

Filling In The Gaps In The History Of Vocal Jazz: Connee Boswell and The Boswell Sisters

Jazz historians and scholars have essentially ignored many of women's contributions to jazz. In her book, Stormy Weather ¹, Dahl writes, "outside the black subculture, in the larger society, public opportunities for women to perform music were extremely limited; it was mainly in the home that white women played and sang." ² Among the white early jazz singers who stood apart from the main stream of white female vocalists was **Connee Boswell and The Boswell Sisters**. Although famous in their time, they are virtually unknown to young singers and performers of today.

Few jazz history books mention Connee Boswell and/or The Boswell Sisters, yet The Boswell Sisters, and, Connee as a solo artist helped to bridge the gap between blues and jazz singers. ³ The innovations in vocal style of The Boswell Sisters, and in Connee's solo work, represent a unique culmination of vocal influences that in turn initiated developments in the jazz styles of other vocalists.

The city of New Orleans was one of the centers of American blues and jazz in the 1920's and early 1930's. The musical hub of New Orleans was the Storyville district, which housed many saloons, bars and dance halls--as well as 'houses of ill repute'. Although there were dance halls and theaters throughout New Orleans, Storyville contained a plethora of work for the musicians.

In this strongly blues influenced city, Connee Boswell and her sisters spent their childhood. The Boswell home at 3937 Camp Street in New Orleans was filled with music. Helvetia "Vet" Boswell, the last surviving sister, had said that " . . .we actually just grew up with music. Well, mostly my mother was great on the piano and so was papa. But then, they had guitars and banjos. They had musical instruments around all the time."⁴ Papa Boswell preferred classical repertoire over New Orleans jazz and, as a result, the Boswell girls, Martha, Connee and Helvetia, were classically trained. Martha studied piano, Connee studied cello, and Helvetia (called 'Vet') studied the violin. The young girls performed for local church and school affairs. Vet Boswell also described other instruments the sisters played. "Oh, and I'll never forget when mama bought me this beautiful banjo. Then I started what they call the figure eight . . .Martha played the saxophone and Connee did too. And Martha was piano. Well, Connee and Martha both were piano--they were good pianists!"⁵

Family friend, Myra Menville stated, "the Boswell home was always full of musicians."⁶ Some of the musicians that frequented the Boswell home were trumpeters Leon and Louis Prima. (Louie Prima later became a well known entertainer beginning his early career first as a trumpet player). Cornetist, Emmet Hardy, who performed around the New Orleans area also visited the Boswell home. Max Jones mentions in an article that Emmet Hardy may have tutored and inspired the Boswell Sisters. ⁷

Two years before Vet Boswell died, she remembered Emmet Hardy playing cornet at the Boswell home --"A friend of ours played the cornet and we thought we would try to sound like it"⁸

The musical environment of New Orleans compelled the girls to leave classical music behind and play and sing in a blues/ jazz style. Below are excerpts from an April 1987

interview in which 76 year old Vet Boswell further explains the girls musical background.

Writer: "How old do you think (you were)-fifteenth or sixteen, when you started singing jazz?"

Vet: "No, I was about eleven or twelve when I started singing."

Writer: "Started singing?"

Vet: ". . .I mean jazz music. Otherwise we were classical."

Writer: ". . .you had (black) servants in you home. Did they influence your singing, you think?"

Vet: "They were around all the time. And they put us to bed at night.

They always sang us to bed at night even though mama was there . They liked that." 9

When asked about how the Boswell Sisters acquired their style of singing, Vet Boswell replied, "we got it from the 'colored 'people'. Actually we used to go down to the , I'd say, the French market . . .we'd go down and we'd used to listen to the 'colored' people sing." Referring to the black singers, Vet Boswell said, ". . .they could really tear your heart out." 10

Writer: "Did you ever got to the black churches and hear them sing?"

Vet: "Well, we did a couple of times because we wernot to copy, but, in what they were doing. You just feel so--I can't explain it, but you { meaning 'they' } had a feeling from inside." 11

By the time the Boswell Sisters were in their teens, they were interspersing jazz into classical music. (Later during Connee's solo singing career, she recorded swing versions of classics such as "Amapola" and "Martha").

