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The Hidden Voices: Peggy Gilbert and The International Sweethearts of Rhythm

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The Hidden Voices:





The Hidden Voices:

Peggy Gilbert and The
International Sweethearts
of Rhythm

What is your
interpretation of a
hidden voice?



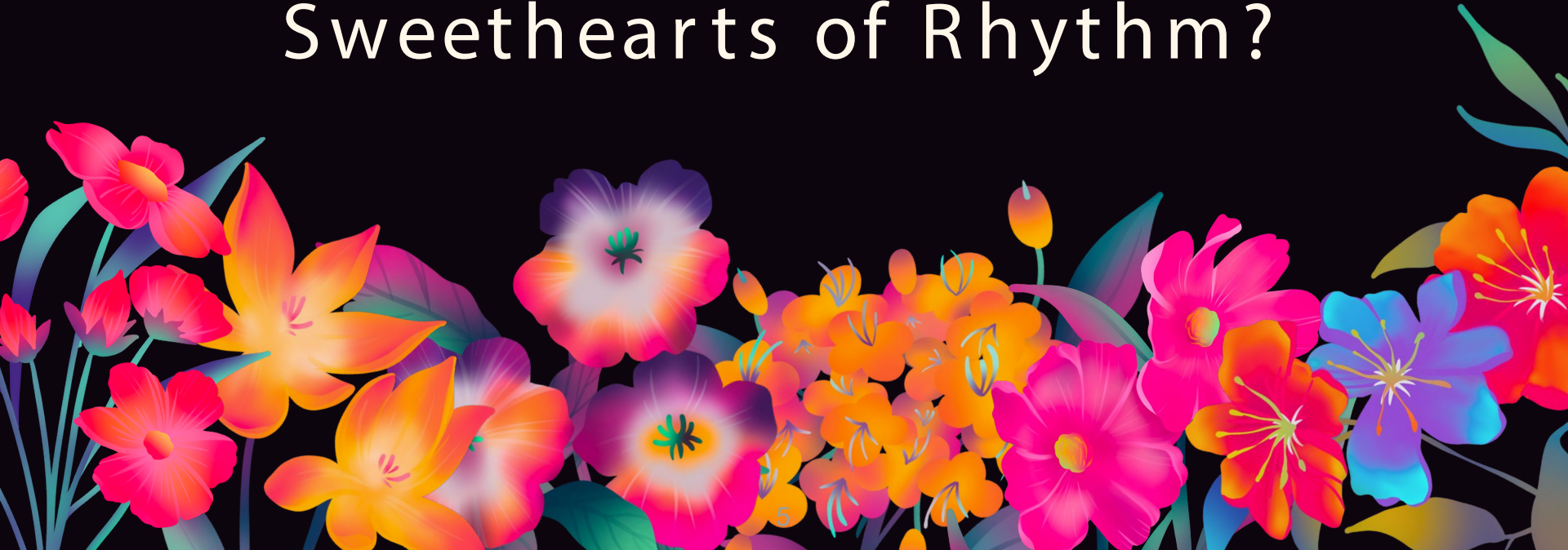
My interpretation



Hidden Voice

I am referencing how the female voice was restricted in the 1920s -60s. I connect this restriction to the female instrumental voice in Jazz. Their musical voice was hidden in music history because of the inferior view of the female players.

Why Peggy Gilbert and The International Sweethearts of Rhythm?





Because their jazz voice was hidden because of their gender. These women are talented individuals that deserve to have their stories told and their music heard.



Sexism

Racism

Intersection of Sexism and Racism

Peggy Gilbert

The International Sweethearts of Rhythm

Conclusion



Sexism

When the genre of jazz emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, women were bound to the societal standard of being housewives, that is, a woman who only cares about the home and the needs of her husband.





