

Swing
TO
BOP



IRA GITLER

~~~~~  
AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE  
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TRANSITION IN JAZZ IN THE 1940s
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AN ORAL HISTORY OF  
THE TRANSITION IN JAZZ  
IN THE 1940S

IRA GITLER

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To the memory of Budd Johnson for his contributions  
to the music from the '20s to the '80s.

He bopped with the best and never stopped swinging.

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# Acknowledgments

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**SWING TO BOP**

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# Introduction

Big bands were the focal point of the so-called “Swing Era,” when jazz reached its greatest popularity, in great part because of its relationship to dancing. Jazz permeated our society from movies through comic strips; found its way into our language, our fashions, and, of course, at its source, was heard in recordings, on the radio (live and on record), in theatres, ballrooms, and nightclubs. The “swing” bands did not play jazz all the time, but even the ballads and novelties were approached from a jazz viewpoint. The “sweet” bands, on the other hand, all had in their books some jazz arrangements, or “flagwavers,” as they were called.

Swing, like the styles of jazz that preceded it, was essentially a black expression, but it was the white bands who were accorded the greatest popularity. Duke Ellington, Jimmie Lunceford, Count Basie, Earl Hines, and Cab Calloway all were successful in this period, but not to the extent of their white counterparts. Benny Goodman, utilizing the arrangements of Edgar Sampson, Jimmy Mundy, Horace Henderson, and, most particularly, Fletcher Henderson, sparked the arrival of the Swing Era in the public consciousness. He was dubbed “The King of Swing,” and achieved the commercial triumph that had eluded Fletcher Henderson in the latter’s years as leader of the first big band to gain wide recognition by playing jazz.

In the mid-1920s, Henderson’s trumpet section was graced by Louis Armstrong who, among his other musical accomplishments, defined what swinging—that solid, yet springing, 4/4 propulsion—was all about.

As the ’30s segued into the ’40s, new ideas were coming together from various sources and directions; different people were developing along similar lines and others were being influenced directly or building their styles in a particular way because they were being shaped by the attitudes dictated by the innovations of these seminal improvisers. Men such as tenor saxophonist Lester Young, trumpeter Roy Eldridge, guitarist Charlie Christian, pianist Art Tatum, bassist Jimmy

Blanton, and drummer Jo Jones were musicians who caught the ears of their peers and inspired them to extend what they heard and create afresh.

The younger black musicians, tired of the repetition of the riff-derived arrangements and lack of solo space in the big bands, began to form a new music that they felt could not be so easily appropriated by the white leaders. Unobserved by many at the time, bebop evolved from the big bands—on the bandstand but more so in the after-hours jam sessions. This was happening in many parts of the country but really began to crystallize in New York at Harlem clubs such as Minton's and Monroe's Uptown House. From there Charlie "Bird" Parker and Dizzy Gillespie introduced their ideas into the Earl Hines band in 1943 for a short stay, unrecorded due to a recording ban. In 1944 came the first large bebop band, led by Hines's former vocalist Billy Eckstine and featuring, among other young stars of the new movement, Parker and Gillespie.

From there bebop moved to 52nd Street (where it had already put down roots), and in 1945 Dizzy and Bird co-led a quintet that offered their music in its quintessential form. When they recorded for the Guild label that same year, the word was spread to musicians and fans far beyond New York.

Although there were still some very important big bands in the Bebop Era, the emphasis shifted to small groups and the individual soloists within them. Then, too, the modern musicians of that time began to think of themselves as serious artists, whether it was someone like Gillespie, who also overtly entertained, or like Parker, who just planted his feet in a wide stance on the bandstand and played. This is not to say that the giants of the Swing Era were not fine artists, but they were coming out of a different milieu, and only people close to the music realized how "serious" their work was.

The advent of bebop came at a time when many of the same venues that the swing players had used—the movie theaters, hotels, and ballrooms—were also the arenas of the modernists, but to a far lesser extent. The boppers, of course, were performing in the small nightclubs, but were also utilizing the concert halls more and more, whether for programs by bands, combos, or the jam session taken from the club context and placed up on the stage. Norman Granz broke through with his *Jazz At the Philharmonic*, and soon there was Gene Norman's *Just Jazz* and other carbons or mutations.

The young black audience, which no longer supports jazz the way it once did (for a variety of reasons, including the cultural genocide of radio), was into bebop in the big cities above the Mason-Dixon Line. I know because whenever I went into a black neighborhood in the years 1945–1949, whether it was at a record store in Harlem, a shoeshine stand in St. Louis, a rib joint in Chicago, or someone's apartment in Brooklyn, I heard bebop coming out of loudspeakers, juke boxes, and

an assortment of phonographs from consoles to portables. I was in closer touch with black people because of this music.

It was said that people didn't dance to bebop and, for the most part, this was true, but black people figured out a way to make those fast tempos by cutting the time in half whether they were doing a new dance called "The Apple Jack" or the older Lindy Hop. And when Bird or Lester Young or Gene Ammons played a romantic ballad, you put your arms around your partner, moved to the music, and got groovy. Whether it was Young playing a dance in St. Louis or Parker at the Pershing in Chicago, the ballroom was crowded with listeners *and* dancers.

Bebop was characterized as weird but, to many, it was a music that lifted one with beauty and joy. It was an expression of the finest black musical minds and, besides what it expressed explicitly, offered the human verities that jazz had communicated from its inception.

Though bop became a pervading influence, not only in jazz but, as it filtered down, through all facets of the entertainment and advertising industries, the music, as such, was never fully accepted by the public. Its greatest acceptance was when it was popularized by white musicians. This is not to say that the majority of white players who were drawn to the music came with the thought in mind, "Hey, I'm going to make some money with this." Those who did approach it calculatingly made little impact, for I don't believe even the successful popularizers were armed with that attitude.

All the young musicians, black and white, were caught up in the excitement generated by Parker and Gillespie. As a young fan I, too, was very taken with the new ideas. I think the reason I embraced it quickly was because I recognized all the qualities it had maintained from the previous jazz styles that I had been brought up on and loved so much: rhythmic propulsion and the happy-sad duality of the blues that infused so much of the music even when it wasn't couched directly in the 12-bar form. Additionally, if one could make the connection between the chord structures of the standard songs on which the original bop compositions were based and these new themes, it helped in appreciating the new improvisations.

