The recordings of Snoozer Quinn, legendary guitar player
by Tor Magnusson and Don Peak

Introduction
Snoozer Quinn (r.n. Edwin McIntosh Quinn), guitarist, violinist and vocalist. Born October 18, 1906, at McComb, Miss.; died from tuberculosis in New Orleans, Louisiana, in May 1949 (ref. 1; not 1952 as stated elsewhere).

As a child he played mandolin and violin before he at the age of seven took up the guitar. In a few years he was playing professionally in a local trio in Bogalusa. In his teens he worked with Paul English Traveling Show in a band led by drummer Jack Wilrich, then played in Claude Blanchard's and Mart Britt's orchestras. In 1924 he worked with cornet player Johnny Wiggs in Peck Kelly's Jazz Band, "Peck's Bad Boys", at the Washington-Youree Hotel in Shreveport. From late 1925 through 1928 Quinn played in and around New Orleans.

Quinn's most famous engagement undoubtedly was with Paul Whiteman, even though it was of short duration. According to Sudhalter
et al. (ref. 11) Quinn was hired by Whiteman on October 28, 1928; however, a local journal dated February 1929 (ref. 3) reports that Quinn "left last month for New York city, where he will join Paul Whiteman." In May 1929 Quinn was back in New Orleans; on May 10 he was visiting the city of Mandeville with the Red Cap Orchestra (ref. 4).

In his later professional years Quinn played guitar and violin and sang scat vocals in bands led by Earl Crumb, frequently at the Beverly Gardens (ref. 5). Earl Crumb had been the drummer and leader of the New Orleans Owls in the 1920's, but Quinn never played with the Owls (ref. 13) as sometimes has been stated.

Over the years people have made comparisons between Snoozer Quinn and Eddie Lang, and claims have been made that Quinn was superior to Lang. Regarding these things, Wiggs (ref. 14) writes that "People make the mistake of comparing Snoozer with Eddie Lang but their styles are entirely different. Lang was a great orchestral guitar player and so was Snoozer Quinn. But on solos, Lang featured the single note and he had a nice, full, round tone. On the other hand, Snoozer didn't play one note but played the guitar like a piano with at least three notes in the treble, and the bass was going all the time."

Rust (ref. 10) also brings up the comparison and writes that "He [Quinn] made very few records of any kind on which to base the claim made for him that he was superior to Eddie Lang, these being accompaniments to country-style singer Jimmy Davis for Victor in 1931, and some adequate and sporadic appearances with the Whiteman orchestra."

As the following discography shows, Snoozer Quinn made quite a number of recordings in addition to those mentioned by Rust. Quinn's 1948 recordings are of very high class, and if he could play that well at the end of his life, and in the later stages of tuberculosis, then he must have been exceptionally good in his prime.

Recordings:

**SNOOZER QUINN** (Guitar Solos)

BVE 42345-1 "SNOOZER'S" BLUES
BVE 42345-2 (Quinn)
BVE 42346-1 TIGER RAG
BVE 42346-2
BVE 42346-3
BVE 42347-1 THAT'LL GET IT - Stomp
BVE 42347-2 (Quinn)
BVE 42348-1 RAMBLING BLUES
BVE 42348-2 (Quinn)
BVE 42348-3

San Antonio, TX, May 21, 1928
[78] Victor unissued

Note: information from the Victor files, "Recording Book" page 6671-A.

Un traced recordings
"Then Snoozer told me he had cut about eight sides for Columbia in Houston." (Wiggs, ref. 14).

Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra

In an article on Quinn (ref. 12), John Wiggs writes that when Paul Whiteman first heard Snoozer Quinn, he "was hired on the spot, and Whiteman promptly buried him under a million reeds, fiddles and brasses, hardly to be heard any more except at those musician's parties. ... Some of Snoozer's recorded work finally did reach the market among a few Whiteman records of 1929.
1928, through May 16, 1929 (at the time for the last mentioned date, Quinn was, however, back in New Orleans; see above).

We have listened carefully to all the issued Whiteman recordings from the pertinent period, and, with the exception of "Blue Hawaii" (mtx 148085), there is no guitar audible. The guitar on "Blue Hawaii" is a steel guitar, and we judge it unlikely that this is played by Quinn. The conclusion thus is that although he was employed by Whiteman for several months, Quinn is not present on any of the recordings by the Whiteman orchestra.