Weakness



Stupidity



Sexual Object



Domestic Violence

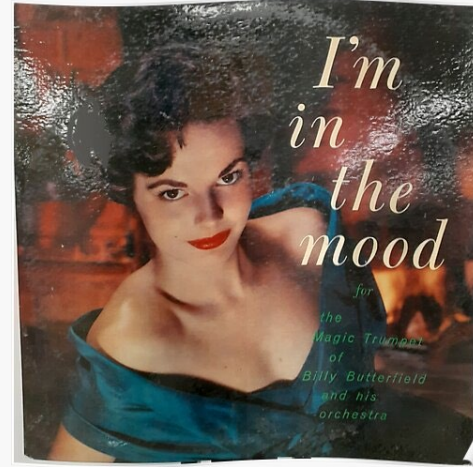


“Women were able to be immersed in the jazz experience and in work opportunities when men fought in World War II...Once men came back from the war, women were expected to regain their previous role of housewife throughout the 1950s-60s.”

In Jayne Caudwell's work, “The Jazz-Sport Analogue: Passing Notes on Gender and Sexuality,” citing Linda Dahl, she states that “instrumental improvisation means assertiveness which means masculinity.”

Women were also eroticized in jazz music as they were eroticized in society. Women were for the service of men allowing for the sexualization of the female body in society and in jazz music.

Female jazz musicians were not primarily appreciated for their talents. These women were objectified for their bodies and thus it was difficult for them to be respected for their talents.





Questions?



Racism



The civil rights movement in the south influenced the African American jazz movement.

The violence and pain the African American people experienced during this movement was what fueled the emotion in jazz.

For example, they suffered the effects of the Jim Crow laws which allowed for the segregation of schools, parks, drinking fountains, restaurants, and restrooms. Each public space had specific places for whites and African Americans.





From this segregation, jazz became a segregated genre with Caucasian performers receiving more performing experience.

The works of Caucasians were marketed to everyone while African American music was limited to other African American listeners.

African Americans were also limited in their performing options through restricted venue opportunities. This segregation caused jazz performed by Caucasians to be promoted more than African American jazz.





Questions?



The Intersection of Sexism and Racism





African American female jazz musicians in the United States had to contend with the combined effects of sexism and racism.

With many African Americans still viewed as less than human in the South, it was difficult for an African American to be respected in society.

With innate disrespect for the African American people, sexism for African American women was intensified.

Where white women may have had a chance of performing in the south, African American women were largely excluded.



African American women, while traveling with men, also had to be hyper-aware of how to coexist in a male dominated environment.

The African American woman, according to the jazz artist Melba Liston, had to be aware of,

- “1) the vulnerability of the black female body;
- 2) the devaluation of the black female body within certain cultural/social spheres;
- 3) how the presence of the African American female body in male-centered spaces could be read as promoting a type of sexual currency that disrupted the power/social relationships among men”





Questions?



Peggy Gilbert



Peggy Gilbert, known for saxophone ability, was a leader in the jazz world. She did not get there without a struggle.

Gilbert struggled with the gender constructs that limited her performing opportunities. No matter how well Gilbert performed, she was still labeled as inferior.

It was not until the late twentieth century that she was regarded as a valid jazz musician.

Through her eight-decade career, Gilbert supported and mentored many female musicians. This helped to bridge the gap between female and male musicians in jazz.

In a 1938 article by Down Beat magazine entitled, “Why Women Musicians Are Inferior.” Gilbert responded with an article of her own that explained the discrimination female performers face.

The magazine published the article with the condescending title, “How Can You Blow a Horn with a Brassiere?” This led Gilbert to be a national advocate for female jazz musicians.



The end of World War II brought many male musicians back into the spotlight. Employment opportunities for women in jazz began to disappear.

Music historian Pool states, "Peggy became the chief advocate for women musicians." Pool continues, "She worked hard to get them jobs and restart their careers. When you see all those musicals, like the Busby Berkeley productions, it was Peggy who got them the jobs."

This exhibits that Gilbert cared as much for other women's careers as she did for her own. Gilbert was constantly devoted to furthering opportunities for female jazz musicians.





