DOC EVANS
DIXIELAND
CONCERT

WALKER ART CENTER
COURTYARD

HISTORY OF JAZZ SERIES
VOL. 1

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TRUE REALISM
HI-FIDELITY
NOTES ON DOC EVANS’ HISTORY OF JAZZ SERIES—VOL. 1

A prevalent misconception regarding traditional jazz—or, as it is more commonly known, "Dixieland"—is that it is a "dead music," incapable of being performed with honesty, feeling, or genuine know-how by contemporary musicians; in short, that it has been supplanted by other, more "progressive" forms of jazz.

The lie is given to this legend by the famous Dixieland cornetist Paul "Doc" Evans and his Twin Cities band on this recording of excerpts from the first two of Evans' series of open-air jazz concerts at Minneapolis' Walker Art Center during the summer of 1957.

Evans, who is a household name in Minnesota, but whose reputation extends far beyond his native state, is that rare combination of artist, scholar, and man-with-a-message that often succeeds, as Evans has, in influencing to a large extent the public taste.

Thus, he has shown actively over the past decade—through widely-ranging personal appearances and recordings, both his own and those made with such jazzmen of stature as Joe Sullivan and Turk Murphy—that not only is Dixieland not dead, but that it is a popular music, in the best sense of the word; a music loved by thousands of all ages and all walks of life, who have never taken seriously the notion that anything so exuberantly compelling might well be, when all is said and done, passe.

So, with the present record: it proceeds from the classical idea that a great amount of good music of a certain kind exists, that there is a generally-established and good way of playing that music, and that both should be perpetuated through all passing fads. It presumes that Dixieland is here to stay.

The specific purpose of the record (first of a series of three), apart from its obvious musical and entertainment value, is to show what early listeners thought of as jazz from about the end of the 19th century to the middle of the third decade of the 20th. This is "The World of Buddy Bolden," the heritage of "Papa Laine's Children," and the ends to which they turned that heritage.

(There is an absence of applause on the first side of the record because it ruined the night of that concert and the music was played indoors, with the musicians returning the next day to the empty courtyard of the Center to record.)

THE WORLD OF BUDDY BOLDEN (1897-1917)

"Speaking of swell people," said Jelly Roll Morton, "I might mention Buddy Bolden, the most powerful trumpet player I've ever heard or that was known and the absolute favorite of all the hangarrounders in the Garden District of New Orleans."

First of the fabulous "kings" of the jazz trumpet, Bolden was a barber by trade, as well as editor and publisher of a local New Orleans scandal sheet. In the 1890s, he formed a band which, so far as historians of jazz have been able to tell, marks the beginning, both in instrumentation and manner of playing, of the music that we call traditional jazz or Dixieland today.

The band played in Storyville, the "tenderloin" district of New Orleans, which was isolated from the rest of the community as a "health measure" by the city fathers in 1897, and finally closed by the Secretary of the Navy at the start of World War I. Bolden, by this time, had gone berserk in the middle of a street parade in which he was playing and had been committed to an asylum.

"He studied too hard," said an old-time jazzman—and well he might have: untouched musical riches, raw materials, lay at his fingertips, and he was one of the first to try to form them, re-combine them, into jazz.

There was the cakewalk, for example, represented here (and probably for the first time on record) by the Whistlin' Rufus of Kerry Mills, better-known as the composer of At a Georgia Camp Meeting. There was the spiritual, already being transmuted into a rag, and suggesting a further transmutation of the leader-and-chorus, hand-clapping swing of such a specimen as the present Down by the Riverside into the basic beat of jazz.

All this jelled in Bolden's mind and came out The Girls Are All Crazy 'Bout the Way I Walk (except, as Evans reports, New Orleans veteran Bunk Johnson said, "I wouldn't exactly call them girls," and Evans himself adds, "I don't think the word was walk") and Get Outa Here, both of which—the tight ensembles, the hypnotic 4/4 beat, and the repetitious, almost primitive double 8-bar phrase which keeps recurring with an increasingly explosive intensity between solos in the latter tune—are Buddy Bolden's world, or as nearly a true representation of that world as we are likely to enjoy half a century removed.

PAPA LAINE'S CHILDREN (1917-1924)

It is not surprising that many of the young white musicians of New Orleans were excited by the new music sweeping out of the Negro quarter in the early 1900s. They found a rallying point in "Papa" Jack Laine, a drummer and local impresario of circus bands—nor is it surprising that there would be an affinity between this type of band and jazz. Much of early jazz was, expressly, marching music played for the many Negro fraternities and clubs of New Orleans which staged almost daily parades. The influence shows in the basically brass-band instrumentation of the Bolden band, which is essentially the instrumentation of the Dixieland band of today.

And it is here—the brass band and their familiarity with it—that the white musicians found entrance into what were then the mysteries of jazz. They had a good deal more to learn, and learned part of it—for example, the meaning and manner of the blues—imperfectly (as in the present charming, though inadequately earthy Blues and Farewell Blues). But what they learned, they turned splendidly into a "raggy" infectious style of playing such original multi-themed compositions as the Clarinet Marmalade and Eccentric also heard here.

In fact, perhaps unfairly, it was that same aggregation of Papa Laine's "children" responsible for Bluein' and Marmalade that first brought jazz to the national attention: when New Orleans Negro trumpet "King" Freddie Keppard refused to make the first jazz records "because then people will have a chance to steal my stuff," the Victor Recording Co. signed, in 1917, the white New Orleans Original Dixieland Jazz Band, which was already a center of acclaim at Reisenweber's Restaurant in New York.

Another young white group, the "New Orleans Rhythm Kings" (Farewell and Eccentric), was soon playing Chicago. Their music—closer to the Negro tradition than that of the ODJB because of a better understanding of the blues and an insistence on the 4/4 beat rather than the 2/4 now associated with Dixieland—"fathered," in turn, such white musicians as the MacPartlands, Eddie Condon, and Dave Tough (George Tupper of the Evans band played with the Rhythm Kings in 1925) and it was thus that the mainstream of New Orleans jazz was passed on, for better or for worse, to others, even younger would-be white jazzmen in the succeeding years.

Notes by Russell Roth