More untraced recordings

"... Beiderbecke, Trumbauer and the others decided that they must have a recording session without delay. Snoozer had been singing along in his peculiar sort of way, a humming accompaniment to his guitar playing somewhat in the fashion of the later-day Slam Stewart, and they wanted to put that on wax. Snoozer's memory is not exact, but he believes that the session was arranged for Columbia. He recalls that four sides were made, including "Singin' the Blues", which had been recorded a couple of years earlier by Bix and Tram for Okeh. On each side he did a humming chorus, but he remembers none of the other titles. And he remembers only Bix and Trumbauer among the other musicians who took part. The records were never released." (Wiggs, ref. 12).

Paul Whiteman Presents Bee Palmer with the Frank Trumbauer Orchestra

Bee Palmer, vocal, with Bix Beiderbecke, co / Bill Rank, tb / Irving Friedman, cl & as / Frankie Trumbauer, C-melody sax / Charles Strickfaden, as / Lennie Hayton, p / Snoozer Quinn, g / Min Leibrook, tu / George Marsh, d.

W 147770-3 DON'T LEAVE ME, DADDY [Joe Verges] New York, January 10, 1929 Columbia unissued [78]
W 147771-3 SINGIN' THE BLUES (Till My Daddy Comes Home) [Sam M. Lewis - Joe Young - Con Conrad - J. Russel Robinson] Columbia unissued [78]
Note: A tape from tests (takes unknown) of the above recordings plays as follows:
(147770-1) — 1st chorus (16 bars) vocal, 2nd chorus (16+2 bars) sax, modulation (2 bars) piano, verse (16 bars) vocal, 3rd chorus (16 bars) vocal, coda (8 bars) vocal; and (147771-1) — intro (4 bars) band, 1st chorus (32 bars) saxes, modulation (2 bars) sax, 2nd chorus (32 bars) vocal, 3rd chorus (32 bars) scat vocal.
The cornet player has been suggested (ref. 9) to be Andy Secrest. However, according to Philip Evans (personal communication), Secrest did not join the Whiteman band until January 27, 1929.

Note: On February 14, 1929, WILLARD ROBISON recorded two titles, "We'll Have A New Home" (W147845) and "Plodding Along" (W147846). These are listed by Rust (ref. 10) with a personnel including "Snoozer Quinn (?)", g. There is, however, no guitar on these recordings, and thus no Snoozer Quinn.

Frankie Trumbauer and his Orchestra

The Trumbauer sessions of March 8, April 17, and April 30, 1929 have in various discographical works (see e.g. ref. 9, 10, 11) been listed with either Snoozer Quinn or Eddie Lang as the guitarist. Several arguments speak in favour of Snoozer Quinn:

1) It seems that Frankie Trumbauer (together with Bix Beiderbecke) was the one who introduced Quinn to Paul Whiteman, and thus Trumbauer was in a way responsible for bringing Quinn to New York. It would then be logical that Trumbauer employed Quinn for his recording sessions.
2) For the 1929 period, Frankie Trumbauer mainly used musicians from the Paul Whiteman orchestra for his recordings. Again, it would be logical if Snoozer Quinn was employed for the Trumbauer dates of March 8 and April 17, 1929 (and possibly also on the April 30, 1929, session) as Quinn at that time was a member of the Whiteman organization.

3) Although there are no guitar solos on these recordings, the guitar is prominently featured, e.g. behind the vocal in "Futuristic rhythm" and behind the clarinet solo in "Raisin' the roof". Also, the verses on "Raisin' the roof" (coming after the first chorus) and on "Wait till you see ma Cherie" (coming directly after the four bar introduction) are played by guitar in harmony with violin. These pieces of guitar work are played in a style more fluent than that which is normally associated with Lang.

However, Philip Evans, co-author of the Bix book (ref. 11), reports (personal communications) that when he did the interviews for the above mentioned book, it was Roy Bargy's view that Quinn did not appear on the recording sessions with Trumbauer; this sentiment seemed to be shared with Bill Rank and Irving Friedman when they were approached about the matter. Philip Evans also refers to a conversation with Johnny Wiggs, who said that Quinn told him of only doing the Bee Palmer date with Bix, and maybe a couple of other things with Whiteman.

