Thanks, Allan

Allan and Sandra Jaffe in front of Preservation Hall, 1960's  photo from the Al Rose Collection

entrepreneur;

The director or manager of a public musical institution.

--- Oxford English Dictionary

A person who organizes and manages any enterprise, esp. a business, usually with considerable initiative and risk.

--- Random House Dictionary

Reporters and listeners have often waxed sentimental over Preservation Hall. But the gift of Allan Jaffe was as concrete and real as his untimely death.

The role of the entrepreneur is a vital, but undervalued, ingredient in the history of jazz. From its earliest days the music has been a medium of professional entertainment. Those who found ways to market it have had an important impact on what was played, where it was played, how it was played, and who played it.

New Orleans bandleaders learned to be entrepreneurs in their own right, maneuvering for each brief gig among hard-nosed club operators and their own competitive brethren. True to business cards which announced "music furnished for all occasions," the jazzmen tailored their sound to the requirements of each job. Often as not, however, they found they could rely on music for only a portion of their income.

Better, more reliable pay required more sophisticated artist-management, with regional and national marketing know-how. From the old riverboat operators like the Streckfus Brothers, to Louis Armstrong's manager, Joe Glaser, and on to today's festival promoters, such as George Wein, a few skillful entrepreneurs have hit on formulas which provided good, steady work for a minority of old-style jazz players. In

the long transition from fish fries, black dancehalls and neighborhood house parties to worldwide concert stages, TV, malls and convention centers, the music itself was bound to be affected. Equally important in this musical evolution have been the changing social environs and

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The Russell-Jaffe Connection:
More Than Jazz Revival

When William Russell arrived in New Orleans in the summer of 1942 to record Bunk Johnson, finding a horn and a new set of teeth for the trumpeter were not his only problems. In addition to confusion between Russell, Gene Williams of Jazz Information, and Dave Stuart of Jazz Man, inferior steel blanks had to be used for recording because aluminum-based acetates were impossible to get during the war years. Furthermore, local consciousness of the New Orleans jazz heritage was at a low ebb. The New Orleans

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education of the players. Today’s New Orleans jazz remains as functional as ever—functional in terms of the mass society.

No one furthered this process more conscientiously, caring, or successfully than Allan Jaffe. Evolving from irregular pass-the-hat sessions at Larry Borenstein’s art gallery on St. Peter Street, which had begun in 1956, Preservation Hall was formally opened by Californian Ken Mills and Orleanian Barbara Reid in the spring of 1961. Management responsibilities passed on to Allan and his wife, Sandra, that September. For the past quarter-century—roughly a third the history of jazz—the Hall has, under his firm-yet-permissive guidance, earned a reputation as the international headquarters of authentic New Orleans jazz. It was typical of Allan that he tried to keep the spotlight off himself and to credit the players for their own success. But it is also

Allan Jaffe with the Olympia Brass Band, 1965.

photo courtesy of the Jazz Archive

typical of such seasoned, independent-minded professionals as Willie and Percy Humphrey, Sweet Emma Barrett or Chester Zardis, that, well ahead of Jaffe’s terminal illness, they spontaneously and sincerely expressed their gratitude and warm feelings for him. Part of the reason for it was Preservation Hall’s far-ranging human support system. What really counted, though, were simply good jobs, under decent conditions. “He’s the best man we had around here yet,” said Chester, who has known most of them since the 1920’s. Willie told me, ‘Jaffe’s management has been perfect. Perfect.”

While Jaffe’s way of caring incorporated a big dose of compassion, it was firmly anchored in bed-rock reality. He could be sharp and sarcastic when he felt the situation warranted it. He took pains to maintain good relations with other nightclub operators, and with musicians who did not fit the preservation hall formula; but when a serious threat appeared, such as a rival “kitty hall” opening across the street with the stated aim of driving Jaffe out of business, his responses were those of an unassailable competitor. No connoisseur or critical collector, he nonetheless loved the rough emotional honesty of the old music and its players. Most of his helicon (tuba) playing in New Orleans was done in the streets and at other gigs with the Olympia Brass Band. He looked at things from ground level, loyally but pragmatically—much as the older black musicians did—rather than an idealistic jazz buff on the one hand or a cool-eyed booking agent on the other. Although he often appeared to be standing in the background, Jaffe observed with an eagle eye. He projected an aura of strong personal and financial power, and ran things very much his own way. He was sometimes given to halting speech or unexplained silences—a combination of qualities which led some people to feel uneasy around him. Paradoxically, he was actually very friendly and generous. He maintained a worldwide network of warm associations which helped make the Preservation Hall carriage and sidewalk a stimulating social crossroads for traditional jazz lovers and other arts-enthusiasts.

