

The Wisconsin-Texas Jazz Nexus

Dave Oliphant

Oliphant, The Wisconsin

Jack Teagarden, courtesy of CLASSICS RECORDS.

As jazz critic Gunther Schuller has commented, it is surprising to discover the "diverse regions of the country" from which jazz musicians have hailed.¹ It is especially surprising that such musicians, with differing geographical, political, social, religious, ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds, have been able to come together to perform a music that requires a very particular spirit, peculiar technical skills, and a sensitivity to and an appreciation for musical forms and traditions that owe their origins to conditions rarely endured by the musicians themselves. Few, if any, of the first black jazzmen, and certainly none of the early white jazzmen, had ever known the often inhuman servitude borne by those who sang the chants, spirituals, and blues that would form the basis of jazz from its beginnings right up to the present time.

The institution of slavery had, of course, divided the nation, and on opposite sides in the Civil War were the states of Wisconsin and Texas, both of which sent troops into the bloody, decisive battle of Gettysburg. Little could the brave men of the Wisconsin 6th who defended or the determined Rebels of the Texas Regiments who assaulted Cemetery Ridge have suspected that, one day, musicians of their two states would join to produce the harmonies of jazz that have depended so often on the blues form that was native to the Lone Star State yet was loved and played by men from such Wisconsin towns and cities as Fox Lake, Madison, Milwaukee, Waukesha, Brillion, Monroe, and Kenosha.² Around the world, jazz has proven a force for the meeting of minds and the free exchange of musical ideas, whether through melancholy and fast-paced blues or the swinging, bopping, driving rhythms that have appealed to players and listeners in every corner of this country and those perhaps in every nation on earth.

By defeating the South in the Civil War, Wisconsin and the other Union states helped make possible in many ways the rise of blues, ragtime, and boogie woogie, forms of black music whose origins have been traced in part to the migration of freed slaves to Texas. The railroad lines in East Texas provided employment for men who had been able to do little more than labor away relentlessly as sharecroppers on the same southern lands where they essentially remained in bondage during the postwar Reconstruction. As Texas folklore scholar Alan Lomax has pointed out, more American music has referred to or been related to the railroad than any other form of musical inspiration.³ Certainly the railroad as a source of sound and sorrow is at the root of blues rhythms and lyrics and the chugging, swaying patterns of boogie woogie, as well as such a sophisticated jazz composition as Duke Ellington's "Daybreak Express." Songsters with their constant reference to a honey or momma going away or a singer's need to leave in the face of lost love are standard blues fare.

However, more important to the emergence of jazz was the fact that the railroad gave to blacks in Texas relatively more freedom to travel, to work at jobs that allowed for greater economic well being and the ability to purchase instruments, to hear radios and recordings, and to develop their music in association with their fellow blacks who began to congregate in cities, such as Dallas and Houston. While the Deep South languished to a large degree under the burden of what William Faulkner refers to as a reliving of "the moment before Pickett's charge, as if the outcome [of Gettysburg] could be changed," Texas moved on and developed a cattle industry in the 1870s and then in the early 1900s an oil industry, both of which offered jobs and a peripatetic lifestyle for blacks that eventually led to their creation of jazz in many parts of the state.⁴

By 1918, black musicians from New Orleans had begun to migrate west and north, many ending up in Texas, California,

and Chicago. Texas blacks had earlier followed the cattle trails north, but, in the 1920s, they also felt the magnetic pull of entertainment worlds in Kansas City and Chicago that catered to musicians who could perform the new music called jazz that had begun to crop up from New Jersey to Los Angeles, beholden to but superseding the guitar-accompanied country blues and the repetitive piano rags. The first jazz recordings had begun to appear in 1917, and, by 1923, classic jazz ensembles had begun performing in Kansas City, Chicago, and New York, led by such seminal figures as Bennie Moten, King Oliver, Fletcher Henderson, and Duke Ellington. Texans had been at the forefront of black music, beginning with Scott Joplin of ragtime fame and continuing with Blind Lemon Jefferson, the King of Country blues, and some of the earliest boogie woogie pianists who had recorded by 1924 in Chicago.⁵ Texans also were present on some of the earliest and most vital jazz recordings, including several made in 1923 by Bennie Moten, Jelly Roll Morton, and Fletcher Henderson.

At the end of the 1920s, two of the most important Wisconsin jazz musicians appeared on the scene: trumpet star Bunny Berigan of Fox Lake and clarinetist Woody Herman of Milwaukee.⁶ Around 1928, contact between Wisconsin and Texas occurred in jazz terms when Woody Herman reportedly toured the state of Texas with the Joe Lichter band, with which he had played during high school.⁷ This marked the first in a fascinating series of musical intersections between Wisconsin and Texas, but rather than through musicians visiting one another's states, it came primarily through their participation in recording sessions that took place elsewhere, usually in Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles. For at least five decades, from the 1930s into the 1970s, a number of Wisconsin and Texas sidemen worked together to create a wide variety of jazz, often based on the blues form. Indeed, during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Wisconsin and Texas jazz musicians would take part in recording sessions that produced outstanding examples of the prominent jazz styles of those periods, from swing to bop to the cool West Coast sound.

