“Blow the Curtain Open”

How Gene Hall and Leon Breeden Advanced the Legitimacy of Jazz in Music Education

Maristella Feustle
Music Special Collections Librarian
University of North Texas Music Library
Jazz Education Network, Dallas, TX
January 11, 2014
STAGE BAND

THERS COLLEGE is fortunate in having a stage band of exceptional versatility. This is comparatively a new field for musicians, and few colleges possess such a unit for entertainment. Under the direction of Floyd Graham a group of twelve talented musicians has given to the College the best in stage band entertainment. This unit accompanied the Eagle Band to El Paso last fall and was the object of admiration everywhere, winning commendations among the bands of other schools represented there. T. C. is justly proud of its stage band and has proved this pride by large attendance and sincere applause at the Saturday night shows. Each evening new features were introduced that will be long remembered by the students who regularly attended these events. In unique settings, the orchestra played the latest red-hot dance numbers as well as new and novel arrangements of all the old favorites. No were these programs pleasing to the ear alone; colored lighting effects and fanciful decorations brought stage into artistic harmony with the music. Too, supplementing the entertainment of the stage band, a chorus of six charming and well-trained dancers added further variety to the picture shows of our school. These girls were trained by Bill Ardis, who from time to time gave acrobatic and tap dances, as well as dress dances with his pupil, Elsie Reid, and later with another of his pupils, Mary Ruth Sewell. All these "brought down the house" with their numbers. In the chorus are Mary Ruth Sewell, Ruth Steele, Mary Belle Gilliam, Mildred Wood, Ruth Atkins, Evelyn Taylor.


All in all, the stage band has enjoyed a maximum popularity with the student body from the start. Its appeal is that of the spirit of youth and its place secure in memory as long as music has power to evoke memories in the human mind.

The T. C. Stage Band
Wilfred Conwell Bain
Gene Hall
Disputes over starting date, first director

- Nothing invites controversy like claiming to be the first to do something.
First...ish

1st North Texas Jazz Band

(Bob Dorough on piano)
(Claude Lueking - lead alto)
(Charles Lee Bell - 1st Ten)
(Clarence Wood - Bari)
(Frank Todd - 1st Bone)
(John Wood - 2nd Bone)
(Jim Cotten - 3rd Bone)
(Lloyd Perkins - 4th Bone)
(Dick Dalrymple - lead Jr)
(Bland War - 3rd Tr)
(Joseph Murray - 2nd Tr)
(Lee Cable - Dr)
(W. McClister - Ten)
Jack Stone - Tr

Gene Hall Lead Band
Walter Hodgson
EXACT COPY of letter to Dr. Hall from

Meridian, Mississippi

Mr. Hall
C/o Music Dept.
N. State Teachers College,
Denton, Texas

Dear Sir:

After listening to your interview, last night, with Arthur Godfrey, I am wondering how low a level the tastes, customs and/or habits of the American People will sink.

It seemed that you were very proud of the fact that yours was the only music dept. in the U.S. teaching Jazz music (or can it be called music?) Thank the Lord that yours is the only place. I should think that the efforts of the School could be put to a much more constructive use. I also wonder if the tax payers are paying the bill for this kind of drivel or if supported by individuals what type of persons they can be to finance such a sorry program.

And your chain gang contestants? Their costumes and music seems to put the stamp of approval on products of the penitentiary. It is rather alarming to me that the rank and file of the American People can be lured into this kind of "culture".

You might rightly tell me that this is none of my business and I will agree with you; you might want to tell me to go to hell and that will be O.K. I just could not resist letting you know one individual's opinion.

As I understand Jazz music, it originated with Negroes and is Negro music. Just why White People have to get down to that level and ape or copy something that belongs to that race, is more than I can understand.

Sincerely yours,
Breeden - 1959
“No goatees!”

NOTES FROM MY FIRST ORIENTATION MEETING WITH THE NTSU LAB BANDS, 1959, Fall Semester....

I'm Leon Breeden - will be serving as your Director - honored to be here...

We are in the jurisdiction of Ft. Worth, for those of you who want to perform with professional groups in the area. I have transfer information which will enable you to transfer from other locals around the country...

