

# SHORT TAKES

## ***The Girls in the Band***

Judy Chaikin's chronicle of women jazz musicians from the 1930s to the present is a lively celebration of music and sisterhood. Featuring top-notch performances, first-person interviews, and archival footage, the film explores well-known themes of sexism endured and overcome, but, like the hottest jazz, it hits enough unexpected notes to keep the audience hopping. Perhaps the most compelling feature is its deft portrayal of sorority transcending racial barriers, which the film plausibly presents as a historical fact within the jazz community. The field of women's studies has just recently begun to grapple with the disconnect between white and minority female experience, and one is hard-pressed to find stories of sincere connection between white women and women of color. Chaikin brings this tale to light effortlessly; there is no force or artifice, no crude attempts to make the narrative fit the theme of racial harmony. The issue of racism is explicitly tackled when some of the interviewees (black and white) recount their experiences touring in the Jim Crow South, and the film also touches on the role members of the jazz community played in the Civil Rights movement. But it is the rich display of women from various ethnic backgrounds and myriad colors discussing their mutual love of jazz and making music together that proves the point without trying. This is the result of smart choices on Chaikin's part: she profiles a sizable, diverse cross-section of women, giving equal time to all, and allows her subjects' trains of thought to drive the narrative. *The Girls in the Band* takes its cue from jazz itself, resulting in the joyful, free-form interplay of ensemble and solo, courage and community. (Distributed by the filmmaker, [www.thegirlsintheband.com](http://www.thegirlsintheband.com))—**Mary Bowen**