



WOMEN IN JAZZ

**A
Survey
by
Frank
Driggs**

PUBLISHER'S NOTES

Wherever the term "All-Girl Bands" is used, we feel it is a necessary inclusion due to the historical context. In addition, the family relationships are mentioned due to the great importance of this information to hundreds of jazz scholars worldwide who will be making use of this survey.

The following women are included in a two-record set ST 109 JAZZWOMEN, A FEMINIST RETROSPECTIVE: Mary Lou Williams, Marian McPartland, Lovie Austin, Dotty Jones, Lil Armstrong, Lil Henderson, Memphis Minnie, Billie Rogers, Norma Teagarden, Dardanella,

The International Sweethearts of Rhythm, Viola Burnside, Dorothy Donnegan, Valaida Snow, Ina Ray Hutton and Her Melodears, Jewel Paige, Una Mae Carlisle, Mary Osborne, Margie Hyams, June Rotenberg, Rose Gottesman, Terry Pollard, Beryl Booker, Norma Carson, Elaine Leighton, Bonnie Wetzel, Sarah McLawler, Adele Girard, Melba Liston, Kathleen Stobart.

Dozens of other women are on various STASH releases. For a free catalog send a stamped self-addressed envelope to STASH, P.O. Box 390, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215.

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Despite the fact that women have been active and outstanding since the start of pop music and jazz seventy-odd years ago, the music business has rewarded them very rarely. Only a handful earned lasting reputations or made a good living playing pop and jazz. Seek out those women whose careers show real longevity and you find Mary Lou Williams (fifty years), Marian McPartland (thirty-five years), the late Valaida Snow (thirty plus years), the late Lil Hardin Armstrong (fifty plus years) and the late Victoria Spivey (around forty years).

Many of the most promising players quit to raise families (Marge Hyams, Mary Osborne and Terry Pollard, to name a few of the best), a few married well (Ina Ray Hutton), at least one went into pictures (Rita Rio who became Donna Drake in movies) and some earned sufficiently large incomes to retire gracefully (Vera Guilaroff, and Evelyn Kaye Spitalny of "Evelyn and Her Magic Violin" fame).

What happened to L'Ana Webster whose picture graces the Stash Records set on jazz women? She may have been the first jazz soloist featured with a male band (with Mike Riley's big band, 1937). What of Billie Rogers (featured with

Woody Herman, 1941-3) or tenor star Vi Burnside of the International Sweethearts Of Rhythm, probably the best of the all-girl swing bands? Marian Gange (guitar) and Betty Roudebush (piano) were considered stars in Ina Ray Hutton's bands; where are they now? What about the hard-blowing clarinetist from Pennsylvania, Ann Dupont? She reportedly turned her back on all-girl bands because they couldn't play enough to satisfy her. Where did she disappear to?

Were the "all-girl" bands just a novelty from an era now long past or did they contribute meaningfully to the development of American music? I think they did make a contribution; there were enough of them for some time that they could not have been just a passing fad. This essay is really an introduction to a subject which raises many more questions than it can possibly answer.

The music industry has given very short shrift to just about all but a handful of talented pianists and vocalists who have come up since World War II. Even some of those are not being heard from very often. Many fine players are still around and working, but they get very little publicity for their efforts.

Who remembers the promising bassist Lucille Dixon who made such a bright beginning with the Earl Hines band in 1943? In order to keep working steadily she wound up leading a nightclub band in Greenwich Village for many years. She is still working, playing a wide variety of jobs, but the kind of recognition she should be getting today has passed her by. Another woman who plays bass and does well with it is Carline Ray, widow of the bandleader Luis Russell. She once sang with Erskine Hawkins years back, but took up bass to insure she could stay in music. Carline now keeps busy alternating between playing and a variety of jobs singing everything from pop to classical.

What happened to Lynne Belle Stapp? If her piano playing was half as good as her reputation she should have been recorded and certainly ought to be better known. Or the wonderful trumpeter Dolly Jones Armenra, whose playing on a 1926 Okeh record by Al Wynn's Creole Five made everyone sit up and listen. She was still living and playing in the Philadelphia area when last heard of in the fifties. Hers seemed to be a major talent, and fortunately she did get to make one record for posterity.

The last time I visited Chicago I saw an ad for Ernestine "Tiny" Davis, the big trumpeter from Kansas City who had been highly touted. I got veteran historian John Steiner to take me to the Rush Street dive where she was working, but the atmosphere was too hard to take. It was obvious all she was doing was just trying to make it through the night. There are plenty of fine male trumpet players not working, so imagine what it must be like for a woman trumpet player. I know I've read every issue of Downbeat and Metronome for the past thirty-five years or so and never saw a story on Tiny Davis, or for that matter on all too many of the other gifted women in the jazz world. (That is slowly changing now.)

I know of only one woman who made a fortune from music, and she deliberately stayed out of the limelight. Her name? Anita Byrnes. Ms. Byrnes was not a jazz player, in fact most of the musicians who worked with her in the lush pre-war years claimed she played piano with boxing gloves on. Regardless, she was one of the great successes in a male-dominated industry, and if only a select few knew about her, it was because she wanted it that way. Ms. Byrnes clambered her way up from pianist in obscure dancing

classes to become one of the highest paid and most sought after society bandleaders, rivalling Meyer Davis, Mike Markel and others in a highly competitive and lucrative industry.

Free-lance players in the pre-war years were more than happy to work for Ms. Byrnes, especially because she paid promptly each week, from her headquarters at the Seymour Hotel on West 46th Street. If she took an out-of-town engagement for any of the wealthy Eastern seaboard families, she would do so only on her terms. These included first class transportation by Pullman car, her musicians put up in the best hotel and provided all meals.

