

"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 singer/pianist 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."¹⁹

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." "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
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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

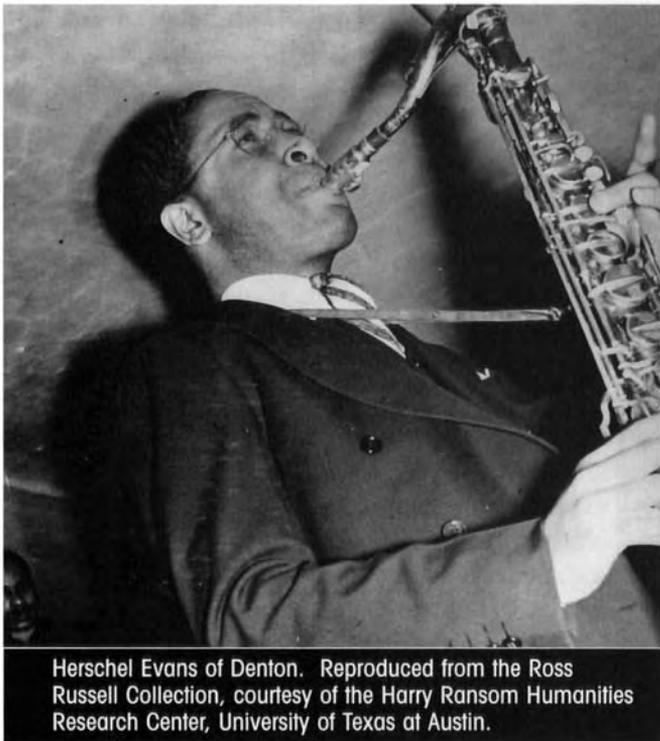
At the peak of their popularity, Trent's sidemen, who earned as much as \$150 a week, were known to wear silk shirts and camel hair overcoats and to drive Cadillac cars. Their wind instruments were all gold plated. Trumpeter Terrence T. Holder recalls, "Then we made a whole lot of extra jobs, too. We'd 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

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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-time territory 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.⁴⁵

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"⁵¹—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 Produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press, 2006

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 Effergée 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

22

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.

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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
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"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
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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

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

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

- "The Texas Shuffle" is a Herschel Evans original recorded on August 22, 1938, with the Count Basie Band. According to music historian Gunther Schuller, the tune is emblematic of the Texas sax sound and "the simplicity of method and cumulative energy fundamental to...the better prototypical Basie-style riff arrangements." Gunther Schuller, *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 242. "The Texas Shuffle" is available on Count Basie and His Orchestra, *The Complete Decca Recordings*, Decca Jazz/GRP compact disc 611.
- The influence of such bands as Alphonse Trent's Orchestra, whose performances at the Plaza Hotel in Dallas by 1925 were broadcast as far away as Canada, extends well beyond the West or the South to cover much of the North American continent.
- Dave Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).
- Dexter, Dave. "Kaycee Local 627 Prospered During 1930 Boom Days: But Moten Band Gave Way to Basie, Kirk and Younger Swing Outfits," *Down Beat* 8 (15 January 1941): 13.
- 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."
- David W. Stowe, "Jazz in the West: Cultural Frontier and Region During the Swing Era," *Western Historical Quarterly* 23 (February 1992): 56.
- Ross Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 54, 64. Russell even 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."
- Nathan W. Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 39.
- For more on the development of jazz during this period, see David Joyner, "Jazz from 1930 to 1960," *Cambridge History of American Music*, David Nicholls, ed., (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 418-447; Russell, *Jazz Style*, 54.
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- See Jeffrey Magee, "Ragtime and Early Jazz," Nicholls, ed., *Cambridge History of American Music*, 388-417.
- Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 20. Oliphant lists Miles Davis's renditions of *Cookin', Cookin', Pfrancin', and Walkin'* as noteworthy evidence of the African-American habit of speech mimicry furthered by Joplin.
- Ibid, 28.
- 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.
- Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 283.
- Gary Hartman, "The Roots Run Deep: An Overview of Texas Music History," *The Roots of Texas Music*, Lawrence Clayton and Joe Specht, eds., (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 15-16. The term "barrelhouse" referred to the makeshift bars in the lumber camps, which were made of planks laid atop barrels.
- Simms Campbell, "Blues," *Jazzmen*, Frederic Ramsey, Jr., and Charles Edward Smith, eds., (New York: Limelight Editions, reprint, 1985), 112-113; Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 77-78.
- Oliphant, "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.html (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.
- Author's interview of Karl H. Miller, 25 April 2003.
- LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People*, Second Edition, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999), 167-168.
- Schuller, *The Swing Era*, 563; Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 52.
- 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.
- Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 42; Dave Oliphant, "Henry Thomas," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 321-323.
- Wyman, *Blues Odyssey*, 121, 172; Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 42-43.
- 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.
- Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 52; Schuller, *Early Jazz*, 284.
- Donna P. Parker, "Sippie Wallace," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 349-350.
- Russell, *Jazz Style*, 59; See also Alan B. Govenar and Jaye F. Brakefield, *Deep Ellum and Central Track: Where the Black and White Worlds of Dallas Converged*, (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1998), for more on the blues and jazz scenes in Dallas.
- Frederick Ramsey, Jr., "King Oliver and His Creole Jazz Band," *Jazzmen*, Frederic Ramsey, Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, eds., (New York: Limelight Editions, reprint ed., 1985).
- Dave Oliphant, "Texan Jazz," Clayton and Specht, eds., *The Roots of Texas Music*, 38-39.
- Jay Trachtenberg, "Gene Ramey: A Tribute," *The Austin Chronicle*, December 21, 1984.
- Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City*, 29.
- Don Gazzaway, "Conversations with Buster Smith," *Jazz Review* 2 (December 1959): 20. Smith continues, "We called that kind of music gutbucket or barrelhouse. The trumpet players and clarinet players concentrated on that. I'll tell you, a lot of it started around here in those medicine shows. We used to have

