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Joe Mosbrook

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# CLEVELAND JAZZ HISTORY

Joe Mosbrook

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A photograph of the Cleveland skyline across Lake Erie. The sky is clear blue. In the foreground, there's a wooden pier with a chain railing. The city skyline includes the Terminal Tower on the left, the Chrysalis Tower in the center, and the modern, curved Cuyahoga County Courthouse on the right. A bridge is visible in the middle ground.

# ***Cleveland Jazz History***

**by Joe Moshbrook**

**Published by the Northeast Ohio Jazz Society**

# ***Cleveland Jazz History***

**Second Edition**

**by Joe Mosbrook**



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## Preface

When the first edition of *Cleveland Jazz History* was published in 1993, I said it was an effort to begin something that had never been done before. I knew then there were many omissions and said I hoped to expand it in the future into a much fuller, better-rounded history of jazz in Cleveland. This is the result of the additional work since the first edition. It includes not only things that have happened since 1993, but much greater detail on earlier events.

It would be foolish to claim that this book fully summarizes the story of jazz in Cleveland. Almost every week, I get calls, notes and e-mails from people suggesting new areas to explore, but I am convinced that this edition is the most comprehensive compilation ever attempted on the subject.

The *Cleveland Jazz History* project began in 1984 when I started writing articles for the Northeast Ohio Jazz Society newsletter. In 1988, radio station WCPN asked me to contribute radio features based on the newsletter articles. With weekly deadlines, I began interviewing jazz artists for the radio series and doing much more research. In 1991, Dr. Thomas Horning and Max Dehn of the Tri-C JazzFest asked me to compile some of the material from the radio essays for a JazzFest symposium. That compilation led to the first edition of the *Cleveland Jazz History* book published by the Northeast Ohio Jazz Society in 1993.

Since then, I was asked to write the jazz article for the *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, deliver numerous lectures on the subject, produce a few television versions for WKYC-TV (where I worked as a news reporter for 35 years), and write Internet versions for the *Cleveland, the New American City* web site ([www.cleveland.us.com](http://www.cleveland.us.com)).

I was delighted when the Jazz Society offered to publish the second edition of the book as part of its 25th anniversary celebration. As was the case with the first book, all profits go to the Jazz Society for its work in promoting jazz in Northeast Ohio.

The second edition runs about 172,000 words. That's about four times the size of the first edition. The new version also includes more than 300 photographs, some very rare, and other illustrations. Many of the photos were given to me from private collections. Others came from the *Cleveland Press* Archives at Cleveland State University, the Cleveland Public Library and the Western Reserve Historical Society. Insofar as possible, I have attempted to identify the sources of the pictures. I have also added lists of recordings of 23 important Cleveland jazz artists and various lists and notes to supplement the text.

Unlike many such books, this effort does not include footnotes. I believe it is better for both the writer and the reader to include sources and notes, in a journalistic style, within the text of the book. Most of the information comes from 15 years of in-depth oral history interviews I have recorded for my weekly *Cleveland Jazz History* radio features on WCPN. When other sources are used, I have attempted to include attribution in the text.

I sincerely thank all the people who helped with this project, particularly those who sat down with me to record their recollections, those who contributed photos and memorabilia, NOJS Executive Director Dr. Carlos Ramos who developed the funding to publish the book, the Cleveland Foundation and the George Gund Foundation, and my wife, Elaine Mosbrook, who again provided eagle-eyed proof-reading as well as an uncommon degree of patience for all the nights I have spent at the computer and recording equipment.

I hope you enjoy the latest effort in this labor of love. I would appreciate receiving any additions or corrections.

Now I plan to continue to produce the weekly radio features and to look for even more information about Cleveland's many links to jazz history.

Joe Mosbrook

# 1. What Is Jazz?

**J**azz has been called a musical reflection of America. But *New York Times* critic Bob Herbert wrote that jazz music is more than that. Said Herbert, "It is the embodiment in music of the quintessentially American idea of free and talented and diverse individuals working, playing, frequently fighting, but most of all improvising together to come up with something beautiful and great."

While jazz is recognized throughout the world as one of very few original American art forms (the comic strip is another), its origins and definition remain fuzzy. Almost everybody who has ever written about jazz has attempted to trace its family tree and define it. They are almost impossible tasks and very few writers or musicians agree.

Jazz, in its many forms, certainly grew out of a wide variety of influences: European church music, African singing, Negro work songs, Negro church music, ragtime music and the blues, but jazz has no clearly-defined, neat starting point. It has been called "a gumbo stirred and seasoned by hundreds of hands." Unfortunately, much of the historical writing of the earliest years of jazz is based on little more than folklore, hearsay and speculation.

## How did jazz begin?

One interesting and plausible piece of speculation was written by Pat Carroll of the Jazz Appreciation Society of Syracuse. She theorized that jazz was born out of social protest – racial protest.

In 19th century New Orleans, there were Creoles who were racially black and mixed, but were culturally European, born of French and Spanish ancestors. Many spoke a form of the French language and some sent their children to schools in Paris. They took pride in their European culture and, above all, insisted they were not Negroes.

Near the end of the 19th century, the French-speaking Creoles in New Orleans lived east of Canal Street, in the area called "Downtown" (down river). On the other side of Canal Street was the so-called "Uptown" (up river) district where poor blacks of African descent lived.

In 1884, the Louisiana Legislature voted a revolutionary change, to extend the legal segregation of Negroes to the Creoles. The Creoles were understandably extremely upset and soon found themselves competing with Negroes for work.

There was particularly strong competition between Negro and Creole musicians for jobs. The Uptown Negro musicians and the Downtown Creole musicians



**Buddy Bolden**

were trying to get the same gigs. The generally better educated Creoles were frequently better musicians and were getting most of the jobs.

The Negroes had been forced to improvise their lives. They extended their improvisation to their music. In an effort to combat the popularity of the Downtown Creoles, the Uptown Negroes tried to set themselves apart from the Creoles by playing loudly and using techniques and tunes that appealed to the base instincts of their listeners and dancers. They also took the then-revolutionary step of playing without written music.

A flamboyant Uptown Negro cornet player named Buddy Bolden began taking gigs from the formally-trained Creoles by playing loudly and frequently improvising, or as he put it, "playing head music." Bolden is said to have bragged that he could not read a note of music. Bunk Johnson, who played with Bolden, recalled that Bolden's band ad-libbed most of the time. Johnson said in a 1942 interview, "I liked to read and I could read good, but Bolden played pretty much by ear and made up his own tunes."

Bolden was known as "King Bolden," apparently giving rise to such later royal jazz appellations as "Duke" and "Count."

Other Uptown musicians began doing what they called "ragging." They were probably subconsciously drawing on all of their previous musical influences and were taking the first unsteady steps toward what would become a major new art form.

Years later, New Orleans musicians Nick LaRocca and Jelly Roll Morton (Ferdinand Joseph Lamothe), born in 1889 and 1890 respectively, both claimed to have originated the new form of music. LaRocca, in 1958-59 interviews with the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University, said, "The miracle happened in Chicago in 1916 at the moment when the Original Dixieland Jazz Band made a fateful rhythmic adjustment to accommodate a theatrical dance team – a shift from a 2/4 pulse to a 4/4 pulse." He claimed that change transformed the feel from ragtime to jazz. Morton, in a 1938 letter to *DownBeat* magazine, claimed he "invented jazz" in 1902 (at the age of 12?) when he composed "Jelly Roll Blues." Longtime New Orleans musician and historian Danny Barker, in his book *A Life in Jazz*, said both LaRocca and Morton apparently believed what they boasted. But it has become fairly clear that jazz evolved over a long period of time from a variety of sources and influences.



## How do you define "jazz"?

Clevelander Mark Gridley, the author of the world's leading introduction-to-jazz college textbook, devoted several pages of his book, *Jazz Styles, History and Analysis*, to a discussion of the problems of defining jazz. Essentially, he said it is difficult to define.

- Historian and critic Barry Ulanov said, "There is no common definition of jazz; it resists dictionary definition."

- Pianist Art Tatum, who played for years in Cleveland, was once asked by a *Cleveland Press* reporter, "What is jazz all about?" Tatum said jazz could not be explained in words. As the reporter turned to leave, Tatum called out, "Tell your editor he will never understand it in words."

Some of the most important people in jazz said basically the same thing in different ways:

- Benny Goodman, one of the most important figures in the history of jazz, admitted he could not define jazz.

- Louis Armstrong, the man who propelled the art form and had hit records in 1926 and 1988 (17 years after his death), had his own simple definition: "Jazz is my idea of how a tune should go."

- Duke Ellington, usually pretty articulate with words as well as music, once defined jazz as "freedom of expression." But he admitted that really wasn't a very serviceable definition. Later, Ellington said, "I don't think I have a definition anymore, unless it is that jazz is a music with an African foundation which came out of an American environment."

- Singer Ella Fitzgerald found it impossible to define jazz. She said, "I don't know. You just swing!"

- Big band drummer Chick Webb, who discovered Ella in the 1930s, tried to define jazz by saying, "It's like lovin' a gal, and havin' a fight, and then seein' her again."

- Saxophonist Charlie Parker once defined jazz as "a happiness blues."

- Pianist Dave Brubeck said, "When there is not complete freedom of the soloist, it ceases to be jazz."

- Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis later said, "Jazz music is freedom of expression with a groove."

- Drummer Jo Jones said, "Jazz is when you play what you feel."



**Louis Armstrong: "Jazz is my idea of how a tune should go."**

Textbook author Gridley attempted to get through this maze of inability by the art form's major practitioners to articulate a definition of the music. The Shaker Heights resident wrote there are two essential elements: First, "Each jazz performance must represent an original and spontaneous creation – improvisation. Jazz requires its performers to create their parts as they play them."

Critic Leonard Feather wrote, "Improvisation is the governing factor of almost every performance generally classified as jazz." However, Gridley rejects the idea that improvisation is the *only* element that distinguishes jazz. Many other forms of music also include improvisation. Solo improvisation was common during the Baroque period. Opera singers in the 1700s and 1800s were permitted to improvise their cadenzas and change the repeated melodies of their arias. When Beethoven's Symphony No. 1 was first performed April 2, 1800 in Vienna, the program noted that part of the concert also included "Herr Ludwig van Beethoven improvising on the pianoforte."

American composer Aaron Copland said the unique thing about jazz is *group improvisation*. "When you improvise, it is axiomatic that you take risks and can't foretell results. When five or six musicians improvise simultaneously, the result is even more fortuitous. That is its charm. Something has been

developed here that has no duplication."

Jazz places the emphasis on the performance rather than the composition. Jazz artists create – or even compose – as they play, within the limits of the style and form they select for themselves. Bix Beiderbecke once said he was unable to play a chorus the same way twice. "I don't feel the same way twice," he said. "That's one of the things I like about jazz, I don't know what's going to happen next."

A jazz performance may be 95% improvisation of variations of the head tune or it may be only an individual solo within a written arrangement. The Glenn Miller Orchestra, a band noted mainly for tightly-performed arrangements and not considered "a jazz band" by many, proved that jazz improvisation does exist in solos played within carefully written and performed arrangements. Miller, who started out as a jazz trombonist, attempted to define jazz as "something you have to feel, a sensation that

can be conveyed to others.”

In addition to improvisation, feeling and sensation, Gridley wrote that to qualify as jazz, the music must project what he calls “jazz swing feeling.”

- Drummer Gene Krupa, a pioneer in “jazz swing feeling,” defined it as “complete and inspired freedom of rhythmic interpretation.”

- Pianist Jess Stacy who, like Krupa, played with Goodman’s swing band, called it “syncopated syncopation,” whatever that means.

- Trumpeter Wingy Manone put it in these words: “Feeling an increase in tempo, though you’re still playing at the same tempo.”

Some have said the key point distinguishing jazz from all previous western music is a new concept of rhythm and phrasing.

- Perhaps one of the better descriptions of jazz was articulated on a radio broadcast in the 1950s by big band innovator Stan Kenton:

“Jazz? A distinct music that depends and thrives on individuality and yet the individual is not oblivious to others nor is he immune to their feelings. Jazz is free. Through spontaneous improvisation, a musician expresses his personality consciously and subconsciously. His music, with its variation of melodic lines and rhythmic patterns, can establish a changing flow of attitudes just as those revealed by a facial expression or a gesture even without words.

“A session in jazz is comparable to an open forum where theories and opinions are discussed openly and freely. Without inhibition or the fear of being reprimanded, a soloist rises and speaks without the aid of notes or previous preparation. Speeches with words of various inflections and insinuations are replaced with a flow of melodic, rhythmic music. One soloist will speak for himself on a chosen topic and then retire to hear the feelings of another on the same subject. On occasions, they will speak of happy things, then those of a more serious nature, sometimes somber and even tragic. All phases of life’s emotions are felt and experienced in jazz.

“Some of the music is complex and reaches far below the surface while other forms dwell lightly. There are speakers in improvised jazz who are eloquent in their ability. Musical words flow freely. Others tend to speak in short sentences with a simple vocabulary.

“However, if sincerity prevails, everyone is felt, understood and appreciated.”



**Stan Kenton**

Despite this excellent description of jazz by Kenton, we are still left without an adequate working definition of the music.

Perhaps Ellington was right when he said, “It’s in the ear of the listener. If a man has some very hungry ears for what he considers jazz, or for a pleasant noise that makes him feel he wants to swing – that’s jazz.”

Jazz is what you or I say it is. Or, as Satchmo said, “My idea of how a tune should go.”

## Why is it called “jazz”?

Most dictionaries say the origin of the word “jazz” is unknown, but various historians have offered a variety of possibilities:

- Minstrel show performers in the 1800s used the word “jasbo” for any theatrical device that was guaranteed to please an audience when all else failed.

- There was an early musician named James Brown who was nicknamed “Jasbo.”

- There was a dancer named “Jasper” who became an entertainment legend in New Orleans.

- There was a drummer who was nicknamed “Chaz.”

- There was a band around 1909 called Razz’s Band and the name may have been twisted into “jazz band.”

- A sign painter in Chicago about 1910 painted a sign for musician Boisey James, using the abbreviation for James: “Music will be furnished by Jas.’ band.”

Willard Espy, in his book *Thou Improper, Thou Unknown Noun*, said it is impossible to prove the word “jazz” derived from a proper name. More likely, he said, it came from an old vulgar term.

Author Stephen Longstreet wrote that the word “jazz” was used by Geoffrey Chaucer in the 1300s and William Shakespeare in the 1600s. In both cases, it was a vulgar slang term.

Espy said the Arabic and Hindustani languages both have words similar to “jazz” meaning sexual desire. He said the English word “jazz” probably began as a vulgar term for the consummation of that desire.

Ralph Burton, in his book *Remembering Bix*, wrote that jazz was “music to copulate by.”

*The Dictionary of American Slang* says the word “jazz,” with its vulgar tone and meaning, was a slang term used by Southern American Negroes in the 1800s.

H.L. Mencken, in his book, *The American Heritage*, said the word “jazz,” with a sexual connotation, was used in folk speech by Negroes in Mississippi River towns in the 1800s. Sidney Bechet, in his autobiography, *Treat It Gentle*, said bluntly the word “jass” “was screwing.” Like many such words, its meaning was obviously expanded in popular usage.

Around the turn of the century, Creoles in New Orleans took the French verb “*jaser*,” which meant to





Louisiana State Museum

**A 1915 photo of comedian and dancer Joe Frisco posing with Tom Brown's band in Chicago**

babble, and expanded it to mean enthusiasm and energy. The sound and meaning of *jaser* were similar to the sound and meaning of the old, vulgar folk verb "to jazz" and the words probably became intermingled in popular usage.

*The Britannica World Language Dictionary* says the Creole word "jass" had its origins in the brothels of New Orleans where the new music was being played, but we know that the earliest New Orleans musicians did not call their music "jazz."

A San Francisco newspaper, *The Call Bulletin*, claimed it first used the word "jazz" in print in 1913.

That was the year that Joe Frisco, later a famous stuttering comedian and dancer, went to New Orleans with a vaudeville act and heard a band led by trombonist Tom Brown. Frisco was so excited by the music that when he returned to Chicago, he told others about it. Historian Martin Williams, in his book *Jazz Masters of New Orleans*, wrote that Brown's band was hired to go north to Chicago in 1915 and play at a club called Lamb's Café. A member of that band, Ray Lopez, recalled one night an actor named Darby Kelly shouted, "Jass it up, Ray!" to the band. "I asked him why he said that and he said the music made you want to 'jazz.'" He said it was an expression used by prostitutes and pimps on the South Side."

According to Martin Williams, local Chicago musicians apparently felt threatened by the New Orleans group and began abusively calling Brown's band "a jass

band," meaning a New Orleans brothel band. Rather than fight the abuse, Leonard Feather wrote that Brown changed his band's billing from "Brown's Dixieland Band" to "Brown's Dixieland Jass Band, direct from New Orleans, playing the best dance music in Chicago."

The band became very popular. Arnold Loyacano, the guitarist in the band, recalled, "We couldn't play soft, didn't know what soft was!"

Soon, another band, led by Bert Kelly, called itself a "jazz band."

A few months later, another Chicago club, Schiller's Café, hired yet another New Orleans band and called it "The Original Dixieland Jazz Band." The owner put up a sign advertising "Jazz Music."

The Original Dixieland Jazz Band went to New York in 1916 and recorded in 1917. "Livery Stable Blues," backed by "Dixieland One Step," sold a million copies and is generally considered to have been the first jazz record.



RCA Records

**The Original Dixieland Jazz Band: Tony Sbarbaro, Eddie Edwards, Nick LaRocca, Larry Shields and Henry Ragas**

Buster Bailey, who was playing with W.C. Handy's show band, said he never heard musicians use the word "jazz" until they heard the records of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band.

Sidney Bechet, a Creole from New Orleans who became one of the legends of the new music, did not like using the word "jazz" for the music. He apparently recalled the roots of the word "jazz" (or "jass"). Bechet throughout his life called the music "ragtime."

Regardless of how the word "jazz" came about, it has become an international word to describe America's unique contribution to world art. Cleveland writer and poet Langston Hughes pointed out in 1955 that "jazz is a word that is the same in every language in the world."

## 2. Cleveland's Earliest Links to Jazz



**T**o much of the world, music in Cleveland means the Cleveland Orchestra, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, polka bands, and Muzak (which, incidently, was invented in Cleveland in 1922 by Maj. Gen. George Squier). Forgotten by many is the fact that Cleveland has also made significant contributions to jazz.

While Cleveland's contributions to jazz certainly do not rival those of New Orleans, Chicago, Kansas City or New York, this city has had many important links to jazz history – links that were largely ignored for decades.

This book looks at the history of jazz from the viewpoint of Cleveland. While that may seem to be a somewhat distorted view considering the contributions of other cities, I believe, when you look at Cleveland's many contributions to jazz history, it is a valid and important view.

The most obvious Cleveland links are the large number of Cleveland artists who became leaders in the growth of jazz. They have included such outstanding musicians as saxophonist Joe Lovano; pianist, arranger and composer Tadd Dameron; trumpeters Freddie Webster, Emmett Berry and Benny Bailey; free jazz pioneer Albert Ayler; guitarists Bill de Arango and Jim Hall; drummers Fats Heard and Morey Feld; trombonists Jiggs Whigham and John Fedchock; clarinetist Ken Peplowski; and even jazz whistler Ron McCroby.

In addition, Cleveland and Northeast Ohio have been the scenes of many significant events in the careers of some of the most important figures in jazz. Duke Ellington's principal teacher studied here. Artie Shaw spent his formative years here. Bix Beiderbecke suffered a tragic set-back here. Jimmie Lunceford began his professional career here. Art Tatum spent years playing at an after-hours club here. Count Basie married a girl from Cleveland and their only child was born here. Django Reinhardt played his first American concert here. Dave Brubeck pioneered college jazz concerts here.

While Cleveland's contributions to jazz can be traced to the earliest years, they were strongest during the

swing and bebop periods. And, after a resurgence of jazz in Cleveland in the last two decades of the 20th century, a new generation of artists, educators and writers has been making significant new contributions.

In the earliest years of jazz, Northeast Ohio produced two musicians who made extremely important contributions. Neither was considered a jazz musician, but both were historically very important to the development of the art form. In addition, Cleveland was an early center in the manufacturing of musical instruments.

### Will Marion Cook

Can you imagine jazz with no saxophones? There would be no Lester Young, no Charlie Parker, no Coleman Hawkins, no Johnny Hodges, no John Coltrane.

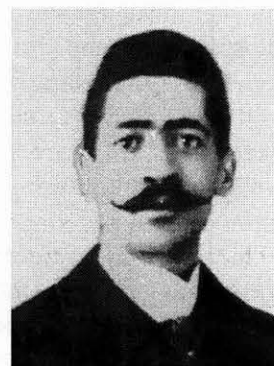
The saxophone was invented in 1840 by Adolphe Sax, a Belgian instrument-maker. He was hoping to develop a new instrument that would combine the playing speed of the woodwinds with the sound of the brasses. While the

saxophone could be played quickly and easily, it never achieved the sound of the brasses and it was generally dismissed by 19th century musicians as little more than a novelty instrument. Around the turn of the century, the saxophone began to appear in minstrel shows.

But in 1905, Will Marion Cook, who had studied music at Oberlin College in Northeast Ohio, saw the potential for the saxophone and began using it in his dance band. It was apparently the first time the saxophone had been used in popular music.

Cook, who was born in 1869 in Washington, D.C., began studying violin at the Oberlin Conservatory at the age of 13 in 1882 and later studied with Joseph Joachim in Germany and Antonin Dvorak in the United States. He became the first Negro to play with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Seeing little future for an African-American in classical music at the time, Cook focused his attention on popular music. In 1898, he wrote and produced a Broadway musical called *Clorindy* (or *The Origin of the Cakewalk*). It was an operetta that included a cast of 26 blacks singing and dancing. It was the first example of performers singing and dancing simultaneously on the Broadway stage. After *Clorindy* opened, Cook later proudly said, "Negroes at last were on Broadway. Nothing could stop us."



**Will Marion Cook  
in his early years**



Critic James Weldon Johnson said Cook was the first competent composer to take what was then known as ragtime and work it out in a musicianly way." Cook's music from *Clorindy* is said to have influenced blues composer W.C. Handy.

Cook also composed such songs as "I'm Coming Virginia," which was later recorded by Bix Beiderbecke, and "Mammy," later an Al Jolson hit. He also helped form the group that eventually became the musicians' union.

In 1919 Cook was leading a band called the Southern Syncopated Orchestra which toured Europe and gave a command performance before King George V of Great Britain. For the tour, Cook hired a young musician named Sidney Bechet to play improvised saxophone solos with the band. Soloing with Cook's band, Bechet became the first master of the jazz saxophone.

It is a stretch to say that Cook's early orchestra played jazz. But there is little doubt that his music was a major step toward jazz – with such elements as improvisation and vibrated and muted notes.

In the 1920s, Cook met a young pianist from Washington named Duke Ellington. Ellington later wrote in his autobiography, *Music Is My Mistress*, that Cook helped him get started in New York, coached him, and was a strong early influence. Ellington said, "I got most of my instruction riding around Central Park and he'd give me lectures in music. "Cook gave me lectures," said Ellington, "on fundamentals of writing and arranging" that he had learned at Oberlin. Ellington recalled, "I'd sing a melody in its simplest form and he'd stop me and say, 'Reverse your figures.'" According to Ellington, Cook "was a brief but strong influence. Some of the things he used to tell me I never got a chance to

use until years later."

Cook's advice, "Don't try to be anybody but yourself," became Ellington's musical credo.

The onetime Oberlin Conservatory student, who contributed so much by introducing the saxophone to popular music, breaking racial barriers, and teaching young Duke Ellington, died in New York, July 19, 1944 at the age of 75.

## Noble Sissle



Noble Sissle

Noble Sissle, who went to high school in Cleveland, was another early contributor who, like Cook, was best known as a popular bandleader.

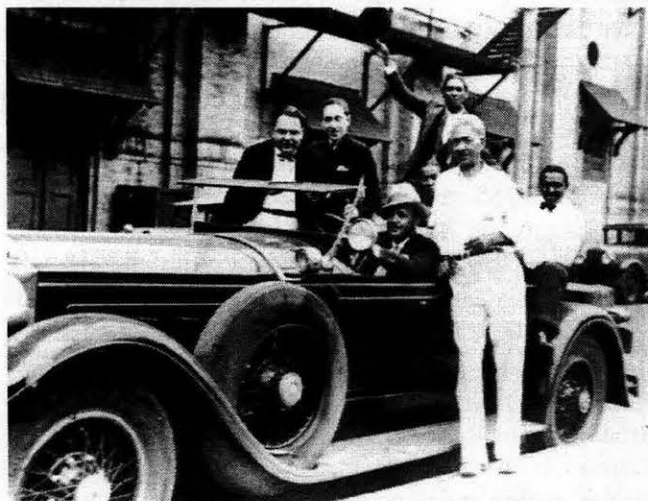
Sissle moved to Cleveland with his family in 1906 when his father became the minister of Cory Methodist Church, then located at East 35th and Scovill. The 17-year-old Sissle enrolled in Central High School where he played on the

baseball and football teams, sang in the school glee club, and was one of Cleveland's first civil rights activists.

In the book *Reminiscing With Sissle and Blake*, Sissle recalled going with a group of white friends to a movie theatre on Erie Street (later renamed East 9th). "When we tried to go in," he said, "they stopped me and told me to sit in the balcony because I was colored." His white friends were angry and persuaded Sissle to file a suit against the theatre. In 1908, young Noble Sissle was awarded \$50 in civil rights damages by a Cleveland court.

Before he graduated from Central High School, Sissle was performing professionally. He sang with a male quartet on the Chautauqua circuit around the Midwest. After high school, he went to DePauw University for one semester and transferred to Butler University in Indianapolis. The manager of that city's Severin Hotel asked Sissle to form an orchestra to play for hotel guests. He became the leader of perhaps the first black orchestra to be featured in a hotel catering to white customers. It was the beginning of a pattern that would continue throughout Sissle's life.

During World War I, he entered the Army and became the drum major of an Army band that caused a sensation in France by playing a form of ragtime music. The 369th Infantry Band, led by Lt. James Reese Europe, began calling itself a "jazz band." Reese's Army band not only helped popularize the new music among U.S. soldiers, it was also probably the first exportation of jazz, America's new art form. Sissle said at the time, "The jazz germ hit France and it spread everywhere" they went.



Louisiana State Museum

**Will Marion Cook (in white pants) with Fletcher Henderson (at the wheel), composer Harold Arlen (second from left), Louis Deppe (waving), Bobby Stark (behind Henderson), and Rex Stewart.**

In 1914, Europe led a syncopated orchestra which recorded such songs as "Too Much Mustard" and "Castle Walk." Some historians, including saxophonist Jackie McLean, in the October, 1990 *DownBeat* magazine, have argued that those records by James Reese Europe, three years before the first recordings by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, were the first examples of recorded jazz.

Shortly after the war, Sissle became the leader of Europe's civilian band after a crazed band member attacked Europe with a knife and killed him. It happened at the end of a cross-country tour, May 9, 1919, at Mechanic's Hall in Boston. Drummer Herbert Wright was angered by Europe's strict direction. Sissle later recalled, "Jim wrestled Herbert to the ground. I shook Herbert and he seemed like a crazed child, trembling with excitement. Although Jim's wound seemed superficial, they couldn't stop the bleeding." As they rushed Europe to a hospital, he told Sissle, "I leave everything for you to carry on." The next day, newspapers carried the headline: "The Jazz King is Dead."

In 1919, when the Sissle-led band was in Chicago and looking for some new musicians, Sissle auditioned a 22-year-old clarinetist from New Orleans named Sidney Bechet. Sissle remembered, "Bechet pulled half of his clarinet from his right coat pocket, half from the left, and his mouthpiece from the inside coat pocket." According to Sissle, "The instrument's keys were held together with tape and rubber bands." But, with the dilapidated instrument, Bechet played a spectacular audition and joined the band despite the fact that he could not read music.



National Archives

Lt. James Reese Europe and his Army band

Shortly after he joined the band, Bechet got a more attractive offer. Will Marion Cook was planning to go to Europe and wanted Bechet to go with him as a member of Cook's orchestra.

Sissle, giving up his band for a while, formed a vaudeville act with pianist and composer Eubie Blake. In 1921, following the lead of Will Marion Cook, they wrote an all-black Broadway review, *Shuffle Along*. The show launched the career of dancer Josephine Baker. One

of the songs in the show was Sissle's composition "I'm Just Wild About Harry," a song which 27 years later Harry Truman used in his presidential election campaign. A member of the chorus of *Shuffle Along* was 19-year-old Fredi Washington who later starred in Duke Ellington's first film, *Black and Tan*, and married Ellington trombonist Lawrence Brown.

In 1923, three years before Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer*, the first feature length sound film, Sissle and Blake made one of the first sound motion pictures, a short called "A Phonofilm." It was first shown at Cleveland's Palace Theatre December 10, 1923.

After producing several other Broadway shows, Sissle in 1928 went to Paris where he formed another band. He re-hired Bechet and added longtime Ellington band member Toby Hardwick.

Sissle returned to the United States in 1930 and his band became popular in theatres and hotels that catered mainly to white audiences. At one point, Jelly Roll Morton tried unsuccessfully to hire away some of Sissle's musicians. The band recorded for Brunswick in 1931 and again toured Europe.

When Sissle and his *Franco-Harlem Review* performed at Cleveland's Palace Theatre for a week in December of 1934, a member of the band was a singer from Cleveland named Billy Banks.

The following year, Sissle hired a young singer who had been a chorus girl at New York's Cotton Club. Lena Horne made her first record with Sissle's orchestra, "That's What Love Did to Me." She was singing with the Sissle Orchestra when it returned to Cleveland for another week in October of 1936.

The members of Sissle's band said his style of leadership was a combination of a stern uncle, a jovial headmaster, and a conscientious sergeant major. His concept of leadership was apparently based on his experience in the Army.



**LIEUT. "JIM"**  
**EUROPE** (HIM-SELF)  
 AND HIS FAMOUS  
 369th U. S. INFANTRY  
**JAZZ BAND**

DIRECT FROM THE FIGHTING FRONTS IN FRANCE

The Band That Played the **Hell Fighters** On To Victory

An ad for Europe's band just after World War I





**Noble Sissle leading his orchestra**

Sissle liked to say he traveled all over the country, including the South, with no racial problems, but Lena Horne later said the band members usually had to go in the back doors of most of the hotels where they played and frequently had trouble getting hot meals and taxis.

Sissle, however, was proud that he was the first bandleader to play at venues that had previously hired only white groups.

In the summer of 1936, he was scheduled to break the racial barrier at the Moonlight Gardens ballroom in Cincinnati. On the way to Cincinnati, his car blew a tire near Delaware, Ohio, causing an accident which seriously injured Sissle. From the hospital where he was being treated for a fractured skull, Sissle sent word to his band that young Lena Horne should front the band in Cincinnati. Without Sissle, the band continued playing at the ballroom for three weeks.

After recovering from his injuries, Sissle asked the band to play a special concert for the doctors and staff at

the Jane Case Hospital in Delaware.

By the late 1930s, despite the presence of Sidney Bechet, Sissle's Orchestra was being overshadowed by the extremely popular big bands. In 1938, Bechet, who was becoming a star in his own right, left Sissle's orchestra and soon was considered an all-time master of the soprano saxophone.

In 1942, Sissle hired a 22-year-old saxophonist and clarinetist named Charlie Parker. Bird played with Sissle's band for nine months at about the same time he first began jamming with Dizzy Gillespie.

Sissle continued leading his band into the 1960s. The musician who grew up in Cleveland died December 17, 1975 in Tampa, Florida. He was 86.

## **The King Instrument Company**



The birth of a company in Cleveland in 1893 had a profound effect on jazz for more than a century. Henderson N. White formed a company near East 53rd and Superior to

manufacture trombones. The first were built for a professional trombonist named Thomas King. In honor of the trombonist, White named his firm The King Instrument Company. The Cleveland company soon became famous for its King trombones.

Such all-time great jazz trombonists as George Brunis, Jack Teagarden, Tommy Dorsey and J.J. Johnson played instruments made in Cleveland by King Instruments. Bix Beiderbecke used a H.H. White Company #6 mouthpiece on his cornet.

Over the years, King branched out, manufacturing almost every kind of brass instrument. Other artists who



Library of Congress

**Sidney Bechet**

played King instruments included Harry James, Wild Bill Davison and Cannonball Adderley, as well as the brass players of the Cleveland Orchestra.

In 1964, the company moved to Curtis Boulevard, just off Route 2 in Eastlake, and changed its name to King Musical Instruments.

It was the Cleveland firm that made Dizzy Gillespie's famous bent-bell trumpet. In 1972, Gillespie visited the King plant in Eastlake and asked designer-engraver Robert Morgan to engrave an intricate floral pattern on his famous trumpet. Later, Morgan, who spent 45 years designing and engraving instruments at King before retiring, received a letter from Gillespie saying, "The job you did is without peer. It is too pretty to play."

At the King plant, about 250 employees crafted hundreds of instruments each week. Chuck Ward, a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music, was the manager of engineering at King. He said King employees made sure the horns "had soul before they were sold."

While there is much technology involved in making a musical instrument, much of the work is done by hand. Craftsmen who understood both the technology and the artistry of the instrument always tested the new horns.

Stan Matras, a former member of the Baldwin-Wallace College and Louisville orchestras, said it takes only a few seconds to know if the sound of the horn is sweet. He said, "I usually go through a two-octave scale on each instrument and I can tell right away if something is wrong. Each instrument is unique with its own sound."

In 1985, the company was purchased by United Musical Instruments of Elkhart, Indiana, but continued to make King brand instruments in suburban Cleveland.

In 2000, the company was advertising a "Jiggs Whigham model" trombone, named after the native Cleveland jazz artist, and was still making a Dizzy Gillespie-style trumpet with an upturned bell.

Gillespie's personal trumpet, engraved in Cleveland by Robert Morgan, was placed on display at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. The Wickliffe resident said, "I never in my wildest dreams thought this would take place."

**Tommy Dorsey**

"Tommy Dorsey, of the Dorsey Bros. Orchestra, New York and his new 'King' Liberty Trombone. Mr. Dorsey is the most sought after trombonist in America, and is often heard anonymously through his many radio engagements."

Mr. Dorsey says "I have never before endorsed any make of instrument, but after playing virtually all the trombones on the market, I think I can conscientiously say that the new Liberty model 'King' trombone is the best horn I have ever played on."

See and try this new "King" Liberty trombone.

APRIL 4 1934

**THE H. N. WHITE COMPANY**  
5225 Superior Avenue  
Cleveland, Ohio

**A 1934 advertisement with Tommy Dorsey endorsing a King trombone**

### 3. The Jazz Age in Cleveland

By the 1920s, jazz was becoming very popular. Jazz records were flooding the country and jazz dance bands were popping up almost everywhere. Cleveland quickly became a very active city for the new form of music.

Longtime *Cleveland Press* editor and columnist Julian Krawcheck told me, "If Chicago was the 'toddling town' of the 1920s and 1930s, then Cleveland must have been a close runner up. There were literally hundreds of neighborhood spots – bars and nightclubs – which featured jazz or blues music on weekends and some nightly."

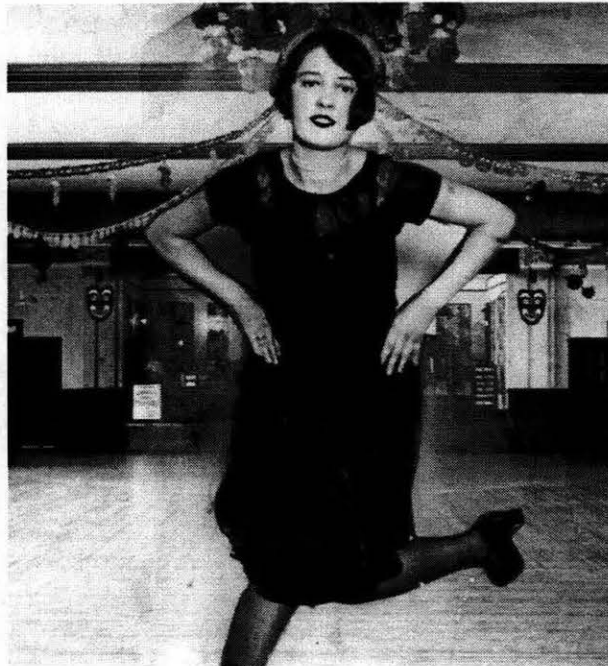
Much of Cleveland's early jazz was played in the area of the city where blacks were settling. Between 1910 and 1920, the black population of Cleveland increased by 307%. Following World War I, African-Americans migrated north for industrial jobs and many found homes in the Central-Woodland neighborhood of the city.

As early as 1921, blues singer Ethel Waters (with piano accompanist Fletcher Henderson) was singing for black audiences in Cleveland. In 1923, Bessie Smith performed at the Globe Theatre at East 55th and Woodland.

#### Jazz frowned on by society

The growing popularity of the new music came despite some early opposition by polite society. As the 1920s began, jazz was not an accepted part of the cultural landscape here. Jazz was considered a renegade form of music, almost a social protest, much as rock 'n roll and rap were in later generations.

In 1918, when the Cleveland Orchestra was formed, the first conductor of the symphonic orchestra, Nikolai Sokoloff, ordered his musicians not to play jazz. He said, "A player cannot do his most beautiful



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives

**Gertrude Mettel dancing the Charleston  
at Oster's Ballroom in 1925**

work if he has misused his talent by playing ragtime." A rule in the musicians' contract said, "No member of the orchestra shall play at a dance or in a parade."

In 1925, the City of Cleveland enacted a series of regulations for dance halls which included: "Vulgar, noisy jazz music is prohibited." The regulation said, "Such music almost forces dancers to use jerky half-steps and invites immoral behavior."

Other regulations included:

- "Male dancers are not permitted to hold their partners tightly.
  - Dancers are not permitted to copy the extremes that are now used on the modern stage.
  - Gentlemen must wear coats while dancing.
  - Expectorating on the floor is prohibited.
  - Suggestive movements are not permitted.
  - Partners are not permitted to dance with cheeks close or touching. When dancers put their cheeks together it is simply a case of public love-making."
- But with the growing popularity of the new music called jazz, many of the city regulations became impossible to enforce and were quickly forgotten.

#### The birthplace of recorded jazz

Phonograph recordings were a key factor in propelling the new and often misunderstood music into the public consciousness in the 1920s.

In 1922, a group of jazz musicians from Chicago, who called themselves the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, went to a rambling brick building on the bank of the White River Gorge, on the edge of Richmond, Indiana – just across the state line from Dayton, Ohio. The building was the factory of the Starr Piano Company which had been making pianos there since 1872.



**Ninth and Euclid in the 1920s**



In 1916, the company also began producing phonographs and phonograph records. The Gennett Records Division was not doing very well because the two giant companies, the American Gramophone Company (which later became Columbia) and the Victor Talking Machine Company (which later became RCA Victor), dominated the business by holding patents on the process of sound recording. Gennett sued Victor and won the right to use the then-new form of lateral cut recording.

Shortly after that court decision, Gennett began recording jazz artists who were performing in Chicago. That first group, including trombonist George Brunis, clarinetist Leon Rappolo and drummer Ben Pollack, went into the tiny recording studio tucked away in a corner of the piano factory. A huge horn protruded through a velvet drape and amplified the music like a cheerleader's megaphone. The sound waves moved a cutting needle, forming a groove in the master record. The turntable was not run by an electric motor; it was totally mechanical, relying on gravity, in much the same way a grandfather clock is powered. At times, when trains rumbled by outside the factory, they had to stop the recording and start over again.

In this tiny room, just a few miles from Ohio, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings recorded such jazz classics as "Tin Roof Blues," "Tiger Rag," and with pianist Jelly Roll Morton, "Clarinet Marmalade."

The following year, 1923, Joe "King" Oliver, who had taken his Creole Jazz Band from New Orleans to Chicago, went to Richmond April 6 to record for the first time. Baby Dodds, who played drums with the band, said, "Joe got the contract through someone who had heard the band play at the Lincoln Gardens in Chicago." Oliver's band took a train from Chicago to Richmond and recorded all day. One of the records the band made was "Chimes Blues," featuring the first recorded solo by a young cornetist named Louis Armstrong.

Lil Hardin Armstrong, Louis' wife at the time, later said the band was grouped around the big horn. But, Louis played so loudly, she said, that you couldn't hear anybody else on the record. They had to move him "way over in the corner, 12 or 15 feet away from the rest of us."

Aside from Armstrong's first recorded solo, that 1923 session in Richmond, Indiana, is remembered for a famous shout near the end of "Dippermouth Blues" — "Oh, plaaay that thing!" Dodds admitted that it came about by mistake. Dodds said he was supposed to take a drum break, but forgot. Quick-thinking pianist Bill Johnson covered the goof by yelling, "Oh, plaaay that thing!" When the shout became popular because of the record, Oliver made it a regular part of the arrangement for live performances.

Jelly Roll Morton returned to the Gennett studio in

1923 to make his first solo piano records, including such songs as "Wolverine Blues" and "King Porter Stomp."

In February of 1924, a young white group which had been playing in Cincinnati and at the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity at nearby Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, went to the Gennett studio to record for the first time. The group was called the Wolverine Orchestra and featured a 20-year-old cornet player named Bix Beiderbecke.



City of Richmond, Ind.

**The Wolverine Orchestra recording at Gennett in 1924. Bix Beiderbecke is second from the right.**

A few weeks earlier, they were playing a New Year's Eve party at the Stockton Club in nearby Hamilton, Ohio. The young musicians found themselves in the middle of a bloody Prohibition era gang war. A group of bootleggers and some of their gun-happy friends decided to celebrate the new year by shooting each other. In an effort to stop the riot, Bix and the Wolverines are said to have begun playing "China Boy" as loudly and as furiously as possible.

Those first records by Beiderbecke and the Wolverines proved to be commercially successful. Three months later, in May of 1924, they went back to record four more sides, including "Tiger Rag."

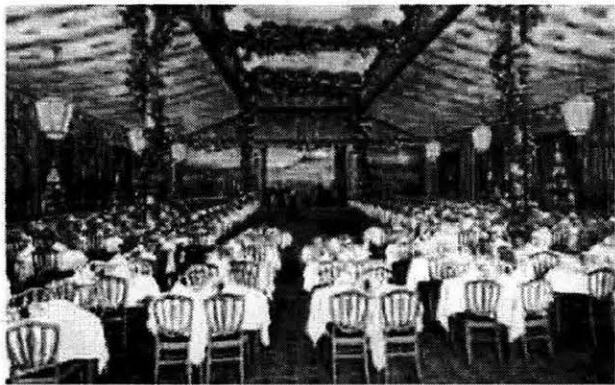
Many of the other early giants of jazz made their first recordings in the 1920s at the Starr Piano Factory in Richmond. They included Sidney Bechet, Muggsy Spanier, Duke Ellington and Fletcher Henderson. It was also the place where in October of 1927, Hoagy Carmichael made the first of thousands of recordings of his composition "Star Dust."

In 1928, Gennett cut more than 1,200 master records — an average of more than five every working day. There is no doubt they were extremely important in popularizing jazz. But, during the economic depression of the 1930s, the sales of records dropped dramatically and Gennett Records went out of business. Starr continued producing pianos until 1940.



## The first jazz records in Cleveland

By 1923, jazz records were also being made in Cleveland. The Vernon-Owens Hotel Winton Orchestra made several recordings. In February of 1925, the Emerson Gill Orchestra, a very popular Cleveland dance band which was playing at the Bamboo Garden at East 100th and Euclid, recorded "Birmingham Bound" in Cleveland for the Okeh Record Company.



**The Bamboo Garden where the Emerson Gill Orchestra played in the 1920s**

Cleveland record collector Jim Prohaska discovered another record by the Gill band entitled "My Name Will Always Be Chickie" with, as the label says, "a singing chorus by Pinky Hunter." Hunter was a popular Cleveland entertainer and a radio pioneer.



Courtesy of Jim Prohaska

When a young student at Ohio State University heard about the Okeh recording session in Cleveland, he auditioned his band. Harold Ortlí and his Ohio State Collegians recorded two sides – "I Couldn't Get To It In Time" and "My Daddy Rocks Me." After college, Ortlí formed a band that played for

years at the Euclid Beach amusement park. He also operated a music store in Cleveland.

Also recording for Okeh in Cleveland in 1925 was Joe Smith and his Martha Lee Club Orchestra. The Martha Lee Club was located in the Ohio and State Theatre building on Euclid Avenue. The same week that Smith recorded "Nora Lee," magician Harry Houdini was performing next door at the Palace Theatre.

Cleveland's Austin Wylie and his Golden Pheasant Orchestra recorded in 1925 for Vocalion Records. They did a song that had been recorded two years earlier by the legendary Coon-Sanders Nighthawks, "I'm Gonna Charleston Back To Charleston."

Wylie also played another important role in Cleveland jazz history.

## "Rock 'n Roll" Not Coined in Cleveland

Ortlí's 1925 song "My Daddy Rocks Me" might surprise some people who believe the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum was located in Cleveland because 1950s Cleveland disc jockey Alan Freed coined the phrase "rock 'n roll."

Actually, Freed simply borrowed an old jazz phrase to describe the rhythm and blues or race records he was playing at the time on WJW Radio.

As early as 1927, Louis Armstrong made a record called "Rock Me Mamma With A Steady Roll." Benny Goodman's 1935 swing recording of "Get Rhythm In Your Feet" included the phrase "rock 'n roll." In 1937, the Bunny Berigan Orchestra recorded a song called "Rockin' Rollers' Jubilee."

## Artie Shaw in Cleveland



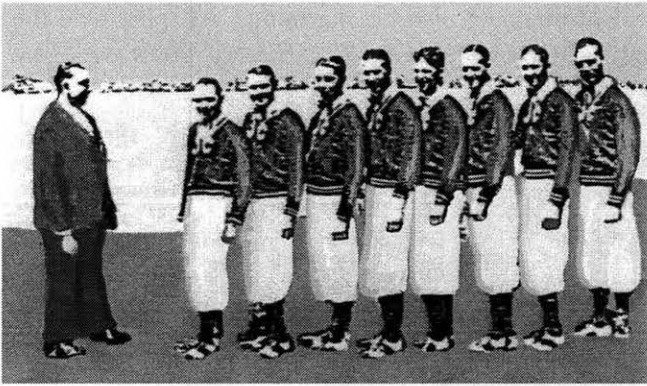
Courtesy of Artie Shaw

**Artie Shaw (far left) with Joe Cantor's Orchestra at the Far East Restaurant on Euclid Avenue in 1927**

In 1927, an ambitious 17-year-old from New Haven, Connecticut, arrived in Cleveland to launch his professional music career. Young Artie Shaw came to Cleveland to join Joe Cantor's band which was playing at the Far East Restaurant on Euclid Avenue.

In his biography, *The Trouble With Cinderella*, the clarinetist recalled, "One of the things I learned while I was in Cleveland was how to arrange." One of his first arrangements was "Wabash Blues" and it did not come easily. Instead of writing the overall score on one sheet, Shaw said, "I spread all the parts out on the floor and got down on my hands and knees with a pencil, jotted down a few notes on one part, and crawled around until I located the part I wanted to go with it." When Cantor's band first played the arrangement, Shaw said, "It was a mess until the other musicians suggested changes in their parts."

Veteran Cleveland saxophonist Hank Geer gave me a copy of a photo of the Joe Cantor Orchestra in 1927. It shows Cantor standing at the left and his band



Courtesy of Hank Geer

### The Joe Cantor Orchestra in 1927:

(L-to-R) Cantor, Charlie Cantor, Chuck Shanks, Vic Buynak, Artie Shaw, unidentified trombonist, Julian Woodward, Willis Kelly and Walt Eastman

members, including Shaw, in a line, dressed in shirts with "JC" on their chests, white knickers, long socks and brown and white oxfords. It almost looks like a page out of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*.

While playing with Cantor's band in Cleveland, Shaw began to listen to some of the jazz records that had been made by Gennett. In an autobiographical essay he wrote in 1995, Shaw remembered his earliest jazz idols and influences were cornetist Bix Beiderbecke and saxophonist Frank Trumbauer. Bix and "Tram" were playing together with the Jean Goldkette Orchestra and recording on their own. Beiderbecke was to jazz in the late 1920s what Babe Ruth was to baseball. Bix, with an unmatched tone, added lyrical and creative solos to what, for the most part, had been a hard-driving, raucous style of roaring '20s jazz.

By 1928, Shaw, who had changed his name from Abraham Isaac Arshawsky to Art Shaw ("Art" sounded older than "Artie"), had become a pretty good arranger and was offered a job in Cleveland's top band of the day, the Austin Wylie Orchestra. The Wylie band was playing eight hours a day – morning, noon and night – at the Golden Pheasant Chinese Restaurant on Prospect Avenue next door to the Hotel Winton (later Carter Manor). Shaw soon became the musical director of Wylie's band.

Pianist Al Lerner (not the later owner of the Cleveland Browns), who was growing up in Cleveland at the time, recalled Shaw "was kind of a strange guy in Cleveland."



Courtesy of Hank Geer

### The Austin Wylie Orchestra in the '20s.

Wylie is playing violin. At the far right is Tom Gerspacher, the uncle of long-time Cleveland musician Hank Geer

Lerner said Shaw had a bright red car and liked to go to fires. "Shaw just got in line with the fire engines," he said, "and got to the fires as fast as they did."

Also in Cleveland, Shaw first heard some so-called "race records," recordings that were made specifically for sale in Negro neighborhoods. Among the recording artists was Louis Armstrong and particularly the records Armstrong made with his Hot Five. Shaw later said he was "entranced" by Armstrong's recordings of "West End Blues" and "Savoy Blues." Armstrong's music on record excited the young Shaw so much that on a day off from the Wylie band, he hopped into his red roadster and drove from Cleveland to Chicago. He called it "a pilgrimage" to Chicago's Savoy Ballroom to hear the great trumpet player in person.

In his autobiography, Shaw wrote he fell in love with a Cleveland girl named Betty (he did not disclose her last name). It was the first love for the young man who would later marry a succession of glamorous women including movie stars Lana Turner and Ava Gardner, Betty Kern (the daughter of composer Jerome Kern), Kathleen Windsor and Evelyn Keyes.

One of Shaw's closest friends in Cleveland was pianist Claude Thornhill. They met during a summer gig at Willy's Lakeshore Gardens and soon roomed together at the Hotel Winton. Shaw wrote, "We used to take long rides along the lakeshore, gabbing our heads off about everything." Another member of the Wylie Orchestra was a young Tony Pastor.

In 1929, Shaw entered an essay contest sponsored by the *Cleveland News* to promote the National Air Races which were just beginning at



The Hotel Winton near East 9th and Prospect in the late 1920s



the Cleveland Airport (later Cleveland Hopkins International Airport). Shaw wrote a 150-word essay, "How The National Air Races Would Benefit Cleveland," and composed a song called "Song of the Skies." He won the newspaper contest and was awarded an airplane trip to Hollywood.

More than 500,000 people attended the 10-day air races, including Charles Lindbergh who had made his famous solo flight to Paris two years earlier.

On Shaw's trip to Hollywood, he ran into two friends from New Haven who were playing with Irving Aaronson's orchestra. They suggested that Shaw join Aaronson's band. When the band later came to Cleveland, Shaw said, "Aaronson himself came into the Golden Pheasant, listened to me play, and offered me a job." Because of his Cleveland girlfriend, Shaw didn't want to leave. But he later wrote, "She sensed my restless ambition and insisted I go to California with Aaronson's band."

"The night I left," said Shaw, "I found it hard to accustom myself to the idea that I was leaving the place where I had lived for the past three years, put down a few tentative roots, worked steadily, made friends, and found myself a girl."

Shaw left Cleveland in his red Auburn roadster and toured with Aaronson's orchestra for two years. He returned to Cleveland in February 1931 with the Aaronson band to play a week at the Palace Theatre on the same bill with comedian Milton Berle.

A short time later, Shaw went to New York and became a top studio clarinetist. He played on many important jazz records including Bunny Berigan's classic "I Can't Get Started." He also rejoined his old Cleveland buddy Claude Thornhill who was playing in New York.

In 1936, Shaw also recorded with one of his early jazz idols. With the Frank Trumbauer Orchestra he recorded Fats Waller's "Ain't Misbehavin'."

Shaw formed his own band in 1937. In 1938, he recorded what he called "a nice little tune from one of Cole Porter's very few flop shows." "Begin the Beguine" became a huge hit and helped win Shaw fame, money and beautiful women. By 1939, when he had become one of the most popular band leaders in the world, his band manager was his old boss from Cleveland, Austin Wylie.

Shaw later admitted he found superstardom "uncongenial." He abruptly left the music business for about a year before forming a new band.

By 1954, at the age of 44, Shaw packed his clarinet away and completely quit the music business. He moved to Spain, then Connecticut and California and spent most of his time writing – books, not music.

Shaw was once asked what epitaph he would like to see on his tomb stone. With the crusty humor of an artist in his 80s, Shaw said, "Just two words – 'Go away!'"

But he could also be charming. After he read the first edition of *Cleveland Jazz History*, Shaw wrote me a very nice note.

## Gene Beecher



**Gene Beecher and his band in Cleveland in 1935**

Another young musician who came to Cleveland in 1927 was Shaw's boyhood friend from New Haven, Gene Beecher. As teenagers, they had entered every amateur contest they could find in Connecticut.

One night at a theatre in Waterbury, when Beecher was playing his banjo, a stagehand had forgotten to bring out a chair for him to rest his foot on while playing. Beecher later recalled, "I played with an invisible chair (holding one leg in the air). It was a sensation. Artie and I won first prize!"

Beecher's family moved to Cleveland at about the same time Shaw came here to join the Joe Cantor band. In 1929, Beecher formed his own band in Cleveland. It played at hotels and restaurants in Cleveland and across the Midwest and South until the early 1940s.

Beecher recalled when he was doing national radio broadcasts from a Chinese restaurant in Cleveland, he would frequently receive sheet music from song pluggers with a 20-dollar bill enclosed.

His band was more a dance band than a jazz band. He later said that in the 1930s he was impressed by the "rippling rhythm" style of Shep Fields and attempted to copy it. At another point in his career, Beecher billed himself as "Gene Beecher, the Music Teacher." He set up a chalk board on the bandstand and had his band members wear mortarboards.

After World War II, Beecher opened a music store and school in South Euclid. In the 1970s, he sold his farm in Jefferson and moved to Florida where he became a very successful painter, showing his folk art creations in a number of leading galleries.

In their older years, Beecher and Shaw continued to correspond with each other and recall their early days in New Haven and Cleveland.

Beecher died in Florida September 23, 2002 at age 93.

## Claude Thornhill

Pianist Claude Thornhill left Cleveland to join Hal Kemp's touring band and then the Ray Noble Orchestra where he met Glenn Miller.



**Claude Thornhill**

Eventually, Thornhill went to New York where he played studio dates for hundreds of records. He arranged and conducted the orchestra for singer Maxine Sullivan's now-classic recording of "Loch Lomond." That 1936 record established Thornhill's reputation among musicians.

Two years later, he arranged for the Bing Crosby radio show. By 1940, with a batch of 60 new arrangements

and a loan from Miller, Thornhill formed his own orchestra.

He composed the haunting "Snowfall," which he used as his theme song, and set out to revolutionize big band music. But, success did not come easily for Thornhill.

The band's first date at Virginia Beach, Virginia, was canceled when the swank ballroom burned to the ground. A gig at a San Francisco hotel ended quickly because the hotel manager said he wanted what he called "a Mickey Mouse dance band." In Hartford, when Thornhill's band members showed up, they found the doors of the ballroom padlocked. The manager had fled with the money. To add insult to injury, when Thornhill returned to his hotel, the desk clerk called him "Mr. Toenail."

But finally, two months later, he took his band to the Glen Island Casino outside New York City and scored a major success.

Thornhill's orchestra featured unique arrangements that combined the romance of classical music with some daring jazz innovations and made full use of the dynamics of a big orchestra. He also hired some excellent musicians. Among them were lead trumpeter Conrad Gozzo, clarinetist Irving Fazola, and future jazz greats Lee Konitz and Red Rodney. They played such unusual Thornhill compositions as "Portrait of a Guinea Farm."

By the summer of 1942, a young arranger named Gil Evans joined Thornhill's orchestra. This was the same Gil Evans who would later be such an important part of Miles Davis' career. For Thornhill, Evans arranged the popular "There's a Small Hotel" and "Buster's Last Stand" which established the Thornhill Orchestra as an outstanding modern jazz band.

In the fall of 1942, during World War II, Thornhill went into the Navy and played piano in a service band led by his old roommate from Cleveland, Artie Shaw. When Thornhill got out of the Navy, he rounded up many of the members of his old band including Evans and reorganized his orchestra.

Evans wrote a piece called "Arab Dance" which was a combination of his interests in progressive jazz and European classical music.

The post-war Thornhill Orchestra was not a conventional big band. You couldn't call it a bop band or a swing band or a sweet band. It was unique.

I remember one night dancing to the Thornhill Orchestra at the Sunnybrook Ballroom in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, and thinking the band was playing pretty dance music. Then, suddenly, out there on the dance floor, I realized that this big, beautiful orchestra was also playing a lot of jazz, in a very different way! I quickly recognized Charlie Parker's "Anthropology." Thornhill began it with a piano solo in a style that John Lewis would later use with the Modern Jazz Quartet. Lee Konitz took a sax solo that reminded me of Parker.

Someone once asked Gerry Mulligan to compare Thornhill and Stan Kenton. He said, "They were probably exact opposites. Thornhill was an introvert. His music was very artistically oriented. He was much drawn to the impressionists. Kenton, on the other hand, was an extrovert and his music was very extroverted and his musical heroes would be more like Richard Wagner." Said Mulligan, "The Kenton band was very muscular and physical; the Thornhill band was spiritual and cerebral and sensitive."

Pianist Thelonious Monk, after hearing the Thornhill Orchestra, said it was "the only really good big band I've heard in years."

By the mid-1950s, when big bands were beginning to fall by the wayside, Thornhill quietly disappeared. The introverted musician suffered an emotional collapse. He bought a home in New Jersey and became a gardener and home handyman while playing only a few occasional gigs.

In 1965, at the age of 56, Thornhill was forming a new band when he suffered two heart attacks. When he died, Duke Ellington said, "I wonder if the world will ever know how much it had in this beautiful man. There aren't many of his kind left."

## The Fletcher Henderson Orchestra

While Claude Thornhill and Artie Shaw were playing in Cleveland, Fletcher Henderson brought his swinging big band to town for the first time. It was in July of 1927. Included in the band, which was blazing the trail for the swing era, was saxophonist Coleman Hawkins. The Henderson band broke with the earlier practice of orchestras led by such people as Will Marion Cook and Noble Sissle



**Fletcher Henderson**



**Another Perry Scoop!!**  
 Only Eastern Ohio Appearance  
**Wed. Night Aug. 15**  
**FLETCHER**  
**HENDERSON**  
 AND HIS ORCHESTRA  
 Pride of Columbia Colored  
 Bands  
 Advance Sale Now  
**BULLDOG CIGAR STORE**  
 44c A Person, Incl. Tax.  
 Box Office 60c, incl. Tax.  
**MONDAY NIGHT 20c A PERSON**  
**SUMMIT BEACH PARK**  
 AKRON, OHIO  
 Where It's Always Cool

A 1932 newspaper ad for the  
 Henderson band in Akron

which played mostly stock arrangements. Henderson's orchestra was one of the first big bands to play its own compositions and arrangements instead of stock arrangements. Historian Frank Driggs called the Henderson Orchestra "the single most important musical force in big band history."

A native of Cuthbert, Georgia, Henderson had first come to Northeast Ohio in 1921 when he was leading a band for the Black Swan Record Company, backing singer Ethel Waters in a series of one-night gigs in Cleveland, Akron, Youngstown and Mansfield. Henderson formed his own band in 1923 and insisted on using only the best musicians. Over the years, they included such future jazz giants as Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, Benny Carter, Buster Bailey, Fats Waller, Lester Young, Don Redman, Rex Stewart and Cootie Williams. Henderson also permitted his musicians to freely interpret the original compositions and arrangements they were playing. With this policy, Henderson's band laid the foundation for the swing era.

By the late 1920s, Henderson's band was an acknowledged leader in big band jazz.

When the Henderson band appeared in Cleveland in June of 1929, it was led by his younger brother, Horace Henderson, a graduate of Ohio's Wilberforce University. Fletcher was recovering from injuries he received in an auto accident. Henderson suffered a broken collarbone, a long gash on his forehead and paralysis of his left side. Led by Horace, the band played at the Crystal Slipper Ballroom, then Cleveland's largest and finest dance hall, at 9802 Euclid Avenue. Five years later, the name of ballroom was changed to the Trianon Ballroom.

The early 1930s were lean years for the Henderson Orchestra. It made several excellent recordings and, while tours were scarce, the band did travel to Cleveland several times.

In February of 1930, Henderson's band was at Oster's Ballroom on East 105th Street. That band featured trumpeters Cootie Williams and Rex Stewart and saxophonists Benny Carter and Coleman Hawkins.

Late in 1931, with such sidemen as trombonist Jimmy Harrison and saxophonists Russell Procope and

Carter, the band spent a month playing at Cleveland's old Hollenden Hotel at East 6th and Superior.

The palatial old Hollenden had been built in 1885 and had been considered *the* hotel between New York and Chicago. Its guest book included the names of Presidents William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt,

### Fletcher Henderson in NE Ohio

- December 1921 -**  
With Ethel Waters in Cleveland, Akron, Youngstown and Mansfield
- July 1927 -**  
Leading his band in Cleveland
- June 1929 -**  
Crystal Slipper Ballroom, Cleveland, with Coleman Hawkins, Rex Stewart and Benny Carter
- October 1929 -**  
Cleveland, with Hawkins, Stewart and Carter
- February 1930 -**  
Oster's Ballroom, Cleveland, with Cootie Williams, Stewart, Carter and Hawkins
- November and December 1931 -**  
Hollenden Hotel, Cleveland, with Jimmy Harrison, Russell Procope and Carter
- August 1932 -**  
Summit Beach Park, Akron
- October 1932 -**  
Cleveland with Hawkins and Stewart
- December 1933 -**  
Cleveland with Russell Procope
- October 2-29, 1934 -**  
Cotton Club, Cleveland
- April 1936 -**  
Ruggles Beach, Lorain, with Cleveland Emmett Berry
- August 23, 1937 -**  
Cleveland with Berry
- August 29, 1937 -**  
Buckeye Lake with Ben Webster and Berry
- October 1, 1939 -**  
Cleveland Stadium with Benny Goodman Orchestra
- November 24, 1940 -**  
Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland with Benny Goodman
- December 27, 1940 -**  
Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland with Goodman
- December 28, 1940 -**  
Youngstown with Goodman
- December 30, 1940 -**  
The Country Club, Cleveland with Goodman
- May-June, 1941 -**  
Cleveland
- April 7, 1942 -**  
Cleveland
- March 3, 1943 -**  
Akron Armory with Cleveland Jimmy Williams and singer Dolores Parker
- November 1943 -**  
Oster's Ballroom, Cleveland, with Parker
- September 28, 1944 -**  
Public Auditorium, Cleveland, with Parker
- October 27 to November 2, 1944 -**  
Metropolitan Theatre, Cleveland, with Parker
- January 19 to 25, 1945 -**  
Metropolitan Theatre, Cleveland, with Parker
- Fall 1948 -**  
Café Tia Juana, Cleveland

Source: *Hendersonia* by Walt Allen

William Howard Taft, Woodrow Wilson and Warren Harding; and opera singer Enrico Caruso. For half a century, it was the place in Cleveland to see and to be seen.

When Fletcher Henderson and his Cotton Club Entertainers appeared at Summit Beach Park in Akron August 15, 1932, the admission was 20¢.

Henderson's band was booked into the brand new Cleveland Cotton Club at 2226 East 55th Street for three weeks in the fall of 1934. Hoping to duplicate the great success of the Cotton Club in New York City's Harlem, owner Bernie Berstein promoted "Fletcher Henderson's All-Star New York Show featuring Dewey Washington, Eunice Wilson, Mabel Scott, the Three Brown Bears, pantomimist Johnny Hudgins and 'Two Piano Queens.'" The show proved so successful that the engagement was extended to four weeks before Henderson moved on to the famous Graystone Ballroom in Detroit.

When Henderson played at Ruggles Beach in Lorain in August of 1936, he played his arrangement of the Fats Waller-Andy Razaf composition "Stealin' Apples," a song that would later become one of Benny Goodman's most popular numbers. Trumpeter Emmett Berry, who had grown up in Cleveland, joined the Henderson Orchestra in 1936. Another new member of the Henderson band was drummer Sid Catlett.

After playing at Buckeye Lake in August of 1937, Henderson broke up his band and joined the Benny Goodman Orchestra as a pianist and arranger. He wrote many of Goodman's most memorable arrangements.

Henderson formed another band in 1941 and made several more appearances in Northeast Ohio including one-week stays at Cleveland's Metropolitan Theatre in 1944 and 1945 and Oster's Ballroom in 1943.

Henderson died in New York City December 29, 1952, at the age of 54.

## Red Callender in Cleveland



Red Callender

A 17-year-old bass player who had grown up in Atlantic City, New Jersey, came to Cleveland in 1933. Red Callender, in his autobiography *Unfinished Dream*, recalled he was playing with a vaudeville troupe called Eddie Hunter's Black and White Review. Their bus broke down halfway between Harrisburg and Cleveland. When they finally got here, they discovered their

show had been canceled, but they played at various spots for about a week before Hunter disappeared without paying his musicians. Callender said they stayed in a Cleveland rooming house "on credit." A few weeks

later, after his father drove to Cleveland with some money for his son, Callender took a bus back home. But he returned to Cleveland a year later.

Callender, who later became one of the most sought-after bass players in jazz, spent 1934 and 1935 here, playing with Jimmy Darrow's big band. He called Darrow "a high-note trumpet player without a lot of business sense."

Callender said he was offered the job of playing bass in the house band at Henry's Furnace, a nightclub at the Majestic Hotel on East 55th Street, the main hotel in the black neighborhood of Cleveland at the time. "The management gave us rooms there, paid us a salary," said Callender, "and we did pretty good on tips." But the hours were tough. They usually played from 9 or 10 at night to 9 or 10 the next morning, whenever the last person went home. Callender said, "We didn't care, we could sleep all day."

Callender recalled, "Fletcher Henderson's band was in town, with Pops Foster on bass, Roy Eldridge on trumpet and Coleman Hawkins on tenor saxophone." According to Callender, they all came to Henry's Furnace to jam when their gigs were over, and after the paying customers went home. He said, "I became a Coleman Hawkins fan right there on the spot (at the Majestic Hotel), and always will be. Never had I heard anything like that before."

He said Roy Eldridge was about 19 years old then and they struck up a friendship. "We wore long overcoats that dragged along the ground," said Red, "but never wore a hat because that was considered 'sissified.'" He said Eldridge carried his trumpet in a case slung over his shoulder by a strap "and I'd trail along with him all over town. He was a bundle of energy, effervescent, entirely wrapped up in music. No one played as high or fast as Roy until Diz dethroned him as king." Callender said Eldridge was the person who took him to Mamie Louise's Chicken Shack in Cleveland to see and hear Harry Edison, a young trumpeter from Columbus who was playing with Chester Clark's band. According to Callender, "Edison's style was fully developed even at the age of 18."

It was Eldridge who took Callender to first hear pianist Art Tatum at a Cleveland after-hours joint before Eldridge left Cleveland with the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra.

In 1935, two years after he had first come to Cleveland, Callender joined another band formed by Jimmy Darrow and played in Mansfield. There he met a piano player from Columbus named Logan "Lord" Hawkins, who got him a job with a band led by Roderick Ray at the Gloria Nightclub in Columbus. From there, he went on the road with Blanche Thompson, and in 1936, at the age of 20, ended up in Los Angeles playing with Buck Clayton's band. After studying with two



classical bass violinists, Callender made his first record, with Louis Armstrong's Orchestra, "Once In A While" and "On The Sunny Side of the Street."

At about the same time, Callender wrote two tunes, "Love Lost" and "Bogo Joe," which were recorded by Lionel Hampton. He gave bass lessons to a teenager named Charlie Mingus and showed Mingus how to develop a powerful, penetrating tone on the bass. From 1940 to 1943, Callender played in the band of Lee and Lester Young. He formed his own group in 1944, and in 1946, appeared in a movie called *New Orleans* with Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday.

In the 1950s, Callender, who had settled in Los Angeles, was a highly-sought-after studio musician and played many dates with native Cleveland arranger Ernie Freeman. He also recorded with the Mills Brothers.

In the mid-1950s, Callender recorded with the pianist he had first met at an after-hours club in Cleveland, Art Tatum.

In the 1960s, Callender became a NBC staff musician in Los Angeles and recorded with dozens of groups including Mingus, Dizzy Gillespie, and even Percy Faith's big, lush elevator music orchestra.

In 1971, Callender's California home was destroyed by an earthquake, but he continued playing, recording, teaching, composing and arranging.

When he returned to Cleveland in 1991 with Jimmy and Jeannie Cheatham's Sweet Baby Blues Band to play a Northeast Ohio Jazz Society concert at Cain Park, Red Callender remembered those days 58 years earlier when he first arrived in Cleveland and met and played with Coleman Hawkins, Roy Eldridge and Art Tatum.

Eight months after that Cleveland appearance, March 8, 1992, Callender died of thyroid cancer at age 76.

## Emmett Berry with Henderson

When Roy Eldridge left the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra in 1936, he was replaced by Clevelander Emmett Berry.

Influenced originally by Louis Armstrong, Berry played with local bands in Cleveland in the early 1930s and went on the road in 1932 with a band led by Frank Terry of Toledo. With Terry, Berry began to demonstrate a fiery, full-toned and flawless technique that would carry him on a 40-year career with many of the most respected musicians in jazz.

He spent three years with the high-flying Henderson band and produced a series of warm, uncomplicated solos on such recordings as "Stealin' Apples," "Christopher Columbus," "Blue Lou," "Rhythm of the Tambourine," "Back in Your Own Backyard," "Chris And His Gang," and "Sing You Sinners."

After Henderson broke up his band to join Benny Goodman, Berry played briefly with Henderson's brother,

Horace, and then joined the Earl Hines Orchestra.

Beginning in 1941, Berry played radio, recording and live dates with Teddy Wilson's Café Society Sextet and joined a much-publicized CBS studio band led by Raymond Scott. In 1943, Berry joined the Lionel Hampton band. In 1944, he played with the legendary John Kirby Sextet and recorded with Eddie Heywood. The Clevelander played the trumpet solo on Heywood's classic recording of "Begin the Beguine."

Beginning in 1945, Berry was a key member of the Count Basie Orchestra and small groups for five years. He later toured with the Johnny Hodges Orchestra.

Berry was not swayed by the advent of bop. He continued to play the straight-ahead swing style he had learned with Henderson.

In 1970, because of ill health, Berry came home to Cleveland to retire.

## Jimmy Williams and Henderson

A graduate of Cleveland's Central High School, Jimmy Williams was playing trombone with a World War II big band at the Portage Ordnance Depot at the Ravenna Arsenal when a friend named Joe Thomas persuaded him to join the 1940s Fletcher Henderson Orchestra.

"Man, this is great," said Williams as he began touring the country with Henderson. "I wasn't making too much money, but I got into the swing of things. I didn't goof it up or anything."

Before long, the college-educated Henderson realized that Williams was a talented musician and he began giving the Clevelander more and more responsibilities in the band. "I would rehearse them and everything," recalled Williams. "It seemed as though Fletcher was tired all the time. He would call a two o'clock rehearsal and I'd get the guys together and we'd start rehearsing."

Williams also arranged for the Henderson Orchestra. One day, when Williams was sitting at a piano, working on a chart, Henderson walked up behind him and said, "I just wanted to see what a good arranger does when he's putting an arrangement together." Williams thought the master big band arranger was pulling his leg. But Henderson sat down, went through the arrangement with him and said, "I like that. You seem to have an idea of what you're shooting for." Williams said to himself, "He wasn't kidding. He was serious about me being a good arranger."

## Bix in Ohio and Cleveland

A number of key events in the triumph and tragedy of Bix Beiderbecke, the legendary cornetist whose art influenced generations of jazz musicians, occurred in Ohio.

From 1924 to 1927, Beiderbecke astounded the jazz



**The Wolverine Orchestra in Cincinnati in 1924.  
Beiderbecke is holding his cornet.**

world with his clarion tone and revolutionary easy-swinging musical figures that bridged the eras of New Orleans jazz and swing. His recordings, still highly prized, personified what was called "The Jazz Age." But, like his contemporary, writer F. Scott Fitzgerald, Beiderbecke was losing a battle with alcohol.

For two months at the end of 1923, Bix was playing with the Wolverine Orchestra at a bootlegging and gambling roadhouse, the Stockton Club, in Hamilton, Ohio, 20 miles north of Cincinnati.

According to Philip Evans, in his exhaustive chronology of Beiderbecke's life, *Bix: The Leon Bix Beiderbecke Story*, the Wolverines then began playing at Doyle's Dancing Academy in Cincinnati and at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Those gigs led to Beiderbecke's first recordings.

It was Monday, February 18th, 1924. Bix and the Wolverines went to the Starr Piano Company in Richmond, Indiana, just over the Ohio line from Dayton, and recorded for Gennett Records. The first record was the old New Orleans Rhythm Kings' song, "Fidgety Feet." The recording session also included Beiderbecke's first recorded solo.

Gennett invited Bix and the Wolverines to return to Richmond in May and June for more recordings.

After playing during the summer of 1924 at Lake Front Park in Gary, Indiana, Bix and the Wolverines set out for New York City in three cars. Ralph Burton, in his book, *Remembering Bix*, said they reached Cleveland long after midnight and checked into what he called "a shabby hotel with a bare



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives  
**Bix Beiderbecke**

electric bulb hanging in the middle of the room, overlooking Lake Erie."

When they finally arrived in New York, they played at the Cinderella Dance Hall at 48th and Broadway and again recorded for Gennett.

On the basis of his records with the Wolverines, Bix was offered a job with the popular Jean Goldkette Orchestra in Detroit. He played on a series of radio broadcasts with Goldkette and, in January of 1925, recorded again in Richmond, Indiana with his own group, The Rhythm Jugglers, which included trombonist Tommy Dorsey.

With the Goldkette Orchestra, Beiderbecke played a series of dates in Ohio in April of 1927 – at a General Motors convention in Dayton, at the Greystone Dance Hall in Dayton, at the Valley Dale Ballroom in Columbus, and at a charity ball at the Neil House hotel in Columbus. From late May (when Charles Lindbergh made his historic non-stop solo flight of the Atlantic) until early July, Bix and the Goldkette band played at Castle Farms in Cincinnati.

In October of 1927, Beiderbecke and Goldkette saxophonist Frank Trumbauer joined the most popular band in the country at the time, the Paul Whiteman Orchestra.

During the fall of 1927, Beiderbecke and the Whiteman Orchestra played at Land O' Dance in Canton, Madison Gardens in Toledo, and for a week in December at the Allen Theatre in downtown Cleveland.



Cleveland Press

**A cartoon of Bix in the  
December 9, 1927  
Cleveland Press**

Other members of the Whiteman Orchestra at the time included Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Henry Busse and singer Bing Crosby. The *Cleveland Press* carried a cartoon drawing of Bix and reviewer Billie Thomas wrote, "To my way of thinking, no child should be started in life without being brought up on this kind of music."

In February of 1928, Bix and the Whiteman band played in Youngstown. In September, they performed at Rainbow Gardens in Erie and at the Land O' Dance Ballroom

in Canton. While in Canton, the band members organized an unusual golf match. Clarinetist Irving Friedman recalled, "Each foursome would start at the first





**The Paul Whiteman Orchestra in 1928.  
Beiderbecke is in the back row, third from right.**

hole with two quarts of whiskey. The two low men on each hole would take a drink. Needless to say, it wasn't too long before the winners were losers and vice versa. While we staggered in after losing golf balls and clubs all over the course, Bix was as fresh as he was when we started."

In November of 1928, Bix and the Whiteman Orchestra returned to Cleveland to play at the then-new Music Hall at East 6th and St. Clair. Bix opened the show playing "Tiger Rag" with a dixieland group and later played in the brass section during Ferde Grofé's arrangement of George Gershwin's "Concerto in F."

But, fellow band member Charles Margulis recalled, "Bix had too much to drink before the concert and passed out as we were playing." Margulis said he continued playing his trumpet with his left hand while holding up Bix with his right hand. Whiteman saw what was happening and immediately had Beiderbecke taken back to the Hotel Cleveland. Thomas King, in his book *Pops: Paul Whiteman, King of Jazz*, said, "In Cleveland, Bix suffered a devastating mental and physical breakdown triggered by his growing dependence on



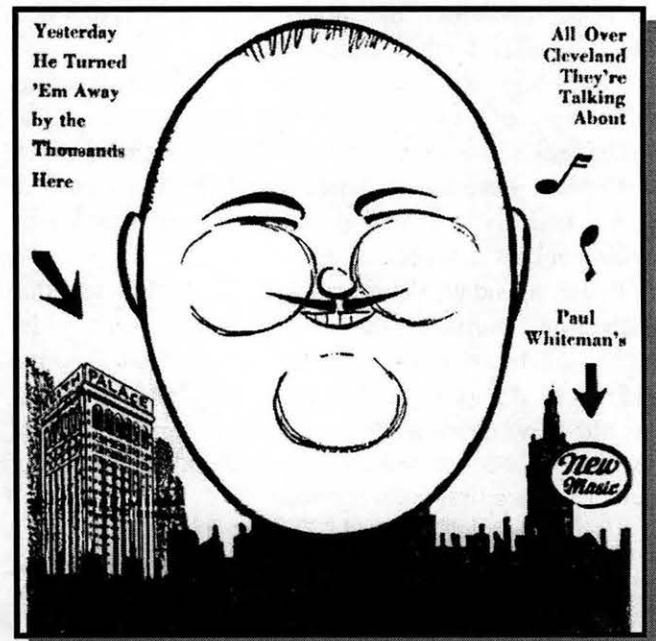
**The Hotel Cleveland  
next to the Terminal Tower on Public Square**

alcohol." Frank Trumbauer's diary noted Bix's breakdown in Cleveland. Pianist Roy Barge said Whiteman left Bix in Cleveland under a doctor's care.

The band went on to Columbus, Cincinnati and Akron without Bix. Trumbauer's diary entry for December 2, 1928 said, "Bix still gone. Stayed in Cleveland with DTs."

Beiderbecke rejoined the Whiteman Orchestra in New York in time to record. But, three days later, Whiteman had him admitted to a hospital on Long Island with pneumonia.

It is not clear if Bix was back with the band when it came to Cleveland in January of 1929 for a week's engagement at the Palace Theatre. There were four shows a day, at 2:20, 4:45, 7:20 and 9:45. An ad in the *Cleveland Press* said Whiteman "turned 'em away by the thousands." *Press* reviewer George Davis said, "Whiteman's fine band pleases crowds." But Davis also noted that "one of his best musicians (Bix) was absent."



**An ad for Buescher's record store in the January 21, 1929 *Cleveland Press*. The store was trying to sell Whiteman records while his band was in Cleveland**

Biographer Jean-Pierre Lion believes Beiderbecke was not with the band this time in Cleveland, but biographers Richard Sudhalter and Philip Evans wrote that after their opening performance, the other band members returned to the Hotel Cleveland and found Beiderbecke had wrecked his room. It was apparently his second breakdown in Cleveland in less than two months! Trombonist Bill Rank said, "He cracked up, just went to pieces." Bix apparently suffered an alcoholic fit. Pianist Barge said, "It was a breakdown, a major one!"

The *Cleveland Press*, apparently after talking with somebody with the Whiteman band, reported Bix was

going home to Davenport, Iowa for a rest. He may have sneaked out of the hotel, past the new Terminal Tower that was under construction, and gone down near Lake Erie to take a train to New York City.

Several weeks later, after Whiteman had hired a replacement for Bix and returned to New York, Bix was found in a New York hotel room, badly beaten and slashed. He had apparently gotten into a fight with some sailors at a speakeasy. This time, Whiteman sent him home to Davenport to rest – on full salary.

After the rest, Beiderbecke rejoined the Whiteman Orchestra and returned to Cleveland in May of 1929 to play at radio station WHK's auditorium. Later that same day, the band also played in Toledo and Detroit.

In a few months, Bix's health got worse and he left the Whiteman Orchestra. He played a few dates with several other bands and made a few more records. But his great artistry had been consumed.

Beiderbecke died August 6, 1931 in New York at the age of 28.

### Bix Beiderbecke in Ohio

#### October and December, 1923

With the Wolverines at the Stockton Club, Hamilton

#### January 14 to March 31, 1924

With Wolverines at Doyle's Dancing Academy, Cincinnati

#### January 18, 1924

With Wolverines at Miami University prom, Oxford

#### January 25, 1924

With Wolverines at Miami University, Oxford

#### March 25, 1924

With Wolverines for fraternity dance, Hamilton

#### April 13, 1927

With Jean Goldkette Orchestra in Dayton

#### April 15 and 16, 1927

With Goldkette at Greystone Dance Hall, Dayton

#### April 17, 1927

With Goldkette at Valley Dale Ballroom, Columbus

#### April 18, 1927

With Goldkette at charity ball at Neil House, Columbus

#### May 29 to July 1, 1927

With Goldkette at Castle Farms, Cincinnati

#### November 30, 1927

With Paul Whiteman Orchestra at Land O' Dance, Canton

#### December 1, 1927

With Whiteman Orch. at Madison Gardens, Toledo

#### December 4 to 11, 1927

With Whiteman Orch. at Allen Theatre, Cleveland

#### February 21, 1928

With Whiteman Orch. in Youngstown

#### September 25, 1928

With Whiteman Orch. at Land O' Dance, Canton

#### November 30, 1928

With Whiteman Orch. at Music Hall, Cleveland  
(Bix passed out during concert and suffered breakdown)

#### January 20-26, 1929

Whiteman Orch. at Palace Theatre, Cleveland  
(Bix suffered breakdown at Hotel Cleveland)

#### May 26, 1929

With Whiteman Orch. at WHK Auditorium, Cleveland

Source: Philip Evans, *The Leon Bix Beiderbecke Story*

Almost forgotten is the fact that key events in Bix Beiderbecke's early triumphs occurred in Ohio and key events in his eventual tragedy occurred in downtown Cleveland.

### Jimmie Lunceford's start here



Jimmie Lunceford and his Orchestra

Also In 1929, a high school athletic director from Manassas High School in Memphis decided to begin a new career as a bandleader. Jimmie Lunceford brought his group of young musicians, some of whom had been members of his sports teams, to Cleveland.

But the black band had trouble scoring here. White bands were getting most of the gigs. Lunceford's first professional band played some summer engagements at Lakeside near Kelly's Island, but generally bombed in Northern Ohio. They later said they spent months of "near-starvation" in the Cleveland area. They moved to Buffalo and finally scored a big success at Cornell University in May of 1933. That night they figuratively blew the other band off the bandstand. The other band was a Cleveland band led by Guy Lombardo. That prom date led to a booking for Lunceford's band at the Lafayette Theatre in New York City and the Cotton Club in Harlem where young Lena Horne was a chorus girl. Within a year, Lunceford hired a young arranger and trumpeter from Zanesville, Ohio named Sy Oliver. Oliver's arrangements, including "Organ Grinder's Swing," pushed Lunceford to worldwide fame. Earlier, Oliver had arranged for the Zach Whyte territory band that had played frequently in Cleveland.

Veteran Cleveland saxophonist Tommy Allen, who toured with Whyte, said when he was with Whyte's band he played many of Oliver's arrangements that most people later associated with the colorful, well-rehearsed Lunceford band.

For years, the Lunceford Orchestra traveled about 40,000 miles a year, including many return visits to Cleveland.

Trumpeters Gerald Wilson and Snooky Young were playing in a Cleveland band in 1939 when Lunceford



hired them for his band. Wilson and Young first played with Lunceford at the Trianon Ballroom on Euclid Avenue. Wilson toured with Lunceford for four years and wrote such classics as "Hi Spook" and "Yard Dog Mazurka." In 1948, Wilson became a member of the Count Basie Orchestra, joining Clevelander Emmett Berry in the trumpet section. Later, Wilson played with Dizzy Gillespie.

During the 1940s, the Lunceford band included several musicians from Cleveland – Freddie Webster, Harry "Pee Wee" Jackson and Jimmy Williams.

Williams was just beginning to learn how to play the trombone at Cleveland's Central High School in the late 1930s when he heard some music on the radio that would have a lasting effect on his life. It was the Lunceford Orchestra playing "My Blue Heaven."

"What is that?!" he asked himself. "I never heard anything like that before!"

Williams' dream of playing with the Lunceford band became a reality a few years later. When Lunceford hired the young trombonist from Cleveland, he suggested that he listen to and watch the band before going on stage for the first time. But, Williams, who had been listening to all the Lunceford records, was confident he could play the book without hearing the band in person. He was shocked when they played the first number.

"I hit the first note," said Williams, "and I didn't hear another note the rest of the night. They were so damned loud! Those trumpets behind me! Man, they blasted!"

Traveling with the Lunceford Orchestra in the 1940s was a constant series of one-night gigs – playing, riding the bus, and often staying in cheap hotels. He said, "It seemed like we covered ten thousand miles in three days."

Besides playing swinging big band jazz, the Lunceford Orchestra also put on an entertaining show. It was fun to watch the trumpeters waving their derby mutes and the trombonists waving their slides in unison as they played. Williams remembered one little show business stunt of the band. "We'd throw our slide out," he said, "and then, it came back up without pulling it up. That was always pretty cute." He explained that he flicked the slide real fast with his finger when the audience was watching the end of the slide. "It just appeared," he said, "that the slide would come all the way back up all by itself."

While traveling around the country, Lunceford frequently hitched rides for his band on military planes. Williams didn't like to fly and had some frightening memories of what he called "young devil-may-care Army pilots."

"One time," he recalled, "We were landing and the pilot missed the wires by about that much. And when he hit the tarmac, we bounced. The wing almost hit the ground. I thought I was going to be a statistic."

Williams, who had a wife and child at home in

Cleveland, soon tired of the rigors of touring the country.

"I liked it," he said, "but it wasn't what I thought it would be. When you're on the outside looking in, you have a perception that it's better than it actually is." Looking back, Williams said the life of a touring band member "is a vagrant's life."

Williams decided to come home to Cleveland. He pawned a ring for fifteen dollars, bought a train ticket, and took the train to the old Pennsylvania Railroad station at East 55th and Euclid, near the home where his wife and son were living.

He spent years driving a Cleveland Transit System bus and leading his own band here.

Williams may have been smarter than he realized at the time. A few years later (in 1947), Lunceford was killed in a plane crash.

## Red Nichols on Prospect Avenue



Courtesy of Red Nichols

### Red Nichols broadcasting from the Golden Pheasant Restaurant on Prospect Avenue in 1932

In January of 1932, Red Nichols was leading a dance band at the Golden Pheasant Chinese Restaurant on Prospect Avenue, the same restaurant where Artie Shaw had played with the Austin Wylie Orchestra. Every night the Nichols band broadcast nationally on the CBS radio network.

Nichols was one of the biggest names in jazz when he came to Cleveland. He had played with Paul Whiteman's big orchestra and later said the greatest honor he ever received was being replaced in the Whiteman Orchestra by Bix Beiderbecke.

In the three years before coming to Cleveland, Nichols had made dozens of enormously popular jazz records with the group he called "Red Nichols and his Five Pennies." Among the sidemen who had recorded with him were Benny Goodman, Jimmy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Bud Freeman, Adrian Rollini, Gene Krupa and

Jack Teagarden. They all went on to become some of the biggest names of the swing era.

But after his stint in Cleveland, Nichols' music became more and more commercial and he gradually faded from the public consciousness.

## Billy Banks

In 1932, Irving Mills, the businessman who helped build the Lunceford and Duke Ellington Orchestras, heard a singer in Cleveland named Billy Banks. Mills took Banks to New York City and got him an engagement at Connie's Inn in Harlem.

Before long, Banks was recording for Brunswick Records. Mills made Banks the front man of a group called the Rhythmakers. The group included such future jazz greats as trumpeter Henry "Red" Allen, reedman Pee Wee Russell, pianist Fats Waller, banjoist Eddie Condon, bassist Pops Foster, and drummer Zutty Singleton. With so much young jazz talent, the 1932 records by Billy Banks' Rhythmakers, one of the first racially-mixed recording groups, were billed as "the hottest jazz ever recorded."

They recorded "The Scat Song," "Oh! You Sweet Thing," "I Would Do Most Anything For You," "Mean Old Bed Bug Blues," "Yellow Dog Blues," "Yes, Suh!" and other songs. The Clevelander, who sang high-pitched, intense vocals, was 24 years old at the time.

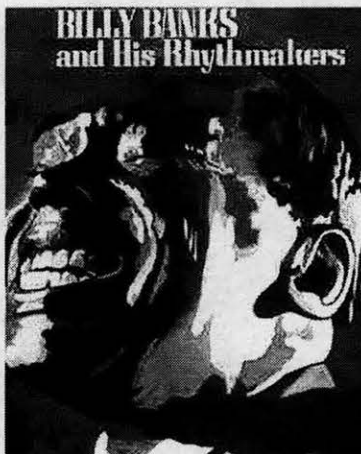
Banks was born in Alton, Illinois, and moved to Cleveland where his family operated a shoe store.

Not long after the recordings, Banks returned to Cleveland. In 1934, he joined the big band of Cleveland Noble Sissle and toured the world and made several records with Sissle's Orchestra including "Characteristic Blues."

From 1938 to 1950, Banks was a featured cabaret performer at Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe nightclub. According to John Chilton's *Who's Who of Jazz*, Banks did 7,151 consecutive performances at the club. By 1952, he was working in a variety show, touring Europe, including Holland, France and Great Britain, where he recorded with

Freddy Randall's band. After performing in Asia and Australia, Banks settled in Japan.

Banks died in Tokyo in October 1967 at the age of 59.



A Billy Banks record cover

## 4. Art Tatum at Val's in the Alley

It was Art Tatum's home away from home. He loved the old upright piano there. He developed much of his piano genius there and he returned time after time, even after he became world famous as the unchallenged champion of the jazz piano.

It was called Val's in the Alley. It was an after-hours joint operated by a man named Milo Valentine and was located at the rear of several stores on the north side of Cedar Avenue near East 86th Street in Cleveland. Veteran Cleveland saxophonist Andy Anderson said, "It was a small spot. I guess it held about 50 or 60 people, had small aisles, a little bar for beer, a piano, and Art."

Duke Ellington, in his autobiography *Music is My Mistress*, recalled going to Val's, "off an alley that was off another alley" to hear Tatum play. Ellington said, "Val's had a piano that was so old and beat-up that Tatum had to learn to play everything up toward the treble end. But it had a most compelling sound and the action was obviously just right because Tatum loved that piano."

One time, while listening to Tatum play, Ellington said he was too overwhelmed to express his feelings.

Born in Toledo October 13, 1909, Tatum had developed a local reputation as an outstanding pianist while he was still a teenager. At the age of 18, he played on a radio program on Toledo's WSPD. He came to Cleveland in 1928 at the age of 19 and soon began playing at the Prohibition Era after-hours joint.

Paul Whiteman, the misnamed "King of Jazz," first heard Tatum at Val's in the Alley in 1929 and was so impressed that he persuaded Tatum to go to New York, but, according to Rex Stewart (in the October 20, 1966 edition of *DownBeat* magazine), Tatum quickly became homesick and returned to Val's in the Alley in Cleveland.

### Count Basie's embarrassment

"I never will forget what happened to me," wrote Count Basie in his autobiography, *Good Morning Blues*.

Basie said it happened when he was touring with the Benny Moten band in the early 1930s. After playing a date in Cleveland, the band members stopped at Val's



Art Tatum

for a drink.

"They had a good piano in there," wrote Basie. "That's the part I will never forget because I made the mistake of sitting down at that piano. That's when I got my personal introduction to a keyboard monster by the name of Art Tatum."

Basie said he didn't know why he sat down at that piano. "The band had just stopped in to get a little taste and a little snack. The piano was there, just sitting there, not bothering anybody. I don't know what made me do it. I went over there and started bothering that piano. I just started fooling around with it, and then I started playing. What did I do that for? That was just asking for trouble!"

That's exactly what he got.

Somebody went out and found Tatum. Basie said, "They brought him in there, and I can still see him and that way he had of walking on his toes with his head kind of tilted."

Tatum sat down at the piano, like a gladiator protecting his turf, and musically vanquished the intruder. When Tatum started playing, Basie said he felt like a rank amateur. He suddenly realized this little bar in Cleveland was Tatum's hangout, *his* place, *his* personal kingdom – not to be violated by some young count.

Basie said, "He was just off somewhere waiting for somebody to come in there and start messing with that piano, someone dumb enough to do something like that, somebody like Basie, in there showing off, because there were a couple of good-looking girls in the place."

Basie said he felt like a boxer who looked up and suddenly saw heavyweight champion Joe Louis coming through the ropes at him. "I didn't have any idea I was on Tatum's stomping ground," wrote Basie. To rub a little more salt into Basie's already wounded ego, one of the girls at the bar said later, "I could have told you."

There were two sequels to Basie's embarrassing welcome to Cleveland.

In 1943 he married a girl from Cleveland, Katy Morgan. They remained devoted for 40 years until her death, and their only child, Diane, was born in Cleveland.

In the late 1940s, when Basie had become one of the most respected bandleaders and piano players in jazz, he was playing with his band in Los Angeles. Other



musicians, including Buddy Rich and Tommy Dorsey, were sitting in. Basie recalled, "The joint was really jumping." As he was playing, Basie felt someone tap him on the shoulder and say, "Hey, Base, what key you playin' in?" It was Tatum. Basie said, "Don't give a damn what key we're playing in! You ain't gonna play!" Basie ran Tatum off his stage, thinking to himself, "I wasn't about to let that cat take over and disgrace me. He knew it. All he could do was laugh." In a friendly way, Basie finally got even for that night years earlier when he was embarrassed by Tatum at Val's in the Alley in Cleveland.

## Goes to New York City

At the urging of the musicians who had heard him play in Cleveland, Tatum finally got up the nerve to return to New York in 1931. Popular singer Adelaide Hall heard him and hired him as her accompanist. The nearly blind pianist quickly memorized her complicated scores. After his first appearance with Hall, his amazing skill quickly became known to the best piano players in New York. The reigning kings, Fats Waller, Willie "The Lion" Smith and James P. Johnson, invited him to a jam session the following night. By all accounts, Tatum outclassed all of them. Waller was quoted as saying, "That Tatum, he was just too good! He had too much technique. When that man turns on the powerhouse, don't no one play him down. He sounds like a brass band!"

When Tatum began playing at the Onyx Club on New York City's 52nd Street, Waller greeted his arrival at the club by announcing, "Ladies and gentlemen, God has just come into the house!"

Tatum's playing was characterized by an incessantly creative left hand, playing four different chords to the bar, subtle chords, unprecedented harmonic subtlety, and sixteenth-note runs at tempos that most pianists could not maintain with just eighth notes.

Respected jazz critic Leonard Feather later said Tatum's "fantastic technique and original harmonic variations placed him incomparably



Count Basie and Art Tatum  
in later years sharing a piano

far ahead of earlier artists." Feather also said Tatum was "the greatest soloist in jazz history, regardless of instrument."

Tatum made his first records in New York March 21, 1933. There were four piano solos: "Tea For Two," "St. Louis Blues," Ellington's "Sophisticated Lady" and "Tiger Rag."

## Tatum returns to Val's

In early 1935, Tatum returned to Cleveland and played at a variety of places here. "As famous as he became," wrote Ellington, "he would always return to Val's in the Alley to play that piano. When he was playing the RKO Palace in Cleveland, he would rush out and make a dash for Val's after doing four or five shows a day. It was the same when he worked one of the plush hotels in Cleveland. He would end up sitting in Val's and playing

for kicks all night." When he was doing network radio broadcasts from Cleveland's WTAM, the station quickly learned that it was wise to send somebody out to Val's to be sure the almost-blind Tatum got to the studio in time.

Veteran Cleveland pianist Chick Chaiken recalled all the Cleveland jazz musicians flocked to the Cedar Avenue after-hours joint to hear Tatum and to buy him beers as he played the old upright through the night.

Rex Stewart wrote, "Tatum's leisure hours began when almost everyone else was asleep, at 4 a.m. or so. He liked to sit and talk, drink and play after he finished work." Carmen McRae, in the book *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya*, claimed Tatum played better after hours. James Lincoln Collier, in his book *The Making of Jazz*, wrote that "Tatum was at his best at the early-morning sessions."

## Red Callender sits in

Bassist Red Callender, who later played with just about everybody from Bunk Johnson to Charlie Parker and even Percy Faith, came to Cleveland in 1933 when he was 17 years old. In his autobiography, *Unfinished Dream*, Callender recalled it was trumpeter Roy Eldridge who first took him to hear Tatum at Val's. Callender said every night there was a raft of excellent



piano players coming by, trying to cut Tatum. "Apparently they had no idea of his world-wide stature. They thought he was just a hometown piano player."

Callender said he would take a tuba and sit in with Tatum. "I couldn't believe my ears," he said, "especially on 'Tiger Rag.' His hands were a blur. I couldn't believe what I was hearing and seeing!"

Callender recalled one night when the very popular Teddy Wilson was in town with the Benny Goodman Orchestra to play at the Palace Theatre. According to Callender, Wilson told Coleman Hawkins, "I think I'll go over and wipe out Tatum."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," warned Hawkins. "I think you better go listen first."

## Al Lerner remembers Tatum



Art Tatum

Al Lerner, a Clevelander who later played piano with the Harry James Orchestra, was there that night and said, "The place was jammed but Teddy didn't want to play." He was apparently heeding Hawkins' advice. But, said Lerner, "Some people pushed Wilson over to the piano and he played beautifully. But, when Art played, Teddy just got up and walked out. He could not handle it! *He could not handle it!*"

A few nights later, young Lerner and Tatum were alone at the piano when Wilson walked in and asked meekly, "Do you mind if I sit here?" Lerner said, "I let him sit at the end of the piano bench where I was. He just sat there and listened to Tatum. He never moved, and didn't play at all."

Wilson later said Tatum was "not only the greatest jazz pianist; there have been very few concert artists who had his ability."

Lerner was 16 years old in 1935 when he first met Tatum. The teenager was playing with a group at a club called Shadowland at East 65th and Carnegie. One

night, after their gig, bass player Red Ryan took Lerner to Val's. Lerner, who at the time had never heard of Tatum, later remembered, "I thought I was a pretty much of a hot shot piano player and I went with Red over to Cedar Avenue."

"When we walked in," said Lerner, "there was hardly anybody in the place. We sat at a table and ordered a beer."

They spotted the upright piano in the corner. Ryan suggested, "Come on, Al, play something." Lerner said, "I sat down and played 'Rosetta' and a couple of other things and went back to the table thinking I was pretty damned good."

Then, he said, "This big hulking guy, who was standing at the bar drinking a beer, walked over to the piano and sat down. As soon as his hands hit the keys, I knew I had been had! This guy was like something I had never heard before! He played 'Tea For Two' as I had never heard it played before or since."

Lerner said he started to cry and ran out of Val's, down the alley to Cedar Avenue. Ryan chased after him and said, "Al, come back! Art wants to meet you." Lerner said he went back inside sheepishly and shook hands "with this pianistic god." According to Lerner, Tatum said, "I like your style, kid. Come in here as often as you can and sit in."

Years later, Lerner recalled, "My heart leaped into my mouth. The shame I had felt just moments before was replaced by awe and a humility for greatness that I have never forgotten."

After that, Lerner said he returned almost every night to hear Tatum play that old upright. The teenager and Tatum became good friends. They often had breakfast together and talked about playing.

"I'd say, 'Art, what fingering do you use?' He said, 'Any finger.' I asked him, 'What if these two fingers got cut off or something, what would you do?'" Lerner said Tatum then demonstrated by using any two fingers on his hand and playing thirds "dramatically, just as fast." According to Lerner, Tatum "had absolute finger independence. Each finger was independent. He could do anything. And, of course, no pianist had a left hand like his."

Rex Stewart remembered one possible explanation for Tatum's dexterity: "He constantly manipulated a filbert nut through his fingers, so quickly that if you tried to watch him, your vision blurred. He worked with one nut until it became sleek and shiny."

Lerner also remembered meeting Tatum years later in New York. "He could see very little at that time. I tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'Hello, Art.' He grabbed my hand and said, 'Hello, Al.' *He knew my hands!*"

Lerner also said Tatum "was a very bright man, very



well versed in just about everything including politics and sports. He could rattle off things. And he studied classical music for 13 years before playing jazz. He was a very, very bright man."

"One night," remembered Lerner, "I saw a woman come in with a piece of sheet music for Tatum to read. He wasn't totally blind; he saw a little bit. She handed him this sheet music and he held it up to his face, right up to his nose, and scanned it up and down. He put the music aside and asked, 'In what key?'"

Tatum was also much admired by classical pianists including Leopold Godowski and Sergei Rachmaninoff. According to Lerner, one of Tatum's biggest fans was world-famous classical pianist Vladimir Horowitz. One time, Horowitz invited Tatum to his apartment in New York City and told the jazz pianist, "I'm working on an arrangement of 'Tea For Two.'" Art sat down at Horowitz' piano and completely dazzled Horowitz with an impromptu jazz version of "Tea For Two." "How long have you played that arrangement," asked Horowitz. Tatum replied, "Right now!"

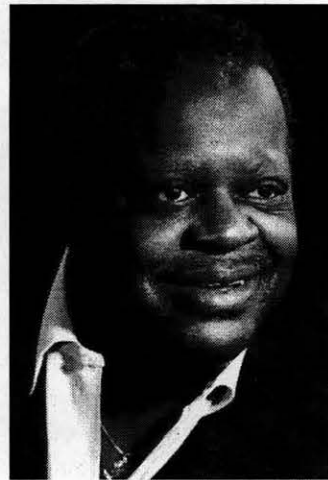
Lerner also offered an insight to Tatum's personality. "He had a thing about other pianists who had made it," recalled Lerner, "and he was sometimes a little bitter. He would show his bitterness by just outclassing them completely."

After playing with the Harry James, Charlie Barnet and Tommy Dorsey Orchestras and accompanying such singers as Dick Haymes and Frankie Laine, Lerner said, "Every pianist of any consequence I have ever come into contact with says he tried to pattern himself after Tatum. Nobody else could ever play like that! A person who isn't a pianist would not know how impossible it is to do what he did. It was impossible!"

Other young Cleveland musicians were also attracted to Val's. Trumpeter Bob Peck remembered going to Val's with his friends to hear Tatum. Peck, who later played with the Glenn Miller, Billy Butterfield, Woody Herman and Claude Thornhill Orchestras, recalled, "It was quite a place, with sawdust on the floor and Tatum at the piano and various kinds of loose women around doing certain things to which I was exposed to early I guess." With a smile, Peck said, "I once had the unmitigated gall to sit in with Tatum. When I look back on it, I think, 'Oh, gosh, was I ever cheeky!'" Like almost everyone else who heard Tatum at Val's in the Alley, Peck said he was "fractured" by Tatum's piano playing.

Bobby Few, who grew up a few blocks from Val's and later became a leading pianist in Europe, remembered he was too young to get in, but sat on the steps outside listening. "I was amazed," said Few, "and hearing Art Tatum at Val's really influenced me to continue in the path of jazz."

## Oscar Peterson's mistake



Oscar Peterson

Canadian pianist Oscar Peterson, who for years was one of the most respected jazz pianists in the world, was playing a concert at Cleveland's Severance Hall in June of 1987. With a tone of reverence in his voice, Peterson admitted to the audience that one time early in his career he had made a "bad mistake in Cleveland." Peterson told the audience, "I followed Art Tatum."

Peterson remembered, "I met Tatum in the late 1930s in Cleveland. We were booked into a theatre in Cleveland and Art was working at a nightclub. A mutual friend introduced us."

Peterson said in Whitney Balliet's 1986 book *American Musicians*, "We had a beer or two and I said, 'Hey, man, I'd like to hear you play!' Tatum said, 'You play first.'" Peterson said he was young and eager, so he did. "When I finished, Tatum told me, 'Hey, I like your style very much.'" Tatum asked him what he wanted to hear. Peterson said, "Something like 'Tea For Two.'"

"Art was blind in his left eye and could see only a little with his right and had these two guys escort him to the piano. The piano was an upright and, as he sat down, he started playing with his left hand while he put his beer down. Then," said Peterson, "he dropped his right hand down on the keyboard." Peterson said, "I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I'm about six foot four and I was leaning against the piano and my legs just went to water. By the time he got through three more numbers, I couldn't take it anymore. I went back to my hotel and I was in tears." Peterson said with reverence, "I had never heard anything like that in my life! I had trouble trying to play again."

When Peterson heard that Tatum was dying in 1956, he flew to Los Angeles to be with him at the end.

## Earle Warren at Val's

The longtime saxophonist with the Count Basie Orchestra, Earle Warren, also had some vivid memories of Tatum at the Cleveland after-hours joint. Warren told Cleveland area jazz fan Jim Gibson, "Man, you should've gotten to Val's! It was the best!"

Warren recalled one late night session there with Tatum. He said quite a few guys were taking long solos. When he finished his, Warren decided to go in the back and take a nap. When he woke up and came back a



couple of hours later, he said the guys were still playing – the same tune – with Tatum backing them up at full steam.

### Mary Lou Williams and Tatum at Val's

Jazz pianist Mary Lou Williams, also quoted in Balliet's book, recalled, "Whenever we were in Cleveland, I stayed close to Art Tatum, who worked there when he wasn't in New York. When we had a day or two off, we played pinball machines in the afternoons and at night we went to Val's, a little after-hours place, where we sometimes stayed until 11 in the morning." She said, "Tatum played and they gave him \$50."

Williams said, "Tatum did everything the other pianists tried to do and couldn't." She added proudly, "He taught me how to hit my notes, how to control them without using pedals, and he showed me how to keep my fingers flat on the keys to get that clean tone. Of course, he didn't show me anything; he just said, 'Mary, you listen.' But once I showed him something. Buck Washington of Buck and Bubbles had given me a little run in Pittsburgh which I used one night at Val's. Tatum said, 'What's that run, Mary? Where'd you get that? Play it for me again please!' I did. He developed that run. It covered just about the whole keyboard. He used it until the end of his life."

A few years later, in 1942, Williams formed a group with fellow Pittsburgh native Art Blakey. It was the drummer's first group as a leader after he left the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra. The first gig for the Williams-Blakey group was at Benny Mason's Farm, an African-American suburban retreat east of Cleveland. She later became a close friend of Cleveland pianist and composer Tadd Dameron.

### Joe Howard's memories of Tatum

Longtime Cleveland pianist Joe Howard was too young to hear Tatum play at Val's in the Alley, but Howard was fascinated with Tatum's playing when he was a teenager in the early 1940s. He later became a leading expert on Tatum's technique.

After he graduated from John Adams High School in 1946, Howard went in the Army and was assigned to Fort Lee, New Jersey, close to New York City where his piano idol was astounding jazz musicians at clubs along Manhattan's



Courtesy of Joe Howard  
**Joe Howard**



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A New York newspaper ad for Tatum  
at the Club Downbeat

fabled 52nd Street. "He was playing in the Club Downbeat on 52nd Street," recalled Howard. "Whenever I would get a night off, I would shoot down there and pay the admission charge and then, buy a beer like at nine o'clock in the evening and sip on the beer all night long just to hear him play."

"One night," said Howard, "I got up enough nerve to go get his autograph. I knew he was almost totally blind but I went up and introduced myself. I said, 'May I have your autograph please, Mr. Tatum. I'm 19 years old.' And he said, 'Oh, yeah, baby!' He pulled a stamp out of his pocket and an ink pad out of another pocket. And he went bam!! He had a stamp that said, 'Art Tatum.'"

Rather than being insulted, Howard said, "I thought it was kind of neat and funny. I thought it showed maybe a humorous side of his genius."

Years later, bassist Slam Stewart, who was playing with Tatum in New York, told Howard another story reflecting Tatum's unusual personality. "He said they were sitting in a restaurant before a gig. They went to this restaurant all the time to eat before the job. There was a bad piano player there. Slam recalled, 'I said to Art, "Why do we keep coming here and having dinner and listening to this bad piano player?"' And he said, 'Tatum got upset with me and said, "Don't ever say that. He's telling you the story of his life."'"

There was another story, told by the longtime music librarian at the NBC radio station in Cleveland. According to Howard, Freddy Wilson told him that Tatum, when he was young, auditioned for a job with the studio band at the station. But the station people listening couldn't understand what he was doing. "They

were looking for someone at that time but they didn't care for the way he played. A few years later, the world-famous Tatum was playing piano solos for the NBC Radio Network from the WTAM studios.

In 1951, after Howard had gotten out of the Army, earned his bachelor of arts degree from Western Reserve University, and married Joan Baker, he and his then pregnant wife were sitting at the front table at Lindsay's Sky Bar at East 105th and Euclid in Cleveland where Tatum was playing. Howard said, Tatum "came in and started playing. He was going over the keys and ended a long run on the very top note of the piano. But, when he hit that note, there was a thud. The piano tuner had apparently removed the string. So what he did was make a whole symphony, if you will, utilizing that thud sound. It was fascinating to see how he just evolved it like that."

In the 1950s and '60s, Howard became one of Cleveland's most prolific and popular pianists — performing with a variety of jazz groups, on WTAM radio and Channel 5 television (WEWS-TV) and even soloing with the Cleveland Orchestra. In the late 1960s, Howard went back to school, got his masters degree from Kent State University, and became a professor of music at Cuyahoga Community College. In the 1970s, he got a doctorate from Case Western Reserve University. His dissertation topic was *The Improvisational Techniques of Art Tatum*. Howard said, "It was kind of an analysis of his style and his technique." Howard analyzed, in an academic manner, the creative genius of the music that flowed extemporaneously from Tatum's mind. "I listened to about 70-some percent of all of his recordings and did a chart on them. I evolved a way of addressing the various techniques. In the first part of the dissertation, I talked about his vocabulary, if you will, and kind of classified it. It was a labor of love."

Looking back, Howard agreed that you had to be a very good pianist to fully appreciate everything Tatum did at the piano. "Most pianists feel that he had this tremendous technical facility, the ability to move all over the keys, and there's a great deal of truth in that. But I found that his greatest contribution was his harmonic conception, substitute chords and extensions, ninths, thirteenth, eleventh, all cycles. And he was doing this in the '30s which, in a way, heralded what happened in the following period that we call the bebop period. They were picking up on all these harmonic directions and innovations. The difference is that Tatum played with the stride style; he didn't play with the bebop conception of rhythm."

In February of 1992, Howard lectured during a celebration in Tatum's birth place, Toledo. Others taking part in the tribute included jazz critic Leonard Feather, broadcaster Hazen Schumacher, and jazz pianists Billy Taylor and Ramsey Lewis.

## A Pilgrimage to the site of Val's



Joe Mosbrook

**The alley, from Cedar Avenue, leading to Vienna Court where Val's was located. Still visible is the house where barbecue restaurant operator "Bama" and his family lived.**

We walked down Cedar Avenue with Andy Anderson who grew up with Tatum in Toledo and played in jam sessions with him at Val's. The house had been torn down years before, but the site, just a block south of the Cleveland Play House, in the shadow of the Cleveland Clinic, still triggered strong memories for Anderson.

At the corner of East 86th and Cedar, we passed a one-story brick building that housed a business called the Seven Seals Variety and Culture Shop, which ironically sold reggae records, and turned up a driveway which Anderson explained was now wider than the alley that once led to Val's. On our right, Andy said there was a popular "greasy spoon" barbecue place. "That barbecue smelled so good," said Anderson, "that people from the Heights, Shaker and Lakewood could smell it and came around to buy ribs."

As we walked up the alley, we spotted a couple of houses that remained in the alley. Andy said there had been several other homes back here, including Val's, which he operated as a bootlegging joint. "We called it 'Val's in the Alley,'" said Anderson, "because it was back off the street where the police wouldn't see it."

"When musicians got off work at two or three in the morning," he said, "they would stop off and get a drink. Every place downtown was closed, but Val's was open all night."

In the alley Anderson remembered the details of the one-time after-hours joint. "Val's door was right here," he said pointing. "There were three or four steps that went up and there was a big fat fella called 'Fats' sitting over there. He was the look-out man. And if you wanted some whiskey (Val sold only beer inside), Fats would take the middle brick (out of the steps) and sell you some whiskey."

Pointing to his right, Andy said, "Val's bar was on



this side, from this wall all the way over. It was a makeshift bar made out of two-by-fours. He poured the beer from a keg. As he poured it, some would spill over onto a plate. He would drink that. That was his."

Anderson remembered another employee of Val's named "Scraunch." He served the beer and sometimes sang. Andy remembered one of the songs: "I can cross the ocean wide . . . I can cross the ocean wide," and when he went into his little dance, everybody would fall out."

To the left of the bar, Andy pointed to the spot where Tatum's piano sat. "It was an upright, one of those old-timers," said Anderson, "but he liked the sound of it. He liked the tone."

As we stood there visualizing Tatum playing, Andy could remember playing with Tatum. With almost a tear in his eye, Anderson said, "He was beautiful, unbelievable, so fast, just a natural."

According to Anderson, Tatum never missed a note on that piano – even when someone else was playing it. "One time, he was sitting at the bar, playing cards and said, 'That man (who was playing the piano) should use his third finger.' After the man made a little run on the piano, Art looked up from his cards and announced, 'He *can't* use his third finger.'"

As we walked out the alley to Cedar Avenue, Andy remembered there was a bicycle shop nearby. He said, "When we'd leave here at about ten o'clock in the morning on a Sunday (after playing all night), we'd rent bicycles and ride them down Cedar Avenue."

It must have been startling for passersby to see two grown men – one almost blind – riding bicycles down the street on a Sunday morning. But it was certainly not as startling as the surprise that many of the world's greatest musicians got when they came to this little after-hours bootleg joint in an alley off Cleveland's Cedar Avenue and first heard Tatum playing the piano.

## A young neighbor remembers Val's

John Mosely was one year old in 1934 when his family moved into the apartment building at 8607½ Cedar Avenue, virtually next door to Val's in the Alley. He lived in the area until the early 1950s and remembered many details of his neighborhood.

Mosely recalled waking up in the morning and hearing the piano music from the after-hours joint that was one of at least six houses in the alley called Vienna Court.

"To enter Vienna Court," he said, "you had to come in off of Cedar, on the little driveway. You went not too far into Vienna Court and then, you hung a left and the second house, entering Vienna Court, was where Val's was."

He said it was a small home where Milo Valentine sold beer after-hours and Tatum played the piano. As a young boy in the neighborhood, Mosely remembered



Courtesy of John Mosely

**Milo Valentine entering his Dawn Social Club  
in the early 1950s**

going into Val's from time to time. He said he remembered a pot-bellied, coal-fed stove. "The living room and dining room were one long room," said Mosely. "I remember the two bedrooms and the kitchen were all to one side. The bar in the large room was against the wall on the right side."

He remembered the piano that Tatum played. "It was an old upright, not like the grand pianos you see in the movies."

As a boy playing in the neighborhood, Mosely heard Tatum's piano frequently. "We used to play baseball up on the hill," said Mosely, "and you could hear the music all over. You could hear the music out on Carnegie Avenue (a block away)."

Mosely also remembered seeing people driving their cars up that alley and then, as Ellington said in his autobiography, turn into another alley, Vienna Court, to get to the after-hours joint.

"Mr. Valentine," said Mosely, "lived in a rooming house that was on Cedar right next to Bryant's Gas Station. And he had a fascination for English Bulldogs. He had one that lived for a long time. The dog's name was 'Pal.' He'd just waddle along and slobber all over everything. He was a typical English Bulldog, gentle. As a kid, you'd think, looking at that pug face, that he was mean. So you never bothered him. And Mr. Val had a huge solitaire diamond ring that he wore on his pinky



finger. And in later life, he got around with a cane."

In the early 1940s, Mosely said Valentine closed Val's in the Alley and opened a legitimate club called the Dawn Social Club out front on Cedar Avenue. "It was a big white-fronted building with red lettering – 'Val's Dawn Social Club.' It had a long bar that went the length of the building."

While he was running the Dawn Social Club, Mosely remembered Valentine bought himself a new car. "He never drove. He couldn't drive. But he bought a blue 1950 Chrysler. I remember the big grill. And he had one of the men in the neighborhood, a fellow from down the street named Hershey, serve as his chauffeur. He drove him everywhere that he needed to go. But Val never did learn how to drive."

As far as Mosely ever knew, Val never had any family in the area. After living in a rooming house down the street, he later moved into a suite of the apartment building where Mosely and his family lived and where Val's new club was located.

"When he got cancer during his final days, he had no family to come and see him. When he died, the barmaids and the people in the neighborhood made arrangements for him."

Mosely also recalled other landmarks nearby. A man nicknamed "Bama" owned the barbecue restaurant in a brick building on the north side of Cedar Avenue at East 86th. "And he got to be pretty good at it and moved into the apartment building next door where we lived." According to Mosely, 'Bama, who had moved to Cleveland from Alabama, and his family lived in a house that still stands in the alley. "Bama's mother," said Mosely, "was born a slave."

When 'Bama moved his barbecue, Mosely said men named Sims and Abbey opened the East End News in the brown brick building. "It was a very successful business," said Mosely, "selling ice cream." Next door, in the same building, "Mrs. Coleman had her religious music store."

On the street level in the front of the apartment building next door (which was razed in the early 1960s)

was a string of businesses: Bob Ellis' Service Club, Norris' Barbershop, Harry's Pawn Shop and Christopher's Grocery Store. In the next building, on the other side of the alley leading to Val's in the Alley, were a poolroom, the Royal Tavern and Juanita's Restaurant.

Val's house and most of the other houses in Vienna Court were torn down in the mid-1950s.

Tatum died at the age of 47 November 5, 1956 in Los Angeles. But the memories of his amazing playing continued for decades.

Because of those memories, Val's in the Alley – Art Tatum's home away from home – became Cleveland's most legendary jazz spot.

