

The Eldorado Ballroom, at the corner of Elgin and Dowling in Third Ward, was one of Houston's most popular black nightclubs.

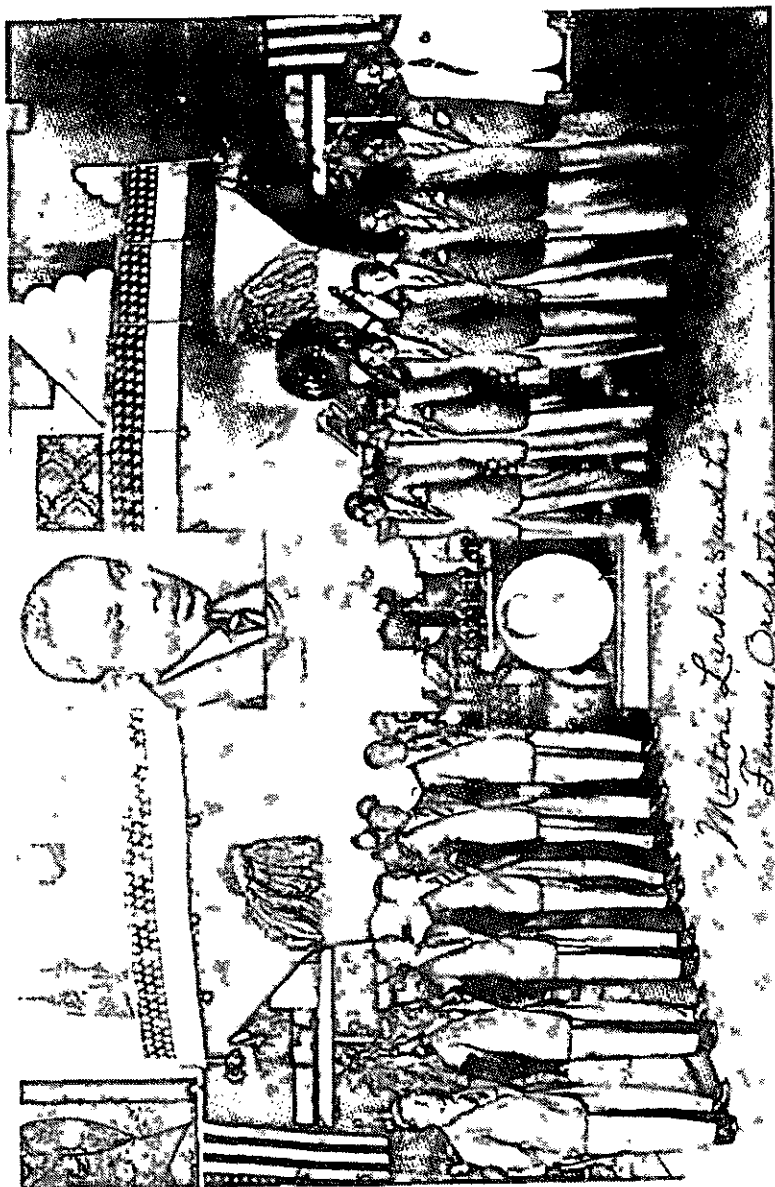
## Jazz Images: A Sampling from the Texas Jazz Archive

Jazz is seldom thought of in connection with Houston, whose claims to fame are generally associated with business entrepreneurship rather than music. Yet Houston has produced more than its share of fine jazz musicians. They were trained here and performed here, but achieved national and international recognition only after they had left the Bayou City. Even though much of their impact on jazz has been from stages in New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles, their innovative styles have collectively contributed what is acknowledged to be a distinctly Texan or Gulf Coast flavor.

The Houston Metropolitan Research Center of the Houston Public Library has established the Texas Jazz Archive in a cooperative effort with the Texas Jazz Heritage Society and the musicians themselves, to preserve this unique heritage. In oral history interviews, photographs, documents, and recordings, HMRC collects these musicians' views of their art. Among the Texas musicians who have donated materials are: James Bolden, Jewel Brown, Leonard Carnagey, Arnett Cobb, Clayton Dyess, Wilton Felder, Jimmy Ford, Art Foxall, "Sonny Boy" Franklin, Ed Gerlach, Billy Harper, Illinois Jacquet, Milton Larkin, David Newman, Florence Pleasant, Sammy Price, Daisy Richards, Armin Sebran, I. H. Smalley, Campbell Tolbert, and Lester Williams. In addition, Inge Larrey, a photographer specializing in the contemporary jazz scene, has generously donated a rich collection of images showing Houston's musicians at work today.

The rare photographs and extensive interviews record these performers' careers: their experiences, trials, and accomplishments. Many voices have already been stilled, and it is now too late to interview such Houston greats as arranger and pianist Cedric Haywood or blues singer Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins. Nonetheless, as the following pictures and excerpts from the interviews show, the materials in the Texas Jazz Archive reflect Houston's contribution to the art of jazz.

*Charles Stephenson*



*Above*, Milton Larkin, trumpet, trombone, vocalist, and band leader.

*Opposite*, Milton Larkin's band at the Aragon Ballroom in Houston. Left to right: H. S. Sloan, L. F. Simon, Lonnie Moore, Frank Dimangio, Willie Lott Thomkins, Lawrence Cato; George Lane, Clifford Mitchell, Charles Gordon, Arnett Cobb, Lester Patterson, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Milton Larkin.

