

## Philadelphia History - Black Musicians' Union, Local 274

### PART III/IV: The Explosion of Philadelphia Jazz Clubs

By Diane Turner

Black musicians in Philadelphia performed jazz to audiences in clubs, theaters, restaurants, cafes, inns, ballrooms, hotels, halls and other establishments. Their performances ranged from masquerade balls to the celebrations such as that of the Emancipation Proclamation Day. A survey of the local Black newspapers in Philadelphia in 1934 gives some indication of Black musical activities at the time.<sup>1</sup> Forty-one Black musical units and fifty-five "live" music venues were identified through newspaper advertisements that year. The smallest musical units identified were The Apache Duo and the Three Dukes of Rhythm (with "Fish Tail" at the piano).<sup>2</sup> The largest musical groups identified were orchestras such as Doc Hyder's Orchestra with His Twelve Famous Southernaires and Clarence McCrary's Orchestra with His Eleven Missourians.<sup>3</sup> There were other orchestras advertised with an undetermined number of pieces such as Johnny Bowden's Orchestra, Charlie Gaines and His CBS Orchestra and others.<sup>4</sup> Big bands continued to be popular during the 1930's. The units identified included Willie Bryant and His Band featuring Mabel Scott, Bert Hall and His Jungle Band and others.<sup>5</sup>

Black musicians were hired in "live" music venues that were dispersed throughout the city. For example, there was Club Hy-De-Ho known as "Germantown Harlem" located at Alfred and Penn Streets, The Sharpnack Inn at 75 E. Sharpnack Street and The Yah-Man Cafe, Banyton and Rittenhouse in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. In South Philadelphia, there were a number of places such as the Mickey Mouse, N.W. Corner of 18th and Federal Streets, New Lincoln Inn, 18th and Carpenter Streets, and O.V. Catto Elks Home, 16th and Fitzwater Streets. North Philadelphia also contained its share of venues with Dixon's Wonder Bar, 19th and Montgomery, Dreamland Cafe, Ridge and Jefferson Streets and Uptown Little Harlem, 22nd and Columbia. In West Philadelphia, there was the Alden Grille, 5714 Girard Avenue, The Wonder Bar Cafe, 5329 Market Street and LaRue Roof Garden, 5946 Vine Street. There were also a number of establishments in Center City such as the Postal Card, 1504 South Street, the Show Boat, 327 N. 9th Street and Lincoln Theater, Broad and Lombard Streets.

There were still places that did not hire Black musicians in Philadelphia. In surveying *The Evening Bulletin* for 1934, none of the Black musical units nor the venues where they played were advertised. The advertisements that were listed in the newspaper included white musicians

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<sup>1</sup> Black newspapers surveyed includes *Philadelphia Tribune*, *Afro-American Press*, and *Pittsburgh Courier*; *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*.

<sup>2</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 1, 1934, p. 14 and November 15, 1934, p. 12

<sup>3</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 26, 1934, p. 12, October 18, 1934, p. 13, October 25, 1934, p. 14, and November 8, 1934, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 13, 1934, p. 12, October 18, 1934, p. 13, November 15, 1934, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 26, 1934, p. 12 and November 15, 1934, p. 12.

and several Black renowned musicians, who appeared in the city. For example, Luis Russell and His Orchestra with Tiny Bradshaw performed at the Cotton Club, 703 S. Broad Street on February 6, 1934. On May 25, 1934, Cab Calloway and His Cotton Club Orchestra was advertised in performance at the Earle, 11th and Market Streets. Most of the ads listed white musical units. For example, Larry Funk and His New York Orchestra performed at the Wagner, 1750 N. Broad Street on May 12, 1934. The Meyer Davis Orchestra played at the opening of The Roof Garden, Bellevue Stratford on June 4, 1934. The Ludy String Ensemble appeared at Green Hotel, 8th and Chestnut Streets on June 19, 1934. On November 10, 1934, Leo Zollo and His 12-Piece Dance Orchestra were listed at The Benjamin Franklin. Jack Hart's Orchestra performed at the French Grotto, 1309 Walnut Street on November 28, 1934.