The Other WAC Band

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts by Heidi Simmons December 2011

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The Other Wac Band

By

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FADE IN

Female voices hum the Delta Blues song. “Lord I Just can’t Keep From Crying.”

INT. CLAPBOARD CHURCH - DAY

A simple, small, country church. Four pews each side, a pulpit on a low platform with folding chairs. A battered stand-up base leans against a worn upright piano.

The hums of “Lord I Just can’t Keep From Crying” turn to words. CHEREE DUNCAN, 23, a beautiful black woman in dungarees, hair wrapped in a bandana, sings and scrubs a wood floor between narrow pews. MRS. DUNCAN, 45, dressed like her daughter, sings in harmony.

MRS. DUNCAN
Lordie. Gonna miss your help.

Cheree stretches, picks up a bucket and cleaning supplies.

MRS. DUNCAN
Sure ya can’t stay for service?

A light skinned little girl, JESSIE, 4, runs down the aisle to Cheree. Jessie, hands out, waits to be picked-up.

JESSIE
Mama.

Cheree nudges the child around, gives her a slight push away.

CHEREE
I’m done here. Let’s have supper.

MRS. DUNCAN
Y’all go on ahead.

Mrs. Duncan sits in the pew, stares ahead. Cheree sets down the supplies, rests her hand on her mother’s shoulder. Cheree kisses her mother’s head.

RAYMOND, 35, a dapper black man, stands in the door. Jessie takes his hand.

CHEREE
(to Raymond)
Thanks for watching Jessie.

RAYMOND
She’s a fine child.
JESSIE
Can Raymond have supper with us?

INT. DUNCAN HOME - DAY

Cheree and Mrs. Duncan, nicely dressed, serve supper to Jessie, Raymond and REVEREND DUNCAN, 50s. He has a white mustache and soul patch.

REVEREND DUNCAN
Raymond’s managing one of the largest farms in the area.

CHEREE
Yes Daddy, I know. I worked domestic there for years.

Cheree pours buttermilk into Jessie’s glass.

REVEREND DUNCAN
(to Raymond)
Any trouble?

RAYMOND
Less since the war started. White men either off fighting or busy working for the effort.

The Reverend gives Cheree a hard look as she fills his glass.

REVEREND DUNCAN
I’m not in favor of war or people exploiting it for profit.

CHEREE
There’s real evil in this world.

Mrs. Duncan hands a plate of steaming greens to Raymond.

MRS. DUNCAN
What’ch ya growing?

RAYMOND
Cotton. We’ve tripled the crop. Being used to make canvas.

Mrs. Duncan and Cheree sit at the table. Everyone joins hands for prayer.

REVEREND DUNCAN
Thank you Lord for this food and this home. Give us strength to go forth and do good. Grant us peace. Amen.
They all respond with Amen.

EXT. DUNCAN HOME - THAT EVENING

A rural dirt road slices through thin woods. The simple white clapboard church is next door to the Duncan home. Raymond and Cheree walk, Jessie skips ahead.

RAYMOND
Mr. Otis promised a bonus. Eventually, I’ll buy my own farm.

Raymond stops, turns to Cheree. Cheree looks ahead.

CHEREE
Jessie!

Raymond takes Cheree’s hand.

RAYMOND
Cheree, I can provide for you and the child. Stay. Marry me.

CHEREE
Ray, you’re a good man. But I want a different life.

Jessie runs back to Cheree and Raymond, studies her mother. Cheree turns back toward home, walks. Jessie follows.

INT. DUNCAN HOME - THAT NIGHT

The Reverend strums a worn guitar. He and Cheree end a Delta-Blues song, “It’s Nobody’s Fault But Mine.” Mrs. Duncan knits, Jessie’s asleep, her head on Mrs. Duncan’s lap.

REVEREND DUNCAN
It don’t make sense to me.

CHEREE
I see how they look at me. Her.

Cheree looks at Jessie, pushes her hair from her face.

REVEREND DUNCAN
Cheree, you can’t run away from your life.
EXT. DUNCAN HOME - DAWN

Early morning light. Cheree walks down the dirt road with a small suitcase. The Reverend, Mrs. Duncan and Jessie watch from the porch.

DISSOLVE

A Donald Duck cartoon logo dissolves into silly, animated Nazi Stormtroopers, who march and sing, “Der Fuehrer’s Face.” In Donald Duck’s nightmare, he awakens as a crazed German who salutes pictures of Hitler, Hirohito and Mussolini...

EXT. FORT EVERETT - NIGHT

A maze of buildings on a southern military base. The Disney anti-Nazi propaganda cartoon continues on an outdoor screen. A small audience of white soldiers laugh and hoot.

SUPER: FORT EVERETT, MISSISSIPPI, 1944

INT. REHEARSAL HALL - NIGHT

A BAND, about 30 members, all white women, are dressed in tan, trim, military uniforms. It’s the Woman Army Corps Band. The WAC Band finishes “In The Mood”. The female conductor, SERGEANT WATERS, 30s, taps her baton. They stop.

SERGEANT WATERS
We’ll play “In The Mood” last. I want control. Understand? No jigaboo stuff. Warm up.

The women get back to playing music.

Cheree, in a military uniform, walks in. She carries a bucket in one hand and cleaning supplies in the other.

A burly blonde, JACKSON, 30s, stops playing her saxophone.

JACKSON
Speaking of jigaboo.

Sergeant Waters looks at her, points.

SERGEANT WATERS
Spill’s over there.

Cheree quickly cleans the mess.

CHEREE
(to Waters)
Anyone taking care of the instrument?
JACKSON
Never lay a hand on our instruments. Your kind is here for one thing, dirty duty.

The other women stop playing. The rehearsal hall is quiet.

SERGEANT WATERS
You’re done here. Dismissed.

EXT. BASE GROUNDS
Cheree lugs her cleaning supplies into a brick building.

INT. BATHROOM
Cheree, on her knees in a tight stall, cleans a toilet. She plops the toilet brush in a bucket, grabs the cleaning supplies and backs out.

LIEUTENANT’S OFFICE
On the wall, a picture of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and military accolades. A big shell casing sits on the desk.

A white LIEUTENANT, 40s, straightens his desk. Cheree stands at attention.

CHEREE
Sir, all finished. Took care of the WAC Band as you requested.

LIEUTENANT
Thank you Private Duncan. Appreciate you volunteering. You’re dismissed.

Cheree lingers, fidgets.

LIEUTENANT
Is there a problem Private Duncan?

WENDELL ROBERTS, 25, a handsome black man in uniform, pops in.

CHEREE
Sir, I want to request a transfer.

LIEUTENANT
This isn’t summer camp. We’re at war. Your service is important to the function of this base.
CHERE
Sir, it’s not the work. It’s Mississippi.

WENDELL
Excuse me, Sir. Your wife is here.

LIEUTENANT
Private Duncan, you’re dismissed.

LIEUTENANT
Corporal, send my wife in.

The Lieutenant’s WIFE, 40s, in an evening gown and gloves, waits at the door, gives Cheree space as she leaves.

The Lieutenant’s wife goes into her husband’s office.

LIEUTENANT’S WIFE
(Southern drawl)
Hello darlin’. It’s a bit disturbing having these darkies running around so liberally. I know you love that boy of yours but really, you’d think he owns the place. So uppity.

LIEUTENANT
Please don’t call them that.

LIEUTENANT’S WIFE
What? Uppity?

She runs her finger along his desk, checks for dust.

LIEUTENANT
They’re soldiers. And good ones.

LIEUTENANT’S WIFE
All right. What ever you say, Lieutenant.
(she salutes)
I just think you give them too much freedom.

HALL

Wendell catches up to Cheree.

WENDELL
The Lieutenant is required to submit the transfer.
CHEREE
Thanks Wendell. Can you help me with the paperwork?

WENDELL
The problem is there’s not many military bases with colored women. Or for that matter, colored men.

INT. OFFICERS’ CLUB - DANCE HALL AND KITCHEN - NIGHT

MEN and WOMEN on a crowded floor, dance to “In The Mood.” People dine at formal tables.

ON STAGE
The WAC Band plays. Sergeant Waters waves her baton.
The WACs turn sheet music, watch Sergeant Waters for cues. She points to a saxophone player, LOUISE, 20s. Louise stands, wails. Waters, irked, motions for her to sit.

THE DANCE FLOOR
A sea of smiling Caucasians, men in uniform and women in evening gowns, conservatively dance. The Lieutenant and his wife move in sync like everyone else.

DINING AREA
An empty table covered with used dishes, glasses and silver ware. Cigarette butts are stuck in left-over food, float in water glasses, etc.

Wendell wears white gloves, a dress shirt, black bow-tie and pants. He moves with the music as he busses the table. His tray is over-loaded.

Wendell hoists the awkward tray to his shoulder.
He manages to keep the beat and avoid dancers as he makes his way toward the KITCHEN’S SWING DOOR.

KITCHEN
A group of BLACK WOMEN wash dishes, mop, put away food.

Cheree, watches the band through the port-hole window in the kitchen swing-door. She dries a pan.

BAM. Wendell backs through the swing door with his tray. He rams into Cheree. Her pan twirls to the floor. Wendell teeters, saves the tray and miraculously regains his balance.
CHEREE
(soft)
They missed a measure.

Wendell trips on the spinning pan. Cheree tries to help, but he, the loaded tray, and Cheree crash to the floor.

Wendell lifts Cheree from the floor, to her surprise he whirls her to the music. Food falls off their clothes. Wendell leads Cheree: pushes, pulls, twirls. They boogie-woogie.

The kitchen staff claps and dances. It’s loose and fun.

The kitchen door swings open. The Lieutenant enters. Everyone comes to attention and salutes.

LIEUTENANT
At ease.

The Lieutenant steps over the mess on the floor.

WENDELL
My fault, Sir. Just having fun.

The Lieutenant is in Wendell’s face.

LIEUTENANT
This is not the place.

WENDELL
We just want to dance. Sir.

There’s a murmur of agreement: “uh huh,” “that’s right,” “amen,” etc. The Lieutenant looks around.

LIEUTENANT
You’d need your own band. Colored musicians.

Cheree keeps her eyes down.

LIEUTENANT
Now get the tables cleared and this kitchen cleaned up.

The Lieutenant leaves. The kitchen staff gets back to work. Cheree and Wendell clean the mess on the floor.

WENDELL
It’d be nice to have a party with live music and dancing.
CHEREE
Maybe I could help with music.

WENDELL
If you’re in, I’m in.

Cheree washes dishes. Wendell spins around.

WENDELL
(to kitchen staff)
How many of you girls play an instrument?

Wendell raises his hand in the air and looks around. JOSIE, 19, petit and plain, holds her hand up.

Josie
I play clarinet.

Wendell slaps his hands together.

WENDELL
Great. Anyone else?

Wendell moves among the girls. He sees RUBY, 35, polishing an already shiny surface. She avoids his eyes.

Ruby
Well, I don’t read music but I can play the fiddle and banjo.

CHEREE
Ruby, if you can play those, you can play anything.

WENDELL
Anyone else play? Or would like to?

Mae, 18, shy, big-boned, wraps food.

Mae
I’d have to learn, but I could use my brother’s trumpet. Leon’s serving over seas. He’d be happy it got some use.

WENDELL
Hot dog! We’re gonna have a party.
CHEREE
(to Wendell)
But how?

Wendell gets down on one knee, takes Cheree’s hand. The
kitchen staff watch.

WENDELL
Where there’s a Wendell, there’s a
way.

The kitchen staff cheers. Cheree slides her hand free.

INT. BATHROOM - STALL - DAY

Cheree, on her knees, scours a toilet.

From somewhere in the building, the sound of TUNING
instruments wafts into the bathroom.

RUBY (OS)
The girls are all energized about
this party.

CHEREE
Take our minds off our troubles.

RUBY (OS)
I hear those white WACs actually
get paid to play music, and travel
all over the world playing it.

CHEREE
They’re paid to play music like
we’re paid to clean, that’s all.

BATHROOM

A row of sinks and mirrors. Ruby polishes a chrome faucet.

RUBY
Well, I want that job.

Cheree emerges from the stall. She trades the toilet brush
for a mop. She mops the floor.

CHEREE
I’ve never been paid to play music.
Think they’ve been paid to clean.

The wafting music is now a full harmonic scale warm-up.
RUBY
I got money saved. Nearly thirty dollars. Gonna buy me a sax.

CHEREE
What if it’s not your instrument.

RUBY
Oh, it’s my instrument.

The bathroom door opens. Cheree and Ruby stand at attention. It’s Wendell. He’s in uniform, stands in the doorway.

WENDELL
Hellllooo.

RUBY
Oooh, you startled us.

Wendell checks the hall then steps into the bathroom. He has files under his arm.

CHEREE
This is a white ladies room.

WENDELL
There’s a trombone player. She bakes in Mess One. She can meet tonight and bring friends.

CHEREE
We have a place?

WENDELL
We do. The rehearsal hall. Eighteen hundred hours. Gotta get the word out we’re gonna party.

Wendell adjusts his heavy file load, exits the bathroom.

CHEREE
He sure is determined.

RUBY
He knows what he wants. You.

Cheree mops. Ruby laughs, wipes a mirror. The harmonic warm-up crescendos.

The bathroom is sparkling clean. Cheree and Ruby gather their supplies.

The bathroom door opens. A gaggle of noisy women, the white WAC Band, in uniform, surge into the bathroom.
Cheree and Ruby are trapped against the wall. Women use the toilets and sinks. They primp in the mirror.

Jackson pushes her way into a stall.

The WAC, Louise, stands next to Cheree, waits for the next available stall.

LOUISE
Our only break for the next four hours. Our band leader’s strict.

CHERRIE
You play the saxophone.

LOUISE
That’s right. You’ve heard us?

CHERRIE
That Sergeant never lets you loose when you solo.

Ruby gives Cheree a look.

LOUISE
You’re exactly right. She’s working on her own “arrangements”. Said I’ll be docked if I try it again. Corporal Louise Pierson.

Louise extends her hand. Cheree wipes her hand on her skirt and they shake.

CHERRIE
Private Cheree Duncan.

LOUISE
You cleaned the rehearsal hall. Sorry about that. Sergeant gets mean before performance. Where did you learn about music?

CHERRIE
My father. He studied with Orson Wannamaker. He’s a Negro musician.

LOUISE
Wannamaker! From the speakeasy days? Plays sax. You play like Wannamaker?

CHERRIE
He’s my godfather. Maybe learned a thing or two.
LOUISE
Bet you move and groove.

Ruby nods at Cheree, mouths “move and groove.”

A stall opens and Louise steps inside.

Jackson exits the stall, kicks over the dirty water bucket.

Grimy water spills over Cheree’s shoes and floods the clean floor. Women SHRIEK.

Cheree rights the bucket, grabs the mop, cleans.

Ruby sees the whole thing. Jackson stares Ruby down, bumps Ruby, heads to the sinks. Ruby mops.

RUBY
(softly to Cheree)
She did it on purpose.

Jackson washes her hands.

