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Mashadi Ione Matabane Date

Axe to Grind:
A Cultural History of Black Women Musicians on the Acoustic and Electric Guitar in the United States

By

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Mashadi Ione Matabane
M.A., New York University, 2001
B.A., Spelman College, 1999

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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ABSTRACT

Axe to Grind:
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By Mashadi Ione Matabane

Though readily recognized as vocalists in American popular culture, black women are generally overlooked as instrumentalists on the acoustic guitar and its more iconic counterpart—the electric guitar. Cultural scholars and writers routinely ignore black women electric guitarists' creative and innovative contributions to the blues, gospel, jazz, and rock of which the instrument is an essential element. This research study documents and explores black women's experiences playing the guitar as creative enterprise and as a means to redefining their roles in life and self-identity beyond racial and gender limitations imposed by the broader society. Black women have a long record as professional and amateur guitarists from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. They have used acoustic and electric guitars to shape and transform their lives for social mobility, entertainment, artistry, recreation, and evangelizing. This study analyzed oral history narratives of contemporary black women musicians discussing how they use the electric guitar in the construction, negotiation, and representation of their identity, self expression, and musicality. Racism and sexism render black women musician's identities as hypervisible and invisible. Still, they employ the electric guitar as a source of distinction, personal achievement, employment, spiritual- and self-expression, and physical and emotional self-defense. As musicians they challenge dominant social meanings and fantasies about the electric guitar as a culturally white and masculine enterprise; demonstrate creative possibilities valuable to the politics of location specific to black women in the United States; and critique popular (often narrow, pathologized) representations of the black female body.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The electric guitar is a culturally iconic instrument in the United States, crucial to evolutions in blues, gospel, jazz, and rock music. Playing electric guitar is typically represented as a masculine activity in popular culture, functioning as a signifier of male sexuality and virility. Yet women, including black women, play the instrument and have a long cultural presence of playing it in blues (Lizzie "Memphis Minnie" Douglas), gospel (Sister Rosetta Tharpe), and rock (Peggy "Lady Bo" Jones). Black women guitarists as instrumentalists are often overlooked in popular culture writings and research where the focus remains on black women as solo vocalists and back up singers. This dissertation explores black women and their engagement with the electric guitar to construct and negotiate their self-presentations, identities, and cultural expressions as musicians.

Mainstream contemporary American culture clearly privileges men as *the* great guitar players and elevates them as the primary creators of rock (usually white men), blues (usually black men), and jazz (usually black and white men). In the 1930s, the electric guitar began to flourish in jazz and, later in the 1940s and 1950s, in blues and rock, respectively. Southern black men such as McKinley "Muddy Waters" Morganfield and Chester "Howlin' Wolf" Burnett are credited with developing a genre of blues in the 1940s, featuring loud electronic amplification of the guitar. Unlike acoustic guitar-based country blues of the 1920s and 1930s, urban blues, as described by many blues scholars, was a new postwar sound of the city fostered by southern transplants (like Morganfield and Burnett) living in Chicago, the music's epicenter.

The musical genre of rock'n'roll was heavily influenced by this electrified blues. Chuck Berry and Otha "Bo Diddley" Bates McDaniel were early innovators of rock'n'roll in the 1950s. As popular musicians, they became known for their singing style, the sounds they created on the electric guitar)and in conjunction with other musical elements), as well as their showmanship on the electric guitar. They helped turn it into a "spotlight instrument."[1] The Bo Diddley beat became a particularly influential signature rhythm pattern that many white male rock musicians emulated and honed well in the 1960s and 1970s in rock bands like The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, The Yardbirds, and The Who—where the electric guitar played a critical role and the lead guitarists became stars.

Most mainstream media and scholarship credit white bands for transforming early era rock'n'roll into rock music despite its multicultural history and clear origins in black music. The term rock is a racialized and sexualized marketing term used by marketers to deny the presence and contribution of black men and women to the music. Based on formal and cultural properties of making music within the commercial music industry, musicians and genres shifted and were differently valued based on race, gender, style, and sexuality as determined by audience marketing priorities. Re-conceptualizing rock'n'roll as rock crystallized the genre as a predominately white youth music produced by white artists and token black artists.

Re-conceptualizing rock'n'roll as rock also hyped the intentional maleness and whiteness of the genre with its exuberant singing, brash attitude, ostentatious body movement, intentional volume and incorporation of sound distortion. But black musicians like Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley helped pioneer all of these elements in the 1950s. To

their credit, many 1960s white male groups did acknowledge their indebtedness to black musicians like Big Bill Broonzy, Muddy Waters, and Chuck Berry. In fact, they generously helped revive the declining careers of some of these older musicians. However, that acknowledgement did not similarly extend to recognition of black women musicians like Memphis Minnie and Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

Susan McClary critiqued this 1960s interracial and transcultural moment that ultimately used black men for the commercial advantage of white bands and ignored black women musicians. New musical borders were created and musical history revised along racial, gender, and sexual lines. British male musicians saw their immersion into black music as a tapping into earthy emotion and sexual virility that they and their culture lacked, but desired to possess onstage. They imagined these qualities to be fully present and available for their consumption in the blues performances of black men. According to McClary, rock musicians universalized blues by making it the vehicle for their own issues of white male alienation at a time when black participation was decreasing in blues and increasing in other popular genres like soul, R&B, gospel, and, later, funk.

Similarly, rock's star instrument, the electric guitar, too, began to crystallize as a predominately white, male, masculine enterprise—though it was a valuable instrument in the sound of R&B, soul, funk and gospel played by predominately black (and male) musicians. Jimi Hendrix stands out in contrast in this regard. Lionized in rock literature as a brilliant instrumentalist playing blues-based rock with a flamboyant onstage attitude, he is credited with producing an innovative repertoire of sounds based on feedback and distortion with the electric guitar.[2]

To make sense of the stratospheric appeal of male electric guitarists like Hendrix and others, the term "guitar heroes" was constructed as a descriptor of their brash and sensuous displays of physical and musical prowess with electric guitars on stage. Guitar heroes, sometimes referenced as guitar gods, made guitar faces—facial gestures made while playing the instrument, as if conquering a heightened musical moment of their own creation with the instrument. Guitar face is often likened to the facial expressions of one in the throes of sexual or religious ecstasy. Male guitarists effectively connected the electric guitar to the enhancement and heightening of their masculinity and sexuality.

Given this historical and cultural context, black women musicians are uniquely situated at a complex intersection of race and gender with the electric guitar. Unlike their male counterparts, they have received little recognition for their cultural contributions. Muddy Waters gained stardom by playing urban blues on an electric guitar in Chicago. But years before Waters, Memphis Minnie played in Chicago as the sole black woman electric guitarist. Her prolific career as a successful singer, songwriter and instrumentalist flourished as the blues changed from country to urban. As one of the first artists to switch from acoustic guitar to the new electric technology, Memphis Minnie helped shape and popularize a more modernized blues. Though influenced by her, scholars cite Muddy Waters far more than Memphis Minnie.

Yet black women have similarly engaged the electric guitar to their own ends. Sister Rosetta Tharpe was the first national gospel star with stellar performances on the electric guitar. Her style of playing became the major impetus for gospel's commercial crossover from black churches to white performance spaces in the late 1930s and 1940s. Tharpe was flamboyant, loud, riveting, and rich. She is only now beginning to be

understood and credited as a rock'n'roll pioneer in wider cultural arenas with the debut of the British-produced documentary *Sister Rosetta Tharpe: The Godmother of Rock & Roll* on PBS in 2013.

This dissertation argues that black women use the instrument to shape and transform their cultural identities, self-representations, and cultural productions. And that their engagement of the electric guitar helps make "visible the power, control, and autonomy of [their] culturally contested black female bodies."[3]

Black Womanhood in the United States

Since the beginning of slavery in America, African American women's bodies have been exploited by what has been called "economies of the flesh."[4] With sharp limitations upon them, enslaved black women lacked the autonomy to define and represent themselves, much less improve their life chances and self-expressions. Prevailing constructs of femininity framed as piety, protection, and purity that brought some protection and security for females were reserved for white women. Black women were portrayed as the desexualized mammy[5] and oversexed Jezebel. Patricia Hill Collins calls these "controlling images," images of a black woman that were always available and ready to serve white interests.[6] At the same time, continuing legacies of racism and racial segregation propel black women into a vibrant resistance seeking liberated and self-generated representations of themselves as women. One significant arena of black female visibility is the entertainment field because it is an historic critical location for black female labor and black female cultural and artistic expression.

The ability to act, dance, sing, and choreograph became real ways for black women to transform and broaden the landscape of their lives beginning in the middle

nineteenth century. Daphne DuVal Harrison, Angela Davis, and Jayna Brown denote, in particular, turn-of-the-century black women performers as preeminent travelers throughout the United States and Europe. As innovators of the cakewalk, blues and jazz, these black women performers functioned, according to these scholars, as independent liberatory sexual subjects—often with emergent feminist consciousness—reclaiming their bodies in and through creative work. "Black female expressive artistry,"[7] and the practices of glamour that are part of entertainment confront "the public history of black female sexualization,"[8] which is based largely on distortion and abuse. Despite marketing biases and marginalization, black women have been highly acknowledged as solo or backup vocalists.

While the singing black woman can be understood as a spectacle, my interviews with contemporary musicians suggest that a woman risks being obscured and commercially marginalized if she also plays an electric guitar. And while acoustic guitars are historically within the purview of women, there is no recognizable popular legacy of black women with an electric guitar strapped onto her body. This study asks how black women electric guitarists deal with this skewed racialized, gendered, and sexualized economy of visibility that impacts their value in the entertainment market. They evoke what Daphne Brooks (2006) calls "bodily insurgency" in reference to "the renegade ways that racially marked women use[d] their bodies in dissent of the social, political, juridical categories assigned to them."[9]

Women playing an electric guitar can experience a resourceful corporeality, immediacy, sense of space, and interiority made external. This "bodily insurgency" puts into play a historically-situated black female body that is also continually creative and in

metaphorical and material motion. These artists also challenge and disrupt male dominance over the instrument.[10]

Theoretical Framework

This research study documents and analyzes the lives and careers of five contemporary black women electric guitarists in the United States. As an interdisciplinary study, it draws upon different interpretive strategies and source materials from American studies, African American studies, popular music studies, and women's studies. While primary emphasis is on African American history, culture and identity, this study incorporates gender as a primary category of analysis interwoven with race, class, sexuality, and geography. Throughout this study, there is documentation of the cultural presence and participation of black women playing the electric guitar as an iconic instrument of power and technology. Wielded by men, the electric guitar functions as an extension of the male body, thus superimposing gender on African-American cultural perceptions of the instrument. Within this research I examine the broad but overlooked existence of the legacy of black women musicians on the electric guitar in blues, gospel, jazz, and rock. This study uses oral history to reveal how contemporary black women artists employ the electric guitar to construct and negotiate their musicianship on and off stage; and their identities as musicians who are culturally- and self-identified as black women in the United States.[11] I examine sociocultural factors that inhibit and inspire this overlooked population's sense of self and musicianship with the instrument strapped to their bodies. In this regard, the approach is linked to music being spatial, that is, explicitly and implicitly connected to real and imagined physical, geographic, and symbolic sites, spaces and places.

African-American Identities in the United States

Michelle Wright (2004) posits that black people's historical encounters with slavery and the continuing legacies of racism make the social constructions of race and ethnicity highly salient elements in the formation and negotiation of black identity. In the United States, black identity is typically synonymous with an evolving stylized set of social behaviors and negative stereotypes created by the dominant white society that intentionally distorts the black image and disregards black cultural diversity. In 1892, educator Anna Julia Cooper observed black women's uniqueness in this quandary, "She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or unacknowledged factor in both."[12] Eleven years later, echoing Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) stated, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness…one ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro."[13] As a product of his times, Du Bois's reference was exclusively male, conflating the black experience to that of black men. But, as Wright notes, it is critical to think about " 'Blackness' as a social category produced in relation to both gender and sex categories." Otherwise, "Even peoples defined by the *same* racial category can be rendered Other in *different* ways" (emphasis in the original).[14] Understanding notions of blackness that are inclusive of gender enables an understanding of the ways in which, as Deborah King (1988) writes, "A black woman's survival depends on her ability to use all the economic, social, and cultural resources available to her from both the larger society and within her community."[15]

There are powerful discourses attempting to render blackness as monolithic that ignore evidence of identity development as a fluid process shaped by multiple situational contexts and sociocultural factors like race, class, and gender, and spatiality. Stuart Hall

(1996) calls this dense network "adaptations," "molded to the mixed, contradictory spaces of popular culture."[16]

> There is, of course, a very profound set of distinctive, historically defined black experiences that contribute…But it is to the diversity, not the homogeneity, of black experience that we must now give our undivided creative attention. This is not simply to appreciate the historical and experiential differences within and between communities, regions, country and city, across national cultures, between diasporas, but also to recognize the other kinds of difference that place, position, and locate black people.[17]

Hall is arguing that the black cultural repertoires of how black people may walk, wear their hair, talk, sing, and produce art are not reflections of something essential or biological, but part of their many responses to the limitations and opportunities of their historical-cultural moments.[18] Blues, gospel, jazz, and rock are "artistic products and aesthetic codes which, though they may be traceable back to one distinct location…[that] have been changed either by the passage of time or by their displacement, relocation, dissemination through networks of communication and cultural exchange."[19]

Feminist Discourses of Geography (Space & Place) and the (Black) Female Body

To their credit, feminist theories of the body have moved beyond homogenized structured binary thinking about women's bodies. Feminist philosopher Moira Gatens (1995) says theorists of sexual difference have their eyes on shifting conceptions of power, bodies, and difference that are potentially advantageous. As such, they have expanded the object of their study from the physical body to the body as lived, "the situated body."[20] Thus affirming that "difference does not have to do with biological 'facts' but rather with the manner in which culture marks bodies and creates specific conditions in which they live and recreate themselves."[21] Moving past a dualist biological essentialism to acknowledge the historical realities of what it means to be in a specific

kind of body in a given time and space, Gatens likens her perspective to an account of the body influenced by Benedict Spinoza:

> A productive and creative body which cannot be definitively 'known' since it is not identical with itself across time. The body does not have a 'truth' or a 'true' nature since it is a process and its meanings and capacities will vary according to its context. We do not know the limits of this body or the powers that it is capable of attaining. These limits and capacities can only be revealed by the ongoing interactions of the body and environment.[22]

In this study, the electric guitar is viewed as a critical element for understanding black female embodiment and establishing new theories of corporeality for black women. While Gatens fails to look at the impact of race on gender, I use her scholarship to propose a theory of corporeality of black women. I assign them vitality that assumes a capacity for self-determination and self-empowerment. I assume that this approach will account for the multiplicative and interlocking range of differences that have real material affects on the human embodiment of black women.

Black feminist critiques of the black female body provide other important theoretical frameworks in this study including Collins's "economies of the flesh," Brooks's "bodily insurgency," Angela Davis's research on blueswomen singers, and Jayna Brown's work on black women singer-actors and chorines. Angela McKittrick's (2006) theory of "material and imagined geographies"[23] that, for black women, uphold a legacy of exploitation, exploration and conquest provides a framework for examining black women playing music of different genres. "The category of black woman is intimately connected with past and present spatial organization and [that] black femininity and black women's humanness are bound up in an ongoing geographic struggle."[24] Black women are intimately connected to and bound up in what McKittrick calls an "ongoing geographic struggle."[25] It is productive to consider the ways in which

black women negotiate and think about their surroundings. Paying attention to space and place can reveal the existence of changeable environments where black women are influential.

Black feminism unequivocally recognizes race and gender as syncretic categories of analysis in the construction and negotiation of black women's lives. It is critically attentive to racist and patriarchal structures of power and domination while challenging black male experience as the sole or leading indicator of black American experience. It inherently affirms black women as producers of knowledge, and acknowledges the reality of their own shifting decisions, desires, and demands.

By proposing a guitar-race-gender-body analysis I acknowledge black women electric guitarists as individuals with vitality, sharing a mutual recognition of the existence of socially-constructed categories (race, class, gender, sexuality) that impact their lives. At the same time, this offers a way to be attentive and respectful of their heterogeneity in using the electric guitar in the formation, valuation and negotiation of their self-representations and cultural productions.

Research Questions

This dissertation explores the following questions:

- How do contemporary black women engage the electric guitar in their music and in their broader lives?
- How do contemporary black women's racialized and gendered uses of the electric guitar impact their cultural identities, self-representations, and cultural productions?
- How do contemporary black women's racialized and gendered uses of the electric guitar offer a critique of limited popular representations of black women's bodies and black womanhood?
- How do contemporary black women's racialized and gendered uses of the electric guitar construct alternative representations of black female bodies and constructions of black womanhood?

Methodology

This is a qualitative research study using oral history interviews as its chief methodology. The oral interview facilitates what George Lipsitz (2007) calls "alternative archives of history" or "the shared memories, experiences, and aspirations of ordinary people, whose perspectives rarely appear in formal historical, archival collections."[26] Black women electric guitarists clearly need an archive of history. I conducted oral history interviews with ten black women electric guitarists. Their responses have informed the dissertation's focus on interviews with five of them. These interviews constitute a critical case sample, which is a process of selecting a small number of important cases—cases that are likely to "yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge."[27] From this, logical generalizations about the women interviewed and theoretical perspectives can be developed from the weight of the evidence.

The women in my cohort differed in age, generation, class, skin color, region, racial-ethnic identification, repertoire, performance style, and/or musical approach. Almost all have a demonstrated propensity toward public recognition through maintaining internet sites, selling their music, public performing, and being interviewed for media. I solicited narrators and found the names of narrators through snowball sampling, research, social media (Facebook and Twitter), word-of-mouth (personal and professional contacts), individual artist websites, as well as niche blues, rock, jazz, gospel organizations and websites.

In this study, the term musician means a person who plays a musical instrument. Musician and instrumentalist will be used interchangeably. The terms singer and vocalist

are reserved for performers who sing only and do not play a musical instrument unless otherwise noted.

Oral History

Oral history interviews provide "words, experiences, and impressions"[28] that enable me to analyze how the musicians in my cohort understand the specific ways in which they select, form and negotiate their cultural identities, cultural productions and self-representations with the electric guitar. Foucault (1980) writes of sets of "subjugated knowledges" relating to the lives and experiences of marginalized people that have been dismissed by dominant knowledges as hierarchically inferior, or "beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity."[29] Keen qualitative interviewing helps transform knowledge about ordinary black American women by positioning them as critical sources of socially significant histories formerly overlooked and ignored. Barbara Christian (1987) aptly notes that marginalized people of color have long produced theory, but often in the creative realm of stories and riddles, not necessarily within Western abstract logic forms.[30] From the words of my subjects, I searched for patterns, similarities and dissimilarities, trajectories of development, repetitive details, omissions, exceptions, and contradictions. Particular themes of interest included: faith and spirituality, relationships with other black women electric guitarists, mobility, travel, dress and style, creative self-expression, body comportment, labor, and music-making practices.

Chapter Descriptions

With chapter one as the introduction, the rest of the dissertation is organized into four content chapters and the conclusion. Chapter two is a literature review that

examines the cultural politics of the acoustic and electric guitar through those blues, rock and guitar sources that have defined or contributed to the guitar, especially the electric, being idealized as a male instrument; rock as a white male endeavor; and blues as a black male endeavor. It also covers the trend of books from the late 1990s into the 2000s that focused on recovering women's musicianship in American popular music—as a result of those rock, blues and guitar sources that largely ignored and/or marginalized women's participation as influential singers and musicians.

Chapter three documents the representational legacy of black women on the acoustic and electric guitar in the United States. It offers summary analyses of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield (mid-nineteenth century) and Memphis Minnie (early-to-mid twentieth century) to reveal how musicianship opened possibilities for different spatial, visual and musical strategies that transformed the landscape of their lives. These two women serve as a baseline of comparison to the guitarists in this study. A key goal of this chapter is to continue the work of establishing a history of black women's association with guitars in American popular music.

Chapter four examines an oral history of Beverly "Guitar" Watkins, of Atlanta, Georgia, as a study of her organized effort, performance practices, beliefs and attitudes. Ms. Watkins is the oldest musician that I interviewed so her life and music-making span decades of historic social and cultural changes in America. Watkins is a professional musician who played in the band of notable artist Piano Red, with whom she opened for James Brown and Ray Charles during the 1960s. With the help of the Music Maker Relief Foundation, she has experienced a revived interest in her blues and gospel. Watkins is a lifelong Southerner, born and raised in the region that created the genre

through which she has worked in over forty years to earn a living to sustain herself and through which she exhibits creativity. Through analysis of her oral interview, this chapter documents elements of her life story and analyzes particular themes about how the electric guitar has shaped the course of her life, impacted how she constructs and understands herself, and how she uses the instrument to negotiate broader issues of race, gender, and genre.

Chapter five focuses on four professional musicians: Cheryl Cooley, Jennifer Bliss, BB Queen, and Suzanne Thomas. Cheryl Cooley, of Southern California, is a founding member of the popular predominately-black female band Klymaxx who experienced great commercial success in the 1980s. Today, Cooley tours and performs under the name Klymaxx as lead guitarist and singer throughout the west coast. Jennifer Bliss is a professional guitarist in Atlanta, Georgia. She was a member of an all-black female band that was almost signed to a large, mainstream record label in the mid-1990s. Now she is an independent musician who works as a studio and touring musician. BB Queen is an independent blues musician from Detroit, Michigan, who has been performing in public since she was a little girl. Suzanne Thomas, of Southern California, is lead guitarist and vocalist in her band, Suzanne Thomas and the Blues Church. In the 1980s, Thomas formed and played in several hard rock bands. Today, she is a music educator with an emphasis on preserving black musical forms such as blues music.

Because they vary in age, class, generation, level of musical prominence, body size, skin tone, life experience, and genre, these women are a valuable coterie through which to describe the opportunities and exigencies of black women electric guitarists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They contend with a mix of the historical

resonances of race-based musical categorization and promotion practices of mainstream recording industry, as well as the late capitalist-era rise of the Internet which has contributed to a democratization of access to resources valuable to creating music, producing music, and promoting music autonomously (especially independently, albeit complexly) from the vagaries of major labels.

Through analysis of their oral interviews, this chapter documents elements of their life stories and analyzes particular themes about how the electric guitar has shaped the cultural productions of these women and helped them construct self-presentations—across shifting sociohistoric contexts. Specifically, I show how the guitar furnishes them with the means to formulate their identities and inhabit their black female bodies in very public ways on their own terms that defy popular representations of them. In addition, I examine how their music-making practices with the instrument provide them the means to enter, structure or otherwise adapt different spaces to accommodate them physically and musically.

The concluding chapter summarizes what was learned from the oral interviews and their support for new and existing theories of the vitality and corporeality of black women. It elaborates upon the implications and contributions of black female engagement with the electric guitar leading toward a (re) enchantment with the black female body (intact with integrity).[31] The chapter presents recommendations for future research. It emphasizes the critical need for studies of gendered black cultural expressions and bodily representations of black women musicians and challenges the hegemony of mainstream blues and rock scholarship centered on masculinity and the male experience as the *authentic* driving forces of musical creation and development.

NOTES

1. Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and The Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 116.

2. Aside from Hendrix, Prince, Lenny Kravitz, and Vernon Reid of Living Colour (the sole chart-topping black rock music band) remain the only black male electric guitarists of pop cultural renown. This is not the case for white male electric guitarists.

3. Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 315.

4. Lisa Collins, "Economies of the Flesh: Representing the Black Female Body in Art," in *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture*, ed. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 103.

5. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, author of Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory (2009) stresses using the term de-sexualized instead of asexualized, in order to express her innate sexuality as a human being that is denied by the stereotype. Cite more properly.

6. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and The Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

7. Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and The Shaping of The Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 117.

8. Ibid.

9. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 158, 162, back of cover.

10. The following are sources from which I draw general ideas or build upon: black identity**:** *Black Popular Culture* (1992) edited by Gina Dent, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) by Paul Gilroy; *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African American Diaspora* (2004) by Michelle M. Wright, "Black Immigrants: The Experience of Invisibility and Inequality" by Roy Bryce-Laporte in *Journal of Black Studies* 3, no. 1 (1972), *Cultural Trauma, Slavery and The Formation of Africa American Identity* (2001) by Ron Eyerman; black women in music: "They Say She's Different: Race, Gender, Genre, and The Liberated Black Femininity of Betty Davis" by Maureen Mahon in *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 23, no. 2 (June 2011), *Shout, Sister, Shout!: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe* (2007) by Gayle Wald; music genres: *Soundtracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place* (2003) by John Connell and Chris Gibson, T*he Right to Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and The Cultural Politics of Race* (2004) by Maureen Mahon, *Rip It Up: The Black Experience in Rock* (2004) by Kandia Crazy Horse, "The Development of The Blues" by Allan More in *The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music* (2002), "Rock: Kick Out The Jams" by Gene Santoro in *The Guitar: The History, The Music, The Players* (1984), *Singing in My Soul: Black Gospel Music In A Secular Age* by Jerma Jackson (2004); women and the electric guitar: "Women and the Electric Guitar" (1997) by Mavis Bayton in *Sexing The Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, *Woman with Guitar: Memphis Minnie's Blues* (1992) by Paul and Beth Garon; the electric guitar: *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and The Shaping of Musical Experience* (1999) by Steve Waksman, *Midnight Lightning: Jimi Hendrix and The Black Experience* (2003) by Greg Tate; women in music: *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Swing Bands of The 1940s* (2000) by Sherrie Tucker, *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of A Century of Jazzwomen* (1989) by Linda Dahl; methods: *Oral Narrative Research with Black Women: Collecting Treasures* (1997) edited by Kim Vaz; black women: *Skin Deep: Spirit Strong: The Black*

Female Body in American Culture (2002) edited by Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (2003) by Hortense Spillers.

11. Edmund T. Gordon and Mark Anderson, "The African Diaspora: Toward an Ethnography of Diasporic Identification," *The Journal of American Folklore* 112, no. 445 (summer 1999): 282–96.

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13. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Boston Globe Family Classics (Paperview LTD in association with The Boston Globe, 2005), 11.

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15. Deborah King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," *Signs* 14 (1988): 49.

16. Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?," in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 28.

17. Ibid., 30.

18. Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. Kuan-Hsing Chen and David Morley, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 1996).

19. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 80.

20. Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 11.

21. Ibid., 71.

22. Ibid., 57.

23. Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and The Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxii.

24. Ibid., xvii.

25. Ibid.

26. George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xi.

27. John A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 91. "Key informant bias" exists but is ameliorated because I am not aiming to make claims that these women's statements are generalizable for *all* black women electric guitarists.

28. David Freeland, *Ladies of Soul* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), xiii.

29. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 82.

30. Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987): 52.

31. Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

CHAPTER 2: RACE, GENDER, GENRE, AND THE GUITAR

Black women in the United States have an enduring legacy playing the acoustic guitar and the electric guitar. *Axe to Grind: A Cultural History of Black Women Musicians on the Acoustic and Electric Guitar in the United States* documents and analyzes the musicianship and life experiences of black women players of the acoustic and electric guitar in American popular music. This chapter is a review of the literature on this topic, organized around the principle of intersectionality—of race, gender, genre, and the guitar—from historical and contemporary perspectives.

I argue that it is typical for literature about the guitar to overlook and ignore women electric guitarists. At the same time, when women's musicianship on the electric guitar is acknowledged that it is praised, exceptionalized, separated out, briefly highlighted and condescended to. Therefore, conducting research about black women guitarists means contending with the stories of a broad range of white women electric guitarists whose historical and contemporary experiences constitute the bulk of content about women electric guitarists in the literature. Black women's participation is typified by a presence limited to the historical and the historicized.

The review draws from an interdisciplinary mix of influential academic scholarship, popular cultural criticism, and mainstream media articles to provide a critical overview of how raced- and gendered bodies function and matter. Information about women's musical activity in rock, for example, has largely resulted from the combined work of scholars and cultural critics (mainly women). The middle to late 1990s experienced a surge in popular media texts about women's musical activity in

mainstream book publishing. Many authors cite this surge as a positive and critical response to a period of time when women artists appeared to be enjoying especially great visibility, success, and popularity in both mainstream and independent music scenes in the United States.[1]

Books such as *She's A Rebel*: *The History of Women in Rock and Roll* (1992) *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop, Soul* (1995), *Rock She Wrote* (1995), *Trouble Girls: The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock* (1997), *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The True, Tough Story of Women in Rock* (2001), *20th Century Rock and Roll: Women in Rock* (2001), and *Girls Rock! Fifty Years of Women Making Music* (2004) explicitly make visible women's longstanding, ongoing participation across genres and eras in the United States as musicians and instrumentalists. In particular, the literature reiterates black women's representational legacy as vocalists in American music, as solo vocalists and girl group members. As such, the core literature of interest responds to the following questions: 1) What are the prevailing conceptualizations and representations of the electric guitar rooted in American popular music (notably blues and rock)? and 2) How do black women guitarists show up in the literature?

This chapter offers diverse evidence demonstrating the dissertation's foundational assertion that black women's musicianship on the electric guitar, in particular, has been and continues to be overlooked and subjected to limitation. In conversation with the dissertation chapters that follow, the bibliographic essay also demonstrates the critical value of the dissertation's particular methodological and analytical choices. I consider black women's musicianship from a critical feminist perspective, bearing in mind what it

can mean to see or to be a black woman with an electric guitar strapped across her raced female body.

The Ultimate Guitar Hero

The electric guitar's critical use in the creation, innovation, spread, and performance of popular music is the topic of books like *The Electric Guitar: A History of An American Icon* (2004) and *The Guitar: The History, The Music, The Players* (1984). The electric guitar's mainstream popularity is linked to the advent of blues, and rock music.[2] And cultural critics like Gene Santoro, in "Rock: Kick Out the Jams," and Robert Palmer, in "The Church of the Sonic Guitar," describe the instrument as "the soul" of rock and rock's "sonic and iconographic *summum bonum*," respectively.[3]

In the process, literature about the guitar reveals rock and blues as gendered spaces as narratives are typically historicized through the experiences of male artists whose musicianship is canonized. In a selective collection of interviews published in *Guitar Player* magazine across decades, music writer Jas Obrecht declares Muddy Waters as the major figure responsible for translating acoustic country blues into urban, electric blues. Santoro (1984) gives Chuck Berry singular credit for originating the rock guitar sound. He also identifies Jimi Hendrix as the figure whose playing later remade the electric guitar as an instrument thereby changing the contours of rock.[4] And it was Eric Clapton, according to *The Guitar Gods: The 25 Players Who Made Rock History* (2009), who "singlehandedly escorted the stinging classic blues style of Chicago into rock music."[5] This is a canon that has room for multiple innovators and pioneers, as long as they are male.

Idealized as the provenance of men, scholars like André Millard in *The Electric Guitar: A History of An American Icon* (2004) argue that the iconography of the electric guitar evokes "certain masculine depictions of the American way of life: powerful, shiny, complex, rebellious, and eminently desirable."[6] Playing the electric guitar is considered a rite of passage for teenage boys.[7] Its sound, Millard says, "has an immediate and persuasive impact on young men."[8]

Mainstream consumer and service magazines appeal to and reiterate these intertwined perspectives linking together notions of maleness, the male body, and the electric guitar. Advertising itself as "the world's best-selling guitar magazine" and as "the largest guitar magazine in the world,"[9] *Guitar World* believes that "America has an obsession with the rock-and-roll lifestyle…we're how they connect with it."[10] "They" are the magazine's readership, which according to its promotional literature, is 92 percent male and college educated.

In their titles and content, books like *The Guitar Players: One Instrument and Its Masters in American Music* (1982), *Legends of Rock Guitar: The Essential Reference of Rock's Greatest Guitarists* (1997), *Talking Guitars: A Masterclass with The World's Greats* (2004*), Legends of Rock Guitar: The Essential Reference of Rock's Greatest Guitarists* (1997), and *Guitar Gods: The 25 Players Who Made Rock History* (2009) attest to the electric guitar as the provenance of men (mainly white and male) and implicitly and explicitly stoke cultural fantasies of the guitar hero. The guitar hero is a rock star, a musician who is largely understood in popular and academic literature as engaging in a public spectacle of virtuosity, maleness, sexuality, and loudness with the electric guitar on stage.

With the trope of the mythical guitar hero, Santoro (1984) argues that the electric guitar functions as a critical "prop" in service of male masculinity and sexuality. Millard (2004) frames its emergence in terms of "the 1960s when electric guitar technology merged with an English interpretation of African American blues traditions and some timeless Western ideas of masculinity."[11] For him, and others, Jimi Hendrix is the "ultimate sixties guitar hero," transmitting a "climax of sexuality and virtuoso playing."[12]

Palmer (1992) has described such 1960s-era male musicians as "worshippers in the church of the sonic guitar." In an essay of the same title, he describes this as "a vast, high-vaulted cathedral vibrating with the patterns and proportions of sound-made-solid."[13] Speaking to the enjoyment of a particular kind of aggrandized status linked to their aggressive and hypersexual showmanship with the electric guitar in hand, in *Boogie Lightning: How Music Became Electric* (1971) Michael Lydon and Ellen Mandel waxed about the guitar "electrified and played by a handsome young man, it can be devastating."[14]

According to Rebecca McSwain (1995) in "The Power of The Electric Guitar," the guitar's musical flexibility, portability, relative ease of learning and affordability have made it a longstanding appealing instrument, ever "accessible to working people of ordinary talents."[15] It has come to be understood as a representative, symbolic marker of American identity and of American ingenuity. As a popular consumer product, it is recreated in the design of everything, everywhere, from greeting cards to swimming pools, coffee tables, and clocks.[16] Its easily identifiable distinctive amplified sound is a mainstay in media advertisements and film.

In *The New Guitarscape* (2010) Kevin Dawe considers uses of the body with and through the "sensual culture of the guitar" as a fundamental fact of performance in need of more consideration. Playing it, he reiterates, calls on and produces complex, coordinated multi-scalar sensitivities as "musicians engage physically with the guitar and the means by which they organize their movements around it and upon it."[17] This is revealed through paying attention to a guitar player's total lived experiences with the guitar and guitar accessories and how musicians convey their personal experiences by playing the instrument, including the bodily, the olfactory and the tactile. Understanding those influential "models of touch,"[18] bodily carriage and movement specifically learned through formal guitar instruction, understanding the material aspects of individual guitars (including shape, size, weight, and string tensility) as these impact the quality of sound and the body's sensual experience with the instrument; and the sounds generated, then, becomes essential.

