

**“The Crossroads of the World”:
A Social and Cultural History of Jazz in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, 1920-1970**

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A Social and Cultural History of Jazz in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, 1920-1970**

Colter Harper, PhD
University of Pittsburgh, 2011

This study examines the social life and cultural history of jazz in Pittsburgh’s Hill District. Comprised of the city’s third and fifth wards, the Hill is located on the upward sloping eastern border of downtown that, in the first half of the twentieth century, fostered a thriving social life marked by the intersection of music, entrepreneurship, and a shifting demographic landscape. The scope of this study includes the decades between WWI and the 1968 riots sparked by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King—a period that encapsulates the emergence of jazz as an American cultural practice and the development of the urban African American neighborhood. Focusing on the lives of performers, venues, as well as the social contexts of the neighborhood’s nightlife, I examine jazz as spatial practice, i.e., as both born from and a force in constructing the social spaces, physical places, and economic contexts in which it was performed. The lower Hill—particularly the intersection of Wylie and Fullerton—represented for the majority of white society a place of poverty, vice, violence, and crime. For this area to be embraced publicly by black print and radio media as a symbol of the neighborhood’s identity demonstrates the ability of the Hill’s African American community to construct understandings of black lives, social spaces, and places that reflected the black cultural autonomy from white society. Paradoxically, the Lower Hill—the city’s poorest neighborhood—was able to develop a space that, for many, was “the crossroads of world.” This study employs the visual studies methodology known as “photo elicitation,” in which images are used to draw forth data in the context of semi-structured interviews. The images used in my interviews with local musicians and audience members were taken from the Charles “Teenie” Harris archive and depict a range of musical activity in the Hill between the mid-1930s to the late 1960s.

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PREFACE

I came to Pittsburgh in the summer of 1994 about to enter 11th grade and was immediately drawn into the city's jazz scene. I had recently experienced a minor revelation while living in the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York where I was working summer jobs between living in Florida and Pittsburgh. It was while having breakfast in my apartment that I heard John Coltrane's *Blue Train*, one of several records that my roommates would rotate during our morning routines. I had heard jazz before but had never felt deeply engaged with it. As I listened to drummer Philly Joe Jones spur on the band, Coltrane fill up the room with his rich tenor sound, and Lee Morgan trace beautifully crafted and virtuosic melodic lines, I was suddenly struck with an appreciation for the process of the music. It was the interplay of the musicians and the joy of what I would later come to experience as the process of improvisation that was calling to me.

In Pittsburgh, I began to take guitar lessons and hear jazz in the city's various clubs. One of the earliest jam sessions I regularly attended was at the Hill House, which was a community center located in Pittsburgh's Hill District. I had heard about the session from a friend who I was practicing with and was anxious to test what I learned at home and in my lessons. The jam session took place on Sunday evenings in a hall that sat about three hundred patrons at folding tables arranged in long rows. Around four in the afternoon musicians toting instruments and people from the neighborhood bringing food and drinks began to fill the hall. The event, run by

veteran Pittsburgh musician Horace Turner, was free for musicians and listeners alike. It was there that I first experienced the music as a community event and learned to rely on my ear and the collective process of improvisation that fed the listeners the experience they sought. It was also where I first experienced active listening from a knowledgeable audience. The audience, mostly African American, was made up of veteran listeners who had experienced the great jazz artists of the 1940s, 50s and 60s.

In the following years, I was drawn into a network of musicians and venues that took me to every corner of the city and in contact with a broad cross section of its communities. I would regularly drop in on venues such as the Balcony, James Street Tavern, Foster's Bar and Grill, the Crawford Grill, Too Sweet's Lounge, and the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild. On a weekly basis I could hear Pittsburgh musicians such as Don Aliquo Sr. (s), Don Aliquo Jr. (s), H.B. Bennett (dr), Kenny Blake (s) Dave Budway (p), Maureen Budway (voc), Dwayne Dolphin (b), Dr. Nelson Harrison (tr), Roger Humphries (dr), Greg Humphries (dr), James Johnson Jr. (p), Ken Karsh (g), Mark Koch (g), Dave LaRocca (b), Jimmy Ponder (g), Bill Purse (g), John Purse (g), "Spider" Rodinelli (dr, voc), Lou Stellute (s), Eric Susoeff (g), Mike Taylor (b), Horace Turner (tr, p), John Wilson (tr), and Leroy Wofford (voc). As I began to sit in at jam sessions I was fortunate enough to play with and learn from musicians of my generation including Howie Alexander (p), Tony DePaolis (b), Danielle Eva (voc), Chris Hemmingway (as), James Johnson III (dr), Paco Mahone (b) Carolyn Perteete (voc), Alex Peck (dr), Nathan Peck (b), Skip Sanders (p), Paul Thompson (b), and Tom Wendt (dr). Without the support, encouragement, and inspiration of these musicians I would not have come to be a part of Pittsburgh's musical tradition and been inspired to write this dissertation.

This study would not have been possible without the support and guidance of my parents. They have offered continuous insight and inspiration as I have sought a life in music. It is rare to have parents who not only encourage but also have the expertise to guide one in their artistic and scholarly goals. I would like to thank my mother Suzan for her insights as a visual artist and for lending her multi-media skills in designing the maps used in this study as well as my father Doug for his insights as a sociologist and photographer as well as his careful editing.

I also owe a great deal to those professors and graduate students with whom I have worked during my graduate studies at the University of Pittsburgh. My advisor Nathan Davis has been an indispensable aid bringing the perspectives of a veteran performer to the scholarly study of jazz. History professor Larry Glasco has been a rigorous editor and contributed a great deal of time and expertise to shaping my writing and ideas. Professor Andrew Weintraub has been a great influence through seminars and discussions and continuously pushed me to engage the theoretical rigors of ethnomusicology. Professor Bell Yung has also been a great guide through his seminars on ethnomusicology and Charles Seeger, raising my scholarly standards through focused criticism. I would also like to thank my colleague Oyebade Dosunmu for his input and encouragement during our long writing sessions as well as his patience in dealing with my abilities as travel guide through Eastern Ghana.

I would also like to thank chief curator Louise Lippencott and archivist Kerin Shellenbarger of the Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh and Charles “Teenie” Harris Archive for providing the images reprinted here and for coordinating our work on Pittsburgh history. I simply would not have undertaken this study if not for the archive of Harris’ photos and must express a great appreciation for the cultural wealth their work has produced.

Finally, I want to thank Michael Glabicki, Liz Berlin, Patrick Norman, Preach Freedom, Dirk Miller, Larry Dawgiello, and Mike Hammer of Rusted Root for keeping my life full of music and for being great companions on the road over the past four years. The band became central to my creative life as I worked on this dissertation and so has contributed greatly to my ideas about the communities we build through music.

The abbreviations for instruments in this study are as follows: saxophone (s), trumpet (t), trombone (tr), piano (p), Hammond B-3 organ (org), guitar (g), drums (dr), vocals (voc).

All photos are by Charles “Teenie” Harris (American, 1908-1998) except for the promotional shot of the Fred Averytt big band (figure 17). The numbers included in the figure captions are accession numbers given to the photos by the Teenie Harris Archive. I have included these numbers to more easily reference the images within the Archive’s online search engine located at <http://www.cmoa.org/SearchCollections/search.aspx>. The photos are used with permission from the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study examines the social life and cultural history of jazz in Pittsburgh's Hill District. Comprised of the city's third and fifth wards, the Hill is located on the upward sloping eastern border of downtown that, in the first half of the twentieth century, fostered a thriving social life marked by the intersection of music, entrepreneurship, and a shifting demographic landscape. In the following chapters, I examine how jazz was connected to the social and economic changes experienced by the Hill District's community—in short, how the life of the community was connected to the life of the music. I focus on the decades between WWI and the 1968 riots sparked by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King—a period that encapsulates the emergence of jazz as an American cultural practice and the development of the urban African American neighborhood.

I focus on the places in which jazz was performed and the social spaces that those performances created to address the question of how music influences the construction of place, social space, and race. In the Hill, nightlife and music flowed into many social arenas. The neighborhood's main avenues were comprised of venues and public spaces in which people collectively constructed and enacted urban culture. Wylie Avenue was the main lifeline of the district, beginning at John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church and ending downtown at the Allegheny County Jail. Wylie embodied the range of the community's dynamics; a steadily increasing African American population interspersed with Italian, Syrian, Lebanese, Irish and Jewish immigrants, the close proximity of vice and piety, poverty and economic innovation, segregation and self-sufficiency. From the 1920s to the 1960s, jazz innovators such as Earl Hines, Erroll

Garner, Mary Lou Williams, Billy Eckstein, Kenny Clarke, Art Blakey, Ray Brown, Ahmad Jamal, Stanley and Tommy Turrentine, George Benson, Jimmy Ponder as well as generations of locally based musicians were nurtured by the clubs and dance halls on Wylie Avenue, Fullerton Street, and Center Avenue. Black disc jockeys such as WILY's John Christain, known as "Sir Walter Raleigh," and WHOD's Mary Dee were celebrated community members who gave voice to black music on the airways.¹ In the early 1950s, Mary Dee popularized calling the intersection of Fullerton Street and Wylie Avenue the "crossroads of the world." On or near this intersection in the heart of the Lower Hill District were black-owned or run businesses such as Goode's 24-hour pharmacy and Bobby Hinton's Grocery Store; nightclubs such as Stanley's, the Blue Note Café, and the Bambola; and two elite social clubs: the Washington Club and Loendi Club. Within the Hill's African American population, social organizations such as the FROGS and the Loendi Club provided the black upper class with networking and social outlets not open to them in downtown Pittsburgh. Ministers and "numbers writers" alike became influential figures that contributed to the life of the community. Gus Greenlee, Pittsburgh's most prominent African American businessman, gained considerable wealth through his control of the "numbers" or street lottery, used his profits for everything from running jazz clubs, to owning baseball teams, to making informal loans to black community members.

¹ William Barlow, *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), pg. 160.



Figure 1 “The Crossroads of the World.” Facing south at the intersection of Fullerton Street and Wylie Avenue. The Blue Note Café, Stanley’s Bar, Goode’s Pharmacy, and an Amoco Station occupy the four corners, c. 1945 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.3181)

The grand epithet popularized by Mary Dee reflects much of what made the Hill an important focal point in the history of Pittsburgh jazz, African American history, and 20th century urban development. The Hill was a destination for workers from both the American South and abroad. This ever-shifting demographic makeup kept the Hill in constant flux, making it a place where daily life unfolded in unique ways. For decades, the busy Wylie avenue intersection bustled with business and social life that did not exist in other parts of the city or region. Trumpeter Chuck Austin recalls visiting the Hill as a child and having the “eye-opening

experiences” of seeing “sidewalk preachers and Muslims and guys [dressed] like Marcus Garvey.”² From the 1910s, the Hill was recognized as a place where revelers flocked for new experiences. It became a place where the local and national intersected, where ideas and artistic practices were exchanged and developed, and where an African American community could, to some extent, operate on its own terms.

The label “crossroads of the world” speaks to the perseverance of the neighborhood’s ever growing African American population to shape a strong community within a segregated society. The lower Hill—particularly the intersection of Wylie and Fullerton—represented for the majority of white society a place of poverty, vice, violence, and crime. For this area to be embraced publicly by black print and radio media as a symbol of the neighborhood’s identity demonstrates the ability of the Hill’s African American community to construct understandings of black lives, social spaces, and places that reflected the black cultural autonomy from white society. Paradoxically, the Lower Hill—the city’s poorest neighborhood—was able to develop a space that, for many, was “the crossroads of world.”

² Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

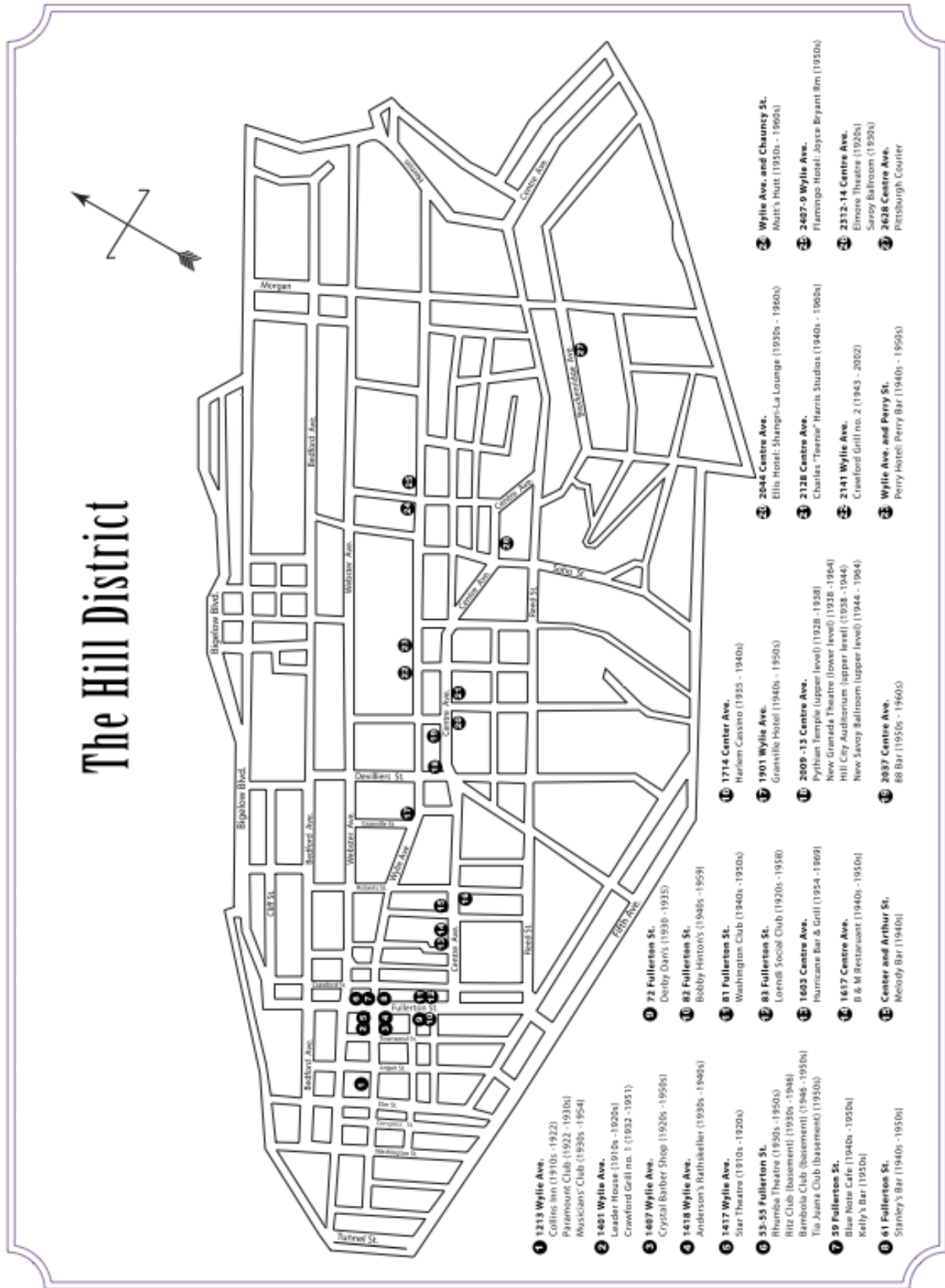


Figure 2 Pittsburgh's 3rd (Lower Hill) and 5th (Upper Hill) Wards before redevelopment in the 1950s

Music venues were focal points of social life in the Hill in an ever-shifting community. They were an integrated part of the Hill's economic infrastructure, as well as places in which cultural memories were reified. **Figure 2** shows the Hill District, comprised of the 3rd Ward or Lower Hill and the 5th Ward or Upper Hill (east of Devilliers Street). The venues and businesses along Wylie Avenue, Fullerton Street, and Center Avenue comprise the neighborhood's entertainment infrastructure. Buildings, such as those at 1213 and 1401 Wylie, housed close to four decades of nightlife and music, and provided generations of musicians and audiences places in which to construct community through music.

Reverberations of the Hill District's musical life could still be felt in the mid-1990s when I began to sit in at neighborhood jam sessions. One of the first venues I performed in was the Hill House, a community events center located in the heart of the Hill District. I was a fledgling guitarist who at fifteen had "discovered" jazz and was intent on learning how to play it. Private lessons acquainted me with the grammar of the music but it was not until I stood on stage in front of the Hill's veteran jazz listeners that I experienced jazz as a mediated process and functioning part of social life.

After being called to play, I found myself onstage with five other musicians whose ages spanned five decades. Horace Turner, the leader of the session, called Miles Davis' composition "Four" and began to count it off. I panicked and leaned over to the bass player and said, "I don't know this song, is there a chart?" to which he replied, "Don't worry, just listen." Without written music, I was left only with unfolding process of interaction among the musicians and between the musicians and listeners. A trumpet player stated the melody as the rhythm section responded with unison rhythmic punctuations. I found the key and began to quietly pick out bass notes against which I tried to hear the chord quality. From that emerged the song's form: eight bars

repeated followed by eight bars of new material, followed by the original eight bars. When my turn came to solo, I quickly found myself lost in the song's form. The rest of the band, sensing my inexperience, guided the song back to the melody. As the horn players and rhythm section took solos over this form I could hear responses from the audience, occasionally interjected during a pause in the solo or during a particularly heated moment. As I attempted to solo, I became acutely aware of audience members and musicians alike following my struggles to negotiate the unfamiliar song. Eye contact and body language made it clear that the music I was experiencing was communally constructed. As the months passed I became more comfortable with the process of listening and reacting, appreciating and commenting, leading and supporting. Though I pursued training under various teachers and in a university program, my most valuable experiences learning the music came from these and similar experiences participating in the life of jazz venues.

Through the jam session, I was introduced to a new community of listeners, socializers, and musicians, all of whom drew from the neighborhood's tradition of music making. Once a week, I would see the drab events hall of the Hill House transform into a bustling community event where listeners and musicians reconstructed experiences and emotions from the neighborhood's past. It was in the Hill House that I first began to hear stories of the neighborhood's musical legacy. People spoke with reverence about clubs such as the Crawford Grill and the Hurricane Bar and the artists that would bring world-class performances to their small, smoky rooms.

Just as I began to become aware of these shared cultural memories and social experiences I was also becoming accustomed to the spatial dynamics of performance. Jam sessions at the Hill House were much more than musical performances. It was a place where community members

and jazz fans alike could socialize, catch up with old friends, enjoy home cooking, and just sit back and relax. Within the large hall, some would sit close to the stage, attentive to the music, while others sat further back and talked. The din of conversation melded in the echoing hall with the music creating a multi-layered sonic backdrop. If the band entered into a ballad, listeners might pause a conversation to take in the more reflective musical moments. Likewise, hard swinging numbers might catch the attention of someone mid-sentence in the entrance alcove or adjoining courtyard as it did when the sound of a local guitarist soloing on stage sent the individual I was talking with into stories about famed guitarist George Benson and his early days playing the small Hill clubs. As I continued to attend the Hill House jam sessions and branch out to other Pittsburgh clubs, I began to understand jazz as a living tradition tied to community spaces rather than a static collection of ideas and sounds housed in my steadily expanding library of recordings and books.

This study explores the roots of the music tradition that I encountered in Pittsburgh's Hill district through a historical examination of its venues as well as the social and economic contexts of jazz performance. I examine how broad societal trends, localized urban community dynamics, social norms of music venues, and the creative life of musicians intersected through a period of five decades. While this study will frame the jazz tradition within a broad context, much of this work focuses on case studies of individual venues and performers that were active from the 1920s to the 1960s. It is my hope that this will provide an in-depth picture of jazz in Pittsburgh's Hill District as well as a fuller understanding of developments in jazz within the political, social, and economic context of the first half of the twentieth century.

While the Hill District is the oldest and most culturally diverse African American community in Pittsburgh, it does not comprise the whole story of African Americans in

Pittsburgh and is by no means the only neighborhood, predominantly black or white, that fostered a vibrant entertainment culture. Due partially to Pittsburgh's hilly terrain, African Americans did not settle in one or two centralized homogenous communities as they did in other Northern cities with less restrictive topography.³ Within the city limits, African American communities existed on the North Side, East Liberty and Homewood neighborhoods. Outside the city limits, African American communities existed in the thriving mill towns that spotted the region. Many musicians within Pittsburgh worked in these smaller communities and many musicians, such as bassist Mike Taylor and trombonist Harold Betters moved from these outlying towns moved to Pittsburgh for work.

Neither is the story of jazz on the Hill exclusively a story of African American community formation. While the Hill remained a focal point of African American culture through the 1960s—maintaining connections with African American communities in other Midwestern, East Coast, and Southern cities—it was also distinct in its ethnic diversity. This diversity offered the potential for cultural interchange that was lacking in other Pittsburgh neighborhoods. After African Americans, Italian Americans were the foremost ethnic group in Pittsburgh to contribute jazz musicians. This is likely due to the long-standing mix of Italian and African American communities:

The integration of Pittsburgh's Italian and black populations occurred as early as 1890 in the Strip District, in the lower hill, and in certain northern sections of the city. By 1930,

³ Laurence Glasco, "Double Burden: The Black Experience in Pittsburgh," in *City at the Point*, Samuel Hays, ed., pg. 70.

every Italian neighborhood except Bloomfield contained black residents, and every black neighborhood contained Italians.⁴

The importance of this cultural cross-fertilization is apparent in the statement of Italian American drummer Chuck Spatafore:

I was born in the Hill [in 1933] and I think that's where I got my sense or feel for the blues because I used to go to the revivals up the street from where I lived. There was a black church right on our corner on Bedford and Elm. We'd be playing outside and would hear the music and go in. It really gave you some sort of roots and direction. Where else would I have heard that type of music?⁵

Examining jazz within a community context allows us to engage the music's inherent paradoxes: jazz as both an African American tradition and a worldwide musical practice, jazz as both a higher art form and popular music, jazz as both a localized practice and international phenomenon. Historical approaches in jazz studies often reduce the music to a progression of styles underplaying the music's importance as a socio-cultural phenomenon that enables performers and listeners to engage modern urban life and the patchwork of identities shaped by economic status, ideas of racial difference, gender roles, technology, and changing aesthetic tastes.

The Hill District, more than other Pittsburgh neighborhoods, embodied these paradoxes as well as the shifting nature of American urban lives and landscapes. During the decades framed by WWI and the riots following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, the Hill District underwent great social and physical change. Broad events such as the northern migration of

⁴ John Bodnar, ed, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960*, pg. 210.

⁵ Chuck Spatafore, interview by author, September 10, 2008.

African Americans, prohibition, the Great Depression, urban redevelopment, the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, subsequent labor desegregation, African American social unrest, failing local industries, and the inner city riots of 1968 reshaped urban life throughout the United States and resounded strongly in Pittsburgh's Hill District.

These broad reaching events shaped the Hill District and subsequently its musical life. For instance, the Great Migration of millions of African Americans from the rural South to urban North reshaped the demographic makeup and social life of the Hill, creating an increased demand for entertainment during the 1910s and '20s. During World War II, nearly one million African Americans served in the military, bringing a new world-view to many restricted by social and economic boundaries. Though the military services had been integrated, soldiers returned to the country they had defended to find it unapologetically segregated, spurring the Civil Rights movement. African American musicians who had served in the military returned home with exposure to new musical experiences and national developments. The Civil Rights movement would achieve its long struggle for equal rights in the workplace with the 1964 Civil Rights legislation, though this would often play out to the detriment of African American labors when union mergers, particularly the Musicians' Union merger, favored the white contingents. Finally, unrest over social and economic conditions within African American neighborhoods came to a head with the riots following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King.

Meanwhile, the mid-1950s initiated city development projects that reshaped the cities into their modern form. Whole neighborhoods were cleared for highways, housing projects, arenas and scores of other projects that would usher in a new urban façade and changing performance spaces. The Martin Luther King riots as well as urban planning irrevocably impacted the business infrastructure of the Hill District and coincided with the decline of jazz

performance within African American communities and the music's functioning as an integral part of African American culture.

1.1 METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

I approached this study as a visual historical ethnography. The study is visual in that I employed photos taken by *Pittsburgh Courier* photographer Charles "Teenie" Harris (1908-1998) to elicit interview data and analyze physical contexts of jazz performance. The study is historical in that it constructs a diachronic narrative within a bounded time period. The ethnographic elements of the study emerge from interviews that focused on cultural norms and social environments. This study is organized chronologically by decade and is structured around the discussion of specific venues, artists, and community members that shaped the community's musical life. I chose to organize the chapters by decade so to frame the Hill's musical life with events of national and international significance, such as World War I, Prohibition, the Great Depression, World War II, the urban redevelopment projects of the 1950s, the civil rights movement, and the inner city riots of 1968.

The photos are taken from the Teenie Harris Archive housed at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. The archive contains close to 80,000 photos of which roughly 60,000 have presently been digitized and made available through an online search engine.⁶ For this project I have used 173 photos, which were generously printed by the archive director Kerin Shellenbarger. Forty-nine of those are reprinted here with permission from the archive. I have

⁶ <http://www.cmoa.org/teenie/intro.asp>

chosen photos that focus on jazz musicians as they performed in Hill District venues as well as the social life of those venues.

Harris was a skilled photographer, able to shoot effectively in various lighting and spatial situations. He was also intimately familiar with the neighborhood and individuals that he photographed. In the 1930s, Harris was a successful “numbers man,” working for his brother William “Woogie” Harris and collecting bets for the “numbers” lottery. In an interview with Ralph Hill, then a Ph.D. student at the University of Pittsburgh, Harris recalled how he came to work as a photographer:

The *Courier* was a side job. The numbers is what was really in, but I liked newspaper work so I got out of the numbers. I opened up a studio of my own on Center Avenue. My brother loaned me money to open up. He said, “Brother, you can’t make money taking pictures.” I said, “I can try.” When I first went to the *Courier*, I was on a percentage basis. I was doing too good so they put me on a salary of 35 dollars a week. I had a big Cadillac [from picking up numbers]. It was 1936.⁷

Harris became one of many black photographers freelancing in the Hill District and continued to document the neighborhood for decades to come. He became a public figure, shaping an identity around his activity as a photographer. His public persona in turn fed how he was received by the community and those he photographed. Pat Reid, who worked for the *Courier* from 1958 to 1961, recalls how Harris’ personality played a role in his photography:

I was thinking of Teenie with those deep dimples. Teenie was very good at taking pictures because he was like a comedian and he would make a lot of faces. Though he

⁷ Ralph Lemuel Hill, *A View of the Hill—A Study of Experiences and Attitudes in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania from 1900 to 1973* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1973), pg. 131.

wasn't trying to be funny. He would talk and those dimples would go in and it would make people smile. They were attractive and they would attract your attention because they were so deep. I think he knew that he was nice looking and he used that when he wanted to...when he was taking pictures of females. He'd flash those dimples. I think what happened was as a result of how Teenie's antics were, with his eyes and smile, over to the side, sort of provocative, he elicited the faces—you can see it in his pictures—the people seem very relaxed and that was real because he was very quick at relaxing people.⁸

Harris also developed a keen eye for the intricacies of social life in the neighborhood. Often he would frame his shots to include as much context as possible knowing that the *Courier* would later crop out what was not needed for the given story. As a result, Harris' photos are a rich source for understanding the social dynamics of jazz venues. His photos demonstrate a consciousness of the varying perspectives that were interwoven around him. For instance, many images capture the perspective of the musicians. This involved sitting at a drum kit or perching on an elevated stage; a precarious place off limits to outsiders. Those shots of musicians performing are often framed to include aspects of the social environment. We see the act of performing as well as the processes of interaction between listeners and musicians that grounded these events in their locale. The photos allow us to experience the Hill as Harris did, as both a familiar home and a vibrant world to be explored and documented. As Mrs. Reid recalls, his skills as a photographer extended to how he understood his subjects:

He only needed to take one picture and he would bring it up to the *Courier* and we were going to press. You could send Teenie and he would get that one picture and it's going to

⁸ Pat Reid, interview by author, September 2007.

be good. He would just stand there and talk for a while and snap right while the person was talking. If he was observing a group he just seemed to know which angle...he would look for a while, he would go into a setting and he'd look for a while, he'd look around the subject like your face, to see you from another side, to look at your head size, look at what you have on. He could do that very quickly and he knew how to take the shot to bring the best out of you and to represent you. He would see if you were mostly serious and would probably take it when you are not smiling. If you in your normal course of conversation have a smile or a relaxed face then he would joke a little to bring that out. He was good at what he did.⁹

In addition to the photos, three collections of interviews were used in this study. The first collection consists of thirty interviews that I conducted. These were semi-structured interviews, which were based around varying numbers of photos that I chose from the Teenie Harris Archive. Twenty-five of the interviewees are musicians with the remaining five being club owners and music enthusiasts. Twenty of the interviewees are African American with the majority of the white interviewees being of Italian American decent. A list of the interviewees with biographical information is provided in Appendix A. My goal with these interviews was to focus on the individual's experiences with locations, events, and individuals in the photos. While I developed a questionnaire, I used it largely in reference to discussing the photos. I found that the photos made the recollection of events from fifty and even sixty years earlier much easier. Drummer Cecil Brooks II noted after looking at a photo of him performing fifty years earlier, "A lot of this stuff I forgot because there was no need to remember. If you hadn't brought these

⁹ Pat Reid, interview by author, September 2007.

pictures I would have forgot about this. It helps a whole lot. You take this stuff for granted and you don't document it.”¹⁰

There is precedence in anthropology and sociology for employing photos in interviews and the analysis of social-cultural contexts. John Collier, a photographer and researcher who worked for Cornell University in the mid-1950s, was instrumental in the development of photo driven studies.¹¹ In his paper “Photography in Anthropology: A Report on Two Experiments” (1957) and book *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* (1967/1987), Collier formed a qualitative research methodology that moved beyond photos as purely illustrative material, employing them to shape the data gathered. In general, Collier found that images brought forth a new interview experience and aided in structuring memories being recalled from distant events:

Photographs sharpen the memory and give the interview an immediate character of realistic reconstruction. The informant is back on his fishing vessel, working out in the woods, or carrying through a skilled craft. The projective opportunity of the photographs offers a gratifying sense of self-expression as the informant is able to explain and identify content and educate the interviewer with his wisdom.¹²

More recent studies have brought the term photo elicitation into use to describe Collier’s approach. Research published in journals such as *Visual Anthropology*, *Visual Studies* (originally *Visual Sociology*) and many other qualitative social science outlets has developed photo elicitation and other collaborative visual methods as a main component of visual methods. The

¹⁰ Cecil Brooks II, Interviewed by Colter Harper, November 19, 2008.

¹¹ Douglas Harper, “Talking About Pictures: A Case for Photo Elicitation” (*Visual Studies* vol. 17, no. 1, 2002), pg. 14.

¹² John Collier Jr. and Macolm Collier, *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* (revised and expanded) (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), pg.106.

specific use of historical photographs to elicit cultural memory was used by Douglas Harper in a study of agricultural change experienced by elderly dairy farmers.¹³

For my study, photo elicitation has been instrumental in understanding the various contexts of performance and the experiences of the musicians I interviewed. As often as possible, I would direct questions and discussions towards the images, allowing for more specific discussions of the experiences of performers and listeners. Beyond the concerns of “who, where, and when” arose personal memories of experiencing music as listener and performer and the importance this had in how people perceived themselves and one another.

The practice of eliciting cultural memories through the use of historical photographs has not been previously explored in musicology. This methodology addresses the difficult task of talking and writing about music, a problem central to the discipline of musicology. As musicologist Charles Seeger argued throughout his career, the language treatment of music foregrounds structural (melody, harmony, and rhythm) rather than functional (social) aspects of musical sound.¹⁴ Seeger’s revelation was in his realization that music functioned to express ideas that could not be communicated in language. Seeger saw that musicians demonstrated in performance the fact that music, social action and cultural understandings were inextricably linked. Language, in interpreting music, often creates understandings that have little to do with the creative processes that guided its creators. For Seeger, the problem remained of expressing in language an understanding of the relation between sound and social processes. Images aid this process by involving the visual senses and so directing discussions towards music as social

¹³ Douglas Harper, *Changing Works: Visions of a Lost Agriculture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

¹⁴ See Charles Seeger, “On the Principles of Musicology” (*Musical Quarterly* 10/2, 1924), pg. 244-250) and “Music and Musicology” (*Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 1933), pg. 148.

action rather than music as sound.

Photo elicitation holds several limitations as a methodology for cultural analysis. Foremost, a photo represents one perspective of a given social environment, which could be represented by multiple points of views. For this study, the available photos are from a single photographer who produced much of his work for commercial means—either on assignment for *The Pittsburgh Courier* or in his studio. Because of this, we must always keep in mind Harris' role in the contexts that he represented. He was both a well-known and respected community member who participated in the neighborhood's social life and someone who represented that same community for artistic and economic reasons. His personal views, biases, and motivations, though not readily apparent in the photos, are nonetheless ingrained by what he chose to include and exclude. I feel confident, however, that this limitation is minimized by the consensus of opinion built by bringing the same image to multiple interviewees. Though the photo represents one perspective, interviewees tend to contribute what they see or don't see and so enter into a dialogue with Harris. In other words, knowledgeable interviewees generally do not only address what is represented but also those important elements that are not represented. It should also be acknowledged Harris made these photos with a great deal of care over four decades and so was among a limited few to have the skills and insight to represent the Hill.

The second collection of interviews includes seventy-four interviews conducted largely by Pittsburgh trumpeter Charles Austin. These were made available through the African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh Oral History Project (AAJPSP) and are housed in the University of Pittsburgh archives. Though the interviews are largely unstructured and informal, they provide a wealth of personal insights by central figures in Pittsburgh's jazz community. Many of these individuals have passed on since this project was conducted in the

mid-1990s, making many of these testimonies the sole record of their contribution to jazz in Pittsburgh.

The third collection of interviews includes twenty-two interviews conducted by Maurice Levy for the Oral History of Music in Pittsburgh Project (OHMP). Levy, a retired Pittsburgh schoolteacher and volunteer at the Carnegie Library's Music Room, began these interviews in 1991 and has since conducted over 300 interviews with Pittsburgh musicians of all backgrounds. The selected interviews are also largely unstructured and conversational, though they provide insight into a cross-section of individuals involved in Pittsburgh's jazz community.

Also of importance for this study is *The Pittsburgh Courier*, a central institution of the Hill and cultural record of African American life in Pittsburgh. In its digitized form, available through ProQuest, I was able to perform specialized searches of individual musicians, venues, and entertainment columns. *The Courier* provided an indispensable tool for determining the dates, locations, and individuals in Harris' photos as well as a source concerned with issues and events pertinent to African Americans.

The Pittsburgh Courier, located in the Hill District from 1907 to 1965, became an important source of news for African American communities throughout the United States. At its height, it had city, national, and fourteen regional editions, which required the Union of Pullman Porters for aid in distributing the paper, particularly in the South. The paper's role in Pittsburgh's black social, economic, and political life cannot be overestimated. The Courier ceaselessly engaged the issue of racial inequality and provided a public voice for those struggling for betterment in the Hill District, Homewood, and other African American neighborhoods. The paper's founder, Robert L. Vann, recognized the need for strong social organizations that could serve the Hill District's black community, often criticizing what he saw as the lack of initiative

among black clergy to work towards better schools, parks, and hospitals.¹⁵ In addition to supporting the civic life of black Pittsburgh, the *Courier* also played an important role in the Hill District's nightlife by providing advertisements for black owned venues, publishing features on notable artists, and generally giving voice and support to the community's performers.

Columns such as Lee Matthews' "Swinging Among the Musicians," George Brown's "No Cover Charge," John Clark's "Wylie Avenue," and Hazel Garland's "Things To Talk About" offer brief glimpses into the neighborhood's nightlife. Writing in 1939, Matthews walked his readers through a late evening with a musician friend enjoying nightlife on the Hill. The first venue, a large dance hall called the Harlem Casino, featured a floorshow with "enchancing song stylist" Froshine. The second, a mid-sized basement club called the Ritz, featured an entertainer "via Judy Canova, doing her number on the music stand" and Erroll Garner whose fingers moved like "lightning among the clouds." The final stop of the night was the Crawford Grill, a small crowded bar with an elevated, rotating piano stand. Matthews focuses his comments on the conversation with local musicians and entertainers as well as the music itself. It was the warm, sociable atmosphere as well as the hard working musicians that ensured that the "crate was rockin'" that gave the Hill's venues their life.

In one night, as demonstrated by Matthews' column, one could traverse a range of performance spaces including dance halls, clubs, after hours joints, and bars to witness the multi-faceted experience of the Hill District. A look at the map in figure 2 shows a winding line from the Harlem Casino to the Ritz and the Crawford that covers less than a mile of the Hill

¹⁵ Andrew Bunie, *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier: Politics and Black Journalism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), pg. 56.

District's main thoroughfares. The close proximity, variety, and prevalence of musical events were common themes in the Hill and the lifeblood of the community's nightlife.

1.2 PITTSBURGH'S PLACE IN JAZZ HISTORY

Regional studies of jazz have focused largely on New Orleans,¹⁶ Chicago,¹⁷ Kansas City¹⁸ and New York,¹⁹ with increasing attention on the West Coast cities of Los Angeles²⁰ and Seattle.²¹ With the exception of William Kenney's *Jazz On the River*, which briefly examines Pittsburgh's contribution to the phenomenon of "river boat jazz," the city's larger contribution to the development of jazz and as a center of jazz performance has remained largely unexplored.

Pittsburgh's contribution to jazz is twofold. First, from the 1920s to the 1960s, Pittsburgh produced highly reputed national and international jazz artists. These include bandleader Billy Eckstein, composer and pianist Billy Strayhorn, bassist Ray Brown, pianists Earl Hines, Errol Garner, Mary Lou Williams and Ahmad Jamal, saxophonist Stanley Turrentine, guitarists George Benson and Jimmy Ponder, drummers Art Blakey, Kenny Clarke, Joe Harris and Roger Humphries, and trumpeter Roy Eldridge. It was not only African American artists who performed and contributed to jazz in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh contributed Italian American jazz

¹⁶ M. Williams, *Jazz Masters of New Orleans* (New York, 1967).

¹⁷ William Kenney, *Chicago Jazz: a Cultural History, 1904–1930* (New York, 1993).

¹⁸ Ross Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest* (Berkeley, 1971).

¹⁹ S.B. Charters and L. Kunstadt, *Jazz: a History of the New York Scene* (Garden City, NY, 1962); A. Shaw, *The Street that Never Slept: New York's Fabled 52nd Street* (New York, 1971/R1977 as *52nd Street: the Street of Jazz*).

²⁰ R. Gordon, *Jazz West Coast: the Los Angeles Jazz Scene of the 1950s* (London, 1986); Kyle Julien, *Sounding the City: Jazz, African American Nightlife, and the Articulation of Race in 1940s Los Angeles*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 2000.

²¹ P. De Barros, *Jackson Street after Hours: the Roots of Jazz in Seattle* (Seattle, 1993).

musicians such as pianist Dodo Marmarosa and Johnny Costa, trumpeter Danny Conn, guitarist Joe Negri, and drummer Chuck Spatafore. Second, Pittsburgh fostered a thriving African American community that provided audiences and venues for touring musicians. These venues and the aesthetic norms that African American audience shared were integral to maintaining a strong cultural link between black communities throughout East Coast cities. The story of jazz in Pittsburgh is intertwined with the social and economic life of other mid-sized Eastern U.S. cities such as Cincinnati, Cleveland, Washington D.C., Charleston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Newark as well as the myriad of smaller mill and coal towns that peppered what now comprises the rust belt.

The literature that has addressed jazz in Pittsburgh has been almost exclusively contained in biographies of artists such as Mary Lou Williams, Earl Hines, Erroll Garner, Billy Strayhorn, Kenny Clarke and Roy Eldridge.²² These portraits peripherally examine Pittsburgh's jazz scene through the early lives of these artists and only offer glimpses of jazz and entertainment in Pittsburgh's African American communities in the pre-World War II era. Often due to the personal struggles of the artists and the hard economic times, Pittsburgh is typically portrayed as a one-dimensional place of burden and struggle rather than an important center of jazz performance. Mary Lou Williams went on the road as a young teen in the mid-1920s, and was afraid to ask for money when she was stranded because her mother would "make me return to Pittsburgh and stay there."²³ In David Hajdu's portrait of Billy Strayhorn, Hajdu finds that Pittsburgh's "provincialism had encumbered Strayhorn's arrival as an artist" while "in the more

²² *Morning Glory: A Biography of Mary Lou Williams* (2004), *World of Earl Hines* (1983), *Erroll Garner: The Most Happy Piano* (1985), *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn* (1995), *Klook: The Story of Kenny Clarke* (1990), *Roy Eldridge: Little Jazz Giant* (2002).

²³ Linda Dahl, *Morning Glory: A Biography of Mary Lou Williams* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), pg. 37.

inclusive, cosmopolitan atmosphere of Manhattan, Strayhorn's musical success spurred his coming-of-age as an individual."²⁴ Eubie Blake, recognizing the brilliance of Earl Hines told the young pianist,

If I catch you here again I'm going to take this cane and wrap it around your head. Do you realize you can stay in Pittsburgh the rest of your life and still be the same boy you are now? You've got to get away from here.²⁵

By leaving, these artists developed and gained recognition that they could not have attained in Pittsburgh. However, they established their musical foundations in the city, and were a part of its musical communities, first as youngsters and often as returning jazz stars. Of equal importance to these national stars were the musicians who, for various reasons, remained in the city for the duration of their careers. These musicians played a central role in the vitality of local venues and interacted with their communities on a deeper level than touring artists.

The rare scholarly references to Pittsburgh jazz can be misleading. For example, Pittsburgh-born ethnomusicologist and jazz scholar Bill Cole wrote in 1976: "During the late 1950s the Midway Lounge was the only place in Pittsburgh where jazz could be heard on a regular basis," which was simply not the case.²⁶ The Midway, owned by Pittsburgh entrepreneur Lenny Litman, was a popular downtown club that featured top names in jazz as well as local jazz groups such as the Deuces Wild. The club's clientele was largely young and white though black patrons and local black musicians did frequent it. However, due to its location, the club was within the jurisdiction of Local 60, the white local of the American Federation of Musicians, and

²⁴ David Hajdu, *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn* (New York: North Point Press, 1996), pg. 65.

²⁵ Stanley Dance, *The World of Earl Hines* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), pg. 31.

²⁶ Bill Cole, *John Coltrane* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976/2001), pg. 3.

thus was influenced by the segregated hiring practices amongst musicians within the region. We glean from this cursory summary that Pittsburgh's jazz scene was largely inactive and unimportant for its African American communities.

A closer examination of Pittsburgh's nightlife reveals that the city developed a national reputation because of the caliber of musicians and tastes of audiences in the Hill's jazz clubs. *The Pittsburgh Courier* writer and editor George Pitts celebrated Pittsburgh's contributions to entertainment in his 1962 article "Pittsburgh Produced Some of Nation's Top Show Folk." He quotes vocalist Johnny Oliver: "In my travels I've found that if a musician made it in Pittsburgh he could leave there and make it anywhere." Dizzy Gillespie also states, "One thing I like about playing Pittsburgh is that you've really got to cut it or get laughed off the stand. Seems the whole audience in Pittsburgh is made up of critics. They all seem to know what's happening. You don't dare relax and hit a bad note." Finally, Chico Hamilton notes, "[Pittsburgh] cats seem to dig good sounds. Seems if you're saying something they appreciate it."²⁷

While the creative lives of several top Pittsburgh performers have been documented, the social contexts and creative environments from which they emerged have remained largely unexplored. Equally unexamined are the roles of locally based musicians in the economic and social life of jazz. At the heart of the African American musical community was a network of performance venues, which supported both local musicians as well as nationally touring artists.

²⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 24, 1962, pg. A17.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW: ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS IN JAZZ STUDIES

Two analytical frameworks emerged from jazz scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s from which the field of jazz studies would subsequently draw its main perspectives. The first, dating to the 1950s, approached jazz in terms of musical structure. Beginning in the 1960s, scholars began to approach jazz as a functioning aspect of culture. In retrospect, these two perspectives reveal the politics of representing jazz in the United States. They also account for some of the difficulties faced by jazz studies in finding a home in the social sciences, including ethnomusicology. Compared to Western art music, which has largely remained the domain of historical musicology, and “world music,” which has been largely the subject of ethnomusicologists, jazz remains unclaimed by any one discipline. As a result of its lack of institutionalization in any single discipline, the scholarship that comprises jazz studies has not developed a unified approach to studying the music.

An overview of jazz histories written during the 1950s and ‘60s reveals a sharp distinction between structurally and functionally oriented analytical frameworks. The structural approaches start from the premise that jazz is an autonomous music most effectively studied as a structure of musical elements. Works such as Barry Ulanov’s *History of Jazz in America* (1952), Marshall Stearns’ *The Story of Jazz* (1956), Andre Hodeir’s *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence* (1956), Andre Francis’ *Jazz* (1960), Dave Dexter’s *The Jazz Story: From the ‘90s to the ‘60s* (1964), and Gunther Schuller’s *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (1968) contributed to this framework and subsequently laid a foundation for the institutional study of jazz. These works shaped jazz for academic treatment by developing a structured dialogue around the structural aspects of the music, a canon of innovative performers, and a historical narrative of the music’s development.

Early jazz scholarship emphasized individuals who produced great recordings and neglected the dynamics and the cultural norms of the communities in which jazz musicians were active. This “great man” approach has fostered an evolutionary model in jazz studies where the music is seen to follow a path through a series of stylistic developments.²⁸ This approach falls short when individuals do not fit within the boundaries of what is deemed jazz, or when musicians contradict the “natural progression” of jazz’s stylistic trajectory. For example, musicians such as Louis Jordan and Ray Charles receive little attention from scholars working in this tradition because they are not seen as jazz musicians, while they were active in the same communities and venues as those accepted as “real” jazz musicians. Similarly, during the 1970s, bands such as the Mahavishnu Orchestra or Weather Report were not seen as stylistic progressions of jazz from the first half of the century, and as a result were viewed as a regression rather than a new expression of jazz by musicians of that time period.

Criticisms of this approach developed in part because of the great social upheavals of the 1960s. The basic premise of the functional approach developed in the 1960s was that jazz is foremost an element of African American culture. While these scholars acknowledge that innovators shape the jazz tradition through the developments of new instrument techniques, compositional approaches, and even lifestyles and spiritual beliefs, they focus to a greater degree on the performers’ relationship with social and economic contexts and African American cultural understandings.

Studies such as Amiri Baraka’s *Blues People* (1963), Charles Keil’s *Urban Blues* (1966), and Albert Murray’s *Stomping the Blues* (1976) approached jazz through the study of African

²⁸ By evolutionary model I mean the approach in which jazz is presented as a progression of styles from New Orleans jazz to big band jazz to swing to bebop and so on.

American history and culture—expressed as a shared “blues sensibility.” Their approaches to jazz studies had the advantage of foregrounding cultural forces, i.e., the blues tradition, questioning the supremacy of traditional musical analyses. By contextualizing jazz within a larger creative tradition, these authors challenge its image as a lofty, universal, and mystical art form. This grounding of jazz in social contexts and historical processes brought the music closer to the field of ethnomusicology while the political stance of the authors quite intentionally brought jazz scholarship into the emerging field of black studies.

This analytical framework had limited applicability to the larger field of jazz studies due to its political overtones. With Black studies emerging in the 1960s, the cultural approach became tied to racial politics. While the scholars of the 1950s avoided the sensitive issue of race in favor of a more universalistic approach to jazz, the new generation of scholars centered their studies on the African American experience. The limitation of these works was that they avoided the inherent paradox of jazz as a widely practiced performance art.

The dichotomy between jazz as a universal art and as a part of African American culture is not a purely academic issue, for it is also inherent in the music itself. Jazz is an African American musical tradition though it has been created, performed, and consumed outside African American communities for much of its history. It could be argued that after the 1960s, jazz was a less integral part of urban African American communities than it had been in the previous four decades. Certainly, contemporary jazz is no longer central to the life of African American communities, having survived largely through its institutionalization and through the creative efforts of small communities of both black and white musicians. Because the music is performed in such a variety of contexts, understanding how it takes on different norms and represents new

ideals and identities becomes central to understanding the music itself. Jazz is both a musical structure as well as a functioning practice within communities.

1.3.1 Spatial Orientations and the Regional Approach

This dilemma in jazz studies—the divide between structural and functional orientation—was partially remedied by the development of regional studies of jazz, which began to appear in the 1970s.²⁹ Using the regional approach scholars began to study jazz as it functioned within localized communities and specific social-economic contexts. They focused on historical processes and the function of jazz within specific urban communities rather than recorded works and artist biographies. Because the typical artist did not have the opportunity to record, these studies tell the story of local unknowns of jazz history, as well as the communities and venues in which the music was performed and supported. Regional studies of jazz have begun to fully address the complex nature of the music as it was practiced in the first half of the twentieth century. Jazz was more than an esoteric musical tradition struggling to rise above its sordid roots to gain the status of art music, for the jazz community extended beyond the practices of musicians into the neighborhoods in which they performed and lived.

The analytical frameworks used in both Paul de Barros' study *Jackson Street After Hours: The Roots of Jazz in Seattle* and William Kenney's *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904–1930* foreground the infrastructure of nightlife—the venues and businesses—that

²⁹ Russell, Ross. *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), Arnold Shaw, *The Street that Never Slept: New York's Fabled 52nd Street* (New York, 1971/R1977 as *52nd Street: the Street of Jazz*), Martin Williams, *Jazz Masters of New Orleans* (New York, 1967), Robert Gordon, *Jazz West Coast: the Los Angeles Jazz Scene of the 1950s* (London, 1986), Paul De Barros, *Jackson Street after Hours: the Roots of Jazz in Seattle* (Seattle, 1993).

maintained jazz as a viable profession. It was the thriving nightlife and the long-run jobs provided by its clubs that drew musicians from across the United States and supported bands. The harsh reality of the music business dictated, “if you lose the job and loaf a few weeks, you haven’t any band.”³⁰

Jackson Street After Hours suggests a parallel between Seattle and Pittsburgh as well as a useful model for conducting a regional jazz study. De Barros’ work focuses on the first half of the twentieth century, exploring the musical life of Seattle’s African American communities. Like most histories of jazz, the author avoids musical analysis, focusing on the development and function of jazz within local communities. De Barros describes the social contexts of jazz rather than the music itself, emphasizing a sociological rather than musicological approach.