Like his friend and mentor, Larry Borenstein, Jaffe shrewdly understood the energy flow of worldly affairs. An elementary school teacher had confided in his mother that whereas some boys were “book wise,” this one was “street wise.” For his business success in a variety of fields, including real estate, he was less inclined to credit his training at the Wharton business school than the common sense learned from early

years of hanging around his father’s paint and wallpaper shop. Biz school had helped, though, he felt, in knowing the right “language” when it came to closing a deal with a CBS or a Lincoln Center. Jaffe’s sympathetic identification with the lives of many of the older black musicians probably had something to do with his youthful experience in brass playing, for which he had received scholarships, and in his having grown up “right on the tracks,” as he put it, in the ethnically diverse, tolerant town of Pottsville, Pennsylvania. Having booked traveling groups while in college helped, too: unlike Borenstein and others, Jaffe realized, early on, that the real payoff for the personable old musicians would be in concert touring, rather than at the Hall alone.

Allan and Sandra took over management of Preservation Hall in a period when America’s only original art form had become virtually moribund in the city of its birth. Within a few years the Hall had done much to revitalize New Orleans’ black musical underworld.

Over a hundred and fifty of the old jazz players were brought out of limbo, many onto the concert stages of the world. But such an outcome had by no means been assured. An iron-willed commitment was needed. In the earliest years both Jaffes worked full-time day jobs in order to keep the Hall open at night. Friends told Allan he had hitched his wagon to an already fallen star. The French Quarter streets were still quite silent: often, there were fewer customers in a whole week than now jam Preservation Hall in the first ten minutes. Bill Russell, Dodie Simmons, and other helpers would sometimes go and sit like patrons, so that passers-by who happened to peer through the dim front windows would think someone was there listening. Even after business began to pick up, many, including some of the seasoned musicians who played there, predicted the Hall would never last.

The nation was on the verge of some major cultural shifts, including a re-valuing of its own past, and of the role of the Negro. Such changes helped underwrite the success of the touring bands, and of the Hall itself, with a strong “Americana” image. Little by little, too, insular New Orleans began to be woven into the national socio-economic fabric. Industries such as petroleum and the port would boom, only to dwindle again; but the tourist and convention industry would enjoy an unprecedentedly steady rise—a key factor in the long-term success of the Hall, most of whose patrons have been out-of-town visitors.

Continued faith and personal commitment on Allan’s part continued to be necessary, nonetheless, in the face of continuing challenges, particularly the gradual, painful demise of his key players.

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Thanks Allan, continued...

Disliking fancy improvements (like the new French Market), old-boy networks, and advertising hype—but adoring the Quarter’s historic buildings, great food and humane traditions—Jaffe made a virtue (and profit) out of changing as little as possible about the building or the players, however old and weak they might become. The more times changed, the more out-of-step was funky Preservation Hall—and thus, almost pervasively, the more attractive it became to tourists. Allan said that his main talent and challenge as an artistic manager was to do nothing. He struggled inwardly to avoid intervening in running disputes between the cantankerous oldsters, and would cringe in silence if one embarrassed the others in front of the audience, such as by begging for tips.

The louder the speakers got along Bourbon Street, the more authentic the unamplified music at the Hall sounded. The slicker TV and show biz became, the more charmingly disarming were six or seven septuagenarians in baggy pants and unmatching shirts shuffling out, or being helped out, onto glittering concert stages. The stiffer the admission prices at Pete Fountain’s or Al Hirt’s joints, the happier were people to wait in long lines in front of the Hall, drop their dollar or two in the wicker basket, buy a Coke from the machine for a dime, stand or sit on the floor, and buy a record from wizened old Bill Russell, authenticity personified as he perched near the cat on a stool as rickety as the building itself.

