

SELECTED OBSERVATIONS FROM THE HARLEM JAZZ SCENE

BY JONAH JONATHAN

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

### Selected Observations from the Harlem Jazz Scene

Dissertation Director:

Dr. Lewis Porter

The Harlem Jazz Scene was prominent throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Beginning with the Harlem Renaissance, this thesis, “Selected Observations from the Harlem Jazz Scene,” explores how jazz came into prominence in Harlem during the Roaring 1920's.

Beginning with the Great Depression, “Selected Observations from the Harlem Jazz Scene” shows how economic and racial tensions culminated into the race riots in 1935 and subsequently in 1943. It explains the reasons and causes for the racial split in the jazz scene that caused white audiences to head to downtown Manhattan.

Interviews in “Selected Observations from the Harlem Jazz Scene” explore the ethnographic aspects of the African American jazz scene and provide a fascinating look into what it was like during those times.

Finally this thesis discusses the slow but steady decline of jazz in Harlem caused by many interconnected factors including gentrification, racial tension, economics, and technological advances.

### **Preface:**

I first became interested in the Harlem jazz scene while living there for two years before attending Rutgers University. I encountered a few clubs that generated my interest in the Harlem scene and I decided that I wanted to do further research on them. I first did a video project on Miles Davis and his early beginnings in Harlem for my thesis advisor Lewis Porter's "Miles Davis and Wayne Shorter" course. Miles mentioned his early days in Harlem in his autobiography and I became fascinated with discovering the places and venues that had previously existed in Harlem. After discovering that there wasn't much information written about what the Harlem jazz scene had been like, I decided that I wanted to write my thesis exploring the ethnographic aspect of jazz in Harlem. Over the past two years I have done research and conducted interviews that are collected into this thesis.

## **Chapter 1: A Brief History and Overview of Jazz in Harlem.**

Harlem became a black cultural center after World War I enabled the Harlem Renaissance. During World War I, the influx of immigrants from Europe ceased all together and African Americans from the south migrated north in droves to fill in the large demand for cheap labor in New York. It is estimated that 200,000 Blacks arrived in New York during the early 1920's. The influx of African American writers, scholars, intellectuals, artists, playwrights, and musicians helped change the cultural demographic in Harlem, creating the Harlem Renaissance.

As blacks moved into the neighborhoods in Harlem, whites began migrating away from Harlem which caused the rents to rise rather quickly. There was great demand for apartments and it was extremely expensive for single families to occupy apartments. Most families took on boarders and in some instances up to 3 families would share a single apartment. Harlem rent parties were created in order to pay for the month's rent and with them came the added benefit of the creation of music outlets within apartments. Willie "The Lion" Smith recalls that the parties "would crowd a hundred or more people into a seven room railroad flat, and the walls would bulge.....Some of the parties spread to the halls and all over the building" (Gioia, 90). Cutting contests between musicians such as James P. Johnson, Art Tatum, Fats Waller, and Eubie Blake helped foster the birth of the "Jam Session."

The golden age of Jazz clubs, cabarets, and venues arrived in Harlem and created a new cultural setting. The major clubs included The Cotton Club, The Savoy Ballroom, Ed Small's Paradise, Broadway Jones' Supper Club, Connie's Inn, and Barron's Exclusive Club. Mobsters, club owners, band-leaders, arrangers, performers, employees, and patrons were shoulder to shoulder within the fascinating cultural setting of the Harlem night club representing an intriguing racial mix. Harlem was one of the major centers of culture in the United States during this time. The Cotton Club, for example, had Sunday night celebrity events where it featured George Gershwin, Langston Hues, Judy Garland,

Irving Berlin, Jimmy Walker, Eddie Cantor, and Richard Rogers. Although the Cotton Club was a whites-only venue, it featured black performers such as Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington. There were many live radio broadcasts from the Cotton Club which made it popular around the country.

In 1929, the stock market crashed which brought about the worst financial crisis ever to hit the United States. As the “wild” era of the 1920's came to a close, the European American fascination with black culture dwindled. African Americans lost their jobs at a far greater rate than European Americans and this caused mortgage foreclosures and rental evictions and a major depression. The socioeconomic forces of the great depression culminated in the great Harlem Race Riot of 1935 as well as the echo of it later in 1943. The Harlem night club scene was seriously affected by the race riots, explored in greater detail in chapter 2. One major effect of the Harlem race riots was the closure of white-only venues such as the Cotton Club which moved to downtown Manhattan.

The swing era which represents the most successful period of jazz came about during the worst financial crisis in the history of the United States. There are many reasons that nightclubs survived and even flourished during an era of great financial hardship. People were looking for something to uplift their spirits during the emotional ups and downs of the Depression and Swing music proved to do just that. Radio was also becoming a major part of entertainment for families at home and big bands were radio-broadcast frequently from venues. Big band music was the most popular in the charts at the time. In Harlem during the start of the Big Band era there were more than 11 white-only venues in Harlem and over 100 black music venues.

In the late 1930's jam sessions took place in Harlem which contributed to the rise of Bebop. The clubs which supported these sessions included Minton's Playhouse, Clark Monroe's Uptown House, and the Heatwave. Minton's Playhouse was one of the main locations for jam sessions throughout the 1940's and into following decades. Musicians such as Teddy Hill, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Christian, Kenny Clarke, Charlie Parker, Roy Eldridge, Miles Davis, and James Moody used to play late into the

hours of the night perfecting the new musical art form known as Bebop. Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie experimented with complex new harmonies over the regular chord changes and played with fast tempos. There were also “hangs” in apartments such as those that took place in Dizzy Gillespie's apartment in Harlem. As saxophonist Budd Johnson states, “ We used to hang around Dizzy's at 2040 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and all the musicians used to come up there....Dizzy was sort of like a school also, and used to sit down at the piano, and of course he was playing modern chord change” (*The Bebop Revolution*, 3.) Following the race riots (discussed in chapter 2), Harlem became more of a closed location for African American musicians to perform. Early musical venues for bebop in Harlem provided a sheltered location for musicians to develop the art form free from the skepticism of jazz critics. The recording ban by the American Federation of Musicians prevented much of early bebop from being recorded but it is possible to hear some home recordings and imagine what some of the early jams sounded like. Many of the early innovators of Bebop became part of Billy Eckstine's Big Band which formed in 1944 and was based in Harlem.

As World War II came around, big bands reached the height of their popularity. Although these bands were popular, there began to be a serious shortage of musicians as many males were drawn into the armed forces. It also became extremely difficult for bandleaders during times of economic hardship to financially support such large bands. From 1942 to 1944 there was a recording ban by the American Federation of Musicians which prevented big bands from recording new material and this also affected the popularity of big bands. Singers with chordal arrangements were not affected which gave them an advantage over the big bands which they had previously been part of and shifted the popularity of the music towards bands featuring vocal music. In addition, musicians who returned from the war had very little interest in hitting the road to tour again after long tours of duty abroad. As further discussed in chapter 2, the race riots of 1943 helped to move the attendance by white audiences from Harlem to downtown which caused many of the clubs that had been open during the swing era to close.



As it became apparent that big bands were declining in their former center of Harlem, the Hammond b3 organ became the perfect replacement for dance venues. The powerful amplified sound of the Hammond organ coupled with its ability to play multiple parts - lead parts, bass-lines, and chords all at once - made it the less expensive alternative for filling dance halls. In the mid-fifties organist Jimmy Smith made his mark at the Harlem Small's Paradise coming into prominence as one of the greatest organists in history. Harlem began to switch all of its piano-based clubs into organ venues and eventually there were many spots which featured it, such as La Famille, Chris's, Showman's, and Lickety Split (further discussed in chapter 3.) The Hammond organ along with a drummer filled up venues with more sound. It also made club owners happy because it was a more economical option for them as they didn't have to pay a bassist.

In 1959 one of the most prominent venues for jam sessions was Count Basie's nightclub and as further discussed in Chapter 4, the best players in New York frequented this night spot. Minton's jazz club continued to operate into the 1960's and some of the best hard bop musicians of the era continued to make their marks in Harlem. However economic conditions coupled with the Harlem race riots of 1964 caused many clubs to close their doors and the main clubs for hard bop opened downtown in Greenwich Village. Many jazz musicians moved to Brooklyn as gentrification caused the rents on the upper west side to skyrocket.

From the 1920's when the Harlem Renaissance thrived in a particular geographic neighborhood to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, jazz has been the heartbeat of the African American community in New York City. The economic and social forces which had first caused it to flourish changed radically over the next ninety years. The ebb and flow of racism, the onset of technologies which changed the demography of its fan base, and the increasing financial pressures on club owners have all contributed to the demise of jazz venues in Harlem. No longer in its hey-day of national favor, jazz continued to change and grow but became narrower in its fan base. The combination of external pressures and

movement of popular music in very different directions has contributed to the demise of jazz in Harlem.

New York City is no stranger to riots of racial tensions. Throughout the nearly 400 years of the city's existence, there have been dozens of racially themed disturbances. The first example of interracial violence on a wide scale happened in 1863. New York's draft riots were caused by the economic strife between white Irish immigrants and recently freed black slaves. At the end of five days there was the modern day equivalent of more than \$75 million in damage. At least 100 people had been killed and more than 2000 people were injured, including 11 blacks who had been lynched (Harris, 279-288.) As a direct result of the riots, thousands of African Americans were forced to leave New York.

History repeats itself and in the case of race riots in New York City, this is immediately evident. In 1900 another riot emerged which was caused by a misunderstanding that resulted in the stabbing death of an off-duty policeman by an African American man. A white mob of angry citizens injured more than 80 blacks and affidavits were given testifying that the police force was complicit in allowing the attacks to occur.

The Great Migration began in the early 1900s and Harlem became the major center of African American residence, business, culture, and music. This chapter will focus on the riots that occurred specifically in Harlem in 1935 and 1943 making the argument that both of these Harlem race riots were the product of rapid socioeconomic changes and the collective response to the frustrations of the oppressed minority population. The Harlem night club scene was severely affected by the Harlem riots which in turn had a direct effect on Jazz.

The period immediately following World War I provided great economic opportunity for African Americans in the United States. The war had stopped the arrival of European immigrants, and African Americans from the south migrated north in droves to fill the large demand for cheap labor in New York City. Harlem had previously been a residential district for white middle and upper middle

class citizens and the arrival of African Americans in Harlem was not taken lightly. White residents formed groups which banded together to fight “a growing menace....an invasion...of black hordes” (Wilkerson, 249.) White landlords were determined to prevent blacks from renting their properties. In “*Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*,” Osofsky writes: “The Great Migration forced Harlem property owners to make a choice. They could try to maintain a whites-only policy in a market being deserted by whites and lose everything, or they could take advantage of the rising black demand and rent to colored people at higher prices and survive.”

As the white middle class moved north to avoid racial integration of Harlem neighborhoods, it is estimated that more than 200,000 blacks arrived in New York by the 1920's. As the rent for apartments rose quickly, there was great demand and it was extremely expensive for single families. Most families took on boarders and in some instances up to three families would share a single apartment.

Although there were some such difficult circumstances for African Americans, the period of the 1920's to 1930's became known positively as the Harlem Renaissance, and it was a time of great optimism for people of color to overcome their previous challenges of racial discrimination and economic inequality.

In addition to the working class, there was also a growing middle class. A group of educated writers, scholars, intellectuals, artists, playwrights, and musicians helped to change the cultural demographic in Harlem. It was an exciting time to be there and scholars such as Alan Locke were optimistic that through intellect and culture “The New Negro” would overcome the stereotypes and racism that they had previously experienced and consequently live in a new integrated social and racial landscape. The 1920's were a golden era for jazz clubs in Harlem and there were many great venues including The Savoy Ballroom, Ed Small's Paradise, Broadway Jones' Supper Club, Connie's Inn, and Barron's Exclusive Club. Many were exclusively white clubs, including The Cotton Club, which had

celebrity nights featuring legends such as George Gershwin, Langston Hughes, Judy Garland, Irving Berlin, Jimmy Walker, Eddie Cantor, and Richard Rogers. In addition to the more than 14 clubs that were whites-only, there were dozens more venues that catered to African Americans and many such as the Savoy Ballroom, were integrated. Harlem was alive and jumping and it was an exciting place to be.

The Stock Market Crash of 1929 caused a ripple of economic hardship for people all over the country and the social and economic hardships hit African Americans especially hard. As the Great Depression came along during the 1930's, the people of color in Harlem experienced major adversities including workplace discrimination, pay inequality, and intolerable living conditions. In a strange twist of reality, Jazz Clubs in Harlem were extremely popular among both European Americans and African Americans during the beginning of the Great Depression. However this would soon change.

The Race Riot of 1935 started with a very routine situation that escalated quickly into mass violence. A sixteen year old black Puerto Rican male, Lino Rivera, was caught stealing a pocket knife from E.H Kress & Company clothing store located on 125<sup>th</sup> Street at 2:30 pm. The white manager of the store and another employee were able to stop the boy before he had a chance to escape through the front entrance. When the boy was threatened with punishment, he bit the hands of his captors which compelled them to call the police. A patrolman with the surname Donahue was called to the store and when he asked the storeowners if they wanted to press for an arrest, they requested that he be let go as they had done to previous shoplifters. Regardless of the request, an officer from the Crime Prevention Bureau was sent to the store. While waiting for the other police to arrive, Officer Donahue took the boy to the basement in back of the store to avoid the commotion of the already gathering spectators. A black spectator exclaimed that the police “had taken the boy to the basement to beat him up” (*Mayor's Complete Commission Report*, 7.) This rumor helped turn what might have been an otherwise routine incident into a much more serious situation.

An ambulance arrived soon after the incident took place in order to treat the wounds of the

storeowner and employee. When the ambulance left the store empty, it helped corroborate the suspicion that the boy might have been badly hurt. In a strange coincidence a driver parked his hearse in the front of the store and entered in order to visit with his brother, an employee. This helped give rise to an even more upsetting rumor that Lino Rivera had been killed. From that point on, the situation began to deteriorate rather quickly.

The manner in which the police conducted themselves played a major role in starting the riot. As the rumors began to spread, citizens entered the store and demanded an opportunity to see the boy for themselves. Police prevented them, however, from inquiring further and this caused the crowd to grow suspicious. One particularly powerful group of African Americans in Harlem called “The Young Liberators” heard the news and the president of the organization, Joseph Taylor, went to the store to check on the rumor. He was turned away by the police at the store. Taylor decided to try a nearby police precinct and was turned away from there as well. By 5:30 pm, the crowd became too large to handle and police shut the store down. At this point the false news of the death of Lino Rivera spread rapidly throughout the streets of Harlem. A speaker began to address an assembly of mostly African Americans on the street corner next to the store. When police told the public that they could not be there, it further enraged the crowd and they set up a speaking area right in front of the store. At this point something was thrown at the entrance to the E.H. Kress store breaking the windows. The police dragged the speaker down and attempted to disperse the crowd. The crowd reassembled across the street and a second speaker was taken down. Both of these speakers were beaten and arrested which was enough to put the crowd over the edge. Smashing of windows began to spread on to Lenox and Seventh Avenue. Assuming that the rumors must have been true, Joseph Taylor's group, “The Young Liberators”, printed a pamphlet at 7:30 pm that read “Child Brutally Beaten....Woman Attacked By Boss and Cops.....Child Near Death” (*Mayor's Complete Commission Report*, 10.) “The Young Communist League” issued a similar pamphlet around the same time without verifying the rumor.

These two pamphlets helped to further spread oil on the fire and all of Harlem became involved. The police disregard of the public's concerns coupled with the public's perception of police brutality indicate the large role police played a large role in the cause of this riot.

The extreme rioting continued into the night causing property damage to more than 1500 stores. At 12:45 am a police patrol car pulled up on a group of rioters in front of Greenberg's Automobile Accessory Shop on Seventh Ave near 128th Street (*Mayor's Complete Commission Report*.) As the crowd dispersed, two police men saw a 16-year-old boy named Lloyd Hobbs break off in an opposite direction from everyone else. Hobbs was subsequently shot in the back by the police and died in a hospital a few days later. This was one of the major tragedies during the riot. This death at the hands of police violence is an indication of the extreme racial tensions that existed at this time.

Thousands of people had turned out for the riot and in an effort to appease the crowd, police picked up Rivera from his mother's apartment and photographed him so that they could prove to the crowd that he had not been killed. Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia oversaw the distribution of posters urging citizens to keep the peace. Eventually, by the end of the next day, the rioting died down and the police restored order.

By the end of the riot, it is estimated that there was more than \$2 million worth of damage which in modern day inflation works out to more than \$33 million. More than 70 people were injured and 100 people were arrested by police. A large police force was deployed to the streets and Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia created a commission to report on the causes of the riot as well as to suggest possible steps to prevent the situation from occurring again.

La Guardia's commission was multi-racial and included various members citywide. There were 6 white members and 7 black members which was particularly unusual for the times. As mentioned in the *Mayor's Complete Commission Report on page 6*,

The original membership of the committee included Dr. Charles Roberts, chairman; Oswald

Garrison Villard, white liberal publisher, vice-chairman; Mrs. Eunice Hunton Carter, secretary; Hubert Delany, Tax Commissioner, Countee Cullen, poet; A Phillip Randolph, President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; and Municipal Judge Charles E. Toney.

The [other]white Members included William Jay Schieffelin, trustee of Tuskegee Institute; Morris Ernst and Arthur Garfield Hayes, prominent attorneys; Col. John J. Grimley of the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry, and Father McCann.

