

A black and white photograph of a building entrance. The entrance features a large, ornate metal door with a decorative arched window above it, resembling a sunburst or fan pattern. To the left of the door, the number '726' is visible on the wall. A person is standing inside the doorway, looking towards the camera. The overall scene is somewhat dimly lit, suggesting an interior or shaded area.

# THE GENESIS AND EXODUS OF PRESERVATION HALL

THE KEN GRAYSON MILLS STORY

RICHARD EKINS



# **The Genesis and Exodus of Preservation Hall**



Ken Grayson Mills, 1989  
Courtesy of Len Klikunas

# **The Genesis and Exodus of Preservation Hall**

The Ken Grayson Mills Story

Richard Ekins

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For Tsar Fedorsky and Larissa Mills, with thanks

**THROUGH THE IRON GATE ON ST. PETER'S STREET LIES ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST RESPECTED MUSIC VENUES – AND THE SPIRITUAL HOME OF NEW ORLEANS JAZZ.**

**IN THE 1950S, ART DEALER LARRY BORENSTEIN FROM MILWAUKEE MANAGED AN ART GALLERY IN THE FRENCH QUARTER, CALLED ASSOCIATED ARTISTS. TO ATTRACT CUSTOMERS, HE INVITED LOCAL JAZZ MUSICIANS TO PLAY FOR TIPS. AFTER A TIME, THE MUSIC STARTED DRAWING MORE ATTENTION THAN THE ART.**

**IN MAY 1961, BORENSTEIN TURNED MANAGEMENT OVER TO KEN GRAYSON MILLS AND BARBARA REID, WHO TURNED IT INTO A MUSIC VENUE AND NAMED IT 'PRESERVATION HALL'.**



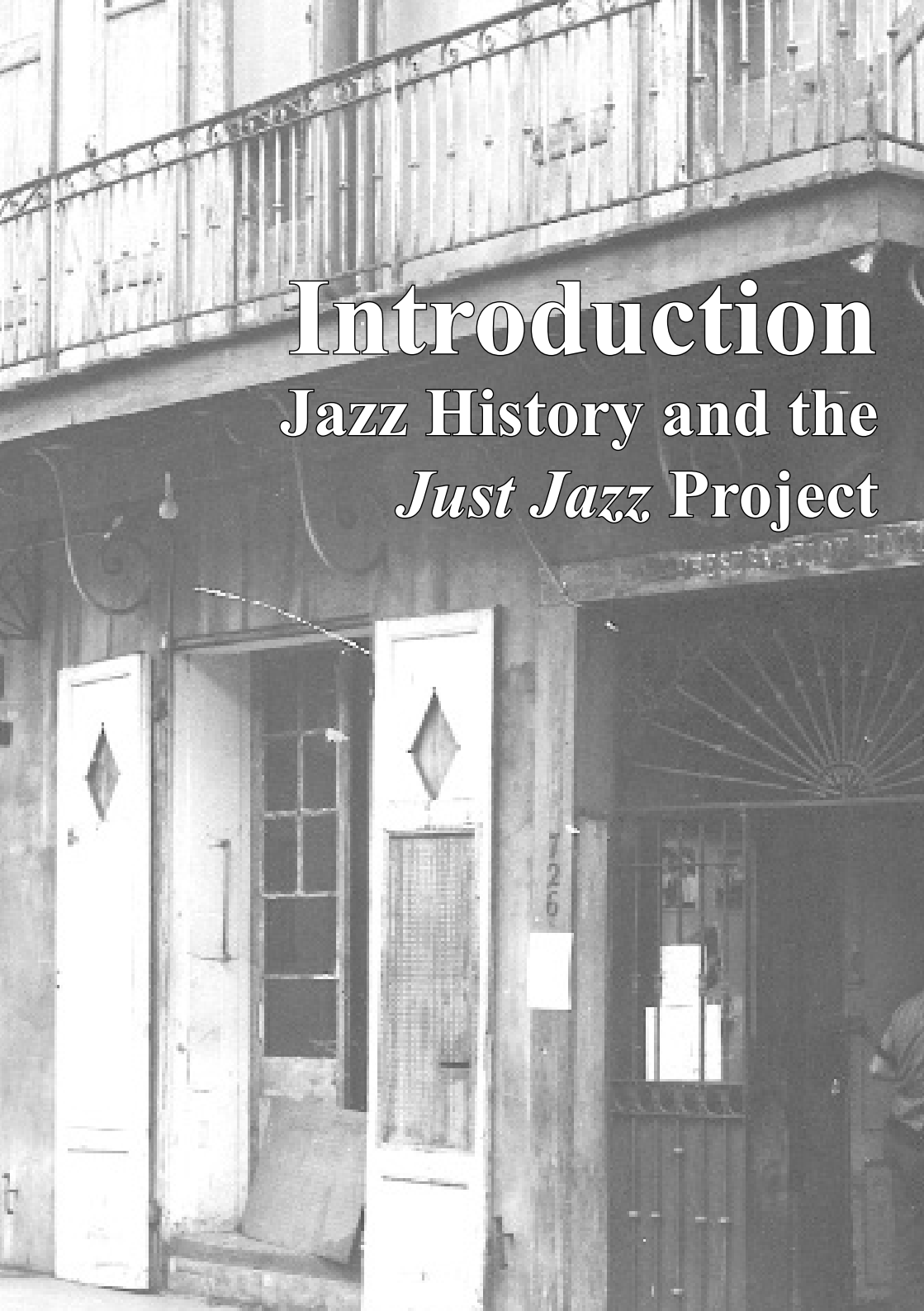
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A black and white photograph of a building facade. The upper part shows a balcony with a decorative wrought-iron railing. Below the balcony, the text 'Introduction Jazz History and the Just Jazz Project' is overlaid. The lower part of the image shows a ground-floor entrance with two white doors. The door on the left is open, revealing a dark interior. The door on the right is closed and has a diamond-shaped window. To the right of the doors is a dark doorway with a sunburst design above it. The number '126' is visible on the wall to the right of the doors.

