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Not Yet a Woman, Never a Jazzman: Listening for Jazz in Midcentury Girl Cultures

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In 1951, Barbara Loveland was a high school senior in Teaneck, New Jersey. A white girl with a "quick smile," Loveland was an accomplished clarinetist who won first chair in New Jersey's All-State band two years in a row.[1] She was also an avid jazz fan and critic. Loveland wrote a jazz column for the school newspaper in which she offered record reviews, digests of jazz trade press reporting, and personal opinions on the state of jazz.[2] Her writing reached a national audience when she published a column in the most popular teen magazine of the time: *Seventeen*. In it, Loveland reviewed the current jazz trends, including Glenn Miller-style swing bands, Dixieland throwbacks, and the mambo craze.[3] She also criticized bands who assumed that "loud noises and weird chord combinations would capture bop enthusiasts" and praised Dizzy Gillespie and George Shearing.[4] Loveland's jazz writing demonstrates her up-to-date knowledge of the jazz press and her clear critical voice. She was a typical high school girl, a musician, a writer, and a jazz connoisseur, and she was far from alone.

Jazz was a widespread interest among teenage girls at midcentury. In urban centers and rural plains alike, girls listened to, played, and wrote about jazz. Like Loveland, many girls recorded their love for jazz in high school newspapers, yearbooks, and in magazines like *Seventeen*. Postwar girls left plentiful evidence

[1] Teaneck High School, *The Hi-Way,* yearbook (Teaneck, New Jersey, 1951), 87, Classmates.com,https://www.classmates.com/siteui/yearbooks/4182792538?page=94; "Eleventh Annual New Jersey All-State High School Symphonic Band in an Instrumental Forum," program, 1950, digitally archived by the New Jersey Music Educators Association, Voorhees, NJ, https://www.njmea.org/history-of-the-all-state-bands; "Twelfth Annual New Jersey All State High School Symphonic Band in an Instrumental Forum," 1951, digitally archived by the New Jersey Music Educators Association, Voorhees, NJ, https://www.njmea.org/history-of-the-all-state-bands.

[2] See Barbara Loveland, "DISCussions," *Te-Hi News* (school newspaper, Teaneck High School, Teaneck, New Jersey, 1951), archived by the Teaneck Public Library.

[3] Barbara Loveland, "I Like All Kinds," *Seventeen*, May 1951, 20, 70, 72, Women's Magazine Archive.

[4] Loveland, "I Like All Kinds," 72.

of their interest in jazz, yet they rarely appear in what Scott DeVeaux calls the "official version of jazz history."[5] This is the version that centers distinct style periods, exceptional individual innovators, and canonical recordings while casting but a glancing look at everyday jazz listeners.[6] In major surveys of jazz history, for example, girls are typically mentioned only as adoring fans or as early-career singers.[7] Sometimes, girls are even positioned as a foil for "real jazz."[8] Teenage girls as connoisseurs, instrumentalists, and critics are entirely absent from this version of jazz history.

Indeed, the historiography of the postwar period tends to place girls and jazz at opposite poles. Kelly Schrum has traced teenage girl culture back to the 1920s, but the mid-twentieth century marked a rise in the visibility of girls as consumers.[9] Magazines like *Calling All Girls* and *Seventeen* strengthened the association between girls and consumption by advertising directly to them, and general interest outlets breathlessly reported on girls' newfound spending power.[10] The girl consumers portrayed in mainstream magazines were exclusively white, middle-class, and suburban, and writers like Robin Bernstein, Aimee Cox, and Ashley Smith have shown that whiteness has long been central to the construction of girlhood.[11]

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[5] Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography," *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 525.

[6] DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," 525.

[7] Gunther Schuller, *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 286; Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (University of California Press, 1997), 89, 198, 256; Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 17, 47, 125, 131.

[8] Christopher J. Wells (Christi Jay Wells), "'A Dreadful Bit of Silliness': Feminine Frivolity and Ella Fitzgerald's Early Critical Reception," *Women & Music* 21, no. 1 (2017): 43–65.

[9] Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture*, 1920-1945 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[10] Richard Gehman, "The Nine Billion Dollars in Hot Little Hands," *Cosmopolitan,* November 1957, Women's Magazine Archive, 72-79; "Teen-Age Girls: They Live in a Wonderful World of Their Own," *LIFE*, December 11, 1944, Google Books, 91.

[11] Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York University Press, 2011); Aimee Meredith Cox, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (Duke University Press, 2015); Ashley L. Smith, "Theorizing Black Girlhood," in *The Black Girlhood Studies Collection*, Aria S. Halliday, ed. (Women's Press, 2019), 21-44. Despite interventions by scholars in the fields of girlhood studies and Black girlhood studies, the image of the white, middle-class, American girl remains strong. Tyler Bickford, for instance, has recently argued that the monumental popularity of Taylor Swift is due in part to Swift's ability to engage the tropes of white girlhood (Tyler Bickford, *Tween Pop: Children's Music and Public Culture* (Duke University Press, 2020), 106-139).

The stereotypical "universal girl" does not fit into the jazz tradition, but nor does she fit into studies of jazz and gender.[12] Writers like Sherrie Tucker, Nichole Rustin-Paschal, Christi Jay Wells, and Tammy Kernodle have long argued that jazz scholars should recognize the crucial importance of gender in jazz studies, yet scholarship about gender and jazz still often focuses on exceptional female players.[13] Because women jazz musicians typically had to perform masculinity to access professional opportunities, Rustin-Paschal calls these players "female jazzmen."[14] While it is absolutely necessary to theorize jazz by "thinking from women's lives," centering remarkable female musicians also tends to uphold the centrality of individual innovators in jazz historiography.[15] Like the figure of the "universal girl," the importance of "great men" in the jazz tradition began to coalesce in the middle decades of the twentieth century. This period saw the advent of bebop and the redefinition of jazz as an elite, complex, art music led by a small number of visionary male musicians. Wells notes that bebop has since become central to the "aesthetics, techniques… and governing ideologies" of jazz historiography.[16] This includes the importance of masculinity in the jazz tradition, as the "legendary" culture of competition and virtuosity among bebop players provides a clear historical precedent.[17] The mid-twentieth century thus looms large in gender studies and jazz studies alike. This period produced powerful—and contrasting—images of feminine, commercial girlhood and authentic, masculine jazz.

These opposing historiographical currents have made it difficult to imagine girls in jazz history. Yet Barbara Loveland was a white, suburban, middle-class girl in the 1950s who loved bebop. In this article, I map the documentary

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[12] Cox, *Shapeshifters*, 13.

