Musical Literacy and Jazz Musicians in the 1910s and 1920s

By David Chevan

In 1988, I conducted a telephone interview with the African American New Orleans clarinet player Willie James Humphrey about his tenure from 1925 to 1932 in the riverboat band led by Fate Marable. During our conversation, I asked Humphrey if Marable had hired him because of his skills as a jazz musician. Although we were talking by phone I could feel the mood of the conversation change. Humphrey sounded irritated as he replied, "You had to be a *musician* [his emphasis], 'cause that's the only way you could get on there. You had to know how to read."

Humphrey caught me off guard. I had been working under the assumption that Marable would have hired New Orleans musicians because of their skills at playing hot solos. I could never have imagined Marable engaging Humphrey, a downtown musician, because he "knew how to read." What was I to make of such a strongly-voiced statement?

One need only think of how Humphrey's words complicate our reading of literature on jazz history, which so often describes the historical tensions and the social and musical disparities between the downtown blacks and the "Creoles of Color" in Humphrey's native New Orleans. According to most histories, it was the "Creoles of Color" who were the formally educated and musically literate group,[1] while the downtown blacks were, allegedly, trained by ear. Willie James Humphrey came from a family of former slaves with no known Creole blood. Yet his father was a respected music teacher in the New Orleans area who taught young players how to read music as well as how to play their instruments.

Humphrey's words, and especially his annoyed tone, served as a catalyzing agent that prompted me to reconsider the early history of jazz from the perspective of musical literacy as well as musicianship and musical training. Many African American jazz artists were studied musicians who might have chosen different career paths if the doors to certain working environments had not been closed to them. We could well speculate about the unrealized concert careers of Coleman Hawkins, a trained cellist who turned to the tenor saxophone, or of bassist Milt Hinton, who spent most of his youth playing violin and was one of the youngest high school students of his day to make the All-City Orchestra in Chicago (Chilton 1990:4, 6–7; Hinton 1988:24–25). These trained musicians sought environments that would challenge all of their musical skills, as readers, interpreters, and improvisers. They did not wish to be confined to

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a single category of music but, like Willie Humphrey, thought of themselves as "musicians."

The aim of this article is to consider the various ways that jazz musicians —both white and black—encountered and engaged with written music in the 1910s and 1920s. I have chosen an ethnographic approach to this subject. That is, this essay will privilege the voices of musicians, surveying and interpreting a broad selection of autobiographies, oral histories, and personal interviews of jazz musicians who grew up, studied, and performed during this period. The material from these primary sources has been sorted into five general sections that cover topics relating to how musicians learned to use written music and to the actual use of written music in performance. The resulting composite picture reveals a wide range of encounters with and responses to written music by these early jazz musicians.

Learning to Read Music

For many early jazz musicians, an attraction to music and the idea of making music began before they were first formally introduced to a musical instrument. Some grew up in musical homes where family members were professional or amateur musicians while others remember first hearing music at church, parades, or other community events. In many accounts, they recalled their attraction to the sounds musicians made and their desire to try to make such sounds themselves. Following these initial encounters, some musicians, such as Pops Foster, experimented with homemade instruments. Others, including Danny Barker and Clyde Bernhardt, formed kazoo groups with their friends and imitated the latest songs. The young Louis Armstrong began his professional musical explorations by singing in a street corner ensemble.[2] These ad hoc and informal settings prepared young jazz-musicians-to-be for their first encounters with real instruments and perhaps, to some extent, for their first encounters with notated music (Foster 1971:2–3; Bernhardt 1986:33; Barker 1986:36; Armstrong 1986:32, 34).

For musicians growing up in a musical household these first experiences were usually facilitated by a family member, typically a parent or sibling. Often a family member became the child's music teacher. Pops Foster's first bass was a cello with strings made of "twine rubbed with wax and rosin." His first teacher was his brother, Willie Foster, who taught him to play and to read. Soon, the Foster brothers and their sister, Elizabeth, were "playing lawn parties and birthdays in the afternoons and evenings" (Foster 1971:3). Eddie Durham was taught by his older brother to play musical instruments and read music: "I could read [music] because my brother studied music . . . he started teaching me trombone and guitar . . . and I could read" (quoted in Pearson 1987:5).

Barney Bigard received his first musical training from his uncle, Emile Bigard, a violinist and the leader of Kid Ory's Creole Ragtime Band. Emile began his nephew's musical education by tutoring him from the Lazarus Music Book, purchased from Sears and Roebuck. It was not until the young Barney had learned to recognize the note names and values that he was deemed ready to even begin playing an instrument, at which point he purchased a second hand E♭ clarinet (Bigard 1985:10–11).

There were many ways for a young musician to obtain training on their instrument. Some early jazz musicians were self-taught, or relied on informal instruction. Others studied privately with teachers, either in school or at home. Most African American communities in urban centers seem to have had at least one general music teacher who taught many different instruments and was responsible for the training and musical skills of entire generations of players.[3]

Singleton Palmer was one of many African American musicians from St. Louis who came of age in the 1910s and 1920s and studied music with P. B. Langford. In addition to giving private instruction, Langford led the Odd Fellows Brass Band. At rehearsals, Langford saw to it that young musicians had an opportunity to learn their craft by sitting alongside more seasoned players.

> What we would do, I would go take a lesson from him [Langford] and then, I think it was every Wednesday night down at the Union Hall . . . we would go down, us youngsters and he'd give us a few pointers then downstairs. Then, later on, upstairs, he'd carry us upstairs to sit beside the older musicians you know and play the marches. He had a darn good band, cause the older guys, they were really good musicians. (Palmer 1982:8)

Trombonist Robert Carter also studied with Langford. Carter's elementary school teacher, Harvey Sims, was inspired to form a concert band at the school. Sims asked Langford to be the bandmaster and, as it turned out, to teach the young children how to play their instruments.

> He would come out to school. There were about twelve of us in the band, and he played an E-flat cornet, and he would take the little band part and he would make the position on the notes, how you make it on the horn. Then he'd play the part on his horn, and you'd follow him. And, actually, I learned how to play. (Carter 1973:2–3)

Carter did not learn to read with Langford, only how to play the positions on his instrument. What we see here is the emphasis placed on the skill of using one's ear to learn to perform proficiently. It isn't clear why

Langford, who was clearly comfortable with written music, chose not to teach the children how to read. Perhaps the task of simultaneously teaching a large group of children basic performance techniques and reading was too great. Later, with the help of his schoolmate, Robert Johnson, Carter was able to arrive at a moment of conceptual awakening that startled him and left a strong and lasting impression.

> Most of the training that I have had has been with fellows. . . . Robert Johnson was one of the first guys that helped me. He said, "Come on. I'll help you," when he wanted me to join Bill Jeter's band. And that's it. Just been from playing with other musicians that can play, sitting down beside them . . . as far as the time, knowing one note . . . I didn't really know. Like a quarter note gets one beat and a half note gets two beats, I didn't really learn that until I . . . played with fellows like Robert Johnson. And he said, "Well, there's nothing to reading music. It's just a matter of arithmetic, and it just came to me like a bolt out of the blue." Well, it is . . . but I didn't know it. That's all there is to it, but I just don't know. (ibid.:31)

Carter's story reveals the importance of exchanges between younger and older, more experienced musicians. Vertna Saunders, an African American cornetist and trumpet player, was similarly frustrated by his early attempts at learning to read music. He relied on his ear to learn pieces. When his playing had developed and his lip strengthened, he was invited to play with a local lodge brass band. They overlooked his inability to read and "just took a little time" with him. One evening after rehearsal, an older member of the band took Saunders aside.

