

## Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies\*

By Sherrie Tucker

His wife Lil often played piano.

Ken Burns's *Jazz*, on Lil Hardin Armstrong.

“. . . are they his third or fourth wives, or two new members of the brass section?”

Cartoon caption, *Down Beat*, August 15, 1943.

My ears were like antennae and my brain was like a sponge.

Clora Bryant, trumpet player, on her first encounters with bebop.

In jazz, the term “big ears” refers to the ability to hear and make meaning out of complex music. One needs “big ears” to make sense of improvisatory negotiations of tricky changes and multiple simultaneous lines and rhythms. “Big ears” are needed to hear dissonances and silences. They are needed to follow nuanced conversations between soloists; between soloists and rhythm sections; between music and other social realms; between multiply situated performers and audiences and institutions; and between the jazz at hand and jazz in history. If jazz was just about hitting the right notes, surviving the chord changes, and letting out the stops, jazz scholars, listeners, and even musicians would not need “big ears.”

Yet, jazz historiography has historically suffered from a reliance on predictable riffs. Great-man epics, sudden genre changes timed by decade, and colorful anecdotes about eccentric individuals mark the comfortable beats. Jazz—quite undeservedly, and all too often—has been subjected to easy listening histories. The familiar construction of jazz history as a logical sequence in which one style folds into another, one eccentric genius passes the torch to the next—what Scott DeVeaux (1991) calls “the jazz tradition”—has dominated popular and critical writing about jazz, even the ways our “Survey of Jazz” classes are taught in universities. I call this progression “dominant jazz discourse” because of the powerful ways it manages to move through and shape jazz narratives that see themselves as distinct from one another. It is not just one discourse among others, but one with a great deal of institutional, social, and political power owed to other discourses about progress, modernism, primitivism, individualism, American exceptionalism, essentialist notions of race and gender, etc. These powerful discourses are, of course, not just about jazz, but move through the ways jazz is talked about, marketed, and understood, even as

they move through the ways other histories are narrated (westward expansion, for example).

This is not to say that enthusiasts of the “jazz tradition” narrative are also enthusiasts of racism or primitivism, or even that they would agree with me and other jazz studies scholars who study these connections. It is also not to say that “dominant jazz discourse” has never been challenged. As with most dominant discourses, it has had its dissenters. Indeed, contradictory perspectives have proliferated from researchers of African American history and women’s history, from black studies and Latin American studies, from academic jazz studies, from the black press and the socialist press, from critical theorists and musicians. Yet, in spite of the continued production of alternate takes, the dominant version continues to dominate. Dominant discourses are good at that. Allow me to just whisper the name of that incredibly useful touchstone, Ken Burns’s *Jazz*, the nineteen-hour master-narrative that precisely (if not succinctly) illustrates what kinds of dominant desires were representable about jazz history for a mass television audience in the year 2001: great men, sudden style changes, colorful anecdotes about eccentric individuals.

Academics, critics, and musicians have squared off in their responses to *Jazz*, but often even the most vigorous objections to the documentary concentrate on scope and inclusion, not on the narrative itself, and revolve around other views of who counts as great men (and I do mean men) and other opinions about the “most important” styles. Even jazz studies scholars who quite purposefully and consciously aim to narrate outside of the “dominant jazz discourse” box often find themselves stumping for inclusion of particular styles and artists in the usual pantheon. Like any dominant discourse worth its weight in salt, this one is slippery and inviting.

Even so, there are some areas in which meticulous historical work in jazz studies has managed to unsettle ideological understandings of jazz historiography. Much of this has involved locating jazz discourse in a history of primitivism, or in European and European American fantasies of exotic otherness, while documenting “lost” jazz practices that did not fit, and therefore do not appear, in dominant discourse. This type of scholarship—which I will soon discuss—is not just about dueling canons, but about taking the canon apart to see what makes it tick, then trying to craft a different kind of historical narrative that contextualizes this ticking, along with other social, cultural, and political frameworks through which jazz has mattered. This article aims to learn from these areas, and to suggest directions for critical expansion. Like many scholars of cultural studies and jazz studies, I consider this work important, not only because it will give us a more complete understanding of jazz history as a distinct narrative, but because it will increase our understandings of the societies for whom jazz has been meaningful.

In this article, I join my colleagues in jazz studies in a call for continued ear-training that will help us to hear and analyze jazz activity and meaning more historically and more in tune with its musical and social complexity.<sup>1</sup> However, I also depart from many of my colleagues in my plea that we learn to listen to, and take seriously, a register that is particularly under-theorized in our field—one that is, in fact, when some of us do bring it up, often dismissed with a vehemence that would make our non-jazz colleagues in popular music studies (rock docs, I like to call them) feel all cutting edge and complacent. (An example seems pertinent, but, like the women musicians I have interviewed about jazz and gender, I hear myself hesitating. Am I afraid of losing gigs? Alienating colleagues? Would personal examples blame individuals instead of the ideology that naturalizes these interactions? Why do the scarce have to prove that scarcity exists and is not accidental? Instead, how about if I just point to the jazz literature, popular and academic alike, and ask where is the gender analysis? Now let's compare that picture with say, film studies, or literature . . .) Rock music studies didn't always send out the welcome wagon to gender theorists either, yet there now exists an exciting body of work in which gender is productively analyzed in a wide variety of rock and pop contexts.<sup>2</sup> I am certainly not the first or only jazz researcher to call for more attention to gender.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, I am concerned that resistance to gender analysis in jazz studies is particularly entrenched, discouraging to scholars most likely to produce new frameworks, and undermining the potential of our work.

I advocate, therefore, ear-training that would enable jazz researchers to better listen for gender in the dissonances, silences, and negotiations of tricky changes at all levels of jazz studies. Listening for gender will be helpful not only to those of us wanting to understand sexism and the experiences and contributions of women in jazz, but also to anyone wishing to develop more complex frameworks for addressing the histories, sounds, functions, and meanings of this fascinating and multifaceted music. Without listening for gender (and to sexuality), in fact, jazz studies risks overlooking a category of analysis that closely follows race (and is, in fact, intertwined with it) as the social category most capable of deconstructing this dominant discourse. Certainly, other categories such as class, capitalism, and nation, are also key components in critical scholarship, but this article will focus on gender, in interaction with sexuality and race.

To return to the handy example of Ken Burns's *Jazz*, how might jazz studies employ more rigorous incorporation of current theories of gender and sexuality and race, as they inflect one another, to deconstruct dominant fictions in which quests of naive and gifted underclass and/or racialized male protagonists are constructed in relation to failed or absent fathers, insufficient or excessive mothers, nagging or manipulative wives, and unnamed frenzied wiggling female bodies? Clearly, I'm still suffering from

my own personal *Jazz* flashbacks, yet I am not simply calling for inclusion of women as musicians into the existing narrative. The narrative itself is shaped by notions of gender and sexuality and race that I find problematic. It is important to emphasize that Burns did not invent these privileged narratives of jazz discourse, nor is he responsible for the longevity of dominant desires that make them marketable to major funding agencies. He is responsible, however, for skillfully fulfilling these desires for familiar representations and stories. My discussion of the Burns narrative, then, is not meant as a beef with Burns, but as a critique of a powerful version of jazz history that I consider harmful; one that permeates American culture at many levels, including contemporary ideas about what jazz is and what it means.

Take, for instance, the representation of Louis Armstrong as jazz naif, who alternately plays “like an angel” and falls in love, bumbling along on his life journey, it would seem, without much capacity for agency or critical thinking. The audience is instructed to cheer as he loses pushy Lil (“his wife who often played piano”—there is no place in this story for her own career). We are to cheer again as he is miraculously liberated from Alpha (a subsequent wife—pictured with a vampish leer, wearing a fur-coat—who, in full knowledge of Armstrong’s love for Lucille, stubbornly refuses to divorce him because she wants to devour his paychecks). And finally, we are prompted to coo and say “awww” when he finally settles down with his prize, Lucille, who is depicted as an uncomplaining, cookie-baking “former-dancer” (kind of like Laura Petry on the old *Dick Van Dyke Show*). Lucille is portrayed as the ultimate object of desire for anyone who has ever yearned for a domestic partner who has no needs or ambitions of her own, doesn’t mind whether her husband comes home or stays away for months at a time, and yet still manages to create the home life he has always wanted.