As important as the harmonic explorations were, it was the rhythmic innovations that were at the core of what made bebop a new and unique expression. The drummers, shown the way by Kenny Clarke, accompanied in a manner that allowed the soloists to fly with eighth-note constructions and extend their lines to include bursts of sixteenth and thirty-second notes. It was a wedding of style and idea that, in new ways, combined elements that had been in existence in jazz for years.

I believe the first time I heard about the new music was when Daniel Bloom, who was a fellow student at Columbia Grammar Prep, was raving about a record called "Bu-Dee-Daht," from the Apollo session that Coleman Hawkins cut in February 1944 with Dizzy Gillespie, Clyde

Hart, Budd Johnson, and Max Roach, among others. It is generally considered the first official bebop recording date and Gillespie's "Woody 'n You" its most celebrated number.

I didn't hear any of the Apollos until after I discovered the Parker-Gillespie Guilds and Gillespie Manors toward the end of 1945 and had set out in search of any and all bebop, be it a chorus on a Johnny Long record of the old Peter Van Steeden chestnut *Home*, or a complete record in the style such as something by the Bebop Boys on Savoy. There were, however, people who heard the Apollos when they were released and were taken with them. Jim Krit, from Chicago, whom I met at college in 1948, said he encountered them when he returned from the Philippines after the war. "We didn't know the word bebop," he said, "but we knew they were different. We called it 'New York' jazz."

It was at that time, through the record program of Sid Torin, known as Symphony Sid, that I really became acquainted with the new "New York Jazz." He played it on WHOM between and among the Basies, Louis Jordans, Wynonie Harrises, and Billie Holidays, and on Fridays, when he came on a little earlier in the evening, he would devote an entire hour to the new releases on labels such as Guild and Manor. Each week he would run a contest in which you had to identify the music or the musician. The reward was free admission to the Sunday afternoon jam sessions at the Fraternal Clubhouse on West 48th Street or the Lincoln Square Center, which was next to the old St. Nicholas Arena on West 66th Street. Jazz promoter Monte Kay (who later went on to manage the Modern Jazz Quartet and Flip Wilson among others), publicist Mal Braveman, and Sid had formed an organization called the New Jazz Foundation under whose auspices these sessions were presented.

One Friday night I called Symphony Sid with the correct answer to his record quiz (I think it was the Slam Stewart trio playing "Three Blind Micesky") and won a pass to the Fraternal Clubhouse on the following Sunday afternoon. The only live jazz of consequence I had heard before was from the theater stage shows but I had never been to a jam session. I was not quite seventeen.

The music that still is remembered vividly from that day is the powerful trumpet blown on "Rose Room" by Bernie Privin, recently returned from overseas and the Glenn Miller Air Force Band; long, tall Dexter Gordon and short, orange-goateed Red Rodney combining on "Groovin' High"; and a slight, dark trumpeter, introduced in an off-hand manner by Symphony Sid as "a little student from Juilliard," who was at the back of a large ensemble on stage for the finale and sputtered through a short solo when his turn came. Many, many months later I realized that it had been Miles Davis.

From that time I began to attend other Sunday afternoon sessions and eventually jazz nightclubs, particularly the ones between 5th and 6th Avenues on 52nd Street or "Swing Street," as it was known. Ac-

tually, I had already been to 52nd Street once to hear Billie Holiday at the Downbeat. I didn't date that much in high school but there was one girl who excited me, and I guess I wanted to take her to something special. Like all 52nd Street clubs the Downbeat was low-ceilinged, long and narrow. Each wall was lined with banquettes and the tables down the middle were flanked by two thin aisles. There were no dressing rooms to speak of and so the performers, their set over, would go out onto the street and club-hop since there were so many places in that block and the one west between 6th and 7th Avenues. Billie had her boxer named "Mister" at that time, and after she had finished singing she walked by our middle-section table with him on the way out of the club. My date must have tried petting the boxer for a minute later she said to me, "Miss Hollywood's dog almost bit me." It was the last time I took her out.

In the mid-'40s, 52nd Street had several jazz styles going at the same time: New Orleans (or its descendants) at Jimmy Ryan's, swing, and bebop. At the Fraternal Clubhouse and Lincoln Square Center most of the musicians were drawn from people working on the Street or players who might be in town with a traveling big band. There was a mixture of swing and bop that told anyone with ears that, although bop was a new way of playing, it came from and was not incompatible with swing, at least insofar as basic thematic material was concerned. Of course, beboppers were extending the harmonies, and rhythmically there were those marked differences, but there were drummers like Harold "Doc" West who were adapting very nicely.

When Dizzy Gillespie came back from California in the winter of 1946 without Charlie Parker, he opened at the Spotlite on 52nd Street with Ray Brown, Milt Jackson, Al Haig, Stan Levey and Leo Parker, no kin to Charlie, on baritone saxophone. Sometimes J.J. Johnson would sit in, a perforated, grey felt beanie hanging on the bell of his trombone, creating a velvet muted tone not unlike that of a French horn. My first published writing on jazz was a review of this group for the Columbia Grammar newspaper.

There were other great nights on the street: a J.J. Johnson quartet with Bud Powell on piano; Roy Eldridge's big band; Coleman Hawkins quartet with Hank Jones at the piano; and a group co-led by Flip Phillips and Bill Harris after Woody Herman's Herd had disbanded.

I left for the University of Missouri at Columbia in the fall of 1946 with intentions of studying journalism. A couple of record review columns for *The Missouri Student* was all the writing about jazz I did for a while. I visited in St. Louis and Kansas City on some weekends, listening to what music I could catch. On short vacations I would get to Chicago. During the summers, I hung out on 52nd Street, the Royal Roost, and Harlem, bought as many records as I could and read about jazz from Mezz Mezzrow's *Really the Blues* to Leonard Feather's *Inside Bebop*.

