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Beyond the Brass Ceiling: Dolly Jones Trumpets Modernity in Oscar Micheaux's *Swing!*

Sherrie Tucker

In the spring of 1938, black filmmaker Oscar Micheaux announced the completion of three new sound films, among them a Great Migration backstage musical romance called *Swing!* (Micheaux Pictures Corporation), in which the protagonists' hopes for improved conditions for urbanizing African Americans are hinged to the attainment of black economic control over black culture.[1] The plot follows several characters—most of them recent Alabama-to-Harlem migrants—as they attempt to launch the first black-owned, black-cast Broadway musical. Struggling for this achievement, the characters in the film participate in what the scholar Houston Baker describes as the Sisyphean quest for black modernity, which he defines not as the rarified activity of a talented few, but as the "achievement of life-enhancing and empowering public sphere mobility and the economic solvency of the black majority."[2] The film's title refers to a valued possession of the lead character, a cook-turned-blues-singer named Mandy, who, at a crucial moment, saves the day (and the black production), because, as her niece puts it, "she's got just what this show needs—Swing!"

But Mandy is not the only character who possesses the ability to "swing" in this low-budget production about black economic and cultural survival in an age of migration and urbanization. Not once, but *twice*, the Chicago-based trumpet player Dolly Jones (credited as Doli Armena) takes "hot" solos that occupy the central focus of the action, holding the gaze of viewers and other characters from beginning to end of her musical numbers. Though she has no lines, and though she appears as but one of many musical cameo performers in the film, Jones's trumpet scenes in *Swing!* may comprise the most effective moments in this film of negotiating what Houston Baker calls "the rhetorical possibilities for crafting a voice out of tight places."[3]

[1] The other two were *God's Stepchildren* and *Birthright* (both Micheaux Pictures Corporation, 1938). According to "Micheaux Films Ready," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 16, 1938, these releases raised Oscar Micheaux's total output to forty films. Until recently, copies of *Swing!* were difficult to locate. It is now commercially available for personal use on DVD in several places, including *Harlem Double Feature: "Moon Over Harlem" (1939) plus "Swing!" (1938)*, Alpha Home Entertainment, 2007. An excellent source for African American films is Phyllis C. Benton, Midnight Ramble Video, http://www.midnightramble.com/.

[2] Houston A. Baker, *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 7–8, 33–34.

[3] Houston A. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 32–33.

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In this essay, I will explore Jones's *Swing!* solos as a part of a search for analytical frameworks that can fruitfully address moments in the interwar years when trumpeting jazzwomen seem to have represented modernity. By incorporating modernity more explicitly into my intersectional analysis of gender, race, and jazz, I hope to consider those moments when women playing instruments and styles associated with men were not only seen as novelties, or as musicians who happened to be women, but as evidence of new generations and new possibilities.[4] I will center on, and circle around, Jones's solos, but my goal is to work toward developing an analytical practice that can accommodate historically specific cultural moments in which jazzwomen trumpeted modernity—in this case, black modernity—in the late 1930s.

In this reading of Jones's solos in *Swing!,* I entertain the notion that a set of cultural trajectories existed in 1938 that made it possible for Micheaux to decide to include a black, trumpet-playing jazzwoman in key spots in his film, and that specific set of circumstances enabled Dolly Jones and her trumpet to represent a hopeful vision of black modernity for black audiences. I argue that Jones's solo scenes are not random cameos, but concentrated vignettes that encapsulate Micheaux's broader signifying practice in *Swing!* But before I can make this case for Dolly Jones's solos in *Swing!,* I need to provide context for two important back-stories: (1) the politics and economics of sound that Micheaux negotiated in his own Sisyphean quest for black modernity; and (2) the discursive patterns of historicizing trumpeting jazz women that continue to make it difficult to see these women as signs of the "new"—except in the perpetual present.

Sound Politics of Black Modernity

The film, *Swing!,* appeared at the height of the "Swing Era" of the late 1930s, a period in which white producers of white bands profited most from the mainstream popularity and "brand-naming" of a form of African American dance music as a sign of white-dominated modern times.[5] As such, "swing" makes for a curious symbol of hope within this film about black economic survival. The framework for this narrative of appropriation is well-rehearsed: Benny Goodman had been crowned by white audiences as the "King of Swing" in 1935, an honor credited in large part by many to Fletcher Henderson—an African American bandleader and arranger whose own orchestra preceded Goodman's in playing the big band dance music style that came to be known as "Swing"—who wrote many of Goodman's charts. Many scholars and writers, including Amiri Baraka, have argued that the Swing Era refers not to a period of musical invention (since black bands had swung for many years)

[4] See, for example, the discussion of non-traditional women as signs of modernity in Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

[5] On the "swing industry" changes that increased the disparity of profits between whites and blacks, see David W. Stowe, *Swing Changes: Big-Band Jazz in New Deal America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 188–22. On the "brand-naming" of swing as marketing modernity, see Kenneth J. Bindas, *Swing, That Modern Sound* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001).

but rather a period of white marketing of white bands playing black music to white audiences.[6]

Yet, while it is true that swing was a shaky symbol for black self-determination in 1938, the black press continued to use the term "swing" positively, and several black films of the 1930s and 1940s hold "swing" out as a sign of hope for a black modernity that benefits black people. It is possible that ownership of "swing" is subtly reclaimed in the title and theme of Micheaux's film. While the film is about a Broadway show—and not the swing industry—to link the word "swing" with black economic solvency creates a powerful subtext that strongly suggests the question: *What if African Americans owned a fair percentage of the capital generated through the successful mass marketing of the Swing Era?*[7]

Micheaux had something in common with black band leaders and arrangers such as Fletcher Henderson. While the sound of "swing" operates as a sign of hope in his film of the same name, the high price of sound film technology had recently cost Micheaux his independence as a filmmaker. In order to continue making black-cast, black-content films for black audiences, Micheaux was forced to enter into what Anna Everett refers to as the "Faustian dimension of his interracial collaboration with Frank Schiffman," a white man who, as manager/co-owner of the Apollo Theater, was already skilled at extracting white profit from black culture.[8] Even as the characters in *Swing!* strive for black cultural autonomy, Micheaux and other black independent silent filmmakers had cast their lot with white financiers, a development that spelled the end of black-controlled, black-cast films.

In addition to pricing Micheaux and other independent black filmmakers out of the market, the new sound film technology of the 1930s exacted other compromises for African Americans involved in the film industry as artists, workers, viewers, and as people living in a culture that eagerly consumed compromised images of them. The advent of talkies spurred an unprecedented demand for black actors in Hollywood, often for "all-talkie," "all-Negro" musicals. Film scholar Alice Maurice explains this phenomenon as Hollywood's answer to industry fears that talking pictures were boring, that audiences would reject the disappointing speaking voices of actors they had once loved, and would fail to sit still for scenes that relied on

[6] Imamu Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1963), 186.

[7] For an analysis of another film in which "swing" is the key to black survival, see Adam Knee, "Class Swings: Music, Race, and Social Mobility in *Broken Strings*," in *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, eds. Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

[8] Anna Everett, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909–1949* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 187–88. For more details on the many ways that sound technology hurt Micheaux, see Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence, *Writing Himself into History: Oscar Micheaux, His Silent Films, and His Audiences* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 211-12. White financiers such as Frank Schiffman and Leo Brescher were not part of, or comparable to, the scale of power and money of the Hollywood Studio system. See Mark Reid, *Black Lenses, Black Voices: African American Film Now, Genre and Beyond* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 8–9.

dialogue. Hollywood saw black actors as entertaining spectacles, able to transcend the limitations of "talkies" by reproducing the sounds and images of beloved stereotypes from minstrelsy so dearly held by white audiences. As black actors began to respond to new incentives to work in Hollywood (such as higher salaries and even some studio contracts), they paid the price by filling the degrading and narrow range of acceptable performance personae. This resulted in a highly compromised repository of mass culture images of black people and culture, a development that brought about a new, very powerful stage in the minstrel continuum.[9] It is an understatement to note that such films as *Hearts of Dixie* (Fox Films, 1929) did not envision modernity as "black economic solvency."

In multiple ways then, *Swing!* (the film) speaks to, and from, the "dangerous crossroads" of the sound politics of black modernity. It represents, signifies on, and is produced from, contexts of struggle for black survival in the urbanizing United States. Such hopes and hardships would be familiar to the film's audiences as well as to its cast, crew, and director.[10] Smack dab in the middle of this cultural-economic-political moment, when white male musicians such as Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and Harry James reigned as the kings of the sights and sounds of swing, Micheaux selected the title and quality of "swing" as a sign of black modern hope, and cast a black woman singer—not an archetypal jazzman with a horn—as its triumphant voice. At key moments, a swinging horn soloist also trumpets black modernity—but in ways that shake up the usual representations of jazz as a modernist discourse.

Beyond the Brass Ceiling

As an historian of women and jazz, my particular entrée to *Swing!* offers a different orientation to the film than that of Micheaux scholars and historians of black cinema, both circles of which have approached this production through the filmmaker's *oeuvre,* working conditions, themes, strategies, and history, primarily as animated by the principle players and plot, and rarely commenting on Jones's trumpet scenes.[11] By contrast, I specifically tracked down a copy of *Swing!* precisely *because* I wanted to see and hear the rare footage of Dolly Jones, one of the many women jazz musicians I had learned about from books by Linda Dahl, D. Antoinette Handy, and Sally

[9] Alice Maurice, "'Cinema at Its Source': Synchronizing Race and Sound in the Early Talkies," *Camera Obscura* 17 (2002): 31–71.

[10] See Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), for an analysis of African American modernity and urban migration as negotiated through movies.