The commission was divided into six subcommittees with each focusing on a different aspect of the social situation in Harlem: The Committee on Discrimination In Employment, The Committee on Crime and the Police, The Committee On Home and Relief, The Committee on Education and Recreation, The Committee on Housing and The Committee on Negro Health and Hospitalization. The Committee held several public hearings and over the two and half months that the investigation took place, more than 160 witnesses took the stand including members of the police force (*Mayor's Complete Commission Report*, 20.) At any one point in time, the audience at these hearings ranged in size from 100-500 people.

Sociologist Dr. E Franklin Frazier was in charge of compiling the studies and surveys that were used in the report. Over 30 people contributed to the report over a period of 8 months. The final product consisted of more than 35,000 words with recommendations for Mayor La Guardia. La Guardia did not receive the report until a year later in March of 1936 and he refused to release the report to the public. After repeated pressure, La Guardia released an edited “softer” version of the report to the public in July, 1936.

The Committee compiled a fairly thorough report which was surprisingly sympathetic to the population of Harlem as a whole.

- The committee compiled 9 chapters which explored the findings of the six committees.
- The committee found that neither the Young Liberators nor the Young Communist League were



responsible for incitement of the riot because they both released pamphlets at 7:30 pm which was more than 2 hours after rioting began to occur.

- The committee found major discrepancies in the story that was told by the police. Policemen claimed that they had led a group of women to the basement in order to bear witness to their statement that Lino Rivera was unarmed. However, no such group of women was ever found and the committee concluded that it never happened in the first place. The committee also disputed the story given by police that defended the shooting of Lloyd Hobbs declaring that the police records were altered in order to change the story in their favor.

The main conclusion which was reported in chapter IX of the *Mayor's Complete Commission Report* was originally only given to Mayor Fiorella La Guardia. It reads as follows:

On March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1935, several thousands of Harlem's citizens, after five years of the depression which had made them feel more keenly than ever the injustices of discrimination in employment, the aggressions of the police, and the racial segregation, rioted again these intolerable conditions. This spontaneous outbreak, the immediate cause of which was a mere rumor concerning the mistreatment of a Negro boy, was symptomatic of pent-up feelings of resentment and in security.

The committee made several recommendations the most important of which are summarized below (*Mayor's Complete Commission Report*, 122-134:)

- That police officers who violate the law should be subject to investigation, punishment, and prosecution by the district attorney where it is warranted.
- That there should be an ongoing committee formed for the public to voice their concerns regarding grievances with the police.
- That there be a system devised to share the truth with the public in an honest, straight forward manner

- That there be fixes to education and recreation starting particularly with the creation of new school buildings.
- That there be a system in place to prevent the discrimination against Negroes in employment
- That the New York City Housing Authority create a plan for a new housing program in Harlem.
- That the tenants of apartments in Harlem be allowed to protest against expensive rents. If the protests do not work, then the citizens have rights not to pay rent until fair agreements are reached.
- That the hospital system in Harlem be revamped and that doctors of color be allowed into all of the City's hospitals.

Mayor La Guardia was a person who liked to fight for the underdog and appointed the Commission with the true intention of helping African Americans. He was surprised, however, at how critical the report was and it put him in a difficult situation. Two of his appointees during his tenure, Police Commissioner Valentine and Hospital Commissioner Sigmund Goldwater, were harshly criticized. For this reason La Guardia did not release the report in its original form and requested each of the incriminated departments to give their response to the report. Meanwhile, in public hearings, La Guardia responded by saying that the city had already implemented the findings and that nothing more needed to be done. As expected, the report was harshly criticized by Valentine and Goldwater. Commissioner Valentine even went so far as to release his own report commending the police for their courage, efficiency, and integrity. La Guardia who was at this point confused by the findings appointed Professor Alan Locke at Howard University to make sense of them.

The professor's analysis was as follows: after the Stock-market crash of 1929, the economic strife that African Americans had been experiencing began to bleed out into the social fabric of the neighborhood. Blacks lost their jobs at a far greater rate than European Americans and this caused mortgage foreclosures, rental evictions and a major depression. As the “wild” era of the 1920's came to a close, the European American fascination with Black Culture dwindled. The early 1930's were just as

“wild”: it was period of rapid and dramatic change in Harlem. The Harlem Renaissance began to die slowly but surely and its demise culminated in the great Harlem Race Riot of 1935. Alan Locke, the same writer who had been optimistic just a decade earlier, now lamented in his article *Harlem: Dark Weathervane*:

Eleven brief years ago Harlem was full of the thrill and ferment of sudden progress and prosperity; and Survey Graphic sounded the tocsin of emergence of a “new negro” and the onset of a “Negro renaissance” Today, with that same Harlem prostrate in the grip of the depression and throes of social unrest, we confront the sobering facts of a serious relapse and premature setback; indeed, we find it hard to believe that the rosy enthusiasms and hopes of 1925 were more than bright illusions or a cruelly deceptive mirage.

Locke's statement indicates that for all intents and purposes, the optimism and hope of the Harlem Renaissance was dead. Although Mayor La Guardia's commission postulated that the riots were a spontaneous outburst of frustration by the population, prominent sociologist Allen Grimshaw states that “There is no direct relation between the level of social tension and eruption of violence: the effectiveness of 'agencies of external control' (the police, the military, and the judicial system) is a key factor in determining whether a riot occurs or not in a particular city”(Grimshaw, 271-289.)

It is the position of this author that the truth lies somewhere in the middle of the two theories. The Great Depression played a major role in the build up to the Harlem Riot of 1935. At the same time, the Mayor's Commission could have been even more critical of the police brutality and irresponsible handling of the initial incident. Yet even more unfortunate was the fact that La Guardia was unable to actively implement the findings of the Commission. Fortunately, in the years following the report, La Guardia proved that he was a particularly effective ally for African Americans in Harlem.

The race riots of 1935 forced venues catering to whites only such as the Cotton Club to close

their doors. Their primarily white audiences no longer viewed Harlem as a safe place to be. The Cotton Club, which was originally located on 142<sup>nd</sup> Street and Lenox Ave, moved south to downtown Manhattan. In addition, white audiences who were already losing interest in the Harlem Renaissance felt that the racial tensions from the riot were a good justification to further absent themselves from the jazz scene in Harlem.

Alan Locke was particularly instrumental in recommending that La Guardia release the entire report of the Commission. He also advised that remedial action on the social situation take place immediately. Although La Guardia did not implement all of Locke's findings, immediate progress was made by August 1936 and within four years La Guardia's administration had completed work on The Harlem River Houses, the Central Harlem Center Building, the Women's Pavilion at Harlem Hospital, and two new schools. The number of black nurses in The Harlem Hospital doubled and the number of black doctors tripled. In addition, La Guardia made several mayoral appointments of Negroes to prominent positions in government (Capeci, 7-8.)

In 1937 it was argued that much of La Guardia's implementation of issues in African American's favor was for political gain which was not disputed. Nevertheless, as a result of La Guardia's progress towards improving social issues for blacks, he was well respected by both white liberals and the black population of Harlem. In 1940 he was honored with an award in Harlem for improving race relations along with five other whites and six blacks (Capeci, 8.) In 1941 La Guardia was received by a crowd of more than 20,000 black supporters during a political rally.

As World War II began, the results of The New Deal went into full gear. The struggling economy was given a major boost as other countries looked to America for needed weapons and supplies. Unfortunately there was great discrimination in the defense industry towards black workers and this was a source of great upset for leaders such as A. Phillip Randolph. Randolph threatened President Roosevelt with a march on Washington D.C. La Guardia who had been a supporter of

Randolph was put in a compromising position. As Capeci states in *The Harlem Riot Of 1943*

Early in 1941, La Guardia, like other officials, believed he lacked authority to compel defense industries to hire black workers and questioned the effectiveness of such authority....Before Roosevelt yielded to A Phillip Randolph's demands for a Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), La Guardia was brought into the negotiations.

La Guardia, however, was able to broker a compromise with Randolph: that the march be broken off in exchange for a productive executive order. Roosevelt was grateful for La Guardia's mediation and made one last effort to have the march called off without the issuance of an executive order. Unfortunately for La Guardia and his political aspirations, that effort failed and Roosevelt was forced to release executive order 8802 which reaffirmed a "federal policy opposed to discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government" (Capeci, 9.) Overall, however, La Guardia's hard work, and careful political tact, earned him the trust and support of African Americans in Harlem.

In the prelude to the Harlem riots of 1943, however, La Guardia and his administration made three major errors which began to erase his popularity with the black community. First, and most significant to the state of jazz in Harlem, was the police department's hand in closing The Savoy Ballroom on April 22, 1943 with the alleged charge of rampant prostitution. The New York Supreme Court's appellate division further affirmed the closing but the public questioned how a club could be so immoral if it had done everything it could, including the termination of liquor sales and the discharge of hostesses, to operate a legitimate business. (Capeci, 148.) The Savoy Ballroom had been the pride and joy of Harlem and one of the main racially integrated jazz clubs in the neighborhood. Several prominent members of the black community inferred that charges of prostitution were really motivated by a more ugly and sinister reasoning: to stop the interracial mixing of whites and blacks on the dance

floor. In addition, the closing of the Savoy helped to further separate the association between black and white audiences in jazz clubs. As Capeci writes in *The Harlem Riot of 1943*:

In response to the closing of the Harlem landmark and the implication that black people were immoral, the People's Voice [An African American Magazine] investigated several white dance halls. An anonymously printed article, introduced by the headline "PV Exposes Vice and Filth in Downtown Dance halls," asserted that prostitution was widespread in eight of the city's "better"[white] dancing establishments....What disturbed blacks most was that the incident served to perpetuate the smear that black people were less decent than white people. Readers of the People's Voice were reminded that the Savoy's closing happened in the New York of that arch liberal Fiorella H. La Guardia

The closing of the Savoy was disastrous to La Guardia's popularity especially in Harlem.

Another costly error that La Guardia made was the choice to lend Hunter College's facilities to the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard Women Reserves. Both government organizations excluded blacks. As Capeci points out "La Guardia consulted only traditional black leadership, and only on issues involving race relations. His caution, often a refusal to consult with more aggressive leadership, isolated and alienated him from important segments of the black community" (Capeci, 16.)

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, which had a long history of blatant racism, had been bidding to build Stuyvesant Town in the lower east side of Manhattan. Without the consultation or support of the black community, La Guardia approved the \$50 million project. La Guardia's critics feared that "Stuyvesant Town would set a precedent for discriminatory tenant selection in future quasi-public projects. La Guardia's progressive policy and the war's democratic purpose made the issue that much more appealing to them" (Capeci, 14.) Prominent figures in black politics such as Adam Clayton Powell Jr. harshly criticized La Guardia. La Guardia's careless mistakes alienated him from the

people who would have helped to curb a riot in Harlem. In the summer of 1943, the true effects were about to be felt.

The city of Detroit which was of major importance during World War II became a major destination for people around the country searching for work. Between June 1940 and June 1943, more than 500,000 people entered Detroit with more than 50,000 of them being African American (Capeci, 68.) Racial tensions mounted in Detroit and by 1942 it was considered “a keg of dynamite with a short fuse” (*Negro Digest*, 72.) The riot finally happened on June 20, 1943 and in its aftermath there were more than 34 people killed, 25 of whom were blacks, and 700 injured. The riot demonstrated that World War II had once again brought up racial tensions and an awareness of the lack of civil rights. As the outbreak in Detroit wound down, La Guardia moved quickly to appease New Yorkers. Capeci writes on page 81 of *The Harlem Riot of 1943*:

In response to a specific request [for comment] by the Harlem Newspaper [*Amsterdam News*], LaGuardia issued a statement that “We are in the midst of a most difficult and trying period,” he began his attempt to offset rumors. He urged residents to keep “cool” and “to have an understanding of the other fellow's problems.

La Guardia knew all too well the consequences of a possible race riot and became very engaged in trying to prevent another riot. When small incidences of violence broke out on June 23, 1943 in Brooklyn, La Guardia commented to Police Commissioner Valentine, “For Goodness Sake. Please watch this section very carefully” (Capeci, 83.) He urged Walter White, one of the top leaders of the civil rights movement, to get in contact with all of the top leaders in Harlem to request that they “see that our people so conduct themselves during the next few critical weeks and months” (Capeci, 84.) In the end, it turned out that another race riot in Harlem was inevitable. It was a disaster waiting to happen.

The Harlem race riot of 1943 began in much the same way that it had started in 1935: a poorly

worded rumor. On Sunday August 1<sup>st</sup>, Marjorie Polite had been a registered guest of the West 126 Street Hotel. After complaining of the poor conditions at the Hotel, she demanded a refund and checked out but before leaving, she requested a dollar tip back that she had given the elevator operator. The operator denied receiving the dollar and Ms. Polite became “very boisterous, disorderly, and profane” (Capeci, 100.) Around 7:30 pm, hotel staff called police and Patrolman James Collins was the officer who arrived on the scene. According to the police story, patrolman Collins asked Ms. Polite to leave. When she refused, Collins arrested her. Mrs. Florine Roberts witnessed the altercation and pressed Officer Collins for her immediate release. Mrs. Roberts was with her son, Robert Brandy, who was on leave from the military police battalion. The official police report contends that Brandy threatened Collins and then attacked him for no reason. It goes on to mention that the soldier hit Officer Collins and began to run. After the officer's repeated calls to halt, he fired a shot which hit Brandy's arm. As Capeci quotes testimony from The Negro Yearbook in *The Harlem Riot Of 1943*, Robert Brandy offered a different story: “Brandy contended, however, that he protested when Collins pushed Miss Polite, and the police officer reacted by throwing his night stick, which Brandy caught; when the soldier hesitated to return the weapon, Collins shot him.”

Given the past history of police brutality in Harlem, Brandy's story is much more believable and it is the position of the author that his story is the truth. Following the event, one of the witnesses shouted out a rumor from out of his windows that a black soldier had been killed defending his mother. The truth was that Brandy had just been injured and he was already on his way to the hospital by the time that had happened. Race relations were on the tipping point, however: the recent memory of the police brutality and violence of the Detroit riots were a catalyst for people to believe that the rumor was true.

In a little less than an hour, more than 3000 people gathered surrounding the 28<sup>th</sup> police precinct, the Braddock Hotel, and at Sydenham Hospital. There was little doubt on anyone's mind that Brandy



had been killed at the hands of the police and they threatened vengeance against the officer who they “believed” had committed the crime. Around 10:30 pm, the rioting began as groups started breaking windows. The riot encompassed three avenues with its epicenter being 125<sup>th</sup>. It spread all the way from 110<sup>th</sup> Street to 145<sup>th</sup> street on 8<sup>th</sup> Ave, 110<sup>th</sup> Street to 140<sup>th</sup> Street on Seventh Ave, and north from 125 Street to 136<sup>th</sup> Street on Lenox Ave (Capeci, 101.) Vandalism and theft were prevalent and rioters set several fires.

It was not until after 9:00 pm that La Guardia was made aware of the disturbance at Braddock Hotel. LaGuardia left for the 28<sup>th</sup> police precinct as soon as possible and upon his arrival, met immediately with Police Commissioner Valentine and Fire Commissioner Patrick Walsh (Capeci, 103.) As the riot intensified, the Braddock hotel was closed by 11:00 pm. Police were instructed to log the events of the riots and several sections of public service were put on duty. By 2:30 am, more than 5,000 police were assigned to the riot zone, and La Guardia ordered the closing of all Harlem Liquor Taverns (Capeci, 103.) By the early morning hours, the riot zone was closed off and traffic was diverted from West Harlem. By the following day LaGuardia had the help of more than 1600 black volunteers, 6,000 city and military police, and 8,000 New York State guardsmen. With the help of five radio broadcasts, municipal sound trucks, and a partial curfew, the riot died down by Tuesday, August 3<sup>rd</sup> (Capeci, 102-105.)

The Harlem Race Riot of 1943 was very serious and caused more than six deaths (all black men), more than 185 black injuries and 550 black arrests. More than 1450 stores had been damaged and damages were estimated at more than \$5,000,000 (equivalent to more than \$67,275,433.53 in today's currency) (*NY Times 1943*.) Although providing food and supplies to the people of Harlem was difficult in the first day following the riot, by August 6<sup>th</sup> there was no food shortage and food stocks were back to normal. Construction began immediately on rebuilding and La Guardia's administration made sure that the City was on its way to a quick recovery.

In Chapter 9 of Capeci's *The Harlem Riot of 1943* he writes that:

To concerned citizens, Harlem's disorder had dangerous national implications. It broke the six-week peace after the Detroit riot and, appearing to be a continuation of the nation's racial crisis, increased the anxiety spawned by the earlier riots. No action was taken by the President's administration during August as President Roosevelt was preoccupied with World War II. Roosevelt had appointed Jonathan Daniels as a personal assistant on the issue of race relations. Daniels made several progressive recommendations to the President (Capeci, 149-151.)

- That the President issue a direct disciplinary statement to the nation
- That old promises be fulfilled as quickly as possible
- That President Roosevelt create a preliminary committee of 21 prominent scholars and educators on race relations.

Much to the chagrin of Daniels and his colleagues, Roosevelt refused the idea and the decision had profound implications. As Capeci writes in *The Harlem Riot of 1943*:

Although understandable, Roosevelt's inaction in the racial crisis of 1943 was unfortunate. Admittedly, the era's racism, lack of precedents and uncertainty of the government's role in race relations, Roosevelt's ambivalence towards civil rights, his physical incapacity, and his single minded concern for the war were barriers to any sweeping progress regardless of presidential action. Nevertheless, Roosevelt's inaction depressed black morale and threatened the gains that had been made as a result of the war. It, in fact, made the existing formidable barriers greater. Roosevelt's stature, influence, and impact among white Americans could have done much to reduce, though not eradicate, those barriers.

