



Reggie Walley of Worcester, at the mike.



Willie Pye of Philadelphia, on drum.

1979 JAZZ

INSIDE WORCESTER'S HOT JAZZ SCENE

By MICHAEL BINGHAM

The Hottentotte Lounge on Austin Street is just off Main, near the old Post Office. You could drive Main Street for years without seeing it, even though it's not more than 200 feet up Austin and easily visible from Main. Moreover it is not located where more timid souls might venture - police cruisers and ambulances are a common sight in that section of the city and it is here that you are most likely to encounter some of Worcester's more colorful "indigents." But on Sunday afternoons, it is possible (and in fact, very likely) to find a variety of young and old, black and white people soaking it in at the Hottentotte, united for a time by one interest - jazz.

Alter stepping inside, it might seem as though the musicians outnumber the listeners. One steamy Sunday in July we saw (and heard) a young white saxophone player from New Jersey, a tall, Jamaica-bassist from Boston, a seventy-ish character who performed a spirited solo blues number on electric piano, even a bandana clad fellow who was reputed to blow an "unbelievable" harmonica (jazz harmonica?). Evidently the word, among aficionados as well as musicians, is out on the Hottentotte which was mentioned first by nearly everyone we spoke with when asked about jazz spots in Worcester.

The club is owned by Reggie Walley



Gelling down 'Ol' Hollerole: (left to right) Reggie Walley and Billy Price with (standing) Teddy Blandin, Harvey Williams and keyboardist Terry Coltrane.

Musicians Keep Alive Memories of Howie

By DAVE MAWSON

Of the "Jazz" in "Jazz"

It was the kind of celestially "jazz" Jefferson would have loved.

For four solid hours yesterday the crowd rocked, swayed and jived to the sounds of jazz at a block party on Austin Street. The occasion: a Summer's World musical tribute to Jefferson, the legendary Worcester saxman who died last month at 67.

"Oooh yes," Reggie Walley said while sipping a beer inside the Hottentotte Lounge on Austin Street. Outside, a pickup group of area musicians was belting out some swing tunes. "He would have loved it. He would have been out there playing."

Walley, a boyhood friend who performed off and on with Jefferson for more than 50 years, kicked off the afternoon's festivities by pounding out a couple of numbers on the drums with fellow members of his ensemble - Jim and Dick Odgren and Bunny Price.

The Jefferson Friendship

Before heading into the Hottentotte for some liquid refreshment, Walley stood on the bandstand outside and reminisced about his friendship with Jefferson.

"Can't take my bat off for too long," Walley said with a laugh before revealing his bald pate to the late afternoon sun. "To me, he was one of the greatest. We played all over the place and he was well-liked by everyone!"

Walley, also 67, used to sing and play the drums in performances with Jefferson and his many bands. Bob Walley and Jefferson were members of the Saxtrum Club... musical fraternity started in 1938 by saxophonist Jefferson and trumpeter Barney Price.

Bunny Price, Balley's 49-year-old son, played bass during the opening set yesterday - a minor diversion from his duties of running the Hottentotte. Price recalled the jam sessions his father and his mates had at the old Saxtrum Club at the corner of Glenn and Clayton streets.

The Father Image

"He was a 100 percent gentleman," Price said. "And he helped a lot of young men like myself. He was a father image."

Like his father, Bunny Price took up the trumpet at a young age. "Between guys like Howie, Reggie and my father, you couldn't do anything else," Price said with a chuckle. Because of respiratory problems, Price began playing the bass 25 years ago.

"Listening to them and following them around - they were inspirational," Price added.

Yesterday's performance was an impromptu jam session with musicians - young and old, black and white - stepping in whenever an opening arose due to the need for a break or refreshment.

The crowd languished in the late afternoon sun, sipping beer and munching on hot dogs and hamburgers that were offered from a makeshift grill next to the Hottentotte. Some people brought chairs and made a day of it, parking the whole family on an open spot in the vacant lot across from the bandstand.

Walley and Price said they hope to make the tribute to Jefferson an annual Summer's World event.

"We're going to do it every year until I'm the next one to go," Walley said with a laugh, pushing his cowboy hat further up on his brow. "And that ain't never go-a happen."



Musicians gather in front of the Hottentotte.

'Tracing all that jazz

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predominantly white crowd of widely varied ages.

Hamilton was backed by organist Phil Porter and drummer Dickie Banda. The three played so well as a unit that it was difficult to believe it was their first gig together. Hamilton's agent (he prefers to be called an "artist's representative") is Charlie Lake, a man whose appearance and demeanor suggest nothing so much as the word "agent." He spoke of Hamilton in the tones of a man who knows a good thing when he sees one. "The kid was born old," he said when asked about his client's style and ability; and described him as "a one-time thing, a phenomenon." The evening's music might have been termed "lounge jazz" (in as much as it never strayed far beyond the realm of accepted tonality) but without the superficiality and banality such a label might imply.

Truly there is in Worcester a jazz scene, and the city's jazz fans and musicians are aware of it, even if most of us are not. It exists, somewhat beneath the surface, only available at certain places and times. Even though widely thought of as America's most uniquely indigenous art form, jazz still has had a remarkably jaded history. For years it was thought bigly improper for white Americans to have anything to do with it, except perhaps for a few thrill-seekers who wished to flout authority. Addiction to heroin, which claimed the lives and careers of so many jazz greats (Charlie Parker comes most immediately to mind) was often spoken of as a "jazz players' disease" by those who would have hated the music and its players.

