

**It Was All a Dream...Pittsburgh Musicians Local 471:
Collective Memory and Alternate Truths**

by

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This project documents the history of Pittsburgh's Black Musicians Local 471, founded in 1908. In 1966, Local 471 merged with white musicians Local 60, forming Local 60-471. Surviving members of Local 471, primarily jazz artists, expressed the deleterious effects of the merger, complaining, among other things, of discriminatory treatment and marginalization. In 1971, seeking equity, some pursued legal action. Ultimately, the courts did not rule in their favor, leaving bittersweet memories of this period. In oral testimonies, many former members of 471 reminisced about the Musicians Club, a social and networking space that flourished during the 1940s and 1950s. While many of them were less engaged in the business affairs of the Local 471, they recalled the vibrancy of the pre-integration entertainment scene and bemoaned the loss of their union and its beloved Musicians Club. Urban Renewal and gentrification of the Lower Hill District, as well as the merger, were watershed moments. Most 471 members felt that racial integration of the two unions sounded the death knell for the autonomy, lush life, and economic opportunity they had long enjoyed.

This study's methodology juxtaposes the collected remembrances of Local 471 members with an analysis of primary sources, providing alternate interpretations of the pre- and post-integration eras. What emerges is a complex portrait of the peak and demise of Local 471. Changing demographics and social conditions, shifting tastes in popular music, the internal

affairs of Local 471, and technological innovations, as well as racism, all shaped the fates of black musicians. This project revealed no singular master narrative of the past. Collective memories at times converged and conflicted with other evidence. Questions emerged as to *why* certain memories and interpretations of the past took hold. Through their nostalgic streams of consciousness depicting both a dreamy and painful past, 471 members created social history from below. These collected memories, constituting "*alternate truths*," expand and enrich our understanding of the past.

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Local 471 – This is your story. I am only a scribe.

Chapter 1: Introduction

**“People lie when they write.
It’s better to talk sometimes.”
--Alyce Brooks**

Pianist Alyce Brooks captured the zeitgeist of this work. In a 1997 interview, Ms. Brooks said that when people write their own life story they sometimes lean toward embellishment and exaggeration. However, she added, there is something about conversation that purifies memory and causes one to give voice to something closer to the truth.¹

Brooks’ theory on telling *our* stories intrigued me. This is a study about living histories, about the potent and vivacious nature of oral testimony and group remembrance. When historians want to document the past, they often look for written sources because these are considered concrete, solid, reliable. However, Brooks’ assertion suggests that there is something inescapably “truthful” about oral testimony—even if our imperfect memories may birth spoken words not always perfectly “factual.” In the act of recalling, people reconstruct the past. They create versions of historical events that become their truths, the interpretations needed to satisfy in that moment.

I remember a conversation with an elderly member of my church, who said that, out of all the presidents he had seen in his lifetime, “FDR was the best, hands down.” The conviction with which he said it startled me. There was no written historical evidence I could have offered to wrench him from his truth. He displayed certitude. He reminded me of the subjects of this research. Their memories of events were recalled as unassailable truths—declarations of what

¹ Alyce Brooks, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by female (unidentified on the audio recording) June 24, 1997, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

it was like to live during a past age. They are the living past. As I immersed myself in this project, I was struck by the power of collective memory to coalesce into perceived truths. Even conflicting memories of similar events could all stake claims to reality. Multiple truths can occupy the same space at the same time. What became clear during this study is that humans are affirmed when they tell their story about how they have navigated time and space.

Memories as spoken may become the moorings that anchor us to the present, connect us to the past, and keep the future from washing away evidence that we exist. Oral testimonies are history in real time—rife with biases perhaps, but maybe no more or less than written statements. In essence, Brooks was saying there is empowerment in oral testimony. This study seeks to gather memories from oral testimonies and measure them against memories from written sources. Local 471 is the test case for this experiment. I am seeking understanding of written and oral mediums as they merge and evolve.

This study examines a time period replete with significant events, with multiple storylines vying for attention. There was the rise and fall of Local 471, Pittsburgh's union for Black musicians. There was America's sin of Jim Crow and the difficulty of shedding its legacies. There is the story of what Black Pittsburghers built: an entertainment mecca sometimes referred to as the *crossroads between New York and Chicago*. There was the demise of this entertainment empire as historical events converged to change the social and economic conditions of Black neighborhoods. There is also the intractability of racism and how it has shaped the Black experience.

This study is about memory and contestation, about Black musicians fighting for their equality as artists from 1945 to 1970. But more precisely, this is a story that relies heavily on

the oral testimonies and the memory of the past. The goal has been to examine how Black survivors of a particular time period recounted what they did and what happened to them. How did their memory create meaning and understanding as it coincided with or converged from “real” events from the past? And when their memories do conflict with historical realities, how can this cognitive divergence be explained?

This is a story of the symbiotic connection between actual events and how we choose to frame these events in our memory. Memories bring us to the foundation of who we think we were and who we became. Memories are sacred because, while they can be influenced by many factors, individuals have the autonomy to construct and believe their own truths. These truths can shift or remain solid upon command. Humans have the power to *interpret* and give meaning to events, even when they have no power to control those events.

The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and other Stories illuminates this concept. In this collection of essays, Alessandro Portelli covers the dramatic death of a steel worker during a rally in Italy in 1949.² Rather than focusing on the actual events of the death, the author is concerned with how those who witnessed Portelli’s death chose to remember and recall the event. Why did they tenaciously hold onto memories of things that, according to historical “fact,” did not occur? Why were there conflicting memories by those who witnessed Trastulli’s death? Portelli points out: “The oral sources used in this essay are not always fully reliable in point of fact.

² Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York: State University of New York, 1991).

Rather than being a weakness, this is however, their strength: errors, inventions, and myths lead us through and beyond facts to their meanings”³

Like Portelli, I want to tell the story of Local 471 in a way that allows for the facts and oral testimonies to intertwine and diverge. The result, I hypothesize, will be a more complicated but richer account of approximately two and a half decades. It will allow readers to access historical events and, more importantly, give insight into the peoples who lived through those events. Hopefully, readers will also understand what it’s like to remember events through someone else’s eyes as well as understand why individuals may choose to remember as they do.

I discovered this project in 2001 as I was seeking a topic for my dissertation. My dissertation advisor, Dr. Laurence Glasco introduced me to Mr. Charles “Chuck” Austin. At the time, Mr. Austin was a board member of the African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh (AAJPSP). This group was mostly comprised of former members of Local 471, the union of Black musicians in Pittsburgh until 1965 when it merged with Local 60. However, there were other members of AAJPSP who were not musicians. Rather, they were simply interested in preserving and re-telling a more accurate history of Local 471. They were seeking a documentarian of their experiences. Many of the official records of Local 471 had been mysteriously lost during the merger. In addition, many of the former members, especially during 471’s height in the 1940’s and 1950’s, had either passed or were elderly or had distanced themselves from the Local. Thus, members of AAJPSP were urgently seeking

³ Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, 2.

someone who could incorporate the memories of the living alongside what had become “official narratives” of what had happened to Local 471. In the eyes of musicians who had lived through certain events, academics and others who tried to tell the story of Pittsburgh’s jazz legacy often critically undervalue the contributions made by members of the Local. Chuck Austin and the other members of AAJPSP persuaded me to embrace the opportunity to help them tell their stories before more of the guardians of their past were no longer living. Little did I know that their urgings would become prophetic. I started this project, but took a ten-year hiatus between 2007 and 2017, during which time several of the musicians I originally met through AAJPSP passed away. It is to them that this project is dedicated.

My initial goal was to build a bridge across the generation gap. I was in my 20s when I began this project and most of the members of AAJPSP were elderly. I spent hours talking with them as a group, trying to understand their personalities. I devoured their stories even as they contradicted each other or filled in gaps when one of their memories failed. Next, I interviewed several of them individually, starting with Chuck Austin. It was during these conversations and interviews that I gleaned detailed accounts of their lives and how they became involved with Local 471. I learned the value of empowering someone to tell their truth. The gratitude they all showed as I documented their lives helped me understand there was something cathartic about this process. These musicians were being inserted into history in ways they hadn’t been before. They gave me a chance to collect their “official” versions of history.

Furthermore, the individuals I interviewed in the early stages of this project helped me re-imagine historical spaces. Mr. Austin and a few others took me on a tour of the Hill District and East Liberty. I took pictures of what stood in areas that used to be locations frequented by

the musicians and their friends. Sometimes my guides would disagree over specific street locations, but it was fascinating to see the degree of conviction with which they proclaimed their remembrances. Those were vital teaching moments. I learned that even when we think we are documenting facts, we are really making choices about which facts we ultimately choose to legitimize and accept as truth. I also learned that part of the privilege of living through an experience is the right to tell the story from your own vantage point—how you saw, felt, and reacted to events at the time. Finally, I learned the power of memory to delete and embellish—many of the good times become grander and more romantic; some of the bad times may be forgotten. Some leave indelible scars.

After gathering the oral testimonies, I examined other primary source material. The University of Pittsburgh archives contained records of Local 471. I scoured boxes and boxes, looking through old news clippings, entertainment programs, ads, meeting notes, photos, union cards, even the union's constitutional by-laws. Chuck Austin gave me copies and notes that contained important information relevant to Local 471. These documents included information on the relationship of Local 471 to the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), which provided oversight of the local, as well as documents relevant to the court case filed in 1971 by former members of Local 471. Brought against AFM, Local 60, and other business owners, the legal case asserted that Black musicians were not receiving fair and equitable opportunities or benefits after the merger of Local 471 and Local 60, the White musicians union in Pittsburgh.

To add to these sources, I did a content analysis of *The Pittsburgh Courier* from 1930 to 1970 to see what was written about Local 471. I wanted to understand the factual realities of what occurred over these decades so that I could juxtapose these events with the memories of

those cited in this study. Other primary and secondary sources were sought to augment my understanding of historical context so I could provide readers with a more complete interpretation.

One of the challenges of this work was that once people became aware I was writing about jazz in Pittsburgh, they often wanted to add their narratives to the mix. This created many decisions of trying to curate seemingly infinite voices into the story versus telling the story through the eyes of a more select group. While all perspectives possess a degree of validity, I tried to limit my oral testimonies to a core group. To these, I added other voices, available through interviews conducted by AAJPSP. The members of the AAJPSP society were all passionately involved in their cause to preserve history. They had been alive since WWII and therefore had seen the evolution of Local 471 before it became Local 60-471. Moreover, because some of them had been involved in fighting for the rights of Black musicians since the 1970s, they were able to recall their entertainment lives as well as the political side of being a Black musician.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, to offset whatever inherent biases AAJPSP members may have had, I added voices from transcribed interviews from other Local 471 members. I wanted the reader to hear from elder statesmen—masters of their historical experience. Some of them had become more famous than others, but I wanted readers to hear also from rank-and-file musicians. They would have been able to give a different sense of how events of the past affected musicians who had not become famous and privileged.

The next challenge was to merge all of these written and oral sources to create a coherent narrative, to give this mixture of material a compelling theme. It seemed the more I

dove into this material, the more I became intrigued with *how* the subjects recollected the past. I became entranced with how their faces shone with joy when they described the “good old days” at the Musicians Club, the social component of Local 471. I was equally enthralled when their joyful expressions turned to angst as they described beliefs that integration with the White union and persistent racism had tragically dismantled entertainment hubs of the Black community.

The sharpness of these historical memories intrigued me. While many details had faded over time, there were certain markers of their experience that couldn’t be forgotten. Furthermore, there were certain lightning-rod memories of things that made my subjects respond viscerally and almost in unison. It was as if there was a historical frequency that could be tapped into—a frequency that Blacks understood because having Black skin in America meant there was some degree of “collective experience.” It became my aspiration to discern the reality from the biased or limited attributes of memories. This was not to disregard memory in any way. Rather, the goal was to enhance the story told by making oral testimony a key driver of the narrative. At the same time, I was interested in interpreting why gaps between memory and the historical past persisted even in spite of evidence. Why is it that how we feel about or remember what happened can be just as important as what actually happened? What does it say about the nature of humanity and memory that we need to hold onto certain narratives while discarding or embellishing others? How is it that we can re-imagine events to the point that it becomes “truth”? The answer to some of these queries lies in a desire to tell one’s own story. The subjects of my study didn’t want to go to their graves without the truth about their past being told. More importantly, they felt it necessary to tell their story on behalf

of all their comrades who couldn't because they were no longer breathing. The oral testimonies collected were from living griots of the Black Pittsburgh experience, the last human links to Local 471. Their memories constituted what paper documents and cold facts can't fully articulate. Whereas their memories, due to advancing age, may not be complete, it was their memories that filled in the vacuum left by what historians refer to as facts. It's because of these memories that the reader will not only *read* what happened in the past, but also "*understand*" what happened.

This study is about memory, but it also is about contesting. The Black musicians who inspired this story provided Pittsburgh lush entertainment during the era of segregation. They contest narratives of the past that fall short in their minds. Local 471 did all within its power to ensure that members received a relatively equal share of the economic pie despite being restricted by segregated neighborhoods and discriminatory practices. Moreover, during the merger of Local 60 and 471 in the 1960's, Black musicians fought to be treated as equal members of the newly formed union. Then in 1971, when Black musicians in Pittsburgh waged a legal fight against discrimination, they were contesting for rights and privileges that should have been granted during the 1964 Civil Rights Act. And in 2001 when I met Chuck Austin, they were still contesting. The living guardians of Local 471's legacy were still waging war with their own union Local 60-471, trying to impress upon the public that Blacks had been and were still treated unfairly. Lastly, it seemed that the last battle front was being waged in the realm of memory. Former 471 musicians like Chuck Austin, Ruby Young, Frank McCown, Dr. Harry Clark, and John Hughes were waging a battle against the historical inaccuracies of the past. They were contesting notions that Local 471 had been a bit player in local history. They knew that, on the

jazz scene, they had played major roles and had been the main attraction, not merely opening acts. Despite racial hurdles, Local 471 had long been the embodiment of entertainment in Pittsburgh. The music produced by members of 471 had buttressed the Black community—giving it a vitality remembered in legendary terms today.

This study rests on the axis of memory and contestation. The Black musicians who contributed their stories fought—and continue fighting—for racial equality. The struggle against discrimination is an inextricable part of their past, yet their memories are equally colored by the blessing of jazz and the way it enriched their lives. Their music, and the entertainment culture spawned by their music, colored their interpretive lens. They remembered much of the good and bad of their lives through their experience as musicians, more specifically as *Black* musicians.

It is my ambition to honor these preservers of Black history by telling a story enhanced by their memories. The story of Local 471 is rich and complicated. However, a close examination of the past of this union will give readers access to individuals who were the architects of a golden era. Local 471 was full of history makers, freedom fighters, and talented artists who should not be forgotten.

Chuck Austin: Master Narrator

The major themes of this study derived from countless conversations with Chuck Austin, some recorded, others informal. Austin tutored me about the music business, past and present. He gave me tours of Pittsburgh to help visualize past entertainment sites that no longer exist. He was engaged in a struggle to preserve the memory of Local 471 from fading. He

became, by virtue of the bond we built and the extensive experiences he shared, the master narrator for this work. He gave this work purpose, a starting point and direction.

Perhaps the major things gleaned from our conversations were specific targets on which to focus my queries. Time and again, Austin emphasized how Local 471 shaped Pittsburgh's entertainment past. This union, which he joined during the 1940's, held the key to gaining a complete view of the jazz age in the steel city. The members of Local 471 who had lived through the merger with White Local 60 were, in Austin's opinion, true experts as to what Black Pittsburgh's musical world was once like. In the telling of history, Austin thought it was crucial to consult those who had actually lived through past eras. This was my first lesson and target for inquiry. I had to gather the colorful voices and personalities of Local 471. I had to listen and document their stories and until I could distill high-definition pictures of the past.

The second lesson I learned from Mr. Austin was that Local 471 had created a special era in music, locally and nationally. As I sought evidence to confirm or dispute this notion, I often found myself seeking greatness. I was looking for fossils that showed Pittsburgh's Black musicians had created a musical mecca during the 1940s and 1950s—a virtual jazz crossroads between New York and Chicago. I assumed that Local 471 members had made great contributions to Pittsburgh culture. I looked for and found evidence that this was indeed true. Local 471 was frequently cited in the press for their activities as many of their members' names appeared to varying degrees. In addition, as I gathered stories from more musicians, these stories painted clear portraits of the impact of Local 471.

Austin emphasized that the world created by Local 471 eventually crumbled due to a myriad of factors. Social conditions changed over time; some Black musicians had not fully

supported Local 471's efforts to protect its constituents. Yet, according to Austin, it was racism that had been a persistent thorn in the side of Local 471. Blacks had been limited in their choice of entertainment venues due to segregation. Downtown was largely reserved for White artists and audiences. Black musicians were not always treated fairly in terms of wage compensation. In addition, racial discrimination reared its head again during the merger. From Austin's perspective, the merger in 1966 of Local 471 with the numerically larger, and entirely White, Local 60 left former Local 471 members in a weakened, subordinate position. Integration hadn't necessarily equated with progress. On the contrary, Blacks no longer had the degree of sovereignty they had possessed in their own Local. They lost their beloved Musicians Club. Ultimately, the loss in a court case claiming discrimination, served as a humbling blow to Austin and others. Former Local 471 members were forced to adapt to a new, unfamiliar entertainment climate during the 1970s. Black musicians now were in direct competition with White performers, with different jobs available than had been in the past.

Austin's role as master narrator did not mean his was the only valid viewpoint. I had the most access to him compared to other musicians, and he passionately shared much about his past lives. But I didn't accept his narrative as the only viable truth concerning the past; I investigated other voices that sometimes confirmed and sometimes contradicted his.

In completing this project, I ascertained that there can be no one version of the truth about past events. Our understanding of past happenings are not immutable. Past events, viewed through the lenses of those who lived through them, are subject to various interpretations and alternate truths. Collective memory can be both harmonious and discordant. It can include unified touchpoints as well as perspectives that diverge. I can only

offer an assessment of selected oral testimonies as they existed in the same space as other documents covering the past. Both master narratives and counter-narratives played a vital role in bringing this version of Local 471 to life. I have galvanized the dreams of the past from those who lived it. I have attempted to place dreams next to other pieces of historical evidence. What emerges is a history of Local 471, a history rife with collective memories and alternate truths.

Summary of Key Historical Events

The common, or “master,” narrative expressed by many former members of Local 471 is that the years between WWI and the mid 1950’s was a Golden Age, “glory years” for Black music in Pittsburgh. At the center of this special time was the Musicians Club, the social arm of Local 471. The intersection of economic prosperity and the ascension of jazz music as American popular music meant that, despite segregation, Black jazz artists were living a lush life. By the latter half of the 1950s, urban renewal razed the historic economic and cultural heart of Black Pittsburgh, signaling a shift in the social and economic conditions. However, while evidence suggests that many Black musicians still prospered during urban renewal and throughout 1960s, the memories of this period paint a darker picture. Some Blacks remember their world as beginning to tilt from its axis.

Since its founding in 1908, Local 471 had been part of the American Federation of Musicians (AFM). If we examine the period focused on in this study, 1945-1970, there was a delicate balance between national and city politics in Local 471 as well as between Locals 60 and Local 471. There were national dictates from the AFM until in 1941, it formally granted

autonomy to locals.⁴ The upshot was that, as many of the subjects of this study entered the music scene after WWII, they became part of a local union that held significant social and cultural sway in the Black community.

During the 1950s, the period which seems to reflect a delineation between actual historical events and how musicians remember the period, Herman Kenin became president of the American Federation of Musicians. Kenin increased pension support and limited the powers of the national president to dictate terms to locals.⁵ Hence, this period should have been a liberating one for members of Local 471. Nevertheless, the pressures created by a national move towards integration, as well as the local disruption caused by urban renewal meant that a confluence of events affected Local 471. This social context meant that Black musicians were holding on to the greatness of what they had known while dealing with the inevitable prospect of change. All the while, the Black music scene in Pittsburgh remained vital. The Musicians Club was the crown jewel of Local 471, the embodiment of all that Black people knew they could be—a regal, gifted, and joyful people who created one of America’s most highly regarded forms of cultural expression. But here lies the challenge for the historian. How does one reconcile the conflicting and overlapping narratives of this period, of good times mixed in with challenging times? During the 1950s, Black musicians in Local 471 were forced to wrestle with the prosperity of the post-War period as it collided with feelings of foreboding created by the on-coming urban renewal. At the same time, Black musicians were forced to adjust to the union’s

⁴ Julie Ayer, *More than Meets the Ear: How Symphony Musicians Made Labor History* (Minneapolis: Syren Book Co., 2005) website (Birth of ICSOM: A Labor Revolution, julieayer.com).

⁵ “Herman D. Kenin, Musicians’ Chief,” *The New York Times*, July 22, 1970, p 40.

changing locations and ultimate demise. Entangled with all these feelings were national and local discussions concerning integration.

In addition to dealing with unsettling social forces during the 1950s, Black musicians in Local 471, like many across the country, were conflicted about integration by way of merging with the White local.⁶ What fruit would the Black community reap from this change in status? As a matter of fact, Carl Arter, president of Local 471 during the early 1950s, had been on a campaign to get all Black musicians to join Local 471 and further consolidate their power base.⁷ A few years after racial integration arrived in the form of a merger of Local 60 and Local 471, former members of Local 471 responded with a lawsuit. The outcome of the lawsuit did not go favorably. Perhaps this study along with other tales told about Pittsburgh's jazz past, will provide a modicum of consolation for Black musicians who feel their paradise has been lost. Overall, there seems to have been a complicated nexus of forces—urban renewal, ongoing racial discrimination, and the changing entertainment scene—all of which undermined much of what had been created and cherished.

Chapter Preview

The story of Local 471 will be told in ten chapters. Chapter 1, "Introduction," describes how I came to learn of Local 471 and appreciate the importance of recording its history.

⁶ Julie Ayer, *More than Meets the Ear: How Symphony Musicians Made Labor History*, (Minneapolis: Syren Book Co., 2005) website (Birth of ICSOM: A Labor Revolution, julieayer.com)

⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 9, 1954, p 19.

Chapter 2, “The Early Years: 1908-1939,” summarizes the early history of Local 471, from the time of its founding in 1908 up through the 1930s. Newspapers, primary documents, as well as oral testimonies for this era were scarce, but nonetheless, this chapter will include a brief overview of the development of jazz as well as the ideological and formational roots of Local 471.

Chapter 3, “The Golden Years,” focuses on the 1940s and the first half of 1950’s, a time when Black Pittsburgh and its lively jazz community enjoyed what is widely recalled by 471 members as the best of times, the “Golden Years.” It was during these years that Local 471 established its Musicians Club, which quickly became the symbolic “headquarters” for Black jazz musicians, beloved locally and renowned nationally. Newspaper sources and oral testimonies along with primary documents create a picture of an exciting era. The Musicians Club inspired musicians’ strongest feelings and fondest memories of 471.

Chapter 4, “The Demise of Local 471,” describes how a program ostensibly meant to redevelop the Hill District razed its economic and cultural heart, devastating the neighborhood’s lively jazz scene and eliminating the many venues where 471 musicians often played. Press coverage, along with memories of this era recall the shifting location of the Musicians Club as well as the dread of urban renewal and its impact on the Black community. Urban renewal did not sound the death knell for Local 471, but it did represent a psychological marker, as members thought back to the time when the entertainment world they had built and known began to erode. Then, in 1966, some 58 years after its founding, 471 suffered dissolution when the American Federation of Musicians, operating in compliance with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, forced the merger of Local 471 with the larger White musicians union, Local 60.

Chapter 5, "Recalling the Merger," focuses on musicians' mixed memories of the loss of 471 and its Musicians Club. The 1960's marked a time when Blacks strenuously fought for racial integration. But, when integration came, the consequences for Local 471 were mixed at best. Merging with the larger, more powerful, White Local 60 created a racial imbalance that disillusioned many, a disillusionment that was further deepened by the riots of 1968. The continuing discrimination tempted many former members of Local 471 to recall the years of segregation as a more positive era than the era of integration. In fact, however, racism was only one culprit for the lack of Black advancement. By the end of the 1960's, we will see how many additional factors had contributed to Black frustration with a lack of empowerment that followed the merger.

Chapter 6, "The Lawsuit and the Memories," details how former members of 471, frustrated and disillusioned, filed a court case charging racial discrimination. To their shock and dismay, the court determined that the plaintiffs failed to demonstrate racial discrimination, a judgment that flew in the face of the personal experience of many. The failed lawsuit left former members of 471 with even greater feelings of disillusionment. The culmination of these events impelled Chuck Austin and others to establish the African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh. They are the ones who approached me in the early 2000s about this project. Collecting the memories of musicians still fighting for their perceived rights and economic benefits coincided with efforts to preserve the legacy of what they had accomplished and given to Pittsburgh.

Chapter 7, "Chuck Austin: Master Narrator," profiles the man most determined to correct the historical record and preserve the memories of former 471. Austin established the

African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh (AAJPSP) in order to conduct interviews of former members. Most of those interviews were done by Austin himself. Members relate why they felt such a kinship with their old union. This is where the more comprehensive oral testimonies introduce the reader to the lives and strivings of those who contributed to this research. By establishing the AAJPSP and conducting most of the Society's interviews, Austin became the driving force and perhaps master narrator of this project. He most consistently and clearly elucidated the reason why recovering and documenting the history of Local 471 was important for him and his colleagues. Their voices spoke to memories of the past and spun exciting tales of a by-gone era. This chapter illustrates the tremendous depth in Pittsburgh's musical talent. From their remembrances, I harvested details about their musical beginnings, their love for Local 471—and originally, sometimes for the merger. Thus, this chapter reinforces the tenuous notion of a unified collective memory. The story of Local 471 is one of a variety of perspectives and a variety of experiences.

Chapter 8, "Supporting the Master Narrative," captures the voices of the many members who largely agree with Austin's master narrative about 471, the Musicians Club, and the sad fate of both.

Chapter 9, "Counter Narratives," captures the fact that, despite Austin's determination to create a single, master narrative, other viewpoints emerged. Some musicians testify how they had been largely indifferent to 471 and uncomfortable with at least some of its practices and policies.

Chapter 10, "Epilogue," features my reflections on the meaning of memory and the significance of this project. It documents key events in the musical career of one especially

prominent musician, Nelson Harrison. Unlike interviews that were conducted and “guided” by Austin toward certain topics and conclusions, interviewer Tommy Willis gave Harrison free reign to tell his life story. Harrison expounds on his journey from boyhood to seasoned musician, intellectual, inventor and advocate for equality in musical opportunities during the 1960’s. Harrison provides a counter-narrative to those like Chuck Austin, who urged Blacks to learn to read music so they could be hired for more “White” jobs. Harrison strongly disagrees with that strategy, and his strongly held views demonstrate that even when musicians remembered similar trials and tribulations, they could disagree sharply on other issues. Sometimes, their opinions were in marked contrast to what other primary sources revealed. It turns out there can be no one master narrative or collective memory. Rather there were multiple stories that exhibited points of convergence and divergence about what it meant to be a member of Local 471.

Legal measures taken by 471 during the 1970s did not validate claims of discrimination by Local 471 members. Nonetheless, the musicians stood on the fidelity of their truth. It is they who lived, felt, and touched this past. I as a chronicler who came after them, can only offer my best attempts to document the empirical and remembered artifacts of days gone by.

Chapter 2: The Early Years: 1908-1939

In the late nineteenth century Pittsburgh was the stuff dreams are made of. Between 1840 and 1870 it had transformed itself from a frontier commercial city into one of the world's leading industrial centers. By 1900 it was being heralded as "Forge of the Universe" and its leading industrial figures—Carnegie, Frick, Mellon, Heinz, Westinghouse—had become household names. Environmentally, of course, Pittsburgh was the stuff nightmares are made of—"Hell with the Lid Taken Off" as Lincoln Steffens labeled it in his 1904 classic, *Shame of the Cities*. The city's polluted skies, dirty water, muddy streets, and dilapidated worker housing were the subject of a six-volume study between 1909 and 1914 by the Russell Sage Foundation.⁸

Culturally, Pittsburgh was by no means a nightmare, but its Presbyterian elite had long been suspicious of leisure, which helped make the city something of a cultural backwater. By the early twentieth century, however, the cultural pulse began to quicken as its industrial elite, reflecting national trends, took an interest in the arts,⁹ Andrew Carnegie led the way in things cultural as well as economic. In the 1890s, he helped make "The Smoky City" a national cultural

⁸ Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1969); Russell Sage Foundation, *The Pittsburgh Survey* (New York: Survey Associates, 1909-1914).

⁹ For a profile of the Pittsburgh Iron and Steel elite, especially their social origins, neighborhoods and institutions, but not their cultural activities, see John Ingham, *The Iron Barons* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978), 13-39, 107-155. See Edward G. Baynham, "A History of Pittsburgh Music, 1758-1958," (typescript in Carnegie Public Library, 1970, 2 vols.), *passim*, 245ff and 294ff. For a discussion of broad patterns in American music, see Charles Hamm, *Music in the New World* (New York: Norton, 1983), *Putting Popular Music in Its Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York: Norton, 1979). Also see H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1988). For an excellent discussion of the building of the cultural and civic landscape of Pittsburgh, see Franklin Toker, *Pittsburgh: An Urban Portrait* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986, 1994), 79-130.

presence by such philanthropic acts as funding the Pittsburgh Orchestra and building Carnegie Music Hall, a large, beautiful performance venue.

Pittsburgh's small but active Black community also showed interest in various forms of "high" culture. Many Black residents were descendants of Virginia migrants who, barred informally from entering many occupations, responded by setting up their own businesses, especially in barbering and hair-dressing, personal service occupations that were avoided by most Whites as demeaning.¹⁰ In the late nineteenth century, newly arriving Black migrants began to supersede this older middle class. Like the city's White immigrants, they had been attracted by Pittsburgh's booming economy, which, despite discrimination, was vibrant enough that many non-industrial jobs were available to Blacks. Between 1870 and 1900, the city's overall population grew five-fold from 86,000 to 451,000. Over the same period, the city's Black community grew even faster, mushrooming almost ten-fold, from 2,115 to 20,355, making it the sixth largest in the nation.¹¹

Despite job openings, Pittsburgh Blacks suffered much of the same social, economic and cultural discrimination that prevailed elsewhere. For example, in 1872, the city's Democratic newspaper—itsself hostile to Blacks—lampooned Republican hypocrisy in posing as friends of the Negro. In "Republican" Allegheny County, the paper noted sarcastically, Blacks "could not

¹⁰ Laurence Glasco, "Double Burden: The Black Experience in Pittsburgh," in S.P. Hays, ed., *City at the Point: Essays on the Social History of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 70ff. Henceforth cited as Glasco, "Double Burden." Also, Patricia Mitchell, *Beyond Adversity* (Pittsburgh: Western Pennsylvania Historical Society, 1994).

¹¹ Laurence Glasco, "Taking Care of Business: The Black Entrepreneurial Elite in Turn-of-the-Century Pittsburgh," *Pittsburgh History* 78 (Winter 1995/96), 177ff. Henceforth cited as Glasco, "Taking Care of Business." By the year 1900, rapid growth in the overall population of Pittsburgh made it the seventh largest city in the nation. Not until 1920 did Blacks make up more than 5 percent of the city's population.

be admitted to the orchestra, dress or family circle of the opera house, could not purchase a sleeping berth on any of the railroads that leave the city, could not take dinner at the Monongahela House, Hare's Hotel, or any A No. 1 restaurant," and could not even enter the Lincoln Club "except as a waiter."¹² Laboring Blacks also suffered occupational discrimination. Until the labor shortages of World War I pried open unskilled industrial jobs to Blacks in more than token numbers, they were generally excluded from industrial labor. As a consequence, most worked as teamsters, refuse collectors, janitors, and laundresses, while the more fortunate found employment as waiters, barbers, railroad porters, butlers, maids, coachmen, and gardeners. The census of 1900 shows that over two-thirds of the city's Italians and Poles, but less than ten percent of Blacks, held industrial jobs.¹³

¹² Glasco, "Double Burden," 69-110. Also Laurence Glasco, ed., *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 1-67. Henceforth cited as Glasco, ed., *WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*. Quote is from pp. 65-66. We do not know whether Blacks were discriminated against in the city's leading cultural establishments, like the Symphony. David Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973) shows that for turn of the century Detroit, although there was racial discrimination in cultural affairs, these tended to be on the part of the smaller theaters. That educated, cultured people in Pittsburgh were capable of discrimination goes without saying. Alberta Hall Nelson, who grew up in Pittsburgh in the 1920's and 1930's, tells of her experience attending a concert by Marian Anderson in the mid-1930's at the YMHA, the Jewish "Y" of Pittsburgh. She purchased a ticket for the concert, and was surprised to notice the strange coincidence that all the Blacks who attended had been sold tickets that seated them in the last few rows.

¹³An interesting regional difference existed. Compared to their Southern-born counterparts, Northern-born Blacks were twice as likely to be either laborers or metal workers, and half as likely to be service workers. Thus, 26 percent of Southern-born Blacks were in labor or metal trades and 36% in service; the corresponding figures were 51 percent and 18 percent among Northern-born Blacks. The figures are even more striking among the relatively few metal workers. Although the puddlers from Virginia receive the bulk of attention of Black iron and steel workers, in fact only 2 percent of Southern-born Blacks were so listed by the census, compared to 11 percent of Northern-born Blacks. This is an anomaly that needs to be explored. The figures are recalculations from Table 3 in John Bodnar, Roger Simon and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

Black Pittsburgh and Classical Music: The 1900s Through the 1930's

Black Pittsburghers manifested a strong interest in the arts, especially, and remarkably, in European classical music. A major study of Black Pittsburgh intones that, "Of the arts, music has been most widely practiced and most fully developed by the Pittsburgh Negro." And indeed, at the turn of the twentieth century, Black Pittsburgh had an active musical life, one centered in church choirs.

Music in Black Pittsburgh was both plentiful and of high quality, something acknowledged at the time by a local White paper. "Pittsburgh's colored population," it wrote, "has made a marked advance in music as well as along almost all the other professions or business lines." The paper was pleased that now many Black musicians had formal music training "with a solid grounding in principles and theory."¹⁴

Between 1900 and 1920, this interest in classical European music can be seen in the fact that Black Pittsburgh boasted six concert orchestras. Not all six existed at the same time, but between 1900 and 1920 scarcely a year went by without at least one operating. They included the Grand Elysian Symphony Orchestra, Robinson's Orchestra, the Myers Family Orchestra, the Kelly Orchestra, Peeler's Orchestra, Taylor's Orchestra, and Frederick Hawkins' immodestly named Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Some of these orchestra leaders had formal training. Kelly was a former coal miner who studied music at Oberlin College in Ohio. Taylor had studied at the Toronto College of Music and had played first violin with the Toronto Civic Orchestra.

¹⁴ Glasco, ed., *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*, 27, 41, 58-59.

Frederick Hawkins, a chemical engineer at Crucible Steel Company, also was a trained musician.¹⁵

These classical musicians enjoyed numerous opportunities to perform in the Black community. David Grant, a harpist from the nearby steel town of Rankin, enjoyed sufficient popularity that in 1900 he declined to participate in a contest in New York City because, he said, "it would seriously interfere with his other engagements."¹⁶ In 1920, Mary Cardwell, a recent graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music and later the founder of the city's National Negro Opera Company, gave a piano recital at Carnegie Hall in her home town of Homestead.¹⁷ Two Black groups specialized in medieval and renaissance music: the Xanorphica Mandolin Quintet, formed in 1909, and the Greater Pittsburgh Consolidated Mandolin Orchestra, composed of forty players.¹⁸

¹⁵On the Grand Elysian Symphony Orchestra, see "Afro-American Notes," *Pittsburgh Press*, January 22, 1905 and January 29, 1905. . Hereafter cited as "Afro-American Notes." On the Myers Family Orchestra, see "Afro-American Notes," May 29, 1910. Hawkins also continued his dance music interests and employed his orchestra to play ragtime and jazz. On Hawkins and Peeler, see Glasco, ed., *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*, 28-49, esp. 5-7, 60-62. David Peeler's son, Lawrence Peeler, was a noted violinist who, in 1937, was hired to teach music, making him the first full-time Black teacher hired to teach in the Pittsburgh public schools (in 1933 he had been hired on a part-time basis). For more on Lawrence Peeler, see Ralph Proctor, Jr., "Racial Discrimination Against Black Teachers and Black Professionals in the Pittsburgh Public School System, 1834-1973" (PhD. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1979), 75-76. In 1937 A.R. Taylor pulled together members of various musical groups to form a forty-five member symphony orchestra that performed at the YMCA and other venues.

¹⁶ "Afro-American Notes," November 4, 1900.

¹⁷The recital was June 29, 1920; reported in "Afro-American Notes," June 27, 1920.

¹⁸ "Afro-American Notes," October 16, 1910 and October 23, 1910. The Mandolin Orchestra and Xanorphica Mandolin Quintet played at Old Calvary Episcopal Church, located at the corner of Station St. and Penn Avenue in Homewood.

Musicians Local 471: Roots, Structure, and Policies

It was in this context that in 1906 Pittsburgh's Black musicians established the Pittsburgh Afro-American Musicians Association to promote and protect their interests.¹⁹ Three committee members evaluated the credentials of potential members, and there was a \$1.00 initiation fee with a \$2.00 yearly dues payment.²⁰ The AAMA was founded at a time when Black musicians, like Blacks in nearly all fields, suffered systematic discrimination. White employers often used them only for performing at circuses and minstrel shows.²¹ The Association tried to address these problems by promoting church recitals and other social events that allowed Black performers to display their efforts in classical music and "high" culture in a more dignified manner. For their efforts along those lines, they drew affection and respect long afterwards.

Curtis Young, a prominent Black musician, described the Association in glowing terms:

¹⁹ Charter of Afro-American Musical Association, recorded June 19, 1906, Judge Marshall Brown, Court No. 1 of Allegheny Co., P.A. Charter subscribers included James E. Jenkins, S. Lincoln Minor, E.H. Gordon, B.C. Gordon, C.A. Howard, Edward B. Robinson, Abraham Turner, John T. Williams, John Gray, C.W. Howard, Isaac Howell, and R.W. Jenkins. Charter filing fee was \$100.00. Initiation fee was one dollar with two dollar annual dues. A special committee of three members would investigate the character and qualifications of all applicants. All applications for membership required the signature of two existing members. Five ballots cast against the applicant resulted in his denial of membership status. (This footnote and the information cited from it were provided by The African American jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh in Manuscript Draft #1. Shakura A. Sabur, "The Roots of the African American Musicians Union Local No. 471 of the American Federation of Musicians in the City of Pittsburgh 1920-1966 and Beyond.") The oral history collection of the African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh (AAJPSP) is housed in the Archives of the University of Pittsburgh.

²⁰ Shakura A. Sabur, "The Roots of the African American Musicians Union Local No. 471 of the American Federation of Musicians in the City of Pittsburgh 1920-1966 and Beyond."

²¹ Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 300. Also see John Szwed, *Jazz 101: A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Jazz* (New York: Hyperion, 2000); Scott Knowles Deveau, *Jazz* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2015). Black performers were also discriminated against in the circus, which included vaudeville acts, burlesque, bands, and side shows, which had become an American tradition by the late 19th century. From 1901 until 1930, Perry J. Lowery, the first Black musician to establish permanent associations with the major circuses, toured with his vaudeville acts and expanded opportunities for Black musicians and performers.

The members of the Afro-American Musical Association were real pioneers in Pittsburgh. They were considered "legitimate" musicians because they focused on the classical musical style and did not play jazz. These musicians could read music, were formally trained in their instruments and maintained a performance demeanor that did not allow for the improvisation, spontaneity, or versatility of jazz. These musicians followed a more European concert traditional style because that is what was accepted as the more "intellectual" idiom.²²

In 1908, two years after the founding of the AAMA, the city's Black musicians established Musicians Union Local 471, which received its charter from the American Federation of Labor only six years after the establishment of the first "colored" musicians union in the U.S.²³ Reflecting the national pattern of racial segregation, the AFM granted only racially separate charters to "colored" and White locals. Thus, in 1897, it had granted a charter to the Pittsburgh White musician Local 60.²⁴ Local 471 was recognized as one of only six Black musicians locals in the nation, making it part of the vanguard for the organized protection of rights for Black musicians.²⁵

²² Shakura Sabur, "Afro-American Musical Association of Pittsburgh: Ancestors of Local 471," in *The Roots of the African American Musicians' Union Local No. 471 of the American Federation of Musicians in the City of Pittsburgh 1920-1966 and Beyond*, Manuscript Draft #, 12.

²³ "AFM – The Black Musicians Union," Old Mon Music: Pittsburgh Sounds, accessed October 20, 2012, Oldmonmusic.blogspot.com.

²⁴ "AFM – The Black Musicians Union," Old Mon Music: Pittsburgh Sounds, accessed October 20, 2012, Oldmonmusic.blogspot.com.

²⁵ "Afro-American Notes," *Pittsburgh Press*, December 13, 1914: 47.

We know little about Local 471's early operation because nearly all of its records were lost during its merger years later with Local 60.²⁶ We know that residents of Local 471 were elected for two-year terms, with no limits on the number of terms they could serve.²⁷ And we know that, while in theory Local 471 had the privilege of voicing members' concerns at national AFM events, segregation limited its influence. More specifically, the all Black musical unions did not have equal voice nor equal vote at the AFM conventions. Essentially, the Black musicians of Local 471 were unable to effectuate any meaningful policy changes against pervasive racial discrimination. For example, with few exceptions, they were not allowed to perform below Grant Street, downtown.²⁸

From the time of its founding in 1908, Local 471 was active. In 1912, it hosted its second annual Musicians Ball at Union Labor Temple and provided twenty musicians for the occasion.²⁹ Its business meetings were well attended, or at least were described as requesting "a large attendance." In 1914, its membership roster was described as "sizable."³⁰ And it held regular

²⁶On the Grand Elysian Symphony Orchestra, see "Afro-American Notes," January 22, 1905 or January 29, 1905. On the Myers Family Orchestra, see "Afro-American Notes," May 29, 1910. Hawkins also continued his dance music interests and employed his orchestra to play ragtime and jazz. On Hawkins and Peeler, see Wright, "The Negro in Pittsburgh," 28-49, 60-62. David Peeler's son, Lawrence Peeler, was a noted violinist who, in 1937, was hired to teach music, making him the first full-time Black teacher hired to teach in the Pittsburgh public schools (in 1933 he had been hired on a part-time basis). For more on Lawrence Peeler, see Ralph Proctor, Jr., "Racial Discrimination Against Black Teachers and Black Professionals in the Pittsburgh Public School System, 1834-1973" (PhD. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1979), 75-76. In 1937 A.R. Taylor pulled together members of various musical groups to form a forty-five member symphony orchestra that performed at the YMCA and other venues.

²⁷ "AFM – The Black Musicians Union," Old Mon Music: Pittsburgh Sounds, accessed October 20, 2012, Oldmonmusic.blogspot.com.

²⁸ Walt Harper, interview by George Thompson, July 21, 1997. The fact that Black musicians could not play downtown was cited in several interviews.

²⁹ "Afro-American Notes," *Pittsburgh Press*, December 13, 1914: 47; also December 29, 1912: 27.

³⁰ "Afro-American Notes," *Pittsburgh Press*, December 13, 1914: 47, and March 15, 1914: 48.

elections of officers. At a meeting in 1914, for example, James R. Williams was elected president; James Myers vice president; George Nelson financial secretary, Baxter Ellis corresponding secretary; William King treasurer, and J.F. Nolden business agent.

For the first ten years or so, we can assume that Local 471 catered primarily to musicians playing classical music. However, beginning in 1917, this all changed rapidly. America's entry into World War I closed off European immigration, which forced American industrialists to recruit Southern Blacks to fill the industrial jobs that would have been taken by European immigrants. Job openings at Jones & Laughlin and other steel plants enlarged the city's Black population from 25,000 in 1910 to 55,000 in 1930, while hiring at Carnegie Steel plants in the nearby mill towns that lined the Monongahela River—Aliquippa, Homestead, Rankin, Braddock, Duquesne, McKeesport, and Clairton—raised the Black population there from 5,000 to 23,000.

The 1920's

The resulting migration of Blacks north, referred to as the Great Migration, transformed the demographics—and cultural life—of Pittsburgh as well as of many other Northern cities. Most of these newer, World War I migrants came from the Deep South, particularly the states of Alabama and Georgia.³¹ Numerically, they soon overwhelmed the city's long-settled elite, often light-skinned and descendants of Virginians. These called themselves as "Old

³¹ Laurence Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century," unpublished MS in possession of the author.

Pittsburghers, stressed genteel culture and classical European music. The newer migrants, often with darker skin and employed in blue collar occupations, favored the blues and ragtime.³²

Even with the challenges of racial prejudice and intra-race color discrimination, adjusting to new types of jobs, and a grueling work pace, Black migrants adjusted, proving their resilience.³³ They did not find economic paradise in Pittsburgh, for were confined largely to low-paying, dangerous, and insufferably hot jobs. They breathed in toxic air and resided in flimsy housing.³⁴ By 1919 on the eve of the Great Steel Strike, 95% of Black workers in Pittsburgh were relegated to what could be considered the worst jobs, meaning the lowest paying and most dangerous.³⁵ Southern labor, which found its rhythm in agricultural cycles, was replaced by the breakneck pace of Northern industrial labor.

During the 1920s, jazz became a bedrock of Pittsburgh's community, the release valve for Black creativity and artistic genius, and a way for Blacks to unfurl their frustrations from the work week. Similar developments were happening in other locales, making jazz part of an eclectic mix of several independent musical genres including blues, ragtime, brass-band music, and syncopated jazz music.³⁶ Many scholars place the origins of jazz to New Orleans in the early 1900s, but jazz has also been linked to and described as a variation of Black folk music

³² Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

³³ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

³⁴ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

³⁵ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

³⁶ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 313-340, 366, 467. "The music called jazz, which had been created by African Americans, was gradually coming to represent the true American music to the world," 467.

embodying African-American, African, and European elements.³⁷ New York and Chicago became hotbeds for early jazz music as it migrated from the deep South north and westward. Although originated by Blacks, jazz was introduced to the broader public by White dance orchestras.³⁸ At the same time White orchestras were displaying their brand of jazz, Blacks were continuing to play the music that they had created. Early Black jazz ensembles usually included pianists, drummers, and or an individual that played the banjo or harmonica.³⁹

Jazz, it seemed, made an early quantum leap. It was deeply rooted in folk music, culled from the soulful instrumental tidings offered from a marginalized population. And yet, it found itself moving from informal realms onto more formal stages. Cities like New York, Chicago, Denver, Memphis welcomed this new music during the early 20th Century.⁴⁰ While there were dance orchestras that played jazz, this music also served as the soundtrack for early vaudeville shows. By 1918 as America was in the clutches of WWI, the linguistic term “jazz” had engrained itself in mainstream vocabulary.⁴¹ Jazz, a genre that had struggled to be recognized and legitimized in its neonatal stages had become something concrete—a genre with a start from which it evolved and proved durable.

The development of jazz was influenced by societal trends in the second decade of the twentieth century. The Great Migration was a result of economic and social forces pulling

³⁷ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 313-340, 366, 467

³⁸ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 313-340, 366, 467, 366.

³⁹ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 313-340, 366, 467, 366.

⁴⁰ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 313-340, 366, 467, 366.

⁴¹ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 313-340, 366, 467, 366, 367.

Blacks from the South and pushing them northward. Night clubs demanding musical entertainment flourished during this period.⁴² Nightlife served as the antidote to the harsh struggle for survival in the mills and mill towns of a Northern city like Pittsburgh. The night club scene became more robust as Black migrants sought to unleash their frustrations and recuperate from utterly back-breaking labor. It was in these entertainment spaces that jazz fulfilled its highest purpose—providing the soundtrack for a people and a city in transition.

It was in this period that Pittsburgh's Black musicians union was founded and persisted. Unfortunately, we know very little of those early years. In 1924, we learn from *The Pittsburgh Courier*, the city's African American newspaper of record, that Local 471 records were not being kept as meticulously as some would have liked. The *Pittsburgh Courier* complained that records mainly recorded lapses in dues payments. We also learn that the union met monthly at such locations as the Masonic Hall and the Iron City Lodge.⁴³ We also learn from one of the leading local mainstream papers that, despite their racial differences, members of 471 occasionally attended meetings of the American Federation of Musicians as guests of Local 60. On May 12, 1920, such a joint meeting was held at the William Penn Hotel, downtown, in which transportation was organized by Local 60.⁴⁴

Most importantly, we learn that the union was seldom able to secure work for its members.⁴⁵ In cases when they found work in White establishments, they faced discrimination.

⁴² Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 313-340, 366, 467, 366, 366.

⁴³ "Fortnightly Club," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 1, 1924: 4.

⁴⁴ "Musicians Get Trip," *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, May 12, 1920: 13.

⁴⁵ John Clark, "Wylie Avenue," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 6, 1926, 3.

For example, they had to get clearance in order to broadcast from radio studios.⁴⁶ Not all discrimination faced by 471 was strictly racial. In 1926, for example, locals complained that out-of-town musicians were being offered higher wage scales than they.⁴⁷ Despite such limitations, Local 471 leaders tried to fight for their members. Fritz Hawkins, for example, who was Local 471 president for eight years, complained that he had petitioned the Handel Theater Corporation to open its doors to Negro performers, but to no avail.⁴⁸

The Great Depression

In 1929, the collapse of the New York stock exchange marked the beginning of the greatest economic meltdown in the country's history. The consequences were disastrous for Pittsburgh. Fifteen percent of White residents and 49 percent of Blacks were quickly placed on the relief rolls, a figure that for Blacks rose to a staggering 60 percent by 1935.⁴⁹ A 1940 WPA study, *The Negro in Pittsburgh*, describes the human devastation wrought by the Great Depression. It characterized the city's Hill District as an example "of the worst that a fiercely industrial city ... can do to human beings." The study portrayed scenes of "impoverished Jews, Italians, Negroes; slump-shouldered men with hungry eyes; Negro women, spindle-legged from

⁴⁶ John Clark, "Wylie Avenue," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 13, 1926: 3

⁴⁷ John Clark, "Wylie Avenue," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 20, 1926: 3.

⁴⁸ Fritz Hawkins, "Letter to the Editor," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 29, 1929: A8.

⁴⁹ Elsie Witchen, *Tuberculosis and the Negro in Pittsburgh: A Report of the Negro Health Survey*, (Tuberculosis League of Pittsburgh, 1934), 55, based on reports by the Bureau of Social Research of the Federation of Social Agencies of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. Also, Eric Davin, "Blue Collar Democracy: Ethnic Workers and Class Politics in Pittsburgh's Steel Valley, 1914-1948," PhD. diss., (University of Pittsburgh, 1999), 271; *Pittsburgh Press*, Feb 7, 1935.

childhood rickets; spine-sagging, down-at-heel, listless men and women, or drink-blurred White and Black faces screeching filth and strident jokes.”⁵⁰ Dire economic conditions caused Blacks to desert the “Party of Lincoln” and turn to the Democratic party of Franklin Roosevelt’s so-called “New Deal.”

Those same conditions, ironically, had a positive effect on the music scene, as music became even more of an elixir for those suffering economic privation. Blacks who had come to Pittsburgh to escape racial terror in the South had been transformed into a new type of citizen: working class, politically active, and entertainment seeking. Interest in classical music persisted, as evidenced in the spring of 1939 when Local 471 musicians participated in a dedication to Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, the noted African American composer of classical music.⁵¹ But, despite continuing performances of classical music by Pittsburgh Black musicians, jazz asserted itself during this time and by the 1940s had become America’s mainstream music of choice.⁵² Newspaper notices in the city’s Black newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, show a sharp decline in classical music concerts and an equally sharp rise in jazz performances.

Partly, this shift to jazz reflects the coming of age of a new generation of Black musicians with extraordinary talents. Billy Strayhorn was one. A prodigy who wrote the sophisticated tune “Lush Life” as a mere teen, Strayhorn’s talent caught the attention of Duke Ellington, who invited him to write music for his band. But there were many others. Mary Lou Williams and Errol Garner, both pianists, Kenny Clarke and Art Blakey, drummers, and Billy Eckstine and

⁵⁰ Glasco, ed., *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*, 26.

⁵¹ “Kandid Comments,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 8, 1939: 21.

⁵² Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 313-340, 467.

Eddie Jefferson, singers, also called Pittsburgh home as they came to national prominence during the thirties. Local figures like Leroy Brown and his orchestra lacked national recognition but were recognized locally as masters of swing.⁵³

Venues featuring live music had no lack of clientele. The most prominent of these, the Crawford Grill, owned by African American numbers baron Gus Greenlee, opened in 1931. Located on lower Wylie Avenue and famous for its piano positioned several feet above the patrons, the Grill quickly became the entertainment place “to be.” The Pythian Temple, another place “to be,” contained two large dance halls. One was the Savoy. Located on Center Avenue, the Savoy had started out as the Elmore Theater until in 1933 it was refurbished and rebranded by Harry Hendel, one of the Hill’s leading club owners. Black music promoter Sellers Hall regularly used the Savoy to host such national figures as Chick Webb, Noble Sissle, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Jimmie Lunceford, and Lucky Millinder. He also brought in Pittsburgh’s own nationally famous musicians, such as Earl Hines and Billy Eckstine, as well as renowned performers like Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, and Mary Lou Williams.⁵⁴ The Savoy also booked national blues luminaries such as Jelly Roll Morton, Ma Rainey, and Bessie Smith.⁵⁵ Musical venues in nearby mill towns also drew large crowds. For example, over 2,000 fans filled Duquesne Gardens for a Valentine’s Dance where the Jimmie Lunceford Band provided the entertainment. Another 1,000 had to remain outside in the rain because there was no room inside. In addition to such major venues, smaller clubs provided plenty of work for musicians.

⁵³ Anon., “Swingin’ Among the Musicians,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 21, 1939.

⁵⁴ “Local Musicians Plan Get-together,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 26, 1935: 18.

⁵⁵ “Savoy Ballroom Orchestra,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 28, 1934: A8.

The Fullerton Inn, the Paradise Inn, the Bird, and Derby Dad's were some of these smaller venues that offered top-notch entertainment.⁵⁶ Work also was available outside the city, in such places as Buffalo, New York, as well as any number of small town in western Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio.⁵⁷

With work widely available, Local 471 prospered and its membership rolls increased substantially.⁵⁸ In 1930, during the presidency of Frederick Hawkins, 471 reportedly had some 1,599 members.⁵⁹ That number may have included "hangers-on" who joined simply in order to socialize with the musicians, but it is impressive nonetheless. In 1931, Local 471 published a membership list to help clarify both its official membership as well as the venues that adhered to wage scales for Black musicians.⁶⁰

Overall, the 1930's were good times for musicians, but the decade was not without challenges. One of the most pressing was securing the right to serve alcohol in the Musicians Club. Local 471 president Henry Jackson asked the national arm of the American Federation of Music for assistance against a ruling by the liquor control board that restricted music and

⁵⁶ "Swingin' Among the Musicians," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 4, 1939.

⁵⁷ "Swingin' Among the Musicians," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 9, 1935: A6. Members of the African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh. Interview (Charles Austin, Frank McCown, Ruby Young, John Hughes provided a series of conversations for me to record and understand the history of Local 471), Interview by Johnathan J. White, April 19, 2005. In this particular interview, the group discussed various local neighborhoods as well as some of the surrounding regions and bordering states that Local 471 members played in.