The decision made it clear that issues for citizens in Harlem would have to be fought on a local level in New York and that there would be no federal aid. By August 14<sup>th</sup>, La Guardia can be credited

with making a radio series to appeal to the public called “Unity At Home - Victory Abroad”. On the show, he gave the basic message that the city was still learning lessons of tolerance, understanding, and good will (Capeci, 157.) The show also featured several prominent celebrities and was aimed at helping to move the city away from the negative effects of the riots.

La Guardia made sure to try and distance himself from his past mistakes. As Capeci writes, “Immediately after the riot, he announced that discrimination in tenant selection was unlawful and that he would implement whatever judicial decision emerged from the controversy over Stuyvesant town” (Capeci, 157.) La Guardia's administration also made sure to reopen the Savoy Ballroom. Lastly, La Guardia moved to distance himself from the Hunter College issue by holding and speaking at a conference for Interracial Unity at the college itself.

A mayor, especially the mayor of New York, is directly responsible for the shortcomings of his city and much of the Harlem Race Riot of 1943 can be attributed to Mayor La Guardia's failure to listen and learn from his mistakes. From 1937, it was already evident that his thoughts towards furthering black rights were political in nature rather than his true feelings. His blatant distaste for civil rights law coupled with his refusal to work with the more progressive black leadership “sold him out” and helped to expose his true nature. La Guardia's failure to consult with black leaders who represented the public's concerns blindsided him to the potential effects of his foolish mistakes. The public began to see La Guardia as a false man with half promises and it set the tone for Harlem to riot again. If La Guardia had been “really” thinking about blacks in Harlem and implemented all of the findings from the Commission's report of 1935, it is entirely possible that the situation could have been avoided all together. The public still felt frustrated with the police brutality of Commissioner Valentine's force and did not have an outlet to voice their grievances. The only way that they felt that they would be heard was to rise up and riot. The repeat performance of oppressive brutality by Commissioner Valentine's police force was appalling. It is even more upsetting that the official police story is in direct opposition

to Robert Brandy's story. Nevertheless, the race riot of 1943 was the product of extreme changes: World War II, the oppression from police brutality and the public's upset with the Mayor's policies.

The Harlem Race Riots of 1943 had an extremely detrimental effect on the jazz club scene in Harlem. It forever changed the racial demographic of Jazz clubs and one can argue that jazz with “white audiences” never fully recovered in Harlem. In addition the author of this thesis would go so far as to argue that the Harlem Riots of 1935 and 1943 helped bring about the demise of the big bands. Harlem had been the center of Big Band Jazz and since white audiences were scared to return to jazz clubs in Harlem, big band popularity waned in New York City in favor of the smaller clubs of 52<sup>nd</sup> Street. The Harlem Race riot of 1943 helped to retrench the racial prejudice and segregation that was already being experienced. When the Savoy Ballroom reopened at the end of 1943 the effects of Jim Crow were felt and the club had completely changed its policies towards integration: it stopped advertising to white audiences and only hired black performers.

One might think that after more than 70 years, police brutality and oppression would have disappeared. Unfortunately in New York City, one can argue that it has only changed shape. Until only recently, New York City has developed the stop and frisk program. The infamous stop and frisk program is a practice where policemen are allowed to stop anyone who they believe has committed, or is about to commit, a felony or misdemeanor. If the policeman believes that he or she is at risk or danger, he or she is allowed to frisk the stopped person for weapons. A large majority of the people who have been stopped are African Americans and Latinos. Fortunately, with the change of mayors in New York from Michael Bloomberg to Bill DeBlasio, it seems that the stop and frisk program has been brought to an end.

In 2011 on March 14<sup>th</sup>, a small riot broke out in Brooklyn over the shooting of 16 year old Kimani Grey (*CNN Article*.) Grey was shot multiple times after police say he pointed a gun at them. As in the incidents of 70 and 78 years ago respectively, the testimony from the public and police differ.

One public leader, Councilman Williams, was even quoted as saying that they “have a hard time believing what the police are saying when the police have lied to me about myself.” The shooting of Kimani Gray can be partially attributed to stop and frisk actions. In a strange resemblance to the past mayor, Bloomberg echoed former Mayor La Guardia when he defended stop and frisk during a recent public trial for more than 45 minutes.

On July 17th, 2014, Eric Garner, an African-American resident of Staten Island died after being put in a 15 second choke-hold by officer Daniel Pantaleo. Cellphone video by a nearby pedestrian captured the incident of police brutality for the whole world to see. Garner had been approached by NYPD officers on suspicion of selling individual cigarettes without tax stamps. After telling police that he was tired of being harassed and that he was not selling cigarettes, Eric Garner swatted the policeman's arms away and Officer Daniel Pantaleo put his arm around Garner's neck and pulled him to the ground and proceeded to push his face into the ground. Four officers moved to restrain Garner while he repeated “I can't breathe” eleven times. After Eric Garner lost consciousness he was turned on his side to ease breathing but it was already too late. Eric Garner was later pronounced dead on arrival to the hospital nearly an hour later. The medical examiner ruled his death a homicide and it caused protests around the country. On December 3, 2014, a grand jury decided not to indict Daniel Pantaleo which in turn caused public protests and rallies referring to police brutality. More than 70 years later, policeman in New York City still have a long way to go when it comes to curbing racism and police brutality

The racial integration of jazz in Harlem slowly disappeared due to the problems that emerged from the Harlem race riots of 1935 and 1943. The Jazz scene has still never fully recovered. In the past few years at least two major jazz clubs in Harlem have closed including St. Nicks Pub, and Lenox Lounge. Gentrification and economic circumstances have forever changed the jazz scene in Harlem.

### **Chapter 3: The Harlem Scene with Radam Schwartz**

Jazz Organist, Pianist, and Educator, Radam Schwartz has built a reputation over the last 35 years playing with greats such as Arthur Prysock, Eddie Lockjaw Davis, David Fathead Newman, Al Hibler, and Jimmy Ford. He has continued until today playing with cats such as Russell Malone, and Cecil Brooks III. Radam Schwartz has also led his own band at the venue Peppermint Lounge in Newark, NJ. since 1986. When that venue closed, the band continued their Tuesday night jam at Crossroads Club in Garwood, New Jersey.

Radam is very knowledgeable about the Harlem organ jazz scene and he was an integral part of it, playing in its clubs during the early eighties. He completed his thesis dissertation on organ jazz at Rutgers University and is a perfect person to tell how organ jazz played a part in the Harlem jazz scene. We completed an interview at his house in New Jersey in May, 2013.

**Jonah:** Let's talk a little bit about Harlem now because my thesis project is on the ethnography of jazz clubs in Harlem throughout the different times and there's not much written about the organ scene which was pretty happening in Harlem...so tell me about what you know about the organ scene.

**Radam:** You know obviously I wasn't around in the fifties but I know that from the early fifties through the mid-eighties, of all the clubs in black neighborhoods...those clubs that distinctively had a black personality to them, eighty percent of them were organ clubs or had organs at times in them and the thing is, this was the type of music that most black people would say is the type of jazz that they listened to. And yet the fact is that if you look at all jazz history, they don't mention that at all which leads you to wonder if there is an endemic situation happening here that the whole history of jazz is told from music that was played in front of a white audience, played primarily by black musicians but still it's about a white audience that the story about jazz history is told....And so when I first came into playing Jazz Clubs in Harlem, the first gig I had playing organ in Harlem was at La Famile where I had a very long working relationship. I came in in the eighties there and I had a relationship with them until the time they really closed. At one point I was working in the jam sessions on Wednesdays and Sunday

nights and playing weekends there....but there were a lot of other great organists who came through and in fact the organ that I have here [in Radam's house] is the organ from La Famile which used to be Jack McDuff's organ...one of Jack's girlfriends was Ms. B. who ran La Famile and Ms. B. on the outside she had a hard exterior...she was hard on me. Sometimes I used to be late and she was a stickler for time and she used to say "I don't understand why that white boy can never be on time."...but later on you would see that there was a soft interior because at one point I didn't have anyone to watch my kids and she made sure they went up to the restaurant and ate. But in any case I played in La Famile in the mid-eighties.

**Jonah:** Where was that located?

**Radam:** La Famile was on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue between 125<sup>th</sup> Street and 124<sup>th</sup> Street and it had a big canopy that went half way out to the side walk because the sidewalk was really wide. And you know there would be a lot of tourists but also a lot of regulars that would come no matter who was playing. You know Charles Earland played there, Lonnie Smith played there, Ruben Wilson. When I first came in...actually the first gig I did in Harlem was not at La Famile, it was at a place called Northern Lights and I went down to La Famile that night and heard Charles Williams play and he had an incredible groove and if you went up the street on 125<sup>th</sup> street a block away from the Apollo, they had The Baby Grand which was run by Eddie Henderson's mother, Thelma. And that club had a Fender Rhodes and a Hammond B3 organ in there. And of course another club between 125<sup>th</sup> Street and 124<sup>th</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue was Showman's which now has relocated to 125<sup>th</sup> and Morningside. A couple blocks away from Showman's was a club called Lickety Split which had a blonde light colored organ.

**Jonah:** Wow, that's cool and most of these were [Hammond] b3's?

**Radam:** It was a blond colored b2. And if you went up on Lenox Ave there was a club called Chris's that had an organ in there where I played New Year's Eve...You know so this is in the 80's that I'm talking about. I also played at a club called Mark IV with a singer named Bobby Curtis and a variety of

other people which was more Blues RnB. This was on 146st and St. Nicolas Avenue but of course up the street was Dude's Lounge which became St. Nick's Pub where of course Jack McDuff would be playing whenever he was in town. So when I was on break I would go up to hear Jack play.

**Jonah:** You said there was another spot on 145<sup>th</sup> Street as well, right?

**Radam:** 145st was Sutton's. Sutton's was not an organ club by the way. They had an upright piano but when I played there with Arthur Prysock...because I was on the road previously with Arthur Prysock playing organ we brought an organ in.

**Jonah:** So tell us a little bit about the logistics of bringing in an organ. Did you have a van?

**Radam:** Well from 1983-1984 Arthur didn't have organ movers or organ dollies so we had to bring it in carrying it from the bottom and move it in. The drummer Don Williams who I work with Tuesdays at Crossroads was a big guy and very strong and he would take one side and my job was to crawl inside the bus and lift it out and give it to Arthur's cousin.

**Jonah:** I want to talk about the culture of Harlem Clubs. Give me a particular night you can remember. Tell me a little about who was in the audience, what was the energy like there, some anecdotes that you can remember.

**Radam:** Well, there's a certain thing about the relationship between a musician and primarily a black audience. It's different and it's a whole different scene and this is true about Newark as well. You know I could tell you about a night at La Famile when Jack McDuff came in and he sat in the front on purpose and started heckling me. But at the end of the night we played these songs together but there was only one organ. So he would play a little and he'd jump up and I'd jump down, play a little and move to the other side and he'd jump back in....and the crowd was going wild. Here's a term that you probably don't hear too much at college but we used to have this term called "Takin' House". "Takin' House" meant like when the audience was just totally into it...screaming and yelling and everything you were doing they were just totally paying attention to....and it's just a great wondrous feeling of



playing music in this type of environment...you know if you can make it happen like that. The other thing back in the day when I was working The Baby Grand sometimes I would work there with Della Griffin, it would be no big deal if Etta Jones or Irene Reid would sit in. You know every club opened itself up for great musicians to come and sit in at the time.

**Jonah:** Any other clubs that we haven't talked about in Harlem that you can remember?

**Radam:** There probably are.....about a year and a half ago I played a gig at a Whole Foods on 97st and Columbus Avenue, and there used to be a club there that I used to play at. I can't think of the name of it right now but that was a large club. Charles Irwin used to play there with Arthur Prysock and Willis Jackson.....Along 125<sup>th</sup> street there were 4 or 5 clubs in addition to Showman's, La Famile, Chris's, Lickety Split.

Jazz bassist Alex Layne is a main stay from the Harlem Jazz Scene for more than fifty years. From 1959 when he got his first job working at the prestigious Count Basie's night club, he has performed with some of the top names in jazz including Max Roach, Freddie Hubbard, Cedar Walton, Coleman Hawkins, Mary Lou Williams, Miriam Makeba, Carmen McRae, Billy Eckstine and many others. I first met Alex while frequenting the jam sessions a few years ago and I admired his bass playing as a fellow bassist.

Alex is the perfect person to interview on the Harlem jazz scene because he grew up during one of the most interesting times to be in Harlem. He has a sharp memory of what it was like to attend various nightspots. We conducted a telephone interview in April 2015.

**Jonah:** Alex, I understand that you were born in Harlem. Could you tell me a little bit about your background and your heritage? You were born in 1939?

**Alex Layne:** October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1939, born in Harlem Hospital. And somewhere around 11 o'clock I believe. Yea, my mother was from Georgetown, South Carolina. She was an educator who graduated from Benedict College in Columbia [South Carolina]. And she taught school in South Carolina until she came to New York, I guess it must have been 1937 or 1938. I don't know what the length of courtship was that my parents were engaged in but my father was born in St. Vincent, British West Indies. He came here at 19 years of age to strike out a new life for himself. He had a dream of becoming a businessman or going into business and that was the goal that he pursued working two jobs and taking some business courses, I believe at the YMCA. He wasn't formally college educated and I don't even know if he necessarily finished high school. I assume that he did but I don't know for sure. And that is from where I sprung and I had one sister whose name is Camille who is now deceased and I'm the only one left.

**Jonah:** Yea, so your father ran a business: a grocery store?

**Alex:** Well, he started out with a hand laundry which he started with a fellow countryman who acquired it from a Chinese man. Of course these were the days preceding retail washing machines. And most black people did their laundry by hand using a washtub and a scrubbing board and you hung your clothes up on a line outside usually the windows that were facing the backyard. My father bought this laundry and he and my mother worked and developed it to a success and then subsequently he bought a grocery store. He added the grocery store to his holdings and eventually some real-estate (apartments) and then into a commercial laundry. In those days all the small hand laundries sent their laundry to commercial laundries who washed it and dried it and then sent it back to the hand laundries to be pressed or ironed and packed and returned to the customer.

**Jonah:** I assume you worked with your parents?

**Alex:** Yea, since about seven years of age. I was going to school one day and my father asked me where I was going because the business was right across the street from our apartment building but he was home and I said I'm going to school and he said "oh yea, you going to school? Well after school report to the store"...and in essence my childhood ended at that point as people normally thought of childhood. I worked almost everyday after school plus homework and my mother enrolled me in Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts and when I was older, junior choir and church so my days were always full...and piano lessons which I started at six years of age...so I was always engaged in some productive activity.

**Jonah:** Yea, so piano lessons must have had an effect on your childhood. Tell me a little about what you worked on?

**Alex:** Well, I didn't take lessons by choice. There had been some musicians in my mother's family though she and her siblings didn't study music. I guess having received a liberal arts education, she wanted to extend the same to my sister and myself. And as children we used to ask for a piano because in those days in homes that could afford it, the piano was a source of entertainment. One Christmas we woke up and there was a piano which we started banging on. And my mother said "Oh no, you have to

take lessons” and I said “lessons, what's that”. I didn't even know what they were, but I soon found out and from six until twelve years of ago I studied under two very good teachers: one black and one hispanic. And I was never thinking of having a musical career. I wasn't a prodigy and I didn't like to practice so when I was 12 years old and I got to graduating from elementary school, my mother said, “Listen I'm tired of fighting with you about practicing this piano if you want to stop you can stop”. And I jumped for joy and immediately ceased any musical activities for at least a year and a half.

**Jonah:** Going back for a minute, you were born during World War II. Did that have an effect on your early beginnings? It must have been an interesting time to be in Harlem?

**Alex:** Well it was an interesting time to be in Harlem just for the fate of the black community. I had very little awareness of the war. The only thing that I was aware of was that we had ration coupons for flour and sugar. And of course I didn't realize until several years after the war was over why we had these coupons. Certain items were rationed because of the war effort, but I had no real awareness of it except that my mother bought us a set of 4 books: a pictorial history of World War II. So from those books I began to get some understanding of warfare. I always had an interest in military things to the extent that later on in my early childhood I became an avid reader and I began to read books on Genghis Khan and some of the eastern military heroes and I don't even know what attracted me to those oriental military men but I read a number of works considering military feats that took place in some of the eastern part of the planet.

**Jonah:** After the age of 12 you went for a year and a half without playing but then I understand you took the test to join the High School of Music and Art?

**Alex:** Correct. I was in the eighth grade and someone came by near the end of the year and said, “Who would like to take the test for music and art?” I didn't even know what it was and I was kind of a wise guy but I raised my hand and subsequently they signed me up and I took the test and I passed. So I began my ninth grade which would normally have been done in junior high school at the High School

of Music and Art. At that time I think we were the second or third group of blacks that had ever entered the school. There were half a dozen of us and of the group several of them turned out to be quite prominent in the field of jazz: George Braith who was an excellent musician even at 16; Pete La Roca who went on to play with Coltrane and a number of other luminaries; Billy Gardner, who played trumpet in school but went on to switch to keyboard and for a number of years was the accompanist for Arthur Prysock (He played in a number of other settings as well but that was the most prominent job that I know of that he held); myself; and another man named Barry Jackson who I don't know what ever happened to.