Most importantly, Jaffe knew that the core of Preservation Hall was the unabashed joy and humanity of the music and its players. He was wise enough to realize that they needed no stage directions to flow naturally out to the people—communicating that same unprogrammed lift that has always set real New Orleans jazz apart from commercialized imitations. If no other entrepreneur of this music has ever succeeded so consistently, over such a long period, it may be because none other was that sophisticated. Jaffe loved the quirky and the downhome—whatever came straight from the heart. He had the rare gift of disseminating some of those things to many thousands of people. In our era, what was once ordinary has become extraordinary. Listeners, as well as players, have a lot to thank Allan for.

W. Carter

Russell-Jaffe Connection, continued...

Jazz Club had not yet been founded, outlets for traditional jazz players and fans were virtually non-existent, and even the pervasive brass band tradition, long a staple of the city, was in decline.

Despite such obstacles, Russell returned the following year. Working conditions in New Orleans were still bad: recording equipment and suitable locations were in short supply. Fortunately, Russell’s brother, an electrical engineer in Pittsburgh, managed to construct a recorder for him for $60, consisting simply of amplifier, cutting head, and microphone. This combination proved sufficient to record George Lewis and his band for Blue Note, with ultimate release on Frank Wolfe’s Climax label (named after one of Lewis’ selections, ‘The Climax Rag’). From this time on, Russell devoted himself to recording projects as a means to capture and promote Burk, his primary interest. This was the incentive behind the American Music label.

The American Music label was geared for mail-order business. Its records were pressed in small quantities and the imperious governing recording sessions was frugality, though not at the expense of quality. This would appear to be a contradiction in terms by today’s digital standards and Russell’s whole approach would be considered anathema. But by going against the grain Russell achieved an immediacy and character in his recordings that were as rare as they were appealing. For example, because he was not financially able to rent proper recording facilities, he had to record in rented halls like the San Jacinto. As engineers in major studios were increasingly attracted to cheap recording facilities, he had to record in rented halls like the San Jacinto. As engineers in major studios were increasingly attracted to “miking” to allow greater control during “miking,” Russell subscribed to a method employed by Ewing Nunn of Audiophile records: one microphone only, strategically placed to capture the natural combination of sounds in the acoustical setting. As a result, Russell was one of the first to really capture the sound of a hall, lending a “you are there” presence to his local band recordings. To the sophisticated tastes of many record collectors his “primitive” recording process exactly suited their expectations as to how a rediscovered jazz band recalling a forgotten style should sound. For others, the ambience captured on Russell’s recordings evoked a vitality and passion characteristic of jazz performance at its best, regardless of circumstances. Though Russell was not the only record producer for the American Music label—the contributions of Aiden Ashforth and David Wyckoff were indispensable—that label came to be valued for its sound (the ironic result of less-than-perfect recording equipment and conditions) and that sound was identified with Russell.

William Russell did not become a permanent resident of New Orleans until the mid-1950’s, and it was only a few years later that William Hogan of Tulane’s Department of History and Richard B. Allen recruited Russell into a project that would preserve a different aspect of the city’s jazz heritage. With a grant from the Ford Foundation the Archive of New Orleans Jazz was established to conduct an extensive series of tape-recorded interviews with New Orleans jazzmen and to make them available to the public. Russell became the first curator of what is now the William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive of Tulane University; its present oral history collection of some 1,500 reels is largely the result of his and Richard Allen’s endeavors. Thus did William Russell again become a central catalyst in the preservation of the New Orleans jazz heritage. Through his and other’s efforts, the foundations for a thorough and methodical assessment of the early jazz years were set in place.

It was several years after Russell’s curatorship had begun that there arrived in New Orleans Allan Jaffe whose presence, like Russell’s, would act to galvanize local sympathy and support for traditional jazz. Jaffe and his wife, Sandra, assumed the management of the fledgling Preservation Hall, then (1961) a noble experiment whose chances for

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When Was Bunk Johnson Born and Why Should We Care?

William Geary "Bunk" Johnson is to this day venerated by many lovers of traditional jazz and, it might almost be expected, disparaged by others. In either case, it's not always clear whether praise or blame are meted out for his music or for the myth which was constructed by jazz historians and record producers at the time of his return to active musical performance in the early 1940's.