Although there were no Wisconsin musicians present—at least so far as I can tell—on a recording of "Bugle Call Rag," made in Los Angeles in 1923 by the group called Jimmie's Joys, this performance comes from the year of an outpouring of jazz recordings that included the first appearances on records of King Oliver and Louis Armstrong, and this piece is a remarkable example of jazz style and technique.⁸ Jimmie's Joys was a group of musicians from Austin who regularly played for dances at the University of Texas, and their rendition of "Bugle Call Rag" already contains many, if not all, the characteristics of jazz, including the use of a well-known natural or manmade sound as the basis for a piece of music—in this case, a bugle call; breaks, in which a soloist inserts a phrase or passage when the rest of the band stops playing; quotations from popular songs, here the

University's anthem, "The Eyes of Texas," and "Yankee Doodle Dandy," the latter quoted by the trombonist; jazz techniques like flutter tonguing by the cornetist and smears by the trombonist; and some swinging group improvisation.

The breaks in this piece are taken by cornetist, saxophonist, trombonist, and pianist, with each contributing a brief solo or a quote from another tune, and such breaks derive largely from the blues, since at the end of each line of verse when the blues man or woman is not singing, an instrument fills in the remaining beats in a bar with comments on what has been sung, which is the origin of jazz

player Red Callender quotes from the same song, which struck me as either a strange coincidence or some type of connection between the notes in "Bugle Call Rag" and those in "Yankee Doodle Dandy." The musical link between the two pieces may be part of the explanation, but in fact on the first recording of "Bugle Call Rag," made in 1922 by the New Orleans Rhythm Kings (NORK), trombonist George Brunis quotes from "Yankee Doodle Dandy," and it is clear that much of this 1922 jazz version was copied by Jimmie's Joys the following year.¹⁰

However, why would an advanced group such as the JATP, in

the same year of the first Bebop recording session (reportedly organized by Texan Budd Johnson), resort to quoting a rather corny flagwaving tune such as "Yankee Doodle Dandy?" It seems unlikely that Callender would have imitated the NORK recording, since so much early jazz tended to be rejected as out of date by later practicing musicians. However, this could be unfair to Callender, who may well have been aware of a tradition established by NORK and carried on by Jimmie's Joys.

In terms of the Wisconsin-Texas nexus, more to the point is the solo electric guitar work of Les Paul, who would later achieve his greatest fame in 1951 with singer-guitarist Mary Ford on their version of "How High the Moon," which pioneered the use of overdubbing. Paul would have known the work



Budd Johnson on saxophone, courtesy of Franklin Driggs.

improvisation. Eventually jazz solos could extend over the entire side of a long playing record, but on this cut of "Bugle Call Rag," each solo break is quite brief, yet still represents an important aspect of any instrumental blues or jazz performance.

Leaping ahead twenty-one years to 1944, we find a recording of a live performance of the very same "Bugle Call Rag," featuring members of the group billed as Jazz at the Philharmonic.⁹ On this date, the JATP musicians included tenor saxophonist Illinois Jacquet from Houston and guitarist Les Paul from Waukesha, Wisconsin. Just as in the 1923 recording, on which the trombonist quotes from "Yankee Doodle Dandy," here bass

of Texas-born electric guitarist Charlie Christian, which influenced every subsequent performer on the instrument. Certainly a number of Paul's pinged notes and his guitar phrasing recall Christian's sound and style. Following Paul's break is Illinois Jacquet's solo, which includes his suddenly playing a low note on his tenor that was, because of the Texan's frequent use of this device, termed a "Texas honk." Also typical of Jacquet's saxophone playing are his patented wild shakes and squeals, which he almost single-handedly made a part of the jazz tenor style, in turn influencing many a saxophonist in later rock and roll bands. The all-out jam that concludes this version of "Bugle Call Rag"

finds Paul's zinging, ecstatic electric guitar and Jacquet's screaming, high-pitched tenor combining to convert this ragtime tune into an updated JATP exhibition full of exhilarating sonic booms and a crowd-pleasing frenetic pace. Also significant here is the fact that JATP organizer Norman Granz broke the color line by writing into every contract that blacks and whites could attend the concerts together, just as black Texan Illinois Jacquet jammed with white Les Paul from Wisconsin.

Backing up ten years to 1934, we find an early pairing of Wisconsin and Texan jazz artistry on recordings by the Adrian Rollini Orchestra. Two tunes, "Davenport Blues" and "Riverboat Shuffle," feature trumpeter Bunny Berigan and Texas trombonist Jack Teagarden of Vernon in something of a swing version of the Dixieland style.¹¹ The first tune opens with Teagarden's smooth trombone sound, after which the various musicians of the group, which include Benny Goodman on clarinet and the Rollini brothers, Adrian and Arthur, on bass and tenor sax, respectively, take

then Bunny Berigan on trumpet, followed by Chu Berry on tenor, and finally Teddy Wilson on piano. Almost ten years before the JATP live recording, this studio performance is an example of a mixed black and white group creating together beautifully and movingly thirty years before the advent of racial integration. Berigan proves on this piece that he possessed a true feeling for the blues and could express it through his impeccable control of his horn in every register. Likewise, Teddy Wilson, who rarely recorded the blues, demonstrates his deep identification with the form and its often somber state of mind, even as he exhibits his piano artistry with its rippling runs and ringing tones. Both of these instrumentalists were better known for their renditions of pop songs, in Wilson's case when he worked with the Benny Goodman Trio and with singer Billie Holiday.

