application became famous not only in the field of entertainment but also in business and significantly impacted the development of human society. The early phonograph industry was dominated by the male voices—not only inventors, since with the case of Thomas Edison, but the primary customer base. However, with the increasing popularity of the phonograph, it also served as a medium for female voices. It played a role in creating an impact on the cultural and social roles of women. This paper explores the gendered female role in gramophone culture and how the phonograph was influential in promoting social change relevant to women.

The phonograph industry was closely involved with male inventors, entrepreneurs, and consumers at its launch. Figures like Thomas Edison and Emile Berliner were highly influential in developing and commercializing the phonograph. The primary consumers were men, who had used phonographs for entertainment, business, and socializing. This male-centric industry reflected the broader societal position that had women's activities limited to public and professional spheres. In Peter Hoar's reading, the author quotes that early phonograph advertising and marketing strategies targeted male consumers, underlining the device's technological marvels and practical applications (Hoar, 2019). With its entry into the home, the phonograph began to change into a technology that might also work in the interests of women.

The arrival of cheaper and more affordable phonograph models in households hugely altered domestic life. Women, who were the principal administrators of the household, were initiated into using this new-fangled technology. Economical and built to occupy a home space, the phonograph brought access to music and an opportunity to while away one's favourite tunes like never before, without ever leaving the house: a medium through which the home was no longer a culture barrier. As Peter Hoar mentioned in *The World's Din*, the phonograph put listening pleasure in the living room, a long way from the concert hall's formality or the bars' boozy crush. This is one of those significant leaps for women: now they can tap into cultural activity from the intimacy and convenience of their homes (Hoar, 2019).

Kenney states that in many cases, the 19th-century social structure excluded women from participating in public musical expression. The phonograph started changing this by recording performances by women and disseminating their music to the larger public, thus proving challenging to gender and societal norms (Kenney, 2018). This technological advancement democratized music production and consumption, allowing women to become more visible and influential in the public sphere. The phonograph made an absolute revolution in preserving and spreading music recordings of women. Before this incredible innovation, women's every musical performance was ephemeral, heard only by those people who were present during the performance. The phonograph recorded these performances for the replay so that women's contribution to music could reach a much bigger audience and have a more lasting effect. This process of the phonograph acts as an analysing beam. This was particularly important in a societal context that often devalued women's voices in public and artistic settings.

As the functions of the gramophone spread through society, more women realised that the gramophone had the ability to receive and record music. The emergence of the gramophone led to the scaling and specialisation of the female music industry, as gramophones began to select women's music and traders bought and recorded it. This industrial expansion and technological enhancement led to more women expressing their emotions and subjectivity, and they became more motivated by music recording and music distribution. This process it marked the evolution and development of the gramophone from a simple home record to the music industry. As the music recording capabilities of the gramophone spread, more businessmen began to set up gramophone companies to purposefully seek out more female musicians to record and promote their songs, and the role of the gramophone industry and women became increasingly prominent. More women learned of the potential that lay with the phonograph in recording and distributing music, hence, increased the need to seek a career in music production. While facilitating professionalization among these women, merchants increased the need to develop the growing market associated with women's music. The phonograph, therefore, opened ways for female musicians, and its increase contributed towards the economic empowerment of females. Moreover, this development brought about new job opportunities for women and changed the deck of gender prominence within the music industry (Hoar, 2019). It brought about resources and space for women, which would have, in every way, been off-limits in profession-

alizing their musical activities. This professionalization was far above people's careers and cultural space in general; the professionalization of women's music influenced the visibility and power of female musicians.

Records rendered of Gauhar Jaan's performances were an apt example to show that there was a place for the commercial valence of female musicians; they could now become parts of the music industry and be recognized by society. Her recordings were not just musical artifacts but symbols of shifting gender relations within the music sphere. Gauhar Jaan's ability to record and distribute her music widely enabled to overcome the constraints applied by her immediate sociocultural environment and project herself into the global arena (Shephard, 2019). There is an extra weight connected with Gauhar Jaan's records as her recordings emphasized the commercial potential of women's music for the first time. This commercial attractiveness encouraged record companies to find more female talents and to invest further and market them, thus growing the numbers of women performers and women's influence in the music field. Her international fame also overthrew the patriarchal notions of her time, demonstrating that women can be successful both in art and on a commercial scale at the global level.

The phonograph had a far-reaching impact on women and their voices. For one, it opened up a space for women's voices and contributions to be made known to a broader public, legitimizing their contribution to art. On the other hand, it led to the professionalization of women's music to the extent that women could earn a living by being musicians, composers, and recording artists. Take, for example, female jazz and blues singers like Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, whose recordings led to the popularization of these music styles as well as the breaking of racial and gender stereotypes. In that phonograph, these performers could bring their lives and emotions and be heard, in the process, reaching into the souls of those listening to them. This also proved that women's voices could be sung to equally robust popularity and that the music they produced was just as commercially valid (Tucker, 2019). The phonograph also allowed women to experiment with new musical styles and genres. Their recordings helped contribute to the widespread popularity of these genres and adjusted the previous racial and gender standards. The significance of that was that such women would be able to permit their music to speak regarding their own lives and social issues and become the harbingers of the cultural life of the epoch. The ability of the phonograph to record and replay such music provided these artists a powerful avenue to access a large audience and change society.