[13] Wells, "'A Dreadful Bit of Silliness'"; Sherrie Tucker, "Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies," *Current Musicology*, no. 71–73 (Spring 2001- 2002): 375–408; Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Bands of the 1940s* (Duke University Press, 2000); Nichole T. Rustin et. al., *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies* (Duke University Press, 2008); Nichole Rustin-Paschal, *The Kind of Man I Am: Jazzmasculinity and the World of Charles Mingus Jr.* (Wesleyan University Press, 2017); Tammy L. Kernodle, "Black Women Working Together: Jazz, Gender, and the Politics of Validation," *Black Music Research Journal* 34, no. 1 (2014): 27–55.

[14] Rustin-Paschal, *The Kind of Man I Am,* 16-17.

[15] Suzanne G. Cusick, "'Thinking from Women's Lives': Francesca Caccini after 1627," *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (1993): 484–507. Cusick is borrowing the phrase "thinking from women's lives" from Sandra Harding. See Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[16] Christi Jay Wells, *Between Beats: The Jazz Tradition and Black Vernacular Dance* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 109. See also David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (University of California Press, 2002), 52.

[17] Guthrie P. Ramsey, *The Amazing Bud Powell: Black Genius, Jazz History, and the Challenge of Bebop* (University of California Press, 2013), 24.

evidence created by and for girls like Loveland to show that they were highly engaged with jazz at midcentury. In considering the evidence of girls and jazz, I follow writers like Wells, Kelsey Klotz, Guthrie Ramsey, and Ken Prouty in turning toward jazz audiences as a way of reconsidering the music's official history.[18] As I will show, most girls who engaged with jazz at school and in female-focused media were amateurs. They neither fit within the jazz tradition nor the "female jazzman" paradigm. Yet their experiences were, in many ways, more representative than those of professional jazz musicians. After all, only a small number of individuals ever played in (or even heard) a jam session at Minton's. Most people involved with jazz at midcentury were amateur players, listeners, and critics, and this majority included thousands of girls. I argue that understanding ubiquity as a criterion for historical relevance in turn allows us to "listen for gender" in new ways.[19]

I first examine the high school yearbooks and newspapers in which girls documented their love of jazz as critics, connoisseurs, and practitioners. Yearbooks and school papers are local in scope, but their value lies in their ubiquity. Together, they create an aggregate record showing that girls' interest in jazz cut across geography, race, and class. The sources demonstrate that while amateur girl jazz aficionados are not considered an important part of jazz history today, they were typical at midcentury. I then turn to two publications aimed at girls, *Seventeen* and *Tan Confessions,* to suggest that the jazz discourses cultivated among girls in local high schools were also visible at a national scale. Unlike school documents, these magazines were widely circulated to millions of readers each month, and both regularly included jazz coverage. Intended for the white, middle-class "universal" girl, *Seventeen* ran jazz writing by both professional critics and girl contributors. In Johnson Publishing Company's romance magazine *Tan Confessions,* Black girl readers incorporated jazz into female-focused discourses about sexuality and respectability. Both publications were much more widely circulated than jazz magazines like *Down Beat,* and their coverage situated the music firmly within the sphere of normative femininity. These magazines demonstrate that the historiographical impulse to separate jazz from popular consumer culture at midcentury is inconsistent with documentary evidence from that time.

The sources show that girls did not consider their interest in jazz to be subversive or unfeminine. They routinely incorporated jazz into their everyday

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[18] Kelsey Klotz, *Dave Brubeck and the Performance of Whiteness* (Oxford University Press, 2023); Ken Prouty, *Knowing Jazz: Community, Pedagogy, and Canon in the Information Age* (University Press of Mississippi, 2011); Ramsey, *The Amazing Bud Powell*; Wells, *Between Beats*.

[19] Rustin et al., *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies*, 1.

life, and their lived experience of jazz and girlhood was reinforced by representations in popular magazines. For girls, jazz was compatible with, rather than a foil to, midcentury femininity. Examining the evidence of girls and jazz thus requires tuning our ears toward the ordinary, rather than the exceptional. Doing so reveals a major strain of jazz history in which masculinity is decentered in favor of adolescent femininity.

POPULAR CHEERLEADERS AND MUSIC CLUB PRESIDENTS: JAZZ IN SCHOOL

The postwar period was marked by a sharp rise in high school attendance, a trend that helped to carve out adolescence as a unique phase of life during which teenagers could develop their tastes and interests. Schools provided time, space, and organized programming to support students' activities, and they also produced a wealth of documentation about teenage life. Today, these sources are well-preserved in collections held by public libraries and local historical organizations. While the archive of any particular school may be small, most schools published yearbooks and newspapers. The resulting historical record is composed of many data points that outline larger trends. These texts are also particularly valuable in that they are produced by and for girls themselves, and they document the diversity of girls' experiences at midcentury. These sources show that girls were interested in jazz in wealthy white suburbs, urban centers, and rural schools alike.

Yearbooks are useful in documenting the listening practices of individual girls via short descriptive captions below each student photograph. In Newark, New Jersey, for example, the 1948 edition of the Arts High School yearbook included many girls who described their musical taste. Among the racially diverse student body were three white girls interested in jazz. Diana Rudman was described as leaving listeners "spellbound after one of her interesting talks on music," Vivian Martin as an "ardent" saxophone player, and Colleen Cole as a "popular cheerleader" whose favorite pastime was "boys."[20] All three listed "be-bop" as a favorite music. A decade later in 1958, girls continued to mention jazz record collecting, progressive jazz, and modern jazz among their hobbies. This interest cut across race. For example, Black graduates of 1958 included Hazel Bullard, who "spen[t] much time in New York" and loved "progressive jazz."[21] Ollie M.

[20] Arts High School, *Vignette*, yearbook (Newark, New Jersey, 1948), 15, 19, 22, 25, 28, archived by the Newark Public Schools Historic Preservation Committee, the Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center at the Newark Public Library, Newark Public Schools, and the Internet Archive on August 23, 2022, https://archive.org/details/NewarkArts1948.

