
Island Girl in a Rock-and-Roll World

An Interview with June Millington by Theo Gonzalves and Gayle Wald

EDITED AND ANNOTATED BY GAYLE WALD

The following text collects edited excerpts from a 30 July 2018 interview with musician June Millington (b. 1948, Manila, the Philippines) conducted by Theo Gonzalves, curator in the Division of Culture and the Arts at the National Museum of American History, and Gayle Wald, Professor of English and American Studies at George Washington University. The interview was conducted at the Institute for the Musical Arts, a Goshen, Massachusetts-based non-profit founded and operated by Millington and her partner, Ann Hackler. The text is based on a transcription by Gracia Brown. This version, which is condensed, edited for clarity, and annotated, was prepared by Gayle Wald.

June Millington is co-founder and lead guitarist of the germinal rock-and-roll band Fanny, which formed in Los Angeles in 1969. The other original members of the band were Jean Millington (June's sister, on bass guitar and drums), Alice de Buhr (drums and vocals), and Nickey Barclay (keyboards and vocals). Fanny recorded four albums with Reprise Records—*Fanny* (1970), *Charity Ball* (1971), *Fanny Hill* (1972), and *Mother's Pride* (1973)—and toured widely in the U.S. and internationally. As Ann Powers has recently observed, Fanny, as fronted by June Millington, “was a showcase for the swagger of long-haired, bell-bottomed, fierce femmes at the dawn of the women's liberation movement.”¹

Since the band's 1973 dissolution, Millington has had a distinguished career working with a wide variety of artists, most notably Cris Williamson, on whose influential 1975 album *The Changer and the Changed* Millington contributed keyboards, guitar, and vocals. After recording several solo albums in the 1980s, Millington reunited with her sister Jean under the Fanny moniker and released *Play Like a Girl* (Fabulous Records, 2011). More recently, with Jean Millington and Brie Darling, she has performed with the band Fanny Walked the Earth, which released its self-titled debut on Blue Elan Records in 2018.

In 1986, with Ann Hackler, June Millington formed the Institute of the Musical Arts (IMA), a non-profit organization that supports women and girls in music and

1. Ann Powers, “Songs We Love: Fanny Walked the Earth, “Lured Away,” 14 February 2018. Accessed online at <<https://www.npr.org/2018/02/14/585422387/songs-we-love-fanny-walked-the-earth-lured-away>>.

music-related businesses. The IMA, which moved to a 25-acre property in upstate Massachusetts in 2001, is now a recording, performance, and teaching facility that supports a variety of vital summer camps for girls. In 2015, Millington published a memoir, *Land of a Thousand Bridges: Island Girl in a Rock & Roll World* (Goshen, MA: Institute for the Musical Arts), which narrates her life from her childhood in the Philippines to the breakup of Fanny in October 1973. The book is currently being made into a musical, with book by Jessica Hagedorn, and into an audiobook scored and narrated by Millington herself. In 2002, Rhino Records released *First Time in a Long Time*, a compilation of all four *Fanny* albums. Millington remains one of American rock's iconic figures.

THEO GONZALVES: How did your parents meet?

JUNE MILLINGTON: My parents met on a blind date, actually, and the fact that they both loved to dance is what set them off. [My father] was a lieutenant commander in the US Navy. So he was dashing, and, you know, American! My mom was in her early 20s and [her family] had all survived the war. It was strict Spanish Catholic, my upbringing. Part of the reason why I was raised a little bit in the upper class was because even though so much of Manilla was destroyed [during the Japanese occupation], my grandfather's ice plant—which was the only ice plant in the Philippines—didn't get bombed. By some fluke. Well, the Americans came, they helped us win, and they drank Cokes. What did they need in their Coke? Ice!

My childhood was wonderful. I chased dragonflies, I hung out in the trees, I'd sit in front of the mango tree and just wait for the mangoes to plop and I'd just eat them till I was sick. But the power structure was unspoken. My grandfather was very strict and you had to follow the hierarchy with the Spanish tradition and the Church and the Chinese. *Limjoco* is my mother's maiden name. *Lim* is Chinese and *joco* is Spanish. So, there I was in that world.