According to Henry Pleasant's *The Great American Popular Singers*, most white singers of the 1920's and early 1930's - -such as Nora Bayes and Vaughn DeLeath--sang in a vocal style influenced by the classical singers of Europe. 12 The repertoire of the early black women blues singers that the young Boswells listened to reflected the economic conditions of the time. The market for the black vocalists--unlike the white singers--was sung in a quasi-blues format for an almost exclusively black audience and recorded on what was called 'race records'. 13 One black singer who became popular and established herself as an interpreter of American popular song was Ethel Waters. By the 1930's singers--white and black--were listening to black singer Ethel Waters. Waters' phrasing of song and clear diction influenced many singers who heard her and her recordings. There is no way of knowing whether or not Connee Boswell and her sisters heard the recordings of Ethel Waters. However, the same style of phrasing and clear diction is evident in Connee Boswell's style of singing.

Specific black singer influenced Connee Boswell and her sisters. Simon's *The Best of the Music Makers* quotes Connee as saying, "And I tried to sing like Mamie Smith. She was a great blues singer, better even, I thought than Bessie Smith. When I was a kid, my mama took me to a theater for blacks--they'd let us whites in only on Friday nights--and there I heard Mamie, and after that I always tried to sing like her."

(Growing up with a classical background also influenced Connee. "I also tried to sing like Caruso--holding on to those notes the way he did.") 14

In the early 1920's, Duke Ellington used black vocalist Adelaide Hall in his band. Ellinton's band and Hall recorded "Creole Love Call" in 1927. 15 This recording exemplified Hall's use of wordless trumpetlike vocals. When black singer Ivie Anderson joined Ellington's

band in 1931, she also was considered a part of the instrumental sound of the ban. However, in the early and mid thirties, this was not the general accepted way of singing. The vocal nuances of rhythmic changes, melodic and dynamic variations suggested by blues singers such as Bessie Smith, Maimie Smith and others, and, by Ethel Waters were not clearly understood by most white vocalists. **The Boswell Sisters were one of the few white singing groups who utilized their own wordless vocals--of which Vet Boswell called 'gibberish'.**¹⁶ Examples of this vocal improvisation can be heard on their recording of "Everybody Loves My Baby" , "I Thank You Mr. Moon", as well as on other various Boswell recordings. ¹⁷ (As mentioned earlier, the Boswell Sisters grew up listening to horn players, the singing of black servants in the Boswell home and blacks who congregated and sang at the French Market).

Early jazz musician Garvin Bushell¹⁸ has said that the black slave and black musicians turned to music to express their feelings of pain and enslavement, Connee Boswell may have particularly identified with music as a means to compensate for her own handicapp (Connee contracted polio at the age of four and as a result lost the use of her legs. According to Vet, there was no wheelchair in the early days of their career , so the other two sisters would lock arms and carry Connee themselves everywhere they went). ¹⁹

Although all three sisters enjoyed music and were trained in classical music, it was Connee who instigated much of the vocal arrangements and encouraged the group's energy. When Connee's two sisters, Martha and Vet retired from singing because of marriage (this was the accepted practice during this time period in America)-Connee who also married, continued her singing career.

The Boswell Sisters

Connee and her sisters first recorded in 1925 on a Victor mobile unit.²⁰ When they left home to perform on the road, it was 1928--the Boswell girls were in their early teens. Their first stop was Chicago to audition for several vaudeville agents. The Boswells were supposed to play a classical set on violin, cello, and piano; a jazz set on banjo, piano and sax; Vet would dance; and then, group singing by The Boswells. However, the girls became so nervous, that they were unable to play their instruments and instead resorted to singing-in harmony- just as they had always done at home. From then on the Boswells were asked to sing. Soon after they embarked on a rigorous Vaudeville tour from the Midwest to the West Coast.

Though not the first unique singing group to incorporate jazz phrasing and improvisation in song, Connee Boswell and The Boswell Sisters were pioneers who influenced many vocal groups after them. Their sense of phrasing and timing was unique; their harmonies, use of cross-voicings, their change of musical 'feel'²¹ and change in tempos and keys within one song were unusual and creative. One of the most notable women's trios influenced by the Boswells was the Andrews Sisters. "One night" , Vet Boswell said, "I was at dinner and a woman came up to me and said, 'If it wasn't for the Boswells there would'nt have been any Andrews'. It was Maxene (Andrews)." ²² In a recent interview, Maxene Andrews, refers to The Boswell Sisters, " They were the all influence. There wasn't another group around that could hold a candle to them" (The Boswell Sisters). "When the Andrews Sisters started to copy the Boswell Sisters--we copied the southern accent-the whole bit. We went all the way! . . .We did'nt say "Bei Mir Bist Du Schon"-it was 'Ba Meer Biss Dew Schane '(pronounced with a southern New Orleans accent)." ²³ Although the song material of the Andrews Sisters was performed and arranged often in a more commercial style to suit the times, the Boswell influence can be heard most clearly on the Andrews Sisters's