Most of Seattle’s venues, musicians, and important community figures were previously unrecognized in jazz scholarship though they formed the core of the music scene in an important American city. Despite being tucked away in the Northwest, far from the Eastern jazz hot spots, the city maintained a vital nightlife from the 1920s to the 1960s, supporting both local and touring artists. An important catalyst for Seattle’s jazz scene was the expansion of the city’s defense industry. From 1937 to 1951, Seattle’s thriving industrial plants drew both soldiers and civilians, who in turn created a demand for local entertainment. Jackson Street was the city’s nightlife epicenter hosting “over two dozen nightclubs...where jazz and bootleg liquor flowed as freely as money from a soldier’s pocket.”³¹ Through the 1920s and ‘30s, Seattle was a stopping point of touring groups such as W.C. Handy, Freddie Keppard, and Duke Ellington.

³⁰ William Kenney, *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904–1930* (New York, 1993), pg. xii.

³¹ Paul de Barros, *Jackson Street After Hours* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1993), pg vii.

The regional approach to jazz, however, asks the question of a particular city or region's contribution to the genre as a whole. De Barros acknowledges that Seattle, though home to a strong jazz community, never stylistically contributed to the music. Rather, he studies Seattle jazz to better understand "West Coast jazz" and to expand the traditional scope of jazz history:

Jazz history typically has been written as the story of a main stem, growing through certain locales and styles—New Orleans, Chicago, Kansas City, and so on. Such a model is useful for getting a handle on the subject, but American culture—Literature, visual art, music, or whatever—has always been a product of our whole land, not just a handful of urban areas.³²

Jackson Street demonstrates that local histories of jazz must address the music's national character as much as its local identity. Because of creative and economic need, musicians have toured the country, disseminating and incorporating new ideas and ways of playing. Localized jazz studies show how local musical communities contributed and drew from national networks of venues, audiences, and musicians. De Barros believes that "the secrets of the real history of jazz" lies in these "relationships between the national and the local, in the crisscrossings of lines all over the American map by the great and the mundane, the sung and the unsung."³³

Jackson Street connects the local and national with detailed stories about local businessmen, entrepreneurs, artists, and events. For instance, de Barros tells the story of trumpeter Herman Grimes, who was born in Alabama but steadily made his way to Seattle, where he spent the bulk of his career. During the 1920s Grimes led Roger's Sunshine Minstrels, making his way to Kansas during the 1930s. According to a band mate, it was black Seattle club

³² De Barros, *ibid.*, pg viii.

³³ *Ibid.*, pg. viii.

owner Russell “Noodles” Smith who sent for Grimes where he became known as “one of the greatest trumpet players out of the Northwest.”³⁴ Through the 1930s, big bands that toured the area repeatedly tried to recruit Grimes, though he rejected life on the road for local work. He did, however, record with Duke Ellington in 1947 between his Navy service and Merchant marine commitment. Many stories presented by de Barros elucidate the complex and migratory lives of jazz musicians. Moreover, we learn that Seattle was a viable alternative for touring musicians, which fostered the creative development of local musicians.

Though *Jackson Street* is a history of Seattle jazz, it is foremost focused on the musical activity of the city’s African American neighborhood. De Barros demonstrated that regional studies of jazz are closely tied to the urban histories of working class African Americans in the first half of the 20th century. Within these communities, jazz intersected with the economic and social realities of the segregated urban experience. In other words, jazz was a part of a world that included urban vices such as prostitution, racketeering, bootlegged alcohol, numbers running and gambling, and was affected by the economic and social changes experienced by the black community. Much of *Jackson Street After Hours* tells the social and economic history of Seattle’s black community as well as the historical processes that fostered a thriving nightlife. Seattle was an unlikely location for a jazz scene, located far from other urban centers with thriving jazz scenes and Seattle was culturally dominated by Northern European immigrants, who have had a marginal involvement with jazz as an audience or as a source of performers. De Barros outlines several elements that did, however, give rise to the Seattle jazz scene. Seattle’s “culture of legalized corruption” supported an entertainment industry that was able to operate

³⁴ Ibid., pg. 46.

outside the regional backlash against alcohol, gambling, and prostitution.³⁵ The profitability of vice influenced all levels of law enforcement and elected officials who benefited from bribes while boosting the local economy, which gained the favor of the city's more conservative population.

By the 1910s, the main entertainment district shifted from downtown's "skid row" to Jackson Street, which was becoming the center of black immigration and settlement. During the late 1910s and '20s, early black entrepreneurs such as Russell "Noodles" Smith and Burr "Blackie" Williams built fortunes from night clubs that sold bootlegged liquor and a hidden gambling scene. Smith's club, The Black and Tan, operated from the 1920s through to the 1960s and featured noted touring jazz artists as well as local acts. In addition to the most esteemed venue for jazz, Smith owned and operated the Top Tavern, the Golden West and Coast hotels. Smith and other entrepreneurs built the neighborhood's entertainment infrastructure and maintained a draw for touring artists.

Seattle's jazz scene dwindled in the late 1960s as it did in most cities across the country. The rise of rock and roll, the economic collapse of inner city communities, and city hall's crackdown on the "culture of corruption" weakened the scene to the point that "Seattle musicians in the 1980s were not even aware that Quincy Jones, Ray Charles, or Patti Brown had worked in the same town they were scuffling in."³⁶ De Barros' work is an integral part of awakening awareness of the jazz tradition on the West Coast as well as demonstrating the importance of local communities for the vitality of jazz on a national level. Studies such as these show jazz to be a mosaic of thriving local scenes driven simultaneously by touring and regional artists.

³⁵ Ibid., pg. 1.

³⁶ Ibid., pg. 202.

William Kenny's book *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History (1904-1930)* also presents a vivid history of jazz in an urban cultural context. Like de Barros, Kenny seeks to understand jazz as a functioning aspect of society, inextricable from the broad historical forces impacting the world at large. Kenny sees histories of jazz based on "phonograph records, career summaries of individual musicians, and photograph collections" as perpetuating a misleading image of the music as "a musical art form evolving in its own isolated world of instrumental mastery, chord progressions, and orchestral formations and disintegrations."³⁷

Kenny uses the regional approach to demonstrate the fluid relationship between jazz and other forms of music. In the first half of the twentieth century, jazz musicians often began their careers performing in church, traveling minstrel troupes, dance bands, or cabarets. The need for regular employment required that jazz musicians be versatile and able to provide a range of entertainment styles. Kenny demonstrates that during the 1920s, jazz reflected a new urban culture focused on spectacle, glamour, and entertainment, which offset the conservative values embodied in the prohibition movement. In this paradoxical cultural context jazz filled a space between the worlds of "lowbrow" folk music, commercial entertainment, and "highbrow" art music.³⁸

Kenny notes that pre-Depression era Chicago jazz originated in working class African American neighborhoods, but drew upon musicians from many backgrounds. He separates discussions of the largely African American South Side scene, and the white dance hall scene to offer a portrait of the entire jazz community. The most innovative jazz musicians were African

³⁷ William Kenney, *Chicago Jazz*, pg. 171.

³⁸ Kenny, *ibid.*, pg. xv.

Americans, Kenny argues, who drew from a wide range of Southern and Northern musical and cultural experiences.

Jazz in black urban neighborhoods had a strong relationship to the business community, a relationship that did not exist in white communities. Kenny notes that because African Americans were “barred from most professional schools and corporations by reason of color, entrepreneurs on the South Side focused an unusual amount of creative energy on such entertainment enterprises as cafes and saloons, pool halls, gambling, bootlegging, vaudeville, popular music making, and such fast-developing enterprises as the production of phonograph records and movies, and professional boxing, baseball, and football.”³⁹ From these communities there developed strong leaders whose professional lives intersected with politics and business as well as the entertainment industry. In 1905, black entrepreneur and politician Robert T. Motts opened the Pekin, which became an important venue for black entertainers as well as a means for organizing the Black vote. Though the club catered both to black and white audiences, the Pekin “employed African-Americans in all capacities and chartered an entertainment strategy which responded to the ambitions of African-American entertainers.”⁴⁰

Kenny demonstrates how venues such as the Pekin, Café de Champion, the Elite, and the Deluxe became important institutions in South Side Chicago, supplying jobs and access to “urbane popular culture” that was otherwise inaccessible for the majority of the black population. As early as 1914, Jelly Roll Morton was playing the Elite and contributing with others to the thriving nightlife scene that was meeting the demands of the ever-increasing population of African American Chicagoans.

³⁹ Ibid., pg. 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pg. 7.

Many innovative musicians migrated to the city including Louis Armstrong, Joe Oliver, and Jelly Roll Morton from New Orleans and Earl Hines from Duquesne, Pennsylvania. By the early 1920s, Chicago drew significant numbers of top jazz artists from New Orleans, including Freddie Keppard, Sidney Bechet, and Lil Hardin. With the high expectations of audiences and club owners, musicians began to shed their “folk anonymity” for new identities as “stars.” Bandleaders such as Joe Oliver and Freddie Keppard took the title “King” to foster an image that led to steady work. As Kenny notes, “some New Orleans musicians had rarely thought of themselves as professionals, living as manual laborers who also played weekend gigs.”⁴¹ While Louis Armstrong—the most renowned innovator in Chicago during the 1920s—was clearly aware of his artistic direction before moving out of New Orleans, in Chicago’s South Side he developed a musical style that drew from folk traditions, the entertainment methods of cabarets, and the instrumental technique of concert musicians. Chicago, with its tradition of integrated venues, provided the cultural and economic context where such innovations could unfold.

Like Seattle and Chicago, the history of Pittsburgh’s Hill District reveals often neglected aspects of jazz: the importance of both touring and local communities of musicians, the place of jazz clubs in the community’s business infrastructure, the interplay of jazz and popular music, and the shifting nature of African American communities during the first half of the 20th century. In the tradition of Baraka and Keil, I focus on cultural traditions to flesh out a socio-economic analysis of the music. Like Kenny and De Barros, I offer a narrative grounded in a specific locales and that places the music in the context of a rapidly changing community. My contributions are both methodological and theoretical. First, I employ photo elicitation to explore musical performance in relationship to specific audiences and venue spaces. Secondly, I frame

⁴¹ Ibid., pg. 41.

my ethnographic descriptions in discussions of liminality and spatial identity—theoretical concepts that are called upon in several disciplines including ethnomusicology.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In conducting an historical study of jazz within a neighborhood or city, one must grapple with the relationship of the music to the physical places and social spaces in which it was created. The importance of place and space in understanding music is apparent in the ways musical sounds invoke locations. For example, despite the global diffusion of Dixieland jazz, reggae, and country music, these genres all reflect understandings of historical eras and social norms that reflect the lives of people within the material conditions of certain places.

In theorizing space one must negotiate several academic treatments of the term as well as its many vernacular uses. For instance, space and place can be used interchangeably as in the “space of the city” and the “city as a place,” or the home as “place where one lives” as well as a “collection of different living spaces.” The concept of space has been widely and diversely treated in the social sciences, as economics, sociology, political science, anthropology, and criminal justice have applied spatially oriented methodologies to various topics.⁴² Sub-disciplines such as cultural geography emerged during the late 20th century to examine how

⁴² Michael Goodchild, Luc Anselin, Richard Appelbaum, and Barbara Herr Harthorn, “Toward Spatially Integrated Social Science,” *International Regional Science Review* 23/2 (April, 2000), pg. 139-159.

human activities are distributed spatially, and how space both informs and is constructed by social action.⁴³

In *We Gotta Get Out of this Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (1992), cultural theorist Lawrence Grossberg treats space and place as distinct though interwoven concepts. Space and place are not understood as static structures but are seen as constantly in flux as various social, political, and economic forces come into play.⁴⁴ He approaches culture or “the abstract structure of daily life” as “a map of space and places, a structured mobility,” giving priority to the contested processes of spatial construction. As Grossberg states, “Every organization of places and spaces is constantly being constructed—territorialized—by lines of articulation and escaped—deterritorialized—by lines of flight.”⁴⁵ For Grossberg, space and place are measured in terms of control over movement, actions, and ideas. The concept of a “structured mobility” suggests limitations and possibilities—shaped by political, economic, and social forces—in how one constructs and negotiates their physical and conceptual environment.

Grossberg distinguishes space as a given physical domain and conceptual realm of social norms, while place designates the specific sites where those norms are enacted. In his words, space comprises the “parameters of the mobility of people and practices,” adding, “They define the trajectories along which different groups can travel and the vectors which make different connections possible or impossible.”⁴⁶ Mobility, in his view, is a way to establish the boundaries

⁴³ Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1998); Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

⁴⁴ Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of this Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (Routledge, 1992), pg. 295.

⁴⁵ Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of this Place*, pg. 295.

⁴⁶ Grossberg, *ibid.*

of an individual's physical reality—embodied in places such as home, community, city, nation—and social space, as measured in the limits of social norms. While the concept of space indicates physical and conceptual boundaries within which individuals exercise varying levels of mobility, places are the physical markers within those boundaries. Places are the points in space where social action takes place, as Grossberg states, places are “sites of stability where people can stop and act, the markers of their affective investments.”⁴⁷ Places embody cultural values both as a physical representation of collective understandings and sites in which social actions take place.

Music is one of many social actions that shape space and is reified in places. Recent studies in cultural geography, such as John Connell and Chris Gibson's *Sound Tracks*, have explored this idea, stating, “Music, through its actual sounds, and through its ability to represent and inform the nature of space and place, is crucial to the ways in which humans occupy and engage with the material world.”⁴⁸ Grossberg proposes that music's social worth is “located in its ability to produce such structured mobilities” and so shape the “map of space and places” that guide our daily lives.⁴⁹ The implication of these assertions is that music is an important means through which we shape our understandings of the world and organize our actions in our surroundings.

1.4.1 Ideology - Music and the construction of Social Space

The relationship of music and social space lies in shared traditions, values, and cultural sensibilities. Cultural geographers John Connell and Chris Gibson offer a framework for

⁴⁷ Grossberg, *ibid.*

⁴⁸ John Connell and Chris Gibson, *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity, and Place* (London: Routledge, 2003), pg. 192.

⁴⁹ Grossberg, *ibid.*

addressing the role of performances in the construction of space: “Understanding how the sound of music can alter spaces, and people’s interactions with them requires differentiation of the ways in which music is consumed and experienced in different locations and contexts.”⁵⁰ In the Hill District, audience members and musicians adapted certain performance norms that affected how the venues were organized. Notable Hill District jazz clubs during the 1940s, 50s and 60s, such as the Musician’s Club, the Crawford Grill no. 2, and the Hurricane Bar, had antecedents in urban juke joints and the “T.O.B.A” circuit venues of the early 1900s, black churches of the 1800s, and even socializing under slavery. They were also sites of interracial socializing, a rare phenomenon in American public life of the mid-20th century. In these spaces audiences developed and maintained sophisticated and critical standards of listening because clubs regularly featured touring artists.

“Active listening,” the mediation of musical ideas by both audiences and performers, was an integral part of these performance spaces. The fact that the Crawford Grill no.2 and the Hurricane Bar did not charge an entrance fee and were recognized as part of the community’s economic and social infrastructure fostered an informal social environment where active listening could take place. This social space created a context in which individuals crossed class, ethnic, and racial boundaries and participated in aesthetic norms tied to African American musical traditions and the shared cultural histories of the Hill District. This use of the term “space” is concerned less with geographical location as it is about imagined space and is akin to Josh Kun’s concept of “audiotopia,” which accounts for the “space within and produced by a musical element that offers the listener and/or musician new maps for re-imagining the present

⁵⁰ Connell and Gibson, *Sound Tracks*, *ibid.*, pg. 193.

social world.”⁵¹ Hence when musicians or audience members refer to a jazz club as a “church” or “spirit house” where one could be revitalized, we come to see how jazz produced spaces in which individuals of various ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds could engage the realities of their lived experiences. This space, or “audiotopia,” is a site of “effective utopian longings where several sites normally deemed incompatible are brought together, not only in the space of a particular piece of music itself, but in the production of social space and the mapping of geographical space that music makes possible.”⁵² In this sense, jazz functioned on the community level to construct physical and imagined spaces in which paradoxical aspects of urban life were juxtaposed: social segregation and cultural freedom, individual expression and community consciousness, the weight of poverty and the promise of spiritual delivery.

It seems reasonable to expect that the social space of the Hill encouraged creative musical development. From World War I to the riots of 1968—particularly the decade from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s—the Hill fostered a nightlife scene that influenced innovative artists who would subsequently gain international recognition; it employed and celebrated nationally touring black artists, and it supported a network of widely celebrated music venues. What was unique to the Hill District as a community that produced such conditions? What was it about the Hill’s space—In Grossberg’s words, the “parameters of the mobility of people and practices”—that produced such a vibrant musical culture? The answer may lie partially with the Hill’s liminal status: its reality as a social world in transition. Migration, urban redevelopment, the civil rights movement, deindustrialization, and the riots of 1968 all shaped the social space of the Hill District. Jazz performance, integral to the Hill District’s nightlife and entertainment

⁵¹ Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pg. 23.

⁵² Josh Kun, *Audiotopia*, pg. 23.

infrastructure, was intertwined with these economic and political processes, as well with the lives of individual musicians and business owners.

The impact of racial, ethnic, and class politics both marginalized and empowered the Hill District. Liminality is an effective concept for exploring the paradoxical characteristics of marginal status. The concept of liminality originated with cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, who adapted the concept from Arnold van Gennep's study *Rites of Passage* (1909). Briefly defined, liminality is a transitional state between two more static states. The transitional or liminal state is a conceptual realm that offers the means to subvert rules and norms of more static states of being.⁵³ Liminality was originally used to analyze rituals in small-scale societies, but has since been applied to individuals, groups, cultural practices, time periods, and spaces in industrialized societies that exhibit "in-betweenness." A contemporary example from Pittsburgh can be found in the neighborhoods that have emerged in the post-industrial era. For instance, the region between two of Pittsburgh's eastern neighborhoods: Shadyside and East Liberty, are in many ways liminal. Shadyside is a largely upper class, white, affluent neighborhood while East Liberty is an economically developing, largely African American neighborhood. With the influx of new businesses on the East Liberty side of the border a new neighborhood has emerged with the name of East Side. The East Side is neither East Liberty nor Shady Side and because of its liminality a new social life exists there that cannot exist in either of its adjoining neighborhoods. A bank building has been turned into an art collective, a corner store into an experimental café that only sells waffles, an empty industrial space into a club that feature DJs, jazz groups, spoken word events, experimental rock, and football parties.

⁵³ Anti-structural in this case is the antithesis of social structure as a set of collectively defined roles such as adolescent or adult, single or married.

In the article “Urban Students, Liminality, and the Postindustrial Context” (1996), Pamela Bettis explores the social world of high school students coming to age in deindustrialized urban America. In this shifting economic world a liminal social context is marked by ambiguous social roles. Bettis notes that in this liminal era “the old rules of the industrial order no longer apply, but the new rules of a postindustrial society, if there are any, are not yet in place.”⁵⁴ Liminality helps Bettis explain the anxiety-ridden comments of students concerning their futures as well as the absence of a social hierarchy amongst students of different ethnic backgrounds. Her research uses the concept of liminality to link the social contexts of deindustrialized communities to the ambiguity expressed by high-school students regarding their identities and life goals.

While my study focuses on an earlier era of American history, Bettis’ use of liminality provides a useful guide for linking individual action to social, cultural, economic contexts. From the 1920s to the 1970s, the Hill District experienced great social and physical change and so was in a constant state of fluctuation. The Hill District’s history, however, has always been one of fluctuation. As historian John Bodnar states, “The heavy population densities coupled with the low incomes of the residents, the overall age of the neighborhood, multiple-family dwellings, and rapid population changes gave the Hill District all of the conditions of zones of transition.”⁵⁵

Urban segregation was central to this instability and change. Though the Supreme Court ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* institutionalized segregation with the doctrine of “separate but equal,” the NAACP and other civil rights organizations continually fought structural

⁵⁴ Pamela Bettis, “Urban Students, Liminality, and the Postindustrial Context”, *Sociology of Education* 69/2 (April, 1996), pg. 111.

⁵⁵ John Bodnar, ed, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960*, pg. 196.

marginalization. Particularly after WWII, with the advent of the civil rights movement, segregation became increasingly identified as a temporary reality, though one with certain “cultural advantages.” For African Americans, the Hill District fostered a rich social life and for many, negated the need to cross-racial boundaries. Trumpeter Chuck Austin recalls the social dynamics of being African American in the Hill District:

I understood my place so rather than cross the line and be bold and challenge it wasn't worth it because in our community we had everything we needed. If you went to the Hill District we had pharmacies, doctors, dentists, and clubs. So what they had downtown, we didn't need that because we had ours. If you were a person of substance and you had the means you could go in these places and they'd take your money but you were not welcome.⁵⁶

Austin's comments infer that segregation was liminal in that it was a transitional state between slavery and social equality, and as such embodied a paradoxical status as both a nefarious social institution and a means for cultural independence. As a result, the Hill District was a community that was both marginalized and empowered, leading it to an alternative system that satisfied local economic and social needs.

Liminality can also be applied to contextualizing the creative processes of jazz, the social life of jazz clubs, and the status of jazz musicians. Jazz is liminal in that it embodied varied and often contradictory identities. Because of its adaptability, jazz during the mid-20th century was a complex social activity, defined more by its diversity than any one practice. Compared to other African American performance practices such as the blues, which was largely relegated to “chitlin’ circuit” venues, and gospel, which existed largely in the church, jazz was played

⁵⁶ Patricia Reid, interview by author, September 2007.

everywhere; from country clubs to concert halls to after hours joints. The traditional approach in jazz studies and, to a greater degree, the music industry, has been to define the music as a bounded entity rather than a area of contestation: jazz is “black music” and so can be marketed through “race records”; jazz is a “universal language” and so can express global unity; jazz is “America’s classical music” and so can be supported by government funds and presented in a concert medium. For these purposes, clear boundaries function well. However, to better understand how the music is made and what meanings it creates, these boundaries and definitions are limiting. Rather, the paradoxical and contradictory identities of jazz are more useful in understanding its commercial, sociological, cultural and musical reality.

In recent studies, ethnomusicologists have used the concept of liminality to explore the social status of musicians and the function of their performance practices. In the article “Music, Time, and Dance in Orchestral Performance,” Stephen Cottrell explores the orchestra conductor as a liminal figure who controls both “real time” and “virtual time.”⁵⁷ In the ritualistic context of the concert hall, the conductor is a central figure whose physical movements mark a transition into another reality. In “Controlling the Liminal Power of Performance,” Lynn Hooker examines Hungarian Romani musicians as culturally valued “tradition bearers” and socially oppressed aspects of a marginal group. Hooker finds that the liminal status of Romani musicians allows them to creatively engage other musical traditions: “they have the power to introduce new elements, and otherwise to upset the strict categorization of musical knowledge in this region.”⁵⁸ Katherine Brown, in “The Social Liminality of Musicians,” asserts that all professional

⁵⁷ Stephen Cottrell, “Music, Time, and Dance in Orchestral Performance,” *Twentieth-Century Music* 3/1 (2007), pg. 73-96.

⁵⁸ Lynn Hooker, “Controlling the Liminal Power of Performance”, *Twentieth-Century Music* 3/1 (2007), pg. 53.

musicians are, in fact, liminal. She argues that the liminal state in which musicians exist explains their control of “cultural capital” and their resulting opportunity to creatively engage society despite emerging from a structurally inferior position.⁵⁹

Jazz musicians in the Hill District during the mid-20th century occupied many opposing roles. They were seen as artists or as entertainers, as black or white, and as popular or counter-culture figures. As a result musicians needed to reconcile their commitment to jazz with the shifting realities of the music business. Jazz musicians wanted to fashion their own art, but they had to do so in a way that met the needs of the marketplace, audiences and club owners. The various ways musicians resolved these contradictions accounts for the complexity of the jazz scene.

Because of their liminal status, jazz musicians were also able to subvert racial roles imposed by segregation and more diffused racial oppression. Some black groups were able to play in a “society” or “white” style to access new markets while some Italian American musicians interviewed in my study were able to play with “soul” to gain access to venues in black communities. In these instances, jazz functioned not as an expression of racialized roles but rather a way to engage racial identities from both sides of the racial divide.

1.4.2 Scenes - Music and the Construction of Place

Social spaces are mapped across physical locations and embodied in the social life of places. Places are therefore the reified sites of space, offering physicality to localized social

⁵⁹ Katherine Brown, “The Social Liminality of Musicians: Case Studies from Mughal India and Beyond,” *Twentieth-Century Music* 3/1 (2007), pg. 13-49.

norms and practices. The relationship between music and place lies in the mediated processes of musical performance.

Places are not solely physical containers for social action because they are imbued with a history of shared memories and meanings. Places develop through time as sites that bind people together through a publicly understood past. Within the Hill District, there were many places in which music was performed. These venues ranged from small bars to dance halls, and were patronized by both black and white individuals. This study addresses how clubs in the Hill District shaped performances, and how performances impacted the organization and norms of places. Examining the spatial aspects of performance puts us in touch with the practical concerns of musicians. A performer must negotiate many factors beyond the technicalities of their instrument and the norms of a musical style when attempting to communicate a certain experience to a listener. The acoustic and spatial features of a place such as a church, club, or street corner influence the structural features of the music performed there. For example, in Chitlin' Circuit venues, typical spaces facilitated interaction between performers and audiences. Audiences did not passively listen to the music nor did musicians expect them to do so. Stage locations and venue layouts affect how the music is experienced and the processes through which it is created. In venues such as the Hurricane and Crawford Grill, "active listening," where both listeners and performers mediated musical ideas, required a creative use of limited spaces.

Another way of examining the meaning of place is to ask the question: "what would jazz be without the jazz venue?" Ideology, identity, and social action all influence how we construct physical places and their social spaces. Photo elicitation interviews, as opposed to question driven interviews helps address these spatial aspects of musical performance by directing interviewees toward the social meanings of physical contexts. If we are to create dynamic rather

than structural understandings of the creative processes of jazz performance, we must examine the social actions and spatial organizations that occur at venue, community, and intra-city levels that contribute to the music's continuity and development. It is in these structures of ideas and space that we delineate the aspects of music imbedded in social action and that make a musical tradition a "living" art.

1.4.3 Identity - Music and the Construction of Race

A liminal phenomenon "occupies a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold."⁶⁰ Arguably the greatest social boundary in the U.S. has been based on biological traits, particularly the color of one's skin. Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that race has and will "*always* be at the center of the American experience."⁶¹ Through U.S history, "race has been a profound determinant of one's political rights, one's location in the labor market, and indeed one's sense of 'identity.'"⁶² In the Hill District, jazz clubs were liminal because they were both part of a segregated African American community and patronized by whites. Within these spaces, social life and creative processes took place that could not take place elsewhere. In Hill District jazz clubs musicians and audiences alike often challenged American racial politics—whites and blacks socialized, integrated groups performed, and musicians explored individualized interpretations of the music that often drew upon racial themes

⁶⁰ *Oxford American Dictionary*.

⁶¹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul Inc., 1989), pg. 6.

⁶² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, pg. 1.

The Hill's celebrated "Golden Era" clubs such as the Crawford Grill, the Hurricane, the Musicians' Club, and the Flamingo Hotel embodied the complex racial politics surrounding musical performance in black communities. These clubs were African American owned, located in the heart of the city's largest black neighborhood, and immensely popular with both white and black patrons from all over the city. The culture of black jazz clubs was partially an extension of the neighborhood dynamics. As Hill resident Robert Johnson recalls, "You didn't know nothing about segregation when I was a kid. We had white and black teachers when I went to school. It was mixed races in that area with Jewish and blacks and Italians and all that. I didn't know about segregation until the service when we had to separate into white and black. My uncles, they knew about it when they were in the service but I didn't find out about it until I got into the service and went to the South."⁶³

The integrated social scene created a one-way door, however, as black venues were largely open to white patrons though the reverse was rarely true. As a result, the racial divide was blurred in many black jazz clubs. As well, the Hill was able to meet most of the economic and social needs of its community. For African Americans, this independence worked in tandem with segregationist policies.

The *Pittsburgh Courier* was the most important conduit of the neighborhood's collective identity. Music was always regularly addressed in the paper. Club owners such as Gus Greenlee, Harry Hendel, Joe and Buzzy Robinson, and Birdie Dunlap, local and touring musicians, and audience members were regularly featured in *Courier* articles. Hendel used his position as the owner of the Roosevelt Theater and Savoy Ballroom to challenge segregationist policies of businesses outside the Hill, engage issues concerning the African American community, and

⁶³ Robert Johnson, interview by author, December 17, 2008.

support local musicians. In 1931, Hendel challenged a public notice that announced that in the Roosevelt Theater “the colored people will sit in the Balcony and the White people will use the first floor.”⁶⁴ The notice had reportedly been distributed by the Theater Operators Union, which was then in a wage battle with Hendel and other theater owners. The attempt to discredit the Roosevelt’s racial policy prompted Hendel to clarify that “There is no Jim Crow policy in this house, there never has been and there never will be as long as I am in control.”⁶⁵ When Hendel had first opened the Roosevelt Theater, he was questioned by the neighborhood’s white residents on his racial policy to which he asserted “that all patrons who attend this theater are welcome to sit anywhere in the house.”⁶⁶

In addition to promoting racial equality in the Hill, Hendel used the theater to directly engage racial issues. In 1933, the film adaptation of Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* was released, creating a national backlash in African American communities for its repeated use of the term “nigger.” Hendel screened both the original and edited version of the film for “about fifty persons, representing a cross-section of thought in the city’s business, social and professional life” to engage and address the anger directed at the movie.⁶⁷ Through the 1930s and ‘40s, Hendel was involved with progressive racial politics, helping finance “the first Hollywood moving picture Negro actress Lena Horne, daughter of Pittsburgh’s Teddy Horne starred” and booking the top touring black artists.⁶⁸ He screened “Negro pictures” at the

⁶⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 10, 1931, pg. 1.

⁶⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 10, 1931, pg. 1.

⁶⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 10, 1931, pg. 1.

⁶⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 21, 1933, pg. A6.

⁶⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 25, 1966, pg. 1A.

Roosevelt when they were available and pursued “bringing in a Negro motion picture production company...to conduct screen tests on the stage.”⁶⁹

The photos of Teenie Harris and other black photographers contributed to the *Courier's* objective of representing black cultural values, as well as increasing awareness of national issues influencing the African American struggle for equality. The stark difference in the treatment of musical events in the Hill neighborhood by white news sources such as the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and the black newspaper *The Courier* demonstrates the importance of black news sources for publicly representing black identity. As addressed in chapter 2 (section 2.2.1), *Post-Gazette* columnist Charles Danver's description of a Hill jazz club distances those portrayed by cloaking them in anonymity. The pianist, though praised for his abilities, is reduced to a racialized image—“a dark-skinned little fellow”—while the audience and venue goes unidentified.⁷⁰ Replacing specific locations and individuals with vague descriptions has the effect of “othering” the black population in white eyes. Danver's column occasionally aimed to present a “slice of life” from the Hill, but instead reduced personal identities to stereotypes, and as such supporting the racial divide.

A cursory examination of *Courier* columns such as John Clark's “Wylie Avenue” reveals a markedly different approach to representing local jazz clubs. Clark shows how clubs such as the Crawford Grill were important for African American celebrities who wanted places to socialize. For example, Clark wrote: “In the ‘Blue Room’ of the Crawford Grill, Monday night, ‘Sugar’ Ray Robinson entertained a few friends with stories dealing with his Army life, in and

⁶⁹ William Y. Bell, “Commercial Recreation Facilities Among Negroes in the Hill District of Pittsburgh,” pg. 50.

⁷⁰ “Pittsburghesque,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 4, 1933, pg. 10.

out of the ring; met new people; autographed pictures, and had a good time.”⁷¹ In the weekly column “Swingin’ Among the Musicians,” Lee Matthews evaluated nightlife in the Hill, giving attention to local musical artists, the ambiance of clubs, and club owners:

Leaving the [Mellos] Café, I go downtown to the Crawford Grill where I meet Gus Greenlee, the man who is responsible for the new Grill Room and the elaborate style of furnishings. Adding glamour to the only sepia spot on the Hill are Cozy Harris and Teddy Birch, the Monday Nite Serenaders. The next stop is the Melody Bar at Center and Arthur streets. The Melody Bar is the newest and latest in hotspots. It has class and is sharp and keen. It is a place to dance nightly to the music of Leroy Brown who features Joe Westray, the latest electric guitar discovery and Earl Garner [sic] on the piano. Leroy Brown had many offers to become affiliated with name bands, but he refused them all in favor of his own band.⁷²

Both Clark and Matthews identify specific places and individuals to inform the local black population of events and to shape understandings of black nightlife that countered white perspectives.

1.5 CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

In Chapter One, I introduced the topic of the musical life of the Hill District in Pittsburgh, describing how I came to study it as well as the methodology and main source material I used. I addressed pertinent literature and analytical frameworks for jazz that emerged in the 1950s, ‘60s,

⁷¹ “Wylie Avenue,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 19, 1946, pg. 28.

⁷² “Swingin’ Among The Musicians,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 19, 1941, pg. 21.

and '70s. I distinguished three types of analysis for jazz; the structural, which treats jazz outside of its cultural context, the functional, which examines jazz as an extension of African American culture, and the regional or spatial, which examines jazz as a localized practice. My study aims to build on the third approach, examining jazz within a socio-cultural context—the Hill District in Pittsburgh during the first half of the 20th century—to understand how the music functioned spatially. My theoretical framework addresses the question of how music functioned spatially, drawing from the concepts of space, place, and race as addressed in cultural studies, anthropology, and ethnomusicology.

Chapter Two examines the development of a cultural and an infrastructure of entertainment on the Hill during the Prohibition era. I examine the demographic shifts of the 1910s and 1920s that shaped the ethnic and racial makeup of the Hill and use case studies of two “black and tan” clubs to portray the racial politics of the neighborhood’s early musical life. In Chapter Three I present the social organizations in the Hill’s black population and its relationship to jazz performance during the Depression Era. I focus on “numbers runners” such as Gus Greenlee and his club the Crawford Grill to illustrate how jazz was integrated into the business infrastructure of the community’s black population, and how “numbers running” was integral to the jazz scene.

Chapter Four examines how musicians in Pittsburgh negotiated the economics and creative developments of the 1940s. Bebop posed a dilemma for musicians who wanted to explore new avenues of expression but was entrenched in a community of listeners and performers who favored swing, R&B, and blues. For those exploring new forms of jazz, small venues provided spaces for jam sessions and jobs where musicians could experiment within the context of other more popular forms of entertainment. Large venues provided the opportunity to

work with dance orchestras where young musicians learned important skills. For musicians who sought a viable local career as a jazz musician, one had to develop a style that was appealing across racial lines. I conclude the chapter with a case study of pianist Walt Harper, a successful bandleader from the Hill.

Chapter Five details the impact of urban redevelopment on the Hill during the 1950s as well as the emergence of the Hill's two most important jazz clubs; the Crawford Grill no. 2 and the Hurricane Bar and Grill. These clubs held an important place as sites where both touring and local artists performed for highly receptive audiences. The practice of "active listening" was of central importance within these venues, which I call "jazz houses." Chapter Six explores the impact of popular music trends, the development of free jazz, the musicians' union merger, and the 1968 riots on jazz performance in the Hill District. In my conclusion I address the concepts of space, place, race, and music as well as the contemporary revitalization efforts in the Hill District.

2.0 1920S: THE BIRTH OF NIGHTLIFE ON THE HILL

During the early twentieth century, the Hill District developed one of Pittsburgh's most vibrant nightlife scenes. The growth of the community's nightlife was linked to broad social events that shaped both the modern American city and African American urban experiences. The influx of Southern black migrants heightened class and race tensions and divisions, but also contributed to the growth of nightlife. Their presence created a clientele for all manner of venues, from bars and brothels to dance halls and early jazz clubs. At the same time, the music and entertainment in the Hill attracted a white clientele, adventurous in the roaring '20s and interested in interracial socializing. Many Lower Hill District venues, known as "black and tan" clubs, subverted racial norms and created an environment in which young jazz innovators learned their trade. These clubs were also transitional institutions for black club owners who would shape the Hill District's jazz scene in the following decades.

2.1 MIGRANT LABOR, ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND HILL NIGHTLIFE

Arguably the greatest force impacting early jazz and nightlife in the Hill was the influx of Southern black migrant workers during World War I. Thousands of these workers found their way into the Hill District, swelling the black population, heightening racial and class conflicts, and supplying a demand for entertainment. The Hill, a neighborhood defined by its ever-shifting

demographic makeup, became the center for a new public lifestyle and nightlife defined on one hand by vice—drugs, prostitution, and bootlegging—and on the other by interracial socialization and musical innovation.

Understanding the Hill’s nightlife culture during the 1920s requires an appreciation of the economic contexts of Pittsburgh during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as well as the region’s topography. Closest in proximity to downtown Pittsburgh, the Hill District experienced continuous changes in population makeup throughout the turn of the century.⁷³ Industrialization and topography were central forces in the shaping of the Hill’s ethnic, class, and racial makeup. With the stretches of flat land along Pittsburgh’s three converging rivers dominated by mills and railroads, residential land near downtown was greatly limited. Families of the elite class established communities in Allegheny City (currently the Northside) across the Allegheny River as well in Pittsburgh’s East End. Middle-class families were able to establish communities further from the industrial center but were restricted by their reliance on the streetcar lines that ran to the east. Migrant and immigrant blue-collar workers were relegated to the surrounding slopes and hills of downtown Pittsburgh, occupying the Hill District, the Strip District, and the South Side neighborhoods.

Pittsburgh’s steel industry fueled the influx of European immigrants and Southern black migrant laborers leading to cultural juxtapositions unseen in most American cities. Following the Civil War, the Lower Hill was populated by Irish and Germans. During the 1880’s, mass emigration flooded the Hill with “Italians, Jews from Russia, Poland and Romania; Russians and

⁷³ Pittsburgh’s population increased from 49,221 in 1860 to 321,616 in 1900. Alexander Zerful Pittler, “The Hill District of Pittsburgh—A Study of Succession” (MA thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1930), pg. 14.

Slovaks, Armenians, Syrians and Lebanese.”⁷⁴ By 1900, Pittsburgh was a thriving industrial center, faceted with a diverse population of European immigrants as well as a small population of African Americans. African Americans remained a minority in the Hill in the 1900s and ‘10s and occupied the neighborhood’s lowest social echelon.⁷⁵ The early black Hill population was small and interspersed amongst a patchwork of ethnicities:

The Negroes in the Hill were subjected to racial discrimination, but they were so comparatively few in number that no organized protests were made, and so they presented no real major problems. Restaurants, saloons and theaters practiced segregation. Public schools had few problems of integration and segregation, since pupils could legally register at any school regardless of the area of residence. The end result was that most Negroes attended Franklin School, most of the Italians went to Hancock School, the Jews split attendance between Grant and Second Ward Schools.⁷⁶

The Great Migration, a broad movement of millions of African Americans from the rural South to Northern cities, was a formative force in the shaping of the Northern urban experience and would greatly increase the percentage of African Americans in the Hill. In the first two decades of the 20th century, Pittsburgh’s African American population expanded by 85 percent, making African Americans one of the biggest ethnic groups—along with Italians and Poles—to flock to Pittsburgh’s steel industry.⁷⁷ The Great Migration was driven largely by the changing nature of work brought about by industrialization and the demand for workers during World War

⁷⁴ M.R. Goldman, “The Hill District of Pittsburgh as I knew it,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 51 (July 1968: 279-95), pg 279.

⁷⁵ The 3rd Ward’s (Lower Hill) African American population grew from 211 in 1900 to 10,383 in 1920. Alexander Zerful Pittler, “The Hill District of Pittsburgh—A Study of Succession,” pg. 33.

⁷⁶ M.R. Golman, “The Hill District,” pg. 290.

⁷⁷ John Bodnar, ed, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pg. 29.

I. With the decreasing viability of southern agriculture, African Americans began to seek additional work in Southern cities. Many subsequently learned of further opportunity in Northern industrial centers and moved north to vastly increase their earning power. As historian John Bodnar argues, “Explanations that blacks simply abandoned the political oppression of the South seem less viable in the face of evidence that suggests they were slowly being weaned away from farming by industrial opportunities.”⁷⁸ The urban north offered a potential for social improvement through steady wage labor and better schooling for African Americans and provided a portion of the black population with new economic and social freedoms.

A new black working class changed the nature of public life in the Hill, infusing the community with Southern cultural traditions and working class values. Many of those workingmen who had come to the region without families found outlets for their income and time in the public life of the neighborhoods. In his study of recreation in the Hill District, William Bell observed, “The large rooming and lodging house population living for the most part outside of family life tends to seek its amusement in public places” as opposed to the private home.⁷⁹ Aspects of the Hill’s emerging public life played into the neighborhood’s image as a center of vice and crime. Though written some six decades later, John Edgar Wideman’s novel *Brothers and Keepers* captures the atmosphere and social dynamics of the early black workingman’s lifestyle in Pittsburgh in the 1920s:

Black music, blues and jazz, came to town in places like the Pythian Temple, the Ritz, the Savoy, the Showboat. In the bars on the North Side, Homewood, and the Hill you could get whatever you thought you wanted. Gambling, women, a good pork chop. Hundreds of

⁷⁸ Bodnar, ed, *Lives of Their Own*, pg. 35.

⁷⁹ William Y. Bell, “Commercial Recreation Facilities Among Negroes in the Hill District of Pittsburgh” (MA thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1936), pg. 7.

families took in boarders to earn a little extra change. A cot in a closet in somebody's real home seemed nicer, better than the dormitories with their barracks-style rows of beds, no privacy, one toilet for twenty men. Snores and funk, eternal coming and going because nobody wanted to remain in those kennels one second longer than he had to. Fights, thieves, people dragged in stinking drunk or bloody from the streets, people going straight to work after hanging out all night with some whore and you got to smell him and smell her beside you while you trying to pull your shift in all that heat. Lawd. Lawdy. Got no money in the bank. Joints was rowdy and mean and like I'm telling you if some slickster don't hustle your money in the street or a party-time gal empty your pockets while you sleep and you don't nod off and fall in the fire. Then maybe you earn a few quarters to send home for that wife and them babies waiting down yonder for you if she's still waiting and you still sending. It you aint's got no woman to send for then maybe them few quarters buy you a new shirt and a bottle of whiskey so you can find you some trifling body give all your money to.⁸⁰

Wideman's description illustrates the cycle of nightlife and desperate living and working conditions that defined the new lifestyle in the Hill. Relevant to the growth of nightlife, this new lifestyle relied on public space as an important substitute for home life and an escape from work life.

With this emerging lifestyle amongst migrant workers the Hill became the most vibrant and notorious entertainment community in the region. Newcomers to the black community, largely comprised of young working class men, increased the demand for entertainment by

⁸⁰ John Edgar Wideman, *Brothers and Keepers* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), pg. 23.

directing incomes into bars, theaters, dance halls, and after-hours clubs. The rise of nightlife caused an increase in gambling, prostitution, violence, and drinking in the Hill District and had adverse effects on Pittsburgh's older African American population. Because many migrant workers were uneducated and unaccustomed to the North, tensions arose around the shifting social life of the ethnically and racially diverse communities. In 1930, University of Pittsburgh Masters student Alexander Pittler noted the easy availability of alcohol in the Hill District despite the restrictions of the Prohibition. In his study he observed that the Hill had at least eight stills producing bootlegged liquor and 178 speakeasies. Speakeasies were far from clandestine operations:

As one walks through some of the streets of the Hill District, one sees moonshine joints, the proprietors of which do not make an attempt to try to cover up the fact. They operate under police protection. One policeman visited the place and even became drunk.⁸¹

Pittler also accounted for 169 brothels and 44 "assignation" houses in the Hill District. Most of the neighborhood's brothels operated in the blocks between Elm and Fullerton in the Lower Hill District and were a highly visible aspect of public life,

Prostitution operates openly in this district. In many parts of this section prostitutes solicit on the streets without restraint. The writer has often been hailed and stopped by the prostitutes while passing through parts of the district. There are brothels of every grade and description from the cheapest to the expensive. There are Negro houses where only

⁸¹ Alexander Zerful Pittler, "The Hill District of Pittsburgh—A Study of Succession" (MA thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1930), pg. 49.

white men are admitted and white houses for Negro men only. Assignment of “call” houses wherein prostitution goes on by appointment exists in large numbers.⁸²

The Southern migrants heightened racial divisions between blacks and whites, as well as class divisions within the black community. Pianist Earl Hines (1903-1983), a native of Duquesne, a town located twelve miles southeast of Pittsburgh, noted the great impact Southern immigrants had on the area’s African American communities. Hines remembers, “a lot of them were good people who were looking for a new place to live and wanted money. But along with them were a lot of roustabouts who had no good intentions at all, and when they came north and found a freedom they hadn’t had, they began to get excited.”⁸³ As the demographic trend shifted to single males, concerns over violence grew. Before the influx of Southerners, Hines remembered, “We didn’t know what it was to lock doors” and “you could walk around all hours of the night and nobody bothered you.”⁸⁴ With the explosion of the African American population in Duquesne, Hines found that segregation became more pronounced as racial tension rose. Hines’ family moved to the edge of town across the railroad tracks finding themselves isolated from the larger European immigrant community. This led not only to racial segregation but also deep class divisions within the black community due to the fact that southern migrant workers most often found themselves living in poorer conditions and working less desirable jobs than those born in the region.

Class divisions in Pittsburgh’s African American community began to shape the demographic makeup of the Hill District by forcing many migrants into the Lower Hill. The “Old Pittsburghers” or OPs as the black elite were called, often moved into the more secluded

⁸² Alexander Zerful Pittler, “The Hill District of Pittsburgh—A Study of Succession,” pg. 49.

⁸³ Stanley Dance, *The World of Earl Hines* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), pg. 11.

⁸⁴ Dance, *The World of Earl Hines*, pg. 11.

Upper Hill District or into peripheral neighborhoods such as Homewood and Beltzhoover. Historian Rob Ruck notes the emergence of “two nearly separate black communities in Pittsburgh based on place of birth and occupation. The two groups lived apart, worked apart, and played apart. OPs formed their own fraternal and literary societies in reaction to the migration, while many of the migrants in turn brought their native community organizations with them.”⁸⁵ Ira Reid, researcher for the National Urban League, suggested in 1929 that the influx of migrant workers had an adverse effect on the Hill District’s black cultural institutions:

There are independent literary clubs and other clubs connected with the churches and social organizations of the city. However, it appears that the coming of the rural Southern Negro to the city served as a deterrent to the earlier cultural efforts. From the resultant cultural lethargy the Negro community is only beginning to awaken.⁸⁶

At the same time that it heightened social divisions, the Great Migration also contributed to the Hill’s nightlife by creating new contexts in which Southern and Northern blacks as well as whites could interact. Pittsburgh’s version of racial integration in the entertainment world was a particular version of similar phenomena in other northern industrial cities, especially New York and Chicago.

⁸⁵ Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pg. 11.

⁸⁶ General Committee on the Hill Survey, *Social Conditions of the Negro in the Hill District of Pittsburgh; Ira De A. Reid, director (1930)* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Digital Research Library, 1999), pg. 97.

2.2 BLACK AND TAN CLUBS

Important to the Hill District's music scene were "black and tan clubs," labeled as such because of their racially mixed clientele. Common in many northern cities, they were also integral to Pittsburgh's social landscape of the times, and represented the Hill's shifting racial and ethnic landscape. They were also of central importance for early jazz in Pittsburgh. Clubs such as the Leader House and Collins Inn, provided both local and touring African American artists with steady employment, exposure, and experience.⁸⁷ These clubs were also part of a network of Prohibition era enterprises that enabled African American entrepreneurs such as Gus Greenlee and William "Woogie" Harris to establish themselves in the community's business infrastructure and public life. Black entrepreneurship laid the foundation for black owned venues such as the Crawford Grill, which became important focal points of Pittsburgh's African American social life and jazz performance.

Though white owned establishments, the Leader House and Collins Inn were touted as having the city's top black performers. As advertised by the *Courier* in 1923, the Leader House, managed by two men referred to as "Clark and Bowles," claimed to excel "all other Hill-district restaurants and lunch rooms in the serving of first class home cooked meals" as well as presenting "some of the most noted of race artists of today."⁸⁸ The *Courier* praised the club's "Bohemian atmosphere" that appealed to "theater-goers as well as the after dance pleasure

⁸⁷ The Collins Inn, located at 1213 Wylie Avenue, was originally owned by Harry Collins though the building became the headquarters of Pittsburgh's black musicians union (Local 471) in the mid-1930s. *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 15, 1933, pg. A6.

⁸⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 28, 1923, pg. 12.

seekers who may desire an old-fashioned home cooked meal combined with music furnished by the premier talent of the musical world.”⁸⁹

Touring black entertainers and musicians would often converge on black and tan clubs after performances at local theaters. In 1924, cast members of the Noble Sissle, Lew Payton, and Eubie Blake musical comedy *In Bamville* performed at the Nixon Theater in downtown Pittsburgh after which they made their way to the newly renovated second floor of the Leader House where Billy Page’s Broadway Syncopators were performing.⁹⁰

The tradition of black and tan clubs originated in New York and Chicago during the 1900s, where they had a reputation for excess. Writing in 1932, the *Courier* theatrical editor Floyd Snelson wrote an article on black and tan clubs describing interracial clubs in Northeast cities. Snelson recounts visiting Barron Wilkins’ Café on West 37th Street New York in 1910 where he witnessed heavyweight champion Jack Johnson entertaining fight promoters, boxers, and an array of white women. As the night unfolded, the club became a study in interracial relationships and nightlife:

Soon the place is packed to the doors with mixed couples and the constant sound of popping Champagne rings like music in the air. Diamond Tooth Annie, a robust Negro woman, phones in a reservation for a party of ten which is a strictly mixed affair. She operates one of the biggest and finest “houses” in the city patronized by the richest millionaires of Fifth Avenue... Good spenders often spent as high as a thousand dollars in one evening. [A woman] arrives at Barron’s just a few minutes past midnight with a distinguished group of wealthy Wall Street bankers, their shining old bald pates denoted

⁸⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 29, 1924, pg. 5.