Of key importance is Lucille’s understanding that Armstrong’s first love must be his trumpet. The jazz hero’s life is depicted as meaningless until he finds the right horn, plays it perfectly the first time, lucks upon the right patriarchal band leader, and makes America feel good. In dominant jazz discourse as channeled by Burns, jazz heroes achieve greatness through male musical bonding in homosocial bands (constructed as aggressively heterosexual against backdrops of prostitutes, wives, female lovers, and shimmying female dancers). In *Jazz*, black women are often presented as obstacles to greatness, yet their presence functions to define the hero’s stature. In episode one, we have the following quote about the legendary Buddy Bolden: “Bolden’s mother tried to calm him down, then turned him into the police. He spent the rest of his life in the Louisiana state insane asylum in Jackson.” Jelly Roll Morton’s story includes the piv-

otal moment when his great-grandmother finds out that he has been working in whore houses, "and threw him out of the house forever. He took to the road at seventeen. . . . To support himself, he blacked up and performed as a vaudeville comic." The next image shows Morton in black-face, on stage with a white or light actress who points her finger at him in what appears to be an accusatory way. Could someone please remind me why jazz studies has no use for gender analysis?<sup>4</sup>

Again, I am not holding up *Jazz* as the solitary culprit responsible for widespread jazz misinterpretation, but instead as evidence of a hegemonic dream world Burns did not invent, a dream world that is powerfully desired by enough target viewers that it attracts the necessary backing to buy representation in the big culture capital mainstream that is PBS. "Blame Burns" is not a slogan that will do any of us any good. Our own practices as jazz researchers, historians, journalists, and scholars in jazz studies could benefit from a closer look at gender. Certainly, our traditional preoccupations with differentiating the "authentic" from the "commercial," the "innovator" from the "imitator" (and dare I mention the relentless tug-o-wars over favorite styles, factoids, and super-heroes that have long captivated jazz writers?), may be better understood if we more persistently attended to historically contingent ideas about masculinity and femininity, in conversation with multiple and shifting ideas about race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, national identity, empire, and capitalism.

Of course, I realize that these are fighting words in jazz research circles. But fighting words are not rare in this field. Jazz researchers square off along many lines, such as the touchy, if far too simply defined, division between "academics" and "non-academics," and additional and sundry boundaries that attempt to distinguish "those with real jazz knowledge" from "loathsome imposters." Jazz researchers' criteria for "real jazz knowledge" is itself far-ranging and contradictory, and variously includes (along with the ability to write and conduct research): the ability to play an instrument; long-time experience in journalism or broadcasting; a big record collection; a good memory for birth dates, studio dates, death dates, and bassists; a Ph.D.; a lack of Ph.D., lit. crit. degree, or musicology degree; close personal friendships with jazz musicians, record producers, and other researchers; and so on. The same definitions are often invoked to delineate "loathsome imposters."

Outrage in the jazz research community today often coagulates around the stand-off between those who wish to batten down the hatches of traditional methods and master narratives, and those bent on disrupting them. The latter often incorporate poststructuralist approaches to subjectivity, identity, language, historiography, representation, and culture that demand radical shifts in thinking and writing about jazz. Often perceived as victims

and perpetrators of elite theoretical fashion, these researchers question familiar jazz-writing imperatives such as (1) canon formation; (2) defining authentic jazz and fiercely guarding its boundaries; (3) jockeying for the final word on historical minutiae; or (4) treating jazz as an artifact (usually recorded) that can be isolated from social context. Instead, they approach their task armed with theoretical crowbars. Discourse analysis, deconstruction, audience reception theories, and semiotics dangle from postmodern tool belts. There is no coherent jazz history, they say. Instead, difference, dissonance, and competing discourses punctuate the sounds of surprise. Questions raised by these spins include: What musics have been called jazz by whom and when and where, and what have these musics called jazz meant historically to variously multiply-positioned musicians, audiences, institutions, and jazz researchers? What kinds of hegemonic struggles have occurred on specific sites of jazz production and consumption? What kinds of projects have been enabled or thwarted in these struggles? How effective has jazz been historically as a space for developing counter-discourses, in forming communities and identities, for producing what Angela Davis calls "collective political social consciousness?"<sup>5</sup>

Among the most productive shifts are the ways in which overlaps of critical race theory and some strands of cultural studies have brought about a much more complex and historical analysis of race than is possible if one assumes that race is a biological and/or cultural given that guarantees tastes and aptitudes.<sup>6</sup> Dominant jazz discourse is marked by a legacy of essentialist notions of race coursing through the gamut of jazz narrativity, including "jazz tradition" historiography, gate-keeping and marketing strategies of the recording industry, and representations in music trades such as *Down Beat*, all of which frequently perceive jazz meaning through white fantasies about black masculinity (see Monson 1995). Much of the most widely available and influential early literature (penned primarily by white men) bears the dominant stereotypical raced and gendered assumptions that black men are superior jazz innovators due to natural inclinations to be musical, emotional, virile or childlike, violent or whimsical. These notions of race are still with us (as relentlessly represented in characterizations of the naive jazz geniuses of Ken Burns's *Jazz*, in the guise of a Civil Rights narrative, no less). Yet, theories about race as a political and historical construct have opened up ways for jazz scholarship to chip away at racial myths.

Even at their most laudatory, equations of racial identity and jazz ability betray their roots in nineteenth-century racial science, in which European-descended positivists classified people of African descent as intuitive, sexual, and uninhibited, and people of their own backgrounds (at least men) as rational, intellectual, and disciplined. The same ideology that con-

structed black men as natural, intuitive players, appointed white men as those who could best classify and judge jazz.<sup>7</sup> White male jazz critics and historians have often counted themselves among the great advocates of black music, culture, and musicians, and many have engaged in explicitly anti-racist politics. Yet it is important to remember that racism is not just about behavior or intentions of individuals, but about histories and institutions and ideology. Critical race theory and cultural studies of race have provided jazz studies with tools to analyze its own historical division of labor based on ideas about race, as well as manifestations of raced meanings in other jazz sites, with a conception of race as historical, institutional, and ideological, rather than simply as a biological given with predictable traits.

Critical race theorists, such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, reject not only the essentialist view that race guarantees particular aptitudes, but also its “vulgar anti-essentialist” flip-side that concludes that, since race isn’t a biological fact, it must be irrelevant. In jazz writing, this often manifests in the rhetoric of jazz as a color-blind, utopian, race-free space, a sonic realm of transsocial pure aesthetics that somehow matter without signifying. Instead, critical race theorists work from an assumption that race is both “not real” and “real”; real “in the sense that there is a material dimension and weight to the experience of being ‘raced’ in American society, a materiality that in significant ways has been produced and sustained by law” (Crenshaw 1995:xxvi).<sup>8</sup> Such an approach renders insufficient debates about which race plays jazz best, as well as analyses that dismiss race as a red herring that detracts from the *real story* (of sound, of genius, of individuals). Instead, it leads jazz researchers to explore the production, consumption, functions, representations, and meanings of *jazz and race* as they inform each other in a vast range of social and historical contexts.

While the influences, practitioners, and audiences of jazz have been diverse in all kinds of ways, I would argue that none of them have been free from the profound historical legacy of jazz as an African American cultural formation developed largely under Jim Crow conditions. Jazz then becomes a site for exploring how people negotiate terms of racial formation, racialization, and racism, in specific ideological, institutional, and social movement contexts (for instance, white supremacy, segregation, desegregation, Civil Rights, Black Power, etc.). The significance of culture, for many theorists, is its ability to mediate between social subjects and social structures (Gilroy 1987:17). It is, in George Lipsitz’s words, “where people make meaning under conditions they do not usually control.”<sup>9</sup> In cultural studies of music, meaning-making is theorized as taking place not only in what Christopher Small calls the “thingness” of musical works, but in music as an activity, or “musicking,” which includes, among other things, playing, listening, playing along with records, dancing, jogging

while listening to a Walkman, etc. (Small 1998:4–10). If race is taken as one of the contested meanings that is struggled over in culture (see, for example, Hall 1992 and Gilroy 1987), it is possible to analyze how differently positioned people, engaged in various modes of jazz “musicking,” negotiate multiple, competing definitions of blackness, racial pluralism, racism or anti-racism, racialization, or racial hierarchy institutions and discourses that affect their lives as social subjects. In such an analysis, then, racial meanings are neither moot nor guaranteed by the racial identities of players. Thus, George Lewis analyzes “‘Afrological’ and ‘Eurological’ systems of improvisative musicality” as “historically emergent rather than ethnically essential” (1996:93). Sound could signify “blackness,” not because genes are audible, but because history is often audible.

As a historical category, race is rarely, if ever, solely about cultural difference, but about power and domination, struggle and survival. Kathy Ogren’s historical analysis of jazz in the 1920s demonstrates that racial meanings in jazz were significantly different for white and black audiences and critics even when considering the same music by the same artists (Ogren 1989). Ron Radano moves the discussion from “is jazz black or not?” to the conundrum of what does it mean to call music “black.” Does calling music “black” encourage exotic, romantic, and essentialist notions of blackness (black people play black music naturally from their genes)? If so, does giving up the term “black music” risk downplaying African American cultural history and power imbalances in the culture industry? (Radano 1993:18–20). Ingrid Monson points out that jazz musicians sometimes argue that jazz is “black,” and sometimes that it is “race-transcendent,” and sometimes the same musicians argue both points in different contexts. For Monson, this is not evidence of fickle musicians flipping between contradictory theories, but rather a negotiation of understandable rhetorical strategies in a complex historical web of racism, racialization, and racial politics. In a society that sometimes sees black achievement as racially determined (black people naturally play jazz, white people are capable of mastering any skill, including jazz), and sometimes sees it devoid of African American cultural history (jazz is color-blind, or the nationalist Burns narrative: jazz is American), it is necessary for musicians to be able to argue both tracks (Monson 1996:199–203). Surely, these questions are not just exercises for a small number of jazz scholars, but are, rather, ones that really do impact people’s lives. This is not to say that race essentialism or race avoidance has disappeared from jazz writing, only that more jazz researchers are reflecting on the ways in which “the nation’s racial consciousness has been embedded in American jazz criticism from the beginning” (Ramsey 1996:30) and are actively engaging theories about race and ethnicity as crucial components of jazz studies.



