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THE FUNCTION OF A JAZZ ARCHIVE

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This paper is about the function, needs, and administration of jazz archives. The future of jazz studies and archives will also be considered. Finally, some of the difficulties of staffing and financing jazz archives will be noted. Throughout the paper, the Archive of New Orleans Jazz of Tulane University will be used as an illustration.

In the simplest terms, the function of a jazz archive is to preserve the jazz heritage, or that portion of the heritage to which a given archive is devoted, and make it available to people who need it or are interested in it. In this context, all of the following discussion is really about how this is being done, how it might be done more effectively, what unique problems arise when working with jazz archival materials, and what solutions might be devised to solve them.

The Archive of New Orleans Jazz was established at Tulane University in 1958. During the previous year I had talked to Dr. William R. Hogan, then Chairman of the History Department at Tulane, about basing a master's thesis on tape-recorded interviews with jazz musicians. It happened that Dr. Hogan himself collected jazz records and was impressed when I told him that I worked for and with Bill Russell, who has made a unique contribution to New Orleans jazz.

Dr. Hogan conceived the Jazz Archive and wrote a proposal which was approved by the Ford Foundation. The foundation gave a grant of \$75,000 to establish the Archive, with Russell and myself as principal researchers and Hogan as the administrator. Supplementary grants later brought the total to \$156,000.

This money carried the Archive through its initial collecting and cataloging phase, after which the University was committed to operate the Archive as a research center. On July 1, 1965, the Director of the Tulane University Library became responsible for the Archive. Since then we have continued to collect successfully, but to catalog with less success. However, the opening of the Archive has made great demands on our time.

We have over 8,000 records listed and well over 10,000 waiting to be processed; 11,821 sheet music items, about two-thirds of which are band orchestration; 1,270 reels of tape-recorded interviews; 678 reels of music; 32 reels of film; 5,448 photographs; and over 17,000 other archival items, including books, magazines, newspapers, catalogs, scrapbooks, posters, and notes. In all there are more than 40,000 items. (Totals updated to 1971)

Developing an effective card catalog for jazz presents unusual problems. At present we use an ordinary library card catalog, but have developed our own system of cataloging records, since there is apparently no standard form suitable for a sound recording archive. The Library of Congress phonograph record catalog cards are not very useful because there are too few headings to be added. For instance, the Blue Bechet LP on Victor has as a main entry simply: *Blue Bechet*. Who would ever look this record up under *Blue*? The suggested headings under which it is also filed are *Jazz ensembles* and *Bechet, Sidney*. The headings are typed on the tops of the cards, and the cards are filed alphabetically under "J" for Jazz ensembles and under "B" for Bechet. This might work in an ordinary music library, but a researcher needs more.

In the Archive of New Orleans Jazz, we shelve the records by the label and the catalog numbers. These serve as call numbers. They also serve as a point of entry to identify the record, and, as such, are familiar to collectors and discographers. The headings on the catalog cards, based on the label and any notes accompanying the record are: *leader, sidemen, band name, titles, composers, and arrangers*. We omitted matrix and take numbers, a serious error, as any discographer knows. This makes it difficult to find out which take we have without checking the record.

The ideal would be a union catalog and a union discography with maximum data available, and appropriate application of information storage and retrieval methods. The jazz recording union catalog could add many more points of entry including matrix and take numbers, place and date recorded, condition, and any collection possessing records, etc. Although books and magazines are useful in identifying examples of a general subject like blues or ragtime, researchers who are more concerned with classification and cataloging might want additional subject headings. Modern computer technology makes such a system feasible and might ultimately serve as a pilot for a union catalog of all sound recordings. This would be an invaluable research tool.

Storing matrix numbers of little interest to most scholars is important to discographers simply because they know whether a series of numbers is relevant or not. Not only do we need to know when the matrix numbers for a jazz recording date began and stopped, but the adjoining dates may be important clues. Sometimes personnel overlap. Don't over-categorize. For instance,

the Alabama Rascals' sessions of March 30 and 31, 1932, and the Big Bill and His Jug Busters' sessions of the same dates probably have some men on all sessions. The numerical listings show that the Alabama Rascals' "Beedle Um Bum" and "Biscuit Roller" were made just before and after Big Bill's "Long Tall Mama." Other matrices are adjacent in the listing.

