

TEXAS MUSIC HISTORY



"The Texas Shuffle"
Texas Jazz Veterans
Texas Dance Halls

TEXAS STATE
UNIVERSITY
1924-1925

The Great YEAR of Texas

Letter from the Director



Fall 2006 marks the Center for Texas Music History's seventh anniversary. During those seven years, the Center has accumulated an impressive list of accomplishments. We now offer several undergraduate and graduate courses covering a variety of topics in Texas music history, and, we have established the very successful Texas Music Oral History Program, through which our graduate students conduct oral

interviews with people from throughout the Texas music community. These interviews are transcribed, archived, and made available for research purposes to students, scholars, and the general public.

The Center continues to help organize a number of educational concerts on campus throughout the year. Our "Texas Music History Unplugged 6" this past March 21st featured a remarkable lineup of artists, including Radney Foster, Terri Hendrix, Lloyd Maines, Rosie Flores, Mingo Saldivar, Miss Lavelle White, Aaron Allan, Cindy Cashdollar, and Elana James. Our "Stars of Texas Music Legacy Series," held in collaboration with the College of Fine Arts and Communication, also has brought several prominent musicians to perform at Texas State.

We've also been busy working with a variety of off-campus organizations in our efforts to preserve and promote the study of Texas music history. One of our most important partners has been Dickson Productions of Austin, which organizes the very popular MusicFest in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. John and Robin Dickson and their staff have helped raise thousands of dollars for the Center and have worked with us to organize tribute concerts that honor pioneers of Texas music.

The Center also has been collaborating with the Texas Heritage Songwriters Association of Austin to acknowledge influential Texas songwriters and to preserve their histories through performances, interviews, and archival collections. As a result of our joint fundraising efforts, we raised \$15,000 this

past March to help fund the Center's many ongoing activities.

In collaboration with Cheatham Street Warehouse and Kerrville Folk Festival, we are working to promote Texas State student songwriters through the Kerrville Folk Festival Student Songwriter Program. This provides support for aspiring student songwriters and allows them to gain experience performing in public.

The Center also is currently developing the new "Texas Music History Online" web site, an interactive database of information, archives, biographies, images, sound clips, historical sites, festivals, and other items related to Texas music. "Texas Music History Online" will serve as a classroom teaching tool, a research database, and an information resource designed to promote Texas music heritage tourism. Our sincerest thanks to Humanities Texas and to the Texas Department of Agriculture's "Texas Yes!" program for providing grant funding for this project.

I would like to offer my sincerest thanks to Gregg Andrews & Vikki Bynum, Dee Lannon, the Center's Advisory Board, Frank de la Teja, Gene Bourgeois, the Texas State University History Department, Perry & Marianne Moore, Ann Marie Ellis, Nina Wright, Elizabeth Denton, Becky Prince, Richard Cheatham, Liz McDonald, T. Cay Rowe, Diana Harrell, César Limón, Lanita Hanson, Gary Hickinbotham, Laurie Jasinski, Terry Boothe, Francine Hartman, Jim & Cathey Moore, John & Robin Dickson, Rick & Laurie Baish, Lucky & Becky Tomblin, Kim & Robert Richey, Jo & Paul Snider, Margie First, Darrell & Barbara Piersol, Phil & Cecilia Collins, Ralph & Patti Dowling, Dennis & Margaret Dunn, Ron & Judy Brown, Grant Mazak, Cathy Supple, Sharon Sandomirsky & Chris Ellison, Byron & Rebecca Augustin, John Kunz, Kent Finlay, Tracie Ferguson, Mildred Roddy, Elmer & Susan Rosenberger, Bill & Michelle Musser, Lee & Judy Keller, Ronda Reagan, Billy Seidel, and all of our other friends and supporters for their help.

To learn more about the Center and its unique and exciting programs, please contact us or visit our web site. Thanks, and best wishes.

Dr. Gary Hartman, Director

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In order to continue this success, we need your help. Your contribution will help fund continued publication of *The Journal of Texas Music History*, along with all the other important educational projects we have underway.

We are very grateful to the donors listed on this page. They have made a personal commitment to preserving the musical heritage of the Southwest. Their efforts will help us continue to increase awareness of how Texas music represents the unique historical development of the region.

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"The Texas Shuffle":

Lone Star Underpinnings of the Kansas City Jazz Sound

Joe Bailey

Photo courtesy of Chris Bailey.

The story of American jazz is often dominated by discussions of New Orleans and of jazz music's migration up the Mississippi River into the urban centers of New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, and St. Louis. This narrative, while accurate in many respects, belies the true nature of the music and, as with any broad historical generalization, contains an ultimate presumptive flaw. The emergence of jazz cannot be attributed solely to any single city or region of the country. Instead, jazz music grew out of the collective experiences of Americans from a variety of backgrounds living throughout the nation.¹

The routinely overlooked contributions of Texas artists to the development of jazz underscore the need for a broader understanding of how this music drew from a wide range of regional influences. As early as the 1920s, roving groups of jazz musicians, or "territory bands," which included a number of Texans, were helping spread jazz throughout the Southwest and Midwest in such towns as Kansas City, Dallas, Fort Worth,

Amarillo, Houston, Galveston, San Antonio, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and beyond. The collective influences of these musicians brought many things to bear on the development of American jazz, including a certain sense of freedom and improvisation that later would be reflected in the emergence of bebop and in the impromptu jam sessions, or "cutting contests," that ran until dawn and helped spotlight younger artists and bold, new musical innovations.²

The Texas and southwestern jazz

scenes, while not heralded on the same scale as those in New Orleans, Chicago, and New York City, have not gone completely unnoticed by scholars. Gunther Schuller, Amiri Baraka, Ross Russell, Frank Driggs, and Albert Murray have long proclaimed the brilliance and influence of the southwestern style, as well as the prominent role Texans have played in its development. Dave Oliphant's 1996 book, *Texan Jazz*, offers the most complete discussion of Texas artists and their contributions to jazz music. Building on the work of these authors and others, this essay further examines the careers of these jazz troubadours from the Southwest who helped to shape the popular "Kansas City" sound of the 1920s through 1940s, and, by extension, changed American music as a whole.³

in competitive jam sessions, or cutting contests, which allowed artists to hone their skills, display their talents, and establish their place within the hierarchy of the territory band circuit.⁵

Kansas City became a hub of activity for these bands beginning in the 1920s, in part, because the Theatre Owners Booking Association and independent bandleaders alike routinely considered the city as the western terminus of the touring circuit. When itinerant bands broke up at the end of their tours, droves of musicians found themselves "stranded in Kansas City. Before long, however, the local night club scene would be transformed, and the town was able to offer a variety of employment opportunities to these players. In 1926, Kansas City's "urban boss," Tom Pendergast, formed a political alliance

Don't let anyone tell you there's a 'Kansas City style,' It isn't Kansas City—it's Southwestern.

Dave Dexter, Jr.

In January 1941, *Down Beat* magazine jazz critic Dave Dexter, Jr., made an important observation about the so-called "Kansas City jazz style" that was taking the nation by storm:

Don't let anyone tell you there's a "Kansas City style." It isn't Kansas City—it's *Southwestern*. The rhythm, and fast moving riff figures, and emphasis on blues, are the product of musicians of the Southwest—and Kansas City is where they met and worked it out so it was foolproof and good.⁴

Dexter was right. The style of jazz usually associated with Kansas City represents a sound cultivated over an expansive region, including the American Southwest. During the years between World Wars I and II, the East Coast's musical landscape had been dominated by New York City's Tin Pan Alley, which was comprised of publishing houses and recording companies, along with legions of song pluggers, repertoire men, talent scouts, and booking agents. By contrast, jazz musicians from the South and Southwest were relatively free from the more institutionalized industry hierarchy found in New York City and seemed at least somewhat freer to pursue greater stylistic individualism and innovation. During the 1920s and 1930s, many musicians from Texas and other southern states formed so-called "territory bands," which generally performed within a limited region that was defined, in part, by the groups' circuit of live venues and the broadcast range of area radio stations. These territory bands typically practiced a "commonwealth system" of payment, living, and voting on performance issues—in sharp contrast to the more autocratic system of their eastern counterparts—and they regularly engaged

with racketeering interests, and the city opened its doors wide to entertainers of all sorts. At the peak of the Pendergast era in the 1930s, an estimated five hundred nightclubs were in operation in the "Wide Open Town."⁶ As the economic hardships of the Great Depression shut down ballrooms across the country and sapped audiences of disposable income, musicians from Texas and elsewhere throughout the Southwest began heading north to "the only haven in the economic storm, Pendergast's Kansas City." Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Texas would provide a number of influential musicians and versatile bands to the development of the Kansas City jazz scene.⁷

Texas had long been home to many high-quality jazz and dance orchestras. Scholar Ross Russell goes so far as to claim that "had it not been for the fortuitous circumstances favoring Kansas City, it is possible that Texas might have rivaled the provincial capital as a center of jazz style." Austin-born bassist Gene Ramey, founding member of the Jay McShann Orchestra and later the Jazz Messengers, recalls, "In those days, everywhere you looked there was bands. There must've been eight or ten bands in San Antonio, and we knew four or five in Houston. There must've been twenty bands in Dallas and Ft. Worth...Almost every week you could find a different band in Austin." A short list of the more noteworthy Texas-based bands of the 1920s would have to include the Alphonse Trent Band, the Don Albert Orchestra, the Terrence T. Holder Orchestra, the Milt Larkin Band, the Nat Towles Orchestra, the Troy Floyd Orchestra, and Gene Coy's Happy Black Aces. In addition, some of the most influential Kansas City-based bands, such as Bennie Moten's and Walter Page's Blue Devils, included a number of Texas musicians.⁸

Of course, these jazz musicians of the 1920s and 1930s borrowed from older musical traditions, including blues, ragtime,

gospel, and other forms of African-American folk music found throughout the South and Southwest. Just as Texan Scott Joplin's pioneering work in ragtime piano helped lay the groundwork for the emergence of jazz, there also were blues and "barrelhouse" piano players in the lumber camps of eastern Texas and southwestern Arkansas whose boogie woogie style contributed to the development of swing. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, musicians throughout the Southwest played on a variety of instruments made of homemade materials or purchased from pawnshops in order to form some of "the first crude jazz orchestras," playing a mixed bag of "blues, ragtime, circus, minstrel, and medicine show music." Although this important musical transition has been well documented in New Orleans and other parts of the South, it continues to receive limited attention in the outlying regions of the Southwest, even though early recordings of such southwestern bands indicate "well-developed styles, fairly sophisticated instrumentation, and sometimes a written repertory."¹⁰

Scott Joplin, born near Texarkana, Texas, in 1868, was among the first and most successful of many black composers to formalize and orchestrate what was, to a large extent, African-American folk music. Taking the complex harmonies of European classical music, along with a structural form based on the European march, and combining these with melodies, themes, phrases, polyrhythms, stop-time breaks, and choruses based on African folk traditions, Joplin's rags reflected a wide range of both European and African influences. Perhaps as importantly, Joplin was the first black composer to truly impart lasting form to folk elements, showcasing them for the first time on the same stages as more "serious" music."

Through his work, Joplin helped sow the seeds of an entirely original American art form, especially by helping give jazz its early vernacular and basic repertoire. Slow drags, stop-time, and the jazz parlance of "talk," "cook," and "prance" found in Joplin's dance themes reflect an attempt to mimic physical movement in music. Furthermore, they reveal a drive to capture rhythm in slang, a characteristic practice in jazz, often parodied, but fundamental to the art's emphasis on the essence of expression. Inspired by Joplin, concert bands throughout the Southwest at the beginning of the twentieth century began to specialize in cakewalk and ragtime pieces. Although ragtime's golden age only lasted into the early twentieth century, the ragtime tradition remained popular across the Southwest, with pianists, brass bands, and dance orchestras playing popular ragtime pieces well into the 1920s.¹²

While Joplin may be the acknowledged "King of Ragtime," fellow Texan Euday L. Bowman's "Twelfth Street Rag" has been recorded by more jazz groups than all of Joplin's compositions combined." Kansas City lore holds that a young Bowman composed the rag at 12th Street and Main, a bustling corner

crowded with pawnshops, all adorned with the symbol of three clustered balls. Bowman reputedly commented to a friend who had pondered opening a shop of his own, "If you get rich on those three balls, I'll write a piece on three notes to make myself rich." As it turned out, Bowman never would become wealthy from his popular composition, since he sold the publishing rights to J.W. Jenkins, a Kansas City musical entrepreneur, for a paltry \$50. Nevertheless, over the years, more than 120 known versions of the "Twelfth Street Rag," ranging in style from New Orleans hot to stride piano to swing to cool tenor saxophone, have been recorded. Having been performed by such a broad range of artists, Bowman's song has served as a vehicle for musicians from a variety of backgrounds to articulate their own unique styles.¹⁴

Bennie Moten's 1925 recording of "Twelfth Street Rag," played in a pure ragtime format converted into orchestral form—eighteen years removed from the ragtime era—belies his own beginnings as a ragtime pianist. Moten, perhaps the seminal bandleader of the Kansas City style, had studied under two piano teachers who were themselves pupils of Scott Joplin. To illustrate further the breadth of ragtime's influences, it is important to stress that Jesse Stone (who penned the iconic "Shake, Rattle, and Roll," a song built on the blues of Kansas City and marketed to audiences as rock and roll), George and Julia Lee, and Alphonse Trent, also were trained in the ragtime tradition before they became jazz band leaders.¹⁵

Had circumstances been favorable for Texas to supplant Kansas City as the nexus of southwestern jazz, ragtime's more dominant influence might well have been phased out sooner than it was in Kansas City. In its place, Texas musicians and their audiences favored blues-drenched grooves and a bawdier barrelhouse style of piano. Boogie woogie (as the barrelhouse style came to be known years later) featured a fast-rolling, hard-rocking bass line that could cut through the noise of the crowds who frequented the sporting houses of east Texas lumber and turpentine camps. The hard-driving barrelhouse blues of the East Texas Piney Woods soon spread to Houston, Dallas, and Galveston, and was sometimes called "Texas style," "fast western," or "fast blues," in contrast to the slow burns of New Orleans and St. Louis.¹⁶

Several Texans helped bring this new boogie woogie sound to national prominence. "Whistlin'" Alex Moore, of Dallas, took his unique style of barrelhouse, combined with melodic whistling, to Chicago, where he first recorded in 1929. Brothers George and Hersal Thomas, of Houston, along with their sister, Beulah "Sippie" Wallace, helped carry boogie woogie throughout the South and Midwest. As it rode the rails north to Chicago and elsewhere during the 1920s, the barrelhouse style inspired other musicians, including "Pine Top" Smith, Meade "Lux" Lewis, and Albert Ammons, who celebrated it in such songs as "The Fives" and "The Rocks."¹⁷ The powerful bass

undercurrent of boogie woogie, however, seems elementary to all of Texas blues, both urban and country. Houston blues singer Sippie Wallace was probably the most influential female singerpianist to combine the boogie-woogie style with gospel, blues, and jazz. Other barrelhouse piano players, including Robert Shaw, who hailed from Stafford, Texas, would find their way to Kansas City after the Great Depression, bringing their unique styles with them.¹⁸

The southwestern jazz tradition exhibits several salient musical characteristics, the first of which is the ensemble approach based upon riffs (repeated phrases). Relying on the foundation of these insistent melodic figures, soloists may launch into open-ended, freewheeling improvisation. All the while, the touchstone of the Kansas City sound is the ubiquitous groove, a *rhythm* emanating from the music's very core. "The Kansas City groove was coming out of Texas blues rather than a New Orleans vibe," explains historian Karl Miller. "The straight up, non-alternating bass line that's big in Texas country blues [gave way in the Kansas City style to] a simpler, deeper groove, where the groove is really coming from the bottom of the music rather than from the interplay as in ragtime." By comparing a hard-driving Basie riff to the lush

According to music historian Gunther Schuller, the blues in Texas is "one of the oldest indigenous traditions and probably much older than the New Orleans idiom that is generally thought to be the primary fountainhead of jazz." As African Americans migrated from the Deep South into Texas, they brought with them "a new hope, a new vision of emancipation, and the music began to change." The Delta blues, best described as "dense, tragic, hopeless and poignant" gave way to a "less cryptic, more outspoken" Texas blues form, "more powerful and exuberant in delivery, more traveled in reference."

Certain characteristics make the Texas blues distinguishable from other regional styles. Texas blues generally does not follow the Delta tradition of repeating conventional phrases in favor of a more inventive narrative approach, calling upon the writer/performer to craft a story of his own and relay it with feeling, but in a lighter, more relaxed, conversational tone. The accompaniment adds further buoyancy, with guitar playing more melodic, agile, and swift than chordal and chunky, all contributing to a sound that is wide-open, engaging, and distinctive.²²

Henry "Ragtime" Thomas, born in Big Sandy, Texas, in 1874, is a good example of this unique style derived from the eclectic

"The Kansas City groove was coming out of Texas blues rather than a New Orleans vibe."

Karl Miller

counter-punctual harmonies of Fletcher Henderson or Duke Ellington's Orchestra, one can easily distinguish the Kansas City groove from the sweeter sounds coming out of the East, or for that matter, even from the syncopated styles of ragtime, or the polyphonic webs played by hot New Orleans jazz orchestras.

In *Blues People*, Amiri Baraka recalls an anecdote which underscores how deeply ingrained the blues has been in the southwestern jazz tradition, especially in comparison to contemporary big bands in the Northeast:

Negroes in the Southwest still wanted a great part of their music to be blues-oriented, even if it was played by a large dance band. And the music of these great Southwestern orchestras continued to be hard and swinging, even when a great many large Negro bands in other areas of the country had become relatively effete. It is said that when Ellington's and Henderson's bands traveled through the Southwest, the musicians there were impressed most by their musicianship and elegance, but they did not want to sound as 'thin' as that.²⁰

influences found in the Southwest. One of nine children born to former slaves who found work as sharecroppers in northeastern Texas, Thomas left the cotton fields around the age of sixteen to become a "songster," traveling among black communities performing ballads, dance music, and other styles. At first, he accompanied himself on the quills, an African-American folk instrument made of cane reeds, before eventually learning to play guitar. Samuel Charters describes Thomas's picking style and vocal delivery. "Like most Texas singers he kept his guitar close to standard pitch, instead of slackened considerably below it, as in Mississippi...Three of his recorded pieces, 'Texas Worried Blues,' 'Cotton Field Blues,' and 'Texas Easy Street Blues,' had nearly all the elements that became part of the emerging Texas blues style."²³

These elements consisted of an "unforced" vocal delivery, a "faster and lighter melody," and a "light and insistent" 4/4 repetition on the tonic of the key to accompany the guitar. Thomas was "one of the first to completely define the Texas guitar style," according to historian Dave Oliphant. His vocal delivery on "Texas Easy Street Blues" hints at Louis Armstrong's scat style, but the most conspicuous precedents of jazz music to be found in Thomas's repertoire were his remarkable imitations

of vocal expressions, singing, or the sounds of passing trains, all performed on his guitar. Oliphant distinguishes Thomas's technique from the barnyard imitations employed by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band on *Livery Stable Blues* (1917), which were "mere novelty effects compared with the human sounds of crying, moaning, and laughing reproduced" in Thomas's music. Oliphant continues, "Henry Thomas represents a vital link between the roots of black music in Africa—that is, nineteenth and twentieth-century American folksong (including spiritual, hillbilly, 'rag,' and 'coon')—and the coming of the blues. All of these forms contributed in turn to the creation of jazz in its various styles."²⁴

An even more influential blues musician from the Southwest who rose to prominence during the 1920s was Blind Lemon Jefferson, born September 24, 1893, in Couchman, Texas. One of the earliest rural blues guitarists to make regular use of improvisation, his stylings, rooted in a call-and-response tradition, were augmented by altogether novel rhythmic and melodic interplay. Jefferson's intricate breaks would not be matched until a decade later when fellow Texan Charlie Christian revolutionized jazz on the amplified electric guitar.²⁵

Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter, born in Mooringsport, Louisiana, on January 21, 1888, but raised in the Lone Star State, was another bluesman in the Texas country blues tradition who would have an impact on the southwestern jazz sound. Jazz critic and historian Marshall Stearns argues that it was Lead Belly, along with other Texas guitar players, who 'kept alive an enormous reservoir of music to which jazz...returned again and again. Its powerful elements of the work song, the ring shout, and the field holler...a dynamic blend in which many of the qualities of West African music are fully represented..without this original mixture, jazz could never have developed.' Audiences throughout the Southwest generally did seem to prefer a more blues-inflected jazz sound. As Gunther Schuller argues in *Early jazz*, 'Out of this earlier, deeper feeling in the music developed a way of playing jazz which was eventually to supersede the New Orleans, Chicago, and New York Styles.'²⁶

This southwestern affinity for a more blues-oriented jazz is apparent in the works of several musicians. Singers, such as the "Texas Nightingale," Sippie Wallace, made recordings that served as a transitional device between the older country blues forms and the modern blues adopted by the jazzmen. With her brother Hersal Thomas on piano and Louis Armstrong on trumpet, Wallace's full, classic blues intonation opened a reciprocal line of influence between jazz and the blues, resulting in a uniformity of style upon which the territory bands could launch their own compositions.²⁷

Just as it is important to note the differences between the country bluesman and the leader of a twelve-piece band, and to <http://ecommons.txstate.edu/jtmh/vol6/iss1/3>

recognize the stylistic fusion found on records by classic blues women such as Sippie Wallace, it would be an oversight to ignore the similarities between jazz musicians and the traditional Texas blues singers. Despite obvious differences in economics of performance, the musicians shared much in common. Dallas, with one of the largest jazz communities in Texas, had a strong blues tradition throughout the 1920s. The Big "D," a rendezvous point for Lead Belly, Blind Lemon Jefferson, T-Bone Walker, and Sammy Price, was swarming with blues singers, boogie-woogie pianists, and small combos. The very same clubs and juke joints where these artist played also were popular venues for territory jazz musicians, such as Buster Smith, Budd Johnson, Keg Johnson, Charlie Christian, Oran "Hot Lips" Page, Herschel Evans, Terence T. Holder, Snub Mosely, Peanuts Holland, Hayes Pillars, and Alphonse Trent.²⁸

The unique jazz-blues scene in the Southwest held a special attraction for other musicians, as well. In early 1930, New Orleans pianist Bunk Johnson, who was barnstorming in Electra, Texas, received a letter from his friend King Oliver in Chicago. "Now, Bunk," Oliver admonished him, "it's your fault you are still down there working for nothing...You must keep in touch with me, because I can't tell just when some good thing will turn up." However, Johnson knew very well why he remained in the less lucrative Southwest, and he replied to his friend Oliver that, he wanted to keep "drivin' down the blues," unfettered by the "sweet" Hollywood music that dominated popular tastes in the larger jazz scenes outside of Texas.²⁹

The broad influence of the Texas blues sensibility is perhaps best exemplified in one of the most successful territory bands of the early 1920s, Gene Coy's Happy Black Aces, from Amarillo. In a region of Texas better known for cattle ranching than for jazz, the Black Aces were playing original numbers "built on the structure of the blues and at tempos slower than were typical of the one and two-step dances of the period." The fact that this blues influence impacted Texas jazz outfits as far north as Amarillo in 1920 helps explain the style's jump from the guitar-based country blues and barrelhouse piano styles to the larger territory swing bands. Groups such as the Aces kept an awareness of earlier Texas black musical forms, developing them within the context of jazz instrumentation, featuring wind instruments, contrast and harmonization of brass and reeds, emphasis on improvisation, and the propulsion of notoriously powerful rhythm sections.³⁰

This "Texas beat" was widely regarded as distinctive to the state and essential to the southwestern sound, from the pioneering work of Alphonse Trent's big band in the early 1920s up through the Jay McShann Orchestra's rhythm section, which, featuring Texans Gene Ramey on bass and Gus Johnson on drums, was often rated superior to the heralded rhythm section of the Count Basie band.³¹ New Orleans trumpeter Don Albert, who played

with the Troy Floyd band of San Antonio, describes the innovations of Texas territory groups:

New Orleans bands [other than parade bands] were small, like the basic five or six pieces, and that was what they now call Dixieland jazz, and they weren't finished [formally trained] musicians. They played beautiful music [but] the difference [between a New Orleans band] and [Alphonse] Trent's [big band in Texas in the 1920s] was that it [Trent's] was a band of at least twelve men. Twelve members—which required arrangements. A six-piece band didn't have to have any arrangements. The sounds were made to sound different and the tempos were different and so was the music. The rhythm [in the Texas bands] was especially the thing that was different from New Orleans... The drums used a silent beat...and the sustained beat which was different with the big bands in Texas. The drummers would read in parts and consequently they got off the rhythm a little bit and came back to it, which the New Orleans drummers didn't do. Different feeling on the drums...and the playing of the cymbals...altogether.³²

Buster Smith, one of the Texas Tenors, a distinguished group of saxophone players from the Lone Star State, concurs when asked about the origins and evolution of jazz in Texas and Louisiana. "Well, I wouldn't say it started altogether in New Orleans...They had a little different sort of jazz from what we had in Texas...the drummer played a little different. We didn't hear as much about New Orleans in those days as we did later on."³³ The powerful tenor Cannonball Adderly describes the Texas sound as "a moan inside the tone," an edge without hardness. The impressive pedigree of Texas sax players had been established during the 1920s, by such towering figures as Herschel Evans, Arnett Cobb, Illinois Jacquet, Booker Ervin, and Buster Smith. The Dallas-Fort Worth area, with its long-standing blues tradition, produced a disproportionately high number of influential sax players.³⁴

From his first recorded solo at the age of twenty with the Troy Floyd Orchestra in San Antonio in 1928, Denton, Texas, native Hershel Evans demonstrated new melodic and rhythmic sensibilities on tenor saxophone. His elegant, melodic, blues-tinged performance floated above the straight "choonk-chink" of the rhythm tuba and banjo on "Shadowland Blues" and "Dreamland Blues."³⁵ Jo Jones called Herschel Evans a "natural. He had a sound on the tenor that perhaps you will never hear on a horn again." Of course, all of the Texan brass and reedmen's scorching, blues-infected playing was not developed in a vacuum.

Buddy Tate recalls with glee the jam sessions across the
Produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press, 2006

Southwest that helped produce that sound. "Working out of Dallas [Nat Towles, Buster Smith, Joe Keys, and myself] used to battle Milt Larkin's band in Houston all the time. Arnett Cobb and Illinois Jacquet were in that band, and they used to battle us every Sunday at Harlem Square in Houston."³⁶

For ten or fifteen years before Kansas City became identified with a certain style of jazz, the Texas territory bands had enjoyed a freewheeling reign over the southwestern circuit. During the 1920s, Texas featured an assortment of high-caliber jazz and dance orchestras that rivaled any region in the country. Jazz music—authentic, indigenous, and rich—seemed to permeate every corner of the territory, from the Sabine west to the Rio Grande, from Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, north to Amarillo. The available sources on these bands, including detailed oral histories provided by musicians of the same era and locale, reveal styles and sounds ahead of their time, which would later shape jazz from the formative ages of swing through the bebop era and beyond. Furthermore, the musicians who developed their chops on the Texas scene would help staff some of the most influential bands during the golden age of swing.