This is not so true of gender. Jazz studies has been a moldy fig on this issue, stubbornly out of the theoretical loop in its sluggishness to incorporate current theories about gender, particularly those that may be considered feminist.

More fighting words. Even in academic jazz studies, to raise the specter of feminist theory, or even of gender as a pertinent consideration, is often to invite an eerie parallel of what it must feel like for a woman horn player, of any number of historical time periods, to enter a cutting contest where the rules of what counts as virtuosity, prestige, authenticity, and value have been laid down by people who, quite possibly, do not want you there. In neither case would I argue that the skepticism one meets is indicative of the irrelevance of gender.

### **Gender as a Useful Category in Jazz Studies**

Although race and gender are very different categories indeed, with strikingly different histories, they inflect each other at every turn. Women-of-color feminists in the 1970s and 1980s were on the forefront of theorizing the inextricability of race, gender, class, ethnicity, nation, and sexuality.<sup>10</sup> Because these categories were experienced simultaneously, what good was it to theorize them as though they occurred in isolation? This is not to say, however, that because these categories are intertwined, they are identical. To say that race is gendered and gender is raced (and that each is affected by other social aspects such as class, sexuality, and nation), is not to say that race and gender work in exactly the same ways, nor that they can be explained in the same terms. Yet, there are some conceptual parallels.

The assumption that sexed bodies determine gender, or that sex and gender guarantee particular aptitudes and tastes, did not hold up well under cross-cultural and historical gender studies, which revealed gender to be variable, contingent, and changing. Just as theorists today are more likely to see race as a historical category and field of power rather than a genetic category and guarantor of aptitude, scholars are more likely to see gender (and perhaps even sex) as socially constructed—even performative. And not only do they tend to see gender as “the multiple and contradictory meanings attributed to sexual difference” (Scott 1988:25) rather than a linear equation of sex and characteristics, they see it as an ongoing process of being welded and stretched, crumpled and reinforced, buffed and scratched, bent and hammered out in millions of construction zones around the world, musical ones included.<sup>11</sup>

Theorists of gender and music apply social constructionist approaches in a variety of ways, too vast to fully enumerate here, but I’ll list a few examples. Musicologist Susan McClary has analyzed constructions of gender and sexuality in musical narratives commonly thought to be “abstract,”

such as Western classical music's sonata-allegro form (McClary 1991). Rock scholar and cultural studies critic Norma Coates (1997) has theorized the gendering of genres that permeates notions of rock as masculine, authentic, and honest, constructed in opposition to pop, conceived as feminine, slick, and artificial. Social anthropologist Karin van Nieuwkerk (1995) studied Egyptian working-class women's conceptions of professional dancing careers as productive labor, arguing that these dancers challenged historically contingent ideological constructions of the female body as sexual only. Suzanne Cusick (1999) has analyzed vocal production not as a natural expression of predetermined gender/sex identity, but as among the sites in which gender and sex are constituted, according to Judith Butler, through repeated performance.<sup>12</sup>

Even readers for whom the ideas on this quick and sketchy list are unfamiliar will be able to discern that none of these approaches could be called essentialist. Essentialist approaches to thinking about women and music would assume that women are biologically bound by an essence that gives them common musical traits across cultural differences, that women, by nature, make and use music differently than men. While very few gender theorists would attempt to argue this today, this belief forms a stubborn root underlying assumptions about women's capabilities in the professional jazz world, in dominant representations of jazz, and in jazz studies. The flip-side—the assumption that music is gender-free, that “music is either great or not, gender has nothing to do with it”—has also lost its currency in many fields, though not, it seems, in jazz. Women are invisible because they weren't good enough. Playing good enough meant playing like men. Women who play like men are “exceptional women,” and exceptional women can enter the discourse without changing it. We can acknowledge the importance of an exceptional jazzwoman in jazz history while retaining a belief that women cannot play powerfully enough, or women can't improvise. We can use her inclusion to argue that our historical vision of jazz is not sexist, but merit-based.

In jazz studies, “gender” is still often taken to denote inclusion of women, and “women's work” at that. In other words, it is the prerogative of women and pro-woman men to gather information on women musicians and compile it for dissertations and for articles and books intended for women readers. In this viewpoint, work on gender and women is seen as benevolent, as a special interest, as useful for women interested in women, but is not considered crucial for jazz scholarship as a whole. Sometimes calls for gender analyses are taken as accusatory cries for political correctives, admonitions from women and pro-woman men to “serious” male jazz scholars to include women. “It is only fair,” goes this framework, to dig up and acknowledge an “exceptional woman” or two for every

study of “real” jazz that one pursues. The most common inclusion narrative that I see about women in jazz is that they have been vocalists, sometimes pianists, but are only beginning to emerge as horn players, saxophonists, bassists, and drummers. This “always emergent” narrative (what I have elsewhere called “the perpetual phenomena phenomenon”) is a handy disposable container for jazzwomen. One might pay tribute to vaguely conceived, brave women musicians, woodshedding on the horizon (or in history), without actually changing one’s tune, and without, I’d like to emphasize, *analyzing gender*. Allow me to demonstrate how this commonly works before I move on to what I mean by gender analysis, as something quite different from—though not unrelated to—the inclusion of women.

We can see the disappearing woman act of “exceptional” or “always emerging” jazzwomen in popular representations of jazz, in labor conditions of jazz musicians, in how jazzwomen are seen by musicians and audiences, in jazzwomen’s own rhetorical strategies for claiming a place in the discourse, and in jazz studies. We see it in *Jazz*, which excuses itself from including women instrumentalists by tokenizing Mary Lou Williams: “With the exception of singers, jazz has mostly been a man’s world. But, during the 1930s, there was one female musician who earned the respect and admiration of all the men with whom she played” (episode 6). Inclusion of one woman (or jazz musician trapped in a woman’s body) justifies omission of others, and inclusion on the basis of male acceptance reinforces a vision of jazz as men’s natural domain.<sup>13</sup> The story appears at once inclusive and familiar.<sup>14</sup> It is also immediately juxtaposed with the aforementioned construction of patient, loving, desireless, non-musician wife, Lucille, as the embodiment of ideal jazz womanhood.<sup>15</sup>

Another example of the easy slippage between frameworks where jazz is taken to be simultaneously gender-free and a man’s world, is the stance Wynton Marsalis has taken to defend the lack of women in the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra: “I hire orchestra members on the basis of merit.” If they aren’t there, they must not be good enough. When interviewed for the *Village Voice* by Lara Pellegrinelli about why the LCJO had not, up to that point, ever had a female member (or an audition, for that matter, which throws another curve into the “merit” argument), Marsalis offered an emerging jazzwoman story: “The more women we have playing jazz, the higher the level of playing gets, the more they audition, and the more women are going to be all over” (Pellegrinelli 2000:65). Someday women will cut it, in other words, and when they do, they will be welcome “all over” the professional playing field.

Sadly, we see similar moves in jazz studies, with its inability to take women and gender seriously. With few exceptions, the field has proceeded largely as though feminist theories about gender and music do not

apply to jazz, and as though the painstakingly compiled “women-in-jazz” histories that began to appear in the 1980s never existed. At best, the “women-in-jazz” literature has been treated as a disposable container to gesture toward, often magnanimously, and then discard. Interestingly, when current gender theories are used in visible and explicit ways, it is usually in service of helping us to better understand the performances and negotiations of discourses of manhood and masculinity of already canonized male musicians. Writing about women instrumentalists, on the other hand, tends to take the form of advocacy literature and historical supplements *or is at least interpreted as such*.

I have contended that the women-in-jazz histories of the 1980s (Dahl 1989; Handy 1998; Placksin 1982) all incorporated far more gender analysis (though not usually explicitly) than has been acknowledged. They *had* to, in order to even *find* the women, who were so often absent from the traditional fields of evidence accepted by jazz historians and jazz discourse. These women-in-jazz researchers had to not only track down information and individuals who had not been recognized as historically important, but they had to find methods for reframing “what counts” as jazz history, so that women musicians who contributed to the history, but were omitted from the usual venues, markets, and categories of documentation could be rendered visible. For me, these reframings were incredibly rich, not only for the women they included, but for the entire areas of jazz practice that had been ignored by the dominant histories. When consulting these texts for data for my own research on “all-girl” big bands of the 1940s, I was repeatedly educated by the implicit gender analyses that enabled Placksin, Handy, and Dahl to look in places like family bands, school bands, and, well, “all-girl” bands, for jazz history. I wish more jazz historians would tap these books for their pioneering theoretical moves, rather than simply picking at them as grist for footnotes to appease special interests. This is just one area of jazz studies that deserves rigorous gender analysis.<sup>16</sup>

Usually, when I tell people that I’m interested in gender and jazz, they think that means that I am interested in reclaiming the “lost” histories of women who played jazz. And I am. Or in exposing the ways that sexism affects women who play jazz today. And I am. But in addition to these interests, and in part because of them, I am also interested in gender as an analytic category for understanding how power is organized, maintained, and challenged, and how change occurs. Historical and professional invisibility is one way that hierarchical power is attained. But how? Gender analysis would seek such explanations. This requires meticulous historical study, since successful invisibility is attained not just once, but over and over and over again. What makes it possible to ignore women jazz musicians as his-

torical subjects when so many women musicians have participated and excelled in jazz throughout the music's history?