# Introduction

Jazz History and the  
*Just Jazz* Project



## **Introduction: Jazz History and the *Just Jazz* Project**

This book of jazz history lies somewhere between an entirely new one and an edited compilation of previously published material. It may be read either as an independent volume or as a reader's guide to my Ken Grayson Mills research in *Just Jazz* magazine, eventually rather grandly titled 'The Ken Grayson Mills Project – The Hidden History of Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records, Preservation Hall, and Preservation Hall in Exile'.<sup>1</sup>

Jazz history writing has always been variously journalistic, scholarly, academic, and musicological. Its authors have been variously amateur and professionally accredited. More recently, particularly with the rise of Popular Music Studies and Jazz Studies in universities, it has become increasingly historiographical. In other words, it has incorporated within itself the history of history, most notably, in my view, in the study of competing definitions of jazz history.

In making sense of competing histories, I find it instructive to ask three initial questions: 1. What is the writer's starting point? 2. What is the writer committed to? 3. What does the writer want to incorporate and/or embrace within his/her history? In this introduction I set out my own position in relation to these questions.

In my recent book *The Politics of Authenticating: Revisiting New Orleans Jazz*,<sup>2</sup> a book written primarily for an academic audience in social science, cultural studies, and musicology, I make it explicit that my starting point was as a 16-year-old English middle-class white male, New Orleans jazz enthusiast, record collector, embryonic trumpet player, band leader, and record producer between 1961 and 1976. During that period, I read much about New Orleans jazz, including many of its histories, but I wrote virtually nothing.

When I revisited the world of New Orleans jazz in 2000, after an absence of twenty-five years, I did so as a professionally trained sociologist

and psychoanalyst. And, by this time, as an established academic writer. Between 2009 and 2013, I studied university-based post-graduate Popular Music Studies, Jazz Studies, and Musicology in the music departments of the University of Liverpool and Goldsmiths, University of London. Writing about the history of New Orleans jazz became a central passion of my life.

