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701 Seventh Avenue, New York, New York 10036; (212) 302-0460; (212) 944-1922 fax
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Little Club Jazz: Small Groups in the 30s New World NW 250

The musicians knew all the small clubs for small combos playing hot jazz, from Boston to the Coast. It was a network of economic survival because, except for the most fortunate jazzmen, there weren't that many long-term engagements for improvisers in the thirties. (Nor are there now.) You skimmed around the country, lighting where you could for a time. The notion of the jazz concert was still remote; only big bands played theaters and ballrooms; and so it was in the clubs that most jazzmen and -women honed their skills while making enough bread to get to the next town and the next gig.

The small clubs were perpetual seminars in the demanding and evolving art of jazz. Local talent always came to hear the more or less renowned visitors. They listened hard, and the braver among them even unpacked their horns and moved toward the stand. There was a lot of "sitting in," both after hours and even before closing when the regular patrons were in the audience. And sitting in could lead to a "cutting contest," which could transform even the sleaziest club into a dramatic setting for a mighty joust.

Coleman Hawkins, who in the twenties had practically invented the jazz tenor saxophone, dominated that instrument so long that when he came to a place it was like the Old West—with Hawkins as the preeminent gunslinger against whom the most daring of the local young felt compelled to test themselves. Finally there came a night in 1933 when the mighty Hawkins was felled. It took four men to wear him down—the then only regionally known Ben Webster, Herschel Evans, Dick Wilson, and Lester Young. The battle, in a Kansas City jazz club, lasted through the night and into the middle of the next afternoon. When it was over, Lester Young had emerged triumphant, and word spread to just about every club in the country, though no newspapers or magazines of the time, so far as I can find out, recorded this significant cultural event.

Musical competition was only part of the ambience of the small clubs. There was also much sharing and trading of ideas. If a traveling big band was in town,

for instance, many of its players—their solo time frustratingly constricted by the big-band framework during working hours—would fall into one of the clubs and stretch out for the rest of the night. For instance, in Boston in the late thirties, hanging out at the Savoy Café, I heard Benny Goodman blow more hot jazz one night and early morning than I had ever heard at a Goodman dance or theater engagement.

Those small clubs, even when they were physically cramped, had a spaciousness of emotional atmosphere that loosened up just about everybody—musicians, customers, bartenders, waitresses. The *presence* of the music was so directly felt that on a good, swinging night the whole room would be suffused with high and indeed soaring spirits.

Alec Wilder, the singular composer and invaluable historian-analyst of American popular song, once said that New York's Fifty-second Street—the most ceaselessly fertile and diversified strip of small jazz clubs in the thirties—"was total friendship. It was the last time an American street gave you a feeling of security and warmth and the excitement of musical friendship."

In Boston, New Orleans, Chicago, Kansas City, Philadelphia, and other places, while there was not quite the aura of Fifty-second Street, there were clubs where that transient but nonetheless exhilarating rush of "total friendship" did lift us all, listeners as well as musicians.

This is not to say that everyone in attendance was a dedicated jazz buff. Many, in fact, had come to booze and seemingly to see if they could make more noise than the noise on the stand. As jazz critic Wilder Hobson once wrote about Fifty-second Street in its glory nights:

If people appeared who were interested in jazz as a cultural item or in the question, "Has Swing A Social Significance?" they were at once lost in the general yammer and shuffle; and the same racket went on whether the music was good, bad, or indifferent. (*From Jazzmen, edited by Ramsey and Smith.*)

True up to a point. But those in the audience who were there to listen, and occasionally to marvel, were not so much "lost in the general yammer" as inured to

it. It should be remembered that in the thirties, while jazz was beginning to be "a cultural item" to some, there was not yet, even among the most serious buffs, the sense that jazz should be something set apart in a quiet place so that it could be listened to without distraction. The nightclub then was perceived to be the natural locale for the music.

It may well be that because I grew up on jazz in the thirties and forties I still much prefer to hear the music in a club than in a concert hall or some other boozeless, more "respectable" setting. But apart from nostalgia, a more objective case can be made that the small clubs were and still are the optimum site for jazz improvising. On the one hand, playing three to five sets a night can be exhausting for those players who prefer to try being creative until the bar shuts down rather than coast on familiar licks. But on the other hand, all that nightly playing time does allow for much more creative scope. If an idea doesn't jell at ten o'clock, you try it again at one or two in the morning. And a sizable portion of my memories of club life in the thirties is of rapt attention to the night-long development of particular solo and ensemble patterns in a piece repeated several times before closing.

Furthermore, because there was plenty of time, the unexpected was all the more likely to happen—even if that itself took a lot of time. At the Savoy Café in Boston, for instance, one evening in the late thirties, Oran "Hot Lips" Page felt a call to sing just about all the blues he knew, and so he did for hours in one of the most moving epic-heroic feats I have ever experienced. An extraordinary event hardly happened every night; but because of the time-ease of most clubs, unheralded musical adventures were much more frequent then than now.

