

IASPM Canada Narvaez Prize Winner 2018

“Goldie and the Gingerbreads: A Case Study of the All-Girl Band in 1960s Rock ‘n’ Roll” by Brittany Greening

Brittany Greening’s paper on Goldie and the Gingerbreads aims to retrieve this path-breaking all-female group from what she convincingly demonstrates is an undeserved obscurity. Confronted by existing categories—particularly a ruling binary of “girl group” versus “rock’n’roll band” and the value-laden and gendered definitions associated with each side of that binary—Goldie and the Gingerbreads appear kind of stranded, historically, because they don’t fit easily into either category. Greening’s work tackles this binary in a way that helps us appreciate the diversity of gendered and genre-d voices of the early 1960s.

Greening’s examination of the failure of popular music scholarship to accord much significance to Goldie and the Gingerbreads illuminates how gendered assumptions and prejudices still devalue and obscure certain practices because they are the practices of women. Thus much of the paper brings evidence to bear showing that Goldie and the Gingerbreads were at least as much a rock’n’roll band as they were a girl group. One of Greening’s primary arguments is that, indeed, they were a rock’n’roll band who were pressured on all sides to act like a girl group. Producers, for example, put gendered limits on their ability to determine their own sound and to choose the tunes they would prioritize. But at the same time, Greening shows, the leader of the group exercised relatively rigorous control over their image, crafting it to suit dominant gender stereotypes of the early 60s; a pregnant member was, it appears, fired, and the leader reveals anxiety about any of the band’s members appearing too butch. These matters can be read as evidence both of their autonomy and their struggles with heteronymous forces.

The committee found that this paper was an admirably solid piece of work, about a clearly defined object, that sets out to actually map and intervene in the field. That is, this paper not only adds to our knowledge of the diversity of gendered experiences in early 1960s popular music, it helps us to understand blind spots in our field, and it reveals some of what has been hidden to us through our own limitations.