### Available Art Tatum Recordings

- 1932-34 - *Art Tatum* - First radio broadcasts (Classics )
- 1933-49 - *Piano Starts Here* - First recording sessions (Columbia)
- 1934-45 - *Pure Genius* - Cleveland broadcast recordings (Atlantis 3)
- 1934-37 - *Masterpieces* - double LP, solos & groups (MCA)
- 1934-39 - *Classic Piano Solos* - early Decca records (GRP)
- 1937-44 - *Art Tatum Masterpieces* (MCA)
- 1938-39 - *Standards* - mostly radio recordings (Black Lion)
- 1940 - *Art Tatum Solos* - Decca recordings (MCA)
- 1944 - *The Remarkable Art of Tatum* - trio (Audiophile)
- 1944-46 - *The V-Discs* - with Oscar Pettiford and Sid Catlett (Black Lion)
- 1948 - *In Private* - Recorded at private party (Fresh Sound)
- 1950 - *Art Tatum at His Piano, Vol. 1* (GNP)
- 1950 - *Art Tatum at His Piano, Vol. 2* - a Los Angeles concert (GPN)
- 1952 - *Complete Capitol Recordings, Vol. 1* (Capitol)
- 1952 - *Complete Capitol Recordings, Vol. 2* (Capitol)
- 1953-55 - *Complete Pablo Solo Masterpieces* (Pablo)
- 1953-55 - *Tatum Solo Masterpieces, Vols. 1-8* CD reissues of 119 songs (Pablo)
- 1954-56 - *Complete Pablo Group Masterpieces, Vols. 1-8* (Pablo)
- 1955 - *20th Century Genius* - recorded at private party (Verve)
- 1956 - *The Art Tatum Trio* - with Slam Stewart and Tiny Grimes (Verve)

## 5. Duke Ellington in Cleveland



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives

**Duke Ellington and his orchestra at Cleveland's Palace Theatre in 1937.**

**Front row (L-R): Freddie Guy, Barney Bigard, Johnny Hodges, Otto Hardwick and Harry Carney.**

**Second row: Rex Stewart, Ray Nance, Arthur Whetsol, Joe Nanton, Juan Tizol, Lawrence Brown.**

**Back row: Billy Taylor, Sonny Greer and Hayes Alvis. (Note two bassists)**

Edward Kennedy Ellington was probably the most creative force in jazz history. For more than 40 years, he made monumental contributions as a composer, arranger, pianist and bandleader in a variety of musical forms. Christoph von Dohnanyi, the world famous classical conductor and the music director of the Cleveland Orchestra, told me in 1985 that he believed Ellington was "one of the really great people in music."

Ellington biographer John Edward Hasse said it was

Cleveland Noble Sissle, the son of the pastor of Cleveland's Cory Methodist Church, who opened the door for Ellington and other black entertainers by producing an all-black Broadway review, *Shuffle Along*, in 1921.

When Ellington, a native of Washington, D.C., went to New York, he met violinist and orchestra leader Will Marion Cook. Ellington said Cook was one of his strongest musical influences. He called him "Dad Cook" and said the Oberlin graduate gave him lectures in music. But, according to Ellington, the most important thing Cook told him was, "Don't try to be anybody else but yourself," advice that Ellington followed throughout his career.

Ellington had many local connections. When he was leading his band at Harlem's Cotton Club in 1928, he hired a four-foot ten-inch left-handed trumpet player from Ohio's Wilberforce University. Freddy Jenkins was the first of a number of Ohioans who would perform with Ellington. From 1931 until his death in 1974, Ellington made more than 40 appearances in Northeast Ohio, frequently for extended engagements.



**Freddy Jenkins playing with the Ellington band**

## Ellington's opening at the Palace

After attracting wide attention for four years at the Cotton Club, making his first hit recording, "Mood Indigo," in October of 1930, and recording the music for a movie, *Check and Double Check*, Ellington set out in 1931 with his orchestra on his first national tour. Beginning February 13, 1931, they played for a month in Chicago and moved on to Detroit, Omaha, Minneapolis, Des Moines, Denver, Kansas City, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Toronto, Philadelphia, Toledo, and, during the week of July 4, at the RKO Palace Theatre at East 17th and Euclid in downtown Cleveland.

Ellington and his orchestra played half-a-dozen performances a day at the 3,100-seat theatre. They played between showings of a movie called *Ex-Bad Boy* and newsreel film of the heavily-promoted July 3 Max Schmeling-Young Stribling boxing match, the first event at the brand new Cleveland Municipal Stadium.

In the depths of the Depression, when 100,000 Clevelanders were unemployed, tickets for the Ellington performances were 35¢ for evening performances and 25¢ for matinees.

The 1931 orchestra consisted of trumpeters Artie Whetsol, Freddie Jenkins and Cootie Williams; trombonists Joe "Sam" Nanton and Juan Tizol; saxophonists Harry Carney, Barney Bigard and Johnny Hodges; guitarist Freddie Guy; drummer Sonny Greer; and Ellington on piano.

After the Cleveland opening, a *Plain Dealer* reviewer wrote, "Duke Ellington Burns 'Em Up!" Ward Marsh said Ellington's tunes "rush at you with a kind of frenzied madness, spiced with tricky rhythms and garnished with strange, half-eerie tonal backgrounds. They ripple and swell through the house with their flashing, artful way of almost completely submerging the melody to give you effects and colors no other orchestra seems to have been able to do."

Archie Bell, writing in the *Cleveland News* two days after the opening, said, "Duke Ellington and his Cotton Club Orchestra are star-lined and they bring along a remarkable newcomer, (singer) Ivie Anderson." Bell said she "has a great individual style of shouting her songs that carries them across the footlights with the skill of a song recitalist who aims to tell a complete story and establish a distinct mood by each selection." Bell wrote that Ellington's new vocalist "takes her place with Ethel Waters and Adelaide Hall."

Anderson later remembered, "When I first joined his band, I was just an ordinary singer of popular songs. Duke suggested I find a 'character' and maintain it."

Reviewing the instrumentalists, Bell said trombonist Nanton "tells a tearful story in something so like a human voice that it is almost uncanny as well as amusing." Praising the band's playing of "Black and Tan Fantasy,"

the reviewer said, "I'll wager the guess that there's more originality and worthy experimentation in it than in half of the 'new music' that is offered in a season by the Cleveland Orchestra."

Later in the week, there were reports of "phenomenal business at the RKO Palace this week." A July 9 story in the *Cleveland News* said, "The crowds not only follow this dispensation of jazz and syncopation, they demand more and more of it." Bell said, "Duke has the best band of its kind to be heard anywhere."

In a newspaper interview, Ellington said, "When I'm making my arrangements or composing something new, I try to think of something that will make my hearers feel like dancing. The desire to step around a little means that people are not bothered very much about the cares of the world, at least for the moment."

## Other performances in the 1930s

Seven months after that first engagement in Cleveland, Ellington returned to Chicago and made his first recording of "It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing." The record, featuring singer Anderson, and solos by Nanton and Hodges, became a sensation in 1932, five years before Benny Goodman was hailed as "The King of Swing." In a later Cleveland interview, Ellington said his band had been exploiting for years a style characterized by "swing," which he said was a Harlem word for rhythm.

Bolstered by his great success in 1931, Ellington returned to the Palace Theatre in Cleveland for another week beginning June 11, 1932. Trombonist Lawrence Brown and saxophonist Otto "Toby" Hardwick joined the musicians who had been in Cleveland the previous year. Ellington was playing a number of engagements around the country at theatres like the Palace. But, when he was interviewed by the *Cleveland Press*, Ellington said, "Every once in a while, I drop out of theatres for a week or a few weeks and play dance engagements. That wakes up the boys and they get back into form. It works like magic."

The Ellington band returned to Cleveland two months later to play a dance engagement August 4, 1932 at the Crystal Slipper Ballroom at 9802 Euclid Avenue. The Crystal Slipper, which had opened in 1924, could accommodate 4,000 dancers. Two years after the Ellington Orchestra first played there, the name was changed to the Trianon Ballroom after a famous dance hall in Chicago.

The Ellington band made its third 1932 appearance in Northeast Ohio when it played for a December 27, 1932 dance at the Land O'Dance Ballroom in Canton. It was a new ballroom at 12th and Market and featured many national and local orchestras. The owner, W.H. Perry, charged 75¢ for admission.



Ellington made his first tour of Europe in 1933. It was followed by tours of New England and the South.

He returned to Cleveland with his orchestra for another week at the Palace Theatre beginning March 22, 1935.

When he came to Cleveland in the 1930s, Ellington and the members of his band frequently went out after their stage shows or dances to Cleveland after-hours clubs to hear local jazz. Duke first heard pianist Art Tatum at Val's in the Alley near East 86th and Cedar. Veteran Cleveland saxophonist Willie Smith recalled that "Duke and the guys in the band came down to the SDCH&Y Club (at East 40th and Woodland) because they knew this is where all the musicians would be after 12 o'clock at night."

The band returned to the area in May of 1935. They did a stage show at the Palace Theatre in Youngstown May 11 and a dance at Cleveland's big Public Auditorium at East 6th and Lakeside May 15. Public Auditorium was the huge downtown hall where Republican National Conventions nominated Calvin Coolidge for president in 1924 and Alf Landon in 1936. Tickets for the Ellington dance were \$1.

**DANCE**  
**DUKE ELLINGTON**  
 PUBLIC AUDITORIUM  
 MAIN HALL  
**TONIGHT**  
 \$1.00 PER PERSON

An ad from *The Plain Dealer* May 15, 1935

Just prior to his 1935 appearances in Northeast Ohio, Ellington recorded "In a Sentimental Mood." At the time, he had two bass players in his band, Wellman Baud and Billy Taylor, the uncle of longtime Cleveland jazz promoter Art Sutton.

The Ellington band returned to the Palace Theatre for another week-long engagement beginning July 31, 1936. This was shortly after trombonist Juan Tizol composed "Caravan."

While Ellington was in Cleveland that week, he met privately with poet and playwright Langston Hughes who had grown up in Cleveland and in 1926 had written a poem called "The Weary Blues." The two planned to collaborate on a Broadway show, *Cock O' the World*. The show never got to Broadway.

1936 was a difficult year for Ellington. He had made relatively few new records, had no real hits, and other big bands, particularly Benny Goodman's, were

exploding in popularity.

When Ellington returned to Cleveland for another one-week engagement at the Palace Theatre August 6, 1937, the band played between showings of a movie called *Marry the Girl*. A young comic from Mansfield was also on the bill. He later borrowed some money from the theatre manager, went to Hollywood and a year later, appeared in his first film. His name was Red Skelton.

Ellington and his orchestra returned to the Palace the week of October 7, 1938, just after playing at the Apollo Theatre in New York City.

On November 25, 1938, a month after his sixth week-long run at the Palace Theatre, Ellington and the band played for a Friday night dance at the Trianon Ballroom where they had performed six years earlier when it was called the Crystal Slipper. A newspaper promotional article said, "Made popular by radio, Duke and his musicians have created a sensation in theatres and ballrooms from coast to coast, as well as in Europe. Duke and his boys have an instinctive feeling for jazz rhythms and broken tempos. They can play 'sweet' and discreet jazz in the manner of Paul Whiteman, then turn about and twist their music into weird and primitive strains."

The article went on to say, "It is his artistry as a conductor and composer that accounts for the presence of so many non-dancers at his dance engagements from coast to coast. Hundreds of the most sedate people crowd the dance halls where the Ellington aggregation



Langston Hughes

**DIXIE ECHO CLUB**  
 V. Tutstone Pres.  
 Presents

duke  
**Ellington**  
 AND HIS  
*Famous*  
 ORCHESTRA

AT  
**TRIANON**  
 BALL ROOM  
 Friday  
 November 25  
 8 P. M. until?  
 General Admission **90c**  
 Box Office Opens 7:30 P. M.  
 Night of Dance

An ad from *The Call & Post* November 17, 1938

plays for the genuine pleasure of listening.”

Ellington and his orchestra did not return to Cleveland again until the summer of 1942. But in 1939 there were significant developments in the evolution of the Ellington Orchestra. When the band made its second tour of Europe, the tour that was cut short because of Adolph Hitler’s increasing military aggression. Ellington hired saxophonist Ben Webster who, like Freddy Jenkins, had attended Ohio’s Wilberforce University. Webster quit the Cab Calloway band while it was playing at the Trianon Ballroom in Cleveland to join Ellington. To replace Webster, Calloway hired Chu Berry from the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra. For two nights, Webster and Berry played side by side on the bandstand at the Trianon.

Duke also hired bassist Jimmy Blanton and pianist-arranger-composer Billy Strayhorn. Blanton would set new standards for the string bass and, like guitarist Charlie Christian, opened new ideas in jazz which would later emerge in bebop. Neither, however, lived to hear bop in full flower.

Strayhorn, who was born in Dayton and grew up in Pittsburgh, made many quiet but extremely significant contributions to the Ellington Orchestra and jazz in general. He is best known for composing the Ellington theme song “Take the ‘A’ Train” and the haunting “Lush Life.”



Mosbrook collection

#### The destination board of New York’s “A” Train

Kay Davis, who later sang with the band, was among many who called Strayhorn “Ellington’s musical alter ego.” She told me, “They thought alike, they composed alike, their whole approach to music was the same. In fact, it was very difficult to tell who was playing piano on some of the recordings. It could have been Billy; it could have been Duke. You couldn’t tell where one stopped and the other began.” But, Davis also said, “Billy’s playing at times was different. He was a classically-trained pianist and when he played by himself, it was different.”

### The 1940s

Ellington spent most of 1941 on the West Coast. He had written a show, *Jump For Joy*, which he hoped to take to Broadway. It opened in Los Angeles July 10, 1941 and folded 11 weeks later, September 27, after only 101 performances. Ellington later said, “It was the



A 1942 ad from the Cleveland Press

hippest thing we ever did.” He said his show created the zoot suit phenomenon which was often credited to another bandleader, Cab Calloway.

With Strayhorn and Webster, Ellington brought his band back to Cleveland’s Palace Theatre the week of August 28, 1942. Blanton, the brilliant young bassist, was not with the orchestra and never played in Cleveland. He had died of tuberculosis at the age of 21.

While performing at the Palace, the Ellington orchestra also played on a seven-hour national radio broadcast promoting the sale of war bonds and stamps. The program, *I Pledge America*, included 21 top dance bands and was carried in Cleveland on WHK Saturday night, August 29, 1942. During the broadcast, the Ellington band played three popular songs of the day – “Tangerine,” “Who Wouldn’t Love You?” and “I Don’t Want to Walk Without You, Baby.”

During 1942, Ellington and his band traveled by train to 80 cities including Cleveland, Canton, Columbus and Cincinnati.

1942 was also the year that Jimmy Hamilton replaced Barney Bigard, singer Betty Roché joined the band, Tizol wrote “Perdido,” and Ellington composed “C Jam Blues.”

Ellington returned to Cleveland in February of 1943 for only the third and final performance of his much anticipated 48-minute tone poem “Black, Brown and Beige,” the longest piece he had ever written. More than 7,200 people attended the concert at Cleveland’s Public Auditorium February 20, 1943. The only other performances of “Black, Brown and Beige” were at New York’s Carnegie Hall a month earlier, January 23, and in Boston January 28. Many critics were not kind. Paul Bowles in the *New York Herald-Tribune* said “it was formless and meaningless.”

However, based mainly on his popular records, Ellington had become an American musical institution. In 20 years, he had made more than 700 records and sold almost 20 million copies.

During the World War II years, there were many



personnel changes in the orchestra. When Ellington played for a dance at Cleveland's Public Auditorium November 29, 1943, one of the members of the band was Cleveland saxophonist Elbert "Skippy" Williams who had graduated from Central High School in 1930, played in Cleveland with Tadd Dameron and Freddie Webster, and toured with the Fletcher Henderson and Count Basie bands. Williams was with the Ellington orchestra from September of 1943 until May of 1944. Williams was no longer with the orchestra when it returned to the Palace Theatre in his hometown for another week, beginning November 3, 1944.

Another new member was Al Sears, whose brother led the house band at Cleveland's Cedar Gardens nightclub. Sears took Ben Webster's place and remained with the band until 1948. Cat Anderson also joined in 1944.

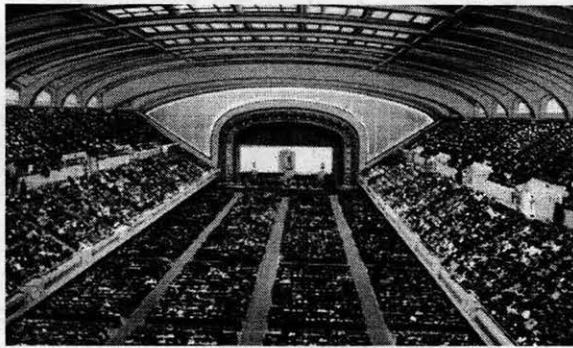
Jazz historian and musician Gunther Schuller, then playing with the Cincinnati Symphony, recalled he came to Cleveland to see and hear the Ellington Orchestra. In an article in the March 1999 edition of *JazzTimes*, Schuller said black musicians were not permitted to stay in downtown Cleveland white hotels and many spent the week living in the dressing rooms at the Palace Theatre. He said the management put cots and heaters in the small dressing rooms. "They put a piano in Duke's room," said Schuller, "and after each show each night, about 1 a.m., he would come in and start ruminating at the piano, improvising. He'd put on his stocking cap and his beautiful maroon silk robe and play (and compose) 'til five or six in the morning. He'd stop about six and grab a few hours of sleep."

Ellington won *Esquire* magazine's Gold Awards for both arranger and for best band in 1945, '46 and '47.

During 1945, the orchestra did a series of Saturday afternoon radio broadcasts. *Date With the Duke* was broadcast live from various sites around the country, wherever the band was playing. On June 23, the broadcast originated from the stage of the Palace Theatre in Akron. A recording of that broadcast, saved by singer Mel Tormé, was later released on Fairmount Records under the title *A Date With the Duke, Vol. 6*.

The band opened with its theme song, "Take the 'A' Train" and followed with "Jump For Joy," "All at Once," "Ko-ko," "I Should Care," "Go Away Blues," "Tootin' Through the Roof," "Every Hour on the Hour" and "I'm Beginning to See the Light."

When the Ellington Orchestra appeared in Akron, the



**Cleveland's Public Auditorium where the Ellington Orchestra performed twice in 1943**

band members stayed at the Mathews Hotel on North Howard Street. In an era when African-Americans were not welcome in most hotels, Mathews, which had opened in the mid-1920s by George Mathews, became *the* black hotel in Akron and hosted such other touring jazz artists as Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Lionel Hampton, Dizzy Gillespie and Cab Calloway. The hotel closed in the mid-1970s.

After singer Betty Roché left Ellington, Duke decided to hire three girl singers – Kay Davis, Joya Sherill and Marie Ellington. Marie was not related to Duke but had been married to Spergan Ellington, an Air Force pilot who was killed in the war. Davis later told me, "Marie had a terrific voice and was a beautiful woman. Duke would always say something very flattering when he brought her out." She later married pianist and singer Nat Cole and their daughter, Natalie Cole, became a very popular singer.

Davis, who is best remembered for her haunting and beautiful wordless vocals with the Ellington Orchestra, said she joined the band through a fluke. "I had gotten my masters degree in music from Northwestern University," she recalled, "and I was sallying forth to do my concert singing and somebody bet me that I couldn't get with Ellington. I knew they were right, but I went down and auditioned anyway." After she sang, she told Duke she was a concert singer and planned a recital the following Sunday. To her surprise, Ellington attended the recital and asked her, "Can you be in Baltimore next Friday?" Davis said, "I picked myself up off the floor, went home and packed my clothes. I had been such a fan of the band! I felt like I was in a dream world."

Her first recording with Ellington was also something of a fluke. She said Duke was backstage teaching singer Al Hibbler the song "I Ain't Got Nothin' But the Blues." Davis recalled, "I just sort of absent-mindedly started humming along with Al's lyrics. The next thing I knew, Duke said, 'Keep that in! I want that on the record!'"

Another time, at Carnegie Hall in New York, Davis remembered Ellington sat down at a little old upright piano backstage and asked Kay, "Do you remember 'Creole Love Call?'" He had composed the song in 1927. With a laugh, she said, "I vaguely remembered something in my childhood. He played a few bars and said, 'Okay, now you go!' The next thing I knew, I was on the stage of Carnegie Hall, with the music on the floor, singing 'Creole Love Call.' That was my rehearsal."

Strayhorn wrote some arrangements that featured



Davis' singing, including the all-time Ellington classic "In My Solitude." But most of her solos were wordless obbligatos. The classically-trained singer seldom did songs with lyrics. "Duke was right," Davis told me years later. She admitted she was angry at the time. "I wanted to sing some songs with lyrics! But when I listen to the stuff from way back, he knew what he was doing."

Cleveland trumpeter Francis Williams joined the Ellington Orchestra in December of 1945 and toured with the band until April of 1949. He returned briefly in 1951 to record "A Tone Parallel to Harlem" and several other numbers, and again briefly in July of 1958. Williams was the father of actor Greg Morris who later starred on TV's *Mission Impossible*. Williams was a member of the Ellington Orchestra during an historic concert in 1946.

## Django Reinhardt's American debut



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives

### Django Reinhardt and Duke Ellington

Ellington brought legendary French jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt to the United States for his only appearances in this country. Reinhardt's first performance in the U.S. was in Cleveland.

It was Monday night, November 4, 1946, at the Music Hall at East 6th and St. Clair. The headline in the *Plain Dealer* the next morning said, "French Guitar Artist Steals Duke's Concert."

Ellington, who called Reinhardt "the most creative jazz musician to originate anywhere outside the United States," invited Reinhardt to come to the U.S. for a tour. Duke paid for his trip.

It proved to be something of a culture shock. While the two world famous musicians had great respect for each other's artistry, they had trouble understanding each other's languages and habits.

When Django arrived, his first words, in a combination of French and English, were, "Where's Dizzy playing tonight?" Django brought no luggage. He didn't even bring a guitar. According to Reinhardt biographer, Charles Delaunay, Django believed American

companies would compete with each other for the honor of presenting a guitar to him. He was wrong and had to buy a guitar when he got to the United States.

On the train trip from New York to Cleveland, Django shared a two-berth compartment with Ellington. The other members of the Ellington band were in a sleeping car. As they were getting ready for bed, Django was astounded to notice that many of the band members were wearing underpants with floral designs. In his limited English, he said, "You're crazy!" When he returned to the private compartment, he was about to joke with Ellington about the floral designs when he noticed Duke's underpants were even more gaudy than his musicians'. Later, Reinhardt asked some French friends to buy him some flowered underwear.

In Cleveland, Django and Duke shared a suite at the Hotel Statler at East 12th and Euclid. *Cleveland Press* columnist Milt Widder reported that before they left for the concert, they had dinner in their suite. Django was again amazed when he noticed Ellington eating his dessert first. Widder quoted Duke saying, "I always eat my dessert first."

John Edward Hasse, in his Ellington biography, said Duke was a hypochondriac. "He'd have four physical examinations a year, pop seven vitamins a day during the winter, and reportedly suffered a phobia of serious illnesses." Hasse also wrote that Ellington "disliked fresh air. Upon entering a room, he would often close all the windows. He was said to also dislike the country. Grass reminded him of graves, and he refused to wear green clothes because they were the color of grass." Among his other phobias, according to the biographer, were flying and wearing clothes with loose or missing buttons, which he thought brought bad luck.

While he was having dinner with Reinhardt in Cleveland, Ellington made a telephone call to his record producer, Albert Moss, in New York City, and listened to two of his new records. Moss asked about a hotel where they planned to stay later on the tour. The name began with the letter M, but Moss had trouble understanding the name over the phone. Ellington spelled it out for him: "M – like in 'Mood Indigo.'"

Reinhardt had only one brief rehearsal with Ellington before the Cleveland concert. It was little more than a 20-minute warm up on the stage of the Music Hall. Duke at the piano asked Django, "What key do you want?" "Any key," said Django. Duke tapped his foot and the two all-time jazz masters just started playing. It sounded like they had been playing together for years.

There had been very little advance publicity for the historic concert in Cleveland. There was only a small ad in the local papers that simply announced, "Elroy Willis presents Duke Ellington and his Orchestra at the Music Hall." There was no mention in the ad that Django

Reinhardt would also appear. Ticket prices for the concert ranged from \$3.60 to \$1.25. Widder wrote the next day, "How the advent of Django Reinhardt escaped the local promoters is a mystery."

The *Plain Dealer* reported 1,800 people attended the Monday night concert. But they had to wait for the music to begin. A baggage car, carrying the Ellington Orchestra's instruments, arrived late and the concert was delayed for about 45 minutes, to about 9:15.

But Glenn Pullen, writing in *The Plain Dealer*, said, "The faithful followers of the popular composer-bandmaster did not seem to mind the long wait. They were offered extra compensation in the form of Django Reinhardt, the noted French guitarist."

Pullen said Django's first American performance soundly substantiated his reputation. Wrote the reviewer: "In the hands of this virtuoso, who resembles the screen's Adolph Menjou, an electric guitar acquires richer, magical qualities. His digital dexterity was remarkable, in intricate chords that were executed with such technical brilliance that the band musicians kept shouting, 'Go to it, master!'"

Reinhardt played improvisations of "Tiger Rag," "Blues in E Flat," and a tune which even Ellington admitted on stage that he was unable to identify.

### Sights and Sounds— Milton Widder

**ELLINGTONIA:** Duke Ellington came to Cleveland yesterday without fanfare and he gave his fans here the greatest treat in the annals of local jazz when he introduced in this country "for the first time" the hottest guitar player in the world—Django Reinhardt.

Now in the name of something or other the advent of Django escaped the local promoters is somewhat of a mystery. This French gypsy has been known for more than 20 years as the founder of the Quintet of the Hot Club of France, and his records are real collectors' items. The Duke paid for his passage on the trans-Atlantic Clipper and is taking him around the country for a six-month tour.

Django had not had a rehearsal with the Ellington Band before last night's concert, only a 20-minute "warm-up," with the Duke at the piano, on Public Music Hall's stage. The band's instruments were hours late in arriving and did not pull into the hall until 7:15 p. m.



Milt Widder's column in the *Cleveland Press*,  
November 5, 1946

Widder wrote, "Duke Ellington came to Cleveland without fanfare and he gave his fans here the greatest treat in the annals of local jazz when he introduced in this country, for the first time, the hottest guitar player

in the world."

The Ellington Orchestra also played without Reinhardt. The selections included a new arrangement of "Black, Brown and Beige." The *Plain Dealer* reviewer singled out trumpeter Taft Jordan for special praise for his solo on "Bugle Break Extended." Ellington, at the piano, played a medley of popular songs of the day, and Johnny Hodges soloed on "Magenta Haze." The *Plain Dealer* reviewer said Hodges "can create more mellow rhythms on an alto saxophone than all the Lombardo brothers," and was "a show-stopper." Trombonist Lawrence Brown, bassist Oscar Pettiford and singer Kay Davis teamed up on "Transblucency."

After the Cleveland concert, Reinhardt traveled with Ellington to Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, and finally New York City where they played two nights, November 23 and 24, 1946, at Carnegie Hall.

Biographer Delaunay said Django was nervous before playing at Carnegie Hall. Django said the guitar he had purchased in the United States was too heavy and didn't have the proper tone. Carnegie Hall was packed when the concert began at 8:30. Many of the people in the audience were admirers of Reinhardt and had been waiting for years to hear him in person. But, Django showed up late and did not go on stage until about 10:30. Many had hoped to see Django performing with the Ellington Orchestra as he had in Cleveland. Instead they were disappointed when he was accompanied by only a rhythm section. Nevertheless, Django got a big ovation and took six curtain calls.

The second night at Carnegie Hall, Django was again late. Ellington even announced at one point that Django would not appear that night. But, at 11 o'clock, he walked in, played, and got thunderous applause.

Reinhardt told Ellington he had met French boxer Marcel Cerdan and they lost track of the time as they talked about France. Realizing he was late for the concert, Django said he jumped in a taxi and asked to be taken to Carnegie Hall. But the New York cab driver apparently could not understand Reinhardt's French accent and took him to the other side of the city.

Because of the incident, some historians called the tour a failure. But, it was the only time that one of the most important guitarists in jazz history came to the United States. And his first performance in the U.S. was in downtown Cleveland.

### One of Duke's sophisticated ladies

Dolores Parker Morgan proudly displayed in the living room of her home in Fairlawn an etched crystal bearing the distinctive profile of her former boss, Duke Ellington. It was presented to her in 1993 when the Smithsonian Museum of American History honored the five surviving female vocalists of the Ellington Orchestra.



As Dolores Parker, she began singing with the Ellington Orchestra in 1947 and appeared with the band during its ninth and last full-week engagement at Cleveland's Palace Theatre the week of February 12, 1948.

A native of Chicago, Dolores Parker had won a 1939 amateur contest at Chicago's Regal Theatre. "I started right out of high school," she recalled, "having worked with local bands in Chicago and should have gone on to Howard University. I was scheduled to go, but I received an offer to join Fletcher Henderson as a member of a trio called 'The Rhythm Debs.' Much to my mother's disappointment, I joined Fletcher Henderson, and much to all of my friends' shock that I would go on the road with 'a bunch of musicians!'"

Henderson's 1942 band was the last edition of his orchestra that, over the previous 20 years, had included such jazz giants as Louis Armstrong, Roy Eldridge, Cleveland's Emmett Berry, Benny Carter, Coleman Hawkins and Ben Webster. Dee's family and friends were still not impressed.

"They thought it was the road to degradation," she said. "I would just never be the same person again. And so, to their enormous disappointment, nothing happened! It was just another job for everybody. And it was wonderful!"

With the Henderson Orchestra, Parker performed at the Akron Armory March 3, 1943, in Cleveland in November of 1943, at Cleveland's Public Auditorium in September of 1944, and at Cleveland's Metropolitan Theatre at East 50th and Euclid for week-long engagements in October of 1944 and January of 1945.

She left the Henderson band in 1945 when she and her husband, trumpeter Vernon Smith, joined the Earl Hines Orchestra. When they had a daughter, they decided to get off the road and move to Los Angeles.

"I was going to just sing in LA or be a housewife or something, but Vernon came home one day and said, 'I hear that Duke Ellington is looking for a singer.' I said, 'Yeah. So?' He said, 'Why don't you go try out?' I said, 'I don't want to try out, I'm not interested.' He said, 'Look, you really ought not turn down an opportunity to at least audition.'

"So I did go and I auditioned, with Billy Strayhorn at the piano, singing his famous 'Lush Life,' which I did not know. He gave me the music and said, 'Sing "Lush Life!"' I said, 'I don't know "Lush Life!"' He said, 'You can read the music. Sing it!'



Roland Paolucci

Dolores Parker Morgan

"And then, he had me sing it for Ellington *on the phone!* This is the honest-to-God truth! He said, 'Now that you've sung it, I want you to sing it for Ellington on the phone. And I said, 'What?!!'

"So he got him on the phone. I sang it to Ellington and thought I did terribly because I did not know the song. Somehow, I was hired on the spot. He came back after talking with Ellington and said, 'Well, you're hired! How soon can you join us?' I said to myself, 'That's not really what I wanted to do, but yes, I'll go.' And that's the way I joined the band."

Since that day in 1947, Dolores Parker has never sung "Lush Life" again, but she became a member of

the Ellington Orchestra that, at the time, included such jazz legends as Ray Nance, Tyree Glenn, Lawrence Brown, Russell Procope, Johnny Hodges, Jimmy Hamilton, Al Sears, Harry Carney, Freddy Guy, Oscar Pettiford and Sonny Greer as well as Shelton Hamphill, Harold Baker, Wilbur Bascomb, Claude Jones, singer Al Hibbler and Cleveland Francis Williams.

She recalled, "They were tremendous musicians who did not take themselves as individuals seriously, but they took their music very seriously and they knew they had always better be in top form or the boss would let them know about it. I mean, everything was lighthearted and fun and it looked like it was all going so smoothly and easily. But Ellington had his ear out for anybody who wasn't up to par."

Among Parker's recordings with Ellington was a song called "Take Love Easy." The 1947 record began with alto saxophonist Hodges, one of the all-time jazz masters, playing a classic singing solo. Critic Stanley Dance wrote, "The way Johnny Hodges 'sings' the first chorus would make it hard for any vocalist to follow, but Dolores Parker does it very well. Her diction, articulation and smooth vocal quality all recall a period when soft, seductive voices were esteemed in ladies more than the harsh, abrasive kind."

Dolores Parker toured the country with Ellington, singing with the band at ballrooms and theatres. "We all received an itinerary sheet," she said, "and all we wanted to know was where they were going next, what kind of date it was (dance or concert) and what we were wearing. For the girls, it had to be gowns. We all wore floor-length dresses. We never appeared in short dresses or in anything other than *evening gowns!*"

She sang with the Ellington band at a dance at the Akron Armory February 11, 1948 and on stage at



Cleveland's Palace Theatre the week of February 12, 1948 when the band performed several shows a day. She remembered the routine for those motion picture theatre performances: "The basic run for a day was four shows. You would come off the stage, they would show a movie or something, and, before you knew it, somebody was yelling out, 'Half an hour!' We rushed back, changed clothes and started all over again."

Kay Davis, who roomed with Dolores on the road, said, "It was arduous but wonderful. It was difficult with all the one-nighters and riding on the bus. But, when we traveled across the country (on trains), we had a sleeper. We were in the good days because later bands traveled by bus most of the time."

Dolores Parker said she treasured the time she spent with Ellington. "I was in awe of the talent in that band and I absolutely felt very, very privileged to be there."

The late 1940s was not the greatest period for the Ellington Orchestra. Musicians' salaries, traveling expenses, a recording ban, and the growing popularity of popular singers were beginning to take their toll on the once-invincible big bands. Ellington, approaching the age of 50, began working on other projects including another ill-fated Broadway show and the new medium, television. Despite the problems, Dolores said he worked hard at maintaining the classic Ellington sound.

### Duke's form of discipline

"The public perception of Ellington," said Dolores Parker, "was exactly what he wanted them to see and I think that his love and his desire to always present a good show was very, very important to him. He didn't want anybody to slack off and goof up at any point or any juncture."

"He could be a perfectionist. Sometimes a musician was being replaced because of an illness or something by some new guy who would want to change some of the notes. Whoever was sitting next to him would say, 'Don't do it! You play it as you see it because that's the way it is to sound.'"

Kay Davis remembered, "If somebody had a little bit too much to drink – or a *lot too much* – he had to play everything in the book. He would solo on one thing after another."

Dolores added, "If he knew the fellas had been out a little bit too late the night before or had too much to drink, and they had a two-chorus solo, Duke would make them play three or four choruses. He would stand on the side of the stage, egging them on while they were about to die from exhaustion. He would do this and laugh about it. It was hilarious!"

One time, Ellington directed his unusual form of discipline at trombonist Sam Nanton, who had been an important part of the band for more than 20 years.

Dolores said Nanton had a bottle in his jacket pocket and was sipping from it with a straw. "Ellington saw it," laughed Davis, "and made him play *many* more choruses."

After touring with Ellington, Parker made several appearances in films and toured the nation and Europe before marrying Gates Morgan, a physician who became the medical director of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company in Akron. In 1985, she provided an endowment for the Kent State University School of Music and in 1989, was the recipient of a Kent State award for her contributions to the arts.

Unlike Ellington's other singers, she continued performing through the 1990s and fondly recalling her years with the giant of American music. Displayed along the staircase of her attractive home in Fairlawn was a series of photographs of her with Ellington and the legendary members of his orchestra. And nearby on a table in the living room was that etched crystal, bearing the profile of her former boss, presented to her by the Smithsonian Museum of American History.

In June of 1949, Ellington received his first honorary degree. It was awarded by Ohio's Wilberforce College. He was also made an honorary citizen of the City of Cleveland.

But he would never again appear on the stage of Cleveland's Palace Theatre. By 1950, the Palace had all but ended its policy of presenting live entertainment. The theatre became strictly a movie house until the 1970s.

### The 1950s

Ellington, now 50 years old, had been touring the world almost non-stop for almost 30 years. A critic for *DownBeat* magazine, Mike Levin, called the Ellington Orchestra "sloppy, disinterested, dreary and tired" and said Duke "seems tired and dejected."

With television becoming popular, ballrooms were dropping big bands and nightclubs were having trouble attracting customers. Trying to regain his momentum, Ellington began touring with package concert shows.

The Ellington Orchestra played a concert with Nat "King" Cole and Sarah Vaughan at the Cleveland Arena, a 10,000 seat sports facility at 3717 Euclid Avenue October 16, 1951.

Built in 1937, the Arena hosted ice hockey, basketball, boxing and many other events until it was demolished in 1977. In the early 1950s, it was also the site of many musical events including disc jockey Alan Freed's ill-fated Moondog Coronation Ball in March of 1952, just five months after Ellington played there. Freed oversold the house and there was a near riot as the rock 'n roll concert was just beginning.

By 1952, longtime Ellington sidemen Johnny



Encyclopedia of Cleveland History

### A 1947 view of the Cleveland Arena

Hodges, Lawrence Brown and Sonny Greer had left Duke's band to join a new orchestra formed by Hodges. Ellington hired Louie Bellson, Clark Terry, Britt Woodman and Paul Gonsalves. Cleveland trumpeter Emmett Berry played with the Hodges Orchestra in 1952 and 1953. Hodges returned to the Ellington band in 1955.

The week of September 19, 1952, the Ellington Orchestra performed at Cleveland's Town Casino at East 107th and Euclid. During the engagement, the band recorded "Take the 'A' Train," "Ko-ko," "Mood Indigo," "VIP Boogie" and "Jam With Sam."

Ellington composed "Satin Doll" in 1953 and returned to Cleveland in October of 1954 for a Norman Grantz-promoted concert with Dave Brubeck, Gerry Mulligan and Stan Getz at the Music Hall, the 3,000-seat theatre in Cleveland's huge Public Hall building.

The band played in Toledo in January of 1956 and received a scathing review in the *Toledo Blade*. The reviewer wrote, "What I heard last night seemed a carnival of uncouth and ugly sound."

Hoping to revitalize his reputation, Ellington concentrated on his extended

compositions and scheduled joint concerts with symphony orchestras.

The band played a concert with the Cleveland Orchestra's Pops Orchestra July 25, 1956 at Severance Hall. With Louis Lane conducting, they performed "New World A-Coming" and the three movements of Ellington's extended piece, "Night Creature" which had been commissioned by composer and conductor Don Gillis. It had been originally performed by the Symphony of the Air and later by symphony orchestras in Detroit, Buffalo, Washington and New Haven.

Playing trumpet with the Cleveland Pops was Harry Herforth who had been Billy Strayhorn's boyhood friend in Pittsburgh. After the intermission, the Ellington band played "Skin Deep" (featuring a long drum solo by Bellson), a medley of Ellington songs, "VIP Boogie" and "Jam With Sam."

A few months after saxophonist Paul Gonsalves electrified the jazz world with his 27-chorus solo on "Diminuendo in Blue" and "Crescendo in Blue" at the Newport Jazz Festival, and Ellington's picture was on the cover of *Time* magazine, the band returned to Cleveland to play an extended engagement at the new Cleveland Cotton Club at East 4th and Huron. An ad in the *Plain Dealer* all but shouted, "Now! Now! In Person! Thru Sunday! Duke Ellington and his 16-piece orchestra." The band performed there from Friday, November 23 to Sunday, December 2, 1956.

Ellington did not return to Cleveland again for almost four years. He spent much of 1958 playing at jazz festivals and again touring Europe where he was introduced to Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain. In early 1958, there was a revival of the show *Jump For Joy* in Miami but it closed after 20 performances. Later in 1959, Ellington wrote the score for the film *Anatomy of a Murder*.

### The 1960s



Duke Ellington

In another package tour, the Ellington Orchestra played a joint concert with the Dave Brubeck Quartet for 2,500 people at the Cleveland Music Hall Sunday night, November 6, 1960.

Pianist Brubeck and his group opened the evening with their version of "St. Louis Blues." *Plain Dealer* reviewer Glenn Pullen wrote, "Some of his quartet's ultra-modernized arrangements had so much razzle-dazzle

that it was difficult at times to recognize the original



A newspaper ad for Ellington's October 1954 appearance in Cleveland



tunes. They took on an exhilarating freshness through the leader's rapid-fire facile piano technique. His thickly-chorded style in a jazz suite, based on an ancient minuet, made it a spectacular original number." The other members of the Brubeck Quartet were saxophonist Paul Desmond, drummer Joe Morello and bassist Eugene Ryan.

The reviewer said Ellington's big band dominated the second half. He wrote, "Suave and witty, the maestro revitalized many of his own jazz classics with color-splashed grandeur." They played "Black and Tan Fantasy" and "I Got It Bad" featuring Johnny Hodges. Other members of Duke's band that night included Sam Woodyard, Ray Nance and Harry Carney.

There was a crisis for the Ellington Orchestra in February of 1961. Nance, Paul Gonsalves, Willie Cook and Fats Ford were arrested in Las Vegas on charges of narcotics possession. Nance, who had been convicted on drug charges in 1956, was sentenced to 60 days in jail.

Trombonist Mitchell "Booty" Wood, who was born and raised in Dayton, Ohio, joined the Ellington band in 1959. He stayed until 1960, returned briefly in 1963, and was a mainstay from 1969 to 1972.

### Another Cleveland Orchestra concert

When the Ellington Orchestra played a second concert with the Cleveland Orchestra Wednesday, June 28, 1961 at Public Auditorium, it again performed "Night Creature." The concert opened with "Asphalt Jungle Theme," "Overture," "Flirtbird," "Pie Eye's Blues" and "Suite Thursday," which Ellington had composed the previous year for the Monterey Jazz Festival.

According to an article by Jan Mellow in the June 28, 1961 *Plain Dealer*, Ellington was "the personification of a night creature." He arrived in Cleveland at 7 a.m. the day before the concert after traveling all night and checked into the Sheraton-Cleveland Hotel.

He immediately had four scoops of ice cream as a bedtime snack and slept until 4:30 p.m. For breakfast, when most people prepare for dinner, Duke ordered a sirloin steak, medium-well, two halves of grapefruit, mild cheddar cheese, tea and a baked potato. He hollowed out the potato and ate only the skin, drenched in four pats of butter.

His main concern was a scheduled 10 a.m. rehearsal with the Cleveland Orchestra, at a time when he usually was sleeping.

During the Cleveland newspaper interview, Ellington said, "I keep this big, expensive band at my fingertips so I can hear right away what I wrote. They get the money, I get the kicks."

His kick at the time was his semi-autobiographical composition "Night Creature." He said, "It starts with the real king of night creatures, a blind bug, coming out of his

shelter. His antennae pick up the idea of morning and he hides. In the second movement, comes the imaginary monster we all fear we shall some day meet at midnight. Finally, comes the dazzling woman who really reigns over the darkest night."

At that 1961 concert in Cleveland, Ellington's close musical collaborator, Billy Strayhorn had a reunion with a Clevelander who had been his boyhood friend.

### Billy Strayhorn's boyhood friend

Harry Herforth of Cleveland Heights, who played trumpet with the Cleveland Orchestra and taught in Cleveland for half a century, grew up in Pittsburgh with Billy Strayhorn.

"We were in grade school together in the Homewood-Brushton area," said Herforth. "He was in my class in 1925. He was 11 and I was 10."

"It wasn't until I became a trumpet student that our burning interest in music brought us together," said Herforth. "We discovered we were simpatico." Herforth became the boyhood best friend of Strayhorn who was born in Dayton in 1915.

Herforth remembered, "Sometimes he would come to my house. Sometimes I would go to his house. You had to go in a little alley to get to his home. We were both dirt poor. Our love of music and books brought us together."

While his family was struggling for money in the 1920s, young Strayhorn worked at number of odd jobs to save enough to buy an old upright piano.

Herforth recalled, "When I went to his home, sometimes I would have to wait for him in the house. There was nothing in the living room except the piano. Nothing! His father, a plasterer, would come in covered with plaster dust. There was no exchange. The rest of the family were somewhere off in the distance. But, despite that environment, Billy, from the beginning, from my earliest recollection, had an elegance and a style. He was refined."

David Hajdu, in his biography of Strayhorn, *Lush Life*, said Billy's father was a bitter man who all but ignored his quiet son. But, his mother, Lillian, who had



Courtesy Harry Herforth

**Childhood friends Harry Herforth and Billy Strayhorn**



graduated from a two-year course at Shaw University, had an ear for elegant speech, and a reputation for formality. Herforth said she apparently instilled a love of books in young Strayhorn.

"I was an avid reader and so was he," said Herforth. "He was far ahead of me. I remember he was telling me one time he had read a marvelous book by Faulkner, *Sanctuary*. I got *Sanctuary* and I couldn't make head nor tail of it."

In their early teens, Herforth and Strayhorn took long walks together in Pittsburgh's Frick Park and talked. "Mostly about books and music," said Herforth. "I know we did not talk about girls. There was no sexual reference at all. We didn't talk about race relationships. We just seemed to accept he was black; I was white. So what?"

Sometimes the two boys would walk to nearby clothing stores. "Billy and I both shared a love of fine clothes," said Herforth, "the clothes that we couldn't afford. We used to go window shopping,

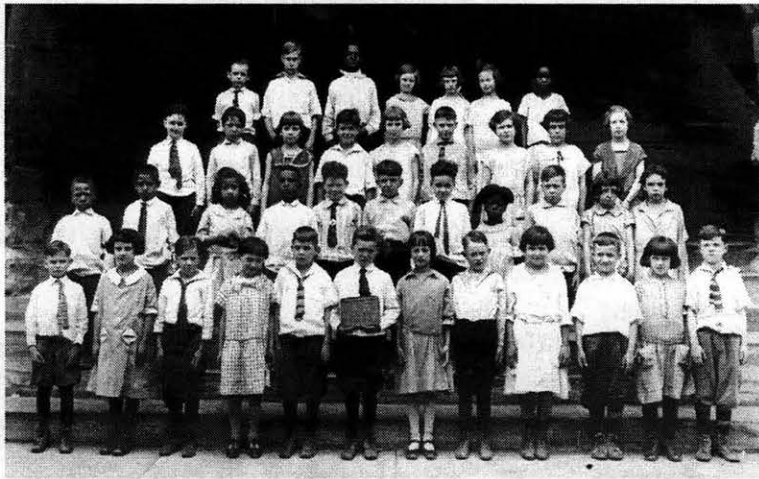


Courtesy of Harry Herforth  
**Billy Strayhorn at age 13**

look at high-priced, expensive shoes, expensive suits, expensive hats and, each one of us promised the other, when we got where we were going to go financially and professionally, we were going to dress well."

But, more than anything else, Strayhorn and Herforth shared an interest in music. Billy was playing the piano and Harry the trumpet. "When I needed an accompanist," recalled the Cleveland Heights resident, "Billy was there and ready and played my piano accompaniment when I played in public."

Eventually, the two boyhood friends went to high school and played in the school orchestra together. In those days, in the early 1930s, Strayhorn and Herforth were not playing jazz; they were playing classical music. When Strayhorn graduated from Westinghouse High



Courtesy of Harry Herforth  
**The 4th grade at Homewood School. Strayhorn is in the second row at far left. Herforth is directly in front of him**

impooverished black young man, playing the Grieg "Piano Concerto" from memory in front of the whole audience. That memory still blows me away!"

Other graduates of Westinghouse High School included jazz musicians Mary Lou Williams, Erroll Garner and Ahmad Jamal.

After high school, Strayhorn was beginning to compose. Herforth remembered, "I was working and going to orchestra rehearsal on Wednesday night (in 1936). I stopped at the drug store where Billy was working. As we took a walk, he asked me, 'What do you think about this?' He sang the opening lines of a song he had composed called 'Lush Life.' I thought it was fantastic."

Herforth may have been the first person to hear the song, written by the young Strayhorn, that later became a jazz classic.

According to Herforth, Strayhorn "admitted a marvelous and undying admiration for the lyrics of Cole Porter, those super-sophisticated things. That's where he got his model, if he needed one. But 'Lush Life' is as super-sophisticated as anything Porter came up with."

More than six decades later, Herforth became emotional when he heard the song his old childhood friend had written. "It brings me to the point of tears sometimes. It chokes me up that Bill could not be even more renowned, that Billy could not have lived long enough to see greater recognition come his way."

Herforth went to the New England Conservatory and

School in 1934, he soloed with the school orchestra. The music teacher, Carl McViker, said more than 50 years later, "The orchestra may have been a group of students, but Billy Strayhorn was a professional artist."

Herforth recalled, "I was there in the orchestra when he played the Grieg 'Piano Concerto.'" A marvelous memory! This young,



Courtesy of Harry Herforth  
**Harry Herforth at age 12**

later played trumpet with the Boston Symphony and the Cleveland Orchestra.

When Herforth went home to Pittsburgh 1938, Strayhorn told him he had been listening to the music of Duke Ellington and shared a secret plan with his longtime friend. "He told me that Ellington was coming to Pittsburgh to play at the Stanley Theatre and he, Billy, would like to take a group of his compositions and show them to Ellington. I remember saying, 'Do it! Do it!' I'm sure he would have done it without my encouraging, but that is what got Ellington and Strayhorn together."

A man Strayhorn had met at the drug store where he worked arranged for the young piano player to meet Ellington who immediately asked him to play. Strayhorn began playing "Sophisticated Lady" and said, "Mr. Ellington, this is the way you played this number in the show. Now, this is the way I would play it."



**Young Billy Strayhorn playing for Ellington**

Three months later, Ellington made his first recording of a Strayhorn song. Within a year Ellington recorded a series of Strayhorn tunes, including one he adopted as his new theme song, "Take the 'A' Train," which also became a jazz classic.

Strayhorn was soon an indispensable part of the Duke Ellington American jazz saga and a legend among musicians.

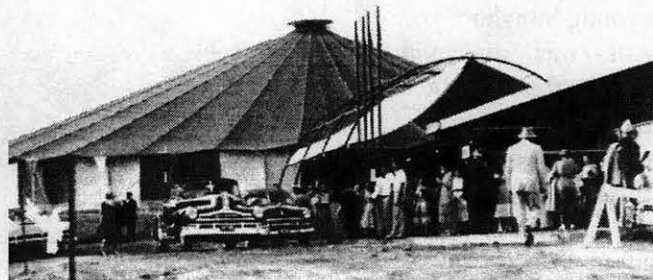
When the Ellington Orchestra came to Cleveland in June of 1961 to play the joint concert with the Cleveland Orchestra, Herforth was playing trumpet with the symphony orchestra.

"We had a joyful hug and a glad reunion," remembered Herforth. I asked him if he could come out to the house for dinner and he said, 'yes.' "I drove downtown later in the afternoon, picked him up, and brought him out to our house on Berkshire Road in Cleveland Heights. We had dinner, this elegant young man, elegant in every aspect, speech and dress, demeanor. I'm sure he charmed my whole family because my children, even as adults, remembered Billy."

Looking back on that family dinner with Strayhorn in Cleveland Heights, Herforth said Strayhorn, who died seven years later, should have been much more appreciated by the general public. Herforth, an

outstanding classical trumpeter and a teacher for more than 50 years, remembered his long friendship with jazz giant Billy Strayhorn as a highlight of his long and colorful career. Herforth said, "Anyone who did not know Strayhorn would be envious of anyone who did."

## Ellington at Musicarnival



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives

### The tent theatre on Warrensville Center Road

In 1962, the Ellington Orchestra played the first of six annual concerts at Musicarnival, a 1,500-seat tent theatre on the grounds of the Thistledown race track on Warrensville Center Road. The Musicarnival had opened in 1954 mainly to present summer musicals and remained in operation until 1975. The July 22, 1962 Ellington performance featured the return of trumpeter Cootie Williams.

There was another Musicarnival concert the following year, Sunday afternoon, July 14, 1963, shortly after Ellington's tours of Europe, the Middle East and the Near East. The Ellington "Jazz Matinee" was followed that night by a performance in the tent of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.

## Ellington at Karamu House

After that concert at Musicarnival, Ellington and his orchestra stayed over in Cleveland for an unusual performance the following day, July 15, 1963. Cleveland's Channel 5, WEWS-TV, was producing a series of television programs featuring some of the top popular and jazz artists of the period. For one program, the station lined up trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie and a group of local jazz musicians including pianist Bill Gidney, singer Dinah Washington, and Duke Ellington and his orchestra. The television station tape recorded the program in various segments on the stage of Karamu House at East 89th and Quincy Avenue.

Opened in 1915 as a neighborhood settlement house, Karamu, over the years, had developed a series of arts programs including nationally recognized dramatic presentations. Langston Hughes had been one of the first teachers at Karamu and many of his plays had debuted there.

The music director at Channel 5 at the time was Joe Howard, the pianist who had become a favorite in



Cleveland by playing almost everywhere – from saloons to Severance Hall. Howard was to play a medley of Ellington songs in a piano duet with Duke. Howard later recalled, “They had two Steinway nine-foot grands on stage, no audience, and we were to play just a medley of a bunch of his compositions.”

Gillespie and his group recorded the first portion of the videotaped television program. Fearing that the director might insist on a number of re-takes, Dizzy made it clear he wanted to play his part only once. He told the director, “I always do it right the first time.” The television director complied with Gillespie’s request and got his camera shots right the first time.

Then, it was time for Ellington to take the stage and videotape with Howard. “When it came time to record,” said Howard, “I had not met Ellington nor had I spoken with him. So I had no idea what we were going to do.”

Howard remembered the entire production was pretty informal. Members of the Ellington band were wandering in and out of the Karamu theatre and nobody, including Ellington, seemed overly concerned about how the show would go.



Courtesy of Joe Howard

#### Joe Howard

As they were about to begin, Howard asked Ellington, “How are we going to do this?” According to Howard, Ellington said simply, “You just start and play.” “So I did,” said Howard, “and he played with me.” Howard said Ellington “had the good sense to fill in where it needed filling in and to stay out. So I just went ahead and played.”

With absolutely no rehearsal and no planning beyond Ellington’s instruction to “just start and play,” the pianist, who had graduated from Cleveland’s John Adams High School and Western Reserve University and was making his living playing on Dorothy Fuldheim’s *One O’Clock Club* television program, found himself playing twin pianos with perhaps the most important figure in 20th century music.

“Occasionally,” remembered Howard, “the band would come in on some of the numbers. On ‘Squeeze

Me,’ the band all of a sudden came in.” The band members probably saw a subtle signal from Ellington.

“We did ‘A-Train’ and ‘C-Jam Blues,’ with the band,” said Howard. “It was just marvelous how the whole thing worked out.”

The members of the Ellington Orchestra at the time included Cat Anderson, Cootie Williams, Lawrence Brown, Johnny Hodges, Paul Gonsalves, Harry Carney, Jimmy Hamilton and Sam Woodyard.

While playing with Ellington and his orchestra, Howard recognized a familiar face on the band stand. “Playing bass on his band was Ernie Shepard who was from Cleveland,” Howard said, “I used Shep a lot before he joined Ellington. And we used to do the morning *Paige Palmer Show* (on WEWS-TV). He and I used to play exercise music for her. And he worked with me at a couple of the clubs. It was nice to see him.” Shepard was with the Ellington Orchestra from 1962 to 1964.

The videotaped television program was broadcast on Channel 5 sometime later. Howard, after leaving Channel 5, got his masters degree from Kent State University in 1967 and became a professor of music at Cuyahoga Community College in 1969. For almost three decades, he taught music and jazz and told his students about Duke Ellington, the man he had performed with that day in 1963.

“I think he had a great band and he was a fine piano player,” said the music academician, “but I think his greatest contribution was (composing) the American song. He wrote some gorgeous things!”

But, 35 years later, Howard did not have a recording, videotape, or even a photograph of his twin-piano performance in Cleveland with Ellington.

A month after that videotaping at Karamu House, Ellington and his band returned to Cleveland for another concert at the Musicarnival (August 14, 1963).

Also in 1963 in New York City, Ellington demonstrated his famous charm on a woman from Cleveland. When her husband demanded that they stay to meet Duke, she wanted to leave, but when they finally met Ellington, he said, “It’s lovely to meet you. Let me show you something beautiful.” He took her by the hand, led her to his dressing room, and pointed to a mirror. Jon Hendricks, who told the story, said, “It was magic. She suddenly became beautiful.”

### Problems at the Golden Key Club

Late in 1963, Ellington and his orchestra were booked into the Golden Key Club at 641 Euclid Avenue. An ad in the December 15, 1963 *Plain Dealer* said, “Ellington opening Tuesday, December 17, for a limited engagement.”

Another ad four days later said, “Regular show 11 p.m. to 2 a.m. Open Christmas Eve.”





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An ad in the *Cleveland Press* January 3, 1964

Then, on January 3, 1963, there was an ad announcing, "Held over, continuous dancing Friday and Saturday beginning at 9:30 and regular show Sunday night 11 p.m. to 2 a.m."

But, the following week, Winsor French's column in the *Cleveland Press* reported, "The Duke Ellington-Golden Key honeymoon came to an abrupt and not entirely amicable ending over money matters. There simply was not enough trade to crack the nut. According to rumors," said French, "the Duke's fee was \$6,000 a week and to meet it, you have to sell a considerable amount of steak, potatoes and whiskey."

There were more performances at Musicarnival May 30 and August 14 of 1964 and March 27 and July 18 of 1965. The Ellington band also played for a private party at the Statler Hilton Hotel at East 12th and Euclid March 27, 1965.

## The death of Billy Strayhorn

Six weeks after the orchestra played at the Cleveland Music Hall April 15, 1967, Ellington's close friend and collaborator Billy Strayhorn died of cancer. Dolores Parker Morgan recalled, "Billy's death was a blow to Duke."

The funeral service for Strayhorn was conducted by Rev. John Gensel, the pastor to New York's jazz community, who had earlier lived and preached for eight years in Mansfield, Ohio.

Rev. Gensel said it was the first jazz memorial service he held in the sanctuary of St. Peter's Church in New York City. He remembered, "Ray Nance and Billy Taylor played a slow version of 'Take the 'A' Train.'"

That was really something else! And Randy Weston played 'Blues for Strayhorn,' a piece he had written some five years before."

Rev. Gensel remembered, "Duke Ellington was there and Benny Goodman and Lena Horne. Just about everybody was there because Billy Strayhorn was such an incredible person. I don't know anyone who wrote more beautiful, sensitive songs and compositions than he."

There was obviously a special relationship between the jazz pastor and Strayhorn. Rev. Gensel said, "Billy left his personal piano to our church to use in our jazz vesper services. He said, 'I want to leave it to you because I know that when the musicians play this piano, it will mean a great deal to them.' And when I tell a musician who doesn't happen to know that piano was Billy Strayhorn's private piano, boy, they are just transfixed!"

In honor of the former Ohioan, Ellington in 1968 composed "The Shepherd Who Watches Over the Night Flock." It featured a trumpet solo by Cootie Williams.

Two months after Strayhorn's death, the Ellington Orchestra came back to Cleveland to play a free concert July 18, 1967 at Woodland Hills Park, Cleveland's largest outdoor recreation center, at East 116th and Kinsman. The name of the park was changed in 1980 to Luke Easter Park in honor of a former Cleveland Indians player who was murdered.

The band played for a dance at the Cedar Point Ballroom in Sandusky July 29, 1967. A private recording of that performance includes "Take the 'A' Train," "Ego," "Caravan," "I Got It Bad," "Satin Doll" and Mercer Ellington's "Things Ain't What They Used to Be."

The band returned to play at the summer festival at Woodland Hills Park July 14, 1968.

Following a South American tour, Ellington and his band returned to the Music Hall for a concert Wednesday night, October 2, 1968. About 1,900 fans had to wait when the band was again late. But, the *Plain Dealer's* Glenn Pullen wrote the concert "clearly proved that he is still the royal duke of inspired jazz music."

The review in the October 3, 1968 *Plain Dealer* said the 68-year-old Ellington was wearing a bright green jacket (he must have reconsidered his earlier dislike for green) and tan slacks and looked incredibly youthful for a man celebrating his 50th anniversary as a jazz artist. Soloists included Hodges, Brown and Gonsalves. Opening the concert were Cleveland combos led by Johnny Boston and Joe DeJarnett.

In April of 1969, Ellington was honored on his 70th birthday by President Richard Nixon at the White House in Washington.

Seven months later, Ellington was again touring Europe. During the grueling tour, he hired native Cleveland trumpeter Benny Bailey, who was living in Europe, to play with his band for a week.

## The 1970s

Lloyd "Tiny" Grimes, who had won national fame with the Art Tatum Trio and later spent a great deal of time playing in Cleveland, performed with the Ellington Orchestra during a CBS television broadcast February 22, 1970 in New York. It was the only time Grimes played with Ellington.

Duke and his orchestra played twice in the Cleveland area in 1972 – for a private party in the Grand Ballroom of the Sheraton-Cleveland Hotel on Public Square September 28 and at a benefit for Glen Oak School in the Mardi Gras Room of the La Place Shopping Center at Cedar and Richmond Roads in Beachwood November 10. Ridley Watts, who organized the benefit, said years later the Ellington band was beginning to sound a little ragged.

Ellington returned May 6, 1973 for a 7 p.m. dance at the Case Western Reserve University gymnasium.

Ellington's last appearance in Northeast Ohio was July 10, 1973 at Admiral King High School in Lorain.

He was scheduled to play in Cleveland in February of 1974 but that appearance, along with many others, was canceled because of Ellington's failing health. His last appearance on stage was in Sturgis, Michigan, March 22.

Duke Ellington died May 24, 1974 in New York City.

Three days later, Rev. John Gensel conducted the funeral service that was attended by more than ten thousand people at New York's Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine. Joe Williams sang "Heritage" and Earl Hines played a medley of "Mood Indigo," "Solitude," "I Got It Bad" and "Satin Doll." Count Basie was in the front row weeping.

After Ellington's death, Mercer Ellington took over his father's band and brought it back to Cleveland's Palace Theatre August 12, 1975. It was 44 years after Duke first played in Cleveland and the 10th appearance of the Ellington Orchestra at Cleveland's Palace Theatre. No other jazz band or group made more appearances.

## Kenny Davis joins the Ellington band

It was the call he had been dreaming of for years.

Kenny Davis, who had grown up at East 79th and Melrose in Cleveland, first learned to read music at Addison Junior High School and first played with big jazz bands when he was a student at East High School, was at home when he got that call.

"The phone rang and it was Mercer Ellington calling from Pittsburgh," said Davis. "He said, 'I called the musicians' union and told them I need somebody that can sight read and can solo. Okay? So meet me in Warren at

the Carousel Theatre.' Mercer said, 'Wear black pants and a white shirt. We'll have a tuxedo coat for you and I just want you to play one night because our trumpet player's not here. He's not going to make it.'"

Davis asked, "Is there going to be a rehearsal?" "No rehearsal," said

Ellington. Sight read everything. Also," added the son of the legendary Duke, "When you come in, don't shake hands with anybody. Act like you've been here before. We don't want the people to think it's a brand new guy coming into the band."

Davis' parents had danced to the music of the Ellington Orchestra in Cleveland in the 1940s. Kenny had always dreamed of some day playing with the Ellington band. Even though Duke had been dead for six years and his son, Mercer, was leading the band, it was still "The Duke Ellington Orchestra." Kenny jumped at the chance and drove to Warren with his trumpet.

After that gig, Mercer asked him if he could play with the band the next night in Lorain. After that, recalls Davis, "He said, 'Can you go to Canton?' And eventually he said, 'Would you like to join the band?' I said, 'Sure!!'"

Davis, who had played with Navy bands after high school and returned to Cleveland to play with a number of Cleveland jazz groups, found himself playing the trumpet parts that in earlier years had been performed by such jazz legends as Bubber Miley, Cootie Williams, Rex Stewart and Clark Terry.

"Oh, man," said Davis, "we toured for awhile. We sometimes did two gigs in one day. One day gig in New York State and another that evening in North Carolina. It was amazing, but wonderful. We played with everybody including Ella Fitzgerald."

Unlike later editions of the Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey and Artie Shaw Orchestras, Mercer Ellington's version of his father's band was not a "ghost band," simply playing the old arrangements. The band combined new music with the timeless jazz Mercer's father had written and made famous. Kenny said he felt he was playing in *The Duke Ellington Orchestra*.

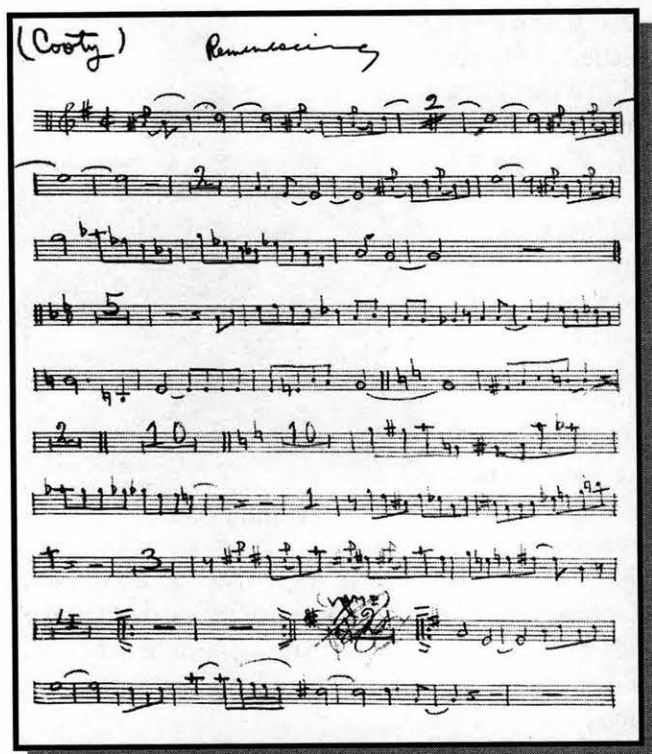
"I'm offended sometimes," he said, "when I hear that term 'ghost band' because here it was, a dream come true, even though it was Duke Ellington's son. We were



Courtesy NOJS

Kenny Davis





A handwritten Ellington score.

Notice "Cooty" in the upper left corner

playing the tunes I had grown up playing, 'Take the "A" Train,' things like that. I was playing the original manuscript. The page in front of me said 'A Train' and instead of listing first, second or third trumpet, it said 'Cootie.' It was Cootie Williams' original manuscript! Oh, man, this was amazing. I was in heaven!"

Davis' featured solo with the band was Duke's composition "Warm Valley."

Davis left the band in 1981, about a year after he joined it. Most of the other band members went to New York to play in the pit orchestra for the Broadway show *Sophisticated Ladies*, based on the music of Duke Ellington. Ironically, Ellington's long dream of a Broadway show did not happen until after his death.

Davis returned to Cleveland and continued to be one of the city's leading jazz artists.

After Davis left the Mercer Ellington Orchestra, Duke's son brought the band back again to Cleveland's Palace Theatre August 12, 1985.

Cleveland singer Vanessa Rubin also performed with the Mercer Ellington Orchestra.

In 1986, Cleveland Congressman Louis Stokes

spearheaded the drive in Congress to appropriate funds to purchase Ellington's personal archives for the Smithsonian Institution.

## World's biggest Ellington celebration

In 1999, the 100th anniversary year of Ellington's birth, the Tri-C JazzFest at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland organized the biggest and most ambitious Duke Ellington celebration in the world. It was bigger than anything in Washington, where Ellington grew up, and bigger than anything in New York City, where Ellington lived most of his life. The eight-month *Everything Ellington* project included:

- Thirty-six concerts by such artists and groups as the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra led by Wynton Marsalis, Joe Williams, Louie Bellson, the World Saxophone Quartet, Clark Terry, Dianne Reeves, Jon Hendricks, James Newton, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Akron Symphony, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra and the Jazz Heritage Orchestra.

- A series of lectures by such speakers as Patricia Willard, David Hajdu, Stanley Couch and Amiri Baraka.

- More than 60 special Ellington radio programs.

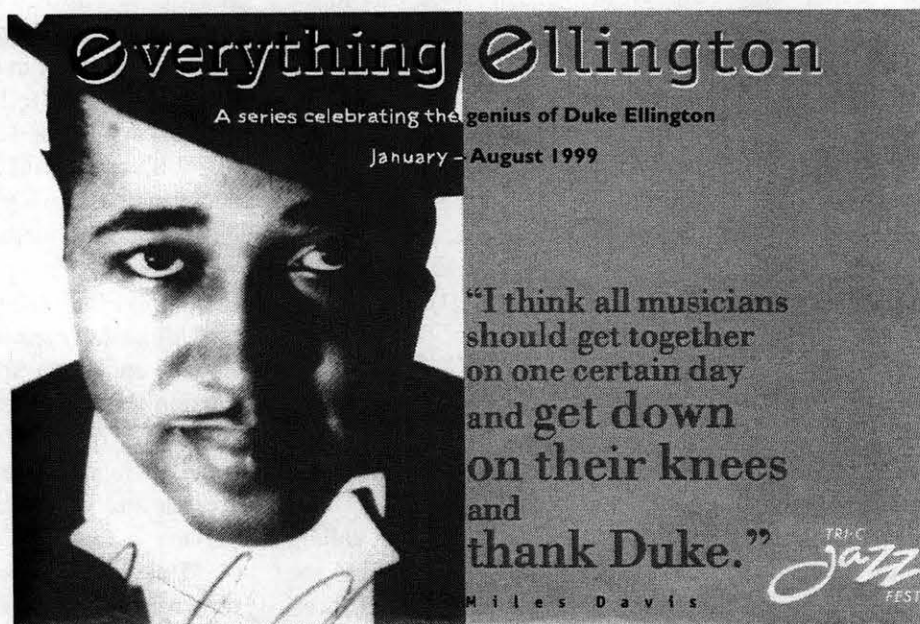
- Several dance presentations.

- Three film presentations including *Anatomy of a Murder*, and *Paris Blues*.

- Several workshops.

- Stage presentations of *Duet for Duke* and *Sophisticated Ladies*.

There is no question that Cleveland played a significant role in the Ellington American music saga.



A poster for the Tri-C JazzFest *Everything Ellington* celebration

## Duke Ellington's Performances in Northeast Ohio

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>1931 <b>July 4-10</b> - Palace Theatre, Cleveland<br/>(first national tour)</p> <p>1932 <b>June 11-17</b> - Palace Theatre, Cleveland<br/><b>August 4</b> - Crystal Slipper Ballroom, Cleveland<br/><b>December 27</b> - Land O'Lakes Ballroom, Canton</p> <p>1933 <b>September 12</b> - Idora Park, Youngstown</p> <p>1934 <b>Jan. 27- Feb. 2</b> - Palace Theatre, Akron<br/><b>June 15-21</b> - Loews Theatre, Canton<br/><b>August 20</b> - Triangle Park, Canton</p> <p>1935 <b>January 27</b> - Danceland Ballroom, Cleveland<br/><b>February 23</b> - Stambaugh Auditorium, Youngstown<br/><b>March 22-28</b> - Palace Theatre, Cleveland<br/><b>May 11-14</b> - Palace Theatre, Youngstown<br/><b>May 26</b> - Elberta Beach, Vermillion</p> <p>1936 <b>March 15</b> - Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland<br/><b>March 17</b> - Stambaugh Auditorium, Youngstown<br/><b>June 9</b> - Oberlin College, Oberlin<br/><b>June 14</b> - Pier Ballroom, Geneva-on-the-Lake<br/><b>July 31- Aug. 6</b> - Palace Theatre, Cleveland</p> <p>1937 <b>August 6-12</b> - Palace Theatre, Cleveland<br/><b>August 18</b> - East Market Gardens, Akron<br/><b>September 15-16</b> - Idora Park, Youngstown<br/><b>October 31</b> - Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland<br/>(Ellington not with band, was at his father's funeral)</p> <p><b>November 3</b> - Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland</p> <p>1938 <b>October 7-12</b> - Palace Theatre, Cleveland<br/><b>November 25</b> - Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland</p> <p>1939 <b>June 30- July 3</b> - Palace Theatre, Akron<br/><b>July 4-6</b> - Palace Theatre, Youngstown<br/><b>September 24</b> - Columbia Theatre, Alliance<br/><b>December 11</b> - Public Auditorium, Cleveland</p> <p>1940 <b>June 15</b> - Stambaugh Auditorium, Youngstown</p> <p>1942 <b>February 6-9</b> - Palace Theatre, Canton<br/><b>August 28- Sept. 3</b> - Palace Theatre, Cleveland<br/><b>November 15</b> - Youngstown</p> <p>1943 <b>February 20</b> - Public Auditorium, Cleveland<br/>(performed "Black, Brown and Beige")<br/><b>February 22</b> - Robin Theatre, Warren<br/><b>October 7</b> - Armory, Akron<br/><b>October 8</b> - Fairgrounds, Akron<br/><b>November 29</b> - Public Auditorium, Cleveland</p> <p>1944 <b>February 18-21</b> - Palace Theatre, Akron<br/><b>February 22-24</b> - Palace Theatre, Youngstown<br/><b>August 30</b> - New Elms Ballroom, Youngstown<br/><b>September 8-10</b> - Palace Theatre, Canton<br/><b>November 3-9</b> - Palace Theatre, Cleveland<br/><b>November 15</b> - Armory, Akron</p> | <p>1945 <b>April 2</b> - Armory, Akron<br/><b>July 19-21</b> - Palace Theatre, Youngstown<br/><b>July 22-25</b> - Palace Theatre, Akron<br/><b>December 21-23</b> - Palace Theatre, Canton</p> <p>1946 <b>November 4</b> - Music Hall, Cleveland<br/>(Django Reinhardt's American debut)</p> <p>1947 <b>November 4</b> - Akron</p> <p>1948 <b>February 12-18</b> - Palace Theatre, Cleveland<br/><b>March 15-17</b> - Palace Theatre, Youngstown</p> <p>1949 <b>November 7-9</b> - Palace Theatre, Youngstown</p> <p>1950 <b>January 28</b> - Masonic Auditorium, Cleveland</p> <p>1951 <b>October 16</b> - Arena, Cleveland<br/>(concert with Nat Cole and Sarah Vaughan)</p> <p>1952 <b>October 19- 24</b> - Town Casino, Cleveland</p> <p>1954 <b>October 22</b> - Music Hall, Cleveland<br/>(concert with Gerry Mulligan and Dave Brubeck)</p> <p>1956 <b>July 25</b> - Public Hall, Cleveland<br/>(concert with the Cleveland Orchestra)<br/><b>October 17</b> - Finney Chapel, Oberlin College<br/><b>November 23- Dec. 2</b> - Cotton Club, Cleveland</p> <p>1960 <b>November 6</b> - Music Hall, Cleveland<br/>(concert with Dave Brubeck Quartet)</p> <p>1961 <b>June 28</b> - Public Auditorium, Cleveland<br/>(concert with the Cleveland Orchestra)</p> <p>1962 <b>July 22</b> - Musicarnival, Warrensville Heights</p> <p>1963 <b>July 14</b> - Musicarnival, Warrensville Heights<br/><b>July 15</b> - Karamu House, Cleveland (TV taping)<br/><b>August 14</b> - Musicarnival, Warrensville Heights<br/><b>December 17- 26</b> - Golden Key Club, Cleveland</p> <p>1964 <b>May 30</b> - Musicarnival, Warrensville Heights<br/><b>August 14</b> - Musicarnival, Warrensville Heights</p> <p>1965 <b>March 27</b> - Statler-Hilton Hotel, Cleveland<br/>(private party)<br/><b>July 18</b> - Musicarnival, Warrensville Heights</p> <p>1966 <b>July 30</b> - Cedar Point Ballroom, Sandusky</p> <p>1967 <b>April 15</b> - Music Hall, Cleveland<br/><b>July 18</b> - Woodland Hills Park, Cleveland<br/><b>July 29</b> - Cedar Point Ballroom, Sandusky</p> <p>1968 <b>July 14</b> - Woodland Hills Park, Cleveland<br/><b>October 2</b> - Music Hall, Cleveland</p> <p>1972 <b>September 28</b> - Sheraton-Cleveland Hotel, Cleveland<br/><b>November 10, 1972</b> - LaPlace, Beachwood</p> <p>1973 <b>May 6</b> - Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland<br/><b>July 10</b> - Admiral King High School, Lorain</p> <p>1974 <b>February 1</b> - Kent State University, Kent<br/><b>February 9</b> - Cleveland Athletic Club, Cleveland<br/>(private party)</p> <p>Duke Ellington died three months later, May 24, 1974</p> |
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(Revised April 2012)



## 6. Count Basie's Cleveland Connections

**W**illiam Basie, pianist and bandleader, was not a Clevelander, but he certainly performed frequently in Cleveland and hired a number of Clevelanders to play in his swinging band. Basie's strongest tie to Cleveland is frequently forgotten. He married a girl from Cleveland and their only child was born here.

### Catherine Morgan Basie

Catherine Morgan left Cleveland at the age of 16 in 1931 to become a dancer. She joined a very popular vaudeville act, the Whitman Sisters. She was one of three girls in the dance company who called themselves "The Snake Hips Queens." When they appeared at the Lafayette Theatre in New York City, there was a jazz band from Kansas City on the same bill. The young dancer from Cleveland noticed the young piano player with the Bennie Moten band. But they didn't meet.

By 1935, she was working as a fan dancer at the Club Harlem and again ran into that piano player. This time he poked his head into her dressing room. She screamed, "Hey, somebody come here! That piano player with Bennie Moten's band, I caught him trying to peep behind my fans!"

He quickly retreated and she didn't see him again until a year later. By this time, the piano player had become the leader of the band and was playing at the Famous Door in New York City. The dancer from Cleveland was working across the street at Leon and Eddie's nightclub. After her show, she slipped into the Famous Door to listen to the band. Occasionally the piano player would wave, smile, or just poke his finger toward her. But they still had never spoken a word to each other.

Later that summer in Atlantic City, she saw him again. He just pointed his finger at her like he was going to shoot her and winked. This time, they finally chatted. After talking with her most of the afternoon, he again pointed his finger and said, "One of these days I'm going to make you my wife!" She shook her head as she left and said to herself, "That bandleader is crazy!"

But when she got back to New York, she returned to the Famous Door to hear the band and see the leader.

A few months later in Detroit, two of her friends finally formally introduced her to William "Count" Basie. She smiled. He pointed his finger at her and said, "Bam!" It was almost ten years after their paths had first crossed.

In his autobiography, *Good Morning Blues*, Basie recalled he married the girl from Cleveland in 1943 in Seattle. Their honeymoon was a series of one-night band appearances.

The Basie band was working in New York when Katy was about to have a baby. She returned to Cleveland and stayed with her parents. Katy and Bill Basie's only child, Diane Basie, was born in Cleveland. He rushed to Cleveland to be with his wife and daughter.

Later, when they rejoined Basie in New York, he said he had vivid memories of seeing Katy getting off the plane from Cleveland carrying their baby. He said, "It was a special thrill bringing my family home from the airport that day, Old Base, his wife and daughter."

They moved into an apartment building near New York's Central Park. Former Clevelander Earle Warren and his wife lived in the same building and became Diane's godparents. The baby was baptized by Rev. Adam Clayton Powell a few years before he became a congressman.

As Basie's band was setting the international standard for swinging jazz, the former dancer from

Cleveland was handling many of Count's personal affairs. While he was on the road, she bought their new home in the Jamaica section of Queens. In the 1950s, he opened a club called "Count Basie's" at 7th Avenue and 132nd Street. It was losing money until Katy personally took over and turned it into a profitable operation. When Basie's father died, Count was playing in England and Katy made all the arrangements. In his autobiography Count said, "She really knew how to get things done."

In 1960, she was active in the political campaign of John Kennedy and took part in one of the inaugural balls.

Cleveland native Catherine Morgan Basie died in 1983. Basie died a year later.

Several key members of the Basie band had strong ties to Cleveland.

### Earle Warren

A native of Springfield, Ohio, Earle Warren came to Cleveland in 1933 at the age of 19 to play with the seven-piece Marion Sears Orchestra at Cedar Gardens at East 97th and Cedar.

Warren left the Cleveland band in 1937 to join the band of Sears' brother, Al, in Cincinnati. That's where



Count Basie

Count Basie saxophonist Herschel Evans first heard him. On Evans' recommendation, Basie hired Warren in April of 1937, just months after the saxophonist had been playing in Cleveland. His starting salary with Basie was \$6.25 a night.

Warren led the Basie sax section that included Evans and Lester Young. With musicians like Young, Buck Clayton and Harry "Sweets" Edison in the band, Warren did not solo often. He said, "I got all the bridges, eight bars in the middle of everything." But Basie said Warren made an important contribution as the leader of the reed section. Warren also composed for the band. With Buster Harding, a Cleveland, who had also played in the Marion Sears band, Warren wrote "9:20 Special." Warren also sang ballads with the Basie band, including "You Betcha My Life." Earle and his wife, Clara, became close friends of Bill and Katy Basie. Except for a hiatus in the 1940s, Warren remained with the orchestra from 1937 until 1950 when Basie was forced to disband his orchestra.

Warren later became the business manager for such performers as Johnny Otis and Eddie Heywood. In the late 1950s, he directed a number of shows including stage shows for disc jockey Alan Freed who had gone to New York from Cleveland. In the 1970s Warren formed a group of Basie band alumni to play for colleges and jazz groups. In the 1980s, he spent much of his time in Europe playing mostly Basie material.

## Harry "Sweets" Edison

Almost forgotten is the fact that Harry "Sweets" Edison, another key member of the Basie Orchestra, also began his jazz career in Cleveland.

Six months after he was born in 1915 in Columbus, Edison's parents broke up and he was raised by his mother. The boy soon began listening to the 1920s records of blues singer Bessie Smith and trumpeter Louis Armstrong. He was fascinated by the early Armstrong records and asked his mother to buy him a trumpet. Money was tight in the household, but when Harry was 12, she bought him his first trumpet for 25 cents down and payments for the full price of \$7.



Earle Warren

One night when Armstrong was playing in Columbus, young Edison couldn't afford a ticket but he managed to sneak in to hear his hero. He was hooked.

He never took a formal music lesson, but taught himself to play the trumpet and began playing with several Columbus area jazz bands.

When he was 18 (in 1933), Edison came to Cleveland to play with a band led by Chester Clark. Bassist Red Callender, also a member of that band, said, "Edison's style was fully developed even at the age of 18 when he was playing in Cleveland."

Edison also toured with the Cleveland-based Jeter-Pillars territory band. Soon, he sat in with Benny Moten and then joined a highly-regarded territory band led by Alphonso Trent.

At the age of 22 (in 1937), Edison went to New York and played for about six months with the Lucky Millinder band. While he was not a good reader, he learned quickly and managed to play the written arrangements with the band.

Then in September of 1937, Edison joined the Count Basie Orchestra where he was a key member for 13 years.

"When I joined the Basie band," Edison told an interviewer for *DownBeat* magazine, "we didn't have any written scores. Everything was head arrangements." Replacing Karl George, Edison joined Buck Clayton and Ed Lewis in the Basie trumpet section. He admitted he had trouble at first playing the head arrangements after playing written arrangements with the Millinder and Trent bands. After a few weeks, he wanted to quit, but changed his mind when Basie told him, "You're playing good, you sound good."

Before long, Edison was an accepted member of the Basie band. Another member of the band, saxophonist Lester Young, after hearing Edison's sweet trumpet style, began calling Edison "Sweets."

Other members of that Basie band included Herschel Evans, Walter Page, Jo Jones, Dicky Wells, Chu Berry, singer Jimmy Rushing, and saxophonist Earle Warren.

Edison called playing with the Basie Orchestra "the highlight of my life, an experience I wouldn't trade for the world. There wasn't much money," said Edison, "and it was rough traveling



Harry Edison



from one-nighter to one-nighter, sometimes as much as 500 miles a night, but it was a lot of fun."

Edison was also a frequent prankster. Once he secretly loosened the strings of Walter Page's bass. Another time, he raided Basie's stash of chicken and devoured it. He later admitted he carefully re-wrapped the chicken bones and pretended he was asleep when the boss found them.

In the book *The Big Band Years*, Edison recalled, "Everyone in that band had a distinctive style. When you heard a Basie record, you knew who was taking a solo."

The self-taught trumpeter, who began his professional career in Cleveland, fit in well, playing his horn in the now-classic spare Basie style. Many other trumpet players played louder and faster, but almost nobody played sweeter and with more lyricism.

Edison became famous for his economical, unhurried, swinging squeeze-note style. He once said, "I could never think fast anyway, so the notes just came few and far between." Almost single-handedly with his trumpet he developed a vocabulary for the Harmon mute.

When Basie broke up his band in 1950 and became Benny Goodman's pianist, Edison was shocked. After 13 years on the road with Basie, Edison suddenly found himself without a job and without a father figure. He worked for awhile with Buddy Rich's band and backed singer Frank Sinatra on his television show and on many of Sinatra's best records.

Looking back more than half a century later, Edison said, "Things have sure changed since the swing era when jazz was the popular music of the day, when melody was sovereign, when cutting contests separated the men from the boys, and when an entire 15-piece band recorded with one microphone."

Edison died in July of 1999 at age 84.

## Buster Harding

His name was not a household word. He was not one of the big stars of jazz history. But he was a musician who was highly respected by other musicians. He wrote and arranged for some of the most important jazz artists, helped define several important big bands, and contributed to the transition from swing to bebop. His name was Buster Harding.

Born in 1917, Harding was raised in Cleveland and basically taught himself to play the piano. He formed his first band while still a teenager attending Cleveland's old Central High School on East 55th Street. In the early 1930s, he joined the seven-piece Cleveland band of Marion Sears before Earle Warren arrived from Springfield. Another member of that early Marion Sears band was Andy Anderson, who, for years, carried a frayed and faded photo of the band members.

Pointing to the old photo, Anderson said, "The first

one was Horace Adams. We called him 'Head.' Then, there was Smitty, a guitar player. And Bus Harding was the piano player and arranger. James Peck, the drummer. He was out of Pittsburgh. And Francis Williams the trumpet player. You know, Greg Morris' father. And myself on bass."

Williams later played with Duke Ellington. His son became an actor and starred on the *Mission Impossible* television program.

Anderson said the band played at Oster's Ballroom twice a week, at the Dreamland Ballroom across the street from the Cleveland Clinic, and at Cedar Gardens at East 97th and Cedar.

Harding left Cleveland in 1937 and got band jobs in Buffalo, Canada and Boston before going to New York in 1938. The 22-year-old Harding became an arranger and second pianist for Teddy Wilson's short-lived big band, a band that included such sidemen as Ben Webster, Doc Cheatham, J.C. Heard and Shorty Baker.

When Wilson's band folded, Harding began writing arrangements for other bands. He penned "Scarecrow" for Benny Goodman and "Stampede in G Minor" for Basie. The song was arranged by Warren, a later alumnus of Cleveland's Marion Sears Orchestra. Warren wrote several other songs for the Basie band, which were arranged by Harding, including "Rockin' the Blues" and "9:20 Special" which featured a solo by Coleman Hawkins.

Harding's arrangements for the Basie Orchestra in the early 1940s helped set the style for that historic band.

Harding also arranged for Cab Calloway's band. Calloway was more of a showman than a musician and was known primarily for his "Hi-De-Ho" singing and dancing. He admitted "There was something missing" in his band for a long time until he hired Harding as his musical director. Calloway said Harding "is turning out stuff that is inspirational. Now, for the first time in my life, I've got a band I can be really proud of."

That Calloway band, directed by Harding, included saxophonists Chu Berry, Ben Webster, and Hilton Jefferson; trumpeters Dizzy Gillespie and Jonah Jones; bassist Milt Hinton; and drummer Cozy Cole.

When Harding left the Calloway band, he began freelancing big band arrangements for Basie, Artie Shaw and Roy Eldridge.

After World War II, Harding did more arrangements for the Basie Orchestra. Included was "Mr. Roberts' Roost," which was later renamed and became a juke box hit as "Paradise Squat." It featured Basie playing organ.

In the late 1940s, Harding also worked as a pianist on New York's fabled 52nd Street. He played piano with singer Billie Holiday at the Ebony Club. The club was run by John Levy who helped Holiday during her drug problems. In her autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues*,



she recalled the place was packed every night. Harding also served as musical director for Holiday's recording sessions.

Like many other musicians and arrangers of the period, Harding managed to successfully make the transition from swing to bebop. Beginning in 1954, he arranged for the Dizzy Gillespie big band. Harding and Gillespie had worked together a decade earlier with the Calloway band. Harding wrote and arranged a number of originals for Gillespie's 1950s big band.

When he was in his 40s, Harding's health began to fail and he curtailed most of his performing.

The Cleveland musician, who contributed so much to the Basie band and others, died November 14, 1965 at the age of 48.

## Skippy Williams

His name was Elbert Williams, but everybody called him "Skippy." He went from Cleveland's old Central High School to the Count Basie Orchestra.

Williams joined the Basie band in 1939, replacing Hershel Evans in the reed section, the reed section that included Lester Young and Earle Warren.

Williams was born July 27, 1916 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Because of Ku Klux Klan activity, his family decided to leave the South. While his mother and sisters moved north, Skippy and his brother, Pinky, worked their way from city to city with their father, an itinerant tailor. The family finally got back together in Cleveland, but shortly after they arrived here, both parents died and the children went to live with relatives at East 83rd and Quincy.

As a teenager, Williams listened to records by such groups as McKinney's Cotton Pickers, a rousing big band led by Don Redman. He taught himself to play the saxophone and later studied sax under Dr. Reddig, who was developing a reputation for school jazz at Central High School. Williams formed his own band to play for local dances. Among the members of that band was a young trumpet player named Freddie Webster.

In 1933, Williams joined the Chester Clark band where he played with Harry Edison and Red Callender.

The following year, 1934, Williams went out on the road with Toledo's Frank Terry Orchestra, a band that had included Cleveland trumpeter Emmett Berry.

By 1936, Skippy Williams found himself in Chicago playing with Eddie Cole, the bassist brother of Nat Cole, and working as a copyist for Fletcher Henderson's orchestra.

It was 1939 when Williams replaced Evans in the Basie Orchestra. On the bandstand, he usually sat next to Warren.

After touring with Basie, Williams left the band in New York and joined the Claude Hopkins Orchestra at

the Zanzibar nightclub on Broadway. He also played with Edgar Hayes, Earl Bostic, former Basie arranger Jimmy Mundy, Duke Ellington, Bob Chester, and Tommy Reynolds, and led his own band for a year.

In the 1940s, Williams appeared in several films including movies produced by black film pioneer Oscar Micheaux.

In late 1940s, Williams settled in Florida and led his own small combo. He often told friends that a highlight of his career occurred when his group became the first black group to play on Miami Beach.

Ironically, in the 1950s, the saxophonist who had toured with the Basie swing machine and other top big jazz bands, found himself playing on some of the early rock 'n roll records of Bill Haley.

In the late 1950s, Williams moved to New York and continued playing. He soloed with the Ellington band during its last Carnegie Hall concert in 1973, not long before Ellington's death.

In 1985, Williams made an extended tour of Europe with other veterans of the Basie band. They spent two months playing in England, France, Germany and Italy.

Skippy Williams died February 28, 1994, at the age of 76, in New York.

His brother, Pinky, older by two years, who played baritone sax with a number of bands, continued to live in East Cleveland. Skippy Williams' son, Jimmy, became a drummer in New York.

## Emmett Berry with Basie



Emmett Berry

Cleveland native Emmett Berry was a key member of the Basie trumpet section from 1945 to 1950 and recorded with Basie's small groups after he gave up his big band.

Berry started playing with local groups in Cleveland in the early 1930s. After joining the Frank Terry band in 1932, Berry replaced Roy Eldridge in the soloist's chair of the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra. He remained with Henderson until 1939 when Henderson broke up his band to join Benny Goodman.

Berry played with Teddy Wilson's Café Society Sextet, Raymond Scott's group, and joined the Lionel Hampton Orchestra in 1943. The following year he was a member of Eddie Heywood's band and recorded a classic trumpet solo on Heywood's "Begin the Beguine."

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Berry was not swayed by the advent of bop. He continued for years to play the straight-ahead style he had learned with Fletcher Henderson.



**Emmett Berry and Thelonious Monk**

If you looked very closely at Art Kane's historic 1958 photograph of 57 jazz musicians, "A Great Day in Harlem," you will notice Cleveland native Berry standing in the front row next to Thelonious Monk.

In the 1960s, Berry performed with dixieland groups in New York. In 1970, because of ill health, he came home to Cleveland to retire.

## Weasel Parker

William Parker, known to jazz musicians and fans as "Weasel," came to Cleveland in the 1950s after playing saxophone with the Basie band.

Like his good friend trumpeter Clark Terry, Parker grew up in the St. Louis area. Together they played in the George Hudson territory band for a year and a half before going to California to join Charlie Barnet's orchestra. Parker recorded with Cootie Williams and replaced Buddy Tate in the Basie band in the late '40s. Weasel is best remembered for his solo on "Normania" (later called "Blee-Blop Blues") with Basie.

He played for years in Cleveland at such clubs as the Jamaica Breeze on St. Clair Avenue where he frequently shared the bandstand with a highly-respected trumpeter named Ismail Ali, better known as "Hickey." Parker also owned a music store, Costello's Music, on East 105th Street and later worked at Prospect Music.

Weasel Parker died in Cleveland March 21, 1992 at the age of 70.

## Ace Carter

When Count Basie died, his chair in the band was filled by a longtime Cleveland jazz pianist, Carl "Ace" Carter.

Born in Youngstown, Carter came to Cleveland in 1954 with the Joe Cooper band. Another member of that band was a trombonist named Mel Wanzo. Three decades later it was Wanzo, then playing on the Basie band, who recommended that Carter take over the

important piano chair in the Basie band.

During a 30-year period, Carter had become a leader on the Cleveland jazz scene. He played regularly at the Boarding House Restaurant on Euclid Avenue and many other jazz spots in Cleveland. He performed with Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Sonny Stitt and recorded with George Benson and Jimmy Scott.



**Ace Carter**

Despite his vast experience playing with some of the best small jazz groups in Cleveland for more than 30 years, it was not an easy assignment taking over the role of the legendary Count Basie in the band. He said in a 1990 interview with the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, "He's

sitting right there next to me, right there beside me." Carter never tried to imitate Basie's piano style. He said, "I'm pretty much on my own as far as soloing goes."

Carter toured with the Frank Foster-led Basie band throughout the United States and to several foreign countries. He remembered one of the high spots was a week in London with Ella Fitzgerald.

But, eventually, the rigors of almost constant travel with the Basie band began to wear on Carter. Even though many of the trips were by plane, Ace said, "Getting up and making those flights was not easy. And you don't always get enough sleep or eat the right kind of food."

Carter left the band in 1991 and returned to Cleveland where he continued performing while battling a series of medical problems.

Ace died of kidney failure September 20, 1996 at the age of 65. Jazz musicians from across the country, including many members of the Basie band, attended his funeral service at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church on East Boulevard in Cleveland.

Over the years a number of other Greater Cleveland area musicians played with the Basie band. They included Eddie Preston, Joe Alexander, Paul Weedon and Dennis Reynolds.



## 7. The Big Band Era

**B**ig dance bands were playing almost everywhere in Greater Cleveland in the late 1930s and early '40s — at ballrooms, theatres, and amusement parks. Big band jazz was the most popular form of music in the world and the bandleaders were bigger celebrities than the rock stars of a later generation.

Many of the big bands began in Cleveland and many Cleveland musicians played with the hugely popular touring bands.



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives

**Benny Goodman and fans in the 1930s**

dancers, but Story said there was a form of racial discrimination. "Duke Ellington, Count Basie or Jimmie Lunceford would be there two nights," said Story. "They would charge 50 cents on Thursday nights for white people and a dollar for black people on Saturday nights."

Story also remembered seeing and hearing the Tommy Dorsey and Woody Herman bands at the Trianon. The Dorsey Brothers Orchestra played there in 1935.

Les Brown and his Band of Renown were at the Trianon in January of 1937.

### Where they played

Veteran Cleveland saxophonist Andy Anderson said he heard most of the bands here. He remembered listening to Erskine Hawkins' 'Bama State Collegians and McKinney's Cotton Pickers from Detroit. "Those guys were really blowing," said Anderson. "They were playing like mad!" He recalled hearing bands downtown at the Palace and Hippodrome Theatres and at ballrooms around the city including Oster's, the Trianon and the Circle, and at Public Auditorium.

### Trianon Ballroom

A favorite spot where many of the top national bands played was the Trianon Ballroom at 9802 Euclid Avenue. The Trianon opened in 1924 as the Crystal Slipper Ballroom. It could accommodate 4,000 dancers. In December of 1926, the Crystal Slipper advertised "The classiest dance crowd of Cleveland" with Moran and Wahl's Crystal Slipper Orchestra. Thursday was "Novelty Night," Friday was "College Night," and everybody was welcome on Saturday and Sunday nights. Duke Ellington and his Orchestra played there for dancing as early as August of 1932. Two years later, the name was changed to the Trianon Ballroom.

Nehemiah Story, better known to his friends as "Chief" Story, said the Trianon in the 1930s and '40s had all the big bands on Thursday and Saturday nights. They played for both black and white

Andy Kirk and his Clouds of Joy played there the following month and originated national broadcasts on the NBC Red Network from the Trianon. On a recording of one of those broadcasts, you can hear the announcer saying, "Greetings and salutation from Andy Kirk and his Clouds of Joy featuring Mary Lou Williams, America's foremost swing pianist, originating from the Trianon Ballroom in Cleveland."

Pianist Al Lerner first heard his future boss, Harry James, at the Trianon Ballroom in 1939. "There were so many bands there!" said Lerner.

Bunny Berigan and his Orchestra spent much of the spring of 1939 at the Trianon. He played there three nights a week in April of 1939 and returned for several more appearances in 1942.

Saxophonist Hank Geer remembered trumpeter Charlie Spivak got his start as a bandleader at the Trianon. "He left the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra," said Geer, "and MCA (the Music Corporation of America) wanted to build a band under Charlie. They sent him to Cleveland, to the Trianon Ballroom. His band became the house band."

"After the Trianon was turned into a bowling alley in 1956," Story said, "there was no place for black people to dance, so they opened a place out near 105th and Cedar called The Playmor. It was a former skating rink and a lot of bands came in there to play."



**Andy Kirk and his Clouds of Joy at the Trianon in 1937.  
At the piano is Mary Lou Williams.**



## Circle Ballroom

Anderson also remembered bands at the Circle Ballroom, a dance hall upstairs above Zimmerman's Drug Store at East 105th and Euclid. "They'd have a breakfast dance at Zimmerman's," recalled Anderson. "They'd have two bands, maybe Horace Henderson at 10 o'clock in the morning and then another band at night."

The building opened in 1920 as the Hoffman Theatre, and was expanded and renamed in 1927 to include both the Circle Theatre and the Circle Ballroom.

The Count Basie Orchestra was one of the big bands that played at the Circle.

Cleveland trombonist Bernard Simms remembered playing with a teenage band led by Evelyn Freeman at the Circle Ballroom. He said, "We broadcast on WHK with Tom Manning as the announcer."

The building was torn down in the mid-1970s to make room for urban renewal developments.

## Public Auditorium

Anderson also remembered jazz bands playing for dances at Public Auditorium downtown. "They had a battle of the bands there, Chick Webb at one end and Fletcher Henderson at the other! We went and danced all day long for 50 cents. And those bands were outplaying each other! Talk about hearing music!"

Cleveland's Public Hall building, part of the Convention Center complex, was opened in 1929 and included both the large Public Auditorium and the 3,000-seat Music Hall. Bands that appeared there in the 1930s and '40s included Count Basie, Lionel Hampton, Lucky Millinder, Andy Kirk, Fletcher Henderson, Chick Webb and Duke Ellington.

When Story was still a teenager, he recalled, "I would make it my business to go down to Public Auditorium or to the Palace Theatre. If I didn't go downtown, I would go out to the Trianon Ballroom."

## Aragon Ballroom

Cleveland's longest-running dance hall was the Aragon Ballroom on West 25th Street near Clark Avenue.

Built in 1919, it was originally called the Olympic Winter Garden and served as both a dance hall and a skating rink. In 1930, Lloyd Harry Meyers and his father, George Meyers, bought the ballroom and changed the name to Shadyside Gardens. Newspaper reports said they installed the dance floor on top of the regular floor, leaving a small air space for resilience. A few years later, they remodeled the ballroom and renamed it the Aragon after a famous ballroom in Chicago. When they reopened, they hired the nationally famous Red Nichols to play for dancing. Nichols and his band had been playing at the Golden Pheasant Chinese Restaurant on Prospect Avenue and making regular national radio



**The Aragon Ballroom on West 25th Street**

broadcasts from Cleveland.

Another early band at the Aragon was Cleveland's Freddy Carlone Orchestra featuring singer Perry Como.

Almost all the name bands played at the Aragon including Harry James, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Bunny Berigan and Woody Herman. At its peak, the Aragon was open seven nights a week and frequently attracted as many as 2,000 dancers a night.

The unusual decor included a glitter ball revolving over the center of the dance floor, salmon and purple walls, burgundy carpeting leading to the maple dance floor and wine-colored benches where dancers could rest between sets.

After George Meyers was killed in a traffic accident outside the Aragon, his son, Lloyd, and his wife, Madeline, took over the operation and ran the ballroom for years.

Carl "Doc" Pfeil, who started working at the Aragon in 1930, made a framed sign which he placed in the ladies room. It suggested to the ladies:

**Don't hesitate to accept the offer of a dance  
from a gentleman when he asks you.  
He pays you a compliment.  
Please consider it in that light and the  
enjoyment of your visit here will be increased.  
You come here for a good time.  
We do our part by giving you the finest dance  
music, and a perfect dance floor  
in beautiful romantic surroundings.  
The rest is up to you, ladies.**

The Aragon continued to present local and national big bands for dancing on a regular basis into the 1980s. The Meyers sold the ballroom in 1987 and the new owners continued to present big bands for dancing until 1993 when the music stopped and the doors closed.

The Cleveland Landmarks Commission declared the Aragon Ballroom a Cleveland Historic Site.

At one time in the 1990s, there was an attempt to convert the building into a night spot for the local Hispanic community, but that effort failed and the structure became the home of a Pentecostal church.

## Oster's Ballroom

Veteran saxophonist and arranger Willie Smith remembered Oster's Ballroom was "where all the bands used to come, Benny Carter, Billy Eckstine, Count Basie, all those people would come through Oster's Ballroom." Smith said, "It was in the black neighborhood but many white people used to come to hear the better professional musicians."

Oster's Ballroom was originally located at 2052 East 105th Street, across the street from the YMCA. Later, it moved to East 46th and Euclid.

Andy Anderson played saxophone with the Marion Sears Orchestra at the original Oster's Ballroom two nights a week in the early 1930s.

In addition to the regular dances, Anderson said Oster's Ballroom had a very unusual event for some special dancers. He remembered, "Thursday afternoons, we played for deaf and dumb students. Mr. Oster would go to the school and bring them in buses. They'd go upstairs and dance. They did all the dance steps – fox trot, one-step, waltzes, what not. They felt the rhythm of the drums through the floor, the vibrations."

"Chief" Story, a participant and active supporter of jazz in Cleveland for more than 60 years, said Oster's "was a nice ballroom, with a spacious floor and people really enjoyed it, hearing the bands and being able to dance."

Many of the other top bands of the 1930s and '40s played at Oster's Ballroom including Fletcher Henderson in 1943, and Louis Armstrong in 1946.

### Cleveland Area Ballrooms

**Aragon Ballroom** - 3179 West 25th Street (1919-1993)  
**Bedford Glen** - Glen Road, Bedford (1905-1944)  
**Central Armory** - East 6th & Lakeside (1903-1919)  
**Circle Ballroom** - East 105th & Euclid  
**Cleveland Public Hall** - East 6th & Lakeside  
**Danceland** - East 98th & Euclid  
**Dreamland Ballroom** - East 13th & Chester  
**East Market Gardens** - Akron (1930s)  
**Euclid Beach Park** - East 160th & Lakeshore (1895-1969)  
**Luna Park Pavilion** - E. 109th & Woodland (1905-1935)  
**Marcane Ballroom** - 3705 Euclid (1940s & '50s)  
**Martha Lee Club** - East 17th & Euclid (1920s)  
**Oster's Ballroom** - 2052 East 105th & 46th & Euclid  
**Puritas Springs Ballroom** - Puritas Road (1898-1943)  
**Springvale Ballroom** - North Olmsted (1923-)  
**Trianon Ballroom** - 9802 Euclid Ave. (1924-1956)

## The Land O' Dance price war

In 1932, a man named H.W. Perry opened a new ballroom at 12th and Market in Canton called Land O' Dance. He began booking many of the most popular bands in the country including Red Nichols.

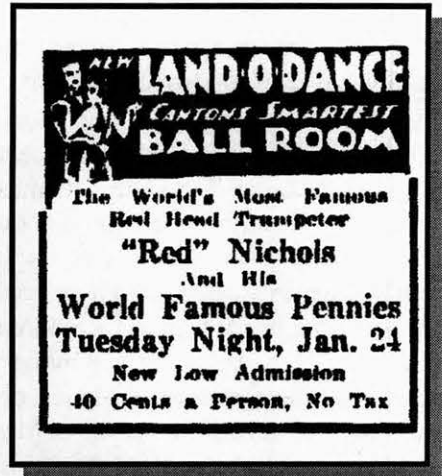
The Land O'Dance became very popular for a brief period, but Perry's business was ruined by a brutal price war with other nearby ballrooms.

When the nationally famous Jan Garber Orchestra played in January, Perry charged 50 cents for admission. Two weeks later, when he booked Red Nichols, the promoter, facing competition from other ballrooms, dropped his price to 40 cents, but, when he spent a lot of money to book the popular Ted Lewis Orchestra, he had to raise his price to \$1.10 and quickly discovered people would not spend that much. Nearby Meyer's Lake Moonlight Ballroom got a much bigger crowd by charging only 25 cents for the relatively unknown Tommy Nichols Orchestra.

During the summer, Perry moved his dances to the Summit Beach Park Ballroom in Akron. There he charged 10 cents to hear Cleveland's Emerson Gill Orchestra and 44 cents to hear the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra with Coleman Hawkins, Benny Carter, Rex Stewart and Buster Bailey.

In a newspaper interview, Perry said, "Most of the boys are giving more consideration to admission price than band bookings." He angrily charged he was forced to drop his ticket prices so low that he was unable to meet operating costs.

By the end of the year, the price war put Perry's Land O' Dance out of business.



A 1932 newspaper ad for Land O'Dance in Canton

### Land O' Dance - 1932

January 12 -	Jan Garber
January 24 -	Red Nichols
January 26 -	Husk O' Hare
January 31 -	Kay Kyser
February 16 -	Don Redman
February 21 -	Ted Lewis
April 8 -	Ben Bernie
April 24 -	Henry Thies
October 4 -	Larry Funk
October 20 -	Ted Hall
November 8 -	Red Nichols
November 15 -	Casa Loma
November 17 -	Northerners
November 22 -	Red Nichols
December 27 -	Duke Ellington



## Summer amusement parks

From the 1920s to the 1950s, there were at least 150 dance halls in Greater Cleveland, according to Bob Strasmeyer, the acknowledged authority on Cleveland area ballrooms. His count did not include numerous dance floors at hotels, nightclubs and party centers. Many of the most popular dance floors were at amusement parks.

Among the summer dance pavilions was Bedford Glen off Broadway near Warrensville in Bedford. Trains brought dancers to Bedford Glen from all parts of the area. The big bands played there throughout the 1930s until the pavilion was destroyed by fire in the 1940s. In later years, there was no evidence of a dance hall at Bedford Glen. It became the site of Mr. T's Printing and Sandblasting and the Bedford Glen Garden Center.

Cleveland trumpeter Bob Peck, who later played with Glenn Miller and Bob Crosby, remembered playing at Bedford Glen and such other summer amusement parks as Brighton Park (near Brookside Park), the Brookside Park Pavilion, Euclid Beach Park, Luna Park, Puritas Springs Park, the Springvale Ballroom, Chippewa Lake Park, Summit Beach Park in Akron, as well as at Cain Park in Cleveland Heights, and the Edgewater Park Pavilion. "In those days," said Peck, "we played all these parks. Some of them were five-cents-a-dance places. They would clear the floor after each song, and then fill the floor again and start the next tune."

Among the hundreds of musicians who played with dance bands at area amusement parks in the 1920s was a young art student named Viktor Schreckengost. He told me that when he was studying art in Cleveland, he played saxophone and clarinet with a band led by Ken Webb at a variety of amusement park dance halls. Later, Cleveland Heights resident Schreckengost became world famous as an artist and industrial designer and was widely praised for his artistic depictions of jazz.

Al Lerner remembered hearing the Austin Wylie Orchestra at Euclid Beach Park. He said the band at the time included such future national names as Billy

Butterfield, Gordon Jenkins and Claude Thornhill. Vic Stuart's band played for years at Euclid Beach.

Saxophonist Hank Geer was still at Collinwood High School when he began playing with various big bands at summer dance pavilions. Geer remembered playing at Euclid Beach, Vermillion, Ruggles Beach, Mentor-on-the-Lake and other summer parks.

## Cedar Point Ballroom



Cedar Point

### The Cedar Point Coliseum Ballroom

The ballroom at the Cedar Point amusement park in Sandusky first opened in 1903. In 1939, the park rebuilt the ballroom on the upper level of the Coliseum Building and began booking some of the most popular dance bands in the country.

The rebuilt ballroom was an art deco showplace with multi-tiered rainbow-colored lights casting a soft glow on the dancers. At the north end of the ballroom there was a large stage with a rainbow motif backdrop and colored lighting. At the other end, there were scores of tables and chairs and a refreshment stand offering sandwiches, beer, wine, champagne and liquor. It was considered one of the largest and most beautiful ballrooms in the Midwest.

One of the first attractions in 1939 was the Ozzie Nelson Orchestra featuring the singing of his wife, Harriett Hilliard. More than a decade later, they were the stars of the radio and TV series, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriett*.

Other bands that played at the Cedar Point Ballroom for almost two decades included Bob Crosby, Woody Herman, Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, Tex Beneke, Ray Anthony, Duke Ellington and Claude Thornhill. For several years, NBC broadcast the bands live from Cedar Point on national radio.

Frequently in the late 1930s and early '40s, the band musicians performing at Cedar Point would hold after-hours jam sessions at Posner's Castle Sandwich Shop. The shop was owned by Cleveland and jazz fan Frederick Posner.

## CHIPPEWA LAKE PARK OPENING DANCE Wednesday, April 30 TOMMY DORSEY

And His Nationally Famous Band

Advance Sale Tickets, \$1 plus tax

General Admission at Door, \$1.25 plus tax

TICKETS ON SALE AT

Anderson Drug

MEDINA

CCC Restaurant

SEVILLE

Westfield Service Store

LEROY

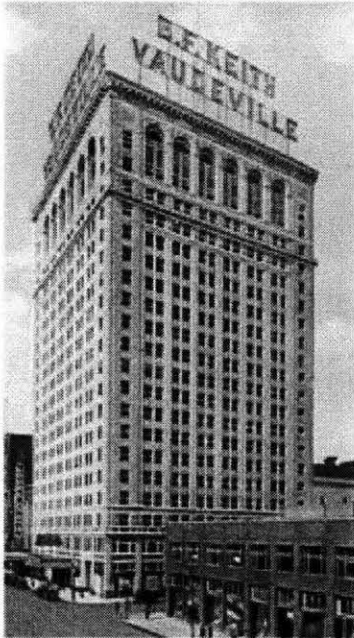
Mary-Myra Service Sta.

RTS. 3 and 224

A 1941 ad from *The Medina County Gazette*



## The swinging Palace Theatre



**The B.F. Keith Building at East 17th and Euclid, housing the Palace Theatre**

Cleveland's Palace Theatre, built in 1922 in the B. F. Keith Building at East 17th and Euclid Avenue, was a major stop on the vaudeville circuit. In 1925, the Palace also began showing motion pictures interspersed with the live entertainment.

Big bands played at the Palace as early as 1929 when the Paul Whiteman Orchestra performed for a week between showings of the movie *Me, Gangster*.

Other bands at the Palace in the 1920s, when Cleveland was

the sixth largest city in the United States with a population of one million, included Ted Lewis, Fred Waring and Guy Lombardo.

Beginning in 1931, there was an almost constant parade of big bands at the Palace, playing full-week engagements with several performances each day between showings of motion pictures. The first was Irving Aaronson's Commanders which included clarinetist Artie Shaw who had been playing with Cleveland's Austin Wylie band less than two years earlier. A relatively unknown Cleveland comedian, Bob Hope, was the featured live entertainer the following week.

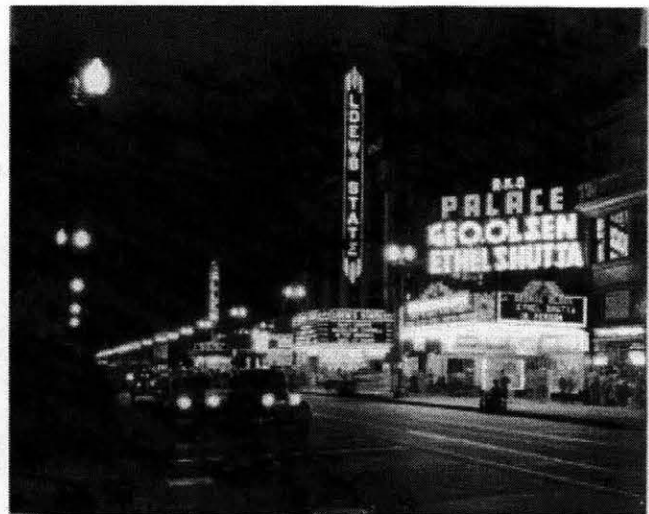
Duke Ellington, on his first national tour, played at the Palace the week of July 4, 1931. It was the first of ten week-long appearances by the Ellington band at the Palace.

Ticket prices, during the depths of the Depression, were usually 25 cents for matinees and 30 cents for evening performances. That also included the movie.

By 1935, vaudeville acts had all but disappeared as the big bands, many of them featuring leading jazz artists, became extremely popular. They were the backbone of the Palace Theatre's live entertainment for the next 15 years.

Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra first played at the Palace in April of 1938 and did its coast-to-coast radio broadcasts from the stage. Many others also later made network broadcasts from the Palace.

An indication of just how popular the big dance bands were was the fact that the ten most popular records of the



Playhouse Square Foundation

**Cleveland's Palace Theatre in September of 1936 when the George Olsen Orchestra was playing**

year in 1940 were *all* recorded by big bands.

Dorsey set the Palace Theatre box office record when his band, with drummer Gene Krupa and a new, 21-year-old clarinetist, Buddy DeFranco, played for a week in March of 1944.

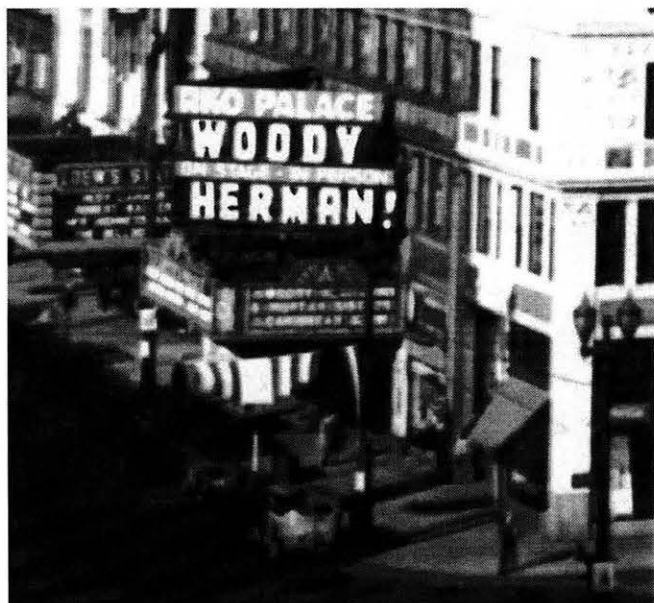


Playhouse Square Foundation

**Tommy Dorsey on stage with his band at the Cleveland Palace Theatre in March of 1944, the week he set the box office record**

During the period from 1931 to 1950, many of the bands returned year after year. Cab Calloway played ten weeks at the Palace, Louis Armstrong – five weeks, Tommy Dorsey – five weeks, Jimmy Dorsey – five weeks, Bob Crosby – five weeks, Fats Waller – four weeks, Nat Cole and his Trio – four weeks, Benny Goodman – three weeks, and Count Basie – three weeks.

By the 1950s, when television was beginning to make inroads into popular entertainment and the big bands were fading, the Palace discontinued its policy of live entertainment. With only a few exceptions, the theatre became a movie house until the 1970s when the Playhouse Square Foundation began a major effort to



Bruce Young Collection

**The marquee of the Palace Theatre during the week of October 12, 1945, announcing Woody Herman and his Orchestra "on stage - in person"**

save the historic Cleveland theatres.

Appropriately, among the first live performers at the restored Palace in 1975 were the Woody Herman Orchestra and the Glenn Miller and Duke Ellington ghost bands.

Later in the 1970s, there were performances by Dizzy Gillespie, Sarah Vaughan, Peggy Lee, Mel Tormé, Buddy Rich, Doc Severinsen, Ella Fitzgerald, Oscar Peterson, Count Basie, Maynard Ferguson, Dave Brubeck, the Four Freshmen, Herbie Hancock, and Jean-Luc Ponty.

Beginning in 1980, the Tri-C JazzFest brought a parade of major jazz artists to the stage of the Palace.

But, the golden years for jazz at the Palace were from 1931 to 1950 when practically every major jazz artist and big band performed there live, frequently for a week at a time.

The list of artists at the Palace reads almost like a jazz hall of fame:



Playhouse Square Foundation

**Woody Herman at the Palace**



Playhouse Square Foundation

**The reed section backing Herman on the stage of the Palace Theatre**



## Jazz and Big Bands at the Cleveland Palace Theatre

## 1931

Week of:

2/7 - Irving Aaronson  
7/4 - Duke Ellington  
9/5 - Benny Meroff  
11/7 - Louis Armstrong

## 1932

1/30 - Paul Whiteman  
6/11 - Duke Ellington

## 1934

3/30 - Hot Chocolates of 1934  
10/12 - Don Redman  
12/14 - Noble Sissle

## 1935

2/1 - Benny Meroff  
2/8 - Paul Whiteman  
3/8 - George Olsen  
3/22 - Duke Ellington  
4/5 - Gus Arnheim  
8/9 - Hal Kemp  
10/18 - Ted Weems  
11/22 - Jimmie Lunceford  
11/19 - Jack Hilton

## 1936

3/13 - Cab Calloway  
5/1 - Fats Waller & Bill Robinson  
6/12 - Louis Armstrong  
7/31 - Duke Ellington  
9/11 - George Olsen  
10/2 - Noble Sissle  
12/11 - Fats Waller

## 1937

4/9 - Don Redman  
5/21 - Cab Calloway  
7/23 - Ozzie Nelson  
8/6 - Duke Ellington  
8/20 - Red Norvo & Mildred Bailey  
9/17 - Jimmy Dorsey with Bob Eberly  
10/15 - Fats Waller  
12/24 - Ted Lewis

## 1938

3/25 - Cab Calloway  
4/1 - Tommy Dorsey  
6/3 - Benny Goodman  
10/7 - Duke Ellington  
12/2 - Ozzie Nelson  
12/9 - Bob Crosby

## 1939

1/6 - Hal Kemp  
2/10 - Ted Weems  
3/24 - Larry Clinton  
4/21 - Jimmy Dorsey  
4/28 - Red Norvo & Mildred Bailey  
5/12 - Benny Goodman  
5/25 - Gene Krupa  
9/8 - Artie Shaw  
9/22 - Louis Armstrong

## 1940

1/12 - Benny Meroff  
3/15 - Woody Herman  
5/3 - Jan Savitt  
8/30 - Charlie Barnet  
10/4 - Jimmy Dorsey  
11/15 - Woody Herman

## 1941

1/31 - Cab Calloway & Mills Bros.