It seems that we have to accept the statements made by several of the musicians who were present at these recording sessions. Thus we have to conclude that Snoozer Quinn is not present on the Trumbauer sessions of March 8, April 17, and April 30, 1929.

Vocal // BING CROSBY
Vocal, accomp. by Matty Malneck, v / Roy Bargy, p / Snoozer Quinn, g.

W 148073-3 MY KINDA LOVE
(Trent and Ahlert) [78]
W 148074-3 TILL WE MEET
(FioRito and Davis) [78]

New York, March 14, 1929
Columbia 1773-D,
Columbia [E] DB 2037
Columbia 1773-D,
Columbia [E] DB 2036

Note: above two recordings were reissued on a number of LP records: Epic EE 22013/4, Epic CE2E201, Columbia Special Products P413153, Jonzo Records JZ-7, and probably others.
Vocal // TOMMY WEIR
Vocal, accomp. by Matty Malneck, v / Roy Bargy, p / Snoozer Quinn, g.
New York, March 14, 1929
W 148075-3 DREAM MOTHER
(Burke, Lewis and Sherman)[78] Columbia 1781-D
Note: On March 14, 1929, were also recorded two titles by PATSY YOUNG (= Annette Hanshaw), "Button Up Your Overcoat" (W148076) and "I Want To Be Bad" (W148077). The accompaniment does not include guitar, and thus Snoozer Quinn is not on these recordings.

Vocal // WILLARD ROBISON / & HIS DEEP RIVER / ORCHESTRA
Willard Robison, vocal, accomp. by Harry Goldfield (?), tp / Chester Hazlett, cl & bcl / Matty Malneck, v / Kurt Dieterle, Mischa Russell, or John Bowman, v / Charles Gaylord, viola / own piano / Snoozer Quinn, g / Mike Trafficante (?), b.
W 148078-2 A GARDEN IN THE RAIN
(Gibbons and Dyrenforth)[78] Columbia 1772-D
W 148079-4 BLUE HAWAII
(Baer, Caesar and Schuster)[78] Columbia 1772-D
Note: On May 15, 1929, Frankie Trumbauer's orchestra recorded two titles in New York, "What a Day!" (W148537-3) and "Alabamy Snow" (W148538-4), issued as by the MASON-DIXON ORCHESTRA on Columbia 1861-D. These recordings are listed by Rust (ref. 10) and by Sudhalter (ref. 11) with a personnel including Snoozer Quinn. This is obviously in error, as Quinn at this time had returned to New Orleans (ref. 4).

Note: On May 19 and 20, 1930, Jimmie Davis recorded seven titles for the Victor company. The recordings were made in Memphis, Tennessee, and Davis was accompanied by two guitarists, whose

identities are not shown in the Victor files. Stephen Calt (ref. 2) credits Snoozer Quinn as one of the guitarists, while Tony Russell (ref. 7) attributes the guitar playing to Ed "Dizzy Head" Schaffer and Oscar "Buddy" Woods. Russell's judgement is based on the fact that the above named guitarists recorded in Memphis on May 21, 1930, as a duo billed as the Shreveport Home Wreckers. We are inclined to agree with Tony Russell's judgement. Eddie Schaffer being nicknamed "Dizzy Head" (see above) opens up the possibility that Ed Schaffer and "Dizzy" Head (see sessions of May 27 and 28, 1931) are one and same person. It should be pointed out, however, that the Victor files give his name as "Dizzy" Head, and that Wiggs (ref. 13) mentions him as Harry Head.

Jimmie Davis / Singing with guitars by / "Snoozer" Quinn and "Buddy" Jones [a]
The Victor files, "Recording Book" page 8287-A, read as follows: DAVIS, JIMMIE (Mr. Peer, present) (Vocal Solos with 2 Guitars ("Snoozer" Quinn & "Buddy" Jones).