Berigan's most famous recording came in 1937, with his stirring version of "I Can't Get Started," which featured both his technically secure trumpet playing and his romantic vocal treat-

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their turns at soloing. Berigan only appears briefly as a soloist, whereas Teagarden returns for a full-blown chorus, before the side ends with his opening theme statement plus a few variations that show off his inimitably tossed-off lip turns. On "Riverboat Shuffle," Berigan can be heard ably leading the ensemble, but here again Teagarden enjoys the lion's share of the soloing, demonstrating as he does his virtuoso handling of his horn.

A more impressive coupling of Berigan and Teagarden occurred five years later when they formed part of an All Star Band that once again included Benny Goodman and Arthur Rollini. Here, on a piece entitled "Blue Lou," which is not really a blues but a very popular riff swing number written by black saxophonist Edgar Sampson, Berigan solos first with some of his spectacular high register work, after which Big T follows with one of his powerhouse breaks full of his robust but always relaxed swing.¹² Berigan then returns for a second solo with more of his skyrocketing high notes. Both of these soloists were certainly virtuosos on their instruments and influential on all subsequent jazz musicians who aspired to mastery of the trumpet and trombone. No matter what state they came from, each had learned the art of jazz and could "talk" the same musical language that would become universally understood and admired.

In 1935, Berigan joined forces with another Texas-born jazzman, pianist Teddy Wilson of Austin, for a recording entitled simply "Blues in E-Flat."¹³ This piece is a classic blues with fine extended improvisations, first by Red Norvo on vibes,

ment of the song's fetching lyrics. A 1936 film clip with Bunny singing and playing the trumpet on the tune "Until Today," with the Freddie Rich Orchestra, does not make the same impact as hearing his rendition of "I Can't Get Started," but it does furnish a close-up of the handsome young musician in action, only five years before his premature death at age 33.¹⁴ Teddy Wilson would live until 1986, recording widely, including a session with bebop giants Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie in 1945. However, the 1935 date with Berigan and Wilson stands as an early example of the superlative, sophisticated jazz playing of two musicians, one from a Wisconsin farming community and the other Texas-born and Tuskegee educated.

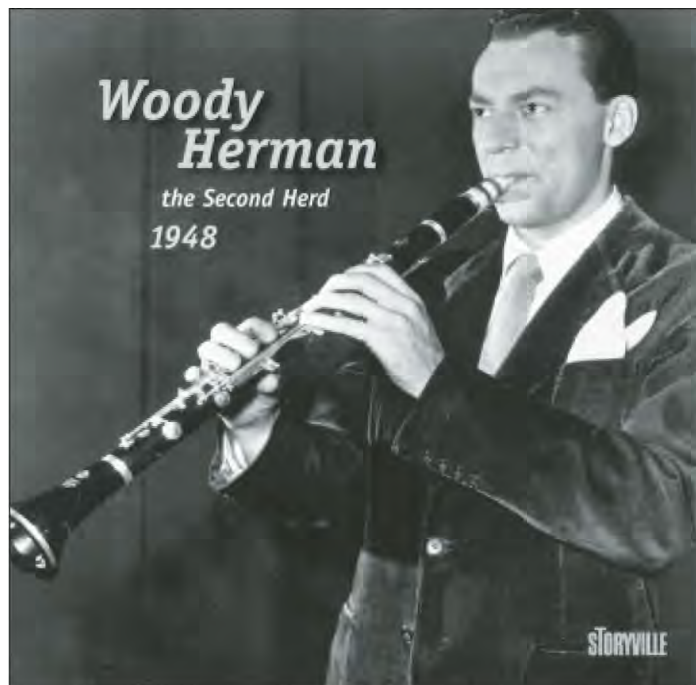
On the 1937 recording of Berigan and his orchestra performing "I Can't Get Started," his star trombonist at the time was "the great Sonny Lee" of Huntsville, Texas, who "played both lead and jazz trombone."¹⁵ Since this piece was a feature for the trumpeter-leader, Lee did not take a solo, but he would on two other tunes recorded by the Berigan orchestra in the same year. On "The Prisoner's Song," Berigan opens with a type of wa-wa mute, and later solos without the mute, bending, ripping, and shaking his notes in a typical jazz style, as does Sonny Lee on trombone, whose open solo shows that he had been listening to his fellow Texan, the "Big T."¹⁶ Lee's entrance is assertive swing of the kind that Teagarden trademarked from the late 1920s, with Lee romping and riding, just as Teagarden did, and echoing the latter's patented lip turns and some of his flexibility on

what, prior to Teagarden, had been considered a rather difficult instrument to manipulate. Also in 1937, the Berigan orchestra recorded "Mahogany Hall Stomp," and again Lee takes a fine solo, although this time using a mute, which softens his sound, even though he still maintains his swing and shows off his considerable technical skill.¹⁷ Both of Lee's solos demonstrate that he was a real pro, and obviously for this reason, he was spotlighted by the Wisconsin trumpeter-leader in what at the time was one of the more popular swing-era orchestras.