2/21 - Glenn Miller  
2/28 - Ray Noble  
3/21 - Will Bradley  
4/4 - Erskine Hawkins  
4/25 - Ted Weems  
9/26 - Tony Pastor  
10/3 - Artie Shaw  
11/28 - Ella Fitzgerald & The Ink Spots  
12/5 - Jan Savitt  
12/19 - Mills Brothers

## 1942

1/2 - Alvino Rey  
1/9 - Glenn Miller  
1/16 - Cab Calloway and Cozy Cole  
1/23 - Jimmy Dorsey  
2/20 - Woody Herman  
3/13 - Glen Gray with Pee Wee Hunt  
5/1 - Fats Waller  
5/15 - Gene Krupa  
7/24 - Tommy Dorsey  
with Frank Sinatra  
8/7 - Vaughn Monroe  
8/28 - Duke Ellington  
9/11 - Stan Kenton  
9/25 - Charlie Spivak  
10/16 - Claude Thornhill  
with Tex Beneke  
11/6 - Bob Crosby  
12/4 - Tony Pastor

## 1943

1/1 - Hal McIntyre  
1/15 - Henry Busse  
1/22 - Louis Armstrong  
1/29 - Woody Herman  
2/12 - Bob Chester  
2/26 - Jan Savitt  
3/12 - Gene Krupa  
3/26 - Count Basie  
4/30 - Cab Calloway  
5/7 - Johnny Long  
5/21 - Louis Prima  
5/28 - Kenny Baker and Sonny Durham  
6/4 - Jimmy Dorsey  
6/11 - Erskine Hawkins  
with Ethel Waters  
7/2 - Glen Gray  
7/9 - Ozzie Nelson  
7/23 - Lionel Hampton  
with Billie Holiday  
7/30 - Charlie Barnet  
9/24 - Woody Herman  
10/1 - Louis Armstrong  
11/5 - Jimmie Lunceford  
12/3 - Charlie Spivak  
12/24 - Tony Pastor

## 1944

1/14 - Mills Brothers  
1/21 - Jan Savitt  
1/28 - Ella Fitzgerald  
2/25 - Vaughn Monroe Orch.  
3/3 - Johnny Long  
3/10 - Tommy Dorsey with Gene Krupa  
3/31 - Cab Calloway  
4/21 - Les Brown with Doris Day  
5/19 - Henry Busse  
7/7 - Count Basie  
7/14 - Bobby Sherwood  
8/4 - Ozzie Nelson

9/8 - Lena Horne  
9/15 - Stan Kenton  
9/22 - Bob Chester  
10/6 - Woody Herman  
10/13 - Jimmy Dorsey  
10/20 - Charlie Spivak  
11/3 - Duke Ellington  
11/17 - Will Osborne  
11/24 - Louis Jordan  
12/1 - Charlie Barnet  
12/8 - Gene Krupa  
12/15 - Nat "King" Cole Trio  
and Benny Carter  
12/22 - Artie Shaw Orchestra

## 1945

1/5 - Mills Brothers  
1/12 - Vaughn Monroe Orch.  
2/9 - Lionel Hampton  
3/9 - Cab Calloway  
3/23 - Louis Prima  
3/30 - Johnny Long  
4/13 - Ella Fitzgerald  
4/20 - Tommy Dorsey with Buddy Rich  
8/3 - Benny Goodman  
8/10 - Henry Busse  
9/14 - Nat "King" Cole Trio  
9/28 - Tony Pastor  
10/5 - Glenn Miller's Modernaires  
10/12 - Woody Herman

## 1946

1/17 - Count Basie  
2/28 - Vaughn Monroe Orch.  
5/16 - Lionel Hampton  
5/23 - Louis Prima  
8/1 - Bob Crosby  
8/8 - Bob Crosby  
10/31 - Freddie Slack  
11/7 - Gene Krupa  
11/21 - Cab Calloway  
11/28 - Vaughn Monroe Orch.

## 1947

3/6 - Nat "King" Cole Trio  
3/13 - Tex Beneke  
3/20 - Lionel Hampton  
5/8 - Louis Jordan Orch.  
7/3 - Louis Prima  
7/10 - Freddy Martin  
9/25 - Ted Weems  
10/9 - Cab Calloway  
11/27 - Tommy Dorsey

## 1948

2/5 - Vaughn Monroe  
2/12 - Duke Ellington  
7/1 - Lionel Hampton  
7/22 - Bob Crosby  
12/30 - Louis Prima

## 1949

4/7 - Nat "King" Cole Trio  
5/19 - Vaughn Monroe  
5/26 - Mills Brothers  
8/11 - Peggy Lee & Louis Jordan

## 1950

6/27 - Ella Fitzgerald  
9/2 - Louis Prima

Source: Cleveland Palace Theatre

## Cleveland's white dance bands

There were many white dance bands playing throughout Greater Cleveland from the 1920s through the 1940s. While it is an exaggeration to call some of them *jazz* bands, they were part of the overall popularity of big bands and many of them graduated familiar jazz names to national fame.

The Emerson Gill Orchestra was playing and recording in Cleveland as early as the 1920s.

Austin Wylie also began leading bands in Cleveland in the early 1920s. In the late 1920s and the '30s, his band featured such then-unknown performers as Artie Shaw, Claude Thornhill, Tony Pastor, Vaughn Monroe and Helen O'Connell.

Trumpeter Bob Peck, who grew up in East Cleveland, joined Wylie's band in the spring of 1937. Other members at the time included trumpeter Billy Butterfield from Middletown, reed player Bill Stegmeyer from Detroit, and pianist Chet Rice from Cleveland. Peck said Butterfield, who became one of the most respected trumpeters in jazz, added much to the jazz sound of the Wylie Orchestra. "That was a very swinging band," he said, "with the personnel that we had."

Peck said Wylie was "a wonderful person who had a penchant for the spirits. Sometimes he had a little difficulty standing up on the stage. In those days, all he did was wave the baton around." According to Peck, Wylie seldom played. "He played the violin, but he'd pick it up only occasionally to help out with a waltz medley."

The end of the Wylie Orchestra came in late 1937 when Billy Rose's Aquacade was a featured attraction at the Great Lakes Exposition. "The Bob Crosby band," said Peck, "was playing at the Aquacade and several of the best players from Wylie's Cleveland band quit to join Crosby." When they left, Wylie gave up his band to become the manager of Shaw's then-nationally famous orchestra.

Freddy Carlone's band from 1931 to 1936 featured a young vocalist from Pennsylvania named Perry Como. In March of 1933, the Carlone band played at the inaugural ball for newly-elected President Franklin Roosevelt. Frankie Laine also sang briefly with the Carlone band.

Sammy Watkins' Orchestra played for years at the old Hollenden Hotel. In 1940 he hired a young singer from Steubenville named Dino Crocetti and changed his



**Billy Butterfield  
in the 1930s**

name to Dean Martin. Martin lived and sang here for three years.

Guy Lombardo, who grew up in London, Ontario, Canada, came to Cleveland, married a Lakewood girl, and played here until 1941. Lombardo's band played for several years at the Music Box above the State Theatre during the winters and at Blossom Heath (later the Cleveland Yachting Club) during the summers.



**Sammy Watkins**

Sammy Kaye, who had graduated from Rocky River High School and become a track star at Ohio University, formed his first professional band in Cleveland in 1931. He played at the Statler Hotel before winning national popularity with his "Swing and Sway" music. One of Kaye's first and most popular records was an unusual version of "Daddy" which came from a University of Pennsylvania Mask and Whig Club production. Kaye later married a wealthy matron from Shaker Heights.

Charlie Zwick, who later headed the United States Information Agency for President Ronald Reagan, led a band at the Winton Hotel.

By the 1930s, black bands were also becoming very active and popular in Cleveland.

## The Jeter-Pillars Orchestra

**Saxophonists**  
James Jeter and Hayes Pillars, boyhood friends who had been playing in the Alphonso Trent band, formed their own territory band in Cleveland in 1934. They first played at a Cleveland club called the Hollywood Café.

Their orchestra helped launch the careers of several extremely important jazz artists.

One of the first members of the band was an 18-year-old trumpet player from Columbus, Harry Edison, who had been playing in



**Hayes Pillars**



Cleveland with a band led by Chester Clark at a spot called Mamie Louise's Chicken Shack. With the new Jeter-Pillars Orchestra, Edison played at various Cleveland clubs including the Magnolia Hotel Creole Bar.

Edison later said, "Jeter and Pillars were very good musicians and they stressed quality in their band." But Edison said there wasn't much room for solos. He toured the Midwest with the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra before joining Count Basie three years later.

Another member of the band formed in Cleveland was drummer Sid Catlett who had played with Benny Carter and McKinney's Cotton Pickers. Considered one of the top drummers of the 1930s and '40s, Catlett stayed with Jeter-Pillars for two years before joining Fletcher Henderson. When Catlett left, he was replaced by another pretty good drummer, Jo Jones. Bassist Walter Page was also a member of the Cleveland-based band. Within a year, Jones and Page became key members of Count Basie's legendary rhythm section.

In 1937, Jeter and Pillars moved their band from Cleveland to Chicago and recorded four sides for Vocalion Records. Included was a song called "I Like Pie, I Like Cake" featuring a vocal by Pillars.

From Chicago, Jeter and Pillars took their band to St. Louis and became a featured attraction at a club called the Club Plantation. In St. Louis, two extraordinary young jazz musicians joined their band – bassist Jimmy Blanton and guitarist Charlie Christian.

Blanton was playing with the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra at the Club Plantation when Duke Ellington first heard him in 1939. After joining Ellington, Blanton, more than anyone else in jazz, made the string bass a solo instrument.

In September of 1939, record producer John Hammond heard Christian playing and recommended him to Benny Goodman. On the basis of his recordings with Goodman, including "Solo Flight," Christian became an all-time master of the jazz guitar, influenced generations of guitar players, and played with the pioneers of bebop in the early 1940s before his death in 1942 at the age of 25.

Others who played with the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra included drummer Kenny Clarke and saxophonist Jimmy Forrest who later replaced Ben Webster in the Duke Ellington Orchestra.

By 1942, the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra became the most

popular band in St. Louis. Miles Davis, who grew up in the St. Louis area, called the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra "a great band." It was featured on a popular national radio program, *The Fitch Bandwagon*.

Jeter and Pillars finally disbanded their orchestra in 1947.

In 1981, the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University and the Smithsonian Institution honored Pillars for his contributions to jazz. When Pillars died in 1992, services were conducted at a St. Louis funeral home operated by Eddie Randle, a bandleader who had first hired young Miles Davis in the early 1940s.

## On the road with Tommy Allen



Courtesy Tommy Allen  
**Tommy Allen**

Touring with the bands was a difficult existence. Veteran Cleveland saxophonist Tommy Allen, who played with the Lionel Hampton Orchestra among others, remembered the rigors of touring.

After growing up in New Castle, Pennsylvania, Allen joined a Youngstown band, Joe Brunswick and his California Nighthawks, with Tiny Bradshaw and

Howard McGee. When Allen joined Ben Hilson and his Twelve Clouds of Joy, he recalled, "We came to Cleveland and played a big dance for about 600 people on East 55th Street. We stayed at the Majestic Hotel. We got stranded here. We couldn't get out of town." Hilson ran out of money.

Later, Allen joined Zack Whyte's territory band. "His greatest forté," said Allen, "was he made money but the musicians didn't make any." One time in Tampa, Florida, Allen remembered, "Whyte gave each member of his band 15 cents and said, 'Go down to the corner. You can get a plate of beans and rice for 15 cents.'" Allen left the Whyte band a short time later.

After teaching and working in a steel mill in Steubenville, Allen got the itch again. He joined the swinging band of Don Redman. Allen said, "He had two books. You play out of this one if you're playing a dance; and tomorrow night, you play out of the other one for a concert."

Later Allen joined the Lionel Hampton Orchestra. His chief memory of touring with Hampton was "playing 'Flyin' Home' non-stop for 45 minutes!"

In 1954 Allen moved to Cleveland and became the secretary-treasurer of Local 550 of the American Federation of Musicians.

Allen died May 21, 1999 in Cleveland.

### Musicians who played with the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra

Harry Edison (1934-1936)  
Walter Page (1934)  
Sid Catlett (1934-1935)  
Jo Jones (1935)

Kenny Clarke (1935-1937)  
Jimmy Forrest (1937-1940)  
Charlie Christian (1938-1939)  
Jimmy Blanton (1938-1939)

## George Thow and the Dorseys

One of the first Cleveland musicians to join a nationally known touring big band was George "Gus" Thow. He replaced Bunny Berigan in the Dorsey Brothers' Orchestra.



**George Thow**

Thow, born and raised in Cleveland, was never considered one of the greats of jazz but he played a key role in one of the pivotal orchestras of the early years of the big band era.

In 1934, the two brothers from Lansford, Pennsylvania, Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey, who had played and recorded with Bix Beiderbecke and the orchestras of Jean Goldkette and Paul Whiteman, decided to form their own band. They broke with the pattern of most of the white bands of the period, which performed mostly stock dance arrangements. The Dorsey brothers, borrowing from their experience with small jazz groups and some of the swinging black big bands, combined elements of small group jazz and big band dance music. They did it with only eleven players and unusual instrumentation: three reeds (Jimmy Dorsey, Skeets Herfurt and Jack Stacey), three trombones (Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller and Don Matteson), piano (Bobby Van Epps), drums (Ray McKinley), bass (Delmar Kaplan), guitar (Roc Hilman) and only *one* trumpet!

When the Dorsey brothers formed their band, they quickly went through a succession of trumpeters: Bunny Berigan, Charlie Spivak, Jerry Neary, and finally settled on the young musician from Cleveland, George "Gus" Thow.

Born in Cleveland July 8, 1908, Thow lived at 1314 West 95th Street when he attended old West High School. He sang in the school glee club and played in the school orchestra. Records from the Cleveland school system show that he had a 90.5 average when he graduated in 1925 and was awarded a scholarship to Harvard University.

At Harvard, Thow played trumpet in a band led by Johnny Green and graduated in 1929 with a bachelor of arts degree in French literature, a rarity for jazz musicians.

After graduation, Thow joined the Isham Jones Orchestra, which included such future stars as Jack Jenney, Pee Wee Erwin, Gordon Jenkins, and

Woody Herman. Thow recorded in 1934 with the early, but unheralded, Benny Goodman Orchestra which included Jack Teagarden and Teddy Wilson.

Then, the 26-year-old Clevelander joined the revolutionary new Dorsey Brothers Orchestra. With Tommy leading the band and playing trombone, Jimmy co-leading from the sax section, and Thow playing the band's only trumpet, the band spent most of the summer of 1934 playing at the Sands Point Casino on Long Island and recorded for a new record company, Decca. Thow's trumpet solo was featured on the band's record of "Weary Blues," arranged by Glenn Miller.

They had a female singer named Kay Weber, but no male vocalist until the booking agent demanded that Tommy and Jimmy hire Bing Crosby's younger brother. The moody Tommy was not happy about being forced to add Bob Crosby to his band and kept needling him, asking if he could sing this song or that song. After Bob said "no" a number of times, it was Thow who broke the tension by joking from the back of the bandstand, "Can you *sing*?!" Even the temperamental Tommy Dorsey laughed. A short time later, Thow played a muted trumpet solo on Crosby's recording of "Basin Street Blues" with the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra.

The night the band was scheduled to make its first radio network broadcast, a storm knocked out the electricity. Tommy had to run around taking candles off patrons' tables so the band members could read their parts in the dark hall during the broadcast.

In the spring of 1935, the Dorsey Brothers began what Kay Weber called "a murderous schedule" – a tour of one-nighters that began in Toronto April 12th. They played in Erie the 13th and Cleveland the 14th. They played here at the Trianon Ballroom on Euclid Avenue. From Cleveland, the band went to New York, Pottstown,



**Cleveland George "Gus" Thow (kneeling at left) with the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra in 1934.**

Others (in front row L-to-R) Roc Hillman, Don Matteson, Skeets Herfurt and Ray McKinley. Standing: Bobby Van Epps, Delmar Kaplan, Tommy Dorsey, Kay Weber, Jimmy Dorsey, Glenn Miller and Jack Stacey.



New London, Waltham, Bristol, Troy, Dearfield, Scranton, Mahanoy City, Schenectady, Hanover, Passaic, Harrisburg, Pittsfield, Waterbury, Providence, Baltimore, and Allentown – all in less than a month!

It was at the Glen Island Casino May 30, 1935 that Thow had an indirect role in the famous break-up of the Dorsey brothers. Tommy and Jimmy had been getting on each other's nerves for months. One night, Tommy called for the song "I'll Never Say Never Again," and counted off the tempo. Thow was getting ready to play a complicated chorus. Jimmy didn't like the beat and looked up at Tommy and said, "Mac, that's a little fast isn't it?" While Thow was playing his solo, Tommy simply walked off the bandstand and never came back.

Tommy Dorsey, of course, formed his own band which became one of the most popular in the world in the late 1930s and early '40s, playing both some very hot swing and some very sweet dance music.

After the break-up of the Dorsey brothers, Thow remained with Jimmy's band. Glenn Miller joined Ray Noble's Orchestra and two years later formed his own band which became the most popular band of the swing era.

When Miller joined the Army and formed a wartime military orchestra, his drummer was his old buddy from the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra, Ray McKinley. After Miller disappeared aboard a small plane flying to France, McKinley became the leader of Miller's AEF orchestra.

Thow played for a while with Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw, and went to California where he became a member of the NBC staff orchestra and played trumpet for a number of movies including a film called *Syncopation*. In 1956 Thow joined the popular Lawrence Welk Orchestra and served as part of the Welk TV show's production staff. He also wrote several songs.

## Harry "Pee Wee" Jackson

Another Clevelanders who joined a nationally prominent big band in the mid-1930s was trumpeter Harry "Pee Wee" Jackson. He toured with several of the best black bands in the 1930s and '40s.

Jackson first joined Earl "Fatha" Hines' orchestra in Chicago. Budd Johnson recalled in Ira Gitler's book *Swing to Bop*, "Jackson was the first guy we took out of Cleveland." Johnson said Jackson was "a very good trumpet player."

According to Johnson, it was Jackson "who pulled our coats" about another Cleveland trumpeter, Freddie Webster. Johnson said the highly-regarded Webster "was never quite the trumpet player that Pee Wee was, but he had that big sound and he played pretty."

Jackson joined Horace Henderson's Orchestra in 1938 with another Cleveland trumpeter, Emmett Berry, and returned to the Hines band in 1940 with yet another



**Pee Wee Jackson (lower right corner) with the Horace Henderson Orchestra in 1938**

trumpeter who had played in Cleveland, Tommy Enoch. In 1941 Jackson, Enoch and Webster were quickly developing what some were beginning to call "the Cleveland Style of Trumpet." They went to Los Angeles with Hines and recorded six sides for Bluebird Records.

In 1942 both Jackson and Webster joined the high-flying Jimmie Lunceford band. When the band came to Cleveland, young musicians from Central High School turned out in force to cheer their alumni heroes.

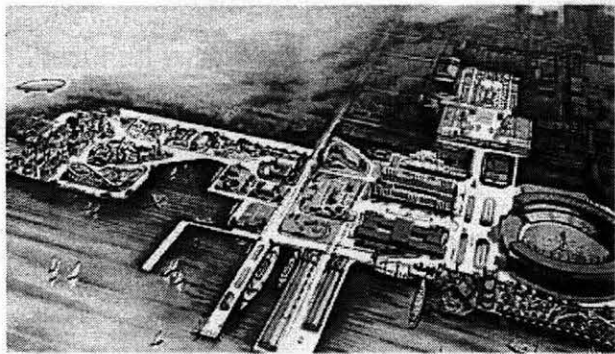
Jackson and Webster returned to Hines again in 1942 and played with such sidemen as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Billy Eckstine and singer Sarah Vaughan. It was the band many later called "the incubator of bop." Johnson remembered, "Freddie would play the big sound and the pretty things, and Pee Wee would play the bop-style songs."

But Jackson apparently began drinking heavily and soon disappeared from the jazz scene. He was not heard from again until one day in the 1940s when a headline appeared in the *Cleveland Press*. It said, "Gabriel Blows His Horn." The story described the adventures of a man who stole a milk truck and drove it through some of Cleveland's better neighborhoods at 5 o'clock in the morning, playing "Taps" and other bugle calls on an old trumpet. After a number of complaints from stunned citizens, he was arrested by Cleveland police. The horn player the headline writer called "Gabriel" was Harry "Pee Wee" Jackson, the jazz trumpeter who had played

with some of the top bands of the 1930s and '40s.

Most people at the time thought it was just an amusing prank. But looking back, that incident was the tragic coda to the career of one of the first top-flight jazz musicians from Cleveland to emerge on the national scene. A few years later, the Cleveland jazz pioneer was dead and all but forgotten.

## The Bob Crosby Orchestra



**An aerial view of the Great Lakes Exposition**

In the early 1930s, the Cleveland city dump was located next to Municipal Stadium on the lakefront. The foot of East 9th Street was a mess, with trash and garbage literally falling into Lake Erie. In the midst of all this and the Depression, when jobs, food and fun were hard to come by in Cleveland, local movers and shakers decided to fill in the dump and do something dramatic to add some punch to a tired city.

They raised a million dollars in private funds and got about \$200,000 from the federal government's Works Progress Administration (the WPA) and built a world's fair-type site on the lakefront. They called it the Great Lakes Exposition. One writer at the time described it as "a city of ivory, a new Baghdad risen in the desert."

Stretching from the Cleveland malls, there was a grand entrance, lined with towering silver eagle pylons. The exposition covered 135 acres, extending from Public



Cleveland Public Library

Hall down to the stadium and as far east as 22nd Street.

More than seven million people attended the exposition during the summers of 1936 and 1937. They saw all the commercial exhibits that would, a couple of years later, highlight the highly-publicized New York World's Fair, as well as a midway that included such acts as 260-pound ballerinas, an eight-foot-four-inch man, snake shows, boxing cats, and even a 90-pound sturgeon.

The centerpiece of the Great Lakes Exposition was a marine theatre at the site of what years later would become the Great Lakes Science Center. There were bleachers facing out toward a floating stage in Lake Erie. It was called the Aquacade. The show at the Aquacade was produced by entrepreneur Billy Rose who at the time was married to entertainer Fanny Brice. The stars of the Aquacade show were former Olympic swimmers Johnny Weissmuller, who played Tarzan in the movies, and Eleanor Holm, who would later become Rose's wife.

The featured musical entertainment at the Aquacade during the summer of 1937 was the Bob Crosby Orchestra.



Courtesy Playhouse Square Foundation

**Bob Crosby fronting the band in Cleveland**

The Crosby band, unlike most big bands of the period, was a cooperative. The band members were, in effect, stockholders and they decided to hire Bing Crosby's younger brother Bob, a singer but not an instrumentalist, to front the band. It was organized by former members of the Ben Pollack band in 1935, shortly after Benny Goodman had become extremely popular. The Crosby band members wanted something different, particularly more jazz improvisation than the Goodman band. They decided to feature big band versions of dixieland jazz.

While playing at the Great Lakes Exposition in Cleveland, the Crosby band hired Billy Butterfield who was playing with Cleveland's Austin Wylie Orchestra. With his huge pure tone and wide range, Butterfield quickly became a key performer for the band.

A few months after Butterfield joined in Cleveland, the Crosby Orchestra was playing at Summit Beach Park in Akron. Butterfield, bassist Bob Haggart and pianist



Bob Zurke went to Akron's Merry-Go-Round Bar. As they left, Zurke began doing a little dance. He slipped off the curb and broke his leg in two places. The band moved on to Los Angeles, but Zurke spent two weeks in St. Thomas Hospital on Main Street in Akron. A month later, with his leg still in a cast, Zurke took part in the first recordings of the Bob Crosby Orchestra small dixieland group, the Bobcats.

The Bobcats became the most talked about feature of the Crosby band, but the full orchestra also recorded in a big band dixieland style. One of the band's most popular recordings was a Haggart and Ray Bauduc composition and arrangement, "South Rampart Street Parade."

Haggart, Bauduc, Butterfield, Zurke and the rest of the Bob Crosby Orchestra attracted good crowds when they returned to Cleveland the week of December 9th, 1938 to play at the Palace Theatre.

Butterfield introduced two of his former Cleveland bandmates on the Wylie Orchestra to the Crosby band, Bill Stegmeyer, a reed player, and Bob Peck, a trumpeter. Both were excellent sight readers.

### Trumpeter Bob Peck

Sitting at the kitchen table in his Seven Hills home, Bob Peck flipped through a stuffed scrapbook. He pulled out a 1940 copy of *DownBeat* magazine. On the cover was a picture of Peck and the other members of the Bob Crosby Orchestra. There were also clippings from the time he spent playing trumpet with the Glenn Miller Orchestra.

Peck said his interest in music began early when he was growing up in East Cleveland. At the age of five, with a group led by his piano-playing mother, he played drums. "I wore a sailor suit," he said with a smile. "I sang and did a sailor's horn-pipe dance."

But he soon developed a more serious interest in music. "When I was about nine, my dad brought home an old, beat-up cornet. I picked it up and sort of took to it," he recalled, "and they started getting me to take lessons. I was doing very well from then on."

By the early 1930s, Peck was playing in Cleveland with a group of high school and college jazz musicians called the Rhythm Club. They played for high school and college dances. They also listened to the best jazz of the period.

"We listened to the colored bands," said Peck. "We used to go down to Cedar Avenue and listen to Jimmie Lunceford and Louis Armstrong, all those great people, all those great bands, and Art Tatum playing at Val's in the Alley!"

After high school, Peck went to Ohio State where he majored in music and played in the university's symphonic orchestra, marching band, concert band and jazz groups.

At the end of the 1937 school year, Peck joined Cleveland's Austin Wylie Orchestra and played at summer amusement park dance pavilions. Peck played for a few months with another local band in Cleveland before getting his big break. "I got a call from Glenn Miller. He wanted me to join his band, which I was more than happy to do. I joined them in New York."

Peck became a member of the Miller Orchestra in 1938 when the band was about to become the most popular big band of the swing era. He recorded with Miller and played a series of one-nighters up and down the East Coast. This was the early Miller Orchestra, before it recorded such classics as "In the Mood," "Pennsylvania 6-5000," and "Little Brown Jug." Peck recalled, "We played such ditties as 'By the Waters of Minnetonka.'"

Miller was struggling at the time, but according to Peck, "It might have been a better band than Miller's later orchestra." Peck recalled Miller was doing many of the things that would make him a household name a year later. "Glenn was very strict as to who wrote what for him. In the early days, he wrote some himself. He was quite a gentleman," said Peck, "but very insistent that everyone do their job the way we rehearsed it. Musically, he was strict."

It was an exciting time for the young trumpeter from Cleveland, but he wasn't making much money. "Most everybody in the band at that time was making \$50 a week. That doesn't seem like much, but we were able to get by because in 1938, \$50 went a long way." Another Cleveland in the Miller band at the time was trumpeter Bob Price.

But, less than six months later, Miller decided to hire a friend of Tex Beneke to replace Peck in the trumpet section. "I went up to Miller's room to get my last pay," recalled Peck, "and he asked me to stay on. Apparently the trumpeter they wanted had changed his mind. I said, 'Well, no thank you. I don't want to stay some place where I'm not wanted.'"

When Peck left Miller in Boston and took a train home to Cleveland, he had a pain in his abdomen. "I got into Cleveland early. My parents called the doctor and late that morning, I was operated on for acute appendicitis."

Looking back, Peck said, "Being fired by Glenn Miller was really a blessing in disguise."

After recovering, Peck in 1939 joined his old musical buddies from the Austin Wylie Orchestra, Butterfield and Stegmeyer, in the popular Bob Crosby Orchestra.

"Crosby was a figurehead," said Peck. "He'd beat off the tunes and wave his baton around, but if (drummer) Ray Bauduc didn't like the tempo, he would change it within the first measure. We came to expect that. But Bob was a nice fellow and handled the emcee and PR bit quite well."



Courtesy of Bob Peck

**Bill Stegmeyer playing  
with the Crosby band**

Peck it was "a fun band."

"It was also," said Peck, "a heavy-drinking band. There was no such thing as dope, but the alcohol passed around freely."

Butterfield was the featured trumpeter. When he joined the Crosby band, bassist Bob Haggart wrote a showcase piece for him called "I'm Free" (later renamed "What's New"). Peck said Haggart was "a wonderful musician, but he was lazy and we always used to be on his back. He was so talented, multi-talented, and when he wrote things, they were beautiful. But, he didn't like to work. Writing takes a lot of work."

One of the band's big crowd-pleasers was a duet by Haggart, whistling and playing bass, and Ray Bauduc on drums, called "Big Noise From Winnetka." "Oh, gosh, they used to hate doing it," recalled Peck. "They had done it so often. Except Bauduc liked to show off."

Peck said saxophonist Eddie Miller was the musically most consistent member of the band.

The Clevelander enjoyed touring with the popular Crosby Orchestra but remembered some of the guys got a little edgy at times, particularly riding through snowstorms on the band bus.

In 1940, some of the best musicians left after an incident at the Blackhawk Hotel in Chicago. A new, young member of the band, trombonist Ray Conniff, was teasing clarinetist Irving Fazola by flicking his ear with his trombone slide. "At the end of the evening," said Peck, "Fazola was pretty drunk and said to Conniff, 'I'll see you upstairs!' We went upstairs. The whole band went up there and we were trying to separate them. Bauduc was trying to break it up when Fazola hurled a few invectives his way and Bauduc hauled off and brought one up from the floor into Faz' mouth. That ended the fight. Somebody took Faz to a hospital and his whole lip was all stitched up. The next night, there was a new clarinet player in the band, Hank D'Amico."

While Peck was with the Crosby band, it was broadcasting on the CBS and Mutual radio networks and ranked number three in *Down Beat* magazine's Swing Band Poll behind Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller.

When the band did a radio broadcast sponsored by Camel cigarettes, Peck said the band members always carried their own favorite brands in Camel packages. According to

When the United States entered World War II, most of the remaining key members of the Crosby band went into the service. Peck served in the Army for more than four years.

After the war, he went to New York and played with Paul Whiteman's radio orchestra. When Butterfield formed his own orchestra in 1945, Peck became an important part of it. He wrote for the band, which recorded for Capitol Records. Among his compositions was a song called "Narcissus." "The record sold fairly well," said Peck, "but I got only about \$49."

When the Butterfield Orchestra disbanded, Peck replaced Sonny Berman in the Woody Herman Orchestra. "We did a record date in Chicago and played theatres and a bunch of one-nighters."

Peck also toured with the orchestra of Claude Thornhill, but again was hit by a medical problem. "We were playing the West Point prom and I couldn't make it. I sent a sub. The next day, a doctor determined that I had TB."

Peck spent a year and a half at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Brecksville and decided to go into teaching. He completed his bachelor's degree and got a master's degree at Western Reserve University. He spent the next 30 years teaching music in Flint, Tucson, Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, and Woodridge in Summit County. He also continued to play trumpet in Cleveland.

In his 70s, Peck continued to practice and remember his days touring and playing with some of the most important bands and musicians in jazz history.

Butterfield continued playing with the Crosby Orchestra until 1940 when he left to join the Artie Shaw band. Butterfield soloed on such Shaw big band classics as "Star Dust" and "Summit Ridge Drive."

Later, Butterfield joined the Benny Goodman band. After viewing both Goodman and his musical arch rival Shaw at close range, Butterfield said, "Goodman was the superior improviser but I never did understand him as a person."

Butterfield also played with Les Brown before forming his own band in 1945. But, the timing for a new band was not good. The bottom fell out of the big band business and Butterfield lost about \$35,000, a lot of money in those days. When the orchestra quickly disbanded, Butterfield went to New York, played in studios during the day, and at such dixieland clubs as Nick's and Eddie Condon's at night. Butterfield was later a member of a group, made up mostly of Crosby alumni, called The World's Greatest Jazz Band.

Bob Crosby had a popular nightly CBS radio program and continued to appear into the 1980s in reunion concerts of his popular 1930s and '40s band.

Stegmeyer died in 1968, Butterfield in 1988, Crosby in 1993, and Peck in 1999.



## Ben Pollack at the Mayfair Casino

When the members of Ben Pollack's band quit en masse at the end of 1934 and organized their own band, the Bob Crosby Orchestra, Pollack formed another band. He billed himself as "The Dean of Sophisticated Swing" and came to Cleveland to play at the Mayfair Casino, a nightclub at the redesigned Ohio Theatre building.

Among the sidemen with Pollack's new Cleveland band were Cleveland drummer Morey Feld, trumpeter Harry James (before he joined Benny Goodman's Orchestra), pianist Freddy Slack (later a leading boogie woogie pianist), clarinetist Matty Matlock and saxophonist Eddie Miller. Miller later said he and Matlock worked out a device with the Pollack Orchestra in Cleveland – playing the sax and clarinet in unison. They said the device became the inspiration for what later became "the Glenn Miller sound."

In the early 1920s, drummer Pollack had played with the New Orleans Rhythm Kings in Chicago. In 1926, he formed his own band which included 16 year old Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Jack Teagarden and Jimmy McPartland and recorded for Victor. Many believe Pollack had the best white big band of the late 1920s. He introduced the device of a small group within a big dance band, coming down front to play hot jazz. His small group foreshadowed such later groups as the Goodman Trio and Quartet, Artie Shaw's Gramercy Five, Tommy Dorsey's Clambake Seven and Bob Crosby's Bobcats.

## Bunny Berigan blowing in Ohio

Part of the triumph and tragedy of one of the most important musicians of the swing era took place in Ohio. Robert Depuis, a retired Detroit school principal, wrote in his *Bunny Berigan, Elusive Legend of Jazz* that Berigan, who was strongly influenced by Louis Armstrong, got his first big band job in 1930 with the Hal Kemp Orchestra. After touring Europe, Berigan and the Kemp band came to Cleveland to play from November 22, 1930 to January 23, 1931 at the Golden Pheasant Chinese Restaurant on Prospect Avenue and broadcast on Cleveland radio station WTAM. During that gig, Kemp hired a young pianist named Claude Thornhill who had been playing with Cleveland's Austin Wylie Orchestra.

In the following few years, Berigan played with Paul Whiteman, the CBS studio band, Abe Lyman and the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra.

In 1935, Berigan

joined the new Benny Goodman Orchestra and made a now-historic tour across the country. Traveling in four cars, the Goodman band played at the Valley Dale Ballroom near Columbus where there was only a small turnout. The same thing happened in Toledo and Milwaukee, but, by the time the band got to the West Coast, a large crowd was waiting outside McFadden's Ballroom in Oakland to hear the new band playing the new music called "swing." They had apparently heard the Goodman band on the radio.

At the Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles, Goodman later said, "There was so much yelling and stomping and carrying on that I thought a riot had broken out." The seven-week engagement attracted 200,000 people. That gig launched Goodman's career, established Berigan's reputation, and is generally considered the starting point of the swing era.

After Berigan was voted the nation's number one trumpeter, he joined the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra in December of 1936 and recorded two now-classic sides, "Marie" and "Song of India," with Dorsey.

Early in 1937, Berigan formed his own band and recorded his own classic jazz version of the Geroqe Gershwin and Vernon Duke composition, "I Can't Get Started."

*I've flown around the world in a plane;  
I've settled revolutions in Spain;  
And the North Pole I have charted,  
Still I can't get started with you . . .*

The record became so popular that Berigan took his band out on the road to play a series of one-nighters including October 28 in Akron, November 12 in Cleveland, November 13 at the Valley Dale Ballroom in Columbus, and November 14 in Fremont.

There was another grueling tour in 1939 – 60 dates in three months. After playing at the Colosseum Ballroom in Lorain January 24, the band members drove their cars through a blinding blizzard to Bedford, Pennsylvania. On the way, one car was involved in an accident and two band members were injured.



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives

Bunny Berigan and his Orchestra in 1939

It was in 1939 that the Berigan band spent the entire month of April in Cleveland. After rehearsing here for three days, they played every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday night at the Trianon Ballroom. In addition to the Trianon gigs, the band also performed at the Hotel Cleveland on Public Square and made short

### Bunny Berigan in Ohio

- Nov. 2, 1930 - With Hal Kemp Orchestra at the Golden Pheasant Restaurant, Cleveland
- July 14, 1935 - With Benny Goodman Orchestra at Valley Dale Ballroom, Columbus
- July 15, 1935 - Berigan Orchestra at Trianon Ballroom, Toledo
- Aug. 14, 1937 - Moonlight Gardens, Cincinnati
- Oct. 28, 1937 - A ballroom in Akron
- Nov. 12, 1937 - A ballroom in Cleveland
- Nov. 13, 1937 - Valley Dale Ballroom, Columbus
- Nov. 14, 1937 - A ballroom in Fremont
- Jan. 24, 1939 - Colosseum Ballroom, Lorain
- Apr. 5-7, 1939 - Orchestra rehearsal in Cleveland
- Apr. 18, 1939 - Hotel Cleveland, Cleveland
- Apr. 19, 1939 - Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland
- Apr. 11, 1939 - Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland
- Apr. 12, 1939 - Meyer's Lake Park, Canton
- Apr. 13, 1939 - Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland
- Apr. 15, 1939 - Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland
- Apr. 16, 1939 - Crystal Beach Park, Vermillion
- Apr. 18, 1939 - Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland
- Apr. 20, 1939 - Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland
- Apr. 21, 1939 - Hotel Cleveland, Cleveland
- Apr. 22, 1939 - Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland
- Apr. 23, 1939 - Valley Dale Ballroom, Columbus
- Aug. 1, 1941 - Lakeside Park, Dayton
- Aug. 2 to Sept. 1, 1941 - Buckeye Lake
- Feb. 7, 1942 - Cincinnati University
- Feb. 8, 1942 - Aragon Ballroom, Cleveland
- Feb. 12, 1942 - Nu-Elms Ballroom, Youngstown
- Feb. 14, 1942 - Aragon Ballroom, Cleveland
- Feb. 17, 1942 - Rainbow Gardens, Fremont
- Mar. 21, 1942 - Bowling Green University
- Mar. 29, 1942 - Trianon Ballroom, Toledo
- Apr. 5, 1942 - Crystal Beach Park, Vermillion
- Apr. 10, 1942 - Wooster College
- Apr. 12, 1942 - Nu-Elms Ballroom, Youngstown
- Apr. 13, 1942 - Cole Auditorium, Norwalk
- Apr. 14, 1942 - Nu-Elms Ballroom, Youngstown
- Apr. 16, 1942 - Nu-Elms Ballroom, Youngstown
- Apr. 17, 1942 - Granville, College, Granville
- Apr. 19, 1942 - Nu-Elms Ballroom, Youngstown
- Berigan was hospitalized the following day. He rejoined his band two weeks later but died June 2, 1942 in New York City
- Source: *Bunny Berigan, Elusive Legend of Jazz*  
by Robert Dupuis

trips to Charleston, Meyer's Lake in Canton, the Masonic Auditorium in Detroit, Crystal Beach Park in Vermillion, Beaver Falls, and the Valley Dale Ballroom in Columbus.

But Berigan, who was drinking heavily, was a much better musician than a businessman. Four months later (August 31, 1939), he filed for bankruptcy. With no money and no band, he rejoined the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra which, at the time, included Buddy Rich, Frank Sinatra and Jo Stafford.

After playing with Dorsey for six months, Berigan decided to form another band of his own. This time, he hired a bunch of unknown youngsters, mostly from the Trenton, New Jersey area. They spent the month of August, 1941 playing at the Crystal Danceteria at Buckeye Lake, east of Columbus.

Pianist and arranger Gene Kutch said, "The first few

nights, we sounded terrible. We lived in a boarding house, frantically tried to write new arrangements, and rehearsed all afternoon." Eventually, Berigan's young band improved.

While at Buckeye Lake, Berigan read an article in *DownBeat* quoting his early hero, Louis Armstrong, saying Berigan was his favorite trumpeter. But, under the stress of the grueling pace and almost non-stop drinking, Berigan's health was failing.

In early 1942, Berigan brought his band back to Northeast Ohio. In February, it played two dates at the Aragon Ballroom on West 25th Street in Cleveland, the Nu-Elms Ballroom in Youngstown, and Rainbow Gardens in Fremont.

In April of 1942, with his health getting worse, Berigan again returned to Ohio for two weeks, playing in Vermillion, Wooster, Youngstown and Norwalk. One night on the band bus, he finished off a bottle of liquor and began to sob, "I'm too young to die."

Berigan played his last gig in Northeast Ohio April 19, 1942 at the Nu-Elms Ballroom in Youngstown. The next day, he finally went to a hospital. A month later, Berigan, one of the most important artists in jazz history, was dead at the age of 33.

Louis Armstrong, the trumpeter's longtime idol, said, "Bunny Berigan was great, but he had no business dying that young!"

### Benny Goodman in Cleveland

He was at the peak of his popularity in June of 1938 when Benny Goodman first appeared with his swing band in Cleveland. They played several shows a day for a week beginning June 3 at the Palace Theatre between showings of a film appropriately entitled *College Swing*.



It was almost three years after Goodman's band had scored its big hit at the Palomar Ballroom in California and just five months after his historic Carnegie Hall concert.

A few weeks later (August 8, 1938), the very popular *Life* magazine ran a long feature article on Goodman and proclaimed, "Swing is the most popular kind of popular music."

The Goodman band played in Cleveland at least twice in 1939 – the week of May 12 at the Palace Theatre and October 1, during a rodeo, at Municipal Stadium. The swinging band spent a lot of time in Northeast Ohio in late 1940 – at the Trianon Ballroom November 24 and December 27, in Youngstown December 28, and at The Country Club in Pepper Pike December 30.



From 1936 until 1940, vibraphonist Lionel Hampton, a black jazz musician, was a star attraction of the band.

## Lionel Hampton with Goodman



Lionel Hampton

After joining Goodman in 1936, Lionel Hampton became a key member of the historic Goodman Quartet. In a 1985 interview, Hampton told me he had fond memories of playing with the group. "Goodman was very disciplined," said Hampton, "and we didn't have no let down. We played good tonight, tomorrow and the next day. We were trained

that way."

Hampton said Goodman's quiet decision to include two black musicians, Hampton and pianist Teddy Wilson, with two white musicians, Goodman and drummer Gene Krupa, "was an historic break-through." Hampton said, "The world looked at it to see how the reaction was gonna be. Everybody received us and we just started melting down segregation."

Hampton said the Goodman Quartet was the *first* example of racial integration by a major national figure in *any* field, not just jazz or music. "In football, baseball, any endeavor, on the stage, in motion pictures, the only thing blacks could do," said Hampton, "was to play maids or butlers. I think this (the formation of the Goodman Quartet) was instant integration!"

Goodman, who never claimed to be a racial pioneer, later said, "Nobody cared much what colors or races were represented just so long as we played good music. That's the way it should be."

## Charlie Christian's last performance

Guitar sensation Charlie Christian, who joined Goodman in August of 1939, was with the band when it began a week's engagement at the Cedar Point Ballroom in Sandusky June 14, 1941. Christian collapsed at Cedar Point and was rushed back to New York where he remained hospitalized with tuberculosis until his death March 2, 1942 at the age of 25.

## Benny and the Cleveland Orchestra

It was Sunday afternoon, January 5, 1942 – less than a month after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The scene was Cleveland's Public Hall at East 6th and Lakeside (where the Republican Party had held its National Convention six years earlier). The attractions were the Cleveland Orchestra and Benny Goodman and

his jazz band.

People were still arriving as the unusual concert began. The Cleveland Orchestra, under the direction of Artur Rodzinski, played the overture to Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. Goodman came out and soloed with the symphony orchestra. He played Debussy's "Rhapsody for Clarinet and Orchestra" and Mozart's "Clarinet Concerto in A Major."

Cleveland *Plain Dealer* reviewer Herbert Elwell was apparently surprised that a jazz musician could play classical music. Elwell wrote, "One could look in vain for evidence of anything but the most well-behaved musicianship. In fact, his playing was on the restrained side. A little too refined to have much character. It pleased by technically brilliant passage work, smooth legato and an even quality of tone."

Goodman had studied classical music as a child but seldom played classical music publicly until after he had won fame as a jazz clarinetist. He recorded with the Budapest String Quartet in 1938 and with Béla Bartók in 1940. Jazz reviewers raved but classical reviewers were merely polite. One review said Goodman's classical clarinet "while correct and expert, was dull."

But most of the 6,355 at Cleveland's Public Hall came to hear Goodman *swing*.

Elwell wrote, "The audience seemed impatient to have the stage cleared of the elaborate paraphernalia of a symphony orchestra and was happy when the jazz boys began to whoop it up and the hot tunes began to sizzle."

Cleveland newspapers reported Goodman left New York by train late Saturday night after a gig at the New Yorker Hotel. The rest of his band was to catch a 9:30 plane Sunday morning. Their flight was delayed at LaGuardia Airport by bad weather and they didn't leave until almost noon. The Cleveland Orchestra was making last-minute plans to extend its part of the concert if necessary. The members of the Goodman band arrived at the Cleveland airport at about 3 p.m., barely an hour before the concert, and got to Public Hall just in time to go on stage after the classical portion of the concert.

Goodman and his swing band opened with "Don't Be That Way," followed by "Let's Do It" and "One O'Clock Jump." Elwell wrote, "The Goodman Orchestra played many songs not listed in the program and each seemed to bring a fresh response of enthusiasm from the delighted listeners."

The classical reviewer also wrote, "Not being well-versed in this highly specialized form of music (jazz), I cannot pretend to appreciate all of its fine points, though I heard most of its rough ones. I was particularly interested in one Cootie Williams, who made the trumpet sound like a sneeze and whose contortions suggested the colic or some violent form of hysteria."

The *Plain Dealer* reviewer was also perplexed by the



**Peggy Lee singing  
with the Goodman  
band**

Goodman band's girl singer. He wrote, "I was interested in the convention which now prescribes having a young lady sit in front of the band and smile knowingly when anything of special merit takes place. This is a great help to anyone ignorant of the refinements of the jazz idiom, which to me seem not nearly so interesting as they used to be. The young lady in question (Peggy Lee) got up before the microphone occasionally and uttered sounds which did not resemble singing and were

unrecognizable as English ("Why Don't You Do Right?"), but they undoubtedly have special meaning for those accustomed to this sort of thing."

The newspaper account of that 1942 concert said, "A few gray haired women and one or two crochety (sic) old gentlemen got up and left before the program was finished. It lasted well into the evening, what with the audience demanding more and more."

The Goodman band also played its rollicking show-stopper, "Sing, Sing, Sing," with drummer Ralph Collier recreating the drum solo Gene Krupa had made famous four years earlier.

Other members of the Goodman Orchestra at the time included pianist Mel Powell; saxophonists Vito Musso, Clint Neagley, Julie Schwartz, George Berg and Chuck Gentry; trombonists Lou McGarity and Cutty Cutshall; trumpeters Cootie Williams, Jimmy Maxwell and Billy Butterfield (who five years earlier had been playing in Cleveland); and guitarist Tommy Morgan.

The *Plain Dealer* reviewer summed up the evening by saying, "The concert was a little like a contest in which the home team lost to the visitors. The huge audience lost no time in expressing itself emphatically in favor of the last half of the program, given over entirely to the delirious doldrums (sic) and frenzied furbishes of Goodman and his jitterbugs."

The headline in *The Plain Dealer* the next day said:

**HOME TEAM LOSES  
TO BENNY GOODMAN BAND**

## **Cleveland drummer Morey Feld**

Beginning in 1944, two years after that Goodman concert with the Cleveland Orchestra, a self-taught drummer from Cleveland named Morey Feld, was playing with Benny Goodman's sextet and orchestra.

Born in Cleveland in 1915 and a graduate of Glenville



Courtesy of Fred Sharp

**Morey Feld ignoring a "smoking prohibited" sign**

High School, Feld got his first real band job in 1936 at the age of 21 playing with the Ben Pollack band at the Mayfair Casino in the Ohio Theatre building. Guitarist Fred Sharp recalled, "At one time, we had a little band (in Cleveland) with me, Morey, Art Cutlip, Wiz Rosenberg and Dick Cutlip. My wife, Iris, sang with the band."

In 1938, Feld joined Joe Haymes' band and first recorded with the combo of pianist Jess Stacy in 1940. He was playing in New York City when Goodman in 1944 put together a new quintet with Red Norvo, Teddy Wilson and Sid Weiss. Feld was added as the drummer. In 1945, Goodman added bassist Slam Stewart to the group and began making sextet records which are still considered some of the best-ever small group swing recordings. The group, including Feld, played at Cleveland's Palace Theatre the first week of August, 1945.

A short time later, Goodman decided to form a new big band and included Feld as his band drummer.

It was Feld who in 1945 helped young Cleveland guitarist Bill de Arango find work in New York playing with Ben Webster and Dizzy Gillespie.

After being replaced by Cozy Cole in Goodman's big band, Feld began playing with Eddie Condon's dixieland groups at Nick's in Greenwich Village. He served as a staff musician at ABC and returned to the Goodman Orchestra in the 1960s. He later moved to California where he opened a drum school.

Feld died at the age of 55 in 1971 during a house fire in suburban Denver.



## Glenn Miller swings in Cleveland



Glenn Miller and Tex Beneke

The Glenn Miller Orchestra had been in existence for only a few months and was struggling when it first appeared in Greater Cleveland in June of 1937. The band played for a Friday night dance at the Chagrin Valley Hunt Club. Members of that early edition of the Miller band

included trumpeter Charlie Spivak, saxophonist Jerry Jerome, and drummer George Simon, who later became a writer and a prolific chronicler of the big bands.

Miller did not return to Cleveland again for two and a half years.



Bob Price

Shortly after that gig at the Hunt Club, in November of 1937, Cleveland Bob Price joined the band and became Miller's lead trumpeter. The following summer (July of 1938), saxophonist Bill Stegmeyer, who had been playing in Cleveland, joined

Miller. In October of 1938, Cleveland trumpeter Bob Peck joined the band, but both Peck and Stegmeyer left before the band returned to Northeast Ohio in December of 1939.

By that time, the Miller Orchestra had become extremely popular. It played for more than 2,000 dancers at the Nu-Elms Ballroom in Youngstown December 7, 1939.

The next day, the Glenn Miller Orchestra returned to Cleveland to play for a week at the Loew's State Theatre. *The Plain Dealer* reported crowded houses for five 45-minute performances from 12:40 in the afternoon until after 11 o'clock at night. *Plain Dealer* reviewer Ward Marsh said there was yelling and screaming and dancing in the aisles.

Marsh could have been describing a latter day rock show when he wrote, "The brasses and the drummer began to work on the emotion of the crowd. I began to question both its sanity and mine." He said the band "created a kind of frenzy which made me a little fearful of the outcome of the show, blasting brasses, wailing



Courtesy of Bob Price

Cleveland Bob Price (middle of the back row) playing with the Miller Orchestra in 1938

saxophones, and a drummer with six hands and two left feet."

We sometimes forget the Miller Orchestra played more than just sweet dance music. In fact, it was ranked as the number two swing band behind Benny Goodman in the 1940 *DownBeat* poll.

The Miller band also played during the summer of 1940 at the Valley Dale Ballroom in Columbus, set an attendance record at Buckeye Lake, and played for crowded dances at Meyer's Lake in Canton and the Pier Ballroom at Geneva-on-the-Lake.

In November of 1940, a young trumpeter from Cleveland, Ray Anthony, joined the Miller Orchestra. He was with the band when it returned to Cleveland to play for a week at the Palace Theatre beginning February 21, 1941. Again, the band played five shows a day, from late morning until late at night, between showings of a movie called *Night Train*.

This time, *The Plain Dealer* reported "whistles, applause in time, stomping, and all those outward expressions of great joy during the show." *Variety* called the week in Cleveland "a whammer." While in Cleveland, Miller and his band originated their three-nights-a-week 10-to-10:15 p.m. national radio broadcast on CBS from the stage of the Palace. One of the announcers for the Miller broadcasts was Paul Douglas who later became a popular Hollywood actor.

A month after that week in Cleveland, the Miller band went to Hollywood to film a movie, *Sun Valley Serenade*.

The band was back in Northeast Ohio on a Sunday night in August of 1941 to play at Summit Beach Park in Akron. *Billboard* reported, "Playing his only one-nighter this season, Glenn Miller and his ork attracted 4,300 paid customers, most of them at the \$1 advance price, but plenty at \$1.25. Ticket lines an hour before starting time extended to all corners of the park and police were necessary to keep the ticket buyers in line. Lew Platt, manager of the park pavilion, said the Miller

band gross was the best at the local spot for any band in the five years Summit Beach Inc. has operated the spot."

*Variety* reported Platt was jailed for running a dance on the Sabbath. Platt was fined \$50, a drop in the bucket considering the thousands of dollars the park made from the appearance of the Miller band.

A week after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, thrusting the United States into World War II, the Miller band returned to Cleveland for another week at the Palace and again did its radio broadcasts from the Euclid Avenue theatre. They broadcast for an hour on Saturday afternoon from 5 to 6 on Mutual, and each night from 10 to 10:15 on CBS. This time *The Plain Dealer* headline said, "Miller band gets cheers from Palace's jitterbugs."

*Billboard* reported, "Glenn Miller's ork gave the RKO Palace (3,200 seats) one of the heftiest weeks in recent years, a huge \$31,000."

During the spring and summer of 1942, the Miller

band played at Meyer's Lake Park in Canton June 7, at the Palace Theatre in Akron for four days beginning July 31, and at the Palace Theatre in Youngstown for three days beginning August 4. The band also did its nightly radio broadcast from the stage of the Youngstown theatre.

A month and a half later, Miller's civilian orchestra played its last performance. It was in Passaic, New Jersey. Miller enlisted in the Army and formed a large military orchestra which included some string players from the Cleveland Orchestra including Ernie Kardos of Cleveland Heights.

Miller died at the age of 41 when his plane disappeared over the English Channel December 15, 1944. The U.S. government speculated at the time that Miller's plane was forced down by ice on the wings, but years later, two members of a British bomber crew, pilot Victor Gregory and navigator Fred Shaw, said they were returning from an aborted mission that day and jettisoned some bombs which exploded. They remembered seeing a Norseman, the same type plane Miller was flying in, knocked into the sea by the shock waves of the bombs.

### Glenn Miller Orchestra in Ohio

- June 11, 1937 - Chagrin Valley Hunt Club, Gates Mills
- Dec. 7, 1939 - Nu-Elms Ballroom, Youngstown
- Dec. 8-14, 1939 - Lowe's State Theatre, Cleveland
- Dec. 15, 1939 - Memorial Hall, Columbus
- Dec. 16, 1939 - Castle Farms, Cincinnati
- Dec. 17, 1939 - Moonlight Ballroom, Canton
- Dec. 19, 1939 - Trianon Ballroom, Toledo
- Dec. 29, 1939 - Trianon Ballroom, Toledo
- June 9, 1940 - Meyers Lake Park, Canton
- June 16, 1940 - Valley Dale Ballroom, Columbus
- June 18-20, 1940 - Castle Farms, Cincinnati
- Aug. 2, 1940 - Indian Lake, Russells Point
- Aug. 4, 1940 - Crystal Ballroom, Buckeye Lake
- Aug. 11, 1940 - Pier Ballroom, Geneva-on-the-Lake
- Feb. 21-27, 1941 - Palace Theatre, Cleveland  
(Five shows a day and national radio broadcasts)
- Feb. 28-Mar. 6 - Shubert Theatre, Cincinnati
- Mar. 7-13, 1941 - Palace Theatre, Columbus
- July 13, 1941 - Valley Dale Ballroom, Columbus
- July 14, 1941 - Indian Lake, Russells Point
- July 20, 1941 - Yankee Lake, Youngstown
- Aug. 16, 1941 - Dreamland Ballroom, Conneaut Lake
- Aug. 17, 1941 - Summit Beach Park, Akron
- Jan. 9-15, 1942 - Palace Theatre, Cleveland  
(National radio broadcasts)
- June 5, 1942 - Trianon Ballroom, Toledo
- June 6, 1942 - Lakeside Park, Dayton
- June 7, 1942 - Meyers Lake Park, Canton
- July 5, 1942 - Yankee Lake, Brookfield
- July 6, 1942 - Sandy Beach Park, Russells Point
- July 31-Aug. 3, 1942 - Palace Theatre, Akron
- Aug. 4-6, 1942 - Palace Theatre, Youngstown  
(National radio broadcasts)

Source: John Flower's *Midnight Serenade*

### Helen O'Connell

She was the prototypical big band "girl singer." Like so many others who contributed to the popularity of the big band era, Helen O'Connell was a native of Ohio. She was born and raised in Lima and began singing with bands at the age of 16 (in 1936).

After singing with the Austin Wylie Orchestra in Cleveland, she toured and sang with Larry Funk and "His Band of a Thousand Melodies," a band that frequently played in Northeast Ohio. As early as 1932, Funk and his band were playing at Land O' Dance in Canton. Funk had organized the band at radio station WGN in Chicago and toured extensively. Critic Lamont Patterson recalled seeing O'Connell with the Larry Funk band in Indiana, Pennsylvania in 1938. He said he fell in love immediately with the 18-year-old blonde with dimples. A short time later, Funk took his band for the first time to New York City.

In 1939, according to George Simon in his book *The Big Bands*, Billy Burton, Jimmy Dorsey's personal manager, heard O'Connell sing one night at the Village Barn in New York's Greenwich Village and told Dorsey about the very pretty blonde singer. He said she was a very sweet person who usually wore a religious cross when she sang. Dorsey hired her.

During her first two years with Dorsey, she sang mostly torch songs like "Embraceable You" and "All of Me," and novelty numbers like "Arthur Murray Taught Me Dancing In A Hurry." Fellow singer Bob Eberly said she had a habit of exploding certain notes. He said she exploded some notes so forcefully that, "I always pictured some little



man standing behind her and pinching her at crucial times."

During the third week of April 1939, Dorsey brought his band with singers Eberly and O'Connell to the Palace Theatre in Cleveland for a week. It was the first time she appeared at the Palace.

In 1940, she won the *Metronome* magazine poll for band singers, but her greatest fame was yet to come.

O'Connell, Eberly and Dorsey were the three stars of the band and arranger Tutti Camarata devised a routine that featured all three. Eberly sang the first chorus of the song as a ballad. The band picked up the tempo and Dorsey played a jazz chorus. When the tempo slowed again, Helen came in with a semi-wailing finale.

The first record they made with this three-star arrangement (in February of 1941) was "Amapola." It sold a million copies. Ten months later, another big hit with the same kind of arrangement was "Tangerine." The gimmick proved to be a sensation. The biggest hit was "Green Eyes" which sold 90,000 copies in the first few days, at a time when 25,000 copies was considered a great selling record.

Eberly credited much of the success of "Green Eyes" to the way Helen sang these pickup notes:

*...those cool and lim-pid green eyes*

What amused Eberly was that because of her limited vocal range, O'Connell could not sing the notes the way they were written, the way Eberly had sung them on the first chorus, starting low and going up. Instead, she sang different and easier notes. The effect on the public was devastating and "Green Eyes" became a classic of the big band era.

O'Connell, Eberly and the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra attracted large crowds the week of January 23, 1942 when they again performed on the stage of the Cleveland Palace Theatre. They sang and played between showings of the Abbott and Costello wartime movie *You're In The Army Now*.

In those days, singers, unlike instrumentalists, were not members of a union. When she began recording with Dorsey, O'Connell got a flat fee of \$15 a record. Eventually, when the records became big hits, her rate went up to a whopping \$25 dollars. Most of the record



**Helen O'Connell singing with Jimmy Dorsey**

royalties went to Dorsey. Also, because singers were not members of the musicians union, they were not eligible for pensions and health insurance.

O'Connell left the Dorsey band in 1943 and was replaced by Kitty Kallen. Helen began raising a family. She had three daughters in her first marriage and later married conductor Frank DeVol, a native of Canton.

In the 1950s, she re-emerged as a television hostess. She was Dave Garroway's sidekick on the *Today Show* on NBC-TV for almost three years and appeared on a number of other telecasts. In the 1970s, she was singing again with big band era nostalgia shows.

In the 1990s, when she was in her early 70s, O'Connell was singing with the Jimmy Dorsey ghost band led by trombonist Jim Miller at places like New York's Roseland Ballroom. By many accounts, she was singing better than she had sung with Dorsey in the 1930s and '40s.

She was still singing in August of 1993. At the Valley Forge Music Fair near Philadelphia, she experienced chest pains and returned to her home in California. She underwent surgery for cancer and less than two weeks later, she was dead at the age of 73.

## Charlie Barnet's lust for life



**Charlie Barnet (right) and his orchestra**

One of the most popular and most-jazz oriented big bands, the Charlie Barnet Orchestra, had just completed a week's engagement at Cleveland's Palace Theatre in August of 1940. With a day off before playing in Buffalo, Barnet decided to take his band on a Lake Erie excursion boat from Cleveland to Buffalo.

During the cruise the band members were toasting drummer Cliff Leeman and his wife on their wedding anniversary. When they finished their drinks, they threw their glasses overboard. Someone threw a bottle. Somebody else threw an ice bucket. Then, the entire band joined in. They started throwing wicker deck chairs into Lake Erie. Arranger and trumpeter Billy May later recalled, "We were all throwing the chairs overboard like crazy! Soon all you could see in the wake of the boat were wicker chairs floating in the moonlight."

A member of the ship's crew came running up screaming, "Whose band is this?!" With a sheepish grin, Barnet looked him straight in the eye and said, "This is Jimmy Dorsey's band."

It was typical of the band led by a man whose lust for life and adventure may have been even bigger than his considerable appetite for playing swinging jazz. Born to a wealthy family, Barnet never worried about the necessities of life. Instead he focused on the pleasures of life — mostly music, women and whiskey, and not necessarily in that order.

Just before coming to Cleveland, his band was playing in Youngstown. After checking into a hotel, Barnet took a taxi to a house of prostitution called Helen's and was surprised and amused to see his band bus parked out front. On the bus was a large sign:

#### **THE CHARLIE BARNET ORCHESTRA**

In his autobiography *Those Swinging Years*, Barnet said, "The whole band had taken over the place."

Barnet once described his band members as "unacceptable in any other line of work or, for that matter, in any other band."

When his band played for a week at the Palace Theatre, the band quickly learned a local custom. Whenever anybody on stage mentioned the name of a Cleveland brewery during the show, free cases of beer appeared backstage.

Musically, Barnet openly idolized Duke Ellington. He quietly hired more black musicians than any other white bandleader. They included Benny Carter, Rex Stewart, Charlie Shavers, Howard McGee, Trummy Young, Roy Eldridge, Clark Terry and singer Lena Horne.

Barnet was best known for his hit records of "Cherokee," arranged by Billy May, and "Skyliner," composed by Barnet on an old pump organ.

One time when a songwriter offered Barnet a new tune, he rejected it and suggested the songwriter take it to Glenn Miller. The song was "In The Mood" which became the most popular record of the swing era. Barnet said years later he still didn't like "In The Mood."

Barnet also lost Billy May to Miller. After joining the Miller band, May said he missed Barnet's band and all the things that happened off the bandstand, things that just never happened with Miller's orchestra.

## **Al Lerner and Harry James**

Born in Cleveland in 1919, Al Lerner (not the later owner of the Cleveland Browns) recalled starting his musical career early by performing in a Prohibition era saloon. "We grew up on Woodland Avenue," he said, "and we used to go into a saloon there and stand on the tables and sing for nickels or whatever. I was five or six years old."

The saloon was a few doors from his stepfather's sheet metal shop where Abe Lerner made stills for bootleggers. He camouflaged the stills with burlap and loaded them into gangsters' trucks. Al remembered rival bootleggers showing up, taking out their guns, and killing their competitors in the street. Soon the feds busted the still-making operation and Al's parents had almost no means to support their children.

But somehow they always managed to have a piano in the house. "Music just came naturally," said Al. "My brother was a drummer who went on the road with bands. Evidently that had a lasting effect on me."

Young Al listened to the Cleveland bands of the day, including the Austin Wylie Orchestra with young Artie Shaw.

By his teenage years, Lerner was playing gigs at a bar where the entertainment consisted of waitresses who doubled as strippers and Al's young trio. "When I was about 16," he recalled, "I played at a place called Shadowland. It was at 65th and Carnegie, on the corner. Years later, I took my wife by there to show it to her and it was just an empty lot." Lerner played piano at Shadowland with his trio for \$15 a week. "I worked there seven nights a week," he recalled, "from 9 p.m. to 2:30 a.m." I had a Model A Ford and I used to stop at the gas station and get a dime's worth of gas."

While playing at Shadowland, Lerner and his friends went to Val's in the Alley to hear pianist Art Tatum. The teenage pianist became a friend of Tatum, a friendship that lasted until Tatum's death in 1956.

When he was playing at the Carnegie Avenue bar, Lerner recalled a singer "used to drift in and sing for a sandwich or a beer." The young singer was Frankie Laine. "I used to tell him," said Lerner, "Don't give up your day job!"

Another friend Lerner first met in Cleveland was saxophonist Earle Warren who was playing with the Marion Sears Orchestra at Cedar Gardens. "When I was in New York later and Earle was with the Basie band," Lerner said, "we used to see one another quite a bit."

One night in 1939, Lerner went to the Trianon Ballroom. He said, "It was the first time I heard the Harry James band with Frank Sinatra. I thought it was a wonderful band."

A few months later, the James Orchestra returned to Cleveland and Lerner was invited to sit in during a



dance at the Hotel Cleveland. "Harry came over," remembered Lerner, "and said, 'How would you like to come with the band?' I said, 'Gee, it sounds interesting. Like when?' He said, 'Tonight!' Knowing Harry already had a pianist, I said, 'No, I can't.'"

But a year later, after getting home from a trip to Florida and Cuba with Irv Metzenbaum (the brother of Howard Metzenbaum who became a U.S. Senator), Lerner said his mother told him, "'Somebody has been calling you from New York.' 'What's his name?' She said, 'I can't remember...Jimmy Harry? Harry Jimmy?' I said, 'Harry James?!' 'That's it! He wants you to call him as soon as you get in.'"

Lerner called James. In a few days, he became a member of the popular Harry James Orchestra.

The band was working at a roadside club called the Chatterbox in Plainfield, New Jersey. The first night, James personally drove Lerner to the gig. "To my surprise and bewilderment," recalled Lerner, the piano player I thought I had replaced was on the bandstand at the piano. His name was 'Jumbo Jack' Gardner. He weighed about 450 pounds." Gardner played the first set and Lerner played the second.

The next engagement was the Paramount Theatre in New York City and Bea Wayne was the featured vocalist. This time, the James band had two pianos and two pianists, Lerner and Gardner, on either side of the stage. When Wayne came on stage to sing her big hit, "My Reverie," Jumbo Jack was supposed to play the arpeggio. When James nodded the cue, nothing happened. Jumbo Jack had passed out on the keyboard. Lerner quickly picked up the cue on his piano.

Lerner played the rest of the show with Jumbo Jack slumped over his piano. When the stage, on hydraulic lifts, descended into the basement, it took three band members to carry the big, dead drunk pianist through a tight doorway to the band room.

The next day, Jumbo Jack Gardner was gone and Cleveland Al Lerner was the sole pianist with the James Orchestra.

The opening act at the Paramount that night was a brother and sister dance team called "Wilma and Buddy Ebsen." Buddy Ebsen, years later, was a star of the *Beverly Hillbillies* TV show.

The male singer with the James band at the time was Dick Haymes. He and Lerner roomed together and, in later years, Lerner became Haymes' musical director. Remembered Al, "Dick was great. He was probably the best singer of the time. As a singer, nobody sang any better than Dick. He had a lot of other faults and he could have been a much bigger star than he was."

Al remembered playing with the James orchestra at the 1940 World's Fair. There were other bands there including Mike Riley, the man who wrote "The Music

Goes Round and Round, Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh." Lerner said Riley "was a crazy man. He put on a raincoat to do 'I Cried For You.' He had little hoses in his raincoat and while he was playing, tears of orange, green and blue shot out of his raincoat!" At the Steel Pier in Atlantic City, Lerner remembered that Riley one time jumped off the end of the pier into the ocean – while playing his trombone.

Also at the World's Fair, when the Harry James band was playing for an outdoor dance, Lerner soloed on "9:20 Special," a song written by two musicians he had known in Cleveland, Earle Warren and Buster Harding.

"One weekend was a lulu," recalled Lerner with a look of agony on his face. "Harry came up with an idea of offering a prize for a Judy Garland sound-alike contest. On what were probably two of the hottest days of the summer, I played piano accompaniment for *over 120 singers!* I was burned to a crisp by the hot August sun which beat down on me unmercifully. I was blistered about my face and neck. The rest of me was covered with heat rash. To this day," said Lerner, "I do a slow burn whenever I hear someone singing 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow.'"

After touring with James for five years, Lerner played piano with the Charlie Barnet, Tommy Dorsey and Artie Shaw bands. He said the Barnet band was "one of the best swing bands with good jazz players. A lot of them weren't much of anything else, but they could play and they could swing. And it was the drunkest band in the world. You couldn't go to work unless you had a jug. If you didn't have one, Charlie would get one for you."

Lerner said he had no idea how many records he played on. He made many records with James, Dorsey and Shaw, plus many others. He said somebody in Los Angeles "brought me albums and records of things I don't remember making. My name was on them as conductor. I don't remember them at all. There were a lot of them."

In 1957, he recorded a jazz group album for Roulette called *Ivory and Bone* with guitarist Al Hendrickson and vibraphonist Frank Flynn.

Lerner also wrote the closing theme song for the *Tonight Show* when Jack Paar was the host. It was called "So Until I See You."

In the early 1980s, the Cleveland native rounded up many of the original members of the Glenn Miller Orchestra and made several tours of Australia. He also took the Miller alumni band to England to play for the BBC.

One night, Lerner went to see the motion picture *Greedy* with Kirk Douglas and was surprised to see himself in the opening scene with comedian Jimmy Durante. "There I am on the screen," he said with a laugh. "A clip was taken from one of our old Harry James pictures, *Two Girls and a Sailor* in the 1940s."

## Vaughn Monroe



**Vaughn Monroe and his orchestra**

Most people remember Akron area native Vaughn Monroe as a muscle-voiced ballad singer. He was very popular in the 1940s and '50s. But, many people forget he was also the leader of a swinging big jazz band.

Monroe formed his band in 1940 after he had played trumpet in the Cleveland area with bands led by Austin Wylie and Larry Funk. Within a year, the 28-year-old Monroe's band developed a large and enthusiastic following. Among his sidemen were trombonist Ray Conniff, drummer Harry Jaeger, saxophonist Carl Rand and trumpeter Bobby Nichols who later played with Glenn Miller's Air Force Band and the Sauter-Finegan Orchestra.

Monroe's band featured a number of excellent improvised solos within the big band charts. Their most popular number was "Take It, Jackson."

Trumpeter, valve trombonist and singer Monroe brought his band to Cleveland's Palace Theatre in January of 1945 and again in February of 1946. Shortly after the second appearance at the Palace, Monroe made a record, "There I've Said It Again," which became a huge hit. While RCA Victor recorded more Monroe vocals, he continued to tour with his jazz band into the 1950s.

Monroe died in 1973 at the age of 62.

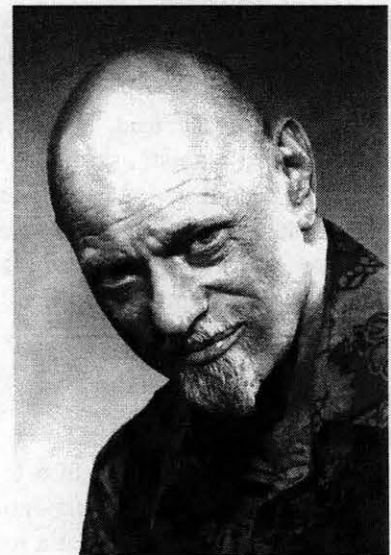
## Hank Geer

Hank Geer, whose real name was Gerspacher, was growing up in the Collinwood section of Cleveland in the 1930s when he said, "I was able to get a saxophone." He said he didn't take any lessons. "You just learn to play."

Geer's sister, Bertha Basler, later said she believed Hank was "born with music. As a small child," she said, "he watched the keys go up and down on the player piano and learned to play." When he was older, she said he would sit on the basement steps with a music stand in front of him and practice every day.

Hank bought a few books, studied, practiced and basically taught himself to play the saxophone. Soon the teenager was playing with various bands around Cleveland.

He recalled, "The summer months would come along and we were working the summer parks – Ruggles Beach, Euclid Beach, and Mentor-on-the-Lake. Somebody called, needed a new player, and I went along."



**Hank Geer**

When Geer was only 15 and still a student at Collinwood High School, he got a chance to play with a band led by a cheery, chubby trumpeter named Charlie Spivak. Geer and some other young Cleveland musicians were sitting in and jamming at Julian Krawcheck's Hot Club of Cleveland. "Charlie came in," remembered Geer, "and said, 'Get that kid!'" One of Spivak's regular saxophonists, Bob Bassey, had just been rushed to the hospital with a ruptured appendix. Geer played with the Spivak band at the Trianon Ballroom in Cleveland. But, when the band went to New York, Hank, then less than 16 years old, went back to high school. He wanted to go to college and study to become a doctor.

The summer after he graduated, Geer joined the band of Ray Anthony, a Cleveland native who had played for six months with the Glenn Miller Orchestra. At the end of the summer, Geer left the Anthony band to enroll at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

At Miami, Geer joined an outstanding college band, the Miami University Campus Owls. Originally formed in the 1920s, the Campus Owls were considered one of the best college big bands in the country. Geer later became the leader of the Campus Owls.

When he took a bus to Cincinnati to take some pre-med courses at the University of Cincinnati, he managed to get a job playing saxophone with a studio band at radio station WLW for a 15-minute program called *The Lion's Roar*. The singer on the program was a young girl who had spent a year singing with the Les Brown band. Geer remembered going out for hamburgers with Doris Day who became an extremely famous and popular singer and movie actress.

When he was in college, Geer was torn between his interests in medicine and music. He said, "I had some very good offers and said to myself, 'Hey, music is my



first love! I'll give it a shot. I can go back to school if I don't make it."

He went on the road, playing with various big bands, but got sick and came home to Cleveland. When Anthony formed his post-war band, he asked Geer to join it. But Geer turned down the offer. He wanted to continue his education and do more in music than play with dance bands that, at the time, were doing little more than trying to extend the big band era.

"That's when I went to Tucson, Arizona," said Geer, "and started teaching at the university. I played in the Tucson Symphony and got into real estate right after the war."

Still in his 20s, Geer moved to Los Angeles City College and began doing orchestrations for movies. He went to Miami, enrolled in a university there and began studying the adaption of music to choreography. He also played with theatre bands in Miami.

When there was an illness in his family, Geer returned to Cleveland and became involved in real estate, building and development. He opened a motel on Lakeshore Boulevard and started his own jazz nightclub, the Euclid Shore Club, but he never gave up his love of playing music.

In the 1950s, Geer toured briefly with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra. The Cleveland saxophonist later said Dorsey "was a hell of a businessman. That's what it's all about. He knew how to communicate with his audience."

After Dorsey died in 1956, Geer again toured with the Dorsey band, then led by Warren Covington. Hank again tired of touring. He said, "Living and playing out of a suitcase on the road all the time, I asked myself, 'Is this what I want to be doing 10 years from now?' I tried to find other avenues."

Geer became more involved in the building and development business in Cleveland. He also bought Marie Schreiber's Tavern Chop House on Chester Avenue near East 9th Street. He continued to play with his own combo in Cleveland, at first with pianist Hugh Thompson. They played for 13 years at various venues including Blossom Music Center and opened shows for such artists as Nancy Wilson.

After Thompson died, Geer performed for years with pianist Bill Gidney and bassist Chink Stevenson.

Geer and his group began playing at Sammy's restaurant in 1980. The dean of Cleveland jazz musicians became a fixture at the restaurant in the Cleveland Flats.

In 1991, he was seriously injured in a freak accident outside Sammy's. A car crashed into the wooden deck where Geer was standing during a break and threw him 40 yards down a steep hill onto some railroad tracks. Geer suffered multiple fractures, including a badly mangled left hand. A year later, after months of operations and therapy, Geer, pushing 70, was playing again at Sammy's.

Following another accident, Geer died October 12, 2000 at the age of 78.

## Stan Kenton and Cleveland

On September 11, 1942, an unusual big band led by a 30-year-old, six-foot-four-inch blond pianist began a week's engagement at Cleveland's Palace Theatre. It was the Stan Kenton Orchestra and billed itself as "The First Band With a Sound All Its Own Since Glenn Miller."

The Cleveland appearance was part of Kenton's first tour after debuting his band the previous summer at Balboa Beach in California and a year before Kenton recorded his theme song, "Artistry in Rhythm," and



The Stan Kenton Orchestra in 1947. At the far right is Howard Hoffman, later a weatherman at WJW-TV.



**A 1954 newspaper ad for Kenton in Cleveland**

phenomenon in the 1940s. It included such outstanding sidemen as Eddie Safranski, Shelly Manne, Boots Mussulli and Kai Winding.

In 1946, young Howard Hoffman, who would later become a television weatherman and announcer at Cleveland's WJW-TV, joined Kenton's band as a member of his vocal group, the Pastels.

Through many personnel changes and sometimes strong criticism from critics, Kenton never lost his boundless energy to play *his* music – or his sense of humor. One time in the 1950s, he recorded a blues duet with Benny Goodman in which they kidded each other. Goodman began by singing, "I hear you got a band, it features 19 brass, and when they hit a clinker, you call it 'progressive jazz.'" Kenton responded with, "It's a good thing you said 'jazz.' Now watch it, Mr. Goodman. Be careful what you say. You know exactly what you're doing. You're giving me that B.G. ray (Goodman's infamous stare)!"

Cleveland Phil Rizzo composed and arranged for the Kenton Orchestra. He also arranged for the Sy Oliver band and wrote ten books on jazz technique. In the '50s, Rizzo returned to Cleveland and opened his Modern Music School on Lee Road in Cleveland Heights and conducted a number of Kenton clinics.

In the 1960s, drummer Nick Ceroli from Warren, Ohio, joined the Kenton Orchestra.

In 1964, a 21-year-old trombonist from Richmond Heights became Kenton's lead trombonist. Jiggs Whigham toured with Kenton for two years before deciding to move permanently to Germany.

Cleveland drummer Ted Paskert also played and recorded with the Kenton Orchestra. Paskert was later a news cameraman at WKYC-TV.

"Eager Beaver."

Kenton's big band did have "a sound all its own" – modern, different and loud. The Kenton style, even then, consisted of a staccato reed section and screaming brasses. Eddie Condon once said, "It sounded like Stan signed on 300 men for the date and they were all on time!"

Led by Kenton's enormous energy and zest, the band became a national

Before Kenton died in 1979, he decreed there would never be a Stan Kenton ghost band, but he left 38 years worth of scores and music which are still played by bands around the world.

## Cleveland Stage Door Canteen

Woody Herman's "First Herd" was playing for a week at the Palace Theatre in February of 1943. The band included such top sidemen as saxophonist Flip Phillips; trombonist Bill Harris; trumpeters Pete and Conte Candoli, Sonny Berman and Neal Hefti; pianist Ralph Burns; guitarist Billy Bauer; bassist Chubby Jackson and drummer Davy Tough.

During the run at the Palace, the Herman band also played a Tuesday night gig at the new Cleveland Stage Door Canteen at 1515 Euclid Avenue. It was one of only seven in the nation opened by the American Theatre Wing to provide free entertainment, food and services for World War II U.S. servicemen.

Sailors from the Navy Bureau of Supplies and Accounts and from ships docked at the Cleveland lakefront, soldiers and marines from the Crile Hospital in Parma, and other servicemen passing through Cleveland's busy Union Terminal flocked to the Stage Door Canteen. The free Tuesday night shows and dances usually attracted about 500 servicemen to see and hear some of the biggest names in show business.

The Count Basie Orchestra, with Harry "Sweets" Edison and Earle Warren, played there March 27, 1943.

In March of 1944, the Tommy Dorsey band with drummer Gene Krupa and clarinetist Buddy DeFranco entertained the troops at the Euclid Avenue canteen.

The Stage Door Canteen staged its biggest show September 3, 1944 when more than 1,800 servicemen crowded the hall to see and hear comedian Bob Hope, who had grown up in Cleveland, singer Frances Langford and the Les Brown Orchestra.

Two weeks later, the Stan Kenton Orchestra, on its first national tour, played at the canteen with singer Anita O'Day and such instrumentalists as Eddie Safranski, Vido Musso, Shelly Manne and Pete Rugolo.

Other entertainers who performed at the Cleveland Stage Door Canteen included singer Perry Como, who

### Jazz at the Stage Door Canteen

January 30, 1943 -	Woody Herman Orchestra
March 27, 1943 -	Count Basie Orchestra
March 11, 1944 -	Tommy Dorsey Orchestra with Gene Krupa
September 3, 1944 -	Bob Hope, Les Brown and Frances Langford
September 17, 1944 -	Stan Kenton Orchestra
October 26, 1945 -	Marion Hutton



had been singing in Cleveland seven years earlier; comedienne Patsy Kelly and Martha Raye; actor Victor Mature and the Cleveland band of Mickey Katz, the father of Broadway entertainer Joel Gray.

During its 33-month existence, Cleveland's Stage Door Canteen served 750,000 servicemen and offered them some of the best live jazz in the world at the time. The canteen closed October 26, 1945, two months after the end of World War II.

## Wally Kinnan's Sagan Serenaders

If you were in Cleveland in the late 1960s and early '70s, you probably remember Wally Kinnan, The Weather Man. He was part of Channel 3's popular television news team that included news anchor Virgil Dominic and sportscaster Jim Graner. Kinnan had the unusual knack of communicating his vast knowledge of weather in a folksy and humorous style.

A few of us who worked with Wally in those days knew that he had played trumpet in some of the big bands. Fewer knew that he had also been captured by the Germans during World War II and had been held in a prisoner of war camp.

Years later, we learned that Wally Kinnan The Weather Man had also been a leader of one of the most unusual bands in jazz history.

In August of 1943, Lt. Henry Wallace Kinnan, a 23-year-old American airman, who had played with the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra before becoming an aviation cadet, was shot down by German planes on a bombing mission over Schweinfurt, Germany. His captors took him to a prisoner of war camp, Stalag Luft III, at Sagan, Germany, about 90 miles southeast of Berlin. At that prisoner of war camp, Kinnan and Pilot Officer Leonard Whiteley of the Royal Air Force formed a big band.

Writing in the February 1994 edition of the *Ex-POW Bulletin*, Wally recalled, "We were forced to make the most of a very few musical instruments of dubious heritage, which had been acquired from the Germans, the Red Cross and the YMCA." He said the real classic among the instruments was a Polish trombone which Wally described as "a plumber's nightmare." He said it could hit only six of the classic slide positions; "The seventh required the player to reach over his shoulder and pull a chain which, in turn, operated a rotary valve in a veritable maze of tubing to produce the desired result." Wally said that awkward trombone was quickly retired from active duty "when some of the more inventive lads determined that the extensive tubing of the old horn could be put to more popular use in a homemade still to produce a local home brew of lethal proportions out of our aging potato crop."

By the end of 1943, Wally said new groups of prisoners, coming in almost daily, produced a surprising

wealth of professional musical talent. Among them were pianist John Bunch (who later played with Woody Herman and Benny Goodman), Tiger Ward, John Brady, Hi Bevens, Nick Nagorka, and trumpeter Vince Shank (who later played with Russ Morgan and others).

Shank, who was transferred to Stalag Luft III from Italy, brought his own trumpet with him and frequently played jazz versions of popular tunes.

Kinnan, who may have been almost a real-life Hogan's hero, persuaded the German staff to find some real musical instruments so they could put on organized musical programs for the prisoners. With Shank, Bunch and the other professional musicians, Kinnan formed a prisoner of war camp big band called the Sagan Serenaders.

Wally said arranger Ward "gave the band a growing library of contemporary big band swing hits that were incredibly accurate reproductions of the sounds of the day." Kinnan said, "Some arriving prisoners went almost into shock when they heard the band play tunes they had been listening to only a few days earlier in England" before they were shot down.

The Sagan Serenaders included four trumpets, two trombones, five saxes, and four rhythm instruments including guitar. By the summer of 1944, all of the chairs were filled by former professional musicians.

One band member recalled Kinnan did a novelty skit with a puppet on his left hand that inspected his trumpet while Wally valved the horn with his right. The band member called it "a hilarious routine."

Wally said, "We were beginning to talk seriously about taking the band on tour in the U.S. when and if we could manage to survive the war."

By the winter of 1945, the Russians were approaching the German prisoner of war camp where the jazz band was playing. On Sunday, January 28, the Germans marched the 12,000 American prisoners, including the band members, out of Stalag Luft III. Wally later said he believed they would be marched into a field and shot. As he marched into the night, he leaned his trumpet against a fence.

They were not executed. They were led on a forced march through a blizzard to Spremberg, almost 200 miles away. Many of the prisoners died during the forced march. Pianist Bunch said he was starving and ready to die when Kinnan saved his life by sharing a potato with him.



WKYC-TV

Wally Kinnan

The prisoners were taken to another POW camp at Moosburg, 30 miles from Munich.

General George Patton and the American Third Army arrived April 29, 1945 and freed the prisoners. The next day, Adolph Hitler committed suicide. A week later, the Germans surrendered. And a few days after that, Kinnan and the other American flyers, who had formed the big jazz band at Stalag Luft III, were back in the United States.

Wally and the others never did take the Sagan Serenaders on tour, or even hold a reunion of what was perhaps the most unusual big band in history. Wally did play trumpet with several name bands after the war before becoming one of the founders of the American Meteorological Society and going into television weather reporting in the early years of TV.

I first worked with Wally in 1961 at the NBC radio and television stations in Philadelphia where he was extremely popular. Every evening before the newscast, he came to my desk to look out the window to see if his weather forecast was holding up.

When Wally and I both came to NBC in Cleveland in the 1960s, we chatted occasionally about his prisoner of war experiences and about playing with some of the big bands. He even played occasionally with bands in Cleveland. I remember a NBC Christmas Party one year, after Wally had been fired by Channel 3. Dan Zola's big band was playing for the party and there, blowing solos in the trumpet section, was former Channel 3 weather man Wally Kinnan.

After leaving Channel 3, Wally moved to Florida and later formed his own 16-piece band in St. Petersburg. It was probably a pretty good band, but certainly not as memorable or as historic as the Sagan Serenaders – the prisoner of war professional jazz band Wally Kinnan formed at Stalag Luft III in 1943.

Kinnan died at 83 November 22, 2002.

## **Trombonist Mitch Zaremba**

He was not a legendary force in jazz, but Cleveland trombonist Mitch Zaremba played key roles in several important big band era orchestras.

Born in Cleveland in 1920 and a graduate of West Tech High School, Zaremba began playing trombone with Cleveland's Jimmy Carroll Orchestra. When the U.S. went to war, Zaremba became an Army medic in the Pacific and saw combat action on Guadalcanal.

When he came home after the war, he was playing well enough to join the trombone section of Gene Krupa's swinging big band. It was the Krupa band that included trumpeter Roy Eldridge and singer Anita O'Day.

He also played with Woody Herman's Second Herd, the famous "Four Brothers" band that included Stan Getz and Zoot Sims.

In 1949, Zaremba went on the road for three years with the popular Frankie Carle Orchestra.

He gave up touring in the 1950s when he and his wife, Ruth, began raising a family in Parma Heights. He led his own band in Cleveland and spent three years playing with Henry "Hot Lips" Levine's studio band at Radio Station WTAM.

But, by the 1960s, music jobs were drying up. Zaremba said, "The big ballrooms became bowling alleys and big bands became little more than enduring timepieces of musical history. It was a grand era while it lasted. We took it for granted and thought it would go on forever."

Zaremba fell back on another talent, photography, and became a news photographer for *The Plain Dealer*, a role he filled for almost 30 years. He was seen almost everywhere in Cleveland with his camera.

Zaremba died at his Parma Heights home at the age of 70 July 28th, 1990.

## **Cleveland trumpeter Joe Dolny**

When he got out of military service in 1946, Cleveland trumpeter Joe Dolny joined the orchestra of multi-talented Bobby Sherwood.

Born in Cleveland in 1924, Dolny joined Zoot Sims in the innovative Sherwood band led by a man who was an arranger, composer, singer, trumpeter, guitarist, trombonist and pianist. They made several popular big band recordings including "The Elks' Parade" and "Sherwood's Forest."

After Sherwood broke up his band in 1949, Dolny joined the Buddy Rich band which included Cleveland trumpeter Emmet Berry and played arrangements by Cleveland Tadd Dameron. In 1950, Dolny was a member of the Claude Thornhill Orchestra, playing arrangements by Gil Evans and Gerry Mulligan. Dolny also later played with the Jerry Wald Orchestra.

In the 1950s, Dolny lived in Los Angeles and played a number of studio dates including recordings with the Ray Anthony Orchestra. He also performed with the Harry James Orchestra in the '50s.

When Cleveland guitarist Jim Hall went to the West Coast in 1955, it was Dolny who helped Hall get a job with the popular Chico Hamilton group.

For years, Dolny led one of the best rehearsal bands in Los Angeles and wrote arrangements for a number of bands including the Si Zentner Orchestra.

## **Dizzy Gillespie's big bop band**

In 1946, bebop pioneer Dizzy Gillespie formed a now-legendary big band to play bebop arrangements. The unusual band included a number of future jazz giants as well as several musicians from Cleveland.

The trumpet section included Gillespie, Miles Davis,





**Dizzy Gillespie's 1947 big band. The three saxists who are standing are (L-to-R) Cecil Payne, James Moody and Joe Gayles. Just over Moody's shoulder, wearing dark glasses, is Cleveland Shep Shepherd. Ray Brown is the bassist. Gillespie is at the far right.**

Fats Navarro, Kenny Dorham and Cleveland Freddie Webster. Cleveland guitarist Bill de Arango recorded with Gillespie's big band. One of Gillespie's closest collaborators and arrangers was Cleveland Tadd Dameron. It was Dameron who suggested that Gillespie hire Cleveland trombonist William "Shep" Shepherd.

When Gillespie's band was playing for a dance at Cleveland's Public Auditorium, Dizzy auditioned Shepherd who was playing at the time with Cleveland's Johnny Powell Orchestra. Gillespie told Shepherd simply, "You can leave now or wait and come tomorrow and meet us in Pittsburgh."

Shepherd told me he met the band the next day in Pittsburgh and toured with Gillespie for two years. He played lead trombone with the Gillespie band that included such jazz artists as John Lewis and Milt Jackson, two future members of the Modern Jazz Quartet.

According to Shepherd, "Dizzy was the most wonderful person to work with you ever seen in your life and he was just like a teacher." He said Dizzy was also "a brilliant person, a deep person."

It was an exciting experience for the Cleveland trombonist. One night in Philadelphia, remembered Shepherd, "This woman came over and sat down right in front of me and got in the way of my trombone slide. It made me kind of peeved. I said, 'What right does this woman have to come and sit in front of me like that?' Dizzy looked up, went over and grabbed her, and introduced her, 'Shep, this is Billie Holiday!'"

In 1948, Shepherd and the Gillespie band toured Europe. It was Shepherd who suggested that Gillespie hire Cleveland trumpeter Benny Bailey for the European tour.

They went by ship and ran into a frightening storm. "That was the most awful storm I had ever seen," said Shepherd. "I had never been on the ocean and the waves looked like mountains. They vibrated the whole ship. The crew locked the doors and boarded them so we couldn't get out. They said, 'If you go out, you'll be blown off the deck!'"

The band played several days in Gottenburg and Copenhagen and met the Prince of Sweden, an avid jazz fan who went with the band to Belgium and Germany.

Shep remembered Gillespie was very popular in Europe at the time and found many people copying his bebop style of wearing a beret, horn-rimmed glasses and a goatee.

Eventually, the Gillespie band got to Paris. For a wildly enthusiastic crowd, Clevelanders Shepherd and Bailey and the other members of the band played a composition by Cleveland Tadd Dameron, "Good Bait."

Bailey remembered, "They accepted this music we were playing which was very new. We got a great reception everywhere. I decided then that I wanted to live in Europe."

Shepherd, the well-schooled trombonist from Cleveland, also performed with the Gillespie band at New York's Carnegie Hall in 1948. They played an ambitious piece called "Soulphony," composed by Dameron. He wrote a special arrangement for Shepherd.

"He had me start off playing a high B natural, that high note. I said, 'Tadd, why are you putting me up so high at Carnegie Hall?' He said, 'Don't worry about it, Shep, you can do it.' So, when I played the solo, I hit the note right on the head, just as loud and clear, and

then my knees started shaking.”

Buster Harding, who had played with the Marion Sears Orchestra at Cedar Gardens in Cleveland, also arranged for Gillespie’s big band.

Longtime Cleveland jazz drummer Lawrence “Jacktown” Jackson was on the road in the early 1950s with a band that ran out of money in Florida. He was stranded but he found an unusual way to get home. Jacktown recalled, “Gillespie’s band came through Pensacola for a dance. It was canceled because of bad weather. It was raining cats and dogs. Dizzy needed a valet. He had one, but his entourage was so large that two men were needed. Milt Jackson and Kenny Burrell were in the band. Kenny and I were classmates in high school (in Detroit). So with his recommendation, and me being a little husky fellow, Diz hired me, not realizing I was a drummer with drums. So here I am with a job but no room for my instruments. I asked my friends to send my drums back home.”

Through the generosity of Gillespie, Jacktown worked his way back home by hauling luggage. He recalled, “Ella Fitzgerald was on the tour with her maid, her musical director, Dizzy’s wife Loraine, the bus driver, the road manager, 15 band members, two valets as well as all the drums, vibes, bass fiddle, music stands, music, and everyone’s luggage.”

Shep Shepherd was Jacktown’s roommate. Saxist James Moody was his seat partner on the band bus.

Jacktown said Dizzy was always trying to have fun. “He was really a big clown,” said Jacktown. “The band would be up on the bandstand playing and he’d be down on the dance floor, shakin’ ‘em up. I remember one incident. He was on the dance floor with a girl and his wife was coming in. I had to get off the bandstand to go

get him, pull his coat, and yell, ‘Here comes Loraine!’”

After becoming a jazz legend, Gillespie formed another big band in the 1980s and toured the world. His all-star United Nation Festival Super Band played an outdoor concert at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo August 21, 1988. Members of that later band included Jon Faddis, James Moody, Slide Hampton, Sam Rivers and Paquito D’Rivera.

Gillespie’s last performance in Cleveland, a concert with a small group, was November 16, 1990 at the Cleveland Museum of Art in University Circle. Dizzy died two and a half years later (January 6, 1993) at the age of 75.

## The Boyd Raeburn Orchestra

Another revolutionary band that appeared after World War II also had a number of Cleveland connections. For many, the Boyd Raeburn Orchestra was *the* big band of the 1940s. The inventive, imaginative sounds of the Raeburn band were far ahead of their time.

Big band chronicler George Simon called the Raeburn Orchestra “one of the truly great bands.” Jazz historian Jack McKinney said, “It may have been the most inventive band of any era.”

Four Clevelanders made contributions to the Raeburn Orchestra. Tadd Dameron, Ray Anthony, Wes Hensel and Ralph Flanagan all arranged for the band.

David Allyn, who sang with the band, told me the story about one foggy morning when the driver of the band bus got lost in Cleveland. “We could see we were in Shaker Heights,” recalled Allyn, “in an area where there were tremendous estates with great iron gates, stone walls and great green lawns and shrubbery, just fantastic places!” Allyn said the band members were



The Boyd Raeburn Orchestra in 1945. Raeburn is at the far right, Allyn at the far left.



digging all the big estates when he suddenly became aware of the ironic situation. Looking at all the big homes they were passing, Allyn said, "We're just roving, wandering gypsies! We're not hip! We're square. Look at this! Look at us! What have we got? These people in these big houses don't care about what we're doing," said Allyn. Suddenly, from the back of the bus came the voice of another band member. "Wait a minute, man!! What do *they* know about Diz and Prez and Bird?!!



Courtesy of IAJRC

**David Allyn singing in Cleveland in 1990**

Despite the general public apathy toward their music, the members of the Boyd Raeburn Orchestra and their group of followers felt a sense of musical exhilaration.

Raeburn formed his orchestra in 1944 and hired an arranger named Eddie Finckel who later said, "We used to take Lester

Young's choruses with the Basie band off records and write them out, analyze them, study them, and write band arrangements based on them."

Later, another arranger arrived. George Handy, who had studied with Aaron Copland and was influenced by Igor Stravinsky, helped create what Allyn called "a new concept of the big band sound."

Among the band members at various times were Buddy DeFranco, Conte Candoli, Jimmy Giuffre, Pete Rugolo, Don Lamond, Jack Jenney, Mel Lewis and even, for a brief period, Dizzy Gillespie. DeFranco later said, "The world just wasn't ready for this kind of music."

Raeburn disbanded in 1948, but many jazz musicians and fans still fondly remember the inventive and exciting Raeburn Orchestra.

## Henry Mancini

Known primarily for his lush Hollywood arrangements and compositions, Cleveland native Henry Mancini played in several big bands and made a significant contribution to jazz history in 1958 when, for the first time, he used jazz as background music for a television drama.

Shortly after he was born in Cleveland April 16, 1924, Mancini's family moved to the Pittsburgh area where his

father got a job at a steel mill. When Henry was 12 (in 1936), he was listening to records and radio broadcasts by the Benny Goodman Orchestra. At 13, he played flute in the Pennsylvania All-State High School Band. At 14, he began taking piano lessons from Max Adkins, the

conductor of the pit band at Pittsburgh's Stanley Theatre. After Mancini graduated from Aliquippa High School, Adkins introduced Mancini to his idol, Goodman.

Goodman invited Mancini to go to New York where the teenager wrote an arrangement for a song entitled "Idaho." It was a complicated arrangement. After listening to his band play it, Goodman said, "Kid, I don't think you're ready yet." Realizing he was in over his head, the young Mancini enrolled at Julliard.

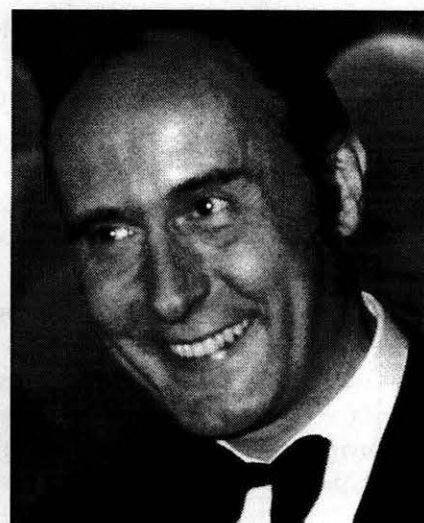
He got a job playing piano for the Vincent Lopez Orchestra, but was fired on the spot for playing too loudly, drowning out the leader.

When he turned 18 (in 1942), Mancini was drafted into the Army Air Corps (in the days before a separate service called the Air Force was formed). He tried unsuccessfully to get into Glenn Miller's Army band, but Miller had him transferred to another military band and assigned to accompany singer Tony Martin.

When Mancini was discharged, an Army buddy helped him get a job playing piano with the post-war Miller Orchestra led by Tex Beneke. After touring the theatres and ballrooms of the country, Mancini said, "When you're on the road with a band, you live in a capsule, a cocoon. There is no other world but the band. You breathe and talk the life of the band. Everything comes down to two things: where do we eat and what time does the job start?"

Because of his unusual sense of humor, other members of the Beneke band called Mancini "Weirdo." One night on the stage of the Earl Theatre in Philadelphia, he teased fellow Clevelander Stan Harris and said, "You're losing your marbles!" For emphasis, Mancini rolled a handful of marbles across the stage as the band was playing. Beneke simply kicked them into the footlights.

While he was with Beneke, Mancini began dating Ginny O'Connor, a member of the band's vocal group.



**Henry Mancini**

He brought her home to Cleveland to meet his family. After they left the Beneke band, they married.

He went to Hollywood, got studio jobs playing for several bands and writing music for some forgettable movies.

In 1954, Mancini was the music director for *The Glenn Miller Story*, a movie based loosely on the life of the bandleader who had refused to hire him 12 years earlier. Mancini wrote the love theme for the film, "Too Little Time."

Mancini's big break, and his most important contribution to jazz, came in 1958. He was asked to write the music for a new television detective program called *Peter Gunn*. It was a jazz score. It was the first time jazz had been used regularly in a dramatic TV series.

"The idea of using jazz in the score was never even discussed," said Mancini later. "It was implicit in the story. Peter Gunn was hanging out in a jazz road house where there was a five-piece jazz group." To record the jazz for the TV show, Mancini used several musicians he had known on the Beneke band including trumpeter Pete Candoli, drummer Shelly Manne and bassist Red Mitchell. When the television program became a hit, RCA released an album of the music. It was number one

on the *Billboard* chart for ten weeks and stayed on the pop charts for more than two years, an unusual accomplishment for a jazz album during the early days of rock 'n roll.

The success of the *Peter Gunn* album thrust Mancini into the public spotlight. He composed and recorded music for a number of motion pictures including *Mister Lucky* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. "Moon River," written for *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, became a major hit and a popular standard that was recorded more than a thousand times. In 1963, he wrote "Days of Wine and Roses." Later that year, Mancini played a concert of his music with the Cleveland Orchestra.

There was another big hit in 1964, "The Pink Panther Theme." It was voted the best instrumental composition of the year and was recorded many times, even by Benny Goodman, who 23 years earlier had told Mancini, "Kid, I don't think you're ready yet."

Over a 30-year period, the Cleveland native sold more than 30 million copies of his albums and won 20 Grammys and four Oscars.

Mancini died at the age of 71 in Los Angeles in June of 1995.



## 8. Central High School

It's amazing how many Cleveland musicians who went on to win national and even international fame, started in music at Cleveland's old Central High School. Among the many jazz notables from Central were Noble Sissle, Buster Harding, Andy Anderson, Skippy Williams, Harold Arnold, Harry "Pee Wee" Jackson, Freddie Webster, Tadd Dameron, "Bull Moose" Jackson, Ernie Freeman, Shep Shepherd, Howard Roberts, Chink McKinney, Jimmy Williams, Willie Smith, Fats Heard, Gay Crosse and Johnny Powell.

Central High School began in 1846 in the basement of a church on Prospect Avenue. Ten years later, the school moved to a brick and stone building at Erie Street (later East 9th) and Euclid Avenue. It was not only the first high school in Cleveland, it was also the first free, public high school west of the Alleghenies.

Ironically, when music was first taught at Central, some believed it was an improper use of school funds. In the early years, most of the students were from Cleveland's oldest, most respected families.

By 1868, Central High School had grown to 214 students. When enrollment exceeded 300, officials decided to build a new high school, a Victorian Gothic structure that was completed in 1878 at 2201 Willson Avenue (later East 55th Street) at Central Avenue. The new building's ornate clock tower was donated by a graduate, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Sr. It faced the avenue that was arched with trees and boasted some of Cleveland's most imposing homes.

Early Central graduates included street light inventor Charles Brush, U.S. Senator Mark Hanna, and businessman and civic activist Samuel Mather. John D.



Old Central High School on East 55th Street

Central's 660 students were black. By the early 1930s, Central had become a predominantly black school, and by the late '30s, the great majority of all of Cleveland's black high school students attended Central. School officials decided to switch the educational emphasis away from liberal arts. They revamped the curriculum to train black students as domestics and laborers. But Central

High School also had a "vocational music department" designed to prepare students for careers teaching and performing music.

Veteran Cleveland saxophonist Andy Anderson, who was at Central during that period, recalled, "I started taking up music under Dr. Reddig, the music director. We had dances on Thursday nights." The school's reputation for music was just beginning.

By the late 1930s, James Lee had become the music director.



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives

Members of the Central High School marching band at a football game

Willie Smith remembered, "Mr. Lee liked excellence in music and he gave everybody a chance. We had a big band at Central with guys like Woody Holt who played saxophone and Carl Fields, the trumpet player. We had shows going on all the time."

William "Shep" Shepherd, who later played with Dizzy Gillespie's big band, remembered Mr. Lee was crazy about big band jazz and took his students to the Palace Theatre to hear Duke Ellington, Tommy Dorsey and Benny Goodman. "Mr. Lee got us special passes to go and see Goodman (in 1939). I stood right there and looked over at them when he had Lionel Hampton, Teddy Wilson and all of them."

Jimmy Williams, who went on to play with the Fletcher Henderson and Jimmie Lunceford bands, recalled, "Mr. Lee was a really nice guy. He let me have a trombone."

James "Chink" McKinney, a drummer, said Central gave the young jazz musicians "a lot of support even though they taught those other types of music. They knew that's what we liked, so they gave us plenty of support, especially Mr. Lee. He used to write arrangements himself. He used to be in an orchestra. He told us about how he used to travel around with seven or eight pieces and how they'd work for \$5 a night."

Williams added, "Mr. Lee took me under his wing and started showing me about orchestrations. I really loved the guy. If you were in the band, you *had* to learn how to read."

The Central High School marching band became legendary. Willie Smith remembered, "We'd be out in the street marching and guys would be jamming." Williams said, "They would come to the games with their horns and you'd hear blasts of riffs. These guys were jamming everything."

Trumpeter Ted Jones was a member of both the school band and the football team. Mr. Lee wanted to keep him in the marching band to play at football games, but Jones said, "Football season came and the horn had to go because I loved football. So Mr. Lee would shake his fist at me and say, 'A big fat F for you, Jones!'"

## Andy Anderson

After he graduated from Central High School in 1932, Andy Anderson played bass with the Marion Sears Orchestra. Looking back years later, Anderson said with a smile, "We were pretty good." The band played a number of local gigs – at Oster's Ballroom twice a week, at the Dreamland Ballroom (near the Cleveland Clinic), and at Cedar Gardens (on Cedar Avenue). Other members of the Sears band included saxophonist Horace Adams, pianist Buster Harding, who later arranged for Count Basie, James Peck, and trumpeter Francis Williams, who later played with Ellington. "All of us

doubled on instruments," said Anderson. "We blew like mad!"

Later members of the Marion Sears Orchestra included Freddie Webster and Earle Warren who later played with Count Basie and, with Harding, composed "9:20 Special."

After making a name for himself in Cleveland playing bass and saxophone,

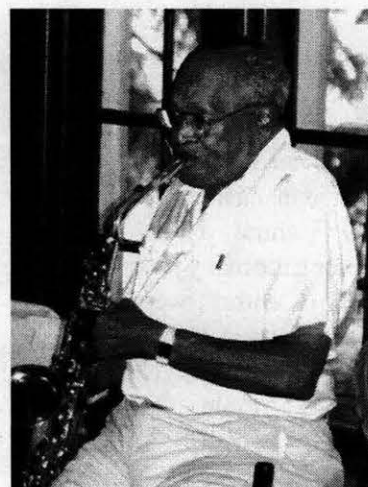
Anderson in the early 1940s went to Los Angeles where he gigged with Ben Webster and a 21-year-old saxophonist named Paul Gonsalves, who later spent two decades with Ellington. Anderson said, "Gonsalves could really blow then!"

Andy recalled one night when he was jamming with Webster, Lester Young walked in and wanted to sit in with the group. Anderson found himself in an awkward position. "Ben and I were sitting there playing and pretty soon, here comes Lester. Ben says, 'I can't play with him!' I said, 'Shoot! Now he's here and I'm in the middle – and here's Lester. Now what am I supposed to do?'" Before long Charlie Christian and Jimmy Blanton also arrived and joined the jam session. Anderson said he somehow managed to get through it. He remembered that night as one of the highlights of his long career.

In California, Anderson played with Eddie Barefield's band, appeared with Louis Armstrong in a film, *Going Places* which premiered the song "Jeepers Creepers," and substituted briefly for Webster in the Ellington Orchestra.

Andy performed with Navy bands during World War II. In the early 1950s, he led bands in Alaska. After returning to Cleveland, he became a letter carrier and continued to play with various bands here.

Anderson celebrated his 90th birthday in 2001 by playing with Cleveland pianist George Foley's group.



NOJS

Andy Anderson

## Carman Newsome

Another early graduate of Central High School had been a teenage black cowboy in Kansas and later became the leader of Cleveland jazz bands and a movie actor.

Carman Newsome's unusual story began in 1912 near Dodge City, Kansas, where he was born. He was the grandson of a freed slave, George Washington Walker, who bought a ranch in Kansas the year Carmen was born. By the time he was nine, he was working on his grandfather's ranch and even breaking horses. Within a



few years, he became known as the first teenaged black cowboy in Kansas.

In the late 1920s, when Carman was still in his teens, his family moved to Ohio and lived for three years in Bellefontaine. Then, they came to Cleveland where Carmen enrolled in Central High School.

The 11th grader found himself surrounded by music and he was fascinated by it. Exposed to the music and entertainment atmosphere at Central, Newsome went out and bought an old tenor saxophone and taught himself to play. Practicing up to ten hours a day, he also taught himself to read music.

Before long, he was playing saxophone and clarinet with various school bands. Sometimes they played at nightclubs. Eventually, Newsome formed his own band which included other Central students. Among them were trumpeters Freddie Webster, Harry "Pee Wee" Jackson, and trombonist George Early.

After he graduated from Central in 1932, Newsome continued leading his band in Cleveland. It was usually an 11-piece group. Newsome's band played for five years at a variety of Cleveland jazz spots including the Heat Wave at the Majestic Hotel, the Furnace Club, Cedar Gardens, the Cabin Club, the Hyland Club and the Suburban Club in Garfield Heights. At various times, Newsome's band included such other former Central musicians as William "Shep" Shepherd, Harold Arnold, Andy Anderson and Bernard Simms.

In 1937, Newsome took his band to the famous Cotton Club in New York City's Harlem, where a decade earlier, Duke Ellington had first gained fame. At the Cotton Club, Newsome met a man named Oscar Micheaux who was producing movies with all-black casts designed to be shown in Negro theatres around the country. Micheaux had begun producing black films in the 1920s and made a film called *Body and Soul* with actor-athlete-activist Paul Robeson. The 52-year-old producer offered the young Cleveland musician a job. Newsome broke up his band and began working for the movie producer in New York. At first, he handled sales and distribution of Micheaux' movies to about 250 Negro motion picture theatres.

Soon, the producer decided to use the former teenaged cowboy and Cleveland jazz musician as an actor in his movies. He saw the handsome young Newsome as what he liked to call "The dark Clark Gable." Newsome starred in five movies for the producer – all advertised as having "all colored casts" – *God's Stepchildren* in 1937, *Swing* in 1938, *Birthright* and *Lying Lips* in 1939, and *The Notorious Elinor Lee* in 1940.



Courtesy of Dorothy Newsome  
**Carman Newsome as he appeared in the 1940 film *The Notorious Elinor Lee***

*Lying Lips* also featured Robert Earl Jones, the father of James Earl Jones. Another performer in the films was the mother of Sammy Davis, Jr.

After starring in five movies, and with World War II brewing, Newsome returned to Cleveland. He went to work for the Addressograph-Multigraph Corporation in Euclid and continued working there until 1970 when he retired because of health problems.

Newsome, however, continued with music. He gave free music lessons to youngsters at the Bell Center on East 81st Street, hoping to engender in them some of the same musical interest he had

developed when he was a student at Central High School 40 years earlier. According to a *Plain Dealer* article in March of 1971, Newsome and his fellow teachers at the center worked with youngsters between the ages of 8 and 18, teaching them to play horns, reed instruments, guitars, drums and piano. Newsome said, "At first, we show them the most simple way to play current hits. This makes them hungry to learn to read sheet music and to improve their instrumental technique." Newsome was proud that some of his students, who had dropped out of school, were encouraged by their new interest in music to return to school.

During those teaching sessions, Newsome also told the kids stories about his life as a jazz band leader and movie star in the 1930s.

Carmen Newsome died July 17, 1974, at the age of 62, at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Cleveland.

## Harold Arnold

Harold Arnold's family had moved to Cleveland from Asheville, North Carolina in 1932 when he was five years old. As a child, Harold studied piano, mostly church music. But he was also listening to the jazz of the late 1920s and early '30s. He was a 13 year old tenth grader at Central High School (in 1930) when he switched from the piano to saxophone.

At Central High School, Arnold learned to read music and became a good sight-reader. He remembered taking a girlfriend to dances in Cleveland. "They never danced," he said. "They just stood in front of the bandstand cheering the bands."

After playing for four years for carnivals and on Mississippi river boats, Arnold decided in 1937 to go to New York with trumpeter Harry Edison of Columbus who had been playing in Cleveland. They joined the Mills Blue Rhythm Band directed by Lucky Millinder. Arnold remembered the night they opened at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem. "Duke Ellington came up afterward

and said, 'You guys sound great!'"

In New York for eight years, Arnold played with such jazz artists as Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller and Wilbur deParis and made a number of records.

Arnold returned to Cleveland in 1945, settled down with his wife and two children, worked for the post office, and played at various local jazz clubs.

He died May 2, 2002 at the age of 90.

## Bull Moose Jackson

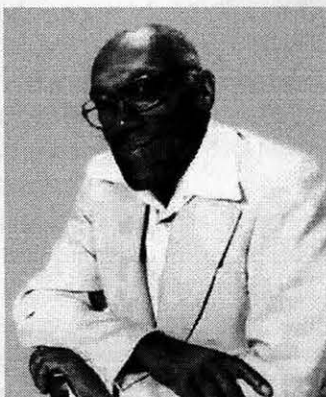
Another Central High School student in the mid-1930s was Benjamin Clarence Jackson who, as "Bull Moose Jackson" became a legend of early honking and risqué-lyrics rhythm-and-blues music.

Born in Cleveland in 1919, Jackson was only three when he began singing in the choir at Cleveland's Avery AME Church. His parents soon sent their musical son off to take violin lessons. But, by the time he got to Central, and over the objections of his parents, young Ben began playing the saxophone. With fellow Central student Freddie Webster, Jackson formed his first band, the Harlem Hotshots. They were soon playing at Cedar Gardens.

After high school, Jackson moved to Buffalo, but returned to Cleveland in 1943. He was playing saxophone with various groups here when he caught the attention of bandleader Lucky Millinder who had a rompin' big band in the early 1940s.

Millinder had been the leader of the Mills Blue Rhythm Band, one of the early black swing bands, until 1938. For a while, Millinder worked with the band of Bill Doggett, who later spent years playing in Cleveland. In 1940, Millinder formed his own orchestra, a band that became one of the most rhythmically exciting bands of the period. Among the musicians in his band were Dizzy Gillespie, who played trumpet on the Millinder band's hit recording of "When the Lights Go On All Over the World," Sam "The Man" Taylor, who later honked his way to fame on the rhythm-and-blues circuit, and Jackson's old boyhood friend from Central High School, Freddie Webster. When Jackson joined the sax section of the Millinder band, some of the other musicians decided "Ben Jackson" wasn't a very colorful name. They began calling him "Bull Moose," and the name stuck.

One of the Millinder band's popular songs was "Hurry, Hurry!" The song was recorded and usually performed by a singer named Wynonie "Mr. Blues"



**Bull Moose Jackson**

Harris. But, one night in Texas, Harris failed to show up for the gig and Millinder pulled Bull Moose out of the sax section to sing the song. That spur-of-the-moment decision by Millinder launched a whole new career for the saxophonist from Cleveland. He began singing more and more with the band, including a song called "Who Threw the Whiskey in the Well?"

Jackson continued to tour, play sax and sing with the Millinder Orchestra for two years until 1945. That's when Syd Nathan, who had an interest in the Millinder Orchestra and ran a small country and western record company, became intrigued with a then-new form of music called rhythm-and-blues. Millinder urged Jackson to record for Nathan. Bull Moose's first record, ironically, was a tongue-in-cheek response to the song he did with Millinder. Jackson called it "*I Know Who Threw the Whiskey in the Well.*"

Over the next five years, Jackson made a number of records including (in 1947) a song called "I Love You, Yes I Do." It became the first rhythm-and-blues record to sell more than a million copies.

After crooning songs like "I Love You, Yes I Do," the unpredictable Jackson would often turn around and, in almost the next recorded breath, belt out double-entendre risqué songs like "I Want a Bowlegged Woman." He followed his hits with a continuous string of popular records including, "Nosey Joe," and "Big Ten Inch Record." Some were too suggestive to play on the radio.

While recording, Jackson toured throughout the late 1940s and early '50s with his own band, which he called The Buffalo Bearcats.

Many people have forgotten that in 1951, Cleveland composer and arranger Tadd Dameron, another Central graduate, was playing piano with Jackson's band. Dameron was, at the time, trying to decide what to do with his own jazz group. Another member of Jackson's touring rhythm-and-blues group was a young saxophonist who had dropped out of Howard University in Washington, Benny Golson. In fact, that is how Golson first met Dameron, who later became Golson's composing and arranging tutor and mentor. After touring with Bull Moose, Golson joined Dameron's group and in 1956 joined Dizzy Gillespie.

Also with Jackson's band briefly was 22-year-old John Coltrane. Pianist Randy Weston also toured with Jackson early in his career.

But, despite some top-flight musicians in his band and a string of hit recordings, Jackson seemed to run out of gas by the late 1950s. In 1958, at the age of 39, he was semi-retired and running a bar in Philadelphia. By the early 1960s, he took a job with a catering company at Howard University in Washington.

Now, fast forward to 1983. A man named Carl Grefenstette, who was leading a rhythm-and-blues band



called The Flashcats in Pittsburgh, sought out the all-but-forgotten r-and-b singer and coaxed him into appearing with his Pittsburgh band. The bandleader said, "We thought it would be the thrill of a lifetime to play with him."

They played a series of sold-out concerts and Bull Moose, the hero of rhythm-and-blues almost 40 years earlier, suddenly became almost a cult hero in Pittsburgh. He made his first record in more than 30 years and said, "I'm elated that I can still perform and I'm very proud that people still remember." He said, "They've resurrected an old man. I had one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel. They dug me out and here I am."

Jackson began recording again and made appearances in New York and Hollywood. In 1985, the 66 year old Jackson performed at Carnegie Hall and toured Europe with Johnny Otis.

The Central High School alumnus continued to perform regularly until 1987 when his health began to fail. His last performance was April 23, 1988, a birthday concert with The Flashcats in Pittsburgh. After that concert, Bull Moose came home to Cleveland and moved in with an old girlfriend.

Benjamin Clarence "Bull Moose" Jackson died of cancer at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Cleveland July 31, 1988.

### Bull Moose Jackson Albums

*R&B Hits, 1947* (Indigo)  
*Greatest Hits: I Want a Bowlegged Woman* (King)  
*Greatest Hits: My Big Ten Inch* (King)  
*Badman Jackson That's Me* (Charley Records)  
*Sings His All-time Hits* (Audio Lab)  
*Big Fat Mamas Are Back in Style Again*

### The Evelyn Freeman Ensemble

"The Freeman Ensemble" was the only notation on the old photograph I found at the Western Reserve Historical Society Library. It was part of the society's collection of photos by Allen E. Cole, a man who almost single-handedly created a photographic history of Cleveland's black community in the 1930s and '40s. There was no indication on the photo of the historical importance of that young band.

Through a series of interviews, I learned the picture



Allen E. Cole / WRHS Collection

**The Evelyn Freeman Ensemble at the Phyllis Wheatley auditorium in 1940**

was taken in 1940 at the Phyllis Wheatley Center auditorium. It shows a group called the Evelyn Freeman Ensemble, a band made up of Central High School teenagers who played at many of the leading dance halls in Cleveland. Several of those teenaged musicians later went on to become extremely important figures in music.

Evelyn Freeman, the teenaged leader of the group, told me (in a February 20, 2001 interview) it began as a family chamber music ensemble organized by her father who had played with dance orchestras in Cleveland in the late teens and early '20s. "I learned to play the piano," she said, "and my brother Ernie came along and they started him out on the violin. Every Sunday morning, before we went to church (at St. James at East 84th and Cedar), we would sight read overtures."