> So there was a trombone player in this band that was a letter carrier. He had a very, very nice disposition and attitude about life, very, very nice. So he asked me after rehearsal one night, "How you getting along?" I said, "Well my lip seems to be coming along fine, but I just can't learn to read." So I'll never forget this statement as long as I live. He said, "Well, I don't see why you should have so much trouble with it." He said, "anytime you see "C," it's in the same place. It's the first . . ." well, he played trombone and he told me this in the bass clef. He said, "Now you're in the treble clef," so he said, "it's the first space below the staff [*sic*]. If you here or in China. It's the same. "C." Its the same all over." I said, "Well, I thought "C" changed." He said, "Oh, no "C" never changes." He said, "What's on the first line of the staff?" I said, "Well, I don't know right now." He said, "E." Anytime you see "E," "it's got to be on the first line." He said, "What follows "E?" I said, "F." He said, "What is that?" I said, "The first space." He

> said, "Sure that's it." So I went on from there and he told me what instruction book to buy. . . . So I bought the instruction book and I could understand it pretty well. Just by the man telling me about "C" was always in the same place. (Saunders 1982:9–10)

One of the best known general music teachers in the New Orleans area was Willie James Humphrey's father, James Humphrey, but he was only one of several music teachers in New Orleans. For example, clarinetists Barney Bigard, Johnny Dodds, and Albert Nicholas all studied with Lorenzo Tio.[4] Nicholas noted that Tio "could teach as well as he could play," but just as important was Tio's musical literacy. Barney Bigard recalled that in choosing a clarinet teacher he had narrowed the field to two possibilities. One choice was a member of the John Robichaux Orchestra. In order to help Bigard make up his mind, a friend suggested that he attend a performance of the John Robichaux Orchestra at the Lyric Theater and sit directly behind Robichaux's clarinetist, Alphonse Picou,

> because he always sits with his music stand facing towards the audience. I want you to watch him read his music. I couldn't see what he was driving at but come Monday we . . . sat directly behind [Picou]. After a few bars it became clear that the old man never played one part of that music and I asked [my friend] what was happening. "He's playing by ear," he said. "Well, I'll be damned," I replied . . . (Bigard 1985:13)

Bigard eventually found the teacher he was looking for in Lorenzo Tio. Like Nicholas, Bigard held Tio's teaching skills in high regard and indicated that these were a reflection of Tio's skills as a musician. "Tio . . . was a great reader, even by today's standards," Bigard recalled. "He had real fast execution and he could improvise—play jazz in other words—on top of all the rest. He would even make his own reeds out of some kind of old cane. Yes, Lorenzo Tio was the man in those days in the city of New Orleans." Bigard was equally struck by Tio's ability to impart his ideas in a unique manner to every student. He noted that no two students of Lorenzo Tio played in the same style (ibid.:17).

The Dodds brothers were concerned with the development of their musical skills and studied with a number of New Orleans teachers. Warren "Baby" Dodds recalled that his brother, John, studied with Lorenzo Tio, as well as with Charles McCurdy. That Johnny Dodds was studying technique and not improvisation may be surmised from Bigard's observations that McCurdy was "quite a musician, but he wasn't a jazz player." Bigard noted that McCurdy could play anything written, but was not able to improvise; "it just wasn't in him" (Dodds 1992:14; Bigard 1985:17).

Baby Dodds began his studies with Dave Perkins but soon switched to Walter Brundy who taught him "the fundamentals of reading music." According to Baby Dodds this interest in formalizing one's studies by obtaining a private teacher, honing technique, and learning how to read music was not common among the musicians of the downtown African American community. Reading music, in New Orleans, was more common with the Creole community, and Dodds felt that he and his brother were exceptions (Dodds 1992:7–8, 13). But I would hesitate to accept Dodds's claim. He appears to be completely unaware of James Humphrey, and may well have not known who amongst his fellow downtown musicians were taking music lessons.

Although most music ensembles were separated along racial lines, early jazz musicians found that private teachers were ready and willing to teach anyone with an interest in music. A few white musicians, such as pianist Jess Stacy, studied with African American teachers, and the reverse was also true. Pianist Pete Patterson, an African American, was playing at the 19th Century Club in St. Louis when he was approached by the white conductor of the Orpheum theater, Dr. Bojes. Bojes invited Patterson to his studio for private lessons.

> He said, "Don't worry whether you have any money or not, because I'm going to give them to you free." . . . So, I went over, and he . . . taught me . . . he gave me eight lessons, and he didn't charge me anything . . . he would have taught me longer, but, you see, I was in music playing, and that was my living then. . . . He gave me three or four of those lessons which were nothing but scales, you know. He said that that was some of the best exercises you can have on the piano is to have those scales. . . . he explained some theoretical parts at times, and he would come up and show me, probably in diacritical marks. . . . Like I come upon a phrase and would have an Italian word there that meant thus and so. Or German . . . or they would have French. Well, he would tell me what that meant. "Allegretto" and "Allegro" and all like that, you know. He taught me all that, because I wasn't well aware of that, you know. I hadn't been playing that type of music that high up, you know. (Patterson 1974:4–6)

Patterson's experience was rewarding, and not unique. For example, while in Paris, Garvin Bushell studied with Henri Selmer (Bushell and Tucker 1990:68). Peg Meyer recalled that whenever Fate Marable's boat would dock in Cape Girardeau, he would invite Jess Stacy, a white teenager, on board to take a piano lesson. According to Meyer, "Fate would have Jess come on the boat and play for him; and in the process teach him how a pianist should play with a band, how to fill in the holes in

the ensemble, and how to back up a band member who was taking a chorus" (Meyer 1989:101). Stacy would later go on to play piano in Benny Goodman's orchestra.

In addition to studying music privately, some early jazz musicians were able to obtain a musical education at school. This usually consisted of playing in a school band or orchestra, or occasionally participating in group instrumental lessons, such as those taken by Robert Carter in elementary school (Carter 1973:2). In these settings, students learned to read music and develop their ensemble skills. These school experiences generally began during their high school years, although Vertna Saunders, Leon King, and Robert Carter, all African American musicians, began their studies in elementary school (Saunders 1982:3; King 1982:5; Carter 1973:2).[5]

Peg Meyer believed that playing in his high school orchestra developed his strong interest in music and enhanced his reading skills. Leon King's first ensemble experience was playing in his high school orchestra in East St. Louis. The ensemble regularly played through various orchestral overtures, and King noticed that his playing and ensembles skills improved dramatically (King 1982:5). When Druie Bess, an African American musician, began Lane Tech High School in Chicago he already had considerable experience playing the trombone. He was pleased to find a teacher there who could guide him further with the instrument. Bess's trombone skills were so good that he was not permitted to play in the band—he had to play in the orchestra (Bess 1971:4).

After high school, musicians might also leave home to attend college where they could continue their music studies. Among others, Lil Hardin studied music at Fisk University and E. A. McKinney received his music education at Tuskegee Institute between 1903 and 1906. McKinney recalled performing in three ensembles run by Tuskegee's music program: the preparatory band, the concert band, and the orchestra, all led by S. W. Grisham. As part of his training, McKinney studied all of the brass instruments. He specialized on the trombone, but also became familiar with the alto horn, trumpet, valve trombone, and French horn. McKinney found himself rehearsing with an ensemble almost every day of the week and noticed his reading skills improve to the point where he was good enough to tour with the school band (McKinney 1974:1, 7–8).

There were also musicians who were self-taught or who were motivated to continue their studies on their own. Those musicians who wished to develop their reading skills would often acquire and study method books or sheet music. Elijah Shaw bought "all the literature I could pertaining to drumming." In addition, he worked with a copy of George Hamilton Green's theory and study on xylophone (Cortinovis 1971:35). Buster

Bailey and his friends would learn the new popular tunes by purchasing the most recent copy of *Etude* magazine.