1940's recordings of "Don't Sit Under The Apple Tree" and "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy". One can compare these songs recorded by the Andrews Sisters to the Boswell recordings "42nd Street", "Top Hat" and others. Maxene has also spoke of the Andrews Sisters early days of performing--the songs they chose to sing were songs recorded by the Boswell Sisters. "We had three songs that we could singthree songs of The Boswell Sisters."²⁴ However, in the Andrews Sisters recordings there is little if any improvisation--unlike The Boswell Sisters. One may also speculate as to how the arrangement of the Andrews Sisters hit "Rum and Coka-Cola" evolved. Years before (1934) the Boswells recorded " Don't Let Your Love Go Wrong" with the same rhythmic change in feel --The Boswells harmonized this song to a rumba beat.

Women singing groups, particularly sister acts, have been popular throughout America's popular music history. Through the Andrews Sisters, the Boswell Sisters' unique harmonies and style influenced many singing groups. Some of these other singing groups include : Three Peters Sisters, Dinning Sisters, The Clark Sisters, The King Sisters, McGuire Sisters and, the Lennon Sisters. Britians' response to the Boswell Sisters unique singing style was the Beverly Sisters, and the Kaye Sisters. Some singers like Rosemary Clooney started out in a 'sister act' before working as a soloist. Singer Judy Garland also started singing with her sisters-The Gumm Sisters. In Christopher Finch's book, he quotes Judy Garland's sister Virginia "We were the first children's trio ever. There were the grown-up trios, the Brox sisters and the Boswell Sisters.The Boswell Sisters were the ones that we liked."²⁵ In the 1960's the musical style of the day was quite different than the 1930's. Such groups as the Ronettes, Shirelles, Chordettes, Chiffons, Crystals, Supremes, and the Vandellas were popular. Yet none of these singing groups have quite reached the inventive styling, blend, and intuitive musicality that the Boswell Sisters achieved. Below is an excerpt from the 1932 song "Crazy People". Here is an example of the sisters' special way of combining vocal harmony and imitating a horn section. This can be clearly heard when listening to the actual Boswell recording of "Crazy People." ²⁶ A portion of the original sheet music "Crazy People" is also included. The horn like interlude sung by the Boswells written below was not written by the composer nor does it appear in the original sheet music edition.

Crazy People" as recorded byThe Boswell Sisters

[cupped hands]

The musical score consists of three staves. The first two staves are vocal parts with lyrics: "Bah", "Bah dah Bah dah Bah dah Bah dah Bah dah Bah dah Bah dah Bah dah BahdahBah dah Bahdah". The third staff is a horn-like interlude with lyrics: "Bah", "Oh", "Bah dah Bah dah Bah dah Bah dah", "(Oh)", "Cra-zy peo - ple like peo-ple like you.", "Cra-zy peo - ple like peo-ple like you.", "Cra-zy peo - ple like peo-ple like you.".

Below are excerpts from The Boswell's recording of "Crazy People".
 Exhibit A displays the groups 'horn-like' introduction to the piece. In
 Exhibit B, the first 8 bars of "Crazy People" are shown as sung by The
 Boswell Sisters. (Exhibit E is a portion of the original sheet music edition).
Exhibit A: Vocal Introduction as recorded by The Boswell Sisters

[Horn-like]

Voice 1
Ba Ba Ba Ba

Voice 2
Ba Ba Ba Ba

Voice 3
Ba Ba Ba Ba

Piano
G-7 C7

Exhibit B: 'Crazy People' as recorded by The Boswell Sisters

Cra - zy peo - ple Cra - zy peo - ple Cra - zy peo - ple Cra - zy peo - ple Cra - zy peo - ple

peo - ple like me go Cra - zy o - ver peo - ple like you peo - ple like me go Cra - zy o - ver peo - ple like you peo - ple like me go

- 1 1 0 - ver peo - ple like you

That the rea-son, may-be, That I call you ba-by,
Love be-comes my rack-et, There is no straight jack-et,

I guess we're each oth-ers coun-ter-part.
That cap hold me in a ves-ti-bule.