- them all over town here and that's where it started."
34. Cannonball Adderly, "Return to the Wide Open Spaces: Ellis Marsalis, David 'Fathead' Newman and Cornell Dupree," *Amazing Records* newsletter, October 1990.
 35. David Minor, "Herschel Evans," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 97-98; Various Artists, *Sweet and Low Blues: Big Bands and Early Territory Bands of the 1920s*, (New World Records NW 256, 1977), Phonodisc.
 36. Shapiro and Hentoff, eds., *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, 309; Frank Driggs, "My Story, by Buddy Tate as told to Frank Driggs," *Jazz Review* 1 (December 1958): 20.
 37. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 133. Kansas City circulated stories of cutting contests to match the band battles of the territories, thus perpetuating the rugged individualist, Wild West heritage of the town with stories of "single tunes played for three hours without a break," of "cabs sent out in the middle of the night to fetch replacements for exhausted pianists and bassists." David W. Stowe, "Jazz in the West: Cultural Frontier and Region during the Swing Era," *Western Historical Quarterly* 23 (February 1992): 53.
 38. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 133.
 39. Driggs, "My Story by Buddy Tate as told to Frank Driggs," 20; Schuller, *Early Jazz*, 286, 300.
 40. Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City*, 45.
 41. *Ibid.*, 41. For more on the career of Don Albert, see Christopher Wilkinson, *Jazz on the Road: Don Albert? Musical Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
 42. Schuller, *Early Jazz*, 292.
 43. Driggs, "My Story by Buddy Tate as told to Frank Driggs," 20; Frank Driggs, "Budd Johnson, Ageless Jazzman," *Jam Review* (November, 1960): 6.
 44. Frank Driggs, Liner Notes, *Sweet and Low Blues: Big Bands and Early Territory Bands of the 1920s* (New World Records NW 256, 1977), Phonodisc.
 45. Driggs, "My Story by Buddy Tate as told to Frank Driggs," 18-19. In their definitive *Kansas City Jazz*, page 66. Driggs and Haddix, offer a different perspective. "Terrence 'T' Holder became well known for his ability to quickly assemble a band—a talent born from his unreliability and dubious business practices."
 46. Driggs, Liner Notes, *Sweet and Low Blues*.
 47. Albert Murray and Count Basie, *Good Morning Blues: The Autobiography of Count Basie* (New York: Random House, 1985), 18.
 48. *Ibid.*; For a more recent discussion of the Blue Devils, see Douglas Henry Daniels, *One O'clock Jump: The Unforgettable History of the Oklahoma City Blue Devils*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).
 49. Driggs, "My Story by Buddy Tate as told to Frank Driggs," 20.
 50. Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City*, 37. The 1920s were the formative years for all sub-genres of jazz. Russell, *Jazz Style*, 131, attributes this rich period of "foment" largely to the white commercial establishment's indifference to jazz: "The rigid system of segregation prevented more than across-the-knee exchanges of ideas between white and black musicians; the riches of Afro-American culture were lost to the white public. Outside of jazz musicians like Jack Teagarden and Wingy Manone, and a few perceptive laymen like John and Alan Lomax, the average Southerner of that period had not the faintest idea that a powerful, indigenous, and unique music, soon to be accepted and admired throughout the civilized world, was growing up like weeds around his back doorstep. On the other hand, the very fact that Afro-American jazz was let alone by the Establishment, and allowed to develop and flower at its own pace, may very well account for the fact that every major movement in jazz until free jazz in the sixties, found its mots in these years of foment."
 51. Dave Oliphant, "Eddie Durham and the Texas Contribution to Jazz History," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, April 1993, 491-525; Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City*, 80. For a discussion of Durham's role with the Oklahoma City Blue Devils, see Daniels, *One O'clock Jump*, 68-83; See also, 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.
 52. Stowe, "Jazz in the West," 66.
 53. *Ibid.*, 60.
 54. Shapiro and Hentoff, eds., *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, 312. For more on Smith's tenure with the Blue Devils, see Daniels, *One O'clock Jump*, 36-38.
 55. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City jazz*, 6. For more on the machine that controlled the city's politics, see William Reddig, *Tom's Town: Kansas City and the Pendergast Legend*, (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1947).
 56. Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City*, 95.
 57. *Ibid.*, 94-95.
 58. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 7, 113. To further illustrate the institutionalized disregard for prohibition laws, Driggs and Haddix write, "The State Line Tavern on Southwest Boulevard sat astride the state boundary between Kansas and Missouri. A white line down the middle of the floor marked the border between the two states. When agents from one state raided the joint, customers just stepped across the line to the safety of the neighboring state."
 59. John McDonough, "A Century with Count Basie," *Down Beat* 57 (Jan., 1990): 36; See Daniels, *One O'clock Jump*, 84-111, for a history of Pages role in the Oklahoma City Blue Devils.
 60. Shapiro and Hentoff, eds., *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, 296-297.
 61. Addis, "The 'Baptist Beat' in Modern Jazz," 9-14; Oliphant, *Texan 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, *Texan 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, *Texan 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, *Texan 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, *Texan Jazz*, 220.
 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.