Some of the bathroom traffic clears. Wet, dirty footprints crisscross the floor.

Jackson watches Cheree and Ruby in the REFLECTION of the mirror. She shakes her wet hands, splatters the mirror, grabs a paper towel, smacks her hands dry.

Jackson turns, glares at Cheree and Ruby. Jackson drops the used paper towel on the floor, heads right for them.

Ruby SEES the name patch: P. JACKSON. Ruby lowers her head.

Cheree, a foot shorter than Jackson, stands tall, locks eyes with Jackson. Jackson pokes Cheree.

JACKSON
Stick to cleaning. Nobody wants your nigger music.

CHEREE
Our service has the same value as yours. I take pride in my work. Do you?

Louise comes out of the stall.

LOUISE
(matter of fact)
Hey Jackson.
Louise moves between Cheree and Jackson. The confrontation is neutralized. Jackson scowls.

The bathroom door opens. Sergeant Waters leans in.

WATERS
Let’s go soldiers. Break’s over.

Jackson sneers at Cheree, leaves the bathroom.

RUBY
I’m not sure what just happened, but I’m glad it didn’t.

CHEREE
(to Louise)
I didn’t need your help.

The WAC Band hustles out. Louise washes her hands, talks to Cheree’s reflection.

LOUISE
It’s Jackson who needs help. She has a problem with--

CHEREE
Colored people?

Louise dries her hands, turns to Cheree and Ruby.

LOUISE
All people. Private Duncan, so you know, we take care of the instruments ourselves. We’re not assigned any help. How about sometime we jam?

Cheree mops. Louise throws the paper towel in the trash

RUBY
A few of us are getting together tonight. Eighteen hundred hours. The rehearsal hall.

Louise hurries out. Cheree and Ruby are alone.

INT. REHEARSAL HALL - NIGHT

Cheree and Ruby sit in the WAC Band’s rehearsal room. It has folding chairs and music stands. There’s a podium, a metal desk, an upright piano and a row of cupboards.

Wendell bursts in the door.
WENDELL
They’re coming.

Wendell marches to the cupboards. He whips out a ring of keys, unlocks a cupboard door, opens it wide.

Music cases of different shapes are stacked inside.

CHEREE
We’re not doing anything wrong here, are we?

WENDELL
I’m still looking into the policy and laws.

Ruby looks over the cases. Cheree takes out a trumpet case.

RUBY
Which one has a saxophone in it?

Wendell grabs a case, hands it to Ruby. She opens the case but is uncertain how to put the sax together.

Cheree takes out the trumpet, puts on the mouth piece. Plays several notes perfectly.

RUBY
Your horn is all together.

Cheree helps Ruby assemble the sax.

Ruby closes the empty case. A name is written on the outside: P. JACKSON

RUBY
Uh oh.

Cheree looks at the case.

CHEREE
It’s one thing using the WAC Band’s room but their instruments?

WENDELL
They’re military issue. The Army owns them. We’re army.

Cheree takes the sax from Ruby.

CHEREE
Don’t be afraid to get the reed real nice and wet.
Cheree licks her lips, wets the reed and mouth piece and plays a scale. She hands it to Ruby who mimics her action.

Cheree tracks Wendell as he scurries around the room. The sax SQUEAKS and SQUAWKS.

Cheree adjusts Ruby’s fingers, makes small corrections as she plays. Ruby’s squeaks become notes.

    CHEREE
    (to Ruby)
    Tight cheeks, wet reed.

Wendell’s at the last cupboard, he tries the key, it doesn’t work.

    WENDELL
    I need to get the key to this cupboard.

Wendell leaves. Ruby plays a scale.

    CHEREE
    Ruby, you’re a natural. Use the strap.

Ruby adjusts the strap, attaches it to the sax.

A tall black woman, DARLENE, 25, walks in with a trombone case. TWO BLACK WOMEN and TWO BLACK MEN follow.

    DARLENE
    I’m Corporal Darlene Young. We all work in mess one. You Cheree?

    CHEREE
    Yes and that’s Ruby.

Darlene waves at Ruby, shakes Cheree’s hand. The men and women nod, wave and shake hands

    DARLENE
    Where’s the party?

    CHEREE
    I’m not sure.

    DARLENE
    I’m from San Francisco. Played professional for three years before signing up. Belonged to the union there.
RUBY
You were paid to play?

DARLENE
Yep. With the men away, we were playing and getting paid for it.

CHEREE
Make yourself at home.

Darlene takes a seat, puts her trombone together.

Ruby, sax harnessed around her neck, shows the new women and men the instruments. They chatter like old friends.

Cheree stands up front. Tuning starts.

Mae and Josie enter followed by THREE BLACK WOMEN with instrument cases.

Mae holds up a music case.

MAE
Got my brother’s trumpet.

JOSIE
Wow! Where did everyone come from?
Is there a clarinet?

RUBY
Josie, over here.

Josie and the three women go pick out instruments.

MAE
(to Cheree)
I’ll sit with the trumpet girls.

Mae takes a seat chats with another woman who helps her get started.

Josie finds a clarinet, takes a seat and assembles the instrument.

A warm up has started. It’s loud and chaotic.

Wendell comes in.

WENDELL
Great. You’ve started.

CHEREE
I’m gonna ask Darlene to lead.
She’s got experience and rank.
WENDELL
Whatever you want.

Wendell goes back to the last locked cupboard.

Cheree sits next to Darlene, waits for her to finish a scale.

Wendell opens the cupboard. Sheet music is organized and stacked.

Cheree fiddles with Darlene’s trombone.

CHEREE
Nicely done, Darlene. Adjust the slide and you’ll get that clarity. Would you consider...

Cheree notices Darlene is not paying attention. The room is suddenly quiet.

Louise stands in the room. Cheree jumps up, goes to Louise.

LOUISE
Those our instruments?

CHEREE
Corporal Pierson. No. I’m sorry you can’t be here.

The women, stunned, watch the exchange.

LOUISE
Call me Louise. We’re all musicians on our own time.

CHEREE
Yes, but we’re not all white. We didn’t make the laws.

Cheree maneuvers her out the door.

LOUISE
Another time.

Wendell steps from behind the cupboard door. He holds sheet music, looks around the silent room. He’s puzzled.

CHEREE
I nominate Darlene to lead practice. She’s a professional musician and a Corporal.

The women murmur. Wendell watches.
RUBY
I nominate Private Duncan.

DARLENE
Let’s put it to a vote. All those in favor of Private Duncan say Aye.

A resounding AYE fills the room including Darlene. Cheree looks at Wendell who smiles and nods.

CHEREE
Okay. Warm up with a C scale.

Cheree picks up her trumpet, plays the scale. The ladies join in. It’s awful.

CHEREE
Stop. Just the C. Tune to the C.

Cheree plays C, Darlene adjusts her trombone, Ruby wets her lips, tightens her cheeks. A clear note comes through.

As they move up the scale, Cheree walks through the group, helps with fingering, rearranges the musicians, pulls shoulders back, squeezes puffed-out cheeks, adjusts instruments.

Cheree raises her hands. They complete an entire scale in tune and harmonious.


The group continues to play the scale. Cheree studies the music.

CHEREE
(to Wendell)
“Taking A Chance On Love?”

WENDELL
This arrangement has a trumpet solo.

The group looks at the music in front of them.

CHEREE
How many of you can read music?

More than half raise their hands.

Ruby turns the sheet music upside down to see if it makes a difference. She identifies the top and puts it right.
RUBY
Let’s give it a go.

Some agree.

CHEREE
Let’s have fun. Join in, keep up or sit out.

Cheree raises her hand for a down beat. They play. Darlene and the other professionals carry the tune. It sounds okay even with the random squeaks and squawks.

Wendell sits at the piano and plays.

Cheree plays trumpet, Josie plays clarinet. Mae sits out.

Ruby, her sax ready, listens, gets the beat and plays it nearly perfect. She never looks at the music.

CLOSE ON MUSIC — The music reads: SOLO. Cheree puts down her instrument, points to another trumpeter to take the solo. The woman stands and wails.

The piece ends. Silence. Everyone stares at Cheree.

CHEREE
Good.
(long beat)
Let’s try another piece.

LATER

The ladies clean and polish the borrowed instruments. With great care, they put them away.

WENDELL
We’re gonna need a place.

Cheree collects the music. Neatly stacks it in order. Most of the girls leave the room.

RUBY
I put Jackson back. Nice and neat.

Cheree’s confused.

CHEREE
Jackson?

RUBY
The sax. I call it Jackson.
CHEREEN
Oh. She would not be pleased.

Ruby gives Cheree a squeeze, runs out.

Wendell takes the music from Cheree, puts it in the folder and carefully slides it back into the cupboard.

WENDELL
You were terrific.

CHEREEN
Me? You sure can tickle the ivory.

Cheree and Wendell walk to the door. Cheree turns off the lights. They leave the room.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

WENDELL
I’ve a good feeling about this.

They walk down the dark hall.

CHEREEN
What next?

WENDELL
We dance.

Wendell grabs Cheree, they dance down the hall.

DISSOLVE

EXT. MESS TWO - DAY

A wood frame building. The Black mess hall. Cheree and Ruby cross the grounds. Louise leaves a group of white women, hurries to Cheree and Ruby.

LOUISE
How did it go last night?

RUBY
It was great. I’m Ruby, sax.

LOUISE
Louise. Also, sax.

Cheree keeps walking. Louise keeps up with Cheree.
LOUISE
I hope we can be friends and play
together sometime. Some of us
would appreciate the opportunity to
jam, have some fun.

CHEREEN
It’s not for me to decide.

LOUISE
We’re not all like Jackson.

Cheree and Ruby go into the building.

INT. ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING - LONG HALL

Wendell slides into view.

WENDELL
Been looking for you. Got a place.
The USO. Just across the way.
Have to be out by twenty-three
hundred but that works since we
gotta be on base by twenty-four.

RUBY
This is exciting.

CHEREEN
When?

WENDELL
Tonight.

CHEREEN
Tonight? RUBY
Tonight!

RUBY
I gotta get my work done. And my
hair done. What do I wear? What
does a sax player wear.

Ruby rushes off.

WENDELL
Gotta let people know!

CHEREEN
It’s off base and on our time?

WENDELL
How bad can it be?
INT. USO QUONSET HUT - NIGHT

A long, rusted, Quonset hut with old cots, folding chairs, a few tables and an upright piano.

Cheree, Ruby, Wendell, Darlene, Mae, Josie and 15 others stand in the door with instrument cases, music folders and baked goods.

WENDELL
Been by this place but never inside.

Cheree sings a note.

CHEREE
Nice acoustics. We’ll set chairs up front.

Wendell stacks instrument cases on the piano and rolls it toward the other end.

RUBY
Push these cots and tables aside, and we’ll have a dance floor.

Everyone digs in, grabs chairs, moves cots, pushes tables. Cheree and Darlene organizes the chairs in front.

More black men and women arrive, some with instruments. Forty people mingle.

Wendell plays boogie on the piano.

The musicians take their seats. They fix chairs for music stands, organize the sheet music and start to warm up.

Louise and three white WACs, ALICE, MERT and JANE approach Cheree.

LOUISE
Ruby invited us. I’m only hoping we can keep up.

CHEREE
Find a seat Louise.

The white women sit by others with the same instruments.

CHEREE
We’re here to have a good time. Let’s start with “In the Mood”. Join in, keep up or sit out.
Cheree gives the first note. They tune to it. Cheree counts the rhythm and plays the rousing beginning on her trumpet. The others join in.

More men and women party. 60 people clap and cheer. They dance. The music is up tempo, exuberant and loud. Mistake are made but no one minds.

Cheree keeps close attention on the 25 musicians. As she conducts she points and gestures to musicians for more or less: tempo, volume, etc.

Some in the crowd drink alcohol and pass it around.

Cheree points to Louise for a saxophone solo. She encourages her to cut loose. Louise goes further than ever before. Ruby stands and plays a counterpoint.

In different parts of the music, Cheree cues Josie to solo, has Darlene stand, solo, and Mert play a trumpet riff.

The crowd dances. The dancing is wild and stylistic. Great dancers take the center of the floor, it’s a joyful competition.

Cheree keeps the piece going until everyone is playing along, even Mae.

Cheree finishes the piece. An eruption of applause, cheers.

DISSOLVE

LATER

The Quonset hut is packed. There are white folks in the crowd. People sit on the stacked cots, talk and drink. More musicians sit-in with the band.

Wendell makes his way to Cheree.

WENDELL
We gotta be outta here in fifteen minutes. Gonna make an announcement. Wrap it up.

Cheree wraps up. Wendell climbs on top of the piano.

WENDELL
Ladies and Gentlemen that concludes our party for tonight. Thank you for coming. Good night.

The crowd is not happy. They boo and hiss.
The visiting musicians play ROWDY JAZZ. Some of the crowd push to the exit, some dance. A fight breaks out.

CHEREES
(to the WACs)
Get our instruments and sheet music. We gotta get out of here.

Ruby, Darlene, Mae, Josie and the white WACs, collect the WAC band instruments and music. They hurry, struggle with the awkward cases.

Cheree and Louise, kneel, carefully put instruments away.

Wendell quickly collects the music into a folder.

The small fight turns to a big brawl. A DRUNK GUY is pushed into the musicians, stumbles over the WACs. He back peddles, tries to keep his drink upright as he plows into chairs and Wendell. Some sheet music flies, the drink spills.

Ruby rips the bottle from his hand, accidently hits Wendell in the head. The Drunk lands sitting in a chair. Sheet music falls in his lap.

Wendell grabs the music off his lap, the Drunk tips backward.

EXT. USO QUONSET HUT

Loud Jazz. A hundred people party outside.

A sheriff’s car arrives with sirens on. The SHERIFF and his MEN get out with shot guns. They stand by the car, cock their guns.

Four Military Police Jeeps and a paddy wagon pull up. MPs get out with flashlights. MPs push through the crowd.

INT. USO QUONSET HUT

The MPs blow whistles, break up the crowd, force everyone aside to get to the music. 10 BLACK GUYS sit and play.

Cheree, Ruby, Louise and the others in their group, follow Wendell in the dark. Loaded with instrument cases they creep by the MPs, the Sheriff and the chaos.

EXT. FORT EVERETT

Wendell leads them to a remote edge of the base. He unlocks a chain linked gate, everyone goes through. They sneak back onto the base.
EXT. USO QUONSET HUT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Everyone has gone.

SHERIFF
Burn it down.

One of the Sheriff’s men lights a gas soaked rag, throws it in the front door of the Quonset hut. The Quonset hut erupts in fire. The Sheriff and his men watch.

DISSOLVE

INT. LIEUTENANT’S OFFICE - DAY

Wendell, bruised face, stands at attention in front of the Lieutenant. The Lieutenant stands behind his desk.

LIEUTENANT
The USO was gutted by fire and the Sheriff says your party did it.

WENDELL
Sir, that is not true.

LIEUTENANT
More than half the colored population of this base and some whites missed curfew. I have nine men sleeping it off in the brig.