Steve Waksman's work, in particular, adeptly analyzes these fantasies and the social meanings invested in the electric guitar in his cultural history of the instrument, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and The Shaping of Musical Experience* (1999). He uses Jimi Hendrix to think about race, gender, sexuality and the body with the electric guitar. Hendrix made groundbreaking sonic innovations with the instrument that changed the rock music landscape. At the same time, Hendrix crafted a persona for himself that projected a very vivid sensibility of autonomous liberty that flowed into his sound and his body. The result was a notoriously sexual performance style on stage with the electric guitar—in particular, playing it between his legs. Assessing such repertoires of physical gestures with the electric guitar, Waksman finds that Hendrix "specifically

and intentionally manipulated his guitar so that it took shape as a technological extension of his body, a 'technophallus.' The electric guitar as technophallus represents a fusion of man and machine, an electronic appendage that allowed Hendrix to display his instrumental and, more symbolically, sexual prowess."[19]

Hendrix's performances with the electric guitar did not occur unproblematically Waksman (1999) argues, as Hendrix negotiated a tricky "field of racialized desire" with a predominately white (male and female) audience. While this offers interesting analysis for a moment of interracial music performance and enjoyment, Waksman reminds the reader that Hendrix's black male body was on intentional exhibitionist display with its overt bodily gestures with the electric guitar at extreme volume in a U.S. cultural landscape where white stereotypical ideas about black male sexuality marked it as, among other things, hypersexual. This is further complicated by Hendrix's complicity through his own intentional desires and self presentation, his ways of being, moving, and making music.

Despite these flaws, this literature is significant to the project because it relates invaluable well-researched historical facts and information about the guitar, its role in popular music, and the integrated impact of both in the United States. It offers useful descriptions of conventional genre characteristics and illuminates a range of the musical priorities of male musicians working within the field across decades. It also provides interpretive insight explaining why the instrument is both venerated and guarded by many male musicians, scholars and writers (as a tool of male creative development, identity construction, and camaraderie, for example). The project selectively engages these factors of influence and import to productively think about how women, particularly

black women, experience and use the guitar in ways that correspond, confound, and challenge them across eras and locations.

Women Guitarists

The edited collection *The Electric Guitar: A History of An American Icon* (2004) is a representative textual example of how different scholars discuss women electric guitarists. In it, Charles McGovern accords women a valuable place in electric guitar history. While "few women came to any public prominence playing electrics before the 1970s," women were "involved with every phase of the instrument's history," including the "production and manufacture"[20] of electric guitars. He identifies white and black musicians like Cordell Jackson and "Mother" Maybelle Carter, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Lizzie "Memphis Minnie" Douglas, and Mary Deloatch as sonic and technical innovators and/or as early players. McGovern also provides visibility, featuring publicity photographs of both Cordell Jackson (albeit a head shot) and Sylvia Vanderpool Robinson of the singing duo Mickey and Sylvia, who is pictured with her electric guitar. McGovern is exceptional for acknowledging the existence of blues and gospel player Deloatch and acknowledging Robinson as a guitarist, and not just as a singer.

However, in the same edited collection, another essay, "Women Guitarists: Gender Issues in Alternative Rock" by John Strohm reflects a transparently opaque (at times possibly quite condescending) overview of women's participation with the electric guitar. To be sure, he credits musicians like Memphis Minnie and Sister Rosetta Tharpe as "two rare examples of innovative female players in the prerock era."[21] He also acknowledges Peggy "Lady Bo" Jones and Norma-Jean "The Duchess" Wofford as "the female electric guitarists in Bo Diddley's touring act." But then Strohm detracts from

their presence and musicianship by saying that Jones and Wofford were "featured as a novelty rather than for their unique talent, and they never recorded on [Bo] Diddley's records."[22] (None of which is true as will be demonstrated in chapter three.)

Gulla (2009) produced an all-male list of musicians who made the biggest impact on rock music.[23] Within his creative bounds to construct the list as he sees fit, Gulla exposes his bias, however, by being dismissive of women musicians: "Women don't exist in the upper echelon (Top 25) of guitarists. Of course, there are exceptional women who play the instrument, but none fit the definition of the book's title about 'making rock history.' "[24] Gulla is typical of those male authors who require women to possess a particularly exceptional musicianship on the electric guitar before they can be described as great. Meanwhile, male musicianship is granted shifting leeway. "Understand that all of the players I included didn't have to be technically gifted," Gulla says. Instead, for Gulla, musicians like The Edge of U2 "rendered revolutionary work as much or more from the heart than through the fingers."[25]

In mainstream popular music, the electric guitar overwhelmingly operates in the monumental service of music-making while consciously and unconsciously serving as a critical tool idealizing and facilitating a towering masculinity and male sexual virility in the crafting of musical identities and personas by male musicians. The electric guitar generates a culturally-encoded "phallic power" through its incredibly loud and voluminous, often distorted, sound, and the physicality displayed while playing it. All of this serves as specific, evolving and static cues showing how we learn about the instrument as a culturally white and male experience.[26]

In addition, dominant conceptualizations and representations of the electric guitar encourage women's participation from a heterosexual, highly-sexualized position. For women, gender comes before their identities as musicians, marking them as novelties and sexual objects who may or may not play the guitar. For example, the website of the leading guitar magazine, GuitarWorld.com, offers a separate tab for "Girls featured Content" promoting a "Girls of *Guitar World*" photo gallery of mainly white women musicians posing seductively with electric guitars. All are dressed in bikini tops and bottoms, lingerie with prominent cleavage.[27] The online page for the magazine's summer 2013 *Buyer's Guide* invokes language likening guitars to women, i.e. "this year's sleek and sexy models;" bass guitars are "big-bottom beauties."[28] The cover features two Playboy Playmates posing with electric guitars, with the large coverline: "The Hottest Guitar Buyer's Guide…Ever!" It is within this oversexualized, hyper-masculine environment that female electric guitarists must blaze a path as professional artists seeking serious attention to their art.

Women's Blues

Historically, blues scholars and writers (largely male and white) structured and defined blues music, in particular, as the predominant purview of black male mastery. Robert Johnson, Charley Patton, Son House, and Muddy Waters are just a few identified as key innovators in the development and dissemination of blues. This was accomplished through cultural narratives elevating the black male body as particularly *authentic* driving forces of *authentic* music creation and development framed by a "gendered dichotomization and periodization of blues history."[29]

Within this abundance of information about male participants, their practices and processes of the blues in the scholarship, there has also been a celebration and marginalization of women. In the literature, they are honored as vocalists. Women like Bessie Smith (1894-1937) and Gertrude "Ma Rainey" Pridgett (1886-1939) have come to be revered for being top-selling artists and wage earners by singing raucous songs about relationships, drugs, violence, and natural disasters.[30] These artists captivated audiences of predominately working-class black women and men who helped propel blues music to national popularity.[31]

However, their early experiences with blues are contextualized through the feminization of the genre distinction, "Classic Blues" aka "women's blues" by blues scholars.[32] In the literature, classic blues describes the polished, urbanized, vaudeville-inspired style of blues dominated and performed by black women singers of the 1920s, often backed by small jazz combo bands, often singing songs written by professional songwriters.[33] The success of women's blues helped lead to the recording of black male country blues players beginning in the mid-1920s.

Country blues is associated with solo male performers accompanying themselves on acoustic guitar. Sometimes referred to as "folk blues" and "downhome blues" the literature understands it to be rougher, gruff, inelegant, and rural-inspired. Urban blues, an electrified blues featuring amplified instruments (bass guitar and harmonica) but especially the electric guitar, is often written about as the invention of male country blues players who created a sound reflective of their adjustment to the intensity of city life in cities like Chicago, Illinois. A sound that, in Jas Obrecht's words, became "smoother and more urban."[34]

Over the decades, seminal and canonical works produced by scholars and cultural critics like Samuel Charters, Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Alan Lomax, Paul Oliver, Robert Palmer, and Charles Keil (beginning in the late 1950s) inevitably worked together to collectively influence subsequent blues and guitar scholars and fans who, in their own more contemporary influential texts and research, continued the reification of blues as a gendered, and gender-stratified, segregated space via structural motifs about women's alleged aesthetic orientations, music-making practices, and life opportunities.

So while the blues woman singer is celebrated and visible throughout popular culture, the blues woman singer who *also* plays guitar remains invisible and marginalized. A book like *Blues Guitar: The Men Who Made The Music* (1993), a collection of interviews and articles from *Guitar Player* magazine, dispenses with women altogether as the title indicates. Maria V. Johnson (2007), one of the few scholars who has written about women guitarists, argues "since rural blues performers were assumed to be male, women who played rural blues were not 'seen.' " And, she notes, this has "obscured the existence of an ongoing sustained tradition of women's blues—a tradition that has included *instrumentalists*, as well as singers and performers and composers in a whole range of styles, including rural, vaudeville, urban, R&B, boogie woogie, and contemporary."[35] Memphis Minnie, for example, remains relatively unknown in comparison to Robert Johnson, a revered artist who recorded fewer songs than Minnie and had a much shorter career and life span. There is but one book written about Memphis Minnie, *Woman with Guitar: Memphis Minnie's Blues* by Paul and Beth Garon (1992). Meanwhile, there are numerous books about the career of Robert Johnson, and other male musicians.

When women instrumentalists are present, in many cases, they are described and presented as celebratory exceptions and/or as matter-of-fact aberrations in ways that are historical and poorly historicized. This is evident in otherwise valuable historiographies detailing the role of the acoustic guitar in country blues and the electric guitar in urban blues. In books like *Nothing But The Blues: The Music and The Musicians* (1993) musicians like Memphis Minnie, Mattie Delaney, Geeshie Wiley and Elvie Thomas are recognized for their role as singer-instrumentalists in country blues who were also recorded in the 1930s, a rarity according to the scholars. *Blues: The Basics* (2005) heralds Memphis Minnie as "the only woman folk blues artist who became famous."[36] Even Samuel Charters had to acknowledge that the classic blues and country blues "generalizations…has to give way a little in the thirties" due to the "exultantly feminine figure" of Memphis Minnie, "a handsome, vibrant woman," in the middle of "the masculine country blues."[37]

While blues scholarship favors those male musicians who were recorded and takes great interest in the musicianship of many of those who were not, a similar recovery effort has not been undertaken for women. The fact that women singer-instrumentalists were rarely recorded has been construed and conflated in much of the literature to mean that women did not engage or had no interests with the guitar doing country blues as a chosen part of their music-making practice. As Nancy Levine (1993) notes, "Their frequent comments on the scarcity of women who play rural blues is an indirect acknowledgement of a lack of information about women performers who undeniably existed."[38]

Scholarly neglect is also an indictment of that historical analytical strain in blues discourse characterized by broad and unspecific assumptions about the nature and quality of black women's lives that fail to take seriously the multi-scalar dimensions of their experiences. Dick Weissman (2005) asserts that there were relatively few women folk blues artists because "few women during this period would have the interest or courage to pursue this lifestyle."[39] Decades earlier, Alan Lomax argued:

> Feminine lives were rock-hard and filled with sorrow, but they did not face alone the humiliation, the danger, the deprivation, and the orphaning of delta life in as direct a fashion every live-long day as did their men….the lives of women as mama's helpers, wives, mistresses, mothers, domestic workers, and churchgoers sheltered and protected them from much of the brutalizing experience of interracial experience their men knew.[40]

In a less presumptuous manner, William Barlow (1989) offers more cogent reasons for the perceived lack of women country blues artists. He attributes their "uneven role" in blues and "missing" presence in rural blues to the social realities of their lives as poor black women in rural communities.[41] They had to negotiate unlimited childbearing and ongoing childcare with their work in the fields, leaving little time "for cultural activities like performing with a blues ensemble." In addition, he notes the "physical dangers" of travel and the "stigma" of being a "branded as 'fallen women' " who stepped outside of their defined social bounds.[42]

Levine (1993) critiques Barlow's reasoning (and simultaneously the way in which much of blues discourse often conflates participation in the music with leading an itinerant bluesman lifestyle filled with hard work, heartbreak, liquor, and fights) as "pat and a bit dismissive." Levine declares that, "with all that good music being played in the Delta, Piedmont, and East Texas in the twenties and thirties, there had to be more than the handful of women [Barlow names] who were actively playing... ."[43] Indeed, more

than Lomax and others himself believed existed. As Tim Brookes notes, and which women surely knew themselves: "women have always played guitar, and in many individual communities or families the best guitarist has often been a woman."[44]

Only a handful of scholars and writers like David Evans, Bruce Bastin, Gayle Dean Wardlow, and George Mitchell were critically considerate of women in the books and articles they published based on original field research into the lives of blues musicians, the music itself, and different local blues traditions throughout the south in the 1960s and 1970s. Though mainly focused on male musicianship, evidence of black women's engagement with the guitar and important biographical and career information was revealed. For example, in oral history interviews, Mott Willis told Evans about Lucille Davis and Josie Bush. Gayle Dean Wardlow spoke to Ishman Bracey who talked about Geeshie Wiley. George Mitchell interviewed Jessie Mae Hemphill and Rosa Lee Hill. David Evans also interviewed Jessie Mae Hemphill and worked with her as a fellow performer, a promoter and producer of her music for decades. And, to be fair, Alan Lomax interviewed and recorded Rosa Lee Hill in 1959.

Paul and Beth Garon conducted intensive research into the life of Memphis Minnie for their biography about her. In it, they build a case securing her a place in country blues, but also in urban blues, as one of the first blues players to plug in and play the electric guitar, and as an influential musician in the Chicago scene where urban blues was created. Despite her pioneering presence and prolific work, their book is the only biography about her.

Another source of information about black women guitarists is through niche music magazines like *Living Blues* (1970-present). Over the decades, they have featured

articles and interviews (including obituaries) about major and lesser known figures like Bonnie Jefferson and Memphis Minnie. Much of the work is based on and often written by some of the same scholars.

Further evidence of black women's varied guitar interest and playing is found in a reference book like Sheldon Harris's *Blues Who's Who: A Biographical Dictionary of Blues Singers* (1979). This reference book gathers its information, again, from the influential research and published writings of largely male blues scholars. Interestingly, the biographical profiles of women singers include information that they also played guitar. For example, 1920s blues singer and Paramount recording artist Lottie Beamon known as "Kansas City butterball" reportedly played guitar.[45]

In this same vein, biographical profiles of the mostly male musicians in the book make reference to and reveal that their mothers and aunts played, and sometimes taught their sons.[46] A short list includes Minnie Watkins who taught her son, Blind Willie McTell, to play the guitar around age 13;[47] Sam Chatmon's mother Eliza Jackson played;[48] Freddie King's mother, Ella Mae King, was a guitarist;[49] Lowell Fulson's mother and aunt played guitar.[50] The list is much longer than what is presented here and shows black women with ongoing engagements with the instrument in blues, as well as broader genres of music.

Within this circle of literature, a litany of artists such as Ruth Brown and Etta James,[51] Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton,[52] Lavern Baker, and The Shirelles[53] are constructed as unheralded pioneers of rock'n'roll from blues, R&B, and pop who have been left out of rock music narratives. "Women have been at the heart of rock and roll all along," says Gerri Hirshey in her introduction to *We Gotta Get Outta This Place*.[54]

When black women instrumentalists do show up, they appear largely from a historical perspective, acknowledged and claimed as pioneers. Black women acoustic and electric guitarists in blues like Memphis Minnie,[55] gospel like Sister Rosetta Tharpe,[56] and rock'n'roll like Peggy "Lady Bo" Jones[57] and Sylvia Vanderpool Robinson (of Sylvia and Mickey) are acknowledged as rock music pioneers of the 1930s to early 1960s. For example, Memphis Minnie's fame as a successful recording artist on vocals and guitar in the 1930s and 1940s is hailed for its popularity and for helping to create "a soundtrack for the Southern diaspora."[58]

From a more contemporary perspective, black women guitarists like bassist Meshell Ndegeocello, folk singer-songwriters Odetta (representatively described as a "bedrock mother figure" of the folk revival), [59] Laura Love, and Tracy Chapman, as well as pop instrumentalists like British artist Joan Armatrading are included. However, *Rolling Stone*'s book about women in rock, for example, has an explicit essay titled, "Chicks with Picks" and features no quotations from black women guitarists. Elsewhere, while the book historically discusses Sylvia Robinson for her pioneering studio work producing early rap music hits, the writer does not note that she also played guitar in her career.[60] The rare source cites Felicia Collins, an electric guitarist who has been playing in the David Letterman Show band for decades.[61] Nor is anything much written about predominately black female bands like Klymaxx, or Cheryl Cooley, their electric guitarist.

Ultimately, in the literature the story of women's musicianship on guitar demonstrates white women's larger presence and recognition in American popular music on the acoustic and electric guitars. They are also more visibly historicized as singer-

instrumentalists on the guitar, including in rock, especially from a more contemporary perspective. The list of examples includes acoustic guitarists Joni Mitchell[62] in the 1960s, who according to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame website, was inducted as a "performer" in 1997. Bonnie Raitt, beginning in the 1970s; Nancy Wilson of Heart (mixed gender band) in the 1980s; and a surge of women instrumentalists like Melissa Etheridge, Lisa Loeb, Liz Phair, Polly Jean (PJ) Harvey, Ani DiFranco, Jewel, Susan Tedeschi, and Sheryl Crow in the 1990s are well represented.

Mainstream music magazines feature black women guitarists although they do not make a habit of it. Singer, songwriter and electric guitarist Malina Moye was featured in the April 2013 issue of *Guitar World*. Cassandra Wilson made the cover of *Acoustic Guitar* magazine in October 2006. *Rolling Stone* featured Tracy Chapman without her guitar on the cover of a September issue in 1988. However, no black women or other women of color were cited in *Rolling Stone's* December 2011 "100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time" special cover story issue or included black women as members of the panel assessing the rankings. In addition, no black women guitarists have been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a performer.

The now defunct independent *ROCKRGRL* magazine (founded by a woman) was mainly focused on white women musicians in folk, and alternative and indie rock. However, they sometimes featured interviews with Peggy "Lady Bo" Jones, Alana Davis, and Bibi McGill (who now plays in Beyoncé's all-female band). McGill is likely the most visible black women electric guitarist in popular music.

Finally, black women instrumentalists appear in biographical profiles in non-music focused books like the *Black Women in America Encyclopedia* (2005), which

includes Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, Memphis Minnie, and Jessie Mae Hemphill.[63]

In addition, black women who play guitar are most central in those books specifically about black women instrumentalists. Representatively, these are researched survey histories and Q& A interviews like D. Antoinette Handy's *Black Women in American Bands & Orchestras* (1981) and *The International Sweethearts of Rhythm* (1983); Sally Placksin's *American Women in Jazz: 1900 to the Present: Their Words, Lives and Music* (1982); Linda Dahl's *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen* (1984); Leslie Gourse's *Madame Jazz: Contemporary Women Instrumentalists* (1995); Sherrie Tucker's *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Bands of the 1940s* (2000); Wayne Enstice and Janis Stockhouse's *Jazzwomen: Conversations with Twenty-One Musicians* (2004); and LaShonda Katrice Barnett's *I Got Thunder: Black Women Songwriters on Their Craft* (2007).

Re-Making the Canon

There is a tiny body of work explicitly focused on black women guitarists on which I build in this dissertation. These are biographical books like Paul and Beth Garon's *Woman with Guitar: Memphis Minnie's Blues* (1992) and Gayle Wald's *Shout! Sister! Shout! The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe* (2007); and a very few scholarly articles.[64] In these publications, the writers research details of their subject's lives and work to place them, and other women instrumentalists, within the eras they moved through as women and as musicians with regard to gender and race. They also consider how women represented themselves visually and how they perceived themselves as musicians.

In "Women in the Blues: 'She Plays Blues Like A Man': Gender Bending the Country Blueswomen," Nancy Levine (1993) intentionally outlines a beginning history of black women guitarists in country blues. To that end, Levine cites the existence of players like Etta and Cora Baker, Flora Molton, "Little" Laura Dukes, "Mama" Estella Yancey, Geeshie Wiley, Elvie Thomas, and Mattie Delaney, Rosa Lee Hill, Jessie Mae Hemphill, Precious Bryant, Ellen Jeffries, Maydell Coleman, and Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten. She cites support of male musicians in the family as a chief impetus contributing to a woman playing guitar. Men like fathers and grandfathers, for example, introduced girls and women in their lives to the guitar, gave them one and/or taught them how to play it. Again, this challenges the narrative of the rarity of black women's engagement with the guitar in country blues milieus, while reiterating that tales of male support and collegiality should not be lost in tales of male resistance—and are worth further research consideration.

Picking up where Levine leaves off, in her essay, " 'I Was Born to Be A Musician Too": Female Guitarists in the Blues" Maria V. Johnson (2002) contributes to expanding a viable legacy of black female guitarists. She cites musicians such as Memphis Minnie, Josie Bush, Bertha Lee, Bonnie Jefferson, Marylin Scott (also known as Mary Deloatch), and Algia Mae Hinton.[65] Culling past sources in conjunction with her own research, Johnson organizes profiles containing important biographical facts and information about the direction of their lives, musical development, performance practices, travels, and recordings (if any) as amateur and professional musicians. Critically, Johnson links these musicians to a set of geography-based blues traditions (like the Mississippi Delta and the Piedmont), a standard of organization constructed and set by blues scholarship that has

often marginalized women. Thus, she reiterates Memphis Minnie and Josie Bush as proprietors of the revered Mississippi Delta tradition, the one most associated with country blues. Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten is linked to Piedmont blues culture of North Carolina. In addition, Johnson focuses on succinctly assessing contemporary players like Deborah Coleman and Beverly "Guitar" Watkins, and their

In Eileen M. Hayes and Linda F. Williams's edited collection *Black Women and Music: More Than the Blues* (2007), Johnson's essay "Black Women Electric Guitarists and Authenticity in the Blues" is concerned with assessing the current state of black women electric guitarists in the American musical landscape. She conducts analyses of magazine interviews, recorded music, lyrics, biographies, and recorded performance styles of a handful of musicians such as Beverly "Guitar" Watkins and Barbara Lynn. Both musicians played electric guitar in the 1960s and continue to play today. She also looks at younger artists such as Venessia Young, Toshi Reagon, BB Queen, and Deborah Coleman. She acknowledges Memphis Minnie and Sister Rosetta Tharpe as pioneer electric guitar players from the 1930s forward and questions why black women electric guitarists have been marginalized since then. Though Deborah Coleman made the cover of *Living Blues* in 1999, by contrast, Johnson points out the popularity of white women electric guitarists in blues and the popularity of black women blues singers who are not electric guitarists. "How is it," she asks, "that a White woman [Bonnie Raitt] become the measuring stick for female guitarists within a Black cultural form?"[66] Johnson tries to answer this question through a critique of contemporary blues scholarship and journalism, which she believes is primarily focused on policing the boundaries of what constitutes the blues through a strident emphasis on authenticity constituted by largely

white male writers. Her assessment is based on analysis of magazine interviews, materials from their recorded work, their musical lyrics, their lives and recorded performance styles.

Ellie Hisama's analysis of black British singer/songwriter and acoustic guitarist Joan Armatrading (1999) in "Voice, Race, and Sexuality in the Music of Joan Armatrading," uses the musician as a vehicle through which to explore the conflation of race, gender and sexuality with femininity and the music business in the pop cultural landscape. Specifically, Hisama is looking at why Armatrading has never experienced popular success in the United States and cites the artist's appearance and racial politics as main reasons. Armatrading dresses plainly and does not wear make-up. Her lack of a highly stylized appearance is atypical in a musical landscape where many artists include physical appearance as an instrumental part of their performance practice. Hisama argues that Armatrading has been criticized for this, citing interviews with her and people who knew her as evidence.

Hisama pushes this notion further by analyzing the impact of race on Armatrading's decision. While Armatrading has been hurt by these choices, white women artists like k.d. Lang and Melissa Etheridge, who make similar sartorial choices, have not. These two proudly and distinctly eschew a glamorous image yet have great career success. Hisama rightly points out that "black women singers have been granted far less freedom in the realm of visual representation."[67] She suggests that black women artists who are visible and seek to be seen do not have the same leeway as their white female counterparts to make such decisions. As so-called divas black women are seen, but plainly-clothed black women like Armatrading, less so. This is true, but Hisama does

not consider in her analysis that the dominant representational legacy of black women is that of vocalist over that of being an instrumentalist, especially on guitar. Armatrading's presence in the United States would not have initially fit into any representation of visible black womanhood in popular culture. In addition, given that cultural landscape, the career of Tracy Chapman stands out. Chapman is a U.S.-born black woman singer and guitarist who has found success as a popular performer in the United States. As if following in the footsteps of Armatrading, Chapman also engages a natural face and hairstyle and wears very plain clothes, but has garnered mainstream success. She is a relatively lone example in this regard. Nonetheless, additional consideration of Chapman in relation to Armatrading and the stratified representational legacy of black women in U.S. popular culture would have been valuable to Hisama's analysis.

In "Women and the Guitar" (1979) Charlotte Ackerley also examines the physical factors and sociocultural factors that she learned confronted women guitarists through her interviews with guitarists, guitar teachers and guitar students across the United States in the 1970s. She concluded then that women did have some distinct differences and concerns in comparison to men, in terms of their approach to playing the guitar. Physiologically, she said women did not possess the same hand and arm strength (as men) needed to persist in playing the instrument—which can prove a deterrent to women. Extra bodily sensitivity when trying to hold the guitar and play it against a woman's pregnant body was another potential for irritation. This is in addition to the way in which pregnancy can interrupt a woman's musicianship with the instrument in a way that does not similarly impact a man playing; and a societal expectation that places the burden of childcare and parenting on women.

Ackerley (1979) cites the gender-biased stereotype of the "common image of the female guitarist— the pretty-faced folk or traditional singer fingerpicking a gentle accompaniment on a classical guitar."[68] Within this gendered framework, her interviewees shared beliefs about women's music making as not being interested in playing in self aggrandizing solo efforts; being uninterested in the technical or mechanical; being more interested in vocals and less on "instrumental embellishment behind the singing" like male players.[69] The implications of these gender divisions in the labor and creativity of music resulted in many women having a limited vision of themselves in the role of rhythm guitarist, especially when, as women players told Ackerley, their male guitar teachers, proponents of lead guitar playing, encouraged them to play rhythm instead. According to Ackerley, the majority of people, men and women, "said that men had more confidence, ambition, discipline, drive, and ego involvement in their playing and were more likely to excel at the guitar and become professional musicians."[70]

Decades later, André Millard (2004) wrote that he believed that while the electric guitar was once "a solid masculine preserve," "American society has changed drastically since the 1960s, and now playing an electric guitar is as much an activity of girls as of boys."[71] However, Mavis Bayton and other scholars like Mary Ann Clawson who have focused on the processes, practices and strategies women musicians deploy to make music dispute this. Maryann Clawson (1999) describes rock "as a gendered work activity."[72] And Bayton (1997) surmises: "Whilst women folk singer-songwriters have played the acoustic guitar, the electric guitar (surely the instrument which most epitomizes 'rock') has been left in the hands of the boys."[73]

Notably, in "Women and the Electric Guitar" Bayton examines an ongoing lack of celebrated female electric guitarists (in comparison to well-known male electric guitarists like Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix). Bayton is clear from the beginning that there has been demonstrable progress, that more women play the instrument than ever before. Yet, they still remain anomalies and they still must contend with sexism around their playing—as they did when Ackerley published. Gender explicitly functions as her key category of analysis and Bayton draws upon her interviews with women musicians in the United Kingdom, her own ethnographic observations and analysis of music magazines. She situates the electric guitar as the premier instrument in rock music, which has historically been a male-identified space. Crafted as a space of technological innovation, it signifies a domain for men and a milieu where women are inept.

Given the confluence of such facts, Bayton traces the skewed socially constructed gender relations that have fostered unbalanced gender participation. "Lead guitarists are made, not born" she states, pointing out that there are no inherently biological or physical reasons for why more women are not visible as electric guitarists."[74] Yet she reiterates that women's music roles are typically seen as being vocalists. Women are also more readily accepted as acoustic guitar players. Bayton cites other social-cultural factors that make demands on women's time and bodies that can detour women from playing the electric guitar. Women are expected to adhere to varying feminine techniques of beauty, paying attention to their bodily scent, the size of their bodies, their clothing style, and their manicured nails.[75] Men are exempted from the burden of these concerns. Women also bear the primary responsibility for children, which can disrupt their musical lives. They also routinely encounter gender prejudice and harassment under the male-

dominated work and performance conditions they must enter for practice purposes and obtaining instruments. This is not to say that male guitarists are all sexist, but it is to point out the entrenched gender prejudice that exists on different levels within different guitar worlds which are male-dominated, from the blatantly hostile to the benevolently patriarchal to the outright supportive.

This kind of space, Bayton suggests, is subsequently not particularly welcoming or shaped toward the constructive inclusion of girls. Boys, she says, are geared toward taking up the electric guitar as a masculine endeavor. It is an instrument that enables them to construct collective space around a shared interest and passion. Over the electric guitar, they can bond, make noise, and start a band (which can attract girls). But "a girl on lead guitar would undermine rock's latent function of conferring 'masculine' identity on its male participants. Its 'masculinity' is only preserved by the exclusion of girls."[76]

Additionally, according to Bayton, playing the guitar well is attuned to a good performance of maleness Bayton asserts. Good music playing skills are synonymous with good sexual skills. The electric guitar is symbolically coded as a phallocentric instrument in shape, in the way it is strapped on to the body, in the way men stand when they play it, in the way they engage the instrument when in the throes of a guitar solo. Bayton likens the latter as a "parody of sexual ecstasy."[77] Consequently, an electric guitar in a woman's hand disturbs this imagery.

These historic and contemporary biases and omissions are critical since music is more than just an arena for displaying one's artistic talents for black women. Music is a crucial locale for the re-construction of black female identity, image, and self-representation. The following chapter continually affirms this fact through analysis of the

lives of black women guitar players across different genres, eras, and locations in the United States.

NOTES

1. I primarily focused in particular on popular media because these are texts most accessible to the American population as general interest books and magazines sold at mainstream book stores like Barnes & Noble or online from websites such as Amazon.com.

2. Tom Evans and Mary Anne Evans, *Guitars: Music, History, Construction and Players from The Renaissance to Rock* (New York: Paddington Press, 1977); Tim Brookes, *Guitar: An American Life* (New York: Grove Press, 2006).

3. Gene Santoro, "Rock: Kick Out The Jams," in *The Guitar: The History, The Music, The Players*, ed. Allan Kozinn et al., 1st ed (New York: Quill, 1984), 159; Robert Palmer, "The Church of the Sonic Guitar," in *Present Tense: Rock & Roll and Culture*, ed. Anthony DeCurtis (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 14.

4. Santoro, "Rock: Kick Out The Jams," 175.

5. Jas Obrecht, ed., *Blues Guitar: The Men Who Made The Music*, Expanded & updated 2nd ed. (San Francisco: GPI Books, 1993), 78; Santoro, "Rock: Kick Out The Jams," 160–161; 175; Bob Gulla, *Guitar Gods: The 25 Players Who Made Rock History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), viii.

6. André J. Millard, "The Guitar Hero," in *The Electric Guitar: A History of An American Icon*, ed. André J. Millard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 14.

7. Mavis Bayton, "Women and the Electric Guitar," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997).

8. André J. Millard, "Introduction," in *The Electric Guitar: A History of An American Icon*, ed. André J. Millard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 6.

9. "Guitar World 2013 Media Kit" (NewBay Media, 2013); "NewBay Media Acquires Guitar World, Revolver, and Guitar Aficionado From Future Plc," *NewBay Media*, accessed October 29, 2013, http://www.newbaymedia.com/newbay-media-acquires-guitar-world-revolver-and-guitar-aficionado-from-future-plc-4/.

10. "Guitar World 2013 Media Kit." The magazine and its website guitarworld.com features interviews, gear recommendations, technique tips, tutorials, transcriptions, and lots of advertisements for gear, guitars and guitar accessories.

11. Millard, "The Guitar Hero," 144.

12. Ibid., 158.

13. Robert Palmer, "The Church of the Sonic Guitar," 14–15.

14. Michael Lydon and Ellen Mandel, *Boogie Lightning: How Music Became Electric* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980), 157–158.

15. Rebecca McSwain, "The Power of The Electric Guitar," *Popular Music and Society* 19, no. 4 (1995): 29.

16. Ibid., 32.

17. Kevin Dawe, *The New Guitarscape in Critical Theory, Cultural Practice and Musical Performance* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 110.

18. Ibid., 114.

19. Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, 188.

20. Charles McGovern, "The Music: The Electric Guitar in the American Century," in *The Electric Guitar: A History of An American Icon*, ed. André J. Millard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 24.

21. John Strohm, "Women Guitarists: Gender Issues in Alternative Rock," in *The Electric Guitar: A History of An American Icon*, ed. André J. Millard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 184.

22. Ibid. In addition, as will be noted in Chapter 3, both Lady Bo and the Duchess were recorded on albums with Bo Diddley.

23. Gulla, *Guitar Gods*, vii.

24. Ibid., ix.

25. Ibid.

26. Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*; Harry Allen, "Interview with Vernon Reid," in *Rip It Up: The Black Experience in Rock'n'Roll*, ed. Kandia Crazy Horse (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Maureen Mahon, *Right to Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and The Cultural Politics of Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Greg Tate, *Midnight Lightning: Jimi Hendrix and the Black Experience*, 1st ed. (Lawrence Hill Books, 2003); Mavis Bayton, "Women and the Electric Guitar," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

27. "Girls of Guitar World," *Guitar World*, accessed May 29, 2013, http://www.guitarworld.com/features/girls-guitar-world.

28. "Buyer's Guide 2013," *NewBay Media Online Store*, accessed September 2, 2013, http://store.guitarworld.com/products/buyers-guide-2013.

29. Maria V. Johnson, "Black Women Electric Guitarists and Authenticity in the Blues," in *Black Women and Music: More Than The Blues*, ed. Eileen M. Hayes and Linda F. Williams (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 54.

30. Bessie Smith, called the empress of blues, and Ma Rainey, called the mother of the blues, were both well-known performers on the chitlin circuit before they made their first recordings with record companies in the 1920s.

31. Daphne Duval Harrison, *Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920's* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 46.

32. LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed from It* (New York: Apollo Editions, 1963); Samuel B. Charters, *The Country Blues*, reprint (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975); David Evans, *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); William Barlow, *"Looking Up At Down": The Emergence of Blues Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

33. Jones, *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed from It*.

34. Jas Obrecht, "A Century of Blues Guitar," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed. Victor Coelho (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 95.

35 Johnson, "Black Women Electric Guitarists and Authenticity in the Blues," 54.

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36. Dick Weissman, *Blues: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 80.

37. Samuel Charters, *Sweet As The Showers of Rain: The Bluesmen, Volume II* (New York: Oak Publications, 1977), 83.

38. Nancy Levine, "Women in the Blues: 'She Plays Blues Like A Man': Gender Bending the Country Blueswomen," *Blues Revue Quarterly* 7 (Winter 1993): 38.