BVE 69352-2 HOBO'S WARNING
Comp; Davis & Jones[78] unissued
BVE 69353-2 BURY ME IN OLD KENTUCKY
Comp; Jimmie Davis[78] unissued; remade (mtx 59064)
November 4, 1932
BVE 69354-2 THE GAMBLER'S RETURN
Comp; Jimmie Davis[78] unissued; remade (mtx 59066)
November 4, 1932
BVE 69355-2 WILD AND RECKLESS HOBO
(Davis - Jones)[78] Victor 23628-B [a]
LP] RCA Victor LPV-548
BVE 69356-2 THE DAVIS LIMITED
(J. Davis)[78] Victor 23601-B [a],
[LP] Bluebird B-6249-B [a]
[LP] RCA Victor LPV-532
Note: "(Time 1:30 to 6:00 PM)". RCA Victor LPV-532 is entitled "The Railroad in Folksong", released in September 1966, and LPV-548 is entitled "Native American Ballads", released in December 1967.

**Jimmie Davis / Singing with guitars by / "Snoozer" Quinn and "Buddy" Jones  [a]**

**Jimmie Davis / Singing with guitar by "Dizzy" Head  [b]**

**Jimmie Davis / Singing with guitars by / "Dizzy" Head and "Snoozer" Quinn  [c]**

**Jimmie Davis / Singing with guitars by / "Snoozer" Quinn and "Dizzy" Head  [d]**

The Victor files, "Recording Book" page 8290, read as follows: JIMMIE DAVIS (Mr. Peer, present) (Vocal Solos with 2 Guitars ("Snoozer" Quinn & "Buddy" Jones); under the second title: (Note:-- Acc by "Dizzy" Head (Guitar); under the third title: Note:-- 2 Guitar acc. by "Dizzy" Head & "Snoozer" Quinn); under the fourth title: Note:-- 2 Guitar acc. by "Dizzy" Head & "Snoozer" Quinn); under the fifth title: (Acc - same as above sel); and under the sixth title: (Acc - same as above sel). Thus the accompaniment is by Snoozer Quinn, Buddy Jones and 'Dizzy' Head as noted after each title. Charlotte, NC, May 27, 1931

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<td>BVE 69359-1</td>
<td>SHE'S A HUM-DUM DINGER Part 2 (From Dingersville)  [g SQ&amp;DH]</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>[c]</td>
<td>Victor 23587-B [a], Bluebird B-5751-A [a]</td>
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<td>BVE 69359-2</td>
<td>SHE'S A HUM-DUM DINGER Part 2 (From Dingersville)  [g SQ&amp;DH]</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>[d]</td>
<td>unissued on 78rpm record Bear Family [G] BFX15285</td>
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<td>BVE 69360-2</td>
<td>MARKET HOUSE BLUES  [g SQ&amp;DH]</td>
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<td>[e]</td>
<td>Bear Family [G] BFX15285</td>
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Note: "(Time 9:00 to 1:00 & 2:00 to 4:00 PM)". For the last title the label erroneously gives "Buddy" Jones as one of the guitarists. Mtx 69357 has been reported as issued also on Bluebird B-5751-B; this record has, however, a different recording ("Sewing Machine Blues", mtx 70657), made on February 2, 1932. Old Timey XI13, called "Steel Guitar Classics", was released in 1973 or 1974; Bear Family [G] BFX15285 is entitled "Barnyard Stomp", released in early 1989.

**Jimmie Davis / Singing with guitars by / "Snoozer" Quinn and "Dizzy" Head  [a]**

The Victor files, "Recording Book" page 8290-A, read as follows: DAVIS, JIMMIE (Mr. Peer, present) (Vocal Solos with 2 Guitars ("Snoozer" Quinn & "Dizzy" Head); and after the second title: Note:-- Guitar acc. by Quinn).Thus the accompaniment is by Snoozer Quinn and 'Dizzy' Head as noted after each title. Charlotte, NC, May 28, 1931

| BVE 69367-2  | THERE'S EVIL IN YE, CHILDREN, / GATHER 'ROUND  [g SQ&DH] | 78 | [a], Bluebird B-5319-A [a], RCA [G] BFX15125 |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----------------|
|              | (Eddie Quinn) Sunrise S-3400-A [a]                      | [a] | [a] |-----------------|

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**THE JAZZ ARCHIVIST**

**VOLUME VII:1-2**
BVE 69368-2 PEA PICKIN' PAPA [g SQ] [78] Victor 23573-B [a]
(J. Davis) [LP] Bear Family [G] BFX15285

Note *(Time 10:00 to 12:00 AM)*. For the last title the label erroneously gives both guitarists as accompanists, when actually it is Snoozer Quinn only. RCA [G] BFX15125, "Rockin' Blues", was issued in 1983 by Bear Family with RCA labels.