WENDELL
I think you’ll find morale is up.

LIEUTENANT
People here take Jim Crow laws very seriously. Fortunately no one was hurt. Well, not too badly.

The Lieutenant gestures to Wendell’s face.

WENDELL
We just want to have a good time.

The Lieutenant sits down.

LIEUTENANT
Rumors are the music was really good. I played with Tommy Dorsey before joining. Trombone. Music matters to me. I understand how it can make a difference.
WENDELL
Then let us keep playing, Sir.

LIEUTENANT
(long beat)
Keep it on base. And only women.
Colored women.

EXT. BASE GROUNDS - DAY
Wendell walks with files under his arm. Cheree and Ruby catch up to him.

CHEREEM
Got the instruments cleaned and back in place.

RUBY
The white WACs helped. Took all night to iron the sheet music. Sorry about your face.

CHEREEM
How’d it go with the Lieutenant?

WENDELL
We’re lucky I’m indispensable and he loves music. Gonna let us keep playing as long as it’s on base and with colored WACs.

CHEREEM
Wendell, I had fun. We’re lucky we didn’t get into trouble. But count me out.

Ruby stops walking. Wendell and Cheree stop.

RUBY
What? How can you say that?

CHEREEM
Ruby, I just can’t be involved.

Cheree walks off.

RUBY
Wendell, without Cheree there’s no music.

WENDELL
What can I do?
RUBY
What about all that, “Where there’s a Wendell” routine. As long as I’ve known her, this the first I’ve seen her happy. You just gonna leave it at that?

INT. REHEARSAL HALL - DAY

The white WAC band convenes for practice. Louise and her friends practice as the rest arrive.

SERGEANT WATERS
Hear about the Negros having a party and burning down their own USO?

LOUISE
Heard the music was great.

Jackson comes in, heads to the cupboard, takes out her sax, sits next to Louise. Louise watches Jackson assemble it.

JACKSON
No damn sweet rolls this morning. Heard the niggers are getting court-martialed.

Jackson attaches the strap to her sax and lifts the sax over her head. The saxophone hangs too short.

LOUISE
Let’s hope not. How will we eat, get our laundry done or have our floors polished. They deserve our respect.

Jackson, adjusts the strap.

JACKSON
There’s something going on with those Nigger WACs and I’m gonna find out. I can feel it.

SERGEANT WATERS
Let’s not waste our time. Warm-up.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Cheree squeezes out a mop, plops it onto the floor. Wendell stays out of the way as she cleans.
WENDELL
How’d you learn so much about music?

CHEREE
I read music before I could read words. My father would take me all over Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, wherever he was playing.

WENDELL
He famous?

CHEREE
The Reverend? I don’t really know. He stopped taking me when I was thirteen. By then, I guess I learned something.

WENDELL
Must be proud of you.

CHEREE
Maybe, but he doesn’t approve.

WENDELL
Of your playing?

CHEREE
He doesn’t approve of me being a soldier. Thinks I’m running away.

WENDELL
From what?

Cheree stops mopping.

CHEREE
Wendell, I have a child. She’s a beautiful little girl, but there’s no life for us in Mississippi.

WENDELL
Didn’t know you were married.

Cheree mops.

CHEREE
Not any more.

Wendell grabs the mop handle.
WENDELL

If I help you get your transfer
will you help with the music?

INT. REHEARSAL HALL - NIGHT

Darlene leads the all girl, colored band. The band has grown
to 30. Cheree is not in the room. They play “It Don’t Mean
A Thing”. The tune is recognizable but the few bars are off
tempo, with scattered notes and wandering focus.

DARLENE

Not bad. Let’s do it again.

RUBY

We played it three times and each
time it’s worse.

The women murmur. Darlene is perplexed. Wendell hands her
new sheet music. She studies it, not sure what to do.

Some women sigh, some put down their instruments, others
dismantle theirs.

Cheree walks in. The women perk up, stop what they’re doing.
Darlene sees Cheree.

DARLENE

Thank God you’re here.

CHEREE

Sorry I’m late. Shall I continue?

They all cheer. Darlene takes her seat. Wendell nods.

LATER

CHEREE

Good work everybody. Let’s find
time for lessons and practice. And
we need our own instruments.

RUBY

When’s our next party?

WENDELL

When we have a place.

The women agree and collect their things.

WENDELL

Knew you’d come back.
CHEREE
I want that transfer.

WENDELL
You need music.

INT. BACK WOODS JUKE JOINT - NIGHT

The small venue is full. All in uniform, Wendell, Cheree, Ruby, Mae and Josie, Louise and her friends, cram around a table in a wood paneled room. A band plays jazz and Delta Blues.

LOUISE
(to Cheree)
Where does it come from?

CHEREE
Most never had lessons. Growd up playing and figuring it out on their own. It comes from their soul. They feel it.

A black man stares at Cheree. He wanders the room, doesn’t take his eyes off her.

Cheree doesn’t notice the man but Wendell does. Wendell approaches the man. MORRIS, 25. He is simple, an innocent.

WENDELL
Something I can help you with?

MORRIS
That girl, she The Reverend’s daughter?

WENDELL
You know her?

MORRIS
Since we’re kids. She’s even more beautiful. And taller.


CHEREE
(to Morris)
Morris Venden, it’s been years. How’s Catfish? He still playing?

MORRIS
He here.
Morris stands and points.

CHEREE
(to Wendell)
I’ll be right back.

Wendell watches Cheree embrace an old black man, white eyed with long grey whiskers. It’s BLIND DADDY CATFISH.

Morris leads CATFISH to the stage, Cheree returns to Wendell.

WENDELL
You know him?

CHEREE
Friend of my father’s. Blind Daddy Catfish.

Catfish grabs his horn.

CATFISH
There be a special girl here tonight. Make her come up. Cheree don’t leave me standing alone.

The joint claps and hoots. Cheree goes to the stage.

Catfish and a small band play, Elvie Thomas’s “Motherless Child.” Cheree’s voice is soft, it cracks. She stops, then belts out the emotional and soulful song with Catfish’s horn accompaniment. It stuns Wendell and the audience.

LATER

Catfish sits with Cheree and her group. They huddle to hear.

CATFISH
Your daddy say music is righteous.
Have to be hospitable to the sound and it’s meaning. He ‘The Reverend’ long before he a preacher.

Wendell puts his hand in Catfish’s and shakes it.

WENDELL
Honor to meet you, Sir.

Cheree stands, takes Catfish’s hand. Catfish gets up. The others leave Cheree and Catfish. He hugs her again.

CATFISH
I can hear your pain. Only music can heal hurt like that.
EXT. BACK WOODS JUKE JOINT - NIGHT

A military sedan waits for Cheree. Wendell is at the wheel. Ruby gets out so Cheree can slide in next to Wendell. Louise and Alice, Mert and Jane are in back with Mae and Josie on their laps.

Wendell drives.

CHEREE
Didn’t know that about my father.

WENDELL
I know our band has a singer.

DOWN THE ROAD

A police car follows the sedan, pulls Wendell over.

WENDELL
We’re gonna be fine.

The POLICEMAN approaches the car. Wendell gets out papers.

POLICEMAN
Boy you got permission to drive this vehicle?

Wendell hands him papers. The Policeman shines a flash light into the car, front seat and back. He holds the light on Louise. She shields her eyes.

POLICEMAN
You all right ma’am?

LOUISE
Yes, Sir.

POLICEMAN
Step out of the car, boy.

Wendell gets out of the car, walks with the policeman in front of the sedan’s lights.

The girls watch the men talk.

CHEREE
Jim Crow.

LOUISE
Who’s Jim Crow.

RUBY
Separate but equal.
CHEREE
Whites can’t be with blacks.

JOSIE
Real sad you girls ain’t black.

The Policeman punches Wendell in the gut, Wendell buckles. The women gasp. The Policeman comes back to the car, shines his light on Louise and her friends.

POLICEMAN
Ma’am I need you and you white girls out of the car.

LOUISE
Ain’t no white girls in this car
Sir. We all black.

The Policeman is confused. Shines his light around again.

LOUISE
Sir, we have Negro mammas and white daddies.

The Policeman steps back, goes over to Wendell who is now upright. He blocks the car’s head lights to see.

The Policeman says something, and Wendell comes back to the car, gets in. Wendell starts the car and speeds away.

CHEREE
You all right?

INT. REHEARSAL HALL – ANOTHER NIGHT

The black all-girl band plays “Begin The Beguine”.

SERIES OF SHOTS (CONTINUES OVER MUSIC):

The rehearsal hall. New girls join. Cheree helps a girl get fingering, prompts another to stand and hit the note.

In a lavish home, Mae gets work as a cleaning lady.

At a modest house, Josie takes laundry from a white family.

On the base, Ruby mops, studies notes.

Off the base, the all girl band waits for a bus. They get on, take seats in the back.

Downtown night clubs: At a white club, the girls use a side door, sit behind the stage. At a black club they sit in front of the stage. They study the musicians.
In the rehearsal hall, Darlene and girls practice, make changes and arrangements. Cheree repairs Mae’s trumpet. Ruby cleans P. Jackson’s saxophone. Switches the reed.

Louise and Ruby jam together.

Inside an old Honky-tonk, Josie and Mae take lessons with a black instructor.

In a modest home, Ruby cooks and cleans for a white family. She puts on a record and dances with the children.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

BACK TO REHEARSAL HALL

“Begin The Beguine” ends.

Louise comes into the rehearsal hall.

    LOUISE
    (to Cheree, Wendell)
    I think Sergeant Waters and Jackson know you’re using the instruments.

Wendell nods, considers.

    WENDELL
    I’ll take care of it.

INT. LIEUTENANT’S OFFICE - DAY

At the Lieutenant’s desk, Wendell assists the Lieutenant with paper work. Wendell points, the Lieutenant signs. Wendell collects the documents, puts them in folders.

    LIEUTENANT
    How’s your all-girl band?

    WENDELL
    Very good, Sir.

The Lieutenant closes a file, hands it to Wendell

    LIEUTENANT
    Nice work, Wendell.

    WENDELL
    Thank you, Sir.

    LIEUTENANT
    So, you need a place.
WENDELL
Yes, Sir.

Wendell pulls a folder from under his arm, opens it on the desk. The Lieutenant reads. Wendell rests at ease.

LIEUTENANT
Mess two. The colored dining room.

WENDELL
Yes, Sir. Since the USO is no longer available, we need your authorization to use the mess hall for recreational purposes.

The Lieutenant leans back in his chair. Stares at Wendell.

WENDELL
Everything in order, Sir?

LIEUTENANT
Yes. As always. Your work is excellent. Every detail.

WENDELL
Sir, then you’ll give permission?

The Lieutenant leans forward, pulls the papers close. He grabs his pen, crosses something out, then signs.

LIEUTENANT
They’re not to wear uniforms.

WENDELL
Yes, Sir!

LIEUTENANT
I’m looking forward to hearing what they got. Dismissed.

INT. HALLWAY

Wendell finds Cheree, he raises a folder, pulls out a flyer.

WENDELL
An invitation to a dance party.

CLOSE ON FLYER: Dance, Dance, Dance. Our very own all-girl band. Saturday Night, 18:00 hours, Mess Two. Come swing the night away.

CHEREE
What about Waters and Jackson?
WENDELL
All taken care of.

CHEREE
The Lieutenant gave permission?

WENDELL
In writing.

INT. REHEARSAL HALL - NIGHT

Darlene tunes her instrument. Some girls sit, chat with
instruments on their laps. There’s no sheet music on stands.

Cheree and Wendell enter.

CHEREE
What’s going on? Ruby, why don’t
you have Jackson out?

RUBY
Jackson’s gone.

CHEREE
Why? What happened?

JOSIE
She’s actually gone.

Darlene puts down her trombone.

DARLENE
The WAC band’s on a USO tour. So
are their instruments and music.

MAE
They’re gone for four weeks.

Cheree is stunned. She holds up the flyers.

CHEREE
We’ll need instruments by Saturday.

Wendell passes out the flyers. Darlene reads it, stands.

DARLENE
Party right here on base.

The girls whoop, cheer. Darlene throws a kiss to Cheree.

RUBY
I’ve got business.
Ruby grabs some flyers, dashes out.

JOSIE
I don’t have a clarinet

WENDELL
How many instruments are we short?

Several women raise their hands. Wendell takes note.

Cheree pulls Wendell by the arm, leads him to a corner.

CHEREE
You have something to do with this?

WENDELL
The USO tour? That’s above my pay grade.

CHEREE
You sure about that?

WENDELL
All things work together for good...

CHEREE
What about music?

WENDELL
I’ll figure it out.

CHEREE
You get instruments, I’ll get music.

EXT. CLAPBOARD CHURCH – DAY

Gospel music, “Let Your Light Shine On Me,” fills the air.

Cheree straightens her uniform, goes in.

INT. CLAPBOARD CHURCH

A service in progress. The CHOIR, mostly women in their Sunday best, continues with the rousing rendition.

Reverend Duncan plays his trumpet, directs the choir. An OLDER GENTLEMAN plays stand-up bass, ANOTHER plays the piano.

Cheree stands in back.
Reverend Duncan sees Cheree, stops playing. The music continues as he goes to Cheree. They hug.

He leads Cheree up front. She sings while her dad plays. Cheree smiles at Jessie.

On the first row, Mrs. Duncan hugs Jessie. Jessie smiles.

The CONGREGATION rises, claps and moves with the music. Raymond claps and sings.

The music ends. Reverend Duncan puts down his trumpet, takes a hanky, wipes perspiration from his forehead, moves to the pulpit.

    REVEREND DUNCAN
    Brothers and sisters, my daughter,
    Cheree Duncan. Serving God and
    country. Hallelujah.

Cheree sits next to her mother and Jessie.

Dissolve

EXT. CLAPBOARD CHURCH

Reverend Duncan greets his little flock as they leave the church. Cheree, Mrs. Duncan and Jessie stand next to him.

Raymond steps forward.

    RAYMOND
    Glad to see you. Nice singing.

    CHEREE
    Hello, Raymond.

Raymond shakes hands with the Duncans and walks away. The Duncans are alone.

    REVEREND DUNCAN
    (to Cheree)
    So good to have you in church. Look at you!

He salutes her.

    CHEREE
    Daddy. I have no rank.

    REVEREND DUNCAN
    You rank number one with me.

He hugs her again.
INT. DUNCAN HOME – DINING ROOM

The Duncan’s and Jessie finish eating. Jessie picks at a piece of sweet potato pie.

    REVEREND DUNCAN
    Catfish told me you sang with him.
    God gave music to heal the soul,
    lift the spirit. I’m so glad to hear you singing again even if it’s in the army. You have my blessing if that’s what you came for.

    CHEREE
    Daddy, I came for sheet music.

    DISSOLVE

INT. BUS – MOVING – DAY

Ruby sits at the back of a bus. She wears a winter coat and grips a purse on her lap.

DING Ruby pulls the cord for her stop.

CLOSE ON BUS DRIVER. He looks in the rearview mirror, sees Ruby stand for her stop. DING She yanks the cord again.