Gilbert's retirement was filled with continued performances as a jazz artist. In 1974, Gilbert founded The Dixie Belles. This was a band composed of women in their 60s and 70s.

This group performed in a wide variety of venues including festivals, clubs, parties, and television programs.

The Dixie Belles were incredibly influential because there were very few all -female jazz groups, especially a group of women this age. The Dixie Belles successfully recorded one album entitled *Dixieland Jazz* in 1986 and continued performing together until 1994.



Music



Peggy Gilbert performed with great talent in jazz music.

Through her influence, many women were able to perform jazz.

Gilbert continued to perform during the Great Depression even with limited money, less accolades, and restrictive gender norms.

There was resentment in the Great Depression when women received jobs over men because of limited job opportunities. Because of this resentment, the role of housewife became standard for women in the United States, especially in the south.





Peggy Gilbert & The Dixie Belles
Dixieland Jazz

Peggy Gilbert's most influential album is, *Peggy Gilbert and The Dixie Belles: Dixieland Jazz* .

This is Gilbert's most influential album because it is her last album, thus, it defines her jazz legacy.

Gilbert introduced the Dixieland style of jazz in this album. Up to this point in history, this genre was not widely explored by women.

Gilbert was able to fully explore Dixieland jazz and add her own playing style in the process, becoming a trailblazer for other female artists in this genre.

Peggy Gilbert & The Dixie Belles

Dixieland Jazz



Some unique characteristics in the song, “Back Home Again in Indiana,” include the utilization of a baritone saxophone solo. Baritone saxophone solos were not common in the Dixieland jazz style.

There are also many solos including: the clarinet, trumpet, baritone (bari) saxophone, and piano. This is uncommon because in Dixieland jazz collective solos are more common.

At the end of the piece, the bari saxophone takes the lead. This is unusual for the style because the trumpet usually takes the lead part. The piece ending in a bari saxophone solo is also uncommon because Dixieland jazz ends in one large collective solo.

Gilbert is the bari saxophone soloist throughout. She alters the common lead trumpet role and creates her own musical narrative. Women were rarely afforded the right to their own voice in jazz so Gilbert was a trailblazer for female jazz artists.





Through her contributions to jazz and women's rights, Gilbert's legacy lives on. Peggy Gilbert continued her love of music despite her encounters with sexism. Her art would continually be dismissed as a novelty act, but she still had a successful career. In response to this sexism, Gilbert spent her life fighting for the equality of jazz and never quit performing.





Questions?



The International
Sweethearts of
Rhythm



The Sweethearts were rediscovered by the departments studying women in the 1970s and 80s. The Sweethearts were viewed as political figures rather than musical artists.

The Sweethearts were remembered for their gender rather than for their talents, so it was not until this rediscovery that the Sweethearts were widely regarded as jazz artists.

These women were seen as novelty acts, not as respectable jazz artists in the 1940s. The Sweethearts were prolific jazz artists, but because of their gender, only a small number of their recordings survive.

Helen Jones Woods, a member of the band, states, "My father heard the band over the radio one time and said, 'I've got a lot of girls here. Maybe I could start myself an all-girl band.'" From there, the Sweethearts were born.

The inspiration of one all-white girl band paved the way for a diverse all-girl band. An all-girl group containing different races was unheard of in the south.

One of the original members, Willie Mae Wong, was of Chinese descent. Two other members were of Hawaiian and Hispanic descent. In Mississippi law, white was the superior race and other races were viewed as inferior.





In 1941 the Sweethearts became professionals. This new fame came with two new white performers including a saxophonist by the name of Rosalind Cron.

In the deep south, a white person performing with different races was viewed as a criminal act. Cron said, "We got to Baltimore and I asked Millie Jones, who was part American Indian and part African American, if she'd like to go downtown on a bus with me to window shop."

On their journey, the two women stopped for a soda and they could not get service. Cron continued, "I said to Millie, 'I'm just going to stop this waitress and find out why she's ignoring us. [Millie] got very excited and jumped up and ran up the stairs [of the restaurant]. She was really frightened.'" Millie did not only have to contend with sexism, she had to contend with the racism of the south.