With their father playing flute, Evelyn the piano and Ernie the violin, "We played at a lot of social functions and we started adding people. Pretty soon, we had about 20 people" (in the ensemble).

One of the members, trombonist Bernard Simms, remembered, "We got musicians from the Central High School Orchestra and Band and did a lot of classical music. We did concerts and played for different affairs, churches, things of that sort." Simms said the ensemble rehearsed at the Freemans' home on East 83rd Street between Cedar and Central.

Evelyn recalled a neighbor didn't like hearing all the music and went to court "and got an injunction against us playing music. That kind of ended the classical music,"



Courtesy of Robert Morton

**The Evelyn Freeman Dance Band broadcasting from the Circle Ballroom in September of 1941.**

(Front row L-to-R): Evelyn Freeman (piano), Van Shepherd (bass), Don Banks (guitar), Robert Morton, Ernie Freeman, Jim Gayle and Charles Mines (saxes). Back row: James "Chink" McKinney (drums), Howard Roberts and Clifford Holt (trumpets), Bernard Simms and William Shepherd (trombones).

she said, "because we didn't have any place to rehearse."

She said her brother Ernie "found an old E-flat saxophone in the closet that my father had played years before and he taught himself to play it." Ernie and the other members of the group quickly became interested in jazz, particularly the big bands of the swing era, and began holding jazz jam sessions after their classical performances.

Evelyn recalled, "When I heard Duke Ellington, it just completely turned me around. I said, 'That is what I want to do, be a bandleader!'"

One Friday morning, she cut her classes at Central and went to the Palace Theatre to see and hear the Ellington band. "I was so enthralled," she said, "I had to go backstage to see Duke Ellington." The teenager managed to get past the security people to meet and talk with Ellington.

Chink McKinney recalled "I found out they were forming a jazz band but didn't have a drummer. Ernie kept saying, 'Chink, why don't you come on down and join us. Just sit in and listen.' The first time I heard it, I said, 'Oh yeah! This is what I want to belong to!' I didn't know how to play, but I had good rhythm." McKinney said he quickly learned to play the drums and joined the group.

Evelyn said they got some big band arrangements, including Count Basie's "One O'Clock Jump," from the

father of trumpeter Millard Jones.

Simms remembered, "We did a two-way concert at the Phyllis Wheatley Center. We called it *From Symphony to Swing*. We did the symphonic portion first and after the intermission, we switched to our swing instruments."

Simms' cousin, Shep Shepherd remembered, "It went so good that Evelyn decided the classical ensemble would become a swing band."

"I had to get these younger fellows," said Evelyn, "about three or four years younger than I was and I had to teach them."

McKinney said the members were all good musicians. He said, "Evelyn taught them everything so they could play all types of music."

The star of the swing band was saxophonist Ernie Freeman. Jimmy Williams said Ernie "was a heck of a musician. He played violin, French horn and the next thing you know, he was playing saxophone and piano. He turned out to be a heck of an arranger."

Ernie began his arranging career by writing charts for his sister's band. Willie Smith remembered, "I'd see Ernie on a bus, writing arrangements for the swing band, right on the bus, while going to school." Evelyn said, "One of the ways we got gigs was by writing special songs for the groups we were playing for." After watching Ernie writing on the bus, Smith said he decided he wanted to arrange music.



After the *Symphony to Swing* concert, Simms said, "We began to get jobs at different places. We played at the Circle Ballroom at East 105th and Euclid."

"I don't remember how we got that," said Evelyn, "but since I was the manager and did all the business for the band, I guess I arranged that some kind of way." Shep Shepherd once told Evelyn, "You are the most aggressive female I ever knew!"

At the Circle Ballroom, the Evelyn Freeman Swing Band did radio broadcasts on WHK with Tom Manning, the longtime Cleveland Indians play-by-play voice, as the announcer. "The fellows all got new coats," said Evelyn, "and we got new bandstands and everything for that gig."

Evelyn also recalled, "I talked old man Oster into opening up his ballroom (Oster's Ballroom at East 46th and Euclid) for Sunday nights."

Simms said, "It only cost 35 cents to go to those dances and the people really looked forward to them."

"Yeah," said Evelyn, "and those kids used to dance! It used to scare me sometimes. I thought they'd have a heart attack, they danced so hard!"

At Oster's Ballroom, Evelyn said, "The boys used to sing a little song:

*Dancing every Sunday,*

*Dancing every Sunday,*

*Dancing every Sunday — at Oster's for 35 cents.*

*For 35 cents, for 35 cents.*

*Go ask your mother for 35 cents!*

And everybody in the band would just fall out."

While they were playing professional gigs, the members of the Freeman Ensemble tried to hide the fact that they were local high school students. Shepherd said, "We told everybody we were from Buffalo. But, one night, a fellow from East Tech saw the band and said, 'I know them! They go to Central High School!'"

Evelyn remembered, "We played for dances all around Cleveland and in two years we were blowing everybody out, all the older professional bands."

But, World War II was beginning and many of the members of Evelyn Freeman's Swing Band were facing the prospect of being drafted. A Navy recruiter, who heard the band, approached the members and asked them if they would join the Navy as a group.

Shepherd remembered, "The Navy man came down to Oster's Ballroom and recruited nine of us at the same time." Simms said, "He had heard our band and stood there in the back and liked it. So he recruited most of the band at the time."

McKinney recalled the Navy recruiter asking, "How many of you guys want to join the Navy?" McKinney said he was reluctant at first until the recruiter said, "If you volunteer, they'll jump you up three ratings."

"They asked me about it," said Evelyn, "and I told them, 'Hey, they're going to take you one by one, so you

might as well join as a group."

McKinney said he finally decided to join the Navy after his buddy, Ernie Freeman, said he would go. "We saw Ernie's picture in the paper (saying he was volunteering)," said Simms. "We knew then that our band was going to break up. So we all volunteered."

The members of the Evelyn Freeman Swing Band signed up together to become members of the first all-black, war-time Navy band called the Gobs of Swing.

## Bernard Simms

Among them was trombonist Bernard Simms who had studied music theory and vocal instruction and played baritone horn at Central High School. After graduating in 1941 and playing trombone with the Evelyn Freeman band, Simms enrolled at Baldwin-Wallace College.

When they enlisted, Simms and the others, including five or six who were not from Cleveland, shipped out, first to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station near Chicago. "We stayed at Great Lakes for about a month," said Simms. "That's where we met Clark Terry and some other great musicians."

Then, they were sent to Bunker Hill, Indiana, where the Cleveland musicians became members of the Gobs of Swing, the first all-black Navy band in U.S. history.



Courtesy of Bernard Simms

### The Gobs of Swing Navy band

"We played for President Roosevelt," said Simms, "when he came through to inspect the base. And we were guaranteed that we would stay in the states during the duration of the war."

McKinney recalled, "We played all types of music — classical, march music, and jazz. We entertained the troops and backed the stars who came to the camp, including Lena Horne."

From time to time, Simms remembered that friends from Cleveland, including drummer Fats Heard, a Central graduate, would visit and sit in with their Navy band. They also met old friends from Cleveland when they

could get away from the base. Shepherd said, "Howard Roberts (another former member of the Freeman band) was with Lionel Hampton while we were in the service and we saw him down in Indianapolis."

The former members of the Freeman band stayed at Bunker Hill, playing together as a Navy band until 1946.

Years later, the Gobs of Swing elected Evelyn Freeman as an honorary member of the band. "I felt very proud," she said. "It means somebody appreciated what I did for them."

"After the war," said Simms, "we came back to Cleveland and many of the fellows joined a band led by Johnny Powell, another former Central student. They paid us \$3 to rehearse at the YMCA at 77th and Cedar and we had a nice band. In fact, it was more or less a continuation of the Gobs of Swing."

McKinney recalled, "Some of the guys started branching out, going in different directions. Some wanted to go to the West Coast and some wanted to go to New York. So that band sort of split up."

Simms decided to stay in Cleveland. "I had an opportunity to go with Louis Armstrong," said Simms. But he decided to take advantage of the G.I. Bill. "I said, 'I can always go on the road,' but I decided to go back to school."

Simms returned to Baldwin-Wallace College, completed his degree, and began a long career as a music teacher in Cleveland schools.

While teaching, he also continued playing from time to time. He played in bands that backed B.B. King, Lloyd Price, Nancy Wilson and Trini Lopez when they performed in Cleveland. Simms taught music at Central Junior High School from 1961 to 1966 when he was reassigned to East Tech. In 1975, he returned to Central where he continued teaching until he retired in 1982.

Simms said, "I tried to teach them, first of all, to be good people. I said, 'Some day in life, we will meet again somewhere and I would rather that we could meet on good terms. I tried to teach them character plus musicianship.'"

Simms died February 6, 2001 at the age of 78.

## Ernie Freeman

After playing with the Navy band during World War II, Ernie Freeman returned to Cleveland, studied for two years at the Cleveland Institute of Music and began preparing for a career that eventually made him one of the most sought-after musicians in the recording industry.

After studying at CIM, Freeman decided to go to Los Angeles to try his luck in the studio business there. He struggled at first while working as a free lance musician. He played piano, without public credit, on a number of rhythm-and-blues and rock 'n roll recordings. After a group called B. Bumble and the Stinger had minor hits

with their upbeat versions of "Flight of the Bumblebee" and "B. Bumble Boogie," the record company hired Freeman to improve the musical quality of the group. Before long, the *Cleveland* was playing lead on the group's records.

In 1955, Freeman's recording of "Jivin' O' Round" became a rhythm-and-blues hit.

Freeman's big recording break came when he was hired by Imperial Records. He arranged, conducted and played on many Imperial releases. Some say it was Freeman who was actually playing piano for Fats Domino during the singer-pianist's period of great popularity. As a leader, Freeman made a number of albums for Imperial including *Ernie Freeman Plays Irving Berlin*, *Jivin' O' Round*, *Ernie Freeman*, *Sky High*, *Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, *Twistin' Time* and *The Stripper*.

Freeman's orchestra backed singer Eddie Fisher on many of his popular recordings.

In 1963, he played on the Jimmy Witherspoon album *Baby, Baby, Baby*. Because the record was made by the rival Prestige Record company, the label identified Freeman as "Ernst Von Funkenstein." Freeman also recorded under his own name for Imperial and had several hits including "Raunchy."

He returned to Cleveland in January of 1959 to perform at the Music Hall.

Later, the one-time Cleveland jazz saxophonist was hired by Liberty Records. While handling a variety of musical tasks for the label, he continued to record his own pop instrumentals including such LPs as *Soulful Sounds of Country Classics*, *Limbo Dance Party* and *Comin' Home Baby*. He also recorded some jazz, including an album with Buddy Collette, Gerald Wilson, Red Callender and Barney Kessel.

In 1966, Freeman was hired as the musical director of Frank Sinatra's Reprise record label. He arranged and conducted many of Sinatra's recordings in the 1960s including "When Somebody Loves You," "Anytime at All," "That's Life," "What Now My Love," "The Impossible Dream" and "Try a Little Tenderness." He won a Grammy for Sinatra's *Strangers in the Night* album.



Cleveland Press Collection /  
CSU Archives

**Ernie Freeman in 1959**



Freeman's former teenaged band mate, Chink McKinney said, "He told me Sinatra put him on the list and told other people, 'You gotta get this guy!' He was the top arranger for vocalists and I think the reason for that was that he was so acquainted with the violin and all the instruments. He knew them very well. Most of his arrangements had plush arrangements of violins."

Also in 1966, Freeman arranged and conducted several Sammy Davis, Jr. recordings and backed singer Dean Martin, boosting the one-time Cleveland singer's career with a huge hit, "Everybody Loves Somebody."

In 1967, Ernie Freeman's studio orchestra accompanied singer Bing Crosby on four recordings including "Step to the Rear." He also arranged and conducted albums by Dinah Washington, Bobby Darin and even comedian Joey Bishop, singing country and western songs.

In 1970, Freeman won another Grammy Award for arranging Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water* LP.

Singer Keely Smith once said, "Ernie Freeman "was one of the best arrangers I ever heard."

Freeman left Reprise in 1971 when the company became more rock-oriented and worked as a free-lancer for the rest of his life. He also composed and arranged for Stan Kenton.

Ernie Freeman died of a heart attack May 16, 1981 in Beverly Hills, California.

### Ernie Freeman's Biggest Records

- 1957 - "Jivin' 'O' Round (a rhythm-and-blues hit)  
"Raunchy"
- 1961 - *Twistin' Time*
- 1962 - *The Stripper*
- 1966 - Arranged and conducted many Frank Sinatra recordings including the *Strangers in the Night*
- 1967 - Backed Bing Crosby on four songs including "Step to the Rear"  
Arranged and conducted Dean Martin's "Everybody Loves Somebody"
- 1970 - Arranged and conducted Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water* LP

### Evelyn Freeman

After most of the members of her band had enlisted in the Navy, Evelyn Freeman continued to play in Cleveland. She led a six-piece group that played at Oster's Ballroom. Among members of that younger group were trumpeter Benny Bailey, tenor saxophonist Ben ("Bull Moose") Jackson, Benny Miller and bassist Vic MacMillan.

After graduating from Central High School at the age of 17, she enrolled at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

She later joined the nationally popular Wings Over Jordan gospel group that toured the country and broadcast

on national radio every week. "The reason I agreed to go with them," she said, "was because they were going to New York and that was my dream."

In New York, where Wings Over Jordan performed at Town Hall, Evelyn and her future husband, Tommy Roberts, went to 52nd Street one night to hear Dizzy Gillespie. "I had the temerity," she said, "to walk up and ask to sit in. I think Dizzy was so shocked that he let me. That was a great thrill playing with Dizzy, Don Byas and Percy Heath."



Courtesy Evelyn Freeman Roberts  
**Evelyn Freeman Roberts  
in the 1990s**

After doing some arrangements for a Wings Over Jordan concert that was broadcast by CBS from Carnegie Hall, Evelyn and Tommy left the group and settled in New York City. He was working as a nightclub singer. In 1953, they performed together with the Noble Sissle Orchestra at the Inaugural Ball for newly-elected President Dwight Eisenhower.

In New York, Evelyn and Tommy spent a lot of time at the Turf Club at 49th and Broadway where they frequently bought soup for struggling young artists. "We bought beef broth," she recalled, "for a whole lot of people including Quincy Jones and Harry Belafonte."

After buying a house in the Bronx and having four children, including future Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority Director Claire Freeman, Evelyn was getting calls from her brother Ernie in California. "You've got to come to California! I need help!" he said.

"He was on the verge of becoming the great arranger," she recalled, "and it was just overwhelming him I think."

After he sent them \$1,000, she, Tommy and their four kids packed up and drove to California in 1956.

"Ernie was a procrastinator," said Evelyn. "He would wait until the last minute to do his arranging." She remembered a number of times, driving to recording sessions, with Tommy at the wheel of the car and she and Ernie sitting in the back seat, rushing to complete the arrangements.

She said she did much of the work on her brother's arrangements. "I never got any credit for it," she said, "but the musicians knew. They knew what was going on." She helped write arrangements for hit recordings by Frank Sinatra, Vic Damone, Dean Martin and many others.



Courtesy Evelyn Freeman Roberts  
**Tommy and Evelyn Roberts  
 directing The Young Saints in  
 Los Angeles**

At the same time, her husband Tommy Roberts was entertaining at such Los Angeles nightclubs as the Cresendo, Ciro's and the Moulin Rouge.

"As we worked in the recording industry," she said years later, "we noticed that there weren't any black background singers. So we started training singers."

Eventually, she recalled, "Our background singers were recording with everybody from Pat Boone to T-Bone Walker."

They also formed a young people's singing group called the Young Saints. The group performed with such stars as Danny Kaye and Eddie Albert and appeared on a number of television programs including *The Jonathan Winters Show* and *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

In 1970, the Young Saints were invited by President Richard Nixon to perform at the White House. "That was exciting," she said, "because the Duke and Duchess (of Windsor) were the honored guests."

Evelyn and Tommy's group also entertained during the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

After all this, we'd love to ask those neighbors on East 83rd Street, who had complained about all the music at the Freeman's house, how they feel about it today.

## Shep Shepherd



**William "Shep" Shepherd  
 playing with Dizzy Gillespie**

Trombonist William "Shep" Shepherd joined the Freeman Ensemble even before he entered Central High School. He was a student at old Rawlings Junior High School. He said, "We started young. Some of the guys were wearing knee pants."

By the time he got to Central, Shepherd was already a good sight reader and was busy playing in Cleveland. In addition to the Freeman

Ensemble, he was playing with such Central students and future stars as Fats Heard and Bull Moose Jackson.

After playing with the Navy band during World War II, Shepherd became acquainted with the older Tadd Dameron who was arranging for Dizzy Gillespie. Dameron introduced Shepherd to Gillespie, who hired him (in 1946) for his big band. After listening to Shep sight read, Gillespie asked, "Are there any more at home like you?"

Shepherd toured all over the world with Gillespie for two years. "Dizzy was the most wonderful person you have ever seen," recalled Shepherd. "He was just like a teacher, a brilliant person, a deep person."

Also touring with Gillespie's band was singer Ella Fitzgerald. Shepherd called her "a beautiful person. When we got to a nice hotel, she'd give a nice party for the members of the band." Shepherd said the band members called Ella "Sis."

Shepherd, who played first trombone in Gillespie's band, seldom soloed. But in 1948, Dameron wrote a solo for Shep on an ambitious piece called "Soulphony" that Shepherd and the Gillespie band performed at New York City's Carnegie Hall.

Shepherd later also played and recorded with James Moody.

## Chink McKinney

James "Chink" McKinney, the drummer in the Freeman band when he was at Central High School, also joined the Navy in 1942 with other members of the Freeman group and performed with them in the Navy band.

Discharged in 1946, McKinney went to West Virginia State University and formed his own band before returning to Cleveland, where he played with such touring artists as Dorothy Donegan at the Theatrical Grill, Meade Lux Lewis at the Hickory Grill, and Rose Murphy.

McKinney recorded with the Chickadee Trio and composed such songs as "Creole Nocturne," "Dirty Shirt Blues," and "I'm In a Blue Mood."

McKinney died March 12, 1991 in Cleveland.

## Howard Roberts

Howard Roberts, who played trumpet with the Freeman band, later became a well known and highly respected jazz musician, composer, conductor and educator.

Sheppard recalled that Roberts was the first alumnus of the Freeman group who made it on the national scene. During World War II, Roberts did not go into the Navy with other members of the



**Howard Roberts**



Freeman band. Instead, he was playing trumpet with the Lionel Hampton Orchestra. He also played with the popular Lucky Millinder Orchestra. Later in the 1940s, Roberts became the musical director of the Cab Calloway Orchestra.

He later became interested in singing and acting. He was the first black tenor in the Robert Shaw Chorale and created the role of Robbins in the international company of *Porgy and Bess*.

Roberts became the musical director of the Tony Award-winning musical *Raisin* and the all-black Broadway production of *Guys and Dolls*.

On television, Roberts served as music director for singer Harry Belafonte. He was twice nominated for television Emmy Awards for a show called *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* and for a gospel-spiritual show, *In Performance at the White House*.

Roberts also created choral arrangements for folk singers Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie. In 1987 at Carnegie Hall in New York, he conducted a chamber orchestra and choir, performing his four-movement symphonic suite *The Spiritual Heritage*. It was a musical representation of the evolution of the black experience.

The one-time member of a teenage jazz band in Cleveland became professor of music at the Borough of Manhattan Community College in New York and served on the faculties at North Carolina Central University and Morgan State University. His choral arrangements of spirituals were published and widely used throughout the country by high school, college and choral organizations. He also wrote for the Boys Choir of Harlem.

Other members of the Evelyn Freeman band became very successful in other fields. Saxophonist Garfield Travis and Clarence Smart became Cleveland police officers. Lemuel Stewart became a doctor. Jimmy Gayle became a photographer for the *Plain Dealer*.

## Fats Heard and "Misty"

Central High School graduate Fats Heard was the man responsible for one of the most durable songs in jazz.

Eugene Heard got his nickname (he was chubby) from friends at about the same time he got his first set of drums for Christmas when he was eight years old. He began taking lessons when he was at Cleveland's old Outhwaite Junior High School. By the



Fats Heard

time he got to Central, Heard played well enough to join the marching band and orchestra. Nehemiah "Chief" Story recalled practicing at Heard's home at East 38th and Scovil.

While he was still in high school, Heard played a date at Benny Mason's Farm with saxophonist Coleman Hawkins. Benny Mason's, also known as "the Cedar Country Club," was a place on Cochran Road in Solon where black entertainers frequently socialized.

After high school, Heard studied at the Cleveland Institute of Music and served in the World War II Navy.

After the war, he joined Lionel Hampton's band but didn't get along with the leader. He said Hampton offered him all sorts of raises but apparently forgot to tell his wife Gladys who handled the money for the band.



Erroll Garner

After playing with various groups in New York, Heard (in 1953) joined Erroll Garner, the little pianist from Pittsburgh who frequently sat on a phone book to reach the keyboard and grunted as he played. Garner was one of the most popular jazz performers of the early 1950s and helped bring jazz to a much wider audience.

Heard first played with Garner in January of 1953 at Storyville in Boston. Heard said they rehearsed for more than three hours, but he quickly learned that Garner seldom played any song the same way twice. Bassist Wyatt Ruther had written down all the keys during rehearsal and was surprised when Garner didn't play in the same keys when he got on stage. Heard later said Garner, who did not read music, "just played where it sounded good to him."

Heard was a member of the Erroll Garner Trio from 1953 to 1955 and made a number of records with Garner. The first session was on February 27, 1953, when they recorded 13 songs. They recorded 17 more in March while they were playing every night at Birdland in New York City.

In James Doran's biography of Garner, *The Most Happy Piano*, Heard is quoted as saying, "I used to kid

Erroll a lot because sometimes he was just sitting at the piano. I would say, 'What are you thinking about? Looks like you're dreaming about something.' Then," said Heard, "Garner would play a little melody, only about four bars." They were the first four bars of what was later to become Garner's most famous composition, "Misty."

When the trio was recording an LP called *Contrasts* for EmArcy Records (on July 27, 1954), they had run out of songs and needed one more to fill the album. "What can we play?" asked Garner.

Heard suggested "that little tune." The trio began improvising on the four-bar melody. It was the first recording of "Misty," a song that became a jazz classic.

A short time after the Garner Trio played at the Loop Lounge on Prospect Avenue in Cleveland (June 1955), Heard decided to spend more time at home with his family. He left Garner, played for a while in Cleveland, and went out on the road from time to time with Teddy Wilson, Sarah Vaughan and Carmen McRae.

Heard settled in the Mount Pleasant area of Cleveland. He operated the very popular Modern Jazz Room near the old Central Market in the 1950s. He also became a real estate salesman, established his own Heard Realty Company in 1974, and moved to Shaker Heights.

Heard died at Lakeside Hospital in Cleveland December 5, 1987 at the age of 64.

## Willie Smith

Saxophonist and arranger Willie Smith grew up with trumpeter Benny Bailey. Smith recalled, "I went to Central High School and Benny went to East Tech, so I changed from Central and went to East Tech because we lived a couple doors from each other on East 36th Street. We came up together and Benny was playing trumpet a while before I started playing. We were such good friends, I said, 'Boy, I gotta learn to play saxophone so Benny and I can play together!'" They played together in marching bands and jam sessions and went out together to hear Jimmie Lunceford, Count Basie, Fletcher Henderson and Benny Carter.

In 1945, when Smith was 19, he and Bailey were playing with the band of Scatman Crothers in Akron. They went to California with Crothers and stayed at the Civic Hotel with such other musicians as Charlie Parker and Miles Davis.

Three years later, Smith and Bailey both joined the Lionel Hampton Orchestra. "That was beautiful," remembered Smith, "traveling with Hamp! He had a blowing-type band, a band where you had a lot of fun. We'd go in a club or a theatre and just tear it up! Everybody was out in the aisles!" Smith wrote and arranged for the band. He wrote "Cool Train" that was recorded by the Hampton Orchestra.



Courtesy of Willie Smith

Willie Smith

In the 1960s, Smith worked for seven years for Motown Records, writing for such artists as Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross, the Tops, the Temptations, the Vandellas and Marvin Gaye. He wrote a medley that Diana Ross and the Supremes performed on the *Ed Sullivan* television program. He recalled that he looked at the TV "and listened to what I had written. It went over beautifully!"

Beginning in the 1970s, Smith led his Little Big Band in Cleveland, continued writing, and quietly worked with youngsters and performed for the sick and elderly.

In 1999, Smith composed and arranged for Joe Lovano's *52nd Street Themes* compact disc. It included five Smith arrangements of the compositions of Central High School graduate Tadd Dameron plus a Smith original, "Deal." The album won a Grammy Award and the *DownBeat* Critics Poll as the best jazz album of the year.

## Gay Crosse

Central High School alumnus Gay Crosse, who was born in Mobile, Alabama (August 15, 1916), played saxophone and led a popular jazz band, the Good Humor



Six, for more than 30 years in Cleveland.

In 1945, Crosse directed a music and dance revue in Cleveland entitled *Jumping the Blues*. Wes Landers, who played drums with Crosse, said (in an interview with researcher Phil Schaap) Crosse would hold the sax while he directed the band but seldom actually played it.

Crosse's chief historical claim to fame is the fact that in 1951 he hired a young saxophonist named John Coltrane to play with his band. Coltrane later said, "Crosse used to be with Louis Jordan and had a little band that was patterned after Louis' band. He sang and played something like Louis."

Although there is still some debate among jazz historians, the 24-year-old Coltrane apparently toured with Crosse. Saxophonist James Moody said he remembered hearing Coltrane play with Crosse's band in Cleveland. Coltrane also made several records with Crosse in early 1951. Included were "Bittersweet," which was re-issued in a Coltrane boxed set (*Last Giant: John Coltrane Anthology*) in 1993, and "Fat Sam From Birmingham." Crosse also recorded such singles as "Gotta Stop Lovin' You" and "I Got a Feelin'" and a LP entitled *Swallow Dollow* for RCA.

During his career in Cleveland, Crosse played frequently at the Blue Grass Club at East 55th and Cedar, at the Club 100 at East 100th and Euclid and at Cedar Gardens at East 97th and Cedar.

Barbara Lee remembered that her father, Edward "Chinch" Lee, played alto sax with Crosse's group. She told me they would practice at Lee's home at East 74th and Quincy. Lee played with Crosse at the Blue Grass and toured the South. At the time, Lee was working as a guard at the Cleveland House of Correction. He died in 1962.

Crosse also operated the Gay Crosse Hotel at 2117 East 83rd Street and the Musicians and Entertainers Club next door. Longtime Cleveland drummer Lawrence "Jacktown" Jackson remembered many jam sessions in the basement of Crosse's club. Jacktown told me he recalled Oscar Peterson and Oscar Pettiford jamming at Crosse's Musicians and Entertainers Club.

The private club with a small one-way window in the front door was raided May 29, 1960 by liquor agents who said Crosse's club had been selling liquor illegally for four years. An article in the May 30, 1960 *Plain Dealer* said, "Sledge-swinging liquor raiders smashed into a long-established neon-lit 'club' yesterday in another pre-dawn strike aimed at liquor cheat spots." Crosse maintained it was a misunderstanding. He said he was operating a legitimate private club.

Crosse, the man who had hired the young John Coltrane and was a prominent Cleveland jazz musician for three decades, died at the age of 54 March 9, 1971 at Huron Road Hospital in East Cleveland.

## The Johnny Powell Orchestra

One of the most unusual and popular big bands in Cleveland in the late 1940s and '50s was led by Central High School graduate Johnny Powell.

Like many others, Powell was completely fascinated by the big jazz bands of the 1930s and '40s. "As a child," he told me, "I used to take a stick and stand in front of the radio and direct the music – Glen Gray and the Casa Loma Orchestra, Paul Whiteman – all those big bands."

By the time Powell got to Central, he found other students who were also attracted by the big bands. "Every Friday," he recalled, "you wouldn't find many of us in class after 12 o'clock because everybody was at the Palace Theatre (to hear the big bands). We'd sit through two or three shows."

But, unlike many of his friends at Central, Powell was not a musician. He never learned to play an instrument. "I wasn't playing anything," he said. "I just liked to lead the band in front of the radio. I had no musical ability about playing an instrument. I just wanted to lead a band and imitate Cab Calloway and Jimmie Lunceford. Those guys were my idols."

It wasn't just the big national bandleaders who attracted young Powell. He was also admiring older Cleveland musicians, including pianist Tadd Dameron. "Tadd was writing 'If You Could See Me Now' at the Cedar Gardens basement," said Powell. "I used to go around in the back and sneak down there where the trash was and look through the window. We used to watch him practicing that tune."

Powell's father, who had run a nightclub in New York City during bootleg days, was by 1946 working as a waiter at the Cleveland Athletic Club. John Powell, Sr. had a big plan for his son who dreamed of becoming a bandleader. When Johnny, then in his early 20s, was in New York, his father began putting his plan together.

"While I was gone," Powell said, his father "sat down with some members of the CAC and told them his plan. He got eight members of the club to buy shares in the 'Johnny Powell Orchestra, Incorporated.'"

The elder Powell sent his son a telegram, telling him to hurry home to Cleveland for a surprise. When Johnny returned, his father made him wait overnight to learn what the surprise was.

Johnny was smiling as he remembered, "The next day we went to Benny Miller's studios at 105th and Superior. I went there not knowing what was going to happen. The door opened and here are 18 guys sitting behind music stands. My father said, 'This is yours!'"

"I could have fainted," said Powell. "And my father said, 'Now you can really wave that stick!'"

Powell's father had used the money he persuaded Cleveland Athletic Club members to invest to hire a

group of Cleveland musicians, most of whom had just been discharged from the Navy and had played together in the Navy band at Bunker Hill, Indiana.

"When they came back home, my father recruited them," said Powell. "He was the first person in Cleveland to pay musicians to rehearse. He wanted to have the best and he wanted them to be on time."

Twenty-three years old and unable to play a note, Johnny Powell became the leader of his own big jazz band. "All I did," he said, "was wave a stick. The rhythm moved me and I danced to the music."

The band included trombonists Shep Shepherd and Bernard Simms, saxophonists Harold Arnold and Willie Smith, trumpeter William Foster; pianist Ernie Banks; and drummer Bobby Smith.

"Our first engagement," said Powell, "was in Kent. Then, we went to Alton, Illinois, and a series of one-nighters." With the motto "Giving the Nation Syncopation," the band played gigs in Cleveland and around the Midwest. Powell's father had even bigger plans for his son's band.

"Lionel Hampton and his wife Gladys appeared at the Palace Theatre," said Powell, "and my father met him and talked to him about my band. Hampton wanted to buy into the organization. They made an agreement where Hampton would get the musicians for my band and, in turn, my band would follow behind Hamp and be known as 'Lionel Hampton's Protégés.'"

Powell said his band traveled with Hampton for a while, but it became difficult for the leader of "Hampton's Protégés," who really did little more than stand in front of the band, wave a baton and put on a show by dancing to the music.

"I was embarrassed a couple of times," admitted Powell, "when I was called to play something. So I decided to do 'Flyin' Home.' I'd pick up a drum and lead the band out of the place to the street, make a circle, and go back in."

With his 18-piece band traveling with Hampton, Powell was performing regularly and getting paid more than some of the better-known jazz groups. He said, "At one time, I received just as much money as Dizzy Gillespie for a full engagement and he was a highly-touted musician."

When the band was playing in Chicago, Powell ran into fellow Central graduate Freddie Webster, who had become one of the most respected trumpet soloists in jazz. In 1946, Webster decided to join Powell's band.

"Freddie was really a character," said Powell. "He had the most beautiful tone that I ever heard in my life.

When he would sound off on his trumpet, it sounded like music from manna. And we all recognized that. It was acknowledged in Cleveland by all the musicians because he was really good."

Earl Douthitt, another member of Powell's trumpet section, remembered when he first heard Webster. "I heard that big tone," said Douthitt, "and I said, 'Oh, my Lord!' He sounded like five trumpets."

With Webster in his trumpet section, Powell's Orchestra played many gigs in Cleveland, including at a nightclub his entrepreneur father opened at East 55th and Euclid.

"In fact," said Powell, "we opened the Palladium which had been the Ten-Ten Theatre, right by the Pennsylvania Railroad station there. They brought my band in to play with the big names."

Powell's orchestra made one record for the Paramount Record Company of Cleveland. On one side of the 78 rpm disc was "Cedar Avenue Blues" featuring Willie Smith on alto sax and a vocal by Eugene Jordan. The flip side was Duke Ellington's "Perdido" featuring a trumpet solo by Webster.

A few months after recording with the Johnny Powell Orchestra, Webster recorded "If You Could See Me Now" with Sarah Vaughan and Tadd Dameron.

Powell said one of his band's biggest fans was Clevelander Don King, who would later become a world-famous boxing promoter. "Anywhere we played in Cleveland," said Powell, "you could depend on Donald King and his entourage to come and listen." King had known Powell's father since the 1930s when they were both working at the Canterbury Country Club.

Powell continued leading his band until 1952 and then, like his father, became a waiter at the Cleveland Athletic Club. He had realized his childhood dream of leading his own big jazz band and later looked back on it as a highlight of his life.

Powell died in 1998.

Old Central High School, which had produced so many outstanding jazz artists, was closed when a new Central High School was constructed in 1940 on East 40th between Central and Cedar. Central was merged with East Tech and the old building was used as a junior high school for several years before being torn down in 1952.

While the old building was gone, the memories of music at old Central High School and the jazz musicians who had started there continued for generations.



## 9. Freddie Webster

**H**is virtuoso solo on the 1942 Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra recording of "Yesterdays" is enough to establish native Clevelander Freddie Webster as one of the outstanding trumpeters in jazz history. More than 50 years later, Dizzy Gillespie said Webster "probably had the best sound of the trumpet since the trumpet was invented, a sound that was alive, just alive and full of life!"

Others also lavishly praised the trumpet work of Webster.

Critic Leonard Feather called the Clevelander "one of the most soulful performers among modern jazz trumpeters."

Miles Davis said Webster was the trumpeter he tried to imitate when he was growing up.

Benny Bailey, who also grew up in Cleveland playing trumpet a few years later, said it was difficult to tell from Webster's records "just how beautiful his sound was." According to Bailey, "Webster had the most wonderful sound of any trumpet player I've ever heard. It was sheer beauty which no one can ever know unless they heard him play in person." During an interview at the 1992 Tri-C JazzFest, Bailey told me, "Freddie always had a big vibrato. But the attack and the way Freddie played chords! Nobody else played like him. He played in a different way from everybody. He didn't play like Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie or anybody else. He had his own style."

Unfortunately, Webster died at the age of 30 in 1947 and did not leave a generous collection of recordings. But there were some 78s, most of which were never re-released on LP or compact disc.

### Early years in Cleveland

The future trumpet virtuoso grew up in the mid-1930s in a very religious home on East 72nd Street near Cedar Avenue. Drummer Lawrence "Jacktown" Jackson recalled when he first came to Cleveland with the Pete Diggs Orchestra, he lived for a period at Webster's home. "His mother and the whole family were very religious," said Jacktown. "Every morning, she'd have the three fellows who lived with them singing church songs before breakfast."

Webster played in the Central High School band. Veteran Cleveland pianist Chick Chaikin recalled



Freddie Webster

Webster blowing riffs with the marching band. While still in high school, he quickly made a name for himself playing with local jazz groups.

Trombonist Bernard Simms remembered, "I was walking down Cedar Avenue with Freddie, going to rehearsal, and Freddie said all he wanted to do was play trumpet so loud and have a tone so big that the whole world could hear him."

After high school, Webster formed his own 14-piece band which toured Northern Ohio in 1938 and 1939. Chaikin remembered that band and said, "Webster was a little guy who could play fast and had a beautiful tone." Webster persuaded his Central High School friend Tadd Dameron to

play piano in the band. Dameron later said Webster was the person responsible for starting him on a career in jazz.

Webster also played with the popular Marion Sears Orchestra at Cedar Gardens, the popular nightclub at East 97th and Cedar. At Cedar Gardens, saxophonist Andy Anderson remembered Webster's tone "was big as a house!" Anderson said, "He also had the touch and feeling for the music."

### On the road

When he was only 21 years old (in 1938) Webster left Cleveland and took his big, full tone and feeling for the music on the road with a series of important bands.

His first job outside of Cleveland was with Earl "Fatha" Hines' swinging big band. Another trumpeter from Cleveland, Harry "Pee Wee" Jackson, was with the Hines band and persuaded Earl to hire Webster. Bailey said, "Pee Wee and Freddie were like that. One wouldn't accept a job unless they hired the other one. One would quit if they didn't hire the other one."

In 1941, Webster went to New York where he met Dizzy Gillespie, pianist Bud Powell, trumpeter Benny Harris and others. They frequently got together in Dizzy's apartment on 7th Avenue or at the Dewey Square Hotel in Harlem and spent hours talking and playing. Historian Feather later pointed to these sessions as the first tentative steps toward a new form of jazz called bebop.

Later in 1941, Webster rejoined the Earl Hines band which, at the time, included Charlie Parker (who was

playing tenor then, not alto), Gillespie, Ray Nance, Billy Eckstine and Sarah Vaughan. This was the legendary Hines band that was called "The Incubator of Bop." Unfortunately, because of a long strike by the musicians' union against the recording companies, this orchestra, with so much rich young talent, never recorded.

## Jamming at Minton's

After playing gigs with the Hines Orchestra, sidemen Gillespie, Parker, Webster and others often slipped off to a club in Harlem called Minton's Playhouse where they jammed for hours.

Gillespie later recalled, "There were always some cats showing up there who couldn't blow at all." One was a tenor player they called "Demon" who tried to dominate the jam sessions. Dizzy called him "The first freedom player – free of harmony, free of rhythm, free of everything!" One night, when Demon was playing chorus after chorus, Teddy Hill, the manager of Minton's, stood in front of the bandstand with his arms folded and yelled, "Demon, get off my bandstand!"

Gillespie said, "We began to work out some complex variations on chords and we used them to scare away those no-talent guys."

As they explored those variations that they had experimented with at Gillespie's apartment, they began to shape what was to become bebop. Of course, it wasn't as simple as Gillespie described it, but Miles Davis, in his autobiography, said, "We was all trying to get our masters degrees and PhDs from Minton's University of Bebop under the tutelage of Professors Bird and Diz."

With Parker, Gillespie, pianist Thelonious Monk, drummer Kenny Clarke and guitarist Charlie Christian, Cleveland's Freddie Webster was one of the early pioneers of the new form. Christian, who was playing with the Benny Goodman Orchestra at the time, lugged his guitar amplifier uptown to Harlem for the jam sessions. Sometimes he left it with Manager Hill.

Hill had become manager of Minton's after playing with Louis Armstrong and leading his own swing band in the 1930s. Gillespie made his first records with Hill's band in 1937 when Dizzy was 20 years old.

Hill continued to manage Minton's until 1969. In 1976, he moved quietly to Cleveland to live with his daughter, Gwendolyn Hill Basket, in Warrensville Heights. Doctors discovered he was suffering from colon cancer. Seven months later (May 19, 1977), Hill, who had played an important role in jazz history, died in



**Teddy Hill**

Cleveland. He was buried at Highland Park Cemetery on Chagrin Boulevard.

When family members went to New York to collect his possessions, they discovered his apartment had been broken into and ransacked. Among the missing items was Charlie Christian's historic guitar amplifier.

## Recording in New York

In 1941, Webster began recording with a variety of bands and jazz groups. He played with Louis Jordan's legendary Tympani Five on such 1941 recordings as "St. Vitus Dance," "Brotherly Love," "Boogie Woogie Came to Town," and "Saxa-Woogie."

In 1942, Webster was playing with the band of Sonny Boy Williams. They recorded a number of sides including Webster's composition "Reverse the Charges."

## Touring with Jimmie Lunceford

In April of 1942, Webster rejoined his old Cleveland friend, Pee Wee Jackson, in the nationally popular Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra, a band that had begun playing professionally in Cleveland nine years earlier. After hearing Webster's trumpet for the first time, critic George Simon wrote in *Metronome* magazine, "There is a brilliant young trumpeter named Freddie Webster playing with the Lunceford Orchestra."

While traveling with the Lunceford band, Webster met a young aspiring trumpeter named Miles Davis in St. Louis. They became close friends and Davis later said, "My real main man during those first days was Freddie Webster. He had a big, singing sound, a big warm, mellow sound. I used to try to play like him."

Benny Bailey said Webster "practically taught Davis. I know that because Miles told me," said Bailey. "They were living together in New York and were very close. In fact, there's a solo on a very early Charlie Parker record. Miles played Freddie Webster's solo, note for note."

It was during this period with Lunceford that Webster recorded live his monumental version of "Yesterdays."

When the Lunceford band, with Webster and Jackson in the trumpet section, came to Cleveland to play for a dance at Ferguson's Ballroom, a group of young



**Webster (second from left) playing with the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra in 1942**



musicians from Central High School went to hear them. Drummer Chink McKinney remembered, "All the kids from school were there, down in front, listening. And every time Webster and Pee Wee Jackson stood up, we cheered our old Cleveland heroes. They did the most beautiful job I ever heard in my life. Boy, they played the job of their lives!" Four years later, Webster would be playing in a band with some of those young admirers.

Bailey, who was eight years younger than Webster, remembered one time when Freddie came home to Cleveland. "He gathered me and a couple other trumpet players over at Richard 'Big Foot' Kennedy's house," said Bailey. "We couldn't play in the house because we didn't want to disturb the neighbors. So we went into the bathroom. It was probably louder in the bathroom. Freddie took his horn out and just played – with no piano, nothing. He just played melodies. Man, it was really something! I felt I was transported to another world. It was beautiful!"

## With Lucky Millinder

Webster spent three years with the Lucky Millinder Orchestra. Another member of that band was former Central High School student Bull Moose Jackson who later became a leading rhythm-and-blues artist.

While he was traveling with Millinder and playing at the Savoy Ballroom in New York, Webster attracted the attention of critic Barry Ulanov. The Millinder band was playing a battle of the bands with the Jay McShann band which then featured Charlie Parker. In a February 1942 review, Ulanov devoted more than half of his column to Webster. He said, "Webster is a real find. He plays with a wonderful sense of structure, giving all his choruses and half-choruses a discernible beginning, middle and ending. His favorite range is a low register, projected with boldness and deepness. He doesn't restrict himself to low notes but makes long scoops from the middle and high registers to the bottom and then sails back up. He plays with an easy technique in perfect taste."

*DownBeat* magazine said Webster "has a colossal tone – big, broad and sure – and is a standout in the band." One of Webster's solos with Millinder was on Bill Doggett's composition "Savoy."

After leaving Millinder, Webster took his big trumpet sound to the band of Benny Carter who had studied at Ohio's Wilberforce University. Singing with the Carter band at the time was Billie Holiday. One night during a radio broadcast, Freddie soloed on "Star Dust" and felt he screwed it up. Other band members were stunned when Webster suddenly pulled out a gun and pointed it to his head.

Webster also took part in the first recording of the Billy Eckstine All-Star Band for the DeLuxe record label.

In 1944, the much-traveled Webster was playing with



**Webster (third from left in the back row) playing with the Sabby Lewis Orchestra in 1944**

the Sabby Lewis Orchestra. With Lewis he recorded Tadd Dameron's arrangement of "Embraceable You."

In July of 1945, Webster recorded his composition, "Reverse the Charges," and "The Man I Love" with a quintet led by tenor saxist Frankie Socolow.

When Dizzy Gillespie formed his big band in 1946, he chose Webster to play in the trumpet section which also included Miles Davis, Fats Navarro and Kenny Dorham. Years later, Gillespie remembered Webster's playing at New York's McKinley Theatre. "Oh, man! We played this arrangement I made on 'I Should Care.' I had the solo and I gave the solo to Freddie. (After he played the solo) I never played that solo no more. The arrangement was out of the band after he left!"

## Return to Cleveland

Later in 1946, the 29-year-old Webster came home to Cleveland and played with a Cleveland band led by Johnnie Powell. The band included a number of younger musicians who had also graduated from Central High School. Among them were 19-year-old saxophonist and arranger Willie Smith and 22-year-old trombonist William "Shep" Shepherd. The band made one record for Paramount Records of Cleveland, "Perdido," featuring a trumpet solo by Webster, and "Cedar Avenue Blues" with a vocal by Gene Jordan. Smith composed "Cedar Avenue Blues" and arranged both sides.

Also playing in the trumpet section of the Powell Orchestra was Earl Douthitt, Sr. Douthitt remembered Webster playing a gig with the Powell band at the Moonglow Ballroom in Buffalo. "All the lights went out before the dance started," said Douthitt, "and Freddie took his horn out of the case, put a mute in, and played in the dark. That was the most beautiful trumpet playing I ever heard in my life – in the dark!"

While playing with the Powell band in Cleveland, Webster continued to play some gigs around the country, including a short stint with Norman Granz' touring show, *Jazz at the Philharmonic*.

In July of 1946, Webster teamed up again with his old high school friend Tadd Dameron and 22-year-old singer Sarah Vaughan. Webster's brief introduction to her vocal on Dameron's best known composition, the



Freddie Webster

popular "If You Could See Me Now," was probably Webster's most widely-heard trumpet playing.

In 1947, Webster was asked to join the swinging Count Basie Orchestra. According to Leon Washington, when Basie asked him what his price was, Webster said, "After you've paid the rest of those guys, you and I split 50-50!" Webster never joined the Basie band.

### A tragic coda

In April of 1947, Webster went to Chicago to play a gig with saxophonist Sonny Stitt. Before he left, Willie Smith, who as a hobby, hand painted neckties, gave one to Webster. It depicted a pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes, which Webster smoked, and smoke swirling around a trumpet. Smith said Webster took the hand painted tie with him to Chicago. Smith never saw that tie again.

Webster died at the age of 30 in Stitt's room at the Strode Hotel in Chicago. Officials said he died of a heart attack, but Miles Davis wrote in his autobiography that Webster died of an overdose of heroin that was intended for Stitt. According to Davis, Stitt had been "beating everybody out of money to support his habit and somebody arranged to give him some bad heroin." Davis wrote, "Sonny gave it to Freddie who shot it and died."

It was the end of the Cleveland native's brief and spectacular career.

### Almost forgotten

Dameron later said, "Webster could have been one of the greatest men in jazz."

Trumpeter Art Farmer, years later, remembered, "Webster was the main player for tone, the man for sound."

Lionel Hampton told me, "Webster was one of the best to come out of Cleveland."

Bailey called Webster "the patron saint of Cleveland trumpeters." He said Webster set the standard for what some have called "The Cleveland style of trumpet." Bailey said, "I don't know what it is, but they had something similar there, a brilliant tone and brassy sound."

Bailey was one of those Cleveland trumpeters influenced by Webster. Decades later, Benny listened to that 1942 recording of Webster playing "Yesterdays" with me and exclaimed, "That was something! That

distinctive vibrato! Those glitches! You have to have perfect control. This was his strong point. I still do a lot of those things without thinking about it — subconsciously."

Trumpeter Freddie Hubbard told me he remembered Webster for "his singing sound." Hubbard said, "You could hear him way in the back of the room without a mike. He wasn't real loud but he carried the sound."

There is little doubt that Webster was one of the most influential performers in jazz in the 1940s and one of the most important jazz artists ever from Cleveland, but, because of his early death and relatively few solo recordings, he is hardly known, even by many ardent jazz fans.

Thanks to those rare old 78 records, collectors can still appreciate Freddie Webster's artistry. Unfortunately, most of those old 78s were never re-issued on LPs or compact discs.

His 1942 five and a half minute masterpiece performance of "Yesterdays" with the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra was released on a long playing record by First Time Records (FTR-1506) as a "Limited Edition for Collectors Only."

### Freddie Webster Records

- 1938 - with the Earl Hines Orchestra  
"Limehouse Blues," "St. Louis Blues"
- 1941 - with Louis Jordan's Tympani Five  
"St. Vitus Dance," "Brotherly Love," "Boogie Woogie Came to Town," "Saxa-Woogie"
- 1942 - with Sonny Boy Williams' Orchestra  
"Savoy Is Jumpin'," "Reverse the Charges," "Rubber Bounce," "Honey, It Must Be Love"
- 1942 - with the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra  
"Knock Me a Kiss," "Strictly Instrumental," "Yesterdays" (long Webster solo), "Bust Out," "It Had to Be You," "Poor Little Plaything," "I Dream a Lot About You"
- 1942 - with Lester Young  
"Poor Little Plaything"
- 1942 - with the Lucky Millinder Orchestra  
"I Want a Tall Skinny Papa," "Let Me Off Uptown," "You're Not the Kind"
- 1943 - with the Lucky Millinder Orchestra  
"Deep in the Heart of Texas," "Sweet Georgia Brown," "Shipyard Social Function"
- 1944 - with the Lucky Millinder Orchestra  
"Savoy," "Hurry, Hurry," "Who Threw the Whiskey in the Well?," "Darlin'," "All the Time"
- 1944 - with the Saddy Lewis Orchestra  
"Embraceable You" (Tadd Dameron arrangement), "Boston Bounce"
- 1945 - with the Miss Rhapsody Orchestra  
"I Fell For You," "He May Be Your Man"
- 1945 - with Frank Socolow & Bud Powell Quintet  
"Reverse the Charges," "The Man I Love," "September in the Rain"
- 1946 - with Tadd Dameron and Sarah Vaughan  
"If You Could See Me Now," "My Kind of Love"
- 1947 - with the Johnny Powell Orchestra (in Cleveland)  
"Perdido," "Cedar Avenue Blues"



## 10. Tadd Dameron

**T**adley Ewing Dameron was an important, but under-recognized, contributor to the bebop revolution of the 1940s. The Cleveland native was not a national celebrity but is still highly respected by jazz musicians as a composer and arranger who spanned the eras of swing and bop. Perhaps more than anyone else, he added form to the emerging new style of jazz that was being pioneered by Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker.

Dameron biographer Ian MacDonald wrote that Dameron was “the main man when it came to translating the language of bop from small combo to a bigger band setting.”

Dameron arranged for most of the important big bands of his era, was instrumental in the introduction of such all-time jazz greats as Clifford Brown and John Coltrane, and composed such jazz standards as “If You Could See Me Now,” “Good Bait” and “Hot House.”

But the Cleveland native’s career was cut short by drugs and health problems and he never achieved great fame outside of the jazz world.

### Dameron’s family

Dameron was born in Cleveland in 1917, but, like many aspects of his life, there was a great deal of confusion surrounding details of his birth and family.

MacDonald was completing his biography of Dameron when he suddenly heard a rumor from a normally reliable source that Tadd and his brother, Caesar, were not really brothers. The source told MacDonald that Tadd had been adopted. This was a fairly important bit of information for a writer who was about to publish a biography. MacDonald called Tadd’s widow, Mia, who said she did not believe that Tadd had been adopted, but she did say she was always amazed at how different Tadd and Caesar were physically and in just about every other respect.

Mia had given MacDonald a copy of the first edition of my *Cleveland Jazz History* book. MacDonald and I had been corresponding and sharing information about



Courtesy Riverside Records

**Tadd Dameron**

the Cleveland musician. With his book about to go to press, MacDonald asked me for help in checking out the rumor about Dameron being adopted.

I called Cleveland City Hall’s Bureau of Vital Statistics and tracked down the birth certificates of both Caesar and Tadd Dameron. When I went to City Hall and got copies of the documents, I discovered some surprises – some information that had never been reported before.

According to the birth certificates, Caesar was born at 9:45 p.m., March 4, 1914, at 2177 East 30th Street in Cleveland. The official birth certificate says Caesar was the son of

21- year-old Isaiah Peake, a porter, who had come to Cleveland from Tennessee, and his 20-year-old wife, Ruth Harris Peake, who was born in Mississippi.

Tadd’s birth certificate said he was born at 11:15 a.m., February 21, 1917, at City Hospital (later Metro). According to Tadd’s birth certificate, his parents were also Isaiah and Ruth Peake. By 1917, the couple had moved to 4500 Central Avenue.

The discovery of the birth certificates in Cleveland’s Bureau of Vital Statistics proved that Tadd and Caesar were brothers, both the sons of Isaiah and Ruth Peake.

While Tadd never talked about it during his lifetime, his widow and biographer MacDonald believed that Ruth and Isaiah Peake split up sometime after Tadd was born and she married a man named Adolphus Dameron. He was a chef and had a restaurant in Cleveland called Dameron’s Hut. With or without a formal adoption, Ruth’s sons, Caesar and Tadd, apparently took her new husband’s surname.

Tadd’s widow gave MacDonald a copy of a letter Ruth had written to President Franklin Roosevelt during War II in an attempt to get “Caesar Dameron” excused from military service. That letter was signed, “Ruth Harris Dameron.”

While all this may seem to be little more than an academic exercise, it does assume some historical importance when you attempt to pinpoint the earliest musical influences of one of the most important jazz

musicians in Cleveland history.

In a 1952 interview, Tadd said he was born into a musical family. He told interviewer Harry Frost, "Everybody in my family played music. My mother played piano. My father played piano and sang. My brother plays alto. My cousins and my aunts, they all play." He added, "My mother taught me piano, but she did not read."

While it is clear that Dameron considered his mother his first musical influence, we do not know who he was talking about when he said, "My father played piano and sang." Was it Isaiah Peake or Adolphus Dameron?

There was another mystery uncovered in the discovery of the birth certificates. On Tadd's certificate, there is a notation that he was the third living child of Isaiah and Ruth Peake. Tadd's widow said she never heard about another sibling. She said that during many detailed conversations with Tadd's mother, she never mentioned any children other than Tadd and Caesar.

## Dameron's early life

Caesar Dameron, three years older than Tadd, was apparently the person who got Tadd interested in jazz. Tadd later said he spent a great deal of time listening to his older brother's records. In the 1952 interview, Tadd said, "I was listening to Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington and the Casa Loma band that was playing unique arrangements at the time."

Tadd attended old Central High School on East 55th Street, a school with a rich musical tradition and where many future outstanding jazz musicians learned the mechanics of the art.

Veteran Cleveland jazz musician Andy Anderson told me he first heard Tadd play piano in the 1930s when Caesar brought his kid brother to the Columbus Nightclub at East 46th and Carnegie and asked if the teenager could sit in with the Snake White Band. Anderson said he was amazed when Tadd started playing. "He's got ten fingers and all of them went down just like this (on the piano keys) and all of them were on different notes," said Anderson. "He had been

studying all the time and I said to myself, 'Gee whiz, with kids like that, who stay in and study! You don't expect to hear anything that good!'"

At Central High School, Dameron ironically failed his music exams. But he became friendly with a young trumpeter named Freddie Webster. Tadd later said he and Webster, who was the same age, "were raised together." They both were fascinated with the music being played in the 1930s by the big bands, particularly the Jimmie Lunceford

Orchestra. They often went to the Palace Theatre downtown to hear the bands including Duke Ellington.

While still at Central, Webster began making a name for himself playing gigs around Cleveland. After high school, he formed his own 14-piece band which toured Northern Ohio in 1938 and 1939. Webster persuaded Tadd to play piano in his band and Dameron later said Webster was the person responsible for starting him on a career in jazz. Dameron also later claimed he had taught Webster how to breathe when he was playing the trumpet.

## Oberlin College?

At one point in his youth, Dameron later told friends that he had originally hoped to become a doctor. There were published accounts that he went to Oberlin College as a pre-med student but dropped out after seeing a man with his arm severed. According to the story, Dameron said, "There is enough ugliness in the world; I'm interested in beauty."

While Dameron was, no doubt, more interested in beauty than ugliness, biographer MacDonald wrote, "The famous and much perpetuated 'severed arm' story appears to be pure fantasy." After his death, Dameron's widow all but admitted the story was apocryphal. MacDonald and Caesar Dameron's wife, Dorothy, made "extensive inquiries" at Oberlin, but could find no record of Tadd ever attending any classes there.

The stories about enrolling at Oberlin and seeing a man with a severed arm may have been Dameron's way of trying to justify his decision to give up his hopes of becoming a doctor and turning to jazz.

PLACE OF BIRTH		STATE OF OHIO BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS CERTIFICATE OF BIRTH	
County of <u>Cuyahoga</u>	City of <u>CLEVELAND</u>	Registration District No. _____	File No. _____
Ward of _____	Neighborhood _____	Registration District No. _____	File No. <u>3118</u>
FULL NAME OF CHILD <u>Caesar Fleming Dameron</u>			
Sex of Child <u>Male</u>	Date of Birth <u>Feb 26 1919</u>	Place of Birth <u>Central High School</u>	Age at Birth <u>26</u>
FATHER Full Name <u>Isaiah Peake</u> Residence <u>450 E Central</u>	MOTHER Full Name <u>Ruth Peake</u> Residence <u>450 E Central</u>		
Color of Race <u>Black</u>	Age at Last Birth <u>24</u>	Color of Race <u>Black</u>	Age at Last Birth <u>23</u>
Birthplace <u>Midland, Tennessee</u>	Birthplace <u>Massachusetts</u>		
Occupation and Industry <u>Unknown</u>	Occupation and Industry <u>Unknown</u>		
NUMBER OF CHILDREN BORN AND LIVING Number of children born in this county _____ Number of children born in this state _____			
CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDING PHYSICIAN OR MIDWIFE I hereby certify that I attended the birth of this child born to _____ and that the child was born _____ at _____ on the date above stated. Signature <u>J. E. Ryan</u> Address <u>450 E Central</u> Date <u>FEB 26 1919</u>			

Tadd Dameron's birth certificate



## Dameron's first arrangements

While Dameron was probably at least partially responsible for some arrangements for the early Freddie Webster band, he later said, "My first big band arrangement was for the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra," a band that had been formed in Cleveland in 1934 and was touring the Midwest. In 1938, at the age of 21, Dameron arranged "I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart" for the Jeter-Pillars band. He later said, "Everything was wrong with it, but there were some good ideas."

Also in 1938, Dameron replaced the ill Clyde Hart as the pianist on the Blanche Calloway band and toured with the band for a brief period. He returned to Cleveland and began arranging for Webster who was leading his own 14-piece local band in Cleveland. Dameron also played with the Zack Whyte band.

Late in 1939, Dameron formed his own band in Cleveland and first began working on several compositions including "Good Bait," "Stay On It" and "Lady Bird."

Veteran Cleveland trumpeter Earl Douthitt, Sr. told me, "Tadd didn't talk too much. He was very quiet. All he knew was music."

At the age of 23 (in 1940), Dameron left Cleveland and went to New York, writing for Vido Musso's band. "Musso fired me," remembered Tadd, "because my voicing wasn't good enough."

He went to Kansas City where he joined Harlan Leonard's Rockets for two years.

## With Harlan Leonard



Dameron's composition and arrangement of "Rock And Ride" for the Leonard band (recorded July 15, 1940) was almost pure swing with little if any indication of bebop, the form of jazz he would later help pioneer. Leonard had played saxophone with Bennie Moten's band in Kansas City in

the 1920s and by 1937 had one of the city's top-rated bands. While he was with Leonard, Dameron first met Charlie Parker who had left the Rockets shortly before Dameron arrived.

Another Dameron composition and arrangement for Leonard was "400 Swing" (recorded by Bluebird Records in Chicago in 1940). In November of that year, the band recorded another of Tadd's originals, "Dameron Stomp." Like the other songs he arranged for Leonard, it was almost pure swing.

Native Clevelander Andrew Homzy, a Concordia University professor who later discovered the manuscript



Harlan Leonard

of Charles Mingus' monumental work *Epitaph*, tried to find Dameron's early scores for the Leonard band. Homzy called Leonard in Los Angeles in the early 1970s and asked, "Are you the Harlan Leonard who had a band in the 1940s?" The music professor was shocked and surprised when Leonard said, "Who are you to call me up and ask me that question? I've been trying to forget about it for the past 30 years. It was such a difficult period of my life. I don't want to speak to you about this music."

Those early Dameron arrangements are still missing.

While he was writing for Leonard, Dameron also sold arrangements to the Jay McShann band. McShann remembered, "He liked my band and would sell me arrangements for about half what it should have cost."

## Arranging for Lunceford

By the end of 1941, after playing with his brother's band in Cleveland, Tadd sent some arrangements to his boyhood hero, Jimmie Lunceford, and soon became a full-time arranger for Lunceford. The band recorded three of Tadd's charts in 1941 and 1942.

Dameron later said he began experimenting with some "new ideas" when he wrote arrangements for the Lunceford Orchestra. They included "I Dream a Lot About You," "It Had to Be You" and "Yard Dog Mazurka

A member of that band, Gerald Wilson, who had joined Lunceford in Cleveland in 1939, recalled in his 1996 *Suite Memories* CD that Dameron "was a wonderful arranger. He was a romantic who liked to write about people, places and things."

## Meets Dizzy Gillespie

In 1942, Trummy Young, a trombonist Dameron had known on the Lunceford band, introduced Tadd to Dizzy Gillespie. Young told Gillespie, "There's a guy here who writes some beautiful things!" Dameron recalled he first met Gillespie during a jam session at Minton's in Harlem. "I started to play some unusual chords," he said, "and Dizzy said, 'Well, that's it, man!'" Dameron was soon playing piano with Gillespie's group at the Onyx and other New York clubs. Dameron later said of Dizzy, "We got to be very good friends."

One night during a jam session with Parker, Bird was so delighted by Dameron's harmonic ideas on the piano that, according to Dameron, "He kissed me on the cheek!"

## With Billy Eckstine

In 1944, after selling arrangements to Georgie Auld and Earl Hines, including "Sweet Georgia Brown," Dameron became an arranger for what is considered the first bebop big band, a band led by singer and valve trombonist Billy Eckstine. The Eckstine Orchestra featured both Gillespie and Parker. The band played Gillespie's "Night in Tunisia" and Jerry Valentine's "Second Balcony Jump." Dameron contributed new arrangements of his compositions, "Cool Breeze" and "Lady Bird," as well as some lush backgrounds for Eckstine's vocals.

By September of 1944, the Eckstine Orchestra included Gillespie, saxophonists Gene Ammons and Dexter Gordon, drummer Art Blakey, and a young singer named Sarah Vaughan.

One time when the band was playing in St. Louis, trumpeter Buddy Anderson got sick and the musicians' union sent a 16-year-old to take his place. Young Miles Davis subbed with the Eckstine band for two weeks.

By the end of 1944, Dameron, Gillespie and Parker had all left the Eckstine Orchestra, but Dameron and Gillespie remained in contact with each other. Tadd showed Dizzy his small group arrangement of "Good Bait." Dizzy liked it and recorded it in January of 1945 with a sextet that included trombonist Trummy Young, tenor saxophonist Don Byas, pianist Clyde Hart, bassist Oscar Pettiford and drummer Shelly Manne.

## Arranging for Gillespie

In 1945, Gillespie and Parker recorded Dameron's "Hot House" (based on chord changes from Cole Porter's "What Is This Thing Called Love?") and "Our Delight."

From 1945 to 1947, Dameron composed and arranged a number of pieces for Gillespie's big band including "Good Bait," "Stay On It" and "Cool Breeze." Tadd took the long phrases, powerful upbeat rhythms, and unusual chord changes of the bebop that Diz and Parker were pioneering in small groups, and used them for the first time in his big band arrangements. Jimmy Heath, a member of the band, said, "I found that Tadd

had that sort of concept similar to Billy Strayhorn for beautiful, melancholy type of ballads. I was fascinated by his chords. Tadd's writing was more melodic than exciting, sort of mellow swing."

But not everybody believed Dameron's bebop writing for Gillespie was solely his own. Saxophonist Budd Johnson, in Ira Gitler's book *Swing to Bop*, claimed Gillespie taught Dameron everything he knew about modern arranging. "He would have Tadd write and Tadd would say, 'Hey, Dizzy, is this the way it goes?' Dizzy would say, 'No, no! Move over there (at the piano). That's the way I want the changes to go, like that!...' " According to Johnson, "Tadd put it down on paper, but Diz was really writing it."

Dameron said in a 1952 interview, "I got on Count Basie's band and that's when I started writing my own style." He was adapting some of Gillespie's and Parker's ideas in his arrangements. Among Dameron's early charts for Basie were "Good Bait," the song he had written



Tadd Dameron

in the 1930s, and "Poor Little Plaything."

Tadd also did arrangements for Boyd Raeburn and Woody Herman. His originals for Raeburn included "Boydstown" and "In-Choirs." Dameron also arranged for a Herman radio program sponsored by Wildroot Cream Oil. One of Tadd's least-known compositions was a commercial jingle, "You Better Get Wildroot Cream Oil, Charlie." Nat Cole later sang the jingle when he did a radio program for the same sponsor.

Pianist Mary Lou Williams recalled that Dameron, "though very young, had ideas even then that were 'way ahead of his time.'"

Dameron, in a self-deprecating statement, once said, "I became an arranger only because there was no other way to get my music played."

## Played with Bill de Arango

In May of 1945, Tadd formed an octet in New York to back singer Sarah Vaughan on his arrangement of "I'd Rather Have a Memory Than a Dream." The group included Gillespie, Parker, Flip Phillips, Curly Russell,



Max Roach, Dameron and a young guitarist from Cleveland, Bill de Arango.

De Arango had known Caesar Dameron in Cleveland but had never met Tadd. The Cleveland guitarist told biographer MacDonald, "When Dizzy made the introductions, he just said, 'This is Tadd.' I had no idea he was Caesar's brother."

### "If You Could See Me Now"



**Sarah Vaughan  
in the 1940s**

When Gillespie took the old tune "Whispering" and changed the chords to create "Groovin' High," Dameron took Gillespie's improvised cadenza on "Groovin' High" and created a ballad called "If You Could See Me Now." Dameron first recorded the song in May of

1946 with Sarah Vaughan and his old boyhood friend from Cleveland, Freddie Webster. "If You Could See Me Now" became the first ballad to emerge from bop and a classic vehicle for Vaughan. It was Dameron's best known composition.

Tadd became a close friend of pianist Mary Lou Williams who had spent a great deal of time in Cleveland. She recalled that whenever Tadd was out of ideas and inspiration, he visited her apartment in New York City. Others also gathered there, including Gillespie, Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk. Williams became virtually the musical den mother for the young bopsters. She later recalled, "Most of the musicians were my friends and they often visited my apartment to write or play their ideas. I loved them. I had so much love for them."



William Gottlieb, Library of Congress

**Dameron playing cards with Mary Lou Williams  
and Dizzy Gillespie at Williams' New York City  
apartment in August of 1947**

In the mid-1940s, Dameron also arranged for Buddy Rich and Boyd Raeburn. Frankie Socolow, who played with the Raeburn Orchestra at the time, said many of Dameron's arrangements for Raeburn "were great."

In 1947, Dameron was honored by *Esquire* magazine as "The Best New Jazz Arranger."

Jimmy Heath remembered, "Tadd was always soft-spoken except when he was showing his new arrangements off. Then he would always sing them in this very high pitched, falsetto voice."

But he was beginning to have some doubts about some aspects of bebop. With its major practitioners becoming almost cultural freaks – wearing goatees, berets and dark glasses – and being ridiculed by many, Dameron was afraid the new form of music was not reaching the general public and was being regarded by many as little more than a passing fad of the post-war period. Hoping to reach a wider audience and separate himself somewhat from the exclusionary aspects of bebop, he joined a group called Three Bips and a Bop which performed vocal and commercial versions of bebop tunes. Babs Gonzales said, "I formed the Bips because I felt bebop needed a vocal bridge to the people. The fire was there, but it wasn't reaching the people."

### With Fats Navarro at the Royal Roost

As bop was slowly being more accepted by the general public, Dameron organized a sextet with Charlie Rouse, Wardell Gray, Allen Eager, Kenny Clarke and an amazing young trumpet player named Fats Navarro. Many at the time (1947) considered Navarro a much better trumpeter than either Gillespie or Miles Davis.

A native of Key West, Florida, Navarro was 24 years old when he began playing with Dameron. At the age of 20, he had toured with Andy Kirk's band and then replaced Gillespie in the historic Billy Eckstine Orchestra. Davis, in his autobiography, said that during the early days at Minton's, "'Fat Girl' would be blowing away everybody that came through the door." Miles called Fats "Fat Girl" and Fats called Miles "Millie."

With Navarro in his group, Dameron recorded for Blue Note Records and played regularly at the Royal Roost, a new jazz club at Broadway and 48th Street in New York City. Jazz fans and fellow musicians began to recognize Dameron and his music. Navarro worked regularly with Dameron for three years and quickly became one of Gillespie's few rivals on trumpet. He didn't play as many high notes as Gillespie, but he did produce some stunning solos with surprising harmonic twists and colorful melodic elaborations.

Unfortunately, by late 1948, Navarro "was a total junkie," according to Davis. "In January of 1949, 'Fat Girl' was too sick to play," wrote Davis in his autobiography, "so I took over for him." Dameron said



Library of Congress

### Tadd Dameron and Fats Navarro

in an interview, "I fired him. That was like firing your right hand. I hired Miles Davis, but I got Fats back."

Miles later said, "Tadd was a great arranger and composer and he was a very fine piano player also."

Navarro made his last record, *Birdland All-Stars*, in May of 1950 with Davis, J.J. Johnson, Dameron, and Art Blakey. Miles recalled, "It was sad to listen to him that last time, trying to hit notes he used to hit like they was nothing."

Navarro died of tuberculosis complicated by drug abuse two months later – July 7, 1950. He was only 26 years old.

He was replaced in Dameron's group by Allen Eager who, as a teenager in 1945, had played with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra. Like many others, Eager made the switch from swing to bop while playing at various clubs on New York's 52nd Street. A disciple of Lester Young, Eager was making distinctive contributions to the new music and became an important part of Dameron's group, but, in the mid-1950s, Eager moved to Paris. He later played on Frank Zappa's first album. While not playing, Eager spent a lot of time skiing, riding horses and driving race cars.

Dameron, meanwhile, composed his major orchestral piece, "Soulphony" which was performed by the Gillespie big band at New York's Carnegie Hall in 1948.

### Tadd's view of bebop

In a 1948 interview, Dameron said, "This kind of music that I've always wanted to play is based on a feeling that the old jazz is limited by the way it sticks to standard chord structures. Modern music seems to me to have a much greater freedom. We can improvise on both structure and melody and we aren't hampered by a strict dependence on the beat, the way the old jazz is. We're trying for a different kind of phrasing and harmonics, a more intricate voicing of chords, using different and more finely shaded chord progressions than they do."

### Goes to Europe

In 1949, Dameron spent some time in Europe. He co-lead a quintet with Miles Davis at the Paris Jazz Fair. After the fair, Dameron stayed in Europe for awhile and remembered, "We had to go to Lyon (France). While we were on the train, the way it was moving gave me a little pattern and I made a tune, 'Lyonia.'" He arranged the song and others for Ted Heath's big band in England.

### Wide-ranging musical taste

Dameron did not consider himself strictly a bopster or even a jazz musician.

In 1950, he was interviewed in one of *Metronome* magazine's Blindfold Tests. After hearing the Tex Beneke recording of "Star Dust," Tadd said, "I can't say I care too much for the style, but it's really good sounding music." Commenting on Jimmy Dorsey's "Johnson Rag," he said, "I can see why people like dixieland; it has a beat and is easy for anyone to understand."

He also admitted, "When I'm at home just listening to music, you know what I play? Ravel, Delius, Stravinsky, Villa-Lobos, just to mention a few."

In 1951, Dameron was trying to decide his future direction in music when he took a job playing piano with a rhythm-and-blues group led by another former student at Cleveland's Central High School, "Bull Moose" Jackson. He toured with Jackson, playing r-and-b songs and novelty numbers.

Another member of Jackson's group was a young saxophonist who had dropped out of Howard University in Washington. Benny Golson quickly became friendly with Tadd. Golson said in the foreword to Ian MacDonald's Dameron biography, "After hearing me play on our first one-nighter together, he approached me at the intermission and said, 'I love the way you play. I'd like you to do some things with me sometimes, perhaps even go to Europe with me.'" Golson said he considered Dameron's offer a stamp of approval. Golson soon became Dameron's composing and arranging student.

After leaving Jackson's band, Tadd formed a big band that worked intermittently. It included at various times Stanley Turrentine, Blue Mitchell and Cleveland saxophonist Tony Lovano. Dameron also led several small groups which toured around Ohio and the eastern states for a year or so. One of his groups included a young Cleveland trumpeter, Bill Hardman, who had just graduated from Central High School.

In another interview, Dameron discussed his arranging style. He said he was primarily concerned with sound. He said he tried to emulate some of the forms of classical masters Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. "I try to make it slow and coherent. I try to make everything go like you're reading a book. You just can't have one idea and jump to another one."



## Introduction of Clifford Brown



Clifford Brown

In 1953, Dameron formed a new nine-piece group which included Joe Jones (not yet called "Philly Joe"), Golson, Percy Heath, and an unknown 23-year-old trumpet player. Dameron said, "I want to use a fellow named 'Brownie' from Wilmington, Delaware. He's another Fats Navarro. He's a little smoother than Fats was, I think, and has a lot of drive." Dameron had been toying with the idea of recording with another trumpeter, a man who had been playing with him on club dates. He said, "I have a trumpet player, Johnny Coles. But for recording, I think I need a little more power." He got it!

With Clifford Brown, Dameron and his group went into a recording studio in New York City June 11, 1953. When recording supervisor, Ira Gitler, first heard Brown, he said, "I nearly fell off my seat in the control room! The power, range and brilliance, together with the warmth and invention, was something I hadn't heard since Fats Navarro."

Trumpeter Idrees Sulieman told Dameron biographer MacDonald that Brown, after each solo, "kept saying 'I'm failing.'" But, two weeks later, Brownie called Sulieman and said, "I've heard the album. I like it."

Brown did not begin playing until he was 15 years old. His father, an amateur musician, had given him a trumpet. While attending Wilmington's Howard High School, the teenager learned quickly. Later, when he attended Delaware State College, he frequently drove to Philadelphia to listen to such boppers as Max Roach, J.J. Johnson, Gillespie and Navarro. Occasionally they let him sit in. Miles Davis later recalled that the jazz musicians in Philadelphia were talking about the kid called "Brownie." One night, he sat in with Parker and Bird told him, "I hear what you're saying, but I don't believe it!"

During that first recording session with Dameron, Brown played several Dameron compositions which later became classics – "Theme of No Repeat," "Fountainbleau" and "Dial B For Beauty."

Dameron's group with Brown played during the summer of 1953 in Atlantic City. The group's records and live performances prompted some big bands to try to make the transition from swing to bop. Among them were Artie Shaw, Woody Herman, Charlie Barnet and even Benny Goodman. Goodman's "Undercurrent Blues" is virtually forgotten today, but it bore an

unmistakable debt to Dameron's work with Brown.

In September of 1953, Brown went to Europe with the Lionel Hampton Orchestra which also included pianist Quincy Jones and trumpeter Art Farmer. In Stockholm Brown teamed up with Jones, Farmer and a group of Swedish jazz stars to record an album (September 15, 1953) which included "Stockholm Sweetnin," "Scuse These Blues," "Falling in Love With Love" and "Lover Come Back to Me." In the weeks that followed, Brown, Farmer, Jones and Jimmy Cleveland recorded enough material in Paris for three other albums for Prestige Records, *The Clifford Brown Quartet in Paris*, *The Clifford Brown Sextet in Paris* and *The Clifford Brown Big Band in Paris*. When Hampton learned that members of his band were recording on their own, violating his rules, he fired the ambitious young musicians.

Brown returned to the United States and joined Art Blakey's new group. Later in 1954, he formed a group with drummer Max Roach. Dameron wrote for the Max Roach-Clifford Brown Quintet.

Brown crossed over into the popular field in 1955 when he made a record with former Count Basie arranger Neal Hefti. *Clifford Brown With Strings* became one of the few successful jazz albums with lush string backgrounds.

By 1956, almost three years after Dameron had introduced him on record, Brown had become one of the most respected trumpeters in jazz. He played at the Loop Lounge on Prospect Avenue in downtown Cleveland. It was his last formal gig. The following night, Monday, June 25, 1956, Brown played an informal gig at a Philadelphia record store called Music City. After that performance, Brown, pianist Richie Powell (the brother of Bud Powell) and Richie's wife Nancy began driving from Philadelphia to Chicago for a weekend gig at the Blue Note. Nancy, an inexperienced driver, was at the wheel in the early hours of the morning. They raced along the Pennsylvania Turnpike, heading for Cleveland. She lost control of the car. It skidded off a wet stretch of the road and careened down an 18-foot embankment. Nancy and Richie Powell and Clifford Brown were all killed. It was four months before Brown's 26th birthday.

Freddie Hubbard, a young trumpeter at the time, later told me, "I couldn't believe it. I cried when he died. I was back in Indianapolis and I had all his books, all his records. I was transcribing solos and practicing those things all day and all night. I used to carry all his albums on my dates. If a chick wanted to be with me and didn't want to listen, I couldn't be with her."

Dameron, meanwhile, was fighting drug addiction. He returned to Cleveland and played piano with a group led by drummer Lawrence "Jacktown" Jackson who told me, "I had a band at the Congo Lounge on Woodland and

Tadd was playing with me, Tadd and Tony Lovano, Joey Lovano's dad. The band was called 'Jack's Town Criers.' We played at the Red Carpet as well as the Congo Lounge." At times when Dameron was not available, Ace Carter played piano with Jacktown's group. Carter later played piano with the Count Basie Orchestra.

In 1956, Dameron wrote for the Max Roach-Clifford Brown Quintet, arranged for Carmen McRae and recorded two albums with young saxophonist John Coltrane. One, entitled *Mating Call*, was recorded November 30, 1956 and included six Dameron compositions – "Mating Call," "Gnid," "Soultrane," "On a Misty Night," "Romas" and "Super Jet." It was one of Coltrane's early recordings and the liner notes by Andrew White said the album was a good example of Coltrane's "post-bebop lyricism."

It was also Dameron's last recording until 1961.

## Dameron's drug problems



When Dameron recorded with Coltrane, both were apparently heavy users of cocaine. According to the *Harvard Medical School Family Health Guide*, cocaine is a stimulant that accelerates physical and mental states but has such

possible long-term use effects as causing lung damage, heart attacks and strokes.

Dameron's use of drugs apparently went back to his early days on the road. Gary Giddens, in his book, *Bird*, wrote that when Dameron first met Charlie Parker in the late 1930s, when they were with the Harlan Leonard band, "One of the reasons for the two musicians' instant friendship was that Tadd could do all sorts of tricks with pharmaceuticals and had a big appetite for getting high."

Dameron biographer MacDonald wrote that Tadd was into hard drugs in the 1940s and several musicians including John Collins and Joe Wilder kept their distance because of his use of drugs. MacDonald quoted Wilder as saying, "I kept away so it wouldn't happen to me."

Record producer Orrin Keepnews was quoted saying Tadd was what he called "one of a small group of charming, well-dressed junkies."

According to MacDonald, both Tadd and Miles Davis "were leading members of the Harlem drug scene." The biographer wrote that Davis took a self-cure and

recovered, but "Tadd continued to use heroin until his imprisonment in 1958."

In 1947, Freddie Webster, Dameron's boyhood friend from Cleveland who had played on Tadd's recording of "If You Could See Me Now" less than a year earlier, died of a drug overdose at the age of 30.

Despite Webster's death, Davis, in his autobiography, recalled that in 1949 there was a lot of dope around the music scene and a lot of musicians were deep into drugs, especially heroin. He said he and Tadd plus Dexter Gordon, Art Blakey, J.J. Johnson, Sonny Rollins and Jackie McLean all started to get heavily into heroin around the same time. Ken Burns, in his TV series *Jazz*, listed other jazz musicians who were hooked on narcotics: Chet Baker, Gerry Mulligan, Art Pepper, Max Roach, Sonny Stitt, Stan Getz and eight of the 16 members of Woody Herman's band. Trumpeter Fats Navarro, who played with Dameron's group in the late 1940s, died mainly of drug abuse in 1950.

Dameron apparently recognized his problem and made several attempts to kick the habit – usually by coming home to Cleveland. After Navarro's death, Dameron came home where, according to MacDonald, "he hoped the 'temptations' would be less than in New York." While in Cleveland, Tadd played at his brother's Twelve Counts club on Cedar Avenue.

After Miles was arrested in September of 1950 for possession of heroin, Tadd again left New York and took a job touring with fellow Central High School alumnus Bull Moose Jackson and his rhythm-and-blues band.

But Dameron apparently did not kick the habit.

In 1953, when Tadd took his jazz group to Atlantic City for the summer, MacDonald wrote that Dameron's "addiction was severe." Tadd later admitted he had to be on his toes in order to keep one step ahead of the police. He sometimes told other addicted band members to take the night off if he felt there was a chance of a bust. He even "fired" Clifford Brown several times because he didn't want the ultra-clean Brownie to be "caught up in any unpleasantness." After several months of this, Dameron disbanded his group and again returned to Cleveland for two years.

In the mid-1950s, drummer Philly Joe Jones later said Dameron "was very stand-offish and many players couldn't get close to him because he was using heroin."

In April of 1956, Dameron was arrested in New York City on several narcotics charges including intent to sell illegal drugs. In court he was sentenced to three-to-five years in prison, but the sentence was suspended and he was placed on probation.

Less than two years later, in January of 1958, Dameron was arrested again and charged with, among other things, dealing drugs. A month later, he was sentenced to prison.



## Serving time in prison

Dameron spent three years at the Federal Narcotics Hospital, a combination hospital and prison, in Lexington, Kentucky. It was the largest institution of its kind in the world. At Lexington, where Chet Baker and other jazz musicians were also being held, Dameron led a 24-piece orchestra and did a lot of writing.

When he was released in 1961, Dameron returned to New York where he wrote and arranged for albums by Sonny Stitt, Blue Mitchell, Milt Jackson and others. The following year, he wrote some arrangements for Benny Goodman's tour of Russia.

Dameron recorded four sides in December of 1961 with Donald Byrd, Curtis Fuller, Julius Watkins, Sam Rivers, Cecil Payne, Paul Chambers and Philly Joe Jones. The recordings, considered sub-standard, were not released by Blue Note Records until 1999.

## Final recording

In a 1962 interview with *DownBeat* magazine, Dameron, who aspired to a musical level beyond bebop, said, "I'd like to do an album of just lovely music." He called the planned album his "comeback." Dameron said he was dissatisfied with his earlier works – "Turkeys, all of them," he said. "I've never been well represented on records." The album, *The Magic Touch*, turned out to be not only his comeback, but his musical farewell address.

He assembled an orchestra that included such all-stars as trumpeters Joe Wilder, Clark Terry, Charlie Shavers and Ernie Royal; trombonists Jimmy Cleveland and Britt Woodman; saxophonists Johnny Griffin, Tate Houston and Jerome Richardson; pianist Bill Evans; bassist George Duvivier; and drummer Philly Joe Jones.

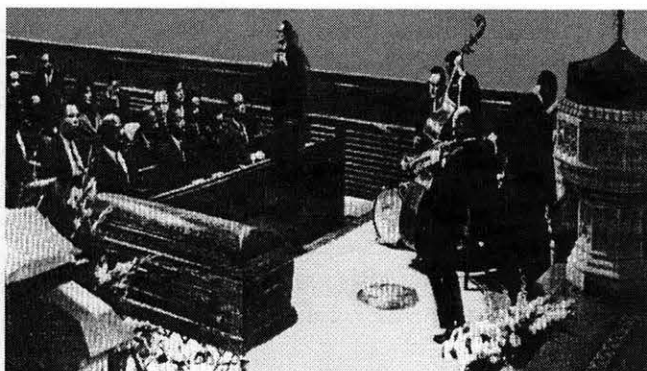
Griffin soloed on "On a Misty Night," the song Dameron had recorded with Coltrane in 1956. Shavers, Cleveland, Griffin, and Evans soloed on an extended version of Dameron's "Fontainebleau." Former Duke Ellington singer Barbara Winfield sang an updated version of "If You Could See Me Now." Evans' piano solo on "Our Delight" demonstrated how Dameron's musical thinking had expanded since his early days with Gillespie. The Fantasy album also included five songs Dameron had written while in prison.

But, after the album was released, Dameron's health began to fade. He was dead three years later.

He suffered several heart attacks and died of bone cancer in New York City March 8, 1965. He was 48 years old.

## Dameron's funeral

Four days after his death, there was an unusual jazz memorial service for Dameron at the Advent Lutheran Church at 93rd and Broadway in New York City. A



Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University

### The Benny Golson Quintet playing at the funeral of Tadd Dameron, March 11, 1965

quintet consisting of saxophonist Benny Golson, trumpeter John Collins, pianist Cedar Walton, bassist Reggie Workman, and drummer Mel Lewis performed. They played "The Squirrel," a favorite Dameron composition. Several of his friends who attended the funeral service said Tadd would have loved hearing the group playing his songs.

The coffin stood in front of the church altar, beneath and barely lighted by the glow from a reproduction of Leonardo Da Vinci's "The Last Supper." The jazz quintet was to the left of the mourners, in front of the pulpit.



Rev. John Gensel

The funeral service was conducted by Rev. John Gensel, a graduate of Ohio's Ashland College and a onetime minister in Mansfield, Ohio. Pastor Gensel had just been named by the Lutheran Church in America as the special pastor to New York City's jazz community.

Rev. Gensel later told me he had frequently visited

Dameron when he was at Roosevelt Hospital in New York City. "He lived not far away from where I lived on the West Side of Manhattan," said Gensel, "and I would visit him at his home and we'd talk. What an incredible musician, arranger, and a great composer!"

Pastor Gensel said very little at the service. He later said he believed Dameron's music spoke for itself.

The Golson group also played "If You Could See Me Now," and "Our Delight." There were only a few words of eulogy. The speakers were pianist Billy Taylor, disc jockey Mort Fega, and Dameron's Cleveland lawyer, Earl Rowe.

In addition to his widow Mia, other members of Tadd's family from Cleveland went to New York for the funeral service. They included his mother Ruth and his brother Caesar. There were among about 150 people in the church. Among the others were Babs Gonzales, Yusef Lateef, Danny Quebec, Randy Weston, fellow Clevelander Bill Hardman, Roy Haynes, Rudi Blesh, Larry Ridley, Walter Bishop, Ray Bryant, Sonny Nevins, Dan Morgenstern, Luis McKay, Barry Harris and Marcel Daniels.

Dameron's mother, Ruth, died five years later (in 1970) at the age of 76.

## Assessments of Dameron

How important was Tadd Dameron to jazz?

Dizzy Gillespie, in his memoirs, wrote, "Dameron became the leading bebop arranger."

Pianist and composer Horace Silver, who grew up during the bebop era, said that Duke Ellington "was and still is the main man. Then come Thelonious Monk and Tadd Dameron."

Native Cleveland musicologist Andrew Homzy said, "If one were to accept that Ellington was to jazz what Bach was to classical music, then Mingus might be jazz' Beethoven, Monk its Chopin, and Dameron its Schubert. As for Schubert, singable melodies and concern for beauty were among the most notable traits of Tadd Dameron."

Philly Joe Jones said, "Tadd was a genius. Many people don't realize that Dameron had an enormous impact on musicians. All the cats who make their living writing for TV and Hollywood owe a great deal to him. They all came from Dameron."

Benny Golson said, "None of his music ever sounded artificial, arbitrary, or manufactured. It always had depth and personality — his personality. It touched not only our minds, but our hearts as well. This is what's really important."

## Tributes

In the 1970s, pianist Barry Harris, who was first exposed to Dameron's music as a high school student, recorded an entire album of Dameron songs. Harris said, "I like Tadd's harmony, the easy way he has with melodies. It's an easy blend of rhythm and harmony."

Almost 20 years after Dameron's death, Philly Joe

Jones led a repertory group called Dameronia which recorded many of the Clevelander's compositions and arrangements. Another band, Continuum, led in the 1980s by Jimmy Heath and Slide Hampton, recorded an album called *Mad About Tadd* for the Palo Alto label.

In 1999, native Cleveland saxophonist Joe Lovano, whose father had played with Dameron in Cleveland, recorded a compact disc, *52nd Street Themes*, which included five of Dameron's songs, arranged by fellow Clevelander Willie Smith. Lovano, a three-time Jazz Artist of the Year, said he learned how to play his horn by listening to Dameron's music.

Most people are amazed to learn that during his career Dameron composed almost 200 songs. Several became jazz standards. Others have been forgotten.



## Tadd Dameron Discography

(Recordings on which Dameron was a performer or the arranger)

- 7/15/40 Harlan Leonard's Rockets: Rock and Ride, 400 Swing, My Dream, A La Bridges
- 11/13/40 Harlan Leonard's Rockets: Dameron Stomp, Society Steps Out, Keep Rockin', Take 'Em, Dig It
- 12/23/41 Jimmie Lunceford Orch: I'm Losing My Mind, Because of You
- 4/14/42 Lunceford Orch: It Had to Be You
- 7/14/42 Lunceford Orch: I Dream A Lot About You
- 3/29/44 Sabby Lewis Orch: Embraceable You
- 4/18/44 Earle Warren Orch: Poor Little Plaything
- 9/5/44 Billy Eckstine Orch: I Want to Talk About You, I'll Wait and Pray
- 1/9/45 Dizzy Gillespie Sextet: Good Bait
- 2/7/45 Billy Eckstine Orch: Airmail Special, I Want to Talk About You, Mean to Me, Don't Blame Me
- 5/11/45 Dizzy Gillespie Quintet: Hot House
- 5/24/45 George Auld Orch: Honey, Stompin' at the Savoy
- 5/25/45 Sarah Vaughan Octet with Bill de Arango: I'd Rather Have a Memory Than a Dream
- 10/16/45 George Auld Orch: Airmail Special
- 10/23/45 George Auld Orch: Just You, Just Me
- 12/24/45 Buddy Rich Orch: Cool Breeze
- 3/7/46 Billy Eckstine Orch: Cool Breeze
- 3/21/46 Dickie Wells' Big Seven: We're Through
- 3/28/46 Buddy Rich Orch: Just You, Just Me, Cool Breeze
- 4/30/46 George Auld Orch: One Hundred Years From Today; Just You, Just Me
- 5/7/46 Tadd Dameron Orch. with Sarah Vaughan: If You Could See Me Now, I Could Make You Love Me, My Kinda Love, You're Not The Kind
- 6/7/46 Billy Eckstine Orch: I Want To Talk About You, Our Delight
- 6/10/46 Dizzy Gillespie Orch: Our Delight
- 6/18/46 Dizzy Gillespie Orch: Our Delight
- 7/6/46 Dizzy Gillespie Orch: Cool Breeze
- 7/31/46 Count Basie Orch: Stay On It
- 9/15/46 Don Redman Orch: For Europeans Only
- 1/7/47 Illinois Jacquet Orch: For Europeans Only, You Left Me All Alone
- 1/9/47 Fats Navarro group: Fat Girl, Ice Freezes Red, Eb Pob, Goin' to Minton's
- 1/22/47 Dizzy Gillespie Orch: Lady Bird
- 1/24/47 Babs Gonzales group: Lop Pow, Oop-Pop-a-Da, Stompin' at the Savoy, Pay Dem Dues
- 4/11/47 Buddy Rich Orch: Just You, Just Me

(continued ➡)



## Tadd Dameron Discography (continued)

- 5/7/47 **Babs Gonzales group:** Bab's Dream, Dob Dia Bli, Running Around, Weird Lullaby
- 7/7/47 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Cool Breeze, Stay On It, Lady Bird
- 8/7/47 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Hot House, Pan Dameronia
- 8/7/47 **Tadd Dameron group:** I Think I'll Go Away, Don't Mention Love to Me
- 8/22/47 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Stay On It
- 9/26/47 **Tadd Dameron Sextet:** The Chase, The Squirrel, Our Delight, Dameronia
- 9/29/47 **Gillespie Orch:** Cool Breeze, Nearness, Hot House
- 10/7/47 **Buddy Rich Orch:** Cool Breeze
- 10/18/47 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Hot House, Nearness
- 10/28/47 **Tadd Dameron Orch:** A Bebop Carol, The Tadd Walk, Gone With The Wind, There Must Be You
- 11/12/47 **Count Basie Orch. with Emmett Berry:** Stay On It
- 12/7/47 **Tadd Dameron Orch:** I Think I'll Go Away, Don't Mention Love To Me
- 12/5/47 **Fats Navarro and His Thin Men:** Nostalgia, Barry's Bop, Bebop Romp, Fats Blows
- 12/11/47 **Coleman Hawkins All-Stars:** April in Paris, How Strange, Half Step Down Please, Angel Face, Jumpin' Jane, I Love You
- 12/11/47 **Dexter Gordon Quintet:** Settin' the Pace, So Easy, Dexter's Riff
- 12/22/47 **Dexter Gordon Quartet & Quintet:** Dexter's Mood, Dextrose, Index, Dexterity
- 12/22/47 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch. with Benny Bailey and Shep Shepherd:** Cool Breeze, Good Bait
- 12/30/47 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Good Bait
- 2/2/48 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Our Delight
- 2/28/48 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Good Bait
- 5/1/48 **Lionel Hampton Orch:** Hot House
- 7/26/48 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Good Bait, Stay On It
- 8/7/48 **Tadd Dameron Quintet:** Now's the Time, Lady Be Good, Just You, Just Me, Jumpin' With Symphony Sid, Anthropology, Good Bait, Lady Be Good, The Squirrel, Pennies From Heaven, Kitchenette Across the Hall
- 9/4/48 **Charlie Parker All-Stars with Miles Davis:** Fifty-Second Street Theme, Koko
- 9/4/48 **Tadd Dameron Sextet with Navarro:** Jumpin' With Symphony Sid, The Tadd Walk, The Squirrel, Symphonette
- 9/7/48 **Buddy Rich Orch:** Good Bait
- 9/11/48 **Count Basie Orch:** Good Bait
- 9/13/48 **Tadd Dameron Band:** Jahbero, Lady Bird, Symphonette, I Think I'll Go Away
- 9/14/48 **Count Basie Orch:** Good Bait
- 10/2/48 **Tadd Dameron Orch:** Jumpin' With Symphony Sid, Good Bait, The Squirrel
- 10/2/48 **Tadd Dameron Trio & Anita O'Day:** What Is This Thing Called Love, How High The Moon
- 10/2/48 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Soulphony in Three Hearts
- 10/5/48 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** The Squirrel
- 10/9/48 **Tadd Dameron Sextet:** The Tadd Walk, Dameronia
- 10/9/48 **Tadd Dameron Trio & Anita O'Day:** September in the Rain
- 10/9/48 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Lady Bird
- 10/16/48 **Tadd Dameron Sextet:** Anthropology, Our Delight, The Tadd Walk
- 10/23/48 **Tadd Dameron Sextet:** Our Delight, Good Bait, Eb Pob, The Squirrel
- 10/30/48 **Tadd Dameron Quintet:** The Chase, Wahoo, Lady Be Good, The Squirrel
- 11/6/48 **Tadd Dameron Quintet:** Anthropology, Wahoo, Tiny's Blues
- 11/13/48 **Tadd Dameron Quintet:** Lady Bird, Good Bait, Dizzy Atmosphere
- 12/7/48 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** The Squirrel
- 1/18/49 **Tadd Dameron Orch:** Casbah, Sid's Delight
- 2/12/49 **Tadd Dameron Orch:** Good Bait, Webb's Delight, Focus, Wahoo
- 2/19/49 **Tadd Dameron Big Ten with Miles Davis:** Focus, April in Paris, Webb's Delight, Good Bait
- 2/26/49 **Tadd Dameron Big Ten:** Miles, Casbah
- 3/5/49 **Tadd Dameron Big Ten:** Good Bait, The Squirrel
- 4/21/49 **Tadd Dameron Big Ten:** John's Delight, Focus, What's New, Heaven's Doors Are Open Wide
- 5/7/49 **Tadd Dameron-Miles Davis Quintet:** Riffide, Good Bait, Lady Bird, Don't Blame Me, The Squirrel, All The Things You Are, Allen's Alley, Wahoo, Embraceable You, Ornithology, Crazy Rhythm
- 6/7/49 **Woody Herman Orch:** Woody's Workshop
- 7/7/49 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Good Bait
- 8/31/49 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Good Bait, Soulphony in Three Hearts
- 9/2/49 **Ted Heath Orch:** Lyonia, The Nearness of You
- 10/27/49 **Ted Heath Orch:** Euphoria
- 11/3/49 **Ted Heath Orch:** So Easy
- 12/7/49 **Artie Shaw Orch:** So Easy
- 1/7/50 **Artie Shaw Orch:** Fred's Delight, So Easy
- 2/2/50 **Tadd Dameron & Pearl Bailey:** Nothing For Nothing, There Must Be Something Better Than Love
- 2/8/50 **Miles Davis Sextet:** Conception, Ray's Idea, That Old Black Magic, Max is Making Wax, Woody'n You
- 6/30/50 **Birdland All-Star Septet with Miles Davis and J.J. Johnson:** Hot House, Fifty-Second Street Theme, Embraceable You, Eronel, Wee, Ow
- 10/17/51 **Bull Moose Jackson:** I'll Be Home For Christmas, I Never Loved Anyone But You
- 7/7/52 **Billy Paul Trio:** Why Am I?, That's Why I Dream
- 6/11/53 **Tadd Dameron Orch. with Clifford Brown:** Philly Joe Jones, Choose Now, Dial B For Beauty, Theme of No Repeat
- 9/7/53 **Louie Bellson Orch:** For Europeans Only
- 2/16/56 **Clifford Brown-Max Roach Quintet:** Flossie Lou
- 2/17/56 **Clifford Brown-Max Roach Quintet:** The Scene Is Clean
- 3/9/56 **Tadd Dameron Orch:** Fontainebleau, Delirium, Clean Is The Scene, Flossie Lou, Bula Beige
- 3/28/56 **Tadd Dameron Orch. and Carmen McRae:** Blue Moon, I Was Doing All Right, I'm Putting All My Eggs In One Basket, Nowhere
- 5/7/56 **Tommy Dorsey Orch:** Bula Beige
- 6/7/56 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch. with Emmett Berry:** Cool Breeze
- 8/7/56 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Cool Breeze
- 11/30/56 **Tadd Dameron & John Coltrane:** Mating Call, Soultrane, Gnid, Super Jet, On A Misty Night, Romas
- 12/31/56 **Jimmy Dorsey Orch:** Bula Beige
- 6/7/57 **Woody Herman Orch:** Slight Groove
- 6/14/57 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Cool Breeze
- 7/2/57 **Woody Herman Orch:** Slight Groove
- 7/6/57 **Dizzy Gillespie Orch:** Cool Breeze
- (Dameron in prison from February 1958 to June 1961)
- 12/27/60 **Blue Mitchell Orch:** For Heaven's Sake, The Nearness of You, Strollin'
- 3/29/61 **Blue Mitchell Orch:** Smooth as the Wind, But Beautiful, The Best Things in Life Are Free, A Blue Time
- 12/14/61 **Dameron group:** The Elder Speaks, Bevan Beeps, Lament for the Living, Aloof Spoo (released in 1999)
- 2/27/62 **Tadd Dameron Orch:** Our Delight, Dial B For Beauty, Bevan's Birthday (LP: *The Magic Touch*)
- 3/9/62 **Tadd Dameron Orch:** On A Misty Night, Swift As The Wind, Fontainebleau (LP: *The Magic Touch*)
- 4/16/62 **Tadd Dameron Orch:** Just Plain Talkin', Look, Stop And Listen, If You Could See Me Now, You're a Joy (LP: *The Magic Touch*)
- 6/19/62 **Milt Jackson Orch. with Clark Terry:** 'Round Midnight, The Dream Is You, If You Could See Me Now
- 7/3-8/62 **Benny Goodman Orch (in Moscow):** Swift As The Wind, Fontainebleau
- 7/5/62 **Milt Jackson Orch:** Echoes, If I Should Lose You
- 7/16/62 **Sonny Stitt and The Top Brass:** See See Rider, Hey Pam
- 5/7/64 **Chet Baker Quintet:** Tadd's Delight, Mating Call, Gnid, Soultrane, Whatever Possessed Me, Walkin'
- 1/14/65 **Chet Baker Sextet:** Baby Breeze
- (Dameron died March 8, 1965)
- 8/23-29/65 **Chet Baker Quintet:** Bevan Beeps, Choose Now, So Easy, The 490, Lament For the Living, Romas, On a Misty Night

Discography Source: Ian MacDonald

## 11. Meet Benny Bailey

**L**et me introduce you.  
I've heard that boredom's entered your life,  
And you're feelin' real low.  
Have you met Benny Bailey?  
Well, he's a fella that you should know...

These lyrics by Jon Hendricks, who grew up in Toledo, were written about jazz trumpeter Benny Bailey, who grew up on East 36th Street between Cedar and Central Avenues in Cleveland.

*...You must meet Benny Bailey,  
At least he's somebody who's hip...*

There are many who have ranked Benny Bailey among the best jazz trumpet players in the world. But because he moved to Europe in the early 1960s and spent most of his professional life there, most Americans, even many ardent jazz fans, did not know him.

### Early musical influences

Bailey was born in Cleveland in 1925. His father played saxophone as a hobby. His mother played piano. Benny started playing the flute, but while he was growing up, he listened to records of such jazz trumpeters as Louis Armstrong and Roy Eldridge, and pianist Fats Waller.

Evelyn Freeman, who was leading a teenaged jazz band in Cleveland at the time, remembered, "Benny came to me one day. He was a little fellow, raggedy as he could be, and he could play only one song, 'Sleepy Lagoon.'" She told me, "He played it for me and I recognized that he had talent. I took him into my band and taught him how to read music."

During an interview at the 1992 Tri-C JazzFest, Bailey told me, "When I was a kid, I used to try to copy some of Roy Eldridge's solos like 'Rockin' Chair' and 'After You've Gone.' That one really knocked me out!



Benny Bailey

'Little Jazz' was all fire, fast, like magic!" Bailey also listened to older Cleveland trumpet players Tommy Enoch and Freddie Webster. Webster was eight years older than Bailey and had already made a name for himself playing with the bands of Earl Hines and Jimmie Lunceford. Bailey said, "Webster was an influence on all the younger trumpet players in Cleveland. I was fascinated by his type of playing. He had something of a Eldridge flavor – not a growl – but sort of a buzz on certain sounds." Enoch, who had come to Cleveland from Pittsburgh, later played with Earl Hines' legendary 1942 orchestra.

Bailey said he was also influenced by a Cleveland trumpeter named Hubert Kidd who played with a family group called the Kidd Brothers. Bailey called Kidd "a real virtuoso on the trumpet." Bailey told me, "Kidd was one of the most fantastic trumpet players I ever heard."

### Bailey's first band

Bailey was still a student at Cleveland's East Tech High School when he formed a band called the Counts of Rhythm. "I remember the first gig we had," said Bailey, "we got paid in hot dogs. We didn't want any money. We lived at home and didn't need any money. We had fun. We would copy Louis Jordan, the arrangements, everything. He was very popular in those days and it was fairly simple to copy. We just copied the records and played dances." Other members of the Counts of Rhythm included bassist Vic MacMillan and saxophonist Willie Smith. They played at such spots as Cedar Gardens and Club Rendezvous on Cedar Avenue. Among the younger musicians who followed Bailey and his band was Bobby Few who also later moved to Europe and spent years in Paris playing piano with soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy.

While leading the Counts of Rhythm, Bailey remembered one time when Dizzy Gillespie was in town. Dizzy was jamming in a room at the Majestic Hotel at East 55th and Central. Tadd Dameron came in and Bailey's local idol, Hubert Kidd, arrived. "He brought his horn and sort of traded choruses with Dizzy. At that time, Dizzy was something else, untouchable, playing impossible things, and Hubert Kidd actually sounded good. They had different styles, but Kidd held his own."

Besides hearing Kidd with Gillespie, that hotel jam session had a strong effect on young Bailey. He remembered Bud Powell and Eddie "Clean Head" Vincent were also there. When Dizzy began playing in his new style of bebop, Bailey remembered thinking, "What's happening here?" It was so different from anything I had ever heard, totally different! At first, I thought he was missing notes. I thought to myself, 'What the hell?! What's happening?' But the more I listened, the more fascinated I became with it. It was something I



couldn't put my finger on, but it was totally different from anything I had heard."

## With Scatman Crothers

Willie Smith, who grew up with Bailey, remembered, "We were working at a club in Akron. Scatman Crothers came into town and he was looking for some musicians. So he hired me and Benny. We played there over a year (1944) with him, playing shows and playing the club."

Crothers, a drummer who later became better known as a dancer, got an opportunity to go to Hollywood. He took Bailey and Smith with him. Smith said they stayed on the West Coast for several years.

In Los Angeles, Bailey remembered, "I got a chance to hear Miles (Davis) and Bird (Charlie Parker), the real source of everything. There were sessions every night at a place called the Casablanca. Actually what the cats would do was try to find out where Bird was gonna be on any particular night and everybody would try to be there. They had sessions at Billy Berg's every Sunday. You could just listen to music all the time all over the place."

Vic MacMillan, who had played with Bailey and Smith in Cleveland, got a chance to play bass on one record with Parker. Bailey remembered, "Parker happened to hear Vic and said, 'Come on, make a record with me tomorrow.'" The record was Parker's "Ornithology," an all-time jazz masterpiece. Bailey said, "It was the only record MacMillan ever made and it's great."

While many young musicians at the time were listening to and trying to copy Duke Ellington, Bailey said, "I just never listened to Ellington or a lot of the older musicians at that time. I had my hands full keeping up with bebop which was pretty fast action."

Smith said, "Music was all that Benny thought about. He used to wake up in the morning, grab his trumpet from the table next to the bed and practice for an hour before getting up." Smith, who wanted to sleep, said, "It used to bug me." Years later, Bailey admitted, "I still do that before I eat breakfast. It gets me set for the day."

All the early playing and practicing paid off. Bailey was hired by the Jay McShann band in 1947.

## Joined Gillespie's band

Later that year, Bailey joined Dizzy Gillespie's big band for a tour of Europe. Bailey told me it was fellow Clevelander William "Shep" Shepherd, who was already playing with Gillespie, who got him into Dizzy's band. Joe Wilder had left the band and Bailey heard they

needed a new trumpet player for the European tour. "I wanted to go to Europe," said Bailey. "Dizzy didn't know me from Adam, but Shep told him, 'I know this guy from Cleveland who can play.' They had a rehearsal in the basement of a theatre. So I just went in and started playing bebop licks. Dizzy said, 'Who's this guy?' Shep said, 'Oh, he's from Cleveland.' Dizzy said, 'Okay, want a job?' So I had the gig."

"Benny always had a distinctive style," said Smith. "He can play so high with so much strength

and has such dynamic chops!" He developed an instantly recognizable mannerism of dropping two octaves in the space of one note. Bailey said years later he often caught himself subconsciously playing some of the "glitches" and "twists" he had heard Freddie Webster playing in Cleveland in the 1940s.



Courtesy of Ulf Abjornsson

**Benny Bailey (wearing glasses) with the members of the Carl-Henrik Norin group in Stockholm, Sweden in the 1950s**

## Back to Europe with Lionel Hampton

Bailey and Smith joined the Lionel Hampton Orchestra in 1949. Bailey led the brass section and Smith did a lot of the writing. Bailey stayed with the Hampton Orchestra for four years despite frequent arguments with Hampton's wife Gladys who, according to Smith, "really ran the band." After going to Europe with Hampton, Bailey decided to stay there. When Bailey left the Hampton band, he was replaced by Fats Navarro.

In 1953, Bailey began playing with Harry Arnold's band on Swedish radio. He soloed on a recording of "Royal Garden Blues" with Arnold's band in November of 1956.

While playing with Arnold in Stockholm, Bailey also played and recorded with a small group led by Carl-Henrik Norin, an excellent tenor saxophonist with the Arnold Orchestra. Norin's son, Bo Norin, told me Bailey played with his father's group from 1956 to 1962. Bailey also made a film in Germany with Oscar Pettiford before returning to the United States in 1959.

## With Quincy Jones

In 1959, Bailey joined the band of Quincy Jones who, after leaving Gillespie and Hampton, had been arranging for various bands including Count Basie and Cleveland Ray Anthony. With Jones' orchestra, Bailey went on a world-wide tour, including six months in the United States and – as luck would have it – back to Europe. In Paris, Bailey made several records with the Jones Orchestra including “A Parisian Thoroughfare” which featured Bailey's muted trumpet.

It was Jones who composed the instrumental salute to the Cleveland. He called it “Meet Benny Bailey.” Hendricks later wrote the vocalese lyrics to match Bailey's improvised trumpet solo. “Meet Benny Bailey” became a favorite of the band and, in time, became a big band standard and a jazz classic.

*... He's the kind o' cat people hear about,  
But in a second-handed way,  
That there's nothing really clear about...*

Jones said of Benny, “His sound is very personal and he completely avoids clichés. Above all, he is thrillingly himself. He is totally uninhibited and will get all kinds of sounds out of his horn to get his message across. He combines fantastic breath control, remarkable range and a flawless technique, and really composes as he plays – like Milt Jackson – so that his solos are not just anthologies of licks.”

Trumpeter Freddie Hubbard told me, “Benny Bailey once picked up my trumpet and I had one of those mouthpieces with a hole in it for the electric attachment to a speaker amp. I lost the button (that covers the hole). Benny held his finger over the hole and blew like it was never missing. I looked at him and said, ‘Man, he's playing!’ You gotta have a lot of wind to do that even with your finger on the hole.”

Bailey was 35 years old when he made his first record as a leader. Recorded in 1960 for Candid Records, *Big Brass* featured Benny's trumpet on arrangements by Quincy Jones with a hard-swinging rhythm section consisting of pianist Tommy Flanagan, bassist Buddy Catlett and drummer Arthur Taylor.

## Moved to Europe

Bailey decided to move to Europe permanently in 1961. Why? Bailey hinted several times that one of the reasons was the growing popularity of drugs by jazz musicians in the United States. Gillespie, in his memoirs, recalled, “Dope, heroin abuse, really got to be a major problem during the bebop era, especially in the late '40s and a lotta guys died from it.” Smith said, “We talked about it a lot and Benny told me, ‘I wanted to get away from all the drugs and stuff being used (in America). All

my friends were getting high. If I had stayed here, I'd have to have become a hermit to stop because as soon as I saw somebody I knew, I'd be drawn into the circle again. So I just tried to separate myself from it completely.”

Smith also said, “He wanted me to come with him. He said Americans don't appreciate jazz musicians as much as Europeans do.”

In 1961, shortly after moving to Europe, Bailey married a Swedish girl. They raised a son and a daughter.

## Playing in Europe

He quickly became one of the most respected jazz musicians in Europe, doing all sorts of studio work in Sweden, Germany and Switzerland. From 1961 to 1963, he was a member of the Berlin Radio Orchestra. From 1963, when he moved to Munich, to 1968, he played with the Max Greger Orchestra. In 1969 he moved to Switzerland and became the lead trumpeter in the Radio Swiss Romande Orchestra based in Geneva.

At times in Europe, Bailey performed with other Cleveland expatriates including trombonist Jiggs Whigham, Rick Kiefer and Bob Lanese.

In November of 1969, Bailey played with the Duke Ellington Orchestra during Ellington's 70th birthday tour of Europe. The band played 32 cities in 35 days. Bailey performed with the Ellington band in seven of the European cities – Rotterdam, Holland; Berlin, Germany; Malmo, Sweden; Cologne, Germany; Pescara, Italy; Bologna, Italy; and Lausanne, Switzerland.

In the early 1970s, Bailey recorded with the revolutionary Kenny Clarke-Francy Boland Band in Cologne, West Germany.

Bailey also made countless records for European record companies. According to Smith, Bailey's trumpet work is on more than 200 records, “but they're almost impossible to find in the United States. I gave him two songs as a present,” recalled Smith, “and to my surprise, he recorded them both!”

In 1987, after returning to Stockholm, Bailey married Janet Norin, the daughter of his former band mate, Carl-Henrik Norin. That marriage continued until 1996 when Bailey was 71 years old.

Bailey went to London in 1988 and recorded an album for Hot House Records. It included a salute to his early trumpet idol, Roy Eldridge. The album was entitled *Little Jazz*.

## Visits to Cleveland

From time to time, Bailey quietly returned to Cleveland to visit his sister Doris at her home on Melzer Avenue and to see his old childhood buddy, Willie Smith.

In April of 1992 Bailey played a reunion concert with





Nancy Ann Lee

**Benny Bailey playing at the 1992 Tri-C JazzFest. In the background are bassist Gary Aprile, drummer Mark Gonder and trumpeter Jack Schantz**

Smith at the Tri-C JazzFest. Smith assembled an all-star 18-piece big band to perform with Bailey. During that concert, Bailey played "T and M" with a huge trumpet coda, "Solar," "I Remember Clifford" in honor of Clifford Brown, "But So Far" and Dizzy Gillespie's "Groovin' High." Bailey also sang Bunny Berigan's classic "I Can't Get Started" and Billy Strayhorn's "Take the 'A' Train." Also performing with Bailey in a small group after the intermission were saxophonist Bobby Watson, pianist Ace Carter, drummer Victor Lewis and bassist Richard Davis.

*Plain Dealer* reviewer Nick Charles wrote, "All who attended can now attest to this local legend's unlimited worth. Welcome home Benny Bailey!"

Bailey admitted he had been away for a long time. He said, "When you leave, you have images in your mind and when you come back and everything is different. It's shocking. We drove by the old corner drug store and it's not there any more!"

If Bailey had remained in the United States, many believe the trumpeter from Cleveland might have become one of the biggest names in jazz. There is little doubt he was one of Cleveland's most important contributions to jazz.

*... We're happy you got to meet Benny Bailey,  
I'm happy fin'ly meeting with you.*

## Benny Bailey Selected Discography

- 1946-49 *Giants of Jazz* (ITA)
- 1947 - *Bebop Enters Sweden*
- 1948 - *Dizzy Gillespie and Max Roach in Paris*
- 1949 - *Lionel Hampton & Gene Krupa* (Forlane)
- 1951 - *The Blues Ain't News to Me*
- 1952 - *In Paris* (Vogue)
- 1952 - *The Artistry of Stan Getz* (Polygram)
- 1953 - *Oh, Rock! Live* (Natasha)
- 1955 - *Lionel Hampton and His New French Sound*
- 1957 - *Big Band Concert* (Dragon)
- 1958 - *Quincy Jones: Jazz Round Midnight* (Polygram)
- 1958 - *Stockholm Jam Session, Vols. 1 & 2* (Steeplechase)
- 1959 - *Benny Bailey Plays*
- 1960 - *O Live in Paris Circa 1960* (Warner Bros.)
- 1960 - *Newport Rebels* (Candid)
- 1960 - *Big Brass* (Candid)
- 1960 - *Our Kinda Strauss*
- 1960 - *Swiss Radio Days Jazz Serites, Vol. 1* (TCB)
- 1960 - *Rights of Swing* (Candid)
- 1960 - *I Dig Dancers*
- 1961 - *Great Wide World of Quincy Jones: Live!*
- 1961 - *The Eddie Harris Anthology* (Rhino)
- 1962 - *Live in Sweden*
- 1965 - *Great Moments in Jazz* (Atlantic)
- 1968 - *Soul Eyes: Jazz Live at the Domicile Munich*
- 1969 - *Three Latin Aventures*
- 1969 - *Swiss Movement* (Rhino)
- 1976 - *Islands* (ENJA)
- 1976 - *Serenade to a Planet*
- 1977 - *Sophisticated Giant* (Sony)
- 1978 - *Grand Slam* (Storyville Records)
- 1978 - *Home Run* (Storyville)
- 1978 - *East of Isar*
- 1980 - *De Lawd's Blues*
- 1981 - *Trumpets in Modern Jazz* (ENJA)
- 1981 - *Upper Manhattan Jazz Society* (ENJA)
- 1981 - *Compact Jazz: Quincy Jones* (Polygram)
- 1984 - *The Mystery of Man*
- 1984 - *Lightrin'*
- 1986 - *Heavy Nights*
- 1989 - *Berlin Contemporary Jazz Orch.* (EMC)
- 1990 - *While My Lady Sleeps*
- 1991 - *Miles & Quincy Live at Montreux* (Warner Bros.)
- 1993 - *Mambo 2000* (ENJA)
- 1994 - *No Refill* (TCB Music)
- 1995 - *Angel Eyes*
- 1995 - *Mainstream Masters* (Jazz Hour)
- 1996 - *I Thought About You*
- 1996 - *Peruvian Nights* (TCB Music)
- 1996 - *Hamp: The Legendary Decca Recordings* (GRP)
- 1998 - *Ool-Ya-Koo* (DNA)
- 1998 - *Uno Dos Tres: Latin Jazz Grooves* (Polygram)
- 1998 - *Rights of Swing* (ITA)
- 1998 - *Bravissimo, Vol. 2: 50 Years of NDR Big Band* (ACT Music)
- 1998 - *The Bag Is Packed* (Timeless)
- 1998 - *Atlantic Jazz: Classics* (Rhino)
- 1999 - *Jazz Is Universal/After This Message* (Collectables)
- 2000 - *The Satchmo Legacy* (ENJA)
- 2000 - *Clarke-Boland Big Band Western Suite* (Collectables)
- 2000 - *Platinum Jazz, Vol. 1* (Artists Only)
- 2000 - *Stan Getz' Finest Hour* (Polygram)
- 2000 - *The Gold Collection: Sings the Poetry of Pope John Paul II* (Fine Tune)
- 2000 - *Groovin' High*

## 12. Cleveland Jazz Clubs



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives

A 1942 photo of Cedar Gardens at East 97th and Cedar

If you wanted some live entertainment in Cleveland, “you could always find it,” said longtime Cleveland jazz enthusiast Neimiah “Chief” Story. “There was never any dearth of music in Cleveland. You could leave one corner, where they had a little four or five-piece band, and walk a block or two and find another one.”

Nightclubs that present live jazz seem to come and go almost as quickly as the seasons. Over the years there have been thousands in Cleveland. But there have been some that continued to present jazz for years and some remain vivid in the memories of musicians and fans for the outstanding artists they offered.

From the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, there were at least 15 Cleveland clubs presenting many of the biggest national names in jazz, frequently for engagements that lasted for a week or two.

Veteran Cleveland trumpeter Kenny Davis recalled that Cleveland’s University Circle area in the early 1960s “was like a smaller version of New York’s 52nd Street.” He said, “You would always see musicians walking along the streets with their instruments and you’d see well-dressed white people walking up and down Euclid Avenue. Nobody would ever bother them because they knew they were there to play and to listen to the music.”

Cleveland’s rich tradition of live jazz began in the 1920s and it continues today, although in a somewhat different form, mainly because of the economics of presenting live music.

### Golden Pheasant Restaurant

For some reason, Chinese restaurants were among the first to present live jazz – not just in Cleveland, but across the country. In the 1920s, the Bamboo Gardens, a Chinese restaurant at East 88th and Euclid, featured a dance band led by Emerson Gill.

But the best known Chinese restaurant in Cleveland to present jazz was the Golden Pheasant next door to the Winton Hotel on Prospect Avenue just east of East 9th Street. The Austin Wylie Orchestra played at the Golden Pheasant for years. Members of his band in the late 1920s included such future national star musicians as Artie Shaw, Claude Thornhill and Tony Pastor.

Bunny Berigan played with the Hal Kemp band at the Golden Pheasant in 1930.

In the early 1930s, Red Nichols, who had become a national name recording with his “Five Pennies,” played at the Golden Pheasant and originated a series of national radio broadcasts from the Prospect Avenue restaurant.