⁹⁰ Bernard Peterson, *A Century of Musicals in Black and White: An Encyclopedia of Musical Stage* (Westport CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1993), pg. 185.

nothing but money! Their pretty brownskins, high yellows and one of them was with a real dark girl. She was a real beauty with shining white teeth and a glistening smile. The gentlemen were indeed chivalrous and attentive to their consorts.⁹¹

Snelson continues with descriptions of black sports heroes seduced by white women and rich white women lavishing black companions with expensive clothes.

The common theme in Snelson's description of black and tan clubs is the interracial relationship as a novelty enjoyed by those with money and power. By 1910, clubs where interracial socializing was accepted were common in most northern cities. Snelson proposes it partially "grew out of the sporting and theatrical fraternity" due to the fact that, for some, "there was no color line when merit, talent, and ability was concerned."⁹² The most well known example of the influence of sports and theater on interracial socializing was Jack Johnson, who was credited for popularizing the "black and tan" trend with his Chicago clubs.

In Pittsburgh, black and tan clubs provided a social atmosphere that could not be found in other neighborhoods. The "Bohemian atmosphere" of the Leader House's cabarets, described in the *Courier*, accounts for its clientele—younger patrons, artists, late night revelers, and entertainers. The implied meaning of this description is the club's status as a black and tan club, where black and white socializing was accepted.

Pittsburgh's black and tan tradition began with individuals such as Frank Sutton, a hotel proprietor and sportsman known as the "black mayor of the smoky city" who ran a hotel at Sixth and Wylie Avenue where "many mixed parties of renowned notables of the sport world" took

⁹¹ Floyd G Snelson, "Snelson Reviews 'Black and Tan' Craze in Metropolitan Centers," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 5, 1932, pg. A1.

⁹² *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 5, 1932, pg. A1.

place.⁹³ Other black and tan clubs in the lower Hill included a club owned by William Ward located at Wylie and Elm Street as well as one owned by Jim Brown located at Wylie and Chatham Street.⁹⁴

In the Hill, black and tan clubs reflected the neighborhood's diversity and played an important part in the neighborhood's nightlife because their often more wealthy clientele enabled the presentation of better artists at higher pay. Also, black and tan clubs provided an environment within black neighborhoods where both whites and blacks could enjoy entertainment, gambling, music, dining, and drinking. The phenomenon subverted cultural norms as both the site of racial intermingling and the vices of urban nightlife, enabling a rare crossing of the racial divide. Singer Lois Deppe, who worked at both the Leader House and Collins Inn, remembers, "black-and-tan shows were a novelty...just as they were in Harlem, and white people went where the good black talent was."⁹⁵

For Earl Hines and Lois Deppe, working in black and tan clubs such as the Leader House and Collins Inn offered an experience of race relations that did not exist in general society. In Hines' experience, musicians and theater performers were able to create social environments where the racial divide could be crossed. The curiosity of musicians and audiences "caused more mingling and more understanding in the theatrical and music worlds," creating a public space with "less discrimination and envy."⁹⁶ Hill District theaters on the T.O.B.A (Theater Owners

⁹³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 5, 1932, pg. A1.

⁹⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 5, 1932, pg. A1.

⁹⁵ Dance, *ibid.*, pg. 132.

⁹⁶ Dance, *ibid.*, pg. 23.

Booking Association) circuit gave artists such as Ethel Waters and Bojangles Robinson national exposure to both black and white audiences.⁹⁷

Racial intermingling was, however, a one-way street where black venues welcomed white patrons while white venues did not welcome black patrons or performers. Lois Deppe's career was directly shaped by his experience with racism in Pittsburgh. After coming to the city in the mid-teens, Deppe was hired to sing with an all-white chorus and orchestra in the Pitt Theater, to accompany silent films. Deppe's stay was short lived after the manager told him "We've got this big chorus, and they've all said, 'We're not going to work with that nigger no longer. He's doing all the solos.' Now I can't lose my chorus just on account of you."⁹⁸ Later, while waiting tables in the Collins Inn on Wylie Avenue, Deppe began to take requests from patrons, "I came back with my hands full of dollars, and I decided right there I was through waiting tables. I had been studying downtown with McClure Miller, who taught concert artists, but now it was nightclubs for me!"⁹⁹ This exclusionary practice in the entertainment world would remain a central force in Pittsburgh's musical scene and influence the career paths of many black artists.

Black and tan clubs were the exception amongst white-patronized venues for offering young up-and-coming black artists regular work and business connections. Harry Collins, owner of the Collins Inn, was involved in Pittsburgh sports in the early 1900s and ran various clubs on lower Wylie Avenue during the 1910s and '20s as well as an upscale club in Chicago called the

⁹⁷ The Star Theater (1417 Wylie Avenue) featured black vaudeville shows and was part of the Southern Consolidated Circuit (1916-1921) and the TOBA (1921-1925). Bessie Smith performed there in 1924. Lynne Conner, *Pittsburgh in Stages: Two Hundred Years of Theater* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), pg. 96.

⁹⁸ Dance, *ibid*, pg. 132.

⁹⁹ Dance, *ibid*, pg. 132.

Elite No. 2. Earl Hines' describes him as "a little short fellow and a very rough guy" who "thought I should be top, and he really paid me a wonderful salary."¹⁰⁰ Collins was likely a European immigrant for Hines noted that "his English was very bad and he couldn't carry on a decent conversation."¹⁰¹

The Collins Inn, while expanding the variety and style of entertainment in the Hill, was closed when Harry Collins was convicted of drug trafficking and sentenced in February of 1923 to pay a fine of \$1,000 and serve three years in jail, though he was released early in August of 1924. His incarceration did not end his involvement in the nightclub business for he was responsible for offering Earl Hines a job at his club Elite No. 2 in Chicago in 1925 and opening a restaurant and hotel at 1314 Wylie Avenue simple called "It" in July of 1929.¹⁰²

Black and tan clubs were a product of the Hill's rapidly shifting ethnic, racial, and class makeup and provided the foundation for a tradition of entertainment and music making that would last the next four decades. Because of reactions against interracial socialization black and tan clubs faded during the late 1920s. Clubs under black management took their place as black entrepreneurs began to find a foothold in the local economy and build a local black audience to patronize their venues. This transition was by no means smooth for black club owners were faced with negotiating local racial politics, Prohibition era governmental corruption, and a range of cultural aesthetics.

¹⁰⁰ Dance, pg. 36.

¹⁰¹ Dance, pg. 36.

¹⁰² *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 6, 1929, pg. 6.

2.3 ENTERTAINMENT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND CHANGING RACIAL NORMS

Collins laid the groundwork for one of the neighborhood's most important black club owners. In November of 1923, the *Courier* reported that the Collins Inn was for sale, using the occasion to promote the expansion of black business in the Hill District; "If a few of our Negroes with \$20,000 or \$30,000...had the business foresight of Harry Collins, over seven-tenths of the property in the Third and Fifth Wards would be owned by Negroes."¹⁰³ In July of 1924, Gus Greenlee became the first African American proprietor of the Collins Inn—renamed as the Paramount Club—beginning a long career in a nightclub business.

Greenlee, born in 1893 in Marion, North Carolina to an affluent family, came to Pittsburgh with little to his name and grew to one of the city's most influential African American club owners. Few others matched his influence on the social and economic life of the Hill District. His father was a masonry contractor and amongst his brothers were two doctors and a lawyer. Greenlee did not follow his brother's paths and after dropping out of college joined the mass of southern African Americans to migrate to the industrial north.¹⁰⁴ Arriving in Pittsburgh by freight train, Greenlee began shinning shoes, followed by work in the steel mills and as a cab driver. After fighting and being wounded in World War I, Greenlee returned to Pittsburgh where he resumed his occupation as a cab driver. His reputation spread quickly in the Hill earning him the nickname "Gasoline Gus" because he was rumored to have transported bootlegged liquor in gas cans.

¹⁰³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 17, 1923, pg. 9.

¹⁰⁴ Ingham, John and Lynne B. Feldman. *African-American Business Leaders: A Biographical Dictionary* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), pg. 296.

During the 1920s, black and tan clubs such as the Paramount came under increasing scrutiny in part as a reaction to the larger nightlife culture that arose during the prohibition era as well as the increasing racial tensions caused by the rapidly expanding black population. The club's popularity grew under Greenlee's ownership though it drew unwanted attention from the police who closed the club after a raid.¹⁰⁵ Undeterred, Greenlee reopened the club in 1924 with aspiring neighborhood businessman Tom "Kid" Welch. In 1925, mayor William Magee focused attention on the neighborhood's nightlife, requiring the Leader House and other Hill District cabarets to close at 12:45 am. This move, while aimed at curbing "the wide-open rein of gambling, bootlegging, disorderly houses and redlight districts" that was seen to have dominated Pittsburgh's nightlife, was protested by the cabaret owners who felt their clubs were specifically targeted because of their "black and tan" events.¹⁰⁶

Further raids on the Paramount were apparently in response to the club's interracial clientele rather than the illegal distribution of alcohol. An article printed in the *Pittsburgh Courier* attacked what appeared to be a media campaign to publicly slander the Paramount Club's reputation. An article had appeared in the *Pittsburgh Post* that called for a crackdown on an unnamed Lower Hill club "where 17 and 18-year-old white girls dance with Negroes and drink with Negroes, almost within sound of the office of John J. Ford, inspector of the First police district."¹⁰⁷ Aimed at branding the Hill District a "plague spot" rife with "black and tan" after hours clubs, gambling, prostitution, bootleg liquor, crime, racial intermingling and other "unspeakable conditions," the *Post* article prompted a harsh rebuttal from the *Courier*. Blaming the *Post's* "prejudiced reporter" and "cracker city editor" for distorting the facts, the *Courier*

¹⁰⁵ Ingham, John and Lynne B. Feldman. *African-American Business Leaders*, pg. 298.

¹⁰⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 28, 1925, pg. 1.

¹⁰⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 28, 1925, pg. 1.

article presents a markedly different image of Greenlee's Paramount Club. Having "taken in all the cabarets" through the Hill, the *Courier* reporter noted Greenlee's policy as follows;

No man could enter the Paramount without a guest. No intermingling of the races was allowed, unless, perchance, the parties were man and wife. This rule was enforced to the letter. White parties, coming to the Paramount came because of the high grade entertainment offered. Local newspapermen with a vague idea of the notorious "black belts" in Chicago, New York, and other cities, where the races mingle without police interference, have chosen this method to stir up racial animosity.¹⁰⁸

Particularly telling in this quote is the author's defense of Pittsburgh's black and tan culture, which he argues was driven by the common appreciation of "high entertainment" across racial boundaries rather than a covert racial intermingling for sexual purposes.

Despite the reactions by black columnists against incendiary reporting by white papers, crossing the racial divide in black and tan clubs could lead to violent repercussions. Snelson notes, "In New York the police department made an effort to break up the practice just before the world war. Murders, brutality and beating were the methods used and many Negroes caused near race riots during the procedure... it turned out that every white woman found in company with a black was arrested and the dark gentleman subject to a terrible clubbing. This soon discouraged the idea and very little mixing is the result. Today the larger night clubs ban mixing of races and it has been reduced to a minimum."¹⁰⁹

The backlash against black and tan clubs also came from the black patrons who saw them as exploitive of black culture for the benefit of white society. The Harlem Casino, an upscale Hill

¹⁰⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 28, 1925, pg. 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 5, 1932, pg. A1.

venue modeled after Harlem's Cotton Club, was originally white owned and advertised as a black and tan club. Like the Cotton Club however, the owner reportedly placed a "color ban" on the nightclub, restricting black patrons. When Greenlee bought the Harlem Casino he "couldn't get Negroes to patronize the establishment."¹¹⁰ It wouldn't be until the 1930s, when Greenlee established himself in the "numbers racket" and opened the Crawford Grill—a club that catered to the Hill's diverse black population—that he would establish a lasting nightclub.

Greenlee was able to sustain the raids on the Paramount Club due to his diverse business activities. At 30, he owned the Workingmen's Pool hall, ran the Sunset Café, and was running a music-booking agency out of the Paramount.¹¹¹ Greenlee managed to reopen the Paramount a year after it was closed by the city, where he featured Lloyd Scott and His Orchestra.¹¹² By 1930, he had become a highly regarded businessman in the black community who represented cultural advancement and a philanthropic spirit valued by the community. In 1933, Greenlee remodeled the Paramount and introduced a new floorshow featuring local entertainer Edna Lewis backed up by the Sherdina Walker orchestra. The *Courier*, a steady supporter of Greenlee, praised the Paramount as "just about the classiest beer garden and nite club the city has ever enjoyed" due to Greenlee's "fine judgment and excellent taste."¹¹³

¹¹⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 10, 1945, pg. 3.

¹¹¹ Ingham, John and Lynne B. Feldman. *African-American Business Leaders*, pg. 298.

¹¹² *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 22, 1926, pg. 8. Lloyd Scott was jazz drummer and bandleader from Ohio who took up a temporary residence in Pittsburgh before moving his band to Harlem. He recorded in 1927 under Lloyd Scott and His Orchestra.

¹¹³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 15, 1933, pg. A6. July 8, 1933, pg. A6.

2.4 EARLY MUSICAL INNOVATORS IN THE HILL

Early Hill District club owners, such as Greenlee and Collins, had to negotiate the complex racial politics of the shifting neighborhood and nightlife scene while providing cutting edge entertainers. These environments served as a training ground for young innovators who needed regular employment to develop ideas and techniques, places in which to network with each other, audiences for feedback, and club managers to aid in accessing the music scene in other cities. They were also spaces in which cultural cross-fertilization occurred between Southern and Northern blacks and whites as well as European immigrants.

The Great Migration brought southern cultural traditions north, providing fertile ground for music innovation. Jazz historian William Kenny suggests that the “traditional respect accorded harmoniums and pianos in southern black life” influenced the rise of Pittsburgh’s contribution of great jazz pianists—Earl Hines, Mary Lou Williams, Billy Strayhorn, Erroll Garner, and Ahmad Jamal—which was unrivaled even by New York.¹¹⁴ As demonstrated with the pianist Earl Hines, the Hill’s emergent lifestyle shaped his European Art Music oriented musical training into a highly innovative improvisational approach. For Hines, the Hill would introduce him to jazz and provide the venues in which he developed as a performer. While still living in the town of Duquesne, Hines recalls,

I still didn’t know anything about jazz. All I knew was finding these popular songs, and playing them, and getting what I could out of them. I still had what you might call a classical type feeling, and it wasn’t until I started going to theaters with my parents and

¹¹⁴ William Howland Kenny, *Jazz on the River* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pg. 158.

relatives that I began to realize these numbers had soul in them, and then I tried to get as much feeling out of them as I could.¹¹⁵

The Hill's nightlife would be an indispensable influence on young musicians such as Hines. At fifteen, Earl Hines began visiting Pittsburgh, which was at its height as an industrial power and reputed as a "wild town at that time, especially on Wylie Avenue."¹¹⁶ He recalls being drawn to the vibrant street and night club life of the Hill District and would often walk down Wylie Avenue just to "listen to the guys" conversations and watch the girls. One night, Hines found himself "sitting in a restaurant, eating big steaks like I'd never seen before and I was reacting to the glamour of the waitresses, when I heard this music upstairs. It had a beat and a rhythm to it that I'd never heard before."¹¹⁷ As Hines began to frequent clubs such as the Leader House he became increasingly drawn to the lifestyle surrounding the neighborhood's nightlife and aware of a new way of playing.¹¹⁸ Hines observed a pianist named "Toadlow" whose way of personalizing songs introduced Hines to the possibilities of improvisation. Hines also began to incorporate the techniques of other pianists such as Jim Fellman and Johnny Watters and develop his innovative musical approach: "Between the two of them at different afternoons, I spent what little money I had; but by putting their two styles together I think I came up with a style of my own."¹¹⁹

By 1920, the Hill District had become an opportunistic place for young musicians such as Hines. It was on Wylie that bandleader Lois Deppe approached Hines and his friend and

¹¹⁵ Dance, *ibid.*, pg. 15.

¹¹⁶ Dance, *ibid.*, pg. 16.

¹¹⁷ Dance, *ibid.*, pg. 16.

¹¹⁸ The Leader House, located at 1401 Wylie Avenue, became the Crawford Grill No. 1 under the ownership of Gus Greenlee. Greenlee operated it from 1932 until a fire gutted it in 1951.

¹¹⁹ Dance, *ibid.*, pg. 18.

drummer Harry Williams to offer them a job in the Leader House. Hines' classical training and ability to read music kept his repertoire up to date because he could buy the latest songs and learn them faster than the musicians who only played by ear. Competition was strong from other venues and it was often the musician's reputation that would draw patrons. Two blocks down Wylie Avenue was the Collins Inn, where vocalist Bob Cole performed and competed with Deppe for the business of passersby.

These clubs provided Hines with his first experiences in the entertainment industry and taught him the importance of not only mastering his instrument but also learning to attract and entertain a crowd as well as network with other musicians. Hines stayed at the Leader House for two years, starting out at fifteen dollars a week. As the band's popularity grew, Deppe augmented its personnel with violinist Emmet Jordan and clarinetist Vance Dixon, who settled in Pittsburgh after having performed there with a touring group. Lois Deppe's band grew too large to perform at the Leader House and eventually toured through West Virginia and Ohio where Hines gained a wider recognition with both white and black audiences.

Working as part of floor shows in the Hill's black and tan clubs introduced Hines to a variety of performance styles and contexts. Around 1924, Earl Hines' was hired at the Collins Inn, located a block and a half down Wylie Avenue from the Leader House. Hines joined a six-piece band led by violinist Vernie Robinson and fronted by vocalist Corinne Howard, the wife of local pianist Bart Howard. Hines recalls the performances focused largely on the popularity of Corinne's beauty and energetic entertainment style:

Now the club had two rooms upstairs with a sort of hallway in between. The bandstand was right in the middle, and she would have to go around the stand to get to the people sitting on the other side. There were very small salaries at this place, so everybody had to

depend on the tips. Vernie Robinson had the band and Corinne would sing in front, and she might end up with two hundred dollars in two fistfuls of bills, which she had to divide up, a hundred for herself and a hundred for us.¹²⁰

Nightlife in the Hill during the 1920s was centered as much on the presentation of personal style as it did on musical entertainment. The musicians' livelihood relied not only on the clubs of Wylie Avenue but also on the street itself and a participation in the lifestyle of the Hill. Without a black union hall, black musicians were often hired off the street. As Hines describes it, "Whoever wanted to hire a man would come up the Avenue and say, 'Is there a drummer here?' or 'Is there a piano player here?' or whatever he wanted. You made your own price and charged whatever you thought you were worth. That's why it paid to be dressed up, because you never knew when somebody was going to call."¹²¹ In the evenings, cars would be parked and displayed on Wylie, and men would wear silk or "*crêpe de chine* shirts, as bright as you could get and with your initials on them," gold dollars or watches attached to gold chains, and Edwin Clapp shoes.¹²²

Hines was drawn into a new lifestyle by the "gamblers and sporting women" he met at the Leader House. He became a pool shark who worked with pool hall gamblers who would run scams on visitors to the neighborhood. Much to the chagrin of his aunt, Hines also found himself involved with a "streetwalker"—a common profession that grew in response to the increased mill workforces. Hines' streetwalker girlfriend provided him with money and new clothes while Hines had to "keep men away who were demanding money."¹²³ These activities, more than in

¹²⁰ Dance, *ibid.*, pg. 29.

¹²¹ Dance, *ibid.*, pg. 22.

¹²² Dance, *ibid.*, pg. 22.

¹²³ Dance, *ibid.*, pg. 19.

any other neighborhood, were the part of public life and the economic infrastructure and though hidden from his family, supplemented Hines' income, allowing him to live and develop musically.

At the close of the 1920s, the Hill District's nightlife served a diversity of ethnic, racial, and class needs in the rapidly changing neighborhood. For the neighborhood's African American population, nightlife and music were a means for constructing social spaces and urban identities as well as integrating oneself in Pittsburgh's shifting urban landscape. For the growing number of black mill workers, nightlife and music offered a respite from grueling workdays and poor living conditions. For whites, the Hill's nightlife provided a style of entertainment not available in downtown and outlying neighborhood venues. For musicians, nightclubs were integral for gaining experience and access to work in other cities. For many of those in the community, nightlife grew into a celebrated aspect of public life, inextricable from the neighborhood's cultural identity and economic infrastructure.

3.0 1930S: SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS, RACKETS, AND NIGHTLIFE IN THE DEPRESSION ERA

The impact of the Great Depression and the repeal of prohibition in 1933 ushered in a new era in the Hill District's nightlife, where music became more fully integrated into the neighborhood's social and economic fabric. The Hill's black community, restricted by the economic downturn and racial politics, supported music and social events through social and fraternal organizations such as the Loendi Social Club and Knights of Pythias. Nightlife and jazz were also bolstered by illegal rackets such as "numbers running," which allowed black entrepreneurs such as William "Gus" Greenlee and William "Woogie" Harris to establish long running clubs and support local and touring musicians. These outlets for musical performance represent the alternative means for social support and economic development that were available to the Hill's fluctuating black community in the 1930s.

3.1 THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

During the Depression era, the Hill District's African American community faced a disproportionate amount of hardship and so developed systems of social support to serve the every expanding community. In 1930, the Hill's black population had grown to 24,563, which accounted for 48 percent of Hill's population and 45 percent of Pittsburgh's African

Americans.¹²⁴ Industrial production in Pittsburgh fell 59 percent from its 1929 average, causing the city's unemployment to far exceed the national average of 24.9 percent, with 31 percent of Pittsburgh's white workers and 48 percent of its black workers going jobless.¹²⁵ The weight of unemployment plaguing the Hill's black population was compounded by high rates of violence and illness in the neighborhood. Nearly 30 percent of Pittsburgh's murders occurred in the lower and upper Hill District, with the lower Hill ranked first in number of deaths from pneumonia.¹²⁶

To understand the role of jazz in the Hill it is important to examine the social and economic experiences unique to the neighborhood's African American population. By the 1930s, Polish and Italian immigrants had established stable communities with strong cross-generational ties in adjoining neighborhoods while Pittsburgh's African American communities remained in a state of flux. Black migration in and out of Pittsburgh occurred at a very high rate, to the point that in 1935 nearly 85 percent of the African American community was estimated to have arrived after World War I.¹²⁷ Though driven by the same promise of economic prosperity, African Americans encountered a markedly different experience than Poles and Italians in both work and community formation. African Americans from the rural South experienced a greater degree of discrimination in hiring practices and housing, and so were less likely to advance economically through subsequent generations. The early African American experience in Pittsburgh was characterized more by mobility than geographical stability, demonstrated by a low percentage of

¹²⁴ William Y. Bell, "Commercial Recreation Facilities Among Negroes in the Hill District of Pittsburgh" (MA thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1936), pg. 9.

¹²⁵ Bodnar, *Lives of Their Own*, *ibid*, pg. 185-6.

¹²⁶ Bodnar, *ibid*, pg. 223. This is not to attribute the violence exclusively to African American community for the Italian Mafia was also active in this area.

¹²⁷ Bodnar, *ibid*, pg. 198.

black homeownership.¹²⁸ In the lower Hill or the 3rd ward, only 0.5 percent owned their homes, while in the upper Hill or 5th ward, 13.2 percent owned homes.¹²⁹ Homeownership percentages would improve in the Hill District through the 1960s though they never reached the levels of Pittsburgh's Italian and Polish neighborhoods.

The social contexts of black nightlife were far more diverse than those portrayed by white news sources such as the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. In 1930, *Post-Gazette* columnist Charles Danver described a nighttime excursion into a Lower Hill after hours club where nightlife served as the backdrop of the Hill's vice, violence, and poverty:

Up Wylie Avenue way there's a Negro gambling dive whose dusky patrons are required to check their knives, razors, blackjacks, and other implements of battle at the door. It's the duckiest place! Run up some time and we'll play games. An alley door opens into a long cellar where smells and smoke are so thick they could be cut with one of the parked knives. The night we were there about 50 sepia guests were crowded around one crap table, clustered about the stove, and draped over railings and in corners—asleep on their feet. Craps (there's a nickel game), cards and a “numbers” writer at a desk invite customers, but there's no compulsion to play. Most of the habitués are homeless Negroes chiseling heat. The tolerant proprietor doesn't bother them, except to oust the sleepers at a certain hour in order to clean up the place... Any one carrying a gun, openly or secretly, is refused admittance. They're running a nice, quiet little place, and they don't want any disgruntled loser shooting up the joint, as he might after unchecking his cannon.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Bodnar, *ibid*, pg. 7.

¹²⁹ Bodnar, *ibid*, pg. 211.

¹³⁰ “Pittsburghesque,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 2, 1930, pg. 8.

The specter of the Depression hangs heavily on Danver's portraits of the Hill's nightlife. Danver accentuates the bleak imagery with ironic praise of the club's social atmosphere. Much of the imagery's effectiveness in mocking the social scene relies on the anonymity of those described and the prevailing violent undertones of their lifestyle. The club is presented as one of many such black social spots—a synecdoche for nightlife on the Hill—where unnamed masses gathered to while away their destitute and desperate lives. In 1933, he described listening to a pianist in “one of the Hill district's countless tiny hideaways”

Between beers, set up by customers who liked music, a dark-skinned little fellow, his fingers in what seemed to be a frantic frenzy, pounded out everything from Beethoven to Berlin. There was no stopping him. Occasionally he would lift the glass to his lips, but the free hand continued to fly over the keyboard. For almost an hour, his tunes flitted across the small dining-room and into the corner bar. A crowd gathered and stood by quietly. Then somebody called for “The St. Louis Blues.” The player's eyes lit up strangely... “Three years ago,” he said simply, “I lived in St. Louis. I once got \$250 for playing that piece out there at a concert. Now I'm playing it for—” And he glanced at the stale, half-filled glass of beer on the music rack!¹³¹

The story projects an image of the hapless black musician, who, regardless of skill, is fated to play for little or nothing. The musician in this vignette finds little hope in the Depression era and little help from those around him.

Danver's descriptions of black nightlife fail to account for the network of social organizations that served the black community and by extension its musical life. While Danver's narrative implies that the fluctuating black community could only support a limited and low-

¹³¹ “Pittsburghesque,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 4, 1933, pg. 10.

class nightlife the reality was that the limitations impacting the community supported a diversity of social organizations and entertainment contexts. This was due in part to the Hill's black community being inundated by waves of Southern migrant workers who relied a great deal on "community networks" in moving North. As historian Peter Gottlieb notes, "Friends, neighbors, workmates, and fellow church or lodge members from the South helped each other travel North the same way relatives did—passing along information about Pittsburgh and offering temporary living quarters in the city to arriving friends and associates."¹³²

While the Hill District was the hardest hit neighborhood in Pittsburgh during the Depression, it maintained a diverse number of social networks and organizations that served its black population and its musicians. Not all musicians and entertainers were destined to live as Danver's nameless pianist—independent from any support system—for an array of social organizations tied to nightlife operated in the Hill. Social and fraternal clubs became an important site for musical performance and social life in the context of the Hill's diverse and diffuse African American population. Though mostly private, social clubs were able to fund performances from membership dues. Often, private social clubs used music as an important aspect of its public identity.

At the close of the 1920s, the Hill was home to a myriad of social clubs that provided a wide array of services. More than 250 of these "good-time" social clubs were referenced in the *Courier* in 1928.¹³³ These organizations were more oriented towards leisure than civic duty and ill equipped to aid the influx of migrants and instability in residency though their contribution

¹³² Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-1930*, pg. 50.

¹³³ General Committee on the Hill Survey, *Social Conditions of the Negro in the Hill District of Pittsburgh*, pg. 97.

cannot be wholly discounted. Foremost, these organizations served as a focal point in a shifting social world and a means of adjusting to an urban existence:

During the year 1928 news items on more than 250 Negro social clubs in Pittsburgh appeared in the social pages of the *Pittsburgh Courier*... It would be difficult to find any other city with a Negro population of the size of Pittsburgh's where so many social affairs are regarded as being of the first water.¹³⁴

Social clubs organized a wide range of public events for the Hill's black community including debates, dances, teas, parties, literary studies, recitals, games and charity and required the dedication and time of individuals to organize meetings, plan events, and even donate their homes for events. Secular organizations such as fraternal lodges and women's lodges organized some programs and public projects that provided work for local and touring musicians. Fraternal organization such as the Elks, Masons, and civic groups such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association maintained auditoriums and staged dances.¹³⁵ Musicians were hired for these events, both large and small, to provide light background music, "hot" dance music, and classical recitals. The performance spaces were held in spacious private homes or rented halls in both the Upper and Lower Hill. Clubs such as the Fifth Ward Progressive Club, Young The Negroes Cooperative League, the Twentieth Century Bridge Club, the Eaglettes, The Utopians and the Frogs organized evenings of "cards and dancing" that featured local groups such as Clarence Williams Mohawk Stomper, Mat Addison and His Blue Rhythm Boys, and

¹³⁴ General Committee on the Hill Survey, *Social Conditions of the Negro in the Hill District of Pittsburgh*, pg. 97

¹³⁵ William Y. Bell, "Commercial Recreation Facilities Among Negroes in the Hill District of Pittsburgh" (MA thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1936), pg. 58-59.

George Hornsby's Syncopators.¹³⁶ *Courier* columnist Lee A. Matthews organized a children's performance troupe called the Kan-D-Kids who performed on KDKA radio and local theaters such as the Roosevelt. A notable member of this group in 1932 was ten-year-old pianist Erroll Garner who would grow to be one of Pittsburgh's most celebrated musicians.¹³⁷

The Loendi Social Club, established in 1897 by George Hall, was the oldest and most prestigious black men's social and literary club in Pittsburgh. In 1902, the club purchased a three-story building for \$10,000 at 83 Fullerton Street, in the heart of the Lower Hill District.¹³⁸ This location would grow to symbolize the social and economic elite of the Hill District's African American population. The Loendi Club remained at this location until 1958 when it was forced to relocate to 841 Ledlie Street in the Upper Hill District due to urban redevelopment.

For over six decades, the club drew together the social elite of the African American community, serving as a focal point for doctors, lawyers, business owners, entrepreneurs, and celebrities. While the club often hired small groups, its contribution to jazz in the Hill District lay in its recognition and support of the arts and great African American artists and figures. The club was established to "serve the literary and social interests of its members" by maintaining a private library, sponsoring public events, concerts and lectures with notable African American figures such as Booker T. Washington and Joe Louis. The Loendi also held special banquets and events to honor African American leaders such as New York Boxing Commissioner Frank Forbes, Yale football captain Levi Jackson, and bandleaders Louis Armstrong, Billy Eckstine

¹³⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 28, 1930, pg. 7; February 6, 1932, pg. 8; March 12, 1932, pg. 8.

¹³⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 4, 1932.

¹³⁸ Laurence Glasco ed., *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), pg. 284.

and Duke Ellington.¹³⁹ Through the 1910s and '20s, the Loendi Club sponsored the Loendis, a black basketball team that gained national recognition with its star players Cumberland Posey, Jr. and William “Pimp” Young.¹⁴⁰ In the late 1910s and early 1920s, the Loendis advanced to four consecutive Colored Basketball World Championships. The home court of the Loendis was the Labor Temple, which could hold 5,000 spectators and was located on the corner of Webster Avenue and Washington Street in the Lower Hill District.

The Loendi served the musical interests of the Hill’s black elite. The club, restricted to members, wives, and guests, hired local jazz artists to perform for special events, dinners, and dances. The Loendi, being a private club, would most often hire jazz groups for “one-nighters” or special events rather than weeks at a time as they were in most public music venues. Due to the image of the club, jazz musicians were expected to provide a more sophisticated mix of music for listening, socializing, and dancing. The building’s smaller rooms and lack of a bandstand most often led to hiring a solo pianist though on occasion groups of up to four musicians would perform for an event.

The style of jazz performed at the Loendi reflected the class differences found in the Hill’s African American community. In 1950, local pianist Teenie Trent worked a regular Sunday session with guitarist Calvin King, bassist Ghost Howell, and percussionist Will Smith—all notable Pittsburgh sidemen. The *Pittsburgh Courier* found that Trent’s style fit well with the atmosphere of the Loendi, which had a long-standing reputation for refinement. Trent’s repertoire was described as “A little old, a little new, a little classical, a bit Latin, an occasional

¹³⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 7, 1958, pg. A3.

¹⁴⁰ Claude Johnson, “The Black Fives Blog”, <http://blackfivesblog.com/?p=351> (accessed April 9, 2009)

blues, but always in good taste.”¹⁴¹ The balance of musical styles is characteristic of “society” or “commercial” events where songs were kept short for the convenience of dancers. That the *Courier* justified the inclusion of the “occasional blues” with the explanation that the music was “always in good taste” hints to the class distinctions drawn by musical styles.



Figure 3 Looking north on Fullerton Avenue with the awning for the Washington Club on the right. The Loendi Social Club (not pictured) was directly next door, c. 1944 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.10819)

The legacy of the Loendi’s support for jazz lived on into the 1940s and 1950s with the club sponsoring events to honor and celebrate the accomplishments of African American

¹⁴¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 4, 1950, pg. 28.

musicians of note. In 1952, for example, the Loendi sponsored a week of events for Pittsburgh vocalist and bandleader Billy Eckstine (1914-1993) who was returning to the city to perform in downtown's Stanley Theater. Eckstine, a "favorite son" of Pittsburgh, was one of the city's most notable African American artists to both contribute to the development of modern jazz and break into the popular music industry. The events organized in honor of Billy Eckstine included "the Loendi Formal at the Fort Pitt Hotel honoring Billy Eckstine; open house for Billy at the Loendi Club; teen-age party for Mr. B; Loendi press, radio and TV party at the club, and the big salute to Eckstine at the Famous Door."¹⁴² Present at the event was boxer Sugar Ray Robinson, bandleader Charlie Barnet, WHOD disc jockey Mary Dee, and club owner Woogie Harris.

As well as bringing in notable African Americans to the Hill, the Loendi maintained connections between the Hill District's African American community and African and the African Diaspora. For the club's 50th anniversary, it hosted a celebration in the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall that featured Governor William Hastie of the Virgin Islands, Ambassador Joseph Charles of Haiti, and Envoy Extraordinary C. D. B. King of Liberia.¹⁴³

Though the Loendi represented the social and economic achievements of Pittsburgh's African American community, it also embodied the class and racial divisions within that same community. Social class lines were often drawn between those with a lighter and darker skin tone. Trumpeter Roger Barbour notes, "When [the Loendi] was in its heyday they had a problem with color. If you were dark skinned they wouldn't let you in there. They had either a window or they could see you through the door and if you were dark you weren't allowed in there. We had

¹⁴² *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 6, 1952, pg. 22.

¹⁴³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 30, 1947, pg. 21.

segregation amongst our own selves.”¹⁴⁴ Racial divisions within Pittsburgh’s African American community were exposed in daily interactions. As Barbour remembers upon entering a club, “A guy was kidding me one night when I went to a place saying, ‘Hey, you just got in under the wire’ because I’m light skinned. He was just kidding but there were problems.”



Figure 4 The Washington Club (left) and the Loendi Club (right) located at 81 and 83 Fullerton Street, c. 1950 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.7847)

¹⁴⁴ Roger Barbour, interview by author, November 19, 2008.

The Loendi was foremost “a prestige club” for the city’s elite African Americans. *Courier* columnist Hazel Garland commented on the Loendi’s image as a “light-skinned” club responding to University of Pittsburgh professor Dr. Lloyd Bell comment that he had been told that he was “too black to get into the Loendi Club.”¹⁴⁵ During the 1940s and ‘50s, the Loendi’s “men’s color ranged from dark black to damn near white” though “most of the women were light complexioned.”¹⁴⁶ Notable black musicians and public figures such as Count Basie would be invited to dinners and social events “but the average Joe blow with a saxophone couldn't go in there.”¹⁴⁷

Despite the presence of dark-skinned members of the Loendi, class divisions remained a reality of Pittsburgh African American neighborhoods. Saxophonist George Thompson remembers that though he was hired to perform at the Loendi he “couldn't just go there. Even us, the African Americans. You had to have a card.”¹⁴⁸ For the musicians, the jobs were considered “society gig” where the music was programmed to fit the intimate and refined atmosphere of the club. Within the Hill District, “the professional people had the people they loafed with just like white society did.”¹⁴⁹

In June of 1958, the Loendi Club’s physical assets were removed from the 83 Fullerton building and put into storage to make way for the wrecking ball. The club purchased a site for \$10,000 in the Upper Hill on which to build the new Loendi club; a one-story \$175,000 structure.¹⁵⁰ To complete the building, the Loendi received a \$100,000 loan from the Western

¹⁴⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 9, 1985, pg. 5.

¹⁴⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 9, 1985, pg. 5.

¹⁴⁷ George “Duke” Spaulding, interview by author, November 16, 2008.

¹⁴⁸ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

¹⁴⁹ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

¹⁵⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 7, 1958, pg. A3.

Pennsylvania National Bank, marking “the first time a loan of this scope had ever been granted [to] a Negro social organization.”¹⁵¹



Figure 5 Vocalist and actress Lena Horne and William "Woogie" Harris at the Loendi Club, February 1938 (Charles "Teenie" Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.5611)

In the 1930s, black nightlife was also supported by more inclusive national organizations. The black Knights of Pythias, a national fraternal order, built the Hill's largest venue and established welfare programs for African Americans. The Pythian Temple (1928-37)—later known as the Hill City Auditorium (1937-45) and Savoy Ballroom (1945-1965)—was built in

¹⁵¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 13, 1959, pg. 1.

1928 at the cost of \$350,000 to house the grand lodge for the Pittsburgh branch of the black Knights of Pythias.¹⁵² The Knights of Pythias, chartered in 1864, was founded on the ideals of loyalty expressed in the Greek myth of Damon and Pythias. The Knights of Pythias, despite its founding ideals, maintained a policy of racial exclusion, prompting the establishment of a black branch in 1880. The Colored Knights of Pythias reached its height in the 1920s, claiming nearly 200,000 members enrolled, accounting for “more than 6 percent of African American men.”¹⁵³

Designed by African American architect Louis Bellinger (1891-1946), the Pythian Temple was located in the heart of the Upper Hill District and provided one of the largest halls available to Pittsburgh’s African American population. Facing Center Avenue was a “banquet and drill hall with...5,000 square feet of drill space” for rehearsing public performances.¹⁵⁴ Facing Wylie was an auditorium and gallery that could accommodate stage productions, concerts, and basketball games. The Pythian Temple was used for lodge meetings, social affairs, athletic events, and has business sites on the street floor.¹⁵⁵ They also staged public events that “offered thousands of members, at least in the North, the chance to parade in smart, military-style formations.”¹⁵⁶

From 1930 to 1936, the Pythian Auditorium featured many of the top touring dance orchestras and bandleaders of the time. Artists including Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, Earl Hines, Don Redman, Chick Web, Cab Calloway, Andy Kirk with Mary

¹⁵² *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 21, 1928, pg. A1.

¹⁵³ Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pg. 38.

¹⁵⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 27, 1927, pg. 1.

¹⁵⁵ General Committee on the Hill Survey, *Social Conditions of the Negro in the Hill District of Pittsburgh*, pg. 95.

¹⁵⁶ Skocpol, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, pg. 38.

Lou Williams, and Eubie Blake made Pittsburgh a stopping point between the East Coast and Midwest.¹⁵⁷

Like many other fraternal organizations, the Knights of Pythias was hard hit by the Depression. In 1937, the Knights of Pythias sold the Pythian Temple to Harry Hendel, a successful Jewish Hill District businessman who was a well-known Hill District figure and music promoter.

Hendel's business activities demonstrate that it was not only African American entrepreneurship that created economic and social opportunities for jazz and the culture it supported on the Hill. Hendel became a powerful Hill District businessman who both invested in the neighborhood's entertainment infrastructure and contributed to the social and economic welfare of the ethnically diverse Hill community. Hendel built the Roosevelt Theater in the late 1920s and, owned and managed the Granada Theater and Savoy Ballroom at their various locations on Center Avenue through the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. While running the Roosevelt, Hendel regularly donated the use of the theater to events and benefits sponsored by the *Pittsburgh Courier*. The public functions ranged from themed social events to relief efforts for the neighborhood's destitute. In 1930, the *Courier* led a relief campaign for the neighborhood's unemployed "Negro citizens" organizing local churches and social groups in a "drive for food, clothing and shelter."¹⁵⁸ Hendel, praised as the Roosevelt's "big-hearted, cosmopolitan manager," donated the theater for a night of music, performances, and movies.¹⁵⁹ With 684

¹⁵⁷ Dave Goodrich, *Key to the City Volume 1: 1928-1954: A Guide to Pittsburgh Music, History, Entertainment and More!* (Dave Goodrich, 1985).

¹⁵⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 15, 1930, pg. 1.

¹⁵⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 15, 1930, pg. 1.

individuals purchasing tickets for the event, the Roosevelt was able to donate \$519 to the cause.¹⁶⁰

3.2 NUMBERS RUNNING AND THE CRAWFORD GRILL NO.1

One of the most important economic influences on the Hill's musical life was referred to as the "numbers," a street lottery game that was popular amongst the working class. African American entrepreneurs William "Gus" Greenlee (1897-1952) and William "Woogie" Harris (1896-1967) came to dominate the numbers business in the Hill. Local tradition held that they introduced the numbers to Pittsburgh in the mid-1920s, possibly from New York. Regardless, by 1930 they had established a strong foothold in the business with their respective "headquarters" operating on Wylie Avenue—Harris operated out of the Crystal Barber Shop with Greenlee based across the street at the Crawford Grill. By the late '20s, numbers running had become business with some estimating Greenlee's daily take being between \$20,000 and \$25,000.¹⁶¹ Other numbers runners began to operate out of the Northside and East End and conflicts arose as Harris and Greenlee's numbers writers began to take bets at better odds outside the neighborhood. Eventually outside pressure forced Harris and Greenlee to confine their business to the Hill and match their odds to that of the other neighborhood numbers runners.¹⁶²

The huge profits of the numbers business drew many potential numbers men but the backlash of the police ensured that most failed. Ted Horne, father of singer and actress Lena

¹⁶⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 13, 1930, pg. 1.

¹⁶¹ Ingham, John and Lynne B. Feldman. *African-American Business Leaders: A Biographical Dictionary*, pg. 299.

¹⁶² *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 26, 1930, pg. 2.

Horne and business associate of Gus Greenlee, managed the Belmont Hotel at 1323 Wylie, out of which he operated a gambling room and ran the numbers business.¹⁶³ In 1934, Horne and five others were arrested when the hotel was raided and “hundreds of numbers books and slips” were found after knocking down partitions and dismantling a 30-foot bar.¹⁶⁴ Horne had apparently been involved in the numbers business for a year and a half though he had been associated with Greenlee for many years.

By 1930, numbers running was entrenched in the Hill District, producing huge profits for a select few and feeding the mystique and notoriety of the neighborhood. With the onset of the Great Depression, the numbers racket continued to grow as people vied for the winnings. The 1930 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette article “Numbers Racket Menaces ‘Hill’ Real Estate Values” lamented the numbers impact on the regions business noting, “Thousands of industrial policies have lapsed, and many collectors have quit even a pretense of making calls on their clients. Insurance money is going into the ‘numbers’ racket.”¹⁶⁵ The article shows the numbers business to be a public phenomenon with “pick-up joints” and “numbers headquarters” located throughout the hill. As Pittsburgh Post-Gazette columnist Charles Danver quipped, “A good way to get mobbed would be to stand at Wylie and Fullerton some night and yell, ‘Is there a numbers writer in the crowd!’”¹⁶⁶ Outside these locations, both African American and white numbers runners lined up to load in bags of coins and slips under the protection of armed guards.

The popularity of the numbers among the Hill’s working-class residents was largely due to the small amounts that could be wagered. One could bet as little as a penny and make five

¹⁶³ James Haskins with Kathleen Benson, *Lena: A Personal and Professional Biography of Lena Horne* (New York: Stein and Day, 1984), pg. 41.

¹⁶⁴ *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 10, 1934, pg. 3.

¹⁶⁵ *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 26, 1930, pg. 1.

¹⁶⁶ *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 2, 1930, pg. 8.

dollars if the three-digit number they selected “hit” that day. The payout grew with the numbers business to the point where a penny bet could yield eight dollars or a five-dollar bet four thousand dollars. Each bettor would receive a receipt and the number would be announced each day after the closing of the stock market. The daily number itself was derived from a system involving the advance, decline, and unchanged rates of various stocks.¹⁶⁷ The popularity of the numbers was fed by word of mouth and new stories of the occasional big win. In 1939, the *Courier* reported, “Wylie went broke on ‘805.’ A blind woman had ninety cents on it. It was a hot tip for the Hill. Now they’re saying that ‘123’ is coming up pretty soon. But they’re warning the rabble to be sure and ‘box’ it.”¹⁶⁸ The “805” had a particularly important meaning to those in the numbers business. In 1930, numerous bets were put on “805” and when the number hit, the winnings were so big that most numbers men defaulted on paying. Greenlee and Woogie Harris were the only ones who paid in full though they nearly went broke pawning their belongings and mortgaging their houses. In paying out the winnings on “805,” Greenlee and Harris gained a strong respect and subsequent edge over the numbers bankers and writers who had defaulted.¹⁶⁹ Following this near disaster, Greenlee and Harris enjoyed a flood of numbers business in the vacuum left by discredited rivals.

Both men provided an informal banking service for the Hill’s black residents. The only institutionalized black bank in the Hill—The Steel City Bank run by Ebenezer Baptist Church—defaulted in January of 1926. The lost savings of black depositors “led to mistrust, disunity, and animosity within the race, the scars of which have not yet completely healed, nor has forgiveness

¹⁶⁷ Johnny Adams, personal interview, Colter Harper (1/7/2009).

¹⁶⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 10th, 1939, pg. 11.

¹⁶⁹ Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pg. 145.

ever been granted.”¹⁷⁰ Teenie Harris recalls running numbers for his brother Woogie Harris during the Depression and the philanthropy of his brother;

They made up to \$3,000 a day, not right away but in two or three years. I used to pick up numbers in McKees Rocks, about \$1.75 a day. Woogie told me to stick with it and about six months later I was picking up three and four hundred dollars worth of numbers a day. It was so fascinating, but not funny. It really helped our Black people in this town. A lot of them got their rent and groceries paid because remember, this was the time of the Depression. I didn't know what the word “depression” was. I had a house on Watt and Webster and everybody thought I owned it, but I was paying \$80.00 a month for rent. Not only that, my brother and Gus paid money out to feed people. Say if you went to Gus or my brother and said that you were behind in rent or needed money for food, all you had to do was tell them the amount and they would peel off and give it to you, just like that.”¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Ralph Lemuel Hill, *A View of the Hill—A Study of Experiences and Attitudes in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania from 1900 to 1973* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1973), pg. 74.

¹⁷¹ Ralph Lemuel Hill, *A View of the Hill*, pg. 127.



Figure 6 Looking from the Crystal Barber Shop across Wylie Avenue to the Crawford Grill, c. 1938-45 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.2238)

Through the 1930s and ‘40s, Greenlee and Harris remained close confidants, establishing their adjacent headquarters on Wylie Avenue and even purchasing large homes next to one another in the less crowded and more affluent eastern neighborhood of Penn Township.¹⁷² Harris, a Hill District native who made his mark as a gambler during the 1920s, shared both the fortunes and occasional downfalls of the numbers business with Greenlee. They were described by those close to them as “cut-buddies” where “if one did exceptionally well in some venture, he

¹⁷² Penn Township is currently Penn Hills.

might cut the other in for a share; similarly, one turned to the other when in trouble.”¹⁷³ As the business grew more profitable, both political figures and gangsters attempted to consolidate Pittsburgh’s numbers business. These efforts were largely unsuccessful though, leaving the numbers racket a fragmented practice and controlled by neighborhood. This would prove particularly important for black life in the Hill District for numbers profits made by Greenlee and Harris provided an important financial base for the neighborhood’s night clubs.

Post-Prohibition nightlife in the Hill had become less surreptitious due to the fading of black and tan clubs and the bootlegging racket. Drinking, socializing, and entertainment were no longer clandestine affairs and could be patronized by a wider cross-section of the community. In his 1938 study of recreation in the Hill District, William Bell viewed the tavern as having played “the same role since the repeal of prohibition that the saloon played before passage of the Eighteenth Amendment.”¹⁷⁴ Bell observed that the tavern differed from the saloon in that it enjoyed an “increased air of respectability” and was no longer exclusively the haunt of men having “lost the strongly masculine flavor.”¹⁷⁵ The tavern was an alternative space to one’s work and home and an important site for the informal socialization that provided music and “surcease from the reality of unpleasant social and economic conditions.”¹⁷⁶

In 1933, Greenlee no longer had to negotiate prohibition laws or racial politics—due to the fact that the club was black owned and viewed as a black club rather than a black and tan club. The improved conditions for running a nightclub coupled with his earnings from the numbers business enabled Greenlee to sustain the longest running business at the location though

¹⁷³ Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons*, pg. 146.

¹⁷⁴ William Y. Bell, “Commercial Recreation Facilities Among Negroes in the Hill District of Pittsburgh” (MA thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1936), pg. 3.