Music



The International Sweethearts of Rhythm performed in the face of adversity and prevailed, establishing a successful jazz career.

The Sweethearts exhibit their talent for jazz in the song “Bugle Call Rag” from the *The Best of The International Sweethearts of Rhythm* album.

This album is influential because it highlights the group's most popular songs.



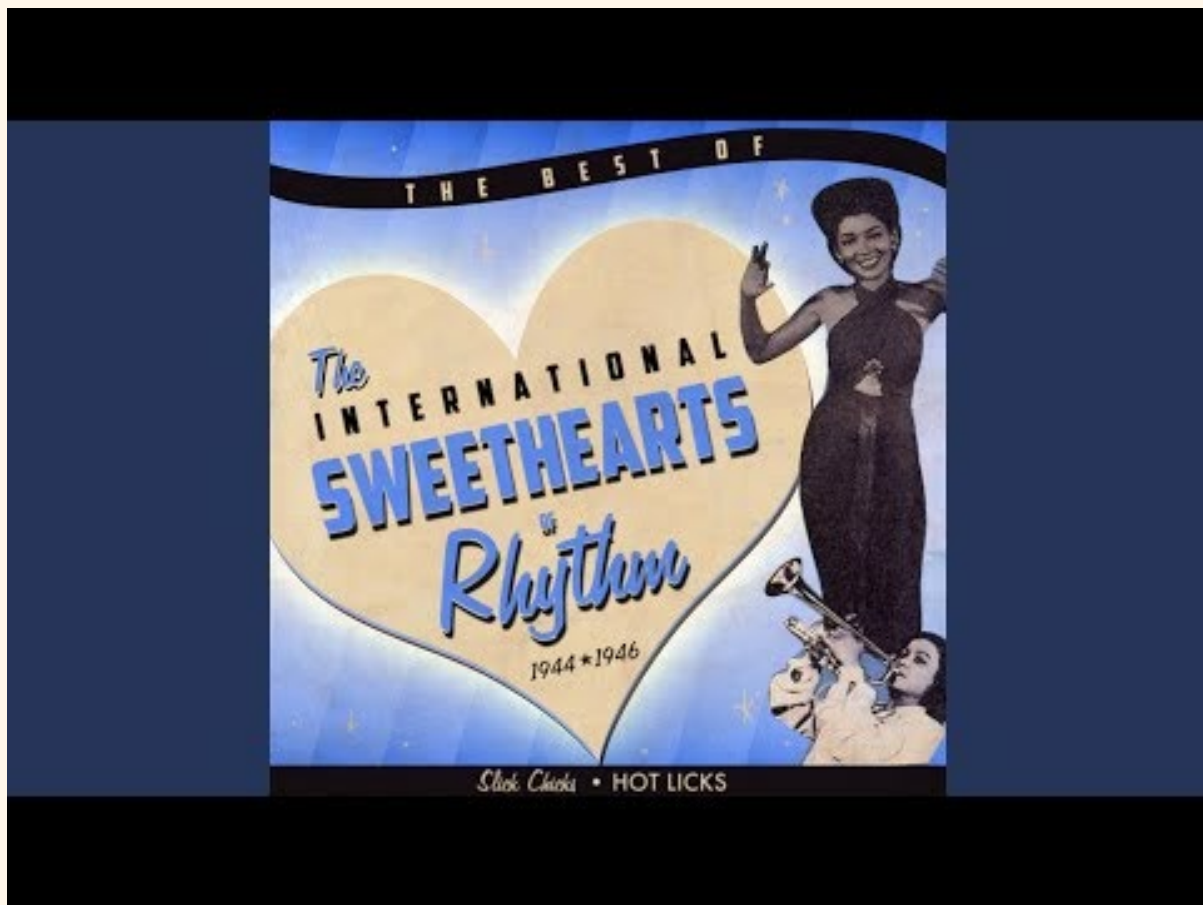


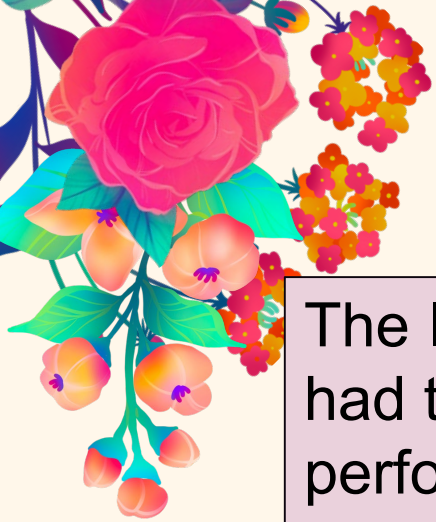
The song, "Bugle Call Rag," has swing attributes throughout with swung eighth notes and beats two and four emphasized.

The song also has the musical attributes of a rag with syncopated rhythms. Syncopation in music means that regular accents are displaced creating a disjunct feeling in the music.

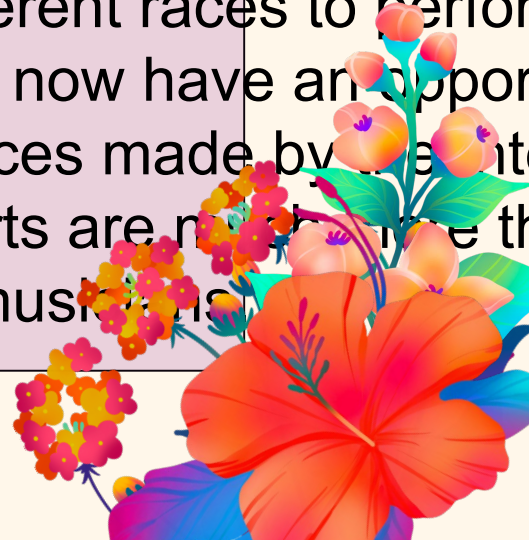
The song was previously popularized by men, and was further popularized by the Sweethearts. The Sweethearts took the song and made it their own by adding their unique sound to the music. These women had to contend with sexist comparison but prevailed despite this criticism.







The International Sweethearts of Rhythm, to do what they love had to combat racism and sexism. To be an African American performing jazz you must accept degradation. The inspiration of the Sweethearts allows more women of different races to perform and leave a lasting legacy. Women of multiple races now have an opportunity to do what they love because of the sacrifices made by the original Sweethearts of Rhythm. The Sweethearts are not just entertainers, like the political figures, they are revolutionary musicians.







Questions?



Conclusion



Women throughout history have all experienced sexism. This sexism affected the career possibilities for women, especially in music. The gender norms and beliefs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries created a restrictive role for women. The woman was meant to be the demure housewife while the man was allowed to achieve. The woman would clean the house, cook the dinner, take care of the children, and support her husband in his endeavors. The woman was always meant to take the supportive role while the man had the career. This began to change when men were shipped off to World War II. The men left a space that women were encouraged to fill. Many women decided to fill the space left by male jazz musicians. Women were able to perform in the male -dominated genre of jazz on a large scale, gaining great opportunities. Once the men came back, however, women were expected to return to their former duties.





The women like Peggy Gilbert and The International Sweethearts of Rhythm did not wish to return to the home. These women wanted to continue to perform jazz. This continuation of jazz performances was not supported and these women were labeled as inferior to male performers. African American women not only had to suffer this sexism, they had to suffer racism. African American women were regarded as too volatile for jazz, suffered name - calling, and were sexually assaulted in the jazz environment. This male - dominated genre of jazz did not encourage female jazz artists to succeed. Despite the struggle of sexism for Peggy Gilbert and the combined struggle of sexism and racism for The International Sweethearts of Rhythm, each of these women created lasting legacies.

