A newsletter of the William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive
Volume XXVIII, 2015

Contributors: Björn Bärnheim, Jerry Brock, Colin Hancock, Shane Lief, Wayne D. Shirley, Caroline Vézina
Volume XXVIII, 2015

© Tulane University Libraries, 2015. Permission to reproduce in whole and in part must be obtained in writing from Tulane University Libraries.

ISSN 1085-8415

In this Issue:

2 Did Louis Armstrong “Flee” from Chicago in 1931? 
  by Björn Bärnheim

15 Singing, Shaking, and Parading at the Birth of New Orleans 
  by Shane Lief

26 The Bolden Cylinder Project 
  by Colin Hancock

38 Jazz à la Creole 
  by Caroline Vézina

46 Baby Doll Addendum and Mardi Gras ‘49 
  by Jerry Brock

49 Transcribing Bessie Smith 
  by Wayne D. Shirley

55 In the Archive

57 Who Was Benny Clement? 
  by the Hogan Jazz Archive Staff

64 Curator’s Commentary 
  by Bruce Boyd Raeburn

Cover photograph: Joseph “Bat” Mosley with the Young Tuxedo Brass Band, New Orleans, February 1957. Photo by Tony Standish, who recently donated to the Hogan Jazz Archive a selection of the photographs that he took during his 1957 jazz pilgrimage from Australia to New Orleans.

Back cover photograph: New Orleans jazzman Benny Clement.
Did Louis Armstrong “Flee” from Chicago in 1931? What Is True and What Is Fiction?

By Björn Bärnheim

Many books have been written about the life of Louis Armstrong. When you compare them you will find a lot of different versions of the same events. Consider what happened to Armstrong in the spring of 1931, especially when he returned to Chicago in March after a year in California, where he played as a guest star with various orchestras and made eight recording sessions. For decades writers have tried to describe what they believe to be a true account of what happened in Chicago that spring. By reading African-American newspapers from the actual period - in this case the Chicago Defender and the Louisiana Weekly - you can compare what the biographers have said with what the papers reported at the time the events actually took place.

A good story seems to get better each time it is told. Armstrong was well aware of this. According to Terry Teachout: “Armstrong liked nothing better than to tell a good story on himself, and the story of what happened to him one April night at the Showboat was one of his best, trotted out regularly and retold with the same consistency that he brought to the playing of his favorite solos.” After reading several books and comparing their accounts of Armstrong’s adventures of March to June 1931, it is a good question to ask whether misinformation has been given knowingly or by accident or by simply borrowing from what other authors wrote in earlier books and magazines?

What Have the Authors Written in Their Books?

The following is a summary of what has been written about this period. The books consulted are given in chronological order by date of publication:

*Swing That Music* by Louis Armstrong (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936). This is Armstrong’s first autobiography.

Page 96: “For about six weeks, in the spring of 1931, I had this band in the Show Boat cabaret, on the Loop, and then I took them out on the longest tour I had ever made to that time.”
Note: Armstrong does not mention any threats made against him or that anything happened to force him to break his contract and “run away” from Chicago in April 1931.

Horn of Plenty: The Story of Louis Armstrong by Robert Goffin (New York: Allen, Towne & Heath, Inc., 1947). This book is based on a memoir, in the form of four or five notebooks, which Armstrong prepared for Goffin in 1943-1944, and which are reproduced in a chapter titled “The Goffin Notebooks” in Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words. Regarding the memoir, Armstrong advised in a letter to Goffin: “There may be several spots that you may want to straighten out - or change around ... Whatever you do about it is alright with me.”

Pages 269-270:

Then it was time for Louis to leave the West, for his latest manager, Johnny Collins, had signed up for a week’s engagement at the Regal Theater in Chicago. It was a triumph! People fought for seats. Youngsters formed an endless queue at the box-office early in the morning. After the week was up, Louis took a short vacation, finding pleasure in revisiting the good old haunts of the Windy City.

One morning, Johnny Collins came to announce that they were going to have a sensational opening.

“Where?” Louis wanted to know.

“At a spot they used to call ‘My Cellar.’ It’s going to reopen in a few days. You’ll have tough going, because a young trumpeter by the name Wingy Mannone has built up a big rep there.”

“What they call the night club now?”

“Show Boat.’ And believe me, Pops, You’ll have to rock the joint.”

Louis handpicked the group that accompanied him at the Showboat: Charlie Alexander (pianist), Zelmer [sic, Zilner] Randolph (trumpeter), Preston Jackson (trombonist), George James, Al Washington, and Lester Boone (saxophonists), Johnny Lindsay (bass fiddler), Tubby Hall (drummer), and Mike McKendrick (guitarist).

Note: Armstrong opened at the Show Boat on Wednesday April 1. The engagement at the Regal Theater started April 4. At the Regal, Armstrong also appeared as an “extra Easter Attraction” with Lucky Millinder and his Cotton Club Orchestra. Zilner Randolph and Johnny Lindsay did not join the orchestra until they played a week in Detroit starting May 23!

Pages 272-274, regarding an incident at the Showboat:

“Louis, somebody wants to see you in your room!”

Louis did not even glance up but merely nodded assent. When he reached his dressing-room, he found a man with a light beard waiting for him, gun in hand.

“Do you know who I am?”

“Why-er-no.”

“I’ m Frankie Foster!”

“Dunno Frankie Foster!”

“We’ll get acquainted!” The man smiled grimly as he thrust the barrel into Louis’s ribs. “I’ve got a one-way ticket saying as how you’re leaving right quick for New York. Mr. Rockwell’s got a job for you at Connie’s Inn.”

“Oh - Mr. Collins didn’t tell me nothin’ ‘bout that!”

“Never mind Johnny Collins - Rockwell’s your boss now. Either you promise to leave this morning, or you and me’ll take a little stroll. OK?”

“No - I mean yes. Oh, sure!”

“That’s better. Now march straight out to that ‘phone. One false move and you’re a dead pigeon.”
Louis did not have to be told twice. He entered the booth, squirming under the uncomfortable pressure in the small of his back. He promised everything demanded by the suave voice speaking from New York, and was thanked cordially for his acquiescence.

An hour later Johnny Collins appeared with the police, but the man with the false whiskers had vanished.

“Louis, you’re not going to New York!” flatly declared the manager.

“I should have told you I was having a little trouble with Rockwell.”

“O.K. I ain’t goin’ to New York. But get this straight - I ain’t stayin’ in Chicago neither!”

“That’s too bad, Louis. I’ve got a wonderful offer for two months in Chicago’s finest theater.”

“Nothin’ doin’! I’d rather take a walk through the cemetery at midnight.”

Johnny Collins sighed, pulled a flask from his pocket to bolster up his courage, and concluded:

“If that’s the way it is, I’m going to sign a contract with the ‘Suburban’ down in New Orleans.”

It was nine years since Louis had been in the South. And suddenly he saw Perdido and was overpowered by the odor of spring when the magnolias break into bloom. ...

The orchestra set out immediately for the South, interrupting its journey with “one-night stands” in several midwestern towns. They crossed Indiana into Ohio, and made a longer stop in Cincinnati; then they visited the larger towns in Kentucky and Tennessee.


Page 117: “When Louis returned to Chicago in April 1931 he did take a hand in the selection of musicians for a ten-piece band which worked with him in Chicago and then in New Orleans and on tour until March 1932.”

Page 118: “When Louis left Los Angeles, after the marijuana contretemps, he went to work straight away at the Regal Theater in Chicago.”

Page 119: “In recalling the viper days Armstrong referred to going on the road with a band after a fortnight in Chicago. This is not quite accurate. His new band, which for a year had the appearance of permanency, was assembled in mid-April for an engagement at the Showboat Café, a new cabaret...”

Page 120: Here Jones and Chilton relate the infamous “Frankie Foster” story, relying mostly on Goffin’s telling of it in *Horn of Plenty*, but also mentioning the arrest of three persons, as reported in the *Chicago Defender*, April 25, 1931.


Page 224: “On the second night of the [Showboat] engagement two New York mobsters walked into the club. Armstrong remembered many years later:

‘One night this big, bad-ass hood crashes my dressing room in Chicago...’”

Page 225: “Precisely what happened next is obscure, but apparently Armstrong spent some time hiding in a phone booth below the glass...

“Collins then got the band on a train heading for Louisville, Kentucky. He managed to smuggle Louis out of Chicago a few hours later, and he and his star caught up with the train down the road.”

Two years later James Lincoln Collier published *Louis Armstrong: An American Success Story* (New York:
Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985), in which he offers a different version of what occurred on that second night at the Show Boat:

Page 124: “Louis slipped out of the club into a waiting cab, raced to the railroad station, and took the first train south. A couple of hours later Collins rounded up some more cabs, took the band to the station, and put them on a train to Louisville, Kentucky. When they arrived, they found Louis waiting there. Now Louis was in serious trouble. He could not go to New York for fear of Rockwell and his gangster friends, and he could not go to Chicago because he had skipped out on the Showboat engagement.”

_Satchmo_ by Gary Giddins (New York: Doubleday, 1992):

Pages 120-125: Here Giddins relates the Frankie Foster anecdote, giving an expanded version of what Goffin published in _Horn of Plenty_; while attributing it simply to “Goffin,” Giddins appears to have gotten his version from the “Goffin Notebooks.”


Pages 36-37:

When Armstrong returned to Chicago in 1931, rival gangs vied over the popular star, making life increasingly uncomfortable for him and his manager Johnny Collins...

Convinced it was unsafe to work in the gangster-dominated clubs of Chicago and New York, Armstrong and Collins assembled a band, hired a bus, and began a grueling ten-month tour of Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Memphis, Houston, and other smaller cities.

Note: Miller cites Jones and Chilton’s _Louis_ and Goffin’s _Horn of Plenty_ as his sources for this information.


Page 331: “In the days after [Armstrong’s] return to Chicago... Johnny Collins, who had come to Chicago with Louis, quickly found him a gig at the Regal Theater. It seemed he had landed on his feet, thanks to his new manager.

“At the conclusion of the brief Regal gig, Louis began fronting a large new band comprised of old musical comrades, mostly from New Orleans…”

Page 332: “On April 20, 28 and 29, 1931, Louis wrote, his new band ‘made some of my finest recordings with me.’”

Page 335: “Once Louis completed his recordings, Collins booked Louis and the orchestra into a nightclub called the Showboat. The opening night was a great event. The festivities were broadcast over radio station WIBC, and the show stretched on for hours as one bandleader after another came by to ‘say a few words in favor of Louie Armstrong.’”

Page 335: “As soon as he started the Showboat engagement, Louis received threats and demands for money. When he ignored them, he was approached by two local hoodlums, Joe Fiore and Emmet Ryan, who demanded he pay six thousand dollars, or they would take him for a ride.”

Page 337-338: Here Bergreen recites Gary Giddins’s variation of the “Goffin Notebooks” version of the Frankie Foster story, citing Giddins.

Page 339: “Moving swiftly to defuse the crisis, Collins hustled Louis out of Chicago within hours of the confrontation with Frankie Foster. He instantly canceled the Showboat engagement and sent the band on the road, where Louis unharmed rejoined them.”

_Just for a Thrill: Lil Hardin Armstrong, First Lady of Jazz_ by James L. Dickerson (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002):

Page 162: “Johnny Collins followed Louis to Chicago and resumed his managerial duties, booking
him at the Regal Theater. Louis put together another band and moved out of Lil’s house.”

Page 162: “After Louis’s engagement at the Regal Theater ended, Collins booked him at the Showboat, a popular white nightclub located on Chicago’s Loop. Louis put together a band consisting of Charlie Alexander on piano, Zilner Randolph on trumpet...”

Page 163: “Louis was greeted by a ‘big, burly’ white man with a beard. Louis later described him as having a beard ‘thicker than one of those boys from the House of David,’ an indication he thought his visitor might have been Jewish.”

[note: Regarding Dickerson’s speculation about Armstrong’s mention of the House of David: The House of David was a religious colony, in which men wore long hair and beards. Armstrong would have been aware of them because they sponsored a popular itinerant jazz band from within their ranks.]

Page 164: “Within hours, [Collins] had Louis and the band out on the road, touring the Midwest and Southeast with a series of one-night stands.”

_A Trumpet Around the Corner_ by Samuel Charters (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008):

Pages 289-290: “Armstrong returned to Chicago in April to spend some time with his wife Lil and to play an engagement before ecstatic audiences at the Regal Theater. He then put together a ten-piece band to begin a tour that finally, and momentarily, found its way to New Orleans. But the year’s bad vibrations caught up with him again. The band was still working at the Showboat Club in Chicago, rehearsing on the bandstand for the southern tour, and one night in late April the door of his dressing room was pushed open and he was confronted by a man who took out a pistol... Armstrong finished out the job at the Showboat Club with security guards to bring him back and forth from his apartment.”


Page 162: “Armstrong liked nothing better than to tell a good story on himself, and the story of what happened to him one April night at the Showboat was one of his best, trotted out regularly and retold with the same consistency that he brought to the playing of his favorite solos.”

Page 162-163: “So he sent this gangster, which was the toughest man in Chicago at that time, Frankie Foster, and this cat hadn’t shaved for six months.... This Frankie Foster, he’s a killer man!”


Page 90: “After a couple of nights at the Showboat, thugs showed up wielding pistols and threatened to kill Armstrong unless he agreed to come to New York and work for their boss... But Collins did Armstrong a favor by getting him away from Chicago and the threatening attentions of the New York mob. Armstrong continued to break new ground. After Collins spirited him out of Chicago, he went on an extended tour of the Midwest and the South.”

**_Louis Armstrong: Master of Modernism_** by Thomas Brothers (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014):

Page 412: “On Sunday, March 22, [Armstrong] arrived in Chicago... [H]e immediately stepped into a one-week gig at the Regal Theater, which sold out every night. After that he took a nine-day break, “having a little fun, etc.,” as he put it later. His strong memory of a nine-day vacation is notable, and we should remind ourselves how special a break like that was in a working world where even a celebrated musician hesitated to put his horn down for more than a few hours.”

Page 413: “On April 8 he opened at an after-hours, white-only walk-down called Show Boat (formerly My Cellar) at Lake and Clark Streets, inside the Loop.”
What the Newspapers Reported

A survey of the *Chicago Defender* (both “City” and “National” editions) and the *Louisiana Weekly* for the period of early March to June 1931 gives the following results where Louis Armstrong’s activities are mentioned.

Chicago Defender Press Service, “Louis Armstrong Given Thirty Days; Had Broken California’s Poison Law,” *Chicago Defender* (City Edition), March 21, 1931, page 8; (National Edition), page 1:

LOS ANGELES, March 20.--Louis Armstrong, world’s greatest trumpeter and radio and recording artist, must serve 30 days in the Los Angeles county jail for violation of the state poison act, judge sitting in department 26 of the district court ruled. Armstrong was arrested last December with Joe Pillars, drummer in Abe Lyman’s band, on charges of possession of a quantity of mariahuana. The drug comes in a powdered form and is generally mixed with tobacco in cigarettes known as “reefers.”

The famous trumpeter had been working at the Cotton club, Culver City, for 54 weeks, when his contract with Frank Sebastian, owner of the place, expired. Armstrong refused to have it renewed.

He had been booked for an eastern trip of Loew theaters and will return to Chicago April 17. His wife lives at 4025 Central Ave, Los Angeles.

A photo of Armstrong on the “Picture Page” of this same edition carried this caption: “JAILED - Louis Armstrong, world’s greatest trumpeter, was sentenced to serve 30 days in the Los Angeles county jail. He was convicted of having a quantity of marihuana, a drug product smoked in cigarettes, in his possession.”

The Associated Negro Press, “ARMSTRONG, CORNET KING, IS RELEASED; Was Sentenced To Thirty Days Instead of Six Months - Served Half Term,” *Louisiana Weekly*, March 28, 1931, page 1:

Chicago, March 28.--- Louis Armstrong, known as “the world’s greatest corne [sic, cornet] player,” arrived in this city Sunday for a week’s engagement at the Regal Theater which is to be followed by a longtime contract in a local theater.

His arrival in Chicago was somewhat expected, due to the news that he had been sentenced to six months in jail in California for smoking the poisonous marihuana cigarette. Armstrong explained that he did not get six months but only thirty days and that fifteen days of the sentence was lopped off for good behavior.

It was learned that the smoking of the Mexican cigarettes is not punishable under the narcotic laws which imposes six-month sentences, but under the statute covering poisons, the penalties for which are lighter.

The master of the cornet seems to have gone in for one of those reducing diets. Although there was just as much vigor to the old fellow, he had lost considerable of his corpulence. There was plenty of room inside his collar for the neck which once had filled it. Mr. Armstrong left his wife in the golden west.

Return to Chicago

Armstrong left California with the help of Johnny Collins, who after the marijuana incident became Louis Armstrong’s manager. Collins succeeded in getting Armstrong free and out of California, and they returned to Chicago on Sunday, March 22.

“Louis Armstrong Opens in the Loop,” *Chicago Defender* (City Edition), March 28, 1931, page 8; (National Edition), page 5:
Louis Armstrong, world's greatest trumpeter, accompanied by his manager John Collins, arrived in Chicago aboard the Chief Sunday morning from Los Angeles, where Armstrong has been playing at the Cotton club.

Armstrong, who had been convicted of violating the California poison act, received a suspended sentence of 30 days.

He has been booked to open at My Cellar, a night club in the Loop of Chicago. The band which will accompany him is composed of local musicians.

The Roseland Ballroom

The first engagement Armstrong played after his return to Chicago seems to have been an appearance at the Roseland Ballroom on Sunday, March 29, as a guest performer with Fred Avendorph’s Midnight Revelers.

Chester Nerges, “Blue Notes,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), April 4, 1931, page 8:

LOUIS ARMSTRONG, the king of cornetists, helped make it a pleasant evening for Fred Avendorph’s Midnight Revelers at the Roseland ballroom last Sunday night. Louis played “Cofessin’” and sang two choruses in his well-known style, which broke up the house. He and his band opened Show Boat inn Wednesday night.

The Showboat

On Wednesday, April 1, Louis Armstrong and his new orchestra had its premiere at the Showboat nightclub at Clark and Randolph Streets in Chicago. This engagement was contracted for six weeks.

An entry in Satchmo: The Louis Armstrong Encyclopedia describes the “Showboat Cabaret:”

Located on North Clark Street on the Chicago Loop, the Showboat was a speakeasy controlled by the Capone syndicate. Armstrong performed there in 1931, but his residency suddenly ended one night because of a dispute between two managers, Tommy Rockwell and Johnny Collins, both of whom claimed to represent Louis Armstrong. Called back to his dressing room, Armstrong found a bearded man pointing a gun at him and ordering him to leave for New York in the morning to work at Connie’s Inn - or else. The threat appeared to have come from New York-based Rockwell, and Collin’s response was to send Armstrong immediately on an extended tour throughout Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky until he, Collins, could establish firm control.

The members of the orchestra organized for this engagement were Louis Armstrong, trumpet and vocals; Preston Jackson, trombone; Lester Boone, clarinet and alto saxophone; George James, clarinet, alto, and soprano saxophones; Al Washington, tenor saxophone; Charles Alexander, piano; Mike McKendrick, guitar, and Tubby Hall, drums. Discographies claim that Mike McKendrick played banjo, but he was famous as a guitarist and the misunderstanding is probably because he played a metal guitar with a resonator and special strings sounding close to a banjo. He was also assistant manager of the orchestra. Trumpeter and arranger Zilner Randolph and bass player John Lindsay did not join the orchestra until they played in Detroit at the end of May 1931.

“Louis Takes All Laurels at Show Boat; City’s Best Tooters Pay Respects,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), Saturday, April 4, 1931, page 8:

With Guyon Naitland, acting as master of ceremonies, the Show Boat inn, Louis Armstrong’s new Windy city stronghold, located at Clark and Randolph Sts., was officially ushered in as a member of Chicago’s night life.

The program was broadcast from WIBO between 1 and 2 a.m. Thursday
morning.

The best music minds of the city were present. And Louis showed them how it was done in the best circles. Spotted in the audience and over the “mike” were Art Kassell, Charles Agnew, Johnny Naitland, Hero Collins, Louis Panico, Ben Bernie and several other noted band leaders.

Louis started out with his old stand by “I’m Confessin’” to warm up to “If I Could Be with You.” After heating the mike with his original version of the “Peanut Vendor,” the ace of trumpeters announced that he was going to do a special number in honor of the fellow musicians present. He started on “Tiger Rag” to take 10 encores.

In the band composed of local musicians are Lester Boone, George James, All Washington, reeds, Preston Jackson, trombone; Charles Alexander, piano; Rubin McKenzie [sic, McKendrick], banjo, and Fred “Tubby” Hall, drums.

Johnny Naitland jumped up, and running over to Charles Agnew, exclaimed, “That boy’s got it. For 15 years I’ve been tooting, but after hearing Louis I’ve decided to throw by [sic, my] horn away.”

Panico lauded here as the “king of trumpeters” was silent.

“Louis Armstrong Gets Local Band for Job,” Chicago Defender (National Edition), April 4, 1931, page 5:

Louis Armstrong, world’s greatest trumpeter, opened Wednesday at “The Show Boats,” formerly “My Cellar,” Clark and Randolph Sts., Chicago. In the band composed of local musicians are Lester Boone, George James, All Washington, reeds; Preston Jackson, trombone; Charles Alexander, piano; Rubin McKenzie [sic, McKendrick], banjo, and Fred “Tubby” Hall, drums. Address all mail for Louis care The Chicago Defender, 3433 Indiana Ave., Chicago.