The society business was so good for many leaders that they often booked several jobs on a given evening, making the rounds to put in brief appearances fronting each of their many pick-up bands. Not Ms. Byrnes. If she accepted a job playing a dance, a private lawn party or whatever, Ms. Byrnes would be at the keyboard with her bulldog physiognomy and jet black hair the entire evening. In those distant times society jobs were a grind; continuous non-stop music with only one short intermission around two A.M. when breakfast was served. Ms. Byrnes played

every note of music from start to finish, her formidable presence assuring her hosts of the real thing. She retired to Atlantic City a wealthy woman, unique in her field.

There has been women in the dance field and women improvisers for at least the past seventy years. The Musical Spillers, a highly successful vaudeville team of the turn of the century, was organized by Newmeyer Spiller, who could play trombone and dance at the same time. His group consisted of three men and three women, May and Maydah Yorke and Alice Calloway, all playing saxophones.

How much of this music could have been called ragtime (early jazz) is debatable but it was an all-black outfit and lasted with many personnel changes over a number of years. Ms. Calloway figures elsewhere in this narrative and certainly had one of the longest running careers in music.

When the black theatres began opening up, trombonist Marie Lucas was put in charge of the Lafayette Ladies' Orchestra in New York. She was the highly trained daughter of one of the legendary figures of black entertainment, Sam Lucas. He saw that she got her training in pre-World War I Europe. After his death in 1916,

she was ready to take her place among prominent women musicians. Her musical ability was such that the Elite Amusement Corporation which owned the Lafayette as well as theatres in Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia and elsewhere assigned the training and development of all their theatre orchestras to her.

A newspaper clipping of the time reads, "All young women with even a slight knowledge of music can apply at the Lafayette Theatre any time during the afternoon and see Miss Lucas. The opening of the Colonial and other houses will multiply the work of Miss Lucas, as she will be forced to make a round of these places to teach those members fortunate enough to take advantage of the opportunity. Among those being trained at the Lafayette every afternoon after the matinee performance for the opening of the Colonial on July 31st are: Ruth Reed, cornetist; Evangeline Sinto, violinist; Nettie Garland, trombone; Santos Riviera, bass violin; Florence Sturgess, drums; Olivia Porter, cello; and Emma Thompson, clarinet."

6 Besides Marie Lucas, Hallie Anderson, who

played organ at the Douglas Theatre in Harlem (along with Maude White, piano) was one of the prominent dance band leaders of the late teens and early twenties. Fats Waller learned a great deal listening to pianist Mazie Mullin at the Lincoln Theatre on West 135th Street, often subbing for her, and eventually replacing the staff organist.

Across the river in New Jersey, Ruby Mason, who played piano, sax and accordion, led the house band at the Orpheum Theatre in Newark. At nearby Travasano's Cafe the Famous Jazz Band, a five-piece unit, included Ella Ross and Lucille Stallworth Burkley (instruments unknown). Alma Lambert (mother of Donald Lambert, born in 1904) was a noted pianist, bandleader and teacher around Princeton.

At the dawn of the jazz era, it was the singer Mamie Smith whose recording of "Crazy Blues" on the old Okeh label in 1920 became the hottest thing in the record industry. She helped open the door for Lucille Hegamin, Bessie Smith, Clara Smith, Mary Stafford and Edith Wilson to begin recording blues and jazz. The stereotype of that time restricted black singers (other than Ethel Waters and Gertrude Saunders) from recording anything but jazz or blues. The huge success of

Mamie Smith's records led her to go on the road with the five-piece Jazz Hounds band for the next three years. At the same time Ethel Waters went on the road with the Black Swan Jazz Masters, promoting the sale of her recordings and those of other Black Swan artists. This was Fletcher Henderson's debut as a bandleader and Ethel had to teach him how to play the blues.

Some of the best white singers went into vaudeville with jazz groups. Sophie Tucker, the "Last of the Red Hot Mamas," was one of the first women to have a jazz band. Her Five Kings of Syncopation lasted from 1917 until 1921. Blossom Seeley, one of our greatest jazz-styled singers (called "coon shouters" back then) hired Benny Davis' trio and the wonderful cornetist Ray Lopez in 1917 and toured with them for the next three years as Seeley's Syncopated Studio. Belle Baker, Bee Palmer, Dolly Kay and several other vaudeville stars of that era all had great jazz capabilities, and (except for Lee Palmer) made some outstanding recordings in that vein.

The pioneer women players seemed to be for the most part pianists. There was less prejudice against a woman playing piano than there was against any other instrument. In New Orleans Camilla Todd, one of the city's foremost teachers,

played in the Maple Leaf Orchestra, 1919-20. Edna Mitchell worked with Louis Armstrong at Tom Anderson's. For nearly twenty years Papa Celestin's Tuxedo Orchestra used only women pianists. First was Sweet Emma Barrett who was known in later years as the Bell Girl, whose knee bracelets tinkled as she kept time. She was followed by pretty Jeannette Salvant (who married Celestin's bassist Narvin Kimball) and replaced on occasion by Mercedes Fields. Willa Bart worked with Jimmie Noone, Amos White and Willie Pajeaud, and Dolly Adams a member of the famed Douroux family played bass and drums and bore two bassist sons, Jerry and Placide Adams.

In the post-war years Billie Pierce, Florida-born pianist and singer, charmed tourists and fans who heard her and her husband De De Pierce at Luthjens and at Preservation Hall. Her sister, Sadie Goodson in Pensacola, played with Joe Winn and in New Orleans with Buddy Petit and Alec Bigard.

Among the women working around Chicago was Lovie Austin, well established as a pit band leader. She led bands at the Monogram, Gem and Joyland Theatres for many years, recorded often for Paramount and toured on the TOBA (Theatre Owner Booking Association) circuit.