There was something I needed to know [growing up], but it wasn't going to happen right there. My grandmother died when I was eight, and that was a tremendous trauma for the entire family. And I think with the combination of the War and the trauma suffered by both my father on the American side and the Filipinos in the entire country, this gave me this place where essentially rock and roll was a lot safer. Rock and roll was a place where you could invent yourself and you could reinvent yourself over and over again.

So in a way, in my confusion—why was I? Who am I? What's going on here?—[rock and roll] was a way to express myself and be identified. That was how the Svelts, our first band in high school, did it. We stepped into a frame and then we created ourselves within the frame. And that was the opportunity that the United States gave us, was that the Shirelles were singing. But we had come from the Philippines where we were playing ukuleles, and we already had ear training off of radio. All that conspired to having that kind of attitude: well, what could I lose?

TG: It must have been kind of a shock to land in Sacramento [California—where the Millington family immigrated] in the early 1960s.

JM: It was awful. It was absolutely awful. Number one, the food tasted different. I mean that's just such a big deal. I mean, the first time I ate an orange I was just "so what *is* this"? There is no taste! And also the racism that we encountered in the sense that is

was *so* unspoken, it just didn't exist! You know, invisible. I did try to talk to kids about the Philippines, and nobody knew where that was and everyone assumed we were Mexican, which was not cool. And I'm deaf in my left ear so maybe if I was walking down the hall, maybe somebody spoke to me and I didn't hear them and I had no idea. We felt really out of place.

TG: You and Jean?

JM: Oh yeah! I think the whole family. I mean my mom went from having at least one maid to doing the laundry and everything. I learned how to iron on the ship on the way over. So [chuckling] it was *way* different, way different. And it was cold walking to school in the morning. I had never been in the cold like that. To me, it was pure torture.

In the mid-1960s, [when June and her sister Jean formed the Svelts with some other girls], we did not see girls playing "guitars." If you went to a music store no one would say "Oh, could I help you find your electric guitar strings?" They would say, "Here's the flute section, how about that?"

GAYLE WALD: How did your mother adapt? She helped you *buy* those guitars, right?

JM: My mother was a fierce Filipino mother in that she loved her kids totally and unconditionally, and she did what she had to to make it happen for us even though she and my dad *really* culturally had so many differences. I really think that is what caused them to divorce finally.

[When the Svelts landed their first gig], we went to our parents, we went to our dad, and he couldn't see it. I mean, he's a Yankee from Burlington, Vermont. Graduate of Annapolis. His American, half Filipina *girls* [chuckles] want to go on this completely unknown journey. We didn't have any ropes, but we were going down a cliff. But my mom understood. So she went with us to the music store without telling my dad, and she signed, I would say probably \$500 worth of equipment.

[At one of the band's first gigs at El Cerrito High School], I was given the assignment to write a song about the school or something. [The show] was in the gym, and it was like the middle period of the day. That court was *packed* with kids. And we sang our song with a microphone in the middle of the basketball court and they loved it! They loved our song that I wrote.

It took a lot of guts, but Jean and I, we just did it, we did it. It felt good, it didn't matter if we were scared or not. We were more scared of disappearing in the chasm of American society that gave not a whit about us and didn't even see us. We didn't want to be invisible. And we felt that really strongly. We didn't really talk about it, but we knew.

In [our shared attic bedroom], we closed the trapdoor and we could rock in our own world. There we were learning "Marry Me Bill" ["Wedding Bell Blues"] on an acoustic guitar, or "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman," or "Do You Believe in Magic." But we could also bring up the bass and amp and the drums so we would have band rehearsals up there.

GW: Can you talk about the impact of the 1960s girl groups on the Svelts?

JM: Well it was the way they sang, was what really got to us. They just flung their words out. They weren't trying to hide anything. And we *felt* that, we felt that. "Leader of

the Pack” and “Remember (Walking in the Sand)” resonated so deeply. They had an impact on us that was internal. It wasn’t just, “Oh, we love those songs.” It was like something happened, and it made more space. They put us inside that sacred fire that’s inside, and I mean that sincerely.

For us girls [forming a rock band with electric instruments] just opened up this whole other frequency level that allowed us to walk in the world in a different way. We knew something, and we were in control of it. You see, once we got on that stage, nobody was telling us how to do it; we did what we damn well pleased. At the time, we were playing hits on the radio. I started to write songs, but that wasn’t what people wanted to hear. They wanted to experience, to dance to these hits.