It seems, to be sure, that Bunk was a willing participant in the construction of his myth, providing many details of his life story to interviewers, and even on occasion recording them in his own voice. Early on, doubts concerning the correctness of some of those details were raised, most notably by the late Monroe Berger, then a doctoral candidate in sociology at Columbia University, in an article published in Ralph de Toledano's 1947 anthology, Frontiers of Jazz. Some of his critique centered on the dating of the only known photograph of Charles "Buddy" Bolden's band, which Bunk said he played in, but only after the time of the photograph. That priceless and unique relic, placed in 1895 by Jazzmen, was said by two expert witnesses interviewed by Berger, clarinetists Alphonse Picou and Louis Delisle Nelson, to have come from around 1905. This question has since been dealt with by Alden Ashforth.

Berger didn't proceed to question the birthdate of 1879 which Bunk consistently provided, although that would have been a logical next step. I suspect he would have been discouraged by the inaccessibility to historical researchers of vital records in Louisiana generally, which might have provided a properly attested and sealed birth certificate, which even though not totally impregnable to historical skepticism, is about as close to it as we can get. This inaccessibility is a major annoyance but not a fatal obstacle, since many other records, both municipal and federal, are open to research.

That a great deal of confusion still exists concerning the life and music of Johnson can be shown by comparing some recent reference works of authoritative stature. So far as the date of birth is concerned, the third, revised edition of Rose and Souchon's New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album, as well as the Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American Musicians edited by Eileen Southern still maintain the old date of 1879. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, published in 1980, also has 1879 in the article on Bunk by J.R. Taylor. The editorial revisions made to that article for the version which appeared in 1986 in the New Grove Dictionary of American Music, give 1889 as the date of birth and question the various details of his early career as presented in the 1980 article. The new date—even


photo from the William Russell Collection with the question mark—is said to have been established in Don Marquis's biography of Buddy Bolden of 1978. Marquis argues that since no records have been found in favor of 1879, and that since additional testimony of the sort gathered by Berger argues in favor of a considerably later date, "Bunk was born closer to 1889 and did not play with Bolden." (p. 6) Bolden of course was Marquis's chief interest, not

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Russell-Jaffe Connection, continued...

success seemed slight. A graduate of Wharton School, Jaffe possessed considerable business acumen plus a heartfelt commitment to the preservation of traditional jazz. Within two years of its founding, Preservation Hall could afford. The following year, however, a small bus was obtained and recent tours have been by Greyhound bus or, for long jukebox, by airplane. Preservation Hall now sends three separate ensembles on the road; comprised of some 50 musicians, these groups average about 120 concerts a year. According to one writer, the Preservation Hall bands now offer the best salaries of any comparable traditional outfits, have outlasted most competitors, and frequently set attendance records. What might be dubbed the "dancing-in-the-aisles" syndrome has also attracted interest from major record labels: CBS has offered three LP's from the Humphrey brothers band since 1977.

Like Russell, whose activities as violinist with the New Orleans Ragtime Orchestra are well documented on recordings on the Pearl and Arbokie labels, Jaffe became musically involved with the Preservation Hall bands, becoming the regular brass bass man for the Humphrey brothers' ensembles. Furthermore, his guiding hand as producer for such New Orleans artists as Billie and DeDe Pierce, "Sweet" Emma Barrett, and the Eureka Brass Band added fuel to the fire of revivalism and set musical standards for the genre. On more than one occasion his encouragement and financial assistance saw founding recording projects through to completion.

In retrospect, the efforts of Russell and Jaffe can be seen to have been timely: each acting according to his talents served not only to revive and sustain New Orleans' jazz tradition but, in so doing, made a virtue of austerity, allowing the unvarnished music to speak for itself.

Allan Jaffe, seated to the left, foreground, at a Jim Robinson recording session at San Jacinto Hall, 1964  

photo from the Jack Hurley Collection

Preservation Hall was fielding tours of veteran New Orleans musicians to other parts of the U.S. Willie Humphrey, a mainstay of the Hall's pool of musicians, recalled that the first tour, to Minnesota in July, 1963, was made in an old station wagon, the best that Jaffe's early
Bunk Johnson, continued...

Bunk, but what he does not say is that there were no records invalidating 1879. The evidence was all from oral history, or from estimates of a person's age in a photograph. This brief essay is intended to make known the existence of documents, which, in the absence of a certificate of birth or baptism, may strengthen the arguments of Berger and Marquis.