¹⁷⁵ Bell, “Commercial Recreation,” pg. 16.

¹⁷⁶ Bell, *ibid.*, pg. 16.

his venture was not without its doubts. After the Leader House closed in the mid-1920s, the building became known as “jinx corner” where, a *Courier* columnist noted, “more businesses have failed...than at any other Deep Wylie cross roads.”¹⁷⁷

Greenlee’s most successful and significant nightclub was the Crawford Grill, which he opened on New Years Eve of 1933. With the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which had enforced prohibition since 1920, Greenlee seized on the opportunity to open a “legitimate” restaurant and bar from which he would base his various business ventures, host notable guests from out of town, and feature both local and touring entertainers and bands. Except for special events held on the second floor, the Crawford Grill was not run as an exclusive social club like the Loendi Club.

Though the Grill was touted as one of the most urbane clubs on Wylie during the 1930s and ‘40s, it catered to a wide range of clientele. The Crawford Grill became noted as one of the Hill’s most popular meeting places for everyone from “the highest profession” to the “lowest rackets,” demonstrating that class divisions in Pittsburgh’s African American communities were less prevalent in the nightclubs of the Hill District.¹⁷⁸ Rob Ruck writes of the Grill in *Sandlot Seasons*,

An evening’s crowd included both blacks and whites, and black customers were usually fairly representative of a cross-section of the city’s black population. Visiting Negro League ballplayers, members of black Pittsburgh’s elite, and workingmen unwinding after a shift could be found at adjoining tables, if not actually drinking together.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 13, 1929, pg. 8.

¹⁷⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 14, 1951, pg. 19.

¹⁷⁹ Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons*, pg. 139.



Figure 7 Looking East on Wylie Avenue with the Crawford Grill on the left, c. 1945-1952 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.2495)

The Crawford Grill was amongst the first clubs to receive a liquor license in the Hill District, marking the end of an era of bootlegging alcohol and setting a new standard for the Hill’s black owned nightclubs.¹⁸⁰ At a time when most of the drinking spots along Wylie were seen as “holes-in-the-wall,” the Grill offered “something besides swinging doors, stand-up bars, backrooms and free lunch.”¹⁸¹ Greenlee’s vision for the venue required a considerable personal investment, gaining him a reputation with the *Courier* as having “spent more money among

¹⁸⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 23, 1933, pg. A6.

¹⁸¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 23, 1933, pg. A6.

Negroes in improving various places in the Hill district than any other Negro we know.”¹⁸² In the first year of running the Grill, Greenlee hired James Brown, a noted New York chef, as manager and renovated the club, and redesigned the interior with “a novel replica of a Spanish hacienda...painted in bright terra cotta and paisley frescoes of exotic design.”¹⁸³



Figure 8 The Crawford Grill, c. 1942 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.2227)

Greenlee’s featuring of entertainers from outside of Pittsburgh, particularly New York, contributed to the club’s popularity and distinctiveness in the Hill. On the second floor, Greenlee

¹⁸² *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 6, 1934, pg. A6.

¹⁸³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 23, 1933, pg. A6.

opened the C&G Club to host private parties and stage after-hours floorshows. In 1935, the C&G's entertainment consisted of a floorshow that included a female dancing quartet, a male tenor, and two entertainers from New York—Jean Daniels and Manhattan Pearl, a female impersonator. Hired to back the show was Jack Spruce and his septet.¹⁸⁴ In 1939, the entertainer Bulee “Slim” Gaillard, known for his hits with the jazz novelty act “Slim and Slam” with bassist Slam Stewart, played the C&G club with his 10-piece “Flat Foot Floogie” orchestra. Gaillard's group—named after a popular composition of his—mixed dance numbers with physical and musical feats involving Gaillard playing the piano palm up or the guitar with his left hand over the top of the neck.¹⁸⁵ Like Louis Jordan and Cab Calloway, Gaillard gained wide appeal playing comedic “jump blues” style songs though he was also able to improvise lyrics and scat sing in a style of later beboppers.

The Crawford Grill was far more than just a music venue in that it was a focal point of African American social life. Prominent African Americans, such as boxer Sugar Ray Robinson, and bandleader Duke Ellington, were hosted at the Grill, contributing to the club's mystique. One of the most important collaborations in the jazz world had its roots in the Crawford Grill. As Gus Greenlee's nephew George asserts, it was at the Crawford Grill that he was able to arrange the 1938 meeting between a young Billy Strayhorn and Duke Ellington. Duke was in Pittsburgh performing with his orchestra at the Stanley Theater and George used his visit to the Crawford as an opportunity to introduce Strayhorn knowing that “Duke couldn't say no with my uncle standing there.”¹⁸⁶ The following day Greenlee and Strayhorn met Ellington at the Stanley

¹⁸⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 30, 1935, pg. A9.

¹⁸⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 27, 1939, pg. 21.

¹⁸⁶ David Hajdu, *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn* (New York: North Point Press, 1996), 49.

Theater where Strayhorn's impressive piano skills prompted Ellington to request an arrangement to use with his orchestra. The results, performed on the last day of Ellington's stay in Pittsburgh, impressed him so much that he invited Strayhorn to New York, beginning one of the greatest collaborations in jazz.



Figure 9 A view of the Crawford Grill's first floor facing the Wylie Avenue entrance, c.1938-1945 (Charles "Teenie" Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.2971)

In addition to being the Hill's most distinctive small venue, the Crawford Grill served as stage for Greenlee's public life. Here he balanced his image as both a powerful and extravagant racketeer and softhearted philanthropist dedicated to the betterment of the Hill District. In public, Greenlee played up the role of the socialite racketeer with expensive cars, tailored white suits,

and highly visible business ventures including managing the light heavyweight champion John Henry Lewis, owning the Negro League baseball team the Crawfords, and building of Greenlee field, the only black-owned stadium in the country during its existence from 1932 to 1938.¹⁸⁷ In the Grill, Greenlee played the role of gracious host with themed evenings such as “Chill Night” where Greenlee would assume the role of chef.¹⁸⁸ On occasion, he would close the club to host private dinners for friends and distinguished guests. In 1941, Greenlee hosted a “Feast of the Nimrods” to honor two friends after their return from a hunting trip in Canada. The eight-course meal started with oysters on the half shell and featured the hunter’s spoils: bear. The party included notable African American Pittsburghers such as judge Homer Brown, Constable Pappy Williams and *Pittsburgh Courier* editors as well as the *Post-Gazette* theater critic Harold Cohen and a group of white friends. Well-publicized events such as this helped Greenlee become one of the Hill’s most celebrated figures.

¹⁸⁷ Strecker, GERALYN M. “The Rise and Fall of Greenlee Field: Biography of a Ballpark.” *Black Ball: A Negro Leagues Journal* 2:2 (Fall 2009): 37-67. See for more detail.

¹⁸⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 2, 1935, pg. A9.



Figure 10 William "Gus" Greenlee with his arm around an unidentified woman in a booth at the Crawford Grill No. 1, c.1943 (Charles "Teenie" Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.3097)



Figure 11 Six men including "Hungry" Bill, Fonse Moore, Gus Greenlee third from the left, and possibly Charles "Teenie" Harris on right end, with group of other men, including bartender Tom West, at Crawford Grill No. 1, with photographs above and inscription "Feast of the Nimrods," c. 1940-1946 (Charles "Teenie" Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.6742)

The Crawford Grill embodied Greenlee's complex public persona, which struck a balance between the aloof celebrity and the everyday man. The duality of Greenlee's public image is apparent in photos of him at the Grill. In **figure 10**, Greenlee sits with shoulders slumped, a cigarette hanging from his fingers and a faint grin on his face. His demeanor is of one relaxing in the comfort of his own home. A woman dressed for cold weather drapes her arm around Greenlee and leans her head against his as she laughs, sharing in the cheerfulness of the moment. In contrast, **figure 11** shows Greenlee standing at the bar in the Crawford Grill amongst friends and associates, casually drinking and smoking. His stance, though relaxed, conveys a sense of detachment, as though he were lost in the complex details of his professional life.

The Grill continued to feature bands through the 1940s, though its style of entertainment moved from dance bands and floorshows to solo acts and small groups performing for listening. As noted by *Courier* columnist Lee Mathews in 1941, the Grill's entertainment shifted to music without dancing with the hiring of pianist Rubye Young and vocalist Reva George.¹⁸⁹ Other local soloists and groups would follow, such as pianist Cozy Harris and guitarist Ted Birch, pianists George "Duke" Spaulding and Alyce Brooks, and bassist Al Hinton with pianist John Hughes and guitarist Bobby Dummit.

¹⁸⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 8, 1941, pg. 21. The *Courier* uses a variety of spellings for Rubye Young including Ruby Young and Rubye Younge.



Figure 12 Pianist Alyce Brooks at the Crawford Grill no. 1, c. 1945 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.5695)

While the first Crawford Grill always provided entertainment, music was mostly a backdrop to the club’s social scene and to Greenlee’s grand lifestyle. Pittsburgh jazz musicians identified the Grill as foremost a center of the Hill’s social life rather than a center of musical innovation. Saxophonist Hosea Taylor identifies the street scene in **Figure 8** as made up of

“night people” and “gamblers,” remembering that he would most often “go in there after a gig...order a sandwich and go home” because “the Crawford Grill wasn't known for music.” For Taylor, the Grill was foremost known because Greenlee “tried to provide the best that he could for the public and he was a numbers baron and he had money to spend so he bought that place. He had plenty money back then and he had to spend it somewhere.”¹⁹⁰ In responding to **Figure 12**, pianist “Duke” Spaulding commented on the Grill’s unique presentation of the pianist, seated at a mirror clad piano atop a rotating platform, adding, “the women drew attention more for their dress than what they played,” particularly because nightlife of the 1930s and ‘40s was male dominated.

Trends and practices begun in the 1930s continued into later decades. Throughout the 1940s, for example, musicians at the Grill were expected to play the role of entertainers rather than artists, subduing modernistic musical trends in favor of popular favorites performed in a style recognizable to the venues patrons. Pianist John Hughes, who worked at the Grill in the late ‘40s, describes balancing creative and professional interests noting that “it became an emotional thing with the cats because [they were] into jazz and getting hip.”¹⁹¹ When in charge of the gig, Hughes’ first priority was “to be commercial” and “playing to the people who are going to put a 20 dollar bill up there—pimps and people like that.” While Hughes’ guitarist Bobby Dummit was bebop oriented like local trumpeter Tommy Turrentine, Hughes didn’t feature bebop compositions. While working at the Grill, Hughes chose songs based on their general popularity noting, “I didn't get into the whole mindset of rearranging my music so it would be bop.” Because audiences “hadn't caught on” to bop, Hughes felt, “hey man, ‘Body and Soul’ sells more

¹⁹⁰ Hosea Taylor, interview by author, December 16, 2008.

¹⁹¹ John Hughes, interview by author, January 19, 2009.

than ‘Grooving High’ to the people sitting down here who were passing that money out. They weren't asking for ‘Grooving High.’ I could sell ‘Old Man River’ just as quick as I could ‘Grooving High’ and I could sell it quicker with [Al Hinton] singing it and Dummit playing his advanced chords under there.” More importantly, with an extended gig, musicians would learn the specific tastes of audience members creating a sense of privilege that often led to healthy tips. As Hughes remembers,

I knew a dude who came in named Jimmy Fisher and “I Surrender Dear” was his number—I don't know what he was trying to say. He was a pimp and he'd bring different chicks in there. When Jimmy walked in there and as soon as I finished playing “I Surrender Dear”—you knew how bad times were—there was a twenty-dollar bill in my pocket.

Greenlee provided a support system for musicians working at the Crawford Grill, ensuring regular work and community support. Hughes began working at the Grill in 1947 and performed there with the Al Hinton trio until shortly before a fire gutted the Grill. Hughes likened being hired at the Crawford to being an “artist in residence,” adding, “Once you go in there you don't have to renew a contract every six months or something. You're there.”¹⁹² Hughes had been working at an upscale after-hours club in Charleston West Virginia owned by an African American racketeer named Ed Hicks. When the club was raided for gambling and Hughes was left without a job, Hicks, a friend of Greenlee's, recommended the group for the Crawford Grill. Greenlee accepted the group on behalf of his business associate and Hughes, guitarist Bobby Dummit and bassist and vocalist Al Hinton were hired to replace Cozy Harris, who was leaving for Atlantic City. The connection between club owners was essential for the

¹⁹² John Hughes, interview by author, January 19, 2009.

young musicians establishing themselves in the Hill District. As Hughes remembers, “It was almost like people there were a welcoming committee” with saxophonist Leroy Brown arranging apartments, Stanley Turrentine’s father inviting the band to dinner, and Greenlee providing regular gigs.¹⁹³ Hughes remembers that “it was an advantage being hired by Gus Greenlee” because he “made sure I was welcomed into the Hill as a Celebrity,” which negated the need to build ones reputation “rehearsing in people's houses and all that.”

The Crawford Grill was amongst the few clubs in the city where integrated bands could be found. The Al Hinton trio was unique in that it was an integrated group, which was a rare phenomenon amongst regularly performing bands in Pittsburgh due to segregation in the unions. Because the band was formed outside of Pittsburgh, the addition of a white member was viewed more as a novelty than a source of tension—from local 60 members because the Hill was local 471 “territory” and from 471 members because the job could go to a black musician. Hughes recalls meeting Dummit in West Virginia;

When we were in Charleston he walked in there one night like a hillbilly with his guitar but he wasn't a hillbilly because this cat was hep. So he began to play and there was a woman there who I had brought there from Washington, Pennsylvania. Her name was Ann Baker. Ann Baker was Billy Eckstein's singer and she used to sing with [Earl] “Fatha” Hines because that's the connection... you know what I mean. So [Bobby] came in with his guitar and started playing this jazz shit and Ann had just left off the road with those other cats and she said ‘Johnny, [he can play]’. So he fit right in.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ John Hughes, interview by author, January 19, 2009.

¹⁹⁴ John Hughes, interview by author, January 19, 2009.



Figure 13 The Crawford Grill, boarded up after it was gutted by a fire, 1956 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.2363)

The network of black club owners provided an important support system for one another as well as the musicians they hired. Working at the Crawford Grill also meant that one had connections to other venues in the Hill. With Greenlee as a contact “you could work when you was in the Hill and you could work seven days a week” at the Washington club, the Loendi, Stanley’s, and the Hilltop Club.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ John Hughes, interview by author, January 19, 2009.

This network of black owned and managed clubs formed the foundation for the neighborhood's celebrated jazz clubs of the 1940s, 50s and '60s, and contributed to shaping the Hill District into the region's cultural center for African Americans. These clubs developed from the Hill's rapidly growing African American population, which supported a diverse array of social and fraternal organizations. As seen with Greenlee, the prosperity of many notable jazz clubs was tied to wealth from the numbers business reflecting the limited business outlets available to black businessmen. The contributions of Jewish business owner Harry Hendel, demonstrate how the Hill's diversity provided contexts and outlets for social and economic ties across racial and ethnic boundaries.

4.0 1940S: DANCEHALLS, AFTER-HOURS CLUBS AND THE DILEMMA OF BEBOP

During the 1940s, bebop innovators introduced a musical language and cultural norms that challenged those of the swing era. This divergence within jazz played out on a national level and posed a dilemma for many young musicians who struggled to balance the commercial realities of the working musician and the intellectual advancements of bebop. In the Hill District, swing and big band music was popular among a broad cross-section of the community and could be heard in large venues such as the Roosevelt Theater and Savoy Ballroom as well as a myriad of smaller clubs. Bebop was never a viable performance style in Pittsburgh and could only be played in a limited number of performance settings, predominantly after-hours in clubs such as the Musicians' Club and Bambola Social Club. All local musicians who played bebop—such as trumpeter Tommy Turrentine and drummers Cecil Brooks II and Joe Harris—also worked in dance bands, stage show orchestras, and as a part of floor shows in after-hours clubs. Bandleaders who did find success in the Hill, such as Walt Harper and Leroy Brown, did so by meeting the expectations of club owners and audiences grounded in the swing and blues traditions.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the Roosevelt Theater and the Savoy Ballroom—the Hill's primary venues for big bands—and processes of socialization and performance central to swing jazz. The second section focuses on two small

venues—the Musicians’ Club and the Bambola Club—examining after-hours nightlife and contexts in which bebop was performed. The chapter concludes with a case study of pianist Walt Harper, who negotiated the shifting musical landscape—subverting to lead a successful local band. The following chapter explores how this dilemma was partially resolved with the rise of “hard bop” and “soul jazz” in small clubs—what I call “jazz houses.”

4.1 AESTHETICS AND PERFORMANCE NORMS OF THE SWING GENERATION

During the 1940s, the Savoy and Roosevelt were of central importance for black musical and social life in the Hill. These venues provided young musicians with experience in rehearsed ensembles, access to the support networks of the working musician, guidance from older musicians, and regular work on the road. They were also spaces in which the black community shaped its identity. Popular black bandleaders were both entertainers and cultural heroes for the Hill’s black community. Drummer Joe Harris commented on the interconnectedness of music and black culture during this period, noting that “the people knew the music and who was who in those days. My parents had all the records. It was a black thing because you didn't have many heroes.”¹⁹⁶

The dilemma faced by Hill District jazz musicians reflected a larger conflict of musical ideas in the post-World War II years. Musicians of the swing generation played mostly for dancing and social events in which audiences expected performers to adhere to certain norms of entertainment. The “art of music” for the older musicians centered on the understanding that

¹⁹⁶ Joe Harris, interview by author, November 21, 2008.

“you have to play for people if you are going to make any money.”¹⁹⁷ Bebop pioneer Dizzy Gillespie explains how audience expectations shaped his performances: “Dancers had to hear those four solid beats and could care less about the more esoteric aspects, the beautiful advanced harmonies and rhythms we played and our virtuosity, as long as they could dance... Of course we wanted them to listen; that’s one reason why we played such ear-catching solos, to let everybody know we could and how good it sounded.”¹⁹⁸

Unlike the cultural and performance norms of bebop, swing was shaped by the music’s role as popular entertainment. Swing, a style of big band dance music that dominated the national entertainment scene from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, was economically driven by “a new mass audience: mostly white, youthful, and relatively affluent, filling theaters, ballrooms, and even Carnegie Hall to overflowing.”¹⁹⁹ Swing was most profitable to the music industry as a “unitary popular culture” that cut across “divisions of age, class, race, and religion.”²⁰⁰ The popular music industry fueled this demand by mass marketing bandleader-celebrities in radio broadcasts, recordings, and films.

Though swing’s popularity crossed racial boundaries, swing dances and bands were largely segregated. In urban centers with a sizeable black population, one could expect to find dancehalls located downtown that catered to white audiences and dancehalls within black neighborhoods that catered to black audiences. Harry Hendel, a Jewish Hill District businessman, owned the Hill’s largest theater and dancehall: the Roosevelt Theater and Savoy

¹⁹⁷ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

¹⁹⁸ Dizzy Gillespie, *To Be, Or Not...to Bop: Memoirs*, With Al Fraser, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1979), pg. 356.

¹⁹⁹ Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pg. 118.

²⁰⁰ DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, pg. 300.

Ballroom. These venues came to be patronized largely by the neighborhood's African American population and provided performance spaces for touring and local black artists.

The Roosevelt Theater was the Hill's largest movie theater as well as the city's largest venue that presented black stage shows. Stage shows were performance events that presented big bands with a variety of acts including jugglers, dancers, and comedians. These collective acts drew heavily from the vaudeville and minstrel traditions and were presented in one to two-hour sets to a seated audience. Variety acts had been a staple of the Hill's nightlife since the 1910s and would remain an integral part of live entertainment through the 1940s. At the Stanley Theater, Pittsburgh's largest downtown venue for stage shows, a stage show would stay for a week playing daily at noon, 3, 6, and 9 pm.²⁰¹ The Roosevelt, unable to sustain large production shows for extended runs, presented stage shows every six weeks.²⁰² Unlike the Stanley Theater, the Roosevelt would most often feature shows for one or two days only.

For the Hill's African American musicians, traveling stage shows and dances provided important musical training. Stage show jobs required a different set of skills than other performances. Musicians had to be familiar with a wide range of musical styles, have a good memory for arrangements and value the ensemble performance over individual expression. A local musician lamented:

By not having [experiences in stage shows] a lot of keyboard players don't know how to accompany. [Local pianist] is a good example. He's from our period of time but he doesn't know how to play behind somebody else. He's so busy doing his thing and alternate chords... [Local trombonist] is another a good example. You can't play with

²⁰¹ Joe Harris, interview by author, November 21, 2008.

²⁰² William Y. Bell, "Commercial Recreation Facilities Among Negroes in the Hill District of Pittsburgh," (MA thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1936), pg. 50.

him because you don't know what he is going to play next. He doesn't play a set form. He is very creative but he cannot make it with another horn because he is the dominant one. He will play something and by the time you try and figure out what he is doing he's changed it so you're lost again.²⁰³



Figure 14 The Roosevelt Theater was located at 1862 Center Avenue and had a capacity of 1,400, c. 1946 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.3107)²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Interview by author. The names of the interviewee and musicians have been removed from this particular interview excerpt.

²⁰⁴ Bell, “Commercial Recreation Facilities Among Negroes in the Hill District of Pittsburgh,” pg. 49.

Large Hill District venues such as the Roosevelt brought top jazz artists including Louis Armstrong and Don Redman in 1941, Dizzy Gillespie in 1948, and Ray Brown in 1950 as well as black actors and entertainers into the black community. This created an environment in which young musicians could more easily interact and network with nationally recognized figures. Hill District drummer Harold “Brushes” Lee landed his first touring job while actor Lincoln Perry (1902-1985) was at the Roosevelt. Perry, who headlined the Roosevelt stage show with vibraphonist Pete Diggs leading the band and performers, had developed “Stepin Fetchit,” a character whose exaggerated laziness drew from black stereotypes of the minstrel tradition. Through the 1930s, Perry built a successful film career breaking into the mainstream entertainment industry after appearing in several films with Shirley Temple and Bill Bojangles. Like many early film actors, Perry capitalized on his film persona in theater performances. As Lee recalls, “a janitor saw me standing outside and said ‘Hal, the show needs a drummer cause their drummer is going to the army.’” Lee’s audition consisted of a short talk with Diggs about the Tommy Dorsey numbers in the show after which Diggs announced, “You can stay and see the next show and then I want you to play the last show,” which began between 9 and 10 o’clock. Lee recalls that the show included “about 10 show girls, a singer, a tap dancer, a guy that told jokes, and a strong man.” For Lee, the Roosevelt was the Hill’s Stanley Theater or Heinz Hall and working there provided access to professional mainstream; “When I played the first show at the Roosevelt, when the word got around that I was in the show. It seemed like the guys in there were glad to see me on stage. Kids from the gangs on the Hill were saying, ‘Harold Lee is playing drums up there!’”²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ Harold Lee, interview by author, October 22, 2008.

The Roosevelt was an important venue for other young Hill jazz musicians breaking into the national touring circuit. In 1944, drummer Joe Harris was asked to join pianist Snookum Russell's band on the recommendation of Pittsburgh bassist Ray Brown, who had toured with the group. The Ferguson Brothers, a white-owned agency based in Indianapolis that booked black groups on Southern tours, booked Russell's group. The one Northern date that the agency did book for Russell was at the Roosevelt Theater, in part because of the recognition of its hometown rhythm section. It was at that point that Russell hired local trombonist "Stinky" Davis and trumpeter Tommy Turrentine establishing with Indianapolis guitarist Wes Montgomery a notably progressive core of musicians.²⁰⁶

Named after the famous Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, the first and second Hill District Savoy would become one of the primary dance venues open to Pittsburgh's African American community. The Savoy was "where the black bands played. Some of them played downtown and some played at the Roosevelt. But when they had a *dance*, there were very few places for black bands to play in Pittsburgh in those days."²⁰⁷

The first Savoy Ballroom was first opened in 1933 at 2312 Center Avenue in the previous home of the Elmore Theater. In 1936, the ballroom was in need of renovation and new management:

The orchestra platform is poorly built and very shaky, while the interior decorations are in a state of disrepair. The hall presents a neglected appearance and is now for sale. There is a regular weekly dance on Saturday nights from 7:30 p.m. to 11:45 p.m. for which a local eight-piece band furnishes music and the admission is 25 cents. Every five or six

²⁰⁶ Joe Harris, interview by author, November 21, 2008.

²⁰⁷ Joe Harris, interview by author, November 21, 2008.

weeks an out-of-town orchestra is presented at which time hours are from 9:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. and the admission varies from 65 to 99 cents.²⁰⁸



Figure 15 The New Granada Theater Façade and Savoy Ballroom Entrance located at 2009 Center Avenue, c. 1962 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.3332)

²⁰⁸ William Y. Bell, “Commercial Recreation Facilities Among Negroes in the Hill District of Pittsburgh,” pg. 58.

By 1938, the Savoy was for sale and though weekend dances were still held, the Hill was in need of a large venue for black dances. The same year, Hendel renovated the first floor of the Pythian Temple and opened it as the New Granada Theater, closing his Granada Theater two blocks down Center Avenue.²⁰⁹ During the early 1940s, Harry Hendel ran the Pythian ballroom above the New Granada as the Hill City Auditorium and in 1945 made it the new location of the Savoy Ballroom. With capacities near 2,000, Hendel's venues were among the longest running and the most successful dance halls for top-name black artists performing in Pittsburgh. From 1933 to 1954, Hendel presented touring artists including Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, Earl Hines, Don Redman, Fletcher Henderson, Chick Web, Cab Calloway, Andy Kirk, and Dizzy Gillespie as well as featured many local artists including vocalist Billy Eckstine, pianist Walt Harper and saxophonists Fred Averytt, and Leroy Brown. When singer and bandleader Billy Eckstine returned to Pittsburgh to perform at Hendel's ballroom in 1944, he was promoted as the "Pittsburgh lad who owes his start here at the old Savoy Ballroom years ago."²¹⁰

For Hill District teens in the 1930s and '40s, swing dances were an outlet to participate in national dance crazes. As observed at a black dance in the Hill's Savoy Ballroom, "The overwhelming majority of those attending were apparently between 16 and 20 years of age and interest in the 'Lindy Hop' was intense, at least half of those dancing concentrating on this dance."²¹¹

²⁰⁹ *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, "'New Granada' isn't so new anymore, but plans will help restore luster," Monday, April 12, 1999.

²¹⁰ *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 9, 1944, pg. 22.

²¹¹ William Y. Bell, "Commercial Recreation Facilities Among Negroes in the Hill District of Pittsburgh," pg. 61.



Figure 16 The Duke Ellington Orchestra at the Savoy Ballroom, c. 1944 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.6222)

Both Savoy Ballrooms provided African American teens a public outlet for socializing while the performances of leading contemporary bands provided young musicians with musical direction and inspiration. **Figures 16, 18, and 19** show how listeners—both white and black—would gather at the edge of the stage to be close to the band and observe the intricacies of the performance. Drummer Joe Harris recalls going to the Savoy with other young musicians to hear the Count Basie Orchestra, “Ain't no girls that night because the band was right there a few feet away and I was right there thinking, “This cat Jo Jones is something.”” As a teen, drummer Harold Lee used to stand “by the band stand so I could dig the drummer” and sit in when he was

introduced by an older musician. In 1942, bandleader and pianist Jay McShann came to the Savoy for a Fourth of July event. Black soldiers were temporarily camped at Kennard field in the Upper Hill District and “they had a dance down at the Savoy and Jay McShann was playing down there.” McShann’s song “Confessin’ The Blues” was a “really hot number in the black neighborhoods and in the black world.” Fellow Hill District drummer Frank “Geronimo” Battels invited Lee to meet McShann during the intermission and “while we were back there Jay McShann introduced me to Charlie Parker and said ‘Well Harold, I want to hear you play. So you stick around until we play the last number at the dance.’ The last number at the dance was always “The Star Spangled Banner” so I played that with the band because I could roll pretty good.”²¹²

Saxophonist Harold Young would also stay close to the stage to study the band’s reed players. Once while watching the Count Basie orchestra alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges, Young “kept wondering why he kept turning the pages so I looked around and he was reading a book. I was impressed with his alto saxophone player” because the “cat knew the music so well he had a novel there” while the band was playing.²¹³ This and similar experiences helped introduce Lee and other young Pittsburgh musicians such as bassist Bobby Boswell, trumpeter Tommy Turrentine, trumpeter Horace Turner, Calvin Faulkes, pianist Robert Head, Sonny Morgan, and Sam Hurt to the professional life of the musician.

²¹² Harold Lee, interview by author, October 22, 2008.

²¹³ Harold Young, interview by author, December 29, 2008.



Figure 17 Fred Averytt Band at the Hill City Auditorium (Savoy Ballroom) with Joe Harris (dr) and Horace Turner (t) (second from left), 1942 (Photographer unknown. From the private collection of Joe Harris)

When top name touring groups were not available, Hendel turned to local musicians, providing them with important training and experience. Saxophonist and bandleader Fred Averytt was one of the local artists to provide weekend dances in the Hill during the 1940s. Averytt's drummer Joe Harris found that for black orchestras "there weren't many places to play" so "when we played with this band it was Saturday night and everyone was there. It was a dance hall so it was jammed." Occasionally pianist Ernie Harper, the older brother of Walt Harper, would write arrangements for Averytt though the band's repertoire consisted mostly of stock arrangements. At 75 cents, these arrangements were cheaper than hiring an arranger and were easily recognizable to audiences. Harris recalls that dancers and listeners "were familiar with

those arrangements” from recordings and performances” and “if they wanted to hear [Basie’s versions of] ‘One O’clock Jump’, ‘Sandman’, or ‘9:20 Special’ then the arrangements were just like on the record. All the bands did the exact same thing so it behooved us to play these stock arrangements.”²¹⁴



Figure 18 Eddie "Rochester" Anderson and Cab Calloway at the Hill City Auditorium (Savoy Ballroom), July 1941 (Charles "Teenie" Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.6201)

²¹⁴ Joe Harris, interview by author, November 21, 2008.



Figure 19 The Earl Hines Orchestra featuring Billy Eckstine at the Savoy Ballroom, c. 1939 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.11665)

The Savoy was also a strong draw for white music lovers seeking to hear the top swing bands in a dancehall context. Both **figures 16** and **19** show the presence of white patrons, who crowded amongst those who wanted to hear and experience the big bands up close. Bands at a dance were not restricted by a set musical routine and time frame as they were in theater stage shows. At dances, Harris remembers that bands were motivated by active audiences and had all evening to “get it going.” White audience members were often seen as “people that understood” the genre likely “from the Stanley Theater” but who valued hearing the bands in a more informal and interactive environment. In Harris’ words, “If it was a real jazz fan then he wants to hear the

band at the dance which [was different than the theater] with a set routine of songs and the show was over in an hour. But at a dance you would get it *going*...so that's when they would come out.”²¹⁵

Segregation and exclusionism were characteristic of white rather than black venues. Writing in 1954, a white teacher named Alex Newell commented on the racial dynamics of the Savoy audiences in his *Courier* article “Negroes More Sociable Than White Music Fans.”²¹⁶ Newell was motivated to write the article after hearing Stan Kenton at West View Danceland and observing the management turning away “young Negro men and women seeking admission.” Ballroom events featuring well know dance bands in white suburbs were often advertised as “subject to club membership,” which indirectly communicated a policy of racial exclusion and allowed managers to refuse those minorities who did try to gain entry. Being a lover of “good music, especially when it is spontaneously improvised,” Newell attended the Savoy to hear Count Basie with a friend where he observed a markedly different picture of race relations;

In front of the Savoy...the street was teeming with a gay evening crowd. The presence of occasional strange white people coming to hear Count Basie in no way disturbed the mood of relaxation. On the dance floor the crowd stood and listened much more than it danced to the ingenious liltng rhythms. Swaying in the crowd and oblivious of their minority as whites, I saw a number of apple-faced teen-agers of the genteel type that reminds me of Mount Lebanon [a white middle class suburb in the South Hills]. People talked, became acquainted and mingled with ease. All in all the evening was one big

²¹⁵ Joe Harris, interview by author, November 21, 2008.

²¹⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 4, 1954, pg. 9. Originally printed as “The People Speak: Cites Admirable Race Relations on the Hill,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 27, 1954, pg. 12.

friendly communion with American music. Everybody belonged to it and it belonged to everybody present.²¹⁷

Swing dances, while popular events, could be a dangerous business investment for promoters due to the overhead of running a large venue and the large guarantees for touring artists. Factors such as poor advertisement, weather, cancellations, or just bad timing could cause the promoter to take a loss on a dance. In 1941, *Courier* columnist Lee Matthews asserted, “No promoter is able to use his promotion business as a sole means of livelihood. If he tried it he would soon be broke.”²¹⁸ This would seem accurate for Harry Hendel, who undertook diverse business activities outside the Savoy Ballroom and Roosevelt Theater, though whether he would, as Matthews contended, “give up the whole business for just what he lost in the dance promotion business” while running the Savoy Ballroom, is unclear.

By the early 1940s, swing bands had also become a difficult business venture to sustain, particularly for black artists. The loss of artists entering the armed services, the lessening of dance crazes, the continued segregation of venues, and grueling touring schedules all took their tolls on traveling and local big bands. Black big bands were especially pressed due to venue segregation. For example, black bands traveling out of New York faced the stigma of promoters who feared the legal ramifications of refusing admission to black patrons in white patronized venues. This meant that black bands had to make longer trips to urban centers such as Pittsburgh, where African American populations were big enough to support an all-black dance.²¹⁹ Though the wartime economic boom gave swing bands a renewed base of support, many black artists opted for smaller ensembles.

²¹⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 4, 1954, pg. 9.

²¹⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 8, 1941, pg. 21.

²¹⁹ DeVeaux, *ibid.*, pg. 154.

The desire for creative freedom also led many musicians in other stylistic directions. When playing for dancers, musicians had to foremost demonstrate ability as a group performer. The “feel” and collective sense of swing was what energized audiences and although soloists were regularly featured, their improvisational freedom was restricted by the music’s strict dance-oriented structure. Many innovative soloists found greater freedom in smaller bands in the less formal jam session environment.

4.2 FINDING A PLACE FOR BEBOP IN AFTER-HOURS CLUBS

The aesthetic of the Swing Era; valuing of the musician’s role as entertainer, dance and show music aspects of jazz, lyricism over virtuosity, and emotion over theory, fueled the dominant entertainment culture in the Hill during the 1940s. Audiences and club managers espousing this aesthetic limited bebop to jam sessions and carefully chosen moments in floor show performances.

Bebop challenged the cultural values and musical language of swing. For young musicians exploring bebop in the Hill District, jazz became a feat of personal expression and experimentation that was as much a cultural phenomenon as well as a restructuring of the dominant musical language. As saxophonist Hosea Taylor recalls,

Very few people could play true bebop. Just because a guy plays moderately fast, that doesn't constitute bebop. To me bebop was a lifestyle. Guys wore those horn-rimmed glasses and everybody tried to grow a goatee and got themselves a tam. In the winter

there was a coat they called the “bear coat” with this big lapel. It was a lifestyle and it was fun. Everybody was going around [saying] “bebop, bebop, bebop.”²²⁰

Young musicians espousing the intellectual, technical, and cultural expressions of bebop regularly met with criticism from dancers, listeners and particularly musicians entrenched in the swing tradition. Italian American guitarist Joe Negri remembers, “As beboppers we were discriminated against by the [older] musicians” who saw the music as a trivial exploration and would remark, “What are you doing? You're just flattin’ those fives, that's all you're doing. I know all about that stuff.”²²¹ Saxophonist Hosea Taylor also experienced a backlash from swing musicians who would insist that a song was played “like it was written” and who “wanted you to stay in the same pocket” because “they were too old to switch over to our musical thoughts.” The more extreme clashes of ideals threatened to escalate to physical conflicts. Joe Harris recalls that at one point on Wylie, “I looked around and some of the older cats had pulled out their knives and we had picked up bricks and rocks and stuff [laughs]. We were getting ready to do a battle of the streets because they'd said, “You can’t play that bebop!”²²²

Bebop maintained a tenuous existence in the thriving after-hours club scene. Much as it had been in the late-1910s, Pittsburgh experienced an industrial boom during the 1940s driven by wartime demands for steel and other raw materials. Along with the expansion in industry came a renewed influx of black workers from the rural South—the final push of the Great Migration. Nightclubs—particularly after-hours nightclubs—provided a primary avenue of escape from the hardships of the workweek. Fueled by the disposable income of the industrial workforce, entertainment and music was available every night of the week and continuously from Friday

²²⁰ Hosea Taylor, interview by author, December 16, 2008.

²²¹ Joe Negri, interview by author, December 17, 2008.

²²² Joe Harris, interview by author, November 21, 2008.

night to early Monday morning with clubs staging matinees (4-7pm) and evening events (9-midnight) and after-hours clubs providing late night (midnight-6am) events.

After the regular clubs, theaters, and dance halls closed, the neighborhood's nightlife continued in cabarets and after-hours clubs. These venues were known "largely as an after-theater-party or dance rendezvous" and would feature vaudeville acts and musical revues as well as music for dancing.²²³ These clubs would open in the late evening, around 10 p.m., and close between 4 and 6 a.m. Bell observed, "A doorman is always in the vicinity, but it is only after 1:00 a.m. that he actually begins to function, at which time his purpose seems to be to keep out minors and all persons who may be undesirable from the standpoint of the management, such as detectives, Liquor Board inspectors, etc., and to warn the management in case of a raid."²²⁴ The bands were generally comprised of a quintet that played for listening and dancing. These clubs were patronized mostly "on the week-ends after parties, dances, etc., during the early hours of the morning when almost all other public establishments were closed."²²⁵

After-hours clubs became important sites to take in the mixture of theater, vaudeville, and jazz that were featured in floorshows. The after-hours clubs were run as "social clubs," they were able to subvert state legislated "blue laws," which restricted the hours of operation within nightclubs and the sale of alcohol on Sundays. Far removed from the mainstream entertainment of dance halls and theaters, the social club organized after-hours events featured a wide variety of entertainment for late night revelers. These venues, considerably smaller than theaters and dance halls, provided similar forms of entertainment. They also provided spaces for jam sessions with both local and touring artists and a space where both whites and blacks could socialize.

²²³ Bell, *ibid.*, pg. 64.

²²⁴ Bell, *ibid.*, pg. 64.

²²⁵ Bell, *ibid.*, pg. 65.

4.2.1 The Musicians' Club

The Musicians' Club was a meeting place for musicians and became one the Hill's most active after-hours clubs. The Musicians' Club served as headquarters for Local 471 and provided a bounded location for the informal processes of gaining work as a jazz musician.²²⁶ Prior to the Musician's Club, many musicians were left to seek out work on Wylie Avenue. Bassist William "Bass" McMahon recalls that in the early 1930s,

If you went down on the corner of Fullerton and Wylie on a Wednesday or Thursday, different proprietors would come up, and if they saw a musician they knew, they'd ask him if they could get him for a certain club for a certain number of nights. A lot of times the guys would stand there on the corner with a horn under there arm hoping someone would come up and say, 'Hey, buddy! Can you play? Can you play that horn?' He might get a job, and it would last for a week or maybe a month.²²⁷

²²⁶ Local 471 was formed in 1908 to serve the region's black musicians who were excluded from joining Local 60, the white local of the Federation of Musician's Union.

²²⁷ James M. Doran, *Erroll Garner: The Most Happy Piano* (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press and the Institute of Jazz Studies, 1985), pg 33.

meeting place for black musicians from all parts of the city and grew as a source of pride for working musicians. **Figure 20** shows saxophonist Leroy Brown's group with local DJ Mary Dee and pianist Rubye Young, gathering possibly before an evening gig. The club, empty except for the musicians, is likely not open to the general public providing the musicians with the time and space to relax and connect with one another. For many the club represented a home-away-from-home. As Austin recalls:

That's all I knew. In fact, all of us, that was our thing. Outside of the Musicians Club, we didn't have a life. We knew that to go to the club was... I won't call it a ritual, but you had to go to the club. I felt honored to be a part of this group. Belonging to the union was totally different than it is now. All these guys were union members. We had to be. We couldn't play these clubs if we weren't in the union...and these clubs cooperated with the union to make our existence happen.²²⁹

While the Musicians' Club housed the union office for the black musicians' union it also became a focal point of the Hill's nightlife. It was a place where musicians could socialize, book jobs, play, rehearse, and jam with musicians traveling through town. It also built on the tradition of the Collins Inn and the Paramount Club by presenting bands and floorshows to racially diverse audiences. It was during Harry "Prez" Jackson's time as president of Local 471 that the Musicians' Club became both a performance venue and administrative office. Henry Jackson was originally a bass player who joined Local 471 in 1910, two years after it was chartered to provide black musicians with a means to gain better working conditions.²³⁰ After a period on the

²²⁹ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

²³⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 30, 1946, pg. 14.

executive committee, Jackson was elected president in 1938 and gave up performing to dedicate his full attention to union obligations.

In October of 1941, the Club received a liquor license and a month later was operating a bar for members of Local 471.²³¹ To expand the club's bar business, Jackson authorized "associate membership" so as to provide access to non-musicians. Local 471 issued cards to individuals who were "endorsed" by a 471 member and voted in by the Local's executive committee. Associate membership also helped subvert the legal restrictions on hours of operation by maintaining its status as private social club.

Through the 1940s, the Musicians' Club grew as a meeting place for touring artists as well. The top billing big bands that came through Pittsburgh most often played the Stanley Theater downtown. Drummer Joe Harris recalls that after the shows were finished downtown, "they'd come up [to the Musicians' Club] and we'd have drinks for them and food and then we would play and jam."²³²

Touring musicians—both black and white—who wanted a competitive though fraternal environment in which to jam and socialize would convene in the late hours at 471's Musicians' Club. Harris notes that not all the big bands had musicians who would venture into the Hill adding, "It had to be somebody who could play jazz." Musicians working under big band leaders such as Charlie Barnett, Claude Thornhill, and Ted Heath were considered more "hip" by 471 members and hence more likely to stop by to socialize and jam while band members under leaders such as Spike Jones, Kay Kyser, or Shep Fields were more likely to go to Local 60's

²³¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 25, 1941, pg. 21. November 29, 1941, pg. 14.

²³² Joe Harris, interview by author, November 21, 2008.

club, located downtown.²³³ Progressive musicians did not welcome bands considered to be “society orchestras” or “Mickey Mouse bands” nor did musicians from these groups generally seek the jam sessions of 471’s Musicians Club. Trombonist Nelson Harrison distinguished the white and black Musicians’ Clubs by the style of music featured: “Now the local 60, the white union, they also had a club. They also had jam sessions, they were mostly Dixieland. But for the real bebop and the hard thing, you had to go to 471.”²³⁴

The Musicians’ Club on Wylie fostered a racial mixed environment similar to the neighborhood’s “black and tan” cabarets of the 1910s and ‘20s where whites and blacks performed and socialized together. While Local 60’s downtown club was not a regular stopping point for 471 members, Local 60 members regularly visited 471’s club. For musicians at 471’s club, the creative process of music making took precedent over the politics of racial segregation. Austin notes, “All we wanted guys to do was come in and play so race wasn’t even a part of it. You never thought ‘Oh, that’s a white boy playing’.”²³⁵ The advent of bebop in the mid-1940s further fostered a creative environment that drew a racially mixed crowd of performers and listeners. Drummer Cecil Brooks II remembers, “One thing about musicians, back when all the prejudice and all that stuff was going on, there wasn’t none of that stuff with musicians. There was new music that had come out and everybody was trying to learn how to play it and it was just exciting then.”²³⁶

Jam sessions at Local 471’s Musicians Club were a mixture of camaraderie and intense competition. If musicians came to the Club’s jam session from out of town local musicians likely

²³³ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

²³⁴ Nelson Harrison, interview by author, March 7, 2006.

²³⁵ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

²³⁶ Cecil Brooks II, interview by author, December 5, 2008.

tested them. Pianist Duke Spaulding remembers a common test would be to have the guest call a song and then play it in a remote key. For instance, the standard “Body and Soul,” is most often played in D flat, though groups used to shift the key a half step to D so that the soloist would not hear the key change and enter in the original key. Unless the soloist quickly adapted to the new key they would appear to not know the song. Guitarist Joe Negri recalled a story depicting a similar interaction:

My favorite story is about Woody Herman’s “Second Herd” band of which I had a couple of friends—mainly Serge Chaloff who was the wonderful baritone player from “The Four Brothers.” The band was in town and Ralph Berns, Serge Chaloff, and a couple of the other guys wanted to go to the Musicians’ Club so I took them—I was kind of their guide. So Ahmad Jamal was playing—we were enjoying ourselves very much listening to him—and Stan Getz appears at the door bigger than life, comes in a little drunk with his tenor. It didn’t take him long before he said, “I’m going to go up and play with that kid. He sounds pretty good, I’m going to go up and play with him.” He was rather cocky. So he went up and he obviously hit Ahmad the wrong way because he said he wanted to play “The Song is You” and he wanted to take it up and Ahmad put it in a cockeyed key. If you know the tune the bridge is strange. It’s in C and it goes to E major so Ahmad put it in A which meant the bridge went to Db. So the song is going and lo and behold the great Getz gets to the bridge and kind of trips himself up a little. He wasn’t very happy and put his horn away and left. He called Ahmad “kid” a couple of times and just rubbed him the wrong way.²³⁷

²³⁷ Joe Negri, interview by author, December 17, 2008.

The impromptu nature of the Musicians' Club jam sessions fostered an informal atmosphere unrestricted by the norms of paid performances. Musicians could play, exchange ideas, or socialize over a meal with performances often materializing out of a spontaneous inspiration to play. Judge Warren Watson illustrates the club's role as a catalyst for spontaneous creativity:

It wasn't that you had a jam session but what happened was that I'd be coming in from my gig, which finished at 1 a.m., and I'd get there about 1:30 and somebody else would get there about 2. If you had a piano and a bass man available then we were likely to start playing *if* we wanted to at any time. That was the attitude that we had and that's why we liked it. In addition it was a learning tool. You'd hear a guy play something you liked and you'd ask him "How'd you do that?" and for the most part the guy would show you.²³⁸

One of the most notable Pittsburgh musicians to master the bebop idiom and lead jam sessions at the Musicians' Club was trumpeter Tommy "Teen" Turrentine (1928-1997). As a teenager, Turrentine was already a fervent practitioner of the idiom and leader amongst his generation of Pittsburgh jazz musicians. Saxophonist George Thompson recalls that at the Musicians' Club jam sessions, Turrentine used to write the chords to a new song and say, "Goddammit, I want you to know this next week."²³⁹ This prompted Thompson and other musicians to "write those changes down" and start "thinking about changes because before we were playing by ear. He was the one horn man [who] knew the changes [and] he helped us so much."²⁴⁰ This new style of learning reflects the sentiment of nationally renowned trumpeter

²³⁸ Warren Watson, interview by author, November 26, 2008.

²³⁹ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

²⁴⁰ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

Howard McGhee: “With bop, you had to know—not feel; you had to *know* what you were doing.”²⁴¹



Figure 21 Musicians’ Club with unidentified pianist, trumpeter Tommy Turrentine, and drummer Cecil Brooks II, c. 1945 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.1791)

It was Turrentine’s goal to have other young musicians engage jazz as an intellectual endeavor rather than a form of entertainment. **Figure 21** shows Turrentine at the Musicians’ Club sitting next to drummer Cecil Brooks II. His stance is relaxed though his eyes evince alertness, watching someone out of the frame as he plays. Turrentine’s position at the rear of the

²⁴¹ Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, 167.

stage likely aided in his interaction with the other musicians and the beret hung over the bell of his trumpet served as a makeshift mute to deaden the instrument's sound. His aloof persona—embodied in his body language and clothes—stand as a stark contrast to the sharply dressed and exuberant entertainers of the swing era.

Turrentine's guidance inspired young Hill musicians to expand on ways of performing and thinking about music. For saxophonist Hosea Taylor, bebop's novelty lay in the challenges it posed, both to musicians and audiences: "Talking about the '40s to the '50s, it was exciting because we were all trying to introduce this new music to people and a lot of them didn't understand. Even today they don't understand. Today, you don't find many people understanding bebop or even listening to it. It was so hard to play."²⁴²

Playing bebop became a way of reordering traditional musical values where the musician primarily served the interests of the audience. Those young musicians influenced by Turrentine began to speak of older styles of jazz as the "main thing" or "commercial jazz," distinguishing it from the "new music" that, while structurally related to swing, functioned in fundamentally different contexts. Often, conflicts arose when Turrentine would interject bebop in the context of a swing performance. Because many bebop compositions were based on jazz standards—for instance, Dizzy Gillespie's "Groovin' High" was based on the chord changes of the 1920 popular song "Whispering" by Malvin and John Schonberger—the difference between playing bebop and swing was often a question of certain melodic and rhythmic choices. As Taylor recalls, Turrentine compromised little in such contexts: "Well, we had people at the time...we would call that commercial jazz. They stayed and played 'Whispering' until more people accepted bebop. Now you take a guy like Tommy Turrentine, he didn't care. He would go on a commercial gig

²⁴² Hosea Taylor, interview by author, December 16, 2008.

and play ['Groovin' High'] while everybody else played 'Whispering.'" When asked how bandleaders reacted, Taylor responded, "He wouldn't be there the next time. He didn't care whether he was there or not."