Texas territory bands owed much of their success to the abundance of dance halls, clubs, and festivals throughout the state, which attracted large audiences who were eager to dance. By the 1930s, however, the Great Depression began to change all of this. One by one, territory bands across the Southwest broke up, since so many of their fans no longer could afford to patronize these venues as regularly, and many clubs and dance halls were forced to close their doors. By contrast, Kansas City had a thriving entertainment industry where work remained plentiful, the living was cheap, and good music abounded.

Tom Pendergast's "heavenly city" offered a haven for out-of-work musicians, its booming nightlife supporting some five hundred nightclubs in its heyday, many of them along an eight-block stretch near the Kansas-Missouri state line. As Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix write:

Gambling dens, nightclubs, and taxi dance halls lined 12th Street, extending a mile east from the heart of downtown. Journalist Dave E. Dexter, Jr., estimated that one stretch of 12th Street "boasted as many as 20 illegal saloons and niteries in a single block." The clubs ranged from rough, bucket-of-blood joints with sawdust on the floor and a stomp-down piano player, to elegant nightclubs, presenting elaborate floor shows accompanied by full bands. Club owners christened new clubs by giving a cab driver five dollars and the key to the front door with instructions to drive as far as he could and throw away the key. "The clubs didn't close," recalled bandleader Jay McShann. "About 7:00 in the morning the cleanup man would come and all

the guys at the bar would move out of the way. And the bartender would serve them at the table while the place got cleaned up. Then they would go back to the bar. The clubs went 24 hours a day."³⁷

Through his contacts within the **Pendergast** political machine, territory bandleader **Bennie Moten**, in particular, benefited from the local vice network. Kansas City's native son waged a cunning campaign of attrition against Texas and Oklahoma bands who had relocated to this new musical Mecca during the desperate days of the Depression. **Moten** could take his pick of the most talented musicians, securing priority bookings at headliner clubs and selecting band members with artful calculation.

Moten's story is, in many ways, the story of Kansas City jazz. In 1931, he returned victorious from the East Coast, where he had received rave reviews, including some which praised his band as being even "greater than Duke Ellington's Orchestra."



Bennie Moten's Kansas City Orchestra, Pearl Theater, Philadelphia, 1931. Reproduced from the Ross Russell Collection, courtesy of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

Soon after **Moten** moved back to Kansas City, however, he began to lose musicians amid growing criticism that he had compromised his sound by absorbing the more sedate stylistic influences he had encountered while in the Northeast. Consequently, he set about rebuilding his band by picking up **Herschel Evans** and other more innovative musicians from the Southwest. Despite such changes, problems persisted. At one point, **Moten's** disgruntled band members ousted him as leader and replaced him for two years with William "Count" Basie. During this period, **Moten** worked successfully with longtime rival **George E. Lee** before reuniting with his own band and eventually with Basie for a residency at the *Cherry Blossom*, during the final weeks of **Moten's** life. According to the *Kansas City Hall*, **Moten's** untimely death in 1935, brought the "largest funeral Kansas City had witnessed in 20 years...Thousands of both races from all walks of life, filled every available space...and overflowed far out into the street during the last rites for Bennie

<http://ecommons.txstate.edu/jtmh/vol6/iss1/3>

Moten, beloved and widely known orchestra leader."³⁸

If the **Moten Band** was the iconic band of Kansas City, mixing East Coast sounds with southwestern influences, the story of Dallas's **Alphonse Trent Orchestra** is "as fabulous a one as the Roaring Twenties has to offer." The ten-piece ensemble, founded when **Trent** was still a teenager, landed a two-year gig at the *Adolphus Hotel* in Dallas, one of the most glamorous hotels in the Southwest. By 1925, **Trent** and his orchestra performed regularly at the *Adolphus* and were broadcast over **WFAA** radio all the way into Canada. With this new, high-profile presence, the **Alphonse Trent Orchestra** had become the single most successful jazz band in the Southwest. "It is entirely possible," argues **Gunther Schuller**, "that **Trent** exerted a much greater influence on others, perhaps even [**Fletcher**] **Henderson**, than we might realize," especially over the airwaves before **Trent** cut his first record in 1928.³⁹

At the peak of their popularity, **Trent's** sidemen, who earned as much as \$150 a week, were known to wear silk shirts and camel hair overcoats and to drive *Cadillac* cars. Their wind instruments were all gold plated. Trumpeter **Terrence T. Holder** recalls, "Then we made a whole lot of extra jobs, too. We'd build up two hundred dollars a week, and wasn't any of us used to making that kind of money...We went on [later] to the *Baghdad Club*, between Ft. Worth and Dallas. They had everything out there, races, gambling, everything."⁴⁰

Throughout the 1920s, Texas provided an important network of support for musicians. **Trent's** band and others would play high society ballrooms, governors' inaugurations, and college dances, then hit the clubs and battle out some low-down blues with other territory groups. **Don Albert**, who played trumpet in **Troy Floyd's** band, recalls a particularly lucrative ballroom gig in Prohibition-era San Antonio:

[We played] the *Shadowland Ballroom* every night, every night. It was a gambling casino, just like *Las Vegas*, worse than Kansas City! Slot machines, every card game you can name, every dice game you could name...Prohibition knocked us out for a little while, but they straightened that out after a week or two. Didn't have to worry, money was there. [The gambling room] was a great big room, five or six card [tables], five or six dice tables. The gamblers are dressed in tuxedos and the women in full dress clothes. . .[plus] waiters, and they started using dancers out of Hollywood, teams, a man and a lady. Fantastic dancers, doing the waltzes and adagios, and maybe some great singer.⁴¹

The **Troy Floyd Orchestra** had risen to prominence following the success of **Alphonse Trent** in the mid-1920s. By 1929, **Floyd's**

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Herschel Evans of Denton. Reproduced from the Ross Russell Collection, courtesy of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

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band had played the prestigious Plaza Hotel and had recorded for Okeh Records. The two-sided "Dreamland suite, a slow blues in B-minor, elevated the Texas tradition to a new level of instrumentation and harmonics while retaining a basic polyrhythmic character and pervasive blues feeling. One of the recording's most notable solo contributions came from a young Herschel Evans on tenor saxophone, in which he helped to bring the Texas blues idiom into fluid elegance and make "Dreamland Blues" a clear forerunner to later extended pieces, such as Duke Ellington's "Diminuendo" and "Crescendo in Blue."⁴²

By most accounts, the Texas territory bands of the 1920s were every bit as good as any act further north. Buddy Tate, of the Troy Floyd band, recalls that band mate Herschel Evans always requested the night off to go hear Alphonse Trent's group whenever it came to town. "In those days, they were outplaying Duke [Ellington]...I really think so," Tate recalls. "They would come up and play from nine to twelve every Sunday after they finished their date at the Adolphus Hotel, and, man, you couldn't get in when they played." For jazz giant Budd Johnson, "the Trent band was the greatest I ever heard in my life." Many other musicians who heard these bands play live on the Texas circuit testify that their performances were beyond reproach. The sophistication shown on recordings made by Alphonse Trent validates such praise, despite lower-grade production by the Gennett Recording Company of Richmond, Indiana. Likewise, Troy Floyd's recordings on Okeh exhibit consummate musicianship, authentic blues styling, and very sophisticated arrangements. Although most of these bands

would be dissolved during the Depression, many of their members would go on to assume integral roles in the Kansas City jazz scene.⁴³

Given the great success and impressive level of musicianship achieved by the Floyd and Trent bands and others during their triumphant, albeit abbreviated, Texas reign, why have they not received greater recognition in jazz history? Sheer geography certainly was one factor that helped relegate them to the less-prestigious designation of "territory" bands. Perhaps just as important is the fact that these Texas bands were relatively short-lived, since the Great Depression brought economic hardship that drove many venues and bands alike out of business.

However, another important factor in preventing these Texas bands from gaining greater national attention involved a general lack of sound fiscal support and good management. Being far removed from the Northeast's more entrenched entertainment industry hierarchy may have fostered artistic autonomy, just as the commonwealth system affirmed the territory bands' musical ideals in democratic self-governance. Nevertheless, a lack of access to more high-profile musical arenas hindered the long-term viability of these bands. Many territory bandleaders, although gifted arrangers, profoundly talented musicians, and able businessmen, often lacked the resources necessary to bring their ensembles to their full commercial potential. What's more, when leaders harbored grander ambitions, sometimes the same commonwealth system that made their bands thriving creative units tied their hands with regards to business. Factions of players might prefer gambling and partying in Texas or Kansas City over slugging the band through an East Coast tour that could bring them into the national spotlight; because of the commonwealth system, bandleaders were bound to honor these wishes, even at the expense of the band as a whole. On the other hand, leaders occasionally held back for fear of losing talented players to more lucrative big-city outfits. Critic and historian Frank Driggs notes that the Alphonse Trent band's "intonation and precision were the equal of anyone's, and only lack of good management and Trent's inordinate fear of losing his best sidemen to entrenched leaders in New York prevented him from taking that city by storm (although he did play the Arcadia Ballroom there briefly)."⁴⁴

Buddy Tate recalls Terrence T. Holder's ability to "build a band better and faster than anyone I ever saw." Tate continues, "He was a wonderful person and if you did what he said, everything worked out right. He could build a band in three weeks with knowledge of music and he should have been a big time leader." Despite these abilities and attributes, Holder's orchestra failed to survive the Great Depression, and most of his players were absorbed into other groups.⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Frank Driggs argues that the absence of good management that plagued Alphonse Trent's band also hurt other jazz musicians in the Southwest:

The story of Alphonse Trent is one of jazz's major losses, the story of the ahead-of-its-timeterritory band lacking strong management. Had Trent, or Walter Page, or Jesse Stone had a manager like Irving Mills or Joe Glaser as Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong did, our musical history might have been quite different.⁴⁶

Were it not for the fact that John Hammond "discovered" Count Basie (ironically, through a faint radio signal at the upper limits of his **car** radio dial while in Chicago to record the Benny Goodman Orchestra), the rich jazz style of the Southwest and the many surviving Texas musicians who kept it alive in Kansas City might never have been introduced to the world. Basie had toured extensively throughout Texas, where he first befriended the musicians who would help make his band jump and swing all the way into the 1960s. His accounts of life on the road with Walter Page's Blue Devils, an Oklahoma-based band that often played in the Lone Star State, offer insights into the life of the Texas territory band on the eve of the Depression. According to Basie:

[Texas] was another part of their territory, and they were really kings all down there, and I got to play all those towns like Dallas and Fort Worth. We hung around Dallas a little bit and went down to San

Antonio and Houston; and everywhere that band went they were well loved, and you didn't have to worry about food or where you were going to stay. Because you could always stay at somebody's house. We had a whole lot of friends down there, and it was just great, and I enjoyed everything about it. I was with the band. I was with the Blue Devils. I was a Blue Devil, and that meant everything to me. Those guys were so wonderful.⁴⁷

The "commonwealth" system upon which the territory bands were run was perfectly suited to Texas, where broad popular support in African-American communities was spread over wide expanses of land. For the Blue Devils, the system was noted for its generosity and hospitality. As Basie explains:

A special thing that was so wonderful about that mob was the way they felt about each other. I didn't know what kind of salary I was supposed to get. It wasn't important. It was not a salaried band anyway, and you never heard anybody squawking about finances. We played mostly on a very little guarantee, and then we got the rest from whatever the door receipts were. So what usually happened was that Big 'Un would



Alphonse Trent's Orchestra. Reproduced from the Ross Russell Collection, courtesy of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

get the money, and after we'd bought the gas and figured out the expenses to get to the next town, we'd divide the rest among ourselves, and when the married musicians had special family bills back home, what we made on the next dance we'd play would go to help them. That was what I found out about how the Blue Devils worked. And I understand that a lot of territory bands operated like that in those days. They were called commonwealth bands. It was just like a beautiful family.⁴⁸

Contingent on the kindness of local contacts, the commonwealth system did help sustain Texas bands through the leaner years at the beginning of the Depression. Because of this system, in part, many Texas jazz musicians were not enticed by the lure of higher pay up North, which would have brought with it more invasive industry management. Bands such as Bennie Moten's and Andy Kirk's Twelve Clouds of Joy had played successful East Coast tours and had even been offered regular gigs at Connie's Inn and the Savoy Ballroom in New

One should not infer from Tate's observations that a few highly successful bands in the North were not paid better than bands of comparable, even superior musicianship in the Southwest, or that virulent racism was not a fact of life throughout the South. Success stories, such as those of Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway, however, were the exception and not the rule for the era. Their successes hardly suggest that the North necessarily offered a more attractive artistic climate to the talented bands coming out of the Southwest.

In *Goin' to Kansas City*, author Nathan Pearson provides a context for the shift of jazz music from the Roaring Twenties to the Great Depression:

The 1920s were self-defined as the jazz age, and while that's a romantic generalization, it's largely accurate. Jazz—new, exciting, and disreputable—served well as a symbol for the times. But the era was built on an economic house of cards that tumbled in late 1929 with the start of the Depression.⁵⁰

The Great Depression undermined the Southwest's unique regional support system, making the hardships of the road virtually unmanageable for territory bands.

York City. However, they always seemed to enjoy coming back home to the Southwest, where loyal audiences supported and validated their unique musical stylings.

Ultimately, however, artistic freedom, audience loyalty, and territorial pride could not counter the ravages of the Great Depression. By the early 1930s, musicians in the Southwest were migrating to Kansas City (much more so than New York, Chicago, or St. Louis). This was primarily for economic reasons, and not because they preferred the artistic environment of the North, nor, as Buddy Tate pointed out in a 1959 interview with jazz *Review*, that they believed they necessarily could escape racism by playing in northern venues.

I'll tell you one thing about the South, they'll recognize your talent, because we played all the best white dances and the best locations and broadcast all the time, but up North they'll tell you, "We'd like to put you on a commercial program, but the South won't accept you." That's their way of telling you they won't hire you. They don't want you to get where the real money is. I know it isn't true because Trent played the Adolphus Hotel every day for a year and had a radio wire, and Basie just got into the Waldorf last year.⁴⁹

The Great Depression undermined the Southwest's unique regional support system, making the hardships of the road virtually unmanageable for territory bands. The jazz musicians of Texas and veterans of the territory band battles throughout the Southwest would find refuge at the end of the line, in Kansas City, a bustling "Paris of the Plains." Before the Depression, Kansas City had been just one stop among many in the territories jumping with the sweet thunder of the southwestern sound, although it usually was the last stop on most such tours. Eddie Durham, of San Marcos, Texas, who would write and perform with the Basie band and others, describes the circumstances at the end of the line in Kansas City:

Times were hard, and all the guys got that far and they couldn't get no further. That's the real truth. There wasn't any bands sending for them so they just ended up in Kansas City because they could live...If I go stay somewhere, I wasn't going to pay. Nobody ever bothered you about money in those days...Everything was handy, generous...I think that had a lot to do with it...I know that's as far as I got...Basie got stranded [in K.C., as well].⁵¹

For years the road had been arduous for territory bands, plagued by poor conditions, crooked promoters, and hard luck. The TOBA (Theatre Owners Booking Association)—an acronym which jazz musicians often jokingly claimed to stand for "Tough On Black Asses"—booked one-night stands hundreds of miles apart, with severe penalties for missing dates and scant compensation for grueling travel. These hardships of the southwestern circuit were tolerable, only because of the benefits of the commonwealth system, and only if the pay was decent and the gigs were plentiful. By 1929, however, economic shock waves from the ailing stock market swept through the territories. Conditions worsened with each passing year, with the regional economy reaching its nadir by the middle 1930s. Fewer and fewer Americans could afford the twenty-five to thirty cents required for an evening of dancing. To make matters worse, in the Great Dust Bowl of northern Texas and southern Oklahoma, unsound tilling practices by farmers desperate to make ends meet resulted in dust storms in the mid-1930s, which made living and traveling throughout the area more difficult than ever before. As sideman Drew Page remembers, there were times when tour caravans were forced to slow to a pace of forty miles per day, because of poor road conditions which required that tires be scraped clean "every mile or so" just to keep rolling.⁵²

At the Depression's onset, jazz musicians found work more easily than most, but the drop in disposable income immediately hurt business. Buster Smith, of the Blue Devils, explains, "Most of the time we lived out of a paper sack. You stayed out on the road all the time, and nobody never had enough money to amount to nothing." Top salaries for a musician were eighty dollars a week. By contrast, Cab Calloway's New York Band had earlier grossed \$75,000 a week during their first tour of Texas, of which the band was assured \$15,000 and a percentage of earnings. The grass-roots support of the Texas bands began to wear thin in trying times. Drew Page remembers being paid for playing a Texas watermelon garden in 1930 with a five-cent slice of melon.⁵³

When the deprivations of life on the road became unendurable, many members of the Texas territory groups found a haven in Kansas City, bringing with them a belief in the commonwealth system and their own rich stylistic traditions. Jo Jones, who came to Kansas City via Chicago, describes this coupling of an authentic individual artistic ethos and a collective dedication to the music unique to territory-trained artists:

What I mean is that I was in New Orleans and I was in Chicago but I never heard music that had the kind of feeling in jazz I most admire until I went to Kansas City in November, 1933. Some musicians retain that

feeling for a short period of time and some, like the ones from Kansas City, still retain it. Men like Ben Webster and Lester still have it and Count Basie does. It's hard to describe it exactly. For example, I don't know why the feeling at jam sessions is different in New York from the way it was in Kansas City. But it is. Now, New York is the greatest city on earth. It affords everything contained in Kansas City, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, or anywhere, but we had in Kansas City an unselfishness you don't find here. We didn't have time for selfishness. We were more concerned with our fellow man and with music.⁵⁴

Jones's reflections underscore the open arms of the Kansas City scene that embraced so many jazz musicians in an atmosphere rooted in years as a freewheeling frontier town, where cattlemen at the end of a long drive would rest and spend their wages. The city's Prohibition-era "sin" economy, rooted in machine politics, corruption, and the extensive influence of organized crime in lucrative vice businesses, provided an economic cushion for those in the entertainment and music business. By the 1930s, Kansas City had reached a level of notoriety that reminded syndicated journalist Westbrook Pegler of another famous cosmopolitan den of vice:

Kansas City is more like Paris. The stuff is there, the gambling joints and the brothels, including among the latter a restaurant conducted in the imitation of that one in Paris, more haunted than the Louvre, where the waitresses wear nothing on before and a little less than half of that behind. But like Parisians, the people of Kansas City obviously believe that such things must be and, also like Parisians, are proud of their own indifference.⁵⁵

The city's mobsters needed musicians to staff their many clubs and entertain their patrons. Food and drink were cheap, cabarets closed late, if at all, and musicians were bankrolled by gangsters who did not meddle with their music, and who, likewise, expected deference toward their control. Buster Smith elaborates on the relationship between musician and mobster:

In Kansas City all them big clubs were [run by] them big gangsters, and they were the musician's best friend. They give you a job, and something to eat, and work regular. We didn't know nothing about their business, they didn't know nothing about ours, all they want us to do is play the music, and keep the crowd happy.⁵⁶

Eddie Durham further emphasizes the generosity of the gangsters from the point of view of musicians who were accustomed to the hardships of the road. "Those guys paid you double for anything you ever done in Kansas City." He continues, "They never owed a musician a nickel...Those gangsters would always treat everybody right. If you touched a musician, or one of the girls, you'd go out on your head. Nobody ever harassed musicians."⁵⁷ The gangster-run clubs were often confident they would not be convicted in the local courts. The *Kansas City Call*, for example, reported a 1930 raid at the infamous East Side Musician's Club:

The East Side Musicians suffered a series of raids at the hands of Kansas City police, but the raiders were never able to get evidence enough to convict the club of gambling. The records of the North Side court show 106 dismissals and not a single conviction. Naturally the musicians were very sure of themselves. On the 100th raid, they set out to celebrate and made it a good one by serenading Chief of Police John L. Miles, with a band playing "I Can't Give You Anything but Love."⁵⁸

20 Texas trumpeter Oran "Hot Lips" Page was one of many southwestern musicians to be picked up by native Kansas City bandleader Bennie Moten. "Lips's" blues-drenched phrasing on "Toby" would cement Moten's 1932 recording as "one of the dozen or so most thrilling single sessions in the history of jazz," according to John McDonough, a critic for *Down Beat*. McDonough continues, "Here is the epitome of the Kansas City big band sound before it became absorbed into the swing movement."⁵⁹ Moten possessed the acumen to attract and orchestrate some of the Southwest's greatest talent. In his hometown, however, he used political friends to his advantage in ways that the more loosely managed territory groups could not have imagined. "Lips" Page remembers:

Bennie was a businessman first and last. He had a lot of connections out there, and he was a very good friend of Pendergast, the political boss. Through contacts of this kind, he was able to control all the good jobs and choice locations in and around Kansas City. In his day, you might say that he was stronger than MCA. However, he was also a very good musician.⁶⁰

By following Moten's career as a bandleader, one can see the debt he owed to Texas territory musicians. Not only had he always been very cognizant of the more successful southwestern bands, but, until the departure of Texan jazz trumpeter Lammar

Wright in 1927, Moten's band had enjoyed tremendous success
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building upon the region's distinct blues-riff technique. Moten also sometimes borrowed from the types of arrangements that such Texas musicians as Alphonse Trent, Troy Floyd, and T. Holder employed. An emphasis on arranged music may have cost the Moten band some of its regional character, however, as is evidenced by the whipping it suffered in a "battle" with the Blue Devils in 1928. Despite this "defeat," Moten soon followed the old Kansas City adage, "If you can't beat 'em, raid 'em." He quickly began siphoning away several of the Devils' featured players, beginning with Texans Eddie Durham and Dan Minor on trombone and Joe Keyes on trumpet. Eventually Moten managed to nab Walter Page on bass, Count Basie on piano, and Ben Webster, who had been playing tenor sax with Coy's Happy Black Aces of Amarillo. With "Hot Lips" Page already in the band, this meant that four-fifths of Moten's brass section was Texan. As a result, perhaps the most influential band of the Kansas City era, led by Bennie Moten and whose members would ultimately form Count Basie's band in a meteoric rise to fame, was made up largely of Texans.

The riff approach to large ensemble jazz seems to have come to the Blue Devils, Moten, and later the Basie outfit largely by way of Texas. According to Gene Ramey, "It was Buster [Smith] who really made the Basie band what it was, a riff band with very little music."⁶⁰ The simple "head arrangement formula, in which the main phrases were played from memory rather than from sheet music, became the hallmark of the Basie band. Whereas Duke Ellington wrote for his players, composing Tricky Sam Nanton's trumpet breaks with tailored character and finesse, Basie's players wrote for him, often in rehearsal. "One O'Clock Jump," Basie's theme song, claims its genesis at the end of a characteristically sparse piano solo when Basie reportedly motioned toward Buster Smith to riff with the reed section. After Smith launched into a theme based on Don Redman's "Six or Seven Times," "Hot Lips" Page then led the trumpets through their paces, as Dan Minor and Eddie Durham followed suit with the trombones. In unison for the finale, the number closes with Jo Jones's powerful accents on drums. Smith named the arrangement, "Blue Balls," but on live radio, confronted with the impropriety of public innuendo, Basie drew inspiration from the clock on the wall and named the tune, "One O'Clock Jump." Another version of the story holds that Smith, Durham, and Page worked out the tune in Bennie Moten's outfit. Whatever the case, the tune was copyrighted solely under Basie's name. Whether these sidemen ever were properly credited for their songwriting contributions, their influence certainly was felt in other ways throughout the Kansas City jazz scene, including at the late night jam sessions where they inspired such younger artists as Charlie Parker to further define the Kansas City sound.⁶¹

Perhaps ironically, Page and Smith would leave the Basie

band not long before it achieved worldwide fame. Smith was "skeptical of the grandiose plans in the making," perhaps clutching to southwestern ideals of autonomy, while Page was eager to lead his own band. In their wake, however, fellow Texans in the Basie organization would continue to define and refine their own interpretations of swing. Even through his exit, Smith left another indelible mark on the Basie band. His absence on alto saxophone prompted the band to adopt a fresh "dueling tenor" approach within the reed section to fill the void. Herschel Evans's warm, robust tone played perfect counterpoint to Lester Young's lyric, cool, ethereal restraint. Author Gary Giddins writes:

Basie was the first bandleader to popularize a reed section with two tenors. In Herschel Evans, he had one of the Southwest's most distinctive respondents to [Coleman] Hawkins; his darkly romantic tone ("Blue and Sentimental") and red-blooded authority ("Doggin' Around," "Every Tub") complemented Young's insuperably logical flights. Evans mined the ground beat, Young barely glanced at it. Heard back-to-back in such performances as "One O'Clock Jump" and "Georgiana," they define the range of the tenor in that era—they are as distinct as if they were playing different instruments.⁶³

Largely because so much of Basie's early national press centered on the performances of the tenor dynamos, Young and Evans, the Count stuck to the two-tenor format throughout his extended career as a bandleader. Basie filled the chairs vacated on account of the deaths of Evans and then Young with Texans Buddy Tate, Illinois Jacquet, and Budd Johnson, among others. Johnson, a member of Basie's touring band during the organization's popular resurgence in the early 1960s, got his teenage start performing in the Texas territories. He first played drums and then saxophone in such bands as his brother Keg Johnson's Moonlight Melody Six, as well as in Coy's Happy Black Aces.⁶⁴

Taught piano at a young age by his father, who played a cornet and directed a choir in Dallas, Budd Johnson's broad musical talents would serve him well throughout his career as a musician, arranger, and even as a music director for Atlantic Records. Along with Atlantic's founder, Ahmet Ertegun, Johnson can be largely credited for the wealth of Atlantic's jazz, blues, and R&B recordings during the post-World War II era. Over the course of his distinguished career, Johnson played with, and arranged for such southwestern bands as Coy's Happy Black Aces, Terrence Holder, the Twelve Clouds of Joy, Jesse Stone's Blue Serenaders, and the George E. Lee Band. In Chicago, Johnson played with Louis Armstrong and Earl Hines, and in New York and on USO wartime tours with Cab

<http://ecommons.txstate.edu/jtmh/vol6/iss1/3>

Calloway, Dizzy Gillespie, Woody Herman, and Billy Eckstine. After the war, he played with Coleman Hawkins, Benny Goodman, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington, among others. In addition to this impressive list of accomplishments, Johnson is also remembered for helping organize what is often deemed the first recording session in modern jazz (originating the bop or "bebop" style) on February 16, 1944, featuring Johnson performing with Coleman Hawkins and Dizzy Gillespie.⁶⁵

