



## NEWS RELEASE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 24, 2011

- WHAT:** Women in Jazz: From Hep Girls to Grammy Winners  
Panel featuring alto saxophonist Tia Fuller and Filmmaker  
Janice Littlejohn, Moderator Arlene Avakian
- WHEN:** Tuesday, November 15, at Noon
- WHERE:** 10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Room 1001 in the UMass Campus Center  
University of Massachusetts Amherst
- TICKETS:** Call 1-800-999-UMAS or 545-2511 for tickets or go online to  
<http://www.fineartscenter.com/>
- IMAGES:** To download images relating to this press release please go  
online to <http://www.fineartscenter.com/pressphotos>

#### BILLY TAYLOR RESIDENCY ARTIST TO OFFER PANEL ON WOMEN IN JAZZ WITH DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER JANICE LITTLEJOHN

As part of saxophonist Tia Fuller's residency at the UMass Fine Arts Center she'll participate in a lunch-time **panel with filmmaker Janice Littlejohn titled *Women in Jazz: From Hep Girls to Grammy Winners* on Tuesday, November 15 at noon in room 1001 in the UMass Campus Center.** Moderating the panel will be Arlene Avakian, who helped found the [University of Massachusetts Women's Studies Program](#) and what is now the [Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies](#). Admission is \$7 and includes lunch. Littlejohn is currently producing a documentary film titled *...but can she play?* about women horn players in jazz which features Tia Fuller. The discussion will touch on the important contributions women instrumentalists have made to the genre, beginning with the first lady of jazz, pianist Lil Hardin Armstrong as well as why record companies and radio stations are culpable in keeping women horn players under-recognized, how to find and support women sax and brass players, how Esperanza Spalding's unexpected Grammy win foreshadows a burgeoning transformation of jazz, and why public school education is crucial in fostering an appreciation and awareness of

jazz for future generations and enabling us to preserve the legacy of America's only true indigenous music.

***...but can she play?*** is the first feature-length documentary centered on the lives and music of women sax and brass players who are challenging gender biases and influencing the transformation of contemporary American jazz. The film spotlights a year-in-the-life of 21-year-old alto saxophonist Hailey Niswanger now attending Berklee College of Music in Boston, as she readies for the follow-up to her 2009 straight-ahead debut, *Confeddie*, which solidified her as a rising star in jazz. A link to the presentation reel is available on [youtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) or find it on the home page of the website at [butcansheplay.com](http://butcansheplay.com).

Woven into the narrative are the stories of saxophonists Tia Fuller, Claire Daly, Lauren Sevian; trumpeters Linsey McDonald, Christine Fawson; trombonists Robynn Amy, Aubrey Logan, Jennifer Wharton and Stephanie Baird — women who juggle their lives as wives, mothers and teachers while pushing themselves, and their art, on the road, on the stage and in the classroom. One of the goals of this documentary is to encourage girls towards careers in jazz and to support organizations and programs that provide jazz and music programs for students in underprivileged schools where funding for music education is lacking or non-existent.

Janice Rhoshalle Littlejohn has had a diverse career as an editor, writer and communications expert during her 20-year career as a journalist. Since launching her freelance career over a decade ago, she has worked with television crews, production and editorial teams throughout the United States, Canada and Ghana, and has contributed to a diverse roster of publications including *USA Today*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *In Style*, *Essence Magazine*, *TV Guide Magazine* and *Variety*.

As television and media columnist for BlackVoices.com (now owned by AOL) she engaged audiences with her unique perspective on the business of television and film and its cultural relevance to the African American community. She expanded her platform, and audience, with her popular television columns for the Associated Press.

Janice was a featured commentator for National Public Radio's *The Tavis Smiley Show* and hosts TV industry-related panels for The Paley Center for Media and The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Janice is a longtime contributor to *Emmy*, the Academy's official award-winning bi-monthly magazine. She has also produced online

video segments for RedZone (a division of Showtime Networks, Inc.) and America Online, and was a news writer for KCOP-13 News in Los Angeles.

Alto saxophonist Fuller performs at the Fine Arts Center's **Bowker Auditorium** on **Wednesday, November 16 at 7:30pm**. There will be a **pre-performance talk lead by WFCR's Jazz Safari host Kari Njiiri and visiting filmmaker Janice Littlejohn at 6:30pm** in the auditorium.

Space is limited for the panel so advance tickets are suggested. The Tia Fuller concert is sponsored by the UMass Hotel at the Campus Center, New England Public Radio, UnityFirst.com, the Valley Advocate and Amherst Cinema. Tickets for The Tia Fuller Quartet are \$25 and \$15; Five College/GCC/STCC and youth 17 and under are \$10. Tickets are available from the Fine Arts Center Box Office at 545-2511 or 1-800-999-UMAS, or on the secure Fine Arts Center ticket website at <http://www.fineartscenter.com/>.

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### **PHOTOS**

Hi-res photos available for download: <http://www.umass.edu/fac/pressphotos>

### **PRESS PASSES**

Limited press passes are available. Please contact Shawn Farley at 413-545-4159 or <mailto:sfarley@admin.umass.edu>

### **ABOUT THE FAC**

The Fine Arts Center, located on the UMass Amherst campus, is a presenter of music, dance, theater and the visual arts, bringing hundreds of outstanding and provocative artists to the Pioneer Valley for over 35 years.