Bebop's reordering of musical values and norms alienated listeners and musicians alike. While bebop was instrumental in shaping the direction of jazz during the 1950s and '60s, it was a highly contentious movement and presented musicians with both economic and creative dilemmas. Local 471 may have run the Musicians' Club, though it still had to cater to audiences and provide marketable entertainment to support its revenue intake. Saxophonist George Thompson recalls the performance of bebop being restricted by the older generation of 471 members who would "only let us have a jam session on Wednesday because they said if we played on Saturday night we'd run all the customers out of there."²⁴³ The concern was that the average listener "wouldn't understand what we were playing" and would leave for another club.²⁴⁴ On slower nights, "anyone who wanted to come and play could;" though on Friday and Saturday Local 471 hired an "organized band or a group that played things that people wanted to hear."²⁴⁵

Bebop posed a dilemma for club owners who saw the music as a threat to socialization and good bar business. Audiences alike initially responded negatively to bebop's rejection of the swing era's danceable tempos and simpler melodies. During bebop jam sessions at the Musicians' club patrons would often come in "look around [and scowl] and take the steps. They wanted to hear that funk and move and dance and whistle. When you're running up and down the horn... they knew you were good musicians but they couldn't understand what you were

²⁴³ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

²⁴⁴ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

²⁴⁵ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

doing.²⁴⁶ Moreover, bebop distanced younger musicians from other African American genres such as the blues and R&B. Bebop musicians wore tams and goatees and played songs such as Fats Navarro's "Ice Freezes Red" and Charlie Parker's "Now's the Time." Thompson recalls feeling as a young musician that "We thought that we were a little bit above the average" and that this attitude led to a distancing from the blues musicians. "We didn't allow them around us and it wasn't until later on that I started appreciating it."²⁴⁷



Figure 22 Unidentified vocal group at the Musicians' Club. Local trumpeter John Mishaw and his wife sit at the left, c. 1940-1950 (Charles "Teenie" Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.1842)

²⁴⁶ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

²⁴⁷ Cecil Brooks and George Thompson, interview by author, January 13, 2009.

More lucrative and appealing to the general listener was jazz that was influenced by R&B. The Musician's Club's built a reputation for drawing national celebrities who were performing in Pittsburgh's dance halls and theaters. In 1950, Wednesday evenings began to be billed as "Celebrity Night," which consisted of a variety of touring entertainers performing with Local 471 members. The Musicians' Club claimed to have "first call on the services of traveling artists in this territory for appearances as celebrities."²⁴⁸ Singer Larry Darnell, whose recording of "For You My Love" hit number one on the R&B charts in 1949, performed to a "packed house" in the summer of 1950.²⁴⁹ A week earlier, the nationally recognized R&B singer Wynonie "Mr. Blues" Harris was featured after headlining a revue at the Hill's Roosevelt Theater. **Figure 22** shows a non-bebop oriented jam session with four vocalists likely singing a contemporary popular song. Two women in the background can be seen singing along while other patrons stand at the bar. This type of performance—and the interactive relationship between audiences and musicians that it engendered—was more accessible to the general patron who would frequent the Musicians' Club.

One of the most notable local R&B oriented performers was saxophonist Leroy Brown, who would remain a mainstay at the Musicians' Club throughout the 1940s, working most often on Sunday nights while other clubs were closed. Born in Wacrose, Georgia, Brown came to Pittsburgh at a young age, though he maintained his roots in southern musical traditions. His style of playing reflected the strongly entrenched blues and swing aesthetic held by the majority of the Hill's "night-lifers," and so was highly popular amongst both working class and middle

²⁴⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 4, 1950, pg. 22.

²⁴⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 1, 1950, pg. 20.

class African Americans. Hearing Brown for the first time had a huge impact on the young Hosea Taylor, who wrote:

His eyes seemed to sparkle with glee as he weaved melodic webs for listeners to become entrapped, and then painted fantabulous melodic pictures for them to see. He did so with such gusto embellished with raw beauty that radiated the love for music and humanity in the rare fashion that only he could do. Leroy was basically a thin man, but his tone was as broad as the horizon...²⁵⁰

Taylor's description summarizes a set of musical values common to swing and R&B oriented jazz musicians: improvise to engage audiences, project a dedication to the cathartic powers of music, and produce a rich, vocal-like timbre. As Taylor summarizes: "Leroy Brown's personality was the opposite of Tommy Turrentine's. Where Tommy didn't care, Leroy did. I don't think those two could get along musically. I never heard them play together but I don't think they would get along. Tommy was aggressive and modern and contemporary where Leroy wasn't. They were both beautiful players but in different contexts. Different realms."²⁵¹

Brown's musical style resonated with Hill audiences, which led him to be one of the City's most sought after local black bandleaders in the 1940s. Brown provided regular work for top local musicians including pianist Erroll Garner, vocalist Billy Eckstine, and trumpeter Marion "Boonie" Hazel.²⁵² His appeal was apparent in the wide range of events he was hired for. Black social clubs, such as the Trianon Club,²⁵³ regularly had Brown perform for events.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Hosea Taylor, *Dirt Street* (Pittsburgh: Arsenal Binding & Finishing, 2007), pg. 41.

²⁵¹ Hosea Taylor, interview by author, December 16, 2008.

²⁵² *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 27, 1941, pg. 20.

²⁵³ A national collegiate organization.

²⁵⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 18, 1941, pg. 14.



Figure 23 Leroy Brown performing at the Musicians Club behind an entertainer on the dance floor, c. 1945 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.2968)



Figure 24 Leroy Brown with pianist George “Duke” Spaulding and unidentified vocalist at the Musicians’ Club, c. 1948-1955 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.2048)

At the Musicians' club, Brown would often perform as part of a "floor show" or mixed entertainment event. In 1952, Brown's band performed and backed up the dancer "Nakita" and the comedian duo "Dutche and Dutchee."²⁵⁵ **Figure 23** shows Brown on the small stage on the second floor of the Musicians' Union. His back is turned as an unidentified entertainer—dressed in a Zoot suit, polka dot tie, and cap—engages the audience with a dance routine. Brown uses the moment to gather his thoughts while the drummer focuses his attention on the performer, backing his routine. Pianist George "Duke" Spaulding remembers that the performances were so popular that "Most times you couldn't get in there. Even the whites would come from the white clubs. Anytime from 10 or 11 o'clock on till about 4 in the morning." Reflecting on the small crowded space, Spaulding remembers, "I never smoked but back then the smoke would be from the ceiling three fourths of the way down to the floor."²⁵⁶

4.2.2 The Bambola Social Club

Floor shows—a convergence of swing jazz, blues, minstrel shows, and vaudeville—involved a rotating series of events involving an emcee, a band, dancers, and comedians performing a series of acts through a two-hour set. Floorshows were adapted from the stage shows of venues such as Downtown Pittsburgh's Stanley Theater and the Hill District's Roosevelt Theater, which presented orchestras and variety acts on a larger scale. Small clubs such as the Bambola worked with limited spaces and funds to create similar, yet more intimate and informal environments for no cover. Trumpeter Chuck Austin, in recalling his experience with floorshows, highlights the impromptu nature of these performances:

²⁵⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 29, 1952, pg. 21.

²⁵⁶ George "Duke" Spaulding, interview by author, November 16, 2008.

Delsey McKay would take a coat hanger and go through it. She was a contortionist and she was real slim then, but that was her act. Then you have a singer and then maybe a comedian and that's a floorshow. You might have an interpretive dancer, a shake dancer or the "Dancing Demons" a tap dance team. Then a comedian would come out and tell some jokes and the band would play and that's it. That's what a floor show was all about. It wasn't a rehearsed, planned thing. It was just, "lets do it." Showbiz.²⁵⁷

One of the most popular Hill District clubs for floorshows in the 1940s was the Bambola, which opened in November 1946, three doors from the intersection of Wylie and Fullerton. Like the Musicians' Club, it was run as a chartered social club though it functioned less as a meeting place for musicians to jam and socialize than a place of employment. The social club—run by a board of officers—organized local events, sponsored a baseball team, and provided members with a private space to socialize and enjoy music and floor-shows.²⁵⁸

Despite being operated as a private club, the Bambola was seen as an important boost to the Hill's "nightlife, long dormant in this big steel center."²⁵⁹ A *Courier* columnist went as far as suggesting that the opening of the Bambola marked a revival of the city's nightlife: "With the Bambola located on the main stem, night life, long dormant in the big steel center, looks as though it will yawn and awaken."²⁶⁰ By New Years Eve of 1946, the Bambola had become a focal point of Pittsburgh's black nightlife along with other Hill District clubs such as the Crawford Grill, Teddy Hornes' club, the Musicians' Club, the Washington Club, the Loendi, the

²⁵⁷ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

²⁵⁸ The Bambola's board of officers included Robert "Popeye" Singleton, president; Orlando Rankin, vice president; Shelby Crutchfield, financial secretary; Docenia "Bubber" Johnson, treasurer; Lawrence Richardson, corresponding secretary, and Cal Spitler and Charles "Do Wrong" Moore, bartenders. *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 24, 1947, pg. 23.

²⁵⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 2, 1946, pg. 22.

²⁶⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 2, 1946, pg. 22.

Celebrity Club, Stanley's Lounge and Homewood and East Liberty Clubs such as the Pirate Inn, Rosen's, the Cottage Inn and the El Cabana.²⁶¹



Figure 25 The Bambola Social Club was located beneath The Rhumba Theater three doors north of the intersection of Wylie Avenue and Fullerton Street, c. 1955 (Charles "Teenie" Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.3330)

Located in a broad basement room below the Rhumba Theater, the Bambola was open every night but provided entertainment on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from midnight to five or six in the morning. Because the Bambola operated after hours, patrons were required to carry a membership card to meet the requirements of a chartered social club. These cards were

²⁶¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 28, 1946, pg. 18.

initially given away with no charge, or limitations on membership.²⁶² The main restriction on membership was for women though they could attend “if their husbands or sweethearts [were] members.”²⁶³ Drummer Cecil Brooks II and saxophonist George Thompson describe the social atmosphere pictured in **Figure 26**:

CB: See, in those times when they had an affair you'd bring your own bottle. They'd bring food and whisky and everything. In other words it was like a picnic. There might not even of been a stage. Might have been in some corner someplace but they would have all kinds of tables set up and the people had to pay to get in but then they had to buy a “set-up”—ice and water. That's how the club made their money. GT: Of course at that time it was better for the Hill than it is now because the mills were working and you can see. Look at the way people were dressed. Everybody had a little joint they could open up because they had enough money to do it. CB: Notice though that when people went out in those days they were dressed. Nowadays a guy will go on the gig any kind of way. GT: He'll wear jeans and a sweater...

The late hours of operation freed musicians to work an earlier evening job and provided patrons with a place for socializing after the “legitimate” bars and venues had closed. It also left the space free for musicians and entertainers to rehearse during the week in preparation for the late night floorshows that had become a staple of theater and club performances.

The appeal of floorshows in after-hours clubs was tied to the decrease in large-scale stage shows and the growing demand from the neighborhood’s residents for inexpensive variety shows. As the ‘40s wore on, the difficulties of maintaining a full sized traveling big band

²⁶² *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 23, 1946, pg. 21.

²⁶³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 24, 1947, pg. 23.

challenged all but the most successful bandleaders. Pittsburgh began to be passed by for larger markets. In 1946, *Courier* Columnist George Brown called his readers to demand better stage shows from Pittsburgh's large theaters, disparaging the fact that "Pittsburgh is not as far from New York—the show center—as Los Angeles or Chicago or Detroit, but these cities get stage shows. Unless a guy travels to Cleveland or Philly, the two cities nearest us that do present live talent, then he is solid out of luck."²⁶⁴ The lead black theater performers of 1946 were "Lena Horne, Count Basie, Stan Kenton, King Cole, Duke Ellington, Billy Eckstine, [and] Louis Armstrong" but, as Brown noted, "They go by Pittsburgh so fast that the populace gets a cold from the breeze. All the fine acts and bands say our town is s-q-u-a-r-e."²⁶⁵

The floorshows presented by the Bambola were far from "square," presenting a collage of musical, comedic, and risqué acts. The first stage show featured saxophonist Harry Williams's band with emcee, dancer, and female impersonator Gilda Gray, vocalist Bea Henderson, and "shake dancer" Gypsy Rose Lee who was reportedly could "[shake] the people into bad health with her torrid routines."²⁶⁶ Other early performers who would augment the floorshow were the blues singers Jo Jo Thompson and Andrew Tibbs and dancers Billy and Cricket.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 23, 1946, pg. 21.

²⁶⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 23, 1946, pg. 21.

²⁶⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 2, 1946, pg. 22; December 21, 1946, pg. 22. Harry Williams was listed as Charlie Williams in the November 16th and 30th event listings for the Bambola.

²⁶⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 30, 1946, pg. 20.



Figure 26 A crowd scene at the Bambola Social Club, c. 1946 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.32472)



Figure 27 Female Impersonator performing at the Bambola Club, c. 1946 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.1637)

Female impersonators were an important element in the Bambola’s floorshow. Local cross-dressing entertainers such as Sonny Hines were well known within the Hill and added an element of mystique to the floorshow. Female impersonators—as they were billed and publicly known—performed a variety of routines both as female and male characters.²⁶⁸ Saxophonist George Thompson remembers one performer known as the Bronze Odonis “was built like Atlas”

²⁶⁸ For more information on the phenomenon of female impersonators in the Hill District see Laura Grantmyer’s “‘Live and Let Live’: The Remarkable Tolerance for Female Impersonators in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, 1920-1960,” (University of Pittsburgh: Masters Thesis, 2009).

and “used to put Vaseline and sparkles on his body” to accentuate his muscular physique.²⁶⁹ The band would play a slow number, remembers saxophonist George Thompson, and he’d flex his muscles and pose. Other female impersonator groups had costumes ranging from modern urban exotic themes. Spanish, Hawaiian and African themed costumes were popular and provided an exciting nightclub experience. As Thompson noted, “People loved it and the place stayed packed.” Austin also reiterated the importance of female impersonators for the success of floor shows: “Those female impersonators and this whole culture; it was a draw because people would go down and spend big money drinking and having a good time watching these people...watching these characters.”²⁷⁰ In **Figure 27**, we can see that Teenie Harris chose to frame the female impersonator portrait from below. This perspective accentuates the “larger than life” personalities of the performers. In this case, the performer seems to tower over the rest of the room with muscular arms outstretched—simultaneously embodying femininity and masculinity.

While swing functioned as an integral part of nightlife and dances, bebop musicians fought to find public forums for their music. Largely, they were relegated to jam sessions and other contexts where audiences were of secondary importance, though occasionally they could intersperse the new music within the context of performing older styles.²⁷¹ The Bambola was known foremost as a venue for entertainment rather than musical performance. Musicians were featured on certain numbers, though for the majority of the show they were required to support the entertainers. This made the Bambola an unlikely place for bebop though it became one of the few places where the new music could be heard regularly in the Hill.

²⁶⁹ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

²⁷⁰ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

²⁷¹ Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, pg. 2.

In 1947, the young trumpet star Tommy Turrentine was hired to lead a quartet at the Bambola. The musicians he hired—pianist Robert Head, bassist Bobby Boswell, and drummer Cecil Brooks II—were experimenting with the new idiom of bebop, but had few places to perform the new music other than in jam sessions. Both bar owners and older musicians often saw bebop as a threat to business. Drummer Brooks remembers playing the Parker composition “Scrapple from the Apple” at a club and being approached by the manager who said, “You guys get your shit and get out of here.”²⁷² The young musicians proceeded to walk out with their instruments in hand jesting, “Oh, they just don't dig.”²⁷³

Finding a place for bebop required the musicians to carefully balance their supportive roles as performers with their drive to experiment with the new music. Austin describes how this balance was attained in the context of floorshow performances:

What little bit of bebop I could play... we would play and it would be all incorporated in the night's performance. You don't just play a whole night of bebop but you could play and put a tune in there and you try and do it that way but you don't try and ram it down somebody's throat. Maybe trying to play bebop for a show...some bebop don't fit for shows. You got to play “Lady Be Good” and “Tea For Two.” Some of those other kinds of tunes but you don't jazz it up. Just like when the tap dancers are doing soft shoe. You don't play “Ornithology” behind a soft shoe tap dancer. So there is a way of doing it and a way of not doing it.²⁷⁴

At the Bambola, the format of the evening worked to the advantage of the bebop-oriented musicians. Because the draw of the evening was the floorshow, Turrentine's band had creative

²⁷² Cecil Brooks II, interview by author, December 5, 2008.

²⁷³ Cecil Brooks II, interview by author, December 5, 2008.

²⁷⁴ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

freedom early in the set as patrons were filtering in from other bars and clubs. The disconnect between audiences and musicians did not detract from the musicians' goals, but rather gave them a venue for exploring new ideas. As Brooks noted, "We would play bebop for our enjoyment but the people would come for the shows."²⁷⁵ The period when the band could play bebop was strictly limited to "the first part of the night before it got really crowded." Most bars closed at 2 a.m. though the band was hired to play from midnight to 4. Before the shows started, the management "didn't care what we played because we had to be there at 12 o'clock. At the time when the bars closed that's when they wanted the show to start and they didn't want to hear none of that stuff that we were playing."²⁷⁶

The musicians did not perform bebop purely for themselves for a small audience had begun to develop for modern jazz. During the set "a few people would come out early to hear us play," mostly "aficionados."²⁷⁷ These patrons, though dedicated to the new music did not generally generate revenue for the club, "The guys that knew what was happening would be standing with a beer in their hand. They'd get the beer at nine and [have it for four hours]" as they were "digging" the band. Young jazz musicians would often attend to hear "'Teen' and them bringing the new numbers out."²⁷⁸

Bebop found an unlikely home within floorshows but was generally thought of as an outlet for the musicians and of secondary importance to the main acts. When emcees "would give the band a featured number to play we would play some bebop numbers. They didn't care as

²⁷⁵ Cecil Brooks II, interview by author, December 5, 2008.

²⁷⁶ Cecil Brooks II, interview by author, December 5, 2008.

²⁷⁷ Cecil Brooks and George Thompson, interview by author, January 13, 2009.

²⁷⁸ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

long as we could play that show.”²⁷⁹ Journalist and artist Thad Mosley was one such patron who would seek out those moments when Turrentine could demonstrate his musical abilities:

I didn't care about the shows. I just went to hear Tommy [because] he played his own music. What happened...they may have other acts and he'd play behind them and then they would do their own music. When the [dancers and entertainers] weren't on there they would do a couple of songs. They may have a dancer and they would play music for the dancer and then Tommy would play his own stuff when the dancer was done.”²⁸⁰



Figure 28 Shake dancer at the Bambola Club, c. 1946 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.10090)

²⁷⁹ Cecil Brooks II, interview by author, December 5, 2008.

²⁸⁰ Thad Mosley, interview by author, November 2, 2008.

The musical part of the floorshows, though made up of songs less harmonically challenging to Turrentine and other young musicians, provided other challenges. For the musicians, “every night was like a new night,” which required them to learn how to accompany a steady rotation of new acts.²⁸¹ Musicians, particularly drummers had to be prepared for abrupt tempo changes and other cues essential to the acts as well as develop the stamina needed to perform for the whole event. As shown in **Figures 28 and 29**, the audience’s attention is squarely on the dancer while the band is responsible to improvise along with the routine. As described by trumpeter Chuck Austin:

The floorshow was a category of playing. It wasn't hip playing like you would get at the Crawford Grill or a session. It's like Cecil Brooks said, you play your stuff and have your fun and now it's business time and the business was to play the show. Do the kicks with the dancers and when a comedian said a joke then “BAP!” and all that stuff and entertain some people. We do our job. That's what a lot of musicians fail to realize. We are entertainers. We may not be in that entertaining sense that you would think of but we are. We accompany these people that entertain the public that pays the management that gives us our salary.”²⁸²

²⁸¹ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

²⁸² Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.



Figure 29 Late night at the Bambola Social Club with drummer Cecil Brooks II (out of frame), trumpeter Tommy Turrentine, pianist Robert Head, and bassist Bobby Boswell (unconfirmed) performing behind a "shake dancer," c. 1946 (Charles "Teenie" Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.1833)

The demands on the musicians were at times great. Brooks remembers that sometimes “the show would last so long it wouldn't be funny.” Though there were “a few people that were pure jazz lovers,” most patrons wanted “to have their party music.” Sometimes “the emcee would get them involved. They had something they called the ‘booty green’ and we would play some [loud] music and they would grab someone from the audience and say, ‘Here is so and so! Get out there and show them how to do the booty green!’ They'd get out there and do that for

hours. I'd get so tired I wouldn't know what to do. I just wanted to play.”²⁸³ The dancer Gypsy Rose Lee was known to pick daunting tempos that few drummers could maintain. Drummer Joe Harris, heard that “there was no drummer who could play fast enough for her” so when “she took off, I took off with her,” playing a particularly aggressive tempo. When that portion of her act was finished “she turned around and came over and hugged me and kissed me. She had a body and she could shake man!”²⁸⁴ Brooks also recalls playing behind Gypsy who “had those tempos up and her body was like rubber. She was something else. The faster we played the more these bangles would be going all over the place.” The band enjoyed the challenge of backing dancers “because you had to hit when you were supposed to hit.” In **Figure 29**, Brooks noted, “You can see Teen's got his eyes open and he's watching everything she does [for cues].” The infamous part of her act involved dancing between tables where “guys would put dollars bills and stand them up and she'd pick them up with her privates. Saturday night she'd do well. Especially if there were a lot of people in there she could pick up a couple hundred dollars quick.”²⁸⁵ As Brooks noted, the diversity of performing experiences at the Bambola prepared him for later jobs such as playing in the house band at the Cosmopolitan Club in Akron, Ohio.²⁸⁶

At times the musicians would subvert their purely supportive roles and playfully challenge unsuspecting performers. Turrentine, while able to run a band behind the rotating performances, would not lose the chance to assert the divide between entertainers and musicians. Brooks recalls a tap dancing group called the Three Maghandis. To end their act one of the Maghandis would perform an up tempo dance for one chorus accompanied by the drummer at

²⁸³ Cecil Brooks II, interview by author, December 5, 2008.

²⁸⁴ Joe Harris, interview by author, December 21, 2008.

²⁸⁵ Cecil Brooks II, interview by author, January 13, 2009.

²⁸⁶ Cecil Brooks II, interview by author, January 13, 2009.

which point “everyone would come in and end the song.” One night Turrentine told Brooks, “When he plays this one chorus keep that tempo going as long as you can.” So when the cue came to stop “I just kept playing and he was dancing and looking back” calling out “I’ll get you!” “When we got finished man they wanted to fight!” Encouraged by Turrentine, Brook’s inclination to “play fast” in a modern bebop style reasserted the young musicians new musical values.²⁸⁷

4.3 JAZZ AND ECONOMIC VIABILITY

Pittsburgh jazz musicians who did not relocate to a larger city or tour nationally faced making a viable local living within a small, bounded market. While there were a great number of venues that supported live music, regular employment required establishing a group with an identity that appealed to a wide range of listeners. Relatively few musicians were inclined to lead their own group, due to the range of responsibilities that came with the position. Band leading required a range of non-musical and organizational skills such as booking jobs and rehearsals, promoting, and networking. Successful bands were those who constructed a public identity, which gained the support of venues, newspapers, radio, and prominent community members. Acceptance across class and racial barriers inevitably impacted a group’ musical direction and set band leaders apart from sidemen.

For sidemen, the dilemma of bebop was apparent in the conflicting ideals of the bandleader. Playing “commercial” became synonymous amongst young bebop musicians for

²⁸⁷ Cecil Brooks and George Thompson, interview by author, January 13, 2009.

playing music that was restrained, grounded in swing and which functioned in a wide number of contexts. The bebop musician's creative life was seen to be inevitably sacrificed when they went "commercial." This distinction is apparent in one local musician's assessment of another local musician's career: "He was exceptionally talented when he was young but he forfeited it for commercialism. So I think that sort of stymied [his] bebop career. He got married and had children so what are you going to do?"²⁸⁸

"Commercialism" has been a central theme both amongst jazz musicians and scholars. Ethnomusicologist Scott DeVeaux notes that a narrative has emerged in jazz history that places jazz within the realm of art. This narrative serves to establish jazz's independence from the forces of the entertainment industry and mass consumerism.²⁸⁹ This perspective has served many purposes in the academic world: the legitimization of the music within the university, the emphasis of structural over functional aspects of the music for pedagogical purposes, and the argument for jazz's cultural worth.

Sociologist Howard Becker's study of "dance musicians" in the late 1940s sheds light on the discourse addressing commercialism by examining the boundaries drawn by jazz musicians in their creative and social lives.²⁹⁰ Becker argues that the life of the dance musician was defined in part by their struggle between the interests of the musician and those of their audiences and employers. Jazz was the most valued amongst musicians because it was "produced without

²⁸⁸ Interview by author. The names of the interviewee and musicians have been removed from this particular interview excerpt.

²⁸⁹ Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pg. 12-13.

²⁹⁰ Becker's likely uses the term "dance musician" to emphasize the broad range of styles these musicians performed and the importance of economic concerns for their identities. While they played jazz for enjoyment, their livelihood came from playing dances.

reference to the demands of outsiders.”²⁹¹ Becker’s study depicts the lives of musicians during the 1940s as defined by the dilemma of reconciling economic and creative interests;

The most distressing problem in the career of the average musician...is the necessity of choosing between conventional success and his artistic standards. In order to achieve success he finds it necessary to “go commercial,” that is, to play in accord with the wishes of the nonmusicians for whom he works; in doing so he sacrifices the respect of other musicians and thus, in most cases, his self-respect. If he remains true to his standards, he is usually doomed to failure in the larger society. Musicians classify themselves according to the degree to which they give in to outsiders; the continuum ranges from the extreme “jazz” musician to the “commercial” musician.²⁹²

At the core of the distinction between “jazz” and “commercial” music are the conflicting values of performers and audiences, which are mediated by venue owners and bandleaders. The audience in Becker’s study value the musicians’ ability to play understandable, danceable music while they remain unaware of specialized skills and knowledge valued by the musician. Music valued most by mainstream society is not created to challenge one into new ways of thinking but rather confirm existing values. For the jazz musician, the very act of improvisation is a process of creating new ideas that challenge existing structures.

Race is likely not a part of Becker’s analysis because in writing from the perspective of the white jazz musician who performed largely for white audiences and with white groups his data deal little with how black musicians negotiated a segregated society. For the black musician during the mid-twentieth century, the identity of commercial music certainly did play a role in

²⁹¹ Howard Becker, *The Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), pg. 82.

²⁹² Becker, *The Outsiders*, pg. 83.

black musicians creative lives, though in conjunction with the restrictions of segregated life. In this respect, commercialism both posed a creative dilemma and enabled musicians to cross racial boundaries and access the more lucrative jobs in middle and upper class white communities. To illustrate this process I conclude this chapter with a case study of Pittsburgh pianist Walt Harper, who developed a viable local career by blurring the boundaries between jazz and commercial music.

4.3.1 Walt Harper (1926-2006)

Amongst Pittsburgh jazz musicians who remained in the city, pianist Walt Harper led one of the longest and most successful careers. Harper put his first group together in the mid-1940s and continued to perform until his death in 2006. Those who worked with him praise his business savvy and ability to break into new markets traditionally closed to African American groups. Those same musicians also recalled how Harper's commercially successful formula was creatively restrictive. While Harper was not an innovator in the sense that his contemporaries Ahmad Jamal and Erroll Garner were, he was innovative as an African American bandleader who developed a highly successful local career and crossed racial boundaries. With his approach to repertoire and performance presentation, Harper's music marked the boundary between "progressive" jazz and "commercial" music and espoused an alternative aesthetic to the counterculture movement of bebop in the 1940s and the chitlin' circuit infused hard bop and soul jazz of the 1950s and '60s. Harper's musical style existed between the worlds of mainstream white society and the segregated black community, which enabled him to subvert the racial politics of the music business.

Raised in the Upper Hill District, Harper came from a musical family and began performing at house parties in his early teens. His mother was trained as a concert pianist and his brothers Ernie, a pianist, and brother Nate, who played saxophone, performed professionally. Harper's attraction to the life of the musician was apparent at an early age. At 14, Harper remembers that he would "sneak out of the house around 1 or 2 in the morning...and go to [a club] to make the job," noting that "later on in life my late mother, who was dying, said, 'You know what, you thought you was fooling me, but I know you were sneaking out of the house.'"²⁹³ It was at these clubs that Harper would connect with other young Pittsburgh jazz musicians such as trumpeter Tommy Turrentine, drummer Cecil Brooks II, and bassist Ray Brown, whom he would later hire for his groups.

Harper, a child of the swing era, was greatly influenced by local bandleader Joe Westray as well as touring and recording artists such as Duke Ellington and Count Basie. From them he learned the importance of the music's impact on listeners through the embodiment of sound. Harper recalls both Basie and Ellington telling him, "If it doesn't swing [and] you don't sit and pat your feet, you're in trouble."²⁹⁴ This would become a central tenet of Harper's musical approach and the source of his popularity amongst a wide range of audiences.

²⁹³ Walt Harper, interview by Chuck Austin, July 21, 1997, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh (AAJPSP) Oral History Project.

²⁹⁴ Walt Harper, AAJPSP, *ibid.*



Figure 30 Walt Harper's band with Joni Wilson (d), Tommy Turrentine (t), Billy Davis (tr), Nate Harper (s), Shirely Bashear (s), and Hosea Taylor (s) in the Musicians' Club, c. 1945 (Charles "Teenie" Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.11413)

As Harper became more active as a performer he was encouraged by Local 471 president Hence Jackson to join the musicians' union. At 17, Harper put together his first band to perform a graduation dance at the Fifth Avenue High School. It was there that he first faced the difficult task of programming a night of music and rehearsing a new band. Harper recalls, "they had a Duke Ellington book and I went to Volkwein's [Music Store] and got the book and copied about

20 numbers [because] someone told me you need 20 numbers to play a job.”²⁹⁵ The arrangements included Billy Strayhorn’s “Take the A Train” and Ellington’s “Love You Madly,” both classic swing numbers, which would remain a staple of his repertoire throughout his career.

At an early age, Harper was able to maintain a working band comprised of his contemporaries. **Figures 30** and **31** show a high degree of organization with matching suits and custom music stands. Those musicians who saw these photos also noted that they were likely taken as promo shots during rehearsals. Ray Brown, a Pittsburgh native, became one of the leading modern jazz bassists and one of the greatest innovators utilized in Harper’s early groups. While in Harper’s group, Brown was exposed to a range of touring musicians who would come through the Black Musicians’ Club while the band was rehearsing. In one arrangement, Harper would “write out a little configuration for Ray to play and he played it. In the meantime, [Cootie Williams’] band was down at the Stanley Theater and the bass player...came up to the Hill to hear us and he says, ‘Let me see if I can play it,’ but he couldn’t play it, so...we [continued to rehearse] and he brought the whole band” to listen.²⁹⁶ Harper recalls the touring musicians being struck with the young bassist’s originality and virtuosity. It was shortly afterward that Snookum Russell hired Brown for a tour.

²⁹⁵ Walt Harper, *ibid.*

²⁹⁶ Walt Harper, *ibid.*



Figure 31 Walt Harper Band. Personnel from left to right: Bradley Bluett (s), Harry Kimbro (t), unidentified (s), Tommy Turrentine (t), unidentified (voc), Cecil Brook II (dr), Nate Harper (s), Marcus Kelly (unverified) (b), Walt Harper (conducting), c. 1943 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.1730)

As Harper’s reputation grew he began working a diverse range of jobs including club dates, parties, high schools, and colleges. Harper, who studied composition at Carnegie Tech,²⁹⁷ would use stock charts, his own arrangements and “head arrangements” for the various groups that he put together. The head arrangement was a technique made famous by the Count Basie band, which involved the collaborative arrangement of a song that would be memorized and

²⁹⁷ Currently Carnegie Mellon University.

played on cue. Saxophonist Hosea Taylor recalls Harper's early written arrangements as being simplistic; "He was writing goose eggs, you know those big whole notes and there were very few, I can't remember any eighth-notes. Just whole notes, half notes, and quarter notes."²⁹⁸ Most of Harper's arrangements were unwritten head arrangements, remembers Taylor, and "it was a funny thing because Walt would play a solo and when he wanted the band to play the shout [riff] he would yell 'runcha runcha!' Well, we all knew what that meant. It meant to shout [sings blues riff] 'run-chaa da daa da, run-chaa da daa da.' That was funny but we all knew what to do when he said that."²⁹⁹ For Taylor, it was Harper's leadership abilities that "kept us all intact" and guided the teenaged musicians through performances. The fact that most of the songs followed the standard twelve bar blues form made head arrangements easier to follow. Such songs as "Tippin' In" and "After Hours," made popular by the Erskin Hawkins Orchestra, fit Harper's riff oriented approach.

Head arrangements required a consistent and skilled personnel who could improvise on written parts and improvise backing parts. Drummer Harold Lee found that the written charts were often sparse but that this allowed the musicians to adapt the parts to their preference. Lee recalls, "If somebody took a vacation and another guy took it over he would play what [was] written down and the band would sound like horse shit" because the written chart had not been changed.³⁰⁰

Even at an early age Harper understood that successful band leading required foremost providing an entertaining show. During the 1940s, he would program his sets to include radio hits recorded by artists such as Nat King Cole and Erskin Hawkins. His performances would

²⁹⁸ Hosea Taylor, interview by author, December 16, 2008.

²⁹⁹ Hosea Taylor, interview by author, December 16, 2008.

³⁰⁰ Harold Lee, interview by author, October 22, 2008.

include routines that fostered an interactive environment between his band and the audience. Hosea Taylor found that these routines made the gig “a real thrill.” During his teenage years, Harper “would allow the [horn section] to go out and dance with the girl of their choice—somebody they'd been eyeing all night long—and he'd play ‘After Hours.’ It was a real funky song and everybody would go out and dance. We all thought that *that* was the Negro national anthem at that time. At least I did. So he would say ‘National Anthem’ and we all knew what he was going to play.”³⁰¹ These routines created new meanings for popular songs and functioned as a means of socialization in performance.

Much of Walt Harper’s ability to sustain a working group came from his ability to book performances at high school and college dances, which paid better than club dates. Though Pittsburgh schools were integrated, African American students often faced difficulties in attending prom dances. In 1945, Harper performed at a black prom dance at the Cottage Inn, a dancehall in the eastern neighborhood of Homewood. Taylor, who was 17 when he first started playing proms with Harper, couldn’t recall “any black kids going to the regular prom but out there at the Cottage Inn Walt sort of was making up for that.”³⁰² By 1946, Harper’s success at local high school and college dances had gained him the title “pride of the bobby soxers.”³⁰³

Harper’s success in local High School dances led to regular performances at college dances and concerts outside the black community. Though he continued performing in Pittsburgh’s African American communities, Harper found that consistent access to the lucrative performance markets outside black neighborhoods enabled him to sustain his group. Jazz musicians, both black and white, often found it difficult to traverse the cultural divide between

³⁰¹ Hosea Taylor, interview by author, December 16, 2008.

³⁰² Hosea Taylor, interview by author, December 16, 2008.

³⁰³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 17, 1946, pg. 23.

white and black performance contexts feeling that they had to adapt their performances to various social contexts. For example, Pittsburgh guitarist Joe Negri developed a “straight ahead jazz” style that “you really couldn't do on a dance gig.”³⁰⁴ Harper, however, developed a single stylistic approach for all of his performances. As Negri states, “the thing about Walt that I admired was he had a book and it was the Walt Harper style and he stuck to that while I would go in there and if I'd be playing the dance I would try to adapt to what I thought the audience wanted.”³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ Joe Negri, interview by author, December 17, 2008.

³⁰⁵ Negri, *ibid.*



Figure 32 Walt Harper performing at an out door event, possibly Flagstaff Hill adjoining Carnegie University, c. 1960 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.6937)



Figure 33 Walt Harper's Quintet performing at Carnegie Tech (Currently Carnegie Mellon University), c. 1954 (Charles "Teenie" Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.11426)

When questioned about the style of music Harper performed, musicians foremost emphasized that it was danceable and that it had recognizable elements of the jazz idiom.

Brooks noted of **Figure 31**:

At the same time I played with him my heart was in jazz and bebop was out then. Walt didn't play bebop. He called the band in the later years 'Walt Harper and All That Jazz' but jazz could come in all kinds of forms. But he really wasn't playing the real jazz. You

can see this is a regular band. A dance band, that's what this was. Like I said, he was successful.³⁰⁶

This “cross-over” formula was effective in moving beyond black communities and introducing elements of African American jazz into new venues. As trumpeter Roger Barbour remembers, Harper “found the right ingredient to cross the color line. Before Walt most of them wouldn't hire black bands.³⁰⁷ It was this conscious move outside segregated performance contexts that opened up higher paying jobs and new social networks. As saxophonist George Thompson put it, Harper “had to go beyond the African American society to make the bread. We didn't have any money so to make the bread he had to go into colleges where white students were and from there their parents would hire him in Sewickley Heights and the whole bit.”³⁰⁸

Harper pleased young dance audiences with a consistent and easily recognizable repertoire as well as a cool and controlled presentation. The song that would become associated with Harper was the Duke Ellington composition “Satin Doll,” which was the embodiment of restraint and society club tastes. Saxophonist George Thompson recalls, “Walt played it so much that people thought he wrote it.”³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Cecil Brooks II, interviewed by Colter Harper, November 19, 2008.

³⁰⁷ Roger Barbour, interview by author, November 19, 2008.

³⁰⁸ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008. Sewickley Heights is an affluent white town north of Pittsburgh.

³⁰⁹ Thompson, *ibid.*



Figure 34 The Walt Harper Quintet at the Midway in downtown Pittsburgh. Jon Morris (tr), Cecil Brooks II (dr), Billy Lewis (b), Nate Harper (s), and Walt Harper (p), c. 1955 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.11433)

Harper’s approach, while appealing to mainstream audiences, often restricted the creative efforts of his sidemen. Thompson called the music he played with Harper “understandable jazz,” emphasizing that “he stuck right with the way it was written--no deviation and don’t get wild.” For sidemen seeking experimental approaches used by bebop musicians, dance jobs often proved to be a “monotonous” though steady source of employment. Harper had to remain a strong leader to please both black and white dance audiences as well as keep his sidemen performing in a subdued style. Thompson recalls how the creative environment led to tensions in the band:

He stayed right with the way the record came out. He even wanted Nate to play the solos the same as they were on the records. After a while the guys started rebelling and I played what I wanted to play when it came to my solo. When it comes to the solo, that's me. Now when your arrangement is there I'll play it exactly the way you want it played but I want the freedom to be able to play [a solo], as long as I'm playing the changes the way they should be played.³¹⁰

Harper maintained his status as the “prom king” and “pride of the bobby soxers” through the 1950s. At the same time Harper was booking area colleges and country clubs for largely all-white audiences, he was also performing for notable Pittsburgh jazz clubs and concerts. In the first decade that he was professionally working, Harper had backed and performed with national artists such Nat King Cole, Dinah Washington, George Shearing, and Roy Hamilton as well as the vocal groups the Clovers, Drifters, Dominoes, Orioles, and Checkers.³¹¹ In the following years Harper would continue to be a first call to share the bill with national stars such as vocalist Carmen McRae at the Royal Ballroom in Wilkinsburg.³¹²

Though Harper’s success led him into new performance venues he continued to regularly perform in Hill jazz clubs. In 1954, Harper was performing regularly at the Crawford Grill no. 2 as well as the Musicians’ Club of local 471 after it was relocated from lower Wylie to Frankstown Avenue in the eastern neighborhood of Homewood. Both of these venues were focal points of musical life in Pittsburgh’s African American community and were among the most popular black owned venues in the city. The movement of the Musicians’ Club due to urban redevelopment was a sign of the increasing demographic and economic shift of Pittsburgh’s

³¹⁰ Thompson, *ibid.*

³¹¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 26, 1955, pg. 20.

³¹² *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 13, 1957, pg. A23.

African American population from the centrally located Hill District to peripheral neighborhoods. For two decades, the Musicians' Club had been a central cultural institution for Pittsburgh jazz musicians. Its relocation enabled the rich social and creative life of local and touring artists to continue though removed some three miles from the city center. The opening week, during which Harper performed, saw Lionel Hampton leading a jam session with vocalist Arthur Prysock, and bassist Slam Stewart.³¹³



Figure 35 Walt Harper Quintet at the Crawford Grill no. 2 with John Morris (tr), Nate Harper (s), Bill Lewis (b), and Harold Lee (d), c. 1954 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.11432)

³¹³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 23, 1954, pg. 18.

Harper also performed at white owned and patronized clubs in downtown Pittsburgh. In 1958, pianist Ahmad Jamal returned to perform with his trio in Pittsburgh at the downtown club the Copa. Jamal had gained national recognition performing and recording in Chicago and developed a style marked by both the virtuosic touch of a classically trained musician and improvisational and interpretive sensibilities of modern jazz musicians. Jamal's performance was part of an evening of events during which Walt Harper's band would also perform for dancing.³¹⁴

Despite his lack of technical prowess and dedication to the tenets of the swing generation, Harper was able to present a recording that nodded to modern jazz, experimented with new musical directions, and maintained his core musical identity. The 1952 recording session, originally released by the Hi-Lo Label and later re-released by Savoy as *The Bebop Boys*, featured the Walt Harper quintet with trombonist John Morris, saxophonist Nate Harper, bassist Bill Lewis, and drummer Harold Lee backing up vocalist Eddie Jefferson.³¹⁵ The album's title is somewhat misleading because Harper's band does not abandon its laid back swing style to explore the more aggressive approaches of bebop. The experimental elements of the album are apparent in Jefferson's innovations. The recording was Jefferson's first recording session and spotlighted his use of *vocalese*, a vocal technique that involves writing or improvising lyrics to well known instrumental solos. On *The Bebop Boys*, Jefferson sings saxophonist James Moody's solo from the standard "Body and Soul." Jefferson demonstrates a vocal deftness in recreating Moody's solo with playful lyrics wooing an unknown female with promises of undying love and devotedness. Moody's solo unfolds with a balance of spacious though intricately phrased

³¹⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 1, 1958, pg. 22.

³¹⁵ Carlos Pena, "Pittsburgh Jazz Records and Beyond (1950-1985)" (masters thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2007), pg. 16.

melodic lines evocative of Coleman Hawkins and searing double time licks reminiscent of Charlie Parker posing Jefferson the daunting task of articulating a cohesive story while maintaining the complexity and phrasing of the original solo.

Harper's success as a bandleader involved the continued support of local social organizations and businesses. Harper was the most ubiquitous local jazz musician in the media. Not only did the *Courier* and *Post-Gazette* regularly cover his musical activities but he was also active as a radio DJ and columnist. The *Pittsburgh Courier* regularly covered Harper's gigs and choices in personnel. When he hired trombonist Sam Hurt, the *Courier* reported that Harper likened Hurt to Dizzy Gillespie noting, "that's a lot of bebop."³¹⁶ Harper would perform in surrounding towns such as Vandergrift and Meadville at Country Clubs as well as Carnegie Tech, occasionally sharing the bill with touring artists such as vibraphonist Lionel Hampton. In its reporting on Harper, the *Courier* would regularly feature the high profile nature of his work. What—for the active society or jazz musician—would have been a regular string of engagements, became points of praise for Harper's popularity and success. When Harper began a six-week engagement at the Brenslers Hotel in Ligonier Pennsylvania, the *Courier* noted "This resort town, noted as a vacation retreat for millionaires, is thus ready to have a second sampling of the Harper brand of magic."³¹⁷ The *Courier* would also give special attention to occasions when Harper made specific advancements across color lines as in when he led the "first septet crew to play the ultra-swank Dore's supper club," which "turned customers on so much, the management is considering bringing him back with a full review."³¹⁸

³¹⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 28, 1946, pg. 20.

³¹⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 4, 1959, pg. 17.

³¹⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 8, 1957, pg. A17.

In March of 1955, Harper was hired as a disc jockey by the local radio station WHOD to become the fifth African American to work for the station. WHOD, founded in 1948 by WWII veteran Roy Ferree, developed into an important media outlet for Pittsburgh's African American communities. Ferree initially established the station to give voice to the area's working class immigrants with a diverse range of weekly music shows that included "Jewish Jems," "Tony Ortale's Italian Hour," "Chester's Polka Parade," and "Alex's Avlon's Grecian Melodies."³¹⁹ The station's first African American DJ was Mary Dudley, whose show "Movin' Around with Mary Dee" helped establish a place for black music on the Pittsburgh airways. A graduate of Pittsburgh's St. Mann Radio School, Dudley was of daughter of the Hill District businessman William Goode who owned and managed Goode's 24-hour pharmacy on the corner of Wylie and Fullerton. By 1950, Mary Dee's show had expanded from a 15-minute slot to two hours and included daily news and community segments from *Pittsburgh Courier* columnists Toki Johnson and Hazel Garland. Though WHOD was sold in 1956, it established a format for black radio in Pittsburgh that was later carried on by WAMO.

Harper's show focused on jazz, pop, and swing avoiding R&B, which was the main content of fellow WHOD DJ Mary Dee. The station cited "his personal acquaintance with many of the leading artist of the day and of his vast popularity in the band leading field" as his qualification.³²⁰ Walt Harper programmed "cooler sounds" playing artists such as Count Basie, Woody Herman, Sarah Vaughn, Stan Kenton, Dave Brubeck, Jerry Mulligan, June Christy, Ella

³¹⁹ Laurence Glasco, "Black Radio in Pittsburgh", *New Pittsburgh Courier*, June 6, 2009. Accessed online August 10, 2009

<http://newpittsburghcourieronline.com/articlelive/articles/45060/1/Black-radio-in-PittsburghSearch-for-identity-and-profits/Page1.html>

³²⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 26, 1955, pg. 20.

Fitzgerald, Erroll Garner, and James Moody.³²¹ Harper's program, like his band, appealed to a wide audience with his listeners including "the teenager, the housewife, the college student, and the guy coming home from work." Harper's show remained focused on Pittsburgh's black jazz scene by enacting a mock black Musicians' Club jam session on his radio show every Friday. The *Courier* noted that his imitation of the club's environment was convincing enough "that people have actually gone to the Musicians' Club thinking that the session was really happening."³²² The show lasted two years and was cited by the *Courier* as "the only authentic and exclusively jazz show on the radio in Pittsburgh."³²³

By 1959, Harper had become a celebrated local figure. In the *Courier* article "Walt Harper, A Story of Success at Home," George E. Pitts touched on Harper's popularity in a variety of performance settings.³²⁴ When the United Steelworkers of America led a four-month national strike, many clubs suffered due to the drain on a large portion of the working class' income. Pitts notes that "one of the few clubs that did any business at all was the one where the Harper herd was working. The group was so booked up with one-nighters that Walt could only work for the owner on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Consequently, the club did more business than on weekends."³²⁵ When Harper performed for a college fraternity dance and "word leaked out that the Harper jazzmen were on the campus, students mobbed the dance hall and forced their way in to hear the sounds."³²⁶ In addition to clubs and dances, Harper was often hired for corporate and political events. With the support of Roy Kohler, manager of community relations

³²¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 25, 1956, pg. 26.

³²² *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 25, 1956, pg. 26.

³²³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 30, 1957, pg. 47.

³²⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 12, 1959, pg. 16.

³²⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 12, 1959, pg. 16.

³²⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 12, 1959, pg. 16.

at Gulf Oil, Harper was connected to a range of high paying jobs. On one occasion, his group was flown to Harrisburg by Gulf Oil to perform for Governor David Lawrence and the dedication of the Laurel pipeline. Individuals such as Kohler “opened doors for us that might have never been.”³²⁷ In December of 1959, Harper took two days off from performing with “six nights at a night club, plus 20 dates in concerts and one-nighters, and three dates at the plush new Hilton Hotel.”³²⁸

As the 1960s wore on and jazz musicians felt the increasing pressure from rock and roll’s popularity, Harper maintained a steadily working band. In 1965, Harper was still playing “between 50 and 60 college dates from April through June” and continued to have his pick of club dates during the week.³²⁹ Club owners could count on his wide and loyal following giving him the nickname of the “pied piper of jazz.” Dr. Nelson Harrison, who played trombone with Harper, recalled that he could consistently work with Harper at a time when jazz gigs were generally decreasing in number: “I was with Walt Harper from 1967 to 1970 making \$25 dollars a night and I always had a pocket full of money. Gas was 15 cents a gallon, my rent was \$100, my car payment was \$50.”³³⁰

When the range of Harper’s activities as both a bandleader and public figure are taken into consideration, one can see how his musical life was a notable achievement. Even into the 1970s and ‘80s, Harper continued to expand his professional life. From 1969 to 1975 owned and operated *Walt Harper’s Attic*, a jazz club in downtown Pittsburgh. From 1982 to 1988, Harper

³²⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 12, 1959, pg. 16.

³²⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 12, 1959, pg. 16.

³²⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 27, 1965, pg. 9.

³³⁰ Nelson Harrison, interview by author, March 7, 2006.

ran *Harper's Jazz Club*, his second club.³³¹ Both clubs were dedicated to providing a supportive and intimate performance space for touring and local jazz musicians alike. Among the touring artists Harper featured were Dizzy Gillespie, Mel Tormé, Max Roach, Nancy Wilson, Joe Williams, Wynton Marsalis, George Shearing, Carmen McCrae, and Lionel Hampton.

Musicians such as Leroy Brown and Walt Harper remained dominant local black bandleaders into the 1950s and '60s demonstrating that economic success came to those Hill District musicians who developed a strongly swing-oriented musical approach that appealed across class and racial boundaries and did not embrace the ideals of bebop. A cursory examination of these and other local musicians also demonstrates that the creative lives of musicians in Pittsburgh rarely followed the path of stylistic trends set out in jazz studies: from Dixieland to swing, bebop, cool, hard bop, modality, free jazz and fusion. Often, artistic or economic success depended on circumventing this progression. For example, Walt Harper, Ahmad Jamal and Errol Garner—three Pittsburgh pianists born in the second half of the 1920s—developed an individualized musical identity, which they carried through their careers. For Jamal and Garner, this would be presented almost exclusively in a piano trio format (piano, bass, drums) and center on the virtuosic and highly personalized exploration of original compositions and jazz standards.