Another formal setting where early jazz musicians developed their musical skills was performing with a benevolent society band. P. B. Langford's band at the Union Hall and the Odd Fellows Brass Band in St. Louis were only two of the ensembles that were offshoots of such local societies. Many St. Louis musicians felt that the bands sponsored by local lodge chapters were important learning opportunities for young musicians. Similar stories have been told about the importance of bands affiliated with societies and organizations in New Orleans, and further research would most likely turn up comparable groups in other American urban centers.[6]

While early jazz musicians learned a great deal from their teachers in school and at private lessons, much of their education took place in less formal circumstances. It was noted earlier that Robert Carter and Vertna Saunders did not learn to read music from a teacher but from an informal and spontaneous lesson with another musician. These experiences mirror those of many other early jazz musicians who were profoundly affected by a few remarks made by a gifted peer or an older musician. Pops Foster spoke highly of the advice of his brother Willie. According to Foster, it was his brother who taught him and a number of other young New Orleans musicians the fundamentals of musical notation (Foster 1971:3, 82). Vertna Saunders remembered that a performance with Scofield Brown helped a great deal with score reading (Saunders 1982:30). Louis Armstrong credits David Jones with showing him how to "divide the notes so that whenever Fate [Marable] threw a new arrangement I was able to cope with it" (Armstrong 1986:182).

The earliest jazz musicians began their studies before there were recordings to use as models. As a result, observing musicians in performance was crucial to the development of a young musician. Clyde Bernhardt was told by his teacher, Albert Jones, to go out and watch other musicians perform. Bernhardt then found he could recognize when musicians were taking solos that weren't written in the music (Bernhardt 1986:36–37).

As a young boy, Leon King would go to a dance hall in Collinsville, Illinois, every Saturday night and stand in the window to watch Charlie Creath's band. He knew that Creath had the best musicians, including Zutty Singleton, but he never met them. King paid close attention to the numbers and tried hard to learn them; he also noticed that the entire band was reading music (King 1982:11–12). Preston Jackson would go to the Royal Gardens in Chicago to hear King Oliver's band and sit behind Honore Dutrey. He observed how easily Dutrey would play the cello parts

from stock arrangements on his trombone (Shapiro and Hentoff 1966:97).

Some younger musicians were sensitive to their technical weaknesses and hid them until they were compelled to improve. Vertna Saunders remembered that other musicians would make fun of him when they found out he could not read music. To compensate, he practiced by ear and was able to fake his way through rehearsals and performances until an older musician explained the intricacies of music notation to him (Saunders 1982:5–6, 9–10). Jimmy Harrison went back to the woodshed for some intense practicing after Fletcher Henderson fired him for not being up on his reading. When he returned, able to read, Henderson rehired him (Bernhardt 1986:62).

Five Specific Performance Contexts

Marching Bands

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, brass marching bands were an important component of African American benevolent societies and organizations in most midwestern and southern cities. Many young musicians, such as Singleton Palmer and Robert Carter, were given their first instrumental lessons under the auspices of these organizations, and they continued their studies by observing the older members of the brass bands perform. The number of societies and the demand for players was so great that musicians frequently played in more than one band. In the St. Louis area, for example, musicians played in bands for at least seven benevolent societies: the American United Knights, the Daughters of Africa, the Elks, the Knights of Pythias, the Odd Fellows, the Masons, and the United Brethren Fellowship. Brass bands played for a variety of functions including church ceremonies, picnics, advertisement for society events, and, perhaps most significantly, holiday parades (Palmer 1982:8–9; McKinney 1974:14–15, 37; Saunders 1982:8).

The best known jazz-related activity of the brass marching band was its function in the city of New Orleans at funerals. There are numerous accounts of New Orleans brass bands, sometimes as many as three or four, accompanying the funeral party to the cemetery with slow marches and solemn hymns. The bands would remain outside the gates of the cemetery until the mourners completed the burial. Once the funeral party was outside of the gate, the band, cued either by the drummer or the lead trumpet, would "put their [sheet] music in their pockets and everybody started wailing" (Shapiro and Hentoff 1966:16, 20–21). The musicians in the New Orleans brass bands were clearly comfortable both reading their parts and making up new ones.[7]

Most of these marching bands were made up either entirely or primarily of reading musicians. These were musicians who placed a high value on reading skills and on overall musicianship. Musicians were expected to execute a perfect performance—that is, to perform the piece as written. Further, these musicians would judge the musical skills of others based upon these specific values. Danny Barker used to listen to his grandfather, Isidore Barbarin, discuss the relative merits of individual performances with his friend and fellow musician, Mr. Taton.

> I heard them on the front steps discussing music and musicians very critically. The alto and baritone horns walked in front of the three cornet players in the brass band, and they would hear very closely and clearly who was and was not playing to perfection. . . . Musicians who replaced regular members of both of the great brass bands knew beforehand that when they were handed the music parts to be played that all the ears in the bands were listening sharply at what they were playing, whether right or wrong. (Barker 1986:7)

Individual musicians whose reading and performing skills were exemplary were praised and held up as examples for young musicians. The skills of clarinetist Lorenzo Tio, which have already been discussed, were treated as an exemplary model against which the musicianship of others could be measured. In New Orleans marching band circles, the acknowledged master on cornet was Manuel Perez.

> Manuel Perez was . . . the idol of the downtown Creole colored people. To them nobody could master the cornet like Mr. Perez. When this brass band played a march, dirge or hymn it was played to perfection—no blunders. Many of these marching musicians only played in brass bands, never in dance or jazz bands. (ibid.:26)

Similarly, kudos were given to Buddy Johnson, the trombonist for the Onward Brass Band. Isidore Barbarin described Johnson as "the greatest parade and reading trombone player who ever placed a 'bone to his mouth" (ibid.:64). In New Orleans, to be considered a good reading musician was high praise. It should be noted, however, that there were some marching bands that did not read at all. Nat Towles recalled playing in a marching band where there was "no music, you understand, we didn't know what a sheet of music was" (Shapiro and Hentoff 1966:16). Danny Barker does not mention whether any of these groups were discussed by Isadore Barbarin and Mr. Taton, but one could imagine that they would not have been viewed favorably.

Circus and Tent Show Bands

Some early jazz musicians spent a portion of their career performing in groups that accompanied traveling entertainment such as circuses, minstrel shows, carnivals, and tent shows. Most of these jobs paid well and were sought after by the better musicians. The music played by these bands served a number of different functions. Upon arriving in a new town, most traveling entertainment troupes would advertise their arrival with a parade. Before the show began the band performed overtures and light classics. During the show the musicians would accompany the acts, with virtuoso musicians performing solo features between acts. Following the performance the musicians would play exit music and later, on occasion, present music for dancing. As a result, the musicians who played in these bands were expected to be technically proficient as well as able to perform a wide variety of music (Pearson 1987:7–8, 9, 31–32; Bernhardt 1986:8, 23–26; Bess 1971:4–8; Bushell and Tucker 1990:11–12).

Garvin Bushell spent the summer of 1916 touring with the sideshow band for the Sells-Floto circus. The band consisted of African American musicians from throughout the South and was led by the arranger H. Qualli Clark. Since the ensemble was not the principal band for the circus, their repertoire only consisted of marches, popular songs, ragtime, and a few blues numbers (Bushell and Tucker 1990:11–12). The concert band that played for the show usually had twelve to fifteen musicians, but when a parade took place, the sideshow musicians and other amateur musicians were added to the ensemble so that the band could consist of anywhere from fifty to seventy-five players (Meyer 1989:119).

The musicians read their parts from stock arrangements and band scores. There were few special arrangements written for these traveling ensembles. Although most circuses relied solely on published scores, there were some occasions where original arrangements were used. Eddie Durham's facility as a reading musician enabled him to get work with the Miller Brothers 101 Wild West Circus. This job gave him his first opportunity to write and arrange music.

> I got started in arranging [when] I decided to go with the [Miller Brothers] 101 Wild West Circus. . . . They had two bands, a big white band and the black band. The black band was the jazz band, because they had a minstrel show over there. . . . The black band was a small band, but they still had three trombones and trumpets, and all that. . . . I'd get the guys to rehearse, [and] those old guys could play. . . . That's how I started writing, but it was all for me to learn harmony, because if I made any bad notes they could break away until I straightened up. . . . That's how I learned to voice, so much vocal and five part harmony, because I had to play around [and] . . . to

> experiment with those horns . . . when I left . . . I had my degree anyway. I graduated from Street University. (quoted in Pearson 1987:6–7)

Durham's description of his learning process as being similar to going to a university is reminiscent of Zutty Singleton's observation that working for Fate Marable meant that one was going to the "riverboat conservatory." These observations make clear that the musicians understood that these jobs served a dual purpose: as employment and as places where one could continue and expand their musical education. Durham's tenure as an arranger in a circus band served him well, as he later became an arranger for Count Basie and Glenn Miller, among others.