[11] While most Micheaux scholars have been more interested in the filmmaker's silent output, the sound films, including *Swing!*, have acquired an exciting body of scholarship that I greatly enjoyed reading while researching this article. For rich analyses of *Swing!*, see, for example, J. Ronald Green, *Straight Lick: The Cinema of Oscar Micheaux* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), J. Ronald Green, *With a Crooked Stick: The Films of Oscar Micheaux* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), and Arthur Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical: Black Performance and American Musical Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

Placksin.[12] When I first saw the film, I simply rejoiced to see and hear the rare recorded evidence of a woman playing jazz trumpet, and indeed a star in her day, though a musician omitted from the jazz canon. I had, by that time, tracked down references to Jones's musicianship in the black press of the 1930s and 1940s, as well as in numerous oral histories and autobiographies of jazz musicians, both black and white, and had heard one side of her 1926 Okeh recording date with Albert Wynn's Gutbucket Five. Because of this background, I was delighted, but not surprised, by her expertise as captured on film.[13] But what *did* surprise me, was her "place of value" within the cinematic text, which struck me as refreshingly out-of-sync with other representations of jazz trumpet players and women jazz instrumentalists, not only on film, but in jazz history and criticism.

Most writing on jazz trumpet history has excluded female players or treated them as perpetually emergent.[14] Even in times of inclusion, they are presented as novel, courageous, and/or newsworthy—just for being there. As women with horns, they are presented as "Other," the odd sisters to *real* players, who, as men, are (I suppose) simply exercising their natural inclinations to stretch their lips over their teeth and buzz great columns of air through metal tubes. Trumpeting jazzmen included in jazz books do not require biological fanfare to justify or explain their inclusion—the bands they played with, the styles they helped to develop, and the recorded evidence of their artistry is the context for their belonging in books presenting the pantheon of the greats. Women's inclusion—when it happens—is compromised by the available spaces of tokenism that are already built into narratives of greatness in a gendered discourse.

On the other hand, most writing on women trumpet players in women-in-jazz histories (including my own) has focused on the lack of acceptance for female

[12] Linda Dahl, *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen* (reprint New York: Limelight Books, 1989; orig. pub. New York: Pantheon, 1984), 80-81; D. Antoinette Handy, *Black Women in American Bands and Orchestras*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 41, 46, 166; and Sally Placksin, *American Women in Jazz, 1900 to the Present: Their Words, Lives, and Music*, 1st ed. (New York: Seaview Books, 1982), 64–67.

[13] Among these references, see Danny Barker, "Oral History," interviewed by Milt Hinton, 1980, New Orleans, tape 2, transcript, p. 130, Institute of Jazz Studies, Dana Library, Rutgers University at Newark, Newark, NJ; John Chilton, *Roy Eldridge, Little Jazz Giant* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 33; Irene Kitchings remembers Jones in Stanley Dance, *The World of Earl Hines* (New York: Scribner, 1977), 180; Eddie Durham recalls Jones in Douglas Henry Daniels, *One O'Clock Jump: The Unforgettable History of the Oklahoma City Blue Devils* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 196–97; Bud Freeman and Robert Wolf, *Crazeology: The Autobiography of a Chicago Jazzman* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Mezz Mezzrow and Bernard Wolfe, *Really the Blues* (New York: Random House, 1946), 286–87; and Milt Hinton's memories contribute to the findings listed in Theo Zwicky, "Can't We Talk It Over?," *Storyville*, no. 117 (1985), and Theo Zwicky, "Can't We Talk It Over?," *Storyville*, no. 124 (1986). I listened to the recording of "That Creole Band" on *Forty Years of Women in Jazz: A Feminist Retrospective*, Jass CD-9/10, 1989, compact disc. For an excellent brief account of Jones's career, see Howard Rye, "Jones, Dolly," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford Music Online), ed. Laura Macy. Accessed January 1, 2009.

[14] I have previously discussed the "perpetual phenomena phenomenon" of women instrumentalists and "all-girl" bands in Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Bands of the 1940s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 330.

horn players—what we might call the ''Brass Ceiling''—which can be readily seen in the scarcity of recording opportunities for these musicians, the relegation of their work to novelty status, and the disappearance of their careers from historical memory. In our efforts to critique the conditions of their non-acceptance, we focus on the production and persistence of, and resistance to, socially constructed limitations that women brass players navigated and continue to encounter. This has been important work, but I wonder if it has led us to miss other moments when trumpeting jazzwomen may have signified something of cultural importance. The burden of responding to narratives that continue to assume that trumpet ''greatness'' is gender-free and all-male (with the exception of exceptional women) was an important shift from non-critical celebration of women as women, but it has also directed our scholarship toward deconstructing one set of narrative limits, possibly missing concurrent pathways of possibility. Indeed, it is difficult to write otherwise so long as the ''Brass Ceiling'' continues to affect the conditions of the training, opportunities, and acceptance of women players—and it does.[15]

It bears mentioning that even after the publication of women-in-jazz books from the 1980s to the present, along with the welcome inclusions of excellent biographical entries of female players in recent editions of *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, as well as ongoing references to female jazz trumpeters in numerous musician autobiographies and oral histories, subsequent books have continually appeared that disqualify female players from inclusion—even when they are included. For instance, a 1999 book on the jazz trumpet includes this disclaimer: ''A discerning eye will notice the absence of influential women trumpeters in the preceding historical overview. As of this writing, only Ingrid Jensen can be termed truly influential.'' The author then observes the social reasons for women's absence in a sexist society (the Brass Ceiling) and predicts that with ''greater numbers of female instrumentalists emerging each year,'' progress is ''inevitable.''[16] Jensen is a masterful contemporary jazz trumpet player—she should definitely be included. Yet, what about the dozens and dozens of earlier women trumpet players who emerged in earlier decades, many of whom have been cited by other jazz musicians as influential? Such women include Jean Starr, Edna Williams, Jane Sager, Valaida Snow, Billie Rogers, Ann Cooper, Tiny Davis, Clora Bryant, Betty O'Hara, and others. Figured as ''pioneers,'' ''foremothers,'' or as the forgotten figures of less progressive times, pre-Jensen jazzwomen are rendered prehistorical, rather than as part of the same histories as their male counterparts. Indeed, this narrative continues to configure the significance of contemporary women jazz trumpet players as hinging on their ''emergence,'' a formation that relies on the

[15] I am hopeful that Krin Gabbard's cultural history of the trumpet will shake up these patterns! See Krin Gabbard, *Hotter Than That: The Trumpet, Jazz, and American Culture* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2008). See also Ingrid Monson, ''Fitting the Part,'' in *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies*, eds. Nichole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 267–87.

[16] John McNeil, *The Art of Jazz Trumpet*, 2nd ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Gerard and Sarzin, 1999), 26.

insignificance of earlier female players *as musicians*. Yet, the musicians who—over the last eighty-five years—have been hailed as the first or only female trumpeter to *really play* are too numerous to name, as are those who are tired of hearing about the "inevitability" of progress.[17] An encyclopedia of 479 biographical entries on jazz trumpeters published in 2001 includes eight women, a number that seems both refreshingly inclusive in light of most jazz historiography, yet terribly under-representative. Apparently, the number also seemed small to the author who titled his book, *The Trumpet Kings*.[18] A more recent book introduces a plethora of women jazz trumpet players, but in a chapter-of-their-own, entitled, "The Women of Jazz Trumpet: Heroines in a Noble Endeavor." While well-intended, the author's decision to cordon off the female players into a completely different category than those organizing the careers of male counterparts has the unfortunate effect of celebrating them for biological rather than artistic achievement. Instead of placing them in chapters on styles and eras, thus figuring them into the production of the historical modern, female players occupy a strange textual world that freezes their presence as primordial, separate, and precious. The chapter opens by telling us that "women are the givers and primary nurturers of life and that they alone possess the necessary physical, psychological, and physiological qualities for these roles."[19] Valaida Snow, Tiny Davis, and other musicians are highly regarded in this chapter, and an enthusiastic interview with Clora Bryant appears elsewhere in the book, but none of the female players make their way into chapters on jazz trumpet history, styles, or influential musicians.[20] Incidentally, Dolly Jones is not included in any of these recent books on jazz trumpet.[21]

Yet, in 1938, the "dean of black film-making," Oscar Micheaux, cast Dolly Jones as the only featured instrumentalist who takes full-chorus, "hot," on-camera solos in a film called *Swing!*, in which the abilities to "swing" (as a verb) and to control representations of swing (as a noun), and to benefit economically from swing (as a commodity) represent the locus of hope, and a significant context of struggle, for African Americans "crafting a voice" out of the "tight places" of modernity.[22] In a film about South to North migration, in which the life raft is the ability to "swing,"

[17] See, for example, Dahl, *Stormy Weather*; Handy, *Black Women*; Placksin, *American Women in Jazz*; and Mary Lazarus Woodbury, *Women Brass Players in Jazz: 1860 to the Present* (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1995).

[18] Scott Yanow, *The Trumpet Kings: The Players Who Shaped the Sound of Jazz Trumpet* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001).

[19] Scotty Barnhart, *The World of Jazz Trumpet: A Comprehensive History and Practical Philosophy* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2005), 49.

[20] Ibid., 49–55.

[21] Fortunately, we now have extended research available on Valaida Snow. See Mark Miller, *High Hat, Trumpet, and Rhythm: The Life and Music of Valaida Snow* (Toronto: Mercury Press, 2007); and Jayna Brown, "'Dat Var Negressen Walaida Snow'," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 16 (2006): 51–70. Though it is not possible to discern the research from the fiction in Candace Allen, *Valaida, a Novel* (London: Virago, 2004), this book is also useful when read in conjunction with Miller's study.