In early 1950 I left Missouri and returned to New York. Birdland

had opened the previous Christmas and become the main jazz club. I tried to get a job with either *Down Beat* or *Metronome*, the two leading jazz periodicals of the time, but it was not as simple to break into jazz print in those days as it is today.

My professional debut was a set of liner notes from Prestige PRLP 117, a Zoot Sims album recorded in August 1951. I continued to write for Prestige, also producing records and doing just about everything else—packing boxes, sweeping floors, and serving as liaison with the disc jockeys—intermittently into 1955. I also began to write for other labels and, finally, for *Metronome* and *Down Beat*.

In the 1960s Martin Williams was editing the "Jazz Masters" series from Macmillan and asked me to write *Jazz Masters of the '40s*, a book that concentrates on the major figures of the music called bebop, through the format of biographical chapters. It was first published in 1966, and is now available in paperback from DaCapo Press.

In the early '70s I felt I wanted to do a new book on the subject from a different standpoint. Rather than biography it would be an oral history, tracing the roots of the style and how it evolved from the musicians of the big bands of the '30s to become a full-fledged force in the big bands and, particularly, the small groups of the '40s. Under a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation the work was begun and interviews conducted with the following people (here listed alphabetically): Joe Albany, David Allyn, Jean Bach, Benny Bailey, Eddie Barefield, Jimmy Butts, Red Callender, Johnny Carisi, Benny Carter, Al Cohn, Sonny Criss, Buddy DeFranco, Charles Delaunay, Billy Eckstine, Biddy Fleet, Terry Gibbs, Babs Gonzales, Dexter Gordon, Jimmy Gourley, Al Grey, Johnny Griffin, Al Haig, Jimmy Heath, Neal Hefti, Woody Herman, Milt Hinton, Chubby Jackson, Henry Jerome, Budd Johnson, Gus Johnson, Hank Jones, Barney Kessel, Lee Konitz, Don Lanphere, Lou Levy, Shelly Manne, Junior Mance, Howard McGhee, Jay McShann, Mitch Miller, Billy Mitchell, James Moody, Brew Moore, Gerry Mulligan, Joe Newman, Red Norvo, Chico O'Farrill, Cecil Payne, Art Pepper, Lenny Popkin, Max Roach, Red Rodney, Frank Rosolino, Charlie Rouse, Jimmy Rowles, Zoot Sims, Hal Singer, Frankie Socolow, Sonny Stitt, Idrees Sulieman, Billy Taylor, Allen Tinney, Lennie Tristano, Charlie Ventura, Mary Lou Williams, and Trummy Young.



# The Road

In the period from the early '30s to the war years, the big bands were king and inspired the same adulation that rock bands enjoy today. The jazz fan and the young jazz musician had a very close relationship. Indeed, very often they were one and the same.



**SHELLY MANNE** I remember when I subbed for Davey Tough years ago—when he got ill one night—at the Hickory House with Joe Marsala. I was sitting there playing, and I had been playing drums maybe a year, a little over a year at that time. And Benny Goodman came in 'cause he wanted to hire Davey to join the band. He sat down at the circular bar, right next to the drums. I was playing and it was really nerves time because Benny was there. It's 19 . . . '41 I guess. '40 or '41. Anyway, Benny had, to me, the greatest band he ever had at that time. That was when Charlie Christian and Cootie Williams were on the band—Artie Bernstein and Mike Bryan, Georgie Auld, Gus Bivona. That was a wild band. Eddie Sauter was doing all the writing—"Benny Rides Again."

He left, after he spoke to Joe, and Joe Marsala goes, "Hey, Benny liked the way you played. Maybe he's gonna give you a call." I said, "Hey, you're kidding." About an hour later the phone rang, and Benny said, "Hey kid, what's your name?" And I said, "Shelly Manne." He said, "This is Benny Goodman." I said, "Yes, Mr. Goodman." He says, "You wanta go on the road with my band?" I said, "Yeah." He couldn't get Davey, and I guess he liked the way I played. He said, "Just be down to Grand Central Station tomorrow with your cymbals. I have the drums."

So I put the cymbals under my arm the next day. I think the train was leaving at eleven. I must have been there about eight, sitting there with my one little suitcase, and here they come, about two hours after I'd gotten there, but they start walking in—Cootie, Georgie Auld, Charlie Christian, and Helen Forrest—and, man, I'm sitting there, and

I was really going berserk, you know I really was, and I was scared. I got on the train. I sat there all by myself. In fact, there's a picture I think in one of the jazz history books or something, some place. They took a picture of that band at the station. We were going to the March of Dimes President's Ball in Washington. I sat on the train. I was all by myself, and Benny came up and says, "What are you worried about, kid?" I said, "Well, I haven't seen the book or anything." He said, "You've been listening to my music for years," and he walked away. That night I played with the band. I played with the band I think two, three days, then Davey joined them. He finally got Davey on his phone. It was a funny experience sitting there when you're young, watching these people walk in.

Of course, the big bands were the way a musician could gain national prominence very quickly in a very well-known band. 'Cause everybody knew the third trumpet player, the fourth trumpet player; they'd name me the baritone player, the third alto. They knew everybody's name in the band. That's how guys like Harry James and people like that all became famous in big bands. Like with Benny's band.

I think the big bands were the place where you got your schooling and where you got your experience with other great musicians. 'Cause when we say big bands—when I say big bands—I mean big jazz bands, what I felt were jazz-oriented bands, not just dance bands. Like when we were kids we used to just get in the basement and listen to Duke Ellington records all night.

Of course, big bands gave an individual a chance to be heard nationally and gain a reputation because the big bands had the kind of following the rock bands have now. Maybe not quite as gigantic.

Like the one year with Stan's [Kenton] band when we did concerts. My God, they'd be standing on top of one another to hear the band. It was exciting. It was an exciting time, and the big bands not only paid pretty good salaries for those days for a top-notch sideman, but it was a way of getting, really gaining a reputation. Nowadays it's very difficult to gain a reputation on Woody Herman's band for instance. I know Woody's got a good band, but I can't tell you who's in the band.

Nowadays, most of the young kids come from colleges. They're not well-known. But most of the players in those days were pretty well-known as players before they joined the band. They used to say, "Hey, you know who joined? He joined him." The next thing, you know, you're listening to the band and listening for him, for his solos.