I suggest your getting a DATE BOOK in which you can keep all of your dates to avoid forgetting something important - they cost 10c at the bookstore...

All DANCE BAND MAJORS please stand....applause....Meet me after this meeting, please.

There are NO excused absences from arranging classes, improvisation classes, lab bands, etc. If you have to miss lab band you must get in touch with a sub to take your place...you might work out an agreement with some other guy to help him out/he helps you out/etc. It is a big bringdown to have guys out when the band is ready to rehearse!

Our policy on VISITORS to the Lab Bands:
   If you are in one of the other bands you may visit other ones in which you do not play, but DO NOT INTERRUPT THE REHEARSAL IN ANY WAY!
   If Out-of-town visitors come to see us they are welcome to attend rehearsals...

Smoking is prohibited in classrooms or in the halls in Music Hall. This includes Orchestra Hall and the lobby outside Orchestra Hall.

Check to be sure all forms are filled out and returned to me..

Anything that makes you a "character" is strictly out-of-bounds in this department!!

Many people think of jazz players as dopeheads, drunks, etc. - 'Tain't so!!! IT WON'T BE HERE AT LEAST!!

No goatees! A well-trimmed moustache is o.k.

We'll post "Availability Lists" for possible jobs on the outside - watch the bulletin board...

I'm hoping we can get some jazz groups on the Student Recitals.

Keep your grades up in ALL classes! Remove "X's" during the semester in which they are given! You are here to learn, to improve, to prepare for the life ahead! It takes work and determination - we expect your BEST no matter what you are doing!

INTRODUCTION OF ASSISTANTS FOR THIS SEMESTER: MORGAN POWELL - who will be playing in the 2:00 Band and conducting the 3:00 Band - Morgan??! (applause) BOB PICKERING - plays in the 2:00 and conducts the 5:00 Band. Bob??! (applause) LANNY STEELE - plays in the 2:00 and conducts a small group at 4:00.....Lanny??! (applause)

All bands will have the chance to play most of the same music...some is written for specific groups and will be too difficult (or have wrong instrumentation) for ALL bands.
Breeden and Kenton
Ellington and Getz with the 1:00
Lou and Lady Bird

March 18, 1967

The 1:00 O’clock VTSU Jazz Band members were guests of Mrs. Lyndon Johnson in the private quarters of the White House. The photograph was taken immediately after our reception there...
WHAT IS A “LAB BAND?”

The “Lab” Band derives its name from LABORATORY BAND. The name indicates the true nature of the organization—it exists for experimentation of new ideas in all areas of contemporary music. It is often jazz but also much more than jazz as one hears it commercially presented. While some of the music has its roots in the fundamental nature of jazz the educational approach is far removed from the generally-known struggles of early-day jazz.

The men in the bands (there are SIX of these bands rehearsing daily at North Texas State University) have the freedom to compose and arrange as they wish with the knowledge that their music will be heard. Often it is “trial, error, and correction!” as in any laboratory situation.

Graduates of the School of Music with Lab Band experience have entered professional work in recording studios, motion picture orchestras, and with professional orchestras over the country. The greatest number of graduates enter the teaching profession where one of their assignments will often be to direct the High School “Stage Band” (sometimes called “Lab Band” or “Dance Band” but almost always “Stage Band”). The exact number of these Stage Bands is not known although some feel that it may have reached the 10,000 mark.

Serious directors of these stage bands are in general agreement that the organization is an addition to the music program and should not replace any other group. Students are thus given the opportunity to explore music in almost all of its possibilities. Our goal at North Texas is to help to prepare these directors so that the highest goals of musicianship may be attained.