Bop's most famous figure, Charlie "Bird" Parker, after whom Birdland, "the jazz corner of the world," was named, was born in Kansas City and came of age during the musically fertile peak of the Pendergast era. Growing up in the shadow of Paseo Hall and the myriad venues around 18th and Vine, Parker studied Lester Young and Buster Smith's playing styles with a zealot's fervor. Parker actually adopted Smith as a musical and personal mentor, drawing some measure of stability from the elder jazzman. When the Basie band was on a tour of the East during the middle 1940s, Buddy Tate suggested that Basie hire Parker. As author Gary Giddins explains, however, Parker's personal habits and on-stage behavior discouraged Basie from doing so:

When he recommended him, Basie assured Tate, "When I need a lead alto I'll call him." On an off-night in Boston, they went to hear Parker, but as Tate remembered, "It was the worst night Bird ever had." He wore oversized suspenders and his pants reached midway between his knees and shoes. Basie remarked, "I'd like to use him, but he looks so bad." Tate retorted, "Half the guys in the band look bad until you put a uniform on their ass," at which point Parker vomited on the microphone. Basie slowly turned his head to Tate, who said "Basie don't say anything because I've got nothing to say." The alto job went to Tab Smith.⁶⁶

Charlie Parker would later find guidance and fellowship among Texans Buster Smith, Gene Ramey, and Gus Johnson who, like Buddy Tate, recognized an uncommon talent in the unpredictable and sometimes bizarre young Kansas City son.⁶⁷

According to Gene Ramey, the actual origins of bop extend back not to Harlem's famed Minton's Playhouse, but to a swing-era Kansas City caboose boxcar:

When we got with McShann [Charlie Parker and I] would jam on trains, in the back of the bus, when we got to the dance hall early. When Dizzy Gillespie and Benny Harris and those guys came to Kansas City they knew about Bird. They would look us up, and about eight of us would go out and jam. Buddy Anderson from McShann's band was really the first bop trumpet player. Dizzy began to see what we were doing then. So

bop began much earlier than the critics believed. That's another mistake they made. The critics are always late.⁶⁸

Southwestern horns in outfits such as Count Basie's band had already pushed the harmonic envelope, Ramey emphasizes, to approach what would become modern jazz, tethered to the earth still only by the phenomenal rhythm sections (like Ramey's own steady anchor grounding the Jay McShann Orchestra). As Ramey explains,

It's the same variations as bebop, but the bass player had to keep the basic line. If you were playing 'Sweet Sue,' for example, the bass player used the chords to 'Sweet Sue,' not altered chords, and that gave the horns a chance to go out, to play alternates. So sometimes the horn player would sound like he was in another key, flatted fifths and so forth. That sort of thing was already going on. Along about that time Bird and me had met with this guitarist named Effergie Ware who was showing us the relationship of chords. So, Bird and I would go off and the two of us would jam. My duty was to tell him if he got too far out. If it sounded too strange, I said, 'Whoa.'⁶⁹

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Jay McShann, the congenial bandleader who nurtured such talents as Parker's with uncommon patience, deserves a large measure of credit for the artistic latitude given to Ramey, Parker, and Buddy Anderson. In marked contrast to Cab Calloway, who discouraged his players like Dizzy Gillespie from after-hours jamming, McShann often took part in this "woodshedding." Whereas many other bandleaders quickly tired of Parker's capricious nature and destructive habits, McShann worked to keep Parker on, suggesting after each of his episodes, "Go get yourself together, go crazy for three days, then come back sit down and cool it. Get it out of your system. He'd come back like there wasn't anything happening." At one point, McShann, who was under pressure from Joe Glaser to fire Parker after repeated incidents, even gave Ramey an extra stipend to watch over Parker.⁷⁰

In what many critics consider the last great western band, Texans Gene Ramey on bass and Gus Johnson on drums laid out broad rhythmic platforms for Parker's melodically prolific liftoffs and landings. Johnson's "fast hands and feeling for accents made him an ideal companion for Gene Ramey," whose broad, laid-back tone anchored the band's swing. A recording made on November 30, 1940, at a radio station in Wichita, Kansas, features Parker's solos on "Honeysuckle Rose" and "Moten Swing," rich with the rhythmic and melodic conceptions that would capture the music's imagination for years to come. Gunther Schuller comments:

Nothing quite like it had ever been heard before on the saxophone, and for that matter, in jazz...[T]hink across the 1940 spectrum and see if you can find anything even remotely as fresh, daring, and substantial as Parker's playing. It is, in fact, remarkable in retrospect that, given Parker's precocious originality [he was only nineteen], virtually nobody took notice of him until years later, say, in 1945.⁷¹

"Moten Swing" featured a Parker solo heavily indebted to Buster Smith, whose influence on the Southwest (and directly on Bird) remained strong during the McShann band's glory years. In fact, McShann had apprenticed under territory elders, Buster Smith among them, before he struck out on his own to lead a band. "Buster could write," remembers McShann, recalling his days as a young pianist under Smith's watch at Kansas City's Club Continental. "[He] had his own stuff that he had written including 'The Old Southland.' He had a lot of tunes he heard from other bands...and he had a good book he kept himself like 'Rockin' in Rhythm.'" Still smarting after his separation from the Basie band he had spent his youth building, Smith eventually moved the Club Continental outfit, now under his name, to Lucille's Paradise, a popular nightspot "where the band entertained patrons nightly until 7 o'clock the next morning." Smith enlisted a seventeen-year old Charlie Parker on alto saxophone. Smith and Parker thrived in the clubs lining the blocks between 12th and 18th streets, finding work through all hours of the night and a good portion of the daytime, too, among throngs of musicians and audiences looking for good times and hard-swinging blues. Through the extended hours spent on and off the stage together, Parker quickly adopted his idol as a paternal figure. Smith remembers:

He used to call me his dad, and I called him my boy. I couldn't get rid of him. He was always up under me. In my band we'd split the solos. If I took two, he'd take two, if I took three, he'd take three, and so forth. He always wanted me to take the first solo. I guess he thought he'd learn something that way. He did play like me quite a bit I guess. But after a while, anything I could make on my horn he could make too—and make something better out of it. We used to do that double time stuff all the time. Only we called it double tongue sometimes in those days. I used to do a lot of that on clarinet. Then I started doing it on alto and Charlie heard me doing it and he started playing it.⁷²

In 1936, the election of Lloyd Stark to the Missouri governorship brought to power an administration that within a few years would dismantle Kansas City's political machine,

forcing important changes in the music scene. The city's vibrant nightlife, which provided the working musicians' livelihood, was among the first casualties of Stark's anti-vice crusade. By 1938, state agents were strictly enforcing liquor restrictions, forcing clubs to close at 2:00 A.M. and not open at all on Sunday. Jukeboxes replaced musicians in many clubs that had hosted breakfast jam sessions just weeks before, as owners stretched their pennies to cover lost revenue. Wary of the changes in the Kansas City charts, Buster Smith packed up for New York City in July 1938, promising Charlie Parker and the band that he would send for them as soon as he was situated.

Any illusions Smith may have had about establishing an orchestra in New York vanished quickly as he confronted the difficulties of being a newly-arriving musician in a city with a well-entrenched musical hierarchy. To his dismay, the American Federation of Musicians local union in New York, unlike Local 627, to which he belonged in Kansas City—a welcoming organization that in many ways served as a social club as well as business union—imposed a three-month holdover period for new members. During this time, Smith subsisted on a shoestring by selling arrangements to Count Basie and Artie Shaw. Eventually, Smith began working as a sax for hire in Don Redman's and "Hot Lips" Page's bands. Without Smith's guiding hand in Kansas City, the former Paradise orchestra did not fare well. In 1939, Parker "hopped a freight" to New York City in search of Smith. As Smith recalls:

Charlie got downhearted when it looked like I wasn't gonna send for them, so he just caught a train and hoboed up there [New York], came up there where I was. He sure did look awful when he got in. He'd worn his shoes so long that his legs were all swollen up. He stayed up there with me for a good while at my apartment. During the day my wife worked and I was always out looking around, and I let him stay at my place and sleep in my bed. He'd go out and blow all night somewhere and then come in and go to sleep in my bed. I'd make him leave in the afternoon before my wife came home. She didn't like him sleeping in our bed because he wouldn't pull his clothes off before he went to bed. He was always like that. He would go down to Monroe's and play all night long. The boys were beginning to listen to him then.⁷³

Like his mentor, Parker would have a difficult time earning a decent wage in New York City. When Parker was not playing for tips at Monroe's, he eked out a living washing dishes at Jimmy's Chicken Shack, a popular eatery as well as a venue where piano master Art Tatum was known to regularly hold court. The virtuosity and harmonic invention of Tatum, whose recordings are still regarded by jazz musicians as conceptually advanced and technically intimidating, were not lost on Parker, who picked up on the expert's technique of substituting chords and making fluent, consecutive melodic allusions at a frightening pace.



The Jay McShann Orchestra. Reproduced from the Ross Russell Collection, courtesy of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

The economic hardships of life in New York inadvertently proved beneficial for Parker's health, however, putting alcohol and drugs beyond his meager means. When he returned to Kansas City to attend the funeral of his alcoholic father, he was sober, inspired, and eager to become a permanent fixture of Jay McShann's Orchestra. McShann had maintained his band's solvency during Missouri Governor Stark's tenure through a mixture of serendipity, business smarts, and adaptive musicianship. A wealthy Traveler's Insurance executive in Kansas City who enjoyed blues and boogie-woogie piano as an avocation, often playing duets with black pianists in the clubs surrounding 18th and Vine, helped McShann cross the color barrier at the city's more exclusive country clubs, by recommending him for "casual engagements...where he entertained local movers and shakers." McShann's band learned to play inventive jazz interpretations of popular standards, and was rewarded handsomely in tips. The band's broad repertoire was further enhanced at marathon engagements, such as the Pha-Mor Walkathon, a summer-long stand in which Parker, Ramey, Johnson, and others eventually developed "a book of 250 or 300 tunes and about 150 head tunes," at once benefiting from and enhancing Parker's phenomenal powers of melodic recall. "I often wondered how in the world those guys could remember those head tunes," McShann remarks. "What really helped was having Bird in that big band."⁷⁴

In spite of the band's growing prominence on the national stage, the arrival of World War II spelled doom for McShann and his ensemble, as well as for other large bands coming out of the territory tradition. His induction into the armed services on May 21, 1944, after draft board officials literally "whisked" an incredulous McShann from the stage, ended a colorful chapter in American musical history, one richly shaped by Texans and Texas musical idioms.⁷⁵

To call the Jay McShann outfit the last great band from the West, however, would be to slight the late-blooming Milt Larkin Band, of Houston, considered by many to be one of the best Texas bands of the era. Some critics have argued that Americans abandoned the big band jazz sound, because they associated it with the uncertainties of war, choosing instead calculated crooning and mellow sweetness to narrate postwar suburban lives. While the impact of the war was significant, one can discern in Larkin's case a thread of musical continuity that clearly bridges any gulf between the pre and post-World War II eras. Larkin and his band, which included Texans Arnett Cobb, Illinois Jacquet, and Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, among others, continued the long-standing tradition of a heavily blues-inflected jazz style that had been popular throughout the Southwest since the 1920s.⁷⁶

In Houston in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Milt Larkin and his group kept the blues/jazz tradition alive by playing
Produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press, 2006

"honking...big-foot swing" along Dowling Street, an urban district not unlike New York's Harlem or Kansas City's 18th and Vine. Arnett Cobb's "open prairie" tone and "southern" preacher style made the Larkin band one of the most popular in the Texas territories, and Cobb the envy of marquee national bandleaders, such as Lionel Hampton, Count Basie, and Jimmy Lunceford. In Lunceford's case, Larkin had enough faith in his musicianship to make him the lead tenor at the age of fifteen. Cobb eventually left Larkin, with the bandleader's blessing, to fill former bandmate Illinois Jacquet's vacated chair in the Lionel Hampton Band, just before Larkin was drafted to serve in World War II.⁷⁷

Larkin's group went on to start new trends in bop, hard bop, and blues. A "celebrated nine-month stint" backing Dallas native T-Bone Walker at Joe Louis's Rhumboogie Club in Chicago in the early 1940s heralded a new paradigm in American popular music. Walker, along with fellow Texan Charlie Christian, brought the guitar out of the rhythm section and into a melodic, electrified role at the forefront of the stage and the recorded mix. When the wartime recording ban was lifted, a new style of urban blues spread throughout the West, highlighted by the supremacy of the guitar and the recording industry, two factors that would eventually help usher in the rock and roll era. For the moment, however, swing was still king, with Larkin and Walker giving the music a blues inflection and a flair for showmanship that at once harkened back to their music's formative years in the Southwest and anticipated the coming of jump-blues by such popular recording artists as Louis Jordan. On August 15, 1942, journalist Marilyn King, writing for the *Chicago Defender*, proclaimed, "No band has outplayed Larkin and no chirper has out-appealed Teabone [sic] Walker at the Rhumboogie or any other Southside nightery." The following week, the *Defender's* Rob Roy raved that the Rhumboogie revue featuring Larkin and Walker "may well be rated with the best in night club history."⁷⁸

After the Larkin band's dissolution, Eddie Vinson gained popularity as a blues shouter. It is likely that Vinson learned this skill from Larkin, who loved to belt out some blues behind a full section of horns, and from Big Bill Broonzy, whom Larkin's group met while on tour.⁷⁹ Vinson also made his mark on jazz history with his saxophone, when he lent support to Thelonious Monk's first recording of "Round Midnight" with the Cootie Williams Band. As Dave Oliphant writes, however, it was as the leader of his own band that Vinson perhaps left his biggest mark on the history of jazz:

During this period, Vinson's band included John Coltrane and Red Garland, who toured with Cleanhead down through the South and Southwest. Because Vinson was the altoist in the band and Coltrane was at that time playing alto, Cleanhead convinced John to

switch to tenor. According to J.C. Thomas, "No matter what the band was playing, Coltrane, when not sight-reading, watched his boss attentively, picking up whatever saxophone tips he could. Vinson was a superb technician with an agile style; he had a way of bending and sustaining notes that John really liked. Later, [Coltrane] would notice a similar technique with Miles after he joined the Davis band."⁸⁰

Illinois Jacquet, born in Louisiana but raised in Texas, was a leading member of the Larkin band and a giant of American music whose popularity never waned over a 68-year career. He performed in a variety of contexts, from small-combo to large band (even on the White House lawn in 1993) and always sported a versatile and nuanced style. One of his solos, played on call for the Lionel Hampton Orchestra when Hampton was only nineteen years old (and not yet even the lead tenor), would

define Jacquet—as well as Hampton and Jacquet's successors in the Hampton band, Arnett Cobb and Dexter Gordon. "Flying Home," which featured Jacquet, has been called everything from "the first rock and roll record" to "the first R&B sax solo." The tenor's impassioned blowing employs a "honking" Texas style and moves from the altissimo range of the sax down into its lowest registers, weaving in and out of the song's changes with freewheeling yet somehow elegant, abandon. Some claim that Jacquet extended the harmonic range of the tenor saxophone a full two and one-half octaves beyond what had been previously thought possible through innovative techniques like biting his reed. Legions of saxophone players, from rock and rollers to free jazz players, have borrowed Jacquet's techniques, but few have approximated his skill and taste employing the same.⁸¹

Until his death in 2004, whenever Jacquet flew home to Houston, he would find familiar local flavor and kindred

Whether the music is swing or rock and roll,
and whether it is performed by Herschel Evans or Calvin Owens,
it all is rooted in the blues, which has had a particularly strong impact
on the development of jazz in Texas.

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musical spirit in what has become a distinguishable Houston style he helped to foster. Historian Roger Wood, author of *Down in Houston: Bayou City Blues*, argues that country bluesman Lightnin' Hopkins and urban electric trailblazer T-Bone Walker "together...personify the dialectically opposed forces underlying the evolution of Texas blues." Wood continues, "Even so, if contemporary Houston blues-based music reflects a synthesis of these two styles, it's a lopsided one that tilts heavily in the direction of Walker, the [Houston-based] Duke-Peacock recording empire, the old jazz-blues territory bands of Larkin and Cobb, and the concomitant evolution of a West Coast sound in California [cultivated largely by T-Bone Walker and other Texans making it big in L.A.]."⁸²

In taking Southwestern jazz back to its fountainhead, geographically and stylistically, Larkin and his band members prepared popular idioms for the future of American music. Larkin band mate T-Bone Walker and such Kansas City alumni as Jesse Stone and Joe Turner would help lay the foundation for rock and roll, by allowing fellow Texans, including Buddy Holly, an opportunity to showcase the blues for white America. Texan Budd Johnson would sign Ray Charles to Atlantic Records, his brother Keg playing drums behind Texas tenor Fathead Newman, who blew through the "Genius's" forays into modern soul. Fort Worth native Ornette Coleman would change the face of jazz with freestyle explorations, employing techniques pioneered by Illinois

Jacquet through inventive new models of harmony.

Houston's "Professor" Conrad Johnson, of the Big Blue Sound, recently explained the blues roots of jazz. A gifted tenor, bandleader, and music educator known affectionately as "Prof" in black Houston, Johnson emphasized the distinctive Texas tenor sound:

We are very well accused of having certain idioms and certain sounds that are not present in a lot of other blues. And one of them is the big tenor sound—the Texas tenor sound. And you'll find the guys that come right out of Texas are the ones that really perpetuate this sound. Oh man, like Arnett Cobb, Eddie Vinson, Don Wilkerson, and so many more. Well, I hate to say this, but maybe it's just because everything coming out of Texas is big! You know, it's a concept that we live with. But for some reason, the tenor sound here is not a puny sound. It's just not puny! It's a rich, vibrant sound. So I guess that's it.⁸³

Of jazz forms and their blues roots, Johnson further explains, "Blues is one of the basic forms of music that can be changed to any degree, any complicated way that you would like to take it, because it's only a matter of putting more chords in it to express more precisely what you feel. So you can dig it if it has

maybe just three different chords, or you can take it and put in a multitude of chords, and it's still the blues." Call them what you wish, Johnson insists, of all the many styles inspired in the Texas shuffle, a "driving groove that makes the music rock with a certain passionate yet elegant swing," it all comes down to this. Whether the music is swing or rock and roll, and whether it is performed by Herschel Evans or Calvin Owens, it all is rooted in the blues, a style for which Texas audiences have

always clamored, and one which Texas musicians have colored with inimitable flair. As "Prof" explains:

Blues is the fundamental music. It's where all jazz came from. So if I, in my playing, don't have any blues reference, I don't feel like I'm doing a good job...And I feel that all that we are doing has come from the blues.⁸⁴ ★

Notes

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5. Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff, eds., *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya: The Story of Jazz As Told by the Men Who Made It*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1955), 310. Jo Jones describes the differences between Kansas City and New Orleans jazz musicians. "There are too many musicians out of New Orleans still hanging on Louis Armstrong's coattails — musicians who can't play. But in Kansas City all those guys, even the ones who were playing twenty years ago, were, and still are, individualists."
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13. Ibid, 28.
14. Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix, *Kansas City jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop--A History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 15, 32-33; Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 28.
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18. t a n , "The Roots Run Deep," 16; Randi Sutton, "Alexander Herman Moore" and James Head, "George Washington Thomas, Jr." and "Hersal Thomas," in the *Handbook of Texas Music*, Roy Barkley, ed., (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), 213-215, 320-321, 323; "Handbook of Texas Online," "Robert Shaw," www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/SS/fsh43.htm l (accessed April 9, 2003). Shaw left Texas to perform in Kansas City in 1932. In 1933, he had his own radio show broadcast out of Oklahoma City. Shaw shortly thereafter returned to Texas, first to Fort Worth and then Austin, where he took up permanent residence and opened a barbecue restaurant and then a grocery store (Shaw was named Austin's Black Businessman of the Year in 1962). When Shaw returned to public performance in 1967, critics attributed his unique style to his practicing of the original barrelhouse technique unaffected by newer, more popular blues forms during his thirty-year hiatus.
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21. Schuller, *The Swing Era*, 563; Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 52.
22. See Bill Wyman, *Blues Odyssey: A Journey to Music's Heart and Soul*, (New York: DK Publishers, 2001), especially pages 100-152, for a discussion of regional variations in blues music.
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24. Wyman, *Blues Odyssey*, 121, 172; Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 42-43.
25. Luigi Monge and David Evans, "New Songs of Blind Lemon Jefferson," *Journal of Texas Music History*, Volume 3, Number 2, Fall 2003, 8-28; Alan Govenar, "Blind Lemon Jefferson," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 159-161.
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31. Jay Trachtenberg, "Gene Ramey: A Tribute," *The Austin Chronicle*, December 21, 1984.
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53. Stowe, "Jazz in the West," 66.
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61. Shapiro and Hentoff, eds., *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, 296-297.
62. Addis, "The Baptist Beat in Modern Jazz," 9-14; Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 106.
63. Steven Lasker, Liner Notes, Count Basie and His Orchestra, *The Complete Decca Recordings*, Decca Jazz/GRP compact disc 611, December 1991, 10-11.
64. Gary Giddins, *Visions of Jazz*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 175.
65. Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 170. It was in the Aces Band that Budd Johnson is said to have shown Ben Webster how to play sax.
66. Bradley Shreve, "Budd Johnson" and "Keg Johnson," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 165-166.
67. Giddins, *Visions of Jazz*, 182.
68. Addis, "The Baptist Beat in Modern Jazz," 15-18.
69. Doug Ramsey, "Bass Hit," *Texas Monthly* 176, May 1981, 3.
70. Ibid.
71. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 203, 213.
72. Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 127.
73. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 167-168.
74. Ibid., 179, 190.
75. Ibid., 171, 192.
76. Ibid, 217.
77. Dave Oliphant, "Jazz," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 156.
78. Stephen G. Williams and Kharen Monsho, "Arnett Cobb," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 58; Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 225.
79. Joe B. Frantz, "Charles Christian," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 50-51; Robert Pruter and Robert L. Campbell, "T-Bone Conquers Chicago," *The Rhumboogie Label*, 16 May 2005, accessed March 9, 2006 at: www.hubcap.clemson.edu/~campber/rhumboogie.html
80. James Head, "Eddie Vinson," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 344.
81. Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 220.
82. Ibid., 219-233.
83. Roger Wood, *Down in Houston: Bayou City Blues*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 42.
84. Ibid., 114.
85. Ibid., 40, 113.

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60. Shapiro and Hentoff, eds., *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, 296-297.
61. Addis, "The 'Baptist Beat' in Modern Jazz," 9-14; Oliphant, *Texas Jazz*, 106.
62. Steven Lasker, Liner Notes, Count Basie and His Orchestra, *The Complete Decca Recordings*, Decca Jazz/GRP compact disc 611, December 1991, 10-11.
63. Gary Giddins, *Visions of Jazz*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 175.
64. Oliphant, *Texas Jazz*, 170. It was in the Aces Band that Budd Johnson is said to have shown Ben Webster how to play sax.
65. Bradley Shreve, "Budd Johnson" and "Keg Johnson," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 165-166.
66. Giddins, *Visions of Jazz*, 182.
67. Addis, "The 'Baptist Beat' in Modern Jazz," 15-18.
68. Doug Ramsey, "Bass Hit," *Texas Monthly* 176, May 1981.3.
69. Ibid.
70. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 203, 213.
71. Oliphant, *Texas Jazz*, 127.
72. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City jazz*, 167-168.
73. Ibid., 179, 190.
74. Ibid.; 171, 192.
75. Ibid, 217.
76. Dave Oliphant, "Jazz," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 156.
77. Stephen G. Williams and Kharen Monsho, "Arnett Cobb," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 58; Oliphant, *Texas Jazz*, 225.
78. Joe B. Frantz, "Charles Christian," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 50-51; Robert Pruter and Robert L. Campbell, "T-Bone Conquers Chicago," *The Rhumboogie Label*, 16 May 2005, accessed March 9, 2006 at: www.hubcap.clemson.edu/~campber/rhumboogie.html
79. James Head, "Eddie Vinson," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 344.
80. Oliphant, *Texas Jazz*, 230.
81. Ibid., 219-233.
82. Roger Wood, *Down in Houston: Bayou City Blues*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003). 42.
83. Ibid., 114.
84. Ibid., 40, 113.

Holmesly: Texas Jazz Veterans

Texas Jazz Veterans:

A Collection of Oral Histories

Sterlin Holmesly

Gus Johnson of Tyler. Reproduced from the Ross Russell Collection, courtesy of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

Editor's Note: More than twenty-five years ago, Sterlin Holmesly conducted numerous tape-recorded interviews of jazz musicians in and around San Antonio. A city newspaper reporter at the time, Holmesly undertook the project with great passion and a sense of urgency, completing most of the interviews in 1980. Now the transcripts of these interviews are housed at the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio.

We have published some of the transcripts here in order to encourage researchers, educators, and students of jazz to make greater use of the much larger collection of oral histories at the Institute of Texan Cultures. Included here are interviews with Don Albert Dominique, Ann Neely, Gene Ramey, Bert Etta Davis, Dude Skiles, and Jim Cullum, Jr.¹

This is a collection of diverse people talking about their lives in jazz. The project was inadvertently inspired by Don Albert Dominique one rainy spring night in 1977. Don Albert, as he was known, joined the architect O'Neil Ford and a few others for drinks and dinner at my little rented house in San Antonio. Don and O'Neil started spinning recollections about the 1930s. "Somebody needs to get this down on tape," I told myself, and eventually I did. O'Neil Ford declined to be interviewed, saying he didn't want to be a legend before he died. Almost three years later, I sat down with Don Albert and taped some of his story before he became ill and died. I dedicate this collection to his memory.

As a lover of old jazz, a "moldy fig," I knew several players around San Antonio, and they agreed to talk. Then they vouched for me to other players and so on. I did these interviews²

sporadically, for I had a demanding day job at a daily newspaper at the time. I did not write down questions ahead of time, but used a basic reporter's approach. I asked them about their families, backgrounds, how they got into jazz, who influenced them musically, how they defined jazz, the difficulties of the night life and how it impacted their families, how they dealt with drugs and alcohol, racial animosity, segregation, and the influence of the Ku Klux Klan. From this, we winged it, with answers leading to more questions and expansion of themes or events. While the musicians had much in common, there is a great variety of experiences in their stories.

A number of San Antonio jazz venues also appear in the interviews, including the Eastwood Country Club, some of the downtown hotel ballrooms, Shadowland, Don Albert's Keyhole Club, the L'il Hut (a Sunday jam session joint), and Jim Cullum's Landing, now in its third location on the River Walk.