My first attempt to arrive at a birthdate for Bunk substantiated by documents was published as a kind of passing remark in Storyville 95 (June-July 1981, p. 164ff.) to which was attached a reproduction of the page from the 1900 Federal Census which I thought might refer to him. There the person whom I thought might be Bunk was recorded as born in December, 1889. The general neighborhood, the name of his mother (Theresa), her occupation (cook), and the number of children she had borne (13), were at least close enough for jazz history, but there were things that were not quite right about the entry: the census taker had apparently altered in setting down both the age and the year of birth of the ten-year-old boy. For those who would like to check the entry on the widely available microfilm, the reference is: 1900 Federal Census, City of New Orleans, enumeration district 117, sheet 10B, line 3.

When the 1910 Census became available a few years ago, I naturally couldn't restrain myself from keeping an eye peeled for William Johnsons, as common a name as that is in the general U.S.


Preserving the Essence:

The Legacy of Allan Jaffe

From time to time, situations arise wherein one person can have a decisive effect in determining the course of things. In a truly superlative sense, Allan Jaffe did so for New Orleans and its jazz tradition. He left his mark everywhere, to everyone's benefit, directly or indirectly. Not the least among his beneficiaries, the Jazz Archive at Tulane certainly felt his touch. We miss him already in so many ways.

The Jaffes arrived in New Orleans around the time of the Archive's founding. Known then as the Archive of New Orleans Jazz, it took considerable community cooperation to pull together the initial collection. Conspicuous among those committed to its nurture, Allan Jaffe did much to accommodate the Archive's early fieldwork.

Allan Jaffe attending annual meeting of Jazz Archives advisory board (partially visible second from left), 1982.

Preservation Hall and the Tulane Jazz Archive jointly embodied the advent of a new era in New Orleans jazz, that saw the city itself awaken gradually to the richness of its own musical heritage. The Jazz Revival of the late 1930s and 1940s had refocused attention, nationally and internationally, on the early jazz idiom and on New Orleans as its source. Local consciousness, however, was slower to develop. It was the "rediscovery" of New Orleans jazz by a succession of informed outsiders that gradually spawned the awareness of the local community on a broad scale. The New Orleans Jazz Club, founded in the late 1940s, was an early, and limited, manifestation of this. The subsequent efforts of Richard Allen, William Ransom Hogan, and William Russell significantly enhanced local involvement. The Jazz Archive was the chief fruit of their labor and Jaffe, concerned with what he saw as a disappearing urban folk-art, identified instinctively with its conservationist aims.

Many old jazzmen that Russell and Allen interviewed for the Archive's oral history project performed regularly at the Hall and Jaffe took a personal interest in arranging for their interviews. Allen and Russell, on their part, often helped in lining up musicians for the early Preservation Hall bands, with Allen serving for a time as assistant manager.

Allan Jaffe's support of the Jazz Archive continued to be unremitting over the years. When I assumed the post of curator in 1980 he was, accordingly, one of the first I appointed to the Archive's newly-

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Allan Jaffe and George Lewis, pre-1965.

photo from the Grauman Marks Collection

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Preserving the Essence, continued...

formed advisory board. Allan not only agreed to serve but contributed liberally of his own time and money toward its development. Through his help the Archive could do public programming with solid promotion. In addition, he actively sought out new archival acquisitions.

I can personally attest to the measure of Jaffe's generosity. I turned to him for the loan of a tuba to play with the Louisiana Repertory Jazz Ensemble which I helped found as a performing arm of the Archive in 1980. I hadn't actually played tuba for twenty years at that point, yet Allan lent me one of his vintage Helicons. He permitted me the continued use of his instruments to the present day.

Few will question the need for preservation in today's ever-changing world. Jazz history, in particular, depends upon the dedicated conservation of source materials of the kind gathered in the Hogan Jazz Archive. The legacy of Allan Jaffe, it is hoped, will inspire others after him to the kind of commitment to the city's jazz for which his career provides an object lesson.

Curt Jerde playing Jaffe's helicon, 1981.

When was Bunk Johnson Born, continued...

away at 750 Annunciation, 6th district, was Alfred Johnson, laborer. The fact of the matter is that on either side of 1890 there are more Jerry or Gary Johnsons than you might expect, at many different addresses, and Theresa Johnson is not so uncommon either, so one might not be justified in putting much stress on this particular couple, except for the fact that the address seems likely to have been somewhere in the vicinity of Valmont and Annunciation Streets and, consequently, quite close to the address at which Bunk said he was born, Laurel St., between Peters Ave. and Octavia (Jazzmen, p. 24).