In all those years—and I’ve racked my brain to think of *one* time, even all through Fanny—I never felt racism on the dance floor. Never felt it. Everyone disappeared into that kind of frenetic joy. When we played at officers’ clubs [which were integrated, although mixed-race couples generally did not dance], everyone just wanted to get on that dance floor and enjoy themselves. They were *not* interested in getting into fights.

Now bars—that’s a whole other thing. That’s when the knives come out. I’ve seen a lot of brawls. There was a gig we were doing in Idaho, a club for teenagers mostly packed every night, I don’t know 300 hundred kids or something like that. Someone had gotten stabbed on the dance floor below us. And the owner of the club ran onto the stage and yelled at us, “Keep playing! Keep playing!” And we did.

But mostly it was about that communal joy and that thing of disappearing. We would watch people disappear right in front of us. And then we would disappear. And then: wow! We would wake up and it would be the end of the night. It was fun. It was unbelievable.

TG: You talk in the autobiography also about rehearsing a lot and trying to practice constantly. What did that mean for you and Jean, to get those parts down, and how often would you work a day?

JM: Every day. We practiced all the time. I would come home from school and probably had done most of [my] homework between classes or something because I would go right to that 45, and I would just learn the songs we needed to know by that weekend.

We were learning internally how to be a band. One of the *main* things you want to learn is that the bass has to go with the kick drum. And then you can’t speed up through licks. I mean these are all kind of basic things I now teach at our camps [run by IMA]. But, how do you learn how to do that? And in order to also sing and play at the same time you’ve got to [practice]. I mean, playing bass and singing backup parts and lead is *really* hard. But it was fun for us.

Our mom was so totally supportive. I mean, as soon as we launched into gigs, we *never* got home before one or two in the morning. A lot of the times our mom would get up and make us eggs. So, it was that family thing infused *in* with the unknown, which was so totally fun. I am so amazed that we didn’t get hurt. I know the clubs we were playing were basically Mafia-owned, unless it was a teen center. We had a couple of thugs try not to pay us [at a gig in] Portland. But we didn’t get beat up or anything, ever, because we ran in a pack [laughs].

GW: By the time you started Fanny, you had all this experience. What was your audience like? Were there lots of women at your gigs?

JM: From the time we started playing in 1964 to around the time when I left in October 1973, at shows the guys would rush up [to the stage] with their dates, who never spoke. All through that time, the chicks just stood there. The guys would go, “You’re so great!” Or “How do you do that? Blah blah blah blah . . . not bad for chicks,” and the girls wouldn’t talk. That’s a facet of that time and space that nobody thinks about. And we didn’t even realize it because that was the norm.

I did not like [that Reprise Records only wanted Fanny to play rock and roll]. That’s part of the reason I was so tired [by late 1973]. Because in the long run it didn’t feed my soul as much as just mixing in those dance songs and the funk and the R&B that I love so much. We had to keep it up all the time, and keep it like we’re better than guys, and we *play* rock and roll and that was the standard. And not only did I find that tiring, it was in a way humiliating because I had to be someone. I mean, I did it and I could do it, and now it stands me in good stead. I can play lead, although I wasn’t playing that much lead when we [first] got to LA.

[When guitarist Addie Clement left Fanny], Jean and Alice turned to me and said, “Well now you got to play lead,” and my head exploded, I just *froze*. I did what I do with anything else, I looked at it like a sacred job: now I’m going to learn lead guitar. So, I just worked as hard as I do on anything else.

[Even when playing rhythm guitar], I was always the band leader in that way because I was kind of pushy in the sense that I just had a sense of what it would take to go where nobody had gone before. How do you get a record deal when you’re girls? At one point Alice’s girlfriend, who soon became her ex-girlfriend, was managing our band, and she got us to the Troubadour—on open mic night! That’s where we got discovered by [producer] Richard Perry’s secretary, who I am still in touch with. Perry signed us on to Warner Brothers. [Record executive] Mo Ostin had just had a hit with [Tiny Tim’s 1967 single] “Tiptoe Through the Tulips.” And based on that, Mo signed us sight unseen, because I mean obviously here you had this hit with a novelty song, and obviously these girls are novelty, and maybe we make money off of one or two albums. Exactly the attitude that the Beatles had when the record company signed them.