The bus slows. Ruby walks to the rear exit.

The driver accelerates.

    RUBY
    (to driver)
    Sir, this is my stop, please.

The bus passes her stop. A passenger laughs.

    RUBY
    Please. Sir. Stop the bus.

The driver ignores Ruby. She returns to a seat in the back.

DING. Ruby looks up. A white MAN gets up to exit, he glances at Ruby, gives her an opportunity for the door.

The bus stops. The man takes his time to exit, watches as Ruby rushes the rear door.

The bus lurches. Just before the door, Ruby falls, drops her purse. The door closes. Ruby crawls to her purse, stands. Her knee bleeds. She looks at the driver. He opens the door. Ruby exits.
EXT. DOWNTOWN DISTRICT - BUSY CITY STREET

Ruby makes her way down a sidewalk.

EXT. COUNTY MUSEUM

Ruby uses the "COLOREDS" entrance.

INT. COUNTY MUSEUM

Ruby finds an OFFICE door.

A plaque reads: WALTER WINSTON, CURATOR, AMERICAN HISTORY.

Ruby steps inside.

WINSTON’S OUTER OFFICE

A SECRETARY types.

RUBY
Hello, I’m Ruby Williams. I have an appointment with Mr. Winston.

SECRETARY
Yes. Nice to see you again. I’ll let him know. Please have a seat.

Ruby does. The secretary steps into an interior office.

Ruby holds her purse over her bloody knee.

The secretary reemerges.

SECRETARY
Mr. Winston will see you now.

RUBY
Thank you.

Ruby stands. The secretary sees Ruby’s injury.

SECRETARY
Can I get you something for your knee?

RUBY
No, thank you. It’s fine.

WINSTON’S PRIVATE OFFICE

Ruby enters. MR. WINSTON, 45, a distinguished white man, stands, moves a chair in front of his desk.
MR. WINSTON
Thank you for coming Miss Williams.

Ruby takes off her coat. Her military uniform is clean and pressed. She hangs her coat on a rack, sits down.

MR. WINSTON
I didn’t realize you were in the service.

RUBY
Yes, sir. Four generations.

Ruby reaches in her purse, pulls out a BRONZE MEDALLION the size of a silver dollar. It’s tied to a faded red and white striped RIBBON.

Ruby hands it to Mr. Winston. He uses a jeweler’s loop, looks it over.

Ruby reaches into her purse again, pulls out an old PHOTO.
CLOSE ON PHOTO. Black soldiers during the Civil War.

Ruby places her photo in front of Winston. She points to a man standing in front.

RUBY
That soldier in front is my grandfather. Captain Benjamin Williams.

Mr. Winston scrutinizes the photo.

MR. WINSTON
Miss Williams, this is wonderful. The museum would be honored to add this to our collection. Are you sure you really want to let it go?

RUBY
Yes. Did you talk to your board of directors about a price?

MR. WINSTON
I did. Based on the information you gave me, your grandfather’s service is unverifiable.

RUBY
Even with the medal and photo?

MR. WINSTON
I’m not questioning your word.
Ruby leans forward in her seat.

RUBY
Mr. Winston, my grandfather served with the Black Brigade out of Cincinnati. They didn’t even have weapons or uniforms when they fought Morgan’s Confederate Raiders who came north to terrorize citizens. My grandfather’s unit stopped them.

MR. WINSTON
There’s just so little that exists about free Negros serving in the Civil War.

RUBY
But the Black Brigade is recognized as the first formal organization of Northern Colored People for military service. That should make this even more valuable.

Mr. Winston takes a check from his desk and hands it to Ruby.

MR. WINSTON
It does.

Ruby looks at the check. She’s disappointed.

MR. WINSTON
It’s the best we can do. I promise you, this will be preserved for generations.

Ruby stands. Looks at the photo one last time.

MR. WINSTON
I’m honored to know you, Miss Williams.

Mr. Winston shakes Ruby’s hand and sees her out the door.

INT. OFFICERS’ CLUB - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Cheree, Ruby, Mae, Josie and others prepare food and clean. No music comes from the dance hall.

Wendell prepares a service tray with one dish of food.
WENDELL
Sure slow when there’s no music.

Josie stops washing dishes, mimes playing a clarinet. She HUMS her part, for “How About You.” Mae joins in, HUMS her trumpet part while she cleans.

WENDELL
That’s right, girls. Play it.

Wendell takes his tray out the swing door.

Ruby and the others scat-sing their instrumental parts. Some use pots and pans for percussion.

Cheree grabs a spatula, sings a cappella. A moment of fun.

EXT. MILITARY GROUNDS - DAY

Wendell and Cheree walk along the black barracks. Cheree holds music.

CHREEE
My transfer papers get processed?

WENDELL
It’s in the system.

CHEREER
I don’t know if I’ll have the music ready.

WENDELL
Get the girls to help. I can use the mimeograph. Make copies.

CHEREER
It’s all happening so fast. You sure what we’re doing is all right?

WENDELL
I think the Lieutenant wants this to happen. He knows it’s good for morale.

INT. REHEARSAL HALL - NIGHT

In groups the women write on sheet music. Some play the parts on their instruments.

Ruby walks in slowly, head held high, her saxophone case in hand.
RUBY
Good evening, ladies.

Cheree works in a group, stands when she sees Ruby. The girls stop, focus on Ruby.

CHEREE
Look at you. Everybody, our sax player has arrived.

Ruby struts to her seat, sets the case on her lap, takes out and assembles a brand new saxophone. She milks the moment.

The girls ooh and aah.

MAE
It’s beautiful.

JOSIE
Way to go Ruby.

Ruby wets the reed and plays a riff. The girls applaud.

CHEREE
Let’s play some music.

Cheree puts music on Ruby’s stand. Ruby plays a few bars of “Opus One.” The ladies all join in.

LATER

Rehearsal’s over, the women put their instruments away.

CHEREE
I believe we are ready for Saturday night. Remember, no uniforms. But let’s dress up.

INT. BARRACKS TWO - NIGHT

A long room with neat rows of army cots. Women prepare for bed. A radio on a dresser softly plays “After Hours,” by the Erskin Hawkins Orchestra.

Cheree and Ruby face each other on the edge of their neighboring beds.

Cheree hems a blue evening dress, Ruby polishes her new sax.

RUBY
This is more than I ever expected from the army.
CHEREE
I hope we’re not treading on anyone’s territory.

RUBY
Who doesn’t love music? What’s the worst that can happen?

CHEREE
Court martial, lynching.

RUBY
No. This is a military base and it’s coloreds only.

CHEREE
Colored men have died for less. Whites don’t want us having a good time. Makes them nervous.

RUBY
Seems pretty safe. What’s there to be nervous about?

CHEREE
I’m afraid if something goes wrong I’ll be blamed.

EXT. MESS TWO - NIGHT

Crepe ribbon hangs around the main door.

INT. MESS TWO

A raised stage, a table with punch and cookies. Chairs line the walls.

Decorative crepe ribbon spans the hall. Ruby, Mae and Josie secure balloons to the stage. Two girls from the band mix punch, sort cookies.

On stage, Cheree, in a blue satin gown, puts music on stands and nervously adjusts the chairs.

Wendell checks the sound system, tests the microphone.

RUBY
(to Cheree)
You look terrific.

CHEREE
First time I’ve dressed up to sing.
The band takes the stage, tunes up. Ruby hugs Cheree and joins the girls.

Black men and women enter the hall. They are happy and nicely dressed. Many are in uniform.

Cheree readies her music. Wendell comes up behind her. He taps her on the shoulder with a conductor’s BATON. It’s tied with a small red, white and blue ribbon.

Cheree turns around, nearly gets poked in the eye.

WENDELL
Ooh, sorry. This is for you.

Wendell hands her the baton.

CHEREE
That’s sweet. Thank you.

Wendell steps back, takes in Cheree.

WENDELL
You look great. I’m so glad you’re here at Fort Everett.

CHEREE
We better get started.

The crowd socializes. The chatter grows.

CHEREE
Here we go ladies. As always...

BAND
(together)
Join in, keep up or sit out.

Cheree raises her baton, gives a down beat, they play “Tuxedo Junction.”

The audience turns their attention to the WACs.

A COUPLE dances, then everyone dances. It’s loose, fun and exuberant.

Ruby and the other girls each take a solo.

The song ends. Cheers and applause.

They play “G.I. Jive.” Cheree sings. The crowd cheers, whistles, dances. Cheree has fun with the song. She teases the crowd with exaggerated hand gestures that match the lyrics.
Wendell sees the Lieutenant in back, weaves his way to him.

    WENDELL
    Sir.

    LIEUTENANT
    Your girls are terrific. The singing is a real nice touch.

    WENDELL
    Thank you, Sir. That’s Private Duncan.

    LIEUTENANT
    Oh yes, I know. She’s fantastic.

    WENDELL
    Yes, Sir, she is.

    LIEUTENANT
    I have an idea. We’ll talk Monday.

    WENDELL
    Yes, Sir.

    LIEUTENANT
    Excuse me, I’m gonna get some punch.

The Lieutenant makes his way to the punch and cookies. He catches Cheree’s eye on stage. She salutes. It’s a gesture in the lyric. He gives a salute back.

LATER

The Lieutenant escorts COLONEL HEINZ, 55, into the mess hall. Heinz listens to a few bars of “Don’t Be That Way.”

Heinz scrutinizes the crowd, Cheree and the band. The dancing is wild and crazy: Men dip, toss and flip the women.

Wendell hands Heinz punch but he refuses the cup. Heinz leaves. The Lieutenant follows Heinz out.

Wendell drinks the punch himself.

INT. LIEUTENANT’S OFFICE - DAY

The Lieutenant sits behind his desk. Wendell stands at attention.
LIEUTENANT
Those girls did an excellent job.
A singer makes it great. Think they’d fill in for the WAC band?

WENDELL
Sir, I’ll ask.

LIEUTENANT
This Friday in the Officers’ Club.

WENDELL
Sir, the Colonel approved?

LIEUTENANT
Of course. But the girls need to be in uniform.

WENDELL
Yes, Sir. May we keep holding our own dances, Sir?

LIEUTENANT
As long as time and schedules permit. Dismissed.

Wendell salutes the Lieutenant and leaves.

INT. REHEARSAL HALL - NIGHT

Wendell enters as the girls finish the last measure of “Jivin’ the Vibes.” Cheree walks around the girls and sings.

Ruby riffs like a pro. Darlene solos, then Mae and Josie. The practice is relaxed and easy.

Wendell applauds takes the podium.

WENDELL
Ladies, we’ve been asked to play for the Officers’ Club this Friday. In uniform.

Stunned, the women gasp.

JOSIE
How do we work in the kitchen if we’re playing for the officers?

WENDELL
You’re the entertainment, not the help.
DARLENE
Will we be paid?

WENDELL
Salary stays the same.

RUBY
I can’t think of a better way to serve my country.

Cheree corners Wendell.

CHEREE
I’m uncomfortable if it’s no longer about us dancing and socializing. I’m afraid playing for the officers will lead to unnecessary trouble.

WENDELL
They want you to play. There won’t be trouble. I promise.

INT. OFFICERS’ CLUB - DANCE HALL - NIGHT

In a spotlight, Cheree sings “The Man I Love.” It’s sultry and heartbreaking.

The officers and their wives sit mesmerized. The song ends, the crowd sits in silence. Then a slow build of applause.

The Lieutenant and his wife are with Colonel Heinz and MRS. Heinz, 48. They politely clap.

MRS. HEINZ
It’s great to have such quality entertainment on this base. I think they’re fabulous.

LIEUTENANT’S WIFE
They are surprisingly good.
(to the Lieutenant)
Where did they come from?

LIEUTENANT
They’re are very own WACs.

MRS. HEINZ
(to Colonel Heinz)
Aren’t we fortunate to have such talent right here at Fort Everett.

The extended applause dies down. Cheree bows. The spot goes off Cheree and the stage lights up. The Band, all in uniforms, stand and bow.
The band plays “The Hour of Parting.” Cheree conducts.

Wendell, in his busing uniform, flips wall switches, lights the dance floor. He pushes a spotlight to the wall.

Wendell picks up his tray to bus tables. The dining room is packed.

Mrs. Heinz takes her husband’s hand and guides him to the dance floor. The Lieutenant and his wife follow. The dancing is fluid and beautiful.

KITCHEN DOORWAY

Wendell, tray in one hand, signals to Cheree to stop.

Cheree gets the message and smoothly ends the music.

    CHEREE
    Ladies and gentlemen, we’re going to take a short break.

The women leave the stage.

Cheree meets Wendell.

    WENDELL
    We have a problem. You and the girls need to help in the kitchen.

    CHEREE
    Why?

    WENDELL
    The replacement crew can’t handle all the work.

KITCHEN

Cheree and the girls work their old jobs. They wear aprons over their dress military uniforms.

The Lieutenant enters, sees them working.

    LIEUTENANT
    What are you women doing? Where’s Corporal Roberts? He was to get kitchen replacements.

Wendell comes through the door with a full tray.

    WENDELL
    Excuse me, Sir.
Wendell clears his tray.

LIEUTENANT
Colonel Heinz wants these women back on stage. His wife is not done dancing.

WENDELL
It’s a full house Sir, and the new crew is not prepared.

LIEUTENANT
I’ll take care of this. Just get these women back on stage.

Cheree and the girls remove their aprons, salute the Lieutenant on their way out. The Lieutenant rolls up his sleeves, goes to work in the kitchen.

DANCE HALL
The women take the stage. The crowd applauds.

Cheree sings “And The Angels Sing.” A delighted Mrs. Heinz leads her husband to the dance floor. The few measures fade.

Dissolve

INT. ANOTHER HALLWAY - DAY

Cheree and Ruby mop a long linoleum floor.

RUBY
It’s not fair if we can’t play our own dances. That was the whole point.

CHEREE
Maybe we can manage both.

RUBY
What if we have two shows in one night?

They mop in unison, keeping a rhythm.

CHEREE
It’s just a few weekends ‘til the WAC band gets back.

RUBY
We still have to clean toilets and mop floors during the day then practice evenings.
Cheree and Ruby put the mops into a bucket, stretch out their backs.

Ruby
That boy will do anything for you.

Cheree picks up the bucket and mops, Ruby opens the door. It’s another long hallway.

Ext. Base Grounds - Day
Under an oak tree, Cheree and Wendell sit on an army blanket. Cheree unwraps sandwiches in wax paper, hands one to Wendell.

Cheree
This is the first time I’ve seen you without a file under your arm.

Wendell
Makes it hard to eat a sandwich.

Cheree
Egg salad.

Wendell’s mouth is full. Cheree takes out a canteen and two metal mess cups. She pours, hands a cup to Wendell.

Cheree
Lemonade.

Wendell sips it.

Wendell
It looks like we’ll replace the WAC band for the time being.

Cheree
Any news on my transfer?

Wendell
No. It takes time.
CHEREE
Wendell, We’ll need music and time
to learn it. We’d much rather play
music than clean toilets but it’s
too much. I don’t think we can.