In 1936, before Sonny Lee joined the Berigan orchestra,

he was a member of the first band—an eight-piece group—led by Wisconsin clarinetist Woody Herman. On a number entitled "Take It Easy," Lee plays an obbligato to Woody's singing of the pseudo blues lyrics, with nice lip turns and a mellow sound, and then takes a short break toward the end of the song.¹⁸ A fuller example of Lee's blues playing is found on the tune entitled "I've Had the Blues So Long," where he works within a true blues groove. Here Herman again sings the lyrics and also takes up his clarinet for a few tasteful licks. On a piece entitled "Slappin' the Bass," Lee contributes a driving break on this up tempo tune, displaying more of his fine technical facility. Exhibiting Lee's range is his warm, extended mute solo on the tune "Nola," with the Texan's flexible phrasing followed by Herman's lilting clarinet. Lee's most impressive outing comes on "Fan It," where the trombonist shows that he could approach the level of Teagarden's technical prowess, as Sonny trills, rips upward, leaps from low to high notes, and in general offers a swinging brand of 1930s jazz. The jam at the end of this piece has Herman's clarinet wailing above and Lee blowing riffs below and tailgating in the best Dixieland manner. As the featured trombonist in both the Berigan and Herman bands of the late 1930s, Sonny Lee participated in the most popular recordings of the star trumpeter and was a member of the first of many bands that the clarinetist would lead, in which, as we shall see, a number of Texans would perform prominent roles.

In 1937, Herman's band included Houston-born alto saxophonist and arranger Dean Kincaide, but this Texan did not solo in any of the performances of that year and was more im-



Woody Herman, courtesy of Storyville Records.

portant as an arranger in the Wisconsin leader's rise as a big-band star. Herman's most famous number, entitled punningly "At the Woodchopper's Ball," was first recorded in 1939, with the first of the leader's bands to be referred to as The Herd. Here, once again, a Texan played a central role on this first recording of a tune that ultimately sold five million copies, "one of the biggest big band monster hits ever."¹⁹ The trumpet player who solos using a wa-wa mute with hand effects to produce some excellent growls and syncopation is Horace "Steady" Nelson, who was born in Jefferson, Texas, in 1913, the

same birth year as that of Woody Herman. Like much of Herman's early material, "At the Woodchopper's Ball" was based on a blues pattern, and in fact Herman's outfit was known during this period as The Band That Plays the Blues.²⁰ By this date, the Herman Herd was already a very swinging band, even before its more famous period after the war in 1945. The roaring open trumpet solo on "Big Wig in the Wigwam" is not identified but could be the work of Nelson. The same is true of "Dallas Blues," on which of course it would be wholly appropriate if the Texas trumpeter were the one taking the solo that is as forceful as on the previous blues. It certainly does sound to my ear like the same trumpeter who solos on "Woodchopper's Ball," which has been credited to Nelson.

Another tune on which Nelson performs is "Blue Prelude," from 1940, which served at the time as the band's theme song.²¹ Once more Nelson plays a wa-wa response to the lyrics sung by Herman, with the trumpeter's sound and style reminiscent of Cootie Williams, who at the time was doing his more famous wa-wa treatments for the Duke Ellington Orchestra. In 1941, Nelson returned to Texas, where in Houston he had first played in clubs on South Main before joining up with Herman. Nelson later moved to California, where he performed on the radio shows of Gary Moore, Dinah Shore, and Jimmy Durante, and also played with the bands of Jimmy Dorsey and Hal McIntyre.²² However, it was Nelson's brief stay with Woody Herman that placed him at the beginnings of the Herd tradition and involved him in the recording of some of the Herman unit's most vital blues numbers, "At the Woodchopper's Ball" and "Blue Flame."

In 1944, Woody Herman would, for the first time, record in the new bebop-influenced style of his bands of the mid to late 1940s, and on this occasion, too, a Texan—in fact two Texans—would form part of the Herman Herd that cut a tune entitled “Cherry.” Soloing on tenor saxophone is Budd Johnson, a black multi-reed musician from Dallas. Not soloing but present in the saxophone section is Mexican-American multi-reed musician Ernie Caceres from Rockport, Texas. Woody’s clarinet is in especially fine form on this rocking, bluesy tune, but it is Budd Johnson soloing on tenor who digs deeply into his emotive bag to come up with some tones and lines that were unusual for the Herman band and were the first black jazz inflections to be heard on the group’s recordings. Joop Visser even concedes that Johnson’s “happy synthesis of [the styles of tenor saxophonists] Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins . . . steals the show.”²³

Also, the combination of black and Mexican-American musicians was another first for the band, with a later version of the Herd briefly including black alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges and Cuban trombonist Juan Tizol, both from the Ellington Orchestra. Another tune on which Budd Johnson performs admirably is entitled “It Must Be Jelly (‘Cause Jam Don’t Shake Like That).” Although Herman and vocalist Frances Wayne sing the novelty lyrics for fun, Johnson’s tenor is not fooling around, as he once again digs in for some beautiful, serious jazz, filled with swooping phrases, bent notes, and a conversational style, followed by Herman’s pure, penetrating tone on clarinet. Instrumentally, the contrasting sounds and approaches of the two

musicians complement one another and make for a fully satisfying performance.