Some recent performances of the Lab Band:
Performance in the West Auditorium; Department of State; Washington, D.C.
Joint concert with the Los Angeles Neophonic Orchestra under the direction of Stan Kenton at the Music Center in Los Angeles.
Tour of universities in nineteen cities in Mexico for the Office of Cultural Presentations; Department of State; Washington, D.C.
Concert on June 27, 1967 at the White House by Presidential Invitation for the visiting King and Queen of Thailand. Duke Ellington and Stan Getz were guest performers with the Lab Band on this occasion.
PROGRAM

To be selected from the following arrangements and compositions:

1. S-t .................................................. Don Sebesky
2. Concertino** ........................................ Dan Haerle*
   Gary Grant, Trumpet
   Charles Wilson, Alto Saxophone
   Tom McCall, Trombone
3. Goodbye, Porkpie Hat** ......................... Charlie Mingus, Arranger Tom Boras*
   Ray Lockle, Tenor Saxophone
   John Monaghan, Bass
4. Hello, Young Lovers ..................... Rodgers & Hammerstein, Arranger Kim Richmond
   Bruce Fowler, Trombone
5. A New Day ........................................... Dee Barton*
   Sal Marquez, Trumpet
6. Falling in Love with Love** .............. Rodgers & Hart, Arranger Mike Heathman*
7. Childhood† ........................................ "Tex" Allen*, Arranger Lou Marinis*
8. Codify .............................................. Lou Marinis*
9. Three Thoughts ................................ Dee Barton*
10. Sight-Reading Selection .................. Paul M. Kelly
11. Flashes ............................................. Lou Marinis*
12. Of Five Spot .................................. C. Lloyd, Arranger Tom Boras*
13. Sweet William ............................... Lou Marinis*
14. Norwegian Wood ............................ Jeff Sturgis*
15. Too Much Sake ............................... H. Silver, Arranger Gary Grant*

*Indicates students or former students—all members of the Lab Band at one time.
†"Childhood" respectfully dedicated to Danny Leon Breden, tragically killed by a "hit-and-run" driver in Dallas on February 11, 1968. Danny was the aspiring and wonderful nineteen-year-old son of our director, Leon Breden.
"Tex" Allen, Composer
Lou Marinis, Arranger

PERSONNEL OF THE LAB BAND

Reeds:
Mike Campbell
Chuck Wilson
Louis Marinis
Ray Lockle
Tom Boras

Trumpets:
Gary Grant
Jay Sanders
Sal Marquez
Mark Hurdle
Fletcher Wiley

Trombones:
Tom Mahone
Bruce Fowler
Jeff Sturgis
Chuck Compson
Jim Clark

Piano:
Bobby Haschen

Bass:
John Monaghan

Drums:
El Soph

Guitar:
Frank Kimlicko

Vibes:
Fred Stites

Major:
Junior Music Education
Sophomore Saxophone
Senior Music Education
Senior Music Education
Senior Composition

Hometown:
Covington, Kentucky
Rockport, Texas
Bowling Green, Ohio
McPherson, Kansas
Elmwood Park, Illinois

Ocala, Florida
Sacramento, California
Brawley, California
Sumnerhill, Pennsylvania
Seattle, Washington

Sumrall, Mississippi
Salt Lake City, Utah
Alexandria, Virginia
Palos Park, Illinois
Commerce, Texas

Houma, Louisiana
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Huntsville, Texas
Mimsrytownt, Florida
Kalamazoo, Michigan

*Recorded on "Lab 47" album by the North Texas Lab Band — available from the Lab Band Office, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 76203
April 11, 1968

Mr. Leon Breeden
1309 Tulane Drive
Denton, Texas 76201

Dear Leon:

Although you already know how deeply I appreciate the contribution you made to our recent Seattle Convention, I want to write on behalf of all MENC members to thank you again for helping to make this an outstandingly successful Biennial. Your role in bringing us a musical program of great excellence was an indispensable one. I trust that the experience was gratifying to you, as it was to those who were privileged to attend your performance.

As a follow-up of the convention, I am writing to the Governor, two United States Senators, and Chief State School Officer of every state from which a performing group participated in the Seattle program. A copy of the letter, which draws attention to the group you conducted, is enclosed for your information.

We look forward to many more opportunities to cooperate with you in furthering the aims of the Music Educators National Conference. In the meanwhile, my warm personal greetings and good wishes.

Sincerely,

Louis G. Wersen
President

Enclosure
UNT Music Library

Willis Library, 4th Floor

- Maristella.Feustle@unt.edu

- http://findingaids.library.unt.edu → Departments → Music Library