[Novelty] was the only frame that the record company, and I guess the public, could even imagine [Fanny] and enter as a commodity. They wanted us to smash through and we did. We did. And that’s what I believe our contribution was—I mean, whether or not we get into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; I’m pretty sure it’s not going to happen in my lifetime, maybe in the future. But I don’t even really care, because I was there, I did it. That took a mighty strong heart and an awful lot of will to do that. And I got up every day and I worked—that’s what I do. That’s what Filipinos do. We learn how to learn, and we learn how to work, and we do it. Unflinchingly. I did not complain.

We had to morph into Fanny [in the period between signing with Reprise and releasing the group’s debut, *Fanny*, in 1970]. That’s exactly what we did. And we didn’t know who was going to be the fourth member. So if we heard of somebody, say, in Nashville, we would fly that girl out, and Warner Brothers paid for it, or

Reprise. Finally Nickey [Barclay] came along and she stuck, and she could write those rock tunes we became known for.

Richard [Perry] was the entrée because he was a known producer. He took us around to studios in LA, and he had a house in Laurel Canyon, and we would go sit by the pool naked and hang out, and all these other rock stars would come over. It wasn't Bacchanalian, I can tell you that. But it was definitely a scene, and every week we got better.

We practiced in the [Laurel Canyon] house, and pretty soon there was Little Feat in our basement jamming with us. We were jumping over buildings within a year and rehearsing at Warner Brothers, at the sound lot on those sound stages and learning how you fill up a big space because before that [we had been playing at] clubs. So, first, we did a lot of club gigs around the Bay [in Los Angeles], and the first big one we did was at the Santa Monica Civic Center in which we opened for the Kinks. We opened for Procol Harum there. We saw and met Taj Mahal when he had the Pointer Sisters, who were not known at that time. They were his backup singers, and there were like something like six or eight tubas [laughter]. [We met] Ry Cooder, Randy Newman, who else was on the list? We would run into each other at the studios, so we got to know them on a professional level.

I think we all recorded our first album twice. That was the type of service that Reprise gave to its artists in the early days because they realized that they were facilitating a new brand of American music. Ry and Little Feat came off the label. Bonnie Raitt came on the label after we were on. I mean we were kind of the first! I remember after a show [at the Ash Grove in Los Angeles] hanging out with Bonnie and Maria Muldaur in front of the club, and Maria was like, "I just recorded the *best* song!" Well, it was "Midnight at the Oasis"! Jean came home one night and she was walking on air. She had just come from the Troubadour, and she said, "I just saw the most *amazing* woman." It was Judee Sill.

All of these people and events added to the repertoire of my experiences. It wasn't just the music, it was the culture. We met Jackson Browne. We went to see somebody at Thee Experience, where I heard [Iron Butterfly's] "In-a-Gadda-da-Vida," that entire drum solo live!

So we knew a lot of people before they were who they are today. It was a part of the culture where this sound, this type of Americana music, was being supported and actually nurtured. It wasn't just all that crass stuff that's happening now. Now it's a hook within a hook within a dance number within short skirts within a lipstick commercial! But that wasn't the world we walked into in 1969.

GW: What was your relationship like with your fans then?

JM: The relationship was proving we could play like guys.

GW: So you got fan mail?

JM: Oh yeah! We got a lot of fan mail, in fact David Bowie wrote us a fan letter which I didn't even remember about until just a few years ago after Alice reminded me.

GW: And when you were playing in Fanny did the girls come up to the front and try to talk to you?

JM: No. I'm telling you, it just was not in the repertoire of social behavior. Girls didn't, couldn't, step out like that. They were more sort of behind us than the boys, who

wanted us to prove that we could play like guys, like girls didn't. I don't, I didn't feel like that was [the women's] attitude. They just wanted to see us, and be mirrored. And they didn't need to talk to us so much as just absorb it and process it.