⁵⁸ Gaitor Moir, "Hundreds Turned Away from Lunceford Dance," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 18, 1939: 18.

⁵⁹ "Pitt Lyceum," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 22, 1930: 8.

⁶⁰ "The Theatrical Question Box," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 3, 1931: 19.

dancing shows from continuing after clubs shut down. Jackson lamented that customers were forced to prematurely end the entertainment due to this ruling.⁶¹

With the popularity of the Hill District surging as an entertainment hotspot, Local 471 increased its efforts to build its membership and make sure Black musicians were compensated fairly. An election was held in November 1939 in which Henry Jackson was elected president, Claude Fisher-Vice President and business agent, Claude Melendez- Secretary and Edward Greene-Treasurer.⁶² These leaders would shepherd Local 471 into the decade of the 1940's, a decade that many describe as the beginning of the "Golden Years" of jazz in Pittsburgh.

⁶¹ "Swingin' Among the Musicians," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 2, 1939.

⁶² "Musicians Elect New Officers-Seek Members," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 11, 1939: 21.

Chapter 3: The “Golden Years”

The enthusiasm was palpable. Eyes became misty. Smiles appeared involuntarily. Those who lived through this period frequently became lost in a flood of memories, enraptured by the “mythology”, the “legend”, of what Black Pittsburgh once was and will never be again. Black musicians talk about the 1940’s and early-to-mid-1950’s as the “The Golden Years,” a time when the entertainment scene thrived as never before or since. And, indeed, Laurence Glasco, who has long written about the history of Black Pittsburgh, characterizes the decade of the 1940’s and early 1950’s as the “best of times,” never equaled before or since in terms of Black employment, social life, and optimism about the future. Glasco says it was a time when

[i]ndustries, without government prodding, advertised in the *Courier* for skilled, semiskilled and unskilled workers, and when Blacks flocked to the region to take advantage of booming job opportunities. A time when newly opened, racially integrated housing projects thrilled local residents with their amenities. A time when flourishing businesses stayed open, sometimes all night, and dance halls brought in local as well as national bands. A time when the “Double V” campaign made fighting racism a patriotic act, and when churches, synagogues, radio stations and schools sponsored campaigns for interracial and religious tolerance. A time when an increasingly militant Black community forced downtown department stores to integrate their sales force. This

combination of full employment and racial progress generated a sense of optimism for the future that made the 1940's a very special decade.⁶³

The period began with the lead-up to WWII , a time when fighting for democracy abroad in the face of Hitler's racist regime inspired Blacks to get America also to fight racism at home. They protested the discriminatory hiring practices of local manufacturers, local hospitals, and local railroad companies.⁶⁴ The war years also were defined by a rapid growth in employment, made all the more dramatic because they came almost immediately after the economic depression of the 1930's. With the mills running around the clock, Pittsburgh's Black population surged from 62,000 to 86,000 in the 1940's as migrants poured in to capture those jobs.⁶⁵ Housing conditions also improved, as the federal government created subsidized public housing that gave Blacks access to quality housing that was a far cry from the crowded and dilapidated kitchenettes many Blacks long had occupied. Bedford Dwellings and Terrace Village gleamed with shiny new appliances and multiple rooms for reasonable rates.⁶⁶ Black business sprouted as never before. The 1946 city directory shows a plethora of Black owned businesses that included Goode's Pharmacy, McEvoy's jewelry shop, Nelson's Cleaners, Trower's Tailoring, Pernell's Printing, Woogie Harris' Crystal Barbershop; Nesbit's Pie Shoppe, Ma Pitts' Restaurant, Payne's and Poole's funeral homes, the Colonial, Palace, the Avenue Hotel, and any number of dance halls and night clubs including the Musicians Club, Gus Greenlee's two Crawford Grills,

⁶³ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

⁶⁴ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

⁶⁵ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

⁶⁶ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

and Stanley's restaurant and night club. Doctors, lawyers and dentists had offices on Wylie, while tailors, cleaners, shoe repairers, shoe shine parlors, barber shops, pool rooms, sandwich shops and bar-b-que places dotted [Wylie] Avenue.⁶⁷

The Music Scene

Improving social and economic conditions were reflected with Wylie Avenue becoming even more of a center for live entertainment.⁶⁸ Billy Strayhorn's ode to the "Lush Life" was not a chimera. Elite social clubs like the Loendi and the Frogs threw lavish, joyous celebrations featuring local musicians with national reputations.⁶⁹ There was a new sheen to Black life and culture. The duality of an energized working class juxtaposed with a thriving entertainment scene defined Black Pittsburgh during the 1940's. The Hill District became regarded as a flourishing neighborhood, one where you could find almost anything you desired. Blacks took pride in the neighborhood, and saw the grandeur of their own culture and economic and social capabilities. In this context, musicians came to regard the decade of the 1940's and early 1950's as the "Golden Years." It was a time when Blacks realized their place in America was not hopelessly static. it was subject to change and to be accentuated by the all the aspirations and accomplishments they brought to America's table.

Although jazz dominated the music offerings of the period, a not-insignificant part of Black Pittsburgh was still devoted to its classical roots. In 1941, Mary Cardwell Dawson's

⁶⁷ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

⁶⁸ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

⁶⁹ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

National Negro Opera Company gave a local performance of the opera *Aida* that was lauded by both White critics and Black.⁷⁰ However, there was no question that the historical orientation toward classical music had been overtaken by jazz. It was not a hostile takeover, but it was decisive. In just the year 1946, for example, the Savoy Ballroom brought in a stream of such musical luminaries as Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Roy Eldridge, Erskine Hawkins, Jimmie Lunceford, and Billy Eckstine. Walt Harper's star rose during this era, as did those of other local favorites such as the Honey Drippers, Leroy Brown, Honey Boy Minor, John Hughes, Joe Westray, and Ruby Young. The Loendi Club, Stanley's and the Crawford Grill became famous for top-notch entertainment. In 1945, (although some sources cite an official opening date of 1943), Gus Greenlee opened a second Crawford Grill, located farther up Wylie Ave; in 1949 he opened a third version of the Crawford Grill on the Northside.⁷¹

While the Hill District remained the epicenter of musical entertainment, other neighborhoods had notable jazz venues. Homewood, for example, had the Cottage Inn, and East liberty the El Cabana and Club Casino. Mill towns along the Monongahela River had a number of highly regarded jazz spots, such as the Cotton Club in Rankin, the Sky Rocket in Homestead, and the City Club in McKeesport. Mill towns like Monessen, located farther away from Black Pittsburgh's more traditional entertainment hotspots, brought in such highly touted

⁷⁰ "Mary Cardwell Dawson: Pioneering Founder of the National Negro Opera Company who Fought Discrimination in Opera," Pittsburgh Music History Website, Google, accessed July 5, 2020, sites.google.com. This article also referenced: "Grand Opera as Racial Uplift: The National Negro Opera Company 1941-1962," by Christopher Wells, *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

⁷¹ "Showing the Love for Crawford Grill No. 2, A Once Swinging Hot Spot in Pittsburgh," Pennsylvania Historic Preservation website, last modified in 2018, Google.com. Marylynne Pitz, "Crawford Grill No. 2 Nominated to the National Register of Historic Places," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 1, 2019.

and national figures as Cab Calloway, Dizzy Gillespie and Nat King Cole.⁷² Even venues that catered exclusively to White audiences, like the Palomar in downtown Pittsburgh, brought in noted local Black musicians like Leroy Brown.⁷³

Pittsburgh's Black musicians and Local 471 both benefited from these positive changes in economic condition. The booming economy that accompanied America's entry into World War II provided jobs for literally any man with a good back and a willingness to work hard. Finally, with some money in their pockets, workers could go out to bars and night clubs playing music they enjoyed.

Musicians' references to the 1940's and early 1950's as "Golden Years" by no meant that discrimination had vanished. Local 471's major concern was for Black artists would receive fair compensation and that only members would be allowed to play in local establishments, including those that discriminated racially. In theory, Local 471 had the privilege of voicing its concerns at national AFM events, in reality segregation limited the influence of the Black musicians. More specifically, records indicate that:

Black musical unions did not have equal voice or equal vote at AFM conventions.

Challenges to equal employment opportunities could be successfully thwarted under the language of the separate but equal doctrine. For example, with few exceptions,

⁷² Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

⁷³ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

Black musicians were not allowed to perform below Grant Street, in the downtown area or spend the night in the major hotels in Pittsburgh.⁷⁴

1941: 471 Establishes the Musicians Club

With jobs relatively plentiful, under the leadership of President Henry “Prez” Jackson, who ran things from 1938 until sometime in the mid-1940’s, Local 471 made the most popular and influential move of its long history. In November, 1941, Jackson moved the union from shared space at 1315 Wylie Avenue into its own separate business hall at 1213 Wylie.⁷⁵

The club moved into the spot formerly occupied by the Paramount Club, a prominent jazz club owned by Gus Greenlee, owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords baseball team and the undisputed “Numbers King” of Black Pittsburgh. Before Greenlee bought the place, the Paramount had been known as the Collins Inn, famous for its great entertainment and raucous atmosphere. Greenlee left the Collins Inn in 1931 to establish his Crawford Grill, allowing Local 471 to take over in the mid-1930’s and, in 1941, to open it as the Musicians Club.⁷⁶ The union

⁷⁴ Shakura Sabur, “Afro-American Musical Association of Pittsburgh: Ancestors of Local 471,” in *The Roots of the African American Musicians’ Union Local No. 471 of the American Federation of Musicians in the City of Pittsburgh 1920-1966 and Beyond*, Manuscript Draft #, p.14.

⁷⁵ “AFM – The Black Musicians Union,” Old Mon Music: Pittsburgh Sounds, accessed October 20, 2012, Oldmonmusic.blogspot.com. Jackson was succeeded by Stoney Gloster, who presided until 1954, followed by Carl Arter, who was elected to a four-year term, paving the way for Joe Westray, who became the last president of Local 471, serving as such at the time of the merger in 1965 with Local 60. Westray, Arter and Young became the first representatives to serve as Black representatives on the Local 60-471 joint board.

⁷⁶ “Swingin’ Among the Musicians,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 20, 1941.

installed offices, a bar/restaurant on the first floor, and a combination piano bar/rehearsal space on the second floor.⁷⁷

The Musicians Club quickly became 471's most important and beloved feature. It allowed 471 to operate as both a hiring hall and an informal place where local musicians could socialize, jam, and share tips with one another as well as with touring national musicians. It also provided a place for mentoring young musicians. And it was unique racially. Whereas 471 both legally and traditionally, functioned along strict racial lines, the Musicians Club was open to Whites, a "Black and tan" space that permitted informal, interracial mingling.

The reputation of the Musicians Club's as a place where musicians and non-musicians could rub elbows with the stars of entertainment was furthered in the winter of 1941, when 471 received a liquor license.⁷⁸ This development coincided with Local 471's decision to create associate memberships for those who wanted to drop by for a visit without the cost and responsibilities of full membership in either the union or the Club.⁷⁹ With its piano bar and rehearsal space, the Musicians Club became the showplace for 471, catering to both members and associates, the place where the famous and the "unfamous" inhabited the same sacred space, where Black and White musicians rubbed elbows, as well as where local and national musicians honed their musical chops.

The importance and vibrancy of the Musicians Club persisted well into the 1950's. Chuck Austin typified the rank-and-file members of Local 471. Austin says "When the Club was there,

⁷⁷ "Wylie Avenue," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 29, 1941: 14.

⁷⁸ "Musicians Appeal Liquor License," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 28, 1944: 9.

⁷⁹ "Wylie Avenue," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 29, 1941: 41.

it was open 24/7, ... I mean it was always open. You'd go by and you'd play, we'd put a band together. You play, you learn, you play some new tunes...We were all of one cause, it was just to play music you know."⁸⁰ The legendary Ahmad Jamal seconded this description of the Club and the atmosphere that permeated the Hill during the early 1950's. Recollecting his adolescence playing in different spots in the Hill District, Jamal referred to this neighborhood as the "capital of jazz" and the dome of the capital as the "Musicians Club."⁸¹

Local 471 held the key to this entertainment gateway. Its president, Henry Jackson, outlined a policy which allowed members of the union in good standing, to sponsor friends who could join as associates. These associates, if accepted by the executive board, gained coveted access to the Musicians Club's after hour jams.⁸² All types of individuals thirsted for access to the Musicians Club because it hosted such jazz luminaries as Art Blakey, Erroll Garner, Tommy and Stanley Turrentine, Mary Lou Williams, Leroy Brown, Walt Harper, Ruby Young, Harold Betters (sometimes spelled Bettors), Roger Humphries, Nelson Harrison and others.⁸³ This potent mix of musical talent with varying degrees of acclaim meant that the Musicians Club brought together musicians with national as well as local reputations along with those who simply wanted to share space and hear the melodies that saturated the club. By using both full and associate membership as the gateway, the Club created an exclusive portal that piqued the interest of those who wanted to be part of the action.

⁸⁰ "New Musicians :The Time-Harper Plays Friday," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 23, 1953.

⁸¹ "Local 471 Moves to East Liberty," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 25, 1953: 30.

⁸² "Swingin' Among the Musicians," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 20, 1941.

⁸³ "Swingin' Among the Musicians," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 20, 1941.

Alongside the social influence of the Musicians Club, the clout of Local 471 grew during the 1940's, allowing it to exert pressure on club owners to pay wage scale and hire Black entertainers. For example, as rumors surfaced that the Stanley Theater wasn't hiring Black artists, Local 471 ensured that several Black musicians like trumpeter Erskine Hawkins, saxophonist Jimmie Lunceford, the Ink Spots and others were contracted for work at the Stanley.⁸⁴ Moreover, Local 471 found itself in the midst of national union struggles when James Petrillo, president of the American Federation of Musicians, led a musicians strike against commercial recording companies over royalty payments. The strike was long, lasting from July, 1942 to November, 1944.⁸⁵ That the strike occurred during WWII meant that, despite war-time calls for national unity, the AFM was cognizant that, nonetheless, musicians needed fair compensation for their talents. Local 471, like members of other locals across the U.S., were in some ways independent contractors as well as musicians. As such, they diligently fought to ensure that that they were protected as they lent their skill to a variety of entertainment platforms. Another difficult situation for Local 471 occurred in 1944, when their liquor license was revoked on account of underage drinking. Due to the preponderance of afterhours shows and the litany of performers who regularly flocked to the Musicians Club, opportunities certainly existed for teenagers to partake of the festivities, albeit illegally. Local 471 appealed the ruling, and regained their liquor license after 70 days.⁸⁶ Moreover, as members of the AFM, Local 471 even found itself engaging with the military. The AFM's national president, James

⁸⁴ "Swingin' Among the Musicians," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 20, 1941.

⁸⁵ "Swingin' Among the Musicians," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 31, 1942.

⁸⁶ "Musicians Appeal Liquor License," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 28, 1944: 9.

Trujillo, wrote the Marine Corps, asking them to stop allowing members of their band to offer free music lessons.⁸⁷

Memories of the Golden Years

Given all these positive developments for 471 in the 1940s and early 1950s, it is not surprising that musicians retain generally positive memories of the times and of the union. It was not an indication of Black naiveté. It was not that Blacks didn't face serious issues. In fact, between 1947 and 1954, jobs in the steel industry decreased by 20,000 workers.⁸⁸ As has often been the case in American history, Blacks suffered more acutely than Whites from this employment decrease. Nevertheless, the memories of Black musicians during this era are overwhelmingly positive. Their good feelings about this era seem less like embellishment and more like an acknowledgment that Black Pittsburgh was in a better place, far from perfect but far better than what they had known before. Jazz was a vital component of how Black people, and Black musicians in particular, felt about themselves. It was a time that left an indelible impression on the members of Local 471.

Chuck Austin Reflects on the Golden Years

A Pittsburgh native, Chuck Austin was one of the chief guardians of the past and chronicler of the city's historic jazz legacy, one that in the 1940s and much of the 1950s experienced what most contemporary musicians refer to as the Golden Years. Not only did

⁸⁷ "Petrino Tells Marines," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 21, 1944.

⁸⁸ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

Austin have an expansive career as a multifaceted jazz artist over sixty years, he also volunteered himself as a protector of the legacy of Local 471. His contribution to Pittsburgh's jazz culture made him an inductee into the Pittsburgh Jazz Society's Hall of Fame.⁸⁹

Austin went on to found the African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh and served as its president.⁹⁰ He was a catalyst for keeping the story of Pittsburgh's Black jazz artists alive. He was interested in ensuring the public understood that Local 471 had made a significant contribution to Pittsburgh's music history, but he was not interested in creating an overly romanticized version of Local 471. In numerous interactions with Austin, it never felt as if he wanted to aggrandize his own accomplishments, but he did believe he was part of something special. He interviewed many of his colleagues for an oral history project sponsored by Pittsburgh's African American Jazz Preservation Society. Those interviews, digitally archived by the University of Pittsburgh, reveal Austin's passion for preserving and sharing the history of Local 471.

Austin was both a significant source of memory on the history of Local 471 and a conduit for eliciting and recording the memories of others. Of himself, he says, "I had a good ear, not perfect pitch, but I could play along with music on the radio or a recording and then write down what I heard. I knew right away that there was something special in music for me, and I dreamed of becoming a professional musician."⁹¹

⁸⁹ Robert Gorkczyca, "Chuck Austin: Musician with a Mission," *Western Pennsylvania History* (Winter 2010-11): 25.

⁹⁰ Gorkczyca, "Musician with a Mission," 26.

⁹¹ Gorkczyca, "Musician with a Mission," 26.

Austin expressed a common refrain reiterated by many of his peers. To be a jazz artist, a Black jazz artist, in Pittsburgh was something to aspire to. This aspiration was connected to the rich vitality of the culture that saturated Pittsburgh's neighborhoods. Austin as a young child visited his mother, after her divorce, when she served as a waitress in several Hill District night spots. Austin developed a love and internalized jazz concepts through observation and being in these prized entertainment spaces.⁹² After his graduation from Avonworth High School in 1945, Austin joined the military. It was here that he spoke against the stereotypical manual roles Blacks were often relegated to.⁹³ In 1948 Austin made his way back to Pittsburgh and immediately immersed himself in the music scene. He joined Local 471 because, he says, "joining the union was the best way that I could express the feeling of fellowship and fraternity that I felt for my fellow musicians."⁹⁴

Perhaps, this was the seed for his later activism on behalf of Black musicians in Pittsburgh. In an interview with Robert Gorczyca, Austin characterized Pittsburgh as "Up South," a phrase I heard him use many times in our conversations.⁹⁵ This phrase was an allusion to the segregation policies Austin saw when he returned to Pittsburgh in the 1940's. These policies limited where Black musicians could ply their trade unless they had garnered considerable acclaim. And yet, Austin's memories rarely suggested a severe disadvantage possessed by Blacks, especially during the 1940's and 50's. Austin had honed his musical skills

⁹² Gorczyca, "Musician with a Mission," 26.

⁹³ Gorczyca, "Musician with a Mission," 27.

⁹⁴ Gorczyca, "Musician with a Mission," 25.

⁹⁵ Gorczyca, "Musician with a Mission," 28.

playing in various types of shows with ultra-talented performers, across the South and Midwest.⁹⁶ Thus, when he did inject himself back in the Pittsburgh scene in the late 1940's, he recalled that he "was ready to play all night."⁹⁷ This points to the fact that, despite segregation, Pittsburgh offered Black musicians ample opportunities for employment in the years following the Second World War.

Austin's Bio: Early Years

Austin's first exposure to music was the violin, which he played for one year in 4th grade. As he says, "My mother played piano and my father played violin, so I had no choice but to be musical."⁹⁸ However, while his biological parents were musically inclined, Austin was raised primarily by his very religious grandparents. His grandfather, George Austin, was a deacon and, along with his grandmother, only played gospel within their home. However, his aunt lived next door and played popular music on the piano, which exposed Austin to jazz despite the restrictions on secular music imposed by his grandparents.⁹⁹ His love of a recording of Louis Armstrong, "Jeepers Creepers," was a major catalyst in his burgeoning musical career.

Austin's grandfather presented him and his foster brother with a trumpet one Christmas. Years later, their mother's boyfriend, a musician at the Roosevelt Theatre, showed the boys how to play the scales. Austin says his foster brother never fully embraced the "music

⁹⁶ Gorczyca, "Musician with a Mission," 26.

⁹⁷ Gorczyca, "Musician with a Mission," 25.

⁹⁸ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 7, 2006.

⁹⁹ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 7, 2006.

thing,” but Austin didn’t really have to struggle to learn to play. It was as if playing music came naturally.¹⁰⁰

Six months after receiving his first trumpet, Austin joined his sixth grade band. There he was a little Black boy, who from 6th to 11th grade was the only Black kid in his band. This was partly to be expected. He grew up in a small Black enclave of Ben Avon Heights in the North Hills, which was a mostly White suburb. He recalled feeling a sense of detachment from both his Black and White peers. As he focused more intensely on his music, he grew apart from some of his Black friends. Yet, while he participated in his school band for years, he lamented that his White fellow musicians never invited him to their houses after school to socialize.¹⁰¹ Thus, even in his earliest experiences, Austin was exposed to the walls that racism could erect. He would become keenly aware of what it felt like to be a minority in a musical setting. Nevertheless, these circumstances did not prevent him from excelling as a musician. Soon after joining his first school band, he became a band leader.

Austin didn’t always take full advantage of the opportunities he had during his childhood and adolescent years, but he was fortunate to receive a wealth of musical training. At Pittsburgh Musical Institute, he learned traditional concepts concerning harmony, theory, composition and arranging. Moreover, he had family support. His grandparents kicked him out of the house for playing secular music in high school, but he received ample encouragement from his parents. “I had to practice,” he says.

¹⁰⁰ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 7, 2006.

¹⁰¹ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 7, 2006.

My senior year in high school, my music teacher had a friend who gave me private lessons. My teacher had a big heart. I kind of skated by during this period. I didn't take full advantage of these opportunities. I got married. I was working three days a week and three days I was at school. I was playing at night, so I had little time. But I knew I didn't want to spend all my time playing in Black clubs and shows. I wanted to do other things."¹⁰²

So here again it was clear that even as a young man aware of the Black entertainment world offered by Pittsburgh in the 1940's and 50's, he was also aware that there was another world to which Blacks had no access because of discrimination.

After graduating from high school in 1945, Austin joined the Navy. He had hoped to play in the military band, but never received the chance. He returned to Pittsburgh after leaving the service and moved back to Homewood with his mother. It was during this time, he says, that he began to develop as a musician.¹⁰³ He soon joined Local 471, a move that would reinforce his love affair with the Pittsburgh jazz scene. It also would make him aware of the plight of Black musicians and of the fraternal support offered by 471 and the Musicians Club.

Austin Joins Local 471 in Late 1940's

When Austin joined 471 in the late 1940's, it fulfilled a desire to be in the presence of Pittsburgh's prolific musical talent. However, his joining the union was also a necessity because

¹⁰² Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

¹⁰³ Nate Guidry, "A Life in Tune: Chuck Austin, the 'Perfect Sideman,' Raises the Bar for Career Jazz Players," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 11, 2004: 61.

club owners wouldn't employ a musician who didn't have a union card. Austin's first union card read, "Musicians Protective Association," which meant the union representative would go to the club owners and guarantee that musicians would receive the union scale. Conversely, if musicians were delinquent paying their dues, the union representative would get the money from the club owner before the musicians were paid.¹⁰⁴

Austin smiles generously when speaking of his early years as a union member. He mentions what it was like to go into the Musicians Club where all of Pittsburgh's finest jazz players congregated. There were so many older guys there that he felt overwhelmed. He remembers how the doorman to the Musicians Club would constantly ask him to see his union card before he could enter. Meanwhile other \$2.00 associate members, who often weren't musicians but just people who wanted to socialize with the artists at the Club would walk right past the doorman because their faces were well known.¹⁰⁵

After he began playing regularly, Austin noticed differences in the playing styles of Black and White musicians. "There were two levels of musicianship. Blacks, we played in a more entertaining, crowd-pleasing way. We wanted to entertain you, make you smile. We are not on earth for that long, and I didn't want to get involved with any negative stuff."¹⁰⁶ Whites on the other hand played in a more technical [style], by the letter, an unemotional style."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Guidry, "A Life in Tune."

¹⁰⁵ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 14, 2006.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 10, 2006.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 14, 2006.

Austin worked hard to develop his improvisational style of playing. When he played his first gig, Austin knew nothing about improvisation. “I could read music,” he says, “and play written-out solos, but I had nothing coming out of my head in terms of improvisation.” After years of perfecting his craft, Chuck created his own distinct sound. This was important to him because, as an artist, he felt strongly that “a good sound was the first thing you needed.”¹⁰⁸ Austin’s first job was at an after-hours club in the Hill District. On a tour of neighborhoods he played in, he showed me where vocalist Dakota Staton grew up. He performed with her in the early phase of his career before she became a successful recording artist for Capitol Records.

Since musician jobs were rarely permanent, Austin had to always be prepared to transition to other jobs. When his first gig ended in the early fifties, he was granted the opportunity to play in Joe Westray’s band. He got the job based on a recommendation by Warren Watson, an accomplished musician who at the time was busy with law school. Watson suggested that Austin take his place and play trumpet, partly because he felt Austin could read music well and “could play it all.”¹⁰⁹ Austin found this an excellent experience. Westray’s band primarily played blues, Austin says, since “in those days you couldn’t play a Black event and not play the blues ... it was a great experience for me because it provided me with an introduction to a lot of musicians around the city ... that band was my foundation, and, as often as I can, I give credit to Joe Westray and Judge Watson.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Nate Guidry, “A life in Tune.”

¹⁰⁹ Guidry, “A Life in Tune.”

¹¹⁰ Guidry, “A Life in Tune.”

Austin in the 1950's

During the 1950's, combos, or smaller bands, gained prominence as big bands became economically unsupportable in smaller venues. In 1953, Austin joined the Ruby Young trio as they opened up the legendary Hurricane Lounge. While Young played the organ, Austin played the trumpet, and Bobby Boswell was on bass. George Childress was their manager. Austin described the music he played in this trio as being more commercial. As Austin says:

I hadn't really developed as jazz player or improviser. It was acceptable music. Birdie, who owned the Hurricane, was a good friend of Ruby's. She had a crowd and we made money. For me it was a good experience ... I was just learning to play and just learning the business. When I got fired they brought in a guitar and a sax. They always had small bands because the club was small. They usually had organ trios. I learned to play in 20 or 40 minute sets. Usually we played from 9pm to 2 am, and then we hit the after-hours clubs.”¹¹¹

Austin's playing schedule, especially during his beginning years, was not set in stone. He described his experience in an interview when he stated:

Usually we would play in a neighborhood from Friday to Sunday. We didn't jump from neighborhood to neighborhood on any kind of schedule. Whatever was available, whichever group was ready to go and play, took advantage. The union didn't really handle booking or hiring. That was handled by booking agents and contractors.

¹¹¹ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

Sometimes certain bands suited a certain crowd or brought in money so they were called in.

During and after WWII there was so much money in circulation. There were years that people just wanted to have a good time. We would have floor shows with singers and dancers, including female interpretive dancers to make people have a good time. People were not really listening to the music critically, so we tended to play music that was popular.

Musicians—we are incidental people. People don't pay much attention to what we are doing, but if we stop, they miss it. You just gotta have that thing going on. Even today this is true. It is something about music. That is why we played the juke boxes so loud or people play it in their cars so loud. They are killing themselves, but they need that feeling. Music is this strange commodity. It is therapy.¹¹²

Austin also discussed the audiences and general environments he played in. When asked if he and the other musicians were critical of their performances he responded at length:

There was always someone who was more critical of the music. If I messed up, I knew it even if the audience doesn't, and I would frown up because I don't know how to show my displeasure discreetly. Some bands were ragged, not disciplined. A good band is a disciplined band. By and large, the general public didn't want to utilize their brain but so much, so there wasn't much criticism from them.

¹¹² Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

The next level would be those people who would be critical. In the classical field, there is a great deal of criticism. Plus, it is pre-planned music, no real improvisation. You knew what they would be playing and what you would be hearing from one night to the next. Jazz is more flexible. It depends on what you feel, what the mood is that night. Real jazz is spontaneous. It has to come from within, although you can't let your personal problems and conditions affect you too much. I buried my mother and father, and that [same] night was on the job. When my grandfather passed, my father encouraged me to go to work. In jazz we had to learn to adjust to the crowd—whatever their mood was. I do remember playing at an Atlanta club and a violent situation came about. We tried to play music that would calm the crowd down. Sometimes though, you got to know when to pack your stuff, hide behind the piano, or just get out of there.¹¹³

Austin went on to play with Lloyd Price's band. Price was a major act for ABC Paramount, and his band, which included Austin, recorded an album, *Personality* in 1959.¹¹⁴ In the early 1960's Austin turned down the opportunity to play with Ray Charles' band so that he could remain in Pittsburgh with his ex-wife, Bernice, and their children. He cites this as a regret, yet when asked about sacrificing this opportunity to perform with a big time celebrity like Ray Charles, he stated that it was the right thing to do at the time.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

¹¹⁴ Guidry, "A Life in Tune.":

¹¹⁵ Guidry, "A Life in Tune."

Austin also performed with many other acts including the Jack Purcell Music Service. In the 1970s, he played with Count Basie at the Savoy Ballroom in the Hill.¹¹⁶ He went on to lead the trumpet section in the Roger Humphries Big Band, played with the Big Burgh Band, and with the Balcony Big Band in Shadyside.¹¹⁷ Always eager and ready to take on other jobs, Austin even participated in local Kuntu Theatre Productions requiring small bands, as well as in plays like *Ain't Misbehavin'*, held in downtown Pittsburgh.

When asked to describe his long and varied playing career, Austin replies simply, "Music is my life. It's what has sustained me through some really tough times. It hasn't been easy, but I would do it over again."¹¹⁸

Musicians Who Inspired Austin

One of the things that attracted Austin to the entertainment field was the cutting edge fashion sensibilities of the musicians in those years. Black artists were very concerned about looking good on the bandstand, and Austin had been no different. In commenting on his affinity for Leroy Brown he said, I liked the way he dressed and carried himself, I thought "that's what it's all about." Austin also credited Harold Betters for helping him get a regular gig. Likewise, he reserved high praise for musician Carl Arter, who played sax, piano and organ. "He [Arter] was a

¹¹⁶ Guidry, "A Life in Tune."

¹¹⁷ Guidry, "A Life in Tune."

¹¹⁸ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

heralded person around town ...when he let you into his clique you had to have something to offer.¹¹⁹

While Austin's lengthy and active career garnered him both accolades and the respect of his peers, his is especially notable for its breadth of experience. Austin played in small bands, in big bands, in White and Black bands, for famous and lesser known individuals, and for special occasions. His diligence at his craft, his ability to read music and adapt to the changing economic climate after the merger of Local 60 and Local 471, his ability to double or play more than one instrument, and his willingness to play at venues and in productions which many of his Black colleagues felt required them to compromise their racial integrity as musicians allowed him to keep a healthy playing career while many other local musicians floundered. As we will see, he was exceptional, someone who survived and even flourished with the changing times.

Other Memories: Stanley Turrentine

Stanley Turrentine, Like Chuck Austin, was another prominent example of those with fond memories of the Golden Years of the 1940s and 1950s. The internationally known jazz saxophonist was born into a family of musicians. His father and several siblings played music. When Stanley was nine, his father—a fan of saxophonist Coleman Hawkins—put a horn in his hand and taught him to play. In addition, Carl Arter and Leroy Brown were additional, and influential, tutors to young Stanley.¹²⁰ Stanley also credited his brother Tommy as someone

¹¹⁹ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

¹²⁰ Stanley Turrentine, from collected testimonies of Local 471 members by the African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

who guided, trained, and toured with him as his career flourished. Tommy, he says, “wasn’t very nice” as far as how he spoke to musicians sometimes, but feels his “tough love” made him a better player.¹²¹

Turrentine says the atmosphere at the Musicians Club, filled with top notch artists, helped him hone his skills. He had a brief classical music fling playing the cello in high school, but he became convinced that the saxophone was his passion.¹²² When Turrentine speaks of the Musicians Club, he does so with nothing but enthusiasm, reverence, and gratitude. He reminisced,

I used to sneak down to the Musicians Club on Fullerton [Avenue] and I used to sit in the corner. I used to see some fantastic cats. Illinois Jack was [one] ... Him and I became friends and whenever he came to Pittsburgh he saw me. Sometimes he would take me and let me come up on the bandstand and play. ...I always loved the way he dressed, man, and that’s one of the things that gave me the inspiration to want to be a musician because the guys were always happy and they dressed nice and had all the chicks [laughter].¹²³

Turrentine further elaborates: “The Musicians Club: that was a focal point. I saw almost everybody that I loved [there]. I saw Art Tatum reach for a beer with his right hand, by the piano [while still playing]. I said, “...this cat must have 3 or 4 hands!! ...It was every night and

¹²¹ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

¹²² Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

¹²³ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

every day, really positive....and 471 was a focal point. You had to come there, that was the only association we had.”¹²⁴

Turrentine recalls that when he and Ray Brown were doing an interview at a radio station in Boston, a young girl asked them both, “where is jazz going?” Ray Brown responded, “I don’t know where it is going, but I sure hope they keep the feeling.”¹²⁵

Frank Nelson

Austin and Turrentine were far from the only musicians who retained fond memories of the early years at the Musicians Club. Frank Nelson retained such memories, even though his attachment to the union was brief. Nelson grew up on Pittsburgh’s Northside. His uncle Norman Ball played the saxophone with the Roger Humphries band. When Norman passed, he left his horn to Frank, which became the impetus for his interest in music.¹²⁶ At Oliver High School, Nelson played alto sax with a group called the Silvertones. In 1949, a year after graduating from high school, he joined Local 471. Socializing at the Musicians Club left Nelson with indelible memories. One was the time he met Ella Fitzgerald at the Club. He and some friends went up to [the Musicians Club]. “Everybody knew me,” Frank says, “so they let us in ... so we’re sitting there, Ella Fitzgerald sitting right there [Nelson uses hand motions to show how

¹²⁴ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

¹²⁵ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

¹²⁶ Frank Nelson, interview by Charles Austin, July 26, 1998.

they were sitting] and I said ‘Damn, where is Ella!?’ [I was] right next to her, didn’t even know who it was,” he recalls, laughing heartily.¹²⁷

Harold Lee on the Musicians Club

While Spaulding was a bit ambivalent about the Musicians Club and the local jazz scene, musicians like Harold Lee had more critical recollections. A native Pittsburgher, Lee took an interest in drumming around the age of 12 or 13. He talked about his earliest gigs where he played at the Enterprise Hotel in nearby McKees Rocks, along with musicians like Tommy Turrentine (whom he often referred to as “Tine”). Lee progressed rapidly, getting opportunities to play in the Langley High School marching band while still in junior high school. Furthermore, he took private lessons from Bill Hammonds, a man he describes as a “hammer,” one always convinced that his way was the “right” way.¹²⁸ Lee’s classmate, Joe Harris, blossomed under Hammonds’ heavy-handed tutoring and went on to garner national recognition.¹²⁹

Lee worked in several bands during the 1940’s, becoming so involved in music that school no longer was a priority. Around the age of 17 or 18, he got a job playing for the Step ‘n’ Fetchit show when it came through the local Roosevelt Theatre. He found another gig playing for Max Roach in Indianapolis. However, he noted that Roach was “kicking [out] drummers,” turning them over frequently, so he left. He then found a gig in Knoxville, Tennessee, where he

¹²⁷ Nelson, interview by Charles Austin, July 26, 1998.

¹²⁸ Harold Lee, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

¹²⁹ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

ran up against his old childhood nemesis, Joe Harris. Joe “was kickin’ ass,” he says. “I couldn’t stay then...so I grabbed my gear, came home, went into the Navy, and did well.”¹³⁰ This exchange helps illustrate that the entertainment business could sometimes be cutthroat and competitive. Yet, it was also clear that, even during the Golden Years, some jobs may have been difficult to get. Nonetheless, there still were a remarkable variety of employment opportunities for Black musicians. In the Navy, for instance, Lee prospered. He became well known in military circles as he played on air-craft carriers. He said that officials would request his services saying, “go get the brother” when they wanted him to perform.¹³¹

Lee has only the highest regard for the Musicians Club. He played there, he says, on “quite a few” occasions, and found the Club a stimulating and vibrant place.¹³² Lee’s main complaint is that, seeking to inflate their legacy, some musicians brag about their time at the Musicians Club, exaggerating their success and spinning “fairy tales” about participating in legendary jam sessions. “[S]ome of these people,” he says disdainfully, “talk about their jam sessions, but I know better. I know some of these guys walking around here with names that didn’t put they ass up on that band stand and jam, you hear what I say? ‘Dem boys be waiting for them when they come in there and they cut their heads clean off ... Youngsters say they were there, but I was there!”¹³³ Lee’s intense dialogue brings to light two key points. First, you can’t always trust the stories of entertainers that they tell about their past. Second, the

¹³⁰ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

¹³¹ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

¹³² Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

¹³³ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

Musicians Club encouraged social networking and mutual admiration, but it was also a highly competitive arena where only elite talents had the confidence to engage in impromptu jam sessions.

Robin Webster

Robin Webster started playing at the age of thirteen. His love for jazz found him during his job as a shoeshine boy in his father's barbershop. A man with a sax came in. Robin took an interest in the horn, and ultimately the man sold the silver saxophone to him for \$13.00. He was largely self-taught. However, his education was fast-tracked when he would go and "fool around" at rehearsals in the Musicians Club as a 15 year old teen.¹³⁴ It was in those sessions at the Musicians Club that he developed aspirations to become a professional musician.

Webster served a two-year stint in the military, during which time, he experienced a degree of segregation that initially prevented him from being in a band. However, he couldn't resist the urge to play, occasionally even playing at night in the latrine to quench his desires. Gradually, he built a following in the military, such that his colleagues requested that he play certain tunes.

Discharged in the late 1940s, Webster came back to Pittsburgh, joined Local 471, and quickly built a following. Henry Foster and His Crazy Cats was one of the first bands he played in.¹³⁵ His musician's journey would soon take him into the company of entertainment

¹³⁴ Robin Webster, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

¹³⁵ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997.

heavyweights when, in the late 1940's, he was approached by Joe Westray about playing at an opera show. Webster, Westray, Leroy Brown, and Calvin King would participate in this event, which further increased Webster's visibility. Webster described meeting John Coltrane, who was playing at the time in the Dizzy Gillespie band. A fellow musician, Webster says, "got a little bit out of hand" and fell back into the band set-up, breaking John Coltrane's horn. Describing what happened next, Webster says a tall thin guy approached him and asked "Hey man, what's your name?" When he replied, the man told him, "I'm John Coltrane. I think Dizzy [Gillespie] wants you in the band."¹³⁶ Webster said he was hesitant at first because he had a barbershop, but he joined the band. Impressed, Webster adds, "We had giants man."

Despite his love for the era and the union, Webster is critical of a number of things. In particular, he had issues with Local 471 about securing payment. While many members spoke of the glamorous side of entertainment, Webster reminds one that the entertainment industry was filled with a variety of members, from sophisticated ladies and gentlemen to hustlers and brutes. On a personal level, Webster had issues with people he saw as exaggerating their accomplishments. "Everybody wants to be an innovator," he says, "and they think they are, but they're not. It takes a long time for somebody to come up with something new like Bird [Charlie Parker] or Diz [Dizzy Gillespie]. That's a once in a lifetime thing, and we were lucky to be around Bird and Diz ... Ben Webster." Back then, he says, "you could hear a

¹³⁶ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997.

guy and know who it is. You can identify them right away, and you don't have to see them; you know who it is."¹³⁷

Webster's career brought him into contact with outstanding performers. Skilled at playing the saxophone, clarinet and flute, he rarely played with any group for more than a few years because he feared becoming stagnant. Pushing himself into new challenges, he played for a band featuring Jackie Wilson, explaining proudly and fondly, "those cats worked me to death."¹³⁸ As mentioned before, Webster hooked with Joe Westray's band in 1948, while playing in Pittsburgh's Pirate Inn for four years in the 1950's. He met Della Reese while playing there. A consummate professional, he said she hadn't given the musicians the music for the show. He once knocked on her door asking for the music since it was almost showtime. She proceeded to curse him out which angered him.¹³⁹

Webster could be quite cantankerous when pushed or irritated. He didn't seem to have any problem with aggressively collecting his financial compensation without always relying on Local 471. He recalls how Tommy Turrentine and some of the older musicians would try to intimidate those who were younger and less experienced. But, he says, he never backed down. Similarly, he resisted discriminatory treatment by White clients. In his early days as a musician, he admits he often did not play for scale because he got special rates by playing for certain bands. Playing in White clubs during his early career, he says, often generated conflict but he

¹³⁷ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997.

¹³⁸ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997.

¹³⁹ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997.

got by. “I didn’t take no shit!!” he says proudly.¹⁴⁰ Joe Westray often had to remind him, “we go to play music, we don’t go to fight...we ain’t going to war.”¹⁴¹ Webster was equally aggressive playing in all-Black settings. Once, his payment for a performance was delayed, and he cornered the manager in a rest room. “I got em down in the men’s room and said mother-----! Give me my money now or I’mma flush you down the toilet.”¹⁴²

Webster’s colorful descriptions highlight the fact that sometimes more aggressive means than relying on Local 471’s normal operational procedures were needed to ensure that one was paid. Formal and informal ruffian tactics were a natural part of the negotiating process between musicians and contractors. Finally, Webster emphasized that would not stand for shady business practices by those who hired him. He wouldn’t even open his music case sometimes unless, as he says, the “dollar signs were right.” He considered himself a professional who always showed up on time for events. “If you tell me, meet you at 7:30 and you’re not there, I’m gone...the heck with all the bullshit man, you gon’ tell a sideman to be here a certain time then the band don’t arrive ‘til half a hour, hour later.”¹⁴³

Payment for services rendered was a contentious issue. 471 members Chuck Austin and George Spaulding both detail how the Crawford Grill was notorious for not paying musicians according to scale if they would settle for less. Musicians who played at the Grill after other musicians who had accepted lower than scale wages found that the Grill ownership would not

¹⁴⁰ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997.

¹⁴¹ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997.

¹⁴² Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997.

¹⁴³ Robin Webster, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

go above what they had played previously. This points to an overall lack of leverage by Black musicians despite having Local to negotiate on their behalf.¹⁴⁴

John Hughes

“The thing is, they [Local 471] did the best they could.” These words by pianist John Hughes reference the valiant efforts of Local 471 to protect the interests of Black jazz musicians. A member of the union for nearly sixty-nine years, Hughes is qualified to speak on the evolution of Local 471. Hughes invited me to a program at Bethel A.M.E. church in the Hill section of Pittsburgh. In the lower auditorium of this historically significant church, Hughes and a few other musicians provided the entertainment for a diverse crowd. He introduced me to the audience. I explained that my goal was to write about Local 471 and bring to light the stories of Pittsburgh’s once legendary jazz scene.

During this visit Hughes and his fellow musicians played jazz, blues, gospel, and soul with equal enthusiasm and skill. I was reminded of that Austin had emphasized to me that, as a jazz musician, one of his main goals was to play what the people liked and to make sure they had a good time. This was evident that night as the musicians, like soulful pied pipers, made people sway and clap to numerous popular tunes. However, it also became clear what Hughes had explained made his experience as a jazz musician so different from other musicians. Since he played the piano, he had a better chance of securing work on a consistent basis than some of the other artists, who only played percussion for instance.

¹⁴⁴ George Duke Spaulding, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, October 21, 1997, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

Born in 1924, Hughes is blessed with an effervescent, welcoming personality. His love of music was ignited by his childhood surroundings. Born in Washington, PA he grew up with a piano in the house. Although this instrument piqued his curiosity as a small child it wasn't until about the fourth or fifth grade that he began to learn some notes and hymns taught to him by his mother. Similar to Chuck Austin, Hughes had family influences that spurred his love for music. His mother, a school teacher by trade, had learned to play the piano. She taught him during his early stages, but others helped him progress to more advanced levels. In particular, a neighbor and a teacher, a Catholic Nun, instilled a greater degree of discipline in his practice habits.¹⁴⁵ The kindness and patience of these instructors help develop his abilities up through high school.

While under the instruction of the nun, Hughes got his first experience playing before an audience, typically recitals for their parents. Also, while growing up, he attended St. Paul AME Church, where he listened intently to the pianist, Howard Baldwin, as he played for Sunday School. As a child Hughes was deeply affected by the emotional atmosphere he observed in church. "They [church musicians] were saying something with their instruments and people were listening. Those who applauded, they seemed to be enjoying it."¹⁴⁶ Hughes' teacher, Baldwin, was a music major at Duquesne and after moving on to a teaching position at Howard

¹⁴⁵ John Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

¹⁴⁶ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

University, Hughes took over as the Sunday School pianist.¹⁴⁷ His first paid job came around the age of 15. As he recalls,

I played in a public park, in what they called a big band...they were reading. Everything was written out, the chords for the piano, all the notes for the saxophones and what you did was play those notes. But, you try to interpret the style by the range or the person who wrote it, you know, and maybe another band had played that same arrangement and you heard it and liked it.¹⁴⁸

Hughes: Advantages of the Musicians Club

In 1940, Hughes joined Local 471 partly because he wanted to become known as a person who could read music.¹⁴⁹ But he joined also because many of the local clubs had union bartenders and waitresses, who, he says, “expected you to be a member of the local [471].”¹⁵⁰ Hughes points out that during this time many of the servers and employees at these establishments were members of the food service union. The idea of belonging to a union during this time was very important, and this affected jazz musicians’ ability to play.¹⁵¹ Hughes

¹⁴⁷ Hughes, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh; Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

¹⁴⁸ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004; Hughes, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

¹⁴⁹ Hughes, interview by female Local 471 member, May 25, 1996.. Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

¹⁵⁰ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004. Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

¹⁵¹ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

also studied music at Duquesne, obtaining his BA in music education, and later earned a master's degree in social work and music therapy.¹⁵²

Hughes on Functions of 471

Hughes enjoyed Local 471 and the Musicians Club as places where one could get “some good food, brotherhood, and the chance to meet other musicians”¹⁵³ These sentiments echo those of Chuck Austin who discussed the fact that the union during the 1940's wielded a much greater influence in the lives of artists than it did later. Like Austin, Hughes appreciated that 471 promoted a sense of brotherhood while providing opportunities to socialize that were important to musicians. This was especially true, he says, for musicians not living in Pittsburgh, who often came to socialize in Local 471's Musicians Club.¹⁵⁴ Hughes applauds the union's willingness even to provide outsiders legal assistance when needed.¹⁵⁵

Hughes on the Musicians Club

Hughes says the Musicians Club was especially appreciated by visiting musicians. “During the day,” he says,

¹⁵² Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

¹⁵³ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004; Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

¹⁵⁴ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

¹⁵⁵ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996; Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

you could go down there, go up front playing and practicing and talking and finding out what's going on. If a musician came in...from Atlanta, Georgia and they were performing that night and they got there that morning; they would come to the union, maybe, to find out where would be a cheap apartment for this weekend for them. The union was supposed to direct that. The union was a place for someone to get their hair cut. The union was a place to, maybe, get a suit done right quick. Maybe, you could get it altered. The union had all the information for people who were out of state and for people that were there.¹⁵⁶

The Musicians Club Taught Young Musicians

Because of the high volume of musicians that frequented the Musicians Club there was always a fair amount of knowledge dissemination occurring. Older veterans schooled younger artists not only on the nuances of playing certain numbers, but the skill level that existed established a pecking order.¹⁵⁷ Artists such as Hughes would sometimes listen to the renditions of certain pieces by other more skilled musicians and would be driven to become better.¹⁵⁸ What artists didn't pass through literal instruction they often passed through osmosis, as younger artists especially learned how about the business and how to carry themselves as artists by being in the presence of their more seasoned colleagues.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

¹⁵⁷ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

¹⁵⁸ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

¹⁵⁹ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

Hughes on Other Functions of the Musicians Club

While most local musicians held down regular jobs while playing at night, Hughes and others often found time to visit the Musicians Club several days per week. Hughes, who at one time was working full time as a principal and playing an average of six nights a week, often still frequented the Club four or more times per week.¹⁶⁰ When he first moved to Pittsburgh, he lived only a few blocks from the Club. Often there were no scheduled concerts at the Club, but artists would do what was termed, “sitting in.” This involved artists socializing in the club who would have impromptu jam sessions. The piano in the Club as Hughes noted, was usually always being played by someone. Another person might come in and play bass or the horns. These sessions would usually last for 20 minutes or so as different Club members would move in and out.¹⁶¹ Hughes also mentioned that the Musicians Club was used for rehearsals. For instance, if bands came into town and wanted to hire local performers, they would sometimes gather at the Club to rehearse.¹⁶²

Union Meetings

The Club was also the site where Union meetings were held. Hughes in describing his attendance of meetings and general activity in the politics of the union affairs explained,

¹⁶⁰ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996; Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

¹⁶¹ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

¹⁶² Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

Oh boy, I am not a good attender. I think, I was down there maybe...three or four times at the formal meetings...There were many gentlemen in there who were administrators who did it full time and did it well. They ran for office. They seemed to respond to responsibility. If you had anything to bring up to them about the union they were glad to listen to it, at least, the ones I knew. And, when they had a meeting, they were also the kind to walk up to you and say we had a meeting. You better be at the next one.¹⁶³

Hughes' story reveals that, overall, Local 471 was heavily invested in the lives of its members when he was playing during the 1940's. The Musicians Club which was part Local 471, became an indispensable part of the Black entertainment culture. It was much more than a living space. It became a home away from home.

Ruby Young

**"It's ladies night, oh yes it's ladies night, oh what a night."
--Kool & The Gang**

As a formally trained musician, an officer of 471, and one of the few Black musicians allowed to play in White clubs downtown before the 1970s, Ruby Young was remarkable. Always impeccably dressed, even in her nineties, and less outspoken than most of her male colleagues, her life and career provide another vantage point from which to understand the lives and memories of Local 471 members. She endured rebuffs and insults in the music business, based on her gender as well as her race, yet relates those trials with a smile, especially when talking about the Ruby Young Trio. One wonders how she was able to thrive in

¹⁶³ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

a workplace full of ultra-competitive male artists as well as female artists who also were talented and, when less talented, usually offered a pretty face and sensual appeal that brought in customers?

Ruby Lee Young was born in Tennessee on May 23, 1911 to Aaron and Betty Young. Her family moved to Pittsburgh when she was around 10 or 11 years old. Ruby was merely six years old when her mother started giving her piano lessons . She also received tutelage from a German teacher, Dex Heiman. Ruby attended Schenley High School, where she studied harmony.¹⁶⁴ She also studied music with Nelson Arter, father of Carl Arter, a notable local musician, and with Dr. Etting at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Highly trained, Ruby perfected her craft as a professional pianist-organist at the Pittsburgh Musical Institute and at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. At the time she was emerging on the music scene, most of the musicians in 471 had the ability to read music or some kind of formal training.¹⁶⁵

In the beginning of her career, Young was intimidated by being in a predominantly male world. She received her first real musical gig while playing with saxophonist Charlie Lee at the Soho Community House, and recalls the time that she and Charlie were crossing the street and Charlie said, “Come on, give me your hand.” She told him, no doubt tartly, “Get out of here. I’m making my first gig. I don’t need you to hold my hand.”¹⁶⁶

In 1949, while playing with Harold Lee, Young was introduced to a musician named Billie

¹⁶⁴ Ruby Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996. I copied notes from transcribed interviews provided by permission of the AAJPSP and kept in the Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

¹⁶⁵ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

¹⁶⁶ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

Clinton, who persuaded her to join Local 471.¹⁶⁷ At the time, very few women were members of the union, except for Alyce Brooks, who performed with the Sweethearts of Rhythm, a pioneering group of women entertainers, as well as Minnie Forbes and Mable Rogers.¹⁶⁸ Young was hesitant to join because she knew little about the union. Yet, she would go on to become one of 471's most active members as her career progressed. She joined the union during a period when its powers of persuasion and influence were at their zenith. However, like many musicians that joined during her era, because work was so plentiful in Pittsburgh during this time, musicians often had to be "coerced" to join because many felt they could get work on their own.

For Young the union was important to her early career because she didn't like to travel too far from her mother. Nevertheless, she did get opportunities to play in places like Potsdam, New York because of her agents' ties to the Big Apple. Young would eventually become the secretary of Local 471 in the late forties, and in 1953 held the combined post of secretary-treasurer.¹⁶⁹ As the first female on the Local's executive board, where she served until 1953, Young was a formidable force in Union activities.

Young was aware of the racial climate that led up to the merger. When asked if playing downtown led to confrontations with Whites, Young downplayed most of her struggles. "We had no problem," she says. "You could go to the bar if you wanted to, of course. I would stay on

¹⁶⁷ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

¹⁶⁸ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

¹⁶⁹ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

the bandstand, piano or chair or something. Or, if there was a guest table I could go. I never had a problem.¹⁷⁰

It is significant that Young never mentions friction with the clientele and with White musicians while she performed at White establishments. This runs counter to what many males faced. According to Chuck Austin, there was an informal, but rigid barrier, known as the “Grant Street Barrier,” in which Blacks were not allowed to play in White clubs in the downtown area. Austin says they were quite aware of what establishments were off limits to rank and file black artists. One of the major reasons for the barrier was that White owners and White musicians feared the interaction of Black men with White women. The fact that it was often the White women who initiated social contact did not matter as the America’s obsession with interracial relations spilled into the entertainment industry. So in this case the fact that Young was a woman helped her avoid more volatile racial conflicts.

There were other racial dynamics that Young resented, but they were not serious enough that they left her soured about the merger. As she tells it:

I worked there [Wiggins, a club catering to Whites] for two and a half years and I got that out of the newspaper. ...My husband was in the hospital and I saw this ad and I was...I don’t know what I was doing. I was playing somewhere, but I said, “Ooh I think I’d like that.” And I went over there and she interviewed me. Her husband (the owner) was away and , I guess, that’s why I got the job, because if he had been there, she probably wouldn’t have hired me. He (the owner) said, “Just think, I’ve got a colored woman in

¹⁷⁰ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

here working in my place. I never would have thought that.” And then, I just stood there and looked at him. And, one day he raised his sleeve, he had been somewhere, and said, “I’m just as brown as you are. I’ve got to work on that.” I just walked away from him, because he was ignorant, you know. But then, he let me work there and the people were marvelous. I never had a problem but one place. And, I went there to play cocktail music and had no problem with the proprietor. But when I went in, he wasn’t there and the cook was there. He called me to the door. He said “Miss, so and so is not here,” and then he tried to ease up to me and he ran me around the kitchen with the butcher knife. I ran out the front door, and I called them, and I didn’t even get to start there.¹⁷¹

Frank McCown

**“Diamond in the back, sunroof top,
diggin’ the scene with a gangsta’ lean.”
--William DeVault**

One of Pittsburgh’s noted saxophonists, Frank McCown’s introduction to the instrument began in his late teens. Growing up in the Lincoln-Lemington section of Pittsburgh, he played at Westinghouse and even got some experience at church. McCown notes of his early experiences in music, “everybody played better than me, they had soul”—that essential ingredient that separated the “natural” musician from those who just played notes on a page.¹⁷² With practice, however, Frank became more skilled. Perhaps his musical genes derived from his father, who owned both a radio shop and a barbershop, and also played the clarinet. Growing up in a

¹⁷¹ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

¹⁷² Frank McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

middle class family, Frank's older brother played both the piano and the violin, but was not seriously interested in music. McCown's childhood left him with an optimistic view of life. No stranger to hard work, he worked on a railroad in order to save money to buy a saxophone. Frank's singing ability, his familiarity with both the saxophone and the clarinet would open a variety of opportunities for him to pursue.