[22] Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, 32–33; this concept is revisited in Baker, *Turning South Again*, 15.

and where the stakes are presented as improved economic, cultural, and psychological conditions for African Americans, it is Jones who swings in the South, and then reappears in Harlem and swings there, too. In a narrative in which the ability to ''swing'' is equated with the possibility of achieving a viable black modernity in spite of the broken promises of World War I—the lynchings, the growth of the Klan, the race riots, the retractable dome of Jim Crow that continued to legislate unequal citizenship even after African American military service and sacrifice—how do we understand Jones's key placement *as a black woman trumpet player* in this film? Clearly, her featured presence at critical moments does not support notions that women brass players are *always* treated as novelties or biological marvels, or that they are always sexualized, or overlooked. Nor does her physical presentation suggest that she is simply to be read as a jazz musician who happens to be a black woman. Something else is going on; there is some articulation of gender, race, and brass that seems to herald a ''new'' age for Micheaux, his characters, and for the black audiences he hoped to reach. Let us turn now, to Dolly Jones's first solo in Micheaux's *Swing*!

Solo #1

As a Great Migration narrative, *Swing!* begins in the South, then jumps to the North. It has two settings, if not two sets (Micheaux makes do with the same plaid curtains, checked tablecloths, potted plants, and even extras, from scene to scene, film to film).[23] Still, the distinctions between South and North set into play the drama of hope. The South in the opening scenes is not the happy South of black-cast films produced for white audiences in the 1930s, but a troubled starting point that black characters abandon in search of better lives.[24] As with earlier fiction and musical representations, black cinema of the 1930s—even in films that were financed by white producers such as Schiffman—represented the South as far from idyllic, and the urban North, while not an uncomplicated utopia, as a site and sign of hope.[25] Never mind that Harlem was deteriorating as a black urban economic possibility in the 1930s, as film scholar Paula Massood notes, the *idea* of Harlem retained its appeal for black film audiences. In black film, according to Massood, Harlem was symbolically able to ''conjoin the urban with the urbane, often through the use of contemporary fashions (not work clothes), urban slang (not rural dialect), and the performance of contemporary music (not spirituals).''[26]

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[23] In fact, Dolly Jones appears without her trumpet as a social dancing extra in *God's Stepchildren*, wearing the same dress she wears in her first scene in *Swing!*

[24] Paula J. Massood, *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experiences in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 15–16.

[25] For an outstanding analysis of African American migration narrative, see Farah Jasmine Griffin, *''Who Set You Flowin'?'': The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3–12.

[26] Massood, *Black City Cinema*, 60–61.

Micheaux begins his film in Birmingham, Alabama, the urban, but *definitely not idyllic* South, where we meet the lead character, Mandy (played by actress, singer, and seasoned vaudevillian, Cora Green), and her life of unrewarded toil. Between "slaving in the white folks kitchen" and "taking care of" her unemployed, two-timing husband, Mandy's lot is what other hard-working black women in her community agree is "the hardest job in Birmingham." She "work[s] her guts out" for the off-screen white family, then comes home to a husband, who expects her to finance his modern "look," remaking him with fine tailored suits (fashion rather than work clothes), and to supply him with spending money. He tells her he is a business man, but behind her back he spends her hard-earned cash by taking his girlfriend nightclub hopping, driving her around town in a fancy automobile. Mandy's rival supports her lifestyle by exploiting her railroad porter spouse, who, in fact, bought her the car (mobility) that transports the duplicitous and freeloading lovers to their highly compromised modern identities. They carry out their affair among other couples who dance in the Birmingham nightclub that they frequent—we do not know though how these couples acquired their leisure time. But there is another group of black people in the nightclub who appear "modern" while they are nevertheless working. This latter group does not seem to operate in the same exploitative economy that limits black access to leisure, pleasure, and fashion to those who are willing to take advantage of other black people. These are the musicians at the local nightclub. Although they do not have speaking roles, the musicians perform modern identities by playing "swing." In producing contemporary music for black audiences in a black-owned club, they generate profits for the black community (though one could say that *some* of the money that changes hands is the same money extracted from Mandy and the porter by their unfaithful spouses). The only woman—and the only featured soloist—among the cast of musicians is Dolly Jones.[27]

Dolly Jones's first solo takes place in this Birmingham club. Standing quite still in her floor-length, white formal dress, a white flower in her hair, and a white handkerchief decorating her trumpet, her image contrasts with that of other black women-at-work in the Southern scenes and strikes an unusual image of a jazz musician in the history of jazz on film. After walking casually into the frame, she stands in front of the band (all-male, in sharp, fashionable suits) led by Leon "Bossman" Gross, with whom she performs her featured solo. Playing in the full-toned, fast, syncopated style of 1930s trumpet that was called "hot," Jones delivers her rendition of "I May Be Wrong (But I Think You're Wonderful)." (See Figure 1.) Unlike her contemporary, the spectacular Valaida Snow, Jones does not sing or dance, nor does she clown, like trumpet-player/blues-singer Tiny Davis, who had starred in the all-woman Harlem Playgirls in 1934 and 1935, and who

[27] According to the jazz film historian Mark Cantor, the other band members are as follows: trumpets, Bernard Flood and James Dawson; reeds, Stafford "Pazuza" Simon, Gene Johnson, and Leon "Bossman" Gross (leader); piano, Arthur Bowie; bass, Frank "Coco" Darling (also known as German Arago or Araco); and drums, George Foster. Mark Cantor, e-mail message to author, January 24, 2008.

Figure 1 Dolly Jones's first solo, ''I May Be Wrong, But I Think You're Wonderful,'' in the Alabama night club scene of Oscar Micheaux's *Swing!* (Micheaux Pictures Corporation, 1938). Jones gazes skyward as a female customer gazes at her, patting the table to the music. Between and behind them, trumpet player Bernard Flood also keeps an eye on the featured soloist.

soon became a featured soloist in the International Sweethearts of Rhythm (see Figures 2 and 3).[28] Instead, she matches her own equally serious musicianship with a less showy image of an artist whose palette is 100% sound, whose only physical movement is a slight toe-tapping and barely perceptible bobbing to the beat. Viewing this scene, one can understand the admiring statement of Bud Freeman, a white saxophonist of the famed Austin High Gang in Chicago, who added at the end of his comment about Jones's skills as a trumpeter, that she had ''no

[28] Howard Rye, ''Davis, Tiny,'' in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford Music Online), ed. Laura Macy. Accessed May 21, 2008.

Figure 2 Valaida Snow publicity photo, from the author's collection. Unlike Jones, Snow was known for incorporating her outstanding musicianship on the trumpet with visual performance that emphasized showmanship, gender difference and personality.

affectation, no showmanship—which probably was her showmanship.''[29] At moments of emphasis—when she plays higher pitches, and each time she embarks on the bridge—her physical movement includes a subtle lifting of the bell, and, at

[29] Freeman and Wolf, *Crazeology*, 15–16.

Figure 3 Tiny Davis publicity photo, from the author's collection. One of the more serious and glamorous images of this star trumpeter of the Harlem Playgirls (1930s) and International Sweethearts of Rhythm (1940s), who often combined comedy with trumpet virtuosity.

times, a skyward gaze. But even in these more choreographic moments, she certainly does not seem to regard her trumpet as a fashion crime or comedic prop.[30] Her approach to the horn is relaxed; we do not see the exaggerated blowing that we often find in jazz on film, nor the unlikely distance between lips and mouthpieces typical of publicity photos and filmed performances of women brass players.

Of course, one reason we so often see exaggerated or mismatched movement in cinematic representations of musical performance shot during this era is that the sound was typically prerecorded and then visually pantomimed, or "sidelined," later. Musicians could literally stand on their heads and sound the same. When I first viewed this film, I mistakenly presumed that Jones was sidelining, and thought that, like many sidelining performers—especially women—she was smiling more and breathing less than she actually would have while producing the powerful sounds I was hearing. I speculated that she recorded her solo, and then was directed to act out a more "lady-like" embouchure for the purposes of film. But Micheaux did not have the budget to pre-record sound. As with his other sound films, the musical performances that we hear in *Swing!* are filmed and recorded all at once, often in one take, and shot quickly under constraints of the precious little time he could access the Metropolitan Sound Studios at Fort Lee, New Jersey.[31] Jones may have adjusted her embouchure for film, but if so, she did it in such a way that still produced the sounds we hear. Her "lady-like" appearance is part of the isometric tension between puckering and stretching the lips that can look a bit like a smile with many brass players, male and female.[32] Her consciousness of the camera is legible, not in the way she plays *to it*, but in the way she plays *away from it*. Averting her eyes, and adopting a posture more suggestive of introversion than female display, Jones appears intent on tuning out all distractions of audience and camera, to focus entirely on shaping her trumpet solo. She does not play the spectacle, or the oddity, or the newsworthy item; she does not grant the camera special intimacy to her eyes, or to the surface of her body. It is as though she is trying to solve the problem of the gaze by diverting it through the sound of her horn.

[30] See Valaida Snow's short film, "Patience and Fortitude" (RCM Production, Soundies Distributing Corporation of America, 1946), for one example of an acclaimed trumpet player whose performance nonetheless involves choreography designed to justify her existence as a female horn player. She eases her instrument into the act as a prop after establishing her presence through singing, mugging, and moving. Thanks to Mark Cantor for sharing with me his copy of this Soundie.

[31] Many thanks to Phyllis Benton, Mark Cantor, Krin Gabbard, and MsLadySoul. Thanks also to Harold Cromer, telephone interview with the author, June 24, 2008; and Frederick L. Schwartz, e-mail message to author, January 27, 2008. On Fort Lee film history, see Fort Lee Film Commission, *Fort Lee: Birthplace of the Motion Picture Industry*, 1st ed. (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2006), 87; and Richard Koszarski, *Fort Lee: The Film Town* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 327.