The record of marriage doesn't really confirm or invalidate the information drawn from the census, but it does render relatively unlikely the birthdate of 1879, and makes possible further investigations. I would not undertake them, because I'm sufficiently convinced that December 27th, 1889 is the correct date of birth, but I can understand why others might wish to do so, particularly in the context of a full-scale biography. One hesitates to contradict information that comes directly from the person concerned, but it seems to me that Bunk was the co-operative victim of over-eager seekers after the “original” and “authentic” jazz. Born in 1889, he was the same age as Nick LaRocca, Freddie Keppard, Ray Lopez, and younger than Joe Oliver. Born in 1879, there was no other living claimant to the title of oldest living and still performing jazz/ragtime trumpeter. Somewhere along the line, there seems to have developed the notion—not usually explicitly stated—that the oldest player must somehow be the best, and it was partly to this inflation of musical accomplishment that the scoffers reacted.

Why should we care? Those who like his style can listen to the old records, those who don't can listen to whomever they choose. We should care because one of the great under-utilized resources of jazz history are the recordings of musicians who were already active professionals before the time when jazz bands began to be recorded. We lament the lack of recordings of the Ory-Oliver band of 1917-18, of the Creole Band of 1914-18, of Brown's Band of 1915, when there exist many more than a few recordings of the individual musicians concerned, as well as—sometimes—two, three, or more of them in combination. The problem, of course, is that we are well aware that some aspects of a musician's style can change drastically over the years, and that fashions in popular social dancing and its accompanying pulse do the same. This is the emphasis given by J.R. Taylor in the article cited above, and retained in the revised version published in 1986. He asserts that the influence of Louis Armstrong is quite strong. This seems to me to go too far, or at least to give priority to licks and borrowed motives (although I don't agree that they are at all common) over fundamental timbre and phrasing. My view is that the basic sound of a

1900 Census schedule of Orleans Parish showing Bunk's birthdate as 1889.

courtesy of the LA Division, New Orleans Public Library

musical voice and its characteristic cadences are often--more often than not, I would assert, in the case of jazz--as persistent as that of the voice itself. While I'd certainly be delighted to have recordings by a Bunk Johnson whose musical voice was fixed before 1900, I'm just as pleased to have them from a Bunk who's a decade younger. We can then begin to talk about whether there's a lot of agreement between cornetists belonging to the "class of 1899" and some common features that makes them different from others who learned music outside of New Orleans, and we could talk about differing skills, talents and approaches, rather than determining rank according to some kind of single-valued scale of aesthetic value. We could do the same for the clarinet class of circa 1895: Shields, Dodds, Noone, Tio, Bechet, and so on. In short, chronology matters, because without a chronology, accuracy plus or minus a couple of years, the study of style and influence in an art so volatile as jazz is rendered much vaguer than it needs to be.

Chronology matters to the degree that a good grasp of an artist's genealogy is essential in a discussion of the degree to which his work relates to his social background and education. In Bunk's case our justified skepticism concerning his date of birth is carried over to all the information he provided about himself (as evidenced in the New Grove Dictionary of American Music). But we probably ought to proceed with care. For example, what do we make of Bunk's claim that he attended New Orleans University? Those unacquainted with the state of public and private education for Afro-Americans in Louisiana—as I certainly was until I began looking into the question—might find this an overblown claim. One has to know that at the time in question the major activity of New Orleans University was its primary division, which had at first six grades, then expanded to eight. Music instruction was certainly offered, although at a supplemental fee to the usual tuition of $1.00 a month. Fortunately, among the yearbooks in the Louisiana Collection of the Tulane library are found issues for 1897-98 and 1901-02, when Bunk ought to have been a student. Unfortunately, he doesn't appear in the lists published in the yearbooks. Perhaps some more highly-motivated person should continue to look into the matter. In any event, the whole question of Bunk's socio-economic class, along with that of other New Orleans ragtime musicians, could use more attention.

L. Gushee
Featuring the Friends

The Archive has been the recipient of many significant collections since it was founded in 1958. Lists of its exceptional holdings have previously been published. It’s appropriate to note that this greatest of all critical collections of early jazz is not merely a repository for rare materials, but a living tool which has already supported the work of a large number of creative artists and researchers.