Movie Theaters and Vaudeville

The theater was also a venue where early jazz musicians could find employment. Traveling theatrical productions, vaudeville acts, and minstrel shows needed musically literate musicians to accompany them on tours, and most theaters also had permanent pit orchestras ranging from a single organ or piano to a full orchestra. The responsibilities of the local pit orchestra included playing music before and after the show as well as accompanying movies, vaudeville acts, and other traveling performers. For some theater owners, the ability to read the music provided for the band was more important than the group's popularity or overall musical ability. This is exemplified by two similar events, one in New York City and the other in Los Angeles, that occurred around 1920. In both instances, popular and well-known bands were hired as the pit orchestra for local theaters, but neither band contained strong readers. When the musicians were given written arrangements to accompany other acts and the movie, they could not play the music. Both bands were fired (Bushell and Tucker 1990:23; Foster 1971:122). Not all theater owners were so harsh in their demands. Garvin Bushell heard the local pit orchestras of many African American theaters. "They played jazz and had to improvise behind the singers. Bad notes didn't mean anything if the tempo was right" (Bushell and Tucker 1990:36).

Jesse Stone, an African American pianist and arranger from Kansas City, used to watch his father, a local drummer who played in minstrel shows, marching bands, and the local vaudeville theater. He noticed that all of the musicians, including his father, played from written music.

> One night they would feature my uncle [on trombone] in the pit, the next night they would feature my father on drums. . . . They could read music at that time, but they didn't know the definition of an arrangement. They knew it was handwritten music and even when

> I came up in school they called it "homemade music." (Pearson 1987:11)

Elijah Shaw enjoyed the challenge that came with playing in the theater pit orchestra for silent movies "because you had to play music according to the pictures." The band leader always received a list of cues describing the appropriate music for each scene and, if specific pieces weren't listed on the cue sheet, the musicians in the orchestra were free to offer their suggestions. Most theaters had music libraries with published music for this purpose. Some movies were shipped to the theater with music that included full scores and arrangements.

> I remember when we played the show for Douglas Fairbanks, that big picture he was in the Thief of Baghdad. They sent the music along with the picture, so we didn't have any problems . . . it came right along with the picture. So what we had to do was have a rehearsal . . . That was something. And any number of pictures, the music came right along with the pictures. (Shaw quoted in Cortinovis 1971:57)

There were also those early jazz musicians who played for the silent movies but did not take the job seriously. One group of white Chicago musicians performed pieces by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band with no regard for what was on the screen. Another group of white musicians in Massachusetts played the refrain from "Tiger Rag" during highly emotional scenes (Eddie Condon 1947:146; Kaminsky 1963:11). Not surprisingly, these groups quickly found themselves without a job. Such anecdotes raise the question of whether African American musicians valued reading skills more than their white counterparts. With employment opportunities already limited, one can imagine that there was more at stake in terms of social status and financial gain for African American musicians who could read music.

Most vaudeville acts and theatrical productions rarely made their home in a single theater. They survived and generated their income by touring. In general, musicians who performed for these productions also accompanied the tour. The larger productions were elaborate shows that could last up to two hours and contained a cast of over thirty-five people, plus the orchestra. While in the pit, the musicians read from parts, but all music played on stage was memorized. Most musicians who accompanied the large shows were good readers. While these touring groups, which were more typically small, well-rehearsed ensembles, preferred reading musicians, there were exceptions made for talented musicians who could not read music such as Sidney Bechet, who performed with Will Marion Cook

and his Southern Syncopated Orchestra during their European tour in 1919 (Bernhardt 1986:75, 78; Bushell and Tucker 1990:56–57).

There were even instances where musicians were required to memorize the music for an entire show. As Ma Rainey's music director, Thomas A. Dorsey wrote arrangements both for the small group that accompanied the tour and for the local pit orchestras. Rainey kept her band on stage and made it a part of her show. Dorsey had written and arranged the entire show—from "overture to finale"—and it was important that every musician know his part. Before the tour began Dorsey rehearsed the band "for four straight weeks, five hours a day" until they had memorized the music. Thus, although written music was involved in the performance, audience members would not have seen a single piece of sheet music used by the featured musicians (Harris 1992:91–93).

Recording Studios

One venue that frequently required the use of written music was the recording studio, and some musicians have left accounts that shed some light on the different ways that written music was utilized in such a setting. For example, Garvin Bushell discussed many of his early recordings and described pieces in terms of whether he was reading a part or improvising his line. This kind of information clarifies not only what specific pieces were notated, but also how the musicians felt about the music they were playing.

As in other environments, pieces might be fully notated, partially notated, or not written at all. Or the musicians might have memorized their parts and no longer relied solely on the score for their performance. A closer reading of some oral histories makes it possible to identify some recording sessions which used fully notated parts and some recording sessions where the music was completely learned and performed by ear.

Garvin Bushell recalled recording sessions from 1921 led by Perry Bradford that did not use written music. But Bradford had developed a unique method for obtaining a good performance.

> Perry Bradford used to direct those sessions with Mamie [Smith]. He'd stand on a big platform and make motions for what he wanted the instruments to do, moving his hands up for high notes, down for low ones. We knew so little about recording in those days. Compared to today's technology, it was like the difference between hitching a horse to a rig and having a Cadillac. If we'd just used common sense, we would have done things much different. (Bushell and Tucker 1990:22)[8]

"Common sense" in this instance probably means using written music. Baby Dodds remembered that there was little written music used by the

Hot Seven in rehearsal for their recording sessions with Louis Armstrong in 1927. The process for working out routines and details on the recording was informal and democratic.

> With Louis' outfit we used to have rehearsal and anything that we had in mind for any particular number we would work out then. He would tell each of us when to take a solo or when not to, and who would come in at different times. We weren't a bunch of fellows to write down anything. That would have made it too mechanical. We would stop and talk it out more than anything else. If there was any writing involved Lil [Armstrong] would write down what the musicians were supposed to do. (Dodds 1992:72)

Although Baby Dodds suggests that there is something "mechanical" about written music, he does acknowledge that Lil Armstrong was jotting down something during the rehearsals. In interviews, Lil discussed using her own arrangements for the New Orleans Wanderers sessions in 1926. Lil's notations during the rehearsals might have been little more than simple outlines in long-hand, such as reminders of the routines and solo order.

In contrast to the Hot Seven's parts, Baby Dodds recalled that Jimmy Blythe would "write out the parts and give each of us the part for our instruments" for his sessions in 1927 (Dodds 1992:71). A similar experience occurred when Jelly Roll Morton hired Dodds for his Red Hot Pepper sessions in 1927. Dodds recalled that Morton did not bring the musicians into the studio until the group had already met and rehearsed their parts to his satisfaction.

> During the rehearsals he would say, "Now that's just the way I want it on the recording," and he meant just that. We used his original numbers and he always explained what it was all about and played a synopsis of it on the piano. Sometimes we had music and he would mark with a pencil those places which he wanted to stand out in a number . . . he often gave us something extra to do, some little novelty or something. When we made "Jungle Blues" he wanted a gong effect and I think I used a large cymbal and a mallet to produce the effect he wanted . . . It took quite a bit of rehearsing on some of those to get just what Jelly wanted but he told us what he expected and we would do our best to get the right effect. (ibid.:74–75)

Garvin Bushell recalled that notated music was used when making recordings with Fletcher Henderson for Black Swan in 1921, but much of the time not every musician would receive a part.