**Jonah:** Where was that school located?

**Alex:** It was located on 135<sup>th</sup> and the entrance was on 135 Street between St. Nicolas Terrace and Convent Avenue. It is now a part of the City University of New York complex. It was a beautiful setting up there. There was a large playground adjacent to the school called Jasper Oval where a lot of the kids used to come and play baseball because it was one of the few baseball fields around, and St. Nicolas Park which is still existing today in virtually the same state it was when we attended the school. It was a very interesting park. It was long and narrow and my house was right next to that park at the southern end. All I had to do was cross the street and I was like in the country. It really afforded me a very unique environment to grow up in. I grew up in a very natural environment: we had tree swings and we used to play in the grass which was very high. We could run through the grass and almost not be seen from the street and we loved it.

**Jonah:** You weren't that far from the clubs in the area. The jazz scene was not too far from there, right?

**Alex:** Well, the jazz scene was kind of spread out through Harlem. From 132<sup>nd</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 135<sup>th</sup> Street had quite a few clubs but Harlem, the border line, from 110<sup>th</sup> Street the southern border and 155<sup>th</sup> street the northern border and on 110<sup>th</sup> street was a club I can't remember where Charlie Parker and other luminaries used to perform...and then you had 118<sup>th</sup> Street Minton's Playhouse, 121<sup>st</sup>

the Charlamare, 123<sup>rd</sup> Street Sugar Ray Robinson's. I mean there were so many clubs you had the Palm Cafe on 125st, The Baby Grand on 125st, further east a place called the Celebrity Club. I worked there with Tiny Grimes, one of the great early guitar players. And moving on uptown you had Count Basie's on 132st where I worked my first job and on that block you had 3 clubs right next door. There was a club called Wells which had been in existence since the 1920's, called the home of chicken and waffles, and at one point they even had two floors, each having music. Abby Lincoln and some other well-known singers used to work upstairs and then they had local musicians downstairs and everybody went there for breakfast. Down the street was another place called the Zanzibar which housed an organ room, going back to 1959. Jimmy Smith was evolving as a jazz star in those days. Certain clubs used to gear towards the organ in those days because it saved them money rather than having to hire 4 pieces (rhythm section and horn)...they would hire two pieces. The organ and just the drums or the organ drums and guitar which was the configuration of Jimmy Smith's group. Up the street you had a place called Connie's where a lot of the more skilled musicians used to go and jam. And right across the street from there you had Small's Paradise where all the top groups: Max Roach, Miles Davis, Horace Silver and so on, used to appear weekly. In those days an appearance of groups usually extended about two weeks.

**Jonah:** Could you tell me about when you got started on the bass and some of your teachers?

**Alex:** Well, I got started in the High School of Music and Art. From my childhood I always found the bass exciting. I didn't even know its function but I remember going by a music store on 125<sup>th</sup> street and they had a bass in the window and I asked my mother, "Hey I want that." And she would say, "You won't even practice the piano, what would I look like buying that for you?" And of course it was too large at the time for me to have been able to play it. I think I was around 10 years old when I saw the bass. So when I got to Music and Art I had gained entrance on piano but I was not really a good pianist and they asked me what instrument I would like and I chose the bass. I only stayed there for a year and

I didn't receive any significant instruction. The instructor was not really a bass teacher. He would come and give us the instruments and direct us so we sort of were left to fend for ourselves. As I said I was surrounded by 4 or 5 other musicians in the school who I named previously and they were all much more musically astute and developed than I was and most of them lived in the Bronx. So after I left the school, my mother subsequently bought me a bass and I began to go to Bronx by bus or train and jam. Finally I began to work in some little coffee shops. That's how I really began to get into the instrument. But I really didn't even know how to tune the instrument up properly. What I did find out was that I had a very good ear which is why I gained admittance to Music and Art because the most important part of the test was ear training to test your ears. I found that I could harmonize melodies just by ear, once I began to understand about chords. That's how I got into bass. I was self-taught until I secured the job at Count Basie's. I studied under a number of teachers but none of them ever gave me the type of foundation that I needed and some of them were very prominent players. When I finally got four or five years into music I went to a guy Alvin Gram who was the principle player for the New York City Ballet. I went there for the first lesson and he threw this music in front of me and I could barely read. When I looked at the music, I said "Wow you must be kidding!" But he just sat there and made me fight my way through the music. After I got through the lesson I began to realize that my lack of progress was self-inflicted. I hadn't really forced myself nor had any of my previous teachers really forced me to take a piece of music and work my way through it repeatedly. I had to go through some of the fundamental things that I was having a problem with and didn't understand so I would gain some skill and knowledge. I began to teach myself over a period of years so in all real essence I could say that I'm self-taught. I won't name some of the people I studied with; I don't want to disparage them as they were all excellent players but in my opinion not good teachers.

**Jonah:** In 1959 Steve Pulliam gave you the call to work with him at Count Basie's night club in the house band. What was that like?

**Alex:** Well, it was a shock to begin with because I didn't know him. I don't even know how he got my name. But I replaced Larry Gales in that band who was going on to work with Thelonious Monk. In that band was Steve, who had been a main stay in Buddy Johnson's band. He was very active in the music field as a contractor, a vocal coach, and a band leader. He also had the house band in two or three of the most prominent jam sessions in New York besides Count Basie's. We also did Freddie's in the Bronx and Brankers in Upper Harlem on 155<sup>th</sup> Street and St. Nicholas Place. When he called me he said, "Would you like to work with me at Count Basie's?" I said "Sure!" So I went there on Monday night and in the band was Bruno Carr who later went to work with Ray Charles and the piano player was Sonny Donaldson who worked with a number of people but I don't know of any major players that he was a member of. That was my first professional job. I also had begun to work with George Braith but Count Basie's was my first steady job. We were there on Monday night for the jam session, Saturday afternoon, and Sunday afternoon. At that time the main house band was Eddie Lock-jaw Davis with Shirley Scott and Arthur Echer on drums. So I was thrown into the highest levels of music instantly and somehow I managed to hang on and I began to develop some skill and enough that I ended up working with a number of prominent artists from that period. I went on to work with Freddie Cole, Nat King Cole's brother, in 1960-62. I subsequently went on to work with Miriam Makeba for about a year and Carmen McRae. Most of my jobs were with singers.

**Jonah:** Count Basie's was one of the most prestigious clubs in Harlem. What was the atmosphere inside like?

**Alex:** Terrific. The main source of entertainment for people in those days. Alcohol was the main drug of choice. So with the confluence of the two, the bars in those days or nightclubs as they might have been called, were the place that everybody went and especially on weekends those and the dance halls. Prior to my working at Count Basie's I had begun to work with dance bands headed by young musicians mostly. There were hundreds of dance halls in New York at that time. People used to have



these social clubs where they threw dances on Fridays and Saturdays and these clubs used to make money through these ventures. This came out of the area of house parties. They used to call them rent parties in previous years. So Count Basie's was the premier jam session at that time. Birdland also used to have a Monday night jam but it wasn't really open: you could only sit in there if somebody knew you. In Count Basie's you didn't need that criteria so all the young musicians and many of them who came to prominence subsequently came to Count Basie's to introduce themselves to the New York scene: Freddie Hubbard, Cedar Walton, Wayne Shorter, I could go on and on. Some guys who were superb players who you never have even heard of, who came to New York and rose through the ranks for a few years and then just disappeared. The saying was that if you could make it in New York you could make it anywhere. So all the top musicians especially from the midwest and the south used to come to New York to establish themselves in the industry: Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi went to Chicago first then came to New York. The east coast players: North Carolina, South Carolina, mostly came straight up north to New York City. So you had a confluence of cliques in New York that were established by your place of origin: the Detroit clique, the Philadelphia clique, the Chicago clique. If you look on a lot of recordings of that era you will find that whoever was established here, the next wave would come and would have almost a ready made entree into work and into the social scene because they had that affinity because they were from the same place same city. So a lot of times the Detroit guys, for example worked together when they were in New York. Now in New York we had New York-originated musicians but we didn't have a clique. I mean we had many significant people: Max Roach, Thelonious Monk, Arthur Taylor. A number of New York born musicians basically worked with everybody. When a guy would come from Detroit quite naturally he knew all the Detroit musicians so they would sometimes give him a place to stay, they would take him around and introduce him, they would give him gigs if he was qualified. Same thing with the Philadelphia group.

**Jonah:** What kind of other characters would show up to the club besides musicians? I remember you

mentioned the Mob?

**Alex:** Well, the Mob controlled all the clubs coming straight out of prohibition, when most of the clubs had been established going back to the speakeasy. So the mob controlled all the alcohol and to the great extent they also controlled the clubs. They might not be the owner on record but their influence was absolute in terms of them extracting money from the club. This was also the place where they had their social scene especially in some of the white clubs. They had their different mob groups with their favorite places to hang out. I worked in number of those places. There used to be a place where one of my first gigs was where the Mob hung out in the Bronx called the Wee Small Hours. On the juke box was nothing but Frank Sinatra records. Many of the Bronx mobsters of prominence used to come there and hang out. The owner's name was Bennie Boom-Boom, and at some point someone took him out in the ally out back and boom-boomed him. I worked with Freddie Cole at a place in West Chester and one of the biggest Mob groups, Joey Gallo and Eddie Gallo were involved in a mob war during those days in the sixties. They were the predecessor to John Goddi and were very prominent in the media in those days. They were friends with this Jewish mobster which used to control this place in West Chester and his name was Mikey Ross. On several occasions they asked us to stay late and play for their meetings and we were always kind of nervous because if somebody came into take these guys off, they weren't gonna leave any witnesses. But the mobsters loved music. Especially the Italians: they loved mob music and they loved the black musicians as long as you stayed in your place. And they loved Freddy Cole because he was the brother of Nat King Cole. He got acknowledgement and a lot of work from different gang sections because Nat and Frank Sinatra were the two biggest male stars of the time. Freddie looked and sounded like his brother so they would listen to him and have him work in their clubs.

**Jonah:** Count Basie's was located next to other clubs as you mentioned previously, such as Small's Paradise. Did you ever go in there?

**Alex:** Oh yea, I used to go into Small's all the time....even prior to my work at Count Basie's. Of course you couldn't drink until you were 18. In those days you had to have military registration. You were issued a draft card and in those days it was proof of your age. Most blacks didn't have cars so they didn't have drivers' licenses and picture id in those days anyways. All youths of all ethnicities had to register for the draft. I used to go into Small's prior to the age of eighteen and I developed a friendship with the bouncer named Sam. I used to stand near the band stand against the wall and watch the different bands when they came into perform and sometimes other people would see me standing there and they would stand behind me: there would be about 15 guys all pressed up against the wall. So he would come along and chase everybody away but I always knew that I could come back. If there were too many people around he would chase people away. When everybody went back outside I would drift around and eventually he would let me stay. But when I got my draft card at 18 in 1957 I went into Small's and ordered a beer at the bar. So I'm sitting at the bar and it's one of the first beers I'd ever drank and the bouncer walked past and did a double take and he asked the bar tender "You served this kid...what's going on with you?" And he said, "The kid has a draft card" and the bouncer said "A draft card! Let me see it. This is not yours, get the f\*\*k out of here". And he took the beer away and put me out. We laughed about it later on but that day I was pissed. So yea, I used to go in the clubs of course once I started working at Count Basie's I used to go in all the clubs. I used to go into Minton's frequently where coincidentally I'm in the house band now. There were clubs all over. There were clubs uptown and even further up Seventh Avenue there was the Reni Bar, a place called Jocks. There were ballrooms, there were so many jobs it was unbelievable looking back. Most clubs had music six nights a week, and some had music seven nights a week. It was unbelievable musicians were working all the time. For about 20 years more as was the case for myself you could actually make a living as a musician. The work was that plentiful and compared to the average day worker, the pay was much greater. The average day worker man an average of \$15-\$30 per week. A good gig in those days would

pay between \$15 and \$25 a day. So if you're working 6 days a week you came up with a \$125 a week...and then you had the club dates which included all the dance hall work. There was work galore and there were a lot of musicians who besides whatever effort you made to develop your skill you had plenty of time to develop it on the bandstand because you were always working.

**Jonah:** You worked with some of the greatest musicians of the time including Coleman Hawkins, Max Roach, Freddie Hubbard, Cedar Walton. What are some notable memories of working with some of these musicians in Harlem?

**Alex:** Well, I worked with the younger musicians Cedar and Freddie after I moved to Brooklyn. One of my first times working at the Vanguard was with Coleman Hawkins. I really wasn't the most qualified on the job, and many of the jobs I was probably the least most qualified guy on the job but compared to most of the other bass players I was on the second tier and was called to sub for people like Ron Carter and Richard Davis or whomever couldn't make an extra job. I was on that level. But yea, I worked with a number of top musicians and many of the older musicians in particular and a lot of top singers.

Miriam Makeba, Carmen McRae, Gloria Lynn, Billy Eckstine, Johnny Hartman, Grady Tate and many of the second tier singers who were excellent but just hadn't received that top recognition from a commercial standpoint. For a number of years I worked with a lot of the top piano players. I worked with just about every top female pianist: Mary Lou Williams, Dorothy Donegan, Hazel Scott etcetera.

**Jonah:** When did you leave the Harlem scene so to speak because you went on the road right?

**Alex:** Well, I was on the road, I mean my first trip was to Bermuda in 1961, the first time I was out of the country. I travelled the North East frequently...Boston, Syracuse, Rochester, Baltimore. In 1964 I went to Africa with Miriam Makeba and I subsequently made 4 trips to Africa. I went to Europe also with Miriam in 1964. We also worked Lincoln Center. We were the first black group to work Lincoln Center and record there. At that time she was an international star and we went to London and did a TV Show, Paris and the Olympia theatre. And we went to Kenya in Nairobi doing a TV special for ABC.

And we spent the bulk of our time in Tanzania being a participant in the third annual celebration of their independence.

**Jonah:** You returned to Harlem in 1996 right?

**Alex:** Yea, I left Harlem in 1963 and moved to Brooklyn which became at that point the epicenter of jazz in New York. Most of the prominent Jazz Musicians who lived in New York lived in Brooklyn at that time. We were all chasing the cheap rents. Rent in Manhattan had begun to rise and it had become gentrified. The upper west side where many of us lived began to be torn down for urban renewal so almost everybody moved to Brooklyn. In 1969 I left music for almost 10 years. I spent three years as a follower of Elijah Muhammed. Subsequently I went back to school and spent the next six to seven years in school. At that point I was made to realize that if I wanted to continue in music I needed to be educated, musically speaking, and I wanted to be educated in total. Not only did I focus on music but I attempted to educate myself in general from a liberal arts point of view. I took language, I took math and I took English. I went the whole nine yards besides music. I ended up earning an associate degree with honors from Bronx Community college and then I transferred to Queens College which I didn't finish I was actually about 12 credits from a Bachelor's degree when I was subsequently chosen by Danny Holgate who was a contractor for the emerging black shows of the time. Beginning in the mid 70's was shows such as *Bubblin Brown Sugar*, *Ain't Misbehaving*, *Sophisticated Ladies*. There was a period where black shows became very successful on Broadway and Danny Holgate was instrumental in arranging the music and contracting the musicians so in 1979 I left school to go with him on a show called *No Maps on My Taps* detailing the history of black tap dancing and they had 3 live tap dancers: Chuck Green who was probably one of the prominent dancers of that period; Sandman Sims, and Buster Brown. So they would show a film and we would come back on stage and perform live with these three dancers. From 1979 to 1989 I returned to Europe with three shows (mentioned above). From 1989 to 1995 I lived on Long Island. I lost almost all contact with the New York jazz scene at

that point. I did work frequently at the top jazz club in Long Island called Sunny's Place where a lot of guys used to come out to play. In 1995, I moved back to Harlem and tried to reconnect myself to the New York jazz scene which at that point had virtually evaporated.

**Jonah:** Now you play in some clubs in Harlem. Name some of them and how the scene has changed since you have returned.

**Alex:** Well, the scene has changed dramatically. Most of the clubs are gone. I've worked in a number of the clubs that are still active in terms of presenting music. First in Londell's, from 1996 when he first opened until last year (2014). I worked with my own group in that period of time. I worked with the Jazz Foundation of America in their jazz in schools program for about 10 years. I also was the bass player for their Monday night jam session until 2000. I'm still working for the Jazz Foundation but at 2000 there was a disruption in my participation in the Monday night session. I began to work with my own group from that time at Lenox Lounge off and on for a number of years with the Saturday night jam session. I worked in all the prominent clubs that still had music going on in Harlem. Some of them are now closed including Lenox Lounge. In 1999 I had also gone to work with the Harlem Jazz and Blues Band which in my opinion was the most outstanding senior band in the country. In that band was Al Casey who used to work with Fats Waller and who had been a downbeat winner for 1944 and 1945 on guitar; Johnny Blowers on drums who was Frank Sinatra's drummer for 12 years; Bubba Brooks a tenor saxophonist who was a prominent member of the first organ trio to receive recognition; and Ed Swanson who worked with Louis Armstrong. In fact in 2000 we did a tour because it was the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of Louis Armstrong's birth. We went to Mexico, Sweden, Finland and number of places holding celebrations commemorating Louis Armstrong's birth. Of course all of those members of that band are now deceased except for myself and Joey Moran who joined the band later on. In 2004 I went to China for six months and worked with a drummer from California at The Ritz Carlton, Shanghai. In 2006 I worked on a cruise ship for three months in Alaska. Coming up to current times I'm still

working at the Garage (West Village). I'm 18 months into Minton's as a part of the house band. I still work for the Jazz Foundation, alternating every other Monday on the jam session. So you know things have been good.

