

A Repository of the Treasure of Cincinnati Jazz History

Back before the contemporary era (2013), there were venues where musicians played saxophones, clarinets, trumpets, trombones, upright basses, drum kits, pianos and guitars. They played swing and jazz, styles which were popular in the 1930s through the 1960s. This was a rich, swinging, vibrant, intelligent music with a sophisticated repertoire. In the Cincinnati area, besides the theaters downtown that had pit orchestras, there were fancy supper clubs - like the Beverly Hills, the Lookout House (both in Northern, Kentucky, actually), and Castle Farm - that featured dinner and dancing. There were burlesque gigs and strip clubs where musicians found employment. Cincinnati had local television and radio programs that featured live music and employed staff musicians and arrangers: The Ruth Lyons Show, Paul Dixon Show, Nick Clooney Show, Dennis Wholley Show - all aired five days a week. The Midwestern Hayride - first on radio and later on TV, employed country & western musicians.

There were black jazz clubs and white jazz clubs and some that were mixed. In the West End there was Cincinnati's Cotton Club where the best touring bands and musicians played. In my own memory in the early-70s, there was the Viking Lounge on Vine St. near the zoo, where I heard Yusef Lateef, Pharaoh Sanders, and McCoy Tyner at different times. And Ed Moss' Golden Triangle, Emanon and Mozart's (before that he had Love's Coffee House). There was Roberts' Neoteric Lounge on Hackberry & Wm. Howard Taft, which had formerly been known as Herbie's. Mahogany Hall presented jazz in Mt. Adams. There was the Soho Underground where Over-The-Rhine met the West End, and the Family Owl in Clifton. Downtown there was the Living Room where Thelonious Monk and Oscar Peterson performed. What is now called the "Jazz Festival" - an event that features R&B primarily, originated as the Ohio Valley Jazz Festival, which was held, first at the Carthage Fairgrounds, then Crosley Field, then Riverfront Stadium.

I had heard stories about Babe Baker's on Reading Rd. Lester Young and John Coltrane played there during my lifetime, but I was way too young to have experienced them. Jimmy McGary jammed with Sonny Stitt and Miles Davis, and was hired by Brother Jack McDuff as part of his local pick-up band. There were many great local Cincinnati musicians.

The Greenwich Tavern has been around for many years. I know that Gordy Brisker and Bill Berry had a group there in the late-50s. In a more recent era - the 1980s - there was a renaissance when Art Gore led a house band with Jim Anderson on bass and Bill Cunliffe on piano. They often backed traveling name soloists, such as, George Coleman and Sonny Fortune. The Greenwich also featured Jimmy Smith and Art Blakey.

There is a long history of jazz and jazz players in Cincinnati. Players learned from one another and from recordings. Many musicians were drawn to this area. It was a hot bed. Fats Waller was a resident musician on radio station WLW. Noted ragtime

composer Artie Matthews opened "The Cosmopolitan School of Music" which was attended by black music students, Cincinnati boasted 2 other serious music schools - The Conservatory of Music and The College of Music. Composer and noted jazz theorist George Russell was born here but left very early in his career