Feminist historian Joan Scott argues that in order to address these questions, one would need to conceive of gender not just as a synonym for women, and not just as a critical description of sex and gender roles, but as one of the primary fields "within which or by means of which power is articulated" (Scott 1988:45). So rather than studying women or gender in the field of jazz, one might study jazz on the field of gender. One could, for example, study jazz as one kind of practice that mediates struggles over historically contingent ideas about sex-assigned qualities and relationships. A study of jazz on a field of gender (as a field of power) may yield insights into how style hierarchies, star systems, club policies, hipness barometers, etc., were established by recording companies, music publishers, jazz journalists, and historians. Scott's important essay, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (1986) is worth revisiting for its conceptual clarity on the differences between descriptive or causal gender studies and gender as an analytic category that can help historians, including historians of jazz, to better understand complex workings of power in society.

My stakes in wanting to study jazz on a field of gender, as well as on other fields where power is articulated (such as race, class, nation, sexuality, etc.), are grounded in wanting to know more about how power and struggle operate in jazz settings. I believe that jazz is an especially rich site for studying key clashes of contradictory social meanings in twentieth-century U.S. history (as well as in histories of other locations). Great varieties of social meanings have been attributed to jazz, as grappled over by variously located subjects—take the hypothetical simultaneity of beliefs that jazz stimulates interracial harmony, national love, subculture formation, black pride, bohemian ennui, spirituality, sexual prowess, democracy, chaos, and sales of luxury cars. One of the social meanings I subscribe to, both in my enjoyment of the music and in my scholarly work, is that these gaps in shifting and contradictory discourses may expose hierarchical fissures as opportunities for productive trouble and social change.

I am interested in how ideas about jazz and gender affect each other, how jazz meanings have been structured by (and structure) historically and culturally specific ideas about femininity and masculinity. This means that I am interested in how at the same time such ideas relate to ideas about things like race, class, sexuality, and nation, since gender never takes a solo. I would also argue that masculinity never takes a solo, either. It might *appear* to solo, but if we look closely, I think we can usually find that even the brassiest balls-to-the-wall renditions of jazz masculinity are constructed in relation to notions of femininity, and are shot through with

notions of race, nation, sexuality, class, and power. And even when we try to meticulously tease them out, we find that masculinities and femininities come in many forms, and do not always adhere to the sexed bodies we expect. In fact, they not only stick to a variety of bodies in a variety of ways, but to things that aren't bodies at all, like instruments, timbres, pitches, tempos, volumes, styles, genres, venues, after-gig activities, etc., and not only to these objects, but to how they are valued. A feminized style, for instance, may be valued differently in jazz than a masculinized style, even if each contains both men and women. To think that complex gender analysis of jazz is moot (since jazz is *obviously* masculine music produced by men for men) is to expect jazz to be more linear than life.

We have bigger ears than that.

### **Jazzmen and Masculinity Studies**

Interestingly, one place where gender has been explicitly deployed as an analytic category (and decidedly not as a synonym for women) is in recent studies of articulations of masculinity in performances, representations, and biographies of male jazz musicians. Cultural critics and historians have written, often insightfully, about jazz figures (usually Miles Davis) and have analyzed the versions of masculinity that produce and are produced through their music and other modes of self-representation, not only in performances, but also in interview settings and in autobiographies.<sup>17</sup> Much of this work has attempted to grapple with the appeal of Davis's "cool" sound—a sound variously interpreted as introspective, even vulnerable (effects produced through a stark, vibrato-less tone, timbral fuzziness, and techniques likely to produce them, such as half-valving), that was the antithesis of previous notions of hyper-masculinity on the trumpet<sup>18</sup>—in relation to his unapologetic violence against women as represented in his autobiography.<sup>19</sup>

Hazel Carby's analysis of Davis's autobiography tracks the trumpet player's self-representation of his journey toward black manhood and masculinity as a struggle between two spheres: the claustrophobic world of women, in which Davis depicts himself as trapped and violent, and the creative world of men, to which he escapes and in which he feels passionate, intimate, and relatively free (1998:135–65). In another Miles Davis analysis, Robin D. G. Kelley explores the trumpet icon's personal and musical style as reflecting a "pimp aesthetic," one which one did not have to really be a pimp to embrace, but which explains the relationship between Davis's musical appeal and misogyny as continuous, rather than operating in opposition. Kelley locates "cool" in a personal style associated with pimps that had a cultural history in African America, including jazz settings—not just as a stereotype, but as a way of being masculine, attractive, and

powerful in racist urban environments (2001). Elsewhere, Kelley has expanded on this historical construction of black masculinity among beboppers, arguing that the fleet musical language and hipster lexicon “sharply contrasted with the passive stereotype of the stuttering, tongue-tied Sambo.” In a culture where “whites commonly addressed them as ‘boy,’ zoot suiters made a fetish of calling each other ‘man.’” (Kelley 1993:87). Kelley also makes the important point that the exploitation of women by “black male hipsters of the zoot suit generation remind us that the creation of an alternative culture can simultaneously challenge *and* reinforce existing power relations” (ibid.:88). Though their analyses are different, both Carby and Kelley clearly see gender, race, sexuality, and class as complex fields of power that jazz plays upon in unique ways, but does not automatically transcend.

The men and masculinity (or Miles Davis Studies) school of gender analysis, while yielding important insights, worries me a bit, both for its tendency to omit women (except as oppressed victims) and feminized spheres all over again, and for its privileging of iconic figures that “fit” the most celebrated, even stereotypical versions of black masculinity in jazz. I would feel better about this trajectory if it could be enhanced through greater consideration of other genders enlisted in, and often eclipsed by, the production of dominant racialized hyper-heteromasculinities of dominant jazz discourse. What would happen if we were to take these insights and open them up to consider bebop and cool jazz cultures as including women (some of them instrumentalists), femininities, and female genders (that might include masculinity)? What are the implications for women musicians who played cool jazz and bebop? What kinds of identities did women accustomed to being called “girl” claim when they called each other “man?” What roles were open to female instrumentalists in a cultural formation marked by a “pimp aesthetic”—particularly women who were racially marked in ways that constructed them as hypersexual in dominant race and gender ideology? I have written elsewhere about the interplay between discourses of black womanhood, respectability politics, and jazz, in certain performances of African American women musicians (Tucker, forthcoming). Did respectability and other discourses of black womanhood produce other ways of being gendered cool jazz or bebop subjects?<sup>20</sup>

Also, while I think it is important to analyze and expose all forms of violence against women, I also worry about how constructions of black masculinity as particularly misogynist can obscure racism and sexism in the dominant culture (including the market in which jazz autobiographies and other jazz products circulate). When Davis represented himself in his autobiography as an angry black man who took pleasure in beating up

women, he did so not in discursive isolation, but on the unavoidable and powerful fields of dominant definitions of race and gender. This self-portrait was produced and would circulate amid the ideological contours of a marketplace in which such constructions are commonplace and expected, not to mention profitable. I'm not interested in second-guessing why Davis wrote the book he did, or lived the life he did, nor in defending, excusing, or indicting him as an individual, but I am interested in examining the dominant desires that shape the profitability of race and gender stereotypes. If dominant jazz discourse—and even certain jazz counter-discourses—reproduce narrow, stereotypical, and damaging representations from the field of gender on which they play, wouldn't we, as jazz researchers, do well to try to find out what historical actors we are missing, to listen to their versions of jazz history, and to learn what other kinds of gender analyses they make possible?