There was a dimension to the small-club experience that is not much written of now that jazz is finally and rightly being recognized as high culture and serious music and all that. The clubs of the thirties were a gestalt, a fusion of markedly individualistic life styles—not only those of the jazzmen, traditionally tending to be oblivious of the norm, but also those of the clubs' habitués. Some of the latter were engaged in pursuits of dubious legality; others had legitimate, if unusual, nocturnal enterprises. And then there were the club employees—often including, in the twenties and thirties, bouncers—with picaresque odysseys of their own. The club scene was a vividly detailed microcosm with intersecting centers of diversely underground behavior and attitudes. The musicians intimately influenced everyone connected with that scene—in speech and dress and, deeper, in the ways they had made continual risk-taking into so formidable a craft. And to some extent the musicians, in turn, were fascinated by the necessarily resourceful and irreverent figures of the night with whom they were almost inextricably connected. I can't recall a musician I knew in the thirties and forties who, in whatever town he came to, did not have immediate access to knowledge about certain dynamics of power there that the straight day citizens knew nothing about.

It was also in these clubs, in the twenties and especially in the thirties, that much of what little integration was going on in the country took place. In most cities, only in the jazz clubs could blacks and whites gather casually; the music signified why they were there, and so no words, pietistic or otherwise, were necessary.

I mention all this about the club life so that hearing these recordings of the period you may have some idea, if you weren't there yourself, of who was listening to this music where it was being played. For the regulars, the aficionados, the jazz-transfixed, the club was both a place of celebration (shouting or laughing aloud in the pleasure of the music and of beating time, hoping it was in the right time if a musician saw you) and an important social milieu. Whatever was happening outside in politics or the economy, for these hours there was a bonding of spirits, almost a secret society of prideful believers in the swinging truth.

In many clubs the music lasted a good deal longer than the general public knew. After hours, the spirit-bonding comprised musicians only, except for a few hangers-on. It was then that the jam sessions took place. And in some cities the musicians' commitment to these sessions was so ardent that it seemed as if jazz never stopped. Remembering Kansas City in the late twenties and early thirties, drummer Jo Jones says:

Some places in Kansas City never closed. You could be sleeping one morning at 6 A.M., and a traveling band would come into town for a few hours, and they would wake you up to make a couple of hours' session with them until eight in the morning. You never knew what time in the morning someone would knock on the door and say they were jamming down the street. [To which pianist Sammy Price adds] I remember once at the Subway Club, on Eighteenth Street in Kansas City, I came by a session at about ten o'clock and then went home to clean up and change my clothes. I came back a little after one o'clock and they were still playing the same song. (*From Shapiro and Hentoff: Hear Me Talkin' to Ya—see bibliography.*)

A sense of the Chicago jamming scene, later in the thirties, is distilled by Billy Eckstine while he tells of what was always hoped for in one of those marathon contests—the sudden advent of an unknown combatant who sweeps the field. Eckstine recalls a breakfast dance—a common phenomenon of the era—at which, after the show, the musicians would jam.

We were standing around, [Eckstine remembers] when a guy comes up that looks like he just got off the freight car, the raggedest guy you'd want to see at this moment. [The ragged stranger borrows a horn and, Eckstine continues] This cat gets up there and I'm telling you he blew the hell off that thing! It was Charlie Parker, just come in from Kansas City on a freight train. . . . He blew so much until he upset everybody in the joint. (*From Hentoff: Jazz Is—see bibliography.*)

And in New York clubs as well, especially in Harlem, there were breakfast dances and jam sessions throughout the thirties. In the more jazz-struck cities there were also Sunday-afternoon sessions—about the only way to conquer the Sunday blues that beset all us urban backsliders. While I was still so young I had to sneak in, I heard my first live jazz at Sunday-afternoon communions at the Ken Club in Boston, beginning with the volcanic Sidney Bechet and continuing with the justly named Wild Bill Davison and, in time, a sizable number of the musicians in this album.

To me, just into my teens, there was no more magical place than a small jazz club, especially on a Sunday afternoon. Later I discovered that if you were in the right club at the right time on a weekday afternoon, the magic could be even more compelling. One cold winter day in Boston, passing the Savoy Café, I was pulled indoors by a slow blues curling into the sunlight. Count Basie, hat on, with a half smile, was floating the beat with Jo Jones's brushes whispering behind him. Out on the floor, sitting on a chair leaning back against a table, Coleman Hawkins filled the room with big, deep, bursting sounds, conjugating the blues with the rhapsodic sweep and fervor he so loved in the opera singers whose recordings he played by the hour at home. In that club that afternoon, the

blues went on and on as the players turned it round and round and inside out and back again, showing me more of its faces than I had ever thought existed. I stood just inside the door, careful not to move and break the priceless sound. In a way I am still standing there.

As I have tried to indicate, those little clubs in the thirties where jazz was played meant a great deal not only to the musicians but also to a certain number of lay listeners throughout the country for whom those rooms, those musicians—that whole way of staying free of what others wanted you to be—became a model of the independent life. Most of us never became musicians, but the sounds stayed with us, the sounds you'll hear in this set. Sounds unique to each musician who made them.

And where else could they have kept on making them during the thirties but in those small, squeezed-in rooms where the whiskey was watered and where the decor made everything look illicit but that were nonetheless, without knowing it, authentic cultural sources? Or refuges, if you like, for jazz has always needed places where people feel sufficiently kindly toward it and each other so that the musicians can get paid.