[21] Arts High School, *Vignette*, yearbook (Newark, New Jersey, 1958), 54, archived by the Newark Public Schools Historic Preservation Committee, the Charles F. Cummings New Jersey

Simmons similarly "enjoy[ed] modern jazz," as did B. Melba Smith, who liked to "sleep, listen to progressive jazz, and eat."[22] Girls also noted specific artists. In 1961, the yearbook of Newark's majority-Black South Side High School included Joyce Character, who was a fan of Cannonball Adderley, and Hortense Cox, who loved Milt Jackson and Duke Ellington.[23] Their classmate Sarah Cutts was also president of a music club and a collector of jazz records.[24] While these girls had access to major jazz scenes both in Newark and in New York City, they were not alone in their love of jazz. At South Philadelphia High School, for example, Marguerite Alford "attend[ed] every jazz concert that comes to Philadelphia" and aspired to work in a record store.[25] Even in Manlius, New York, a suburb of Syracuse with a population of around two thousand, high school graduate Cara Bersani was both an award-winning artist and a jazz fan.[26]

Not every book included detailed information about hobbies, but they very often featured photos of girls playing jazz in school ensembles. In the 1940s and 1950s, schools began forming bands to furnish music for dancing. Midcentury music educators explicitly championed these groups as spaces where students could develop skills in swing and New Orleans jazz styles.[27] Girls often played in these ensembles. In Newark, the 1948 Arts High School book featured a photo of the dance band playing at the Valentine's Day Dance. The small ensemble was mostly white and all-male except for a blonde female saxophone player in the front row (fig. 1).[28]

Information Center at the Newark Public Library, Newark Public Schools, and the Internet Archive on July 11, 2022, https://archive.org/details/NewarkArts1958.

[22] Arts High School, *Vignette,* 65.

[23] South Side High School, *Optimist*, yearbook (South Side High School, Newark, New Jersey, 1961), 18, 35, archived by the Newark Public Schools Historic Preservation Committee, the Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center at the Newark Public Library, Newark Public Schools, and the Internet Archive on August 23, 2022, https://archive.org/details/NewarkSouth1961.

[24] South Side High School, *Optimist,* 19.

[25] South Philadelphia High School, *Keepsake*, yearbook (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1961), 72, Classmates.com, https://www.classmates.com/siteui/yearbooks/4182814909.

[26] Fayetteville-Manlius High School, *Oak Leaves,* yearbook (Manlius, New York, 1963), 24, archives of the Manlius Historical Society, digitally archived by the Central New York Library Resources Council,
https://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16694coll56/id/12657/rec/11.

[27] Howard E. Kelley, "Teachers and Dance Bands," *Music Journal* 5, no. 2 (1947): 51. See also Clement Wiedinmyer, "Dance Bands in High Schools," *Music Journal* 10, no. 3 (1952).

[28] Arts High School, *Vignette*, yearbook (Newark, New Jersey, 1948), endpapers, archived by the Newark Public Schools Historic Preservation Committee, the Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center at the Newark Public Library, Newark Public Schools, and the Internet Archive on August 23, 2022, https://archive.org/details/NewarkArts1948 .

Figure 1. A dance band plays at Arts High School (Newark, NJ) in 1948

Similarly, in 1961, the majority-Black South Side High Yellowjackets boasted girls on baritone saxophone and bass (fig. 2).[29] Again, Newark was no anomaly. The jazz band at Waynesville High School in North Carolina also frequently included girl players. In 1950, for example, the jazz band featured girls on trumpet, clarinet, and saxophone.[30]

[29] South Side High School, *Optimist*, yearbook (South Side High School, Newark, New Jersey, 1961), 77, 80, archived by the Newark Public Schools Historic Preservation Committee, the Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center at the Newark Public Library, Newark Public Schools, and the Internet Archive on August 23, 2022, https://archive.org/details/NewarkSouth1961.

[30] Waynesville High School, *The Mountaineer*, yearbook (Waynesville, North Carolina, 1950), 50, archived by the Haywood County Public Library and DigitalNC, https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/236364?ln=en&v=uv#?xywh=1513%2C0%2C5742%2C3654&cv=50.

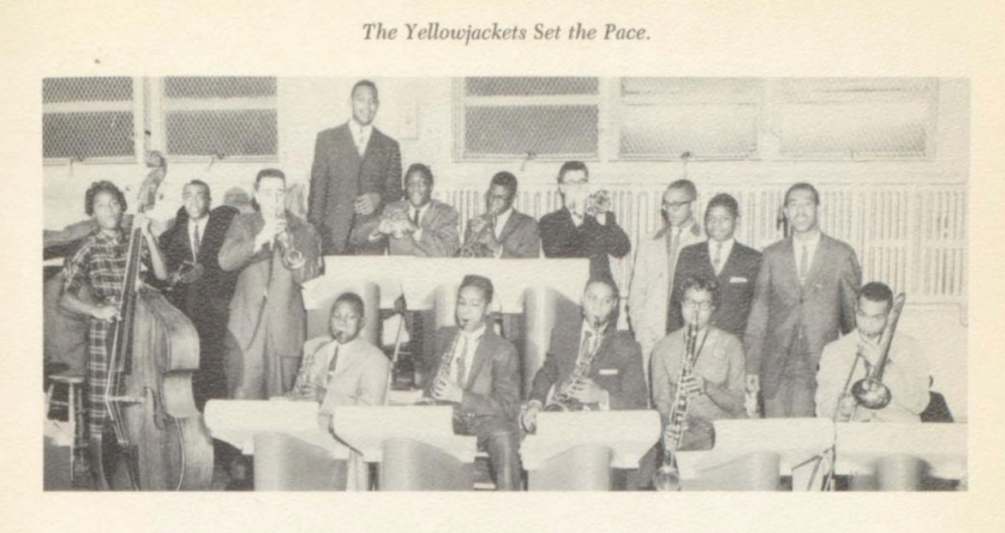

Figure 2. The South Side School (Newark, NJ) dance band, called the Yellowjackets, pictured in 1961.

In 1958, the dance band and combo at West Chicago Community High School featured a girl vocalist, bass player, pianist, and two saxophone players.[31] That same year, in Berlin, Connecticut, cheerleader Carolyn Alice Peterson was a music club member and a four-year-veteran of the school's dance band.[32] Memorably, the 1960 yearbook of Osawatomie High School in Osawatomie, Kansas included a picture of an all-white ensemble called The O. H. S. Jive-Makers.[33] There are five saxophonists in the first row, and the sole male player has to sit a bit apart from the others, to make room for their wide tulle skirts (fig. 3). In 1966, the all-Black jazz band at Winston-Salem, North Carolina's Carver High School had a majority-girl saxophone section in addition to girls on trombone and piano (fig. 4).[34] As these diverse examples indicate, girls were

[31] West Chicago Community High School, *Challenge*, yearbook (West Chicago, Illinois, 1958), 71, archived by the West Chicago Public Library District on April 29, 2015, https://wcpld.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/WCCHS-Yearbook-1958wcpld-searchable.pdf .

[32] Berlin High School, *The Lamp*, yearbook (Berlin, Connecticut, 1958), n.p., archived by the Internet Archive on August 24, 2016, https://archive.org/details/berlincthighschoolyearbook_1958_images/mode/2up.