CHORUS
C - R - A - ZY Peo-ple! C - R - A - ZY Peo-ple! Cra-zy

peo-ple like me Go cra-zy o-ver peo-ple like you.

F - F - Y Peo-ple! G - O - O - F - F - Y Peo-ple! Diz-zy peo-ple like me go

nut-ty over things that you do. When we are under each the moon
Don't mind me if I rave a bit.
If you want walking in the rain
You no-lice when we're in the park

The moon a-bove, You have me act-ing like a fool. It must be
Sweet an-gel child, It's just a hab-it that I've got. You drive me
Or in the snow, I'd go get wa-ter on the brain. And freeze me
Down by the Zoo. I want to kiss you in the dark. I go cack

love, sweet love, wild, Im wild C - R - A - ZY Peo-ple! C - R - A - ZY Peo-ple! Cra-zy
too. Oh, oh do do

peo-ple like me go cra-zy o-ver peo-ple like you.

cra-zy o-ver peo-ple like you.

Exhibit C illustrates the phrasing of Connee Boswell.

Exhibit C: Connee Boswell's solo excerpt

When we are un - der - neath the moon the moon a - bove

You've got me act - ing just like a loo -

— ny, it must be — love swe - et love

Trans. by S. Sifter

In Exhibit D—this Boswell arrangement is sung with a change in feel. There is a change to half time, to double time, four bars of scat by Connee into a cadenza ending in a minor key; the cadenza includes a 'call and response' section at the beginning, ending with a vocal emulation of horns. Below is an excerpt of the cadenza—from double time to out of tempo. Notice the 'horn-like' inflections and vocal sounds emulating horns. When listening to all of The Boswell Sisters recordings, one can more clearly hear their unique inventiveness and style.

Exhibit D: Connee Boswell's scat solo

part

part Ba da wuh da ah wah la - da - Ba Ba - da de - di - le do - uhh —

part

Trans. by S. Sifter

Exhibit E: Excerpt of The Boswell sisters ending

People like me go cra-zy o-ver peo-ple like you wa oo

People like me go cra-zy o-ver peo-ple like you wa oo

People like me go cra-zy o-ver peo-ple like you wa oo

[Horn-like]

Trans. by S. Sifter
 Edit. by J. Shapiro

Exhibit F: Boswell sisters ending

No Tempo [sung Horn-like]

(*a capella*)

Mm-wa wu wa wa m - wa wa wa

Mm-wa wu wa wa m - wa wa wa

Mm-wa wu wa wa m - wa wa wa

Trans. by S. Sifter

Connee Boswell

As early as 1944, jazz critic and writer John Lucas acknowledged the impact of Connee Boswell on other singers. He wrote, "Few singers have influenced the development of America's everyday songs more than Connee Boswell."²⁷

One of the most acclaimed singers who emulated Connee Boswell is Ella Fitzgerald. Ella has often cited Connee as her primary vocal influence. In a 1977 interview with Cadence writer, Tom Everett, Ella says that when she first was asked to sing, "I tried to sing like Miss Connee Boswell."²⁸ Garvin Bushell, member of the Chick Webb band during 1938 and 1939, recalls he and his colleagues remarking to Ella, "You're sounding more like Connee Boswell everyday, Sis". Bushell followed by saying "Oh, And she liked that."²⁹ The influence of Boswell upon Fitzgerald is particularly noticable on Ella's early recordings--the rhythmic phrasing and sliding into pitches are very similar to Boswell's. At times even the pronunciation of particular words are similar. (Boswell was from New Orleans, Fitzgerald from Yonkers, New York. An example of a direct emulation by Ella can be heard in the 1935 recording "Love and Kisses". Below demonstrates a measure in which Ella approaches the melody by first singing a grace note a step above the melody and then slides downward into the note. Boswell does this frequently in her recordings as soloist in The Boswell Sisters vocal arrangements.