She coached singers and dancers and did war work in World War II, and came out of retirement to record for Chris Albertson on Riverside Records in 1961. She passed away in Chicago several years ago.

Probably the best-known and most well-liked of all the female musicians in Chicago was Lil Hardin Armstrong. She (like Lovie Austin), was born in Tennessee, studied at Fisk University for three years and began her professional career in Chicago in 1917. She played with Freddie Keppard on two occasions, with King Oliver off and on from 1921 through 1924, married Louis Armstrong in February, 1924 and helped him in no small measure to achieve fame and maturity throughout the remainder of that decade. She made all the famous Hot Five and Seven Records for Okeh from 1925 through 1927, and organized some outstanding sessions of her own (The New Orleans Bootblacks' and Wanderers' dates for Columbia in 1926). She devoted much of the late twenties to studying theory and composition and received degrees from the Chicago College of Music and later the New York College of Music.

8 After she and Louis separated she gigged with various leaders and organized one of the first

all-girl swing bands which played the Lafayette Theatre (1932), the Apollo Theatre (1934), the Graystone Ballroom and other locations over a three-year period. This unit featured Hazel Scott's mother, Fletcher Henderson's wife, Leora Meux and above all, Dolly Jones, one of the great trumpet players of that day.

Lil switched to an all-star all-male band which she led until 1937 and included Jonah Jones, Teddy McRae, George Clark, Snub Mosley and others but did not record. In 1936 she began a long-term contract with Decca Records using all-star groups until 1940. In 1939 she opened her own Swing Shack restaurant in Chicago and gigged with the Dodds Brothers. The forties she devoted to solo work and an occasional record session. In 1952 she went to Europe for the first time playing solos, jamming and doing a little recording. Back in Chicago she continued doing solo jobs and playing with small combos. In August 1971, she died on stage, on network television, while performing at a memorial concert in tribute to Louis Armstrong, who had died a month earlier.

An early woman bandleader in Chicago was the temperamental violinist Mae Brady whose ten-piece group in 1919 included Buster Bailey,

clarinet and Eddie Jackson, drums. Mae was in Lil's all-woman big band in 1934. That fine veteran of the Musical Spillers, Alice Calloway (Thompson) was the drummer with Walter Barnes' first band in 1926.

The outstanding trumpeter Dolly Jones, daughter of pianist Dyer Jones, and married for a time to saxophonist "Hooks" Hutchinson, recorded and gave clear proof that she could easily hold her own against well-established male competition. She made "That Creole Band" with Al Wynn's Band on Okeh in 1926. She was later heard from in small clubs all along the East Coast and last known to be living in the Philadelphia area some years ago.

Lottie Hightower's Nighthawks had a reputation in the Chicago area not the least because of her husband Willie's trumpet playing. Irene Armstrong Eadey from Marietta, Ohio led hot combinations in Detroit and Chicago from the late twenties into the early thirties. She married Teddy Wilson in 1932, moved with him to New York and gave up her career to help him with his. After they divorced she concentrated on song-writing and composed the memorable "Some Other Spring," "I'm Pulling Through," and "Ghost of Yesterday,"

given inimitable performances by Billie Holiday and others over the years.

Bassist Thelma Terry had a big reputation in the Middle West and managed to get her all-male band recorded by Columbia in 1928. Georgia Corham's Syncopators held down a lengthy gig at the New Apex Cafe in Chicago. She was a house pianist at Black Swan, on staff with W.C. Handy's publishing firm and the mother of the talented guitarist, John Collins.

Cleo Brown, from Meridian, Mississippi, was raised in Chicago and active in small clubs and on the road starting in the late twenties. Along with Virginia Hayes, she was among the first to play boogie-woogie, which didn't become vogue until the thirties. She made some good records on Decca, played New York, Hollywood and Chicago, and was, surprisingly, an early influence on Dave Brubeck. She has not been heard from in many years.

One of the most successful gig band leaders was Ida Mae Maples whose behind-the-scenes activities kept many a top-flight sideman working when no other jobs were available, from some time in the twenties until the end of the thirties. She was all-business and noted for her perfect tempo.

Gladys Palmer enjoyed quite a bit of success as a singer and pianist in Chicago and was heard in New York and California and made one record for Miracle around 1946.

There is a woman who while not a player herself was nonetheless instrumental as an organizer of Chicago's Hot Club, and more importantly as the first woman recording supervisor (for Irving Mills' newly organized Master and Variety companies). This was the Canadian-born Helen Oakley who supervised many of the best records by Johnny Hodges and the various Ellington sidemen. She has also done publicity work for Chick Webb and Bob Crosby as well and has written extensively on jazz for many years.

The only other woman producer in the jazz area was Bess Berman, one of the owners of Apollo Records in the forties. Twenty years later the remarkable and versatile Victoria Spivey had her own Queen Vee company in partnership with Len Kunstadt and together they produced a series of interesting and varied blues and jazz recordings.

Of the Midwest musicians, pianists are once again best remembered. In Kansas City during the twenties Ragtime Kate Beckham and Julia Lee were two of that city's favorites. Ragtime

Kate's husband Tom had been a banjo player with Coon-Sanders and their five-piece jazz combo was one of the town's best. Julia Lee started with her brother, singer George E. Lee, right after World War I and stayed with him through the mid-thirties when she began a long and successful career as a soloist in small night-clubs. During World War II she became nationally prominent playing theatres from coast to coast where she captivated audiences with her rhythmic double-entendre songs, many of which were recorded by Capitol Records in the post-war years. She played solo barrelhouse piano and sang almost until the day she died in April, 1958.

