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 ***Black Women and Music: More than the Blues (review)***

Monica Hairston

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

Monica Hairston (bio)

Black Women and Music: More than the Blues. Edited by Eileen M. Hayes and Linda F. Williams. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007. 261 pp.

In a discussion of traditional divisions of labor between musicology and ethnomusicology and how those divisions "have influenced the study of black music, or perhaps better, how [black music] has influenced these divisions," musicologist Guthrie Ramsey suggests that black music or "blackness" tends to upset the disciplinary apple cart. That black music is always already constructed as Other in relation to these fields of musical inquiry results for Ramsey in methodological approaches that, in seeking their "intellectual" and "ethnic" center, are eclectic and often in tension with one another.¹

While I can and do relate, I also wonder what happens to the apple cart when the blackness in question is also female. Often, black music scholarship not only privileges male cultural producers but also reflects the chronological or great man narrative forms of traditional musicology. When the musicking of African American women is considered, does the cart explode? Black feminist interventions in music studies have the potential to blow up or at least supremely complicate questions of audience, beauty, authenticity, meaning, authorial voice, and/or identity in music (to name just a few). Or does the cart remain untouched? As coeditor Eileen Hayes points out in her introduction, "New Perspectives in Studies of Black Women and Music," even "feminist ethnomusicologies have yet, by and large, to incorporate 'multivocal, interdisciplinary thinking' regarding 'race' in a way that makes a difference both politically and intellectually" (4). As a scholar of black music and specifically of black women making meaning for themselves and others in and [End Page 96] through music, I know, to borrow a term from Gwendolyn Pough's essay, that black women's music can and does bring multiply determined wreck to the apple cart in question. The ten powerfully interdisciplinary essays in *Black Women and Music* stand as example.

They do so in part by issuing "a corrective to discursive practices that inadvertently make invisible as much as illuminate the heterogeneity of black women's musical experience," as Hayes articulates (6–7). The heterogeneous reality of African American women's musical activity is on

full view; represented here are those who have worked in or are working in the fields of classical, electric blues, hip-hop, jazz, gospel, musical theater, and the avant-garde. These musicians are vocalists, instrumentalists, composers, conductors, emcees, and announcers, and, tellingly, the collection draws not only from musicology and ethnomusicology but also from rhetoric and theater, English, women's studies, writing, and performance.

As the back cover states, *Black Women and Music* is the "first interdisciplinary volume to examine black women's negotiation of race and gender in African American music." Furthermore, it is not chronological, is not meant to be comprehensive, and does not invest in canon building. However, it does present an impressively wide range of experiences, questions, genres, and approaches organized in three broadly thematic sections. The first, "Having Her Say: Power and Complication in Popular Music," considers forces of gendered and racialized regulation in hip-hop, electric blues, and musical theater as well as how they are negotiated by artists and audiences. The second section, "When and Where She Enters: Black Women in Unsung Places," references the work of both Paula Giddings and Anna Julia Cooper and considers black women's musicking in under-examined contexts such as those of the gospel announcer, the contemporary jazz musician, the jazz avant-garde, and "women's music" scenes. The third and final section, "Revisiting Musical Histories," serves as a significant addition to and critique of feminist musicology's reclamation project(s), which seldom include efforts to recover black women's histories or account for the factors that have historically marginalized their efforts.

In her essay "Hip-Hop Soul Divas and Rap Music: Critiquing the Love That Hate Produced" Gwendolyn Pough examines the contradictory sexual politics inherent in hip-hop through the frame of bell hooks's notion of "Love as a Practice of Freedom."² The theoretical frame allows Pough to see a role for black feminism in hip-hop beyond...

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1. See Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 17–19.



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2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
+1 (410) 516-6989
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