

MID-MONTH RECORDINGS



—SR Drawing by Paul Orban.

BY THE RIVERS OF NEW ORLEANS...

The Jazz Commemoration Works Project

By FREDERIC RAMSEY, JR.

A PROPER controversy got going not so long ago in New Orleans, and it had to do with a proposal to commemorate the birthplace of jazz. One group wanted to erect a monument on Basin Street, and another group opposed the idea of erecting anything to commemorate New Orleans music. To this writer the strangest aspect of the controversy was not that there was opposition, but that such unanimity existed amongst those who had selected the one site.

Somewhat belatedly, I should like to suggest to good citizens of the city that they are missing a trick. Those who would have settled for one monument and one commemoration deserve to have lost their case; what is wanting in New Orleans is an open-handed stake-out of the entire territory of jazz's origin. This would soon find the city embarked on a magnanimous public-works program to rival the splendor of ancient Rome.

Our Jazz Commemoration Works Project would be organized along departmental lines, with an over-all director appointed by the governor. I have no particular favorites for this appointee, but I do feel that some one like Louis Armstrong would know his way around town well enough not to confuse Basin Street, formerly Basin, then North Saratoga, then Basin, with Old Basin Street.

Four departments could probably take care of the whole job. Facsimile

could expedite the restoration, reconstruction, and reclamation of dilapidated buildings associated with the birth of jazz; Monuments would place, commission, and see to the execution of statuary and special constructions; Museums and Parks would concern itself with park planning, landscaping, museum buildings, and ways of filling them; Plaques and Markers would requisition plaques and markers, and supervise their installation at suitable locations.

It would be impossible to enumerate the hundreds of rewarding projects which could be completed by this organization, so I shall have to content myself here with a few nominations concerning those points which, to any one who has ever thought he heard the sound of Buddy Bolden's horn while standing on the corner of Rampart and Perdido, must be accepted nowadays as *sine qua non*. And in order to bring them quickly to life I shall propose a little tour of the city which might be projected to include some of these more significant locales.

Our outing could very well begin at the corner of Rampart and Perdido streets. As every one knows who has committed to memory the personnel of Buddy Bolden's first band, this is the very spot at which a number of New Orleanians used to congregate at the turn of the century in order to listen to his horn—whether he played uptown, at Johnson Park, or whether he played at Gretna across the river, in the shade of the well-known and

justly celebrated pecan grove. Travel in those old times was difficult, with only a few primitive electric cars to serve the entire city. Evidently those who listened to Bolden preferred to remain at one spot rather than undertake the arduous journey uptown, or across the river by steam ferry. This is often given as explanation for his blowing so loud.

Our plan for commemoration at this site is a little ambitious, but hardly out of keeping with its significance. Huey Long, for example, is remembered to thousands by a bridge in his name which crosses the Mississippi nine miles upriver; its cost was estimated at \$13 million. That is appropriate for a politician, but certainly more could be done for an artist of Bolden's stature.

We propose a marble-faced, rounded arc spanning the Mississippi at this point, with one end of the arc anchored firmly at Rampart and Perdido, and the other extremity falling down gracefully amongst the pecan trees of Gretna. If these are not still standing—and very probably they are not—it should be a simple matter to remove the unsightly docks, rail yards, and manufactories that stand in the way. The restored grove could serve as an airy picnic ground.

Inscribed across the face of the arc, in letters no less than ten feet high, the legend, "Architecture Is Frozen Music" (Goethe), will be visible to all boats arriving at the port of New Orleans. In much the same manner

as our Washington Monument and Statue of Liberty, the arc is to be hollow inside, with windows opening on the Mississippi, upriver and downriver. The view from the crest of the arc would be stunning. No public transportation in the arc, however; the silent, respectful tread of the thousands of feet of ensuing generations of tourists would impress on their less-sturdy characters the inspiring example of a man whose lungs could vault the Mississippi.

For the Perdido side of the arc's porphyry footing we have selected, after Wilder Hobson (who used them for his book, "American Jazz Music"), the lines of Walt Whitman:

I hear the key'd cornet, it glides
quickly in through my ears,
It shakes mad-sweet pangs
through my belly and breast.

For the Rampart side, we rather lean toward a one-line commemoration of those who congregated at Masonic Hall (hard by the corner), and the Eagle Saloon with no other thought but to pay homage to Bolden's distant horn. Perhaps Milton's "They Also Serve Who Only Stand and Wait" will do.