**Jonah:** How has working at Minton's jazz club changed since you first attended the club back in the 1960's?

**Alex:** Oh well, it's completely changed. The configuration of the room is still basically the same in general: the position of the bar, the bandstand used to be in the middle of the room and now it's in the back where the mural is which is like a bandshell. Now Minton's is an upscale restaurant with a companion restaurant next door called Cecil's. In the 1960's Minton's was a place where the night life people hung out. The number takers, the ladies of the evening, it was that kind of atmosphere. The good church people didn't really go there as Minton's had a reputation for mostly the street people, the petty criminals, the dope sellers, that kind of thing. It was always crowded in those days but subsequently it has been revitalized by Richard Parsons who used to run Time Warner and it looks like it's going to be an overwhelming success. It started out a little slow and a little shaky but in the last six months or so during the weekends both restaurants have been packed. Cecil's seats over 100 people and Minton's does as well. They have two different distinct cuisines. Minton's serves southern cuisine and Cecil's serves Afro-Asian. They had a change in chef recently and people seem to be really raving about the food now. We were hired from the very first day it opened. First it was two separate bands but subsequently we've been combined so the rhythm sections alternate. I'm there every other weekend....now we're into our 18<sup>th</sup> month and they treat us pretty well. It's one of the better jobs in the city and we're all happy.

**Jonah:** With gentrification in Harlem where do you see the future of the jazz scene going?

**Alex:** Well, Minton's is basically the only place now where you will find something close to traditional jazz or bebop which is the form of jazz in my opinion that achieves world-wide recognition. The swing

era jazz and ragtime jazz before that received recognition on a world level but it wasn't until after World War II that jazz really began to be disseminated and appreciated on a total world-wide basis through Asia, Africa everywhere. As far as jazz in Harlem the bar business has turned into the restaurant business. The wise-guy control has turned to the control of the MBAs and they don't value music. Beginning with the late 1970's there's been a continual diminution of the presentation of music, not only in Harlem but throughout the city. You don't have jazz on radio like you used to have it and the schools have stopped teaching it. So the basis for the appreciation of jazz has completely gone down. Our fan base is dying out daily and the new fan base that's developing is very small and very limited. So I don't really see a great future for jazz per say but stranger things have been known to happen and maybe there will be a series of events or circumstances which will revitalize the jazz scene. There are a few major clubs like the Blue Note, the Jazz Standard, the Jazz Gallery. But on the east side there used to be a proliferation clubs with piano groups and all that's gone. Even in the west village you only have Smalls, Fat Cat, the Garage, and a few other places that have music on a nightly basis but there are no jobs. And the jobs that are existing don't pay enough for someone to make a living as a musician. I don't know where the future is going to go. I don't even know how the young players who call themselves musicians survive. Many people now have day jobs and I don't know whether the others are gaining welfare or help from their families or living in circumstances like immigrants do where there are four or five people in an apartment to try and help maintain the rent. Most of these jobs only pay between 50 and 100 dollars. You can only play once or twice a month at best. So I don't know how one could even project themselves at being able to sustain themselves. You can't pay rent, you can't buy a car, you can't buy clothes, you can't buy food: you've got to have another source of income. A few of the educated and lucky ones are into teaching and if you're fortunate enough to get a teaching job and qualified enough to get one you can kind of sustain yourself that way but to do so purely as a performing musician seems to have come to an end. The record companies are basically all



gone and the ones that are left aren't making money. The streaming that's on the internet does not pay; you can't even get airplay of any consequence. There's only basically one jazz radio station for the whole world and that's WBGO. In the 1950's-1970's there were 3 or 4 stations, some running all day and the others running all night where people could be introduced to the music. Now you can't even sell cd's anymore so I don't know what the future is. I just count myself as fortunate to have come along at the time that I did and I guess the young folks will have to make their fortune.

This transcription below comes from a recording of Stompin' At The Savoy by Charlie Christian playing live at Minton's Playhouse on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1941. The bassist Nick Fenton plays this line behind Charlie Christian. The recording is interesting because it captures some of the first instances that harmonically complex bebop lines are played in the historically significant Minton's Playhouse.

### **Biography of Nick Fenton:**

Nicholas Fenton was an American jazz bassist who was active in the early bebop scene. Fenton was the child of Caribbean immigrants and grew up in Manhattan in the area of Manhattan Avenue and 119<sup>th</sup> Street. He was in the house band in the early 1940's with Kenny Clarke, Joe Guy, and Thelonious Monk for the New York Jazz Club Minton's Playhouse. Fenton played in jam sessions with musicians such as Charlie Christian, Dizzy Gillespie, and Hot Lips Page. In 1940 he played with Coleman Hawkins and his first recording was made for Okeh Records with Slim Gaillard (Put Your Arms Around Me). In 1941, he played with Lester Young (Tickle Toe) and Una Mae Carlisle (Blitzkrieg Baby); In 1942 with Lucky Millinder and in 1945 with Dud Bascomb. He was involved in 20 recording sessions between 1940 and 1945 in the field of jazz.

# Stompin At The Savoy (Nick Fenton Bass Line)

Edgar Sampson Chick Web Transcribed by Jonah Jonathan

**A**  
:39

Upright Bass

6

U. Bass

12

U. Bass

18

U. Bass

24

U. Bass

29

U. Bass

Chord progressions for the bass line:

- Measures 1-4: D<sup>b</sup>maj7, A<sup>b</sup>7, D<sup>b</sup>maj7, D<sup>o</sup>7, E<sup>b</sup>m7
- Measures 5-8: A<sup>b</sup>7, D<sup>b</sup>6, B<sup>b</sup>m7, E<sup>b</sup>m7, A<sup>b</sup>7, D<sup>b</sup>maj7, A<sup>b</sup>7, Dmaj7
- Measures 9-12: D<sup>o</sup>7, E<sup>b</sup>m7, A<sup>b</sup>7, D<sup>b</sup>6, D<sup>b</sup>7, G<sup>b</sup>7, G7
- Measures 13-16: G<sup>b</sup>7, B7, F<sup>#</sup>m7(b5), B7, E7, F7, E7, A7
- Measures 17-20: A<sup>b</sup>7, D<sup>b</sup>maj7, A<sup>b</sup>7, D<sup>b</sup>maj7, D<sup>o</sup>7
- Measures 21-24: E<sup>b</sup>m7, A<sup>b</sup>m7, D<sup>b</sup>6, A<sup>b</sup>maj7

## Musical Analysis

In measure 1 the starting note (Db) and its consecutive note (F) are chord tones to Dbmaj7. (Gb) and (G Natural) are connecting tones. In measure 2 note 1 (Ab) corresponds to the Ab7 chord and note 2 and 3, Bb and B respectively, are connecting tones to the fourth note C which is also part of the Ab7 chord. The same note pattern is repeated again in measure 3 and 4 corresponding to the Dbmaj7 chord and then the D o7 chord. In measure 5 note 1 (Eb) is part of the Ebm7 chord; note 2 (F) is a connecting tone and note 3 (Gb) is also part of the Ebm7 chord. Note 4 (G natural) is a connecting tone. In measure 6 note 1 (Ab) corresponds to the root of the Ab7 chord. Note 2 (Gb) is also part of the Ab7 chord. Note 3 (F) is a connecting tone and Note 4 is Eb which is a chord tone to Ab7. In measure 7 note 1 (Db) and note 2 (F) are chord tones to Db6. Notes 3 and 4 (Gb) and (G natural) are both connecting tones.

In measure 8 note 1 (Ab) is a connecting tone and note 2 (Gb) is a chord tone to Ebm7. Note 3 (F) is a connecting tone and Note 4 (Eb) is a chord tone to Ab7. In measure 9 note 1 (Db) and note 2 (F) are chord tones to Dbmaj7 while note 3 (G) and note 4 (G natural) are connecting tones. In measure 10 note 1(Ab) and note 2 (Gb) are part of the Ab7 chord. Note 3(F) is a connecting tone and Note 4(Eb) is a chord tone. Measure 11 is a repeat of measure 9. In measure 12 note 1 (Ab) is part of the Do7 chord. Note 2 (Gb), Note 3 (F), and Note 4(E natural) are all connecting tones. In measure 13 note 1 (Eb) is part of the Ebm7 chord; note 2 (F) is a connecting tone and note 3 (Gb) is also part of the Ebm7 chord. Note 4 (G natural) is a connecting tone. In measure 14 note 1 (Ab), note 3, and note 4 (Ab) are chord tones to Ab7 while note 2 (Bb) is a connecting tone. In measure 15 note 1 (Db) and note 2 (F) are chord tones to Db6 while notes 3 and 4 (Gb) and (G natural) respectively are connecting tones. In measure 16 note 1 (Ab) is a chord tone to Db7 while note 2 (Gb) is a connecting tone. Note 3 is a chord tone to Db7 while Note 4 (Eb) is a connecting tone. In measure 17 notes 1 and 2 both (Gb) are the root

to Gb7 while notes 3 and 4 both (G natural) are the root to G7.

In measure 18 notes 1 (Gb), 2 (Db), 3(Bb) and 4 (Gb) are all chord tones to Gb7. In measure 19 notes 1 and 2 both (B natural) are the root of B7 and notes 3 and 4 both (C ) are chord tones to F#m7b5. In measure 20 notes 1 (B natural), 2 (F#), 3 (D#) and 4 (B natural) are all chord tones to B7. In measure 21 notes 1 and 2 both (E) are the root of E7 and notes 3 and 4 both (F) are the root of F7. In measure 22 notes 1 (E) and 3 (G#) are chord tones to E7 while notes 2 ( F#) and note 4 (B natural) are connecting tones. In measure 23 note 1 (A), note 3 (C#), and note 4(A) are all chord tones to A7 while note 2 (B natural) is a connecting tone. In measure 24 note 1 (Ab), note 3 (C ) and note 4 (Ab) are chord tones to Ab7 while note 2 (Bb) is a connecting tone. In measure 25 note 1 (Db) and note 2 (F) are chord tones to Dbmaj7 while note 3 (Gb) and note 4(G natural) are connecting tones. In measure 26 note 1(Ab), note 3(C) , and note 4 (Ab) are part of the Ab7 chord while note 2 (Bb) is a connecting tone. In measure 27 note 1 (Db), note 2 (C ), and note 4 (Ab) are chord tones to Dbmaj7 while note 3 (Bb) is a connecting tone.

In measure 28 note 1 (Gb) and note 3 (Eb) are connecting tones while note 2 (F) and note 4 (D) are chord tones to D o7. In measure 29 note 1 (Eb) and note 2 (Db) are chord tones to Ebm7 while note 3 (C ) and note 4 (Bb) are connecting tones. In measure 30 note 1 (Ab), note 3 (C ), and note 4 (Ab) are chord tones to Abm7 while note 2 (Bb) is a connecting tone. In measure 31 note 1 (Db) and note 2 (F) are chord tones to Db6 while notes 3(Gb) and 4 (G natural) are connecting tones. Lastly in measure 32 note 1 (Ab), note 2 (Gb), and note 4 (Eb) are all chord tones to Abmaj7 while note 3 (F) is a connecting tone

## **Chapter 6: The Decline of Jazz in Harlem**

Jazz began to flourish as new musical art form in the 1920's in several places in the United States such as Chicago, Kansas City, and New Orleans. New York City, however, became one of the most popular places for the art form and Harlem, which had a large influx of African Americans, became the epicenter. As the Roaring Twenties came into place Jazz thrived in Harlem with countless clubs opening up their doors to this new genre of music.

The Harlem Renaissance became the creative cauldron for many art forms but especially for Jazz, it opened up a new way for a mixing of race and class. It was the golden era for culture in Harlem . The rent parties created an atmosphere which allowed for cutting sessions between talented musicians who were beginning to establish themselves. Musicians such as James P. Johnson, Art Tatum, Fats Waller, and Eubie Blake developed from these parties and they turned out to be the top players of the era.

The uninhibited era of the Harlem Renaissance came to an end with the arrival of the Great Depression. The golden era of the 1920's had itself come to an end and with these changes came racial tensions. The economic hardships brought on by the Great Depression caused Harlem to become rife with problems and this culminated in the race riots of 1935.

The race riot of 1935 caused major shifts in the Harlem jazz scene. White audiences began to stop attending Harlem jazz clubs and major venues such as The Cotton Club moved downtown. It was during this same time period that Big Band jazz had become popular among all races and it was unfortunate that social and economic conditions created a downturn for the scene that had otherwise been flourishing.

As the center of popular jazz moved downtown, a new genre, Bebop, formed in the jam sessions of Harlem. Its creators came from the big bands of the era and musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie,

Teddy Hill, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Christian, Kenny Clarke, Charlie Parker, Roy Eldridge, Miles Davis, and James Moody began to have jam sessions to develop their craft at Minton's Playhouse and Clark Monroe's Uptown House away from the harsh ears of the critics.

The race riot of 1943 further pushed white audiences away from Harlem and caused the closing of the Savoy Jazz club for racially mixed audiences. By this era the main clubs for white audiences had moved to 52nd Street downtown. World War II had a major effect on the big bands. Many players grew tired of touring and band leaders could not afford to keep paying the large amounts of money required to keep their groups going. Music moved further towards bebop and small groups with singers, another reason that venues featuring large bands in Harlem closed their doors. As bebop began to develop it eventually grew into Hard Bop and the experimental jazz of the era moved further south in the city into Greenwich Village.

Organ Jazz came into fruition in Harlem in the 1950's and 60's. A Hammond organ was amplified and it was able to make sounds similar to big bands with far fewer band members. It became a lot cheaper for club owners to hire organists and many predominately African American clubs moved into organ jazz. As gentrification began in New York City in the 1950's and 60's, club owners struggled to pay their rents and many of them were forced to close down. Many of Harlem's native jazz musicians and others who were living there began to move to Brooklyn where the rent was cheaper.

In the 1950's, the development of new forms of entertainment such as television and recordings began to encroach on the success of live Jazz in clubs. People stopped going out at night for live entertainment and this had a major impact on the economic success of jazz clubs. It was no longer economically feasible for club owners to keep their doors open as bars and dancehalls. Jazz in Harlem became designated as ambient music for restaurants for limited audiences. The cutting edge jazz clubs were no longer based in Harlem.

By the 1960's the main spotlight of music had moved away from jazz altogether, losing ground

to newer genres of American music such as Rock and Roll and R&B. Jazz continued to exist but it never achieved the popularity of the Big Band era again. Although there are some encouraging signs of an increasing interest in jazz in Harlem such as the successful reopening of Minton's Play House and the new opening of Ginnie's Supper Club, it is fair to say that the future of jazz has moved away from its origins in Harlem.

### **Appendix: A historic list of Harlem night clubs as listed in the Grove Encyclopedia**

These nightclubs are listed under the nightclubs section of the *New Grove Encyclopedia of Jazz* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. They can be found on the online database of Grove Music Online under New York. I have selected only those clubs from the New York listings that were located in Harlem.

#### **1. Alamo Café**

253 West 125th Street. Situated in Harlem, in the basement of the Hurtig and Seamon burlesque house, this rowdy club presented dixieland bands for white audiences. Jimmy Durante served as house pianist from 1915 to 1917, the dancer and singer Eddie Jackson performed from 1917 to 1921, and Durante's New Orleans Jazz Band, comprising Achille Baquet, the trombonist Frank Lhotak, Frank Christian, and Johnny Stein, was resident there from 1919 to November 1921. In 1925 it became an African-American venue, the Swanee Club (see below).

#### **2. Alhambra Ballroom.**



2100 Seventh Avenue. Located above the Alhambra Theater, it opened on 13 September 1929 with the bands of Benny Carter, Luis Russell, and Zach Whyte, the Missouriians, and Johnson's Happy Pals playing alternately for dancers. The Gene Rodgers Revellers, which included Otis Johnson and Rudy Powell, served as intermission band for one year. The ballroom was a venue for leading Harlem-based African-American bands into the mid-1940s.

### **3. Alhambra Theater.**

2100 Seventh Avenue. It was built by Percy G. Williams around 1905 and later sold to the B. F. Keith chain of theaters. Until 1926 African-Americans were allowed only in the second balcony, but thereafter advertisements read "sit where you please." Under the direction of Milton Gosdorfer, the Alhambra Theater became an important circuit venue, rivaling the Lafayette Theatre in popularity. Gosdorfer staged variety shows that often included musical acts, and among the musicians who performed for him were Bessie Smith (1927) and Cab Calloway (1931); Edgar Hayes led the resident orchestra there from August 1927 until 1930, when a band led by Emmett Mathews took over. It later became a motion picture theater.

### **4. Apollo Theatre.**

253 West 125th Street. Variety theater. It was opened in 1913 under the direction of Frank Schiffman and Leo Brecher, who had earlier owned the Lafayette Theatre. In the 1920s it staged various shows in which jazz played some part, but it came into its own as a venue for jazz only in the 1930s. The building was bought by Sidney Cohen late in 1933, and structural renovations were set in train. The theater reopened on 26 January 1934 under the management of Morris Sussman and quickly

became the center of Harlem entertainment and an internationally known venue.

During the 1930s and 1940s, particularly, the Apollo offered performances by all the leading jazz musicians, and an engagement there was regarded as an important landmark in a musician's career. The great swing bands (among them those of Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, Chick Webb (for illustration see [not available online]), Count Basie, Cab Calloway, and Benny Carter), singers (Bessie Smith, Lena Horne, Ella Fitzgerald, and Sarah Vaughan), pianists (James P. Johnson, Lil Armstrong, and Fats Waller), and jazz dancers and entertainers (Buck and Bubbles and Bill Robinson) all appeared on the Apollo's stage. The theater also played an important role in the discovery of new talent; it mounted competitions and weekly sessions specifically for amateur musicians. Although it continued to be active after the 1940s, its heyday as a jazz venue was over and it later specialized in presenting rhythm-and-blues, gospel, and soul music.