The jazz union catalog would also help in locating requests for records. Existing catalogs and discographies are not complete or standardized. Where do you find a list of all recordings of a particular tune? How do you add new facts to a discography? Even the loose-leaf ones get out of date, assuming that they are completed in the first place. Discography is now so complex that teamwork is necessary. Since one answer to complexity is centralization, perhaps the ultimate solution is one jazz center.

An additional advantage of such a complete catalog is that the research is less likely to be inadvertently repeated.

On the subject of information retrieval, it should be noted that it is no service to have 200,000 records, as does the Archive at Lincoln Center, if your users do not know what you have. There is a great deal of discussion in the library field now, concerning both books and recordings, about developing an efficient catalog — one that is easy to put information into as well as get information out of — without diluting it beyond usefulness.

Once a computerized program is set up it is rather easy and inexpensive to modify it by adding a loop to a computer program and repunching a card. New and/or contradictory data can be easily added. Information on records is never definitive and often needs further investigation. Even record labels can be wrong. For example, according to Lizzie Miles, J. Russel Robinson accompanied her on "Black Man (Be on Yo' Way)," not Spencer Williams as the label reads. Aural evidence is useful, but doubtful when not confirmed.

The proposed union catalog and existing discographies would provide the basis for a union discography. The need for a research center with these points of entry and the sources of data is obvious. It would be of use to discographers, musicologists, performing musicians, cultural historians, and scholars from many other fields. Even the record companies might use this tool to locate copies of their own records to make masters for reissue. Discographers would find that the rapid sorting techniques and complete storage of information would save time and minimize useless duplication and uncorrected scholarship, etc. We desperately need universally accepted, standardized methods.

In addition to the union catalog, a method of exchanging sound archival material is needed. Why not loan tapes from one archive to another as libraries loan books? A researcher can get books sent to the Tulane library from out-of-town libraries. He can write for Xerox copies of rare archival material. Why not a similar system for sound archives? A taped copy of rare discs or tapes could be sent from one institution to another. Duplicate copies of unique tapes and rare discs could be deposited in another institution for use and as a safety measure.

A brief survey of existing jazz archives and libraries points up the need for coordination among them. Greater cooperation would not only result in more effective use of archival material, but of funds, as well.

In addition to the Library of Congress and the Archive of New Orleans Jazz, there are archival collections at Rutgers, the Arkansas Arts Center, North Texas State University, Emory University, Indiana University, the Smithsonian Institution, the New Orleans Jazz Museum, the European Jazz Federation Library Centre in Brussels, the Jazz Institute of Chicago, and other institutions. Of course, there is a great deal in the individual collector's possession too.

The John D. Reid Collection of American Jazz is housed in the Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock. The collection contains about 4,000 recordings, all 78s in excellent condition, with emphasis on jazz from 1917 to 1940. It also contains other archival material not described in the literature currently available. Some of the recordings are extremely rare. Doubtless there is a large number of unique copies in the collection. It is cataloged and ready for use, but has not been used. It would be worthwhile to make taped copies to be deposited in other archives both as a safety measure and to make the music available.

North Texas has a large collection of Ellington recordings. In 1969 Emory announced that it had received a collection of 2,000 books dealing with jazz, art, and linguistics.

The Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music consists of taped music and a few interviews. The tapes seem countless in number and are mostly folk music from all over the world, but there is some jazz. The Australian Jazz Archive is being organized in Melbourne.

Much blues, gospel and hillbilly material are in the John Edwards Memorial Foundation at the University of California at Los Angeles.

The Smithsonian has little jazz material, but wants to collect more. The European Jazz Federation is especially concerned with bibliography. There can be no doubt about the need to develop programs and techniques for pooling and exchanging these materials.

The numerous, unique, legal problems involved in reproduction of sound, especially music, further complicate the maintenance of jazz archives. The ownership of recorded music and interviews is not determined. Is it the record company? The composers? The performers? The publisher? All of these, and others? What are the rights of an interviewer? An interviewee? Is a battery of lawyers and a lobby needed in Washington to work on the copyright law? Perhaps the copyright lawyer of the Council on Library Resources should address himself to "this barrel of snakes" as Fred Cole, president of the Council, calls it. Perhaps a test case would clarify some of the legal issues.