SNOOZER QUINN - Guitar [a]
SNOOZER QUINN - Guitar / JOHNNY WIGGS - Cornet [b]

No. 3 MELANCHOLY BABY
(Time 2:35) [no composer credit]
No. 7 YOU TOOK ADVANTAGE / OF ME
(Time 2:50) (Rogers - Hart)
No. 10 SINGING THE BLUES
(Time 3:45) [no composer credit]
No. 12 SNOOZER'S TELEPHONE BLUES
(Time 3:20) (Quinn)

[78] WIGGS, INC. 2100-B [b]
New Orleans, 1948
[78] WIGGS, INC. 2101-A [a]
[78] WIGGS, INC. 2101-B [b]
[78] WIGGS, INC. 2100-A [a]

Samples of labels designed by Johnny Wiggs for his Snoozer Quinn release. Used with permission of Mrs. Betty Hyman.
The entire session was later issued on an LP record as follows:

**THE LEGENDARY SNOOZER QUINN / with JOHNNY WIGGS**

**SIDE ONE**  
1. Nobody's Sweetheart [co JW]  
2. Georgia On My Mind / Smoke Gets In Your Eyes  
3. Singin' The Blues #1 [co JW]  
4. Singin' The Blues #2 [co JW]  
5. You Took Advantage Of Me  
6. Snoozer's Wanderings

**SIDE TWO**  
1. Snoozer's Telephone Blues  
2. Clarinet Marmalade [co JW]  
3. Out Of Nowhere  
4. After You've Gone [co JW]  
5. Lover Come Back To Me / On The Alamo  
6. My Melancholy Baby [co JW]

Note: "[The records] were made on an acetate cutting machine before tape recordings came out. They were made in the Nurse's room on Snoozer's ward at the hospital where he was a patient suffering from advanced tuberculosis. I had to sweep the threads off the cutting needle and the nurses and orderlies were opening the door to see what all the racket was about. I was trying to keep the door shut and running the machine and playing the cornet with one hand. I was playing with a cold lip after being off the cornet for eighteen years and I didn't have a chance to warm up. I'm not proud of my cornet playing, but there was too much of the great Snoozer on the duets to keep me from releasing all the tunes." (Wiggs, ref. 14). As Wiggs doesn't mention these recordings in his article published in May 1948 (ref. 12), it is assumed that they were made after that date.

The Fat Cat Jazz Records FCJ104 was reviewed in Down Beat (ref. 5) where the record was given a rating of five stars.

Snoozer and friend (possibly Angelo Capraro) in Texas in 1927. From the George and Abbie Kay Collection.
Acknowledgements:

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References:


Comments, corrections, additions, etc., to the above discography will be gratefully received. Please write to: Tor Magnusson, P.O. Box 25065, S-40031 GOTEBOG, Sweden, or Don Peak, P.O. Box 2161, Hollywood, CA 90078, U.S.A.

Snoozer's lifelong friend, John Wigginton Hyman (Johnny Wiggs) in 1959. From the Al Rose Collection.
The Manuel Perez Band at Willie Washington's Pythian Temple Roof Garden in August 1923. In addition to Perez, jazzmen Johnny St. Cyr and Willie J. Humphrey were featured with the band (on balcony above dancers).

Dancing Hot and Sweet: New Orleans Jazz in the 1920s

"The story of music in New Orleans must begin with dancing."