NAT HENTOFF *has written extensively on jazz, and among his books are Hear Me Talkin' To Ya (co-edited with Nat Shapiro), The Jazz Life, and Jazz Is. Mr. Hentoff is a staff writer for The New Yorker and columnist for The Village Voice. He also writes on education, civil liberties, and politics.*

Side One Band 1

My Honey's Loving Arms

(Joseph Meyer and Herman Ruby)

Joe Venuti's Blue Four: Joe Venuti, violin; Jimmy Dorsey, baritone saxophone clarinet, and trumpet; Rube Bloom, piano and vocal; Eddie Lang, guitar; Charlie Kegley, drums. *Recorded December 12, 1928, in New York. Originally issued on Okeh 41251 (mx # W.401449-A).*

Joe Venuti's jazz comes out of the twenties, and this performance typifies a sort of rambunctious pre-swing-era, speakeasy-style white jazz in which subtlety of beat or phrasing was hardly the general desideratum. Except, that is, for Venuti, who, then as now, transcended most style and time categories, going his own hotly swinging but singularly supple way.

From 1925 on Venuti had played a series of chamber-jazz dates with Eddie Lang that were widely influential in the gracefulness of their swing.

This performance is also of his-

toric interest for the hooting baritone and blunt trumpet of Jimmy Dorsey, who went on (both as co-leader with his brother Tommy and as head of his own band) to become one of the virtuoso technicians of the alto saxophone—but a much slicker player than the young, swaggering Dorsey heard here.

I love your loving arms
They hold a world of charms
A place to nestle when I am lonely.
A cozy Morris chair
Oh, what a happy pair!
One caress, happiness, seems to bless
 my little honey.
I love you more each day,
When years have passed away,
You'll find my love belongs to you only.
So when the world seems wrong
I know where I belong,
Right in my honey's loving arms.

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Band 2

Rocky Mountain Blues

(Bill Simmon)

The Harlem Footwarmers: Arthur Whetsol, trumpet; Joe "Tricky Sam"

Nanton, trombone; Barney Bigard, clarinet; Duke Ellington, piano, leader, and arranger; Fred Guy, banjo; Wellman Braud, string bass; Sonny Greer, drums. *Recorded October 14, 1930 in New York. Originally issued on Okeh 8836 (mx # 404483-B).*

The Harlem Footwarmers were actually a Duke Ellington combination, and "Rocky Mountain Blues" exemplifies the Ellington style of the period. It was already unique. No other harmonies sounded like Duke's, nor was anyone else capable of creating such strangely evocative, pungent, poignant yet tough and sinewy melodies as that of "Rocky Mountain Blues."

The magisterial Duke is on piano. Barney Bigard retains, in liquidity of tone and vocalized phrasing, a clear bond with his New Orleans roots. Arthur Whetsol, who, like Duke, came from Washington, D.C., was with all the Ellington bands until 1937, when he had to leave music because of illness. Duke mourned his departure for a long time; nobody, he used to say, ever quite equaled the sweetness (without sentimentality) of Whetsol's tone. Playing a lusty trombone on this

track is Tricky Sam Nanton, soon to become wittily expert, with a rubber plunger, in producing humanlike "speech" on his instrument. Even without such effects, Nanton, as he indicates in this solo, always played as if his horn were an extension of his natural speech.

As for the writing, in 1930 it was designed as it always was with Duke:

After a man has been in the band for a while, I can hear what his capacities are, and I write to that. And I write to each man's sound. A man's sound is his total personality. I hear that sound as I prepare to write. I hear all their sounds, and that's how I am able to write. Before you can play anything or write anything, you have to hear it. (*From Hentoff: Jazz Is—see bibliography.*)

Band 3

Hejre Kati

(Jeno Hubay)

Eddie South and His International Orchestra: (?)Clifford King, clarinet; Eddie South, violin and vocal; Antonia Spaulding, piano; Everett Barksdale, banjo and guitar; Jimmy Bertrand, drums. *Recorded September 27, 1931, in Chicago. Originally issued on Victor 22847 (mx # 67557-1).*

If Joe Venuti was the first thoroughly professional jazz violinist, Eddie South was the first rhapsodic-romantic jazz virtuoso on the instrument. He had the technique and the temperament to pursue a classical-music career, but when South was coming up professionally there was hardly any room for black instrumentalists in symphony orchestras or on the classical solo circuit. (There has been some improvement, but not much.)

The opening of "Hejre Kati" could have taken place at a Hungarian restaurant, except for the rhythm section, but then, in a sudden burst, a scat-singing flight by South himself indicates he's no gypsy. This hornlike vocalizing on wordless syl-

lables was first popularized by Louis Armstrong, who obviously influenced South's approach to idiomatic vocalise. What is fascinating in South's scat-singing is its hot, rough quality in contrast with his patrician violin playing, which sometimes had only a distant link to jazz or other Afro-American roots.

Band 4

[I Wish That I Could Shimmy Like My] Sister Kate

(A. Piron)

Henry Allen and Coleman Hawkins and Their Orchestra: Henry "Red" Allen, trumpet; Dickie Wells, trombone; Russell Procope, clarinet and alto saxophone; Coleman Hawkins, tenor saxophone; Don Kirkpatrick, piano; Bernard Addison, guitar; John Kirby, string bass; Walter Johnson, drums. *Recorded March 27, 1933, in New York. Brunswick, unissued (mx# B.13184-A).*

Red Allen who grew up in New Orleans brass bands (one of which his father led), has never received his full due as a remarkably consistent, inventive trumpeter. During the thirties he went far beyond his beginnings to construct an incisive style that in some ways presaged some of what Miles Davis was to do a couple of decades ahead. Leonard Feather has called Allen "one of the great stylists of the '30's," and Red's stinging solo here, however brief, indicates why. Russell Procope, who follows on clarinet, was eventually to earn an international reputation with Duke Ellington. New York-born and -bred, Procope was one of a number of highly sophisticated New York jazzmen (Benny Carter was another) whose work was characterized by thorough musicianship.