An additional limitation on the development of a comprehensive archive is union restrictions. The Archive of New Orleans Jazz, for instance, is allowed to make documentary recordings, but not to copy them. Shouldn't safety copies be deposited in a similar institution? Could one get permission from

the union? Can commercially available recordings be copied? Is information on availability available?

The day-to-day use of archive materials presents security problems that must be dealt with. Will researchers sneak copies with small, portable, tape machines? Are the archivists responsible and trustworthy? Are security precautions adequate? Stolen music and interviews might even be sold.

The technical aspects of the standardization of recording and playback equipment, and the storage and preservation of material in sound archives, should be handled by specialists like John Reid, John Steiner, and Robert Carneal of the Library of Congress; M. K. Testerman of the Graduate Institute of Technology, University of Arkansas; and John Colvin of the Audio Engineering Society.

What kind of needle is best for copying 78s in poor condition? What do we do about hill-and-dale records? What is the best base for tapes? How can we cut down on search time for a particular tune on a tape? What about using cartridges? What playback and recording equipment has the lowest maintenance costs? What about print-through? We need to anticipate and try to plan for future developments. The founders of the Archive of New Orleans Jazz never dreamed of stereo when they applied for the Ford grant.

Should all discs be copied on tape? At Tulane the Paramounts and Brunswicks from the depression years have been copied. The rare items in a block can be picked out by catalog numbers. However, all the rarest records have not yet been taped because there has not been time to hunt them down. In addition to being a good safety measure, taping has enabled collectors to give us copies of items not in the Archive.

Interest in the oral history of jazz provided much of the initial impetus in establishing the Archive of New Orleans Jazz, and since 1958 the Archive has acquired over 600 interviews. Alan Lomax is generally credited with the first recorded interview with a jazz musician back in 1938, and one might say that oral jazz history began then. Lomax interviewed Jelly Roll Morton for the Library of Congress, and that interview remains one of the most fascinating and fantastic documents in jazz.

Unfortunately, private individuals did most of the interviews until 1958, and many are not now available. Again, centralization may be the key to systematizing efforts to retrieve these interviews.

Undoubtedly, the oral history aspect of jazz archives will grow in importance. The *American Archivist* carries many articles on oral history. The *Wilson Library Bulletin* of March, 1966, published an oral history symposium, and an Oral History Association has been organized.

Unfortunately, there are no documents on the early development of jazz music. The earliest jazz record known dates back only to 1917, long after the new style began to emerge. Not only were the record companies slow to become interested, but the music was considered too vulgar for anyone to write about. Like so many other aspects of American culture, it was deemed unworthy of any but the smallest notice. Therefore, the memories of musicians, dancers, and others who had an interest in the subject are the primary source on the early days of jazz.

In addition to providing information about the music and their lives, these people create vivid pictures of an era seen from a unique standpoint. The interviews will be of interest not only to jazz scholars and musicians, but also to journalists, anthropologists, sociologists, cultural historians, linguists, musicologists, and folklorists.

The Archive has been developing new interviewing techniques in the post-Lomax period. One new direction involves interviewing obscure musicians and non-musicians, who often give us a new perspective. These supplement interviews with more famous personalities whose answers sometimes seem too pat.

Our interviewers attempt to obtain as relaxed an atmosphere as possible. To make the interviewees less conscious of the tape recorder, the interviews are generally conducted in the interviewees' homes, and are not rigidly structured. A list of suggestions and standard questions is used as a guide, but often the most revealing statements emerge from casual asides and comments. Although biographical data are well documented, the interviewers also encourage the unexpected. Interviewees might ramble from one subject to another and reveal a new facet of their personalities, or suggest a new insight into their music. Some questions are purposely vague to allow latitude in the answers. Explanations are sought rather than simple yes or no responses. If this technique is not productive, then specific questions are asked.*

Fortunately, the interviewees are generally articulate, cooperative, and enjoy reminiscing. Although their formal training is usually limited, they appreciate the value of history and are keenly aware of the development of and changes in musical styles.

Because of the time element, the Archive interviewed the oldest people first. One woman was over 100 years old and sang variants of several hymns. Sick musicians have been interviewed and particularly appreciate the chance to make history and get paid besides. Many of the musicians interviewed have died.