[33] Osawatomie High School, *The Trojan Spirit*, yearbook (Osawatomie, Kansas, 1960), 61, Classmates.com, https://www.classmates.com/siteui/yearbooks/190629.

[34] "Jazz Band," Carver High School, *Yellow Jacket,* yearbook (Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 1966), 72, archived by the Forsyth County Public Library and DigitalNC, https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/38636?ln=en&v=uv#?xywh=1009%2C3159%2C1423%2C611&cv=75.

playing and listening to jazz everywhere, from urban centers like Newark to remote outposts in upstate New York.

Figure 3. The O.H.S. Jive Makers of Osawatomie, Kansas, 1960.

School newspapers preserve girls' jazz writing and offer a more detailed understanding of their critical perspectives. School papers are somewhat scarcer than yearbooks, but they can be found in the local history collections of many public libraries and in the digitized history collections hosted by state governments. Some girls had regular record review columns in these papers, and their writing demonstrates their facility with different jazz styles, familiarity with the jazz trade press, and frequent attendance at live events. Barbara Loveland is a good example. Loveland's column was entitled "DISCussions" and often included information gleaned from the jazz trades. In the February 7, 1951 edition, for instance, Loveland reported on *Down Beat's* poll results for best artists of 1950, noted that *Metronome* gave Lennie Tristano's new recording an "A" rating, and triumphantly declared that "bop is definitely not dead."[35] In a different column, Loveland reviewed a performance by bandleader Ralph Flanagan's ensemble. Loveland described the group as "pretty terrific… sparked by a really swinging drummer," but noted that the arrangements were but paler imitations of the then-popular Glenn Miller dance arrangements.[36] She ended her review with a note that *Metronome*, "a magazine bought chiefly by those in

[35] Barbara Loveland, "DISCussions," *Te-Hi News,* school newspaper, Teaneck High School, Teaneck, New Jersey, February 7, 1951, archived by the Teaneck Public Library.
[36] Barbara Loveland, "DISCussions," *Te-Hi News*, school newspaper, Teaneck High School, Teaneck, New Jersey, 1951, archived by the Teaneck Public Library.

the music business," would announce all-stars soon.[37] Loveland's writing demonstrates the breadth of her engagement with jazz and her own musicianship likely granted her some authority as a music critic within the school. Loveland clearly felt able to recommend jazz recordings and explain the workings of the trade press to her peers. She demonstrates that in the early 1950s, even a white suburban girl could engage with jazz as a player, fan, critic, and advocate.

JAZZ BAND

Left To Right: Donald Stowe, Charles Burns, Rosaland Little, Melvin Oliver, Melvin McCoy, Phyllis Powell, Belinda Williamson, Shirley Hauser, Barbara Bailey, Barbara Nichols, Charles Green, William Peay, Derry Bigsby, Charles Wallington, Steven Miller, John Butterfield, Ernest Ingram, John Caesar, Wendell Robinson.

Figure 4. The Carver High School Jazz Band (Winston-Salem, North Carolina), 1966.

[37] Loveland, "DISCussions."

Like the Newark girls mentioned above, Loveland lived in a suburb of New York City and had access to a major jazz scene. But girls in more far-flung locations also wrote about jazz. Elizabeth McCulloch, for example, wrote a regular music column in the student paper of Grimsley High School, an all-white school in Greensboro, North Carolina. Her column, entitled "Disc and Dat," reviewed a variety of recordings, including jazz. In the March 25, 1949 issue McCulloch reviewed records by the Mills Brothers, June Christy, and a compilation album of bebop by Coleman Hawkins, Dizzy Gillespie, Kenny Clarke, and Lucky Thompson.[38] McCulloch declared that this album is "surely a must for [jazz fans]."[39] In nearby Durham, the all-Black Hillside High School boasted music columnist Marion Dunn, who wrote a "Song of the Month" column in the *Hillside Chronicle.* The October 1947 column overflowed with songs of the month, including Louis Jordan's "Boogie Woogie Blue Plate" and the King Cole Trio's "I Miss You So" and "Embraceable You."[40] These columns demonstrate the breadth of girls' jazz taste.

Girl reporters in remote locales offer an intriguing look at jazz culture outside urban centers. In Alliance, Ohio, which then had a population of around twenty thousand, honor-roll student Shirley Niswonger wrote a regular arts column in her school paper between 1943 and 1944.[41] Her column, entitled "Between the Times" included reviews of film, radio, theater, and music, and announcements of upcoming events. She also reproduced jazz coverage from other sources. On October 15, 1943, for example, Niswonger reported that the *Saturday Evening Post* was raving about Duke Ellington's band.[42] On September 22, 1944, she reviewed a new Artie Shaw record and reported that Glenn Miller was still a

[38] Elizabeth McCulloch, "Disc and Dat," *High Life*, school newspaper, Grimsley High School, Greensboro, North Carolina, March 25, 1949, 2, digitally archived by the Greensboro History Museum and DigitalNC, https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/2018236518/1949-03-25/ed-1/seq-2/.

[39] McCulloch, "Disc and Dat."

[40] Marion Dunn, "Song of the Month" *Hillside Chronicle*, school newspaper, Hillside High School, Durham, North Carolina, October 1, 1947, 3, digitally archived by North Carolina Central University and DigitalNC, https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/2022240382/1947-10-01/ed-1/seq-3/.

[41] See *Red and Blue*, school newspaper, Alliance High School, Alliance, Ohio, October 1, 1943, archived by the Rodman Public Library and ohiomemory.org, https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p16007coll48/id/1864/rec/13.

[42] Shirley Niswonger, "Between Times," *Red and Blue*, school newspaper, Alliance High School, Alliance, Ohio, October 15, 1943, 3, archived by the Rodman Public Library and ohiomemory.org, https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p16007coll48/id/776/rec/1.

favorite with troops overseas (she gave no source for this information).[43] When possible, Niswonger reviewed local performances. In the spring of 1944, she raved about a live performance by Bobby Sherman's band and gave a brief overview of Sherman's career.[44] That December, she noted that she had recently seen bandleaders Charlie Barnet and Charlie Spivak and their ensembles. She wrote that they "did not set the world on fire with their stage revues. Barnet on sax and Spivak on trumpet are tops, but the shows themselves could have been better."[45] Niswonger went on to announce that Artie Shaw and Vaughan Monroe would soon be playing nearby.[46] Niswonger continued her sharp critiques of live jazz in the column throughout her sophomore year before moving on to other interests.