### Cedar Gardens

Another spot that began as a Chinese restaurant became a longtime favorite spot for jazz. Veteran Cleveland saxophonist Andy Anderson recalled going to the restaurant, then called the Butterfly Inn, in the late 1920s and early ‘30s. “After parties and school proms,” said Anderson, “we would go to the Chinese restaurant (at East 97th and Cedar) to get something to eat.”





A newspaper ad for Cedar Gardens

You got enough room downstairs!

"Hecht opened up that cellar door and that was the entrance into the basement. He made a nightclub out of it." He called his new nightclub Cedar Gardens. It opened in 1934.

The club soon featured a seven-piece band led by Marion Sears, the brother of Al Sears, who later spent years playing with the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Members of that early Cedar Gardens band were Anderson, Horace Adams, Bobby Smith, Buster Harding (who later composed "9:20 Special"), James Peck and Francis Williams (who later played with Duke Ellington). Later members of the Marion Sears Orchestra at Cedar Gardens included Earle Warren, Freddie Webster, Tadd Dameron and Benny Bailey.



Courtesy of June Harding

#### Cedar Gardens performers in the 1930s

Cedar Gardens became Cleveland's version of Harlem's Cotton Club, with a band, a full floor show, dancers and singers. At the peak of its popularity, Anderson said Cedar Gardens was presenting shows seven nights a week.

While the club was located in a black neighborhood of Cleveland, it, like New York's Cotton Club, attracted

many white customers. Trumpeter Earl Douthitt said, "If it hadn't been for the white trade, they would have closed up. The white people came around in their cars and by cab."

Cedar Gardens flourished in the late 1930s and early '40s. But, John Mosely, who grew up on Cedar Avenue, said, "For some reason, it didn't fare too well in the late '40s." Douthitt said some customers were getting beaten up and their cars stolen. "That killed the business," he said, but Cedar Gardens continued to feature local jazz groups until the late 1960s when it closed.

### Elite Club

Just across the street from Cedar Gardens (at East 97th and Cedar) was another nightclub that featured jazz. It was called the Elite Club.

Anderson remembered, "Phil Taylor had the bar on the corner upstairs. He'd have ten-piece bands up there and floor shows. The floor shows went until three o'clock in the morning."

Pianist Al Lerner, who later played with the Harry James Orchestra, remembered hearing trumpeter Freddie Webster playing at The Elite Club. Lerner said, "They called it 'The E-Light Club.'"

Cleveland trumpeter Benny Bailey, younger than Webster, said he played there as a teenager with a group called the Counts of Rhythm.

Douthitt recalled, "All them big time gamblers and everybody used to come by the Elite Club and Cedar Gardens at one time or another."

Years later, Douthitt, who as a boy sold newspapers at the corner of 97th and Cedar, still remembered the crowds at Cedar Gardens and the Elite Club.

### Club Rendezvous

A few years later, next door to Cedar Gardens, Caesar Dameron, a musicians' union official and brother of Tadd Dameron, opened a club called the Club Rendezvous. Some said it was the headquarters of Caesar's numbers operation. But it was also a popular spot for live jazz.

Veteran musician Byron Smith recalled, "This was one of the main jazz clubs. Everybody used to come through there, everybody you can name, all the top stars."

Neimiah "Chief" Story said The Club Rendezvous was a popular spot for big bands as well as small groups. Story remembered seeing the Lionel Hampton band at the Rendezvous.

Club Rendezvous was also the launching pad for many young local musicians. Trumpeter Bailey and his boyhood friend, saxophonist Willie Smith, who later arranged for Lionel Hampton, played there with the Counts of Rhythm.

In the 1950s, Caesar Dameron's brother, Tadd, had a club called Dameron's Hut at East 79th and Wade Park.

Kenny Davis, a teenager who lived nearby at the time, recalled, "I was too young to go inside, but I sat outside and listened to the music. The door was open so you could hear them. I remember Joe Alexander, who played tenor saxophone, put a sign, written in crayon on cardboard – 'Fifty dollars to anybody who can blow me off the bandstand.'"

## Turf Club

Also at East 97th and Cedar was a spot called the Turf Club. That's where a 19-year-old Wilberforce College student from Cleveland named Rose Murphy began singing and playing the piano in 1933. At times, when she got the lyrics mixed up, she chirped, "Chi chi." She was soon known as "The Chi Chi Girl." The device became her trademark as she appeared at a variety of Cleveland clubs and moved on to New York and Los Angeles in the 1940s and appeared frequently with bassist Slam Stewart. Her record, "I Can't Give You Anything But Love" sold 2.3 million copies.



**Rose Murphy**

Murphy married Edward Matthews, a onetime waiter at the Cleveland Athletic Club, who became her business manager and later, president of a record company in New York City.

Rose Murphy last appeared in Cleveland in 1986 when she sang for the opening of the new Hilton Cleveland South hotel. She died November 16, 1989 at a nursing home in College Point, New York. She was 75.

## Majestic Hotel

At East 55th and Central Avenue, the Majestic Hotel was the African-American hotel in Cleveland during the long period when Negroes were not permitted to stay in the major downtown hotels. Touring black entertainers, including many jazz artists, stayed at the Majestic when they came to Cleveland. Among the hotel guests in the 1940s were heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis and Indians pitcher Satchel Paige. It was almost automatic that the Majestic presented live jazz in its nightclub.

Andy Anderson remembered, "I opened that up in 1931 when it was the Furnace Room. Bassist Red Callender played in the house band at the Furnace Room in 1934 and '35. Later, said Anderson, they changed



**The Majestic Hotel at East 55th and Central**

the name to the Heat Wave. It closed down and later reopened as the Rose Room."

The Rose Room was the site of Cleveland's most memorable jam sessions. Pianist Duke Jenkins led the house band in the Rose Room from 1952 until 1957 and played six nights a week. "Every Monday from *five o'clock in the morning until ten*, we had what we called "The Blue Monday Party," a jam session that attracted large crowds. Jenkins remembered, "We would work Sunday nights and go up in the hotel and sleep for a couple of hours before getting up for the Blue Monday Parties. He said, "People were lined up outside at five o'clock in the morning to come in. You couldn't get a seat because we had all the celebrities who were working in different clubs and they would come and perform."

Among them were Joe Williams, Ben Webster, Sonny Rollins, Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, Kenny Clarke and Nancy Wilson. When she was still unknown, Jenkins said, "She came into a Blue Monday Party and sang with



Courtesy of Duke Jenkins

**The Duke Jenkins Trio: (L-R) drummer Ralph Jackson, pianist Duke Jenkins, and saxophonist Fred Jenkins**



us. People went crazy because she was so good.”

Later, when she had become a national celebrity, Jenkins was singing one of her songs one night. He had his eyes closed and heard someone say, “‘Would you mind if I sang the second chorus?’ It was Nancy Wilson standing there in front of my piano!”

Another participant in the Blue Monday jam sessions was pianist Erroll Garner. “He came in to sit in with us,” said Jenkins. “He was fantastic!”

While the Majestic Hotel was a black hotel located in a black neighborhood, its nightclub also attracted white audiences. “Sunday nights,” said Jenkins, “most of the judges and their wives were there for dinner. The dance floor was packed all the time.”



**Former Duke Ellington bassist Junior Raglin played with Duke Jenkins at the Rose Room**

A member of Jenkins’ five-piece house band at the Rose Room was bassist Junior Raglin who had played with the Duke Ellington Orchestra from 1941 until 1945. When Ellington was staying at the Majestic, he called Jenkins and invited him to have lunch with him. “He wanted to talk about Raglin,” said

Jenkins. “He wanted to find out how he was doing.” According to Jenkins, Ellington told him, “You’ve done more with Junior than anything I could do.”

“Just the fact that Ellington knew who I was,” said Jenkins years later, “was one of the big thrills of my life.”

The Rose Room “was quite a place,” remembered Jenkins. “We don’t have any places like that any more.” The Majestic was torn down years ago but, years later, Jenkins said, “Every time we drive down there, we look at the corner and still think about the Majestic and the Rose Room.”

## Theatrical Grill

At 711 Vincent Avenue downtown, the Theatrical was not only Cleveland’s longest running jazz nightclub, where almost all the jazz greats performed, it was also the city’s best known and most colorful meeting, eating and drinking spot for more than half a century.

The Theatrical was the anchor of “Short Vincent,” a 485-foot street nestled amid the tall buildings of Euclid and Superior Avenues and East 9th and East 6th Streets.

As early as 1885, there was a music hall at the site later occupied by the Theatrical. In 1913, Isadore Weinberger opened a steak and chop house called Kornman’s on Vincent. It was a hangout for sports and show biz types until 1967. In the 1920s, travelers would spill out the back door of the palatial old Hollenden Hotel looking for nighttime entertainment at a variety of Prohibition Era speakeasies along Short Vincent. In the 1930s, Cleveland Public Safety Director Eliot Ness, who had earlier been an “untouchable” federal agent busting bootleggers in Chicago, padlocked a tavern on Short Vincent after he caught a waiter padding a bill.

In 1937, Morris “Mushy” Wexler opened the Theatrical on Short Vincent. Wexler ran a gambling wire service that provided odds for bookies and was later accused by a Senate committee of being a member of the Cleveland mob. Retired Cleveland newspaperman Julian Krawcheck, who came to Cleveland the same year the Theatrical opened, said, “Mushy was a racketeer in his early years, but he became a gentleman restaurateur and was really a delightful man.”

The Theatrical quickly attracted large crowds of sports and entertainment figures, lawyers, reporters and gamblers. According to *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, Short Vincent offered “good food, underworld gossip, and the odds on almost anything.”

Wexler’s grandson, Jeffrey Spitz, sitting at the bar in the Theatrical, recalled, “This was probably the only place in the city of Cleveland where the judges and lawyers sat with felons. We had a mixed group of people that came in – every judge, every lawyer, and probably every hoodlum in the city of Cleveland hung out here. And when they were at the Theatrical, they were perfect gentlemen. We never had a problem. Everybody got along just wonderfully.”

Longtime *Cleveland Press* columnist Winsor French, who covered the local entertainment beat in a Rolls Royce, once wrote that Short Vincent was “the only part of Cleveland that literally never goes to bed.” He said, “It slows down, but it’s never quiet for very long.”

According to one Short Vincent legend, two regulars were disappointed when they saw a sign on their favorite



**Cleveland Press / CSU Archives**  
**A policeman patrolling Short Vincent in the early 1960s**

bar saying, "Closed for Alterations." One looked at the other and said, "They must be washing the glasses."

In the early 1940s, when a young singer named Dean Martin was performing with the Sammy Watkins Orchestra next door at the Vogue Room of the Hollenden Hotel, he would dash over to the Theatrical to join impromptu jam sessions with the jazz musicians.

Short Vincent was Cleveland's entertainment center years before the Flats. Wexler booked a parade of jazz greats for his Theatrical Grill. In the early years, recalled Krawcheck, "It was almost entirely hot jazz musicians including Bobby Hackett and Jack Teagarden." Teagarden played for two weeks in September of 1959, returned in July of 1960 for a six-day engagement and in August of 1962 for a two-week stay.



**Jack Teagarden playing at the Theatrical in 1959**

Others who performed at the Theatrical included Earl "Fatha" Hines, Gene Krupa, Wild Bill Davison, Oscar Peterson, Dorothy Donegan, Dizzy Gillespie and Billy Butterfield. They didn't come to Cleveland for one-nighters; they were on the bandstand at the Theatrical six nights a week, usually for a couple of weeks.

Jazz photographer Gene Bixby was there one crowded night when Marian McPartland and her trio were playing. It was so crowded that he had to sit behind a post near her drummer. "Geez, this is going to be terrible," he said to himself. "All I'll hear is the drums." But, he was in for an unexpected treat. "Marian came on and announced she had a new drummer named Joe Morello. Bixby recalled, "They were the most beautiful drums I ever heard in my life. I was hypnotized by the drums. I never heard Marian play the piano." Morello later went on to national fame playing with Dave Brubeck's group.

Photographer Bixby said, "Mushy didn't want me to take pictures in the Theatrical because I might take pictures of some guy whose wife didn't know he was there."

The club and the jazz artists attracted dozens of world-famous entertainers including Edward G. Robinson, Victor Borge, Jimmy Durante, Judy Garland,

### Jack Teagarden in Cleveland

11/8/30-1/10/31 -	With Ben Pollack Orchestra at the Hollywood Restaurant
2/8/35-2/14/35 -	With Paul Whiteman Orchestra at the Palace Theatre
12/31/40 -	Teagarden Orch. at Trianon Ballroom
5/2/58-5/11/58 -	Modern Jazz Room
5/5/58 -	Panel discussion at Cleveland Public Library
9/7/59-9/19/59 -	Theatrical Grill
7/11/60-7/16/60 -	Theatrical Grill
11/1/61-11/11/61 -	Hickory Grill
11/8/61 -	One O'Clock Club on WEWS-TV
8/20/62-9/1/62 -	Theatrical Grill
8/29/62 -	One O'Clock Club on WEWS-TV

Milton Berle, Frank Sinatra and Lorne Greene. "Whenever they were in town," said Spitz, "they would come here."

Morrie Fisher, the longtime head waiter at the Theatrical, recalled celebrities who visited the club: heavyweight champion Joe Louis, actresses Jayne Mansfield and Mamie Van Doren, actors Don Ameche and Yul Brynner, and sports figures Boog Powell, Blanton Collier and Billy Martin. Longtime Cleveland jazz enthusiast Ron Watt fondly recalled seeing New York Yankees' manager Martin sitting on one side of the bar with Cleveland politicians and mobster Danny Greene (who was later killed in a mob bombing) on the other side of the bar.

In 1953, while Richard Tuma, a bartender at another Short Vincent spot, Mickey's Show Bar, was sitting atop a flag pole for a month, a tornado ripped through the colorful little street. Tuma hurriedly shinnied down the pole and narrowly escaped injury as the tornado made a shambles of Vincent Avenue, but the Theatrical building managed to survive until seven years later.

Disaster struck the popular gathering place September 13, 1960. Fire broke out in the nightclub. Spitz recalled, "There were fire engines all over Vincent Avenue, Superior and East 9th Street. It was probably the worst fire of the year in Cleveland." It took almost fire hours for the firemen to control the blaze. The building and the Theatrical Grill were destroyed.

"My grandfather was beside himself," said Spitz. "His whole life was here. There wasn't anything we could save except one bottle of Scotch that my dad (Wexler's son-in-law, Buddy Spitz) has at home as a remembrance."

Almost immediately after the fire, Wexler announced he would rebuild. While the construction was underway, Wexler rented a corner bar at the Hollenden and managed to keep most of his employees on the payroll and his regular customers supplied with beverages.

The handsome new \$1.2 million restaurant opened about a year later with jazz trumpeter Jonah Jones performing on the bandstand.



After the fire, Wexler continued his policy of featuring top name jazz artists. The 1960s saw such jazz performers as Clark Terry, Jimmy Forrest, Red Norvo, Urbie Green and Dizzy Gillespie at the Theatrical. Muggsy Spanier, who had played frequently up the street at Kornman's, played at the Theatrical in August of 1963. While he was there, he also played at half-time of a Cleveland Browns football game.



**The "house band" at the Theatrical for several years in the 1960s: Bob McKee, Nancy Ray, Ken Seiffert and Hank Kohout**

After Wexler died in March of 1979, Krawcheck said the music policy changed to include pop performers.

By the 1970s, downtown Cleveland's nightlife was gradually migrating to the Flats, a new entertainment area along the Cuyahoga River. By the 1980s, the Theatrical was the only nightclub remaining on Short Vincent and continued to offer jazz by such favorites as Bill Doggett, Harold Betters and Randy Moroz, who played piano for lunch and dinner. A favorite for many years was Glen Covington. Spitz said, "We brought him in once, then again and again. All of a sudden, we were bringing him in five and six times a year. They don't have entertainers like that any more," said Spitz.

In June of 1990, 53 years after the club opened, the Theatrical stopped presenting live jazz. For a couple of years in the 1990s, Jim Swingos rented the restaurant and made a brief attempt at restoring its former glory. But Swingos did not get enough business to pay the bills.

In 1999, the building was still there but there was no jazz, just a so-called "Gentlemen's Club" featuring scantily-clad girls. Jeff and Buddy Spitz said their building, which housed Cleveland's longest running and most legendary jazz nightclub, was up for sale.

## Alpine Village

Another downtown restaurant that presented live jazz for years was Herman Pirchner's Alpine Village at 1620 Euclid Avenue. While best known for its parties and gatherings of politicians and celebrities, the Alpine

Village also offered live entertainment featuring such jazz artists as Cab Calloway, Pearl Bailey and Artie Shaw.

As colorful as some of these entertainers were, they often found themselves playing second fiddle to the unpredictable owner of the restaurant.

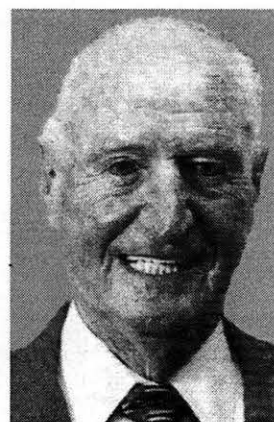
Pirchner was born in a small Austrian village and toured Europe as a circus clown and aerialist. When he was 19 (in 1925), he came to America during Prohibition. He could not comprehend why the United States outlawed "a wonderful beverage like beer." So, with his brothers, Otto and Karl, he began brewing beer illegally in the basements of Cleveland social clubs and selling it to members. Soon, he opened his own beer hall, a Prohibition era speakeasy, at East 81st and Union.

In 1931, after working as a professional wrestler and a boxing promoter, Pirchner bought the Marigold Gardens restaurant at East 185th and Lakeshore Boulevard.

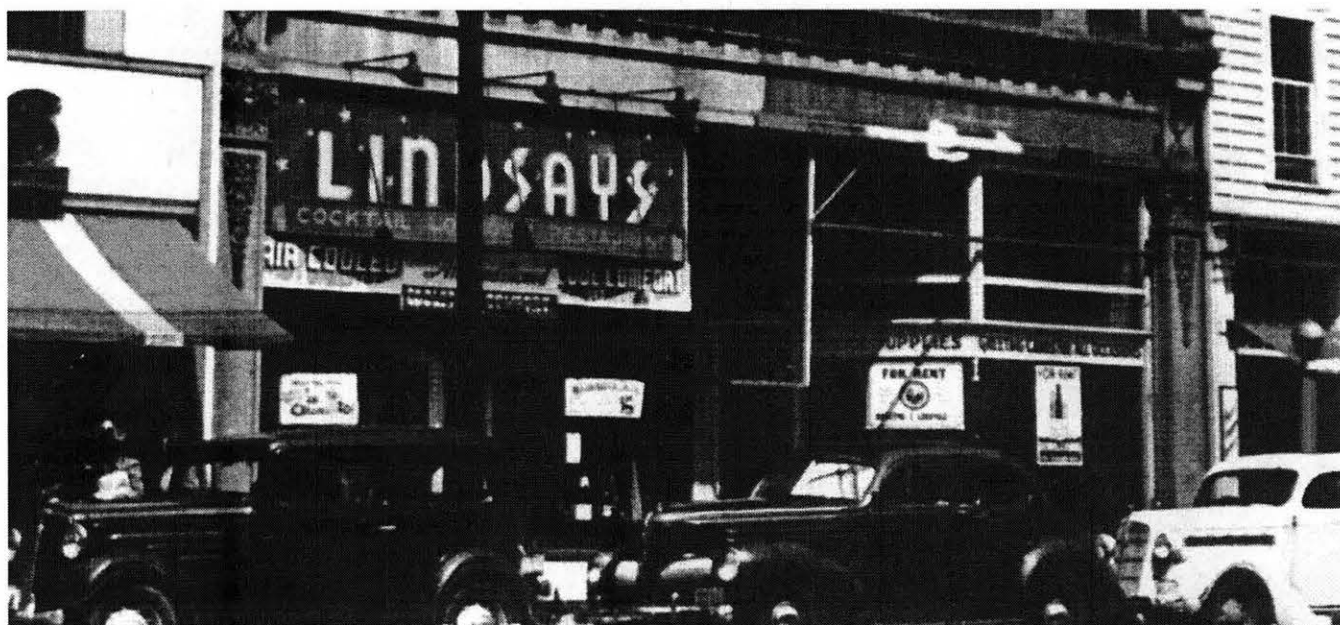
Three years later, he opened the Alpine Village, at what became Cleveland's Playhouse Square. He served good food, had a dance floor that would rise and descend, and hosted a parade of celebrities. Bob Hope and Dwight Eisenhower were among the many who stopped in for dinner. The NBC Radio Network did regular coast-to-coast broadcasts from the Alpine Village and Pirchner's German accent became known across the country.

One day at the restaurant, the manager of the Grotto Circus was complaining about the poor sale of advance tickets for his show. Pirchner suggested, "You should do something sensational, like have Karl Wallenda (the world-famous wire-walker), carry me on his back on the high wire." The circus manager did just that and publicized the stunt heavily. Cleveland's Public Hall was packed when the ringmaster announced what he called "a life or death performance." Pirchner climbed onto the shoulders of the wire-walker and carefully balanced himself as he was carried, without any rehearsal or a safety net, on a tight wire suspended 50 feet above the floor. When the flamboyant restaurant owner came down a rope ladder to take his bows, he fell flat on his face and the crowd cheered.

In the early 1950s, when television was becoming popular and the theatres at Playhouse Square stopped offering live entertainment, downtown Cleveland was beginning to look like a ghost town at night. Pirchner started to lose money with his restaurant, but he kept it open until 1956.



**Herman Pirchner**



Cleveland Public Library

### Lindsay's Sky Bar on Euclid Avenue in the 1930s

#### Lindsay's Sky Bar

Perhaps the most popular and certainly the longest running of the many jazz clubs in the University Circle area of Cleveland was Lindsay's Sky Bar on Euclid Avenue near East 105th Street.

Willie Smith said, "Lindsay's Sky Bar was one of the first clubs to book nationally-famous jazz artists on a regular basis in Cleveland. The Sky Bar was really the first real jazz club. It started bringing in the top stars – Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday and all the others."

On the ceiling above the small stage there were lighted stars. There were also stars on the carpeting. The cover charge was \$1.

The Sky Bar was owned by Phil Bash, his glamorous blonde wife Rickie, and other members of their family.



Courtesy of Jim Prohaska

Billie Holiday singing at Lindsay's Sky Bar in 1951

Operating from 1934 to 1952, Lindsay's presented nationally-known jazz artists in a club setting for years before other jazz clubs began appearing after World War II. As early as 1937, an unknown singer named Frankie Laine sang at Lindsay's. He told me Lindsay's is where he first heard Cleveland pianist Art Cutlip play "Shine," a song Laine later made into a national hit.

Phil and Rickie made frequent trips to New York City to scout and hire the best acts. Among the other jazz artists who performed at the Sky Bar were Coleman Hawkins, Earl "Fatha" Hines, Dizzy Gillespie, Roy Eldridge, Gene Krupa and Oscar Peterson. They were all treated as stars at Lindsay's.

Phil Bash died in 1954, his wife in 2003.

#### Fleets Inn

A popular bar in the late 1930s at East 9th and Lakeside, Fleets Inn, featured a jazz trio with pianist Ray Raysor, drummer Clarence Wetterman and a trumpet player. Veteran Cleveland guitarist Fred Sharp remembered the trio "always welcomed sit-ins." Sharp said he jammed there when he was only 15 years old.

*Cleveland Press* writer Julian Krawcheck remembered one time in the 1940s when he tried to interest bandleader Red Nichols in a girl singer named June Hart who had been one of Frankie Laine's early influences in Cleveland. Krawcheck said he took Nichols to Fleets Inn to hear her. But Nichols showed no interest whatsoever in the girl singer. "He wasn't at all impressed by her," said Krawcheck, "but he loved the drummer, Orly May." According to Krawcheck, Nichols said to May, "I don't know how much money you're making, but if you pick up and go with me right now, I'll double whatever it is." May turned down the offer and stayed at Fleets Inn.



## Gleason's



Courtesy of Jimmy Saunders

**Jimmy Saunders (center) playing at Gleason's with Tiny Grimes (guitar), Red Prysock (sax) and Jerry "Bird Legs" DeWillis (drums)**

For two decades, from 1942 until 1962, one of the most popular jazz nightclubs in Cleveland was Gleason's at East 55th and Woodland. Located in a predominantly black neighborhood of a heavily segregated city, the owner, William "Jap" Gleason, welcomed everybody who loved the music. It was one of several spots in Cleveland at the time where the races mixed freely – to hear jazz.

In the 1940s, Gleason's presented mostly blues performers including Bo Diddley and B.B. King. James Brown, a young singer at the club, also swept floors and carried cases of beer to earn a little extra money.

Eventually, Gleason began booking nationally-known jazz performers including pianist Nat Cole and his King Cole Trio. Ella Fitzgerald sang at the club. So did Sammy Davis, Jr. Jack Teagarden played his trombone there, Dizzy Gillespie his trumpet, Charlie Parker his saxophone, and Ahmad Jamal the piano.

Veteran Cleveland pianist Jimmy Saunders said, "They would have different groups come in. One was Eddie Chamblee. Chief Story remembered Chamblee would walk on the bar while he was playing his saxophone. "And people would have to move their drinks back so he wouldn't kick them over."

At one time, Chamblee was married to singer Dinah Washington.

Story and many others also remembered Big Maybelle, a very popular singer at Gleason's.

Another favorite at Gleason's was guitarist Tiny Grimes who had toured with pianist Art Tatum and bassist Slam Stewart before coming to Cleveland. Willie Smith said Grimes played almost exclusively at Gleason's all the time he was in Cleveland. Saunders, who played piano with Grimes' group at Gleason's, said,

"Cleveland fell in love with Grimes. He had a great saxophonist who was a hell of an entertainer, Red Prysock, and they loved the drummer, (Jerry DeWillis) 'Birdlegs' they called him. Everybody loved 'Birdlegs.' And then, Ike Isaacs was a heck of a bass player. Ike went on to play for and marry Carmen McRae."



Courtesy of Rodney Richardson

**During a break (L-R): Red Prysock, Sir Charles Thompson, Tiny Grimes, Rodney Richardson and Jerry "Bird Legs" DeWillis**

Gleason also brought in such artists as Hazel Scott and Ahmad Jamal.

William Gleason closed his jazz nightclub in 1962 and went into the real estate business. After Gleason's closed, The House of Blues operated at the same location from 1964 to 1967 and also presented a series of jazz artists.

Gleason died April 26th, 1996 at the age of 88.

## Café Tia Juana

In the Glenville section of Cleveland, at East 105th and Massie Avenue, there was a large sign over the front door. It was shaped like a Mexican sombrero and it announced, "Café Tia Juana." The club, operated by the Hoge Family, presented top name jazz artists from 1947 into the early 1970s.

Cleveland Heights resident Bill Anderson, who researched Cleveland jazz clubs for *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, says artists who appeared at the Tia Juana in the 1940s included Gene Ammons, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat Cole, Erroll Garner, Roy Eldridge, Dinah Washington and Charlie Parker. Attractions in the 1950s

included Carmen McRae, Sarah Vaughan and Billie Holiday.

Jimmy Saunders, who led the house band at the Tia Juana, remembered it "was beautifully designed on the inside. It was like a four-leaf clover and they had four bartenders, one in each part of the clover. And the stage revolved. I can remember playing with Miles Davis. He was standing up against the stage post playing, with his legs crossed, and going around and around in circles. It was a very beautiful place."

Cleveland saxophonist Butch Linthicome remembered Charlie Parker playing on that revolving stage. "Man, it was awesome," said Linthicome. "Bird would slowly turn and play the hell out of that horn while he seemed to admire what was happening as he watched himself in the mirrors that surrounded the interior of the club."

Saunders had graduated from Cleveland's Central High School in 1942, served in the Army, and graduated from Howard University. He returned to Cleveland in 1949 and began playing intermission piano at the Tia Juana. One night, guitarist Tiny Grimes approached Saunders and said he needed a piano player for his band. "I told Grimes," said Saunders, "that I did not know how to play in a band. He said, 'Well, you don't have to solo in the beginning, just play some chords.' I said, 'I don't know how to play band chords. All I know how to do is play for a vocalist.' And he said, 'Well, you'll do.'"

Before long, Saunders was leading the house band at the Tia Juana, in the very demanding and challenging job of backing the major artists who came to Cleveland to play one-week engagements.

Saunders remembered the first time he rehearsed with Carmen McRae. "She said, 'You're not playing that the way I'd like for you to play it. Would you mind getting up?' I didn't know she could play the piano. And lo and behold, I suddenly realized she was an excellent pianist!"

The day that the Nat "King" Cole Trio was scheduled to open at the club, "his manager came in, went up on the bandstand, plunked a couple of notes on the piano and said, 'Nat "King" Cole can't play on this piano!' The owner immediately said to Saunders, 'Jimmy, here's \$1,500. Go buy a piano!' I took the \$1,500 and bought a new piano."



Cleveland Press Collection / CSU Archives  
**Café Tia Juana**

Saunders and Cole became good friends. Jimmy recalled, "He had Christmas dinner with me at our little house on Quincy Avenue and when my first son was born, he sent me a congratulatory telegram."

When singer Dinah Washington was appearing at the Tia Juana, she said to the pianist, "Jimmy, I'd like to get a new pair of shoes. Do you know any place where I can buy a pair of shoes?" He took her to Milgrim's Shoe Store downtown and was amazed. "She bought 30 pairs of shoes! Thirty pairs!! And Milgrim's was a fairly expensive store."

Saunders also played for Sarah Vaughan. He remembered her as "a classy lady, beautiful to work with and play for."

After Billie Holiday finished singing one night, he took her and her manager to the Chinese

restaurant at East 97th and Cedar to get something to eat. "It was the only place that was open that time of night."

Other jazz artists who appeared at The Tia Juana included Pearl Bailey, Max Roach, Ray Brown, Ella Fitzgerald and Billy Eckstine.

## Moe's Main Street

Moe's Main Street at East 79th and Euclid Avenue featured a number of jazz performers in the late 1940s and early '50s.

Mel Tormé, at the age of 25, sang at Moe's in 1950. In his autobiography, *It Wasn't All Velvet*, Tormé described Moe as "a thick little man whose entire wardrobe seemed to consist of a navy pea jacket and a woolen cap with a pom-pom."

In July of 1951, Tony Bennett was singing at Moe's when he met his first wife, Patricia Beech, who had just moved from Mansfield to Cleveland. In his autobiography, Bennett wrote, "I could see her from the stage. She was sitting ringside and I was taken with her beauty."

Jazz photographer Gene Bixby remembered one night when dixieland cornetist Muggsy Spanier was playing at Moe's. "Muggsy's wife was in the front row," said Bixby, "and Muggsy ripped off a chorus and his wife stood up and shouted, 'It's too good for the common people, Muggsy!'"

Moe's Main Street was also the spot where the Four Freshmen first performed in Cleveland in 1951. They



appeared with an unknown singer named Johnny Ray, who later became a major national recording star. Freshman Ross Barbour said, "Moe's Main Street was a place where all the entertainers worked. In those days," said Barbour, "Ray would play a song and bang on the piano. Then, 'He'd rip off the front of the piano and throw the keyboard over.'" Smiling, Barbour called it "an exciting demonstration of passion about the music."

On New Year's Eve of 1951, then-unknown entertainers Johnny Ray and the Four Freshmen teamed up to sing "Auld Lang Syne" together at Moe's Main Street.

## Loop Lounge

One of the most popular downtown jazz clubs of the late 1940s and 1950s was the Loop Lounge at 612 Prospect Avenue (near the later site of Gund Arena and Jacobs Field). It was opened by Teddy Blackmon in 1948 and remained in operation until 1958.

Chief Story said, "The Loop was the place to be, especially on Sunday." He remembered seeing Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, Clifford Brown, Tiny Bradshaw and Lionel Hampton at the Prospect Avenue club. Other jazz artists who appeared at the Loop included Gene Ammons, Lester Young, Chet Baker, Johnny Hodges, Billie Holiday, Milt Buckner, Terry Gibbs, Illinois Jacquet, James Moody, Sonny Stitt, Charlie Parker, Ben Webster, and J.J. Johnson and Kai Winding.

Bixby, who photographed many of the jazz greats in Cleveland clubs in the '40s and '50s, said the Loop was his favorite jazz spot. "It was folksy," he said. "Everybody sort of knew everybody else." Bixby said he never went on opening night for a new jazz act because "it was always too crowded and you couldn't get a seat."

Bixby remembered a packed house one night when J.J. Johnson and Kai Winding, riding the popularity crest of their "J.J. & Kai" hit records, were playing at the Loop. Bixby roamed behind the bandstand with his camera to get photographs of the trombonists and their group.

Bixby was also there one night when singer Billie

Holiday and saxophonist Ben Webster were performing. "When it was time to play the next set," recalled Bixby, "Ben had a little trouble getting back up on the bandstand. He sort of stumbled. Billie looked at him and said, 'Ben, you can't play. You're drunk!' That didn't bother Ben at all. He got up and played the whole set beautifully."

Jimmy Saunders, who had led the house band at the Tia Juana and later held the same job at the Loop Lounge, recalled playing for King Pleasure, the singer who made a career out of vocalizing words to James Moody's classic "Moody's Mood For Love." Saunders said, "He had a big throne that he sat on and wore a robe. That was his trademark. He was very popular at the Loop Lounge."

When Saunders was playing with Coleman Hawkins at the Loop, Hawkins said, "Let's play 'Lover.'" Saunders asked, "What key?" Hawkins said, "F sharp."

Saunders told Hawkins, "I can't play that in F sharp." They played "Lover" in E flat that night, but Saunders spent the entire next day practicing the song in every key on the keyboard." That night, when Hawkins again called for 'Lover,' he asked Saunders what key he wanted to play in. "This time," Saunders said, "we'll start in C and we'll go up in fourths when I holler 'change key,' and we'll just change fourths until I tell you to stop!" Coleman laughed. We had a lot of fun. He was a wonderful gentleman."

The following week, Charlie Parker came to the Loop and Saunders was nervous about playing with the saxophone giant. "I

went down to the Record Rendez-vous and spent all week listening to all the records I could of Charlie Parker."

After playing two nights, Saunders said he was feeling very comfortable playing with Bird. On the third night, the house was packed and "there were better musicians than I in the audience when, all of a sudden, Parker starts playing a ballad. I didn't recognize the song. Bassist Rodney Richardson had played with the Count Basie band for four years and with Eddie Heywood for three years and I usually could depend



Gene Bixby

J.J. Johnson and Kai Winding at the Loop Lounge

upon him to recognize a song and call out the chords. Fats Heard was brushing on the drums. I said, 'Rodney, what is he playing?' Rodney said, 'I don't know.' I was sitting there with my hands folded while Parker was playing. Finally, Rodney said, 'This is "Stella By Starlight,"' and he said, 'Jimmy, it's in F sharp.' I didn't know it even if it was in C. All I could do was sit there.

"When Parker finished playing his solo, he turned and looked at me, and just stood there for 32 bars. He stood there in silence. I sat in silence. Nobody was doing anything but the bass and the drums. After the 32 bars, Parker turned around and began playing again.

Cleveland pianist Bobby Few, who later played with the Steve Lacy group in Paris, was there that night and remembered the incident. "I was 16 or 17," said Few. "I walked in the door and Parker was playing with pianist Jimmy Saunders. Some problem arose. Jimmy quit playing and Charlie just kept playing."

Saunders later said, "Parker never said anything to me about it. I never said anything to him about it. But, for months, the other musicians used to say, 'Stella By Starlight' and I thought I was going to lose my mind. To this day, I still don't know how to play 'Stella By Starlight.'"

Drummer Lawrence "Jacktown" Jackson also played with Parker at the Loop Lounge. "Jacktown" said, "It was wonderful! I really felt that my drums were playing *me*! It was just that easy." For Jacktown, playing with Parker was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. "When I first started playing music, I said to myself, 'If I can play well enough to play with Charlie Parker, this is my ultimate goal.' And this is what happened!"

When Parker was off the bandstand in Cleveland, Jacktown said, "He was a devil! Whew! Yeah!" Jackson refused to disclose some of the things Parker did in Cleveland, but other people said the drummer and Parker once spent a night together in the Cleveland city jail following a police narcotics raid at the old Majestic Hotel.

Chief Story remembered one night when Parker arrived an hour and a half late for his gig at the Loop. "Before he got halfway to the bar," said Story, "someone stopped him and started talking. He stood there and talked for another hour. Melvin, the boss of The Loop Lounge, said, 'He'll never play here again!' He never did. Melvin never hired him again."

Photographer Bixby, raised on swing and traditional



Courtesy of Martin Martinez  
**Rodney Richardson**  
at age 83 in 2001

jazz, had trouble appreciating bebop at first. He remembered a night when bop pianist Billy Taylor was playing at the Loop. "He was playing modern piano and it puzzled me," said Bixby.

When the Woody Herman big band played at the Loop, they had to build a special stage to accommodate all 16 players and their instruments.

After the Loop closed in 1958, the Domino Lounge operated in the same location for a few years.

Saunders, by leading the house bands at both the Tia Juana and the Loop Lounge, probably played with more national jazz artists than any other Cleveland musician.

He also made one record, "Jimmy's Blues," a self-produced and self-distributed 78, which sold 250,000 copies. He remembered, "The sales got to be so big that a disc jockey in Akron quit his job to help promote the record. My wife quit her job to help distribute it, and we invested in

a quarter-page ad in *Variety*. The orders started coming in from all over the country – from Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, New York, all over." Because of the popularity of his record, Saunders traveled around the country with his band. One time, while driving from Cincinnati to Cleveland, he was listening to his car radio. "I tuned to three stations and all three, one after the other, played 'Jimmy's Blues.' That was one of my greatest thrills." Ironically, Saunders never saved a copy of his hit record. "I was the owner and the bandleader," he said. "I had a basement full of them, but now, I don't have a single copy." We managed to find a copy for him.

## Leo's Casino

Leo's Casino was originally a bar opened in 1952 by Leo Frank at East 48th and Central. Frank expanded his bar into a jazz room and booked such jazz greats as Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball Adderley, Lou Rawls, Gene Ammons, Sonny Stitt and John Coltrane. But, one night in 1962 when pianist Ramsey Lewis and his trio were playing, the club was destroyed by fire.

After the fire, Leo's moved to Carnegie Avenue. In September of 1963, after Frank was joined by partner Jules Berger, they opened a new, bigger nightclub in the Quad Hall Hotel building at 7500 Euclid Avenue. The new Leo's Casino seated about 700 people and served dinner.

Leo's continued to present top jazz artists but also booked rhythm-and-blues acts and comedians. Dick Gregory called Leo's "the most integrated nightclub in America." Longtime Leo's Casino emcee Freddie Arrington later remembered, "The audience always





Cleveland Public Library

### The original Leo's at East 48th and Central

looked like a great big checkerboard to me.”

There were usually three shows a night Thursday through Sunday and the admission charge was usually \$2. At times, for more expensive acts, it jumped to \$4.50.

Trumpeter Freddie Hubbard said he would never forget performing at Leo's Casino. “Most of the time, (when he was playing with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers) we played big concerts, but this was right in the neighborhood. It was one of the best experiences I've had because the people who came to this club really liked the music and they wanted to hear some jazz. These people were really into the music.”

Hubbard, who spent a full week at Leo's, also remembered, “They had balloons in the ceiling.” He also recalled Curtis Fuller, another member of the Jazz Messengers at the time, “had a bar bill of \$116 one night. He must have bought a lot of people drinks. He couldn't have consumed that much in a week.”

Hubbard also provided a touring musician's view of playing in Cleveland jazz clubs. He said Cleveland jazz audiences were generally more conservative than jazz audiences on the East and West Coasts. “The people in Cleveland,” said Hubbard, “want to hear the real thing. They want to hear the hard, straight-ahead bebopping and the jazz like Coltrane, Bird, Miles and myself play. They're true listeners, not people who go with whatever is hot and commercial.”

Hubbard also said, “When you come to a place like Cleveland, the people want to accept you into their homes and get to know you as a person. In most places, they just want to do business with you and you're gone. That's one of the traits I like about Cleveland. The people are nice people and they want to treat you to a nice meal and treat you like real people.”

By the late 1960s, the costs of booking top name entertainers began skyrocketing. Frank told the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, “We'd pay an act \$3,000 or \$4,000 (for four nights) and suddenly they could get \$15,000 for one night.” Frank sold his share of the club to Berger in 1970 and the club closed in 1972.

In June of 1999, Frank was honored when the Rock

and Roll Hall of Fame designated the Euclid Avenue site of his former club an historic landmark. Two weeks after the ceremony, Frank died of respiratory failure at the age of 71.

### Modern Jazz Room

Drummer Fats Heard, who had toured and recorded with pianist Erroll Garner, returned to Cleveland and operated the Modern Jazz Room downtown near the old Central Market on East 4th Street.

In 1954, it was called the Cotton Club. In 1957, Heard bought the club, renamed it “the Modern Jazz Room” and presented top-flight jazz artists until 1960. Usually playing for a week at a time were such artists as Erroll Garner, J.J. Johnson, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, The Modern Jazz Quartet, George Shearing and Horace Silver.

Photographer Bixby remembered Carmen McRae singing at the Modern Jazz Room. “Those places were usually kind of noisy,” said Bixby, “but when she sang, you could hear a pin drop. She could mesmerize an audience.”

Bixby also recalled Cleveland guitarist Bill de Arango at the Modern Jazz Room. It was after de Arango had become a sensation on New York's 52nd Street, playing with Dizzy Gillespie and others. Despite de Arango's amazing guitar solos, Bixby said he was not impressed at first. “Bill was a puzzle,” said Bixby. “He only played when he took a solo. He never played rhythm.” But Bixby's attitude about de Arango dissipated later when he got to know the celebrated guitarist. “He was a very shy man and I think he didn't want to interfere with the other guys' solos. So he didn't play rhythm. I misinterpreted it.”

On Sunday night, June 24, 1956, The Modern Jazz Room featured an all-star bebop line-up of Clifford Brown on trumpet, Sonny Rollins on tenor sax, Max Roach on drums, Richie Powell on piano and George Morrow on bass. The following night, after playing an informal gig in Philadelphia, Brown and Powell were driving to Chicago and were killed in a traffic accident on the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

Singer Marilyn Holderfield remembered going to the Modern Jazz Room in 1957 to hear her idol, Billie Holiday. Holderfield told *Cleveland Plain Dealer* writer



Clifford Brown

Michael Drexler, "I couldn't believe it. I was trembling. She looked beautiful." When Marilyn told Billie that her parents didn't want her to sing jazz, she said, "Billie Holiday just took hold of my hand and encouraged me. She was so sweet. She said, 'Just do it your way!' And this was the last year of her life. I will never forget that."

Trombonist and singer Jack Teagarden performed at the Modern Jazz Room for a week in May of 1958.

In 1961, the club became The Club Downbeat and featured local jazz artists.

## University Circle

Cleveland trumpeter Kenny Davis remembered the area around Cleveland's University Circle being a mecca for jazz fans in the early 1960s. He said it seemed like there were jazz clubs almost everywhere.

Davis said, "You could park your car on 105th and walk to ten or twelve different clubs featuring live music by Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Billie Holiday and dozens of others.

One night in 1962, Davis and his wife made the rounds. They caught Oscar Peterson and Ray Brown at Leo's Casino; an all-blind group that included Roland Kirk and Eddie Baccus in the front window at the Club 100; and Donald Byrd, Pepper Adams, Sam Jones, Louis Hayes and Herbie Hancock downstairs at The Alhambra.

Chief Story remembered that jazz fans didn't really need a car to hear good jazz. "A lot of people walked from one club to another. You could leave one corner, where they had a little four or five-piece band in the window, and walk a block or so and there would be another one."

## Town Casino

Just down the street from Lindsay's Sky Bar, on Euclid between East 105th and 107th was the Town Casino with two jazz rooms. There was a bar in the front and a ballroom in the rear. Chief Story remembered seeing saxophonist Eddie Chamblee "walking the bar" (getting up on the bar to play) in the front and Lionel Hampton's big band playing in the ballroom. Story also recalled Billy Eckstine and Sarah Vaughan performing at the Town Casino.

Others who performed at the Town Casino included Count Basie, Coleman Hawkins, J.J. Johnson, Sarah Vaughan, George Shearing and Louis Armstrong.

## Club 100

The seemingly endless line of bars with live jazz along Euclid Avenue near University Circle were all competing with each other for customers. Hoping to attract jazz fans, some had their musicians playing in the front window where passers by could see and hear them.

At the Club 100 at East 100th and Euclid one night

in the early 1960s, there were three musicians playing in the window and there was a sign announcing the jazz group. It said, "The Three Blind Mice."

If you walked in and listened for a while, you discovered the three musicians were all sightless. On the keyboards was Eddie Baccus who had graduated a year or so earlier from the Ohio State School for the Blind in Columbus and had moved to Cleveland. Playing drums was George Cook. And playing the saxophone was a 25-year-old from Columbus named Roland Kirk.

After a few tunes, Kirk surprised almost everybody in the Euclid Avenue bar by playing *three instruments simultaneously – in three-part harmony!*

Most of the customers were amazed and amused. Kirk had worked hard to develop the trick fingering and what he called "circular breathing" (inhaling through his nose and exhaling through his mouth at the same time).

Later, after touring with Charlie Mingus and changing his name to Rahsaan Roland Kirk, he became a well-known as a serious jazz musician.

When Kirk suffered a stroke in 1975 at the age of 39, one side of his body was partially paralyzed. But he devised a method of playing two horns at one time, using one arm. Kirk died in 1977. Baccus continued playing for years in Cleveland.

Others who performed at Club 100 between 1959 and 1966 included Clevelanders Gay Crosse, Joe Alexander and Weasel Parker. The club was destroyed by fire in 1966.

## Jazz Temple



A 1963 newspaper ad for The Jazz Temple

About a half-mile east at 11339 Mayfield, near the intersection of Euclid Avenue was the Jazz Temple which was opened in 1962 by Winston Willis. The club,





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### The Jazz Temple on Mayfield near Euclid

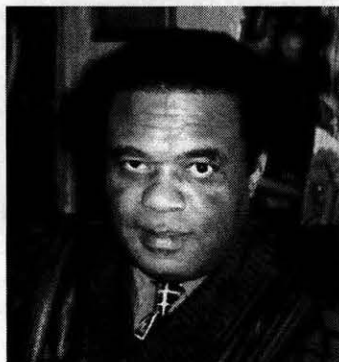
housed in a two-story brick building, also featured many national jazz artists, including Art Blakey, Les McCann, Sonny Rollins, Herbie Hancock, Miles Davis, Stan Getz, Dinah Washington and John Coltrane. Washington sang there the week of July 23, 1963. Coltrane and his group played twice at the Jazz Temple – in February and September of 1963. During the September engagement, drummer Elvin Jones arrived a day late and Cleveland drummer Lawrence “Jacktown” Jackson filled in for him, playing with Coltrane, McCoy Tyner and Jimmy Garrison.

But there were problems at the Jazz Temple. Some people apparently were not happy with the jazz club in the neighborhood.

Trumpeter Freddie Hubbard, playing with Blakey’s Jazz Messengers at the time, remembered a bomb threat at the Jazz Temple. Hubbard told me, “I don’t think the people in the neighborhood wanted the club to be there so they threatened to throw a bomb in the club that night.” But, according to Hubbard, “Blakey told his band members, ‘I don’t care what they do, we’re going to play anyway.’”

“We were playing ‘Three Blind Mice,’” said Hubbard, “while a friend of Art’s came in and danced on nails and walked through broken glass.” The dedicated young jazz musicians did not understand why they were doing what amounted to a vaudeville show at the jazz club. Another member of the band, Cedar Walton, said, “Why are we playing with this guy? We’re supposed to be playing jazz!”

Blakey explained, “This will take the people’s mind



Freddie Hubbard

off the bomb threat.” Hubbard admitted it did just that. Despite the threat, there was no bomb.

But later, there was an explosion at the Jazz Temple (August 13, 1963) and a shooting incident. During an argument one night, singer Gloria Lynne was accidentally shot in the leg. The Jazz Temple soon closed.

Some believe the bombing and the shooting at the Jazz Temple contributed to the end of the jazz boom in University Circle and Cleveland.

Over the years, there were many nightclubs around the University Circle area. Byron Smith remembered, “You had the Sky Bar, the Mirror Show Bar, the Band Box on the corner, Jack’s Place upstairs on 105th, The Club 100 and the Town Casino.” Others were the Cabin Club on Euclid between East 105th and 107th and the Alhambra Grill at East 105th and Euclid. It was owned and run by colorful longtime Cleveland underworld figure Shondor Birns. Also in the neighborhood was the Merry Widow club.

### Jazzman and Superman

A University Circle area jazz club played an unusual role in a significant development in pop culture history.

In 1940, 32-year-old Leo Nowak was a part time jazz musician playing at a club at East 105th and Euclid. During the day, he worked as a graphic artist. To supplement his income, Nowak painted a mural at the club where he was playing. One night, during a break, a man approached Nowak, told him how much he liked the mural, and said he



A Nowak drawing

knew two guys who were looking for an artist. The two had just opened a small studio at 105th and Euclid.

“I just walked right up to the studio and introduced myself,” remembered Nowak. After looking at a sample of his work, the two guys hired him on the spot.

The “two guys” were Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel. They had been childhood friends in Glenville and after graduating from Glenville High School, dreamed up the idea of a comic strip hero who possessed superhuman strength. It took them four years to sell their idea to a comic book publishing company.

By the time jazz musician and graphic artist Leo Nowak walked into their studio, Shuster and Siegel had a big national comic book hit – Superman.

Shortly after they hired him, Nowak was drawing covers and stories for *Superman* comic books. Nowak said Siegel wrote the stories and Shuster "really was not a very good artist." Nowak did much of the drawing.

Nowak drew *Superman* in 1940 and '41 until he was drafted into the Army. After he left, Shuster, Siegel and other artists continued producing the comic book art from their studio at 105th and Euclid. Those *Superman* comic books led to newspaper comic strips, a daily radio program and, in later years, a television series and motion pictures.

After World War II, Shuster and Siegel moved to New York City. But in 1948, after they demanded more money from DC Comics, they were fired and *Superman* was written and drawn by others.

Shuster died in 1992, Siegel in 1996.

Onetime Cleveland jazz musician Nowak, who became successful illustrator in California, died January 6, 2001 at the age of 93.

## Euclid Shore Club



### A newspaper ad for Geer's Euclid Shore Club

"It was kind of a fluke the way it all happened," said Hank Geer as he recalled his unusual jazz club at 17555 Lakeshore Boulevard.

After playing with the big bands of Charlie Spivak, Ray Anthony, Ralph Marterie and Tommy Dorsey, Geer returned to Cleveland in 1949 and went into the construction and development business while continuing to play his saxophone. He opened a small motel with just four units in 1951 not far from Euclid Beach Park. Geer's sister, Bertha Basler, later recalled, "My father built the motel for Henry because he didn't want him playing music out where they were selling liquor."

By 1952, the motel had grown to 36 units. Then Hank decided to build a house for himself nearby. "One thing I always wanted in my own home," said Geer, "was a front room large enough to rehearse an 18-piece band. So I built it."

But Geer soon discovered that his new house was not really a private home in the normal sense of the word. His sister said his many friends from his years on the road with the big bands started showing up.

"Lee Mervin came into town," remembered Hank, "and said, 'I just got in from Canada and I'm broke. Got a place for me to stay?' And I said, 'Yeah, I got a room, come on down.'" Before long, comedian Marvin moved from the motel into Geer's house. And others began arriving.

"One guy said his wife threw him out of the house. He wanted a place to stay. I said, 'What the hell, we'll get another roll-away bed.' And then I had dancers staying there, and other musicians, and pretty soon there were about ten people, all living there, dancers practicing and musicians playing."

Eventually, with so many artists and entertainers living and playing in his house, Geer decided to turn his home into a club. He got a liquor license. The Euclid Shore Club began as a private club in 1955 and membership quickly grew to about 1,500.

Bertha Basler said, "Because they had liquor there, my mother didn't go down to that club for two years." But, it became very popular. "Nobody could find any place like this," said Geer, with all those musicians coming and going and playing music. We started making shows."

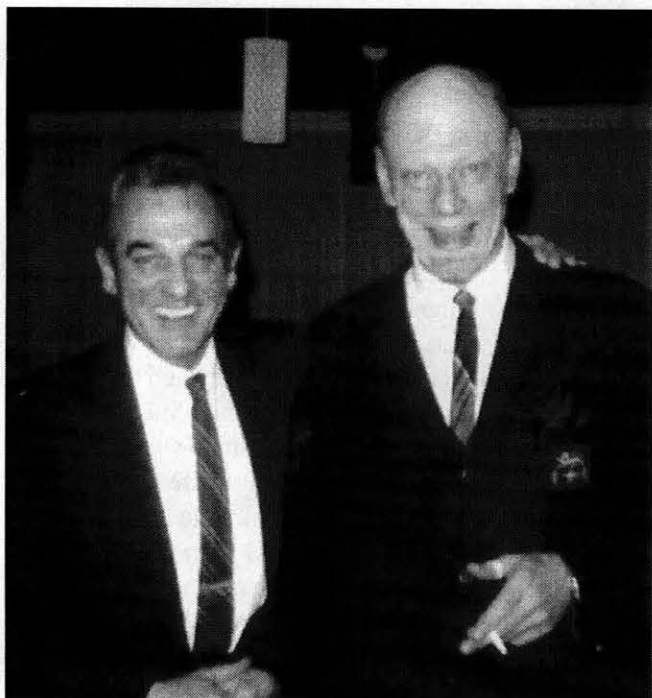
Almost every night for years, musicians and fans flocked to Geer's Euclid Shore Club. Among the regulars were pianists Hugh Thompson and Bill Gidney and bassist Chink Stevenson.

Hank and his sister soon discovered it wasn't easy running a nightclub and restaurant. "It was a 24-hour business," said Bertha. "Henry had to do the cooking if the cook didn't show up. One night, after he cooked dinners, he was playing the organ and the electricity went off. We had to light candles. A short time later, we got a phone call that the motel was robbed — all in one night."

In the 1960s, the club also featured dixieland jazz. Clarinetist Ted Witt remembered playing at Geer's club with a two-beat group called the Forest City Jazz Band. Basler remembered Witt and others, who had been playing for fun in each other's houses on Friday nights, "came marching in one night. They didn't know how to go about getting a paid gig and somebody told them, 'Go to Hank Geer's. Just go in and tell him you want to play.' Henry was playing the organ when they marched in playing. He just laughed about it and, sure enough, he let them play. "We got hired," said Witt, "and we were there for about two years on Saturday nights." Basler said, "They were just great."

Local jazz legend Tony Lovano, known by most of his friends as "Big T," spent a lot of time playing at the unusual Lakeshore Boulevard club. In the mid-1960s, Lovano brought his teenaged son with him to sit in.





Courtesy of Bertha Basler

**Drummer Gene Krupa with Hank Geer  
at his Euclid Shore Club in February of 1967**

Joey Lovano, who later became *Downbeat* magazine's three-time Jazz Artist of the Year, recalled, "My dad first started taking me to some of his gigs and sessions at the age of 13. I would listen and maybe sit in on a tune or two at the end of the night. At Hank Geer's Euclid Shore Club, I first met Bill Gidney, Paul Bunion, Hank Geer, Bill de Arango, Ace Carter, Tony Haynes, Emil Boyd, Chink Stevenson and Eddie Baccus." Lovano said, "I was all ears. These musicians all became my teachers in one way or another."

At times, some nationally known musicians stopped in to play and listen. They included drummer Gene Krupa and singer-pianist Johnny Ray.

Finally in 1972, when Hank and Bertha's mother became ill, Hank decided to sell the club and the motel. Bertha said, "He thought we should quit and just thought we better sell the whole thing and be done with it."

A man named Richard Cerri bought both the motel and the club and changed the name to Cerri's Supper Club. He hired Geer to play there for about a year, but according to Bertha, "He just let it go down hill and didn't keep it up the way we always did."

From 1955 to 1972, Hank Geer's Euclid Shore Club was a major spot for jazz in Cleveland.

### **After-hours jam session spots**

Many of Cleveland's older musicians still believe some of the best jazz was played in the early morning hours at illegal after-hours spots in Cleveland.

The most legendary was Val's in the Alley near East 86th and Cedar where pianist Art Tatum held court for

years. But there were many others.

One of the most popular after-hours spots for a number of years was Jimmy Owens' on Thackery Avenue just off East 55th. Longtime Cleveland guitarist Fred Sharp remembered it was a three-story house run by Owens who was known as the "Black Mayor of Cleveland." Sharp said Owens did not hire entertainers, but many musicians would stop in to join all-night jam sessions. "I remember playing there myself," said Sharp, "and hearing Art Tatum, Ray Raysor and Caesar and Tadd Dameron."

Retired newspaper editor Julian Krawcheck recalled the music at Jimmy Owens' would continue until five or six o'clock in the morning, long after the legal nightclubs had to close for the night. "You had to knock on the door to get in and say, 'Steve sent me' or something," said Krawcheck. Both black and white musicians would join the jam sessions after their regular gigs. Saxophonist Caesar Dameron was one of Krawcheck's favorites. "Never mind his numbers business," said the former editor, "He was a damned good alto man. He was real good. I always thought he was a much better musician than Tadd."

Earl Douthitt remembered, "All the big time entertainers came by." But, when various other after-hours diversions invaded the neighborhood, Jimmy Owens' and some of the other after-hours spots began to disappear. Douthitt said Cleveland Police Chief Michael Blackwell played a role in their demise. According to Douthitt, "The mayor of Cleveland told Blackwell and his detectives to start kicking down the doors because they had a red-light district down there on Thackery and Hawthorne with prostitutes and pimps." It ended the after-hours jazz in the neighborhood.

Another after-hours joint was called the SDCH&Y Club. It was at East 40th and Woodland. Willie Smith remembered, "It didn't open until 12 o'clock at night." Smith said he remembered Duke Ellington and the members of his band came to the SDCH&Y Club whenever they were in town. "We knew that when Duke came to town, this is where all the musicians would be after midnight."

### **After-hour rib joints**

In the view of many Cleveland jazz musicians, various rib joints around town were almost as important to local jazz as the nightclubs and after-hours spots, particularly in the 1930s and '40s. The rib spots did not provide music but they did provide tasty nourishment for the musicians after they completed their gigs.

Fred Sharp remembered, "The rib joints that many jazz musicians used to frequent after work, from 2 to 5 a.m., were part of the jazz scene in Cleveland."

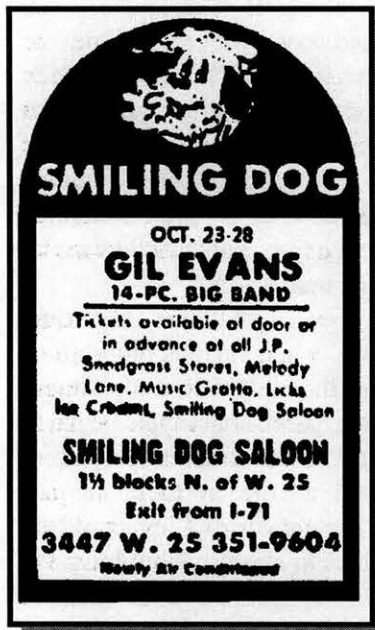
He remembered such Cedar Avenue rib places as Hot

Sauce Williams, 'Bama's, Fraziers, Bob's Barbecue and Cedar Gardens. Other rib joints on Carnegie Avenue were Whitmore's and the Pepper Pot.

Unlike other rib joints, Sharp said the Pepper Pot at East 77th and Carnegie frequently featured local unpaid talent in jam sessions almost every night.

"I remember having barbecued ribs many times," said Sharp, "with Frankie Laine; Art and Dick Cutlip; pianists Ace Carter, Poison Gardner and Lanny Scott; guitarist Willie Lewis and many others." Scott, a nationally known piano player had performed with such artists as Jonah Jones and Coleman Hawkins.

## Smiling Dog Saloon



A 1973 newspaper ad for the Smiling Dog

house band at the Smiling Dog and performed with a variety of touring national artists including Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock and Weather Report. In October of 1973, the Smiling Dog attractions included the Gil Evans Big Band and pianist Bill Evans.

Joe Lovano played frequently at the Smiling Dog when he was a teenager. Lovano said, "I remember hearing a lot of great bands there – Stan Getz, Sonny Stitt with Milt Jackson, Miles Davis, Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, the Keith Jarrett Trio and Quartet." Many played two-week engagements. Lovano said Krivda, Bill de Arango and Skip Hadden played as a trio at the club "and I used to sit in with them."

Lovano told me he got his first big break while playing at the West Side jazz club. "Willie Smith and I sat in with Brother Jack McDuff there in 1975," said Lovano. "I was playing baritone saxophone in an ensemble with four saxophones. Willie was playing lead

The 1970s was a lean period for jazz in Cleveland. There were few clubs offering live jazz. The most prominent was the Smiling Dog Saloon on the West Side at West 25th and Woodbridge, just off Interstate 71.

The Smiling Dog, a former bowling alley, was opened as a jazz club in 1971 by Roger Bohn and continued almost exclusively as Cleveland's site for jazz until 1975. Saxophonist Ernie Krivda played in the

alto. About two weeks after we played a couple of nights with Jack at the Smiling Dog, McDuff called and asked us to join his band and go on tour. That was right when I was first starting to play and record with Lonnie Smith."

Other Clevelanders who performed frequently at the Smiling Dog included vibraphonist Ron Busch, trumpeter Kenny Davis, saxophonist Ron Kozak, pianist Bill Dobbins, and drummer Jamey Haddad.

When the Smiling Dog closed in 1975, the Cleveland jazz nightclub scene was quiet for almost a decade.

After closing his jazz club, Bohn opened an antique shop on Clifton Boulevard. On Tuesday, May 21, 1996, Bohn was found badly beaten in his small shop. He died the next day at the age of 51. Bohn's wife said she had tried to call Roger at the shop, but no one answered the phone. She rushed to the store and found her husband on the floor, badly beaten. She ran next door to a French restaurant and asked the owner, Jim Adams, if she could use his phone to call 911.

Cleveland homicide detectives had very little to go on, but they did find a Lakewood woman and her daughter who had been in Bohn's shop shortly before the beating. They said there was also a man there who appeared to be very nervous. He was still there when the woman and her daughter left.

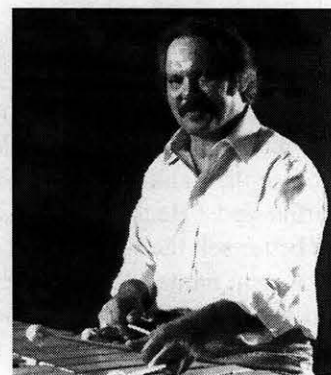
Seven months later, the police charged a 34 year old thief and confidence man. The woman and her daughter identified him as the man they had seen in Bohn's store. But a jury acquitted him and the murder of the one-time Cleveland jazz club owner remained unsolved.

## Bop Stop

In June of 1991, when jazz was making a comeback in Cleveland, bassist Gary Aprile walked into a new and different jazz club and said, "Ron Busch is fulfilling a life-long dream. Busch, a jazz vibraphonist, opened his own club, the Bop Stop at East 40th and St. Clair.

"This club has all the intangibles," said Aprile. "It's owned by a musician, it has the right music, the right atmosphere, and the music is the focus."

Busch, a Cleveland native, began talking about his dream in the 1980s after studying with Cal Tjader and playing on the West Coast with such artists as saxophonist John Handy and pianist Denny Zietlin. The West High School graduate said that someday he wanted to be able to present Cleveland area jazz artists and his



Courtesy of Ron Busch  
**Ron Busch**



own music in his own place, in a setting designed for those who really want to listen to jazz. By 1990 he said, "If I could find a place I could afford, I would give it a shot."

Busch said, "I felt that by no stretch was I breaking new ground. There had been other clubs – the Village Vanguard in New York, Shelly's Mann Hole, and the Black Hawk in Chicago – that made music the focus."

With his partner, Robert Marks, the former manager of the Smiling Dog Saloon, Busch leased a little neighborhood corner bar at East 40th and St. Clair. They painted and decorated the room, set up a small bandstand near the front window, and began presenting many of the best jazz performers in Cleveland. The Bop Stop quickly became very popular with jazz musicians and fans alike.

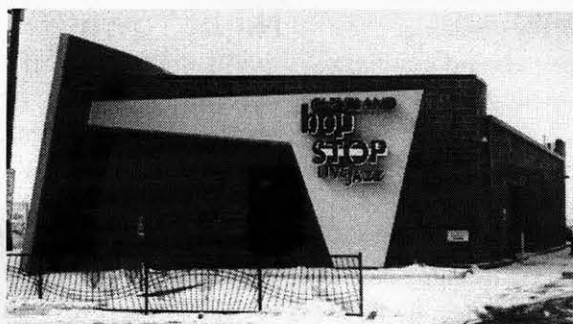
In the first few years, Busch seldom booked more than four or five musicians, but they usually brought some of their friends to sit in. One night he booked pianist Chip Stephens and his trio. "They had played a concert with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra," said Busch, "and ran over here after the concert, got set up, and began playing by 10:30. Then some of the other players from the band, (trombonist) Pat Hallaran, (saxophonist) Chris Karlic and others came in and they all played great. The people here were just in awe at such great music in a little room like this!"

Jazz textbook author Mark Gridley of Shaker Heights said "Busch's Bop Stop had become the mecca for serious jazz fans and musicians who need an inexpensive place that is convenient and unpretentious. It is where they can comfortably listen to live jazz without being distracted by the extraneous activities common to most other night spots." Added Gridley, "Busch runs the Bop Stop with the heart of a musician and the dedication of a jazz fan."

Busch booked his own favorite musicians, all top-flight professionals, many of whom had recorded and toured with national names. His policy bothered some other Cleveland jazz musicians.

"It's not an oasis for all the musicians in town," replied Busch, "but it is an oasis for the musicians who have decided that they're going to challenge themselves. There're a lot of guys who are not willing to take the chance."

The Bop Stop also quickly became the spot for name touring musicians to sit in after their formal performances. Among them were Tommy Flanagan, Bobby Watson, members of Manhattan Transfer and Ken Peplowski. It also became almost an annual event for



Joe Mosbrook

**The third Bop Stop opened  
at 2920 Detroit Avenue March 7, 2003**

world famous saxophonist Joe Lovano, when he came home to Cleveland for Christmas, to spend a night or two playing with old hometown friends at Busch's club.

A Monday night tradition began early at the Bop Stop. Busch said, "I want to have a band and asked trumpeter Jack Schantz to organize one." Schantz put together an experimental 14-piece group

called the Jazz Unit that played almost every Monday night at the Bop Stop.

In 1994, bassist Dave Morgan moved back to Cleveland and stopped in at the Bop Stop on a Monday night. "I was shocked," said Morgan, "hearing players of the caliber of Schantz, Busch, and (saxophonists) Howie Smith and John Klayman. I thought it was incredible. I ran home that night and knew I would have to write for this band." Morgan became a regular bassist, composer and arranger for the Bop Stop Jazz Unit.

Five years after opening his club at East 40th and St. Clair, Busch moved in 1996 to bigger quarters downtown at West 6th and Lakeside in the historic warehouse district not far from the Flats. He also changed the name of his jazz club slightly to "The Cleveland Bop Stop."

After moving downtown, Busch's view of his jazz club changed somewhat. He told Clint O'Connor of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, "We tried to go back in time to create the authenticity of the old clubs. But then, we found out stuff had changed. In the '60s people drank, smoked and stayed out late. But, in the '90s, many people are teetotalers. They want a smoke-free environment and they want to be home by midnight."

Even with an updated approach, Busch was having trouble making ends meet. Anita Nonneman went to his rescue and became Busch's partner. "She saw me starting to sink and threw me a lifeline," said Busch. "She said, 'I believe in what you're doing and I believe in the guys that are doing it with you.'" Busch called Nonneman "his patron saint, a maternal figure for the Bop Stop. If the Bop Stop is my child," he said, "Anita is its stepmother."

In the fall of 2000, Busch and Nonneman closed the club on West 6th Street and planned to move to a third Bop Stop location at 2920 Detroit Avenue by the spring of 2001.

They wanted to restore an old warehouse building, but, in Busch's words, "We found the ground that building sat on was completely compromised with rubble underneath." An old farmhouse from the early 20th century had been collapsed beneath the warehouse

building. So, instead of restoring the building, they decided to tear it down and construct a brand new jazz nightclub from the ground up – the first ever in Cleveland!

The project stretched on for more than two years, but the wait for jazz fans was worth it. About 150 crowded the new Cleveland Bop Stop Friday night, March 7, 2003 and were treated to a state-of-the-art jazz listening room. The central point was the stage. It was ringed by three tiers of tables and chairs configured in a semi-circle with the bar at the rear, a fireplace and large windows looking out to a patio and Lake Erie in the distance. There was not a bad seat in the house.

Busch and Nonneman hired an acoustical engineer to design the stage and a sound system which included a control room. Busch said, "It's a nice clear sound with equipment we control from the sound booth." Musicians on opening night said it would be an excellent place to record.

They also installed an elaborate computer-run lighting system, also controlled from the booth.

When the new Cleveland Bop Stop opened, Busch said he planned to expand his stylistic approach to presenting jazz. Unlike the earlier Bop Stops, he planned to present some singers, Latin jazz, blues, fusion, and even dixieland and occasional national jazz artists.

After the long construction delays, Busch and Nonneman were obviously proud of their new club. Busch smiled and said, "All we have to do now is handle the baby with care and bring in the best music we can."

## Night Town

An upscale restaurant at the top of Cedar Hill in Cleveland Heights, Night Town, opened in 1965 and owner John Barr began presenting local jazz pianists and occasional touring traditional artists.

In 1999, Barr and Manager Brendan Ring, who later purchased the restaurant, hired Jim Wadsworth to book top national jazz artists. Wadsworth began bringing in such musicians as Ahmad Jamal, McCoy Tyner, Ray Brown, Ken Peplowski and the Four Freshmen to perform in the restaurant which seats only about 100 people. Wadsworth said, "The only way to book someone in a smaller venue is to catch them when they are in the territory and when they need work. You make the best offer you can."

The formula worked. As the 21st century began, Night Town was the only Cleveland club presenting top national artists on a regular basis. "We have occasions," said Wadsworth, "when a millionaire is sitting next to a postman and they're both having a great time together. Where else does that happen?"

In 2002, *Downbeat* magazine named Night Town in Cleveland Heights one of the top 100 jazz clubs in the world!

Wadsworth admitted it had become difficult for jazz clubs to continue to exist but said, "The role of the clubs is essential in nurturing talent and providing a workshop for musicians to bring their work along. Some of the most exciting moments in jazz are in the nightclub-type environment."

## Some Long-running Cleveland Jazz Clubs

**Agora Ballroom** - 1730 East 24th Street  
**Alpine Village** - 1620 Euclid Avenue  
**Boarding House** - 11311 Euclid Ave. near Mayfield  
**Café Society** - 966 East 105th Street  
**Café Tia Juana** - East 105th and Massie  
**Cedar Gardens** - East 97th and Cedar Avenue  
**Chatterbox** - 5123 Woodland Avenue  
**Chung's Restaurant** - 21080 Lorain Avenue  
**Cleveland Bop Stop** - East 40th and St. Clair,  
 West 6th and Lakeside, 2920 Detroit Avenue  
**Club Isabella** - at University Hospitals  
**Club 100** - 10020 Euclid Avenue  
**Club Rendezvous** - East 97th and Cedar  
**Corner Tavern** - East 78th and Cedar Avenue  
**Cotton Club** - East 55th near Cedar Avenue  
**Cotton Club** - East 4th and Huron  
**Easttown Motor Hotel** - 15103 Euclid Avenue  
**Ebony Lounge** - 6916 Cedar Avenue  
**Elite Club** - East 97th and Cedar Avenue  
**Esquire Lounge** - 10530 Euclid Avenue  
**Euclid Shore Club** - 17555 Lakeshore Boulevard  
**Gleason's** - East 55th and Woodland Avenue  
**Golden Pheasant Restaurant** - 944 Prospect  
**Hot Spot** - West 3rd and Superior Avenue  
**House of Swing** - 4490 Mayfield Road, South Euclid

**Jazz Temple** - 13139 Mayfield Road, near Euclid  
**Lancer Steak House** - East 77th and Carnegie  
**Leo's Casino** - East 48th and Central, Carnegie Avenue,  
 and 7500 Euclid Avenue  
**Lindsay's Sky Bar** - East 105th and Euclid  
**Loop Lounge** - 612 Prospect Avenue  
**Lucky Bar** - 9812 Cedar Avenue  
**Mardi Gras** - 1423 East 21st Street  
**Mirror Show Bar** - 12376 Superior Avenue  
**Modern Jazz Room** - 2230 East 4th Street  
**Moe's Main Street** - East 79th and Euclid  
**Native Son** - 15301 Kinsman Avenue  
**Night Town** - 12383 Cedar Road, Cleveland Heights  
**Peabody's Café** - Cedar and Taylor Roads, Cleveland Heights  
**Peabody's DownUnder** - Old River Road, in the Flats  
**Rose Room** - Majestic Hotel, East 55th and Central  
**Rusty Nail** - Route 43, Twin Lakes  
**Sammy's** - 1400 West 10th Street in the Flats  
**Sir-Rah's House** - 4170 Lee Road  
**Sixth Street Under** - 1266 West 6th Street  
**Smiling Dog Saloon** - West 25th and Woodbridge  
**Theatrical Grill** - 711 Vincent Avenue  
**Town Casino** - 10613 Euclid Avenue  
**Turf Club** - East 97th and Cedar Avenue  
**Val's in the Alley** - near East 86th and Cedar



### 13. Cleveland Jazz Guitarists

Guitarists who grew up in Cleveland have been among the most important and most acclaimed in jazz history. They all drew their inspiration from the all-time grand masters of jazz guitar, Django Reinhardt and Charlie Christian.

#### Fred Sharp

Anyone who was even a casual listener of jazz in Cleveland from the 1940s to the '80s probably heard guitarist Fred Sharp. He played with some of the biggest names in jazz and was the man Jim Hall credited as his teacher.

In the mid-1930s, when Sharp was growing up in the Glenville area of Cleveland and listening to music on the radio, the guitar, with a few exceptions, was not a solo jazz voice, but a rhythm instrument. Then one day, Sharp heard a Cleveland guitarist on a local broadcast.

"At the time I started studying the guitar," said Sharp, "the only guitar you ever heard was in the big bands. My father used to run in and say, 'Fred, listen quick! Is that a guitar?' That's all I heard until Dick Lurie had a morning radio program and played some solos. He really got me started."

Sharp ran out and bought a guitar at a shop on Prospect Avenue. He remembered, "It was a Regal and cost \$4.95. I bought it at Schubert's Music House on Prospect and I played it until my fingers started to bleed under the nails. I said, 'This is no good!' We took it back and my mother bought me a \$30 Gibson. That same guitar today would probably be a collector's item. It would probably be worth \$300."

He took his first lesson from Max Fischer at Schubert's. With his brother, Jackie, Fred began playing on children's radio programs on Cleveland's old WTAM.

"And I studied," he said, "with Jerry Stone, a buddy of (famous banjo player) Eddie Peabody. I learned very quickly with Jerry. He was in the old Hippodrome Theatre Building. I was with him at least a year. So, I had some formal training, much more than most guitar players today. Now, they pick it up, learn a few chords, and they're off."

It was Stone who introduced Sharp to the guitar music of Belgian gypsy Django Reinhardt, an all-time master of the jazz guitar. Later, Sharp accumulated the world's largest collection of Reinhardt records.

Sharp began playing gigs in Cleveland when he was



Courtesy of Fred Sharp

**Fred Sharp and Babik Reinhardt, the 23-year-old son of Sharp's guitar idol Django Reinhardt, in Paris in 1967**

still a teenager. He joined the musicians' union when he was 16. By 1940, when he was 17, he was playing at parties and country clubs around Cleveland. "I played with bandleaders Clint Noble and Jack Horowitz," he said, but he had bigger plans.

"In 1941, I went to New York to become famous. My father borrowed \$50 on his life insurance policy and gave me the money to go. Joe Sharp never had money at all. In New York, I put in for my union card. You had to stay six months to get your card and I went to the union floor every day and started to get some club dates. The scale was \$7 then for a club date, but most everybody paid \$4."

When he was still in his teens, Sharp remembered he almost starved trying to become famous in New York. "I went broke in no time," he said, "and did not become famous! I

lived in a small room with no windows at 18th Street and 8th Avenue, below a warehouse and above a stable. I rented the room for about \$5 a week. I went so broke there that I was down to pennies. I remember walking down 33rd Street to the main Post Office and going through all the pay telephones to see if I could find any change. I had almost no money!"

He found just enough money to take a cab back to his small room. He planned to clean it out and call his father in Cleveland to send some money for him to come home, but, in the cab, Fred suddenly got lucky.

"I put my hand down on the seat and there was a roll of bills. I think it was like \$50. I didn't tell anybody. I put it right in my pocket. It saved my life! I had 50 bucks and I ate. That lasted two or three days."

Sharp paid \$10.66 for a train ticket to come home to Cleveland. But he returned to New York at least four or five times later, still seeking fame and fortune in the jazz world. He struggled in New York off and on from 1942 to 1944 and finally decided to give up and come home.

In 1945, he met and taught a 15-year-old Cleveland guitarist named Jim Hall. Sharp also formed his own trio in Cleveland. They played at some of the best spots in the city and with some of the biggest names in jazz.

"I had Hank Kohout on piano," remembered Sharp, "and Walter Breeze on bass. We were at Chin's Golden Dragon on 105th Street. Alternating with us was the Art Tatum Trio."

The Tatum Trio included bassist Slam Stewart and guitarist Tiny Grimes, who later spent years playing at Gleason's at East 55th and Woodland. While playing

opposite the Tatum Trio in Cleveland, Sharp finally got the big break that had eluded him in New York.

"The Adrian Rollini Trio came to Chin's and played in the restaurant," he said. "Their guitar player, Allen Hamlin, was going in the navy and Adrian needed a guitar player. He didn't know anybody. He came in and heard me one night and said, 'Can you come to New York?' I said, 'Are you kidding?!'"

Rollini had played with legendary artists like Bix Beiderbecke in the 1920s. By the mid-1940s, he had switched from bass saxophone to vibraphone and formed his own group.

Sharp went to New York with Rollini and toured with him for five years, playing mostly long engagements at top clubs around the country.



Courtesy of Fred Sharp

**The Adrian Rollini Trio in 1945:  
(LtoR) George Nyder, Rollini and Fred Sharp**

One time when the trio was playing at a theatre in Washington, Sharp remembered George Nyder waking up when it was fairly dark outside. He yelled to Sharp, "Hurry! Get dressed! We missed two shows!!" Sharp called the hotel operator who said it was 5 a.m., not 5 p.m.

Sharp made one album and several records with Rollini's group and later played with Red Norvo's big band.

By the 1950s, Sharp was back in Cleveland playing guitar with various groups. He remembered one time when he was working with pianist Chick Chaiken at the Colony downtown. Chaiken was busy performing almost every night somewhere and operating his Currier-Chaiken Music Store and school in Cleveland Heights during the day. "One night," recalled Sharp, "we were playing a tune and he kept repeating the first eight bars. I looked around at him and he was asleep! He had been

burning the candle at both ends. He was the only guy I knew who could play the piano while he was sleeping."

But now, Sharp was playing guitar only on a part-time basis. He had become a successful manufacturer's agent, selling electronic equipment.

He had first become interested in ham radio and electronics through a Cleveland friend named Al Gross, an unheralded Cleveland inventor. In 1938, while still in high school in Cleveland, Gross invented the walkie-talkie. During World War II, Gross invented a top-secret intelligence communications system for the government. In 1949, he invented the first wireless pager and later, the first wireless telephone and citizens band radio.

Sharp was also doing some electronic inventing. He developed a method of transmitting slow-scan color television pictures over ham radio. He also learned to speak French, toured Europe eight times, became an oil painter, and wrote about jazz and electronics for a variety of magazines.

In 1967, Sharp went to Europe and met Babik Reinhardt, the 23-year-old son of the Clevelanders' longtime guitar hero, Django Reinhardt, at the Disques Vogue recording studio in Paris. During that meeting, Babik gave Sharp the guitar his father had played during his American debut in Cleveland in 1946. "I took it to a special packaging company and had it professionally packed," said Sharp, "and shipped to my home in Cleveland." But, when Sharp got home, there was no sign of the historic guitar. About a month later, he went to the customs office at Cleveland Hopkins Airport and learned Reinhardt's guitar had been sitting there, waiting for someone to claim it. The customs officer said they couldn't make out the address and just held it.

For about 15 years in Cleveland, Sharp played with jazz flutist and author Mark Gridley, who said Sharp was one of the best rhythm guitar players in the world.

In 1990, Fred Sharp sold his electronics business and, with his wife Iris, retired to Sarasota, Florida, where he began playing with such jazz names as Bobby Rosengarden, Bob Haggart, Dick Hyman, Jerry Jerome and Al Klink. Other Florida musical neighbors included saxophonist Gerry Mulligan and bassist Milt Hinton.

The Sharps' son, Todd, became a leading rock guitarist. He toured with Bob Welch, Hall and Oates, Mick Fleetwood and Rod Stewart. He also recorded several albums and composed movie and TV scores.

## Bill de Arango

In the late 1940s, Clevelanders Bill de Arango was one of the most respected jazz guitarists in the country, but he suddenly decided to give it up and come home.

Born in Cleveland September 20, 1921, de Arango grew up in Cleveland Heights. He said there was a lot



good jazz in Cleveland at the time. "When Duke Ellington came into the Trianon Ballroom on Euclid Avenue," said de Arango, "the place was unbelievable. It was loaded with heavy energy. Everyone was smiling and sweating. There were 2,500 people dancing and 80 guys standing around the bandstand. Fifty-five of them wanted to be musicians."

De Arango and a few non-musician teenaged friends went to see the Benny Goodman Orchestra at the Palace Theatre and went backstage after the show. "We were standing there with Goodman," de Arango told me, "and my friends pointed to me and told Goodman, 'He can do it (play guitar), he can do it!'" When Goodman returned to Cleveland, de Arango was there again. Bill recalled, "Benny was talking with some guys and he stopped, looked at me, and said, 'Hey, don't wander away!'"

The following year (1939), de Arango went to Ohio State University and began working harder on his guitar playing. Like almost every guitarist of the period, he listened to the records of the amazing young Charlie Christian who was playing with Goodman.

When de Arango came home from college, he was hanging around jazz clubs in Cleveland, particularly the Hot Spot on West 3rd Street near Superior. Eventually he was invited to sit in. De Arango told interviewer Stuart Kollar (in *Northern Ohio Live*, July 1987), "We had good local players in Cleveland and they showed me things. Playing with good people, you get better in a hurry."

After playing in an Army band at Fort Sill, Oklahoma during World War II, de Arango returned to Cleveland in 1944 and resumed playing at local clubs. His technique and amazing speed began to attract the attention of national jazz musicians who came to town. He remembered, "Guys from the Goodman and Artie Shaw bands, when they were in town, kept telling me, 'You ought to go to New York.' So I went."

He soon found himself on New York's 52nd Street, a legendary strip of jazz joints between 5th and 6th Avenues where musicians and fans circulated from club to club. "After listening to some of those great artists, I decided I better go home," said de Arango. "But drummer Morey Feld (from



**Bill de Arango in the 1940s**

Cleveland) introduced me at a few places and I sat in. I guess they liked it." Others said de Arango caused quite a stir on "The Street" with his ability to play at fantastic tempos.

Ben Webster, who had played saxophone with the Duke Ellington Orchestra for four years, "came up and asked me where I was working. I said I wasn't. He said, 'What's the matter, don't you want to work? Come on down tomorrow night. We start at nine.'" De Arango spent a year and a half playing with Webster at such 52nd Street clubs as the Onyx, the Spotlight

and the Three Deuces.

One night when world heavyweight boxing champ Joe Louis walked into a club, Webster, who was nicknamed "The Brute," playfully gave Louis a shot in the belly. The champ staggered and then returned the greeting. Webster was taken to the hospital with three cracked ribs.

De Arango said the jazz musicians did not make a lot of money playing at the 52nd Street clubs, but he said, "It was a good setting for the music."

De Arango soon was recording with some of the biggest names in jazz. In May of 1945, the 23-year-old Clevelander recorded with Red Norvo, Johnny Guarneri, Slam Stewart and Feld. It was almost the same group that had recorded just a few months earlier as the Benny Goodman Sextet. They recorded "A Bell For Norvo," "Time On My Hands," "On The Upside Looking Down" and even "Jingle Bells."

De Arango's style was evolving. He later told me, "I played for the moment – the music that reflected my thinking." He was beginning to assimilate much of the new style of bebop and gravitated toward the bop movement. He said, "What they played was great and the more we played together, the more they put into me musically."



**Bill de Arango playing with Ben Webster and Charlie Parker**

He recorded with Ike Quebec in August 1945. Then came records with Sarah Vaughan, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. His 1946 records with Gillespie's big band included "Night In Tunisia" and "52nd Street Theme." On the basis of these recordings de Arango was considered one of the top jazz guitarists in the country. He won *Esquire* magazine's New Star award.

But he was becoming dissatisfied. De Arango said the

audiences were largely inattentive. The *Cleveland* decided to leave New York. He returned briefly in 1948 and led his own group which featured a then-unknown young vibraphonist named Terry Gibbs, but he decided to leave the national jazz scene.

Years later, when he was asked why he left New York, de Arango was unable to explain it. He said, "I really don't know. It was a great thing then, but I don't know why I left."

He lived in Florida for a while before coming home to Cleveland. He opened a music shop and studio at Cedar Center in University Heights. He studied, taught, and played a few local gigs in relative obscurity, except for a 1954 album, *Alone Together*, which he recorded for EmArcy Records. It included "Gone With The Wind," "All God's Children Got Rhythm," "The Nearness of You," "The Gypsy In My Soul," "Dancing On The Ceiling," "Summertime" and "These Foolish Things."

In the 1960s, de Arango's style continued to evolve. One reviewer wrote, "De Arango's improvisations frequently bordered on complete freedom and some of the most complex jazz with probably the fastest fingering ability in the country." De Arango said at the time he was being influenced by classical composers Schoenberg and Hindemith. He said it was Charlie Parker who had first introduced him to classical music.

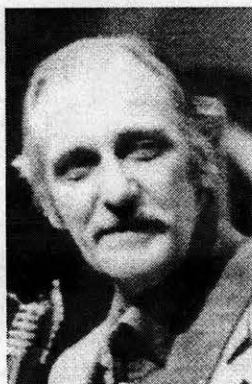
Always outspoken, de Arango said, "Jazz players gave the scene away to rock 'n roll players," who according to de Arango, "worried about *their* importance and put themselves ahead of the music. They (the younger jazz musicians) wanted to play concerts without the heat and emotion that the old thing had. Jazz is not supposed to be cool. The last thing an audience wants to do is sit and intellectualize about the music."

Ironically, in 1971, 50-year-old de Arango was playing with a local Cleveland group called Henry Tree which combined elements of both jazz and rock. In 1983, he recorded a completely different kind of album with fellow Clevelanders Jamey Haddad and Joe Lovano. It was a far cry from his early days in New York City.

Asked about his series of changing styles of playing, de Arango told me, "I don't think of styles. I just want to play music."

Approaching his 80th birthday and living in a nursing home in East Cleveland, de Arango said he did not like much of the jazz he was hearing in 2001. "It's all simple and repetitive," he said, "and they call it 'jazz?!'"

But more than playing, de Arango was teaching. Among his students in the 1980s was Bob Ferrazza, who said, "It was like learning from a Zen master. Sometimes we'd just sit and think and talk about the music in a real deep and serious way." Ferrazza said, "We would do



de Arango in 1981

things that you don't do in school learning music. He would put a record on and just say, 'play!' It was a more inductive kind of learning. It wasn't really deductive at all."

According to Ferrazza, de Arango never wanted to stay with one thing for very long. The young student believed that is why de Arango gave up the national jazz scene in 1948. "I think he was possibly looking for new things musically to do and might have felt a bit stagnated by that scene. He probably thought it was time for a change and came back to Cleveland."

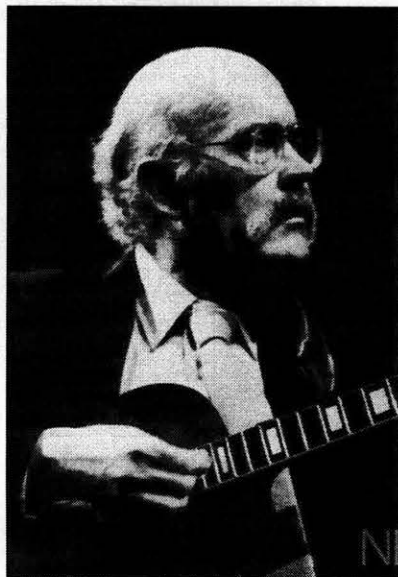
Jazz guitarist Bill de Arango played *his* way for more than six decades and taught countless students some of the lessons he had learned first-hand while playing with such all-time jazz giants as Gillespie, Webster, Parker and Ellington. No one ever questioned that the music de Arango played was jazz.

### Bill de Arango Discography

- 1945 - With Sarah Vaughan, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Flip Phillips, Tadd Dameron, & Max Roach: "What More Can a Woman Do?," "I'd Rather Have a Memory," "Mean to Me"
- With Slam Stewart Quintet: "Honeysuckle Rose," "Mood to be Steward," "Voice of the Turtle," "Slammin' the Gate," "Jingle Bells," "On the Upside Looking Down," "Time on My Hands," "Bell For Norvo."
- With Charlie Kennedy: "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," "Crazy Rhythm," "I Can't Get Started," "Whispering," "I'll See You in My Dreams."
- With Ike Quebec: "Girl of My Dreams," "Jim Dawgs," "Scuffin'," "I.Q. Blues."
- 1946 - With Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra: "52nd Street Theme," "A Night in Tunisia," "Ol' Man Rebop," "Anthropology"
- With Trummy Young Orchestra: "Don't Be a Baby," "Lazy Lullaby," "Try Try Again," "Tidal Wave."
- With Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis Quintet: "Surgery," "Lockjaw," "Afternoon in a Doghouse," "Athlete's Foot."
- Bill de Arango Septet with Ben Webster and Sid Catlett: "The Jeep is Jumpin'," "I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good," "Dark Corners," "Blues Mr. Brim"
- With Ben Webster Quintet: "Frog and Mule," "Spang," "Doctor Keets," "Park and Tilford Blues"
- Bill de Arango Septet with Ben Webster: "Goin' Back to Washington," "Did You Ever Set to Thinkin'," "Suzie Bee," "I Ain't Gonna Marry"
- 1947 - With Charlie Ventura Sextet: "Synthesis," "Soothe Me," "Blue Champagne," "Stop and Go"
- Charlie Ventura Carnegie Hall Concert LP: "Ghost of a Chance," "Characteristically B.H.," "Ralph Burns Up," "Just You Just Me"
- 1954 - Bill de Arango Quartet: *Alone Together* LP: "Alone Together," "Gone With the Wind," "All God's Children Got Rhythm," "The Nearness of You," "The Gypsy in My Soul," "Dancing on the Ceiling," "Summertime," "These Foolish Things"
- 1971 - With Henry Tree (rock group): *Electric Holy Man*
- 1978 - *Another Time/Another Place* LP
- 1981 - With Joe Lovano: *298 Bridge Street* LP
- 1993 - With Joe Lovano: *Anything Went* LP



## Jim Hall



Jim Hall

Fred Sharp's onetime student, Jim Hall, went on to become one of the most respected guitarists in jazz.

Born September 4, 1930 in Buffalo, New York, Hall was only a few months old when his family moved to Geneva in Lake County, Ohio, where his uncle had a farm. Hall remembered the first music he heard was his uncle Ed playing country songs like

"Wabash Cannon Ball" on the guitar. He said his mother "played the piano a little bit." After spending a year on his uncle's farm and after his parents had split up, he moved with his mother and brother to Cleveland where they lived in various rooming houses. Hall later recalled his mother supported her sons by working as a secretary at a tool company. When Jim was eight, they moved to a new WPA housing project, Woodhill Homes, at East 96th and Woodland Avenue, and lived there until he was 25.

His mother gave Jim a guitar for Christmas. It took a year for her to make the payments. The youngster was fascinated with the instrument and quickly learned to play it. He took lessons from Jack DuPerow and said his favorite song at the time was "Music, Maestro, Please."

By the time he was 13, Hall was playing with a teenage band consisting of guitar, clarinet, drums and accordion. He recalled, "The accordion was big in Cleveland at the time." He said the clarinet player in the teenage band loved Benny Goodman records and played "Solo Flight" for Hall. That record featured the solo guitar of Charlie Christian. Hall called it "instant addiction." He rushed out and bought a 78 rpm album of the Goodman Sextet, and he didn't even own a phonograph.

"I didn't know for sure what that was," said Hall later, "but I knew I wanted to do it. I started trying to learn how to improvise and how to become a jazz player."

Hall was impressed not only with Christian's solo playing, but with "the stuff he did with the meter. He turned it around. It was really brilliant. I suspect he was some kind of an incredible intellect because he had a combination of musicality and intelligence which I think is really rare."

While they were at John Adams High School, Hall and saxophonist Tony DiNardo formed their own group and began playing gigs. Playing with Hall at the time was teenaged pianist Joe Howard who remembered, "We would camp out in Mantua, where my dad had a farm, and listen to Lenny Tristano records and try to figure out, 'What is that song based on?'"

Hall's mother was alarmed by her son's enormous interest in jazz. Years later, he said, "My mom felt that jazz music was a little too sexy or emotional or something. She didn't like me playing the nightclubs when I was 15, which I was doing. I can't blame her for that."

His mother called Cleveland guitarist Fred Sharp who later told me, "She said, 'He wants to quit school and he's only 15. Could you talk to him?'" Sharp said, "Hall wasn't very good at the time, but he wanted to be a guitar player. He had heard me play and he knew that I had done some playing." Sharp began giving guitar lessons to the 15-year-old Hall. "I talked him into staying in school, which I am quite proud of. I said, 'Look, I can get you in a band, but you'll be the kid in the band and you have so much time. Why don't you do your school and then there'll be plenty of time to play?' He did."

Sharp also introduced Hall to the records of such guitarists as Carl Kress, Dick McDonough and Django Reinhardt.

Hall said years later he still had never heard better guitars than those played by Christian and Reinhardt. He also listened to saxophonist Coleman Hawkins and pianist Art Tatum. He went to the Palace Theatre to see the Duke Ellington and Artie Shaw Orchestras, particularly when guitarist Barney Kessel was playing with Shaw.

In a videotaped interview, Hall remembered the first time he saw Ellington: "The band was behind a scrim, a sort of half curtain. You sort of knew there were musicians back there. And they started playing 'A Train' and about halfway through the piece, the scrim went up and *there* was the band. It was really a thrill! That experience stayed with me."

After graduating from high school where he played bass in the school band, Hall enrolled at the Cleveland Institute of Music. "It was a great decision. I was there for five years and I majored in music theory. I had five years of counterpoint and music theory and I heard all kinds of music from Gregorian chants all the way up through electronic music." Hall wrote a string quartet piece as his master's thesis. The three-movement piece won a Danish jazz prize for a string quartet composition.

Other students at CIM at the time included modern classical composer Donald Erb, composer Hale Smith and Howard Roberts, a onetime member of the Evelyn Freeman Ensemble in Cleveland who later became an internationally respected choral director and arranger.

Hall believed he was heading toward a career in classical music, but while studying at CIM, he continued playing jazz on weekends. He frequently ran into the relatives of Joe Lovano. "I knew his dad, Tony Lovano, a tenor player," said Hall, "and his uncle, Carl Lovano, a trumpet player."

In 1955, after getting a bachelor's degree from the CIM, but not completing his master's, Hall decided to concentrate on jazz. With alto saxophonist Ray Graziano, Jim went to California "to seek my fortune." To get there, they agreed to deliver a car for somebody and paid only for the gas. They drove the lavender Cadillac convertible from Cleveland to Los Angeles and stayed at the Hollywood home of Hall's 90-year-old great aunt.



Jim Hall in 1956

Hall got a job at a used sheet music store and eventually, with some help from Cleveland Joe Dolny, got a job playing with a new group being formed by Chico Hamilton. During his year and a half with Hamilton, Hall played on two LPs and began to impress a number of

important jazz musicians. In 1956, he recorded *All Night Session, Volumes 1, 2 and 3* with Hampton Hawes, Red Mitchell and Bruz Freeman.

In 1957 he joined the Jimmy Giuffre Trio and recorded two albums with the group. "It was a great experience for me," remembered Hall. "It really incorporated a lot of the stuff that I had been exposed to in music school."

Later, he toured South America with Ella Fitzgerald.

Hall was also influenced by Count Basie's longtime guitarist Freddie Green. "The first time I met him," said Hall, "was on the *Sound of Jazz* television show that Nat Hentoff helped put together. When everybody left the studio, Freddie was sitting there reading the newspaper. I was a kid and I said, 'Hi, Freddie. Would you mind if I take a look at your guitar?' And he looked at me and said, 'Yes I would.'" Later, the two guitarists became good friends.

Hall's first album as a leader was called *Jim Hall Jazz Guitar*. He made it in 1957 with bassist Red Mitchell and pianist Carl Perkins.

In 1959, Hall performed with saxophonists Ben Webster and Paul Desmond.

In 1961 he teamed up with Sonny Rollins on the

now-classic jazz album *The Bridge*. In 1962, he recorded the *Interplay* and *Undercurrent* albums with pianist Bill Evans.

Hall was one of the rising stars of jazz when he got married in 1965 at the age of 35. With a new wife, he decided to get off the road and, in a sense, settle down. He took a job playing in the house band for Merv Griffin's television show. Hall later said it was "a factory job, a way not to travel. I did it for three and a half years and made a modest income, not a terrific amount of money." From a music standpoint, Hall said the TV work was like a day job. "It was like being out of music," he said. In one interview, he recalled the TV job as "the low point" of his career.

Valve trombonist Bob Brookmeyer also played in the TV show band. Brookmeyer was less diplomatic than Hall when he later said, "Short of putting a stake through my heart, I found out that I indeed had been in the world of adults before and I just joined the world of ungifted, untalented and angry children in television."

Gradually, Hall began moving back into what he called "creative music." He managed to mesh his career with his wife's. She was a psychoanalyst with a steady practice and did some teaching. She also worked in radio and had a sense of music programming.

He came back strong in the 1970s and began making a stir with a number of excellent jazz albums. Whitney Balliet, in his book *American Musicians*, said Hall didn't look capable of creating a stir of any sort. Balliet wrote that Hall had three principal expressions: a wide smile; a child's frown; and a calm, pleased playing mask – eyes closed, chin slightly lifted, and mouth ajar." Said Balliet, "He could easily be the affable son of the stony-faced farmer in the painting 'American Gothic.'"

The guitarist who had lived on a farm in Geneva, Ohio and grew up and learned to play guitar in Cleveland, established himself as one of the leading guitarists in jazz. He was nominated for a Grammy and won the *DownBeat* Readers' Poll for Best Jazz Guitarist.

Writing in the March 1975 *New Yorker*, Balliet said, "Jim Hall has a grace and inventiveness and lyricism that make him pre-eminent among contemporary guitarists and put him within touching distance of the two grand masters, Charlie Christian and Django Reinhardt."

In a 1992 interview in *The Plain Dealer*, Hall admitted, "It's never been easy for me to play fast. I feel if I were an athlete, I'd be a marathon guy rather than do the 100-yard dash." Explaining his spare and subtle style, Hall said, "I think silence allows the listener to get into what you're playing, to react to what you've just played and anticipate the next thing."

In the summer of 1992, Hall telephoned his old teacher. Fred Sharp said, "He called me especially to thank me for teaching him. He said he felt remiss, in all





Courtesy Telarc International

**Jim Hall, George Mraz, Joe Lovano and Lewis Nash recording live in Cambridge, Mass. in 2000**

the years that have gone by, that he never called me and thanked me for helping him get started."

In 1993, Hall began recording for Telarc International of Cleveland. He said, "Telarc has been great and pretty much allowed me to record what I wanted." The first CD for Telarc was *Dedications and Inspirations*. The second was *Dialogues* which included duets with such artists as Clevelander Joe Lovano and trumpeter Tom Harrell. With Lovano, Hall played one of his own compositions, "Bon Ami," a song he composed to play at a Django Reinhardt festival. Hall said Lovano was "amazing with a great positive spirit." Lovano said Hall "is one of the greatest improvisors of all time – on whatever instrument it happens to be." According to Lovano, Hall has influenced all of the great guitar players of his generation.

In 1996, Hall made a third album for Telarc, *Textures*. It spotlighted his composing skills and included 16 strings and seven brass instruments on some of the songs. Hall's daughter, Devra, said the seeds of *Textures* were planted years earlier when he studied composition at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

In January of 2000, Hall recorded live with Lovano at the Regattabar in the Charles Hotel in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The CD, produced by Cleveland's Telarc International, was with the quartet called Grand Slam. Backing Hall and Lovano were bassist George Mraz and drummer Lewis Nash. The compact disc included four Hall original compositions and three Lovano originals.

One criticism of Hall's work was that he lacked a style. Hall admitted, "I'm not sure I have what's called a style. But I have an approach to music that, in a way, is interesting. I try to consciously allow myself to grow – more of an attitude or approach to the music. I don't like to be boxed in or to be labeled."

Looking back on his career, Hall had some difficulty comprehending the world-wide acclaim he was receiving. "I played in a theatre in Japan," he recalled, "and I was standing backstage thinking, 'How did I get here from the housing project in Cleveland, Ohio?'"

### Jim Hall's LPs and CDs

- 1956 - *All Night Sessions - Vol. 1* (OJC)
- 1956 - *All Night Sessions - Vol. 2* (OJC)
- 1956 - *All Night Sessions - Vol. 3* (OJC)
- 1956 - *Chico Hamilton in Hi-Fi* (Vogue)
- 1956 - *The Chico Hamilton Trio* (Vogue)
- 1957 - *Jim Hall Jazz Guitar* (Pacific Jazz)
- 1958 - *Street Swingers* (EMI)
- 1959 - *The Train and River with Jimmy Giuffre* (Atlantic)
- 1959 - *7 Pieces with Jimmy Giuffre* (Verve)
- 1959-65 - *The Complete Recordings of the Paul Desmond Quartet with Jim Hall* (RCA)
- 1960 - *Good Friday Blues* (Vogue)
- 1961 - *The Bridge with Sonny Rollins* (RCA)
- 1961-62 - *Desmond Blue/Late Lament* (RCA)
- 1962-63 - *The Bossa Nova Sessions with Zoot Sims* (West Side)
- 1962 - *Undercurrent with Bill Evans* (Blue Note)
- 1962 - *Interplay with Bill Evans* (OJC)
- 1962 - *Loose Bloose with Bill Evans* (Milestone)
- 1963 - *Interaction with Art Farmer* (Atlantic)
- 1963 - *Live at the Half-Note with Art Farmer* (Atlantic)
- 1963 - *Something's Coming* (RCA)
- 1963 - *Natural Soul* (Milestone)
- 1964 - *Art Farmer Meets Mulligan and Hall* (Moon)
- 1964 - *Two Jims and Zoot* (Mainstream)
- 1966 - *Intermodulation with Bill Evans* (Verve)
- 1969 - *It's Nice to be With You* (MPS)
- 1971 - *Where Would I Be?* (OJC)
- 1972 - *Alone Together with Ron Carter* (OJC)
- 1973 - *Jim Hall Live!* (Horizon)
- 1975 - *Concierto* (Columbia)
- 1976 - *Commitment* (A&M)
- 1979 - *Live at the North Sea Jazz Festival* (Challenge)
- 1981 - *Circles* (Concord)
- 1981 - *First Edition with George Shearing* (Concord)
- 1981 - *Concerto de Aranjuez* (Evidence)
- 1982 - *Live at Village West* (Concord)
- 1984 - *Telephone with Ron Carter* (Concord)
- 1986 - *Jim Hall's Three* (Concord)
- 1988 - *These Rooms* (Denon)
- 1989 - *All Across the City* (Concord)
- 1990 - *Live at the Town Hall, Vols. 1 & 2* (MusicMasters)
- 1991 - *Subsequently* (MusicMasters)
- 1992 - *Youkali* (CTI)
- 1993 - *Something Special* (MusicMasters)
- 1993 - *Dedications and Inspirations* (Telarc)
- 1995 - *Dialogues with Joe Lovano and Tom Harrell* (Telarc)
- 1996 - *Textures with Joe Lovano* (Telarc)
- 1997 - *Panorama: Live at the Village Vanguard* (Telarc)
- 1998 - *By Arrangement* (Telarc)
- 1999 - *Jim Hall & Pat Metheny* (Telarc)
- 2000 - *Grand Slam with Joe Lovano* (Telarc)
- 2001 - *Jim Hall & Basset* (Telarc)

### Bob Ferrazza

He had no intention of getting into jazz when he first took up the guitar.

"I wanted to be a rock star," said Bob Ferrazza. I had a friend next door who had an awful guitar with the strings six inches off the fret board. I borrowed his guitar and a starter book. I did that for about six months. Eventually, my parents bought me a guitar."

Ferrazza began playing rock guitar, but quickly tired of simply trying to imitate rock stars. He wanted to add something of himself to the music. One day, he heard a different kind of guitar record. "It was a slow thing. I didn't even know it was jazz. It was George Benson playing 'This Masquerade.' In fact, I think I was washing my dad's car when I heard it on the radio. It was something! You know, when you hear music that just gets your attention, you can't really describe it? It makes you feel something. It gets you excited! That was the first jazz that I heard, and I never thought much about it other than I liked that. So when I heard George Benson's name, I wanted to hear what he had after that. I was interested."

Ferrazza heard other guitar records by people like Wes Montgomery. "I started to get interested in jazz. A friend of mine suggested that I get in touch with this guitar player named Bill de Arango, a famous jazz guitar player. I was really gung-ho. I wanted to learn everything I could about the instrument. I called him up and he said, 'Come on over.' That was it. He played me some records and I was hooked."

When Ferrazza went to de Arango for his first lesson, de Arango had him first listen to some jazz records by Miles Davis. "That was the first jazz that I heard that was mysterious. I didn't know what it was. I'd never heard music like that. I didn't hear that when I was a kid. It was just incredibly mysterious music to me."

Unlike many other musicians who first played at very early ages, Ferrazza was 15. He never played in school bands. But, while studying with de Arango, he graduated from Brush High School and enrolled at Cleveland State University where he studied composition with Bain Murray and with Howie Smith. He said he was intimidated when he tried out for Smith's CSU Jazz Band. "When I auditioned for it, you had to read music. I had resigned myself to not being able to make the jazz band, but I went to the audition anyway. I was completely intimidated, but they were auditioning on a blues. So I figured, 'Well, a blues I could play.' I could hear they were playing F blues so I just got up and played F blues when it was my turn to play. Howie wrote the tune so he knew I wasn't reading the music; I was just playing F blues. There were certain things that I would miss that were in there. But I could play along

with the band. He said, 'How long will it take you to read that?' I said, 'I don't really know.' I really wanted to get in the band so I said 'not long.' I guess Howie liked it enough. I was able to play in the band. Ferrazza learned to read while playing in Smith's CSU big band and continuing to study with de Arango.

At about the same time, he began playing gigs around town. "We played wherever we could, mostly at parties. I think my first real job was at Turkey Ridge on Coventry. I was 18 or 19. We got a little band together. The other things that followed were the inner-city type things, like for *no money*, but playing with some good people. I think they got me into the right type of music and got me steeped in the right sort of traditions, learning how to swing. I think that's important. It's real important!" Ferrazza began making a name for himself with both



Nancy Ann Lee

Bob Ferrazza

musicians and audiences in Cleveland.

In 1986, the young jazz guitarist got the opportunity to play a Northeast Ohio Jazz Society concert backing singer Ernestine Anderson at Case Western Reserve University's Harkness Chapel. Not long afterward, Ferrazza was saluted by *DownBeat* magazine as one of the country's "Most Deserving Young Jazz Musicians."

In 1991 he produced his first album, a compact disc called *Personal*. "It was a huge thrill," he said. The album included two standards and five Ferrazza original compositions, including one song with the unusual title "Spiritual Funk." "It is just a phrase," he said, "that a friend of mine used to talk about being in a bad mood. I liked the phrase. So the next time I got in a bad mood, I thought about that phrase. Later, I wanted to have an aggressive tune that would express that."

"My goals are musical goals," said Ferrazza. "I have things that I want to do on the guitar, things I want to do musically. Those are my goals. I just want to play the guitar as well as I can. I have a sound in my head that after all these years, I still haven't achieved on the guitar, but I'm always striving for."

In September of 1992, Ferrazza played at New York's famous Blue Note club, but unlike many other ambitious young jazz artists, he has no great, burning desire to move to New York. "Hey, music is the same no matter where you play it and I would like to stay here. I love Cleveland. This is a great town!"



## 14. The Singers in Cleveland

**F**orgotten by many is the fact that several of the most popular singers of a generation had sung with jazz bands in Cleveland. Perry Como, Frankie Laine and Dean Martin all spent several years singing here before winning national fame. Martin and Tony Bennett met their wives in Cleveland. Other well-known singers had memorable appearances and experiences here. In addition, several native Cleveland singers made national reputations. One became an overnight success after 50 years of trying.

### The singer who turned down Carlone

In the early 1930s, a young singer from Lakewood turned down an offer to join one of Cleveland's most popular bands. That decision opened the door for a future national star.

The young Lakewood singer's name was Bert Porter. He had played saxophone and guitar and sung with a band led by Bob Royce at Ohio State University and later with the Vernon-Owens band in Cleveland. After getting his civil engineering degree in 1928, Porter spent several years singing with various bands in Cleveland and attracted the attention of popular Cleveland bandleader Freddy Carlone who was playing at the Rainbow Gardens on the Lakewood-Cleveland border. Carlone wanted Porter to become his band's singer, but Porter had other plans.

He went to work in engineering and in 1947 became the Cuyahoga County Engineer, a position he held for 30 years. He was the man who was primarily responsible for building the freeway system linking Cleveland and its sprawling suburbs. In 1953, he ran for mayor of Cleveland and served as the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party chairman from 1963 to 1969.

### Perry Como

When Porter tuned down Carlone's offer, the Cleveland bandleader hired a handsome young barber from Cannonsburg, Pennsylvania, named Perry Como. Copying the crooning style of Bing Crosby, Como came to Cleveland in 1933 and sang with the Carlone Orchestra at various Cleveland hotels and other spots around Northeast Ohio for the next three years. The band also performed at the March, 1933 Inaugural Ball for President Franklin Roosevelt in Washington. Another member of the Carlone Orchestra was Johnny Singer, who later led his own Cleveland band for years. Singer, who played at the Hotel Cleveland in the early 1950s, remembered Como crooning with the Carlone band at Conneaut Lake Park in the summer of 1933.

Carlone's band also played at the Crystal Slipper Ballroom at 9802 Euclid Avenue before the name was changed to the Trianon Ballroom. When Como married

his longtime girlfriend, Roselle, in 1933, Carlone was the best man. The young couple lived in South Euclid

One night in 1936, Como was singing with Carlone at a gambling spot in Warren when another bandleader, Ted Weems, walked in to play roulette. Weems heard Como sing and saw the crowd call him back for several encores. Weems immediately offered Como a job with his orchestra. Como toured with Weems' 11-piece band for six years and became the prototypical big band singer.

Como later became one of the most popular record and television singers of the 1950s.



**Perry Como singing in Cleveland in the 1930s**

### Como and Frankie Laine

Como, while he was touring with the Weems band, met an ambitious young singer in Chicago named Frank LoVecchio. His main claim to fame at the time was setting the world's record for marathon dancing – 145 days! He had also done some singing with jazz musicians Joe Marsala, Henry "Red" Allen and Art Hodes. The young singer, who later changed his name to Frankie Laine, heard that Como was about to leave the Weems Orchestra and was hoping to get the job, but, at the last minute, Como decided to stay with Weems. Laine told me that Como apologized to him and asked, "Would you like to go to Cleveland? I can make a call and maybe get you a job."

Como called his former boss, Freddy Carlone, and LoVecchio began singing in Cleveland with Carlone's band late in 1937.

### Frankie Laine in Cleveland

In his autobiography, *That Lucky Old Son*, Laine wrote that his high hopes in Cleveland were "quickly shot down." He discovered that Carlone then had a Guy Lombardo-style sweet band. Laine wanted to be a jazz singer. He said, "When I heard the reed section playing a shade sharp to get that saccharine Lombardo sound, it rasped me like fingernails drawn across a chalkboard." When Laine wanted to sing jazz songs, Carlone said, "Frank, we just don't do that kind of music."

Laine sang with the Carlone band at Vincent's Club on East 9th Street, but he stayed with Carlone for only a few weeks. Bookings for the band were scarce. "Two



Courtesy of Frankie Laine

### Frankie Laine in an early jam session

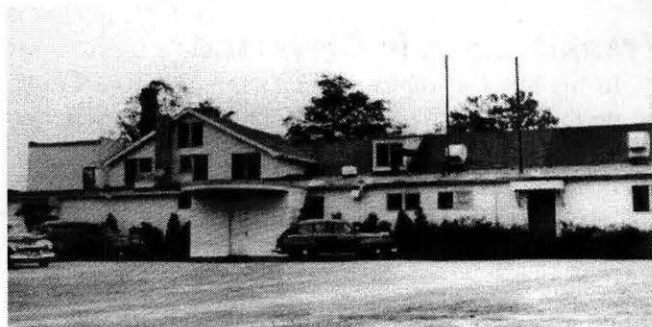
weeks after I started," Laine told me, "Carlone fired everybody."

The future international singing star began 1938 in Cleveland – broke and unemployed. The son of gangster Al Capone's personal barber managed to find a job singing for a man named "Twinkle" Katz at an East Side bar called the Ace of Clubs, but a week after he started, the club burned down.

"So a friend of mine," said Laine, "suggested I go to Lindsay's Sky Bar at East 105th and Euclid. I auditioned and I got the job there and stayed five months." Working at Lindsay's, Laine met a Cleveland pianist named Art Cutlip "and we used to teach each other songs. We put together a hell of a repertoire book of about 1,000 songs." It included their own arrangement of Louis Armstrong's classic "West End Blues."

Laine called his five months at Lindsay's Sky Bar "absolute musical heaven for me." One night there, he heard Cutlip play a song on the piano. "'What's that?' I asked. He said, 'It's a song called 'Shine' that Armstrong used to do.' I said, 'I'd like to learn it.' So he taught it to me." Ten years later, Laine's recording of the song he had learned at the Sky Bar in Cleveland became one of the nation's biggest hit records.

### Dean Martin in Cleveland



The Mounds Club in the late 1930s

While Laine was singing in Cleveland in the spring of 1939, a 21-year-old singer from Steubenville got a job at the Mounds Club on Chardon Road in Willoughby Hills.

Owned by Irish gamblers who paid "protection money" to the infamous Mayfield Road Gang, it was a drinking and gambling carry-over from Prohibition days. The club was a private monument to indoor sports and offered the biggest names in entertainment, excellent food, and almost any form of gambling you could think of. The young singer filled in as a singing coupier at the local mob's private playpen.

It was a colorful spot. Eight years after Martin was there (September 28, 1947), comedian Peter Lind Hayes and his wife, singer Mary Healy, were entertaining about 250 customers at the Mounds Club when ten masked men, wearing fatigue suits and carrying submachine guns, burst in and halted the show. Most of the people thought it was part of the act until one of the bandits fired a shot into the ceiling. They forced the manager to empty the safe and took cash, jewelry and furs from the customers. On the way out, one of the bandits spotted a big diamond right on the finger of a man who was well connected to the Cleveland mob. He told the gunman, "Do you know who I am?!" The gunman said, "I don't give a ---- who you are," and ripped the ring off his finger. The hooded gunmen made a clean get-away with a take estimated at \$500,000.

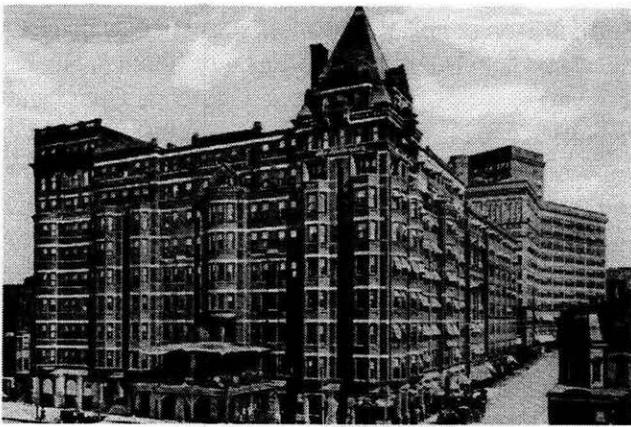
By the end of 1939, Martin, the singer, who grew up in Steubenville with Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder, found work at other gang joints in the Youngstown area. He decided to move on to Columbus where he joined Ernie McKay's band. In Columbus, he changed his name from Dino Crocetti to Dino Martini. While singing at the State Restaurant in Columbus, he was heard by another singer named Lee Ann Lee. She was the wife of Cleveland bandleader Sammy Watkins.



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives  
Dean Martin and Sammy  
Watkins in 1940

Watkins' orchestra was a Cleveland institution, playing at the city's top supper club, the Vogue Room of the palatial old Hollenden Hotel at East 6th and Superior. Nick Tosches, in his biography of the singer, *Living High in the Dirty Business of Dreams*, wrote that Watkins hired the young singer in the fall of 1940. It was at about the time Italy's Benito Mussolini was declaring war on England and France, and Watkins, whose real name was Watkovitz, demanded the young singer change his name again – to Dean Martin. As Dean Martin, he sang with Watkins' band at the Hollenden for three years.





The old Hollenden Hotel at East 6th and Superior

Martin later remembered it was a different Cleveland in 1940. There were one-dollar houses of prostitution downtown. The Hotel Gillsy was directly across East 9th Street from the Roxy burlesque theatre. In the 1920s, the Gillsy had advertised rooms for \$1 a night (\$1.50 with a bathroom). The Erie Hotel was near St. John's Cathedral. The Milner Hotel was on Chester Avenue, also near the Roxy. There were also after-hours bars, called "sneak joints" – the Lighthouse at 9th and Lakeside, and Greek "coffee houses" on Bolivar that offered around-the-clock booze and gambling. There were also all-night restaurants offering all sorts of entertainment – the Nickel Plate Grill on Broadway, the Kit Kat Klub on Hough Avenue, and the 3700 Club on Euclid Avenue.



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives

The Roxy Burlesque Theatre at 9th and Vincent

But the classiest spot in Cleveland in the early 1940s was the Vogue Room at the Hollenden, a stately Victorian hotel with bay-windowed suites that had hosted five U.S. presidents.

Watkins introduced his new, young singer on a Friday night in November of 1940. Glen Pullen, writing in *Variety*, said Martin "backs a personable kisser with a warm, low tenor and an agreeable manner." Martin



Entrance to the Vogue Room at the Hollenden

was paid \$35 a week, a free hotel room, and a 50 percent food discount at the hotel restaurant.

## Laine returns to Cleveland

Frankie Laine, meanwhile, had left Cleveland for New York City hoping to find his fame and fortune, but he also had trouble finding work in New York and decided to go home to Chicago.

