

http://www.elpasoinc.com/lifestyle/local_features/young-female-musicians-and-all-that-jazz/article_ed0c4d56-93b6-11e9-b4c4-c3050ca5a89a.html

Young female musicians – and all that jazz

By Cindy Graff Cohen / El Paso Inc.

Jun 21, 2019



These young musicians from across the borderland comprise El Paso Jazz Girls, which has an upcoming workshop and concert. Photo provided by El Paso Jazz Girls

Women have historically been conspicuously absent from several musical genres, particularly jazz – that uniquely American music with a big beat and an improvisational spirit.

El Paso native Amanda Ekery is out to close that gap with El Paso Jazz Girls.

She launched the program, now in its second year, to bring together young female musicians to play music and learn about jazz – and to work toward greater equity on the jazz stage.



“Research shows that many girls drop out of their schools’ jazz bands,” says Ekery, a musician herself and a 2012 Coronado High School graduate. “In the last 10 years, only seven girls made the Texas All-State Jazz Band.”

Typically a man’s world

Orchestras and marching bands may be full of women, but jazz has been a man’s world.

Experts speculate about women’s absence from the jazz scene.

Jazz – and all its variations from swing to bebop to Dixieland – encourages bold improvisation, with musicians vying for the spotlight with their solos. Are girls encouraged to take that spotlight for themselves?

“Our mission is to empower girls in a supportive community that fosters self-expression, confidence and collaboration,” Ekery said.

Programs and concerts

This month’s weeklong El Paso Jazz Girls program puts girl musicians on center stage.

Ten girls took part in the inaugural program, and more than two dozen girls signed up in 2019, with about half from middle school and half from high school.

They'll be bringing a variety of instruments, including violins, cellos, woodwinds and horns.

The group's first-ever concert at Ardovino's Desert Crossing on Friday, June 28, will include jazz classics from Duke Ellington and female jazz composers, along with original compositions tailored to this year's instruments.

The concert is part of Ardovino's year-round weekend live music series.

"We've been having jazz bands for years," Marina Ardovino said. "But we've never had a stage full of women playing jazz."



Amanda Ekery

Jazz Girls is just one of Amanda Ekery's music education outlets – at 25, she already has considerable experience in the field.

The New York-based vocalist and composer has written a workbook for singers, co-founded the Lomax Folk Project, created the Crayon Box music skills workshop series, coordinated education programs at Jazz at Lincoln Center and served as a Metropolitan Opera Guild teaching artist.

She holds a master's in jazz performance from the New England Conservatory and a bachelor's in jazz studies from the University of North Texas. She sings and plays flute and piano, and thanks Kenny Capshaw, Ida Steadman, Ann Hallmark and other El Paso teachers for their encouragement.

This month, she took time from her regular job in academic affairs for the New School of Jazz and Contemporary Music to work with singers at the Tel Aviv Conservatory's Center for Jazz Studies.

In just a few short years, her network is spanning the globe.

"The music world is smaller than people think," she said. "It's all about being kind and nice to people – and about loving to teach music."

El Paso Jazz Girls Program

Open to female musicians and vocalists in grades 7-12

No previous experience needed

Seven teaching artists: women jazz musicians and singers

9 a.m.-4 p.m. June 24-28

UTEP Music Building

Room 140 (band room)

epjazzgirls.com

El Paso Jazz Girls Concert

7:30 p.m., Friday, June 28

Ardivino's Desert Crossing

1 Ardivino, Sunland Park, N.M.

Outdoor bandstand, weather permitting; reservations recommended for dinner on patio

No cover charge

575-332-4283