Right from the start of my jazz journey back in 1961, I was committed to so-called ‘authentic’ New Orleans jazz, most especially what might be called the sub-genre of New Orleans jazz associated with the rediscovery and resurrection of Bunk Johnson in the early 1940s.<sup>3</sup> For a while in the 1960s the tradition associated with this sub-genre became known as ‘Contemporary New Orleans jazz’, or sometimes ‘Contemporary New Orleans music’.

This was the period of a flourishing second wave of New Orleans jazz revivalism, with hundreds of new record releases of New Orleans musicians, either recorded in New Orleans or on tour, during the 1960s to mid-1970s. More recently, I find the term ‘old style’ New Orleans jazz, perhaps the most useful in distinguishing this sub-genre. I use it as a sensitising concept well understood by the devotees of this music, even if it is difficult to define with precision. I remain committed to this sub-genre. From my standpoint as an academic, I also remain committed to writing about ‘authenticity’ in New Orleans jazz – as ‘authenticating’. In other words, viewed as a social construction variously constituted, consolidated, and progressed over the entire trajectory of its history.<sup>4</sup>

However, this book is written principally for the enthusiast of the music and for the general enquirer, rather than for the academic. Consequently, I do not wish to dwell further on the matter of authenticity beyond this preamble.

I will say right now, however, that I regard both my *Just Jazz* Ken Grayson Mills and Barbara Glancey Reid Projects as studies in ‘resuming authenticity’. In other words, I see both Mills and Reid in their different ways as resuming the constructions of so-called authentic New Orleans jazz, initiated most notably by William ‘Bill’ Russell in his series of American

music 78 shellac records issued in the mid-late 1940s, and extended by his series of vinyl LPs in the early 1950s, now all available on American Music CD.<sup>5</sup>

So, what do I want to incorporate and/or embrace?

The book has two main purposes. In the first place it was born out of my frustration, not to say despair, that despite writing over forty-five *Just Jazz* articles making the contribution of Mills and Reid to second wave revivalism explicit, especially in relation to their co-founding of Preservation Hall, the lie kept being perpetuated that it was Allan and Sandra Jaffe who founded the Hall. Indeed, I felt compelled to open the first paragraph of chapter 1 of my *Politics of Authenticating* book with the following:

By the spring of 2021, I had just finished a five-year project that involved my publishing some forty-five articles on Ken Grayson Mills and Barbara Glancey Reid, the co-founders of Preservation Hall in New Orleans. Preservation Hall was co-founded in 1961 and quite soon afterwards became a major, worldwide, tourist attraction and remains so today. It is now advertised as a ‘historic music venue in the French Quarter working to protect, preserve and perpetuate the spirit of traditional New Orleans jazz.’<sup>6</sup> Mills and Reid had been systematically and cruelly erased from the history of Preservation Hall, most notably by Sandra Jaffe and her son Ben Jaffe, following Allan and Sandra Jaffe’s taking over the management of Preservation Hall. This was after Mills and Reid had been ousted in September 1961 by the Hall’s then lessee, Larry Borenstein. Such was the influence of the Jaffes’ ownership and marketing of the ‘Preservation Hall’ brand, that only a small coterie of New Orleans jazz enthusiasts, record collectors, writers and musicians knew of the importance of Mills and Reid. I wrote my articles in the spirit of ‘righting a wrong’. In academic terms, I was writing ‘hidden history’.

I was saddened to have felt obliged to add in a footnote to that first paragraph:

Sandra Jaffe died in December 2021. Richard Sandomir in *The New York Times*, in addition to numerous other obituary writers, maintains the falsehood that she founded Preservation Hall. More accurately, Sandomir’s obituary cites the impresario George Wein that ‘There is no question that Preservation Hall saved New Orleans jazz’.<sup>7</sup>

The fact is that despite my best efforts, and those of *Just Jazz*, the lie that Allan and Sandra Jaffe founded Preservation Hall appears regularly and consistently in all manner of locations. Put more specifically, the lie most usually remains the ‘truth’ within the circles not only of journalists and the general reader but also amongst many jazz studies academics and PhD students who should know better. In short, the erasing of Mills and Reid and their immense importance to the history of New Orleans jazz continues. Does it matter? For me and many others it does.