When taken together, school yearbooks and newspapers outline the widespread nature of girls' engagement with jazz during the postwar period. These sources show that girls were interested in jazz across geographical location, race, and class. Their listening tastes were varied, and some girls honed their skill as players in school dance bands. The presence of girl jazz columnists also suggests that there was an audience for such columns, perhaps made up of girls who listened to jazz but did not document this preference. If we listen for gender in this record, these sources require us to revise our ideas about the relationship between femininity and jazz. School documents make it clear that schools were a place in which girls could both "do" jazz and perform conventional femininity. At school, girls like Colleen Cole could be white cheerleaders who were also into bebop. Columnists like Loveland, McCulloch, Dunn, and Niswonger could write authoritatively about the music and participate in archiving their own work by joining the editorial staff of school papers. In school ensembles, the saxophone section could wear tulle. As a whole, these documents outline a large audience of everyday jazz listeners, players, and fans and reveal an alternative gendered terrain in jazz history.

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[43] Shirley Niswonger, "Between Times," *Red and Blue*, school newspaper, Alliance High School, Alliance, Ohio, September 22, 1944, 2, archived by the Rodman Public Library and ohiomemory.org, https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p16007coll48/id/1730/rec/18.

[44] Shirley Niswonger, "Between Times," *Red and Blue*, school newspaper, Alliance High School, Alliance, Ohio, April, 21, 1944, 3, archived by the Rodman Public Library and ohiomemory.org, https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p16007coll48/id/839/rec/26.

[45] Shirley Niswonger, "Between Times," *Red and Blue*, school newspaper, Alliance High School, Alliance, Ohio, December 15, 1944, 2, archived by the Rodman Public Library and ohiomemory.org, https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p16007coll48/id/1942/rec/5.

[46] Niswonger, "Between Times."

SWEATERS AND SKIRTS: GIRL JAZZ WRITERS IN *SEVENTEEN*

High school girls' interest in jazz was not a subterranean counterculture. It was routinely represented in the period's most prominent magazine for girls: *Seventeen*. *Seventeen* debuted in 1944 and became an immediate hit.[47] The first issue sold out nearly half a million copies in less than a week, and by 1949, circulation topped 2.5 million.[48] Because circulation numbers are based on sales figures, it is likely that many more actually read the magazine, as each copy was typically shared among multiple girls.[49] As Kelley Massoni describes, *Seventeen's* founding editor Helen Valentine sought to educate girls by including serious reading in every issue and focusing on "'high culture' in literature, art, and music."[50] But *Seventeen* was also deeply commercial. Promotional director Estelle Ellis pioneered the use of market research to define teenage girls as a specific consumer group, and by 1946 the magazine claimed ad revenues north of eleven million dollars.[51] The resulting publication included plenty of advertisements for personal care products, clothing, and housewares (for the future bride). These appeared alongside coverage of current events, fashion, beauty, and jazz. Beginning with the first issue, *Seventeen* ran jazz criticism, profiles, and record reviews. Advertisers also drew on the music's allure to sell products.[52] The ubiquity of jazz in *Seventeen* demonstrates that girls' engagement with the music was not niche. Indeed, the magazine's circulation dwarfed that of trade magazines like *Down Beat*, meaning that while jazz critic Dixon Gayer also wrote for several trades, *Seventeen* provided the largest audience for his work.[53] In many ways, *Seventeen* exemplified the commercial culture that many

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[47] Kelley Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers: A Cultural History of* Seventeen *Magazine* (Routledge, 2016); and Schrum, Some Wore Bobby Sox.

[48] Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox,* 2; *Circulating American Magazines*, James Madison University, http://sites.jmu.edu/circulating/, Accessed March 23, 2025.

[49] Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox*, 2.

[50] Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox*, 2.

[51] *Seventeen* promotional material, reprinted in Kelly Schrum, "'Teena Means Business': Teenage Girls' Culture and "Seventeen" Magazine, 1944-1950," in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures,* ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York University Press, 1998), 143. For a more thorough discussion of *Seventeen's* market research and advertising practices, see Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers*, 81-140.

[52] For an engaging discussion of music and advertising in *Seventeen*, see Lyn Ellen Burkett and Kim Wangler, "Music and Advertising in Seventeen Magazine, 1944-1981," *College Music Symposium* 59, no. 2 (2019): 1–25.

[53] *Down Beat* circulation was around 80,000 in the late 1930s but fell below 40,000 by the early 1950s. For a concise discussion of the history of the magazine see John McDonough, "60 Years of Down Beat," in *60 Years of Jazz,* Frank Alkyer, ed. (Hal Leonard Corporation, 1995), 11, 14.

midcentury jazz critics disdained.[54] Yet it was a major source of jazz knowledge for millions of readers.

Jazz coverage in *Seventeen* was surprisingly broad. In the 1940s, Gayer wrote profiles and record reviews in nearly every issue, and he didn't confine his focus to white bandleaders. Gayer featured Black musicians like Nat Cole, Cab Calloway, Lionel Hampton, and Duke Ellington.[55] Entertainment editor Edwin Miller published a long profile of Mary Lou Williams in the September 1946 issue.[56] Bebop appeared in the magazine beginning in the late 1940s, first in record reviews and then in the biographies of the girl contributors for each issue.[57] In June 1949, for example, Nebraska native Julie Fargo's biography notes that she enjoys listening to "Beethoven, Debussy, and bebop."[58] In August of that year, Marilyn Lerner described herself as "'mad for' jazz, bop, Marian Anderson and 1930 Crosby records."[59] In December, Lois Stolaroff contributed a drawing entitled "Bebop Serenade."[60] In April 1950, Miriam Blumberg published a poem written from the perspective of a bebop player.[61] These examples indicate that girls were listening to a wide variety of jazz styles in the 1940s.

Girls also demonstrated their familiarity with the critical discourse in the jazz press. For example, they often expressed their concern with the boundary between "real" jazz and commercial fluff. As Barbara Loveland wrote in *Seventeen*:

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[54] John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 180.

[55] For the King Cole Trio, see Gayer, "Jazz in Small Packages," *Seventeen,* January 1947, 90-91, 138, Women's Magazine Archive. For Cab Calloway, see Dixon Gayer, "His Hi-Di Highness," *Seventeen,* November 1944, 58-59, 92-93, 95, Women's Magazine Archive. For Lionel Hampton, see Dixon Gayer, "Lionel 'Tadlee Dah Dit Dah' Hampton, *Seventeen,* October 1945, 102-103, 124, Women's Magazine Archive. For Duke Ellington, see Dixon Gayer, "Jazz Takes the Duke Seriously," *Seventeen*, June 1946, 124-125, 130, 132, Women's Magazine Archive.

[56] Edwin Miller, "Mary Lou Williams," *Seventeen,* September 1946, 164-165, 211, Women's Magazine Archive.