Next to “At the Woodchoppers’ Ball,” probably the most famous number Herman recorded was “Four Brothers,” a composition and arrangement by Texas multi-reed musician and composer Jimmy Giuffre of Dallas. Giuffre’s arrangement for three tenor saxophones and a baritone established an identifiable bebop-era sound for the Herman Herd, which continued to employ the same saxophone set-up for several decades to come.²⁴ The first recording of “Four Brothers,” made in December 1947, featured the four brothers of the title, which refers to saxophonists Zoot Sims, Serge Chaloff (on baritone), Herbie Steward, and Stan Getz, who solo in turn and conclude the piece with cameo breaks. Giuffre was not a member of the Herd at the time of this recording but would appear as a tenor saxophonist in the Herman band during 1948 and 1949.

One tune recorded in July, 1949, is entitled “Not Really the Blues,” of which it has been observed that the piece “happens to be one of the few jazz compositions with a totally apt title. It is the blues, but spread out over sixteen bars instead of the usual twelve.”²⁵ One of the trumpets in the 1949 Herd was Shorty Rogers of Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and it was through the association of Giuffre and Rogers as alumni of the Herman band that they later worked together in Los Angeles, recording under the name of Shorty Rogers and His Giants. In 1955, Rogers and Giuffre recorded a stirring quintet version of “Not Really the Blues,” with Giuffre soloing to wonderful effect on



Jimmy Giuffre, second from right on sax, courtesy of Franklin Driggs.



Harry Babasin on bass with Woody Herman's Second Herd, courtesy of Franklin Driggs.

tenor, with his funky, down-home style in full tilt, and Rogers swinging away with his typical non-stop trumpet line.²⁶

Woody Herman was responsible for training and promoting innumerable sidemen who went on to success on their own, and Jimmy Giuffre was but one Texan who profited from working with the Wisconsin leader. Giuffre's own piano-less trio, formed around 1956, brought him the widest recognition, both for his playing and his writing talents. At the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival, Giuffre performed with his trio consisting at the time of Bob Brookmeyer on trombone and Ralph Peña on bass. A film of the Festival captures the Giuffre 3 performing one of his more famous compositions, the folksy tune entitled "The Train and the River," written originally for his trio with Jim Hall on guitar.²⁷

Another Herman alumnus from Texas was bassist Harry Babasin of Dallas, who was in the Second Herd of 1948, along with Giuffre and Rogers. Babasin participated in a recording session on May 12 that produced another version of Giuffre's

band jazz.²⁸ Babasin himself would, like Giuffre, end up in Los Angeles where, in 1952, he arranged for and performed on a recording session with Charlie Parker and Chet Baker, and, in 1953, he would form part of an historic recording on which jazz and bossa nova were first combined.²⁹

The next Texan to form part of the Woody Herman organization was Gene Roland, also of Dallas. A fellow student with Jimmy Giuffre and Harry Babasin at North Texas State University in Denton, Roland is credited with the idea of arranging for a sax section of four tenors, which Giuffre modified in writing and arranging his "Four Brothers" for the Herman Herd. Roland was the first important arranger for the Stan Kenton Orchestra in the mid 1940s but also arranged for a number of other bands, including that of Woody Herman, whose staff he joined in 1957 as chief arranger. In 1958, Roland arranged seven of the twelve tunes recorded by the Herman band for its album entitled *Woody Herman '58*. In speaking of his arrangement of "Blue Satin," Roland remarked that it was a "slow blues typically in the Woody

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"Four Brothers," but unfortunately this live recording from the Hotel Commodore in New York does not pick up the bassist's notes as fully as one could wish, although in the opening of Giuffre's tune he can be heard clearly keeping time and also furnishing just the right notes for the soloists. Babasin also comes through on the tune entitled "The Goof and I," in which his bass lines are audible behind the sax soloists and between some of the section work, though he tends to be drowned out frequently by the thundering drummer. Babasin's bass is clearest during Woody Herman's brief solo, as, again, two men from distant states work well together to create some swinging big-

Herman idiom," which reveals that the Texan was well aware of Herman's "language strongly influenced by Basie and Ellington," and in fact Roland's arrangement especially recalls the pulsing, unrushed Kansas City swing of the Basie band.³⁰

In addition to the brass and reed sections, Roland's arrangement features Bill Harris's witty trombone and Don Michaels's climactic percussion. Again, of his tune "Bar Fly Blues," Roland reported that it was written especially for Herman, "Not the title, but for his particular type of slow blues alto playing."³¹ Alto was Herman's first instrument, rather than the clarinet, and this piece by Roland serves as a showcase for the leader's

saxophone solo, punctuated in Roland's arrangement by shaking, muted brass. The loping piano motif, which is something of a Texan trait, sets the relaxed blues mood, with trombonist Bill Harris supplying some sad, slithery phrases. The title of another Roland arrangement, "Wailin' in the Woodshed," plays on the similar title of an early recording from 1941, "Woodsheddin' With Woody," on which Steady Nelson had formed part of the trumpet section, along with Wisconsin trumpeter Cappy Lewis of Brillion.³²