[32] The "smile embouchure" was more commonly used in the mid-twentieth century than it is today. Frank Gabriel Campos, *Trumpet Technique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 55–56. I wonder if girls and women have sometimes been socialized more toward the "smiling" pole of the necessary tension, but that is a topic for another day and another researcher.

I am mortified by the many times I have presented this scene as an example of sidelining. But my mistake does direct me to insights about the performance conditions of women who play instruments associated with men. There are commonalities among live and sidelining female players. If the instrument is culturally understood as male, and the player is not, audiences may be conditioned to perceive the juxtaposition of body and sound as "out-of-sync," an effect of what Ingrid Monson calls, not "fitting the part."[33] To be heard, women trumpet players have historically enlisted a variety of visual performance strategies for dealing with this problem of "sync." Jones's performance of gender, race, and brass, though more subtle than that of Valaida Snow, is not without sync. What is it that allows her to "speak" with her trumpet from such treacherous representational quagmires as existed for black women and jazz musicians on film in the 1930s? What are the pathways that facilitate this combination of gender, race, and brass that "syncs" black feminine respectability, agency, and jazz trumpet?

I originally read the white flower behind one ear and handkerchief, which wafts from the body of her trumpet, as finessing an iconic link to the jazz tradition through Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong. But Holiday was not yet associated with white gardenias in 1938, and if the white handkerchief was meant to hail Armstrong, such a reference is sidetracked by the way she uses it—or rather does not use it.[34] It simply dangles from her trumpet in a neat triangle, like a banner or veil. This is not a handkerchief for mopping perspiration. It appears to exist only as an accessory to the long white dress; female vocalists in the film also perform with elegant dresses and matching handkerchiefs. The serious jazz trumpeter is presented both as a skilled soloist of the Armstrong tradition (she was, in fact, admired by Armstrong, Roy Eldridge, and Doc Cheatham), and as the epitome of virginal respectability—a significant choice in the history of representations of African American women, who have historically been denied images that present them as being attractive without also indicating unlimited sexually availability.

If she was not taking a jazz trumpet solo, replete with sonic shading such as shakes and blue notes, she would cast the image of a shy bride—a picture quite outside the narrow range of Hollywood representations of African American women or jazz musicians at the time. She seems to fall outside the three categories that Deborah Willis has argued pervade representations of black women throughout the history of Western art: "the naked black female (alternatively the 'National Geographic' or 'Jezebel' aesthetic); the neutered black female, or 'mammy' aesthetic; and the noble black female, a descendant of the 'noble savage.'"[35] And her performance would most likely strike an equally incomprehensible chord with the dominant history of Hollywood representations of jazz musicians, which has been analyzed by Krin

[33] Monson, "Fitting the Part," 267–287.

[34] Thanks to John Thompson for alerting me to the periodization of Billie Holiday's gardenia.

[35] Writes Willis, "Even imagery that resists these stereotypes alludes to these figures." Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), ix.

Gabbard as a fascination with (and containment of) black men's sexuality through cinematic depictions of African American men with trumpets as either hypersexual or emasculated.[36] In contrast with (or boxed in by) these representational traps, Jones stands in the center of the frame and directs the energies of the scene into sound, not image; she sounds magnificent, while looking like a young, attractive, modest, feminine black woman who has what it takes to seize the modern moment on her own terms. Throughout her solo, the attentive, but nonplused, on-camera southern black public looks on, casually enjoying the music, apparently not at all shocked at the sight of a woman trumpet player, nor baffled by the image of a black jazz musician as respectable, focused, thinking artist. Stationed on the dance floor at some distance from the band that plays behind her, Jones is physically and visually "between" two groups of people: the well-dressed women in the audience and the other musicians (all men). [37] No one appears to appreciate her performance more than first trumpet player Bernard Flood, who plays a supporting role in the background as a member of Leon Gross's orchestra.

Perhaps this performance appealed to Micheaux and his black audiences (the on-camera one that he directs, and the off-camera one that he anticipates) precisely because it is so dramatically "out-of-sync" with degrading representations of black women, black men, jazz musicians, and black sexuality produced for the titillation of white audiences. This image of the respectable black woman as young and attractive—not sexualized or desexualized—and as a skilled producer of a style of music that expresses African American and American modernity, may have configured "out-of-sync" as a good thing—a welcome vision of difference for black audiences, rather than a titillating novelty that confirms or constructs the norm.

In his memoir, trumpet player Roy Eldridge remembered his first encounter with Jones as an experience of surprise, pleasure, and new respect. While passing outside a club, he stopped to listen to a "very good trumpet-player." At intermission, he went inside to see if he could sit in with the band. "Sitting up at the bar was a girl wearing a long gown, holding a trumpet across her lap. I said, 'I guess you're holding that for your boyfriend. When does the band come back?' She gave me a cool look and said, 'I am the trumpet-player,' and she started to blow hell out of the trumpet; then she motioned me to sit in. Her name was Dolly Jones and she really gave me a battle, it went on and on; when we finished we were so excited we fell on one another."[38] Eldridge's story conveys the pleasure of playing with a colleague who is a "very good" trumpet player, yet at the same time an attractive and respectable woman—his story

[36] On representations of Louis Armstrong on film, see Krin Gabbard, *Jammin' at the Margins: Jazz and the American Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 205–38.

[37] Women trumpet players have often been historically featured as "special acts" rather than regular band members when they have played with otherwise all-male bands. This practice was also true of early racial integration in swing bands. Teddy Wilson, for example, was first presented as a "special feature," not a regular member, of Benny Goodman's band in the 1930s.

[38] Chilton, *Roy Eldridge*, 33. Thanks to Krin Gabbard for this example of a black male trumpet player's account in which a female trumpet player is praised for her musical skill and represented as an attractive modern black woman.

concludes with the addendum that because she was married, nothing happened on the romantic level, but that they continued to jam until three a.m.

I have mentioned that at moments of emphasis, such as higher pitches and the bridge, Jones tilts her horn upwards and lifts her eyes to the skies. Krin Gabbard has written of the "obvious phallicism" of jazz trumpet, but for a variety of reasons, a psychoanalytic approach of this sort does not seem a compelling analytic for the representational work of this scene.[39] Gabbard's formulation that "the phallic symbolism of the jazz trumpet has not been lost on Hollywood filmmakers" seems to presume that Hollywood learned its interpretations of jazz trumpet from African American performance culture, rather than orchestrating the jazz trumpet into its own working vocabulary of blackness, which we know were so often so very "out-of-sync" with black audience desires. Are jazz trumpets on film "obviously phallic" or do they become so through Hollywood's heavy-handed use of them as such (as variations on, say, the tilt or droop of the gangster's machine gun, only with the added advantage of suggesting, or even displaying, a black body)? Why should we assume that Hollywood's love affair with thrusting props accurately reflects black performance practice? Might Hollywood have been "out-of-sync" with at least some of the ways that black audiences and musicians and filmmakers understood the jazz trumpet, including full-toned styles, escalations in pitch, and the act of directing the bell upwards? The same year that *Swing!* was released, an article in *The New York Amsterdam News*, a black paper, noted that while black women jazz trumpeters were unusual, some black women "have gone places with that instrument." The article praised a number of black female trumpet stars who had emerged, and the writer suggested alternative ways of understanding their cultural meaning—none of which defined them through "lack." One quote, from Ann Cooper, even offered what seems, from this vantage point, an alternative, even feminist, application of Freudian interpretation. When asked how long she had been playing the trumpet, she replied, "I was weaned on the horn." To suggest that Dolly Jones—the famous trumpet playing daughter of an equally famous trumpet playing mother—seizes her solo as a means to "establish" or even to "signify on" "phallic authority" would seem to foreclose other readings.

I am more persuaded by Eden Kainer's observation that Jones, in her long white gown and bold, swinging trumpet, may evoke the representational space forged by Gabriel, the horn-toting archangel, who, although usually figured as male, accesses a kind of Heavenly sex-gender arrangement that transcends human limits.[40] Armstrong himself often drew on Gabriel's precedence, perhaps as a way to open up the tight spaces to which he was often delegated as a black male jazz musician in a racist society obsessed with viewing black men within an unforgiving binary of hypersexual

[39] Krin Gabbard, "Signifyin(G) the Phallus: *Mo' Better Blues* and Representations of the Jazz Trumpet," in *Representing Jazz*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 114–15.

[40] According to Matthew Kuefler, "angels were supposed to be [seen as] beyond sexual difference" in the third-, fourth-, and fifth-century Roman Empire. For more on angels and gender, see Matthew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 231.

Figure 4 Brass section from the Prairie View Co-Eds, 1943. Courtesy Ernest Mae Crafton Miller. Used by permission.

or asexual black masculinity. Through Gabriel, black women musicians were also able to sound and move beyond restrictive ceilings. Jones's mother, Diyaw Jones (sometimes spelled Dyer), was remembered as standing "in a spotlight, doing a solo on her trumpet, a tiny woman who could blow like the archangel Gabriel."[41] Publicity photos of both white and black women trumpet players often harkened to the iconography of herald angels, with eyes uplifted and gleaming horns directed to the clouds. Brass section photographs of traveling all-women jazz and swing bands sometimes present a visual combination of heavenly brass choir, respectable black womanhood, and angular patterns of gleaming brass modernity.[42] (See Figures 4 and 5.)

[41] Jean-Claude Baker and Chris Chase, *Josephine: The Hungry Heart*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1993), 27.