Although the interviews were done in San Antonio, many of the players have lived and worked elsewhere throughout the country and around the world. Don Albert Dominique came to San Antonio from New Orleans in 1927 to play trumpet in the Troy Floyd band. Under his stage name, Don Albert, he then started his own band, and later opened the Keyhole Club, the first integrated nightclub in Texas. Ann Neely sang in Texas and California with such notable musicians as pianist Peck Kelly. Bert Etta Davis, who had performed with the all-black, female Prairie View A&M Co-eds during the 1940s, went on to become the lead saxophonist for singer Dinah Washington. Bassist Gene Ramey, a native of Austin, was in Kansas City during the great jazz years and performed alongside Charlie "Bird" Parker and Jay McShann. Dude Skiles, born in Missouri but raised mainly in Texas, was a multi-instrumentalist who worked with Jack Teagarden, Fred Waring, and others. Jim Cullum, Jr., built San Antonio's "Happy Jazz Band into the Jim Cullum Jazz Band, which has played for over a decade on more than 100 International Public Radio stations, bringing alive the history of jazz to a worldwide audience. All of these musicians, and the dozens of others whose interviews are housed at the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio, made important and lasting contributions to the Texas music scene and to the larger musical history of this nation.

I admit to scholarly shortcomings in the collection, but, at the time, I wasn't after scholarship. I wanted these people to tell their own stories in their own words. And they did.²

DON ALBERT DOMINIQUE

When I was a kid, eight years old, I was a singer, and I used to go to the clubs, private clubs in New Orleans.

My dad would take me, and I'd sing with the full orchestras and play the trumpet whenever I

watched an old trumpet player named Nelson Jean playing. And I started learning under him and I couldn't get any sense out of him, so I quit.

I finally went to Mr. Milford Peron, who was a finished musician, one of the ole' professors. I learned the basic parts of the cornet with him. There was Lorenzo Tio, the ole' man, Papa Tio. Then there was his son Lorenzo, Jr. The old man was a genius from Mexico. He was a finished clarinetist who played in all the symphonies. He was an artist on top of it. And he taught most of us kids around there like Barney Bigard, my cousin.

In those days, the kids who wanted to learn music learned from their friends. It was a family affair from the beginning. All a kid had to do was say he wanted to learn something and one of the friends was going to teach him. Those fellas like Jelly Roll Morton were just a little bit in front of me. I don't quite remember them vividly, but they were there. After I learned to play the horn, then I played in New Orleans on the riverboats and on the boats that ride Lake Pontchartrain. Most of that was Sunday gigs. The President, and the Capitol, those were the big steamers from St. Louis that spent the winter in New Orleans.

I came to San Antonio in 1927 to play trumpet in Troy Floyd's band. We played at Shadowland and also at another nightclub out on Fredericksburg Road. I stayed with Troy for a couple of years, then a friend wanted me to start my own band. And he financed me with about \$1,500. In those days, that was gobs of money! I started out with nine musicians out of New Orleans. In those days, people who were good enough in New Orleans left. They might go to Kansas City and mostly Chicago. Wasn't such a thing as going to California. It was too, too far.

We went straight to Dallas for the State Fair. That was the first gig I had, and from there I came back to San Antonio to play at the Chicken Plantation. That was in 1929. My father-in-law to be didn't believe that I was going when I left New Orleans. He said, "Oh, no, you just like these other ole' Creole boys. You're gonna stay. You're not gonna leave." I say, "Well, you just watch. I got my ticket already."

Well, I left with a little band out of three pieces I organized in New Orleans, an alto player and a banjo player and myself. We were goin' to join another little group that was already organized in Dallas and left on the train with a band out of Waco, Texas. Herschel Evans was playing alto sax in those days. I had to play, blowin' my horn all night on the train. The guys couldn't understand how I could get such a pretty sound out of my trumpet. I had to play for 'em and play for 'em. And finally when we got to Dallas, Herschel left, and I went up and got this little job up there on Main and Elm Street, upstairs in the worst part of the city. I stayed up there for six months until Troy Floyd picked me up.

Raul Estes had the place. We worked with Raul Estes for about six or seven months and closed down. He went to work

at Shadowland as a gambler, the head gambler. So, he was in the know, and he was in with Mr. **Barnett** and the rest of the guys that owned Shadowland and that way he got me in. And we stayed there, first time for eighteen months. That was during Prohibition and gambling was illegal but it was wide open at Shadowland. I started off with ten pieces all together, in my band. There was Don Albert and His Ten Pals. Louis **Cottrell** was in that and Herb Hall was. We brought Herb here. I picked him up from New Orleans. He was out of a little town of **Reserve**, Louisiana. The whole family were musicians, but I only used him out of his family. He played the alto and the baritone. See, we had the Duke Ellington sound. And we copied the baritone like (Harry) Carney played with Duke. You hear my album and you hear the sound.

We stayed around here and we stayed at Shadowland. There wasn't any other outlet. We had gotten to the peak where we

we left New York in '32 or '33, I think it was. I don't exactly remember the date. Then we come back south where I could book the band myself on one-nighters.

Yeah, Rocky Mountain, North Carolina. There used to be dances in the Carolinas they called it June-Germans, and they started late at night and go early in the morning. And my band was always picked out to play these big dances. And we were booked at Rocky Mountain, North Carolina, and we couldn't find any accommodations. We had to stay in the bus or with some colored families that we'd known. So, we come on into the town and we went right to the hall and instead of trying to get places, we stayed in the hall to rest.

And I had a fellow who always was surveyin' and researchin', Fats Martin, the drummer, and they all were sittin' out on the porch, some of 'em in the bus. He come to me, and say, "Say, Ole Man," he say, "Come here, and let me show you what I

Well, this is it. I'm gonna leave this town. I'm not coming back."
And that's when I went to New York.

could get so far as the music was concerned, so I wanted to venture and I wanted to travel on the road so the first time I left I got as far as Kansas City. And they called me to come back. They couldn't get a band to fill my place at Shadowland. So, that happened on three different occasions. The last time I just said, "Well, this is it. I'm gonna leave this town. I'm not coming back." And that's when I went to New York. But most of the time it was a road band. We played all over the United States.

New York was great. I was right at the top of the ladder. Most of it was concentrated in the big ballrooms like the **Roseland Ballroom** and the **Pollard Theatre** and the **Savoy Ballroom**. But just when I got my big break, I had gotten the band up to about sixteen or eighteen pieces, and the bookers wanted to cut my band once and set three of my men on the side, and go ahead and let me get to the top. But I had an idea that those guys started with me and I just wanted them to reap the benefits of what we were really going to get into this big time.

So, I disagreed with puttin' 'em on the side. Well, that's one of the big mistakes. When you go back and you wonder and you say, "Now, what the hell did I do this for?" And it would have been just as simple to let them sit in the background and go right ahead and play. We wouldn't have missed them. The arrangements were good. One man could drop and somebody take his place. I couldn't get the bookings and basically, I was holding out for big money for my band. Well, I say big money. In those days, 300 to 400 to 500 bucks a night, which today is nickel and dime, but in those days it was big, big money! So

found." He was always, always callin' me the Ole Man. I was twenty, twenty-one, or twenty-two years old, but I was the boss, so they called me the Ole Man. So we go into this place and here where you hang your clothes, a clothes closet, the white robes are stacked up to the ceiling and the hoods, the cross, and the by-laws, rules, and regulations of the **Ku Klux Klan**. I said, "Lad, come on out of there. What are you doin' looking up all this junk like this? Let's get out of here!" So, the band that I had was a band that didn't never play a request. A set book, go from top to bottom. So, that night didn't anybody get refused of any kind of a request! They come ask for some of the most ungodliest names you ever heard. We made music to that and played — gave it the song, the music, the name, and everything else. If we didn't know it for 'em, we played it, but we got out of town right quick! We left right away! That was the fastest the bus ever was packed.

Then there was the night we were on the road when we came into New York City and everybody was asleep and the bridge was up. We had left West Virginia, 700 and some miles and we come into New York to rehearse for a stage show with **Ralph Cooper**, **Ella Fitzgerald**, and **Billie Holliday**. And we were coming in to do this around '34 or '35, maybe. When we come into town, there was a place for buses to go, trucks to go and automobiles in different lanes. And at the top of the **George Washington Bridge** were two little clearance lights, red lights, that was for the airplanes. Well, we didn't know this. We's just country boys out of the South and this guy got to pumping on

his brakes and the piano player was sleeping and got up. He said, "The bridge is up! The bridge is up!" And everybody in the band woke up then. See, they thought the bridge was up and the bus was gonna go over this bridge! So, the poor driver, he was scuffling to pump the brakes so that the bus would stop. Well, he finally got it stopped. We stopped on the very tip top of the George Washington Bridge. Well, we could see that we were lost. We weren't going over the bridge but we just missed the bus route. The driver never drove anymore for three months!

I kept the band until 1940. The war was coming on and things were getting tight. Musicians weren't acting right. I had some dopies in the band. And things were scarce and far and few between. I decided, well, I got to try something else. I got to get us security for me and my family. I left the band here, and I went to New Orleans. I didn't stay there too long. I came here and I went to work in 1941 at Kelly Field and retired in 1974.

I continued my playing. I had two nightclubs, Creole nightclubs. I opened one in November of 1944 out on Highway Street. I closed that one down in January or February

either sing it happy, sing it sad, or sing it bad, one or the other.

The best single jazz musician I ever heard? Well, there's no comparison with Louis Armstrong. He is outstanding. The fellow's dead, but the awards that were given to him, he deserved 'em. Put a thousand trumpet players in a room and you could distinguish his notes from the others. Sidney Bechet was a great, great reed man, which he was, but it's the difference all together in him and in Louis. Louis reached everybody from the kids on up. Bechet was just an ordinary good, great musician, not in the same vein as Louis Armstrong. I knew Louis. We were close, close friends.

But now Duke Ellington is a man that reached everybody in the jazz field. He knew what to do with his men, he knew how to place them, he knew how to write for them, consequently, he made it something outstanding that no one else could imitate. Count Basie hasn't contributed what Duke Ellington has. Ellington was a composer, writer and an artist.

This so-called modern jazz, I didn't think too much of it 'cause it was a bit over my head. I couldn't understand what they

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shake your body,**

of '46. I opened this big one the Keyhole Club out on Poplar Street, Easter Saturday 1950. And I kept it until I sold it in 1964. I had wonderful success. I had the first fully integrated club in the United States! We had trouble with the police. They didn't go along with the integration. That was the whole crunch of it, but I won the case in the courts. Was a judge named Judge Sanders and this lawyer here, he's still active. That's Henry Archer. That's his boy that's on the City Council. We won the case. They tried all kind of ways to close it just because of the integration. And they used every subterfuge that they could.

Jazz, I've always described it as a happy feeling, and it's something that makes you feel glad all over and you want to slap your hands and clap your hands, stomp your feet and you just want to have a good time, shake your body. The blues are jazz in a way, yes. It's a basic part of our jazz. What they're playing, they still use the form of different changes, the B flat change, the C change, and the G change, and that's what it's built around. And blues were built from that and then the tempo is the thing that changed around from the slow blues to the jump tempos. The blues came out of the souls of the slaves.

That's a known fact, because they sung just how they felt. That's about the only way they had to vent their feelings. You can

were doing. The average person didn't, but they had to accept it. There was nothin' else around. That was forced upon 'em, just like rock n' roll. People don't like it. They hold their ears. They do everything! What else are they gonna listen to? They're tryin' to bring the big bands back, but it's almost an impossibility.

How does a jazz musician form his own style? It usually comes to you natural and by association with others. It just comes natural. I'm just a straight jazz trumpet player, strictly to the lead like the old musicians done it when I was a kid. Just beat around the lead just a little bit, don't get too far away from it, mostly feel what you're playing. You have to have control of your horn, your lips, and your thoughts. See how good you can make it sound to the other person and at the same time make it pleasin' to you as you playin' it. That's what we call working around, beatin' around it. Yeah, that's what we call it.

My best friend? Well, that covers a lot of territory. Well, Duke was one of my favorites. Earl Hines was for awhile. And, of 'course, Jimmy Lunceford. Not too many people remember Jimmy, but he was a great, great friend of mine. Talking about my band members, talking about Herb Hall, Louis Cottrell, Fats Martin. Those were regular members of the original band, and those were great musicians. Herb was in last week. He

comes in two or three times a week, he and his wife. He's goin' to North Carolina on a gig next week. He's 73 years old, he is. He says, "You lived!" And I guess I did. I really lived. Got no regrets.

Traveling with the bands usually was real tough in the Southern states and that's where we were concentrated on. I've seen lynchings in Mississippi and Texas, right here in Columbus, Texas. Two boys, sixteen years old were lynched the day we came in to play the dance. We didn't play. We had to leave town. And the same thing happened in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. We used to see these kids on the chain gang with the big balls chained to their legs in the hot sun all day, sunup to sundown. Being as light as I was, they all thought that I was white, and I got the better part of everything. The band would get hungry, I'd stop in some café in some little town, pool our money, go in there and get a bunch of sandwiches and bring it out and give it to 'em. They'd eat in the bus, and sleep in the bus!

Playing a dance in some small Southern town was always a 70-30 deal, and the band would get 70 percent and the owner would get 30 percent. Sometimes we'd split \$200 or \$300 for the band. That would go for the whole group. Bob Crosby and the Bobcats were up in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. They were on the road and they stopped. We stopped with 'em. We had sandwiches, and we had other things in the bus. We shared with the Bobcats.

We played against Glen Gray and the Casa Loma band. Gray had a real big one, real good band, and he was concentrated in the area of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and Glenn Falls, New York. We were up there in the wintertime. We'd turn around and get the hell outa there right quick! It was too cold for us! So we got a gig in Detroit, at the Plantation Nightclub. They sat us down for four months. Brother, that was the height of the winter. So we spent that in the nightclub in Detroit, Michigan. It must have been around '35 or '36.

We recorded our albums here in San Antonio, at the old Bluebonnet Hotel on the Vocalion label. As far as we knew, the sales were good, but we had no jurisdiction over the sales. We sold outright. If you wanted to make a nickel in those days, you needed it! You'd do anything to sell out. Like anything else, it's just like we played in Chicago for Al Capone and Ralph Capone. Now, those guys paid us good money! All the gang wars were going on. I've seen 'em come right into Detroit, Michigan, with the shotguns right where we were playing. They were looking for somebody in the club. And the manager told us, "You just go ahead and play and don't worry about nothing". If they find who they looking for, they'll take him out of here and they won't do nothing in here."

That also happened here in San Antonio when they raided the Riverside Gardens down there on Houston Street. It was during the holiday season, and they come and raided the place for gambling there. They had mixed drinks in those days and

the Rangers, two of 'em stand at the front door and they scattered the others throughout the nightclub. And they locked all the doors so nobody could get in and out. I never did stop playin' one piece for twenty-five minutes, man, until they finished raiding the place! Customers, and the roulette wheels, the cards, the dice, you name it. They had all that packed up in the wagon, tearin' it up! The same with Shadowland, they closed it down and locked all the instruments in there, the Rangers did. We had to get a citation from downtown to go out there and get our instruments out of there. Otherwise, they'd be there yet! No, those guys were all the big time gamblers like Red Berry. They were all in cahoots. They raided 'em and they paid their fine and would be back in business again the next night. And we were back playing the next night.

In Chicago, you just played your music and that's it. Your money was fine. Your money was always there. Always in cash. It was beautiful! It's just like Jack Teagarden and I, we played together in Indianapolis, Indiana, in a snowstorm. We were two old Southern boys, and I had a gig in a nightclub, a colored nightclub up there, and they were workin' at a theater, so Jack came on and he say, "Don" he say, "get your horn, man! Let's go to play somethin'. It's snowin'!" And man, I say, "I don't see no snow!" He say, "Get the horn!" So, we got the damn trumpet and we go outside and man, snow is fallin' down a mile a second, and damn fools out there playing their horns! Playing in the snow. He was a great guy! I played with him just once in awhile. We weren't in the bands together. The guy pumped some trombone!

In New Orleans, I played the horn in four different brass bands. Yeah, I played those long years ago, it wasn't as bad as it is now. The lower element has taken it over. And it's more of a mockery now than it was. In other words, they were trying to show you that there's a lot of sadness there when a person dies, but still in all there's happiness in the end. That's what it's trying to tell you.

Ours was a musical family. My grandfather was a singer; my grandmother was a singer. And I had an uncle who played the violin, one played the trumpet and the cornet. In those days his name was Wilson, and we had Uncle Natty Dominique, who was a trumpet player and another was a violin player. Barney Bigard, the clarinetist, is my cousin and we grew up as kids together. We studied together. You name 'em and you find he's been there. He's been in demand all over the world.

The Creoles were the finished musicians in New Orleans and they had a lot to do with teaching the blacks the techniques, the crafts and the two came together through intermingling. The Creoles were more fortunate because of their color and of their background, their roots. All of them played music, sung, danced or done something in the art world. And Negroes as a whole have always been able to capture somethin' from somebody else, and it was no problem for them to get in with

these Creoles and play with 'em. Manuel Perez was a Creole, but he played with all the blacks and, what we call black. I despise the name black, but I have to go along with, it's the modern term they use today. I would rather say a colored fella. You don't know what to say!

I've done so much for the Negro that it would take months to record the things that I have accomplished and the things that I have been involved in and the things that I have done for the black race. 'Course I'm in the background. I don't push it, because I'm not too interested in them referring to me as "The Black," because, actually, I am NOT black. And I resent that, because years ago, I remember when I was young and I would call a fellow black, he was ready to fight! Today, that same fellow wants me to address him as a black, so where am I going? So I just stay in the background and the things I have done, they're recorded. Someday they'll come to light.

I won that Keyhole Club case. I had disturbed the State of Texas when I won that case in 1954. And when I won the case, it was the decision that the judge handed down. He said there's no law in the State of Texas that prohibits the congregation of people regardless of race, creed, or color. And then I was in no violation of any laws. Case dismissed. So, consequently any place that wanted to accept the people as I accepted them, whites, blacks and all that, whoever wanted to enter the doors. It was acceptable then after the decision was made. That was a great thing. I'm not interested in the black race, the white race, and the blue race. I'm interested in the race of people. And I've gotten along.

ANN NEEL

In 1933 there was a contest put on by the manager of the Gunter Hotel and Mack Rogers, the leader of the orchestra in the Gunter Cave. Mack Rogers' band was in the Caveteria. It was actually a cafeteria and called caveteria. It was decided by the manager of the hotel to try and locate a girl singer to perform in the Cave with Mack. Approximately 150 girls answered the call, so auditions started. It took weeks to eliminate all but thirty. Then to six. Each sang at the noon broadcast each day on WOAI. I was the last to sing, and I won. The audience and Mack did the judging. So, I had a two-week job at \$10 a week at the Gunter Hotel. I worked with Mack for a year and a half. I came on the air each day at noon singing "Bye, Bye, Blues," and we signed off with the same.

I graduated from old Main High School in 1929, so I was twenty years old in '33. I sang in the high school glee club, and while in junior high school, I sang in operettas, in which I took the lead. I did love to sing, but really did not have but very little training. While with Mack we did some barnstorming over the state of Texas. He thought nothing about jumping from San

crazy – but it was fun. You know in those days there wasn't any money. We worked on a commission basis most of the time.

While at the Gunter they allowed me a room, which I utilized for changing clothes. When I left Mack and the band, I joined the Red Mill's and George Hill's band, a dance band consisting of eleven musicians and myself. I joined the band in Houston. We worked at a gambling club and we were there all summer. There I was, the floorshow, and will have to admit I was very nervous. Lots of people sitting out there. In later years the club burned to the ground.

The next move was to Corpus Christi. It was another gambling club located just across the causeway. We were there for the summer. Enjoyed that job very much. Met so many nice people, also. In those days, the cotton buyers from England spent the summer there. I might add they loved to gamble. At the end of that engagement we toured a while and then back into Houston. The Rice Hotel and the Lamar Hotel hired us. We worked noon and dinner sessions at both hotels, and to finish the evening we worked a dance. Of course, these were separate jobs.

It was hard. While at the Lamar Hotel I worked the Majestic Theater, in the pit, for a week and it was during Thanksgiving. That was something new for me and must say my limbs were shaking. I had four shows a day at the theater, a noon, dinner session, and dance at the hotel. I lived in the evening gown and heavy makeup for the theater job. While working at the Rice Hotel, the Carlone band played in the ballroom. It was an Italian group and the man singer was none other than Perry Como. At that time he was not married and not known. Enjoyed his company at mealtime and he was a super person. You know the rest; he climbed the ladder to the top. After about six months in Houston we went on one-nighters again. Red used cars but finally purchased a Chevrolet bus. And who drove? I did most of the time.

Ironed on the floor or turned a drawer over and ironed my dress on it. I carried a small iron with me. Believe our next engagement was in McAllen, Texas. Another club, privately owned and the name "McCalls." We picked our own grapefruit for breakfast. Met many nice folk from the Valley. I worked a year or more with the band and then decided to quit. After a brief period had a call from a saxophone man, Dave Matthews, from Waco. Joined his band in Waco. He had all Texas musicians as I recall. Good people, and he was excellent. He acquired an agent so we were off to Cincinnati, Ohio. The agent said he had booked us at some club in Illinois. We rehearsed daily. That went on for five weeks. We were told the job did not materialize. The musicians were getting restless and running out of money, so, one by one, they would take off either by bus or hitchhike. Finally, five of us, including Dave's wife had to make a decision. Wouldn't you know, just at that time the job came

through. There was no way to locate the musicians. What a heartbreak. The band was excellent – fourteen pieces.

The trombone man had enough cash for two bus tickets back to Dallas, so I left with him. Must go back a bit and tell you this story. While in Cincy we didn't have much money so Essie (Dave's wife) and I cooked a huge meat loaf each day plus a dishpan full of potatoes. That was daily, and, believe me, it tasted good. Dave had excellent arrangements, some were his and some Harry James'. When Harry and Louise Tobin were married, I met him, and when I went to California, I saw him. Louise was from Denton, Texas. She was a very fine girl singer and sang with the best. She and Harry had two boys. She is now married to "Peanuts" Hucko, a clarinet great.

When I moved to California, Dave Matthews was out there working with a known band, plus Harry was with the band. I visited the club every night with Essie Matthews. The floor show was three blacks (male) dancing with Dave and Harry doodling on their respective instruments which turned out to be "Peckin'," if you remember that tune. The two decided to put it on paper

me the job, the salary, what I would get like room and meals, etc., she said no. That no girl would go with him. If any girl went, she would go. That settled that and they had a small spat. So I walked out. Betty Grable with those beautiful legs did me out. That job was in Colorado and would have been a wonderful job. He had a very good band. He had some Texas musicians in there.

In 1938 I returned to Texas – Dallas, worked with Durward Cline and his well-known band. We played often at the Shreveport, Louisiana, country club. That was a fun job and such great people. Few times hit Mississippi. Most of the work in Dallas. Met Garner Clark at that time and many others. Dallas was a hub for good talent in those days, and many of them went into big time eventually.

If only I could have had an agent, I'm sure I could have earned much more and would have had the opportunity to work with known bands. My decision one day, "Oh, this isn't for me." It was too much road. However, I had fond memories of California, where I met many fine artists. Met a few movie

When we'd go out on the road, here I was standing with a huge megaphone, not a dainty one, but a great big one, Tone came out very well, but the people couldn't see my face and I had to learn to hold it with one hand so I could wave with the right hand or something.

and it sold, but the bandleader put his name to it.

I went to California in 1936, after the Ohio thing fell apart. Joined my mother and sister in Los Angeles. Jobbed up and down the coast, auditioned often and worked a nice spot in Pasadena, namely, The Huntington Hotel. A beautiful place and a good combo to work with. A group of ex-Jimmy Dorsey's band. It was five pieces, maybe seven. Can't remember but excellent musicians.

I won the contest with "Baby Won't You Please Come Home," so it has to be a favorite. "Say It Isn't So," "Sweet Sue," and I loved to sing "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," plus many, many more. Eleven tunes were goodies in those days. At the Gunter we had no public address system, so I had to use a megaphone. For broadcasting on WOAI, I used a microphone, but on jobs it was the megaphone. When we'd go out on the road, here I was standing with a huge megaphone, not a dainty one, but a great big one. Tone came out very well, but the people couldn't see my face and I had to learn to hold it with one hand so I could wave with the right hand or something.

Going back to my time in California – I must tell you this story. I had an audition with Jackie Coogan. He said fine, you have the job. His wife, Betty Grable, was there. After he offered

stars, Joan Crawford and Franchot Tone. They were married at that time, and I joined their table at the Ambassador Hotel, where the Coconut Grove is. Yes, and there was another place I enjoyed and saw many movie stars. The Trocadero, which was forsaken years ago.

I met "Red Norvo, terrific vibe man. He was playing in a small club in Studio City. He was great. Of course, he was younger then and could hear. They had huge jam sessions when I was out there. I went to many, but one was on top of one of the hills looking over Los Angeles. Both Dorsey bands were there, Phil Harris band, Ted Weems also. Just can't remember them all right now. Just listened. No females participated. They just let those great musicians jam. It was something, and I had never heard anything like it.

I went back to Dallas. Pounded the pavement looking for work. It was tough, those were hard times. I was not prepared for office work, but I decided to take a fast typing course. How fast? One month and, believe it or not, I was sent to Love Field, which was the Air Transport Command, and began my Civil Service Career. That lasted twenty-eight years. The good Lord was kind to me. I worked hard and learned plenty. I began in Dallas, then to Barksdale AFB, from there to Goodfellow at San

Angelo, Texas, and then into Randolph. While at Goodfellow AFB, I was the Cadet Club hostess for a period of time.

Let's return to San Antonio. Back in the '20s and '30s many name bands came to our city. Then we had the open-air roof at the Gunter Hotel, the Plaza roof which was the Plaza Hotel and the St. Anthony roof at the St. Anthony Hotel. Henry Busse (trumpet), Isham Jones, Earl Burnett, with him was Spike Jones, who later put together a band in Los Angeles and became famous until his death. Earl Burnett died in San Antonio, as I recall. Then there was Louis Armstrong who came to our then Shadowland, now the Roaring Twenties. Many more but the names do not come to me just now. Don Albert owned the Keyhole Club, which I went to several times.

My favorite singers? Helen Forrest, Edith Wright, Ella Fitzgerald, and can't forget Ethel Waters. Then there was Sarah Vaughn and lots more. In those days we had no TV, so I would

once a year or every five years, you are not going to be in tune. You hear what you want to do, but you are not getting it out. You're not pulling the diaphragm, in other words, not using it properly. To get that foundation one has to work, work and more work. It also takes money to pay for all that.