For musicians such as Tommy Turrentine, Cecil Brooks II, George Thompson, and Chuck Austin, stylistic choices were often negotiated in relation to economic contexts. Jobs for musicians in the 1940s would range from playing in dance bands and stage shows to playing as a part of a floorshow to playing in small groups for listening audiences. The multi-faceted nature of these musicians' work life fostered a diverse set of musical skills that blurred the boundaries

³³¹ <http://www.waltharperandallthatjazz.com/a/p/bio00.html> accessed August 12, 2009.

between jazz and other popular forms of music. The popular analytical model of stylistic evolution is ineffective for framing the creative lives of these individuals because it fails to account for the individual approaches of each musician, the demands of their audiences and working environments, and the economic and political realities of working as a musician.

The “bebop dilemma” did however lead many musicians to incorporate aspects of bebop into swing and R&B performances. Joe Harris describes how experimentations in harmony and melody had to be carefully approached while touring with Snookum Russell. Russell was foremost a R&B musician though he was known for hiring virtuosic and innovative musicians such as trumpeter Fats Navarro and trombonist J.J. Johnson. Because the group toured the Southern “Chitlin’ Circuit” his style was restricted to the blues and swing idioms. As Harris noted, “we'd be playing down south and that's what the blacks wanted.” When modern jazz musicians Tommy Turrentine and Ray Brown joined the band they began writing arrangements that explored new harmonic and melodic ideas while maintaining the blues structure and shuffle and boogie rhythmic frameworks. The regular performances enabled Turrentine and Brown to explore modern ideas within a popular idiom and dance audiences. Audiences expected and “wanted to hear the blues” though “you could get in there and get away with” exploring a new musical language as long as the rhythmic structure remained unchanged.

The financial difficulties of emphasizing bebop too heavily can be seen with Billy Eckstine who was one of the most notable Pittsburghers to contribute to the development of bebop. Though he was born in Pittsburgh, Eckstine had moved to Washington D.C. as a teen where Pittsburgh pianist and bandleader Earl “Fatha” Hines heard him sing. Eckstine joined

Hines' group in 1934 and toured with him until 1943 when he formed his own group.³³² With progressive young musicians drawn from various bands including the Earl Hines Orchestra, Eckstine formed the first big band to fully explore the new idiom of bebop. With a lineup that included vocalist Sarah Vaughan, drummers Art Blakey and Joe Harris, saxophonists Charlie Parker, Dexter Gordon, and Gene Ammons, and trumpeters Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, and Fats Navarro, the Billy Eckstine big band provided a creative outlet for bebop to flourish. The band, though legendary amongst musicians and aficionados, never attained commercial success. In the late 1940s Eckstine began to shape his career as a ballad singer recording songs from the American songbook on MGM Records. His subsequent commercial success came at the expense of his musical experimentation with modern jazz though he remained nonetheless a celebrated figure in the jazz community.

³³² Richard Severo, "Billy Eckstine, 78, Band Leader And Velvet-Voiced Singer, Dies," *New York Times*, Tuesday, March 9, 1993.



Figure 36 The Billy Eckstine Orchestra with “Lucky” Thompson (s), “Dizzy” Gillespie (t), Charlie Parker (s), and Eckstine in Downtown Pittsburgh’s Aragon Ballroom, August 1944 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.9184)

The “bebop dilemma” found partial resolution during the 1950s with the emergence of “hard bop.” Drummer Cecil Brooks II recalls a conversation with drummer J.C. Heard in the 1940s that anticipated this shift: “He said ‘Man, I’ll tell you what. This bebop stuff, by the time it becomes popular, it’s going to be called something else.’ I was like 16 or 17 years old and he told me it was going to be called something else. He said ‘Some other guys are going to be taking it

over and making new things.”³³³ Hard bop innovators accomplished this by mixing the language of bebop with the aesthetics of swing. Artists such as drummer Max Roach, trumpeter Clifford Brown, pianist Horace Turner, and drummer Art Blakey distilled the ideas of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie into a format that was more accessible to listeners of R&B, blues, and gospel. Brooks, in commenting on the famous collaboration of Clifford Brown and Max Roach, noted, “They all started dressing up and cleaned up their act and they were playing bebop but—you heard [the album] *Study in Brown*—they were playing it so...people could listen to it.”³³⁴

During the 1950s, small club nightlife would shift away from floorshows to a format that featured hard bop bands in highly interactive environments. Clubs such as the Crawford Grill no. 2 and the Hurricane Bar would become new focal points of jazz performance where musician and audience values were reconciled in highly charged performances. If the dilemma of bebop was resolved, it was in these small neighborhood clubs—what I call “jazz houses”—for it was here that modern jazz found a home.

³³³ Cecil Brooks II and George Thompson, interview by author, January 13, 2009.

³³⁴ Cecil Brooks II and George Thompson, interview by author, January 13, 2009.

5.0 1950S: URBAN REDEVELOPMENT AND THE RISE OF THE JAZZ HOUSE

During the 1950s, the Lower Hill District experienced the turmoil of urban redevelopment, which cleared homes, businesses, and public places and dispersed families to surrounding neighborhoods. Redevelopment also marked the shift of nightlife activity away from Fullerton Street and Lower Wylie Avenue, the focal point of entertainment during the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. This reshaping of the neighborhood's physical and social landscape coincided with the "golden age of modern jazz," so termed by musicologist Ingrid Monson because it "established the aesthetic standards by which succeeding generations of jazz musicians have continued to measure themselves in the early twenty-first century, as well as a set of symbolic meanings that remain central to the identity of the genre."³³⁵ The local places in which this new era of jazz unfolded were mostly small black owned and patronized neighborhood clubs—what I call "jazz houses." The term "house" in this context alludes to the role of these venues as spiritual and social sanctuaries for a community that experienced the destruction of homes through redevelopment. In the Upper Hill, jazz houses including the Crawford Grill no. 2, the Hurricane Bar, Flamingo Hotel, Mutt's Hut, Mason's, the Ellis Hotel, the Perry Hotel, and the Little Paris Club served as focal points for social life and musical innovation. Within these clubs

³³⁵ Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), pg. 4.

grew a style of performing and listening that met both the artistic needs of jazz artists and the social needs of a diverse audience.

5.1 CLEARING PLACES AND RECONSTRUCTING SPACES

Urban redevelopment ushered in a new era in the Hill's nightlife by physically removing what had been the neighborhood's central entertainment district during the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, displacing families and businesses, and isolating the city's African American population. In Pittsburgh, the post-Depression decades saw the Hill burdened with overpopulation and inadequate housing. Studies found that a third of the homes were either unfit for living or in need of major repair with families sometimes sleeping six to a room.³³⁶ Though it claimed to relieve poverty and slum conditions, urban redevelopment began the process of isolating the Hill, which was accentuated by the riots of 1968. By displacing businesses and residents from the Lower Hill, redevelopment in the 1950s precipitated the shift from an ethnically and racially diverse neighborhood into a largely working class African American community. Many displaced African Americans from the Lower Hill moved east to Homewood and East Liberty as the "white flight" led the Italian, Lebanese, and Jewish Hill Residents to relocate to the suburbs and peripheral neighborhoods.

³³⁶ Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987). pg. 70.

Urban redevelopment plans began in Pittsburgh with the passing of the Urban Redevelopment Law in 1945, which provided City Officials with eminent domain over property that they determined to be blighted or otherwise used in economically or socially undesirable ways. In September of 1955, the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh approved the Lower Hill Redevelopment Plan. This redevelopment project would be the city's largest, both in area and budget, with 105 acres slated for demolition and a proposed \$18 million dollars in initial relocation and clearing costs. The demolition of the Lower Hill's 1,300 structures would begin June 1956 and displace an estimated 8,000 residents comprised of 1,239 black and 312 white families.³³⁷

There was little question that the Lower Hill was in need of some form of rehabilitation of its haphazard street planning and often poorly maintained buildings—physical remnants of the rapid industry driven development that sprung up in the first half of the 19th century. However, the redevelopment planners had little interest in rehabilitation, ultimately aiming to expand downtown Pittsburgh—bordered on the north, west, and south by the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers—to the east. Redevelopment authorities showed little concern for replacing the Lower Hill's social and economic infrastructures, asserting that the “extension of the central city as now represented by the adjoining Golden Triangle” would be a benefit to the city's prosperity and usher the city's entrance into the modern age.³³⁸ Rather than rehabilitate the existing structure, the Urban Redevelopment Authority opted for complete demolition stating, “The major objective of this project is the clearing of an area of massive blight which, due to a

³³⁷ Lynn Hogan, ed., Reproduced from the *Pittsburgh Senior News*.

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~njm1/hillhist.htm> (accessed march, 2006).

³³⁸ Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, “Proposal for the Redevelopment of Redevelopment Area No. 3 in the 2nd and 3rd Wards of the City of Pittsburgh” (Pittsburgh: Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, 1955), pg. 3.

poorly designed street pattern, over-crowding, outmoded or completely lacking sanitary facilities, improper and mixed land use, has deteriorated beyond the point where rehabilitation would be conceivable.”³³⁹ A particularly telling statement demonstrates the lack of cultural and economic worth that the Lower Hill held for the Authority:

Admittedly, it is a costly project. At the same time, it would be worth all its costs to secure the clearance of the Lower Hill district as it stands, and to free the community from the burdens which such a concentrated area of sub-standard housing and depressed living conditions impose upon our common society and upon our individual conscience.³⁴⁰

The great failing of the redevelopment authorities was their inability to work with local black leaders and communities and recognize the cultural value attached to buildings in the Lower Hill. Places are not passive structural backdrops to lives for they are integral to constructing the memories and social infrastructures that constitute a community. As psychiatrist Mindy Thompson Fullilove poetically states, “The cues from place dive under conscious thought and awaken our sinews and bones, where days of our lives have been recorded.”³⁴¹ Places are imbued with social value and cultural memories as social life unfolds within them.

Clubs such as the Local 471’s Musicians’ Club had supported nearly three decades of musical life and so become imbued with the community’s collective memories and identity. However, at the time of redevelopment, the Musicians’ Club, like many buildings on Lower Wylie Avenue, was in a state of neglect. The building, previously home to the Collins Inn in the

³³⁹ Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, “Proposal for the Redevelopment of Redevelopment Area No. 3,” pg. 3.

³⁴⁰ Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, *ibid.*, pg. 10.

³⁴¹ Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), pg. 10.

1910s and the Paramount Club in the 1920s, held an important place in the neighborhood's musical history but drastically needed renovation by the 1940s. Gus Greenlee, who had owned the club from its days as the Paramount Inn, did not invest in modernizing the building, though he was known to help Local 471, which, at times, didn't "make enough money to even pay the rent."³⁴² The state of the building, however, did little to keep away patrons who flocked to hear the best local and touring musicians. Saxophonist Hosea Taylor first went to the famed Musicians' Club as a teenager in the mid-1940s, after being invited to an audition for Will Hitchcock's dance band. There he found that the state of the Musicians' Club did not match its reputation, appearing from the street to be "nothing more than an old dilapidated row house."³⁴³ Walking up the stairs of the Musicians' Club to where the bands rehearsed and performed, Taylor noticed, "The banister was nice and shiny on top and appeared to be in O.K. repair but it sure as hell wasn't...to be mistaken for a means of support. It had seen its last days while the remainder of the building was in the process of doing the same."³⁴⁴ Even energetic performances were noted to strain the old structure. One Saturday night, drummer Joe Harris remembers pianist Erroll Garner stopping by: "The bandstand was up on the second floor and you could dance and stuff. So Erroll Garner got his groove going and the floor was actually [moving] and I said this building is going to fall down because that's Erroll Garner's style. Makes you pat your foot. Everybody was yelling 'Yea Garner!' and the floor was actually bouncing. It was an old building. Nowadays they wouldn't allow people in there."³⁴⁵

³⁴² George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.

³⁴³ Hosea Taylor, *Dirt Street* (Pittsburgh: Arsenal Binding & Finishing, 2007), pg. 143.

³⁴⁴ Taylor, *Dirt Street*, pg. 144.

³⁴⁵ Joe Harris, interview by author, November 21, 2008.

Such places are integral to what Fullilove calls the “mazeway” or collection of routine movements through which individuals engage their environment and as a result come to understand themselves in relationship to their surroundings. A mazeway functions as an “external system of protection” that maintains a balance between the individual and their environment.³⁴⁶ Moreover, in following a mazeway, one constructs understandings of oneself in relationship to social and physical environments. Fullilove terms the disruption of an individual’s mazeway as “root shock.” At the individual level, root shock accounts for the “profound emotional upheaval that destroys the working model of the world that had existed in the individual’s head” while at the community level, it “ruptures bonds, dispersing people to all the directions of the compass.”³⁴⁷

With the redevelopment of the Lower Hill, a third of the Hill District had to find new homes, places of business and leisure spots—the collection of places that comprised individual mazeways. Italian American drummer Chuck Spatafore recalls how the networks of ethnicities were deeply impacted by redevelopment and resettlement:

Most of the Italians and Lebanese moved to Brookline, Beechview, and Dormont. I moved north. For the most part they moved in groups. The Church in the Hill—St. Peter’s—was torn down and it was political because they kept Epiphany Church. St. Peter’s was Beautiful Church. I was baptized there. There was an old woman with a sign that said “Save St. Peters.” Epiphany was an Irish church and St. Peter’s was an Italian church and the feeling that [mayor] David Lawrence kept the Irish church—which

³⁴⁶ Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock*, pg. 10.

³⁴⁷ Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *ibid.*, pg. 14.

became a Syrian church—and knocked down a beautiful Italian church. They taught Italian there when I was a kid.³⁴⁸

Another example of the displacement associated with root shock is the relocation of the Musicians' Club to Homewood in East Pittsburgh. Opening in 1954 at 6500 Frankstown Avenue, the new Musicians' Club continued providing a space for musicians and patrons to socialize. The new location, however, accentuated the neighborhood rivalries. As Chuck Austin explains:

Back in those days there was a funny thing where the Northsiders didn't want to come to the Hill, the Hill didn't want to go to Homewood and all that kind of stuff but initially with the club being here we didn't have that problem. The Club was in the Hill District and guys from Homewood, Braddock, or wherever would meet. That fraternal happening that brought us together, that common bond, was fine when [471 was in the Hill]. When we moved to East Liberty there was a little funny thing because that turf thing came into play. It really didn't have any effect on us as musicians but it played a little bit into the [scene] because [Homewood and the Hill] were rivals. Before the tearing out of the Hill and the black people moving and the white flight, Homewood was a separate neighborhood, the Hill was a separate neighborhood, and North Side was a separate neighborhood. The [first] Musicians' Union had brought all these musicians together in the Hill District.³⁴⁹

Austin's statement demonstrates the unsettlement that comes with root shock. While the institution of the Musicians' Club was the same, its relocation altered the social dynamics that unfolded within its walls. Prior to redevelopment, the Hill had been both figuratively and literally

³⁴⁸ Chuck Spatafore, interview by author, September 10, 2008.

³⁴⁹ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

at the center of black Pittsburgh life. Redevelopment scattered thousands to peripheral neighborhoods upsetting the balance that had been maintained by the Hill's cultural primacy. Though institutions such as the Musicians' Club continued to operate, their relocation altered the social dynamics of performances and socialization.

Physical relocations put a strain on community networks but did not completely dismantle them. To counteract the impact of root shock, musicians, club owners, and audiences reconstructed places and social spaces. As Fullilove argues, root shock in mid-20th century urban neighborhoods such as the Hill District disrupted the "home-street-club" structure in which jazz functioned. Her assertion that jazz's vitality was dependent on the social networks and business infrastructures within and between neighborhoods such as the Hill District is supported by stories of such individuals as Gus Greenlee and clubs such as the Musicians' Club. Fullilove, however, goes as far as to suggest that redevelopment displacement caused jazz in the United States to nearly disappear, "surviving by dint of becoming an academic subject in high schools and colleges, played in a few austere clubs in New York and other big cities."³⁵⁰ This fate of jazz more appropriately describes its course in the later 20th century. As for the decade from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s during which redevelopment projects were widespread, jazz thrived in neighborhood clubs. The Hill District was not completely razed and those who remained constructed a sense of continuity in clubs just east of the redevelopment area. Clubs such as the Crawford Grill no. 2—named as such to maintain continuity with the Lower Hill club—and the Hurricane Bar provided new places where musical life could continue to develop and thrive.

³⁵⁰ Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *ibid.*, pg. 16.

5.2 THE BIRTH OF THE JAZZ HOUSE

Despite the destruction of the Lower Hill District and the exodus of African American and European immigrant families, the Hill continued to develop a rich entertainment scene that catered to both neighborhood residents and nationally touring artists. Pittsburgh's African American nightclub culture expanded in the mid-1950s with such "jazz houses" as the Crawford Grill No. 2 and the Hurricane Bar, where touring and local jazz artists performed in small, intimate settings for highly receptive audiences. Jazz houses drew from the neighborhood's tradition of black nightlife reaching back to the black and tan clubs of the 1910s and '20s and were sites of black musical performance where the aesthetics and cultural sensibilities of the "golden age of jazz" were constructed.

The informal setting and highly responsive audiences in these clubs fostered an environment that fed the artistic vitality of jazz during the 1950's and '60s. Audiences, club owners, and musicians all played essential roles in the music's success as an artistic endeavor, a cathartic release of working class woes, and a means of engaging urban life. Clubs such as the Crawford Grill no. 2 and Hurricane Bar were intimate environments with seating capacities for about 150 people. Both venues were organized similarly with two-seat tables filling the space between the booths and the bar. This fully utilized the narrow rooms, providing a variety of listening spaces for audiences while maintaining the centrality of the music. The stages, located midway through the room behind or next to the bar, were raised four to five feet off of the ground. This made the group easily visible from any point in the club. It also aided the projection of the music in the absence of a sound system. A stage located at the far end of the room would have divided the audiences, with those close to the stage encouraged to listen and those seated or standing closer to the entrance inclined to socialize. Had performers played at ground level in

such a crowded environment, an audience member would have struggled to see the faces of the performers. With the raised stages, audiences could see and hear the performance, and performers could also see and hear the audience.

The move to the Upper Hill was both a means to maintain continuity with the black nightclub traditions of the Lower Hill and a break from previous eras of the neighborhood's nightlife. The Upper Hill, less crowded and home to more of the neighborhood's social elite, contrasted the more densely populated Lower Hill, which was burdened with poverty and vice. These divisions reached back to the class divisions within the black community between OPs or "Old Pittsburghers" and the waves of migrant workers from the American South. The new Crawford Grill created an environment where patrons of all backgrounds would convene to socialize, dine, and listen to music, though the social atmosphere was far removed from the male dominated numbers runners haunt of the previous decades.

Jazz houses provided social spaces that subverted the norms of segregated society. Segregation outside of the Hill continued to dissuade African American patrons from regularly attending jazz clubs in downtown Pittsburgh and in white neighborhoods. Venues that featured "colored acts" but catered to white audiences included a range of downtown clubs such as Mercur's Music Bar, the Midway, the Hollywood Bar, and the Copa, as well as supper clubs such as the Twin Coaches and the Holiday House located in Pittsburgh's suburbs. The social environment of these clubs often made African Americans feel unwelcome and as a result they did not widely attend them. In 1954, in his weekly *Courier* column "No Cover Charge," George F. Brown noted, "One and all know that Pittsburgh is not going to win any medals in the integration department in night clubs. Mixing in Pittsburgh clubs is not nearly the same as it is in New York or Philadelphia, to cite two cities that are fairly all right in this respect. I suppose you

call that the mores of the city. But life goes on.”³⁵¹ Club owner and jazz patron Thomas Burley reflects on the social atmosphere in clubs where African Americans were comfortable socializing and supporting music:

The [Crawford Grill’s] audiences were men and women who were dressed to the nines, dressed up and going out for the night. When we would go out we would do the same. This was a time when there weren’t a lot of places for African Americans to go. There weren’t a lot of places where we were even welcome. Not just not welcomed, there weren’t a lot of places where we even thought of going because that was just the way it was. Seldom did we go to a place like the Holiday House, which was a club in Monroeville, or the Twin Coaches, which was a place out on Route 51. These were supper clubs that you could go to if you had a reservation. You didn’t go unless there was an act that appealed to us, like if they had Billy Eckstein. They weren’t places that you went as a matter of routine. That didn’t change until well into the ‘60s and even then I’d go and have a chip on my shoulder because I would expect the worst. I would expect someone to treat me bad or not serve us or spill something on you. It never happened.³⁵²

The success of Hill District clubs also depended a great deal on a national network of black owned and patronized clubs often called the “Chitlin’ Circuit.” This network of clubs provided musicians with regular work, club owners with affordable performers, and audiences with top-notch entertainment. The Chitlin’ Circuit, while including many large theaters, was largely comprised of an informal network of small black-owned clubs. Many club owners had diverse business activities and so were able to recoup losses in the music business. As Burley

³⁵¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 16, 1954, pg. 19. Cited from the column “No Cover Charge” by George F. Brown.

³⁵² Thomas Burley, interview by author, January 2006.

explains; “Some of these places were fronts for other businesses such as the numbers business. Even the Crawford Grill, back in the day, before Buzzy Robinson had it, it was a front for Gus Greenlee and Joe Robinson’s numbers business. They didn’t have to make it on the basis of the business because it provided a legitimate storefront for other things where the money was really made. A lot of clubs were tied to other businesses.”³⁵³

The Chitlin’ Circuit audiences were comprised largely of “masses of blacks who were more often than not poor, making subsistence wages, or not working at all.”³⁵⁴ Venues generally charged little if anything to enter though the demands on artists were great. Pittsburgh entrepreneur and club owner Thomas Burley noted that the network “provided places for musicians to financially sustain themselves from day to day and information on where it was that they were going to be able to be to work.” The tour route facilitated “communication between—and they called it the ‘Chitlin’ Circuit’—what was going on in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago.” Moreover, it made it possible for club owners to afford the era’s great performers because “They were willing to play for a lot lower price.” As Burley explains: “How do you think [Joe Robinson] got people like Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Horace Silver, and Art Blakey? How do you get those people to the Crawford Grill; a place that seated fewer than a hundred people, a place where you didn’t have to pay a cover charge, a place where the cost of the food and drinks was relatively low? You got them there because you didn’t have to pay them much.”³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Thomas Burley, interview by author, January 2006.

³⁵⁴ David Henderson, *’Scuse Me While I Kiss the Sky: Jimi Hendrix, Voodoo Child* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1978/2008), pg. 75.

³⁵⁵ Thomas Burley, interview by author, January 2006.

The circuit took its name from chitterlings, a “great favorite food of the black masses” and a persistent remnant from slavery days when it was one of the few meats available to enslaved blacks.³⁵⁶ Chitterlings, or the slang chitlin’, are the intestines of the pig and require cleaning, soaking, heavy seasoning and slow cooking to remove the smell of excrement. David Henderson notes that, by the mid-20th century, chitlin’ “had virtually disappeared from restaurants, venues, and dinner tables in black neighborhoods and communities of respectability, but hung on with persistence in the locals considered to be less respectable.”³⁵⁷ Because of the lower class associations of the food, “Chitlin’ Circuit also became a term used symbolically to indicate the poor conditions available to great black music.”³⁵⁸

In the 1950s and ‘60s, the Chitlin’ Circuit featured a wide array of doo-wop, R&B, blues, and soul musicians and was the training ground and livelihood for many of the era’s great jazz innovators. Jazz scholar David Rosenthal notes the decline of the Chitlin’ Circuit as “one of jazz’s problems today” because it offered a performance environment where young musicians could “acquire a grounding in the basic of rhythm, voice, and delivery—that is, to draw nourishment from the wellsprings of black North American song.”³⁵⁹ Hard bop and the network of black clubs that comprised the Chitlin’ Circuit functioned to connect black communities and construct a shared urban identity amongst African Americans. As music scholar Mark Anthony Neal states:

[The] loose network of black nightclubs, juke joints, and after-hours clubs was invaluable for the creation of common aesthetic and cultural sensibilities among the African-

³⁵⁶ David Henderson, *’Scuse Me While I Kiss the Sky*, pg. 75.

³⁵⁷ David Henderson, *ibid.*, pg. 75.

³⁵⁸ David Henderson, *ibid.*, pg. 75-6.

³⁵⁹ David H. Rosenthal, *Hard Bop: Jazz and Black Music 1955-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pg. 115.

American diaspora—a noble and significant feat, given the changing demographic of black public life in the midst of post-World War II migration patterns. In large response to economic transformations in the American South, namely the mechanization of the farming process, more than four million blacks migrated to the urban North and urban South during the postwar period. At its core, the Chitlin’ Circuit invoked the reconstruction of community and the recovery of cultural memory for many of these second-wave migrants.”³⁶⁰

Neal’s analysis foregrounds the emotional needs of dispersed communities that shared the experience of segregation, redevelopment, and economic underdevelopment. Musicians answered with music that could provide a “spiritual catharsis” to those on unstable ground.³⁶¹

Jazz musicians found that the language of bebop could only go so far on its own to meet the shared needs of black communities. Hard bop, unlike bebop, emphasized the importance of shared values between artists and listeners. The economic reality of the Chitlin’ Circuit had much to do with this. Audience members in Chitlin’ Circuit venues were often spending scarce funds for an uplifting experience that would ease the hardships of their daily lives and affirm their place in the community. Because of this, hard bop musicians were constantly faced with the fierce expectations of their audiences and so developed stylistic approaches that engaged the audience and embraced contemporary musical trends. Lou Rawls describes the experience of playing the Chitlin’ Circuit and how it shaped his approach:

For years I played nightclubs, working the chitlin’ circuit. These clubs were very small, very tight, very crowded and very loud. Everything was loud but the entertainment. The

³⁶⁰ Mark Anthony Neal, *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pg. 30-31.

³⁶¹ Neal, *What the Music Said*, pg. 30.

only way to establish communication was by telling a story to lead into the song. That would catch people's attention.³⁶²

Jazz scholar Leonard Feather notes that the monologue that introduces Rawls' song "World of Trouble" exemplifies the singer's ability to set "the mood so perfectly that the audience lives every moment of it," adding, "On the chitlin' circuit, the technique scores because all the Wattses and Harlems of the world can identify with it."³⁶³ For modern jazz during its golden age, this dialogue between stage and bar room—reverberating with the subtexts of urban struggle—created distinct performance spaces.

In the Hill, the Crawford Grill No.2 and Hurricane grew to be the neighborhood's most celebrated clubs because they created an inviting environment for both blacks and whites to socialize, featured top touring artists, and were structured in a way that facilitated audience and performer interactions.

5.2.1 The Crawford Grill No.2

William "Gus" Greenlee and his business partner and friend Joe Robinson opened the Crawford Grill no. 2 in the mid-1940s.³⁶⁴ The Grill, as it became known, would be the last of Greenlee's nightclub ventures, which had started with the Paramount Inn in the early 1920s. What would become a nationally recognized jazz venue during the 1950s started as one of many

³⁶² Leonard Feather, "Lou Rawls—Up From Tobacco Road," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1967, pg. N27.

³⁶³ Leonard Feather, "Lou Rawls—Up From Tobacco Road," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1967, pg. N27.

³⁶⁴ The opening date is listed as 1943 on the historical marker placed in front of the Crawford Grill No. 2 by the Pennsylvania Historical Society. The August 29, 1953 *Courier* article "Crawford Grill No. 2 Is Hailed as Prettiest Lounge in the East," covers the seven-year anniversary of the club which would place the opening date in late 1946.

taverns along Wylie and Center Avenue that served drinks and Southern cooking into the late hours. Greenlee did distinguish the nightspot with several renovations and by hiring Bill Norwood, a chief cook from the U.S. Navy who had previously worked for eighteen years in various hotels and nightclubs.³⁶⁵ The Crawford Grill's reputation was also greatly bolstered by the *Pittsburgh Courier*, which published weekly reviews and regularly covered special events. Greenlee's celebrity status within the Hill and the reputation of his previous bars and nightclubs also marked the Crawford Grill no. 2 as an institution that embodied both the strength of the African American business community and the vitality of the Hill District's nightlife.

Greenlee, whose wealth and power in the numbers business peaked in the late 1920s and 1930s, had by the mid-1940s seen his numbers profits dwindle. This did little to slow his business activities, as Greenlee continued investing in local sports ventures and a series of nightclubs as well as supporting other business ventures. Though he by no means died a poor man, Greenlee was "said to have lost the best part of his winnings on legitimate business ventures" within the Hill and suffered financially from the "many 'feeds' he gave for unemployed men during the depression."³⁶⁶

In addition to his various business ventures and philanthropic activities, the first Crawford Grill on lower Wylie Avenue was becoming a business liability. Problems with leaking water lines were reported to have nearly "doubled the normal cost of upkeep on the building."³⁶⁷ In 1950, two individuals, injured due to the building's poor upkeep, filed lawsuits against Greenlee. The first lawsuit was filed by a woman who fell after stepping on a loose grating in front of the Grill. The second was from a soft drink salesman who fell down the cellar steps after

³⁶⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 15, 1946, pg. 21.

³⁶⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 10, 1945, pg. 3.

³⁶⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 10, 1945, pg. 3.

the top step broke under his weight.³⁶⁸ While it is unknown whether the plaintiffs received their requested \$2,500, the Crawford Grill was in clear need of renovation and was outliving its use as a popular bar, entertainment space, and meeting place of numbers runners and businessmen alike. In July of 1951, a fire gutted the Crawford Grill No. 1 and adjacent apartments. Though plans were made to rebuild the popular social spot, Greenlee turned his attention to the new Crawford Grill.



Figure 38 Looking east on Wylie Avenue with the Crawford Grill no. 2 on the left, April 1967 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.2366)

³⁶⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 26, 1950, pg. 2; *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 25, 1950, pg. 6.

While Greenlee severed ties with the Crawford Grill No. 1 in the early 1950s, he renovated the Crawford Grill no. 2 and installed a raised stage midway through the venue's main room. These renovations coincided with an increased emphasis on the club's music, which started with the hiring of local bandleaders and eventually moved to include noted touring performers. The small raised stage in the first Crawford Grill restricted musical acts to solo pianists, duos and occasionally drumless trios while the long broad room of the Crawford Grill no. 2 could accommodate larger groups and audiences. The stage, elevated over five feet off the floor, made the band the central focus of the venue. One could view the stage from any booth or seat at the bar and the height of the musicians aided the projection of the acoustic instruments.

Early bands played much of the same role in the new Grill as it did in the old. One of the earliest musicians to gain note at the Grill was Pittsburgh Hammond Organist Sammy Nowlin, who started working there in the spring of 1948 and regularly performed there for the next three years. Much like the first Crawford Grill, the new Grill was a place for neighborhood locals to socialize and have a good meal. Music in this context complemented the establishment's restaurant and bar business by entertaining guests with requests of popular songs. An early review praised the Crawford's music as "a nice background for the prime steaks, chops, short orders and sandwiches," indicating that the bands had yet to become the venue's strongest draw.³⁶⁹

Greenlee hired local alto saxophone legend Leroy Brown and his quartet, the "Brown Buddies," to build the club's identity as a jazz club. Brown's musical reputation and Greenlee's popularity helped maintain the old Crawford Grill's "fascinating and inescapable magnetism" in

³⁶⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 12, 1952, pg. 22.

the new location.³⁷⁰ Brown's quartet included pianist George "Duke" Spaulding, bassist William "Bass" McMahon, and drummer Bobby Anderson, and was one of the most active and respected local African American jazz groups. They were distinguished by their professionalism and versatility as well as being the first local black group to be hired in a downtown club.³⁷¹ Locals also appreciated that Brown could "have written his own ticket to New York with big name bands" but preferred to stay in Pittsburgh.³⁷² Defending his decision to pursue a local rather than national career, Brown stated, "I like the folks at home and they have been good to me. They deserve good music too and I have always tried to give it to them."³⁷³

Leroy Brown and his band succeeded on a local level by perfecting older styles of jazz and eschewing the newer approaches of bebop. During the early 1950s, jazz audiences were still heavily swing-oriented, expecting both a familiar repertoire and an original performance that they couldn't experience elsewhere. To achieve this, the band had to have a diverse repertoire including blues, swing, Dixieland, and contemporary popular songs. Their sets would include swing classics by Fletcher Henderson and Benny Goodman, boogie-woogie numbers, ballad request, and occasionally a contemporary crossover hit such as the 1952 Billboard topper "Blue Tango."³⁷⁴ As saxophonist Hosea Taylor noted about Brown, "That guy could play Mary's Little Lamb and I would love it. Just the way he played knocked me out. He had this beautiful tone" which he could maintain at any tempo.³⁷⁵

³⁷⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 14, 1951, pg. 19.

³⁷¹ According to George "Duke" Spaulding, the downtown club was the Hollywood Showbar, which first hired Brown's group in 1945. George "Duke" Spaulding, interview by author, November 16, 2008.

³⁷² *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 19, 1952, pg 22.

³⁷³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 19, 1952, pg 22.

³⁷⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 19, 1952, pg 22.

³⁷⁵ Hosea Taylor, interview by author, December 16, 2008.

This approach to programming was important for sustaining entertaining performances for weeks and months on end. The groups' personalization of these songs through subtle arrangements and approaches to soloing created a musical experience that both appealed to the general audience and featured the musicians' creative individuality. What distinguished Leroy Brown's group was his abilities to balance their roles as entertainers and jazz artists. Brown adhered to an older musical philosophy that emphasized the melodic and rhythmic characteristics of the swing era as well as the often dogmatic rejection of bebop's emphasis of virtuosity and detachment from audiences.

Leroy Brown and His Brown Buddies became a regular feature at the Grill through to the fall of 1953. A *Courier* review of the nightly sets commented on the groups appeal to local audiences:

One reason that Leroy's outfit is popular is due to the fact that the boys never jump frantic. The people can always recognize the music. When the band plays jump numbers, the boys do not blow the patrons out of the place. It's cool. When Leroy plays sweet, people listen and do not go to sleep. It's a happy medium.³⁷⁶

The *Courier* reviewer emphasizes Brown's ability to program the set effectively and continually engage an audience unaccustomed to the more esoteric developments in modern jazz. Brown also hired musicians who tended towards understatement and subtlety in service of the groups collective sound. Pianist "Duke" Spaulding was respected among local musicians but was viewed as "so unassuming that most fans miss his artistry. Duke is a team man and he doesn't reach for attention."³⁷⁷

³⁷⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 19, 1952, pg. 22.

³⁷⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, August, 1952, pg. 22.

In July of 1952, Gus Greenlee passed away, leaving the Crawford Grill No.2 to his partner Joe Robinson, who shared management and ownership with his son William “Buzzy” Robinson. The senior Robinson continued to invest in the Grill with promotional events and renovations. In September of 1953, the Crawford Grill reopened with a week of festivities celebrating the club’s most extensive renovation. Among those who attended was mayor David Lawrence who praised the club as “one of the finest places I’ve ever been in.” Lawrence, the primary architect of the city’s redevelopment, stated “I am as proud of this restaurant as I am of the big skyscrapers going up downtown. Small businesses are the lifeblood of Pittsburgh as well as the big industries. I salute Joe Robinson.”³⁷⁸

In early 1954, Robinson began hiring other local jazz musicians, including pianist Alyce Brooks and guitarist Joe Westray for weekly runs. By June, he settled for an extended contract with pianist Walt Harper. Harper’s quintet, including his brother Nate Harper on tenor sax, Bill Lewis on bass, Jon Morris on trombone, and Harold Lee on drums was the first local African American group to break the racial divide to perform for white college campus dances and socials. By the mid-1950s, Harper had gained the title “pride of the Bobby Soxers,” a label which had strong ties to young white popular culture.

Like Leroy Brown, Harper built his repertoire from a wide range of musical genres, though his emphasis remained on songs of the swing era. With many of his performances being for proms and other social dance events, Harper played many “jump blues” songs such as “Bottoms Up,” Latin numbers such as “Mambo Inn,” Billboard chart toppers such as “Little Things Mean a Lot” and swing numbers such as “Satin Doll” and “Lullaby of Birdland.”³⁷⁹ His

³⁷⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 5, 1953, pg. 21.

³⁷⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 21, 1954, pg. 19.

repertoire embraced a “society” rather than an experimental approach to jazz and by doing so created a widely marketable sound for both jazz and popular music lovers.



Figure 39 Walt Harper's Quintet at the Crawford Grill on “Bermuda Shorts Night.” From the left: Jon Morris (tr), Bill Lewis (b), unknown man, Nate Harper (s), Harold Lee (dr), and Walt Harper (p), c. 1954 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.11430)

As seen in **figure 39**, Walt Harper aimed to please his audiences with themed events such as “Bermuda shorts night,” which in turn provided the *Courier* another aspect of his performances to promote. This approach drew from the entertainment traditions of swing era big bands and stage show orchestras when audiences sought out mixed entertainment presented with swing music. Such events gave the performances a playful quality that countered the image of the serious, technique-oriented bebop musician, diversifying the venue’s entertainment and

appeal. As Joe Robinson noted, “Walt has drawn more people than any other attraction in the [club’s] eight-year history.”³⁸⁰

After three months of playing nightly at the Grill, Harper took a break from his nightly sets to tour local colleges and proms, but returned in January of 1955 to play for several more months. The *Courier* celebrated his return to the popular nightclub, praising the group’s appearance and presentation as much as their music. Brown and Harper’s musical residencies at the Grill helped build the club’s audience and set higher standards for subsequent bands.

Starting in 1956, Joe Robinson began to feature well known touring jazz acts for weeklong engagements. In April, bassist, composer, and bandleader Charles Mingus performed with his quintet following the release of his critically acclaimed album *Pithecanthropus Erectus*.³⁸¹ The album was the first to feature Mingus as a composer and arranger, and prefigured the free jazz movement of the 1960s with experimental approaches to form and group improvisation.

Mingus represented a sharp stylistic departure from the local groups that had built the Grill’s popularity, and marked the beginning of a new era for the club. Shortly afterwards, in May of 1956, drummer Art Blakey returned to his hometown to play the Crawford Grill with the Jazz Messengers. The group, comprised of pianist Horace Silver, trumpeter Donald Byrd, bassist Doug Watkins, and Hank Mobley on tenor saxophone, was a leader in blending the technical virtuosity of bebop with the rhythmic and harmonic sensibilities of gospel and blues.

Blakey had grown up performing in Hill District venues such as the old Savoy Ballroom and was a source of pride for the neighborhood. Cecil Brooks, who had taken over the drum

³⁸⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 11, 1954, pg. 19.

³⁸¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 31, 1956, pg. A38.

chair in Walt Harper's band, recalls Joe Robinson expressing that he was "taking a chance" by bringing in Art Blakey. Blakey's popularity at the Grill, however led to Robinson's focus on top touring acts. It was at this point that the Crawford Grill began its shift to a "jazz house" that featured modern recording jazz artists. As Brooks recalls, the shift was from the more "commercial" local artists to innovative groups from New York. For Brooks, the music before that point hadn't been "real jazz like Art was playing."³⁸²

Touring groups that followed in the Crawford Grill during 1956 and '57 were Cecil Young, Paul Quinchette, James Moody, Les Jazz Modes featuring Charlie Rouse and Julius Watkins, Teddy Charles, Chet Baker, Chico Hamilton, Miles Davis, Max Roach, and Cannonball Adderly. These artists were instrumental in developing the aesthetic standards and symbolic meanings of jazz's golden age. During the Crawford Grill's height from 1957 to 1967, drummer Max Roach was one of the most featured touring jazz artists. As an innovator in bebop and hard bop, few embodied the sensibilities of hard bop more than Roach, who built a reputation as one of the leading jazz drummers and bandleaders. Roach, though a celebrated regular to Pittsburgh, also had a reputation for losing his temper. In 1959, William "Buzzy" Robinson shortened Roach's week long engagement due to the drummer's angry outbursts directed at his band and members of the audience. Roach's sidemen, trumpeter Booker Little, saxophonist George Coleman, bassist Art Davis, and trombonist Julian Priester, were reportedly unhappy with Roach's behavior and submitted their resignations after this event.³⁸³

³⁸² Cecil Brooks II, interview by author, December 5, 2008.

³⁸³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 28, 1959, pg. 3.



Figure 40 Drummer Max Roach performing at the Crawford Grill with Ron Matthews (p), Eddie Kahn (b) and Clifford Jordan (s), July - August 1963 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.9188)

Roach found himself without a band and turned to local musicians to join him for the rest of the year. On bass he chose bassist Bobby Boswell, one of the top local bassists who had also gained national recognition touring with Billie Holiday and Louis Jordan. To fill the saxophone and trumpet chairs, Roach hired the brother Tommy and Stanley Turrentine, known as two of the local leading modern jazz players.

Despite being fired in the middle of his weekly run at the Grill, Robinson rehired Roach, who repeatedly packed the club. In 1963, Roach “broke all Grill records for attendance” with

nightly crowds forcing the management “to close the doors in order to maintain some semblance of elbow room.”³⁸⁴ Roach’s performances were not without further problems. In 1966, the *Courier* reported “Roach threw the bass fiddle from the bandstand and slammed the piano back against the wall. During this tantrum, the second he was reported to have displayed in two engagements over a two year period in Pittsburgh, Center Ave. police arrested Roach at the request of Elmer Black...a doorman and order-keeper at the Crawford Grill.”³⁸⁵ Roach, apparently distressed by the news of pianist Bud Powell’s death, returned to New York to attend the funeral.

5.2.2 The Hurricane Bar

As with the Crawford Grill no. 2, the Hurricane Bar embodied the social values, musical sensibilities, and spatial dynamics of the jazz house. It was opened in 1953 but, like the Crawford Grill, did not begin to regularly feature touring jazz artists until 1956. Managed by Anna Simmons “Birdie” Dunlap (1904-1998), the Hurricane developed into Pittsburgh’s most notable organ jazz house featuring both nationally recognized and local hard-bop, “soul jazz,” and R&B groups.

Like Gus Greenlee, Mrs. Dunlap had established herself in the Hill District through decades of music promotion. She was born in the Hill District and had family roots in Pittsburgh reaching back to 1831.³⁸⁶ At 15, she married Bill Herbert who apprenticed under Sellers McKee Hall—an early black music promoter in Pittsburgh. When Hall moved to New York, Herbert and

³⁸⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 21, 1963, pg. 16.

³⁸⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 20, 1966, pg. 1A.

³⁸⁶ Bernard Holland, “Birdie Says Bye Bye to Hurricane, All That Jazz,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (February 4, 1980), pg. 18.

Dunlap continued booking and promoting black musical events in Pittsburgh. Together, they brought in artists such as Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong, and Ella Fitzgerald to large dance halls such as the Motor Square Garden in East Liberty and the New Mirador in Homestead. In 1938, Herbert was killed while working as a laborer and Birdie stopped promoting local shows. In 1939, she began running an after-hours club in the Hill and traveling with Shine Dunlap, her future husband and manager of the Ritz Club. They married in 1945 and opened the Hurricane together eight years later.

Like the Crawford Grill, the Hurricane began featuring bands that appealed to swing oriented audiences and gradually shifted to touring hard bop groups. Opening the Hurricane in the last week of October, 1953 was the Rubye Young Trio. Organist and pianist Rubye Young was a close friend of Birdie Dunlap's and had gained recognition performing behind floor shows with "Honey Boy" Minor and his Buzzing Bees led by drummer James Minor.³⁸⁷ Though she had left Honey Boy's group and began working largely as a solo artist, she hired trumpeter Chuck Austin and bassist Bobby Boswell to accompany her for the extended stay at the Hurricane. According to Austin, the group's sound was modeled after that of trumpeter Jonah Jones, whose understated interpretations of swing and jazz songs had greatly boosted his popularity during the 1950s. Austin notes that he was only five years into playing on the Pittsburgh scene and didn't consider himself a modern jazz trumpeter; "In my early days I would play the melody and I was a good ballad player and had a big sound, pretty and all that, that's why Rubye used me. But in terms of being hip, I didn't know nothing about that."³⁸⁸

³⁸⁷ Rubye Younge, interviewed by Maurice Levy, January 1, 1995, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Oral History of Music in Pittsburgh.

³⁸⁸ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

For Austin, the Hurricane was the “novel new club” during a time when few upscale nightclubs were opening in the Hill. The *Pittsburgh Courier* increased the neighborhood’s anticipation of the Hurricane’s opening with promotional ads and articles. The *Courier* described the Hurricane’s interior design that gave the room “a cozy air,” and the fact that the venue charged no cover allowing patrons to stay for diner or just a quick drink.³⁸⁹



Figure 41 Rubye Young (Hammond B-3 organ), Chuck Austin (t), and Bobby Boswell (b) perform on the Hurricane club’s raised stage, November 1953 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.1169)

Music was, in the Hurricane’s early years, a complement to the décor, food, and ambiance of the room. Austin states, “We really didn’t draw that much because the music really

³⁸⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 31, 1953, pg. 18.

wasn't that great." As a leader, Young mostly played "ballads and standard tunes but nothing out of the ordinary." The group did not use arrangements or charts but rather stuck to a repertoire of popular and jazz standards from the 1930s and '40s. Austin remembers that there were no set lists and Young would "play 'Indian Love Call' or whatever she was comfortable with and that's what we would do. It was a drag for Boswell because Boswell wanted to play [more modern jazz]." ³⁹⁰ After several months Young replaced Austin and Boswell with guitarist Calvin King and saxophonist Leroy Brown who had recently finished an extended stay at the Crawford Grill with his own quartet.

Before Young's stay at the Hurricane came to an end in the summer of 1954, the group featured the Pittsburgh born trumpeter Roy Eldridge for a week. Though noted for his virtuosic and adventuresome improvisations that had gained him recognition with the big bands of Gene Krupa and Artie Shaw, he exercised more restraint at the Hurricane. The *Courier* praised Eldridge's restraint as fitting for the club's clientele noting, "Roy plays plenty of muted stuff and when he plays open horn he doesn't blast and this goes over [well] in the Hurricane." ³⁹¹

1954 was a pivotal year for jazz as young artists began to blend the techniques of bebop with popular African American genres, to produce a widely popular subgenre known as "hard bop." Miles Davis's album *Walkin'* and Art Blakey's live album *A Night at Birdland* marked a new era of jazz in which the innovations of bebop found a popular voice.

Following Young's thirty-two week run at the Hurricane, Mrs. Dunlap began to hire touring and local organ groups by the week. The club's one year anniversary was celebrated with the King Solomon Trio featuring Rose Lehman on guitar and Barry Calimese on tenor

³⁹⁰ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

³⁹¹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 26, 1954, pg. 19.

saxophone. Following acts during the next year included largely R&B artists including Ernie Ransome (g), Jackie Davis (org), Lindy Ewell (dr), Robert Banks (org), Eddie Winters (dr), Johnny Sparrow (s), and Al King (s).



Figure 42 Organist Jimmy Smith, drummer Donald Bailey, and guitarist Thornell Swartz performing at the Hurricane, c. 1956 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.4863)

In March of 1956, organist Jimmy Smith would play the first of many weeklong engagements that would catapult the Hurricane’s reputation onto a national scale. Fresh from his debut at the Café Bohemia in Greenwich Village, Smith’s popularity was steadily rising, having recently signed with Alfred Lion at Blue Note records. Smith was a relative newcomer to the

Hammond organ, having purchased his first in 1953. Previously a pianist and bassist, Smith shaped an approach to the organ that would influence following generations of jazz organ players. Smith was able to play walking bass lines with his feet, chords with his left hand and melodic ideas with his right hand, effectively filling the all of roles of the small jazz group other than the drums. Smith married the melodic vocabulary of bebop with the rhythmic and harmonic frameworks of R&B. The result was a music that intersected with both the intellectual interests of modern jazz fans and the sensibilities of the working class.

In his eight years with Blue Note, Smith recorded close to forty sessions and released nearly thirty albums as a leader. Though Smith was fast becoming a nationally recognized jazz star, he regularly returned to the Hurricane from 1956 to 1960. His second visit in July of 1956 was extended for a month after the “success of the trio...was so astounding,” drawing “standing room only crowds.”³⁹² It was rumored that during this stay, “Smith worked so hard that Birdie’s organ caught fire and she was forced to send for a repairman.”³⁹³ Smith returned again in December continuing to pack the Hurricane and set the precedent for the aggressively hard swinging and emotionally charged performances of the organ groups to follow. The *Courier*, once a champion of the “cool” sounds of Rubye Young, embraced Smith’s performance style:

When he becomes wrapped up in a number, begins grimacing, then breaks into his weird improvisations, bedlam breaks loose. But Jimmy Smith is only warmed up by then. Next his collar comes loose, perspiration streams down his face, his shirt becomes soaked and

³⁹² *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 14, 1956, pg. 21.

³⁹³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 15, 1956, pg. A23.

he's ready to really play. But enough of that. To read about this fellow and not see him is murder. Get down to the Hurricane in a hurry and have the treat of your life.³⁹⁴

Dunlap again extended Smith's stay for a month where he played cuts from two recently released albums; *The Incredible Jimmy Smith* and *A New Sound-A New Star*. A review complimented Smith's adventuresome approach to the standards that he performed noting, "Jimmy Smith's forte is the manner in which he cuts away from the melody on a tune and takes off on a series of improvisations that only he could possibly play."³⁹⁵ Further reviews emphasized Smith's role as a creative force dedicated to reaching for new artistic heights while still entertaining audiences. Smith was portrayed as a "tireless worker who grimaces, grunts and groans and thoroughly enjoys his work and at the same time, electrifies the audience with his personal magnetism."³⁹⁶

By 1958, Smith had begun to experiment with the soul jazz genre that he had shaped. "Smith, whose organ ramblings not only are entertaining, but at times downright baffling, has the unusual knack of injecting into his playing seemingly impossible improvisation. One of the highlights of the group's performance is when they sail into a tune called "The Champ," parts one and two, giving vent to all their individual know-how and simultaneously coming together on common ground after taking solo trips to 'outer space'."³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 29, 1956, pg. A15.

³⁹⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 19, 1957, pg. A19.

³⁹⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 15, 1957, pg. A21.

³⁹⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 18, 1957, pg. A10.