[42] I thank Eden Kainer for this revelation, which—once I thought about it—reminded me of all the Christmas card depictions of female herald angels I have received from women brass players over the years! Tapping into angel iconography seems to be one route for women to not appear out of place with trumpets. Another iconographic avenue deserving of further investigation is suggested by Eileen Southern's and Josephine Wright's fascinating research on paintings and drawings depicting musical activities of African Americans. They observed a recurring image in the 1890s and early 1900s in which young black girls summoned field workers to their meal breaks by playing animal horns or bugles from kitchen doorways. Eileen Southern and Josephine Wright, *Images: Iconography of Music in African-American Culture, 1770s–1920s* (New York: Garland, 2000).

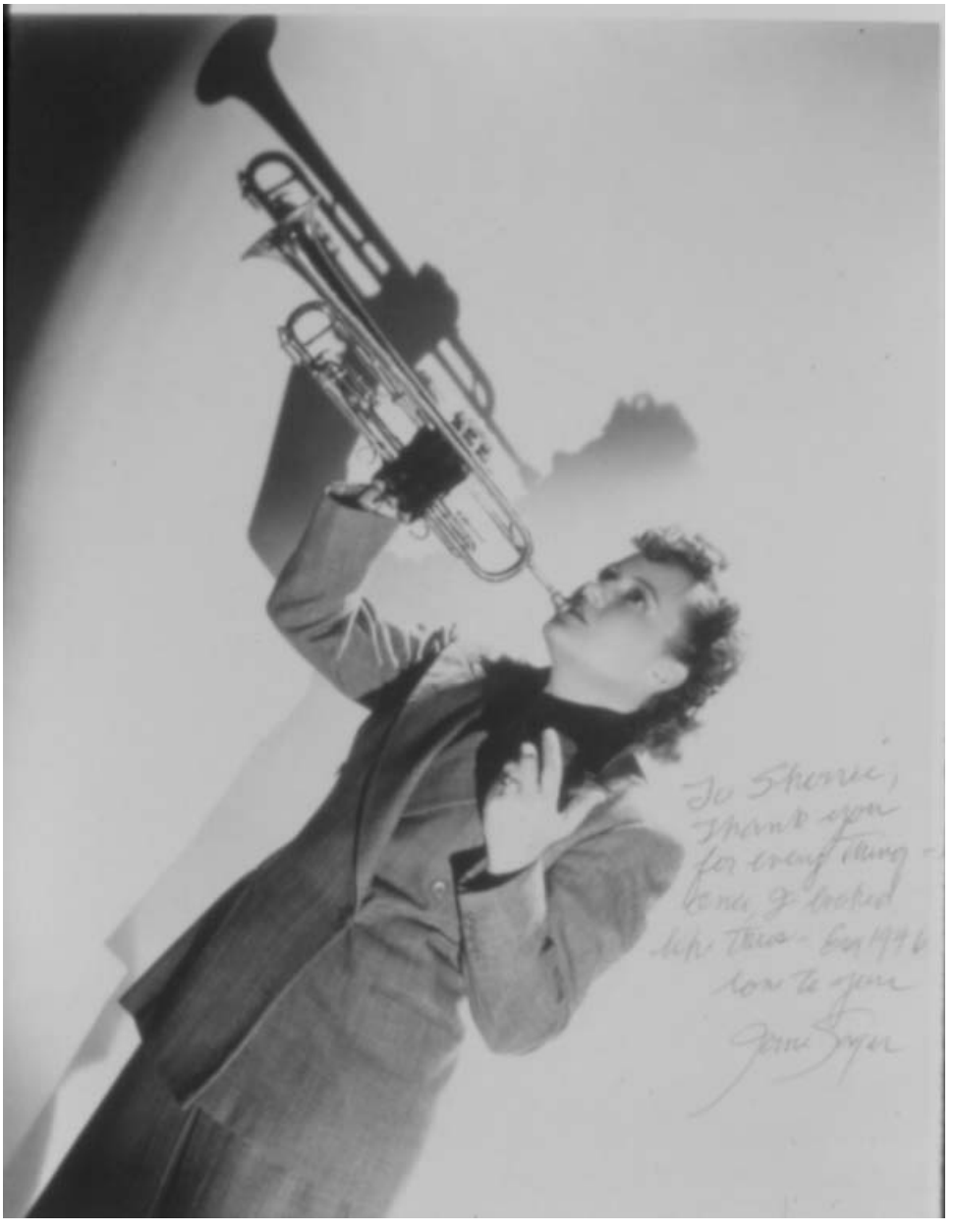

Figure 5 Jane Sager, publicity shot, 1940s. Courtesy Jane Sager. Used by permission. Note the gap between lips and trumpet. Publicity photos painstakingly merged conventions of female glamour with those of professional instrumentalists, often resulting in curious studio compromises. It almost appears as though Sager will rest her mouthpiece on her right check.

Angels provide a representational space where women's voices are brassy and righteous at the same time. For example, in the 1920s, the flamboyant white evangelist, Aimee Semple McPherson, hired a white woman trumpet player named Essie Binkley West, to wear a white robe and play the trumpet and organ as part of her religious spectacles from Angelus Temple in Echo Park.[43] West's photos portray the oddly familiar profile, a figure in a long white gown, raising her horn diagonally upward. As "the Angel of Skid Row," West later played her trumpet in the streets in the 1930s and 1940s, raising donations for her mission for homeless women.

Gabriel is a recurrent figure in African American religiosity, popular culture, and activism, an image able to combine power, volume, admired women, and trumpets. References to Gabriel abound in spirituals and gospel, and this imagery traveled to popular performances, such as Sister Rosetta Tharpe's rendition of "Lonesome Road" ("Look up, look up, and see your maker ... When Gabriel blows his horn," etc.). Mahalia Jackson found Gabriel's trumpet a useful model when she migrated from New Orleans to Chicago, and joined the choir at the Greater Salem Baptist Church. When her voice carried over those of the other members of the fifty-person choir, the choir leader "waved his hand to stop us short." Jackson thought she was about to be sent away, "Right out the door!" Instead, the director asked her to try a solo. Jackson recounts that "I picked out 'Hand Me Down a Silver Trumpet, Gabriel.' I was praying hard I'd just get through it, but everybody liked the way I sang it so much that I was a member of the choir from then on."[44]

In African American culture, religious associations with Gabriel's trumpet are often linked to social and political ones, and there are many examples of secular references to the musical archangel in instances when there is a moral imperative to herald the news, sound a warning, or issue a call to justice. For instance, Dr. Anna Arnold Hedgeman, a civil rights worker in Truman's administration, and the only woman on the Executive Committee of the March on Washington, entitled her memoir, *The Trumpet Sounds: A Memoir of Negro Leadership*, taking the title from a traditional spiritual. For Hedgeman, the trumpet calls for justice to "roll down like rivers." And when she wrote, "The sound of the trumpet grows louder in America," she meant that the imperative for Civil Rights, as trumpeted by protestors of injustice, was at last being heard.[45]

Dolly Jones is definitely heard in her first solo in *Swing!*—the sound of her horn is the centerpiece of the shot and of the nightclub act. Even the dancers stop to listen. While there is nothing in the plot to lead us to believe she is speaking to or channeling God, nor that she is demanding civil rights for her people, one could argue that she inspires respect through a powerful combination of sounds and images. Absent are stereotypes about black womanhood and jazz musicians. Dolly

[43] Cecilia Rasmussen, "Mission Maintains Its Efforts to Educate Women," *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 2003, B4.
[44] Mahalia Jackson and Evan McLeod Wylie, *Movin' On Up*, 1st ed. (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1966), 49–50.
[45] Anna Arnold Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds: A Memoir of Negro Leadership* (New York: Holt, 1964), 202.

Jones and her trumpet (if not the portrayal of Mandy's two-timing, loafer of a husband) supports bell hooks's praise for Micheaux's "screen images that would disrupt and challenge conventional racist representations of blackness."[46]

Although my reading of this scene may seem like a hopelessly contemporary feminist anti-racist jazz fantasy, it *is* important to note that Dolly Jones *was* a well-established professional trumpet player with black audiences at the time of Micheaux's *Swing!* Also known as Dolly Hutchinson, or Doli Armenra (or Armenera or Amenra), Jones was a second-generation jazzwoman, whose mother Diyaw Jones was a pre-Armstrong jazz trumpet player and, according to some sources, a teacher to the internationally famed Valaida Snow.[47] As members of the Jones Family Band, Diyaw and Dolly worked with Josephine Baker, who got her start with this ensemble, first as a trombonist, and then as a singer.[48] Dolly Jones had recorded with trombonist Albert Wynn twelve years prior to the making of *Swing!*, and had since worked with numerous groups in both New York and Chicago, including the jazz chair in the trumpet section of Lil Hardin Armstrong's Harlem Harlicans, an all-woman orchestra that also included Alma Long Scott (pianist Hazel Scott's mother) on reeds, and Leora Mieux Henderson (Fletcher Henderson's wife) on trumpet.[49] In November 1937, Jones appeared in the Harlem Uproar House, which was located, not in Harlem but on 52nd Street, as a member of white clarinetist Mezz Mezzrow's integrated Disciples of Swing. Billed as "seven whites, seven colored, and Dolly," this production played a key role in integrating a nightclub act near the theater district, if not the Great White Way itself. The volatility of this endeavor is evident in the vandalizing of the club (swastikas appeared on the club's promotional poster and dance floor one morning after the group's performance). The integrated show then moved to the Harlem's Savoy Ballroom.[50]

It could easily have been during this period that Micheaux shot *Swing!* It would have had to have been a time when Jones was working in New York, since the economically strapped filmmaker selected the musical acts for his sound films by enlisting currently working artists, right from their gigs, costumes, charts, and all. Dancer Harold Cromer recalls that his own spot in *Swing!* came about when Micheaux caught him backstage at the Apollo Theater. The filmmaker invited Cromer and his piano accompanist to perform same numbers they had done in the show that night on film the next day, and they were told to "take the ferry from 125th

