

State of the Field: Jazz and Gender, Issue 2 *Letter from the Guest Editor*

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“White supremacy is the child of patriarchy, not its parents.”¹

—Philip Ewell

The current presidential administration’s goal to root out “woke”-ness (read: all historical and cultural movements, artifacts, and people that they disapprove of) has been astoundingly far-reaching.² As I detailed in my first letter to the editor for this double special issue on Jazz and Gender, the elimination of studies across government websites has already directly impacted our subfield.³ And as I write to you for this second issue, jazz remains on the front lines of the current culture war as the administration begins to build its own cultural base.

In June 2025, Jason Moran left his position as the artistic director for jazz at the Kennedy Center, a position he had held since 2011.⁴ Moran did not give an explicit reason, simply concluding a longer, gratitude-filled social media

¹ Philip Ewell, *On Music Theory and Making Music More Welcoming for Everyone* (University of Michigan Press, 2023), 10. After Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 7.

Many thanks to Eugenia Siegel Conte for her thoughtful suggestions and comments on this essay.

² This essay was written before comedian Jimmy Kimmel was pulled from the air by ABC/Disney, seemingly at the urging of Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr. The necessarily lengthy lead times on academic journals have rarely ever combined well with current news stories—a statement that seems now like an understatement of the tallest order. Bobby Allyn, “Legal Experts say pulling Jimmy Kimmel from air may amount to illegal ‘jawboning,’” *NPR*, Sept. 18, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/09/18/nx-s1-5545720/kimmel-abc-carr-fcc-jawboning>

³ Kelsey Klotz, “State of the Field: Jazz and Gender: Letter from the Guest Editor,” *Journal of Jazz Studies* 16, no. 1 (2025), 1–13.

⁴ Elizabeth Blair, “Composer and Pianist Jason Moran is latest departure from Kennedy Center,” *NPR*, July 9, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/09/nx-s1-5461448/jason-moran-kennedy-center>.

statement, posted July 8, “And with that, I bowed on Juneteenth.” That invocation, paired with the earlier departures of artistic directors Renée Fleming and Ben Folds, other artists’ refusal to perform at the storied venue, and the abrupt firings and dismissals of various administrators and board members, offered not-so-subtle clues as to what may have led to Moran’s departure.⁵ On September 11, 2025, it was announced that Kevin Struthers, the administrator who oversaw jazz programming at the Kennedy Center and who had been with the Kennedy Center since 1995 (just one year after Billy Taylor had been named artistic director of jazz at the Kennedy Center), had been inexplicably fired.⁶

One month after Moran’s post, the next bit of jazz news from the Kennedy Center hit my inbox with the subject line, “Jazz is back at the Kennedy Center with the Glenn Miller Orchestra” (Fig. 1). The body of the email promised twice that, “The golden age of jazz is back!” and referred to the Orchestra as “the most popular big band in the world.”⁷ The email begins with a large image of the orchestra—dark-suited men (including only a handful of men of color, none of whom are Black) in red ties holding their instruments, with the leader in a light grey suit leaning casually on a railing. The sole woman—the vocalist—reinforces her liminal space in the band, wearing a black dress and standing next to the band while leaning casually on the leader’s shoulder. According to NPR, as of

⁵ Javier C. Hernández, Robin Pogrebin, and Derrick Bryson Taylor, “Rhiannon Giddens Is Latest to Cancel at Kennedy Center After Trump’s Takeover,” *New York Times*, Feb. 26, 2025: <https://www.nytimes.com/article/kennedy-center-cancel-shows-resignations.html>.

⁶ Anastasia Tsioulcas, “Jazz Head at Kennedy Center is the Latest Firing at the Beleaguered Arts Institution,” *NPR* Sept. 11, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/09/11/nx-s1-5538440/jazz-director-kennedy-center-trump>; Travis M. Andrews and Janay Kingsberry, “Kennedy Center Fires Head of Jazz Programming, Adding to String of Exits,” *The Washington Post* Sept. 11, 2025. In a video interview from 2021, Struthers recognized Billy Taylor as a mentor, and named the Kennedy Center Living Jazz Legends event as among his favored events (he namechecked Black musicians Jimmy Heath, David Baker, Jon Hendricks, and Cleo Laine).