[57] "As We Heard Them," *Seventeen,* March 1949, 24, Women's Magazine Archive.

[58] "You Worked with Us This Month," *Seventeen,* June 1949, 42, Women's Magazine Archive.

[59] "You Worked with Us this Month," *Seventeen,* August 1949, 44, 47, Women's Magazine Archive.

[60] "You Worked with Us this Month," *Seventeen,* December 1949, 39, Women's Magazine Archive.

[61] Miriam Blumberg, "Jim...His Story," *Seventeen,* April 1950, 124, Women's Magazine Archive.

> I am a strong adherent of progressive jazz, rather than the commercial vein. Unfortunately, many fine jazz musicians must resort to commercialism in order to make a living…. However, in nightclubs such as Birdland and Bop City, publications like "Metronome," [sic] and the musicians themselves put up a strenuous fight for expression in their music.[62]

Loveland laments that "commercialism rears its ugly head" even in bop but notes Dizzy Gillespie as a favorite.[63] Her conclusions are echoed a decade later by eighteen-year-old Lorraine Botkin, who interviewed Dave Brubeck for the magazine in 1961. Brubeck told Botkin that, unlike popular music, "jazz is for people who are not afraid to be nonconformists."[64] Botkin noted the impact of Brubeck's statement, which she credited with spurring her transformation from a Dixieland fan into a modern jazz aficionado.[65] However, fifteen-year-old Ann Joy Levitt and seventeen-year-old Karen Storey are more diplomatic. Writing in 1950 and 1957, respectively, both girls note that jazz compilation albums play an important role in educating teenagers about different styles of jazz.[66] In these moments, girl writers extend contemporary debates playing out in jazz trade magazines. Through their writing, critical jazz discourse escaped niche publications and spread to a national audience of girls.

However, girls' familiarity with jazz criticism did not necessarily lead to them flout strict midcentury gender roles. More often, girls upheld gendered norms in their jazz writing. For example, in Louise Goldwasser's fiction story entitled "The Whirling Square" (1952), a girl protagonist named Laura competes in a choreography competition against a sophisticated opponent named Todd.[67] Todd takes Laura on a date to Birdland. Goldwasser writes:

> there was Charlie Parker, his contorted brown face expressing his tension, his saxophone weaving out its cool web of off-beat restraint. "Parker's good," Todd was saying, "but Lennie Tristano is tops. Or Stan Getz. I could listen to this stuff for hours." Laura laughed a little. "You amaze me. You're so- so genius-y [sic], and yet you can like this trash." Todd looked at her solemnly… "Laura, you've got to learn not to condemn anything you don't yet understand. Honest, I can see this stuff as a serious form of

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[62] Barbara Loveland, "I Like All Kinds," *Seventeen*, May 1951, 20, Women's Magazine Archive.
[63] Loveland, "I Like All Kinds," 72.
[64] Lauren Botkin, et. al., "Hear Your Heroes," *Seventeen,* January 1961, 95, 101, Women's Magazine Archive.
[65] Botkin, et. al., "Hear Your Heroes," 101.
[66] Ann Joy Levitt, "Popular Records," *Seventeen*, May 1950, 16, Women's Magazine Archive; Karen Storey, "Teens and Jazz," *Seventeen*, January 1957, 86, Women's Magazine Archive.
[67] Louise Goldwasser, "The Whirling Square," *Seventeen,* September 1952, 151, 183-188, Women's Magazine Archive.

> music… it isn't hacked out. Can't you see how intensely sincere they are about it?"[68]

Todd ends up winning the competition with a dance choreographed to George Shearing's "Conception," and Laura is left with only a record of the tune and a copy of Todd's notated choreography. In this instance, Goldwasser is clearly familiar with famous bebop players and the aesthetic values associated with the music, yet her choice of Todd as the arbiter of true jazz knowledge and the usurper of female ambition upholds gendered norms. Goldwasser also further appeals to the specifically white, middle-class femininity of *Seventeen* by citing white musicians Tristano, Getz, and Shearing over Parker.

Advertisers, too, incorporated jazz in ways that might subvert scholarly assumptions about gender and jazz while preserving midcentury gender roles. For example, an early 1950s advertisement for Kotex menstrual products featured jazz.[69] In it, two white teenage couples listen to records. One boy reads off the record sleeve to an attentive couple, while his date stands apart from the group, feigning interest in a book. The record sleeve features the words "Be-Bop" in large letters and an illustration of a trumpeter in silhouette. Below this image, the copy reads: "You figured Steve's the answer to *any* gal's blind date prayer. 'Cause [sic] Steve collects be bop; keeps *everyone* spellbound with those albums! Everyone except Sue, you discover." The copy continues: "to set a gal at ease at problem time, Kotex is the answer."[70] Like Goldwasser's story, this advertisement combines masculinist bebop and with feminine topics like dating and menstrual hygiene, but the jazz connoisseur is ultimately portrayed as male.

Seventeen preserves detailed evidence of girls' engagement with jazz. Girls were clearly familiar with diverse jazz styles, but both girls and advertisers integrated this knowledge into racialized gender roles. I suggest that the girl jazz fans in *Seventeen* require new ways of understanding gender and jazz. In upholding gendered expectations, girls like Goldwasser are not immediately legible as subversive or even feminist. Instead, the jazz coverage in *Seventeen* documents a sphere in which girls did not need to perform masculinity to appreciate jazz, but neither did their love of jazz liberate them from the constraints of midcentury femininity. In fact, with its large-scale circulation and pedagogical outlook, *Seventeen* played a major role in establishing gendered

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[68] Goldwasser, "The Whirling Square," 186.

[69] Kotex advertisement, *Seventeen,* November 1953, 125, Women's Magazine Archive. This advertisement was part of a larger campaign that included others with references to jazz. See Kotex advertisement, *Seventeen,* September 1953, 196, Women's Magazine Archive and Kotex advertisement, *Seventeen,* October 1951, 46, Women's Magazine Archive.

[70] Kotex advertisement, *Seventeen,* November 1953, 125, Women's Magazine Archive.

norms. The ubiquity of jazz in *Seventeen* should spur us to expand our thinking about gender and jazz beyond the borders of masculinity toward more nuanced–and more ordinary–gendered experiences of jazz.