Ella Fitzgerald's "Love and Kisses"

The image shows two staves of musical notation in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The first staff contains the lyrics "Fu - ture di - vine Love and kiss - es". The second staff contains the lyrics "Ne - ver miss - - - make - ing a hea - ven for two". The notation illustrates a specific melodic technique: a grace note (a quarter note) is placed above the main melody line, starting on a pitch one step above the main melody and then sliding down to join the main melody. This occurs in the first measure of the first staff and the first measure of the second staff.

Trans. by J. Shapiro

The vocal approach to particular words such as landing on the vowel of a word and singing it in full voice or in a fuller tone towards the end of the word is typical Connee Boswell--and influenced Ella Fitzgerald to do the same . When Ella sang "Rhythm and Romance" (1935),³⁰ she borrowed the vocal sound and rhythmic phrasing of Connee by incorporating "whoa-o" within the song in the exact same way that Boswell would vocalize. Connee Boswell used similar horn like additions to her songs often. But this particular horn like syllable, "whoa-o" is used in Boswell's 1934 and 1935 recordings of "The Object Of My Affection."³¹ Other recordings that demonstrate the close association between Boswell and Fitzgerald's style include Ella's recordings of "Organ Grinder's Swing", and "Just A Simple Melody."³² One only need to listen to Connee and her sisters recordings 1931-36 to hear such a remarkable similarity.

The most obvious corrolation between Boswell and Fitzgerald can be heard on The Boswell' recordings, "I Thank You, Mr. Moon (1931), "Down on The Delta" (1932), "Charlie 2 Step" (1932), " and "Darktown Strutter's Ball"(1934), "The Object O My Affection" (1934 & 35), "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself A Letter" (1936), "Let Yourself Go" (1936), "Music Goes Round and Round" (1936).³³ The Boswell influence can also be heard when comparing Connee Boswell's solo recordings "Me Minus You "(1932) , "The River's Takin Care Of Me" (1933), and others.³⁴ One must also keep in mind that there were other songs the Boswells sang on live radio broadcasts not recorded on phonographs.

Let us compare early recordings from both singers. Look first to the sheet music edition of "I Thank You Mr. Moon" (Exhibit A) written in 1931,

CHORUS

Must ev'ry night you shine so bright, You know that lov-ers need your light, I thank you, — Mis-ter Moon.

You take two hearts and tie them tight, — If love goes wrong you make it right, I thank you, — Mis-ter

Moon. — You're the one that keeps the world ca-ress-ing, Ev'-ry beam is

like the Heav-en's bless-ing — To-night is the night, — my one big chance, Please help me out, and

in ad-vance. I thank you, — Mis-ter Moon. — Most Moon.

The musical score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of six systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. Chord diagrams are provided above the vocal lines. The lyrics are: "Must ev'ry night you shine so bright, You know that lov-ers need your light, I thank you, — Mis-ter Moon. You take two hearts and tie them tight, — If love goes wrong you make it right, I thank you, — Mis-ter Moon. — You're the one that keeps the world ca-ress-ing, Ev'-ry beam is like the Heav-en's bless-ing — To-night is the night, — my one big chance, Please help me out, and in ad-vance. I thank you, — Mis-ter Moon. — Most Moon." The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line and a more active treble line with various textures.

Exhibit C demonstrates the original sheet music edition of the song "Undecided" written in 1937. Exhibit D is a transcription of Ella Fitzgerald's recorded version of 1937. Ella's sung version is unlike the sheet music edition. If we compare Connee's solo work of Exhibit B and Ella's performance of "Undecided"-Exhibit D, we can see some similarities in phrasing. What cannot be seen but heard by listening to these specific recordings are similarities in diction, articulation, and vocal embellishments.

Undecided

Lyrics by SID ROBIN
Music by CHARLES SHAVERS

Moderato

Cmaj7 C6 Cmaj7 C6 F9

First you say you do and then you don't... and then you say you will and

F9 D7 Dm7 Ab7 G7 C

then you won't... You're un-de-cid-ed now, so what are you gon-na do?_

Ab9 G9 Cmaj7 C6

Now you want to play, and

"Undecided" as recorded by Ella Fitzgerald

Exhibit D



First you say you do and then you don't And then you say you will and



then you won't you're un-de-ci-ded now ,So what are you gon - na do

Trans. by J.Shapiro

Another example of Boswell's effect on Ella is depicted below. Compare the sheet music edition of "A Tisket A Tasket" to Fitzgerald's recording in 1937. In this particular transcription Ella changes the lyrics and phrasing of her own composition reminiscent of Boswell's solo work on the recording "Hand Me down My Walking Cane"--where Connee and her sisters insert their own lyrics into the song. Although more obvious when listening to the actual recordings, Connee's solo recordings of "Me Minus You" and "The River's Takin Care of Me" represent much of Boswell's special vocal approach. Below are excerpts from these two recordings.