“My KC Story: Kevin Struthers | If These Halls Could Talk,” *The Kennedy Center* Posted Dec. 16, 2021. Accessed Sept. 12, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTkv0EgmEsY&t=2s>.

⁷ The “Golden Age” branding seems to be a throughline for the Kennedy Center’s current attractions. On September 17, the Kennedy Center re-posted an NTDTV news segment highlighting *The Sound of Music*’s run at the Kennedy Center, highlighting the quote, “The golden age of musical theater is now on full display at one of the nation’s most prestigious institutions.” @kennedycenter. 2025. “NTDTV covers the Kennedy Center Red Carpet event prior to *The Sound of Music*.” Instagram, Sept. 17, 2025. https://www.instagram.com/reel/DOtd8CyATYh/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==.

September 2025 “the only mainstage jazz performance still on the Kennedy Center’s schedule” is the Glenn Miller Orchestra.⁸



Figure 1. Screenshot of mailing list email from the Kennedy Center to the author. Sent August 12, 2025.

The Kennedy Center’s promotion of the Glenn Miller Orchestra suggests a conservative approach to musicking, though not in terms of the political ideologies expressed by the artists or the genres assumed to be associated with political conservatism, both of which have been a clear focus of the current administration. Rather, the musical conservatism espoused by this particular performance has more to do with the veneration of jazz as a history and a tradition, and a predominantly white, male one at that. Combined with an all too-common nostalgia bias, jazz—a Black musical tradition heralded by Wynton Marsalis and others as not just a symbol, but a stand-in for democracy—has suddenly been deployed in the new administration’s arsenal of

⁸ Tsioulcas, “Jazz Head at Kennedy Center is the Latest Firing at the Beleaguered Arts Institution.”

cultural assault at what it considers the crown jewel of the United States: the Kennedy Center.

In her book, *Haunthenticity: Musical Replay and the Fear of the Real*, jazz scholar Tracy McMullen uses the term “haunthentic,” an amalgamation of “haunt” and “authentic,” to describe the goals of many live re-enactments of past musical glories. The details upon which these re-enactments rely go beyond the tunes played, stage set-up, or costuming, and instead toward a deeper affective yearning on the part of the audience. As McMullen writes of late twentieth and early twenty-first century jazz re-enactments, “Faced with perpetual discourses of insecurity and fear, it is unsurprising that audiences were increasingly drawn to reenactments that offered performances of the known: performances that provide a sense of stability and mastery, a respite from the open-mindedness, insecurity, and ‘loss of a sense of grounding’ characteristic of postmodernity generally and fueled by political discourse.”⁹ Lacking control and fearing instability, audiences use cultural re-enactments to replay certain idealized moments, privileging certain identities and ideals around citizenship in the process.

McMullen focuses in part on the Yale Concert Band’s April 8, 1994 performance celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day. The performance was a reenactment of an early 1940s Glenn Miller radio broadcast from the very same performing space. For McMullen, Miller’s rise to prominence paved the way for a new kind of white male dominance in the field of popular music. While bandleader Paul Whiteman might be understood as too feminized through his “cultured” approach to concert jazz and Benny Goodman might be associated with a more virile white masculinity through his associations with Black musicians and arrangers, Miller’s authoritative, disciplined, and eventually patriotic performances of white masculinity contained and controlled the femininity associated with commercial popular music *and* maintained a segregated jazz field.¹⁰ Put simply, the retrogressive assault felt by the present-day Kennedy Center’s programming isn’t only because the Glenn Miller Orchestra is named for a hugely famous white big band leader, or that the band enjoys unusual stability in a big band field whose reports of death began almost immediately after World War II, or that it is advertised as bringing the “golden

⁹ Tracy McMullen, *Haunthenticity: Musical Replay and the Fear of the Real* (Wesleyan University Press, 2019), 98.