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[46] bell hooks, "Micheaux: Celebrating Blackness," *Black American Literature Forum* 25 (1991): 351.
[47] See "Dolly and Dyer Jones," in Placksin, *American Women in Jazz*, 64–6.
[48] In contrast to the representations of successful, talented, black womanhood that Jones embodies in Micheaux's *Swing!*, biographical and autobiographical materials on Josephine Baker frequently present the Jones Family, and Dolly in particular, as sexually aggressive and freakish. See Josephine Baker and Jo Bouillon, *Josephine*, trans. Mariana Fitzpatrick (New York: Paragon House, 1988), 22; and Ean Wood, *The Josephine Baker Story* (London: Sanctuary Publishing, 2002), 50. Jean-Claude Baker casts a different light on the Jones Family Band, insisting that despite what was said previously, Baker's experience with the Jones family, particularly with Dyer Jones, was positive. Jean-Claude Baker and Chris Chase, *Josephine: The Hungry Heart* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001), 27.
[49] Placksin, *American Women in Jazz*, 61.
[50] Mezzrow and Wolfe, *Really the Blues*, 286–91.

street, it's five cents, a nickel there, and a nickel return."[51] Cromer recalled that Micheaux himself operated the camera that afternoon, and that he recognized other performers from the Apollo, as well as from Harlem's Kit Kat Club. According to Massood, it was the "cultural cache of the Harlem cabaret scene" that made it possible for Micheaux's film musicals to generate hopes for black modernity in the 1930s.[52] As the music historian Guthrie Ramsey points out, although the mid-1930s saw a shift from Harlem as a black urban center of hope, to its decline as part of a larger system of "urban ghettos, ravaged by poverty," the "indisputable successes of black musicians during this period served as a counterweight to this plight."[53] Micheaux's impromptu hiring practices of musical acts may have been necessitated by economic limitations, but the appearance of actual acts plucked from currently operating Harlem clubs added cultural value to the final film products. Dolly Jones may have already represented hopes for black modernity for black audiences familiar with her performances, but for those who did not know her, she still could have hailed the richness and variety of Harlem's musical offerings.[54] We do not know why Micheaux asked her to come to Fort Lee, but we do know that he framed her as a talented black woman trumpet player in the (urban) South who migrates to Harlem where she once again trumpets modernity.

Let us imagine for a moment a vision in which, among the million-and-a-half African American traveling and migrant workers of the interwar years, we can see the movements of brass-playing jazzwomen: Jones grew up on the road, trumpeting with the family band; Valaida Snow traveled in Europe and Asia in the 1920s and 1930s; and Ann Cooper moved from Chicago to New Orleans in the mid-1930s to play trumpet with Joe Robichaux's Rhythm Boys, before moving to New York.[55] These are just three of the black women brass players who were among the musicians who participated both in the accelerated speed of black sound facilitated by new recording technologies, and on the circuits paved by industrialization, urbanization, and migration that connected traveling musicians with mobile and displaced audiences and with one another. Can we imagine the Great Migration as including black women carrying musical instrument cases?

"Where is freedom going on a Jim Crow train?," wrote Langston Hughes in a 1943 essay.[56] Black migrants in the aftermath of World War I through the 1930s must have

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[51] Harold Cromer, telephone interview with the author.

[52] Massood, *Black City Cinema*, 60–61.

[53] Guthrie P. Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 116–17.

[54] Her popularity would continue after *Swing!* In the 1940s, her byline would appear atop occasional columns in *Music Dial*, a magazine run by African American musicians in Harlem. See Doli Armunra, "It Wasn't Told to Me, I Only Heard," *Music Dial*, November 1943, 6.

[55] Despite the name of this popular New Orleans band, it employed, at various times, three women. According to Robichaux, Cooper left after a year when the bandleader moved her out of the regular section and into a feature spot. While Robichaux saw it as a promotion, Cooper felt that she was being cut out of the band. Joe Robichaux, Oral History Digest, March 19, 1959, reel 1, transcript, p. 4, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

[56] Langston Hughes and Christopher C. De Santis, *Langston Hughes and the Chicago Defender: Essays on Race, Politics, and Culture, 1942–62* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 200.

been asking the same question even as they picked up their lives and headed to new destinations. In another essay, Hughes likened Memphis Minnie's electric guitar to "Negro heartbeats mixed with iron and steel."[57] For those hearts to beat hopefully, modernity and its machine age would have to bend—probably not willingly—to benefit African Americans. The struggle to benefit from modern changes is palpable in references to airplanes and automobiles in African American song lyrics, fine arts, newspaper stories, and films of this period. Josephine Baker had a plane and knew how to fly it well before African American pilots were allowed to fly in the U.S. military.[58] Valaida Snow's orchid-colored automobile is lovingly described in accounts of her spectacular presence as a glamorous entertainer and trumpet player.[59] There are additional stories—traveling concurrently with Micheaux's films—through which technology, jazz, migration, and new gender identities functioned as apt symbols for the hopes and dangers of modernity for African Americans.

What was meant by "modernity" certainly varied according to how different groups of people expected rapid changes in technology and urbanization to affect their lives. For members of the dominant culture, the fast pace, powerful machinery, and anonymity of modern city life were signs of progress; this skyscraper world though was also thought to alienate people from "primitive" or "authentic" aspects of their humanity. Thus, the popularity of expressive culture was thought to be "primitive," "authentic," or outside the superficial realm of commercial culture. True to colonial discourse, these qualities were usually associated with non-white people, and often mapped onto the bodies of women of color, and sometimes linked to so-called fallen white women. Musical forms associated with black people were often imbued with these associations by white audiences, who often loved jazz precisely because of the escape it seemed to provide from order, discipline, and sobriety. For African Americans, however, black expressive culture was one of many "survival technologies" (to borrow Joel Dinerstein's critical term) in which "portable" cultural forms were created that were self- and community-sustaining. African American musicians did not produce jazz in order to be "primitive." Culture as "survival technology" was meant to prevent black people from falling, and was a primary vehicle for accessing the world of commerce, rather than escaping it. These are the very same concerns that animate the plot of Micheaux's *Swing!*[60]

White women also trumpeted modernity in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, though their articulations of gender, race, and brass resonated differently. I once visited a

[57] Ibid., 95–96.

[58] Baker received her pilot's license in 1933. Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life: The Icon and the Image* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 68, 307n50.

[59] Langston Hughes featured Snow and her car in his essay on African American automobility, "Bright Chariots" (orig. 1951), in Langston Hughes, Arnold Rampersad, and Dolan Hubbard, *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 323–27. See also Miller, *High Hat*, 61.

[60] Joel Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture between the World Wars* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 18–23; Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 9.

Chicago Historical Society exhibit entitled, ''Fashion, Flappers 'n' All That Jazz.'' The exhibit focused on the changing images of women across the 1920s as heralding a radical shift from tradition—the straight lines, bare limbs, bobbed hair, and beaded glamour of women being modern and symbolizing the modern as well as lasting signs of modernity among images of gangsters, speakeasies, and jazz. Now, when I think of flappers, I think of white women in beaded dresses with bobbed hair, doing the Charleston to music that is, of course, played by men—so imagine my surprise when I turned the corner and saw a wall of photos of flappers playing band instruments. And, lo and behold, they were not Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis. The photos were of the Ingenues, a very famous-at-the-time, Chicago-based, but world-traveling, white ''all-girl'' band led by trumpet player Louise Sorenson. The whole wall was plastered with photos of the Ingenues—with their cigarettes, worldly looks, automobiles, trumpets, saxophones, and trombones. In these images, they represented the epitome of modern women, even if their presence in history has been less remembered than other signs of the Jazz Age. I was particularly struck by a photograph of trombonist Paula Jones; the high-contrast light flashing from her slick bob and gleaming brass horn did not seem to encode messages of not belonging, but of being the center of change; not of lost history, but of the brilliant present; not of women losing or forfeiting or rejecting their femininity, but of a generation's thrilling break with tradition. (See Figure 6.) This image of a woman with her trombone did not smack of trivial novelty entertainment, but presented another exciting articulation of gender, race, and brass as the signs of modernity—very daring, very sexy, very jazzy signs indeed—and these ideas were linked in white ''Jazz Age'' imaginations with fantasies about black ''Otherness.''

The white women in the Ingenues probably did not see themselves as accessing modern identities through black music, but the literature on this use of jazz in the ''Jazz Age'' compels such an analysis of white performance and reception of ragtime, blues, and jazz. This reading is supported, for example, in Kathy Ogren's work on the 1920s white reception of jazz,[61] as well as Susan Cook's work on the white dance team, Irene and Vernon Castle, and their association with African American orchestra leader, James Reese Europe.[62] Vernon needed Irene's flapper style in order to construct himself as modern, and both performers needed black music. As Jayna Brown has put it, ''For white women, the shifting meanings of modern female physicality were articulated through the performance of the racialized female body.''[63] White women's bodies were made free and modern through multiple

[61] Kathy J. Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America and the Meaning of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[62] Susan Cook, ''Passionless Dancing and Passionate Reform: Respectability, Modernism, and the Social Dancing of Irene and Vernon Castle,'' in *The Passion of Music and Dance: Body, Gender, and Sexuality*, ed. William Washabaugh (New York: Berg, 1998), 133–50.

[63] Jayna Jennifer Brown, *Babylon Girls: African American Women Performers and the Making of the Modern* (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2001), 94. I look forward to the imminent publication of her book of the same title on Duke University Press.