The Apollo Theatre on 125th Street should not be confused with that on 42nd Street, usually referred to as the old Apollo, which flourished in the 1920s.

## **5. Audubon Ballroom.**

Broadway at 166th Street. A small venue, it offered bop performances in the 1940s. In January 1949 or January 1950 (sources differ) a sextet that included Sonny Rollins, Art Blakey, J. J. Johnson, and Miles Davis played there. The club is celebrated in the title of Rollins's composition Audubon, recorded by Johnson in 1949 (Savoy 947).

## **6. Audubon Bar and Grill.**

3956 Broadway. Located in a business complex on the site of Harlem's former Audubon Ballroom, the Audubon Bar and Grill opened in March 1996. Jazz is offered on Monday nights, and among the performers who have appeared there are Gary Bartz, Hamiet Bluiett, James Carter, Hilton Ruiz, and Dakota Staton.

### **7. Bamboo Inn.**

2389 Seventh Avenue. It was opened late in 1926 by Honey Brown as a combined Chinese restaurant and taxi dance (i.e., dime-a-dance) hall; the Palace Garden Club (see below) had previously occupied the building, but it was closed by the police and the Bamboo Inn opened in its place. Early in 1927 it was renovated and made into an expensive supper club, but after suffering a fire in summer of that year it resumed its existence as a Chinese restaurant and dance hall. Brown played at the club in his own band, which was led by the pianist Willie Wilkins and included the banjoist John Marrero and the trombonist Clyde Bernhardt. Among other jazz musicians who performed there were Jimmy Archey in a band led by the reed player Edgar Campbell (1926–7); Archey, Greeley Walton, Harry Carney, Russell Procope, Charlie Holmes, and the pianist Joe Steele in a band led by Henri Saparo (1927); Archey, Langston Curl, Ward Pinkett, Holmes, and Manzie Johnson in a band led by Steele (1927–8); and Elmer Snowden, who worked there before moving to Smalls' Paradise. The Bamboo Inn closed in late 1929 and a new club, the Dunbar Palace (see below), took over the premises.

### **8. Bamville Club.**

65 West 129th Street. It opened in October 1924 in premises that had formerly housed the

Rendezvous Cabaret (see below) and took its name from the title of the successful show *In Bamville*, by Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake. Horace Henderson's Collegians played there in 1924. Following a temporary closure the club was reopened in November 1926 by the orchestras of Fletcher Henderson, Jimmy Wade, and Fess Williams. In mid-1927 it became Club Ebony. Sources are unclear, but Elmer Snowden seems to have held residencies at both the Bamville Club and Club Ebony.

### **9. Band Box.**

161 West 131st Street. The club was active from the 1920s to around 1935 on the second floor of a building that contained several rehearsal rooms; it was managed by the cornet player Addington Major, who had earlier played with Mamie Smith. The Band Box became a popular after-hours venue with musicians playing engagements elsewhere in the city; among those who took part in the impromptu jam sessions there was Jabbo Smith. By the 1960s the premises had become a funeral home.

### **10. Barron's Club [Barron Wilkins' Club].**

2259 Seventh Avenue/198 West 134th Street. One of the first large clubs in Harlem, it was opened by Barron Wilkins around 1915 in the basement of a building at the corner of Seventh Avenue and 134th Street. In its first years it featured leading stride pianists, including James P. Johnson and Willie "the Lion" Smith. Mamie Smith sang there before 1920. Among the musicians whom Wilkins engaged in the early to mid-1920s were Sam Wooding and his Society Syncopators (early 1920s), Duke Ellington (as a solo pianist, 1923), the Washingtonians, led by Elmer Snowden (1923), and Joe Turner (i) with Hilton Jefferson. The club's activities seem to have ceased around the time of Wilkins's death in 1926.

Venues at the same location in later years – notably the Theatrical Grill and Monroe’s Uptown House – used the 134th Street address rather than Wilkins’s Seventh Avenue address.

#### **11. Basement Brownie’s.**

152 West 133rd Street. From around 1930 to 1935 this was an after-hours venue for pianists, notably Fats Waller, James P. Johnson, Willie “the Lion” Smith, and Art Tatum.

#### **12. Bowman’s Grill.**

92 St. Nicholas Place. Overlooking the Polo Grounds (where the New York Giants baseball team played), this lounge presented jazz trios and organists from 1955 to 1958, when Bowman’s Grill became Branker’s Lounge (and, perhaps coincidentally, when the Giants abandoned New York for San Francisco).

#### **13. Branker’s Lounge.**

92 St. Nicholas Place. It succeeded Bowman’s Grill (see above) in 1958. Kenny Burrell and Sonny Red were among those who appeared there into the mid-1960s.

#### **14. Brittwood.**

594 Lenox Avenue. Bar and grill. It offered jazz from around 1932 to 1942. Among the musicians who held residencies there were the pianist Willie Gant, Frankie Newton, Pete Brown, and

Clyde Hart; the house pianist for a considerable period was Don Frye.

### **15. Capitol Palace.**

575 Lenox Avenue. Owned by Johnny Powell, it was opened in 1922 under the management of Rudolph Brown. Among the musicians who played there were Fats Waller (early 1920s), Willie “the Lion” Smith (1920s), the Broadway Syncopators, led by the reed player Billy Paige (1924), Lloyd and Cecil Scott (1925–8), Lizzie Miles (1926), Cliff Jackson (late 1920s), and the banjoist Bernie Robinson (1927). The Capitol Palace closed in 1929 and the venue reopened as the Saratoga Club (see below).

### **16. Celebrity Club.**

35 East 125th Street. This Harlem social club was open from around the mid-1930s and housed two venues, one at street level and another in the basement. Art Simms served as house pianist in 1945; much more significantly, Buddy Tate led the band (usually a septet) in the basement room from 1953 to 1971.

### **17. Club Baron.**

West 132nd Street and Lenox Avenue. It opened in the early 1940s, during which period Sabby Lewis’s big band appeared, as did Valaida Snow. A photograph dating from 1964 shows that the club was still in existence then, but jazz was evidently no longer featured after 1946, when Leonard Ware performed there.

**18. Club Basha.**

2493 Seventh Avenue. Owned and run by Sidney Bechet and a partner, its name was derived from Bechet's surname (in the corrupt pronunciation used by his New York friends). The club opened in summer 1925 in basement premises that in the preceding year had housed a venue called Hermit's End. Bechet led the house band, which included Johnny Hodges and Tommy Benford, and his enterprise quickly became a success; however, owing to a quarrel with his fellow manager, Bechet withdrew and by September 1925 was on his way to Europe. The club continued to prosper at least into 1926.

**19. Club Ebony.**

65 West 129th Street. In mid-1927 the Bamville Club (see above) was renovated and reopened as Club Ebony, under the management of Gardner Pickett and Lloyd C. Thomas. Sources are unclear, but Elmer Snowden seems to have held residencies at both the Bamville Club and Club Ebony. By the 1960s the premises had become a laundry.

**20. Club Harlem.**

West 130th Street and Lenox Avenue. Luis Russell led his band there from November 1928 into early 1929, when it moved to the Saratoga Club. Club Harlem later became a restaurant, the Harlem Grill.

**21. Club Sudan.**

644 Lenox Avenue. After having been vacant for nearly a decade, the former Cotton Club opened as the Club Sudan in November 1945, with Andy Kirk's band featured. Billy Eckstine performed there in 1946, after which the venture failed. The building was later demolished and replaced by an apartment house.

## **22. Cocoanut Grove.**

253 West 125th Street. It operated for a period around 1930 in a room in the basement of the Apollo Theatre; its owner and manager was Joe Ward. Louis Armstrong performed there from February 1930. The venue was later known as the Rathskeller, and eventually it reverted to use as a rehearsal room.

## **23. Connie's Inn.**

2221 Seventh Avenue (to 1933); 200 West 48th Street (1933–6). The Seventh Avenue venue, which consisted of basement premises next door to the Lafayette Theatre, had earlier functioned as the Shuffle Inn, at 165 West 131st Street. In June 1923 Connie and George Immerman opened Connie's Inn there, with a new entrance on Seventh Avenue (and consequently a new address). Wilbur Sweatman's band, which included Coleman Hawkins, played at the opening. From September 1923 until February 1926 the house band was led by the violinist Leroy Smith, and thereafter until late 1927 by the clarinetist and saxophonist Allie Ross, with whom Zutty Singleton later played; in 1929 the pianist Leroy Tibbs was in residence there.

Connie's Inn enjoyed its greatest success in the 1920s and early 1930s and established a strong rivalry



with the Cotton Club for audiences and performers. Among the numerous important groups engaged to play at the club were Horace Henderson's Dixie Stompers (late 1920s) and bands led by Luis Russell (late 1920s, 1932), Louis Armstrong (1929–30), Fletcher Henderson (November 1930 into 1931), Fats Waller (1931), and Don Redman (1932–c1935); in the early 1930s a number of performances were broadcast from the club on radio station WBC. In 1933 Connie's Inn moved downtown to 200 West 48th Street, a building formerly occupied by the Palais Royal, with the Seventh Avenue venue becoming first the Harlem Club and then, more successfully, the Ubangi Club (see below). In 1935–6 the revue *Stars over Broadway*, which featured Fats Waller and Billie Holiday among others, was staged at the new location of Connie's Inn. It apparently continued in operation until sometime in 1936, since the Cotton Club took over the premises in September of that year (see below).

#### **24. Cotton Club.**

644 Lenox Avenue (to 16 February 1936); 200 West 48th Street (September 1936–10 June 1940); 656 West 125th Street (from c1978). The venue on Lenox Avenue was first opened within the Douglas Casino building in 1920 as the Club Deluxe, under the ownership of the former heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson. Owney Madden took it over and in 1922 changed its name to the Cotton Club; the club's manager in the early 1920s was Don Healy and the stage manager was Herman Stark. Following race riots in Harlem in 1935 the area was considered unsafe for whites (who formed the Cotton Club's clientele) and the club was forced to close (16 February 1936). It reopened in September 1936 downtown on West 48th Street, in premises that had formerly housed the Palais Royal and Connie's Inn (1933–6) and continued to operate at this location until June 1940.

The Cotton Club was the most famous of the city's nightclubs in the 1920s and 1930s, attracting a

clientele that often included the cream of New York society. Its glittering revues provided a medium for performances by the most prominent jazz musicians of the day, and the club's activities were brought to a wide audience by frequent broadcasts. The house band when the venue first opened was Andy Preer's Cotton Club Syncopators; after Preer's death in 1927 Duke Ellington's orchestra was engaged, and its residency became the most celebrated in the club's history, lasting until 1931. Cab Calloway and his Missourians, who had first appeared with great success in 1931, then took over, and Calloway's time as the Cotton Club's bandleader (which extended to 1934, when Jimmie Lunceford succeeded him) was to make his reputation. Both Ellington and Calloway returned after the club moved downtown; the Lenox Avenue premises remained vacant until November 1945, when the Club Sudan opened (see above). Most of the principal jazz musicians, singers, and dancers of the period appeared at the Cotton Club at some stage, notably Louis Armstrong, Ethel Waters, Ivie Anderson, Bill Robinson, and the Nicholas Brothers. The heyday of the club's existence was re-created in Francis Ford Coppola's film *The Cotton Club* (1984).

A new club of the same name had opened at 656 West 125th Street by at least 1978. In the late 1990s it offered swing bands on Monday nights and various jazz groups on Thursday through Saturday nights.

## **25. Count Basie's (Club) [Count Basie's Lounge].**

2245 Seventh Avenue. A small, comfortable venue, it was opened by Count Basie. Although it was not his primary purpose to create a club where he could play, he sat in from time to time; in October 1956, shortly after it opened, he recorded there as a member of a mainstream sextet, with Emmett Berry, Vic Dickenson, Aaron Bell, Bobby Donaldson, and Joe Williams. The club operated into the mid-1960s; among the other musicians who played there were Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis and

Shirley Scott, Lou Donaldson, Marlowe Morris, Wild Bill Davis, Sir Charles Thompson, and Joe Newman.

## **26. Dickie Wells's Shim Sham Club.**

169 West 133rd Street. It was opened by Wells (who should not be confused with the famous trombonist of the same name) in 1933 in premises that had previously housed the Nest Club (see below) and operated successfully for several years. Among the musicians who performed there was Billie Holiday (1936).

## **27. Dunbar Palace.**

2389 Seventh Avenue. Formerly the Bamboo Inn (see above), this venue opened as the Dunbar Palace in October 1930 with a battle of the bands pitting Fletcher Henderson's group against that of his brother Horace Henderson. During the 1930s the Dunbar Palace presented dances hosted by Harlem social clubs. It later became the Dawn Casino.

## **28. Garden of Joy.**

Seventh Avenue between 138th and 139th streets. This open-air cabaret, which catered for white audiences only, occupied an entire block on Seventh Avenue; the site had a dance floor, illuminated at night by Japanese lanterns. It was in operation from at least 1920, when Willie "the Lion" Smith held the first of a series of long residencies there. During the early 1920s Sidney Bechet, James P. Johnson, Bubber Miley, and Coleman Hawkins played at the Garden of Joy as sidemen with

Mamie Smith, and in the middle of the decade Hawkins was a member of a band led by the pianist Ginger Jones. Other jazzmen to appear there included Charlie Gaines, who played with several different leaders.

### **30. Golden Gate Ballroom.**

Lenox Avenue and 142nd Street. Founded in October 1939 by Jay Faggin (or Fagin) (who had earlier owned the Arcadia Ballroom and the Harlem Uproar House), it was situated in the auditorium of the Douglas Theater. Meant to compete with the Savoy Ballroom (two blocks south on Lenox Avenue), it could hold 6500 people, but the venue failed in less than a year. During this brief period Coleman Hawkins, Hot Lips Page, Count Basie, Teddy Wilson, Harlan Leonard, and Les Hite led big bands there, and Sammy Stewart played organ.

### **31. Harlem Club.**

2221 Seventh Avenue. Formerly Connie's Inn (see above), this nightclub operated briefly in the mid-1930s. It was succeeded at the same location by the Ubangi Club (see below).

### **32. Harlem Opera House.**

211 West 125th Street. It was opened in 1889 as an opera house, but by the early years of the 20th century it was used for variety performances. Its most active period as a jazz venue occurred in the mid-1930s but was short-lived: on 9 June 1934 Frank Schiffman and Leo Brecher, the owners of the

rival Apollo Theatre, took over the opera house and in the late spring of 1935 discontinued its stage policy, converting it to a movie theater. After the cessation of jazz performances at the Harlem Opera House the Apollo was the only theater in Harlem presenting variety acts. The building was demolished in December 1959 and a bowling alley was constructed on the site.

Among the jazz musicians who appeared at the Harlem Opera House during its brief golden era were Tiny Bradshaw, Don Redman, Teddy Hill, Chick Webb, Benny Carter, Fletcher Henderson, and Charlie Turner's Arcadians. Ella Fitzgerald won an amateur contest there early in 1935, before her success at a similar competition staged at the Apollo Theatre, which launched her career

### **33. Heat Wave.**

266 West 145th Street. The club was active in the 1930s and 1940s under the direction of Louis Metcalf, who also played there until 1946. Hot Lips Page, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Ben Webster, and Lester Young are among those who performed at the Heat Wave; Marlowe Morris was house pianist.

### **34. Hermit's End.**

2493 Seventh Avenue. It was in operation by the early 1920s. Cecil Scott and Lloyd Scott led the resident band there in 1924. The premises were taken over in 1925 by the Club Basha (see above).

### **35. Hollywood Restaurant.**

2262 Seventh Avenue. From around 1943 to 1952 this was a venue for jazz pianists, including Don Lambert, Marlowe Morris, and Billy Taylor (ii).

### **36. Hoofer's Club.**

2235 Seventh Avenue. Situated in the basement of the Lafayette Theatre, where the Rhythm Club had originally been, the Hoofer's Club opened in 1932. It was a gathering place for the leading African-American dancers of that era, including Bill Robinson, Honi Coles, Bunny Briggs, Baby Lawrence, Chuck Green, and Cholly Atkins; Willie "the Lion" Smith, Benny Carter, and Bernard Addison were among those jazz musicians who played there. Remembrances of legendary tap-dancing cutting contests at the Hoofer's Club are celebrated in a re-creation of the venue in the film *The Cotton Club* (1984).

### **37. Hot-Cha Bar and Grill.**

2280 Seventh Avenue. In the mid-1930s this Harlem nightclub and restaurant presented musical revues, one of which featured Billie Holiday early in her career (1934), and Garland Wilson served as intermission pianist on its second-floor balcony. Don Frye was house pianist, and the venue also hosted jam sessions, with Roy Eldridge, Cecil Scott, and Chu Berry among those who participated. The jazz policy was discontinued soon afterwards, but a photograph from 1964 shows the building's façade unchanged.

### **38. Hotel Cecil.**

210 West 118th Street. Brooks Kerr was resident there in 1996–7.

### **39. Johnson's Tavern.**

St. Nicholas Avenue at 130th Street. From around 1935 to 1945 the drummer Theodore “Puss” Johnson hosted jam sessions at his tavern; Milt Hinton recalled Coleman Hawkins, Roy Eldridge, Lester Young, and Ray Perry as being among those who participated. The venue later became a grocery store.

