

James "Popeye" Maupin



Cherry Red <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyxoTFOtoBU>

James "Popeye" Maupin was born in Cincinnati in 1917. He always said his father had been a 6'8" Liberian Prince who played in the original Harlem Globetrotters. As a child, Popeye played the drums and danced on the streets of Cincinnati as people walking by would throw coins. However, he would say that his show biz career really began, when there was a notice in the paper one day that if someone would wrestle a bear at the Emory Auditorium he would be paid \$100.00. Twelve year old Popeye, already over 200 pounds, took the challenge and won the \$100.00 The next year he rode a Brahma bull bareback at Crosley Field for \$300.00.

Before WWII, he went to New York, became a Lindy Hopper, and was then hired to dance in the chorus of the Broadway show "Helzapoppin." A conscientious objector during WWII, he served two years in prison. He lost his eye in a construction accident. During the late 40s and into the 1950s, Popeye ran the Cotton Club in the West End for the Newport mob. It was one of the most famous black clubs in the country, holding more than 1,000 dancers per night. Every big band coming through the Midwest, had to go through Popeye, who got a piece of the action. When the government closed down the Cotton Club, Popeye managed the Sportsman Club in Newport. Like the original Cotton Club in New York, the mob wouldn't allow Blacks in the Sportsman Club. However they entrusted Popeye to run it.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Popeye reinvented himself, embraced the hippie lifestyle, and move to Mt. Adams, where he was identified as the Mayor of Mt. Adams and the grandfather for all the hippies passing through Cincinnati. Whenever he was asked how old he was, he would respond, "Two days older than dirt." In the early 1970s, I took Popeye into Rich & Ellie Goldman's 5th Floor Recording Studio, with Wilbert Longmire on guitar, Wayne Yeager on organ, John Young on bass, Grover Mooney on drums and Jimmy McGary on sax. We recorded an outrageous Longmire tune, "Sumpin' T'eat," "Nightlife," and "Cherry Red." Candidly, I can't tell the difference between that cut and this one. . . . [Popeye singing "Cherry Red"](#).

In 1972, I brought him to New York to become Popeye Arlens for the Arlens Department Store chain. He toured the country with his band, dressed like the Sultan of Kurdistan, and re-opened all the Arlens' stores across the country. In the 1980s, he moved to Los Angeles, lived in Hollywood and sang in all the clubs. He also became best friends with David Carradine. Around 1991, Popeye had a severe heart attack, and was brought back to life by medics with electric shock. In 1993, as his diabetes grew more severe, doctors told Popeye that he might lose his legs, he moved back to Cincinnati. Sadly, he was hospitalized and had his legs amputated. Soon thereafter, his heart finally gave out.

Popeye was the most lovable, funny, big-hearted Santa Clause of a personality anyone would ever meet. On July 26, 1993, Popeye's funeral was presented at Southern Baptist Church, at Reading Road and Lexington. Reverend James Milton presided. I loved Popeye and will forever miss him. Doug Yeager.

A Piece Written Upon The Death Of Harry Garrison - Pat Kelly

Who is Harry Garrison?

Harry Garrison, who died on September 20, 2013, just a week short of his 78th birthday, was the proprietor of The Player Piano Shop. His business rebuilt player pianos, and conventional pianos. I met him in 1975. I started working for him full-time in 1976. He was also a magician on stage, a smoke ring blower, a major collector of 78rpm recordings, art collector, and a former trustee of the Classic Jazz Society of Southwestern Ohio. The late Frank Powers was his best friend. Harry was a character, a super intelligent man with encyclopedic knowledge, a humorist, and a lover of the arts, especially music.

Origins of the Blue Wisp

I was working out on the sidewalk in front of his shop at 2029 Madison Rd. sometime in 1978 and noticed a hydraulic lift truck hoisting a sign to the bar/diner 2 doors away. The sign said, "Blue Wisp Jazz Club". As an aspiring young pianist who had paid some early dues on the Ed Moss scenes at The Golden Triangle and Emanon, and at jazz gigs at Shipley's, Miller's Pub and a variety of other places, I

was mystified. I looked at Harry and said, "What is this? What the hell is going on here?" Harry grinned and said, "You'll see, Patrick, You'll see!"