¹⁰ McMullen, *Haunthenticity*, 119. See also W. Anthony Sheppard, ed. *Beyond the Bandstand: Paul Whiteman in American Musical Culture* (University of Illinois Press, 2024). For more on the gendered relationship between white jazz fans and Black jazz musicians, see Ingrid Monson, “The Problem with White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 48, no. 3 (1995): 396–422.

age” of jazz back, or that the Orchestra is known primarily for performing hits of the 1940s, or even that its promotional imagery so closely replicates the racial and gendered segregations of its origins. To re-perform Miller is to re-create an idealized and normative citizenship around maleness and whiteness, and to deploy it as a form of affective control and comfort. As McMullen writes, “Miller tapped into the desire for the comfort and reassurance of repetition and indeed, of the identical, during troubled times. And what he repeated were images of white masculinity as reasoned and in charge.”¹¹

Musical performances always mean something, and State-affiliated venues like the Kennedy Center create additional layers of meaning, identity, and community with those performances. As jazz scholar Kim Teal demonstrates, various venues and individuals have used Mary Lou Williams as a cultural hero in order to shore up their gender bona fides.¹² Whereas the deployment of Williams helped Ethan Iverson, Jazz at Lincoln Center, and, yes, the Kennedy Center, to address jazz’s “gender problem” across the 2010s, the Kennedy Center is now deploying the Glenn Miller Orchestra to address a different kind of identity issue in jazz—one that aligns jazz with the white masculine fragility/dominance paradigm so key to the current president and his supporters. Given the administration’s persistent efforts in recent months to review and rewrite histories on display at the Smithsonian museums, historical accuracy seems less determined by subject matter experts and more based on outdated American exceptionalist vibes.¹³

As frustratingly impotent as it may seem, one of the most important ways we as scholars can counter inaccurate histories that continue to prioritize the stories of “the wealthy, the pale and the male” over all else, and that subsume anyone else’s stories within them, is to continue doing diligent work as music and culture scholars.¹⁴ When we do this work, we are creating a record of inclusive music

¹¹ McMullen, *Haunthenticity*, 122.

¹² Kimberly Hannon Teal, “Mary Lou Williams as Apology: Jazz, History, and Institutional Sexism in the Twenty-First Century,” *Jazz & Culture* 2 (2019): 1-26.

¹³ Robin Pogrebin and Graham Bowley, “Smithsonian Responds to Trump’s Demands for a Review of Its Exhibits,” *New York Times* Sept. 3, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/03/arts/design/smithsonian-bunch-trump.html>. For citizen historians’ response to threats of Smithsonian review, see Elizabeth Blair, “Wary of changes under Trump, ‘citizen historians’ are documenting the Smithsonian,” *NPR* September 22, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/09/22/nx-s1-5517973/smithsonian-document-citizen-historians>.

¹⁴ “The wealthy, the pale and the male” was a phrase used by Kim Sajet, the former director of the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., to describe the challenges in expanding the historical inclusivity of a museum dedicated to portraiture. In late May 2025, the current president claimed to have “fired” Sajet, though legal scholars doubted his ability to do so.

histories, of cultural histories that speak with marginalized folks and that critique the power structures that so often tip the scales in favor of the same individuals again and again. We need this data and this interpretive work now, and we will need it in the future. This issue of JJS, like the one that preceded it, emphatically continues this work.

THIS ISSUE

I hinted in the previous issue's letter that the editorial team and I took a slightly different approach in these issues than some other journals. As the submissions came in and I read them as guest editor, my priorities were clear cut: beyond ensuring that the proposal was in some way related to both jazz and gender, they needed to 1) be clear (or have the potential to be so); 2) be credible; 3) either present new information or a new perspective; and 4) be able to start or contribute to ongoing conversations in this field. These goals were my way of aligning our editorial process with critiques of paranoid reading by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Heather Love, Suzanne Cusick, and William Cheng.¹⁵ Paranoid reading and writing refers to common assumptions regarding what published academic work is supposed to do or be; it seeks the problematic, prizes power and authority, and ultimately works its way into our writing and editing, encouraging writers to write from a defensive position. In seeking new kinds of academic engagement, Sedgwick, and later Cusick, suggest reparative reading, which would focus on affects aligned with seeking pleasure, including love and hope. Ultimately, reparative reading is additive, building cultural density through its resistance of authoritative knowing. And while, as Sedgwick and

Laura van Straaten, "How a Smithsonian Museum Stopped Being About the 'Wealthy, Pale and Male'," *The New York Times* Apr. 27, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/arts/design/national-portrait-gallery-performances.html>; Robin Pogrebin and Graham Bowley, "Smithsonian Museum Director Trump Said He Fired Decides to Step Down," *The New York Times* June 13, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/13/arts/design/kim-sajet-resigns-smithsonian-national-portrait-gallery.html>.