McCown spent a few years in the Navy where, although a petty officer, he performed many the same menial tasks as other Negro officers. He recalled having to clean his horn with a toothbrush while in the Navy. While his navy experience allowed Frank to travel to places like New York and Kansas City, when he left the service, he felt his life was devoid of true purpose and direction. In his own words, he was just "messing around," which prompted his parents to send him off to college.¹⁷³

College turned out to be most beneficial for his musical career and the breadth of life experience. McCown attended Johnson C. Smith, a historically Black college in Charlotte, North Carolina. However, before leaving for college, McCown had joined Local 471 in 1948 or 1949, and so was the proud owner of a union card when he arrived at Johnson C. Smith. Frank's time in the South exposed him to life events he had not experienced in Pittsburgh.¹⁷⁴

Frank enjoyed his time at Johnson C. Smith. While there, he was able to find playing opportunities, even though his Local 471 union card didn't carry much weight down there. Nonetheless, the card let those seeking non-White horn players know that he was available. Frank does not speak much about racial discrimination as a chief obstacle he faced in North

¹⁷³ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

¹⁷⁴ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

Carolina. Rather, he felt isolated because he was not a Southerner. Some were jealous of his Northern background. Others, perhaps, of his appearance, being often outfitted in dazzling and stylish ensembles. Years later, his conversation frequently alludes to his love for a fashionable lifestyle and nice cars.¹⁷⁵

Handsome and dapper, Frank garnered the attention of the ladies, White as well as Black, which shocked the local men. He played in a club called Excelsior, a pretty plush facility. A Black drummer, Gene Crosslin, took a liking to Frank and gave him the nickname “Frantique.” They played on a regular basis several times per week. Their clientele included many middle-class and upper-class Blacks, such as teachers and doctors.¹⁷⁶

Frank had few racial problems at college. He sensed a feeling of “kinship” between many young Blacks seeking to become upwardly mobile. “Everybody looked out for one another,” he says.¹⁷⁷ Frank was particularly proud of his ability to handle conflicts with Whites. “I knew how to handle trouble in the South”, he says with a sly smile, indicating that he possessed a charm and finesse, as well as a sense of Northern confidence and sensibilities that allowed him to easily navigate the color-line. He McCown says this is because he didn’t grow up with preconceived notions of boundaries prescribed for “colored folk,” so in some ways he saw the South through a different lens than the locals. However, he notes that, just as in Pittsburgh, most Blacks in Charlotte lived in residentially segregated neighborhoods. Inevitably, however, some things served as stark reminders of time and place, such as “Niggerhead Peaches,” a

¹⁷⁵ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

¹⁷⁶ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

¹⁷⁷ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

product he saw in one of the local stores. What he regarded as a total affront was no big deal to many of the local Blacks. But such, he says, was life in the South during the Jim Crow era.¹⁷⁸

When McCown returned to Pittsburgh, he took a job at Beermind and then moved on to a position with the Department of Energy. These were his day jobs, of course; he played evenings in places around Pittsburgh, such as Monessen, Rankin, and Braddock. Remarkably, he also played in the Youngstown Symphony and jazz orchestra.¹⁷⁹

In Pittsburgh, McCown enjoyed a varied career. He played in a rough, blue-collar neighborhood in South Park, as well as in clubs in Homewood and Shadyside. For over a decade, he worked as a chemist after meeting a Southern White woman who had a PhD. in organic chemistry. The two opened a company in South Park that worked on ways to help clean the air and decrease the poisonous gases in mill smoke.¹⁸⁰

While McCown had some positive things to say about Local 471, his recollections pointed to the fact that he was more of a free spirit than a dedicated member of the union. He explained that he felt that in the 1940's and 1950's the Union's powers were limited. McCown's assertion that Local 471 lacked power was a lament made by many artists although Chuck Austin is careful to describe the difference in the union's power declined in the late 1950's. Local 471 at one time did have much more influence over the lives of musicians than in

¹⁷⁸ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

¹⁷⁹ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

¹⁸⁰ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

later periods as the historical context and the very essence of Pittsburgh's Black neighborhoods changed—some would say for the worse.¹⁸¹

Frank stated that the union's lack of real strength was often demonstrated by the fact that he would play jobs where there were union and non-union performers playing together. However, he says, its weakness also was demonstrated by the difficulty in collecting dues from men who often did not want to part ways with "their dollars and cents." Frank's natural charm and gentlemanly ways—as well as that he had a car, was always clean, and stayed off drugs—endeared him to union leadership. He was recruited to collect money for the union. Given a book and a badge like a policeman, he went out to collect dues. Some musicians refused to pay up; others were hard to deal with unless one knew how to handle them, especially when they got drunk. He mentioned one musician who would get into uncontrollable stupors. He smiled and recounted that he would have to physically jump on him to calm him down until his drunkenness subsided. Yes, Frank says a bit proudly, one had to know how to "control many different types of personalities and characters"¹⁸²

Frank also was entrusted to pay musicians for gigs. He used union and non-union performers in some gigs but tended to pay them equally so as to not upset the non-union members. Interestingly, he also admitted that the money he paid out was not always scale, but it seems that artists were more concerned more about fighting to be paid something as opposed to fighting to be paid for scale.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

¹⁸² McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

¹⁸³ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

Frank detailed a litany of experiences over the course of his career. He played at venues like the Hurricane, Union Hall, the Crawford Grill, various Masonic lodges, the Ammon Center, the Duquesne Club, the Stanley Theatre, and Smitty's. He played all over Pittsburgh. He even played in Shadyside with a gentleman billed as an African story-teller. This gentleman wanted Frank to take off his clothes, sit in a window, and play his flute in the background while he told stories, he recalled with laughter. He also played in country clubs with gentlemen like Bill Cotton. He met such jazz royalty as Thelonious Monk. He occasionally played for Dakota Staton during the fifties. He even had a friendship with the singer Phyllis Hyman.¹⁸⁴

McCown retained fond memories of the Musicians Club. They had the best chili, he said, but when he was younger his mother, who was very protective of her son, often made him eat at home. The club he said "was always jammed up with people,"¹⁸⁵ but he also admitted that he didn't hang around the Club much.

Bill Gambrell

**"It's a difficult job but somebody has to do it."
--Bill Gambrell**

Bill Gambrell's life story offers a union leader's view of Local 471 and the Musicians Club during the Golden Years. In some ways, the position of union leader was a thankless job. With so many workers clamoring for opportunities and with high expectation levels, the union leader may find him or herself under intense pressure to produce. In a musician's union for instance,

¹⁸⁴ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

¹⁸⁵ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

the needs of artists varied drastically. In Pittsburgh, the many venues that offered jobs, frequently tried to circumvent union scaling measures, resulting in cheaper pay for Black artists. Over time as Local 471's influence in the community dwindled from its peak in the thirties and forties, union leaders had to exert Herculean efforts to win minimal gains for their membership. Further complicating their tasks was members' growing indifference to the union. Many joined the union out of necessity in the 1930's and 1940's, when the union wielded influence and could insist that artist join up if they wanted to play. Hence, the motivation to join was often strictly transactional, rather than based on a personal commitment and loyalty to the collective. The primary concern often was not to mobilize a united front against unfair practices of club owners and band leaders, but simply to acquire a union card and get on the bandstand. While this does not make these artists any more culpable for the economic fates as union members in other occupations, it does help explain why, over time, members of 471 were left vulnerable to larger changes roiling the music industry.

Union leaders often found themselves in the unenviable position of defending the rights of those who were not necessarily committed to protecting these rights themselves. The intense, almost insatiable, desire for many Black musicians to showcase their musical abilities at times blinded them to the political realities of their occupations. Furthermore, for many of the common artists who didn't reach the upper echelons of musical stardom, music was their passion, but playing was only a part-time job. The question of how much attention most musicians gave to the political or economic side of their struggle begs to be answered. How many could foresee that the 1960's would bring a precipitous decline in their job opportunities? Did they understand or have time to calculate the outcomes of a lack of dedication to union

affairs while they were caught up in the euphoria of a lively jazz scene? By all accounts, during the 1930's and 1940's, despite segregation, many found ample gigs in Pittsburgh and in surrounding towns. Yet, even with numerous opportunities, the competition for playing time was intense enough that some undercut union leadership by accepting off-scale pay rates. Club owners often were primarily concerned with profits. As a result, artists trying to participate in the local music scene stood by on the sidelines eagerly anticipating their moment in the sun. When that moment arrived, they desperately tried to maximize their experience, even to the detriment of personal finances.

To understand the economic pressures Black musicians faced, one only has to consider how many have responded when talking about the highlights of their musical careers. Artists like Chuck Austin often showed genuine affection for the club owners or band leaders that provided fair opportunities and equitable treatment. Others, however, felt exploited while playing for ridiculously low rates. This put union leaders in the uncomfortable position of fighting for those who didn't always fight for themselves. They had to confront artists who didn't want to pay dues and thought they could walk onto a Pittsburgh stage without membership in 471. The union leader was the one tasked with convincing club owners that musicians deserved fair pay for their performances. The union leader was saddled with the responsibility of seeing the larger picture, securing decent wages and a reasonable degree of protection for the cultural producers who were keeping so many clubs and bars full of vitality on a nightly basis.

Bill Gambrell was both a musician and a leader of Local 471. As such, his views on the evolution of 471 hold considerable weight, and his perspective is that of someone who

understood what Black musicians had long been fighting for. Gambrell's father, Seth Gambrell, along with Tom Jones and Fritz Hawkins, had been instrumental in bringing Local 471 to Pittsburgh in the 1920's.¹⁸⁶ As a former secretary of Local 471, his father afforded him the chance to meet entertainment luminaries.¹⁸⁷ Gambrell grew up in East Liberty, a neighborhood with many venues where musicians could play. Because of his father's position, quite a few of these musicians practiced in Gambrell's home, giving him a bird's eye view of how Local 471 operated. Ultimately, he earned a gold membership in the union, meaning he was a member for at least 50 years.

Gambrell's playing career began in the 1930's, while he was still a student at Peabody High School. Grateful that the school allowed him time to study under the guidance of a piano tutor, young Gambrell entertained his fellow students with his skillful play.¹⁸⁸ His skills with the tenor saxophone brought him into contact with such luminaries as Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington. Later on, he played with singers like Dakota Staton, another local musician, and Della Reese. Gambrell remembers being amused that, even as a youngster, he was taller than Cab Calloway.¹⁸⁹ In describing his early experiences as a musician, Gambrell notes,

I started...back in the day when 9 out of 10 homes had a family piano and when they threw a party they hired a piano player. Now, there were three of us that were in competition with one another. We got all the work for the area okay. That was Howie

¹⁸⁶ Bill Gambrell, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

¹⁸⁷ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

¹⁸⁸ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

¹⁸⁹ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

Gordon, Errol Garner and myself. And, Errol Garner got a lot of work, because he was a hell of a musician. I got a lot of work, because I got along with the ladies, okay?¹⁹⁰

Gambrell's relationship with Erroll Garner started in childhood. In those days, virtually every Black musician had a nickname. Gambrell explains how Errol Garner's became "gumdrops."

They had these candy kids; there was a bunch of young Black talented kids, male and female, and they gave them names of candy, each one. My brother-in-law was Peppermint Stick, I think, or something like that and they went around to theatres and put on stage shows. Erroll Garner was one...My wife is Tootsie Roll.¹⁹¹

Gambrell's introduction to Local 471 came during his late teens. He played solo recitals since the age of 16, and understood the logistics of the union. Because there was so much activity on Frankstown Road in East Liberty close to his home on Broad Street, Gambrell approached Hence Jackson, president of Local 471 and joined the union in either the late thirties or early forties. The union's leadership infrastructure was already in place when he joined—a president, vice-president, business agent, and secretary-treasurer. Gambrell played in various bands and even recalled a job in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, where he played in a 10 piece band and didn't even know the guys he was playing with.¹⁹² Gambrell was very aware of how difficult it was for Black musicians to play Downtown, in what was referred to as the "forbidden zone." When asked if he played downtown, Gambrell replied:

¹⁹⁰ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

¹⁹¹ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

¹⁹² Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

Not a whole lot, not in those days.... Count Basie ... was actually ... the first Black group to ever play downtown Pittsburgh and that was at the Westin William Penn. And they kept their foot on those musicians so hard that they couldn't wait to get up on the Hill and blow off steam. Boy, they had some hellish jam sessions, you know. But that not only opened the gates for the Black musicians downtown, but it started Count Basie on his way.¹⁹³

Gambrell had great respect for the Musicians Club, yet stresses that it was at its peak while at its Hill District location, not after it moved to East Liberty.¹⁹⁴ Again, even as African-American musicians could not always definitively define what the Club meant to them, its declining importance was consistently affirmed in numerous interviews.

Hosea Taylor

Hosea Taylor's memoir *Dirt Street* (2007) spins tales of his fast-paced life with riveting honesty, while also voicing an undeniable affection for what music and the entertainment industry have provided for him. At just over 81 years of age, Taylor is still active in lecturing about and playing jazz music. *Dirt Street* mostly details events in the 1940's and 1950's, but it also covers his childhood years and later life.

Dressed casually in charcoal sweats and with a clean shaven face and head, Taylor looks young enough to make a mockery of his 81 years. He exudes confidence but also possessed a humility rooted in his initial exposure to jazz's true heavyweights. In his autobiography, he

¹⁹³ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

¹⁹⁴ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

consistently makes a point of explaining the pecking order in jazz based on talent:

I was playing in a club during the forties. A guy dressed like a businessman came up on the bandstand and asked if he could play the piano. I said sure and noticed the guy couldn't see too well. I told him he could play whatever he wanted and he started to play "Strike Up the Band." I heard everything; he played symphony, ragtime, opera...his left hand was just as fast as his right hand. He was impressive, and the way he laid the chords he was easy on me. When somebody told me it was Art Tatum, I laughed because I knew I wasn't going to be the best. How could I be when Charlie Bird Parker could play 300 notes to my 30, in a song. I knew I wasn't the best, I just wanted to be in the show, I just wanted to get through the chord.¹⁹⁵

When asked how he felt about jazz, Taylor replies provocatively: "Jazz, I would compare to a beautiful woman. It's like having intercourse with a beautiful woman. It's that same feeling. I always tell the audiences I perform for that I'm 81 years old and have a 22 year old girlfriend who's pregnant [referring to jazz music]. Of course someone in the audience always yells who's the father, because they know I can't be." Taylor's humor and vivid descriptive abilities are often on full display. His love for jazz music not only led him to write *Dirt Street*, but also to begin writing a second book on his experiences with Local 471.

Over the course of his long career, Taylor befriended many local musicians, including Leroy Brown, John Hughes and Chuck Austin. His dalliances with women and his travels outside of Pittsburgh painted a picture of a lifestyle full of intoxicating diversion. His road to becoming

¹⁹⁵ Hosea Taylor, interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

an accomplished musician was not easy or short, but music seems to have pulled him up from humble beginnings and set him on a satisfying journey of nearly sixty years.

Born in 1928 in Pittsburgh's Hill District, Taylor played the clarinet as a youth before, at the age of fifteen, switching to the saxophone. Taylor's prodigious talents allowed him to play with Walt Harper's Band (1945), the Joe Westray Orchestra (1946), as well as at the Crawford Grill and the Mellon Jazz Festival.¹⁹⁶ His recollections of those times are worth quoting at some length:

It was a warm autumn night in the very early Forties. Someone was giving a house party, or what was and still is called a social [a party in which you either pay for admission, and or for refreshments]. It was crowded and dark-the only light was a very dim red light in the corner near the record player. I was doing the slow grind with a certain young lady, and we were discovering things about one another's body and chemistry. Wee Bea Booze was singing her blues hit C. C. Rider by way of the record player, and I could feel the music deep down in my bones. I even discovered a bone I didn't realize I had, after all, I was just a young boy at the time. There I was discovering music and girls simultaneously. Little did I realize that I would someday become a musician, or anything else for that matter, and perform with the great Wee Bea Booze in the years to come. C.C. Rider was Wee Bea's only hit recording that I know, but it was and still is considered to be a classic, and played a role in pioneering Soul jazz as it is known today. Soul Jazz was called race music in those days, and it was labeled, and or considered unfit for

¹⁹⁶ Taylor interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

human audio consumption let alone broadcasting because of its earthy beat and nitty gritty straight to the point lyrical connotations... As a young man I became absolutely wild and fascinated by music and girls. It seemed like the girls were music, and music was girls, and the same thing holds true today. But I had a problem, and the problem was that I lacked the ability to express myself, after all I couldn't slow grind all of the time, in fact that's the only dance I ever learned to do because there was nothing to learn, you just did it. My being a young man who was socially awkward and not blessed with any of the conventional social graces, I had to find some way somehow to make my feelings known, and I'm glad because I chose music to do my expressing, and it did and still does.¹⁹⁷

This lengthy quote raises several interesting topics. Against the backdrop composed of the stories of many Pittsburgh jazz musicians, Taylor discusses the notion of "race music" in more detail than almost all others. Chuck Austin, John Hughes, Frank McCown, and Ruby Young speak of the 1940's as a prolific era for live jazz music, a time when people were looking for something to ease war tension and lubricate the transition back to peacetime. Jazz as mainstream music was appreciated by Americans of all races. Taylor's description of "Soul Jazz" and "race music," however, denotes the tendency by record companies to categorize music with ethnic labels. Black artists in film, television, music and the stage all found themselves prisoners of a segregated world to the extent that their work was often considered acceptable only for Black audiences. It was the rare Black artist indeed—the Nat King Cole, the Duke

¹⁹⁷ Hosea Taylor and Jackie Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street: A Quintessential Autobiographical* (Pittsburgh:3blindmice, 2007), 9-10.

Ellington, the Count Basie—who could cross the color line and reap the financial rewards of doing so.

Taylor alludes to one of the side effects of integration: the various “underground” art forms created by groups marginalized by the mainstream. Just as segregation limited opportunities for most Black artists to play for White crowds, it also catalyzed the development of a sort of musical bi-polarity. Chuck Austin frequently referred to Blacks having to play totally different styles of music for Black audiences versus White audiences. With Black audiences there was a form of music that allowed for creativity and cultural instinct to combine with skill. On the other hand, Austin says, for White audiences, they often found themselves prisoners of the precise instructions represented by the notes and arrangements on the page, denied the room needed for innovation and improvisation. It is not that one form of playing was inferior or superior, Austin says, just different.

Jerry Betters

**“You know, now, I had problems with ... 471 one time.”
--Jerry Betters**

Jerry Betters is one of the musicians most dissatisfied with 471, both its leadership and its failure to adequately protect the rights of Black musicians. His critical perspective raises the questions of why some artists were critical of Local 471? Was it because a musical union, unlike an industrial union, had less control over the economic fate of its members? Did historical context play a major role in how artists felt? More specifically, did musicians who joined the union in the latter part of the 1950’s feel that way because they joined at a time when the

union's powers and unity were diminishing, along with decreased overall opportunities for Black artists to ply their craft. The record suggests that musicians like John Hughes had a smooth musical transition even as Local 471 became segregated. Thus, having bonded with 471 during its years of greatest influence, he retained an optimistic view of the union. Similarly, a musician like Chuck Austin, who enjoyed regular employment after the merger, held some negative, but mainly positive, feelings about the union. And lastly, musicians like Jerry Betters, had a successful musical career, but nonetheless harbored serious reservations of Local 471 and its leadership.

Born in 1932, Jerry Betters was sixteen when he became seriously involved with the world of music. Betters came from a family that was musically inclined, and it was natural that he dabbled with the piano and saxophone before initially settling on the drums.¹⁹⁸ It turned out that he had little affinity for the drums, and so switched to the bass while still in high school. Besides his school training, Betters also had a private tutor and was even able to take drum lessons in a New York studio.¹⁹⁹ Joining the union at the age of sixteen, Betters was able to secure work in New York for over a decade before coming back to Pittsburgh in the mid 1950's and performing with his famous brother Harold Betters. Because Jerry and his brother had built their reputations in New York, their return to Pittsburgh created two dynamics. On the one hand, Jerry felt like he encountered difficulties by being a relative unknown on the Pittsburgh scene. On the other hand, his New York ties inflated his reputation. People didn't realize he was

¹⁹⁸ Jerry Betters, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

¹⁹⁹ Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

from Connellsville, and saw him as a big time artist from the Big Apple.²⁰⁰ After his return to Pittsburgh, Betters began to encounter difficulties with Local 471. As he explains:

I joined the Connellsville union first and then that's when I had trouble with 471. See we were getting so much work, so Carl Arter [president of 471] and Ruby Young[secretary]...were mad because they felt like we were invading, you know what I mean. It wasn't about that, we were just working, so he [Carl Arter] slapped fines on me all the time, big fines. ...Then they called [local) 60 in on me too, to Blackball me. ...He [Arter] stopped me from working for two weeks, because of competition, and took his group in.²⁰¹

Unlike many, Betters got work in White clubs. Nonetheless, Local 471, which monitored the status of Black artists, noticed this and insisted he pay dues to Local 471. Incredulous, Betters offered to pay a “traveling tax,” feeling that Local 471 was simply trying to limit competition.²⁰² The case of Jerry Betters illustrates the complications of trying to study musicians' unions. Because there were so many venues in which to perform, and because club

²⁰⁰ Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

²⁰¹ Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997. Professor Aaron Johnson of the Music Department at the University of Pittsburgh, explains additional aspects of the complicated relationship between Betters and Local 471. “AFM work rules, Johnson says, are very local centric. Touring musicians can come and go, but the rules try to prevent outsiders from having steady engagements in the local's area of jurisdiction. You can solve that by being a paying member of more than one local—i.e. for a while I was in the DC local 161-710 and NYC local 802. I never worked in NJ so I never joined Local 16 even though I lived in its area. AFM rules have been quite strict on how you join a new local, so that you don't just pay a few months dues to poach a gig. There is a process for transfer and for joining and additional local. One reason musicians like Betters would have issues with a local like 471 is that the sanctions during this time always are imposed on the members. 471 would be powerless to sanction a Pittsburgh venue that hired a Connellsville cat, but they could try to fine the Connellsville cat. If the Betters didn't pay the fine or obey the rulings, they could put him on any number of sanction lists, such as the International Unfair List—particularly if he acted as a bandleader—and this would encourage people all over North America from hiring him, especially on gig that had filed contracts” (Johnson comments, November 20, 2020).

²⁰² Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

owners could request and pay for whatever artists they wanted, Local 471 lacked substantial leverage to bargain with the owners.²⁰³ Betters felt that Carl Arter and the rest of 471's leadership were willing to use underhanded tactics to secure jobs for Union members and limit competition from non-members. One could argue that Local 471 was doing its job and protecting its turf when it reprimanded musicians who played in Local 471's jurisdiction and/or played for wages below scale. Time and time again, Chuck Austin insisted that fines, stern conversations, and not allowing non-union artists on the bandstands were necessary to protect the rights of all Black artists.²⁰⁴

Betters conformed, but always resented that his 471 membership was not voluntary. In 1956, about two years Local 471 moved from its location in the Hill District to East Liberty, Betters joined the union. "I was forced to join," he says. "I went into clubs and thought, 'Why fight these people?' So, I joined Local 471."²⁰⁵ At the heart of this conflict was that Betters played in many clubs outside of Local 471's jurisdiction. Playing under the terms of the Connellsville union, he thought, should have required only that he pay the "traveling tax."²⁰⁶ Still angry, Betters' directed his frustration mainly at union president Carl Arter. "What he [Arter] really did was, they wanted to get a gig. He did it to undermine me, and then when they got out there the guy couldn't keep them because they didn't know what they were doing."²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

²⁰⁴ Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

²⁰⁵ Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

²⁰⁶ Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

²⁰⁷ Jerry Betters, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

From Betters' point of view, Local 471 was willing to put its members in positions in place of non-union members even if the talent level was not sufficient.

Betters' recollections show that while many Black musicians shared good times during the Golden Years, good feelings were not universal. When considering the effectiveness of Local 471 as a tool for protecting musicians' livelihoods, differences in life experiences and employment options meant that there was often no common goal around which to unionize.

Chapter 4: The Demise of Local 471

The 1940's and 1950's were good times for Blacks in general, largely because the employment boom that accompanied America gearing up for war brought gains in employment that were never matched afterwards.²⁰⁸ During this era, just one neighborhood of the Lower Hill, located in the 1400 block of Wylie Avenue between Townsend and Fullerton, boasted such retail outlets as Goode's Pharmacy, Stanley's Tavern, Ma Pitt's Restaurant, Pryor's Furs, Mason's Bar, Crawford Grill #2, Poole's Funeral Home, Pernell's Printing Shop, the Flamingo Hotel, and Nesbit's Pie Shop.²⁰⁹ Even a section of Centre Avenue, although populated primarily by Jewish merchants, featured such beloved businesses as the Bailey Hotel, LaSalle's Beauty Salon, Lillian Allen's "Your House of Beauty," the B&M Restaurant, Lee's Floral Shop, Hick's Grocery, Pace Music Publishers, Turfley's Electric, Tyson's Bakery, Teenie Harris' photographic studio, and the McTurner, West and Fountain funeral homes."²¹⁰

The 1940's and 1950's were the best of times also for Local 471. In 1941, it opened the Musicians Club. Throughout the 1940s, and for years afterwards, members found work in any number of clubs, bars, and night spots. They also remained busy providing entertainment at local schools, at any number of community events, at various celebratory dinners, as well as at such places as the Kaufman Auditorium, Schenley High School, the Centre Avenue YMCA, Leech

²⁰⁸ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

²⁰⁹ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

²¹⁰ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

Farm Hospital. They also gave concerts at events sponsored by the Pittsburgh Department of Parks and Recreation.²¹¹

The Constitution of 1955, shows that, at least into the mid-1950's, Local 471 continued to be reasonably well run. The duties of its president, vice president, secretary-treasurer and three directors were clearly specified. The same was true of the Local's goal, namely "to unite the instrumental portion of the music profession for the better protection of its interests in general encouragement of musicians, the use of every effort and means which may tend to the elevation of music and musicians, and for the establishment of a minimum rate of prices to be charged by its members for their professional services, and for the enforcement of good faith and fair dealing between its members, and also its patrons, and to cooperate with organized labor."²¹²

Local 471 had quite liberal membership requirements that did not exclude Whites. Upon payment of an entrance fee of \$50.00 and quarterly dues of \$2.00, any competent musician of "good moral character" and over 16 years of age could join, regardless of "race, creed, color, or religion." New members had to demonstrate competency on their chosen instrument or instruments and, unless no one else was available for a particular engagement, were not

²¹¹ "Musicians Club Concert Band, Velma Carey in City Parks Band Concerts," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 24, 1955: 20; *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 22, 1952: 22; "Hill City Cavalcade of Local Stars at Schenley"; *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 11, 1952; "Who's Who In Labor," *Pittsburgh Courier* January 24, 1953:16; "NAACP Youth Confab Meets Next Monday," *Pittsburgh Courier* July 29, 1950; "William L Streets Post Brings Name Artists to Leech Farm"; *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* November 10, 1954; "New City Band to Give Concert," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 18, 1954; "Gala Music Extravaganza," *Pittsburgh Courier*, Dec 28, 1954: 19; *Pittsburgh Courier* June 25, 1955; "Lockjaw Davis Hit at Flamingo [Inn]," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 5, 1956 36.

²¹² Constitution and by-laws, Musicians Protective Union Local 471, American Federation of Musicians, Pittsburgh, PA. Local 471, 6500 Frankstown Ave, Pittsburgh, PA. Amended November , 1955. African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Library Archives.

allowed to play any other instrument than the one(s) they registered with the union. The Constitution lists several duties, as well as a long list of prohibited activities, notably anything “imperiling the interests” of the union or its members; violating the wage scale by working for less than the scheduled price, failing to fulfill an engagement or filling it with more (or fewer) musicians than contracted for; performing in a group having a member not in good standing with 471; not carrying one’s membership card to an engagement; not maintaining “good moral character”; and not reporting to leadership, ahead of time, full details of an engagement.²¹³ Members were warned about their contractual obligations. They also and were instructed to always carry their membership cards, which were required for them to have access to the bandstand. Members were instructed to accept jobs using “only” their registered instrument, and not to accept other jobs that would interfere with other members’ employment opportunities.

Union officers were instructed to insist that employers pay fair scale rates. This practice, according to Chuck Austin and others, was frequently violated. Employers often refused to pay scale except to musicians whose fame or stature gave them leverage. Lesser-known musicians, aware that other musicians would take their place if they refused, often accepted wages that were less than scale. However, at least 471’s by-laws show that the Local clearly spelled out expectations for employers and musicians alike. Enforcement of 471’s wage-scale policy was made difficult also by the large number of venues where artists performed. Unlike an industrial

²¹³ Constitution and by-laws – Musicians Protective Union Local 471

union where workers might be all under one roof, the entertainment industry had numerous separate, independent employers, which made it difficult to regulate wages.

The Local's constitution states that members must maintain "good moral character." This seems like an odd statement when we think about the job of a union. However, it makes perfect sense when considering the social context of the nature of the entertainment field. Segregation and racial divisions imposed expectations on Black behavior that went beyond the dictates of Local 471. W.E.B. DuBois talked about the "double-consciousness" of Black Americans, who developed dual ways of navigating society for survival purposes. Certain codes of behavior were suggested when interacting with the majority White population, while Blacks could be less guarded when in the presence of members of their own race. Furthermore, Black behavioral and personality stereotypes, often negative remnants from slavery, were reinforced during the Jim Crow era and had to be resisted. Black entertainers strove to prove they were not uncouth, uncivilized, and unsophisticated. This is not to say that all Local 471 members or Blacks for that matter acquiesced to rigid codes of conduct. Rather, double-consciousness alludes to the fact that, as a minority with a distorted legacy in America, Blacks were wary of how they were perceived by Whites. Even in segregated settings, musicians were reminded of the politics of "racial representation" and their responsibility to uphold a decent image. Moreover, this warning to Local 471 members to maintain good moral character was also a practical economic concern. As musicians played at various establishments and performed in a myriad of events, they not only represented "the Black race" but Local 471 as well. It was simply bad business to conduct themselves in ways that would cast aspersions on local 471 and make future employment opportunities less likely. While Pittsburgh's entertainment industry

certainly had its rowdy musicians and establishments, entertainer Frank McCown says many musicians were fixated on looking good and conducting themselves with class and sophistication.

Clearly, Local 471 aimed to operate in a professional manner. It didn't always keep full and accurate records,²¹⁴ and some musicians (as well as club-owners) broke the rules concerning payment, but the union tried hard to limit the exploitation of Black musicians. In general, wage scales for Black musicians were lower than those for Whites. Chuck Austin succinctly summed up the cause as simply "there are too many niggas like me who will play for nuthin'."²¹⁵ Austin's is the response of a frustrated jazz musician who understood that, even with ample opportunities to play live music, well-paying gigs remained few and far between.

Good times lulled many musicians into a dangerous complacency. It seemed to many that the relative prosperity would last forever, but in fact, some of the developments that heralded greater opportunities and acceptance for Black musicians turned out to be dangers. One unrecognized threat was that, in the 1940s and 1950s, the White public took to jazz in greater numbers than ever before. As a result, national jazz celebrities now came to Pittsburgh, performing often downtown or in Oakland at the Syria Mosque, but also in the Hill. The Savoy, the Crawford Grill, the Hurricane Lounge, and the Musicians Club began featuring highly popular local Black musicians such as Walt Harper, Leroy Brown, and Joe Westray, whose talents matched those of many national figures. Walt Harper was so popular that he broke the house record for attendance at Crawford Grill #2. When he played there on weekends, White

²¹⁴ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

²¹⁵ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

patrons often outnumbered Blacks.²¹⁶ It seemed Black Pittsburgh—and Black Pittsburgh jazz musicians—felt they had the best of both worlds: a style of music they could call their own along with a growing White clientele for their product. However, as jazz attracted increasingly large White audiences, the jazz scene became less and less dominated by Blacks. Venues catering to White audiences increased in number, as did the number of White jazz musicians. Historically, Blacks have been generous in sharing their cultural creations. There has always been a thin line for Blacks in the integration of their cultural production with the mainstream population. In order for jazz to go mainstream, it had to be accepted by White audiences. This acceptance was an indication of the appeal of Black music, its undeniable infectious qualities. Yet, in the end, the White embrace of jazz caused at least some Black musicians to worry that their music was being stolen from them.

Urban Renewal

A second, more obvious threat to Black musicians—but one that, ironically, proved less destructive—emerged in the mid-1950's in the guise of urban renewal. Proposed as a measure to remove blight from the Hill and transform it into a more desirable neighborhood, between 1956 and 1960, much of the Lower Hill—the site of most Black businesses and music venues—was razed, to be replaced by a domed Civic Arena and a huge parking lot. Urban renewal marked the end of many bars, restaurants, and night clubs that featured live music, particularly jazz.

²¹⁶ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

Urban renewal of the Hill District entailed a “deforestation” of Black culture and Black life in the Lower Hill, the section closest to downtown. The process uprooted approximately 8,000 residents, mainly Blacks but also a considerable number of Whites, and razed numerous bars and clubs where musicians played. The population of the Lower Hill dropped from 17,334 in 1950 to 2,459 in 1990. Urban renewal of the Lower Hill was a disaster for the music scene in the Hill. The vibrant jazz culture of the Lower Hill was snuffed out by urban renewal, which razed dozens of small jazz clubs. It also razed the beloved Musicians Club, where local artists perfected their craft, some on their way to international fame. National jazz figures like Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, Dizzy Gillespie, Jack McDuff, Sonny Stitt, and Max Roach played week-long engagements. When their performance ended for the evening, they often went to the Musicians Club to relax and interact with local musicians and fans. Sometimes they engaged in jam sessions to the delight and edification of all.

As early as 1950, the city of Pittsburgh had begun to focus attention on the broken places in the Hill, seeking to create a new cultural district in the Hill District. The blueprint for renewal included a plan to convert the Lower Hill into the city’s cultural district by tearing it down and erecting a large amphitheater, upscale apartments, art galleries, the symphony and the opera. Ultimately, city planners wanted to push into the Middle and Upper Hill, and convert Centre Ave into a corridor of up-scale apartment buildings and businesses all the way to Oakland.²¹⁷ Portraying it as a way to help residents of the Hill was and will always be an example of the duplicitous nature of gentrification. On its face it is often presented as

²¹⁷ Randy Fox, “Pittsburgh’s Hill District: The Death of a Dream (photos),” *HuffPost*, September 15, 2012.

something good and needed for progress. And still, the question is always after the transformation what will be left behind, what will displaced communities have real access to, and what will people do once uprooted.

Nevertheless, collected interviews and other sources clearly reveal that many Blacks were on board for change, sincerely feeling that urban renewal would improve the neighborhood. White Councilman George Evans stated that “90% of the buildings in the area are sub-standard, and have long outlived their usefulness, and so there would be no social loss if they were all destroyed.”²¹⁸ And while this was the perspective of a White man, it merely echoed prominent Black journalists like Frank Bolden, Paul Jones, and George Barbour, who wrote that the Lower Hill was in need of physical and social repair.²¹⁹ The *Pittsburgh Courier’s* Trezzant Anderson was especially determined that urban renewal come to fruition and vigorously opposed anyone not on board with the remaking of a neighborhood he characterized as being possessed by “lost souls.”²²⁰

Unfortunately, many Blacks believed in on the promise of urban renewal. They cast their hopes on political shakers and movers they hoped would be invested in building the Black community. Ultimately perhaps it was less that these promises were not kept, but rather that the gulf between what actually happened and what Blacks imagined would happen was impossible. Perhaps it was something that could never have been.

²¹⁸ Glasco, “History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century.”

²¹⁹ Glasco, “History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century.”

²²⁰ Glasco, “History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century.”

John Robin, the head of the Urban Redevelopment Authority, promised that evicted residents would gain access to affordable public housing. Blacks remembered Terrace Village and Bedford Dwellings in decades prior and thought well of this plan.²²¹ Blacks' optimism and trust blinded them to the possibility that predominantly White neighborhoods would prevent the Housing Authority from acquiring land on which to house displaced Hill District residents.

Things moved quickly. In September 1955 the federal government appropriated the funds. By June of next year, buildings began coming down. The redevelopment area involved 95 acres, and displaced more than 8,000 residents, including 1,239 Black families and 312 White.²²²

Today, the painful aftermath of urban renewal seems predictable. And yet, with the power of retrospection to look back at this moment in time, the negativity of urban renewal's outcome still seems jarring. The businesses that once flooded lower Wylie Avenue were no more. Landmarks like Bethel AME Church, a pillar of the Hill District since 1850, was torn down, along with the prestigious Loendi Club.²²³ Poor Blacks found themselves seeking refuge in neighborhoods like Homewood. Blacks who had probably been descendants of migrants who came generations before were now migrating again—albeit to other neighborhoods rather than to other cities. In Homewood they fell prey to scarcely better conditions than what they had left—overcrowded and with exorbitant rent fees.²²⁴

²²¹ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

²²² Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

²²³ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

²²⁴ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

Urban renewal was devastating both to Blacks' material lives and psyches, a period remembered as a watershed moment in the history of Black Pittsburgh. Something was lost. And seemingly many Black Pittsburghers have never fully recovered. This becomes readily apparent whenever today Pittsburgh attempts to upgrade, gentrify, and redevelop certain areas. There are Blacks still alive who lived through urban renewal and are haunted by its ghosts. They never let those of us who are younger, more optimistic and more forgetful, stop remembering what happened to the Black community in 1955.

And yet, although many Black Pittsburghers remember the pain of urban renewal, a closer look reveals that other forces also plagued the Black community. Nationally as well as locally, the Black middle class and the Black lower class had been losing contact with each other during the 1950's. As America began its shift from a primarily industrial economy to a service economy, poor Blacks lost their moorings while middle-class Blacks enjoyed a degree of upward mobility. Pittsburgh's steel industry had been in economic descent since the second decade of the 1900s, but booms related to World Wars I and II had severely lessened the impact or disguised the larger downward trend.²²⁵ In addition to troubling economic trends in the Hill District, the neighborhood had also been plagued by an increase in the heroin epidemic beginning in the 1950's. Juvenile deviance and criminal behavior increased as a side-effect of the Lower Hill being razed.²²⁶

Thus, the climate of the Hill had been affected by national as well as local trends. Urban renewal, while often recollected as a moment that annihilated the Hill, was not a total disaster.

²²⁵ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

²²⁶ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

City directories from 1953 versus 1959 show that Wylie Ave lost most of its business vitality, Centre Avenue experienced an influx of displaced businesses. Thus, Centre lost the Bailey hotel, LaSalle's Beauty Salon, and Teenie Harris' photo studio, but gained the Hurricane Lounge, Woogie Harris' Crystal Barbershop, Hartzberg's Bar and restaurant, and Pryor's Furs, who relocated from Wylie Avenue because of urban renewal.²²⁷

So perhaps it wasn't just that Blacks were hit hard by national and local negative forces during the 1950's. Many understood these were the inevitable, cyclical blows that America would land upon its darker citizens. But what affected Blacks then and still affects them now is how the 1950's ended compared to its glorious beginning. At the beginning of the decade, optimism prevailed. And yet the decade ended on a sour note. The Black middle class had come a little closer to their American dream, but the masses were still struggling to find their economic footing. The loss of their portion of the Hill was the equivalent of planets being flung from orbit. Yes, other complex historical factors contributed to their discontent. But it was urban renewal that left the deepest scars. Jazz musicians were a part of the Black community. They could be regal while performing, able to shock and awe various audiences—but they were built of the same stuff; they shared the same DNA as many of the poor Blacks who cast their demons away on dance floors. These jazz artists were hurt by the Hill District's transformation and the accompanying loss of many venues as well as the loss of a chunk of their audience. They knew things could never be the same. Or maybe they realized their own fate and future

²²⁷ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

was never really in their hands. They had been kings and queens of the Hill. And yet their kingdoms were subject to removal and alteration without compensation.

Before delving into the impact of urban renewal, a note concerning Black music must be made. Many of the jazz musicians interviewed for this study talked glowingly of opportunities to share their gifts in entertainment spaces located in the Hill and for upscale audiences. A certain gleam catches their eyes and their chests swell with pride as they expound upon Pittsburgh's glamorous past. And yet, what is also apparent is that many rank and file jazz musicians played wherever their talents could be enjoyed and compensated. They cherished good times in the Hill, in the limited opportunities for Black jazz artists to play downtown or in other predominantly White spaces, in East Liberty, in Monessen and Connellsville and other industrial centers on Pittsburgh's outskirts. The Hill District may have served as the epicenter of Black entertainment during the 1950's, but rank and file jazz musicians operated by the creed, "have trumpet will travel." Artists like Frank McCown fondly recall some of the dangerous elements they encountered in certain neighborhoods and venues. Their episodes of surviving in places where their musical gifts brought them into contact with deviant and unpredictable segments of the Black community, was a badge of honor. The love of music; the genuine desire to give the people what they wanted overpowered reservations they may have had concerning the venues where they played. Many jazz artists understood that those Blacks most deprived and who lived in the most dilapidated areas were also the ones who most needed the salvation, the sweet release, provided by music. The Hill was flooded by jazz rhythms. The masses' remembrance of this era is less about struggle and more about striving. In the Hill Districts they were kings and queens.

Musicians Club Relocates

In 1951, as rumors of impending urban renewal began circulating, Local 471 began seeking out alternative locations for itself and the Musicians Club.²²⁸ Officers and members began the search for a new space that would replicate the magic of the Club's Wylie Avenue location. Around Christmas 1953, some three years before urban renewal began actually tearing down the Lower Hill, president Carl Arter announced that the Musicians Club would be relocating to 6500 Frankstown Avenue in East Liberty, at the intersection of Enterprise Street. The front of the new venue housed a bar called Johnny Brown's, while the back housed The Famous Door, a cabaret room with a stage, behind which were offices that could only be entered from Enterprise Street.²²⁹ The club now had a 600-person capacity and, as at its prior location in the Hill, became a coveted venue where musicians and the music-loving public could gather.²³⁰

Despite urban renewal, Black musicians still made their presence felt. The Michelle Organ Trio, the Ruby Young Trio, King Solomon's Trio, Eddie Winters and the Rhythm Rockers, along with a bevy of solo performers including Nancy Wilson, George Benson, Max Roach, Charles Mingus and others graced the stage of the Hurricane Club. Birdie Dunlap, owner of the Hurricane remarked, "I just can't explain it to you because segregation and prejudice was rampant. But everybody would be sitting together in the same booths. And I had a good time

²²⁸ "Musicians Local Elects New Secretary Treasurer," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 22, 1951: 27.

²²⁹ "Musicians Club Moves to 'Old Famous' Door," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 26, 1953, 1.

²³⁰ "New Musicians Club Jumps All the Time," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 23, 1954: 18.

with them.”²³¹ Nonetheless, that the Musicians Club had to relocate was symptomatic of the lack of power that characterized the Black situation in Pittsburgh. Entertainers and performers might reign as kings and queens in their own entertainments spaces, but they reigned over only a few domains, and even then, their reign was precarious, subject to whims of the majority.

Overall, musicians liked the new location, and came to look upon it with the same warm feelings they had felt towards the Club’s former Hill District location. The *Pittsburgh Courier* labeled 6500 Frankstown as one of “the jazziest spots” in the city. Lionel Hampton, after a visit to the city, praised the new location as the “foxiest musicians club in the country, bar none.”²³² This was not to be the Club’s only move. In the late 1950’s, it would move once again, this time to Westray Plaza on Lincoln Avenue in Larimer, its last location.²³³

The musicians continued to value the Club because it represented a continuation of music and opportunities to play and learn. Chuck Austin treasured those early years. “When you joined the union,” he says, “you took on a totally new persona...in terms of how you felt playing music, you was with the big boys!”²³⁴ Pete Henderson felt the same about the East Liberty location. “We felt so big to be a part” of the union, he exclaims.²³⁵ Henderson especially loved the camaraderie. The Musicians Club, he said, was open “all day, all night. And at that time it wasn’t little jazz groups, there were bands man! It was always somebody there that

²³¹ “Michelle Organ Trio at the Hurricane,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 1, 1956: A34.

²³² “New Musicians Club Jumps All the Time,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 23, 1954; Nelson Harrison, email correspondence with Larry Glasco, 17 September 2020.

²³³ “New Musicians Club Jumps All the Time,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 23, 1954.

²³⁴ Pete Henderson, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, March 8, 1998, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

²³⁵ Henderson, interview by Charles Austin, March 8, 1998.

would teach you....It was like a brotherhood. I felt very comfortable, [like part of an elite group] ... Yes!”²³⁶

Despite the attraction of the new location, urban renewal had cleared the Hill of many of the venues where they had formerly played. Established national acts began performing one night stands at places like the Civic Arena and then bolting quickly out of town, not interacting and jamming with local musicians.²³⁷ Henderson, Austin, and other musicians felt something had been lost. They recollected the bonds that had been forged in the Club while it was located in the Hill District, and cited the move to East Liberty as the beginning of the decline in unity and solidarity among members. “The old Club inspired and directed you,” Henderson exclaims. “We were one of the metropolises of jazz!”²³⁸

471 Activities Under Carl Arter

Even with fewer performance venues available, some members of Local 471 performed as much as ever. Ruby Young (piano), Calvin King (electric guitar), and Leroy Brown (saxophone), played at *The Pittsburgh Courier* Home Service Fair in June 1954.²³⁹ Variety shows at Schenley High regularly asked for musicians to play.²⁴⁰ The Pirate Inn hosted the multifaceted

²³⁶ Henderson, interview by Charles Austin, March 8, 1998.

²³⁷ “Crossroads of the World,” Pittsburgh Music History-Hill District, Google.com. (This site cross-references: “The Crossroads of the World: A Social and Cultural History of Jazz in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, 1920-1970. By Colter Harper, 2001. Historic American Buildings Survey Civic Arena (Public Auditorium) Habs No. Pa-678 0. Lower Hill Officially ‘Blighted’, *Pittsburgh Post Press*, September 19, 1950.)

²³⁸ Henderson, interview by Charles Austin, March 8, 1998.

²³⁹ “Trio at Home Fair,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 12, 1954.

²⁴⁰ “Variety Show at Schenley to be Great,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 10, 1954: 12.

Carl Arter who played piano, sax and clarinet. Local 471 also pushed to fill spots in military concert bands,²⁴¹ while also creating an eighteen-piece ensemble band that drew rave reviews from locals and even such national figures as Duke Ellington.²⁴² Carl Arter and Local 471 executive leadership also pushed members to develop programming which offered diverse musical genres, including symphony, bebop, jazz and swing.²⁴³ This in theory would have provided its membership with continuous relevancy and economic opportunity even as musical tastes shifted over time. Press coverage of Local 471 and the Musicians Club remained positive through the period, although the Club was bedeviled by underage drinking among teenagers who managed to secure fake union cards.²⁴⁴

Powell/Arter Conflict

Musicians looked upon the 1950's positively, but the decade had its own share of conflict. In 1957, Bill Powell, a popular Black disc jockey at WILY radio station, raised the ire of Carl Arter by calling for the integration of Local 471 and Local 60 as well as for the freedom for him to employ non-union members during his radio show. Arter responded sharply that Local 471's affairs were not of Powell's concern.²⁴⁵ Powell had been a successful DJ in Nashville Tennessee before he brought his popular, all Black, R&B/ Soul music format to the Pittsburgh

²⁴¹ "Local 471 Urges Musicians to Join the Union," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 9, 1954: 19.

²⁴² "Musicians Club to Unveil 18 Piece House Orc ," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 17, 1954: 18; "No Cover Charge," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 30, 1954: 19.

²⁴³ "Musicians Club Starts New Concert Band," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 30, 1954: 1.

²⁴⁴ "Musicians Face 3 Liquor Charges," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 9, 1954.

²⁴⁵ "Carl Arter, Bill Powell Feuding Over Union Policy," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 9, 1957: 1.

airwaves. This type of radio offering enthralled some but also was a harbinger of the demise of live opportunities for jazz musicians both in Pittsburgh and nationally. Live instrumentation was losing its stranglehold on the ears of Black listeners.²⁴⁶ As a result of this conflict with Powell, Arter found himself forced to defend the policies of Local 471, which had an estimated 300 members in 1957. Arter denied that he supported segregation and suggested the union was open to anyone regardless of race, creed or ethnicity. Indeed, Local 471 had a few White members.²⁴⁷ Joe Westray added fuel to the fire by naming some of the White venues where had played, and called on Powell to examine bias and racism in his own profession of broadcasting.²⁴⁸ Ruby Young continued the ongoing feud, adding that 471 had placed Powell on the "unfair list" because he employed non-union members on his show.²⁴⁹ Powell rebuffed these claims and threatened litigation if Local 471 couldn't prove the charges.²⁵⁰

This conflict illustrated that Local 471 leadership was vulnerable to attacks, but also that it was more than willing to defend its position. 471 officers were not adverse to conducting a war of words with other powerful opponents. On the other hand, Powell's attack shows that the popularity of radio and recorded music represented a threat to the union and to the livelihood of those who made their living by playing live music. Those musicians had to coexist with recorded music in a more profound way because consumers had more options to quench

²⁴⁶ "Carl Arter, Bill Powell Feuding Over Union Policy," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 9, 1957: 1.

²⁴⁷ "Statement by Carl Arter President of Local 471 AFM," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 9, 1957: 34.

²⁴⁸ "Joe Westray Enlightens Powell," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 16, 1957: 5.

²⁴⁹ "Ruby Young. Musician Officer-He Should Deal with Segregation as seen in His Profession," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 23, 1957.

²⁵⁰ George Pitts, "A Reader Blasts Rock and Roll at Pitt," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 27, 1957:A18.

their entertainment thirst. Finally, it showed that jazz's dominance was being challenged by Rhythm and Blues for listeners and dominance, reminiscent of the shift from classical to jazz decades earlier.

1958: Local 471's Musicians Club Celebrates Its 50th Anniversary

And yet, despite these challenges, 471 continued to thrive. In January 4, 1958 its Musicians Club celebrated the 50th anniversary, demonstrating that it had proven resilient despite challenging societal variables and the inherent difficulty of trying to unionize musicians.²⁵¹ Such challenges were illustrated by an interesting development in January of 1958 when Local 471 suspended union membership for several members including George Shorty Harris and Thomas Turrentine. No reason was given for the suspension, but doing so highlights the unstable nature of the music industry. There were too many musicians seeking gigs for union leadership to be able to completely control the rule breakers.²⁵²

Finally as the 1950's was coming to an end, President Arter encountered attacks from his own membership over mismanagement of Union funds. Arter was stung but ran again for office after considering resignation.²⁵³ The issue soon blew over, and Arter would go on to join a theater group formed by Local 471 which, as the decade closed, provided new opportunities for the musicians of 471.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ "Wylie Ave," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 4, 1959.

²⁵² "Notice to All Tavern Owners-Club Owners," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 18, 1958.

²⁵³ "Miles Ahead of Miles' Head is the Issue," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 7, 1959: 16.

²⁵⁴ "New Theater Group Formed," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 28, 1959: 18.

The Merger

Throughout the 1950's, Local 471 successfully met the challenges of urban renewal as well as attacks from outside and criticism from within. However, the Local was soon to encounter the greatest challenge of its long existence: that of racial integration.

The struggle for racial integration in America has a long and difficult history. In 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution settled a question of whether the nation would continue half-slave and half-free, but it did not settle the question of whether the freedmen were to enjoy the rights and privileges of first-class citizenship. In 1896, that question was settled, at least temporarily, when the Supreme Court declared that they were not, defining the era of Jim Crow and racial segregation. For the next 68 years, based on the conviction that racial desegregation would lay the basis for racial harmony and racial equality, Blacks fought to end the court's separate-but-equal policy. It was a goal that most Blacks believed in fervently. It was the goal of the Civil Rights Movement, and which concluded successfully with the 1964 Civil Rights Act outlawing racial segregation in the public sphere.²⁵⁵

Passage of the Civil Rights Act brought tangible and important racial gains nationally. Over the next ten years the Black middle class doubled in size. Psychological gains also accrued, as attested by such prominent Black writers as Alice Walker, who argued that Act's results increased Black feelings of self-worth. Racial activist and scholar Vincent Harding insisted at a gathering of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee members that if anyone doubted that

²⁵⁵ In 1964, Congress passed Public Law 88-352 (78 Stat. 241). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. Provisions of this civil rights act forbade discrimination on the basis of sex, as well as, race in hiring, promoting, and firing. The Act prohibited discrimination in public accommodations and federally funded programs. It also strengthened the enforcement of voting rights and the desegregation of schools. From: U.S. Dept. of Labor website. *Legal Highlight: The Civil Rights Act of 1964.*

racial progress had been made, he or she “had forgotten what life was like in a Jim Crow America.”²⁵⁶ The doubters, however, had a point. The gains of the movement were distributed unevenly, benefiting mainly middle-class Blacks but making only slight improvements to the daily life of “ordinary” blue-collar and grassroots Blacks. This distinction was especially apparent in urban centers of the North, Pittsburgh included.

That Pittsburgh was a microcosm of larger national trends became apparent in March, 1966, when the American Federation of Musicians, responding to the mandates of the Civil Rights Act, ordered the merger of Locals 60 and 471, the city’s racially separate musicians unions. The response by many members of Local 471 ranged between acceptance, anxiety, and rejection, reactions that in many ways mirrors the reaction of the city’s larger Black community. All told, the varied responses challenge the historian to objectively portray events that occurred in a time that has become steeped in legend, hyperbole, and romanticism. Certainly historians can revise and revisit, but the 1960’s are not only a period in which historians must compete with fetishized versions of this decade, but there are many who lived through the 1960’s still alive and willing to pose their recollections in juxtaposition to whatever narratives historians might muster. The sixties are remembered in a variety of ways: as a decade in which America convulsed and heaved itself forward into a changing political landscape; as a decade in which conservative status quos of the 1950’s were being contested; as a decade of international and domestic upheaval, unsettling, rethinking of how power should be distributed; as decade of assassinations, of the oppressed waging war for their political territory and humane space in

²⁵⁶ Wayne Santoro, “Was the Civil Rights Movement Successful? Tracking and Understanding Black Views,” *Sociological Forum* (June 2015): 628.

America, of triumph and tragedy, of America looking into the looking glass and perhaps seeing itself clearly for the first time. The sixties were a time of transition, bookended by a sense of hopefulness along with feelings of rage and disappointment. And yet, once we strip away the lofty and larger-than-life descriptions often attributed to the sixties, we see that it was an extension of changes that had begun in the 1950's. It was a unique time of culmination of passions and zealousness that had been stirring in previous years. It is a decade that historians live for—to be able to decipher the truth from legend; and yet to acknowledge that the legend has become its own unalterable truth in the collective memory of many. The sixties will always be remembered as a peculiar decade by many of those who lived to tell about it to younger generations.