New Orleans has always been a dancing town, and it is no wonder that jazz entered the local scene "feet first", as a dance music. Whether on the streets in the "second line," at neighborhood dance halls, on the riverboats, or for "script" dances at Tulane University, jazz musicians sought to move an audience in the most direct sense, making dancers part of the action and feeding on the energy. This dynamic came early, as trombonist Bill Matthews affirmed in his recollections of Buddy Bolden for the Hogan Jazz Archive: "Everybody was crazy about Bolden when he'd blow a waltz, schottische or old low down blues. He was the sweetest trumpet player in the world... Bunk Johnson got his style following Buddy with his sweetness, but could never play rough and loud like Bolden." Unlike later jazz critics who praised "hot" and scorned "sweet", New Orleans musicians valued the difference because the dancers wanted variety. In a given night at Odd Fellows Hall, Bolden might offer waltzes, polkas, and quadrilles to his early crowd; upon their departure (usually around midnight), the music would turn "rough and ratty" for the "night" people who preferred slow drags, shags, and belly rubs. The mixed fare performed by Bolden's
proto-jazz band and the less than legitimate style in which it was rendered were characteristic of the New Orleans musician's desire to give the public what it wanted. Also apparent, however, was a divergence of taste between young and old as a new generation demanded greater freedom and excitement in music and dance. The formalism of the nineteenth century was yielding to a vigorous vernacular sensibility, evident in the demand for novelty and a willingness to experiment in order to achieve it.

When the popular dance team of Vernon and Irene Castle published Modern Dancing in 1914, they could scarcely have foreseen what the Fates held in store for Terpsichore in the years to come. As notable dance authorities, their intention was to provide a "state of the art" manual of dance etiquette for the average American as a means of "preserving youth, prolonging life, and acquiring grace, elegance, and beauty." If the Tango, the Castle's newest sensation, degenerated into "acrobatic display" or "salacious suggestion" it would be "the fault of the dancers and not of the dance." A decade later, the "flaming youth" of the Jazz Age had much to answer for as they flaunted the Shimmy, the Charleston, and the Black Bottom, choosing unrestricted self-expression over propriety.

In this transition, New Orleans jazz bands played a major role. But music suited to local dance styles did not necessarily translate readily in other towns. Cornetist Ray Lopez, with Tom Brown's Band from Dixieland at Lambs Cafe in Chicago in May 1915, remembered some awkward moments: "Our debut was pitiful. Those Yankees wouldn't listen or dance. We took turns talking to the customers. 'Folks this is New Orleans music. Hot music. People down South dance. Come on and try. Have fun.'" The Original Dixieland Jazz Band was more successful in January 1917 at Reisenwebers in New York, but as Nick LaRocca recalled, the response to the band's opening number was "Tell those farmers to go home!" Only after the proprietor had explained to the customers that the music was for dancing did the situation improve. Gradually, the ODJB succeeded because they worked to adapt their "rough and ready" style of playing to the fox trot rhythms which appealed to dancers in places like Chicago and New York. Another New Orleans outfit, the Original Creole Orchestra, had been the first to leave the city in 1914 but sought fame on the vaudeville stage, thus eliminating a dancing audience. The ODJB's draw as a dance band led to their famous recordings for Victor in 1917, which heralded the dawn of the Jazz Age and rejuvenated a boom in record sales which had begun four years earlier with the popularity of the Tango. Between 1914 and 1921 annual production of records jumped from 25 to 100 million, owing largely to the desire of Americans to test new dance steps in the privacy of their living rooms before venturing out in public. Whereas the dances of the nineteenth century had required certain minimums of deportment and training, utilitarian steps like the fox trot were comparatively more versatile and accessible. One did not necessarily have to be svelte to fox trot, and it was not by coincidence that the dance came to be known as "the businessman's bounce." From the fox trot to the Charleston, jazz dancing had something for everybody, and the dance
mania which swept the nation in the 1920s, with attendant record sales, seemed to prove it.

New Orleans jazzmen factored dance into their repertoires in various ways. On the Strecker's steamers, members of Fate Marable's bands were actually tested by company officials on their ability to execute dance tempsos precisely; "Captain Joe Strecker was very particular about music on the excursion boats. He would attend rehearsals, tap his feet with his watch in his hands, and if the band failed to keep the proper tempo (70 beats per minute for fox trots and 90 for one steps) somebody got hell."

The New Orleans Owls took a more relaxed approach. As leader and saxophonist Benjie White explained, during rehearsals at the West End Roof Garden "half the band would rehearse while the other half danced with college girls." Albert Nicholas joined King Oliver's Dixie Syncopators in Chicago in 1926, a band made up mostly of New Orleans men. In his interview with Richard B. Allen for the Hogan Jazz Archive in 1972, Nicholas described how Oliver would instruct the band to play softly in certain passages to incorporate the sounds of dancer's feet for percussive effect. Each in its own way, these bands sought to cater to the dancing public for fun and profit.

