

***A Women's History of The Beatles.* By Christine Feldman-Barret. New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 257 pp. ISBN 978-1-5013-7594-1.**

History has always been dictated by the privileged: in rock music, white male scholars, critics, and producers have been guardians of the legitimate discourse. By the same token, women have often been considered as hysterical fans, reduced to consumers incapable of speaking seriously about popular music. Christine Feldman-Barrett addresses this issue in her book *A Women's History of The Beatles*. In this work, she rebalances the narratives about the Beatles and allows women to express themselves to "help recast the historical record" (p. 12). From a sociological and historical perspective, this approach elucidates how women empowered themselves thanks to popular culture in the second half of the 20th century. Musically speaking, some sections could have been enriched by a more technical analysis. However, by focusing on the women's reception of the Beatles, Christine Feldman-Barrett opens a very fruitful area of research and shows how the band "ostensibly offered women [...] a musical liberation unique in the annals of popular music" (p. 112).

According to the author, *A Women's History of the Beatles* is not only a restoration of women's voices, but also a reinterpretation "that reminds us that histories are constructed not only through methodology, but individual subjectivities" (p. 171). Indeed, the numerous testimonies from women throughout the book allow the reader to understand the articulation between story and history that Christine Feldman-Barrett intends to demonstrate. The objective is to rebuild a history thanks to varied narratives: fans, Beatles' ex-wives and girlfriends, female entrepreneurs or musicians recount their personal experience with the Beatles, to oppose the "masculinization" (p. 5) of rock music. Indeed, we cannot fully understand the Beatles phenomenon without examining women's reception of the band. The intergenerational approach is central to determine how this reception is reshaped and reinvested throughout sixty years of fandom, from Beatlemania to the third-generation fans (Chapters 1 and 2). Some parts are very enlightening on women's new place in society. For example, in the middle of the first chapter, the author examines how young women, by going to concerts and daring to go out in the city of Liverpool at night, redefined public space (pp. 26-32). Thanks to a balance between testimonies and analytical distance, Christine Feldman-Barrett shows how this redefinition of geographical mobility was a turning point in young women's emancipation.

The extensive collection of testimonies from a wide variety of women is admirable. However, presenting a subset of these interviews would have been more effective at conveying the purpose to the reader and would not have prevented the author from including all the testimonies at the end of the book in a dedicated section. This approach might have reduced redundancy in the narratives, especially between the two first chapters, and would have left room for more detailed analytical discussion. Next to these interviews, newspaper articles and fans' letters sent to magazines constitute an important basis of the book's documentation, but could have been more valuable by varying the sources. Furthermore, the author could have more effectively used visual documents to convey her thesis by expressly commenting on them. For example, the photograph of the Liverbirds (fig. 4.3 p. 119) could have been analysed to show how, in the second half of the 1960s, the Beatles influenced physically and scenically this all-female band, with a redefinition of femininity. Finally, there are no tables summarizing the data. Such documents would have been beneficial in the first chapter to recapitulate the social analysis of the audience attending the Beatles' sets at the Cavern Club, and in the last chapter when the author demonstrates the rise of female scholars in Beatles Studies. A clear

presentation of the data would have clarified the argument and been a great help in understanding the evolution of the social dynamics that are analysed.

As previously stated, the main subject of this book is not musical analysis, and its focus on sociological and historical aspects of women's narratives is well-demonstrated. Indeed, Popular Music Studies are vitally multidisciplinary: we cannot speak about the music of the Beatles out of its context and analysing women's reception of this phenomenon is a great input to Beatles studies. However, the opposite can also be true: dedicating a chapter to how the Beatles' music influenced female musicians or how female bands influenced the Beatles without discussing music-making can be problematic. By occulting musical analysis in the fourth chapter, the Beatles' influence on female musicians between the 1960s and the 2000s cannot be demonstrated firmly, likewise the influence of female performers on the Beatles. It would have been very interesting to show how female performers such as the Marvelettes or the Ronettes majorly influenced the Beatles, aesthetically and musically speaking. This point could have been developed in a book about women's creativity and empowerment. Maybe a solution would have been to concentrate the chapter on a few musicians or bands – for example, the subversive approach of the Beatles' music by Siouxsie Sioux or the *beatlesque* echoes in Sam Phillips' repertoire – and to analyse their work in detail. However, this section has the great quality of making us discover or rediscover a lot of all-female bands or female musicians.

In conclusion, *A Women's History of the Beatles* is a sociological and historical approach of how the band contributed to women's emancipation during the last sixty years and how personal stories can help rebuild a new gendered history, put in perspective with second and third-wave feminism. The profuse testimonies give a precious view on the past decades and constitute a remarkable collection of work, which might open new paths to future research, either in Cultural History or in Feminist Studies.

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