Maybe five years ago a guy [posted to Fanny's Facebook page], and he said, "I just want to apologize to you. Me and my band went to see you at the [LA club] Whisky a Go Go, and we were so threatened all we could do was badmouth you. But now I realize we only did that because you were better than us." We ran into that attitude a lot because of our will, our perseverance, our discipline. We got better, and that just made us more of a threat—to the point that I didn't even really bother to talk to too many people. It was just the same thing over and over again. "I'm amazed!" And blah blah blah. With the press the first question was, "What does it feel like to be a girl guitarist?" I mean, I just found it offensive 'cause I'm smart. So after about a year of that, the charm definitely wore off! The bloom off the rose. *Are you fucking kidding me? Really?* That was my rock-and-roll response inside my head. *"Are you talking to somebody else? I mean, what? What? What?"* [No one realized] that I had brains, had aspirations that were not just rock and roll. And they didn't realize I wasn't fucking everyone. I mean, they *thought* that. They made that assumption. They made assumptions about drugs.

I was really kind of a monk or a nun, cleverly disguised as a [cat meowing sound]. Because in order to [make the music] I had to put *so* much effort and energy into throwing it out. There was nothing coy about it. Nothing coy. In fact, I talked to our road manager a few years ago when I was kind of in the throes of [writing *Land of a Thousand Bridges*], and he said, "June, do you realize a lot of the time you actually turned your back to the audience [starts laughing] when you were playing?" And I said, "No!" He was like, "Did you realize that every time you played, the guys in the bands who you played with would be standing on the side of the stage going, Oh my God?" I said, "No!" I didn't because I was concentrating on doing the best job I could and getting flung out on stage and *flinging* it out there with the band.

It was a little bit frightening because I couldn't have an off night, I couldn't get sick, I couldn't say I don't feel like doing it tonight, whatever, if I had my period and like that. None of us could do that. You're on the edge, you're on the point of the line, the spear, whatever. It's just *really* tough. What I can say is it was really tough to be the first girl or young woman recognized as the lead guitar player. And that was the only kind of frame they could put me in, and I *really* hated that. That's part of why I was so tired [by 1973]. I felt like, how am I going to learn how to be a person? How am I going to learn how to actually talk to people? Because I could not have a conversation like this really.

GW: It was like we were talking before about invisibility, but having only a certain kind of invisibility, only with a teeny window.

JM: It was exhausting. And people assumed *again* that there was *a lot* of drugs and, I mean, yeah, it was the '60s, '70s, c'mon. Of course there were drugs swirling around us. But I was vegetarian, I did yoga. Not a lot of people were doing *that* around me. And I was *so* shy. I mean I couldn't handle it. I tried to open it, I just didn't have the skill! In order to get that skill, I had to leave Hollywood. I went into Buddhist studies, as I explain in [*Land of a Thousand Bridges*], and slowly but surely [I worked through] that intense feeling of tenseness, being squeezed and coiled all the time.

With Buddhism I was learning how to uncoil while having the stability of understanding what the universe actually consists of, which is holographic thought, that at every moment we are creating.

GW: Did that change your music?

JM: I think so. And by the time I got introduced to feminism and women's music I had already relaxed just a little bit. I lived in Woodstock for a year, I'd gone in and out for a couple of years going to New York and meeting new people, meeting some old friends. They took me seriously, which is what I needed. I needed to not have that question asked of what it feels like to be a girl guitarist. I *really* needed that. [In Fanny] they were forcing me to be one-dimensional, they were corralling me every chance *they* got. It was easier to cater to that one-dimensional thinking that was out in society. I mean Fanny was selling 60,000 units [of] each album, and we still didn't have a Top 40 hit.

GW: So how did you get involved with women's music?

JM: I didn't know [singer-songwriter] Cris [Williamson] was a fan [of Fanny]. In fact, when we were about to a gig at Max's Kansas City in New York, there was a line waiting, and Cris describes it thus: She was standing in line and she saw this cab or this limo disgorge Fanny, and we walked by the line and she just walked behind us pretending to be one of us. She got in for free pretending to be one of us, pretending to be part of Fanny!

[In early 1975] I was living in Woodstock [New York] with a woman [who] was a bass player and had jammed with Cris. [Cris] somehow found out and she sent her a tape [for me] and said I'd like you to consider playing on an album I'm going to do. Because basically she and the other women at Olivia [Records, founded in 1973] had dreamed up Olivia [laughs]. [On the tape] I could *hear* this *really*—I'd call it strong, interesting, alluring, mysterious voice. *Really* good, really strong. But, equally what sort of drew me in was the *audience* [of women]. They were just screaming and going *crazy*, and this was, I found out later, at a church basement in Washington or Baltimore or something. Little knowing that was destiny calling [laughs] in that 45-minute span [of listening to the tape]. So when [my friend] went out to San Francisco to do a gig with Cris, I basically tagged along and sat in.