A-Tisket, A-Tasket

Words and Music by ELLA FITZGERALD
and VAN ALEXANDER

Moderately

Bb7+ Eb Ab Eb Bb7 Eb Ab Eb Edim

A - tis - ket a - tas - ket, A green and yel - low bas - ket, I

Fm7 Bb7 Fm7 Bb7 Fm7 Bb7 Eb Edim Bb7 Bb7+

bought a bas - ket for my mom - mie. On the way I dropped. It, I

Eb Ab Eb Bb7 Eb Ab Eb Edim

dropped it, I dropped it, Yes on the way I dropped it, A

Ella Fitzgerald's 1938 recording of
"A Tisket A Tasket"

A tis - ket a tas - ket I lost my yel - low bas - ket and
if that girl - ie don't return it, don't know what I'll do - Oh dear, I've won - dered where my

ans. by J. Shapiro

"Hand Me Down My Walkin Cave" (1932)
rec. by Connee Boswell and The Boswell Sisters

(1/2 Time) E [Trio]

mm - My aunt Mat - tie she told me not - to go, Aunt Mat - tie told me
not to go My Aunt Mat - tie she told me not to go
go, Aunt Mat - tie told me not to go wa wa wa wa - ah

ans by S. Sifter and edit. by J. Shapiro

**"The River's Takin Care of Me" (1933)
as sung by Connee Boswell**

Note: these b's are really sharp Bb's (in between pitch)

I get that ri-ver that frien - dly ri-ver he gives me ev-ery thing free

Oh I love that ri-ver The ri-ver's ta-kin ca-re of me

Trans by S. Sifter

**"Me Minus You" (1932)
as sung by Connee Boswell**

(3rd chorus)

Me mi - nus you means just no-thin at all but

me plus you e-quals love no thin but love

Trans. by S. Sifter

It is evident the early recordings of Ella Fitzgerald clearly emulate Connee Boswell's vocal style. However, Ella achieved her own vocal style, beginning with the Boswell sound, including the singing of horn like riffs or 'scat' syllables,-- and took jazz singing another step further. Had it not been for Connee Boswell and The Boswell Sisters, perhaps Ella Fitzgerald would not have had the impact as she did on vocal jazz and other singers. Perhaps vocal jazz as we know it a present may not have evolved in the same way.

Connee Boswell's close friend of over twenty years, Marge Ryter, recalls how Connee spoke of other vocalists who borrowed her unique style of singing--to the extent of imitating Boswell's pronunciation. Even though Connee's solo career was waning for personal as well as management reasons in the early 1950's, she had already made her mark on jazz and pop vocalists. Marge Ryter says "Keely Smith came to Connee and said 'I'm going to use your "I" {pronounced like 'ah'}.³⁵ Ryter also relayed Connee Boswell's telling the story of bandleader Glen Miller using Boswell's musical ideas. As told to Marge Ryter, Miller said to Connee, "I have borrowed a riff of yours--hope you don't mind."³⁶ Ryter claims that Miller's song, "Sold American" came from Connee Boswell.

Connee Boswell as soloist influenced many vocalists, the most notable being Ella Fitzgerald. Directly Connee Boswell influenced singers such as Mildred Bailey, Kay Starr, and others. Connee's sister Vet Boswell said "Bing Crosby always said Connee was the only singer he was influenced by."³⁷ Indirectly thru early Ella Fitzgerald, Boswell's influence became widespread--her musical ideas further developed by Ella and others to make jazz singing what it is today. Connee and her sisters essentially opened the door to vocal style for white and black singers alike--bridging the gap, paving the road to creativity in vocal jazz. The Boswell Sisters, trained musicians, were innovators in vocal jazz history, and pioneers of vocal style which was quite a feat for singers of the 1930's era. As with many pathbreakers and leaders in history, it is only with time and reflection that we fully realize the boldness and major contribution Connee Boswell and The Boswell Sisters gave to vocalists. Perhaps now, fifty years later, we can thank Connee, Martha and Vet Boswell for breaking 'new ground'.