The trombone solo by Dickie Wells reveals the skill with which he was able to fuse a most expressive vibrato with an unusually limber technique into slippery speechlike patterns with a propensity for mocking wit. Coleman Hawkins' instantly authoritative entrance is symbolic, in retrospect, of the over-

whelming force he had become on the tenor by 1933. The group as a whole, moreover, is an already mature exemplification of the classic hot swing of the thirties—rhythmically smoother than the jazz of the twenties and with an increasing number of ambitious, daring soloists. (A caveat here: Louis Armstrong, who liberated all solo jazz in the twenties, was himself not eclipsed by any of the hornmen of the following decade.)

Band 5

China Boy

(D. Winfree and P. Boutelje)

Candy and Coco: Gene Austin, piano; Otto "Coco" Heimel, guitar; Candy Candido, string bass; Monk Hazel, drums and trumpet mouthpiece (?). *Recorded September 19, 1934, in Los Angeles. Originally issued on Vocalion 2849 (mx # LA.209-A).*

Candy and Coco was a small combo that worked in Gene Austin's Los Angeles club, My Blue Heaven (named after the singer's most remunerative hit). Candy Candido, a bass player and a comic with a basso-profundo voice, appeared in several movies. The liveliest element here is Monk Hazel originally a New Orleans musician, who also played cornet, mellophone, and on occasion what sounds like trumpet mouthpiece alone.

Band 6

Squareface

(Gene Gifford)

Gene Gifford and His Orchestra: Bunny Berigan, trumpet; Morey Samel, trombone; Matty Matlock, clarinet; Bud Freeman, tenor saxophone; Claude Thornhill, piano; Dick McDonough, guitar; Pete Peterson, string bass; Ray Bauduc, drums; Wingie Manone, vocal; Gene Gifford, arranger. *Recorded May 13, 1935, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 25065 (mx # 89796-1).*

Gene Gifford, born in Americus, Georgia, was both a proficient banjo-guitarist (with Jean Goldkette and Glen Gray, among other bands) and a distinctive arranger much respected by musicians though largely unknown elsewhere except to the nucleus of jazz aficionados. "Squareface" has a quite distinguished personnel to plumb its rather melancholy mood. The lovely legato clarinet playing is by Matty Matlock, who was to achieve considerable and justified renown with the Bob Crosby band. The "talking vocal" is by the unusually subdued Wingie Manone. After Morey Samel's gruffly assertive trombone, there is the crackling, electric sound of Bunny Berigan, one of the most emotionally powerful horns in jazz. The thirties were the apex of Berigan's career as trumpet player and band-leader. After 1942 there was no career at all.

Old squareface, old devil gin.
 What you looking at me for?
 Ain't gonna lead me to sorrow and sin
 No more, no sir! no more.
 Too many times you got under my skin.
 I'm through with you, old squareface.
 Ain't gonna get me again, no sir!
 Ain't gonna get me again.

Old squareface,
 What you keep hanging around for?
 What's that you say, it's time to begin?
 Well, just once more.
 Might as well bring those pink elephants in.
 Man, I'm feeling low,
 Old squareface....
 You know, you've got me again, yes sir!

You really got me that time!

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Band 7

I Got Rhythm

(George and Ira Gershwin)

Red Norvo and His Swing Sextet: Stew Pletcher, trumpet; Donald McCook, clarinet; Herbie Haymer, tenor saxophone; Howard Smith, piano; Red Norvo, xylophone; Dave Barbour, guitar; Pete Peterson, string

bass; Maurice Purtill, drums. *Recorded March 16, 1936, in New York. Originally issued on Decca 779 (mx # 60898-A).*

It is tempting to call Red Norvo one of the quintessential musical spirits of the thirties; but the same could be said of him at a later period of jazz, for he has never stopped growing. Nonetheless, Norvo—just about the first musician bold and resourceful enough to even think of extracting jazz from the xylophone—was indeed an embodiment of the swing period. His command of what Count Basie guitarist Freddie Greene called "the rhythm waves" (the moving foundation of the music) was almost uncannily exact. Norvo's beat was loose yet precise, flowing yet immensely (though softly) propulsive. In 1935, having left Paul Whiteman's band, Norvo firmly established his reputation among jazz cognoscenti with a run at the Hickory House on New York's Fifty-second Street. He also began to record prolifically. This performance is representative of the crisp, continually building Norvo style.

The first solo is Red's, and it is still remarkable how hotly swinging he was able to make that xylophone contraption sound. The very hot Hawkins-shaped tenor is that of Herbie Haymer, who had been with Norvo at the Hickory House and who later was a featured soloist with Woody Herman. There are swift flights by trumpeter Stew Pletcher and clarinetist Donald McCook before Norvo returns, backed by characteristic swing-era riffing (the repetition of a short melodic phrase).

