

# BESSIE, BILLIE & NINA

## PIONEERING WOMEN IN JAZZ



**Friday, March 18th at 7:30<sup>PM</sup>**  
**Stephen B. Humphrey Theater, SJU**

*Pioneering Women in Jazz* features an exceptional all-female band and powerhouse vocal performances by Charenée Wade, Vanisha Gould and Tahira Clayton as they pay homage to three iconic women. Bessie Smith was known as the “Empress of the Blues.” Nina Simone was the “The High Priestess of Soul.” And Billie Holiday was revered as the great “Lady Day.” Bessie, Billie and Nina were trailblazers who used their singular gifts to give voice to the marginalized and hold a mirror up to America. Their contributions resonate across genre and ongoing movements toward equality for women, African-Americans and the LGBTQ+ community.

## CONNECT

TOPICS AND THEMES THIS PERFORMANCE ENGAGES WITH:

- Jazz, Blues & Soul Music
- Civil Rights & Civic Engagement
- Gender Equality & Sexual Identity
- American History
- [Embrace Difference](#)
- [Think Deeply](#)
- [Live Courageously](#)

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- Women in Jazz Organization: [www.wearewino.org](http://www.wearewino.org)
- Bessie Smith: [www.britannica.com/biography/Bessie-Smith](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Bessie-Smith)
- Billie Holiday: [www.billieholiday.com](http://www.billieholiday.com)
- Nina Simone: [www.ninasimone.com](http://www.ninasimone.com)

## ENGAGE

The music in this performance covers a range of styles that fall under the “Jazz” umbrella.

- What did you notice that set the different styles apart from each other?
- Did one style resonate more strongly with you? If so, which one and why?
- Did the music in this performance differ from what you expected?
- Did this music sound like jazz to you? What matched or differed from your expectation?

Historically, Jazz has been a very male dominated genre. In many instances, women are often vocalists with male bands.

- This performance features an all-female band - why is this significant in relation to this particular performance?

During this performance, audiences are transported to the past to experience the point of view of Bessie Smith, Nina Simone and Billie Holiday.

- What other forms of art can bring history to life? How do they do this?
- Were there issues raised that are still relevant today?
- Why do you think these women have been called “trailblazers”?
- From your perspective, how did these musicians defy or advocate against cultural expectation?

Nina Simone is famously quoted as saying, “Jazz is not just music, it’s a way of life, it’s a way of being, a way of thinking.”

- What do you think that means?
- Although the vocals in this performance can stand alone, how did the instruments used support the singing?