39. Weissman, *Blues*, 80.

40. Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 361–362.

41. William Barlow, *Looking Up At Down*.

42. Ibid., 179–180.

43. Levine, "Women in the Blues: 'She Plays Blues Like A Man': Gender Bending the Country Blueswomen," 34.

44. Tim Brookes, *Guitar: An American Life*, 183.

45. Sheldon Harris, *Blues Who's Who: A Biographical Dictionary of Blues Singers* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), 40–41.

46. Maria V. Johnson, "I Was Born to Be A Musician Too": Female Guitarists in the Blues," *Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies* 33(3) December 2002: 214-26, 217.

47. Harris, *Blues Who's Who*, 369.

48. Ibid., 119.

49. Ibid., 305.

50. Ibid., 188.

51. Barbara O'Dair, ed., *Trouble Girls: The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1997).

52. Gerri Hirshey, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The True, Tough Story of Women in Rock* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2001); Maureen Mahon, "Race, Gender, and Genre: The Power Dynamics of Rock," in *African American Music: An Introduction*, ed. Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby (New York: Routledge, 2006).

53. O'Dair, *Trouble Girls*; Mina Julia Carson, Tisa Lewis, and Susan M. Shaw, *Girls Rock!: Fifty Years of Women Making Music* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

54. Hirshey, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, 5.

55. Carson, Lewis, and Shaw, *Girls Rock!*; Hirshey, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*.

56. Hirshey, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*; O'Dair, *Trouble Girls*; Carson, Lewis, and Shaw, *Girls Rock!*.

57. O'Dair, *Trouble Girls*.

58. Ariel Swartley, "Little Mamas, Wild Women, and Balls of Fire: The Blues," in *Trouble Girls: The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*, ed. Barbara O'Dair, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1997), 7.

59. Hirshey, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, 71.

60. O'Dair, *Trouble Girls*, 215.

61. Hirshey, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*; Carson, Lewis, and Shaw, *Girls Rock!*.

62. Hirshey, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*; O'Dair, *Trouble Girls*.

63. Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds., *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1993).

64. Levine, "Women in the Blues: 'She Plays Blues Like A Man': Gender Bending the Country Blueswomen"; Marcus Charles Tribbett, "'Everybody Wants to Buy My Kitty': Resistance and The Articulation of The Sexual Subjects in The Blues of Memphis Minnie," *Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies* 29, no. 1 (1998): 42–55; Maria V. Johnson, "'I Was Born to Be A Musician Too' : Female Guitarists in the Blues," *Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies* 33, no. 3 (December 2002): 214–26.

65. Johnson, "'I Was Born to Be A Musician Too': Female Guitarists in the Blues."

66. Johnson, "Black Women Electric Guitarists and Authenticity in the Blues," 53.

67. Ellie M. Hisama, "Voice, Race, and Sexuality in the Music of Joan Armatrading," in *Audible Traces: Gender. Identity, and Music*, ed. Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley (Zurich: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999), 116.

68. Charlotte Ackerley, "Women and Guitar," in *The Guitar Player Book*, rev. ed. (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1979), 259.

69. Ibid., 260.

70. Ibid.

71. Millard, “Introduction,” 11.

72. Mary Ann Clawson, “When Women Play the Bass: Instrument Specialization and Gender Interpretation In Alternative Rock,” *Gender and Society* 13, no. 2 (April 1999): 193.

73. Bayton, “Women and the Electric Guitar,” 1997, 37.

74. Ibid., 39.

75. Ibid., 44.

76. Ibid., 41.

77. Ibid., 43.

CHAPTER 3: BLACK WOMEN PLAYING THE GUITAR IN THE UNITED STATES

This chapter documents a representatively select history of black American women's unheralded diverse, continuous existence playing acoustic and electric guitar in the United States. The primary concern is the intersection of gender, race, and the guitar in black women's lives and careers as they strive to construct and negotiate self-representations, identities and cultural expressions that are socially, culturally, and personally satisfying in the midst of a racially hostile and misogynistic society. Consequently, it uses historical analysis and black feminist theories to analyze and credit these musicians as critical actors and producers of American music history from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. The chapter examines the lives and experiences of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield and Lizzie "Memphis Minnie" Douglas, black women musicians who were exceptional examples amidst the everyday regular stories. These two early, worthy examples foreshadow the experiences of black women traversing racialized geographies, contending with racialized femininities, and dealing with external expectations while trying to shape and meet their own expectations.

The guitar was played in colonial-, federalist- and antebellum-era America.[1] Jeffrey Noonan states that it was played "by professionals as a formal concert instrument and privately by amateurs as part of home entertainments."[2] Typically, this meant men played it in public and women in the home. During the antebellum period, the guitar functioned as an instrument of gentility for middle to upper-class women—a tool of socializing and socialization by a leisure class of women in their parlors.[3]

In sharp contrast, enslaved black women were treated as chattel and subject to being sold right alongside a music instrument. They worked hard as servants for white women who played the guitar at their leisure. And while some freedwomen played the guitar as leisure and entertainment this was often part of a strategy of social etiquette to abrogate the degradation associated with their womanhood, race, and humanity. The guitar emerges as a clear demarcation of social class based on race and citizenship status.

The "cult of true womanhood" ideology is deeply interwoven into this narrative about how white women appropriated the guitar differently from black women. One purpose of the true womanhood ideology was to protect white middle and upper-class women while steering them toward a "cultivated and demonstrated domesticity, piety, and purity that truly marked them as appropriately ladylike and feminine;"[4] and confirming the home as their primary sphere of influence. Popular advice literature geared toward white women like *Godey's Lady's Book* approved the guitar as an acceptable instrument and suitable pursuit of female leisure. In 1831, *Godey's Lady's Book* noted, "The extraordinary fascination and currency which this favourite instrument has acquired in the fashionable circles, has induced us to give it with some degree of attention."[5]

While black women were influenced by the rhetoric of the "cult of true womanhood" they were beyond its protective cover. Guitar playing did not automatically convey sanctioned femininity and respect upon black women though middle-class African American women sought it. In that regard, guitar playing by middle-class black women may be understood as performances of respectability demonstrating their

ideological, structural and cultural participation in upwardly mobile, middle- and- upper class lifestyles conveying intelligence, morals, leisure, and sociability upon them.

Published books of the era often included explicit mention of guitar playing by black women in an attempt to uplift their representation and public image. In his autobiography *Recollections of Seventy Years*, Bishop Daniel Payne of the African Methodist Episcopal Church wrote about a trip to Louisville, Kentucky, in 1852, whereupon "a colored lady whom I called to see had a young slave girl of considerable accomplishments on her right hand singing and playing the guitar to her, while at her left stood a white servant doing her bidding."[6]

Initially, guitars were imports from Europe but by 1833, the Martin Guitar Company, for example, began selling guitars it made in New York City and in 1850, "C. F. Martin, Guitar Maker" was expanding his business "in order to supply the increasing demand for his instruments."[7] In the late nineteenth century, Noonan states, the "American guitar" was "not only a mass-produced and nationally distributed item but also the subject of national advertising campaigns carried to consumers on the pages of inexpensive magazines." "Cheap but serviceable" guitars were available from major retail store catalogues like Sears and Roebuck and in large cities.[8] The guitar increased in popularity as an instrument in competition with the banjo and mandolin signaling the market creation of a "nineteenth-century highbrow/lowbrow cultural division."[9] The appeal was mainly to white, middle and upper class individuals looking for a suitable pursuit for their artistic edification.[10] "Because whites made significant technological contributions to the evolution of the banjo, nineteenth-century authorities insisted on identifying it as both Caucasian and progressive, an instrument suited to the modern

world and for use in the parlor and in the recital hall by white men and women."[11] But the banjo needed rehabilitation from its role in minstrel shows aimed at lower class whites in an insidious stereotyping of African Americans. Early and influential proponents of the banjo, mandolin, and guitar (BMG) movement like S.S. Stewart (founder of his own highly influential guitar and banjo magazine) deplored the guitar as mere accompaniment to the banjo, and negatively characterized the guitar as an instrument of the "black underclass"[12] and as "an emotional, unpredictable instrument, associating it with Roman Catholic Spanish and Italian immigrants."[13]

While promoting racial division within culture, Stewart was not entirely wrong in associating the guitar with underprivileged populations. At the turn of the twentieth century, the guitar, in its acoustic form, was poised to function as a critical instrument in string bands including jazz, ragtime, and blues. These genres were largely created, innovated upon, and spread by poor and working class blacks; as well as multi-generational European immigrants, like Jews and those same "Roman Catholic Spanish and Italian immigrants."[14] The guitar also became critical to the development of country and bluegrass music, which are predominately associated with the musicianship and listening habits of poor and working class whites. According to David Evans, the guitar was especially appealing to African Americans because it did not possess the banjo's persistent association with minstrel shows or slavery.[15]

Black Women and the Guitar in Colonial and Antebellum Eras

In 1777, the *Gazette of the State of South Carolina* printed a notice announcing an upcoming estate sale in Charleston "consisting of some valuable household and kitchen furniture, sheets, table cloths, wearing apparel of all sorts, books of various kinds, *a*

guitar, one Negro wench, and sundry other articles" (emphasis mine).[16] This notice documents an early association between guitars and black women. Though likely unintentional, it nonetheless offers a prescient foreshadowing of what was to become a highly important economic and cultural relationship. Like guitars, Africans also were imported into colonies such as South Carolina, casting the two together.

Colonial newspapers sometimes note the presence and use of guitars, alongside slave sales and runaway slaves. Colonial musicians "came from all classes: professional emigrants from Europe, native professionals, 'gentlemen amateurs,' and amateurs among the lower classes, and musician-domestics—both indentured servants and slaves."[17] Eileen Southern documented the existence of enslaved musicians from the advertisements, news and notices in colonial-era newspapers. " 'Runaway listings,' " she says, "invariably gave more information about slaves than 'for sale' advertisements, where "the possession of musical skills was considered to be noteworthy."[18] By the representative accounts she cites in her research, male slaves played the French horn, violin, and fiddle. Some apparently also ran off with their fiddles and fifes.[19] Less notice was given to the musical talent of enslaved black females in official notices than to their labor potential as field and domestic workers.

After the guitar was transported to the United States, the steel-stringed incarnation eventually became popular among African-Americans after the Civil War (1861-1865).[20] In antebellum times, free black women used the guitar mainly as amateur performers in the home. A tiny minority of free black Americans were middle class, upper middle class, or wealthy, with some formal education allowing them to work in professions primarily as teachers.[21] According to historian Dorothy Sterling, these were the wives and

daughters of ministers, teachers, and small business owners.[22] They had some measure of power and autonomy and often mimicked white society in their own search for respectability and meaning. The author of *Sketches of the Higher Classes of Colored Society in Philadelphia* (1841) noted that "it is rarely that the visitor in the different families where there are two or three ladies, will not find one or more of them competent to perform on the piano-forte, *guitar*, or some other appropriate musical instrument; and these with singing and conversation on whatever suitable topics that may offer, constitute the amusement of their evenings at home" (emphasis mine).[23] According to Bishop Daniel Payne's accounting in *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (1891), the guitar was an acceptable instrument in the denomination if properly played. The AME Church and Bishop Payne, in particular, were adamantly opposed to any style of worship that resembled African or "heathen" religious practices or threatened their sense of respectability, i.e. imitation of white worship. At a sacred music benefit concert for the AME Church, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield sang solos accompanied by seven violins. The AME Church encouraged such artistic talents and sponsored competitions "for the best original sacred piece, arranged for the guitar and accompanied by the voice, a silver medal, worth not less than $10; for the next best, a floral crown. By the best we mean the most melodious and accurate according to the laws of musical science."[24]

In 1858, *The Colored Aristocracy of St. Louis* noted two "young ladies" dubbed "the Misses Reynolds" from Baltimore. One of whom, "Miss Rebecca" is described as "handsome, and plays well on the guitar. She sings like a nightingale, and is one of the brightest ornaments of society."[25] Abolitionist newspaper *The National Era*, which serialized Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, announced a boarding and

day school in the city on "Summer street, corner of Schuylkill Sixth street, opposite the church."[26] Alongside of teaching reading, writing, history, geography history and language lessons, they offered guitar for "10 to $15 per quarter" under "extras."[27]

In 1847, most free black women earned between 25 and 50 cents a day taking in laundry (*Census of the Condition of Colored People in Philadelphia* in 1847) making guitar lessons far beyond their reach. At the same time, some formerly enslaved women like Fanny Jackson Coppin and Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield benefited from the largess of their white benefactors and through other kinds of "contact with people of refinement and education."[28] Such women were afforded opportunities to learn the piano and guitar.

Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield

Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield (1819-1876) became the first famous black woman musician in the United States as an opera singer and instrumentalist. She had a remarkable career as a popular classical music performer.[29] Known as "the sable phenomenon," with a reported three-octave range, from 1851 to 1854, she performed a repertoire of operas, ballads, and minstrel songs before predominately white audiences in haute segregated concert halls throughout the Midwest, New England, and London. She was billed as "the Black Swan"—a race-based nickname that likened her to the Swedish opera soprano singer Johanna Maria Lind. Taylor Greenfield was born enslaved in Natchez, Mississippi and was freed by her owner, Mrs. Greenfield, after the woman became a Quaker and moved to Philadelphia, taking one-year old Elizabeth with her.[30] Taylor Greenfield's accolades were many and typical of the following:

> She gave us first the arietta, Where are now the Hopes I've cherished?" accompanying her voice with the guitar—which, as well as the harp and piano, she uses very skillfully.[31]

> She plays with ability upon the…guitar.[32]
>
> By her own energy, and un-assisted, she has made herself mistress of the Guitar….[33]

In one of her two memoirs, Taylor Greenfield relates how she began limited singing engagements at private parties with the support and patronage of a friendly neighborhood acquaintance and Mrs. Greenfield (before she died). During a trip to Buffalo, New York, by ship, she captured the attention of a highly influential white woman who noticed Taylor Greenfield's guitar playing. This chance encounter led to her professional debut at a series of concerts in Buffalo. Taylor Greenfield's popularity grew due to enthusiastic and curious word-of-mouth which led to subsequent performance invitations back in major cities, including Baltimore, Maryland, a slave state, and in London, England, before Queen Victoria of England at Buckingham Palace in 1854.[34] As a black woman engaged in an elite white endeavor of singing classical music, Taylor Greenfield was a novelty. As a free black woman during slavery in the United States, she was an anomaly.

An intriguing mix of flattering, oxymoronic responses in news accounts and letters to the editor (ostensibly) about her performances reveal a fixation with elements of her body (her figure, features, skin color, style, and voice)—nearly as much as her talent—that reflect racist discourses on pseudoscience and gender proscriptions constructing "gendered differences between black and white womanhood, especially with respect to their sexuality."[35]

A February 20, 1852 *Springfield* [Massachusetts] *Daily Post* article about a Taylor Greenfield performance exclaimed, "Why, we see the face of a black woman, but

we hear the voice of an angel: what does it mean?"[36] "Although colored as dark as Ethiopia, she utters notes as pure as if uttered in the words of the Adriatic"[37] wrote Columbus, Ohio's *Daily Capital City Fact* two weeks later in March. Her figure was described as being stout, robust, of low stature, thick set, and fleshy. She had "a full bust,"[38] a "healthy chest,"[39] or what another reporter kindly described as "magnificent roundabout proportions."[40] Still, she had "very uncomely features,"[41] as a "plain looking, medium sized, wolly [sic] headed, flat nose negro woman."[42] Reported *The Detroit Daily Advertiser*, "There is no softening away of the African into the color, hair, or lineament of the Caucasian. She is black in earnest…with every lineament showing her origin."[43] She was "but slightly modified from the pure African lineage —retaining the low forehead, the depressed nose, and the expansive mouth, without the bulbous labia."[44]

Concert reviews noted Taylor Greenfield's "modest" attire complemented by a penchant for wearing jewelry, and blue and green colored dresses. It is not surprising then that a letter from a female acquaintance demonstrated the writer's self-acknowledged liberty to instruct Taylor Greenfield on her appearance, after commending her style of "modesty and simplicity." "Wear nothing in your hair," the writer, Elizabeth Smith, the daughter of politician and abolitionist Gerrit Smith, advised, "unless it be a cluster of white flowers in the back; never wear colored flowers, nor flowing ribbons. Let your dress be a plain black silk." "Dress very loosely…to conceal the figure," she continued. "In the midst of all the prejudice against those of your color…your appearance should be strikingly genteel."[45] Notably, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* found nothing wrong with Taylor Greenfield's appearance, writing about her "graceful stature, with a face of

intelligence and gentleness;" "modest and tasteful in her dress," with "an easy carriage."[46]

In 1852, Frederick Douglass' newspaper, *The North Star,* published an interesting reprint of a *Journal of Commerce* review about a sight witnessed at a bride's party in Paris, written by foreign correspondent Mr. Walsh. According to Walsh there was a woman of color, "a new black Malibran" singing and performing on the guitar. "About twenty-five years old," she was reportedly from Havana, Cuba, where she "acquired there the reputation of a musical prodigy." She "played the guitar beautifully and gracefully" he reported. Her "complexion the sambo, Florentine bronze; woolly hair." While "her charms were displayed without stint; arms, neck, and shoulders bare: bust and arms beautifully turned." He also noted her "thick lips, scarlet gums, white teeth, short stature." Walsh wrote that had he closed his eyes he would have "fancied myself in Old Virginia, listening to a good banjo, and peculiar mellow tones of the African race." He reported that some of the white French "ladies" present "remarked that they might have thought her a chimpanzee brought from the garden of Plants and dressed for the occasion."

Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield carried a great burden of representation as the first black woman musician to become famous. Ironically, while much is written about her physical appearance and voice, there is little if anything written about her self-accompanied musicianship on the piano, harp, and guitar. However, the existence of reports attesting white people with keen musical interest in her suggests a high level of artistic achievement that could supersede the pervasive virulent racism and sexism that surrounded her. Taylor Greenfield had great fortitude and through her self-aggrandizing

memoirs demonstrated a strong sense of freedom and mobility afforded her through her musical skills. Keenly aware of the obstacles confronting her, Taylor Greenfield was ambitious and unafraid to reference the word genius in her own regard. She tried to convey the difficult negotiation of what was once a burgeoning and all too short-lived professional singing career in her memoir, written in the third person (1853):

> What would she not then have given for a good and willing instructor in the art of music. But, alas! Such was not attainable for the *colored* girl! No money would induce a "Professor" to include a "Darkie" among his pupils. Such an admission would have jeopardized his professional success, even in that liberal and free city; and would have exposed teacher as well as pupils, to excessive ridicule![47]

Realizing that "upon her own genius alone could she rely," Taylor Greenfield "procured a guitar, on which, by ceaseless perseverance and indomitable energy; she overcame immense difficulties. At first, she taught herself crude accompaniments to her songs, and gradually improving became a very pleasant guitarist."[48]

Taylor Greenfield inhabited an exceptional albeit short-lived social location in the American cultural landscape. There was no representational precedence for what she accomplished in music. Daphne Brooks observes, "Exploring a new field of public expression for black women in song and instrumentalism, Greenfield challenged racial, gender, and cultural politics of the mid-nineteenth century."[49] She pioneered a way for black women to labor through their own natural, creative talents in entertainment; which, in turn, offered a form of social agency that could transform their social conditions and upend negative visual representations of them, however temporary or partial. The issues of value, visibility, performance and music-making practices, physical appearance, and environment that exemplified her corporeality as a black woman singer-instrumentalist is

prescient of the representational shape of things to come for many of the black female singer-instrumentalists in the late nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.[50]

Black Women and the Guitar During the Gilded Age (1870s–Turn of the Century)

At the turn of the century, the late Victorian American era, the guitar was still a parlor instrument but also professionally performed in recital halls. It continued as an indication of respectability for "Black Victorias,"[51] middle-class and upper middle-class black women. For wealthy black women like educator and philanthropist Mary Church Terrell described as "the premiere representative of our womanhood" by *The Colored American* in 1900,[52] it served as a fount of pleasure, while facilitating interracial socializing with classmates that became a significant aspect of her latter philanthropic work. As a freshman at Oberlin College in the early 1880s she received a guitar from her father and taught herself to play chords. On college outings with friends "it was my duty to play chords to accompany the singing."[53] In her book *Negro Musicians and their Music* (1935), folklorist and concert pianist Maude Cuney-Hare mentions Clara Monteith Holland, a "skilful player of the guitar"[54] in the late 1870s. Monteith Holland was the daughter of Justin Holland, the first black classical guitarist in the United States.

In their quest to promote and defend the respectability and culture of black Americans, black newspapers like *The Richmond Planet*, *The Christian Recorder*, *New York Age*, *The Plain Dealer* (in Detroit, Michigan); and *The Colored American* (in Washington, D.C.), regularly reported on black women's civic, educational, and social pursuits. In these articles, the guitar emerges as an instrument of interest. An 1874 report in the *Christian Recorder*, the AME Church's newspaper, celebrated the denomination's philanthropy, including for "schools for the children of the street and guitar."[55] Mrs. A. E.

Francis, an "instructor of guitar and banjo"[56] in Providence, Rhode Island, and Blanche D. Washington, who had a music school at 144 West 32nd Street in New York,[57] were two women out of many who taught guitar (along with other such instruments as piano) and sought music students through placing advertisements in their local African American newspapers.[58]

Black women played at social events for fraternal organizations like the Integrity Lodge 1768 in Worcester, Massachusetts, where "Miss Cooper" gave a "well rendered"[59] guitar solo, alongside a Mr. Hawkins in 1892. At the Bethel Lyceum in New York in 1889, "a fine guitar duet was rendered by Miss Mattie L. Horton and Miss Scott, accompanied by Miss Chase of the Drury Opera Co."[60] Black women also played for church events. "Miss Jessie Shaw"[61] performed a guitar solo as part of the entertainment organized by the Willing Workers at Thanksgiving in Ithaca, New York, in 1890. Eloise Bibb played "Sebastopol" on the guitar at an 1891 New Orleans University graduation where she was a student.[62] In *The Southern Workman* of Hampton Institute notice is given about the school's mandolin and guitar club.[63]

According to Doris Evans McGinty (1997), the Washington, D.C. black elite had "a fifty-year history of interest in classical music, a tradition in which there was considerable opportunity for women to participate"[64] by 1900. There was the Aeolian Mandolin, Guitar and Banjo Club[65] that performed classical music throughout the area, and surrounding cities, including churches.[66] The Treble Clef Club, founded in 1897, was particularly well-known for the classical music events they regularly organized (emphasizing black composers).[67] "Miss Susie Butler" performed a guitar solo at a "very creditable affair" given by "the colored band of Superior" in West Superior, Wisconsin.[68]

Blacks in St. Louis organized a "ladies' guitar and mandolin club."[69] There was the Ohio-based Olympia Ladies' Quartette. An undated program (likely from the early to mid 1900s) features pictures of four well-dressed members, described as "versatile daughters of the Southland." They were "Miss Dazalia Underwood," "Miss Hester O. Brown," "Miss Anna Smith," and "Miss Crealea Peyton."[70] The Olympia Ladies' Quartette traveled the United States (Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois)—participating in the chautauqua movement, a civic endeavor that organized a collection of wide-ranging cultural, educational and spiritual presentations and performances on a tour throughout semi rural America, of which music was a particularly critical element. The Olympia Ladies' Quartette also toured overseas in Sidney, Australia, and Capetown, South Africa, singing classical music, "jubilee choruses," "plantation melodies," and playing together in different formations as well as solo on the mandolin, violin, and piano. The cover of the program features all four women holding an instrument. One is holding a guitar, two are posing with mandolins and the fourth with a violin. They also performed readings by Paul Laurence Dunbar and sketches.

In Chicago, "a sneak thief" robbed the Lucas', stealing "a fine guitar belonging to Mrs. Lucas" and Mr. Lucas's mandolin.[71] In 1895, a "Mrs. Knowlton" gave an "entertaining" "guitar solo."[72] In 1904, *The Colored American* reported on "Miss Helen Stevens," dubbed as "one of Philadelphia's smart set" was reportedly a member of the Treble Club Social and described as being "an accomplished pianist and guitarist." In the same issue, *The Colored American* also reported on Louise Venning, a public school teacher and physical education enthusiast, who was born into the black elite of Philadelphia. She, too, played the mandolin and guitar in the Treble Clef's mandolin and

guitar club.[73] In *The Negro and the White Man* (1897), Bishop Wesley John Gaines of Georgia assessed black America's status and progress since emancipation and noted, "The men and women quickly learn to play upon the guitar and the mandolin, and even the piano."[74] Given their self-appointed role as guardians of the culture and male dominance, it is a strong testament that church bishops endorsed the guitar, especially for women. As a young well-to-do girl growing up in Philadelphia at the turn of the century, bandleader and saxophonist C. Isabele Taliaferro Spiller played instruments like the mandolin and piano alongside of her mother, Josephine Benjamin Outlaw Taliaferro who accompanied her on guitar.[75]

Black Women and the Guitar in the 1920s and 1930s

In the 1920s and 1930s black women continued to play guitar. In New York, bassist Olivia Porter Shipp founded and led the Negro Women's Orchestral and Civic Association, in which a Betty Lomax played guitar.[76] In a fawning 1935 article profiling Zora Neale Hurston in the *New York Amsterdam News*, journalist Thelma Berlack-Boozer mentioned that the "energetic author-anthropologist," among other things, smokes cigarettes, enjoys Lindy Hopping and "plays guitar a little."[77] An early black musical chorus performer in *Shufflin' Along* (1921) and star of *Blackbirds of 1928*, jazz singer[78] Adelaide Hall had a successful career in the United States and Europe[79] dancing and singing "several of her popular numbers with guitar,"[80] outfitted in stylish gowns throughout the 1930s. The *Pittsburgh Courier* described her performance at Chicago's Regal Theater in 1933 as "the darling girl with the guitar and the mellifluent voice."[81]

Black women also continued to negotiate expectations of reproductive, physical, and domestic labor, migrating from the countryside to the city in the South; and up North

and out to the Midwest for better life opportunities. This era offered the broader option to pursue entertainment as a professional career. While not everyone could achieve this possibility, which included the attendant possibility of being recorded, black women were enjoying access to the guitar to nonetheless play, even if it was informally and for recreation, for little to no pay.

Unlike the piano, which many women played, a guitar was more affordable and portable. There is evidence of poor and working class black women playing acoustic guitars within their local southern communities and in vaudeville. Such women cultivated consistent and multi-scalar paths of travel and networks of mobility. Within their own local communities they moved among their homes, fields, schoolhouses, juke joints, churches, friends and family's homes, and to nearby cities. As struggling entertainers, performing gave black women extended ways to traverse racialized geographies with heightened purpose, independence and the potential to make money traveling and touring to perform and record songs on specific short and long routes, whether from city to city on a tour, or back and forth between home and an in-town or out-of-town recording studio and performance dates.

Singer and guitarist Lizzie "Memphis Minnie" Douglas (1897-1973) left her family home on a farm in Walls, Mississippi, to tour with Ringling Brothers throughout the South during World War I, before moving to Memphis, Tennessee, to play on Beale Street. [82] Van Zula Carter Hunt (1901-1995) also played guitar on Beale Street in Memphis and in medicine shows, carnivals and circuses throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Carter Hunt performed with Bessie Smith.[83] "Little" Laura Dukes (1907-1992), of Memphis, played ukulele, and banjo, and traveled with minstrel shows and variety shows.

From Mississippi, Esther Mae Scott (1893-1979) sang and played guitar in travelling medicine shows.

Josie Bush (birth and death unknown) was the singer and guitarist who brought the popular song "Riverside Blues" to Drew in the Mississippi Delta from her native Florence, Mississippi, in the late teens and early 1920s where she had learned it from Willie Love, a local musician. It took root at Drew and was later learned by her husband Willie Brown, a blues guitarist, and her distant cousin Mott Willis, who also played guitar.[84] According to Willis, guitarist Tommy Johnson changed the song around a bit, but was always careful to give Bush credit before playing the song by saying, " 'I'm gonna play some of Josie.' "[85] Bush also taught Willis "Joking Blues."[86] In interviews with David Evans in 1970 and 1971, Willis said:

> Her home was in Rankin County, out there from Florence, but she'd be over across the river playing. *She was a good guitar player to be a woman.* She was playing guitar when I first knowed her, when I was a little old boy….Used to give little old suppers, and we'd go down there. *"Riverside Blues," that was her piece.* Well, she sure could sing though. Man, she'd have the house rocking, you know. You see, everybody have a different way of playing, you know. But *Josie could play better than any woman I ever seed play a guitar*. And she could sing so, you know…And after awhile she went to the Delta and come back, and she told me about a fellow up there, he could play good. And *he learned some of her pieces; she learned some of his'n*" (emphasis mine).[87]

Though she never recorded and remains obscure as a Mississippi Delta blues musician, Josie Bush apparently moved around with and without a man.

Mississippi blues singer-guitarist Mattie Delaney (1905–death unknown) was one of the few women guitarists to be recorded. She recorded "Tallahatchie River Blues" and "Down the Big Road Blues" at the Peabody Hotel[88] in Memphis on February 21, 1930.[89] Like Delaney, Mississippi-based musicians Elvie Thomas (birth and death unknown) and Geeshie Wiley (birth and death unknown) were also recorded. In 1930 and 1931, they

traveled to Grafton, Wisconsin, to play guitar together on four songs ("Motherless Child Blues," "Over to My House," "Last Kind Word Blues," and "Skinny Leg Blues") and were recorded for Paramount Records in 1930.

Blues and the guitar expanded women's access and quality of mobility and personal freedom. In their own ways, blueswomen engaged and constructed their lives outside norms of domesticity and female submissiveness to males. According to Hazel Carby, "Hopping freight cars was particularly difficult and dangerous for women, and traveling tent shows and vaudeville offered an alternative way to achieve mobility for young black women…. This increase in the physical mobility of these women is paralleled by the challenge to sexual conventions and gendered social roles that is found in their music."[90] Both Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith left home at early ages to pursue careers in entertainment that involved grueling travel schedules that took them from city to city throughout the South and Midwest. These traveling women also sang and wrote about travel as a lyrical theme in their songs.

Angela Davis addressed themes of mobility in the blues of singers Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey. She points out the need to acknowledge imagination in women's blues as a way to "engage aesthetically with ideas and experiences that were not accessible to them in real life." Acknowledging this functions as "challenges to male dominance as real-life experiences."[91] That is, women have their own ways of expressing creativity growing out of their life experiences that are both different and similar to those of men. The latter are most often acknowledged as normative and privileged but women brought feminine imagination and creativity to the Delta blues that bluesmen also appreciated.

In blues scholarship men of the era like Charley Patton are revered for the quality of a black male creativity fostered by chaotic highly itinerant living habits. This was precipitated by the need to look for work. In the process, men connected with women for sex, food, and lodging. It is widely understood that this pattern of life largely contributed to how they learned blues and spread a variety of blues styles from the different blues cultures they encountered working as sharecroppers on local plantations in the Mississippi Delta or the sawmills and lumber yards. This rambling man traversing a circuit of cities for work, women, liquor, and song is an irresistible trope in blues scholarship and popular culture.

Though subject to ideological gender restrictions and concerns for physical safety that made jumping trains in order to look for performance opportunities or steady work in sawmills and lumberyards, women's work, networks of contacts, and their broader networks of mobility invite consideration of the restless woman who still engaged in "blues representations of women engaged in self-initiated and independent travel."[92] These women lived and worked right alongside of men as fellow workers, wives, girlfriends, and relatives in some of the same blues cultures, like the Mississippi Delta of the 1920s and 1930s. And, as previously noted, women were known to teach men and to play with them. Whether she was a woman who "rambled" for miles or "rambled" near, limited to her neighborhood, small town, or city, she likely experienced bouts of fitfulness. Women, too, chafed against restrictions, experiencing feeling restless for a better life that was not limited to contending with backbreaking, low-paying jobs as sharecroppers or domestic servants for whites.

Black women's cultural productions from the eras speak to these broader ways that black women were always on the move whether by choice and/or by force. For blueswomen, the blues was a means of expressing her needs and women with the ability to play the guitar could self accompany themselves, which offered a certain level of independence that did not require the same demands of finances, transportation, and management that were required for those backed by bands, for example.

Lizzie "Memphis Minnie" Douglas

Over the course of her long career in the first half of the twentieth century, Memphis Minnie helped shape the modern cultural landscape of the music by being one of the first blues artists to switch from the acoustic guitar to the new technology of the electric guitar, according to her biographers, Paul and Beth Garon.[93] The Garons understand Minnie as a critical, highly influential musical figure in blues. A competitive guitarist, Minnie enjoyed a successful and prolific career as a singer, songwriter and guitarist of changing blues styles (from country to urban), recording over 100 sides with Columbia, Vocalion, Decca, and Bluebird record companies. Minnie wrote and/or performed songs such as "Bumble Bee" (1929), which made her famous; "Hustlin' Woman Blues" (1935); and "Me and My Chauffeur Blues" (1941), her biggest hit.[94] She traveled throughout her career in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s around a circuit mostly in the South in support of her musical endeavors. Memphis Minnie was one of the very first black women singer-guitarists to record and garner a measure of regional and national popularity. As such, the guitar transformed and broadened the landscape of her life.