The whole big band, road syndrome is something that's virtually finished now. Of course there are a few bands that still travel, but even the small groups don't travel the way they once did. The club circuit is not as extensive, and the airplane to an engagement has replaced the road.



SHELLY MANNE They're not forced—the bands and small bands even today—aren't forced to live together like a family. I think that the big bands traveling in those days, what we were talking about, being locked up together, creative juices flowing between twenty guys, created a whole thing away, another creative thing away from an influence of someplace else. In other words, I think it was healthy, because it created a thing of your own.

And traveling and constantly living together and exchanging ideas, creative ideas—playing and creating with your playing on the job at night created a thing away. You weren't influenced. You didn't say, "Let's play it like they played it." You didn't hear how they played it. You said, "Hey, let's play this chart. Let's do this." And you got your own individual sound that way.



If you were a big-band musician in the '30s you played mostly for dancers in large ballrooms, roadhouses and, in the Southeast, huge tobacco warehouses. Bands went on location in hotels and theaters, but more often it was one-nighters and the rigors of the road. They traveled by bus, car, train and sometimes, as with Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway, by private railroad car.



MILT HINTON I'd like to mention this about Cab. Cab had a standard that he wanted to set. He traveled to the South; he always traveled first-class. There was no planes, it was always Pullman wherever he could get a Pullman, and a baggage car next to the Pullman—a huge baggage car where he had a great big, green Lincoln Continental, and he carried a chauffeur, and we had our trunks in his baggage car, and when we got to the small towns were you couldn't get a train into, then he could hire a bus. This kept us out of conflict with the people in the South that were biased, black and white. Mostly white, but even black guys couldn't go in a black neighborhood in the South and walk in the bars because the guys would figure we were pullin' rank on them because we were sharp—we were city slickers—those niggers are from New York and they've come here to take our chicks. There could be a confrontation and somebody could get hurt and most likely it would be us.

It was so competitive, so Cab, to keep this down, he would hire this Pullman. We would get out, get us cabs to the dance hall. At intermission we'd make whatever connections we wanted with the chicks, and then we'd tell them, "Meet you at the Pullman." We kept a Pullman porter for six months at a time—the same guy. When we left to go to the dance, we'd tell him to get fourteen bottles of whiskey, three watermelons, and a hundred chickens and have it there for us. We'd leave the money, and the guy would have it all set up so that when the dance was over, and we'd made our connections at intermission with all the other chicks we were going to be involved with—we'd tell

them to just come on down to the railroad station. Then we didn't have to go into town and have to compete with the local people, local fellows for the fancy of their local ladies. The ladies who were our choice came down, and when the party was over we'd thank them for their gratuities, and they got off the train, and the train would pick us up and take us on to the next town.

Cab had this feeling that he wasn't very successful playing dances in the South because in the South—as it is, almost now, there were radio stations that sang only blues, and “I'm Gonna Cut Your Head Off,” and I'm gonna do this, and “I'm Gonna Kill My Woman,” and he didn't believe in this. He thought that perhaps what he intended to do was to try to entertain the people, especially the black community, show them the sharp zoot suit, the hip styles, the new lingo, and this kinda thing, to elevate 'em, but they kept requesting blues, and Cab wasn't a blues band. He didn't believe in these blues, because these blues taught people to fight, and to get under, to make them feel low and degraded, and he didn't feel this.

So Cab consequently would not acquiesce to this type of thing, and of course the people hadn't been educated to his type of entertainment. It was just too sharp for them, and his dances fell off. The white dances were great, even though we had problems with all those who wanted to jump us and all those crackers who wanted to beat us up. They were so rude down there that you could hit a nigger in the mouth—as long as you could get three hundred dollars, and some of them had the money so they wanted to do it—and especially a nigger like Cab. He was a bigshot. So we had these problems along with that, and not being able to play a double dance—play a white dance tonight and a black dance tomorrow night. He was continually losing money in the South, so he decided to give up playing down there. Because the radio stations only plugged blues and race records and whatnots, and not enough of his things. And they did not do that, there, for him, for Cab. The people who could hear him on radio and came just from what they listened to from the Cotton Club on radio programs, but the records, he was never really big in records. Because they never bought his type of records in the South. So he finally gave it up.



The private Pullman helped avoid hostile confrontations, but they were an exception. Usually a black band had to stay at black hotels or at private homes in black communities. Sometimes there were no blacks.



**TERRY GIBBS** I was talkin' with Milt Hinton. There was one town, I'll never forget, Marysville, Kansas, where there wasn't a black section of town, where the guys actually had to sleep on the bus.



Nat Towles, out of Omaha, Nebraska, solved this kind of problem by moving his band around in a big sleeper bus. During my

hitchhiking experiences, when I was at the University of Missouri, I remember seeing the bus, with the band's name printed clearly on the side, tooling along U.S. 40. A musician once told me, "When that bus used to park for the night, in the morning the ground around the bus would be covered with condoms. And it would get pretty funky inside. They used to clean it out periodically. They called it the 'traveling garbage can.'"

The area Towles traversed was called the "territory." It included Kansas, Missouri, Texas, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and the Dakotas. Bands also made forays into Montana and Wyoming, but these states weren't included when someone referred to the "territory." (When I was in the midwest in the '40s, however, a "territory" band also meant white, "mickey mouse" bands out of Mankato or Sioux Falls.)



**BUDD JOHNSON** Grant Moore was a band out of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He had all of these cats with him too, Jabbo Smith, all those cats used to play with Grant Moore.

The only thing about the Dakotas, there wasn't many black people around like us. We used to stay in white homes. They didn't have other hotels, and we would stay with white families in their homes. There was very little prejudice.