“Broadcasting,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), April 11, 1931, page 9:

Louis Armstrong just about broke up things on WIBO last Wednesday and every night since with his torrid trumpeting from Show Boat inn, Clark and Randolph Sts., where he is now playing. The world’s greatest cornetist comes on the air at 12:15 every night except Saturday and Sunday, when he comes on at 1 a.m.

“Chicago Provides King of Trumpet With Royal Escort,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), April 18, 1931, page 8:

The king of trumpets has his royal escort—that is police escort. Louie Armstrong, according to his manager, John Collins, hasn’t been making all those high tremolos just for the high salary he has been receiving at the Show Boat, Clark and Lake Sts.

The shivery notes have been coming from Louie’s shaky fingering due to an uneasiness said to be caused by gangsters. Anyway, the Armstrong has been the victim of threats if he stays at the Loop whoopee palace.

“They’ve even been trailing me at night,” says Louie. Now the popular trumpeter has two policemen for his escort to and from his nightly rendezvous.

Several South side musicians expressed the opinion that the threats were coming from white musicians opposed to Louie’s invasion of the Loop territory. Rival cabaret owners were also blamed for the attempted scare.

“Armstrong Accosted by Gangsters; Trumpet Ace Has Trio Arrested,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), April 25, 1931, page 11; (National Edition), page 5:

Milton Weil, music publisher; Joe Fiore, gangster and hoodlum, and Robert Emmett Ryan, Jake Linglestool, were arrested Saturday on a charge of attempting to
extort money by intimidating Louis Armstrong, world’s premier trumpeter, now at the
Showboat, Clark and Lake Sts. and John Collins, Armstrong’s manager.

It was charged that Fiore and Ryan asked the king of trumpeters to “come across
with $6,000 or take the rap.” Louie and his manager refused. The following evening the
pair returned and reduced the stipulation to $3,000 and then to $1,000.

Armstrong wouldn’t do any business with the extorters and called the police. He
was given two officers to guard him day and night.

The fact that Weil is part owner of Coffee Dan’s, another cafe a short distance
from the Showboat, and which has been losing business steadily since the Showboat’s
acquisition of Louie, is believed by police to be the reason back of the cornetist’s
intimidation.

Weil, when arrested, denied that he had attempted any extortion or threats.
He declared, according to police, that his motive was to “reason” with Armstrong about
changing his manager.

In the meantime, the king of trumpeters keeps his royal escort – two motorcycle
coppers.

Note: The trio appears to have been arrested on Saturday, April 18, 1931.

“Hoodlums Plot Against Popular Louis Armstrong,” Louisiana Weekly, May 9, 1931, page
7:

Chicago, May 7. - Louis Armstrong, popular and nationally known cornetist,
broke into the news again Saturday, when Milton Weil, white music publisher and song
writer, and Joe Fiore and Emmett Ryan, two white hoodlums, were arrested on charges
of attempting to force Armstrong to give them one thousand dollars.

The white men were arrested on a warrant sworn out by John Collins,
Armstrong’s manager. Collins said that Weil is part owner of Coffee Dan’s cabaret where
Armstrong was employed several weeks ago. Recently the cornetist was booked by the
Show Boat, a rival establishment, Weil is alleged to have introduced the hoodlums to
Armstrong, and they demanded the money from him.

Weil denied any knowledge of the extortion plot, but Fiore and Ryan are alleged
to have figured in several extortions recently.

The Regal Theater

From Saturday April 4, 1931, Louis Armstrong played as an “Extra Easter Attraction” in
addition to the Cotton Club Orchestra for a week at the Regal Theater. “Located at 4719 South
Parkway Boulevard in Chicago, this variety theater opened the doors to its 1,500-person capacity foyer
and 3,500-seat auditorium on February 4, 1928.” What time the “Easter Attraction” started is not
mentioned in the advertisement published in the Chicago Defender, April 4, 1931. Probably Armstrong
played some feature songs and then went back to his engagement at the Show Boat nightclub.

“Trumpet Ace,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), April 4, 1931, page 8:

LOUIS ARMSTRONG, Ace of all trumpeters, will bring his gold instrument to
charm patrons of the Regal theater, beginning Saturday, April 4. Louis comes direct from
Frank Sebastian’s Cotton club in Culver City, Cal., where for more than a year he proved
the favorite of the film folk. Lucius Millinder and his Cotton club band will accompany
the tooter.

This article was accompanied by a photo of Louis Armstrong. On the same page, next to the photo, the
following article appeared under the headline, “Louis Armstrong Leads Regal Shows This Week:”

Louis Armstrong, “King of the Trumpet”; the Cotton Club orchestra, Lucius Millinder, “Prince of Pep”; a galaxy of popular stage stars, and ace screen attraction will smash all previous big show records at the Regal theater for Easter week, starting Saturday, April 4. Oh boy! Oh boy! What a show! Louis Armstrong left Chicago billed as the jazz idol of the Windy city, he returns after completing a triumphant journey the idol of the entire country. Saturday he’ll play and sing those number’s he’s made famous all over the United States to his own home-towners right over the Regal footlights in person. You’ve been raving about him. Come to the Regal Easter week and rave with him. But look who else is on this sensational bill.

Lucius Millinder [sic, Millinder] and his Cotton Club orchestra! When these happy, merry, jazzy boys dazzle you with their charm and music Saturday you’ll wonder where they’ve been all your life. Radio fans have heard their tantalizing tunes and show, critics have acclaimed Lucius and his gang as night-life’s finest entertainers during their long successful engagement at Chicago’s Cotton Club. Now your Regal scores again, bringing you these merry revelers in person for their South side appearance as a special Easter treat with the trumpet king, Louis Armstrong.

Speed! pep! and Louis Armstrong, Melody! mirth! and Lucius Millinder, and a big, jolly, jam-up of entertainers, old favorites and new favorites, will join in the frolic to make this show the hottest show you’ve ever seen. Wait’ll you see those lovely Regalettes in gorgeous costumes doing their latest novelty number. Wait’ll you hear hot Sammy Williams playing those songs you to sing. No foolin’, it’s the biggest show in town.

“Inside Info,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), April 18, 1931, page 8:

Louis Armstrong, who hails from New Orleans, bears the title of “Iron Lip” in the Crescent City. Demonstrated this by playing ten choruses of “Tiger Rag” to end on E flat above high C at the Regal last week.

The El Rado Cafe

On Sunday, May 10, there was a farewell party held at the El Rado Cafe for clarinetist Jimmy Noone, who was going to leave Chicago together with his orchestra for a gig in New York. Among the many musicians there to celebrate Noone were Louis Armstrong and his orchestra.
Chester Nerges, “Blue Notes,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), May 16, 1931, page 8:

THE FAREWELL party given at El Rado cafe last Sunday night by the orchestra was one of the most enjoyable affairs seen on the South side. Several selections were rendered by Earl Hines’ artists from the Grand Terrace, Louis Armstrong and his band from Showboat, Jimmy Noone’s unit and Jerome Carrington’s boys, who are now holding down the job at El Rado. The climax of the evening was when Louis Armstrong played 20 choruses of “Tiger Rag.”

The Owl, “Cabarets,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), May 16, 1931, page 8:

Joe Edie, general manager of El Rado, was all smiles Monday at 7 a.m. for there wasn’t an available table in the cozy submarine pleasure palace.

The cause of the overcrowded merriment was that Chicago’s own Jimmy Noone was being treated a farewell banquet. Among the orchestras that lent their assistance were Irene Edie’s Peacock Strollers, Earl Hines and his band, Louie Armstrong with Doll Jones featured, Jerome Carrington, Boyd Atkins and his Vagabonds and Jimmy’s own gang played as they never played before.

Little Zinkey Cohn proved to be a master pianist. All the stage celebrities were out in full forte. Pretty Marie Wade with all of the vivaciousness of youth was the center of attraction. Galvin Stone made the guests at perfect ease as he escorted them to their tables. A night of nights or rather mornings.

The Savoy Ballroom

Armstrong made one final appearance in Chicago before he and the orchestra went on a tour that also led to his hometown New Orleans. After he had concluded the contract at the Show Boat nightclub he and his orchestra played an evening dance at the Savoy Ballroom on Thursday, May 14, 1931.

“Armstrong Ends Chicago Engagement at the Savoy,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), May 9, 1931, page 8:

In bringing to the Savoy ballroom Louis Armstrong and his recording orchestra Thursday evening, May 14, the management has secured America’s outstanding musical aggregation, as Mr. Armstrong is conceded to be the world’s greatest cornetist, not only by musical critics, but also by envious trumpeters.
The article continues with a long résumé of Armstrong’s career, and ends with the following:

Chicago was calling and Louis was anxious to return to the city that gave him his start. So Mr. Collins arranged to have him appear at the Show Boat, a smart rendezvous located in the Loop in Chicago for a limited engagement of six weeks.

He will appear at the Savoy ballroom on Thursday evening, May 14, for his only ballroom appearance, and final engagement in Chicago, as he leaves on a dance tour through Illinois, Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia. He then returns to Hollywood with Mr. Collins, his manager, to complete a contract with R.K.O. Pathe pictures.

Chester Nerges, “Blue Notes,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), Saturday, May 9, 1931, page 8:

LOUIS ARMSTRONG and his band, who have been playing at the Show Boat for the past six weeks, are planning to take to the road after their engagement at the Savoy, May 14. It is a known fact that no one could do any better on the road than Louis, who is a drawing card in himself aside from having a band made up of stellar musicians such as Lester “Satchel” Boone, George “Beau Brummel” James and Al “Hawkins” Washington, reeds; Preston Jackson, who plays plenty of trombone; Reuben McKenzie [sic, McKendrick], banjo; Charles Alexander, piano, and Fred “Tubby” Hall, drums.

“L. Armstrong Bids Chicago Fond Farewell; Embarks on Tour of Southern States,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), May 16, 1931, page 9:

Louis Armstrong, world’s greatest trumpeter, and his orchestra played their final engagement in Chicago Thursday at the Savoy ballroom before he and his orchestra embarked on a journey which will take them to Armstrong’s home, New Orleans.

En route he will play one-night dance stands through Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio and West Virginia, according to his manager, Johnny Collins. Following a two-week stand in New Orleans the world’s greatest tooter is then scheduled to make a trip to the Coast, where he has been signed by R-K-O-Pathe pictures for talking shorts.

In the orchestra, which has been with him since his Chicago engagement at the Showboat, composed of local musicians, are Lester Boone, Al Washington, George James, reeds; Preston Jackson, trombone; Reuben McKenzie [sic, McKendrick], banjo; Charles Alexander, piano, and Fred Hall, drums.

Clifford W. Mackay, “Going Back Stage With The Scribe,” Chicago Defender (City Edition), Saturday, May 23, 1931, page 10:

Louis Armstrong drew 2,700 paid admissions to the Savoy ballroom in his final Chicago appearance Thursday, May 14. One time the Scribe couldn’t get backstage. A squadron of police with sawed-off shotguns were patrolling the rear entrance. Louis’ gangster trouble necessitated the precaution.

Summary

After reading some of the books about Louis Armstrong and comparing their different “stories” about what happened to him between March and June 1931 there is a lot of confusion! From the Chicago Defender (City and National editions) and discographies we can see the following time schedule for Louis Armstrong’s activities during that period:
Sunday, March 22 Louis returned to Chicago from a year in California
(CDC March 21, 1931, 8; CDN same day, 1)

Sunday, March 29 Louis made a guest appearance at Roseland Ballroom
(CDC April 4, 1931, 8)

Wednesday, April 1 Louis and his new orchestra opened a six week job at Show Boat
(CDC April 4, 1931, 8)

Saturday, April 4 Louis made a special guest appearance for a week at Regal
Theater with Lucky Millinder and his Cotton Club Orchestra
(CDC April 4, 1931, 8)

Saturday, April 18 Three men arrested for attempting to extort money by
intimidating Louis
(CDC April 25, 1931, 11; CDN same day, 5)

Monday, April 20 Louis Armstrong and band made a recording session for Okeh

Tuesday, April 28 Louis Armstrong and band made a recording session for Okeh

Wednesday, April 29 Louis Armstrong and band made a recording session for Okeh

Sunday, May 10 Louis Armstrong and band and other bands played at a farewell
party at El Rado Cafe for Jimmie Noone, who was leaving for New York
(CDC May 16, 1931, 8)

Thursday, May 14 Louis Armstrong and band played their final engagement in Chicago at Savoy
Ballroom
(CDC May 9, 1931, 8; CDC May 23, 1931, 10)

Saturday, May 23 Louis Armstrong and band began a week at Greystone Ballroom,
Detroit, MI.
(CDC May 23, 1931, 10)
Zilner Randolph and John Lindsay joined the band in Detroit
(Paige Van Vorst, “Z.T. & Old Man Mose,” Mississippi Rag, April 1975, 2)

(Endnotes)
1 Terry Teachout, Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 162.
2 Louis Armstrong (Thomas Brothers, ed.), Louis Armstrong, in His Own Words: Selected Writings (Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 1999), 82-110.
3 Ibid., 77.
5 Ibid., 251.
Singing, Shaking, and Parading at the Birth of New Orleans

by Shane Lief

As the tricentennial anniversary of the founding of New Orleans approaches, it is remarkable that few historical narratives include indigenous people as a key part of the story of the city. This follows a general pattern of neglect and misrecognition which has only been partially remedied by a couple of studies published in recent years. More usually, indigenous groups and their cultural practices have been discussed in specialized ethnohistorical accounts of the Lower Mississippi River Valley. The most comprehensive work at the time of this writing is F. Todd Smith’s *Louisiana and the Gulf South Frontier, 1500-1821*, which includes a discussion of “various Indian groups... on the eve of the earliest European intrusion” and during the period when the region was absorbed into the United States. During the past decade, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, an international public has become more curious about New Orleans and the regional roots of its musical culture, spurring a host of publications about the history of the city. In most of these accounts, however, while Native Americans are mentioned as being crucial to the survival of New Orleans in its early days, they quickly fade into the background as attention is turned to the activities of European and African people when musical traditions are described. Such narratives often ignore the various intertwinnings of cultural practices and personal experiences within families that have blended histories, such as many Louisianans with both African and indigenous roots. This is all the more surprising when we consider that, in the early twentieth century, musicians with Native American ancestry participated in the development of jazz, the musical idiom quintessentially associated with New Orleans. For example, while clarinetist George Lewis had Senegalese ancestry on the maternal side of his family, his father’s mother was Choctaw, and during the early part of his musical career, Lewis maintained close ties to the Mandeville area on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, near Choctaw communities that still existed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Exploring indigenous ancestries thus becomes a way of reexamining the development of jazz and other musical traditions associated with New Orleans, to appreciate individuals and families with multiple cultural identities that defy inherited paradigms of interpretation. It has been a slow and painful process for people extricating themselves from a violent social order structured according to racial categories. By the middle of the twentieth century, more musicians from Louisiana who had long suffered institutionalized sanctions for speaking languages other than English were embracing their native heritage by incorporating traditional practices into their performances onstage: “Tunica-Biloxi Harry Broussard, who toured the nation playing jazz saxophone, [often recalled] breaking into a Tunica song in the midst of a performance and how much the audience liked it.” Nonetheless, by alluding to cultural background, this creative gesture of musical self-expression was a balancing act between identity and commercial appeal, as the experiences of his audiences were shaped by the long history of exoticized images of the “American Indian” common in stage productions, concerts, and minstrel shows during the nineteenth century and in other forms of mass entertainment such as movies throughout the twentieth century.

While we learn to recognize the nuances of identity that have emerged from contact between many cultural groups over the past three centuries, we should remember that the original populations in the Lower Mississippi River Valley were singing and dancing here long before Europeans and Africans arrived. This article seeks to address the ‘prehistory’ of New Orleans music, offering an account of the first organized musical performance in New Orleans in 1718, along with descriptions of other early musical encounters in the city, followed by a discussion of the possible significance of these interactions to begin the process of acknowledging and understanding indigenous contributions to popular music in New Orleans.
Before we begin this story, however, we must also recognize the need to tread carefully along such notoriously unstable ground as the colonial historical record. Nearly all of the materials we have are filtered through the experiences of European colonists and missionaries. In a trenchant turn of phrase, Patricia Galloway suggests that producing narratives from such materials is tantamount to the effort to “wring blood from the stones of European incomprehension and representation of Native behavior and testimony.” Despite myriad “discursive distortions,” we can still try to restore as much of the context as possible by identifying the social, economic, and political circumstances of interaction, so we can “get closer to at least hearing echoes of Native words and seeing outlines of Native actions.”

The first documented public event involving a musical procession in New Orleans is the “Marche du Calumet de Paix” (Peace Pipe March), which took place soon after Bienville founded the city in the spring of 1718. Although the calumet ceremony was a relatively recent practice in the Lower Mississippi River Valley, it was linked to tightly structured, ritualized protocols of interaction that stretched back for centuries, including the “playing of a flute-like instrument” which had in earlier periods “served an analogous role” to the calumet throughout North America. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the French had learned how critical the calumet was in establishing good relations with indigenous groups. While it could be an ambiguous symbol that masked underlying hostility, the presentation of the calumet usually conferred the “ability to create peaceful interaction.”

Bienville’s older brother, Iberville, certainly understood its usefulness, having made “carvings on trees of his three ships, along with a depiction of a man carrying a calumet of peace” and presenting to the chief of the Bayogoula a “custom-made calumet made of iron” in the unusual shape of a ship and having a “white flag adorned with a fleur-de-lis” and “ornamented with glass beads.” In addition to smoking the pipe itself, the calumet ritual “involved elaborate processions, lengthy speeches, feasting, gift exchanges, and dancing,” including “physical contact in the form of rubbing, the seating of participants on mats or skins, and the beating of posts coordinated with the recitation of war heroics.” Of course, it also involved singing and playing percussion instruments.

The musical procession in New Orleans in 1718 represented the culmination of the peace settlement after a ruthless war conducted by the French against the Chitimacha which had lasted several years.
and ended in the mass enslavement of the latter, who were the first group in the New Orleans area to suffer this particular kind of calamity on a large scale.¹⁶ According to a letter sent from Arkansas Post in 1727 by Father Paul du Poisson, the Jesuit missionary (or “black robe,” to use the indigenous term for a “man of the cloth”), Chief Framboise was the leader of the Chitimacha who “descended with his tribe to New Orleans to chant the calumet before the new Governor.”¹⁷ The colonist Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz was present at the ceremony and wrote a first-hand account of the proceedings in his *Histoire de la Louisiane* published in 1758.¹⁸ It includes a description of the musical procession, how the singing dancers kept time with percussion instruments, after the Chitimacha emerged from their boats upon their arrival at the settlement of New Orleans. This particular passage, which was omitted from the earliest English translation and all subsequent reprints from the late eighteenth century, provides a unique glimpse of indigenous musical practices at the founding of the city:

> I was with Monsieur Bienville when they arrived on the river in several pirogues. They approached while singing the song of the Calumet, which they shook in the air, and in rhythm, to announce their delegation, which effectively consisted of the Spokesperson, as the people say, or Chancellor and a dozen other men. On these occasions they are adorned with the finest things, according to their taste, never failing to have a Chichicois in their hand, shaking it also in rhythm [“en cadence”].

> There were not more than a hundred paces from the place they disembarked to Monsieur Bienville’s cabin. However, this little bit of land sufficed for them to keep their way nearly half an hour, always marching to the measure and cadence which regulated them.¹⁹

Le Page du Pratz added a note about the *chichicois*: “The Chichicois is a gourd pierced with two holes, for inserting a short stick, with the lower end serving as a handle. They put pebbles inside to make sound; in the absence of pebbles, they put in dry beans or kidney beans. It is with this instrument that they keep the beat while singing.”²⁰ We thus have our first description of musical instruments being played at the beginning of New Orleans, the equivalent of shakers being used in a public parade. The word that Le Page du Pratz uses for the gourd rattle, *chichicois*, is the more common spelling from among a large variety of forms recorded in different accounts from the same historical period. The same term appears in Pénicaut’s report of the ceremonies held by several indigenous groups in March 1699 at Fort Maurepas, which Iberville had just established, where they danced “‘au son de leur chichicois’ (to the sound of their chichicois)” and beat a water drum with two sticks.²¹ Another spelling variant is mentioned by Jesuit Father Mathurin Le Petit, in a letter sent from New Orleans in 1730, in his description of the Natchez using their “sicicouet.”²² Most of the French colonists and missionaries would have been acquainted with this term, which was widespread among many different indigenous groups, through the medium of Mobilian Jargon, a trade language that was spoken by Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans throughout a large part of what is now the Southeastern United States.²³ The spelling *šešekowa* represents the most likely reconstituted form in Mobilian Jargon, which could refer to a variety of percussion instruments, including gourd rattles and tambourine-like drums that were used in ceremonies throughout the Mississippi River Valley.²⁴ In view of its likely origins, this term for the gourd rattle encapsulates its role in the vast network of trade and cultural exchange which existed throughout North America, as it appears to be one of the very few Algonquian-derived terms in Mobilian Jargon: “Because of the frequent occurrence of the variant forms of this Algonquian word in the literature, it may be supposed that, if any Algonquian word entered Mobilian [Jargon], the word for rattle did.”²⁵

Describing events that took place just a few years after the Chitimacha calumet ceremony in
New Orleans, in late 1721 and early 1722, the Jesuit missionary Father Pierre F. X. de Charlevoix offers an important account of ongoing exchanges between European colonists and indigenous people. As he traveled down the Mississippi River, he met the chief of the Tunica and was impressed by the exhibition of French cultural traits: “[The chief] was dressed in the French fashion [and] carries on trade with the French, supplying them with horses and poultry, and is very expert at business... He has long since stopped wearing Indian clothes, and takes great pride in always appearing well-dressed.”