Early on, Minnie's playing the guitar signaled a keen recognition of her understanding about how the guitar provided immediate possibilities and opportunities

for her as a working-class, young black woman who eschewed a stationary life tied to domestic burdens. She was born Lizzie Douglas in 1897 in Algiers, Louisiana, twenty years after Reconstruction and a year after the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision. By the time she received her first guitar as a Christmas gift in 1905, the acoustic guitar was strongly identified with men and a masculine sensibility.[95] Demonstrating a natural gift, Minnie engaged the guitar's portability and her ability to play it as an asset that offered her the ability to run away from home in Walls, Mississippi, to nearby Memphis, Tennessee, where she played music on the street to earn money instead of working on the family farm.[96] According to relatives, they never saw Minnie "chop no cotton or pick no cotton."[97]

Minnie relocated to Memphis sometime in the 1920's when the city was considered the murder capital of the nation. She became a fixture on Beale Street. At night, Beale was a swinging strip of legal, illegal and extralegal economies, including dining, gambling, and prostitution.[98] Mostly German, Greek and Italian immigrants were owners of these establishments while African-Americans were their employees and customers.[99]

Beale was also a space of creativity for the male musicians who gathered on the street, in the park or in the bars to practice blues and jazz music as pianists, guitarists, and singers.[100] Black women's presence on Beale could have multiple meanings—many of which were negative given the street's notorious reputation for extravagant, transgressive pleasure. According to William Barlow, Memphis was second to New Orleans in prostitution.[101] In "Policing the Black Woman's Body," Hazel Carby writes that "the movement of black women between rural and urban areas and between southern and

northern cities" in the 1920s provoked a "moral panic" among social reformers who believed such women were "easily victimized subjects who quickly succumbed to the forces of vice and degradation."[102] Memphis was representative of the "broader tensions and anxieties about race, class, and sexuality" that existed between working class and middle class blacks at the turn of the century.[103]

According to Tera Hunter, working-class blacks played hard to release the physicality of their bodies from its use producing wealth for whites in favor of an engagement of their bodies for their own amusement, however temporary.[104] Minnie used the guitar to conflate the two, to play the guitar for the benefit of providing work and pleasure for her black female body. Black middle-class critics presumed that bodies listening to and performing the blues (aka "devil's music") were steeped in vice thus confirming white notions of black degeneracy.[105] Hunter analyzes these as biases preoccupied with "who had the prerogative to control black, especially, female, laboring bodies."[106] In Minnie's case, those prerogatives were overly concerned with how "black female expressive artistry carried the public history of black female sexualization."[107]

Minnie embraced Beale's lexicon of abjection and gained immunity from any personal class-conscious concerns. Her guitar picking skills gave her access to Beale's close-knit male musical camaraderie. Men dominated the Memphis country blues scene and the acoustic guitar, but Minnie leveraged her position learning from and performing with male musicians. In the 1920s, bluesmen like Frank Stokes, Furry Lewis, Robert Wilkins, husband Joe McCoy, and Willie Brown were collegial and impressed with her abilities.[108]

According to musician Willie Moore who knew Minnie in Memphis, "Everything Willie Brown could play, she could play, and then she could play some things he couldn't play."[109] According to Paul and Beth Garon, Minnie often played lead guitar with both Willies.[110] As a woman surrounded by musical men, her dexterity on the instrument toned down some of the gender biases that otherwise threatened to position her as musical helpmeet, singing or playing backup guitar for the men. Her skills could not be denied so men could not easily dismiss her especially since the blues were meant to be an accessible experience, open to personal identification and communal participation through its integrated use of language, emotion, and dances speaking to the love lives, job situations, big dreams, and hard times of its predominately working-class audience. Minnie tapped into Beale, honing her skills on guitar and garnering attention such that she would eventually become "the reigning blues queen in Memphis."[111]

Minnie's itinerancy expanded her opportunities for mobility and employment beyond that typically allotted to black women in the early twentieth century, south and north. At that time, southern space was structured by racial segregation, lynching, and sexual violence. Career opportunities for poor and uneducated black women were circumscribed by housework or sharecropping. Leading a rambling life the way that men could had the potential to mark them as "bad" women and/or place them at an elevated risk regarding their safety and well-being.

Nonetheless, like plenty of other women, Minnie took to the road. The guitar furnished her with the means to inhabit her body on her own terms in her home region, in spite of the risks. From Memphis and, later, Chicago, Illinois, Minnie crisscrossed state borders, city lines and property thresholds, traveling to play at roadhouses, picnics,

stores, juke joints, house parties, Saturday night fish frys, nightclubs and country suppers, building up her audience and earning money.[112] "She'd play anywhere," Memphis Slim said.[113] Minnie traveled alone or with male musicians like Pee Wee Whitaker, a trombonist, as she pleased. For five to six years she played with guitarist Willie Brown in Mississippi until around the late 1920s. When Minnie was married she toured with her husbands (who were always musicians).[114]

As the height of popularity for "Classic Blues," waned by the beginning of the Depression, record companies began to favor recording what was perceived as a more "folk-sounding" country blues played by rural black male acoustic guitarists. In 1929, just months before the stock market crashed, Minnie was discovered by a Columbia scout in a barbershop playing with then husband Joe McCoy. One of the first songs she performed guitar on, "When the Levee Breaks,"[115] is considered "the most rhythmically varied accompaniment in Spanish tuning."[116] "Bumble Bee Blues" became a hit and Minnie migrated to Chicago.[117] There she would eventually help shape an emerging style of an urban electric blues by her early and public adoption of the electric guitar and her role in sonically popularizing the instrument in her blues performances in local clubs. Urban blues was made famous by Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, musicians who later participated in the Chicago blues scene and likely encountered her in clubs and in recording studios.[118] In the early 1950s, Memphis Minnie briefly recorded for Checker Records, a subsidiary of Chess Records that signed and recorded male electric guitarists like Waters, Wolf, Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry—who all went on to enjoy successful careers that surpassed her own.

Nonetheless, the instrument helped formulate and regenerate her sense of self and agency, serving as a source of mobility, employment, and access. It gave her the means to enter and sometimes re-structure different spaces to accommodate her physically and musically. The guitar functioned as an axis around which she could re-negotiate meanings of racialized femininity as a traveling black woman musician living and working at the crossroads of eras that bore witness to significant musical and social changes.

As a black woman musician, Minnie's early adoption of and subsequent influence upon use of the new technology of the electric guitar in Chicago marks a creative, historic collision between a black female body and an iconic instrument. When Minnie strapped on that guitar, she signaled her synergy with the new amplified sound of the city.[119] The acoustic guitar that blues musicians played was itself an instrument of transition as the blues (once a purely vocal sound) deferred to the range of the guitar's strings when it became a popular accompaniment to blues singing.[120] This produced a blues music that was both vocal and instrumental by the time it entered national prominence with the classic blues singers.[121] Classic blues entertainers sang and performed back-up accompaniment by male instrumentalists, on piano, for example.

However, the advent of the electric guitar with its steel body and "scientific sound," as Langston Hughes described it, changed the quality of the instrument's sound. It was an "expression of, and entitlement to, the here and now."[122] Minnie responded by becoming a critical proponent in its use with blues in the city.[123] She shifted "from the elaborate guitar picking style that is heard on her earliest releases to a more lyrical style."

In the 1930s Minnie competed with blues guitarist Big Bill Broonzy in a competition in Chicago:

> …Everybody was saying "Is that man going to play against that poor little weaker woman? He should be ashamed because any man should beat a woman playing a guitar." I sang 'Just a Dream' and they liked it very much. Then I sang 'Make My Getaway' and I got down off the stand… So Tampa Red called Memphis Minnie to the stand and everybody got quiet. She first sang, 'Me and My Chauffeur' and the house rocked for twenty minutes, then she sang, 'Looking the World Over.' John Estes and Richard Jones went to the stand, picked Minnie up and carried her around in the hall…So Memphis Minnie won two bottles.[124]

This story reflects how Minnie used the electric guitar to negotiate new meanings. With a guitar strapped onto her body, over a dress with a slit up the thigh, Minnie manhandled the guitar, and demonstrated the stamina and dexterity needed to play it. She made the guitar, "talk, say fare thee well,"[125] alternately holding it close to her chest, or otherwise engaging its phallic-shaped symbolism as a natural extension of her woman's body. In this manner, perhaps the guitar's implicit and explicit masculinity is being used to enhance Minnie's womanhood, sexing the guitar away from a male perspective and sensibility toward that of a singular woman. By putting herself on display as a performer with the guitar for the consumption of both men and women, Memphis Minnie bent the guitar's sonic submission to her lyrical content, bodily intent and desires as an attractive, swaggering, self-described "down home girl" and "hellcat" with a penchant for chewing tobacco and drinking Wild Irish Rose and a knack for outplaying men, according to the male musicians who played with her and witnessed her performances.

With the electric guitar and its ability to emphasize its volume the musician could improve their ability to be heard over the din of noisy crowds.[126] It also played into some musician's predilection for ostentation and intensified guitar playing. The electric guitar heightened the structure of space in a way that gave players, including women like

Minnie, license to lose themselves in the physicality of their body. According to musician James Watt, "She'd stand up out of that chair, she'd take that guitar and put it all 'cross her head and everywhere."[127] Clearly, Minnie helped define the electric guitar as a legendary instrument of showmanship, though this brand of performativity would largely become publically presented in the interests of masculinity and hypermasculinity.

Memphis Minnie's showmanship with the electric guitar was accompanied by her visible commitment to feminine techniques of beauty. She wore $200 wigs, "fancy clothes,"[128] jewelry, make up and high heels—producing an intentional link between the sexuality of the songs she sang and the sexuality she chose to represent. Her brand of glamour gave her entry into low-down spaces that were the only places she could go to gain experience, showcase her illustrious skills, and provide the means of engaging candid facial bodily expressions in the manipulation of the instrument that can be understood as being reminiscent of a woman being gesturally immodest and vocally uncontained and liberated—violations of appropriate womanhood.

In conjunction, into the 1940s, the Garons state that Memphis Minnie's performances became "more hard driving, distinctive and sophisticated."[129] She played a circuit of blues clubs on the South Side of Chicago, like the 708, and the Gate.[130] These were social spaces linked to a high level of performativity forged by the currency of the electric guitar. A December 1941 *Chicago Defender* article touted the opening of a Chicago-based Cotton Club featuring Roosevelt Sykes and "Memphis Minnie on the electric guitar."[131] A month later in January of 1942, the newspaper reported: "When the club was opened a few weeks ago Memphis Minnie was playing at a hot spot downtown but was brought South at tremendous cost to the management. She is one of the most

famous song stylists in the game song today."[132] The Garons state that she was the sole black woman electric guitarist and the best female blues artist in the city. Her black female body was at the center of a vital city-space where, nightly, living, breathing improvisational black artistic expression was cultivated and reengineered.[133]

On New Year's Eve 1942, Langston Hughes saw Memphis Minnie play the electric guitar at a club on New Year's Eve in 1942, and wrote about it for his column in the *Chicago Defender*. He marveled at Minnie and her performance, reporting an interesting descriptive composite image of her. She had a voice that was "hard and strong anyhow for a little woman's" and a "slender" body that was dressed "neatly." She wore glasses and reminded Hughes of an "old-maid school teacher with a sly sense of humor." Yet she had the marks of a provocative woman wearing polished "dark red nails," "high-heeled shoes," and a dice ring as she played to a receptive audience. [134]

Hughes continually registers his fascination with the juxtaposition of Memphis Minnie and the sonic power she skillfully harnessed. Hughes finds her electric guitar playing, music and singing to be hard. The electric guitar "is very loud, science having magnified all its softness away," he writes. Her voice "is made harder and stronger by scientific science," noting the way in which Memphis Minnie grabbed and yelled into the microphone to the crowd below her. Minnie, sitting in a chair atop a refrigerator, played her guitar "amplified to machine proportions—a musical version of electric welders plus a rolling mill." Her music, "runs and trills and deep steady chords" speed through the "amplifiers like Negro heartbeats mixed with iron and steel." Her legs "move like musical pistons."

Despite the creative sonic onslaught, Hughes, perhaps not surprisingly, finds the rhythm the only thing particularly discernible. The rhythm, which he describes as "old as Memphis Minnie's most remote ancestor," ultimately "overrides all modern amplification." Hughes's description of his encounter with Memphis Minnie's electric and electrifying performance does not condemn or question her presence in such spaces where men and women crowd together to dance to blues and drink alcohol late into the night in celebration. Instead, by the end of the column, in spite of marveling at her skills, he rhetorically wonders if the power of the electric guitar she is engaging ought to be actually credited to her or to science itself.

In addition, Hughes's descriptions of Minnie's guitar playing have strong connotations of sexual ecstasy. With her electric guitar strapped on, she "grabs the microphone," "yells," " throbs out the rhythm," "beats out the blues" and "swings it"—her hand moving up and down the strings of the guitar's neck in musical masturbation. This excites the coed audience to "holler out loud," "snap their fingers," "get up and move their bodies." "Men holler yes," Hughes declares and "when they do, Minnie smiles," as if satisfied with using the electric guitar to stimulate them to a collective orgasm in the confines of a shared small, dark and smoky space. It is a shared feeling as Hughes describes how "her gold teeth flash" and her "ear-rings tremble." The electric guitar becomes the vehicle through which Minnie makes indulgent gestures and ostentatious physical movements, freeing up her black female body in a space that is welcoming and one that she makes her own.

Over the course of her career, Minnie worked for herself and made her own schedule. Her life as a performing artist is a rich example of black women's different

abilities to embody and "assert an empowered presence."[135] Her last recording session was in 1959, according to the Garons. By then, she and husband guitarist Ernest "Little Son Joe" Lawlers had moved back to Memphis. Both continued to perform in and around the city in trios and a band with other musicians, at fish frys, friend's homes, and juke joints. Money was a problem and her guitars "were constantly in and out of the pawn shop."[136] As a couple they also performed on the King Biscuit Time, a popular blues radio show featuring black musicians as hosts and performers. In the early 1960s, Minnie suffered two strokes and died in 1973. Her death certificate listed her occupation as maid.[137]

As a performer, singer, and guitarist Minnie influenced artists such as Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, and the Rolling Stones—which helped secure their places in blues and rock histories, but not her own.[138]

Black Women Guitarists in Blues

Family relations and domesticity to fellow musicians helped the careers of many of the women in blues. After marrying Willie Brown, Josie Bush learned and shared his repertoire.[139] According to her cousin Mott Willis, "They used to play together just like two men, you know." Supposedly Bush and Brown had a tempestuous relationship mixing love and music:

> Well, both of'em was jealous of one another. They'd fight, you know. Go to places that way and play and get to fighting. I used to laugh about it, you know. And I'd be playing with'em, and I'd try to part'em, you know. Them old things was mean. They both of'em jealous of one another. Maybe some man would come up there and tell her, "Miss Josie, I want you to play me the 'Riverside.' " She had a lot of pieces she played, you know. And if he [Willie Brown] didn't hear what the man said, you know, those things get mad as a white-mouthed mule. "Josie, what'd that nigger say to you?" It started just from that on, you know. They parted, and she went to Helena, Arkansas.[140]

Nancy Levine and Maria V. Johnson observed the impact that relatives had on black women playing the guitar in country blues. Men were especially influential. For example, Josie Bush reportedly had an uncle named "Red" who taught her;[141] Little" Laura Dukes (1907–1992) told D. Antoinette Handy in a 1979 interview that a "fella by the name of Robert McCollum taught me to play the guitar. But with my little bitty hands, the uke became my instrument."[142] Robert McCollum was a blues guitarist who performed and recorded under the name Robert Lee McCoy and Robert Nighthawk in the 1930s and 1940s. Dukes also had a father who was a musician who played with W.C. Handy. Bonnie Jefferson (1919–2005) learned the guitar from her "intensely musically inclined" family.[143] "I learned to pick the guitar from my older brother Willis Lewis."[144] It is clear that women received support from male members of their family or other colleagues.

Etta Baker (1913–2006) was a North Carolina musician who had played the guitar since the age of three.[145] Her 1956 field recording of "Railroad Bill" (recorded by folk singer Paul Clayton) was released on the album *Instrumental Music from the Southern Appalachia* and became a folk standard. She did not publically perform because her husband, also a musician, refused to leave home and would not allow her to travel without him.[146] Upon retiring from her job at a textile mill in the late 1980s,[147] Baker began recording and performing at blues revival festivals throughout the United States.

Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten (1895–1987) was born in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in a musical family where she learned to play the guitar and banjo with her left hand. Known in folk circles for her classic song "Freight Train" (a song she wrote at 11 or 12), Cotten pioneered a guitar-picking style named after her, in which "she fretted the strings

with her right hand and picked with her left, the reverse of the usual method."[148] She played pre-blues music characteristic of late eighteenth and very early nineteenth century melodies with both black and white roots. "Discovered" by the ethnomusicological, folk-singing Seeger family (for whom she eventually worked as a domestic in Washington, D.C.), Cotten, like Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, gave private performances for "congressmen and senators, including John F. Kennedy."[149] Her first recorded album (1958) was entitled *Elizabeth Cotten: Negro Folk Songs and Tunes.* Cotten garnered success playing a circuit of music festivals after 1967. She also recorded with Smithsonian's Folkways label: *Shake Sugaree* (1967) and *When I'm Gone* (1979). In 1985, Cotten won a Grammy for Best Ethnic or Traditional Folk Recording. In 1987, folk singer-guitarist Odetta organized Cotten's last concert. Her acoustic guitar is currently on display at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.[150] In a 2001 oral history interview about school desegregation in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Sheila Florence shared that her mother "played piano, she played organ, and she played guitar. My aunt, which is Libba Cotten, played. She taught my mom how to play the guitar, and she learned playing "Freight Train."[151]

Bonnie Jefferson (b. 1919) was born in Arkansas and grew up singing in church and playing instruments. She and her brother, who also played guitar, "were taught to tune and chord the guitar by my mother, Clara E. Lewis, on an old acoustic guitar we used to borrow from a friend…." Jefferson said: "A turning point in my musical life came in 1931 when I heard a lady guitarist who was visiting my home. Her name was Mamie Scott. She could sing and pick immensely, and to listen to her gave me a deeper desire to play guitar. So in the early 30s my older brother gave me one of his guitars to

practice on. So after the chores were done in the evening I would practice hour after hour on songs my father used [sic] pick, such as 'Take Me Back,' 'Louise,' and 'Spanish Flangdang] (sic)[sic].'"[152] Married in 1949, for ten years Jefferson "decided to give up my guitar to be a housewife." She did not play the guitar again until the 1960s. By the time *Living Blues* magazine published her first-person narrative in a 1974 issue, she was living in San Diego, California, employed at a laundry. While she had been performing small gigs that local blues fans sought out for her at colleges on the west coast like the San Diego State blues festival. She had also recorded, but the magazine still made an appeal to its readership asking for help with obtaining performance opportunities for Jefferson so that she could better support herself and her husband who relied on her.[153]

Algia Mae Hinton (b. 1929) was born to farming parents in Johnston County, North Carolina. At age nine she began learning the guitar. Hinton did not record until 1998 under the auspices of the Music Maker Relief Foundation with whom she also toured, earning international recognition. *Honey Babe,* the title of her album, is also the title of the first guitar song she learned from her mother, who also played the instrument.[154] According to Bruce Bastin, a scholar of the blues tradition in the southeastern United States, her mother was so good on stringed instruments "that tales persist of her selling her soul to the devil"[155] —a blues trope typically reserved for male musicians. Hinton also had an aunt who played guitar.[156]

Blues guitarist Jessie Mae Hemphill (1933–2006) grew up in a large musical family of multi-instrumentalists in the north Mississippi hill country where she was born and raised. The Hemphills played a wide range of genres, including a pre-blues style of music on fifes and drums—sustaining an African American musical tradition dating back

to the eighteenth century.[157] Hemphill was the granddaughter of Sid Hemphill, a well-known local fife-and-drum and string band musician who was first recorded in the field by folklorist Alan Lomax in 1942.[158] Alongside the guitar, she played drums, fife, and tambourine. Her mother (Virgie Lee) and aunts (Sidney Lee and Rosa Lee Hill) also played guitar (among other instruments).[159]

Rosa Lee (1910-1968), sometimes known as Rosalie Hill, learned the instrument from her father (Sid Hemphill) and played with him at local events.[160] Lomax made field recordings of Hill singing and playing the acoustic guitar in Como, Mississippi, in 1959. One year before Rosa Lee Hill died, George Mitchell interviewed her and recorded Hill performing.[161]

Hemphill learned to play from male and female members in her family (including Rosa Lee) and grew up playing in various musical formations with her father, grandfather, mother, sisters, and family friends.[162] Mitchell recorded Hemphill as well, in 1967, when she went by her married name, Jessie Mae Brooks. David Evans later recorded Hemphill in the early 1970s. According to Evans, with whom she worked and performed extensively, her music making initially largely occurred at events such as "local house parties and picnics"[163] throughout Mississippi and in Memphis, Tennessee, where she lived for a period of time. In the 1980s and 1990s, Hemphill began playing music festivals and performed shows throughout the United States and Europe before a stroke in 1993 partially paralyzed her and prevented her from continuing to the play the guitar though she continued to sing. Hemphill recorded albums such as *She-Wolf* (1981, released in France) and *Feelin' Good* (1990, released in the United States); and was a

featured artists on a variety of compilation blues and world music albums. She also won W.C. Handy blues awards.

While women like Memphis Minnie bucked tradition and convention by not attending church, many musicians attended church and gained critical performance and musical skills within the institution. Bonnie Jefferson (in Arkansas), "Mama" Estella Yancey (in Chicago) and Jeanne Carroll (in Chicago) grew up singing in the church.[164] In particular, Sister Rosetta Tharpe carried the mood and tenor of her church upbringing into her career.

Black Women Guitarists in Gospel

Throughout American history, religious fervor has compelled willing women to use all of their available resources to spread the gospel. In the early 1800s Jarena Lee defied nineteenth century convention for black womanhood by preaching the gospel in the mid-Atlantic area. She strove to spread the good news wherever she could reach on foot. Lee, a free woman, risked kidnap into slavery by crossing into slave states to preach the gospel. Denied the right to be ordained in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, she won over founder Bishop Richard Allen who eventually licensed her as an exhorter.

Nearly one hundred years later, similarly motivated, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Rev. Jeannette Johns, and a duo called the Gospel Keys harnessed their ability to play the acoustic and electric guitars for their own missionary zeal, to evangelize and "sing unto the Lord a new song." As Stephen Foster notes "no less than forty-one Psalms command" Christians to do just that.[165] With biblical scriptures in mind and the guitar in hand these women moved across a range of spaces and places: the street, the stage, the tent, and the church. Perhaps not as dangerous as the path followed by Jarena Lee, these women had

to negotiate their way across the highly contested terrain of the secular and sacred. In the process, they, too, upended conventional boundaries imposed upon womanhood. Though the church offered women many benefits, it was double-edged as a locale. Black women could flourish and find respect as missionaries and musicians but were denied ordination as ministers or entry into higher levels of church leadership.

The Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C.), a predominately black denomination, was founded in the late 1890s in Mississippi.[166] They enjoyed great passion and exuberance in praise and worship, including the freedom of speaking in tongues, which denomination doctrine viewed as a gift from God's Holy Spirit. They refused to ordain women into the ministry yet Sister Rosetta Tharpe (1915–1973) was forged as a spiritual woman and creative artist in that milieu, a milieu that claimed to follow the free flowing of the Spirit over human laws. As Jerma Jackson notes, "The belief that musical ability represented the power of God working through an individual gave women great latitude in developing and deploying their musical skills."[167] Clearly, the male-dominated church leadership felt God did not extend that power to be an ordained minister or pastor.

Born in Arkansas, Tharpe was raised by a deeply religious mother in Chicago where they migrated in the early 1920s when the city was on the cusp of becoming the birthplace of gospel music. Thomas Dorsey developed gospel by mixing "Baptist lyrics and [a] Sanctified beat with the stylized delivery of blues and jazz."[168] However, it was Tharpe who displayed a strong blues-inspired showmanship on the acoustic and electric guitars with her palpable and unabashed mixing of the sacred and the secular that would make her a star. With her evangelist mother, Tharpe spent years ministering on the street with her guitar, playing at revivals and other church events in the 1920s and 1930s.[169]

Her decision to play in nightclubs and on Broadway in the late 1930s invited controversy from her church audience but invited mass crossover appeal to the broader American culture where white people were not yet exposed to gospel music.[170] Tharpe made her debut in 1938 at the Cotton Club in Harlem, performing the gospel song "Rock Me" and the blues tune "I Want A Tall Skinny Papa."[171] With her early National Resonator guitar in hand, singing and accompanying herself, Tharpe became known for both blasphemously and brilliantly "swinging the spirituals," investing a loose jazziness into previously more sober and somber songs sung in church. Tharpe knew she was a rebel violating church protocol by choosing to perform in nonreligious spaces where there were forbidden actions of unrestrained sexuality occurring through gestures and immodest dance moves, undaunted drinking, slinky clothing, and sexy music.[172] She further defied societal and church conventions by divorcing her husband, dressing more fabulously, fashionably, and even gaudily. Nonetheless, as Gayle Wald notes in her biography about Tharpe, Tharpe understood "herself doing God's work as a popular musician."[173]

In 1939, *Life* magazine published a feature with photographs about Sister Rosetta Tharpe and her newfound fame. With her popularity, she became the first gospel singer to sign to a major record label (Decca Records) and the first gospel artist to earn national celebrity. This was before the so-called golden era of gospel music (after World War II) when Mahalia Jackson, Clara Ward and other gospel artists and groups popularized the genre.[174] According to gospel music scholar Mellonee V. Burnim, the budding genre functioned as a place of opportunity where women could earn respect and attention.[175]

For Decca, Tharpe recorded vocals and guitar several times with pianist Sammy Price throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In his autobiography, *What Do They Want?* Price

remembers Tharpe ambiguously and dismissively. He claimed Tharpe "tuned her guitar funny and sang in the wrong key…She could sing and all that, but then she was a folksinger, more or less."[176] "With Rosetta, I'd tell her how to move her capo and get the guitar in the right key, because without the capo she'd sing in A and E, all those guitar keys."[177]

Price was reluctant to record with Tharpe because of his discomfort in playing overtly religious music "with too much rhythm."[178] He was convinced to record with Tharpe both by the allure of money and by a conversation with Tharpe's mother, Katie Bell Nubin: "That if, when a song was played, the thinking behind it was right, then there was nothing wrong with it."[179] In September 1944, Tharpe and the Sam Price Trio recorded "Two Little Fishes and Five Loaves of Bread," "Strange Things Happening Every Day," "I Claim Jesus First," and "Singing in My Soul."[180]

Price also claimed that Tharpe was essentially uncharitable and never wanted to pay him despite all the work he did to advance her career. This is an ironic reversal of gender relations with a woman allegedly abusing a man to advance her career. Those allegations did not deter Sister Rosetta Tharpe in pursuit of her creativity, her guitar playing and fame according to Gayle Wald. Tharpe went on to collaborate and perform with boogie-woogie combos, swing bands, and gospel quartets, touring the United States and Europe throughout the length of her long career.[181] "Every aspect of her playing and singing was Spirit-driven," Wald notes, "and yet consciously calculated at the same time."[182]

Tharpe influenced musicians like Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Johnny Cash.[183] "There's something about the gospel blues that's so deep the world can't stand it," she

told writer and gospel record producer Tony Heilbut in an interview in the 1960s.[184] He, in turn, emphasized that "she could pick blues guitar like a Memphis Minnie."[185] On the guitar, she "developed a Sanctified gospel guitar style that emphasized the picking of individual notes as a counterpoint to her voice."[186] By all accounts, Tharpe was a flamboyant performer in style, dress, and showmanship.[187] It is only recently, however, that critics have recognized her as a rock'n'roll trailblazer, including a long overdue documentary that aired on PBS in February 2013.

Decades earlier, in 1909, Rev. Jeannette Johns of Baltimore, Maryland, began evangelizing on the street with her guitar while wearing "a clerical collar and vest."[188] A member of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ), with her guitar she functioned as an amateur musician who performed her religious work with three books—"the Bible, hymn book and pocket book."[189] The *Afro-American* noted that these three items were "a most desirable triumvirate for church work." Her presence was enough of a marvel that the newspaper entitled the article, "A Revivalist Who Conducts Street Meetings and A Woman At That."[190] In her choice of locale and religious style of dress, Johns defied popular conventions as she engaged in proselytization and church work involving women over the years her name appears in local black newspapers of the era.

A March 1910 article in the *Afro-American* noted a "Rev. Mrs. Jeannette Johns, of St. John A.M.E. Zion church, Baltimore, preached to an over flowing congregation" at an evening service at Trinity A.M.E. Zion church in St. Michaels, Maryland.[191] A September 3, 1910 issue of *the Washington Bee* listed a "Miss Jeannette Johns"[192] as a member of the recently appointed "missions"[193] committee at the Washington District conference of the AMEZ Church. The 1910 Census lists a 38-year-old "mulatto" woman named

Jeannette Johns whose occupation is listed as minister. She is listed as living with her mother, Susan Smith, and a boarder at 818 McDonough Street in Baltimore. This Jeannette Johns was born in Washington, D.C., was widowed with seven children, none of whom were living at the time of the enumeration.[194]

Two years later in 1912, Johns created a large leadership role for herself by soliciting women elders, evangelists and missionaries in the church denomination to join in the creation of a "Ministerial Women's Union of the U.S.A.," of which she was the president.[195] In 1913, "Rev. Mrs. Jeannette Johns" preached on one Sunday "two very acceptable sermons" and lectured (a distinction the *Afro-American* made) on a Monday at A.M.E. Zion Church. The newspaper printed that she had the "making of a race leader."[196] "Her subject, Little Things, created a broad field," the paper wrote. "She kept the audience interest until she sat down.[197]

Sister O.M. (Ola Mae) Terrell was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1911. An evangelist who played guitar on the streets of Atlanta, she was a member of "the Fire Baptized and Holiness churches." A 1941 *Cleveland Call and Post* article noted that a "Mrs. Ola Mae Terrell of Atlanta, Ga." had been working with two other women in holding services at a local church with plans to travel to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania "to hold services there."[198] Terrell had a short recording career. With Columbia Records in 1953, she recorded songs such as "How Long," "The Gambling Man," "Lord I Want You To Lead Me," and "Life is a Problem." She later had a Sunday radio show on WPAL out of Charleston, South Carolina. In 1955, the *Atlanta Daily World* announced upcoming events in Commerce, Georgia, reporting that "Sister Ola M. Terrell will render a program in behalf of Sister Eunice Gillispie. Come out and hear this great singer."[199] Musicologist

Bruce Nemerov found her living in a nursing home in the 1990s and interviewed her. According to Nemerov, she "taught herself to play the guitar and began writing gospel songs and singing them on vice-ridden Decatur Street." From the 1930s to the 1950s, "Sister Terrell lived the life of an itinerate evangelist and supported herself with her music. She was known only to those who heard her sing and play on the street corner, in a park or at church.[200] Terrell died at age 95 in 2006, not long after Nemerov found her.

A woman by the name of "Mother" McCollum was also a guitar evangelist, but not much is known about her. She recorded in Chicago in June 1930: "When I Take My Vacation in Heaven," "Jesus is My Air-O-Plane," and "I Want to See Him."[201]

A Sister Matthews recorded "Stand by Me" in Oakland, California, in 1945.[202]

Blues and gospel singer Flora Molton (1908-1990) evangelized with her guitar in Washington, D.C., in the late 1930s. Born in Virginia, her father was a coal miner who became a pastor. Raised in church, Molton was inspired to play guitar listening to men play the instrument with knives at "house hops, house parties."[203] She eventually bought a stringless $1.00 guitar from a pawn shop, "…I got that guitar and got me some strings and I commenced to start playing on that."[204] A girl in her church who played guitar first tuned it for her. Molton told Eleanor Ellis, in *Living Blues* magazine, that she loved to travel, "first thing I think about is traveling"[205] and that the Lord called her to preach in the Holiness Church. Combining the two, Molton spent most of her life singing, preaching, praying and holding church services on the street and at different churches by herself and with other church members and street singers. Molton constructed a musical and religious coexistence with the guitar as a critical tool of her missionary work. Molton also performed at festivals and clubs singing blues and gospel. Modeling her performance

practices on the actions of Jesus who "went among all classes of people," she understood her ability to perform in such spaces (where people were "going to take drinks") to be compatible with her beliefs because her goal was to help people, to "enlighten them about the Lord."[206]

Still another artist who publically contended with secular-sacred crossover concerns was Mary Lynn Deloatch.[207] Born in Brookstation, Georgia, in 1923 (death unknown), she is believed to be from Charlotte, North Carolina.[208] When recording gospel she used the name Mary Deloatch.[209] When recording R&B, she was known as Marylyn Scott.[210] In 1950, she signed with Savoy Records, a company based in Newark, New Jersey, known for its jazz and gospel roster of recordings.[211]

In 1949, "Marylyn Scott" performed on guitar and vocals in a minstrel show in Beaufort, South Carolina.[212] In 1950 "Marylyn Scott" with Johnny Otis recorded "Beer Bottle Boogie" and "Uneasy Blues" for Regent, a subsidiary of Savoy.[213] An advertisement in *Billboard* that same year touted her as Mary "Deloach" with "sure fire hits!": "Our Father Loves His Son" and "I'll Ride On a Cloud With My Lord." The ad labeled her "sensational spiritual songstress of the South." In 1952, she recorded "Lord's Gospel Train" and "New Gospel Street."[214] In addition, she recorded "Rumors of War," a song she wrote, and "Life Was a Burden" as Mary Deloatch, both for Savoy.[215]

Deloatch recorded blues songs such as "I Got What My Daddy Likes" and gospel songs such as "I'll Ride On A Cloud With My Lord" in 1945, 1950, and 1951 in Charlotte, North Carolina; New York City; and Atlanta. In 1951, "I Want to Die Easy" by Mary Deloatch is listed under "new spirituals" in an advertisement for Gertrude Arnold's radio show "Tips and Tops from the Music Box," alongside of "Rosetta Tharpe—Marie

Knight and Rev. C.L. Franklin and the Ward Singers on WSAP 1350 AM,[216] Portsmouth, Virginia's first radio station, founded in 1942.[217]

While official knowledge about her life is sketchy, public records, articles and ads in the Norfolk-based *New Journal and Guide* newspaper are rich resources about some aspects of her life. Summit County, Ohio marriage records list a singer named Mary Lynn Deloatch as marrying a minister named Robert Grady Moore on October 10, 1964.[218] They shared a residence in Akron, Ohio. The license informs that she was a widow with no children. Deloatch was also a local radio host, and a traveling singing evangelist, visiting churches with her "talking guitar" in the Tidewater area of Virginia, and other southern and midwestern cities.[219] She also had some appearances on television and radio "in Cleveland, Canada, Detroit, Mich.; Delaware, Maryland, New York and other places."[220] This particular article featured a photograph of Mary Deloatch wearing a choir robe and her electric guitar.[221] In June 1962, "Marylyn Scott" was scheduled to perform in Cleveland, Ohio, at the Music Box as an added attraction.[222]

Deloatch used radio to further her career and missionary calling. She hosted a show on WRAP-AM in Norfolk, Virginia, in the 1950s. In advertising photographs, Deloatch poses, smiling, wearing a choir robe, standing before a microphone, holding a electric guitar. One ad calls her "Sister Mary DeLoatch"—"Tidewater's Missionary of Song" who, twice a day, "conducts" "sunrise spirituals," alongside of "The Mary DeLoatch Program." "[223] At the end of June in 1970, "Rev. Mrs. Mary Deloatch" conducted a revival at a Baptist church in Philadelphia. The *Philadelphia Tribune* noted that she "will also be playing her electric guitar."[224]

The Gospel Keys (alternately known as Two Gospel Keys or Two Gospel Keyes)—"Mother" Sally Jones (b. unknown-d. unknown) and Mrs. Emma Daniel (birth unknown–death unknown), "great grandmothers both"—were also reportedly members of Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C.) out of Augusta, Georgia. [225] Little is known about them, but according to the liner notes of a commercial music collection of guitar evangelists, both women were described as " 'itinerant street singers' in their sixties in 1950,"[226] evangelizing with the guitar and tambourine.[227]

With Emma Daniels on guitar[228] the Gospel Keys made gospel recordings like "You've Got to Move" throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s in New York. "You've Got to Move" was later rerecorded by the Rolling Stones, as well as many other groups and singers of popular music. A 1950 article in New York's *Amsterdam News* noted that the two women would be performing at an Easter sunrise service "open, with spiritual blessings, to the public,"[229] at Rockland Palace in Harlem, along with a slate of other gospel musicians. Sixties soul singer and songwriter Freddie Scott was the grandson of Sally Jones. Scott told *Soul Express* that he sang with his grandmother when he was "eleven-twelve. At twelve years old I went with her to Europe, to England."[230] It is likely that these women were evangelizing on the street in the decades before they began recording.