### **40. Lafayette Theatre.**

2227 Seventh Avenue. Variety theater. This 2000-seat theater opened around 1915 under the ownership of the Coleman brothers and became one of the principal venues of its kind in Harlem. In the 1920s it was taken over by Frank Schiffman and Leo Brecher, who by the mid-1930s also owned the Apollo Theatre and the Harlem Opera House; as was the case with the opera house, the Lafayette's activities as a variety theater were discontinued by its owners in 1935 and it became a movie theater.

The Lafayette flourished as a venue for jazz performance in the 1920s and 1930s, when many of the most important musicians of the day played in the bands that accompanied its shows. Wilbur Sweatman topped the bill there in 1923, with Duke Ellington, Otto Hardwick, and Sonny Greer in his band; Ellington later returned with the Washingtonians (c1927). Other prominent bandleaders who appeared included Fletcher Henderson (intermittently 1928–34), Zutty Singleton (1929), Louis Armstrong fronting Carroll Dickerson's band (June 1930), Blanche Calloway and Noble Sissle (both 1931), Bennie Moten (1931–4), and Chick Webb (1933). Fats Waller worked there as an organist with

James P. Johnson in the show *Fireworks* of 1930. The basement of this theater housed the Rhythm Club (see below) and its successor, the Hoofer's Club (see above).

#### **41. Lenox Club.**

652 Lenox Avenue. Owned by Caspar Holstein, it was opened in the 1920s; it was located in Harlem next door to the Cotton Club (see above). The main feature of the Lenox's programs was its Sunday-morning breakfast dances, beginning at 7 a.m. and continuing until 11; the popularity of these events led to the venue's informal adoption of the name Breakfast Club. Among the jazz musicians who played there during the early 1930s were Cliff Jackson and Johnny Russell. In addition to nightly floor shows the Lenox hosted jam sessions, often involving members of Duke Ellington's orchestra; other of its jam sessions featured Louis Armstrong in a battle with Rex Stewart, and Chu Berry. In the mid-1930s it became the Radium Club and then a dance venue, the Continental Hall.

#### **42. Lenox Lounge.**

288 Lenox Avenue. It opened in either 1939 or 1942 (sources disagree) and offered jazz, among other genres, in its Zebra Room. In 1988 it was taken over by Alvin Reed, Sr., who in 1999 restored the club's original art-deco interior. It has continued to offer jazz into the new century, with bookings being handled by Mickey Bass; in the late 1990s such notables as Johnny Coles, Charles Davis, Hamiet Bluiett, Chico Freeman, John Hicks, and James Spaulding appeared there on Friday and Saturday nights.

#### **43. Lickety Split Lounge and Restaurant.**



2361 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard. Makanda Ken McIntyre performed there in the late 1990s; the venue also held a weekly jam session beginning at 11 p.m.

#### **44. Lido Ballroom.**

160 West 146th Street. Active from at least the early 1930s, it offered music for both dancing and concerts. Jelly Roll Morton led a band there in October 1932, and on 19 August 1944 Mamie Smith (singing one of her last engagements), Billie Holiday, and others gave a benefit concert in the ballroom.

#### **45. Lincoln Theater.**

58 West 135th Street. Variety theater. A small theater was opened at this address by Marie Downs in 1909; it was later demolished and the Lincoln was built in its place in 1915. The theater was run for a short time by Frank Schiffman and Leo Brecher (see also Apollo Theatre, Harlem Opera House, and Lafayette Theatre, above). The Lincoln Theater was a member of the Theater Owners' Booking Association circuit and presented many jazz performances as part of its variety programs. Fats Waller was the house organist there in the mid-1920s, doubling at the same time at the Lafayette. In 1927 Victoria Spivey held a highly successful residency there. It later became a church

#### **46. Luckey's Rendezvous [Rendezvous Inn, Rendezvous Club].**

773 St. Nicholas Avenue. It was opened by Luckey Roberts in 1940 and was active as a venue for many styles of music, from opera (sung by the waiters) to jazz, until around 1954, when Roberts gave

up its ownership. The high point of each evening's entertainment was Roberts's own solo piano spot.

#### **47. Manhattan Casino.**

280 West 155th Street. This Harlem amusement hall, holding 6000 people, operated from around 1910. In 1920 and 1921 it hosted all-star concerts featuring, among others, Lucille Hegamin. Around the late 1920s it became the Rockland Palace (see below).

#### **48. Mimo Club.**

2237 Seventh Avenue. It was partly owned by the dancer Bill Robinson and was in operation from around 1937. Eddie Barefield and Frankie Newton led bands there; Sidney Bechet appeared in 1941 as the leader of a quartet and then continued with a nine-piece band. From 1942 the club operated under new management as the Murrain Restaurant, Cabaret and Lounge.

#### **49. Minton's Playhouse.**

210 West 118th Street. It was opened in 1938 by the tenor saxophonist Henry Minton. In 1940 the club's management was taken over by the former bandleader Teddy Hill (see fig.6), who concentrated much of his energy on the regular Monday-night jam sessions, in which visiting musicians took part; among the guest performers who played there often were Dizzy Gillespie, Hot Lips Page, Roy Eldridge, Charlie Christian, and Don Byas. The resident musicians included Thelonious Monk (from 1939), Kenny Clarke, Joe Guy (who led the house band), and Rudy Williams (1945). The weekly jam session and after-hours playing at Minton's provided an opportunity for musicians such as

Gillespie and Monk to explore new ideas together, and their experiments played an important part in the development of bop. In the 1950s Tony Scott and Jerome Richardson held long engagements there. In 1997 ambitious plans to renovate and reopen Minton's Playhouse were initiated, but the venture appears to have failed.

#### **50. Monette's Supper Club.**

133rd Street. This short-lived nightclub was named after Monette Moore, who sang there. It was at Monette's that John Hammond first heard Billie Holiday in 1933.

#### **51. Monroe's Uptown House.**

198 West 134th Street; 52nd Street (from 1943). It was opened by Clark Monroe in the 1930s in premises formerly occupied by Barron's Club and the Theatrical Grill and became known for the presentation of swing (Billie Holiday sang there for three months early in 1937) and (from the mid-1940s) bop. The club staged jam sessions that rivaled those at Minton's Playhouse (see above); Charlie Parker was the featured soloist in 1943. In December 1944 Monroe opened a second club on 52nd Street, the Spotlight (see below). (See also Tinney, al.)

#### **52. Murrain Restaurant, Cabaret and Lounge.**

2237 Seventh Avenue (formerly West 135th Street). Formerly the Mimo Club, it came under new management and was renamed in 1942. Hot Lips Page was the resident bandleader, and Earl Bostic, who first played at the Mimo Club with Page, also led a group there. It closed in 1945.

### **53. Murray's Roseland.**

71 West 135th Street. Formerly J. W. Connor's Café, it had a brief existence in 1927 as Harlem's parallel to the famous Roseland Ballroom downtown on Broadway. The entire block of buildings had been demolished by the 1960s.

### **54. Nest Club.**

169 West 133rd Street. It was opened in the early 1920s by John Carey and Mel Frazier and managed by Johnnie Cobb (1923) and Jeff Blood (1927). Among the jazz musicians who led bands there were Sam Wooding (c1923), Elmer Snowden (mid-1920s to early 1930s), George Howe (1927–8), Luis Russell (1928), and Lorenzo Tio, Jr. (1933). In 1932 the Rhythm Club (see below), which had functioned at 168 West 132nd Street, closed at that venue and began to operate in a room behind the Nest Club. The Nest Club itself closed in 1933, and Dickie Wells's Shim Sham Club (see above) took over the venue. By the 1960s the premises were being used as a loft and warehouse.

### **55. Palace Garden Club.**

2389 Seventh Avenue. At its grand opening on 14 March 1925 Fletcher Henderson's band and June Clark's Creole Orchestra played there. The club was closed by federal agents one year after it opened; late in 1926 the Bamboo Inn took over the premises (see above).

### **56. Paradise Club.**

Eighth Avenue and 110th Street. Big Nick Nicholas led jam sessions there in 1950 to 1951, with Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Stitt, Sonny Rollins, Gene Ammons, Hot Lips Page, Shorty Baker, Joe Newman, Ike Quebec, and Charli Persip among the participants.

### **57. Plantation Club.**

Two major venues in the city were known by this name. The principal Plantation Club opened at 644 Lenox Avenue (at West 142nd Street) in the premises occupied until February 1936 by the Cotton Club; it flourished until the early 1940s. Among the bands that appeared there were those led by Willie Bryant (1937), Ovie Alston (1937), and Hot Lips Page (1938). Una Mae Carlisle performed at the club in the early 1940s, after her return from Europe.

Around 1930 Connie and George Immerman (who also owned and ran Connie's Inn, see above) took over a venue on Lenox Avenue and West 126th Street, intending to extend the rivalry that Connie's Inn already posed to the Cotton Club; Cab Calloway was to have been the resident bandleader. But their Plantation Club was destroyed, probably on its opening night, by gangsters hired by the Cotton Club's proprietor Owney Madden.

### **58. Pods' and Jerry's.**

168 West 133rd Street. Its formal name was the Patagonia, but it was known by the nicknames of its owners, Pods (Charles) Hollingsworth and Jerry (Jeremiah) Preston; after the repeal of Prohibition in 1933 it was renamed the Log Cabin. It flourished as a venue for small groups from 1932 and featured such musicians as Willie "the Lion" Smith, Jelly Roll Morton, Fats Waller, Sidney

Bechet, and Billie Holiday. By the 1960s the premises had become a church.

### **59. Primrose Dancehall.**

125th Street. This Harlem venue engaged jazz bands to play for dancing during the 1930s. Cozy Cole and his Hot Cinders were among the groups that worked there. In 1935–6 Ray Noble led a band at the Primrose that included Charlie Spivak, Pee Wee Erwin, Bud Freeman, Glenn Miller, and Claude Thornhill.

### **60. Pyles's.**

Fifth Avenue at 138th Street. This Harlem saloon, run by Harry Pyles, hosted informal piano cutting contests from around 1918 to 1920, with James P. Johnson, Willie “the Lion” Smith, and other leading stride players participating.

### **61. Renaissance Ballroom and Casino.**

150 West 138th Street. It was active from the early 1920s into the 1960s in large premises in a two-story red-brick building; the entertainment it offered, besides gambling and dancing, included cabaret acts, and there was always a call for jazz musicians. Vernon Andrade was resident at the Renaissance for a period of 15 years from around 1923, and among his sidemen at different times were Happy Caldwell, George Washington, Zutty Singleton, and Al Sears. Fletcher Henderson led his band there regularly in the late 1920s, Chick Webb’s orchestra played in 1928–9, and Edgar Hayes’s in 1937–8. In the early 1940s Sears led a big band, of which Lester Young was a member early in 1943.

## **62. Rendezvous Cabaret.**

65 West 129th Street, near Lenox Avenue. It opened on 11 September 1923 under the direction of Broadway Jones. Fletcher Henderson's group may have played there shortly before beginning a residency at the Club Alabam, but sources are unclear. In October 1924 the Bamville Club opened at the same location (see above).

## **63. Reuben's.**

262 West 130th Street (*c*1930–38); 242 West 130th Street (*c*1938–45). Run by Reuben Harris, it offered yet another venue in Harlem where stride and swing pianists could play, and compete, informally. Fats Waller and Clarence Profit are among those who appeared there. By the 1960s both buildings had been incorporated into a housing project.

## **64. Rhythm Club.**

168 West 132nd Street/2235 Seventh Avenue (to 1932); 169 West 133rd Street (from 1932). It was opened in the early 1920s and managed by Bert Hall, a trombonist from Chicago. An informal venue in a basement room below the Lafayette Theatre, it is identified by both the 132nd Street and the Seventh Avenue addresses. The Rhythm Club became a favorite haunt of musicians, who often jammed with the house band there. Sidney Bechet, Buddy Christian, Tommy Benford, and Louis Metcalf worked together at the club in 1924, and Bechet returned as resident bandleader the following year. The

Rhythm Club was apparently still active in the early 1930s, for in 1932 it moved to a room at the back of the Nest Club on 133rd Street and the old venue was renamed the Hoofer's Club (see above). For a time the Rhythm Club published its own newsletter, the *Rhythm Club News*. In later decades the 133rd Street venue was converted into a loft and warehouse.

#### **65. Rockland Palace.**

280 West 155th Street. This dance hall, which held 6000 people, was formerly the Manhattan Casino (see above); it took its new name around 1928, when the Royal Garden Orchestra, led by the drummer Herbert Cowens, played there. In late 1930 Noble Sissle's band, with Sidney Bechet, undertook its first New York engagement at the Rockland. Other groups to perform at the dance hall during its long existence were Horace Henderson's Dixie Stompers (1931), Fletcher Henderson's Orchestra (1932), and a band led by Happy Caldwell(1957).

#### **66. Rose Danceland.**

309 West 125th Street. A small venue, established in a former dancing school on the second floor of a corner building, it was in operation from at least 1927. In that year Tony Sbarbaro and Chick Webb played there and Jelly Roll Morton began a residency that lasted into 1928, with a group that included at various times Lee Blair, Russell Procope, Omer Simeon, and Ed Anderson. In the early 1930s Bingie Madison (1931) and the pianist Earle Howard (1932) were both resident at the club. By the 1960s the premises had been converted into an office building.

#### **67. St. Nick's Pub.**



773 St. Nicholas Ave. This venue, run by Berta Alloway, is perhaps best known for its Monday-night jam sessions, which began in the mid-1990s and are led by Patience Higgins and the Sugar Hill Jazz Quartet. St. Nick's Pub also presents jazz on at least five other nights of the week, featuring mostly house bands. Brooks Kerr played there in 1996. (T. Souter: "Neighborhood Report: Harlem: Major Sax Appeal: on Mondays, the Joint is Jumping. Guess Where," *New York Times*, 22 Feb 1998)

#### **68. Saratoga Club.**

575 Lenox Avenue. Opened in 1929 in premises formerly occupied by the Capitol Palace (see above), it was managed by Johnny Carey and Sandy Thompson. It was one of the earliest cabarets in Harlem to adopt a jazz policy; Sidney Bechet's New Orleans Feetwarmers and a band led by Luis Russell both appeared there before the turn of the decade. Among resident musicians in the 1930s were Charlie Green and the pianist Earle Howard (both 1930) and Reggie Johnson, whose band included Cedric Wallace (1932). The venue was renamed Martin's Tavern in 1933.

#### **69. Savoy Ballroom.**

596 Lenox Avenue. It was opened on 12 March 1926 by Moe Gale (Moses Galewski), Charles Galewski, and a Harlem real-estate businessman called Charles Buchanan, who functioned as the ballroom's manager. The Savoy, which occupied the second floor of a building that extended along the whole block between 140th and 141st streets, was billed as the world's most beautiful ballroom; it had a large dance floor (200 feet by 50 feet), two bandstands, and a retractable stage. It swiftly became the

most popular dance venue in Harlem, and many of the jazz dance crazes of the 1920s and 1930s originated there; the ballroom enjoyed a long and glittering career that lasted well into the 1950s before a decline in its fortunes set in.

On its opening night the Savoy featured Fess Williams and his Royal Flush Orchestra, the Charleston Bearcats, fronted by Leon Abbey, and, as a guest band, Fletcher Henderson's Roseland Orchestra; the Charleston Bearcats formed a lasting connection with the venue and later changed its name to the Savoy Bearcats. Except on special occasions, the ballroom engaged two bands, which played alternate sets, and this policy led to its becoming a famous venue for battles of bands. Elaborate events of this kind were also organized by the management: on 15 May 1927 the Savoy presented a "Battle of Jazz," which featured King Oliver's Dixie Syncopators, a band led by Williams, Chick Webb's Harlem Stompers, and Henderson's Roseland Orchestra; other battles were fought between bands led by Lloyd Scott, Webb, Alex Johnson, Charlie Johnson, Williams, and Henderson (6 May 1928) and between Cab Calloway's Missourians and groups led by Duke Ellington, Henderson, Cecil Scott, Lockwood Lewis, and Webb (14 May 1930).

From the 1930s a number of bandleaders formed long and influential associations with the ballroom. By the mid-1930s Chick Webb's name was inextricably linked with that of the Savoy, and he continued to lead his band there through the decade; his singer from 1934 was Ella Fitzgerald, who took over leadership of the ensemble after Webb's untimely death in 1939. Al Cooper's Savoy Sultans first appeared at the ballroom in 1937 and remained for many years. The Erskine Hawkins Orchestra enjoyed a similar connection with the venue, holding extended residencies from the 1940s through the 1950s. Besides those who played there regularly, most of the important bands and musicians of the swing era appeared at the Savoy at some time: Andy Kirk, the Mills Brothers, Sidney Bechet, Count Basie, Coleman Hawkins, Roy Eldridge, and many others appeared for single engagements or held short residencies there. Benny Carter's big band made its *début* in the ballroom in March 1939 and

Carter continued to work there intermittently until January 1941. As was the case with several of the city's most famous nightspots, the Savoy was connected by landline with a New York radio station, which allowed its music to be broadcast throughout the nation. The building was demolished in 1958, and the grounds were absorbed into a housing project.

#### **70. 721 Club.**

721 St. Nicholas Avenue. Formerly the Silver Dollar Café (see below), it was renamed the 721 Club following the repeal of Prohibition in 1933 and thereafter presented small jazz groups, including, in 1941, that of Ernie Henry. By the 1960s it had become a neighborhood bar, the Spot, and was no longer featuring jazz.