When I started to play with Cris [I began to understand] the separatism and pain and the idea of feminism and *why* feminism and what, you know, it's actually going to do for me and society and so on. For me personally, [this understanding] allowed for me to go into the spiritual side of my writing. I needed something that was not just rock and roll, that was soothing, and this was all about the soul. We all called upon this energy; the audience called upon it. Cris just happened to be the person who came in on the horse with the songs, with the perfect voice. And so this was destiny.

I think about the witches who were burned at the stake and *all* the women who were beat up, not given credit for their art. All that energy came up through a vortex, and all of a sudden, there I was in the middle of it with Cris because she was the goddess of the whole thing. Her and a couple of other women. Meg Christian was in there. So once again I found myself in this incredible vortex of magnetic

energy which was actually a paradigm shift [from Fanny and rock and roll]. It was all part of what was coming next.

[As a member of Cris's band], I disappeared! Nobody cared about me. Cris was the thing! So I took a vacation. I was like on the love boat when I went on tour.

TG: Did it feel like work then?

JM: No! She let me do Tai chi on stage. She let me play drums. I had complete and total freedom! Half the time I couldn't hear what she was singing on stage because there were no monitors! These were not like big professional gigs, these were women trying to figure out sound and how to produce a gig. It was completely separatist.

I left Fanny with, I think, \$800 or \$900 in cash. Then I moved to this place in Peconic [New York]. I had no money, I could barely get into New York. I had never experienced a New York winter without a comfy hotel and a limo, or without a road manager taking us from place to place hooking it up. I didn't know about gloves and it was *really* cold. And I got out of the subway and I was walking to go to a jam or something and the wind was *whipping*, and I had a coat that was barely adequate. I don't even know if I had a scarf and I was carrying my guitar. And I thought to myself, *I have to learn how to be now in this world*. Which is not protected.

I'd jam night and day wherever I could. I learned about salsa, I learned about reggae, I learned about disco, I learned *all* this other stuff. I learned about meeting other people from other cultures and then women's music. I just really opened myself up to the whole thing, and at some point the whole thing boiled over because I believed, like so many women, that once I got into the feminism thing, which involves spirituality and the idea of egalitarianism [things would be better than they had been in Fanny]. It ended up with me having my heart broken because I thought I wasn't going to experience what I had experienced in Hollywood [with Fanny]. In fact, I did experience that in its own way in women's music, so I kind of had to leave and lick my wounds and do a lot of solo gigs and sleep on my friends' couches and sort of reconfigure. I thought: Well, I kind of judged Hollywood and the way I was treated as [a] woman or treated as a commodity. [Then] woman's music totally surprised me and broke my heart. And then I realized: Okay, so if I can criticize these women for their actions, in terms of what they say and what they do and how they have hurt my feelings and broken my heart and ripped me off, some of them, while nurturing me and feeding me this whole new experience and new feminist philosophy and a new way of being in the world—well, why don't I see if I can walk my talk, and that's on me. That is on me. It's tough to walk the talk. How do we not rip people off? How do we not hurt people, how do we not injure these kids that come in [to the IMA]? How do we serve? And how do we pay it forward? So that's my whole gig.

GW: Can we go back to clarify? You talk about women's music also breaking your heart?

JM: Completely business.

GW: So the same dynamics?

JM: Business. We wanted [purity] and that was the rhetoric, and I don't believe that we all believed in it. But, when you have a repressed segment in society and they go off into their own thing, well, the stuff is going to come up. I mean, you don't heal

yourselves and then come up avatars overnight. So we actually couldn't do it. We were hurting each other and trying to reinvent business practices but not succeeding entirely because there's always that thing where you're doing business and you don't really have that understanding and you're just fucking walking over people.

GW: And racism.

JM: Oh, yeah! I'll give you an example. I am standing with a woman, a woman's music booking agent/events producer. In fact, Ann [Hackler, Millington's partner] and I are standing with her, and she looks at the two of us and she says, "I need a women-of-color act for this next festival I'm doing." And Ann says flat out to her, "Well, June's a woman of color." So, that kind of invisibility is something I encountered, over and over again. I can give you another example. I called, I think, this college in Ohio because I wanted a gig and they said, "Oh we already have a woman of color act booked for this year." This was a woman that was saying this to me. So racism plays itself over and over again. It's the Hydra, it goes into every strata of society, and it presents itself in subtle and not-so-subtle ways that are not so different from festival producers or any producers when we were in Fanny saying, "Oh well, we already have a woman act."