> Fletcher was in charge of the record dates. He might pick the numbers in the office, present them to the vocalists, then we'd have a rehearsal and get it together. Often there were only two pieces of music, one for the piano and one for the trumpet (or violin). Sometimes everybody would have a part. (Bushell and Tucker 1990:31–32)

Even if there were only two pieces of music for all of the musicians, it seems clear that the crucial moment in this reading and learning process was during the rehearsal where the musicians would "get it together." It is unfortunate that Bushell does not explain why every musician did not get a part. Perhaps the complexity of the piece determined whether every musician at the session would even need a part.

Dances

Written music was often used by musicians who performed at dances in the 1910s and 1920s. The degree of literacy expected of the musicians appears to have been related, at least in part, to the level of formality of the event. This is reinforced by descriptions of some of the different types of dances played by musicians during this period. Social dancing from the turn of the century until at least the late 1920s retained certain formal characteristics. It was common for dances on the riverboats and in certain parts of southeast Missouri to use program cards. The card had numbered lines, and before the show began dancers would sign up on each others' cards; a placard by the band would announce which "number" was being played (Meyer 1989:131). In most cities, the "respectable" dance halls had someone to chaperon the activities on the dance floor. Danny Barker recalled that even one of the roughest rooms in New Orleans had some kind of chaperon to determine who could and could not dance in the venue.[9]

Peg Meyer, a white musician, performed for dances in a wide variety of venues, playing a ballroom one night and a low "dive" the next. Leon King, an African American musician, played for dances in fraternities, sororities, dance halls, and once, for a picnic on a makeshift scaffold. Dances held in formal settings, "high class places" such as hotels or dance halls, were more likely to hire bands where the musicians read music than those in less formal settings such as rent parties or "chittlin' stomps" (Meyer 1989:97; King 1982:5–10, 20–23; Foster 1971:43).[10]

There was a "high-class" and "low-class" continuum in both African American and white communities. Bands were organized to work with a general type of venue in mind and their ability to read music played no small part in this matter. For example, John Robichaux's band in New Orleans was a reading band and was able to work its way from public dances in Lincoln Park to private dances in upper class venues, eventually

becoming in 1919 the house band at the Lyric Theater, the city's premier black theater. In contrast, Buddy Bolden's band, a group that did not rely on written music for performances, was featured at a hall whose nickname was Funky Butt.

Perhaps the versatility and the variety of genres within its repertoire was the best measure of the degree to which a band would rely on written music. Pops Foster believed that repertoire played an important role in determining the venue where a New Orleans musician or band might be hired. "It was a rule in New Orleans if you didn't play any blues you didn't get colored jobs, and if you didn't play lancers you didn't get Cajun jobs. White jobs didn't care what you played. The Tuxedo Band didn't play any blues; they were a ragtime band and didn't get colored jobs. They got a lot of show jobs and later on some of the dicty affairs" (Foster 1971:54).[11]

Foster's delineation tends to coincide with particular venues, genres, and the presence or absence of written music. Bands that played "dicty affairs" would perform pieces such as lancers and were reading bands, while bands that played blues, for the most part, were not. Race was not the ultimate factor that determined whether written music was used by a band. Many bands that played dances for African Americans read music on the job. Leon King remembers dances for African American lodges where the performance consisted of playing stock arrangements straight, playing the stocks with changes, and playing head arrangements. The bands that played the Monday night black dances on the Streckfus boats in St. Louis functioned in a similar manner (King 1982:20–23; Peretti 1989:74).

As has been noted above, the repertoire of dance bands reflected the musical tastes, styles, and expectations of the audiences who attended specific venues. The pieces developed by a group were generally molded around these expectations. Some groups, such as King Oliver's band, had distinct repertoires for different audiences. Clyde Bernhardt recalled that Oliver usually called "smooth, sweet modern numbers" for white audiences and "when we worked colored places, which was often on our Mondays off, we played a lot of blues and jazz numbers" (Bernhardt 1986:97). Bands that could read music usually had a larger repertoire than those that could not. Ensembles with musically literate and technically skilled musicians, or that frequently rehearsed, were in a better position to play more demanding and complex pieces than those that did not.

Pete Bocage recalled that his father, who played in a turn-of-the-century New Orleans dance band, did not play any jazz. All of the music his father played was read by the ensemble; some of it was in manuscript while other pieces were published. "And they had a set of books they called 'Manhattan Books'—dance books, you know," Bocage remembered. "Well they had quadrilles, they had mazurkas, and they had waltzes, and they had

lancers and varieties, and all that type of music they played those days" (Bocage 1959).

When Johnny St. Cyr began playing in New Orleans, "a band would have a repertoire of about thirty or forty numbers." The musicians he knew and the bands he played with consisted primarily of reading musicians. When they needed new "written music, the musicians would buy it at the big music stores, Werlen's or Grunewald's, then change it around to suit themselves" (St. Cyr 1966:6–8; Hennessey 1994:5).

Ragtime was played by most turn-of-the-century dance bands. Many musicians considered "Standard High Class Rags" (better known as the Red Back Book), a collection of band arrangements of ragtime numbers published by John Stark, to be an important source for their repertoire. The Red Back Book was one of the primary sources for Scott Joplin's music. Musicians growing up in New Orleans and Chicago recall hearing local groups perform Joplin numbers from the Red Books (Bocage 1959; Mezzrow 1972:29). There even was competition amongst musicians for good arrangements of new pieces. Pops Foster belonged to a musicians' club and purchased ragtime numbers by Scott Joplin, Tom Turpin, and Walter Jacobs by mail order. "For a dollar you got four numbers. When we got a number nobody had, we'd cut the title off the sheet and write 'Some Stuff' up there and put a number on it to keep track of them. If a guy would ask what it was, we'd say 'Some Stuff' and that way he couldn't order a copy of it" (Foster 1971:78).

Bands with large repertoires were careful to program their sets to include a wide selection of styles. Clyde Bernhardt was impressed with the variety in King Oliver's 1931 performances. The band's repertory included

> Hot numbers like "Tiger Rag" so the guys could show off; the "St. Louis Blues," "Beale Street," and the "Memphis Blues;" waltzes and standards such as "My Wild Irish Rose," "Danny Boy," and even "O Sole Mio"; Oliver originals like "Mule Face Blues" and "Boogie Woogie." [Oliver] also did "Lazy River," "Stardust," and other new tunes and introduced many songs just as fast as they came out. (Bernhardt 1986:96)

Peg Meyer carefully planned the repertoire for his performances from the first song to the very end of the night, and always kept his band's crowd-pleasing showmanship at the forefront. Meyer rotated the various types of dance tunes systematically to allow the dancers to plan their dance cards. "We played fast and "wild" numbers for one-steps, bouncy melodious tunes for the regular fox trots, blues for the slow fox trots and grinds, and waltzes. We usually programmed our evening using this rotation, and with the program card system the dancers could not only select

their partners for the evening but could select the type of dance and tempo" (Meyer 1989:132–33). In contrast, Pops Foster heard some New Orleans dance bands that only performed ragtime numbers: "If you danced to ragtime you could grab the chick and squeeze her anyway you wanted to" (Foster 1971:73).

Reading Skills and Regional Differences

The general level of musical literacy and technical ability in the 1910s and 1920s varied regionally. Touring musicians were in a good position to notice the differences in musical practice around the country. While some regional differences may have been slight, there were occasionally cities or regions where musicians encountered a higher level of musicianship. In the eyes of many musicians, musical literacy and technical ability were seen as linked—a technically adept musician was one who could read and play his part well.

For example, in 1921, while on tour with Mamie Smith in Chicago, Bushell was struck by the musical literacy and technical fluency of Doc Cooke's band at the Sunset Cafe and of Erskine Tate's Vendome Theater pit band. "They could read—or some of them could, the ones who played the Vendome Theater. Chicago jazzmen had the advantage in those years of having a crack at theater music before the New York jazzmen did. They improved their ability that way, and so could read a little better than jazz musicians in the East" (Bushell and Tucker 1990:25–26).

While Bushell considered Chicago to be a good reading town, he found the level of musicianship to be high in many other locales as well. In Baltimore, Bushell encountered many skillful, technically adept jazz musicians.