The age of the subjects and the informality of the interviewing technique frequently require putting reminiscences into an historical context to elicit specific information. If the interviewer has a working knowledge of history,

*Much of the above material has been published in the WILSON LIBRARY BULLETIN, March 1966, Vol. 40, No. 7.

especially local history, or can link events to births, deaths, marriages, etc., the interview is often more productive.

Another source of oral history is jazz courses. When guest musicians are invited to discuss and demonstrate jazz styles, their colorful comments, singing, and playing are well worth preserving on tape.

In addition to tapes made by staff members, taped interviews are donated by people interested in jazz. Not all of these are Orleanians; musicians in other localities have been interviewed to provide contrast and to show the diffusion of jazz. Younger musicians from the United States, England, France, Germany, Sweden, and Australia have also been interviewed to document the spread of the idiom.

Tapes are never erased since no written transcription or digest is perfectly accurate. The spoken work expresses feelings which cannot be duplicated on paper. Also, it is easy to misunderstand the recorded word. For example, one secretary, in transcribing a tape, wrote "liar" for "lawyer," a grave error. Another wrote "Maple Leaf Rag" as "Make Believe Rag."

A further complication is that colloquial usage, local idioms, and trade jargon can be confusing. "musician" means one who reads music as opposed to a "head" or non-reading player. A jazzman who relies solely on his ability to improvise is simply not a musician in some circles. Therefore, the tapes are retained as reliable primary source material.

Originally, it was thought necessary to write down every word the musicians said. Later it was decided that, in the interest of time, a brief digest with editorial comments would satisfy most research needs and would make the material more readily available.

Paul Crawford, a professional trombonist, arranger, and graduate of the Eastman School of Music, did most of the summaries of the interviews. His wide acquaintance and playing experience with musicians are a valuable background for writing up their interviews. After he completed a draft, it was checked against the tape and, if necessary, editorial comments are added. The tapes are then indexed with references to people as well as bands, places, and other subjects.

So that the taped material may be used by researchers, the interviewees sign releases which permit quoting of their exact words. If they refuse to sign, the interview may be cited, but not quoted.

Unfortunately, there has been too little use of the interviews. Researchers are much more interested in phonograph records. They are enjoyable and an ideal starting point if you cannot get live music, and are good historical documents as well. The Archive not only has New Orleans jazz on disc, but also examples of the folk, popular, and classical music which provided the background of New Orleans music. In addition, there are some records of later developments in jazz.

Although enormous progress has been made in recording and preserving jazz, there are still areas which deserve more attention. Barry Martyn, an English drummer and owner of a documentary record company, suggests finding more unissued sound recordings and making more documentary recordings of existing music, especially functional music. Almost-lost styles can be recreated through imaginative planning of band personnel and the use of old scores.

More air shots should be issued. These are often excellent demonstrations of how a band played on a dance job as contrasted to its studio work.

The use of film as a documenting technique could be expanded. Films should be made documenting the music and musicians. Folk instrumental techniques which will otherwise be lost might be preserved on film. In another area, instrumental instructional films using animation and slow motion can demonstrate things a music teacher never could.

Finally, written notes by observers and participants are invaluable as a documentary source because newspapermen and jazz writers have generally neglected current happenings. New Orleans journalists ignore many of the jazz traditions which are kept alive as part of community life. For example, the neighborhood dance halls continue to hire jazzmen; the Masons employ jazz brass bands in laying the cornerstone of a church; and Orleanians still put jazz to its original use as dance music for private parties. These events seldom make the newspapers in New Orleans. Charlie Suhor in *Downbeat* of June 12, 1969, discusses jazz and the New Orleans press at great length. The situation is not confined to New Orleans since jazz exists underground all over the country and throughout much of the world.

Another need is adequate space for efficient working conditions, something too often ignored in colleges and universities. In addition to enhancing the operation of an archive, space enables it to accept donations from private collectors, estates, etc.

I believe that the need for a ragtime archive, a blues and spiritual archive, and even a rock and roll archive is apparent. The latter illustrates how quickly material becomes scarce. Try to find a rock magazine from 1952.