The monograph *Democracy in Black* provides guidelines for reporting on controversial developments and contradictory feelings that are so strong that they cause what Eddie Glaude calls “disremembering.” When we “disremember,” Glaude argues, especially following

an egregious moment in the past, we shape how we live in the present. I borrow the word from Toni Morrison. In the novel *Beloved*, she grapples with the difficulty of memories, haunting memories that come back to consume. Disremembering enables the characters in the novel to ward off, temporarily, the pain of past events.

Disremembering blots out horrible loss, but it also distorts who the characters take themselves to be. Something is lost. It is this sense of the word that strikes me as

particularly useful for our current moment. Disremembering is active forgetting.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul*, (New York: Broadway Books, 2017), 46-47.

“Disremembering” challenges historians to be more meticulous in their craft. In this case, one must ask how has the sixties has been redacted in our minds and why have some ideas and images become crystalized and not others? All Blacks were not freedom fighters and all freedom fighters were not Black; Martin Luther King dreamed but at times was also bitterly disappointed; women were the backbone of the movement but were given little recognition; Vietnam vets today still chafe at America’s lukewarm and even callous treatment of their defenders; progress was made but the protectors of the status quo made sure by the end of the decade America didn’t go too far left; and in the Black community when the 1960’s had culminated their seems to have been a strange mixture of pain and pride. A reckoning with America’s racial history had occurred. The winners and losers were unclear. Black collective memory of this time is convoluted. It was a period in which the Black community’s strength and weakness were both illuminated. It is these two extremes that complicate our memory of the sixties.

The 1960’s Civil Rights Movement

The variety of Black responses reflects the complexities of changing social and economic conditions. Urban renewal dealt a devastating, but not fatal, blow to the Hill District, making the years following urban renewal full of stories of survival, persistence, and resilience That the real story is more complex raises the question of why so many have chosen to portray this period one dimensionally, as a fatal blow to Black Pittsburgh? What altered the public’s memory? Could it be partly that living in a Black skin has caused disappointment to become almost encoded in the DNA of African Americans? America’s progress towards racial equality

must always be measured against the index of Black pain. Yet, despite the historical reality of that pain, it is the job of the historian to also articulate the moments of light, victory, and progress.

Many in Black Pittsburgh were optimistic about the future and committed to making it even better. An article in *The Pittsburgh Courier*, “Year Review: It Happened in Pittsburgh 1960, The City with a Brighter Future,” points out several positive developments.²⁵⁸ That spring, local college students, White as well as Black, participated in sit-ins in downtown Pittsburgh. In June of that year, Reverend Martin Luther King came to the city and spoke at its inaugural freedom rally. Blacks in Homewood pushed for labor rights and protested racial discrimination practiced by local businesses. All this activity gave the article an optimistic tone, one that portrayed Pittsburgh as a city on an upward trend. The freedom struggle was a sign of Black people exerting their political will for justice in America in new and exciting ways.

Another *Courier* article, “History of Aurora Club and Ducks; Club Women played a big role in Pittsburgh’s growth,” by Hazel Garland, paints a picture of Black Pittsburgh’s active social scene.²⁵⁹ The Aurora Club and the Frogs, along with other Black clubs in Pittsburgh, Greensburg, Newcastle, Franklin and Harrisburg were hosting “outstanding cultural events” in the Black community and extending their reach in service endeavors. The Frogs were identified as Pittsburgh top Black male club even during the sixties.²⁶⁰ Other *Courier* articles from the sixties

²⁵⁸ Harry Brooks, “Year Review: It Happened in Pittsburgh 1960, The City With a Brighter Future,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 31, 1960:18.

²⁵⁹ Hazel Garland, “History of Aurora Club and Ducks; Club Women Played a Big Role in Pittsburgh’s Growth,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 24, 1962:A2.

²⁶⁰ “Brief History of the Frogs,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 24, 1962.

point to a long history of rich Black culture and a tradition of political activism extending back into the 1800s, of Black proficiency in business, and of those who fought and mobilized others to craft a more prosperous existence for local African Americans.

Despite all this, urban renewal reminded many of how swiftly colossal forces arrayed against them could undercut their progress. Like sandcastles kicked away, Black institutions were vulnerable to the whims of the powerful. The lesson was that constant vigilance is necessary. Curtiss Porter is an example of the latter. Porter described the pain of being a Black student in Pittsburgh during the 1960's. Less than one percent of the University of Pittsburgh's student population was Black during his years there as a student, and he found "the Whiteness was overwhelming"²⁶¹ "I never saw myself as a leader," Porter continues. "I was primarily someone who observed society, analyzing, puzzling over why things worked the way they did. But I did put my voice in, ...I had a moral outlook."²⁶² Porter would go on to become one of the architects of the Black Action Society's takeover of Student Union office at the University of Pittsburgh in response to King's April 4, 1968 assassination. The physical occupation by these students forced the administration to acquiesce by making a more concerted effort to recruit more Black students and faculty and develop a more substantial Black studies program. This example is important to understand because it shows how many Blacks during the sixties were caught in a vortex of struggle, and were assaulted by a multitude of socio-political forces that compelled action. Those who were inclined to fight vociferously for their rights found ample opportunity. But the 1960's was a unique decade in that the social pressures that catalyzed

²⁶¹ Ervin Dyer, "Black Action," *Pitt Magazine*, Spring 2019, accessed at pittmag.pitt.edu.

²⁶² Ervin Dyer, "Black Action."

Black activism were so acute that even those without a fully developed sense of consciousness became involved. Black language, Black fashion aesthetics and traditional Black modes of protest all shifted in response to the social urgency of the decade. There was a moral tide bending the Black masses towards collective action. This is not to be overstated. All Blacks did not join in protest during the 1960's. However, enough of them did to demonstrate that there was something peculiar about this decade in Black history.

Music: Freedom Songs and the Civil Rights Movement (1960's)

There was a close relationship between music and the civil rights struggles of the 1960's, in which the former played a key role in shaping, spreading, and sustaining the latter.²⁶³ So-called "freedom songs" contained lyrics that outlined the realities of the fight for freedom in the language of everyday people. Whether through literal or metaphorical language, freedom songs made it clear that there was a struggle; a righteous striving occurring during the sixties. Secondly, songs connected people. Blacks and Whites who may not have known each other bonded through song. Moreover, music created a template for dreaming about a better way of life. Faith-based songs helped Blacks merge heavenly goals with more temporal ones. Songs that were not faith-based but spoke directly to the harsh nature of the struggle allowed Blacks to feel that their hopes for a radically new society were in reach. Music was emotional and spiritual adrenaline for the soldiers of the freedom struggle to keep pushing through darkness. And conversely, music also served as a diversion from the bitter effects and laborious nature of

²⁶³ T.V. Reed, *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Present* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 13-14.

engaging in a social movement. John Lewis, for example, listened to the latest popular music as he traveled the country, simply to replenish his mind and spirit during the 60's.²⁶⁴

While “freedom songs” are most closely associated with call and response genres, jazz also played an important role. Charles Mingus in 1960 wrote “Fables of Faubus”, a scathing musical critique of the racist practices of Arkansas governor Orval Faubus, and the inaction of President Eisenhower.²⁶⁵ Max Roach’s 1960 album “Freedom Now Suite” provided his strong reaction to American racism. Nina Simone and John Coltrane were moved by events in 1963, especially the Birmingham church bombing which killed four little girls. They both shaped their music in songs like “Mississippi Goddamn” and “Alabama” around the intense pain Blacks suffered at the hands of American racism. Coltrane’s drummer, Rashid Ali, stated, “those were trying times in the 1960’s. We had the civil rights thing going on, we had King, we had Malcolm, we had the Panthers. There was so much diversity happening. People were screaming for their rights and wanting to be equal, be free. And naturally, the music reflects the whole period.”²⁶⁶ Thus, music did not simply serve as salve for the wounded psyches of Black Americans, it was also organically part of the struggle. The cauldron of resistance against entrenched racial antagonism gave rise to new levels of creativity—a different and maybe higher purpose for music than entertainment. Unquestionably, the high levels of protest activity occurring in Pittsburgh during the 1960’s made Black jazz artists could not detach themselves from the reality of being Black in America. Inevitably, they were part of the movement.

²⁶⁴ T.V. Reed, *The Art of Protest*, 38.

²⁶⁵ “The Influence of Jazz on the Civil Rights Movement,” fdmusic.live, accessed February 10, 2017.

²⁶⁶ “The Influence of Jazz on the Civil Rights Movement.”

Joe Westray: President of 471, January 1962

For whatever reasons, Local 471 faced financial difficulties in the early 1960's. Perhaps because of that, at the elections in December, 1961 members replaced Carl Arter, who had served as the :Local's president for eight years.²⁶⁷ Joe Westray, the new president, had a long history in the world of music and in the local jazz scene. When thinking about history being written through memories and oral testimonies, there are times when a narrative about a person's life must be provided by others if that person can't speak for him or herself. Westray had passed away by the time Chuck Austin had wanted to conduct an interview with him. Instead, Austin interviewed Westray's sister Cathy, who was grateful for a chance to resurrect the memories of her brother.²⁶⁸ As they talked, Chuck and Cathy created a portrait of a man who was a giant in Pittsburgh's entertainment circles. Going through pictures and filling in the gaps in each other's memories, they brought Joe Westray's legacy to life.

Joe Westray grew up with four siblings, Sterling, Lorraine, Wilma and Cathy. Cathy commented that both of her sisters had passed by the time she was sixteen. Because of this, she and Joe developed a special bond that was reflected in her effusive and loving praise for her brother. But it was also reflected in her numerous mentions of how Joe often took her with him when he performed at gigs.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ "Hollywood Gives Negro Realistic Role," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 9, 1961: A20.

²⁶⁸ Joe Westray, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh. This interview is listed under Joe Westray's name but is actually given by his sister, Cathy. Joe Westray passed away on July 9, 1980 before this collection of oral histories was gathered by the AAJPSP.

²⁶⁹ Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

According to Cathy, Joe started getting serious about music at the age of eighteen. He went on enhance his training at Carnegie Institute of Technology, and played with a group called the Harlemites. “[M]usic was his whole mind,” Cathy says, “when he was rehearsing, everything had to be right.”²⁷⁰ He became a band leader early in the 1940’s, not long after the Musicians Club opened in 1942. Westray went on to lead one of the first professional bands in Pittsburgh. He was also one of the best-known Black music arrangers at the time. Cathy spoke proudly of her brother. “[A]nybody who’s ever been a professional [musician],” she says, he has worked with them. ... [I]t’s nowhere I go in this city or surrounding areas that someone don’t know who Joe is. That makes me feel good.”²⁷¹ Austin reaffirmed these feelings when he emphasized several times that all the musicians that came out of Westray’s band were good musicians.²⁷²

Westray played in several venues, including the Harlem Casino in the Hill, as well as in Clairton, Johnstown, Altoona and even Ohio. Austin mentioned a story of some of the musicians who traveled to Ohio with Westray. They had nick-named him, “Mize’ short for Miser, because they often were broke and Westray always seemed to have money to loan them.”²⁷³ Westray was a tireless worker. He would get up at 5 or 6 am during the week, work as a truck driver

²⁷⁰ Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

²⁷¹ Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

²⁷² Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

²⁷³ Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

during the day, sleep a little, and get right back up for a night performance. This, as Austin interjected, was “the life of a musician.”²⁷⁴

Yet, Westray’s hard work was not limited to music and his day job. His sister explained that anytime she needed something fixed, he would fix it. She described him also as if he took care of her like a father. She emphasized their strong bond when she told Austin, “When Joe passed, [a brief pause] it was like a tree trunk. And after, that was it...It took me a long time to get over it. But I started thinking about the good times.”²⁷⁵ Her words were laced with sadness, but also laughter as she compiled the accomplishments and reflected on the character traits of her brother.

While Cathy showed tender affection for her brother, Austin showed his appreciation, describing how Westray had saved the Musicians Club. This part of the conversation highlighted a topic that both Austin and Cathy reflected upon at length. They recalled the bitterness, envy and in-fighting amongst the musicians, intra-racial tensions that, in their eyes, were a serious detriment to the status of Black musicians especially after the merger. “So many of our [Black] musicians were fighting among themselves. They figured by going into the White union, they would get more jobs. But Joe [Westray] knew better,” Cathy says.²⁷⁶

Following Carl Arter’s term 1955-1962, Westray served as president of Local 471 through the merger period. He was pressured by a number of forces. There was the looming inevitability of integration, which was not enthusiastically embraced either by many musicians,

²⁷⁴ Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

²⁷⁵ Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

²⁷⁶ Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

whether White or Black. Second, there were the internal tensions of the Black musicians, who seemed to be losing their passion for the union. The level of disunity was exacerbated by neighborhood provincialism. Many Black musicians had allegiances to different parts of the city, such as East Liberty, the Hill and the Northside, creating geographical cliques that diminished the collective bargaining power of Black musicians.²⁷⁷ Third, after the merger, Joe Westray was reduced from president of Local 471 to simply a board member of the newly formed Local 60-471. This "demotion" meant that, for the sake of integration, Black musicians relinquished much of their autonomy and representation. These converging forces meant that former members of Local 471 had an uphill battle in recreating the "lush life" they attributed to their earlier times at the Musicians Club.

It was when Chuck and Cathy spoke of the Musicians Club and the period before the merger that I could sense the joy in their voices. Cathy explained that segregation created no special hardship for Black musicians. They knew they couldn't go downtown and play, "but they had everything here" she says, referring to the wide array of entertainment and commercial options available for Blacks in the Hill District before urban renewal.²⁷⁸ "Everything meshed", she added, emphasizing the amazing camaraderie Black musicians had at the Musicians Club. Cathy recalled how she came to dance and hear the music. Austin added that it was common for Local 471 members to play a gig then run down to the Musicians Club "to get some of [Hot Sauce] Williams' chili."²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

²⁷⁸ Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

²⁷⁹ Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

In addition to being a talented musician, Westray was a prosperous business owner who had converted a former skating rink into a combination ballroom/bar known as Westray Plaza. In response to the union's financial problems, he offered the Musicians Union space in his own property, Westray Plaza, located about a half mile away at 917 Lincoln Avenue. Some members objected to the offer, arguing that the move would enrich Westray. "They really thought he was taking over," says Cathy, but "Who else was going to do it?"²⁸⁰ Austin tried to get members to see they were gaining by not having to pay for refreshments in the new spot and truthfully, there were few alternatives if the Club hoped to survive. Overall, Austin considers Westray's act a magnanimous gesture.²⁸¹

Austin's interview with Westray's sister is part of his determination that the legacy of Westray and of other members of Local 471 be more widely known and be given their proper place in the canon of jazz. He is fighting to prove Pittsburgh deserves a level of recognition equal to New York, Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, New Orleans, and other cities with a rich jazz tradition. It is as if he feels Local 471 has been slighted, under-studied, underappreciated. He feels it is not enough simply to tell or write an "official" history. It also important who the "teller" of that history is. In this interview with Westray's sister, he spoke with special irritation when discussing previous efforts to tell the story of Local 471. He and Cathy pointed to flaws in the public television documentary *Wylie Ave Days*, which has been praised for celebrating the Hill District's historic musical prowess. Austin and Cathy offer their own critique of the film and of some of its contributors. One of these is Frank Bolden, former city editor of *The Pittsburgh*

²⁸⁰ Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

²⁸¹ Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

Courier. Austin says Bolden couldn't tell the full story because he didn't have access to certain experiences or wasn't present at certain venues. Black entertainers were an exclusive fraternity and musicians knew each other intimately in ways that writers of history didn't. Austin and Cathy brought up Erroll Garner's nickname, "Gumdrops," as an example. Austin lamented that Frank Bolden said that Garner received this nickname because the saying was if you gave him gumdrops he would play the piano all day. Austin pointed out that the real origin of the name, "Gumdrops," went back to an old local music group called the Candy Kids. Cathy agreed, replying that she remembered the Candy Kids.²⁸²

This exchange was important because it revealed that even the most skilled documentarian does not have unlimited access to the subject being studied. There are some secrets that can only be learned by lived experience, or through communication with people intimately connected to those who "experienced" them. An outsider, even though well intentioned, may not even know the right questions to ask in order to gather certain truths. This fact is further illustrated by how often the musicians in these recorded interviews use nicknames to refer to each other or musicians in general. They have their own language. They speak of venues that no longer exist, as if they are still here. They often refer to street locations and landmarks to identify entertainment venues even if they can't remember the actual name of the business. Thus, the historian must be able to decode these conversations and serve as an interlocutor for the public. Objectivity is important, yet Austin demonstrates that just as important is the use of history for the higher purpose of correcting falsehoods and cementing

²⁸² Westray, interview by Charles Austin, November 13, 1997.

and creating a legacy for a group of people slowly dying away. History may inform, but Austin wants to transform how Local 471 was viewed by Pittsburghers and Americans in general.

Pittsburgh AFM Convention (1962)

In June 1962, the American Federation of Musicians held its convention in Pittsburgh, attracting delegates from the United States, Canada, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. The convention was hosted by both of Pittsburgh's Musicians Locals 471 and 60. President Joe Westray and acclaimed pianist Walt Harper attended as delegates representing Local 471.²⁸³ Over 1200 union members converged on downtown Pittsburgh for the convention which was held at the new Civic Arena. The irony of this location is striking. The new Civic Arena was the impetus for the urban renewal project in Pittsburgh's lower Hill District, which had wiped out many jazz venues and forced 471 to relocate outside the Hill district. Local 471 now was tasked with providing entertainment at an extravagant event alongside their Local 60 brethren.²⁸⁴ Co-hosting the convention showed that the landscape of Pittsburgh's music scene was changing and that interaction between Black and White musicians was increasing.

The participation of 471 in the national convention showed that it and its members still possessed considerable clout. Local 471 President Joe Westray served as keynote speaker. Press coverage indicated that not only was this event highly successful, but it was not burdened by contentious relations between Blacks and Whites. It took place in a harmonious atmosphere that seemed to demonstrate the potential for harmonious integration. "Complete Harmony

²⁸³ "Musicians Convention," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 26, 1962.

²⁸⁴ "Delegates Convene in Pittsburgh," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 16, 1962: 16.

Sets Tone for AFM sessions,” according to upbeat coverage by *The Pittsburgh Courier*.²⁸⁵ Several Local 471 members lent their talents to this event, including Walt Harper, drummer Honey Boy Minor, Alyce Brooks and Harold Betters.²⁸⁶ There was even an art show, organized by the Pittsburgh Plan for Art, that coincided with the Convention. Both Local 471 and Local 60 sponsored this event with Local 60 president Hal Davis mentioning the importance of Pittsburgh’s musicians contributing to Pittsburgh’s emerging cultural renaissance.²⁸⁷ That *Courier* coverage of the event was overwhelmingly positive implies that any misgivings about integration harbored by Black (and White) musicians, Local 471 and Local 60 found a way to work together. It is always possible, of course, that the positive vibes surrounding the convention was based largely on one significant fact: that Locals 60 and 471 had agreed before its start that the issue of racially segregated locals would not be raised.²⁸⁸

Westray Letter on Challenges Facing 471

And still, despite the after-glow of a successful convention, Local 471 could not escape the changing musical landscape. President Joe Westray in a letter to the editor of the *Courier*, commented on union wage scales affecting Local 471. Wage scales had to be watched closely, he said, to ensure equitable compensation for one day events versus more formal events that lasted several days. He also rebuffed notions that Local 471 members were tardy for events or

²⁸⁵ “Complete Harmony Sets Tone for AFM Sessions,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 16, 1962: 15.

²⁸⁶ “Musicians Shine Brightly at AFM Convention,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 23, 1962: 26.

²⁸⁷ “Unions Aid Art Show,” *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 22, 1962: 17.

²⁸⁸ “AFM Lauds Pittsburgh after Biggest Session,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 23, 1962:26.

were less than courteous when providing services.²⁸⁹ It was pivotal for union leaders to consistently control the narrative concerning union members. Bad publicity meant a potential decrease in leverage when negotiating wage scales, something that Local 471 could not afford.

Finally, the year 1962 is notable for two more events that had a melancholy tone. John L. Lewis a long-time Local 471 Board member of Local 471, and Henry Colbert, a pioneer for the protectorate going back to its days on Wylie Ave, both passed away.²⁹⁰ This is significant because in conversations with the musicians who served as the catalysts of this research, it is clear that they harped on the importance of the elders, those who held the key to the legacy of Local 471 and thus, the reasons its history, memories, and values were worth fighting for. I also got the sense that many of the older musicians (whether they reflected back on how they felt during the 1960's; or when I probed their feelings about the merger of Local 471 and 60 in the present) felt they were able to contextualize the integration movement because they were old enough to remember playing during an era when Black musicians felt like Local 471 and its activities were the center of Pittsburgh's entertainment universe. One wonders how many Black musicians living during the decade of the merger held nagging fears that they were rapidly losing control of their musical lives. Events on the surface may have appeared to be proceeding as normal, but what was going on in the minds and hearts of Black musicians as the mid 1960's approached?

²⁸⁹ "No title," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 23, 1962.

²⁹⁰ "Airman Dies," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 30, 1962; "Henry Colbert's Funeral Friday," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 25, 1962: 28.

471 Delegates Go to AFM National Convention

And yet, a consistent motif rears itself again and again when examining the literature around Local 471. The daily business of 471 proceeded apace in advancing the welfare of its members. In 1963, Local 471 sent delegates, including Joe Westray, George Childress and Ruby Young, to the AFM national convention held in Miami.²⁹¹ In 1964, Local 471 continued its tradition of celebrating its own when it honored Walt Harper, Harold Betters and Edgar Willis at the Musicians Club.²⁹² The *Pittsburgh Courier* in those years ran many columns describing the myriad activities Local 471 members, along with mini sketches of the musicians themselves. Also in 1964, Local 471 convinced Dr. McClellan, head of the Board of Commissioners of the Allegheny County Fair hosted in South Park, to end its White only policy and allow Black musicians to play. In August of 1964, Joe Westray's quintet became the first Black group to perform at the Fair.²⁹³

1966: The Merger

All of this served as context for the most momentous event in the history of 471: its merger in 1966 with White Local 60. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 terminated the legal basis for Jim Crow racial segregation in most areas of American life, including employment.²⁹⁴ Partly because of the Act, Blacks made substantial occupational and economic gains, such that by

²⁹¹ "Local 471 Sending Three Delegates to Sessions," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 8, 1963: 16.

²⁹² "Three Musicians Honored," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 18, 1964: 5.

²⁹³ "Negro Band Cracks County Fair Barrier," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 29, 1964: 2.

²⁹⁴ Steven Rogelberg and Sandra Lynn Rogelberg, "The Civil Rights Acts of 1964," *Sage Encyclopedia of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Sage Electronic Books, accessed August 29, 2020, 172-173.

2002 the number of firms without any Black workers decreased from 50 percent to around 25 percent.²⁹⁵

The employment provisions of the Civil Rights Act proved controversial among many White employers, who resented the federal government telling them how to run their businesses. However, even some Blacks were critical of parts of the Act, arguing that forced integration would undermine Black-run institutions that foster independence and racial solidarity.²⁹⁶ This was certainly the case in Pittsburgh. In March of 1965, merger negotiations began between Hal Davis of White Local 60 and Joe Westray of Black local 471 which, by 1966, resulted in the racially merged Local 60-471. The details of those negotiations are well covered by Colter Harper in his 2018 article, “The Paradox of Progress.”²⁹⁷ The merger provoked long, contentious, and bitter battles by Black musicians, who felt disempowered by the merger and fearful that it would severely weaken the ability of Local 471 to protect the interests of Black musicians.

Well before the merger, Locals 471 and 60 had talked about merging as they grappled with how to conduct business as usual and entertain the masses. In July of 1960, representatives from the two Locals held discussions over a possible merger. There were warning signs that gave 471 pause. Hal Davis, president of Local 60, had always been a staunch

²⁹⁵ Juliet Aiken, Elizabeth Salmon and Paul Hanges, “The Origins and Legacy of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” *Journal of Business and Psychology* (December 2013): 394. The figures were 21 percent for Black men and 25 percent for Black women.

²⁹⁶ Sharon Stanley, *An Impossible Dream?: Racial Integration in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.

²⁹⁷ Colter Harper, “The Paradox of Progress: Jazz, Resistance, and Black Musical Labor in Pittsburgh (1955-1974),” *Jazz Perspectives* 11: 1, 69-101, accessed on-line.

advocate for his constituents. In 1960 during exploratory talks to consider merging with Local 471, Davis' insisted on higher wage scales for White musicians over Blacks, which became a sticking point for integration measures.²⁹⁸ However, the American Federation of Music passed a ruling declaring that both Local 471 and Local 60 members would sign the same contracts with club owners.²⁹⁹ The whole matter, however, revived memories among Black musicians of the discriminatory conditions in the early 1900s that led to the founding of a separate Black local in 1908 that had assigned Local 471 a subsidiary status to Local 60. As merger talks got underway, some members of Local 60 questioned the need and the wisdom in merging the two. Black musicians, aware that 471 had only 300 members while Local 60 had over 2,000, feared their power and voice would be diluted in a combined union.³⁰⁰

Merger Ends All Segregated Musician Halls

Especially harmful to 471 musicians was that racially separate musician halls, in this case the Musicians Clubs for both Local 471 and Local 60, were to be abolished. While the American Federation of Musicians thought this was a vital step towards bridging the racial gap in America, there were unintended consequences. From the time of its opening in 1941, Musicians Club had served as the nucleus of Local 471 activity. International and national Black music stars would frequent the Musicians Club and Local 471 members would often acquire employment

²⁹⁸ "Will Musicians Union Local 60 Promote 'Discriminating' Music for Fun Spots?" *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 30, 1960: 2.

²⁹⁹ "Federation Rules Against Local 471, Then Reverses Decision, New Era Opening," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 6, 1960: 5.

³⁰⁰ "Local 60 and 471 May Merge, But Past and Present Problems Must Be Forgotten," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 13, 1963: 4.

as sidemen in bands due to networking with these luminaries.³⁰¹ Thus, the separate space occupied by the Black Musicians Club facilitated social intercourse, and also served as a conduit for creating employment opportunities. After the merger, no new Musicians Club was created, as the merged units of Local 471 and Local 60 were forced into an uneasy alliance, albeit one that, at least in theory, carried potential benefits for Black musicians.

However, bridging the racial divide in America has never been easy. Eliminating separate Musicians Clubs was supposedly a means to eliminate the “vestiges of separation and discrimination”³⁰² While Chuck Austin remembered that the merger had brought feelings of cautious optimism from some Local 471 members, many Black musicians thought the loss of the Musicians Club dealt a death blow to the union to which they had belonged.³⁰³

The pain was felt not just by Black musicians oriented strictly to playing jazz. It also affected those who played in marching bands, churches, and orchestras, as well as those who performed pop music.³⁰⁴ Losing the Black Musicians Club, or “Hall” as it is sometimes referred to, demoralized some members so much that they let their membership lapse. Dating back at least to the 1950s, this had been an issue with members who saw no compelling need to

³⁰¹ William B. Gould IV, “Interview on the Local 60-471 merger agreement, and Local 471 lawsuit, Gould’s role in it and why the lawsuit was unsuccessful,” interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018. I had email correspondence with Mr. Gould on June 10, 2019. He directed me to his video interview with Colter Harper. He was out of town at the time we spoke. However, he offered to talk with me more in depth if I needed help at a later date. He also directed me to his work at: Social Science Research Network (SSRN) at <http://ssrn.com/author=2365983>)

³⁰² William B. Gould IV, “Interview on the Local 60-471 merger agreement and Local 471 lawsuit.”

³⁰³ William B. Gould IV, “Interview on the Local 60-471 merger agreement and Local 471 lawsuit.”

³⁰⁴ William B. Gould IV, “Interview on the Local 60-471 merger agreement, and Local 471 lawsuit.”

remain active in Local 471. There is and has always been a sort of free agency that musicians maintained as they sought employment.

Signaling the End of 471

And yet, the seemingly inevitable move toward a merger continued as the decade reached its midpoint. One of the most remarkable aspects of the merger is the total—absolute total—lack of coverage in the local press. Neither *The Pittsburgh Courier* nor the major mainstream dailies, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and the *Pittsburgh Press* uttered a word about the proposed merger. The focus of news coverage was a strike by Local 60 against the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. But nothing about how, when, and why the merger took place, nor about sentiments of the musicians regarding the merger. This lack of coverage remains a deep mystery.

Newspaper coverage or not, the local parent body, the American Federation of Musicians, had been calling for the integration of separate locals since the 1950's, due to the dubious assessment of race as a sole condition for segregation. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which helped propel the AFL-CIO desegregation policy of 1966, was born of political strivings in America that originated before the 1960's.³⁰⁵ The AFM, along with the rest of America, was reacting to demands for racial integration created by the Civil Rights movement.

³⁰⁵ "Music Union Re-elects Officers," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 7, 1966.

The AFM responded accordingly, as it pushed for the merger of Locals 471 and 60 in Pittsburgh. The merger became official in March of 1966.³⁰⁶ The merger had come to fruition largely due to efforts by Local 471 presidents Carl Arter from 1955-1962 and Joe Westray from 1962-1965. Both had fought discrimination against Local 471, and Westray had helped broker the agreement that merged the two locals in 1966 after year-long negotiations.

What little we do know of the merger is provided by records of Local 60-471 archived at the University of Pittsburgh. Those records make clear that there were key conflicting demands by officers of both unions. Local 60, for example, had a history that officers could not be actively playing musicians. This was controversial for 471 members, whose officers had traditionally continued their careers as performing musicians. We also know that Local 471 feared its voice would not be heard in a merged union because Local 60 boasted some 2,000 members, while Local 471 had only 324. Aware of the power imbalance, Westray insisted on guarantees of Black officers in the merged union. This immediately became a bone of contention for Local 60, whose members termed it “segregation-in-reverse” and opposed removing any of their officers to make room for those from 471. In the end, both sides agreed to increase the board membership by three officers from 471, who would serve on the joint board only until new elections were held four years later. 471’s president, Joe Westray, along with George Childress and its secretary-treasurer Ruby Young served on the board.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ The Pittsburgh Musicians Union Local 60-471, AFL-CIO webpage on the University of Pittsburgh’s website list the official date of the merger between Local 60 and Local 471 as January 1, 1966. The By-laws of the Local 60-471, found at: afmpittsburgh.com, and updated last on May 1, 2017, under Article 1 state that the merger took place in 1966 without specifying the month.

³⁰⁷ Colter Harper, “The Crossroads of the World: A Social and Cultural History of Jazz in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, 1920-1970” (PhD. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2011), 261-263.

George Childress of 471 wrote movingly of the long history of discrimination against Black musicians in lucrative downtown venues. Local 60 president Hal Davis was sympathetic to Black concerns and supported their desire for a guaranteed representation on the merged union's Executive Board.

In the elections that took place in 1971, Ruby Young and Joe Westray, running to represent Black musicians of 471, both failed to secure the votes necessary to be elected. It was a devastating loss, one that generated intense resentment on the part of Black musicians. Angry at the outcome, Chuck Austin, Ruby Young, Clyde Jackson, George Spaulding, "Doc" Miller, and "Ducky" Kemp established BMOP (Black Musicians of Pittsburgh). Securing the services of an attorney, William B. Gould, they filed a lawsuit against the merged union, alleging racial discrimination.³⁰⁸ The lawsuit dragged out for another four years and ended in utter defeat for the Black musicians. The court found little evidence of racial discrimination in employment opportunities for Black musicians.

The merger proved fatal for Local 471, which no longer had a legal right to exist. In addition, Black anger over continued discrimination and frustration over their unsuccessful lawsuit led to the end of the beloved Musicians Club, the source of much camaraderie and socializing.³⁰⁹ The collateral damage of this merger was the closing of Local 471's Musicians Club since the merged protectorates had to operate just one headquarters. While this closing has often been described as a disagreeable move by many of the Local 471 members, perhaps also it was born of prudence due to the much larger membership of Local 60.

³⁰⁸ Colter Harper, "The Crossroads of the World," 263-264.

³⁰⁹ Colter Harper, "The Crossroads of the World," 264.

The merger had painful consequences that were more than psychological. Due to misplaced records from Local 471 during the 1960's merger, many Black musicians later had to attempt to prove they had been members and thus eligible for benefits. George Childress, Chuck Austin's good friend and former business manager, had his salary reduced by the White members of the merged Local 60-471 Executive Board.

60-471 Embroiled in Pittsburgh Symphony Strike, Other Non-Black Issues

Despite the obvious hard feelings on the part of Black members of 60-471, the newly combined union proceeded with its affairs. Shortly after its founding, the newly merged union found itself totally focused on a long, contentious labor dispute with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, a conflict of little interest to the Local's Black members. However, racial tensions in the merged union received no attention in the press, either White or Black. Not even evidence of interracial collaboration received attention in the press. For example, during the year of the merger, Local 60-471 held a series of free concerts sponsored by the Department of Parks and Recreation. These concerts were held weekly, meaning that a working relationship within the new union had to have become normalized to some degree.³¹⁰

Normalized or not, it was the failure of Blacks to win seats on the board of the merged union that convinced many former members of Local 471 that what they had feared had come to pass. How would candidates they preferred ever be voted into union leadership in the newly formed union when there were so many more White members than Black? Black musicians had

³¹⁰ "Musical Reflection," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 21, 1966: 17.

gone from a union in which their interests were centered, to one where their influence would be difficult to maintain going forward without special provisions being made.

Chapter 5: Recalling the Merger

Following the assassination of Martin Luther King in April, 1968, Black America was convulsed by riots and racial upheavals that culminated a pattern of increasing racial violence. In 1963, Birmingham, Alabama and Cambridge, Maryland suffered race riots. In 1965, Watts became the site of the largest riot in American history, leaving 34 dead and 1,000 injured. And in 1967, riots broke out in sixteen cities, including Newark, Detroit, Harlem, Rochester, and Toledo, Ohio.

During those years, Pittsburgh suffered no racial eruptions. However, in 1967, racial tensions began to rise. Fights broke out between Black and White students at Oliver High School on the North Side.³¹¹ In Homewood, four businesses were firebombed and 35 White-owned stores had their windows broken.³¹² In the Hill District, police and firemen doused a firebomb on the roof of the Mainway Supermarket, and there were rumors that some on the North Side were preparing for a riot. Then, in early April, just a few days before King's assassination, *The Pittsburgh Courier* mentioned ominous rumors of a planned "B-Day," or "Burn Day" circulating on the North Side.³¹³

After King's assassination, the first two nights saw remarkably few incidents. But on the third day, Palm Sunday, the Centre Avenue retail corridor of the Hill District erupted in looting

³¹¹ "Oliver High Students Protest in Cafeteria," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 4, 1967: 7.

³¹² "Fear of Black Militancy Terror Threatens to Close H-B Stores," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 9, 1967: 1.

³¹³ Carl Morris, *The Black Mood in Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: New *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1968), 3, 5, Pennsylvania Room, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. The advertisement for *The Black Mood in Pittsburgh* appeared in the *Courier* for April 6, 1968. King had been assassinated on April 4 but the *Courier* appeared only weekly. The first *Courier* edition mentioning King's assassination and the ensuing riots was the edition of April 13, 1968.

and firebombing.³¹⁴ Amos Lawson, who was attending a Delfonics concert that night at the Savoy Ballroom, says the group sang only two songs before announcing, “Well, due to what’s going on, we’re going to have to cancel the show.” Rioters stoned firemen all night, and looters had their way, even temporarily taking over the Number Two police station.³¹⁵ The riots soon subsided, but only following the loss of most of the Avenue’s retail stores. “I saw all the businesses on fire,” Lawson says sadly, “the cleaners, the hat store, shoe shops, everything was on fire.”³¹⁶ A large interracial march from Freedom Corner to Point State Park on this same Sunday showed that not all were invested in destructive means of protest. Nonetheless, violence spread briefly to Homewood and the North Side. National guard troops, along with the urging of local Black politicians, finally helped control the protests.³¹⁷

The aftermath of the riots saw many White-owned businesses permanently vacate the Hill, especially along Centre Avenue. Diamond’s 5 and 10 cent store, Gordon’s Shoes and the local Economart were among White retail shops that left.³¹⁸ But the riots also destroyed many Black-owned businesses, including many small bars and taverns that had given employment to musicians. Even Black store owners who wanted to stay had difficulties doing so because insurance companies now hesitated, or even refused, to insure businesses. Customer numbers

³¹⁴ Glasco, “History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century.”

³¹⁵ Alyssa Ribeiro, “A Period of Turmoil: Pittsburgh’s April 1968 Riots and Their Aftermath,” *Journal of Urban History*, published online April 9, 2012 at <http://juh.sagepub.com/content/39/2/147>.

³¹⁶ Amos Lawson, interview by Laurence Glasco, May 15, 2013.

³¹⁷ Glasco, “History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century.”

³¹⁸ Glasco, “History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century.”

plunged, and the good feelings about the self-sufficiency of the Hill were relegated to nostalgia.³¹⁹

The riots exceeded even urban renewal as a threat to the viability of the Hill. In the 1950s, urban renewal had razed much of Wylie Avenue and the Lower Hill, but many merchants simply relocated to Centre Avenue and the Middle Hill. However, when Centre burned in 1968, merchants did not relocate. The 130 retail shops that had been operating in 1965 were reduced to only 66 by the early 1970s, and many of those were struggling to survive.³²⁰ After the Mainway Supermarket was torched, the Hill District would go forty-five years without a major grocery. Businesses and houses were left abandoned. As they decayed over time, they turned into empty lots.

The 1968 Riots as Context of Growing Bitterness

It was during this volatile, racially tense background that the forced merger unfolded between Locals 60 and 471. By the time of the merger in 1966, and especially after the expiration of the four-year transition period guaranteeing Black representation on the board, Black musicians' reactions became downright hostile. When Blacks got no positions on the board, attitudes hardened, souring the way many ever after would regard the merger.

Surprisingly, the year 1968 began innocently enough for the newly merged Local 60-471. By all indications, at least some former members of Local 471 were finding outlets for their talents, as indicated by the appearance of regular ads for events at Joe Westray's Ebony

³¹⁹ Glasco, "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

³²⁰ Calculated from listings in city directories.

Lounge. An ad in January of 1968, for example, announces, “Back by Popular Demand, Guys and Dolls Review.”³²¹ In that same month, notices of events at Walt Harper’s Jazz Workshop appeared in the *Courier’s* entertainment section. The workshop was advertised for several months and often included national entertainment heavyweights as featured guests. The workshop, according to press releases at the time was listed as the “year’s top entertainment.”³²² The Harper’s January workshop showcased nationally recognized entertainer Dionne Warwick, an indicator of the health of the local entertainment scene. Some residents believed there was more entertainment in the Hill, Shadyside and Homewood than in the Golden Triangle downtown.³²³ In the Hill District, the Crawford Grill remained especially active. A picture from *The Pittsburgh Courier* featured the nationally famous drummer Max Roach performing there.

Overall, in the early months of 1968, Pittsburgh had a music scene that, if far from what existed before the riots, was still reasonably active. Any number of ads in *The Pittsburgh Courier* requested jazz artists and/or made reference to Local 471. There even was an advertisement for musicians to work in the symphonic marching band, with interested individuals invited to the Half Way Art Gallery.³²⁴ Ramsey Lewis and the Walt Harper Quintet performed at the Hilton Hotel, providing at least some offerings for local musicians to participate as side men.³²⁵

³²¹ Advertisement, “Westray’s Ebony Lounge,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 6, 1968: 8.

³²² “Harper’s Jazz Workshop Year’s Top Entertainment,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 6, 1968: 8.

³²³ “Harper’s Jazz Workshop Year’s Top Entertainment,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 6, 1968: 8.

³²⁴ “Attn. Musicians – Any Age – Wanting to Join Symphonic Marching Band,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 6, 1968.

³²⁵ Advertisement, “Ramsey Lewis and the Walt Harper Quintet,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 6, 1968. “Errol Garner Slated for Detroit Concert,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 6, 1968:13.

Impact on Musicians

The riots of 1968 bifurcated the local Black musical world. The loss of many smaller clubs and bars meant that only musicians with broad appeal could find work, and even they found it increasingly difficult to bargain collectively for terms of employment and wage scales. The music business had always been difficult to organize since it included many who acted as independent contractors. Moreover, in the case of former members of Local 471, many of the rank-and-file because so casually involved with their union's activities that at times it didn't seem as if there was urgency in making sure they were treated equitably.

As a result, "ordinary" musicians found employment opportunities wither, while leading entertainers secured gigs. Walt Harper moved his jazz workshop to a different date so that proper attention could be paid to the memory of Reverend King. Black entertainers also continued to plan a major local event for that year, the Pittsburgh Jazz Festival, a sign that, despite the recent upheavals, music didn't completely stop.³²⁶

Even after the riots and the loss of many venues in the Hill, the upper tier of Black musicians continued to find work. In May of that year, an event to benefit Camp Achievement was held that included "professional men of jazz" and former members of Local 471 like Carl Arter and Judge Warren Watson.³²⁷ Although racially charged incidents between citizens and the police continued locally, jazz artists remained in demand. The Pittsburgh Jazz Festival, held at the Civic Arena, drew over 11,000 for two nights of performances. The first night of the festival, headlined by Ray Charles, was attended by a small crowd of 3,200 people, but the

³²⁶ "Harper Negotiates New Jazz Workshop Date," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 13, 1968: 23.

³²⁷ "Jazz Session (photo caption) *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 18, 1968: 8.

second night in which local and national artists like Thelonius Monk performed, attendance reached 8,000. The second night showcased a variety of jazz groups and styles, indicating that a thirst for both traditional and modern jazz persisted during the sixties.³²⁸ In July, the Hurricane, a popular lounge which had been graced by many former Local 471 members over the years, ran several ads. Another ad for the Crawford Grill expressed excitement for several jazz artists who were booked to perform.³²⁹ Even WQED-TV, the local public television affiliate, hosted a series on local jazz music that highlighted artists popular with the younger generation.³³⁰

It is in this mixed picture that Pittsburgh's jazz musicians mused on the future of their careers. Describing those musings requires the historian to be a truth-teller. While the collective memories of many Black Pittsburghers—including many of the city's Black musicians—point to urban renewal as the death knell of Pittsburgh's Black cultural community, the data seems to point in a different direction. Throughout the 1960's, Pittsburgh's Black entertainment scene remained fairly robust. It was the devastating after-effects of the 1968 riots that truly changed the character of Black Pittsburgh, and of the Black music scene, for the worse. The Black business and entertainment districts suffered irreparable damage. There was White flight, and a Black descent into negative and self-destructive behavior like drugs and a lack of regard for the sanctity of community.³³¹

³²⁸ "Pittsburgh Jazz Festival Draws Over 11,000; Ray Charles Great; Crowd Small," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 29, 1968: 19.

³²⁹ "The Jazz Communicators at Crawford Grill," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 6, 1968: 16.

³³⁰ "The 'NET Jazz' Series Starts," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 6, 1968: 16.

³³¹ Glasco,. "History of Black Pittsburgh: The Twentieth Century."

That the 1968 riots signaled a precipitous decline in the vitality of the Black community cannot be denied. But if historians are truly humble and open to varying interpretations of the past, they must also concede that it is perfectly valid for Blacks to recollect the death of something significant after urban renewal. Mindy Fullilove would call it “Root Shock”—the disengagement from what we consider home and heritage. And therefore, historians of this time and place must reckon with two symbolic deaths, two catastrophes: urban renewal and the 1968 riots. The city’s Black jazz musicians lived through both of these moments. It is not their word against that of the historian. It is a collaboration of narratives which will hopefully bring us closer to the truth.

Fall of 1968: Continuing Racial Tension but Also Progress

In the fall of 1968, jazz music showed every sign that it continued to be a source of entertainment for Pittsburghers. George Benson’s quartet performed at the Hurricane bar in September. In addition, WQED TV aired a series on the use of technology, electronic vibration, in a newer form of jazz.³³² Bill Powell, a popular local Black DJ who had been embroiled in tensions with Local 471 members, hosted a regular daily two-hour jazz show on WAMO-FM, and provided a popular showplace for jazz on Saturdays from 7-11pm at the Aurora Jazz Club.³³³

Press coverage in October of 1968 shows that racial tension still existed alongside normal entertainment events. The Homewood neighborhood, for example, experienced

³³² “WQED TV to Air New Jazz Sound,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 14, 1968.

³³³ Advertisement, “Bill Powell Jazz Session,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 14, 1968: 8.

heightened racial animosities.³³⁴ Nevertheless, the front page of *The Pittsburgh Courier* highlighted the Walt Harper Jazz Workshop, scheduled to take place on November 3rd with international star Hugh Masekela.³³⁵ In November, Walt Harper's Jazz Workshop continued with Pittsburgh legends Erroll Garner and Walt Harper's quintet. Another jazz workshop was also scheduled for December spotlighting Nina Simone.³³⁶ Both these workshops took place at the Hilton Hotel downtown. Overall, it seems that the murder of King caused pain and despair, yet jazz maintained a consistent presence on Pittsburgh's entertainment scene. At least some musicians who had been members of Local 471 were still performing regularly. Perhaps artists like Walt Harper were so famous that the merger of Local 60-471 and the decline of entertainment venues affected him less than those who were lesser known. However, the jazz crowd was aging, and the R&B, soul, and Motown crowd was becoming gradually old enough to go to bars and nightclubs. A shift was in the air.

The overall employment status of rank-and-file Black musicians after the merger is difficult to glean. The more illuminating evidence comes from personal testimonies and interviews of those who lived through that period. Many of them allude to the death of something plentiful that started with urban renewal in the Hill District and continued after the integration of Pittsburgh's White and Black musical unions. Certainly, immediately after the riots of 1968, jazz and its Black practitioners were still performing and in regular demand in

³³⁴ "Race War Brewing in Homewood," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 12, 1968: 1.

³³⁵ "Annual Walt Harper Workshop Opens Nov. 3rd," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 7, 1967: 14.

³³⁶ Advertisement, "The Walt Harper Workshop – Sat. Nov. 30," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 16, 1968.

Pittsburgh. The social climate was changing and, behind the scenes, Black leaders in Local 60-471 were fighting for Black musicians' rights.

Forces Against Black Musicians

Despite the aforementioned evidence suggesting jazz remained relatively healthy following the riots of 1968, there is also evidence illustrating that by the late 1960's forces were converging to close off Black employment opportunities. First, the social movements that had gripped the Black community meant that many jazz artists had a higher level of race consciousness. In Pittsburgh for instance, the Black Arts movement had been formed to encompass Black conscious objectives as well as showcase modes of artistic expression. This organization included a jazz band made up of Yusef Nafees, a bass player, Billy Jones, drummer, James DuBois, trumpeter, and Kenny Fisher, saxophonist. Music historian Frank Kofsky detailed a troubling experience for this group. It had a standing engagements at the Loaves and Fishes Coffee House and the Halfway Gallery, local Pittsburgh venues, but on one occasion needed to borrow \$75 to rent a bass. They were unable to raise the money, and hence the owner retracted the offer. That a mere \$75 could be an intractable obstacle for such a talented group served as a canary in a mine as related to jazz. Essentially, jazz had entered a new era in which the genre was no longer as much in demand locally before. As the number of venues that focused on jazz declined, opportunities declined for the "ordinary" musician, if not the celebrity. Jazz was no longer the main dish of Black America. It became a side meal along with other musical genres such as soul.

Furthermore, erroneous public perceptions of jazz musicians hurt the artists economically. Many who had grown up playing jazz in Pittsburgh during the 1940's and 1950's bragged about the prestige of being a Black entertainer. While many of them had worked day jobs to supplement income from their performances, they could usually find a gig in the evening and after hours. By the late 1960's, some felt the prestige of their craft had diminished. As local jazz scholar Frank Kofsky said, "People who go out want to be entertained – they think music is frivolous, and it definitely is not. It is not a joke. The misconception about music and musicians is that they are happy-go-lucky guys who run around the streets all day."³³⁷ This perception, along with the disregard some still accorded jazz because of its "Negro" origins, meant that people were not always as willing to pay as much to hear jazz as they would for performers of other genres. Jazz artists like Yusef Nafees firmly believed that artists who played for the Pittsburgh Symphony were treated with more respect and compensated more fairly than jazz artists.³³⁸ It would have been inconceivable for a performance by the Pittsburgh Symphony to be held up because \$75 couldn't be raised for an instrument.

As a result, Black jazz artists in Pittsburgh felt increasingly squeezed by the waning influence of jazz. Bars were no longer enough to sustain their employment. And at any rate, some questioned whether bars and pubs were sophisticated enough to appreciate a "valid art" like jazz.³³⁹ Other factors affecting Black jazz musicians in Pittsburgh during the late 1960's

³³⁷ Frank Kofsky, "The Fate of 'New Jazz' or: 'The Case of the Borrowed Bass' or: Pittsburgh Just Doesn't Swing Anymore," *Pittsburgh Point*, January 19, 1967: 5.

³³⁸ Kofsky, "The Fate of 'New Jazz'."

³³⁹ Kofsky, "The Fate of 'New Jazz'," *Pittsburgh Point*, January 19, 1967: 5.

included the declining respect for the professionalism of jazz, the elevated social consciousness of Black musicians that shaped their understanding of social reality, the growth of Black racial consciousness, and the overall racial politics of America. These issues, in combination with the 1966 merger of Local 60 and Local 471, meant that Black jazz artists wrestled with a complex set of social and cultural forces.

In some ways, racial integration increased rather than reduced Blacks' awareness of racial boundaries. Partly, this reflected growing Black racial pride and race consciousness during the 1960s, but it also stemmed from the necessity that Blacks and Whites come together in ways they had never done before. As a result, musicians' responses to the merger reflected larger racial trends. Those responses, moreover, were far from monolithic. They varied according to the individual career, personality, and life experiences of a given musician.

The prospect of integrating with Whites heightened apprehension among some. As a result, before the merger, some Black musicians were tantalized by the prospects of access to White spaces while others were content with what the Black community had to offer. As a result, the merging of Locals 60 and 471 brought to light racial tensions that were already bubbling beneath the surface of the local music scene. Once many Black musicians found themselves out of work after the merger, race became the culprit of convenience. Some of those who did not have wide public appeal did not fare as well nor were they able to contain their frustration at those they perceived to be impeding their employment opportunities.

Ruby Young: Professional Complaints

These tensions emerged even in someone as accomplished as Ruby Young, who had long worked in venues that catered to predominantly White as well as African American audiences. While musicians like John Hughes and Chuck Austin had little problem playing mainstream material, Young took this as an insult to her artistic sophistication. One incident in particular provoked her ire. “I don’t like working with [White musicians like] Peter Tibbs,” she says. “When I sit down at the organ to play something...see when I worked at most White places, you had to learn the show tunes. I got one of these trash bags full of tunes. I bought music. I spent a fortune on music and you had to...keep up. See, and I’m not used to it. When they’d get off and say play so and so...something Marvin Gaye played on a thing, you know, and I told Marce, if you ever do this to me again I’ll kill you, because I just don’t like this jukebox stuff, you know.”³⁴⁰

Young’s anger concerning this incident is reminiscent of a common reaction by others. While many were not averse to playing “popular music,” they made a sharp distinction between jazz and what they considered the “juke box music” that many White bands and audiences preferred, which they felt did not showcase their talents and could be played by mediocre artists. While this attitude may be perceived by some as elitist, it is an indicator of how adaptable Black musicians had to be in this newly integrated musical world. It was a world in which former members of Local 471 who did not have highly adaptable skills or illustrious reputations were forced to compete with popular rhythm and blues artists. Thus, while a

³⁴⁰ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

favorable outcome in the lawsuit could have addressed some discriminatory ills, many Black musicians were feeling squeezed out by the changing nature of music at the time.

Frank McCown

Frank McCown offers a somewhat different perspective on the merger. He believes that on the eve of the merger many White musicians were in the same boat as their Black counterparts. During the sixties, the decline in popularity of jazz, the relative lack of systematic control over the wage scale of White as well as Black musicians, and the decrease in the number of venues in which to perform because of urban renewal left all Pittsburgh musicians in a precarious position. One mistake that Black observers made in trying to understand race in America is that, because discrimination against Blacks has been so blatant, they underestimate the trials and tribulations facing Whites. As a result, broader anxieties often don't receive the appropriate degree of attention.

McCown believes that, before the merger, Black musicians had done virtually all they could. He stops short of saying that Whites and Blacks encountered a level playing field, but his personal experiences reinforces his belief that the entertainment industry was one realm in which, despite societal discrimination, Blacks still can partake in at least some of the American dream. The merger didn't really create feelings of anxiety for McCown. "After the merge [sic]," he says, "I still got along with Whites."³⁴¹ Things were going well. "I had nothing to be jealous about. I had a fine job, car, [and] I had White women," he adds with a wry smile. McCown's

³⁴¹ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

musical abilities and social grace had allowed him to taste the sweetness of the American dream. He never comes off as bitter, although he did address the fact that there were differences in how White and Black musicians approached the craft, something he noticed especially after the merger. “White musicians,” he says, “didn’t solo like Black guys did. They often read.” Black musicians, however, were accustomed to solo performances and improvising. McCown does not portray either of these playing styles as superior or inferior, just a fact. Nonetheless, this is a critical point because Austin and McCown maintain that the inability, or refusal, of many Black musicians to read music was a major reason they found themselves jobless during the sixties.

McCown also points to his ability to navigate the music scene as helpful in finding employment. He accepts that racism existed, but chooses to highlight the uniqueness of his own musical journey, and attributes his post-merger success to the fact that he had built friendships with White musicians as well as Black. He speaks with affection for his White colleagues, feeling that, like their Black counterparts, they too had fewer job opportunities.³⁴²

In addition, the ability to “read” is a matter of degree. Quite likely, a number of “non-reading” musicians could point at a note on a page and tell you what it was. However, reading proficiency includes skills like being able to read difficult and tricky music and also the ability to sight-read—or play music with few noticeable mistakes when seeing it the first time. For many

³⁴² McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

musicians, reading is not something they have had to do every day and their skills have atrophied.³⁴³

Hosea Taylor

Like Frank McCown, Hosea Taylor also took the merger in stride. Despite the impact of segregation and racial discrimination on Black artists and their abilities to play in certain venues or in certain styles, Taylor did not attribute too many negative side-effects to his own personal life. "For me," he says, "the times, especially the 1940's, were beautiful. I didn't pay attention to racial discrimination. I was having too much fun."³⁴⁴ Taylor says that playing with White guys was little different from playing with African-Americans.³⁴⁵ He does not deny that racism was present, especially after the merger, but insists that Jack Purcell, a White band leader who hired Black musicians, was like the "Branch Rickey of music." Just as Rickey chose Jackie Robinson to be the first Black player in the majors, not because he was the best but because he had the right "temperament," Taylor believes some Black artists got jobs because they were easier to get along with or were light-skinned. Some dark-skinned players, he says, were overlooked.³⁴⁶ Taylor recalls trying to play downtown, where many of the jobs were reserved for Whites, and being told that his 471 contracts were not recognized by club owners. Two of his colleagues, Art Barnes and Theodrus Birch, were more militant than he and were not afraid of engaging in

³⁴³ Aaron Johnson, written comments to Johnathan White, November 20, 2020.