When I was singing with Red Mills and George Hills we had a piano player named Peck Kelly. Peck was the greatest I had ever heard. Very different from others. He was a genius, and don't let anyone ever tell you that he wasn't. Very creative. Let's say, he was born with a super talent. He was very patient with me. You learn from an artist. He would be all over the piano but brought me in just beautifully – you just could not miss. He did a lot of fill-ins, but then that was a big thrill. If I could have had Peck as my accompanist through the next eight years or so I could have reached substantial heights. We had long intermissions at the club in Houston, and he would coach me

I was called a "torch" singer and was nicknamed Torchie."

listen every night to the radio. Tuned it in to Chicago, where I could get the Trianon Ballroom. It always came on late and would keep it low so as not to disturb my family. Oh, how I loved all that and just to realize we could get Chicago on the radio. Some of the singers just did not appeal to me, but some phrased so well and had a good voice. Knowledge of music helps. Tone placement, correct breathing very important, plus good looks. That always helps.

I can read music. I took piano when I was a youngster and just wish I had continued. But all I could think of was get outside and play. I did like to sing and later I was a nut about singing in tune. I was told by musicians I had perfect pitch. Even now when I hear anyone singing sharp or flat, it makes my spine crawl. Believe me when I say Ella and Sarah sing in tune and perfect pitch. Helen Forrest was always good. Phrased well. If you have the natural ability, it is more appealing. All have their own styles and all are different.

I was called a "torch singer and was nicknamed "Torchie." So it was more of torch singing, if you can define that, I never could. I sang on the beat and did not try to fiddle faddle around. Now, if I do sing, I can put a little more into it. I think it's because of being calmer and having listened all these years. I sang at my high school reunion. It was fun. Had Tony Rozance, Gene McKinney, and Curly Williams behind me, and, of course, they are all pros.

My problem is trying to remember lyrics. Gene and Curly cued me, which helped. Don't think I was in tune all the time, and that upset me. When you don't use the vocal chords but

the entire time. In those days clubs remained open to three in the morn. We had Peck for one year. He would never leave Houston but he agreed to come with us to San Antonio when we played at the Plaza Hotel.

My lowest point was when we were in Austin at a club for a few weeks and they raided it. That, I had never experienced. I took off but fast, with permission of course. I stayed away until the next night, so it was just a brief locked doors situation. Another job, in Kilgore to be exact, another strange happening. The boys came on the bandstand, I came out and sat in my chair. The customers were filing in, I happened to look at the ceiling. It was absolutely covered with scorpions. Just a mass. I had never seen anything like that before. In a short period of time the caretaker had everything under control.

Another crazy story. I was with Mack Rogers when this happened. Driving down the road going south of San Antonio, suddenly saw a sea of black in front of us. I asked what that was. As we approached, it was a mass of tarantulas crossing the road. Never had I seen that before nor since. We rolled the windows up and drove right through them. It must have been at least twelve feet wide. They were called the Mexican tarantulas. I don't recall whether that is the one that eat the cattle or not, but mercy, they said they could jump as high as the fender.

You must realize that in those days you would drive miles and miles before you would see another small town. Great experiences and I learned a lot. Another time – this girl singer had to sew buttons on many musicians' shirts. They were good fellows. In fact, they kept an eye on me so I wouldn't walk into someone's trap,

When I retired from Randolph AFB, I went to work for Jim Cullum, Sr., at the original Landing on the San Antonio River downtown. Liquor by the drink came along, so he wanted me to be the cashier. I needed one more year of work so I could get my Social Security when it came time. So, instead of working one year, I worked four. When Jim passed away, Jim Jr., moved The Landing across the river, and I continued working for him. Didn't get away from there until three, four or five in the morning. This is ridiculous. Isn't good for anybody's health.

I knew Ernie Caceres when we were sixteen years old. He worked in the pit at the Texas and the Majestic Theater as a saxophonist and clarinet. He was a terrific musician. His brother, Emilio, was also a great musician. Ernie went to New York early. In fact, his career started there. He worked with Paul Whiteman, Glen Miller, Louis Armstrong, Tommy Dorsey, Jack Teagarden, and many more. Emilio worked a long while with Gary Moore on a TV show. Believe it was 1963 when he returned to San Antonio. Like many musicians he squandered his money and drank heavily through the years.

He came back from Las Vegas but ill. He had been out there and working with Johnny Long. Came back to San Antonio after that engagement. He learned he had diabetes. Then the cancer appeared in his throat. He was dead in a year. Jim Cullum Sr., put a tribute together prior to Ernie's death. It was huge, and people came from everywhere. After his death, mail came in from all over the world, England, Germany, and elsewhere. Want to put it this way, Ernie was a genius, and so was Emilio. Did you know he and Ernie were half brothers?

Memories are great, and it all was fun, but if I had it to do over again, I would not choose show business. I will say, if I could have had a teacher (voice) plus an agent, I might have developed into a performer who could hold her own and made some money. Will never forget Connie Boswell telling me, "You've got it, go after it." The Boswell Sisters were the greatest. Also, Peck Kelly would say, "Torchie, you are going to be big someday – you have a natural!" I loved it, but it all came to an end. I learned a lot through my singing years; met wonderful people and some lasting friendships. I just enjoy and like good folk.

GENE RAMEY

I was born in Austin, Texas, April 4, 1913, three blocks from the State Capitol, down on 13th Street. Music seems to've been a family tradition. My family was singers. I understand my grandfather was a violin player. One of those hot violin players of the late 1800s and the early 1900s. We was one of those entertaining violinists.³

My mother used to always tell me that I got the habit of patten' my foot like that from my grandfather. That's something that I tried my best to break, but I couldn't. I had lots of

instruments. I think I could pinpoint it most by saying that first was the tempo blocks. And then I had a trumpet, and a baritone horn. And I played drums in the Boy Scouts with the marching band. I just picked it up. I taught myself till I got to the bass horn, and then I had some music in school. I sang in a quartet in school. I had my basic teaching, but after I found out I couldn't play anything else, I – I played the ukulele pretty good. And then I got ahold of the bass horn, a tuba, and that turned out to be my thing.

I switched to string bass after I got to Kansas City. I went there to college, to Western University in 1932. Actually August the 18th, 1932, I entered Western University. They had a band there and I got a partial scholarship. So I went there. Although I had been playing music in Austin for a couple of years.

I played with three different bands in Austin. My permanent job was with the Moonlight Serenaders. We had a social club and the cost of the band was so much that we got together and bought our own instruments. That's where I worked with Herschel Evans, the tenor sax player who later wound up with Basie. At the time I think he was with Troy Floyd. I met Herschel there. He was playing saxophone. I think it was tenor. Might have been C melody. That was a popular horn then. And very few musicians played the tenor sax. But I think Herschel was playing tenor. And then I played with George Carley.

We bought music at a place in Austin. Reed's Music Store, which is still there. You could buy a whole orchestration. I remember we got that thing, Duke Ellington's "Ring Them Bells," and we had lots of stocks of —some of them they had 'em in off keys, they'd give you as a sample. We got lots of those. I remember we had that "When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain," and "Should I?" and "Dream a Little Dream of Me," and, oh I can't remember all of them. We improvised. We very rarely used the chart, except for the first and last chorus. And that was the general idea of most of the bands from Texas, all that we encountered. That was about '30, '31, and early '32. And then I went to Kansas City. They had a place called the Potato Ballroom, and, on a holiday, every holiday, they had a battle of bands. And they had Alfonso Trent, Bennie Moten, Walter Page and his Blue Devils, Georgie Lee's band, Clarence Love's band, Andy Kirk's Twelve Clouds of Joy.

Most of the people stood there and watched those bands battle. 'Cause they'd just take turns and each one'd play about three tunes. I can still remember Georgie Lee and Jimmy Rushing each singing in that big, big hall without a microphone. They had those megaphone things. And this is the thing that amazes me now is that you hear these guys can't hear each other or can't hear you, you know. And a much smaller room.

Well I didn't just get out there, and play although I had been offered jobs. Somebody by the name of Sergio Rome had come to Austin and tried to get me to go. And several of those

minstrel shows had tried. But I was set on saving enough money to go to college. I finished school in January of 1930, and I was shining shoes and playing music on the side and doing everything I could to make, save enough money to have something to go to college with.

It's a funny thing. This was a black school that was co-sponsored by the state. And some kind of problem was involved there and the church pulled out. The church had all of the high degreed teachers. I mean teachers with the master's and the doctor's degrees. They broke off and the school automatically dropped down to a two-year college. And so I got my certificate. But I got there just in time to witness the downfall of it. I got a two-year certificate. And I went there for electrical engineering 'cause I couldn't get that in the state of Texas. In those days Prairie View was the only school there, and they didn't teach anything like that. A friend of mine who was the drummer in the band, he went there first, and he was to graduate. After he graduated then I was —and I got one year in

the complete overhauling. In those days it was a lot of money, especially for me.

My uncle was a roofer in Austin, and so about that time I started doing a little painting around Kansas City and I established quite a little trade. I did about sixteen or seventeen houses inside and out. Had one fellow helping me. So I managed to get hold of some money to pay for it. I didn't pay my tuition and that. The second year I didn't have to pay anything anyway. But I had already met Walter Page and Lester Young, and so when I started to playing with a little band in Kansas City, the Hot 'n Tots. And the nine of them were high school seniors in Kansas City, Kansas. And my school was in Quindera, Kansas. So somebody told them about me and asked me to come and join 'em. In the meantime, I'd been workin' with two Kansas City, Kansas, bands. And so I said, "Well I got nothin' to do. I'll go down if you wanna come pick me up."

So I started first to practicing with 'em with the bass horn. And I got my bass fiddle and they had enough patience with me

I got a bass violin book, and inside they had folded up a whole chart of the fingerboard, And all you had to do was take that and tape it on your fingerboard, And with that you could find out where all the positions were that you knew on your bass horn,

and then the school collapsed. I transferred over into what they called—it was *nothin'* but a *printin'* course, but they called it journalism. So I took two years of that.

While there in school, I switched to the string bass. There's another thing that happened. They had a great band there and they had lots of students. And when the school, broke off, the state had supplied the school with all sorts of instruments. I remember there was four bass violins, and oh, I guess about ten first, second violin cellos and everything, and saxophones and everything. They had a big band. So I happened to see that they were taking those bass violins and tying 'em up to the ceiling in the storeroom. And I noticed that all of 'em had cracks from that heat up there. I mentioned it to the man who took care of the thing. He said, "Well let me call Topeka, Kansas, and see what they want to do about this," he said, "'Cause they're just gonna fall to pieces up there." And they sent word that you could have what you wanted.

So I took two of the bass violins I wanted to have at home and one for me to play on. The one I had at home — I was gonna try to find out how to fix it myself. I just tore it all to pieces. Both of 'em were cracked but the other one, I took it to a music store in Kansas City called Jenkins Music. And they

overhauled it and fixed it for me. I think it cost about \$20 for

to learn how to practice and learn. Walter Page was really my teacher. What I did, you might say, to transpose, I got a bass violin book, and inside they had folded up a whole chart of the fingerboard. And all you had to do was take that and tape it on your fingerboard. And with that you could find out where all the positions were that you knew on your bass horn. So I had that down pretty good, but I just didn't know what to do, you know, playing bass violin. It was a whole new thing for me.

So I started with that, then I met Walter Page, and he told me, said, "Well if you ever feel like coming over I'll teach you." And now this was in '34 when I first met Walter Page. By the way, when they gave us those instruments, I took—that first saxophone that you saw with Lester Young playing sideways. That silver horn? Well that was one of the school's horns. And I took that and I gave it to him. Lester Young is three years older than me, so he was about twenty-two. You know Lester Young was an alto player before, that's why he got that tone that he had.

So in the winter of '35 this band got a job at the place called Frankie's and Johnnie's in Kansas City, Missouri. So we make it across there every night with our instruments playin' this nightclub. Well, first of all the club wasn't that well advertised, and secondly, the band was strictly a rinky-dink band. We were just school kids. We would split a note 'cause the reed section

didn't hit together, you know. It was just a school band, and it was just practically amateurs. So that lasted about six weeks. In the meantime, I had taken a job at Western University as assistant engineer. So I had the double-duty of trying to take care of my job at Western University and playing that music. And in '34 I had gotten married too, you see. And after that Frankie and Johnnie's thing went down then, a girl, a pianist in the band—they called her Countess Johnson—she took Mary Louise's place with Andy Kirk. We decided to organize a little thing, had six pieces. And we got a job at a place called the Barley Due, which was two blocks down the street from the Reno.

And now this job was extremely hard for me. It was from 8:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m., and you couldn't quit. Those jobs there, when you took a job there, and you decided you wanted to quit, some mysterious voice in the distance would tell you, "You don't quit here." I got a dollar and a half a night. I also had the job at the Western University and that was 8:00 (a.m.) to 5:00 (p.m.). So you know what I did on the day shift. I slept all day. I had three hours in the afternoon and three in the morning. It sure isn't much. Especially traveling all the way from Missouri to Kansas. And I lived over in Quindera, which is just on the outskirts going to Leavenworth.

By the way, that school, Western University, was that site where John Brown had rescued the slaves. And at the bottom of the hill on that campus was lots of brick cuts that still stand there. They're in shambles, but they still stand there where he'd go across the Missouri River there and bring the slaves across. And so a monument was built there. And that school originally was named Western University, and that was the first black school west of the Mississippi River. And it was like a landmark. In fact, they still have those monuments as a kind of a tour section like that. But there's no school now. I think it's a senior citizens' home or something there now.

Well I stayed at the Barley Due about a year. I just had to get somebody to help me at the school job. The school job only paid me \$40 a month, anyway, and room and board, you know. I had a wife and a baby at that time. I didn't have a wife when I first started workin' over there but shortly after I married in '34 and the baby came in '35.

By this time Bennie Moten had died and Basie had taken over. You probably heard the story of that. When the band broke up, when Moten died, the band broke into two sections. One of 'em was run by Gus Moten, Bennie Moten's nephew, and a guy named Prince Stewart, or Dee Stewart. He was a trumpet player. Now, they seemed like they had the inside shot on everything. They was heirs to all of the territory that Moten played. But the band was nothing. They got the job at the Reno, and Basie went out on the road. And as far as I know, they went on a tour and they got to Little Rock and they got

'em and finally gave 'em enough money to get back to Kansas City. They came back straggling.

I know that he got back and "Prez" (Lester Young) became my closest friend. We used to talk about that all the time. And that was the first time they ran across Buddy Tate. T. Holder's the name of the band I was trying to remember a while ago. He was the first owner of the Andy Kirk Band. And he still lives in Muskogee. And "Prez" said that the first time they ran into Buddy Tate was there. He might've been with some of those Oklahoma bands. But I do remember, I played with him in Austin with Sandy Holmes' orchestra.

And they managed to get back to Kansas City and this man, Saul—I can't think of his last name—who owned the Reno Club, he was just completely dissatisfied with Gus Moten's band. They weren't drawing anybody. The band didn't swing or nothin', so he had Basie to get his nine pieces. And Walter Page had been the owner of the band called the Blue Devils. And he had a great alto player named Buster Smith. And they both had come over with Bennie Moten anyway. And Hot Lips Page. These was all Texas musicians, too. Well, Page was from western Oklahoma.

And they had a swingin' little band. And on top of that they played the type of music that didn't knock everybody's ears out. They took over the job at the Reno and immediately after that the radio station liked it so well that they came and asked if they could put a line in there. And so I was glad to have it. So every night at 12:00 they would come on. Now at that time the Pendergast scandal was full blown. And so we had Sunset Terrace was further out. It came on at 11:00 and had a guy named Ellins that sang in the band and played on that. So this same radio station made themselves something like a chain of nightclubs, like NBC and CBS were doing. And they switched from this station, and they'd come up to the Reno. And they had another thing at the Playmore Ballroom.

I would say the beginning of the Count Basie band taking form. Before that, naturally, they evidently were doing good but nobody knew 'em. So their bookings fell off and everything. But I would say that the Reno was really the thing. And there was such a great understanding between the owner of the club and Basie. And he was just crazy about Basie. I always called him Basie. I tell you, we used to call him something else. Well, he always had holes in his pants. But everybody called him "Holey." That gave me a chance to go up there in intermission and get a few free lessons from Walter Page. Then in his intermission he'd come down and check to see what I was doing. That also made a strong relationship between the two of us. And there was — the lady piano player that I worked with—Lester Young fell in love with her. So he was down every evening at intermission. Or she was up there every intermission. So we hit together. We were like the baby brothers and sisters of Count Basie's band.

Now that place finally was shut down, and I guess that's the only thing that caused us to leave. This club, the Barley Duc closed up. The Reno was a little bit more sophisticated. So they didn't have all the things that these other clubs had. Like we had the nude girls. One place we played they had an act with a horse. So evidently they had something else going on then, because one night after we left — it must've been in the morning; it wasn't day after we left, but, anyway, there was a shoot-out between the owners of this club and the FBI. And there was supposed to've been drugs involved of some kind. And one FBI was killed and two of the owners of the club. That was the end of that. Then and there. So the Barley Duc was short-lived in that respect. But we had the most business, naturally, because all that kind of attraction.

We had another place we went to, the Wilby Chateau. This was out in the ritzy neighborhood, like the White Plaza out in the quiet neighborhood. It was more like residential. And we

sophisticated rich lived in Kansas City on the Plaza. It's somethin' like a Hyde Park. And then the other union didn't like the idea of us being out in that neighborhood, so they tried to zone it off. We had a segregated union too. And so the thing went to James Petrillo [President of the American Federation of Musicians], and he broke the back of it right away. He said, "I'm here fightin' this and here you are tryin' to create it. So those guys're gonna play any place they wanna play."

So, we were all an instant success there and they had the colleges. Right away we started playing the University of Missouri, University of Kansas. All the nearby colleges and everything. So we had lots of the college kids that followed us all over. Had a fan club, you know. And that same year, I was supposed to've been the first black to join Charley Barnett in October of 1938. They called me in and told me that Charley Barnett had been looking for me all day. So, I rushed over to the union and come to find out he had contacted Jay McShann

So, we were all an instant success there and they had the colleges. Right away we started playing the University of Missouri, University of Kansas. All the nearby colleges and everything, So we had lots of the college kids that followed us all over. Had a fan club, you know

played out there. We had a radio broadcast at a place called the State Line Tavern. This was a club that straddled the state line. Now in Missouri, Truman had passed a law there during his regime that all clubs had to close at 1:00, which was a sudden shock to the people. Been stayin' open till five. And so to counteract this, this man had this State Line Tavern, and then in Kansas you could stay open till Doomsday. So they had a bar over here and a bar over here. When they closed in Missouri, they just walked to the other side of the room and kept on playing.

It was shortly after that I joined Jay McShann's band. I'm gonna work with him this Friday in Chicago. In fact, we never severed our relationship, although I stayed in New York and he went back to Kansas City. After we broke the band up and I came with Jay McShann then I managed to get all the rest of 'em in the band. The reason the band broke up was Countess was called to take Mary Louise's place with Andy Kirk. Countess is the one Lester Young was in love with. Her name was Martha Johnson.

Then I stayed with McShann. Now there was a funny thing on that situation, too. I joined this band on a two week stint to fill in for a guy who was gonna come in two weeks later. Now he didn't want to come in until his favorite drummer was available. Now Gus Johnson had been workin' in Lincoln, Nebraska. Gus came on with the band. And so we immediately

and Jay had taken me way out in the country. So I missed that job. But, anyway, we gained popularity. And that year Jay and I won the New Star Award.

By this time we had gotten Charlie Parker. We had trouble with him. I met him in '35 before Jay McShann came into Kansas City. The band that I was with, the Hot 'N Tots, played a battle of bands against their high school band. And that's when I first met him. And he was—what's the word—adamant? He didn't speak to you. He'd just sit over there and sulk. But I guess he was thirteen or fourteen or so. I was twenty-one or so, you know. Then in '35 he was workin' across the street from the Reno where we'd see each other every night at the jam sessions, and he'd come down to our club, and we became very close friends. And we started to go out in the parks and find places to jam, he and I and a couple of the other musicians that was interested.

I think he was just getting hooked on something. Usually I had my car, so I'd drive the guys. And usually I'd keep his horn and his jacket, 'cause if we didn't, it'd be in the pawn shop. I don't want to say it was drugs, 'cause I never in my life saw it, and we became very close. I never saw him shoot a line. But I do know this much, that he was an experimenter. We used to call him the pharmacist. He'd go to the drugstore and try to find anything that he could use to get him high.

Charlie Parker joined McShann in '38. And we went to do this thing in Chicago in February of '39 when we got the reward. And we were supposed to stay two weeks, but they really liked us, and so we stayed six weeks. And when we got back, Charlie Parker had gone. So we left the band there at the Martins on the Plaza in that exclusive club there. And we got back, Charlie Parker was gone. When we got to Chicago, one night the guys called and said, "You know what?" Said, "Your alto player was in here." He told McShann, "Your alto player was in here tonight." Said, "He blew out everybody." He was just going around looking for alto players and chop 'em up. And so we just thought maybe he was in and gonna come and see us. Next thing we knew, he was in New York. So he was dissatisfied, I guess, because we won the award and he didn't, so he left. Anyway, he went on to New York and we came back to Kansas City. They got another alto player before we got back.

Then McShann began to prepare to get a bigger band, because the union laws. We had seven pieces, and certain ballrooms you had to have maybe twelve or fourteen. So then McShann and his manager began to enlarge the band. And that was late '39. And '39 we were brought to Chicago. That was just before the big band came in, still seven pieces. But we were supposed to do our first recording then. The man put us on the bus and brought us up there. And we hadn't gotten permission from the union to go into that jurisdiction. So we got there and they put us in our rooms in this fabulous hotel down in the loop there. And about two hours later we went to the recording studio and as soon as we got there, the union broke in and said, "All right, just put those instruments back and I give you twelve hours to get out of town." So they sent us back to Kansas City, and we got the big band, twelve pieces.

We had two male singers. We stole Al Hibler from this territory right here. We got him outta Boots and his band, Boots and His Buddies band. Right here in San Antonio. And then we had a great ballad singer name of Bill Nolan. And so we started playing the circuit then. We came down to Texas, down here and went back there. That's how we happened to see Hibler when we came down here, and McShann was attracted to him. Didn't sign him on, just took him. And Hibler said, "I want to go with him right now." And Boots said, "All right." He's in New York, now. He's actually livin' just across the river in Jersey. And he's got a nice house there. His wife—he and his wife broke up but he's got that big house and he's been takin' care of it nicely. So we were on the tour, Texas tour, with the big band. '40 was the first time. And then we did it on up until '44 when the band broke up. We had a home base in Kansas City, where we went back to a place called the Century Room in a hotel there.

I think of Charlie Parker as a guy who could've been talented, I wouldn't say genius, but could've been talented in any field he tried. He was a nice, considerate guy and we had like a nice

family, as far as the band was concerned. He loved to jam, and I loved to jam. I had a fourteen-piece band at Western University. And so the trumpet player who was really the first bebop trumpet player was in my band at Western University. Buddy Anderson, he's the one that Miles Davis has always raved about. And so I brought him into Jay McShann's band. So now we, in '38 and like that, just the three of us used to go in and jam, the trumpet player and Charlie and myself. We were the only ones that took an interest in jammin'. The rest of 'em was out chasin' the chicks or somethin' else. So we used to go and sometimes when we got off work and stay out to daylight, sometimes 9:00, 10:00 jamming.

Lester Young as a person, I'd say, was one of the nicest guys in the world. His favorite word was "no evil spirits." And he was just like that. He married interracially, and when he was inducted into the army and he was somewhere in Alabama, I think, or somewhere in Mississippi, Alabama. Anyway, he brought his wife down there. And right away they found a reason to put him in the brig. He liked to talk about how every night they'd come out there and have target practice on his head. They whipped "Prez" so badly that if you notice that when he came out of the army, his whole thing different and everything.

What was my absolute best experience as a musician? A guy named Eddy on drums and a piano player from Minneapolis. And we had a groove there one night. It was in the summertime and they had the front door open. And we looked up and all of the musicians from all of the clubs out there at the bar. Somebody had gone and told 'em, said, "You should get that groovin' that the guys are playin'." And it was so exciting that after that I started to teaming with Sid Catlett until he went with Louie Armstrong. He decided that he'd rather work with me than the bass player that he had. But it was one of those things you can hit from time to time when you hit it and hold it. But we hit one and held it for the whole night.

In '44 I had taken over Jay McShann's band, on several occasions, many occasions. When he was sick or when he was out when he had all those battles with induction and everything. And so it was agreed that I would take over the band and keep it intact until he got back from the service. Now the bookin' agent, and the manager and McShann had agreed that I was to take it over. But it was supposed to be the Jay McShann band under the direction of Gene Ramey, featuring Walter Brown. We played that last night in Kansas City, it was in May '44, and at 12:00, the army MP's came and took McShann off the stand. This was his last goodbye, you know. So we shook hands, and it was agreed then that I'd take it over.

But as soon as he left the agent told me that they had decided to keep down complications, not to use Jay McShann's name. It would be Walter Brown and his band under the direction of Gene Ramey. Well I immediately told them "No." Now they

had booked a lots of things ahead, you know. When I told 'em, "No" the whole band said, "No, we're not goin' either." So, this broke the back of the band right then and there. I might have got myself in bad permanently with the agencies for that. I didn't think of it. The only thing I realized, the way I felt, was that if they're gonna do this, they **might** use me for trumpet player for three months and then kick me out.

So, I just decided not to take it. So, I went to work for Saul at the Reno. I stayed in Kansas City and went to work for Saul at the Reno for about five weeks. I was right at home in Kansas City, but I wanted to get back to New York 'cause I had my house there and everything. And I stayed with him five or six weeks at the Reno. And Louie Russel's band came through. He asked me if I could leave right away and I said, "Yeah. I will leave now." And so I went back to New York with Louie Russell. I stayed with him from about the middle of July until October. And then Hot Lips Page asked me why didn't I come on down to 52nd Street with him. So I said, "OK." I had to go and apply for a union card before they would let me work. They had a thing there where you had to be on six months probation before you could become a regular member.

I've recorded with McShann, Count Basie, and Louie Russell, Earl Hines. Individuals: Dizzy Gillespie, and Sarah Vaughan, Stan Getz, Thelonius Monk. George Shearing, and Lennie Tristano, Billy Taylor, Sir Charles Thompson, Buck Clayton, Jimmy Rushing and Lester Young, Roy Eldridge, Buster Gary, Eartha Kitt. I went into the Chase Manhattan Bank, the loan department there. And the day that I took that job at Chase Manhattan I got a letter from Joe Morainian tellin' me that Joe Glazer wanted to see me right away, wanted me to join the band in two days. I thought I'd go on and take it. I said, "No." I said, "If I do I'll be right back on that alcohol thing." I was seeing myself becoming an alcoholic. I spoke to a friend of mine and he told me, he said, "listen, the only way you're gonna get away from alcohol is get away from the environment." He said, "well it's gonna be hard but it's your choice. Now if you wanna break it, that's the way you're gonna have to do it."