If anyone symbolizes Kansas City jazz it's Mary Lou Williams. Mary Lou was born in Pittsburgh and began her career playing in small TOBA vaudeville units, winding up in Kansas City around the time Andy Kirk formed his Clouds Of Joy Orchestra. She played on their first recordings when Kirk's man failed to show up for the session. Jack Kapp, Brunswick's recording supervisor, was so taken with her ability, he insisted she make all their records. A year later when Kirk's band was in Chicago to make more Brunswick Records, his regular

piano player was on hand, but Kapp, who was one of the legendary recording men of his time, refused to record the band unless Mary Lou was playing piano. She finally joined Kirk during a long run at the old Pearl Theatre in Philadelphia and went on to become the band's principal attraction for a dozen years as soloist, composer and chief arranger. During that time she wrote for another dozen bands, giving Benny Goodman two of his biggest early hits, "Roll 'Em" and "Camel Hop."

She left to form her own combos during the war, since by this time she was very well established as the unquestioned first lady of jazz. Mary Lou travelled with Duke Ellington as staff arranger and later in the forties played with Benny Goodman briefly. She had long stays at both Cafe Society clubs in New York, the Village Vanguard and Bop City. After spending two years in Europe recording, she stopped playing for three more, devoting most of that time to religious studies and a charitable organization, the Bel Canto Foundation.

Aside from her composing, she was noted for the time she spent helping musicians like Bud Powell and Theolonious Monk in the forties and her ability to stay abreast of all developments

in modern jazz. In the fifties, she resumed her career and has been active pursuing music, education and charitable activities since. She is now on staff at Duke University in North Carolina, teaching and playing music. This professorship represents a tremendous stride forward for women in jazz and women in music generally, although it is belated for someone of Mary Lou's accomplishments and long years in music.

Some of the other good Kansas City pianists included Nellie Britt, Lee Etta Smith, Fay "Oregon" Jones, Margaret "Countess" Johnson, Charlotte Mansfield, Edith Griffin, Lillian Lane, Essie May, Bettye Miller, Vivian Jones (married to saxophonist Jimmy Hamilton and seen on occasion on a commercial promoting the lure of Jamaica).

Around Oklahoma City, Norma Teagarden was top rated playing and recording with her brother Jack's big band and small combos. Having moved to California, she can still work as often as she cares to. A local woman named Lynne Belle Stapp, who came up later in the thirties, was so highly regarded she was called the female Peck Kelley after the legendary Texas pianist. Juanita Burns (Mrs. Abe Bolar) and Ozzie

"Bumps" Huff, the star of the Darlings of Rhythm (married to ex-bandleader Clarence Love), were two other players active and well thought of in both Oklahoma and Missouri who are still active today.

In that part of the world one could hear Peggy White's Texas Rockets and Anna Jones' Western Swing Girls (still active on the West Coast). A fine french horn player named Pauline Oliveras was singled out for praise in the good lab band run by Ed Gerlach at the University of Houston in the fifties. For several months in 1945, Mildred Shirley (Mrs. Lloyd Springer) played bass and sang with Jack Teagarden's big band.

One of the Southwest's finest pianists was Andrus Coy, who spent her entire career as star of her husband's Happy Black Ages band on the road. She still plays organ around Fresno and Bakersfield where she has made her home since they came off the road in the mid-fifties.

Around St. Louis, Marge Creath, Charlie Creath's piano-playing sister, was very highly rated until she married drummer Zutty Singleton and stopped playing. Marcella Kyle and Jane Himingway also worked with Creath's groups, some of the best St. Louis had in the twenties.

Auzie Crawford Shoffner was noted there until she left town and married trumpeter Harvey Dial. She played in bands and nightclubs in Cleveland and Detroit and Pittsburgh well into the war years. DeLois Searcy was active first in St. Louis and then up and down the Eastern Seaboard for a number of years. Later Mary Johnson was active as a pianist with her husband Willie Austin's band.

One prominent woman executive was Ruth Royal who became musical director of KCKN in Kansas City, Kansas in the mid-thirties after a career in vaudeville as a singer and pianist. She had her own programs and was involved in an executive capacity with WREC in Memphis, WMC in Nashville and KMBC in Kansas City where she was billed as the Girl of a Thousand Songs.

Another well-remembered radio bandleader in the Middle West was Jeanne Brown whose staff orchestra broadcast regularly from Fort Wayne, Indiana in the forties.

Ramona Davies became a star with Paul Whiteman's orchestra in 1932 after an early start on WLW in Cincinnati. She made dozens of records in a variety of combinations and was extremely popular with a semi-jazz style. She

went to Europe in 1937 and then led her own big band until the war. Later, she married baseball announcer Al Helfer and retired.

One of the nearly forgotten phenomena of the band era was the "all-girl" band, not all of whom played just jazz or swing. Babe Egan and Her Redheads, Alex Hyde's Musical Darlings, The Hollywood Debs, The Golden Gate Girls, The Ingenues, The Coquettes, Eleanor Sten and Her Smoothies, Vincent Lopez' Debutantes, The Dixie Sweethearts, The Diplomettes, Glenna Thompson, The 42nd Street Girls, Ada Leonard, Ina Ray Hutton and Her Melodears, Sara Battles, Mitzie Shelton, Joy Caylor, Judy Kayne, Helen Compton, Ruth Noller, Velma Wuensch, Sally Sharon & The Dixie Debs, The Harlem Playgirls, Anna Wallace, Dody's Swingtet. From far away places...Conception Castro's Anacoma Orchestra (Havana), Ivy Benson and Her All-Girl Band (London and still active) and Harumi Miyagawa's 14-piece band at the Shibashi Dance Hall in Tokyo. These were among countless big and small bands made up entirely of women who rode buses on one-night stands and played theatre, ballroom and hotel engagements for more than two decades.