> There was good jazz in just about every cabaret, no matter how low or cheap. Baltimore musicians had more technique than the New York players, I don't know why. They were very fly, smart, creative improvisers. But they didn't play the blues the way the musicians from the South did. Their jazz was based on ragtime piano practices, and piano ragtime influenced the way they played their horns. They also had the best banjo players in the world. (ibid.:34)

Bushell doesn't comment on the musical literacy of these musicians, but his comments regarding ragtime suggest the importance of written music in the ragtime tradition. Buster Bailey grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, and recalled playing a hot style of music. As a teenager, Bailey played with W. C. Handy's band, among others. Bailey believed that the biggest difference between the music in New Orleans and that of his native Memphis was that New Orleans musicians improvised more: "ours was more the

note variety. We played from sheets" (Shapiro and Hentoff 1966:77). Pops Foster remembered that W. C. Handy's band played society dates throughout the South. Foster thought that Handy's band played as though the music had been through-composed, with little or no improvisation (Foster 1971:90).

St. Louis native Vertna Saunders visited New Orleans while playing trumpet on the riverboats. He heard Papa Celestin's band, a small big band, and was not impressed with the way the group read its arrangements.

> Now the largest band that I ever heard in New Orleans was the band they called Papa Celestin. . . . He had a large band, but it was just a lot of men in the way . . . they were reading. They had arrangements. The style that the New Orleans musicians played, they were much better in small groups. (Saunders 1982:71–72)

As a young boy growing up in Louisville, Kentucky, trombonist Dicky Wells "never heard that New Orleans 'tailgate' sound style." According to Wells, the bands in Louisville tended to be larger ensembles that played mostly from stock arrangements with room for improvisation (Wells 1991:9). Garvin Bushell was not impressed by the musicians that he heard in 1922 during a trip to the West Coast. He felt the jazz there "was nothing compared to the Midwest, East, and South." Bushell's critical and discerning ear noticed a good deal, and his observations make clear how carefully musicians were listening to one another and watching how each other were performing. He knew which bands had good readers, which bands had good improvisers, and which had both. Bushell recognized the value of musical literacy, technical proficiency, and of just plain sounding like a good jazz musician. The values Bushell held were shared by many other musicians, since these ideas could be found in varying degrees in all regions of the country.

Reading and Faking

After moving to New York City, Bushell joined a rehearsal band that met once a week. These rehearsals exposed him to material that he might encounter on a bandstand (Bushell and Tucker 1990:16–17). Bushell's combination of reading and "faking" skills appears to be typical of many early jazz musicians. As noted earlier, it was possible for a musician to be exclusively a reading player, such as Charles McCurdy. In addition there were numerous players, such as Sidney Bechet, who read very little or did not read music at all. These musicians relied on their ear skills and were known as "fakers." Jack Weber observed bands composed of readers and fakers in New Orleans. According to Weber, high class musicians could read, and dance musicians could not. Weber also noted that some of the

fakers believed that "if they learned how to read, it would ruin their ability to improvise!" (Shapiro and Hentoff 1966:59).[12]

For some, reading and faking may have been opposite sides of the same coin, but Pops Foster recalled that musicians would learn their music from parts and, after memorizing it, would no longer use the written music. Playing from memory and the process of embellishing, eliding, and otherwise changing the part over time, should be understood to be a part of the process of faking. Foster also stressed the idea of rehearsing as a social activity; it was a way for musicians, family, and friends to gather and spend time together.

> Everybody wanted you to rehearse at their house so they could have some fun. . . . We'd start rehearsing about eight o'clock in the evening and play till eleven or midnight, according to when the juice ran out. You'd be rehearsing inside and people would be dancing outside. After we'd play a number three or four times we didn't need the music anymore. Everybody who played in New Orleans had to memorize. I can still remember a lot of numbers we played back in 1909. I hear one bar of it and I'm ready to romp. (Foster 1971:58)

Foster's incorporation of reading music, rehearsing, memorizing, faking, and socializing into a single continuum reveals how much reading music was part of the culture in his home. The interaction between reading and faking was also present on the bandstand. Those musicians with good reading skills had to prove their ability in order to get work in reading bands, and they had to survive the constant scrutiny of other musicians continuously assessing their abilities. Musicians with strong reading *and* faking skills might be put in the position of choosing between jobs that involved primarily one or the other of these talents. These musicians were concerned about how associating with non-reading bands would affect their reputation and future ability to acquire work. There was also the give and take that took place in bands that consisted of a mix of reading and non-reading musicians. Finally, there were occasions when musicians who read found themselves having to pretend that they were faking.

Some trained musicians who wished to perform in dance bands had to learn how to fake. Alphonse Picou's first encounter with a group that specialized in faking illustrates how this learning process took place.

> I was invited down to the rehearsal that night and I went to the place and I said to him, "What do you want me to do?" I said, "Do you want me to play my instrument? Is there any music?" He said, "Music? You don't need none." I said, "How am I going to play?" He said, "You're going to come in on the choruses." I said, "All right," and then I

tuned up; we all tuned up our instruments. He said that when I couldn't come in, to stay out and listen until I could come in. I did just what he told me and we got into it, and through with it, and the whole band shook my hand and told me I was great. . . . That particular style of playing without music was very new to me. I think it was impossible to me! It seemed a sort of style of playing without notes. (Shapiro and Hentoff 1966:19)

Later, Picou found that even faking bands relied on reading, or at least on the readers in the band. Rehearsals were held to learn new music, usually from published parts. The material was memorized and "then, after that we didn't need that music no more. We'd go out of the way with it" (ibid.:59)[13].

Most faking bands had at least one reader to teach the other musicians the written parts. In the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Eddie Edwards would show other players their parts. Likewise, Elmer Schoebel and Arnold Loyacano demonstrated the arrangements for the other members of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings who could not read (ibid.:61, 82).

Baby Dodds found that he relied on both his reading and faking skills when he played with King Oliver. Oliver led a reading band, but he expected his musicians to put in more than was written on the paper, and when he counted in the song Dodds was ready to comply.

When I got there the first piece of music they put in front of me was Canadian Capers. I asked Joe [Oliver] how he was going to play it. He said from the left hand corner to the right hand corner; from top to bottom. The trio was in the middle of the number. I said "Kick off," and Joe kicked off. I read that piece of music down, from side to side and I went back to the trio. I had played that number once and knew it, so I began playing my own style of drums. (Dodds 1992:33)

When Clyde Bernhardt arrived in New York City from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1928 he had to prove that his reading skills were up to the local standard. He was hired by band leader Herb Cowens for his first New York job on the recommendation of trombone player, Dicky Wells. Bernhardt was aware of his outsider status and his need to prove himself to the other musicians on the job. This need was reinforced by the treatment he received when he arrived to play and only two of the musicians on the bandstand spoke to him.

The first set, Herb Cowens told me to lay out if I come to a hard part, not try any passage I couldn't play. There was no rehearsal. We played two sets. The music seemed like average arrangements—I saw

> no hard parts. As we started the third set, Cowens called some of his best jazz arrangements and I heard [Ray] Corn and [Bill] Lewis whispering loud that everybody going to see some good fun now. "This gonna be reeeeeel good," they were saying. "This boy's goin' back where he come from, fast." So Cowens stomped off a set that included Black Maria and Beau Koo Jack, difficult pieces that asked for your butt. But I knew right away they were the exact stock arrangements Henry McClane [a Harrisburg band leader] used, the latest songs ordered from Feist & Feist direct from New York City. When my solo part came, I stood up and easily played it note-for-note as written. And very loudly so that everybody could hear. Before I sat down I put in a little extra stuff especially for Corn and Lewis. After the set, Cowens came over. Said he knew I never seen those numbers because only New York bands played such hard arrangements, and here I read them all at first sight. Bill Lewis jumped up when he heard where I learned to play. "Man, all them Harrisburg niggers read as fast as you?" Ray Corn was slapping me on the back, said those numbers cut even the best sharks in town. I acted like I thought it was easy music—never told anyone I been playing those same arrangements for months and almost knew them by heart. Kept my mouth shut and nobody never found out. . . . After word got around the Band Box about my fast reading, jobs started coming in. (Bernhardt 1986:66–67)

Once he had proven himself in an adverse setting, Bernhardt was able to establish himself as a viable contender in the highly competitive New York music scene. Nor was this the first time that Bernhardt was given a job on the merits of his reading abilities. When Pittsburgh band leader Tillie Vennie invited him to play trombone for her band she praised his reading by saying, "All your parts were correct. You [are] playing better than you think you are" (ibid.:46).