³⁴⁴ Taylor interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

³⁴⁵ Taylor interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

³⁴⁶ Taylor interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

fisticuffs because of discrimination.³⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Taylor stresses that some Blacks received great opportunities, such as Joe Westray, who performed a Broadway show in the mid-forties. In summary, while Taylor speaks about how the complexities of racial politics had operated in his experience, he never wears the mantle of excessive racial pride. “I’m not trying to be the Black messiah,” he says. I’ve been Black all my life and had a lot of fun. I’ve never wanted to be White.”³⁴⁸ Taylor’s combination of racial pride and acute awareness of racism and social restrictions characterize many of the members of Local 471. They may have been upset at not playing certain venues due to segregation, yet most of them did not feel inferior to White musicians. They simply made the best of the times they lived in.

George Spaulding Sympathetic About the Merger

George Spaulding feels that, in addition to racism, some Black musicians suffered from the merger partly because they did not grow beyond a certain level in their musical skills. After the merger, Spaulding recalls the time when he offered advice to younger musicians that aspiring piano players should learn how to play every hymn in a church’s hymnal. These hymnals, he advised, contain a variety of styles, so mastering them helped musicians like himself develop a range of skillsets. Spaulding suggests that too often younger musicians are satisfied with a rudimentary understanding of music and thus do not grow beyond a basic

³⁴⁷ Taylor, interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

³⁴⁸ Taylor, interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

level.³⁴⁹ His comments, like those of Austin and McCown, reinforce the idea that many Black musicians were not adequately prepared for the entertainment scene that evolved after the merger, either because they were limited in the types of music they could play, or because they had not fully developed their skill set in ways that let them stand out from their peers. Thus, while discrimination was strongly suggested by some musicians as the sole explanation for their problems, others attribute it also to self-inflicted wounds of the musicians themselves.

Bill Gambrell

Bill Gambrell also retains mixed feelings about the merger. He decries the degree of racial discrimination Blacks endured afterwards. As a former officer of Local 471, he had interacted with Local 60 leadership and personally observed the ways in which Black musicians did not receive equitable treatment from Local 60 as well as from club owners. For example, White musicians—but not their Black counterparts—usually were paid scale. In addition, ex-members of Local 471 were promised a \$2,000 death insurance benefit but received only \$1,000. Moreover, the by-laws of the American Musicians Protective Association stipulated that club owners were to pay into the musician's pension, but this was not adhered to for Black musicians. "It never happened," Gambrell says, "Not with Black people."³⁵⁰

On the other hand, Gambrell alleges that many Black musicians harmed themselves by

³⁴⁹ George "Duke" Spaulding, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, October 21, 1997, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

³⁵⁰ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

resisting the idea of employers paying into their pensions in order to maximize earnings.³⁵¹ “I’d have to fight with those men to take that much pension, to take that much money off playing a gig.”³⁵² Gambrell understood the logic: Black club owners sometimes resisted paying scale wages; meager wages caused Black musicians to request that owners not deduct any additional money.³⁵³ In addition, the pension program started only in the 1960’s, meaning that musicians who had grown accustomed to collecting a full check bristled at the notion of paying into a pension fund. Complicating the relationship between union leadership and rank-and-file members, there was an extended time requirement before a musician became eligible to collect a pension. Gambrell and Austin mentioned a membership requirement of fifty years, as opposed to other unions which required only thirty-five years of service.³⁵⁴ As a result, general mistrust of the White leadership of 60-471 made the notion of waiting so long to collect their pension fueled rumors that union officers were hoarding funds or were purposely trying to fleece the rank-and-file.³⁵⁵

³⁵¹ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

³⁵² Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

³⁵³ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

³⁵⁴ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

³⁵⁵ Members of the African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interviewed by Charles Austin. Charles Austin, Frank McCown, Ruby Young, John Hughes provided a series of conversations for me to record and understand the history of Local 471. Interview by Johnathan J. White, April 19, 2005. In this particular interview, the group discussed various local neighborhoods as well as some of the surrounding regions and bordering states that Local 471 members played in. They also talked about general policy practices by Local 471 as well as the Musicians Club.

Most importantly, Gambrell says, unless there was an issue that affected them directly, Black musicians did not involve themselves much in union matters.³⁵⁶ There were enough Black members, he says, that when the merger took place they could have gone in as a bloc and voted somebody in. But they didn't. "Just like I said," he adds bitterly, "[for] two years or more, I was the only [Black] that ever went [to meetings]."³⁵⁷ Gambrell insists that, although many Black artists had valid reasons to feel that the union had forsaken them, or was powerless, or was a nuisance, this did not change the fact that, after the merger, they did not mobilize to ensure they had a voice in its operation.³⁵⁸ Black musicians, he feels, could have entered the merger in a much more powerful position had they coalesced and been more active in union affairs. Gambrell is not alone in this view. In interview after interview, former members of Local 471 indicate that their participation in union affairs had been casual, obligatory, aimed at meeting only minimum requirements for union membership.

Overall, Gambrell regards the merger as a lost opportunity. He says he understood what Black musicians had gone through. But even after dealing with the trials of union leadership and the sometimes thankless service it required, he continued serving as a delegate because he believed he could usefully represent his fellow artists. While Gambrell speaks candidly about the shortcomings of his fellow artists, he says the downside of being an officer never outweighed his desire to serve, even when he was the only Black delegate representing Local 471 at national conventions. He accepted apathy as part of the burden of leadership.

³⁵⁶ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

³⁵⁷ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

³⁵⁸ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

Harold Lee

Gambrell was not the only musician who harbored mixed feelings about the merger. Harold Lee remembered that while there wasn't much optimism for the merger, the conditions that existed for Blacks prior to the merger were far from ideal. Black musicians, he says, had long suffered under the machinations of 471 officials. Favoritism continued after the merger, with the added burden of racism. Lee and Austin both acknowledge the historic influence of cliques among local entertainers that limited the number of downtown jobs available to Black musicians.³⁵⁹ Because racism guaranteed most of these jobs for Whites, only the most popular and privileged Black musicians had any chance of working those job. "Leroy Brown and all them," Lee asserts, "they had 'em [the good jobs] locked up in the union...They got those jobs. The power structure wasn't in favor for the younger musicians. We were locked out of them jobs by our own people."³⁶⁰ Lee's assertion illuminates the long-existing, uglier side of Local 471 politics. The limited opportunities available to Blacks in higher-paying White establishments meant that Black power brokers affiliated with Local 471 were the gatekeepers—and they favored established Black artists. Hence, some Black musicians based their feelings about the merger on their pre-merger experiences with Black managers and "gatekeepers." Lee also complains that 471 officers, in addition to playing favorites, had not done a good job handling the day-to-day operations of the union. He charges that they employed such poor bookkeeping practices that "everybody who was an officer of 471 should have went to jail."³⁶¹ Unlike some

³⁵⁹ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

³⁶⁰ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

³⁶¹ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

of his colleagues, however, Lee found work after the merger, often through city sponsored engagements. But over time, he gradually withdrew from the local music scene and pursued other interests.

Jerry Betters

Jerry Betters, like Frank McCown and Hosea Taylor, approved the merger, but still had mixed feelings. He speaks harshly of the way Local 471 operated before the merger. He himself had been a club owner as well as a musician, so he could look at the merger from the perspective of both. In addition, he differed from most other musicians in that his popularity regularly drew large audiences.

Betters acknowledges feeling the sting of racism similar to what his lesser-known counterparts describe. He mentions an incident that reveals one of America's most notorious racial taboos, one that underlay a good deal of the racism Black musicians faced. When asked if he had any problems playing in White clubs, he says:

Yeah, there were [problems]...basically, it was about girls. ... I had a good name and at that time it wasn't like the clubs today. They hired you because of your drawing power, you know. So I went to the White clubs because I was Jerry Betters and I would bring a crowd in. So I had a following. Anyway, so when I go in the clubs and people would come in and a lot of girls would come in and they [White club owners] didn't like this, so they'd say, the next week, "This is the band's table there." "What do you mean, the band's table?" "The band's table, so you don't need to go to the bar to have a drink." I said, "Well man, I can't handle that because I got too many friends coming in, saying

‘Hey Jerry, come and have a drink.’ And I gotta say, ‘I’m not allowed to come up to the bar and drink?’ “ I said, “I can’t handle this.” So I didn’t.³⁶²

Betters’ tendency to stand up for his rights and challenge any perceived slights, racial or otherwise, distinguishes him from many others. He was the rarest of Black musicians, one who would not compromise his dignity in order to perform. He says his brother Harold, also a popular performer, “would bend a little more than I would, and I would tell him, ‘Man, I couldn’t stand that, I would rather not work than do that.’ And,” he adds, “I never did.”³⁶³ While one has to consider that Betters’ popularity made it easier for him to take a stand, a thorough look at some of his testimonies reveals that he spoke his mind regardless of the potential repercussions.

Betters speaks about one particularly painful incident involving legendary Pittsburgh band leader Walt Harper. Under the assumption that he and Harper were friends, Betters resented what he regarded as Harper’s efforts to “get in” on his jobs. On one occasion, he says, one of the coordinators for events at Hadden Hall where he was playing told him that, “ We still want you okay, but that SOB [Harper] told us, I’ll take Jerry’s night and work fifty dollars cheaper.”³⁶⁴ Betters also feels that his popularity and that of his brother rankled some of the local Black musicians, who were at times quite competitive both for jobs and for the spotlight. Betters feels that those who did not make the proper connections or endear themselves to local heavyweights faced obstacles to their employment. These obstacles may at times have

³⁶² Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

³⁶³ Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

³⁶⁴ Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

been related to the restrictions that segregation placed on Black opportunity, yet there also were factions and power brokers, both Black and White, who tried to control the music scene and, on occasion, undercut fellow musicians if a desirable opportunity presented itself.

Jealousy among musicians and the occasional lack of “camaraderie” at times made it difficult for musicians to get along with others on the same set or at the same club, much less within the same union.³⁶⁵ Leadership faced not only the normal squabbles over money and jobs, but also dealt with the egos and personalities of artists who waged musical warfare for the hearts and the minds of audiences.

Jerry Betters angrily uses the word “blackballed” so often that it is fair to ask how common was the practice. And if this practice was indeed common, what was the true landscape for musicians of lesser reputation? If someone of Betters’ stature found himself restricted sometimes both by segregation and by Local 471, then what resistance lay in the path of lesser known musicians who did not possess the social cachet to demand fair treatment? Betters’ experience illustrated that it was not as simple as being simply for or against the merger. Black musicians often had conflicting and varied experiences, based on their interactions with both the White community and the Black.

Critics

Musicians who joined 471 during the 1960’s—an era when job opportunities decreased and the union declined in power—had less appreciation for what the union meant to earlier

³⁶⁵ Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

generations. If such musicians had trouble finding gigs, their main concern was why Local 471 could not deliver employment opportunities. If they had steady gigs, they questioned the need to join 471 and were hostile to the merger.³⁶⁶

Tommy McDaniel and Chuck Austin: Loss of Gigs

Critical memories of both 471 and the merger are evident in the way two musicians look at the merger. Tommy McDaniel expresses frustration at the fall-off in opportunities to play, which he attributes partly to the diminishing effectiveness of the union. Born in 1941, McDaniel's music career took off in the 1960s, just as jobs were closing off and 471 was losing clout. Given this, it is not surprising that McDaniel belonged to 471 but was not heavily invested in the political side of union affairs. This made him similar to the majority of his peers, who lamented there "was nothing much you could do" when it seemed "[White] guys were getting gigs who weren't as good as me."³⁶⁷ McDaniel didn't have trouble with the older guys who knew how to read music, but says it was when less-qualified others got opportunities over him that irritated him and disappointed him in the union. During his interview with McDaniel, Austin sensed the disappointment, and offered his own analysis. "It's unfortunate," he told McDaniel, "that we had the merger back in the sixties, but overall the union has done an adequate job for people that stayed in it and participated in it the right way."³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Charles Austin, Frank McCown, Ruby Young, and John Hughes, members of the African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Johnathan J. White, April 19, 2005.

³⁶⁷ Tommy McDaniel, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, March 9, 1998.

³⁶⁸ McDaniel, interview by Charles Austin, March 9, 1998.

Underneath this conversation, several factors were at work. Austin had developed an affinity for the union based on earlier decades of having seen its positive impact, whereas McDaniel joined Local 471 at a time when the Local was declining following the baneful consequences of urban renewal. In addition, Austin was heavily invested in union affairs, whereas McDaniel watched from the periphery and had limited understanding of what the officers were about. Perhaps most importantly, Austin was able to stay employed. While he always remained cognizant of the struggles of others seeking employment, he emphasized that unemployed musicians like McDaniel, who maintained only a cursory relationship to the union, undercut the union's effectiveness. Black musicians were vastly outnumbered by Whites in Local 60-471, and so the old officers of 471 needed "all hands on deck" for them to have any sort of voice in the merged organization. In these types of conversations, Austin often appeared conflicted. He felt connected to his Black peers, yet had successfully adapted to the changed realities much more readily than others. In spite of this, he fought for Black musicians while also being frank in pointing out their shortcomings.

Robin Webster Opposed the Merger; Complains About Local 60

Some musicians had opposed the merger when it happened, often because they were embittered by the discriminatory treatment suffered at the hands of White musicians. Robin Webster recounted his thoughts about the merger, emphatically stating, "I was against the merge."³⁶⁹ He told a compellingly story to illustrate why he felt that way:

³⁶⁹ Robin Webster, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997.

One night all the ofay [White] boys was in there, in our club...trying to write some of this shit [the music they heard] down. So I got Sam Hurt, Tommy Turrentine, and I think Jeffrey Elliot, and we went down to their union house [Local 60 headquarters]... I think it was on Forbes Ave. and we get to the door, a guy opened the peephole...We said we are musicians. We here in town, we'd like to come in, have a drink and play a little bit. They said, *"well, uh, your club is right on Wylie Ave."* They gave us the address and everything. So I went back to the Club [Local 471 Musicians Club] went upstairs and said, 'every one of you motherf-----s [White musicians] get outta here!' I got them out of there. Someone asked me what I was doing. I said, *"We can't go in their club, we just left there."*³⁷⁰

This story reinforced a theme mentioned by other Local 471 members, that White musicians were welcome at their club but there had been little reciprocity. Thus, many Black musicians, like Webster, were in no rush to integrate. They often felt that, despite America's moves towards racial integration in the 1960's, they still were not welcome in White spaces. Webster knew at the time of the merger that Blacks had not been welcome, so he didn't see possibilities for a fruitful partnership between the two locals.

Charles Cottrell: Merger and Loss of Gigs

Charles Cottrell is highly critical of the merger, and is adamant that job opportunities dried up after the merger. "It was like night and day," he says. "Before the merger, I'm not

³⁷⁰ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997.

saying I was turning down jobs, but my telephone was ringing!!” After the merger, he says, it was rare that someone would call him for a gig.³⁷¹

It is no doubt relevant that Cottrell also has mixed feelings about the so-called “Golden Years,” feeling there was cliquishness and favoritism. Born in 1923, Cottrell started playing piano at the age of 12, learning his craft by ear since his mother and father both played. Early in his musical development, jazz music grabbed him when he heard a Blues group from Chicago. As he describes it, “I heard this music and it set my soul on fire.”³⁷² After leaving the military Cottrell joined Local 471, where as a younger artist, he found engaging with established musicians challenging. “It was a hard clique” he said; it “often depended on who was on the bandstand”, as to whether or not he got a chance to play.³⁷³

Nelson Harrison

Nelson Harrison is a well-known, accomplished musician and former member of Local 471. Like Chuck Austin, Harrison speaks with an authority based on his long success as an entertainer. Harrison grew up in a family of academics in the Homewood-Brushton neighborhood, where he attended Westinghouse High school, graduating in the class of 1959 . Harrison’s formative years were spent in an environment saturated with music and musicians. He became a trombonist while also developing his own unique playing style. A prodigy who

³⁷¹ Charles Cottrell, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, January 29, 1997, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

³⁷² Cottrell, interview by Charles Austin, January 29, 1997.

³⁷³ Cottrell, interview by Charles Austin, January 29, 1997.

could play entire compositions perfectly by ear, his career provided opportunities to play with several internationally known artists.

Harrison was keenly aware of the harm caused to Black musicians by the merger of locals 60 and 471. He cites instances in which he felt that, despite their talent, Black musicians were often frozen out of union jobs. He recalls his shock when he and a few other Black musicians in Local 60-471 were contracted to play with James Brown's band, there was an alarming lack of Black musicians. He went to James Brown's dressing room, gave him his card, and requested that he be contacted next time a contract to his union was offered. Brown said that he would continue to hire White artists but in the future would make sure more Black musicians were included.³⁷⁴ Harrison hinted that the chaos from the mergers of unions across the country had contributed to this. In Pittsburgh, he said, 471 had given in to the White local, and during the merger had lost both their headquarters and their records.³⁷⁵ "We always had some competent players, super players," Harrison adds, "but all of a sudden we don't get the jobs."³⁷⁶

Harrison's analysis reinforces a reality highlighted by Chuck Austin that Black musicians had as much raw talent as the top White players, but still did not receive their fair share of jobs. The only conclusion is that they were excluded from opportunities on account of their race. Austin also feels that the inability of many Black musicians to read music closed off

³⁷⁴ Nelson Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis, *The Timmy Willis Show*, YouTube, January 11, 2020, video.

³⁷⁵ Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis.

³⁷⁶ Nelson Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis.

employment opportunities, Harrison, who himself had one time played classical music, felt that reading was a lesser skill than the ability to improvise. Reading, he says, was a “dumbing down” of musical intelligence and something that undercut one’s ability to speak the improvisational “language” of jazz.

Reflections on the Variety of Opinions

The disillusionment of many Black musicians with the merger of local musical unions reflected the larger story of American race relations. Federal policy could mandate integration, but not the changing of people’s hearts and minds. How does one assess the cost to a minority group having to adjust to the dominance of the majority? How were Blacks to fend off the inevitable “White-washing” of their own culture and independence as they fought for the benefits of mainstream acceptance? The forced integration of the music locals in Pittsburgh was illustrative of America’s attempts to end racism in a forthright but overly simplistic and short-sighted way. Providing a trial period for assimilation of both locals-was an effort to effect change, may have been a sincere effort, but nonetheless was flawed, an effort of convenience without a true acknowledgment of the recalcitrance of racial animus, attitudes, and behavior.

Perhaps the merger represented the best America could offer its darker citizens at the time. Integration, even if done clumsily, was seen as the way to cure racism. The after-effects and side-effects were considered simply ancillary costs. However, in Pittsburgh, integration of the racially separate musician unions left many Black members out in the cold despite being formally and legally regarded as equal partners.

Reflections on the Unintended Consequences of Integration

While integration may have had the potential to move the nation toward a non-racial future, in fact the merger had painful, unanticipated consequences that created inequities in representation and employment. One could even ask whether what local Black musicians really wanted was a return to more sovereignty over their affairs, something that a merged union simply could not provide. It is a notable fact that integration cost African Americans control over both their own sporting lives and their niche in the music industry. It is also notable that Gus Greenlee and Sonnyman Jackson—the money behind the Crawfords and the Grays of the Negro Baseball League—also had clubs where music was central: the Crawford Grill and the Skyrocket Lounge.

Because Black musicians were affected by factors in addition to that of race, these intersecting pressure points heightened irritability, anxiety, and bitterness following the merger. Some Blacks like Jerry Betters aimed their ire at multiple fronts, but for many members of Local 471, their time in the union consisted simply of getting a union card so that they could play. They had little interest in the day-to-day struggles of the union. They were unprepared to deal with dearth of employment opportunities, which perhaps naturally spawned animosity towards both Local 60 and 471. Jerry Betters' story is intriguing because he had by all accounts a successful career and was in constant demand. But listening carefully to his words makes it that while he courageously addressed many issues during his career, he also was deeply hurt by treatment he perceived as unfair, both by Local 471 and Local 60.

Chapter 6: The Lawsuit and the Memories

**“[S]egregation was evil at its core,
but there were unanticipated consequences
by dismantling it.”
--William Gould, attorney³⁷⁷**

The 1960's were filled with triumph and tribulation, a time when Black America was engaged in a movement to free itself from centuries-old oppression, to taste the fullness of the American Dream and achieve a proper recognition of humanity. Integration into the fabric of American democracy was seen as the way to those larger goals, the way for Blacks to stand on equal footing with Whites. However, this was not always the case. Integration did not directly translate into freedom and equality. On the face of it, the merging of racially separate musicians unions should have been welcomed as a major step toward a racially integrated society. Ironically, however, when integration arrived, it proved an ordeal for all and a tragedy for many.

One day in 1996, Chuck Austin sat re-reading an old letter from the AFM (American Federation of Musicians) stating that AFM Local 471 of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania had officially merged with the White musicians Local 60. The letter brought back painful memories as Austin once again began wondering what had gone wrong, and why. He and many of his colleagues in 471 felt that the merger had been a disaster that caused a loss of power for Black musicians and exposed them to continued racial discrimination.³⁷⁸ He remembered that what should have

³⁷⁷ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

³⁷⁸ Shakura Sabur, "Afro-American Musical Association of Pittsburgh: Ancestors of Local 471," in *The Roots of the African American Musicians' Union Local No. 471 of the American Federation of Musicians in the City of Pittsburgh 1920-1966 and Beyond*, Manuscript Draft #1, p.1.

been a moment of celebration turned into a time of trepidation and anxiety. He and his colleagues had not necessarily expected equal employment opportunities for Black musicians simply because the unions had been merged, but they had not expected the sort of racial discrimination that followed, and the powerlessness to do anything about it.

The merger agreement called for the abolishment of racially separate musicians unions. The merger was meant to be a vital step towards bridging the racial gap among musicians, in keeping with the recently passed Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawing racial segregation in public places. Neither the AFM nor the two locals, however, were prepared for what ensued. Since 1941, when the Black Musicians Club opened in Pittsburgh, it had served as the nucleus of Local 471 activity, frequented by international, national, and local Black musicians and a hub of networking. It was the place where 471 members networked to acquire employment as sidemen in bands.³⁷⁹ After the merger, both 471 and the beloved Musicians Club disappeared as separate entities. The merged units of Local 471 and Local 60 were forced into an uneasy alliance, albeit one in which the potential benefits for Black musicians theoretically could have been many.

The Lawsuit

As bitterness grew over the fact that, in elections of December 1970, no Blacks were elected to the board of the merged union a group of former 471 members formed the BMOP (Black Musicians of Pittsburgh), secured the services of William Gould, a Stanford-trained

³⁷⁹ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

lawyer, and, in 1971 filed a formal complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC). The EEOC investigated and in December of 1972 reported back that BMOP had demonstrated probable racial discrimination.

Bolstered by that report, BMOP, on behalf of previous Local 471 members Carl Arter, Arthur Barnes, Thomas Miller, Ruby Young, and Bobby Boswell, filed a lawsuit against the AFM, the AFL-CIO, Local 60-471, and several club owners, charging racial discrimination. It was a suit that members felt would be easy to win. “All we wanted,” Chuck Austin says, “was the back pay we would have earned if we had been allowed to perform after segregation was deemed unconstitutional. All we wanted was for the court to intercede in our behalf to stop the on-going discrimination against Black musicians in Pittsburgh. All we wanted was a little justice, a little dignity, a little respect.”³⁸⁰

After the court case was filed, George Childress, former president of Local 471, reached out to Derrick Bell, a family relative and alumnus of the University of Pittsburgh Law School. At the time, Bell was teaching law at Harvard University. Nationally known for his critical race theory analysis of America, Bell had facilitated the appointment of William Gould to Harvard Law School, and relayed the concerns to his colleague that George Childress had shared about the merger of Locals 471 and 60. Seeing a valuable opportunity to effect change, Gould eagerly took on the case.³⁸¹ The lawsuit coincided with the end of the “transition period” for the

³⁸⁰ Shakura Sabur, “Afro-American Musical Association of Pittsburgh: Ancestors of Local 471,” in *The Roots of the African American Musicians’ Union Local No. 471 of the American Federation of Musicians in the City of Pittsburgh 1920-1966 and Beyond*, Manuscript Draft #1, p.2.

³⁸¹ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

merger of 60 and 471 in which Blacks had been guaranteed board representation for four years.³⁸²

The legal team for the Black musicians was led by William B. Gould, along with Stanton Levenson, and Melvin L. Wulf of the American Civil Liberties Union. The suit argued that Local 60-471 had practiced racial discrimination by excluding Black artists from employment and discouraging them from pursuing certain jobs. The plaintiffs asked for back pay that had been lost because of discrimination and for the courts to end the alleged discriminatory practices outlined in the brief. The brief alleged a historical pattern of racial discrimination. Buttressed by findings of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in October of 1971, it also alleged clear inequities in violation of Title 7 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. An excerpt from the brief states, "...the past and present discriminatory practices of the Local have had a chilling effect' on the ability of the Local to establish credibility with the Black musicians, with the result that many Black members are refusing to pay dues or have left the union altogether, while young Black musicians are deterred from joining [Local 60-471]."³⁸³ Numerous Black musicians testified during the trial that Local 60 had practiced a malicious form of discrimination against Blacks even as they protested. Furthermore, the brief referenced the discriminatory origins of Local 471:

³⁸² "The case of Black Musicians of Pittsburgh and George Childress, et al., vs. Local 60-471, American Federation of Musicians, AFL-CIO," (Civil Action No. 71-1008) AND Black Musicians of Pittsburgh and George Childress et al., vs. Joseph Schaefer, Anthony Pasquarelli, Nicholas Lomakin, Joey Simms, Joseph Marone and Jack Purcell. (Civil Action 72-787). An appeal was filed in 1975, "Black Musicians of Pittsburgh, et al., brief filed in the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, 1975."

³⁸³ Shakura Sabur, "Summary of the Brief Alleging Racially Discriminatory Practices of Local No. 60 Against Members of Local No. 471," in *The Roots of the African American Musicians' Union Local No. 471 of the American Federation of Musicians in the City of Pittsburgh 1920-1966 and Beyond*, Manuscript Draft #1, p.7.

The Afro-American Agreement of 1908 formalized discrimination in Pittsburgh by relegating Black musicians to work in the all-Black portions of Pittsburgh, known as the Hill District, which possessed lower paying jobs. Repeated appeals by Black members of Local 471 to eliminate the discriminatory pattern of employment fell on deaf ears on the national and local level...Moreover, Local 60 enforced the status quo blocking opportunities of Black musicians through the ouster of members of Local 471 from all-White clubs and imposing discipline in the form of suspensions and fines on Black musicians who dared defy the ban.”³⁸⁴

The Black plaintiffs complained that, before the merger, Local 471’s Black Musicians Club welcomed their White counterparts while Local 60’s club excluded Blacks. The suit also alleged that there was a dearth of Black booking agents and contractors to help facilitate Black employment opportunities during the pre-merger years.³⁸⁵ And, it said, Black musicians were especially dissatisfied with the racial imbalance of power in the merged union. At the time of the merger, Local 60 claimed over 2000 members while Local 471 claimed only 324.³⁸⁶ The imbalance in membership numbers stoked fears that Blacks would forever lack the influence need to enjoy equal access to jobs. The merger agreement included such stipulations as the following:

³⁸⁴ Shakura Sabur, “Summary of the Brief Alleging Racially Discriminatory Practices of Local No. 60 Against Members of Local No. 471.”

³⁸⁵ Shakura Sabur, “Summary of the Brief Alleging Racially Discriminatory Practices of Local No. 60 Against Members of Local No. 471.”

³⁸⁶ Shakura Sabur, “Summary of the Brief Alleging Racially Discriminatory Practices of Local No. 60 Against Members of Local No. 471.”

a four-year transitional agreement expanding the executive committee from six seats to nine seats with the three additional reserved for Black representation. Another term of the Agreement stipulated that uniform equal rights shall be granted all members in the merged union. Group life insurance was to be continued as well as double indemnity coverage. A minimum of two assistants to the President of the merged union, one from the membership of Local 471 and one from the membership of Local 60, were to be appointed for the period of the Agreement...The agreement also provided that a Black office employee would be hired but no positions were made available. Although the Articles of Agreement to merge Local 60 and Local 471 were effective for a period of five years, starting January 1, 1966, Black musicians of Pittsburgh had little involvement in the negotiation process.³⁸⁷

Thus, the heart of the complaints was that, following the merger, Local 60-471 leadership, which was dominated by White members, reneged on promises to its Black members. The latter felt they had no real democratic recourse to amend their inequitable conditions, and that they could not rely on the union's White members to treat them fairly.

Austin, Childress, and other former members of 471 felt confident they would prevail in the lawsuit. During the trial, however, they were forced to admit that after the merger, Osgood, the president of Local 60-471, actively promoted racial integration of union members. "Various events were sponsored by the President of the Local to foster friendship among the members of the merged Local. Plaintiffs also admitted there had been a lack of interest on their part in

³⁸⁷ Shakura Sabur, "Summary of the Brief Alleging Racially Discriminatory Practices of Local No. 60 Against Members of Local No. 471."

trying to make the merger work. At times, it was admitted, they “had refused to participate in elections, meetings, and social events.”³⁸⁸

While Black musicians may not have engaged due to feelings of marginalization or alienation, such admissions fatally weakened their case. The court decided against their suit, a verdict that dealt a death blow to their case and to their hearts and minds. The court ruled that the transitional period negotiated by both Local 471 and Local 60 was not only “collectively bargained” but provided enough time for the two parties to establish equality in the new union arrangement.³⁸⁹ The court rejected charges that the brevity of the agreement allowed White officers to drag their feet on promises until the agreement expired and Blacks were no longer guaranteed representation on the executive board.³⁹⁰

Given that arguments could be made both for and against racial discrimination, the plaintiffs’ case was not as clear-cut as Austin and others had believed. In a non-jury trial, Federal District Judge Barron McCune ruled that discrimination had been practiced prior to the merger, but the plaintiffs had failed to show compelling evidence, statistical and otherwise, proving its continuation. As a matter of fact, some of the statistics used by the plaintiffs

³⁸⁸ Court Documents, “Black Musicians of Pittsburgh v. Local 60-471, etc., 442 F. SUPP. (D. Pa. 1977), U.S. District Court for the District of Pennsylvania,” *Memorandum: McCune, District Judge*, JUSTIA US Law website, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/442/855/2284967/>.

³⁸⁹ Shakura Sabur, “Summary of the Brief Alleging Racially Discriminatory Practices of Local No. 60 Against Members of Local No. 471.” Also, Shakura Sabur, “Afro-American Musical Association of Pittsburgh: Ancestors of Local 471,” in *The Roots of the African American Musicians’ Union Local No. 471 of the American Federation of Musicians in the City of Pittsburgh 1920-1966 and Beyond*, Manuscript Draft #1, p.11.

³⁹⁰ Shakura Sabur, “Summary of the Brief Alleging Racially Discriminatory Practices of Local No. 60 Against Members of Local No. 471.” in *The Roots of the African American Musicians’ Union Local No. 471 of the American Federation of Musicians in the City of Pittsburgh 1920-1966 and Beyond*, Manuscript Draft #1, p.9; Court Documents, “Black Musicians of Pittsburgh v. Local 60-471, Etc., 442 F. SUPP. (D. Pa. 1977), U.S. District Court for the District of Pennsylvania,” *Memorandum: McCune, District Judge*, JUSTIA US Law website, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/442/855/2284967/>.

bolstered the defendants' case by showing that, overall, Black musicians of Local 471 had higher incomes than White members of Local 60.³⁹¹ The court never investigated the details of this remarkable finding; some felt the higher income of Black musicians simply represented the fact that lower pay forced them to work more gigs. But whatever, the reason, this fact—uncontested by the plaintiffs—led the court to rule that racism was not the intractable issue it was purported to be by the Black litigants.

The Black plaintiffs had argued that when proprietors made requests for musicians, Local 60-471 did not refer them to Black musicians, in part because of the lack of Black representation on the union's Executive Board.³⁹² Judge McCune did not agree, pointing to disingenuous practices on behalf of the plaintiffs. He cited an incident in 1974, when a prominent, unnamed 471 member ran for a position on the Executive Board of Local 60-471, and Black plaintiffs requested he withdraw so as to not hurt the court case if he was nominated for the position. The unnamed candidate was bassist Bobby Boswell, who didn't withdraw, but instead reduced his campaign efforts. Even with a lower profile campaign, he lost by only fifteen votes and felt he could have won the position easily with a normal campaign. The plaintiffs had tried to suppress this occurrence in the eyes of the judge.³⁹³ This incident points

³⁹¹ Court Documents, "Black Musicians of Pittsburgh v. Local 60-471, Etc., 442 F. SUPP. (D. Pa. 1977), U.S. District Court for the District of Pennsylvania," *Memorandum: McCune, District Judge*, JUSTIA US Law website, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/442/855/2284967/>.

³⁹² Court Documents, "Black Musicians of Pittsburgh v. Local 60-471, Etc.

³⁹³ Court Documents, "Black Musicians of Pittsburgh v. Local 60-471, Etc., 442 F. SUPP. (D. Pa. 1977), U.S. District Court for the District of Pennsylvania," *Memorandum: McCune, District Judge*, JUSTIA US Law website, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/442/855/2284967/>; Colter Harper, "The Paradox of Progress: Jazz, Resistance, and Black Musical Labor in Pittsburgh (1955-1974)," *Jazz Perspectives* 11, no. 1 (2018): 98.

to more racial equity than many former members of Local 471 acknowledged in their testimonies, a fact seized upon by the defendants as evidence that sincere efforts by Local 60-471 to incorporate Black members had been rejected by the plaintiffs.³⁹⁴ The verdict delivered a striking blow to the plaintiffs by stating that not only was the case brought forth by the Black Musicians of Pittsburgh lacking sufficient evidence to prove racism before and after the merger, but there was impropriety in how the case was presented in court. The assumption here was that the Black musicians had such a weak case that they had to manipulate or downplay evidence to win a decision. Gould, the plaintiffs' attorney, suggested that much of the frustration from Black musicians during the merger came from the loss of the Musicians Club and its unique social and economic benefits. However, the legal documents speak little about the loss of a music hall but focus, rather, on jobs, economic/insurance benefits, lack of political representation, and the like.³⁹⁵

Litigants of Local 471 had not been well served by their attorney, William Gould, who admitted years later that the case "was not one of my finest hours."³⁹⁶ Yet, in the larger scheme of things, 471's experience was a microcosm of historical realities for African Americans who long had faced the harsh realities of racism, a less than ample political voice, and a legal system that was unsympathetic to their cause and tilted towards those in power. The bandstand and the stage were the only instruments firmly within their control. These were the material objects that allowed for freedom and the pure ecstasy of living. While artists like Chuck Austin have

³⁹⁴ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

³⁹⁵ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

³⁹⁶ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

never stopped fighting for their rights, it is clear there are painful scars left from the sixties and early seventies as a result of the legal defeat. Many of the musicians articulated a clear reverence for their time spent in entertainment with their peers. This is juxtaposed with their bitter feelings towards their counterparts in Local 60 and the discriminatory treatment they had long endured. This is the American tonic for Black people; a drink flavored with a hint of hope and optimism which inevitably leaves a sour aftertaste.

Attorney Gould reaffirmed a similar theme in his 2018 interview with jazz historian Colter Harper. Though Gould lived through the experience of the court case and held the court papers in his hand during the interview, he admitted there were aspects of the case that he couldn't recall with clarity. He looked over notes in response to Harper's queries and responded in detail to the questions that he clearly remembered. This is the delicate balance of memory; it may yield to temptation to fill in the gaps of the past with narratives we are most comfortable with—or narratives we would have like to have seen. Mr. Gould's face would light up when he spoke of the individual Black musicians themselves, or his time spent in the Crawford Grill listening to jazz, or his description of angst at the inability to secure legal victory for people he loved. A rational and scientific look back at the past events of the court case reveals that legal precedent was followed by the judges. There was a period where Blacks and Whites in Local 60-471 had an opportunity to fully unite their considerable skills, but it never occurred. Could both sides have been to blame for not wanting to relinquish their former ways of life and culture to satisfy the promise of integration? Did four or five years provide enough time for the historic reversal of racially separated locals? We will never know the answers to those important questions.

Questions persist as to where the merger went wrong. What could former members of 471 have done to achieve a favorable outcome? In addition to the cold hard facts of the case, there were flesh and blood human beings who lost a stake in Pittsburgh. Black musicians lost their records and their beloved Musicians Club, their protective space in a segregated world. Mr. Gould seemed to be shuffling the years in his mind, searching for alternative outcomes. He along with the Black musicians had put up a good fight—but they were denied. The optimism he held at the time does not seem naive from his present vantage point. “On balance,” he says, “as I look back on the world I grew up in as it relates to race, this today is a better world, a better country...there are more opportunities. At least until this era, many negative attitudes had been forced underground.”³⁹⁷

This is what we all are left with: memories of the wheels of change turning slowly; memories of bitter political and legal defeats; memories of a court decision that seemed to say Black suffering was in vain. And yet, sober reflection forces us to utter platitudes. This world has changed for the better. America has evolved. But the process has not been without pain, without tears, and mercifully without the bearing of arms.

While there are examples of Black and White collaboration and discord in entertainment after the merger, the events of the early 1970’s reveal trouble brewing after the newly formed union. There were issues that were systemic and historical. Local musicians who had operated effectively when they were racially separate found themselves drawn together by forces beyond their control. The struggle that ensued in the 1970’s, while reflecting the

³⁹⁷ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

currents of tense race relations in America at that time, didn't necessarily reflect the "Black and tan" intermingling that had characterized Pittsburgh's music scene of the early 1900s. Before the merger, Local 471 had often hosted Whites at the Musicians Club, and Whites had been in the audiences of many of their performances. Yet, when Local 471 and Local 60 tried to aggregate their talents in an organized protectorate, certain wounds were revealed to have never truly healed.

For a brief time, the merger of Local 60 and Local 471 represented the realization of America's aspiration—to become a true melting pot that included the descendants of Black slaves as well as of White immigrants. Music and sports are often trumpeted as vehicles for bringing diverse people together. But in the early 1970's, the limitations of America's integration strategies were revealed. To put it succinctly, the integration of Local 60 and 471 crumbled amidst racial divisions.

Taking all this into account, attorney Gould had seen the case as an opportunity to stretch the boundaries of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He devised an audacious plan of attack—to argue that time sensitive transitional agreements were ineffective in preventing discrimination while integration was supposed to be taking place.³⁹⁸ The EEOC had investigated the plight of former Local 471 members and found some evidence of discrimination. This along with the fact that Gould had also been engaged in other labor cases convinced him that a new frontier in law could be pursued.

³⁹⁸ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

In the court case, Gould pursued the notion of the “inherent ineffectiveness of date specific transitional agreements.” In this case, the musicians who formed the joint executive board after the merger had a specific time frame to ensure that Black members received an equal share of the benefits as members of the newly formed 60-471. The issue is that if White musicians had no real incentive to fully integrate with Black musicians, they could simply wait for the transitional time frame to elapse. The entire body would then have to vote on which members would serve. Blacks were frozen out of this process because of the racial imbalance in membership numbers. To illustrate this, not until the early 2000s did Chuck Austin become the first former member of Local 471 to be elected to the merged executive board, over three decades after the merger took place.³⁹⁹

However, in an impressive display of modesty for someone so accomplished, attorney Gould, in an interview with Colter Harper, admitted that, in retrospect, it would have been wiser for him to withdraw his legal complaint. The rules of the game were such that no court had overturned or fundamentally altered transitional agreements as they were occurring across the U.S.⁴⁰⁰ Gould admitted that it was foolhardy of his legal team to believe they could persuade the courts to stray from historical precedent—especially considering that the presiding judge possessed a notoriously conservative record.⁴⁰¹ In his interview by Harper,

³⁹⁹ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

⁴⁰⁰ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

⁴⁰¹ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

Gould teetered between sadness at the case's outcome and his hope at the time that his legal team could have been agents for change and that the cause they pursued was just.⁴⁰²

The problem, as Gould put it, was that past issues of discrimination re-emerged in the present. Even after integration, Blacks remained locked out of most "good" jobs. Gould believed there was "nothing magical" about the 4-5 year transition period that would spell the end of racial discrimination. He and his legal team wanted to fight for a transitional period that was indefinite or sufficient to make sure that racial discrimination was largely eliminated.⁴⁰³ In retrospect, it seems that, considering the tenor of the times, the conservative tilt of the presiding judge, and America's tendency to take only cautious steps towards racial progress, Gould was asking too much. But at the time, the case seemed like the right thing to do and the argument potentially winnable.

The fate of 471 reflected the troubled story of integration writ large. Federal policy could mandate formal integration, but how long would it take for laws to change people's hearts and minds? And how does one assess the cost to a minority group of having to accommodate majority rule? How were Blacks to fend off the inevitable loss of independence as they fought for the benefits of mainstream acceptance? The forced integration of the Pittsburgh's music locals was illustrative of America's attempts to end racism in a forthright but overly simplistic and short-sighted way. Providing a trial period for assimilation of both locals- was an effort to effect change, but a timid and incomplete effort. It was an effort of

⁴⁰² William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

⁴⁰³ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

convenience without truly acknowledging the recalcitrance of racial animus, attitudes, and restrictive behaviors on both sides of the racial divide.

Perhaps the merger represented the best America could offer to its darker citizens. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 had compelled Integration of the separate locals. Even if done clumsily or without the collective will needed to make it more successful, integration was seen as the magic potion that would cure racism and racial discrimination. The after-effects, or side-effects, of integration were considered simply the ancillary costs of progressive change. Black members of Local 471 found themselves still left in the cold by the perception that they had been included as equal partners with Local 60.

The lawsuit that would ultimately be filed by members of Local 471 was an indictment of the limitations of integration and a merger agreement that assumed White members would willingly hand over access to their resources and job opportunities. Therefore, as Blacks had done so often in the past, they were forced to fight for rights that should have been guaranteed. As Austin thought back, he could only voice the pain.

Bridging the racial divide in America has never been easy. Eliminating racially separate musicians unions was supposedly necessary in order to eliminate the “vestiges of separation and discrimination.”⁴⁰⁴ While Austin remembered that the merger had brought feelings of cautious optimism from some Local 471 members, many others considered the loss of the Union and of the Musicians Club as a death blow to what they had built.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

⁴⁰⁵ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

The pain was felt not just by Black musicians, but also by those who played in marching bands and churches and orchestras.⁴⁰⁶ Losing the Musicians Club, or ‘Hall’ as it was sometimes referred to, demoralized some members so much that they let their membership lapse. To a certain degree, this had long been an issue with some members who did not see the need to maintain membership in Local 471. The merger did not compel true integration and equality with any deliberate speed.

Chuck Austin Reflects on Pain of Losing the Case

Chuck Austin and the other 471 litigants thought proving discrimination would not be difficult. After all, as they pointed out, no Blacks were elected to the board of the merged union after the expiration of the five-year merger agreement mandating such representation. To the dismay of 471, the U.S. Third District Court ruled that racial discrimination had not been proven. That disappointment was followed by another, when the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal, effectively ending further legal challenges.⁴⁰⁷ In some ways, perhaps, 471 should not have been surprised. The legal outcome had been portended in a pretrial conference in September 20, 1974, over an attempt to recover attorney fees from the case. A summary of the court notes said:

both plaintiffs and the EEOC knew there was little evidence of discrimination available, and that the difficulties of the merged Local could be attributed as much to the plaintiffs as to the Local. Second, that there was absolutely no evidence of disparate employment

⁴⁰⁶ William B. Gould IV, interview by Colter Harper, Stanford Zoom, March 12, 2018.

⁴⁰⁷ “Union Suit Charges Musicians Union Federation With Discrimination,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 20, 1971.

opportunities, and even if there were, there was no evidence that the Local had any effect on the hiring done, as it had no hiring hall and received at most, an insubstantial number of job referrals.⁴⁰⁸

These remarks show that a convergence of issues caused Local 471 to lose. Proving discrimination was difficult because there was a long history of musicians operating as “independent contractors” in securing employment and using a myriad of formal and informal networks to do so. 471-60 did not do the hiring, which placed the case of the Black musicians on unsteady legal ground.

In his later years, Austin remained baffled as to why the Black musicians lost their case. Having lived through and absorbed America’s racism through his pores, he felt the evidence presented should have been clear enough to persuade the court. But not only did the Black musicians lose their initial case filed in 1971, their appeals which stretched until 1977 also failed. The courts interpreted the relationship between Local 60 and 471 as one between two equal parties, even though a closer look at the facts disputes this. The court ruled that Local 471 had negotiated for a four-year term of guaranteed representation on the merged union board of directors. After four years, no Black representation was guaranteed, and so Black leaders would have to be voted in by members. However, during the first three years Blacks had only three out of the nine members on the executive board of Local 60-471. This meant they could be, and were, consistently outvoted by White members on important issues. Black artists were outnumbered by 10 to 1 in the general body membership at this time, making it

⁴⁰⁸ Court Documents, “Black Musicians of Pittsburgh v. Local 60-471, Etc., 442 F. SUPP. (D. Pa. 1977), U.S. District Court for the District of Pennsylvania,” *Memorandum: McCune, District Judge*, JUSTIA US Law website, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/442/855/2284967/>.

virtually impossible for them to alter the power imbalances through voting. By the time the four-year “transition period” ended in 1971, Blacks had very little recourse to address the power imbalance that still existed.⁴⁰⁹ They were reliant upon the willingness of White leadership to offer them equal opportunities and truly integrate them into a world which had excluded them for so long. This is a flaw of integration policy: it cannot guarantee equal treatment even if different groups occupy the same social and employment spaces. Integration can even initially exacerbate racial tensions as parties may feel forced to act counter to their own social and cultural proclivities.

Austin remembered some of the collateral damage from this legal defeat that had repercussions moving forward. “Black musicians in Pittsburgh,” he says, “still have no voice. Many of our Black musicians have gotten so frustrated that they have stopped their membership. The biggest tragedy is that too many musicians have also stopped playing.”⁴¹⁰ Austin also regrets that the courts and Local 60 had threatened the elders of the Black jazz community with historical erasure. Many musicians abandoned Local 471 despite its efforts to fight for them because ultimately it couldn’t end racism.⁴¹¹ Even after the merger, he laments, most Black musicians still “could not penetrate downtown.”⁴¹² Downtown represented the

⁴⁰⁹ Shakura Sabur, “The More Things Change,” in *The Roots of the African American Musicians’ Union Local No. 471 of the American Federation of Musicians in the City of Pittsburgh 1920-1966 and Beyond, Manuscript Draft #1*, p.1-2.

⁴¹⁰ Shakura Sabur, “The More Things Change,” in *The Roots of the African American Musicians’ Union Local No. 471 of the American Federation of Musicians in the City of Pittsburgh 1920-1966 and Beyond, Manuscript Draft #1*, p.1-2.

⁴¹¹ Shakura Sabur, “The More Things Change.”

⁴¹² Shakura Sabur, “The More Things Change.”

promised land of high paying jobs, glittery entertainment venues, a more expansive platform to showcase talent, and the social acceptance so many Black artists craved and felt they deserved. Black artists could not reconcile themselves to their racial plight, feeling they continued to lose “tenure, union time, insurance and benefits” after the merger.⁴¹³ Despite the mistreatment and despite putting their best legal foot forward, they were still found wanting.

This raises the question: where else could they have turned? What alternative measures would all those who trumpet America’s ample opportunities suggest these musicians have taken? They fought and lost. Don’t let the smiles of the jazz elders fool you. They are often intoxicated by the sweet memories of the camaraderie and good times they shared. But these feelings are separate from their memory of the wrongs perpetrated by systematic racial discrimination. As Austin laments:

Here I am sitting in this court room again. This room smells stuffy and feels as sterile and cold as the process of trying to get justice has turned out to be. I can feel my energy draining. It feels like the strain to get out the last breath and hit that last high note on my trumpet after a long hard gig in a smoke filled joint following a full day’s work. It’s the feeling you get when you know what you have to do to keep tempo but your chest burns and your throat is dry and your head throbs. It’s the feeling a musician gets when he wants to give a top rate performance but he also wants the night to be over. I need a rest. I need to clear my head.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ Shakura Sabur, “The More Things Change.”

⁴¹⁴ Shakura Sabur, “The More Things Change.”

Here is Austin in his senior years, recollecting his raw emotions and the toll exacted by the legal battle that consumed Local 471 for over six years, from 1971 to 1977. His reflections illuminate the haunting nature of racial injustice; the demon that can't be killed—and which still haunted him during the time of my interview with him. He detailed once again the reasons for the legal grievances against Local 60. And yet, as he sat decades removed from that painful era, he also derided the current state of affairs for Black musicians fighting to receive health benefits from Local-471. He is adamant that Blacks had been discriminated against after the merger. He feels this despite his own post-merger employment security. And yet, there seems to be a tug of war between what musicians like Austin recall versus the facts that emerged from court case.

The disentanglement of factors that led the court to rule against BMOP, despite their recollections of mistreatment and inequities, is the crux of the matter. How does one make sense of facts found documented in primary sources when these facts complicate and in some cases outright contradict anecdotal evidence provided by former members of Local 471? The best answer may be found in the nature of the entertainment business and the varying levels of attachment to the union held by many musicians at this time. Many were in fact independent contractors. Even those in one band had different employment outcomes from those in other bands. This meant that, while operating as individuals represented loosely by a union that didn't control hiring, Blacks experienced a litany of experiences colored by varying degrees of racial discrimination. Moreover, because many musicians were much more concerned with the act of performing than being engaged in union activity, they had only cursory knowledge of specific acts of discrimination endured by their colleagues, even though informal social

networks helped spread word of what was happening. When it was time to pursue a lawsuit, BMOP had the challenge of amassing ample anecdotal descriptions of racist treatment into quantifiable evidence. In doing so, it seems they failed.

Other issues plagued former Local 471 members in the aftermath of the merger. During the merger litigation, records from Local 471 were misplaced, lost forever. As a result, many former members of 471 had to prove they had been members and thus eligible for benefits. There were other painful consequences. Chuck Austin watched his dear friend George Childress (who died in 1973), who had been the business manager for Local 471, have his salary reduced by the White members of the Local 60-471 Executive Board. He also watched White musician, Nick Hagerty, who also was a member of Local 471, receive full compensation during a subsequent illness.⁴¹⁵ It was the rumination on these hurts and injustices that kept Austin stuck in past memories that he felt compelled to tell current and future generations about the history of Local 471. Yet the dredging up of the past had collateral emotional effects on the story-teller. Wounds had to be re-opened. Skeletons had to be yanked from closets.

The painful disappointments of the sixties and early 1970's persisted. When issues arose in later years that showed the difference in life experience between Black and White musicians, Austin found himself catapulted backward to a decade that showed with clarity that White musicians were valued more than Black musicians. As a valiant soldier for Black rights, Austin felt the pressing of his age and diminishing energy. In discussions with him, his statements would alternate between optimistic remembrances and bitter reflections. There was a

⁴¹⁵ Shakura Sabur, "The More Things Change."

painfulness to being Black that only his trumpet sound and forced recollection of the good times could medicate.

One of the things that bothered Austin incessantly was that, even decades later, the merger of Local 60-471 and the results of the ensuing court case seemed unfathomable. In his mind, it should have been a “no-brainer.” All the former members of Local 471 should have had to do was show a history of employment discrimination, which should have been easy. As Austin and others saw it, Black musicians had been systematically excluded from work and discouraged from applying for work. “Back in the day,” he continues, “we really believed that if given an equal chance in training and education, encouragement and opportunity, we’d put Pittsburgh on the jazz musical map on par with Kansas City, Chicago or even New York.”⁴¹⁶

Segregation had excluded Blacks from playing in parts of the city that paid handsomely. The problem was that even after integration, Black artists were still frequently discriminated against and not given the same employment opportunities or pay. “We expected a more level playing field,” Austin says. “We expected folk to do the right thing. But that didn’t happen. So, we had to go to court to be heard.”⁴¹⁷ Reaching deeper into his memories, Austin says that even after the merger, the union’s all-White disciplinary board levied fines or suspensions for Blacks who played at all-White clubs, regardless of whether the clubs had solicited their engagement. It was the compilation of injustices like these that led to legal grievance against Local 60-471 by Black members.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶ Shakura Sabur, “The More Things Change.”

⁴¹⁷ Shakura Sabur, “The More Things Change.”

⁴¹⁸ Shakura Sabur, “The More Things Change.”

Musicians Reflect on the Lawsuit

The court decision shows the importance of memory to a history 471. According to Dr. Stefan Wheelock, while memories can willfully distort or simply be inaccurate, they can also reveal deeper truths behind or underneath facts.⁴¹⁹ The musicians from 471 who engaged me to tell the story of Local 471 felt convinced that what they remembered was truth, that they had never been given a truly fair shake. For them, the events leading up to the court case and the resulting decision simply reaffirmed that discrimination was encoded into their lives and into the legal system. The courts wanted them to provide legal proof of an unfairness they were intimately familiar with, but in the end, they found it difficult to translate the gradations between outright and transparent racial discrimination and other ancillary circumstances that diminished their employment opportunities after the merger. They were trying to prove structural racism when much of their conception of ill treatment had come from the vantage point of personal injustices. They knew and felt something in the newly merged union was off kilter-and even more so, their experience in the merged union was a fulfillment of fears some had had even before the merger.

Many of the musicians remembered how they felt about events leading up to the lawsuit. They often didn't detail the court case specifically. Rather, their memories parsed events related to the merger and the lawsuit that followed. What emerged is not one united vision of the past, but rather a variety of views. The lawsuit and its examples of racial discrimination crystallized the recollections of many Black musicians and precipitated

⁴¹⁹ Stefan Wheelock, "The Intersection of Literature, History and Hip-Hop," interview by Johnathan White, *Thinkin' Too Much Podcast*, ZOOM, April 10, 2020, video.

frustration with the White executive board of the merged union. Many recalled a post-merger past of multiple villains and multiple examples of racial discrimination.

Such simplified memories, however, were not universal. It is worthwhile to repeat, in summary fashion, their contrarian perspectives. Chuck Austin, a staunch supporter of 471, places blame to some extent on the failure of many Black musicians to join in and do more to strengthen their own positions as employees. Austin is convinced that this lack of unity and discipline contributed to the relative inability of Local 471 to protect the rights of its members. He says many musicians didn't understand the importance of the union and the imperative of playing for scale. Not infrequently, they would play for lower wages than the wage-scale required because they were unemployed at the time. "They were not going to band together and make it right," Austin laments."⁴²⁰

George Spaulding, another leader of 471, provides additional insights—based on his personal history—as to why some Black musicians failed to prosper after the merger. While growing up, Spaulding says, he and other young musicians played piano and organs in a variety of churches. In so doing, they learned a variety of musical styles and developed a broad range of skills. Too often, he suggests, young musicians lack that church-based training and never advance beyond a basic level of musicianship.⁴²¹ Spaulding's comments reinforce the idea that many Black musicians were not adequately prepared for the entertainment scene that confronted them after the merger. Thus, while many felt strongly that racial discrimination was

⁴²⁰ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 26, 1997.

⁴²¹ Spaulding, interview by Charles Austin, October 21, 1997.

the thorn in their side, others like Spaulding stressed the degree to which some wounds were self-inflicted.