I played from 1930 up until 1966. I continued to play but I played in country clubs, and I played mostly with the Dixieland musicians and the country club. But I only play like one or two nights a week. I think I played every country club in the New York area. I think it saved my life to tell you the truth 'cause I look at my friends who've gone on, all from alcoholism. "Course Prez had already died. But Red Allen, we were in that same boat together. Buster Bailey, Coleman Hawkins, Jimmy Webster, Don Byars. Everybody ended up with that liver thing. Coleman Hawkins kept a half-gallon of whiskey by his bedside everyday. I used to go get him and take him fishin' to try to get him away from it. He'd say, "Well I got to bring my old lady with me." I'd say, "Man, we're goin' fishin'." He'd say, "I'm

talkin' about this ole lady." I recorded with him. As I said, it's gonna be hard for me to recollect.

BERT ETTA DAVIS

In a native San Antonian, and a graduate of Phillis Wheatley High School. Actually we started with a jazz band at Phillis Wheatley. We organized a jazz band out of the marching band. My mother and father were dance fanatics. And being an only child, in those days we didn't have baby-sitters. So I went with 'em, and I was exposed to music. I even went to hear Don Albert's band when I was a little girl. And there was another one, Troy Floyd. They had the library auditorium, which is called the Carver Culture Center now. All the functions mostly were there. And they would carry me and I'd sit up on the stage most of the time, just sit and listen to the band. And I always was fascinated with the saxophone. That's what I always wanted to play. And that's what I've played since seventh grade.⁴

I became a professional when I was in Prairie View College, and that was during the war. All the male musicians were drafted into the service, and so the band director there decided with one, which was me, to organize an all-girl group. He phoned the high schools of Texas during the summer to try to find girls who were interested in Prairie View to entice them to come and organize a band. Our communications at Prairie View at the time were writing messages with crayon on the sidewalk. Up under the bed somewhere in the dormitory, you know, "come tonight we are gonna organize a band," and you'd be surprised to know how many girls had brought their instruments from home. Well, they were pretty good; we were able to organize a band. We played at college, and then we went out and played at different towns. Around in Houston, Dallas, small towns, just starting, and then we did that throughout the school year and then next year, next summer we went on the road. All-girl band, dance band. In between we played jazz and we did the army camps during World War II. It was a big salary of \$9 for one night. And my salary was \$13 but the rest of the people it was \$9.

After the first year, and well during this first summer, we went all the way to the Apollo Theater, in New York, and when we got there my picture was on the placard, advertising me as a college coed. I was seventeen. I just went out and played my alto and everybody received me so well. We stayed only that week, and then we had the whole big salary of \$90. Yeah, we were playing at the theater that week that was the scale, but when we first left here, we all joined the Dallas local so we were all union musicians.

And then we left for New York and we played at the Royal Theater in Baltimore, the Howard Theater in Washington, D. C., and then we did a one-nighter tour all the way down the East Coast to Florida and across, and we ended up back in

Texas, and we had a week's vacation. The biggest problem we had was no place to stay other than homes, unless there was a black hotel. And in a town where they didn't have any hotels, we would have to stay in people's homes.

Then school for the next year, started the band again, and then, during the next year, the band got better, because there were girls who came out of high school and kept going, and we ended up in Houston and seven of us stayed together as a small band, and we got a booking agent and the agent set up one-nighters. I've tried to get back to college ever since but something has always stopped me. I did go for one semester and my father got ill and I had to come back home so that broke that up and I had to stay because my dad was in the hospital.

We played in Detroit, and then we left Detroit and went to Peoria, Illinois, and there was a musician. I don't recall her name. She wanted to go out on her own. Her name was pretty big, and she came to Peoria and asked us if we'd come with her. And so I stayed with her for a few years. It worked very good. We worked 51 weeks out of the year. We would stay a week or two weeks at

been, we played together in Chicago.

I was just running around ahead of myself, because, after being with Diana, I went to Europe and there was a girl from Stockholm, Sweden, who came to New York, and she had been sent over by an agent from Stockholm to see if she could find the best jazz girl musician in the states and see if they would go over there. And in the states she ran into J. J. Johnson, the trombonist, and he told her about me. They called me long distance to see if I was interested in going to Europe. We played nine months. They had the advertisements you know, the best clubs, and they drew large crowds. It makes you wonder why you have to go to Europe for people to hear you. They do, they have a different feeling toward music over there. We would always have a crowd, and it's nothing to go on an hour show on the radio and you know do television.

Jazz is the main thing in my life, yeah. I couldn't ever give it up because it's a part of me. It's a shame that being a jazz musician and knowing jazz as I do, that I would have to take another job to support myself. In the manner that I want to

The biggest problem we had was no place to stay other than homes, unless there was a black hotel. And in a town where they didn't have any hotels, we would have to stay in people's homes.

a place. We wouldn't do any one-nighters, mostly the clubs, and then we all went to the Caribbean. And we played Canada all the time, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec, and others.

I think when I was twenty-five, I decided to organize my own band. I used all males. I got another booking agent out of Chicago. And they kept us working. And then I came back. I was living in Chicago then, and then after that I went with Diana Washington. I was a featured player with her.

Charlie Parker was my idol as a saxophonist. We were very good friends. I knew the Bird, and we used to practice. He had a group in Washington, D. C., and I'd go to their rehearsal and then I would go to the hotel with him, and we'd sit up there in the hotel room and practice. He always admired my tone. And I admired his too, and he said, "I wish I had your tone. If I had that, I'd really be something." And I said, "Yeah but I can't think as fast as you can." He never forced me in anyway of anything and even on the drugs or nothing. I was excluded, as far as that's concerned. You know he only treated me as an assistant. No, he never even mentioned the drugs, and I would sit in the room with him and practice and play, and some of the different things and that was never brought up. You see all the band members they always treated me like a sister. Yeah, I was very good friends with the Bird (Juster Young). We had to have

play jazz, but I wouldn't even work on another job, if I was able to leave whenever there was a time that I was able to play. I've got a new boss at the Salvation Army, and I explained to him that, if I have a job out of town, that I'm going. But I never miss a day's work, going to work, but if it's anything pertaining to music I've got to go. That's my life, and I gotta go.

When I came back from Europe in '64, by then Parker was dead, and Prez was gone and Diana Washington died the next week. The tour was over, and I came back and people thought I came from a funeral, but it was just that it happened at that time. I like Billie Holliday, and she was always friendly to me. As a matter of fact, if she was playing some place and I walked in, I would play in the band. She would play with me all night, and she'd say, "Oh, I know how to put it together," and she'd open the case and put my horn together. She said fans taught me how to put a horn together. Charlie Parker's impact on me as a saxophone player was the greatest.

Then I stayed two years on the job in La Salle, Illinois, with my all-girl band. The job just kept me in flashes really, because I played everything in which I have learned to play everything. Here in San Antonio I play country and western jobs, jazz jobs, any kind of jobs, you know. I play. It doesn't make any difference now. It was just one club, in La Salle, Illinois, when

I had my group. This was before Martin Luther King. And we were booked into La Salle but at a different club, and they wouldn't let us live in the hotel and there was no place to live in this all-white town, in '60s early, no this was in the '50s the first time. And we had to live in a town called Ottawa, which is seventeen miles and commute back and forth every night. I went back to that town ten years later and actually stayed at the inn. On my days off, I would have to go to Chicago but there then I would get invited out. I could get all the credit I wanted.

Diana Washington changed my name to Ladybird. Ladybird. Charlie Parker wrote a tune called "Ladybird." She thought that would be appropriate. Nobody knows me down in San Antonio by Ladybird. You know it's a funny thing about your home town. Yeah, people recognize you more away from your home town than they do here in San Antonio.

I went back to Chicago, and I was gonna try to go to school and my father passed. He got sick and I came home and left my mother by herself, and I stayed another year in Chicago and came home on visits. I could see her thyroid, because she had had a thyroid operation when I was still in high school, and it looked like the thyroid had grown back. I came back home. She called me one day, which was very rare, it had to be something really bad for her to make a long-distance call. And she told me that her doctor wanted me to call him, and I said what is wrong, and he said that the goiter had grown back, and she almost died. I made a promise to God that I wouldn't leave her. She died last year. I came back to San Antonio.

DUDE SKILES

Well, now let's see, I'm sixty-five now. I would say I've been **hackin'** at it on music for over fifty years. My dad and mother were active in music and played dances all around San Antonio for twenty years. I was born in Joplin, Missouri, 1915. My folks were out of Kansas City at that time, and my daddy had the pit bands on a tent show. And they played the Southwest on weekend stands, really. They were just typical tent shows that played the circuit.

They took the bands out every summer with three or four tents, and Daddy stayed with the main tent, which usually made Texas, all the Southwest area. My dad and mother played San Antonio or in towns outside San Antonio, like **Floresville**. They got acquainted with San Antonio in those years, and in about 1927, I think it was '26, my Dad came down with a big band. It was a twelve-piece band that he had put together in Kansas City and called it The Kansas City Monarchs.

I don't remember he came into San Antonio in about '25 and booked a series of dances around the area; Poteet, Poth, Pleasanton, had 'em all booked. All he had to do was play 'em.

got a hold of all the guys in his band - they were livin' in a downtown hotel - and told 'em if they went out and played in the band, they were subject to a fine and suspension and everything they could do to keep 'em from going. So when it came bus time, only one guy showed up. So, Daddy just said, "we'll just go on down and play it anyway." Went down and played it with his violin, his mother and a banjo player and a bass player. And they got through the night.

I started out on drums. And I played drums with my dad and my mother and we played such things as the Tourist Club in the early '30s. Over the years we were the band, and I played drums, and my mother played piano and Jack, my brother, played the banjo. And we played on one of the first radio stations in San Antonio. It was KONO, and later we had an early morning program at 5:30 in the morning, six days on KTSA. I've got a brochure on that, The Skiles' Music Makers.

And Daddy played all these homemade instruments. He made a pitchfork fiddle, and we did a lot of schoolwork. We'd go all around the auditoriums of the local schools, and he would play cigar box fiddle and give out directions on how to make all these instruments to the kids. And the school systems liked it, and he continued that way all while I was goin' to junior high school, Nathaniel Hawthorne. I went there and finished there, and then I went from there to Main Avenue in 1930 and finished there. I owe a great deal to Otto Zelle. He was a band director around here in both Brackenridge and Jefferson. I was in the band at Main Avenue, and Otto needed a bass player real bad, and I had started on trumpet prior to that.

In fact, I was playing trumpet in the band. He needed a bass player, tuba. I had a knack of playing jazz on anything with three fingers on it, and he heard me toodlin' around on bass one day, and convinced me that I gotta play toodle for him. I was never much of a reader to begin with, but I had a pretty good ear. Even when I went with Fred Waring, I couldn't read a lick.

That was 1937. I went as a trumpet player. Brother Jack and I were musicians out on the West Coast not working steady or anything. MCA were booking all the stuff that we did and wanted to know if we would like to go up to San Francisco and audition for Waring. He needed a jazz trumpet player. And that's all I was doing then. Jack and I drove from Los Angeles, where we were at the time, to San Francisco for this audition. I sat in the group and we played a couple of things there, and I got through it, not being able to read very well, and Waring thanked me and I was on the way out and I said, "Would you mind listening to my brother on guitar?" and Jack came in and Waring just went for it.

All during high school and all during junior school, Jack and I were playing an average of three nights a week with my folks, dances. He would book 'em and, in those days, during The Depression, and we would play on commission. I guess we

played every little town that there was! I played Goliad, and I can remember playing Goliad out on a square, or a dance hall that was not too far out of town that was built for dancing with the big open windows that would open, so it would be halfway cool.

And there was a young man with the WPA came in there one night, and we were playing with an all-girl band, The Battle of Music. During the dance, he was sitting next to the band, and that was back in the days when families came to the country-dances. They'd have babies on the pallets sleeping back underneath the corners. It was real different than it is today. So, when this elderly man came in and walked up to this twenty-year-old boy leaning against a post of a chair and asked him, he was about ten feet from me, and asked him if he was the one that was dating his daughter. And boy, I don't remember his answer, but the old man pulled out a gun and shot him five times, right there at the dance. All the people kept on dancing around. They laid him out, and the coroner came, and took the bullets out and I'm the guy that held the Coke bottle that he

playing rhythm without any keys. Well, the keys without any hammers on the piano!

The only colored people that I had anything to do with, who worked out at Shadowland, for a long time, Boots and his Buddies. And I knew this trumpet player, the guy from Louisiana that just passed away, Don Albert. I went in and sat in at his club. He had a club in those times. I used to go out there and play drums and bring along my trumpet. The way I started on trumpet, my Dad gave me a shopworn, one I think he paid twenty bucks for it. They had a pawn shop on Houston Street across the Texas Theater in those days, and my dad made the rounds, and he gave me a trumpet. And I would take that trumpet to work with us on the three or four nights a week that we were *playin'* dances in these various halls around here. It took me quite awhile. My dad showed me the fingering, and he was familiar with I'd say, all musical instruments, and I finally mastered "Dark Town Strutters Ball."

And, of course, Jack was on banjo and switched over to guitar

I remember one night I went up and sat in and I played with Louis Armstrong at the Foggy Bottom, about '27 or '28, and he came through with the band,

dropped the bullets in. He was shot through the lung and left a great big splotch of blood right next to where he was *layin'*, and we just kept right on playing, and then the people were starting to go home. They were afraid. There used to be loud backfires on almost every car when they started because it was halfway cool and racin' engine. It would sound like gunfire, and it held up the people leaving because some of the smart alecks out there were doin' it on purposes.

My dad was very lenient with me, and any time I wanted to go sit in with somebody I could do it. There were all kinds of bands coming through. I remember one night I went up and sat in and I played with Louis Armstrong at the Foggy Bottom, about '27 or '28, and he came through with the band. I just couldn't get enough of him, ever. I was about a nineteen-year-old kid, and I was up there.

I knew the colored guy who had an instrument repair place downtown. Its name was Morton Rhythm. He had an old piano with no keys on it, and it didn't make a sound. I'd go down there and sit in. All the guys who played jazz would go sit in. He had a shop right downtown pretty close to the Nix Hospital up on the second floor, and there's a typewriter place underneath it now, and he was there for years and all the guys would go down there. Seriously, he would make enough noise on that piano so that late got a good vibration going, he was just

along about then. He's always a pleasure to play with. The guy who really knocked me out was Jack Teagarden. Just killed me, you know. I followed Teagarden and right along that time, I was just doing so-so on the trumpet, not *workin'* at it too hard. Paul Whiteman came through and played the Texas Theater. And the guy in the show got up and played "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," and it just fractured me. Bunny Berrigan, and he just killed me! But from then on I couldn't practice enough. I was takin' lessons from Erwin Scott, a trumpet player around here for years and years that played the Texas Theater when they had the pit bands. He was not an exceptional trumpet player, but he was very patient and could read like a fox.

Jack and I drove to Chicago first, and I got awful sick while I was in Chicago. It would have to be in about '36, I think. We went with Waring in '37 so it would have to be in about '35 or '36. We arrived there, and I don't think we had \$10 between us. So we went to the YMCA, and we got a room, and they're pretty cheap. It was bitterly cold then, but we would go into a bar and ask if it would be all right to come in there and play and take our instruments. They'd say all right, and we would go in there and play at the bar and for tips and with a little cigar box and made real good money for them. It was right in the middle of The Depression.

Chicago was a real eye-opener. I went to the Three Deuces

and sat in with Art Tatum. I didn't believe it when I heard him! I had caught amoebic dysentery and went to St. Luke's. I was a guinea pig; tried the sulfa drugs and it looked like horse pills. Whatever they did, cured me. When I got rested up and strong again, we decided to try it again. So, we went out to the West Coast this time. We had an ole' Willis Knight, burnt more oil than gas! But we made it, and we got set up out there and went by and auditioned for MCA, Music Corporation of America. And they set us up for an audition at the Biltmore Hotel, and we got a job there playing intermission. It was Jack and me, that's all. We did quite a lot of singing then, the two of us. We were really doing a great job there, and somebody came by and asked us how old we were, and I was nineteen and Jack was fifteen and a half. They convinced this owner that we were too young to be playing in a bar, so we had to quit.

Fred Waring was the disciplinarian, just a Boy Scout, Eagle Scout. He was the most strong-minded man you could possibly imagine, and there wasn't an original note that came out of his show at all. It was all Waring. He conducted it, delivered it and it was packaged to his specifications. And he paid us just a subsistence salary. On the road, it **finally** got up to where I was making \$300 a week, which was considered the tops at that time. Waring and I had many words, you know. I was pretty smart-alecky. But he taught me more about the deportment and show business than I could have learned any other place.

After I left Waring, I was kinda stomping around looking for something, I went with Jack Teagarden, which was quite a switch there. Freedom was the name of it. Most band leaders that I had anything to do with and with very few exceptions, they were bastards. They were just tough as nails. Goodman, in particular, that guy was somethin' else. I auditioned for his band and didn't make it. He pulled out a thing on the audition called "Waltz and Swing Time." He put me on first, and I botched it. But he was just generally, just real rude. In New York language at that time, he was a schmuck! Yeah, but boy, he could play!

Then I got a chance to go with Johnny Green, and that's the best band I was ever with, by far. We were doin' shows and CBS stuff. I was with him two years. I can't say anything bad about the musicianship in New York. They got more guys out of work up there. The last time I heard anything about it, there's about 30,000 and 20,000 are out of work.

And as far as respect for musicians, among the general public, I think the only thing lower than the musician on a credit rating, is a barber. There's just no way that you can walk in and say, "I'm a musician. I'm a trumpet player, and I have played with somebody," and they wouldn't loan you a dime!

JIM CULLUM, JR.

I was first exposed to jazz by my father's playing and Garner Clark. And there was a clique in Dallas; they were active there. Interesting musicians and interesting characters, fiercely independent players who starved to death in Dallas mostly during the '40s is when he was doing his thing. My dad went to SMU (Southern Methodist University). He went to SMU in the early '30s, and wanted to play football as an athlete. He was ineligible for football, and his other love was playing jazz music. And **after** he'd had a couple years doing that, he went to Sewanee. Sewanee is a university in Tennessee. He went there, and I don't think he was much of a scholar. Mostly, he was interested in just playing his alto saxophone and practiced all the time. And generally was a nuisance to the faculty and some of the other kids, because he was always practicing. Or at least that's the impression that I always got.

And he came back to Dallas, and when he found that he couldn't play football there because of the transferring - eligibility and so forth - he heard that they were organizing the first SMU band. Hadn't been a band there. I think, if I'm not mistaken, this is 1933. He went over there and he knew Garner Clark, and Garner Clark was in the band as a ringer. He was not really enrolled at SMU, but he was playing in the band, a cornet player. And he played hot jazz choruses, and dad played clarinet choruses. And they had one or two other guys that could kinda play hot take-off jazz. The band was about thirty, thirty-five pieces. They were not well organized. They played about ten tunes, all jazz tunes. And they had the riffs worked out, and they would play the riffs behind the soloist. And that put the band into its first college jazz band. But that just solidified his burning desire to continue to play jazz.

And along the way, **fortunately** or **unfortunately**, however you want to look at it, he met my mother, which kind of slowed down his jazz career considerably. That's the unfortunate part. But he dropped out of SMU after one year and got married. Went to work in the family wholesale grocery business and really put away all his horns and didn't try to play very much. Just occasional things, but didn't try to play much. Worked hard at the grocery business and studied under his father's instruction and became an accountant in night school. Kind of a flash in business.

So, in 1936, when Benny Goodman came along, he was very fascinated by the turn that music was taking. He had enough years to think about his life and so forth. And it wasn't too many years until he decided to drop out of the business in the early '40s, about the time that I came along. And he went into full time music career sometime during World War II years. They used to have terrific jam sessions at our big house there in Dallas.

Garner Clark slept there a lot on the sofa. One of my vivid memories as a kid was going downstairs and in the living room,

Garner would be stretched out on the floor in front of the fireplace which had a gas grate. It was one of these things where the gas burns under the wood to ignite the wood. Well, the wood had long since been gone and the gas was burning to keep Garner warm, and he was in front of the fireplace just stiff like a corpse. He would lie so straight and still that he wouldn't mess up his clothes. And the next morning, he'd get up and he'd look completely neat. Didn't look like he'd been sleeping in his clothes at all. He slept there either on the floor in front of the fire or in better weather, he slept on the sofa. I was a little boy, and music used to wake me up and I'd go down and sit and listen and make a nuisance of myself. That's my first memory of jazz.

As time went on, 1946, '47, we went to Venezuela. My father, by this time, beat around by the music business quite a bit and decided to go back into regular business activity. Took a job with a Rockefeller organization in Venezuela. So, we went there for two years. And upon our return—fall of 1949—Garner Clark was forming a band and they were playing about one or two nights a week. This is the same clique of Dallas

he wasn't paying too much attention to me at that time. I discovered the Louis Armstrong records first and I listened to those things, and I just loved 'em. It was wonderful.

There were all kind of Louis Armstrong records. There were a few Hot Fives and Sevens; there were also Louis Armstrong playing with a lot of big bands. Louie in the '30s when he'd become a high-note player. I just thought that he played great. And then my tastes broadened a little more and I started discovering offshoots of this. And the next passion that I had became the Bix Beiderbecke records. Within a couple of years I'd gotten to where I knew Beiderbecke choruses by heart. I could sing 'em, too. I could whistle. I couldn't play anything on any instrument.

One day my father discovered me whistling one of these choruses. He didn't realize it was a Bix chorus. I didn't even know he was paying attention. I'm whistling away, and he said, "Say, that's pretty good. That's pretty good. You ought to take up some kind of a horn like a trombone or something. That sounds pretty good." It was a Bix Beiderbecke chorus; it should

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musicians of which there were probably about thirty and maybe another ten or fifteen on the fringes. But the guys who were in the hard core of this thing were fiercely independent about their music and were very apt to go and tell the band leader, "Don't call me again for your lousy, crummy band." And they did that a lot, and so they didn't work. Over the next few years, somehow, that embedded in my consciousness about there was something special about the music.

We moved to San Antonio in '53, and I didn't like it a bit. But, the funny thing about it, I went and I would sit and brood in my room about what a terrible thing this was. Write long letters to my friends in Dallas and my cousin, Mary, who has nothing to do with the story at all, except that she became my pen pal for about a year and I'd write her and tell her how terrible it was. But the thing is that my father's 78 record collection was in there, and I listened to a few of these records. And little by little, in this period I went through, a year or so, being very unhappy about being in San Antonio, I would listen to these records, and I got to where I started developing an ear for the music and a feeling for it. At that early age I had not played any instrument or had any instruction. And my father was so preoccupied at that point with his own business activities trying to kind of make up for all the years that he messed around having a lot of fun being an eccentric in Dallas, and he couldn't stand on his hind legs and whistle very well, but

have been pretty good. So he encouraged me. Said, "Why don't you take up some kind of a horn. That sounds pretty good. You probably have a pretty good talent for jazz. Sounds pretty good. What are you whistlin'?" He said something about playing a trombone. Trombone looked to me like it wouldn't be so hard, you know. You just slide.

We had this grocery business, and I was always working there; from the time we came to San Antonio I was kind of put to work, every day in the summer. I'd go down there and do anything they wanted me to do. Sweep or stack things or weigh up pinto beans. Anyway, sometimes they sent me out as a helper on a truck, and help unload. And in those days they had tarpaulin trucks with open backs, and they were designed for two men. So one man would stay in the truck at all times so that nobody would steal anything. They didn't have locking closures, doors, on the back of the truck. One day I'm there and we pull up on Houston Street to a little café that's right where the Frost Bank is now. And across the street there's a pawn shop and there was a cornet there and kind of fitted the image of what I had in my mind about the Beiderbecke thing. Wow, look at that old cornet. It was really quite an early model, I'm guessing it was early 1900s model. It's a very short one. Had the original case and it was such a clever looking little thing.

And so I went in and the guy wanted \$12 for it. And we haggled around. We haggled around for a couple of days. I went

back, and finally I bought it for \$7, and I went to the San Antonio Music Company and bought a book for \$1 on how to play a "C" scale, and from there I started playing tunes and playing along with records. And little by little learning to play, teaching myself how to play. And my dad'd come home and he'd say, "What are you doin? You ought to practice, take some lessons, practice." I didn't want to take lessons. I didn't want to learn to read. I just wanted to play. I'm not certain, but I think it was about '56. I was about a sophomore in high school and I must've been about fifteen years old when I started. Within about a year, I'd gotten to where I could play a little bit. Within a couple of days I learned two tunes. And every afternoon I'd go home and play along with records mostly. Did that for a while. Drove the neighbor crazy. But that's how I got started.

I was going to Alamo Heights High School. We had a band there, a little band. A guitar, drums, and one of the kids played clarinet and myself. Four people. First we just had guitar and clarinet player. This one fellow was always hanging around and he'd say, "Wow." He liked it. And we're trying to learn this tune, trying to learn jazz and the blues. Pretty simple, basic tunes. So he'd always stand around and clap his hands on the off beat. "I think I'd like to play with you guys. Take up the drums, maybe." So he kept talking about it, and so we borrowed a snare drum. Got him some drumsticks and practiced up for a couple of weeks, you know. He could keep kind of a beat there. So, little by little he became the drummer.

And we went down to another pawn shop. See, I'd had this great success with the pawn shop. So we went down and Sunset Loan Company on Commerce Street had a big ol' bass drum in there. "Oh, look at that. That's what we need." Had a scene painted on the front. Part of this stuff fitted my image of early jazz bands and what they were supposed to look like. Well, we got that old drum; fixed it, redid it a little bit and worked on it. We made a homemade pedal out of wood and door springs and things. It didn't work too good. We used it for about a couple of weeks and finally we went down and bought a real pedal. And we still have that drum. It's at the Landing. We finally put new heads on it, but it's basically a very good instrument, you know. Good drum. But anyway, we used that old drum and the snare drum and we got a cymbal or something. This guy didn't have any technique but he had a pretty good beat. And so we played and all kinds of things.

Dad would come up once in a while. He's kind of interested in what was going on and interested in what we were doing. So he played saxophone. He'd go sometimes down to Mayfield's and borrow a saxophone, a baritone or a tenor, because we didn't have a trombone and play a third harmony part. We played some jobs; we actually booked some jobs and played those jobs with our band. Dances and things. When we got out

except for me, and I had gotten married, following in my father's footsteps, at the tender young age of eighteen. So I went to work on the grocery business and started going to SAC. And I started working right away. And so I didn't get to play very much. After a while, I'd complain to my dad. You know this bothered me. "I never play. I never play. All I do is work in this damn grocery business, you know. Just grinding away here. And I'd like to be able to play a little music once in awhile." So we started having Sunday afternoon sessions.