Charlevoix assumes that a complete transformation has taken place, a seeming vindication of the deliberate “Frenchification” policies that were being carried out farther north, in the Illinois Country and other areas in the Great Lakes region which had more than a century of French colonial presence.

In fact, Tunica Chief Cahura-Joligo was described by another chronicler as “baptized and almost Frenchified.” Nonetheless, by triangulating the various written accounts, we catch a glimpse of what was likely an astute strategy on the part of the Tunica chief: “though he was observed as dressing in the French manner and owning a complete suit of French clothes, at least one chronicler described him as preferring to carry his breeches rather than wear them.”

In effect, some indigenous groups and individuals were deploying cultural symbols they had gleaned from the French, creatively appropriating new resources to steer perceptions of themselves as potential allies or trade partners, or perhaps for other purposes that remain unclear.

An even more astonishing instance of transcultural exchange awaited Charlevoix as he approached settlements of the Acolapissa just upriver from New Orleans, on January 4, 1722: “As soon as we came in sight of the village, there was a drumbeat, and as soon as we disembarked, I was complimented on behalf of the chief. I was rather surprised, while approaching the village, to see the drummer dressed in a long robe which was part red and part white, with red-and-white sleeves. I asked about the origin of this custom, and was told that it was not very ancient, that a governor of Louisiana had made a present of this drum to these Indians, who have always been our faithful allies, [but] that this kind of official’s uniform was of their own invention.”

We have no other details about what kind of drum this was, which materials it was made from, or whether it was played with a stick. In any case, the Acolapissa were highly attuned to protocols of interaction and had possibly considered that it would be ‘good form’ to use this musical gift to greet other French colonists. This documentation of the Acolapissa drum is also an important reminder of how easily one can ascribe timelessness to an ‘exotic’ cultural practice. Though “preoccupied with the question of Indian origins,” Charlevoix was acutely aware of the possibility of change: “‘New events... and a new arrangement of things give rise to new traditions, which efface the former, and are themselves effaced in their turn.’”

According to what we might call the ‘Charlevoix principle’, we can never be too sure of how old or new a particular tradition might be, whether it has been handed down for generations within a specific cultural group or, instead, a relatively new phenomenon that has emerged from a recent encounter between groups.

In 1730, eight years after Charlevoix heard the Acolapissa drum, another musical encounter suggested how deeply blended European and indigenous cultural practices had become as the French continued to settle the lower reaches of the Mississippi River Valley. During the summer of that year, a delegation of indigenous groups from the Illinois Country—the region between the Great Lakes and the Upper Mississippi River which played “an important role in Louisiana’s internal economy”—traveled to New Orleans on a diplomatic mission. On a more overtly political level, this was a gesture of solidarity with the French several months after the Natchez had annihilated Fort Rosalie, in late autumn of 1729, when wounded and dazed survivors straggled into the city to tell the news that “all was fire and blood” upriver.

The burgeoning population of New Orleans was excited by the arrival of the Illinois, led by Chief Chicagou and Chief Mamantouensa (leaders of the Michigamea and Kaskaskia, respectively): “People crowded into the church to witness the spectacle of ‘savage’ Indians worshiping and singing before the altar. The highlight for the audience was a responsive Gregorian chant in which Ursuline nuns ‘chanted
the first Latin couplet...and the Illinois continued the other couplets in their language in the same tone.” Of course, this was much more than a syncretic ceremony: it had become a combination of spiritual uplift and public entertainment. This performance of bilingual antiphony reflected the growing contact between Europeans and indigenous people, but more specifically the French and Kaskaskia, with the latter recognized as “the most Christianized of the Native peoples in the region [i.e., Pays des Illinois or Illinois Country].” After singing their words to European melodies, the Illinois also “presented a calumet to the French governor,” blending “traditional notions of Illinois reciprocity” into the ceremony.

This complex event reveals how the pattern of French and Native interaction in the Upper Mississippi River Valley amounted to an “empire of collaboration.” Even if the social arrangements were far from idyllic, “the diverse inhabitants of Illinois lived together, spoke the same languages, and intermarried.” In effect, “French colonists and Illinois Indians [had] developed a flexible interracial order based on a huge network of kinship and fictive kinship linking together French and Native peoples.”

Moreover, as in other areas in the middle of North America, elements of “native ground” existed in the Illinois Country; that is, places where “Indians were more often able to determine the form and content of inter-cultural relations than were their European would-be colonizers.”

This call-and-response between the Ursuline nuns and the Illinois in New Orleans also demonstrated how music could serve as a medium for interacting senses of spirituality. Several decades of contact with “black robes” had led to a considerable number of conversions to Christianity. One of the most well-known of the indigenous Christians of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was Marie Rouensa, the daughter of a Kaskaskia chief. After marrying the French colonist Michel Accault, she prevailed upon her parents to embrace Christianity, and likewise exerted a religious influence on her new husband: “According to [Jesuit missionary] Gravier, Accault acknowledged ‘that he no longer recognizes himself, and can attribute his conversion solely to his wife’s prayers and exhortations, and to the example that she gives him.’ ” The intriguing circumstance of an indigenous person inspiring a European to return to Christian practices in the 1690s is similar to the role reversal that Father Le Petit noted in 1730 between the indigenous people visiting New Orleans and the French residents of that city. At the same time he celebrated the Christian practices of the Illinois in his letter to Father d’Avaugour, Procurator of the Missions in North America, he expressed his shock at the lack of religious practices among the French soldiers in New Orleans, as well as their poor taste in music:

In the course of the day, and after supper, [the members of the Illinois delegation] often chant, either alone or together, different prayers of the Church, such as the Dies irae, etc., Vexilla Regis, etc., Stabat Mater, etc. To listen to them, you would easily perceive that they took more delight and pleasure in chanting these holy Canticles, than the generality of the Savages, and even more than the French receive from chanting their frivolous and often dissolute songs.

You would be astonished, as I myself have been, on arriving at this Mission, to find that a great number of our French are not, by any means, so well instructed in Religion as are these Neophytes: they [i.e., the indigenous people] are scarcely unacquainted with any of the histories of the old and new Testament; the manner in which they hear the holy Mass and receive the Sacraments, is most excellent; their Catechism, which has fallen into my hands, with the literal translation made by Father Boullanger, is a perfect model for those who have need of such works in their new Missions.

In fact, “[u]nlike many other Indian groups, the Illinois were not hostile to missionaries and were open to prayer.” However, it is also important to keep in mind that, rather than a fixed fusion between European and indigenous ways, this wave of Christianization was part of an “ongoing set of
adaptations.” If we take a look at the translation of the catechism mentioned by Le Petit, we can see that Native Christianity included many elements that were not completely synonymous with European spiritual concepts. Instead of the usual <Di8> (“Dieu”), the first line of Le Boulenger’s version of the Apostle’s Creed has <kichemanet8a> ‘great spirit’, which draws upon the Algonquian concept of manitou, which among other things could refer to “the spirit that gave a thing or a feature of the landscape, such as a rock or a waterfall, the power to influence human affairs.” It is interesting to note there was a wide range of differing insights and strategies among the Jesuit missionaries. While Le Boulenger saw fit to incorporate an indigenous spiritual concept into the Christian catechism as a reference to the Lord Almighty, other “black robes” would sometimes interpret manitou as “demon.” In fact, the term <manet8a>, identified as a “key word in the Illinois-Jesuit religious encounter,” could be translated as ‘spirit,’ ‘God,’ or even ‘medicine’ or ‘snow’, revealing the challenges facing the missionaries as they tried to “graft French ideas onto Native terms.” Even the use of the calumet among the Illinois was a “recent adoption” in response to encounters with Siouan groups to the west, an “accommodation to the [ceremonial] language of their new territory,” as the various Illinois groups moved in response to warfare with the Iroquois and widespread European incursions.

In New Orleans, diplomatic ceremonies involving the calumet were common throughout the eighteenth century, and often involved many different indigenous groups:

New Orleans hosted a series of ceremonial visits in the autumn of 1769, when Alejandro O’Reilly summoned lower Mississippi River tribes after completing the military occupation of Louisiana for Spain. On September 30, chiefs, interpreters, and other persons from the Tunicas, Taensas, Pacanas, Houmas, Bayogoulas, Ofogoulas, Chaouchas, and Ouachas approached the general’s house with song and music. Inside he greeted them under a canopy in the company of prominent residents of New Orleans. Each chief placed his weapon at O’Reilly’s feet and waved a feather fan over his head. O’Reilly accepted their fans, smoked their pipes, and clasped their hands.

As various diplomatic missions came and went, there were Native Americans living in the city and its environs. “On the outskirts of New Orleans, groups of Houmas, Chitimachas, and Choctaws camped along Bayou St. John and Bayou Road [and in] the city’s streets and in the marketplace, Indian women peddled baskets, mats, sifters, plants, herbs, and firewood [while the men] sold venison, wildfowl, and cane blowguns and occasionally earned wages as day laborers and dockworkers.” Their involvement in city life was not restricted to economic activities: “Hundreds of Indians gathered in late winter to request gifts from officials and to join in the celebration of carnival.” While legal restrictions militated against the mixing of different groups, after several generations, “[m]any New Orleanians, identified as white, black, or free colored by the end of the eighteenth century, possessed various degrees of Indian ancestry.”

By the early 1800s, this region was being swallowed by the growing political entity of the United States and adopting new categories of cultural identity in the process. The language of government was beginning to erase indigenous people from official records. In 1808, Governor William Claiborne remarked in a letter to James Madison that, in the region which was then known as the Orleans Territory, “there are now several hundred persons held as slaves, who are descended of Indian families,” and only two years later, the Louisiana Supreme Court ruled that “persons of color may be descended from Indians on both sides.” Since the racial formation at the time had assumed tripartite division of whites, blacks, and gens de couleur, indigenous ancestry was effectively erased by fiat. The pervasive trope of the ‘vanishing Indian’ which kept reappearing in public discourse throughout the following two centuries was thus facilitated by early bureaucratic maneuvers. This turned into a local variant of the “one-drop”
rule: “Because of Anglo-American conceptions of race... anyone with visible or known African ancestry (one drop of African blood) was considered black for most purposes.”56 This prescription of racial categories persisted for many decades. Klopotek (2008) explains further:

People of mixed black, white, and Indian ancestry were classified as mulattoes by the 1910 census, undifferentiated from people of solely white and black ancestry. Surrounding populations in Louisiana acknowledged Indian ancestry in multiracial tribal communities by addressing them as Redbones, a derogatory term that denotes Indian, black, and white ancestry. The official census record, however, did not have a category to reflect that distinction, leading one to conclude that the record stated they were solely black and white instead of Indian...

Similarly, in terms of previous federal acknowledgement of Indian communities, the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] of the 1930s, because of the one-drop rule, extremely disinclined to treat communities with black ancestry as Indian tribes...

Bureau records indicate that black ancestry among some Louisiana Indian groups made officials less inclined to serve any of the Louisiana tribes.57

Nonetheless, different indigenous groups continued to live in New Orleans and the surrounding region, often selling goods at public markets in the city and occasionally singing and marching through the streets. The prolonged cultural contact over the centuries had specific musical manifestations. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Bayou Lacombe Choctaw “used a unique wooden or vine strip” around drum heads to tighten them, a feature “similar to African drum traditions” and potentially borrowed from drumming practices in Congo Square, in nearby New Orleans.58 Moreover, after the War of 1812, the Choctaw “borrowed the European snare drum, stretching a taut cord across the bottom of their cedar bucket drums to give them the ‘snap’ of European drums.”59 Of course, invoking the Charlevoix principle, we cannot be too certain that any of these developments were necessarily wholesale adoptions from other cultural groups, but they certainly suggest that a significant amount of transcultural interaction had taken place over the past few centuries.60 People did not share all of their life experiences across racial and socioeconomic lines, but music—like language—is a porous realm that allows the sharing of sounds.

During the first century of the city’s history, a series of public musical encounters reflected and
shaped the changing social reality of New Orleans. By the late nineteenth century, people who spoke Choctaw had recognized New Orleans as a language contact area, naming it “Balbancha,” i.e., a place where people speak strange languages. This toponym reflects an awareness of what had been at the time of the Louisiana Purchase the “most compactly multilingual part of the United States.” Likewise, the Lower Mississippi River Valley can be seen as a ‘music contact area’ that represents a particularly rich confluence of musical practices including indigenous traditions. Appreciating the deep collective cultural heritage of the region requires an interdisciplinary approach, combining insights from archaeology, linguistics, and music history, as well as other modes of interpretation. This helps prevent our vision from being governed by dubious notions of cultural ‘purity’ and linear development. While recognizing the many worlds within New Orleans, we also should take care not to slip into the opposite quagmire of “irreducible complexity” or “uncritical multiculturalism;” that is, an anesthetizing blur of ideas obscuring the complicated history of shifting identities and asymmetrical power structures.

New Orleans is truly a musical multiverse, where distinctive styles have emerged from interactions between different cultural groups, linguistic communities, and families, but this multiverse did not germinate within a vacuum of silence. The juggernaut of the city’s public musical performance traditions was set in motion by an indigenous group who danced, sang, and shook their chicicicos, all moving in rhythm or ‘in time’ (“en cadence”), expressing a different time-sense from their colonial audience. If New Orleans is known for its special styles, including “New Orleans ragtime”—the early alternate term for “jazz”—which conveys a different sense of time, we should pay heed to the very first experiences of people with interacting time-senses mingling in the music played and heard in the city’s public spaces. We should take into account indigenous traditions in the Lower Mississippi River Valley and explore how these have helped shape the musical practices associated with New Orleans.

***

Special thanks to Jack Stewart, Russell Desmond, and Pete Gregory for their support and encouragement. This work is dedicated to the indigenous people of Louisiana.

(Endnotes)


3 A notable exception is Ann Ostendorf, Sounds American: National Identity and the Music Cultures of the Lower Mississippi River Valley, 1800-1860 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), but since the timeline of this book begins more than 80 years after the founding of New Orleans, the earliest musical encounters with Native Americans in the city and the surrounding area fall outside the scope of its narrative.


5 Tom Bethell, George Lewis: A Jazzman from New Orleans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 9; ibid, 16; as a teenager, Lewis played with a music group in Mandeville called the Black Eagle Band (Ibid, 40). Lewis’ father does not seem to have had a direct impact on his musical style, but his indigenous background likely influenced his life in a number of ways that are difficult to measure.


8 Among our most important sources on indigenous cultural practices are the Jesuit Relations, a series of reports written by French missionaries of the Society of Jesus over four decades in the middle of the 17th century, from 1632 to 1673. See Allan Greer, ed., The Jesuit Relations: Natives and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America (new York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000).

9 Patricia Galloway, Practicing Ethnohistory: Mining Archives, Hearing Testimony, Constructing Narrative (Lincoln:

11 Philomena Hauck, *Bienville: Father of Louisiana* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1998), 69; Richard Campanella, *Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2013), 110. Of course, the term “city” refers to what was envisioned in 1718 rather than the actual status of New Orleans at that time. For several years, New Orleans was little more than an outpost which developed slowly and fitfully until it became the capital of the French colony in 1722.


13 Brown, 311.

14 Ibid, 316.

15 Ibid, 314.


18 Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane* (Paris, 1758). *Histoire de la Louisiane* is a rich resource of information about life during the early days of the French colony. However, this famous work was profoundly shaped by an enslaved Chitimacha woman. After settling temporarily on “Bayou Tchoupic,” Le Page du Pratz “bought from a neighboring settler a native slave in order to be certain of a person to cook for us… We did not understand one another yet, my slave and I, but I made her understand by signs, which the natives understand easily; she was of the nation of the Tchitimachas, with whom the French had been at war for several years.”

19 Ibid, 65. Angle brackets are used throughout this article to indicate exact spellings in manuscripts. A likely pronunciation of <chichikois>, given in the International Phonetic Alphabet, is [ʃiʃik̪]; Pénicaut continues with a description of the drum: “They have another instrument, too, made of an earthen pot in the shape of a kettle, containing a little water and covered with a deer skin stretched tight across the potmouth like a tambour; this they beat with two drumsticks, making as much noise as our drums.” Quote in Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams, trans. and ed., *Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Pénicaut Narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953), 6. From the recently translated memoir by Marc-Antoine Caillot, who worked in New Orleans as a clerk for the Company of the Indies from 1729 to 1731, we have further musical details of “how they perform the calumet ceremony when they come to the commander’s house in New Orleans”: “When they have finished making their speeches, four worthies get up, along with four Indians, and dance the calumet dance, all painted and ornamented with different types of feathers, to the sound of an earthen pot covered with a deerskin, ornamented with many bells and accompanied by their voices. This makes music as bizarre as their movements and dances.” We also get a taste of which kind of tobacco was sometimes used: the pipe was filled with an “excellent herb that in France is called feneque.” In Marc-Antoine Caillot, Erin M. Greenwald, ed., *Charlevoix’s Louisiana: Selections from the HISTORY and the JOURNAL* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 160.

20 This particular note (but not the preceding passage) was translated by James M. Crawford, *The Mobilian Trade Language* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 177-8; the English text here represents a translation by the author, loosely guided by Crawford’s previous translation and also reviewed by Russell Desmond.

21 Ibid, 65. Angle brackets are used throughout this article to indicate exact spellings in manuscripts. A likely pronunciation of <chichikois>, given in the International Phonetic Alphabet, is [ʃiʃik̪]; Pénicaut continues with a description of the drum: “They have another instrument, too, made of an earthen pot in the shape of a kettle, containing a little water and covered with a deer skin stretched tight across the potmouth like a tambour; this they beat with two drumsticks, making as much noise as our drums.” Quote in Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams, trans. and ed., *Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Pénicaut Narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953), 6. From the recently translated memoir by Marc-Antoine Caillot, who worked in New Orleans as a clerk for the Company of the Indies from 1729 to 1731, we have further musical details of “how they perform the calumet ceremony when they come to the commander’s house in New Orleans”: “When they have finished making their speeches, four worthies get up, along with four Indians, and dance the calumet dance, all painted and ornamented with different types of feathers, to the sound of an earthen pot covered with a deerskin, ornamented with many bells and accompanied by their voices. This makes music as bizarre as their movements and dances.” We also get a taste of which kind of tobacco was sometimes used: the pipe was filled with an “excellent herb that in France is called feneque.” In Marc-Antoine Caillot, Erin M. Greenwald, ed., *Charlevoix’s Louisiana: Selections from the HISTORY and the JOURNAL* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 160.

22 Crawford, 65.


25 Lankford, 115: “There is good archaeological evidence, in fact, that widespread trade networks had existed in eastern North America for well over two millennia by the time of the arrival of the French”; Crawford, 66-7.


28 Ibid, 120.

29 Ibid.

30 Charlevoix, 166-7. One of the French words used for “drum” in his original account is spelled <quaifflè> (using the long “s” common in 18th century typography), an unusual variant of the more standardized spelling of caisse ‘box’

31 While we have no definitive evidence, the use of this particular word <quaſſe>, which is similar to the French term for the snare drum, carries the suggestion that two drumsticks may have been used to play this drum, a practice that was observed by Pénicaut over two decades earlier among indigenous groups living near the Gulf Coast; see note 21 above.


33 Smith, 92; Tracy Neal Leavelle, The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, 1; although the visitors to New Orleans are referred to as the "Illinois," this name represents a loose coalition, a "cover term for several subgroups" speaking Algonquian languages, including the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Tamaroa, and the Michigamea. See David J. Costa, The Miami-Illinois Language (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 2.

34 See George Edward Milne, Natchez Country: Indians, Colonists, and the Landscapes of Race in French Louisiana (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015). In the words of Marc-Antoine Caillot, who met some of the survivors, “everything was on fire and covered in blood at Natchez” (Caillot, 124). Father Le Petit offers an explanation of the visit in New Orleans: “The Tchikaches [Chickasaws], a brave nation but treacherous, and little known to the French, have endeavored to seduce the Illinois Tribes from their allegiance: they even sounded some particular words to see whether they could not draw them over to the party of those Savages who are enemies of our Nation. The Illinois have replied to them that they were almost all ‘of the prayer’ (that is, according to their manner of expression, that they are Christians); and that in other ways they are inviolably attached to the French, by the alliances which many of that Nation had contracted with them, in espousing of their daughters... At the first news of the war with the Natchez and the Yazous, they came hither to weep for the black Robes and the French, to offer the service of their Nation to Monsieur Perrier [government of Louisianans], to avenge their death” (Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, vol. 68; The Burrows Brothers, 1900: 201-3).

35 Leavelle, 1. Chief Chicagou was a particularly well-traveled representative of his people: just five years earlier, in 1795, he participated in a delegation of the “Illinois Confederacy” (Cahokia, Kaskaskia, Michigamea, Moingwena, Peoria, and Tamaroa) to Paris, France, where he addressed King Louis XV in person. The syncretic musical practices of the Kaskaskia were observed a generation earlier, in 1711, by Pénicaut: “The Revered Jesuit Fathers have translated the Psalms and the hymns from Latin to their language. At Mass or Vespers the Illinois sing the stanzas in turn with the French that live among them; for example, the Illinois sing one stanza of the Psalm or the hymn in their language, and the French the following stanza in Latin, and so on with the remaining ones, and in the key in which they are sung in Europe among Catholic Christians” (Pénicaut, 139).

36 Leavelle, 124.

37 Ibid, 125. Taking place while the French were conducting their campaign against the Natchez, this presentation of the calumet was certainly also an indication of military alliance. As practiced by many indigenous groups in the Mississippi River Valley, “the ceremonies associated with the calumet facilitated trade and diplomacy among friends by expressing a commitment to violence against common enemies” in Brett Rushforth, Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and African Slaveries in New France (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 30.