Black Women Guitarists in Jazz

The 1940s were a grand era for black women, black women musicians and American musical development. Jazz was jumping, gospel was in full swing, R&B was rising. Black women variously participated in different economies of visibility and continued representing a diverse set of engaged notions of black womanhood. Though

not a professional musician, an April 28, 1945 *Pittsburgh Courier* "Personalities" column profile of "Mrs. Margaret McDaniels," noted that aside from a life centered on membership in civic organizations like the NAACP and other clubs, she was also a popular local performer, a coloratura soprano and "along with her other accomplishments she plays the electric guitar."[231]

In February 1945, McDaniels' professional counterparts, "three lovelies"—Carline Ray on piano, "Marjorie Putnam at the electric guitar," and Edna Smith on bass, (all "Juilliard graduates")—were slated to join Cardinale "Slim" Perpall's band. In an article titled, "Women Get Hip in Ork on Main Stem" *The New York Amsterdam* announced that "Cardinale and His Cards" were "the first main stem orchestra to okay women instrumentalists." "The Trio drags down at least a dozen encores nightly."

Many professional and semi-professional women instrumentalists joined such predominately male and male-led bands as members or featured vocalists or instrumentalists of jazz and swing bands. They also formed and joined all-female jazz and swing bands and orchestras that toured the United States. The latter were in particularly high demand during the male musician shortage caused by the World War II draft. Of these, the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, the Prairie View Co-eds, and Eddie Durham's All-Star Girl Orchestra were comprised of mainly African-American women playing instruments like the saxophone, the trombone, the drums, trumpet, and piano. Many of these women had been playing since the 1920s and 1930s in other all-girl orchestras and bands throughout the United States.[232]

It was also a particularly strong era of increased enterprise, professionalization and professional achievement for black women instrumentalists, including those on the

guitar—a fact underappreciated in many histories of popular music. These were some of the hey days of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Memphis Minnie, Marylin Scott Deloatch, and Wee Bea Booze as performing and recording artists. The "seventeen-girl sepia band"[233] International Sweethearts of Rhythm had a roster of guitar-playing women in the 1940s. Shortly after graduation from Juilliard, guitarist Carline Ray joined the group (1946–1947).[234] Sweetheart's bassist Edna Smith could also play guitar.[235] Long before becoming Sweethearts bandleader and vocalist (1941–1948) Anna Mae Darden Winburn won an amateur talent contest as a teenager, singing while playing a guitar. In the late 1930s, she led a band (with pioneer jazz electric guitarist Charlie Christian), Anna Mae Winburn and her Cotton Club Boys. Formerly, the band had been called the Kansas City Blue Devils.[236] She also worked in Chicago at the Grand Terrace Ballroom for a period of time. She had a self-admitted limited knowledge of songs she was able to sing and play. She also had a very limited wardrobe of fancy dresses suitable for the space. As she told Sally Placksin (1982), "I worked up there on tips alone, and I had four numbers in my repertoire: 'Did You Ever See A Dream Walking,' 'If It Ain't Love,' 'Shanty Town,' and 'Red Sails in the Sunset.' I could play those songs on my guitar…and I'd walk around the tables and people would stick money in the guitar and that's how I made my living."[237]

The "Orchestra Notes" column in *Billboard* noted that "electric guitarist" Roxanna Lucas joined the International Sweethearts of Rhythm in 1942.[238] According to D. Antoinette Handy, Lucas and Carline Ray played in the Swinging Rays of Rhythm as well. In addition, an Yvonne Plummer would also play guitar.[239] A February 1942 *Cleveland Call and Post* article about the "all star band of beautiful girls" noted the

band's diversity of "Puerto Ricans," "Spanish," Chinese, and "Negroes." Listed under Negroes was a Helen Paine, described as "master of the guitar."[240]

Like Memphis Minnie, these female musicians had collegial and/or romantic relationships with talented male contemporaries. Sammy Price played piano for Beatrice "Bea" Booze, Sister Rosetta Tharpe,[241] and Nora Lee King. Booze's career launched at a Lionel Hampton vocalist audition that led to her opening for Louis Armstrong after winning a local black newspaper contest.[242] Nora Lee King married rhythm guitarist Lawrence Lucie, who recorded with artists like Billie Holiday and played in big bands with Benny Carter, Fletcher Henderson, Lucky Millinder, and Louis Armstrong in the 1930s and 1940s.[243] Sister Rosetta Tharpe enjoyed a popular stint performing with Lucky Millinder. Carline Ray sang with Erskine Hawkins and his orchestra.[244] Ray later married musician Luis Russell, Louis Armstrong's bandleader.[245]

As professional musicians, image was a critical component of their careers. Many musicians, regardless of gender, took publicity shots in which they were well-dressed, well-groomed, often posing with their instruments. In *Swing Shift* Sherrie Tucker's interviews with female musicians, who played in all-girl bands in the 1940s, repeatedly emphasized the ways in which their adherence to techniques of femininity functioned for them as an "additional labor" that "masqueraded as leisure."[246]

As women playing male-identified instruments, they had to continually and demonstrably attest to their femininity. Women musicians had to impress skeptical audiences with their expertise and prove that they could play. They sought to be more than just pretty faces at the same time that they had to visually insure that they were putting forth pretty faces through their commitment to wearing dresses, jewelry, heels,

and having their hair permed. By these means, they attempted to avoid the racial castigations visited upon Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield. Delivered from the bonds of slavery but not the rigid limitations of segregation and racism, black women in the early to middle twentieth century saw the guitar and singing as a means to a better economic status as well as to provide pleasure to people while deriving pleasure and self-esteem in their own skills in playing an instrument and in being themselves as black women. Some black women achieved fairly high levels of musical success, despite their humble beginnings in life.

Born in Alabama, Nora Lee King (1909–1995) was called a "singing girl guitarist" by black newspapers like *The Amsterdam News* and *The Afro-American*.[247] In the late 1930s, she had a group called the Rhythm Dandies who, according to D. Antoinette Handy, performed in 1939 at Sunday intermission at Madison Square Garden hockey games.[248] King performed in a variety of places in New York, including the Harlem Swing Concert,[249] on the Kay Kyser Musical Knowledge radio show,[250] and at the Chateau Moderne. As part of a duo called Nora and Delle, King recorded "Army Camp Blues," "Get Away From My Window," "You Ain't Been Doin' Right," and "Why Don't You Do Right?" for Decca.[251]

As her career progressed into the 1940s, she wrote songs like "I Used to be a Good Girl" (1946) and played venues such as Burt Kelley's Stables and The Place in New York, as well as the Harlem Defense Recreation Center.[252] She also recorded and/or performed with artists such as Sammy Price,[253] Dizzie Gillespie,[254] and Mary Lou Williams.[255] She eventually joined guitarist Lawrence Lucie's[256] rhythm quartet, The Lucienaries). She married Lucie in 1945.[257] Together, they played in a trio and began

recording. According to Lucie, "Nora Lee" was "a wonderful singer," who could also play accordion.[258] With her husband, King co-founded a record label, Toy Records, and arranged and produced music. Later, they hosted a cable television show in Manhattan from the early 1970s to the 1990s. Together for 47 years, Lucie said they "never had to wonder where we'd get our next job."[259]

King is tricky to suss out as she appears by numerous names. In 1963, on the Toy Records label, she released "Morning" and "Move On Down the Line" as Susan King, listing herself as songwriter or co-songwriter through the name Lenore King. The song was copywritten through her own Kinlu Music.[260] According to the Catalog of Copyright Entries for 1963, under the pseudonym of Lenore King she cowrote "Blow, Trade Winds, Blow Again" with trumpeter Ludwig "Joe" Jordan, again under Kinlu Music.[261] In 1966, listed as Lenore King, she cowrote "One More Tear" with Jerry Logan for Eddie Griffin. Lucie again arranged and produced.[262] King also edited Lucie's book *Special Guitar Lessons* as "NoraLee King Lucie" through their Playnote Music Publisher company. She died in 1995.

Carmalita (sometimes referenced as Carmen) Hampton (1916–1987) played guitar, banjo, and saxophone (baritone and bass[263]). She was born into a musical family in Ohio and in the 1940 Census, her listed occupation is "guitar player" in a "band." She and her brothers and sisters (Aletra, Marcus, Clarke, Jr., Robert, Virtue, Dawn, Maceo, and Locksley)[264] all sang and played instruments. They were homeschooled by their parents as they traveled all over the United States in a family band.[265] At age 14, she was listed as "musician" in an "orchestra."[266] In 1938 on a trip to Richmond, Virginia, the family was featured as a swing music band called the Royal Hamptonians in a *Norfolk*

Journal and Guide article.[267] Before she and sisters Aletra, Dawn, and Virtue formed The Hampton Sisters in the 1940s.[268] Carmalita was working with Aletra at Fort Benjamin Harrison "serving the injured soldiers when they came in," as Aletra stated in an interview with the African-American newspaper, *The Indiana Herald* in 2000. In the same interview, Virtue told writer Kathy Johnson, "We'd go down and play through the wards at night"…"We worked there about 6 months before going to Camp Aturbury and began working in the laundry. Next we entertained at Grissom Air Force Base, all through the Red Cross."[269]

Beatrice Booze (circa 1913–death unknown), better known as "Bea Booze" and "Wee Bea Booze," was born in Maryland.[270] Her stage name was a combined direct reference to her petite stature with her first name shortened. Some scholars cite her real name as "Muriel Nicholls"[271] but it is not clear what the source is for this. Her ability to play guitar and sing (coupled with a media delight with her height and size) garnered Booze some success and a short-lived popularity. She was often described as "Baltimore's blues singing guitarist,"[272] a "guitar strumming lassie,"[273] or "the little girl with the voice and the guitar."[274]

Her biggest hit was 1942's "See See Rider," a classic blues tune, sung by Ma Rainey, Chuck Berry, and many others. Booze was featured in *Billboard* as the "tiny miss" able to "cut a wide circle in sepia sets."[275] She performed with Louis Armstrong at Town Hall in Philadelphia, where the reviewer noted "shouting out the lines to the accompaniment of her guitar twanging, gal listens as a real hot hosanna songbird for those deep-down Delta blues."[276]

Booze traveled and recorded vocals and guitar on a number of singles for Decca records (many with Sammy Price).[277] She sang on ABC Radio and the Savoy in Chicago with Louis Armstrong. Interestingly, the same day Booze recorded "Catchin' As Catch Can" and "War Rationin' Papa") with Price for Decca, Price recorded with Nora Lee King on "Deep Sea Diver" for Decca.[278]

Booze was born into a musical family. Her father and brother Charles played piano. Brother Alfred played sax. A 1944 *Afro-American* newspaper article stated that she "often upset the household plunking a ukulele."[279] She reportedly taught herself to play guitar and played different nightclubs "for as little as $1.50 a night, sometimes for the tips she made."[280] Discovered in a music competition sponsored by the *Afro-American* newspaper in Baltimore, Maryland, in February 1942, Booze played her guitar and "put over a risqué number, 'Hip-shaking Mama'" and won the prize, a vocalist position singing with Lionel Hampton's orchestra.[281] A month later she was recording "See See Rider" for Decca.[282]

Booze went on to tour with Louis Armstrong's orchestra throughout the Midwest and Southwest. In 1943, she performed with Louis Armstrong and his big band, doing vocals on "Don't Cry Baby" for an ABC radio broadcast from Houston, Texas.[283] In 1944, she performed at the Regal Theatre in Chicago with Andy Kirk's orchestra in May.[284] She also performed on a bill with Andy Kirk and June Richmond in San Antonio at the Library Auditorium.[285] And again, she performed with Armstrong at the Savoy in Chicago.[286] In 1945, she sang on recordings ("Alabama Bound" and "Doggin' Man Blues") with Andy Kirk.[287] Like many other musicians of the era, Booze sang songs about the war, "War Rationing Papa" and "Uncle Sam, Come and Get Him." An article

noted that she was not married because "her main boy friend was inducted into the army."[288]

In 1950, *Billboard* said that her style of singing on the song "Don't Tell Me Nothin About My Man" was "in the Bessie Smith tradition." Even more telling, they described the song as a "nostalgia blues."[289] In 1951, noting "Easy Rising Blues/I Just" and "I Just Ain't Feeling Right/Easy," she was listed under "Advance Rhthm [sic] & Blues Record Releases."[290]

Over the course of her career, she worked a circuit of clubs throughout the Midwest and north like The Silver Dollar in Boston,[291] The Moonglow in Chester, Pennsylvania,[292] and the Quincy Social Club in Cleveland.[293] A December 1950 advertisement for a performance at the Quincy Social Club billed her as "the Famous See See Rider Girl" with a picture of Booze in a dress with a guitar.[294] In August 1951 "that little bit of blues singing dynamite" was performing at Lawson's Hotel in Philadelphia with Candy Johnson.[295] And in 1954, she was scheduled to play Christmas Eve at the Cotton Club in Cleveland.[296]

Despite her success, Booze was back living in Maryland at 1344 Division, according to the 1956 Baltimore City Directory, which also listed her as working as a maid.[297] Two years later, however, the directory listed her occupation as "musician.[298] In 1962, Booze recorded vocals and guitar with Sammy Price, "Good Time Poppa" and "What Else Ain't-Cha Got?" for Stardust.[299]

Black Women Guitarists in Rock'n'Roll

In the 1950s, black women like Peggy Jones were quietly making history. Eventually known as Lady Bo, Jones (b. 1940) became the first black woman guitarist in

rock'n'roll when she began playing with Bo Diddley in his band from 1957 to 1961 (first part-time, then full-time in 1958), recording and touring with him throughout the United States.[300] Bo Diddley is largely cited in American music history books as one of the inventors and founders of rock'n'roll music.

Jones's multifaceted artistic development began early. She was born into a musical family that encouraged her in a range of talents, including dancing (like tap), singing (including operatic), modeling, and composing. She had performed at Carnegie Hall twice by age nine. At twelve, she chose to play the ukulele, and for high school, Jones attended New York's The High School for Performing Arts. By 1955, she switched to the electric guitar because "it was kind of stupid to go into entertainment with the ukulele!"[301] "I was always a subject of someone coming up to talk to me; you're automatically different anyway when you're walking down the street with a guitar."[302] "In the 1950s, there were no other female guitarists," she told *Rockrgrl* magazine. "I had no help." She learned by going to Apollo Theater shows and watching performances of musicians such as Ike Turner and Mickey Baker."[303] Later, she bought a guitar after seeing the singing guitar duo of Mickey & Sylvia at the Apollo.

In his biography, written with George R. Write, Bo Diddley said he "came up with the idea of puttin' a girl guitar player in the group," after his male guitarist was drafted. "That was somethin' *new*, you dig, because there wasn't no chicks in groups playin' guitars at the time. The chick [Peggy Jones] started playin' and she was *dynamite*."[304]

In 1957, Diddley noticed her walking down the street with a guitar strapped to her back as he was standing outside of the Apollo Theater (where he was scheduled to perform). Lady Bo remembers:

> Hysterically he said what is that? He had never seen a Supro guitar. I said, "Now that's a dumb question! First you probably never saw a girl carrying a guitar down the street before and want to know if I played it, did you think that was funny?" He said, "NO!" I continued, "then you insult my ax and I listen to Wes Montgomery, Kenny Burrell and Charlie Parker and I THINK I've heard of you! Do you think that's funny?" He said, " No, but I like your attitude, let's play something."[305]

At the time, Jones was already well on her way to crafting a career for herself. She had already played guitar for a Continentals record in 1956 and sang first tenor as a member of a vocal quintet group called The Bop-Chords on the 1957 release of their single, "Baby"/"So Why."[306]

According to Lady Bo, playing with Bo Diddley in the early days "was like training because the hardest things in the world for me at that time was the rhythm, that Bo Diddley rhythm….My hands were so sore. I thought I was going to have a permanent lock on holding my pick trying to play this rhythm."[307] Together, in what she described as a "strictly student-teacher" relationship despite rumors suggesting the opposite,[308] they generated a "unique double rhythm guitar sound"[309] in rock'n'roll music that enabled Diddley to earn a place of honor in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987.

Jones played guitar (often a Cadillac thunderbolt-shaped guitar[310] that she lent to Norma-Jean "The Duchess" Wofford, who later replaced Lady Bo) and sang on many of his most popular hits, like "Gunslinger," "Road Runner," and "Hey Bo Diddley."[311] Jones played on several albums: *Bo Diddley* (1958), *Go Bo Diddley* (1959), *Have Guitar, Will*

Travel (1960), *Bo Diddley in the Spotlight* (1960), *Bo Diddley is a Gunslinger* (1960), *Bo Diddley is a Lover* (1961), and *Bo Diddley's a Twister* (1962).[312]

When not working with Diddley, Jones flexed her musicianship in different professional formations: singing in a duo named Greg and Peg, "playing on sessions for other people," and performing as a singer in nightclubs.[313] By 1961, she also had her own trio, The Jewels, an interracial trio with bass guitarist Bobby Baskerville and drummer Brian Keenan, who went on to play for The Chambers Brothers. Later, in 1963, she and husband Baskerville released one single as Bob & Peggy.

An early 1960s publicity photo of The Jewels shows everyone holding the instrument they played in the band. Like Memphis Minnie before her, Jones exhibited her brains and beauty with the guitar in hand. Lady Bo poses with an electric guitar in tight black pants, high heels, a matching black plunging V-neck sleeveless top with a necklace dangling just above her revealed décolletage. The two male musicians (bass player and drums) flank her on either side wearing matching suits with skinny ties.

In published interviews with niche blues and rock music websites and books, Jones constructs a modest narrative of herself as important to rock'n'roll music's development. According to her, "I laid down an awful lot of tracks in Bo's Washington, D.C., studio between 1960 and 1962…..I had all these ideas and I'd put them on tape and play my guitar leads over my guitar rhythm parts."[314] Unfortunately, when Chess Records, Diddley's label, obtained them, her critical musical contributions were lost in credits that read "unknown personnel" or were credited to Diddley himself or to The Duchess.

> From age seventeen (1957) I emerged at a time when there were no other female lead guitarists and spent years as the lesser known band member in the career of Bo

> Diddley. It seems you were ignored if you played an instrument. Record labels, promoters, forgot your name like you didn't exist. Most photographers and newspapers edited the girl guitar player (me) out of photos that went to press like it wasn¹t important. Had I been treated as a serious artist then, maybe my career would be different today.[315]

"Bo didn't get into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987 by himself," she says. "What I would like is that my little contribution be acknowledged. I was there. I just want the recognition. I want it down in the books."[316]

Like many women musicians before her, Lady Bo's career was somewhat slowed by caring for family, a factor male musicians have not historically dealt with in the same way. Throughout her time with Diddley, "I came off the road now and then to help out" with her mother's sickness and to see after her two younger sisters. However, while touring with Diddley in 1962 on a trip to Nashville, Tennessee, she "got a message that I was needed home. I told Bo and he said no problem, your job will still be here when you get back. I went on leave of absence. I returned home and for the next seven years raised my sisters even though mom was doing better, I was needed."[317]

Lady Bo did not return to Diddley's band until 1970. She played as a guitarist and a vocalist with Diddley in different band formations through 1989 in the United States and overseas. Lady Bo continues to play today, largely on the West coast where she lives and at festivals throughout the United States.

As a woman playing the electric guitar Jones also understands herself as part of a musical legacy that links her to artists such as Sister Rosetta Tharpe: "She crossed the line so to speak and was judged by the Church as I crossed the line and picked up a guitar and was judged by Man, and woman. Controversy, yes. Criticism, yes."[318] There is a sense of achievement she exhibits in her career triumphs and professional skill:

> The guitar is a male ego thing supposedly and it was acceptable for a woman to just sing the Blues. I am opposed to this I guess. I was always focused and had a plan. I am an alien!"

Says Jones, "The guitar chose me. Besides, in the beginning it was easier than carrying a piano or a drum kit around which I also play." [319]

With Peggy "Lady Bo" Jones gone, Bo Diddley hired another woman guitarist, Norma-Jean Wofford (c. 1942–2005), stage name, The Duchess. Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, into "a very good family,"[320] Wofford recorded and toured with Diddley and his band from 1962–1966. "In the days she was growin,' I taught her how to play guitar, an' then I taught her how to play my thing. Then, after I hired her in the group, I named her Duchess." Diddley also intentionally created a story that they were brother and sister to "better protect her when we were on the road." [321]

Wofford appears on *Bo Diddley* (1962), *Bo Diddley's & Company* (1962) (on which she is featured on the cover with an electric guitar), *Surfin' with Bo Diddley* (1963), and *Bo Diddley's Beach Party* (1963). In 1963, she toured with Diddley in England.[322] Three years later, Wofford left the group and performing when she decided to get married.

She can be seen performing with Diddley on *The Big TNT Show* (1965), dancing, singing and playing an electric guitar while wearing high heels and a slinky, tight ankle-length dress. In one publicity photograph, Wofford is posing with an electric guitar while wearing tight pants, heels, a sleeveless V-neck top, and a bracelet. She is centered between Bo Diddley and Jerome Green who is holding two sets of maracas. Again, The Duchess is in the middle and they flank her, wearing matching suits of checkered coats, bowties, black pants, and dress shoes. In another publicity photograph, Wofford is alone,

posing in skin-tight pants, heels and a corset-inspired, thin-strapped sleeveless top, wearing a necklace and a bracelet. She is striking a pose. Wofford died in 2005 with little recognition of her participation in rock'n'roll outside of niche rock'n'roll websites.

A largely self-taught musician, R&B/soul singer and guitarist Barbara Lynn's career height surged between 1962 and 1968 and is arguably a quintessential example of a bright albeit short-lived popular music career of an artist whose music continues to reverberate in contemporary niche musical circles like Lady Bo. Her biggest hit was 1962's, "You'll Lose A Good Thing," which pushed a Ray Charles single from the top R&B chart spot to #2, a heady feat for a 19 year old.

Barbara Lynn Ozen (b. 1942) grew up in a working-class family in Beaumont, Texas, that supported their daughter's musical initiative. Both of her parents worked in factories and saved up money to present Lynn with different musical opportunities growing up. She had piano lessons, and played the ukulele before slowly moving toward playing the electric guitar, "My first guitar was an Arthur Murray ukulele that my mother went out and bought me for $9.95. Then they saw that Barbara could really do something, and they bought me a solid body guitar, and then one you could plug into an amplifier, a Gibson." Because she is left-handed, the instrument had to be special ordered. "I just wanted to play the guitar so bad," she told the *Austin American-Statesmen* in 2010. Those were, she remembered, the "longest three weeks of my life."

Lynn derived inspiration from Guitar Slim, Jimmy Reed, and Elvis Presley[323] as "there weren't really any women playing electric guitar that I knew of coming up." Consequently, she, too, thought "It would be odd for a lady to play guitar" and intentionally pursued playing the electric guitar. Largely self taught, she played along

with songs on the radio and eventually formed her own all-girl band in grade school, called Bobbie Lynn and the Idols, that covered popular Presley songs.[324] "We were about the baddest thing at my school…winning all the talent shows" and playing teen dances.[325]

In high school, she kept performing on her own and writing songs. By age 19, a song she had written, "You'll Lose A Good Thing," reached #1 on the Billboard R&B chart in 1962. Lynn toured with "all the big acts—Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Jackie Wilson, Sam Cooke, Gladys Knight, Marvin Gaye. I met Michael Jackson when he was nine years old."[326] She also performed on American Bandstand and at the Apollo. In the summer of 1962, a Norfolk, Virginia newspaper, the *New Journal and Guide*, reported that "the guitar-playing gal from Texas" now had an entourage that traveled with her consisting of "a personal manager, a road manager and her own private secretary."[327] Lynn released records throughout the sixties, including *You'll Lose A Good Thing*, *Sister of Soul*, and *Here is Barbara Lynn* for Jamie Records and Atlantic Records. Meanwhile, Lynn married, and had kids. She later divorced her first husband who was interfering with her ongoing musical aspirations, and later remarried.

Though 1969 was the last time she charted, her music of that era speaks for itself in terms of the artists attracted to her music. Aretha Franklin covered "You'll Lose A Good Thing" and it became a country music hit as well. The Rolling Stones covered "Oh, Baby! (We Got A Good Thing Going)" in 1965. In 2002, electronic and dance music artist Moby sampled her song, "I'm A Good Woman." Lynn reemerged in the 1980s and proceeded to record a live album from a tour in Japan, *You Don't Have to Go*, as well as studio albums, *So Good*, and *Until Then I'll Suffer*. In the 2000s, she recorded *Hot Night Tonight* and *Blues & Soul Situation*. She also began performing at music festivals like

The Ponderosa Stomp, at local clubs in Los Angeles and back in Beaumont where she eventually returned to live. Lynn won a Pioneer Award from the Rhythm and Blues Foundation in 1999 and had the street in front of her house named after her in 2011.

As a young southern female adult launching into adulthood and into the national spotlight as a newly successful musician in the 1960s, Barbara Lynn contended with a terrain that required negotiating a complex, contradictory and ever shifting array of factors around race, gender, and music that impacted her life arc. Her vocal abilities coupled with her musical abilities on the electric guitar effectively altered the landscape of her life.

The electric guitar impacted her mobility. According to Lynn, her father very much wanted her to attend college. However, recognizing his daughter's talent, desire, and the opportunities that were opening up for her to potentially link the two lucratively and creatively, he acquiesced with one condition. If the recording career did not work out, "She's gonna have to stop that and go on to college," Barbara Lynn recounted.
In addition, her father thought she was too young to be on tour alone. As a result, concerned for her well-being and protection, her parents decided that her mother would quit her job working at a box factory to accompany Barbara Lynn on cross-country tours.[328]

Previously, Lynn had been performing around a circuit of clubs and roadhouses in the Gulf coast, an area rich with R&B, blues, and soul music, to name a few genres. [329] Presumably, these gigs took place with her parents' permission and with one of them present as a chaperone, as these were nightclubs, dives, and roadhouses. With the electric guitar in hand, Barbara Lynn had a reason to be in such spaces. Unlike the world of art

music characterized by institutionalized wealthy patronage as a means to further one's career and develop musically, vernacular musics like R&B, blues, gospel, and soul have a long history characterized by a more accessible, informal, do-it-yourself aesthetic. A musician in the genre could be exposed to knowledgeable musically-inclined members of the community (friends, family, mentors, school music teachers, and bands), play in church, and for recreation. All of these ways provided opportunities to learn, perform, gain experience, professional music development, and introductions to invaluable contacts and community with other musically creative individuals, peers or otherwise. As such, the nightclub served as a valuable space for Barbara Lynn. Clubs gave her the opportunity to be seen and noticed.

However, these were also spaces deemed tawdry by middle-class sensibilities for the presence of liquor and indecent music—all enjoyed by an earthy clientele. Tawdry was especially improper for smart, young (especially under-aged) well-behaved girls and women, like Barbara Lynn. Lynn knew she had to be careful, "If my principal at that time would have known that I was in clubs, they probably would have threw me out of school."[330]

Through sociocultural institutions such as school, family, the church and black media, young women like Barbara Lynn learned contradictory codes of propriety regarding bodily deportment, beauty, style of clothing, and quality of relationships. In addition, African American women who worked in entertainment were acquainted with the broader politics of respectability that demanded consideration of the ways in which their individual representational choices in film, on television and/or music could positively or negatively impact African Americans as a group.

Playing the electric guitar, Barbara Lynn defied gendered patterns of instrumentation choice. Like many of the electric guitarists interviewed (see Chapters 4 and 5) Barbara Lynn's decision was a calculated one designed to tap into eliciting a sense of uniqueness that could work to her advantage as a musician who was not just a woman, but also a black woman. As she remembers it, this is exactly what presented her with the opportunity that jumpstarted her professional musicianship. A fellow musician saw her playing in a nightclub and later told Huey P. Meaux, a well-known New Orleans-based soul record producer, about her: " 'There's a black girl over here playing electric guitar that you've gotta see.' " Indeed, Barbara Lynn remembers, "people would get all excited seeing a black girl play left-handed guitar."[331]

For Barbara Lynn, the instrument functioned as a tool through which to variously negotiate pivoting desires around style and pleasure. As early as forming Bobbie Lynn and the Idols, Lynn recalls that "we did a lot of the Elvis tunes like 'Jailhouse Rock,' and I swung my instrument."[332] Implicitly, there is pleasure in exhibiting one's own physical and emotional feelings through music and musical instruments. Explicitly, she signals her awareness of, participation in and recognition of the existence and value in using a rock'n'roll persona. As an adolescent, Barbara Lynn was present for early bi-racial rock'n'roll whose musical elements and liberal bodily movement and style of showmanship with the instrument was based largely on black American blues music and its performance aesthetic.

Barbara Lynn's musical landscape also included girl groups. As Jacqueline Warwick notes, "the girl group sound and style occupied a prominent position in mainstream popular culture at the very beginning of the 1960s, emerging in 1957 and

dominating the pop charts from 1960 to 1963."[333] Yet because of the electric guitar she was drawn to the music of musicians like Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, Jimmy Reed, and Elvis Presley.

Stylewise, Bobbie Lynn and the Idols "all wore pants." In this regard, Lynn and her female band mates contravened dress codes that preferred little girls, young women and adult women wear dresses, a piece of clothing considered to be a sartorial mark of their specific gender and its attendant femininity. At age 19, however, during her solo career, Lynn invoked another set of representational priorities by choosing to wear dresses. In one live performance on the 1966 syndicated program *The !!!! Beat*, Barbara Lynn performed "It's Better to Have It" with her electric guitar while wearing a sleeveless, at-to-above-the-knee length black dress, a pair of heels, a ring and a bracelet.[334] In another live performance, she wore an ankle-length sleeveless black dress with matching heels.

Publicity photographs from the era show her artistically posing with her electric guitar wearing dresses. In one particular iconic image, Lynn is posed holding an electric guitar wearing a below-the-knee length sleeveless dress with a veil attached.

Lady Bo, the Duchess and Barbara Lynn had a contemporary in Sylvia Vanderpool Robinson (1936–2011). Robinson was a singer, songwriter, producer, independent record label executive, and electric guitarist. Born into a musical family of immigrant parents from the island of Saint Thomas, Robinson began playing guitar as a young girl and recording songs for Savoy ("Little Boy") and Jubilee records in the 1950s. She also performed in the singing duo Mickey and Sylvia with McHouston "Mickey" Baker, a jazz music session guitarist in New York who later served as her guitar teacher.

Formed in 1954, Mickey and Sylvia garnered Billboard success with their 1957 song, "Love is Strange," a Bo Diddley song. As a result, they played "the TV, niteclub and theatre circuit," making $3,500 a week. [335]

When the duo parted ways (though they recorded off and on together) Robinson was able to continue to deploy her multiple musical skills, writing songs, playing as a session musician, and producing music for artists like Ike and Tina Turner, as well as for The Moment's on their hit song, "Love on a Two-Way Street" (1970), which she cowrote. She and her husband also became independent record producers and executives. In 1973, she released the successful single "Pillow Talk," on one of the many record labels they founded together. In a 1973 interview with the *New York Daily News* (reprinted in the *Los Angeles Times*), in which the reporter noted her "lush figure" early in the article, Robinson said: "I'm not an accomplished guitarist, but I can write those notes for my music without anyone doing them for me. I play at all my recording sessions."[336]

Interestingly, Robinson is better known as a pioneer in the genre of hip hop as cofounder of the record label Sugar Hill Records.[337] In 1979, Sugar Hill Records produced and released the first commercially successful hip hop single, "Rapper's Delight" by the Sugarhill Gang. In addition, the label produced and released "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five. These are universally beloved songs that are now considered classic in hip hop music.

Throughout different eras and in different genres, black women musicians led multi-scalar lives playing the guitar. In many cases, the instrument was a tool of employment, creativity, visibility (albeit often measured), and travel. As such, it was a

tool that these musicians took advantage of in their own interests, whether professional, semi-professional, amateur, for recreation or evangelization. Harnessing their vocal abilities to musical abilities on the instrument they were, at the same time, able to use the instrument as a tool through which they could begin to create opportunities for themselves, instead of waiting for opportunities created by someone else.

The next chapter focuses on a contemporary example of a black women guitarist whose life has been shaped by playing the electric guitar for over fifty years, encompassing elements of the blues, rock and gospel in her music and in the rhythm of her life.

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241. Hank O’Neal, *The Ghosts of Harlem: Sessions with Jazz Legends* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 203.

242. E.B. Rea, “Bea Booze, Decca Artist, Once Made $1.50 a Night,” *Afro-American*, January 8, 1944.

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248. Handy, *Black Women in American Bands & Orchestras*, 43.

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252. "Socially Speaking," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 25, 1943.

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254. Donald L. Maggin, *Dizzy: The Life and Times of John Birks Gillespie* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006); Price, *What Do They Want?*, 99. In 1942, as part of a sextet, Pete Brown's Band, Dizzy Gillespie performed trumpet and Sammy Price played piano accompanying her vocals on a song she co-wrote with Price, "The Cannon Ball."

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256. "Scoring in West 52nd Street," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 18, 1944.

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270. "Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920" (Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census), Ancestry.com, http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?gsfn=Beatrice&gsln=Booze&gss=angs-c&pcat=35&h=38805522&db=1920usfedcen&indiv=1&ml_rpos=4 (accessed November 13, 2013). A Beatrice Booze age 7 is listed alongside of brothers named Charles and Alfred; parents, Phillip and Lydia Booze.

271. Price, *What Do They Want?*, 100.

272. Rea, "Bea Booze, Decca Artist, Once Made $1.50 a Night."

273. "Some of the Nation's Most Popular Waxers Whose Platters Are Basking in the April Spotlight Parade," *Afro-American*, April 8, 1950.

274. "Piney Brown Comes to the Cotton Club," *Call and Post*, December 18, 1954.

