DOC EVANS
DIXIELAND
CONCERT

HISTORY OF JAZZ SERIES
VOL. 2

WALKER ART CENTER
COURTYARD
“Perhaps nothing in human history has spread across the earth so far, so fast as New Orleans music,” wrote Alan Lomax in Mister Jelly Roll. “Thirty years after its genesis it was as popular and understandable in New York, Paris, Prague, and Shanghai as in its own hometown.”

And so it continues, under the name of “Dixieland.” Its popularity and intelligibility at the opposite end of the Mississippi valley from New Orleans are attested in this sampling of the second pair of courtyard jazz concerts staged during the summer of 1927 at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, by Paul “Doc” Evans, perennial Dixieland cornetist, and his equally hardy Twin Cities band.

The object of this fifth annual series of appearances at the Walker by Evans and his men was to trace, in brief, musically, something of the history of that spread of Dixieland jazz from New Orleans across the face of the globe. The first two concerts — “The World of Buddy Bolden” and “Papa Laine’s Children” — dealt with jazz at its beginnings. In this record is depicted the ripening of jazz, its development into a classic form.

Chicago is the scene. The time is the 1920’s. The conditions of growth are the post-war Prohibition era with its throwing aside of restraints, its drinking, its gangsters, its reckless stock market speculations, and the emancipation of women. But an even more important historic factor in the growth of jazz was that vast migration of Negroes from the agricultural South to the industrial North — 50,000 of them to Chicago’s South Side alone — in search of work in the burgeoning factories of World War I and the boom years following.

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“The Twenties: A Pair of Kings in Chicago” was one result of that migration — trumpeters Joe “King” Oliver and Louis Armstrong following their people out of New Orleans, following to provide the music for the onrush to the North.

“The Twenties: Mister Jelly Roll in Chicago” was another result — the legendary genius of jazz composers battered by a hostile town, writing masterpieces out of the richness of his memories and the fury of a hurt ambition.

Veteran Dixieland trumpeter Bob Gruenefelder, native Twin Citian and an alumnus of the Harry Blons recording band, provides the second horn on the Oliver-Armstrong concert.)

THE 'TWENTIES: A PAIR OF KINGS IN CHICAGO

Joe Oliver looks every inch the king in the old-fashioned photos which show his band stiffly posed at Chicago's Royal Garden Cafe. He was a big man, and a dignified one, for on his shoulders rested the symbolic mantle won in “cutting” contests with other horn men when they tried to blow each other out of their respective bandwagons in the streets of Storyville.

He was not an innovator. He could read and write music, as well as playing jazz trumpet better than anybody else. He spent his talents bringing to its final fruition, both in structure and performance, practically the same music that had been heard in New Orleans for the past twenty-five years.

It had become a complex music — compositions of several themes, played out in closely-knit ensemble passages, punctuated by individual instrumental “breaks,” as in the Mabel's Dream of the present record. It has assimilated the blues, which Oliver played beautifully, as in the Jazzin' Baby Blues (also played here) of his composer-pianist Richard M. Jones. It had assimilated ragtime through the “stomp,” which Oliver played beautifully, too, as in the re-creation on this record of Snake Rag.

He didn’t try to change the music, he polished it, making of his band a kind of training-ground or “college” at which nearly every major Negro jazz figure of the day matriculated — among them Armstrong, the Dodds brothers, Ory, and St. Cyr. In this sense, a quasi-graduation exercise is Ory's Creole Trombone, commemorating the tent-show music which many of the New Orleans veterans had played.

Louis Armstrong joined the band shortly after it had reached Chicago. He was then a mere boy, a graduate himself — of the New Orleans Waifs' Home. But he was not a boy on trumpet; the recorded duets he played with Oliver made jazz history. He was the coming king — everybody knew that, including Oliver; but until “Prince Satchmo” was convinced of it, he remained with the band, supplying a major part of its significance.

When he left Oliver, he could never make up the loss. Although he has been called “the most important musician in Chicago between 1921 and 1930,” these last five years were waning ones for him. He began to lose his teeth, a trumpet-man's most precious assets. The hall in which he was playing burned down. Jobs fell through. He took to the road. When he finally died — on the road — all he had left was his fame. It burns brightly still.