I was out in Montana in 1940 and the only place we could stay was in some little, crummy Chinese hotel. They wouldn't even let us in none of the hotels. We couldn't eat in none of the restaurants in town. We couldn't even go to the red-light districts. I don't know about the '20s. But up through the Dakotas, that was different. That was in the late '20s—'28, '29, '30, '31. It started to get a little bad in '31 because some of the cats started messing up, knocking the daughters up and wouldn't marry them and all of that sort of thing. So it got bad about then. We used to feel, we used to feel nothing. A lot of Indians up that way. We used to drink that beer with them and alcohol. We used to put that alcohol in the beer and shake it up and get high. Play all of those state fairs all through Nebraska and Iowa. And no heat. We used to sit up and play with our overcoats and gloves on in some of these barns and things. But a hell of a lot of fun, lot of fun during those times. But I mean all in all . . .



Milt Hinton wasn't laughing on the night of June 19, 1936. He was on the road with Cab Calloway, and the experience of that time stays with him.



**MILT HINTON** In Dallas, Texas, we played the World's Fair. Joe Louis was fighting somebody [Max Schmeling] and got knocked out if I remember properly. It was the greatest disgrace of our lives, 'cause here we were in no black man's country, and they wouldn't even let us listen to it on the radio in the fair grounds, and we had to walk outside the

fair grounds to a little bar to listen to the fight on the radio, and after having been saddened by [his knock-out]. . . .

'Cause [Joe Louis] was an impetus to dignity, to manhood, to us. He was a symbol. It was a chance for us to say, "Hey, man, look out. Don't do that. Here we are." And this was a great symbol, and we had to go outside the fair grounds to a bar to listen, and then on top of that, Joe Louis gets knocked out, and officials made us *pay* to get back in where we were working! Made us pay to get back in! So aside from feelin' so low, we came back in and had to pay to get back in.



Dexter Gordon was approaching his eighteenth birthday when he left his native Los Angeles for the first time as a member of Lionel Hampton's band. What he saw and did is typical of much of the black band experience.



DEXTER GORDON We left—it was 1940, December 23rd, 1940. We left Los Angeles, and I joined the band like just a few days before we left. I never had a rehearsal with the band. And then we got into this bus. It was a small bus. Gladys [Mrs. Lionel Hampton] was economizing. It was a line called All-American—All-American Bus Line—and the whole band could fit in there, but it was tight, and it was strictly a California bus, and it's December, and so our first stop was Fort Worth, Texas, which I think is about fifteen hundred miles. It took about three days to get there. And after we got out of Arizona, we got into New Mexico, it started getting cold, and so then we got to El Paso, there was a mutiny [laughter]. There was a mutiny in the band. And this cat Jack Lee was the road manager with the band. And the cats said, "No, no, man, shuck this bus. We got to get a real bus." 'Cause that kind of bus was okay for California or a short trip, but being out on the road you needed something like a Greyhound. Something insulated and strong. But then we got the bus, a real bus. I think it was El Paso, 'cause by that time, everybody was wearing overcoats. We were wearing California clothes anyway, but we got everything on.

So then we went to Fort Worth and we played the Hotel Fort Worth. It was a white hotel that was strictly white. And the next day, a couple of days later, we played in some other towns. We played in Dallas. The state fair. For a black dance. And I remember seeing this cat with this beautiful white Palm Beach suit dancing his ass off, swinging. And all of a sudden during the dance, at one point, there was a big circle of people, moving out, moving out and pretty soon it looked like an arena, these two cats in the middle, and this one cat was the cat with the white suit, and then suddenly his suit was red. I'll never forget that.

But for the most part I don't remember too many special incidents, except a funny thing happened one time we were in Mississippi and doing these one-nighters and gettin' food out of the back of the restaurant and all that kind of shit. So we pulled into this filling station, a roadside diner. Everybody's hungry, and nobody wants to get out of

the bus and go through all that hassle and shit, so me and Joe Newman said, "Fuck it, we'll get out." And cats are calling, "Why don't you get something, bring me back a pork chop or something?" I said, "Yeah, man." So the cat, the man, is working on the bus, the owner of the gas station, he's filling up the bus, and he's going through all this. So anyway, Joe and I go into the diner, and we stand at the counter—we don't sit down, we stand at the counter. And say we'd like to get something to eat. And there's two young chicks in there. So one said, "Okay, what would you like?" So I said, "I'd like some ham and eggs" or something like that. And Joe said, "Yeah, same for me." She said, "Okay, where would you like to sit?" "Well, here." "Sit down." Just straight life, you know. We're the youngest cats in the band anyway. So we sit down, and then we started eating. By this time the cats in the bus are getting a little curious. They see us go in the front door and expect to see us come right out, and we're in there for a little while, so they start coming out of the bus, stretching, and getting a little curious. They wander over there, they come in. Man, we're sitting there drinking coffee, ham and eggs, toast, napkins, and everything and say, "What the fuck is this?" Next thing you know, the whole fuckin' diner is filled up with the band. And the chicks are ordering this and that. And all of a sudden the front door bursts in, and here comes the cat finished with the bus. And he comes in and sees this diner all filled with niggers eatin', and man this guy got so red. Looked like he was gonna explode—gonna have a heart attack—man, he was really dramatic. And all the cats froze. All gawking and looking. So by this time me and Joe had finished. And the cat's screaming, "Get all these niggers out of here. Uhhh. I'll kill them. Where's my gun?" So then, by this time the manager had come in. So he starts talking to the man and coolin' him off. And the cats are coming out, whether they'd finished or not. And later on he's telling us, that he told him, "All these guys, they're not Southern boys, they don't know nothing about this, they're all from New York or Hollywood or something." And he was talking to him till we got out of there.



When blacks and whites gravitated to one another there were problems. The road experience could bring these to the surface.



LEE KONITZ The biggest hassle that I can recall is traveling on tours with Bird and black musicians in the South when we had to stay in different places. This was in '53 we went out, and in Georgia they had to have a white man in the taxi before they could leave the airport, and things of that nature stand out in my mind. Bird invited me to stay at their hotel.



When Charlie Rouse, who had been raised in Washington, D.C., went on a deep Southern tour with Dizzy Gillespie's orchestra in 1945 he experienced the kind of incident that cannot be ignored.

Washington is a Southern city, but not in the sense that Memphis or Mobile is a Southern city. As a Washingtonian, Rouse thought of himself more as a Northerner. Most of the men in Dizzy's band were from well above the Mason-Dixon line. Their previous encounters with prejudice more often took a more subtle guise. So going south was a total immersion in a negative atmosphere of separate water fountains, dividing lines at dances, and much worse.