Female performers' influence in phonograph culture transcended the music performed. The growing popularity of women's recordings began to set the stage for sociocultural norms and values. For example, the success of female vocalists began to alter previous ideas of gender appropriateness, which made female public performance more acceptable. Besides, the phonograph allowed women to experiment with new styles of music and varied genres. used the phonograph to discover different music traditions and express creativity. In fact, the accessibility of recording technology means that women from diverse cultural sectors are drawn into the conversation and add varied and contrasting features to the musical landscape (Jones, 2018). Female artists' recordings also contributed to the diversification of the music industry. Their recordings informed the masses about their styles and understanding of different genres. This cultural diversification was explicitly crucial in breaking down racial and gender barriers, furthering the cause of a more inclusive and equitable cultural environment.

The legacy of women's voices in the phonograph era reveals itself in the form of their lasting impact on the music industry and society. By stepping into the public realm with their recordings, women set an example for future generation female artists. They showed that women, through their music, could be as commercially and creatively successful as men, enabling several other women to make their way in the arts without any discrimination or other barriers. The achievements of women artists during the Gramophone era not only earned them social recognition and commercial success, but also broke the boundaries of traditional gender roles, so that women were no longer confined to the domestic sphere. Their public impact and professional excellence highlighted female capabilities and inspired future generations.

The result of the phonograph industry's drive to professionalize women's music, and thus their economic empowerment, is also of great significance. Women musicians, who had only been restricted to private performances, now had a means of livelihood through the music they produced. This was significant when challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for gender equality (Smith, 2020; Jones, 2019). The phonograph industry provided new opportunities for women concerning careers and played an important role in reshuffling the deck to boost male imbalance and female dominance within the music industry. Women have come to be appreciated and prominent as musicians. This was very significant; hence, it improved gender equality and contested gender norms of the day.

The professionalization of women's music by the phonograph also had broader cultural impacts. It shaped different musical genres and thus impacted the pluralization of the music industry. Female musicians introduced various aspects and styles from their perspectives in their music, hence enriching the cultural texture and stimulating musical genres such as jazz, blues, and classical music. Additionally, the phonograph was part of the professionalizing process for women's music; it was the inevitable influence of many who came after on up to today. Here, it laid a stepping-stone to a professional music career. This legacy returned from the phonograph business and set the tone for greater equality within the arts world. This is a legacy that women continue to be inspired and empowered by in the music industry today (Miller, 2020).

The phonograph's impact on women's social status was not confined to music. Through such a contribution to their social position, the device challenged patriarchal structures in a multi-level and broad-based way, helping them to pursue cultural and intellectual life. At least as far as one can view the general picture, it was beneficial for the general course of events in the fight for gender equality and women's rights. A phonograph opened the spread of feminist ideas and the invention of a more open cultural environment. Correspondingly, under its highly dynamic qualities, women's music made its way into the hearts of many others, causing a shift in perception of the place and role of women in the context. That is how the phonograph became an agent of social change, a device by which women's voices got enhanced and pushed to the greater height of gender equality. The phonograph, as Michael Denning explains in his book *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution*, was helpful en masse in the spread of jazz and other popular music, thereby coming closer to modernity and the flapper movement. Both genres were symbolically the best representation of breaking away from Victorian values and a development mechanism for building a more emancipated female identity. The phonograph played a very central role in all of this development by enabling jazz and other popular music to be widely disseminated, consequently bringing modern ideas into the role definition of gender. As mentioned, these social changes through music were not the only impact of phonographs. Instead, it played a central role in other general and intellectual movements. In the same vein, the phonograph facilitated the engagement of various voices and contributed to the general democratization of cultural production and its social consumption by challenging hierarchies and old exclusionary systems.

Technological innovations within the phonograph industry were the most significant new path in shaping the cultural and social landscape of the early 20th century. Other such innovations include the shift from acoustic to electrical recording, which enhanced sound quality and could, at this point, bring forth a more realistic representation of performance. This new technology increased recordings' allure to the general public, and women became heavy consumers and performers. The invention of portable and cheap phonographs at the end of the 1920s and 1930s made recorded music accessible to various classes and social ranges. This would break down gender barriers, as women would then participate in prevailing cultural and social activities related to music from virtually all classes. The emergence of the gramophone was therefore not just a technological advancement, but had a broader historical force, integrated into social, cultural and political movements, and was a major factor in promoting gender equality and social change. Enabling women to express their voices and challenge traditional gender norms in the music industry.

Overall, it was responsible for reshaping social change concerning gender disparity. This gendered history of the phonograph in relation to the female role reflects the importance of technology in society dynamics and the advance of gender equity. The phonograph democratized the arc of production and musical consumption, offering women a creative outlet. Ultimately, that changed not only the music business but the basic social order itself—traditional gender roles and other societal values. It remains a flag-station example of the impact of technological development on society.

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