

NO BUSINESS IN SHOW BUSINESS

Italian Women in the Performing Arts²²¹

*Carla Bodo and Simone Pace*²²²

While there are many gender-related differences and distinctions in the arts and media sectors of the different European countries, three things are common everywhere. First, despite the policy of equal pay for equal work, women earn (usually 20-30%) less money than men in the same professional position or status. Second, women are more often than not found in sectors with lower-paid jobs and professions with secured income and less competition. Such sectors tend to become feminised: women representing a majority or even attaining dominance in the field. Third, artistic professions are precarious, that is, employment and income are seldom fixed or continuous, and even this precariousness is unevenly distributed between genders – with women more likely to face this reality. The case of Italy presented here is not extraordinary – neither in the light of the entire labor market nor sector-wise - but may serve as an illustration of the income disparities between men and women in the cultural sector and specifically in the various professions of the performing arts.²²³

The Italian census of 1996 showed that 274 000 persons were employed in the Italian cultural sector. The share of women was some 32%. However, in the case of traditional humanistic disciplines and heritage professions, almost half (49%) of the employment positions were already held by women. Moreover, the prevalence of women in libraries, museums and book publishing²²⁴ supports the universal European phenomenon of increasing feminisation in certain cultural occupations.

If we narrow our focus to female employment in the performing arts and related cultural industries, the proportion of positions occupied by women is slightly higher than in the sphere of cultural employment as a whole. Their share was 41 per cent in 1995, having increased from 37 per cent in 1990.

In the Italian performing arts labour markets women are well represented amongst administrative staff, relatively well among artistic professions, but not so well in technical professions.

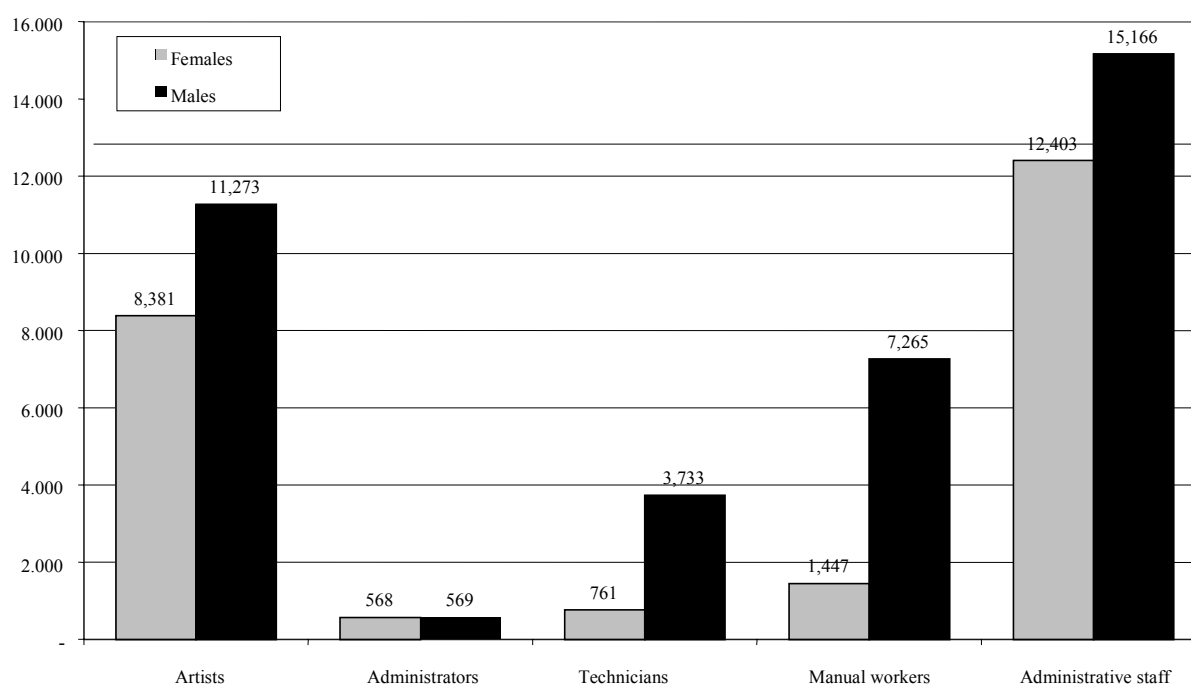
²²¹ This text was originally produced in Italian.