GW: How do you feel being Asian American played into that?

JM: Unfortunately, I played the role of the nice Filipina woman. I didn't know how to not do that. Now I speak my mind, to a lot of people's chagrin. Not just about racism but about all sorts of stuff. Like I'm at the point where last night [at the IMA] I mentioned how some of the girls would come to camp or they would enter college or something and say, "I'm not a feminist." And I'm like, "You're not a feminist? How can you be here and not be a feminist? Let me give you a quick tutorial of what women have done so you could be standing here *saying*, "I'm not a feminist!" I am so offended by that! So, [now] I am not quiet about that.

I learned from that paradigm shift in the '70s when I got involved in it, kicking and screaming. I did not want to encounter my own experiences of sexism and racism. And actually racism came first, so when misogyny reared its head with the Svelts, I barely noticed! Why? Because racism was the thing that actually dominated everything and shut me down. Totally shut me down. So climbing out of that and then wondering why I wanted to get involved with sexism. All these great thinkers, women feminists came out, and they were kicking butt intellectually. I had to experience seeing that audience and the interaction with Cris and everything was so big!

I have all of these experiences. But I can't just go out in life complaining about how I was treated. I'm not into that! I feel like my life is a success story, I keep learning. I am doing what I can to pass it on and to serve.

When I left Fanny it felt like a bad acid trip because it didn't look or feel like anything we thought success was going to be. It was like ashes in my mouth, and it scared the hell out of me. I was terrified. I just couldn't understand where I was and where we were. How did this happen? We should have been at the top of the world. I mean, we had success, we had blah blah blah, but there was just that thing that happened with society ... I gave everything I could and it was not going to happen.

GW: What do you mean "not going to happen"?

JM: We were not going to have that Top 40 hit. Why don't people talk about Fanny in a colloquial way [today]? Because we did not have that hit that comes right into your mind. "Charity Ball" did not make it in that way, Jean's song "Butter Boy" did not make it that way either. It wasn't a Top 40 hit. So, they're not going to reference us in rock magazines or whatever because we don't have that [snaps several times] easily identifiable, an easy identifier. We don't have that.

GW: We were talking earlier about your relationship with Todd Rundgren [who produced *Mother's Pride*, Fanny's last album]. And it seems in the book he kind of came in and declared, "I am the producer!"

JM: When we got to the studio he asked us to gather in front of him, and he laid down on his forearm right in front of us exactly like this looking up at us. And then he says, "Okay, so I'm your producer, right?" And we're going in circles looking down at this guy and we go, "Right." And he goes, "I'm your producer because I know more than you, right? So you're going to listen to everything I tell you to do, right?" And at that point I kind of disappear. Jean and Alice remember nothing of that scene. For me, it's seared because I place memories in my body in different ways, and that one was a trauma. I remember that trauma. Now, that's not to say we didn't have fun with Todd, in fact we did.

Yes, I probably was a brute of a man in many lifetimes [in the past]. I probably tortured and hurt many people, but at the same time I'm back here to make restitution. And part of it is to hold up to the side that I just know is the right thing to do ... I feel like that is the most important part of my life [now]. Of course I think the music is super important and that is why I am alive. But this part of making restitution is really a big deal for me. I think of the stories that I heard [in childhood] about the Japanese occupation. For *years* I had this dream, I can't remember when it started, but it went on for years and years. I am in the downstairs of my grandmother and grandfather's place, where the maids washed clothes, the *lavadoras*. It was basically concrete with one window and a drain in the middle and I would be in that room, and Japanese soldiers would be throwing in live grenades through that one window, and I would have to throw the grenade out, get it and throw it out before it blew up on me. Now, that's really tiring and that would happen all night for years and I never told anyone this. That was like my normal life. Well, how great was it to get into rock and roll, when I could just keep turning up and making [the dream] recede more and more [chuckles].