39 Ibid, 10.

40 Ibid, 7-8. This included an overlapping of European and indigenous slavery systems. “As the region’s Natives encountered French traders and eventually settlers in the second half of the seventeenth century, they greeted them with rituals and gifts to signal their friendship and to invite the newcomers into an alliance. Among the most significant of these gifts were enslaved enemies, offered as a sign of trust and evidence of Native power” (Rushforth, 11).

41 Kathleen DuVal, The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 4. As used by DuVal, the term ‘native ground’ pertains to the Arkansas River Valley, but it could also be applied to other areas where indigenous people had more control over the circumstances of interaction with Europeans. At the same time, we must keep in mind that cycles of warfare, slave raids, and shifting alliances show how a dynamic hierarchy of control existed among native groups, which in turn was exploited by the European colonial powers: “the French insistence on mediating, rather than taking sides in, disputes between Native groups registers as a cynical attempt to exert authority rather than an example of French accommodation to Native cultural demands” (Rushforth, 12).

42 There is a strongly gendered aspect to indigenous Christianity in the Illinois Country: “Numerous French observers commented that the Christian message attracted women far more than men among the Illinois... Kaskaskia and other Illinois women, like Marie Rouensa, discovered in Christianity a comforting source of spiritual renewal and a viable outlet for their social energy” (Leavelle, 138).

43 Leavelle, 160. Of course, for every story of conversion, we must consider the political or social factors: “Female Christian converts often defied their families and communities” (Leavelle, 172). Marie Rouensa’s father also had other things in mind besides spirituality: “Chief Rouensa of the Kaskaskias certainly hoped to strengthen his relationships with the French” (Leavelle, 174).

44 Thwaites, 209-211.
At the same time, it must be noted that, among the groups of the Illiniwek (Illinois) coalition, many Kaskaskia had converted to Christianity by the fourth decade of the eighteenth century while most Peoria still remained aloof to the missionaries’ efforts.

Ibid, 38.

Leavelle, 106; please note that the grapheme <8> could be used to represent the phonemes o, u, and w (Greer, vi).

Leavelle, 106.

Ibid, 108.

The significance of the calumet among the Illiniwek had many dimensions: “Miami-Illinois-speakers called the calumet ‘ap8agana,’ and its shaft ‘ap8acanti,’ referring to the feathers with which the shaft was wrapped, drawing manit [sic], or spiritual power, from these beings that lived between heaven and earth and therefore bridged the two worlds. The smoke, too, linked the sky world with land, drawing upon the power of the sun, which had grown the tobacco, by ingesting and then offering back the smoke from the plant. Indians sometimes made calumets in pairs, one painted green and the other blue to represent the earth and sky, emblematic of the calumet’s power to bring otherworldly power to bear on worldly matters. Alliances confirmed in a calumet ceremony thus represented far more than practical political agreements. They were sacred bonds, and those who violated them risked disaster” (Rushforth, 31-2).


Ibid, 179.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid, 168.


Ibid, 88. “Indians disappeared from sight in New Orleans not because they died out or moved away, but because, in the words of an 1880s observer, they ‘melted away into mulattoes.’ The Indians became New Orleanians by gradually blending into the city’s African community. An overwhelming number of black families in New Orleans today have in their genealogies several not very remote Indian ancestors” (Johnson, 40).


Ibid.

The sharing of musical practices stretches back to the earliest days of the French colony of Louisiana. In early May of 1706, Pénicaut volunteered to get food supplies from a nearby settlement of Acolapissa and Natchitoches since he “understood and spoke their language well and was even a friend of the chiefs of both these nations.” With three days of rations and accompanied by eleven other Frenchmen, he set out from Fort Louis to the shore of Lake Pontchartrain, stayed a couple of days in the village, and participated in social events: “We had in our group a companion named Picard, who had brought a violin with him. He could play it well enough to have these savages do some figure-dancing in step. They had us nearly dying of laughter, for the musical instrument had the whole village drawn up around Picard; it was the most comical sight in the world to see them open their eyes in amazement and every now and then cut the most comical capers ever seen. But it was quite another matter when they saw us dance a minuet—two boys dancing together. They would gladly have spent the whole night watching us and listening to the violin, had not the Chief of the Colapissas, fearing we were tired out, come to tell us that lodgings were assigned to us. All of them wanted to have us in their homes: the Chief of the Colapissas reserved the violin player to lodge with him” (Pénicaut, 107). The next evening, the tables were turned as everyone laughed at Picard trying to keep up with the indigenous drummer and singers: “When the sun had sunk low and all had eaten supper, we danced, as on the evening before, quite far into the night. Their dances... are conducted to the sound of a little drum. Our musician endeavored to keep time with the drum and the singers’ voices. Although he made a most painful attempt that drew upon all his skill and caused us all to laugh out loud, he never was able to approximate their rhythm; and, as a matter of fact, their singing is more savage than the savages themselves. Although it is an incessant repetition, Picard could not get their pitch; but he made amends by teaching many of the girls in the village to dance the minuet and la bourée” (Ibid, 109-110).


Richard Bailey, Speaking American (2012), 100.

The Jazz Archivist

The Bolden Cylinder Project

By Colin Hancock

One of the greatest legends in jazz history holds that, sometime around the turn of the previous century, the pioneer jazz cornetist Charles “Buddy” Bolden cut some cylinder records in New Orleans for a grocer and phonograph enthusiast named Oscar Zahn. While these recordings have yet to be found, there remains a substantial interest in them for their historical importance and overall mystery. A significant number of authorities in the field of jazz have stated that Bolden was the genre’s first star. Like Beethoven and Bach, Bolden inspired other musicians to follow in his footsteps, but unlike those great composers, whose scores have survived just as they were written two centuries ago, no recordings or scores of Bolden’s performances are known to survive. What we do know is that Bolden was influential enough to create a large following that to this day holds him in high esteem. Bolden’s music, then, warrants a closer examination, and this may perhaps be best accomplished by attempting a recreation of his style.

The Project

I was first approached with the idea of recreating the Bolden cylinders by the drummer Hal Smith, after I had had the opportunity to record a group of Austin musicians, of which he was a member, onto wax cylinder. From the get-go I was interested in the project—but I must admit that at first I felt it would be too great a beast to tame, especially since I was dealing with malfunctioning equipment at the time. However, after a few months to make repairs and perform tests, I contacted Smith again in the spring of 2014 to let him know that we were ready, and we immediately set to work. Our first objective was to identify the tunes Bolden’s band would have played and recorded.

Willie Cornish was one name that came up a number of times in this research, since he was the first person to mention the cylinder, and he probably played on it. When interviewed by Charles Edward Smith in 1939, Cornish recalled having recorded “a march rather than a blues or stomp,” for a “white record company” and that he had “heard it many times.” Smith speculated that the record possibly would have been titled a “novelty number,” in keeping with the times. Adding to the confusion, Cornish stressed that the recording was made before 1898, when he joined the army to fight in the Spanish American War. This statement presents a number of problems, since it is not clear whether Bolden was even playing professionally by 1898, let alone popular enough to attract the attention of Oscar Zahn.

Veteran New Orleans clarinetists George Baquet and Alphonse Picou both recalled that the title Bolden originally recorded was “Turkey in the Straw.” This seems plausible, since “Turkey in the Straw” was a huge hit around the turn of the century — it was recorded on cylinder as early as 1892 by Louis “Bebe” Vasnier for the new Orleans-based Louisiana Phonograph Company, and 1896 by Billy Golden for Edison — and it was a “novelty number” as Smith suggested. However, Picou and Baquet both stated that the Bolden recording was made around 1906. From their accounts, I began to get the feeling that Bolden may have either recorded more than one selection, or on more than one occasion. This is certainly possible. Further investigation of the Cornish interview reveals that he told Smith he knew of someone who “had a copy.” Although Oscar Zahn probably did not own a pantograph—an apparatus that allowed record manufacturers to mass produce multiple cylinders—it is likely that he either “tube copied” the records (i.e., he attached one tube from the playback machine to the recording machine) or even more likely that the band recorded the selection (or selections) more than once, so that there would be a number of copies, a practice known at that time as “making rounds” of recordings.

Recording on wax cylinders is not a terribly difficult process once one gets the hang of it (my
own experience attests to this; I once cut seven records in under two hours without any duds or different takes), so it seems probable that Zahn would have known how to record takes and re-takes of various selections, perhaps at different times. Additionally, a photo in Don Marquis’s *In Search of Buddy Bolden* shows what looks like a 1906 Model A Edison Standard Phonograph with the caption “The original Edison cylinder used to record the Bolden Band.” While a Standard is not the best model on which to record, that machine may certainly have been used to record Bolden, or may have been Zahn’s personal playback machine. I contacted Marquis to ask him about the machine and the cylinders and to run this possibility by him, but in his opinion the record was cut around 1898, and only one tune was recorded at that time. I also contacted Bennie Zahn, Oskar’s niece, who said that a copy of the cylinder may have been in her family’s barn, which was destroyed in the 1960s.

An important note made by both Don Marquis and Vic Hobson is that the making of the cylinders would have been a “down home” operation, using a home-recording attachment and blank wax cylinders, rather than the “high-tech” equipment used by the big companies of the day, such as Edison and Columbia. Thus, the cylinders would have most likely sounded “ratty” (i.e., rough and dirty; a reference to the record itself as well as the style of playing), compared to, say, a selection by the Edison Military Band or Columbia Orchestra from the same time. Even though it is likely the recording did sound crude, there would no doubt have been some dignity in the performance itself. It may have begun with a few words at the beginning, which was common practice of the day, possibly announcing “Prof. Bolden’s Orchestra,” as they were designated in a 1903 advertisement for a Mardi Gras Ball. Because the band performed quite regularly, it is also likely that they came to the session well-rehearsed.

Bolden’s Music

Although we have no way of knowing exactly when Bolden recorded or whether he recorded more than once, we found that the safest way to recreate what he would have recorded was to identify and record, in the appropriate styles of the era, all the tunes Bolden’s band may possibly have cut. In addition to “Turkey in the Straw,” titles that have been associated with the Bolden band repertory include “Pallet on the Floor,” “Careless Love,” “Get Out of Here and Go Home”, “Don’t Go ‘Way Nobody,” and “Funky Butt” (“Buddy Bolden’s Blues”). We also chose to include popular hits of the day such as “Creole Belles,” which Bolden was likely to have played.

The next challenge was to get an idea of what Bolden and his band would have sounded like. Fortunately, leads were not entirely lacking. A single photo of Bolden’s band survives to reveal the instrumentation: two clarinets, a valve trombone, trumpet, guitar, and bass. Oral history suggests the band also had a regular drummer, Cornelius Tillman, not present in the photo. While its date is uncertain, the photo is often reported to have been taken around 1894; but this is probably inaccurate, as Bolden is not likely to have even been playing professionally at the time. The photo is a useful resource because it shows the (admittedly abbreviated) Bolden band, and confirms that for a time he used two clarinets rather than the customary violin. Cornelius Tillman seems to have been absent when the photo was taken, but he certainly played frequently with Bolden and would most likely have been present on the cylinder; so, for our recreation we decided it would be best to include drums.

For a preliminary idea of the Bolden band’s “sound,” Hal Smith directed me to a couple of Bolden “tribute recordings,” one by the British jazz bandleader Humphrey Lytton; the other by the Imperial Serenaders, who used a very similar lineup to that of the original Bolden band. After studying these interpretations of Bolden’s music, our next objective (and my personal challenge) was to form an idea of what Bolden himself sounded like. Comparisons have been made of his style with those of Freddie Keppard and Joe “King” Oliver, whose recordings are available for study. Another clue is that, according to Willie Cornish, Bolden “sometimes used a rubber plunger, water glass, half a coconut shell, derby hat, a piece of cloth, or his hand” as a mute.
For a better idea of the way the old time players would have sounded, we consulted the respected jazz historian and Bolden authority David Sager at the Library of Congress, who provided an abundance of notes, information, recordings, and reference sources from his own research. One name Sager led us to was cornetist Willie “Bunk” Johnson, who was around during the earliest days of jazz, and may even have played with Bolden. Johnson did not play outside of Louisiana for extended periods of time, as many other jazz greats did, which may help to account for why his 1940s recordings show a more “traditional” trumpet style than those by, say, Louis Armstrong or King Oliver. Johnson provided a detailed and very valuable description of the Bolden band and its sound. His recordings include interpretations of Bolden’s style in “Make Me a Pallet,” “Careless Love,” “All the Girls Go Crazy” (also known as “All the Whores Like the Way I Ride”), and his famous whistling solo version of what he called “one of Buddy’s old ‘make-up’ tunes.”

Another individual acknowledged by Sager for possible insight into Bolden’s music is the cornetist and bandleader Pablo Valenzuela. An Afro-Cuban, Valenzuela was among the first in Cuba to record the local danzon style and possessed a strong lead attack and tone, traits that more than one account attribute to Bolden as well. Moreover, the Orquesta de Pablo Valenzuela used a startlingly similar instrumental lineup to Bolden’s, with a string bass and drums in the rhythm section, a trombone, and multiple clarinets. Valenzuela recorded some cylinders for Edison in 1906, and among them are a few ragtime numbers. A good example is the two step “Happy Hobbs,” on which you can hear the strong 2/4 rhythm being played arco (bowed) by a string bass and a drive from the snare and bass drum. Though it was performed hundreds miles away, when one listens to this recording it is not hard to envision Bolden’s band playing this same tune at a Johnson Park picnic or a Funky Butt Hall dance.

Because Johnson and Valenzuela’s recordings yielded such valuable insight into the music of the Bolden era, I decided to research other musicians who were active at the time and later recorded. Cornetist Oscar “Papa” Celestin and clarinetist Alphonse Picou were, like Bunk Johnson, veterans of the early days of New Orleans jazz who never left their native city. Celestin made his start with Henry Allen Sr.’s band across the Mississippi River in Algiers, Louisiana, around the turn of the century. Apparently there was a time when he, Joe Oliver, and Manuel Perez were the cornet team in the band; it must have been a force to be reckoned with! By the mid-teens Celestin had joined forces with William “Baba” (or
“Bebe”) Ridgley in the Original Tuxedo Jazz Orchestra, which secured a steady booking at Spanish Fort during the early 1920s. This attracted the attention of the Okeh Record Company, whose representatives made a field trip to New Orleans in 1925 and recorded three exciting numbers by the group, including “Careless Love,” which Bolden was said to have also performed. The band split up after the session, and Celestin’s Tuxedo Jazz Orchestra recorded for Columbia for the remainder of the 1920s. Celestin was rediscovered during the jazz revival of the 1940s, and made some great records that show a style similar to Bunk Johnson’s in attack and technique.

Alphonse Picou provides an interesting contrast to Celestin. Being a “Creole of Color” from downtown New Orleans, he came from a more refined musical background and began as a reading musician. However, when he showed up for rehearsal with the Independent Band, he found that the band did not read a note of music, instead just “ragging” it. At first somewhat befuddled, Picou soon caught on and eventually became one of the city’s leading clarinetists, influencing such later greats as Sidney Bechet and Johnny Dodds. Picou may even have played with Bolden, and he certainly knew about the Bolden cylinder.

The music of Bunk Johnson, Joe “King” Oliver, Freddie Keppard, Pablo Valenzuela, Oscar Celestin, and Alphonse Picou helped bring together missing pieces of the puzzle that is the story of Bolden and his sound. Because we are lucky enough to have recordings by these musicians, we have at least an idea, however backwards looking, of what was being played at the turn of the last century in and around New Orleans.

After much discussion, Hal Smith and I concluded that we would record eight of the tunes that the Bolden band may have recorded or was likely to have played. To demonstrate the music Bolden would have played for a parade, formal event, or picnic at Johnson Park, we chose “Creole Belles” (a popular cakewalk of the day) and the rousing “Don’t Go’ Way Nobody;” and to demonstrate the music he would have played for the dancers at Funky Butt Hall, we chose “All the Girls Go Crazy” and his famous closer “Get Out of Here and Go Home.” To show that Bolden was also known for his soulful blues style, we picked two early tunes that he was also rumored to have recorded: “Make Me a Pallet on the Floor” and “Careless Love.” Finally, we included two novelty numbers with which he was associated. The first was “Funky Butt,” which Jelly Roll Morton famously recorded as “Buddy Bolden’s Blues.” Last but not least came the tune that Bolden was rumored to have first recorded, “Turkey in the Straw,” which we decided should be played with a marching beat.

Bolden’s Story

Buddy Bolden’s story is full of legends and mysteries, but it is still possible to get a good idea of his life, thanks to Don Marquis’s wonderful book In Search of Buddy Bolden. Bolden was born in 1877 and began to pick up music around 1894. By 1900 he was leading one of the top bands in the city, with major competition coming only from the orchestra of John Robichaux. While Robichaux’s band reportedly offered a more refined approach in the Creole tradition, Bolden’s band played with heat, energy, and volume that attracted large crowds. By the early 1900s he had landed a relatively steady job at the dancehall/church nicknamed “Funky Butt Hall.” Unfortunately, Bolden began to show signs of mental instability; in 1907 he was sent to the Louisiana State Asylum, where he remained for the rest of his life, never to play a note in New Orleans again. He died in 1931, his final resting place an unmarked pauper’s grave in Holt Cemetery.

While Bolden may not have been able to see jazz grow into a major American art form, his impact and influence certainly stayed put. Louis Armstrong, Bunk Johnson, Kid Ory, and many others have mentioned Bolden as a dominant figure in jazz’s earliest days. Without Bolden’s mix of blues, ragtime, marches, and folk music, we can predict with some certainty that jazz as we know it today would have developed in a significantly different way.
The Musicians

For the Bolden cylinder session, we assembled a talented group of musicians who proved to have an excellent understanding of the style we were aiming to recreate. David Jellema played Willie Cornish on valve trombone; Jonathan Doyle and Lyon Graulty channeled Lewis and Warner on clarinets; and the rhythm section was taken care of by Jamey Cummins on guitar, Ryan Gould on string bass, and Hal Smith on drums. I sat in on cornet.

I am a Texan, born in Austin and raised in the town of Buda, just south of the capital. I began playing the trumpet at the age of seven, after being exposed to the recordings of Bix Beiderbecke and the Wolverines, Louis Armstrong’s Hot Five and Hot Seven, and Sidney Bechet. I studied for six years under the instruction of Dan Torosion and played in my high school jazz band (led by Mark Kazanoff), orchestra (led by John Moon), jazz combo, and chamber ensemble. I was a three-year member of the Texas Private School Music Educators (TPSMEA) competition, holding the position of 4th chair bass in the 2013 Orchestra and 1st chair trumpet in the 2014 and 2015 Jazz Bands. I am currently 1st chair trumpet in the Cornell University Jazz Ensemble.

David Jellema, known by friends as “Jelly,” is mainly a cornet and clarinet player. Originally from Washington, D.C., he is not only learned in jazz performance and history, but also has a Bachelor of Arts in Classical Civilizations and a Masters in Library Services. He has worked in world relief projects in the Middle East and conducted archival work at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. This recording session was Jellema’s first with a valve trombone, having picked the instrument up only a month before, but his performance exceeded everyone’s expectations.

Originally from Chicago, Illinois, Jon Doyle is an excellent multi-instrumentalist with special interest in the clarinet and soprano, alto, tenor, and bass saxophones. He studied music at Chicago’s DePaul School of Music before becoming a full time musician in the 1990s. Doyle is an alumnus of some high profile bands, having played with the Jim Cullum Jazz Band, Willie Nelson, Asleep at the Wheel, The Jon Doyle Swingtet, and The Fat Babies. He possesses a strong attack and control of the clarinet that made him a perfect fit for Frank Lewis’s part.

Lyon Graulty is another talented multi-instrumentalist. Lyon is from rural Massachusetts, where he began his career playing a variety of different genres thanks to his diverse musical ability. Eventually, he made his way to Austin, where he now plays with such great local talent as the Thrift Set Orchestra, White Ghost Shivers, The Swingsters, and The East Side Dandies.

We were very fortunate to have Jamey Cummins on guitar. Originally from Davenport, Iowa, Cummins is a multi-instrumental jazz musician and composer, and an authority on early styles of guitar playing, from Bud Scott to Django Reinhardt. His knowledge of ragtime guitar helped a great deal to give the band the pulse it needed to capture the sound that made Bolden’s band so popular with dancers. He has played banjo, guitar, and piano, and sung in groups ranging from 1920s style jazz orchestras to progressive rock bands. Cummins currently resides in Austin as a fulltime musician, playing predominantly vintage jazz and pursuing his original folk band “The Parish Festival.”

Our bassist Ryan Gould deserves special recognition. He and his wife Lauryn had to travel to Ireland the day after the session for a year abroad, yet he agreed to take part in it. Despite the limited low response of the acoustic recording process, Ryan’s bass is heard quite clearly on all of the wax cylinders, and it would have been almost impossible to capture the Bolden band’s sound without it! Originally from Pennsylvania, Gould has become Austin’s go-to bassist, sitting in with Floyd Domino, Erik Hokkanen, Jim Cullum, Jon Doyle, The Jazz Pharaohs, and many others. He is especially knowledgeable about early New Orleans string bass playing, and an authority on bass pioneer Bill Johnson.