After a few weeks, he got a call from Cleveland pianist Art Cutlip who urged him to "come on back to Cleveland!" Laine hitchhiked to Cleveland and discovered the job Cutlip called him about had disappeared. Laine managed to find a job singing at the College Inn near Fenn College (the later site of Cleveland State University) for \$20 a week.

Laine said, "Cleveland was a great jazz town in those days." He recalled jazz musicians used to congregate at the Cabin Club at East 105th and Euclid where the comedian was a brash youngster named Joey Bishop, who later became a late night network talk show host and a member of Frank Sinatra's so-called "Rat Pack" in Hollywood.

While he was singing at the College Inn, Laine met a girl singer named June Hart who sounded like Mildred Bailey and did an old song called "That's My Desire." Laine said he "absorbed the song from listening to her."

Cleveland pianist Al Lerner, who later played with the Harry James Orchestra and became Laine's musical director, said, "Frank learned the song from her but she didn't sing it right, the way the music was written."

After singing at the College Inn, Laine moved to a nightclub called the Wonder Bar at East 17th and Euclid, across the street from the Palace Theatre. "One night," remembered Laine, "Pee Wee Hunt, who was playing at the Palace, came in and I got to talking with him. I asked for an audition with his band and I showed him the song book Art Cutlip and I had assembled at Lindsay's Sky Bar. Hunt said, 'Gee, this is great! Can I borrow it?'" Half a century later, Laine said he never got his songbook back from Hunt.

After Laine lost his singing job at the Wonder Bar, a customer named John Curley asked him, "How would you like a regular job?" Laine recalled, "Curley put me on as a third shift, semi-skilled machine operator out at Parker Appliance at 175th and Euclid." The firm was making airplane parts for the war effort. Laine remembered, "The first week, I made 150 bucks, so I said, 'The hell with singing!'" He worked the night shift at Parker Appliance (later Parker-Hannifin) for the next three years during World War II, but he continued to sing in Cleveland on weekends with a variety of Cleveland jazz musicians including Fred Sharp and Bill de Arango. He remembered them both as "wonderful guitarists." He sang at the Wade Tavern on Wade Park Avenue and sat in with his old friend, Art Cutlip, and others during the bi-weekly jam sessions of Julian Krawcheck's Hot Club of Cleveland.

Laine was living at the Club Albion on Cedar Hill in Cleveland Heights. He remembered Cleveland being very cold during the winters. He said, "There were many mornings, when I got home from work, that I wished I were some place else because it was so cold and it was snowing. It was icy and it was hard to drive. And I lived on a hill. It was tough."

## Martin marries in Cleveland



Cleveland Press Collection / CSU Archives

**Dean Martin (left) with Sammy Watkins Orchestra in Cleveland in 1943**

At about the same time, Martin, living downtown at the Hollenden Hotel, met an 18-year-old girl from Philadelphia named Betty Anne McDonald. She was traveling with her father on a business trip to Cleveland and staying at the Hollenden. They saw Dean sing with Watkins' band. Dean and Betty soon began dating. In the spring of 1941, the girl's father was transferred to Cleveland and bought a house in Cleveland Heights.

By that summer, Dean and Betty were engaged. On October 1, they went to the Cuyahoga County

Courthouse on Lakeside Avenue, got a marriage license, and were married the next day by Father H. N. McCormick at St. Ann's Catholic Church at Cedar and Coventry Roads in Cleveland Heights. After spending their wedding night at the Hollenden, they took off on their honeymoon on the band bus with the Watkins Orchestra, headed for Louisville. When they returned to Cleveland a few weeks later, Martin and his wife rented a furnished apartment at 2820 Mayfield Road in Cleveland Heights.

A couple of weeks later, the United States entered World War II. Martin got a physical draft deferment and continued to sing with Watkins at the Hollenden.

On June 7 of 1942, precisely nine months after their wedding, Dean and Betty became parents. Stephen Craig Martin was born at what later became Deaconess Hospital in Cleveland. On the way to the hospital, the expectant father fainted in a taxi cab.

A month later, the young Martin made his first coast-to-coast radio broadcast. The Sammy Watkins Orchestra, voted "The Most Popular Band in Cleveland," was featured on a radio program called *The Fitch Bandwagon* on NBC. At 7:30, Sunday night, July 5, 1942, they went on the air from the studios of NBC's WTAM at 9th and Superior, across the street from the Hollenden.

Martin sang four songs including "What'll I Do" and "Sweet Leilani," but, the big night for the Sammy Watkins Orchestra and the young singer suddenly collapsed when the announcer, Tobe Reed, closed the broadcast by telling the nation, "You've been listening to the music of *Sammy Kaye* and his Orchestra."

## Laine auditions for Benny Goodman

Laine was still working in the defense plant in Cleveland and singing on weekends. In August of 1942, Don Haynes, then the Cleveland correspondent for *Down Beat* magazine, drove Laine to Cedar Point to audition for Benny Goodman. After Laine sang a couple of jazz tunes, Goodman turned him down. Laine told me, "Benny said I was a rhythm singer and said his girl singers did those kind of songs; the male vocalists did the ballads in his band." Even after Laine became world famous, he said he never met Goodman again.

## Martin sings for Ohio Tool Company

In December of 1942, Martin sang with the Sammy Watkins Orchestra at a big Christmas party for employees of the Ohio Tool Company at Public Hall in downtown Cleveland. Tom Kennish of Royal Garden Records on Lorain Road in North Olmsted gave me a rare recording of a radio air check of Martin singing with Watkins at that party. He sang "White Christmas," very much in the style of Bing Crosby.



## Laine goes to Hollywood

Laine managed to persuade Parker Appliance to transfer him to its plant in the Los Angeles area. He left Cleveland in August of 1943 and drove to California. He looked up a pianist he had known in Cleveland, Al Lerner. After touring with the Harry James Orchestra for five years, Lerner had settled in Los Angeles and was playing for a series of radio programs. "One day," remembered Lerner, "Laine showed up from Cleveland. He had a Pontiac convertible, a wreck of a car, and drove up to my apartment. I was the only person he knew in Los Angeles."



**Frankie Laine recording**

Eventually Laine managed to get a recording date. According to Lerner, "Frankie had 15 or 20 minutes left on the date and said, 'Let me sing something.' The musicians just faked the accompaniment." He sang "That's My Desire." The recording became a huge national hit. After years of struggling for work, much of it in Cleveland, Laine finally became a big national singing star.

When he recorded "That's My Desire," he sang the song the way he had heard June Hart sing it at Lindsay's Sky Bar in Cleveland, but according to Lerner, "She sang the song wrong and so did Frank. The publisher of the song didn't recognize it the way Laine sang it."

Years later, Laine told me, "I never knew she was singing it wrong and I don't think she knew she was singing it wrong. She was doing it the way she learned it. And I learned it from her. And it was wrong. All these years, I've been receiving royalties on 'That's My Desire' from the wrong things that I learned from her in Cleveland."

Even with the hit record, Lerner said "The public had never seen Frankie Laine. He was bald and wore a hairpiece. The black population thought he was black. It was curious, blacks were buying a lot of Frank's records."

In the years after "That's My Desire," Laine's records sold more



**Frankie Laine in 1951**

than 100-million copies and he eventually won 21 gold records. He also wrote the lyrics for the jazz standard "We'll Be Together Again" which was recorded by more than 150 artists.

Martin left Cleveland four months after Laine left. In December of 1943, Martin went to New York, and soon teamed up with comedian Jerry Lewis. They became one of the top entertainment acts in the country.

While most of their later recordings were hardly considered jazz, Perry Como, Frankie Laine and Dean Martin were all part of Cleveland's jazz scene in the 1930s and early '40s.

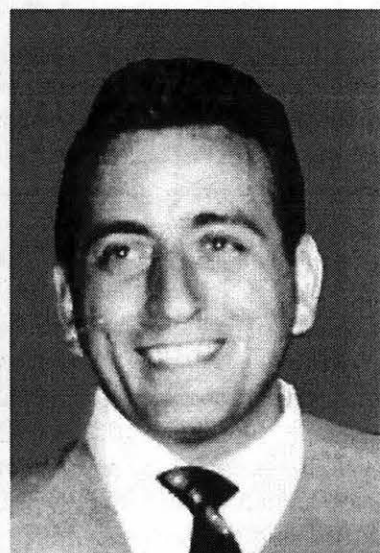
## Tony Bennett's Cleveland links

In 1946, Cleveland guitarist Fred Sharp was playing with the Adrian Rollini Trio in New York City. Sharp and his wife, Iris, were living in Astoria, Long Island. They took the BMT train from Manhattan to Queens Plaza and walked to their home. One night, they stopped in at a local club called the Shangri-La at Queens Plaza to hear the band. The band was led by trombonist

Tyree Glenn who, earlier in his career had played with Louis Armstrong, Benny Carter and Cab Calloway. There was a young singer there almost every night. On this night, when the Sharps stopped in, Glenn invited the young vocalist to sing with his band.

Sharp told me the young singer was "just great" and said, "After his set, we invited him to our table for a drink." He told Sharp his name was Joe Bari and said he had written a song called "Satan Wears a Satin Gown" and was hoping someone would perform it. Sharp said, "We told him we were friends with Frankie Laine" who was appearing at the Paramount Theatre in New York City. Sharp suggested that Joe Bari take his tune to Laine and "tell him that Freddie and Iris Sharp had sent him."

At the Paramount, Laine was on the bill with the Stan Kenton Orchestra and singer June Christy. Going backstage, Bari told Laine that Cleveland's Fred Sharp had sent him and he sang his song for Laine. Laine, in



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives  
**Tony Bennett in Cleveland in 1953**

his autobiography *That Lucky Old Son*, recalled he listened to Bari sing the song and asked, "What do you need me for? You sing great!"

Laine eventually recorded the song and Bari became good friends of Fred and Iris Sharp. "He came over for dinner a few times and we played and sang together," remembered Sharp.

Bari soon began opening other career doors. He appeared on the *Arthur Godfrey Talent Scouts* program and got a job singing with Pearl Bailey in Greenwich Village. In 1949, he made his first records for a small label called Leslie Records.

Bari's first records went absolutely nowhere, but his manager had an idea. He persuaded comedian Bob Hope, who had grown up in Cleveland, to catch Bari's performance in Greenwich Village. Hope liked what he heard and said, "Come on, kid, you're going to come to the Paramount and sing with me." But, Hope didn't like the young singer's stage name, Joe Bari, and asked him what his real name was. The singer told him, "My name is Anthony Dominick Benedetto." "That's too long for the marquee," said Hope. He thought for a moment and then said, "We'll call you Tony Bennett."

After the gig at the Paramount Theatre, Hope took Tony Bennett, along with the Les Brown Orchestra, Jane Russell and a tap dancer, on a six-city tour. When Bennett got back to New York, he signed a contract with Columbia Records and began appearing on television programs in New York.

In 1951, his recording of "Because of You" became a big hit. It was the country's number one record for ten weeks and sold over a million copies. This led to his own booking at New York's Paramount Theatre and gigs in Miami, Chicago, Buffalo and Cleveland.

In July of 1951, Bennett was singing at Moe's Main Street, a nightclub at East 79th and Euclid that booked many upcoming artists in the early 1950s. By this time, Sharp had left Red Norvo and was back in Cleveland. He was not aware of Bennett's new hit records and noticed an ad in *The Plain Dealer* with a photo of the singer appearing at Moe's Main Street. His wife said, "That's Joe Bari, the singer we knew in Astoria! He changed his name to Tony Bennett!"

While he was singing at Moe's Main Street in Cleveland, Bennett spotted a beautiful young woman in the audience. After the show, her date asked him to join them at their table. Bennett learned her name was Patricia Beech. She had just moved to Cleveland from Mansfield to attend the Cleveland Institute of Art and



**Tony Bennett's first wife,  
Mansfield native  
Patricia Beech**

was a big jazz fan. Less than a year later, Bennett married the girl he met in Cleveland. They had two sons. Bennett's career zoomed. He recorded a series of hit pop records, but he was too busy to pay enough attention to his wife and sons.

In 1962, Bennett recorded a song entitled "I Wanna Be Around." The song was originally conceived by a lady in Youngstown named Sadie Vimmerstedt. She was not a professional songwriter. According to Bennett, in his autobiography *The Good Life*, Sadie came up with two lines:

*I wanna be around to pick up the  
pieces*

*When somebody breaks your heart.*

The Youngstown resident sent the lines to songwriter Johnny Mercer and said she thought the lines would make a good song. She had no idea where Mercer lived, so she simply addressed the envelope:

"Johnny Mercer, Songwriter, Los Angeles, California." Somehow her letter got to Mercer and he liked her lines. He wrote the rest of the lyrics and the music. Bennett had another hit.

While Tony was making a series of hit pop records, he did not neglect his old first love—jazz. He frequently performed with jazz artists and recorded with both Duke Ellington and Count Basie. In 1958, Bennett recorded "Firefly" with his longtime friend, Bill Basie, and his band.

During his great success, Bennett's marriage to Patricia Beech disintegrated. After he recorded "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," they were divorced. Patricia stayed in New York. Tony later married Sandra Grant, a young woman he had met while making a film in Hollywood. They had two daughters.

In the 1970s, after he had left Columbia Records, Bennett's life, by his own admission, was getting out of control. In his autobiography, he wrote, "At every big party I'd go to, people were high on something. Cocaine flowed as freely as champagne, and soon," he wrote, "I began joining in the festivities. Compounded with my pot smoking, the whole thing started sneaking up on me."

With the help of his son, Danny, Bennett managed to revive his career. In 1995, his album *Tony Bennett: MTV Unplugged* was awarded a Grammy for Album of the Year.

Transcending generational lines, Bennett, who was first encouraged by Cleveland jazz guitarist Fred Sharp, and who married a Mansfield girl he met in Cleveland, was still winning new fans and was finally being recognized as a jazz singer.



## Frank Sinatra in Cleveland



Frank Sinatra

Pianist Al Lerner was one of the first Clevelanders to hear and appreciate singer Frank Sinatra. It was in 1939, shortly after the 24-year-old singer had joined the Harry James Orchestra. They appeared at Cleveland's Trianon Ballroom on Euclid Avenue. Years later, Lerner said, "I had never heard a singer who sang with that approach to a song. He was unique."

After leaving James and joining the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, Sinatra returned to Cleveland in 1941 and performed during an RCA Dance Caravan at Public Hall.

The following year (1942), Sinatra and the Dorsey band played four shows a day for a week, beginning July 24th, at the Palace Theatre. By this time, Sinatra was sharing top billing with Dorsey.

As a single, Sinatra returned to Cleveland July 14, 1943 for a concert with the Cleveland Summer Orchestra at Public Hall. *The Cleveland Press* said the crowd of 9,142 was nearly 90% what the paper called "Sinatra girls."

In those days, Sinatra was an extremely popular singer and he won the *DownBeat* Readers' Poll nine times in the 1940s and '50s. He was not a "jazz singer" per se, but learned much of his singing technique by listening to jazz instrumentalists. Sinatra often said his greatest teacher was not a vocal coach, not other singers, but jazz musicians – particularly Tommy Dorsey and the way he breathed and phrased on the trombone.

Sinatra's singing also influenced many jazz musicians. Miles Davis said in his autobiography that he learned how to phrase by listening to Sinatra sing.

Ernie Freeman, who grew up in Cleveland playing with his sister's high school orchestra, the Evelyn Freeman Ensemble, later went to Los Angeles and arranged for Sinatra among others. Freeman arranged Sinatra's recording of "Strangers in the Night."

After he became a singing superstar, Sinatra recorded with the Count Basie Orchestra. Trumpeter Harry "Sweets" Edison, a mainstay of the Basie band, who was playing in Cleveland in the 1930s, backed Sinatra with Nelson Riddle's Orchestra on many of Sinatra's best records.

Sinatra returned to Cleveland in 1967. He sang with the Buddy Rich Orchestra at Public Hall July 6, 1967.

By the early 1970s, Frank Sinatra had become an

entertainment icon. On October 26, 1974, he sang at the black-tie opening ceremonies for the Richfield Coliseum. The \$25 million arena was built by Sinatra's friend, Nick Mileti. When Sinatra came to Cleveland for that opening, he arrived in a private jet. He and his 20-member entourage stayed at the Keg and Quarter Hotel at East 18th and Euclid. The hotel at the time was the Cleveland home-away-from-home for many of the biggest names in show business, but, according to the owner, Jim Swingos, "None was bigger than Sinatra."

"I got to know him," said Swingos, "and he was probably one of the most exciting personalities I have ever met. And we had them all in the hotel back in those days." Swingos said, "There was a certain charisma about Sinatra, a certain magic. When he walked into a room, everyone stopped, no one spoke."

Sinatra stayed at Swingos' hotel several times and the singer was not at all like the young rock 'n roll stars who frequently trashed their hotel rooms. According to Swingos, "Sinatra was a down-to-earth fella who appreciated being taken care of and liked to be treated like family."

Swingos' most vivid memory of Sinatra staying at his hotel was the night Sinatra was leaving the hotel to perform in the inaugural show at the Coliseum. "The people in the dining room heard that Frank was going to be leaving soon to go to the Coliseum," said Swingos. "The entire dining room emptied into the small lobby. Security called up and suggested that maybe he should take the basement route; it would be safer. So I mentioned that to Frank and he said, 'Don't worry about it.' So we got into the elevator. The lobby doors opened and it was just filled with people, packed like sardines. As he walked out of the elevator, the crowd in the lobby became totally silent as if everyone held their breath. A path opened for him to exit through the doors into his limousine. After he got into the limousine and left, everyone in the lobby had a collective sigh." Swingos said, "It was the most magical moment that I have ever experienced."

Sinatra stayed at Swingos' hotel again in March of 1988 when he appeared with Sammy Davis, Jr. at the Richfield Coliseum.

Sinatra's last performance in Cleveland was November 7, 1992. Then 76 years old, Sinatra sang in the round and appeared with his son, Frank



Cleveland Press / CSU

Frank Sinatra at  
Public Hall in 1943

Sinatra, Jr., who led a full orchestra. Among the songs he sang that night was "All Or Nothing at All," a song he had sung with the Harry James Orchestra 53 years earlier at the Trianon Ballroom.

Sinatra died May 14, 1998, at the age of 82 in Los Angeles.

## Mel Tormé's tough times here

Singer, composer, arranger, drummer, actor and author Mel Tormé had some unforgettable and frightening experiences when he was singing in Cleveland in the 1950s.

A child prodigy, Tormé was only 9 years old when he acted on a series of radio programs in Chicago. He was only 15 when he composed a song called "Lament to Love" which became a hit record for the Harry James Orchestra. He was only 17 when he became a singer and drummer with Chico Marx' big band. He was only 18 when he made a movie with Frank Sinatra. He was only 20 when he composed "The Christmas Song." He was only 21 when he recorded with his vocal group, the Mel-Tones, with the Artie Shaw Orchestra.



Mel Tormé

At the age of 25, Tormé was a national name and had performed in the nation's biggest supper clubs and on network television shows. He came to Cleveland for a series of gigs.

He was booked into Moe's Main Street. While singing at Moe's, Tormé said he encountered an extremely noisy table, "two brassy blondes and their escorts." When they kept talking and laughing during his songs, Tormé halted his performance and angrily announced, "Years ago, I accidentally ran over a mule and killed it. I was warned that mule would come back to haunt me. And sure enough, that jackass is with us tonight!"

The audience laughed, but Moe, the owner, was beside himself. He screamed at Tormé, "You got any idea who those guys are?" One was Julius Petrie who had spent time in prison for shooting the mother of one of his hoods. At the time Tormé insulted him, Petrie was facing a charge of robbing \$70,000 from an armored truck. "And you're standing on that stage calling him a jackass!" screamed Moe. "You better be careful going back to your hotel!"

After the show, Tormé went to a late-night restaurant

in Shaker Heights. As he walked in, he noticed to his surprise and fear that the mobster and his loud friends were sitting in a booth. "He stared at me for a moment," recalled Tormé, "but continued talking to his girlfriend." Tormé said he never heard from Petrie, but later read about him in the best-selling book *The Last Mafioso*.

While Tormé was appearing at Moe's, *Cleveland Press* entertainment writer Winsor French wrote a scathing review of his show. Tormé remembered, "He roasted me up one side and down the other – brilliantly. I had never been slammed with such panache, wit and style." Tormé discovered French, who resembled movie actor Clifton Webb, lived at the Hollenden Hotel. Tormé called him and said, "I don't like the content of the review, but I love the writing."

The Cleveland newspaperman was flabbergasted, saying he had gotten nasty calls from wounded performers in the past, "but no one *ever* called to compliment me on a bad review!"

A few days later, French called Tormé and said he wanted to interview him for *The Press*. They met for lunch. Tormé said he found French to be "an endearing little man with a wistful countenance, a crew cut, and elegant taste in clothes, but terribly lonely and unhappy." They became friends and French managed to get Tormé booked into the classy Vogue Room of the Hollenden.

Tormé, in his autobiography, recalled that the Cleveland newspaperman once carefully inquired if Tormé had ever experienced any homosexual tendencies. "As tactfully as possible," said the singer, "I explained that I had always been, purely and simply, a girl lover."

A couple of months later, Tormé was performing at the Yankee Inn on Route 8 when a huge, mean-looking, red-haired man at the bar began loudly flipping coins on the polished surface of the bar, interrupting his songs. "After the Petrie incident," Tormé said he was "gun-shy about opening his mouth to a noisy customer." When the big, red-haired man continued to make a lot of noise, Tormé simply walked off the stage in disgust.

The owner of the Yankee Inn ran to the dressing room and told Tormé, "He's an ex-marine who has broken more jaws in Akron than you could count on your fingers. He's threatening to wipe the walls with you!" As Tormé was about to leave, "Big Red" blocked the front door and in slurred tones threatened, "I'm gonna mash you!"

Tormé, a gun collector, pulled a Colt .38 Detective Special out of his overcoat pocket, jammed it into Big Red's stomach and cocked it. Big Red backed away, turned without a word, and stumbled out the front door. Tormé said it was the only time he had ever pointed a gun at anyone.

After his frightening experiences in Northeast Ohio, it was perhaps ironic that more than 40 years later, the former child prodigy who had become one of the most



admired jazz singers of the era, was the star performer at the inaugural broadcast of jazz radio station WCPN and was recording for Telarc International, the Cleveland-based record company.

Tormé died June 5, 1999.

## Jimmy Scott

The voice reminded some people of Dinah Washington or Sarah Vaughan, but the singer was not a woman. It was Jimmy Scott, a Cleveland native who late in his life was nominated for a Best Jazz Vocal Grammy.



Jimmy Scott in the 1940s

Scott reportedly was the victim of a rare glandular disorder which left his voice high-pitched and kept him from growing to 5 feet 8 inches until he was almost 40 years old.

Once you got past the gender shock and listened to him, you realized that little Jimmy Scott was not only a ballad stylist, but a true jazz singer who used his unusual voice almost like a saxophone.

Most jazz fans, even in his native Cleveland, had never heard of Scott until his 1992 album for Sire Records was nominated for a Grammy. His overnight success took almost half a century.

Born in Cleveland in 1925, the third of Arthur and Justine Scott's ten children, Jimmy began singing in church to his mother's piano accompaniment. Tragically, she died when Jimmy was just 13. She was struck by a speeding car while trying to push one of her daughters out of the way.

Jimmy developed an interest in jazz. In 1945, at the age of 20, he helped organize a summer musical festival at the Palace Theatre. He toured the South with a contortionist named Estelle "Caldonia" Young and began singing at various Ohio nightclubs.

In the late 1940s, Scott was singing in Cleveland and is said to have jammed with Charlie Parker at the old Majestic Hotel at East 55th and Central.

In 1948, comedian Redd Foxx and boxing champ Joe Louis helped Scott get a gig at the Baby Grand Club in Harlem. That's where Lionel Hampton heard him. Always looking for new talent, Hamp gave Scott an on-stage audition and Jimmy soon joined the touring Hampton band. Other members of the band at that time included Clevelanders Benny Bailey and Willie Smith.

Scott sang on Hampton's recording of "Everybody's Somebody's Fool." The record reached the number six spot on the *Billboard* rhythm-and-blues chart.

Ironically, that

Decca 78 rpm record did not carry Scott's name. The label said simply, "Vocal with Orchestra." Hampton apparently felt the public would think he had a new girl singer performing the song written by his wife and band manager, Gladys Hampton.

In the early 1950s, Scott joined the band of Paul Gayten and began to influence such young singers as Nancy Wilson and Marvin Gaye.

In 1955, he signed with Savoy Records and cut such sides as "When Did You Leave Heaven," "Imagination" and "Don't Cry Baby."

In the summer of 1960, at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem, Scott stole the show – which included Ray Charles and the Coasters – by singing "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." Scott's performance impressed Charles who signed him to record for his Tangerine Record label. With Charles backing him on piano, Scott made an album called *Falling In Love Is Wonderful*. But, his big break in 1963 fell apart when Savoy Records went to court and convinced a judge that Scott was still under contract to Savoy. The judge ordered Scott's album with Charles be pulled off the market.

Giving up hope that he would ever become a nationally-known singer, Scott came home to Cleveland. He sang in a few clubs here, worked in the shipping room at the old Sheraton Hotel and cared for his ailing father. He even did some free singing for residents at nursing homes.

In 1969, Scott got another chance. He returned to New York and recorded an album for Atlantic Records. It included such jazz artists as pianist Ray Bryant, bassist Richard Davis, drummer Billy Cobham, and tenor saxophonist Frank Wess, but again, there were legal problems. Savoy Records heard about the Atlantic album and threatened to sue. Again, a Jimmy Scott album was taken off the market.

Despite the legal hurdles, Atlantic recorded Scott again in 1972. It was an album called *The Source* with Junior Mance and Ron Carter. Included was a song that had been popularized almost 20 years earlier by the Four





**Jimmy Scott in the 1990s**

Freshmen, "Day By Day," in Scott's almost agonizingly slow phrasing.

Because of the continuing legal problems over his contracts, that record by Scott was not released by Atlantic Records for more than 20 years.

Now, fast forward to 1991!

The man who had come so close to stardom but never quite made it, sang at the funeral of rock artist Doc Pomus. Seymour Stein of Sire Records heard him, was impressed, and signed Scott to a long-term contract. Cleveland native Tommy LiPuma produced the album called *All the Way*. It hit the top ten lists in 1992 and was nominated for a Grammy in 1993. Finally, after almost half a century of near-misses and legal problems, Jimmy Scott from Cleveland, with his old-fashioned and romantic singing style – at the age of 67 – became a star.

In June of 1993, when Scott made his first professional performance in Cleveland in almost 40 years, he sang "Unchained Melody" and other romantic tunes at Rhythms on Playhouse Square. *Plain Dealer* reviewer Carlo Wolff said, "Scott returned to his hometown a winner, treating fans of idiosyncratic, highly intimate jazz to a unique vocal display."

After years of obscurity and near-success, Scott finally achieved an unusual spot in jazz history. In his late 70s, he was singing all over the world.

### Jimmy Scott Discography

- 1950 - "Everybody's Somebody's Fool" - 78 with Hampton (Decca)
- 1951 - *Live in New Orleans* - with Paul Gayton (Speciality)
- 1952 - *House of David* - with Fathead Newman (WEA/Atlantic/Rhino)
- 1955 - *Very Truly Yours* (Savoy)
- 1955 - *All Over Again* (Savoy)
- 1955 - *If You Only Knew* (Savoy)
- 1959 - *The Fabulous Little Jimmy Scott* (Savoy)
- 1963 - *Falling in Love is Wonderful* (Tangerine)
- 1969 - *Lost and Found* (Atlantic/Rhino)
- 1972 - *The Source* (Atlantic)
- 1990 - *Jimmy Scott* (Savoy)
- 1992 - *All the Way* (Warner Bros.)
- 1992 - *Twin Peaks* soundtrack (Warner Bros.)
- 1993 - *Lost and Found* (Atlantic/Rhino)
- 1994 - *Dream* (WEA/Warner Bros.)
- 1994 - *In Love with Jazz Passengers* (Windham Hill)
- 1995 - *Pearls with David Sanborn* (WEA/Elektra)
- 1996 - *Heaven* (WEA/Warner Bros.)
- 1998 - *Holding Back the Years* (Artists Only)
- 2000 - *Mood Indigo* (Fantasy)
- 2001 - *Over the Rainbow* (Milestone)
- 2002 - *Falling in Love is Wonderful* (Rhino Handmade)

### Ella Fitzgerald's last major concert

Ella Fitzgerald made her last major public appearance in Cleveland. It was at Playhouse Square during the 1992 Tri-C JazzFest. As we listened to her that night, we were certainly aware that she was one of the all-time jazz legends nearing the end of an astounding career. But, we did not realize that within a year, Ella Fitzgerald would lose both legs because of complications of diabetes or that in four years she would be dead.

When she took the stage, she sang "Sweet Georgia Brown." After the applause faded, she said, "Welcome to our part of the show. Hope you enjoy the songs that we have chosen. Some I know, some I don't." The capacity crowd roared as everybody's favorite jazz singer joked, "I may make up my own lyrics."

Dr. Thomas Horning, the founding director of the Tri-C JazzFest, confirmed later that Ella was not well at the time, but loved to talk with children. Horning remembered introducing his 12-year-old daughter to the world famous singer. "She had my daughter sit on her lap like a granddaughter," said Horning, "and



**Ella Fitzgerald**



they just went on and on while there were lines of people waiting to see Ella, but she was visiting with my young daughter and even invited her to visit her in California.”

When Ella died at the age of 78 June 15, 1996, there was worldwide praise for the woman who had entered an amateur contest on a dare at New York’s Apollo Theatre 64 years earlier when she was just 14 years old.

When she went on the Apollo stage that night, she said she froze. “The man said, “Do something,” recalled Ella, “so I tried to sing like Miss Connie Boswell and somebody in the audience said, “Hey, that little girl can sing!” I won first prize. Then I tried the Harlem Opera House and won again.”

Bardu Ali, who was playing guitar with the Chick Webb Orchestra, heard her and suggested that Webb hire her for his band. The little drummer didn’t want a girl singer for his swinging big band, but finally said, “We’ll take her to Yale University and if she goes over with the college kids, she stays.” She did.

Webb became not only her boss, but her mentor and guardian. Ella later remembered, “He always taught me that ‘You never want to be something that goes up fast because the same way you go up, you come down, and you meet the same people.’”

By the age of 20, Ella had written some of the lyrics and recorded “A Tisket a Tasket,” a song that became a national hit. When she was 21, Webb died of tuberculosis and Ella fronted his band until 1942.

Ella and the band played the week of August 12, 1940 at East Market Gardens in Akron.

When the band broke up, she continued on the road as a single and performed at Cleveland’s Palace Theatre with the Ink Spots for a week in January of 1944.

Longtime Cleveland drummer Lawrence “Jacktown” Jackson remembered one night in the 1940s when he was hired at the last minute to play drums for Ella. “She came to town and her drummer couldn’t make it,” said Jacktown. “Can you imagine I was hired to replace Buddy Rich?!”

Fitzgerald frequently said Dizzy Gillespie taught her bebop. Dizzy said he never had a better student. “She just dove into it,” remembered Gillespie. “Her choice of phrasing and using her voice as an instrument was unbelievable.” She toured with the Gillespie Orchestra in the late 1940s. A member of that band was Cleveland trombonist William “Shep” Shepherd. He said, “She was a beautiful person, a lot of fun, a beautiful person to know.”

When Ella toured South American in 1957, her guitarist was Cleveland Jim Hall.

In the 1980s, she was performing in London with the Count Basie Orchestra which after Basie’s death was led by Frank Foster. Filling Basie’s piano chair in the band, backing Ella, was Ace Carter, who had spent over 30

years playing with various groups in Cleveland. Carter later recalled that those performances with Ella in London were the highlights of his career with the Basie band.

Ella, of course, performed in Cleveland many times. Perhaps one of the most memorable for her was on December 10, 1984 when she came to Cleveland to help celebrate the 115th anniversary of the Cleveland YWCA. She was always very involved in doing things to help young women and children. The benefit began with a 6:30 p.m. cocktail buffet at Case Western Reserve University’s Thwing Center followed by a concert at Severance Hall next door and a post concert dessert reception at Thwing Center.

Everybody who ever listened to music has memories of Ella Fitzgerald, but there were some special memories for some Clevelanders.

## Vanessa Rubin

In the 1990s, she became a popular and respected jazz and pops singer.

Born in Cleveland in 1956, Vanessa Rubin recalled, “I grew up listening to jazz before I knew what it was. I have five older brothers and they’re all jazz enthusiasts so I really didn’t have a choice in what I listened to. I love the big band sound, the Basie band, the Ellington band.”

She recalled her father used to play a lot of Glenn Miller records and he loved saxophonists Cannonball Adderley and Gene Ammons. She said she listened to singers Sarah Vaughan, Nancy Wilson and Carmen McRae.

After graduating from Cleveland’s John F. Kennedy High School, Rubin went to the University of Cincinnati and Ohio State where she graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in journalism. While at Ohio State, she competed in the Miss Black Central Ohio contest and got a standing ovation when she sang “God Bless the Child.” Looking back, she said that was the moment she decided she wanted to become a professional singer.

In the late 1970s, after college, Vanessa began singing in Cleveland jazz clubs. She performed with such groups as the Blackshaw Brothers, Sam and Billy, and later with vibraphonist Cecil Rucker and Willie Smith’s Little Big Band. She made a record with the Cleveland Jazz All-Stars featuring saxophonist Ernie Krivda and trumpeter



Novus Records

Vanessa Rubin

Kenny Davis at Peabody's Café in Cleveland Heights.

Determined to make it as a jazz singer, she moved to New York City in 1982. She got a day job teaching English at Prospect Heights High School in Brooklyn and began singing at such New York citadels of jazz as the Village Vanguard and Sweet Basil's with the Pharaoh Sanders Quartet and Kenny Barron's Trio. She also spent a lot of time at Barry Harris' Jazz Cultural Theatre where well-known jazz performers would come to teach struggling young artists who would present concerts on weekends. Rubin had stints singing with Lionel Hampton's big band, the Mercer Ellington Orchestra and Frank Foster's group, the Loud Minority.

In 1991, Vanessa landed a recording contract with the RCA/Novus label. Her first album was *Soul Eyes*. Backing the Cleveland singer were pianist Kirk Lightsey, bassist Cecil McBee, drummer Lewis Nash, trumpeter Eddie Allen and pianist Onaje Allen Gumbs who also produced the album.

The liner notes were written by another former Cleveland, Willard Jenkins, who went from being the founder of the Northeast Ohio Jazz Society to executive director of the National Jazz Service Organization in Washington and a nationally respected jazz writer. In the album notes, Jenkins wrote, "It's a rare occasion when a legitimate new jazz singer comes on the scene. Well, clap hands, here comes Vanessa Rubin!"

In her album acknowledgments, Vanessa thanked several Clevelanders, including her family and Dr. Lawrence Simpson of Cuyahoga Community College.

Some reviewers questioned whether *Soul Eyes* was a jazz record or a pop record. Many were reviewers who emerged in a period when jazz had become so esoteric that it cut itself off from popular music. They may have forgotten that in the 1940s, big band jazz was the most popular form of music and, as late as the 1950s, there was still a very thin line between pops and jazz. Such artists as Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, the Four Freshmen and others made records that became very popular without surrendering their allegiances to jazz. In more recent years, such performers as Harry Connick, Jr., Natalie Cole and Diana Krall, all clearly jazz performers, were also appreciated by popular music fans.

Rubin believed she could be true to her jazz roots while producing music that also appealed to a wider audience. Making no apologies, she said, "For a long time, jazz was not being supported. Jazz is still part of the music business and there is a need for some young blood in the business. The audience is coming back and it's time to get back to basics with something that is real and will last."

At the 1992 Tri-C JazzFest, Vanessa got a standing ovation from her old Cleveland friends including some local jazz musicians she had sung with here. She was

backed by Dennis Reynolds' Jazz Revival Orchestra which included Ernie Krivida who had helped her and performed with her at various Cleveland clubs in the 1970s.

In 1993, she recorded another album, *Pastiche*, which included "I Only Have Eyes For You" and "In a Sentimental Mood." That was followed by another CD in 1994, *I Am Glad There Is You*, a tribute to Carmen McRae. Other albums included *Vanessa Rubin Sings* in 1995, *New Horizons* in 1997, *Language of Love* in 1999, and *Girl Talk* in 2001. She also performed on a number of other albums.

### Vanessa Rubin Compact Discs

- 1991 - *Soul Eyes* (Novus)
- 1993 - *Pastiche* (Novus)
- 1994 - *I'm Glad There Is You*, a tribute to Carmen McRae (Novus)
- 1995 - *Vanessa Rubin Sings* (Novus)
- 1997 - *New Horizons* (BMG)
- 1999 - *Language of Love* (Telarc)
- 2001 - *Girl Talk* (Telarc)

#### As guest with others:

- *A Merry Christmas* (RCA compilation)
- *I Love Your Smile* with Cecil Bridgewater (Mesa Bluemoon)
- *Mean What You Say* with Cecil Bridgewater (Brownstone)
- *We Got What You Need* with James Williams (Evidence)
- *The Jazz Heritage All-Stars Live at the Blue Note* with Kenny Burrell (Concord)
- *The Shade* with Marc Puricelli (Music Masters)
- *Get There* with Dennis Rowland (Concord Vista)
- *City Breeze* with Naosuke Miyamo Trio (Crown)
- *Live at Peabody's Café* with Cleveland Jazz All-Stars (North Coast Jazz)
- *This is For You* with Dewey Jeffries (Della)
- *Jazz Directions 2, 1997* with East Carolina Univ. Jazz Ensemble (EquJazz2)
- *Christmas Songs* with Ray Brown Trio (Telarc)
- *A Swingin' Wedding* (RCA compilation)
- *Jazz For Swingin' Lovers* (a compilation)

### Jeri Brown

She amazed Cleveland jazz audiences for 13 years when she performed here from 1976 to 1989. Later, she amazed jazz fans around the world with her sultry voice and vocal gymnastics.

The niece of jazz trumpeter Virgil Carter, the multi-faceted Jeri Brown was born in St. Louis in 1952 and began singing at jam sessions while she was still in grammar school. She began taking opera lessons at the age of 12, won a scholarship to Westmar College in Iowa, and toured Europe with a light opera chorale.

Brown moved to the Cleveland area in 1976 and got her masters degree in classical music at Kent State University. She taught music at Oberlin, Cleveland State University and Cuyahoga Community College while performing with a variety of local groups including the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra. Her four-octave





**Jeri Brown singing in Cleveland**

range was always influenced by the sound of the horns behind her. She loved to use her voice to play off the instrumental passages of the musicians.

*The Plain Dealer* once said of her, "Of all the young jazz singers to emerge in recent years, the one who has the greatest chance of inheriting the mantle of scat queen from Ella Fitzgerald is Jeri Brown."

Critic Chris Colombi, Jr. wrote that Jeri Brown is "a consummate jazz musician whose axe happens to be her vocal chords."

Brown left Cleveland in 1989 to join the faculty at Concordia University in Montreal. While teaching there, she began in 1991 to record for Justin Time Records. Her first album was *Mirage* with pianist Fred Hersch and bassist Daniel Lessard. It was followed by *The Peacocks* in 1993, *A Timeless Place* with Jimmy Rowles in 1995, *Fresh Start* and *April in Paris* in 1996.

Jeri later moved to Nova Scotia to teach at St. Francis Xavier University.

### **Jeri Brown Discography**

- 1991 - *Mirage* (Justin Time)
- 1992 - *Unfolding the Peacocks* (Justin Time)
- 1994 - *A Timeless Place* (Justin Time)
- 1995 - *Fresh Start* (Justin Time)
- 1996 - *April in Paris* (Justin Time)
- 1998 - *Zaius* (Justin Time)
- 1999 - *I've Got Your Number* (Justin Time)

### **Mar'Shal Baxter-Beckley**

She began singing in Cleveland and toured the country for 16 years, including performances at New York's famed Apollo Theatre, and was even invited to sing at the White House.

Mar'Shal Baxter-Beckley said, "I started singing at about two or three years old. My mom was a gospel

singer and we sang background for her in Cleveland." They were called the Thomas Singers. Mar'Shal's father had been a blues singer and guitar player in Mississippi and Missouri and played keyboard for the family group.

"When I was eight years old," said Baxter-Beckley, "I decided I was going to play accordion." Her parents went to a music store on Prospect Avenue and bought her an accordion. There was a story in a Cleveland newspaper that she was the first black girl who ever bought an accordion from that store.

Before long, the eight year old girl with a big voice and a new accordion began performing in public. "I started doing little gigs," she said. "My father played guitar, his friend played bass, and my younger brother became the drummer." She spent much of her youth singing and playing in all types of music settings, churches, clubs and parties – but not jazz.

One day when she was 12, she came home from school and her mother said, "You won't believe who's in the living room!" It was singer Marvin Gaye who had come to their home to ask Mar'Shal's brother to play bass for him. She laughed as she recalled, "I walked in and fainted. I just passed out!"



**Mar'Shal Baxter-Beckley**

After graduating from high school in 1966, she went on the road. In the late 1960s and early '70s, she sang at the Apollo Theatre in New York where she met such performers as comedians Redd Foxx and Slappy White. She also came home to Cleveland from time to time and performed with some major names here. "I had the opportunity to sing with Gladys Knight and Dionne Warwick at Leo's Casino." She also met – for the second time – singer Marvin Gaye. He remembered her, "You're the little girl who passed out. I was so worried about that." That night, he dedicated his show to her.

"I didn't start singing jazz until I was 20 or 24," she said. "I was introduced to a 20-piece jazz orchestra, Just a Touch of Class, and I started singing with them."

After raising two children, including a son who produced his own record albums, Mar'Shal decided she didn't want any more of the constant traveling. She came home and made Cleveland her base of operations. "Why leave my hometown?" she asked herself. "I can make some noise here."

Beginning in the early 1990s, she sang with a variety of jazz groups in Cleveland, including, for the first time,

a dixieland band. She added her gospel-trained singing voice to the New Orleans Stompers, delighting audiences with a style that reminded many of the early days of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey. She said she enjoyed singing the old songs and having a wonderful time with a great bunch of guys who play jazz part time because they love the music.

She also recorded in Cleveland, including an album entitled *Believe in Me* with pianist Ray Odum and drummer Tony Bird.

In July of 1994, she was invited to sing for President Bill Clinton at the White House in Washington. The president was hosting a White House luncheon for PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to mark the signing of a new treaty.

"I really didn't believe it," said Mar'Shal. "I thought it was a joke." But, after the reality of it set in, she went out and bought some new clothes. Her manager, Ray Odum, wrote a song for the occasion and asked her to add the lyrics. Literally overnight, she wrote the words to a song called "Presidential Blues."

With new clothing and a new song, they went to

Washington. But things did not go quite as planned. Mar'Shal remembered what happened. "There was a tornado the night before. There was no power. We got a call saying, 'We're going to move it to the courtyard across the way.' They called off the luncheon because Arafat and Rabin wanted to leave early because of the weather. President Clinton took them to the airport in his limo and got back just as I finished singing 'My Country 'Tis of Thee.'" Because of the power outage, she had to sing through a bullhorn.

The president apologized for what had happened and Mar'Shal gave him a recording of "Presidential Blues."

The multi-faceted Mar'Shal Baxter-Beckley was also busy writing plays. She wrote almost a dozen plays which she produced and directed around the Midwest. As you might expect, her plays included a great deal of music and religion. One was entitled *Get Back to the Church*. Another was *The Cotton Club Moved to Harlem*. At times, she persuaded some of her jazz friends, including trumpeter Al Kinney and singer Archie McElrath, to perform in her plays.

Mar'Shal also operated a catering service.



## 15. Boogie Woogie Piano

In a period when jazz meant rhythm and the music was played mostly for dancing, solo pianists were constantly searching for ways to attract attention. Those with less musical skill than Art Tatum – and that includes almost everybody who ever played the piano – had trouble trying to compete with the big bands to win the approval of the dance-crazy public.

Some discovered they could please dancers with a fast-paced blues style. They added repeated eighth notes in the bass line rather than quarter notes and repeated figures, often interspersed with single-note runs, with the right hand. The style came to be known as “boogie woogie.” Two of its most important boogie woogie pianists had strong ties to Cleveland.

### Cow Cow Davenport



Cow Cow Davenport

One of the earliest blues piano players, Cow Cow Davenport, moved to Cleveland in 1930 and spent the last 25 years of his life here after playing in New Orleans' historic Storyville district, performing with Bessie Smith, and composing a number of songs, including some that became boogie woogie

classics.

Charles Davenport was born in Anniston, Alabama in 1894, one of eight children of a minister and a church organist. He taught himself to play the organ and began taking piano lessons at the age of 12. His religious parents objected to his playing blues and ragtime. “So, whenever I’d get a chance,” he once told an interviewer, “I would slip away from my home to practice on some neighbor’s piano.” He said his grandmother had always told him that if he disobeyed his parents, “The boogie man would get him.” He began calling his piano music “boogie music.”

When Davenport was 16, his parents, fed up with his interest in ragtime piano, sent him to the Alabama Theological Seminary. He was promptly expelled for playing ragtime or “boogie music.”

He went to Birmingham and began playing for dancers at honky tonk joints. When they began dancing to his piano styles, he started calling his music boogie-woogie.

When he was 20, Davenport went to Atlanta and got jobs playing piano at bars and brothels. Within several years, he was touring the South with a carnival tent show, playing in the Storyville section of New Orleans,

and working with Bessie Smith on the vaudeville circuit.

In his late 20s, Cow Cow teamed up with singer Dora Carr. After playing theatres in the South, they went north (in 1923) to Pittsburgh and New York City. He said, “I went directly to the Okeh record company and they sent me to Clarence Williams. I began to record my numbers and Clarence began to publish them. One of the first was “Cow Cow Blues.” He later recalled, “I was trying to imitate a train and originally called the song the ‘Railroad Blues.’ I was trying to get in a part where the switchman boarded the train from the cow-catcher on the front of the locomotive. The word ‘cow’ somehow stuck with me.” He later began referring to himself as “Cow Cow.”

Davenport claimed his 1923 recording of “Cow Cow Blues” was the first boogie woogie recording. Long before the boogie woogie craze of the late 1930s and early ‘40s, Davenport took the basic 12-bar blues and added an eight-to-the-bar left hand bass line.

He made dozens of records as a leader and as a singer, including “I Ain’t No Iceman.” Another early song which he co-composed was “I’ll Be Glad When You’re Dead, You Rascal You.” The Davenport song became a classic vehicle for Louis Armstrong.

Davenport also made a number of piano rolls of his primitive style. He carried dozens of rolls in the trunk of his car and sold them at his performances, just as many other musicians later sold their records, tapes and CDs at gigs. With his record and piano roll sales, Cow Cow was making more money than he had ever made before and later said, “I had to go back home and show off.” He said he “showed off (his singer) Dora (Carr) too much and somebody took her away from me.”

By 1927, Davenport found another musical partner named Ivy Smith. They spent a great deal of time performing in Chicago.

One night in the late 1920s in Pittsburgh, Davenport said he met a pianist named Pinetop Smith, who, in Davenport’s words, “was trying to copy my piano style.” Smith was also calling his piano music “boogie woogie,” but, according to Davenport, “Smith really didn’t know what he was playing.” Ironically, in the mid-1930s, Smith’s “Pinetop’s Boogie” became the first widely-recognized example of the boogie woogie style. Smith’s song was recorded by Bing Crosby and it triggered national interest in the style. The Tommy Dorsey big band made a record of “Boogie Woogie” and it sold more than four million copies. It became the most popular of Dorsey’s many hit records.

While the music of his younger admirer was being played nationally, Davenport was having trouble making a living as an entertainer. In 1930 (at the age of 36), he moved to Cleveland where his sister lived and opened a record shop. He continued to compose and tried to tour

several more times, but his popularity was fading and he was forced to sell his tour bus. At one point, he opened a café in Cleveland.

In the 1940s, several of Davenport's old songs were resurrected. In the midst of the boogie woogie boom, Ella Mae Morse, Ella Fitzgerald, and others made hit records of his best remembered song, "Cow Cow Boogie."

After Davenport finally achieved some national attention, he was afflicted with a partial paralysis that all but deprived him of the use of his right hand. Unable to play, he went to New York City in 1942, and worked as a washroom attendant at the famous Onyx Club, a citadel of bebop, on 52nd Street.

After regaining the use of his hand, he played a number of local gigs in Cleveland and married a singer named Peggy Taylor who also happened to be a snake charmer. Newspaperman Julian Krawcheck, who had formed a jazz organization called the Hot Club of Cleveland, invited Davenport to play at some of the club's sessions at the Cabin Club at East 105th and Euclid. "He must have been in his late 50s," recalled Krawcheck, "but he looked to be in his 60s."

"One night, he brought his wife to sing and *she brought a snake with her!* Oh, my God," recalled Krawcheck, "I was scared to death! I didn't know what to do. I wanted to stop the music and tell the people to run like hell!" Krawcheck said Davenport's wife was never invited back.

In the early 1950s, Davenport and his wife became involved in theatrical productions at Cleveland's Karamu House.

Davenport died of hardening of the arteries in 1955 at the age of 61 at his home on East 92nd Street in Cleveland. He was buried in Cleveland's Evergreen Cemetery.

Davenport never won the wide recognition he probably deserved as an early pioneer of jazz piano, a developer of the boogie boogie style, and as the composer of several classic jazz songs.

## Freddie Slack

Probably the most popular boogie woogie piano player of the 1930s and '40s, Freddie Slack, a native of La Crosse, Wisconsin, came to Cleveland in 1935 to play with the Ben Pollack Orchestra at the Mayfair Casino, a plush nightclub in the Ohio Theatre Building on Euclid Avenue. A year later, Slack left the Pollack band and joined Jimmy Dorsey's Orchestra which included Cleveland trumpeter George Thow and drummer Ray McKinley.

In 1939, McKinley teamed up with trombonist

Will Bradley to form a new big band and hired Slack to play piano and arrange. With so many big bands playing at the time, success for the new Will Bradley-Ray McKinley band depended on a distinctive sound. The Bob Crosby Orchestra had become popular by playing big band arrangements of dixieland jazz.

McKinley and Slack had heard Cow Cow Davenport, Meade Lux Lewis, Albert Ammons and others playing boogie woogie with small groups and wondered how a big band would sound playing boogie woogie jazz. They decided to experiment with the eight-to-the-bar form.

McKinley remembered, "We were playing one of those songs one night at the Famous Door and two songwriters were there. There was a part where I had a drum break, and for some reason or other, instead of playing the break, I sang out,

***Oh, beat me, daddy, eight to the bar!***

After the set, McKinley said one of the songwriters "called me over to the table and asked if they could write a song using the vocal break."

"Beat Me, Daddy, Eight to the Bar," composed by Don Raye and Hughie Prince and played by the Will Bradley Orchestra with drummer Ray McKinley and pianist Slack became a big national hit. The band quickly made a series of other popular big band boogie woogie records including "Fry Me, Cookie, With a Can of Lard," "Scrub Me, Mama, With a Boogie Beat," and "Bounce Me, Brother, With a Solid Four." Slack became the national personification of the boogie woogie piano style.

Two years later (in 1941), Slack formed his own band, but he had little success until he hired a singer he had met with the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra. Ella Mae Morse's recordings with Slack's band of Davenport's "Cow Cow Boogie" and "Blacksmith Blues" helped put the new Capitol Record Company in the black.

Slack appeared in two Hollywood movies but gave up the band business in the early 1950s.

In August of 1965, at the age of 55, Slack was found dead in his Hollywood apartment of undetermined causes. It was 30 years after he had come to Cleveland to play at the Mayfair Casino and 25 years after he had become the most popular boogie woogie piano player in the country.



**Freddie Slack**



## 16. "Modern" Jazz

It wasn't swing. It wasn't bebop. It really didn't fit any of the other labels writers like to impose on various styles of jazz in hopes of trying to clarify and understand the forms.

Anyone who has spent any time at all listening to jazz knows it is virtually impossible to neatly departmentalize styles; most are amalgams of many styles. Like artists in all fields of art, jazz musicians incorporate what they consider the best of what they have assimilated, add their own touches, and attempt to create something new.

In the 1950s, when most discussions were still revolving around the battle for jazz supremacy between swing and bebop, there were several departures into other areas which pre-dated the free jazz of the 1960s. On the West Coast, they were playing what they called "cool jazz." Pianist Dave Brubeck, incorporating many classical references in his music, was playing what many at the time called "cerebral jazz." Big band leader Stan Kenton dubbed his music "progressive jazz."

It is impossible to neatly pigeon-hole every jazz style because there has not been a straight-line evolution of the art form. Duke Ellington's music included almost the full spectrum of jazz styles. Over the years, creative experiments have ranged far and wide.

The non-swing, non-bebop experiments of the 1950s, that some called "modern jazz," were historically significant and had important some links to Northeast Ohio.

### Dave Brubeck and jazz at Oberlin

For years, Oberlin College had one of the most respected music schools in the country, but it did not recognize jazz. There were no jazz courses in the curriculum and very little support for, or interest in, jazz at Oberlin – until March 2, 1953. A few jazz enthusiasts at Oberlin decided to try to crack the classical music barrier. They organized a jazz concert and booked the very popular Dave Brubeck Quartet to play at Finney Chapel.

The concert had all the ingredients of a major disaster. Brubeck and saxophonist Paul Desmond had just had an argument. Bass player Ron Crotty had just been given his notice. Drummer Lloyd Davis was ill with the flu.



Fantasy Records  
**Dave Brubeck at  
Oberlin College in 1953**



**Finney Chapel at Oberlin College**

To make matters worst, Brubeck later recalled the Oberlin Conservatory's concert grand piano was "kept under lock and key." He said, "I was given a small, beat-up, barely playable old grand."

But when the concert began with an explosive version of "These Foolish Things," many of the classically-trained Oberlin Conservatory students began to hear the devices Brubeck had borrowed from Bach, Beethoven and Chopin – atonality, fugues and counterpoint.

The students appreciated the dry humor of the musicians, including such lines as Desmond's comment when he was asked about his reputation of dating beautiful fashion models. Desmond said the fashion models "will go out for awhile with a cat who's scuffling, but they always seem to end up marrying a manufacturer from the Bronx. This is the way the world ends," said Desmond, playing on the words of poet T.S. Eliot, "not with a whim, but with a banker."

The musicians did the same sort of thing with their music, playing on the devices of the classical masters.

The concert was a huge success and a recording of it became one of the most popular jazz records of the 1950s. Brubeck called it "a breakthrough album for the Dave Brubeck Quartet." The performance opened the door for both college campus jazz concerts and live recordings of concerts. Perhaps even more important, the 1953 Brubeck concert at Oberlin College helped make jazz an accepted part of the established cultural scene.

### The Four Freshmen and Stan Kenton

Four young men had been singing, playing, and entertaining at clubs in Cleveland, Springfield and Dayton with little success. They were thinking about giving up show business when in 1950 a tall, thin man with blond hair quietly found a seat in the back of the room where they were singing and playing, the Esquire Lounge in Dayton. The tall man was "progressive jazz" evangelist and bandleader Stan Kenton.

The original Four Freshmen – Bob Flanigan, his cousins Ross and Don Barbour, and Hal Kratzsch – were students at Butler University's Arthur Jordan Conservatory of Music when they began listening to various vocal groups including Kenton's Pastels. That Kenton group included Howard Hoffman, who later became an announcer and weather forecaster at Cleveland's Channel 8.

By October of 1949, the Freshmen were performing at the Esquire Lounge in Dayton. Five months later, when Kenton stopped in and listened, he told the vocal and instrumental quartet he would try to persuade executives of Capitol Records to sign them to a recording contract. In October of 1950, the Four Freshmen made their first record for Capitol, "Mr. B's Blues."

When all-time jazz trombone giant Jack Teagarden first heard Flanigan play trombone in 1950, he gave Flanigan his personal mouthpiece. Flanigan told me that Teagarden "thought the mouthpiece would improve my sound. So I played with it. After listening to me play, he said, 'It's yours!' I said, 'Mr. Teagarden, that's the mouthpiece that you're playing.' He said, 'Son, first thing, let me tell you my name is "Jack." And number two, it doesn't make any difference what mouthpiece I use, I still get that same funny sound.'"

Flanigan continued to use Teagarden's trombone mouthpiece until 1968. After a rehearsal in Kansas City, somebody stole his trombone including the Teagarden mouthpiece. Bob borrowed another trombone for the gig. He never recovered his instrument or the mouthpiece that Teagarden had given him 18 years earlier, but Flanigan got another mouthpiece exactly like Teagarden's and proudly told me, "I still have it!"

While waiting for their first record to be released, the Freshmen spent a lot of time performing in Cleveland. Ross Barbour remembered a strange engagement at Moe's Main Street, a nightclub at East 79th and Euclid. He remembered, "Johnny Ray was closing and we came in for his final four days." According to Barbour, singer Ray's act was not the same as it was after he sang "Cry" on the Ed Sullivan television show and became a nationally famous singer. Barbour said, "Johnny would play the song and he'd bang on the piano, rip off the front, and throw the keyboard cover." The Freshmen worked four nights with Ray. On New Year's Eve (1950), Barbour said, "Johnny Ray and the Four Freshmen sang 'Auld Lang Syne' together for these people in Cleveland."



Capitol Records  
**Stan Kenton in the  
1950s**

While they were playing and singing every night at Moe's Main Street, the Four Freshmen were also making videos to be used on video juke boxes. They did it for a company in Shaker Heights. "We went there in the morning," recalled Barbour, "and recorded the music. Then, in the afternoon, we lip-synched for the films."

After their first records were released, the Four Freshmen returned to Moe's Main Street in December of 1951.

In January of 1952, the Freshmen played at the Old Mill in Akron and at the Akron Armory.

In July of 1952, Barbour, in his book *Now You Know*, recalled he and the other Freshmen were in a coffee shop in Akron when they first heard a record they had made for Capitol 14 months earlier. "It's a Blue World" became a big hit record among both jazz and pop fans and opened the door to concerts around the country, including the Ohio State Student Union in December of 1952.

After that concert and a week at the Palm Garden in Columbus, the Freshmen drove to Cleveland for another engagement at Moe's Main Street and to promote their records. Barbour said, "In those days, Cleveland was the place where the big hits were made. If you wanted your record to go to the top, you would put it into the hands of Cleveland disc jockeys."

While they were here, the Freshmen were asked to judge a talent contest at a Cleveland television station. Barbour recalled one of the contestants was an accordionist who played "Lady of Spain" and had forgotten to zip his fly.

By the beginning of 1953, the Freshmen had two records on the hit charts – "Blue World" and "The Day Isn't Long Enough."

When they were appearing with singer June Christy at the Yankee Inn on Route 8, the Four Freshmen were made honorary members of the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity at the University of Akron. Later in 1953, after Ken Errair replaced Hal Kratzsch, they sang and played at the Blue Crystal in Girard, the Spa Athletic Club in Erie, in Columbus for a week, at Ohio Wesleyan, at Bexley High School and Capitol University in Columbus, and Denison University before returning to the Esquire Lounge in Dayton.

The Four Freshmen's first album, *Voices in Modern*, was released in August of 1954. It demonstrated not only the solo voice of Don Barbour, but the fact that in addition to being a very popular jazz vocal group, the Freshmen



were also very talented jazz instrumentalists.

In May of 1955, when I spent some time with the Four Freshmen, we used to go out almost every night to local jazz clubs. The members of the most popular vocal group in the country sat in instrumentally with local jazz groups. It was interesting that most of the customers in the jazz clubs in Easton, Pennsylvania, where I was going to Lafayette College and working at a local radio station, had no idea these guest artists, sitting in with their local favorites, were members of the then-nationally famous Four Freshmen. Soon, the word got around to the jazz players in the area and there were wild jam sessions almost every night. At the time, the Freshmen were rehearsing for their *Four Freshmen and Five Trombones* album, the first they did with written arrangements.

By the time the Four Freshmen began their extended *Road Show* with Stan Kenton in 1959, Ken Albers had replaced Ken Errair. They played for five thousand people at Ohio State University in 1963.

In June of 1964, they appeared every day for a week on the nationally syndicated *Mike Douglas Show* at Channel 3 in Cleveland.

Barbour said, "That was the strangest week in our lives. We signed on to do the five days with *The Mike Douglas Show* and to appear every night that week at the Twin Coaches in Pittsburgh. We'd get up in the morning and fly to Cleveland, do *The Mike Douglas Show* at about one o'clock in the afternoon. We'd get out of there at 3:30 or so, get on an airplane and fly back to Pittsburgh. This was with instruments and all the luggage."

Flanigan remembered, "At the end of the week, Mike said, 'I've never seen anybody who looked as tired after doing a week on television.' They told him what they had been doing and 'He couldn't believe it.'"

On February 4, 1966, the Freshmen performed two shows at the Cleveland Music Hall with the New Christy Minstrels. It was the first production booked by Jules and Mike Belkin who went on to become Cleveland's most important live entertainment promoters for the next 35 years.

In 1967, the Four Freshmen performed for six thousand at Kent State University and returned to Cleveland in the summer of 1968.

Over the years, there were many personnel changes. Bob Flanigan continued to sing with the group for 44 years – until 1992, three years after he suffered a heart



Four Freshmen

**The Four Freshmen in the late 1950s (clockwise from the top): Bob Flanigan, Ross Barbour, Ken Albers and Don Barbour**

attack at Chautauqua in nearby New York State. He later lived in Las Vegas and served as the group's manager. Ross Barbour retired in 1977 after 29 years on the road and settled in Simi Valley, California. His brother, Don Barbour, was killed in an auto accident in 1961. Ken Errair was killed in a plane crash in California in 1969. Hal Kratzsch died of cancer in 1970.

But, other talented young singers and instrumentalists continued the Four Freshmen tradition. Flanigan said the new Four Freshmen did not consider themselves "a ghost group." He said they were adding new things all the time. "They approach it," he said, "like they want to be the best Four Freshmen of all time. That's what they want."

The new Four Freshmen appeared with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra in

the springs of 1994, 1995 and 1998 and the Freshmen invited the CJO to back them when they were the first group to be inducted into the Vocal Group Hall of Fame in Sharon, Pennsylvania in July of 1997.

What was arguably the best vocal jazz group in history continued to have strong ties to Cleveland and Northeast Ohio half a century after they first began singing and playing.

There were other Kenton connections with Northeast Ohio. Several area musicians were members of the Kenton Orchestra. Nick Ceroli from Warren, who had played with the Lionel Hampton Orchestra, played drums in the Kenton band in the 1960s. Tony Leonardi, who later became Director of Jazz Studies at Youngstown State University, played bass with the Kenton Orchestra. Ted Paskert, a drummer from Cleveland, played and recorded with Kenton. Later, a trombonist from Cleveland astounded Kenton.

## Jiggs Whigham

When Kenton first heard 21-year-old Cleveland native Jiggs Whigham play the trombone, he said, "That kid's amazing!" Almost three decades later, Whigham continued to amaze his jazz audiences and students mostly in Europe.

Haydn Whigham was born in Cleveland in 1943. The only child of a trombonist, he was exposed to a lot of musical influences at an early age. His mother, in her Richmond Heights home, said he had perfect pitch at the age of five and began playing the trombone at ten. When he was in junior high school, one of his teachers



Jiggs Whigham

told his parents that he should take music lessons. Mrs. Whigham regularly drove him to the old Cleveland Institute of Music at East 34th and Euclid for lessons and theory classes. He learned quickly and well.

When he was only 17 and still a student at Brush High School, Whigham got a summer job playing trombone with the Glenn Miller ghost band led by drummer Ray McKinley.

After the tour with the Miller Orchestra, Whigham returned to Brush High School and graduated before returning to the road with the Miller band for two years as the first trombonist and featured soloist.

He came home again and studied at the Cleveland Institute of Music and at Western Reserve University before answering the call of another big band. In 1964, after playing with the Hermit Club Big Band in Cleveland, Whigham became the lead trombonist of Kenton's inventive orchestra. Jiggs was only 21 at the time.

In 1966, Whigham decided to move to Germany where he joined Kurt Edelhagen's jazz band in Cologne. The band played for the West German Broadcasting Company. At the same time, he began playing concerts throughout Europe, making many radio and television appearances and sharing bandstands with such artists as Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, Thad Jones, Mel Lewis, Dexter Gordon, Freddie Hubbard and Lee Konitz. He also toured Africa with the Edelhagen band.

In the 1970s, Whigham began teaching at the University College of Music in Cologne. By 1979, he had been appointed director of the jazz department in the highly-regarded music school. While living in nearby Bonn, he continued to play a number of concerts in Europe and to make regular trips back to the United States and Cleveland.

During those trips home, he made a number of recordings. In 1980, he joined Kai Winding, Bill Watrous and Albert Mangelsdorff to record a classic of its type called *Trombone Summit*. He also recorded solo albums and albums with a Canadian group called the Brass Connection, which included five trombones.

In 1987, Whigham took part in the first Stan Kenton Convention in England. Joining such other Kenton alumni as Rolf Ericson, Shorty Rogers and Bud Shank, he played Kenton classics with the Ernie Eye British

band. The convention proved so popular with British Kenton fanatics, Eye and his 20-piece band began playing two concerts a month consisting entirely of Kenton Orchestra arrangements.

Whigham became head of the Jazz and Popular Music Department of the Hanns Eisler College of Music in Berlin, guest conductor and soloist with the BBC Big Band in England and, in 1996, the leader of the RIAS Big Band in Berlin, one of the best big bands in Europe. He led the RIAS Big Band in a series of concerts and recordings.

An adventurous modern jazz trombonist, Whigham once expressed his jazz philosophy in these words: "Train your ear to be as quick as your eye, be a poet, avoid cliché licks, and meet your responsibility to your audience."

Whigham, his wife and two daughters maintained a summer home on Cape Cod. They returned from Germany usually once a year. In the late 1980s and the early '90s, he came back to Cleveland several times to play with local combos and to be a guest soloist with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra.

He was appointed visiting professor for trombone at Indiana University for the 2000-2001 school year.

One of the most respected jazz trombonists in the world, Cleveland native Jiggs Whigham, in the words of his mother in Richmond Heights, "is one of those people who is extremely happy with his life as both a teacher and a performer."

### Jiggs Whigham Discography

- 1966 - *Jazz Wien 1966*
- 1980 - *Trombone Summit*
- 1984 - *Lightrnin'*
- 1988 - *Shades of Kenton* (with Lee Konitz)
- 1989 - *The Jiggs Up*
- 1991 - *The Best of Back to Balboa*
- 1995 - *'Round Midnight Concert*
- 1996 - *Little Magic in a Noisy World*
- 1996 - *Jiggs & Gene*
- 1997 - *Nice 'n' Easy*
- Dreaming*
- Brazilian Portrait*
- 1998 - *First Take*
- 1999 - *Between or Beyond Black Forest*
- 2000 - *Live at Newport: 1959, 1963, 1971*
- As leader of the RIAS Big Band of Berlin**
- 1996 - *Greetje Kauffeld Meets Jerry van Roojen and Jiggs Whigham*
- 1997 - *Destiny*
- 1997 - *The Music of the Trumpet Kings*
- 1997 - *Nostalgie*
- 1997 - *RIAS Big Band Berlin Presents Helmut Brandt*
- 1997 - *Allen Farnham Meets the RIAS Big Band*
- 1998 - *Blue Highways* (with Claudio Roditi and Paul Ferguson)
- 1998 - *Live in Berlin - The BBC Big Band Meets the RIAS Big Band*
- 1998 - *Swingtime* (with Max Greger and Benny Bailey)
- 1998 - *Tribute to George Gershwin*
- 1999 - *The Music of Duke Ellington* (with Clark Terry)



## 17. Big Bands of the 1950s

The big bands were losing their great popularity in the early 1950s for many reasons, most of them economic. But there were a number of big bands still recording and some were still touring. Two of the most popular were from Greater Cleveland and one, launched in 1952, performed not only for a high school prom in Cleveland, but also with the Cleveland Orchestra.

### Ray Anthony



Anthony was born Raymond Antonini in Bentleyville, Pennsylvania January 20, 1922 and moved to Cleveland with his parents and five brothers when he was very young. His father, who led a band in Cleveland, gave him trumpet lessons when he was only five. Shortly after he graduated from old Audubon Junior High School

and while attending John Adams High School, he was leading his own band. He joined the musicians' union at the age of 15.

When he was 16 (in 1938), Ray Anthony went out on the road with the Al Donahue Orchestra. When he was 18, he was auditioned by the very popular Glenn Miller. It was an on-the-job audition. Anthony recalled he rushed to the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York City and almost fell off the bandstand in his excitement about playing with the nation's most popular band. He said the first number they threw at him was the very popular "Tuxedo Junction," which he had never played before. He said he got through it in "acceptable style" and joined the Miller band. But, according to George Simon in his book, *The Big Bands*, Anthony never really hit it off especially well with Miller and left the band six months later.

Anthony later played with Jimmy Dorsey and returned to Cleveland to form his own band. Among the musicians in that band was Hank Geer, a saxophonist who had just graduated from Collinwood High School. As a high school student, Geer had played with the Charlie Spivak Orchestra, the house band at the Trianon Ballroom. After high school, Geer spent the summer touring with Anthony's band. He left just in time to enroll at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio where he would lead an outstanding college dance band.

Anthony, meanwhile went into the Navy in 1942 for four years.

After World War II, Anthony returned to Cleveland, formed another band, and signed a contract with Capitol Records. It was during this period, the late 1940s, that there was a revival of Glenn Miller music. Anthony began playing many of the old Miller tunes, including his own arrangement of "Tuxedo Junction." His band was not playing much jazz, but it did swing at times and became very popular, making dozens of records and playing countless college proms. For his recording dates, Anthony frequently used top studio jazz musicians including Conrad Gozzo, Georgie Auld, Skeets Herfurt, Mel Lewis and Plas Johnson, who later played Clevelanders Henry Mancini's "Pink Panther Theme" for the movie soundtrack. Anthony's most popular record was the theme song of a popular radio and television series *Dragnet*.

Leading a band through the 1950s, Anthony helped extend the big band era. He eventually settled in California and in the 1980s was conducting a mail order service for big band and jazz records.

### Ralph Flanagan

One of the most popular big bands in the country in the early 1950s – and one of the strangest – was led by a musician who was born and grew up in Northeast Ohio.

Ralph Flanagan was born in Lorain April 7th, 1919. By the time he was in his early 20s, he was playing piano and arranging for the sweet band of Rocky River native Sammy Kaye. After serving in the merchant marines during World War II, Flanagan became a studio musician for RCA Victor Records in New York and began arranging for such bandleaders as Charlie Barnet, Hal McIntyre, Gene Krupa, Boyd Raeburn and Clevelanders Blue Baron.

During the Glenn Miller revival of the late 1940s, RCA Victor re-issued all sorts of old Miller recordings and airchecks and was looking for new ways to continue the momentum of the Miller popularity. Record producer Herb Hendler hired Flanagan to record some Miller songs for a minor record label. When Hendler later went to work for RCA, Flanagan was working as a staff arranger for the Mitchell Ayers Orchestra which



was playing on the Perry Como television show. Hendler suggested to his RCA bosses that Flanagan front a Miller-type band and make some new records in the Miller style. The bosses at RCA apparently confused Flanagan with Bill Finegan who had written a number of excellent arrangements for the Miller Orchestra. Actually, Flanagan had no connection whatsoever with the Miller Orchestra, but Hendler figured that by creating a band that sounded something like Miller's, RCA would either create a popular new band or at least stimulate the sales of old Miller records. He managed to achieve both objectives.

Flanagan wrote some new arrangements and used musicians from the *Perry Como Show* to record them in 1949. RCA Victor mounted a huge promotional campaign and the records began to sell. Heavy disc jockey play prompted requests for the band to tour ballrooms in the East and Midwest. Hendler found himself in a box because, despite the popular records, there was no Ralph Flanagan Orchestra. It was strictly a pick-up studio band. So, Hendler hired Bernie Woods, the former music editor of *Variety*, to help form a touring band, manage it, and get booking contracts. Woods not only got bookings, he also got an agreement for commercial radio broadcasts from wherever the band was playing. The ballroom owners were attracted by the prospect of added publicity.

In March of 1950, with a new, young group of touring musicians, Flanagan set out on the road with his Glenn Miller-sounding band, but Flanagan quickly provoked the anger of other big band leaders. He was charging only \$1,000 a night during the week and \$1,500 on weekends while most of the other big bands were getting \$2,500 a night. Tommy Dorsey openly accused Flanagan of trying to undermine the older, more established bands.

Propelled by the heavy RCA promotion of the Miller-style records, Flanagan's ploy worked. Woods, in a 1994 book entitled *When the Music Stopped*, said the Flanagan band quickly became "the most sought-after band in the country." There is no doubt the band was popular. During its first year and a half on the road, the band got only one night off per week, played for more than three million people, and grossed about \$1.5 million, an unheard of figure for the era.

Among the band's most popular songs were "Hot Toddy" and "Shaker Heights Stomp."

While the Flanagan Orchestra was playing new songs arranged in the Glenn Miller style, there was little jazz content, but the college kids thought they were dancing to the same kind of music that propelled the early years of the swing era.

The biggest problem, according to Woods, was Flanagan. In his book, Woods said Flanagan simply did

not like being a public figure. "He loved the money," said Woods, "but he hated being a bandleader." And the ballroom operators, who liked his music, didn't like him. Flanagan's band manager, later called the leader "A mouse of a man," who seemed to do everything he possibly could to alienate almost everyone. When his fans approached the bandstand, he would turn away. When they tugged at his trousers, he kicked at them. One time in Albuquerque, said Woods, "Flanagan kicked a girl in the teeth and her boyfriend tried to drag the bandleader off the stage."

In the fall of 1951, the Flanagan band was booked in a package tour through a series of Michigan cities with the Mills Brothers. The legendary African-American singers asked if they could ride on the bus with the band, but, according to Woods, Flanagan refused to permit the Mills Brothers on his bus.

One time in the mid-1950s, Flanagan attracted the amazement of newspapers by taking an early morning stroll in the nude along an East Coast beach.

Some of the Lorain native's biggest problems were prompted by his love of flying. He had a pilot's license and enjoyed flying his own plane when the band was touring. One time in Iowa, he spotted the band bus from the air and flew in low twice, buzzing the band. When he landed the plane at a nearby airport, he was greeted by some not-very-friendly policemen.

Another time, when he was scheduled to play at the Steel Pier in Atlantic City, Woods went up in Flanagan's plane to toss advertising leaflets out the window. As Flanagan piloted the plane up and down the beach and Woods threw leaflets out the window, the plane narrowly missed a steel cable that was attached to an advertising balloon.

Another time, Flanagan tried to fly into Vandenberg Air Force Base in California where there was extremely



Ralph Flanagan and his airplane



heavy security. He was told by the control tower to veer off; private planes were not allowed in the military air space. Woods said the Air Force was set to blast Flanagan out of the sky until the Air Force pilot spotted the band name on the side of his plane.

In Chicago, he was taking off from Midway Airport when the control tower told him to wait for an incoming airliner. Flanagan decided to try to take off anyway. As the big airline was landing, it blew over Flanagan's plane as it was taxiing for takeoff. He escaped serious injury but finally the authorities lifted his pilot's license.

Flanagan also managed to get in trouble with labor unions. He frequently refused to give his band members the required number of days off. The American Federation of Musicians also jumped on him for embarrassing his band members.

It wasn't just the musicians' union. At the Capitol Theatre in New York, Flanagan got into trouble with a theatre union. In a dispute in which union members said he was violating union rules by personally moving equipment into the theatre, he knocked down an angry stage hand. A few minutes later, a sandbag from the flies above the stage dropped and narrowly missed Flanagan's head.

Woods also recalled that one time in Phoenix Flanagan went to a barber shop and fell asleep in the chair. The barber gave him a very close haircut. When he woke up, he discovered the barber had snipped away at his hair-piece.

Fed up with the leader's strange behavior, Woods left the Flanagan band after about a year and a half. Flanagan continued to tour and record until the late 1950s when popular vocalists, early rock 'n roll, mounting big band costs, and his own antics destroyed the popularity of the Ralph Flanagan Orchestra.

Flanagan continued arranging in the 1960s.

## The Sauter-Finegan Orchestra

The students at Cleveland's Cathedral Latin High School prom were fascinated by the unusual music, but they couldn't dance to it. They stood around and listened as the orchestra played music in a way they had never heard before.

It was the Sauter-Finegan Orchestra, a revolutionary, inventive and whimsical big band that performed from 1952 to 1957.

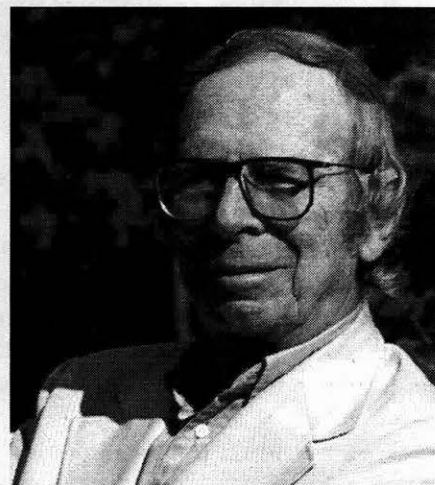
When I first heard the Sauter-Finegan Orchestra the week after Dwight Eisenhower was nominated for president, I recalled Eddie Sauter had played with Charlie Barnet's band and arranged for Artie Shaw and Benny Goodman ("Superman" and "Clarinet a la King" among others). I recognized Finegan as the man who had arranged for five years for the Glenn Miller Orchestra. He arranged Miller's hugely successful "Little Brown Jug."

The early 1950s was an odd time to form a new big band. Ballrooms around the country had closed. The costs of operating big bands had skyrocketed and record companies and radio stations were spotlighting singers rather than bands.

Despite the current trends, Sauter and Finegan called the best studio musicians they could find into RCA's Manhattan Center studios on May 12, 1952 and recorded their first two sides, "Doodletown Fifers" and "Azure-Té (Paris Blues).

Among the musicians on the record date were some excellent jazz artists – trumpeter Bobby Nichols, trombonist Bill Harris, pianist Ralph Burns and drummer Don Lamond, all from the Woody Herman band.

A couple of weeks later, after trombonist



Bill Finegan in 1990

Kai Winding joined the band, they recorded an almost classical version of "April In Paris" with soprano Florence Blumberg singing a haunting, virtually wordless obligato with Nichols' muted trumpet, and "Midnight On The Ganges."

The Sauter-Finegan Orchestra combined elements of jazz, classical music and pops in clever and frequently humorous arrangements. They used all manner of instruments – the entire woodwind family, a keyboard glockenspiel, celeste, harp, recorder, tubas, bells, tuned water glasses, a toy trumpet and even kazooos. Finegan told me, "People never knew what to make of us because nobody could put a label on it. We were often asked, 'What is it?' We would simply say, 'It's music.' They would ask, 'Is it jazz?' We'd say, 'Well sure, there's some jazz there.' We had some great jazz players in our band. Some people would say, 'The band doesn't swing.' We'd say, 'You haven't listened to it.' Every single thing we played was not a swing piece like Count Basie or Duke Ellington or Woody Herman, but there's swing in there. There's jazz in it. It has many elements. We never tried to put a label on it. It was just music."

It was different and interesting music, but it was not all jazz despite the presence of such other jazz artists as Doc Severinsen, Lou Stein, Mundell Lowe, George Duvivier, Milt Hinton, Al Klink and Mousey Alexander.

When Finegan came to Cleveland in November of



**The Sauter-Finegan Orchestra on the road**

1991 to be the guest conductor of the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, he told me, "Most of the things we were writing were sort of in transition from the dance music of the big bands into more concert-listening type things. We had a foot in each camp there for a while."

He said, "We started recording these things in New York with no intention of going out on the road with it and playing in person. We hoped to just make records."

When the orchestra began getting rave reviews and its records began selling well, booking agent Willard Alexander urged the band to go on the road. Finegan recalled, "The first summer we went out, we worked our way to Chicago and I think we played mostly ballrooms in amusement parks, and they weren't too ready to listen to concert material. They'd look at the band and they'd see a tuba and a harp and the percussion section and hear the xylophone and they'd say, '*How can you dance to that?*' They were used to brass and saxophones with the old dance bands."

Finegan remembered, "The funniest remark of all time was one night when somebody hollered up, 'Hey, when are you gonna play something we can dance to?' One of our trombone players (Sonny Russo) hollered right back, 'When are you gonna dance something we can play to?'"

Eventually they were forced to play some dance music. Finegan said, "We quickly wrote some charts of things people could dance to, and we would do some of our regular things."

The Sauter-Finegan Orchestra played February 19, 1954 at the Aragon Ballroom in Cleveland.

I saw the band in Wilmington, Delaware. Their bus carried a large sign proclaiming, "Music Is Fun!" In the middle of the wild assortment of instruments and red blazers on the bandstand, Finegan conducted from a large audio control board (years before musicians went crazy with sound systems). He used the mixer, which had been built by Sauter's brother, an engineer with Bell Labs, to increase the volume of small instruments in the orchestra.

When the Sauter - Finegan Orchestra performed "Midnight Sleighride," based on Prokofiev's "Lt. Kije Suite", which began with the sound of a horse's hoofs in the snow, Finegan soloed. He beat his hands against his chest in rhythm. Finegan later said it was probably his best solo work on record – "or on snow!" Later Finegan said of his chest-thumping, "I made a fool of myself for five years."

When they did "The Honey Jump," most of the band members played a battery of kazoos. On "Yankee Doodletown," Sauter soloed on a toy trumpet.

The Sauter-Finegan Orchestra performed a joint concert with the Cleveland Orchestra at Severance Hall. Together they played "Concerto for Jazz Band and Symphony Orchestra." In addition to the concerto, Finegan recalled, "They played a couple of things and we played a few things. It was a great concert. We really enjoyed being here."

Eventually economic pressures caught up with the Sauter-Finegan Orchestra. Sauter took a job as music director of a radio station in West Germany. Finegan continued with the band for a while using studio musicians, but finally disbanded the orchestra in March of 1957.

Sauter, who later did the orchestrations for the album *Focus on Stan Getz*, died of a heart attack in 1981. Finegan later wrote arrangements for the Glenn Miller ghost band and the Mel Lewis Orchestra, which included Cleveland's Joe Lovano, and taught jazz at the University of Bridgeport.

Some of the former Cathedral Latin students were at Cuyahoga Community College in November, 1991, when Bill Finegan, then 74, returned to direct the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra playing some of his arrangements. It was the first time any other band had played the complex Sauter-Finegan charts.

The CJO performed another Sauter-Finegan concert in January of 1999.



## 18. The Far-Ranging 1960s

In the 1960s, rock 'n roll and Motown were monopolizing popular music. The big jazz bands of the 1930s and '40s and the singers of the '50s had faded from the public consciousness. It was a critical time for jazz. Jazz had not been the world's most popular music for almost two decades and seemed to be almost lost in the cross-fire of other forms of musical entertainment.

Some artists, who viewed jazz as an almost straight-line evolutionary process, tried to extend it in a variety of directions, sometimes with disastrous results. Others, rejecting the need to expand, reverted to earlier styles of jazz. The result was a fragmentation of jazz which, in turn, diminished its general popularity. Jazz had moved from the mainstream of popularity into a much more exclusive area of popular culture. Like the battle between bebop and swing in the 1940s, jazz found itself split, not into just two competing philosophical camps – but many.

The evolutionists delved into hard-bop, neo-bop, free jazz, and a variety of other styles, all seeking the next step in an evolutionary process. In reaction, other jazz artists reverted to the earlier styles of New Orleans and swing and tried to improve on what had been done earlier in those styles.

Through this sometimes awkward and confusing period, a number of artists from Cleveland were still making substantial contributions to the many faces of jazz.

### Albert Ayler's controversial art

If you had never heard Clevelander Albert Ayler before, you might wonder if he were really a musician or simply trying to perpetrate a musical joke on his audience. He sometimes sounded like a child making his first attempts to get sounds out of the saxophone. He blew honks, growls and shrieks. He twisted and shoved them almost into submission. He sounded like a musical Jackson Pollack pouring paint from a ladder onto his canvas. But a few minutes later, Ayler would string together a long run of perfectly enunciated notes and you would suddenly realize he was a very capable technician. In fact, Ayler was a formally trained musician.

Ayler, who marched to a distinctively different drummer, once said bebop was too simple. He said it was "like humming along with Mitch Miller." He



Cleveland Press / CSU Archives

Albert Ayler

sought to create jazz that had more to say.

He was a world leader in the free jazz movement of the 1960s, but Ayler's early influences offered little or no indication of his eventual experiments in unstructured music.

Born in Cleveland July 13, 1936, Ayler was raised by Edward and Myrtle Ayler in Shaker Heights. He grew up in a very musical atmosphere. He said his father played violin and a Dexter Gordon-style saxophone. "When I

was two," recalled Albert, "I used to blow foot stool. My mother told me I'd hold it up to my mouth and blow as if it were a horn." When his father played Lionel Hampton records, Albert would mimic the musicians. Edward decided to teach his son to play alto sax. Albert recalled, "I'd play duets with him at church."

According to Jeff Schwartz' book *Albert Ayler: His Life and Music*, Edward Ayler insisted that his son practice, even beating him at times when Albert refused to practice and wanted to be out on the street with the other kids. Years later, Ayler remembered, "I'd be playing a ballad and my father would say, 'Get back to the melody. Stop playing that nonsense!'"

Ayler was taught music by his father until he was ten years old. Then, he went to Benny Miller's Music Academy at East 105th and Superior. He continued studying with Miller until he was 18. Ayler later said he was influenced at the time by some surprisingly traditional musical models – Lester Young and Sidney Bechet. He said he was "crazy about Bechet."

At John Adams High School, Ayler played first alto in the school orchestra, doubled on the oboe, and demonstrated a photographic memory for musical scores. He was also a champion high school golfer.

### Bobby Few and Ayler

One of Ayler's boyhood friends was Bobby Few, later an important jazz pianist in Europe. Few recalled, "Albert and I used to play baseball together, along with his brother, Don Ayler (six years older than Albert). When we were in high school, we played music for cabaret parties and strip-tease shows. I remember very well playing the blues with Albert. He was a very good blues artist at that time."

At 15, Ayler was playing saxophone with Lloyd Pearson and his Counts of Rhythm. The boys listened to

records by such classic jazz artists as Lester Young, Wardell Gray, Charlie Parker and Cleveland trumpeter Freddie Webster. They also went to Cleveland jazz clubs to catch live performances of such artists as Illinois Jacquet and Red Prysock. One night, at Gleason's, Albert met blues singer and harmonica player Little Walter Jacobs who had played with Chicago blues legend Muddy Waters. Little Walter asked Ayler, while he was still in high school, to join his touring blues group. Ayler's father remembered, "When he got the job, he was so excited he could hardly believe it. He came running home shouting, 'They're gonna take me with 'em! They're taking me!'"

Ayler toured with Little Walter's rhythm and blues group during the summers of 1952 and '53. Blues artist Robert Lockwood, Jr., who later settled in Cleveland, recorded with Little Walter. Despite the excitement of touring, young Ayler was not happy with the life style.

When he came home, he played with Lloyd Price and became familiar with the rougher side of Cleveland life. He spent a lot of time at a barbershop where the local pimps congregated. He acquired a reputation that would continue for the rest of his life as a wild dresser and womanizer. He began wearing brightly colored leather suits that became his trademark.

## Ayler at John Carroll University

When Ayler graduated from John Adams High School in 1954 at the age of 18, he began attending John Carroll University in nearby University Heights. At the time, Ayler was really more interested in studying the bebop jazz style of Charlie Parker. He met Bird in Cleveland in 1955 and said, "I saw the spiritual quality in the man." Albert said, "He looked at me, smiled, and shook my hand. I was impressed by the way he played the changes." Others said Ayler was soon imitating Parker and some local musicians began calling him "Little Bird." Some said Ayler would warm up by playing Parker solos *backward*.

While Ayler was in college, classmate William McLarney recalled Albert would go to the Club 100 and the Esquire Lounge at 105th and Euclid where jazz musicians Ace Carter, Bill Gidney, Roland Kirk and Eddie Baccus were playing. He told the musicians he had been studying "Arabian music." Many of the musicians did not want Ayler to sit in with them. After listening to his unstructured honks and howls, some musicians derisively called Ayler "Bicycle Horn." Occasionally, Kirk

let Ayler sit in with his group.

Accepting those childish honks, growls and shrieks as a deliberate part of his art, some critics in retrospect have said Ayler's music expressed his point of view during a troubled period of our history. During the "Black Is Beautiful" and "Black Power" movements of the turbulent 1960s, it may have been Ayler's way of asserting black identity, of rebelling against established standards of taste and acceptability. In that historical context, some critics said Ayler's music had meaning as art.

McLarney said Ayler, when he was in college, had a beard with a white patch and often wore an expensive leather suit. "He had a scar on his throat that I was told was inflicted with a knife. He was usually in the company of his brother Donald."

## Ayler joins the Army

He left college in 1956 and went in the Army. When Ayler was stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky, he played in Army bands and jammed with Stanley Turrentine and other musical free-thinkers. "The commanding officer of the Army band," remembered Ayler, "would say about my playing, 'He's insane. Don't talk to him. Stay away from him!'"

While he was in the Army, Ayler became bored with the bebop style of Parker and decided to switch from alto to tenor saxophone. In a 1966 interview in *DownBeat* magazine, Ayler said, "It seemed to me that

on the tenor you could get out all the feelings of the ghetto. On that horn, you can shout and tell the truth." That was perhaps a strange statement from a young man who was not a product of a ghetto. He was raised in the upper middle class and racially-integrated Cleveland suburb of Shaker Heights.

In early 1959, Ayler was reassigned by the Army to France. He frequently went to Paris jazz clubs and began absorbing the then-new jazz of John Coltrane who was recording with Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk. "To listen to Coltrane," said Ayler, "was just like he was talking to me, saying, 'Brother, get yourself together spiritually.'" Beaver Lewis, who served in the Army with Ayler, said, "After hearing Coltrane, Albert felt there was something missing in his music and he wanted to find whatever that was."

Also in France, Ayler was influenced by another unlikely source, the French National Anthem. He called it "La Mayonnaise" and later constructed several



Albert Ayler



compositions from its simple theme including "Infinite Spirit," "Spirits Rejoice" and "Light in Darkness."

Ayler was discharged in 1961 and lived briefly in Los Angeles. There he met struggling veteran comedian Redd Foxx who told him, "Play what you believe in." What Ayler believed in did not mesh with the cool and hard bop sounds that were being played in L.A. at the time.

He returned to Cleveland. When Ayler played his revolutionary sounds in Cleveland, many local musicians did not understand or appreciate what he was trying to do. His old friend Lloyd Pearson said Ayler was frequently "rejected by the audience. They laughed at his style because they hadn't heard it before."

Later, Ayler went to New York City. Bobby Few remembered, "He would always come back to Cleveland and say, 'Bobby, why don't you come to New York? It's better than here in Cleveland.' But, it was ten years later," said Few, "that I finally caught the message and did that."

When Few arrived in New York to join his friend, Ayler decided to return to Europe. His old college friend, McLarney, said, "Albert told me once that he was going to go to Europe, spend a year, make a record or two, and show all the critics. Which is pretty much what he did."

In Europe in early 1962, Ayler listened to such jazz revolutionaries as Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman and Coltrane and played his own form of avant garde or free jazz. In Sweden he supported himself by playing commercial music during the day and performing in his own style during jam sessions at night. One time in Stockholm, Ayler recalled, "I started to play what was in my soul and the promoter pulled me off the stage."

He made his first record October 25, 1962 in the Main Hall of the Academy of Music in Stockholm. Joining Ayler, who played both tenor sax and piano, were bassist Torbjorn Hultcrantz and drummer Sune Spangberg. They recorded ten songs including "Good Bait" which had been composed by Cleveland Tadd Dameron.

"He really made a path over there," remembered Few, "because those people weren't accustomed to that music and he was like a pioneer to bring it there."

Some critics praised his records; others condemned them. Historian and critic Martin Williams wrote that Ayler was trying to make music from a negative premise, but many people appreciated the new paths Ayler was blazing. He made more records, including some with his old childhood friend Few. "I recorded four or five albums with him on Impulse," said Few, "and they were very successful albums."

Ayler returned to New York in 1963 and came home to Cleveland the following year and married Arlene Benton. They had a daughter, Desiree.

Ayler again tried playing his free-form jazz in several clubs around Cleveland's East 105th and Euclid area, but

he didn't attract much attention here. Albert and his trumpet-playing brother, Donald, decided to go back to New York in late 1964.

## Ronald Shannon Jackson's memories

By 1966, when Ayler was considered a leader of the free jazz movement, he met a 25-year-old drummer from Texas named Ronald Shannon Jackson. Later, at a Tri-C JazzFest, Jackson said, "I went to a studio to make a recording with a young man named Charles Pollack and while making this recording, Albert Ayler was in the studio. After the session, Albert came over to me and said he wanted me to play with his band. I had just gotten to New York and *any* music with *any* band was welcome. So I started working with him."

Jackson played with Ayler for about two years, and said Ayler was always seeking something new in his music. "He got me to open up. He said, 'Play the way you play alone when there is no one else around. That's what I want!' So this is what I did. It required me using all of the influences of music that were in my life, from the march to bebop, slow to back-beat and shuffle."

After leaving Ayler, Jackson went on to help create new forms of jazz with even bigger names. "By working with Albert," said Jackson, "it was much easier for me when I worked with Ornette Coleman who I feel was doing about the same thing. He wanted to change the music, but he wanted to change it in a way that was like I remember when we were kids, playing in the park in Texas. The musicians would get off at 6 a.m. or 7 a.m. from their after-hours gigs and go to the park and just jam. That, to me, was the most beautiful music I ever heard. It was just total freedom of expression in music. People would gather there 'cause they knew all the musicians would be there because no one would bother you in the park in the morning. No one would disturb you about it."

In New York, according to author Schwartz, Albert met a woman named Mary Parks who became his constant companion, lover, sometimes collaborator, and manager of his business affairs. Parks later said, "I would like to think that I was a force who continually inspired him at times when he only wanted to meditate."

By August of 1968, Ayler had made several records and was playing in New York with his regular group that included pianist Call Cobbs, bassist Bill Fowell and drummer Beaver Harris. Ayler fired his brother Don from the group. Don later said he left because of the increasing influence of Mary Parks on Albert's music and his life.

Steven Tintweiss toured with Ayler on his last trip to France. Tintweiss recalled, "We played and recorded two concerts at the Maeght Foundation in St. Paul de Vence on July 25th and 27th of 1970. A few days later, we

played a private concert at the tourist villa where we were staying."

In addition to albums from the second concert, a full length movie was made. Tintweiss said he never saw the movie.

## Ayler's death

Four months later (November 25, 1970), Ayler's body was pulled from New York City's East River. He was 34-years-old.

Over the years there were various theories about how he died. Some said he was shot by the police. Others said he was killed by the FBI in a plot to suppress black culture. Still others said he had been killed by the Mafia with his body tied to a jukebox.

In an article in the November 23, 1997 *Cleveland Plain Dealer Sunday Magazine*, writer Michael Drexler said, "Most people who knew him say he was murdered over mounting drug debts." Ayler's father said he could not accept the theory that drugs were responsible for his son's death. According to the elder Ayler, "He may have smoked a little reefer, but nothing hard." Ayler's brother Don said some of Albert's sidemen told him marijuana was smoked during some of their shows. However, said Don, "Albert's substance intake almost certainly never included addictive drugs such as heroin or cocaine."

Before his death, Ayler was quoted as saying, "Since we are the music we play, our way of life has to be clean or else the music can't be kept pure. I couldn't use a man hung up with drugs. Fortunately, I've never had that problem."

Mary Parks told her version of Ayler's death to English discographer Mike Hames in 1983. She said, "The strains of surviving as a musician in New York seriously affected the mind of Albert's brother Donald. Their mother, Myrtle Ayler, blamed Albert for introducing Donald to the musician's life and continually pressed Albert to look after Donald" who had suffered a mental breakdown. Parks said, "Albert helped in several ways, but he did not want Donald to live with him or play with him. After two years of aggravation from his brother and demands and threats from his mother, Parks said, "Albert could no longer cope."

According to the English discographer, Parks said Albert told her "his blood had to be shed to save his mother and brother." Thinking very seriously about death at the age of 34, Albert even outlined how he wanted the rights to his music divided after he was gone.

The night he disappeared, Ayler again, according to his lover, said, "My blood has got to be shed to save my mother and my brother." He smashed one of his saxophones over their television set and stormed out of the house. Mary called the police to report Albert missing.

According to Hames, Mary said Albert took the ferry to the Statue of Liberty and jumped off, committing suicide, as the boat neared Liberty Island.

Ten days after his lifeless body was found in the river, there was a burial service at the chapel of Cleveland's Highland Park Cemetery. Fifty-five people attended, mostly family members. Donald was deeply shaken by his brother's death.

Within a year, two of Albert Ayler's sidemen also suffered unusual deaths. Henry Grimes moved to California to become an actor and vanished without a trace. Pianist Call Cobbs was killed by a hit and run driver.

Albert's mother died in 1980 and his father remarried.

For years, Edward Ayler frequently played golf at Highland Park Golf Course near his Warrensville Heights home. On the 11th hole of the Red Course, near the cemetery, where there is a simple headstone that says, "Albert Ayler, 1936-1970," the elder Ayler frequently paused to shake his head and remember the tragedy of his older son, the jazz musician many around the world still called "a genius." Edward Ayler tried to make some sense of what happened to his son.

By the time he died, Ayler was considered a leader in the narrow world of the second generation of avant garde or free jazz musicians. It was an ironic twist for the Cleveland musician who had grown up listening to this father's records of Lionel Hampton, Benny Goodman, Muddy Waters, Freddie Webster, and Charlie Parker.

Many jazz fans later dismissed Ayler's avant garde efforts as little more than almost-forgotten 1960s experiments. But, Ayler's music did help set the jazz stage for John Coltrane and some of the later musical experiments of Miles Davis.

## Albert Ayler Discography

- 1962 - *The First Recordings, Vol. I* (GNP)
- 1962 - *The First Recordings, Volume II* (DIW)
- 1963 - *My Name is Albert Ayler* (Black Lion)
- 1964 - *Goin' Home* (Black Lion)
- 1964 - *Witches and Devils* (Freedom)
- 1964 - *The Hilversum Session* (Coppens)
- 1964 - *Bells/Prophecy* (ESP)
- 1964 - *Spiritual Unity* (ESP)
- 1964 - *Vibrations* (Freedom)
- 1965 - *Spirits Rejoice* (ESP)
- 1965 - *New York Eye and Ear Control* (ESP)
- 1965 - *Bells* (ESP)
- 1966 - *At Clugs Saloon, Volumes I & II* (ESP)
- 1966 - *Lorrach: Paris* (hat ART)
- 1967 - *In Greenwich Village* (Impulse)
- 1968 - *Love Cry* (Impulse)
- 1969 - *Music is the Healing Force of the Universe* (Impulse)
- 1970 - *Volume 1* (Shandar)
- 1970 - *Volume 2* (Shandar)
- 1970 - *Nuits de la Fondation Maeght* (Shandar)



Bobby Few said the music of Ayler was more than an historic curio. Looking back, Few remembered it being "Very fiery, very elemental and stemming from scales and themes." Said Few, "His music, his themes, fit in very well because they were stimulating, very good music."

Few said Ayler's music continued to have many fans in Europe. "And it's still working today," added Few in our 1994 interview. "In Europe, he's what you might say still number one."

Was Cleveland's Albert Ayler far ahead of everybody else, or was he simply trying almost anything just to be different? It's a question that years after his death still was not answered.

## Pianist Bobby Few

One of Cleveland's leading jazz pianists in the 1950s and '60s, Bobby Few later became one of the most respected and busiest pianists in Europe. After moving to Paris in the late 1960s, Few performed on more than 50 jazz albums.

The son of the maitre d' at The Country Club in Pepper Pike, Few grew up on East 84th Street between Quincy and Central. Interviewed during a visit to his hometown, Few recalled, "I was very fond of baseball, but my mother was more interested in getting me started in music. I wanted to play flute but she wanted me to play piano. They bought a piano. There was an old Polish family that lived on the street that had a piano and my father and my uncle had to roll the piano down the street to bring it into the house. It was really a spectacle."

Few studied classical music for 12 years with Katherine Holland Forbes, the organist at St. Paul's Church, and with Benjamin Austin. At his first recital, he played Chopin's "Polonaise."

"Everyone would always pass by and hear me playing the piano," said Few, "and they would stop outside for a while and just listen. The kids were outside playing baseball, but I had to stay in and play the piano. And now, I'm glad I did!"

While studying classical music, the young musician was also exposed to jazz. "My dad had these *Jazz at the Philharmonic* records with Illinois Jacquet and Ella Fitzgerald. I began to listen to those records. Also he had a lot of Art Tatum and Erroll Garner and I became influenced by them and decided to learn how to play boogie-woogie. I would go to my classical music lessons and while the teacher was preparing herself, I

would play boogie-woogie and she would tell me, 'No, no! Don't play that stuff! You must play the classical music first!'"

Bobby got an opportunity in his own neighborhood to hear some live jazz piano by perhaps the all-time greatest jazz pianist. "I remember, as a little kid, hearing Art Tatum on Cedar Avenue at a little tavern (Val's in the Alley) at 86th and Cedar. I just sat on the steps there and was amazed! That really influenced me to continue in the path of jazz."

Few began listening to records of other jazz pianists. He bought more records by Garner. "I loved his music," said Few, "because I had been studying Claude Debussy

and it influenced me because Erroll was so 'Water Music' and I just seemed to take to that flavor of water-type-flowing music. He really started me on the way playing in that style." That style remained a very important part of Few's playing.

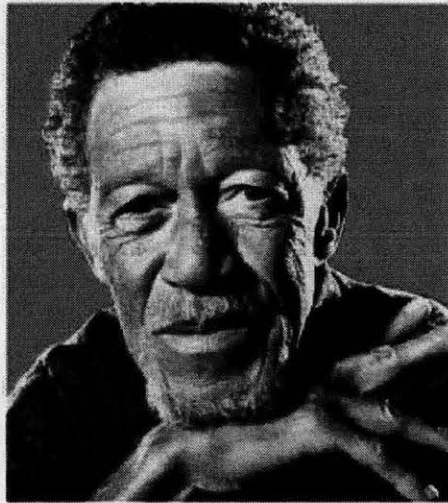
He was also influenced by the harmonic explorations of Thelonious Monk and recalled, "People were actually calling me 'Thelonious Monk, Junior' because I was trying to copy his licks and the things that he would do. I hadn't quite found my own style yet. I was searching for a style."

Few never played in school bands, but he did play jazz concerts at Rawlings Junior High School and

later at East Tech High School.

In 1950, Cleveland's East Tech was an almost all-white school. Teenager Few was involved in a bitter protest demonstration that finally opened the school to blacks. "We had a club called 'The Young Nobles,'" said Few, "and we were responsible for East Tech to be integrated. We blocked the school for almost the whole week. Even the principal and the teachers couldn't get in and the police took us away many days. We just kept coming back and blocking the entrance. Finally, they decided, 'Well, we better let them in.' But, at the same time, they moved all the equipment out and all the whites left and went to another school."

While he was at East Tech, Few tried to listen to as much jazz as possible. He saw and heard Charlie Parker in Cleveland. "I met him at the Loop Lounge down on Prospect. I was young, 16 or 17, and I walked in the door. He was playing with a pianist named Jimmy Saunders. Few remembered speaking with Parker. "He was very encouraging to me. He told me to continue to stick to the music and if I wanted to do my own songs, to continue to try to do that."



Courtesy Bobby Few

**Bobby Few**

Few started playing with a group that included Cleveland's top saxophonist of the period, Joe Alexander, trumpeters Bill Hardman and Carl Fields, bassist Richard Mitchell, drummer Lawrence "Jacktown" Jackson, and singer Gene Jordan.

"We were playing places like Smitty's Tavern, Tia Juana, the Mirror Show Bar, Club 100, the Safari Club, the Alhambra Tavern – all the clubs that are not existing now. At that time, Cleveland was booming with jazz."

Few played in Cleveland for 20 years. He formed a trio called the East Jazz Trio with drummer Raymond Farris and bassist Cevera Jeffries, the older brother of Dewey Jeffries. It was perhaps the most popular jazz group in Cleveland at the time.

Eventually, his old childhood friend, Albert Ayler, persuaded Few to go to New York.

"I moved there and suffered for about seven years, but the suffering was well worth it because I earned my stripes that way." In New York, Few played with Jackie McLean, Roland Kirk, and Brook Benton. In 1962, he toured Jamaica and Europe with Booker Ervin, Few's cousin Bob Cunningham, and LeRoy Williams.

In 1969, Few decided to go to Europe. "I was playing with a tenor saxophonist named Frank Wright; drummer Muhammad Ali; bassist Alan Silva; and Arthur Jones, a saxophonist from Cleveland; and we decided we needed to move. We said, 'What about Paris?' Everybody said, 'That sounds exciting.' So we took our resources, packed our bags and left, and never came back."

It was a period of protest, not only in the United States, but in France. "When we got there, there was a revolution of students and Paris was really on fire. Automobiles were on fire and there was tear gas in the streets. They were fighting for better schooling and money. We were walking down the street and all these policemen were running after the students, so we ran into a club, and the guy locked the door behind us. We found out it was the leading jazz club of Paris, called the Cat and Fish. The owner asked us, 'Who are you guys?' We said we came in from New York. He asked us, 'Would you like to play in the club?' We said, 'Yeah, when can we start?' He said, 'What about tomorrow night?' We said, 'Yeah!'

"And from that point on, we began to be recognized as something new and fresh there." They wanted to do more. "We rented a van," said Few, "and started going around to major festivals in Belgium, Holland and Spain, and just kind of sat in on the festivals. The next thing we knew, the organizers were hollering for us to do the next festival."

Few had been playing in Europe for more than a decade when he met master avant garde soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy. "Lacy heard me playing in Belgium and wanted to know, 'Who was that pianist?' He was thinking about going back to New York. When he heard me, he decided to stay. He asked me would I

like to play with him. I said, 'Sure would!' So, I started playing with Lacy in 1982."

With Few at the piano, the Steve Lacy Sextet became a pioneering force in Paris. The group made its only appearance in Cleveland in July of 1986, playing a Northeast Ohio Jazz Society concert at Case Western Reserve University's Harkness Chapel. Few remained with the Lacy Sextet until 1992.

While best known for his work with Lacy, Few also continued performing with his own group as a soloist and with various other groups. He made dozens of records in addition to his 1960s albums with Ayler. "I have 54 albums to my credit now. I recorded with Archie Shepp, Booker Ervin, I recorded with Albert. I recorded many under my name. We formed our own record production company called 'Center of the World,' and we produced our own records with Frank Wright, Muhammad Ali, Alan Silva and Noah Howard."

Few was never strictly an avant garde or free jazz musician. "I performed a concert in a castle in Normandy and did only Duke Ellington's music. I pulled out some songs from 1939-41. There was one called 'I'm Afraid.' There was another called 'Azure' (Blue). People hadn't heard these Ellington songs before.

"I began by playing basically what they call 'free jazz,' which is musical improvisation or black classical music, and now (1992 to 1994), I am more into mainstream, playing basically my compositions, my own songs. So far, I have 500 songs that I have written, many of them with words, and I have been able to record three albums solo and one trio under my name *with my music*."

Some of Few's compositions are almost diametrically opposed to the free jazz work he did with Ayler and Lacy. "There's one called 'Let's Play Dice,' a comedy type of song, around the situation of a dice game and I say, 'It's nice to play dice, but you might lose your pants,' and things like that. There's another one called 'Like a Waterfall.' Being in Europe and seeing many cascades, I decided to write this song. It's become very famous over there.

"I've also started singing. I'm not really a singer, but I sing anyway and it works. My songs are being recognized over there more and more so that people don't always come and say, 'Hey, can you play "Misty?"' Instead they say, 'Hey, Bobby, can you play that song of yours?' I say, 'Sure,' and I do it."

Few always tried to target his music to his audience. "In Europe, there are certain festivals where you can really just go as you like musically and there are some clubs where you have to play your music in a fashionable beat or in a funky manner and be more commercial, but there is more opportunity in the festivals, live concerts, and radio shows to do what you really want. You can play your theme and then, go to the Moon and Jupiter.



They don't care. They love it! The more far-out you get, the more they become enthusiastic."

For Cleveland native Bobby Few, the highest form of musical expression came from creating his own music. "I'd like to encourage more musicians to try to write their own music. Go out there and strike a bell with their own personal music. It works," he said, "if they believe in it."

### Bobby Few Discography

- 1968 - *Marzette Watts Ensemble* (Savoy)
- 1968 - Booker Ervin: *The In Between* (Blue Note)
- 1969 - Albert Ayler: *Music Is the Healing Force of the Universe* (Impulse)
- 1969 - Albert Ayler: *The Last Album* (Impulse)
- 1969 - Archie Shepp: *Pitchin' Can* (America)
- 1969 - Frank Wright: *One For John* (BYG/Actuel)
- 1970 - Noah Howard: *Space Dimension* (America)
- 1970 - Frank Wright Quartet: *Uhuru Na Umoja* (America)
- 1970 - Frank Wright: *Church Number Nine* (Calumet)
- 1970 - Archie Shepp: *Coral Rock* (America)
- 1970 - Alan Silva: *Seasons* (BYG/Actuel)
- 1971 - Hans Dulfer: *El Saxafon* (Catfish)
- 1972 - Frank Wright: *Center of the World* (Center of the World)
- 1973 - Frank Wright: *Last Polka in Nancy?* (Center of the World)
- 1973 - Bobby Few: *More or Less Few* (Center of the World)
- 1975 - Bobby Few, Alan Silva, Frank Wright: *Solos & Duets* (Sun)
- 1977 - Joe Lee Wilson: *Secrets From the Sun* (Sun)
- 1977 - Noah Howard: *Red Star Featuring Kenny Clarke* (Mercury)
- 1977 - Bobby Few: *Few Coming Thru* (Sun)
- 1979 - Bobby Few: *Continental Jazz Express* (Vogue)
- 1979 - Sunny Murray Quintet: *Aigu-Grave* (Marge)
- 1979 - Bobby Few, Cheikh Tidiane Fall, Jo Maka: *Diom Futa* (Free Lance)
- 1980 - Steve Lacy: *Ballets* (hat ART)
- 1981 - Steve Lacy & Brion Gysin: *Songs* (hat ART)
- 1982 - Steve Lacy Featuring Bobby Few: *The Flame* (Soul Note)
- 1982 - Steve Lacy: *Duets* (Musica Jazz)
- 1983 - Steve Lacy Two, Five & Six: *Blinks* (hat ART)
- 1983 - Bobby Few: *Rhapsody in Few* (Black Lion)
- 1983 - Steve Lacy Seven: *Prospectus* (hat ART)
- 1985 - Steve Lacy Sextet: *The Condor* (Soul Note)
- 1985 - Mike Ellis: *What Else is New?* (Alfa)
- 1986 - Talib Kibwe: *Odyssey* (Madrigal)
- 1986 - Steve Lacy Sextet: *The Gleam* (Silkheart)
- 1987 - Steve Lacy: *Momentum* (RCA/Novus)
- 1988 - Steve Lacy: *The Door* (RCA/Novus)
- 1989 - Steve Lacy: *Anthem* (RCA/Novus)
- 1990 - Steve Lacy + 16: *Itinerary* (hat ART)
- 1991 - Steve Lacy Sextet: *Live at Sweet Basil* (RCA/Novus)
- 1992 - Steve Lacy Double Sextet: *Clangs* (hat ART)
- 1993 - Steve Lacy Octet: *Vespers* (Soul Note)
- 1994 - Steve Lacy: *Findings* (CMAF)
- 1994 - Zusaan Kali Fasteau: *Sensual Hearing* (Flying Note)
- 1995 - David Murray: *Flowers Around Cleveland* (Bleu Regard)
- 1997 - Kali Fasteau: *Comraderie* (Flying Note)
- 1997 - Bobby Few, Fasteau, Noah Howard: *Expatriate Kin* (CJR)
- 1997 - Noah Howard Quartet: *In Concert* (CJR)

## Coltrane's Cleveland connections

Saxophonist John Coltrane, the most influential jazz artist of the 1960s, if not the entire second half of the 20th century, had many connections with Cleveland and Clevelanders.

As early as 1951, Coltrane was playing with the rhythm and blues band of Clevelanders Bull Moose Jackson. It was the Jackson band that included Tadd Dameron, Bill Doggett (who spent many years playing in Cleveland), Frank Wess, Philly Joe Jones and Benny Golson.



Rhino Records

### John Coltrane in 1957

Less than two weeks later, in June of 1951, Coltrane joined the band of Clevelanders Gay Crosse that was playing at the Showboat nightclub in Philadelphia. Some say Cleveland saxophonist Joe Alexander, who was also a member of Crosse's Good Humor Six, was a major influence for the young Coltrane. Coltrane recorded with Crosse's band in 1952. One of the numbers they recorded was "Bittersweet" which composer Hale Smith, a Cleveland Institute of Music graduate, had originally written for trumpeter Howard Roberts who had been a member of the Evelyn Freeman Ensemble in Cleveland.

When Coltrane recorded with Earl Bostic in April of 1952, another member of Bostic's group was Cleveland saxophonist Pinky Williams. When he recorded with the Johnny Hodges Orchestra in 1954, a member of Hodges' band was ubiquitous Cleveland trumpeter Emmett Berry. In 1956, Coltrane recorded the *Mating Call* album with Dameron. In 1959, in Paris, he influenced the younger Albert Ayler. In the 1960s, Coltrane played five times in Cleveland.

When Coltrane died in July of 1967, Rev. John Gensel, who had been a minister in Mansfield before becoming the pastor to the jazz community in New York, conducted the service. Among the jazz artists who played at Coltrane's funeral service was Ayler.

### John Coltrane in Cleveland

- 1951 & 1952 - touring with with Gay Crosse band
- 1954 - with Big Maybelle at Gleason's
- Feb. 16-19, 1961 - Welcome Inn, East 116th & Kinsman
- June 20-25, 1961 - Algiers Lounge, East 103rd & Euclid
- July 24-29, 1962 - Leo's Casino, East 49th & Central
- Dec. 11-16, 1962 - Jazz Temple, Euclid & Mayfield
- Feb. 5-10, 1963 - Jazz Temple, Euclid & Mayfield
- Sept. 17-22, 1963 - Jazz Temple, Euclid & Mayfield
- Aug. 19-22, 1965 - Leo's Casino, 7500 Euclid

Sources: *Call & Post* and Chris DeVito

## Rahsaan Roland Kirk

The sign in the window of Club 100 at East 100th and Euclid in the mid-1960s announced "Three Blind Mice." The trio included Eddie Baccus on keyboard, George Cook on drums and a 25-year-old saxophonist from Columbus named Roland Kirk.

After a few tunes, Kirk surprised almost everybody in the Euclid Avenue bar by *playing three instruments simultaneously, in three-part harmony.*

It was a difficult gimmick that certainly attracted attention. Some other musicians considered it little more than a stunt that was more suited to a vaudeville novelty act. Kirk, who later called himself Rahsaan Roland Kirk, said he was a serious, talented jazz musician who had simply applied himself to something different. He said other musicians were too lazy to try it. He said they didn't want to "really work at something that might be too hard to get to."

He realized that he was best known for playing three instruments at the same time, but said, "Catch me on a good night playing a solo!" In fact, Kirk was a pretty good jazz musician who could blow with the best.

Born in Columbus in 1936 and, like Baccus, educated at the Ohio State School for the Blind, Kirk once said, "When I pick up an instrument, I don't believe I'm blind. I feel the accomplishments I've made with what the Creator has given me, allow me to see more than a whole lot of trumpet players, saxophone players, and piano players who are able to see."

As a teenager in the early 1950s, Ronnie Kirk, as he was known then, had his own band, playing all over Ohio, performing mostly honking rhythm-and-blues. One night when he was 16, he said he dreamed he was playing three instruments at the same time. The next day, he went to a music shop and found two old saxophones which had been used in turn-of-the-century Spanish military bands. Kirk taught himself to play the three instruments simultaneously.

In 1960, it was Ramsey Lewis who helped Kirk get a recording contract with Cadet Records. Kirk toured and recorded with Charlie Mingus and first appeared in New York City in 1962 at the Five Spot. In New York, he also performed with Cleveland pianist Bobby Few. Another Clevelanders who played frequently with Kirk was bassist Chink Stevenson. Baccus, who went to



Rahsaan Roland Kirk

school with Kirk and was playing with him at the Club 100, later became a jazz legend in Cleveland.

All said Kirk was a very unusual and interesting musician and personality. They recalled that Kirk said he considered jazz "black classical music, steeped in a wild, untamed spirit."

Despite having fun with his unique talent of playing three instruments at the same time, Kirk was rooted deeply in the jazz tradition. He once said, "You don't see the European classical musicians allowing the music of Bach, Brahms or Beethoven to become extinct. We," he said, "have the same obligation." According to Kirk, "It's a shame for people to say 'bop is square' or 'New Orleans is square.'" While playing bop and avant garde jazz, Kirk was still fascinated with the earliest form of jazz in New Orleans. He said, "If

you were fortunate enough to be involved in one of the funerals in New Orleans, (you would see that) when a guy leaves in New Orleans, he goes out the right way. They really give a nice way to go."

In fact, Kirk once played with New Orleans' Olympia Brass Band during the Jazz and Heritage Festival. He also knew the early music of such jazz pioneers as Jelly Roll Morton and Fats Waller.

His main influences, however, were bebop and avant garde. He admired Miles Davis, but disagreed with Miles about some of his musical experiments. "One time I said to Miles, 'Why do you use all that electricity? I don't dig all that stuff too much. I like the mute. You quit using that mute. You made a mistake, Miles!' He said, 'Roland, everybody's got to change.'"

Kirk suffered strokes in 1975 and 1977. They took his life at the age of 41.

Before playing his last chorus, Kirk said, "When I'm reincarnated, I'm gonna come back as a musical note. That way, nobody can mess me up."

As you left the Club 100 on Euclid Avenue, you remembered Kirk's stunt of playing three saxophones simultaneously. But, you also felt a little sorry for the man who seemed to be fighting a clown image. If you listened carefully, you also realized that he was a talented, soulful artist who honored the traditions of what he called "black classical music" and seemed to be saying with almost every note, "Something fine and beautiful is coming 'round the bend. Please let it be a surprise!"



## Bill Hardman



Bill Hardman

Trumpeter Bill Hardman, born April 6, 1933, was just three years older than Ayler and Few and a product of essentially the same Cleveland environment. But Hardman took a different path in jazz. He was strongly influenced by the bebop playing of Clevelanders Freddie Webster and Benny

Bailey, as well as Clifford Brown. With his fast playing and strong tone, Hardman helped propel the evolution from bop to hard bop.

Tadd Dameron hired Hardman in the early 1950s. In 1956, Hardman began a long association with bassist Charlie Mingus. It continued off and on through the 1960s to 1972. He also had three different stints with Art Blakey and his Jazz Messengers. Despite his associations with leading jazz performers, Hardman never won widespread fame. It wasn't until 1973 that a *DownBeat* poll voted him "The Jazz Artist Deserving Wider Recognition."