Some of these historical actors would include other African American male jazz musicians, whose performances of black masculinity have varied a great deal even in the same time periods. Herman Gray urges us to consider the "lives and careers of John Coltrane and Miles Davis" as "emblematic of the complex social relations (race, class, sexual) and cultural politics surrounding the self-construction and representation of the black masculine in the public sphere" (1995:401). Coltrane's respect for Alice Coltrane as a woman and as a musician, his "black and third world internationalism," and his spiritual quest make him a very different figure indeed. Other studies that help to map a fuller inventory of African American jazzmen's performances, representations, and constructions of black masculinities in jazz include John Szwed's study of Sun Ra (1998), Ron Radano's work on Anthony Braxton (1993), Robin D. G. Kelley's continuing exciting work on Thelonious Monk (1999), David Hajdu's biography of Billy Strayhorn (1996), and Preston Love's autobiography (1997).<sup>21</sup>

For a complex model of masculinity analysis in jazz studies, I would recommend Nichole Rustin's Ph.D. dissertation, *Mingus Fingers: Charles Mingus, Black Masculinity, and Postwar Jazz Culture*, which explores Mingus's life, music, and autobiography, to "reveal how postwar jazz's counterculture enabled black men to challenge prevailing racial stereotypes by representing themselves as complex subjects with multiple and contradictory experiences." Rustin's historically specific approach takes postwar jazz culture as a place of possibility, *albeit* one that also reproduced many of the "broader U.S. racial, social, sexual, and cultural politics" that regulated representations of "modern black masculinity" (1999:viii). In other words, "while jazz was a counterculture that embraced black men, it also policed articulations of black masculinity that did not fit within certain models"



(*ibid.*:3). Rather than an either/or analysis that demonstrates how Mingus is consistent with dominant or alternative notions of black masculinity in jazz, Rustin analyzes Mingus's struggles with sometimes being the "right" kind of black masculine jazz subject and sometimes not. Not primarily interested in what black masculinity has meant to white America, Rustin is interested in finding ways that "allow us to image black men not just as desired objects of mimicry and spectatorship, but as desiring subjects whose experiences have been under-theorized" (*ibid.*:19). Rustin analyzes how in his autobiography Mingus portrays himself as struggling with how to represent himself as a black man, a complicated process that finds him sometimes succumbing to dominant stereotypes of black masculinity, sometimes rejecting them (*ibid.*:48), and sometimes intervening in "dominant constructions of race, masculinity, sexuality, and creativity that surrounded him" (*ibid.*:29).

Rustin makes a welcome leap in theorizing women's experiences as wives of male jazz musicians in a chapter about Celia Mingus, who ran the independent record label Debut with her husband Charles Mingus and drummer Max Roach from 1952–58. In bringing Celia Mingus into the realm of jazz subjectivity, Rustin also unravels discourses not usually theorized in jazz studies, such as domesticity and women's experiences. How does "musician's wife" translate into other kinds of jazz roles and subjectivities? We are invited to consider figures such as Gladys Hampton, long-time business manager of the band led by her husband Lionel Hampton. While wives actively involved in the jazz business have sometimes been written about either as wicked gold-digging intruders into men's greatness, or as admirable proto-feminists leading the way for women's careers in arts administration, Rustin's approach is analytical. She uses the inclusion of women not as an end in itself, but as a way of considering other kinds of gendered jazz subjectivities that are a part of jazz history, and that have functioned to shape jazz history, music, and meaning, whether or not they are visible in the dominant discourse.

Theorizing women's experience is not the same as including one or two token women into existing frameworks. How would a gender analysis of Miles Davis look if it incorporated, for example, narratives from points of view of women in various jazz roles, including musicians? One woman musician who told me a different kind of story about Miles Davis than those that commonly circulate, was the African American pianist and saxophonist Frann Gaddison. Gaddison, who became close friends with saxophonist Gene Ammons while playing piano in Lionel Hampton's band between 1948 and 1950, told me a story about going to a concert in Los Angeles with Ammons and Davis. The itinerary of gendered spheres here is quite

different from Carby's reading of Davis's autobiography as a narrative in which a man escapes the confining world of women through entering the creative world of men. According to Gaddison, when they arrived at the concert, she wanted to stay, but the two men wished to leave.

[Ammons] and Miles got mad because a certain [male] saxophone player was playing on the concert. They got to the door and turned around and walked out. So I came all the way from San Diego to hang out with them. But they went and got some girls and made me sit in the lobby while they were making it with these chicks! (Gaddison 1994)

Here we have Gene Ammons, Miles Davis, and Frann Gaddison—three professional jazz musicians—all going to a jazz concert together *to hear other musicians play*. Already, we have Ammons and Davis as members of the jazz audience, rather than isolated geniuses who only live on stage, expressing their feelings through their horns, or holed up in some (picaresque) dingy hotel room in lonesome dissipation. And these two male musicians plan to join the jazz audience in the company, no less, of a woman, who is lover to neither, but a colleague Ammons met in Hampton's band, and an instrumentalist to boot. However, as they enter the hallowed sphere of jazz, the male musicians get huffy and want to leave, not to escape the company of Gaddison or other women, but because they dislike a particular male musician on the bandstand. So Ammons and Davis leave the world of male jazz creativity to have sex with prostitutes, not as pimps, but as clients. Woman musician Gaddison waits, disappointed, not because she desires either man's sexual attention, but because she had come "all the way from San Diego" to hang out with fellow musicians—whose music she admires and who are experiencing levels of success she will never know—and to hear what is happening musically in L.A.

Gaddison's memory narrated to me, a woman writer interested in women in jazz, forty years after the fact, is no more a clear channel to the past than is Davis's autobiography or any other representation of jazz history. Her story is a self-representation of a jazz musician who is virtually left out of the discourse, and she crafts it with a complex understanding of the social structures that would define her as "not a real jazz musician" throughout her lifetime. Her own interpretations often surprised me, as did the interpretations of many women jazz musicians I have interviewed, and I imagine these interpretations would surprise other jazz historians. Yet, why does it follow that Gaddison's narrated memory of a jazz history that includes her and marginalizes her at the same time, as told to someone writing about women in jazz, has no place in "serious" historical mem-

ory of jazz? Why do her negotiations with the ways that jazz discourse loses sight of her even as she spends her life as a working black female jazz instrumentalist not get picked up as highly relevant to jazz studies? When I asked Gaddison if her story illustrated some of the difficulties of working in a man's world, she told me that her worst problems as the only woman in men's bands were actually not with the male musicians, but with women in the audience who jealously assumed that if there was a woman in the band that she was "making it" with the men.

Customers would have eyes for some of the guys in the band and they couldn't get to them and so they would want to bug me, or if I walked by a booth or a table or something, they'd be trying to trip you or whatever. That was always happening. (Gaddison 1994)

Again, we have a very different set of gender constructions and relationships than we might expect to see in dominant jazz discourse. We have a jazz club with women in it, for example, women on the bandstand, and women in the audience. We also have some very different constructions of desire, competition, the music profession, and sexual harassment. Gaddison certainly doesn't construct a harmonious picture of jazz culture, but neither does she give us a picture of a jazz culture in which misogyny of black male musicians is a key feature, or where black women exist merely to define the heroic stature of jazz history's favorite geniuses. Jazz studies with gender and women in it might ask: What discourses produce Gaddison's narrative strategy? How common is this narrative among jazz-women? What else do we need to know in order to make sense of it? These are questions I would like to see taken seriously.

My point here is that incorporation of women instrumentalists' versions of jazz history must not stop at the level of token inclusion. These versions have too much to teach us about jazz as a set of social practices where concepts that are important to people have been struggled over, reaffirmed, debated, and challenged. I could cite countless examples of instances when interviews with women jazz instrumentalists shattered my previous notions of the gender organization of jazz history. Another example would be my interviews with various members of the African American all-woman band, the Darlings of Rhythm, in which I was told again and again by women musicians, including Gaddison, how the Darlings were a good band because they sounded "masculine." At the same time, the same musicians rejected as offensive the back-handed compliment, "You play like a man."<sup>22</sup> The implication of their objection seemed to be that a band of women playing like women could sound as masculine (positively perceived as musical power, drive, and spontaneity) as men playing like men;

that neither the most valued style, nor the genders associated with them, were the exclusive property of men. Again, I would not want this history to simply be plunked into a more inclusive progress narrative to show that women also played jazz in the 1940s. Rather, I would want this version of jazz history that included women and a range of gendered meanings to be used as a rich source of clues as to how jazz historiography may be enriched through complex gender analysis of sound and value, as it affected both women and men.

Bryce Traister cogently spells out the dangers of analyzing white male "heteromascularity" as one gender performance among others, one that may, in fact, be decentered, or "troubled," through performances of alternative genders. Noting that the "rise of heteromascularity studies" in university settings coincides with popular conceptualizations of "masculinity in crisis"—including the men's movement's recuperative embrace of heterosexual manhood and male-bonding, institutional and cultural receptivity to white men's claims of reverse sexism and reverse racism, and the cheers inspired by the heroic entrance of Viagra as gallant soldier in the war on impotence—Traister cautions that a side effect of a focus on masculinity as performative, unstable, and constructed is missing the many profound ways in which American heterosexual masculinity is not femininity's analytical double. Historically constituted, contingent, and performative, yes; but as a regime of power with global effects, white American heteromascularity has not exactly lost any ground through the ways it has been constructed (Traister 2000). For these reasons, it seems important, as the study of masculinity becomes more and more prevalent in jazz studies, that we take care to guard against narrow theoretical frameworks that avoid a range of genders and that ignore other social categories such as sexuality and race. Particularly, it is important to recognize, and critically head off at the pass, those approaches that appear intent on recuperating an allegedly flagging white masculinity, which has had, obviously, a different historical relationship to American patriarchal power than black masculinity. Analyses of black masculinity in jazz must be prepared to work on a number of contradictory levels in order to account for experiences of black male musicians, as well as for the raced and gendered complexity of white men's and women's attraction to particular ideas about black masculinity (Monson 1995; Kelley 1999). After all, dominant jazz discourse has been shaped by a history of white European interpretation of *both racial and gender* categorization that constructed African-descended men as masculine (violent, powerful, virile) in some ways, and as feminine (irrational, intuitive, physical) in others.<sup>23</sup>