He finishes his sandwich, swigs his lemonade.

WENDELL
Aren’t you having fun?

CHEREE
I am. But what can it lead to?
What difference does it finally
make. We’re all tired.

INT. MOVIE HOUSE - NIGHT

A NEWSREEL plays on a big screen. Violent combat.

Cheree, Ruby, Mae, Josie, Darlene and other black WACs make
their way in the dark theatre’s balcony. Black patrons
complain as they giggle and stumble into seats.

On the theater screen, grainy COMBAT ACTION continues. Black
Black men take cover, shoot through ruins, etc.

NEWSREEL NARRATOR
The War in Europe continues. The
92nd infantry faces mountainous
terrain and tremendous resistance
from the German Fourteenth Division
and Italian Fascist soldiers.
Casualties are high but the Allied
forces continue to push forward.

Mae leans forward in her seat, turns to her friends.

MAE
(whisper)
My brother Leon’s division. In
Italy.

The women nod. Josie takes Mae’s hand.

On the theater SCREEN, intense war action. Men die on both
sides. Scenes of suffering civilians.

NEWSREEL NARRATOR
There’s no telling how much longer
or how many more lives this war
will take as Hitler presses the
Eastern Front.
On the theater screen, Hitler rides in an open jeep with his arm extended as he passes German troops.

The newsreel ends. A “Buy War Bonds” slide fills the screen.

The feature presentation, Irving Berlin’s “This is the Army”, opens on the screen.

Dissolve

INT. LIEUTENANT’S OFFICE - DAY

Wendell stands at attention, the Lieutenant looks over pages.

LIEUTENANT
When this war is over, you should be a lawyer. This is well-written, makes perfect sense. But it’s beyond what I can authorize. I’ll talk to the Colonel.

WENDELL
Thank you, Sir.

EXT. BASE GROUNDS - DAY

Colonel Heinz drives the Lieutenant in a military Jeep across the base.

LIEUTENANT
It’s good to have great music back in the Officers’ Club. We had a nice time.

They cross a field where military hardware is parked: cannons, tanks, etc.

HEINZ
You and Mrs. Heinz. Might as well have been Glenn Miller himself.

They travel through segregated barracks, pass Mess Two.

LIEUTENANT
Be nice to have them play every Friday and Saturday.

A platoon of young black men march in formation. Heinz swerves around them. A JIVE CADENCE briefly wafts by.

HEINZ
When does the WAC band get back?
They drive between long stark buildings, some Quonset huts and the Officers’ Club.

LIEUTENANT
The white WAC band will be back in three weeks. Sir, the colored women are WACs and a band as well.

HEINZ
I’ll give you that.

LIEUTENANT
We could refer to them as WAC Band Two. Like Mess One and Mess Two. So it’s not confusing.

A unit of young white men run an obstacle course.

HEINZ
I’m not confused, Lieutenant. They’re colored and we have segregation policies.

LIEUTENANT
Yes, Sir. I’m aware of those policies but nothing prohibits colored women from playing music or playing in an Officers’ Club as long as the Commanding Officer gives authorization.

HEINZ
Can you show me that in writing Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT
Have it right here, Sir.

The Lieutenant pulls Wendell’s paperwork out of an attaché case. Heinz grabs the papers while he drives, looks at it.

HEINZ
This better not blow up in my face. Make sure everything’s according to regulations. Have it on my desk tomorrow. Mrs. Heinz will want to dance this Friday and Saturday.

LIEUTENANT
Happy wives make happy officers.

Heinz hands it back to the Lieutenant.
INT. BASE INFIRMARY – DAY

Wendell sits on an examination table, buttons-up his uniform shirt. A white DOCTOR, 60, writes in a file at his desk.

DOCTOR
I’m sorry Corporal Roberts. These things don’t just go away. You’ll have it your whole life.

Wendell jumps down from the table and tucks in his shirt and fastens his belt.

WENDELL
I signed up to fight. Europe, the Pacific, I want to fight, Doc.

DOCTOR
Not with a heart murmur. Don’t know how you got in but I get the feeling you do.

Wendell knots his tie, grabs his hat.

WENDELL
This condition won’t last.

DOCTOR
Hopefully the war won’t last. By the way, that all girl band you manage, they available to hire?

Wendell’s taken aback.

WENDELL
Might be.

DOCTOR
We have a medic’s conference at Fort George and they’d be a nice addition. Let me know. Would you?

WENDELL
You know they’re Colored.

DOCTOR
Don’t care if they’re green. They’re as good as any big band I’ve heard. Better.

INT. COLONEL HEINZ’S OFFICE – DAY

The Lieutenant stands in front of Heinz’s desk. Wendell stands behind him. Both are at attention.
Heinz flips through pages in a folder on his desk.

HEINZ
You have this all worked out, don’t you? You and your boy.

LIEUTENANT
Yes, Sir. Private Roberts is very thorough and extremely competent. It’s all according to military policy and regulation.

HEINZ
I don’t like it. But it’s temporary.

LIEUTENANT
Yes, Sir.

Heinz signs on a page, closes the folder and hands it to the Lieutenant. The Lieutenant reaches for the folder and Heinz pulls it back.

HEINZ
The slightest trouble and I’ll revoke my authorization and have offenders court-martialed.

Heinz returns the folder to the Lieutenant.

EXT. HEADQUARTERS – DAY

The Lieutenant and Wendell stride out with big smiles.

WENDELL
There’s paperwork to file and jobs to replace. But it’s effective immediately.

LIEUTENANT
There’s one more thing. I’m recommending you be promoted to Sergeant.

Wendell stops.

WENDELL
Sir, yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir.

They shake hands, salute and go their separate ways.
INT. REHEARSAL HALL – NIGHT

The women sit around and chat. Some instruments are out but no one plays.

Wendell comes in with a folder.

WENDELL
Everything okay?

CHEREE
We’re just taking a break.

WENDELL
I’ve got good news. You are Fort Everett’s official WAC Band Two.

The women cheer and clap. Cheree lowers her head.

WENDELL
There’s more. Your day jobs have been suspended so you can practice nine to five.

Hands go up. Ruby’s first.

RUBY
No more dirty duty?

WENDELL
Tomorrow your new job will be to report here and work on music.

DARLENE
We get paid for it?

WENDELL
Your salaries remain the same. But we have a budget for music.

Darlene stands up.

DARLENE
(yells)
Hallelujah!

The women hug, jump up and down in celebration. Wendell jumps up and down by himself.

Cheree leaves.

HALLWAY

Wendell follows after her, stops her in the hall.
WENDELL
I thought this would make you happy.

CHEREES
I know this is important to you and the girls.

WENDELL
Yes, it’s important. Our music is making a difference. I don’t understand why it’s not important to you?

CHEREES
I have other things to consider.

Cheree leaves, Wendell grabs her arm.

WENDELL
Your daughter? Please, tell me.

Wendell releases her arm. Cheree looks away, hesitates.

CHEREES
A few years back, my husband and I had a real good feed business. It was burned down and nothing was done. Like we never existed.
(reconsiders)
I don’t want anything to happen to the girls for something I’ve done.

WENDELL
All you’ve done is make good music.

INT. OFFICERS’ CLUB - DANCE HALL - NIGHT

Cheree sings and conducts “I’ve Got Rhythm.” The women are in uniform. Ruby, Darlene, Mae and Josie play short solos. The music is tight, controlled but has a unique, jivey style.

Wendell, in uniform adorned with new chevrons, works the spotlight.

The officers and their wives dance. They glide smoothly around the floor. Heinz and his wife move in a precise and well-trained manner. The Lieutenant and his wife dance the same.

CHEREES continues singing, “I’ve Got Rhythm” but the tempo changes. It’s faster and looser. Louder and more robust.

MATCH DISSOLVE
INT. MESS TWO - LATER

Cheree belts out “I’ve Got Rhythm”. She and the girls are in street clothes. They move and groove.

Cheree ends her solo but the band plays on. Ruby, Darlene, Mae and Josie play their solos, but this time they rip.

Black couples fill the dance floor. Everyone does the same dance in sync.

Wendell grabs Cheree off the stage, leads Cheree into the energized throng.

They do the Lindy Hop -- flip and dip, swirl and shake, hoot and holler.

DISSOLVE

INT. REHEARSAL HALL - DAY

Cheree passes out sheet music.

CHEREE
“The National Anthem.” We need to learn it and other patriotic songs.

Darlene stands up.

DARLENE
We’re professionals now, we do what’s required.

The girls nod. Ruby looks over the music.

RUBY
It shouldn’t be hard.

CHEREE
It’s gonna be harder on me.

Cheree goes to the podium, raises her baton. The ribbon is still attached.

They play the “National Anthem.” It’s recognizable but way too jazzy and soulful.

Ruby throws in a solo. They jam freely.

Cheree lets them go with it. She hums along. Cheree taps her baton, stops the music.
INT. OFFICERS’ CLUB – DANCE HALL – NIGHT

Cheree conducts “Blowing Up A Storm”. People dance.

Wendell waves to Cheree, gets her attention. Cheree leaves the stage.

Ruby stands, blows a sax solo.

Cheree meets Wendell.

CHEREE
They’re so good.

Wendell is solemn.

On stage, Ruby sits down. Mae stands, wails a solo.

WENDELL
The Lieutenant just told me Mae’s brother was killed in combat last month. Her family was just notified. But she doesn’t know. The Lieutenant thought, you might be the best person to tell her.

Wendell hands Cheree an envelope.

WENDELL
It’s papers for her leave. The funeral’s next week. There’s no good way to say it.

Cheree wipes a tear.

STAGE

Josie and Mae are on their feet, play together.

INT. REHEARSAL HALL – LATER

Most of the women have left. Only Josie, Mae and Cheree remain.

JOSIE
You were great.

MAE
No you were great.

Cheree sits at the desk, sorts through sheet music. The ENVELOPE sits on the desk.
CHEREE
Mae, I need to talk to you.

MAE
Is it serious?

CHEREE
Yes. And personal.

MAE
Can Josie stay?

CHEREE
If you like.

Josie and Mae sit. Cheree pulls her chair around to the girls, hands Mae the envelope. Mae sees the military envelope with her typed name. She grabs Josie’s hand.

MAE
What’s happened?

CHEREE
It’s a leave of absence.
(steadies herself)
Your bother was killed in action.

Mae sobs on Josie. Josie weeps with her friend.

CHEREE
Your brother will have a military burial with full honors. He’s a hero.

Mae straightens up. Collects herself. Wipes her tears.

MAE
He died in Europe for what?
Liberty? We don’t have liberty!

Mae slumps back in her chair. Josie comforts her. Cheree hands a single sheet of music to Mae.

CHEREE
This is a solo trumpet piece. I’m sure your brother would be honored.

Mae sobs, takes the music.

Josie leads Mae out.

Cheree puts her head down on the desk.

Wendell comes in, sits beside her.
CHEREE
I’d like to go to the funeral.
Josie should go as well.

WENDELL
Sure.

CHEREE
It’s a terrible reminder.

Cheree dries her eyes. She touches his chevrons.

CHEREE
I never congratulated you on your promotion.

WENDELL
The rank just keeps me from having to bus tables.

CHEREE
I’m glad you’re not overseas.

Wendell helps Cheree up, hugs her. They walk to the door, his arm around her.

WENDELL
You know two and a half million coloreds registered for the draft?
Seventy five percent of us ended up in the Army.

Wendell turns off the lights.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A fence divides the grass and headstones. It’s segregated.

An American flag covers a casket. Civilians are dressed in black.

An HONOR GUARD stands at attention, his gun at his side. Mae, in uniform, trumpet in hand, stands with her FAMILY. Josie and Cheree are in uniform as well.

A BLACK PREACHER finishes the homily.

PREACHER
...Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.
We lay this soldier to rest until the Creator of the universe comes again to claim his children.

Mae steps forward. Cheree joins her.
Mae proudly plays “Taps” (aka “Day is Done”) on her brother’s trumpet. Cheree sings. It’s raw and soulful.

CHEREE
(sings)
Day is done, gone the sun. From the lake, from the hills, from the sky. All is well. Safely rest, God is nigh.

When Mae and Cheree finish the verse, the Honor Guard SHOOTS his rife in the air three times.

INT. REHEARSAL HALL – DAY

The girls play the last few bars of Shaw’s arrangement of “Nightmare.” Cheree conducts. Josie riffs a clarinet solo.

Wendell comes with a manila envelope. Wendell places the envelope on the podium.

WENDELL
Your orders.

Cheree puts down her baton, girls stop playing. Wendell lopes out.

CHEREE
Let’s see what our orders are?

Cheree holds up the envelope and displays the label for all to see.

CHEREE
WAC Band Two.

Cheree pulls out the paperwork. She reads it to herself.

RUBY
Can we get in on it please?

CHEREE
Our Commanding Officer is hosting a visiting officers luncheon. We are to open the session with the National Anthem at twelve hundred hours. Tomorrow. Let’s get started.

INT. OFFICERS’ CLUB – DANCE HALL – DAY

The girls, in dress uniform, sit on stage ready to play.

A CLOCK reads twelve o’clock.
The dance floor is covered with tables set with white linen and china.

Black men and women stand with water pitchers ready to serve.

White, high-ranking officers, file into the room and are seated.

There is one WHITE WOMAN OFFICER.

Wendell sits at a table. He is the only black officer in the room.

WAC Band Two watch the men scrutinize them.

Colonel Heinz comes in and sees the black WACs on stage. He says something to the Lieutenant.

COLOR GUARDS march in with an American flag and military flags and place them on either side of the stage.

The audience immediately stands at attention -- except the WAC band. Some band members hesitantly stand then sit again.

The color guard salutes, ten-hut and leave the stage.

The audience stares at the band. Nothing happens. An uncomfortable moment.

DARLENE
(sotto to Cheree)
Go to the mic.

Cheree does.

CHEREE
Please join me in our National Anthem.

The girls start with a fanfare and launch into the anthem. It is robust and big. Cheree sings it perfectly.

After the song, Cheree sits.

The officers remain standing. Wendell shifts nervously.

Colonel Heinz goes to the stage, takes the microphone.

HEINZ
Fellow officers, filling in for our regular Women Army Corps Band, is Fort Everett’s WAC Band Two.
Scattered applause.

    HEINZ
    Ladies, you are dismissed.

WAC Band Two, randomly stands and walks off.

    HEINZ
    Chaplain, if you’ll lead us in prayer.

The CHAPLAIN makes his way to the stage.

INT. ANOTHER HALLWAY - DAY

The women file into the hallway with their instruments. They chatter about the event.

    RUBY
    I thought we were great.

    CHEREE
    I think I made a mistake. Some kind of protocol.

    RUBY
    Never had to know protocol for cleaning toilets.

INT. HEINZ’S OFFICE - DAY

Heinz sits behind his desk, the Lieutenant and Wendell stand at attention.

    HEINZ
    I’ve never heard the National Anthem played that way.

    LIEUTENANT
    Sir, you didn’t like it?