And that just leaves Hal Smith. In addition to being an extremely talented drummer, Smith is one of the best jazz historians I know, and whenever I had a question regarding this project, he was the first person I went to. Born in Indiana, Smith grew up on the West Coast, where he witnessed much of the
Dixieland revival that took place there in the 1960s, seeing such legends as Kid Ory, Johnny St. Cyr, Ben Pollack, Chink Martin, Sharkey Bonano and Santo Pecora (to name a few) in person. He has played in a wide variety of groups, from the Dukes of Dixieland, New Black Eagle Jazz Band, Jim Cullum, and Butch Thompson Trio to rockabilly, blues, and western swing bands. He has made over 200 recordings and is a respected jazz journalist. For the session, Smith and I researched very early recordings of full drum kits and drum styles to recreate the style of Bolden’s drummer Cornelius Tillman with the utmost respect. Smith’s motto for the session was “WWCTD,” or “What Would Cornelius Tillman Do,” and I am sure Cornelius would be smiling if he heard the results.

Equipment

Perhaps what best distinguishes this project from other attempts to recreate Bolden’s music is that we employed recording equipment from the Bolden era. When Wynton Marsalis recorded onto wax cylinder at the Edison National Historic Site in 1999 he said it confirmed his suspicion that the limitations of early recording technology had a lot to do with “sounding” more like a jazz musician, and he is 100% correct. There truly is no way to get the same type of sound electrically that you get when recording acoustically.20 The process is simple: the performer sings, speaks, or plays his instrument into the larger end of a large recording horn, and the sound travels to the smaller end, at which lies a diaphragm and cutting apparatus called a stylus. A recording engineer makes sure the entire apparatus runs smoothly as the sound waves vibrate the diaphragm, which causes the stylus to etch them into a rotating wax cylinder or disc, forming grooves. To play the record, a separate apparatus is used, which is essentially a reverse of the recorder.21

The frequency range for acoustic recordings lies roughly between 100 and 2500 Hz, whereas a modern day microphone’s frequency can reach upwards of 20 kHz. With such a limited range, you lose a lot of highs and lows in the acoustic recording process, as well as a lot of background noises and the overall “sensitivity” of a performance. Also, while it is true that you lose a lot of sound when recording acoustically, you also gain a lot of sounds through machinery noise and of course, “surface noise” (remember, you are recording on a rotating piece of wax).

Since we had a lot of time to prepare for the session, I decided to take the “better safe than sorry” approach and compile as much equipment as possible. My main recording phonograph is an Edison Triumph from around 1905, and since Zahn was a phonograph enthusiast, it is very likely that he would have recorded on one of these larger machines, as they were the best ones for recording. I did find that Zahn originally had a 1906 Edison Standard A for a playback machine, and since I own the very
same model from the very same year, I figured it would be wrong not to use it.

I was quite fortunate to come across an original recording horn, probably specially ordered from the Edison factory in the late 1890s. It measures 38 inches in length and 16 inches at the bell and is completely conical, directing the sound right to the diaphragm and producing very loud and clear recordings. The recording head used was a modified Edison Recorder attachment from 1905. While it was all original when I first acquired it, and recorded on it in that state for about a year, somehow it was damaged quite severely. Fortunately, I have some wonderful friends in phonograph circles, among them recording engineer Benjamin Canaday (aka “The Victrola Guy”), who rebuilt the recording head with elements of his ultra-sensitive polymer Canaphonic Recorders as well as original parts. Thus, what was once a mediocre recording attachment became a studio quality recording head with excellent presence and response. Canaday has been a mentor to me throughout my own career recording onto cylinder, and since he is incredibly learned in the subject, having him involved in the project was a must!

The task of obtaining blanks was slightly more difficult, and the ones used came from a variety of sources. Locally, I located three in a chest of cylinders owned by bassist Ryan Gould, and one from my good friend and phonograph expert Tim Knapp in Seguin. A large number of brown wax blanks were supplied by John Levin of Los Angeles, and a few black wax dictation blanks were supplied by Ben Canaday (Willie Cornish recalled the records being cut on “old Dictaphone records”). I even came across a Paul Morris blank from England, which was left over from one of my previous sessions. In all I brought along 15 blanks, of which we used 14!

Perhaps the most interesting piece of equipment used was not a recording instrument, but rather an instrument recorded. Upon arriving at the session, Jellema offered that, rather than using my Conn Victor cornet, I play his 1893 English Besson cornet, suggesting it would provide an even more accurate sound, seeing as its vintage was of Bolden’s time. I immediately jumped at the opportunity to use such a beautiful horn, and it made a world of difference in the quality of the recordings, and certainly in my playing.

The Session

With the equipment ready and musicians accounted for, all that was left to do was to record. The date of the session was set August 4, 2014, at David Jellema’s home in East Austin. We were ready to roll. I arrived at Jelly’s house, and he and Smith helped me set up the recording equipment in the “Dandyville Studio,” behind his house. Arriving soon after was a film crew from St. Stephen’s, my high school, who had graciously offered to film part of the session (special thanks to Mike Dolan, Jaxter Kim, Julia Mewbourne, and Charlie Ozburn). As it turns out, the film that would be produced by this magnificent group of film students went on to win a spot in the 2015 South by Southwest Film Competition in the Teen Film category.

When the rest of the musicians arrived, we began to figure out placement of the instruments around the recording horn. The guitar and string bass were the closest, about a foot away. The clarinets stood behind them at about 3-5 feet away, while the drums (a kit of bass drum, snare, blocks, and cymbals) were placed about 4 feet away to the left of the horn. The cornet and valve trombone stood farthest away, about 8-10 feet from the bell of the recording horn. Some light adjusting of positioning had to be done, but I brought along my pair of listening tubes, which I stuck into the end of the horn to hear just exactly what sound was going on the cylinders.

With all of this taken care of, we commenced to record. I will provide a breakdown of each tune cut.
Wax Cylinder Key:
- CBW - Columbia Brown Wax (ca. 1895-1905)
- CBL - Columbia Black Wax (ca. 1903-1907)
- DC – Dictaphone (Black Wax) (ca. 1925)
- EBW - Edison Brown Wax (ca. 1897-1929)
- MBW - Morris Brown Wax (ca. 2012)

**Test Grooves 1&2, “Make Me a Pallet” 0:30 & 0:39, MBW - 160 RPM**

The initial test is quite off-balance with the lead clarinet and trombone almost inaudible, though Gould's voice was of excellent caliber for the announcement. The nature of the blank is also evident, as it was warped and muddled some of the performance. The second test is far better, with more presence from the bass and guitar, as well a good balance between the clarinets. Unfortunately, the performance is cut slightly short by the end of the blank.

**“Make Me a Pallet on The Floor” [Take 1] Master 2:14, CBW - 160 RPM**

This often-recorded song got an uncommonly risqué treatment when Jelly Roll Morton sang it for Alan Lomax. We decided to leave out the verse and just take it at a slow drag tempo. Taken at a slightly faster tempo than the tests, the performance starts off quite easygoing, although the balance is not perfect, owing to the fact that this was the first recording. Even so, the band moves along quite nicely through four choruses, “ragging” more and more throughout (note the great trombone pickup by Jellema at the beginning of the third chorus). Notable is Gould’s bass presence and the solidity of the final chorus, definitely Boldenesque.

**“Don’t Go ‘Way Nobody” [Take 1] Master 1:51, CBW - 160 RPM (click to play audio sample)**

If the previous recording left any doubts as to whether or not the band was truly attempting to recreate Bolden’s style, this recording takes care of them. Starting off with Gould’s announcement, which sounds eerily reminiscent of Arthur Collins, the tune kicks off sounding like a lost Peerless Orchestra recording, with the exception of Smith’s driving drums, which are truly a force to be reckoned with, especially in the first verse and chorus. The second time through the chorus, the cornet rags along with the lead clarinet and harmonizing of the trombone (also listen for Smith’s bass drum). The second time through the verse, the clarinets really kick things up, but the highlight is the rideout in which all the horns are a tour-de-force (despite the confusion between the cornet and clarinet at one point).

**“All The Girls Go Crazy (Bout’ The Way I Walk)" [Take 1] Master 2:08, CBW - 155 RPM**

Another dancing number, “All the Girls Go Crazy” is an upbeat performance. Smith’s use of the traditional New Orleans woodblock count-off shines through. Gould’s arco bassline along with Jellema’s harmonizing (which gives listeners a reminder that “tailgate” trombone was non-existent during Bolden’s time) are also quite prevalent. After the second chorus, Gould steps up to the recording horn and sings two choruses in the Bud Scott fashion with a little help from the band (a reportedly common occurrence when the band performed at Funky Butt Hall). Listen for the driving rhythm from the snare and Cummins’s guitar during the vocal. The two rideout choruses are really great, especially the interplay between the cornet (I was thinking Bunk Johnson) and Lyon Grauty’s excellent Alphonse Picou style clarinet playing.


The band listened carefully to a recording of the Edison Military Band prior to recording this track to really change gears from a “ratty” sound to a more society orchestra sound (such as the Women’s Mardi Gras Ball). In fact, if Bolden performed this tune, which is quite likely, he likely would have “borrowed” it from rival John Robichaux’s orchestra, who read the written orchestrations of pieces,
rather than ragged them.

Of all the tunes recorded, this is the one that sounds most like an original cylinder recording. The first take, though a good performance, has a few flubs and an overall uneasiness to it due to the complexity of the arrangement. Fortunately, the second take was excellent. Opening with the same intro as in the stock, all horns are in sync and the group sounds much larger than it is (owing to the acoustics of the hall, as well as Jellema’s powerful trombone lines). Smith rides the woodblock in the verse, but comes in on the snare during the chorus, which really drives the band. Graulty plays excellent clarinet lines that are, once again, very Alphonse Picou-like. The band then shifts to the C section with ease, Smith once again riding the woodblock and Gould’s string bass really prominent. Then, after the bridge, the band changes to the final section, first playing it in an extremely refined style with the addition of excellent clarinet work by Doyle and Graulty. Then, things kick up a notch when the cornet signals the band to go ratty on the final chorus. All horns rag the strain with impeccable precision and Gould’s plucked bass really drives the band. It was one of the session’s highlights.


Taking a completely different turn from “Creole Belles,” we decided to refer to Bolden’s famous “Funky Butt”/“Buddy Bolden’s Blues”/“St. Louis Tickle”/“Cakewalk in the Sky” as simply “Blues,” to avoid referencing it in a way that would have offended listeners in 1906. Unfortunately, the first take was recorded on a slightly damaged blank and ran off the end of the cylinder, but the second take survives and plays loud and clear throughout. The true highlight is the very present guitar on this performance; especially behind Gould’s vocal (he sang the Jelly Roll Morton lyrics). The cornet then takes a chorus using a glass bottle (just as Willie Cornish said Bolden did) as a mute. The final chorus was cut in half to keep up with the time frame of the cylinder (its 2:10 length was really pushing it).

“Careless Love” [Take 1] Master 2:15 DC - 155

One of the finest performances of the set, “Careless Love” is played at a standard Slow-Drag tempo. The tune is quite significant historically, being one of the oldest American melodies in existence, having roots in Appalachia and along the Mississippi. The cornet picks up the tune, and the unison playing between Doyle’s clarinet and cornet are extremely present, as well as Cummins’s guitar and Gould’s bass. The little bit of arranging I did to really get the feel of the tune and Bolden’s band was a duet played here by myself and Jellema on trombone. Played straight, it is more to emphasize the “bluesiness” of the melody. This is further stressed in the clarinet duet with (bottle) muted cornet interjections in the background. The out chorus is one of the finest we recorded, with a nicely ragged performance by the cornet, obbligato clarinet, and drums, as well as excellent “moaning” by Jon Doyle’s clarinet and Jellema’s trombone.


While it is not the most difficult thing to record on wax cylinders, it can be tedious, and the three takes of “Get Out of Here and Go Home” prove this. The first take was an excellent performance, especially the second half where the band is at its raggiest, but unfortunately the blank was quite noisy and there were a couple of really loud “thumps” in the wax. However, one wonders if the “rattiness” that Willie Cornish spoke of comes alive on that dirty blank. The second take is even worse, with an extremely loud blank and two huge “drop outs” (when there is a depression in the wax, and the cutter skips or changes the depth of the cut, causing the sound to go in and out).

Thankfully the third performance survives in excellent condition. Smith’s drums are showcased best on this recording, especially the “four-ONE” beat on the bass drum. Listen to him take off during the
Getting set up for recording. Left to Right: Smith, Hancock, Cummins, Gould, and Doyle. Photo by David Jellema.

The difficulties of learning “Creole Belles” did not stop us from enjoying ourselves, at least a little. Left to right: Hancock with 1893 Besson cornet, Doyle, Graulty, Kim, Gould, and Cummins. Photo by David Jellema.

Smith and Hancock discuss the finer points of Bolden’s music, while Doyle works out his part. Photo by David Jellema.
fourth time through the verse. On the second time through the chorus the band really rags it, and the cup mute on the cornet is quite an interesting dynamic change. The rideout, however, is the highlight. Gould switches to pizzicato on his bass, and the interplay between Doyle and Grauty also adds to the beauty of the performance. The band nails the ending.


The final tune of the session is also one of the most interesting recorded. It is most likely to have been the “novelty number” recorded by Bolden’s band, as several sources claim; we play it at a march tempo, similar to how Willie Cornish described it. The first take is an overall good performance, but after Gould’s vocal there was some confusion as to what was to be played next and the tune almost falls apart. Luckily, there were two blanks left, and we recorded it one more time, resulting in an excellent take.

Smith has the honors of counting the tune off, and the band rags the tune from the get go. The clarinets come in for a very Wilbur Sweatman-sounding verse, followed by my interpretation of a Bolden style lead. Then, Gould steps in front of the recording horn one last time, doing an excellent interpretation of Billy Golden’s vocal of the tune, which Bolden is likely to have heard. (We listened to a cylinder of Golden singing the tune prior to the recording, which really made a difference). The band is having a great time during the vocal, “whoopin’ and hollerin’” throughout. Then the two final choruses put an end to a most rewarding recording session.

Afterword

By the end of our session, we had cut fifteen recordings: eight masters, five duds, and two test grooves. All eight of the tunes written out had been waxed, and several alternate takes existed of the performances. I spoke with Smith about the results and he made a very good point about what set our recreation apart from others: “We did not take an academic approach to Buddy Bolden’s music. There were no bar-by-bar instructions on how and what to play. Rather, we came to the project as jazz musicians, following our own instincts. As the session progressed, we became more comfortable with the idea of playing and improvising in a style that only survives in the written recollections of Bolden’s sidemen and those who actually heard the band. The musicians in Professor Hancock’s Orchestra are specialists in a wide variety of jazz idioms. But for one magical morning and afternoon, everyone in the orchestra managed to place themselves into the atmosphere of a makeshift recording studio in 1906 New Orleans.”

At certain points in several of the recordings, the band sounds less and less like it is trying to interpret a style and more and more like it is playing real music, and, more than that, like it is enjoying it. The performances have the balance between loose and stiff that so many people who witnessed the birth of jazz and its prehistoric days attribute to it. It was music for dancing, drinking, and having fun, not pondering over like some static display in a museum. And while what we played on that day in August may not seem like jazz to modern listeners, it is as much jazz music as what Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Stan Getz or Wynton Marsalis play, because it points to where the music started.

Dedicated to Don Marquis and the families of Buddy Bolden and Oskar Zahn.

Edited by Ian Hancock, Hal Smith, David Jellema, Susan Schotz, and Colleen Hynes.

The Jazz Archivist

XXVIII, 2015

(Endnotes)


3 Smith, “The Bolden Cylinder.”

4 Marquis, In Search of Buddy Bolden, 44.


6 Louis Vasnier’s “Turkey in de Straw” was advertised in an 1892 edition of The Phonogram (Dan Weisman, “The Louisiana Phonograph Company,” The Jazz Archivist, vol. 4, no. 2 [December 1989], 2) An extant copy has yet to be found. Speculation that the Bolden cylinder was also recorded by the Louisiana Phonograph Company is made doubtful by the fact that the company seems to have ceased recording activities by 1894, placing it just outside of the possible time frame for recording Bolden (Brooks, Lost Sounds, 90). Billy Golden, “Turkey in the Straw,” Edison Record 4011, 1898, can be accessed electronically via the Cylinder Preservation and Digitization Project: http://cyinders.library.ucsb.edu/search.php?queryType=@attr%201=1016%20&query=straw&num=18start=10&sortBy= &sortOrder=ia.

7 Hobson, Creating Jazz Counterpoint, 14.

8 Marquis, In Search of Buddy Bolden, 164.

9 Marquis, In Search of Buddy Bolden, 44; Hobson, Creating Jazz Counterpoint, 14.


11 Though musicians came and went from the Bolden band, there was a core group, referred to by Marquis as the “regular band” (76), who formed a recurrent personnel from around 1900-1906.

12 For a practical overview of Bolden’s purported repertoire, see the chapter titled “How and What He Played” in Marquis, In Search of Buddy Bolden, 99-111.


15 This Is Bunk Johnson Talking, Explaining to You the Early Days of New Orleans, American Music LP 643.


17 Pablo Valenzuela, “Happy Hobbs,” Edison 18948, 1907. This record can be accessed electronically via the Mainspring Press Collector’s Blog: https://78records.wordpress.co/2012/09/14/the-columbia-cuban-catalogs/.

18 Hobson, Creating Jazz Counterpoint, 88.


21 To obtain the best possible sound from the drums and bass, two instruments notoriously difficult to record acoustically, I ran several trial recordings with different horn setups and positioning of instruments until I found the “sweet spot.” It is a common misconception that these two instruments could not be recorded acoustically. Actually, there are several examples, going as far back as the earliest days of commercial recording (Issler’s Parlor Orchestra, Edison, 1899) that use snares, blocks, cymbals, and toms, and even a few records from the 1900s and 1910s featuring string bass, not to mention that Kid Ory’s Sunshine Orchestra used one on their 1922 Nordskog sides and the Original Tuxedo Orchestra included one in their first session for Okeh, recorded in New Orleans in 1925.

Jazz à la Creole

By Caroline Vézina

Enslaved Africans had been gathering to sing, play music, and dance in the vicinity of New Orleans and neighboring plantations since the early days of the colony. After the Louisiana Purchase, these gatherings were permitted to continue, most notably at the famous Congo Square in New Orleans. Church services, balls, Carnival, and private social events also allowed for the performance of dance and music. In those days, Louisiana was characterized by a Caribbean-like three-tiered society composed of Whites, Gens de Couleur Libres (Free People of Color), and enslaved people. According to the original meaning of the word, all three of these groups were “Creoles.” Although they were divided by skin color, wealth, rights and privileges (or lack thereof), occupation, and education, they shared the Catholic religion and the French language as defining factors of their cultural identity.

Creoles of color – as the Free People of Color came to be called – valued formal musical training, and, during the nineteenth century, Creole musicians composed, played and/or sang classical, military, and dance music, as well as cantiques (religious songs from the Catholic Church), and popular songs in Creole French that incorporated African, European, and Caribbean elements, decades before the emergence of ragtime and jazz.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Creole musicians played a significant role in the development of jazz as teachers, bandleaders, instrumentalists, singers, composers, and arrangers. Many of them, including the Tio family (whose involvement in the Louisiana musical scene can be traced back to the war of 1812), Alphonse Picou (1878 or 1879-1961), Kid Ory (Edouard Ory, 1886-1973), Jelly Roll Morton (Ferdinand Joseph Lamothe [or LaMenthe], 1885 or 1890 – 1941), Lizzie Miles (Élizabeth Marie Landreaux, 1895-1963), Sidney Bechet (1897-1959), and Barney Bigard (Albany Léon Bigard, 1906-1980) spoke French as their first language; and most of them received some formal music training. They were afforded plenty of opportunities for professional engagements in parades, weddings, funerals, lawn parties, fish fries, dances, etc., which went on all year long.

Jelly Roll Morton’s performance and discussion of the Creole song “C’été ‘n aut’ can-can, payé donc” in his famous 1938 Library of Congress recordings clearly establish that Creole songs were performed in the formative years of jazz:

This… was one of the early tunes in New Orleans. It’s from French origin. And I’m telling you, when they start to playing this thing in the dance hall they would really whoop it up… [T]his was around about nineteen-five, nineteen-six. All the bands – the little bands that was around – played it… [I]t happened to be a favorite so far as the tune goes. But there seemed to be some vulgar meaning to it that I have never understood. I know what all the rest mean, but the can-can – I can’t understand the can-can business [Laughs]. But I’ll tell you, everybody got hot and they threw their hats when they get to start playing this thing.³

Yet, it is not quite clear when jazz musicians started to include Creole songs in their professional repertoire, even though they doubtless played and sang them with relatives and friends. In 1949, while working on his biography of Morton, Alan Lomax met with Creole guitarist and banjoist Johnny St. Cyr (1890-1966). As they were discussing the Golden Rule Band – “the first real hot band… back around nineteen hundred” – St. Cyr explained that it was what they “called a dance orchestra” that mostly played ragtime pieces and “popular numbers,” and that the Creole songs “came up in later years… [W]e had lots of Creole tunes during that time but the bands never bothered with them.”
Lomax: What do you mean? Who played those Creole tunes then?
St. Cyr: Ah, people used to just sing ‘em. They’d always get a bunch of Creoles – Creoles are noted for good times, you know. On Sundays, they’d have what we call a cowan in Creole, turtle dinners, you see. It was famous around Creole section [sic]. Until today they’s quite a few of ‘em still has those cowan dinners. And, uh, they have their wine and their beer there, and – wasn’t as many musicians then as they have now. And those babies get out there and they’d get happy. And they’d get to get to [sic] singing and clapping... People would be dancing and that’s it!

