

THE HITCHCOCK INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN AMERICAN MUSIC

presents, in collaboration with the Brooklyn College Composer's Forum,
the Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities,
and the Conservatory of Music at Brooklyn College:

MUSIC IN POLYCULTURAL AMERICA

spring 2021 virtual speaker series

The Battle on the Vibes: Politics of Race and Gender in Jazz during the 1950s

YOKO SUZUKI in conversation with VICTOR SOLANO

Jazz pianist/vibraphonist Terry Pollard was discovered by legendary vibraphonist Terry Gibbs and performed in his band from 1953 to 1957. Newspaper and trade magazine reviews reveal that the highlight of the band's shows was a vibraphone duet featuring Gibbs and Pollard. Gibbs recalled, "a Black girl and a white guy battling it out on the vibes" always elicited a standing ovation from the audience. This talk explores the complex politics of race and gender in jazz during the 1950s through the case of Pollard's performances with the Gibbs band. During their television appearance on the *Tonight Show* in 1956, Pollard and Gibbs musically, physically, and verbally acted out a duet "battle," an exchange that demonstrated their equal mastery of the vibraphone and of bebop idioms. This performance was a framed space where

temporary integration in terms of both race and gender was possible. These two musicians' musical connections and the proximity of their bodies crossing over the instrument during the duet not only disturbed audiences in the South but also blurred the boundaries between Black/white as well as male/female that were hard to navigate in 1950s American society.

Yoko Suzuki teaches at the University of Pittsburgh and performs as a jazz saxophonist. Her research, which explores the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality in jazz performance, has been published in *Black Music Research Journal*, *American Music Review*, and *Gender, Education, Music, and Society*.



TUESDAY, 20 APRIL, 12:30PM

register here for Zoom link: <https://rb.gy/kg1620>

free and open to the public; this event will be recorded
for more information, visit us at hisam.org