"SEX-CRAZY MEN" AND "SOUND JUDGEMENT": JAZZ IN *TAN CONFESSIONS*

Seventeen was aimed at white girls, but Johnson Publishing Company's romance magazine *Tan Confessions* similarly documents Black girls' interest in jazz at scale. Created in the mold of popular romance pulps like *True Confessions, Tan Confessions* resembles *Seventeen* in its national reach. The magazine began publication in 1950 and reached a circulation of around 300,000 just a year later.[71] After 1952, *Tan Confessions* was renamed *Tan,* but the new version of the magazine maintained the home service features, general interest articles, celebrity profiles, and romantic confession stories that made *Tan Confessions* popular.[72] *Tan Confessions* was intended for adult Black women, but girls made up a large and vocal segment of the magazine's readership. Jazz was also a common topic across the magazine, which included personal essays by jazz musicians, record reviews, and "confession stories" that featured jazz.[73] Because *Tan Confessions* was a romance magazine, its jazz coverage featured themes of sexuality, romance, and domesticity. While jazz stories could be salacious, they typically stopped short of subverting gendered norms. Reader responses, however, were surprisingly varied. In *Tan Confessions*, Black women and girls participated in a vibrant discourse about sexuality that integrated jazz into the female-focused sphere of the romance magazine.

Tan Confessions did not often solicit jazz writing from girls, but girls were frequently represented in the magazine's pen pal pages and "Teen Time" columns. Pen pal solicitations were often sexually charged (information about appearance and willingness to exchange photos were common), and girls

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[71] Leisa D. Meyer, "'Strange Love': Searching for Sexual Subjectivities in Black Print Popular Culture During the 1950s," *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 628-9; *Circulating American Magazines*, James Madison University, http://sites.jmu.edu/circulating/, Accessed March 23, 2025.

[72] I will be using the name *Tan Confessions* when speaking about the magazine in general, but references to some specific examples will include the name *Tan* for accuracy.

[73] A popular feature of midcentury pulp magazines, confession stories typically concerned shocking romantic travails and were ostensibly written by real readers (the "real readers" were more often professional fiction writers and editors). For an in-depth analysis of the stories in *Tan Confessions,* see: Meyer, "'Strange Love'"; Noliwe M. Rooks, *Ladies' Pages: African American Women's Magazines and the Culture That Made Them* (Rutgers University Press, 2004); Philip M. Gentry, *What Will I Be: American Music and Cold War Identity* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

routinely included jazz as a possible topic of correspondence. In 1959, for example, Joya Bennett of Cincinnati wrote: "I am a Negro girl, 16 years old… my favorite pastimes are dancing, reading, and listening to records from rock 'n' roll to progressive jazz."[74] In 1960 and in 1961, respectively, Jean Hill and Betty Jean Jackson also included progressive jazz among their interests.[75] After the magazine's rebranding to *Tan,* teenagers also submitted small articles about themselves for the magazine's regular "Teen Time" column. In 1964, Saundra Denice Cutrer mentioned that her favorite jazz musician was Ahmad Jamal, and 1966, fifteen-year-old Bernice Pittman listed her hobbies as "reading, writing, modern dancing, listening to modern jazz, and… sports."[76] Although *Tan Confessions* was not explicitly for girl readers like *Seventeen*, girl jazz fans are easy to find in these pages.

Jazz is also a common theme in the magazine's confession stories, which typically reinforce traditional gendered expectations. As Noliwe Rooks and Leisa D. Meyer have noted, *Tan Confessions* struggled to resolve the inherent tension between its profitable focus on sexuality and the racial politics of respectability that characterized midcentury Civil Rights organizing.[77] Within this tension, the magazine explores sexuality while ultimately upholding standards of chastity, monogamy, and domesticity for women. The sexually permissive culture surrounding jazz provided a convenient site for this exploration. Stories about jazz almost always involve a woman who encounters sexual temptation or danger in jazz spaces. But rather than eschewing jazz altogether, stories typically conclude with the women and their mates remaining involved in jazz but rejecting the sexual freedom associated with the music.

In 1952, for example, a story called "Confessions of a Band Wife" involves a woman who cultivated her love for jazz as a teenage girl.[78] After eloping with a jazz pianist who later cheats on her, however, the band wife must return to her family home in disgrace. The story resolves when both husband and wife realize

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[74] Joya Bennett, "Pen Pals," *Tan*, August 1959, 6, archived by the Internet Archive on July 22, 2023, https://archive.org/details/sim_tan_1959-08_9_10.

[75] Jean Hill, "Pen Pals," *Tan*, January 1961, 6, archived by the Internet Archive on July 22, 2021, https://archive.org/details/sim_tan_1961-07_11_9; and Betty Jean Jackson, "Pen Pals," *Tan*, July 1960, 6, archived by the Internet Archive on July 22, 2021, https://archive.org/details/sim_tan_1960-07_10_9.

[76] Saundra Denice Cutrer, "Teen Time," *Tan*, December 1964, 11, archived by the Internet Archive on July 22, 2021, https://archive.org/details/sim_tan_1964-12_16_2/page/11/mode/1up; Bernice Pittman, "Teen Time", *Tan*, July 1966, 29, archived by Internet Archive on July 22, 2021, https://archive.org/details/sim_tan_1966-06_17_8.

[77] Meyer, "'Strange Love'," 627-628; Rooks, *Ladies' Pages,* 117.

[78] "Confessions of a Band Wife," *Tan,* April 1952, 21, archived by the Internet Archive on July 21, 2021, https://archive.org/details/sim_tan_1952-04_2_6/page/20/mode/2up.

that faithful monogamy is the true path to happiness.[79] A surprising number of stories involve female jazz musician protagonists, and these have similar endings. A 1958 story entitled "Unworthy of His Love" features a female jazz flute player named Cassie who goes on tour with a band and is impregnated by the charismatic bandleader.[80] After learning the bandleader is married, Cassie accepts an offer of marriage from her friend and bandmate. Again, the story makes no mention of the pair giving up music. In these stories, women are endangered by the sexual permissiveness of jazz culture but ultimately find happiness in monogamy. But these examples also show that respectability politics do not always require women to give up jazz altogether.

In a rare girl-authored article from 1953, the then-teenage jazz singer Toni Harper (or perhaps her publicist) emphatically reiterates this point.[81] Famous for sexually charged songs like "Candy Shop Blues" and "Miss In-Between Blues," Harper makes pains to separate the eroticism of the songs she sings from her own sexuality. She writes: "Odd though it may seem, it is true…Those songs about love and devotion don't apply to me, personally."[82] Harper notes that her mother watches her closely while on tour to protect her from "the sex-crazy men who… sometimes get wild ideas about entertainers, even girls like me."[83] Drawing on firsthand experience to outline the dangers of sexually charged jazz culture, Harper writes that "a girl of 15… is entering the most dangerous period in her life."[84] Harper speaks to the fact that sexual dalliance can have profound consequences for the women and girls on the jazz scene. But by repeatedly

[79] "Confessions of a Band Wife," 63.