While the women probably were pretty good box-office they were looked down upon by a

great many male players. In Downbeat in 1938 an unsigned and sneering article entitled "Why Women Musicians are Inferior" read in part:

"Why is it that outside of a few septia females the woman musician never was born capable of sending anyone further than the nearest exit? It would seem that even though women are the weaker sex they would be able to bring more out of a poor, defenseless horn than something that sounds like a cry for help. You can forgive them for lacking guts in their playing but even women should be able to play with feeling and expression and they never do it."

In the same February, 1938 issue is a rebuttal by Rita Rio, one of the more successful all-women bandleaders, and the only one who turned it into a movie career (why Ada Leonard or Ina Ray Hutton weren't in films I'll never know). Her response was completely cool and reasoned:

"...the feeling, tone and phrasing... is a quality which girls alone are more likely to possess because of the aesthetic nature of their sex. I think our mutual public will agree that a warm vibrant tone is much more pleasing than the

masculine sock so often emphasized by our men bands. I notice girls, because of their feminine tendency, cooperate to make a rhythm section a united unit dependent on each other, rather than the masculine tendency to lead on his own instrument... Either beautiful music or swing music is much more pleasing with a delightful picture than with a trite male band in its uniform tuxedos. Girls find a pleasing picture does not detract from good musicianship... "

Despite that, Ina Ray Hutton's group was one of the only ones to be seriously considered as a swing outfit, and this might have had a great deal to do with the fine Alex Hill arrangements they played, plus the fact that they were managed by Irving Mills, who had built Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway into top attractions. Ina Ray also recorded twice in 1934 with the all-female band (which also made film shorts and a feature) and again in 1940 with an all-male band.

Since, at that time if you were a black musician you were expected (by the white public, anyway) to play only jazz and blues and play them well, the Dixie Sweethearts, Harlem Play-

were all hot bands. Most of the women played in all three groups as well as several other spin-offs and some fine players worked in all of them.

It wasn't easy to organize a band such as the one drummer Sylvester Rice got together in 1935. Rice was the son of established territory leader Eli Rice and a top pro with a dozen years of varied experience under his belt. Stecker Brothers of Minneapolis, Rice's bookers, wanted Sylvester to organize an all-girl (sic) swing band for them which was to be called the Harlem Playgirls. He recalled in a personal conversation, "I took Orvella Moore, piano from my father's band and I had one week to get the girls rounded up. We ran ads and wrote to schools and colleges, musicians' unions and any place we thought could come up with any kind of girl musician that would travel. At that time not too many girl musicians were in existence. I finally contacted enough to get the ball rolling.

"One girl from New York (Elizabeth King, trombone), three from Chicago (Lula Edge, saxophone, Mary Shannon, trumpet and Jean Taylor, vocalist and front), one from Lincoln, Nebraska (Pamela Moore, violin), one from Atlanta (Jean Ray Lee, trumpet), one from Kansas City (Ernestine "Tiny" Davis, trumpet), and to get Marge Back-

strom from Waterloo, Iowa we had to take her older sister Marie as vocalist since Marge was only seventeen at the time. We had a signed contract with Gwenn Twiggs, bass and when I arrived back in Minneapolis after picking up the girls I was informed that Gwenn had rejoined her former band, the Dixie Sweethearts. This left me without a bassplayer so Marie Backstrom begged me to let her take up bass. Lawrence Williams instructed her and in one week she was playing enough to get by—she had a piano background.

"The first rehearsal was the sorriest mess I have ever heard. Orvella and I went out and got drunk afterward and I was on the verge of tears. We had just left Eli's band and they were really swinging. I had one week to whip the band into shape and hit the road. We did it, rehearsing day and night. Learned about twenty five numbers and when we finished playing them, we'd start right over.

"I could write several books about this band and not fully cover the weird things that happened. However, the band did jell and by the time we hit the West Coast the girls were an excellent attraction.

"The Dixie Sweethearts booked by Nichols out of St. Paul were also headed for the West Coast but they were floundering badly so to knock out our competition we hired Alice Proctor, trumpet, Marjorie Ross, Madge Fontaine and I switched to front the band and hired Jennie Byrd, drums. Gwenn Tiggs went home to St. Paul and Mayme Lacy, their leader, later came out to California.

"Our band worked from Minneapolis to the West Coast and then south to Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma the first year. Edna "Edie" Crump was to have taken over the band six months after it was organized, but the Stecker Brothers decided to give me a complete year of it. Crump had the band the following year."

Althea Conley (trombone) wrote to me of some impressions of her years spent with Babe Egan, Ina Ray Hutton, and Mills Cavalcade Orchestra. "We gals in those days didn't consider ourselves to be pioneers so to speak, just ordinary musicians. And the masculine sex seemed to take it for granted that we were women and not a bit unfeminine, not in the least. Of course there were exceptions as there are nowadays but there were very few.

"We rode buses on most of the one-night stands,

usually during the summer season and there were times we rode all night and got to the job just in time to get into our costumes and go to work. We all had our share of dating as any young gals would do. Our theatre engagements gave us time to relax for they were usually one or two week stands. As one band finished their stint there always seemed to be another one to go into and it went that way for a good many years.

"It was fun to play when we had battles of music at the various halls with such bands as the Casa Loma Band, Fletcher Henderson, Kay Kyser, Earl Hines, Woody Herman and many others. Half the night for one band, half the night for the other. On our trips we always had a ball. We went through tornados, and had breakdowns and sometimes we had to get out and push the bus when the grades were too much. Had to change tires and have had to siphon gas from the tank and put it into the distributor to keep going. The going got rough sometimes but we enjoyed every minute of it."

Occasionally a woman slipped through to the top and grabbed lots of lush jobs. One was the vivacious Florence Richardson who was the sweetheart of the late C. F. Zittel of Zit's Theatrical Weekly fame. Miss Richardson held down many a

high-paying hotel job in the New York area for years as a result of the publicity she received through Zit's newspaper, a long-forgotten early rival of Variety.

