

AT THE CORNER
OF...



"BLACK HISTORY MONTH - A TRIBUTE"

This being Black History Month, allow your nutty narrator to explain what it means to me, a third-of-a-century music mercenary who has enjoyed listening to and attempting to musically execute black America's greatest contribution to this country - a music art form that is the deepest, hippest (and of course, most

ignored and downright hated by the masses) - in the whole gosh-darn godless world. I speak of jazz - from Jellyroll Morton to McCoy Tyner - (not Paul Whiteman to Kenny G) and all it's "affiliates", swing, blues, boogie, bompity boms, jump, be-bop, gospel, funk, and even some of the vicious hip hop rhythms of the present.

I was blessed to have been exposed to all this as a mere toddler, listening to "spirituals", and later blues and authentic rock and roll on Pittsburgh's WAMO radio and even heard a few vocal groups recording live in my father's recording Studio in the late 50's. Though I wasn't present, he engineered sides for the Del Vikings, Guy-Tones, Skyliners, and the Marcells (including their 1961 hit Blue Moon). How many ten year olds can claim such deep memories of their father cranking up the old Ampex 350's and giving a cue for the Marcells lead singer to commence with that "bomp-bomp-a-bomp-rang-a-dang-ding, etc." Intro of Blue Moon? Today's G-exer may recall his respective memories of his father something like this: "Yeah, I remember my dad beating the old lady senseless, then lighting a joint and kicking up the volume on the latest Bon Jovi record." Then, of course, there was Porky Chedwick, the "daddy-o of the raddio" playing Wynonie Harris, Jimmy Reed, Roy Brown, Elmore James, the Fortune groups (featuring Detroit's Johnnie Bassett naturally) and in the words of HOME RUN DERBY's Mark Scott, "many others" on WAMO radio. These memories are much on the order of Richard E. Nixon recalling the beautiful tulips at Camp David and his meetings with Bob Haldeman.

Now we move on to WAMO's sister station "WAZZ for jazz", heard at age 13 in 1961; the live Cannonball Adderly Riverside recordings, Dizzy Gillespie's big band VERVE works of art, and the Blue Note sides of The 3 sounds, Stanley Turrentine, Horace Silver, Jimmy Smith, and all those geniuses of God. Long before I could "OHHH, NELLIE" in Foghorn Leghorn fashion for the first time I experienced the delightfulness of women, I was introduced to this great music art form which will perhaps explain why I was not only unimpressed with the so-called "British rock invasion" of 1963, but downright offended by it's corny, silly, dainty, and effeminate squareness. And my tama-tama (or cho) were and still are further busted by the still - perpetuated myth that somehow those groups were directly influenced by the Real thang.

Archeologically enough, there was a time in the words of James Brown, when one could here Jack McDuff, Don Patterson,

Jimmy Smith, Jimmy McGriff, Shirley Scott, Lonnie Smith and all the great organ groups at Pittsburgh's Hurricane Bar, then stroll up the street from Centre to Wylie Avenue and hear Freddie Hubbard, Bobby Timmons, Wynton Kelly, Horace Silver, James Moody, Kenny Burrell, etc... at the Crawford Grill #2. Listening to these masters for me was a real jazz education that sadly has gone the way of old, cozy baseball parks without rock music blaring between every pitch. And all those cats were like fathers to me, putting up with my pestering them for musical information and even allowing me to sit in with them on the "matinee" gigs preceding the weekend night gigs, truly being what Jack McDuff recalled recently, "a pain in the ass." Just the fact that these great masters would put up with a young hang nail on the fickle finger of fate like me was astounding in itself. But one must remember that this was thirty years ago, the height of the civil rights movement when race relations were quite tense and annually, you worried about working in the "chitlin clubs" dreading the "long hot summer" of riots, looting, and burning. The terms "Get whitey" and "Burn baby burn" in that theater of war was as commonplace as "www.com" in today's yuppie information society. Though shot at occasionally in Pittsburgh's Hill District, or having gomi (garbage) lobbed at me walking down Lennox Avenue in Harlem in search of organ clubs, by and large, it was safer than parking a Toyota in a Taylor shopping center for fear of a layed off assembly line worker tossing a bowling ball through your windshield in the spirit of "Buy American" a few years ago. Thus, I want to tip my hat during Black History Month, 1998 to all the brothers that created and taught me the greatest music in the history of this entire clapping-on-the-wrong-beat world. Now we'll have more blues stories, but first let's tune in on these words.



Bill Heid. Contributing/writer

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