Vennie's evaluation of Bernhardt's reading skills was not unique. Given the highly competitive atmosphere of most jazz environments, it was only natural that musicians were constantly assessing one another's abilities, not only in terms of reading, but in terms of other skills. Pops Foster remembered that most leaders had differing expectations concerning how their musicians should read and execute figures. He was frequently criticized, especially by James Humphrey, the father of Willie James Humphrey.

> He [Humphrey] was always saying, "You'll never be a musician," and "You'll never play nothin'." We'd be playing some place and he'd start worryin' me with, "You'd better learn how to read." I'd say, "Oh man, go hide yourself," or "don't rush yourself, go ahead and play."

> Those old guys wanted to read and play different than we did. Jim Humphrey and John Robichaux wanted to play one way, and Freddie Keppard and us wanted to play ragtime. Old man Humphrey didn't like anybody who couldn't read, and he didn't like the way I picked the bass; he wanted me to bow it. (Foster 1971:86)

It is striking that Humphrey and Foster equate reading with being a musician and playing well, and it is a reminder of the opening quote by Willie James Humphrey. It is also worth noting that Foster indicates that reading was expected from musicians playing differing styles of music in New Orleans. Moreover, Foster's comments indicate that there was a view of musical literacy amongst the younger New Orleans musicians that was creating a division by generation. The "old guys" wanted the younger musicians to read and perform in a specific manner. The younger musicians, such as Foster, were not necessarily opposed to reading music, but they also wanted to just "go ahead and play."

Despite this apparent generational difference, Foster was ultimately influenced by the musical values of Humphrey and his peers. Foster's autobiography is filled with critical assessments of musicians' reading skills. It is all the more interesting that Foster reserved his harshest criticism for musicians and bands that could not read music.

> The bands that couldn't read could play nothing but choruses. They'd play nothing but chorus after chorus. . . .
>
> There were a lot of players around New Orleans who would only play with their own band. Some of the guys were Ory, Frankie Dusen, Albert Nicholas, and George Brunies. Those guys couldn't read so good or couldn't read at all, and they couldn't go into other bands and start playing. Ory couldn't read too good and couldn't find a note either. If he wanted B-flat he couldn't slide up to it and blow, he'd have to slur his horn up to it. He'd stop when he got on the note. I was always able to play with any band by reading or playing by head. That's the way I played with so many bands around town. (ibid.:74, 50)

Foster recognized two distinct approaches to trumpet playing in New Orleans. He distinguished these styles by the timbral effect sought by the performer and by the reliance on written music. According to Foster, players like Louis Armstrong were of the "jazz type." These players did not use written music and they "played hot and made the band swing." In contrast, those trumpet players whose sound could be described as sweet would not play original breaks; "if they had to play a break, it had to be written for them." The one exception to this, according to Foster, was

Bunk Johnson. Foster aslo held a low opinion of New Orleans pianists. He believed that most could not read and "could only play in one key like F-sharp." He added sarcastically, "most of the bands couldn't transpose the music to play with them." According to Foster, Johnny Dodds once sought him out for advice about getting work outside of New Orleans. Foster told Dodds to "study and train . . . to play with any band and not just one" (ibid.:50, 77, 99).

Foster expressed admiration for Big Eye Louis Nelson's ability to sight read the violin parts at dances and considered Buddy Petit "very pleasin' to listen to, even though Petit could read." This odd choice of phrasing suggests that Foster may have been of two minds about the relationship between reading and faking. On the one hand, he recognized the intrinsic value of being able to rely on one's ears and fake. On the other, he couldn't help but admire the beauty in the playing of his peers who could read.[14]

Preston Jackson and Mutt Carey also praised the reading and playing skills of Manuel Perez. Richard M. Jones and Clyde Bernhardt presented opposing views of King Oliver's reading skills. Jones thought that Oliver was "a good reader and a good technician. Anything you'd stick up, he'd wipe right off." Bernhardt, on the other hand, thought that Oliver's sight reading skills were weak. He even quoted Oliver as saying, "I'm the slowest goddamned reader in my band . . . you guys might read faster but damn it, you better wait for me" (Jones quoted in Shapiro and Hentoff 1966:96; Bernhardt 1986:91).

Clyde Bernhardt held the opinion that by 1927, "if you didn't read" there was "no place for you in a good-quality band" (Bernhardt 1986:62). It is possible to push the date earlier, for some dance bands that played "swing," "hot music," and "jazz" consisted entirely of reading musicians in the 1910s and 1920s. In New Orleans there was the John Robichaux Orchestra and Bab Frank's Peerless Band, and on the riverboats were the bands of Fate Marable, Tony Catalano, and Charlie Creath. There were some musicians in reading bands who would not play with non-readers. According to Clyde Bernhardt, "if a guy wanted me for a gig but his fellows was not good readers, hell, I rather not take it. Not good for your rep to play those bands and I knew it" (ibid.:87).

There were, however, many bands that employed differing combinations of reading and faking musicians. Danny Barker noted that most New Orleans bands hired "a fiddle to play the lead—a fiddle player could read —and that was to give them some protection." Jelly Roll Morton was under the impression that the only member of the Freddie Keppard Creole Band who could read was the clarinetist, George Baquet, and that was why he had the responsibility of playing lead. And, as was mentioned earlier,

Arnold Loyacano and Elmer Schoebel, the only two members of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings who could read "sort of helped the others when they needed it" (Shapiro and Hentoff 1966:20, 82, 90).

These various combinations of reading and non-reading musicians in the same ensemble are evidence that it is impossible to present a single model of oral and literate transmission in early jazz. What we find is a wide range of perspectives and practices. There were many instances when reading and non-reading musicians are working together and helping one another, but there are numerous instances where the musicians are competitive and will not even work in the same ensemble. Moreover, it is important to factor into this equation issues such as race, social class, and income.

There were times when bands of African American reading musicians found that they needed to pretend that they could not read. In New York, James Reese Europe led an orchestra that consisted primarily of reading musicians. But according to Thomas Hennessey, Eubie Blake recalled that Europe's orchestra never used written music when performing at white dances.

> Europe would buy full, stock arrangements of the popular hits of the day and rehearse his musicians, all of whom were good readers, extensively in this material, adding a few distinctive touches to make the arrangement fit the band. Once the arrangement was worked over, however, it would be memorized and the music would not be brought to the job. Mr. Blake stated that this was to avoid breaking the white stereotype that blacks were too stupid to read music and that their musical ability was a wondrous gift and not the result of hard work. To maintain this illusion, Europe, when taking requests would ask the patrons to sing a few bars of the melody and ask for a few minutes to "work it out with the boys." Then he would have the orchestra play the tune exactly as it had been rehearsed, to the accompaniment of amazed remarks by the audience about the natural talent of these Negroes. (Hennessey 1973:19–20)

Blake's story about Europe stands in stark contrast to what was discussed earlier regarding Thomas A. Dorsey. Dorsey trained his musicians until they had memorized their music because he wanted the band to look its professional best. In contrast, Europe trained his musicians to memorize the music in order to exploit the racist tendencies of his employers. The use of written music is featured prominently in both stories and its memorization reflects the need for both groups to satisfy professional demands. There was however, a different motivation for each of the leaders. The primary difference here is that Dorsey's audience was African

American and Europe's was white. Other differences may include region and social class. We know that African American bands led by Fate Marable and John Robichaux on the riverboats and in New Orleans read music in front of a white audience, but these audiences were not as wealthy as those in New York. It would be interesting to find evidence about how both these audiences actually felt about written music and its use by African American bands.