I am ultimately wary of the common failure of men and masculinity studies to see gender as relational, as mixed with other things, and as em-

bedded in our understandings of things besides bodies. Can an analysis of masculinity as disconnected from femininity adequately account for gender as a field on which histories of power are waged? (I cannot fathom “femininity studies” either, but since nobody else does, there is no critique needed!) Ideas about femininity, in relation to ideas about masculinity, and utterly inflected with ideas about race, have played a key role at various times and places in constructions of what counts as authentic jazz, and gender is the category that we need for this analysis, not one normative construction of it. Jazz authenticity has been constructed differently in different times and places—and specific studies of genres, venues, and roles are certainly needed—but it would appear from my own studies of the 1940s that women’s bodies have often served as signs for “not jazz.” During the 1930s and 1940s, the boundaries of “real” jazz were frequently marked by differentiation from feminized, devalued sub-genres such as “sweet,” “novelty,” and “Mickey Mouse.” A common theme in my interviews with both African American and white women musicians from the 1940s is the frustration of understanding oneself to be playing in the mode of Count Basie, Harry James, or Jimmie Lunceford, but being perceived by audiences and reviewers as a kind of entertainment akin to “dancing dogs.” Even playing in styles associated with men were more likely to earn women’s bands popularity as sex-spectacles—cross-dressers of sorts—as evidenced by the many references in the trades to women trumpet players as “the female Louis Armstrong” and drummers as “a Gene Krupa in girls’ clothes.”<sup>24</sup> Masculinity studies of jazz would be enriched by the incorporation of what Judith Halberstam (1998) calls “female masculinities,” and gender studies of jazz would benefit from the inclusion of femininities, a greater range of masculinities, and the incorporation of representations of women, both dominant ones and women’s self-representations of their experiences as jazz subjects.

### **Jazz and Gender with Women in It**

I have spoken about battles within jazz studies affecting the incorporation of gender analysis and the inclusion of women’s experiences as jazz subjects, but there are battles in women’s studies that are worth considering as well. Feminist historians have been debating the importance of writing women’s experience versus the merits of gender analysis for some time, a difficult conversation that Louise Newman describes as “an impasse sometimes characterized by academic name-calling, with historians of women accusing historians of gender of political irrelevancy and historians of gender calling historians of women theoretically naive” (Newman 1991:58). Newman argues for a bridge that reconceptualizes women’s “experience” as not just a political standpoint, but as something that is “produced by and mediated through cultural forms” that are shaped by

constructions of gender, as well as of "race, class, nationality, ethnicity, etc." (ibid.:66–67). Far from apolitical catchphrases, what these terms mean, and how they affect our lives, make them too important to dismiss as academic fashion. Social analysis can help us to understand why differently located people have the experiences that they do. In jazz, as in other fields, asking "Where are the women?" is not only a useful question for uncovering "lost" or "hidden" histories of women's achievements, but it is a useful question for finding out how gender structures a field.

Asking "Where are the women?" in jazz history can sometimes reveal areas that I call the "feminized, marginalized, and devalued sub-categories" of jazz. At various historical moments, these feminized and devalued areas (which contain both women and men) have included music educators, vocalists, novelty bands, "sweet" bands, certain instruments (such as flute and harp, and sometimes—and sometimes resolutely not!— Hammond organ), local scenes, family bands, and "all-girl" bands, which were invariably seen as a distinct "inauthentic" genre even when they played the same charts with the same instrumentation and influences as men's bands that were constructed as authentic. Music education has been an area that has contained both women and men, and has been feminized and devalued. If we paid more attention to it in jazz historiography, we would know more about some influential women who were active in this area, including Daisy Peterson, music teacher of many jazz musicians and Oscar Peterson's sister; about Alma Hightower, the drummer who led a WPA children's band in Los Angeles in the 1930s and 1940s; and about other teachers, male and female, who trained jazz musicians.<sup>25</sup> The loss of these histories only helps to buoy the racist notions of black musicians as untutored, natural geniuses.<sup>26</sup>

Krin Gabbard has equated male band leader Kay Kyser's stage antics with an aura of "emasculatation" that led to the exclusion of his band from serious musical consideration (1996:23–32). For Gabbard, Kyser's "emasculatation" is produced through the band leader acting like a nerd instead of a he-man. I would add that it is also significant that he utilized a performance style that was associated with the feminized and devalued sphere of "novelty" bands (bands whose entertainment value emphasized gimmicks and comedy). "All-girl" bands were automatically considered "novelty" bands, with women musicians as their gimmick, regardless of repertoire, instrumentation, or musicianship. Even the feminized, devalued sphere of "all-girl" bands served as a disposable container for both women and men who built their careers therein. Female vocalists who sang with all-woman bands, as well as male leaders and arrangers, have been excluded along with these bands' female instrumentalists.

My own area of study for the last decade has been, in fact, "all-girl" bands during World War II, and I will now turn to this feminized, deval-

ued area as an illustration of why “Where are the women?” is, for me, a more far-reaching question for jazz studies than listing individual women’s names as tokens of appreciation. When I tried to “listen to gender” in the historical evidence of “all-girl” bands (oral histories, reviews, publicity photos, some short films, and very few recordings), the gaps between how women musicians narrated their experiences and how they were represented (or neglected) in dominant jazz discourse were so great and so contradictory that I needed to broaden my scope. I found it necessary to listen to how “all-girl” bands operated on fields of gender, race, class, sexuality, and nation—fields that also included such things as men’s bands, a world war, and radical changes in labor and migration. I theorized that during the war years, the entire profession of musician was feminized, as ideas about acceptable masculinity were equated with military service. In part, the relative acceptance of women musicians during World War II was due to the feminization of the field. And, to an extent, this acceptance was due to the ideological linkage of “working for, supporting, and entertaining our boys” with acceptable notions of female behavior. Both of these gender constructions account for how and why women’s bands would be acceptable during World War II, and why they would not be considered “real bands” in dominant jazz discourse. Another factor is that music trades such as *Down Beat* and the musicians’ union were lobbying the government to classify the job of “musician” as “essential” and “draft-exempt.” So at the same time that women musicians were actively using *Down Beat* want ads to search for jobs (and, in fact, many jobs were available for women musicians, who were, after all, one category of draft exemption), *Down Beat* editorials, photos, and cartoons all used representations of women’s bodies to define the boundaries of jazz by signaling “not real jazz.”<sup>27</sup>

I didn’t expect to find this. This is another articulation of gender and jazz that I stumbled upon by asking “Where are the women?” and “Why and how did they manage to both exist in, and disappear from, jazz history?” When I first started going through *Down Beat* magazines of the late 1930s through the 1940s, it was because I was in search of information on “all-girl” bands. I knew there would be an occasional listing, as several books on women in jazz had already been published and the authors listed *Down Beat* as one of their sources. But what I didn’t expect to find were the other ways that women’s bodies had been represented in the magazine.

I was especially struck by the jokes, poems, and cartoons in which women were portrayed as sexy, ditzy, talentless singers, dumb dates who didn’t appreciate jazz, provincial kill-joys (often wives) who spoil hipster fun, and squealing, misguided Sinatra fans (Sinatra’s war-time popularity among female fans, despite his 4-F rating and skinny physique, ranked him unpopular with many servicemen).<sup>28</sup>

While the careers of many women musicians went unnoticed or under-rated, there was no shortage of representations of women's bodies in *Down Beat*. These representations abounded in *Down Beat* during the war years, much as they abound in *Jazz*, though the historical context is radically different. In both cases, "authentic jazz subjects" are defined in opposition to women's bodies that signify "not real jazz" (or "exceptional," i.e., "not real" women). Interestingly, though *Down Beat* was a white-owned and -operated institution, the inauthentic jazz subjects marked by women's bodies in *Down Beat* were invariably marked by white women's bodies. *Down Beat's* rigid and essentialist formula of "Negroes play superior hot jazz" and "women play sweet non-jazz and do it poorly" was confused by the presence of black women musicians. Were they black? Were they women? Were they jazz? Were they not-jazz? *Down Beat* solved this mystery by rarely depicting African American women's bands. Interestingly, *Down Beat* suffered no similar dilemmas over the presence of white male jazz musicians, who were praised routinely for their ability to learn and excel at a music that black men were presumed to come by naturally.

Accordingly, I found that although all "all-girl" bands were marginalized, they were not marginalized equally, and that these differences had a great deal to do with what various women's bodies and performances signified on fields of gender, race, class, etc. Not surprisingly, the most commercially successful "all-girl" bands tended to be white, and tended to be those that were seen and heard as "not real jazz." Phil Spitalny's "Hour of Charm" orchestra, with its audio-visual performance that hailed historical memories of accomplished Victorian ladies entertaining guests in the parlor, epitomizes this effect. The Darlings of Rhythm, the band I mentioned earlier in which members described their music as undifferentiated from men's music, were popular in the black press, barely mentioned in *Down Beat*, and are now absent from jazz discourse. Without an analysis of jazz in a field of gender, one might assume that the women who were depicted in *Down Beat* were the ones who best fit the magazine's standards for jazz bands. Merit arguments don't hold water in the pages of dominant jazz discourse, or jazz studies, for that matter, any more than they do at Lincoln Center.