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4. Dexter, Dave. "Kaycee Local 627 Prospered During 1930 Boom Days: But Moten Band Gave Way to Basie, Kirk and Younger Swing Outfits," *Down Beat* 8 (15 January 1941): 13.
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 to 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.
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15. Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 283.
16. Gary Hartman, "The Roots Run Deep: An Overview of Texas Music History," *The Roots of Texas Music*, Lawrence Clayton and Joe Specht, eds., (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 15-16. The term "barrelhouse" referred to the makeshift bars in the lumber camps, which were made of planks laid atop barrels.
17. Simms Campbell, "Blues," *Jazzmen*, Frederic Ramsey, Jr., and Charles Edward Smith, eds., (New York: Limelight Editions, reprint, 1985), 112-113; Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 77-78.
18. Hartman, "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 (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.
19. Author's interview of Karl H. Miller, 25 April 2003.
20. LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People*, Second Edition, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999), 167-168.
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.
23. Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 42; Dave Oliphant, "Henry Thomas," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 321-323.
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.
26. Oliphant, *Texan Jazz*, 52; Schuller, *Early Jazz*, 284.
27. Donna P. Parker, "Sippie Wallace," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 349-350.
28. Russell, *Jazz Style*, 59; See also Alan B. Govenar and Jaye F. Brakefield, *Deep Ellum and Central Track: Where the Black and White Worlds of Dallas Converged*, (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1998), for more on the blues and jazz scenes in Dallas.
29. Frederick Ramsey, Jr., "King Oliver and His Creole Jazz Band," *Jazzmen*, Frederic Ramsey, Jr. and Charles Edward Smith, eds., (New York: Limelight Editions, reprint ed., 1985).
30. Dave Oliphant, "Texan Jazz," Clayton and Specht, eds., *The Roots of Texas Music*, 38-39.
31. Jay Trachtenberg, "Gene Ramey: A Tribute," *The Austin Chronicle*, December 21, 1984.
32. Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City*, 29.
33. Don Gazzaway, "Conversations with Buster Smith," *Jazz Review* 2 (December 1959): 20. Smith continues, "We called that kind of music gutbucket or barrelhouse. The trumpet players and clarinet players concentrated on that. I'll tell you, a lot of it started around here in those medicine shows. We used to have