Ina Ray Hutton, daughter of pianist Marvel Ray, was a gorgeous dancer who had gotten a reputation singing and dancing in several musical revues in the early thirties. Irving Mills, the wealthy music publisher who was Duke Ellington's and Cab Calloway's manager decided to build an all-woman orchestra around her since there seemed to be a growing market. In 1934 he added "Hutton" to Ina Ray's name because of the constant publicity attached to Woolworth heiress Barbara Hutton. Mills had his staff arrangers Alex Hill and Will Hudson write a library of swinging arrangements for them to play, and as soon as they had them down, he got them recorded on Vocalion (thirty-five cents list price) and Victor (seventy-five cents list price), an astounding achievement, the first for an "all-girl" band.

There were several women trading on the name and reputation and presumed relationship to either Cab Calloway or Duke Ellington after 1930. Jean and Harriet Calloway were not related to Cab or to one another and probably were not really named Calloway at all, but both

women led bands or fronted others throughout the swing era. Jean led Fess Whatley's Orchestra out of Birmingham and the Yellowjackets (an Alphonso Trent unit) out of Little Rock. Harriet led King Oliver's band and headed up a revue with Red Perkins' Dixie Ramblers. There was a Ruth Ellington (no relation to Duke or to his sister Ruth) who headed up King Kolax' big band in 1936 for a cross-country tour.

Mayme Lacy (Dixie Sweethearts), Lela Julius, Edna Crump (Harlem Playgirls), Anna Mae Winburn (Red Rivers or the Sweethearts of Rhythm) and Anna Ray Moore (Milt Larkins) were among many other black woman bandleaders in their own right, who were mainly singers or dancers, as was the case with many of the leaders of the white all-girl bands of that time. Lela Julius had been a trombone player with several of the bands before heading up the Harlem Playgirls at their first appearance at the Apollo Theatre in New York in 1937.

Victoria Spivey directed Lloyd Hunter's Serenaders (Omaha) and Jap Allen's Cotton Pickers for a period of about a year in 1931. This was a package put together by MCA to capitalize on her successful film appearance in Hallelujah (MGM 1929) and her many hit Okeh and Victor

Records. They did well for a while playing Boston and other Eastern cities but they missed New York and folded when several sidemen failed to be on time for a job at an amusement park in Lansing, Michigan.

Victoria had her own show, "Tan Town Topics," in Dallas, and became a member for a time of Bessie Smith's road show. After marrying dancer Billy Adams in 1937 she became his personal manager, having made her last records for a long time. Victoria appeared in one of the Hellzapoppin' companies in the forties, quit performing in the fifties to become a church administrator, then came back with a bang in the late fifties and was continually active performing and producing records until her death this year. Throughout her long career she remained a remarkable stylist.

Some others who got involved with the big bands included Sophie Tucker, who didn't enjoy her usual success when for four months she went against the advice of her agent of twenty six years and toured theatres, second class hotels and nightclubs in 1936. From 1936 to 1938, Ethel Waters, the top black star of the pre-war period, financed and fronted a package tour with her lover trumpeter-arranger Eddie Mallory's big

band. Mallory had initially induced her to back him with this excellent band, one with upcoming stars like Don Byas and Tyree Glenn. However, the whole package went for a total of \$5500 a week in theatres (when they could get the dates) when she herself as a single with just her pianist was drawing \$3500 a week, with none of the attendant headaches and large expenses of maintaining a company of thirty people on the road. Ethel went on to star in "Manba's Daughters," one of her biggest stage successes.

Blanche Calloway, Cab's older sister, was an established star nearly ten years before anyone ever heard of her brother. She was one of the top black stars of theatres and nightclubs throughout the twenties, and seemingly overnight she was being ignored in favor of Cab Calloway. He had Irving Mills behind him and Irving Mills had the Cotton Club in his pocket. When Duke Ellington went on the road, Mills replaced him with Cab and a band formerly known as the Missourians (which had been Ethel Waters backup in a show called Africana in 1927). Cab's fame was made by records, by radio and a well-oiled publicity machine.

18 Blanche was still a star but she didn't have that kind of management and was forced by circum-

stances to become a bandleader. Her manager was Sam Steiffel, owner of the Pearl Theatre in Philadelphia. Blanche worked in front of Charlie Gaines and Andy Kirk's bands for most of 1931 before taking over the nucleus of a Kansas City outfit with which she toured constantly for the next decade. She did well enough since she was a tremendous performer and many who knew both felt she had it all over Cab. He got the breaks, and Blanche and her often excellent bands (Vic Dickenson, Clyde Hart, Prince Robinson, Frank Wess, etc.) were relegated to lesser venues.

Blanche had to declare bankruptcy at one point in the late thirties. She then worked as a soloist and later married the owner of the Howard Theatre in Washington where she and her band appeared regularly. Her later activities included managing singer Ruth Brown and working as a disc jockey for a Miami radio station.

Non-playing woman leaders also included swing singer Dolly Dawn who took over George Hall's band after singing with him for nearly six years. She did well until the draft broke up the band in 1941. She worked as single for many years after. Ella Fitzgerald was the brightest star in Chick Webb's band when he died in 1939. She headed up the band (musical directors included Taft

Jordan, Eddie Barefield and Teddy McRae) for three more years before going out as a single in package tours, which she still does, brilliantly.

Dancer Anna Mae Winburn's beauty probably helped in no small measure in the success enjoyed by the International Sweethearts of Rhythm in the early forties. She played no instrument but fronted a couple of territory bands working out of Oklahoma City before that and later was married to the son of Red Perkins, an Omaha bandleader with whom she had done a short tour.