Conclusion

When Willie James Humphrey died in 1994, I realized that I would never have a chance to follow-up on our brief phone call. There were so many more questions that I wanted to ask him. I would have wanted to know more about the differences and similarities between the repertoire that musicians read versus the repertoire that they faked. I would have wanted to know about Humphrey's views on the differences between New Orleans musicians and the musicians he encountered on the riverboats. I'd have asked him about other uptown musicians who studied with his father. More than anything else, I would have wanted to discuss with him the idea of being a "musician."

Race has not played as large a role in this story as I had initially expected it would. There were African American musicians who placed a high value on reading and those who did not. The same could be said of white musicians. Musicians who wanted or needed to learn how to read found a way, no matter how many obstacles they encountered. What remains striking, however, is the emphasis placed on non-reading musicians by white music critics and writers of the 1920s and 1930s. One of the earliest examples of this is Charles Edward Smith and Frederic Ramsey's *Jazzmen,* which opens with a quote from Bunk Johnson that identifies the Bolden Band as the first jazz band because "it did not read at all" (Ramsey and Smith [1939]1985:v). The book continues in the same vein with a strong emphasis on the inability of the first jazz musicians to read music. Historian Kathy Ogren has identified "primitivism" as one idea central to these writers. She states that "white readers *believed* jazz performance could transmit the values of a simpler past into the furious present" (1989:151; emphasis in the original). I would suggest that for these writers the disregard of musical literacy helped add to that sense of primitivism, thereby affirming these values.

Although the many jazz musicians cited in this article came from different parts of the country, had different ethnic and racial backgrounds, and worked in a wide variety of environments, it is possible to establish the recurring presence of written music in their musical lives. It seems, from the perspective of the musicians, that playing jazz and reading music were not

separate activities, but could and did take place in the same environments. It also appears that the musical literacy of any individual mattered less than the presence of at least one reader in any given ensemble. As long as even one person in the group was able to read music, *all* of the musicians in the ensemble had access to written music. These readers created what might be thought of as circles of musical literacy, with most jazz musicians encompassed by these circles—given access to written music, whether or not they could read themselves. The idea of musical literacy was and continues to be shaped by social, cultural, and aesthetic values. In a sense, however, nearly every early jazz musician, even those who could not read music, encountered and interacted with written music.

Notes

1. See, for example, Collier (1983:56–57), Porter and Ullman (1993:23–24), Schuller (1968:70), Stearns ([1956] 1970:63–66), Tirro (1977:72–75), and Williams (1967:9–10).

2. For more on Armstrong's experience singing in this childhood quartet, see Abbott (1992:314–19).

3. Information about these music teachers has been obtained by surveying oral histories, primarily with African American musicians. It seems reasonable to imagine that similar kinds of conclusions could be drawn about white urban communities but more research is still needed on this subject. For example, it would be interesting to know about what kind of training these teachers had, the degree of their musical literacy, and how a person came to obtain the status of the local music teacher in large cities. Because a handful of names are repeated in the oral histories it is possible to determine who some of these teachers were. In New Orleans and the surrounding parishes the local African American music teacher was James Humphrey; in Chicago, Major N. Clark Smith; in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Joe Vennie; and in St. Louis, P. B. Langford (Peretti 1989:74; Hinton 1988:22–23; Palmer 1982:7–8; Bernhardt 1986:35).

4. For a detailed discussion of Lorenzo Tio and his family's pedagogical role in New Orleans, see Kinzer (1996).

5. Louis Armstrong remembered being introduced to the cornet during his court-ordered stay at the Home for Colored Waifs in New Orleans (Armstrong 1986:35–48). Jabbo Smith, Gus Aiken, Tommy Benford, and Cat Anderson were among the many young boys who learned their craft while playing in one of the Jenkins Orphanage Bands in Charleston, South Carolina (Chip Defaa 1990:192–95; for more information about the Jenkins Orphanage and its bands, see Chilton 1980).

6. Among the organizations that supported bands for young musicians were the Knights of Pythias, the Elks, the Masons, and the American United Knights and Daughters of Africa. In St. Louis, the Knights of Pythias band was led by William Blue; Sammy Long and Dewey Jackson were two of his students (McKinney 1974:37; Saunders 1982:8; Long 1973:1, 3).

7. While they may have been less common, practices similar to those in New Orleans were reported for funerals in St. Louis and Kansas City. Lawrence Denton remembered that during the summer in Kansas City he kept busy playing funerals on almost a weekly basis (Pearson 1987:18). Robert Carter and E. A. McKinney describe elaborate funeral marches to the St. Louis cemeteries. As a young boy Carter would frequently fill in for musicians who had to work during the time of the funeral procession. McKinney began playing in these parades around 1904. He remembered that the band might play a hymn or, quite frequently, "General Sherman's Funeral March" on the way to the cemetery. Then, "after the funeral had gone on, then that's when we'd swing around and get into it." "Getting into it" in St. Louis during the early part of the century meant playing ragtime on the way back from the cemetery. Carter's description of the St. Louis societies and their fraternal burial societies paints an image that is quite similar to accounts of New Orleans activities (Carter 1973:3–7; McKinney 1974:17–20, 23–24).

Marching bands were a frequent sight on the streets of St. Louis. During the 1910s, Singleton Palmer remembered seeing at least one parade every Sunday. The effect of these bands on some young boys was strong enough to create, in effect, a St. Louis version of the second line. The repertoire of the bands varied considerably. Some bands only played marches and pieces from the standard brass band literature while others included circus music, overtures, ragtime, waltzes, and occasionally jazz (Bernhardt 1986:51; Carter 1973:9; Pearson 1987:18; McKinney 1974:5).

8. This method is reminiscent of the contemporary practice of "conduction" by the composer and trumpet player Butch Morris. According to Morris conduction "is a means by which a conductor may compose, (re)orchestrate, arrange, and sculpt both notated and non-notated music. Using a vocabulary of signs and gestures, many within the general glossary of traditional conducting, the conductor may alter or initiate rhythm, melody, and harmony; develop form and structure; and instantaneously change articulation, phrasing and meter. For example, indefinite repeats of a phrase or measure may now be at the discretion of the new composer on the podium. In this way conducting becomes more than a method for musical interpretation, but an actual part of the process of composition" (Morris 1991).

9. For another view of dance halls and chaperons, see Badger (1995:82–83, 86–87).

10. For other views on playing in a wide variety of venues, see also Bernhardt (1986:54), Singleton in Shapiro and Hentoff (1966:17), Dorsey in Harris (1992:51–52), Bradford (1965:97, 122), and Smith (1975:65–67).

11. A lancer was a square dance of nineteenth-century origin, closely related to the quadrille. The band book of the John Robichaux Orchestra, housed at the Ransom Hogan archives at Tulane University, contains a wide repertoire of dance music that covers popular genres and styles from the late nineteenth century through the 1930s. I discuss Robichaux and his repertoire in Chevan (1997:134–95).

12. In a letter, the late John Steiner wrote to me in 1992 that "the bass saxman Spencer Clark used the still darker word 'cheating.' " It would be interesting to learn if other musicians ever referred to faking by this term, a value statement that implies some sort of wrong-doing on the part of the faker.

13. These recollections by Alphonse Picou help contextualize Barney Bigard's "discovery" of Picou "playing by ear" with the John Robichaux Orchestra.

14. A partial list of those black and Creole musicians whose reading skills were appraised by Foster includes Walter Brundy, Sidney Desvignes, Johnny Dodds, Louis Dumaine, Sam Dutrey, Freddie Keppard, Charles McCurdy, Albert Nicholas, Big Eye Louis Nelson, Joe Oliver, Buddy Petit, Alphonse Picou, Zutty Singleton, and Jean Vigne (Foster 1971:28, 44–47, 50, 77, 81, 83, 87, 89).

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