

**“Louise Tobin Blues:”
Challenging Gender Stereotypes in Life and Music**

**by Kevin Mooney
Texas State University**

km30@txstate.edu

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Paper Abstract

Louise Tobin (b. 1918) has stories to tell. A professional jazz vocalist from the 1930s through the 1990s, she is among the last survivors of the swing era and one whose oral history informs our understanding of female jazz singers and the challenges they faced during the better part of the twentieth century. Her biography is significant: first wife of trumpeter Harry James, who never viewed her as an equal partner; singing with Benny Goodman, connecting both with the “orchestra wives” as well as with her accompanying musicians; alone, raising her two boys after James divorced her for Betty Grable, continuing to record and perform as much as she was able; and, meeting, marrying, and performing for thirty years with her second husband clarinetist Peanuts Hucko. Yet, her music, one song in particular, “Louise Tobin Blues,” with lyrics written by Tobin herself, provides perhaps her strongest statement of independence and self-determination. Drawing from hours of interviews, recordings, and archival sources from the Louise Tobin and Peanuts Hucko Collection, I argue that while her life in music in many ways challenged traditional gender stereotypes, Tobin’s song offered her a forum for a more significantly gendered form of self-expression that would not have been acceptable in contemporary mainstream discourse.