

January 19, 2011

2011-01-19: Profiling the “First Lady of Song”

Jason Kornwitz
Northeastern University

Recommended Citation

Kornwitz, Jason, "2011-01-19: Profiling the “First Lady of Song”" (2011). *News@Northeastern*. Paper 789. <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20002032>

This work is available open access, hosted by Northeastern University.

Profiling the "First Lady of Song"



Northeastern University music professor Judith Tick is writing a biography of legendary jazz vocalist Ella Fitzgerald. Photo by Mary Knox Merrill.

January 19, 2011

Judith Tick, Matthews Distinguished Professor of **Music** at Northeastern University, has been awarded a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities to write a biography of legendary jazz vocalist Ella Fitzgerald.

Tick, a pioneer in the study of women and music, will be one of the first music historians to chronicle Fitzgerald's rise from an amateur entertainer in Harlem to one of the most beloved interpreters of the Great American Songbook.

"There is brilliant jazz criticism about Fitzgerald, and a highly respected biography, but I intend to use new archival sources to develop a richer context for Fitzgerald's life and work," says Tick, a self-described "second-wave feminist historian" who grew up listening to Fitzgerald, Judy Garland and Frank Sinatra.

"My job is to reconstruct what Fitzgerald's experiences would have been like as she moved from an African-American woman in a racist society to a figure of great cultural power and authority."

Tick has a long history of scholarship in American music. Her biography on American composer and folk musician Ruth Crawford Seeger is considered a classic in the field and figured prominently in her 2004 induction into the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

Last year, she was elected as an honorary member of the American Musicological Society for her scholarship in women's studies and American music.

Tackling Fitzgerald's extraordinary accomplishments in music and society — she won 14 Grammy Awards and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from George H. W. Bush over a 59-year career — is Tick's latest challenge.

But she's prepared to paint an expansive picture of the artist known as the "First Lady of Song."

To do so, Tick is drawing on interviews with Fitzgerald's family and friends, analyzing heaps of photographs and videotapes and examining thousands of pages of scores from the Ella Fitzgerald Collection at the Smithsonian Institute.

She's also conducting research at the Northeastern University Library, which houses digitized versions of three major historical African-American newspapers.

"This is a major commitment on the part of Northeastern to give scholars and students access to the intellectual revolution of our time," says Tick.

She plans to begin writing the biography in the fall and expects the book to hit the shelves sometime within the next three to five years.

The structure and content of the biography will emerge naturally through her research.

"I don't start out with many preconceptions," says Tick. "What I do know is that Fitzgerald's voice was of the kind that comes along once in a century."

View selected publications of Judith Tick in IRis, Northeastern's [digital archive](#).

For more information, please contact Jason Kornwitz at 617-373-5729 or at j.kornwitz@neu.edu.

Archives

The following news stories and features are available. For information about older content, please contact University Communications and Public Relations at (617) 373-5471.

2011

January
February
March
April

Share



Like

Sign Up to see what your friends like.

[Northeastern Home](#) | [Find Faculty & Staff](#) | [Find A-Z](#) | [Search](#)

© 2010 Northeastern University · 360 Huntington Ave., Boston, Massachusetts 02115 · 617.373.2000 · TTY 617.373.3768