Who has used the Archive of New Orleans Jazz? Among them are jazz musicians, generally foreign, also some record collectors and discographers. Others are people who are just curious, visitors from abroad sent to us by the State Department, mass media people, especially writers, TV producers, and film makers. There have even been a few students and teachers, but the fact that so few have used the Archive is a disappointment to me.

These, then, are some of the things necessary for a jazz archive to preserve effectively and make available the jazz heritage: a union catalog and complete discography specifically designed and indexed to meet the requirements peculiar to jazz studies, a standardized system for the exchange and distribution of archival materials, clarification of union regulations and legal technicalities governing jazz materials, standardization of recording and play-

back equipment, more written coverage of jazz activities, and space and equipment for efficient operations and expansion.

How these needs, and others, are to be met brings us to the question of staffing and financing. Recruiting staff members is a major consideration in any organization. There are no standards of scholarship or established requirements for a jazz archivist or administrator.

It is possible that a type of interdisciplinary approach would be useful. For example, discographers are qualified to examine and identify recordings, and musicians are knowledgeable about sheet music, while historians, sociologists, and anthropologists can contribute by placing jazz in its historical, social and cultural context. In addition, the research discipline and techniques of social scientists are useful tools in jazz research.

Perhaps some sort of clearinghouse of personnel references or a screening committee would simplify hiring procedures.

As a corollary, young people with ears, some brains, and an interest in jazz must be encouraged and ultimately trained as jazz archivists. Notice the kids who come to hear jazz, who play jazz, who collect records, who do research. They have experience and insights that no school can provide. Com-petent, interested people should be encouraged to explore jazz studies as a possible profession. Volunteers can do good work, but their duties should be carefully explained and supervised.

The staff needs flexibility to produce. The most important work is out of the shop. You can find valuable 78s and photographs in junkshops, provided you can get out from behind the desk. You have to meet people who can help you, especially collectors and musicians.

Paul Crawford, who works in the Jazz Archive once played trombone with Al Ballanco's band. Ballanco mentioned that he had parts of John Robichaux's library of stock arrangements. Naturally, the Archive obtained them, and they are the one collection that interests young musicians most. In fact, there are three LP's made from these arrangements. Personal contacts are invaluable.

Money from educational and philanthropic institutions does not come to jazz projects in any amount approaching the real needs of researchers and students. There is often a reluctance to accept any new musical style and it is reflected in the difficulty of changing curriculum and facilities to meet new needs and interests.

Moreover, most universities are over-committed, and state universities may be subject to the pressures and interests of politicians. For various reasons, some of which are economic, there is little community support for art centers. All this signifies a lack of support for jazz and jazz studies that results in compromises and policies which, though necessary perhaps for the survival of an archive, curtail its effectiveness.

The Archive of New Orleans Jazz is without funds to fulfill properly and maintain the intent of its grants. The budget did not allow for the purchase of a complete sound system. It was decided that the best equipment, within reason, should be obtained even though this meant having only one turntable and one amplifier for two listening booths. Eventually more electronic equipment will be bought. Since cheap playback equipment means unsound equipment and false economy, it is believed that the present equipment will save on maintenance costs.

Paradoxically, the success of the Archive has become one of its problems. Originally the Archive was conceived of as primarily an oral history project. However, donations of records and sheet music from collectors and record companies and heavy usage of the Archive have created a substantial backlog in cataloging, shelving, tape transcriptions, and filing.

The only solution is foundation grants and gifts of large sums of money from rich alumni and jazz lovers. The alumni look richer than the jazz lovers. Getting grants requires time, again a precious item. You must have also a good imagination, the ability to write, a talent for selling and organizing, and a lucky break. Somehow, contact someone in power who likes jazz and appreciates its importance; its meaning. He can find the right foundation and ram a project through.

An urgent matter is supporting individual researchers before it is too late to get at the data. They are first-rate scholars. Why shouldn't a jazz discographer or an oral historian get some help? Foundations give grants to fiction writers --- why not to individual jazz researchers? They do invaluable work.

These are some of my ideas on jazz research and research tools. Perhaps your job will be easier with my suggestions for the developing of a union catalog and discography, the exchanging of tapes of music and interviews, and increased use of film and written notes. I hope to see improved archives, better cooperation among archives, and more effective use of archival materials.