275. Maurice Orodenker, "On the Stand," *Billboard*, November 27, 1943.

276. Ibid.

277. Price, *What Do They Want?*, 100, 102. She recorded her vocals and guitar playing for Decca Records in New York City in March of 1942, accompanied by pianist Sammy Price: "If I'm A Fool (I'm a Fool about the Man I love)" (Decca 8619), "I Love to Georgia Brown So Slow" (Decca 8629), "Uncle Sam Come and Get Him" (Decca 8619), "If I Didn't Love You (Decca 8629), "See See Rider Blues" (Decca 8633) and "Let's Be Friends" (Decca 8621). The chronology in the book was compiled by Bon Weir. In March 1944, Booze again recorded vocals and guitar with Price for "Mr. Freddie Blues" (Decca 48033), "Gulf Coast Blues" (Decca 48033), "These Young Men Blues" (Decca 8658), and "So Good" (Decca 8658).

278. Ibid., 100. According to the book's record chronologies, the guitar was omitted on "I'm a Fool about the Man I Love."

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282. William Ferris, *Blues from the Delta* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1978).

283. Jos Willems, *All of Me: The Complete Discography of Louis Armstrong* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 140.

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291. "In Recording Spotlight," *Afro-American*, April 4, 1942.

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297. "Baltimore, Maryland City Directory," 1956.

298. "Baltimore, Maryland City Directory," 1958. She was also listed at the same Division Street address.

299. Price, *What Do They Want?*, 134.

300. George R. White, *Bo Diddley, Living Legend* (Chessington, UK: Castle Communications, 1995), 98.

301. Lou Holscher, "Lady Bo: Rock & Roll and R&B Original," *Blue Suede News*, Winter 1997, 8.

302. Ibid., 8–9.

303. Diane Lowery, “Lady Bo Sets the Record Straight,” *Rockrgrl*, October 1996, 16.

304. White, *Bo Diddley, Living Legend*, 98.

305. Lea Gilmore, “Lady Bo,” *Lea Gilmore’s It’s A Girl Thang!*, accessed July 7, 2013, http://www.p-dub.com/thang/LadyBo.html.

306. Holscher, “Lady Bo: Rock & Roll and R&B Original,” 9; Todd Baptista, “Harlem’s Bop Chords Built Their Own ‘Castle In The Sky,’” *Goldmine: The Music Collector’s Magazine*, November 12, 2011, http://www.goldminemag.com/article/harlems-bop-chords-built-their-own-castle-in-the-sky.

307. Holscher, “Lady Bo: Rock & Roll and R&B Original,” 9.

308. Lowery, “Lady Bo Sets the Record Straight,” 16.

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310. Renee Westbrook, “Lady Bo: Guitarist Extraordinaire,” *Rockrgrl*, Fall 2005, 43.

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312. David Blakey, “Lady Bo - A Tribute,” *Bo Diddley - The Originator*, http://members.tripod.com/~Originator_2/ladybo.html (accessed July 7, 2013).

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326. Corcoran, "Classy, Soulful Barbara Lynn."

327. "They're Talking About...," *New Journal and Guide*, July 21, 1962, 14.

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333. Jacqueline C. Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture: Popular Music and Identity in the 1960s* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 13.

334. John Broven, *Record Makers and Breakers: Voices of The Independent Rock "n" Roll Pioneers*, Music in American Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 114.

335. "Mickey and Sylvia Reunited; Sign Wax Pact And Get $25,000 Bonus In Deal," *New Journal and Guide*, August 6, 1960, sec. A.

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337. Robinson also made millions of dollars when she sold the catalogue in 1995.

CHAPTER 4: BEVERLY "GUITAR" WATKINS

Biography

Beverly Watkins has always worked and played the electric guitar, migrating and traveling between rural Georgia towns and the city of Atlanta, with Atlanta finally emerging as an anchoring site in her life. Her strong Christian faith touches everything that she does, especially her outlook on life and dedicated musicianship with the electric guitar. The electric guitar has amplified the kind of choices, chances and changes she has experienced over the course of her life as a working class southern black woman. She graduated from high school in 1960 in Atlanta, and had one child, Stanley Watkins, who is also a musician.

Watkins's birth into a musical family exposed her to music and encouraged her to practice it. She was born in 1939 in the segregated wing of Atlanta's Grady Hospital. Her mother, Ramona Hayes Watkins, died when Beverly was only three months old. Watkins was raised by various female relatives who shuttled her back and forth between Commerce, Georgia, where her grandmother Phillis Hayes and Aunt Gwinnell Hayes Pittman lived, and Atlanta. Around age eleven, Beverly moved back to Atlanta under the care of her Aunt Margaret. They lived in southwest Atlanta on Fair Street, near Flipper Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Beverly attended E.R. Carter Elementary School. Next, they moved up Fair Street to Webster Street, then to a one-bedroom apartment on Northside Drive. After graduating from English Avenue School, Beverly attended Booker T. Washington High School (the first and only public high school for African Americans in Atlanta, founded in 1924),[1] before transferring to

Samuel Howard Archer High School (where emerging soul singer Gladys Knight was a classmate one year behind her) because Washington High was perennially overcrowded. By then, she and Aunt Gwinnell were living in the Fourth Ward neighborhood, a "mature community with an active black intelligentsia and a commercial center that was a showcase of black entrepreneurship in the South," east of downtown Atlanta.[2]

Watkins's professional career began early in high school, playing bass in a combo called Billy West Stone and the Downbeats. In her junior and senior years at Archer, she began to play with blues musician Piano Red's back-up band on rhythm guitar. Born in Hampton, Georgia, William "Willie" Lee Perryman (1911-1985) was a singer and musician known by his stage name Piano Red, referencing his reddish hair and his instrument. By the time Watkins met him, Perryman was a veteran musician who had long been a part of the southern black music scene, alongside of Atlanta-area country blues guitarists like Blind Willie McTell (with whom he once recorded), Barbecue Bob, and Curley Weaver.

In 1950, Piano Red released two R&B songs, "Rocking with Red" and "Red's Boogie."[3] "Rocking Red" became an R&B hit.[4] In 1951, *Billboard* reviewed his new release "Wrong YoYo" as "a rocking socking boogie with a catchy lyric. His chanting and 88-ing have the same crude power and spirit as his click "Rocking with Red."[5] Today, his hard pounding boogie woogie piano places him in the pantheon of overlooked black artists whose style of effusive singing and piano playing invoked sonic elements that served as foundational precursors to music that came to be called rock'n'roll.

Watkins attributes working with Piano Red as a crucial turn in her development as a professional musician. Graduating from Archer High in 1960, Watkins continued to

perform with Piano Red's band Dr. Feelgood and the Interns. In 1961 they had a pop hit with "Dr. Feelgood" on Okeh records,[6] and she later gave birth to her son.

Watkins's solo commercial recording career launched in the 1990s when she joined the Music Maker Relief Foundation. Through the foundation she has toured the United States and the world, and released four studio recordings. She is aware of constructing a narrative about her life and career, which is modestly documented in media interviews and compact disc liner notes, as well as her official biography for Music Maker.

At seventy-four, she is invigorated and ambitious. Watkins continues to take her professional musicianship seriously, relentless pursuing opportunities to play and record. She seeks opportunities to go back out on the road touring again, but on the international scene where she recognizes her value as a musician and American roots musical figure to enthusiastic European audiences, in particular. Watkins also wants to record a new album, and to own a small house with a practice room.

Her oral narrative is characterized by playful hyperbole infused with confidence and is recounted through an interconnected musical-religious framework that she structures and links emotionally with the verbal device "it rocked on" as a transitional refrain in her storytelling. She has a strong sense of place that evokes stories based on where she was living, venues she played, and cities she visited. Watkins shares stories out of chronology with contradictions and ruptures in her perception of time, and she is relational in her narrative. She consistently refers to family and other people in her extended musical network. The 1960s emerge from her storytelling as an influential era.

The decade also emerges as a critical element in her self-understanding of her music making and identity. For Watkins, the electric guitar is her joy and livelihood.

Beverly "Guitar" Watkins and the Electric Guitar

The electric guitar has shaped Beverly Watkins's life, career, and self-identity. She has been playing the electric guitar since she was about twelve or thirteen and currently owns seven guitars, a mix of acoustic, electric, and bass guitars. According to Watkins, they each have "their own personalities" and names—Peace, Red Mama, Glory, White Cloud, Jimi Hendrix, Rhythm Boy, and Black Boy. Watkins always keeps Peace, one of her favorite guitars, nearby—in case of an emergency she can grab it and escape. Protective of her guitars, she does not cotton to people who come up to her at shows asking to touch or to play them. "I don't want anyone else's spirit on my guitar. No one can touch it or play it." Her statement expresses the inseparable link she believes exists between her spirituality and musicality.

The electric guitar drives Watkins's determination to excel in life. "The electric guitar, it pushes me. What I mean, it puts me out there." It "keeps me going." The instrument keeps her invigorated creatively, mentally, physically, and financially. "If I sit from the bed to the kitchen to the TV," she says, "this [meaning her body and mind] here gon' go down." Her body, dexterity and agility are critical to being able to make the most of her instrument and make a living. She works to maintain a sense of bodily integrity. "I go to therapy once a week. They work on my back, my arms. I have a therapist that works on my fingers." The instrument assists in grounding her, and giving her motivation to stay active and engaged. Watkins has survived a heart attack and cancer. "I'm very interested in myself, to keep myself going." "I think. I focus. I stay focused."

Watkins is conscious of commanding attention onstage by showcasing her skills on the electric guitar and including exuberant on-stage body movements. These are crucial to her showmanship. A charismatic personality, Watkins describes herself as a "high active entertainer" displaying energetic exhibitionism on her instrument. She likens herself to James Brown in showmanship and said, "I be kicking some butt!"

One of her key moves captivates the crowd: when she flips the electric guitar behind her head and continues to play seamlessly. This is a time-honored electric guitarist move in blues and rock music. It is a way to wow the crowd, but to wow them with a heightened awareness that informs them to "look at me but do not underestimate me." Watkins is aware that this move is impressive because she is an older black woman blues electric guitarist—a rarity in many people's eyes. "People are surprised when a black woman can play like a man."[7]

Watkins is also keenly aware that the blues is male dominated and privileges the musicianship of black men as vocalists and instrumentalists, especially on guitars and piano, over that of women. Black women exist in blues primarily as vocalists. Blues as a genre affirms the participation of white male and female musicians, including white women guitarists, who have a much larger visibility over black women electric guitarists. As Maria V. Johnson (2007) asks in "Black Women Electric Guitarists and Authenticity in the Blues," "How is it that a white woman [Bonnie Raitt] becomes the measuring stick for female guitarists within a Black cultural form? Why are critics so unused to seeing Black women playing electric guitar? Why are they not more numerous and/or visible today?"[8]

The electric guitar gives Watkins the opportunity to earn money and support herself. She plays a circuit of restaurants (Fat Matt's Rib Shack), blues clubs (Northside Tavern, Blind Willie's), and festivals (local community and blues music), mostly within the Atlanta metropolitan area, sometimes throughout the southeast. She has played the Blues Passions Festival in France, the Ottawa Blues fest in Canada, and the Tinner Hill Blues Festival in Falls Church, Virginia. In the past, Watkins has played in New York and overseas, which she enjoys the most. She also plays at local nursing homes for free and has been affiliated and worked with the Jazz Foundation of America and the Willie Mae Bruckner Rock Camp for Girls.

Back when the Piano Red band disbanded sometime in 1965/1966, she continued to work to make a living performing with the electric guitar.[9] Watkins says she played in a band called the Fendells—"everybody in the band had Fender amps." A "Mr. Thomas" was the lead guitar player and "Mr. Joseph Smith. He was the promoter for that band." She says Smith would go to Gainesville, and other surrounding towns to get jobs for them. They once played a club on Forest Avenue (at the Purple Grotto). She also played with Atlanta-based pianist Eddie Tigner and the Ink Spots (an incarnation of the original group). Until Tigner's stroke, a few years later, she went on the road with them on the weekends. "We did Holiday Inns. Sometime we would be there maybe a week, maybe two weeks and we would play in the lounges there." She remembers that Eddie Tigner and the Ink Spots once performed as far away as Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

While continuing to play gigs, Watkins supplemented her income from performing by working low-wage, labor-intensive jobs outside of the field of entertainment in order to maintain a modest living. She was employed at car washes,

washing windows, drying down cars, and collecting tips. She also cleaned offices at night in buildings such as Equitable and Summit. “No matter what I did,” she says, “I never forgot my music.” “I never stopped playing. Never.”

Watkins played with Leroy Redding (Otis Redding’s first cousin) and the House Rockers. In 1988, she retired. She auditioned and earned a spot playing regularly at Underground Atlanta. It was while playing at Underground Atlanta that she feels as if “God put me on another level. That’s when the solos started kicking in. It was already in there, but it just wasn’t the time.”

During the earlier post-Piano Red period, Watkins’s transition from playing rhythm guitar to lead guitar occurred over time with much practice. She says that with Piano Red’s band “I didn’t do no solos. All that stuff kicked in as I progressed in music.” However, with the end of the band sometime in the mid-to-late 1960s, she struck out on her own as a musician, playing casuals, playing in different bands, eventually forming and organizing her own bands. It was also the time that she began doing solos, not only out of her growing desire, but also because it was a resourceful move as playing lead guitar opened up opportunities for her to form her own band with herself as the leader instead of joining one or always performing as a backup musician. This enabled her to better control the means of her cultural expression and secure work instead of waiting to be called in. Acquiring the ability to handle playing rhythm and lead guitar further rounded out her musicianship. Playing lead guitar, she says, is “the gift that God gave me.”

The electric guitar is a tool of personal enjoyment for Watkins. Performing on it, Watkins says, induces a “natural high,” such that “sometimes when I get home [after

performances], I have to just chill and come back down." Intertwined with this is the critical role the electric guitar plays in contributing to her sense of esteem and achievement. She is proud to be a professional and knowledgeable musician, especially on the electric guitar. "When I strap it on I know the instrument 'cause I was taught about the different parts; and how to use the instrument. . . . I adjust my own stuff." "They take music for fun now," she says, referencing some of the younger musicians she encounters, "but when I came up it was a serious deal."

Watkins takes pride in her professionalization. She is extremely particular about her sound, "When my sound is not what I want you will see it. Even if I do a big show I say I need to be up there. I need to come up and adjust the way I want." She is also very serious about punctuality for herself and musicians she works with. "My band now, they know I do not play lateness." "I play now like I'm not going to play anymore. That's the way I do that. Give it all you got."

Playing blues and gospel on the electric guitar gives Watkins the opportunity to showcase her presence, garner recognition and visibility, and to possess a measure of control. The electric guitar strapped on to her body, she generates a black female musical agency that enables her to claim a role as a blues legend. It also enables a public expression of black femaleness where the instrument is critical to a cultural identity formation and negotiation.

Beverly "Guitar" Watkins' constructs herself within networks of relationships (inside and outside of her family, and in her profession) that contribute to the development of her musical skills on the electric guitar. "Back in the day I was taught very well. I know my craft." In her musical family, her father, Lonnie Watkins, played

harmonica, grandmother Phyllis Hayes sang, and grandfather Luke Terrell played banjo. He took her "far and near to different churches" and sharecropping farms for performances at barn dances held in and around Commerce, Georgia.

Women in her family also played guitar. "My Aunt Nell played guitar. My Aunt Bea played guitar." Watkins still has Aunt Nell's old Stella guitar. These aunts, her mother's sisters (Gwinnell Hayes Pittman, Luther Beatrice Hayes, Ruth Hayes and Margaret Hayes) sometimes performed as the Hayes Sisters. They played piano and organ. Together, they would go "round to different churches and play and sing" around Commerce, Georgia.

Growing up in such a family nurtured Watkins's musical ability and development. "It comes up from the background of your family," she says, and "it springs up from the ancestors." Her father explained to her how it was important to "learn how to meet the public."

At age eight Beverly received a little guitar from her Aunt Margaret. A cousin, Sylvester Jackson, had a Stella guitar that she swapped her blue bicycle to get. Later, another aunt bought her a trumpet for $90 from Sears and Roebuck.

This early music training within her family was bolstered by quality music education in high school that also cultivated her passion for music. She encountered music teachers who mentored her and provided opportunities for her to participate in music at school. While at Washington High, she experienced "my first little thing on stage . . . 'Don't Mess with My Blue Suede Shoes,' Elvis Presley. I was on a talent show. I had on some blue suede shoes and a blue skirt and a white blouse. And a little guitar. I won first place."

After transferring to Archer High, Watkins earned a position as third trumpet for the school band led by Lloyd Terry. Bandmaster Terry was also a respected jazz musician who performed locally. "He was very, very serious," she says. "I didn't read [music] when I first started going to high school. But Lloyd Terry taught me how to read." She remembers expressing her desire to play guitar to him. In response, he ordered one for her and taught her on the instrument after school. "He taught me how to…instead of tuning up your guitar just e natural. He taught me how to tune 4-40. Back in them days they didn't have the pitch pipes and all that stuff, so you had to go to the piano to tune up. E-A-D-G-B-E. I took piano lessons, but that wasn't what the Lord wanted me to do. So piano is just like guitar…. Tune 440 with the piano. Make your own chords." She says, "I was taught very well."

Lloyd Terry also instilled commitment and discipline, according to Watkins:

> I'll never forget we was out on the field in rehearsal at 6 o'clock [am] at the Herndon Stadium. I had lost my mouthpiece. I left it at home and he walked through, "Beverly, what are you doing? You ain't got no mouthpiece." I said, "Mr. Lloyd." He said, "Step out of the band." I mean they were serious back then, you know. He said, "You knew better." I said, "Yes, I did. He said, well you won't participate in the activity we got coming up." I said, okay." It happened for a reason. He said, "But I do have your guitar."

Watkins also cites recognition of Sister Rosetta Tharpe's music and musicianship as a great impact upon her. According to her biographer Gayle Wald (2007), Tharpe, a vivacious onstage personality, gave righteously raucous performances of gospel songs with a bluesy and swing music feel with the guitar.[10] The first 45 rpm record that Watkins owned was of Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

Early on, she appears in local black newspapers. In 1958, the *Atlanta Daily World* noted the participation of "Miss Beverly Watkins on electric guitar" in a local musical

showcase. [11] March 1960, “Beverly Watkins and the Casuals” appeared in the “Mid-Day Sports Dance” program at the Waluhaje Ballroom.[12] Sometime in the late 1950s/early 1960s Watkins joined Piano Red’s band The Meter-Tones[13] on rhythm guitar. Here she encountered adult professional musicians. Watkins laughs and says, "I used to stand up and play, look good and play. Play the rhythm part.” Watkins was still in high school then so “Piano Red would come out there and ask, could I carry my lesson on the road as a senior. I would get all my lessons and take them with me and when I come back in, you know. Piano Red was just that thought of back in those days.”

Playing with Piano Red was a big deal for her in Atlanta where he had a popular daily show on WAOK, an Atlanta-based AM radio station that played R&B. WAOK was owned by Zenas Sears, a white, racially progressive disk jockey, producer and promoter of black music programming and performances. “I’d be up to the radio every evening at three o’clock for him to come on to hear him.” Watkins says, “You could hear the dogs barking in the back” as he did the show from a studio built in his backyard.[14]

Piano Red became a mentor for Watkins and he introduced her to a coterie of hard-working, professional musicians conversant in blues, soul, and R&B. Some of the musicians she played with were: Curtis Smith on lead guitar, Bobby Lee Tuggle on drums, Tommy LeGon on bass guitar, and Roy Lee Johnson on guitar. Watkins credits Tuggle with connecting her to Piano Red. In the mid-1950s, Tuggle was labelmates with Bo Diddley on Checker Records and had minor success with the R&B song, “The $64,000 Question.”[15] He was also a radio personality, alongside Piano Red at WAOK. A singer, songwriter, and guitarist, Roy Lee Johnson wrote “Mr. Moonlight” (the B-side of

"Dr. Feel Good"), which was later covered by The Beatles on their album, *Beatles '65*. More detailed information about Curtis Smith and Tommy LeGon seems unavailable.

Watkins remembers rehearsing three times a week. If anyone was late, Piano Red exacted a fine. Onstage uniforms were required.[16] With this level of extensive musicianship, experience, and order, naturally, Watkins says, "Piano Red had the baddest band in the South." As Roy Lee Johnson told a reporter in 2010: "We had three guitars and an unusual sound for back then. If you hear the Beatles sound, actually it sounds like us."[17]

In September 1960, the band played on a bill with BB King.[18] On Christmas night in 1961 they shared a bill with headliner James Brown and The Famous Flames, along with numerous "added attractions" in Atlanta.[19] A year earlier in November 1960 the band had shared the bill with Brown and The Famous Flames at Atlanta's Magnolia Ballroom in Vine City.[20] That same month they shared a WAOK-sponsored concert bill with headliner Ray Charles and artists such as Little Anthony and the Imperials, and Jimmy Reed.[21] In 1962, they shared the bill with the Marvelettes at the Magnolia Ballroom.[22] And in 1964, they played on the same show with Otis Redding.

Despite gender bias, Watkins benefited from male support and association. She expresses gratitude and pride in the musical camaraderie that embraced her during this part of her musical life. "The band members then, we helped each other. We placed each other's fingers. Put it right there. And we took time." She continues, "Back in those days I was taught about volume control, tone control. The amp, I learned how to adjust." She recalled one particular experience:

> When Tommy got in the band, we was playing with those clamps. So what Tommy did, he would take Curtis and I down on Forest Avenue, the name of that

> hotel was the Forest Arms, and this guy put out "Honky Tonk." Bill Doggett. So Tommy would take me by the Forest Arms Hotel to meet Billy Butler. Billy Butler was Bill Doggett's lead guitar player . . . Billy Butler showed me, when they would come in town, how to, he took me off of that clamp . . . . They called them clamps back then but now they call them capos. To clamp your chord.

In addition, as the only woman in the band, Watkins says Piano Red made sure everyone looked out for her:

> Back in those days we respected each other. We were like sisters and brothers. They took care of me. We would go out of town somewhere and we'd go out to a party. Piano Red would tell'em, "Y'all look out for Beverly." And if we would get rooms somewhere in a motel back in them days, I would be in the middle.

When they could not stay in a motel because of Jim Crow racism, the band slept in the station wagon they traveled in.

Dr. Feelgood and the Interns recorded eight songs at a Columbia Records studio in Nashville on May 23, 1961. They released songs under Columbia's Okeh imprint: "Dr. Feel Good," and "Right String But the Wrong Yo-Yo,"[23] a Piano Red remake from the 1950s; "Let's Have A Good Time Tonight," "The Same Old Things Keep Happening" in 1962,[24] and "My Gal Jo"/"Bald-Headed Lena" in 1963.[25]

In an undated publicity photograph of Dr. Feelgood and the Interns, Watkins is dressed like a nurse. Watkins stands holding her guitar like the other musicians, but she is dressed in a white short-sleeved, knee-length nurse's uniform, complete with a nurse's cap tucked on top of her coiffed hair. Piano Red is dressed in a bow tie, sport coat and pants, and stands next to her. Watkins remembers adamantly refusing to wear the matching white oxford "nurse's shoes." Rejecting gender stereotyping perceived as toning down her sense of attractiveness and stylishness, Watkins wore flats. But the gender-based expectations are obvious as the rest of the band is wearing doctor's uniforms, white tops and black pants. In another undated group photograph from the

early 1960s, Watkins wears a knee-length, three-quarter length sleeve black dress, her hair piled on top of her head, while Piano Red is dressed in a tie and dark suit jacket. The rest of the male band members wear ties and light-colored suit jackets.

The band played in a variety of locations and performance settings. "We did all the colleges," she recalls, including the University of Alabama,[26] Medical College of Virginia (now Virginia Commonwealth University),[27] University of Georgia, Yale University, the University of the South, Sewanee in Tennessee;[28] Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina;[29] Tulane University,[30] and Princeton University.[31] Roy Lee Johnson agrees: "We probably played every college up and down the East Coast and around the South."[32] Fraternities were a solid constituency. The April 15, 1966 Davidson College student newspaper *The Davidsonian* lists an "After Party Schedule" noting Dr. Feelgood and The Interns were scheduled to play at a closed party for Sigma Chi fraternity at a place called the Flounder Inn in Kannapolis, North Carolina from 11:30 pm to 3:30 am in April 1966.[33]

In Atlanta, the band provided entertainment for social and civic programs, and events at local spots like the Waluhaje Ballroom,[34] the Magnolia Ballroom, and the Auburn Avenue Casino near The Royal Peacock. The Casino was Atlanta's answer to the Apollo Theatre in Harlem. As part of the so-called chitlin' circuit, these large dance halls, located in black communities and neighborhoods, played critical roles in hosting the performances of major recording artists in R&B, jazz, pop, and soul, as well as large-scale black political and social events.

> We would play there every Monday night [at Magnolia Ballroom]. Piano Red would give out 50 cents. 50 cents. Half off. Silver dollars. We'd be playing there. We used to play, "Hey! Bo Diddley!"[35] by Bo Diddley. And I mean they'd get to fightin'. Tables and chairs and bottles everything be flying 'cross.

When crowds became unruly, stimulated by too much alcohol and relationship rivalries, Piano Red's advice to her was clear, "Beverly, always unplug your guitar and get out of the way." The band also played "juke joints" in "little country towns" like "Winder, Jefferson, Commerce, and Monroe, Georgia." She described these spaces: "There's a bandstand right there, a couple tables, smoke, you know a lot of smoke and stuff back then. Might've been selling liquor on the counter, fish sandwiches, hot dogs, chicken sandwiches."

Here, too, fights would break out:

> We used to go to those little places, you know, and what happened was they'd get to fightin' out there and many times I had to run out the back door. I was told so: the thing to do is just leave your amp, take the guitar with you . . .but they loved us, you know.

Sometimes performances occurred in venues serving dual purposes. Watkins remembers one where "a funeral home was downstairs and we played upstairs." She recalls:

> "Beverly, we got a dressing room downstairs." I said, " 'Naw, I don't think so." Told one of the band members, "Come and go down here with me." And one night we went down there to dress and I looked around there. I said, " 'Naw." I said, "From now on I'll just come dressed."

Later, the band was renamed Piano Red and the House Rockers. They toured across the United States, including New York, Washington, D.C., and Chicago.

Watkins experienced a major career surge through the collegiality of blues guitarist Danny "Mudcat" Dudeck who saw her playing on a Wednesday open mic night in the middle 1980s at Fat Matt's Rib Shack, a barbecue restaurant in Atlanta. Impressed by her performance, he generously tipped her and expressed keen interest in playing guitar with her. "Me and him played and then I got to be friends with him and the first job

I played was the Northside Tavern." Mudcat is a fixture at Northside Tavern, a local blues dive in Atlanta. Through Mudcat, Watkins came to the attention of Tim Duffy, a folklorist and the founder of Music Maker Relief Foundation in North Carolina. Duffy eventually saw her play in the food court at Underground Atlanta. "He came and he caught my show. Dropped $50 in the tip bucket," she remembers.

Joining Music Maker in 1995 gave Watkins rejuvenated access and opportunity. As Music Maker notes in her online biography, with the organization's assistance, she obtained "grants for sustenance, and several guitars."[36] In addition, her career as a solo artist, featured artist, and added attraction surged. In 1999, she toured with Grammy award-winning blues singer and guitarist Taj Mahal on the Winston Blues Revival Tour, which doubled as a Music Maker benefit in nineteen cities in the United States. "He [Mahal] taught me so much about the jazz licks. Oh, he's amazing. He's the one who taught me how to do the chords to 'Misty.' I like to be around those kind of people."

Music Maker booked Watkins overseas on their Revue tour with fellow musicians. She also played Europe (Belgium), Canada, Argentina, Australia, and played at the Blues to Bop festival in Lugano, Switzerland (1997). One of her guitar cases is plastered with stickers indicative of her world travels.

Watkins released *Back in Business* (2000), *The Feelings of Beverly Guitar Watkins* (2003, 2005), *The Spiritual Expressions of Beverly Guitar Watkins* (2009), and *Don't Mess with Miss Watkin*s (2007). "I had been up on a recording session, that recording session with Piano Red. But never had produced." "It was a schooling, an educational thing for me." She is especially proud of *Back in Business*, which was produced by British music producer Mike Vernon, who produced artists such as

Fleetwood Mac. *Back in Business* earned her a nomination as Best New Artist for a W.C. Handy Award, bestowed yearly by the Blues Foundation.

Watkins's musical and spiritual practices inform one another through the electric guitar. Just as her faith is instrumental in the construction and performance of making music, the electric guitar is instrumental in its own way in the practice of her faith. It grants her opportunities to creatively express herself and her faith as a Christian. Watkins spiritual practices include regular church attendance, a belief in prayer, and sharing the good news of her belief in Jesus as her Lord and Savior with others. She also plays at churches, including her childhood "home church," Jonas Chapel in Commerce, Georgia, every first Sunday. She believes that her ability to play the electric guitar is "a gift that God gave me. That's my instrument he gave me to use in life."

Watkins deeply believes that "music is a healer" and responds to this belief in different ways in her own performance practices. Before shows—"When I get ready to do a show, I go and pray. If I'm with a band, whoever, I say let's have prayer before we go on stage." When performing, Watkins says, "When I get onstage, it's all different. God and his angels take over on stage . . . the first note we [when playing with a band backing her up] do I'm gone. I'm flying. I'm gone. I'm gone." This, too, she attributes to God. "All the stuff I do, playing behind my back, you know, guitar. I have a certain time to do that. He's there. He's there, telling me what to do. And I get high up on music. I be so high up there, you know . . .That's a natural high. God gifted. God gifted." She also considers her ability to "play by ear. I can hear anything and I can pick it up" as a gift from God.

Creatively, “the guitar talks back,” “they talk” and allow her to express and record her life and of those she encounters, which is healing. In addition, after shows, her work is not done. “When I go in clubs or whatever, I have 23rd Psalm prayer and I give them out as I sell my CDs. ‘Cause we, first, we got to give Him his first and then after that its ministering in music. That’s what I do.” Her playing “turns water into wine.”

Watkins is especially keen on biblical scriptures, like Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me;”[37] and Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”[38] She is inspired by the adage that “What God got for you, can’t nobody take.” She says: “Peoples have come to my shows down and out. They done lost their husband, boyfriend, no money, but when I see them they’re just, tears just flowing and I cry with ’em. And after I do my show I go out in the audience and talk to the peoples. Tell ’em thank you for coming.”

In doing this, she is modeling herself on Jesus who “went everywhere and taught.” With the electric guitar, music making for Watkins functions not just as entertainment, but as a potentially moral force. Similarly, Watkins compositional sensibility stems from her Christian faith and her life experiences. She wrote “Jesus Walked the Water” based on scripture in the Bible. “Greyhound Blues” was the creative result after a trip. “Aftershock Blues” was written after experiencing an earthquake in California. Watkins also writes by experience “I need to get some money to see my honey” / “Love came by to say goodbye.”

Perhaps because of the particulars of her biography—including being raised by grandparents—faith and religion are the anchors of Watkins as an artist. Her music flows

seamlessly from the church to the club to the juke joint. She easily traverses this span of music because "God gave me the talent to play it, as a blues guitarist. I took piano lessons, but that wasn't what He wanted me to do. He wanted me to play this."

As the child of legal racial segregation, Watkins now navigates what was once a black music but is now a commercialized genre largely controlled by white blues fans, promoters, and musicians who organize national and international festivals and tours, release and re-release blues compilations.

To Watkins's advantage, the older a musician the more authentic the blues he or she is thought to produce. Watkins believes that "as a black sister you got to know what you are doing." "We have always had soul," she says about black people. She understands herself as an active participant within the genre with valuable links to the past. Proud to play the blues, Watkins is "glad to represent my culture" and sees herself as contributing to the continuation of a black musical tradition that some African American musicians and scholars have argued blacks gave away to whites.

As an older black woman performing blues music, Beverly Watkins is a rarity, especially as an electric guitarist. She recognizes her value in this regard. Tim Duffy, founder of Music Maker said, "She plays guitar like a man, puts it behind her head. She prowls the stage like Jimi Hendrix." Her online Music Maker biography quotes her as saying, "My style is real Lightnin' Hopkins lowdown blues. I call it hard classic blues, stompin' blues, railroad smokin' blues."[39] Perhaps in an unconscious nod to male privilege in the blues economy, Watkins signals her alignment to a much more familiar legacy of more visible male blues guitarists. But at the same time she says, "Women are way beyond men."

Watkins has learned to navigate the complex and contradictory racial politics of blues and its commodification. This transformation allows older black blues musicians the opportunity to play, be seen and enjoy fans of the music, with a wide-ranging audience, many of whom are quite ardent and knowledgeable. It is hard to imagine that individuals whose careers never launched or were struggling could now find themselves treated like rock stars.

Still, commodification of blues can essentialize the music, the South, and its older black musicians by invoking notions of primitivity, poverty, and backwoods bumpkins fresh out of the Depression-era countryside with their guitars. In September 2013, Watkins will travel to England to play at the Red Rooster Festival with the King Bees as her backup band. On the website Watkins' is excitedly billed as a "blues legend" whose performance will be an "exclusive show;" her "first UK appearance in sixty years of performing." Watkins prefers playing overseas where she appreciates the enthusiastic response to her music and musicianship as an artist. Yet, the Red Rooster Festival, in the spirit of successful marketing, reliably traffics in old-school descriptions of blues and the American South including describing itself as "a whisky sippin', guitar strummin,' banjo pickin,' rib suckin' weekend of Southern blues and country in the heart of Suffolk County."

Watkins says too often, in the United States and overseas, there is an expectation that she "look tore down" like an old blues music country bumpkin. She does not care for fellow older blues musicians who cater to that stereotyping through their manner of speaking, style of dress, and demeanor with white blues audiences. She finds it unprofessional, unnecessary, and demeaning. "Act accordingly," she says. In many ways,

everyone, regardless of race, contributes to these tensions around blues romanticism, possessing competing desires, whether as performers or as fans.

Watkins is keenly aware of the way in which her age intersects with her marketability—the older one is the better. At age seventy-four, she does not see herself as elderly, which is how she feels she is sometimes positioned and underestimated, receiving treatment as if she is frail and uneducated. Watkins understands herself as an energetic woman, very much alive. She seeks to project an image of independence, "I deserve better. I know that."

In constructing her personal style, she says, "I like to be dressed," typically comfortably and practically.

> As a female guitarist and an entertainer, I've had people say, why you don't wear dresses? I say I'm entertaining because I'm all over the stage. I'm not like some guitar players. I'm not acoustic cute. No. I'm all over the stage. I have my harmonicas out there. I come out there, slide out there doing the James Brown.

Watkins likes to wear black or gray slacks and black flats. Her tops range from a functional white to dressy black, short or long-sleeved, sometimes patterned with flowers, stripes, abstract swirls or lines, or decorated with sequins. She often accompanies her wardrobe with a black vest or a blazer (functional or dressy). Application of lipstick completes her look. She keeps her hair simple, neatly combed down or pulled back.