#### **71. Shalimar.**

2065 Seventh Avenue. This Harlem nightclub, operated by Red Randolph, flourished from around 1940 to 1960, presenting such artists as Ben Webster, Marlowe Morris, and Julian Dash.

#### **72. Showman's Café.**

125th Street (mid-1940s–1985); 2321 Frederick Douglass Boulevard (1985–98); 375 West 125th Street (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard) (from August 1998). Open from the 1940s, the Showman's Café was originally situated next door to the Apollo Theatre and served as a post-show gathering spot for the Apollo's patrons. It began to offer soul jazz in 1978, when its new owner purchased a Hammond B-3 organ for the club. In 1985, after a fire destroyed the premises, it moved to

Frederick Douglass Boulevard. Its specialty continued to be soul jazz – Danny Mixon and Reuben Wilson are but two of the organists who have graced its stage – but for many years it has also featured tap-dancing on Thursday nights. The club moved to 125th Street in August 1998, during a period of gentrification of that area of Harlem. It is a frequent stop for numerous Japanese and other non-American tourists. (<<http://www.bigapplejazz.com/nycjazzclubs.html>> (2001))

### **73. Shuffle Inn.**

165 West 131st Street. Named for the hit musical revue *Shuffle Along*, by Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake, this venue opened in November 1921 and was managed by Jack Goldberg; the orchestra was directed by Luckey Roberts. In 1923 it became Connie's Inn (see above), with a new entrance, and consequent new address, on Seventh Avenue.

### **74. Silver Dollar Café.**

721 St. Nicholas Avenue. The club flourished from the mid-1920s until the repeal of Prohibition. At some point in the early 1930s Kaiser Marshall's trio, which included Rudy Powell, played there.

### **75. Smalls' Paradise.**

2294½ Seventh Avenue. Soon after closing his venue on Fifth Avenue (see immediately below) Ed Smalls opened Smalls' Paradise (on 22 October 1925) in basement premises, where he offered music and dancing. It became one of the most successful clubs in Harlem, surviving the Depression and then the difficult postwar years, when most venues in the area felt the pinch and many closed.

Smalls' enjoyed its heyday in the 1920s and early 1930s, when many of the most important groups and musicians of the period occupied its bandstand. Charlie Johnson (whose band was heard at the opening), Willie "the Lion" Smith, Jimmy Archey, and Fletcher Henderson all first played there in the mid- to late 1920s, and Smith and Johnson both returned to the club for long residencies; Elmer Snowden led the Smalls' Paradise Orchestra there during the early 1930s, and the group made the film *Smash your Baggage* in 1932. During the Depression Smalls cut back his operation, and in 1934–5 James P. Johnson led a band of reduced size; after 1935, however, the club's resources were restored, and by 1937 Hot Lips Page was leading a big band there. In the 1940s and 1950s resident bandleaders included Chris Columbus (1944), Gene Sedric (late 1940s), Harry Dial (1947–55), Happy Caldwell (1950–53), and Gus Aitken (1950).

At some point Smalls sold the venue and operated a liquor store on 154th Street. In the mid-1960s, when Red Prysock and Ray Charles were among those who appeared, Smalls' Paradise was owned by the basketball star Wilt Chamberlain. It continued to be active into the 1980s and ceased operations only in 1986.

## **76. Smalls' Sugar Cane Club.**

2212 Fifth Avenue. From around 1917 to 1925, before he established his famous Smalls' Paradise (see immediately above), Ed Smalls ran Smalls' Sugar Cane Club, which was said to be the first such venue to cater to affluent white audiences who went "slumming" (i.e., traveled uptown to Harlem for an evening of entertainment). The club initially featured the pianist Paul Seminole, as well as waiters who sang and danced while serving and during floor shows. From 1923 the club's house band was led first by the pianist Charlie Smith and then by June Clark, whose sidemen in 1924 included Benny Carter.

By the 1960s the premises had been absorbed into a housing project.

#### **77. Swanee Club.**

253 West 125th Street. Formerly the Alamo Café (see above), a Harlem venue for whites, it became the Swanee Club, an African-American club managed by Joe Ward, in 1925 and operated as such for approximately a decade. The trombonist Bill Brown and his Brownies initially served as the house band and broadcast from the club twice weekly.

#### **78. Theresa Hotel Bar and Grill.**

2090 Seventh Avenue. Una Mae Carlisle was the house pianist there in the late 1940s.

#### **79. Tillie's Chicken Shack.**

2134 West 133rd Street (*c*1928–33); Lenox Avenue between 121st and 122nd streets (1933–5).

Another of the Harlem venues dedicated to stride and swing pianists, Tillie's Chicken Shack featured Bob Howard, Fats Waller, and others from around 1928 until 1933, when Prohibition ended. After moving to larger premises on Lenox Avenue the club no longer offered any significant music.

#### **80. Ubangi Club.**

2221 Seventh Avenue (1936 or later – early 1940s); 1678 Broadway (early 1940s–*c*1948). It opened some time after 1936 in the premises formerly occupied by Connie's Inn and the short-lived

Harlem Club (see above); Connie's Inn and the Ubangi were the only clubs to succeed at the location. Some time in the early 1940s the Ubangi moved downtown to a building on Broadway that later housed the Clique and Birdland (see above). Before the move bands led by Teddy Hill, Kaiser Marshall (1935), and Ovie Alston played at the club, while in the 1940s resident bandleaders included Leon Abbey, Cecil Scott (1942–3), and Erskine Hawkins. The successful floor shows at the downtown venue were written by Chappie Willett.

### **81. Victoria Café.**

West 141st Street and Seventh Avenue. It presented jazz from at least the 1930s, when among the groups to perform there was a trio led by Freddie Moore (1933–6). Don Frye was the house pianist. Edgar Hayes and Kaiser Marshall also led bands at the café, and Moore returned there in November 1940, when Louis Metcalf was among his sidemen. The club closed around 1945.

### **82. Vo-de-do Club.**

2110 Seventh Avenue. William “Dude” Adams ran this club, which opened in June 1927 above the Alhambra Theater. Cliff Jackson led the band there before he took up a long residency at the Lenox Club.

### **83. Wells' Upstairs Room.**

2249 Seventh Avenue. It was opened by Joe Wells around 1946 and presented music from late in that decade into the 1960s; among those to appear were the trios of Mary Lou Williams and Patti Bown, Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle, Marlowe Morris, Wild Bill Davis, Willie Lewis, Ram Ramirez, and Dizzy Reece, who made his *début* in the USA at Wells' Upstairs Room in 1960.

#### **84. Yeah Man.**

2456 Seventh Avenue (1925–33); 2350 Seventh Avenue (from 1933). It began as a speakeasy, then after the repeal of Prohibition it opened as a legitimate club in new premises nearby. The house pianist at the second location was Don Lambert, and from the late 1930s the club featured a number of small groups, including the trio led by Clarence Profit. Yeah Man was taken over in the mid-1940s by John Velasco and began to advertise under a new name, Jock's Place, in April 1946. Al Casey appeared there in June that year, and Lambert, Maxine Sullivan, and Leonard Ware performed in July. Jock's Place remained active at least until early 1948.

#### **85. Ye Old Nest.**

This club in Harlem was active in the 1930s, when it was a noted venue for jam sessions.



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The following abbreviations indicate the nature of the respective articles. The abbreviations are:

[A] = analytical remarks [B] = extensive book review [BT] = blindfold test [C] = concert review [D] = discography [F] = feature article [I] = interview [“I”] = article written by the respective musician himself [O] = obituary [R] = extensive record review [T] = transcription

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Rejected Bartender Commits Suicide, in: New York Amsterdam News, 23.Jun.1962, p. 1 (short F: former Minton's bartender William Walcott)



Jim Haskins: *The Cotton Club*, London 1977 [book]

NN: Cotton Club Reborn, in: *Down Beat*, 45/9 (4.May 1978), p. 10 (short F)

Harry Sobol: Remembers the Cotton Club and Cab, in: *Cab Calloway & Bryant Rollins: Of Minnie the Moocher & Me*, New York 1976 [book], p. 96-103 (F)

## **Discography**

### **G2060.10]**

*Jam Session* : Dizzy Gillespie (tp) plus 2 or 3 other tp's, unknown p, b, d.

**Private recording "Clark Monroe's Uptown House",**

**New York, October, 1941**

The Dizzy crawl (incomplete) Masters of Jazz (F)MJCD86 [CD][**G2059]**

**The Harlem Jazz Scene 1941** : Dizzy Gillespie (tp) unknown (tp) Don Byas, Chu Berry (ts) unknown (p) Nick Fenton (b) Kenny Clarke (d) or Harold "Doc" West (d)

**Live "Minton's Playhouse", New York, May 1941[G2060]**

Dizzy Gillespie (tp) Kenny Kersey (p) Nick Fenton (b) Kenny Clarke (d)

**Live "Minton's Playhouse", New York, May 1941**

(F)MJCD45 [CD]

**[C767] Cab Calloway**

includes : Eddie Rector (step dancing-1,vcl) Lethia Hill, The Cotton Club Trio (vcl)

**Cotton Club, Harlem, New York, April 20 & 21, 1931 [C791] Cab Calloway**

**Broadcast "Cotton Club", New York, c. November,1932**

***Billie Holiday With Buster Harding And His Orchestra [H7131]:*** Billie Holiday (vcl) acc by Tony

Scott (cl) Buster Harding

(p,cond) others unknown

**Live "Apollo Theater", Harlem, New York,**

**December 10, 1952 [E1293]**

***Duke Ellington And His Cotton Club Orchestra :*** Bubber Miley (tp) added

**New York, January 8, 1929**

**[B3419] Count Basie**

Buck Clayton (tp,arr) Ed Lewis, Bobby Moore (tp) Eddie Durham, George Hunt, Dan Minor (tb) Earl

Warren (as,bassax) Herschel Evans (ts) Lester Young (ts,cl) Jack Washington (alto,bar) Count Basie

(p)

Freddie Green (g) Walter Page (b) Jo Jones (d) Jimmy Rushing, Billie Holiday (vcl) Jimmy Mundy,

Eddie Durham (arr) Howard Doyle (mc)

**radio broadcast "Savoy Ballroom", New York, June**

**30, 1937**

**[C2196] Benny Carter**

**On The Air : *Benny Carter Big Band* :** Lincoln Mills, Joe Thomas, George Woodlen (tp) Tyree Glenn

(tb,vib)

Vic Dickenson, Jimmy Archey (tb) Benny Carter (as,cl,arr) Jimmy Powell, Carl Frey (as) Ernie Powell,

Castor McCord (ts) Eddie Heywood (p) Ulysses Livingston (g) Hayes Alvis (b) Henry Morrison (d) or

Ted Fields (d) or Keg Purnell (d) Dell St. John (vcl)

**Radio Broadcast, Savoy Ballroom, New York, July**

**24, 1939**

**[F1917] Ella Fitzgerald**

Ella Fitzgerald (vcl) acc by Dick Vance, Bobby Stark, Taft Jordan (tp) George Matthews, Nat Story, Sandy Williams (tb) Garvin Bushell (cl,sop) Hilton Jefferson (as) Wayman Carver (as,ts,fl) Teddy McRae (ts,bar) Tommy Fulford (p) John Trueheart (g) Beverly Peer (b) Bill Beason (d)

**NBC radio broadcast, Live "Savoy Ballroom", New**

**York, January 22, 1940**

**[H3126] Coleman Hawkins**

Roy Eldridge, Bunny Berigan, Harry James (tp) Tommy Dorsey, Jack Jenney (tb) Coleman Hawkins (ts)

Count Basie (p) John Kirby (b) Gene Krupa (d)

**WNEW Broadcast, "Make Believe Ballroom", Savoy**

**Ballroom, New York, June 14, 1940**

Body and soul Bean (It)01

Ad lib blues (\*) Jazz Archives JA19, Bean (It)01

King Porter stomp Jazz Soc (Swd)AA504, RCA

(F)FXM1-7325, Bean (It)01

**[M5450] Jay McShann**

***Jay McShann And His Orchestra*** : Buddy Anderson, Bob Merrill, Orville Minor (tp) Lawrence Anderson,

Taswell Baird (tb) Charlie Parker, John Jackson (as) Fred Culliver, Bob Mabane (ts) James Coe (bar)  
Jay McShann (p) Leonard "Lucky" Enois (g) Gene Ramey (b) Harold "Doc" West (d) Al Hibbler (vcl)

**NBC Broadcast "Blue Network", Savoy Ballroom,  
New York, February 13, 1942**

**[J3671] Buddy Johnson**

**At The Savoy Ballroom :** Frank Brown, Dupree Bolton, John Wilson, Willis Nelson (tp) Bernard  
Archer,

Leonard Briggs, Gordon Thomas (tb) Al Robinson, Joe O'Laughlin (as) Jimmy Stanford, David Van  
Dyke (ts) Teddy "Cherokee" Conyers (bar) Buddy Johnson (p,arr) Jerome Darr (el-g) Leon Spann (b)  
Teddy Stewart (d) Ella Johnson, Arthur Prysock (vcl)

**ABC Radio Broadcast "Savoy Ballroom", New York,  
October 16, 1945**

**[M9627] Clark Monroe**

***Clark Monroe's Band* :** Charlie Parker (as) prob. Clark Monroe (vcl) unknown tp, 2 or 3 saxes, rhythm  
section, poss. incl.

Allen "Pee Wee" Tinney (p) Ebenezer Paul (b)

**Clark Monroe's Uptown House, New York,  
January/March, 1942**

Cherokee Onyx ORI221, Spotlite (E)SPJ120,

**[S8318] Jimmy Smith**

**Groovin' At Small's Paradise, Volumes 1 & 2 :** Jimmy Smith (org) Eddie McFadden (g) Donald

Bailey (d)

**Live "Small's Paradise", New York, November 15,  
1957**

**[G3505] Babs Gonzales**

**Live At Small's Paradise :** Babs Gonzales (vcl,narr) Clark Terry (tp) Johnny Griffin (ts) Horace  
Parlan (p)

Buddy Catlett (b) Ben Riley (d)

**Live "Small's Paradise", New York, c. 1962**

**[C11134] King Curtis**

**King Curtis Live At Small's Paradise :** Melvin Lastie (cnt) King Curtis (ts,saxello-1,vcl) Willie  
Bridges (bar)

Paul Griffin (el-b) Cornell Dupree (g) Chuck Rainey (el-b) Ray Lucas (d)

**Live "Small's Paradise", New York, July 22, 1966**

**[E998] Roy Eldridge**

**Live At The Apollo 1944/47 :** no details

**"Apollo Theatre", New York, June 14, 1944**

Jumpin' with jeep Everybody's EV-3003

**[H6130] Earl Hines**

**Live At The Apollo 1944-1947 :** Betty Roche out

**Apollo Theater, New York, January 10, 1945**

Tales of the Vienna woods Everybody's EV3003

Blue skies Masters of Jazz (F)MJCD148 [CD]

**E1602] Duke Ellington**

*Duke Ellington Treasury Show #12*

**ABC Broadcast, "Apollo Theater", New York, June  
30, 1945**

**[C4726] Charlie Christian**

**Jazz Immortal (The Harlem Jazz Scene - 1941) :** Joe Guy (tp) unknown tp-1 & ts-1 added , Kenny

Kersey (p) Charlie

Christian (g) Nick Fenton (b) Kenny Clarke (d)

**Live "Minton's Playhouse", New York, May 12, 1941**

**[C7575] John Coltrane**

*John Coltrane Septet :* John Coltrane (sop,ts) Pharoah Sanders (ts,fl) Alice Coltrane (p) Jimmy

Garrison (b)

Rashied Ali (d) Algie DeWitt (bata-d) Jumma Santos (perc) Billy Taylor (announcer)

**Radio broadcast, (\*), Harlem, New York, April 23,  
1967**

**[C7046] Ornette Coleman**

**Tone Dialing : *Ornette Coleman & Prime Time* :** Ornette Coleman (sax,vln,tp) Dave Bryant  
(keyboards) Chris

Rosenberg, Ken Wessel (g) Al MacDowell (el-b) Brad Jones (b) Chris Walker (b-1, keyboards-1)

Denardo Coleman (d, programming) Badal Roy (tablas, perc) Avenda Khadijan Al (vcl-2) Moishe

Naim

(vcl-3)

**Harlem, NY, 1995**

**[H5882.20] Patience Higgins**

**Live In Harlem : *Patience Higgins' Sugar Hill Quartet Jamming With Guests* :** Patience Higgins (ts)

Les Kurz (el-p)

Andy McCloud (b) Eli Fontaine (d) + Guests: James Zollar (tp-1) Kiane Zawadi (tb) Gerald Hayes (as-

2)

Hamiet Bluiett (bar-3) Montego Joe (d-4) Leopoldo Fleming (cga-5) Ghannayia Green (vcl)

**Live "St. Nick's Pub", Harlem, New York, April 5,**

**1996**

**[C3158] Joey Cavaseno**

**Live At Showman's : *Joey Cavaseno/Mark McGowan* :** Mark McGowan (tp) Joey Cavaseno (as)

Bobby Forester

(org) Kenny Bolds (d)

**Live "Showman's Cafe", Harlem, New York, May**

**23, 1996**

**[G3323.20] Edsel Gomez**

**Cubist Music :** Don Byron (cl) Miguel Zenon (as) Steve Wilson (as, fl) David Sanchez (ts) Gregory



Tardy

(ts,b-cl,fl) Edsel Gomez (p) Drew Gress (b) Bruce Cox (d) **Harlem, New York, 2005**