Band 8

Chasing Shadows

(B. Davis and A. Silver)

Putney Dandridge and His Orchestra: Putney Dandridge, vocal; Roy Eldridge, trumpet; Leon "Chu" Berry, tenor saxophone; Harry Grey, piano; Hilton "Nappy" Lamare, guitar; Artie Bernstein, string bass; Bill Beason, drums. *Recorded June 25, 1935, in New York. Originally issued on Vocalion 2982 (mx # 17730-1).*

Putney Dandridge is remembered because of the quality of some of the combos with which he recorded—as in this performance, introduced by New Orleans guitarist Nappy Lamare and soon taken over by Chu Berry, a tenor man who by now was seriously challenging Coleman Hawkins' hegemony in that field. With a leaner sound than Hawkins', Berry swung hard and deep but also with a loping lyricism very much his own. Roy Eldridge, with whom Chu recorded some of the decade's most enlivening small-band sides, was beginning to emerge as *the* dominant swing-era trumpeter (Louis Armstrong always excepted) and retained command until Dizzy Gillespie toppled him in the forties.

After Berry returns, the inescapable mark of a Dandridge session—a Dandridge vocal—is upon us, but the phenomenon to pay attention to is Eldridge's horn behind him. Eldridge's commentary on the theme is a superior illustration of the essence of jazz variations. And it must be said that Dandridge, infected by the jazz jubilation abounding behind him, finishes off in quite creditable strutting fashion.

Chasing shadows,
 Chasing love dreams in vain,
 While my heart keeps on singing
 Just a lonely refrain.
 I'm chasing shadows,
 All is cloudy up above,
 Like a shadow I'm drifting,
 Hoping I'll find my love... my love.
 Who knows someday someone may
 come along
 And change my song to happiness,
 Until the darkness fades into the dawn,
 I'll just go on, I guess,
 Chasing shadows,
 Just a dreamer am I,
 Hoping I'll find a rainbow
 When the shadows roll by.

Band 9

Knock, Knock

(J. Morris, V. Lopez, and W. Tyson-Davies)

Stuff Smith and His Onyx Club Orchestra: Jonah Jones, trumpet; Hezekiah "Stuff" Smith, violin and vocal; James Sherman, piano; Bobby Bennett, guitar; Mack Walker, string

bass; Cozy Cole, drums. *Recorded August 21, 1936, in New York. Originally issued on Vocalion 3300 (mx # 19731-1).*

Hezekiah Leroy Gordon "Stuff" Smith was the hottest, the most cooking (as later jazz jargon would put it) of all jazz violinists. And in unalloyed fervor he was one of the key spirits of the thirties, during which he was a continually active club player. As an entertainer Stuff was much given to novelties ("Ise A Muggin'" was a large hit for him the same year he made this recording). "Knock, Knock" is in the same vein, and although the lyrics are not likely to stay in your mind, Stuff's sizzling playing and Jones's trenchant trumpet are.

Knock! knock! Who's there?
Onyx!
Onyx who?
It's an onyxpected pleasure!

Knock! knock! Who's there?
Tangerine!
Tangerine who?
Tangerine the bell-boy come in [*sic*].

Knock, knock! Who's there?
Fortification!
Fortification who?
Forti-vacation I'm going to Buffalo!

Knock! knock! Who's there?
Gorilla!
Gorilla who?
Gor-ill of my dreams I love you!

Knock! knock! Who's there?
Dick!
Dick who?
Dick your hands up, I'm tongue-tied!

Knock! knock!
Who's there?
Frankfurter!
Frankfurter who?
Frank-fur-ter lovely evening!

Knock! knock!
Who's there?
Derby hat!
Derby hat who?
Der-be a hot time in the old town tonight!

Knock! knock!
Who's there?
Goldstein!
Goldstein who?

There's gold-stein them thar hills!

Knock! knock!
Who's there?
Macoushla!
Macoushla who?
[*Words indistinguishable.*]

Knock! knock!
Who's there?
Lemke!
Lemke who?
Lemke call you sweetheart!

Ring! Ring!
Who's there?
Ethel!
Ethel who?
Ethyl gas—no knock!

Boys, why don't you stop all that psychopathic patois?
Psychopathic patois who?
Psychopathic patois, don't you try to two-time me!

Knock! knock!
Who's there?
Saul!
Saul who?
Oh, s'all there is, there ain't no more,
No use knocking at my door.

Side Two Band 1

In a Little Gypsy Tearoom (E. Leslie and J. Burke)

Louis Prima and His New Orleans Gang; Louis Prima, trumpet and vocal; Ellsworth "Pee Wee" Russell, clarinet; Frank Pinero, piano; Garry McAdams, guitar; Jack Ryan, string bass; Sam Weiss, drums. *Recorded June 27, 1935, in New York. Originally issued on Brunswick 7479 (mx # B.17739-1).*

Louis Prima was a national star of little-club jazz of the thirties—less for his playing, although he was capable of forceful jazz, than for his showmanship. The gustiness of Prima's music and the driving energy of his attempts to please his audiences all night long conjured up the atmosphere of Bourbon Street back home in New Orleans. There, to this day, the doors of nearly all the clubs are left open in hope of attracting passersby with the compelling sounds of the good

high times inside.

With Prima in this performance is Pee Wee Russell, the wholly inimitable clarinetist of whom Prima told historian Arnold Shaw: "He had the most fabulous musical mind I have known. He never looked at a note. But the second time I played a lick, he'd play along with me in harmony. The guy seemed to read my mind. I've never run into anybody who had that much talent." In addition to Russell's ingenuity, the performance is noteworthy for Prima's zestful horn and his ingratiating singing, a blend of Italian and Louis Armstrong-like ebullience.