The collection is cited in hundreds of books, magazines and newspapers, on local and network television and in the dissertations of many doctoral candidates. The piano sheet music and band and orchestral arrangements are constantly being supplied to the musicians of the world.

Naturally, since it’s so easily accessible to them, local artists like the New Orleans Ragtime Orchestra and the New Levia than Oriental Foxtrot Orchestra have been able to build their repertoires with items from the Archive. The Louisiana Repertory Jazz Ensemble and the New Orleans Classic Jazz Orchestra have all been enriched by its use.

In October, a distinguished young musician from California, Frank French, came to New Orleans, especially to spend most of ten days plumbing the resources to be found on the fourth floor of the Howard-Tilton Library. In December, a six-part T.V. series entitled "Creole Rags-New Orleans Music The Day Before Jazz" will be filmed for cable T.V. entirely with items from the Archive. The nation’s primary ragtime scholars, Trebor Tichenor, Mike Montgomery, David Jasen, Terry Waldo and Max Morath have all used the Archive’s riches freely, and it has added to the luster of the city’s reputation and enriched the musical culture of the world.

This is why we’re so proud of it and why we encourage others to participate. It’s also why the Friends of the Archive, besides supporting it financially, should be on the lookout for privately held collections which ought to be steered into the library. Those who are members must already know where many collections are, and there’s no reason to be shy about trying to influence their owners to provide for the ultimate disposition of records, tapes, printed music, jazz and ragtime memorabilia and books so that it eventually comes to the Archive. There’s enormous satisfaction in seeing this material credited in print when one knows one has been part of building this invaluable resource. Now’s the time to think about one’s own holdings, considering whether one can really do without certain items, especially when they remain accessible for all time.

It’s important, too, to realize that the Archive is in a temperature and humidity-controlled environment and that paper items, so fragile to begin with, are carefully stored in acid-free folders and envelopes for the sake of protecting them better than they would be in most private homes. Few things are as satisfying as sharing cultural assets with people who are interested in and concerned with the same matters you are. The Archive always acknowledges acquisitions by mail and it’s a continuing thrill to receive these letters of appreciation.

Al Rose

Letters to the Editor

Editor’s note:

This issue is the first to include essays by "outside" contributors, William Carter and Lawrence Gushee. Mr. Carter is a noted photographer who is currently completing a history of Preservation Hall. Professor Gushee is a distinguished musicologist who has published a number of scholarly articles and critical essays on the subject of early New Orleans jazz. We take this opportunity to invite any and all of our readers so inclined to submit written or graphic material germane to our newsletter. We will make all efforts to print them, subject to space limitations.

July 3, 1987

I was interested to see the photograph of the Louisiana Five printed in the last issue of The Jazz Archivist; it’s a valuable addition to the relatively small number of photographs of this organization. Readers may be interested to know that not only is Alcide “Yellow” Nunez missing, but also pianist Cawley and banjoist Berger, if other published photographs of the group have correct identifications. Otherwise put, this is a different band, with the only member in common being leader Anton Laa. The instrumentation of the band that made so many interesting and neglected recordings for Emerson and Columbia between the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1920 was clarinet, trombone, drums, piano, and banjo, with the exception of Columbia A2949 which added a cornetist. This group probably came to New York from Chicago with dancer Joe Frisco (some of the earliest recordings were issued under the name "Frisco Five") and stayed on to work at the Tokio cabaret. My guess is that the group in the picture was formed sometime in 1920. My prowlings through city directories and copyright records lead me to suspect that Laa was Chicago born and bred. He wouldn’t be the first musician to have claimed New Orleans origin, either out of love for the music or commercial advantage.

Lawrence Gushee
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
Picturing the Past

The Five Rubes (1915): After Tom Brown's Ragtime Band finished its residency at Lamb's Cafe in Chicago, it journeyed to New York in September, 1915 to work in vaudeville. What must have appeared at the time to be a promising step upward proved to be the band's undoing, for shortly thereafter the band disbanded. Pictured, left to right, Bill Lambert, d; Tom Brown, tb; Larry Shields, cl; Ray Lopez, c; and Arnold Loyacano, b. photo from the Al Rose Collection

Speaking of Jazz, continued...