Why the Blue Wisp became a jazz club instead of a country/western bar

Paul Wisby, an early retiree from General Motors, due to a heart condition, operated the bar and diner 3 doors from the main building of The Player Piano Shop. I ate lunch there sometimes. I had seen Paul face down at the end of the bar on more than one occasion. He was a lanky, friendly, country sort of guy. Harry resided above his business at 2029 Madison Rd. When Paul told Harry that he was going to bring in country/western music to his club (no Blue Wisp Jazz Club sign yet) Harry wanted to dissuade him because he did not like the prospect of drunken fights and gunfire outside his residence. He also would have preferred music more to his own preference.

He told him, "No, Paul, you don't want country/western music, you want JAZZ!" Paul responded quizzically with, "JAY - IZZZ?!!!!"

Harry's patronage of the original Blue Wisp jazz scene

Once the sign was up, and after a couple weeks, there was one weekend where music was provided by Crosswind, a popular jazz/pop/fusion group. On the Saturday night of that gig, Paul Wisby gave me the gig for the following weeks.

Harry put a Steinway B grand piano in the club which, at that time, had a kitchen, a pool table, and pinball machines. The house band for the first 4 or 5 weeks was (Let it here be known--): Pat Kelly - piano, Marty Wittow - bass, Jon Vinegar - drums. At the suggestion of my friend Fred Hersch, who was then living in New York and making a name for himself, I called Jimmy McGary and asked him to be on the gig. He came by on a Saturday night after his wedding band gig, thought it was a hip scene, had fun playing with us, and decided to join us on the gig. Soon Donny Gauck became the drummer. I can't recall why Jon left. We became the house band.

Harry kept a piano of some sort in the Blue Wisp for years. The Steinway came out, a Weber went in. Later he put in a 9 ft. Baldwin. He never charged a cent. He drank there, and entertained with smoke ring shows and humor. Many a time we went to his apartment after the gig to hang out, listen to his recordings and have a nightcap with the band members, Popeye Maupin, and other friends. On a couple of occasions he drove the inebriated Jimmy home to Withamsville. BTW, we had a happening scene. The pool table and pinball machines were gone. We brought in a PA system for Paul to purchase. We initiated WNOP nights that were highly promoted and well attended and brought in guests - especially Cal Collins who hit it off with Paul due to the country connection. The place was jammin'. Our Thursday jam session were standing room only. I remember one time when a newcomer drummer to the area who was playing brushes on a phone book behind Kenny Poole at the Celestial came by. It was John Von Ohlen - the great veteran of Stan

Kenton and Woody Herman and other great bands - who later became a staple of the club.

How the Blue Wisp (Marjean) screwed over Harry

Harry moved the 9 ft. Baldwin to the Garfield Place location (the Wisp's second) after the club was forced to vacate the Madison Rd. club. (At this point, I, Jimmy, and our band was long gone. I think Jimmy called Paul a stupid, f----- hillbilly in an argument about money. We were fired. We had been there 3 nights a week for about a year and a half.) But the Wisp was in a Golden Age with JVO, Steve Schmidt and either Mike Sharfe or Lynn Seaton on bass as house trio. The Blue Wisp Big Band had formed and was successful.

Marjean, through someone, arranged to purchase a new grand piano from Krefling Pianos, a competitor of Harry. Negotiation with Harry was bypassed. It was just done - after years and years of patronage and providing a professional instrument - they spent money with someone else. Ingrates. It wasn't right. Harry never stepped into the place again nor spent a cent on them. And he was quiet about it - didn't want to make a big deal about it.

Harry was a good guy. I learned a lot from him as an employee and had lots of good times, too. If I may quote my friend Marc Wolfley:

"Harry was one of the most colorful Cincinnati characters I had the good fortune to know...a generous man who loved music and this community deeply. A merry gentleman who's presence will be missed and fondly remembered."

Let's celebrate Harry - because there would have been no Blue Wisp Jazz Club without him. The Paul and Marjean part of it was a fluke.