

SHOW GIRLS

CELEBRATING MONTREAL'S LEGENDARY BLACK JAZZ SCENE

A National Film Board of Canada Production



Photo: Olga Spencer Federigham

Show Girls celebrates Montreal's swinging Black jazz scene from the 1920s to the 1960s, when the city was wide open. Three women who danced in the legendary Black clubs of the day — Rockhead's Paradise, The Terminal, Café St-Michel — share their unforgettable memories of life in the middle

of one of the world's hottest jazz spots.

From the roaring twenties, through the dirty thirties and on into the golden era of clubs right through to the sixties, **Show Girls** chronicles the lives of Bernice, Tina and Olga, who started dancing for a living as teens — mixing their memories with rarely seen footage of the era.

Their stories are told against the backdrop of the fascinating social and political history that made Montreal one of the Eastern seaboard's jazz and nightclub centres for decades.

Director: Meilan Lam Producers: Tamara Lynch, Barrie Angus McLean
52 minutes Order number: C9198 033



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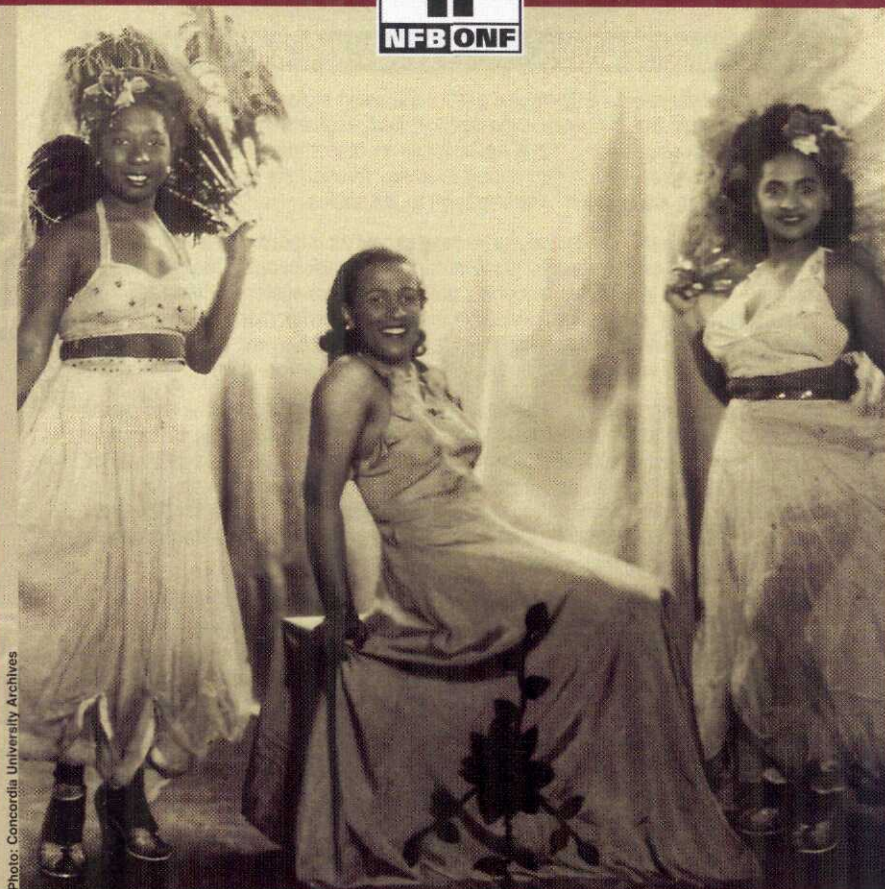
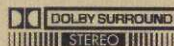


Photo: Concordia University Archives

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN IN MONTREAL'S JAZZ ERA

Show Girls celebrates a little-known part of Canadian history by warmly depicting the lives of three Black women. Olga Spencer Foderingham, Tina Baines Brereton, and Bernice Jordan Whims sang and danced in nightclubs and theatres during Montreal's jazz era — from the roaring twenties, through the dirty thirties and on into the "golden era of clubs" right through to the sixties.

From slavery onward, dance and music have served as important and fundamental forms of cultural expression and survival for many Black people. Denied a written history — dance and music became conduits for Black history. Often, however, these methods of expression became a means of entertainment for mainstream audiences. This was the case when Black dance and Black music became the rage in much of North America despite the racial discrimination prevalent at the time.

Jazz started to gain widespread popularity in Montreal in the 1920s. The St. Antoine district or "downtown" was already home to thousands of American Blacks who had initially come to work on the railroads. Montreal's jazz clubs originally started in the late 19th century as recreational clubs for Black porters and were the jump-off point for decades of jazz in the city. When prohibition shut down the New York nightclubs, Black entertainers were among the many who flocked to Montreal looking for work, bringing their music and dance with them.

Show Girls is set in a history that was integrally tied to the development of Montreal's Black historical district and in a community that was influenced by the Black music and dance of Harlem. Its use of personal stories along with archival information is an approach that lends itself to use (both formally and informally) in the following disciplines: History, Music, Dance, Multicultural studies and Women's studies.

Suggested activities for using Show Girls as a tool for cross-curricular enrichment in secondary and post-secondary studies.

Media Studies

Examine the portrayal of Black women and men in popular media. How are Black people portrayed in your favourite TV shows and movies today? Explore stereotypes and popular images of Black people and how they have changed over time.

Labour Studies

From the early to mid-1900s, Black women in Canada had few options available when it came to earning a living, except for work as domestics or in low-paying jobs as cleaners, clothes washers, etc. The women in the film chose other avenues. Discuss the changes in their careers and how changing attitudes, government regulations and laws may have opened or closed doors for Black women and others. For more extensive study, research current labour and equity laws in Canada and elsewhere.

**Director and
Researcher:**
Meilan Lam

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Producers:
Tamara Lynch
Barrie Angus
McLean

**Executive
Producers:**
David Verrall
Barrie Angus
McLean

52 minutes

Order number:
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Anti-Racism

1. To earn a living as an entertainer, it was sometimes necessary to go on the road. Racism and sexism made it difficult for Black women, and sometimes for Black men, to find lodging — even in some of the hotels they worked for. Research government initiatives or laws that challenge this type of discrimination.

2. If you lived in Montreal when the clubs were segregated, where would you want to go for a night on the town: "uptown" or "downtown"? Why? What would you do? Research contemporary or historical cases where discrimination was challenged.

Music and Dance

1. Black dance and Black music have been a part of North America's culture for generations. What are their forms today? Do some research on cultural and/or regional dance forms and music genres that influence popular dance and music.

2. What were the stereotypes of women as nightclub dancers? Were the women in this video marginalized by society, by their families, or by their Black community? How did these Black women express the sense of power they exercised in their lives? What were the factors that anchored this power? How do you think this has changed today?

3. Interview someone who has worked as an entertainer in a club. What do they remember about the music, the jam sessions or the other entertainers?

Black Canadians

Because so little history has been told, Blacks in Canada are an invisible population to many Canadians. See if you can make a list of 10 Black heroes or achievers who were born before 1925 and who lived in Canada. Try to include at least 3 women on that list. Write a paragraph on one woman and one man.

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