Watkins pursued her profession with the electric guitar while not submitting to coercive gender norms dictating marriage and children as her objective goal in life. She has never been married. She recalls that men wanted to marry her, but their expressed desires came with an ultimatum for her to give up her career as a musician. "I've had men come up to me, 'You put that guitar down, you don't need to be up here playing that

guitar, put that guitar down and let's get married and have some babies'. . . . That wasn't for me to do. I have one and that was enough. No more."

When she was pregnant and still playing with Piano Red, Watkins continued to play guitar onstage until her eighth month of pregnancy. "I would be up there with my guitar and I could feel him. . . . You see my stomach 'fore you see me comin' through the door." Watkins says when she gave birth to her son, Piano Red announced it on the radio. Watkins's family helped with the baby as she continued to play: "My first cousins, everybody in my family pitched in. My Aunt Bea pitched in. My Aunt Nell. My Aunt Margaret. Aunt Ruth. All my aunties they pitched in."

Watkins says that she has had to contend with rumors about her because she plays the electric guitar. "I've been, you know, talked about. . . . And that didn't matter with me, you know. Because what? My playing. As a woman. They even said I play like a man. That's alright too. God put me here. So I know I know my craft. And it feels so good." She says that being a black woman dealing with some men's disbelief in her ability to play the electric guitar has been "very hard." "I've been amongst a lot of men I have met on the shows. And they say, they'll come up, 'Oh, yeah, I heard about you. Can you really play?' I say, 'You know, sir, just wait. Wait and catch the show.' That's professional."

Not surprisingly, her creativity can be summed up in her own words, "I feel what I play." And playing for Watkins includes an ongoing commitment to practicing "my licks." Why? "Because I got to."

Conclusion

The electric guitar emerges as a critical element directing the course and quality of her life. The instrument has influenced her self-representation, faith as a Christian, and identity construction and negotiation as a musician and as a southern black woman.

After graduating from high school, Watkins did not continue on to college. Instead she was able to call upon a different set of skills that proved useful and valuable in contributing to her survival as a working-class woman. In her familial and early academic milieus, it was acceptable for a woman to play music, not just privately but also publically. Musicianship was treasured and fostered as a valuable skill. For Watkins, it was an avenue that responded to a young black girl's curiosity and took her desires to learn more and to be creative seriously. Musicianship was a space through which she could recognize a talent and capitalize off of it by pursuing a career as a professional. With her electric guitar strapped to her, Watkins was able to earn and accrue personal and social value in the worlds she moved through.

In 1939, Watkins was born into a place and era when black American musical traditions like blues, jazz, and gospel enjoyed mass appeal. The electric guitar offered an opportunity through which she as an adult black woman could give rein to her musical creativity, foster its development and find outlets for its release. There were numerous examples of black women who chose a life as a working musician, as vocalists and as instrumentalists—including artists such as Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Mahalia Jackson.

With the electric guitar Beverly Watkins dealt with men who accepted her playing the electric guitar as a fellow musician, traveling and performing with her, even mentoring her. Meanwhile, other men in her personal life found it problematic. Though

living an early itinerant life with relatives between Commerce and Atlanta and then moving around to different Atlanta neighborhoods, Watkins's musical talents on the electric guitar enabled her to expand her circuit of mobility to regional and national travel, which she might not have otherwise been able to experience.

As a result, her instrument, the electric guitar, has been her passport, certifying her identity as a working musician, functioning as a portal into and channel for her Christian faith, serving as a filter through which she registers her well-being, her very sentience; and through which she sets and achieves life goals.

NOTES

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CHAPTER 5: BB QUEEN, JENNIFER BLISS, SUZANNE THOMAS & CHERYL COOLEY

This chapter examines the oral histories of musicians BB Queen, Jennifer Bliss, Suzanne Thomas, and Cheryl Cooley because they lead multi-scalar lives. That is, they represent a variety of musical genres, levels of career success, professional and personal experiences, and recording output across shifting socio-historic contexts. As women in a male dominant music field, they move through some of the same routes and circuits, challenges and opportunities but with some differences. This fact is important because as the authors of *Girls Rock!* note, "We feel that the story of women [in rock] also includes those women just starting a band, playing the local coffeehouses or traveling a regional circuit."[1] While the dissertation is not concerned with formally judging expertise or genius as musical proficiency (though the musicians interviewed were clearly concerned with that kind of assessment as professionals and artists), the oral history interviews conducted reveal a broader understanding of what it can mean for a musician to exhibit brilliance and intelligence in one's artistry, including possessing a keen self-awareness of who one is and where one is going as an artist, professional, and woman.

Cultural expression is a critical feature of making music for artists. The electric guitar is a critical element in how the musicians in this chapter shape and experience their cultural expressions. The United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) defines cultural expression as "those expressions that result from the creativity of individuals, groups and societies, and that have cultural content."[2] These musicians cultural expressions with the instrument largely rely on their engagement in music-making practices of song writing, performing, practicing, rehearsing, and creating

songs for sale or for personal value. Because of its connection to gender politics in the United States, the electric guitar is an important instrument to examine for its role in shaping the cultural productions and expressions, identity and self-representation of black women musicians. The electric guitar can mediate the construction and negotiation of black female subjectivity in relationship to music. The electric guitar can also function as a metaphorical "power" tool used by these musicians to negotiate expectations of the nature and quality of their engagement on the electric guitar that are specific to them as black women. Indeed, there is a very particular kind of determination that a black woman must possess to continue to play the guitar in a sometimes hostile environment.

Biographies

BB Queen: "Born and bred" in Detroit, Michigan, BB Queen's parents created a physical and cultural space encouraging the growth of their children's musical abilities. "Whatever it was that we needed musically they were there." Perhaps this was natural since she recalls Detroit as a big music town, home of Motown Records. BB Queen could play musical instruments and dance from an early age. Her father, an employee at the Ford Motor Company, took her and her siblings into "after hours joints" to dance where "we would make so much money. We'd have all kinds of loot." It quickly became crystal clear to BB Queen that she could parlay her musical skills and talents into earning money. Though she first learned to play the clarinet and saxophone, her parents bought BB Queen her first guitar and her mother gave up the dining room space to convert it into a rehearsal space for her and her siblings. She began singing and dancing in numerous talent shows. At age 14, BB Queen was playing clubs with her 12 year-old sister on

drums. They often played back up for a 1960s doo-wop band. Because they were underage, the two sisters were not allowed to leave the back room and could not enter the club itself until it was show time. At 16 BB Queen got her driver's license so she could be more independent and drive to band gigs under her own aegis. She made money to buy James Brown records, shoes, or anything else she wanted or needed. BB Queen remembers songwriter and producer Sylvia Moy of Motown Records scouting out her family with a visit to their home. Despite the thrill of the experience, her family did not allow her pursuit of music to deter her from greater things. BB Queen graduated early from high school and, as she understands life now, believes that playing music on the electric guitar has "taken her places that money couldn't buy." BB Queen toured with BB King's daughter, Shirley King, and cites meeting BB King as a highlight in her life. BB Queen has traveled all over the world. She married and divorced a fellow guitarist and has a daughter. She is currently affiliated with Heron Media Records out of Las Vegas, Nevada. Like many performers, she insisted on preserving the mystery of her name and age: "I'm not 20, I'm not 30." She was dubbed "BB Queen" by an older woman in her home church, where she also played on Sunday mornings. The older woman said, " 'Sister, you're our BB Queen.' " BB Queen immediately and proudly adopted the name.

Jennifer Bliss: Bliss is originally from Shaker Heights, Ohio, but now based in Atlanta, Georgia. In her early 40s, Bliss is a working professional musician who has toured over the world with artists from a wide variety of musical genres, like Fred Hammond (gospel) and Musiq Soulchild (neosoul). She graduated from the historically black, all-female Spelman College in Atlanta, where she majored in English and played in the school's jazz band led by musician Joe Jennings. After college, in the mid-1990s,

Bliss played in Edith's Wish, a black female rock band that was once signed to Arista Records. After that "intimidating and humbling" experience, Bliss is no longer interested in "chasing this merry-go-round industry dream." Aside from working as a session musician and playing back up for established artists, she is a songwriter and singer who independently produces her own music. She deems herself an integral part of the music scene in Atlanta. Bliss began playing guitar after her father and older brother picked it up as a hobby. At seven years old, wanting to be "just like my older brother," Bliss decided she also wanted to play guitar. However, her brother teased her by saying," 'Girls can't play guitar'… and that was all she wrote" because "I started taking guitar lessons." It is only over the last few years that she has been able to play full-time, however, as she previously always maintained a "9-to-5."

Suzanne Thomas: In her early 50s, Suzanne Thomas is a hard rock and blues songwriter, vocalist and electric guitarist who likens herself to a "minister with a congregation" because "anyone who will listen" is her audience. Born in Korea of black American and Korean parentage, Thomas was adopted at five by a black family in the United States, where she was raised in Los Angeles, California. Thomas's parents placed her in organ lessons with renowned jazz organist Jimmy Smith. After a stint as a runaway living on the street, Thomas got back on track with the help of an aunt in Ohio. Upon graduating from high school and briefly attending Ohio State University, Thomas switched to the electric guitar and moved back to Southern California to attend music school—inspired by Barbara Lynn, Buddy Guy, and Jimi Hendrix. In the 1980s, Thomas played in all-black hard rock and punk bands that experienced major label interest. Today, while she would like to perform full-time, she maintains a full-time job, and

performs music throughout California. Possessing "a deep respect for rhythm" Thomas plays gigs in funk, soul, and blues bands, including the band A Taste of Honey with bassist Janice-Marie Johnson, replacing original electric guitarist Hazel Payne. Thomas has performed with artists such as blues legend Hubert Sumlin and jazz artist Keb Mo'. She also plays acoustic and bass guitar. Her music making is buttressed by an encyclopedic knowledge of music history and Thomas understands her career as a life's work committed to performance, but also the protection and furtherance of black cultural traditions in music.

Cheryl Cooley: Cooley is cofounder and lead guitarist of the all female, predominately black funk, R&B and pop band Klymaxx. In the 1980s, Klymaxx had several big hits in R&B that charted on Billboard, including "Men All Pause" (1984), "Meeting in the Ladies Room" (1985), and "I Miss You" (1985). When Klymaxx was dropped from their label in the 1990s, Cooley put the guitar down for a while and became an electrician. She now performs with a restructured configuration of Klymaxx under her musical leadership on lead guitar. Originally from Chicago, Illinois, Cooley remembers receiving toy guitars for Christmas from her parents. As she put it, "The guitar was my playmate." After moving to Los Angeles at age 10, however, they gave her a real one with a microphone and she eventually began taking guitar lessons with her older sister's encouragement. By high school, she was playing her first electric guitar. In school, she studied composition and learned to write music. In music school for college she confronted racist male professors who underestimated her in ways that sought to "destroy my spirit." While her parents were "very supportive" of her musical endeavors and were

proud of their daughter's success performing in a platinum-selling band, Cooley jokes she still "should've listened to my mom and learned typing."

Contemporary Black Women Musicians and the Electric Guitar

Discourses of femininity are undergirded by centuries old stereotypes derived from European economic, social and political hegemony over people of color. These stereotypes are not black women's formulations of themselves. They are external, white perceptions that black women have had to negotiate while developing, cultivating and reinforcing their own positive, valuable understandings of themselves. Not surprisingly, musicians, like other artists, use their skills and creative sensibilities in this process. In this study, black women musicians battle the gendered and racialized bias attached to the electric guitar to strategically incorporate that instrument as a mediator of new self-representations.

For these four electric guitarists, use of the instrument functions as: a source of versatility in terms of their skill set, a source of achievement, a tool to demonstrate stamina, endurance, dexterity, prized skills, and to signal their connection to technology, and scientific power. As previously noted, according to BB Queen, playing music on the electric guitar has "taken her places that money couldn't buy."

Probably, the electric guitar is foremost a tool for creative expression. With it, these musicians can do what they love most—make music. There is "a freedom," Bliss says, "When you're able to do things professionally and be self expressed with whatever you're gift is that God has given you." Cheryl Cooley agrees, believing that "having the guitar is, like, here's my purpose for being in front of you right now. Here's my passion. You know, I'm going to play. I'm going to play to express what's inside me."

Then there is the sonic and technological creativity involved in the electric guitar that excites musicians. Jennifer Bliss says:

> In my world, it's really about being versatile as a player. Can you play rock? Can you play jazz? Can you play gospel? Can you play R&B? Can you flow? Can you hear, can you listen, can you fill in the holes, do you know? How many different guitars do you have? Do you have an acoustic, play electric, jazz guitar? Do you have a 12-string? Do you need someone to…can you learn a song just by listening to it? That's basic.

Cheryl Cooley, who loves music theory, loves the electric guitar because it is "so intricate" and because "I'm into detail." "I'm left handed. I write left handed. So fingering on the guitar, of course, is going to be natural because I've already got the dexterity." With the electric guitar as her instrumental tool, her music making calls into play a "certain amount of logic and creativity that's gotta kind of ping pong back and forth," which she enjoys. BB Queen says playing the electric guitar "presents a challenge" that she absolutely relishes because the "guitar is not an easy instrument to play… but one can express yourself so much more with its sound." The electric guitar, she says, is "my recorder:"

> I figured out once I get it in the fingers then I got it in my brain. So if I get a melody line, I immediately go to my guitar and pick it up and, you know, then if I go *makes music making sound* on my fingers just to play that then I know where those fingers went. It's like a route… Once I take that path. I very seldom forget it.

What is evidently clear throughout these interviews raising questions about social and cultural divisions related to the music industry and the electric guitar, these women see themselves as artists first. They think and feel within that realm. That is what got them to the electric guitar in the first place—a desire to express themselves creatively through music, not so much a desire to break down social strongholds, or overcome racial

and gender inequalities, though that does help motivate them. As Cheryl Cooley says, "It's me and the guitar. And the audience just happens to be involved."

The musicians in this study implicitly and explicitly referenced social meanings and cultural fantasies about the electric guitar as cool/sexy, wonderfully loud, technologically expressive, possessing a voluminous power, vibrant and vivid. Perceptions of the electric guitar as fun may be as much a motivator for learning the instrument as the hope for uniqueness and earning money. This also may be a reflection of their personalities—creativity combined with the discipline to complete their art. Bliss proclaims the electric guitar as "the coolest instrument in the world," and "fun, it's a powerful expression, it shows your skills." BB Queen excitedly told me:

> As far as the sound, everybody, you can soup up a guitar like you can soup up a car, you know." "What excited me then and still excites me now is that it's so unique... I think just the sound, the guitar in itself. Oh, man, I just feel like I am. I can't wait to hit the first note. I mean, because people say, do you get scared? And you know, most people always say, it's always some form of afraid. Well, I wouldn't say that I'm afraid. I would say that I'm excited. I'm more excited than I would actually say afraid...I'm so excited and I'm so overjoyed. I'm more than happy. I'm so overjoyed inside that I can't wait to let other people feel how joyful I am through the music.

Suzanne Thomas likens what it feels like for her to play the electric guitar to dreams she has had where she is flying through the air. "The freedom and the high...where you can control, and just swoop down into the valley and change direction like a bird."

Expressing one's femininity as an artist on a culturally designated aggressively male instrument can be a bit tricky since being aggressive while being feminine can seem in opposition. Jennifer Bliss says she appreciates bringing "an African American femininity" to a male dominated industry. "You know what I'm saying? I feel purpose."

BB Queen relishes "being a queen on stage." Cheryl Cooley muses, "I don't know if it's so much power as much as it is an extended expression of me." There is something clearly challenging and exciting for women to express their art, their self expression through a medium seen as antithetical to their very being.

Musicians who identify as black and female do so in a popular representational field that typecasts and notices black women first as vocalists. Women are more often recognized if they are vocalists or playing more acceptable instruments such as the piano, acoustic guitar, or bass guitar. The electric guitarists in this study all acknowledged, as BB Queen aptly quips, that "none of us are household names," although there is Bibi McGill who plays lead guitar in international pop star Beyoncé's backup band.

As discussed in Chapter 3, black women have maintained a steady presence and participation with the acoustic and electric guitar in the United States. This history remains largely unknown even among the musicians in this study. They, too, were unaware of the long legacy of black women electric guitarists save Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Barbara Lynn (or they had an awareness of another female instrumentalist like trumpet player Cynthia Robinson of Sly and The Family Stone).

While Suzanne Thomas grew up listening to Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Barbara Lynn, Jennifer Bliss laments, " You can find a whole bunch of black female keyboard players, drummers and bass players. But I don't know any black female guitar players to be perfectly honest. The only one I know of is Bibi out of L.A." In spite of not knowing the full history of black women on their instrument of choice, these musicians definitely understood the cultural biases attached to the electric guitar as a white and male dominated instrument. Thomas observes, "It is so acceptable if a female plays keyboard

or even a saxophone. But for a female to come out and play a guitar when the guitar is looked at as a phallic symbol… And this is a male thing. This is a man thing. You have to grip that thing." Jennifer Bliss notes:

> When you talk about guitar players and guitar solos— it has been dominated by male sexuality, by male sensuality. You know, he is trying to conquer and woo some woman with this guitar solo, so he's just playing and just showing off. That male-dominated Ted Nugent energy, you know that goes out there aaargh, give me a rifle! Woman, come over here. That caveman kind of spirit and I mean, that's definitely there.

At the same time, these musicians recognize that white women guitarists get more recognition and opportunities than they do. Race is still a hindering factor alongside gendered bias. White women electric guitarists like Bonnie Raitt and Susan Tedeschi have enjoyed far more opportunities than black women have, perhaps because white women are more marketable in the commercial world. Twenty-eight year old Australian guitarist Orianthi Panagaris had a coveted spot as a lead guitarist for Michael Jackson's comeback tour before his death in 2010. Her manager told *Billboard* a year earlier that their plan in looking for opportunities was "to always position her as a guitar player. A female Slash, if you will. In America, there are so many female pop singers who drop a guitar around their neck and strum a few chords to look cooler or better than they actually are. Ori is a totally different thing. She's the real deal and she happens to sing."[3]

The article, "Guitar Heroine," references Panagaris as a "guitar virtuoso" whose appearance as Jackson's lead guitarist would "establish her as the female Carlos Santana." Her record label noted their hopes to sell her image through merchandise. "There's so much you can do with a female guitar hero, which has never been done before." He suggested ideas for "pink Strats or nail polish with USB drives shaped in the

shape of guitars."[4] One year later, he told *Billboard*, "We're delighted that young girls can look at her and think, 'Wow, I can play guitar;' that it's not just a boy's arena."[5]

While, Panagaris's manager did not say so, he was clearly referring primarily to white girls as the primary beneficiaries of this proposed marketing campaign of a pioneer contemporary female electric guitarist. The teen market in America is over $100 billion and two-thirds of American teens are white. For the time being, it seems that white women will continue as the preferred target in a male-dominated cultural industry despite the pioneering work and ongoing participation of African American women on the electric guitar.

Says Bliss in reference to black women:

> When you pioneer anything new, you're always going to have condescending people. Because you're presenting something to them that's unfamiliar and it's not the box that they are familiar with. And any woman who plays guitar, electric guitar, has to deal with that. It's something that you have to deal with and shake off when it happens. But, you know, the fact that you have to shake it off shows you where we are as a country, and where we're not.

This coterie of musicians acknowledge contending with assumptive sexist attitudes about women's participation as an electric guitarist. As women, people typically expect them to be a vocalist. BB Queen says that men who see her with the electric guitar still assume it cannot be hers to play. "Fact of the matter is, I still walk into a place with a guitar and they'll say, 'Oh, can you play that thing?' You know, or something like that. And a guy can walk in and hold the guitar for me and it's, 'Man, you play? Man, go on up there and hook up.' They assume that a guy can play and that a woman can't... Every time I get up there with the guitar I have to re-prove myself."

Similarly, Jennifer Bliss says, people assume "all the time" that she is anything but the guitar player. "My guitar is right there and they say, 'So you sing background?' "

When she informs people that she plays electric guitar, often times lead guitar, “They’re like, ‘Oh!’ And they get a puzzled look.” Meeting similarly preconceived notions, Suzanne Thomas says people make all kinds of assumptions except the obvious, “When I walk in I must be the guitar tech or something. Or there has to be another guitar coming because this band absolutely could not possibly function with just, on the strength of one guitar player who’s a female. So it’s like, ‘Well, when is the guitar player going to get here?’ They always assume that as a female you’re only playing rhythm or acoustic guitar.”

People maintain a strong assumptive link between women and the acoustic guitar as an appropriate, expected and more likely instrument for a woman to play. BB Queen says:

> And another assumption is that a woman should play acoustic guitar. Why is it every time someone asks me if I play guitar, they now say, ‘Oh, uh, you play acoustic?’ They say they never expect me to show up with a 10-piece band with horns and everything, and me fronting the band. They always expect me to come up like, you know, with an acoustic guitar, and you know, and I’m singing a folk song, and then I’m supposed to point to another guy. He’s supposed to take the lead. Then I’m supposed to come back up and sing. You know, I’m still supposed to be in that mode. The woman is supposed to sing and play an acoustic guitar, but the guy is supposed to come up out there and rip a hole in somebody’s butt on the guitar.

Jennifer Bliss says that in conversations about guitar playing, the electric guitar tends to get left out. The assumption is that all women guitarists are acoustic players. While she also knows how to play the acoustic guitar and actually teaches it, the electric guitar dominates her identity as an artist, as it does for all of the musicians interviewed. Upon learning that she played guitar as a profession, a family friend responded, “ ‘You play folk guitar? You play acoustic?’ ” Regarding the electric guitar versus acoustic guitar, Bliss says, “I’ve always kind of had a chip on my shoulder. I just don’t think I’m

the kind of person that can be satisfied with playing three-chord songs or not being able to go into a jam session and just be like, 'What!' " For her, the assumption that she plays acoustic guitar purely because she is female, "It's just like so condescending." Compared to the electric guitar (as it is by musicians themselves and as evident by each instrument's individual popular culture representations), the acoustic guitar is easily perceived as lacking the versatility and exhibitionism of the electric guitar. Some of this is a side effect of how these women feel society prejudges women's music making on the acoustic guitar as natural, emotional, predictable, and underwhelming.

At the same time, many men especially do not expect women to be outstanding electric guitarists. According to the musicians interviewed there are those players who police the instrument, setting the rules and criteria for what they believe to be authentic, good guitar playing, which often presumes masculinity; and privileges the lead guitar, attention to speed, loudness, exhibitionism, and technical prowess, if not outright virtuosic command of the instrument demonstrated through the prized acts of guitar solos and shredding. BB Queen says, "A lot of people are about speed. Shredding. The faster you are, the more impressed they are."

BB Queen finds that men think "we buy according to color" and not "according to sound or how it feels." Part of the reason she initially dove strongly into the technical aspect of the electric guitar was as a strategy to insure that her musicianship would be taken seriously. "I learned a whole bunch of technical terms just to impress the guys." The guys being "those guitar geeks that can tell you how you should be playing…'you should be holding your hand this way and that way.' " It's like, she says, everybody is looking to catch women musicians like herself "holding her pick wrong. 'She's playing in

D that should be a C.' " But, BB Queen says, "Well, if it sounds good to me then that's what I do."

At the same time, playing the electric guitar signals these women's recognition of and, in some cases, adherence to these same mainstream features of the electric guitar as a proudly competitive, loud instrument of bodily and sonic exhibitionism. In fact, the musicians interviewed say that they enjoy showing off their musical skills to doubters and people who assumed they cannot play because they are women on an instrument defined by male sexuality; or what one earlier referenced as a "Ted Nugent" energy.

Cooley wears knee pads to facilitate her guitar solos when she drops down to her knees and jumps back up. Thomas notes, "Audiences don't look for us to be ripping out lead lines and stuff. And being powerful and empowering... I mean I have to play way better than the guys in order for someone to say, 'You're a good guitarist.' Now I can meet up with a guy and they can just play and shuck, and everybody thinks he's just the cat's meow. And I have to play like, I have to nearly just rip him to shreds to be considered a good guitarist. Or not even a good guitarist, just a guitarist."

Still, these musicians have different takes on rocking, so to speak. While they all shred, Bliss believes "solos don't always have to be aggressive." BB Queen believes that while "you can play 20 million notes," still "you have to say something." Says Suzanne Thomas:

> Some people at some point think, Oh, if you're not playing lead...a lot of people are stuck on lead, because they go, "Oh, yeah, I'm the star. I'm playing lead." In rock, the favored lead guitar position is associated with guitar solos, although each member of a band whether lead or rhythm can do a solo.

Further she says:

> A lot of people will ask me now, "Do you play rhythm or do you play lead?" Well,

> I play both, but see a good guitarist, a guitar is just a guitar. That would be like asking me, "Well, can you drive a Ford or can you drive a Toyota?" If it's got six strings on it, you should be able to play it. That's just one of my opinions. It's something I've learned through my experience.

While she loves the "freedom and electric-ness" of playing hard rock music on the electric guitar, she also has a deep "respect for the rhythm" from her love of soul music, which heavily impacted her approach to making music overall, regardless of genre. In soul, rhythm guitar is a stylistic element that plays a critical, dominant role to a song. She cites the beginning of Al Green's "Love and Happiness," James Brown's "I Feel Good," and Prince's "1999." While the guitar solo is indeed "your chance to shine," it does not have to occur at the expense of "a nasty groove," rhythm. In this, musicians like Thomas cultivate their own standards, reifying, rejecting and adjusting different musical factors and stylistic elements in the process. The irony is that this is typical of musicianship, but it also can put them in opposition to musicians who function as gatekeepers, controlling mainstream sounds of genres, and the representations of those genres in culture.

For BB Queen and the other musicians, the electric guitar is a tool for self-expression and a source of mechanical and emotional defense. BB Queen notes:

> You can just express yourself to me so much more on a guitar. I know probably every person that plays an instrument says that. But, and, just, I don't know, it probably gives you a feeling of power too in itself 'cause you do know you're doing something that most of the guys can't and it's different, you know. It gives you a feeling of power or equality, if you wanna put it like that. Because when you put that guitar around your neck nobody's gonna say, "Awww, she's so cute." You know, they're not gonna say that. You know, they're gonna say, "Can you play?" You know, that's it. Can you play? When I walk out on that stage then that's the end of "Awww, it's a lady, it's a girl." All that's done. That's a done deal. Now you gotta bring it.

Jennifer Bliss: "For me, it's a weapon" and the guitar is a method to fight back. She can express and re-create herself beyond the limits that society seeks to place on her

as a black woman. Cheryl Cooley states, “Well, for me, it [the guitar] is a shield in the sense of being able to stand up in front of all those people. If I had to get up on stage without a guitar in front of all those people, I don’t care if it’s 10.” She jokes, “They gon’ have to have some smelling salts for Cheryl, who’s gon’ be on the floor.” Likewise Suzanne Thomas says, “I couldn’t be onstage without a guitar. I’d die. I definitely couldn’t get on stage. If somebody said just get up here and sing. I could probably get through it, but my Linus blanket is my guitar. Because then it’s like nothing can harm me. Nothing else matters.” Clearly, these women feel a deep personal and artistic connection to the electric guitar, as a tool of self-presentation of protection, and courage.

These musicians recognize and enjoy the electric guitar’s hegemonic sociocultural position in American popular music and share similar experiences of biased treatment (in the above mentioned ways) with white women. This is one dimension of gender bias that black women share with their white female counterparts. Orianthi said she “had a teacher at school who told me to take up the harp!” Jennifer Bliss says, “That’s something that we [women] all have to deal with—putting yourself out front on a stage with people watching and judging you [on predetermined criteria] which adds another element of potential insecurity.”

However, gender is not divisible from race. While all women in show business are judged by cultural standards related to so-called sex appeal with a focus on “boobs and heels” being black and female with an electric guitar strapped onto your body leads to experiences that their white female counterparts do not have to contend with. Most notably expectations of beauty standards and femininity, style, body type, musical genre, and race and ethnicity are at play, literally and figuratively. The musicians interviewed

were exceedingly aware that as contemporary black women who play the electric guitar they are overlooked, ignored and must contend with racialized femininities that impact how they are seen and judged with respect to beauty and appearance. At the same time, they are in a uniquely contradictory position that they can benefit from, a consistent theme in the oral narratives.

Jennifer Bliss says, "There is a pressure for women professionals to look a certain way, in order to be taken seriously, regardless of what their profession is, especially for those that are in show business. And if you're black, it's all the more challenging. Black women's beauty is not celebrated the same way white women's beauty is." She further expressed a deep concern for "what that does for the self-esteem of the woman, the black woman in particular because, as Americans, there's a beauty standard that we'll never meet."

Bliss critically notes, "There is value with your presentation, your physical presentation. But don't try to pimp my physical presentation. And I'm not dressing for you, I'm dressing for me." She laments that women come to the stage as artists, expecting to be judged by their musical skills not their personal appearance.

> So much of our value is placed on our appearance and if it fits into and so much of how we feel about ourselves, let alone, I mean, let alone, our hair. You know if you are natural or you got dreadlocks, whatever, it's just, it's challenging. Especially now it just seems it's more challenging than ever to, for black women's beauty in all of its glory and sizes and shapes and colors to be celebrated and not feel like it has to be defended. And all the more so for every black woman guitar player.

These kind of interrelated issues of gender, race and genre are things, Bliss observes, "Susan Tedeschi never has to deal with."

Then there is the ubiquitous issue of skin color. Black women possess different skin tones so along with battling standard white racism, there is also colorism emanating from black people. Both are very painful. Jennifer Bliss's lighter skin tone sparks multi-pronged levels of questions about her skin from whites seeking to racially box her in. They look at her and ask, " 'What are you mixed with and who are you? Which one of your parents is white?' And all this kind of stuff. And I'm like, both my parents are African American. Both my grandparents, all my grandparents, you know. It's just black, African American people come in all shades and colors, you know. And I don't need to justify that to you. But you don't really see a lot of people in the forefront that are African American that are my hue."

Blacks also bring the baggage of colorism to Bliss and other lighter-skinned African American women. "I'm a fair skinned black woman so another thing is the whole light skinned, dark skinned dynamic thing…. I'm like, I haven't even opened my mouth yet." For self-identified multicultural black women like Suzanne Thomas there is another level to contend with. Thomas is half Korean and half African American, but states unequivocally and unapologetically that "culturally, I'm all black. It's just what it is." Black culture is "my culture, 100%." She says people encounter her and develop a cognitive dissonance when they see and hear her play the electric guitar. It is as if they tell themselves, " 'Our eyes are telling us one thing. Our ears are telling us something else,' " she says.

Even after audiences see black women electric guitarists perform, Bliss notes: "And still at the end of it, they still don't know what to do with you." With the electric

guitar these musicians continually confront stereotyped expectations based on gender and racial biases deeply rooted in American, and western culture and history.

Genre Limitations

The musicians in this study play a mix of blues, jazz, funk, rock, R&B, soul, and gospel though audiences do not expect them to have such a broad range of artistic ability and interest. This low expectation seems to be racially based as white women do not face such long-range artificial limitations. Bonnie Raitt and Susan Tedeschi, for example, are well known and celebrated for playing blues while a black woman in the genre like Deborah Coleman is not.

Meanwhile, BB Queen says she must battle the stereotypes associated with being a black woman who does play blues music.

> I have shown up to so many places and they say, "Hey, hi you doin? Now when is Queen gonna get here?" But I am. I am. I'm BB Queen. You know, and then they'll go, "Oh! Aah!" and I know what they expected. They expected a big, fat, black, greasy woman with two teeth and I know they expect that and I'm supposed to come in and go, "Whatcha'll got to eat in here? Y'all got some chicken?" You know, that kind of stuff. I love chicken and I always talk about it, but it's just the stereotype of a black woman in blues is this huge, black, uneducated, greasy face, talkin' loud, spittin', drinking whiskey, you know just everything that the guys do, but you still just supposed to be…that's the stereotype. If you look like that, you get so far ahead.

Ironically, when BB Queen began her music career, "I didn't know one blues song." "One of my aunts, she said you need to learn how to play one blues. You know, because we were doing all these cabarets in Detroit and clubs. You need to learn one blues. I'm like, 'Don't nobody want to learn no blues. That's old people music.' "

As noted in the previous chapter, Beverly "Guitar" Watkins experiences the same blues woman stereotypes and is constantly negotiating expectations that she should

appear as a broke and tore down old woman. She is also bothered by those black artists who play into those negative expectations. This expectation for a musician to meet a particular stereotype fits into what Tara McPherson calls "white racial melancholia," flowing out of particular paradigms of the South. These musicians are aware of how powerful elements of white racial melancholia within the broader blues niche undergirds and influences their careers. But as BB Queen jokes, "I play the blues, it doesn't mean I got the blues." While she is pigeonholed into the blues because of her name and because she enjoys playing the music, she also plays soul, neo-soul, and funk. However, BB Queen says, when it comes to blues "because somebody still needs to tell the story then I'll take it." Suzanne Thomas, who also loves rock and funk alongside blues, also sees herself as contributing to continuing the black blues tradition.

Black women who choose to perform outside of mainstream, read: "black" musics, such as R&B, soul, or gospel; or outside of unexpected music formats like a band can face cognitive dissonance as well. Jennifer Bliss recalls playing electric guitar in an all-black female band called Edith's Wish in the mid-to-late 1990s. There was a bidding war over Edith's Wish and they eventually signed to Arista Records:

> I think the novelty of all black females, not just singing, but playing everything and rockin' was too fascinating for them to be. That was so fascinating to them, to people, whether we played for white folks or black folks. That's why it was so powerful because of that whole novelty, and the songs that we had and things we were doing overshadowed prejudice. When they saw Edith's Wish they wanted us, everybody wanted us to succeed. Because it was something that was. It was something that was pioneering in a way, more than if it was just a singer with a white band.

Yet, in the end, Arista decided they did not know what to do with the band.

Suzanne Thomas played in two different all-black female hard rock bands, Krank and PMS. Record labels were interested in them, but expressed confusion and cluelessness as to how they would market them. Thomas says,

> They really didn't know what to do with us. What are you going to do with an all black female band? They didn't know what to do with an black male band, so now what are you going to do with an all black female band that plays rock? That are hardcore rockers? We used to do shows with Body Count and Mother's Finest. We were hard rock, but we still had that groove though. It was very frustrating because I was a straight out rocker. You know, we were no different from Van Halen and all that, but we were just black and female.

Inspirations

All of the musicians note that they were inspired to pick up the electric guitar by both male and female electric guitarists. BB Queen was inspired as a preteen by seeing BB King and Jimi Hendrix on television. As budding artists, they accepted no limitations on who their role models would be. BB Queen says,

> I started playing electric guitar at 13 years old. I saw BB King on TV playing a guitar and I said, hmmm, how do they make those sounds, how does he change the note, you know? And I got real close up on the TV and they were showing his fingers and I said, oh he puts his finger there. Then he clamps down, you know. That kind of stuff and I saw him on, it was a show called 'Showtime in Detroit' and I saw him that one week. And the next week they brought Jimi Hendrix on. So I said, whoa, I want to be like BB King and I wanna play like that dude right there.