**CHARLIE ROUSE** We hadn't been to the South at the time, and at the time the South was very bad. And I think it was in Memphis, Tennessee . . . we had to get out of town early in the morning. There was a bass player from Arkansas named Buddy Jones.\* Well, I met Buddy Jones in Washington. We were friends there. So he was in the Navy and he was in Memphis, and when we got there with the band we played a one-nighter, and Buddy wasn't supposed to be there, you dig? But he met us in the daytime, and we're walking up and down Beale Street together, and everybody is looking at us weird. We wasn't paying no attention or anything. So when we left each other, Buddy said, "Well I'll see you at the dance tonight." I say, "Okay." And when we got to the dance the police came and beat him and clubbed him out of the dance. They called the SPs and they came and, oh man, they messed him up and they told us we had to get out of town before sundown. It was really weird, man. And the next time I saw Buddy we talked about it. But we felt that it was something happening, 'cause we was walking up and down Beale Street laughing and talking and people turning around looking at us, and we say, "Hey, look at those weird dudes looking at us." And we's just walking up and down the street. We left, but then they put him in, put him in the brig. And he told me later that he stayed in the brig for about two or three months.



Despite incidents such as this, black and white musicians continued to interact. Mixed bands were more for jam sessions and recordings—when the Eddie Condon Chicago gang, all white, arrived in New York in the '30s, they cut sides with Red Allen, Sid Catlett, Alex Hill, Teddy Wilson, Fats Waller, Pops Foster, and Zutty Singleton—until Benny Goodman officially broke the "color line" in the mid-'30s when he hired Teddy Wilson and Lionel Hampton as regular members of his orchestra.

Georgie Auld, a Goodman alumnus, led a band in the '40s that was predominantly white but had some black sidemen and played for black audiences at theaters like the Apollo in Harlem.



\*Influenced to go into music by Charlie Parker, whom he met in Arkansas in 1941, Jones later played with Charlie Ventura, Joe Venuti, Lennie Tristano, Buddy DeFranco, and Elliot Lawrence.

AL COHN It was the first time that I had ever really been exposed to black theaters and the black neighborhoods, so it was kinda new for me and a great experience. Shadow Wilson played with the band for a while and Howard McGhee, and I don't remember anything happening that was . . . I remember being in Harlem in those days and never thinking there was any kind of "draft"\* going on. I don't know how it was for the guys when we played downtown.

When we were with that band we did some one-nighters and, as a matter of fact, I remember hearing something, a little Jewish prejudice going on then too. [In Ohio we were] driving to some gig in the back of the truck when something happened to the bus, and we got a lift from the hotel, and this guy was talking about these Jewboy bands from New York. Being so involved in my own thing, I wasn't even listening to that stuff. I didn't even hear it.



Only well enough to remember the remark thirty-five years later. But it was not just about being black or Jewish. It was the state of being a musician, looked down on much as vaudevillians and actors, have been for as long as there have been itinerant entertainers. White bands didn't exactly have a picnic out on the road. Musicians of any race were regarded as interlopers by rednecks or most any provincial and were on a back-door, employees' entrance footing to a great extent. So although they didn't have the problem of "wrong" skin color, white bandsmen, too, knew the rigors and pitfalls of the road. Vocalist David Allyn tells a story that illustrates this and, at the same time, reveals the hipster mentality of a body of white musicians who grew up in the wake of Lester Young, Dizzy Gillespie, and Charlie Parker.



DAVID ALLYN Rocky [Coluccio] and a bunch of buys—Stan Kosow, Stan Levey, Tubby Phillips, and let's see, who the hell was with them? Don Lanphere. We're in Art Mooney's band; we're out on the road. He had a pretty good dance band. Not that show shit that he had all the time, but we had a pretty good book. And we went out to make some money just a few weeks. And we're lost in Cleveland, in Shaker Heights. And the bus driver, it's foggy and kind of dawnish and he didn't know where the hell he's going and we're riding around. And at that time, I was strung out, and I was fucked up. This could have been around '51, '52. Around in there. And it was miserable being out there without shit. You know you're making "croakers"† all the time for Dilaudid. Tryin' to score somewhere. But Jesus we wouldn't hit very much 'cause you'd be missing most of the time. Get beat and all that shit. You'd have to leave town, get on the bus.

\*negative feelings.

†doctors.

I think we're just coming into Cleveland! But anyway, the bus driver's lost and there's the gray dawn coming up. And as the fog starts to lift and we're rounding corners, we could see that we're in an area where there's tremendous estates—with great big iron gates and stone walls and houses sitting back, with pillars. Great green lawns and shrubbery. Just fantastic places. And I picked up on it. I used to stand by the driver where I could hold court. "Look at this. Oh, my God, look at this." They would say, "Oh, man." Just like unison, everybody, "Oh, dig that pad. Oh, that's wild. Look at this over here. Look at this. Oh man, look at this." And this went on. The guy's saying, "Jesus, I can't find my fuckin' way." He's trying to drive the bus. And we didn't give a shit about him. The pads were so wild. The houses were just so wild, right? These great big estates. And I said, "We're gypsies. What are we? We're roving, we're wandering, we're stupid." I said, "We're not hip. We're not hip. They're hip. We're square. Look at us. What have we got?" And they're saying, "Oh, you're right, David."

And I say, "What the fuck are we doing?" Who listens to us? Nobody. These people don't even want to hear us. Maybe they turn us on for five minutes and turn us off. And we're working years. They're hip. We're square. That's what it is. We're gypsies. We're bums. That's what we are. And we don't have any shit, and nothing is right." And Rocky Coluccio says, "Yeah, but wait a minute, man, now wait a minute, what do they know about Diz and Prez and Bird?" [laughter]. Oh, God. Fucking classic.



Despite the hardships and down days, all was not despair in the big bands. Before 1941 and during the early years of the war, there was no heroin problem. There were soul-testing times, to be sure, but these were men interacting and enjoying the bloom of their youth and experiencing musical and extramusical discoveries.