¹⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke University Press, 2003), 123-51; Heather Love, "Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," *Criticism* 52 (2010), 235-241; Suzanne G. Cusick, "Dreaming Reparative Musicologies in a Paranoid Time," AMS President's Endowed Plenary Lecture, Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society in Denver, CO (9 November 2023); Suzanne G. Cusick, "Musicology, Torture, Repair," *Radical Musicology* 3 (2008), <http://www.radical-musicology.org.uk/2008/Cusick.htm>; William Cheng, *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good* (University of Michigan Press, 2016).

Cusick note, reparative readings can be dismissed by paranoid readers as “weak” or “merely aesthetic,” Cheng adds that the reparative is “reflexive and reflective, unafraid to linger on the naked reasons for why and how we produce critical work.”¹⁶ Sedgwick, Cusick, and Cheng’s approaches to reparative reading suggest the benefit in working against academia’s paranoid norms: that different types of writing (including in terms of structures, emphasis, and logics) serve diverse audiences and purposes—and *that those audiences and purposes are no less valuable* than what academic norms have typically valued.

As the other editors and I reviewed the article proposals for these issues, we were struck by the wealth of information and creativity of the submissions as a whole. Even more, we were awed by the responsibility of choosing which topics (and in many cases, which women) would receive space and attention, and which would remain in the endless file of “understudied jazz women’s history.” This issue features three articles and four case studies. Each contribution is intellectually brave, deeply personal, and contributes something we need in this field—something I believe will be of use to our students and ourselves. Two of the articles heavily feature interviews, in which participants describe their gendered experiences within the jazz field: First, Jenna Przybysz surveys a number of women, non-binary, and gender-queer individuals, asking whether and how they identify with a variety of jazz and gender slogans that emerged between 2017-2019. Then, Theresa Chen interviews a number of Asian and Asian American women jazz musicians to better understand their intersectional experiences in jazz performance and educational contexts. The last article offers a media studies analysis of Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach’s 1964 performance of *We Insist! Max Roach’s Freedom Now Suite* on Belgian television. Marcus Grant focuses especially on the juxtaposition of Lincoln’s sartorial and musical choices with the camera’s extreme close-up shots.

To create more space in this issue, we selected a few additional submissions and asked the authors to conceive of their pieces in a slightly different way—as case studies, which, like our articles, would go through peer review, but which would be more accessible to undergraduate students. Case studies might have an argument, but more importantly, they open up avenues of inquiry for undergraduates or their instructors to follow up on. Instead of a more typical word count for traditional articles, at between 6,000-10,000 words, case studies would be in the 3,000-4,000 word range—making them more easily assignable

¹⁶ Sedgwick “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” 22; Cusick, “Musicology, Torture, Repair”; and Cheng, *Just Vibrations*, 40.

for students who increasingly struggle with longer reading assignments.¹⁷ And with their streamlined focus and shorter length, they would offer a more achievable model of research for research projects. The case study authors succeeded at the additional challenges we presented them with, with topics ranging from the first examination of Marian McPartland's archives (Lael Dratfield) to June Tyson's work with the Sun Ra Arkestra (Meghan Gilhespy) to an investigation of Filipina jazz musicians in the mid-twentieth century (Krina Cayabyab) to an exploration of recent feminist interventions in jazz (A.J. Kluth).

Cheng writes that, "Paranoid work desires authority."¹⁸ As many of us have so painfully and clearly observed over the past eleven months, authority can offer feelings of safety and reassurance to those that fit the unspoken norms of citizenship, but it is always at the cost of freedom and agency, particularly for those who do not fit those norms (and as we have seen, those norms will continue to narrow). Especially now, humanities fields writ large must continue to work against authoritarian logics that would limit methods of knowledge, communication, and creativity. Doing so creates space for new tools and approaches and builds community and solidarity, both of which will safeguard our current historical work, and will sustain more dynamic histories going forward.

¹⁷ Rose Horowitz, "The Elite College Students Who Can't Read Books," *The Atlantic*, Oct. 1, 2024, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2024/11/the-elite-college-students-who-cant-read-books/679945/>.

¹⁸ Cheng, *Just Vibrations*, 4.