Frank McCown, on the other hand, does not consider the shortcomings of some Black musicians a negative. “White musicians didn’t solo like Black guys did,” McCown says, “they often read.”⁴²² McCown explained that Black musicians were accustomed to solo performances and improvising, whereas their White colleagues simply played what was in front of them. McCown didn’t portray either of these styles as superior or inferior. He considered it just the way things were. McCown’s ability to navigate the music scene points to the degree that employment depended on individual merit and personal magnetism. McCown never denied racism was a factor that hindered Blacks, but rather highlighted his own unique journey and attributes that sustained his success even after the merger and lawsuit. McCown also emphasized how he had built friendships with White as well as Black musicians. He recognized that, in regards to reduced employment opportunities, many White musicians were in the same boat as their Black counterparts. This perspective was not shared by many 471 members, but it made sense to McCown because he considered himself something of a free agent not dependent on Local 471’s clout in the music world.⁴²³

Nelson Harrison, another highly accomplished and well known musician, speaks with considerable authority. He grew up in the Homewood-Brushton section of Pittsburgh, and is the beneficiary of a rich musical heritage. Coming from a family of strong academics, He became proficient as a trombonist while also developing a playing style. He performed with

⁴²² McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

⁴²³ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

internationally known artists when they came to town, yet in spite of his success, is sympathetic to the charge that racism caused harm to members of Local 471 after the merger. Harrison recalls that, in 1967, Jack Purcell had a contract to hire four Black musicians from Local 60-471. Dr. Harrison, Chuck Austin, Art Nance and Jimmy Armstrong”, were the four chosen. But Harrison suggests that, had it not been for the union, there would have been all Black musicians at some of these gigs.⁴²⁴ He charges that often, as the only or one of a few Black men in a band after the merger, he felt that there should have been more of his Black peers there. He cites instances where he felt that on certain jobs, when union members were hired, Black musicians were often frozen out, despite their talent.⁴²⁵ Harrison hinted that the chaos from the mergers of racially separate musical unions across the country had contributed to this. In Pittsburgh, the Black union, in his words, had given in to the White local, and in the process had loss their building and records.⁴²⁶ “We always had some competent players,” Harrison says, “super players, but all of a sudden we don’t get the jobs.”⁴²⁷ This reinforces a reality that Chuck Austin highlighted when speaking of the court case brought against Local 60-471. Black musicians were convinced after the merger they were excluded from opportunities. There could be no argument that, all too often, Blacks with as much talent as the White players did not receive job offers. These discrepancies were often attributed to racism, although Austin and Harrison differ about the importance of the inability to read music as a weakness among Black musicians.

⁴²⁴ Harrison, “Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal,” interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁴²⁵ Harrison, “Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal,” interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁴²⁶ Harrison, “Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal,” interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁴²⁷ Harrison, “Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal,” interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

Austin saw reading music as fundamental to survival in the changing musical landscape, while Harrison considers reading a lesser skill compared to the ability to improvise.

Other members of Local 471 believe the union had been more effective before the merger because it had an important degree of autonomy. Harold Lee recalls how, before the merger, Local 471 protected its members. When contracted to play at an event not arranged by the union, he might not receive payment if the event was canceled on account of weather; however, that was not the case when Local 471 was responsible for an event. Sometimes club owners and event sponsors legitimately wanted to renege on payments when the musicians “played around” too much on the job. Lee explained that Local 471 leadership sometimes tried to shift troublesome musicians to certain jobs to ensure success, but they also would warn club owners about certain members, letting them know that once a musician was hired, compensation was mandatory.⁴²⁸

As a result, while integration may have potentially been beneficial to the Black musicians, Lee’s comments reveal the unintended consequences of the merger. The court case attempted to address inequities in representation and employment after the merger, but one could question if the priority for musicians was regaining more sovereignty over their affairs, something not easily available in a racially integrated union. Lee felt this way even though he admitted that Local 471 had organizational issues which hindered its effectiveness. Lee recalled being told by a knowledgeable insider that when the merger of Local 60 and Local 471

⁴²⁸ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

occurred, the bookkeeping had been deplorable.⁴²⁹ In addition, Lee and others recognized that many musicians valued the union card so they could play, and had little regard for the day-to-day struggles of the union. Many of these musicians were unprepared to deal with shrinking opportunities to play and developed an animosity towards both Local 60 and 471.⁴³⁰

Ruby Young, popular pianist and officer of 471, acknowledged the changing musical landscape that affected the union's authority both before and after the lawsuit. Young's anger is reminiscent of that of other local musicians. While many were not averse to playing popular music, they were clear to make a distinction between jazz, show tunes, and what their derisively referred to as "juke box music." Although Pittsburgh was considered a major jazz city, it did not maintain a jazz culture as vibrant as places like Chicago, New York, and New Orleans. As a result, the appeal of live jazz in Pittsburgh was undercut as rock, pop, and soul music took became the dominant genres by the sixties. Many Black musicians like Young felt that popular tunes did not allow them to showcase their talent. While this attitude may be perceived by some as elitism, it is also an indicator of how adaptable Black musicians had to be and how the historical trajectory of Black music emerged as another variable in determining the fate of local musicians. By the time of the lawsuit in the 1970's, Black musical tastes had evolved. Jazz, while still appreciated, no longer dominated entertainment spaces; it had to share the stage with mainstream soul music, "juke box stuff" as Young referred to it. This meant that those former members of Local 471 who did not have highly adaptable skills or illustrious reputations were

⁴²⁹ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

⁴³⁰ Members of the African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh. Interview of Charles Austin, Frank McCown, Ruby Young, and John Hughes by Johnathan J. White, April 19, 2005.

forced to compete with popular rhythm and blues artists. Black jazz artists were being squeezed out by the changing nature musical preference as well as by racial discrimination.

Tommy Turrentine was less bothered by the merger and lawsuit as he was by what had been lost even before those momentous events. Turrentine explained that in the Golden Years of Local 471, “everybody played with a lot of feeling...we knew how to hit that note...we will never recapture that...I learned that in the Musicians Club.”⁴³¹ Turrentine’s thoughts suggest that closing of the Musicians Club sounded the death knell for many Black musicians. For musicians like himself, the lawsuit addressed inequities after the merger, but he felt that the more germane issue had deeper historical antecedents.

One could surmise that, for some, the 1970’s lawsuit was almost like an afterword to the triumphs and struggles of Local 471 members. But the stories of many former Local 471 members, especially those who had begun their careers in the 1940’s and 1950’s, had for the most part already been written by the 1970’s. Their relationships, whether deeply rooted or casual, had been firmly established by their long history with Local 471. Nonetheless, most of them were not fully abreast of the political maneuvers of the union both before and after the lawsuit. They were swept up in a current of personal journeys as entertainers, as members of the Black community during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and as actors in a complicated and disparate landscape of entertainment that both unified and separated. They knew racism had played a role in employment opportunities and in their treatment by White colleagues. Yet, this compilation of memories leading up to the lawsuit reveals that Local 471

⁴³¹ Stanley Turrentine, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

members, even in their collective memories, held a variety of opinions and memories of the same period.

The opinions and recollections of these musicians demonstrate that there was no one collective experience and no one collective memory. Rather, there was a body of experiences and memories which harmonized at some points and not at others. When evaluating the legalities of the lawsuit brought by Local 471, it is easy to focus solely on racial discrimination, a narrative simply of individual and systemic racism. Nevertheless, these memories also reveal a complex nexus of elements that include racism but also societal factors, actions internal to the Black community, and personal behaviors. To various degrees, all of these contributed to the lawsuit pursued by former Local 471 members. Their grievances were rooted in events that occurred after the merger, but they also sprang from a deep seated and perhaps subconscious recollection of a time when they were the rulers of Pittsburgh's Black entertainment scene. By the time of the lawsuit, that was no longer the case. The music that long had insulated them from the most pernicious effects of racism had shown its limitations when they were forced to share the same entertainment spaces with Whites. Integration heated passions and frustrations to a boiling point, and they turned to the legal system as a remedy. Legal redress, however, turned out to be no solution. Paradise had been lost, and was not to be recovered.

In the years immediately after the lawsuit, live studio big bands were phased out of jobs, further undermining the employment landscape of Pittsburgh's jazz artists.⁴³² Early in 1974, George Childress, who had spearheaded the legal suit against 60-471, died. A beloved

⁴³² "Networks Phasing Out Big Bands," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 22, 1972: 21.

musician, Childress had served as both an assistant to the merged union president and a business agent.⁴³³

The legal measures which Local 471 members initiated in 1971 through filings with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission had dragged its way through the legal and court system for three years. The resulting defeat in court perhaps drained much of Local 471's membership. Black members had wanted an extension of the five-year agreement that guaranteed at least some Black representation on the executive board. This was denied and Black musicians were left to fend for themselves.⁴³⁴ This was not the end of the union, but it was the end of an era. By 1975, the White press shifted coverage away from jazz musicians, White as well as Black, to the labor struggles of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, focusing on a long, bitter strike for higher wages led by the Symphony's musicians, who were also represented by 60-471.⁴³⁵ Surprisingly, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, also ceased coverage of the struggle of Black jazz musicians against Local 60-471. Suddenly, and inexplicably, it seems their lives and struggles were no longer of compelling interest even to the Black public.

Perhaps not surprisingly, members of old 471 often speak less harshly of the evils of segregation than the disappointments of integration. They lament what happened when Blacks and Whites were forced together in social settings or found themselves competing for entertainment gigs. The Brown v. Board of Education case in 1954 had established that racial segregation had deleterious effects on the race, but Black musicians never felt inferior to their

⁴³³ George Childress, Obituary notice, *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 12, 1974: 25.

⁴³⁴ "Musicians Prepare for Legal Action," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 11, 1974: 1.

⁴³⁵ "Symphony Orchestra's September Strike," *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 9, 1975: 1.

White counterparts nor did they feel deprived because they had an all-Black union. On the contrary, they relished the all-Black enclaves that clamored for their musical gifts. They were not naïve as to how discrimination and segregation constrained their possibilities, but they often remembered the racially separate days of the 1940's and 50's as the best of times for themselves. Tommy Turrentine explained that in the Golden Years of Local 471, "everybody played with a lot of feeling...we knew how to hit that note...we will never recapture that...I learned that in the Musicians Club."⁴³⁶ His thoughts suggested that the closing of the Black social space, the Musicians Club, sounded the death knell for many. The lawsuit may have addressed post-merger inequities, but for many the more significant woes preceded the court case.

⁴³⁶ Stanley Turrentine, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

Chapter 7: Chuck Austin: Master Narrator

In the painful years following the court case, Chuck Austin and others sought a way to preserve and disseminate the story of Local 471. Toward that end, in 1996, he, along with Dr. Harry Clark, and other jazz supporters, established The African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh (AAJPSP).⁴³⁷ Over the next three years, the AAJPSP conducted interviews with former Local 471 members and preserved them at the archives of the University of Pittsburgh.⁴³⁸ The interviews include contributions from hometown trailblazers like Art Blakey, Mary Lou Williams and Ahmad Jamal, as well as accounts of lesser known local musicians.⁴³⁹

Many of the AAJPSP interviews were conducted by Austin himself. As a result, the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee provided a way for the participants to affirm and correct each other's memories. The back and forth conversations were dynamic. The enthusiastic memory sharing provides a vivid picture of Pittsburgh's jazz community as seen through the eyes of musicians. In addition, these interviews provide an opportunity for current and future generations to grasp the rich legacy and significant contributions made by Pittsburgh's Black jazz musicians.

The AAJPSP preserved the history of local 471 through more than oral testimonies. They also organized panel discussions, concerts, and workshops to show-case and extend the legacy

⁴³⁷ Mike Shanley, "The African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh Presents Day-Long Event," *Pittsburgh City Paper*, June 25, 2009, accessed online.

⁴³⁸ This description of the project is found on the University of Pittsburgh Library System website, Historic Pittsburgh; Guide to the African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh Oral History Project, Records and Recordings, 1995-1999 AIS.1998.04.

⁴³⁹ Mike Shanley, "The African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh Presents Day-Long Event."

of Local 471. They led the charge to get city recognition for famous buildings and locations vital to the city's entertainment past. In May of 2010, I personally wrote a letter on behalf of the AAJPSP to urge official support for a sign to mark the historic location of the former Local 471 union building in the Hill District.

The AAJPSP also managed to preserve at least a few of Local 471's records, which was important because most of the records had been lost in the merger. The AAJPSP also helped document the tense legal fight of Black musicians to secure equitable treatment as union laborers during the early 1970s. The willingness of AAJPSP to share stories from Local 471 has allowed historians to investigate the racial and economic dynamics that plagued Local 471 members both before and after the 1960s. In other words, Austin and the AAJPSP have been key to unlocking much of Local 471's musical past, documenting the systemic racism and economic challenges faced by musicians of color. The AAJPSP has also been a bridge between older and younger generations of music enthusiasts, something evidenced by an event held in 2019 called, "Generations of Jazz: The Wisdom of the Elders with the Enthusiasm of our Youth."⁴⁴⁰ The AAJPSP is the link between the past of Local 471 and its future, the embodiment of history being told from below.

Remembering and Reflecting on the Lawsuit

The founding of AAJPSP began one day in January, 1996 when Austin re-read a letter from the American Federation of Musicians stating that AFM Local 471 of Pittsburgh, PA had

⁴⁴⁰ "Generations of Jazz: The Wisdom of the Elders with the Enthusiasm of Our Youth," WZUM.org website, October 23, 2019.

officially merged with the White musicians local, Local 60.⁴⁴¹ The letter brought back memories of what should have been a moment for celebration became a time of trepidation and anxiety for him and his fellow Black musicians. Now, late in life, Austin found himself wrestling with memories of how he and his friends had lost their lawsuit alleging racial discrimination brought on by the merged Local 60-471.

Austin still regards the demise of Local 471 and the Musicians Club as fatal blows to the community of Pittsburgh jazz musicians. Thirty years after the merger, he was still fighting for vindication. As part of the leadership of the African American Jazz Preservation Society and a former member of Local 471, he felt compelled to tell future generations about the importance of Black union. Yet the dredging up of the past was painful, for it continually reopened old wounds. The feeling of disappointment never left. Recalling the merger and the lawsuit took Austin back to a time when White musicians were valued more than Black. He saw himself as a valiant soldier for Black rights, continuing the struggle despite the pressure of age and diminished energy. His statements alternate between optimistic remembrances of what Black jazz musicians had built in Pittsburgh and bitter reflections on past scars and current wounds.

Austin as a Central Part of This Study

Unlike most of his Black counterparts, Austin's personal music career survived both the merger and the closing of many venues where Black artists had once performed. Austin on-going professional success meant he could have easily ignored the acrimonious court case

⁴⁴¹ Shakura Sabur, "The More Things Change."

between Local 471 and Local 60, yet he chose to become involved with the case and fight to ensure equitable treatment for others. Ironically, he persevered despite being referred to by some as an “Uncle Tom,” either out of envy or out of a lack of awareness of the sacrifices he had made to keep his career alive. Austin bemoans the fact that many Black musicians give the union little support. Many offered a variety of reasons, such as the union didn’t really secure or provide jobs, took too much money from their paycheck, and didn’t stop racism. Austin spoke freely of those mistakes, but he never let go of his good feelings about what the union and the Musicians Club tried to do for Black artists.

When Austin is asked why he had engaged so deeply in the struggles that accompanied the merger and subsequent legal battles when he could have lived life as a musician free from all the confusion and bitterness, he smiles and explains that his deep involvement with the union began by accident.⁴⁴² While he had always been diligent about paying dues and supporting union leadership, he had not been part of that leadership. He had never held the office of president or been on the executive board. Once during the 1990's, he ran on a slate for union leadership for the merged union, but was not elected. Nonetheless, the nature of his diverse musical career pulled him into the struggle between Local 471 and Local 60. What was even more intriguing about Chuck’s career is that, when one looks closely at the events of his life, it becomes clear that he had been uniquely prepared to become a liaison between White and Black members of the merged union.

⁴⁴² Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 14, 2006.

When Austin offers memories of the past, he references mostly Black musicians. But he also speaks fondly of Jack Purcell, a White musical contractor who secured consistent work for him in the later stages of his career. Purcell often employed Austin to play during the 1960's and 70's, a time when societal tensions made the hiring of Black musicians over Whites a risky proposition among many White unionists.⁴⁴³ After the merger in 1966, the job market shrank for all musicians, both White and Black. White jazz musicians, who had always had more lucrative opportunities than their Black counterparts, maintained a tight grip on the best-paying musical jobs. However, thanks in no small measure to Purcell, Austin was one of the few Black artists, post-merger, who found consistent work. This placed him in an awkward position, never totally accepted by White artists, yet criticized by Black artists who felt that he must have “sold out.” Austin often mentions the constant friction between himself and some musicians. He expresses frustration with what he deems the “crabs in a barrel” mentality of Black Pittsburghers, a criticism he considers especially bothersome because it diminishes his own hard work and conscious effort to make his musical resume well-rounded enough to adapt to a changing cultural landscape.

Although Pittsburgh is noted for producing nationally renowned jazz artists, it is important to tell the stories of the many artists like Austin, artists who never achieved national stardom, but kept the local scene vibrant, who provided the oxygen for clubs and bars that exhaled good music on a nightly basis. Austin never attained national fame, but his musical training and flexibility gave him ample opportunities to find steady employment. He played in

⁴⁴³ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 14, 2006.

small bands and big bands. He turned down an opportunity to play on the road with Ray Charles, but remained in Pittsburgh and played for the Steelers band and in numerous local stage productions.

Austin is an example of how Black musicians had to learn to navigate changing economic and demographic conditions. This became especially true after the merger and the accompanying loss of both the union and the Musicians' Club. Austin provides a living example of how perseverance and flexibility allowed him to find work under rapidly changing circumstances. He knew that the key was to be prepared for whatever doors opened. He was not hindered by notions of what style of music "real" Black musicians were expected to play. He understood that while he loved playing amongst his own people, the disappearance of many Black clubs made it imperative for Black musicians to put down roots elsewhere. He felt that no longer did they have the luxury of making some quick money at any number of clubs in the Hill District or East Liberty. No longer did they have the luxury of not reading music.

Austin represents an important aspect of how African Americans should respond to racism and racial segregation, whether to strive for racial inclusion or make the best of separation. While the majority have favored inclusion, it has sometimes come at a severe price. The sense of loss can be great when a historically disenfranchised people try to assimilate into a mainstream that demands the dilution of their racial identity and culture. Austin typifies Blacks who, on the one hand, have a profound love for their people, but also realize that economic stability requires the ability to adapt, to become what the majority culture wants them to become, even at the risk of losing their cultural identity.

Austin achieved inclusion, but never lost himself. He reflects W.E.B. DuBois' notion of double consciousness—the idea that Blacks have to become skilled at navigating Black and White worlds within America. While able to transition from playing for mostly Black audiences to playing with Whites and for mostly-White audiences, Austin remained firmly grounded in certain principles. When talking about the problems of Black musicians, his voice is laced with bitterness and frustration. At the same time, however, he was aware of his own shortcomings as well as the frailties of the human condition that allowed White racism and Black defeatism to flourish. “It’s just Pittsburgh!” he sometimes exclaimed, exasperated that he no longer had words to identify why Blacks and Whites can’t move toward a more progressive understanding of race relations; or why many local musicians care little of Pittsburgh’s great musical past which should be inspiration for contemporary musicians. He laments that if Black artists are not aware of what came before them, they will never understand the nature of the beast that stands before them.

Growing up in Ben Avon Helps Austin See Nuance, Not Just Race

In several of our conversations Austin brought up the fact that though he considered himself a Pittsburgher at heart. He grew up in Black pocket of Ben Avon Heights, in a fairly integrated, moderately rural neighborhood that exposed him to the nuances of Black-White race relations. He recalls with a distinct look of sadness and hurt the rejection of his White grade school peers who never invited him over to their houses after school to play music. Nonetheless, these experiences did not preclude him from developing fruitful and long-lasting relationships with Whites later on in his life.

Austin's upbringing in a predominantly White area gave him the ability to traverse White and Black societal boundaries. While he never directly credited the racial experiences he endured as a child for creating his consciousness today, Austin is aware that his upbringing differed from that of most other Blacks. "I am a country boy from Ben Avon Heights," he says. As such, "it was maybe easier for me to see some of the racial problems and the mentality it created in Black people, than other Blacks who lived in the more urban parts of Pittsburgh. There is just a different mentality of country versus city people"⁴⁴⁴ Although Ben Avon was a relatively well-off area, Austin's family came from relatively humble beginnings. During his years in Avonworth High School, from which he graduated in 1945, Austin often was either the only, or one of the very few, African-American to participate in school activities. Until the eleventh grade, he was the only Black in the band. These formative years taught Austin how to voice Black concerns in a majority-White setting.

When asked about his role in the struggles among Pittsburgh Black musicians, Austin hesitates briefly, then pulls out a faded Black and White newspaper photo of his grandfather, George Austin. A trainer for the 1925 world champion Pittsburgh Pirates, George was the only Black person in the picture. Austin wonders aloud: "Maybe my grandfather passed something down to me in his blood."⁴⁴⁵ Whether the legacy of his childhood years or of his grandfather, Austin acquired an ability to navigate White and Black worlds. Never entirely comfortable in either world, he made better adjustments to the changing employment landscape than many of his peers.

⁴⁴⁴ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 14, 2006.

⁴⁴⁵ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 14, 2006.

In light of Austin's background and childhood, it seems a bit curious that he considers his involvement in the court case between Locals 471 and 60 as more an accident than a conscious decision. The members of Local 471 saw him as someone experienced in working with White folks, as well as someone who found regular work at a time when other Black musicians didn't. For these reasons, Austin became a key player in the case. It wasn't intentional, he insists, but necessary because most other Black musicians were not involved enough in union matters to have a clear idea of what was going on. They just assumed that, after the merger, they would get jobs.⁴⁴⁶

Austin insists that his initial involvement in the case was not intentional, but his personal history challenges that assessment. He was someone who as a child learned the pain of exclusion first hand when his White classmates only socialized with him up to a point. He had been the leader of his high school band, as well as the only Black in the band. He was someone whose grandfather had been the only Black staff member of the Pittsburgh Pirates during a time when Blacks were not allowed to play in the Major Leagues. He was someone who had won the respect of both White and Black employers because of his determination to accrue whatever skills were needed to be more broadly employable. He says he understood something his peers did not, that whether racism and discrimination were unfair became irrelevant. Blacks needed to look beyond the betrayal and inequities resulting from the merger. They had a responsibility to support Local 471, a responsibility which many had previously shunned. By the time of the merger, it was too late to abandon the struggle. Austin refused to be consumed by

⁴⁴⁶ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 14, 2006.

bitterness. His early years in Ben Avon taught him to channel his anger into pursuing his music by way of whatever avenues were open to him. Those years also prepared him to become a fighter in the movement to secure rights for Black musicians.

Sees Benefits of the Merger

Especially painful was the surprise at the outcome of the court case and of legal appeals that ran for six years, from 1971 to 1977. At the time of the merger, Austin had hoped the merger would open the way for economic opportunity and recognition by mainstream society. He explains, “My attitude was I didn’t want to do this [only play in Black clubs] all my life. I wanted to play downtown with the White boys.”⁴⁴⁷ These are the sentiments not of a man who felt there was something wrong with playing with his people, but rather of a man who knew that ultimately Whites would never respect Blacks as equals until Blacks had the opportunity to consistently play on the bandstand with them. Nor, he felt, would Blacks receive just compensation for a night’s work, relative to what White artists made, if they only played in Black clubs. “I had a family and realized I had to be prepared for more,” Austin says.⁴⁴⁸

Long before the merger and court case, traveling through the Jim Crow South had shown Austin the limitations that racial discrimination imposed on Blacks. Traveling around the country in the late 1950’s with Lloyd Price, he had been witnessed occasions when band members had to accept mandatory pay cuts. He saw how shows could be canceled at the last

⁴⁴⁷ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 14, 2006.

⁴⁴⁸ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 10, 2006.

minute, meaning no pay for musicians.⁴⁴⁹ He understood there was little true security for Black musicians. Thus, he saw the merger with skepticism because of racism from the past, but also viewed it with cautious optimism that a greater market for Black musicians' services would emerge.

However, Austin also remembered that, by the 1960s, many members of Local 471 offered only lukewarm support to the union. "Before the merge," he says, "we had a lot of fringe members who didn't pay dues and had a casual attitude or negative thoughts concerning the union. But there were some who went by the book and paid their dues." These attitudes, he adds, extended back in time several decades even as some union members always maintained hostile attitudes and or apathy towards leaders because of the perceived inability of these leaders to guarantee them jobs or a certain pay scale.⁴⁵⁰ For such members, Austin laments, "the merge seemed like the final straw for dropping out of the union. People weren't working, and the jobs that were left were as competitive as they should have been, because many Blacks had been in the clubs and not in the mainstream music scene."⁴⁵¹ So while young artists joined Local 60-471 when it was officially established in 1966, these artists didn't have the loyalty to 471 that previous artists had. And in reality how could one expect them to have strong feelings for the union when many of the older members of Local 471 were lukewarm in their support or didn't always take younger guys under their wings.⁴⁵² "We failed to convey to

⁴⁴⁹ Gorczyca, "Musician with a Mission."

⁴⁵⁰ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 8, 2005.

⁴⁵¹ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 8, 2005.

⁴⁵² Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 8, 2005.

younger guys, to communicate and bring them along,” Austin laments. “We splintered ourselves. Going back to the merge we died when we stopped socializing and communicating. The end result is what we have now.”

However, unlike most of his colleagues, Austin argued strenuously that the merger had some positive effects. “If we hadn’t had the merger,” he insists, “we wouldn’t have Local 471 today. At the time of the merger, there was not enough financial support in the Black districts. In Pittsburgh which is not too different from other places, many musicians were not unified or helping each other, or just didn’t want to do the work to gain the needed skills to play in White settings.”⁴⁵³ Thus, despite serious negative ramifications, the merger kept the union from dissolving.

Understands Why Support for the Merger Collapsed

Austin’s past shaped his views of the union, of the merger, and of the court case. His introduction to jazz occurred during a time of legally sanctioned, pervasive Jim Crow policies. He had traveled with vaudeville shows in Mississippi where even mundane actions required caution. He recalled two female performers trying on clothing in stores as they journeyed through the deep South in the 1950’s. He laughed as he remembered telling the female performers who dared to try on clothing, “You can’t do this, you are going to get us killed.”⁴⁵⁴

Austin had also played at venues where White and Black audience members were separated in the same auditorium, or were forced to attend separate shows. The experiential

⁴⁵³ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 8, 2005.

⁴⁵⁴ Guidry, “Chuck Austin, the ‘Perfect Sideman’.”

wisdom gained over the course of his life did not instill bitterness in Austin. Instead, it made him a diligent protector of the rights of Black musicians. It also made him appreciative of various opportunities available as his skill set and varied experiences that allowed him access to jobs which some of his counterparts did not have. This caused resentment amongst his peers, something Austin talked about frequently. It also meant that some of his peers attributed his consistent employment after integration to his currying favor with White employers in a way that was unsavory or simply based on the lottery of affirmative action. Sometimes referred to as an “Uncle Tom,” Austin says: “It hurt me that people I thought were my friends could say those things about me...I was fulfilling my dreams of becoming a top musician, and I knew that I had earned the job. It wasn’t given to me because I was Black.”⁴⁵⁵

Austin argues that Black support for the merger disintegrated for several reasons. For one, the merger did not pave the way for enhanced economic opportunity. Blacks lacked adequate leadership on the merged executive board after a five-year trial period in which three Black members out of six total members, were guaranteed seats on the executive board. When this merger agreement expired in 1970, no Black member of Local 60-471 would be voted to the executive board again for thirty years.⁴⁵⁶ Most upsetting, the court case charging the merged union with racial discrimination proved unsuccessful. Many Black musicians had seen the writing on the wall before the legal defeat. In the merged union, their collective body had become a minority segment. White members could easily outvote them and elect officers of their choosing. Some Blacks felt their chances for obtaining equality under these circumstances

⁴⁵⁵ Gorczyca, “Musician with a Mission.”

⁴⁵⁶ Gorczyca, “Musician with a Mission.”

were slim to none. Disappointed, attendance at union meetings and payment of dues waned. Apathy and despair only intensified after the court case. Some Blacks viewed Local 60-471 as showing preference to those who played in big bands or the symphony.⁴⁵⁷ The disgruntled feelings of Black members were not simply based on the social context of the time. Their feelings were based on an aggregate accumulation of experiences in a society that favored White Americans, even the inner sanctum of jazz.

Though Austin found himself grappling with the tension between Black and White musicians in 1966, he recalled that the problems leading to the demise of Local 471 were multifaceted. While many Black musicians blamed Local 60 and/or the members of Local 471 for the lack of jobs after the merger, he felt that blame could be shared by many parties. He insisted that loss of the Musicians Club was a key factor undermining the strength of Black musicians. “When we lost the club,” Austin says sadly, “we died.”⁴⁵⁸ The White musicians were so concerned with Black musicians fraternizing with White females that they banished the Musicians Club, the social setting that facilitated such fraternization. Doing so chilled social relations. But more importantly, it diminished the major strength of the Black jazz community, the informal networking fostered by the Musicians Club that provided emotional support, socialization, mentorship, and information about job opportunities. The Musicians Club was the place where Black musicians could become more cohesive and understand their rights. Many White musicians, by virtue of playing classical music, had training in reading music and so, in contrast to their African-American counterparts, could play the wider range of music demanded

⁴⁵⁷ Gorczyca, “Musician with a Mission.”

⁴⁵⁸ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 8, 2005.

by larger, mainstream venues. They benefited from the more formal networks and outlets available to those who plays in such venues. Most African-American musicians played jazz in clubs and bars, and so found the more informal networks cultivated in the Musicians Club essential to their playing careers.⁴⁵⁹

Another problem was the inequitable opportunities offered to Black artists. African-American club owners and musicians never prohibited Whites from playing in their establishments. In addition, Whites who felt uncomfortable playing in Black neighborhoods had the luxury of playing downtown and in White neighborhoods. Most Black musicians were informally restricted from playing in predominantly White neighborhoods and in downtown venues.⁴⁶⁰ Austin emphasized that Local 471's main goal was to ensure that Black musicians who got on a bandstand were dues-paying members of 471. They had little control over whether club-owners allowed Whites to play. Whites had been allowed to come fraternize in the Musicians Club, and a number took advantage of the opportunity and enjoyed the fellowship. Occasionally, Blacks like Austin who had personal relationships with Whites, or who were adept at reading music, or who had the skill of “doubling” (playing more than one instrument) were fortunate enough to be employed by Whites or play in front of majority White crowds. Nevertheless, such possibilities were quite limited for most Black musicians. Before the merger, many African-American musicians had accepted the fact that Whites had access to their establishment even if the privilege was not returned. For some, this created the false expectation that the merger would result in more equal interactions and correspondingly

⁴⁵⁹ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 8, 2005.

⁴⁶⁰ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 8, 2005.

greater opportunities. They expected to gain access to more lucrative jobs previously available only to Whites. These high expectations gave some a false sense of security that kept them from taking the necessary steps to improve their musical training in a way that would strengthen their chances of getting jobs once they were in direct competition with Whites for employment.

Many 471 members became very disillusioned when employment options decreased rather than increased. This was partly due to racism, but also to changing social, economic, and demographic conditions. Urban renewal closed many Black-owned establishments in the Hill; others closed for a variety of reasons. By the time of the merger, there already were substantially fewer places for Blacks to play. Black artists and former members of Local 471 grew increasingly dissatisfied with the results of the merger. Austin says many thought things would get better after the merger, but he wasn't sure that would be the case.⁴⁶¹ Many focused their frustration on Austin because of his consistent employment, including in "White" establishments. They also were angry with Local 471 for not supplying them with more jobs, forgetting or unaware that this had never been the primary function or responsibility of Local 471. The union's historic focus on protecting African-American rights had been effective—and applauded—in an era when jobs were more available.

After the merger, Austin says, many artists felt—correctly—that Local 60-471 was of little benefit to them. The newly merged union reneged on the agreement to treat Black artists equitably, reducing 471's former president to that of simply a board member in the newly

⁴⁶¹ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 8, 2005.

merged local. They promised jobs that never materialized.⁴⁶² As a result, Austin adds, Black support collapsed.

Critical of Black Attitudes

Austin and others tried to garner support for the union, but met resistance. He tried to get Black musicians to pass out flyers about the union but many, he says, “were just worried about the money.”⁴⁶³ He is critical of some jazz purists who approached the music as if they were playing for themselves. “[W]e played to the people,” he says, and

the people who pay to come see you are very important. I have found that musicians who are self-centered have not traveled the path I traveled. Black musicians are so often concerned about money. I remember shortly after the merger, me and Boswell, [the only Blacks playing] wanted to do some jazz workshops for this Jewish Seminary. We played free in some Jewish temples often, and the Rabbi would play—he liked the Congo drums. But because of this we got other opportunities.⁴⁶⁴

However, it was not just Black musicians at fault. Austin lamented that in the current social climate (the 1990s) Black musicians didn’t get the same degree of support from Local 60–471 that was accorded many local White musicians, who also got work playing for the local ballet and opera. Painfully aware of the disparity in opportunities available to Black musician, Austin continued to fight on. “It is hard for me to see or explain when and how real

⁴⁶² Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 10, 2006.

⁴⁶³ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 10, 2006.

⁴⁶⁴ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

integration[in Pittsburgh] will come about he says. I don't think I will ever see it in my lifetime. I do blame Pittsburgh. Coming from another area, I can see things Pittsburgh can't get beyond. Things are taken for granted. Most people don't want to talk to people or hear the truth."⁴⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Austin's fighting spirit was reinforced by his love for the art form. "In my lifetime," he says, "I want to do something in a positive fashion that will inspire young musicians and give hope to them that they can do better."⁴⁶⁶ Austin fought to educate people on the merits of Local 471 for two main reasons. First, he felt it was the older generation of jazz musicians, from the 1930's to the 1950's that put Pittsburgh on the nation's cultural map. Second, he continued to believe in the importance of music. "Music heals the body," he says, "it is soothing through trials and tribulations. I want to entertain you, make you smile. We are not here on earth but for so long, so I don't get involved with negative stuff."⁴⁶⁷

When asked about his involvement in protecting the rights of jazz musicians and enlightening people today, Austin said he did so because of the importance of the art form. Jazz music, he says, remains important because it has become an enduring, "standard form" of music. Some of the newer styles are popular for only a moment, like a fad. Even when you go back to rock-and-roll, it was popular only for that period of time. But jazz, Austin argues, is a mainstay. Even in sampling, artists often use jazz materials.⁴⁶⁸ Austin may have a point here because while jazz may not be as influential as it once was, Wynton Marsalis' Jazz at Lincoln

⁴⁶⁵ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

⁴⁶⁶ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 10, 2006.

⁴⁶⁷ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, May 10, 2006.

⁴⁶⁸ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

Center in New York, which opened in 2004, indicates that jazz enthusiasts are taking major steps to ensure that it remains a viable and relevant musical genre.

Austin feels that schools could help reverse the declining interest in jazz. Children, he says, need to be educated about jazz at an early age because it is “the true music of our forefathers.” Some schools, he says, are now trying to do better, and some jazz players are teaching, quite unlike the situation years ago when you had people teaching who did not know what they were doing. Classical musicians, he says, often get training and have degrees, whereas jazz players often do not. One of his former teachers, Carl McVicker of Westinghouse High School taught people like Errol Garner and Ahmad Jamal. In addition, he says, “the community added to the music experience—you don’t have this today.” The Westinghouse band is not doing as well as it should. “Basically, he adds, “the kids just memorize.”⁴⁶⁹

Austin was also adamant that, following the merger, Black jazz musicians seeking jobs had to step up their game in order to compete. He explained that Black musicians when performing with Whites “need that extra edge,” they needed to stay a step ahead be up on the tunes. They also had to develop strong listening skills and be versatile in their playing abilities.⁴⁷⁰ According to Austin Blacks also needed to become more proactive in the business side of music.

Many Black jazz artists don’t have that stake or control, like in hip-hop. Very few own companies or have access. Many Black artists haven’t taken the time to get business smarts. Whatever trade they were in, they were just concerned about getting paid. It

⁴⁶⁹ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

⁴⁷⁰ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 10, 2006.

never went beyond providing a service or understanding the business. There were a few Black managers and agents, but the majority were jazz players. Blacks were often just not conscious of the business part. I remember for example, Ray Brown's brother was a bassist. He was a CPA, and some wanted him to be a co-manager of our group. But most of the musicians didn't want him because he wasn't a musician.⁴⁷¹

But even after his detailed explanation of the results of the merger, Austin noted that Pittsburgh is a special case. "Pittsburgh is so far behind other cities," he laments. "In other places like New York there are more activities, more interest in jazz. Pittsburgh is another world. Many don't even understand what my current project [telling the history of Local 471] is all about. Sometimes we are like crabs in a barrel," he says, shaking his head in exasperation. But the tired look on his face is not the look of a man who has given up.⁴⁷² Rather, it is the look of a warrior who has paused momentarily in a struggle to assess his opposition.

Defends 471

Many former members of Local 471 commented on the strivings of the union to address economic opportunities. For instance, Austin noted that some musicians claimed that 471 cheated them out of money. Austin noted, "The union people did their jobs; there was no stealing. They just took the proper dues from whatever payment the club owners gave. People took it wrong. If they didn't pay dues, usually they got suspended after three times." Austin defends Local 471 against charges about shortcomings in collecting dues and in not being as

⁴⁷¹ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 7, 2006.

⁴⁷² Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 7, 2006.

well organized and well-run as Local 60. “I think the union [471],” he says, “was kind of slack in certain areas as far as collecting payments, because they were trying to look out for Blacks. Others have said Local 60 was more strict and probably better organized. I was told though by a member of Local 60 that 471 was stricter in terms of collecting dues from its members.”⁴⁷³

Pain and Disillusionment

Austin remained deeply troubled by the results of the court case. Losing the case seemed unfathomable, both at the time and decades later. It should have been a “no-brainer,” Austin felt. All they should have had to do was show a history of employment discrimination, and that should have been easy. Not only were Black musicians discriminated against because of race they, “were systematically excluded from work and discouraged from applying for work.” Segregation had excluded Blacks from playing in “White” parts of the city that paid handsomely but were largely reserved for White musicians. Even after integration of the two unions, Black artists were not given the same employment opportunities or pay as Whites. “We expected a more level playing field,” Austin says. “We expected folk to do the right thing. But that didn’t happen. So we had to go to court to be heard.”⁴⁷⁴

Decades after the bitterness of the legal defeat in the 1970’s, Austin delivered a sobering assessment of all the efforts he and his colleagues had put forth to protect the rights of Black musicians. Austin was one of the musicians in a 2004 performance of the famous musical, *Ain’t Misbehavin’*, in Pittsburgh. “I thought that our work in the musical,” he says,

⁴⁷³ Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 14, 2006.

⁴⁷⁴ Sabur, “The More Things Change.”

“proved that we Black musicians could do the job, any job that we were called upon to do.”⁴⁷⁵

Austin lamented that decades of proving to White America that Black musicians were capable performers had not significantly enhanced their job opportunities.⁴⁷⁶ This must have been a bitter pill for a man who had experienced the lush life of jazz in Pittsburgh. At the twilight of his life, Black artists were still not in a good position. And still, in my countless interactions with him, I never saw Austin’s smile fade, nor the passion for his peers abated. The love for jazz music sustained and buoyed him. His poignant memories and his willingness to preserve the recollections of others reflected this.

⁴⁷⁵ Gorczyca, “Musician with a Mission.”

⁴⁷⁶ Gorczyca, “Musician with a Mission.”

Chapter 8: Supporting the Master Narrative

Chuck Austin conducted most of the interviews organized by the African American Jazz Preservation Society. Most took place in the late 1990s, meaning that there was a reliance on memories that often reached back decades. Austin's own preferences shaped the interviews by directing the conversation and jogging the memories of those he interviewed. Because he lived through the periods they discussed he was often able to combine his remembrances with the interviewees to reconstruct a version of the past.

The interviews show that Austin was not the only one who lamented the effects of the merger and the failure of the lawsuit. Others echoed Austin in recounting how Local 471 provided a valuable support network for its members even if it couldn't always guarantee that members were paid a fair wage. They also bemoaned, like Austin, that too many musicians have given too little support to 471, at best paying their dues, but not getting involved in union activities. Most especially, they felt that the Musicians Club was the crowning glory of the union, that it provided them the sort of fellowship and exposure to other talented musicians that made life worthwhile. They considered the Musicians Club an invaluable part of the Local 471 experience, part of an entertainment landscape that was the equal of that found in any other city.

Like Austin, these musicians felt a deep sense of loss from the merger of Local 471 with Local 60. While print sources give a sense of the vitality of Local 471's past, interviews and personal testimony detail the lushness of the entertainment culture created by 471 and the Musicians Club. All in all, their narratives largely reinforce Austin's "master narrative" of the

glorious history and tragic demise of both Local 471 and the Musicians Club. The narratives also reinforce the fact that the musicians varied greatly in their background, training, personalities, and professional success. They were a lively, talented group, proud of their accomplishments and proud to be part of Pittsburgh's jazz scene. Their views reinforce those of Austin and are part of the master narrative of Local 471 that he wanted to leave for future generations. We will survey them, from some of the earliest members of 471 to the most recent.

Ruby Young

In the late 1940s, Ruby Young became the secretary of Local 471, taking over for Joe Porter and becoming the first female on the union's executive board, a position she would hold until 1953, when she became its secretary-treasurer.⁴⁷⁷ Young continued along her trailblazing path even after 471 merged with Local 60. Young also was an officer in the Pittsburgh Musical Society, and went on to become a key figure in contract negotiation between the merged Local 60-471 and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Young broke gender barriers in other ways. She was a vocalist, which was typical for women artists, but she also was a pianist and organist who had her own trio, which was not at all usual.

Young's talents had long been in high demand. She was one of the few Black musicians able to get work downtown, even before the merger with Local 60. When asked in 1996 about that, she replied proudly and at considerable length:

⁴⁷⁷ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

That's [not] the only place I played. I played all the after-hour spots. I played Honey Boy's, Duffy's Tavern. When we went in there, when Honey Boy said he had a gig at Duffy's Tavern, I wanted to go through the ground because Duffy's Tavern had a terrible name [reputation]. And we went in there and they had bouncers with their fists wrapped, you know. And we were there one week and they were all gone. Our people started coming and just ran the riff-raff out and Duffy's Tavern turned out to be one of the best jobs...And we worked the 320 Club. Oh, I can't remember the names of the clubs, after-hour spots. And, on Saturdays, now, we worked three jobs on Saturdays. We worked matinees, we worked early jobs and then, we went to the Washington Club. We worked the morning. We did that every weekend for years and I remember when Erroll Garner ...all the ball players...used to come to the Washington Club after hours and we entertained all of them. It was marvelous. And, I mean, it was classy. The nice people came in and no fighting. It was just beautiful.⁴⁷⁸

In addition to these, -Young also played in such desirable African American venues as the Hurricane, Taylor's, and even the prestigious Loendi Club.⁴⁷⁹

Again, it seems that Young had few difficulties finding work. Her status as a female possibly helped rather than hindered her opportunities, especially in finding work at predominantly White venues downtown. Her career illustrates how proper connections and formal musical training enhance opportunities for Black musicians to get work despite racism and the competitive environment.

⁴⁷⁸ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

⁴⁷⁹ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

Young had her share of problems with some fellow musicians. She describes an incident which led to her leaving Honey Boy, a prominent band leader on the local scene. She belonged in a group that included Calvin King, John Anderson, and Honey Boy. One night, after Calvin King absolutely electrified the crowd with his singing and skillful guitar playing, Honey Boy, whom Young describes as someone who "just had no respect for people," thereafter would not allow King to sing for fear of being overshadowed.⁴⁸⁰ Young's problems with Honey Boy continued when, one night, he asked her to pick up some musical equipment. Young's boyfriend, incensed that Honey Boy had asked her to lift some heavy things "as if she was some lackey, told Honey Boy, "...if I ever see you do that again, they'll put me in jail because I'll knock you out."⁴⁸¹ Thus, even though Young was well respected on the local music scene, there were times that as a woman she may have been vulnerable to mistreatment. Honey Boy, she said, was simply a difficult person to work with. However, despite misgivings, Young admires him for getting his musicians jobs that paid well above scale.

Young agrees with Austin about the importance of knowing how to read music. When she played as a teenager in Meadville, she and the rest of the group made good money because they all read music.⁴⁸² At the 320 Club, downtown, she played for a female singer name Boots Swan who, after being jilted by another musician, asked Young to play for her. The results were big paydays. "She [Swan] packed the house every night...If we made a \$50 tip that night, that

⁴⁸⁰ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

⁴⁸¹ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

⁴⁸² Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

night was slow,” Young says.⁴⁸³ Young also played in the El Moona Club where she was able to make \$50 to \$100 per job, excellent payment for a night’s work. As a matter of fact, the work was so good that it enabled Young to buy a house and furnish it in a year. She exclaims somewhat in shock even today, “that’s something for a sixteen year old.”⁴⁸⁴ So, again, Young’s career illustrates the difficulty of trying to generalize the experiences of Black musicians. She personally had few difficulties getting work, which she credits to both Honey Boy and the ability of her band to deliver what the public wanted.

In discussing the post-merger climate for other Black musicians, Young corroborates their recollections of diminishing opportunities. She also corroborates Austin’s lament about the lack of awareness among not a few musicians of the workings and history of 471. This lack of awareness and appreciation caused Young to join Austin and others in the work of the African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh. Young, like Austin, hoped the AAJPSP could help overcome the lack of dedication some musicians to their craft, which often goes hand in hand with a resistance to play certain tunes or styles if considered too “White” or unconventional.

Most importantly, though, Young’s success as an entertainer and officer of 471 demonstrates that the decline of opportunity did not affect all artists equally. Being a woman did not necessarily mean that her path to success was more arduous than that of a Black man. In fact she seemed to thrive in leadership positions, winning several elections in 471 against men. Her commitment to 471 made her one of the central figures in the court case following

⁴⁸³ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

⁴⁸⁴ Young, interview by Charles Austin, December 10, 1996.

the merger of Local 60 and 471. Overall, Young's attitude towards 471 was positive, although she felt that a few had betrayed her. Nevertheless, disappointment did not hinder Young from being fully invested in trying to protect the rights of musicians.

Charles Cottrell

Charles Cottrell started playing piano at the age of 12, learning his craft from his parents, both of whom played musical instruments. Early in his musical development, Cottrell fell in love with jazz music after hearing a blues group from Chicago. He says, "I heard this music and it set my soul on fire."⁴⁸⁵ After hearing Nat King and others performing and he became equally enchanted by the evolving styles of Black music.

Cottrell recalls how his love of jazz upset family routines. His parents had to deal with him playing at 3 am because, when ideas came to him, "there was no more sleep" and he would play.⁴⁸⁶ Cottrell was easy going and humble in his description of his past. He enjoyed being a "side-man" as opposed to playing solos. This fact impressed Chuck Austin, who noted that not many musicians were secure enough to cherish background or lesser stage roles.

Cottrell is an example of the disappointments felt by many Black musicians following the merger. Cottrell recalls that, before the merger, he found ample employment opportunities. During those good times, however, he, like many others, did not participate much in union activities. He simply kept his dues current. After the merger, however, Cottrell realized things had changed for the worse. "I went to one meeting after the merger," he says. "It didn't take

⁴⁸⁵ Cottrell, interview by Charles Austin, January 29, 1997.

⁴⁸⁶ Cottrell, interview by Charles Austin, January 29, 1997.

the sky falling on me to see where that was going ... Everything dried up. There were two spots where I know I could get work, but they stopped calling.”⁴⁸⁷

Despite his own experience, Cottrell, like Austin, feels that lapses in employment for Black musicians after the merger cannot solely be blamed on White racism. Cottrell feels that the younger generation hindered their own access to employment by not mastering the fundamentals of playing their instrument, or by only being able, or willing, to play one style of music.⁴⁸⁸ Cottrell, like Austin, feels it is important that older artists like himself help guide the current generation to practices that would enhance their appeal to employers. Like Austin and many others, Cottrell feels strongly about the sense of fellowship fostered by Local 471 and the Musicians Club. Cottrell fondly recalls, “It was more than just the union. It was not a time I couldn’t remember going in there [Musicians Club] and I didn’t feel as though I was richer...I would either learn something about music or I would learn something about life.”⁴⁸⁹ Cottrell stressed that, in addition to developing one’s musical skills, the successful musician also had to “be a psychologist,” someone also able to deal with business people “in various states of consciousness.”⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷ Cottrell, interview by Charles Austin, January 29, 1997.

⁴⁸⁸ Cottrell, interview by Charles Austin, January 29, 1997.

⁴⁸⁹ Cottrell, interview by Charles Austin, January 29, 1997.

⁴⁹⁰ Cottrell, interview by Charles Austin, January 29, 1997.

Frank Nelson

Frank Nelson had a different perspective from that of most other members of Local 471. He was largely unaffected by the merger and the struggle that followed it because his time with the union was brief. Nelson grew up on the Northside of Pittsburgh and was inspired by his uncle Norman Ball who played the saxophone in the Roger Humphries band. When his Uncle passed, he bequeathed his horn to Frank, who at the time was 15 years old and a member of the Oliver High School band.⁴⁹¹ In high school, Nelson played alto sax with a group called the Silvertones. This was really the peak of his music career.

Nelson graduated high school in 1948 and joined Local 471 the next year. However, even before joining 471 he was known locally for his work with the Silvertones, which enabled him to get into the Musicians Club. He appreciated that the Club drew luminaries to Pittsburgh and gave fellow musicians a sense of prestige and community. It was a space where one could rub elbows with the talented and famous and not even notice because there was so much excitement and so many people who came both for the music and for the food, especially its famous chili.⁴⁹²

The life of a Local 471 member could be seen as glamorous, but there also were darker episodes. Nelson told a harrowing story of the time when, as a young man, he was performing at the Bamboola Club. During a break, he went to use the restroom and, when he opened the door, he saw another musician with a needle in his arm. Perhaps this incident still haunted him.

⁴⁹¹ Nelson, interview by Charles Austin, July 26, 1998.

⁴⁹² Nelson, interview by Charles Austin, July 26, 1998.

When asked what advice he would give younger musicians, he replied, “practice, study, get into theory, take piano lessons, but [stay] as far away from drugs as possible.”⁴⁹³

Frank Nelson’s musical life was cut short as compared to that of some other artists. He played the sax for six years, from 1944 to 1950, when he had to have some teeth taken out before going into the military. After that, he was not able to play the sax. He considered becoming a disc jockey but moved on to other things, gradually losing interest in Local 471.

Because Nelson’s playing career was brief, he was largely unaffected by the merger of Local 60 and Local 471 and the ensuing aftermath. He retained good memories of Local 471 and the Musicians Club, especially while it was located in the Hill District. “[T]hose were the days,” he exclaims excitedly, prompting Chuck Austin to interject how everyone used to come to the Club Fridays and Saturdays.⁴⁹⁴

However, things were not always rosy. Nelson discussed an incident in which he lost his prized saxophone. “The day before I went into the service, Sonny Wilson said, ‘Frank, Cotton has to play somewhere and doesn’t have a horn. Will you loan him your horn?’ So I loaned him the horn and never saw it again.”⁴⁹⁵ Nelson’s voice dropped noticeably when he said this during his conversation with Chuck Austin, reflecting his disappointment in being betrayed by a peer. These incidents illustrate that being a member of Local 471 and having access to the Musicians Club were wonderful privileges with perks, but nonetheless there were negative experiences that sometimes get glossed over or excluded in the rosy sentimentalism of collective nostalgia.

⁴⁹³ Nelson, interview by Charles Austin, July 26, 1998.

⁴⁹⁴ Nelson, interview by Charles Austin, July 26, 1998.

⁴⁹⁵ Nelson, interview by Charles Austin, July 26, 1998.

In a remarkable exchange with Austin, Nelson admitted that Local 471 musicians never truly influenced his career, nor were they his role models. When asked which musicians inspired him, he said he wanted to imitate Johnny Hodges, but after he heard Byrd [Charlie Parker], “that was it.”⁴⁹⁶ Austin pressed Nelson about his local influences, but Nelson flatly stated that local Pittsburgh musicians “never made an impression on me at all.”⁴⁹⁷ This frank response seemed to reflect Nelson’s overall attitude that, while he had fond memories of the Musicians Club, he didn’t get involved in Local 471 business beyond paying dues. After he stopped playing music because of his teeth, he lost interest in the union and its activity. “I really have no concept of what happened or what was going on” [with the union], after the merger in 1965,” he says.⁴⁹⁸

When Austin and Nelson discuss the merger, Austin returned to his argument that discrimination wasn’t the only reason some musicians lost work. “A lot of the Black musicians,” Austin says once more, “couldn’t read that well, so they got eliminated not only because of racism, but because of their own doing,” Austin adds that skin color also played a role, in that light-skinned Blacks had more opportunities to find work in “White” venues. An artist like Duke Spaulding, he says, who was “real fair,” could “pass for White” and “slide by” because they were more accepted to White audiences. Austin says this with no bitterness or envy, only with the frankness of someone who understands the privileges accorded those of lighter skin color.

⁴⁹⁶ Nelson, interview by Charles Austin, July 26, 1998.

⁴⁹⁷ Nelson, interview by Charles Austin, July 26, 1998.

⁴⁹⁸ Nelson, interview by Charles Austin, July 26, 1998.

Finally, Austin reminded Nelson of just how prominent was the legacy of Local 471. “Any Black musician that came through this town,” he says, “had to come through 471, ... think of how powerful how influential ... 471 ... has been to the stars that come out of Pittsburgh,” he adds.⁴⁹⁹ Austin continued to make his case to Nelson about the union’s significance. “A lot of people don’t even know they had two separate unions,” he continues.

Nelson remained less engaged with 471, and tells his story with a degree of emotional distance. But Austin, like a skilled evangelist, never misses an opportunity to praise Local 471’s accomplishments while also sprinkling in the shortcomings of its members. The sum of this verbal exchange is an illustration of an elder helping a fellow musician comprehend the gravity of the legacy of 471. It is as if Austin’s passion, recollections, and encouragement open the eyes of his interviewees. Austin seems either to expand their appreciation of Local 471 or see that its legacy was being part of a cultural movement in which Blacks attempted to guard and present its musical gifts to America.

Robin Webster

While many Local 471 members spoke of the glamorous side of entertainment, Webster had a rough edge to his language that reminds the reader that the entertainment industry was filled with a myriad of characters, from sophisticated ladies and gentlemen, to hustlers and brutes. Robin Webster started playing music at the age of thirteen. It began one day while he was working as a shoeshine boy in his father’s barbershop. A man with a sax came

⁴⁹⁹ Nelson, interview by Charles Austin, July 26, 1998.

in. Robin took an interest in the horn, and ultimately the man sold him the saxophone for \$13.00. Webster was largely self-taught, but he learned fast when, as a fifteen-year-old, he would “fool around” at rehearsals in the Musicians Club on Wylie Avenue.⁵⁰⁰ It was during those sessions at the Musicians Club that he developed aspirations to become a professional musician.