5.3 SOCIAL NORMS AND CULTURAL SENSIBILITIES OF THE JAZZ HOUSE

Monson's definition of the "golden age of jazz" foregrounds the "aesthetic standards" and "symbolic meanings" established by leading innovators and reconstructed by subsequent generations of musicians. I have thus far examined the performance history of two of the Hill's leading clubs during the 1950s and '60s. Here, I will examine the social and physical infrastructures that supported this era and nurtured its development. Clubs such as the Crawford Grill no. 2 and The Hurricane Bar and Grill were highly regarded jazz houses because they provided places in which the neighborhood's traditions of nightlife socialization operated symbiotically with innovative musical performance. For those living in the rapidly shifting world of the Hill District, these clubs provided a sense of continuity and respite. For musicians seeking new avenues of expression, these clubs comprised the support network and feedback system integral to developing as an artist. In short, these clubs grounded jazz in local communities and provided a means through which such communities socially networked in times of "root shock."

The Grill and Hurricane became counterparts in the Hill District's nightlife scene with the Hurricane featuring R&B, blues, and gospel influenced jazz organ groups and the Crawford Grill featuring an array of straight ahead, hard bop, and modern jazz. As focal points of nightlife, these clubs developed a welcoming social atmosphere for music lovers and socialites alike. The physical location of the clubs provided easy access to interested patrons whose "mazeways" followed musical performance. As *Pittsburgh Courier* staff member Pat Reid remembers, "Even if people didn't work on the Hill they came through there to stand and see who was on that night."³⁹⁸ The Crawford Grill, located on the corner of Wylie and Elmore, and the Hurricane

³⁹⁸ Pat Reid, interview by author, September 2007.

Bar, located several blocks away on Center Avenue, provided easy access for potential patrons. The central location of these venues was reflected in the diversity of their patrons. A retrospective article on the Hurricane commented on the importance of this diversity:

All sorts of people. Guys who never had a nickel and never would; guys who were rolling in the dough, and all the schemers and dreamers in between. Women, who were knockouts; and women who used to be, and women who were hard and fast and out for a good time. The uppercrust and the undercrust, side by side. And a lot of what you might call characters.³⁹⁹

The Hurricane was a place where the average man on the street could rub elbows with celebrities. In addition to the range of touring musicians that regularly performed there were visiting artists including Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Sarah Vaughn, who would stop in to pay their respects. Local sports legends such as former Steelers quarterback Bobby Layne would also stop in. It was rumored that in one night at the Hurricane, “Layne and his entourage got down to some serious drinking, about \$600 worth.” Other accounts told of how Layne, “Put two crisp \$100 bills in the saxophone of Big Jay McNeely as a tip.”⁴⁰⁰

Because of the small size of the Grill, the band could be heard from the side street, which slanted uphill and had an entrance directly to the back of the stage. Often those who didn’t go into the Grill for a lack of money or time would stand outside the stage door and listen. People walking or driving by could stop by “that door cracked right by the bandstand and listen to see who was playing.”⁴⁰¹ For those driving by the front of the Grill, “There would always be an unofficial doorman and you could just yell out the car window” to find out who was being

³⁹⁹ Ann Butler, “Birdie’s Place,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (April 3, 1984), pg. B6.

⁴⁰⁰ Ann Butler, “Birdie’s Place,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (April 3, 1984), pg. B6.

⁴⁰¹ Pat Reid, interview by author, September 2007.

featured that week.⁴⁰² Mrs. Reid remembers driving by the Crawford Grill after work and listening for the drummer. If it was a personal favorite such as Chico Hamilton or Max Roach then she would remark to a friend, "Hey, that sounds good, lets go in" and enjoy the music for a set or two before going home or to another venue.⁴⁰³ The Hurricane, reverberating from the sounds of the Hammond organ, also served as its own advertisement to those within earshot. Passing residents could "feel the bass outside the building" and would often stop to listen. As Mrs. Reid remembers, the sound "just caught you. When you'd hear that Hammond—when you'd hear Jimmy Smith—you just automatically went in, no matter what you had on your schedule."⁴⁰⁴

The intimate size of the Hurricane and Grill contributed greatly to the sonic experience of its audiences. The Hurricane was a smaller venue—"holding 120 wall to wall"—than the Grill, though similarly structured.⁴⁰⁵ It sat on the north side of Center Avenue three blocks up from the urban renewal zone in the Lower Hill District. Entering the long, narrow club, one faced a narrow walkway crowded with tables, bordered by booths on one side and a long bar on the other. In the back end of the club were bathrooms, a small kitchen, and open floor space where audience members could stand and listen. The focal point of the room was a raised stage that sat above the bar, about two-thirds of the way back into the club. The Hurricane's stage, about ten feet wide and five feet deep barely accommodated a Hammond organ with the accompanying drums and saxophonist. As the club's popularity grew, the stage was expanded slightly with a narrow walkway jutting off to the right. Sitting at the bar or standing across from the stage one

⁴⁰² Pat Reid, interview by author, September 2007.

⁴⁰³ Pat Reid, interview by author, September 2007.

⁴⁰⁴ Pat Reid, interview by author, September 2007.

⁴⁰⁵ Ann Butler, "Birdie's Place," *The Pittsburgh Press* (April 3, 1984), pg. B6.

was able to see the performers as well as they heard them. Mrs. Dunlap and her husband “Shine” Dunlap decided to put the stage behind the bar after seeing a similar setup at a Detroit club called Sonny Wilson’s. Dunlap liked the layout noting, “That way the people are bound to buy something, because they’re not looking away from the bar they’re looking toward it.”⁴⁰⁶



Figure 43 View from the Hurricane Stage with organist Rhoda Scott's band performing, c. 1960 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.13237)

In **Figure 43**, we can see how the small space of the Hurricane Bar was organized to foster a certain relationship between performers and audience members. The physical layout of

⁴⁰⁶ Ann Butler, “Birdie’s Place,” *ibid.*, pg. B6.

the club demonstrates the values of both performers and patrons concerning musical performance. Compared to Howard Becker's classic study of dance band musicians in *The Outsiders*, where physical boundaries were erected to maintain the intellectual boundary between the "hip" musicians and "unhip" audience, here we see that the space has been shaped to cultivate an interactive environment between the listener and performer.⁴⁰⁷ With the raised stage behind the bar, the musicians not only could be clearly heard in every part of the club but also seen. Vice versa, the musicians could more clearly "read" the listeners reactions to their performance and respond accordingly.

The Grill was larger, allowing for a more prominent stage placed between the bar and table seating. **Figure 44** shows the close setup required to fit on the Grill's small square stage. Because the stage jutted out into the middle of the rectangular room, musicians could perform facing a range of directions. Because of the stage's placement, it was fully integrated into the various social spaces of the room. Here, Harris faces the club's entrance as he photographs the band. Brown stands with his back to the bar and front door while facing the club's rear booths and tables. As the most mobile member of the groups, Brown is able to move and direct his playing to different parts of the room; the bar, standing room, booths, or tables. Anderson on drums and McMahon on bass face outward with an easy view of both the front and back of the club while pianist Spaulding, who faces the side wall, has visibility of the bar. With the musicians literally towering over the patrons, the music is easily projected through the room without amplification. Also, audience members are offered an intimate view of the band's body language, musical interactions, and informal banter.

⁴⁰⁷ Howard Becker, *The Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), pg. 108.



Figure 44 Leroy Brown (s), George "Duke" Spaulding (p), William "Bass" McMahon (b), and Bobby Anderson (d) at the Crawford Grill no. 2, c. 1952 (Charles "Teenie" Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.10098)

“Active listening” was integral to the performances in these venues. Listeners would interject verbal responses and clapping into solos, which encouraged musicians to build solos using “call and response” patterns. In the live setting, soloists would often leave a few seconds between phrases to demonstrate that they were listening to the audience and to provide them space to respond. This approach extended the creative conversation of the ensemble to include the audience. When the band lost the attention of audience members who had started talking and

socializing the soloist would play an aggressively loud solo to get their attention. This would reorient patrons towards the stage, usually in mid-conversation, at which point the soloist would have to justify their “request” for attention by performing with more personal conviction.

When bands were not up to the listener’s standards—when they did not swing hard enough, interject some original personality or dramatics into the performance, or when they became too self-absorbed—audiences would respond with attentive silence. In situations where the band was not performing well the audience might take a more prominent roll in the performance verbally guiding the musicians. Though describing an event in the 1980s, bassist Dan Wasson describes this process of interaction between performer and audience:

When I started working, we might be “playin’ a slow blues. The crowd played it, not me. They could sense that I wasn’t sure what to do. I might [play some aggressive, fast idea] and they would say, “Take your time...O.K...do a little bit...now hold up.” It was like they were teachin’ me to drive. They were so responsive and very supportive. It wasn’t so much, “lets be nice” as it was “we got to get our shit off” so lets walk him through this so he can get us to where we got to go. It is what is needed. Everybody needs that. I would say that demographic knows that they need it and knows techniques to make sure that they can get it⁴⁰⁸

Several aspects of this statement emphasize the importance of knowledgeable participation in Chitlin’ Circuit venues. First, audiences had a clear idea of how they wanted performances to unfold. Listeners valued the process of the performance and understood the importance of their contribution. This involved a disposition of giving to receive for musicians and listeners knew that their aesthetic needs would not be met if they did not serve one another.

⁴⁰⁸ Dan Wasson, personal interview (March 6, 2006).

Second, venue spaces played a key role in creative processes by facilitating the visual and oral/aural communication of listeners and musicians. In audiences were not close to the musicians, and if they could not see them, their input would be lost on the performer and vice versa. Finally, the goal of the performance was the catharsis of the audience. Many who attended such events came to release the stress of a working class life, of a segregated existence, or the trials of love.

Without these norms and shared understandings, jazz performance becomes creatively insular and divorced from its listeners. It could become a product, or something presented, rather than a process, or something mediated. Dr. Nelson Harrison laments that audiences no longer offer feedback:

People are afraid to do that now. Where did that come from? That's not part of the culture and what made this music great. What made the music great were the audiences that knew whether you were playin' or not. If you *weren't* playin' then they'd be looking [silently] at you and if you *were* playin' they'd be shoutin' at you. That's what made you play [well]⁴⁰⁹

Much of the appeal of these clubs was the high level of performances spurred on by appreciative and knowledgeable audiences. The dynamic social atmosphere and physical layout of the Grill fostered a symbiotic relationship between musicians and listeners that drew from the tradition of listening and performing in the Hill District and other African American neighborhoods. The audiences expected a high standard of musicianship and had methods for communicating their expectations to musicians. Harrison recalls hearing groups at the Crawford

⁴⁰⁹ Nelson Harrison, interview by author, March 7, 2006.

Grill that were less experienced performing for Hill audiences. When the group would “finish playing a tune and there’d be total silence and the looks on [the listeners] faces would say, ‘Are you going to play something or what?’”⁴¹⁰ The group “played two numbers and nobody clapped so for the next number they played, I clapped to give them some feedback cause they were scared to death.” This act of feedback gave the musicians some confidence “so for the next number they played a little better.” This in turn encouraged more listeners to clap after the song and the band to subsequently play more confidently. Harrison remembers, “By the time they were done with the set they played something really good and the people were responding. It was an interactional thing.”⁴¹¹

Audiences took advantage of the spatial arrangements to communicate their appreciation or disapproval. Mrs. Reid remembers, “I think Pittsburghers have a greater ear for music as a result of those days. Just your average, everyday worker had a better ear for musicians. We were very critical. Many times I got tired of George Benson thinking, ‘He’s just messing around,’ and just walked out. They had to really perform here to keep your attention. They had to be good.” When questioned on how audiences developed high listening standards, Mrs. Reid suggests, “I guess from it being so available. You would become a more critical listener. The Jazz Crusaders were here in ‘66 and set the place on fire. In among the people at the Grill were musicians, local musicians just listening.” Mrs. Reid describes how this process of listening would unfold:

Sometimes Miles Davis, he could get way out there. What you would notice around you was that people would just continue to talk, drink, and eat. But if it was somebody who really was on target [there was] complete silence. Even if you were talking to someone

⁴¹⁰ Nelson Harrison, interview by author, March 7, 2006.

⁴¹¹ Nelson Harrison, interview by author, March 7, 2006.

you'd say, “hold up” and you're going to listen and then if they'd start getting way out somewhere you'd say, “...as I was saying.” The musicians could see that because they were that close to the people. Just up a few steps. They'd know instinctively where to go then. They'd say, “They were listening when I did this” so it gave them a gage too. You didn't mind them going out there but they had to come back into that base tune that was recognizable. There was the style like Earl Garner where he would tip-toe on the piano and everyone would get quiet where he was performing and you would listen or all of the sudden he would “BANG” and everyone would say, “Hold it, let me hear this” and stop talking. Musicians, really good musicians that play clubs on a regular basis, they know, like Les McCann, they know how to get your attention. A sudden “VRRR!” on a horn would be an attention getter. But whether they could keep you would depend on what they did after that.⁴¹²

Mrs. Reid's comments address the interplay that was integral to active listening. Audience members were not passive recipients of the music. Rather, the process of musical improvisation depended greatly on how audiences were listening and reacting. As Mrs. Reid notes, modernist musical experimentation—“getting way out”—signaled a disconnection between the musician and listener. Audience members would shift their focus between conversation and listening depending on how the musician improvised. Listeners would focus on what the musician was improvising following certain cues such as dynamic shifts or certain accented musical statements interjected in quiet phrases.

An important backdrop to this process of active listening was the climate of socializing. For many Hill District patrons, these clubs were stages for the art of socializing—expressed

⁴¹² Pat Reid, interview by author, September 2007.

through knowledge of clothes, conversation, and food—as much as they were for music. Many came because of the venue’s reputation, others because of the food or to meet men or women.

Mrs. Reid remembers the diverse social life that characterized the Grill:

The atmosphere at the Grill, you were supposed to be cool. Everybody had their little walk on and were dressed up in suits and ties. Ladies had their dresses. Some people preferred the booth to the bar. John Henry Johnson of the Steelers and Roberto Clemente would always be sitting at the bar. In the back were all the Courier staff. With the way it was set up, we would always sit in the back because we felt that we were closer to the bandstand because nobody would be walking in front of us except to go to the bathroom. The people who wanted action sat in the front because they wanted to see somebody and to be seen. We didn't care about being seen.⁴¹³

Many who patronized the Grill and the Hurricane did so as part of social ritual that began Friday night and lasted until Monday morning. Journalist and artist Thad Mosley, distinguished himself as one drawn more by the music than the nightlife. Some of the other patrons “wouldn't know who was playing at the Grill because they had no interest.” Weekend audiences included both a “core of people who went strictly to hear the music and a core of people who went out strictly on Friday and Saturday night.” While the steel mills were still active “people just came out, not only to the Grill but to all the bars and clubs. People used to go from one place to another and then to after hours joints.”⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ Pat Reid, interview by author, September 2007.

⁴¹⁴ Thad Mosley, interview by author, November 2, 2008.



Figure 45 View of the Crawford Grill from the stage, August 1953 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.19642)

While the Hurricane and Grill featured many bands that worked the “Chitlin’ Circuit,” they by no means maintained a social environment that could be compared to the “buckets o’ blood joints” of the South. Both Birdie Dunlap and Joe Robinson worked hard to create urbane though informal atmospheres. Mrs. Dunlap was rumored to have run a brothel in the Lower Hill District during the 1930s and 40s, from which she had gained the wealth to begin the Hurricane. These rumors are largely unfounded granted that she claimed to have refused to marry Shine until he gave up his profession as a pimp. Mrs. Dunlap was an essential force behind the Hurricane’s growth and popularity, known both as a shrewd businesswoman who “patrolled [the]

place like a drill sergeant” and a popular neighborhood figure who cultivated a rich musical environment for eager audiences.⁴¹⁵

Mrs. Dunlap jointly owned the club with her husband William “Shine” Dunlap (d.1964) though she was seen as fiercely independent woman who was the primary manager of the business. Under Mrs. Dunlap’s direction, the Hurricane provided a markedly different social experience than many other jazz clubs. Regulars noted that Mrs. Dunlap always conducted herself in a professional and elegant manner, rarely took a drink, smoked a cigarette, or cursed.⁴¹⁶ Moreover, she did not tolerate behavior that she felt was inappropriate. Men who she saw were being disrespectful to women were kicked out. Others could be removed if they used profanity or were not purchasing drinks. Performers were expected to be respectful as well. Early in his career, the comedian Richard Pryor offered to perform during the twenty-minute intermission. Mrs. Dunlap told him to “keep it clean” to which he replied, “Oh yea, I will.” After a few minutes of his act “These two guys in suits came on either side of him and his feet never touched the floor. They just threw him out.”⁴¹⁷ For Birdie, it was important “to be there every night and treat the people right” because, “They had to know how to behave in my place and they had to know it was safe.”⁴¹⁸

Club owners had to turn a profit while also creating an environment where patrons felt socially unrestricted. Neither the Grill nor the Hurricane charged a cover or held an official drink minimum and so drew revenue largely from drink and food sales. The lack of a cover charge was important for maintaining an informal environment where patrons could feel free to stop in for a

⁴¹⁵ *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 10, 1998, obituaries.

⁴¹⁶ *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 10, 1998, obituaries.

⁴¹⁷ Tony Janflone, interview by author, January 6, 2009.

⁴¹⁸ Ann Butler, “Birdie’s Place,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (April 3, 1984), pg. B7.

quick drink or stay the whole evening. This system required the music, cooking, and environment to draw a steady stream of patrons. Mrs. Dunlap worked constantly to maximize profits from the audience as patron Mrs. Reid remembered of the Hurricane,

No matter how crowded it was [Birdie would] say, 'Come on in! Plenty of room.' You could hardly move your elbow and the waitresses were instructed by Birdie that someone had to be drinking something at all times. You could [drink] pop or liquor or whatever but she wanted to make sure that as fast as you finished that glass she'd say, 'Let me clean up honey. You want something else?' She was a hustler. You were never turned down from going in there.⁴¹⁹

While being a courteous hostess, Mrs. Dunlap focused much of her attention on maintaining a constant flow of revenue. Trumpeter Chuck Austin remembers that she "had a little way of catering to money and if you sat around and weren't drinking nothing then you weren't going to occupy this space" that could be used by a paying customer.⁴²⁰ Limited seating led to a social atmosphere that was uncommon in other clubs. On particularly busy nights at the Hurricane, patrons would have to "sit with whoever Birdie sat you with. People would come from [the suburb of] Mt. Lebanon and she'd squeeze a fly in between a glass if she could. She'd make the people from Mt. Lebanon sit with the guy from Wylie Avenue and it didn't make any difference to her as long as she made a buck."⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ Pat Reid, interview by author, September 2007.

⁴²⁰ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

⁴²¹ George Thompson, interview by author, December 11, 2008.



Figure 46 Anna Simmons “Birdie” Dunlap (center in white dress) and William “Shine” Dunlap (at bar in tuxedo) at the Hurricane Grill. Rubye Young (org), Chuck Austin (t), and Bobby Boswell (b) perform on the club’s raised stage, November 1953 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.1166)

As illustrated in **Figure 46**, Mrs. Dunlap was personally involved with seating, serving, and generally catering to her patrons. Her demeanor is both relaxed and attentive. Though she stands—menu in hand—presumably talking and taking orders from a packed booth, she casually looks over her shoulder to survey the other patrons—possibly calculating where to seat new arrivals. Mr. Dunlap’s maintains a relaxed demeanor at the bar, providing the space needed for his wife to manage the business to her taste. This dynamic between the couple maintained an effective balance in the club’s management, which was apparently shaken when Mr. Dunlap

unexpectedly died: “It never was the same once “Shine” was gone. After he passed on in 1963 she kept it going, but the truth is the heart of the Hurricane didn’t have her heart in it. And all this time she’s been trying to forget him, but she just can’t.”⁴²²

Mrs. Dunlap also understood the importance of knowledgeable listeners who appreciated the artists and fostered an interactive relationship between the audience and musicians. Stellute recalls, “When she liked your solo or something she would get a glass or a saltshaker and tap on the bar and that meant that she wanted you to respond.” The communicative relationship between performers and listeners was an important part of the Hurricane’s economic viability. Artists were expected to both entertain and express their individual musical identities that they had shaped through years of training. When the John Bartel quartet, an all white jazz fusion group from Pittsburgh, was hired at the Hurricane, Mrs. Dunlap instructed Bartel to “do your thing” noting “I know what you do so don't come in here and think that you have to play like Sonny Stitt.”⁴²³ When it came down to the music, Mrs., Dunlap was knowledgeable and appreciative of originality, innovativeness, and professionalism.

In seeming contradiction of her business mindedness, Mrs. Dunlap would also welcome under aged listeners who showed a particular interest in the music. Guitarist Tony Janflone Sr. recalls going to the Hurricane as a teen and being confronted by Mrs. Dunlap who discouraged minors in the bar. Janflone remembers,

She wasn't going to let me in and I said “Tell me where to go to hear this kind of music and I'll go. I know I'm under age but I'm not under age to the point where I don't want to

⁴²² Ann Butler, “Birdie’s Place,” *ibid.*, pg. B6.

⁴²³ Lou Stellute, interview by author, December 1, 2008.

hear this kind of music. I want to hear this kind of music.” So she gave me a big hug and I could go in there.⁴²⁴

Saxophonist Harold Young was also drawn to the Hurricane as a teenager and recalls that “Birdie wouldn't say a word to us because she knew that we were in there to listen to the guys play and we didn't take up any space sitting in seats and not buying anything. We were too young to drink so she would just let us be there.”⁴²⁵

As the Crawford Grill and Hurricane featured more touring and recording artists the audiences became increasingly diverse mixture of young and old, black and white, working class and blue collar, jazz aficionados and socialites. For whites from outside the neighborhood, the Grill provided a means for socializing with African Americans and experiencing top jazz artists in a community setting. Students from Duquesne University and the University of Pittsburgh would come to the Grill to “get an education that they couldn't get downtown.”⁴²⁶ Downtown jazz clubs such as the Midway featured many of the same groups that performed at the Crawford Grill though due to the city's informal segregationist policies the Midway lacked the social dynamic of Hill venues.

Clubs such as the Crawford Grill and the Hurricane provided a welcoming atmosphere for whites and blacks from all of Pittsburgh as well as surrounding towns, and offered outsiders of the Hill a safe place to experience the Hill District. As Mrs. Dunlap noted, “I just can't explain it...because segregation and prejudice was rampant. But everybody would be sitting together in the same booths. And I had a good time with 'em.”⁴²⁷ As Mrs. Dunlap's nephew Bill Easley

⁴²⁴ Tony Janflone, interview by author, January 6, 2009.

⁴²⁵ Harold Young, interview by author, December 29, 2008.

⁴²⁶ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

⁴²⁷ Ann Butler, *ibid.*, pg. B7.

described, “If folks weren’t integrated when they came in...they sure were by the time they left.”⁴²⁸ As tensions grew with the deteriorating economic life and social unrest of the Hill during the 1960s, some “white people were afraid to come to the Hill because of the drug situation.”⁴²⁹ Though for those non-Hill district patrons who came to the Hill the Crawford Grill provided a safe environment. In 1978, the National Beverage Association presented Mrs. Dunlap with a plaque naming her Jazz Humanitarian of the Year for her contribution to racial harmony.⁴³⁰

While racial tension reached its peak during the 1950s and 60s, black jazz clubs were amongst the few public places where interracial relations were not only accepted but also redefined. As Mrs. Reid, of the *Courier*, remarked:

Seemed like everyone, black and white, got along ok...*around music*. There wasn't that big separation in the '50s. You'd see as many whites in the Grill as you'd see blacks. We weren't as blacks allowed to go to a lot of the white clubs. There was a place called the Holiday Inn in Monroeville. We could rent the place and all blacks would be there but we weren't allowed in the club during “white night” as we called it. They'd have guys singing in there that we didn't care for anyway. They had second-rate crooners like Vic Damone.⁴³¹

Early examples of interracial social interaction (or “socializing”) were found in the Hill’s “black and tan” clubs. 1920s clubs such as the Leader House and Collins Inn (these became the Crawford Grill no. 1 and Musicians Club during the 1930s) hired black artists who performed for mixed audiences. White entertainment seekers from outside the neighborhood were an important

⁴²⁸ Ann Butler, *ibid.*

⁴²⁹ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

⁴³⁰ Ann Butler, *ibid.*

⁴³¹ Pat Reid, interview by author, September 2007.

part of the revenue flow and contributed to an environment where bands could find regular work. Both singer Lois Deppe and pianist Earl Hines were employed in the club's house bands. For Hines, these clubs provided an introduction into a new musical and social world that would lead him on to a career as one of the innovators of his instrument.



Figure 47 A view from the stage of the Joyce Bryant Room in the Flamingo Hotel (12407 Wylie Avenue), c. 1956 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.45263)

As discussed in Section 2.1.1, the interracial environment of black and tan clubs caused controversy and even violent backlashes. In the early 1930s, black and tan clubs faded and were replaced by largely black patronized clubs that welcomed but did not cater to white audiences. By 1938, interracial socializing in taverns had decreased though Bell attributes this more to

cultural differences than racism noting that white Hill District taverns catered to the “other nationality groups within the area, such as Italians and Jews, and the culture patterns characteristic of their constituency are sufficiently different to evoke little desire on the part of the Negro group to visit them.” During the 1940s, whites from outside the community patronized large venue such as the Savoy Ballroom (Section 3.1.2) where the top swing bands performed. This phenomenon continued until the mid-50s when clubs such as the Crawford Grill no. 2 and the Hurricane Bar coaxed large numbers of whites back into the neighborhood with nationally recognized artists.

Figures 47 and **48** capture the audiences on a busy night at the Flamingo Hotel, located on upper Wylie Avenue. Both images show a number of white couples—between 10 and 20 percent of the audience—enjoying the performance. Teenie Harris captures a sense of ease in the cramped room and though black and white couples mostly sit at their own tables, there is little sign of racial or social divisions. The audience is unified in its style and attention to the music: men wear suits and ties, women wear evening dresses, and everyone is present to experience the performance. The band’s presence is evident through the body language of the listeners who laugh, attentively listen, clap, drink, or talk with friends. In the second image, a man identified as vocalist Sammy Davis Jr. sits at the center table with his tie loosened, smoking a cigarette, shooting a detached glance at the stage. Sitting to Davis’ right is vocalist Delores Parker and at the end of the table is bassist Edgar “Peepers” Willis—both regular performers at the Flamingo. Addressing the photos of the Flamingo Hotel, saxophonist Harold Young commented, “There were never any problems. People had something in their mind, which was music. It was all about

music and eating and having a good time. People just seemed to get along very well together.”⁴³² Trumpeter Roger Barbour reflects Young’s sentiment when asked about club integration in the Hill: “Yea, most of the jazz clubs were [integrated]. That was the thing about jazz. I didn't seem like they saw any color or race. But jazz, it didn't seem like there was any color there.”⁴³³ In this sense, jazz venues such as the Flamingo Hotel fostered a cross-racial musical culture. As Barbour noted, jazz, as a genre, “just seemed like a different ball game altogether.”



Figure 48 Audience at the Flamingo Hotel with local singer Delores Parker and touring entertainer and singer Sammy Davis Jr. looking on, c. 1952 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.41452)

⁴³² Harold Young, interview by author, December 29, 2008.

⁴³³ Roger Barbour, interview by author, November 19, 2008.

Though institutionalized segregation kept the local musicians union divided along racial boundaries, integrated groups were a regular phenomenon in the Hill. Addressing **figure 49**, trumpeter Chuck Austin noted,

This is a good example of what 471 was all about. We had more integration. The white guys would come play with us with no questions, with nothing [negative] going on. They just wanted to play music and our club had an open door policy for them but we couldn't go downtown to local 60 although we belonged to the same federation. We couldn't do that because of social conditions. All we wanted guys to do was come in and play so race wasn't even a part of it. You never thought "Oh, that's a white boy playing." That wasn't the case. If there was another guy playing then all we wanted to do was make music and the clubs that we had had that environment.⁴³⁴

Harold Young also comments on the precedence of musical skill over racial identity:

There was not a race issue—it wasn't a problem. Guys just got along well. Either you could play or you couldn't. That was it. Nobody cared what color you were. It didn't make sense. I've never seen any signs of [racism with musicians]. Even today, guys get along well together. I think the one common thread there is the music itself. You'd come on the gig and try to the best you could. In terms of being able to do some things collectively, that's all that was important. If you couldn't do it, so be it.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁴ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

⁴³⁵ Harold Young, interview by author, December 29, 2008.

The Grill audiences were much less inhibited than the audiences to which Aliquo had become accustomed; “They would let you know either with their body motions or their yelling or their appearance some way.” He remembers them yelling “Oh yea!” when he played a good solo. After the set was over, “you would get off the bandstand and everybody would come over—at least the ones who liked you—and talk to you to get some kind of feedback as to what you are all about, which would make you feel pretty good. The recognition always gave you some incentive to get better.”⁴³⁷ The high standards of the audience created one of the few venues for local artists, where the musicians could “stretch” creatively while maintaining the support of the audience. As drummer Chuck Spatafore remembers, “You didn't have to cater [to the audience or management] at the Grill. You could do what you want.”⁴³⁸

“Root shock” manifested itself in a number of ways. Collective unrest in the Hill was apparent in responses to the city’s redevelopment projects. Initially, the renewal spurred hopes that it would benefit residents in the Hill District. However, it quickly became clear that the neighborhood would bear the greatest disadvantage. The clearing of houses and businesses moved quickly with poor plans for relocation. Lower class families had to find any homes they could and most relocated to peripheral neighborhoods such as Homewood, East Liberty, and the North Side where pockets of African Americans already lived. Problems arose when it became apparent that the redevelopment was providing little for the displaced community. The Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP took action when it was discovered that the Civic Arena, which had displaced thousands of African Americans, employed “Five Negro ushers out of a total of

⁴³⁷ Don Aliquo, interview by author, September 11, 2008.

⁴³⁸ Chuck Spatafore, interview by author, September 10, 2008.

86” and “some colored janitors.”⁴³⁹ This was seen as a “direct insult to the entire Negro community that no responsible jobs had been offered to qualified Negroes.”⁴⁴⁰

For those whose mazeways were disrupted, jazz clubs temporarily offered new places in which to maintain old traditions of socialization and music making. Creating and nurturing a mutual sense of community between musicians and audiences was an integral part of the creative process for many performances in the Crawford Grill and other Hurricane during the 1950s and 60s. Drummer Roger Humphries would often “read” an audience before a performance had even begun noting, “When you see the people in the audience and it just connects, that brings everyone together.”⁴⁴¹ Audience members at the Grill “were just there for the same thing. Just getting together and listening to the music and appreciating the music and the musicians.”

For musicians and audience members alike, the experience had spiritual overtones, reflected in the interactional norms taken from African American churches. For Humphries, the appreciative comment of a non-musician that “Man, this is church. I get so much out of it spiritually. I just feel so happy,” functioned to give the music life and direction. For trombonist Nelson Harrison, the Grill was a “spirit house. A church where people came to get fed.” Music at its greatest could “enable you to go out there and face life. When times were the hardest, you could go get healed with the music and you could face anything.”⁴⁴² The club’s popularity was tied to this communal aspect of listening and performing where people came to be fed spiritually. Saxophonist Lou Stellute remembers the importance of the audiences and social atmosphere;

⁴³⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 7, 1961, pg. 1.

⁴⁴⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 21, 1961, pg. 1.

⁴⁴¹ Roger Humphries, interview by author, December 5, 2008.

⁴⁴² Nelson Harrison, interview by author, March 7, 2006.

At the Hurricane most of the people were in the back half of the room and at the bar and they could look up and see and the communication was really great. When you were really hot and pumping they would be into it. They would be yelling and screaming. It was a great experience. I feel sorry for anyone who didn't go through that experience. When they liked you, the audience really fed the performance and it was an important thing. The drummer in [John Bartel's] early band was Jeff Marino and he said, "Man, this is so great! It's like sending and receiving." That's what it is. You're up there and you are playing your heart out and they're responding. It's like the audience and the musicians, it's almost like the Vedas, you know. There's no separation and the more you give the more they give back and the more you get in the zone. That's the element of spirituality of this whole era. And there was a great element of spirituality involved in all this. This country is a remarkable country of what we have produced and how we have produced it. A group of people brought here against their will, then the blues, and then Jimmy Smith in the '50s, Motown... I was one to always try to play to the best of my abilities. Even if there wasn't any audience there were the other musicians. But yes, there was an extra spark when you start to receive that energy. It builds you up. It's like [Pittsburgh bassist] Dwayne Dolphin says, "It's like Zen Man." You are enriching their lives and as a result they are enriching your life.⁴⁴³

The construction of meaning in jazz performance relied as much on spatial existence as it did with the neighborhood's history, contemporary events, and African American musical traditions. The spaces in which musical life unfolded—what music scholar Guthrie Ramsey calls "community theaters"—provided a medium through which individuals shaped shared values and

⁴⁴³ Lou Stellute, interview by author, December 1, 2008.

engaged changes in their ways of life. As Ramsey states, “community theaters...provide audiences with a place to negotiate with others—in a highly social way—what cultural expressions such as music mean.”⁴⁴⁴ The appreciation of these clubs as community theaters was even expressed between club owners or the Hurricane and Crawford Grill, though they had technically competed for the neighborhood’s business. In 1973, Joe and Buzzy Robinson held a special event at the Grill to honor Birdie Dunlap and her contributions to the neighborhood’s nightlife and support of musicians. Musicians and community members alike came out for “Birdie Dunlap Night,” and the *New Pittsburgh Courier* featured the event.⁴⁴⁵

Several elements brought the golden age of jazz to life in venues such as the Crawford Grill and Hurricane. These were places influenced by the cultural norms of the Chitlin Circuit as well as sites of racial integration. They were also places where jazz innovators explored new ideas in an intimate and highly interactive environment. These clubs created a jazz community that provided a social vitality that is apparent in Harris’ photos.

⁴⁴⁴ Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003), pg. 77.

⁴⁴⁵ Hazel Garland, “Birdie Dunlap Has Her Night,” *New Pittsburgh Courier* (September 22, 1973), pg. 17.

6.0 1960S: JAZZ UNDER FIRE

Several factors contributed to the decline of jazz clubs and the further economic and social isolation of the Hill District from surrounding communities during the 1960s. First, jazz underwent radical stylistic changes that further separated it from black popular music. Jazz in the Hill was torn between black popular music and the experimental directions of free jazz. Free jazz pushed into new creative territory though it affected the role of jazz as a social institution in the Hill District. Second, in 1965 the primary social institution of black musicians in Pittsburgh—the black musicians’ union Local 471—was dismantled and merged with the white musicians union Local 60. The merger, aimed to eradicate segregation, destabilized the African American jazz community. It led to the closing of the black Musicians Club—a key black musical organization. The final factor that led to the decline of Hill jazz clubs was racial tension, which peaked with Martin Luther King’s assassination on April 4th, 1968. The riots of 1968 destroyed much of the Hill District’s business infrastructure. These shifts within musical, social, and economic structures marked the end of a musical and social era in which jazz functioned as an integral part of an integrated community’s social and economic life.

6.1 DIVERGENT PATHS: FREE JAZZ AND SOUL

In the early 1960s, the new musical directions of free jazz challenged the “jazz house” culture and aesthetics of hard bop. Free jazz discarded the dominant stylistic norms as well as the social norms of jazz’s “golden age,” challenging musicians and listeners alike to reevaluate the music’s place in their communities. At the same time, younger generations of musicians and listeners sought out new directions in popular music that did not function in the small “jazz house” context.

In February of 1960, alto saxophonist Ornette Coleman performed at the Crawford Grill No.2 with his quartet, including trumpeter Don Cherry, bassist Charlie Haden, and drummer Billy Higgins, on the heels of his 1959 release *The Shape of Jazz to Come*.⁴⁴⁶ This album, with its conspicuous absence of piano and new approaches to improvisation, was a seminal moment in the ascendent free jazz movement. Responses in the Hill were mixed. One *Courier* critic hailed Coleman’s innovations as a benchmark in the development of jazz, stating “Ornette Coleman, alto artist, is very definitely the most talented musician to arise on the jazz scene since the late Charles Parker.”⁴⁴⁷

For many Pittsburgh musicians, Coleman’s innovations were highly controversial. Trombonist Harold Betters recalls going with Pittsburgh organist Bobby Jones to hear Coleman at the Crawford Grill:

I went down to hear Ornette Coleman. I couldn't understand him because he played all over. I couldn't stand him! I was with Bobby Jones and he was saying, “He's a motherfucker!” So I'm sitting there looking up and I heard that “blip blop” and I

⁴⁴⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 13, 1960, pg. 16.

⁴⁴⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 13, 1960, pg. 16.

wondered what the hell is he trying to prove? What's the feeling I get? I don't understand the picture. Bobby said, "If you want a picture, see an artist."⁴⁴⁸

Bettors' reaction to the new sounds was consistent with many other local musicians steeped in the swing tradition. Vocalist Sandy Staley recalls of Ornette Coleman, "I didn't know what the hell he was doing. I left because it hurt my ears. He was squeaking and squawking and it wasn't very pleasant so I only took a set and then left."⁴⁴⁹ Even those experienced with the once revolutionary style of bebop reacted negatively to the aesthetic sensibilities of free jazz. Drummer Chuck Spatafore recalls, "Twice I tried to listen to Ornette and I just couldn't do it."⁴⁵⁰ Coleman unapologetically broke with the stylistic traditions of swing, which had formed the core of jazz's identity and facilitated its role as popular music. Coleman's music established new norms for listening and engaging jazz—so much that the new musical discourse between Coleman and his band translated to local jazz musicians as "blip blop" and "squeaking and squawking."

Because free jazz presented a stark contrast to hard bop and swing groups, it drew mixed responses from audiences as well. As had bebop in the late 1940s, free jazz drew listeners who appreciated these new directions. For the average audience member in the Hill, however, free jazz did not function as had previous styles of jazz and as a result changed the social environment so closely tied to the identity and personality of typical Hill clubs such as the Crawford Grill and the Hurricane. As music scholar Mark Anthony Neal states, these new trends effectively alienate the core listening audience of urban communities:

⁴⁴⁸ Harold Bettors, interview by author, November 12, 2008.

⁴⁴⁹ Sandy Staley, interview by author, November 17, 2008.

⁴⁵⁰ Chuck Spatafore, interview by author, September 10, 2008.

As bebop presaged, the heady jazz of the 1960s, often devoid of swing and an accessible blues center, quite possibly represented the genre's final break with the black working class, who often valued it, like the blues and rhythm and blues, for its cathartic powers in the leisure spaces they inhabited. In this regard, the political agenda of critics and the personal choices of musicians were at odds with the desire and pursuit of pleasure on behalf of some black audiences, particularly as pleasure often undermined, temporally at least, the realities of segregation, Jim Crow politics, and racism.⁴⁵¹

Neal emphasizes the relationship between stylistic innovation and the social function of music. As free jazz introduced new approaches to composition, improvisation, instrument technique, and audience interaction, it removed the social cues ingrained in the hard bop and swing traditions, leaving many listeners unable to "actively listen."

The separation of jazz from black musical values was gradual. Crawford Grill audiences clearly favored the hard swinging style of hard bop players such as Horace Silver, Art Blakey, and Max Roach for the same reason the music affirmed shared values based in both secular and religious musical traditions. For these reasons, hard bop remained a mainstay at the Grill though "Buzzy" Robinson continued booking experimental artists including Jimmy Guiffre's trio with pianist Paul Bley and bassist Steve Swallow, Rashaan Roland Kirk, and Eric Dolphy. These performances prompted a discourse concerning the identity of jazz. In June of 1963, Eric Dolphy performed with his quintet, which included vibraphonist Bobbie Hutcherson, bassist Eddie Khan, drummer J. C. Moses and Eddie Armour on flugelhorn. Dolphy's week at the Grill came several months after the recording of his album *Iron Man*, a mixture of through-composed, free form,

⁴⁵¹ Mark Anthony Neal, *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pg. 32.

and hard bop compositions that featured Dolphy's angular improvisations and Hutcherson's modern harmonic approach. Dolphy's week at the Grill prompted *Courier* columnist to comment on the controversy surrounding Dolphy's innovations and whether the music was still considered jazz. The columnist distinguished Dolphy from Ornette Coleman who he felt relied "upon a mélange of distorted Parkerisms which are embossed on meterless improvisations which meet with howls of derision from practically everyone with the exception of [scholar] Gunther Schuller and [pianist] John Lewis" and Charles Mingus who was "a winner of almost universal accolades as the 'angry man' of jazzdom with his intrepid embellishments of the blues via his own stellar stylings."⁴⁵² There is little doubt that Dolphy's approach was strongly rooted in the jazz tradition though his innovations were, in the context of the Crawford Grill, a sharp departure from the norm.

In offering a sharp break with the dominant stylistic trends in jazz, these new directions forced audiences to intellectually engage the music and thus to accept a new relationship with jazz. These divisions are apparent in a *Courier* review of a 1965 performance by John Coltrane with his quartet including bassist Jimmy Garrison, pianist McCoy Tyner, and drummer Elvin Jones. By the mid-decade, Coltrane was deep into his explorations of free form group improvisation, extended solos, and the expressive technique of multiphonics. Gone were the musical and visual cues so familiar to hard bop and soul jazz audiences that created the familiar call and response interactions between listeners and performers. The result was that "much of the audience became restless that night, which might account for the reason so many ladies suddenly had to go to the rest room."⁴⁵³ The reviewer, while praising Coltrane's musical contributions,

⁴⁵² *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 8, 1963, pg. 18.

⁴⁵³ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 3, 1965, pg. 13.

depicted the performance as “more akin to an assault than a performance” adding that “only a few hard core fans were willing to accept the elemental beauty of his offering overlooking all obstacles that might have come between the conception and expression.”⁴⁵⁴

These musical explorations revolutionized both the language of jazz as well as the meaning of socializing around jazz. Jazz, which during its golden era had largely been the focal point for going out and having a good time, was becoming something inaccessible to the common patron.

6.1.1 The New Granada

In the 1960s jazz also distanced itself from the Hill’s younger generation, whose interests were geared towards urban blues, doo-wop, R&B, and soul. Just as they had filled the Savoy Ballroom in the previous three decades for swing dance bands, African American teens filled its halls for R&B and soul artists of the day.

Johnny Adams, a first generation Italian American businessman from the Lower Hill District, recognized the burgeoning demand amongst black teens and reopened the Savoy from 1960 to 1964. Adams, who had previously booked artists and managed nightclubs in Pittsburgh, responded to an add posted by owner Harry Hendel that offered free rent of the Granada and Savoy in exchange for renovations and upkeep of the building. Adams recalls, “At the time I had a little bit of money so I went down to talk to Harry, who was in charge of the distribution of movies. He said ‘John, the place is run down. You put the money in and fix it up then you can

⁴⁵⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 3, 1965, pg. 13.

have free rent for a year.’ So I did. I went in there and improved it. Put in drapes and refinished the floors and fixed the seats.”⁴⁵⁵

Refurbishing the Granada Theater and Savoy Ballroom extended a tradition of large community events in the Hill District. Adams rented the Savoy out for a variety of events, ranging from church functions to social club events for “cabarets” or benefits. Community based social clubs would provide their own drinks, food, and band. Cabarets were “the only time they would set up tables” on the dance floor. Most patrons went there to dance with some listeners retreating to the balcony where they could take in the show.

The reopening of the Granada announced that jazz was no longer the dominant music of the Hill. Managing the acts was dancer and entertainer Rudy Moses. With the decline of swing and big band dances in the 1950s, Adams and Moses began featuring R&B, and soul artists, in dances geared towards “young adults from 18 to 21.” Promoted by local radio stations WAMO and WZUM and deejays Mary Dee, Sir Walter, and Craig “Porky” Chedwick, the dances often filled the room to capacity. A diverse cross section of black artists were featured including vocalists Tina Turner, Bobby “Blue” Bland, and James Brown and organist Wild Bill Davis. Local artists included jazz guitarist George Benson, Chuck Edwards, and jazz saxophone player Stanley Turrentine who also gained valuable exposure and experience during this period of the Savoy’s operation.

Adams remembers Pittsburgh guitarist and singer George Benson “used to always draw full capacity on the dance floor” because “young black high schools kids would always come to the dance” and “the older people would go and sit in the balcony.” Benson, though well known in jazz circles for his virtuosic guitar playing, was an active singer with his group The Altairs,

⁴⁵⁵ Johnny Adams, interview by author, January 7, 2009.

which focused on doo-wop and R&B. As Adams recalls, Benson was deeply influenced by local R&B stars: “Incidentally he got a lot of lessons from Chuck Edwards. Chuck Edwards was one of his idols and Bob “Ponytail” Wagner was from Center Avenue also and George would always stay close to those guys who were excellent. He would get some pointers but then he had his natural ability and outshined his mentors.”⁴⁵⁶



Figure 50 A view of the stage at a young adult dance at the Savoy Ballroom, c. 1964 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.17145)

⁴⁵⁶ Johnny Adams, interview by author, January 7, 2009.



Figure 51 A view from the stage at young adult dance at the Savoy Ballroom, c. 1964 (Charles “Teenie” Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.17143)

Figures 50 and **51** show the Savoy Ballroom filled to capacity for a local dance sponsored by the Carnegie based R&B radio station WZUM. Adams remembers “the young ladies would dress fit to kill” and the house rules required the men to wear coats or sports jackets.”⁴⁵⁷

Adams left the Savoy after Hendel asked him to sign a lease for \$2,000 a month. Adams noted that “there was never a big profit” with touring acts being paid six thousand dollars,

⁴⁵⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 31, 1962, pg. A18.

“usually three thousand in advance and three thousand during intermission” and soul stars, such as James Brown, being paid ten thousand dollars for an engagement. Adams found the losses too great to continue: “By the time you paid your help and security—the city insisted that you had at least six to eight security officers—and then there was gas and electric.” While Adams asserted that liquor was not served at these events and police protection was hired for security, the Savoy was the scene of occasional disturbances. In 1962, the *Courier* reported, “following a hectic riot at the Savoy Ballroom last mid-week, during which a score of policemen brought a liquor-crazed minority of offenders under control, Lieut. E. Kilkeary, of Police Station 2, has asked that the operators of the Savoy be forced to surrender their license.”⁴⁵⁸ The confrontation began after eleven officers were called to the ballroom to quell several fights in the audience. The event escalated as police were apparently assaulted with chairs and flying objects, which led to the arrest of ten of the ballroom’s patrons. One observer reported police carrying the “squirring figure of a teenager to the station” whose “bloody head was ‘split open’ across the top.”⁴⁵⁹ As a result the Granada and Savoy closed and have remained boarded up since 1964. Recently the building has been the focus of local preservation activists, who received \$91,000 in 2009 for basic stabilization efforts.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 2, 1962, pg. 1.

⁴⁵⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 2, 1962, pg. 1.

⁴⁶⁰ Mark Belko, “New Granada Theater Benefits from Slots Revenue” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Friday, February 27, 2009.

6.2 DISMANTLING SOCIAL NETWORKS: THE MUSICIANS' UNION MERGER

Along with the stylistic and functional divergences between jazz and black popular music, the 1960s witnessed the dismantling of black musical networks. A central institution that supported jazz came to end with the merger of the black and white musicians union locals. Desegregation, an essential step toward racial equality, paradoxically weakened social and economic networks that were central to the African American struggles for progress. Prior to the merger, the Musicians' Club of Local 471—Pittsburgh's black local—provided a space for both white and black musicians to socialize, hone their skills, meet celebrities, form bands, and rehearse. With the constant interaction between local and touring musicians the environment was richly creative. Musicians rehearsing for a gig might be interrupted by a musician from New York, Chicago, New Orleans, or Kansas City, and shown a new way to voice a song, phrase a melody, or approach the rhythmic feel of a tune. Saxophonist Hosea Taylor remembers:

Everyone went to the Musician's Club whether you were a musician or into nightlife. I saw a number of national musicians go there and get [shown up] by Pittsburghers in the '40s. A lot of national players were afraid of [trumpeter] Tommy Turrentine and it brought them down a peg.

The institutionalization of discriminatory practices towards African American musicians in Pittsburgh was rooted in segregated union locals. Local 60, Pittsburgh's first American Federation of Musicians local, was chartered in 1897 and held an informal policy of racial exclusion. Local 471 was chartered in 1908 by a small group of African American Pittsburgh

musicians who wished to secure better working conditions.⁴⁶¹ Throughout the first half of the 20th century, Local 471 grew despite its secondary status to Local 60, which controlled the music clubs and halls of downtown Pittsburgh. These venues were largely off limits to all but the most successful traveling black performers and to most black patrons, while the Hill District venues, within a stone's throw east of downtown, operated under the jurisdiction of local 471.

The “handful of musicians” that first comprised Local 471 grew to over two hundred members in 1946, and reported 324 members at the time of the merger in 1965.⁴⁶² Amongst 471's membership were jazz innovators whose recordings and performances shaped jazz as a national art form and as an African American musical tradition. Early members included arranger and bandleader Don Redman (1900-1964),⁴⁶³ whose arrangements were used by Paul Whiteman and Count Basie; pianist Earl “Fatha” Hines (1903-1983), whose illustrious career began as musical director for Louis Armstrong in the late 1920s; pianist Mary Lou Williams (1910-1981), whose compositions and improvisational approach influenced several generations of jazz innovators, and trumpeter Roy Eldridge (1911-1989), who extended the technique of his instrument and was one of the leading improvisers of the swing era. Later members included singer and bandleader Billy Eckstine (1914-1993), pianist and arranger Billy Strayhorn (1915-1967), drummer Kenny Clarke (1914-1985), drummer Art Blakey (1919-1990), pianist Erroll Garner (1921-1977), bassist Ray Brown (1926-2002), trumpeter Tommy Turrentine (1928-1997), pianist Ahmad Jamal (b. 1930), tenor saxophonist Stanley Turrentine (1934-2000),

⁴⁶¹ Harold Keith, “Who's Who in Labor,” *Pittsburgh Courier* (November 30, 1946), pg. 14. The article names Charles Catlin, H.C. Walters, W.A. Kelly, and R.A. Dinguid as founding members.

⁴⁶² Local 60 minutes, University of Pittsburgh Archives, pg. 232. At the time of the merger with Local 471, Local 60 consisted of 2000 members.