How many Texans may have passed through the Herman big-band academy I am unable to say for certain, but will mention one other, trumpeter Dennis Dotson of Jacksonville, whose work with Herman in 1975 I have not heard but do know his performances on the 1990 recording, *Return to the Wide Open Spaces*, with fellow Texans James Clay and David "Fathead" Newman.³³ The 1975 aggregation was not Herman's last, since he continued to lead groups up until his death in 1987, but even so, Dotson represents a long line of Texans stretching from Sonny Lee in Herman's first group of 1936 through Steady Nelson, Dean Kincaide, Budd Johnson, Ernie Caceres, Jimmy Giuffre, and Harry Babasin in the 1940s to Gene Roland in the 1950s and to the final Texas musician that I will discuss, black drummer Gus Johnson of Tyler, who was with Herman in the 1960s.

The only recording by Woody Herman with a small group of himself, a piano, bass, and drums was made in 1962, and on this occasion Gus Johnson occupied the percussion seat. Budd and Gus Johnson (no relation) were two of the few blacks ever to record with the Herman Herds, but both were key players on the recordings on which they appeared. Titled *The Woody Herman Quartet: Swing Low, Sweet Clarinet*, the 1962 album consists almost entirely of standard jazz tunes, from "Rose Room" and "Don't Be That Way" to two of clarinetist Artie Shaw's famous features, "Begin the Beguine" and "Summit Ridge Drive." The one more typical Herman piece is entitled "Pee Wee Blues," apparently written by his pianist, Nat Pierce.

In speaking of the members of his quartet, Herman remarked that "The guys are the rhythm section that's

been with me for quite a while and we work well together."³⁴ This is perhaps most evident on "Sweet Lorraine," which swings at any easy gait, with Johnson's unobtrusive snare-drum licks just enough to keep things perking along nicely. After the waltz-time theme statement on "Begin the Beguine," Johnson drives the piece expertly with his steady timekeeping and his rim-shot backbeats in four-four; his drum roll before the final section sets up a fine contrast for the tune's conclusion. However, it is his haunting rhythmic pattern on the tom-tom and his subtle cymbal work for "Pee Wee Blues" that are a high point of his presence on this album, although his drumming on "Don't Be That Way" is also outstanding, as it is on "Summit Ridge Drive." All in all, Gus Johnson shows here why he was so successful as the percussionist for the Jay McShann Orchestra, the last of the great Kansas City big bands in the early 1940s, and for what was tagged the New Testament band of Count Basie in the early 1950s. Just as Woody Herman made authentic jazz with whites or blacks, Gus Johnson too could contribute to any type of ensemble, and both men from states with little in common in terms of weather, history, or cultural heritage could unite to create the harmonious, engaging sounds of swinging jazz.

In addition to Bunny Berigan and Woody Herman with their big bands and combos, one other Wisconsin jazz musician who teamed up with a Texan was bassist Buddy Clark of Kenosha. In 1956, Clark joined Jimmy Giuffre for a recording session with a sextet led by Lennie Niehaus, an alto saxophonist and composer who had made a name for himself by anchoring the sax section of the Stan Kenton Orchestra. In putting together his piano-less sextet, Niehaus brought together the special talents of the Wis-

consin bassist in conjunction with drums and a front line of alto, tenor, and baritone saxes and trumpet, a rather unusual combination that proved refreshing in the best West Coast tradition. Clark reportedly toured Europe with a Giuffre unit in 1959, but I have thus far found no recordings for such a group.³⁵

Fortunately, the Niehaus Sextet session allows a listener to hear these musicians from Wisconsin and Texas working as part of a superb ensemble, with the



Bunny Berigan, courtesy of CLASSICS RECORDS.

music on Niehaus's album marked by the clean lines and crisp execution of so much of the West Coast music of this period.³⁶ Paired with drummer Shelly Manne, Clark drives the group with a round, full tone quality, and on the blues entitled "Elbow Room," he takes an extended solo that shows off his warm sound and flowing notes. The pairing of Clark and Giuffre comes particularly on the tune entitled "Three of a Kind," a type of jazz fugue in which at one point the combination of just string bass and baritone sax together achieves a rich tonal blend. On "Fond Memories" the moving lines of tenor, alto, and baritone saxophones and bass make for an especially touching effect, with the baritone and bass adding greatly to the lush overall sound. On "Knee Deep," the bass and baritone are hand in glove as they swing together with a marvelous sense of unity. This album's peculiar instrumentation is a perfect emblem for the kind of harmony that jazz has always made possible, in bringing together as it does musicians from different parts of the country and even the world, regardless of instruments, backgrounds, or personal styles.