    HEINZ
    I didn’t say that. It was unexpected and nontraditional.

The Lieutenant and Wendell look straight forward.

    WENDELL
    Yes, Sir, it was bold.

    HEINZ
    I stuck my neck out for your WAC Band Two.
LIEUTENANT
Sir, they didn’t present per the protocol, but that hardly renders their service incompetent.

WENDELL
I take full responsibility. Sir, I should have gone over it with them.

LIEUTENANT
Sir, were officers upset?

Heinz gets to his feet. His face is flushed.

HEINZ
Of course! There were officers who were upset, offended and outraged, as well as officers who were impressed.

LIEUTENANT
It won’t happen again, Sir.

Heinz walks to a window, stares out.

HEINZ
Got COs who want to see me court-martialed and I’ve got COs who want to borrow WAC Band Two.

WENDELL
Sir, please. The battles are not only overseas. Don’t let this infraction be used as an excuse to keep these women from playing music. Set a precedent, Sir.

Heinz faces the men. Wendell’s clenches his teeth.

HEINZ
I’ll think about it. Dismissed.

INT. OFFICERS’ CLUB - DANCE HALL - NIGHT

The Officers’ Club is packed, the dance floor full. WAC Band Two plays, “Opus One.”

SERIES OF SHOTS (MUSIC CONTINUES):

The rehearsal hall. Wendell brings a manila envelope. Cheree opens an order to play. She waves it at the girls.
On the base grounds, WAC Band Two, without instruments, marches in rows. Their arms extend to the shoulders of the women in front and side.

At a U.S. ARMY HOSPITAL, a military bus leaves the girls off. The Doctor, from the infirmary, greets them. They enter, in uniform and with instruments.

At Mess Two, black men and women dance as Cheree sings.

On the base grounds, the girls march with instruments, bump into each other. They can’t keep a straight line.

In the rehearsal hall, Cheree opens more orders.

On the base grounds, Colonel Heinz drives by the girls marching in perfect order without instruments. They salute and he returns the salute.

At the Officers’ Club, the girls practice standing and sitting in sync.

Fort George, another military base. The White Woman Officer introduces WAC Band Two to a sitting crowd of mixed military personnel and their families. The girls stand in perfect unison and play.

The Officers’ Club has new music stands. Cheree practices a bow, the women do the same, exit the stage in tight order.

In the rehearsal Hall, Wendell hands Cheree another envelope.

The U. S. Army hospital another day, wounded men in robes and wheelchairs, white and black, stop WAC Band Two to shake hands, chat and flirt.

Another military base. The women play in front of full bleachers.

On the base grounds, the girls march and play their instruments. They pass Heinz’s office. He watches from his window. A group of white recruits applaud.

END SERIES OF SHOTS AS MUSIC FADES.

INT. HEADQUARTERS - HEINZ’S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

A white secretary, BETTY, 30s, sits at a desk typing. An intercom, files, in/out box, and a NEWSPAPER are on the desk.

The Lieutenant and Wendell enter.
BETTY
Lieutenant, he’s expecting you.
Sargent Roberts you may have a seat over there.

Betty points to the furthest chair away from her desk.
The Lieutenant steps inside Heinz’s office.

WENDELL
May I read your newspaper ‘over there’?

Betty glares at Wendell.

WENDELL
Thank you.

Wendell grabs the paper, sits, reads the front page of the Mississippi Gazette.

HEADLINE: “Assassination Attempt on Hitler.”
Another story: “Eisenhower Commands Second Front”
Wendell thumbs the paper. He stops near the back.
ON PHOTO: A black man in uniform hangs from a tree.
CLOSER on paper:
“KKK Suspected In Lynching. Murders of Black men in uniform on the rise. Military Negros are warned to stay on base. Local boy from Fort George found hanging Tuesday…”

HEINZ’S INNER OFFICE
The Lieutenant hands Colonel Heinz a file. Heinz studies it.

HEINZ
What’s the problem?

LIEUTENANT
Sir, basic training promotion for coloreds takes place on Thursday. The whites on Friday. WAC Band Two is scheduled to play at Fort George Friday. Unless you call their CO, we won’t have music.

HEINZ
What do you suggest?
LIEUTENANT
Sir? Cancel Fort George?

HEINZ
Can’t do that. I promised they could use WAC Band Two. They’re promoting their recruits.

LIEUTENANT
Sir, we always promote on Friday. Fort George will understand.

HEINZ
I gave my word. Any other ideas?

The Lieutenant stands at attention. He’s silent.

HEINZ
What would Sergeant Roberts suggest?

LIEUTENANT
I’m certain I don’t know, Sir.

HEINZ
Let’s ask him.

LIEUTENANT
He’s right outside, Sir. Waiting instruction.

Heinz speaks into his intercom.

HEINZ
Betty, send in Sergeant Roberts.

Wendell enters the office, salutes, stands at attention.

HEINZ
At ease. I didn’t like the idea of WAC Band Two. Women, Negros. But they’ve earned my respect. So, Sergeant Roberts, what solution do you offer for the promotion of our colored and white recruits?

Wendell looks to the Lieutenant. The Lieutenant shrugs.

WENDELL
I’m not sure I understand, Sir.

HEINZ
I think you do.
WENDELL
Sir, yes, Sir. There will be only one promotion of all recruits, colored and white on Thursday.

HEINZ
Write that up. Have it on my desk today. Thank you gentlemen. Dismissed.

The men ten-hut, salute and leave.

EXT. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The Lieutenant and Wendell walk, a passing truck stirs up dust.

WENDELL
It’ll be the first nonsegregated promotion.

LIEUTENANT
We need to be careful.

WENDELL
It’s a huge step.

LIEUTENANT
Heinz won’t make the call. He wants us to take the blame if the shit hits the fan.

WENDELL
Sir, I’m willing to do that.

EXT. FORT EVERETT PARADE GROUNDS AND STADIUM - ANOTHER DAY

Promotion grounds. Nation, state and military flags gently move in the breeze. Colonel Heinz, The Lieutenant and other military brass stand on a platform center field.

WAC Band Two sits on the field, plays a medley of patriotic music as black and white men go through promotion.

Military family members, black and white sit integrated in the bleachers. It’s a beautiful day.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - BLACK NEIGHBORHOOD CAFE - NIGHT

Wendell opens a door for Cheree. They exit a cafe. Both wear street clothes.
WENDELL
There’s a club near here. Music’s suppose to be good. Shall we try it?

CHEREE
Be a nice change to just sit in the audience.

Wendell takes Cheree’s hand. They walk briskly.

CHEREE
What’re you gonna do after the war?

WENDELL
I’m thinking about law school. There’s a new thing called a GI bill. Pays for education.

CHEREE
You’ll be a great lawyer.

WENDELL
You?

CHEREE
Teach.

WENDELL
Music?

CHEREE
Maybe.


WENDELL
Lot of people here.

They pass the line to the door.

WHITE MAN
This isn’t your neighborhood.

WHITE WOMAN
Go home.

Wendell and Cheree ignore them.

CHEREE
(whispers)
Let’s go somewhere else.
WENDELL
It’ll be worth it.

They step to the front door.

WHITE MAN TWO
No black entrance here.

Wendell goes to a white DOOR MAN, leans in, says something.

The crowd watches Wendell and Cheree enter the club. Some yell epithets and curses, others get out of line and leave.

INT. THE ALIBI – NIGHT

Low lighting. Candles on tables. An all male BLACK JAZZ BAND plays “Gonna Be Some Changes Made.”

Wendell holds Cheree’s hand, leads her to a stage-front table occupied by a WHITE COUPLE. There are two empty seats.

Wendell says something to the man, removes Cheree’s coat and they sit down.

WENDELL
Cheree, I want you to meet Mr. James and his fiance Greta.

Cheree shakes hands.

MR. JAMES
Wendell says you’re a musician.

Cheree’s surprised. Shoots Wendell a look.

CHEREE
I’m in the Army.

MR. JAMES
He says you’re in a band.

CHEREE
I sing in a WAC Band.

Greta laughs.

GRETA
(German accent)
Vhat’s Vhack?

CHEREE
Woman’s Army Corps.
Greta
Why are you in zee Army?

Cheree
We’re at war.

Cheree fidgets. Wendell puts his arm around her.

Wendell
Cheree, Mister James is a music producer. Manages this band. I told him about you and your WACS.
(to Mr. James and Greta)
Huge demand, booked solid.

The song ends. Cheree’s not happy.

Mr. James
Will you sing for us?

Cheree stands, bends to Wendell’s ear.

Cheree
(in Wendell’s ear)
Do you ever stop working?
(to all)
Glad to.

Wendell forces a grin, nods to Mr. James and Greta.

Mr. James stands, motions to the band leader. Cheree takes the stage, talks to the band and adjusts the microphone.

Cheree sings a sultry, “I Don’t Want To Set The World On Fire.”

After a few bars, the white crowd stops chatting, eating and drinking. They watch and listen, spellbound.

The verse ends. Applause and whistles. Wendell stands, claps and cheers. Cheree bows, hurries off the stage, marches past Wendell and out of sight.

Mr. James
She’s wonderful. Everything okay?

Wendell grabs Cheree’s coat.

Wendell
I’ll be in touch. Thanks.

Wendell forces his way through the White throng. Some men deliberately bump him.
Cheree shoves her way toward the exit. As she passes, random ad libs: “Don’t go, baby.” “You’re great.” “Sing another.”

EXT. THE ALIBI - NIGHT

Curb side, Cheree looks up and down the street. She spots a CAB and waves. The cab pulls to the curb.

Wendell exits the club.

Cheree reaches for the cab door, the DRIVER sees she’s black and drives off. Some White people in line snicker.

Wendell hands Cheree her the coat. She takes it and walks. Wendell trots after her.

CHEREEL AM I YOUR CLIENT OR GIRLFRIEND?

WENDELL GIRLFRIEND? DEFINITELY GIRLFRIEND.

Wendell holds her hand. She pulls it away.

WENDELL I’M SORRY.

Cheree stops.

CHEREEL I THOUGHT TONIGHT WAS ABOUT US.

WENDELL IT IS. BUT FOR ME, IT’S ABOUT YOU.

CHEREEL IT’S NOT WHAT I WANT FROM ALL THIS.

WENDELL WHAT DO YOU WANT?

CHEREEL I WANT THE WAR TO BE OVER.

Cheree walks on. Wendell catches up. They walk together silently and apart.

EXT. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Two White WACS in uniform, enter the building.
INT. HEINZ’S OFFICE – DAY

Sergeant Waters and Corporal Jackson of the white WAC Band stand at attention in front of Heinz. They salute.

HEINZ
At ease. Sergeant Waters, Corporal, welcome home. Didn’t expect you back for another week. How was the tour?

WATERS
Fine, Sir. I’ll get right to the point. Have we been replaced?

HEINZ
You mean WAC Band Two.

WATERS
So it’s true.

JACKSON
They’re Negros?

HEINZ
Yes. And, no you haven’t been replaced.

WATERS
What’s their pay grade?

HEINZ
E-1. No rank.

Sergeant Waters is relieved.

JACKSON
We cut our tour short to be here for the promotion to find out it’s been cancelled.

HEINZ
Not cancelled. It was yesterday.

Jackson’s irate. She HISSES.

WATERS
You combined the promotion for whites and the colored, and had that Negro band play?

Heinz is calm.
HEINZ
Yes, Sergeant.

JACKSON
Sir, that is unacceptable.

HEINZ
(to Waters)
Do you have a problem with the way I run this base?

WATERS
I do. And I will file a complaint, Sir. Now that we’re back, their service is no longer required.

HEINZ
There is plenty of work for two bands.

JACKSON
But there is only one rehearsal hall. And I will not share it with Negroes. Nor do I have to. Sir.

HEINZ
I understand your position Corporal.

WATERS
Sir, the Officers' Club, is it true they’ve been playing there?

HEINZ
Yes.

Heinz remains patient.

WATERS
Where are they now?

HEINZ
Playing the promotion at Fort George.

WATERS
And after they’re done, are they dissolved? Sir?

HEINZ
Sergeant Waters, that decision is mine. They, like you, are serving our country.  
(MORE)
As for Corporal Jackson’s discomfort of sharing rehearsal space, another location will be selected. Anything else?

Heinz stands. The women stare forward.

   HEINZ
   You are dismissed.

The women salute, ten-hut 180 degrees and leave.

HEINZ’S OUTER OFFICE

Sergeant Waters and Jackson strut out, nod a knowing look to Heinz’ secretary, Betty. She smugly returns the nod.

EXT. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The women leave the building.

   JACKSON
   It’s an outrage that Niggers get paid for the same job we do. Rank or no rank, it’s not their place.

   WATERS
   If Heinz authorized this against military policy, he’s in big trouble.

INT. REHEARSAL HALL - DAY

Sergeant Waters and Corporal Jackson join the white WACs. They put away their instruments.

   LOUISE
   Sergeant Waters, will we be playing today?

   JACKSON
   The promotion was yesterday. Apparently there is another WAC Band -- Negroes. And they played yesterday.

   LOUISE
   Good for them.

   WATERS
   It’s against military policy.
LOUISE
Segregation does not prohibit them from making music.

JACKSON
They’ve been using this room. I can’t stand the thought.

LOUISE
I know the women. They’re professional on all counts.

WATERS
They’ve taken our jobs -- promotions, the Officers’ Club. In fact, they’re playing at Fort George right now.

LOUISE
Excuse me Corporal, but I haven’t received a pink slip.
(beat)
You knew those women would be playing, didn’t you? That’s why you rushed us back here.

Waters gets in Louise’s face.

WATERS
Corporal, you are out of line.

A WAC finds sheet music in the cupboard.

WAC I
Hey look at this. It’s their sheet music.

Waters hurries to the cupboard. The WAC holds a sheet of music.

WAC I
Lyrics. They have a singer!

Sergeant Waters grabs the music, scans other sheet music.

WATERS
No patriotic music. Not one song.

LOUISE
Probably using it at Fort George.

Jackson scrutinizes a sheet.
JACKSON
Look at this. It’s a copy, a mimeo of our music. It’s your arrangement Sergeant!

LOUISE
Jackson, you can’t be sure it’s the Sergeant’s arrangement. You can barely read music.

Another WAC reads a piece of music to herself.

WAC II
Here’s my part in “Sing, Sing, Sing”. It’s pretty good. Not that different, but different enough.

WAC II nods to a beat she hears in her head.

WATERS
Jackson, confiscate everything in this cupboard.

LOUISE
You can’t do that.

WATERS
Watch.

Louise sidles up to WAC II, looks at the same music. WAC II points out a passage. Louise takes the music.

Jackson collects the music from the cupboard and the women.

LOUISE
That’s their property.

Jackson grabs for the music in Louise’s hand. Louise turns, Jackson yanks the music from her hand. It tears in half.

Louise walks away with her half of the torn music.

WATERS
It’s copyrighted material. Can’t use it without permission. It’s law. It’s stealing.

(to Louise et al)
Be back here by thirteen hundred hours for practice.

Louise heads for the door.
LOUISE
Practice? For what? I thought we were replaced.