⁴⁶³ Harold Keith, “Who's Who in Labor,” pg. 14.

guitarist George Benson (b. 1943), and guitarist Jimmy Ponder (b. 1946).⁴⁶⁴ The innovations and contributions of these artists were among the most valued in jazz. Billy Eckstine's bebop bands, Billy Strayhorn's collaborations with the Duke Ellington Orchestra, Erroll Garner's playful virtuosity, Ahmad Jamal's conceptual approach to the piano trio, and Ray Brown's contribution to the artistry of bass playing are but a few examples of how Pittsburgh musicians shaped the course of American musical history.

Venues employing black musicians expanded in the 1960s though the most lucrative jobs remained out of reach. *Courier* writer George Pitts noted in 1962, "Even today in Pittsburgh, few Negro combos are making their sole livelihood playing music. The big spots—Holiday House, Twin Coaches, Town House, Ankarra—and others, have all white house bands and have never entertained the idea of giving steady employment to a Negro group."⁴⁶⁵ This situation of "separate but equal" continued until January 1966 when, following a series of negotiations spurred by a forced national merger, the two joined to make Local 60-471. While many hoped that the merger would grant access to better paying jobs in the Downtown area it became apparent by 1971 that this would not be the case. Discussions of a merger between the black and white musicians' union locals were met with resistance from both black and white musicians. Local black musicians expressed concern that "we would be outvoted for top offices...and I doubt that we would get as much work as we are now getting. If most of the good jobs go to the white boys now, a merger would make them get all of the good gigs."⁴⁶⁶ Many of these fears were realized as the members of the black union local were subsequently excluded from

⁴⁶⁴ Musicians Member List of Local 471, accessed April, 2010:

http://www.library.pitt.edu/labor_legacy/MusiciansMemberList.htm.

⁴⁶⁵ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 24, 1962, pg. A17.

⁴⁶⁶ *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 5, 1959, pg. 13.

positions of power in the new merged local. In 1970, a representative of the group Black Musicians of Pittsburgh (BMOP) lamented on the situation of African American musicians in the city, stating:

We are in a worse position now than the one that we had before Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. At least then we had some leadership positions, our own hall and more work. Now Black musicians have been driven out of leadership – and the ‘black jobs’ to which we were relegated are diminishing.⁴⁶⁷

The Civil Rights struggle had succeeded in overturning the legal structures of segregation and discrimination. However, as indicated above, it became clear that racist practices, solidified over decades, were not easily undone, and that the Civil Rights legislation would lead to new structures of exclusion for minorities. Workplace desegregation, an essential step towards desegregation, had altered the social, economic, and physical landscapes in which jazz musicians worked. This presented a paradox in the Civil Rights struggle because it diminished African American representation in the musicians’ local union and dismantled social institutions and networks that served the interests of Pittsburgh’s African American community.

The informal arrangement between Local 60 and Local 471 created a “one-way road” in that white musicians and patrons were welcomed into Hill District venues while black musicians and patrons faced a hostile environment downtown. Local 471 trumpeter Chuck Austin recalls:

Before the civil rights struggle, you could go into some of these [downtown] clubs if a white guy took you in or vouched for you. You may walk in and have the same green dollar as the next guy but conditions were of such here that you were not welcome. You

⁴⁶⁷ African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh (AAJPSP). Located in the University of Pittsburgh archives.

could feel it though they would not actually say to you “get out” but they would treat you in such a way that you knew you weren't welcome even though it was downtown Pittsburgh. Because of the [white union local's] stronghold over the entertainment venues it just was that way.⁴⁶⁸

At the time of the merger, Local 60 consisted of 2,000 members while Local 471 had 324 members. The President of Local 60 made \$10,000 annually and Local 471's President earned \$2,100 a year. Discussions between officers of Local 471 and Local 60 to undertake the merger began in March of 1965 at Local 60's headquarters downtown. At this meeting Local 60 President Hal Davis expressed the need to “meet on common ground” so to “effect an agreeable merger.”⁴⁶⁹

Joe Westray, president of Local 471, provided the black local's terms on which this merger would be agreeable. Of central importance for Westray was the assurance of black representation in the merged union. Westray insisted, “The merged union [must] employ at least one Negro member who was employed in the same capacity, on the office staff at comparable salary.” This would become a central point of contention, prompting comments such as, “there is no vacancy on the office staff of Local 60, and to create a new job, so to speak, is unwise and expensive.”

In addition, Local 60 wanted to restrict officers from continuing as active playing musicians. At the time, the majority of Local 471's board members were respected performers in Pittsburgh, with president Joe Westray, secretary treasurer Rubye Young, and union officer Walt

⁴⁶⁸ Chuck Austin, interview by author, August 31, 2008.

⁴⁶⁹ American Federation of Musicians. Local 60-471 (Pittsburgh, Pa), “Records of the American Federation of Musicians Local 60-471 (Pittsburgh, Pa.), 1906-1967, bulk 1911-1951,” Housed in the University of Pittsburgh Archives, p. 232.

Harper being permanent features in local jazz venues. Westray's reputation as a bandleader, arranger, mentor, union representative, and businessman reached back two decades. With local African American bandleaders such as Len Gloster, Thay Whiteley, Donald Woods, and Will Hitchcock, Westray was responsible for the livelihood and professional training of several generations of Pittsburgh musicians.⁴⁷⁰ World renown saxophonist Stanley Turrentine began working with Westray at 13 and recalls how the elder musician was instrumental in involving him in the Musicians' Union and providing him his first touring work in the surrounding mill towns.⁴⁷¹ Other distinguished Pittsburghers who Westray trained were singer Dakota Staton and pianist Erroll Garner. When Local 471 relocated due to the redevelopment of the Lower Hill District, Westray provided the space above his East Liberty Club the Ebony Lounge for the new offices.

Further meeting minutes show an adamant resistance to Local 471's proposed conditions of merger labeling them "segregation in reverse." The underlying problem was that a merged union with equal representation would require replacing one-sixth of the white local's executive committee with 471 members. Ultimately, it was unacceptable to the Local 60 officers to remove their officers to accommodate incoming committee members from the black union. The final merger agreement specified that three officers from Local 471's board would serve in temporary positions on the merged local's expanded board for four years, after which elections would be held. Former 471 president Joe Westray, secretary Rubye Young, and officer George Childress were chosen to fill these temporary spots on the merged committee.

⁴⁷⁰ Kenan A. Foley, *The Interpretation of Experience: A Contextual Study of the Art of Three Pittsburgh Jazz Drummers* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2007), pg. 103.

⁴⁷¹ Stanley Turrentine. interview by Chuck Austin, November 23, 1997, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh (AAJPSP) Oral History Project.

Both black and white union officers pleaded for a reasonable resolution. Prior to the first post-merger elections Hal Davis stated in a letter to the Board that he stood by the need for black representation and firmly supported the incorporation of “a black candidate for the Executive Board and a black candidate for delegate to the A. F. of M Convention.” His resolve was expressed in his statement:

Some of the statements I hear that disturb me are; “why should we support a black person, they only represent a small minority... non-blacks can legislate and deal fairly with black people as well as black people can.” I respectfully suggest to you that this kind of archaic reasoning is what has led to some of the major problems which confront our society today. This kind of reasoning has been in existence for well over 100 years and it is high time we start to face up to conditions as they exist today.

George Childress of 471 mirrored these concerns, citing the long history of exclusion from well-paying recording sessions, downtown clubs, and city park concerts, noting that many black musicians no longer felt that they had a union in the post-merger era. Childress addressed the accusations of “segregation in reverse” by proposing a quota, which would be based on membership numbers. Still, fear remained amongst white union member that board positions would be flooded by black personnel at the expense of white jobs.

Despite the pleas of Hal Davis and George Childress no member of 471 was elected to the executive board, or as a delegate after the transitional period from 1966 to 1971. When it became apparent that previous 471 members would have no representation on the merged local’s board or amongst convention delegates, the Black Musicians of Pittsburgh, or BMOP, was formed to spearhead a lawsuit against the union. Established in 1971, BMOP was headed by Clyde Jackson, pianist George Spaulding, organist Rubye Young, trumpeter Charles Austin,

drummer Thomas “Doc” Miller, vibraphonist “Ducky” Kemp and represented by Attorney William B. Gould.

The Black Musicians of Pittsburgh’s lawsuit against the merged local aimed to prove that there was a strong precedent of discrimination against black musicians, and that the merger had effected little change of that discrimination. The group included over seventy 471 members who had been discriminated against in the past and who felt that “the merger agreement carried forward the effects of past discrimination” due to the lack of discourse prior to the merger.

The case dragged on for four years but eventually ruled in favor of Local 60-471 finding: The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission brought its discrimination action in bad faith for several reasons. First, there was little evidence of discrimination available. Moreover, the court found that the EEOC knew that the problems asserted could be attributed to the party claiming discrimination. Further, there was no evidence of the existence of disparate employment opportunities. Finally, the court found that the EEOC knew that the statistics offered in their case in chief were not conclusive, and, in fact, tended to support the position of the defendant.⁴⁷²

The merger and subsequent lawsuit had several outcomes that affected African American musicians in Pittsburgh. The first was the closure of 471’s club and meeting hall. The merged union could only operate one Musicians’ Club, which necessitated the smaller of the two locals to sacrifice their headquarters. At the same time, Local 60 also discontinued their own bar and club, which effectively ended socialization and jam sessions in the union hall. As one 471 member mentioned; “There were possibilities of drawing from the best [musicians] of both locals but they didn't look at it that way.” These actions coupled with the lawsuit caused further

⁴⁷² Accessed August, 2008. <http://www.altlaw.org/v1/cases/543283>

tension and resentment between white and black musicians, which solidified segregated hiring practices. For example, those few 471 members who were hired by white contractors faced being ostracized by black members who were continually excluded.

The second change was the gradual shifting of union emphasis from smaller clubs and jazz musicians toward larger venues and “commercial jobs.” The merged local focused on booking in the previous jurisdiction of Local 60, ignoring the venues that had been patronized by Local 471. This made the union irrelevant for many musicians, both black and white, who worked in venues previously covered by Local 471, because they were no longer required to pay work dues on those jobs, and hence did not benefit from the union’s benefits.

The third change was the disconnection between touring black artists who required backup bands in Pittsburgh, and local artists. Before the merger, touring African American artists would book bands through Local 471. After the merger, they would hire musicians through the merged 60-471 union. Often the weaker music reading skills of former 471 members were used as an excuse by booking agents to hire white musicians. On occasion, a touring act would force integration by insisting on mixed hiring. Saxophonist Don Aliquo Sr. remembers:

I played the Lena Horne and Tony Bennett show at Heinz Hall in about '78. At the rehearsal she looked at the band and there were no black players and she wouldn't play. [The booking agent] hired [three previous 471 members] and after that she agreed to play. [They] had to fire a couple of guys and get a couple blacks in there.⁴⁷³

Finally, with the merger African American musicians no longer had a means by which to represent their interests. The post-merger transition period from 1966 to 1971 failed to integrate the governing body of the musicians’ union. It was not until 2000 that a former 471 member was

⁴⁷³ Don Aliquo, interview by author, September 11, 2008.

elected to the merged union board. Disheartened with these effects, many 471 members discontinued membership from the union, officially barring them from work that previously had been available to them.

6.3 SOCIAL UNREST AND NIGHTLIFE

The riots following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King on April 4th, 1968, had the single greatest impact on the decline of jazz in the Hill District's nightlife. Both the Hill's business infrastructure and social life experienced a catastrophic blow that left the community fractured and isolated. In Pittsburgh, the riots began on April 5 and lasted until April 12, resulting in "505 fires, \$620,000 in property damage, one death and 926 arrests."⁴⁷⁴ The low death toll in Pittsburgh, as compared to Detroit, Newark, and Washington D.C., is attributed to the cooperation of Mayor Joseph Barr with black community leaders K. Leroy Irvis and Reverend Jimmy Joe Robinson, who personally took to the streets to quell angry crowds.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁴ Bruce Vanwyngarden, "View from the Top," *Pittsburgh*, February 1988, 40.

⁴⁷⁵ Laurence Glasco, "The Civil Rights Movement in Pittsburgh: To Make this City 'Some Place Special,'" unpublished article.



Figure 52 Men and women gathered outside Economart Market with broken windows, Rendezvous Shine Parlor, and Hogan and Mary's Bar-B-Q, with fire hoses in street, after riot, c. 1968 (Charles "Teenie" Harris, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh: Heinz Family Fund, 2001.35.7014)

While Pittsburgh escaped the death tolls of other cities, there was little that could be done to save neighborhood businesses. The lights from the fires could be seen all over the city. When the looting abated most of the Hill District's businesses were destroyed, leaving the remaining merchants little hope of continuing. Zola Hirsh, a second-generation Jewish Hill District business owner, commented on the destruction of his dry cleaning business:

The settlement that I wound up with was horrible and unbelievable. The final settlement for all of my business was \$30,000.00 with my attorney's fee and outstanding debts on

equipment, I wound up with \$9,000.00. I had enough to start again but not enough to gamble another beginning on the Hill.⁴⁷⁶

Within days of King's assassination, the Hill District's business infrastructure was in ruins, which set in motion the last stage of "white flight." Hill District resident Robert Johnson recalls how the economic decline affected the neighborhood's social life. Before the riots, the Hill had maintained its own economic and social balance:

Everybody knew everybody in this area. That's when you could go into a bar and lay your money on the table... even when I was going to bars it was like that because everybody in the neighborhood knew everybody. Little alleyways back there like Duff Street but Wylie had the stores. There was a bowling alley there too... If you went further down there were clothes stores on Wylie and shoe stores on Center, Center Shoe Store, Gordon's Shoe Store. After the riots came a lot of those stores closed up. People still went out, but it wasn't like it was before. [When] it calmed down, people missed the stores—the Mainway and the Pennywise supermarkets. They burned what they shouldn't have burned. They didn't realize what they were doing. We didn't. They didn't realize they burned them selves out. A lot of people suffered for it. Especially older people because they had to go far to get what they need.⁴⁷⁷

Many of the "looters" were non-violent participants whose experience with poverty led to shortsighted decisions. One neighborhood member recalls that when the looting began:

⁴⁷⁶ Ralph Lemuel Hill, *A View of the Hill—A Study of Experiences and Attitudes in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania from 1900 to 1973* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1973), pg. 160.

⁴⁷⁷ Robert Johnson, interview by author, December 17, 2008.

I listened to the 12 o'clock news and they said, "let people go in the Mainway Grocery store and tell them they can take anything they want just don't burn the place down." I grabbed my boys and took them walked all the way up Dinwiddle and got across from the Mainway and said "You'all stay here." I set them on the stoop and went in. People were snatching and grabbing and knocking shit all on the floor. They had one of these walk-in coolers and I went in there. They were stepping on more meat then they were carrying out. I had my little boxes and I came out and said, "Yea, come on." So this elderly lady, she's coming down with a cane. Right next to the Black Beauty. She said "Oh, my God. They breaking into the cleaners and stealing their own brothers and sisters clothes." I said, "shit." That was the end of the Hill. When we burnt all that stuff up and tore it out. The end of an era. It was never the same after that. It started going down. How long is this little bit of stuff they take going to last. We ate that stuff up damn near overnight.⁴⁷⁸

In disrupting the social and economic life of the Hill, the riots had an immediate impact on musical life within the community. Trumpeter Roger Barbour recalls his weekly job at the Working Man's Club coming to an end with riots: "I think it just closed down. I don't think it was destroyed. I don't remember anything happening up here after the riots."⁴⁷⁹ Birdie Dunlap's famous Hurricane Bar closed within a year after the riots, citing the drop off in clientele and increased neighborhood violence:

When Martin Luther King got killed, it made a whole lot of difference. The whites were afraid to come up. It gave hoodlums an excuse to be violent. They didn't just jump on whites; they were robbing and thieving against their own people. I didn't have any

⁴⁷⁸ Interview by author. I have omitted the interviewee name due to the topic of the quote.

⁴⁷⁹ Roger Barbour, interview by author, November 19, 2008.

trouble inside the Hurricane. It was coming in—snatching pocketbooks and breaking into cars.⁴⁸⁰

Though looters did not attack the Hurricane, Mrs. Dunlap was under constant threat from individuals threatening to bomb the building if she didn't give them money. Anger, directed at the Hurricane because of the “whiteys coming in there,” led Mrs. Dunlap to hire an off-duty policeman to patrol the premises. Despite her efforts, clientele continued to drop off, reaching the point where she was “sitting in that bar and no one was there.” Business was so bad that “the bartenders started calling in sick because they weren't getting anything in tips.”⁴⁸¹ When the Hurricane accidentally burned in 1969, Mrs. Dunlap rebuilt it but, when faced with reopening, decided to sell the business rather than struggle on.⁴⁸²

Racial tension altered the social atmosphere of nightlife in those clubs that remained after the riots. The riots led many white audience members away from black owned clubs to nightclubs, restaurants, and after-hours clubs in safer neighborhoods. Though tension dissipated in the following years, white audiences never returned in pre-riot numbers. For white musicians who relied on black clubs for jobs, networking, and musical training, the choice was more difficult. Guitarist Joe Negri remembers, “The whole Hill was very open to going up to clubs. There was nowhere you didn't feel comfortable. After the Martin King riots things changed.”⁴⁸³ Italian American Guitarist Tony Janflone recalls, “After the riots it was pretty dangerous to go but I still kept going because I had to and I wanted to” adding, “When the whites quit coming to

⁴⁸⁰ Bernard Holland, “Birdie Says Bye Bye to Hurricane, All That Jazz,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (February 4, 1980), pg. 19.

⁴⁸¹ Bernard Holland, “Birdie Says Bye Bye to Hurricane” *ibid.*, pg. 19.

⁴⁸² Bernard Holland, *ibid.*, pg. 19. The Hurricane was reported to have suffered a fire in April of 1970 by the *Pittsburgh Press* (June 16, 1970, pg. 15) leading one to believe that Birdie recalled the date incorrectly for the 1980 interview with Holland.

⁴⁸³ Joe Negri, interview by author, December 17, 2008.

the black clubs because they were afraid, then things started to change.”⁴⁸⁴ Whereas, white musicians had been welcomed in black clubs, for a period after the 1968 riots, they became the focus of black anger. Janflone, though never attacked, recalls the hostility that would occasionally arise:

I did have one experience. I played in a VFW in Wheeling, West Virginia. There was a guy dancing around in the audience and it was all blacks in this club. So he'd dance up to me and I'd pay no attention to him but I'd hear him say something like, “Man, white boys can't play.” Oh, fine. So finally he grabbed my guitar as he got a little more alcohol in him and when he grabbed my guitar I said, “There's a steel rod in this neck and you know what? If you ever touch me again you're going to be wearing this guitar.” He never bothered me after that. I was again shocked because all I was doing was something I loved to do. I didn't know it would be so controversial. I really love music and that doesn't really belong in music.⁴⁸⁵

White bands, regularly booked in Hill District jazz clubs before the riots, quickly became a liability for club owners. Drummer Chuck Spatafore recalls: “The night that the riots hit—they had the National Guard in front of the Crawford Grill—I get a call from a guy named Shy Chicago—he ran the bar for Buzzy and his dad—and he asked, “What you doing this week. Why don't you bring an all white group up to the Grill?” He had all his friends there laughing and yelling.”⁴⁸⁶ Though this exchange between friends was aimed at lightening the somber mood of the events, it demonstrates how quickly interracial socializing around jazz declined.

⁴⁸⁴ Tony Janflone, interview by author, January 6, 2009.

⁴⁸⁵ Tony Janflone, interview by author, January 6, 2009.

⁴⁸⁶ Chuck Spatafore, interview by author, September 10, 2008.

White jazz musicians increasingly sought work in venues that catered to largely white audiences and found that they had to change their stylistic approaches to fit the expectations of white audiences. Singer Sandy Staley explains this shift towards white popular culture:

I could see the jazz thing ending when the Holiday Inn syndrome started. People wanted flash and Elvis suits and shit. Every band had a name instead of [using the artist's name as with the] Bobby Negri Trio. We were one of the first jazz band to do rock songs like "Green Apples," "By the Time I get to Phoenix," and "Alone Again Naturally." We did stuff from Jesus Christ Superstar. "Everybody's Talking at You" from the movie Midnight Cowboy. We made up a fake band name "Attila and Hon" [laughs].⁴⁸⁷

Saxophonist Lou Stellute experienced a similar shift in musical emphasis after the riots. Stellute was a member of the all-white quartet led by jazz organist John Bartel. The Pittsburgh based group—consisting of Bartel, Stellute, guitarist Larry O'Brien, and drummer Jeff Marino—found success locally in black and "salt and pepper" clubs and eventually branched out to tour the Chitlin' Circuit throughout the North East. Before the riots, Stellute recalls that audiences were supportive and appreciative of the group's dedication to playing "black" or "soul" jazz. More importantly, these clubs provided a musical direction and training that was unavailable to these musicians:

Just the fact that I was there as a white person playing in these clubs and trying to play this music honestly, you were accepted and it was just a great thing. To me, it was better than going to any university because you were around the guys all the time. You would run into Sonny Stitt or Don Patterson and you would talk to them.

⁴⁸⁷ Sandy Staley, interview by author, November 17, 2008.

When the riots hit, Bartel's group was performing in Columbus downstairs from Ike and Tina Turner. Stellute recalls, "We had to be escorted out with our equipment to our van and had to leave town because they were shutting the club down." After that, the group continued to play Chitlin' Circuit clubs but it quickly became apparent "that there was a new era coming in." As the clubs that had supported the groups rise and development began to close the John Bartel began to focus on clubs in the "so called white territory."⁴⁸⁸

The John Bartel Group began performing at rock clubs and festivals, opening for nationally touring act such as the Mahavishnu Orchestra and Alice Cooper, and recording on the pop and rock label Capitol Records. The group stayed together until 1975 but split due to disagreements over the group's integration of rock n' roll:

After the riots...we thought that if we wanted to continue to have the group playing and we all were going to make a living playing music then we would have to try other things and be more versatile. That was one of the frictions that caused the group to break up. Larry and I did not see the need to be influenced by the English rock groups as John did. He was into King Crimson and Brian Auger. Larry and I thought that the group should stay true to itself and continue to play within the soul jazz idiom. It started to get to be more about "breaking the gap" or becoming successful. John started to think that the group was unique enough that we should capitalize on that. If it had been a couple years later when groups like Dreams and the Brecker Brothers came out... What we were trying to do was a little bit ahead of its time and a little bit insincere. Larry and I felt that the

⁴⁸⁸ Lou Stellute, interview by author, December 1, 2008.

direction we were taking was too contrived and didn't put the right emphasis on the music.⁴⁸⁹

The group's movement away from the Chitlin' Circuit and towards rock clubs required a fundamental change in the musical approach. For Stellute, the values and performative norms of clubs such as the Hurricane were no longer part of Bartel's music because, "After the 60s it was not so black centered. Basically all the clubs we used to play were in the black areas. It just wasn't happening after the riots. People weren't booking." This shift marked the decline for many musicians—both black and white—of a way of learning, performing, and experiencing jazz that was grounded in the social life of black communities. As Stellute explains:

When I came up we learned by playing the music in its natural environment. No matter how technically excellent a musician is in school there is still something missing when you are not in the midst of it. When you went to these clubs and played you learned directly from life. People who came into those clubs were working people who had hard lives and came into those clubs to have a good time and you fed off of that. Through osmosis it went into your being and you were inspired by that. You were inspired by the hookers, the junkies, even just the fact that you were in an environment that was so exciting and different from the one I was born in. It was a great school. Those places were a great education. A lot of white people do not get a chance to interact with black people in a real way and understand how they are. To see how they have really contributed immensely to the culture of this country and how willing black people were in sharing this though they have a great reason to be hostile to white people. Now, you almost have to teach in a University because the scene is gone. There are almost no

⁴⁸⁹ Lou Stellute, interview by author, December 1, 2008.

places to learn how to play. There is something about passing it on verbally and being with the players that makes it a little bit different.

Riots, coupled with the Union's failure to effectively integrate black and white musicians greatly weakened the social and economic networks that supported jazz performance and education. In the early 1970s, racial tensions lessened but the end had come to an era where the Hill District would serve as host to the greatest of local and touring entertainers and to a time of jazz oriented social institutions such as the Musicians' Union and the Hurricane. Looking at the events of the 1960s, we are left to ask how jazz performance would have fared in the 1970s—the music's so-called dark age—if processes of union integration had proceeded differently and the riots had been avoided. While the influence of soul and rock cannot be denied in the decline of jazz performance, we cannot ignore the impact social change in the 1960s had on the physical landscape and creative processes of jazz musicians.

7.0 CONCLUSION: MUSIC IN COMMUNITIES, COMMUNITIES IN MUSIC

In examining the Hill District's musical life over a five-decade period, this study has sought to understand jazz as a spatial practice, i.e., as both born from and a force in constructing the physical places, social spaces, and economic contexts in which it was performed. I hope to have illuminated how music functioned within the Hill District by grounding jazz—a phenomenon of international influence—in local lives and places and in doing so connected the creative processes of artists to social contexts as well as the values of non-musicians.

Studies of music often lose sight of the importance of place. Music is a means of imbuing our environments with meaning and centering ourselves in the physical world. Environments also influence how we produce and consume music. Understanding jazz as a situated activity connects musical sound to the life of clubs and the collective understandings that were constructed within their walls. For pianist Earl Hines (section 2.1.4), the Collins Inn and Leader House were places where one could experience a new kind of improvised music, interact with local and touring artists, and begin a professional career. These clubs also fostered a new lifestyle that reflected the complex backdrop of the Hill's rapidly shifting ethnic and racial makeup. On one hand, these clubs offered opportunities and inspirations for young musicians while on the other they were a gateway to vices such as prostitution, bootlegging of alcohol, and gambling. Hines, a young classically trained musician from a middle-class African American family, realized in these clubs that this new music went hand in hand with the emergent lifestyle

of the Hill. The early Hill clubs, as focal points of the neighborhood's nightlife, were the physical embodiment of these values, norms, and inspirations.

As the decades wore on, many of these physical locations continued to operate as focal points of nightlife, offering spaces and opportunities for new generations of musicians. In this sense, the power of place was an important part of constructing the community's musical legacy. The Collins Inn became the Paramount Club in 1922 and then the Black Musicians' Club in mid-1930s. The Leader House became the Crawford Grill no. 1 in 1932. Both buildings enjoyed close to four decades of musical life, which served the steadily growing African American community. The Musicians' Club gave a home to the black Musician's Union Local and helped expand the unionization of Pittsburgh's black musicians. The Crawford Grill was a public expression of black entrepreneur Gus Greenlee's success and connection to the Hill. Though both locations were razed with Urban Redevelopment, they lived on in new locations; the Crawford Grill no. 2 on Upper Wylie Avenue and the Musicians' Club in Homewood.

Analyses of place also allow us to engage how the music was made. Looking at the physical construction of venues illuminates the creative processes of jazz musicians by putting us in touch with the practical experiences of the jazz gig. Clubs such as the Crawford Grill no. 2 and the Hurricane Bar were laid out to utilize limited space and to facilitate an interactive environment between listeners and performers. Musicians and listeners alike commented on the importance of this environment and the role of the room in fostering the aural, oral, and visual dialogue between performer and audience member. A contribution to the success of these two specific clubs was that they fostered environments that provided both entertainment and, for many, an important cathartic release.

As discussed in the literature review (section 1.3), a regional approach in jazz studies has the advantage of highlighting the music's relationship to social and economic contexts, racial identity, and the functioning roles of space and place in modern urban society. Whereas the structural approaches of early jazz scholars emphasize stylistic development, musical form, and innovative individuals, and the functionalist approaches of black studies scholars of the 1960s stress African American cultural history and aesthetics, regional approaches ground jazz as a practice in a specific locale and, in doing so, place functional and structural concerns in community contexts. In other words, studying jazz as a situated activity in a community such as the Hill District, questions its ethereal, essentialist qualities, its portrayal as a universal, non-culture specific art form, and its identity as an exclusive product of a unified and insular African American musical tradition. Jazz becomes something people experience, in specific circumstances, economic contexts, places and times. The Hill District was influenced by its proximity to Pittsburgh's steel mills, its hilly terrain, racial and ethnic diversity, and its function as a link between African American communities throughout the eastern United States. From these factors its vibrant nightlife emerged.

Regional approaches to jazz often address the nature of the connection between musical identity and place. Concern with jazz as a localized social phenomenon has, in many instances, led to an understanding of regional sounds. For instance, the dominant jazz narrative describes the emergence of one regional style after the next. Studying New Orleans jazz, Chicago jazz, Kansas City jazz, West Coast jazz, or East Coast jazz identifies the music as a situated activity, though it underplays how the musical styles migrated from place to place, influencing established traditions and sometimes creating entirely new styles. The emphasis on regional sounds also leads one to simplify the stylistic diversity and contextual complexity of a given city

or region. As Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, and George Revill note in the introduction of *The Place of Music*: “To consider the place of music is not to reduce music to its location, to ground it down into some geographical baseline, but to allow a purchase on the rich aesthetic, cultural, economic, and political geographies of musical language.”⁴⁹⁰

The quest for a regional sound often reduces musical styles to simple caricatures. If one were to look for a regional sound in Pittsburgh jazz they would be quickly overwhelmed by the individuality of its innovators. Pittsburgh jazz musicians engaged this shifting musical landscape leading to a multitude of results amongst which there was little stylistic consensus. For example, three notable Pittsburgh musicians of the same generation are pianist Ahmad Jamal (b.1930), bassist Ray Brown (b.1926), and trumpeter Tommy Turrentine (b.1928). All three developed in Pittsburgh and found international recognition. But they were not a part of a “Pittsburgh sound,” rather their commonality was their individuality. As noted by Pittsburgh drummer Joe Harris, “We didn’t develop a style like New Orleans, we developed great individual musicians.”⁴⁹¹

I have also sought to highlight the conflicting narratives on race and jazz. Much of jazz literature has taken the position that jazz is either a universal or an exclusively African American phenomenon. The story of jazz in the Hill does not exclusively describe African American life in Pittsburgh. The diverse contributions of Pittsburgh jazz musicians from the 1920s through to the 1970s reflect the ethnic, racial, and class diversity of the Hill District. The close proximity of different elements in this diverse environment created social environments and economic innovations rare in other neighborhoods. From the black and tan clubs of the 1910s and 1920s,

⁴⁹⁰ Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, and George Revill, eds., *The Place of Music* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998), pg. 4.

⁴⁹¹ Joe Harris, Interviewed by Maurice Levy, April 22, 1994, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Oral History of Music in Pittsburgh.

where pianist Earl Hines was first exposed to jazz and inner city nightlife, to the black Musicians' Club of the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, where white and black musicians—both touring and local—could network, socialize, and jam to the Crawford Grill no. 2 and Hurricane Bar, where legendary performances kept small audiences enraptured, the Hill was home to a style of socializing that served the entertainment interests of its varied inhabitants as well as a myriad of nightlife revelers from the larger Pittsburgh region. On the Hill we see how jazz flourished in a context of racial and ethnic diversity and how stylistic innovations derived from distinctive social and economic contexts.

That racial norms of American society were often subverted in these contexts speaks a great deal how music influenced vastly different urban experiences. For the American jazz musician and audience member in the 20th century, performance contexts were often highly racialized spaces. State and national laws as well as a racial ideology dictated separate living spaces and institutions such as music unions and venues. In this sense, race was embodied in the physical spaces in which people lived, in the patterns of segregated life, and the music that was created in these contexts. The Hill District's nightlife drew upon a racial logic that dictated difference from an individual to a national level. Musicians playing on the Hill could not avoid the dominant racial ideology nor were they able to avoid engaging it through performance.

The importance of Charles "Teenie" Harris' photographs for this study cannot be underemphasized. All of the issues discussed thus far—music's relationship to place, social life, economic contexts, and racial politics—emerged in interviews driven by Harris' photographs. Through Harris' work, I was shown how clubs were structured and how performers and audiences acted and dressed—in short, what the Hill's nightlife experience looked like. In the absence of recordings, these images have served to give meaning to the music. They have also

helped interviewees recall events that occurred over a half century ago, and helped structure interviews by serving as a focal point for questioning. As I conducted interviews, I realized that the photos more than illustrative material for they offered a means of entering and observing the Hill as an ethnographer. Often, I would watch interviewees relive experiences while looking at the photos. For instance, saxophonist Hosea Taylor commented on a photo of himself: “I’ve got my head cocked over like Lester Young and that outfit, that was a terrible outfit. That’s all I had to wear. I wore it every day and every place.” These seemingly mundane details of everyday life bring the observer into a world long gone and brings to life the values and experiences of its inhabitants.

To my knowledge, this is the first historical ethnography of a musical culture that uses photos rather than recordings to guide interviews. By using a photo of a musical event in an interview the conversation invariably focuses on the practicalities of experiencing music. One talks less about what was played and more about how people experienced the music. This is a particularly difficult aspect of musical performance to bring out in normal conversation because many details of performing and listening may seem mundane but are actually very rich for social analyses. Also, by having a picture to guide one’s memories, these important details are made easier to recall. Photo elicitation proved an important part of my regional study because it brought out the practical concerns of performers, club owners, and audience members rather than changes in musical structures. By looking at jazz as it functioned within a community we are more likely to look at the mediated processes that give the music its emotional efficacy rather than the structural changes that explain the shift from one style to another. This is not to say that structural musical analysis is not useful for understanding jazz but rather that it must first be

framed by social, cultural, and economic contexts. Ultimately, this approach to jazz history enables us to address a myriad of social issues relevant on both a local and national level.

The social life described in this study seems far removed when one visits the Hill now. Much has been lost since the riots of 1968. The contemporary Hill District is a common inner-city picture: overgrown and rubble-strew lots, a handful of small locally owned shops, public housing and other developments, some original housing stock, and very few if any entertainment venues. The lack of business and building infrastructure matched with the reputation for gang crime has created a social barrier that makes the neighborhood largely invisible to the rest of the city. The city's road system contributes to the Hill's isolation by guiding traffic to the north and south, creating a socially dead zone between downtown and the neighborhood of Oakland.

Renewal and revitalization projects have increased in the past few years demonstrating that many think the solution lies in reclaiming the past. Those aware of the Hill's cultural history and its decline after the 1968 riots have emphasized the importance of the neighborhood's physical and social isolation, population decrease, and economic stagnation. The most recent plan by Pittsburgh's Sports & Exhibition Authority is to tear down the Civic Arena, located in what was the Lower Hill. The Arena has been home to the Pittsburgh Penguins hockey team since 1967, though they relocated in 2011 to the newly constructed Consol Energy Center. The proposed plan for the 28-acre Civic Arena development area includes "1,191 residential units, a 150-room hotel, 298,750 square feet of retail space and 606,000 square feet of office space" as well as a new system of roads that would "better connect the Lower Hill District with

Downtown.”⁴⁹² Debate is currently deciding the fate of the Civic Arena itself with those opposing its destruction arguing for its redesign and incorporation into new business developments and those supporting its destructing expressing a need for a completely new start. Howard Graves, CEO of Graves Architects Inc. supports “tearing down the arena because it would make way for positive development, which would not occur if you kept it intact” noting “The urban fabric would benefit immensely.”⁴⁹³ Graves’ argument is partially validated by the fact that he grew up in the Hill and so has the advantage of “speaking as an insider.” There can be little doubt that improved road systems, the development of public spaces, and a strengthened business infrastructure will improve the use of the Civic Arena site but those who remembered the promises of the 1950s redevelopment authorities will surely question the benefits it will bring to the remaining Hill District community.

The cultural value of the clubs discussed in this study continue to be invoked in local life and public policy. In the past few years plans have been implemented to restore and eventually reopening both the Granada Theater and the Crawford Grill no.2. In 2009, the Hill District Community Development Corp began a ten year \$1.1 million project to “save the 81-year-old building on Centre Avenue” with hopes of converting it into a “cultural center and theater with possible residential and commercial space.”⁴⁹⁴ In 2010, four private investors and three nonprofits purchased the Crawford Grill no. 2. The public face of the project has been former

⁴⁹² Jeremy Boren, “Redevelopment of Civic Arena Site Hangs on SEA,” *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, Wednesday, September 15, 2010. Accessed online September 18, 2010.

http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/news/pittsburgh/s_699465.html

⁴⁹³ Boren, “Redevelopment,” *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴ Jessica Turnbull, “New Granada Theater in Hill District will be Centerpiece of Cultural Revival,” *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* (Thursday, June 4, 2009). Accessed online http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/news/s_628064.html

Pittsburgh Steeler and Hall-of-Famer Franco Harris who has touted the importance of reopening the restaurant and nightclub:

This is a good corner. You stand here and your head just starts bopping up and down. This is such a historic site that the preservation and history of it has to live on. So the question is, how do we do that? Well, the first step is to buy this building—so we did. We had all these talented people who came from Pittsburgh like Ahmad Jamal, who I just saw at the first ever National Jazz Day concert here and though they went elsewhere to pursue their careers, they always came back and they were great ambassadors for Pittsburgh. Can we capture how things were and how they evolved? It will be hard, but we'll try to preserve that feel as closely as possible.”⁴⁹⁵

The hope placed in the renewal of venues such as the Grill and Granada begs the question of whether the music makes the community or the community makes the music. The renewal projects, while aiming to improve the social and economic conditions on the Hill do not address this question. Rather, they invest in the ghostly meanings of buildings left dormant in a community long abandoned by the businesses, families, and patrons that fed its cultural life. More notable is the assumption that past literally lives in places that can once again produce great art despite the shift in societal contexts.

While I advocate projects that serve the Hill's community, I feel that these projects should be informed by an examination of the neighborhood's social, economic, and cultural history so we don't simply resurrect the places without acknowledging the conditions that made

⁴⁹⁵ Christian Morrow, “Crawford Grill Purchased...Franco Harris Part of Investment Group,” *New Pittsburgh Courier* (Wednesday, April 14, 2010). Accessed online http://www.newpittsburghcourieronline.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1859:crawford-grill-purchasedfranco-harris-part-of-investment-group&catid=41:business&Itemid=37

them important sites. The challenge remains of developing this musical and cultural tradition in new social contexts. I hope this study provides some grounding as we move forward in this important endeavor.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

John Adams (Interviewed on January 7, 2009) Mr. Adams is a first generation Italian American who grew up in the lower Hill District. Amongst his diverse business activities, Mr. Adams ran Adams Production, which booked touring and local artists such as James Brown and George Benson in Pittsburgh during the 1960s.

Don Aliquo Sr. (Interviewed on September 11, 2008) Mr. Aliquo is a first generation Italian American born in 1929 in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He spent three years in Washington, DC performing with the Walter Reed Army Band and subsequently graduated from Indiana State Teacher's College. He continues to perform locally as a sideman and bandleader. Don is an adventuresome and inspiring saxophonist who is always a pleasure to perform with and talk to.

Chuck Austin (Interviewed on August 31 and December 10, 2008) Mr. Austin graduated from high school in 1945 at which he enlisted in the Navy. He joined Local 471 of the American Federation of Musicians in 1949 and has worked regularly as a trumpeter for over six decades. In 2003, Mr. Austin became the first African American board member of the merged Union Local 60-471. He has also organized the African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh (AAJPSP) and conducted interviews to record local African American musical history. Chuck continues to be an inspiring performer and friend who has given freely of his time to share his knowledge of Pittsburgh jazz.

Roger Barbour (Interviewed on November 19, 2008) Mr. Barbour was born in Oakdale, Pennsylvania in 1935. As a teen, he began visiting Pittsburgh with trumpeter Edwin

“Youngblood” Davis. Mr. Barbour continues to perform in Pittsburgh as a sideman and leader of the Roger Barbour Quartet.

Harold Betters (Interviewed on November 12, 2008) Born in Connellsville, Pennsylvania in 1928, Mr. Betters began working with his brother Jerry (vocals, drums) in the early 1950s. Mr. Betters has led a long and successful career as a trombonist and bandleader and continues to perform both locally and nationally.

Spencer Bey (Interviewed on January 16, 2009) Mr. Bey grew up on the Hill and served in the military from 1946 to 1949. Upon returning to Pittsburgh, Mr. Bey studied music at Philleon Studios and worked with local bandleaders including saxophonist J.C. Gordon and Drummer Joni Wilson.

John Brewer (Interviewed on August 27, 2008) Mr. Brewer is a historian who has lived, written about, and taught local African American history. We have coordinated our research on local music venues, which continues to inform my work on Pittsburgh jazz.

Cecil Brooks II (Interviewed on November 19, 2008 and January 13, 2009) Mr. Brooks grew up in the Hill District and used to “sneak out the window at 14” to play drums in local clubs. In 1947, Mr. Brooks toured with Sir Charles Thompson followed by work with local bandleaders including Tommy Turrentine, Walt Harper, Bobby Jones, and Harold Betters. Though in his eighties, Cecil remains youthful and continues to work both locally and nationally.

Thomas Burley (Interviewed on January 15, 2006) With fellow entrepreneur Les Montgomery, Mr. Burley ran the Crawford Grill No. 2 during the late 1990s. They went on to run the Crawford Grill on the Square in Station Square from 2003 to 2006. Mr. Burley’s daughter Janis has also supported jazz in Pittsburgh through her work with the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust.

Joe Harris (Interviewed on November 21, 2008) Born in 1926, Mr. Harris attended Allegheny High School where he played in the marching band and symphony orchestra. As a teen, Mr. Harris regularly performed in Pittsburgh for dances and floorshows. In 1944, he left Pittsburgh to tour with Snookum Russell’s band, which at the time also included trumpeter Tommy Turrentine, bassist Ray Brown, and guitarist Wes Montgomery. In 1946, Mr. Harris joined Dizzy Gillespie’s big band and went on to work many top jazz acts including Billy Eckstine, Erroll Garner, and James Moody. Mr. Harris returned to Pittsburgh in the late 1980s and where he has continued his career as an educator and performer.

Dr. Nelson Harrison (Interviewed on March 7, 2006) Dr. Harrison graduated from Westinghouse High School in 1959 where he played trombone in the school orchestra. In his teens, Nelson was regularly gigging on the local scene. He earned his Ph.D. in clinical psychology and has maintained a career as a performer and educator working alongside such notable artists as Count Basie and James Brown. Nelson has continued to guide and inspire Pittsburgh's younger generation of jazz musicians. He regularly performs in Pittsburgh, mostly on his "Trombetto," a four-valve brass instrument that he developed.

John Hughes (Interviewed on January 19, 2009) Mr. Hughes attended Duquesne University from 1941 to 1945 after which he worked as a pianist with the Al Hinton trio. The group worked in Cincinnati and Charleston settling in 1947 as the house band at the Crawford Grill no. 1. Mr. Hughes continues to perform and teach piano in Pittsburgh.

Roger Humphries (Interviewed on March 8, 2006 and December 5, 2008) Mr. Humphries began his professional career as a drummer during his early teens. In 1962, he joined saxophonist Stanley Turrentine and organist Shirley Scott's touring group and subsequently worked with such notable artists as Horace Silver and Ray Charles. Mr. Humphries continues to perform, teach, and lead jam sessions in which younger musicians learn the jazz tradition.

Tony Janflone Sr. (Interviewed on January 6, 2009) A second generation Italian American, Mr. Janflone grew up in Washington, Pennsylvania. In his youth and teens he was drawn to hard bop, soul jazz, R&B, and blues. After graduating high school in 1957, Mr. Janflone began playing guitar and began working with local bandleaders such as organist Bobby Jones. Mr. Janflone continues to live in Washington where he teaches and works as a guitar luthier.

Harold "Brushes" Lee (Interviewed on October 22, 2008) Born in 1926, Mr. Lee who has lived much of his life in the Hill District. He joined Steppin Fetchit's touring stage show in 1943 and returned to Pittsburgh to work as a sideman with such bands including Walt Harper's quintet.

Joe Negri (Interviewed on September 15 and December 17, 2008) Mr. Negri is a first generation Italian American who began his musical career in his early teens performing in Italian social clubs. Born in 1926, Mr. Negri has had a long and successful career as a sideman, bandleader, music educator, recording artist, and TV personality on the children's show "Mr. Roger's Neighborhood." Joe is a great friend and musical inspiration who continues to demonstrate the highest artistry as a guitarist.

Gene Ludwig (Interviewed on March, 8, 2006) Mr. Ludwig moved to Pittsburgh in 1942, graduating from Swissvale High School in 1955. After being drawn to local clubs such as the Hurricane and Musicians' Club, Mr. Ludwig switched from piano to organ, which became his life long instrument. Through his long performing and recording career, He has gained notable recognition both locally and nationally as a proponent of the instrument and "soul jazz." Mr. Ludwig passed away July 14th, 2010.

Thaddeus Mosley (Interviewed on November 2, 2008) Mr. Mosley was an English and Journalism major at the University of Pittsburgh. He freelanced as a journalist for the *Pittsburgh Courier* during the 1950s but was discouraged from full-time work in journalism due to racial discrimination. His work as a sculptor also began in the 1950s and he has had many subsequent exhibits and commissions that have gained him international recognition. Thad is also a great lover of jazz and a supporter of the arts. I often see him at Roger Humphries' jam sessions where he is quick to recall the decades of jazz greats who have come out of Pittsburgh. Thad's art is also a great inspiration. He is a gracious host and a visit to his studio draws you into a forest of towering wood and metal sculptures. A truly unique vision.

Jimmy Ponder (Interviewed periodically though 2005) Mr. Ponder grew up in Pittsburgh in Beltzhoover and began playing guitar at 14. After graduating High School in 1964, Mr. Ponder joined Organist Charles Earland whom he toured and recorded with for three years. During the 1970s and '80s, Mr. Ponder was based out of New York and Newark where he performed and recorded both as a sideman and bandleader. Known as "Uncle Jimmy" to his students, Mr. Ponder demonstrates a voracious dedication to music in every performance. I am deeply indebted to him for his musical guidance and inspiration.

Jack Purcell (Interviewed January 13, 2009) Mr. Purcell grew up in the southern suburbs of Pittsburgh and began taking violin lessons when he was 9. He started his first band in 1935 when he was 15 and quickly began working the local dance hall circuit. Mr. Purcell studied music at Carnegie Tech and worked in the Pittsburgh Symphony from 1948 to 1956. Beginning in the early 1950s, Mr. Purcell led one of the most successful society dance bands out of Pittsburgh.

Pat Reid (Interviewed on September 2007) Mrs. Reid worked as writer, junior editor, and staff member at the *Pittsburgh Courier* (1958 to 1961), was the vice president of the business and professional women's club and secretary of Pittsburgh's young adult chapter of the NAACP. I

met Mrs. Reid, along with her husband Walt, at a local jazz concert. Her insights into the musical life of the Hill have been of central importance for this study.

Chuck Spatafore (Interviewed on September 10, 2008 and January 5, 2009) Mr. Spatafore is a first generation Italian American who was born in the Hill District in 1933. A child of the swing and bebop eras, Mr. Spatafore has continued to work as a local sideman and bandleader. We first met on a gig with Don Aliquo Sr. and I was immediately struck with his humorous and energetic personality as well as his youthful excitement for playing jazz.

George “Duke” Spaulding (Interviewed on November 16, 2008) Mr. Spaulding was born in Asheville, North Carolina and came to Pittsburgh in 1941 where he began working with Hildred and Frank Humphries’ band. He has led a long career as a pianist, organist, and piano tuner. His early work with local artists included Leroy Brown’s quartet. The son of an AME Zion minister, Mr. Spaulding has maintained his roots in the church and continues to play organ for services. He is also the imperial organist for the Prince Hall Shriners and a member of the Masons.

Sandy Staley (Interviewed on November 17, 2008) Mrs. Staley was born in 1939 in Natrona, Pennsylvania. She worked from an early age as a singer and dancer with her father who led a local band in New Kensington. Mrs. Staley led a long career as a vocalist gaining recognition from musicians and audiences alike for her improvisational approach and interpretations of standards. She passed away September 1, 2009.

Lou Stellute (Interviewed on December 1, 2008) Mr. Stellute began his musical career in the mid-1960s with the John Bartel Quartet. The all-white group began touring the chitlin’ circuit and continued on to gain some acclaim within the fusion and rock communities. Mr. Stellute has continued to perform both locally and nationally and is a long time sideman with Roger Humphries. Lou, a subtle and understated individual, has developed a powerful and melodic voice on the tenor saxophone.

Hosea Taylor (Interviewed on September 15, 2007 and December 16, 2008) Mr. Taylor was born in the Hill District in 1928 though he grew up in Penn Township. He began playing saxophone in 1943 and has documented his early musical experiences in his self-published book *Dirt Street*.

George Thompson (Interviewed on December 11, 2008 and January 13, 2009) Born in 1927, Mr. Thompson joined Local 471 in the late 1940s. Mr. Thompson has led a long career as a sideman working extensively with bandleaders Walt Harper and Bobby Jones.

Dan Wasson (Interviewed on March 6, 2006) Mr. Wasson's musical career began in the early 1980s when he began to sit in on guitar in local black neighborhood bars. He has since moved to playing bass and become a regularly performing local musician. We met in the late 1990s at a local jam session where he was the band's bassist.

Warren "Judge" Watson (Interviewed on November 26, 2008) Mr. Watson attended Westinghouse High School where he played trumpet in Carl McVicker's orchestra club. After graduating in 1940, Mr. Watson attended Oberlin Conservatory followed by service in the Navy where he led a 17-piece band. After returning to Pittsburgh, Mr. Watson continued as a bandleader, performer and music educator while earning a law degree. He was later appointed a judge, which earned him the affectionate nickname amongst local musicians.

Harold Young (Interviewed on December 29, 2008) Mr. Young grew up in the Hill District and graduated from Schenley High School in 1952. He has remained in Pittsburgh as an active saxophonist and music educator. In 1973, Mr. Young founded the Jazz Workshop, Inc., which remains based out of the Homewood branch of the Carnegie library. The Workshop draws together musicians and community members with the aim of perpetuating the cultural traditions of jazz.

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