St. Cyr went on to play and sing his rendition of “Eh La-Bas.” Similarly, Alphonse Picou recalled the last time he played with Lorenzo Tio in Los Angeles: “They threw a party for him and made him sing ‘Eh La Bas.’” Picou also remembered playing Creole songs on “dance jobs” and at Mardi Gras. In a 1959 interview, Paul Barbarin (1899-1969) and Theresa Wilson (Barbarin’s sister) described Carnival as it was “then” – which, from their point of view, was better than in 1959 – when “colored people” were masking, singing, and dancing – with some men cross-dressing as women and dancing with other men. When asked what would people sing, Barbarin only remembered the words of a few songs, but his sister went on to comment that they would “sing all kind of Creole songs [and] put all kind of words in them... They all – they’d make a real song out of it. They’d rhyme it up.” Leonard Bechet (Sidney Bechet’s older brother) also recalled that musicians “had a variety of pieces, that they make up themselves.” During a 1949 interview, clarinetist Alphonse Picou was joined by his (mostly unknown) brother, singer and songwriter Ulysses Picou, then 66 years old, and Paul Dominguez on guitar for a performance of one of Ulysses’s compositions called “La Misère”/”Misery.” According to Alphonse Picou, Ulysses was the one “who wrote all Creole songs [such as] ‘Who Stole My Bottle / Qui Veut Qu’Y Voler Ma Bouteille?’ or ‘Qui Veut Qui Dit Toi Que Moi T’As Parlé Là-Bas / Who Told You I Was Going Over There.’” This strongly suggests that Creole people, and therefore Creole musicians, had a practice of improvising and composing music and/or lyrics at least on occasions such as Carnival and informal familial music playing, like at a cowan dinner.

But, even if the evidence suggests that Creole songs were popular and became part of the repertoire of early jazz musicians, none appeared on the first jazz recordings of the late 1910s and 1920s, probably because record producers would not have seen any commercial value to them. However, as the New Orleans jazz revival of the 1940s and 1950s was largely prompted by the desire to document the origins of jazz, Creole musicians and collectors alike seem to have thought it important to (finally) record what they remembered of this uniquely Louisianian repertoire as it was interpreted by early jazz musicians and singers. “Eh La Bas” stands out as the Creole song most often recorded by jazz musicians. Kid Ory recorded it in 1946, some twenty-four years after his landmark recording of “Ory’s Creole Trombone.” Despite the title, “Ory’s Creole Trombone” is not a Creole song per se. However, it does exemplify the early New Orleans jazz style characterized by a front line of horns and polyphonic texture, with the cornet (or trumpet) playing the melody, the clarinet playing an ornamented countermelody in a higher register, and the trombone playing a melodic and rhythmic bass line, supported by the rhythm section maintaining a regular but swinging beat in 2/4. Its multiple short trombone breaks give Ory a more predominant role than his usual rhythmic and melodic backup for the melody – hence the title – but it is in keeping with the popular genre of slide trombone specialties of the time. Ory revisited his old composition, recording it again in 1945 with his Creole Jazz Band. It is worth noting that this later recording, although slower, shares a similar instrumentation and arrangement with the 1920s version. We can therefore infer that Ory’s musical approach was similar during the 1920s and 1940s, and that his...
1946 recording of “Eh La Bas,” as well as his 1947 live recording of it at the Green Room in San Francisco, reflect the way he would have played it in the early years of jazz. However, there could have been some variations, as on his 1960 Verve recording, where the refrain is performed in call-and-response with pianist Lionel Reason. This particular version also contains longer solos – 32-bar clarinet and trumpet solos and a 24-bar piano solo – followed by a few choruses of collective playing and improvisation, more typical of early jazz, apart from the four-bar drum solo on the last eight.

In 1956, Lizzie Miles recorded a version of “Eh La Bas” whose lyrics are longer than Ory’s version, with Bob Scobey and his Frisco Band providing a New Orleans jazz type of accompaniment. Miles started her career as a teenager, working with musicians such as King Oliver, Kid Ory, and Bunk Johnson. Like many early blues singers, she toured on early black vaudeville and minstrel show circuits, then made her first recordings after moving in New York in 1922, eventually recording with Jelly Roll Morton in 1927. Of particular interest is her bluesy, low-chest voice with her rich timbre and raspy tone, whether singing in English or in French. Her bilingual performances of popular songs such as “Basin Street Blues,” “Bill Bailey Won’t You Please Come Home,” and “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” – along with De De Pierce’s rendition of “All of Me”/“Tout de Moi” – demonstrate the ability of New Orleans Creole
musicians to adapt their vocal and musical style into French.  

According to Sybil Kein, “‘Eh La Bas’… is based on ‘Vous Conné Tit la Maison Denis’ [and] was sung by Creole men dressed as women and playing small guitars on Mardi Gras as late as the 1940s.” Several other scholars have collected a song they usually called “Mon Cher Cousin,” or sometimes “Maison Denise,” which contains the same first verse as “Eh La Bas,” followed by different lyrics. In Gumbo Ya-Ya, Lyle Saxon wrote that “‘Mo Ché [sic] Cousin, Mo Ché Cousin’ was one of the most popular of all the Creole songs. It is said that more than one hundred verses were written to the same tune, all dealing with cooking and mulattoes striving to pass for Whites.”

Creole songs were also composed to commemorate events or as social commentaries, or both. “Toucoutou” by Joseph Beaumont (1820-1872), is based on the case of Anastasie Desarzant (whose nickname was Toucoutou), who attempted to pass for White (Passé Blanc) but was defeated by the Louisiana Supreme Court in December 1859. According to Saxon, dozens of versions existed for this song, once again reflecting the improvisational nature of the Creole songs. On March 21, 1945, Kid Ory recorded a version of Beaumont’s song under the title “Blanche Touquatoux” for Decca Records, with Cecile Ory (his sister-in-law) joining him on vocals. Musically speaking, this version exemplifies the Spanish tinge of the early New Orleans jazz style, as the first two choruses, one instrumental and one vocal, are performed with the tresillo rhythm before switching to a swinging 4/4 for the last choruses. On one of his 1960 Verve sessions, Ory recorded a solo version of “Blanche Touquatoux” that again incorporated elements coming from later jazz developments, such as an eight-bar intro arguably based
on the I-vi-ii-V progression of “Rhythm Changes,” a kind of walking bass line in 2/4 and a sixteen-bar piano solo. Ory’s vocal chorus is followed by a chorus of group playing with the trumpet and trombone playing the melody – one after the other – supported by the clarinet playing a countermelody. After the piano solo, the piece closes with a recap of the melody played by the three horns in typical New Orleans style. Ory’s version is also significantly shorter; his lyrics differ substantially from the text given by Saxon in Gumbo Ya-Ya, but, as both sets of lyrics are clearly satires of the “Toucoutou Affair,” we can identify them as variants of the same song.

During the same session, Ory also recorded a series of traditional French songs that were part of the common repertoire of children’s songs in Louisiana and French Canada. Someone at Verve had taken notice of Ory’s success in France and wanted to release an album of French songs, but they remained unreleased for years because, “What the French really wanted… was traditional jazz, not FRERE JACQUES.” However, I suggest that Ory recorded these songs as a tribute to his French heritage, as he had most likely heard and sung them as a child. These recordings also testify to the Creole musicians’ dynamism in maintaining and sharing their Creole heritage in the jazz age.

As Creole Songs were recorded, they reached new audiences and gained in popularity. In his liner notes for the LP reissue of the 1947 Jazz a la Creole session, Rudi Blesh wrote:

The Jazz A La Creole session sticks in my memory for a peculiar aftermath. We set up the date for the Creole Serenaders to wax some traditional cooking A ‘La Creole [sic], with Nick [Albert Nicholas], Pops [Foster], Danny Barker, and the Harlem stride giant, James P. Johnson. Nick and Danny did the Creole singing. There was much Creole laughter after the vocals one of them in particular. Within weeks we had a mysterious best selling single in Montreal and Quebec. Later on we found that our little Circle, dedicated to “pure” jazz, had innocently waxed a “party” record in patois we didn’t dig. But they did dig it in Canada where the local French and the New Orleans Creole are strongly similar – both being Early French.

I suspect that the mysterious hit was “Les Ognons” [sic], as its call and response refrain Belles calas tout chauds! can have a double entendre with sexual connotations. The song was actually inspired by the “street cries” – “short musical expressions which were sung with the purpose of selling wares” – of the marchandes de calas. Street vendors were an ever present fixture of the New Orleans soundscape who may have unknowingly contributed to the transmission of songs like the one that caught the attention of George Washington Cable, who wrote in 1886 about a marchande de calas that he heard singing a “Calinda” song when he was a child.

Various musicians and scholars have pointed to the fact that Creole songs incorporated African- and Caribbean-derived characteristics which became important elements of early jazz; most notably, a unique vocal timbre with melodic and pitch inflections and rhythmic figures such as habanera and tresillo, i.e., the famous “Spanish Tinge.” In an interview with Bill Russell, drummer Warren “Baby” Dodds provided this recollection of his early days in New Orleans:

In the downtown district where the Creoles lived, they played blues with a Spanish accent. We fellows that lived Uptown, we didn’t even play the Creole numbers like the Frenchmen downtown did – such as Eh La Bas. And just as we changed the Spanish accent of the Creole songs, we played the blues different from them. They lived in the French part of town and we lived uptown, in the Garden district. Our ideas for the blues were different from theirs. They had the French and Spanish style, blended together.”
Charles Hiroshi Garrett adds that, “Dodd’s position as an uptown outsider is of particular interest here, for he later notes that an interest in Spanish rhythms eventually spread from the Creole district throughout New Orleans.”

In 1867 the authors of *Slave Songs of United States* observed that:

> The voices of the colored people have a peculiar quality that nothing can imitate; and the intonations and delicate variations of even one singer cannot be reproduced on paper... [They] abound in “slides from one note to another, and turns and cadences not in articulated notes.” “It is difficult... to express the entire character of these negro [sic] ballads by mere musical notes and signs.”

In her 1932 thesis on Creole songs, Camille Nickerson similarly noted “the difficulty of notation... owing to the Negro’s *oddbity of intonation* and his ingenuity for *complicated rhythm*.” Commenting on one of the Creole songs transcribed in his biography of Morton, Lomax remarked that there was more syncopation than could be annotated, and he described the vocal arrangement in which the first voice came in with its own line before the chorus was finished as an “early stage of African polyphony.”

Alfred Pouinard and Sybil Kein both point out that several of the Creole melodies start on, and therefore emphasize, the fourth or the second beat of a measure, a feature that became a defining characteristic of jazz.

Finally, though only a limited number of Creole songs have been preserved, “there was a time when the songs were plentiful and popular.” Some eighty-five Creole songs have been collected by various musicians and scholars since the publication of *Slaves Songs of the United States*. Consequently, it is safe to assume that early jazz musicians had access to a large repertoire of Creole songs to perform in and around New Orleans, even if by the time they were interviewed they had unfortunately forgotten many of them. These songs constitute a tangible heritage of the Creoles and their unique contribution to jazz. They form an original repertoire that belongs both to the Black American folk music and to the Franco-American folk music, reflecting not only the multicultural and creolized nature of jazz, but also the cultural identity of the Creoles of Louisiana to the present day, as some of these songs are still being played and recorded.

(Endnotes)

1 The first collection of slave songs, *Slave Songs of the United States*, was published in 1867 under the direction of William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison. Most of the songs presented are English language Negro spirituals, but the book closes with seven songs, all secular, that were “obtained from a lady who heard them sung, before the war, on the 'Good Hope' plantation, St. Charles Parish, Louisiana.” The short explanation that accompanies these songs indicates that they were sung in what was “evidently a rude corruption of French... spoken by the negroes [sic] in that part of the State” (Allen, Ware, and Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States*, 1867, [New York: Peter Smith, 1951], 113).

2 First spelled *criole*, the word came to French in the seventeenth century – via the Portuguese *criolau* and Spanish *criollo* – and was defined as “the name Spaniards give to their children born in the colonies” (Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel* [Rotterdam, 1690], author’s translation), which corresponds to the way it became used in the French colonies: “Long before the transfer to Spain, Iberville and Bienville referred to *creoles* as a matter of course in their communications with royal officials; and church functionaries regularly so described native parishioners in registering births, marriages, and deaths among their flock (Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., “Creoles and Americans,” in Arnold R. Hirsh and Joseph Logsdon, eds., Creole New Orleans [Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press,], 137).

3 Morton’s performance of and commentary on “C'était N’aut’ Can-Can, Payez Donc” (sic) can be heard on *Jelly Roll Morton: The Complete Library of Congress Recordings by Alan Lomax*, Rounder 11661-1888-2 CD-al, CD 6, track 14. The quote is from “Transcript of the 1938 Library of Congress Recordings of Jelly Roll Morton,” *Jelly Roll Morton: The Complete Library of Congress Recordings by Alan Lomax*, PDF file on Disc 8, 106-107 (author’s emphasis in bold). A footnote to the transcript (106) specifies that the can-can was “a variation on the quadrille and polka [that] was first danced in France in the 1820s and [was] subsequently banned by the police as indecent.” In an interview conducted by Alan Lomax in 1949, Leonard Bechet also mentioned having played this song; to him, can-can meant “gossip” [http://research.culturalequity.org/get-audio-detailed-recording.do?recordingId=13130, accessed September 1, 2015].


6 The 1949 New Orleans Jazz Interviews demonstrated a direct link with Marc-Antoine Caillot’s narration of the 1730s Mardi Gras celebration at a home on Bayou St. John, in which he was disguised as a bergère (shepherdess), already establishing a tradition of cross-dressing (Erin M. Greenwald, ed., A Company Man: The Remarkable French-Atlantic Voyage of a Clerk for the Company of the Indies - A Memoir by Marc-Antoine Caillot [New Orleans: The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2013], 134-135).


10 Ernest Borneman has defined what he called the “tangent” in jazz “during the very years which, in recording history, appear to be the most fruitful ones – the years when the New Orleans jazzmen migrated to Chicago and were recorded there for the first time. It must have been during these very years that jazz lost its ‘Spanish tinge’ and reduced itself to a series of improvisations in straight 2/4 and 4/4 time on Tin Pan Alley tunes. What got lost at that time was the essence of jazz: the African and Creole themes of the formative years, and the Creole manner of rhythmic accentuation” (Ernest Borneman, “Creole Echoes, Part 1,” The Jazz Review, vol. 2, no. 8 [September 1959], 14).

11 In 1944 Bill Russell – whose work strongly influenced the New Orleans Jazz Revival – founded the American Music label to release the numerous recordings he did with early jazz musicians. Marili Morden, owner of the Jazz Man Record Shop in Hollywood, and her husband Nesuhi Ertegun established the Crescent Records label, which released the four sides recorded by Kid Ory in Los Angeles in 1944-1945, and then became part of the Jazz Man label, which issued traditional jazz recordings between 1946 and 1951. In 1946 Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis founded Circle Records. After they issued, among other things, an abridged LP version of the 1938 Jelly Roll Morton Library of Congress interview; the 78rpm album set “A Night in Old New Orleans: Celebrating at a Home on Bayou St. John,” in which he was disguised as a bergère (shepherdess), already establishing a tradition of cross-dressing (Erin M. Greenwald, ed., A Company Man: The Remarkable French-Atlantic Voyage of a Clerk for the Company of the Indies - A Memoir by Marc-Antoine Caillot [New Orleans: The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2013], 134-135).


13 “Ory’s Creole Trombone” was also recorded in 1927 during the seminal Louis Armstrong Hot Five sessions with Kid Ory, trombone; Johnny Dodds, clarinet; Johnny St. Cyr, banjo; and Lil Hardin, piano, in a similar arrangement.


15 Kid Ory and His Creole Band, “Ory’s Creole Trombone,” Crescent 6, November 1945 (Mutt Carey, cornet; Daniel Howard, clarinet; Buster Wilson, piano; Bud Scott, guitar; Ed Garland, bass; Minor Hall, drums).

16 Kid Ory, “Eh la Bas,” 1960, issued on The Complete Kid Ory Verve Sessions, Mosaic MD8-189 CD-al, CD 7, track 9. The other musicians on the recording were Teddy Buckner, trumpet; Bob McCracken, clarinet; Frank Haggerty, guitar; Morty Corb, bass; and Jesse Sailes, drums.

17 Lizzie Miles, “Eh la Bas,” on The Great Bob Scobey & His Frisco Band, Jansco JLP 6252, 1956, reissued on Jazzology JCD285. Miles’s lyrics are also closer to everyday life in New Orleans, such as in this verse: “Tu connais Madame Josephine? A vient d’aller vivre dessus la Rue Dauphine/Madame Mongo, dessus la Rue Congo/Tombée, cassée son grand zozo” (“Do you know Mrs. Josephine? She just moved on Dauphine Street/Above Mrs. Mongo, on Congo Street/Fell and broke her big bone” [transcription and translation by the author]).

18 During the mid-1920s, Miles spent some time in Paris, where she was nicknamed La Rose Noire, singing in cabarets such as Chez Mitchell and Chez Bricktop, both of which were managed by musicians from the United States. Not much is known about what she sang during her sojourn in Paris, but she confided to an interviewer that she “didn’t have no trouble getting along in French, because [she] learned Creole French from [her] mother” (Lauraine Goreau, “An Evening with Lizzie Miles,” Jazz Journal, vol. 17, no. 1 [January 1964]); Lizzie Miles interviewed by Richard Allen, January 18, 1951 (Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University). To listen to this interview, go to: http://musicrising.tulane.edu/listen/detail.do?recordingId=410/L-Miles-Interview-1951-01-18.


21 See Marie Theard, Old Songs of French and Creole Origin Collected in Louisiana, ca 1935, 220; Henri Wehrmann, Creole Songs of the Deep South, 1946, 7; and Alfred A. Pouinard, Recherches sur la musique d’origine française, en Amérique du Nord, Canada et Louisiane (Thèse de Doctorat, Université Laval, QC, 1950), 230. Harry Oster recorded it during a 1956 field trip (Fonds Harry Oster, Archives de Folklore et d’ Ethnologie de l’ Université, Laval, Québec, F901, CD 1671, track 28, song 133); that same year, Adelaide Van Wey recorded “Maison Denise” on her Street Cries and Creole Songs LP (Folkways FP 602).


24 Saxon, Gumbo Ya-Ya, 428. Saxon reproduced what Desdunes identified as the refrain of the song in his book, Nos hommes et notre histoire, in which he specified that “Malheureusement, nous n’avons pas toutes les chansons que Beaumont a composées à cette occasion” (“Unfortunately, we do not have all the songs that Beaumont composed in this occasion” [author’s translation]) (Rodolph Desdunes, Nos hommes et notre histoire [Montreal: Arbour & Duport, 1911], 38-39).


26 Originally unissued, Ory’s 1960 version of “Blanche Touquatoux” is included on Complete Kid Ory Verve Sessions, disc VII. The “Rhythm Changes” come from the 1930 George Gershwin song “I Got Rhythm,” which became a standard and a very commonly used chord progression during the 1930s and 1940s.

27 The songs are: “Au Clair de la Lune,” “Auprès de Ma Blonde,” “Frère Jacques,” “Il était une Bergère,” “L’ Alouette,” “Le Roi Dagobert,” “Marlborough S’en Va-t’en Guerre,” and “Sur le Pont d’ Avignon.” They are included on The Complete Kid Ory Verve Sessions, disc VII.


29 Rudi Blesh, liner notes, Baby Dodds Trio - Jazz a’la Creole, GHB LP GHB 50, nd, reissued, with Blesh’s original LP liner notes, on GHB BCD-50, 2000. This material was originally issued on Circle 78rpm album set S-13.

30 An instrumental version of the song became a hit for Sidney Bechet in France.


32 George W. Cable, “The Dance in Place Congo,” The Century Magazine, XXXI (February 1886), 517-532, 527. Later on, Danny Barker (1906-1980) also recalled the street vendors: “They have a basket on their head, and they wouldn’t hold the basket. It would be the blackberry lady or the strawberry lady or the pie lady.... Old ladies used to sell... I can’t think of them things. Calas... They stand by the church. Each church you see these old women standing there with a basket. Have on ‘em slave clothes. Big skirts... One particular... I’d go and stand and look at her, and she would look at me, and I wouldn’t say a word. She would shake her head. ‘Pauvre. Pauvre petit’” (Danny Barker interviewed by Michael White, July 21-23 1992 [Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program, NEA Jazz Master Interview, 7]).


34 Garrett, Struggling to Define a Nation, 58.

35 Allen Ware, and McKim, Slave Songs of the United States, iv-v.


40 The list that I have gathered does not presume to be exhaustive.

41 I refer to America in its original meaning as a continent, so that “Franco-American” represents all of the French communities of the American continent — French Canada, the French West Indies, French Guyana, etc.
Baby Doll Addendum and Mardi Gras ‘49

By Jerry Brock

In my memorial piece to Uncle Lionel Batiste (The Jazz Archivist, vol. 27, 2014), I addressed the commonly accepted yet problematic and inconclusive origin story of black women masking baby doll as it related to Lionel’s mother Alma Batiste. This brief addendum explores a bright moment in the baby doll tradition in New Orleans during the Carnival season of 1949.

Following Bessie Smith’s June 1926 recording of “Baby Doll,” the future movie actress Hattie McDaniel wrote and recorded “Brown Skin Baby Doll” in July 1926 for Meritt Records.1 Earlier that same year Ethel Waters recorded “Sugar,” foretelling the end of the baby doll trend in 1920s music:

Have you heard what I’ve done,
Found a word, just the one,
That takes the place of one
I used to call Baby doll!
It ain’t new, it ain’t old,
But if you’ll do what you’re told,
You’ll find the answer if you take a look
In Mr. Webster’s dictionary book.
The name is sugar!2

However, the tradition and popularity of masking baby doll in New Orleans continued into the early 1980s, before its demise and subsequent twenty-first century revival. The New Orleans women’s afrocentric embodiment and expression of the baby doll persona outweighed and outlasted the national tendency.