My purpose, in other words, is not to argue that we all recognize once and for all that women are now and have always been present in jazz (though they certainly have), or that "real jazz ability" is gender-free. I am interested in how jazz sounds, spaces, images, scholarship, and historiography are gendered whether women are in them or not, and in what we can learn about jazz and gender when we ask "Where are the women?" and theorize those representations and experiences.

I'll leave you with two personal anecdotes about jazz and gender.



I. Has anyone else out there had the experience of approaching the bandstand with a notebook to ask a question for a review one is writing for a jazz magazine—only to be interrupted by someone who wishes to order a vodka tonic? Now there's a jazz experience on the field of gender. And so is an experience that I, as a white woman, have *not* had, but that has been described to me by an African American woman colleague: I, unlike her, have never been mistaken for a vocalist in the band. And so are the experiences described by Douglas Henry Daniels and Reuben Jackson, who have remarked that as African American men who write about jazz, they are often assumed to be members of the band.<sup>29</sup> All of these are examples of how jazz operates on a field of gender and race (as fields of power). But so is the unremarked presence of a white male jazz critic jotting down notes for his review.

II. A friend asks me if she should keep or return the four-CD jazz compilation sent to her by her book club. She wants to enhance her knowledge of jazz, but she's uncomfortable with the package they sent.

I look it over. Each CD has a selection of straight ahead, blues, and standards played by a revolving roster of notable jazz artists, from Red Garland to Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis to Cindy Blackman. In the whole collection, Blackman is the only woman. Yet, the inclusion of one woman—a drummer, no less—among the dozens of instrumentalists, constitutes a milestone in the world of anthologized jazz recordings.

"But look at the covers," says my friend.

"Jazz for a Rainy Afternoon" is represented by a white woman walking in the rain in what appears to be a wet mesh dress over black bikini underwear. The cover for "Jazz for the Open Road" depicts a white woman in high heels and short skirt hitchhiking by thrusting her pelvis toward the headlamp of an oncoming sedan. "Jazz for When You're Alone" is a collection of ballads: "'Round Midnight," "Stars Fell on Alabama," "You Don't Know What Love Is"—tunes, in other words, that jazz musicians often play. The picture on the cover is of a woman in a fuzzy sweater, rubbing her thighs together, directing a come-hither look right at you that doesn't make it seem like she's alone. And "Jazz for a Lazy Day" (the disc that includes drummer Cindy Blackman on one cut) invites the viewer to follow a white woman who wades, fetchingly, away from us in a creek. Is she aware of our gaze? Though the water barely covers her ankles, her sopping wet skirt clings opaquely to her butt and thighs. I think about the *Down Beat* cartoons; the writhing prostitutes of Ken Burns's *Jazz*; the horror and titillation that their own sexual associations with jazz and black masculinity have held for white mainstream audiences; the whole supercharged history of white women's sexual bodies as the makers or breakers of white racial purity; the whole supercharged history of hyper-sexualization

of black people and culture for white entertainment, violence, and dominance; the effects of the white male gaze on the unrepresentability of black people's pleasure and agency and subjectivity, all women's pleasure and agency and subjectivity, and especially of black women's pleasure and agency and subjectivity.

Yes, I say. This collection will enhance your knowledge about jazz.

In *all kinds* of ways.

I'm a liar if I say it won't.

### The Shape of Jazz Studies to Come

Though experience and history both warn me that many jazz scholars will probably read this article as a call for white male bashing, I hope that there will be at least some who will hear my intended call for ear-training in jazz studies that would enable us to listen for gender and race as inextricable, complicated, changing, and profoundly salient to our work if we are seriously interested in historical and cultural significance of jazz production and consumption. A far more complex variety of race-specific genders and sexualities have flourished and clashed, collaborated and cut each other down, in jazz contexts than is commonly acknowledged. Even the well-known versions of jazz genders that "fit" the mold of dominant jazz discourse are constructed and policed in relation to other genders, and these struggles are not just about style and taste, but about power. Ideas about femininity and masculinity have been historically embedded in discourses of jazz authenticity and value. Analyses of both women's and men's jazz practices will benefit from explorations of struggles over ideas about masculinities and femininities, as improvised over the unpredictable changes of social and political time, by musicians, audiences, journalists, historians, collectors, disk jockeys, record producers, documentary and feature film-makers, and academics.<sup>30</sup> Of course, these powerful social ideas that affect all our lives are changing constantly, and, as in jazz, the changes sometimes go by awfully fast. That's why we need "big ears."

#### Notes

\* I presented an earlier version of this paper at the American Studies Association, Seattle, Washington, November 22, 1998. I would like to thank fellow panelists Ingrid Monson and Bob McMichael, commentator Herman Gray, and audience participants, particularly Nichole Rustin, for helpful dialogue at our session, "Troubling the Silences in the Sound of Surprise: Jazz and the Intersection of Race and Gender Politics."

1. See, for instance, the critical directions promoted by a diverse range of jazz studies authors in Gabbard (1995a, 1995b) and Buckner and Weiland (1991).

2. See, for instance, Whitely (2000), as well as articles in Whitely (1997) and Barkin and Hamessley (1999).

3. See, for example, Heble (2000:141–65), Guillory (1998), Gabbard (1995b:104–30), Carby (1998:135–65), Monson (1995), Ake (1998), and Griffin (2001).

4. For the Armstrong scenes, see *Jazz*, episode 6. Bolden and Morton scenes can be found in episode 1.

5. As someone who has spent a great deal of time researching and writing about all-female big bands of the 1940s—groups that were seldom recorded and routinely omitted or trivialized in music trades and subsequent jazz and swing historiography—I am grateful for research models for listening for social meanings, and not just for trans-social “greatness,” even if, at least for the moment, it all-too-often means fewer transcriptions. This trade-off is a tendency not only in jazz studies, but in other fields of music scholarship as well, as exemplified by this ice breaker from a recent Society for Ethnomusicology mixer: “So, do you do notes, or do you do race/class/gender?” (I wish I caught your name so I could cite you!) Despite the tendency for polar ice caps to divide researchers who “do” musicological analysis, and those who “do” social analysis, there are also those who “do both,” including Susan McClary, Susan Cook, Ingrid Monson, Rob Walser, Martha Mockus, and Ellie Hisama, among others. For Angela Davis’s analysis of black music as a site for developing “collective political social consciousness,” see Davis (1998).

6. For analyses of primitivist and essentialist tendencies in jazz criticism, see John Gennari (1991), Guthrie Ramsey (1996:33), and Ted Gioia (1989).

7. There is also a legacy of essentialism in early jazz criticism and historiography by African American writers. Bearing the burden of representing black music as evidence of positive qualities of the race, black writers wrote about black music as one forum for promoting race pride, and to lobby for increased respect and improved conditions for all African Americans. This body of jazz writing, published primarily in segregated print circuits such as the black press, did not fit the paradigm nor make much of a dent in dominant jazz discourse, but is a valuable source for better understanding the serious struggles over competing social meanings that have occurred in jazz settings. See Ramsey (1996) and Porter (1997).

8. See also Omi and Winant (1994:55) for a presentation of “racial formation theory,” which accounts for the “sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed.”

9. Comments by George Lipsitz on “Popular Culture and Urban Struggle,” American Studies Association, Detroit, Michigan, October 14, 2000.

10. In contemporary usage, “women of color” is a U.S.-specific term that encompasses many groups of women, including Latina, Asian American, Native American, and African American women, and sometimes other groups as well, such as Arab Americans. The history of this usage of the term has an activist as well as a theoretical history, and represents a coalition developed in the 1960s and 1970s of non-white feminists of various backgrounds, who found themselves multiply-marginalized: in liberation movements in their racial, ethnic, and cultural communities, and by women’s liberation and women’s rights groups dominated by mainstream white feminists who were often unable to recognize the significance of differences between women, as well as commonalities among them. For examples of women-of-color writing, see, for instance, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1981).

11. For scholarship that explicitly maps how such theories have been and can be applied in musicology and ethnomusicology, see Monson (1997), McClary (1991), and Cusick (1999).

12. Thanks to ongoing work in musicology and ethnomusicology, jazz studies does not have to begin from scratch as it figures out how to listen for gender. A strong intellectual community devoted to applying feminist theory and queer theory to music has been developed through a series of groundbreaking conferences on "Feminist Theory and Music." The participants of these meetings who work in jazz include Susan Cook, Travis Jackson, and myself. See, also, the scholarly journal, *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*.

13. I find it fascinating that the repeated inclusion of Mary Lou Williams as a token of appreciation in jazz historiography is so closely paralleled by Diane Middlebrook's analysis of Billy Tipton as a woman who passes as a man in order to play jazz (Middlebrook 1998). While Middlebrook's biographical treatment of Tipton is more complicated than that, my own speculation about Tipton's story is that he was no more passing as a man in order to play, than was Williams, but that this is the only narrative in dominant jazz discourse that can explain the existence of women instrumentalists, even musicians so diverse as Williams and Tipton. My guess is that Tipton presented himself as a man because he identified as a man, and would possibly not be pleased with his greatest fame being achieved as the subject of the first biography of a woman jazz instrumentalist.