Ann Lunceford (also known as Baby Briscoe, or Joan Lunceford, no relation to bandleader Jimmie) directed Joe Bobichaux's big band in the late thirties and was rated as a woman with very big potential in Ella Fitzgerald's style until she was shot to death in a dance hall.

Probably most versatile woman instrumentalist in the pre-World War II years was Valaida Snow (1905-56), billed among other things as "The Queen Of The Trumpet." Valaida was a highly-charged personality who sang, danced, conducted full-size orchestras and produced stage and night club revues. Born in Chattanooga, Tennessee to a performing family she was first heard of in 1922 at Barron Wilkins' cabaret in Harlem. She built up a reputation in Will Mastin's Holiday In Dixieland,

Follow Mee and Chocolate Dandies. She first went abroad to the Far East in 1926 in a package with drummer Jack Carter's orchestra, remaining there through 1928. She then went back and forth between the United States and Europe appearing both here and abroad in shows like Rhapsody In Black (1931) where she first conducted the pit orchestra in a lengthy version of Rhapsody In Blue and in the Blackbirds of 1934 in London. Criss-crossing this country she produced shows at the Grand Terrace in Chicago, made her first recordings, did a road tour with Earl Hines' orchestra (1933), and starred in the show at Sebastian's Cotton Club in Culver City and appeared in two films (1935-6). She and her younger sister, Lavaida Carter once headlined right across the street from one another on Broadway in the early thirties when her sister was singing with Noble Sissle's orchestra.

Valaida was particularly successful in Europe, recording more than forty titles for three companies over a five-year period until she was imprisoned for three years in Denmark during the occupation. Exchanged late in 1942 for a German agent, she married veteran TOBA performer and night club producer Earle Edwards who nursed her back to health.

Her career resumed in earnest with a road tour fronting the Sunset Royal orchestra in 1943 and she picked up enough momentum playing service camps throughout the country to make new recordings with Apollo and Beltone, two of the new independent firms which began at the end of the war. The owners of the latter firm were so enamored of her talents that they sunk a small fortune into lavish arrangements for a thirty-piece studio orchestra on some ballad standards, but the budget was just too much for a small company and those records became nearly as rare after they went out of business, as those made in Europe.

Una Mae Carlisle was a soft-spoken part-Indian pianist and singer from Xenia, Ohio who became a protege of Fats Waller when he was working out of Cincinnati in 1932. She toured with him throughout 1933 and played piano to his organ accompaniment over WLW. She went to England and the Continent in 1937 and 1938, making her first records there under Leonard Feather's supervision. Feather, incidentally, must be given a great deal of credit for publicizing and recording women jazz players. From that time on he was pretty much alone in those endeavors.

20 Una Mae Carlisle's career moved at a much quicker pace when her hit song Walkin' By The

River and later, I See A Million People were released on Bluebird in 1941. From then on her radio and stage appearances were increasingly popular. She appeared on the Gloom Dodgers show as a regular member of the cast in 1945 and had her own radio and later a television series in the late forties and early fifties. She was forced to retire in ill health and passed away in 1956 at age 38.

One could find nearly a dozen talented female pianists in the New York area, many of whom sang and did emcee work in the uptown and downtown areas. Dot Hill, Dot Scott (of Rhythm Dukes fame on Decca), Jeanne Burns on 52nd Street in 1936; Hazel Scott who had a big band for a while in 1939 and plenty of movies, radio and nightclub work on both coasts thereafter; Gladys Easter who is still active in Greenwich Village; Jewel Paige who was better known as a vocalist. Later on Rose Murphy (before she found the Chi-Chi girl gimmick which made her such a rage during World War II) played intermission piano at the Famous Door, Mary Osborne (from North Dakota) was in and out of town with several big bands (Terry Shand, Joe Venuti, Raymond Scott, etc.) and later on 52nd Street in 1946 (and recording with Coleman Hawkins) with her own trio staying

a year at Kelly's Stables. Adele Girard's harp graced the Hickory House's bandstand for years.

When Woody Herman's band came into the New Yorker Hotel in November, 1941 he had added a trumpeter-vocalist named Billie Rogers. Billie was a big asset to the band, could sing well and play good horn too. She eventually became part of the Herman brass section, no small honor in those days and after two years left him to form her own big band (all-male) which came back to New York and played four months at the Pelham Heath Inn summer and fall, 1944 (Johnny Mandel was in the trumpet section and writing Ellington-styled arrangements). The band was put together by her husband-agent Jack Archer, but lasted only until 1945. She then joined Jerry Wald's orchestra for some months and eventually started up another group which had less luck than her first, and disbanded 1950.

Woody Herman was also responsible for bringing vibraphonist Margie Hyams to national recognition with his First Herd in 1944-5. She made many of his fine Columbia Recordings in that time, left him to form her own trio which was well thought of during 1945-8 and then joined the hottest new group in modern jazz, the George Shearing Quintet.

At the peak of her fame in June 1950 she married and left the business.

Many fine women players were out West as well, going all the way back to 1920 when Melba Clay was featured with Wood Wilson's Jazz-O-Rhines in Los Angeles. Bertha Gonsoulin replaced Lil Armstrong in King Oliver's Band late in 1921 and spent quite a few months working in that famous group. Pianist Edythe Turnham (her son Floyd was one of Los Angeles' best alto men for years) led her own Dixie Aces throughout most of the twenties and thirties. Betty Hall Jones was much in demand working with Paul Howard and Roy Milton. Dorothy Broil worked with Red Mack, Jack McVea and Luke Jones. Camille Howard enjoyed a big reputation with Roy Milton's group when he was one of the hottest combos in the war years. She came to California from a three year stay at one club in Galveston.