After serving two years in the military, Webster joined Local 471 in the late 1940's. During his time in the military, even though racism initially prevented him from being in a band, he couldn't resist the urge to play. Sometimes at night, when others were asleep, he would go to the latrine and practice. Gradually, he built a following in which fellow soldiers would ask him to play certain tunes. After leaving the military he continued to play in Pittsburgh and built a large following. Henry Foster and His Crazy Cats was one of the first bands he played in.⁵⁰¹

Webster at some point met John Coltrane while the latter was a member of Dizzy Gillespie's band. It happened one evening when Webster was playing at an event where a fellow musician “got a little bit out of hand” and fell backwards, breaking Coltrane's saxophone. As Webster describes it, “this cat [Coltrane] walked up to me, kind of cat with no expression, tall thin guy. He says, ‘Hey man, what's your name.’ I said, ‘Robin Webster.’ Coltrane replied, ‘I'm John Coltrane. I think Dizzy [Gillespie] wants you in the band.’”⁵⁰² Webster was hesitant at first because he had a barbershop, but he soon joined the band. In thinking of those times, he says admiringly, “We had giants man.” Webster knew he had been a part of a special era in

⁵⁰⁰ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵⁰¹ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵⁰² Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

music. “Everybody wants to be an innovator,” he says, “and they think they are, but they’re not. It takes a long time for somebody to come up with something new like Bird [Charlie Parker] or Diz [Dizzy Gillespie]. That’s a once in a lifetime thing, and we were lucky to be around Bird and Diz.”⁵⁰³

Skilled at playing the saxophone, clarinet and flute, Webster rarely played with any group for more than a few years. He feared becoming stagnant and pushed himself into new challenges. He played for a band featuring Jackie Wilson, and complained happily, “those cats worked me to death.”⁵⁰⁴ He hooked with Joe Westray’s band in 1948, playing in the Pirate Inn for four years in the 1950’s. He met Della Reese while playing in the band for her.⁵⁰⁵

Webster’s interview revealed that he could be quite cantankerous when pushed or irritated. He spoke about how some of the older musicians like Tommy Turrentine would try to intimidate the younger musicians, but he never backed down. Secondly, he resisted discriminatory treatment by White clients. In his early days as a musician, he said he didn’t often play for scale because he got special rates because of the bands he was playing with. Performing in White clubs during his early career, he said, “I was a problem there too because I didn’t take no shit!!”⁵⁰⁶ He commented further that Joe Westray often reminded him, “we go to play music, we don’t go to fight...we ain’t going to war.”⁵⁰⁷ Webster was equally aggressive

⁵⁰³ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵⁰⁴ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵⁰⁵ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵⁰⁶ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵⁰⁷ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

around Black clientele. He discussed one incident in which his payment for a performance was delayed. He cornered the manager in a rest room. “I got ‘m down in the men’s room and said mother-----! Give me my money now or I’mma flush you down the toilet.” He was paid.⁵⁰⁸

Webster’s colorful stories highlight the variety of characters in the music business. Formal and informal ruffian tactics were a natural part of the negotiating process between musicians and contactors.

Austin explained to Webster how, from the very beginning, he was impressed by Local 471. “On my union card,,” he says, “I remember seeing, *Musicians Protective Association ...* Someone had explained to me early on, the role of the union was to protect and help us get our money from these jive promoters and contractors.”⁵⁰⁹ At the same time, Austin lamented the lack of discipline in some musicians who did not honor the scale, thereby making it harder for Local 471 to be an effective protector. Webster agrees, adding that most of his interactions with Local 471 were positive, especially when he was new to the business. He describes older musicians like Claude Fisher as being helpful and kind, and that he and Kenny Spaulding became “tight as a drum.”⁵¹⁰

Because of his early history with 471 and the Musicians Club, Webster, like Austin, has reservations about the younger generation, and feels that the camaraderie of the old Musicians Club has been lost. Partly, this was because Pittsburgh had lost many of its Black clubs and music venues. Austin recalled how saturated Frankstown Ave was with entertainment spots.

⁵⁰⁸ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵⁰⁹ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵¹⁰ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

“You could go out one door and go two doors down,” he says, and “right next door ... guys were ... playing live music.”⁵¹¹

These two pillars of Pittsburgh’s jazz community felt something important had been lost with the younger generation. Austin frankly says, “It’s a sad state of affairs for the young Black musicians, because they have nobody to identify with.”⁵¹² Webster was even more critical. “They [younger musicians] don’t respect older musicians. I couldn’t tell one of those ... kids nothing.”⁵¹³ This statement at first may seem hypocritical considering Webster was quite the rebel as a young man. However, one could surmise that Webster might differentiate between his own aggressive willingness to stand up for his wages and self-respect and the unwillingness of young musicians to listen to take advice from their more seasoned peers.⁵¹⁴ Austin also felt that many young musicians were given so much positive re-enforcement that when they entered the real world they would run up against harsh criticism that could break their spirit. Constructive criticism by elders who had played jazz at an elite level, Austin argued, was necessary in order to help the youth become better. Webster agreed.⁵¹⁵

One of the most illuminating parts of the exchange between Austin and Webster was their discussion of the union merger in the 1960’s. Austin pointed out that Local 471, from what he remembered, always had a few White members, and therefore members considered

⁵¹¹ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵¹² Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵¹³ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵¹⁴ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵¹⁵ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

themselves already integrated. Whites had long been welcome in Local 471, a practice that went back decades to the racially integrated "Black and tan clubs" of the 1920s that existed in Black neighborhoods. However, tension always existed because many Blacks knew that when the music stopped they were not welcome in White spaces.

Webster agrees with Austin that some Black members of Local 471 were not able to adapt to the employment landscape after the merger because they could not read music and refused to learn to do so. For that reason, they remained stuck playing tunes popular in the 1950's such that, by the time of the merger in the 1960's, their resistance to change, along with their inability to read music, limited their opportunities to perform.⁵¹⁶ To support Austin's point, Webster provided an illustration of how Black musicians were often viewed as not proficient in the technical nuances and theory of music because so many of them played by ear. He talked about preparing to play behind a female vocalist. However, in order to put on the performance, the musicians had to complete a process called transposition. This process requires them to play a song in a different key, higher or lower. Webster explained that he and his colleagues were able to adjust and complete the process easily so that the vocals and the music could synchronize.⁵¹⁷ Those who mastered such skills fared better after the merger, Webster and Austin both agreed, while others floundered.

⁵¹⁶ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

⁵¹⁷ Webster, interview by Charles Austin, September 25, 1997.

Harold Lee

Austin's interview with Harold Lee reveals several troubling issues, notably a degree of in-fighting among Black musicians that no doubt hindered Local 471's effectiveness. A native Pittsburgher, Lee had been interested in drumming since around the age of twelve. Some of his earliest gigs were at the Enterprise Hotel in McKees Rocks, a local mill town, with musicians like Tommy Turrentine, brother of Stanley. Lee progressed rapidly as a drummer; while still in junior high school, was allowed to play in the Langley High School marching band. In addition, he got to take private lessons under Bill Hammonds, a man whose rigorous teaching style Lee describes as a "hammer."⁵¹⁸

During the 1940's, Lee became so involved in music that he neglected his studies. At around the age of 17, he got a job playing for the Step 'n' Fetchit show when it came to the Roosevelt Theatre downtown. He got another job playing for a short time with Max Roach in Indianapolis. He then landed a gig in Knoxville, Tennessee, where he ran up against an old childhood competitor, Joe Harris, who had also studied under Bill Hammonds. Lee says Joe was "kickin' ass" as a musician. "I couldn't stay then...so I grabbed my gear, came home, went into the Navy, and did well."⁵¹⁹ This exchange helps illustrate that the entertainment business could be cutthroat and competitive. Yet, it was also clear that while some jobs may have been difficult to get, many Black musicians found opportunities in those days to perform. In the Navy

⁵¹⁸ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

⁵¹⁹ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

for instance, Lee became well known in military circles as he played on aircraft carriers. Officers would request his services, saying, “go get the ‘brother’ ” when they wanted him to perform.⁵²⁰

Lee left the Navy after two years of playing and traveling overseas. Around 1946, he returned to Pittsburgh, joined Local 471, and found work playing with Carl Arter’s Silvertones. Lee makes it clear that the restrictions on Black musicians performing downtown were not solely due to racism or segregation, and adds that he had his own run-ins with union leadership. Having played in many different places, both nationally and internationally, Lee at times felt restricted by the union. He paid his dues but avoided involvement in its operations, even though he often disagreed with some of the leadership and their actions. “I wasn’t right,” he admits, but adds, only half-jokingly, “they wasn’t right.”⁵²¹

Lee agrees with Austin that, during the 1940’s and 50’s, Pittsburgh offered Black musicians plenty of entertainment opportunities. Still, many Blacks found work by undercutting their peers and accepting pay that was less than union scale. Lee says some who had a big reputation like Joe Harris, actually priced themselves out of work. There were so many Black musicians willing to play below scale that artists had to be careful when they negotiated financial terms with proprietors. Lee had personal experience with this. He says that Joe Harris dominated so many opportunities that “I undercut Harris with the price or I wasn’t going to get a bowl of beans.”⁵²² This type of ruthless competition was evident in Pittsburgh as both Austin

⁵²⁰ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

⁵²¹ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

⁵²² Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

and Lee mentioned that Pittsburgh establishments would often settle for lesser skilled players “in order to save money.”⁵²³

In discussing the Musicians Club, Lee confirmed Austin’s belief that it was a stimulating and vibrant venue in which to play and socialize. He enjoyed “quite a few sessions” playing at the Musicians Club in its Hill District location.⁵²⁴ Lee agrees with Austin about Local 471’s less than meticulous record keeping. Austin added that Local 471 resorted to padding its membership rosters during the merger to give the impression it was stronger than it really was. Austin maintains there were only about 100 dues paying members at the time, but Local 471 suggested there were about 200 by including those who may not have been current or caught up with their dues. This was important because, after the merger, those members who paid dues were able to get their death benefits and pensions.

Austin added that the merger enabled musicians to receive a pension if they kept up with their financial obligations, but the importance of doing so eluded many former Local 471 members. Some, like Austin, were knowledgeable about union affairs and fared better than others after the merger. The latter, he says, got lost in the changing social landscape and succumbed to despair and bitterness. Nevertheless, Austin’s interview with Lee underscores how difficult it was for the union to police the actions of members. This, along with rivalries, infighting, and poor record keeping, limited the effectiveness of Local 471.

Lee reinforces the fact that many Black musicians harmed their own chances for a successful career. He said he tried to teach younger artists the importance of mastering their

⁵²³ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

⁵²⁴ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

instrument and not to get caught up with “socializing.”⁵²⁵ Lee honestly referenced his own penchant for the latter, getting into minor trouble and not always being as serious on the gigs as he could have been. Lee was not bitter, only honest about the investment Black musicians had to make to succeed. But even those who fell short seemed to have enjoyed their moments of recognition during the Golden Years of jazz in Pittsburgh. Harold Lee was no different; he laughs at mishaps during his career, but says he has no regrets.

George “Duke” Spaulding

George “Duke” Spaulding provides another confirmation of Austin’s judgment about the merger and lawsuit. One of the oldest members of 471, Spaulding died in 2018 at age 95, playing music almost to the end. He differs from many other musicians in that for much of his career he often played with White bands before audiences that were predominantly White. Spaulding spent his early years in Asheville, North Carolina. There, inspired by his mother, he got interested in music at the tender age of four. As a child, he lived around the corner from a place called Waltz Dream. From his bedroom window, he could hear the famous jazz musician Fats Waller playing the piano. Spaulding later got to meet Waller, which inspired him to become a pianist.⁵²⁶

Spaulding spent three years at Julliard Music School in New York, where he honed his piano skills playing classical music. After three years, he left Julliard to fight in WWII. After his discharge, he got a telegram from Pittsburgh musician Leroy Brown, who had heard of

⁵²⁵ Lee, interview by Charles Austin, July 3, 1997.

⁵²⁶ “Master Pianist George H. ‘Duke’ Spaulding Passes at 95,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, March 2, 2018.

Spaulding's outstanding playing for troops in the military. Spaulding came to Pittsburgh, joined Local 471, and played with Leroy Brown's band, one of the few Black bands that played downtown to White audiences.

While Spaulding maintained a day job to supplement his income, he was able to play music five to six nights a week during the 1940's and 1950's. For a musician living in Pittsburgh—and even at times in places like New York—it was difficult to make a living working solely as a musician. Bandleaders might have been able to do this, Spaulding says, but only by underpaying the band members.⁵²⁷ Spaulding played at the Musicians Club during the 1940's but did not praise the local music scene to the same extent as Austin and Turrentine. In addition, Spaulding says, local musicians found it hard to get entertainment opportunities if they didn't belong to certain cliques.⁵²⁸

Spaulding enjoyed playing downtown, partly because of the elegance and formality. "We had tails," he says proudly, referring to the tuxedos they often wore while working.⁵²⁹ However, Spaulding explains, fraternization with Whites was kept to a minimum, and only "just a handful" of Black patrons were ever allowed into these places. Spaulding indicated that his access to these White spaces was due to the connections that Leroy Brown had cultivated with White proprietors. He doesn't say so, but it also was probably helped by his light complexion. In any case, access to downtown venues wasn't simply a matter of talent. Blacks also needed to

⁵²⁷ George Duke Spaulding, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by Charles Austin, October 2, 1997.

⁵²⁸ Spaulding, interview by Charles Austin, October 2, 1997.

⁵²⁹ Spaulding, interview by Charles Austin, October 2, 1997.

broker relationships with influential Whites. Because of this, very few Black jazz artists gained access to such spaces.

When asked about the politics of playing in the union, Spaulding agreed with Austin that many Black musicians played for less than scale, which he said was occurring even in 1997, the year he was interviewed by the AAJPSP. Austin stressed in the interview that the proper procedure was to play a gig, leave, and then a few weeks later receive a check in the mail. Being compensated this way allowed artists to have taxes deducted and earn a pension and death benefits. However, Austin intimated that 80-85% of musicians who came through Local 471 were not able draw a pension and were not eligible for death benefits because they hadn't paid their dues. In addition, some ended up owing the government money because they hadn't had proper taxes deducted from their wages.⁵³⁰ Spaulding did not dispute that contention by Austin.

Spaulding had mixed feelings about the so-called "Golden Years," even though in many ways he had lived a charmed life. He did not rhapsodize about the "Golden Years" and the Musicians Club like some of his contemporaries. He had integrated himself into mixed race bands as well as in churches, which insulated him somewhat from the consequences of the merger. Besides paying dues, he didn't participate in union affairs. Therefore, his career was another in a large sampling of musicians who maintained only loose ties to Local 471. As Austin maintained, these tenuous connections by many members no doubt played a role in lessening Local 471's ability to protect the rights of its members.

⁵³⁰ Spaulding, interview by Charles Austin, October 2, 1997.

Spaulding opposed the merger between Locals 471 and 60, feeling it was government-imposed and should have been handled internally by the two locals. He also felt that Local 471 could have put up a greater fight during the integration proceedings if the Black local had had more financial wealth, comparable to what he had seen in places like Chicago and Buffalo.⁵³¹ Nevertheless, because he had ample experience playing with White bands and dealing with White club owners—and maybe to some degree because of his light complexion—Spaulding said the merger didn’t disrupt his employment. He was as busy after the merger as he had been before.⁵³²

Dave Lee

Dave Lee’s story resembles that of Cottrell. Lee joined Local 471 in 1954 without formal training in music. Like many other Black musicians, he learned music simply by interacting with others, again highlighting the importance of mentoring. Lee speaks with gratitude about Bobby Anderson, one of his early mentors. He described being overwhelmed while playing during one performance as he tried to keep up with the frenetic pace of the music. “I was trying to go straight 4 by 4 and it hung me up...Bobby was one of the few that would give me good information...I asked Bobby “how do you play that, man, and he showed me how to play it, and I said, ‘I’ll be faster next time’.”⁵³³ Lee mentions others important to his growth as an artist. “I played with Clark Jones, Fitzpatrick, all those non-union guys,” he says. “It was the beginning of

⁵³¹ Spaulding, interview by Charles Austin, October 2, 1997.

⁵³² Spaulding, interview by Charles Austin, October 2, 1997.

⁵³³ Dave Lee, interview by Charles Austin, March 6, 1998.

learning how to get a beat...I was told don't play with them, stay ahead a fraction."⁵³⁴ It was these subtle nuances known by the elders who had mastered the music, that were needed to play the in the aggressive jazz scenes found in required by Pittsburgh. But both Lee and Austin agreed that the key for emerging artists during the 1940's and 1950's was to listen to experienced musicians. Less experienced musicians wanted to learn from the masters so that one day they could take their spot on the pedestal. It was a loving, but fierce, competition that made mentors and mentees sharper and stronger. The relationships were reciprocal. Older, more adept musicians possessed the wisdom to pass on, while the younger, less adept had the responsibility of listening and learning.

Lee agrees with Austin that many Black musicians never learned to read music. As a result, they lost out on employment opportunities where they might be asked to play a tune they were unfamiliar with. Lee recalled instances when musicians embarrassed themselves on stage. He advises, "don't say you can read, then get up there stumbling...ain't got time for that...If a boss [unclear] ask me if I can [read music] I'd say I can't read shit, [laughter] that's the way to go."⁵³⁵ The point here is that there was always knowledge available for the taking but it was up to musicians to embrace the lessons that existed all around them.

The career of a musician wasn't simply about playing the music. Aesthetics and style also mattered. Musicians knew they had to be what was known as "clean," in which a "sharp" appearance was essential to success. "I used to watch [local musician] Nash," Lee says. "He had his initials on his socks, he was clean! ... What did they say when I joined the union, you gotta'

⁵³⁴ Dave Lee, interview by Charles Austin, March 6, 1998.

⁵³⁵ Dave Lee, interview by Charles Austin, March 6, 1998.

have a blue suit, a Black tie, and a White shirt, and Black shoes. That was a must” when you went on a job.⁵³⁶

Nevertheless, like many other musicians, Lee was only casually involved in union affairs. He stayed up on his dues but was disdainful of the way the union operated after the merger. “The old guard couldn’t care less,” he says bitterly. “Who did they look out for? The guys in the symphony,” he says, referring to the fact that members of Local 60-471 employed by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra were almost exclusively White.⁵³⁷ Lee even implied that the collection of pension dues was akin to a “hustle” because he wasn’t sure that Blacks benefitted. He explained that sometimes Blacks would get offended by the scale wages offered to play at certain venues because they weren’t being compensated for the other factors like having to carry around heavy equipment. He referenced an organist who had to carry his organ around. On this, Austin disagrees with Lee, arguing that if more Black members of 471 had consistently paid their dues before the merger, they would later have been in a better financial position.⁵³⁸

Stanley Turrentine

While most of the musicians interviewed by Austin and the African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh were known locally, a few had achieved national and even international acclaim. Pittsburgh-born saxophonist Stanley Turrentine was one of the latter. Born into a family of musicians, Turrentine took an early interest in music, which he credits to

⁵³⁶ Dave Lee, interview by Charles Austin, March 6, 1998.

⁵³⁷ Dave Lee, interview by Charles Austin, March 6, 1998.

⁵³⁸ Dave Lee, interview by Charles Austin, March 6, 1998.

the influence of major local figures, Carl Arter and Leroy Brown, who served as influential tutors.⁵³⁹ Turrentine also credited his brother, Tommy, as someone who guided, trained and toured with him as his career flourished.⁵⁴⁰ Turrentine praised the Musicians Club and its top notch artist members for helping him hone his skills. “The Musicians Club,” he said, “that was a focal point.”

I saw almost everybody [there] that I loved. I saw Art Tatum reach for a beer with his right hand, by the piano [while still playing]. I said, “this cat must have 3 or 4 hands!!” ... It was every night and every day, really positive and 471 was a focal point. You had to come there. That was the only association we had.⁵⁴¹

Turrentine started his professional career playing for five dollars a night with his brother Tommy and several others at the Perry Bar.⁵⁴² He spoke of this seemingly paltry amount with joy, as part of his initiation into the entertainment business. Later, he performed in Joe Westray’s band alongside such outstanding musicians as Robin Webster and Dakota Staton. Turrentine considers Westray as a father figure who even allowed him to live in his home at one time.⁵⁴³ Formal relationships among Black musicians were important, but Austin’s interview with Turrentine reveals the importance of informal and familial relationships as well.

⁵³⁹ Stanley Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin.

⁵⁴⁰ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

⁵⁴¹ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

⁵⁴² Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

⁵⁴³ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

Around 1951, Turrentine joined Local 471, paying approximately \$35 for a membership fee. In 1959, after serving two years in the army, he came back to Pittsburgh and immersed himself in its lively jazz scene. “When I first got here in 1959,” he says, “you didn’t have to go downtown to play. It was a lot of jam sessions, everywhere.”⁵⁴⁴ Turrentine played with Max Roach, Bobby Boswell, his brother Tommy, and others like Abby Lincoln, as they built an international following that included tours in Europe. During this time, Turrentine did a lot of recording, including with the nationally famous Max Roach band.⁵⁴⁵ While Turrentine spoke fondly of his time overseas and nationally, he expressed a special love for his Pittsburgh roots and how his native city nurtured him. He described the 1950’s as “so much fun” with so many jam sessions. “When we’d finish at the Perry Bar, we would run down to the Musicians Club, [where] I would hear Carl Arter and these cats,” he rhapsodizes.⁵⁴⁶

Turrentine emphasized that musicians of his generation had “more camaraderie back then, it was all about the music, we supported each other.”⁵⁴⁷ This internal support, he says, shielded Black musicians from the downside of segregation. “We didn’t want to go down to Local 60, and we didn’t need to...that’s one of the things missing today.”⁵⁴⁸

For Turrentine, playing with fellow musicians created a unique, positive feeling. He recalls the time he and Ray Brown were doing an interview at a radio station in Boston, and a

⁵⁴⁴ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

⁵⁴⁵ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

⁵⁴⁶ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

⁵⁴⁷ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

⁵⁴⁸ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

young girl asked them "where is jazz going?" Brown responded, "I don't know where it is going, but I sure hope they keep the feeling."⁵⁴⁹ Turrentine admired the Musicians Club, but was not deeply involved in the operations of Local 471. He explained he was more consumed with charting his own career and wasn't able to focus on what others were doing. Despite focusing on his career, Turrentine managed to develop excellent relationships with other Black musicians. He said some of them even prayed together, and that friendships within the music fraternity became "a school in itself."⁵⁵⁰

Nevertheless, Turrentine states emotionally that race influenced his music. Traveling in the South with Ray Charles exposed him to segregation and aggressive discrimination. They stayed in racially separate hotels and toured on a "raggedy bus." But when they got on stage, regardless of what they had gone through, they performed.⁵⁵¹ Your experiences, Turrentine says, "affect the way you think, the way you approach music. You might see somebody get killed that day, and your reaction, you 'play' that. You can't verbalize it, but you play it ... You play from your experience."⁵⁵² Turrentine says his music came from his life circumstances. The things he saw as a Pittsburgher and growing up during the Jim Crow era gave his music a particular sound.⁵⁵³ He noted that when the music business changed during the 1960's, too many became disconnected from the good feelings and musical foundation of the past. For

⁵⁴⁹ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

⁵⁵⁰ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

⁵⁵¹ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

⁵⁵² Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

⁵⁵³ Turrentine, interview by Charles Austin, November 23, 1997.

Turrentine, the merger of Local 60 and Local 471 was simply a symptom of an era that was fading away.

Despite this, Turrentine felt that all was not lost. Teaching young students at the University of North Carolina offers proof, he feels, that jazz was still vital. He jokingly says he could barely keep up with the young, university musicians, but they inspired him because they had the same hunger for jazz that he remembered having as a young boy visiting the Musicians Club. These young musicians, he says, would be the worthy caretakers of jazz music—even in an era where jazz was no longer the central music expression of the Black community.

Kenny Fisher

Saxophonist Kenny Fisher is another well known Pittsburgh musician. His quartet, which included, Jesse Kemp, pianist, Wade Powell, trumpet, and Tony Fountain, drummer, traveled the U.S., Europe, and the Caribbean. But they played primarily in local spots like the Loendi Club and the Crawford Grill.⁵⁵⁴

Fisher's love of jazz began at the age of sixteen under the encouragement of his father, who took him to music venues like the Rose Bar in the Hill. In such places, he observed and learned from such musicians as Robin Webster, Bill Gambrell and Walt Bradford. But it was after the family moved to East Liberty that Fisher's love of jazz intensified. He regularly visited the Musicians Club, located then on Frankstown Avenue, where he met leading musicians like Jimmy Armstrong and his big band. Waxing nostalgically, Fisher says he can "remember the first

⁵⁵⁴ "Kenny Fisher Plays With the Angels; Pittsburgh Jazz Icon Passes at 69," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, November 5, 2009.

time I went ... there was a big band going on in the club ... and I talked to these guys and they told me how to get a teacher.”⁵⁵⁵ This commentary reinforces the fact that it was the networking of the Musicians Club that most captivated Black artists.⁵⁵⁶

Fisher joined 471 around 1955, during the time when the union was still located in the Hill. After the merger and subsequent lawsuit, Fisher became an active member of the AAJPSP oral history project. Like many of his peers, he had been only casually involved in union affairs. This became evident when, as Austin prodded him for details about how he felt about the merger, he offered only brief responses.

Fisher’s reticence perhaps speaks volumes. It was not Local 471 that held his loyalties. It was the Musicians Club, which he was more than happy to talk about. “I remember,” he says, “we would go there quite a bit. They would have sessions in the basement” where he saw stars like Horace Silver and George Coleman perform.⁵⁵⁷ Like many of his fellow Pittsburgh entertainers, Fisher was mesmerized by people he met and hung out with in the Musicians Club. Only those who lived through it, he says, can understand how much was lost. Fisher went on to have considerable success as a musician, but as was the case with his contemporaries, he feels strongly that he could not have become successful without the opportunities offered by the Musicians Club.

⁵⁵⁵ Kenny Fisher, interview by Charles Austin, July 28, 1997.

⁵⁵⁶ Fisher, interview by Charles Austin, July 28, 1997.

⁵⁵⁷ Fisher, interview by Charles Austin, July 28, 1997.

Pete Henderson

Pete Henderson was another former member of local 471. At the age of nine, his dad one day brought him an old silver horn in a paper bag and simply said, “play me something.” Henderson started learning the French horn initially but gave it up due to an incident at Baxter Junior High School in Homewood when the music teacher told him that he couldn’t play the horns because his lips were too big. Thankfully, young Henderson had his trumpet at home, given him by a neighbor who told him to pick out one from the music store. Henderson paid the neighbor back with the money he earned from his paper route and odd jobs. Henderson went on to study at Westinghouse High School under the legendary instructor Carl McVicker. His most influential training occurred in the Army, which he joined in the mid-1950’s and played in a band full of former teachers.⁵⁵⁸

In 1958, after getting out of the military, Henderson went on to play with many stalwarts of the local jazz scene, including Jerry Elliot, Walt Harper, and Joe Westray. Henderson spoke glowingly of the Musicians Club and his early years with Local 471, exclaiming: “We felt so big to be a part” of the union.⁵⁵⁹ Chuck Austin echoed these sentiments, adding, “When you joined the union, you took on a totally new persona ... in terms of how you felt playing music, you was with the big boys!”⁵⁶⁰ Henderson reveled in the camaraderie he found at the Musicians Club, appreciating that it was open all day and all night. “And at that time,” he says, “it wasn’t

⁵⁵⁸ Pete Henderson, interview by Charles Austin, March 8, 1998.

⁵⁵⁹ Henderson, interview by Charles Austin, March 8, 1998.

⁵⁶⁰ Henderson, interview by Charles Austin, March 8, 1998.

little jazz groups. There were bands, man! It was always somebody there that would teach you....It was like a brotherhood. I felt very comfortable. Yes!”⁵⁶¹

Over time, however, Henderson lost interest in Local 471, partly because he had gotten into drugs. This affected his playing, and resulted in union officers treating him as something of an outcast. Henderson admitted that, while battling drugs, he was often "spaced out" and not focused on building relationships with union members. Moreover, he felt disappointed by the union. He laments that sometimes he hired 471 union members to play at gigs, only to discover that they couldn't play the arrangements. He would fire them on the spot, but then was reprimanded by Local 471 because it was against union policy for a musician to be fired in that manner. In another instance, a union member he hired asked for an advance. Henderson summarily rejected the request, and ran up against union objections. In the interview, he admits, with a tone of bitterness that, due to drugs, "my later years in 471 ... were not that great.”⁵⁶²

Tommy McDaniel

Tommy McDaniel provided Austin the chance to interview a much younger musician whose remembrance of the Musicians Club differed from that of some older players. McDaniel took bass lessons at Peabody High school and honed his craft by practicing at home. McDaniel started playing professionally by his senior year high school. After graduating in 1959, he played at Stanley's with a band that included Dave Lee on drums.

⁵⁶¹ Henderson, interview by Charles Austin, March 8, 1998.

⁵⁶² Henderson, interview by Charles Austin, March 8, 1998.

Chuck Austin interjected that some members had a hard time paying dues or fees for Local 471 and it might take them a whole year to pay off. However, McDaniel's comments illuminated the fact that Local 471 was still performing its duty to monitor and protect its constituents in the early 1960's. McDaniel articulated that he would pay his fees and union officials would give him a receipt. Nevertheless, he says, he missed the "golden era" of the Musicians Club due to his youthfulness. "I used to hear stories of the [jam] sessions at the Club," he says, "but by the 1960's the union was having problems."⁵⁶³

McDaniel didn't resent employment opportunities going to older guys who knew how to read music and were prepared, but he did resent others who seemed less qualified getting more opportunities than he did. It irritated him and increased his apathy towards the union. Sensing McDaniel's disappointment, Austin replied, "It's unfortunate [that] we had the merger back in the sixties. But overall, the union has done an adequate job for people that stayed in it and participated in it the right way."⁵⁶⁴

Underneath this conversation, several factors were at work. Austin's affinity for the union was based decades of observing its impact, along with that of the Musicians club. McDaniel joined Local 471 at a later period, when the Local was declining from its heyday and had moved from its headquarters on Frankstown Ave to Westray Plaza. The union was undergoing changes caused by geographic location and the baneful effects of urban renewal. Secondly, Austin was heavily invested in union affairs while McDaniel was attached to the union simply through payment of dues. As a result, McDaniel was not privy to the nature of the

⁵⁶³ McDaniel, interview by Charles Austin, March 9, 1998.

⁵⁶⁴ McDaniel, interview by Charles Austin, March 9, 1998.

union's actions and rationales for its actions. Finally, Austin was able to stay consistently employed, both before and after the merger. He remained aware of the struggles some musicians had in finding employment, but tends to emphasize that casual musician members like McDaniel limited the union's effectiveness. Black musicians, Austin maintains, were vastly outnumbered by Whites in Local 60-471, and so needed all hands on deck. Austin in these types of conversations often appears conflicted. He felt connected to his Black peers, yet he never had a major lapse in employment. In spite of this, he didn't allow himself to look on other musicians who had difficulties adapting to the new musical environment. Austin fought for Black musicians while also being honest with them about their own shortcomings.

This conversation between older and younger musicians was colored with congeniality. McDaniel at one point acknowledged his great respect for Austin and his peers, exclaiming that they were considered "the giants of jazz."⁵⁶⁵ He mentioned that Pittsburgh's jazz reputation extended far beyond its geographical borders, into venues in upstate New York. If an owner walked around his venue and needed a musician to perform, he would ask around. If a musician mentioned they were from certain places, the club owner would simply speak and keep moving. But if a musician said he or she was from Pittsburgh, the owner would say, "Are you doing anything today?"⁵⁶⁶ Pittsburgh's Black jazz musicians enjoyed respect beyond the city. If you were from Pittsburgh, people often assumed "you automatically could play."⁵⁶⁷ So, although McDaniel was not closely involved in the business affairs of 471, he had a clear

⁵⁶⁵ McDaniel, interview by Charles Austin, March 9, 1998.

⁵⁶⁶ McDaniel, interview by Charles Austin, March 9, 1998.

⁵⁶⁷ McDaniel, interview by Charles Austin, March 9, 1998.

understanding of Pittsburgh's jazz legacy. He knew there was a hierarchy among Pittsburgh's Black entertainers as he depicted his own average talent, "I might not be a good musician," he says, "but I have the ability to listen to the good ones." So, in the case of Austin's stated declaration that he wanted "to bring ... to public attention that Pittsburgh played a prominent role in the music scene," McDaniel understood the legacy—and what it meant to follow in the footsteps of giants.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁸ McDaniel, interview by Charles Austin, March 9, 1998.

Chapter 9: Counter Narratives

Chuck Austin's "master narrative" of 471 and the Musicians club may have been the dominant voice, but it was not the only voice. Pittsburgh's jazz community was diverse both in its members talents, training, and professional careers. It also was diverse in its attitude toward, and memory of, Local 471, the Musicians Club, the merger, the lawsuit, and the fate of Black music and Black musicians in Pittsburgh. These musicians admitted they maintained only a loose connection with 471, paying their dues but feeling it had drawbacks—cliquishness, poor record keeping, inadequate pensions, failure to ensure fair pay. Some felt that the importance of reading music was overrated, that improvisation was the key to jazz. And they were bitter at the decline in opportunities to work and make a living as a musician, whether caused by racial discrimination, by the merger, or by larger social forces altering the public's taste in the type of music they wanted to hear and reducing the amount live music the public was willing and able to support. In the end, about the only thing they all agreed on was the value of the Musicians Club, the thing they missed most from the merger of Locals 471 and 60.

Nelson Harrison

Nelson Harrison is one of the key figures in the Pittsburgh jazz history. Today, his web site, the Pittsburgh Jazz Network, is a rich source documenting both the history of jazz in Pittsburgh and the current jazz scene. Harrison is the one today most responsible for maintaining and celebrating that history.

Engaging, enthusiastic, and confident, Harrison is a man of many accomplishments: the inventor of a new musical instrument (the trombetto), a master musician, a music theorist, an educator, and a composer. His family heritage and childhood upbringing laid the foundation for his drive to achieve. Harrison at one time played in the same band as Austin, giving the two men some shared experiences. However, his formative years and his navigation of the local music scene differed sharply from that of many. Partly because Harrison was interviewed by Timmy Willis rather than by Chuck Austin, he recounts past events without the filter of Austin's strong views on the union's history. Harrison, like Austin, acknowledges that racism played a role in limiting employment opportunities for Black musicians. Yet, in a clear example of presenting a counter-narrative to what Austin and other peers felt, he dismisses the importance of being able to read music. Unlike Austin, Harrison regards the ability to read music as something embraced by those incapable of, or without the proper appreciation for, improvising. Harrison himself could read music, which helped him find work as a musician after the merger of Local 471 with Local 60. Nonetheless, he provides a different perspective, one that raises the question whether many Black musicians were denied job opportunities primarily because of their inability to read music. Or could Black musicians have developed a unique sound or something else that made them sought after by those who solicited entertainers from a racially mixed union?

Nelson Harrison and Chuck Austin played in the same band at one time, giving them many shared experiences although their child rearing and navigation of the music scene display stark differences. Given their long relationship, it is perhaps notable that, unlike most other interviews, that with Harrison was conducted not by Chuck Austin but by another musician,

Timmy Willis. In this interview Harrison freely recounted past events without these memories being filtered through Austin's interview style. Harrison, extremely intelligent and verbose, like Austin acknowledged that racism played a role in the lack of employment opportunities for Black musicians. Yet, in a clear example of presenting counter-narrative to what Austin and other peers felt, Harrison, dismissed and argued passionately against the skill of reading music as a necessary skill for Black musicians. Instead, reading music was a skill to be embraced by those incapable of or without the proper appreciation for the ability to improvise and play a sound emanating from deeper source. Harrison who could read music, and was able to find work as a musician after the merger of Local 471 with Local 60, provides a different perspective. Were many Black musicians denied opportunities primarily due to their inability to read music? Or, was there something else at work that alluded to the inability of some musicians to develop a unique sound or market themselves in a way that made them vital to those who solicited entertainment from an integrated union? Harrison agreed with Austin that racism excluded Black musicians. However, Harrison pushed back at the notion of reading music as vital to a Black musician's survival.

Born in 1940, Harrison says that in the Homewood-Brushton neighborhood where he grew up, "you saw in every field nothing but excellence. And you wanted a piece of that."⁵⁶⁹ In addition, Harrison was raised in a family of educators and academics who created an atmosphere that he calls a "wonderland," a place where he and his four siblings grew up with

⁵⁶⁹ Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

“stuff money couldn’t buy.”⁵⁷⁰ Harrison’s neighborhood was about “80% Italian” at the time, yet racial tension was minimal until he entered his teenage years. Then, noted, parties started to become more segregated and he noticed how it seemed prior relationships changed and became more distant. Harrison was about sixteen when he first became acquainted with racism. He realized when still a student at Westinghouse High School that some in the administration didn’t want Blacks to succeed. He came to understand that the career options for his Black peers were more limited than for White students. Nonetheless, Harrison’s outlook on life remained positive, largely because of the strong support he had received at home.⁵⁷¹

Early on, Harrison’s attraction to music seemed natural and unforced. During his childhood years, it seemed, “every house had a piano.” His father had a collection of jazz records that he played often, featuring such musical giants as Erroll Garner, Duke Ellington and others. As Harrison says, “music was in the air.”⁵⁷² Moreover, one of his aunts was a concert pianist who had taken lessons at Mary Cardwell Dawson’s Opera House, located at 7101 Apple Street in Homewood . Aunt Phonetta played for luminaries like Marian Anderson and taught Nelson Harrison piano at a young age. Young Nelson had shown interest in the piano when only two years old, but around the age of six or seven, his lessons became more formal. He struggled with technique but learned through listening. He later learned that he had “perfect pitch” and an ability to memorize entire musical arrangements and play them back perfectly.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷⁰ Harrison, “Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal,” interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁵⁷¹ Harrison, “Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal,” interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁵⁷² Harrison, “Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal,” interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁵⁷³ Harrison, “Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal,” interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

When Harrison was about 10 years old, his brother Paul helped him learn the trumpet. Later, both boys were tutored on the instrument by Carl McVicker, the legendary White music instructor at Westinghouse High School. In junior high, Harrison was part of a band that grew out of the school orchestra. He had switched to the trombone and he and classmates formed a band called, the Beethoven Bebops. The band was taught by Warren Watson, who had led a jazz band while in the Navy. Watson accelerated Nelson's development as a trumpet player by bringing in talented local musicians to rehearsals. When he was only twelve years old, Harrison sat alongside Jerry Elliot, an arranger some consider as good as Quincy Jones.⁵⁷⁴ Sometimes, during practice sessions, Harrison found himself next to Sam Hurt, a trombonist who had played with Dizzy Gillespie.⁵⁷⁵ These mentoring sessions, along with hearing jazz on the radio when local musician Walt Harper was a jazz disk jockey on station WHOD ignited Nelson's love for jazz. When he was merely thirteen years old, Harrison played at the Ross Inn on Route 51 with his youthful bandmates. The boys soon were taken under the wing of older musicians. "They were so good to us," Harrison says almost reverently about those who had taken the time to show him the path to becoming a professional musician.

Harrison also speaks of the tangible and intangible impact of Local 471 as a mentoring fraternity, one with what has been termed a "pass-it-on tradition" in which elder musicians shared their time, expertise, and wisdom with the younger generation.⁵⁷⁶ Harrison, who went

⁵⁷⁴ Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁵⁷⁵ Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁵⁷⁶ Bob Studebaker, "Pass It On: Pittsburgh Jazz Mentorship Tradition Continues," February 28, 2018 at WESA.FM website.

on to play trombone with the likes of Count Basie, cherishes that tradition. “Whenever I meet a musician,” he says, “especially if they’re in the jazz world or trying to be, the first question I ask them is ‘Who are your mentors?’ ... It has to be somebody who spoke the language, because jazz is spoken music.”⁵⁷⁷ Harrison also benefited from the mentoring of Judge Warren Watson, an accomplished saxophonist and trumpet player. “He taught us how to play jazz, how to articulate it,” Harrison says. “There’s a different language, there’s a dialect. It’s not from the sheet music, it’s the way you play the sheet music. ... Local 471 was a place where you could find that language spoken.”⁵⁷⁸ Nelson laments the loss of nightlife venues after urban renewal tore down much of the Hill District in the late 1950’s. “Venues come and go,” he says. “You see that all the time. There are no after-hours clubs anymore. That used to happen all the time. We used to play till daylight.”⁵⁷⁹

Now a mentor of young musicians, Harrison urges younger musicians to discover the limits of their creativity. He tells them, “music is mostly silence ... when you make a sound you are interrupting silence. Don’t interrupt the silence until you replace it with something meaningful and beautiful...the silence is the womb where all this takes place.” This is an example of the type of on-going, indispensable mentorship offered by Pittsburgh’s Black musicians at places like the Musicians Club as well as in local entertainment venues.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁷ Studebaker, “Pass It On: Pittsburgh Jazz Mentorship Tradition Continues,” February 28, 2018.

⁵⁷⁸ Studebaker, “Pass It On: Pittsburgh Jazz Mentorship Tradition Continues,” February 28, 2018 .

⁵⁷⁹ Studebaker, “Pass It On: Pittsburgh Jazz Mentorship Tradition Continues,” February 28, 2018.

⁵⁸⁰ Nelson Harrison, “The Metaphysics of Music – Part 1 of 6,” April 10, 2009, accessed at washingtondcjazznetwork.ning, Dr. Nelson Harrison’s Videos, Washington DC Jazz Network website.

Reflections on Nelson Harrison

Nelson Harrison is one of the few musicians who, along with Chuck Austin, can speak authoritatively about the history of jazz in Black Pittsburgh.⁵⁸¹ In conversation, Harrison in some ways reminds one of Austin. Indeed, he agrees with Austin on a number of points. But he strongly disagrees on one major point: the importance of improvisation in jazz. Harrison was initiated into classical music as well as jazz, he saw the contrasts between the two genres. He describes classical music as in some ways being “chained to the page” because the musician has to read music to have any proficiency. In jazz music however, Harrison stresses the importance of improvisation. He himself learned jazz not by reading music but by listening. For countless hours, he listened to records and live performances, a practice that continued as he matured into adulthood. It was this listening, similar to a child listening to a parent to learn to speak a language, that gave Nelson his understanding of how to play jazz and improvise. In listening, the elder musicians served as his “jazz parents,” teaching him the language of improvisation. Furthermore, because Nelson listened to many piano and trumpet players, he created a style of playing the trombone that was different from his peers. He recalled a moment in 1973 when he met jazz historian David Baker at a workshop at the University of Pittsburgh. Baker asked Harrison why he didn’t sound like J.J. Johnson, one of the nation’s premiere trombonists, and one that nearly every jazz trombonist of note had emulated. Nelson explained that because he had cultivated his playing style by listening and mimicking a variety of instrumentalists, he had freely created an original sound without even knowing it. Harrison embraces the freedom of

⁵⁸¹ Nelson Harrison, “Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal,” interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

improvisation and sees it as requiring a higher level of musicianship than reading music. He compared improvising and playing by ear to preaching. When people go to church, they don't want someone to read to them. They want someone who can "preach" from the heart.⁵⁸²

Nelson feels that the loss of many of Pittsburgh's jazz venues is partly because the newer "school musicians" who rose to prominence after the 1960's couldn't tell audiences a story through their music. They could only play what was on the page.⁵⁸³

Overall then, Harrison's early musical education was one of contact with highly skilled artists, both in his family and in the community. His combination of formal and informal learning provided a rich educational reservoir for his sound. "I practice in the dark."⁵⁸⁴ This quote summed up Harrison's affinity for listening, improvising and feeling music. He had learned jazz music mostly by listening and then playing what he heard. He played in the dark because he played by ear and didn't need to write on paper. As a matter of fact, when he taught youth later in his life, he would often point to a file cabinet and stress that they could carry all the music in those cabinets with them. However, if they got the music in their head, they could take it anywhere.⁵⁸⁵

Being born in 1940 meant that the golden era of the Musicians Club was fading as Harrison came of age. He did however, speak enthusiastically of what it was like to be a part of the Pittsburgh jazz scene. While he dreamt of, and ultimately received, opportunities to play

⁵⁸² Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁵⁸³ Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁵⁸⁴ Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁵⁸⁵ Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

with both Art Blakey's Messengers and the Count Basie Band, Harrison also relished the local scene. Beginning in 1962, he played with Joe Westray's band for many years. He spoke warmly of the Crawford Grill. "When you played jazz in Pittsburgh in an era with the clubs, the audience was sophisticated, they came to get fed", he explained.⁵⁸⁶ He added that if a musician could entrance a crowd at the Crawford Grill, he or she could be successful anywhere in the world.⁵⁸⁷

Harrison also has strong feelings about the general state of jazz education. He found that during his college tenure, there was no real respect for jazz in academia. This was one of the reasons he pursued music therapy and ultimately, clinical psychology, receiving a PhD in 1974. He knew that as a Black man, he needed multiple paths to success since any one path could run into resistance.⁵⁸⁸

Harrison has strong feelings about the merger, partly because of the power imbalance in interracial settings. When he played in predominantly White bands, he felt like a token minority.⁵⁸⁹ While some of his peers also played in mostly White bands, Nelson emphasized this "token" idea more than most. Harrison also found the atmosphere less congenial. He regards himself as more assertive in challenging discrimination and spoke out against inherent biases of some White musicians who considered jazz as less of a musical form than classical music. Most importantly in that regard, Harrison regularly challenged the notion that reading music should be in the toolkit of jazz musicians. It's not that reading wasn't a requirement for some jobs, but

⁵⁸⁶ Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁵⁸⁷ Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁵⁸⁸ Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

⁵⁸⁹ Harrison, "Dr. Nelson Harrison Up Close and Personal," interview by Timmy Willis, January 11, 2020.

Harrison disliked what he regards as acquiescence to a more European-oriented approach to jazz. Harrison says he advised younger musicians that the ability to memorize, listen, and not be afraid of was essential to taking their skills to the highest level. Most of all, Harrison encouraged youth to dream big. His own story as musician and renaissance man born and bred in Pittsburgh was proof that racism, while presenting a barrier, was not impregnable.

Harrison is one of the most authoritative spokesmen for the history of jazz in Pittsburgh, but his is far from the only relevant voice. Others have important things reflections and memories that complement, and sometimes problematize, those of Harrison. The following set of reflections and memories are gleaned from interviews I conducted personally, gathered from transcribed interviews along with a few other sources to garnish the stories. These memories are significant because unlike taking quotes from former Local 471 Members and adding these quotes to primary sources to create a narrative, these biographical chapters constitute efforts to allow the survivors of this history to speak for themselves. While collective memory is the primary theme of this work, the term collective may mislead the reader. Memories have been compiled “collectively” to add flesh to the story of Local 471. Yet, the term collective does not mean all memories were created equally. Likewise, it does not mean all subjects had equal input, or that each of the individuals who contributed to this study lacked their own individually compelling stories. Finally, the term collective does not suggest total agreement or monolithic thought. Instead, I have collected stories from former Local 471 members to preserve their legacy; and to provide a compelling and more comprehensive picture of the past that can be gathered from primary sources such as press coverage of union documents.

Finally, this body of chapters; this collection of voices, serves to properly acknowledge those who built the history of Local 471, brick by brick. The retelling of their individual journeys reminds us that even as people live their singular lives, those lives intersect with others. It is in the looking back at history through the eyes of these elders that gives a clearer picture of how interconnected their lives were. These chapters focus solely on the lives of musicians fighting to preserve the legacy of Local 471 or who vividly recall their connection to the glory days of Pittsburgh as a jazz mecca.

John Hughes

“The thing is, they did the best they could.”

--John Hughes

These words spoken by the effervescent pianist John Hughes several years ago, reference the valiant efforts of Local 471 to protect the interests of Black jazz musicians. Born in 1924, Hughes began his music career at the age of 16, playing piano at the Crawford Grill.⁵⁹⁰ Having been a member of the union for nearly 69 years, Hughes is certainly qualified to speak on the evolution of 471. Hughes invited me to a program at Bethel A.M.E. church, located in the Hill District. In the lower auditorium of this historically significant church, Hughes and a few other musicians provided the entertainment for a diverse crowd. Church members were there to fellowship, share their artistic gifts, and enjoy good food. Hughes introduced me to the audience. I explained that my goal was to write about the plight of Local 471 and hopefully

⁵⁹⁰ Janice Crompton, “John Wesley Hughes, Jr. / Jazz Pianist with the Golden Touch,” *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 1, 2018, accessed online.

bring to light the stories of Pittsburgh once legendary jazz scene.

Hughes and his fellow musicians then played a rousing array of Jazz, blues, gospel, and soul selections. Hughes' smile reminded of a point Chuck Austin had emphasized. One of his main goals of a musician is to play what the people liked and to make sure they had a good time. This was evident that night as the musicians, like soulful pied pipers, made the people sway and clap to numerous popular tunes. However, it also became clear what Hughes had explained made his experience as a jazz musician so different from other musicians. Since he played the piano, Hughes had a better chance of securing work on a more consistent basis than musicians who played other instruments. The piano, he explained, was like an "orchestra by itself." Consequently, there was a demand for a pianist more often than for other instruments. Secondly, Hughes was able to read music and play what was before him. This is important to mention because during the merger of Local 471 and Local 60, fewer jobs became available for Black musicians. Of the few accessible jobs, most went to the those who could adapt from an improvisational style of playing to a more structured style requiring the ability to precisely read and play certain arrangements. In explaining this in greater detail Hughes commented that;

for instance, we have some musicians, pianists, trumpet players who were born with a gift at an early age that lets them have a deep understanding of music. Now whether or not you say that's reading or not, I don't know. To me it's being born with this gift to hear it and to totally understand what was involved, the intervals that are involved and not only to do that, but to take it a step beyond. Now, whether they read or not I will not say. I would say they are geniuses who go beyond the reading point. You know what

I mean? Their minds are able to just perfectly analyze and see what is involved in this whole business.⁵⁹¹

What is ironic about this quote is that the talent Hughes describes, this ability of some musicians to play by ear and without reading, did not always serve them well as time passed. Certainly those who were exceptionally gifted could improvise and play a structured arrangement without reading. However, as Chuck Austin frequently laments, there were things that were acceptable when playing for Black audiences or bandleaders that were not acceptable when playing for White audiences and bandleaders.⁵⁹² To be able to read music, as Austin put it, was to be able to play the notes as they were arranged in front of you. Thus, this "genius," this capacity to improvise and produce a sound that originated from the within, that so many Black artists relied on did not always benefit them after the merger. As employment opportunities declined during the 1950's and 1960's their lack of formal training proved to be a handicap, yet, many resisted straying too far from their musical roots. For many these roots consisted of an organic feel for music that allowed for freer and more fluid expression. They considered "reading music," or playing only the notes as they were arranged, restrictive.⁵⁹³

Hughes represents an ideal scenario for the local Black musician. He had steady work and he played music that allowed him to engage his audience in an enjoyable manner. And, importantly, he had enough formal training to play in venues that demanded the ability to

⁵⁹¹ John Hughes, African American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996, audio, Archives Services Center, University of Pittsburgh.

⁵⁹² Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 14, 2006.

⁵⁹³ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 14, 2006.

"read." After the merge of Local 60 and Local 471, as the number of Black venues dwindled, Hughes' training and résumé afforded him access to "White" spaces. Hence, while many Black musicians struggled to find opportunities to play after the merger, Hughes had relatively fewer difficulties problems securing "gigs."⁵⁹⁴

Hughes' opportunities to perform at a fairly consistent rate shaped his attitude toward the union. Overall, he remained positive about Local 471 and what the union had tried to accomplish. He understood that many Black artists were at a disadvantage, compared to their White counterparts. He took in stride both Local 471's rise and its ultimate demise. He preferred to highlight the good times rather than the difficulties faced by him and his fellow musicians.⁵⁹⁵ Preferring not to detail the failures of previous individuals or administrations in Local 471, Hughes leaves an interviewer with the impression of a gentleman who had deftly found his niche within Pittsburgh's shrinking music scene. This is not to say he was oblivious to the struggle, but one can sense relatively less bitterness from him.

One needs to remember that, in the 1940's and 1950's, jazz music—at least in Pittsburgh—was remarkably popular, almost the community's dominant form of music. It is equally important to understand that during this period, because of the proliferation of opportunities for Black artists, many who could not read music were able to find work.⁵⁹⁶ Hughes's penchant for playing tunes that appealed to the general audience reflected of the larger Pittsburgh jazz scene. Hughes admits that he doesn't write music, but again his ability

⁵⁹⁴ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

⁵⁹⁵ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

⁵⁹⁶ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

and willingness to play what the market demanded kept his entertainment life thriving for decades.⁵⁹⁷ The Black jazz scene in Pittsburgh, perhaps indicative of the working class background of many of its Black residents, often was not an avant-garde or “high-brow” scene that appealed to only connoisseurs. Hughes’ formal training and ear for popular sound facilitated his transition during the years of Local 471’s decline.

During the 1940’s, Hughes played in a variety of venues. In the early 1940s, Hughes had spent some time playing as part of a trio for Kings Record Company in Cincinnati. Hughes says the group’s style mimicked that of Nat King Cole. This sound, he says, was popular at the time. “It wasn’t a hard jazz sound. There were no drums, you understand. To really do jazz you better have some drums. ...It was more or less a cabaret type [of music].”⁵⁹⁸ The group also played in a private club for Whites in West Virginia. The trio was under the direction of Al Hitler. In the mid-1940s, Hitler provided the connections for Hughes to play at the prestigious Crawford Grill No. 1 in Pittsburgh.⁵⁹⁹ But Hughes had a variety of places where he played. On Fridays, he typically played at a club, and on Saturdays at “special dances.”⁶⁰⁰

In the late 1940’s, Hughes joined the army, being discharged in 1952. He taught at a school for delinquent children in Canonsburg for nearly 15 years. All the time he was teaching, he still played jazz music at night and on weekends. This was extremely common for jazz musicians in Pittsburgh. They often held steady jobs and subsidized these jobs with the money

⁵⁹⁷ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

⁵⁹⁸ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

⁵⁹⁹ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

⁶⁰⁰ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

made from musical gigs; or perhaps one could view their main jobs as subsidizing the musical employment.⁶⁰¹

During this 15 year period from 1952 to 1967, while he was teaching, Hughes had the opportunity to play with the Harold Betters Quartet. It was while Hughes was in the Army that he met and befriended Betters, a Pittsburgh native who played the trombone. Betters, upon leaving the service, played with Ray Charles, and when he returned to Pittsburgh started his quartet. Betters understood the music business Betters, and so was able to secure steady engagements, playing almost every night of the week.⁶⁰² Years later, Betters' quartet performed primarily at the Encore in Shadyside, a popular jazz venue that catered to a large, racially mixed audience. Hughes characterizes the place as "THE" jazz house in Pittsburgh.⁶⁰³ One of Betters most valuable assets as a bandleader was that he was an astute business man, Hughes notes, he kept up with the popular songs so that the group could add them to their repertoire.⁶⁰⁴ While Hughes also received invites to play with some big bands, most notably in Texas, he felt loyalty to those he performed with and developed relationships with in Pittsburgh. Loyalty paid off. It was because of the notoriety of Harold Betters that Hughes would be granted the opportunity to participate in big events like the Newport Jazz Festival as well as at major events held in Pittsburgh's Civic Arena.

⁶⁰¹ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

⁶⁰² Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

⁶⁰³ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

⁶⁰⁴ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

Once the quartet became fairly well known, Local 471 helped Hughes secure longer engagements and play consistently. This spared Hughes the sort of haphazard and shifting schedules that were the lot of many other musicians.⁶⁰⁵ However, Local 471 was the conduit that allowed Black musicians the opportunity to play at local establishments. Also, through the union, local artists in Pittsburgh would receive notice that other artists from out of town were coming to Pittsburgh. The local artists treated these visitors well, as guests Hughes explained.⁶⁰⁶ This hospitality had been especially important during the 1940's because Black musicians at that time didn't always have the money to stay at hotels. Hughes commented that "it was a real sharing thing"⁶⁰⁷ between Black artists as his wife would cook for guests or sometimes they offered a place to stay. So it is clear that despite the harshness of segregation, Black musicians through Local 471 developed their own support system to nurture local and out of town musicians.