Demand for "hot" and "sweet" dance bands did much to improve economic conditions for New Orleans musicians, especially when debutante balls on St. Charles Avenue began to rely heavily on the services of A.J. Piron's New Orleans orchestra, the New Orleans Owls, and Celestin's Original Tuxedo Jazz Orchestra. Piron's reputation as a dance band leader was such that he received an offer to accompany the Castles (which he declined). After two trips to New York to record for Victor in 1923 and 1924, the band returned to become one of New Orleans' favorite society dance orchestras at venues like the Pythian Temple Roof Garden (which Piron bought with royalties from his compositions and recordings) and Suburban Gardens. In a similar vein, trombonist William "Baba" Ridgley of the Original Tuxedo Jazz Orchestra remembered how his income increased from $1.50 per night in Storyville to $25 for a debutante ball, another indication of how social acceptance of jazz as a dance music helped it to rise above earlier connotations of vice and poverty.

Ironically, it was the road to broad social acceptance that ultimately spelled the end of the dance connection for jazz. By the late 1930s jazz critics were organizing concerts, such as John Hammond's "Spirituals to Swing" extravaganzas in 1938 and 1939 at Carnegie Hall, in an effort
to place jazz on an equal footing with classical music. The advent of bebop and progressive jazz in the mid-1940s accelerated the trend toward "jazz as art," and when Bunk Johnson's New Orleans Band debuted at the Stuyvesant Casino in New York in the fall of 1945, its musicians wondered what they were doing wrong when the assembled jazz intelligentsia just sat and listened. Today, from Lincoln Center to Preservation Hall, jazz is regarded primarily as a concert music, but its history as a dance music reminds us that even an art form can be fun when invested with the right spirit and rhythm.

Bruce Boyd Raeburn

Sources

LaRocca, Nick. Interview by Richard B. Allen, 21 May 1958, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.
Matthews, Bill. Interview by Ralph Collins and William Russell, 10 March 1959, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.
Ridgley, William "Baba". Interview by Ralph Collins and William Russell, 2 June 1959, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

In his interview for the Hogan Jazz Archive in 1972, Albert Nicholas (third from right, seated) described how band leader Joe Oliver instructed his Dixie Syncopators to play softly enough "to hear the feet of the dancers."
An Appreciation for an Old and Good Friend.

Russell William Wagner was an old and good friend who died August 9, 1992 after a career which pushed him forward and beyond the recognition of most jazz authorities. I knew him as Mr. Wagner, but then he became Bill Russell and I never discovered the logic behind his name change, but I'm sure he had some. In the early 1970s we were both living in an old house in the French Quarter (due to the endless generosity of the late Allan Jaffe) and working on our various music projects when the following incident occurred.

You see the bird in this picture? This is Bill's notorious "Tweety Bird" (a.k.a. "Pretty Boy") in behalf of which he made many an unsubstantiated claim. This overprivileged parakeet had been trained to put fairly complex sentences together and reportedly able, in an unbelievably soft voice, to make a few intelligent pronouncements. Now, it was clear that the bird's musings would have a very limited audience but Russell never hesitated to attribute the most complex sayings to this sport-model sparrow. Unfortunately by his own enthusiasm Bill convinced others of the bird's mental achievements. There were even some people who sought Tweety out as a psychiatrist, or worse. So it's no wonder that many have questioned how the bird merits the space occupied in this sketch.

I drew it while Tweety and Bill were keeping house in the apartment next to mine, at the request of the publisher of an English jazz journal who needed a picture of Bill. I would from time to time stop by to see how they were doing. Never having been an aviculturist, as soon as I joined them I repeatedly heard talk about this mini-vulture's intellectual prowess. One night, while visiting, I waited until all was quiet and tried to sneak by the bird, only to hear him say in his tiny voice: "My name is Pretty Boy. I live at 600 Chartres Street in New Orleans with Bill Russell." At this point I was so surprised that I yelled out loud, "This stupid bird doesn't even know you moved!" I took a certain satisfaction in this pronouncement, but I certainly didn't share it with Bill.

Al Rose

Bill Russell and Al Rose at Larry Borenstein's house, Thanksgiving 1980. Photo by Frank Demond, from the Al Rose Collection. Al right: portrait of Bill Russell by Al Rose.