Probably the biggest success in the war and post-war years was Nellie Lutcher from Lake Charles, Louisiana. Nellie got her start with a family band traveling in Louisiana and then worked with other territory bands well into the Depression when she came to California to live with relatives. She began working clubs along Central Avenue and built up such a following

that Capitol Records signed her to a long-term contract and her hit recording of "He's A Real Gone Guy" became a big smash right after the war. She played theatres and nightclub engagements throughout the country for a decade. Today she is still working and also a board member of Local 47 in Los Angeles.

Trombonist Melba Liston began being noticed when she played with Bardu Ali's house band at the Lincoln Theatre in Los Angeles during the war years. Later she became part of Gerald Wilson's excellent big band and began writing arrangements for him. She later joined Dizzy Gillespie and Count Basie writing and soloing with both bands. She co-led Clark Terry's big band, wrote for Duke Ellington and the Buffalo Symphony, for Diana Ross and other pop singers and has been living in the West Indies where she is Director of the Jamaica Institute of Music and affiliated with the University of the West Indies.

Saxophonist Jack McVea had an all-woman group with Clara Bryant, trumpet, Jackie Glenn, piano; Anna Glasco, bass and Matty Watson, drums in 1950 which worked under the name The Hollywood Sepia-Tones. A year later the same women were working with the talented violinist Emma "Ginger" Smock (she added guitarist Willie

Lee Terrell and vocalist Vivian Dandridge of Dandridge Sisters fame). This was one of the first female jazz combos to play on television.

Memphis Minnie Douglas McCoy Fowler from Algiers, Louisiana stood almost unsurpassed as a guitar picker. It is said that she beat the great Bill Broonzy in a picking contest one time. Most of her many recordings are quite rare but some have been recently reissued. Boogie woogie and blues pianist Georgia White was a staff pianist at Decca, and a recording artist herself. Her "Blues Ain't Nothing But" is a classic.

There seems to have been at least one outstanding jazz woman in Canada, the late Vera Guilaroff, called the Princess Of The Piano. Born in London, England to Russian and English parents Ms. Guilaroff was inspired by Willie Eckstein, one of Canada's pioneer jazz pianists, and at one time teamed with him as "Les Vagabonds des Pianos" for French language station CKAC. She recorded prolifically for the Compo company and was billed as Canada's premier jazz pianist. She was the Canadian Broadcasting Company's soloist for four years. In 1937 she toured England, recorded for HMV and broadcast for the BBC as Canada's Melody Girl. She also toured Europe with a big band that year and in

later years began composing extensively. Her home in Montreal was the scene of many jam sessions with visiting musicians from all over the world. Her version of "Maple Leaf Rag" cut in 1926 was one of the very first recordings of this classic composition. As her mentor Willie Eckstein always said of her, "she played a lot of piano."

In England most of the female ensembles were relegated to the provinces: The Rhythm Girls (Yorkshire), Gladys Wigginton (Newquay), The Boston Belles (Scarborough), Marie and Her Orchestra (Cardiff). A man named Don Rico was the Phil Spitalny of England in using an all-women string orchestra until 1936 when he changed over to brass and reeds (unfortunately considered male domain). The most prominent female outfit was Ivy Benson's (saxophone) which is still working (according to Marian McPartland). Pianist, singer and vocalist Peggy Cochrane was popular as England's "Tune-a-Minute-Girl" and was equally adept at jazz and classics. A group known as the Calores Trio was singled out for the Melody Maker as having possibilities in the mid-30's and violinist Carole Carraturo was singled out for her solo choruses in the group.

Nowadays Kathy Stobart commands attention with her tenor work.

Marian McPartland is certainly England's best-known jazz player and today occupies perhaps the top position among women players. She didn't really get into jazz until she went overseas to Europe during World War II with the English ENSA and our USO troupes. She met cornetist Jimmy McPartland in France and began working in a group with him. Her early experiences were with commercial acts like Billy Materl and she got most of her inspiration then from records by Art Tatum and Teddy Wilson.

Aside from working with Jimmy, whom she later married and from whom she learned a very wide repertoire of jazz standards, she has always led her own trios, working regularly for years at the Hickory House on 52nd Street, the Composer, the London House and lately the Cafe Carlyle. Marian has made many outstanding albums, has written various columns and articles; produces records for her own company, Halcyon Records, and is in constant demand for every kind of performance in concert, on television and select hotels and nightclubs.

In her wake or during the same period came Dorothy Donegan, Hadda Brooks, Beryl Booker

(her trio at the Embers with Bonnie Wetzel, bass and Elaine Leighton, drums was one of the delights of 1952-3), Barbara Carroll, Toshiko Akiyoshi (now leading a big band in California with her husband Lew Tabackin which has made many albums on the RCA and RCA-Japan labels), Patti Bown, Joanne Brackeen, the organists Shirley Scott and Sarah McLawler, Blossom Dearie, Jutta Hipp, Pat Moran, Carla Bley, Nina Sheldon, Patti Wicks, and many others.

Vi Redd (alto sax), Dotty Dodgion (drums), Janice Robinson (trombone), Patrice Rushen (piano), Carole Kaye (bass and guitar), Bobbi Humphrey (flute), Barbara Kay Donald (trumpet, piano, trombone and singer), Sue Evans (percussion) are just some of many young players who have come into jazz music since 1950. Jill McManus' group, The Jazz Sisters, is attracting attention right now, and in 1978 there is to be a major woman's jazz festival to be held in Kansas City. It is the brainchild of Diane Gregg, public awareness director of radio station KCUR-FM and jazz singer Carol Comer. This is a first and it seems at long last that women may finally be given some of their due, not just as novelties but as players and long-time contributors to the mainstream of American Music.

Frank Driggs (c) (p) 1977

Those with knowledge of pioneer women players are requested to write to the author at 1235 East 40th Street, Brooklyn, New York 11210.

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