In listening to the jazz recordings discussed here, one cannot necessarily identify the players as either from Wisconsin or Texas. Perhaps with a musician such as Jack Teagarden, whose trombone sound was so particular to him and has been described as similar to a Texas drawl, one may recognize a regional intonation or technique. However, in making jazz, musicians from these two regions of the country played the same notes, the same tunes, the same kind of syncopated rhythms, and with the same or at least a similar type of swing feel. If Texans leaned more toward blue notes, this could be an identifying mark, as in the case of Budd Johnson of Dallas. Yet as we have seen, Woody Herman and his early unit was billed as The Band That Plays the Blues, and Joop Visser even asserts that Herman had "a blues feeling that is not usually found in white performers, except Jack Teagarden."³⁷

What distinguishes these musicians is, ultimately, less notable than what they have in common—a love of jazz that transcended regional boundaries and racial and cultural differences. Even if they created distinctive sounds on the same instruments, such sounds were not necessarily regional in nature but merely the result of different ways of approaching their horns, of holding them, or of positioning the mouthpieces on or between their lips and teeth. Without wishing to minimize the effect of differing backgrounds, I would emphasize the fact that, in jazz, any player can join with his fellows to produce happy or sad melodies and fast or slow rhythms that have appealed to listeners around the globe. Wisconsin and Texas, in this sense, are no different from Sweden or Japan, where jazz has also brought together peoples of differing races, religions, and geographical areas to find in music a common meeting ground for relieving the sorrow of loss and celebrating the joy of being alive. ■



Jack Teagarden, courtesy of Franklin Driggs.