While learning the organ with Jimmy Smith, Suzanne Thomas says her brothers were listening to the other Jimi, who ultimately captured her musical attention. Thomas's church pastor "played a candy red Strat like Jimi Hendrix and he rocked. He was playing, 'Give Me That Old Time Religion.' " Thomas's strict aunt did not allow secular music on Sunday but Thomas was able to get away with listening to Sister Rosetta Tharpe, whose gospel blues mix confounded her aunt. "She'd listen, look at me, and listen and give me

that look, like, 'I know you're trying to put one over on me.' " Thomas was also inspired by left-handed electric guitarist and songwriter Barbara Lynn who had a number-one hit with her song "You'll Lose A Good Thing" in 1962. Although Thomas says, she did not realize Lynn played guitar until later.

In addition to looking to a broad range of artists for inspiration, many musicians were ushered into music by their families who were very supportive and encouraged their musical ambition. BB Queen's parents were a major source of support and encouragement for her and her siblings. They even played in a family band. BB Queen observes, "They were not the parents that said, you know, 'turn it down, don't play.' My poor mom, her little dining room. She just didn't even have a dining room. She took the table out—everything—so that I could have a rehearsal room." Suzanne Thomas's parents put her into organ lessons with renowned jazz artist Jimmy Smith at age six.

Faith

Religion and faith play a strong integrative role in the lives of the musicians whose families instilled church-going as a regular part of their formative years. Jennifer Bliss, Suzanne Thomas, and BB Queen have a very strong sense of cultivating and maintaining spiritual discernment. Church is an important part of their participation in black cultural traditions that have been critical to and supportive of their musicianship on the electric guitar. It helps link them to major aspects of a "common cultural identity"[6] and they play a role in church as musicians. The church has space for them and they make space for church in their lives.

Obviously, many musicians play electric guitar in church, continuing to make it a critical site supporting their musicianship in different ways over their life spans. BB

Queen easily moves between clubs and church. “Matter of fact,” she says, “I had my own tour bus and I would change my clothes on the bus, walk off the bus, and go in the church because I would not miss my church gig on Sunday. I’d come in and they’d say I’m probably thinking I’m still playing with Little Milton or somebody because of the way I was playing.”

> It was the mothers of BB Queen’s church who gave her, her the stage name: One day I was walking down past the aisle and one of the mothers tapped me and she said, “Umm, you know what? You’re our own queen.” She said, “We gon’ call you BB Queen. We got our own BB. We got BB Queen.” These same women, she remembers with amusement would bring tape recorders to record her playing with the choirs. On Sunday, the mothers sitting in front would actually bring their tape recorders. It would be so funny because who uses a tape recorder? And they would have a whole line of tape recorders sitting out in the front row while I’m playing. And the pastor of the church, he said, “I thought they’d be coming taping me. Listening to what I got to say. I find out they over here taping my guitar player. They ain’t even thinking about what I’m saying.”

BB Queen proclaims, “I praise with that guitar” whether in church or not. In this way, the church functions as a site of study, learning and practice, and even as a source of income for many musicians. For Jennifer Bliss, churches are a “good, steady gig,” alongside club gigs and playing corporate events, the 3 c’s (church, club, corporate).

Regardless of their age, many musicians express the influence of their faith and church experiences on their musicianship with the electric guitar. While the black church is made up of a multitude of denominations of faiths of all kinds, the Pentecostal, Holiness and Baptist churches are largely the denominations most often cited as incredibly influential on the creation and innovation of American musics such as blues, rock, jazz, and gospel. Music scholar and record producer Anthony Heilbut reaffirms this in *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times* (1971) when he remarked that “gospel

is one saved step from the blues"[7] BB Queen points out that, " 'Baby, baby, baby' on Saturday night is 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus' on Sunday."

As an instrument, the electric guitar has been critical to the formation of the sound and popularity of R&B, rock, blues and gospel. As BB Queen notes, " 'Open the Floodgates' ain't nothing but 'Purple Rain.' " As such, playing the electric guitar mediates the experiences of musicians of faith and those who are churchgoing, helping them negotiate the sacred and the secular.

Playing secular music and playing in church creates an in-between space for musicians who really do have faith in God. As black women they have to make a choice about how to negotiate this in-between space. "Trying to find your place, when there's no place to find," according to Jennifer Bliss, is not easy. BB Queen says, "I always say a prayer that when I hit these notes, I say, 'Lord.' I say, 'let, if someone needs to laugh, let 'em laugh. Let it be a good laugh. If somebody needs to cry. Let 'em cry, but let it be tears of joy, you know what I'm saying. That I will actually minister through the music so that they can have a real good time. Not nothing evil. I don't want any of my notes or anything to put people's thoughts astray." These are real issues that some musicians have to deal with. These are issues because, ultimately, they create narrow representations of black women and impact their ability to play and perform. This impacts their identity construction and development, perhaps more so than for other musicians who by virtue of racial and gender privilege are not burdened by similar long standing stereotypes and structural limitations imposed by commercial markets. Black women musicians know that they are contending with the perception of being seen as novelties, spectacles,

anomalies, and phantom musicians when all they want is just the opportunity to practice their work as an artist without the artificial limitations of race and gender.

Despite the difficulty they encounter as black women strapping on a white male instrument, these musicians push through the challenge because of the opportunities playing the electric guitar affords. With all its taboos for black women, the electric guitar is available to be engaged as a tool in the formation and negotiation of their identities in which a sense of uniqueness proves valuable.

Jennifer Bliss says that is what partially appealed to her, given her personality.

> If I was going to choose any instrument, it would've been the guitar. Not just because it is the coolest instrument in the world, which it is. But because there're no black women that are playing it. That's part of what appealed to me. Because I wanted to stand out and be special. Not just for attention's sake, but because there's something romantic about being a pioneer; that, is and has, always appealed to my sensibilities. It's always, to be able to go out there and change people's opinion and change people's prejudices.

Cheryl Cooley suggests the same, "It's a feather in a cap, the fact that I am a woman playing. 'Oh, wow, that's neat, you know.' "

Utility & (In)Visibility

BB Queen says:

> I started off playing clarinet and saxophone. And we already had a chick running through Detroit. She played with Stevie Wonder and everything at like 16 and she played saxophone. Her name was Norma Jean Bell and I said, oh we already got somebody running through. I gotta get me an instrument where they can't kick me out the band. I'm getting me an instrument where they are stuck with me. They can get another saxophone because there were a lot of people playing sax. It's not a lot of women playing. Well, I said, girls, but it's not a lot of girls playing guitar.

BB Queen's recognition that two women playing the saxophone would not be a sustainable working option for her in Detroit speaks to a keen awareness of structural limitations on black women in this industry. She knew she had to become indispensable

and foster longevity as a musician seeking a steady working career in entertainment. The electric guitar was a critical instrument to her plan. Her thinking also acknowledges her recognition of the clarinet as a gendered female instrument limited to Western art music, such as classical music. It is not a key instrument in more popular music like jazz, pop, rock, and gospel. Continuing on this instrument would have limited her opportunities nor supported her desire to construct her identity under the mantra, "I'm just a person of uniqueness."

On a 2010 YouTube channel, guitarist Janice Marshall-Coates posted two clips of herself playing the electric guitar. The uploaded clip is usefully entitled: "Gospel African American Female Lead Guitarist."[8] Marshall Coates observed the novelty of her positionality and musicality by noting all the different specific aspects of her identity, which she is using to secure viewing hits. Coates recognized her uniqueness in music as a black female lead guitarist. In order to construct their personal and on stage persona, black women electric guitarists are required to do that for themselves. They cannot wait for or expect record label marketers to do that for them. Even Beverly "Guitar" Watkins asserts her unique value as an older black woman playing the electric guitar.

Black women recognize those musical areas where they dominate representationally in U.S. culture. They may not dominate all musical arenas but they demand to be seen and recognized in the areas where they do have uniqueness and positive presence. The electric guitar functions as the chosen instrument, functioning as a tool securing opportunities for them and cultivating their visibility as musicians on an unexpected instrument. This does not always work to their advantage, but they believe that it is a response that can occur. Their choice of the electric guitar also optimizes their

awareness of the representational precedence they set for black woman musicians overall. Jennifer Bliss takes this seriously: "The Spelman woman in me is like, you know what? I mean we're always pioneering something and we gotta clear the way and we gotta make sure that people know that we're here and we do it. You gotta come correct."

Her use of the word pioneer is somewhat hyperbolic. It is also indicative of the fact that while she is aware of pioneer artists like Memphis Minnie, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, and Lady Bo, she perceives a necessity in seeing herself not just as a latter-day contributor to that rich (but largely unheralded legacy), but also as a stakeholder. She is a stakeholder who must construct and claim her own ongoing pioneer status given that she is a black woman playing a male designated instrument in the 21st century, against the odds and not by playing it safe.

Employment

Like all other musicians, these musicians use the electric guitar practically, as a key tool in securing employment to, as Bliss states, "put a roof over my head." Still, most of the women in the study have had to work another job to supplement their life as musicians. There is pride and frustration in this. Pride in having multiple skills but also frustration because it is rare to be able to quit the main job to pursue and make a living off of playing music. Clearly, this is a perennial battle for most musicians in their careers that can fluctuate for any number of reasons beyond sheer determination and skills. Bliss notes:

> When I graduated my family was expecting me to come back to Cleveland and be a teacher or something like that. And I just kind of had one of those—and I was planning on doing that because it's the safe route and everything. I was talking to some of my friends, who've seen me doing all this stuff with me, and [they] said "You know you wanna be a musician." And I was like…it was one of those forks

> in the road—sometimes you gotta go with your gut. So I decided not only was I not going back to Cleveland, but I was going to pursue music.

BB had no such competing demands on her. Playing the electric guitar with and without her family band helped her to support her family by paying the family's mortgage so they were always supportive of and hoping she would become a full time professional musician. Even after her family band broke apart, she kept pursuing playing. Nonetheless, throughout her career, BB Queen has always worked full-time jobs and has worked to create opportunities for herself. "I've never been poor in my life," she says. When she was married with kids, the whole family toured together. "The music is my job," she says, "but I have had some interesting jobs and I have had them…they all coincided with the music." She was a flight attendant, who used the job to fly to gigs. She had a trucking company for 15 years, which facilitated the moving and hauling of music equipment. Today, she says, "I'm just really beginning. I'm not turning the heat down. I'm turning the heat up."

One musician has a career working on major construction projects, but no one in that world knows she is a musician because she is concerned about the stereotypes people hold about musicians being irresponsible and prone to doing drugs. In this regard, life is hard because she would like to play music full time and support herself and her family. Right now what works for her is taking "time to be creative" then cycling back to work a straight job to "pay the rent."

Like other musicians interviewed, she has experienced bouts of disenchantment with music due to health problems, label frustrations, lack of well-paying gigs and just dealing with "gender bull shit, color line bull shit, people being jerks" that sometimes makes her think about quitting music. Yet there is "joy in the journey" as BB Queen

believes and so because they can only ignore their passion for the electric guitar and music but for so long, they pick up the instrument again and keep pushing, the way black women always have because they will "always play guitar."

Conclusion

For this selective group of women the electric guitar has been an instrument of joy, pain and creativity, reflecting the varying conditions which they live and work in. For them, the instrument is not just a rock instrument, but a soul instrument, a blues instrument, a funk instrument. It is a tool of transformation, however, partial or short-lived. But it is also a tool that they themselves control through the manipulation of their bodies outside of what anyone else says or thinks about them. In their own ways, each woman has reset the contours of her life and reimagined creative possibilities for herself lives and how she represents herself in the world.

NOTES

1. Mina Carson, Tisa Lewis, and Susan M. Shaw, *Girls Rock!: Fifty Years of Women Making Music* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), xvii.

2. "Glossary," *UNESCO*, accessed November 19, 2013, http://www.unesco.org/en/convention-2005/glossary/.

3. Lars Brandle, "Guitar Heroine: Orianthi Steps Out of Michael Jackson's Shadow," *Billboard*, November 7, 2009.

4. Ibid.

5. Jason Lipschutz, "Guitar Heroine," *Billboard*, January 9, 2010.

6. Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Underpinnings of Black Solidarity* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 169.

7. Tony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 215.

8. Janice Marshall-Coates, “Gospel African American Female Lead Guitarist,” *YouTube*, accessed November 19, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3wW86uopGU.

CONCLUSION

The guitar is regarded as of remarkable sonic importance in the creation and evolution of musical genres such as blues, jazz, rock, and gospel. Dominant mainstream representations of the electric guitar in popular culture see it as the exclusive purview of white men, primarily in rock, and black men in blues. These racialized gender-based notions about appropriate musical instruments for women abound though African-American women have made an undeniable significant contribution to music using the guitar. Their artistic use and mastery of the instrument, acoustic and electric, has long functioned as a tool through which they entertain, evangelize, and educate. The musical contributions of women instrumentalists in general have been understudied and overlooked in much mainstream institutional and popular accounts, and visual imagery.

The purpose of this study was to document contemporary black women artists' engagement of the electric guitar, and to understand how the electric guitar affects the construction, negotiation, and representation of their bodies, identities, and musicality. I collected data through oral history interviews, a qualitative method that values collecting the perspectives of individuals from a broad range of social positions to study information about their lives and their experiences with events, places, and eras. This approach was of critical importance because the literal and figurative voices and musicianship of black women electric guitarists are most often marginalized. In my interviews with these musicians, I asked about the different forms of organized effort they put forth to make music with the instrument in order to reveal their different performance practices, beliefs, and attitudes. In the process, recording their oral histories helped affirm their existence as instrumentalists by providing them a vital outlet to think

and talk about their lives and their work. It also served as a framework through which they could be identified as participant stakeholders, creators and legatees linked to American music histories.

My selection criteria was limited to women between the ages of 20 and 75 who self identified as black or African-American, with professional experience playing the electric guitar. I conducted interviews in person and over the phone with ten musicians. They were diverse in age, life experience, career level, education, class, genre, generation, skin color, and location in the United States. I later analyzed the oral history interviews of five of them: Beverly "Guitar" Watkins and Jennifer Bliss of Atlanta, Georgia; BB Queen of Detroit, Michigan; Suzanne Thomas, and Cheryl Cooley of Southern California. These women were chosen because they met selective criteria befitting the temporal imperative of finishing the dissertation and completing my dissertation program. Each works as an independent artist, session musician in recording studios, backup tour musician, church musician, singers, songwriter, composer, and music educator in her respective community. They are also mothers, entrepreneurs, teachers, and electricians.

In interviews with each musician I further asked about their creativity and musical development with the electric guitar, their experiences playing the electric guitar, and their feelings about the instrument. I was able to investigate larger, ongoing discourses around black womanhood, popular music, and musicianship in the United States. I was also able to investigate, more pointedly, the ways in which the electric guitar has shaped elements of black female cultural expression and self-representation across shifting socio-historic contexts and geographical locations.

In evaluating the interviews, I engaged historical and cultural analyses with black feminism(s) as an intercessory framework because by design black feminism takes black women seriously as historical subjects and as active contemporary producers of culture. Black feminism has established intellectual traditions that explicitly acknowledge black women's existence, privilege their experiences, and recognize both black women and their experiences as diverse due to a critical foundational awareness of the shifting impact that multiple sociocultural categories can have upon the nature and quality of black women's lives.

Of all the different categories of analysis present in the transcriptions, race and ethnicity, gender, genre, and age collectively emerged as particularly salient in how these musicians variously experienced their bodies, navigated their identities, and prioritized their musicianship with the electric guitar. The instrument, my research shows, can function as a catalyst and a mediator in what emerged as black women's thematic encounters with issues of value and visibility broadly bound up in cultural perceptions and expectations of black women's bodies and musicality. With the electric guitar strapped to them, black women challenge external cultural perceptions and expectations of black women's bodies and musicality. As well, black women can also accommodate, strengthen, or advance their own internal perceptions and expectations of their bodies and musicality through their different practices with and investments in the instrument.

Interpretive Findings

The electric guitar impacts how black women construct, negotiate and experience their identities, self-presentations, and musicality. Black women's musicianship with the electric guitar heightens their self-confidence. Playing the instrument provides an

unmistakable level of versatility, artistry and performativity. It also alleviates stage fright for those self-consciously less confident about their singing voices. The critical addition of being able to play the electric guitar emboldens their personality, giving them a concrete factor through which to reason and push past the fear, reminding them that they can feel secure in their skilled performance on the electric guitar.

Not all of the women in this study were fully aware of the long and traceable history of black women's sustained presence and participation on the guitar (acoustic and electric) over time. Yet, playing the electric guitar functions as a tool of cultural imperative for them by intensifying their symbolic connection and material contribution to propagating African American musical traditions and forms of rock, blues, jazz, and gospel. It is also a tool of spiritual expression used in praise and worship, ministering, and fostering fellowship. The electric guitar increases a musician's versatility by offering another avenue, the church, through which they can earn money playing during services and/or by touring with gospel artists. For these women, playing the guitar is also a direct line to God. Most believed that God bestows the musical skill that enables them to entertain and inspire audiences. In this, they follow in the footsteps of musicians such as Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Mary Deloatch.

Black women's musicianship with the electric guitar forces them to encounter and confront a very specific kind of (in)visibility. As instrumentalists with an electric guitar they are a population hidden in plain sight. They contend in a field where black women possess a timeless and global legacy as vocalists or as instrumentalists on the piano. Further, challenging expectations of black women's musical capabilities and interests, they function as sonic and visual interlopers in a field of representation in music where

the guitar is perceived as culturally white and male.

The musicians interviewed are attuned to genre conventions of the marketplace that seem to differentially value artists based on gender and race, and not musicianship alone. In blues, black men, white men, and white women on the electric guitar prevail. In jazz, white and black men predominate. In rock and heavy metal, white men dominate. Gospel may be the critical genre where black women electric guitarists establish a visible and valued presence.

Black women's musicianship with the electric guitar can take advantage of black female (in)visibility. They recognize themselves as black women playing an electric guitar and know that this combination is considered culturally unfamiliar. They can accrue value by constructing and marketing their musical presence (or by accepting being externally perceived as such) as a rarity, an exception. Doing so has helped musicians to book gigs, request higher billing on shared musical programs, garner higher pay, and sell more products. It also strengthens their sense of pride in their musicianship.

Yet being understood as unique places them at risk of being perceived as a novelty and novelties are often underpaid and trivialized. However, reckoning with being a novelty can certainly be preferred to being outright ignored and overlooked. Novelties still gain opportunities to be seen and to get paid to demonstrate musical skill.

Black women's musicianship with the electric guitar can tap into and potentially capitalize on conventional reactions toward the electric guitar that are culturally-proscribed to invoke and evoke the visceral and the virtuosic; as well as convey the cool. Largely dictated by male musicians and critics, these cultural appeals and performance norms—like that which privileges the guitar solo and shredding—have also

understandably been absorbed by women musicians. For some of them it is a pleasure to "kick butt," as one musician describes it, by surging into a guitar solo and/or shredding before crowds and audiences where they are particularly underestimated as musicians on the electric guitar. It can be an honest moment of musicianship and a strategic move to signal their understanding, acceptance and adoption of male-dominated performance norms of being loud and expert on the instrument—such an act has helped a musician garner audience support, legitimation, and validation of musicianship.

However, male-dominated performance norms of being loud and expert on the instrument have also been upended by these women in the course of their musicianship. For example, while they can evince an appreciation for surging into a guitar solo or shredding, they also demonstrate appreciation for what they believe is the critical power of rhythm and the importance of playing to keep the rhythm on electric guitar. Similarly, though they can demonstrate a commitment to assembling a high-charged physical performative style with the instrument, they can also eschew those sets of gestures, bodily inflections and movements as the singular, prized method of musicianship with the instrument in favor of what they feel to be a less aggressive guitar solo, but no less amazing solo.

Strapped to their bodies, these musicians engage its phallic-shaped symbolism as a natural extension of their own female bodies when they play it. It is possible to consider the instrument, at this point, as submitting (or being placed in the position of submitting) to their musical and bodily priorities as black women musicians; or as facilitating the process and establishment of their musical and bodily priorities as black women musicians. Some of these musical priorities focus on: professionalization with the electric

guitar in the interest of furthering a career in entertainment and their own self-directed creative development; a desire to be externally judged on their command of the electric guitar instead of being judged based on age (being too old), body type (being overweight), race (being black), and gender (being female); and garnering recognition, for example.

Black women's musicianship with the electric guitar contends with the haze of influential broader popular pathologized and limited notions about black women and the black female body that circulate in the larger society. Black women's physical presence and cultural representation "evokes a racialized, sexualized and exploitative history"[1] that has resulted in black women and their bodies becoming "systematically overdetermined and mythically configured."[2] Under these terms, black women have been and continue to be marked, misconstrued, and otherwise pilloried as excessive and/or masculine, inherently and overtly sexual, voluminously loud, overweight, and brash in bodily deportment.

However, black women's musicianship with the electric guitar unsettles these stereotypes. As previously noted, the instrument is idealized for conveying a metaphoric and physical overindulgence in service of implicit and explicit masculinity, male power and authority—like Zeus slinging thunderbolts from the sky. The electric guitar involves enacting and intensifying full-bodied movements, gestures of immodesty, irrepressibility and vigor. And while the electric guitar is not in any danger of being eclipsed by an overwhelming number of female players, especially black women players, it is interesting to consider the implications of a black woman bringing the fullness of her self with the electric guitar strapped across her body (breasts or thickness around the middle included)—an instrument technologically amplified, flowing with scientific power,

electricity. It is a metaphoric empowerment of the socially disempowered.

Black women's musicianship with the electric guitar is heavily intertwined with their physical self presentation with the instrument. Their experiences are impacted by tropes of racialized femininity in music such as the regal jazz chanteuse, the wizened soul singer, the splashy pop star, the reverential gospel great, the opera diva, the neosoul songbird, and the hard-living blues shouter. Each trope possesses its individual characteristic ideals of style, clothing, carriage, and deportment. Though most of these tropes are largely specific to black women (soul, gospel, neosoul and blues singers), they represent the broader landscape of music that holds demanding expectations for beauty and femininity that are impacted by marketplace vagaries of race, gender, genre, age and the body for women in music. The musicians interviewed express enormous awareness about the ways in which they did and did not meet standards of sexiness (high heels, tight clothing, cosmetic), youthfulness, and body size even as instrumentalists. They are under the same intense expectations of self presentations as vocalists. They dress to accommodate playing the electric guitar in their female bodies based on their respective ages, body sizes, style inclinations, and musical experience. They make deliberations about everything from jewelry (bangles and bracelets on the wrist can get in the way) to shoes (high heels can destabilize a musician, throwing her off balance) to the fit of clothing (tight clothes can inhibit the range of one's movement on and with the electric guitar), and hair. Some experience a joy in the process of dressing up to perform. Others expressed irritation. Whether they enjoy the process or not, they have no interest in wasting time being solely concerned about dressing up. They want to be comfortable on stage, playing and having fun.

Both implicit and explicit is knowledge of the different stakes for men and even white women. White women's beauty and femininity is presumed in ways it is not for black women. As such, some of the musicians express the importance of dressing to display and maintain femininity in the course of performance. There is a hint of strategic respectability for the sake of the collective (black women) and for one's own sense of self as a black woman preparing for the stage with the knowledge of her previous experiences and that of societal expectations about her and her body's capabilities.

Black women's musicianship with the electric guitar disrupts dominant social meanings and cultural fantasies about the electric guitar as when the electric guitar serves as a conduit for showcasing an alternative womanhood and musicianship. With it, they enact a "bodily insurgence,"[3] modeling Daphne Brooks's (2006) notion of "the renegade ways that racially marked women use[d] their bodies in dissent of...social, political, and juridical categories assigned to them."[4] Strapped to them, the electric guitar functions as a tool through which to rebuff aforementioned stereotypes. Even if they are considered by others or construct themselves as a novelty, a spectacle, or an exception, the fact of their existence, presence and musicianship as black women on the electric guitar makes them agents of a bodily insurgency that complicates those formulations in a landscape that richly rewards (monetarily and or visually) black women as singers, preferably hard-living blues shouters, regal jazz chanteuses, splashy pop stars, and reverential gospel greats.

Hortense Spillers (2003) has posited that the black woman singer is a prime example of "black female sexual experience" "in the sense of her dramatic confrontation

between ego and world that the vocalist herself embodies." These women, Spillers says, are involved in a:

> Dance of motives, in which the motor behavior, the changes of countenance, the vocal dynamics, the calibration of gesture and nuance in relationships to a formal object—the song itself—is a precise demonstration of the subject turning in fully conscious knowledge of her own resources toward her object. In this instance of being-for-self, it does not matter that the vocalist is 'entertaining' under American skies because the woman, in her particular and vivid thereness, is an unalterable and discrete moment of self-knowledge.[5]

Based on the experiences of the musicians interviewed, I believe Spiller's intriguing notion works in considering the power of the electric guitar when in the hands of black women, displaying black female technological proficiency in their performance. The electric guitar is a tool through which black women can self validate and self define themselves by engaging a "dramatic confrontation between ego and world." Here a:

> Dance of motives, in which the motor behavior, the changes of countenance, the [electric guitar] dynamics, the calibration of gesture and nuance in relationships to a formal object—the [electric guitar] itself—is a precise demonstration of the subject turning in fully conscious knowledge of her own resources toward her object [the electric guitar]. In this instance of being-for-self, it does not matter that the musician is 'entertaining' under American skies because the woman, in her particular and vivid thereness, is an unalterable and discrete moment of self-knowledge."

In this manner, I suggest that the electric guitar enables them to experience a (re) enchantment with their very own black female body as intact and with integrity.[6]

This is a measure of inhabiting their bodies from a position of relative bodily autonomy. Their musicianship on the instrument can also emerge from a place beyond just responding to stereotypes. Instead, it can emerge from their own musical bodily desires, whether preplanned or spontaneous as when moved by the spirit or the universe in performances with the electric guitar as a tool of self actualization. For black women electric guitarists, the electric guitar can function as a tool through which they can move

within their bodies, feel alive, be creative, speak, fall in love with their bodies, stretch the instrument's capacity, stretch their own capabilities, feel the weight of it pressed against them, feel their fingers producing sound on the strings—essentially, the culmination of the integrative action of their mind and their bodies syncing up with the electric guitar.

They "re-present the black female body" [7] with the electric guitar and widen its "representational potential."[8] As such, the electric guitar can also be understood as functioning as a tool of what feminist science historian Evelyn Hammonds (1997) calls a "politics of articulation."[9] Black women's musicianship on the electric guitar, contributes to that which "would build on the interrogation of what makes it possible for Black women to speak and act;"[10] and, feel. This is critical to considerations of how black female interiority is identified and expressed. It is also important because whether they seek it out or not, and many do, these musicians serve as role models for other women of color, especially young girls.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited in design to a small interview sample of musicians who specifically played the electric guitar in a handful of musical genres because of time and financial restrictions. Future research should look at black women who play acoustic guitar who span different decades and have gained significant mainstream recognition like Odetta (1960's), Tracy Chapman (1980s), Alana Davis (1990s), India Arie and Ruthie Foster (early 2000s); and, most recently, Valerie June whose music is being sold in Starbucks. Some young black women have gained a measure of visibility playing the guitar in Christian music.

Telling a more comprehensive and in-depth narrative about black women electric guitarists and their efforts and experiences participating in American popular music remains of immediate research interest. The next phase of research will involve Bibi McGill, the most visible black woman electric guitarist in popular music as Beyoncé's musical director and lead guitarist for her all-female touring band, The Suga Mamas. In addition, Brittany Howard who performed on *Saturday Night Live* with her predominately white male band, The Alabama Shakes. Since 1993, singer-songwriter, funk and rock musician Felicia Collins has played electric guitar in the CBS orchestra, as a member of David Letterman's house band. Musician Kat Dyson played guitar as a member of Prince's New Power Generation in the 1990s and has maintained a career working in the studio and performing in television house bands, and on stage with musicians from multiple genres. In 1978, Hazel Payne regally posed with her electric guitar on the cover of her band's self-titled debut album, *A Taste of Honey*, alongside band member Janice-Marie Johnson, who posed with her bass guitar. She reportedly still plays the electric guitar. Other musicians to document include: Deborah Coleman, Danielia Cotton Roberts, Venessia Young, Barbara Lynn, Deborah "Portia" Neeley-Rolle, Shelley Doty, Samantha "Ghettosongbird" Johnson, and Malina Moye.

I interviewed Tamar-kali, Denise Reese, Diamond Rowe, and Monnette Sudler for later publication. Tamara "Tamar-kali" Brown is a New York City-based blues and soul-inflected independent rock and hardcore punk artist. Denise Reese is a New York-based guitarist who experienced early success in a family band that headlined local music festivals and opened for John Legend. Diamond Rowe is lead guitarist in a heavy metal

band called Tetrarch that proudly aims for mainstream popular success. Monnette Sudler is a recorded jazz guitarist, composer, and educator from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In the course of my research, it became apparent that black women on bass guitar have a long history of participation on the instrument and continue to experience critical success playing it. Some include: Meshell Ndegeocello; Gail Muldrow, who played with Sly Stone and The Family; Janice-Marie Johnson of A Taste of Honey; Felice Rosser (who was poised to break out in her black rock band Faith in the 1980s); Joyce "Fenderella" Irby of Klymaxx; Starr Cullars, the first woman instrumentalist to play with renowned funk band Parliament-Funkadelic; Leslie Langston of the alternative rock band Throwing Muses; Debra Killings, who worked as a session musician for LaFace Records in the 1990s; and Kamara Thomas of Earl Greyhound.

Just as they have been critical to the early development of male musicians, bands have been critical for women musicians as well, according to Sherrie Tucker and D. Antoinette Handy. Learning how contemporary black women experience band membership as instrumentalists would deepen our understanding of women's unique contributions to culture. It also would help us to recognize that phenomenon once considered exclusively male never were confined to one gender.

Some of the women I interviewed have had experiences with major labels, which held the promise of national or commercial success. These particular stories must be told especially those about striving to build a career in rock and heavy metal, instead of genres such as R&B and jazz where black women are typically expected to be positioned and marketed. This greatly relates to black women's participation in different music genres especially rock, how they negotiate rock as a white cultural act, reclaim black

participation in rock, and promote their ongoing engagement with rock as a black woman's cultural act.

In order to overcome historic gender and racial discrimination. black women electric guitarists have used the Internet to increase their visibility, networking and merchandising. This use of new social media bears study as younger audiences are deeply involved in social media use. For example, one website called *Guitar Goddess* states that it is dedicated to connecting women guitarists and developing a database of musicians, while offering guitar reviews and technique instruction.[11] Do black women guitarists benefit from social media? What characterizes their experiences on-line? Do such websites help break down barriers and inspire other black women to enter the field?

In addition, over the last ten to fifteen years, many musicians have chosen the independent route, bypassing or rejecting mainstream music labels in favor of smaller labels or handling their own merchandising, booking and promoting through websites they control. How has the Internet improved their access and opportunities to develop and cultivate visibility, name and talent recognition? Has the Internet been effective for networking and building communities of electric guitarists both male and female, and of different races? It would be important to develop an inventory of the various ways black women instrumentalists use the Internet for finances, music education, and as a clearinghouse. Is this different from the on-line objectives of males and musicians of other races?

Literal and symbolic geographies of black female cultural identity and expression are another potentially rich research endeavor. Like Memphis Minnie whose life alternated between the South and the North, some of the musicians in my cohort had

experiences of migration. Their attitudes reflect similar shifting investments in activating and (re) activating elements of past local, national, and "transnational structures of circulation and intercultural exchange established long ago."[12] This is particularly so for those who have a critical consciousness about African American histories and musics related to the southern and African diasporas, even among those who have never been to the South, out of the South, or to Africa. In addition, it is also important to learn about women's ongoing experiences with travel through different spaces and places around the world with mobility within different kinds of circuits. In that regard, it is essential that similar biographies be recorded of black South African women who have similar experiences to African American women of intense annihilation of self and body and limitations of social, cultural and economic development.

While I have demonstrated their awareness of how they negotiate normative gender and race constraints by playing the electric guitar, sexuality was not broached at all and still more must be done about issues of femininity. Both issues revealed themselves during the course of my interviews with musicians, specifically their interest in conveying femininity on stage while performing with the electric guitar and negotiating assumptions about their sexuality because they are black women who play the electric guitar.

Finally, it is important to analyze the visual components of women's cultural expressions and self representations using feminist visual culture analysis. This includes "visual images and cultural artifacts"[13] like publicity photos, liner notes, "album" covers, promo materials, memorabilia, recorded video and digital performances, and magazine covers. For example, what did it mean that Diana Ross posed with manicured nails poised

on the strings of an acoustic Gibson guitar on the cover of *Jet* magazine in 1971. Or what message does Barbara Lynn convey posed in a black and white publicity shot in a form-fitting sequined floor-length dress with her electric guitar? Feminist visual cultural analysis focuses on "how issues of gender, sexuality and power are inextricably intertwined in all aspects of our society's visual culture."[14] Black feminist visual cultural analysis focuses on black female visual production and representation, acknowledging the "universe of questions around black self esteem, cultural heritage, and aesthetic preferences"[15] that confront black women.

Future research should broaden to document and apply these questions to women in other music genres and instruments in order to generate new and broader perspectives and histories about women in music. Our understanding of the history of culture and human cultural processes are incomplete with this as it is obvious that women make unique contributions to culture. This manifests in their musicianship, musical development, educational attainment, economic opportunities, cultural influences and achievements, and varied vulnerabilities. This work shows how it is necessary to maintain race and gender as intentional categories of analysis in cultural research.

NOTES

1. Lisa Collins, "Economies of the Flesh: Representing the Black Female Body in Art," in Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture, ed. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 103.

2. Daphne Brooks. *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 7.

3. Ibid., back of the book.

4. Ibid., 162.

5. Hortense Spillers. *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 165.

6. Ibid.

7. Collins, "Economies of the Flesh: Representing the Black Female Body in Art," 122.

8. Ibid.

9. Evelyn Hammonds, "Black W(holes) and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality" in *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture*, ed. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 316.

10. Ibid.

11. "|About," *Guitar Goddess*, accessed August 13, 2013, http://guitargoddess.com/about/. As of August 2013, the web site seems stagnant.

12. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 87.

13. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 3.

14. Claire Pajaczkowska, "Issues in Feminist Visual Culture," in *Feminist Visual Culture*, ed. Fiona Carson and Claire Pajaczkowska (New York: Routledge, 2001), 21.

15. Judith Wilson, "One Way or Another: Black Feminist Visual Theory," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelie Jones, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 21.

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