It was in a little gypsy tearoom,
When I was feeling blue,
It was in a little gypsy tearoom,
I first laid eyes on you.
When the gypsy came to read the tea leaves,
It made me feel quite gay,
When she said that someone in the tea room
Would steal my heart away.
I thought it really inconceivable,
But imagine my surprise,
You made the story quite believable,
Right there before my eyes.
With a smile that's sweeter than the roses,
You made a dream come true.
It was in a little gypsy tearoom,
I gave my heart to you.

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Band 2

Bugle Call Rag (J. Pettis, B. Meyers, and E. Schoebel)

Roly's Tap-Room Gang; Jonah Jones, trumpet; Sid Stoneburn, clarinet; Larry Binyon, tenor saxophone; Adrian Rollini, bass saxophone; Fulton McGrath, piano; Dick McDonough, guitar; George Hnida, string bass; Al Sidell, drums. *Recorded March 17, 1937, in New York. Master, unissued (mx # M.270-1).*

Ungainly, with a sound like the barking of a very large, thirsty dog, the bass saxophone, along with perhaps the bagpipes, would seem to be the least likely instrument on

which to try to play jazz. But Adrian Rollini (who was also a vibraphone player) did make it come boundingly alive. Rollini, in addition, was unusual among jazz players in that he had considerable business acumen. He successfully ran his own jazz club, Adrian's Tap Room, in New York. Hence the designation of the combo on this recording as Roly's Tap-Room Gang.

The key sidemen are Dick McDonough, one of the most discreetly accomplished rhythm guitarists in jazz history, and Jonah Jones, a big-band trumpeter who also (as most of them did) had an easy affinity for the small-club setting. Impressive, and very much of the period, is the powerhouse tenor of Larry Binyon. The cynosure, though, is Rollini taming his huge horn.

Band 3

Jungle Love

(L. Robin and R. Rainger)

Teddy Wilson and His Orchestra: Bobby Hackett, cornet; Gene "Honey Bear" Sedic, clarinet; Johnny Hodges, alto saxophone; Teddy Wilson, piano; (?) Alan Reuss, guitar; (?) Al Hall, string bass; Johnny Blowers, drums. *Recorded April 29, 1938, in New York. Brunswick, unissued (mx # 22825-1).*

Teddy Wilson developed an urbane, cleanly crafted, and greatly influential piano style out of his main influences, Art Tatum and Fats Waller. He headed the historic and still fresh Billie Holiday small-combo recordings in the thirties and broke the color line when he joined Benny Goodman. Wilson had his own big band for a brief time as well as various small units, and he often recorded (with and without Billie Holiday) as the leader of an all-star combo, as is the case here.

The first soloist, Bobby Hackett, is characteristically lucid, melodically serene and inventive, and altogether a model of jazz lyricism. Johnny Hodges, whom Wilson borrowed from the Duke Ellington orchestra, was also a most unruffled soloist,

every note seeming to flow with such unerring logic that the horn might be playing itself. A master of space, letting less say more (this could be said of Hackett too), Hodges did not so much swing as soar. Teddy Wilson is a third soloist entirely in control of time. The ardent, slightly acrid clarinet is that of Honey Bear Sedic, then of the Fats Waller troupe.

Band 4

What's the Use?

(C. Newman and I. Jones)

Emilio Caceres Trio: Emilio Caceres, violin; Ernie Caceres, clarinet and baritone saxophone; Johnny Gomez, guitar. *Recorded November 5, 1937, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 26719 (mx # 015752-1).*

The Caceres family, of Rockport, Texas, included two exceptional musicians. The better known was Ernesto ("Ernie"), a baritone saxophonist and clarinetist who went to New York to work with, among others, Bobby Hackett and Jack Teagarden in the mid-thirties and Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and Woody Herman in the next decade. Then there was Emilio, a violinist of whom musicians told resplendent tales but who did not record much. This band, therefore, is a special find in that it includes both brothers. Emilio was unmistakably a jazz fiddler in time, phrasing, and harmonic coloration. Ernie, after playing background baritone, switches to a clarinet solo that is both assertive and poignant (an uncommon combination). Emilio goes on to wail (as would have been said in a later jazz generation), as does Ernie returning to the baritone.

Band 5

Clarinet Marmalade

(L. Shields and H. Ragas)

Joe Marsala's Chicagoans: Marty Marsala, trumpet; Joe Marsala, clarinet; Ray Biondi, violin; Adele Girard, harp; Joe Bushkin, piano; Eddie Condon, guitar; Artie Shapiro, string

bass; Danny Alvin, drums. *Recorded April 21, 1937, in New York. Variety, unissued (mx # M.415-1).*

When I was discovering the musical surprises and almost instant camaraderie of the jazz clubs of the thirties, I heard a lot of Joe Marsala, who at the time played Boston rooms fairly often. He was one of the Chicagoans who had worked the speakeasies with such legends—shortly-after-their-own-time as trombonist Floyd O'Brien. Marsala, as you can hear, played in what can roughly be called the Chicago style—driving hot but rhythmically, anything but smooth. (The Chicagoans, by and large, always seemed to be in somewhat of a hurry.)