Mardi Gras 1949 was unusually momentous. Louis Armstrong’s reign that year as King Zulu created immense local excitement and generated national and international press. Local music clubs scrambled to present the biggest shows they could afford. The Caldonia Inn, corner of St. Phillip and St.
Claude streets, promoted its Carnival season entertainment in the *Louisiana Weekly*:

It’s a new show again at the Caldonia Inn. This time it’s “Baby Dolls of 1949.” Last week’s feature act, with the one-leg jitterbug dancer, Albert Bellvue, was such a success that the same routine will be repeated for the Carnival guests. Along with this teasin’ – tossin’ show will appear such stars as [baby dolls] Virginia Smith, Mary Anne Foster, Gloria Lopez and Myrtle Nightingale and the solid group the Hair Combo.

Cha Cha Hogan, the versatile emcee will once again introduce those top performers of the show: Lloyd Ignicious, Mattie Campbell and Alma Lollypop Jones... The two floor shows every week end begin exactly at 11:30 p.m. and 2 a.m. So for Carnival it’s the Caldonia Inn.3

This line-up exemplifies the deep pool of down home talent that existed in and emerged from the culturally rich black New Orleans communities of the time, as Uncle Lionel Batiste and members of his family had done. Of the four featured baby dolls, there is no account that any of them pursued song and dance as a career; yet, to perform with the Hair Combo indicates talent. Also, the fact that they were promoted and presented as headliners attests to the popularity of the baby dolls and their potential to draw customers. Longtime Sixth Ward resident Henry Youngblood recalled, “Gloria Lopez was a Batiste baby doll. She went to Calvary Spiritual Church. You see back then, everybody had different names. There was Ruth Caldonia, Bo Weevil, Mule, Cutsie Babu, Steamboat...”4 Gloria Lopez continued to honor the New Orleans baby doll tradition, and she participated in downtown neighborhood parades and social organizations for decades.

This was possibly the first Carnival season performance of Henry Byrd, piano player in the Hair Combo, who was otherwise hustling day labor jobs. He began playing at the Caldonia in March 1948.5 In November 1949 he made his first recordings as Professor Longhair, including “Mardi Gras in New Orleans,” for the Star Talent label.6 It is not too far a stretch to consider that this song, Longhair’s ovation to Mardi Gras and the Zulu King, was inspired by Louis Armstrong’s participation in that year’s Carnival festivities. By the 1970s Byrd had finally begun to achieve worldwide acclaim for his innovative contributions to American music.

The emcee, Sumter “Cha Cha” Hogan, was a New Orleans native, employed in 1949 as a driver for Ed’s Cab Service, and residing at 606 North Johnson.7 Around the time of Professor Longhair’s first recordings, Hogan recorded “My Baby Loves Me” and “My Walking Baby” for the same label.8 Huey “Piano” Smith remembered Cha Cha as a “blues shouter” who was one of the people who inspired the term “rock n roll” and who stood up against race discrimination.9

Hogan moved to Detroit in the 1960s and continued to appear in bars and nightclubs as an emcee, comedian, and singer, opening for the Four Tops and others.10 In the 1970s he made the funk instrumentals “Grit Gitter” and “Just Because You’ve Been Hurt” for Soulsville Records.11 Some of his unexpurgated comedy routines, drawn in part from historic vaudeville, were collected on the X-rated comedy LP *Brother Eatmore and Sister Fullbosom*, as by “Cha Cha Hogan – The Black Foxx.”12 In the mid-1970s Cha Cha appeared on several episodes of the TV show *Sanford and Son*, starring Redd Foxx.13 Following the death of Bill Kinney, he became the lead singer with Stanley Morgan’s revived Ink Spots and moved to Las Vegas.14 There he continued his street-wise stage performances and passed away in November 1986.15

Albert Bellvue, the one-leg jitterbug dancer, was working in 1949 as a cobbler at Bean’s Shoe Hospital uptown on LaSalle Street.15 He later worked as a roofer and house painter, and in 1975 he opened the barroom Al’s Place at 1738 North Galvez.17 “One Legged Albert we called him. He could dance man. The jitterbug is high spirited and physical with a lot of moves. The way he’d turn was so fast the woman would get lost and another would jump in. I never saw a roofer like Al. He could walk up a
ladder onto a roof with a full roll of felt paper on his shoulder like it was nothing.”

Of the show’s three “top performers,” Lloyd Ignicious was a “Golden Voice Crooner” and Mattie Campbell a “female mimic.” “Jump blues” singer Alma “Lollypop” Jones, wife of local comedian Lollypop Jones, recorded for Mercury in 1950 as Alma Mondy. Their story deserves its own chapter.

Within a year of appearing at the Caldonia Inn with the Baby Dolls of ’49, Professor Lonhair, Cha Cha Hogan, and Alma Mondy all launched recording careers (Vernon Winslow Collection of Recorded Sound, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University)

(Endnotes)

1 Hattie McDaniels (sic), “Brown-Skin Baby Doll,” Meritt 2202, June 1926.
4 Henry Youngblood interviewed by Jerry Brock, September 19, 2015; Polk’s New Orleans City Directory, 1949, includes: Gloria Lopez, 2329 Ursulines; Virginia Smith, 538 N Rampart; Mary Anne Foster, 2733 St. Ann. It is possible that Myrtle Nightingale was also known as Myrtle Jones, who was a featured singer at the Caldonia during the late 1940s.
5 Rick Coleman, liner notes, Mercury Records: The New Orleans Sessions 1950 & 1953, Bear Family BCD 16804 BH.
6 Professor Lonhair and his Shuffling Hungarians, “Mardi Gras in New Orleans,” Star Talent 808.
7 Polk’s New Orleans City Directory, 1949.
8 Cha Cha Hogan, Star Talent 810.
9 John Wirt, Huey Smith and the Rocking Pneumonia Blues (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014) 44.
10 Imdb.com, Cha Cha Hogan.
11 Cha Cha Hogan, Soulsville 45 SV 1017.
12 Cha Cha Hogan, Brother Eatmore and Sister Fullbosom, Laff LP 147.
16 Polk’s New Orleans City Directory, 1949.
18 Youngblood interviewed by Brock. Henry further stated, “We had a funeral for the Caldonia right before they were going to tear it down when they built the park. We had a small display casket that we got from Blandin Funeral Home and we marched to the ‘Cal,’ set the casket inside and set it on fire. We marched up the street as the Caldonia burned down.”
Transcribing Bessie Smith

By Wayne D. Shirley

In the late 1980s I transcribed the words of the Bessie Smith recordings (words only; not the music) as they appeared in the series of five two-LP albums released by Columbia Records in the early 1970s. Every evening I would transcribe the words to one song, playing the record over and over until I thought I’d got everything; the next day I’d enter it on my computer at work, print out my transcription, and take it home to compare with the recording. There were usually a few slips: I’d note these slips for correction and then start the same process with the next song. I had thoughts of publishing the transcriptions as a book–a sort of Bessie Smith Songster–but when I got to about the 120th of the 159 songs, I became involved with a four-year project which involved all my time. I kept up my routine of transcribing a song a day until I’d finished the 159 (#160, the soundtrack to the 1929 film St. Louis Blues, I did later), but there was no time for getting them in shape for publication—introduction, ironing out kinks, the complex worries of copyright.

By the time I had finished my four-year stint I had become involved with other projects. Then in 1998 Angela Davis published her Blues Legacies and Black Feminism, with its appendix containing transcriptions of all the Bessie Smith records. I figured I should let my own transcriptions rest for a while. (The transcriptions in Blues Legacies... were drably presented–without comment, alphabetically by title rather than chronologically by date of recording [which annoyed me much more than it should have], but I checked some of the tough spots and found the solutions usually sound.) Now, with the advent of digital technology, which makes it possible to listen over-and-over-and-over to a single line—or even a single word—without having to drop the needle on the vinyl for every single listen, my transcriptions seem to be relics of an earlier era.

Last year in correspondence with Lynn Abbott I remarked that I'd once found myself writing brief comments on each of the Bessie Smith recordings (I don't remember whether I mentioned the transcriptions themselves); he asked for copies for the Hogan Jazz Archive and I duly marched to the town Xerox shop and ran off the 200-plus pages of my paper copies (my current computer will not deal with my antiquated diskette copies) and sent them off. More correspondence ensued; Lynn finally suggested that I might like to write a column on Bessie Smith for The Jazz Archivist. I gladly accepted the offer. This is the first column; it is, I'm afraid, the driest, but I felt it was worth starting out talking a bit about one of the principal helps I had in transcribing Bessie Smith. Here goes:

During the 1920s, record companies got an extra two cents for their records if the music on them was protected by copyright. Thus it was to their interest that, when any new song was recorded, the song be registered for copyright. This was done by depositing some kind of paper copy with the Copyright Office in Washington, D.C. (It was not until the 1970s that you could copyright a song by depositing a recording of it.) Different recording companies had different strategies for producing a piece of paper which would serve as a deposit: Paramount Records, for example (Ma Rainey! Blind Lemon Jefferson!) made transcriptions of the words of the songs from the recordings proper—nicely typed on yellow wood-pulp paper of good quality for the 1920s; the paper still holds up (or did in the 1990s, when I last saw samples). The transcriptions are often ok, but they have no more authority than the transcriptions you or I might do; occasionally a line or two is fudged quite badly. Columbia Records, which recorded Bessie Smith, was more slap-dash; occasionally, especially with numbers published by the Clarence Williams Music Publishing Company, they could send in published copies of the music; otherwise they'd usually send in something used in the recording session itself. If we were
lucky, it would be words-and-music; more often it was a words-only sheet used by the singer at the
session (or the recording engineer? often what we have is a carbon). If the song were later published,
the Copyright Office would usually be sent a copy of this version as well. Copyright could also be held
with a music-only sheet; sometimes these sheets do represent the song as performed (well, sorta); other
times they seem to be sheets of manuscript music picked up at random, bearing no relation to the music
on the recording. The word-sheets are often on yellow wood-pulp paper, some of it near complete
disintegration due to its acidic content. At its best — and that certainly includes those word-sheets
if they’re in readable shape — this Columbia material is far more revealing than the Paramount, since
it represents what was actually used in the recording, but it can often be disappointing. “What was
actually used in the recording”: used, but by no means always used as it appears in the piece of paper
sent in to secure copyright: see the second of my three stories below.

Before the stories, some cautions. Copyright deposits are direct documents of a recording
session only for songs first recorded at that session (or, in the case of a song recorded in multiple
sessions by the same singer, a document of one of those sessions): for songs already recorded earlier
they’re only a check on what the words were — or what they were as given to the singer — when the
song was first recorded. (This elaborate phrasing will serve also for songs which were published before
the first recordings of them were made — “A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight,” “Alexander’s Rag-Time
Band”). The Columbia system of submitting for copyright something used in the session proper worked
much better for studio sessions than for sessions set up in a southern hotel room: therefore Bessie Smith
is well-represented, while Robert Johnson is not. (Paramount’s method – transcribing the words of the
record after it had been made — worked equally well for Ma Rainey and Blind Lemon Jefferson). Not all
songs recorded were copyrighted — “Hot Springs Blues,” which has a word in the second stanza which I
was unable to transcribe, is one of several songs recorded by Bessie Smith which were never deposited
for copyright. Some copyright deposits which were duly sent in cannot now be located — perhaps the
acidic paper has crumbled until they are unidentifiable; perhaps they were filed out of order eighty-
odd years ago when they first came in. (“You’ve Been a Good Old Wagon…”, with that mysterious line
which I can hear only as “Has manners of a crown,” is a good example from Bessie Smith of a song whose
copyright deposit can no longer be located.)

Here are the three stories. The first involves the identification of a piece recorded by Bessie
Smith but never issued. (The masters for the Bessie Smith recordings can no longer be found in the
Columbia/SONY master files, so we must deal with copyright to find out about such unreleased titles as
“Jot ‘Em Down Blues”.) The second is a small example of how Bessie Smith can contribute to the words
of a song written by someone else. The third is an example of one of the most important uses of the
copyright deposits for scholars of the blues: clearing up the meaning of a line which you as transcriber
just can’t figure out.

First story. On May 14, 1925, Bessie Smith recorded—with trombonist Charlie Green and
pianist Fletcher Henderson, both trusted accompanists and good friends — a number listed in Godrich &
Dixon’s Blues and Gospel Records 1902–1942 merely as “Ragtime Dance.” As many of you know, “The
Rag Time Dance” is the title of an ambitious short theater piece by Scott Joplin (as also of the piano rag
which was drawn from it: but it’s the theater piece which has words); the idea that Bessie Smith might
have recorded something by Scott Joplin was tantalizing. It would not be the earliest piece recorded by
Bessie Smith: “A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight” is 1896 to Joplin’s 1902.

But copyright deposits show a much more likely candidate: on July 23, 1925, the Perry Bradford
Music Publishing Co., one of the principal companies used by Columbia Records to copyright music
recorded by Bessie Smith, deposited for copyright a manuscript — words and music — of “Longshaw’s Rag
Time Dance” by Fred W. Longshaw. Fred Longshaw was a frequent pianist on Bessie Smith records (and
occasionally a harmonium-player: that’s his harmonium you hear just before Louis Armstrong enters in
Bessie Smith’s recording of “The St. Louis Blues”); he also appears as songwriter – often in collaboration with one other person – for seven duly released recordings by Bessie Smith, including “Reckless Blues” (“I ain’t good-looking, but I’m somebody’s angel child”). His unmistakable handwriting, duly present on “Longshaw’s Rag Time Dance,” is on several other copyright deposits for songs Bessie Smith recorded, including some not by Longshaw himself (including “My Man Blues,” the hilarious duet with Clara Smith). The word “Longshaw’s” at the start of the title is a late addition to the copyright-deposit copy; it was almost certainly titled just “Rag Time Dance” when it was entered into the recording log.

Looking carefully at the Joplin “Rag Time Dance,” it’s clear that it would be unlikely to appeal to Bessie Smith. The entire number is too long for a 10-inch 78 RPM record side. The opening description of the ball at which the dance takes place is stiffly declamatory beyond what Bessie Smith would care to do; the dance proper, which includes some fist-rate ragtime, has a voice part only marginally more suited to her style. And there’s a lot for piano alone (and very little which would be natural for Charlie Green’s trombone). Fred Longshaw’s “Rag Time Dance,” on the other hand, is a verse-and-chorus popular song much after the model of “Ballin’ the Jack” – indeed the chorus, like the chorus of “Ballin’ the Jack” (and, for that matter, the dance proper of the Joplin “Rag Time Dance”) is a description of the steps the dancers are to take. (Longshaw’s verse is ruthless self-promotion – “Folks have you ever heard of Fred Longshaw…”.) Longshaw also includes the trademark off-the-tonic start of the chorus of “Ballin’ the Jack”; his song finally seems like a copy of a glorious but in 1925 slightly faded original.

Just over a week before recording “Rag Time Dance”, on May 5, 1925, Bessie Smith did record her real tribute to the ragtime generation, Chris Smith’s “Cake-Walkin’ Babies from Home”; even this glorious record was not immediately released. (It would have been in competition with the Clarence Williams Blue Five recording, done for Okeh on January 8 – Louis Armstrong! Sidney Bechet! Eva Taylor vocal! – an absolutely unbeatable record.)

Second story: Bessie Smith often changed the material she was given. Most ruthless example is very early – April 11, 1923 – when she recorded “Beale Street Mama.” “Beale Street Mama” is a straightforward popular song with a verse which sets up the chorus by telling us that Joe has been thrown over by his girl-friend and that, “if you were near him, you would hear him / start his mournful cry.” The verse is, in fact, a device to make the chorus, which is a wail about a man’s unfaithful “Beale Street Mama,” available for a woman singer as well as a man: she’s reporting to us what she’s heard. Bessie Smith sings the verse quite straight; but she starts the chorus “Beale Street Papa, why don’t you come back home?”, and sings the entire chorus as a woman’s complaint about her man. This is certainly the most radical change she made, and for the new listener the most bizarre. I’d like to look at a much smaller and less ruthless change, one of my favorites:

In response to the 1927 Mississippi flood, songwriter Porter Grainger, who had written “’Taint Nobody’s Biz-ness if I Do” and “Sing Sing Prison Blues” and who would write “Put It Right Here (or Keep It Out There),” wrote that year his “Homeless Blues” (“Mississippi River, I can’t bear to hear your name”), which Bessie Smith recorded on September 28, her tribute to that most devastating American flood of the first half of the twentieth century. As Porter Grainger wrote it – as we read it in the copyright deposit copy – it’s a powerful song, leading to a final desolate stanza:

Wish I was a eagle – or nothin’ but a old black crow.
Wish I was a eagle – or nothin’ but a old black crow.
I’d flop my wings and leave here and never would come back no mo’.

A powerful ender, but it’s not what Bessie Smith wants. On the recording she sings:

Wish I was an eagle, but I’m a plain old black crow.
Wish I was an eagle, but I’m a plain old black crow.
I’m gonna flap my wings and leave here, and never come back no mo’.
For Porter Grainger humanity is helpless before the power of nature. For Bessie Smith, all God’s chillun got wings.

Third story: One of the most useful aspects of the copyright deposits is the clearing up of spots hard to decipher on the recording (what is that “Big Redhead” doing in the “Chicago Bound Blues”?). Here is my favorite story about this:

“Black Mountain Blues,” which Bessie Smith recorded in 1930, is a twelve-bar blues – seven rich stanzas! – with a text credited to “H. Cole.” (“H. Cole” seems to be a pseudonym for J. C. Johnson, who is responsible for the words to many of Bessie Smith’s greatest recordings, including “Empty Bed Blues.”) “Black Mountain Blues” tells of an impossibly rough township:

Back in Black Mountain a child will slap your face.
Back in Black Mountain a child will slap your face;
Baby’s cryin’ for liquor, and all the birds sing bass.

The first line of the third verse, and its repetition as the second line, sound very much like

Homes in Black Mountain can’t keep a man in jail.

Bessie hits “Homes” extremely hard, as though it had a special meaning. Transcriptions have tended to substitute some other word or set of words that made more sense; I had always been puzzled by it while listening to this song, one of the Bessie Smiths I most admired. (I joked with myself that it was really “Holmes,” though Sherlock detected criminals rather than seeing that they didn’t escape from captivity; and Bessie Smith avoids literary references – unless you count “Andy Gump” in “Down in the Dumps” from her last recording session.)

It was late in my project of transcribing all of Bessie Smith’s recordings that I finally called for the copyright of “Black Mountain Blues” (it’s no. 149 of the 159 recordings). It immediately gave me the answer: the line read, in the copyright deposit,

Home in Black Mountain, can’t keep a man in jail.

“Home in Black Mountain”: that is, “In Black Mountain, where I come from....” Nothing in the Bessie Smith recording suggests that Black Mountain is her home-town; it’s just a place where she’s known a man that left her for a “city gal” and that she intends to go back to and get her revenge.

If you were to expand the line as it appears in the copyright deposit, it would read:

[Back] home in Black Mountain [you] can’t keep a man in jail,

“you” meaning people-in-general, not you-I’m-talking-to. Bessie Smith’s version, similarly expanded, would read

[My] home’s in Black Mountain, [where you] can’t keep a man in jail.

It seemed so simple once I’d seen the copyright deposit. (Though I do wonder: if I’d come to this conclusion by myself, without the help of the copyright deposit, would I have thought “that’s just too pat; it asks the listener to assume too much?”) So, one of the thorniest cruxes in the words to the Bessie Smith recordings is resolved with the help of the song’s copyright deposit.

By the way: I managed to solve by myself the problem of that “big redhead” in “Chicago Bound
Blues,” a spot that had troubled me ever since I started to listen to Bessie Smith recordings, before I saw the copyright deposit (which duly confirmed my solution). Despite the clear break which Bessie Smith makes after “head,” the line runs

Big red headline, tomorrow’s Defender news.

That is, The Chicago Defender, the premier black newspaper of the nineteen-twenties (which did often have red headlines) will have a big red headline tomorrow. (The headline, she sings, will read WOMAN DEAD DOWN HOME WITH THE CHICAGO BLUES!)

[Technical note for those interested in doing research with copyright deposits: as most readers of The Jazz Archivist know, the Copyright Office is part of the Library of Congress. They hold the documents pertaining to the registering of music (and other forms of creative endeavor) for copyright. The actual music deposited for copyright is in the custody of the Music Division of the Library of Congress. You should start your search by inquiring of the Copyright Office whether there was something submitted for copyright for the item you are interested in: give the title, the year (and perhaps the next year as well) and make clear it’s a piece of music you’re interested in. (Do not talk of it as a recording or you will get a polite letter explaining that recordings could not be copyrighted until the 1970s). Year is important, as is the fact that it is music you’re looking for; otherwise you will get much material of no interest to you. The Copyright Office will charge for this service. If you get a positive answer from the Copyright Office, you should write the Music Division saying you are interested in a copy, giving the information the Copyright Office has sent you. (Addresses of both are simply Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Copyright Office has the zip code 20542, the Music Division 20540). If you are in Washington, D.C. you can use the Copyright Office’s card-files and the Music Division without going through the mail; the process is elaborate and the learning curve rather steep, so this should not be attempted on a trip made just for this purpose alone. If you live near a major research library that was around at the start of the twentieth century, you might check to see whether they have a copy of the serial government publication Catalogue of Copyright Entries, Part 3: Musical Compositions, which was published (that is, Part 3 was published) from 1906 to 1946. This will allow you to do your own research on what was deposited for copyright during any year covered by its publication. If the librarian is puzzled by your request, refer the librarian to the current Guide to U.S. Government Publications, page 605, where the Catalogue... is listed as LC 36/3. Unfortunately, very few libraries have this extremely bulky and seldom-used serial, which for some of us is lifeblood. (Remember, it’s just Part 3 of a general catalogue of copyright entries; the whole set may be in the general collections of your library, not the music division).]
Clockwise from top left: staff member Alaina Hebert (far left) and curator Bruce Raeburn (far right) accept a gift of truffles from Mathilde Zagala of the Sorbonne, visiting the Jazz Archive on a six-month Fulbright Scholarship, and her husband Stefan; Freddi Evans, author of Congo Square (left), and Judy Cooper; Yoshio and Keiko Toyama (left center, with Narvin Kimball’s banjo) and a group of visitors from Japan; Shaye Cohn of the band Tuba Skinny; brass band trombonist Jerome Jones; Sally Newhart, author of The Original Tuxedo Jazz Band; Lucien (left) and Jules Bauduc (right) join the curator in examining materials from the collection of their uncle, the great New Orleans drummer Ray Bauduc.