14. Incidentally, Florentine Films, the production company that produced *Jazz*, contacted me early on for phone numbers of musicians from an all-woman big band popular with black audiences in the 1930s and 1940s, the International Sweethearts of Rhythm. The Ken Burns organization interviewed two alumnae from that band, yet left the footage out of the completed documentary. Just before the documentary aired, I was contacted again, this time with a request for an essay on women in jazz that could run on the Ken Burns *Jazz* web-site. I complied, feeling that it would be better to have the information available even if it wasn't deemed part of the prime time narrative. My essay focused on women instrumentalists, making the point that while women have been accepted as vocalists throughout the history of the music, they have been marginalized as instrumentalists, except as pianists. Amazingly, the web designers added audio links to female vocalists as illustrations! For instance, my line "Because information on female jazz vocalists is more readily available, this historical sketch concentrates on instrumentalists" is illustrated with an audio link to Billie Holiday singing "Fine and Mellow!" Also, whenever I mentioned a male instrumentalist, his name was highlighted on the web-site because there was a link to more information about him. When I mentioned a female instrumentalist, her name was not highlighted—no link—again, illustrating not her existence, but her lesser importance. The website is an uncanny demonstration of historical erasure in action ([http://www.pbs.org/jazz/time/time\\_women.htm](http://www.pbs.org/jazz/time/time_women.htm)).

15. Many thanks to Gina Dent and the students in her graduate seminar, "Popular Culture and Social Problems," for the stimulating discussion of this fascinating segue in *Jazz*, episode 6. University of California, Berkeley, March 15, 2001.

16. I do not mean to undermine advocacy literature. I envision gender theorizing that complements such work. Recent efforts to eliminate sexism in jazz include

the protests against Jazz at Lincoln Center for failing to audition or hire women musicians for the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, spurred by Lara Pellegrinelli's investigative piece (2000) and cheered on by jazz critic Nat Hentoff (2001). The International Association for Jazz Educators includes a women's caucus, a mentorship program called Sisters in Jazz, and the Lil Hardin Armstrong award honoring a pioneering jazzwoman residing in the city of the annual conference. Psychology professor Doris Wright's study-in-progress, "Career Development of Women in Jazz," seeks to understand barriers facing women and girls who pursue careers in jazz (Kansas State University). Jeanette Lambert's "Jazzgrrrls" listserv provides jazzwomen with an internet community for sharing information and questions and a support network. An example of the potential alliances between gender theory and feminist practice is enacted in Ajay Heble and Gillian Siddal's co-authored chapter, "Nice Work If You Can Get It: Women in Jazz." Heble and Siddall note the remarkable resistance encountered by the Guelph Jazz Festival when they programmed a "women in jazz" theme in 1998 (Heble 2000:141-65). From their experiences as cultural critics and jazz festival programmers, they developed a set of questions for theorizing gender and women in jazz.

17. See Carby (1998:135-65), Kelley (2001), Gabbard (1995b:104-30), Walser (1995), and Guillory (1998).

18. See Walser (1995) and Gabbard (1995b:104-30).

19. I have more reservations about approaches to jazzmen and masculinity studies that rely on quick and dirty equations of horns and screech trumpets with expressions of phallic power. My caution is grounded in a historical consideration of the working conditions of female brass players, who have been bombarded with jokes about "blowing" and "horniness," who are relentlessly told that women appear vulgar when blowing into horns and that women lack the physical ability to blow horns, and who are assumed by all kinds of people to play trumpet out of "lack" (in Freudian terms). If that doesn't set your caution meter spinning, then consider all those gender and race stereotypes about black women as castrating matriarchs. For many reasons, I resist the notion that trumpet envy is the best theoretical tool available for understanding the careers of Dolly and Dyer Jones, Valaida Snow, Jean Starr, Tiny Davis, Billie Rogers, Clara Bryant, et al. Surely, the signs of gender in music (and elsewhere) are more fluid and changing than a direct link from horn to penis to phallus would indicate. Why isn't the flute phallic? It, even more than the trumpet, is high-pitched and rod-like. Gender cannot be theorized simply by the shape of objects or fixed equations of sound and meaning, but through analyzing social meanings and practice in historical and cultural contexts.

20. Farah Griffin (2001) theorizes the limitations of respectability politics in her superb race and gender analysis of Billie Holiday. See also my forthcoming article, "Improvising Womanhood, or a Conundrum is a Woman: Race, Gender, and Representation in Black Women's Jazz, 1930-1950."

21. Preston Love's autobiography (1997), perhaps the most radical departure of all, is a self-representation of Love as lead player (rather than improviser), as family man, as laborer trying to make a living at his craft, and as author analyzing his own life as a black male musician on the road, an analysis that includes addressing the importance of writing it himself. David Ake (1998) explores "alternative masculinities" facilitated by jazz in his analysis of the music and testimony of Ornette

Coleman, drawing parallels between Coleman's use of diminutive instruments (e.g., his plastic saxophone and Don Cherry's pocket trumpet), with Coleman's stated temptations to castrate himself. Some of Ake's analysis strikes me as ahistorical, as it tends toward an oversimplification of many forces impacting struggles over race, gender, and sexuality that ultimately overestimates the power of marginalized identities and representations to destabilize hegemonic ones. It furthermore underestimates the possibility that Coleman's rejection of the image of the hyper-phallic jazzman was an implicit critique of the construction of hyper-virility that is commonly mapped onto African American men—and onto black male jazz musicians in particular ways—by the dominant culture. This is a stereotype that has, in fact, been historically deployed to justify lynching and castration of black men.

22. See my chapter, "The Darlings of Rhythm: On the Road and Ready to Run," in Tucker (2000:195–224), also published as "'Nobody's Sweethearts': Gender, Race, Jazz, and the Darlings of Rhythm," *American Music* 16 (1998): 255–88.

23. The need for complex gender analyses to account for constructions of jazz masculinities is well illustrated by a 1956 *Down Beat* article on Horace Silver, in which the pianist complained of cool jazz (a genre often associated with a certain school of white musicians on the West Coast) as "faggot-type jazz . . . with no guts." Silver warned young readers of the magazine that listening to "faggot-type jazz" may, in fact, lead to their own "faggot-type jazz" futures, a fate they should guard against by listening more to "the masters like Bird, Bud, Tatum, Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Miles, Sonny Rollins—the guys with depth" (Hentoff 1956:18). Many thanks to Mark Burford for calling my attention to this remarkable example of the many ways race, gender, and sexuality are entangled throughout jazz discourse at its many levels.

24. A *Down Beat* article in 1937 described the female drummer in the "all-girl" band the Ingenues as "A Gene Krupa In Girls' Clothes!" Another drummer was described in 1940 as a "skirted Krupa." See "They Have A Gene Krupa In Girls' Clothes!" (*Down Beat*, April 1937, p. 21) and "Anne Wallace Weds, Quits" (*Down Beat*, September 1, 1940, p. 8).

25. For information on Daisy Peterson, see Mark Miller (1997:250–51). For accounts of Alma Hightower's band, see the many references to her WPA band in oral histories of African American musicians in Los Angeles conducted by Steven Isoardi and compiled in Clora Bryant et al. (1998).

26. For a consideration of these primitivist myths with regard to musical literacy among early jazz musicians, see David Chevan's article in this issue (pp. 200–31). See also Jeffery McMillan's discussion of Ernestine Morgan's central role in the early musical education of her brother, Lee Morgan (pp. 160–61).

27. For a sampling of such images, see *Down Beat*, August 15, 1943 (women linking arms with a male band leader; caption reads: "I haven't seen the new *Beat*—are they his third or fourth wives, or two new members of the brass section?"); March 15, 1944 (a "girl singer" whose breasts are about to fall out of her strapless gown tries to remember: "He said to watch my timing, my phrasing—and what were those *other things*?"); and July 1, 1944 (a woman in the sax section without a sax looks annoyed. The tenor man next to her admonishes: "Quit your squeakin'!

With these prices—how *else* can I take you out?”). Again and again, women on the bandstand are depicted as not real jazz musicians, constructing the outer limits that maintains the boundaries of the “real jazz subject.”

28. See Lewis A. Erenberg’s excellent discussion of the challenges to gender ideology posed by Frank Sinatra’s war-time popularity (1998:196–98). See also Steven B. Elworth (1995).

29. Daniels writes that musicians and managers often assumed that he, as a black man, was a jazz musician (and not the writer/professor who had scheduled the appointment) when he showed up in jazz clubs to meet with musicians he wished to interview for his historical research on Lester Young (Daniels 1987:152). At a panel discussion, Jackson contrasted his own experiences as a black male jazz critic who is often assumed to be a jazz musician, with those of female jazz instrumentalists who are often assumed *not* to be musicians (“Agents of Change” panel, *Sung/Unsung Jazzwomen* symposium, presented by the Smithsonian Institution and 65, An Arts Center, BAM Majestic Brooklyn Theater, October 20, 1996).

30. Despite professional antagonisms between these various roles, there is also a great deal of variance of opinions and politics within the categories; oddly enough, one of the things those of us who study jazz tend to have in common is that we frequently enlist in two or more of these incompatible “warring factions” at once.

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