**SHELLY MANNE** The important thing about big bands was the fun that you remember having on them. You don't remember the really bad shit that happened. You remember the good things. At least I do. I remember when I was, years ago, with Bob Astor's band or some band in Boston. We were playin' in Boston, and I dress up like the hunchback of Notre Dame. I'd get the girl vocalist to make up my face. I was so skinny and gaunt in those days. I'd stick a pillow in my back, and I remember the Copley Square Hotel—not the Copley Plaza—the Copley Square Hotel. They had fire escapes that ran around the whole building. You could walk all around the building on the fire escapes. Old-style building. So I used to find out what room the guys were in playing cards or something. Oh, there was another band in there. Another good band . . . oh, it was Will Bradley's band. I ran around the fire escape, and I'd run by and I'd peek back and say something and then, all of a sudden I'd jump in the window at them or something.

We used to do crazy things like that. And then I'd run, everybody would scatter. I'd finally run in the bathroom, and they used to have the shower that had a shower curtain, a round one, in the middle of the bathroom. You'd open it, and there guys would be standing there like that. Straight up. Or else we played, I'll never forget it, with Stan Kenton's band. We played a place up in New Hampshire and we stayed in an old house. Like really a hundred, hundreds of years old, the house was. It had a big wicker chair, like a Sidney Greenstreet chair, and at night the hallways were wide and dark, and they didn't have many lights. You just had little, dull lights. Well, I got there real early one night after the job, and I just sat there in the chair like this. I knew a couple of the guys were coming, and I just sat there. They came down this dark hallway in this very spooky kind of house. They flipped. But things like that I remember. We did wild things when we were kids.

I remember on Bob Astor's band, Al Young—Al Epstein. Yeah, used to be Al Young. You know he played trumpet with Babe Russin's band. He played baritone, but on trumpet he could only play middle G to C above high C. He studied with Costello for a little while. And he could only play the high notes, so he used to play all the high notes, like Paul Webster in Lunceford's band. He'd play the end, so we'd play a lot of Jimmie Lunceford arrangements—"For Dancers Only" with Babe Russin's band—and we rehearsed at the Fraternal Clubhouse. Al would put his baritone down and hit the trumpet notes at the end of the chart.

But anyway, we used to do wild things. We were at Budd Lake in New Jersey with Bob Astor's band at the Wigwam, and Al says, "I'll give you fifty cents if you eat that spider and some mustard." You know, you'd do it. You'd do anything, man. One day he put iron glue in my hair while I was sleeping. I woke up—my hair was long in those days, right—my hair stood like that for weeks. I couldn't get it out. Crazy things.

When Neal Hefti first came from Omaha, he came to join Sonny Dunham. Something happened between him and Sonny, and he joined Bob Astor's band. We roomed together. And at night we didn't have nothing to do, and we were up at this place—Budd Lake. He said, "What are you gonna do tonight?" I said, "Why don't you write a chart for tomorrow?" Neal was so great that he'd just take out the music paper, no score, [hums]—trumpet part, [hums]—trumpet part, [hums]—trombone part, [hums], and you'd play it the next day. It was the end. Cooking charts. I never forget, I couldn't believe it. I kept watching him. It was fantastic. And one night we got arrested in Budd Lake 'cause we went out with the guys, had a couple of beers or something—we were just kids. And we opened a big truck where there was ducks, transporting some ducks or something. We opened it out and let them all out. They took us to jail. But those are the things, you remember those things, strange things.

One time with Stan's [Kenton] band, we played a small theater . . . and these things were happening all the time. Played an old theater in New England, and Ray Wetzel used to . . . you know, the trumpet riser in the theater was very high, and Ray weighed almost three hundred pounds or whatever he weighed, and he'd jump off the riser and run down front to sing a vocal. He jumped off the riser this day, and he went right through the stage up to his waist with his trumpet. And there he is stuck in the stage, and of course, like the band couldn't play for like fifteen minutes. We were in tears rolling around. The audience was laughing too, I'm sure. But those things were always happening. Now Stan running for—beating off the band, and running for the piano bench to hit the downbeat on a tune, and the piano bench collapsing on him. Things like that always happened. They were fun days.

Once we were playing a one-nighter in Kansas City in a ballroom, and we're changing clothes. We're late for the job; we're changing clothes in the back. The bandstand was here, and there was an aisle-way that led down this little flight of stairs, and the dressing room was behind the bandstand. And the sprinkler system broke, with all our music, our instruments, our uniforms, everything. And Stan was standing there holding the sprinkler, yelling, "Go get a plumber or something." I remember little things like that, that happened.

On Woody's [Herman] band, see I didn't ride on the bus. I bought my own car when I joined Woody's band, and I traveled in the car. Also, I drove with Woody in his car. I made a left turn in a car while I was driving with Woody and drove up . . . I thought it was a street, in Pittsburgh, but it was railroad tracks. I was driving up railroad tracks. The street was to the left.



Sometimes playing in a band was just plain hard work, even if you weren't on the road. A location job in a ballroom or hotel was a matter of coming to work in the evening, but the theater stage shows were a different matter, alternating through the day with the feature film.



AL COHN Joe Marsala was my first name band, in '43. We played one week in New York during that time at the Loew's State. That's when I found out what it is to work. I didn't know that you come in at twelve noon, and you're there till eleven o'clock at night. You know, four or five shows a day. That was one week, seven days. But some guys got on a show that really made it, and they spent six weeks doing seven days—you know something like that—playing the same show all the time. You have time off between shows, so you grab a bite to eat. How many times can you see the movie?

Well, it's different if you're working as a musician at Radio City—I

never did it, so I don't really know. They have a system. Work a few weeks and then take a few days off.



Most major cities had huge movie palaces with the facilities for stage shows, but New York had more of them. Manhattan had the Paramount, Capitol, Strand, and Loew's State. The neighborhood houses, such as the Flatbush (in Brooklyn) and the Windsor (in the Bronx), were otherwise used more for theater presentations rather than motion pictures. Even if one was in grade school it was possible, when school let out at three o'clock, to hear bands such as Count Basie and Charlie Barnet bands in one's own neighborhood. Then there was downtown Brooklyn, where one might see and hear the Jimmie Lunceford band at the Brooklyn Strand in a show headlined by Bill Robinson; and of course, the bright lights of Broadway.

