

Jazzwomen get their due

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“Women really did a lot of things that sound like delusions if you get your information from sources that don't take gender into account in the field of power,” said Sherrie Tucker, an expert on jazzwomen, who gave the [New Orleans Center for the Gulf South's](#) second annual Sylvia R. Frey Lecture on Wednesday (March 13) in the Qatar Ballroom of the Lavin-Bernick Center on the Tulane University uptown campus.



Neliska “Baby” Briscoe led a jazz band. (Photo from the [Hogan Jazz Archive](#) at Tulane University)

Tucker told several anecdotes about successful women who accomplished great feats in the field of jazz, but who are seldom remembered for them.

For example, she said when New Orleans jazzwoman Neliska “Baby” Briscoe was living in a retirement home, her attendant considered her stories of “wearing a tuxedo and waving a baton, touring the country leading a jazz band” to be mere delusions, not the realities of her ward's former life.

Tucker, a professor of American studies at Kansas University, focused on uncovering the lost stories of women involved in the New Orleans jazz scene around the turn of the 20th century.

Many of these women were famous during their own time but have since fallen into obscurity.

The lecture's goal, and the goal of Tucker's current scholarship, is to study the role New Orleans women played in the male-dominated field of early 1900s jazz, and to restore them to their proper place in history's understanding of the jazz tradition narrative.

Closing out her lecture, Tucker had a task for her audience: "More work needs to be done in all kinds of related areas! If you need a paper topic, I have one for you."

Frey, a professor emerita of history, is the namesake of the lecture. She was director of the [Deep South Regional Humanities Center](#) at Tulane, which promoted education and research on the region through academic conferences, research fellowships, teacher training, lectures, performances, exhibitions and tours.

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