EXT. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING – DAY
Louise storms into the building.

INT. LIEUTENANT’S OUTER OFFICE – DAY
Wendell sits at his desk, types fast with two fingers.

LOUISE
Wendell I need to see the Lieutenant. It’s important.

Wendell presses the intercom.

WENDELL
(into phone)
Sir, Corporal Pierson from WAC Band One is here.

Wendell leads her into the Lieutenant’s office.

LIEUTENANT’S INNER OFFICE
Louise salutes and stands at attention.

LIEUTENANT
At ease Corporal.

Louise notices Wendell’s new chevrons.

LOUISE
Sergeant Roberts should hear this, Sir.

Wendell closes the door.

LIEUTENANT
I’ve already spoken to Colonel Heinz. We have another rehearsal room for WAC Band Two.

LOUISE
Sir, this is not about that. Sergeant Waters confiscated their music and is going to pursue copyright. She’s saying they stole her music. Sir, this has nothing to do with policy or laws. It’s about the women being Colored.
Louise drops the torn sheet music on the Lieutenant’s desk.

    LIEUTENANT
    Thank you Corporal. I appreciate you coming in. We will look into
    the copyright issue.

    LOUISE
    I hope WAC Band Two isn’t in any trouble. Thank you, Sir.

Louise salutes both men and leaves the office.

    LIEUTENANT
    If you ever thought of yourself as a lawyer, now’s the time. Find out
    all you can about music copyright.

    WENDELL
    What do you think Heinz will do?

    LIEUTENANT
    I don’t know, but it’s about to hit the fan.

INT. COLONEL HEINZ’S OFFICE – DAY

Waters and Jackson stand at attention. Heinz leafs through sheet music.

    HEINZ
    I don’t know anything about music or copyright issues.

    JACKSON
    Probably can’t even read music.

    HEINZ
    Excuse me corporal?

    JACKSON
    I’m referring to the Negro women.

    HEINZ
    Like you, those women are soldiers.

    WATERS
    They stole our arrangements and copied material without our permission. This violates laws beyond military influence. An investigation needs to be opened and they should be suspended.
**JACKSON**
They should be kicked off the base when they return from Fort George.

**HEINZ**
(to Jackson)
That’s enough Corporal. I don’t want to hear another word from you.
(to Waters)
Can your WACs play for the Officers’ Club tonight?

**WATERS**
Yes, Sir.

**HEINZ**
You’re dismissed.

The women salute. Heinz returns a half-hearted salute.

The women leave.

**EXT. HEADQUARTERS - DAY**

**JACKSON**
I know who’s behind all this. It’s Louise's Nigger girlfriend. I’m gonna fix her.

**INT. COLONEL HEINZ’S OFFICE**

The Lieutenant stands in front of Heinz’s desk.

**HEINZ**
We’ve got a problem with Sergeant Waters and Corporal Jackson.

**LIEUTENANT**
Wendell is looking into the copyright issue.

**HEINZ**
Until it can be sorted out, WAC Band Two is disbanded and will go back to their regular duties.

**LIEUTENANT**
What about tonight?

Heinz reaches for pen and paper on his desk. He writes something hands it to the Lieutenant.
HEINZ
Give WAC Band Two the weekend off.
Monday, back to their jobs.

LIEUTENANT
Yes, Sir.

The Lieutenant gets up. They salute.

HEINZ
WAC Band Two has done a good job.
Worked hard to honor this base.

EXT. HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Wendell stands by the door. The Lieutenant walks out, claps Wendell on the back.

LIEUTENANT
What’d you find out?

WENDELL
Can’t find any copyright violation. What did Heinz say?

LIEUTENANT
WAC Band Two is finished. Back to regular duty Monday. They have the weekend off.

WENDELL
Want me to tell them?

LIEUTENANT
I’ll do it.

WENDELL
They’re due back at thirteen hundred hours.

LIEUTENANT
I don’t want this to become a war between WACs.

WENDELL
Sir, it is a war.

EXT. BASE GROUNDS - DAY

A military bus pulls up near the rehearsal hall. The Lieutenant and Wendell stand at attention. Wendell looks at his WATCH. It reads 1:30.
WENDELL
Thirteen thirty. They’re late.

The women get off the bus with their instruments. They salute the Lieutenant and nod to Wendell.

WENDELL
Good afternoon. Please follow me to your new rehearsal room.

JOSIE
New?

MAE
Why do we need a new place?

The women follow Wendell.

Darlene maneuvers herself and her instrument case off the bus. Cheree, last off, carries music.

Cheree sees Wendell lead the women past the rehearsal hall.

CHEREE
(to Darlene)
Where’re we going?

Darlene shrugs.

Cheree Salutes the Lieutenant and double times her step.

The Lieutenant climbs onto the bus steps, briefly talks with the driver, jumps off and follows the women.

The women straggle, lug their instruments. “America the Beautiful” drifts from the rehearsal hall.

EXT. WOOD FRAME BUILDING

Wendell enters the building. Cheree and the women follow.

INT. CLASSROOM

A cramped, windowless classroom has chairs with half-desks. A chalkboard is on the wall. The girls squeeze in.

WENDELL
Find a seat.

Cheree enters. Wendell offers a weak smile. There’s no chairs left. Cheree and others stands in the room.

The Lieutenant makes his way to the front with Wendell.
LIEUTENANT
Ladies, WAC Band One is back. Monday you are reassigned to your old duties.

A collective moan from the women. Some cry.

LIEUTENANT
Thank you for a job well done. You have worked hard, served your country, brought honor to Fort Everett and yourselves.

The Lieutenant defers to Wendell.

WENDELL
You are all granted a leave starting now. I’ll have your positions posted Monday morning. Questions?

Hands go up. They all talk at once.

RUBY
We can still play our dances?

WENDELL
Yes. Absolutely.

RUBY
That’s all we wanted at first.

Some hands go down.

JOSIE
Those white WACs are jealous.

DARLENE
They’re mediocre at best.

CHEREE
What if we refuse to go back to our old jobs?

The women murmur.

WENDELL
That is an option you can consider. I’m sure there are others on base that would support your protest.

The Lieutenant is stunned, the women are excited.
LIEUTENANT
That is not a good idea. You have orders. Refusing a direct order during wartime is punishable by death, at the very least court-martial. Please, go back to your duties.

The women chatter, debate all at once.

LIEUTENANT
The bus driver can take you to town. He leaves at fifteen hundred hours. You’re dismissed.

The women get up, they take their instruments. They continue their excited, angry conversation.

The Lieutenant looks sadly at Wendell, leaves.

Wendell turns to Cheree. He takes her hand.

WENDELL
WAC Band Two is worth fighting for. But there’s more to be done.

Cheree pulls her hand away.

CHEREE
You made this band, not me.

WENDELL
Not true. You need to see the Lieutenant. Your transfer’s come through.

EXT. WOOD FRAME BUILDING

Cheree exits the building. Darlene, Ruby, Mae, Josie and the majority of WAC Band Two mob her, pounce. She’s stunned.

DARLENE
Mae
A protest is serious I don’t want to loose this business. We going through job. with it?

JOSIE
Ruby
All this is your fault. I’ll do it if you think it will get the band reinstated.

Wendell comes out of the building.
CHEREE
Do what you think is right.

Cheree storms off. The women look to Wendell, surround him.

INT. LIEUTENANT’S OFFICE - DAY

Cheree stands at attention in front of the Lieutenant’s desk.

LIEUTENANT
Your transfer’s been approved, Iowa. They run supply logistics to Europe.

CHEREE
When do I go?

LIEUTENANT
As soon as Wendell finalizes the details. I’m proud of you and WAC Band Two. I want the band reinstated and I’ll do whatever I can. But if the women disobey orders, it will never happen and Wendell, his military career will be over.

CHEREE
You want me to tell them to go back to dirty duty?

LIEUTENANT
You’re their leader.

CHEREE
No. Not anymore.

LIEUTENANT’S OUTER OFFICE

Cheree stands in front of Wendell’s desk. He types, focuses on his work, does not look at her.

CHEREE
Anything I need to do?

WENDELL
Truck leaves for Des Moines Monday. You got what you came for.

EXT. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

Cheree is met by Louise, they walk.
LOUISE
I heard. I’m so sorry. Some of the girls and I have discussed it. We know how serious it is and we’ve decided to join you in protest.

CHEREE
Why would you do that?

LOUISE
Why wouldn’t I? You’re my friend.

EXT. BASE GROUNDS
Ruby and several of the girls wait for the bus. Wendell comes by with paperwork.

WENDELL
I’m looking for Cheree.

RUBY
Haven’t seen her.

WENDELL
She needs to sign one more document before her transfer’s finalized.

RUBY
Transfer?

WENDELL
She leaves Monday.

The women grumble. Ruby takes Wendell’s arm guides him away, out of earshot.

RUBY
Know why she’s running? She witnessed her husband lynched and their home and business burned. The white men were caught but were let go.

The bus pulls up and the women get on, look at Ruby.

WENDELL
Sweet Jesus. She wants out of the state ‘cause she’s afraid of those men and to protect her child.

RUBY
It’s all about that child.

Ruby runs to catch the bus.
EXT. RURAL COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A jalopy sputters down the dusty road. Golden light illuminates the thin woods.

INT. CAR

The Reverend Duncan is at the wheel. Cheree, eyes closed, rest her head toward the last sunshine.

CHEREE
Thanks daddy for picking me up.

REVEREND DUNCAN
We spent a lot of time and many miles in this old car. I always find a long drive meditative.

CHEREE
Why’d you stop taking me with you.

REVEREND DUNCAN
You became beautiful. Too beautiful. The audience got distracted. Couldn’t hear the music.

Cheree laughs.

REVEREND DUNCAN
Wasn’t right to take you to those places anymore.

CHEREE
Daddy, I’m taking a transfer to Iowa. Des Moines. I leave Monday. I don’t want to argue, I want you to understand. Jessie is safe now.

Tears fill Cheree’s eyes.

CHEREE
But growing ups going to be hard. She’s not apart of either world here. Maybe I can raise her there.

Cheree cries. The Reverend pulls over.

REVEREND DUNCAN
Jessie’s a good child. She’s pure of heart. There’s no evil in her.
CHERE:
I thought God would grant me the
gift of seeing my beloved husband
in her face. But instead I see him
swinging from that tree, our home
on fire and that man on me.

Cheree gets out of the car, runs into the woods, vomits. The
Reverend gets out goes to Cheree, holds her.

REVEREND DUNCAN
Child, don’t take it out on Jessie.

CHERE:
I got a death threat today. I wish
they’d make good on it. Be done
with all this.

REVEREND DUNCAN
Breaks my heart to think your anger
and bitterness blinds you to the
grace and beauty you can still make
in this unjust, unfair world. Go
to Iowa, but stop running.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The congregation is on their feet hums “Let it Shine.”

Cheree, solos a verse, eyes shut and still, lost in the
music. It’s rousing and transcendent.

EXT. CHURCH

Jessie plays with other children. The Reverend and Mrs.
Duncan greet happy parishioners. It’s beautiful and idyllic.

Cheree stands on the road. Raymond greets Cheree.

RAYMOND
That was beautiful.

CHERE:
How are you Ray?

RAYMOND
Today was a blessing.

CHERE:
Yes.

RAYMOND
My cousin is at the Tuskegee Flying
School.

(MORE)
He said the President’s wife is coming and they’re having a band play. I thought maybe it was your band.

CHEREE
Not our band. You going?

RAYMOND
I might.

EXT. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - DAY

Ruby and the women from WAC Band Two, check for their assigned duties on posted lists. The women stay, chat.

The Lieutenant and Wendell watch the women.

DARLENE
We going to do this.

RUBY
Anyone See Private Duncan.

JOSIE
Private Duncan doesn’t care. She’s out of here. Took a transfer.

MAE
I’d rather clean than be arrested.

Louise and her friends join the women.

LOUISE
Good morning.

RUBY
You’re not going to work today?

LOUISE
We’re here to protest. We want you reinstated. What do we do?

RUBY
I don’t know. I’m gonna sit and wait, see what happens.

Ruby, Louise and her friends sit on the ground. Others do the same.

Mae and Josie are surrounded. They sit. Over 40 people sit. More join the group.
The Lieutenant’s wife and Mrs. Heinz come out of the building, stand next to the Lieutenant and Wendell

**LIEUTENANT’S WIFE**
We thought we should show our support.

**LIEUTENANT**
(to his wife)
This is a surprise. Mrs. Heinz, your husband know you’re here.

**MRS. HEINZ**
I don’t think so.

**LIEUTENANT**
Wendell, call Colonel Heinz and get the MPs.

**WENDELL**
I don’t think I’m working today.

Wendell joins the sit-in, which continues to grow. The Lieutenant’s Wife and Mrs. Heinz sit next to Wendell.

The lieutenant goes inside the building.

**INT. LIEUTENANT’S OFFICE**

The Lieutenant calls the Military Police and Colonel Heinz.

**LIEUTENANT**
Sir, we have a problem.

**EXT. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING**

Well over a hundred people sit on the ground. They gather and peaceably chat.

**INT. LIEUTENANT’S OFFICE**

Cheree walks in, the Lieutenant hangs up the phone.

**CHEREED**
Good morning, Sir. I’m looking for Wendell. Sir, I have an idea that might get WAC Band Two reinstated.

**LIEUTENANT**
Reinstated?! They’re going to be arrested and court-martial.

**CHEREED**
I don’t understand, Sir.
The Lieutenant opens the window blinds. A huge crowd sits outside.

LIEUTENANT
This is totally out of control.
Look what you’ve done. I’m about
to lose twenty three years of
military service because of you.

CHEREE
Sir, I had no idea. What can I do?

LIEUTENANT
Go to Iowa.

The Lieutenant grabs a megaphone leaves. Cheree follows.

EXT. ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING

The Military Police have surrounded the crowd. The
protesters lock arms.

The Lieutenant comes out with a megaphone. Cheree behind
him. Cheree takes the megaphone.

RUBY
(yells)
Private Duncan!

The crowd goes quiet. Colonel Heinz pulls up in his Jeep.

CHEREE
(into megaphone)
There is only one thing I really
know and that’s music. But I’m not
asking you to sing. It’s time to
go back to work.

The crowd groans, boos. Heinz grabs the megaphone away from
Cheree.

HEINZ
(into megaphone)
Go to work or be arrested. That’s
an order.

Nobody moves. Heinz hands the megaphone to the Lieutenant.

HEINZ
(to the Lieutenant)
This is your problem.
LIEUTENANT
(into megaphone)
Soldiers. Attention!

The crowd looks around. The MPs close ranks.

The men and women protesters slowly get on their feet, including the Lieutenant’s wife and Mrs. Heinz. Colonel Heinz is shocked to see his wife in the crowd.

LIEUTENANT
Dismissed!

The crowd peaceably disperses. Cheree walks through the crowd. No one talks to her. Ruby ignores her.

EXT. MOTOR POOL - DAY

Cheree walks to an idling, canvas top transport truck, climbs in back.