Hughes and others often found time to visit the Musicians Club four or more times per week.⁶⁰⁸ This was easy for Hughes when, for a time, he lived only a few blocks from the Club. Often there were no scheduled concerts at the Club, but artists would do what was termed, "sitting in," socializing and holding impromptu jam sessions. Hughes says the piano in the Club was almost always being played by someone. Another person might come in and play bass or the horns. These sessions would usually last for 20 minutes or so as different Club members

⁶⁰⁵ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

⁶⁰⁶ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

⁶⁰⁷ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

⁶⁰⁸ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

came and went.⁶⁰⁹ Hughes also says that the Club was used for rehearsals by bands that came into town and wanted to hire local musicians for an engagement.⁶¹⁰

Not all musicians felt as positive about the union's leadership efforts as Hughes. Of course, during the 1940's, jobs were more plentiful than later. Hughes commented that at times he would attend meetings and keep abreast of what candidates were running for office and would encourage young musicians to join the union.⁶¹¹ Nevertheless, although Hughes applauded the union's work during this era, he himself did not consistently attend meetings.⁶¹² And, while jobs were plentiful, many other 471 members did not due their due diligence. Union leaders tried to remind members how important attendance was, there were still those who barely got involved in union operations. Their concern, almost exclusively, was the music. This habit of non-engagement became a real negative for African-American musicians when the employment landscape started to shift and union solidarity was sorely needed. This in turn led to bitterness against union leadership. Moreover, some artists became less inclined to join the union because they lacked faith in the union's ability to secure economic security and protect labor rights.⁶¹³

In addition he spoke about some of the other artists that he played with, including bassists Bobby Boswell and Michael Taylor. He also played with drummers Cecil Brooks and

⁶⁰⁹ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

⁶¹⁰ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

⁶¹¹ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

⁶¹² Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

⁶¹³ Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

Harold Lee.⁶¹⁴ As he played the piano, although he admitted that he was still learning the instrument despite being exposed to it at a young age, he also later played the keyboards. Furthermore, because he played the piano he received many opportunities to play as a soloist. The piano and guitar can stand on their own in performances.⁶¹⁵ So this was another fact that presented Hughes with more options for lucrative employment than his colleagues.

At this point in his career, Hughes prefers playing for special events and in private clubs like the Pittsburgh Athletic Association, where he has played regularly for years.⁶¹⁶ A humble gentleman, Hughes feels he is still learning and perfecting his craft. Hughes has deep affection for the former Musicians Club, and feels that life is too short to dwell on the failures of Local 471 and its leadership. Seemingly, he has moved on to other opportunities without allowing regretting the past to sour his outlook on the present and future. Could the fact that he generally stayed out of the politics of union affairs but still had ample employment have left him unable to see the frustrations of his fellow Black musicians? Hughes came of age during jazz's golden era of Black jazz in Pittsburgh, an era when a seemingly endless array of clubs, restaurants and bars gave Black jazz artists a sense of no limits to their opportunities. The threat of urban renewal and merger with a Local 60 was not even on the horizon. Rather than being bitter about what was lost, Hughes takes solace in the sweet memories of what they once had. It was a moment in history that has come and gone. Still romancing the piano and

⁶¹⁴ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

⁶¹⁵ Hughes, interview by female moderator, May 25, 1996.

⁶¹⁶ John Hughes, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 11, 2004.

keyboards in his twilight years represents a case study of how some musicians successfully adapted to and graciously accepted the merger.

Frank McCown

McCown detailed several interesting tales about his playing days while in college. He would sometimes play at a music hall across from campus. At times others would be practicing there as well. One day while practicing he met 2 White guys and 3 White girls. They embraced him and would actually take him around to places to play. However, as the racial codes of the times dictated, White establishments sometimes refused service to him even while he was in the company of Whites. His White female companions would even provoke the ire of White patrons by sitting in his lap while they were out. Frank's adventures definitely showed that not all Whites in the South viewed Blacks as inferior. Moreover, his closeness with other young Whites reflected a common theme with Black musicians living in the North and South. While entities like Local 471 and the Musicians Club allowed Black artists a safe space insulating them from racism—the fluidity and kinetic energy of the jazz movement brought many Black artists into contact with White fans, partygoers and fellow musicians who didn't allow color to hinder the formation of personal relationships.

McCown loved that women were attracted to musicians. "I was into the ladies," he says.⁶¹⁷ Access to women, considered one of the perks of being an entertainer, was mentioned by many musicians in interviews. Male musicians not only faced the temptation of Black woman

⁶¹⁷ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

admirers but were susceptible to the more dangerous attention they received from White female fans. However, even as a twinkle appeared in his eye as he discussed his affections for women, it was obvious that there was one special woman, his wife, that still held the key to McCown's heart. When he brought up his wife, who passed away nearly eleven years earlier, McCown paused. "She was the only girl I ever really loved," he said.⁶¹⁸

Nevertheless, while McCown had a close relationship with his wife, he had opportunities to explore other friendships with other women during his career. McCown had always tried to stay on the cutting edge of fashion. He had a nice job, disposable income, the nicest "threads," and carried himself with the prerequisite confidence of an entertainer. At times, he says, people assumed he was a pimp because of his fashions and the some of the people he kept company with. Although people harassed Black musicians for socializing with White women, Frank never spoke as if this fact was a true hindrance to his leisure activities. He was good friends with musician Jerry Betters. Betters as told by Frank, played at some of the hot spots downtown (off limits to many Black artists) and always had White women around him. This in turn brought a certain amount of criticism, but Jerry, like many other Black musicians of the time, did not stay within society's prescribed racial boundaries. McCown often spoke as if the racism of the time certainly existed, but was more of an inconvenience than a confining social ill. Musicians appeared to have more latitude and options to cross racial boundaries than the average Black man. Such was their charmed existence, especially in an integrated neighborhood like the Hill or East Liberty. However, at no time did resistance, even if very subtle, not exist to

⁶¹⁸ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

this sort of behavior. It was just that racial attitudes of the time did not preclude Black male entertainers from enjoying what many considered the "fruits" of their occupation.

McCown recalled that, as an officer with 471, he had a book and a badge, "like a policeman," when he was sent out by the Union to collect money from musicians. It was not an easy assignment, as some musicians refuse to pay up. McCown admitted that some musicians were hard to deal with, especially when they were drunk. One musician named Roscoe would get into uncontrollable stupors, and McCown would have to calm him down until his drunkenness subsided.⁶¹⁹ Furthermore, McCown also had opportunities to pay musicians for gigs. He used union and non-union performers in some gigs, but tended to pay them equally so as not to upset the non-union members. He admits that the money he paid out was not always scale, but it seems that artists were more concerned about being paid something as opposed to fighting for scale.

McCown had a full professional life, with a litany of experiences over the course of his career. He played at venues like the Hurricane, Union Hall, the Crawford Grill. He played in Masonic lodges, at the Ammon center, the Duquesne Club, the Stanley Theatre and Smitty's. He played in country clubs with gentlemen like Bill Cotton, and also played mill towns like Aliquippa, Monessen, Rankin, Braddock and Connellsville. He even played in Shadyside with a supposed African story-teller who wanted him to sit naked in a window and play his flute while the gentleman told stories. McCown met jazz royalty like Thelonious Monk, and had the pleasure of Dakota Staton's lending of her vocal gifts to a group he played in during the fifties.

⁶¹⁹ McCown, interview by Johnathan J. White, October 20, 2009.

He also was friends with Pittsburgh's notable singer, Phyllis Hyman, and was aware of her unfortunate choice in men.

McCown had interesting thoughts about the merger between Local 471 and Local 60. At first, he believed that the merger couldn't have been a negative thing because during the era of segregation Blacks had no real power. Referencing that Whites would have nothing to do with clothing that had been worn by African-Americans, McCown says he had learned from his Southern experience "that if you put a hat on, it was yours because you were Black." So he clearly understood that despite some of the perks and benefits of his dynamic lifestyle, overall by the sixties the merger of the White and Black union should have been a way of lessening racial disparities and injustices.

McCown had warm feelings for his close friend Ruby Young, a prominent member of Local 471. One time, he recalls, there was a banquet that Ruby wanted to attend but would not because she didn't have a date. He offered to take her and convinced her to go because he did not like seeing her so downcast. He is a man who values people and holds reverence for the good times his life has blessed him with. He enjoyed the finer things in life, and his gentlemanly character shines through in interviews. He has taken the good and bad in his life in stride and has emerged with more positive memories than negative. He views racism as a sickness, an inextricable part of this country's history, but, unlike many of his fellow musicians, the impact of living as a second class citizen did not engender in him the same level of bitterness as in other Black artists. It seems that good music, an action-filled lifestyle, nice cars, nice clothes, and pretty women, served as a pleasure inducing tonic for a Black man whose life experience was as diverse as his impeccable wardrobe. Certainly it has been a wonderful life for McCown,

one that shows the diversity of experiences and reactions among Pittsburgh Black musicians to racial injustice.

Hosea Taylor

The one thing that is most apparent from Hosea Taylor's autobiography is his profuse and infinite affection for music as well as the lifestyle afforded a successful musician. His memoir, *Dirt Street*, published in 2007, is a collection of entertaining highlights from his career as a jazz artist in Pittsburgh. Taylor spins tales of his fast-paced life with riveting honesty. Yet, at the core of his work there is an undeniable affection for what music and the entertainment industry have provided for him. Born in 1927, Taylor remained active playing and lecturing at the time of my interview with him in 2008.⁶²⁰ His autobiography, *Dirt Street*, mostly details events in the 1940's and 1950's, but it also covers aspects of Taylor's childhood and later life. Taylor had an interest in literature as well as music, Mark Twain being one of his favorite authors.

When interviewed, Taylor smiled and said that he could offer the truth because he had nothing to lose. Within the decade of the 2000's, Taylor had produced several albums, *The Serious Saxophone of Hosea Taylor: Walking the Walk* (2000); *Indubitably Quintessential—Hosea Taylor* (2003); and *Hosea Taylor—Synesthesia* (2006). Like other older artists, Taylor possesses great respect for those who came before them and paved the way, and there is constant acknowledgement of the prodigious talents of their peers. Like his contemporaries, he

⁶²⁰ Taylor interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

has genuine affection and admiration for other jazz artists. Taylor mentioned that there are even younger musicians, like Robbie Edwards, who some say mimic his style. Taylor, in his easy-going manner, said he doesn't know what to make of this but is flattered and humbled by those who might follow in his footsteps. It was similar to what he experienced as a young person who admired musicians like Charlie Parker, Johnny Hodges and Marshall Rodgers, and at one time of other incorporated elements from their playing style into his, consciously or unconsciously.

Taylor thinks jazz in Pittsburgh remains very healthy right now, somewhat surprising given the feeling of many like Chuck Austin that live jazz in Pittsburgh is undergoing a slow death, with only a few establishments offering steady opportunities to hear live jazz. Taylor, however, believes that, depending on the individual, there is a good deal of cooperation between the older and younger musicians. In this, he differs sharply from Chuck Austin, who is frustrated that Pittsburgh musicians have not come together to learn from and inspire each other. Austin feels that the gulf separating young and old seems impassible at times because of arrogance, selfishness, apathy, and an unwillingness to understand and appreciate what both sides have to offer. Taylor's comments perhaps reflect that all hope is not lost and there is still healthy cooperation between those time travelers from the city's glory days to the contemporary crowd.

Taylor in his long career befriended many local musicians, including John Hughes and Chuck Austin. The rich, and yet sometimes fleeting, nature of friendships and relationships between entertainers becomes clear as Taylor drops so many names in his vivid recollections. His dalliances with women and his travels outside Pittsburgh paint a picture of a rich and varied life, a journey of nearly sixty years.

Kenan Foley, ethnomusicologist at Carlow University and documentarian of the Black musicians who were members of Local 471, writes that, “For Taylor and his young cohorts every day was as adventure as they found their way, with ‘eyes and ears of glee’ into the city’s thriving jazz scene. One of Taylor’s early musical heroes was the saxophonist Leroy Brown, then a prominent local band leader and one whom Taylor continues to draw on for inspiration today.”⁶²¹

As a young child Taylor spoke of the mystical attraction of big bands, a sentiment shared by Chuck Austin. Frequenting the Stanley Theatre downtown, little Hosea became obsessed with the musical shows. He began to envision himself one day performing on stage.⁶²² The saxophone held the greatest appeal to young Hosea; its boisterous sound made it stand out from the other instruments. Taylor recalled his path to getting his first instrument this way:

As the next Christmas season approached, I began to hint to my father that I wanted to play the saxophone in the worst kind of way, so he began inquiring about the possibilities of his son becoming a musician or saxophone player. I don’t know who in the hell he made his inquiries to, but I do know that some asshole told him that I had to learn to master the clarinet before I could learn to play the saxophone. There I was, faced with the horrible thought of having to learn to play such a terrible looking and sounding instrument, but what could I say or do, for in those days your parents’ words were law.⁶²³

⁶²¹ Taylor interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

⁶²² Taylor interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

⁶²³ Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 12.

However, as time went on, his stance towards the clarinet softened as his skill level increased. He explained:

World War II was in progress and Swing was the in-thing. Bebop and Modern Jazz were unheard of at the time, so the clarinet wasn't so bad after all when it came to playing the music of the times. There I was, feeling like the only Black kid in the world who wore glasses and played the clarinet, but it was an identity, at least I was trying. I can remember many days practicing while the other kids played games in the heat of the summer. Our doors and windows were always opened, so I heard them, and they heard me, but they were and still are my friends, and respected me for what I was trying to do and vice-versa.⁶²⁴

However, though Taylor initially excelled in playing clarinet, his propensity for staying out late while playing and courting women led to his father taking away his clarinet. This punishment, levied during his early teen years, taught young Hosea a much-needed lesson.⁶²⁵ At the age of fourteen, the labor shortage during WWII enabled young Hosea was able to find a job and, with the earnings, finally purchase his first alto sax.⁶²⁶ About a week after acquiring the saxophone, Taylor and his friends Eddie Woods and Irwin Swann secured a gig at the Walk In Café on Frankstown Avenue. Taylor and his crew made decent money playing four hours a night, six days a week.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 13,14.

⁶²⁵ Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 19,20.

⁶²⁶ Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 28,29.

⁶²⁷ Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 36.

A chance meeting with local musician Leroy Brown ignited a fire in young Hosea. Hearing Brown play in Danny's Café on Broad St. in East Liberty, Taylor noticed Brown's unique sound. The encounter inspired Hosea, alerting him that there were extremely gifted musicians playing right in Pittsburgh. Brown came over and spoke with Hosea and his friends, furnishing another source of inspiration for the young musician.⁶²⁸

Taylor confesses that he thoroughly enjoyed his years performing in East Liberty. Maturing into a more sturdy man and distancing himself from the awkward bespectacled lad that played the clarinet, he found himself making money playing music, hanging with friends, and flirting with pretty women. Taylor and his friends reveled in all the delights East Liberty had to offer as he waxed nostalgic,

I can still visualize the ladies dressed colorfully in the fashions of the forties with their pompadour hairdos and ankle strapped shoes. I remember the big fish bowl like mugs of beer that sold for about a dime and the big slow revolving ceiling fans that made sure the smoke was evenly distributed into each and every pair of eyes. Danny's Bar, like so many other establishments in that area, gave way to the wrecking ball in the name of progress [urban renewal]. Now the head honchos and promoters of East Libertyism [sic] are putting forth a concentrated effort to regress in the name of progress. What a mess. It seems to me like they destroyed life and replaced it with death. Now they are trying to wake the dead. There are many pictures of East Liberty of old around today, but

⁶²⁸ Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 40, 41.

nothing takes the place of fixed memories of sound, memories of smell, memories of feel, nor memories of actually being there back then.⁶²⁹

Speaking of how urban renewal altered East Liberty during the 1950's, Taylor echoes the regrets of many musicians who were a part of Local 471 and remember the many opportunities once offered by the Hill District and East Liberty. While Taylor's autobiography entertains with its spiced-up, humorous method of telling stories, his brutal honesty and his numerous revelations about his penchant for womanizing creates a picture of another world that existed for Black musicians during the era of racial segregation. If one were to believe the tales of good times, then Black Pittsburgh during the forties and early fifties was almost a magical place for Black entertainers. However, just as Harlem had its share of hardships and disappointments, so too did Pittsburgh. Yet, the euphoric feelings and the riveting excitement created by music and the life that surrounded it has created for many musicians a utopian image of what Pittsburgh once was.

Hosea Taylor joined Local 471 in 1945, mostly because he had to in order to play with Walt Harper's band. Like most other Black musicians, Taylor is not always complimentary of 471, but holds a strong affinity for the Musicians Club. For Taylor, as for many others, the two were different entities:

⁶²⁹ Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 57.

When the Musicians Club was located in the Hill, the physicals were horrible. The heat was often not working. I remember waitresses serving you in overcoats because it was so cold. But the people had a good time and there was good music. It looked bad, but it was a glorious place because of the people. When the Club moved to East Liberty, the physicals were much nicer. It was great because the young guys, we could not always afford teachers and yet we could learn from each other. We would jam sometimes for two days straight.⁶³⁰

While Taylor had the opportunity to play with musical luminaries like Sarah Vaughn and Billy Eckstine, he also played with many lesser known, local musicians at smaller venues, sometimes earning as little as \$5 a night. This range of playing experience appears to have been a common thing amongst Pittsburgh jazz musicians. Other musicians, interviewed by both myself and the AAJPSP speak about how fluid the jazz scene was, especially before urban renewal. With so many places to play and all types of gigs available, many jazz artists found themselves playing with or listening to iconic figures one night in an “A” level venue like the Crawford Grill, and on the next night playing in a small blue-collar bar with strictly local musicians. Such was the diverse nature of Pittsburgh’s jazz scene during the 1940’s and 50’s.

This diversity was enriching, but also created problems for 471. Because opportunities for Black artists were so plentiful and on a nightly basis they had to negotiate with different parties in different establishments, labor leaders faced a daunting task. The forceful and controlling style attributed to many of 471’s early labor leaders was most likely a necessity as

⁶³⁰ Taylor interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

opposed to the mere flaunting of power. Artists like Chuck Austin talk about how union leaders would literally come and get musicians off the stands to get them to pay their dues. 471 leaders also fought to get a decent scale for their clients, yet, with so many Black artists willing to play regardless of scale, the task for union members was formidable. Taylor for instance, speaks so glowingly of the fun of a musician's lifestyle that one wonders how concerned most musicians were about fighting for a decent scale as opposed to just enjoying the opportunity to play. To further complicate things for union leaders, in an industrial union the workers usually fought for rights on jobs that provided their main income. Often, this was not the case for Pittsburgh Black musicians. Musicians with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra could support themselves on yearly salaries, most of the local Black jazz musicians saw the music industry as a side gig. This in turn, made it more difficult for musicians to feel invested in protecting their most basic rights. Time after time, artists mention that their number one concern was getting on the bandstand and performing and having a good time. Paying union dues and becoming truly engaged with the politics of negotiating scale were often treated as a nuisance, although some like Chuck Austin and John Hughes display a sincere gratitude to union leaders for their efforts to protect the musicians.⁶³¹

Taylor considers his experience with Local 471 a real education. Plodding along in the forties in bands like the Johnny Jackson Band and the Jerry Elliot Band, he found his path at times frustrating. A virtual musical gypsy, Taylor moved in and out of Pittsburgh to pursue various gigs. Yet after getting paid a the ridiculous amount \$1.25 for a job in Sewickley,

⁶³¹ Taylor, interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

Pennsylvania, he admitted his anxiety peaked and he knew he had to get back to Pittsburgh.⁶³²

His first introduction to the Local 471's Musicians Club in the Lower Hill on Wylie Ave helped him to understand the level he was operating on. "Wow! Those cats wuzn't foolin' around," he marvels, recognizing that jazz heavyweights congregated in and refined their considerable skills in the Musicians Club.⁶³³ The Club's competitive yet fraternal atmosphere often bewildered young musicians, and Taylor was no different. The Musicians Club was a place he dreamed about frequenting as a youngster, and the perils of the unpredictable music industry had not diminished his love for the art. "I was only 16, 17 at first and too young to drink, but I was allowed to be a part of something," he says. "I had a card and I could see Billy Eckstine or Tommy Turrentine."⁶³⁴

The fast-paced nature of a musician's life often led to exhilarating but fleeting moments of ecstasy. One night Taylor and his band might be entralling a raucous crowd, and the next night the job might be over or the group might disband and its members disperse. Taylor's rapid-paced lifestyle made love a dicey proposition. His autobiography recounts numerous infatuations with damsels as talented as they were beautiful. Nevertheless, many of his interactions with the opposite sex seemed like brief joy rides, leading nowhere. Playing music propelled Taylor into a world of abundant opportunities for love. But while his interest in women was strong, it is clear that music was the true love of his life. Taylor says as much in his own words,

⁶³² Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 88.

⁶³³ Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 87.

⁶³⁴ Taylor interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

It's not so much what I do when performing with all of these dynamite practitioners of the Creative and performing Arts that benefits me such a thrill, it's simply the idea of being on the same stage or bandstand with such beautiful people. The presence of their company in such an artistic setting benefits me the pleasurable [sic] feeling of actually being in the position to artistically love and be understood ...If it were not for the practitioners of the arts I perform with, and the beautiful people I perform for, because of my cultural need to do so, life for me would be without meaning. How else could or would I be opportune to express my sorry-assed self, for without them there would be no me.⁶³⁵

Ironically though, while music was comparable to a life-long dream that he chased, it was not the only dream that enchanted him during his youth. Remarkably, at one time Taylor wanted to be what he described as a "junk man." As a youth he watched this man collect and sell junk during the week. On Saturday's, his reward was putting on a clean shirt and on Sundays spending the day in bed with a voluptuous woman.⁶³⁶ Nonetheless, for Hosea Taylor, music was his calling. It chose him. "It is in my blood," he says.

If I can't play, it's like not being able to eat. A little while ago I had a spinal condition that temporarily made me a quadriplegic. As I lay in the hospital unable to play, a little girl inspired me and told me I had to get back. I trained hard to get back.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁵ Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 94.

⁶³⁶ Taylor interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

⁶³⁷ Taylor interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

And so here is a man in his early eighties who loved his saxophone so much that the desire to play again served a catalyst for his recovery from paralysis. While music stirred Taylor's innermost passions as a young man, there were also more tangible reasons why he pursued music with such vigor. He explained:

Music was too beautiful to give up. Back there in the forties, the only way for a poor Black boy to escape a mediocre life of a boring existence was to become a prize fighter, a tap dancer, singer, or a musician. I couldn't dance, sing nor fight, so it had to be music for me. This musician had realized his dream, for I am what I want to be and I am who I want to be, and I am identified with what and who I want to be identified with. Maybe I didn't chase the rainbow per se, because I as well as others full well know there's no end to a rainbow, and that there is no pot of gold at the end, simply because there is no end. But I did recognize as well as appreciate the rainbow and its awesome beauty as a means of motivation.⁶³⁸

It seems that in between the lines of Taylor's poetic description he is describing desires held by many African Americans during the era of segregation. The desire to be free of the monotonous and racial restraints that circumscribed their lives was painfully longed for by Blacks seeking their version of the American dream. Entertainment has historically been viewed as an avenue out of the ghetto and dire economic circumstances. But Taylor describes what it must have felt like for Blacks in urban centers like Harlem, Chicago, D.C. and Philadelphia during the forties and fifties. Music and the richness of Black entertainment during the segregation era

⁶³⁸ Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 97.

must have provided an intoxicating elixir for coping with the drudgery of life as second class citizens.

Most revealing is that Taylor listed the virtues of the Musicians Club effortlessly while saving some of his harsher criticism for Local 471. The Musicians Club he said was very beneficial musically. However, he feels that during the 1940's and 1950's many of the union's officers were "crooks," regardless of who was president. "They operated in an Amos and Andy fashion," he says, "doing things like giving jobs to their friends."⁶³⁹ They tried to be heavy-handed at times, but that didn't really affect him. Taylor didn't mince words when he discussed how he referred to the treatment of many young Black musicians by Local 471 and Local 60. "I referred to the White union as Jim Crow and the Black union as Jack Crow. I was treated bad by both."⁶⁴⁰ Taylor feels Local 471 was of little importance in his getting jobs; but he treasured the Musicians Club. He feels that, even after the merger, "if you could play, you could get a job."

Taylor had a varied, successful career. He played with nationally known artists like Duke Ellington and Stanley Turrentine, as well as with such local giants as Joe Westray, whom he playfully describes as "ghetto rich."⁶⁴¹ He performed all over Pennsylvania and in places like West Virginia and New York. His multifaceted experience demonstrates the wealth of opportunities potentially available to Black artists during the 1940's and 1950's. Taylor, like some of his colleagues, confesses that the music scene was still viable during the 1950's but

⁶³⁹ Taylor, interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

⁶⁴⁰ Taylor interview by Johnathan J. White, January 21, 2008.

⁶⁴¹ Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 178.

opportunities had started to diminish.⁶⁴² Call it the "magic" or the vibe or a certain feeling, but something changed in Pittsburgh's Black community during the 1950's and into the 1960's. Despite this occurrence, Hosea Taylor, 79 years old when he finally finished his memoir, recalled more good than bad.

This story began on a very tiny Dirt Street a long time ago, about a young boy growing up smack dab in the middle of the African American culture during the 1940's, the World War II years; who fell in love with a girl named music, and could never seem to let her go. There were times when I tried to leave her, but every time I looked around, there she was as beautiful as ever. It seems like the older I get the younger she gets, ain't that funny? Most stories are written about people who grew up and became rich and famous; this story is a little different. This story is about someone whose goal was and still is to be happy and I've achieved that happiness.⁶⁴³

Jerry Betters

**"You know, now, I had problems with 471 one time."
--Jerry Betters**

Born in 1933, Jerry Betters had unusual access to opportunities to play in the lucrative "forbidden zone" of White clubs, both in Pittsburgh and in New York City. Like Chuck Austin, he knew about what was described as "the list" that floated around during the 1960's naming the

⁶⁴² Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 211.

⁶⁴³ Taylor and Dozier, ed., *Dirt Street*, 211, 212.

Black bands that couldn't perform at White venues.⁶⁴⁴ Better's agrees with Austin that, while racism was a culprit in limiting opportunities for Black musicians, many hindered their chances by not being able to read music or resisting the need to tailor their playing style to agree with that demanded by White bandleaders and club-owners.⁶⁴⁵ However, Better's disagrees with Austin in his attitude toward 471. He presents a unique case study of someone who was a gifted drummer capable of playing at White venues but was harassed by the local Black union, at least from his perspective.

In a 1997 interview Chuck Austin, Better's makes a point of stressing that Local 60 treated him fairly well during his time in Pittsburgh, better than Local 471.⁶⁴⁶ He feels that Local 60 most likely assumed he was a member of Local 471 and so had no need to feel threatened by him.⁶⁴⁷ One consistent theme throughout Better's' interview with Austin was that he was unafraid to name names. He spoke frankly of his plight as a as a musician of color. While most of his barbs were reserved for 471 leadership; his attitude towards his career reflect the attitudes of many Black musicians during that time.

Better's recounted some of his early, racially formative experiences as a musician. In his first trip into the deep South to play with the Joe Louis show band, Better's some of his band mates were asked by Louis to attend a meeting to brief them concerning the trip to Mobile, Alabama. Better's explained,

⁶⁴⁴ Better's, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

⁶⁴⁵ Better's, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

⁶⁴⁶ Better's, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

⁶⁴⁷ Jerry Better's, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

We were young and wild and we never made the meeting. ... So we're on this big bus and I feel like I'm a damn star, man. The first theater we played, we pulled up at the theater man, we had one White kid in the band, played piano. So we jumped out, and he jumped out, and we're all happy, people were all around, watching the show come in, and inside the theater, man, the police grabbed me and pulled out his club and said, "Nigger, the back door," and I said, "I'm with the show."⁶⁴⁸

Bettters also played at the Apollo for \$90.00 per week. This might have been considered good money, except that it was actually below scale according to what Bettters had been told. He had been instructed to ask for \$125.00 per week for his services. However, when told that he was a mere unknown and thus had to take \$90 or leave, it was \$90 that Bettters accepted.⁶⁴⁹ This situation perfectly highlights the struggles that Black musicians faced. Even with the support of unions, the scales were sometimes just suggested starting points for negotiation. If an artist wanted a gig bad enough, he or she often took what was offered. This practice worked fine as long as jobs were plentiful. But, when the supply started to dry up, and union members looked to their leadership for help, there was very little that 471 could do, even before the merger, but especially afterwards.

Bettters also talked about the need for Black musicians to be versatile to keep regular employment. He recalled an incident where he had to read music and play it, even though he was not very familiar with the material.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁸ Bettters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

⁶⁴⁹ Bettters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

⁶⁵⁰ Bettters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

Betters developed music savvy as a club owner. He owned the club for fourteen years. While he didn't have the money to advertise as some other clubs did he maintained business by word of mouth. Billy Eckstine, Maxine Sullivan, Roy Eldridge, Stanley Turrentine*, and even Frank Sinatra came by and performed at his club.⁶⁵¹

Betters enjoyed frequenting the Musicians Club in East Liberty, where he socialized and occasionally performed. Yet his engagement with 471 was minimal.⁶⁵² His career did not suffer because of this. Betters case is intriguing because he had by all accounts a successful career and was in constant demand. Nonetheless, he also was at times deeply hurt by treatment he perceived as unfair .

Betters and Austin closed their interview discussing how jazz would evolve in Pittsburgh. They noted there were some talented young musicians, and that Black and White musicians intermingled more now than in the past. They even suggested solutions to helping educate Black youth who know very little of Pittsburgh's illustrious jazz past. Still as these two local giants of the music scene flipped through recollections of their prime days, they both decried how difficult it is to get artists in Pittsburgh to put aside petty personal issues and work together. Betters and Austin agree that this seems to be a growing divide between the young—who have the talent and energy necessary to continue Pittsburgh's jazz legacy—and the older musicians who have the wisdom needed to help the young avoid costly mistakes.⁶⁵³

⁶⁵¹ Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

⁶⁵² Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

⁶⁵³ Betters, interview by Charles Austin, July 1, 1997.

Jerry Betters feels, remarkably, that sometimes the most difficult battles were waged within the Black musical community as opposed to between Blacks and Whites. However, although hard to quantify at times, one must also acknowledge that racial discrimination spilled over into Black-on-Black rivalries and disagreements.

Betters' example shows that while many saw Local 471 as vital to their careers and the Musicians Club as vital to their social well-being, others flourished by operating on the fringes of the local scene, performing on the local scene but not fully "of it." This fact then affected their attitude towards Local 471.

Bill Gambrell

"It's a difficult job but somebody has to do it."

--Bill Gambrell

Bill Gambrell, like other musicians, held great reverence for the Musicians Club, yet was careful to point out that the Club was in decline by the time it moved from its Hill District location to East Liberty.⁶⁵⁴ During its declining years, he says, some out of town musicians held a condescending attitude towards Pittsburgh, quite a change from the time Pittsburgh jazz enjoyed a high reputation nationally. Some, he says, "looked down their noses on Pittsburgh musicians."⁶⁵⁵ On the other hand, both Gambrell and Austin noted that, when challenged, Pittsburgh musicians liked to make a point of showing out-of-town artists just how talented

⁶⁵⁴ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

⁶⁵⁵ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

they were. On more than one occasion, their demonstrated talents caused visitors to literally leave the bandstand after being humbled.⁶⁵⁶

Gambrell was a sharp dresser with an air of elegance to his demeanor. He seemed to know that part of a musicians appeal was in his look, or aesthetic. Thus, Gambrell recalled that it didn't matter if he was playing in someone's garage, he was dressed to impress. Not only did this make him feel better about himself, but he noted that it meant something to the hardworking common people who came to see him perform. He represented a model of success and sophistication to those Blacks who could only aspire.⁶⁵⁷

During the 1940's and 50's, Gambrell spent much of his time on Frankstown Avenue in East Liberty, playing at spots like the El Cabana and the Pirate Inn. At those places he made only \$71.00 as a band leader for six days of work, while the side men made \$55.00.⁶⁵⁸ He and Austin both concurred that musicians salaries during the forties and fifties were far from ideal. Gambrell once worked a job and getting only a dollar for his night's effort. Pay scales were often set lower for Blacks.⁶⁵⁹ The Pirate Inn, however, gave Gambrell both regular work and a bit of local fame. He mentioned being in West Virginia and walking down the street when a woman recognized him from the Pirate Inn.⁶⁶⁰ Hence it is apparent that as some musicians became fixtures at certain night spots, they accumulated a local and not so local fan-base. Thus,

⁶⁵⁶ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

⁶⁵⁷ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

⁶⁵⁸ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

⁶⁵⁹ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

⁶⁶⁰ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

when Gambrell found himself in leadership, he was already aware of the exploitation of Black musicians. It is important to remember that in understanding the plight of Black musicians in Local 471, one must not confuse the abundance of opportunity or the passion for playing music, with equitable and respectable treatment of artists financially. While at one time segregation created a bevy of Black venues for jazz musicians looking for work, the conditions of their work often were less than satisfactory. Yet, so many of the Black artists paint such vivid pictures of a beautiful Black entertainment world that existed in the Pittsburgh of years gone by that one forgets how unfairly they were treated.

Another issue compounded their unequal pay scales. Because many musicians did not pay taxes out of their pay, largely because there was no real infrastructure to make sure that clubs and bars deducted taxes from paychecks. Moreover, musicians had so much latitude as to where they played and for whom, that only through having an extensive following or a diligent business manager could Black musicians ensure themselves of dealing with club owners on a more level playing field. Since so many musicians took payments under the table and then did not take out their own taxes, this practice at times resulted in financial repercussions. Gambrell recalled how he was questioned about the use of the term "miscellaneous music" on his income taxes. Although he was able to escape penalty, he said that the authorities did go after other musicians.⁶⁶¹ As a result, the authority of Local 471 as a protective union was limited by the refusal or negligence of many musicians to accept prudent payment procedures. Indeed, when evaluating the practices of many African-American artists one gets the sense that it was a

⁶⁶¹ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

free for all—with artists accepting whatever rates they could get over or under the table. Only the truly diligent musicians and the ones who learned from experience over time made a habit of paying taxes.

Gambrell was versatile, able to play with minimal rehearsal time. This helped him thrive in good times and survive in the bad. As he explains:

Easter Monday used to be a favorite for dances, okay. One reason why I survived as long as I did, because my flexibility to—my playing with White groups. I played in a 100% polka band and they didn't even bother to tell me what key to start in; I knew the pattern for the day and that all paid off, because I worked three years, six nights a week [with them] at the Sundown, [located] downtown.⁶⁶²

Gambrell even learned to play an electronic drum machine, a windup rhythm maker, which afforded him more playing opportunities. His versatility opened up chances for him not only to play in Pittsburgh, but also in Sewickley, Coraopolis, Ambridge, and Aliquippa. Moreover, he learned to bake, and recalled once playing music and baking a cake for the same wedding!⁶⁶³ Doing so allowed him to make more money for the job.

The opportunity to play downtown gave Gambrell a keen understanding of how the music business works. He says that Black musicians often erred by telling the club owners the scale figure, as opposed to offering their own price for service. Thus, club owners only wanted to pay scale, which in reality was supposed to be just a bottom starting point—the minimum a

⁶⁶² Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

⁶⁶³ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

musician should receive, not the ceiling.⁶⁶⁴ Black musicians offering to play for scale, Gambrell says, helped maintain large pay disparities between Blacks and Whites.

In the later years, I mean, if they didn't want to pay my price, later for them. But, when the Blacks first started filtering Downtown, they didn't pay the Black musicians—well, here's a good example. Paul Whiteman had a group, orchestra in Pittsburgh. I don't know what they made, but Duke followed them and Duke got \$1,500.00, which I know damn well Paul Whiteman got six times more than that, see. So, that's what they were facing down there.⁶⁶⁵

Gambrell's compelling life story leaves the reader with an understanding of the complex lives led by many Black artists. Here was a gentleman who from childhood was exposed to the glittery world of entertainment, and later learned the less flamboyant, but just as significant, business side of entertainment. While he achieved success as an artist, his efforts as a union leader did not bring him the same level of success, or satisfaction. The myriad problems endemic to an industry laced with racism and without strictly adhered to economic guidelines made the life of union leaders stressful. Successful musicians such as Gambrell had to be self-motivated since the thanks from union members was frequently few and far between. However, Gambrell's accomplishments illustrate an ability to juggle life's circumstances as a working musician and a business leader.

⁶⁶⁴ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

⁶⁶⁵ Gambrell, interview by Charles Austin, May 8, 1995.

Chapter 10: Epilogue

The beauty of memory is that it allows us to recapture the past. It never leaves us because we can reconstruct it at will. Memory also allows us to re-interpret and make sense of the past. Things that didn't make sense in the moment, because we were too busy living, become clearer and more explicable with the benefit of looking back. While our memories can reflect biases, our inability to recall every detail of the past, and our editing of good and bad moments, there is no denying the importance of memory. The interviews that constituted the substance of this project, both those conducted by me and by Chuck Austin for the AAJPSP brought to life the period of the mid-1940's to the early 1970's in the Black Pittsburgh music scene. I was fortunate to be allowed to take this journey with my esteemed elders, many of whom once ruled Pittsburgh's jazz age.

This project started in the early 2000's, when I was asked to contribute to an oral history of Local 471 being undertaken by The African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh. AAJPSP granted me access to documents and records from Local 471, but the most exhilarating aspect of this research was getting to listen to the stories of former members of Local 471, to conduct my own interviews of them, and to mine the treasure trove of oral and written interviews they provided. I was then able to take these stories and create an oral history of the past, based largely on the memories and perspectives of Local 471 members themselves. I took their words and measured them against some of the press material I found documenting past decades, along with the work of other scholars who documented Pittsburgh's jazz age and the activities of the Black and White musicians unions. While the stories told by these griots of the

Black experience weren't always fully congruent with some of the other primary and secondary sources, I learned that the value of the recorded memories was that they added depth, complexity and richness to a story that otherwise had to be constructed piecemeal by newspaper accounts.

Moreover, it was interesting to see how this story evolved. It started with my desire to create an oral history of Local 471, a "history from below," told from the perspectives of those who had lived it. I initially sat in on group meetings to hear how former members discussed the past. In these group chats, members reaffirmed each other's recollections, filled in the gaps when they couldn't remember details, and jostled with other's interpretations when they disagreed. But the influence of the group was noticeable. As I listened to stories told by key members of the African-American Jazz Preservation Society, common themes emerged. One, many members had begun their careers in the 1940's and 1950's, during a period they often described as the "golden era." Secondly, they often pointed to urban renewal and the forced relocation of the Musicians Club during the 1950's as a watershed moment. Third, they often recalled the tensions that existed prior to the merger of local 471 and Local 60 in 1966. Finally, they talked about the devastating aftermath of the merger and how racial discrimination ultimately led to a lawsuit filed by Black musicians in 1971. Each of these—the "golden years," the relocation, the merger, and the lawsuit—was significant, triumphant as well as tragic. Local 471 had formerly been home to musical giants and a master class of Pittsburgh's Black entertainers. Yet, ultimately racism and societal events out of their control eroded and ultimately stripped away their paradise. All they had left were memories and fellowship they had built over the years.

As I dug further into the project, Chuck Austin became my primary guide. While his colleagues had given me my first mental picture of the historical landscape surrounding Local 471, my conversations with Austin instilled certain narratives into my consciousness. These narratives were reinforced by many of the interviews collected by the African-American Jazz Preservation Society of Pittsburgh. During these AAJPAP testimonies, Austin often served as the lead interviewer, providing the questions and members give their accounts. Austin was a fierce and passionate advocate for Local 471. His frustrations with how Black musicians had been treated in the past and were still being treated at the time of my research in the early 2000s were palpable and obvious. “I do have frustration with people not listening and learning beyond the music,” Austin says.

Many Black artists don’t know the history of the music. Economically and socially, many Blacks don’t have resources to compete on the same level as Whites. 98% of our audience here is White people, even in blues concerts. Some artists are so sophisticated that we stepped beyond the blues. It’s hard for me to understand why Black people cannot be more involved. Economically and socially—and some of the places they have these [jazz] affairs, Blacks are not comfortable. For example, back in the day, Blacks didn’t have access to the Starlight Theatre. But on the Hill for instance, Blacks had access to everything. They could walk everywhere, and if they got drunk they could make it home.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁶ Charles Austin, interview by Johnathan J. White, July 24, 2004.

Austin knew that Black musicians had created and been part of something extraordinary. He had served in leadership positions after the merger of Locals 60 and 471, and was upset that Blacks no longer had the “lush life” he remembered before the merger. He was upset that jazz no longer held the place it formerly enjoyed in the minds and hearts of the public. He was upset at self-inflicted wounds Black musicians had inflicted upon themselves, short-circuiting their union solidarity and bargaining power. He was upset at the racism that had blocked his colleagues from employment opportunities during segregation and after the integrated locals. He was upset at the social and economic conditions Black people still found themselves in. These frustrations energized Austin to passionately tell his story and the story of Local 471.

As I accumulated more stories and reviewed more sources from the past, I found that many of Austin’s accounts were corroborated. And still, his version of the past was not the only one with merit. Alternating narratives existed, told by those whose lives and time in Pittsburgh had intersected those of Austin. There were musicians who had similar experiences to those of Austin, and others whose experiences and memories differed. Some remembered events Austin described with similar clarity, while others barely commented on them at all. There were some topics like the importance and grandeur of the Musicians Club that generated almost universal positive flashbacks from former members of Local 471. But there were other topics that differed, such as how Blacks fared after the merger, and even the impact of racism.

This intellectual journey taught me two principal things. First, because many of Local 471’s records were lost or destroyed during the merger, newspapers and other written documents could provide only a limited view of 471. Where and when certain artists

performed, union policies, events like urban renewal, and the struggle against radio disk jockeys, or hints of strife between Black and White entertainers can be culled from press sources and documents. Yet, the stories beneath these stories—the rich multi-layered lives many Local 471 members lived from the mid 1940's to the early 1970's, only emerged through oral testimonies. Second, I learned that, despite the compelling stories told by master narrators like Chuck Austin and Nelson Harrison, theirs were only singular voices among others. At times, these collected memories converged and harmonized like that of a big band. At other times, however, the various memories were discordant and unique—a succession of solos, each adding to the story of Local 471. The fact that all these musicians were Black and former members of Local 471 meant that they had indeed shared some similar experiences, but they frequently had different viewpoints and perspectives based on such things as their personal journeys in entertainment, their age, their level of fame, and how personally connected they had been to union politics. It was sobering to start this project assuming there would be a large collective consensus on certain things because these were people who had all grown up in Pittsburgh, had careers in entertainment and had been members of Local 471. And yet, what I found was there was no singular collective memory, two master narrators but no one master narrative. There were threads of poignant life stories that could be quilted into a larger body of work. The members of Local 471 reclaimed and provided glimpses of the past, and it was up to me not to distort or manipulate their words to fit into a preconceived collective narrative. Instead, using their voices along with other source materials, I wanted to highlight points of congruence and contention, while also unearthing a fuller story; a social history told by those who created this history.

At times, the musicians spoke less harshly about the evils of segregation than they did about what happened when Blacks and Whites were forced together in social settings or found themselves competing for entertainment gigs. The Brown v. Board of Education case in 1954 established the fact that segregation had deleterious effects on the self-image of Blacks. However, in the specific case of Black musicians, the idea that they felt inferior to White musicians or truly deprived because they had an all-Black union was not readily apparent. On the contrary, the musicians who were the focal point of this study relished the all-Black venues that appreciated their musical gifts. They were not naïve about the ways that racism and segregation placed limits on their mobility, but many felt the segregated decades of the 1940's and 1950's were good times for them, both personally and professionally.

Key Findings

Ultimately, several key observations emerged from this project.

- 1) Many of the musicians agreed they had some of their best times in the Musicians Club during the 1940's through the mid 1950's. The social fraternity and support network provided was instrumental to the development of Black musicians and the prestige with how they viewed their occupations. They rubbed elbows with local and national music legends and had a space to call their own. Some musicians centered their most fond memories of the Musicians Club while it was at its location in the Hill District before moving to East Liberty. Others indicate that even after the Musicians Club moved, it was still a much beloved and frequented spot for Black musicians. The Musicians Club was also key to understanding racism and why some members of 471 believed it played a role. Some Black musicians felt that it

wasn't just federal mandates for integration that brought the Black Musicians Club to an end during the merger. Some believed that White fear of Black male entertainers fraternizing with White female clientele also made White authorities insist that racially separate musicians clubs couldn't be operated after the merger. This storyline is an example of something that could only be pulled out by oral testimonies and not through press materials or court documents.

2) Urban renewal certainly changed the texture of the Hill District and shifted venues in Black entertainment. Nonetheless, press sources and testimonies reveal that Black artists were still playing consistently around Pittsburgh through the late 1960's. From press material and the extent of my research, it was hard to tell if Black entertainment opportunities decreased by a certain percentage after urban renewal.

3) There were ambiguous feelings amongst Black musicians as well as a degree of racial tension leading up to the 1965 merger of local 60 and 471. Press sources indicate a fairly stable working relationship between Locals 60 and 471 before the merger. Local 471 also seemed to have a solid bond with the American Federation of Musicians, the national governing body at that time. Oral testimonies exhibited a fair amount of skepticism of how the merger would benefit Black musicians. Some members of Local 471 were hopeful of positive outcomes while many felt no need or desire to integrate with the White union, especially if it meant losing their fraternal gathering space, the Musicians Club.

4) Black musicians provided little commentary on the court case alleging racial discrimination by White members of the merged union, Local 60-471. This may have been because, besides paying their dues, many had only a casual affiliation with the business affairs of Local 471. Few ran for office or had much interest in the legal and business affairs of the

union. Thus, their reflections on the court case if any, were often brief or somewhat ambivalent. Local 471 members like Chuck Austin, who had been personally involved in the court case, were much better informed about 471 and had much more to say about it.

5) Nearly all musicians who provided oral testimonies explained that racism existed and had affected them personally, but very few framed racism as an intractable obstacle or so vexing that it took away the joy of being an entertainer. Austin knew the inner working of the grievances in the racial discrimination legal case, and Nelson Harrison pointed out sharp discrepancies in how Black and White musicians were treated after the merger. Racism was real, as some White artists secured employment despite inferior playing skills. Other musicians, described the sting of racial segregation as having blocked them from being able to play in many of the most desirable places in Pittsburgh.

6) Black musicians spoke enough about the transgressions within the Black entertainment fraternity that made it clear that racism wasn't the only hindrance to the well-being of Black musicians. These included a lack of unity among Local 471 members, along with a relatively small number of members who were actively involved in union politics, both of which limited the political and economic power of the union. In addition, the fact that many Black musicians could not, or would not, read music scores meant that their employment opportunities dwindled after the merger simply because they lacked this skill set. Nelson Harrison argued that reading amounted to an inferior style of musicianship, at least as far as jazz was concerned. Nonetheless, the need to read music remained part of the reality of the changing musical landscape. Third, musical tastes in the Black community had shifted by the 1960's. Jazz was no longer the most dominant musical genre as it had to share the spotlight

with soul music. Ruby Young alluded to this when she bitterly recalled being asked to play more common pop music at some events as opposed to the jazz she had fallen in love with. Along with this shifting musical landscape, radio disk jockeys who could play jazz on records, cut into the demand for live instrumentation. Fourth, Local 471 had a fair amount of power to protect Black entertainers, but certainly did not have unlimited power. Black musicians often played below scale, thereby undercutting their own strength and that of 471. Furthermore, some Blacks didn't ask for pensions and didn't have money taken from paychecks to guarantee a pension later. The entertainment industry is regulate because of the existence of numerous venues and contractors looking for musicians, many of whom frequently saw themselves as free-lance entertainers as opposed to part of a collective unionized body. Taken together, these factors meant that by the time of the merger in 1965-1966 and the court case brought in 1971, Black members of Local 471 felt pressures from a variety of angles. Racism was certainly a major issue, but there were additional factors that hurt the progress of Black artists.

7) While some artists spoke of uneven playing field for Blacks artists, many still relished their careers as musicians. They lived a fulfilling life, personally and professionally, in Pittsburgh, virtually putting it on the map as a city renowned for jazz. Many created a psychologically rewarding cultural and social environment during the era of racial segregation. For many, that acclimating to integration proved challenging, a difficult transition to a new way of thinking, performing, and socializing without the guarantee of more expansive employment opportunities. It makes sense that the merger and its after-effects were jarring for older members of Local 471 who remembered the prime years of the 471 and its affiliated Musicians Club. Essentially, these personal accounts, as well as newspaper accounts, demonstrate that in

the 1940's and 1950's Black musicians were part of fulfilling musical environment. However, by the decades of the 1960's and 1970's, they increasingly realized that they didn't possess the collective, economic and political strength or proprietary ownings to guarantee full employment. After the merger, they were at the mercy of White venues and White contractors and a White-dominated musicians union. In that regard, the lawsuit they filed charging racial discrimination can be viewed as an attempt to reconcile the fact that, after the merger, most had little control over their destiny. This is the more sobering storyline that had to be untangled from the feel-good memories of the glamorous life of entertainment. Local 471 members as they told stories of their past revealed themselves to be both victors and victims.

8) Local 471 was regarded in different ways by different members of the union. Local 471's remaining records and constitution show an organization that took many of its foundational principles from the national governing body for musicians dating back to its founding in 1908. By most accounts, 471 fought hard to secure the rights of members, including a fair wage scale. The union was often limited in its effectiveness because of the difficulty in monitoring all the employment opportunities available as well as because of the apathy of many members. Some, like Chuck Austin and John Hughes, fervently supported 471. Others, like Jerry Betters, recalled a tumultuous relationship with Local 471 because of its perceived heavy handed tactics. Overall, this protectorate that often operated without the full political investment of its members, was remembered both positively and negatively. Nevertheless, it was often mentioned almost in passing by many of those who offered testimony. It was a necessary obligation that allowed Blacks access to the bandstand and the lifestyle they desired. Local 471 as a body was not remembered with the same intensity and sentiment as the

Musicians Club. It could not fully guarantee equal treatment and wages for its members, and thus was not always fully appreciated. However, it could have probably been a more viable protective force for Black members if more had invested themselves more fully in the union. Black musicians seemed to savor and value their bonds as entertainers much more than as union members. They often related their trials and triumphs to their unique merits or shortcomings or skin color, rather than to their union membership.

9) Finally, a key observation is that female voices in 471 were few and far between. Newspapers documented the activities of female musicians who had been a part of the Local, but women were largely confined to being vocalists rather than instrumentalists. The great majority of musicians interviewed by the AAJPSP were male. While Ruby Young played a major role in Local 471, her voice was magnified by the fact that she was one of the union's very few female members. Hence, to call this project a study of collective memory or a social history is only partially true. Jazz may have been a male dominated industry during the decades researched, but often the stories were told by men who might speak of their interactions with women. I regret not having more diligently sought out female voices to contribute their own truths and narration for the story of Local 471. As it stands, it is all too easy to assume this is a social history of male entertainers.

Final Reflections

This project has left me with a profound sense of satisfaction. Memories that had been circulating among the Local 471 peer group have been given a new life, a new format in the form of the written word. Many of the surviving members of Local 471 easily share good times

in conversation with each other, but formally documenting their recollections creates bridges linking the past to the present and the future. The story of Local 471 won't collect dust in mental archives. Rather, having their story told allows them to re-live their past life and retrieve those good feelings. It amplifies their humanity.

The history of Local 471 does not reach a dramatic conclusion that ties up the narratives of many musicians. Rather, it helps us understand that people who may have been part of a collective experience as musicians, as African-Americans, as Pittsburghers, as survivors of a particular generation, will at times have congruent interpretations of certain events or eras. In this study, there was significant solidarity on the fact that the Musicians Club was a key part of their heritage, one that was lost, ironically, through racial integration.

And yet, despite expressing interpretations of the past that converged at times, the musicians also articulated differences, sometimes subtle, sometimes stark, in their experiences. For example, several members of Local 471 described varying degrees of impact from the merger. They were collectively part of an entertainment landscape, even as they played in different bands and in different types of programs. They often knew each other in intimate ways or through hearsay. Sometimes they were a mutual admiration society; at other times they were fierce competitors as to who deserved a spot on the bandstand. They had a mutual love for jazz, but not always a mutual love for each other. They were bitter about racism and what they had lost during integration, but they were just as often, if not more so, satisfied with their lives. The hardships didn't seem to outweigh the good times, at least when they fell into bouts of nostalgia. They were keenly aware they had been part of those set apart as entertainers, yet, they expressed a profound connection to the listeners, who gave their music

validation. They were part of a collective union and yet they remained individual artists in their own right. Some were entrenched in the political affairs of Local 471, but many more were only casually affiliated with the union, regarding Local 471 as simply a means to an end, a gateway to the music and lifestyle that Billy Strayhorn referred to as a “lush life.”

There was no unified collective memory. Their racial identity, their profession as musicians, their sense of community were modalities in which their lives were lived. Nonetheless, the pervasiveness of these identities did not mean that their interpretations of the past were monolithic. While gathering their stories and accompanying source material, I attempted to create a social history, a history from below. I also attempted to see the divisions between the narratives provided by oral testimonies versus other source material—perhaps separating facts from legend. What I often found was that primary documents contained facts. The Constitution of Local 471, for example, clearly stated its rules and regulations. But the oral testimonies frequently revealed the “truth” beneath the facts. Thus, many musicians discussed that not only were Local 471’s wage scales not provided by employers, but many Black musicians willingly played for less than scale. Without the memories, it would be difficult to distill deeper meanings from the press material and other documents related to the story of Local 471.

This project, while evolving into a social history from below, is really a compilation of alternate truths and interpretations of past events. It is tempting to focus on rank and file of Local 471 and see them as part of a mass struggle; a working-class group of artists who leveraged the union to secure better conditions of employment. But in fact, most members of Local 471 were more interested in discussing their music than their involvement with the union.

The union was important. It facilitated a degree of access and equity. But for many, the most important thing was the music and the lifestyle it afforded. Being an entertainer was a lifestyle in and of itself which provided perks, excitement, and riveting passion that traditional occupations could not compete with. Many members of Local 471 had regular 9-5 jobs. Being a musician was also a "job." Yet, these music jobs were often referred to as "gigs." This special vernacular that evolved around music further demonstrated that the entertainment profession was perceived as different from normal "jobs." Being a musician made those involved feel like they were somebody significant. The entertainment industry, and the feelings it generated, often allowed this special group of Blacks to transcend the boundaries of skin color, class, and geographic space. They became part of something that elevated Black Pittsburgh to a culturally elite status. Local 471 played a role.

In that context, the merger of Locals 60 and 471 significantly ruptured the lives of Black musicians. But the collected memories of former Local 471 members, while varying on many things, converged on the conviction that jazz, especially during the 1940's and 1950's, affirmed the humanity of Black people like few other things. It was for Black people and of Black people. It transformed the image of Blacks from uncivilized to sophisticated. It is through the collaboration of many voices from the past that this current generation—and those beyond—will grasp the impact Local 471 had on Pittsburgh and the world.

This project has gathered the alternate truths of former Local 471 members, and rendered them visible. Decades after the dream of the golden era of Pittsburgh jazz has ended, the collective memories of the elders awaken us to a time when Black Pittsburgh was a cultural mecca.

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