55 The Jazz Archivist
XXVIII, 2015
Clockwise from top left: Dr. Hilary Jones (left) and Tonya St. Julien, from Florida International University; cultural representatives from Brazil meet with the curator (clockwise from top right): Nattalia Paterson, Bruce Raeburn, Luciana Rocha Feres, Natalia Ferreira, Monica Toyota, Elaine Parreiras Oliveira, Alexandre Da Silva Fernandes Filho; Karina Engmann and Per Oldeus, author of Professor Longhair: A Scrapbook; musician/educator Dr. Michael Torregano; trumpet player Mervin “Kid Merv” Campbell; Rachel Breunlin, co-director of the Neighborhood Story Project; Allen Kimble (right) sharing his Colored Waifs Home artifacts with the curator.

XXVIII, 2015

The Jazz Archivist 56
Who Was Benny Clement?

By the Hogan Jazz Archive Staff

Since we posed this question in our last newsletter, only a few additional shards of biography have come to light. Born to Thelma and Junius “June” Clement on November 12, 1928, Bernard Francis Clement was raised uptown at 726 Arabella Street, where he first started playing the trumpet. At Samuel J. Peters High School in 1945, he played in the band that took first place in a citywide high school jazz band contest.\(^1\) Taking music for his profession, Benny Clement became a well-respected situation player with a passion for modern jazz, which he pursued until his death in 1994. Had he chosen to join the “New Orleans jazz revival,” he might be better remembered today. At this late date, precious few of his old running partners remain available to speak on his behalf.\(^2\) Were it not for Charles Suhor’s singular study, *Jazz in New Orleans: The Post War Years through 1970*, and the diligence of relatives Ken and Lorelei Clement Schaefer, Benny Clement’s important legacy – a life in jazz – might be invisible to the public record.\(^3\)

In 1946 Benny enrolled at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. For much of that year he kept a diary, in which he logged some of his earliest adventures as a working jazzman.\(^4\) January 9: “Spent another day at school learning nothing. I want to study music but haven’t had a chance.” January 10: “skipped school... and went to see Louis Prima at St. Charles [Theater in New Orleans].” January 11: “Worked at Dreamland tonight then I went to the Beverly Country Club... with Tony Costa and Charlie Duke.” January 13: “Worked all day at Dreamland. The band sounded swell tonight.”

November 20: “There was a jam session at the [LSU] band hall tonight. I played fair... Was measured for tuxedo for concert band. 6 of us sang a little barber shop harmony last night.” November 23: “Overslept my theory class this morning. Left for N.O. at 10... Ronnie and I went to Varsity Club in Algiers to hear Jack Delaney. He sure plays great. Leo Bickham works across the street at the Club.
Alla [sic]. Frank Alessi has a new James French Selmer.” November 24: “went to hear Glenn Miller (Tex Beneke) band at Auditorium. What a band... Sold my trumpet to John for $20. Went to Preview Lounge after dance with Donald & Paul Logust [sic, Logos]. A great combo works there.”7 November 30: “Went to dance at Field House but it was awful. Met Al Biletto [sic] & Ed Fenasci, we went to Jame’s [sic] Steak House to hear combo.” Over the next several years, Clement and saxophonist Al Belletto maintained a close musical relationship.8

On December 9, “Instead of studying I went to the Silver Slipper with Paul & Bill. We jammed until 3 in the morning. I was really on, played great. Everybody was high and playing like mad.” On December 17 Clement played on campus with the LSU concert band: “First time I wore my tux since I left Pierson’s band... After the concert we stayed in the music building and listened to jazz records till 2 in the morning.” On December 18 he planned to see Dizzy Gillespie: “We were all set to go but we couldn’t get Joe’s car out of the shop. It wasn’t even fixed. Dizzy was in Rouston [sic], La. He played on the La. Tech campus. We went to a movie... shot pool for a while, and then came home.” On December 21 he got home to New Orleans just in time to bathe and “and leave for Laurel Miss. I played at the Country Club with Hector Fontana [?]. We drank all the way up there. I only had a few. The bass player got so loaded he couldn’t play the job. It was a wild drunken dance. I got home from Laurel about 9 o-clock. Was I tired. I was so beat we’ll just call this a lost day.”

By 1948 Clement was working regularly in and out of town. He played a season at a resort pavilion in the Ozarks that year, as a sideman with Al Elliott and His Orchestra. Back on the home front, he joined forces with Al Belletto and others to explore the modern idiom. One of the few venues in which they were free to stretch out was local strip clubs. Belletto: “All the jazz that I was playing was playing for strippers, that was the only place that you could experiment, in the public, as far as modern jazz went, would be for the strippers. In fact, there were some strippers around that used to pay Benny Clement and I, they’d have a trio working in a strip joint, and they would give Benny and I maybe $5.00 apiece, and we’d go in and play seven hours, just to have some horns in there, and we’d be playing some of these bebop charts, and the strippers would be dancing.”9

This photo was probably taken at the Dreamland Ball Room in Metairie. Benny Clement is seated just to the right of drummer, Charlie Duke. Tony Costa is the sax player at far left.
Interested in connecting with other modernists, Clement and Belletto started to seek out local black players. Belletto recalled pilgrimages to the Texas Lounge on Canal Street to see a band led by Earl Williams, who “played bass and sang like Billy Eckstine; he had Earl Palmer on drums; on piano Ed Frank… And Benny Clement, this little white trumpet player and myself, we used to go around there quite a bit, and then they let us sit in and play a number of times, until, just to get the segregation part of this, the police came in and warned us not to do that… And the second time these police came, they were going to arrest us. And we couldn’t understand this, naturally; Benny and I were considered ‘bohemians’ of a sort, during that period.”

912 Toulouse Street

New Orleans had a local version of New York’s “jazz loft” scene at 912 Toulouse Street, where black and white musicians defied the segregation laws to join in all-night jam sessions. Among them, Earl Palmer recalled “jamming in Benny Clement’s apartment, 912 Toulouse.” Others remembered it as piano and bass player Johnny Elgin’s apartment. Belletto: “Basically the guys that I started getting involved with were my age – there was a trumpet player – Benny Clement was the trumpet player; he and I, we would learn all those charts, the trumpet and the alto parts, off the records, and that’s, we spent a lot of time, and there was a guy named Johnny Elgin, a bass player around town working, and eventually became a pianist, too, and we used to [have] sessions at his house at least once a week.”

The Toulouse Street address was immortalized in the referential song “912 Greens” by “folk music revival” artist Ramblin’ Jack Elliott. Elliot’s song did not mention the jazz scene at 912; but folk
renewal banjoist Billy Faier, Elliot’s “host” at the infamous French Quarter location, has written of his sojourn at “Johnny Elgin’s at 912 Toulouse Street... There were nightly jam sessions there with Sonny Wayne, drummer, Mouse [Bonati], alto sax, Brew Moore, Tenor Sax.” 14 Johnny Elgin appears to have vacated 912 Toulouse by February 1954, when he started mailing letters from Philadelphia and Chicago to jazz aficionado Al Rose, who was getting his mail at 831 St. Louis. It seems Elgin had left New Orleans in order to distance himself from a drug problem. In one letter, posted from Chicago, he noted:

Lost my ring somewhere before I left. Guess somewhere around 912.
Have had no charge, b’s, or whiskey. Just port wine, which I cherish dearly as my last link with enforced insanity.
Regards to the disciples of True Jazz... And to the French Quarter.” 15

In another letter, posted from Philadelphia, Elgin touched on the death of New Orleans saxophonist Don Guidry - “shot a bunch of horse and died” - and then changed the subject to enquire: “please tell al whether your possessions are still safe at nine twelve... wish I had them here.” 16 It may be that Benny Clement inherited 912 from Elgin; he listed it as his address in 1957, when he was arrested for possession of marijuana. 17 This troublesome episode arose from the possession of a single joint, resulting in an absurd conviction of “marijuana addiction” that remanded Benny Clement to a United States Public Health Service Hospital in Fort Worth until “cured.” 18 This was actually a lesser conviction that suspended what would have been an inordinately excessive five year sentence in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. 19

Given the current legislative climate of decreased penalties for marijuana possession, expansion of medicinal use, and even legalized recreational use, the massive legal hurdle that Benny faced is downright shocking by modern standards. The old *Reefer Madness*-inspired approach netted many people with minor drug offenses serious prison time. Musicians were especially vulnerable. Benny pursued and was granted a full pardon by Louisiana Governor John McKeithen in 1971. 20 News of his pardon must have been bittersweet, since the pain and suffering this event caused Benny and his family could hardly be mitigated retroactively.

Session at Rizzo’s on Bourbon Street. Left to right: Bill Patey, drums; Benny Clement, trumpet; possibly Don Brooks, piano; Joe “Cheeks” Mandry, saxophone.
Charles Suhor has described a revolving door of sorts that existed between New Orleans, the Gulf Coast, and Baton Rouge, as overlapping populations of young modernists from the Crescent City, the Biloxi area, LSU, and Southern University worked or jammed together over the years. Al Belletto recalled:

There wasn’t much for me to do in New Orleans, and I remembered my connection with Gus Stevens in Biloxi, and was trying to put together a thing, and at that time Freddie Crane was in town, who I still think is one of the greatest jazz piano players in the world; Freddie was here, and Benny Clement was here, the trumpet player that I had grown up with, and Donald McKnight was the drummer who; we had played together, and a bass player from New York named Gary Miller. And I put this band together and tried to beg Mr. Stevens to give us a shot. Well, we went in for two weeks and stayed a year... and after we had been there about six months Mel Torme came in, and he was just amazed... that we could put something like this together right down there in the middle, in the Deep South. And he became very helpful [he taught them how to sing parts and get road bookings — Detroit, Calumet City, Buffalo].

At some point before 1954, when Belletto and company started recording for Capitol Records, Benny Clement left the band: “Benny and I weren’t able to continue the Gus Stevens thing. Benny had sort of went off the edge, and we had to replace him at that time, which was a heartbreaking situation, but, so Willie Thomas had come in.” Though Clement missed out on the Capitol Records deal, he can be...
heard on two 45s cut for the local Patio label in 1956 or 1957, in company with Joseph “Mouse” Bonati, leader and alto saxophone; Jimmy Johnson, bass; Earl Palmer, drums; Chick Power, tenor; and Ed Frank, piano. These recordings survive as rare artifacts of the path-breaking experiments conducted at the Texas Lounge, 912 Toulouse, and other locations.

Benny Clement continued to plow the territories of jazz, both as a leader and sideman. A running account of his calendar would be daunting to any old road warrior, if only it could be assembled from the bits and pieces he left behind. One thing is certain: Benny Clement “knew the life.” He appears to have spent most of the back side of his career in Orlando, Florida. Disney World opened there in 1971, and Benny was the trumpet player with Disney’s Top of the World Orchestra as early as June 1972. This placed him in company with some of the great sidemen of the big band era. Benny was the Orchestra’s “featured jazz player” during the 1980s, when he recorded what are probably his last aural artifacts with drummer Don Lamond and his wife, singer Terry Lamond. He was with Don Lamond’s Big Band in 1986 when they played an All-Star Jazz Festival in Cocoa Beach; and in 1987 he led his own Benny Clement Trio at “a new series called ‘Genuinely Jazz from the Landmark Center’” in Orlando. At this point, after four- some years in the trenches, Benny Clement moved into the shadows. We remain hopeful that people will come forward to help fill in the blanks; players who ran the roads with him; or who may recognize some of the faces in the photographs that accompany this piece; or who just may have an anecdote or two to share about this important New Orleans pioneer of the modern jazz idiom.

Special thanks to Charles Suhor for sharing his expertise; and to Ken and Lorelei Clement Schaefer for opening their collection of Benny Clement photographs and memorabilia.

(Endnotes)
1 We ran a photo of the Samuel J. Peters High School Jazz Band in our last issue, identifying the players as Rupert Surcoff, bass; Oliver “Stick” Felix, trombone; Lou Timken, drums; Thomas Balderas, guitar; Benny Clement, trumpet; Tony Mitchell, clarinet. Charles Suhor has since supplied a corrective, to the effect that the clarinet player is actually Frank “Chick” Power, and the drummer is not Lou Timken.
2 Among his early contemporaries, saxophonist Al Belletto and bass player Oliver “Stick” Felix both died just last year: Felix on September 16, 2014, and Belletto December 26, 2014.
3 Charles Suhor, Jazz in New Orleans: The Postwar Years through 1970 (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2001). Section III of Suhor’s book, aptly titled “An Invisible Generation: Early Modern Jazz Artists (192-290), and his Appendix 2, “Early Modern jazz Musicians in New Orleans (305-308), give an in-depth account of dozens of local modernists who were pioneering the new jazz in the city. The most luminous marker of Benny Clement’s legacy are the photographs, diary, and related memorabilia in the cus

4 Benny Clement Diary, courtesy Ken and Lorelei Clement Schaefer.

5 Ads in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* confirm that Prima opened at the St. Charles Theater on Wednesday, January 9, 1946, for a week-long stint.

6 Clement may have been working at the Dreamland Ballroom, 2319 Harlem Avenue, Metairie, which was not far from the Beverly Country Club, 2533 Jefferson Highway. Ads for Dreamland in 1946 editions of the *New Orleans States* mention “Orchestra Every Night,” “The Sweetest Music – The Largest Dance Floor.”

7 Ads in the *Times-Picayune* confirm that a dance was held at Municipal Auditorium, November 24, 1946, with music by the Glenn Miller Band of 32 pieces, led by Tex Beneke. Suhor, *Jazz in New Orleans*, 226, places “underrated drummer Paul Logos” among “the best of the early white Baton Rouge modernists.” Suhor gives an account of activities at the Preview Lounge, Carondelet and Canal, during this time (221-222).

8 Suhor points out (226-228) that Clement and Belletto were part of what became a solid tradition of young modernists in the postwar years at LSU. Among the other players were trumpeter/band leader Lee Fortier; trumpeter Vinnie Trauth; trombonist Carl Fontana; trombonist/pianist Larry Muhoberac; reedmen Phil Hermann, Eddie Hubbard, and Chick Power; pianists Mose Allison and Rusty Mayne; pianist/bandleader C. J. Alexius; bassists Richard and Bobby Alexius; and drummer Reed Vaughn.

9 Belletto interviewed by Jason Barry, October 28, 1981 (Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University). For a discussion of the city's strip clubs and the modern jazz artists who played in them, see Suhor, 206-208.

10 Belletto interviewed by Berry. Others who played with Williams's band at the Texas Lounge included Alvin “Red” Tyler, tenor saxophone; and Sam Mooney, guitar (Tony Scherman, *Backbeat: Earl Palmer’s Story* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999, 92; Suhor, 222).

11 Scherman, 93; Suhor, 270.

12 Belletto interviewed by Berry.


15 Johnny Elgin letter to Al and Mary Rose, Chicago, n.d. (circa 1954) (Al Rose Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 67, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University).

16 Johnny Elgin letter to Al and Mary Rose, Philadelphia, n.d. (circa 1954) (Al Rose Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 67, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University).


19 Allotment # 156-313, State of Louisiana vs Bernard F. Clement, Criminal District Court for the Parish of Orleans, filed April 2, 1957 (Ken and Lorelei Clement Schaefer Collection).

20 Ellis C. Irwin, Attorney at Law, letter to Mr. B.F. Clement, October 1, 1971. (Ken and Lorelei Clement Schaefer Collection).

21 Suhor, 228, 230.

22 Belletto interviewed by Berry.

23 Belletto interviewed by Berry.


26 Ibid.


Curator’s Commentary

Lots of good news to report, so let’s jump, jive, and wail right into it. After 20 years of negotiation, the gift agreement for the donation of the Louis Prima collection was signed on September 10, 2015. Delivery of this multi-faceted collection, rich in recordings, films, photographs, diaries and personal papers, instruments, artifacts, and awards is currently scheduled to occur in March 2016, contingent on the freeing up of space in Jones Hall with the relocation of Rare Books to the 6th floor of the FEMA Howard-Tilton Memorial Library build back construction project. Plans are under way to create a Louis Prima Room adjacent to the Jazz Archive for display of selected materials from the collection and access to digital materials through two patron work stations. The room will also serve as a meeting space for symposia, lectures, and meetings accommodating up to 50 people. We expect it to be ready for patrons by 2017. Prima’s importance to jazz and American popular music is evident in the sheer range and durability of his musical accomplishments, and the good people at the Gia Maione Prima Foundation, who made this donation possible, will surely agree that this gift represents a homecoming for one of New Orleans’ most illustrious musical sons. Thanks especially to Tony Sylvester of the Gia
A wondrous rarity, offering pianist Ed Frank in the role of band leader and featuring a special shout-out to Dr. Daddy-O and his radio sponsor, Jax Beer, on the label (Vernon Winslow Collection, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University)

Prima Foundation, whose dedication to the cause made it all possible, and to Beth Turner, Tulane’s Executive Director of Legal Affairs and Philanthropic Giving, for her consummate skill and insight as a negotiator.

Although collection development has been curtailed somewhat due to space limitations in Jones Hall, we have been fortunate in recent years to attract collections of moderate scope that are unique and have significant research value. Last year we were pleased to report the donation of Walter Eysselinck’s collection of recordings and photographs. This year we received, via transfer from the Amistad Research Center, the Vernon Winslow Collection of 78s, including over 3,000 examples of post-World War II jazz, blues, rhythm and blues, gospel, and popular music. This collection represents a cross-section of what Winslow played on the air during his expansive career as “Dr. Daddy-O,” the first African-American disc jockey in New Orleans. The collection is appropriately heavy on New Orleans sounds, from Archibald to the Zion Harmonizers, and including several unique pressings from the local gospel community and some extremely rare items from Victor “Papa Doc” Augustine’s near mythical Wonder label.

In 2015 we also inaugurated our Björn Bärnheim Research Fellowship, with the first award going to David Maxson, a Ph.D. student at Penn State University conducting preliminary research for a dissertation project concerning the way “jazz funerals” were used following Hurricane Katrina by different groups to explain the scope and significance of the devastation and rebuilding effort. Maxson made several short trips to the Archive before receiving the Bärnheim fellowship in August 2015, which allowed the opportunity to spend two weeks familiarizing himself with the historical context out of which funerals with music and second line parades developed in New Orleans. We intend to present this fellowship to at least one candidate annually and encourage all doctoral candidates, post docs, and independent scholars who are working on New Orleans music topics to apply. The fellowship award is $1500 and requires a minimum of two

Bruce Raeburn (right) presents the Hogan Jazz Archive’s first Bärnheim Research Fellowship award to David Maxson of Penn State University
weeks of research conducted continuously at the Hogan Jazz Archive. Most often, the target dates will be
during the summer, and applicants should submit a research prospectus of no more than two pages and
a brief CV to the Björn Bärnheim Research Fellowship Committee, c/o Alaina Hebert, Hogan Jazz Archive,
6801 Freret Street, Room 304, Tulane University Libraries, New Orleans, LA 70118 no later than May 31,
2016, for the next round.

We also have sad news to report. Mrs. Alma Williams Freeman, an Associate Curator of Graphics
and Administrative Assistant at the Archive for more than 25 years, passed away on December 10, 2014,
after a year-long fight against cancer. During her decades at Tulane, Alma “broke in” three curators
and illuminated the workplace with her presence in a profound way. Her knowledge of New Orleans
jazz and jazz photography was vast, and she was unfailingly gracious and cheerful in dealing with staff
and patrons alike. The photograph of Alma and her husband Don Freeman that you see here is the
one we have kept on display at the Archive since her departure following Hurricane Katrina in 2005,
a daily reminder of the pleasure we got from working with her and knowing her. Among her many
accomplishments at the Archive was an oral history fieldwork project on the Church of God in Christ,
organized and conducted with Lynn Abbott. Alma is survived by a daughter, Mrs. Loretha Bridges, and a
son, Loren Williams.

Finally, we encourage all readers to view our newly updated homepage, which offers more
digital content with every new year, ranging from finding aids to artifacts: photography, sheet music, and
oral history, along with exhibits on riverboats and jazz and, most recently, a collection of posters culled
from the Robichaux Sheet Music Collection (Robichaux used them to wrap orchestrations, which is why
they all have folds in the middle), assembled by our Associate Curator for Graphics, Alaina Hebert. Back
issues of The Jazz Archivist are also available as pdf files for free. For those who wish to have a printed
hard copy of the newsletter, checks for $25 to cover Friends of the Hogan Jazz Archive annual dues will
be necessary. Like New Orleans musicians, we often do what we do for love, but the money “don’t hurt,”
as they say. Thanks to all, and enjoy this spectacular issue, which is the most voluminous that we have
ever published.

-- Bruce Boyd Raeburn

Don and Alma Freeman

XXVIII, 2015
The Jazz Archivist  66