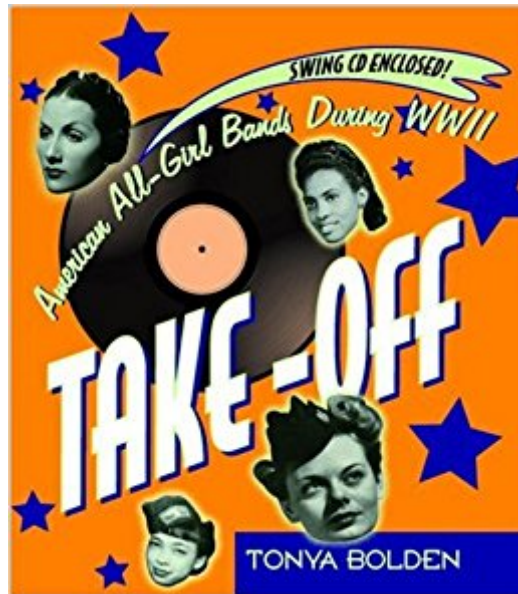


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# Take-Off (Bk & CD): American All-Girl Bands During World War II



## Synopsis

The 1940's was a time when society thought it improper for women to make a sax wail or let loose hot licks on skins, but with the advent of World War II and many men away fighting the war, women finally got their chance to strut their stuff on the bandstand. These all-girl bands kept morale high on the homefront and on USO tours of military bases across the globe while also helping to establish America's legacy in jazz music. "Take-off?" Oh, yeah. Several all-girl bands did. This book includes a hip swing CD.

## Book Information

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Hardcover: 80 pages

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Shipping Weight: 1 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

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Age Range: 10 and up

Grade Level: 5 and up

## Customer Reviews

Grade 5 - History and music are combined in this account of all-women bands during World War II. Information about jazz and swing underlies Bolden's focus on the significance of female musicians who filled the void created by the war. They had to prove themselves in general and overcome ideas about what kind of music was appropriate for women to perform. Racism also impacted the ability of a number of the bands to tour the country. Bolden provides a wealth of material in this brief selection, and does so in a lively prose style and with frequent use of jazz vernacular. Photo captions and boxed inserts add interesting details. Endnotes; source lists of books, periodicals, and videos; a recommended reading list, and a discography are appended. This

book would be most helpful for assignments on music or women's history. —•Renee Steinberg, formerly at Fieldstone Middle School, Montvale, NJ Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

To appreciate this book, readers need at least a nodding acquaintance with swing music. The accompanying CD will help, and Bolden's introduction, which features opinions from Benny Goodman, Ella Fitzgerald, and others, gets things off to a good start. Then, using fascinating archival material, including newspaper and magazine articles and posters, all heavily captioned, she goes on to discuss pioneering female jazz bands, which gained steam particularly during World War II after most male band members went overseas. One problem is that a book about female musicians from the past doesn't have the hook of derring-do that accompanies books about women fliers or explorers. Bolden counters the difficulty by using a fresh style of writing, as bouncy as the music, and incorporating lots of slang--which works, up to a point. History students may be the best audience for this, but some kids will love the music and want to know more. Quotes are sourced and extensive lists for further reading and listening are provided. Ilene Cooper Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Very nice book about little known all girl bands of WW II. Neat imagery through out the well written history that sweetly includes author's groovy banter and commentary about the several units covered. Only disappointment for me was that the superb CD featured the only two nationally recognized, pre-war bands among the several other actual wartime units described in the text. Maybe the other bands never recorded or the sides are extremely rare so either difficult to acquire or very pricey to have added. I particularly wanted to hear the Texas Prairie View A & M band because of San Antonio's one and only Bert Etta Davis getting on board at age 17 as is well described in the text. "Ladybird" Davis was one of the band's true stars and she continued to display her fine alto sax chops with other bands during the 1950s and '60s. She returned to her hometown San Antonio in 1970 and continued playing into the early 1980s. A nice 1980 oral history interview with Bert Etta can be heard online while sadly Ms. Davis passed away in 1983 at age 61. She was one in a million and I was much disappointed not to be able to hear her riffing away on the CD included with this otherwise fine book by authoress Tonya Bolden.

Readers interested in the all-girl bands of the World War II era should find this book a great introduction to the topic. It's a short book but full of great pictures and concise histories. The more

popular groups of this period are included - Ina Ray Hutton, Ada Leonard, the Prairie View State College Co-eds, the International Sweethearts of Rhythm - as are several side-bars that present various individuals. The book also has an informative glossary of music terms and music related slang terms, as well as two pages of selected sources that list choice books, articles, periodicals, and videos. All of this information is supported by a great 16 song CD that includes songs from the previously mentioned groups, as well as two cuts by trumpeter Valaida Snow. Knowing little about this part of music history, I found this book to be very helpful. It was an easy read, but all the historical highlights were there - and the CD is a definite plus! "Take-off" is a good book to have before you tackle a more detailed historical account like "Swing Shift" by Sherrie Tucker. Highly recommend "Take-off."

Aimed at a pre-teen audience...too much "cute" jargon. The materials all lifted (with credits) from other publications and disjointed. I happen to know a number of the musicians in the book, and it sells their stories short.

This product was a fast delivery, well packaged, in good condition, at a fair price and as described. This book is well written and an interesting historical read. The enclosed CD is great!

Excellent

To all naïf readers who still think Kathleen Hanna, Courtney Love or Liz Phair were doing anything new by boldly storming their way into previously male territory, may I suggest Tonya Bolden's Take-Off? A quick and easy read, complete with photos, newspaper clippings and an obsessive amount of research, Take-Off chronicles the rise and eventual fall of "all-girl" big bands of the World War II era, proving once and for all that every female musician from Nancy Wilson to the Go-Go's to any number of riot grrrls would still be just singing in the shower were it not for the brave and brilliant contribution of the swing musicians who fought sexual and racial discrimination in order to prove, in no uncertain terms, that "girl musicians...are as much the masters of their instruments as are male musicians." Take-Off (which is slang for an improv solo) tells an abbreviated story, for sure, but nonetheless lays it out: 16 million American men served in World War II, and their absence created room for more than just Rosie the Riveter; it also allowed space for The Hour of Charm All Girl Orchestra, Ada Leonard (a former stripper) and her All-American Girl Orchestra, and The International Sweethearts of Rhythm, among others. And while Take-Off will never be confused with

a hard-hitting piece of feminist scholarship, Bolden does offer tentative critiques of the ways in which patriarchy forced the hands of the women she chronicles, explaining, for example, that as female musicians got bolder and played harder music, they compensated by dressing softer, trading in their simple skirts and blouses for strapless gowns with hem-to-hem ruffles the musicians had to iron on their travel suitcases. She also dedicates significant time detailing race relations of the time and the importance of single-race bands. Bolden's use of jazz-era slang throughout the book often feels a bit silly and heavy-handed, but *Take-Off* is still a commendable exploration of the women who worked to dismantle the myth that "only God can make a tree, and only men can play good jazz." And perhaps best of all, the book comes with a CD of some of the most exciting swing music to come from the WWII era, reason enough to buy this book! While *Take-Off* is hardly definitive, it takes a necessary step in establishing that contrary to public opinion of the time, not all "women like violins."

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