INT. TRUCK

Wendell, breathless, slings himself into the back of the truck. He sits on the bench next to her. They’re alone.

WENDELL
I know what happened to you. I looked up the case. I’m so sorry.

Wendell hands her an envelope.

CHEREE
What’s this? More paperwork?

Cheree looks at the papers in the envelope.

WENDELL
It’s what happened to those men and your daughter’s father.

CHEREE
So he’s a war hero?

WENDELL
You should go. I understand.

CHEREE
No Wendell, you don’t understand.

Cheree pulls her suitcase and duffle bag from under the bench, stands up. Wendell lends a hand. They climb out of the truck.
EXT. MOTOR POOL

Wendell carries Cheree’s duffle bag.

CHEREE
I have a favor to ask.

WENDELL
Name it.

Cheree’s transport truck rumbles by, obscures their conversation.

EXT. BASE GROUNDS - DAY

Heinz, the Lieutenant and Wendell sit in a Jeep. Separate troops of white and black recruits march in formation, shout a cadence song in unison.

HEINZ
It’s a huge gamble.

LIEUTENANT
Sir. But if it works...

WENDELL
Let’s not loose all that we’ve worked for. Please, Sir.

HEINZ
If we can get her to come here, how do we have WAC Band Two play when it’s WAC Band One’s job?

Separate White and Black troops march past each other on the field. For a moment, it appears as if they’re integrated.

The Lieutenant notices the illusion.

LIEUTENANT
We’ll have a military parade, a procession in her honor.

WENDELL
WAC Band One doesn’t march.

HEINZ
But WAC Band Two does.

LIEUTENANT
Sir, we can invite the community and dignitaries.
WENDELL
We’ll make you proud, Sir.

HEINZ
Get the women ready. For now, this is classified.

Heinz starts the Jeep and they drive off.

INT. OFFICERS’ CLUB – DANCE HALL – STAGE – DAY

The white WAC Band is seated on one half of the stage. They put instruments together and tune. The other half of the stage has empty chairs and stands.

Waters hands out music.

LOUISE
Who’s joining us?

WATERS
All I know is Colonel Heinz and The Lieutenant told us to report here for rehearsal.

Jackson has her sax together. She wets the reed.

JACKSON
Must be something big.

Jackson and Louise tune together.

Heinz and the Lieutenant walk on stage. The women stand at attention.

HEINZ
At ease. You will be rehearsing today and over the next few days with the other WAC band.

Murmurs and protests move across the group.

WATERS
Sir, if you’re referring to the Negro women, this isn’t right.

HEINZ
You will sit on this side and they will sit on the other. You will share music and ideas. I expect complete cooperation or you will be written up and demoted. Is that clear?
WATERS
Yes, Sir.

Heinz nods to the Lieutenant to take over, exits.

The Lieutenant takes center stage.

LIEUTENANT
Any questions that will move this rehearsal forward?

Louise raises her hand.

LOUISE
What are we rehearsing for?

LIEUTENANT
That’s classified.

INT. CLASSROOM

The women file in and sit. Cheree is not present. Wendell enters.

WENDELL
Thank you ladies for putting down your mops and sponges. We’re going to play music today.

The women chatter excitedly.

RUBY
Who’s going to lead?

Cheree comes into the room.

CHEREE
I will, if you’ll have me?

JOSIE
What are you doing here? Thought you abandoned us.

CHEREE
I didn’t know how important you were to me. This band and playing music with you is the best thing that’s happened to me.

DARLENE
We need a leader. I’m glad you’re back and I’m glad we have this opportunity to play music.
MAE
What are we playing for?

WENDELL
That’s classified. Get your instruments and report to the Officers’ Club, asap. And one more thing, you’ll be practicing with WAC Band One.

The women leave. Ruby hugs Cheree.

RUBY
I knew you’d stop running.

INT. OFFICERS’ CLUB – DANCE HALL – STAGE

The white women silently watch as Cheree leads the black women on stage. They carry instruments and walk in a precise and orderly manner.

Cheree goes to the podium at center stage. She gestures for WAC Band Two to take their seats. They sit in unison.

Wendell enters with a thick folder under his arm.

WENDELL
(to Cheree)
There’s not enough music to go around. You’ll have to share.

Wendell distributes music to every other stand. Cheree motions for some of her band members to scoot closer where the two bands are divided.

Ruby moves to Jackson. Darlene moves to a white trombonist. A white WAC, scoots next to Mae.

WATERS
(to Cheree)
Can you even read music?

CHEREE
Can you play it as written?

Cheree and Waters are nose to nose. Waters pushes Cheree aside, taps the podium with her baton, gets her group’s attention.

JACKSON
Amateurs.

RUBY
Hambone.
Jackson is on her feet, pushes Ruby down, onto the floor.

Darlene climbs over chairs, punches Jackson. The women mix it up. Wendell pulls women apart but is overwhelmed.

The Lieutenant pulls a pistol from under his pant leg. BANG He fires a shot into the ceiling. The women and Wendell scream, drop to the floor.

LIEUTENANT
Enough! Take your seats. You have your orders and God knows I’m going to see that you follow them.

The women sit. Wendell resurfaces with a bloody nose.

WENDELL
If you can’t get along, just fake it ‘til you feel it.

LIEUTENANT
Sergeant Waters, your group doesn’t march, Private Duncan’s group will do that. We need to coordinate who will play what and when.

WATERS
We’ve marched.

DARLENE
We’ll show ‘em how it’s done.

Mae, Josie and few others are back on their feet. Cheree, at the podium, motions for them to sit. They do.

LIEUTENANT
Put your jealousy, bitterness and prejudice aside. That’s an order.

Wendell dabs his nose with a handkerchief.

WENDELL
Ladies, let’s make music.

Waters taps her baton. Cheree taps her baton.

WATERS
Who is going to conduct this group?

WENDELL
The Lieutenant.

The Lieutenant is surprised. He steps up.
LIEUTENANT
It’s been a while. But you’re all very talented. Let’s see what we have.

The Lieutenant looks at the music on the stand. He studies it. Cheree points to parts on the page.

CHEREE
Watch for the time change here.

Waters points to the page.

WATERS
Two breaks before the bridge.

Cheree hands the Lieutenant her baton, the worn ribbon is still attached.

LIEUTENANT
(to the women)
On four. One, two, three, four.

They play a few bars of “Jersey Bounce.” It’s out of sync, chaotic and competitive.

The Lieutenant taps the baton.

LIEUTENANT
Whoa! Stop! STOP!

The music stops.

LIEUTENANT
WAC Band One, pick up the tempo. WAC Band Two, less soul. And follow me. Let’s see if we can play in sync now. Again, one, two, three.

“Jersey Bounce” starts again. It’s better.

Dissolve

Later - still in the Officers’ Club

Rehearsal is over.

LIEUTENANT
Ladies tomorrow we’ll meet on the south field. We’re marching. Dismissed.

Some women pack up, leave, others linger in mixed clusters.
Cheree and Waters work on a piece of sheet music. Mae works with a white WAC trumpeter. Josie shares fingering with a white WAC clarinet player. Ruby works with Louise.

WENDELL
I’m not sure this can work.

LIEUTENANT
It better.

DISSOLVE

SERIES OF SHOTS OVER MUSIC: “OVER THERE.”

On an open field, all the women march. The black WACs march, play like pros. The white WACS struggle to keep up and in order. Wendell and the Lieutenant flank the white group like sheep dogs. They get in step.

On the field, all the women march next to each other. Ruby trips, Jackson keeps her from falling.

In an otherwise empty stadium, rows of chairs sit on the playing field. The women march in, sit down on their separate sides. The Lieutenant and Wendell gesture for the women to switch sides. It’s an integrated mess.

In the rehearsal hall, Cheree and Waters, both upset shake sheet music at each other. The Lieutenant holds up his hand, they stop. Wendell divides the music between them. Wendell turns his back, Cheree and Waters trade music.

END SERIES OF SHOTS AS MUSIC FADES.

INT. OFFICERS’ CLUB – DANCE HALL – STAGE – DAY

A cacophony of discordant sounds. It’s chaos. White and black women practice different songs loudly, yell across each other at Wendell.

Wendell is bewildered. The Lieutenant laughs at Wendell.

Commanding Officer Heinz enters, shocked at the chaos.

Wendell and the Lieutenant jump to attention.

WENDELL
Ten-hut!

The women stop, stand at attention, salute. Heinz is visibly upset. His face is flushed, veins pulse in his forehead.
HEINZ
What in the Sam Hill is going on?

LIEUTENANT
Sir, just blowing off some steam.

HEINZ
Thursday, nine hundred hours,
Eleanor Roosevelt, the First Lady
of our beloved country, will be
here. The purpose of her visit is
to see first-hand how we work and
live on this base in harmony. I
hope that’s what she’ll take away.

He leaves. They salute. The women excitedly chatter.

LIEUTENANT
We have our orders. This is
important to this base. Please do
your very best to make this event a
success. Your dismissed.

EXT. PARADE GROUNDS AND STADIUM - DAY

The BLEACHERS are full of military personnel, local
dignitaries and civilians. The white WAC band sits next to
the platform, plays “Stars and Stripes Forever.”

CENTER FIELD rows of seated soldiers surround a platform
decorated with red, white and blue bunting. A podium stands
in the middle of the platform.

On the PLATFORM Heinz sits next to an older dignified woman.
It’s ELEANOR ROOSEVELT. Other officers with the same rank,
sit in the same row, including a BLACK OFFICER.

Behind Heinz and Roosevelt, the Lieutenant and Wendell sit
with other lower-ranked officers.

Tanks, Jeeps with cannons, big military trucks, drive slowly
around the field. Flags flutter.

The crowd cheers. White troops march in full regalia
followed by black troops in full regalia. They salute as
they pass the platform. “Stars and Stripes Forever” ends.

“The Army Goes Rolling Along” swells. Cheree, wields a brass
parade baton, leads the black WACs into the stadium. They
march.

The crowd stands, applauds, some wipe away tears.
The song fades. The black women march to the empty seats next to the seated white WAC band.

On the platform, Mrs. Roosevelt leans over to Heinz and whispers something. Heinz nods, leans back, talks to the Lieutenant. The Lieutenant turns, speaks to Wendell. They both get up and leave the platform.

PULL BACK

The WHOLE FIELD. The Lieutenant and Wendell make their way to the WAC bands.

The Lieutenant and Wendell talks with Waters and Cheree.

Waters and Cheree quietly talk to the women.

Waters motion for the women to stand and merge.

The women willingly integrate their seating and music. The sax players, trumpet players, trombone players, etc., group together, wait for direction.

Cheree motions for them to sit. They sit in perfect order.

Wendell and the Lieutenant return to their places on the platform.

Waters hands Cheree a microphone. Waters gives a down beat. They play and Cheree sings "My Country, Tis of Thee."

Mrs. Roosevelt stands, hand over her heart.

The crowd and the officers stand.

The entire stadium sings along with the stirring music and patriotic words of freedom.

The song ends. The crowd hollers and applauds.

Mrs. Roosevelt takes the podium. She blows a kiss to Cheree and the women. The roar grows louder. She holds up her hand for silence.

ROOSEVELT

In 1939, Marian Anderson sang that song to an integrated crowd of seventy-five thousand in front of the Lincoln memorial. It moved me then. And it moves me now. Let us work together here and abroad to bring about liberty. God bless America.
The crowd goes nuts. Mrs. Roosevelt gently waves. She takes her seat. Heinz goes to the podium.

DISSOLVE

BEHIND THE STADIUM - LATER

The white and the black WAC band put instruments away amidst excited chatter.

Cheree and Sargent Waters shake hands.

CHEREE
You conducted beautifully. There’s so much I can learn from you.

SERGEANT WATERS
And me from you. You’re a terrific musician. Please forgive my prejudice and disrespect.

CHEREE
Forgive me.

Heinz, the Lieutenant, Wendell and a slew of officers, escort Eleanor Roosevelt to meet the women.

LIEUTENANT
Attention!

The Lieutenant stands erect as Heinz and the First Lady enter the throng of musicians.

The women all come to attention. Wendell moves a trombone case in front of Mrs. Roosevelt.

HEINZ
Ladies, may I present First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

The women applaud. Mrs. Roosevelt takes Wendell’s hand, steps up onto the case.

ROOSEVELT
Thank you all for such a warm welcome and wonderful presentation. I am extremely encouraged at the positive steps toward integration. It’s an inspiration to see how you work together. It’s what makes this country strong.

(to Heinz)

(MORE)
I congratulate you, Colonel Heinz and all of Fort Everett. May you serve as ambassadors for the nation and entire Armed Forces. I am confident the day will come when all our citizens, men and women, colored and white, will have the same liberties as those we fight for over seas. Again, I thank you all for this enlightening experience. May we remain diligent.

The women politely applaud. Mrs. Roosevelt waves, steps off the case and disappears into the crowd.

Ruby finds herself next to Jackson.

RUBY
Thanks, Jackson. Couldn’t have done it without you.

Jackson sneers. Ruby gives Jackson a quick hug. Jackson turns away from Ruby into Josie and Mae, who hug her. Jackson waits for their release and leaves.

LONG DISSOLVE

EXT. PARADE GROUNDS AND STADIUM - ANOTHER DAY

Promotion grounds. Nation, state and military flags flutter.

The white WAC Band sits with their instruments and music in the stands. Military family members, soldiers and officers black and white sit integrated. Maybe a hundred people in the bleachers. It’s a beautiful day.

Jessie and Cheree’s parents are in the crowd. Mae’s family too.

The black WAC Band, in formal uniform, sits on the field in neat rows of chairs facing the bleachers. They have no instruments.

Color guards flank both sides of the black WACs.

Colonel Heinz stands at the podium. He’s flanked by the Lieutenant and Wendell.

HEINZ
(to women)
Please stand.

Cheree and the women all stand.
HEINZ
As your Commanding Officer, it is with great pride I designate you Fort Everett’s Army Service Forces WAC Band number Two.

Heinz, the Lieutenant and Wendell salute the women.

WAC Band Two return the salute.

WAC Band One plays, “On the Sunny Side of the Street.”

Heinz releases his salute as do the other men and women. The women continue to stand at attention.

HEINZ
WAC Band Two, you are dismissed.

WAC Band Two cheers and tosses their hats.

Cheree makes her way around the group congratulating and hugging the women. It’s returned.

Jessie runs to her mother. Cheree grabs the child into her arms and kisses her face, spins her around.

Cheree sees Wendell leave. She and Jessie catch up.

CHEREE
Wendell this is Jessie.

Jessie shakes Wendell’s hand.

Cheree hugs Wendell. “On the Sunny Side of the Street” wafts over them.

PULL BACK The girls continue to congratulate one another. Friends and family enter the field to celebrate.

FADE OUT

SUPER OVER BLACK

The war in Europe ended May 8, 1945. Women’s Army Corps Bands continued to serve until 1947.

July 26, 1948, President Harry Truman signed executive Order 9981 which ended segregation of the United States Armed Forces.

THE END