[80] "Unworthy of His Love," *Tan*, February 1958, 26-27, 62- 65, archived by the Internet Archive on July 22, 2021, https://archive.org/details/sim_tan_1958-02_8_4/page/26/mode/2up.

[81] Toni Harper, "I've Never Been Kissed," *Tan*, February 1953, 20-23, 50, archived by the Internet Archive on July 21, 2021, https://archive.org/details/sim_tan_1953-02_3_4/page/n5/mode/1up . Harper was not the only child musician to get this chaste treatment in the magazine. Young singing star Frankie Lymon had a similar article entitled "I'm Too Young for Girls" in the November 1956 issue. Harper, Lymon, and boogie piano prodigy Frank "Sugar Chile" Robinson were also rehashed in the article "Is Teen-Age Love Dangerous?" about the "powerful sexual urges" of youths. Frankie Lymon, "I'm Too Young for Girls," *Tan*, November 1956, 18-19, 63, archived by the Internet Archive on July 22, 2021, https://archive.org/details/sim_tan_1956-11_7_1/page/18/mode/1up; "Is Teen-Age Love Dangerous?" *Tan*, February 1958, 8-10, 66, archived by the Internet Archive on July 22, 2021, https://archive.org/details/sim_tan_1958-02_8_4/page/n6/mode/1up. For a longer discussion of girls' writing about sexual violence in *Tan Confessions,* see Emmalouise St. Amand, "Blues and Bobby Sox: Singing Black Girlhood in New York City, 1950-1970" (ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2024).

[82] Harper, "I've Never Been Kissed," 21.

[83] Harper, "I've Never Been Kissed," 23, 50.

[84] Harper, "I've Never Been Kissed," 21.

emphasizing her own chastity, Harper also creates space for her participation in jazz while conforming to gendered notions of respectability.

In both *Tan Confessions* and *Seventeen*, jazz is incorporated into ultra-feminine contexts without challenging them. In *Tan Confessions,* however, readers sometimes question the respectability imperative. This is visible in the reader responses to Harper's article. Fifteen-year-old Ossie Evans, for example, wrote to the magazine to express her dissatisfaction with Harper's puritanical view toward kissing. Evans wrote:

> I am 15 and I've been kissed by boys, but there has been nothing serious. I know how to say "no." There is a limit to how far a girl may let a boy go. Toni should never write another story about not being kissed by a boy or about sex because she doesn't know enough. She should stick to her singing and let girls who are interested in boys take care of their own business.[85]

Evans gestures to the potential consequences of sexual activity while emphasizing her confidence in her own sexual agency and responsibility. Sally Crawford, by contrast, unambiguously approved of Harper's outlook, writing that Harper showed "good sense and sound judgement."[86] Similarly, a Chicago reader identified as E. R. S. wrote that she, too, was "a teenager who has never been kissed" and that she thought that refusing romance was "the best way for a girl to become something in her life."[87] In their responses to Harper's article, Black teenage girls offer their own thoughts on the respectability politics represented in the magazine. Some, like Evans, chafed at the restrictions of propriety. Others, however, appreciated Harper's respect for the potential sexual dangers faced by girls and women in jazz spaces.

In *Tan Confessions,* jazz discourse was explicitly oriented toward female sexuality, domesticity, and romance. And while the magazine contains less girl-authored jazz writing than *Seventeen*, it still provides ample evidence that Black girls were reading, thinking, and writing about jazz at midcentury. The "Teen Time" column and pen pal solicitations allowed girl jazz fans to connect with one another and letters to the editor allowed Black girls to respond to the magazine's coverage. Jazz fiction in confession stories gave girls a way to imagine themselves within a fantasy jazz culture that ultimately valued their safety (if only within a heterosexual marriage). *Tan Confessions* also offers additional

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[85] Ossie Evans, "Letters to the Editor," *Tan*, May 1953, 6, archived by the Internet Archive on July 21, 2021, https://archive.org/details/sim_tan_1953-05_3_7/page/n5/mode/1up.
[86] Sally Crawford and Elizabeth Brooks, "Letters to the Editor," *Tan*, May 1953, 6.
[87] E. R. S., "Letters to the Editor," *Tan*, April 1953, 6, archived by the Internet Archive on July 21, 2021, https://archive.org/details/sim_tan_1953-04_3_6/page/n5/mode/1up.

evidence of the widespread nature of girls' jazz listening, reading, and writing at midcentury.

CONCLUSION

The historical evidence is clear: in the middle decades of the twentieth century, girls were playing, listening to, and writing about jazz. When they could, girls also documented their interest in jazz by contributing to archives of school documentation. For them, jazz was an ordinary part of girlhood in rural areas and urban centers alike. Major magazines like *Seventeen* and *Tan Confessions* reflected this, as both ran jazz coverage with girl readers in mind. These sources show that girls' interest in jazz was highly visible at midcentury, both in local school auditoriums and in nationally circulated publications.

Girls belonged to the majority of jazz listeners, players, and critics who were not famous professionals. If we are to value gender as a way of thinking through and beyond the jazz tradition, I suggest that a fruitful move would be to look beyond the exceptional to the everyday. Writing women jazz musicians back into jazz history is a worthy task, but the girls discussed here were not exceptional innovators or working players. Instead, they demonstrate that requiring exceptionalism, innovation, or even professionalism as criteria for inclusion in jazz history upholds gendered ideas about what "counts" in that history. Girls do not fit into histories of jazz that hinge on "great men" (or great female jazzmen), but nor should they be construed as occupying an alternative history. Truly thinking beyond the jazz tradition requires re-evaluating criteria for historical relevancy to understand how gender structures jazz outside the professional sphere. Continuing to privilege the minority perspectives of exceptional players and male critics means continuing to ignore a large swath of available historical evidence.

Finally, if thinking through gender helps us to expand the jazz tradition, expanding the jazz tradition helps us to think about gender. *Seventeen* and *Tan Confessions* show that the presence of jazz in feminine spaces did not automatically disrupt gendered norms. Instead, when writing about jazz in these publications, girls sometimes went out of their way to uphold racialized gender roles. In this way, girl jazz fans do not always conform with feminist imperatives of resistance or subversion. As amateurs, girls were not required to perform masculinity to enjoy jazz, but their love of jazz was not necessarily liberatory. Scholars have shown how female players expertly negotiated masculinist norms to gain access to professional jazz spaces. But postwar girls' experience with jazz outlines a gendered landscape in which the boundaries between masculinity and femininity were much more porous. Turning toward girls enables us to "listen

for gender" in jazz history with more nuance, even when it may not easily fit within existing disciplinary priorities.

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