²²² Carla Bodo and Simone Pace, Observatory of Performing Arts, Rome.

²²³ "Performing arts" refers here to what the Italians call *spettacolo*: performing art and related culture industries and entertainment, "overall cultural employment" includes also the cultural service sectors (libraries and museums).

²²⁴ This list of occupations does not include female journalists. According to 1999 figures released by the National Social Security Institute for Italian Journalists, only 28% of those employed are women.

Figure 1: Performing arts: work units by professional category and by sex in 1995



Source: Data from ENPALS.²²⁵

Unit = employment in FTE (full time annual employment).

Nevertheless, even if the number of female workers has increased in the 1990s (more so than men), the positions held by women were more precarious in terms of total number of days worked, and fees paid for their work: The average pay for women in 1995 was 137,000 lire, or about a quarter less compared to men (161,000 lire). Furthermore, the total amount of compensation paid did not even keep pace with the rate of inflation during the six years included in the study.

Table 1: Female workers: average of days worked yearly per capita and average daily earnings per field of activity – 1995

Fields	Female workers	Average days per capita	Average daily earnings (thousands of lire)
Music	12,913	69	182
Theatre	6,127	85	133
Cinema	15,201	97	159
Radio-television	9,090	233	141
Entertainment	13,025	47	104
Total	56,356	100	147

Source: Elaboration on ENPALS data concerning only the performing arts.

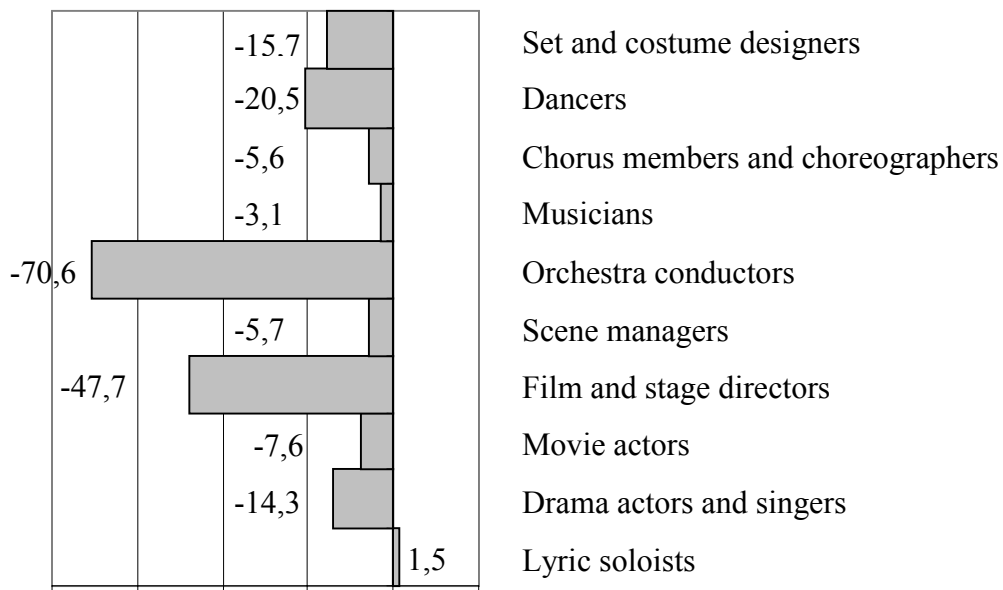
The entertainment sector ("show business"), is the one which offers least employment to women. The 13,000 females employed in the entertainment sector were offered work on an

²²⁵ ENPALS (National Institute of Social Security for the Performing Arts) is the social security institution with which all persons who work in the performing arts (and sports), even if just for a few days (such as extras in a film) must be registered. It was created in 1947.

average of only 47 working days a year in their own professions. Music is another field in which Italian women seem to also suffer from discrimination. On average they only worked 69 days a year in 1995. The situation in the field of music is very similar to many other European countries. The position of women has already improved in the film industry, where on an average they worked 97 days a year; they fared the best in the field of radio and television, which offered almost full time employment to women.