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NOTES

- 1 Linda Dahl, Stormy Weather (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 98.
- 2 Dahl, 1984, p. 7.
- 3 Some well known jazz texts that make no mention of Connee Boswell include :
Whitney Balliet, American Singers (New York: Oxford, 1979);
James L. Collier, The Making of Jazz (New York: Delta, 1978);
Lewis Gillenson, "Women in Jazz" Esquire's World of Jazz (New York: Cromwell, 1975);
Ira Gitler, Swing to Bop (New York: Oxford, 1985);
Leslie Gourse, Louis' Children: American Jazz Singers (New York: Morrow, 1984);
Nat Hentoff, The Jazz Life (New York: Dial, 1961);
Gunther Schuller, Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development (New York: Oxford, 1968);
Robert Reisner, The Jazz Titans (New York: Doubleday, 1960);
Frank Tirro, Jazz: A History (New York: Norton, 1977);
Martin Williams, The Jazz Tradition (New York: Oxford, 1983);
Martin Williams, The Art of Jazz: Essays on the Nature of the Development of Jazz (New York: Oxford, 1959).
- 4 Helvetia (Vet) Boswell, personal interview by Jan Shapiro, April 4, 1987.
- 5 Vet Boswell interview, 1987.
- 6 Myra Menville, " . . . Of Things Past" The Second Line, Winter 1977: 1-17.
- 7 Max Jones, "Connee Boswell: A Great Singer" Melody Maker, 23 Oct. 1976:14+.
- 8 Vet Boswell interview, 1987.
- 9 Vet Boswell interview, 1987.
- 10 Vet Boswell interview.
- 11 Vet Boswell interview.
- 12 Henry Pleasants, The Great American Popular Singers (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974) 15-33.
- 13 'Race' records refer to records issued primarily for the Black audience by record companies. These recordings were not generally heard by the white masses nor were these recordings readily available for purchase.
- 14 Connee Boswell as told to George Simon in his book, The Best of the Music Makers (Garden City, New York: DoubleDay, 1979) 81-82.
- 15 Dahl, p. 125.
- 16 'Gibberish' refers to Vet Boswell's explanation to the Boswell family's special way of communicating by using nonsense syllables and words/and or altering everyday speech. The Boswell Sisters incorporated 'gibberish' in their music as a form of improvisation.
- 17 The Boswell Sisters, "EveryBody Loves My Baby" (Brunswick 6271, Feb. 1932) "I Thank You Mr. Moon" (Brunswick 6231, April 1931) reissued on The Boswell Sisters CBS 1982, P3 16493.
- 18 Garvin Bushell, personal interview by Jan Shapiro, May 21 &24, June 25, 1989.
- 19 Vet Boswell interview, 1987.
- 20 Don Shewey, "Sibling Harmony" The Soho News, June 17, 1981.

- 21 Vet Boswell interview, 1987.
- 22 Maxene Andrews personal interview by Jan Shapiro, June 20, 1989.
- 23 Maxene Andrews, interview, 1989.
- 24 Maxene Andrews interview.
- 25 Christopher Finch, Rainbow-The Stormy Life of Judy Garland (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1975).
- 26 The Boswell Sisters "Crazy People" The Boswell Sisters 1932-1934 Biograph BLP C3.
- 27 John Lucas, "Cats Heppend By Connee's Chirping" Downbeat 15 Oct. 1944: 3-4.
- 28 Tom Everett, "Ella Fitzgerald Interview" Cadence June 1977:7-8.
- 29 Garvin Bushell, personal interview, 1989.
- 30 Ella Fitzgerald, "Rhythm and Romance" on Ella Fitzgerald: Forever Young-Vol 1 (Decca 1123, 1935) reissued on Contact Records, 1986.
- 31 Connee Boswell and The Boswell Sisters, "The Object of My Affection" The Boswell Sisters: You Oughta Be in Pictures (1934) reissued on Conifer Records, CHD 136, 1986.
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- 34 Connee Boswell, "Me Minus You" "The River's Takin Care of Me" from Connee Boswell: The Early Solos: 1931-35, Spokane Records.
- 35 Marge Ryter, personal interview by Jan Shapiro , June 23 & 24, 1989.
- 36 Marge Ryter interview, 1989.
- 37 Vet Boswell interview, CBC radio, Toronto, Canada, 1982.