Three acanthus-patterned walks radiating from the base of the arc will serve as promenade to bring visitors to reconstructions of three of the original hang-outs once sacred to the neighborhood—The Red Onion, Funky Butt, and The Eagle. Whiskey is to be dispensed, barrelhouse fashion, from reproductions of I. W. Harper kegs. It is planned to retail "rough top" beer, once sold for five cents a half can in the "good-time" era, for slightly more than its former cost. Profits realized from this venture will eventually pay for the cost of erecting the arc, or Bolden's Bow, as it is to be known. Not Blow—that sounds a bit rough, while "Bow" suggests a rainbow, and is more alliterative.

A most attractive feature of the acanthus-cluster of saloons around the base of Bolden's Bow will be the old, gilded eagle that used to fly above the bar, and which blew down on one never-to-be-forgotten evening. Beneath the revived eagle a small engraving in brass will preserve the defiant statement:

The Eagle boys fly high
And never miss a feather
If you miss this dance
You'll have the blues forever.

The reference, of course, is to members of the Eagle Band who succeeded Bolden, and who celebrated their musical prowess—perhaps with less restraint than deemed fitting nowadays

—with this primitive, yet sincere quatrain. Some have suggested that a line from Tennyson would do better here, but we stand true to our design—accuracy is our inspiration, and history cannot be fudged.

Continuing our tour, and working our way respectfully up Perdido Street, keeping in mind the charming Creole proverb collected by Lafcadio Hearn, "*Marché narien lazambes qui besoin*," which translated means "You need legs to walk," we finally arrive at the site of Basin Street.

Our plan is the complete restoration of every famed house of pleasure that used to grace this *allée*, from Tom Anderson's corner bagnio right on down the line, with every last piece of decorative brick replaced in its original position. Here visitors can roam at will through the fabulous pleasure-domes of Storyville, evoking through contact with each treasured item of this incredible settlement, all that transpired within its walls. Visitors meandering through air-conditioned rooms will be able to marvel at fur-coated pianos, gold and silver service, and collections of brilliants amassed by the proprietors of these lavish establishments. A slight charge will be made for admission, with a reduced family rate.

Going uptown and crosstown from Basin Street we should eventually arrive, guidebook in hand, at the former site of a picturesque passage once known as Murderers' Alley. It extended, roughly, from a corner bar at Jackson Street (now Jackson Avenue), down and across Jackson in a

zigzag that debouched into Philip Street. This district is pregnant with haunting mementos of the happy childhoods of Louis Armstrong, Buddy Bolden, and King Oliver.

Recently the city fathers saw fit to clear out some of the softly weathered cabins that used to lend such a nostalgic flavor to this region, and to substitute for the once delightfully cluttered backyards of the residences a modern, two-lane thoroughway, named after Simon Bolivar. However, it would take only a second thought on the part of the town council to restore old Franklin Street to its pristine status.

In the waxworks museum such delightful personalities as Gyp the Blood, Cocaine Buddy, Dirty Dog, and Buck Tooth Rena could be seen once more in faithful recreations based on cherished gold-bromide likenesses of them once taken at Tintype Hall, which used to stand hard by on South Liberty between First and Philip Streets.

Proceeding due northwest from this corner (or, if "*lazambes*" are weary, take No. 33 trolley coach at Freret and First, transfer at Washington to No. 18 motor bus uptown, transfer at Carrollton to No. 6 motor bus or trolley coaches 37, 39, southbound, get off at Olive), we come at last to the renowned site of Johnson and Lincoln Parks which, by a strange quirk of history, no one has ever been able to locate with any certainty.

Once there were two parks, Lincoln and Johnson; it was here, beneath the



—Ewing Galloway.

Street in New Orleans—"a program to rival the splendors of ancient Rome."

spreading live oak trees, that gallant duels of music were executed between members of the Buddy Bolden and Robichaux Orchestras. Most old-timers when interviewed concur that the two parks were somewhere in this neighborhood.

A further complication is that if we take these informants literally, remembering that just at the turn of the century Carrollton had only recently been incorporated into the larger city of New Orleans, then "Carrollton by the tracks" might place both Lincoln and Johnson Parks alongside the old lines of the historic Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Docks and Grain Elevators, or in other words, in the area marked on present-day maps as Jefferson Parish.

This is just a mite confusing, and in order to simplify matters I would suggest that a panel of jazz authorities be appointed by the Director of the Project, and entrusted with authority to decide upon an actual former site for the two parks. This would furnish a splendid opportunity for an outdoor festival, picnic, and panel discussion, at a date to be set some future time.