Figure 6 Paula Jones, trombonist, from the ''Jazz Age'' all-woman band, the Ingenues. From the Chicago Historical Society and Jerry Douglas. Used by permission.

transgressions: through black sound production, through playing instruments associated with men, and through styles associated with non-white people.

If primitivist fantasies about jazz and blackness as places for white people to assert modern identities are operative in understanding the popularity of white women trumpet players, how might we theorize the performances of African American women trumpet players—such as Ann Cooper, Diyah Jones, Valaida Snow, and Dolly

Jones—especially when they played for black audiences? Included in the range of performances are flapper images, with the flapper also being an important image for many African Americans. Primitivism was a popular way of presenting black female bodies to white audiences, but it was also not unusual in segregated black performance spaces. Jayna Brown's analysis of how African American chorus dancers deployed "the guise of other colonized women" to "claim their own bodies as modern" is helpful in understanding Orientalism and exoticism in black performance for black audiences.[64] Deborah Willis's reading of the importance of Josephine Baker's performances suggest that "Baker reveled in her own body, the first black woman to do so publicly and spectacularly," and excuses her pandering to her audiences' "appetite for exotic 'Others'," since she was "able to extract profit and pleasure from her celebrity."[65]

During the same time period that saw the release of Micheaux's *Swing!*, white filmmakers also selected "swing" and other forms of black music to represent urbanization and modernization, but the potency of the music, and of its associations with race, gender, class, and the modern city, were differently configured. Instead of a cultural passport to better living, jazz, swing, and blues became vehicles for Hollywood filmmakers to shuttle white, self-modernizing audiences on what Peter Stanfield has called an "excursion into the lower depths."[66] Black musical idioms, as well as popular songs associated with these forms, provided a sonic shorthand encapsulating "'transgressive' female sexuality, the 'blackening' of white identity, and 'urban primitivism.'"[67] Oftentimes, these "excursions" rely on "fallen woman" scenarios in which white women are "racialized," or symbolically associated with "racial others," through both plots that construct them as hypersexual, drug-using criminals, and accompanying musical scores designed to evoke white imaginaries of blackness. Women, blackness, and jazz—as well as boundary-crossing and modernity—are also closely linked in Micheaux's *Swing!*, but not necessarily as a recipe for moral decline. One jazzwoman in the film does succumb to the dangers of the modern city, but other African American female characters strive, and sometimes succeed, in their efforts to improve their own working and living conditions as modern black women through their work on the black musical. Most notably, when Dolly Jones appears in Harlem and takes her second jazz trumpet solo, she is not taking an "excursion[] into the lower depths" by any stretch of the imagination, nor is she tumbling into a decline of debauchery, crime, and sex. Instead, she is glimpsed in her new city, traveling with purpose and possibility.

[64] Ibid., 140. Micheaux's films, including *Swing!*, also include dance numbers that exemplify black performances of Orientalism and primitivism.
[65] Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body*, 98–9.
[66] Peter Stanfield, *Body and Soul: Jazz and Blues in American Film, 1927–63* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 78–113.
[67] Peter Stanfield, "An Excursion into the Lower Depths: Hollywood, Urban Primitivism, and *St. Louis Blues*, 1929–1937," *Cinema Journal* 41 (2002): 86.

Solo #2

The second half of Micheaux's *Swing!* takes place in Harlem, after several characters have migrated from Birmingham. It is important to note that a plethora of Hollywood-produced black-cast film musicals were circulating at the same time as Micheaux's sound films. These films tended to set their scenes of black life *wholly in the rural south*, and, in the words of Paula Massood, in an "unspecified post-Emancipation" time frame that nonetheless evokes an "antebellum idyll" through imagery "associated with the plantation system." During an era "that was witnessing the redefinition of a majority of African Americans as urban rather than rural," argues Massood, Hollywood films supported an "ideology that removed African Americans, and all peoples of African descent, from a 'civilized' world that was urban and therefore modern."[68] In contrast, African American films produced for African American audiences represented the South as a troubled legacy, and the urban North, specifically Harlem, as a sign of hope.

Now in the North, Mandy, the cook, has left her exploiters—the "white folks' kitchen" and the fickle black husband—to seek a new life in Harlem. As soon as she arrives in New York, she looks up her college educated niece, Lena (Dorothy Van Engel), who arranges employment for Mandy as a costume mistress. To add to the excitement, the employer is a handsome black man, Mr. Gregory (Carmen Newsome), with whom Lena is falling in love. The hopes for black modernity are invested both in the launch of the first black-controlled, black-cast Broadway musical, and the success of this black couple, Mr. Gregory and Lena, to achieve a relationship in which neither person is exploited (that is, beyond the "normative" mainstream, middle-class heterosexual gender hierarchy evident in their names; he is referred to throughout the film as "Mr. Gregory," and she by her first name, though he does call her Miss Powell on occasion).

The name "Mr. Gregory" is just one of many clues that the producer of the play is a stand-in for the filmmaker, whose own real-life migration history included becoming a homesteader in Gregory, South Dakota, in the early 1900s.[69] Film historian Pearl Bowser confirms that Mr. Gregory's lines in *Swing!* convey Micheaux's own philosophy as a black filmmaker. In a fascinating and remarkably poorly acted speech, which has been described by film historian J. Ronald Green as a "pep talk for moderation," Mr. Gregory explains to his company that, "while a colored show ... is supposed to stay within a certain prescribed scope, we must, if we hope to get anywhere, deliver something within that scope, that the public will like and come to see that is entirely different from what an audience is accustomed to seeing and hearing."

Mr. Gregory's talent search is complicated, and driven by a strategic balance of capitalism and double-consciousness. He seeks to offer "entirely different" representations within the "scope" conditioned by white-controlled shows.[70] The

[68] Massood, *Black City Cinema*, 15–16.
[69] Green, *Straight Lick*, 89.
[70] Ibid., 105.

Figure 7 Dolly Jones takes her second solo, "China Boy," as her character auditions in Harlem for the first black-owned, black-cast Broadway musical in Oscar Micheaux's *Swing!* (Micheaux Pictures Corporation, 1938).

film music scholar Arthur Knight points out that this speech itself both delivers and defies the convention of the musical-within-a-musical. Instead of addressing his cast on opening night, Mr. Gregory's gives his "pep talk" to a partial cast before the auditions are over, and, more significantly, even before a theater is secured, thus dramatizing the "fragility" and "constraints" of the black production.[71] I agree with the significance of this early placement, though I do not see "moderation" and unassailable "constraints" as the point. What I hear is a tactical plan for planting "something entirely different" that will reach those who need it for their very survival, while flying under the radar of those who are satisfied with an unequal modernity. It is during the auditions for this "something that is entirely different" that Dolly Jones takes her second solo. (See Figure 7.)

"So this is the little girl from Birmingham," exclaims Mr. Gregory, as Jones enters the Harlem rehearsal hall with her trumpet. She now appears urban chic, in a stylish suit and fur hat, not as an angelic bride nor her vampish, wanton opposite, but as a modern, confident young black woman with self respect and marketable skills. Still

[71] Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical*, 191.

refusing to return the gaze of the film viewer, Jones faces the camera with lowered eyes, directs the bell of her horn directly forward, and launches immediately into a lively rendition of "China Boy" (a tune which had been popularized by "King of Jazz" Paul Whiteman in 1929, and was a hit record with for "King of Swing" Benny Goodman in 1936).

Unlike her earlier solo in the film, where her audience is clearly appreciative, in this scene she is tightly framed between two men—with Mr. Gregory on her left and his assistant on her right—who each scrutinize her performance as they try to decide if she is appropriate for this historically important show and the social, political, and economic project it represents.[72] While it is tempting to read this scene as a straightforward example of sexism in action, it is important to note the deliberateness with which Micheaux stages this intense male scrutiny of the female jazz trumpeter within a claustrophobic frame of his own making. The scene feels like a tight place because it is set up that way. Other scenes of auditioning acts depict Gregory and his assistant standing off to the side, thus leaving the performers a space on the screen that is their own. The camera constructs a box of men around Jones—with the bass player behind her, pianist in front, and the gatekeepers to employment on either side, arms crossed, staring at her fingers as if waiting for a mistake. From this tight space, Jones plays confidently and is focused entirely on her buoyant solo, even if her prospective employers are not. A series of cutaway close-ups of Mr. Gregory and his assistant reveal them slowly warming to her sound, eventually nodding in surprised approval. She never acknowledges her judges until the end, when she shoots them a quick smile that I read as triumphant. While she certainly seems pleased by her own playing, she does not seem surprised by it. Nor does she seem unaccustomed to the response of a surprised audience. Women jazz musicians have often described to me the daily routine of not only playing music for audiences, but of converting them to the notion that women could play at all.[73] Perhaps the "little girl from Birmingham" is smiling to know she can win over her new audiences in Harlem; or perhaps Jones the actor/musician is smiling at the surprise of her coworkers in the film. Or perhaps she is amused by having the opportunity to shoot a scene that reveals the tight place from which she has carried forth her career. Of course, we cannot know what Micheaux's or Jones's intentions "really" were; but we can observe how the scene was sonically and visually performed, framed, and positioned.[74]

While some of the other migrants in the film struggle with country naiveté, Jones's character has arrived in Harlem already equipped to "swing"—which is the quality identified in the film as the cultural element that black people must control in order

[72] I would like to thank Krin Gabbard for his observation about the framing of the shot and how it relates to Houston Baker's "tight spaces."

[73] Sherrie Tucker, "Telling Performances: Jazz History Remembered and Remade by the Women in the Band," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 1 (1997), 12–23.