All this was fine fare for clubs because it was exciting, starting with a great deal of collective punch, with brother Marty Marsala propelling the front line. Violinist Ray Biondi was aptly intense. The rhythm section—one of the period's more sterling units—included raconteur-entrepreneur Eddie Condon, who very seldom took a solo but was a most steady timekeeper. The harpist—Joe's wife—while not exactly a swinger, understood jazz phrasing.

Just to indicate what else one could discover in a jazz club, I found out between sets over a period of time that Joe Marsala was an avocational expert in the history of European migrations back to pre-Christian times. There were other jazzmen with relatively arcane specialties, and I supplemented my schooling from a number of them in jazz rooms during the late thirties and beyond.

Band 6

Beale Street Mama

(R. Turk and J. R. Robinson)

Bob Howard and His Orchestra: Bob Howard, vocal; Billy Kyle, piano; Teddy Bunn, guitar; Haig Stephens, string bass; O'Neil Spencer, drums. *Recorded July 26, 1938, in New York. Originally issued on Decca 2056 (mx # 64346-A).*

Like Putney Dandridge, Bob Howard has endured in jazz chronicles because he used notable musi-

cians on his record dates. This performance, for instance, would not have been preserved here because of Howard's singing, but it is worth attention because of the presence of the insinuatingly lyrical guitarist Teddy Bunn, who played as if he were conversing with himself but was able to wholly envelop listeners in the moods he set. (Bunn, who preferred a deftly shaded single-note style, was best known for his work, along with Leo Watson, as part of the Spirits of Rhythm, a particular favorite during the thirties at the Onyx Club on Fifty-second Street.)

Also of interest here is the piano of Billy Kyle, an expansive performer who built a substantial reputation with John Kirby toward the end of the decade and with Louis Armstrong in the fifties.

Beale Street Mama,
Why don't you come back home?
It isn't proper to leave your papa all
alone.
Sometimes I was cruel, that's true,
But Mama, your sweet papa never two-
timed you.
Boo-hoo! I'm blue!
So how come you do me like you do?—
I'm crying....
Beale Street Mama,
Don't mess around with me.
There's fancy petting that I can get in
Tennessee—for me.
I still get my sweet cookies constantly,
But not the kind you serve to me.
So, Beale Street Mama, come back home.
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Band 7

Tapioca

(W. Strayhorn)

Barney Bigard and His Jazzopatens: Rex Stewart, cornet; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Barney Bigard, clarinet; Harry Carney, baritone saxophone; Billy Strayhorn, piano; Jimmy Blanton, string bass; Sonny Greer, drums. *Recorded February 14, 1940, in New York. Vocalion, unissued (mx # M.1140-A).*

Barney Bigard and His Jazzopatens was yet another combo—they proliferated on recordings in the thirties and forties—extracted from the Duke Ellington band. The pianist

here is Billy Strayhorn, who was Ellington's closest musical associate, so close that it was sometimes difficult even for an Ellington sideman, listening to a record, to tell whether Duke or Billy was the pianist. On this up-tempo, riff-built number, the featured soloists are Barney Bigard (an interesting illustration of how a New Orleans-trained jazzman adapted not so much to swing as to Ellington's very special world), Rex Stewart (a musician of great flair and keen intelligence), and Harry Carney (who practically dominated the baritone saxophone in jazz until the advent, years later, of Gerry Mulligan).

Juan Tizol, perhaps the first distinguished Puerto Rican jazz performer, was also a composer and arranger who was instrumental in adding a Latin tinge to Duke's repertory. Jimmy Blanton, who died at the age of twenty-one two years after this recording was made, greatly expanded the potential of the string bass; he was the first player to consistently and brilliantly improvise on that sizable instrument as if it were a horn. Sonny Greer, Ellington's richly caparisoned drummer until 1951, was usually more at wizardly ease in an orchestra than in a small combo.

Band 8

Blues in My Condition

(Cootie Williams)

Cootie Williams and His Orchestra: Charles "Cootie" Williams, trumpet; Lou McGarity, trombone; Les Robinson, alto saxophone; Skippy Martin, baritone saxophone; Johnny Guarneri, piano; Artie Bernstein, string bass; Jo Jones, drums. *Recorded May 7, 1941, in New York. Originally issued on Okeh 6224 (mx # CO.3045-1).*

Cootie Williams' association with Duke Ellington (starting in 1929) had seemed so natural a part of the jazz firmament that the shock generated by Cootie's departure in 1940 to join Benny Goodman led to a threnody of the time, Raymond Scott's "When Cootie Left the Duke."

Here the post-Duke Cootie has

assembled a number of luminaries of the swing period, most of whom were probably not aware that bebop (or modern jazz) was already starting to stir.

Cootie begins with the firmly controlled, expressive growling technique that made his work immediately identifiable, and goes on to indicate how poignantly evocative he could also be. Lou McGarity, also with Benny Goodman at the time of this recording, plays with customary relaxed power. Johnny Guarneri, a swinging eclectic, is heard briefly before Cootie, growling again, concludes the proceedings.