The following figure tells the Italian story of "gender-biased earning" in the performing arts.

Figure 2: Percentage gap in average daily earnings of female compared to male performing artists, 1995

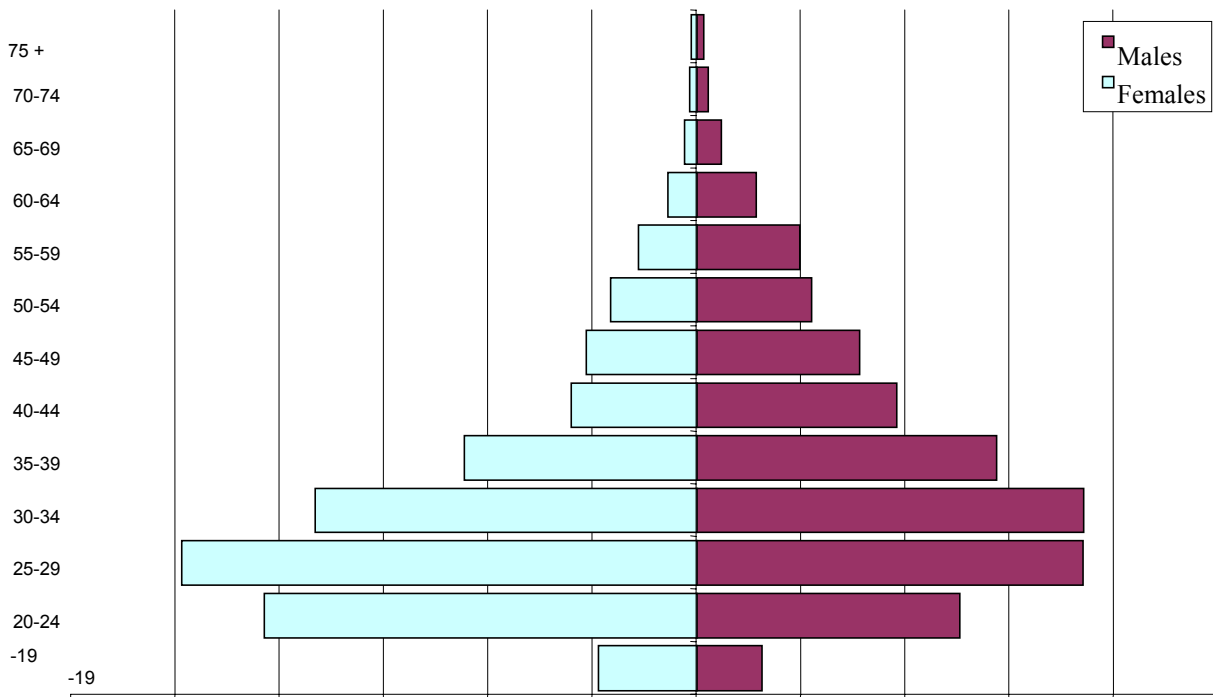


Source: Elaboration on ENPALS data concerning only the performing arts

Does Age Matter?

If we study the proportion of women workers in the different age groups we can note that there are proportionately more young women than men, up to the age of 30. There are significant numbers of women in the field between the ages of 30 and 40, but are progressively fewer in the older age groups. Already in the age group between 40-55 the share of women declines considerably.

Figure 3: Performing artists in Italy classified according to age and gender



Source: Elaborations on ENPALS data

These figures could be read in two different ways. An optimistic interpretation could lead us to imagine that if, up to now, women have been under-represented in performing arts professions, in the long-term - within about twenty years - the situation could achieve a relative balance, with women overcoming such barriers. On the other hand - according to a less optimistic interpretation by professionals of the theatre world - the sudden drop in employment opportunities for women over the age of 40 could be explained with an enduring tendency of excluding female artists (particularly actresses and dancers) from the labour market at a more advanced age.