This gets us to our next project of commemoration. From Olive and Carrollton get back on trolley coaches No. 39, southbound. Change to No. 31 trolley coach at Broadway and St. Charles, get off at Audubon Park carousel. Walk southwest to Seal Pool.

Rare trees, flowers, and grass held over from the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition of 1885, enhance this environment. In this fragrant tropical setting, an outdoor bandstand, jazz shrine, and arboretum will commemorate with quiet dignity all that is sacred to the spirit of jazz.

Founders Day ceremonies will take place each year on a date to be chosen by the panel of authorities. The date to be selected will probably correspond as closely as possible to that awesome moment when Ferdinand Morton first invaded the tenderloin, perhaps late in February, 1902—it will have to coincide with Mardi Gras.

The ceremonies, traditional from the start, will always open with the setting out of slips from the original china-berry tree which grew back of James Alley on the site of Louis Armstrong's birth, and from which his grandmother used to cut switches intended for the young genius of jazz. A symbolic flagellation dance will be performed by a barefoot chorus of modern interpreters.

Perhaps you have been wondering what memorable event connected with the birth of jazz could have occurred at Seal Pool. To be quite honest, the pool has nothing at all to do with jazz, but it is a lovely spot.

Now jump in.

New Audiences and Old Jazzmen

By NAT HENTOFF

THERE has been an increasing amount of campaign literature by jazz proselytizers to the end that jazz be recognized as an "art form" with the accompanying panoply of respect that is accorded classical music.

Many of these jazz lobbyists, however, in their zeal to "legitimize" their love, have ignored or, worse yet, have shared a serious failure in perspective on the part of a large percentage of their own constituents—jazz musicians as well as listeners. If jazz is indeed an "art form," a fair majority of its practitioners and supporters ought by now to be expected to possess—and listen according to—an informed sense of the history of this young musical language.

The dedicated initiates of an "art form" ought surely to have the kind of feeling for tradition and the individual talent that was indicated, let's say, by experimentalist James Joyce's far from slight acquaintance with the evolution of English literature; that enabled Schoenberg to work with profit and apparent pleasure in basing his Concerto for String Quartet and Orchestra on Handel's Concerto Grosso, Op. 6, No. 7; and that enables a collector of paintings to own and enjoy equally a Cranach and a Jack Levine.

But the melancholy fact concerning jazz adherents is that only a relatively small segment of the jazz audience and of the younger musicians does have enough feeling for jazz roots to be aware of the continuing richness and resourcefulness of the *whole* of the language's tradition. A grim corollary of this drought of understanding as it operates within the jazz audience is that as many jazz musicians grow older and stylistically out of favor they are reduced to spare weekend appearances, infrequent club dates or, finally, a job in the post office or its frustrating (for a musician) equivalent.

Coleman Hawkins, the procreator of the jazz tenor saxophone and a musician who retains often overpowering inventiveness, has not been invited to appear in a major New York, Chicago, or West Coast jazz club in a very long time. And although a new recording by Hawkins is sporadically released, Hawkins is not signed to and consistently publicized by any one label,



—Carole Galletby.

John Lewis—"historically well grounded."

although almost any young modern jazz sideman with the beginnings of a name is wooed and won to a recording contract.

Were it not for Norman Granz's determination to continue to utilize older jazzmen of continuing creativity on his Jazz at the Philharmonic tours and on his recordings, it is doubtful whether even so maturely masterful a jazz improviser as Roy Eldridge would still be playing to large audiences in large halls at least part of each year.

Other musicians of Roy's generation have not been so fortunate. Dicky Wells, a trombonist whom several European jazz aestheticians regard with consummate admiration (cf. André Hodeir's "Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence") has at last report been forced into a rhythm and blues caravan to sustain himself. Rex Stewart, a uniquely expressive hornman, has a radio disc jockey show in upstate New York and plays some weekend engagements. Vic Dickenson, a James Thurber-like trombonist, manages to keep working by juggling one-nighters and occasional week-length stands in pickup bands, but he is almost unknown to the younger (and much larger) section of the contemporary jazz audience.

SIMILARLY dispossessed, to a large extent, of a continuing audience are older musicians like trumpeters Cootie Williams, Taft Jordan, Emmett Berry, Joe Thomas, Shad Collins, Harold Baker, Doc Cheatham; reedmen Ben Webster (whose recordings for Norman Granz have kept for him