NOTES

1. Gunther Schuller, *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 562.
2. A shorter, preliminary version of this essay was presented at Lakeland College in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, on October 1, 2003. I wish to thank Karl Elder and Lakeland College for inviting me to speak as part of their Krueger Fine Arts Lecture Series. One of the first Wisconsin musicians that I was aware of hearing, without knowing that he was a native of Monroe, Wisconsin, was Joe Dodge, drummer with the early Dave Brubeck Quartet. I began my lecture at Lakeland College "with a bang not a whimper," to paraphrase T.S. Eliot, by playing Dodge's bass drum thud that opens "Take the 'A' Train" on Brubeck's 1954 *Jazz Goes to College* (Columbia Records, CK 45149). Although there was no connection between Dodge and Texas musicians that I know of, it was my own personal memories of listening with pleasure to Dodge and the early Brubeck Quartet that was my excuse for beginning the talk with an example of his typically "kicking" the bass drum in so many of the Quartet recordings. It was only after researching Wisconsin jazz musicians for the talk at Lakeland College that I discovered, over forty years after first hearing Dodge, that he was from the thirtieth state.
3. In *The Folk Songs of North America* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), Lomax writes: "No subject, not even the little dogie, has produced so much good American music as the railroad . . ." (406). Quoted in Ann Miller Carpenter, "The Railroad in American Folk Song, 1865-1920," in *Diamond Bessie & The Shepherds*, Publication of the Texas Folklore Society No. XXXVI, edited by Wilson M. Hudson (Austin: The Encino Press, 1972), 103.
4. See William Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* (New York: Random House, 1948; rpt. 1972), 194.
5. For a discussion of Texas boogie woogie musicians in Chicago, see my *Texan Jazz* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 74-81.
6. Robert Dupuis, in his *Bunny Berigan: Elusive Legend of Jazz* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), gives Berigan's place of birth as Hilbert, Wisconsin, but Berigan grew up in Fox Lake. See Appendix E (n.p.).
7. John Chilton, *Who's Who of Jazz: Storyville to Swing Street* (Philadelphia, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1972; revised 1979), 143.
8. *Jimmie Joy and His Orchestra* (Arcadia Records, 2017D, n.d.), recorded ca. September-October 1923. The notes to this album identify the musicians on the recording of "Bugle Call Rag" as: Jimmie Maloney, clarinet; Rex "Curley" Preis, cornet; Jack Brown, trombone; Lynn "Son" Harrell, piano; Smith "Sykes" Ballew, banjo; and Dick Hamel, drums. Smith Ballew, known primarily as a vocalist, was born in Palestine and went to high school in Sherman, attended the University of Texas from 1920 to 1922, and has been credited with organizing Jimmie's Joys. Later, in 1926, he fronted Dick Voynow's Wolverines, which had previously included the legendary Bix Beiderbecke. In 1929, Ballew formed his own orchestra, which in 1932 included Bunny Berigan. See Dupuis, 57-58, and also John H. Slate, entry on Ballew, in *The Handbook of Texas Music* (Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), 15.
9. *Jazz at the Philharmonic* (Verve Records, VE-2-2504, 1976).
10. *New Orleans Rhythm Kings and Jelly Roll Morton* (Milestone Records, M-47020, 1974). I am grateful to Morton Stine, my longtime musician friend from Wichita Falls, now at East Carolina University, for going back and listening to the NORK recording after I asked him why he thought the trombonist with Jimmie's Joys and Red Callender on the JATP recording would both quote from "Yankee Doodle Dandy." I am also indebted to a student at Diamond Hill-Jarvis High School in Fort Worth, who identified "Yankee Doodle Dandy" when I could recognize the tune but couldn't place it by name. I asked an auditorium full of students to listen for a familiar tune being quoted in the Jimmie's Joys recording, thinking that they would all easily recognize "The Eyes of Texas," but one young man on the front row yelled out "Yankee Doodle Dandy," and I knew immediately that he had heard the trombonist's quotation and was correct as to its source. I later contacted Robert Botello of the school's Fine Arts Department and asked if he could give me the name of the student. He checked with the other teachers in attendance and they said that the student was Adelaida Robles. This means that more than one student recognized "Yankee Doodle Dandy," since the student that I heard yell the title was a young man just down from where I was speaking on the stage. I was impressed by the student body and pleased that they responded so enthusiastically to the jazz that I played for them. On hearing Glenn Miller's "In the Mood," with the trumpet solo by Fort Worth native Clyde Hurley, some of the students began to rise and dance in front of their seats and a few moved into the aisles to "cut a rug" just as the jitterbugs had done almost 65 years before when the piece was first recorded in 1939.
11. *The Golden Horn of Jack Teagarden* (Decca Records, DL4540, n.d.).
12. *Bunny Berigan: His Best Recordings 1935-1939* (Best of Jazz, 4021, 1995).
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Meet the Band Leaders* (Hollywood, CA: Swingtime Video, ca. 1984).
15. Dupuis, 163 and 181.
16. *Bunny Berigan: The Pied Piper 1934-40* (RCA Bluebird, 66615-2, 1995).
17. *Bunny Berigan: His Best Recordings 1935-1939*.
18. *Woody Herman and His Orchestra 1936-1937* (Classics Records, 1042, 1999).
19. Joop Visser, notes to *The Woody Herman Story* (Proper Records, Properbox 15, 4 CD set, 2000), 15.
20. *Ibid.*, 2.
21. In 1941 the Herman Herd recorded "Blue Flame," which would replace "Blue Prelude" as the band's theme song "and would remain its theme to the end" (Visser, p.17 of notes to *The Woody Herman Story*). Steady Nelson was also in the band when "Blue Flame" was recorded, but there is no trumpet solo. On "Bishop's Blues," also from 1941, Nelson was still with the band but the trumpet solo here is taken by Cappy Lewis of Brillion, Wisconsin. Yet another blues on which Nelson solos is the classic "Farewell Blues," and on "Bessie's Blues" he vocalizes with Herman. He also is heard singing the phrase "Beat me, papa" to end the popular tune, "Beat Me Daddy, Eight to the Bar." See Robert C. Kriebel's *Blue Flame: Woody Herman's Life in Music* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1995), 43.
22. Information on Steady Nelson's later years was supplied to me by his niece, Lucy Carriker, who also informed me that her uncle was the vocalist on two sides recorded by the Herman Herd: "Oh Caldonia," a song that predated the 1945 "Caldonia" that the famous Third Herd recorded with such instrumental stars as trombonist Bill Harris and bass player Chubby Jackson; and "Whatcha Know, Joe." Neither of these tunes that Nelson sang is included on *The Woody Herman Story*, although the 1945 "Caldonia" is. Robert Kriebel also credits Nelson with a vocal on "Rosetta."
23. Visser, notes to *The Woody Herman Story*, 22.
24. In 1963, the Herman Herd appeared on *Jazz Casual*, a television program hosted by jazz critic Ralph J. Gleason, and the band's use of three tenors and a baritone sax can be seen from the video of this appearance released under the title of *Woody Herman and the Swingin' Herd* (Rhino Home Video, R3 970024, 2000).
25. Simon Korteweg, liner notes, to *Woody Herman and His Orchestra: Early Autumn* (Capitol Jazz Classics Vol. 9, M-11034, 1972).
26. *The Swinging Mr. Rogers: Shorty Rogers and His Giants* (Atlantic Records, 1212, n.d.).
27. *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (New Yorker Video, NYV 16590, ca. 1987).
28. *Woody Herman: The Second Herd 1948* (Storyville Records, STCD 8240, 1997).
29. *Bird and Chet: Inglewood Jam* (Fresh Sound Records, FSR-CD 17, 1991); *Laurindo Almeida Quartet Featuring Bud Shank* (Pacific Jazz Records, PJ-1204, 1955).
30. Quoted in liner notes by Nat Hentoff, to *Woody Herman '58* (Verve Records, MG V-8255, 1958).
31. *Ibid.*
32. "Woodshedding with Woody" is included on *The Woody Herman Story*.
33. *Return to the Wide Open Spaces* (Amazing Records, AMC-1021, 1990). See my *Texan Jazz*, 314, 434-35.
34. Quoted in liner notes by Ralph J. Gleason to *The Woody Herman Quartet: Swing Low, Sweet Clarinet* (Philips Records, PHM 200-004, 1962).
35. Prior to joining Giuffrè for the 1956 session, Clark had been a member of the Tex Beneke Orchestra from 1950 to 1954. Beneke, a tenor saxophonist and singer from Fort Worth, was a featured sideman with the Glenn Miller Orchestra in the late 1930s and early 1940s.
36. *Lennie Niehaus Volume 5: The Sextet* (Contemporary Records, C3542, 1956).
37. Visser, notes to *The Woody Herman Story*, 14. Visser goes on to mention an incident that occurred with regard to the Herman band's playing of the blues at the Rice Hotel in Houston, a disappointing but not surprising example of racism at the end of the 1930s. Visser reports that around 1938 the hotel manager sent a note to Herman saying "Will you kindly stop singing and playing those nigger blues" (14).