In the 1970s, Hardman joined fellow Clevelander Eddie Preston in a group called the Brass Company. Bill moved to Paris where he lived for a number of years. In 1990 he toured Sweden with Walter Bishop and Harold Jefta in the Charlie Parker Memorial Quintet. Hardman was preparing to perform with his quintet at New York's Birdland when he died December 8, 1990 at age 57.

A boyhood friend of Hardman, Raymond Farris, remembered him as "a fantastic trumpeter and a complete gentleman." Farris recalled, "Bill introduced me to some notable people while he was here in Cleveland, people like Horace Silver, Junior Cook and Art Blakey."

## Kamal Abdul-Alim

Trumpeter, composer and educator Kamal Abdul-Alim left his native Cleveland in the late 1960s, studied under Archie Shepp and Max Roach at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, and went to New York City in 1969.

"One of my first gigs," he said, "was on a bill presenting the son of composer Cal Massey at a place in Brooklyn called the Squeeze. Everybody was there — Archie Shepp, Lee Morgan, Pharoah Sanders and Leon Thomas. Cal Massey came up and gave me a hug and said, 'Hey, man, I know you're a burner.'" It was the validation Abdul-Alim needed. "He's telling me I'm a

burner and Lee Morgan is there. Morgan was my idol."

The Clevelander quickly became an active participant in New York's jazz loft scene and found himself playing with such artists as Sam Rivers, Ernie Wilkins, Clark Terry, Frank Foster, Frank Wess, Slide Hampton and Bill Hardman.

Abdul-Alim said skyrocketing rent prices for lofts killed the jam sessions and jazz in New York in the 1970s. "Prices for the lofts," he said, "became so high, creative people couldn't live in them no more."

In the 1980s, Abdul-Alim lived for extended periods in Paris and Dakar, Senegal, and became deeply involved with African and Afro-American musicians and music.

He also studied and taught at Long Island University and Columbia University in New York as well in the New York City public schools.



Kamal Abdul-Alim

## Al Serafini

While Ayler, Few, Hardman and other Clevelanders were blazing new musical trails, another was following an old path. Saxophonist Al Serafini, who may have been born 20 years too late, had dreamed of leading a big dance band on coast-to-coast radio network broadcasts. After graduating from John Adams High School and playing with the Jack Olson and Russ Carlyle Orchestras, Serafini (in 1960) formed his own band in Cleveland. It was usually an eight-piece band, playing what Serafini called "The Happy Swinging Sound." Regular band members included saxophonists



Courtesy of Bertha Basler

Al Serafini and his Orchestra doing a coast-to-coast broadcast from Cleveland's Sahara Hotel

Serafini, Larry Patch (Paciorek), Earle Cooke and Don Kubec; trumpeter and valve trombonist Bernie Arendas; pianist and arranger Chuck Curtis; drummer Mal Vangar; and bassist Nicky Davis.

Patch later recalled, "Serafini was a high-energy person and he had a bunch of guys who were not only good musicians, but loyal." Patch called the band "a musical family."

In 1960, he began playing 11 consecutive New Year's Eve broadcasts on WJW Radio. In 1961, he achieved his boyhood dream by broadcasting nationally from Cedar Point on the Mutual Broadcasting System. He also broadcast from the Sahara Hotel in Cleveland on CBS, and in 1967 from Atlantic City's famed Steel Pier.



Courtesy of Al Serafini

**The billboard at Atlantic City's Steel Pier promoting the Cleveland band in 1967**

Patch remembered thinking, "Gee, here I am playing at the Steel Pier where in years gone by, all the famous bands played."

Serafini also made a number of albums with his popular big band and from 1975 to 1988 served as regional manager for Broadcast Music Incorporated.

He had just finished a gig at SportsWorld in Cleveland May 1, 1992, when he suddenly suffered a heart attack and died at the age of 62. Within two weeks, his longtime pianist and arranger, Chuck Curtis, also died.

## The young lions of the 1960s

The widely diverse styles of the 1960s had some interesting effects on young musicians who were trying to get started in jazz.

Ernie Krivda grew up in Garfield Heights and graduated from Holy Name High School in 1963. He spent a year at the Cleveland Institute of Music where he said he found there was little interest in jazz. He went on the road with the touring Jimmy Dorsey ghost band. When he came home and enrolled in Baldwin-Wallace College, he said he was "a young, forward-looking bebopper with all the narrowness and focus that implied." He found some other students interested in jazz, but, to his surprise, not all were beboppers. He recalled "One cat who spent most of his time talking about jazz artists like Bix Beiderbecke and Louis

Armstrong." At the time, Krivda said he believed "'jazz history' was like Clifford Brown."

The "other cat" was Andrew Homzy who had played tuba at Brooklyn High School and became interested in jazz when he bought a Benny Carter chart for the school band. Unlike Krivda, Homzy wanted to study the roots of the music. Krivda said, "This was the first jazz scholar that I had ever met, the first person that had a curiosity about the history of the music."

Krivda and Homzy represented the divergent directions of jazz in the 1960s. Homzy was playing tuba with Ralph Grugel's Bourbon Street Bums, a dixieland band, in the Cleveland Flats. Krivda was the cool bebopper. Eventually, they got together. Homzy persuaded Krivda to play clarinet in a dixieland band and Homzy played a few times with modern jazz groups, playing bass parts on his tuba.

Years later, both Krivda and Homzy looked back and laughed about it. Growing up together in different musical "bags," they both achieved great respect in jazz a quarter of a century later. Krivda became one of Cleveland's leading jazz musicians and a nationally known recording artist. Homzy became an internationally respected musicologist.

## The Fairmount Jazz Festival

The 1960s also saw the creation of one of the most memorable series of jazz parties in Cleveland history.

Ridley Watts, a successful packaging industrialist and jazz enthusiast, his wife, Skip, and some friends decided to throw a series of parties at the Watts' palatial home on Fairmount Boulevard in Cleveland Heights. Each year for the parties, they brought in such jazz artists as Count Basie and his full band, Teddy Wilson, Eddie Condon, Earl "Fatha" Hines and the World's Greatest Jazz Band.

When the popularity of the Fairmount Jazz Festival outgrew their home, they moved the party to the LaPlace shopping center in Beachwood where the Duke Ellington Orchestra performed in 1972, two years before Ellington's death. Proceeds from the Ellington performance benefitted the Glen Oak School.

## Cleveland's two musicians' unions

The early 1960s also saw Cleveland's two musicians' union locals finally "merge" after 45 years of racial segregation. Local 4 of the American Federation of Musicians was one of the oldest in the nation. But, like most other major cities, Cleveland had a separate Negro local – Local 550.

Tommy Allen became the secretary-treasurer of Local 550 after returning to Cleveland in 1954. Roc Evans, who played with Ray Anthony's Orchestra, recalled the white local had about three times as many members as the black local and had a higher scale for



musicians than the black local. But many outstanding jazz musicians started out as members of Local 550. While bop pioneer Tadd Dameron was becoming a major jazz figure in New York, his older brother, Caesar Dameron, was serving as a business agent for Cleveland's black local. Allen said Caesar was only a fair saxophone player but lived a much bigger life style. He said Caesar reputedly ran an illegal numbers operation. "He had the Club Rendezvous on East 97th Street. He owned that building and that's where he apparently took care of his numbers. He had money and drove a Rolls Royce."

Local 550 was doing well in the 1950s. It got a percentage of the fees paid to black musicians playing in Cleveland, including the national touring bands of Duke Ellington and Count Basie. "In 1959," remembered Allen, "we got ten percent of what the bands that came into town received and our share for that year was \$110,000. They had taken in over a million dollars!"

But there was dissension within Local 550. Allen said he was being shut out of some of the local's financial affairs by union president, Franklin Simpson. "I couldn't get in the office and we argued about it. I said, 'Look, I'm the secretary-treasurer. I'm supposed to have a key to the office.' I talked to the board about it and they said, 'You should have a key.'" But Allen never got the key. He said Simpson and his secretary, who were at the office every day, kept all the payroll records. Allen simply signed their reports and sent them to the national office in New York.

Before long, Allen received a complaint from the national secretary. "He said I hadn't sent a report of the payrolls. *I had sent it!* It seemed like somebody was taking some money. Simpson and I were having words."

The national officers called Simpson and Allen to a special meeting in Pittsburgh where Allen showed them his check stubs. Allen said Simpson walked in late "drunk as a monkey." The national officers came to Cleveland for an investigation. Allen said he explained the local's finances. After Simpson presented his side of the story, the national officers gave Local 550 an ultimatum: "You will merge with the other local or we'll take your charter!"

It wasn't really a merger in 1962 and it had very little to do with racial equality. It was really a shotgun wedding prompted by suspicions of mishandled funds.

Allen said, "Local 4 offered us \$25,000 for our building and the land, but we got only \$10,000." He said Local 4 demanded more than \$100 from each of the 275 members of Local 550 to join the other local of the same union.

Trumpeter Kenny Davis recalled, "Local 4 took the officers of Local 550 and put them in very subordinate roles in Local 4. They made these guys go out and check clubs. One of the checkers was Caesar Dameron."

According to Allen, "They said two of our officers would be integrated with their officers." But it never happened. As late as 1991, Allen said there was still no black member of the Local 4 board and resentment continued among some black musicians almost 30 years after the "merger."

## 19. Traditional Jazz

During the far-ranging jazz style experiments in the 1960s, jazz became more complex, more fragmented and in some ways more exclusive. Some longtime jazz fans, who were turned off by such artists as Albert Ayler and Cecil Taylor, said the new forms of jazz were creating an esoteric art reserved for only a few hip insiders, not the popular art form they had known in earlier years.

Buddy DeFranco, who was leading the Glenn Miller ghost band at the time, and was a highly regarded bop clarinetist, said, "The more harmonically developed you get, the further away from the audience you're going to get and then, all of a sudden, you have just a select few."

But there were some musicians and listeners who related the appreciation of jazz to the appreciation of classical music. They believed good music is timeless regardless of the latest fads. The experiments of the 1960s prompted some longtime jazz fans to revert to the roots of the music, just as others had done in the 1940s when the great popularity of the swing bands had transformed jazz from an off-beat novelty into a serious art form and research into the history of jazz began.

### Broun's search for the origins of jazz

Heywood Hale Broun, the 22-year-old son of a newspaperman whose column ran regularly in the *Cleveland Press*, suspected the records of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band were not really true reflections of the earliest forms of jazz. Broun went to New Orleans in August of 1940 hoping to record some of the early pioneers of jazz. He found trumpeter Kid Rena, clarinetists Alphonse Picou and Louis "Big Eye" Nelson, and trombonist Jim Robinson. They gathered August 14, 1940 in the home of guitarist Willie Santiago to play.

Writing in the September 1940 edition of *HRS Society Rag*, Broun recalled he wasn't sure if the aging musicians could still play. "I said in a high nervous voice, 'Let's try 'Panama.' After about four bars, I worried about nothing.

My seven veterans were getting a kick out of it."

A week later, Broun took the musicians, ranging in age from 41 to 70, to a studio at New Orleans radio station WWL and recorded eight sides including "High Society,"

"Panama," "Clarinet Marmalade," and "Gettysburg

March." The records, which did not sound much like



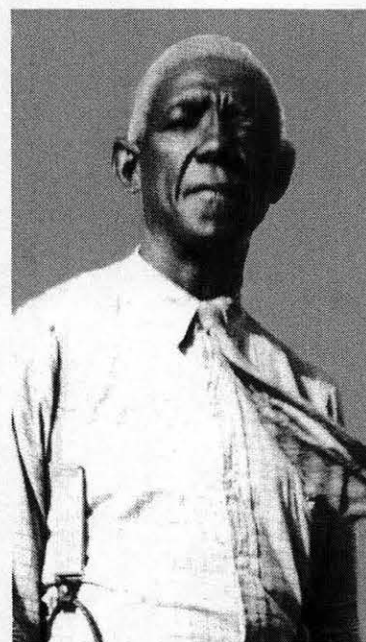
Louisiana State Museum

### Bunk Johnson (in back row with cornet) posing with the Superior Orchestra in 1910

the raucous Original Dixieland Jazz Band recordings, were released September 17 by Delta Records in an album of four 78 rpm records that sold for \$6. The records caused a sensation and triggered new interest in early jazz and prompted further searches for the origins of the music.

Broun also found trumpeter Willie "Bunk" Johnson who had played in New Orleans at the turn of the century with the legendary Buddy Bolden and the Superior Brass Band. Broun also tried to record Johnson, but the trumpeter declined, saying he needed a decent trumpet and some new teeth before he could try to make some records in the old style.

### Mary Karoley's home recordings



Bunk Johnson in 1942

Two years later (February, 1942), Mary Karoley, a friend of clarinetist and saxophonist Sidney Bechet, made another attempt to record the 62-year-old Johnson. She went to his home in New Iberia, Louisiana, knocked on the door, and found the pioneer trumpeter in his small living room, reading a newspaper. He was dressed in a cotton shirt, work trousers and blazing red suspenders. She later wrote, "His handshake was gentle,

but the texture of his skin was very rough. I wondered



what he was doing to earn his living."

Within a few minutes, Mary Karoley persuaded Johnson to play for her. She got an inexpensive disc recording machine from her car, but discovered there was no electricity in Bunk's home. A neighbor stretched a series of extension cords to Bunk's living room. When everything was set up, the trumpeter looked at Karoley and asked, "What do you want me to play, Miss Mary?"

"Anything that comes to your head," she said. He picked up his old, beat-up trumpet with sticky valves and started to play. He played "Shine" and she heard and recorded what no one else had heard in decades — jazz pioneer Bunk Johnson playing with obvious tone, rhythm and drive.

Johnson apologized for his terrible horn and asked Karoley to take a message to his old New Orleans friend Sidney Bechet. "Tell him I'm in need of a good trumpet and if there's anything that he can do, I'd be mighty proud."

After playing "Weary Blues," Johnson told Karoley, "I'm about the only trumpet player living today of that age, of the old gang, and able to play."

Bunk concluded his private concert in his home for the woman he called "Miss Mary" by playing a tune he had played with Buddy Bolden in 1895, "Pallet on the Floor."

She took those crude home recordings, including her interview with Johnson, to New York and played them for her good friend, John Reid, who was working for RCA Victor Records. She also played them for Sidney Bechet. After listening, Bechet recorded a message for Johnson. He said, "What do you say there, Bunk, old pal? Boy it was a treat to hear your voice over that record."

The clarinetist and saxophonist, who had left New Orleans to play with Oberlin College graduate Will Marion Cook, Cleveland Noble Sissle and Duke Ellington, said he wanted to play again with Johnson. "Listen, old boy," said Bechet, "why don't you make up your mind and come here (to New York) so we can make some records together." With Mary Karoley's portable disc recorder rolling, Bechet picked up his saxophone and began playing along with Bunk Johnson's recorded trumpet on "Weary Blues."

## Bunk's first recording session

Four months after Mary Karoley's home recordings of Bunk Johnson playing, in June of 1942, three jazz researchers — Bill Russell, David Stuart and Gene Williams — beat RCA Victor to the punch. They went to New Orleans and made a series of records with Johnson playing in a band that included clarinetist George Lewis and trombonist Jim Robinson. The recordings included "Panama," "Down by the Riverside," "Storyville Blues," "Ballin' the Jack," "Pallet on the Floor," "Weary Blues," "Moose March," "Bunk's Blues" and "Yes, Lord, I'm

Crippled."

After recording the music, which echoed the earliest forms of jazz, the researchers also interviewed Johnson. He claimed he had taught Louis Armstrong to play the trumpet. Armstrong later denied Johnson's claim

but confirmed that as a child he had followed Johnson during New Orleans street parades. Johnson also said he had taught Joe "King" Oliver, Armstrong's early mentor. He said he had received a letter from Oliver in 1929 confirming his claim. "That letter is in Cleveland," said Johnson. "Miss Mary has that."



## The search for Mary Karoley

For several years, I attempted to confirm that Mary Karoley was from Cleveland. In New Orleans, I went to see George Buck, the man who was running American Music, the record company that released those early recordings of Johnson and Bechet made by Karoley. Buck said he didn't know if she was a Clevelander, but he believed she married a man named John Reid.

Then Buck introduced me to Dick Allen, the former curator of the Tulane University Jazz Archive, who had done extensive research into early New Orleans jazz. Allen smiled and said Mary Karoley and John Reid were never married but had lived together for a long time.

We took the St. Charles Street trolley to Tulane University and went to the Jazz Archive and met the new curator, Bruce Raeburn, the son of bandleader Boyd Raeburn. He went through the files but could find very little about Mary Karoley.

He did produce an old newspaper article about Reid. It said he was a native of New Jersey who worked for RCA, later owned an electronics company in Little Rock, Arkansas, and had a collection of about 5,000 jazz records. The article also said Reid had died at the age of 65 in 1974 in Little Rock. The article also said Reid had the jazz notes of Mary Karoley. While reading this, I wondered if those notes included that letter from King Oliver to Bunk Johnson, the letter that, according to Johnson, "Miss Mary has in Cleveland."

I later learned that Reid's collection of records and notes had been contributed to the Arkansas Arts Center in Little Rock. When I tried to get access to the collection, librarian Patrice O'Donoghue told me the collection was not accessible because it was in storage.

I later discovered in a 1942 Cleveland City Directory

that there was a Mary Karoley living on Lorain Avenue. I also learned that a year and a half after her first meeting with Bunk Johnson, Karoley was living in Mount Healthy, Ohio, just outside of Cincinnati.

After those historic Bunk Johnson records, made by the three jazz researchers, were released on the Jazz Man label, Johnson and Lewis became national jazz celebrities and toured the country, setting off a revival of early jazz.

## The Hot Club of Cleveland

Even before those historic recordings by Bunk Johnson, there was a traditional jazz group here called "The Hot Club of Cleveland." It was started in 1940 by 29-year-old newspaperman Julian Krawcheck.

He told me, "I had come to Cleveland in 1937 to work at the old *Cleveland News*, and there was a fellow there named Paul Myhre, who was a great friend of some of the musicians in the Bob Crosby band," which played at the Great Lakes Exposition in Cleveland in 1937.

The newspapermen loved the style of jazz based on New Orleans dixieland and wanted to hear more of it live. To do that, Krawcheck said he and others decided to form a jazz club. There was a famous club in France which presented concerts by gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt and violinist Stephane Grappelli. That club was called "The Hot Club of France." Krawcheck said the Clevelanders decided to model their club after the French organization and call it "The Hot Club of Cleveland."

Krawcheck began organizing traditional jazz sessions every other week at various places around Cleveland. "A favorite place," said Krawcheck, "was the old Artists Club in the 80s between Euclid and Carnegie. A number of the jam sessions were at the Cabin Club, beneath Diamond's Delicatessen on the south side of Euclid Avenue between East 105th and East 107th. "That was quite a place," remembered Krawcheck. "People would go down there to listen to the music, but they also danced." They also had jam sessions at the Jade Room of the old Fenwick Hotel.

The Hot Club of Cleveland did not pay the musicians. They wanted to come and play just for the fun of it. In fact, Krawcheck laughed, "Those musicians had to pay \$2 monthly dues in order to come down and play for nothing."

Krawcheck got married shortly before one of the Hot Club sessions. He remembered, "When we got back from our honeymoon, they played when I came in (Freddie Slack's) 'Beat Me, Daddy, Eight To the Bar.' I blushed like hell."

Krawcheck's wife Marie said her new husband spent most of his nights going around town scouting jazz musicians for the Hot Club sessions. "Somebody would

tell me of a good trombone player," remembered Krawcheck, "and I would go alone on the street car and listen to him. If I thought he was good, I would ask him to come down to the next session."

Among the young musicians who took part in the bi-weekly Hot Club jam sessions was singer Frankie Laine, who at the time was working in a defense plant in Cleveland and singing at the Wade Tavern on Wade Park Avenue. Krawcheck said he believed Laine was a better singer at the Hot Club sessions than he was later when he became nationally famous and sang such songs as "Shrimp Boats Are Coming."

"Another one," recalled the retired editor and columnist, "was Morey Feld, who I always thought played too loud." Feld later recorded with the Benny Goodman Sextet and Orchestra.

"There were all kinds of odd guys," said Krawcheck. "There was a trombone player named Bob Freeberger. He was marvelous. He was a Jack Teagarden-type trombonist but he was a little crazy. He stayed in a rented room on Payne Avenue. I went up to his room one time and he had pasted up over his bed little reminders to do things, such as 'Remember to write Mama Friday night!'"

"There were a couple of brothers in the group, Art and Dick Cutlip. Dick played the bass and his older brother played the piano. He was wonderful, but he couldn't stand Freeberger. They just didn't get along. In arranging these sessions, and getting together different musicians, I had to learn who liked whom and that sort of thing and try to keep them apart so they wouldn't get in fights."

Other musicians included trumpeter Wiz Rosenberg, Jasper Wood, Ray Raysor, Lanny Scott, and Caesar Dameron. Krawcheck said he believed Caesar was a much better musician than his younger brother, Tadd, who became a respected bop pioneer.

"One of the regulars," said Krawcheck, "was Johnny Huntington, from a society family. He would come down with some of his society friends and play a tenor saxophone very much like Bud Freeman."

Some of the musicians who played at the Hot Club jam sessions formed a band they called the Dixie Dandies. Included were clarinetist Sam Finger, pianist George Quittner, guitarist Freddy Sharp, trombonist Kenny Emerson, and drummer Orly May.

May attracted the attention of a national band leader. Krawcheck remembered taking Red Nichols to Fleet's Inn at East 9th and Lakeside to hear singer June Hart, but Nichols was so impressed with drummer May that he ignored the singer and offered May a job.

Veteran Cleveland jazz saxophonist Hank Geer remembered he was only 15 when he sat in with Krawcheck's Hot Club group. One night, Geer said



band leader Charlie Spivak, who was leading the house band at the Trianon Ballroom, showed up at a Hot Club session and liked Geer's playing. He offered the schoolboy a job with his band.

Another well-known musician who sat in during the club sessions was pianist Cow Cow Davenport.

The Hot Club of Cleveland continued for three years, until 1943, when Krawcheck left his newspaper job for military service.

"I hate to say it," recalled the courtly Krawcheck, who grew up in the South, "but it fell apart when I went into the Army. I suppose I would have to say that I was the prime mover in the thing and seemed to hold it together."

Krawcheck also remembered there was a short-lived Cleveland Jazz Society here in the early 1950s.

## Sam Finger

An alumnus of those Hot Club sessions, Sanford "Sam" Finger, became for many people the personification of dixieland jazz in Cleveland. He continued playing traditional jazz for more than half a century, including many performances at Cleveland Indians baseball games.

Born in Cleveland in 1915 and raised in Elyria, Finger studied clarinet at Glenville High School, the Oberlin Conservatory and Ohio State University where he got a music degree in 1941. While playing at those Hot Club jam sessions, Finger was one of the organizers of the Dixie Dandies. By the early 1950s, they recorded four tunes on 78 rpm records and received some national attention.

Finger died in 1999 the day before his 84th birthday.

## Another revival in the 1950s

By the early 1950s, the almost fanatical popularity of the swing era was fading. Most big bands were folding mainly for economic reasons. It was simply too expensive to take 18-piece jazz bands around the country. It was the era just before rock 'n roll and the record company executives, apparently not understanding what the bopsters were doing, shied away from jazz. They began pushing singers and novelty tunes.

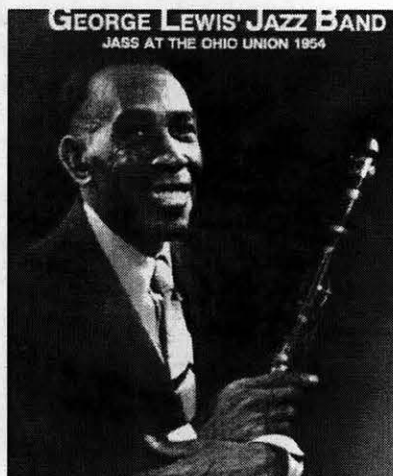
But another thing was happening in the early 1950s. Many jazz fans, particularly college students, who had grown up listening to the big bands, discovered dixieland (or traditional) jazz. It was not unusual on college campuses in the early '50s to have several top-flight traditional jazz bands playing at fraternity parties almost every weekend. Dixieland jazz was again becoming popular, particularly in college towns around the country.

In Cleveland, Trevor Guy, who billed his band as "Trevor Guys' Guys and a Doll," was playing frequently for college parties. The band included such players as trumpeter Kenny Emerson, drummer (and Case Tech

professor) Bob Slaymaker, pianist Dr. John Budd, clarinetist Dr. Charles Angelotta and the "doll," singer Betsy Griffiths. Guy, a graduate of East High School and Western Reserve University, where he led the marching bands, was an architect who played dixieland jazz in Cleveland for half a century. His band recorded three albums.

Guy died at the age of 88 August 8, 1998 in Shaker Heights.

## George Lewis in Ohio



George Lewis at Ohio State

During the winter of 1954, an Ohio State University graduate student named Bill Jaynes wanted to do something more than simply hire a local dixieland band. He wanted to promote a concert at Ohio State by one of the legendary New Orleans

pioneers, clarinetist George Lewis, who had played with Bunk Johnson on those historic 1942 records..

Jaynes went to Frederick Stecker, the manager of the then-new Ohio Union and proposed the concert. "He accepted the idea," said Jaynes, "and we began to make the arrangements.

To promote the concert, Jaynes got Columbus radio stations to play George Lewis records and persuaded a local newspaper to publish stories and pictures of Lewis and his group. Despite all the advance publicity, advance ticket sales were disappointing.

On the day of the concert, Jaynes' first job was to host the band members. He took trumpeter Kid Howard and trombonist Jim Robinson to a state liquor store where they purchased a bottle of bourbon before retiring to their rooms. Jaynes took pianist Alton Purnell and Joe Watkins to a fraternity house where there was a piano to play. Purnell wanted to open the concert with the Ohio State football song, "Across the Field," but the band struggled with the song and decided to open instead with "Beautiful Ohio."

During the afternoon of the concert, the band assembled in the lounge of the Ohio Union to play a preview of the music, hoping to boost ticket sales. When the aging New Orleans jazzmen began playing, people streamed into the lounge and applauded enthusiastically after each number.

That night, despite the poor advance sale, there were long lines of people waiting to buy tickets.

During a funeral music sequence, Lewis, Howard and Robinson, the front line, circled the auditorium. When the band played "Ice Cream," the crowd joined in the singing and some began dancing in the aisles.

The concert was so successful that Bob Clark, the owner of a Columbus record store, booked the band to return to town for a two-week engagement at the Club Riviera on the outskirts of Columbus. Opening night produced only a modest crowd. The weeknight attendance was slim, but, on the weekends, it improved, with many who wanted to dance to the music of the New Orleans pioneers. In addition to the George Lewis band, Clark brought in an all-star band and a group called the Dixieland Rhythm Kings from Dayton. The battle of the bands attracted about 500 people. That was only about one-third of the seating capacity.

Jaynes later said, "Everything seemed to indicate that while the Ohio State concert had been very successful, and record store owner Bob Clark had high hopes, nothing comparable to the earlier breakthrough of Benny Goodman or the later triumphs of the Beatles was in the offing."

## Forgotten pioneer Larry Conley

A former jazz trombonist and composer named Larry Conley came to Cleveland in the summer of 1953 and composed a series of songs with Cleveland drummer Art Cook. From June until September, they wrote such songs as "It Can't Be True," "Sing a Song of Long Ago," "Somebody Took You Out of My Arms," and "When the Reign of Love Begins."

Veteran saxophonist Hank Geer recalled Cook was a graduate of Cleveland's West Tech High School, a good-looking guy who worked at a Cleveland radio station. His brother Norbert played with a number of jazz bands in Cleveland and performed with the pit orchestra at the Palace Theatre. Art Cook later moved to San Francisco.

Who was Larry Conley? His name is probably unfamiliar to most jazz fans, but he was a very important pioneering figure in jazz history.

Conley's daughter, Hope Conley Lang of Port Jefferson, New York, said he was born in Keithsburg, Illinois, November 29, 1895. In 1923, he went to Chicago with the Gene Rodemich Orchestra and made about 50 records for Brunswick. Conley was the trombone soloist on the band's June, 1923 recording of Jelly Roll Morton's "Wolverine Blues."

Six months after Conley made his record, a group of young musicians formed a band called the Wolverine Orchestra which played a number of college, dance hall and theatre dates around Indiana and Ohio. The young cornetist with the Wolverine Orchestra was the now-

legendary Bix Beiderbecke. The band made its first record in Richmond, Indiana, near Dayton, in February of 1924, *a year after Conley's recordings*.

While Beiderbecke and the Wolverines were apparently copying his stuff, Conley, eight years older than Beiderbecke, continued to play and record with the Rodemich band. He was also composing songs. In June of 1924, the Rodemich band recorded Conley's composition, "Tia Juana." The song featured a Conley solo. There is little doubt that Beiderbecke and the Wolverines were aware of Conley and the Rodemich Orchestra. Four months after Conley's recording, Bix and the Wolverines recorded their own version of Conley's "Tia Juana."

Beiderbecke's recording of "Tia Juana" is cited as one of the classic examples of early jazz despite the fact that the composer's solo was framed in an obviously better arrangement than Beiderbecke's. It now appears clear that Beiderbecke's solo was influenced by Conley's.

Another song composed and recorded by Conley in 1924 was "Shanghai Shuffle." Shortly after this recording, the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra made a recording of Conley's tune. The soloist was Louis Armstrong. Other artists on that record included Rex Stewart, Coleman Hawkins, Benny Carter and Buster Bailey. Bunny Berigan also recorded Conley's "Shanghai Shuffle."

Many musicians have said Conley's trombone style on those early recordings was a strong influence on yet another immortal jazz giant, Jack Teagarden, who also recorded "Wolverine Blues."

Conley eventually settled in St. Louis and formed a local band called the Conley-Silverman Orchestra. His daughter said her father stopped playing trombone following an auto accident in the late 1930s, but he continued to compose. He went to New York and wrote for Pathé Films and was responsible for a song that became a pop and jazz standard, "A Cottage for Sale." It was recorded more than 100 times by such artists as Frank Sinatra, Nat Cole, Tony Bennett, Dinah Washington and Mel Tormé. The Billy Eckstine version of the song sold over a million copies in 1945. There were also jazz versions recorded by Erroll Garner, Earl Hines and Buddy Montgomery and later recordings of it by Roberta Flack and Etta James.

Conley, who spent the summer of 1953 quietly composing in Cleveland with Art Cook, was an unheralded jazz pioneer who should certainly be more widely recognized in jazz history.

## Henry "Hot Lips" Levine

An internationally known traditional jazz musician spent much of the 1950s leading the studio band at radio station WTAM in Cleveland.





RCA Victor Records

### Henry "Hot Lips" Levine

Henry "Hot Lips" Levine was only 19 years old in the 1920s when he replaced Nick LaRocca in the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. In the late 1920s, Levine played trumpet in an English big band led by Bert Ambrose. Another member of that band was a young trombonist named Ted Heath who would later lead Great Britain's most popular big band.

In 1940, Levine became a staff musician for NBC in New York and led a dixieland band on a network radio program called *The Chamber Music Society of Lower Basin Street*. Guest soloists with Levine's group, which he called "The Barefooted Dixieland Philharmonic," included soprano saxophonist Sidney Bechet and singers Dinah Shore and Lena Horne. The program was so popular at the time that RCA Victor issued several albums of the band's recordings. Levine also recorded with Jelly Roll Morton.

In the 1950s, as the music director of NBC's radio station in Cleveland, Levine led the studio band playing live every morning on *The Morning Bandwagon* with host Johnny Andrews.

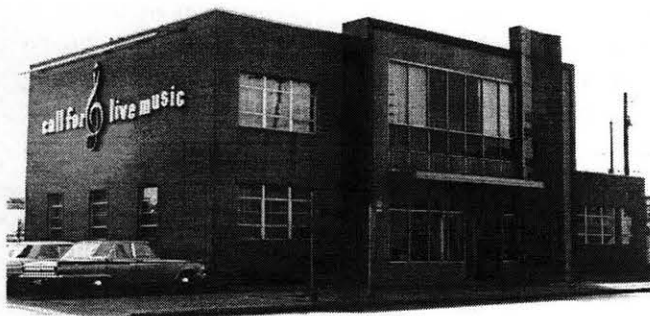
Bud Ford, the producer of that program, gave me some recordings of those broadcasts. The band played all sorts of music on the morning drive-time program and occasionally played some flat-out dixieland. The morning of May 15, 1954, Andrews opened his broadcast by introducing "Henry 'Hot Lips' Levine and his golden trumpet." Said Andrews, "If you like dixieland music, boy, we've got it coming! You can't top 'Muskat Ramble!'"

After they played the dixieland classic, Andrews asked Levine if the tune was called "Muskat Ramble" or "Muskrat Ramble." Levine admitted he didn't know. Andrews claimed it was "Muskat" because the name derived from Muscatel wine. One band member said that New Orleans musicians, when they were thirsty, would call for "Muskat Ramble," finish the tune, and run to the saloon next door for some wine.

Levine's recording of the song was listed on the RCA Victor label as "Muskrat Ramble."

Levine remained at the Cleveland radio station until 1956 when NBC sold WTAM and its Cleveland

television station to Westinghouse. That ended live music on the station. Ford said part of the deal was a buy-out of the station's musicians' union contract. According to Ford, the \$500,000 buy-out was used to build the musicians union building at East 22nd and Carnegie.



Cleveland Public Library

### The musicians' union building on Carnegie Ave.

After leaving Cleveland, Levine returned to New York and recorded an album called *Dixieland Jazz Band*. The liner notes were written by Cleveland *Plain Dealer* columnist George Condon. Ironically, one of the songs on the album, composed by Levine, was "The Cleveland Press," in honor of Cleveland's competing afternoon newspaper. Another Levine composition was "Indian Uprising," a salute to the 1954 American League champion Cleveland Indians baseball team.

After living and playing in Miami Beach and Las Vegas, "Hot Lips" Levine, a frequently forgotten jazz pioneer who was part of Cleveland jazz history, died in 1989 at age 82.

### Louis Armstrong in Cleveland



Louis Armstrong

The most influential artist in jazz history made many appearances in Cleveland. One of the most memorable was Sunday night, September 8, 1960 at Public Hall.

Performing with his All-Stars, the 58-year-old Armstrong proved in Cleveland that he could still blow

his trumpet and still sing.

Unlike many jazz artists who followed him, Armstrong was an outstanding showman, entertaining people simultaneously on different levels. While avid jazz aficionados marveled at his amazing trumpet work and vocal phrasing, completely tone deaf members of the audience, who wouldn't know Duke Ellington from the Duke of Edinburgh, could also enjoy his entertaining performances. During that concert in Cleveland, Armstrong told the crowd, "You gotta have fun, daddy. That's the only way!"

Satchmo played almost non-stop that night. With him in his band were clarinetist Barney Bigard, trombonist Trummy Young, pianist Billy Kyle, drummer Danny Barcelona, bassist Mort Herbert and singer Velma Middleton. Among the numbers he sang was "Mack the Knife," the big hit he had recorded four years earlier.

Armstrong was unique by remaining very popular for more than 62 years. His first hit record, "Muskat Ramble" with the Hot Five, was recorded in 1926. Sixty-two years later, in 1988, 17 years after his death, Armstrong's recording of "What a Wonderful World," featured in the movie *Good Morning, Vietnam*, was also on the record popularity charts. No other performer – in any form of music – ever came close to such long-running popularity.

During the 1960 concert at Public Hall, Armstrong was honored by the City of Cleveland. City Council President Jack Russell stepped on stage and presented to Armstrong a council resolution praising him as a musician and as a goodwill ambassador. Armstrong replied by saying to the politician, "Yeah, man. That's nice. Thanks." He placed the resolution on the piano and started playing again for the delighted Cleveland crowd.

## Kid Sheik in Cleveland

Kid Sheik and his Storyville Ramblers, one of the few authentic New Orleans jazz bands that ventured north, came to Cleveland and played for a month beginning September 16, 1961 at the Tudor Arms Hotel at East 107th and Carnegie.

Lee Osborne, the promotion manager of the Tudor Arms, had heard Kid Sheik's band in New Orleans at Preservation Hall. Osborne persuaded his boss, Tudor Arms Hotel Manager Sam Gerstner, to book the band to play six nights a week from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m.

in the hotel's Empress Room. Posters for the booking said, "Now Opened, Empress Room of the Hotel Tudor Arms, presenting for the first time, direct from New Orleans, Kid Sheik and his New Storyville Ramblers."

The band arrived in Cleveland from New Orleans September 14. The next day the hotel threw a birthday party and press reception for the leader, trumpeter Kid Sheik, whose given name was George Cola, and who had played with the historic Eureka Brass Band in New Orleans.

By all accounts, the New Orleans band was a big hit in Cleveland. The *Plain Dealer* called the band members "Six patriarchs of jazz, still going strong." Other newspapers praised the New Orleans musicians, some of whom had played with the early legends of New Orleans jazz.

Among them was clarinetist Captain John Handy, 61 at the time, who had played with such New Orleans pioneers as Kid Rena and Kid Howard and with his own group at his own dance hall in New Orleans. He became an internationally-known jazz soloist who performed with such artists as Johnny Hodges and Sidney Bechet. He later played at the 1970 Newport Jazz Festival, where his stomping, timeless style created a sensation.

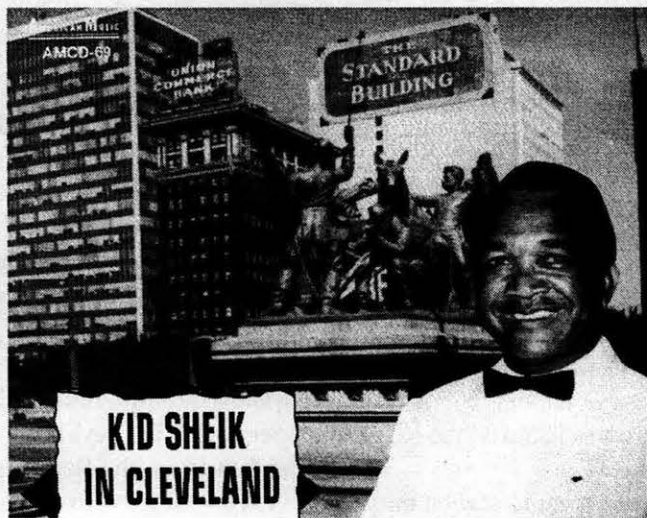
Playing drums with that traditional band at the Tudor Arms was Josiah Frazier who had recorded with trombonist Jim Robinson and others during the revival of New Orleans jazz in the 1940s and 1950s.

Recordings of Kid Sheik's Storyville Ramblers playing in Cleveland were first released by Golden Sunset Records. The cover of the album showed Kid Sheik, dressed in a white dinner jacket, standing in front of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument on Cleveland's Public Square. The album notes said the enthusiastic crowds that went to the Tudor Arms to hear the Storyville Ramblers were not necessarily avid jazz fans.

Newspaper articles said the band attracted crowds on their personality as much as their musicianship.

While the month-long gig by the Storyville Ramblers in Cleveland is probably forgotten by most, it was historically significant because it was one of the very few instances of an actual New Orleans jazz band venturing to Cleveland to play.

The unusual extended engagement by Kid Sheik in Cleveland prompted yet another revival of dixieland jazz here.



American Music Records



## Ralph Grugel

A huge man with a huge sense of humor and love for what he termed "authentic early American music," trombonist Ralph Grugel began playing with his traditional jazz band at Fagan's in 1962. At the time, it was the only nightclub in the Cleveland Flats with live entertainment. Grugel recalled, "We were at



Ralph Grugel

Fagan's for nine years. Harry Fagan, the owner, named us 'The Bourbon Street Bums.' He used to advertise 'Find us and have fun at Fagan's' and 'New Year's Eve every Saturday night.'" As the crowds grew, the band's gig was extended to three nights a week.

Clarinetist Doug Hopkins remembered that when a garbage barge was towed past Fagan's on the Cuyahoga River late at night and the skipper blew the tug's horn, the band would respond with a chord that sounded exactly like the boat horn (the ultimate call-and-response jazz?). Hopkins also recalled catching pianist George Quittner reading when the band was playing. He asked him, "George, what in the world are you reading?" Quittner responded, "It's the basic structure of the ionosphere."

Touring musicians would stop at Fagan's to sit in with Grugel's band. Hopkins remembered a drummer from the Jackie Gleason Orchestra came one night and failed to get through one song. "He couldn't keep up with the band," said Hopkins, "it was swinging so hard!"

It was the beginning of what later became the live entertainment center of Cleveland. Other clubs opened in the Flats and began attracting good crowds with dixieland jazz. Clarinetist Ted Witt remembered, "Grugel's band started everything down in the Flats."

Eventually rock bands took over the entertainment spots in the Flats. But Grugel continued playing traditional jazz for decades with his Eagle Jazz Band. At times, his was the only dixieland band performing in Greater Cleveland. He played long-term engagements at the Market Street Exchange on the West Side and at the Cleveland Crate and Trucking Company in the Flats.

Other trombonists were amazed when they discovered the fun-loving Grugel used Lemon Pledge as his slide lubricant.

Grugel also made a number of recordings with his Eagle Jazz Band and had a loyal following wherever he appeared. By the end of the 20th Century, he was the acknowledged patriarch of traditional jazz in Cleveland. During a tribute by the EARLYJAS society, Bert Smith,

who played piano with Grugel for years, said, "No one in Northeast Ohio has contributed as much, or even come close to contributing as much, to dixieland and traditional jazz music."

## Clarinetist Ted Witt

Ted Witt, who had studied classical clarinet at the University of Missouri, was working at General Electric's Nela Park. He recalled, "Several engineers there had some musical talent and we began getting together in each other's basements on Friday nights." By 1964, they got out of the basement and formed a band called the Forest City Stompers. They got a



NOJS

Ted Witt

job playing at Diamond Jim's in the Flats. "We were there every Friday and Saturday night for four years," said Witt.

He and other members of the band were serious about the roots of jazz. They researched the music, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, and learned all the tunes the ODJB had recorded. Witt made several trips to New Orleans. "I remember marching down Canal Street with the Delta Queen Jazz Band in the big parade," he said. "I met Danny Barker and George Lewis shortly before they died. Kid Ory was back for one of those affairs."

Later, Witt played with the Forest City Jazz Band at the Walnut Manor on Mayfield Road and at Hank Geer's Euclid Shore Club on Lakeshore Boulevard. In the 1970s and '80s he frequently played clarinet with Grugel's Eagle Jazz Band and became a member of the long-running Earlville Jazz Band that played regularly at the Rusty Nail restaurant in Twin Lakes just north of Kent.

Witt said the music of what he called "The Jazz Age" (1917-1935) is a rich American art heritage that should not be forgotten. He admitted "Jazz has certainly evolved, but that doesn't necessarily mean that everything that has come later is better. And much of it is not, in my humble opinion." Witt added, "We have hardly scratched the surface of what was done during those years. Granted there has been a tremendous amount of great music since then, but I've found that to be such a rich heritage that I have a hard time even doing justice to that period, much less any other."

Witt also played for years at Night Town in Cleveland Heights and was a founder of the Night Owls, a 1920s-style dance band.

## Yet another revival of traditional jazz

Through the 1970s and '80s, there were only a few dixieland bands playing regularly in Northeast Ohio, but in 1986, when there was another revival of interest in the roots of jazz, a group of traditional jazz fans, led by Jean and Paul Huling ("Sister Jean, the Ragtime Queen and Laundry Fat") formed a club called EARLYJAS (The Earlville Association of Ragtime Lovers Yearning for Jazz Advancement and Socialization). They held monthly "meetings" (concerts and parties) Sunday afternoons at the Rusty Nail in Twin Lakes. About 200 traditional jazz fans showed up each month.

In May of 1990, EARLYJAS teamed up with the Northeast Ohio Jazz Society and the American Cancer Society to stage *A Tribute to Turk Murphy*, a two-day festival at the Tangier Restaurant in Akron. Capacity crowds turned out for the three sessions and the event raised about \$2,000 for the Cancer Society. The festival featured three bands from Northeast Ohio – Grugel's Eagle Jazz Band, the Earlville Jazz Band and the New Orleans Stompers – plus the Cakewalkin' Jass Band from Toledo, the Blue Chip Jazz Band from Cincinnati, the Classic Jazz Stompers from Dayton, and the West End Jazz Band from Chicago.

The 1990 benefit festival was so successful that EARLYJAS decided to stage an annual three-day dixieland jazz festival. The first was held in September of 1992 at the Holiday Inn in Kent. Nobody really knew what to expect. Would there be enough interest in the earliest forms of jazz to make the event worthwhile? The answer was a resounding yes. Bob Engle, the festival director, said, "The turnout that we got for it was more than I expected." There was standing room only for the Friday night, Saturday afternoon, Saturday night, and Sunday morning sessions. Many fans traveled for miles and stayed in the hotel for the full weekend to hear five dixieland bands play almost wall-to-wall traditional jazz.

In addition to the local Eagle and Earlville Jazz Bands, Engle brought in the Original Salty Dogs from Chicago, the St. Louis Rivemen, and Ray Heitger's Cakewalkin' Jass Band from Toledo. I was asked to emcee the Saturday night session.



**The Cakewalkin' Jass Band**

The following year (1993), the Fall Jazz Festival was again held at the Kent Holiday Inn, but Engle said, "We knew that we had totally outgrown the capacity of the hotel and its ballroom facilities."

In 1994, the festival moved to the larger Holiday Inn in Strongsville, at the intersection of I-71 and Route 82. Each year, there was a parade of outstanding traditional jazz bands from around the country coming to the Cleveland area for the annual three-day event. The crowds of dixieland lovers ranged from 1,200 to 1,500. *Mississippi Rag*, a national publication devoted to traditional jazz, called the Cleveland area event "one of the best jazz festivals in the Midwest."

Engle said, "We get people from all over the country, from Canada, and even people from overseas. We've had people from England and South Africa." Engle estimated that 75 to 80% of the people attending the traditional jazz festival each year were out-of-towners.

Bandleader Grugel said the local festival attracted most of the leading traditional jazz bands in the world. "It's a good thing for Cleveland," said Grugel. "It's like the old days when Cleveland was on the map as a major stop for the big bands." But, with a characteristic smile, Grugel added, "If you ask for a Neil Simon song, they'll throw you out!"

## Cleveland Links in New Orleans



Joe Mosbrook

**Preservation Hall**

In New Orleans, we walked into Preservation Hall, the world-famous citadel of traditional jazz in the French Quarter. We spotted a familiar face playing bass with the band that included ageless trumpeter Percy Humphrey, his clarinetist brother Willie, and banjo player Narvin Kimble.

It was Ben Jaffe, who had played some very modern jazz in Northeast Ohio with a group called No

Evidence when he was a student at Oberlin College.

Ben graduated from Oberlin and returned to New Orleans where his father, the late Alan Jaffe, had founded Preservation Hall in 1961. Alan died in 1987 at the age of 51. During our visit, Ben said he and his mother, Sandra, were running Preservation Hall.

"We're trying to get things back to the way they were when my father was still alive," said the young Jaffe.



"Nothing had changed here in the past 30 years and people's attitude was diminishing a little because there wasn't the direction that there was under my father."

Ben was spending most of the day at the 200-year-old former stable on St. Peter Street, just off Bourbon, doing the bookkeeping, booking the musicians, and opening every night at 8 and closing at 12. "Of course, I sit in with the band," Ben said. "I'm not the regular bass player, but I frequently fill in and I'm happy about that."



**Ben Jaffe**

It was certainly not the style of jazz that Ben was playing at Rhythms and other Cleveland clubs. "I was playing more modern and more avant garde music in Cleveland," said Jaffe. "I still play that here in New Orleans. In fact, I also teach at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts and perform with the Jason Marsalis Quartet and play more modern music, but I think musicians of today need to be versatile and that's what I was thankful and grateful for in Cleveland, to get the experience to concentrate on playing more mainstream jazz."

From Preservation Hall, we went down Bourbon Street to the Can Can Jazz Café in the Royal Sonesta Hotel and got another surprise. Sitting in with Chris Tyle's Silver Leaf Jazz Band was cornetist Jim Cullum, the leader of the Jim Cullum Jazz Band which had played a concert the previous summer at Cain Park in Cleveland Heights. Cullum said he was spending a couple of days in New Orleans during a break in the production of his nationally-syndicated radio programs.

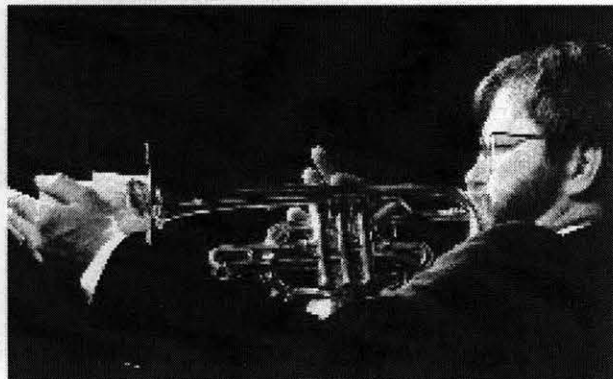
We followed Cullum through the throng on Bourbon Street, which, on any given night, makes the Cleveland Flats seem like a Sunday school picnic. We went to Fritzel's where Cullum sat in with former Dukes of Dixieland clarinetist Jack Maheu. Playing with Maheu's group was John Royen, a pianist who had recorded with Northeast Ohio's Jamie Wight and Ted Witt. We had met Royen when he was playing at Night Town in Cleveland Heights.

Royen said Wight, who moved permanently from Port Clinton to New Orleans the previous summer, had been very busy playing traditional jazz in New Orleans.

## Jamie Wight

A couple of days later, we got together with Wight. He explained he had been coming to New Orleans for about ten years (since 1984) and loved it, but was reluctant to pull up stakes in Northeast Ohio because of his children. He said it was Royen who introduced him to the small community of Mandeville, just across Lake Pontchartrain from New Orleans. "We found good schools and a laid-back community very much like what I was used to up in Port Clinton. My wife pushed me into it. We just quit and came down."

For Wight, the move to New Orleans was not the same as a bop musician going to New York to be near the center of the jazz action. "It's more than that," he said. "You don't come to New Orleans just to play music; you come to live in New Orleans, to work with the musicians of New Orleans, to eat the food they prepare here. It's a way of life."



Courtesy of Jamie Wight

### Port Clinton's Jamie Wight in New Orleans

Wight was playing a lot in New Orleans. As we chatted, Wight was preparing to leave on a 12-day jazz cruise to Jamaica, Grand Cayman, through the Panama Canal, Costa Rica, and Acapulco. "It's a rough way to make a living," laughed Wight, "but what can I say, somebody's got to do it."

Wight became a member of the famous Dukes of Dixie, played with Andrew Hall's Society Jazz Band of New Orleans, Chris Tyle's Silver Leaf Jazz Band and led the house band at Fritzel's European Jazz Pub on Bourbon Street. He also recorded with a number of New Orleans bands.

We also stopped in to see George Buck, the owner of Jazzology Records and a lot of other labels. He told us he was releasing an album by Jamie Wight and his New Orleans Joymakers. The album, *Spreading Joy*, included Cleveland's Ted Witt. Buck also introduced us to Dick Allen, the former curator of the Jazz Archive at Tulane University, who recalled such obscure facts as Artie Shaw leaving Cleveland in 1931 to join Irving Aaronson's Commanders. Allen also suggested some ideas for the *Cleveland Jazz History* radio series.

We found a few more ideas when we took the St. Charles Avenue trolley to the Tulane Jazz Archive and met the current curator, Bruce Raeburn. He brought files to us in a room where we were seated in front of a desk that had been salvaged from Lulu White's Mahogany Hall in Storyville and a mantelpiece that was once part of the Storyville establishment where Jelly Roll Morton played piano.



Joe Mosbrook

**Mantelpiece from the Storyville house where  
Jelly Roll Morton played and  
the desk from Lulu White's Mahogany Hall**

Bruce was interested in the local history work we've been doing in Cleveland and requested a copy of the *Cleveland Jazz History* book to include in the Tulane Jazz Archive.

We found other Northeast Ohio links in New Orleans. Don Marquis, the curator of the New Orleans

Jazz Collection, a museum in the old U.S. Mint building, is a former Cleveland. The museum's collection includes the trombone of George Brunis, a key member of the historic New Orleans Rhythm Kings. The instrument was made by the H.N. White Company at East 53rd and Superior in Cleveland before the firm moved to Eastlake and became the King Musical Instruments Company.

On our first full day in New Orleans we found ourselves at the French Market listening to the Olympia Brass Band, New Orleans' most famous marching band. The band was playing for tips along the street and attracted a large crowd of tourists, many of whom joined in, singing, dancing and cheering as the band played familiar traditional tunes.

We also found veteran trumpeter Wallace Davenport playing some excellent traditional swing, with Dizzy Gillespie overtones, at Maison Bourbon, and Danny Barker's Jazz Band playing for a dinner crowd at George and Nina Buck's Palm Court Jazz Café. The Palm Court was one of the few places in New Orleans that featured *both* good food and good jazz.

Music is everywhere in New Orleans. One of the better instrumentalists was a street musician we found at the edge of Jackson Park, playing "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans" on his soprano saxophone. The strangest was a percussionist who was walking down Royal Street with an odd collection of one-man band devices attached to a large carrying rig that he had strapped around his shoulders. He stopped to play a tune with two other street musicians who were sitting in the middle of the street. They all had to scramble when fire engines roared by.

Then, when we returned to Cleveland from New Orleans, we got another surprise. We learned that Preservation Hall musician Willie Humphrey's grandson, Dr. Jeff Lapeyrolerie, lived a few blocks from us in Cleveland Heights. Dr. Lapeyrolerie's mother was Humphrey's only daughter.



## 20. Resurgence in the 1980s and '90s

Interest in jazz in Cleveland was at a low ebb during the 1970s. There was very little live jazz being performed here by either national or local musicians, and very little recorded jazz being played on area radio stations.

Jazz flutist, saxophonist and textbook author Mark Gridley remembered, "It was so bad that I would have to drive to Pittsburgh, Cincinnati or Detroit just to hear Miles Davis or Chick Corea." In 1971, Gridley, who was studying and teaching at Case Western Reserve University, organized a series of monthly jazz concerts featuring such local musicians as Bill Dobbins, Lamar Gaines and Val Kent. It was almost the only live jazz in town at the time.

But, by the end of the 1970s and early in the 1980s, four things happened to help trigger a resurgence of jazz in Greater Cleveland:

- The Northeast Ohio Jazz Society was formed in March of 1978,
- The Tri-C JazzFest was launched in April of 1980,
- The Cleveland Jazz Orchestra was formed in May of 1984,
- Public Radio Station WCPN began programming jazz in September of 1984.

The combination of these four developments in a fairly brief period ushered in a new era of jazz appreciation in Greater Cleveland.

### Northeast Ohio Jazz Society

The Northeast Ohio Jazz Society, a volunteer group of jazz fans, was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization March 22, 1978 and began promoting a wider appreciation of jazz through a variety of concerts and projects.

The founder and first president of the society was Willard Jenkins who later became the executive director of the National Jazz Service Organization in Washington and a free lance writer for several national jazz publications.

#### NOJS Presidents

1978 - 1984 -	Willard Jenkins (writer)
1984 - 1986 -	Judy Strauss (pianist)
1986 -	Robert Derwae (writer)
1986 - 1987 -	Larry Simpson (educator)
1987 - 1991 -	Evan Morse (veterinarian)
1991 -	Frank Giaimo (attorney)
1991 - 1995 -	George Case (graduate student)
1995 - 1996 -	Jim Gibans (architect)
1996 - 2000 -	Larry Skinner
2000 - 2001	Jim Wadsworth (jazz promoter)
2001-	Lawrence Glover (drummer)



NOJS

#### A Northeast Ohio Jazz Society concert on Cleveland's Public Square

The late Allison Kaslow, a founder of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, was the Jazz Society's first executive director in 1986 and '87. John Richmond served as the full-time, paid NOJS executive director from 1989 until 1999. Dr. Carlos Ramos became the executive director in 2002.

After presenting a number of well-attended jazz concerts and education and social events, the jazz society marked its tenth anniversary in 1988 with a gala dinner dance at the University Club and a concert at the Ohio Theatre featuring Ernestine Anderson, Terence Blanchard and Donald Harrison.

Also in the late 1980s, President Evan Morse and Treasurer Les Knowlton spearheaded a drive to secure major funding from the Cleveland Foundation and the George Gund Foundation to hire a full-time executive director and to open a jazz society office in the Heights Rockefeller Building at Mayfield and Lee in Cleveland Heights.

The Northeast Ohio Jazz Society presented dozens of live concerts each year, frequently with national artists, and offered a series of jazz education programs including a unique full week of jazz education programs at various area schools beginning in 1991. Jim Szabo,



NOJS

#### Ken Peplowski and students at a Northeast Ohio Jazz Society workshop

one of the original members, launched the NOJS JazzLine in 1983 to provide telephone listings of jazz events in the area. The listings were extended to e-mail in the 1990s. The Jazz Society presented monthly jazz education seminars called "Jazz Klatches;" monthly "Pub Nights," spotlighting area musicians and clubs that offered live jazz; published a monthly newsletter (which I edited for ten years); and initially presented my weekly *Cleveland Jazz History* radio broadcasts on WCPN.

Membership in the Jazz Society grew to about 900.

During the summer of 1991, the NOJS was notified it had been selected as one of only 16 organizations in the U.S. to share a \$3.4 million jazz grant from the Lila Wallace-Readers' Digest Fund. With money from the foundation the Jazz Society launched a series of major projects. It commissioned saxophonist David Murray to compose a new work, "The Picasso Suite," which was presented in conjunction with the Cleveland Museum of Art's exhibition of Pablo Picasso paintings. The world premiere of "The Picasso Suite" occurred March 11, 1992, at the art museum's Gartner Auditorium. That concert led to a continuing series called *Jazz on the Circle*, presented in cooperation with the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Musical Arts Association and the Tri-C JazzFest.

Early in its history, shortly after presenting its first few concerts, the Northeast Ohio Jazz Society helped launch a new jazz festival at Cuyahoga Community College.

## The Tri-C JazzFest

"It was a dream," said Dr. Thomas Horning of Cuyahoga Community College, "but I thought it could work."

Musician and educator Reginald Buckner, who was an artist-in-residence at Tri-C in 1979, suggested the school try to present a jazz festival. Horning asked leaders of the Northeast Jazz Society to help organize the first two-day event in the spring of 1980. The featured artists included drummer Buddy Rich, pianist McCoy Tyner, and pianist and bandleader Earl "Fatha" Hines.

A key figure in jazz history, Hines was the man who set the stage for the important educational element of JazzFest. Horning said, "Earl came over and met with our students and worked with them. It was a sign of what was to come for us."



Tri-C JazzFest  
Dr. Thomas Horning

The modest festival struggled for the first few years, but gradually grew in general popularity. By 1984, the festival was extended to ten days including its first standing-room-only crowd for a concert by saxophonist Sonny Rollins. The Tri-C JazzFest was becoming a major annual community event in Cleveland.

1984 was also the first year that a well-known jazz musician served as the JazzFest artist-in-residence. The first was guitarist Mundell Lowe. He was followed by trumpeter Clark Terry. "We think of Clark as the father of our educational programs," said Horning. "He spent ten days here in 1985. We went from school to school throughout Cuyahoga County, visiting dozens of school bands. He was so energetic, but he collapsed after the ten days. We ran him ragged." Jazz icon Terry continued to serve as the honorary chairman of JazzFest. Other artists-in-residences have included Billy Taylor, Ellis Marsalis, Gary Burton, Rufus Reid, James Williams, Marcus Belgrave, Bobby Watson and Joe Lovano.

During the 1980s the International Association of Jazz Educators called the Tri-C JazzFest "the nation's premier educational jazz festival."

The long list of concert performers over the years included: Woody Herman, Milt Hinton, Max Roach, Betty Carter, George Shearing, Louie Bellson, Ray Brown, Dizzy Gillespie, Joe Williams, Wynton Marsalis, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Carmen McRae, Oscar Peterson, the Count Basie Orchestra and Ella Fitzgerald.

Horning recalled, "It was wonderful getting Ella to come here. She was not well at the time, but sang like Ella of earlier years. It wasn't very long after that she passed on. I think that was her last big jazz concert."

In the mid-1980s, when Cleveland and other cities across the country were attempting to attract a planned rock 'n roll hall of fame, Horning and the Tri-C JazzFest played a key role in Cleveland's bid. With little or no fanfare, they put together a proposal for an educational component for the museum, a National Center for American Music. Richard Celeste, who was the governor of Ohio at the time, said the Tri-C proposal was the decisive element in attracting the rock hall to Cleveland. As the 20th century ended, Cuyahoga Community College was planning to build a \$20 million center on Woodland Avenue to serve as "a home for jazz, rhythm and blues, rock 'n roll, country, blues and big band music."

In 1999, the Tri-C JazzFest attracted international attention by spearheading the world's most extensive



The JazzFest logo  
in the 1980s



celebration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Duke Ellington, a year-long series of concerts, lectures and educational events.

JazzFest's major concerts brought important artists to Cleveland, but, more importantly, helped finance the festival's primary focus – education. Thousands of young musicians got the opportunity to work with the best jazz musicians in the world.

One of those young musicians was pianist LaFayette Carthon who was a student at the Cleveland School of the Arts. Carthon remembered, "It started when Clark Terry was the artist-in-residence, then Billy Taylor, Wynton Marsalis and Ellis Marsalis." Horning said, "It's great when a young artist can be inspired by the people who have come here."

Another of the young musicians was Dominick Farinacci, a Solon High School student who was named to the Grammy Awards High School Jazz Band for two years and who was invited by Wynton Marsalis, whom he met at JazzFest, to solo on national television with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra in New York in December of 2000. Horning said, "That's one of the things I'm most proud of, that our students in our jazz studies program are playing on a national level."

Looking back, Horning said, "In terms of cultural events, JazzFest has evolved into one of the major events of the city of Cleveland and we're very pleased that it has." Horning was once shown a videotape of children playing in Africa. One of the African kids was wearing a Tri-C JazzFest T-shirt. There is no doubt that the annual jazz festival has put Cleveland's little Cuyahoga Community College on the cultural map. Somebody once said, "The JazzFest is to Tri-C as football is to Notre Dame." Horning said, "I like that analogy because I went to Notre Dame too."

The child in Africa probably knew nothing about Notre Dame football.

### Tri-C JazzFest Artists-in-Residence

1984	Mundell Lowe
1985	Clark Terry
1986	Dr. Billy Taylor
1987	Ellis Marsalis
1988	Gary Burton
1989	Rufus Reid
1990	James Williams
1991	Marcus Belgrave
1992	Bobby Watson
1993	Geri Allen
1994	Kenny Burrell and Marvin Stamm
1995	Joe Lovano
1996	Benny Golson and Steve Coleman
1997	JoAnne Brackeen and Cyrus Chestnut
1998	Rufus Reid
1999	James Newton
2000	Cecil Bridgewater
2001	Christian McBride
2002	John and Jeff Clayton

## The Cleveland Jazz Orchestra



CJO

### The Cleveland Jazz Orchestra in concert at Cuyahoga Community College

Big band jazz, which had a long and rich tradition in Cleveland, had all but died here by 1983 when Gary Scott and several other musicians got together to play some big band charts just for fun. Scott said, "Some of the better professional musicians in town created a rehearsal band called the North Coast Jazz Orchestra. We rehearsed at Lithuanian Hall in Collinwood and played a few concerts here and there. Then in 1984, a guitar player friend of mine and I decided to go ahead and start a concert band. We presented our first concert May 20, 1984 and since that time we have been the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra."

In 1987, Roland Paolucci of the University of Akron was hired as music director of the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra. "If the tradition of the big bands is going to be maintained," said Paolucci, "we're going to dip back to the days of the late '20s and early '30s with territory bands. I think the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra is just that now, a territory band."

The CJO played a subscription series of two performances of at least six concerts each year plus a number of special performances and a number of free outdoor summer concerts in various communities throughout Northeast Ohio.

Unlike the big swing bands of the '30s and '40s, which depended on distinctive sounds and styles for success, the CJO was playing big band jazz from a variety of periods and in a variety of styles. "We're a repertory big band," said Paolucci. "We try to play repertoire, not just exclusively ours, but the music of people like Stan Kenton whose band is no longer in existence."

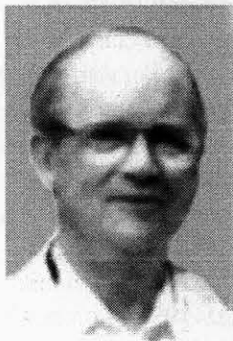
The Cleveland Jazz Orchestra played concerts saluting the bands of Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Duke Ellington and others and featured such guest soloists as Lew Soloff, Paquito D'Rivera, Ken Peplowski, Louie Bellson, Art Farmer, Sarah Vaughan and Jiggs Whigham, Terry Gibbs, Tommy Flanagan, Joe Lovano, Milt Hinton, Clark Terry and Arturo Sandoval. Guest conductors have included such composers and arrangers as Bill Holman, Sammy Nestico, Bill Finegan, Bob Florence, Clare Fischer, Gerald Wilson, Frank

Foster and Maria Schneider.

Members of the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra also organized a big band for teenagers called OJOY, the Ohio Jazz Orchestra for Youth. Directed by CJO trombonist Paul Ferguson, OJOY later became the Settlement Jazz Orchestra and was operated in cooperation with the Cleveland Music School Settlement.

In the 1990s, the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra was attracting good crowds to its series of big band concerts. The biggest crowd was for a concert with former Glenn Miller saxophonist and singer Tex Beneke.

## Buddy Sullivan



**Buddy Sullivan**

A featured saxophonist with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra during its first decade looked like a respected accountant and sounded like a veteran of the big band era. Buddy Sullivan was both.

Born and raised on a farm in Minnesota, Sullivan said he learned to play the sax at home. "The cows," he said, "listened to me over the fence."

In 1941, after high school, Sullivan was good enough to play with several territory bands. He recalled, "It was a lark for a young kid. But looking back on it, I wonder how we all survived because it was a terrible existence. I was paid \$5 a night."

Eventually Sullivan joined a band from Hollywood led by Al Graham. "We played at hotels in the Midwest," said Sullivan, "and that's where I met my wife. She was a singer on the band." They were married six months later.

After playing in an Air Force band during World War II, Sullivan in 1946 joined the big band of Cleveland native Alvino Rey. "We played one-nighters through the Midwest and he wanted me to go to the West Coast with the band, but the pay was \$75 a week and I couldn't figure out any way to support a wife and kids. I decided to go to school and study accounting."

Sullivan became a certified public accountant in the late 1940s but continued playing jazz with a leading jazz group in Toledo. "We played with numerous good players," remembered Sullivan, "people like Shorty Rogers, Frank Rossolino, Art Pepper, Lee Konitz and Zoot Sims. I remember one time, the whole Woody Herman band descended on us. Al Cohn, Zoot Sims, Serge Chaloff, Bill Harris and Don Lamond sat in with us and Mel Tormé, who was singing with the Herman show, sat in on drums."

Sullivan moved to Cleveland in 1968 to take an accounting job. Buddy and his wife, Florence, raised

eight children.

In 1983, he got together with some other Cleveland musicians to play some old big band charts. "We rehearsed at Case Western Reserve and later at the Lithuanian Hall on East 185th Street. At first, we called it 'the North Coast Jazz Orchestra.' It gradually evolved into the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra.

Forced to give up being a full-time musician almost 40 years earlier to support his growing family, Buddy Sullivan successfully combined a business career with jazz and made significant contributions to Cleveland's jazz resurgence.

## Jack Schantz

Jack Schantz, who had toured for three years with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra led by Buddy Morrow, became a featured trumpet soloist with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra in 1988 and was named music director in 1993. He assembled a core group of musicians, many of whom had also played with the Morrow band. They included lead trumpeter Lou Pisani, lead trombonist Paul Ferguson, lead saxophonist Kent Engelhardt, plus saxophonists John Klayman and Rich Shanklin.

Shortly after becoming the music director of the CJO, Schantz said the band includes "the absolute cream of the crop of Cleveland musicians. We have world-class players in the lead chairs." He called Ferguson "a ridiculous trombone player who plays principal trombone in the Canton Symphony and then, at the drop of a hat, plays burning jazz solos."

Schantz said he believed the role of the CJO is to both "recreate some of the more important artists and music of this genre and to try to develop something new and unique from Cleveland. And the only way you can do that in a big band," he said, "is by the writing. It's the writers and the soloists who give a band its personality."

Unlike many other big bands, the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra has had several excellent composers and arrangers contributing regularly to the book. They include Ferguson, Shanklin and bassist Dave Morgan.

Schantz admitted that it is not always easy trying to balance the roles of a repertory band and a creative contemporary band. "It's really a hard thing to do," he said, to get the right mix of what people want to hear, what people are willing to pay money for, and what is satisfying artistically for us. The hard mix for me is to find programming that is going to be interesting and



**Jack Schantz**





commercial at the same time because, after all, we're making a product and we want people to come and see us."

In the spring of 1992 the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra released a recording, a cassette entitled *Cleveland Jazz Orchestra - Greatest*

*Hits - Live!* It was a compilation of recordings from various performances during its 1990-91 concert season and included such classics as Duke Ellington's "Merry Go Round" and Jelly Roll Morton's "Black Bottom Stomp," as well as originals by CJO members, including Ferguson's "Blue Highways" and Chas Baker's "The Wayback Machine."

There was a flurry of recordings by the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra in 1998 and 1999. A videotape of a May 1998 CJO concert with the Four Freshmen was distributed world wide by the Four Freshmen Society. A live recording of a 1998 CJO concert with former Count Basie arranger Sammy Nestico was packaged into a compact disc entitled *Swingin' Together*. And in June of 1999, the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra recorded in a studio for the first time, producing a compact disc entitled *Traditions*, a salute to Cleveland's colorful big band history. The CD included a 28-page booklet I wrote tracing Cleveland's many big band traditions.

In the summer of 1999, as part of the *Everything Ellington* celebration in Greater Cleveland, the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra performed a joint concert of Duke Ellington music with the Cleveland Orchestra at Blossom Music Center.

In 2001, the CJO recorded another CD, *Night and Day*, with its frequent singer Barbara Knight. Included were arrangements of standards by CJO members.

In 2002, Al Couch, who had played trumpet with the Cleveland Orchestra for 30 years, joined the trumpet section of the CJO.

## Other Cleveland big bands

Appropriately, as the 20th Century ended, Cleveland was one of very few cities with several working big bands. In addition to the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, two other professional big jazz bands were playing regularly.

Saxophonist Ernie Krivda, who had developed a national reputation as a small group soloist and recording artist while working from his base in Cleveland, said, "No matter what I've pursued artistically throughout my life in music, big bands have always engendered strong feelings in me." In the 1990s, he formed his own Fat Tuesday Big Band which began



Ernie Krivda

## Ernie Krivda and his Fat Tuesday Big Band

almost immediately playing regular gigs and recording.

Krivda made it clear from the beginning that it would not be a nostalgia big band. His Fat Tuesday Big Band played charts by Quincy Jones, Bill Holman, Bob Florence, Ernie Wilkins and one-time Clevelander Chuck Israels.

Krivda gathered such musicians as guitarist Lee Bush, trumpeter Steve Enos, trombonists Garney Hicks and Chris Anderson, and saxophonists Dave Sterner and Bernie Pelsmajer to form the nucleus of the Fat Tuesday band and released two compact discs, *Perdido* (1998) and *The Band That Swings* (1999).

The Jazz Heritage Orchestra, formed in 1998 under the sponsorship of the Cleveland State University Black Studies Program, also began making significant contributions to big band jazz in Cleveland. Directed by Dennis Reynolds, who had been the lead trumpeter of the Count Basie Orchestra directed by Frank Foster and the Clark Terry Big Band, the Jazz Heritage Orchestra included a number of outstanding performers. Among them were trumpeter Marcus Belgrave, former Duke Ellington saxophonist Vince York and bassist Marian Hayden, as well as a group of young Cleveland musicians.

Dr. Howard Mims, the director of Black Studies at CSU and the driving force behind the Jazz Heritage Orchestra, said the major missions of the band were to preserve and perpetuate the musical heritage of the great African American jazz masters and to take big band jazz to young African American students with clinics and workshops.

The band's first performance was September 18, 1998 during an Arts Midwest conference in Cleveland. As part of the Tri-C JazzFest's *Everything Ellington* celebration in 1999, the Jazz Heritage Orchestra performed the sacred music of Duke Ellington at the Allen Theatre.

Another big band playing frequently in Cleveland was led by trumpeter Rudy Scaffidi, who had graduated from Collinwood High School and played with a series of studio orchestras in New York and such big bands as the Dorsey Brothers, Bob Crosby, Ray Anthony, Buddy

Morrow and Billy Butterfield. In the 1980s, Scaffidi began leading the Billy May Orchestra. From his base in Cleveland, Scaffidi continued leading the May band to 2000.

Other big bands performing regularly in Cleveland included the Dan Zola Orchestra, Night Coach, the Townsmen and the Hermit Club Big Band.



**The Hermit Club Big Band**

Formed in the late 1950s, the Hermit Club Band consisted of former professional musicians who had become successful businessmen and young, aspiring players. Some of the band members over the years had toured with Buddy Morrow, Tommy Dorsey, Ray Anthony, Tex Beneke, Johnny Long and others. Younger players went from the Hermit Club Big Band to other bands. They included Chuck Finley who later played with Buddy Rich, Gary Brown who went with Stan Kenton, Rick Keifer who played with the Kurt Edelhagen band in Europe, and Jiggs Whigham who played with Kenton.

The Hermit Club Band, led for years by vibraphonist Bud Wattles, a veteran of the Woody Herman Orchestra, seldom performed publicly. Its regular concerts were for members of the performing arts club located in a colorful Tudor building off Chester Avenue behind the Playhouse Square complex. Pianist, arranger and businessman Dick Lezius said, "This band gives me an opportunity to do something I can't get anywhere else. This band swings!"

## WCPN

Cleveland had not had a jazz radio station for years when WCPN signed on the air in September of 1984. There was only a smattering of jazz programs on several stations.

The new public radio station immediately began programming jazz shows during much of its broadcast day and carrying national jazz programs from its networks, including Marian McPartland's *Piano Jazz*, on weekends. The original schedule included 57 hours of jazz per week.

Leading the original push for jazz programming on WCPN was longtime jazz writer and broadcaster Chris Colombi who was the station's original nighttime jazz host. The other original jazz DJs at WCPN were Mike Love, who came to Cleveland from Detroit, and Jennifer

Stephens. When Colombi left the station in 1987, he was replaced by former John Carroll University radio station jazz host Dan Polletta. It was Polletta who began running my *Cleveland Jazz History* radio features on his program in September of 1988.

During that month, WCPN's jazz programming increased to 80 hours a week. But six years later, in 1994, shortly before hiring Bobby Jackson as music director, the station began cutting back on daytime jazz and airing more NPR network talk shows. By the end of the 1990s, there was no weekday jazz programming on WCPN before 9 p.m. Polletta, however, continued to broadcast excellent jazz from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. and an overnight jazz program was added.

## Jazz advocate Chris Colombi



**Chris Colombi**

There was a loud gasp of shock at the Cuyahoga Community College Metro Auditorium during a concert by the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra November 1, 1991 when Gary Scott announced from the stage that Chris Colombi had died few hours earlier. He died of cancer at the age of 49.

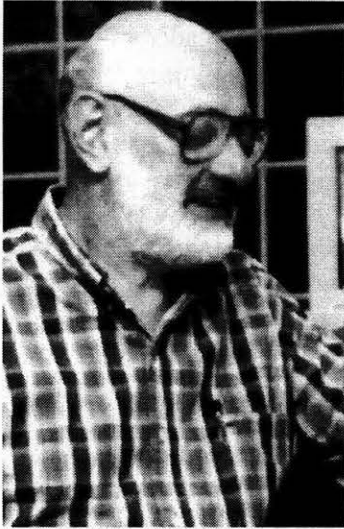
Colombi was Cleveland's most visible and enthusiastic supporter of jazz for more than a quarter of a century. He was a jazz host on a series of radio stations including WCUY (in the 1960s), WCLV and WCPN. He wrote a weekly jazz column for *The Plain Dealer* from 1969 to 1987, served as the Cleveland correspondent for *DownBeat* magazine for 18 years, taught jazz courses at Cleveland State University for 17 years, and served on the advisory board of the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra. Colombi frequently lectured on jazz and narrated a series of multi-media jazz presentations for Cuyahoga Community College.

Before he died, Colombi said he wanted a memorial, not a funeral. He said he wanted a jazz concert. In a letter to his wife Barbara, he wrote, "Celebrate that this old f - - - passed this way and hopefully made things happy. I want a party that you and Jess (their daughter) can remember."

That party was held Sunday evening, July 26, 1992, at Cain Park in Cleveland Heights. Chris specified the artists he wanted to perform: saxophonist Howie Smith, trumpeter Kenny Davis, pianist Neal Creque, flutist Mark Gridley and the full Cleveland Jazz Orchestra. He also said he wanted television anchorman Leon Bibb and me to participate. It was a joyous evening, celebrating a man who had done so much to bring jazz back to life in Cleveland.



## College jazz bands



**Roland Paolucci**

The resurgence of jazz was also reflected in a growing number of excellent college bands in Northeast Ohio.

One of the best, year after year, was the Youngstown State University Jazz Ensemble directed by Tony Leonardi, an alumnus of the Woody Herman, Stan Kenton, Buddy Rich and Chuck Mangione bands. The jazz program at Youngstown State,

started in 1970, produced such performers as pianist Harold Danko, Glenn Wilson and Dennis Reynolds. Leonardi died at the age of 62 July 11, 2001.

The University of Akron Jazz Ensemble was led by Roland Paolucci who had started at the university in 1975 after teaching piano at his parents' music store and after working as director of the Akron Jazz Workshop Big Band. Paolucci remembered the University of Akron band had been an unofficial group organized simply because the students wanted it. The director at the time took a year's leave of absence and suggested that Paolucci run the jazz band in his absence. "He took me aside," said Paolucci, "and said, 'I hope you do a good job because I don't have much expertise in this. When I come back, I'd like to recommend they keep you on.'"

That's what happened. Paolucci continued leading the University of Akron Jazz Ensemble for 25 years until his retirement in 2000.

By 1978, he was organizing festivals at the university several years before the Tri-C JazzFest began in Cleveland. Each year, he would bring in name musicians to work with his jazz students. Among them were Phil Woods, Slide Hampton, Eddie Daniels, Tom Harrell, Bob Brookmeyer and Bill Dobbins.

In the summer of 1980, the University of Akron Jazz Ensemble made a trip to Europe to perform at several jazz festivals including the prestigious Montreux Jazz Festival.

"We flew to Geneva," said Paolucci, "and then we bussed to Montreux where we had two official performances. At the Montreux Casino, Paolucci's band had a recording made of its live performance.

Members of the saxophone section at the time included John Orsini, who later became a staff musician at Disney World, and Mark Lopeman, who later toured with the Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Buddy Rich and

Tashiko Akiyoshi bands.

From Montreux, the Akron Jazz Ensemble traveled south into France, to Nice on the French Riviera to play at the Nice version of the Newport Jazz Festival. Dizzy Gillespie was also there and so was Lee Konitz who recognized one of the Bill Holman charts the

Akron band was playing, an arrangement he had played with Holman in the 1950s. "It caught his attention," recalled Paolucci, "and he came by and stuck through the whole performance. He came up to me and said, 'Gee, I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed your band.' I said, 'Lee, I appreciate this, but please step over here and tell the guys because they're the ones who would really, really appreciate it.'"

Other members of that University of Akron band that toured Europe in the summer of 1980 included trumpeter Jack Schantz and drummer Mark Gonder, both of whom later toured with the Dorsey and Miller bands.

In later years, the Akron band included trombonist Paul Ferguson, pianist Chip Stephens, trumpeter Doug Huey, drummer Joe Brigandi, bassist Gary Aprile, and trumpeter Dan McCarthy.

Saxophonist Howie Smith became the coordinator of jazz studies at Cleveland State University in 1979. In 1985 Smith was the first jazz musician to win the Cleveland Arts Prize for Music. He won Ohio Arts Council artist fellowships in 1986, 1988 and 1990 and performed concerts and conducted jazz workshops throughout the United States, in Canada, South America, Europe and Australia.

Smith always enjoyed doing something different. During one of his *Concert in Progress* presentations in 1986, he offered what he called "a saxophone duet." The "duet" quickly grew. The startled audience eventually saw and heard a chorus of 60 saxophonists on stage serenading together!

Trombonist and arranger Paul Ferguson, who toured with the Miller and Dorsey bands and was the principal trombonist with the Canton Symphony Orchestra and the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, led the Case Western Reserve University Jazz Ensemble.

Lakeland Community College developed an excellent jazz program and an orchestra led by Kent State University and Akron graduate Dan McCarthy.

The Kent State jazz program, headed by trombonist



**Howie Smith**

Chas Baker, produced trumpeter Reggie Pittman who later toured with Lionel Hampton.

The Oberlin College Jazz Ensemble, founded in 1973 by saxophonist Wendell Logan, toured Brazil in 1985. Such performers and educators as Donald Byrd, J.J. Johnson and Jimmy Owens served as artists-in-residence at Oberlin.

## Summer jazz festivals at Blossom

Beginning in 1984, with the renewed interest in jazz, Blossom Music Center, the summer home of the Cleveland Orchestra, began staging annual summer jazz festivals. The center brought some of the biggest names in jazz to the Greater Cleveland area.

There were some problems, including continuing sponsorship. The first year, it was called "the Kool Jazz Festival." Then, in 1985, "the JVC Jazz Festival," and in 1986 "the Blossom Jazz Festival." In 1987 and 1988, it was "the Ohio Bell Jazz Festival."

Each year, the Musical Arts Association, in an effort to expand public appeal for the jazz festival, began booking more and more artists who were not considered part of mainstream jazz. In 1988, Lionel Hampton walked out when he objected strongly to being on the same bill with groups like the Fabulous Thunderbirds. That ended the summer jazz festivals at Blossom.

Since then, Blossom has booked a few jazz acts from time to time, but the festival never reappeared.



**Miles Davis who played two years at the Blossom festivals**

### Summer Jazz Festivals at Blossom

- 1984** - Sarah Vaughan, Akiyoshi-Tabackin Big Band, Heath Brothers, Lionel Hampton
- 1985** - Miles Davis, Lee Ritenour, Spyro Gyra, Ray Charles
- 1986** - Spyro Gyra, David Sanborn, Stan Getz, Tony Williams, Natalie Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, Gerry Mulligan, Stanley Jordan
- 1987** - Oscar Peterson, Branford Marsalis, Herbie Hancock, the Crusaders, Stevie Ray Vaughn, the Timeless All-Stars, James Moody, Miles Davis, Freddie Hubbard, Woody Shaw
- 1988** - Carmen McRae, Ramsey Lewis, Mel Tormé, Larry Clinton, Najee, Sarah Vaughan, Lionel Hampton, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Los Lobos.

## Leo Coach's unusual gigs

One of Cleveland's leading jazz artists during the resurgence of the 1980s was pianist, leader, composer and recording artist Leo Coach. Many jazz fans who heard Coach and his Contemporary Music Coalition playing in a variety of Cleveland clubs and on records did not realize that Coach was also involved in some of the strangest jazz gigs of all time. In the summer of 1991, when the Soviet bloc was beginning to come apart at the seams, Coach, his drummer, Alan Nemeth, and his bass player, Rick Kodramaz, planned a six-concert overseas tour, beginning with a performance at a prestigious arts festival.

"We were in Slovenia during their independence," said Coach. "The old former Soviet bloc was still pretty much intact and Slovenia was really one of the first break-away countries. And we got stuck in the middle of a civil war."

They arrived the same day that Slovenia declared its independence from Yugoslavia. They performed in what quickly became an independence festival, with more than 100,000 people crowding the streets.

The next day, Communist tanks rumbled into the city and Yugoslav attack helicopters streaked overhead. The three touring jazz musicians from Cleveland found themselves in the middle of a war.

"There were, all of a sudden, a lot of soldiers and armored vehicles on the street," said Coach. "The city is ringed by mountains and to get from one side of town to the other, there are tunnels. An anti-tank gun was positioned right at the mouth of the tunnel and there was maybe an 18 or 19 year old kid sitting there with his feet up on the gun and his finger on the trigger. I caught his eye. The kid looked back as if to say, 'What the hell am I doing here?'"

With a civil war underway and the jazz festival called off, Coach and his group fled. They managed to get the last train out of Slovenia and headed toward the safety of the Austrian border. They were unwilling eyewitnesses to the beginning of the historic fall of the Communist bloc.

They returned the next two years and played a series of concerts in newly-independent states.

## Hank Geer's tragic accident

The dean of Cleveland jazz performers during the 1980s was Hank Geer, the saxophonist who for years had traveled and played with the bands of Ray Anthony, Tommy Dorsey and others. He performed with symphony orchestras, ran his own popular jazz nightclub, and, beginning in 1980, led the jazz group at Sammy's restaurant in the Cleveland Flats. Perhaps as much as anything, it was the playing of Geer and his group that gave Sammy's its special appeal as a restaurant. Among Cleveland jazz musicians, Geer



personified the professional, the man who played jazz well almost every night for more than half a century.

In July of 1991, Geer was taking a break between sets on a little porch outside Sammy's. A drunk in a car came barreling down the street, careening into the parking lot, and crashing into the deck. Geer was thrown over the rail, down a steep hill onto railroad tracks below.

He suffered multiple broken ribs, a fractured pelvis, and a horribly mangled left arm and hand. He was rushed to Metro General Hospital where he told a doctor, "Man, I need this hand to play. If you can't fix it right, please find me the cat who can!"

Geer had a whole platoon of doctors and therapists. Some of them were frustrated musicians themselves and appreciated the special musical talents of their patient, the importance of his playing, and how necessary his hand was in playing the saxophone. They did everything possible for Hank through a series of operations.

He said, "I had three doctors when I was in Metro Hospital. This hand surgeon said, 'This is what we gotta do.' He said they had to take that bone out because it was out of line and it was becoming what they called 'sugar-combed' at the end, like a honey comb, and it was losing its density. The doctor said, 'We gotta cut that out.'

"I said, 'How are you gonna do that?'"

"He said, 'We gotta cut it out and make it like a "V" in there.'

"I said, 'Where're you gonna get the other bone?'"

"And he said, 'We'll take it out of your hip.'

"I said, 'Man, I gotta butcher on 185th Street. Can't I bring in one of those bones?'"

"He laughed and said, 'We have to graft it in there. You'll have a plate in there.'

"That's why (demonstrating) this is raised like this. There's a metal plate in there now. It's all healed up, but there is still stiffness in there. When I play keyboard, man, I cramp up in here."

After a series of operations, Hank had to use a special brace to train his fingers to do what a saxophonist's fingers have to do. Demonstrating, he said, "I put this stupid thing on here, put these straps around it and it pulls my fingers apart. I have to leave it there for about 40 minutes."

Without the special device, Geer's fingers refused to do what fingers normally do. "It's like a rubber band," said Geer. "You take that thing off, and boom, they go back like that."

During his therapy, Geer said it was a little easier to play the saxophone than the piano. "With the sax, I couple my hand around the horn. It's already coupled. I can't get it out, so it's just a matter of bending it around. But I do have a tough time with the high notes because you gotta get that action in here. I couldn't even reach that cluster down here on the lower notes with this. I couldn't move my little finger."

But Geer worked hard at regaining the use of his left hand and his doctors gave him the green light to begin playing again. The doctor said, "If you can sit in, do it as much as you can."

It was a long, difficult battle. "It's just a matter of practice and therapy," said Geer. "I'm working out and gettin' my chops back. Just working at it every day."

Philosophical about the accident, Geer said, "I didn't have any choice. I could have been killed. I had good people working with me and giving me encouragement. Most people say, 'Man, you're the hardest working guy we've ever seen!'"

Geer's courage and perseverance won him more respect than even his extraordinary playing.

After finally making his comeback and playing again at Sammy's, Geer again suffered major medical problems. He died in late 2000 at the age of 78.

His determined rebound from near death seemed to personify the resurgence of jazz in Northeast Ohio in the 1980s and '90s.

## 21. Joe Lovano

No other jazz musician from Cleveland has ever achieved the world-wide acclaim that saxophonist Joe Lovano got in the 1990s and early 2000s.

He was voted "Jazz Artist of the Year" by *DownBeat* magazine critics and readers in 1995, 1996 and 2001. He was named "International Artist of the Year" by *Jazz Report* magazine in 1995. *DownBeat* called Cleveland native Lovano "the very epitome of the '90s professional jazzman."

*DownBeat's* Larry Blumenfeld wrote, "The sheer breadth and ambition of Lovano's artistic endeavors reflect a consistent level of achievement. Lovano raises the level of the game and of those around him."

The *DownBeat* article said Lovano "knows his history, not just the history of the music, but the value of his personal history."

That personal history began in Cleveland where Lovano was almost literally born to be a jazz musician. When he was born December 29, 1952 in Cleveland, his father, Tony "Big T" Lovano was already a highly-regarded local jazz tenor saxophonist.

"There are pictures of me as a baby," recalled Joe, "with an alto when I was about six months old." Fellow Cleveland saxophonist Ernie Krivda said, "I think he wanted to be a jazz musician before he wanted, like most kids, to be a cowboy or a fireman. It was always his dream."

With music filling his home, Lovano began playing the alto sax when he was only five or six years old. His father was always his musical idol. "My dad," said Lovano, "was a real passionate musician. He also was a barber, had a family, and he taught me about the whole way of life in music."

Lovano told me, "My dad grew up in the bebop era. He played at jam sessions with John Coltrane in Cleveland and with (Clevelanders) Tadd Dameron, Benny



Joe Lovano

Bailey, Bill Hardman, the great tenor player Joe Alexander, and Jim Hall." Because of his family, Tony decided to remain in Cleveland. But he was so respected that he often shared bandstands with such artists as Stan Getz and Flip Phillips when they came to Cleveland.

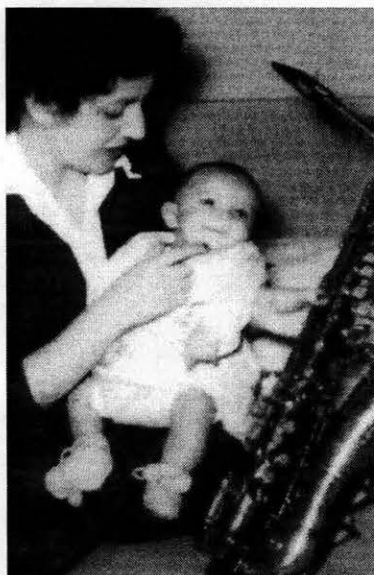
Drummer Lawrence "Jacktown" Jackson, who frequently played with the elder Lovano, said, "He wasn't as advanced (as Joe became). He didn't have the same command of his instrument, but Tony was a hell of a saxophone player!"

When Joey, as he was called, was about 10, his father began giving his son serious lessons and he began listening to his father's records, particularly saxophonists Sonny Stitt,

John Coltrane and Lester Young, and trumpeter Miles Davis. When Joe was 11, his father bought him a King Super 20 tenor saxophone. Within a year, his father began taking his son with him to rehearsals and gigs. As the boy was listening, "I was starting to learn the music they were playing," Lovano said, "All the guys in my dad's generation (in Cleveland) were my teachers."

One of those "guys" was Willie Smith, the Cleveland saxophonist who had arranged for the Lionel Hampton Orchestra. Smith recalled young Joey "used to come over all the time. He always wanted to play because he saw what his father was doing. Naturally, he wanted to be a musician."

"I grew up knowing about the Cleveland scene from my dad," said Lovano. Writer Howard Mandel quoted Lovano saying, "I was really lucky. My dad was a great player, had fun with music and just loved to play. I learned from him that jazz expression is vast. He never told me, 'This is good and that's bad.' He let me explore it all and he taught me about each instrument. That taught me how to play. He taught



A family photo of baby Joe Lovano with his mother, Josephine, and a saxophone





Judi Silvano

### Tony "Big T" Lovano

me to check out piano players and drummers and bass players and trumpeters. He'd say, 'If you're going to play with them, you have to know what's happening. You're going to play with drummers; you have to know how to fit in your ideas with their rhythms.'

"This really opened me up," said Lovano. "From an early age, I used to listen to records from the inside of what was

happening, and not just on the basis of what the soloist was playing. That was great," he said, "and I think it was really generous of him."

As a result of his father's enormous influence, Lovano gained a very broad view of what jazz music should and should not be. His father was never content to keep on playing the same old songs with the same old groups. Years later, Lovano, "the most straight-ahead jazz man on the scene today," as *DownBeat* called him, was constantly experimenting with new groups, new sounds, and new forms of musical expression.

### Early playing in Cleveland

By the time Lovano was 13 (in 1966), his father often let him sit in and play during the last set of gigs. When Joe was 14, Tony took him to jam sessions at places like Hank Geer's Euclid Shore Club on Lakeshore Boulevard. This was where he first met such leading Cleveland jazz musicians as Bill Gidney, Paul Bunion, Hank Geer, Bill de Arango, Ace Carter, Tony Haynes, Emil Boyd, Chink Stevenson, Eddie Baccus and "Jacktown" (Lawrence Jackson) who later told me, "Dad really put it on his son. If it weren't for Tony, 'Big T,' there would be no Joey."

When Joe was a student at Euclid High School, his father took him to Public Hall in downtown Cleveland to hear pianist Dave Brubeck in a concert that also featured Gerry Mulligan." According to Lovano, it was that concert that convinced him that he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and become a jazz musician.

Despite his interest in jazz, Lovano later admitted that while he was still in high school, he was playing all kinds of music including rock 'n roll and Motown.

### At the Smiling Dog Saloon

Before he graduated from Euclid High School, Lovano was playing at the Smiling Dog Saloon on West 25th Street, a club that presented many national jazz artists. Krivda, who often played there with Lovano, said, "It was an incredible experience, an opportunity to play opposite the major names in the music."

Lovano told me, "I remember hearing a lot of great bands there. I had a chance to play opposite a number of great groups at the Smiling Dog. Ernie Krivda and Bill de Arango and Skip Hadden played as the house trio and I used to sit in with them. (Vibraphonist) Ron Busch played in a number of different bands there with Ernie and Ron Kozak, another saxophonist from Cleveland. And I was a teenager and just coming on at that point in the early '70s. I had a chance to play there a lot."

It was at the Smiling Dog that Lovano said he got his first big break. He and Willie Smith were sitting in with Jack McDuff's group. "I was playing baritone saxophone in an ensemble with four saxophones and Willie was playing lead alto. About two weeks after we played a couple of nights with Jack at the Smiling Dog, he called us to join his band and go on tour."

### Berklee, Woody and New York

After high school, Lovano went to the Berklee College of Music in Boston. He joined Woody Herman's orchestra in 1976 and made five albums with Herman.

In the late 1970s, Lovano got a chance to sit in with the Bill Evans Trio, a group he had originally met at the Smiling Dog. "That was an unbelievable experience," said Lovano. "I just brought my horn down there. Mark Johnson was playing bass. It was a Sunday night and I just approached Bill and asked him if I could sit in. And he was great. It was incredible! He said, 'Yeah, let me start the set and I'll bring you up.'

"I remember I played 'Body and Soul' and 'Stella By Starlight' with them and an arrangement of a tune he recorded on the *Interplay* album which featured Jim Hall, Freddie Hubbard and Philly Joe Jones, 'You and the Night And the Music.' I had heard them earlier in the week. They were playing this one arrangement from the record and I knew the part. When they asked me what I wanted to play, I called that tune and played his arrangement on it. I was really proud that I could play something that they were playing."

### With Thad Jones and Mel Lewis

After he moved to New York, Lovano joined the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra that was playing one night a week at the Village Vanguard. "I joined the band in 1980," said Lovano, "and played with the band every Monday night that I was in town and not on tour from 1980 until about '91. Mel died in 1988 and I stayed on

the band for about three years after he passed."

Lovano later said, "The music of Thad Jones and Mel Lewis was a development from the Ellington-Basie school, a complete evolution in modern band writing. And the thing about this music that was so strong," he said, "was that it was *performance* all the way. Most of the recordings were live recordings and every time, through the same arrangements, the musicians could be creative within the music. It was always growing and taking new shapes.

"When you play with older cats and legends, people like Woody Herman or Mel Lewis," said Lovano, "they elevate you into another strength especially if you know where they're coming from and you know their history and their life. All of a sudden, you're a part of that. Thanks to my dad, I grew up really knowing about the history of jazz and the history of players, and the traps that a lot of cats go into. When I went to New York, I was already almost somehow seasoned a little bit to the way of life in the world of music."

Lovano was also playing dates and making records with Paul Motian, Carla Bley, Jack McDuff, Lonnie Smith and others. Lovano said, "Playing with musicians like Paul Motian since 1980 was really a key factor in my development about that concept, about developing solos that are special for the moment, not only the tune they're playing, but the people you are playing with."

Living with his wife, singer Judi Silvano, in New York, Lovano was playing frequently in the city and teaching at New York University and William Paterson College.

### First album as a leader

In 1985, Lovano recorded his first album as a leader, *Tones, Shapes and Colors*. The Joe Lovano Quartet included pianist Ken Werner, bassist Dennis Irwin and drummer Mel Lewis. They recorded three Lovano compositions, "La Louisiane," "Tones, Shapes and Colors" and "In the Jazz Community" as well as three originals by Werner. Lovano demonstrated his long exploration of the concept of using a variety of instruments. He said, "I had acquired a lot of instruments during my travels and tried to develop a concept of



Courtesy of Joe Lovano

accompanying myself on solo sax with gongs." The liner notes of that album said prophetically, "Joe Lovano is ready to step up and out."

As he was beginning to "step out," Lovano never forgot his jazz roots in Cleveland. In March of 1986, he came home and had a party at the Beachwood Studio in Cleveland to celebrate the release of his first album. "To celebrate," said Lovano, "we had a jam session. We just called tunes and had some fun." They

recorded that informal session. Included were Joe's father, his uncle Anthony Lovano, organist Eddie Baccus and drummer "Jacktown." The jam session was released on a compact disc entitled *Hometown Sessions*. It included father and son tenor duets – probably their last.

Tony Lovano died less than a year later (January 8, 1987) at the age of 61. Unfortunately "Big T" did not live to see the world-wide acclaim his son was about to achieve.

In 1991, Joe signed a contract with Blue Note Records and began recording a series of excellent compact discs including *From the Soul*, *Universal Language*, *Quartets Live at the Village Vanguard*, *Trio Fascination*, *Celebrating Sinatra* and *Rush Hour*.

On *Rush Hour*, Lovano soloed within large ensemble arrangements written by Gunther Schuller. It was an unusual setting for a musician who was best known for his work with small jazz groups, but he drew on his



experience with the Herman and Jones-Lewis big bands. Lovano said later, "I would have never made a recording like *Rush Hour* and play with the intimacy that we did, with a large ensemble like that with strings and woodwinds, if I had not experienced



playing in large groups.”

Lovano expressed himself, seemingly effortlessly, within the context of the large orchestra, playing his mainstream, bebop and even free-jazz solos, as integral parts of complex and sometimes difficult Schuller arrangements.

Lovano said, “Putting things together with different combinations of people, shaping music, and making jazz happen,” was his way of life. He said he wanted to do it in a variety of ways, drawing on the artistic stimulation he was getting from a variety of musical environments.” The *Rush Hour* CD won the *DownBeat* Critics and Readers’ Polls for 1994 Album of the Year and a Grammy nomination.

On *Celebrating Sinatra*, featuring songs made famous by singer Frank Sinatra half a century earlier, Lovano discovered that within the big ensemble arrangements of Manny Albam, there emerged a variety of small combos – duets, trios, quartets and quintets – in which he and the other jazz artists could spontaneously interact with each other, improvising original music.

Lovano told *DownBeat*, “I find that half of my audience, the young crowd, never heard these standards played at all, by anybody. The other half of my audience never heard any original music; they’ve only heard standards done in fairly conventional ways.” By using the Sinatra standards as frames for new pieces of musical art, Lovano and his fellow players performed the same arrangements, but they never played them exactly the same way twice.

Like many outstanding jazz artists, including his father, Lovano was seeking more artistic challenges than he could get playing with the same group all the time. Perhaps more than anyone else in jazz, he played and recorded with a wide variety of stimulating jazz artists.

## Remembering his Cleveland roots

By the early 1990s, Lovano had become a world-class jazz artist. He was ranked number four saxophonist in the 1991 *DownBeat* Readers’ Poll. More than any other jazz artist from Cleveland, Lovano always had great respect for his jazz roots in Cleveland and returned home frequently to perform and take part in what he called “Cleveland’s rich musical scene,” a scene which his late father had helped create.

In 1995, when he was first voted “Jazz Artist of the Year,” Lovano spent more than a week in his hometown playing and serving as the artist-in-residence at the Tri-C JazzFest.

## With Jim Hall and Dave Brubeck

Also in 1995, Lovano was further honored when two all-time jazz giants, Jim Hall and Dave Brubeck, wrote songs honoring him.

Guitarist and composer Hall, who also grew up in Cleveland and had played with Tony Lovano, wrote a song dedicated to Lovano called “Calypso Joe.” It was reminiscent of an earlier Hall recording with Sonny Rollins, “St. Thomas” (from the *Saxophone Colossus* album). Lovano had been so impressed with the Rollins-Hall recording that he had recorded the song in 1986 when he came home to Cleveland for that recording session with his father. Hall invited Lovano to join him on the recording. They made the record for Telarc, the Cleveland-based recording company, in February of 1995 at the Power Station in New York City.

Brubeck, whose concert in Cleveland years earlier had inspired Lovano to become a professional musician, wrote a song entitled “Joe Lovano Tango.” The pianist said he began repeating Lovano’s name and it fell into a tango rhythm. Brubeck said, “I finished Joe’s tune in the car on the way into New York from my home in Connecticut.” He went to the Clinton Recording Studios in New York City on June 6, 1995 to record for Telarc. Not only did Brubeck compose and record “Joe Lovano Tango” in honor of the Clevelander, he also invited Lovano to record it with him.

Brubeck told Lovano he wanted the piece played “Not as a typical tango, but as more of a comment on the tango. He said to Lovano, “You should feel free to take it any direction you want to go.”

Lovano said, “It was truly an honor to be part of the 75th birthday recording session for Brubeck. In my wildest dreams,” said Lovano, “I never thought Dave Brubeck would compose a piece for me to play with him on such a milestone in his life and career.”

## Touring the world

Lovano was in demand everywhere. He recorded with a huge number of different artists and toured the nation and the world, playing an almost endless number of jazz festivals and such jazz clubs as the Village Vanguard, the new Birdland, the Blue Note and Sweet Basil’s in New York City; the Jazz Showcase in Chicago; the Bimhuus in Amsterdam; the New Morning in Paris; and Yoshi’s in Oakland.

When Lovano came home for Christmas in 1998, he spent a couple of nights playing with some of his old Cleveland musical friends at Ron Busch’s Bop Stop on



Blue Note Records

West 6th Street. He asked his father's old friend, Willie Smith, to write some arrangements for a ten-piece group.

Less than a year later (November, 1999), Lovano recorded several of Smith's arrangements on a Blue Note compact disc, *52nd Street Themes*. The CD included several of the pieces Smith had written for Lovano's hometown session at the Bop Stop.

It also included five compositions by bebop pioneer Tadd Dameron, who had also played with Lovano's dad in Cleveland – "If You Could See Me Now," "On a Misty Night," "The Scene is Clean," "Whatever Possess'd Me," and "Tadd's Delight." Lovano said, "I laid heavily on Tadd's tunes because that's where Willie really lives. Learning tunes like 'Hot House' and 'Good Bait' really taught me a lot about how to play this music."

In the liner notes, Lovano expressed his thanks, as always, to his late father, Tony "Big T" Lovano.

The recording by one of the biggest names in jazz was, in effect, Lovano's salute to his hometown and particularly Willie Smith and Tadd Dameron. With so many Cleveland connections, *Fifty-second Street Themes* could easily have been called "Euclid Avenue Themes." It won a Grammy Award for Jazz Record of the Year.

## Lovano's role in jazz

In an interview during a break that night at the Bop Stop, I asked Lovano how he viewed his position in jazz. He said, "I feel all these things that are happening right now, are happening right on time for me. It takes a while to develop your music and your sound. And it takes some experience playing in a lot of settings. I'm starting to blossom and just trying to find myself in my sound and in different directions and concepts within jazz." He added, "I feel it's such an honor to be playing this music and it's really a gift and a treat to be touring and to be able to present things like this."

"I feel really proud that I'm getting some recognition for some really creative projects and not a lot of over-produced things or a lot of hype. You know, people are reacting to things that I've done. I would like to build up a library or a catalog of not only my playing but my compositions as well."

In 2001, Lovano also joined the faculty of his alma mater, the Berklee College of Music in Boston.

And what does one of the world's leading jazz musicians do when he is not playing jazz or teaching? In a 1997 interview, Lovano said, "I love nature, walking in the woods, swimming, and playing golf." He said his uncles in Cleveland all played golf and he used to caddy for them when he was a teenager.

In a few short years, Lovano amassed an enormous catalog of recordings, both as a leader and as a sideman.

## Joe Lovano Discography

### Lovano as leader:

- 1985 - *Tone, Shapes and Colors* (Soul Note)
- 1986 - *Hometown Sessions* (Nimbus)
- 1987 - *One Time Out* (Soul Note)
- 1988 - *Village Rhythm* (Soul Note)
- 1989 - *Lovano/Romano: Ten Tales* (Owl)
- 1991 - *Sounds of Joy* (Enja)
- 1991 - *Solid Steps* (Jazz Club)
- 1991 - *Landmarks* (Blue Note)
- 1992 - *From the Soul* (Blue Note)
- 1993 - *Universal Language* (Blue Note)
- 1994 - *Tenor Legacy* (Blue Note)
- 1994 - *Rush Hour* (Blue Note)
- 1995 - *Worlds: Joe Lovano Wind Ensemble* (Evidence)
- 1995 - *Quartets: Live at the Vanguard* (Blue Note)
- 1996 - *Celebrating Sinatra* (Blue Note)
- 1997 - *Jazz Saxophone* (Blue Note)
- 1998 - *Trio Fascination* (Blue Note)
- 1998 - *Flying Colors* (Blue Note)
- 1999 - *Friendly Fire* (Blue Note)
- 1999 - *52nd Street Themes* (Blue Note)
- 2000 - *Unknown Voyage* (Robi Droli)
- 2000 - *Grand Slam* (Telarc)
- 2001 - *Viva Caruso* (Blue Note)

### Lovano with others:

- Woody Herman Orchestra** - *40th Anniversary in Carnegie Hall; Roadfather; Chick, Donald, Walter and Woodrow; Woody and Flip Phillips*
- Mel Lewis Orchestra** - *The Definitive Thad Jones, Vol. 1; The Definitive Thad Jones, Vol. 2; Soft Lights and Hot Music; Make Me Smile; Live at Montreaux; 20 Years at the Village Vanguard*
- Paul Motian** - *Psalm; One Time Out; On Broadway- 1, 2, 3; Motian in Tokyo; Jack of Clubs; Monk in Motion; It Should've Happened a Long Time Ago; Bill Evans; Story of Maryam; Trioism*
- John Scofield** - *What We Do, Time On My Hands, Meant to Be, Live*
- Tom Harrell** - *Sail Away, Form, Visions, Passages, Upswing*
- Peter Erskine** - *Transition, Sweet Soul*
- Charlie Haden Orchestra** - *Dream Keeper*
- Don Grolnick** - *Night Town*
- Judi Silvano** - *Dancing Voices, Songs I Wrote or Wish I Did*
- Gust Tsillis** - *Sequestered Days*
- Henri Texier** - *Paris Botignoles, TransAtlantic Quartet, TransAtlantic & Abercrombie*
- Salvatore Bonafede** - *Actor-Actress*
- Lonnie Smith** - *Afro-Desia; Lonnie Smith and George Benson; When the Night is Right; Keep on Lovin'*
- Jim Hall** - *Dialogues, Grand Slam*
- Dave Brubeck** - *Young Tigers and Old Lions*
- Bill de Arango** - *298 Bridge Street, Anything Went*
- Ray Drummond** - *Excursion*
- Allen Farnham** - *The Common Thread, 5th House*
- Eric Felten** - *Gratitude*
- Andy LaVerne** - *First Tango in NY*
- Lee Konitz** - *Rhapsody*
- Judy Miamack** - *Long as You're Living*
- Peter O'Mara** - *Avenue U*
- Saheb Sarbig** - *It Couldn't Happen Without You*
- Ed Schuller** - *To Know Where One Is*
- George Schuller** - *Looking Up From Down Below*
- Alain Soler** - *Durance*
- Kenny Werner** - *Uncovered Heart*
- Yosuke Yamashita** - *Kurdish Dance, Dazzling Day, Ways of Time*



## 22. Ken Peplowski

Seven years younger than Joe Lovano, Ken Peplowski also soared to international prominence. In a little more than 15 years, he catapulted from a kids' polka band in Cleveland to the most respected jazz stages in the world.

Born May 23, 1959, Peplowski grew up in the Cleveland suburb of Garfield Heights. Like Lovano and most musicians, his first musical influences were at home.

"My father was an amateur musician," he remembered in an April 2000 interview with me, "He was a policeman and he used to bring home instruments and try to play them himself. He started with the trumpet. Gave that up in frustration. Then, the clarinet. Gave that up. I became a clarinet player. Then, he wound up kind of messing around with the accordion for the rest of his life."

Peplowski's father, however, was serious about his sons learning to play their instruments. Ken said his policeman father was a stern task-master.

"My father did what they always say you're not supposed to do with kids. He was the stereotypical father who sat there with his arms crossed, making us practice. You would think we would rebel against it, but I loved the music so much! And I loved the clarinet from the first time I played it. I just loved the sound of the instrument."

At first, Peplowski was not a serious jazz fan, but he loved playing the clarinet and played at every opportunity.

### Kids polka band

He remembered, "When I was about maybe nine or ten years old, with my brother, we formed a Polish polka band." They played for parties around Garfield Heights. "It was," he said, "a great way to immediately jump up a couple of levels in playing. It was like learning how to swim by being thrown into the water."

"I was taking lessons all along, private lessons, at a music store called Cattell's on Turney Road and we used to rehearse there with the band. We actually learned how to write music, read music, and make arrangements for this band. At these Polish polka dances, you have to play some big band standards, so I learned that too. I wound up getting a saxophone for that reason, because I was playing all these old big band standards."



Years later, after playing with some of the dixieland legends at Eddie Condon's in New York, Peplowski saw a similarity between polka music and early American jazz. "The Polish polka, believe it or not," he said, "is so close to New Orleans jazz, it's frightening. Everybody is always making these parallels about where jazz came from." With a smile, he said, "I can say it's Polish American music because it's two trumpets playing in tandem, every song has got four or five different parts, there're drum breaks, and the clarinet improvises through the whole thing. So it was a great way to learn how to play."

Ken and Ted Peplowski's kids polka band began making a name for itself around Garfield Heights

and Greater Cleveland and was soon appearing on radio and television broadcasts. "We used to go on that old show *Polka Varieties*. We went on that show (on WEWS-TV) and some of the radio shows. We were out there working and that gave me a taste of what it was to be a professional musician. From the first time I played in public, I thought, 'This is for me! This is what I want to do.'"

Peplowski never had any other job. He always made his living by playing music.

His far-reaching musical tastes also began early – at home. "Another kind of unusual thing about my family," he said, "was everybody listened to everything. My parents would sit down with us and listen to the latest Beatles record, they would listen to classical music, polka music, jazz music. And they let us spend a lot of the money we made to buy records. I spent money on records like you can't believe!"

### Early jazz influences

Among the many records Peplowski was buying were old 1930s and '40s recordings by all-time jazz clarinet legend Benny Goodman. He explained, "Because I was so into the clarinet, I tended to gravitate toward records of people who play the same instrument – Benny Goodman! That was the big thing for me. The light bulb came on."

The Goodman light bulb came on for Peplowski in the late 1960s when he was still very young and when Goodman was considered pretty much an historic relic. "That was really within just a couple years of my

playing," he said. "I was ten years old or eleven years old. I think the first thing I heard was that (Goodman) Carnegie Hall concert."

Goodman was not Peplowski's only early jazz influence. "The second big influence," he said, "was Duke Ellington's band. I picked up some records of his and I was really knocked out. My first exposure to the band was the later band with Jimmy Hamilton and Russell Procope, and I was so knocked out by their two different styles of clarinet playing."

The 1970s was a relatively quiet time for jazz in Cleveland. There were only a few nightclubs presenting live jazz here, but Peplowski remembered many of the big bands were still coming to Cleveland. "There weren't many chances for the local guys to play, but bands always came in. I remember seeing Duke's band. We saw Benny a couple of times at places like Musicarnival, and Maynard Ferguson. All the big bands used to pass through town – Count Basie, Ella."

## Garfield Heights High School

Peplowski went to Garfield Heights High School where he played in various jazz and classical musical groups, and where he got an opportunity to hear and meet some of the world's leading jazz artists.

"There was that big movement in the '60s," he said, "with all those big bands coming to school programs and workshops. And we had them too. We had Maynard Ferguson's band, and Stan Kenton's band came in. And for a kid like myself, it was so exciting to not only hear those people play, but then talk with them. And they give you tips on playing and everything. That was a big deal!"

After graduating from high school, Peplowski was more convinced than ever that he wanted to devote his life to playing music. He enrolled at Cleveland State University and studied clarinet. He also began playing jazz gigs around Cleveland.

## Jazz group in Cleveland

"I had a quartet in Cleveland," he said. "We used to play at this place called Newman's Corners, this bar that just decided to have jazz. We built up a huge following. I was playing a couple of nights a week with the jazz group and also jamming with some of the guys around town like Bill Gidney, a great piano player. There were a few joints, like the Smiling Dog Saloon. There used to be a place downtown where Bill always played."

"I was playing a little bit of jazz and I got a big break. My teacher at college, a guy named Al Blazer, got my quartet booked on this jazz festival in downtown Cleveland. It was the Tommy Dorsey band, the Teddy Wilson Trio and my group. Buddy Morrow, who was leading the Tommy Dorsey band, heard me play and made me an offer to come on the road playing lead alto

and he could even give me a feature spot in the band with clarinet with the rhythm section. I took the opportunity and I left. So I left Cleveland when I was about 20 years old, after about one and a half, maybe two years at Cleveland State, to go on the road with the Tommy Dorsey band."

## Touring with the Dorsey band

Peplowski spent the next three years with the Dorsey Orchestra, touring the country, playing saxophone and clarinet in an almost never-ending series of one-nighters around the country.

On the road with the band, Peplowski's roommate was trumpeter Jack Schantz, later the music director of the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra. "He practiced all the time and listened all the time," said Schantz. "And he was a very, very funny guy. I don't think I ever laughed as much in my whole life as when I was on that band. Everybody was just real funny. I guess you have to develop that sense of humor because the life style is really hard. It's like perpetual jet lag. You never have enough sleep."

Peplowski smiled when he remembered that phase of his life. "We had a lot of laughs on that band," he said. "Twelve-hour poker games, you know, on the bus, and hi-jinks on the road."

While having fun on the road and playing the music of Tommy Dorsey, Peplowski, according to Schantz, was studying the old music of his boyhood music hero, Benny Goodman. "He had all these Goodman solos on tape," said Schantz, "and he knew them all. He could play them all, note for note. And he would just sit on the bed, playing along with these Goodman solos."

Peplowski admitted, "In my earlier days, I would listen to the record and get the horn out and try to play back some of the things. I was such a fan of Benny! I went through a period of a few years of not listening to him because, geez, I don't want to sound like him as much as I loved him. And because I loved him so much, I thought, 'This is not right! I don't want to be another imitator.' So yeah, I was sitting there listening to those records. And the same thing with Sonny Stitt. I was just eating those things up."

## Influenced by Sonny Stitt

While Peplowski was obviously strongly influenced by Goodman, he was also influenced by bebop saxophonist Stitt. The Cleveland native had been listening to Stitt's records for years. While Peplowski was traveling with the Dorsey Orchestra, he had an opportunity to meet Stitt.

"We were staying in Chicago at this place called the President Hotel," said Peplowski. "He was there at the hotel. He was in town playing at the Jazz Showcase. So I very timidly knocked on his door. At that time, they gave you the room numbers of everybody, not like now."



And he comes out. I'll never forget this because you're 20 years old and here's your hero. He comes out at two o'clock in the afternoon in his pajamas. And it looked like I had woken him up. But he invited me inside.

"We wound up spending the whole day together. It was amazing, an amazing day. He had me go up and get my horn. I came back down and was scared to death. He gave me this lesson where he would play things for me. He couldn't really articulate what he was doing, but he would play it for me. I would play it back. We'd get a fake book out and he'd say, 'You gotta learn all these songs, you really have to expand your repertoire.' And he was giving me lessons about playing music and playing with rhythm sections and learning."

In many ways, Peplowski was influenced as much by the bebop of Sonny Stitt as he was by the swing of Benny Goodman. In 1997, Peplowski recorded "Purple Gazelle," a song John Coltrane, hardly an exponent of swing, had recorded years earlier.

Besides learning some of the complexities of bebop from Stitt, Peplowski said he learned some universal music lessons from the man he met in Chicago.

"You know that Sonny Stitt, for many years, the critics just kind of passed him off as a Charlie Parker imitator. And he said to me, 'You can't listen to the critics. You can't listen to good reviews or bad reviews; you have to play for yourself. That's the bottom line. If you give your own personality a hundred percent, then you can be happy at the end of the day.' And I have taken that with me ever since. It's a very valuable piece of advice. Because, otherwise, you're always trying to chase this elusive market place."

After touring with the Dorsey Orchestra for three years and studying with Stitt, Peplowski settled in New York City in the early 1980s and began a long struggle to become a respected jazz musician.

## Almost quit music

He had his clarinet and saxophone, a lot of experience and ambition, but, like many other jazz musicians who have gone to New York to seek fame and fortune, he discovered the city had not rolled out a red carpet for his arrival.

"In fact," said Peplowski, "when I moved to New York, I didn't know anyone there except one saxophone player who was on the Tommy Dorsey band. Nobody! I was running out of money. I didn't have any connections in New York for work." Peplowski admitted



he was on the verge of giving up music, the central focus of his life since he was nine years old. "I applied for a regular job," he said. "I talked my way into a position as the assistant manager of a photo processing plant. I knew nothing about that. I was supposed to report to work on Monday. This would have been *my first non-music job ever*. I've been working since about ten. So, it was kind of a blow to me and I was thinking about this the whole weekend. I woke up that morning and thought, 'I just can't do this. I can't go in there. This is going to be like a big set-back. I gotta hang in there!' I called up the people and said, 'I know you're not going to understand this, but I can't take this job.' They thought I was nuts."

Like other jazz musicians who have faced job crises in New York City, Peplowski decided the only way to get started, and pay the rent and keep food on the table, was to accept a variety of playing jobs even if they didn't measure up to his musical goals.

"That's what you do when you go to New York," he said. "You do everything and anything. And you keep meeting new circles of musicians until you find your little niche."

He played with avant garde jazz groups, symphony orchestras, bebop bands, and even with aging dixieland musicians.