Not until the 1930's did a hybrid of streamlined jazz and the Tin Pan Alley school of popular song capture a wide and enthusiastic audience among white Americans. Artists such as Glenn Miller, Duke Ellington and Benny Goodman captured the hearts and shaped the tastes of the country and, with the aid of the by now inexpensive, mass-produced records and the spread of radio, created our first "pop" music. Competition for jobs and the soaring expenses of keeping an 18- or 21-piece band on the road led to a decline in fortunes for the "Big Bands"; and the advent of television resulted in a country which stayed at home more often. Jazz diversified and split into different schools, in a sense going underground again, or at least taking a remote back seat to the new, sing-er-oriented pop music of the fifties.

and it is he more than anyone else who seems to personify the essence of the jazz heritage in Worcester. Although he is probably not over sixty, he has a show business career spanning 45 years. A dancer and singer as a youth, he taught himself to play the drums, and the fact that he was once offered a job by Duke Ellington attests to his success. He no longer dances much, but his drumming

Jazz And Rock

Yet the renaissance of popular jazz in the 70's again has musicians and critics searching for answers. Does the union of jazz and rock, or "fusion," represent a boon or a sellout to artists such as George Benson and Herbie Hancock, two notable beneficiaries? The aforementioned Bunny Price, who plays bass at the Hottentotte and, with his trumpeter father Barney Price, is well-known to

Worcester jazz buffs. Forty-ish, with a short goatee and the sturdy build of a man who has worked hard, Bunny Price conveys a feeling of strength but gentleness as he manipulates his electric bass.

"I started out about 1957, playing string bass. I was listening to people like Miles (Davis), John Coltrane, and Cannonball (Adderly). I still have a Sinnell bass, but I mostly just play electric now," he said, reflecting the feelings of many jazz bassists who decided that the stand-up's cumbersome and lack of projection were too great a price to pay for its breadth of expression.

propels the music with a precision and vitality which belie his years; the warmth and feeling of his voice when he sang "Misty" (the only time he took the ever-present pipe out of his mouth) brought a unique freshness to the old standard.

When the stage (actually not so much a stage as a corner of the small room) was not filled with musicians sitting in for a few numbers, the regular band holds

Price, who has had a jazz show on WICN, feels that jazz-rock fusion has had a positive effect, inasmuch as it has brought to jazz many new fans who were first, perhaps, attracted to the rock elements of the music. "I think fusion music has made a lot of people more aware of jazz and its roots," he said, adding that the influence of "rock, especially rock rhythms are changing the face of jazz." This was most evident at the Hottentotte, especially when the younger players sat in.

There are those, however, for whom jazz reached its apex in the late 1910's and early 1920's. They are not just a tiny minority of jazz fans, and support this music with a vigor and vehemence not unknown to Red Sox diehards. Moreover, area bands such as the Tuxedo Classic Jazz Band and the New Black Eagle Jazz Band are finding that their music, "traditional jazz," makes friends fast among both young and older listeners.

Traditional jazz, refers to the engaging and high-spirited music which emerged from New Orleans in the early part of this century, the music actually called "jazz" (nobody is certain exactly where the term originated). Early New Orleans jazz, as played by the hands of King Oliver and Kid Dry, was somewhat raucous but always light, beamed down music, with little or no instrumental improvisation.

The Sticky Wicket Pub in Hopkinton has in its nine years of existence, built itself a reputation as the place to hear traditional New Orleans-style jazz in the area. In fact, it has even gotten to be a little bit of a touristy thing, owner Foster Yeardon noted, and cited the presence of guests from as far away as Sweden and Japan as proof.

Jazz, especially the old-time jazz, is a universal language; Yeardon said. He is no friend of contemporary jazz. Asked about it, he said that "the other stuff is not even jazz - it's junk... irrelevant music." Those who might be tempted to dismiss him as a crank have probably not seen the audiences at the Sticky Wicket. The crowds are a cross section of ages which enjoy the music in a passionate way.

The Black Eagles, who have played there for eight years and are, more or less, the Mhouse band "pack this place absolutely every Thursday night. You can't get in here," Yeardon said.

Radio Jazz

Alan West is program director at WCUW radio, and one can tell he loves

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All that Jazz

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jazz. A 44-year-old young white man with a thoughtful bearing, he spoke articulately and deliberately about his concept of what jazz is... WCUW programs forty hours of jazz weekly.

"Essentially, jazz is music from an African tradition, nurtured in American soil. Our jazz programming is dedicated to listener awareness of improvisation as an art form throughout the tradition of a music called jazz," West said.

A recent poll, by the station's listener response to the jazz programming 10 be "very positive; and indicated that Worcester's jazz audience is growing. West has been instrumental in bringing to the city a monthly series of jazz concerts at the New England Repertory Theater on Oxford Street. A tiny theatre, seating only 100, its size is, in fact, an asset to the concert series, promoting a unique degree of communication between performer and audi-

ence. What lies in the future for the Worcester, Dot to mention the American, jazz scene? Nearly everyone with whom we spoke agreed that jazz appreciation and involvement are on the upswing.

"Worcester is actually a good town for jazz," said Carl Cooper of WICN radio, where 35 hours weekly are devoted to jazz programming. "People are becoming more aware of what jazz is."

The audience? "From about 22 all the way up," Cooper said.

In the recent past many talented, if lesser known, jazz lights lived and played in Worcester simply to make a decent living. No one could blame them for finding it ironic that they needed to leave the country which spawned the music in order to find wide commercial and artistic acceptance. But this situation seems to be beginning to change for the better. The multitude of different "schools" arguing over the essence of "true jazz" merely obfuscate the fact that it all is jazz music, from Louis Armstrong to Anthony Braxton. Jazz fans come more loyal to their music than can be said of, for instance, pop music fans, those who embrace the jazz spirit never let go. It is, after all, the most unique American art form.