At the Apollo on 125th Street, one often saw Alan Curtis, with his 40-suit wardrobe, as Philo Vance; downtown, one was more likely to view Humphrey Bogart in a Warner Brothers epic while cutting school to catch the morning show of Lionel Hampton featuring Arnett Cobb and Herbie Fields. A classmate once sat through Morris Carnovsky trying to intimidate Alan Ladd in *Saigon* three times just to see four stage shows of Buddy Rich.

The bands were a way of life then, particularly for the strong fans and the budding musicians. Not everyone had the New York advantage, but there were stages all over, and eventually the bands arrived there.



**JIMMY HEATH** When I was in high school in North Carolina, my uncle used to take me to see the big bands that came down to North Carolina to play, and I saw the Erskine Hawkins band down there. I know 'cause I got everybody in the band to autograph—and the Sweethearts of Rhythm—an all-girls band who nobody realized before the liberation business, but they had a big band. But Erskine Hawkins was one of my favorites. They used to go into some kind of things with the big bands, even with Erskine Hawkins, that would only incorporate the alto, maybe.



Many bands had little groups that would come down front, like the Cab Jivers with Cab Calloway.



**JIMMY HEATH** So now they chased the small group back. It was very difficult. But, I mean, in the beginning there was a small group. Then they went into the big band era. When I was around Philly after I finished school—and I was around there for a few years—I was studying with a guy, saxophone, for about six months or so, and I was fre-

quencing the Earle Theater. Every week I would go over on the day they would open and carry my lunch and see the whole three or four shows a day, and I would know all the arrangements, memorize all their arrangements. I saw Mitchell Ayres. I saw Shep Fields and all them saxophones. I saw Alvino Rey with the steel guitar. I saw Tommy Dorsey's band; Jimmy Dorsey's band; Cab Calloway with Chu Berry; Georgie Auld's band with Shadow Wilson and Howard McGhee; Gene Krupa's band with Roy Eldridge; Andy Kirk's band, with the three tenor players: J. D. King, Edward Loving, and Jimmy Forrest. I saw that. I saw Cootie's band with Eddie Vinson; Charlie Barnet's band when "Cherokee" was out. Let me see . . . well, Lunceford I saw once. And Benny Goodman, of course. He had Georgie Auld with him. "Good Enough To Keep." "A Smooth One." I saw Boyd Raeburn's band. And Lionel Hampton used to come in there and kind of break it up. Basie, of course. But Lionel Hampton was really sensational in the Earle Theater. They had to line up to see him.



Hamp's band caused great excitement at the Capitol in late '43. "Flyin' Home" was at its height, and Hamp was jumping off drums and leaping in the air.



JIMMY HEATH Earl Bostic was in the band . . . and Arnett Cobb would be breaking houses down. I saw it once when Johnny Griffin and Arnett did their routine, throwing their coats down and all that.



On the road, players encountered bands that never made it to the big city stages.



DEXTER GORDON Texas—well the big cities, Houston and Dallas—there was a little action there. And Houston had some good local bands there. Like Milt Larkins. [Illinois] Jacquet and Arnett [Cobb]—all those cats came out of that band. Then I remember we ran into the Carolina Cotton Pickers somewhere. Had a raggedy old bus, and the cats were wearing overalls. They really looked like the . . . territory band you know. There were a lot of them at that time. A lot of bands.

JIMMY HEATH I saw lesser-name bands that were good bands, like when I was out with Nat Towles. There was always the Carolina Cotton Pickers band from the Jenkins Orphanage round South Carolina where Cat Anderson came from. And that band was always very good. There was another one called Floyd Ray from out West. That was a very good band, and Ernie Fields' band from Tulsa, Oklahoma. That's the first band I saw Bill Evans playing in—Yusef Lateef—but he was Bill Evans then. So I can say that 'cause he was Bill Evans then. He came to Wilmington, North Carolina, where I was going to school, in Ernie Fields's

band. And I remember that big tone, even then. In fact, I got with Yusef last year and was singing some of the arrangements that they had in that band 'cause I could—when I go and hear a band and I really like an arrangement, I sit there until I got it kind of learned.



There were all manner of fan clubs for bands and for the individuals who peopled those organizations, but you didn't have to be a club member to know who played what with which band. There was that unofficial club—the jazz fraternity—that supported the bands but, even more so, was aware of the soloists who were surfacing in the sea of orchestration that bubbled with surging ensembles and hot riffs.

However many solo opportunities these players received in the bands (some had entire featured numbers to themselves, but their normal space was more likely to be eight or sixteen bars rather than a full chorus of thirty-two bars) there wasn't enough room for them to do what was becoming an increasing imperative. There was a need for the music of the soloists to expand, while in the confines of the big bands it was being constricted, like the feet of the infant females of ancient China. But if the structure of the big-band performance was sometimes binding, the atmosphere surrounding these bands was conducive to opening new chances for expression.

The big bands brought countless musicians in contact with one another, whether within the same band or in encounters between and among bands. Since these organizations were constantly in motion around the country, they were always rubbing shoulders with one another in the large cities where one or more might be playing at the same time, or at least laying over at the same—or a nearby—hotel or other lodgings. There was also the interaction among the itinerants and the best of the locals in both large and small cities and towns.

The arena of communication became the jam session. It came in all sizes and styles and could happen almost anywhere. It was both proving ground and learning experience; a test of will and ego and a chance to try out and/or learn new ideas. If these jams didn't usually fit the Hollywood image—musicians whipping out their horns on a train or bus and wailing away into the sunset or dawn—there were scenes like the one saxophonist Eddie Barefield describes when he was with Bennie Moten's band in 1932.



**EDDIE BAREFIELD** We played the dance in Indianapolis that night, and the next day we're to meet in front of the ballroom to go to Terre Haute, Indiana and play the dance that night. And everybody's in the bus, loading up and settin' there. Just as we got to pull out, a guy in a little