- them all over town here and that's where it started."
34. Cannonball Adderly, "Return to the Wide Open Spaces: Ellis Marsalis, David 'Fathead' Newman and Cornell Dupree," *Amazing Records* newsletter, October 1990.
 35. David Minor, "Herschel Evans," in Barkley, ed., *Handbook of Texas Music*, 97-98; Various Artists, *Sweet and Low Blues: Big Bands and Early Territory Bands of the 1920s*, (New World Records NW 256, 1977), Phonodisc.
 36. Shapiro and Hentoff, eds., *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, 309; Frank Driggs, "My Story, by Buddy Tate as told to Frank Driggs," *Jazz Review* 1 (December 1958): 20.
 37. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 133. Kansas City circulated stories of cutting contests to match the band battles of the territories, thus perpetuating the rugged individualist, Wild West heritage of the town with stories of "single tunes played for three hours without a break," of "cabs sent out in the middle of the night to fetch replacements for exhausted pianists and bassists." David W. Stowe, "Jazz in the West: Cultural Frontier and Region during the Swing Era," *Western Historical Quarterly* 23 (February 1992): 53.
 38. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 133.
 39. Driggs, "My Story by Buddy Tate as told to Frank Driggs," 20; Schuller, *Early Jazz*, 286, 300.
 40. Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City*, 45.
 41. *Ibid.*, 41. For more on the career of Don Albert, see Christopher Wilkinson, *Jazz on the Road: Don Albert? Musical Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
 42. Schuller, *Early Jazz*, 292.
 43. Driggs, "My Story by Buddy Tate as told to Frank Driggs," 20; Frank Driggs, "Budd Johnson, Ageless Jazzman." *Jazz Review* (November, 1960): 6.
 44. Frank Driggs, Liner Notes, *Sweet and Low Blues: Big Bands and Early Territory Bands of the 1920s* (New World Records NW 256, 1977), Phonodisc.
 45. Driggs, "My Story by Buddy Tate as told to Frank Driggs," 18-19. In their definitive *Kansas City Jazz*, page 66. Driggs and Haddix, offer a different perspective. Terrence 'T' Holder became well known for his ability to quickly assemble a band—a talent born from his unreliability and dubious business practices.
 46. Driggs, Liner Notes, *Sweet and Low Blues*.
 47. Albert Murray and Count Basie, *Good Morning Blues: The Autobiography of Count Basie* (New York: Random House, 1985), 18.
 48. *Ibid.*; For a more recent discussion of the Blue Devils, see Douglas Henry Daniels, *One O'clock Jump: The Unforgettable History of the Oklahoma City Blue Devils*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006):
 49. Driggs, "My Story by Buddy Tate as told to Frank Driggs," 20.
 50. Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City*, 37. The 1920s were the formative years for all sub-genres of jazz. Russell, *Jazz Style*, 131, attributes this rich period of "foment" largely to the white commercial establishment's indifference to jazz: "The rigid system of segregation prevented more than across-the-knee exchanges of ideas between white and black musicians; the riches of Afro-American culture were lost to the white public. Outside of jazz musicians like Jack Teagarden and Wingy Manone, and a few perceptive laymen like John and Alan Lomax, the average Southerner of that period had not the faintest idea that a powerful, indigenous, and unique music, soon to be accepted and admired throughout the civilized world, was growing up like weeds around his back doorstep. On the other hand, the very fact that Afro-American jazz was let alone by the Establishment, and allowed to develop and flower at its own pace, may very well account for the fact that every major movement in jazz until free jazz in the sixties, found its roots in these years of foment."
 51. Dave Oliphant, "Eddie Durham and the Texas Contribution to Jazz History," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, April 1993, 491-525; Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City*, 80. For a discussion of Durham's role with the Oklahoma City Blue Devils, see Daniels, *One O'clock Jump*, 68-83; See also, 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.
 52. Stowe, "Jazz in the West," 66.
 53. *Ibid.*, 60.
 54. Shapiro and Hentoff, eds., *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, 312. For more on Smith's tenure with the Blue Devils, see Daniels, *One O'clock Jump*, 36-38.
 55. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 6. For more on the machine that controlled the city's politics, see William Reddig, *Tom's Town: Kansas City and the Pendergast Legend*, (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1947).
 56. Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City*, 95.
 57. *Ibid.*, 94-95.
 58. Driggs and Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz*, 7, 113. To further illustrate the institutionalized disregard for prohibition laws, Driggs and Haddix write, "The State Line Tavern on Southwest Boulevard sat astride the state boundary between Kansas and Missouri. A white line down the middle of the floor marked the border between the two states. When agents from one state raided the joint, customers just stepped across the line to the safety of the neighboring state."
 59. John McDonough, "A Century with Count Basie," *Down Beat* 57 (Jan., 1990): 36; See Daniels, *One O'clock Jump*, 84-111, for a history of Page's role in the Oklahoma City Blue Devils.
 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.