Band 9

Bugler's Dilemma

(Lou Singer)

John Kirby and His Orchestra: Charlie Shavers, trumpet; Buster Bailey, clarinet; Russell Procope, alto saxophone; Billy Kyle, piano; John Kirby, string bass; O'Neil Spencer, drums; Lou Singer, arranger. *Recorded July 25, 1941, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 27568 (mx # 066896-1).*

In a sense, the John Kirby band could be called precursors of cool jazz. That is, the emphasis on hot, extrovert swinging that marked much of the small-combo jazz of the thirties changed, in Kirby, to tightly disciplined ensemble work out of which came equally disciplined and carefully designed low-key solos. It was all done most skillfully and required instrumentalists of exceptional swiftness of execution and total mastery of their horns. All of which is evident in this performance. It was Kirby's conviction that the time had come for a new approach to small-band jazz, and his chamber sounds were certainly quite fresh at the time, though rather narrow in scope.

Other, younger players were also convinced that the musical times were a-changing, and out of their daring explorations came the music that succeeded the swing of the thirties—bebop (New World Records NW 271).

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Side One Total time 26:59

- 1 *MY HONEY'S LOVING ARMS* (Joseph Meyer and Herman Ruby) 3:08
(publ. Mills Music, Inc.)
 Joe Venuti's Blue Four
- 2 *ROCKY MOUNTAIN BLUES* (Bill Simmon) 3:12
(publ. Southern Music Publishing Co., Inc.)
 The Harlem Footwarmers
- 3 *HEIRE KATI* (Jeno Hubay) 2:47
(publ. Normandy Music)
 Eddie South and His International Orchestra
- 4 *[I WISH THAT I COULD SHIMMY LIKE MY] SISTER KATE* (A. Piron) 2:39
(publ. Jerry Vogel Music Co.)
 Henry Allen and Coleman Hawkins and Their Orchestra

5	<i>CHINA BOY</i> (D. Winfree and P. Boutelje) (publ. <i>Leo Feist, Inc.</i>) Candy and Coco	2:58
6	<i>SQUAREFACE</i> (G. Gifford) (publ. <i>Mayfair Music Corp.</i>) Gene Gifford and His Orchestra	3:22
7	<i>I GOT RHYTHM</i> (George and Ira Gershwin) (publ. <i>New World Music Corp.</i>) Red Norvo and His Swing Sextet	2:47
8	<i>CHASING SHADOWS</i> (B. Davis and A. Silver) (publisher unknown) Putney Dandridge and His Orchestra	2:43
9	<i>KNOCK, KNOCK</i> (J. Morris, V. Lopez, and W. Tyson-Davies) (publisher unknown) Stuff Smith and His Onyx Club Orchestra	2:59

Side Two Total time 26:46

1	<i>IN A LITTLE GYPSY TEAROOM</i> (E. Leslie and J. Burke) (publ. <i>Fred Ahlert Music Corp.</i>) Louis Prima and His New Orleans Gang	2:49
2	<i>BUGLE CALL RAG</i> (Jack Pettis, Billy Meyers, and Elmer Schoebel) (publ. <i>Belwin Mills Publishing Corp.</i>) Roly's Tap Room Gang	2:58
3	<i>JUNGLE LOVE</i> (L. Robin and R. Rainger) (publ. <i>Paramount Music Corp.</i>) Teddy Wilson and His Orchestra	2:45
4	<i>WHAT'S THE USE?</i> (C. Newman and I. Jones) (publ. <i>Leo Feist, Inc.</i>) Emilio Caceres Trio	3:20
5	<i>CLARINET MARMALADE</i> (L. Shields and H. Ragas) (publ. <i>Leo Feist, Inc.</i>) Joe Marsala's Chicagoans	3:04
6	<i>BEALE STREET MAMA</i> (R. Turk and J.R. Robinson) (publ. <i>Fred Fisher Music Co., Inc.</i>) Bob Howard and His Orchestra	3:14
7	<i>TAPIOCA</i> (W. Strayhorn) (publ. <i>American Academy of Music, Inc.</i>) Barney Bigard and His Jazzopaters	2:29
8	<i>BLUES IN MY CONDITION</i> (Cootie Williams) (publ. <i>American Academy of Music, Inc.</i>) Cootie Williams and His Orchestra	2:51
9	<i>BUGLER'S DILEMMA</i> (Lou Singer) (publisher unknown) John Kirby and His Orchestra	2:52

Full archival information on the recordings and a complete list of the performers for each selection may be found within the individual discussions of the works in the liner notes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to extend our thanks to CBS Records for: "My Honey's Loving 'Arms"; "Rocky Mountain Blues"; "[I Wish That I Could Shimmy Like My] Sister Kate"; "China Boy"; "Chasing Shadows"; "Knock, Knock"; "In a Little Gypsy Tearoom"; "Bugle Call Rag"; "Jungle Love"; "Clarinet Marmalade"; "Tapioca"; "Blues in My Condition"; and to RCA for: "Hejre Kati"; "Square Face"; "What's the Use?" "Bugler's Dilemma."

The producer wishes to thank Robert Altshuler for the loan of certain rare 78 rpm discs.

Producer/Researcher: Michael Brooks

Rerecording engineer: Doug Pomeroy

Cover art: Man Ray. "Jazz." Air brush.

Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, Columbus, Ohio; Gift of Ferdinand Howald

Cover design: Elaine Sherer Cox

Library of Congress Card No. 76-750693

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For additional information and a catalogue, please contact:

New World Records

701 Seventh Avenue, New York, New York 10036

(212) 302-0460 • (212) 944-1922 fax

email: info@newworldrecords.org

www.newworldrecords.org