

Exhibit uncovers the untold story of women in music

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Singer Blanche Thomas takes the microphone in a Bourbon Street club around 1950 in this photograph from the Hogan Jazz Archive. (Photo by Ralston Crawford, courtesy of the Ralston Crawford Collection of Jazz Photography, Hogan Jazz Archive)

Every New Orleanian can probably name some female musicians that shaped local music, but [Hogan Jazz Archive](#) associate curator Alaina W.

Hébert felt that part of the story of women in New Orleans music was not being told.

She seeks to build on the fascinating and enlightening story of those New Orleans women in “Building a Tradition: The Multifaceted Legacy of Women in New Orleans Music.” The exhibit, on display in the Joseph Merrick Jones Hall Gallery, shows women’s contributions to music, not only as pianists and singers, but also as teachers, composers and publishers, and later as DJs. They led orchestras and ran record stores, too.

“I wanted to tell a more holistic story of women’s involvement in music in New Orleans ... not just jazz and not just musicians, but these quiet ways that women were involved as much as they could be,” Hébert said.

Over the course of a year and a half, Hébert extracted the women’s stories from unlikely places. She listened to oral histories that described the way musicians were reared, and perused their family trees. Often the products of “matrifocal” households - not necessarily single-mother households, but those in which a mother or grandmother was the major caregiver — musicians were indebted to the women who cared for them.

Hébert pulled together photos and clippings that documented women’s influence, and other assorted memorabilia that shows they were eager to create their own roles within the industry, even if society frowned on it. Hébert also included women who worked at the Hogan Jazz Archive, such as Betty Rankin and Allison Miner, who were critical to the preservation of New Orleans music.

“It’s not necessarily the most obvious or direct contributions” to music, Hébert said, adding that piecing together the family information was often challenging.

The exhibit is on view in the Joseph Merrick Jones Hall Gallery on the second floor of Jones Hall through Nov. 28. A digital exhibit is planned for the future.

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