And my father was in Alcoholics Anonymous and he went to one of the A.A. meetings and came back and said, "You know, I met this guy at the A.A. club. Banjo player. He's a real good musician," I said, "Well, did you hear him play?" He said, "No." "Well how do you know?" He said, "Well I can tell by talking to him." I couldn't quite figure that out, you know. But he knew. Later on I got to where I understood that, where you could tell sort of by how the guy acted whether he could play or not. But it was Benny Valfre. So Benny comes around right away, and he's a wonderful guy, real good musician. So right away we had the first ingredients of the band. Somehow we stumbled on to Willson Davis, and Chuck Reiley was coming around occasionally. And pretty soon, it didn't take too long, this thing started sounding like a band. Then another thing that had a kind of influence on me, was that Dad made those records with Don Albert on trumpet and Chuck on trombone. And I went and listened to those things.

Some of 'em were very good. They had Cliff Brewton on piano and Junior Edwards and a bass player named Chief, Chief Acosta. And Don Albert, of course, who was playing very good then. Kind of worked his chops up and got himself in good shape and he sounded pretty good then. Some of those things are excellent. Some of 'em are not so good. They had Paul Crawford arrangements. So, Paul came over to see what they were doin' with his arrangements. I met him and he really fascinated me. We had a session one time that I just thought Paul played wonderful. He was a trombonist from New Orleans.

So we took some of these guys and had Paul come back again another time. And we had this rhythm section that I particularly liked which was Bill Case on piano and Valfre and Benny and Harvey Kindervater on drums and Crawford and Dad and myself. And that was the first time we played, and it was the Happy Jazz Band. It was those guys. We played for the San Antonio Jazz Club. I think it was 1962. We played at the Roaring '20s. Might of still been Shadowland. I had another cornet by then. It was a real antique-looking thing and it had an old mouthpiece. Those things were hard to play. The band sounded pretty good. They taped it, and, boy, it sounded terrific. I enjoyed it a lot, so we wanted to play every Sunday. Dad and I went out and we went to beer joints looking for places to play on a Sunday afternoon.

What we wanted to try to work out was to play to the gate, you know. We finally went to Rex's. We went to a couple of places and they said, "Naw." They didn't want to do it. But we went to Rex's and somehow the guy liked us or something. Can't remember exactly. But we started going out there. We played on his patio. It was in the summer. And we played there about six months and we would take a dollar cover charge. And that was what we took. And usually, if we were lucky, we broke even. Sometimes we lost a little bit paying the other five guys. We continued like that there at Rex's for about six months and we were discovered, sort of, by people.

And Bill Case didn't wanna play. That was another thing that happened. In those days Bill Case played great. He was a great rhythm player. He was really good. He didn't want to play because he didn't want to play for money. He'd had bitter experiences and he didn't want it. So pretty soon we came up with Cliff Gillette. I can't remember how we learned about him.

By the time we got to the Landing in April of '63. 'Bout six months after we started, maybe nine months after we started

La Serena, which was located where the Bwana Dick is now. And those were the only two places on the river. There were no clubs. There were no hotels. There was no *nothin'*. We never had intended to play except on weekends, you know. We brought Cliff Brewton down here from Dallas to play piano in the band, and he was supposed to play with a couple of other guys on weeknights to make about a five-night a week deal. And it didn't work at all, 'cause the weeknights would just fall flatter than a fritter. Nobody would come down there; on the weekends we would be jammed. So it gradually worked around to where we were just open on weekends. We were still in the wholesale grocery business. I would work hard in that grocery business and I wouldn't touch my horn from Saturday to the next Friday a lot of times. Wouldn't even touch it, and that's no way to play the trumpet. Go down there and struggle, go crazy trying to play, and sounded terrible, and you know. Never had any chops.

After a couple of years it began to change. The audience became a little different. It became less a toy of these wealthy investors and more of a place for the tourists gradually. At first it was all San

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the band and we first went to Rex's, along the road we met Jim Hayne. And boy, Jim Hayne was an inspiration 'cause he was a pure, dyed-in-the-wool tailgate trombone player from the word "go." And there was no mistaking it. Boy, I just thought he was the greatest thing. So he said, well, he wanted to put together this club on the river. And he came and talked to Dad and said, "We want you to play. Will you play, and, if so, for how much?" And Dad said, "Well, we'll play on one condition, that you'll play trombone." I know, looking back, that Jim probably had no intention of staying in it very long. But he did it for awhile. He played great, too.

Jim was the one who put the investments together to open The Landing. It was in the basement of what they call the Nix Annex, which was a four-story building that butted up to the Nix. And it was a parking garage. But the basement was open, and most people when they were in there thought they were in the basement of the Nix. And we had about twenty to ~~twenty~~-two guys put in \$1,000 apiece, and it was a very elite group of investors. They were all very monied people, well thought about. That had a lot to do with the success in the early days.

When we went there, only Casa Rio was there on the river. ~~Had been there since the 40s. I think. And it was a gift shop,~~

Antonio people. But little by little it started changing. Within a short time, a couple of years, the Poco Loco opened next door. And the two places together had a sort of an attraction. But little by little it changed. And by 1968, of course, they built two big hotels for HemisFair. And all these out-of-town people started coming, and convention facilities were built in '68.

The thing is that I'm playing this music that flourished mostly in the '20s or at least had its origins there. It's got a timeless quality and it's just as viable in the '90s and it was in the '20s. It's a classical form. And it's the same thing with classical music if you go in and you hear the symphony play a symphony that's 300 years old and it sounds just as beautiful, today, as it would to people 300 years ago. It becomes a classical thing. That's the way I view the early jazz. So, I can't see that a great hot chorus by Kenny Davern in 1980 is a thing that has less integrity than a great hot chorus by Johnny Dodds in 1930. And I can't really see what the difference is or why one's right and why one isn't.

When you've got a group that's just playing together two nights a week, regardless of how they need the money, or whether there's a job they have, it's very easy to be compatible with someone that you just spend two days a week with. It's much harder to be

compatible with someone that you spend day after day, like there's somebody that's right at the next desk—sometimes you just get to where you can't stand the guy because people have a natural tendency for their personalities to rub when they're forced in close. But that's a problem in the jazz band business.

The reason that the band was so stable for so many years were several. Number one, we only played on Friday and Saturday nights and an occasional other thing so we were not thrown together where our personalities got to be where people got so when they couldn't stand each other quite so bad, you know. And it was a very pleasant arrangement. We'd go down there and play on weekends and it really was a very happy experience. The band was aptly named, and, despite the fact that we weren't all as polished as we could have been individually, the band always had a very good, usually had a very good sound and feel in those early days, and had a lot of fire.

But as we went along the main thing that happened was that we got into liquor by the drink in 1971. And it happened all of

I don't think it's gonna happen. So go ahead and stay in there." Then he got killed in a plane crash. And so the other people that ran the thing, well they were very nice to us, too. But we got down to a month-to-month deal. And we just didn't have any lease there. This was all going on about the time my father got sick. And they came to us and told us that we were going to have to get out of there.

Then, on top of that, the state came in and audited our books. We had a practice, set up in the early days of the Landing, we did not pay admissions tax. In those days there was state admissions tax of ten cents on the dollar. Well, what we did was we charged a fifty-cent admission and up to fifty cents is exempt. At fifty-one cents the tax starts. So you could come in for fifty cents, stand at the bar. You were admitted. That was admission. Fifty cents, exempt from tax. But if you wanted to purchase a table, that cost another dollar and a half, see. So most people just flew on through. And to be very honest with you, it was stretching things quite a bit, because most people

I live at night, or rather, work at night instead of in the daytime. That one thing in itself is going to cause me to have a different kind of life,

a sudden. We had not made an exact, elaborate plan, except that we knew that liquor by the drink was coming. And it was unclear exactly when the law would be enacted. And, I'm a little fuzzy about these details, but we weren't exactly sure it seems like to me. And we had put the application in knowing that it was gonna happen, and we wanted to start selling liquor by the drink. It was very hard in those early days without liquor by the drink. It was just impossible to operate on weeknights. And the only way the Landing could do any good was by being just packed on the weekends. And the weeknights, there was no way to pay for a seven-piece band or even a four-piece band.

When the liquor by the drink started, we had the first license in town. Dad pulled that thing out, going back to his days as an accountant and he'd gone out there and made a couple of trips out to see the Liquor Control Board people, and gotten us on the top of the list. And we were given the first license in town, and opened a day or two before anybody else. Or at least a day before anybody else, and scooped everybody. We were on the front page of the paper and a woman was taking a drink saying "at the Landing." And there was a big write up in the paper, showed me carrying in a case of whiskey.

The original Landing had no lease. David Brooks, the landlord, had told us they would give us the one-year lease, because they didn't know what they would do. They might tear the Nix Annex building down, and, if they did have to tear it down, they didn't want to be hurt without it. But, he said, "But

that came and paid the \$2 cover charge didn't know what the system was. Although there was a sign there that said, "Fifty cent entry," admission. "Table charge, dollar and a half." And sometimes somebody'd just stand at the door, and then we'd just charge 'em fifty cents. But that was very few. So we didn't pay any admissions tax.

Well, it'd been standing up under scrutiny of the state auditors and stuff, who'd come around and check bars all the time. And it'd been standing up until this one eager beaver cat that came and got hold of it. Said, "Oh no." And they went back for six years, something like that and they came up with this enormous tax that was owed. It seems to me like it was \$60,000 in tax. And dad's dying of cancer. The state is after us for \$60,000 in old admission taxes and the lease is up.

We'd just been evicted. And we've got a Full-time professional band sitting there that costs a lot of money, and I just didn't know how in the world I was going to work the thing out. But what finally happened was, I nosed around and trying to find out a place. And I went here and I went there and it just didn't look like I was going to be able to find any place to go to work. And there was a guy named Roger Ridings who had been with the Chamber. And he was working for the Stockman Restaurant. He was the manager.

And they were having a lot of trouble there. They had lost a lot of money. I don't know what all their problems were, but they were getting' ready to reorganize and sell out or

something. And he said, "Jim, I strongly suggest that you call David Strauss and see what kinda deal you can work with him. I think that really maybe you can lease some of this building." So I chased this thing all the way down and it went on and on and on. Man, it was the toughest negotiation. Anyway, we finally agreed on this place. And they had to do a lot of work on it. And it kept taking longer and longer. They had to pour a slab to be part of our ceiling and the floor for the restaurant, which at one time the thing had been a two story room, and they were going to divide it in half. Put us in the bottom and the restaurant at the top. And they had to do that and everything took longer than it was supposed to.

And I went back to the Nix people. I said, "Fellas, we're gonna have to have another month." And they just screamed bloody murder and said, "Can't do it. You're messing us all up. We've got to have this space." And so Jim Hayne went back with me and they finally agreed to give us another month or three weeks. As it was, we were about a month or six weeks with no place to play for the band. We went and played at officers' clubs at the air bases, and we hustled all around and got funny little jobs, went to West Texas for about three or four days.

I didn't see how we were possibly going to meet the payroll. Nobody's making enough money to pay the rent. So we got over there and we got the thing open, and it just took a super human effort. Now in the meantime we worked on that tax thing. Once in awhile I've thought about leaving town and getting away from here and starting over where I can just be a musician and not trying to be into all this stuff. But I don't want to do that. If I did that I'd have to play some music I didn't like and stuff. And this way I can play exactly what I want and the band is great. So it suits me and it's worth it.

For one thing it's very hard to get seven people—and, we're just talking about strictly musically, and leaving all the business and stuff out. It's very hard to get seven people who want to all go exactly the same way. And you might be able to get seven guys who will go out and play casual and listen to each other and bend their styles and blend, and sound pretty good. But to have a continuing professional and, they're personalities there—their musical ideas come to the surface, you see. And a guy who's a very good player, he's got some musical ideas of his own that he wants to express his own thoughts. And it's hard to get seven guys whose basic thoughts, when they all surface, are gonna go the same way.

I have not done any of this like a typical businessman. I have not done it, because I expected to make a lot of money, although I sure wouldn't mind it, you know. But I haven't done anything because I thought it was the smart way to make money or that it had a great, bright future, or that it was gonna bring me fame and fortune. And I really don't care as much about prosperity, great tremendous success or anything. I'll be

very satisfied with a modest degree of success and to be able to keep the band together and have a full career and do this. I will be very satisfied with that kind of result from this activity.

George Nash, my cousin, says that I'm an anachronism. I don't really feel that's the case, and I'm not trying to live in another era at all. I knew a couple of strange characters who liked to pretend that they were Bix Beiderbecke, and try to just do things just for the sake of sort of being eccentric. It's an effort for them to do it, but they do it, because they want to be that person. And that's not my scene at all. I'm just intense about trying to do what we've been out doing it for so many years and it turns my life kind of upside down a little bit. So I live a different life style than most San Antonians. I'm sure it's quite different than yours or most other people around town.

I live at night, or rather, work at night instead of in the daytime. That one thing in itself is going to cause me to have a different kind of life. I don't know that the rest of my activities are too much different than any busy professional. I'm real interested in a few things, and I tend to kind of concentrate on those few things and I don't have a great deal of variety in my life. Sometimes you don't much feel like going to work. But that's not significant with me. I feel real lucky to be in a position that I'm in and to be able to do what I do when I see so many others who would like to do this sort of thing and are not able to do it for a variety of reasons. So I feel pretty fortunate and I basically most of the time get a lot out of it and my playing is up and down. According to how well the band performs and how well I personally perform. And that goes up and down a little bit.

Let me just say that the whole situation over the years was up and down and some years. But in difficult years, it was awful hard for us and it was awfully hard, it took a lot of determination and a lot of commitment and was an uncomfortable thing economically. The patoff for me was that I enjoyed the playing and I also had a legacy at doing this. I kept on doing it even though it was pretty uncomfortable some of those years. ★

Notes

1. Other scholars have relied on Holmesly's interviews, including: Christopher Wilkinson, who wrote a biography of Don Albert Dominique entitled *Jazz on the Road: Don Albert's Musical Life*. (University of California Press, 2001). Don Albert served as the main source of inspiration for Holmesly's interviews.
2. Sterlin Holmesly would like to thank the Institute of Texan Cultures at the University of Texas, San Antonio, especially Esther MacMillan, for help in archiving these interviews.
3. For more on Gene Ramey, see Cameron Addis, "The 'Baptist Beat' in Modern Jazz: Texan Gene Ramey in Kansas City and New York," *Journal of Texas Music History*, Volume 4, Number 2, Fall 2004, 8-21.
4. For more on Bert Etta Davis and the Prairie View A&M Co-ed band, see Sherrie Tucker, "Uplift and Downbeats: What If Jazz History Included the Prairie View Co-eds?" *Journal of Texas Music History*, Volume 2, Number 2, Fall 2002, 30-38; See also Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: "AII-Girl" Bands of the 1940s*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000).



Texas Dance Halls:

History, Culture, and Community

Gail Folkins



Past the front door of the Twin Sisters Dance Hall, a few miles west of New Braunfels, the honey-colored floor gleams, and the stage in front of us is framed in the same blonde wood. It could just as easily be Saturday evening in the late 1800s, when many of these dance halls were first built, except for the pick-up trucks starting to fill the parking lot outside. This hall is a new one for me; I scan the walls and the front stage. I may not be a native Texan, coming instead from the mountains near Seattle, but I am a dance hall wife. From my first visit to Gruene Hall with friends in the early 1990s to the gigs that my musician husband has taken me to across Texas, I have learned to slide across dance floor "salt" and to smell the years buried in the woodsy-dust scent.

The floor boards at Twin Sisters creak under our feet. It is so early that few people are here yet; as with most gigs, musicians are among the first to arrive and the last to leave at the end of the night. The band members of TCTaylor and 13 Days, along with spouses and a friend or two, help tote their black bundles of gear. My husband, John, is carrying his favorite bass guitar. I lug what I can, usually the electrical cords, the music stand, sometimes an electric bass in its soft black bag. Long arms outstretched to take his bass, John smiles behind his horned-rim glasses, happy that this is his job. As the lights dim, my research starts, too.

Years after my first dance hall visit, I decided to write about the vibrant settings that had become a regular part of my life. I 2

wanted to share the halls not through my eyes alone, but also through the eyes of individuals I meet at each gig who keep dance hall culture strong—hall owners, musicians, patrons, and friends. Interviews with some of my initial contacts and those of my musician husband soon led to an expanding circle of people eager to talk about their dance hall experiences.'

TEXAS DANCE HALL HISTORY

German and Czech immigrants built a number of dance halls throughout Texas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, primarily as community and cultural centers. These early halls often served as meeting places where fraternal organizations gathered to conduct business in support of local farmers, merchants, and other residents. The dance halls also provided an important means of cultural identification for immigrant communities. According to Nick Morris in *A History of the S.P.J.S.T.: a Texas Chronicle*, "When an immigrant

immigrants effectively preserved boundaries between themselves and other dance hall patrons."⁴

Because "Das Deutsche Lied," or "the German song," was central to family and community celebrations back in the German-speaking parts of Europe, music also became an integral part of daily life in virtually every Texas-German settlement. Singing societies, which quickly sprang up within German communities throughout the Southwest, performed in local dance halls and at music festivals all across the state. As a result, the German dance halls often were the hub of social activity within each Texas-German community, and they hosted performances by various singing groups, as well as brass, woodwind, and string bands. Czech settlers, meanwhile, held many of their dances in family homes until the early 1900s, when Czech-Texan fraternal organizations, most notably the S.P.J.S.T. (Slavonic Benevolent Order of the State of Texas, founded in 1897), began building halls throughout the state.⁵

Over the years, the ethnic makeup of most of these

German and Czech immigrants built a number of dance halls throughout Texas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, primarily as community and cultural centers.

arrived in America in those days, he naturally sought the company of those most like him in customs, habits, language, and common interests." To ease this transition into their new lives, immigrants frequently brought with them familiar aspects of their traditional culture—including music and dancing—to help comfort them in an unfamiliar setting, calling on what James Clifford terms in *The Predicament of Culture* "performances from (re)collected pasts."²

Music provided settlers with a welcome opportunity to relax and socialize. In *Dance Halls and Last Calls*, Geronimo Treviño III describes the importance of singing and dancing in the immigrants' lives. "The German and Czech immigrants brought with them their Old World habits. The dance hall/community center became a focal meeting place for their favorite pastime of dancing and listening to singing groups. It provided the medicine they needed from the rigors of farm work."³ In addition to partaking in fun and recreation, immigrant parents also used the halls to pass along traditions of music and dancing to their offspring. In this way, the dance halls became an important link in the transmission of ethnic culture from one generation to the next. Randy McBee explains in *Dance Hall Days* that "the cliques and social clubs that flourished in the dance hall...were so identified with ethnicity,

communities changed, and dance hall patronage began to reflect the demographic shifts of immigrant cultures. Historian Gary Hartman explains that "as succeeding generations of German and Czech Texans increasingly assimilated and moved out of the small towns into bigger cities, the ethnic bond that had kept the communal celebrations and other events going in the local communities began to erode." As the children and grandchildren of the original immigrants began to more fully integrate into "mainstream" American culture, the strong sense of ethnic nationalism associated with the halls began to fade. From the middle to late 1900s, both German and Czech dance halls lost their specific ethnic constituency and began serving as public venues for various ethnic groups and their music.⁶

By the 1950s, the increased migration of rural residents into urban areas, coupled with the growing role of television as the chief source of family entertainment, meant that many small-town dance halls fell into disuse and disrepair or came to be used as sports facilities, bingo parlors, or for other non-musical purposes. As more people migrated to the cities, rural dance halls had increasing difficulty attracting clientele. A new generation of consumers was finding its music on CDs, videos, and in concert arenas rather than in the old dance halls scattered throughout the Texas countryside.

Despite these changes, the historical appeal of the halls,

combined with their functionality as performance sites, helped keep dance hall culture alive and thriving. Although most Texas dance halls suffered a decline in use during the middle part of the twentieth century, by the beginning of the twenty-first century, many of them are more popular than ever, hosting a variety of local and nationally-known entertainers and, once again, providing a dynamic and vital component in the state's larger musical culture.

THE ROLE OF MUSIC

As part of the long-term evolution of dance halls, community culture has been redefined to reflect newer, regional-based identity, instead of the old ethnic-based cultural identity. Migratory patterns and a shifting populace could not help but influence the music played in the surviving Texas dance halls. Customers responded to a divergent regional sound, and communities once defined by ethnic origin were at once broken and reformed. From the traditional polkas and folk music

styles of ethnic music throughout the Southwest.⁸

In the midst of this trading and borrowing of musical styles, Texas dance halls served as cross-cultural incubators, helping give rise to entirely new forms of music that are distinct to the Southwest. Hartman considers the unique geographic, social, and ethnic make-up of Texas to be a key factor in spurring these musical innovations.

Partly because Texas was less strictly segregated than the Deep South, and partly because the rugged environment of the western frontier necessitated cooperation among traditionally disparate groups, people of different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds interacted somewhat more freely in Texas than in other parts of the South, exchanging musical ideas and influences in the process.⁹

One of the most notable examples of this cultural cross-

From the traditional polkas and folk music brought over by the German and Czech immigrant cultures, Texas musical styles began to embrace and blend together western swing, honky tonk, Tejano, and rock.

55

brought over by the German and Czech immigrant cultures, Texas musical styles began to embrace and blend together western swing, honky tonk, Tejano, and rock.

Music has been an important catalyst for cultural change in virtually all human societies throughout history, and it certainly has played an important role in shaping and reflecting the complex cultural evolution of the American Southwest. As Martin Stokes argues in *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music*, "musical performance, as well as the acts of listening, dancing, arguing, discussing, thinking, and writing about music, provide the means by which ethnicities and identities are constructed and mobilized." Since Texas dance halls provided a comfortable and accessible arena in which neighboring ethnic groups could share musical traditions, the dance hall/community center became vital to the remarkable cross-pollination of musical cultures that occurred throughout the state.

For instance, the polka music of Czech and German immigrants, which is still played in many Czech and German settlements across Texas, spilled out of specific regional dance halls to become a standard feature in the musical repertoires of Anglo, Mexican, and other ethnic communities around the state. Another good example of this exchange of musical traditions is the accordion. Brought to Texas by German and Czech immigrants, it was soon incorporated into conjunto, Tejano, zydeco, and other

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pollination to be associated with Texas dance halls is the emergence of a dynamic new style of music during the 1930s that would come to be known as "Texas swing" or "western swing." Although western swing was rooted in the "Anglo" folk traditions of the British Isles, it also absorbed a variety of other musical influences, including Mexican-American, African-American, German-American, and Franco-American. Western swing, which combined traditional fiddle breakdowns with blues, jazz, pop, polkas, mariachi, Dixieland, and big band swing, could be heard on radios and in dance halls across the country during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Texas artists Bob Wills and Milton Brown, both of whom were strongly influenced by a variety of musical styles, were the leading architects of early western swing. Performing in dance halls throughout the Southwest, Wills, Brown, and other artists helped define Texas dance hall culture with their signature sound, which was a lively, highly danceable form of country music that borrowed from the multitude of musical traditions found in the region.¹⁰

In addition to western swing, other types of musical synergies formed within the cultural vortex of the Southwest during the early twentieth century. One of the most significant of these has been conjunto, which incorporated the German-style of accordion and polka into Mexican-American folk music,

producing a dynamic and energetic dance music that is now popular throughout the United States. Santiago Jiménez, Sr., one of the pioneers of *conjunto* music, grew up in San Antonio, where he absorbed the sounds of German and Czech accordion music. As an adult, he blended these eclectic influences into his own unique Mexican-American sound to help define the modern *conjunto* style. Today, younger *conjunto* players continue to perform this music at festivals and in dance halls throughout the Southwest."

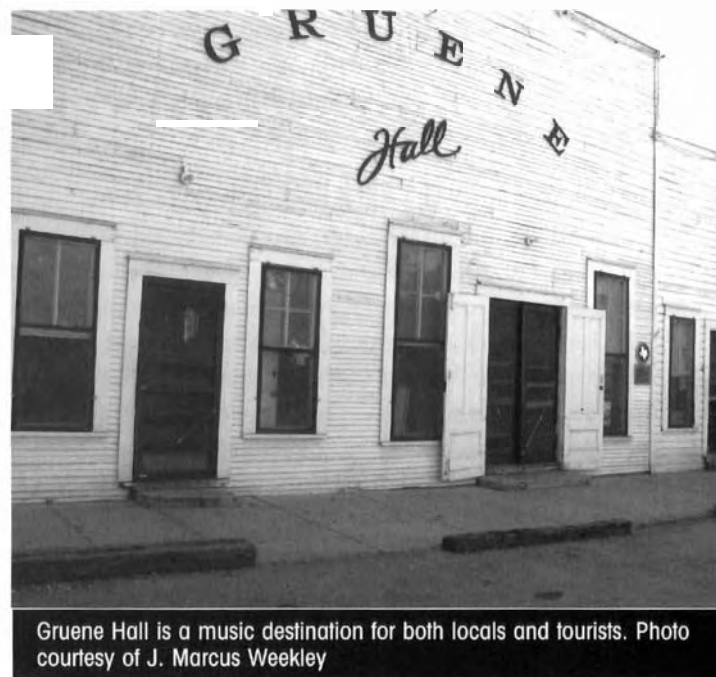
Adolph Hofner, a German-Czech musician who lived in San Antonio, is another good example of this mingling of ethnic cultures that has taken place throughout the state over the years. Hofner performed in numerous Central Texas dance halls, mixing Czech polkas and German waltzes with western swing and fiddle hoedowns. Along with Ernest Tubb, Lefty Frizzell, Floyd Tillman, and other Texas musicians, Hofner also helped pioneer a new style of country music in the 1940s and 1950s that came to be known as "honky tonk," which is still performed by countless bands in dance halls across Texas.¹² As they have done for generations, Texas dance halls continue to provide an ideal environment for the exchange of musical cultures and the ongoing evolution of various types of musical genres.

56 TODAY'S DANCE HALL CULTURE

Texas dance halls survive in contemporary culture because of the social function they serve and the combination of traditional and innovative sounds that keep filling the wooden floors with dancers. Today's dance hall owners manage to attract a diverse clientele within their historic venues, which, for the most part, still feature the kind of regional music that reflects the halls' long-term contributions to the development of Texas culture. As dance hall patrons and performers interact, they continue to foster community bonding and artistic creativity. The halls still attract people of all ages, from singles in trim jeans looking for jitterbug partners to seniors who have been waltzing together for years. Children learning to two-step with their parents or sliding across the dance floor during set breaks are a healthy indicator that this living tradition will continue.¹³

The regional music of the halls is another predictor of their survival. Similar to musicians past, today's performers play a critical role in keeping dance halls relevant and thriving. From the updated western swing sound of Asleep at the Wheel to the Tejano mix of Little Joe y la Familia, bands and singer-songwriters perform a wide variety of Texas music ranging from traditional to cutting edge. And while the music helps keep the dance halls afloat, dance halls serve the musicians' needs, as well, by giving them a variety of venues in which to perform. Along with such well-known locales as Gruene Hall and Luckenbach Hall, smaller venues also have helped launch the

careers of musicians and provided them with regular employment. Numbering well over one hundred, Texas dance halls thrive in a melding of history, community, and music that



Gruene Hall is a music destination for both locals and tourists. Photo courtesy of J. Marcus Weekley

remains regionally rooted rather than commercially defined.