"Within a month, I was getting a few calls to sub on bands," he remembered, "and because of my clarinet playing, I was subbing a lot at Eddie Condon's (dixieland club). They were really kind to me because I didn't know the repertoire. And those old New Orleans tunes are pretty difficult, but the guys would let everybody else take a chorus and then me."

During this period, Peplowski also journeyed west an hour or so to play for a jazz appreciation club in the Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton area of Pennsylvania. The club, called the Fugowees Jazz Club, put on jazz concerts several times a year. The "chief" of the Indian-named group was Parke Frankenfield, an Easton resident who had led the Bob Crosby ghost band. The number two man of the club was Red Mascara who remembered, "Peppy played for us many times, either as a leader or as a side man. At first," Mascara told me, "he came in with a group called the Condon All-Stars headed by Ed Polcer (who had taken over Condon's club in New York). Later, he came back quite often, once with a guitarist named Frank Vignola who was only 21, but a darn good musician." Mascara said he always had a bag

of pretzels ready for Peplowski. "He loved the pretzels." Years later, Mascara said Peplowski was "the best clarinetist to come along in a very long time."

Peplowski also joined the big band of Loren Schoenberg in New York. Schoenberg was also an archivist and personal manager for Benny Goodman.

In 1985, Goodman hired Schoenberg's band to appear with him on a PBS television special. Cleveland Peplowski suddenly found himself performing with his boyhood hero. The Garfield Heights native soloed on several numbers during that TV program, including "King Porter Stomp."

Other members of that band included pianist Dick Hyman, guitarist James Chirillo, bassist Bob Haggart and drummer Louie Bellson. Eventually, Peplowski remembered, Schoenberg was fired and it became the Benny Goodman Orchestra.

Peplowski, who had been struggling in New York, was performing with, and being appreciated by, some of the biggest names in the history of jazz, including the legendary Goodman.

"We worked a lot with him. And we rehearsed every week at the old Wellington Hotel," said Peplowski. "We did a couple of records and a PBS special."

## Playing with Goodman

Peplowski was playing tenor saxophone with the Benny Goodman Orchestra. "He was really excited about that band. We were playing all those old Fletcher Henderson charts and it was really a great time for me and he could still have nights when that old frail man blew us off the bandstand." Goodman at the time was 76 years old and had not played much in public for years.

"We had a night at Radio City Music Hall," remembered Peplowski. [On the bill] "It was Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Benny Goodman and Placido Domingo. Needless to say, everybody was at the top of their form because when one person was on, the other three were watching from the wings. That night, Benny played so good that we missed every entrance. The saxophone players were just sitting there, you know, open-mouthed. *We literally couldn't play!* I remember playing 'Stealin' Apples' and he would take chorus after chorus and we have these background parts. We couldn't play! We just stopped playing. We were just in awe of him! Louie Bellson, who was playing drums, came up to me afterward and said, 'I haven't heard him play like this since the 1940s!' *An unbelievable night!*"

Goodman, the clarinetist Peplowski had been listening to on records since he was a kid in Garfield Heights, died June 13th, 1986 at the age of 77.

"After he died, they actually wanted us to keep the band going because they had jobs booked all the next year. The band got together and we said, 'He didn't

want a ghost band.' We felt a little funny doing this, a little sleazy almost." Peplowski said the members of Goodman's last band decided to play one tribute concert in honor of the all-time jazz great.

"They asked us if we would do one more concert. And we agreed. That was our memorial to him. We played this one thing – with me playing the (Goodman) clarinet parts."

Peplowski said Goodman was "a very complicated guy," but he said he had a good relationship with him.

After playing with Goodman's last band, Peplowski's career blossomed. He began playing at jazz festivals around the world and made a series of compact discs for Concord Records, drawing on a wide variety of influences, from the polka music he played as a kid in Cleveland, to the Benny Goodman classics, and the bebop of Sonny Stitt. "The secret," he said, "I think is to take those influences and move on."

## Recording for Concord

In 1987, Peplowski began playing with his own trio at an Upper West Side club in New York called J's. It was just a neighborhood restaurant and bar until Peplowski began playing there and attracting the attention of jazz fans and musicians. Later that year, he recorded his first album as a leader, *Double Exposure*. It included "Lava," a Peplowski re-working of the old Goodman classic "Avalon."

By the early 1990s Peplowski had become a major figure at jazz concerts and festivals and recorded three more albums for Concord Records – *Sonny Side*, *Mr. Gentle*, and *Illuminations*. In addition, he recorded *Lazy Afternoon* with the Hank Jones Quartet and performed with such artists as Mel Tormé, George Shearing, Dan Barrett, Leon Redbone, Scott Hamilton, Howard Alden and Rosemary Clooney. He was the winner of the 1990 *JazzTimes* Critics' Poll on clarinet.

Peplowski's 1992 compact disc, *The Natural Touch*, earned the highest award in Europe for a jazz recording, The Preis Der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik Award.

Peplowski also made a couple of compact discs for Telarc International of Cleveland with Frank Vignola, the guitarist he had played with in the Condon All-Stars when he was scuffling for work.

He had come a long way from that kids polka band in Garfield Heights. "I can't complain," said Peplowski. "I'm doing good. Got a nice career happening and it's a good life for me. It's a good career playing music."

Peplowski also said he was glad he made that phone call in the early 1980s, turning down a job at a photo processing plant, and decided to concentrate on a career in jazz. "It's one of the most rewarding things you can do," he said. "Sometimes, for many musicians, not financially rewarding, but there is something about music that makes you play it. It's a blessing and a curse."



If you are a real musician, you can never *not* play music. You can't say, 'I'm going to give this up.'"

In April of 2000, Ken Peplowski came home to Cleveland to perform with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra and its music director, Jack Schantz, his old roommate

on the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra. They played the "Homage Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra," which was composed for Peplowski by James Chirillo who had also been a member of Goodman's last band and, this night, was the guest conductor of the CJO.

### Ken Peplowski Discography

#### As leader:

- 1987 - *Double Exposure* (Concord)
- 1989 - *Sonny Side* (Concord)
- 1990 - *Illuminations* - with Howard Alden (Concord)
- 1990 - *Mr. Gentle and Mr. Cool* - with Scott Hamilton (Concord)
- 1992 - *The Natural Touch* (Concord)
- 1993 - *Concord Duo Series, Vol. 3* - with Alden (Concord)
- 1994 - *Steppin' With Peps* (Concord)
- 1994 - *Live at Ambassador Auditorium* - with Sweets Edison (Concord)
- 1994 - *Encore! Live At Centre Concord* - with Alden (Concord)
- 1995 - *It's a Lonesome Old Town* (Concord)
- 1996 - *The Other Portrait* (Concord)
- 1997 - *A Good Reed* (Concord)
- 1998 - *Grenadilla* (Concord)
- 1999 - *Last Swing of the Century* (Concord)
- 2001 - *Lost in the Stars* (Nagel-Heyer)

#### As sideman:

- 1974 - *Concord Jazz Heritage Series* (Concord)
- 1979 - *'S Wonderful: Salute to Ira Gershwin* (Concord)
- 1980 - *Concord Jazz Heritage Series* (Concord)
- 1982 - *Concord Jazz Heritage Series* (Concord)
- 1982 - *Steve Allen Plays Jazz Tonight* (Concord)
- 1985 - *Let's Dance* - with Benny Goodman Orchestra (Music Masters)
- 1985 - *Red to Blue* (Sugarhill)
- 1986 - *Terry Waldo's Gotham City Band*
- 1986 - *Chicago Jazz Summit*
- 1987 - *Strictly Instrumental* (Concord)
- 1987 - *Time Waits For No One*
- 1988 - *In Concert in Tokyo* (Concord)
- 1988 - *Reunion* (Concord)
- 1988 - *No More Blues* (Concord)
- 1988 - *Solid Ground*
- 1989 - *Lazy Afternoon* (Concord)
- 1989 - *Howard Alden Trio Plus Special Guests* (Concord)
- 1989 - *George Shearing in Dixieland* (Concord)
- 1989 - *I've Got My Fingers Crossed* (Audiophile)
- 1989 - *The ABQ Salutes Buck Clayton* (Concord)
- 1989 - *Fireworks! Red Hot & Blues* (Riverwalk)
- 1990 - *Just A-Settin' and A-Rockin'*
- 1990 - *Stampede* (Jazzology)
- 1991 - *The Boss Nova Years* (Concord)
- 1991 - *Comet Chop Suey* (Concord)
- 1991 - *Sugar*
- 1991 - *Groovin' High* (Concord)
- 1991 - *A Concord Jazz Christmas* (Concord)
- 1992 - *Up a Lazy River*
- 1992 - *Washington Guitar Quintet* (Concord)
- 1992 - *Christmas With Travelin' Light* (Telarc)
- 1992 - *Makin' Whoopie* - with Sam Pilafian and Frank Vignola (Concord)
- 1992 - *A Tribute to Carl Jefferson* (Concord)
- 1992 - *Groovin' High*
- 1992 - *Wild Oats* (Jazzology)
- 1993 - *What Matters Most*

- 1993 - *Friends*
- 1993 - *The Bix Beiderbecke Era*
- 1993 - *Get Happy* (Concord)
- 1993 - *I Hear Music* (Concord)
- 1993 - *Just in Time* (Concord)
- 1993 - *Dreamin'* (Concord)
- 1993 - *Aquarelle* (Concord)
- 1993 - *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Concord)
- 1993 - *The Bix Beiderbecke Era* (Nagel-Heyer)
- 1994 - *Trombone Artistry* (Nagel-Heyer)
- 1994 - *Whistling in the Wind* (Private Music)
- 1994 - *A Tribute to Bing Crosby* (Concord)
- 1994 - *Moments Like This* (Concord)
- 1994 - *Let It Happen* (Concord)
- 1994 - *Baseball: the American Epic* (Elektra/Asylum)
- 1994 - *From Broadway to Bebop* (Concord)
- 1994 - *Live* (Concord)
- 1994 - *Fujitsu-Concord 26th Jazz Festival* (Concord)
- 1994 - *Songs I Learned at My Mother's Knee & Other Low Joints* (Jazzology)
- 1994 - *Daddies Sing Good Night* (Sugarhill)
- 1994 - *Encore! Live at Centre Concord* (Concord)
- 1995 - *Dreaming*
- 1995 - *Summit Meeting*
- 1995 - *It's a Lonesome Old Town* (Concord)
- 1995 - *Cinema Jazz* (Concord)
- 1995 - *Easy to Love: Songs of Cole Porter* (Concord)
- 1995 - *It Was Me* (Daring)
- 1995 - *Whose Honey Are You?*
- 1995 - *Jammin' a la Condon* (Jazzology)
- 1996 - *Look What I Found* (Arbors)
- 1996 - *Swing is Here* (Reference)
- 1996 - *American Songbook Series: Richard Whiting*
- 1997 - *Swingin' Jazz For Hipsters, Vols. 1 & 2* (Concord)
- 1997 - *Harold Arlen Songbook* (Concord)
- 1997 - *Irving Berlin Songbook* (Concord)
- 1997 - *George Gershwin Songbook* (Concord)
- 1997 - *Cole Porter Songbook* (Concord)
- 1997 - *Rodgers & Hart Songbook* (Concord)
- 1998 - *Swingin' (Slider)*
- 1998 - *Broadway* (Nagel-Heyer)
- 1998 - *Fruit Cocktail*
- 1998 - *The Best Thing For Me* (Arbors)
- 1998 - *Arbors Records Sampler, Vol. 1* (Arbors)
- 1999 - *Sweet and Lowdown* (Sony)
- 1999 - *A Rosie Christmas* (Sony)
- 1999 - *The Best of the Concord Years* (Concord)
- 1999 - *Sensitive to the Touch* (Groove Jams)
- 1999 - *The Feeling of Jazz* (Arbors)
- 1999 - *Jazz Moods: Brazilian Romance* (Concord)
- 1999 - *Afterglow* (Arbors)
- 1999 - *Sweet and Lowdown* (Sony)
- 2000 - *Re-Discovering Louis & Bix* (Nagel-Heyer)
- 2000 - *History of Jazz, Vol. 1* (Arbors)
- 2000 - *Route 66 - That Nelson Riddle Sound* - with Cincinnati Pops Big Band (Telarc)
- 2000 - *Ballad Essentials* (Concord)
- 2000 - *Let There Be Love* (Telarc)

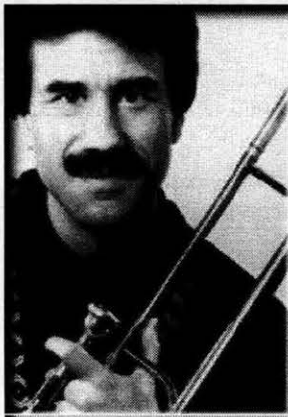
## 23. Other Major Players

As the 21st century began, a small army of jazz artists from Cleveland were making their marks on world jazz stages. Perhaps never before had so many excellent musicians from Cleveland received such widespread recognition simultaneously.

In addition to Joe Lovano, Jim Hall and Ken Peplowski, there were many world class musicians from Cleveland playing and recording. Some traveled extensively; others remained in their hometown and made Cleveland their base of operations.

Here is a closer look at some of them:

### John Fedchock



John Fedchock

In 1974, when Woody Herman and his Orchestra were in Cleveland for a series of performances, they went to Mayfield High School on Wilson Mills Road to play a concert and conduct a clinic. In the front row was an 11th grader from Highland Heights who was playing trombone in school bands. He was excited about the music and the band, and got the autographs of all the

players on a record cover. He began collecting Woody Herman records and Herman became his musical idol.

After he graduated in 1975, the young trombonist, John Fedchock, went to Ohio State University where he got a degree in music and education and began studying for a masters degree at the prestigious Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. At Eastman, Fedchock met alumni who were on the Herman band. He sent a tape to Gene Smith, Herman's lead trombonist.

In the summer of 1980, while still studying at Eastman, Fedchock received a call at four o'clock in the morning. He got a leave of absence from Eastman and joined the touring Herman band in Chicago. For the young trombonist from Highland Heights, it was a dream come true.

From his record collection, Fedchock already knew most of the Herman band's book. "I even had some of my parts memorized," he said. Reading the arrangements was no problem.

By the second night, Herman started calling the 22-year-old Clevelander "Too Tall John" and began featuring him frequently on solos. At the Concord Jazz Festival in August of 1981, Fedchock soloed with the band on "North Beach Breakdown."

Fedchock was touring the nation with the Herman Orchestra, playing concerts, dances and radio broadcasts.

"Woody never told us in advance what tunes we would play," said Fedchock, "but the band would know what the upcoming number was after a couple of words of the little rap he gave the audience."

After touring with the Herman Herd for a couple of years, Fedchock wrote his first arrangement for the band, a tune called "Fried Buzzard."

In 1985, when Woody was doing a small group tour, Fedchock returned to Eastman and finished up his masters.

Five months later, he returned to the Herman Orchestra and became Herman's music director and an arranger. He did 16 or 17 charts for the band. Looking back, Fedchock said, "Woody didn't like to do the old stuff."

In a radio interview, Herman said, "We try to find new material and try to find things that are reasonably new and different. I think that I would have lost interest a long, long time ago if I had been very stylized and stuck to a particular sound." In fact, according to Fedchock, Herman was bugged when people requested the old tunes. One time at a dance hall in Iowa, a customer complained to Woody that he wasn't playing his old big band hits. Fedchock said Woody asked the man, "What did it cost you to get in here?" Woody whipped out a twenty dollar bill, gave it to the man, and said, "See you later, Pal!"

In Herman's autobiography, *Woodchopper's Ball*, Fedchock said, "Woody would ride on the bus occasionally, but he didn't interact too much with the guys. His only rule was to get on the stand and swing and play great. That was it!" On the bandstand, he wouldn't say anything, but the Clevelanders remembered, "You could tell from how he was looking at someone in the band if he wasn't digging it." If he wasn't digging a solo, "he'd bring forward a second guy to play it, just to show the first guy, 'Hey, you're not making it.' He didn't have to say anything."

Fedchock was "making it" and remained with the Herman band for seven years, from 1980 until Woody's death in 1987. The Clevelanders later toured with Gerry Mulligan's Concert Jazz Band, Louie Bellson's big band and the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band.

In 1989, Fedchock and fellow Eastman graduate Maria Schneider formed a band together.

In the 1990s, Fedchock formed his own band, the New York Big Band, and began recording with it in 1995. One of the tunes on the band's second CD, *On The Edge*, is titled "The Chopper," one of Herman's nicknames. Fedchock wrote "The Chopper" to honor his boss at a Carnegie Hall concert. John said he tried to "evoke the feeling of some of the great medium-groove charts we played with the (Herman) band."



In the 1999 *DownBeat* magazine Readers' Poll, Fedchock's New York Big Band was voted number five in jazz. As a trombonist, he was voted number five. And, as an arranger, he was voted number four. There were similar results in the 2000, 2001 and 2002 polls.

The Cleveland area native who first saw and heard the Herman Orchestra when he was a 16-year-old 11th grader at Mayfield High School, had become a major player in the world of jazz.

### John Fedchock Discography

#### As a sideman:

- 1978 - *Live at Carnegie Hall & Montreaux* with Herman
- 1979 - *Best of Woody Herman and his Big Band*
- 1979 - *Concord Jazz Heritage Series*
- 1980 - *Farthest Corner of My Mind*
- 1981 - *Live at Concord Jazz Festival* with Herman
- 1982 - *World Class* with Herman
- 1983 - *My Buddy* with Rosemary Clooney
- 1989 - *Treasure Island*
- 1986 - *Woody Herman's 50th Anniversary Tour*
- 1987 - *Woody's Gold Star* with Herman
- 1988 - *Ebony* with Richard Stoltzman
- 1989 - *Fired Up* with Lew Anderson Orch.
- 1989 - *Feelin' Good, Yeah!* with Lew Anderson Orch.
- 1989 - *Straight to My Heart: The Music of Sting*
- 1990 - *Treasure Island* with Bob Belden
- 1992 - *Turandot* with Bob Belden
- 1993 - *The Best of Woody Herman*
- 1994 - *Voices in Standards*
- 1994 - *The Third Degree*
- 1994 - *Forced Air Heat*
- 1994 - *Evanescence* with Maria Schneider Orch.
- 1994 - *Passion Dance*
- 1994 - *Live at Newport & the Hollywood Bowl*
- 1996 - *Under the Influence*
- 1996 - *Vintage Year*
- 1996 - *Loyalties*
- 1996 - *Friday Evenings at Sardi's*
- 1996 - *Planet of Tears*
- 1998 - *Currents*
- 1998 - *In Good Company* with George Rabbai
- 1999 - *From Broken Hearts to Blue Skies*
- 1999 - *Blues for an Old New Age*
- 1999 - *Gallery*
- 1999 - *Live in London at Ronnie Scott's* - Herman band
- 1999 - *Music of Sting* with Bob Belden
- 2000 - *Things For Now*

#### Leading his New York Big Band:

- 1995 - *New York Big Band*
- 1998 - *On the Edge*
- 2000 - *Hit the Bricks*
- 2002 - *No Nonsense*

## Ernie Krivda

Unlike contemporaries Lovano, Peplowski and Fedchock, tenor saxophonist Ernie Krivda decided to make Cleveland his base of operations and won wide praise for his music.

Krivda, a native of Garfield Heights, was also exposed to jazz early. His father played tenor sax and frequently listened to records by Coleman Hawkins and Benny Goodman. He started his son on the clarinet.

One day, when Ernie was in eighth grade, he later recalled, "I suddenly discovered I really enjoyed practicing. I couldn't put the horn down."

He didn't begin playing the saxophone until he was 16, but he learned the instrument quickly and was soon playing jazz gigs around Cleveland.

Shortly after he graduated from Holy Name High School, Krivda went on the road (in 1963) with the Jimmy Dorsey ghost band. He returned to Cleveland in the mid-1960s, enrolled in Baldwin-Wallace College and played in the bands of two Cleveland jazz legends, organist Eddie Baccus and guitarist Bill de Arango.

From 1970 to 1975, Krivda was the leader of the house band at the Smiling Dog Saloon where he shared the stage with such national touring artists as Chick Corea, Elvin Jones, Ahmad Jamal, McCoy Tyner and Freddie Hubbard.

Krivda won the *Scene* magazine poll as "The Top Jazz Musician in Cleveland" in 1972 and '73. Critic Bernard Larait wrote, "Ernie Krivda should be ranked with the top musicians in jazz."

In the mid-1970s, he became a soloist with Quincy Jones' last orchestra which included Frank Rosolino and Sahib Shihab. They toured the U.S. and Japan and, in 1976, recorded an album, *Mellow Madness*.

Krivda moved to New York in 1976, signed a contract with Inner City Records and made three albums for the firm.

At one point, Miles Davis was quoted as saying, "I want that white boy in my band." But Krivda declined the offer. Davis at the time was using three loud electric guitars in his group and Krivda didn't want to live and work in New York. In an interview with *Northern Ohio Live* (January 1990), Krivda said, "In New York you have to do all sorts of things to keep your life together. I played in discos and worked at a bank during the day, and I still couldn't pay my rent. I didn't have time to concentrate on my stuff, which is why I went there in the first place. The emphasis there is on making cash. It is not a contemplative environment."

Krivda returned to Cleveland in 1978 and began



Ernie Krivda

concentrating on his stuff—a number of albums with his own groups, soloing on albums with others, writing serious music, playing at a variety of Cleveland area clubs and, from time to time, traveling to Toledo, Detroit and Buffalo for gigs. He was also teaching at the Willoughby School of Fine Arts.

An intense saxophonist with a dramatic style, Krivda in the 1990s was considered one of the jazz leaders in Cleveland. Following the 1992 release of his 15th album, *Ernie Krivda Jazz*, by Cadence Records, Andrew Sussman wrote in *Fanfare*, “If Krivda lived in New York, he would almost certainly be universally recognized as a major talent.”

In 1993, Krivda formed his Fat Tuesday Big Band, originally as a rehearsal big band and later as a concert and dance orchestra. The band played regularly in Cleveland and recorded. At the same time, Krivda toured with small groups, performing in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York. In 1997, he also formed Swing City, a seven-piece group consisting of Cuyahoga Community College music teachers. He also served as artistic director of the Cuyahoga Community College Jazz Studies Program and as assistant director of the Lakeland Community College Jazz Festival.

### Ernie Krivda Discography

#### As leader:

- 1977 - *Ernie Krivda and Friends* (Inner City Records)
- 1980 - *The Alchemist* (Inner City Records)
- 1980 - *The Glory Strut* (Inner City Records)
- 1983 - *Live at Peabody's* (North Coast Jazz Records)
- 1983 - *Live at Rusty's* (North Coast Jazz Records)
- 1985 - *The Fireside Sessions* with Kenny Davis (North Coast Jazz Records)
- 1986 - *Tough Tenor Red Hot* (Cadence)
- 1986 - *Well You Needn't* (Cadence)
- 1989 - *Lee's Keys Please* (Timeless)
- 1991 - *Ernie Krivda Jazz Krivda Quartet* (Cadence)
- 1993 - *So Nice to Meet You* with Paula Owens (Cadence)
- 1996 - *The Art of the Ballad* with Bill Dobbins (Koch)
- 1997 - *Sarah's Theme* Krivda Trio (Cadence)
- 1998 - *Perdido* Fat Tuesday Big Band (Koch)
- 1999 - *The Band That Swings* Fat Tuesday Big Band (Koch)

#### 2003 - *The Music of Ernie Krivda* (Cadence)

#### As a sideman:

- 1970 - *Textures* with Bill Dobbins Jazz Orch. (Advent)
- 1976 - *Mellow Madness* with Quincy Jones Orch. (A&M)
- 1983 - *Live at Peabody's* with Bill Dobbins Quartet (North Coast Jazz Records)
- 1988 - *Tonal Paintings* with Cliff Habian (Milestone)
- 1989 - *Manhattan Bridge* with Cliff Habian (Milestone)
- 1996 - *Galleria* with Pete Selvaggio (Koch)
- 1998 - *Even the Broken Letters Spell Earth* with Daniel Thompson (Bottom Dog)

### Dan Wall

Pianist and organist Dan Wall came to Cleveland after making a name for himself playing and recording

with guitarist John Abercrombie. Wall quickly became one of Cleveland's most respected jazz pianists.

A native of Atlanta and a third generation pianist, Wall established a reputation in the Georgia city before going to New York in the 1980s. He played in a number of New York City clubs and recorded with Steve Grossman, Eddie Gomez, Jeremy Steig, Joe Chambers and accompanied such singers as Dakota Staton and Sheila Jordan.

In 1992, Wall began playing organ with a trio that included Abercrombie. He made several recordings with Abercrombie and drummer Adam Nussbaum and toured throughout the United States, Canada, Japan and Europe.

Wall, who frequently played at the Cleveland Bop Stop and recorded with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra and Ernie Krivda, is married to singer Carol Veto.

### Jack Schantz



Roland Paolucci

#### Jack Schantz

The music director and featured trumpet soloist of the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, Jack Schantz, who has recorded with legendary pianist Oscar Peterson, grew up in Orrville, Ohio, on the edge of Amish country.

“My parents were in the pipe organ business,” recalled Schantz. “It’s been in the family since 1870. My father and mother weren’t necessarily musical; my father was the businessman and mechanic. My uncle was the musician. He went to Oberlin and one of his classmates was Al Haig.”

It was his uncle’s record collection that first got Jack interested in jazz. “One of the first recordings I remember,” said Schantz, “was a Stan Kenton album with a trumpet solo by Conte Candoli on ‘There’s a Small Hotel.’ I played that record so much that I couldn’t give the worn-out disc back to him.”

Schantz began playing trumpet in junior high school. His band director at Orrville High School was a former big band saxophonist who formed an excellent student



jazz band which went to the Montreux Jazz Festival in France and toured Europe for two weeks. "I remember I was in a hotel room in Belgium and I said to myself, 'Now this is for me! This is what I want to do!'"

After a year at Otterbein College, Schantz (in 1974) joined a big band called the Akron Jazz Workshop. It was led by Roland Paolucci. Other young members of that band included Mark Gonder, Gary Aprile and Paul Ferguson – later all key members of the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra. When Paolucci became the director of the University of Akron Jazz Ensemble, Schantz enrolled at Akron and played in the band. He also played his trumpet anywhere he could.

"Every place I could sit in," said Schantz, "I would go. There was a place where I really learned how to play, a place in Stow called the Village Pump. There was a band there every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night and I would go and sit in. I just totally made a fool of myself every night. But then, I went home and practiced."

His persistence and practice paid off. In 1980, as he was about to tour Europe with the University of Akron Jazz Ensemble, Schantz was offered a job playing with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, then led by trombonist Buddy Morrow. "About three days after I got back from Europe, I hopped on a plane and went to Minneapolis and joined the Dorsey band. I absolutely loved it! I had a ball for the first three or four years! I was happy and proud to be doing that."

Schantz' roommate on the road with the Dorsey band was clarinetist Ken Peplowski. Later, after Peplowski became world famous, he was a featured guest soloist with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra. "After the concert," said Schantz, "we went to the Bop Stop and had this jam session. It was one of those magical nights! We just burned the place down!"

In addition to touring with the Dorsey Orchestra, Schantz played with the Glenn Miller ghost band. "Whenever they were doing a gig and needed somebody," said Schantz, "I would go out and fill in for a couple of months. I also played with the Artie Shaw band for awhile and did a couple of gigs with Woody Herman's band."

Schantz left the road in 1988 and joined the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, then led by his old college jazz band director. Schantz was named music director of the CJO in 1993.

He also performed with smaller groups. In 1993 he recorded an album called *Speechless* with pianist Chip Stephens, bassist Jeff Halsey and drummer Val Kent.

In 1995, Schantz was selected to play trumpet solos on Oscar Peterson's Christmas compact disc. When Peterson chose Schantz for the album, Schantz said, "I felt like I had won the lottery! It was one of the greatest things I have ever done. It was an absolute thrill!"

Schantz also formed an experimental 14-piece group called the Jazz Unit that played Monday nights at Ron Busch's Bop Stop in Cleveland. Schantz said, "I thought it would be a good opportunity to establish a Monday night tradition in Cleveland much like they have in New York with Monday nights at the Village Vanguard."

Bassist Dave Morgan soon joined the group and began writing for it. Schantz said, "Morgan's writing and playing transformed the band to one with a unique voice and a unified concept."

The trumpeter described the little band as "a forward-looking, modern jazz ensemble that utilizes different instrumental tamblers unlike a conventional big band and uses soloists to a much different degree than conventional big bands."

Morgan said, "We're not trying to be esoteric in any way, just showing that jazz can move forward without getting more and more out." Schantz' Jazz Unit released its first compact disc, *Choices*, in late 1998.

In 2001, Schantz became the director of jazz studies at the University of Akron.

#### Jack Schantz Discography

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| 1992 - | <i>The Cleveland Jazz Orchestra - Greatest Hits Live</i>                               |
| 1993 - | <i>Speechless</i> - Schantz' Quartet (Azica)   |
| 1995 - | <i>An Oscar Peterson Christmas</i> (Telarc)  |
| 1998 - | <i>Choices</i> - Schantz' Jazz Unit (Bop Stop)   |
| 1999 - | <i>Swingin' Together</i> - leading and soloing with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra (CJO) |
| 1999 - | <i>Traditions</i> - leading and soloing with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra (CJO)        |
| 2001 - | <i>Friends</i> - Paul Ferguson Jazz Orchestra  |
| 2002 - | <i>Night and Day</i> - Barbara Knight and the CJO                                      |

#### Neal Creque

Pianist, composer and teacher Neal Creque called Cleveland his "musical utopia." That's a big statement from an artist who had been Carmen McRae's musical director, recorded with dozens of top name artists, and had his compositions performed by such well-known jazz artists as Ramsey Lewis and Grant Green.

Creque, who came to Cleveland in 1973, was born and raised in St. Thomas, the Virgin Islands, the son of a classical piano teacher and poet. Creque recalled his father "was also involved the political arena. He took a seat in the government, but devoted most of his life to teaching. My father had all eight of us in the family learn how to play the piano. In classical music it's important to get an early start. I was very fortunate."

Creque was not exposed to jazz until he was a teenager. "I have a brother who spent some time in New York," he said, "and when he came back home, when I was about 14 years old, he introduced me to jazz. I think I just took a liking to it immediately. When I first

started with jazz, I was emulating people like Dave Brubeck. Why Dave Brubeck? Because he was also classically trained and I could relate to that. In fact I think I could credit him with being partially influential in my making the transition. I said to myself, 'If he could do it, I guess I could also.'"

Creque continued to study classical music, but got more and more interested in jazz. When he left St. Thomas in 1956 to attend Thiel College in Greenville, Pennsylvania, he formed the school's first jazz band.

When he left Thiel, Creque went into the Air Force for four years and played in a series of service jazz bands. "Of course, we had a marching band," remembered Creque. "At that time I also had to play bass drum or cymbals in the marching band. It was intriguing because to play for an entire troop means you had to have the strength to hit that bass so that troops can hear it a mile away while you're marching, but I enjoyed it."

While Creque was best known as a jazz pianist, he never considered it incongruous to play classical music or even to beat a bass drum in a marching band. "I don't look at it from the prospective that I'm a jazz musician. *I'm a musician.* I love classical music. I love jazz and I march to the beat of my own drum."

After four years in the Air Force, Creque's personal drum beat took him in a completely different musical direction. "I went to Miami and immediately got involved with a rock 'n roll band. I played the Hammond B-3 organ and traveled from Miami to New York." He called it his initiation into the music business. "Paying his dues" had an almost literal meaning. He bought a new Hammond organ to play on the rock tour and remembered, "We had these go-go girls and I was unaware that they would get up on my instrument and, with their shoe heels, carve the heck out of my brand new Hammond organ! Oh, it was a learning lesson for me!"

After two years on the road with the rock group, Creque went to New York and worked with singer Ronnie Sateran, Mongo Santamaria's Latin jazz group, Pucho and the Latin Soul Brothers, and former Count Basie singer Leon Thomas.

He was soon playing piano in New York recording studios, backing all sorts of artists. He said, "I got a chance to meet some people like Oliver Nelson and a



Bill Rieter

Neal Creque

number of musicians who were recording with the Bob Thiele's Flying Dutchman label. That allowed me to do a lot of studio work with a number of musicians."

Thiele was producing a series of important albums with such artists as Nelson, John Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders and Archie Shepp. Thiele was also married to singer Theresa Brewer. Creque played piano on her recording of "Day By Day."

Neal said he couldn't remember how many recording dates he played in New York. He said, "The producer would call and say, 'Hey, Neal, come on down! We have a session.' I wouldn't even know who the artist was. I was just there.

They came in and recorded. I did things with Stanley Turrentine. When I look back on it now, there were names that seem to be very, very big."

Creque also went on the road. He met his future wife Nina in Toledo. "I met her on Easter Sunday," he said. I went to a jam session while I was on my day off and she was there. She liked jazz also, and two weeks later, we were married."

After Creque had established himself as a talented, reliable pianist in New York, he began working with singer Carmen McRae. "She immediately liked how I played," he recalled. "I toured with her and then became her musical director. It was very interesting because she was very demanding. I was very fortunate because I have seen Carmen McRae make a musician feel very small, but I did my homework and I never had that problem with her." McRae wanted Creque to go with her to the West Coast, but, Neal and Nina had a young daughter and decided to stay in New York.

In 1971, he made his first album as a leader, *Creque*, *Creque* (later reissued as *Black Velvet Rose*). It was the first of three albums he recorded for Muse Records. It included eight of his own compositions. One was called "Nina." Looking back at that first album, Creque said, "It had a conglomeration of different styles of music. It was not pinpointed at one particular style."

By 1973 Creque had tired of the big city. "Nina and I decided, 'Let's leave New York.' Apartment rents and things were skyrocketing. Crime was increasing and my daughter was in the second grade. We said, 'Let's make the move so she can have a fair shot at life.'"

Creque came to Cleveland where his wife's father

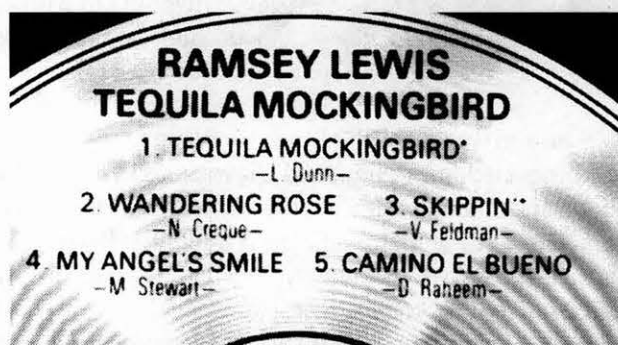


was living. He almost got out of music. "I started to study the real estate business. That's what Nina's father was into. I studied it and was about to take a test, but I got a call from Leon Thomas and he asked me to come back and do a tour with him."

By the 1990s, Creque had become an acknowledged leader of Cleveland's jazz community with his obvious artistry, class, and style, doing what he loved doing — making music. He played with almost everyone here in small groups and with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra. He and former Roland Kirk bassist Chink Stevenson were a Saturday night institution at the Boarding House in University Circle. In 1991 Creque recorded with guitarist Bob Ferrazza on Ferrazza's first album *Personal*.

Besides playing tasty jazz in Cleveland, Creque was a prolific composer. He wrote literally thousands of songs. He told me he didn't know how many. "I stopped counting at about 3,000 about eight or ten years ago." Some days, more than five new songs poured from Creque's creative mind into his piano. He said, "I have reel-to-reel tapes in my basement. When I listen to some of them, it's amazing the number of things that I put on tape, songs that I didn't realize I composed. I didn't bother to write them all out. I have a tremendous volume of music that I have to take account of some day. I have to catalog the whole thing."

Some of Creque's songs were recorded by guitarist Grant Green, pianist Ramsey Lewis and singer Leon Thomas. Green included two of Creque's compositions, "Dracula" and "Windjammer" on his 1970 Blue Note album *Green Is Beautiful*. Creque played organ on "Windjammer." Green's recordings established Creque as a composer. "Ramsey Lewis had my biggest hit," said Creque. "He recorded a tune called 'Wandering Rose' (on a 1977 Columbia album, *Tequila Mockingbird*). I still get royalties on that. It was marvelous. I'm thankful to him for that and whenever he comes to Cleveland, he plays it for me in his concerts here."



Ramsey Lewis' recording of  
Neal Creque's composition "Wandering Rose"

"George Benson wanted to record 'Dracula,' but his producers didn't want him to do that because, at the time, he was getting involved as a singer. The tune was

recorded by Adrious Muhammad in 1993 with Randy Brecker and Burnett Purdy."

Creque was almost always thinking of new songs. The day of our interview he said, "Last night, as soon as I got home from playing at Night Town, I sat down and started writing. I was up until two o'clock."

In addition to composing and playing piano several nights a week in various Cleveland clubs, Creque was also busy teaching at Oberlin College, Cleveland State University, the Cleveland School of the Arts, and giving private lessons. He said, "I get such a great satisfaction seeing what you can extend to another person." He saw his teaching as an extension of his teacher father.

Creque said philosophically, "The best thing to do is to follow your heart. You cannot say, 'I'm going to make a lot of money in this business of the music of jazz.' So, follow your heart!"

Looking back, he said he had no regrets about leaving New York. "I think it was the best thing I could have done." Music was Creque's life and he said he was happy doing it in Cleveland.

He told me, "Every musician must find his utopia. For me, I see this as my utopia because I enjoy the teaching part of it. Cleveland has more to offer in jazz than New York, Detroit or California."

After battling kidney cancer for several years, Creque died December 1, 2000. He was 60 years old and never did get around to cataloging all his compositions.

## Duke Jenkins



Duke Jenkins

Pianist, singer and leader Duke Jenkins was one of Cleveland's leading jazz performers for more than half a century by practicing a simple philosophy — perform melodic music that people understand and can relate to. His philosophy carried him through an endless series of musical revolutions.

He told me, "I don't understand what's happening in music. It used to be so great with Sinatra, Nat 'King' Cole and Tony Bennett and the great music they

were doing."

Jenkins' family moved from Alabama to the Canton area when he was five months old. He began playing piano in Canton when he was nine. He recalled, "I had an

uncle that could play by ear. He played 'Pinetop's Boogie Woogie,' and I used to watch him play. He said, 'Want me to teach you how to play this?' He started teaching me, note for note, how to play Pinetop's 'Boogie Woogie.' I used to play that thing all day. My mother would run me out of the house, 'If you don't go out and play, I'm going to go crazy.'"

By the time he was in high school, Jenkins and his brother, Fred, had their own radio program. They were on the air every Thursday morning for 15 minutes on WACT in Canton. "They called it *The Jenkins Brothers Show*," he said. "We used to sing. I played piano and we sang duets together and Fred would tap dance. We got to be the kings of the school. Everybody got out of class to hear us every Thursday."

After high school, Jenkins went to Miami University in Oxford, Ohio and for a brief period sang with the college big band, the Miami Campus Owls.

He was making a bigger name for himself performing with a small group on campus. "I was playing for the fraternities down there," he said, "and they started calling me 'The Duke.' Almost every week, my picture was in the campus newspaper."

Jenkins' parents were hoping he would become a doctor, but he was developing a reputation on campus as a musician. "One day," he recalled, "the dean of the school of music saw me and said, 'Jenkins, what school are you in?' I said, 'I'm in liberal arts.' He said, 'What are you doing in liberal arts?' I said, 'I want to be a doctor.' 'You're going to be a doctor?!' And he asked, 'Do you want to be a doctor?' I said, 'My dad wants me to be a doctor. I want to be a musician.' The dean talked me into changing over to the music school."

But, in the early 1940s, America was at war. Jenkins, at the age of 21, went into the Army and played with an Army band at Camp Wallace near Galveston, Texas. He played glockenspiel in the marching band and clarinet in the Army concert band. He and his wife, Christina, were married in 1943 shortly before he was sent to Europe. When he went overseas, the Stan Kenton band was on the same ship and all the musicians joined in jam sessions. In Europe Jenkins was stationed at La Havre, France, where he played with the Army band and helped guard German prisoners of war.

When he was discharged, he returned to Canton and quickly got a job playing with a group in a small club. Before long, the group became "The Duke Jenkins Orchestra."

Jenkins left Canton in 1948 and went to Chicago with a five-piece band to perform at Chicago's Brass Rail. With him in Chicago was his wife who was going to school to learn how to make hair pieces. She developed a new technique of weaving artificial hair to real hair. "So we right away got a patent on it," said Jenkins, "and

formed a company called 'Christina's Hair Weave.'" As the hair weave company grew, Duke and Christina decided to move to Cleveland.

From 1952 until 1957, Jenkins led the house band at the Majestic Hotel and hosted the now legendary Rose Room Blue Monday Party jam sessions early Monday mornings, jam sessions that attracted such traveling artists as Joe Williams, Nancy Wilson and Erroll Garner. As a result of his popularity at the Rose Room, Jenkins got a regular television program in Cleveland in 1955 and 1956.

In 1959, Jenkins decided to leave Cleveland for a job in Miami Beach. He was playing at the Theatrical one night when Mushy Wexler, the owner, asked him, "Duke, have you ever been to Miami Beach?" "No." "How would you like to go?" Wexler called Harry Musselman, the owner of the Eden Roc, and said, "I got a group here that'll just fit your room!" Jenkins and his trio played six nights a week for three years at the Eden Roc. The night he opened, actor Rock Hudson came to the show. Frank Sinatra and Nat "King" Cole were both performing nearby. Sammy Davis, Jr. stopped in one night and sat in on drums with Jenkins' group.

Jenkins returned to Cleveland in 1961 and became a mainstay of area jazz rooms by practicing his simple philosophy of performing melodic music that people understand and can relate to.

## Chuck Israels



Chuck Israels

His family moved from New York City to Cleveland Heights in 1946. His step father, Mordecai Bauman, taught voice at the Cleveland Institute of Music and booked jazz concerts at Severance Hall.

While his son was attending Coventry Elementary School, old Roosevelt Junior High, and Cleveland Heights High School, jazz giants like Louis Armstrong and Jack Teagarden came to their home on Washington Boulevard near Cottage Grove for dinner. The family remained in Cleveland Heights for six years, until 1952.

Chuck Israels went to MIT to study engineering, but switched to Brandeis University to study music. He progressed quickly. At the age of 22, he was playing bass on a recording with John Coltrane.

In 1959, Israels went to Europe and played with American jazz expatriates including pianist Bud Powell.



Israels later told an interviewer, "It was heaven! I got to know movie director Nicholas Ray and beat poet Gregory Corso." He came back to the United States in 1961.

Israels replaced Scott LaFaro, who was killed in a traffic accident, in the Bill Evans Trio. For five years, Israels toured with Evans. He later said, "Playing with Evans was the best job in the world for a bassist."

Also in the '60s, he performed with such diverse jazz artists as Benny Goodman, Kenny Clarke and Lucky Thompson.

By the late 1960s, Israels decided to concentrate on composing and arranging. He studied with Hall Overton while playing bass in the studios and theatres of New York City. Before long, he was conducting orchestras for Broadway shows.

In 1981, when his wife, soprano Margot Hanson, got a job with the San Francisco Opera Company, Israels moved to the Bay Area and spent much of his time writing arrangements for big bands, many of them in Europe.

In 1993, the former Cleveland was invited by the North German Broadcasting Company to write for and conduct a production with the Hanover Radio Philharmonic Orchestra. He hooked up with the Metropole Orchestra, an unusual orchestra in the Netherlands. The Metropole Orchestra was a big jazz band with a medium sized string section, extra woodwinds, one horn, extra percussion and a harp. Within this framework, Israels brought in trumpeter and flugelhornist Claudio Roditi to play a concert in April of 1996 at the Frits Philips Hall in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. Israels said that instead of concentrating on the fiery aspects of the Brazil-born and Berklee-educated Roditi, he wanted to provide vehicles to show the trumpeter's ability to "get inside a piece of music and explore it." A recording of that concert was released by Cleveland-based Azica Records. The record company was headed by Bruce Egre who also grew up in Cleveland Heights. The compact disc was called *The Eindhoven Concert: Recorded Live in the Netherlands*. It included an unusual Chuck Israels arrangement of "Nature Boy." The arrangement, set in a framework of a string orchestra, included a jazz flugelhorn solo by Roditi. The concert was recorded live, with no re-takes, no edits, and no inter-cuts.

A few months after recording with the Metropole Orchestra, Israels came back to Cleveland to play at the Lakeland Community College Jazz Festival. From the airport, he had friends drive him up Cedar Hill to Cleveland Heights, his old stompin' ground, where he had first been introduced to jazz as a school kid. He said, "We drove up Cottage Grove, Washington Boulevard, Cedar and Lee - all over. The streets looked the same," he said, "as they did almost half a century earlier when Louis Armstrong and Jack Teagarden and others came to their home on Washington Boulevard for dinner."

## Chuck Israels Discography

### As leader:

- 1976 - *National Jazz Ensemble*
- 1997 - *Endhoven Concert* (Azica)

### As sideman:

- 1956 - *Jazz Showcase* (Original Jazz)
- 1961 - *The Jazz Years* (Black Sun)
- 1965 - *The Complete Riverside Recordings [1956-63]*
- 1958 - *Coltrane Time* (Blue Note)
- 1960 - *Herbie Mann Anthology*
- 1960 - *Stratusphunk* (Original Jazz)
- 1961 - *Copenhagen Concert*
- 1961 - *Eric Dolphy in Europe, Vols. 1-3* (Original Jazz)
- 1961 - *A Day in the City* (Original Jazz)
- 1961 - *Nirvana*
- 1962 - *The Best of Herbie Hancock* (Blue Note)
- 1962 - *How My Heart Sings!* (Original Jazz)
- 1962 - *Moonbeams* (Original Jazz)
- 1962 - *Compact Jazz: Bill Evans* (Polygram)
- 1962 - *Complete Blue Note Sixties Sessions* (Blue Note)
- 1962 - *Vintage Dolphy* (G.M.)
- 1962 - *Circle Waltz* (Original Jazz)
- 1963 - *Bill Evans Trio at Shelly's Manne-Hole* (VC)
- 1963 - *Jazz 'Round Midnight: Bill Evans* (Polygram)
- 1963 - *Time Remembered* (Prestige)
- 1963 - *My Point of View* (Blue Note)
- 1963 - *New Jazz on Campus*
- 1964 - *Compact Disc: Stan Getz* (Polygram)
- 1964 - *Getz Au Go-Go* (Polygram)
- 1964 - *Judy Collins Concert*
- 1964 - *Trio Live*
- 1965 - *Bill Evans Trio with Symphony Orch.* (Polygram)
- 1965 - *Time to Remember* (Live in Europe)
- 1965 - *Trio '65* (Polygram)
- 1965 - *5th Album* (Elektra/Asylum)
- 1965 - *Here and Now* (Original Jazz)
- 1966 - *Bill Evans at Town Hall* (Polygram)
- 1968 - *Herbie Hancock*
- 1968 - *Playback*
- 1969 - *The Best of Judy Collins* (Elektra/Asylum)
- 1974 - *Phoebe Snow* (CDD Compact Classics)
- 1977 - *Libby Titus*
- 1978 - *Baltimore* (Sony)
- 1984 - *Monk Suite*
- 1984 - *Complete Landmark Sessions* (Jazz Records)
- 1985 - *Sings Ballads* (Concord)
- 1990 - *Times Like These* (Artifex)
- 1991 - *Too Marvelous for Words* (Valley Entertainment)
- 1991 - *'Round Midnight* (Milestone)
- 1991 - *Blues for McVouty*
- 1992 - *The Art of Coltrane* (Blue Note)
- 1992 - *Jazz 'Round Midnight: Big Band*
- 1992 - *Jazz 'Round Midnight: Chanteuses*
- 1993 - *I'm All Smiles*
- 1994 - *Verve Jazz Masters 5: Bill Evans* (Polygram)
- 1994 - *The Best of Patti Austin* (Sony)
- 1995 - *The Best of Verve* (Polygram)
- 1997 - *The Complete Bill Evans on Verve* (Polygram)
- 1997 - *Riverside Records Story* (Riverside)
- 1997 - *Jazz Giants Play George Gershwin* (Prestige)
- 1997 - *Great Jazz Artists Play Jerome Kern*
- 1998 - *An Evening With Herb Ellis* (Jazz Focus)
- 1998 - *Ultimate Bill Evans* (Polygram)
- 1998 - *Complete Johnny Mercer Songbook* (Polygram)

## David Berkman



**David Berkman**

Another alumnus of Cleveland Heights High School, pianist David Berkman, the son of well known Cleveland attorney Bernard Berkman, went to New York in the mid-1980s and became a conspicuous member of the New York jazz scene by the 1990s. He performed with such artists as Tom Harrell, Sonny Stitt, Billy Hart, Matt Wilson and

Billy Drewes, plus the Woody Herman and Village Vanguard Orchestras.

Berkman arranged material for vocalists Eden Atwood and Lisa Michel and recorded with Eliot Zigmund before becoming a member of the Cecil McBee ensemble.

Berkman's 1998 compact disc *Handmade* included 12 of his compositions and featured the trumpet of Harrell.

### David Berkman Discography

#### As leader:

- 1995 - *Dark Street* (Freelance)
- 1998 - *Handmade* (Palmetto)
- 2000 - *Communication Theory* (Palmetto)

#### As sideman:

- 1990 - *Dakota Staton* (Muse)
- 1994 - *There Again* (Concord)
- 1997 - *Unspoken* (Palmetto)
- 1997 - *Beyond Thursday* (Double Time Jazz)
- 1998 - *Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz* (Baby Boom Music)
- 1999 - *Other Side of Standards* (Palmetto)
- 1999 - *When Summer Comes* (Challenge)
- 1999 - *Other Side of Ellington* (Palmetto)
- 2000 - *Never Never Land* (N2K Encoded Music)
- 2000 - *The Navigator* (Palmetto)

## Greg Bandy



**Greg Bandy**

Like many outstanding Cleveland jazz musicians, Greg Bandy went to New York City to advance his career. Unlike most, he stayed there 24 years, making his living as a jazz drummer.

Born in Cleveland in 1951, Bandy was also exposed to jazz early. His father, Charles Bandy, was a jazz promoter and brought many national jazz artists to Cleveland. When Greg was

11 (in 1962), his father took him to the Musicarnival in Warrensville Heights to see and hear the Duke Ellington Orchestra. After the performance, Greg went backstage

with his father and met Ellington and his drummer, Sam Woodyard. Bandy later recalled with a smile, "He let me go on stage and play his drums."

By the early 1970s, Bandy had become a leading jazz drummer in Cleveland. He went to New York in 1972 and quickly learned "you had to prove yourself." He admitted it wasn't easy at first. "Sometimes I slept in my car," said Bandy in a 1996 *Plain Dealer* interview, but he eventually proved himself to other jazz players in New York and began supporting his family as a working jazz drummer.

He recalled that shortly after he arrived in New York, he was playing in a club when legendary bassist Charlie Mingus walked in, listened to Bandy's group, and asked the Clevelander if his group would play between sets at the Village Gate.

While making New York his base of operations, Bandy recorded with such artists as Pharoah Sanders, Richard "Groove" Holmes and Jimmy Witherspoon. In addition, he played drums with such jazz performers as Joe Henderson, Jackie McLean, Betty Carter, Leon Thomas, Jimmy Scott and Yusef Lateef. He toured the world with some of the biggest names in jazz.

He was also active in the theatre. He scored performances of the Ruth Williams Dance Company and acted in a 1985 Metropolitan Opera production of *Porgy and Bess* at Lincoln Center and appeared in the Negro Ensemble Company's 1990 production of *Sidewinder*, a play based on the life of jazz artist Lee Morgan.

Bandy decided to return to Cleveland in 1996. He said he came home to take care of his mother, but admitted that New York had lost some of its luster. "It's not the creative mecca it used to be," he said.

Back in Cleveland, Bandy became very active playing with local groups while still touring from time to time. Ron Busch, the co-owner of the Cleveland Bop Stop, said Bandy "is a great drummer."

### Greg Bandy Discography

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>With Pharoah Sanders -</b>       | <i>Oh, Lord, Le Me Do No Wrong</i><br><i>Harvest</i>                             |
| <b>With Jimmy Ponder -</b>          | <i>Mean Street No Bridges</i><br><i>So Many Stars</i><br><i>To Reach a Dream</i> |
| <b>With Nat Dixon -</b>             | <i>Contours</i><br><i>Backstreet Blues</i>                                       |
| <b>With Teruo Nakamuro -</b>        | <i>Big Apple</i>   |
| <b>With Bross Townsend -</b>        | <i>What a Body</i>   |
| <b>With Cleve. Jazz All-Stars -</b> | <i>Live at Peabody's</i>   |
| <b>With George Braith -</b>         | <i>Wildflower</i>  |
| <b>With Art Davies -</b>            | <i>Re-emergence</i>  |
| <b>With Malachi Thompson -</b>      | <i>Legends and Heroes</i>  |
| <b>With Johnny Lyth -</b>           | <i>Happy Ground</i>  |
| <b>With "Groove" Holmes -</b>       | <i>Hot Tat</i>   |
| <b>With Jimmy Witherspoon -</b>     | <i>The Blues</i>   |
| <b>With Miquel Chastang -</b>       | <i>Live at the Café Populart</i>   |



In addition to performing, Bandy was teaching at Cuyahoga Community College, Oberlin College and in Cleveland schools.

At the 2000 Tri-C JazzFest, Bandy led an all-star group in a tribute to Art Blakey. Performing with Bandy in that concert were such former members of Blakey's Jazz Messengers as Curtis Fuller, Wallace Roney, Curtis Lundy, Bill Pierce, John Hicks and Gary Bartz.

## Eddie Baccus, Sr.



**Eddie Baccus, Sr.**

Almost four decades after he played at the Club 100 at East 100th and Euclid with Roland Kirk and George Cook, Eddie Baccus was still winning great praise for his jazz in Cleveland.

Born November 17, 1936 in Lawndale, North Carolina, Baccus began to lose his eyesight at the age of eight. He entered the Governor Morehead School for the Blind in Raleigh, where he studied piano. In the 1950s, his family moved to Dayton and Eddie enrolled in the Ohio State School for the Blind in Columbus. He graduated in 1960, after taking a year off to play with another student of the school, a Columbus native who at the time called himself Ronnie Kirk. Later as Rahsaan Roland Kirk, he became famous mainly for his unusual ability to play three different saxophones at the same time in three-part harmony.

After touring the Midwest with Kirk's band, Baccus came to Cleveland in 1959 and after listening to organist Jimmy Smith, switched from piano to organ. He again played with Kirk in a series of engagements along the string of jazz clubs in the East 105th and Euclid area of Cleveland. Those gigs led to a record album called *Feel Real* in 1963.

Baccus moved permanently to Cleveland and married. He and his wife Jean began raising five sons. He was playing organ with Cleveland's top jazz artists, including Tony "Big T" Lovano.

Tony Lovano's son, Joe, remembered, as a teenager, sitting in with his father and Baccus. Baccus also played with the major names that came to town – Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt among them – at such venues as Sir-Rah's House on Lee Road and the East Town Motel in East Cleveland. Over the years, Baccus played with almost everybody in Cleveland, even big band leader Al Serafini in the early 1970s.

In 1986, Joe Lovano, celebrating the release of his first album as a leader, gathered a group consisting of

his father, Tony Lovano, relatives and friends in the Beachwood Studio in Cleveland for an informal recording session. Included were drummer Lawrence "Jacktown" Jackson, and organist Eddie Baccus. It was only the second album for Baccus, the Cleveland organist who had impressed so many local and national jazz musicians over the years.

Ramon Morris, a Pittsburgh area saxophonist who played many times with Baccus, told *Plain Dealer* writer Carlo Wolff, "I believe if he had left Cleveland and gone to New York and played with a higher level of musicians on a regular basis, he would have had much, much more to say. I think his story would have been just as profound as (jazz organ legend) Jimmy Smith's."

Baccus never appeared disappointed with his career. He said, "I just love playing. I figured if I made it big, okay; and if I didn't, okay. I always thought that if I could give somebody advice or help, an up-and-coming musician, I would."

He gave a great deal of musical advice and help to many young musicians, including the youngest of his five sons.

## Eddie Baccus, Jr.



**Eddie Baccus, Jr.**

Baccus' son, Eddie Baccus, Jr., became a highly-respected jazz saxophonist in the 1990s.

Born October 22, 1970, he graduated from Cleveland's John Hay High School and received a full scholarship to attend the Berklee College of Music's 12-week summer program.

In the fall of 1989, he went to New York and performed at the Apollo Theatre and studied with fellow Clevelander Joe

Lovano.

Returning from New York in 1991, Baccus volunteered to teach for a year at Cleveland's School of the Arts before returning to Berklee to complete a full program.

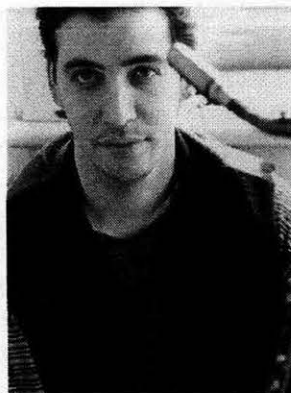
In 1993, Baccus went on the road, performing for a play called *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. He also toured with trumpeter Lester Bowie and performed with such well known artists as Dianne Reeves, Angela Bofill, George Duke, Najee, Bobby Watson, Marcus Belgrave, Benny Golson, Curtis Fuller and Grover Washington.

Later, he toured and recorded with the group *Pieces of a Dream*. His CDs with the group included *Pieces* and *Ahead to the Past*.

Whenever he came home to Cleveland, he almost always played with his father, the jazz organist who became a Cleveland music legend.

## Mike Lee

A little boy named Mike Lee, the son of neighborhood friends Jack and Kathy Lee, was performing in a school program at Fairfax Elementary School in Cleveland Heights. It was one of those typical grade school shows, with proud parents applauding the efforts of their youngsters, assuming the kids would quickly tire of their music lessons in a few years.



Mike Lee

But, for little Mike Lee it was the beginning of a music career that a few years later would attract wide attention and respect. He began studying the saxophone at the age of 14. When he went to Cleveland Heights High School, Lee was thinking about becoming a photographer, but he quickly discovered that photography is a very private pursuit. He said, "I needed something I could do both in public *and* in private, something I could do that was really hard."

He played a few jazz gigs in Cleveland and went to the University of Cincinnati to study music. He said he wasn't challenged in college and decided to leave and go to New York in 1984.

"New York is an amazing scene," he said. At one spot he counted 14 players, including himself, waiting to sit in with a jazz group, "and they could all play." He supported himself by working in word processing and playing some commercial jobs, including the wedding of the daughter of New York Governor Mario Cuomo. Tiring of hustling jazz jobs in New York, Lee returned to Cleveland in 1988 and "just pretty much let the phone ring."

In 1989, while playing with Willie Smith's Little Big Band, Lee was scheduled to play a Northeast Ohio Jazz Society concert saluting Tadd Dameron. Smith's band was the opening act for trumpeter Johnny Coles. Coles' tenor man got sick. At the last minute, Coles asked Lee to sit in with his group. Playing with both groups that night, Lee outplayed everybody and was clearly the star of the concert.

During the summer of 1990, Lee joined the Woody Herman Orchestra with piano-playing buddy Chip Stephens who had toured with Herman's orchestra before Herman's death.

Back in Cleveland after the Herman tour, Lee teamed

up with Stephens, bassist Kevin Muhammad and drummer Ron Godale to make his first record as a leader. The compact disc, *The Quiet Answer*, included four of Lee's original compositions. At the party celebrating the release of their son's first album were Jack and Kathy Lee who recalled that day two decades earlier when their little boy first played in an elementary school program.

Returning to New York, Lee played frequently with the Village Vanguard Orchestra, the Maria Schneider Orchestra and with large ensembles backing such artists as Benny Carter, Harry "Sweets" Edison, Eddie Daniels, Claudio Roditi, Louie Bellson, Natalie Cole, Buddy DeFranco and Mel Tormé.

In 1997, two of Lee's compositions were selected among the top five in the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz and BMI International Jazz Composers Competition. He was also a member of Joe Lovano's *Celebrating Sinatra* touring ensemble.

Lovano said, "Mike Lee is a very gifted and exciting young saxophonist who has the future in his sound."

Cleveland writer Mark Gridley said, "Tenor saxophonist Mike Lee represents the latest luminary in a long tradition of outstanding Cleveland saxophonists."

His albums as a leader include *Above the Battleground* and *My Backyard*.

## Holly Hofmann



Holly Hofmann

When Holly Hofmann was in graduate school at the University of Northern Colorado, veteran trombonist Slide Hampton heard her play and was impressed. They exchanged letters and tapes, and when Holly went to New York in 1991, Hampton arranged for her to sit in with Frank Wess and George Coleman. "You're going to get into a cutting session," warned Hampton, so be prepared."

When she showed up, Coleman looked coolly at the young woman from Cleveland and said, "So, you want to play with us big boys?"



He called several numbers, and, in a move of intimidation, counted them off at burning tempos, much faster than the big boys usually played. Holly Hofmann held her own with the big boys, and they quickly became very friendly.

Being young and female and playing the flute was not the easiest way to succeed in the jazz world, but Hofmann was beating the odds and gaining wide acceptance.

Born and raised in Cleveland, she was the daughter of Nelson Hofmann who had played guitar with big bands led by Paul Whiteman and Jack Teagarden before becoming a chemist with the Diamond Shamrock Company. He played jazz records, mostly big band music, at home.

One day when Holly was five, her sister brought home a flute from school. "I picked it up and just started playing," she remembered. "For some strange reason, it seemed really natural to me." Her father arranged flute lessons for his young daughter. Before long, she was studying classical flute with members of the Cleveland Orchestra, including principal flutist Maurice Sharp.

She continued to study classical flute when she went to high school at the Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan, a year-round program for gifted kids, where she learned, in her words, "There are dozens of other people as talented as you are and you're not the prodigy you thought you were." She returned to Cleveland and got her bachelor's degree at the Cleveland Institute of Music and performed as a substitute with the Cleveland Orchestra.

Hofmann had become very proficient technically as a classical musician, but was intrigued with the jazz playing of artists like Charlie Parker. She went to the University of Northern Colorado to get a masters degree and became deeply involved in jazz. She began playing jazz gigs including some in Denver and Los Angeles.

In 1984, Holly decided to go to San Diego, forget about the classics, and concentrate on jazz. Jeannie Cheatham, the Akron native who was living in San Diego, said, "It was hard for Holly at first. Some of the guys would pat her on the head and say, 'Not bad for a girl,'" but her strong technique and jazz lines won the admiration of some important jazz artists including veterans James Moody and Mundell Lowe. Moody, long a leading saxophonist and flutist, said, "Holly is a wonderful musician, beautiful soul, beautiful person and beautiful flute." Guitarist Lowe said, "Holly is a rare talent and a complete joy to work with." Later, Lowe joined Holly on her third recording, *Duo Personality*.

The Clevelander was also sharing stages with Hampton, Moody and Kenny Barron. Critic Leonard Feather called her "one of the most outstanding and fast-rising flutists in the world."

She led her own group consisting of former Ella Fitzgerald pianist Mike Wofford, bassist Bob Magnusson and guitarist Ron Satterfield. They played across the country and at festivals around the world.

She also got back to Cleveland from time to time. She played at the Tri-C JazzFest in 1991 with trombonist Jiggs Whigham and saxophonist Ernie Krivda. She also played a few times at Rhythms of Playhouse Square and took part in a Northeast Ohio Jazz Society *Great Lakes Jazz Summit* in 1993 at the Cleveland Museum of Art, just across the street from the Institute of Music, where the jazz flutist won her bachelor's degree, and Severance Hall, where she played classical flute with the Cleveland Orchestra.

In the late 1990s, Hofmann was recording about one album a year. In 2000, she recorded *Live at Birdland* with bassist Ray Brown and drummer Victor Lewis.

Overcoming all sorts of obstacles, she was playing with the big boys.

#### Holly Hofmann Discography

##### As leader:

- 1989 - *Further Adventures* (Capri)
- 1990 - *Take Note* (Capri)
- 1992 - *Duo Personality* (Jazz Alliance)
- 1995 - *Tales of Hofmann* (Azica)
- 1996 - *Just Duet* (Azica)
- 1999 - *Flutopia* (Azica)
- 2000 - *Live at Birdland* (Azica)

#### Paul Ferguson

Paul Ferguson became one of the busiest and most talented jazz artists in Northeast Ohio.

Most people knew him as the boyish-looking lead trombonist with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra and as a member of a variety of jazz groups in Greater Cleveland, but many did not realize that Ferguson had toured with the Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey Orchestras, served as the director of Jazz Studies at Case Western Reserve University, was a very active composer and arranger whose works have been performed and recorded by some of the biggest names in jazz, and, in his spare time, was the principle trombonist with the Canton Symphony Orchestra. He also played at times with the Cleveland Orchestra.

When he was first introduced to music, it was classical music. "My mom had a great love of music," said Ferguson. "She used to take us in the living room and turn on Brahms' 'Fourth Symphony.' We'd all fall asleep and she would carry us up to bed."

Ferguson was born in Sandusky in 1961, lived in New Jersey when he was four and five, and grew up in Perry Heights between Massillon and Canton. When he was eight, his mother introduced him to live classical music.

"She took me to see George Szell conduct the

Cleveland Orchestra at Blossom," he recalled. "It was the only time (July, 1969) that Szell conducted at Blossom. He conducted Brahms' 'Fourth,'" the piece Ferguson had fallen asleep to as a young child.

Unlike most excellent musicians, Ferguson did not learn to play at a very early age. In fact, he didn't start playing until he was 15 years old. "I sang in the choir in junior high school and thought, 'This is fun, but it isn't that much of a challenge because you have a dozen other people singing along in the same part with you.' So I thought, 'Those guys in the band, how do they ever do it? Everyone has to play their own instrument? I thought they were really something. So, in ninth grade, I finally decided to take up an instrument.'"

At first, he played the baritone horn, but quickly realized that wasn't much of a jazz instrument and switched to trombone. He said, "My parents had a Duke Ellington record, *Ellington at Newport*, and a couple Sammy Davis records where he sings with Buddy Rich and Count Basie. I just loved those records. I'd pick up the trombone and try to play along with them and it was a lot of fun."

He was soon playing with high school groups and taking private lessons. Ferguson was also listening to the recordings of trombonist J.J. Johnson. He said, "I transcribed a couple of albums of J.J.'s stuff, especially the album *J.J. in Person*."

After graduating from Perry High School, Ferguson enrolled at the University of Akron and became a key member of Roland Paolucci's University of Akron Jazz Ensemble. After getting his bachelor's degree at Akron, Ferguson, then 22, decided to go out on the road.

"My first real gig," said Ferguson, "was actually a legit gig with a group called the American Wind Symphony. I traveled with them for the summer of 1983."

The following summer, Ferguson was selected to play with the touring Glenn Miller ghost band. "I filled in for the summer of '84, the summer of '85 and part of the summer of '86," remembered the trombonist. "It allowed me to get to know a lot of different musicians. It was just a great summer job for me. The timing was perfect. The money was not great, but better than I would have done had I been home. That was really a great experience because I was playing lead trombone every night." Ferguson admitted, "The Miller band is a



Paul Ferguson

little bit trying because there are so many hits you have to play every night – 'In the Mood,' 'String of Pearls' and 'Moonlight Serenade.' In a two-hour concert, you wouldn't have room for much else than the big hits, but the gigs I really enjoyed were the four-hour dances. We'd get a little bit deeper into the book and play a lot more charts by Bill Finegan and Billy May. Those were really a pleasure."

After his first summer of touring with the Miller Orchestra, Ferguson enrolled at the Eastman School of Music to get his master's degree. One of the five other students taking a music writing course under former Cleveland area jazz pianist Bill Dobbins was Maria Schneider, who was later voted the Jazz Arranger of the Year. "She's one day older than me," said Ferguson. "We were very

good friends there, helping each other out, staying up late, eating pizza and copying parts for each other and stuff like that. It was a manic situation in a way, working very, very hard." Schneider later called Ferguson "a beautiful musician and a beautiful person."

Ferguson wrote some arrangements for a concert at Eastman by native Cleveland trombonist Jiggs Whigham. "Just three days before Jiggs was coming in," said Ferguson, "I hadn't written anything. Somehow, something just wasn't just clicking. So, I'll never forget, going to bed on a Thursday night, and just set to drift off to sleep, I heard this little figure. I scribbled it down. I wrote the chart the next day. It was called 'Buckeye Blues' and Jiggs has played it all over the world. He even recorded it with Mel Lewis."

After getting his masters degree, Ferguson toured for two years with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra.

When he came to Cleveland in 1988, he became the director of Jazz Studies at Case Western Reserve University, joined the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, and was selected to be the principle trombonist with the Canton Symphony. He composed and arranged many charts for the CJO and many others.

He also continued to write for Whigham. During the summer of 1996, Ferguson went to Berlin to record with Whigham's RIAS Big Band, the Berlin radio orchestra. "I thought it would be Jiggs' album, featuring him," said Ferguson. "But, it turned out to be nine of my compositions, three or four of which featured Jiggs and several featuring Claudio Roditi." The recording was released as *Blue Highways*.





In 1999, Ferguson recorded another compact disc of his arrangements and compositions. It was called *Friends* and featured many of his musical friends, many of whom played with him on the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra. "When I write a piece," said Ferguson, "I hear the voices of my friends in the CJO. Duke Ellington, Johannes Brahms,

all the great composers, wrote music with their friends in mind. That's what helps bring the music to life."

Recording as the Paul Ferguson Jazz Orchestra, the band performed four Ferguson arrangements of songs associated with Frank Sinatra, five Ferguson compositions and a Ferguson arrangement of a 1711 song by British composer Henry Purcell. "It seemed like an unlikely candidate for a jazz song," said Ferguson, "but the song from Purcell's opera *Dido et Aeneas*, is one of the most moving songs in the entire operatic literature."

Besides being an excellent trombonist, Clevelander Paul Ferguson was emerging as a leading big band composer and arranger.

## Chip Stephens

He soloed on Arturo Sandoval's Grammy Award winning compact disc *Hot House*, named in honor of one of the best known compositions of Cleveland composer and arranger Tadd Dameron. Chip Stephens was one of Greater Cleveland's leading jazz artists for more than a decade.

A native of Ashland, Ohio, Stephens was a protégé of Akron pianist Pat Pace and first attracted wide attention with his piano playing when he was 20 years old in 1984. He spent four months playing with the Glenn Miller ghost band.

After touring with the Miller band, Stephens worked on his bachelor's degree at the University of Akron. He became a member of the University of Akron Jazz Ensemble. Other members of that Akron band in 1986 included trumpeter Doug Huey and drummer Joe Brigandi. The following year (1987), when he was just 23, Stephens captured second prize in the prestigious Jacksonville Jazz Piano Competition. That award led to a job with the Woody Herman Orchestra.

Chip frequently performed with jazz flutist and textbook author Mark Gridley who later remembered, "I was astonished and thought, 'My god, there is nobody else in the world playing like this right now. He took chances that just blew me off the stand. I had to hang on by my fingernails to keep my bearings when Chip was

playing."

Stephens spent two years touring with the Herman band and was featured in a solo on the band's *Live in London* compact disc. While touring and recording with the Herman Herd, Stephens returned from time to time to Cleveland and played frequently here and recorded. In 1990, he recorded *The Quiet Answer* with saxophonist Mike Lee.

Whenever he was home, Stephens also played with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, and in 1992 was featured on a small group recording, *Speechless*, by the CJO's Jack Schantz.

He toured with the Maynard Ferguson Orchestra for two years, playing piano with the driving big band of the renowned trumpeter.

In 1995, Stephens recorded his first album as a leader, *Bootcamp*, for Cleveland's Azica record label. It included a number of original compositions.

In November of 1998, Stephens was playing with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra during a concert with former Count Basie arranger Sammy Nestico. Stephens soloed on many of Nestico's arrangements and a recording of the concert was released on a CD, *Swingin' Together*.

At about the same time, Stephens got the opportunity to tour with the big band of trumpet virtuoso Arturo Sandoval. He traveled the world with the Cuban trumpeter and soloed on his album *Hot House*, which also featured Michael Brecker and Tito Puente, and won a Grammy Award. When Sandoval came to Cleveland for a performance with the CJO in May of 1999, the Cuban trumpeter found two familiar faces in the CJO band. In addition to Stephens at the piano, saxophonist Kenny Anderson had also toured with Sandoval.

Later, Sandoval performed on Stephens' compact disc *The Fields of My Youth*.

Along the line, while playing and touring, Stephens got a masters degree in classical music from Cleveland State University and taught at Youngstown State University.

At the age of 36, Stephens became a professor of jazz piano and improvisation at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

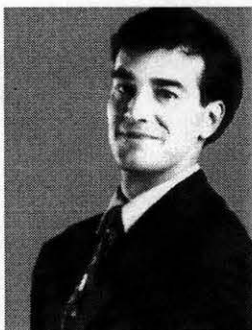
## Mike Petrone

He combined a love of playing jazz, a love of the theatre, and a restless energy to create entertaining and creative music at a variety of restaurants and night clubs in Greater Cleveland and on record.

Mike Petrone, who viewed jazz more as entertainment than a religious experience, acquired much of his interest in music and his drive from his father, John Petrone, a professor of music at Oberlin College. "I've tried to learn from my dad," said Petrone. His father for many years was a piano player in

Cleveland, had his own trio, recorded, and worked as a high school band director as well as college teacher. "He definitely gave me a lot of pointers," said the younger Petrone, "and put me into it when I was about 14 years old."

Before long, young Mike was playing his own gigs. The first place he played was the Hanna Pub.



**Mike Petrone**

Playing jazz piano, however, was not Petrone's only artistic passion. "I got involved in the theatre," he said, "as the music director at the Cleveland Play House and I went to New York and spent some time there doing jazz and also working in the theatre." He spent ten years in New York playing piano in theatres and such clubs as Sardi's, the 21, and the Tavern on the Green.

According to Petrone, the New York jazz scene was exciting, but frustrating. "From a money perspective and from the amount of work that there is, I found it difficult. Things are a lot better here. There are fewer people who do what I do for a living here than there are in New York. Being in New York was a thrill, maybe because of all the great players that are there. You can walk into a gig and guys will sit in with you. On the very first gig I had in New York, John Hicks was in the audience and came up to sat in. That was a sobering experience."

Petrone returned to his hometown in 1991. He took up almost permanent musical residence at Turner's Mill in Hudson, and quickly became an active and energetic member of the Cleveland jazz scene.

He also wrote the score for the motion picture *Flattered* and recorded the soundtrack for the film. It included Cleveland singers John Morton, Meredith Rutledge, Tom Claire and Ki Aallen.

The motion picture soundtrack album was released on Goblin Bee Records, a new label which Petrone formed in 1994 with fellow Cleveland jazz pianists Leo Coach and Cliff Habian. "We're jazz musicians," said Petrone, "and we know we're not going to make a mint, but we'd like to sell some CDs."

If energy and enthusiasm are the main criteria, Petrone could easily find himself someday heading a national record company, while at the same time, writing and playing jazz, and perhaps even producing musicals for the stage.

## Cliff Habian

*The All Music Guide to the Best CDs, Albums and Tapes* listed Cliff Habian's 1987 album *Tonal Paintings* as among the best jazz albums and called it "a mix of progressive and contemporary."

Born in Cleveland in 1956, Habian began taking

piano lessons at the age of nine. He said, "I started on clarinet and became discouraged because I couldn't get a decent tone out of the instrument. Because my mother played piano, she asked me if I would be willing to take piano lessons. I did and I absolutely fell in love with the instrument. I quit clarinet immediately."

As he progressed with the piano, Habian planned to become a classical pianist. But he soon learned there were other forms of piano playing. "Because I took traditional classical piano lessons," said Habian, "what really kept me going were the other styles of music I was exposed to. For example, I have always been a movie buff and, even as a kid, I would see those old Liberace movies and hear him playing boogie woogie and things like that. That really excited me and kept me going with the instrument. It was the jazz things and novelty tunes that were really fun."

By the time Habian was 15, he was studying with Cleveland pianist Joe Howard. A recognized authority on Art Tatum, Howard introduced his young student to the piano of the man who had spent years playing in Cleveland. "Listening to my first Tatum album did it for me," said Habian. "Some people are so discouraged when they first hear Tatum, they quit the instrument altogether, but I never looked at it that way. I saw it as something to aspire to. I knew I wanted to go into jazz. I absolutely knew it!"

In high school in the early 1970s, Habian said he began listening to another form of music. "One day," he said, "somebody turned me on to Emerson, Lake and Palmer which was essentially a rock band. But they were really a classical-jazz-rock band. They took a lot of classical music and kind of synthesized it in arrangements



**Cliff Habian**



which had a rock feel but with classical themes."

Habian was bitten by the synthesizer bug. He began listening to Joe Zawinul's synth with the group Weather Report. The Clevelander also began composing.

In the 1980s, Habian self-produced an album of his compositions, *Tonal Paintings*, and began selling it in Cleveland. "I was doing okay with it locally," said Habian. "Then I decided, 'I think I'll send it to a few labels. I sent out six packages. Within two weeks, I had a phone call from the vice president of Fantasy Records and he said, 'We're very interested in signing you!' They sent a contract to me. I hired an attorney who went over it and I signed it."

Fantasy Records released Habian's *Tonal Paintings* album on its Milestone label. He recalled, "They completely redid the art work and packaging. Fantasy was just beginning to produce compact discs and distributed Habian's album around the world. "It was being sold in Switzerland, the Philippines, Japan, Australia and Germany," said Habian. "Some of my friends said they saw my CDs in Italy and Germany. Those were exciting times."

The success of his first album led to a second, *Manhattan Bridge*. "I not only recorded with great people like Joe Lovano and Eliot Zigmund, but I also met with the artist whose painting became the cover of *Manhattan Bridge*."

*Keyboard* magazine said in its April 1994 issue, "Cliff Habian is a skillful player with easy fluidity on the piano and solid chops on the synthesizer." Critic Leonard Feather wrote, "Cleveland has an engaging eclectic."

At the end of the 20th century, Habian was one of the busiest musicians in Cleveland. He was playing seven days a week at a variety of clubs and restaurants. He said, "I don't have enough of me to go around. I could be playing 10 nights a week."

The Cleveland pianist was being recognized both world-wide and locally for his unusual musical innovations.

## George Foley

Cleveland pianist George Foley, born in Boston and raised in Cleveland Heights, was improvising on the piano almost before he could read. He recalls, "My mother says that I was improvising at the piano a couple years before I started taking lessons." It took him a year to persuade his mother that he should begin taking piano lessons at the Cleveland Music School Settlement. "I studied classical music from about the age of nine to my first year of college," said Foley, "and started taking theory when I was about ten."

A pivotal event occurred when Foley was 13. His sister's boyfriend was listening to him play and asked,

"Do you know how to play ragtime?" "What is that?" asked Foley. "So he lent me the best-selling record from the early '70s, *Piano Rags* by Scott Joplin, and it really got me excited." The movie *The Sting* had triggered a revival of interest in the ragtime music of Joplin. "So I started working on 'The Maple Leaf Rag' which took me about six months to learn because it's a really hard rag."

By the time he got to the College of Wooster, Foley had become a serious student of American ragtime music. "Ragtime happened before jazz," he said. "It was the first American popular music, starting in the 1890s, the same period that the popular music business began in the United States."

Playing and composing his own ragtime numbers, Foley called ragtime the direct ancestor of jazz, which like jazz, evolved over the years from the simple to the more complex. "To say the whole ragtime spectrum is one thing is like saying everything from Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry up to what's happening in rock now is one kind of music."

In 1977, at the age of 19, George Foley recorded his first album, *Cleveland Rag*. It included six of his own ragtime compositions, plus seven rags dating from 1888 to 1923. "One of the things I've enjoyed doing," said Foley, "is presenting ragtime, particular tunes, particular composers that other people haven't covered because there is such a wealth of stuff." He sold the album at Cleveland area record stores, and wrote to Jazzology Records, which was issuing a series of albums called *The Jazz Piano Heritage Series*. "I sent them a copy of this first record and I said, 'I'd like to do another one. Would you be interested?' And they said, 'We like *this* one.' I didn't really have a national agenda in mind when I made it, but they did put it out." A national review of the album called Foley "a potentially monster ragtime talent."

His reputation was enhanced when he went to a Ragtime Society convention in Toronto and met and played for the legendary Eubie Blake. With Blake on the piano bench next to him, Foley played his version of "Spanish Venus," which had been composed for Blake by Lucky Thompson and arranged by Willie "The Lion" Smith. "As I was playing, he made a lot of comments. When I finished playing the tune, he looked at me and said, 'You're a fine pianist, but the Lion got the tune all wrong!'"

Foley's national reputation grew as he uncovered and recorded other all-but-forgotten ragtime tunes. "I recorded an album called *I Love It*. I did a variety of obscure rags on side one. Side two was devoted to a composer from Buffalo named George L. Cobb."

The Clevelander issued his third ragtime album in 1989. It was called *Smiles And Kisses* and included some more advanced ragtime. A nationally-published review of Foley's album said, "Foley exhibits excellent taste and a keen ear for neglected gems."

Despite his long fascination and national reputation with ragtime music, George Foley spent most of his time playing a variety of jazz styles with various groups at many clubs and restaurants in Cleveland.

## Dennis Reynolds



**Dennis Reynolds**

Trumpeter Dennis Reynolds, a graduate of Shaw High School in East Cleveland, caused a lot of excitement among Cleveland jazz fans in 1990 when he unveiled a swinging big band called the Jazz Revival Orchestra. It was not just another rehearsal band. Reynolds brought to it his experience playing

with the Count Basie and Lionel Hampton Orchestras.

Reynolds played in the Youngstown State University Jazz Ensemble in the early 1980s and formed his own band which played for a while in the Warren area. He studied with Cat Anderson and played lead trumpet with Hank Mobley's big band and with Louie Bellson before joining the Basie Orchestra in 1986.

"Man, that was like goin' to heaven," said Reynolds. "I was scared to death on my first job. I had to get it together real quick in two weeks." After two years with the Basie band, Reynolds joined the Lionel Hampton Orchestra.

He returned to his home in Warren, revived his old band and decided to move his base of operations to Cleveland where he could find better players. Two of his former teachers, Snooky Young and Clark Terry, made guest appearances with Reynolds' orchestra. Frequently singing with the Jazz Revival Orchestra was Dolores Parker Morgan of Akron, who in the late 1940s had sung and recorded with the Duke Ellington Orchestra.

Reynolds said, "I really feel that my generation, guys in their 30s and 40s, has to find a way to keep the tradition going. I promised Clark (Terry) I would do my very best to keep it going."

The Jazz Revival Orchestra lasted only a few years, but in 1998, after touring with Illinois Jacquet, Reynolds was named director of another new big band, the Jazz Heritage Orchestra, sponsored by the Black Studies Department at Cleveland State University.

## Ron McCroby



**Ron McCroby**

Greater Cleveland also claimed the world's greatest jazz whistler. Ron McCroby, calling himself a "puccoloist," performed on the Johnny Carson television show and at jazz festivals around the world.

It was not just a novelty for the Chagrin Falls

resident. He was always a serious musician. He began his unusual art when he was playing clarinet in a high school marching band. The regular piccolo player got sick and Ron filled in by whistling his part. Later, when he worked for an advertising agency in Cincinnati, he was producing jingles for television. He recalled, "Often when I was explaining parts to the flute players and piccolo players, I would say, 'Guys, I want (whistles to demonstrate)' and I would show them how the line would go."

"My wife said, 'Hey, you oughta give this a shot!' So I made a little demo tape of some nice tunes with a rhythm section. That tape got into the hands of Jimmy Lyons who produced the Monterey Jazz Festival. Jimmy liked it and called me. Blew me away! He asked me if I would be interested in performing at the Monterey Jazz Festival! I said, 'I'll fit it in!' That sort of opened national doors for me."

McCroby made several records, including such jazz standards as "I Remember Clifford" and "Four Brothers."

Jazz writer Rhodes Spedale said, "The advent of Ron McCroby is an object lesson in the jazz whirl, demonstrating that an imaginative individual with a lot of energy and determination can get an opportunity to showcase a trail-blazing approach."

McCroby died at the age of 68 August 5, 2002.

These and many other Cleveland jazz musicians – the artistic descendants of such Clevelanders as Noble Sissle, Pee Wee Jackson, Tadd Dameron, Freddie Webster, Fats Heard, Benny Bailey, Bill de Arango and Jim Hall – are all helping to set the standards for the future of jazz.



## 24. Preserving the Legacy

Clevelanders have also been in the forefront of efforts to preserve and chronicle the legacy of jazz. In fact, it might be argued that Cleveland's greatest contribution has been its unusual and almost continuous effort to spotlight and preserve jazz.

### The Ellington Archives

Cleveland Representative Louis Stokes spearheaded the effort in Congress in the 1980s to appropriate funds for the Smithsonian Institution to purchase the personal archives of Duke Ellington. Included were manuscripts, arrangements, recordings and photographs from Ellington's personal collection.

Stokes said at the time, "Duke Ellington is a unique figure in American culture. As one of our greatest composers, he deserves to be well represented in America's national museum, the Smithsonian."

Stokes' efforts came following a chance meeting between Ellington's son, Mercer, and the director of the Smithsonian museum, John Kinard. Kinard told Mercer he had heard about an unsuccessful attempt by Yale University to acquire a large collection of Ellington's papers. After learning from Mercer that his late father's collection was available, Kinard contacted Roger Kennedy, the director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. They worked with an attorney to negotiate with the Ellington estate for the personal archives. The negotiations took two and a half years. Eventually, through the prodding of Stokes, Congress in 1988 appropriated the funds for the acquisition of the priceless collection of manuscripts, photographs, recordings, clippings and personal items documenting Ellington's legacy as a performer and composer.

Three years later, Ellington's sister, Ruth Ellington Boatwright, sold 2,000 additional manuscripts, photographs and memorabilia to the Smithsonian. They had been kept in filing cabinets in her one-room Park Avenue apartment in New York City.

A portion of the Ellington archives was displayed at the Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art for a month beginning October 7, 1995.

### Transcribing jazz masterpieces

Dr. Frederick Starr, president of Oberlin College in the 1980s, was a major force in another effort to preserve the legacy of jazz.

Starr told me, "Gunther Schuller and I decided (in 1988) that what we needed to do was take the real masterpiece recorded performances and carefully transcribe them, get the notes on paper so accurately that you could take a high school band in Elyria and they could sit down with a good conductor and actually play



Frederick Starr

'Daybreak Express' by the Ellington band or some Goodman piece, or whatever.

"If the music isn't played and played well," said Starr, "it dies. There is no way that a music that is not performed can be called 'living.'"

Starr and Schuller began by joining forces with the Smithsonian Institution to transcribe classic jazz performances recorded by Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, Count Basie, Earl Hines, Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Jimmie Lunceford, Dizzy Gillespie and others. Starr and the Smithsonian secured financing to transcribe and publish 40 to 50 volumes of what they called *The Jazz Masterworks Editions* over a period of about 20 years.

Starr said the transcriptions "will enable professional repertory orchestras and college ensembles to recreate the great classics of recorded repertory and encourage the growth of jazz repertory ensembles." He said, "audiences will be stunned by the difference between the slapdash published parts available since the 1930s, generally simplified versions done quickly, and the music the great bands were *actually playing*."

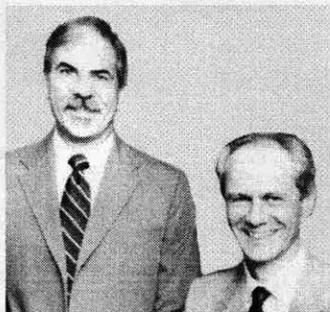
The first *Jazz Masterworks Edition* was *The Duke Ellington Orchestra: The Extended Works from 1929 to 1937*, edited by Schuller and including "Symphony in Black," "Reminiscing in Tempo" and "Creole Rhapsody."

Within several years, the Smithsonian project produced a number of excellent live concerts of Ellington music including concerts by various repertory big bands such as the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra and the Smithsonian Jazz Orchestra.

Starr was also a founder and leader of a group called The Louisiana Repertory Jazz Ensemble which gained an international reputation by playing authentic recreations of the music being played in New Orleans between the years of 1890 and 1930. Starr said he wanted to "peel away the layers of paint [various interpretations of early New Orleans music] and restore the original features" of what he called "this old house of jazz." The members of the group found old manuscripts of many songs that were played before records were made.

## Telarc International

In March of 1990, two Clevelanders – record producer Robert Woods and recording engineer Jack Renner – took their sophisticated digital recording equipment to the famed Blue Note nightclub in New York City to record a live performance by a jazz trio. It was a revolutionary move for the Clevelanders who had won world-wide praise for their natural, simple and realistic recordings of symphony orchestras. Woods and Renner, the co-founders of Telarc International of Cleveland, were not sure they could transfer their classical music recording magic to jazz.



**Jack Renner and Bob Woods of Telarc International**

After listening to the recording, the jazz artists – pianist Oscar Peterson, bassist Ray Brown and guitarist Herb Ellis – said, “*Beautiful!*” Renner knew at that moment they had passed the test. “We achieved,” he said, “what we thought was the best possible sense of the excitement of being in the club.”

When the recording was released a few months later on a compact disc entitled *The Legendary Oscar Peterson Trio Live at the Blue Note*, it won two Grammy Awards. The Cleveland company was off and running as a major player in the jazz recording industry.

Telarc was founded in 1977 by Renner and Woods, two classically trained musicians and teachers, who pioneered a “minimal miking” technique in their recordings and made the first commercial classical recordings in the U.S. in the digital format. “We’re not out to make hyped-up recordings,” said Woods.

After the success of that first jazz recording with Oscar Peterson, Telarc moved quickly into the recording

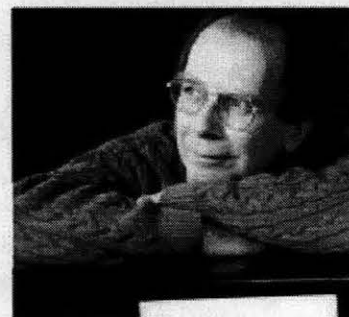
of jazz and amassed an impressive stable of jazz artists.

By 2000, Telarc had more than 600 recordings in its catalog, ranging from classical to jazz and blues, and was releasing more than 50 recordings each year. From its headquarters in Beachwood’s Commerce Park off Chagrin Boulevard, the firm’s approximately 50 employees were setting new standards in both the quality and the quantity of jazz recordings from Cleveland.

## Discovering a jazz masterpiece

An educator from Cleveland won international acclaim for his work.

Andrew Homzy, who had played tuba with Ralph Grugel’s dixieland band in the Cleveland Flats in the 1960s, discovered almost by accident what Whitney Balliet



**Andrew Homzy**

of *The New Yorker* magazine called “The most important composition to emerge in jazz since Duke Ellington’s ‘Black, Brown and Beige’ in 1943.” Homzy found, hidden away in the apartment of Charles Mingus’ widow, the score for a monumental two-hour orchestral work called *Epitaph* which Mingus had composed before his death in 1979.

Homzy, who grew up in Cleveland and went to Brooklyn High School in suburban Cleveland, became a music teacher at Concordia University in Montreal. He wanted to catalog Mingus’ compositions. He called Sue Mingus and discovered the unknown work in an old chest in her apartment. Homzy took a year off from the university to go through all the scores he found. “Eventually,” he said, “I began to see a pattern. There were 18 different sections with numbered measures.” Homzy slowly pieced them together. The score for a 30-piece orchestra ran 500 pages and included 4,000 measures.

Mingus’ *Epitaph* was first performed June 3, 1989 at Lincoln Center in New York City with Gunther Schuller directing an all-star orchestra. Jon Pareles of the *New York Times* wrote, “It ranked with the most memorable jazz events of the decade.” Two days later, there was a second performance at Wolf Trap near Washington. The third performance, April 22, 1990 – the 68th anniversary of Mingus’ birth – was at Severance Hall in Cleveland with a proud Homzy and his family in attendance. The Severance Hall audience applauded loudly when from the stage I introduced Homzy and explained how the Clevelanders had made jazz history.

### Telarc Jazz Artists

Count Basie Orchestra	Jon Hendricks
Louie Bellson	Ahmad Jamal
Ray Brown	Jimmy McGriff
Dave Brubeck	James Moody
Jeanie Bryson	Frank Morgan
Freddy Cole	Gerry Mulligan
George Coleman	Joe Pass
Hank Crawford	Oscar Peterson
Al Di Meola	John Pizzarelli
Erroll Garner	Andre Previn
Dizzy Gillespie	Vanessa Rubin
Stephane Grappelli	Hilton Ruiz
Benny Green	George Shearing
Al Grey	Bobby Short
Jim Hall	Mel Tormé
Lionel Hampton	Steve Turre
Slide Hampton	McCoy Tyner



Homzy is also a recognized authority on Duke Ellington and contributed to the first biography of Cleveland native Tadd Dameron. He wrote two chapters of Ian MacDonald's *Tadd, the Life and Legacy of Tadley Ewing Dameron* – one on the importance of Tadd and the other analyzing Dameron's music. I contributed to MacDonald much of the information on Dameron's early life in Cleveland.

## Textbook author Mark Gridley

*Jazz Styles – History and Analysis* by Cleveland educator and musician Mark Gridley became the most popular jazz textbook in the country. Gridley's book was a required textbook in introduction-to-jazz courses at more than 400 colleges and universities throughout the United States. The book was also published in several foreign languages.

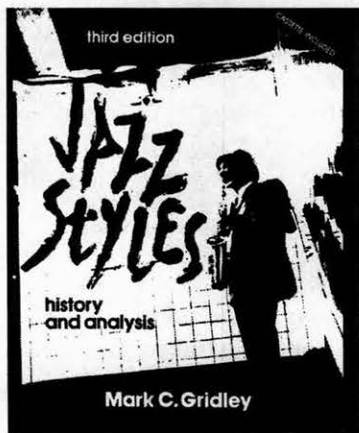
In 2002, Gridley estimated that about a quarter of a million copies of his book had been sold.

Gridley told me it began almost by accident when he was a graduate student at Case Western Reserve University. He asked the chairman of the music department why there was no jazz course at the school. "It turned out he had been looking for someone to teach a jazz course. I threw together a syllabus and designed the course," said Gridley. "I recorded my lectures and gave them to a girl to transcribe. Over two or three semesters I had a bunch of classroom handouts." He copyrighted his material and contacted an editor. "He was also looking for someone to write a jazz textbook," said Gridley.

The first edition was published by Prentice Hall in 1978. A second edition came out in 1985. The third edition in 1988 included a cassette recording illustrating many of the points Gridley made in his manuscript. A number of Cleveland jazz musicians performed on the cassette. A fourth edition was published in late 1990. In 1992 Gridley also compiled compact discs of classic jazz performances to be



Nancy Ann Lee  
Mark Gridley



used in conjunction with his book.

He also wrote a *Concise Guide to Jazz* for high school and college students to use in a ten-week program. The smaller book also included tape or CD recordings.

A resident of Shaker Heights, Gridley played flute with his own group and taught psychology at Heidelberg College.

## Drum book author Chuck Braman

"When I was learning to play drums," said native Clevelander Chuck Braman, "I was very frustrated with the standard material that I was being taught from. I thought it was not complete and not logical. Although the books were regarded as classic and had been used for years, I couldn't understand why they did it this way as opposed to that. Why didn't they think of this? Basically, what bugged me was, I thought, 'Why isn't this more systematic and logical?'"

So Braman sat down and wrote his own book about drumming. *Drumming Patterns* is a systematic presentation of the components of rhythm and drum technique. Louie Bellson said, "This creative, valuable book is for every drummer's library." *DownBeat* magazine called it "An outstanding book."

"I spent three years alone at a computer," recalled Braman, "working out all the different possibilities and trying to put something together. I finally did. I wrote the book."

Braman didn't begin playing drums seriously until after he graduated from Berea High School in 1977. "I was lucky," he recalled. "My dad got me started in music around the time I was 11 or 12 years old. A local disc jockey named Ronnie Barrett, got a Freddie Hubbard album called *First Light* and gave it to my dad and my dad gave it to me." The Hubbard album sparked Braman's interest in jazz and his father nurtured that interest. "My dad took me to the Theatrical where the house band was Bob McKee, Bill Dobbins and Lamar Gaines. I was really knocked out by them."

Soon the teenager was taking drum lessons from McKee and going to jazz concerts. At a Duke Ellington concert, he met a young teacher named Mark Gridley who was about to begin teaching a course in jazz history.

"I took Mark's course the next summer. That was when I was 13. I sat in on the course he was teaching at Case Western Reserve while he was in the process of researching his book. He was an incredible source, teaching me who was who and what the good music was." According to Braman, Gridley, was the best teacher he ever had.

"Since I got a late start playing drums," recalled Braman, "the first thing I wanted to do when I got out of high school was put in some heavy practicing. Instead

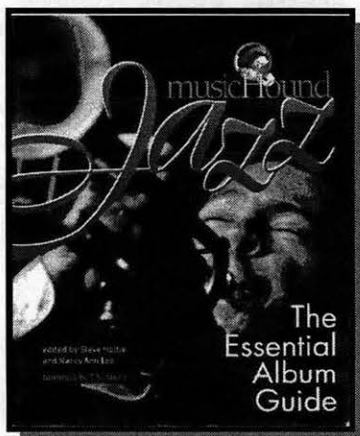
of going to college, I practiced a lot, maybe six, eight, ten hours a day for a year or two."

By the late 1970s, he was playing at a variety of clubs in Cleveland. "I started doing what I've done ever since, basically hustle gigs in places that had never had jazz before, talk them into trying it. At some places it would work out and I'd have a place to play and I would call my favorite players and go out and play."

After playing and writing in Cleveland, Braman moved to New York in 1989 and soaked up the playing of his drumming heroes, Paul Motian and Roy Haynes. "I really loved their playing," said Braman. "I also loved the playing of Elvin Jones, Tony Williams, Philly Joe Jones, Max Roach, Billy Hart and Al Foster."

For Braman, jazz reached an artistic peak with Miles Davis, Tony Williams, Wayne Shorter and Herbie Hancock. "To me, that's the ultimate in jazz. That was the era when it really reached the zenith of its evolution. To me, the '60s, just before fusion, was my favorite era in jazz."

## A jazz record guide



Another important written contribution to jazz, *Music Hound Jazz: The Essential Album Guide*, was co-edited by magazine writer Steve Holtje and Cleveland Heights free lance jazz writer and photographer Nancy Ann Lee.

She said the book, published in 1998, is "really for people who

are new to jazz, recommending what albums to purchase. It's a buying guide of jazz compact discs currently in print."

The guide is a huge paperback book, about 1,400 pages, two inches thick, and weighs almost five pounds. Included are entries for 1,260 jazz artists, living and dead, with brief biographies of each and suggestions regarding their most important compact discs. Lee admitted compiling all the information was a massive undertaking.

"It took a year from the time I signed on," she said. Lee and Holtje assigned articles on individual artists to a virtual army of jazz writers across the country. "We had 90 writers on the project," she said, "and edited entries from our writers. I edited about half of the book, about 600 entries, and of those 600, I wrote or co-wrote about 200."

Among the 90 writers who contributed to the *Music*

*Hound Jazz Album Guide*, in addition to Lee, were seven others from Cleveland – John Bitter, George Foley, Chris Hovan, Dan Polletta, Jim Prohaska, John Richmond and Bill Wahl. "I was very lucky to have so many good writers," says Lee. "They are all knowledgeable people who knew their history and the artists they were writing about."

The *Music Hound Jazz Album Guide* includes biographies and compact disc listings for 13 jazz artists from Cleveland: Albert Ayler, Benny Bailey, Tadd Dameron, John Fedchock, Jim Hall, Chuck Israels, Ernie Krivda, Joe Lovano, Ken Peplowski, Vanessa Rubin, Jimmy Scott, Pete Selvaggio and Dan Wall. Lee said, "I tried to include as many as I could and I apologize to those jazz artists from Cleveland that I didn't get into the book."

The *Music Hound Guide* included a compact disc of performances by ten of the artists and photographs of many more, plus listings of jazz publications, jazz internet sites, record labels, radio stations, festivals and producers.

Lee said she received notes from some of the artists that she wrote about in the book. "And they were very pleased about their entries and the overall presentation of the book."

For co-editor Lee, whose other written work appeared in *DownBeat*, *JazzTimes*, Cleveland's *Plain Dealer* and *Free Times*, there was a huge sense of accomplishment in being a major contributor to the literature of jazz. "It's a tremendous letdown after a very, very intense period of time," she said. "I feel like you would with a new baby, kind of, 'Look, what I made!'"

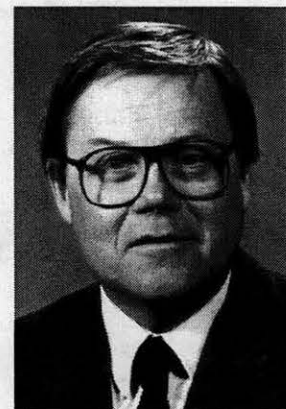
## Jazz author at Kent State

William Howland Kenney, an historian at Kent State University and a traditional jazz clarinetist who played frequently in the Greater Cleveland area, wrote two books that have been recognized as important contributions to jazz literature.

Kenney's *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History 1904-1930* was published in 1993. The focus of his scholarly work was on jazz in Chicago in the

1920s. Unlike most other books on the subject, it placed the music in the social and economic setting of the period.

According to Kenney, the craze for popular dance music began in Chicago before World War I and exploded in the teens when more than 65,000 blacks



Bill Kenney



from the South migrated to Chicago. This migration, wrote Kenney, "triggered Chicago's jazz age." Just after World War I, workers with money to spend on entertainment flocked to night clubs on Chicago's South Side, particularly an area called "The Stroll," a bright-light district on South State Street. Kenney quoted Cleveland writer Langston Hughes saying that "Midnight was like day" on The Stroll even without street lights.

According to Kenney's book, the word "jass" first appeared in Chicago's black press in 1916. Others have claimed the word was used earlier.

In addition to the musicians who shaped jazz in Chicago, Kenney examined the politicians, businessmen and even gangsters who contributed to jazz in Chicago as well as the social and economic forces (Prohibition, the Depression, race relations, and technological advances in recording and film) that contributed to it.

In a review published in the Arts Midwest *JazzLetter*, Tom Jacobsen wrote, "Kenney has clearly shown that a proper understanding of Chicago jazz in the '20s goes well beyond an account of the musicians and their music."

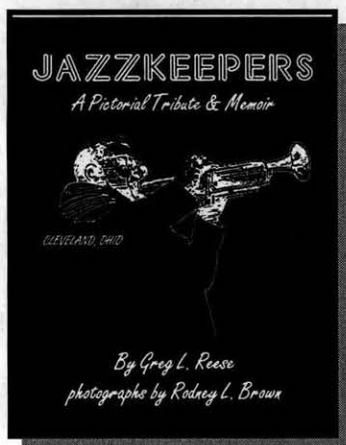
In his book, Kenney acknowledged the assistance of Clevelanders Joel O'Sickey, Jim Stincic, John Richmond, Larry Booty and Brad Bolton.

Kenney's second book, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945*, was published in 1999. The 288-page book examined the interplay between recorded music and social, political and economic forces during the phonograph's rise as a popular form of entertainment. Victor Greene of the University of Wisconsin said, "At last someone has attempted to place the phonograph industry in the context of America's cultural life."

## A pictorial salute to Cleveland artists

Until I began doing weekly *Cleveland Jazz History* radio features for Radio Station WCPN in 1988 and the first edition of the *Cleveland Jazz History* book was published in 1993, there had been absolutely no effort to chronicle Cleveland's many links to the history of jazz. Then, in 1996, there was another book about Cleveland jazz and Cleveland's jazz musicians.

*Jazzkeepers* was produced by Gregory Reese, the director of the East Cleveland Public Library, who had been presenting free jazz concerts at his library on



Euclid Avenue since 1988. Reese told me, "I thought that some of the stuff should be documented. We have some great local musicians and performers in the city and we really don't pay tribute to them as we should."

Reese got photographer Roger Brown to go with him to various clubs in Cleveland and begin taking action shots of Cleveland jazz performers.

Consisting mostly of photos, the 176-page book includes virtually full-page original pictures of 101 Cleveland jazz artists and 14 Cleveland jazz clubs and venues. Reese also interviewed some of the artists. Included is Weldon "Schoolboy" Haggins who told Reese that he once performed with boxing great Ezzard Charles playing bass.

Reese said he learned that many of the Cleveland jazz musicians "aren't concerned about making it big. They enjoy what they are doing here locally. They have full-time jobs but they love the music."

## Collecting Django Reinhardt records

The guitar that Django Reinhardt bought in the United States and played in Cleveland when he made his American debut here was later presented to a Clevelanders who had amassed the world's largest collection of Reinhardt records.

Fred Sharp began his life-long fascination with the French jazz guitarist in the 1930s when Sharp was still a teenager living in the Glenville area of



**Fred Sharp and his wife Iris with a small portion of their Django Reinhardt record collection and the guitar Reinhardt played in Cleveland in 1946**

Cleveland. His guitar teacher, Jerry Stone, asked Sharp, "Have you heard about the French hillbilly guitar player? His name is Reinhardt and there's a record out called 'Clouds.' I went out immediately," said Sharp, "and bought the record. It was a *Decca Personality Series*. It was 75 cents, the most expensive record out. I played it in the store and it just floored me. It put a mark on me for the rest of my life."

Sharp sent away for a catalog. "It listed all these Djangos. I had never heard any of them. So I sent them

money and ordered all the records that were listed.”

While pursuing his own guitar career, touring with the Adrian Rollini Trio and Red Norvo's big band, Sharp continued building his Reinhardt record collection. “I had about 50 sides and got in touch with a guy in Chicago who was a Django collector. He said, ‘If you want some of them, come to Chicago and we’ll tape them.’ So I went to his house. He had stuff I had never heard of. He had like 600 sides. We taped for hours.

“The collection began to build from there. I started to buy records and trade with people in Holland, Belgium, all over the world.”

Reinhardt died in 1953 at the age of 43 and was buried at Samois, France. Sharp visited Django's grave eight times and planted flowers there.

Django's son, Babik, learned of Sharp's great interest in his father's music and gave Django's old guitar to Fred, the guitar Reinhardt had used when he played with Duke Ellington in Cleveland in 1946.

Eventually, Sharp's collection of Django Reinhardt records grew to about 1,100 sides. “Most people don't know he made that many,” Sharp said. “Of course there's a lot of second takes and third takes of things.”

Charles Delaunay, Django's biographer, asked Sharp to compile the Reinhardt discography.

## Remembering Albert Ammons



Cleveland resident Christopher Page set out in the 1980s to research the life of boogie woogie pianist Albert Ammons. Page said, “I wanted to discover and reconstruct the man behind the famous name. The irrepressible joy that radiates through the notes on Albert Ammons records seems to have been a reflection of his soul and I had to

find out if this was true.”

In 1989, Page began interviewing Ammons' family members, friends and associates and researching the history of boogie woogie. In 1997, the Northeast Ohio Jazz Society published Page's book, *Boogie Woogie Stomp, Albert Ammons & His Music*. The book is not a biography in the usual sense; it is more a celebration of Ammons and boogie woogie music.

Page celebrated the publication of the book with a party at his home. Among the guests were a number of boogie woogie piano players and Ammons' son, granddaughter, niece and nephew.

## The Campus Owls preserve swing



Courtesy of Hank Geer

### Hank Geer directing the Miami University Campus Owls Alumni Band

If you spent any time at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio between 1924 and 1961, you probably remember the Campus Owls. It was a student big band that played at Miami for four decades.

The band was formed just a few weeks after Bix Beiderbecke and the Wolverines played at Miami's Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity in 1924.

In the summer of 1935, the Campus Owls were booked by the Cunard Lines to play aboard a trans-Atlantic ship. They played as an intermission band for the Duke Ellington Orchestra. They went to Germany, France and Switzerland in 1938.

The leader of the Miami Campus Owls in the early 1940s was the saxophonist who later was considered the dean of Cleveland jazz musicians, Hank Geer.

“It was a first class band,” recalled Geer. “Most of the guys came off the road with bands they played with in the summer months.”

In fact, before he went to Miami University, Geer had played with bands led by Charlie Spivak and Henry Busse. During the summer before starting college, Geer was touring with the Ray Anthony Orchestra.

Another member of the Anthony band, Harry DeMarco, also joined the Campus Owls with Geer. DeMarco later toured for years with a group called the Tune Toppers and played with a variety of big bands in Cleveland, including the Vince Pattie and Hal Lynn bands.

Trumpeter Dick Mains, who played with the Campus Owls in 1940 and '41, later played with the Teddy Powell Orchestra and in 1945, joined the Benny Goodman band. Mains later spent 31 years playing with the U.S. Army Band.

Each fall, they arrived in Oxford a week early to prepare for the new school year. “We did nothing that week but break in new recruits and rehearse,” said Geer. “We rehearsed eight or nine hours a day, getting ready to play at the end of the week for the Freshman Mixer.”

The Campus Owls was not an official Miami University band. It was a bunch of student musicians who were working their way through college. In



exchange for free meals, they played Monday through Friday nights at a local restaurant called the Huddle. "It used to be packed," remembered Geer. "We also did two-hour sessions on Sunday afternoons. People drove up from Cincy, drove down from Dayton, came from Columbus. They came from all over. They used to have to put two traffic cops to direct the traffic in Oxford, there were so many people that wanted to come in and hear the band. And the Huddle wasn't a big restaurant."

When Geer was leading the Owls in the '40s, the band also played throughout the Midwest during school breaks.

The Campus Owls was a dance band, playing the music of the swing era, strongly influenced by Benny Goodman. Geer said, "We were carrying five brass, five trombones, four saxes, and four rhythm, same as the old Goodman band."

In addition to leading the band, Geer was one of the arrangers. The band members wrote their own arrangements of the popular music of the day, as well as some tongue-in-cheek original charts. Jack Amaran did an original thing called "A Madrigal to a Melancholy Mugwump."

In addition to the nightly sessions at the Huddle and touring during vacations, the Campus Owls frequently shared the bandstand at college dances with name bands. Geer remembered the night the Gene Krupa Orchestra came to Miami. "We'd always play opposite the name band. Some of the guys came in and said, 'These college kids are gonna play some things.' The members of the Krupa band went outside to have a smoke or whatever. And when they heard the band, they all turned around and came back, to stand down front and listen." Krupa later said he never heard a college band play so well.

Les Brown said the Miami Campus Owls were better than the college band he led at Duke University, the Duke Blue Devils. Drummer Ray McKinley, who sat in with the Miami band one night, said the Owls was the best college jump band he ever heard.

"We'd make enough for tuition on road tours at Christmastime," recalled Geer. Like all touring bands, the Campus Owls had their share of adventures on the road. Geer remembered, "Up in the Catskills in the wintertime we pulled into Binghamton, all frozen, and we slept ten guys in a room."

The band faded away in 1961, but in June of 1992, during the annual alumni reunion, there was a reunion of the Campus Owls alumni in Oxford. "It was beautiful to see all the guys," said Geer. "When we sat down to practice, I knew I had my work cut out for me to try to put this together and try to make it at least presentable."

Geer, one of the few members of the Campus Owls to make music his career, led the alumni band for the reunion concert. Most of the players were doctors, lawyers and businessmen — many in their 60s and 70s —

and said Geer, "Some guys hadn't touched their horns in 50 years!"

While some of the playing at the reunion concert was a little rough around the edges, it still sounded pretty good and reminded the players and the thousands of others who listened to the Campus Owls over the years of an outstanding, long-running college big band.

After that first reunion, the Campus Owls alumni began playing regularly at the freshman orientation and reunion weekends. The band's alumni also created an endowment to preserve the memory of the Campus Owls and to promote jazz. Among other projects, they sponsored a high school jazz festival at the university.

To help raise money for the endowment, the alumni group produced a half-hour videotape of the band's history. I was delighted when they asked me to host and narrate the video presentation. Entitled *Big Swinging History*, it was completed late in 1997 and sold by the university.

When Geer died in 2000, it was suggested that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to the Campus Owls Memorial Fund at Miami University.

## Jazz recorder Fred Eisenberg

"Come on upstairs," said Fred Eisenberg, "I want to show you something." The retired rabbi led me to the third floor of his Cleveland Heights home. There, he had a huge collection of jazz recordings.

I had seen many large jazz record collections, but this one was different. There were shelves filled with reel-to-reel tapes that Eisenberg had recorded *himself* on location. He had spent years, from the 1950s to the early '70s, combining his interests in jazz and recording by creating his own library of live performance recordings.

His collection included live performance recordings of such artists as Les Brown, Harry James, Louis Armstrong, Stan Kenton, Bobby Hackett and Lionel Hampton. "Hampton was thrilled," he said, "because I recorded him in four channels. He had heard of me and knew what I was doing and knew that if he wanted them, he could have those tapes."

Eisenberg began recording in Boston when he was 13 years old. His father gave him a Wilcox-Gay disc recorder, in the days before wire and tape recording, and he began recording jazz from radio broadcasts on plastic-coated paper discs.

When he went to Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Eisenberg was hired by a Cincinnati radio station and Columbia Records. "My best gig," he said was to record Dave Brubeck for the *Jazz Goes To College* series. "All of the material from the University of Cincinnati, I recorded on a Magnacorder tape machine. I set up the microphones, listened as they were warming up, set the mics [volume] and went and sat down and

watched the concert. It was incredible!"

After becoming a rabbi, Eisenberg served as an air force chaplain. He began recording all of the jazz artists who entertained at Lackland and Keesler Air Force bases, where he was stationed.

"I taped everybody I could," he said, "everybody from the Buddy Morrow band to Louis Armstrong and Jack Teagarden. You name 'em. If they were there in the South in the 1950s, I got them."

In November of 1958, the Stan Kenton Orchestra played a four-hour dance at the Keesler Air Force Base. "I set up four microphones and just let it rip," he recalled. Eisenberg's private recording of the Kenton performance was later released on a compact disc.

Over the years, Eisenberg recorded countless jazz artists. He was not sure how many. "I must have a hundred tapes of live performances that I taped," he said. "I did a lot of stuff for Hampton and some for Harry James. I recorded them for the bandleaders mostly."

He said he believed his live recordings of live performances were far superior to carefully-engineered studio recordings. "The studio recordings, even the best ones," he said, "are absolutely dead. They don't have the proper ambiance. And the feeling of the live music from the live musicians, even when they made mistakes," he said, "was much, much better than the beautifully-engineered recordings of the time."

Eisenberg was also critical of recordings made with dozens of microphones and later mixed by engineers. "With those," he said, "I feel that what I'm getting is a fake. The engineer is making the music, not the band. That hurts because it shouldn't be the engineer's choice as to what goes on the recording."

When he became the rabbi of a congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eisenberg continued his long interest in playing clarinet. He played for four or five years with a group that included a banker and teachers. His last gig as a clarinetist, he said proudly was with trumpeter Bobby Hackett and trombonist Vic Dickenson.

Eisenberg came to Cleveland in 1971. "I was with (Rabbi) Arthur Lelyveld at Fairmount Temple," he said, "and there was no time for collecting. I spent 70 hours a week visiting people, working with them, teaching and preaching." Later, Eisenberg became the founding rabbi of Temple Israel Ner Tamid on Lander Road.

"Now that I have retired," said Eisenberg, "I'm going back to sort through my collection."

With an enormous collection of jazz that he recorded, Rabbi Eisenberg plays some of his tapes for friends but he flatly refuses to sell them. "We listen to them and we

share them and we don't sell them – *for any amount of money!!*" He explained his philosophy: "I recorded this for posterity, not to make money. I was never interested in making money from it. I wanted to be sure, in the Mosaic tradition, that I wrote down 'the words of God' – the music and excitement of these good musicians."

Rabbi Eisenberg also said, "Jazz is like a religion. It's beautiful, it's lovely, it's expressive. And a good musician is praying. He's praying that he hits the notes and that people listen and like what he is doing."

## Jazz painter Raymond Farris

When Miles Davis died in September of 1991, there was hanging in his home in California a portrait of him painted by Cleveland drummer and artist Raymond Farris.



**Raymond Farris**

"After meeting and keeping in contact with Miles," said Farris, "I gave him a portrait of himself, which was hanging in his Malibu home. It was a painting of Miles on a coin and it had the inscription, 'In Miles We Trust.'"

That unusual portrait of Davis by Farris was not the only copy. Farris said, "Freddie Hubbard had another of my Miles Davis acrylic oils hanging in his home in Hollywood Hills."

For painter and jazz drummer Farris, there was always a definite connection between his visual art and his music. "Without a doubt," he said, "They are both very creative media, involving individual self-expression and improvisation."

Davis had been Farris' hero since he was a child and his brother began bringing home jazz records, "and there was something about that music that I could never get out of my mind," said Farris.

He went to East Tech High School and studied drums with former Stan Kenton arranger Phil Rizzo at his Modern Jazz School in Cleveland Heights and with the percussionist of the Cleveland Orchestra at the Cleveland Music School Settlement. By 1960, Farris found himself playing jazz drums with such Cleveland stand-outs as Carl Fields and Bobby Few. In 1961, Farris became part of a popular local jazz group, the East Jazz Trio that included pianist Few and bassist Cevera Jeffries, the late older brother of Dewey Jeffries.



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## About the Author

Joe Mosbrook, a television news reporter in Cleveland for 35 years, began in 1985, as a sideline, writing a series of features for the Northeast Ohio Jazz Society newsletter on Cleveland's links to jazz history. In 1988, Cleveland's public radio station, WCPN, asked him to produce radio versions of the articles. The weekly radio features included excerpts of recorded oral history interviews he conducted with dozens of Cleveland jazz musicians.

The radio features led to the first edition of the *Cleveland Jazz History* book published by the Northeast Ohio Jazz Society in 1993. It was the first attempt to chronicle Cleveland jazz history in book form. He was also asked to write the local jazz section for the *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* as well as Internet versions of the local jazz features for the *Cleveland, the New American City* web site.



Joe Mosbrook

Mosbrook began his broadcasting career while majoring in English at Lafayette College. His first radio broadcasts on the college station were jazz shows.

Since coming to Cleveland in 1967, Mosbrook covered most of the major news events in Northeast Ohio for three and a half decades for WKYC-TV, anchored NBC Radio Network newscasts, and reported on NBC's *Today* and *Nightly News* broadcasts. He received several TV Emmys, a Distinguished Service Award from the Society of Professional Journalists, and was inducted into the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences' prestigious Silver Circle.

He also served for ten years as vice president and newsletter editor of the Northeast Ohio Jazz Society, as a member of the board of trustees of the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, and as president of the Cleveland local of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists.



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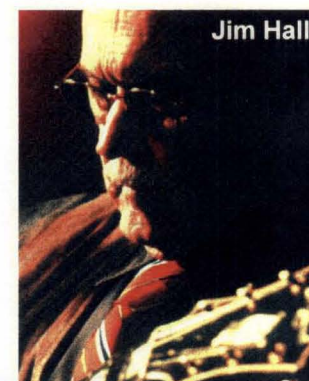
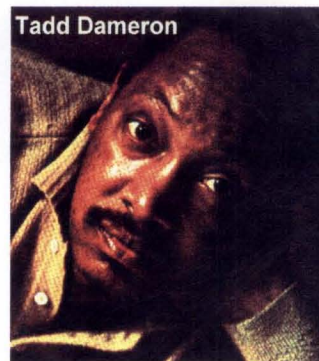
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