In that house [in Manilla] *everybody* told me, my aunts, my uncles, my grandparents, the maids, everybody who was there at the house told me how the Japanese would just come any time night and day, and they would search for guns. My grandfather was trying to put together our history based on our Lim heritage in China, and they took that because they didn't know if it was war plans or something. Not understanding, so they took *that* part of our heritage also.

So much of life is brutal. It's not just all rainbows, and hopes, and peace for the world, everybody gets dental care! If I could just give you a vignette that just rose up out of my head, it would be great to see a little cartoon, a little animated feature ... now this would be horrible but [of] a woman burning at the stake. All of sudden she leaps off and she's got a guitar! She leaps off the stake and she's got a guitar and she's singing—like the girls [teenage campers at the IMA, who had performed earlier that

afternoon] did—Bikini Kill’s “Rebel Girl.” Or Alice Bag’s “Modern Day Virgin Sacrifice.”

GW: Was Bag’s memoir *Violence Girl: East L.A. Rage to Hollywood Stage, a Chicana Punk Story* (2011) an inspiration for you?

JM: Both of her books [including *Pipe Bomb for the Soul* (2015)] were. Yeah. She’s badass, I love her.

GW: You write in the book that when you were in the Svelts and you were transitioning to electric instruments you didn’t necessarily know about the women who had played guitar or even had gone electric before.

JM: I hadn’t even heard of Sister Rosetta Tharpe before. Toshi Reagon, Bernice Johnson Reagon’s daughter, was the first one to mention her to me. You get into a whole other swirl of herstory, history, and so on.

GW: Ann said she did not expect you some day to be working with kids.

JW: Ah! Never! I have no patience!

TG: So if teaching students wasn’t the initial work of IMA, what were you envisioning as the mission for the organization?

JM: Helping women in any way we could. In any genre. Just educating, maybe, if we could find ways to do that.

TG: Has there ever been talk about a TV show or a record label [for the work that comes out of the IMA]?

JM: That’s way, way down the line. People say we should make this a reality show, your girls camp. Which is impossible actually and wrong [chuckles] on so many levels. [With] record companies, I’m about ready to see if we can make that happen because so many great songs are written out of here. But, by the same token I don’t want girls to expect that they can come [to a girls rock camp] and write a hit song. They should experience whatever it is they need to within the actual context of who shows up for camp. Because that is really what gives us the results. We cause fourteen girls to show up together, and by the time of the [culminating] show, they’re one and they are experiencing [things] together. You know: “I survived camp with June Millington” [laughs].

TG: That would make a great t-shirt!

GW: Would you have liked to have been in a girls camp? This is exactly what you *didn’t* have.

JM: It’s really the Svelts-point-ten. It’s what we had to create for ourselves. I mean Jean and I would sneak out our bedroom window and go off to one of the girl’s houses to practice in the middle of the night. So we had the same attitude. [At the first camp in 2002], in fact, the hardest thing for me was realizing I’m not one of them [the campers]. I wanted to be one of them actually, the first year, and I was kind of resentful and jealous that I had to be the adult and teacher. I mean, I want to jam, too!

[What we teach] is not just learning an instrument or music itself, it’s also the production and the drama. How you do the in-breath and the out-breath of the

whole show. One thing I insist on is before we actually do the sound check [for the camp's culminating performance], we just walk into position. Don't touch an instrument, just walk into a position. It's really important for [the girls at camp] to get that in their bodies to sort of realize what a show is. The other thing that I do is tell them, "Give your audience"—which in this case is their families and their friends and some of the community—"give them the gift of five seconds after the song. Because here is what they try to do. They finish a song and then they will turn away. So give [the audience] that gift, and guess what? They're going to give it right back to you because they want to adore you. So I tell them that so they can have little bit of confidence in that five seconds. You're here because you want [the audience] to love you and to clap. You want to hear that, you want to feel that, but you won't get as much if you leave them right away.

And that's a big moment for me to cause them to understand. I start off [camp] and say, basically, you have to own this space. You have to own it. The best performers I've ever seen walk on stage and they own the space. It's just as simple as that. But how do you do that? Well you can practice it. You can act. That's why acting exists. So [at performance time] they each go up to the microphone and they say whatever causes their audience to go into fits of laughter or whatever, and they're a success! So that [training] translates into the show.

I know those moments. I mean 55 years of doing gigs—that's not inconsiderable! I have a lot to pass onto them. ■