The following first-person accounts are intended to provide a closer look at life inside a few well-known Texas dance halls, including Gruene and Luckenbach, along with some less-well-known halls in Fayette County and the Hill Country.

★*Gruene Hall*★ Ernst Gruene, namesake of the hall, immigrated from Germany to Texas in 1845. Rather than settling in the established community of New Braunfels, he created a picturesque settlement further up the Guadalupe River that eventually became the town of Gruene. About thirty families joined Ernst over the years to help build a thriving community based primarily on cotton production. Henry D. Gruene, Ernst's son, built several houses in the growing town and also directed the construction of Gruene Hall, which was built by Christian Herry in 1878. The hall, which served as a combined saloon and dance venue, became a center of social activities for local residents. Although these early years were prosperous for Gruene, the community eventually fell on hard times, as the 1930s ushered in the economic devastation of the Great Depression.

Gruene was largely abandoned throughout much of the mid-twentieth century, but it experienced a renaissance beginning in the 1970s. Gruene Hall, which had escaped demolition by developers when it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970, was purchased in 1975 by Bill Gallagher and Pat Molak of San Antonio, along with several

other historic buildings in the riverside community. After making minor repairs to the dance hall and restoring its immediate surroundings, the new owners began booking musical acts that both reflected and contributed to the local culture. Within a couple of years, the hall had become a very popular venue for such Texas musicians as Willie Nelson, George Strait, Tish Hinojosa, Delbert McClinton, Joe Ely, Marcia Ball, Pat Green, and many others.

On the day that the Cosmic Dust Devils perform at Gruene Hall, the crowd is made up of locals as well as those who have driven in from Austin, San Marcos, and San Antonio. Between songs, I step out into the hall's old biergarten, which is filled with picnic tables and oak trees; a warm breeze floats overhead. This summer is a busy one for the band, taking them to New Braunfels, San Angelo, and places in between. Most of the dance halls they will visit, which have been used for a hundred years or more, defy their age; their owners keep them strong through fresh musical acts that bring in crowds and varied performance times that are conducive to singles, parents, and kids alike.

★Luckenbach Dance Hall* Before this night's show, my photographer friend Marcus and I tour the grounds at Luckenbach. I take notes while Marcus snaps photos. The community has remained small; even today, its population is listed as twenty-five. What have grown are the town's popularity and its ties to country music. Luckenbach began with a post office in 1854, followed by a dance hall, cotton gin,

the town in 1971 to John Russell (Hondo) Crouch, Kathy Morgan, and Guich Kooch.

Under this new ownership, Luckenbach flourished as a place for music, festivals, and laid-back fun, all reflected in the town's slogan, "Everybody's Somebody in Luckenbach." The community gained statewide attention when Jerry Jeff Walker and his Lost Gonzo Band made their 1973 live recording of the popular album *Viva Terlingua* in Luckenbach. The small town became internationally famous when Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson released their 1977 hit song "Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)." Willie Nelson's Fourth of July celebrations, some of which have been held in Luckenbach over the years, further bolstered the community's reputation as a haven for Texas music.

The community looks similar to when it was first built, with the old general store and dance hall nestled among shimmering oak trees and fields rolling into nearby woods. On this evening, some people are waiting for the band to start, while others sit outside, picking guitars with fellow musicians in impromptu jam sessions. Much of the crowd is left over from the women's chili cook-off that was held earlier in the day. Families, singles, and bikers lounge on picnic tables scattered around the grounds and swap stories of the day's events. Atop a temporary stage set up on the grounds, members of one of the chili teams gather to sing karaoke. The leader of the group croons "Play That Funky Music" to the rest of the chili cook-off teams who are cheering below.

Inside the dance hall, tonight's featured band, "Two Tons of Steel," sets up its instruments and gets ready to play. Kids wearing Luckenbach T-shirts sit between young parents. Nearby, couples in their sixties and seventies wait for the band to come out on stage. The wooden tables in the dance hall start to fill. Later, the lights that line the dance hall eaves will start to glow. When the warm-up act, Jed and Kelly, takes the stage, several dancers spill onto the floor. Fans outside the hall lean on their elbows and peer into the open sides of the hall. Among them is a man in a cowboy hat who proclaims that "Texas is the best place on earth."

★Ammannsville and Dubina Hall* Riding in a tan van through Fayette County, I breathe in fields of blowing grasses, the narrow road we follow parting them like a comb. Gary McKee, a Schulenburg native and vice chair of the Fayette County Historical Commission, has volunteered to give me an early afternoon tour of some of the many dance halls in this part of East Central Texas. On this warm day in March, Gary plots a course to the Fayette County communities of Ammannsville and Dubina. The sun, straight overhead, pierces through the oak leaves and into the van.

Off a gravel road south of La Grange, Gary's expression brightens. He adjusts his baseball cap and scans the roadway for a shady space to park. Ammannsville, our dance hall



Soft lights brighten up a Luckenbach Saturday. Photo courtesy of J. Marcus Weekley

and blacksmith shop by the end of the nineteenth century. In 1886, the post office was reopened after a brief closure, and postmaster August Engel renamed the town Luckenbach after some of the area's German settlers. His son, Benno Engel, sold <http://ecommons.txstate.edu/jtmh/vol6/iss1/5>

destination, stands at a corner created by three intersecting roads—the asphalt version we drive on, a dusty road that meets it from a grove of trees, and a second dirt road that I later learn leads back to Schulenburg. From the shady parking spot that Gary has found, we climb out of the van. Above us towers a well-preserved dance hall, painted white with a hint of yellow. I look up to read the tall black letters on its front—K.J.T.—which stand for *Katolika Jednota Texaska* (Catholic Union of Texas). Ammannsville served as one of four original lodges within the K.J.T., a fraternal Czech-Catholic organization formed in 1889. Fayette County records state that Ammannsville, Dubina, and Hostyn were the first Czech settlements in Texas, and about seventy-five percent of Czech immigrants were Roman Catholics. A nearby church, painted an even brighter shade of white, points its steeple toward the clouds.

The only car that sits in the gravel parking lot belongs to a nearby group preparing for a picnic. Ammannsville and other local communities host church picnics, family reunions, and saint's days celebrations in their halls. "We've had parties here until two in the morning," Gary chuckles. Someone can celebrate an entire lifetime in a dance hall, he adds, from baptism, to birthday parties, to wedding and funeral receptions.¹⁴ We spend a half-hour in the hall before driving down the road to Dubina Hall, which appears in a sudden cluster of buildings behind an old oak grove.

Established in 1856, Dubina was one of the largest all-Czech settlements in Texas. The first immigrants endured a sleet storm to settle the area in late November 1856. The community survived its first winter and planted for spring, but the resulting crop the next year was still only one bale of cotton. Eventually,

the town grew more prosperous, and the new residents built a church and dance hall as part of their settlement. The dance hall, which nestles in a small clearing next to live oak trees, derives its name from the Czech word for oak, *Dub*. Although



Ammannsville's KJT Hall is one of the many dance halls in Fayette County. Photo courtesy of J. Marcus Weekley



Dubina Hall hosts polka lessons and the occasional picnic. Photo courtesy of J. Marcus Weekley

smaller than Ammannsville, the Dubina dance hall looks no less grand, with its wooden floors illuminated in the afternoon light. About twenty townspeople mingle around plates of barbeque for a Sunday picnic. They invite us to join them, but we politely decline, still full from lunch earlier that day.

With so many dance halls scattered throughout the area, Saturday night dances could be found almost anywhere in Fayette County during the first half of the twentieth century. "The Czech musicians played the accordion and made their own beer," says Ed Janecka, a Fayette County judge who meets us on the church steps. "It was a place for people to get together," he says of the dance hall at Dubina. "I have wonderful memories of growing up here, with the polka and folk dances, along with some rock dances." He stares across the green lawn to the dance hall, where a few people finish their lunch.¹⁵

Today, the rural location of the dance halls impacts the performances they host. "People don't live as close to the halls as

they once did," Ed says. "It used to be, there were halls everywhere, some in the middle of nowhere. The 1930s were the golden age of Czech polka music," he adds. After World War II, many of the polka bands broke up, and the growing popularity of country and rock music soon changed the flavor of the music played within the halls. "We give polka and waltz lessons at the hall," Ed says. Along with providing a social outlet, such efforts also keep the traditional dances alive. Gary's eyes light up at this news; I watch him make a mental note about the next sessions. "My favorite thing," Ed says, "is when the dancers all move together as one." I cannot tell if he is talking about past or present, and decide he probably means both.¹⁶

★ *Wright's Park** At the end of our dance hall tour, Gary McKee turns his van into the dirt driveway in front of Wright's Park, which is just outside of Schulenburg. "I've always wanted to visit this place," he says, adding that our tour gives him a good excuse to stop by. We park the van, walk past the picnic tables outside, and step into the dim light of the hall. That is when we spot Robert, grandson of Olton Wright, the man who built the 1948 hall and gave it his name. Robert sits behind the bar arranging pictures and text for an upcoming Juneteenth celebration. "Hello," Gary says. Robert waves us into the hall. "Come on in."¹⁷

While Gary and Robert talk, I hang back to look at the inside of the front door, which is covered in snapshots of past dance hall parties. Faces in the photographs, mostly African-American, laugh together at round tables or cut a rug on the dance floor space in the middle of the room. Robert tells us that the crowd at Wright's Park varies on any given night, both in terms of its size and musical tastes. "Anyone's welcome," he says. "It's not just for black people." Robert motions to the bar, which is still covered with his flyer project. "How about a beer?" he asks. He reaches into a cooler and hands a beer to Gary and the Coke I request to me. Although Robert has written a short history of the hall, he tells us that his mother, Ora Mae Moore, is the real expert. "She's the one you want to talk to," he says.¹⁸

A few months later, I drive back to the hall so I can experience the local Juneteenth celebration and meet Ora Mae. As I arrive, she takes a break from tending bar and walks to the table where I sit. Between the smiles and greetings she gives others in the crowd, she begins to tell me about her father, Olton Wright, who opened Wright's Park in 1948. Ora Mae started helping her dad run the hall in 1960 and has worked there ever since. She shows me a brochure her son Robert has written. It includes the dance hall's history along with photos of Olton, one of which shows him smiling under his cap. When Olton passed away in 1984, he left the hall to Ora Mae. "In his will, he asked me to take care of the place and never to lose it," she says. Her eye wanders again to the people who fill this venue, which has been continuously run by three generations of her family.¹⁹

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The hall got its start when Ora Mae's parents, Olton and Josephine Wright, decided to build a dance hall on their land located on the outskirts of Schulenburg. To help the family raise funds, Josephine took their children, Olton, Jr., Walter B., Ora Mae, and Henry, to East Bernard, Texas, where they picked cotton all summer. While Josephine and the kids worked in the fields, Olton kept his job in town, working at a retail store. Josephine and her kids earned five hundred dollars that summer, which the family put toward the dance hall. Building the hall was no overnight task. According to Robert Moore's historical account, clearing the land took almost a year to complete. Olton and Josephine Wright celebrated the official opening of their dance hall, which they named Wright's Park, with a 1948 Juneteenth celebration. Guests came from the neighboring communities of Schulenburg, Hallettsville, Weimar, Oakland, La Grange, Moulton, and Yoakum. After barbeque and baseball, the partygoers danced late into the night, melding their dance hall inauguration with the Juneteenth celebration of freedom for Texas slaves, which was belatedly proclaimed in Galveston, Texas, on June 19, 1865.²⁰

On the fifty-seventh consecutive Juneteenth celebration at Wright's Park, Marcus and I walk between picnic tables filled with laughing participants and watch kids make a run for the moonwalk, which sits by a grove of oak trees. Inside the hall, Ora Mae is back behind the bar. A group of teenagers crowd around the jukebox, deciding what to play next. The dance hall

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Wright's Park celebrates its fifty-seventh Juneteenth event. Photo courtesy of J. Marcus Weekley

has hosted many bands over the year, including B.B. King and Albert Collins. Wright's Park still books live acts on occasion, along with DJs, rap music, and occasional jukebox selections rounding out the venue's entertainment lineup.

★**Twin Sisters Dance Hall*** The Twin Sisters Dance Hall, located deep in the Hill Country against the backdrop of the Twin Sisters Mountains, was built around 1870. Although it is not in operation every weekend, the Twin Sisters Hall Club opens the venue on the first Saturday of each month for an evening dance. On the night that my friends perform, the crowd begins to arrive just as the last rays of sunlight fade outside. Some of the band members wear 1950s-style western clothing, including vintage black and white cowboy boots and cowboy hats, very similar to that worn by western swing bands who have played this hall in days gone by. Even the group's set list, which includes originals, as well as earlier hits by Bob Wills and Johnny Cash, reflects the long-standing generational connections reinforced through Texas dance hall music.

The venue quickly fills with children, parents, singles, and couples, both young and old. Gliding across the hall's well-worn floor boards, made smooth from decades of boot leather, teenagers and the elderly alike experience a sense of nostalgia that connects them to earlier times. While my friend Terrie and I talk, a dark-haired man asks her to dance. When the song is over, she returns, and the man now motions for me to join him. The band launches into a faster two-step, which soon draws more couples to the floor. I watch the smiles around me as the dancers flit and slide. A woman's long skirts wrap around her legs with every spin; it is hard to tell if she belongs to this world, or one from years ago. I take the man's hand and join the circle.

His fast two-step works my cowboy boots overtime. The other couples whirl by in flashes of blue jeans and cowboy boots. As the song ends, I thank the man and find my seat again beside Terrie. Couples in the hall laugh together, Singles on the sidelines turn their eyes toward the band, which eases into its next number, enticing the crowd back out onto the dance floor.

The third set, the final act of the night, usually begins around midnight. The band will continue mixing cover songs and originals with a few rock selections in order to keep the crowd dancing. Much like Texas dance hall bands have always done, the musicians will "read the crowd's mood and select songs accordingly until the night finally draws to a close. As some parents begin gathering up their children in preparation for the long trek home, other singles and older couples remain, waiting for the next round of music to take them back onto the dance floor. When the band does finish its final set, TC, the leader, remains by the stage to talk with members of the audience who linger to chat, offer their feedback, and express their eagerness to return for next month's dance. Just as they have done for well over a century, these dance halls still serve as a place in which musicians and the local community can mingle comfortably and share in the ongoing process of creating and perpetuating regional folk culture. As the last dancers file out of the Twin Sisters Hall, echoes of their laughter seem to intertwine with that of past patrons and hint at the enjoyment waiting in store for generations of dancers yet to come. ★

Notes

- Midway through my work, I invited friend and photographer, J. Marcus Weekley, along for the ride. After our first road trip, Marcus's photos began to tell stories of their own, showing the halls as meeting places filled with life. Even the photos without people suggest the liveliness these halls have witnessed throughout the years.
- Nick Morris, *A History of the S.P.J.S.T.: a Texas Chronicle*, (Temple, Texas: Slavic Benevolent Order of the State of Texas, 1984), 2; James Clifford, *Predicament Of Culture*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 14.
- Geronimo Treviño III, *Dance Halls and Last Calls: A History of Texas County Music*, (Plano Texas: Republic of Texas Press, 2002), 1.
- Randy D. McBee, *Dance Hall Days*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 154.
- Jean M. Heide, "Celebrating 'Das Deutsche Lied in Texas,'" *The Journal of Texas Music History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (2003), 30; See also Morris, *A History of the S.P.J.S.T.*
- Author's interview with Gary Hartman, May 2, 2005.
- Martin Stokes, "Ethnicity, Identity, and Music," in *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. Martin Stokes, ed., (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994), 5.
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- Gary Hartman, "Country and Western Music," in Barkley, ed., *The Handbook of Texas Music*, 66.
- Joe Carr and Alan Munde, *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights*, (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1995), 36-37; For more on western swing, see Charles R. Townsend, *San Antonio Rose: The Life and Music of Bob Wills*, (Urbana, Illinois: The University of Illinois Press, 1986), Cary Ginell, with special assistance from Roy Lee Brown, *Milton Brown and the Founding of Western Swing*, (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1994), Jean Boyd, *The Jazz of the Southwest: An Oral History of Western Swing*, (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1998), and John Mark Dempsey, *The Light Crust Doughboys Are on the Air: Celebrating Seventy Years of Texas Music*, (Denton, Texas: The University of North Texas Press, 2002).
- Jill S. Seeber, "Santiago Jiménez, Sr.," in Barkley, ed., *The Handbook of Texas Music*, 163-164; See also Juan Tejeda and Avelardo Valdez, eds., *Puro Conjunto: An Album in Words and Pictures*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).
- Martin Donell Kohout, "Adolph Hofner," in Barkley, ed., *The Handbook of Texas Music*, 137; Joe Specht, "Put a Nickle in the Jukebox: The Texas Tradition in Country Music, 1922-1950," in Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht, eds., *The Roots of Texas Music*, (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 79-87.
- John Morthland, "Come Dancing," *Texas Monthly*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (March 1995), 78.
- Author's conversation with Gary McKee, May 15, 2005.
- Author's interview with Ed Janecka, May 15, 2005.
- Ibid.
- Author's conversations with Gary McKee and Robert Wright, May 15, 2005.
- Ibid.
- Author's interview with Ora Mae Moore, June 19, 2005.
- Robert Moore, *The History of Wright? Park*

The Women There Don't Treat You Mean: Abilene in Song

by Joe W. Specht. (Abilene: State House Press, 2006. Pp112. Acknowledgments, illustrations, notes, index, music CD.
ISBN 1-933337-06-0, \$14.95 hardcover.)

The list of words that rhyme easily with Abilene is a long one, but that is not the only reason Abilene appears in so many popular songs. Joe Specht has written an entertaining and informative examination of songs featuring Abilene, Texas, in their lyrics or as their theme, as well as the songwriters and musicians who wrote or performed those songs. Although it is a small book the size of a double CD case, it is informative, insightful, well-researched, illustrated, and indexed. Clearly a labor of love, it is also a very entertaining read. The accompanying CD is a nice addition to the book. It includes six songs about Abilene performed by contemporary musicians from the Key City. Five of the songs are covers of classic songs about Abilene, and one is written expressly for the CD.

Specht begins his book with several stories about the most famous song, Bob Gibson and Lester

Brown's "Abilene." First released by Gibson in 1957, a cover version of the song became a national hit in the early 1960s when it was recorded on the RCA label by George Hamilton IV, at the urging of John D. Loudermilk. Insight into the sometimes unfair nature of the music publishing business may be gained here by readers who are not familiar with the realities of dealing with major record labels.

The book continues with chapters about songs from Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins, Ernest Tubb, Johnny Cash, and Bob Dylan. Other well-known artists, including Buddy Jewel, Larry Joe Taylor, Gary I? Nunn, Waylon Jennings, and Dave Alvin are discussed. Specht mentions a substantial number of other artists who have not garnered as great a degree of fame. He also tells us that the reach of

Abilene extends far beyond Texas, as evidenced by songs from the British bands Humble Pie and Yes. Bands from Canada to Germany also have incorporated Abilene into some of their songs. In July 2006, the Australian Broadcast Corporation produced and broadcast an hour-long radio show entitled "Abilene Jukebox," featuring many recordings of songs about Abilene and an interview with Joe Specht.

"The Future Great City of West Texas" is also Joe Specht's home of thirty years. He has not neglected its native musicians, past and contemporary. In the chapter "Local Talent and Then Some," he writes of the many musical contributions to the Abilene "theme" by artists from the Key City.

This book is an enjoyable and affectionate tribute to the city of Abilene, the images it evokes of the American West, and the music it has inspired. It is also a worthy chapter in the overall story of Texas Music.

Gary Hickinbotham

Texas Zydeco

by Roger Wood, Photography by James Fraher. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.) Pp 336. Acknowledgments, photos, and index. ISBN-13: 978-0-292-71258-4, hardcover; ISBN-10: 0-292-71258-8, soft cover.

Although zydeco is rooted in the Afro-European musical traditions brought to Louisiana by French masters and their black slaves beginning in the early eighteenth century, Texas has played an important role in how those musical influences eventually blossomed into what is now modern zydeco. In fact, several of the most influential pioneers of zydeco have lived in East Texas, where they made some of the earliest known zydeco recordings. It also was in the "Frenchtown" section of Houston during the 1930s and 1940s that French-speaking blacks began to blend their "la la" music with the blues, R&B, and other musical traditions of English-speaking blacks, thereby helping to forge the early zydeco sound.

It may surprise many Texans, as well as Louisianans, to find out just how central the Lone Star State has been to the development of zydeco. This is understandable, since zydeco has long been marketed as a uniquely "Louisiana" form of music. Furthermore, unless you happen to live in East Texas, you might not be fully aware of the strong presence of black creole culture in that part of the state.

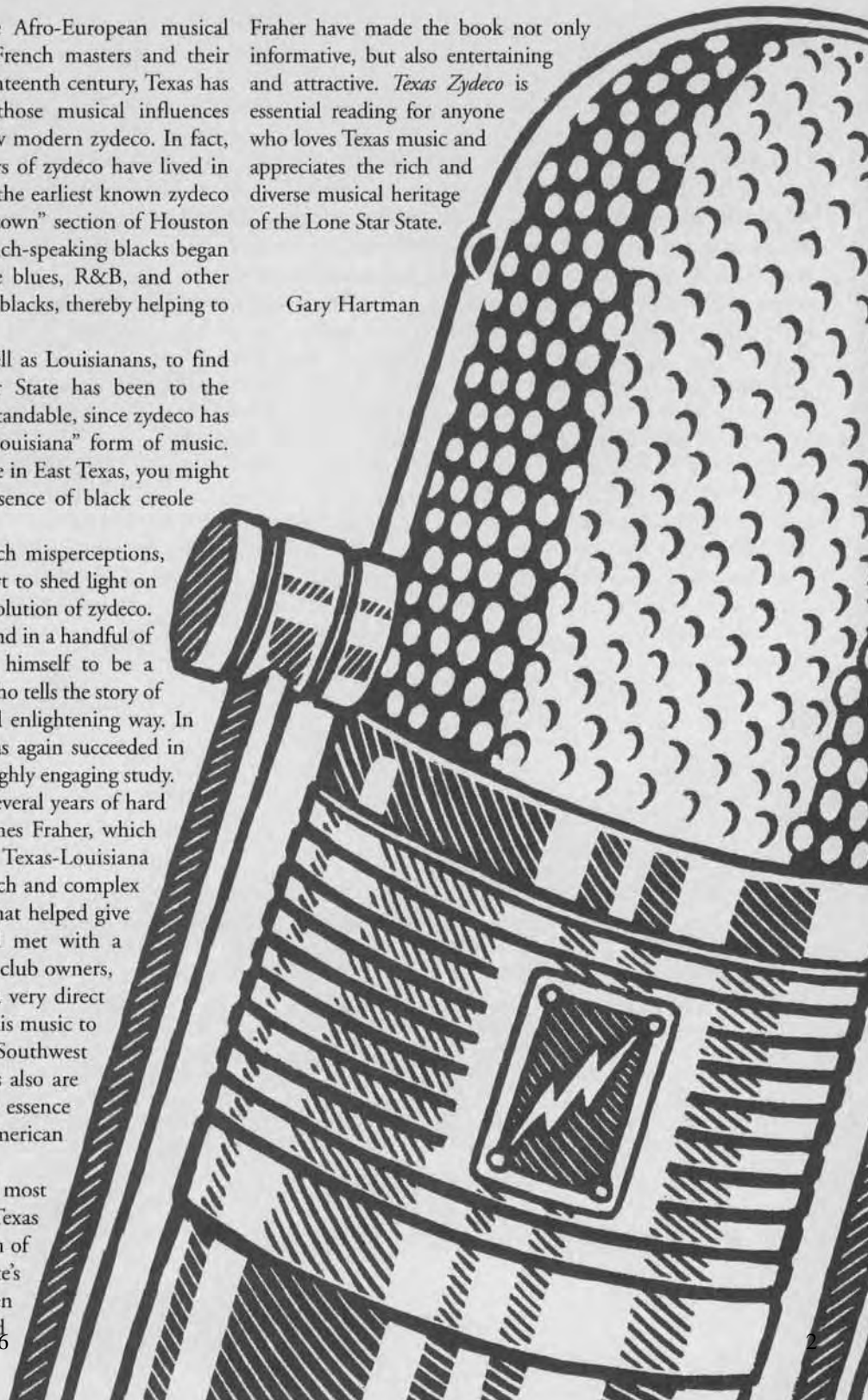
As part of an attempt to correct such misperceptions, Roger Wood has been leading the effort to shed light on the vital role Texas has played in the evolution of zydeco. In his earlier book, *Down in Houston*, and in a handful of published articles, Wood has proven himself to be a shrewd observer and a talented writer who tells the story of zydeco in Texas in an entertaining and enlightening way. In this most recent publication, Wood has again succeeded in producing a well-researched and thoroughly engaging study.

Texas Zydeco is the culmination of several years of hard work by Wood and photographer James Fraher, which involved traveling throughout the Texas-Louisiana border region and documenting the rich and complex cross-pollination of musical cultures that helped give rise to zydeco. In his travels, Wood met with a remarkably diverse array of musicians, club owners, and fans, all of whom help relate in a very direct and personal way the importance of this music to the regional culture of East Texas and Southwest Louisiana. James Fraher's photographs also are superb and certainly help capture the essence of this hybridized Franco-African-American musical genre.

Texas Zydeco may be one of the most important books published about Texas music to date, since it provides a wealth of information about a part of the state's musical heritage that is so often misunderstood. Fortunately, Wood and

Fraher have made the book not only informative, but also entertaining and attractive. *Texas Zydeco* is essential reading for anyone who loves Texas music and appreciates the rich and diverse musical heritage of the Lone Star State.

Gary Hartman



Our Contributors

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is a second-year student at the University of Texas School of Law, who edits for the *Texas Review of Entertainment and Sports Law*. As an undergraduate studying with music historians Karl Miller and Richard Holland, as well as with musicologist Elizabeth Crist, Bailey produced a thesis entitled "Conversations in Jazz," which included interviews with such jazz greats as Roy Haynes and Wynton Marsalis. Bailey is currently involved in a project examining the life and career of Texas musician Doug Sahm.

Gail Folkins

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