Milton Larkin's band was catapulted to fame at Chicago's Rhumboogie Club. "We had never played big shows like this. But when we had our own spot those people nearly went crazy. The swingin' band from Texas! We had to ad-lib shows there, we had no music. Someone tells you, 'Give me two bars of something in B-flat.' You don't do that now; that art is just about gone."



**Illinois Jacquet, tenor saxophone.**

Illinois Jacquet grew up in a family of musicians. "Jazz music is misunderstood today because it's such a difficult, unique form. Most of it is played from the head and how you feel. If you got the blues you just pick up a guitar and start to strumming it. The way your fingers go, that's a tune. It just starts from the gift. And later on, you cultivate that, learn to write it out and make a score. But jazz music was nothing that you go to school and learn. You pick it up and play from the heart."



**Art Foxall, tenor saxophone.**

Art Foxall continues a tradition of tenor saxophone style. "The Texas tenor sound is a sound that is very big, and it's a full sound, and it's laid back and it's lazy. See, Easterners, from New York and so forth, all talk fast. And a lot of the horn players, they play fast. But the Texas horn players, they play effective. It's not how many notes you play, it's where you place those notes. It's a slower sound, and it's a bigger sound, because you can't play fast and have a big sound. Anyone who ever hears a musician from Texas play saxophone can always identify him and say, 'He's from Texas. I can just tell it in his playing.'"



Daisy Richards, jazz dancer (far left).



Jewel Brown, vocalist.

Jewel Brown toured with Louis Armstrong for nine years. "Louis once said to me that he never did seek stardom. He only wanted to blow his horn. But I guess because he loved it so, the result was what it became." Of her relationship with Armstrong's band, she says: "An artist is really no more than what supports them. When you've got good support, it makes you do things you didn't even realize you had inside."

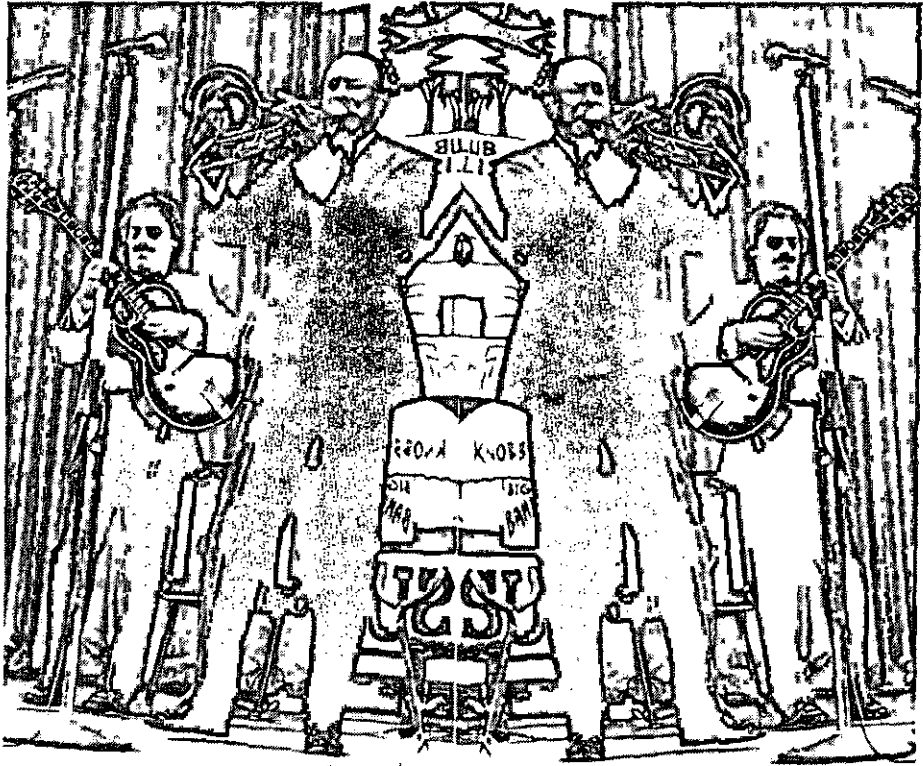


Cedric Haywood, pianist, at right.



Wilton Felder, saxophone, during his oral history interview for HMRC's Jazz Archive.

With the Crusaders, Wilton Felder has performed extensively in the United States, Europe, and Japan. "Jazz is an art form that needs an audience to really be appreciated. You can't have jazz in baseball stadiums and still communicate. How can you play to an individual who's two miles away from you? And you're watching on a video screen? That's why you have so many great performances of musicians when they were playing in club environments; because that is living and sharing the moments together. You react to the people as well as to the other musicians on the stand. You're actually seeing the people's faces and they're sharing in the musical experience with you."



Milton Larkin, trombone, and Clayton Dyess, guitar, perform at a 1984 Juneteenth concert in Houston. Photo by Inge Larrey.

What attracted Clayton Dyess to jazz? "I think it was the unlimited freedom, improvisation, expression. You could wail on a riff and really express anger, or you could just play a real nice pretty ballad. Sometimes you could say with one note what people might try to do with a thousand. And sometimes, you feel like playing a thousand. People who perform it can call it as they see it. It's just the freedom of playing jazz that's so much fun, that's so inviting."