Steve Brown was born in New Orleans on January 13, 1890. He played with his brother Tom's band in all the best places in the city until 1913 when he decided to follow the trade of a sheet metal worker. He returned to music in 1920 and went to Chicago, playing with the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, Goldkette, and Whitman, doing quite a bit of traveling. Goldkette's and Whitman's orchestras then contained several future leaders of renowned swing orchestras, including Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey. Bing Crosby was one of Whitman's singers. Goldkette's band was based in Detroit, and Brown decided to settle there after about three years with that leader. In addition to leading his own band in Detroit in the 1930s and 1940s, Brown even recorded again in 1950 with the Dixie Five, led by pianist (and later ethnomusicologist) Frank Gillis. Brown died in Detroit on September 15, 1965.

Even though Brown's interview was done on the spur of the moment, he came up with many interesting and unusual facts as well as feelings on New Orleans, Chicago, Detroit, and large orchestras of a bygone period. The New Orleans Rhythm Kings had only one member, pianist Elmer Schoebel, who could read when Brown was in the band. Brown had many other interesting things to say about this band; for example, it seemed as though the members could not get together again after Leon Roppolo left so they "sorta" disbanded. Of course, Paul Mares did reorganize in New Orleans, but the band was not the same.

Brown never took a lesson until he began to play with these large ensembles, so he learned how to read well enough, but he did not enjoy Whitman's mixture of rhythmic and symphonic music. Brown stuck with this orchestra until an around-the-world tour was planned. He and his wife did not want to be separated from their children.

Brown roomed with Bix Beiderbecke who often came home from jam sessions when Brown was waking up. Bix was so absent minded that he once went to a job without a cornet. Proper rest might have helped. Brown knew both Bix and Emmett Hardy, who is often said to have been an influence on Beiderbecke, but Brown did not find them similar.

Brown planned to write his own book with corrections of other books. Brown's band never played in houses of ill repute; however, Brown seems to have visited these places. In fact, he forgot that the tape machine was rolling and told of days at the House of All Nations. It took days, but New Orleans was a cosmopolitan city. Customers were even fed so that they would have the strength to stay for days.

This interview covers so much ground that even summarizing is too long. If readers want more on early music in New Orleans, black and white, the roaring twenties in Chicago, and records, read the transcription or listen to the tapes which are historic in several ways. They were the start of a collection which is now over 1500 reels. Steve Brown is not remembered by most jazz fans today. Bassists are rarely noticed, but Brown's solid foundation made him a musician's musician, and he remains widely influential today.

R. Allen

Letters to the Editor, continued...

July 23, 1987

Thank you for sending me the latest copy of The Jazz Archivist (vol. 2, no. 1). I am pleased to note the increase in the number of its pages and the overall improvement in its contents, since its formation. However, I would take issue with you regarding the "Frank-McCurdy Peckers Orchestra" torn photograph (reproduced on page 1) and your comments arising from it.

I do feel it is a mistake on the evidence of an incomplete photograph to jump to the conclusion that the above orchestra did not contain a bass player and then to suggest how its absence would affect the band sound. I would humbly suggest that the band did have a bass player for the following reasons, namely: (1) The composition of the photograph indicates that there would have been a person standing to the right of the guitarist, Coochie Martin, in order to achieve an overall balance to the picture; (2) As we look at the photograph, we can see the light source is coming from the right of the photographer, thus casting a shadow to the left of the figures. We can clearly see a shadow of another standing figure over the right shoulder (as we look at him) of the guitarist; (3) Compare the arrangement of these musicians to almost any other band photograph of the period and we find that the bass player always stands on the far right of the group (where the photograph is torn), balancing the drummer on the far left. This is how all the early bands lined up when performing; (4) Finally, I have it on the highest authority that a complete copy of the photograph has been seen (and may even still exist) and that a bass player certainly was present.

Please accept my comments in the spirit that they are intended. I am only interested in jazz research and feel that the Hogan Jazz Archive is ideally placed to play a vital role in this field, but I feel we must all be careful not to make positive conclusions on the basis of incomplete evidence. Thank you for my copies of The Jazz Archivist during the past year; I have the pleasure of enclosing $15 for a further year's subscription.

Mike Hazeldine
Stockport, England

Dear Mr. Hazeldine,

Thank you for your astute observations. The thought that this torn photo might have excluded one or more other musicians did occur to us and we are remiss for not citing this possibility. Your suggestion that a complete copy of this rare photo exists is intriguing. If we are able to trace it down, we will certainly attempt to print it in a future issue.

Editor

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