[74] For an analysis of representations of women jazz musicians as always auditioning, and for more on sidelining and jazzwomen on film, see Kristin McGee, "The Gendered Jazz Aesthetics of *That Man of Mine:* The International Sweethearts of Rhythm and Independent Black Sound Film," in *Big Ears*, 393–421.

to benefit from a modernity marked by urbanization, industrialization, and new economies and technologies of mass consumer culture. What better symbol of these challenges than the coveted jazz trumpet spotlight of the Swing Era dance band? Jones not only appears in control of her solo on an instrument that was considered masculine—probably the highest status instrument in jazz at the time—but she retains possession of her own black female body, which is neither hypersexualized, nor desexualized. She seems to own her sound and image, despite the tight space allotted to her. I am unaware of any other film of a woman jazz instrumentalist of any race presented in such a straightforward manner—as a focused professional, working at her craft despite the constant scrutiny of disbelievers. For that matter, it is difficult to think of cinematic representations of black male trumpet players in the 1930s that are so resistant to racist legacies of representations of race, gender, and sexuality.[75] Thus concludes the last recorded evidence of the long and distinguished career of Dolly Jones.

If the bulk of the Northern scenes in the film are taken up with auditions for the minor acts, the crisis comes with the literal fall of the show's superstar, a drunken and abusive female singer (played by Hazel Diaz), who topples down a flight of barroom stairs and must be replaced. Unlike Lena, or Dolly Jones, or several other black women migrants who are equipped to survive the modern city, the female star has proven vulnerable to its dangers, including alcohol and vanity, and throughout the rehearsals, she has been insensitive and cruel to her coworkers. Her negativity to the show is central to her character, yet, without the role she fills—described by Mr. Gregory as the "blues singer and mammy lead"—the show is doomed. As Mr. Gregory puts it, "they look for one of them in this kind of show." Mr. Gregory and Lena nearly admit defeat. Suddenly, Lena dispels the doom by remembering that not only can her southern migrant aunt Mandy cook and sew, she can sing the blues. In fact, Lena exclaims with a snap of her fingers (and what I read as a "wink-and-nod" comic epiphany), "she's got just what this show needs—Swing!" Suddenly, the star of the show is none other than the star of the film, Mandy, who—hard-working and humble—has never been impressed by show business, but rather by the fact of working for "colored" not "white." Just as suddenly, a wealthy white man appears; enamored with Mandy's talents, he offers to finance the production and provide his theatre as its venue, with the stipulation that it be renamed "Dat Man I Lub," and be set in the South, plantation setting and all. Mr. Gregory and the cast happily comply. Black control of black culture seems both within reach and seriously compromised. Dolly Jones is nowhere in sight.

Micheaux's sound films are often critiqued for their capitulations to racist stereotyping typical of Hollywood, but it also seems that there are some very serious twists discernible to black audiences aware of the context of struggle in which they were produced. The appearance of a rich white man showing up at the last minute to rescue a theatrical production from disaster is not unfamiliar in the backstage

[75] See Gabbard, *Jammin' at the Margins*, especially his chapter on Armstrong, pp. 205–238.

musical genre. Yet, surely, the presence of the white financier *in this film* also references Schiffman's control of Micheaux's film company (as well as of the Apollo Theatre), to Hollywood control of the film industry and factory of racist representations of black people, to the white control and inflated profit margin in the swing industry.[76] Yet, while Micheaux and his characters appear to uncritically comply with these conditions, they also offer "something entirely different," precisely in the manner of Mr. Gregory's speech. When Mandy amazes everyone by singing "the blues," it is not a blues at all, but far from it—a swinging rendition of "Bei Mir Bist Du Schein." And although we hear that she has been cast in as the "mammy lead," there is nothing within the frame of the film to indicate that Mandy will perform a stereotypical "mammy" role. Instead, Mandy suddenly wears fashionable clothing and conducts herself with confident demeanor. Her subjectivity is no longer subsumed by the people she serves. On the contrary, she has left behind the real-life role of servant, as well as that of two-timed wife, and is shown enjoying her new life as a respected, attractive, and talented black woman thriving in the modern city. Though she reconciles with the husband who mistreated her in Birmingham, she does so through transformed power relations. She is a star; he washes her tired feet backstage. His access to her money is now delimited by the watchful eye of Mandy's niece, who has become—like the woman married to Micheaux, Alice B. Russell—not only the spouse or support staff of the producer, but an active creative and business agent in her own right. (Russell is, in fact, credited as the producer of *Swing!*)[77]

Dolly Jones's role in the film is more ambiguous. Her scenes could be cut without altering the plot. These appearances are barely mentioned in scholarship on Micheaux's sound films. Yet, I would argue that—more than any other scene—they convey the film's message, as well as Micheaux's own strategies for achieving black modernity. As one of the optimistic migrants who auditions for the show, Jones's "little girl from Birmingham" seems to epitomize the ability to subtly but effectively slip in a dose of "something entirely different" that is desired by Mr. Gregory. Yet, even after Gregory and his male assistant loosen their amused skeptical stances in order to nod in approval of her trumpet audition, we never learn if she got cast in the Broadway show. In fact, we never see, or hear, from or about her again. Perhaps her performance strikes Gregory as straying too far from the "expected form" of the black-cast Broadway musical—too disruptive of stereotypical representations of jazz musicians and black women according to the mainstream, or too dangerous for the box office. Or perhaps we are free to imagine that she will appear in the now white-financed, black-directed, black-cast musical as part of that new image of blackness that Mr. Gregory's tactical double consciousness allows him to slip into the show,

[76] I would like to thank John Howland for the reminder that the rich white financier is a plot device in many a classic Warner Bros. backstage musical of the 1930s, only in those films, the bankrolling is motivated by an alluring "gold digger" in the chorus. Another twist, then, in the plot of *Swing!* is that the white financier is motivated by his desire for the newly modern black woman's return migration to the plantation.

[77] Green, *Straight Lick*, 99.

thus pleasantly surprising black audiences while not disappointing white ones. Or perhaps she represents a too-different and too-hopeful vision of black modernity that Micheaux knows will never be allowed to thrive in the racist system in which he works (but which he is able to slip into this film in cameo form). We simply do not know.

What we *do* know, however, is that Dolly Jones *was* cast by Oscar Micheaux, framed in particular ways, and positioned twice in significant *musical* spots in his sound film about the efforts of migrating African Americans to control representations and profits of black culture in the midst of the so-called Swing Era. Entrenched in the ''tight places'' occupied by black entrepreneurs and artists in the 1930s, Micheaux was surely well aware of the symbolic value and contemporary salience of battles over who ''owned'' swing, and who profited from it, and from films about it, in 1938. Yet among the myriad representations brokered by Hollywood studios in the 1930s of swing bands, black entertainers, black female performers, trumpet soloists, none produced the particular combination we see in Micheaux's framing and positioning of Dolly Jones's solos in *Swing!* These scenes would not be appropriated.

Conclusion

It is not enough to reclaim historical women trumpeters from obscurity, or to identify the limits that continue to marginalize them in jazz discourse. We also need to know more about the pathways of possibility on which they traveled, the cultural circuits through which they sounded. Micheaux's *Swing!* offers a glimpse into such a moment within black performance practices of the 1930s, when a trumpet could, in fact, arm a black woman not only with an instrument that can reflect ''the modern world,'' but, as Robert O'Meally has said of the music of Louis Armstrong, with the means for producing ''an encoded strategy for *surviving* modern times.''[78] Perhaps even more than the character of Mr. Gregory, Jones's musical scenes represent Micheaux's hopes and struggles as a formerly silent, and hopefully not silenced, black filmmaker in the mass culture swing boom and the age of sound.

Jones's brilliance is amplified by the disjointedness between acted scenes and musical numbers that Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence have noted as a hallmark of Micheaux's sound films. Budgeted to the bone, and unable to rehearse or to reshoot scenes, the scripts of dialogue acted for the first time were more likely to fall flat than ''already established, already well-rehearsed'' musical acts.[79] Mr. Gregory stumbles through his speech, yet he clearly presents Micheaux's strategy of producing within

[78] Robert O'Meally, *An Appreciation of Armstrong's Hot Five and Seven Recordings, with Selected Commentaries*, liner notes to Louis Armstrong, *The Complete Hot Five and Hot Seven Recordings*, Columbia/Legacy 63527, 2000, compact disc box set.

[79] Bowser and Spence, *Writing Himself into History*, 45–46. Bowser also notes that Micheaux hoped to sell the musical segments of *Swing!* as independent products after the feature film had run its course. Many thanks to Pearl Bowser for our conversation during a chance meeting at the Blue Room in Kansas City, Missouri, September 26, 2003.

the allotted tight space for black performance, while simultaneously giving audiences "something completely different." Twice Dolly Jones takes a featured trumpet solo, and each is a confident, swinging rendition of a popular song in the midst of a culture war that usually boosted white capital and passed as a "craze." By performing her workaday roles as jazz trumpet player and self-assured black woman-on-the-stage, Jones's scenes suggest historical pathways that could "sync" uplift with downbeats, dignity with modernity, swing with survival. In these ways, I argue that the "something entirely different" of Oscar Micheaux's *Swing!* travels through Jones's (still) unexpected re-articulations of gender, race, and brass.

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Abstract

In this essay, the author explores the trumpet solos of Dolly Jones (Armenra, Armenera) in Oscar Micheaux's 1938 film, *Swing!*, as a part of a search for analytical frameworks that can address moments in the interwar years when trumpeting jazzwomen represented modernity. By explicitly incorporating modernity into an intersectional analysis of gender, race, and jazz, this paper considers moments when women playing instruments and styles associated with men were not only seen as novelties, or as musicians who happened to be women, but as evidence of new generations and new possibilities—and, in this case, hopes for black modernity in the late 1930s.