Perhaps a reason for the ‘invisibility’ of my five year project is that it is only available to *Just Jazz* subscribers or on my specialist La Croix records website. So, the first purpose of this book is to provide an easily available source for even the most casual Google search enquirer interested in Preservation Hall and its origins. It will be instantly and permanently available on Amazon, for instance.

My concern, as I write now, is that without such an easily available source, my *Just Jazz* projects will sooner or later be consigned to Reference Only access in such places as the British Library and the National Jazz Archive, Loughton, UK. In these out-of-the-way locations they will be available only to the most dedicated traditional jazz researcher. Moreover, following my death, the likelihood is that my La Croix Records website – which features my various *Just Jazz* projects – will become yet another illustration of what I term ‘Fragile History’. The site will vanish into the ether, never to be consulted again.<sup>8</sup>

The second purpose of the book is to provide a reader’s guide to the Ken Grayson Mills Project, with reference to a selection of articles most relevant to the contested story of the origins of Preservation Hall. For this, it is necessary for me to explain how the articles came to be written and published and to include editorial commentary on those selections with reference to the original project as a whole. At the same time, I want to detail the research methodology I developed as the project progressed.

For this, I now give a chronological account of that progress. Most importantly, I stress the collaborative nature of the project. As I put it in my initial *Just Jazz* announcement of the Ken Grayson Mills Project:

I view this very much as a collaborative project between those who are committed to paying the proper respect to Mills and, in this spirit, I look forward to hearing from you. Use of your material will, of course, be acknowledged.<sup>9</sup>

The project had its roots in a get together I arranged with the English New Orleans jazz enthusiast, expert and commentator, Robert Greenwood, whom I met for the first time in person at a O2 event in London in October 2008. That event, titled *Festival New Orleans*, naturally attracted many New Orleans jazz enthusiasts, especially those living in London at the time. By 2008, I had been working on my Dan Pawson Project<sup>10</sup> for some time and it was through that project that I initially became acquainted with Robert. I had joined the on-line Birmingham [UK] History Forum, and a Google search led Robert to my thread on ‘Dan Pawson and the Artesian Hall Stompers’.

Following the O2 event, Robert and I began seeing each other in London on a regular basis and between us we established what we came to call the Porcupine Society, which held regular meetings every six or so weeks at the Porcupine public house, Leicester Square, for over a decade between early 2009 and the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020.<sup>11</sup> Fred Eatherton took a lead role in convening the group. Some participants joined us for a short period as guests, such as Dan Pawson’s son Spencer. Mike Dine, alas, left us following his unexpected death in December 2016. Mike Pointon’s various activities meant that he was a less frequent attender in the early years but, for the most part, once a member joined us, they attended every meeting. I like to think that between us we covered almost the entire spectrum of expertise in the ‘old-style’ New Orleans jazz scene.

The late Mike Dine had been producing 504 Records since 1979, first on vinyl and then on CD. Moreover, his weekly long telephone conversations

with his business partner Tom Stagg, a long time French Quarter resident in New Orleans, ensured that we were in full contact with the relevant matters of what was happening in New Orleans at the time.

Fred Eatherton contributed the specialist skills of the discographer who already had under his belt his acclaimed Bunk Johnson discography.<sup>12</sup> He was also playing banjo with the Frog Island Jazz Band, a London-based revivalist group dating back to 1962. With this band, he was in contact with the so-called classic New Orleans jazz style tradition associated with the musicians who had left New Orleans and recorded mostly in Chicago in the early 1920s and the early 1930s, as opposed to the so-called ‘stay at homes’ – the major focus of the Porcupine Society. Robert Greenwood was particularly sensitive to the debates about ‘purism’ and ‘authenticity’ in revivalist New Orleans jazz, having followed Ken Colyer since he was a 16-year-old. He was to write later, on Dan Pawson:

As well as being one of the leading authorities on New Orleans jazz anywhere in the world, Dan was the finest and most authentic purveyor of New Orleans music the UK has ever known.<sup>13</sup>

This appreciation was set within an encyclopaedic knowledge and understanding of New Orleans jazz revivalism, in general, together with an enjoyment and appreciation of jazz of most periods and styles as well as blues.

Doug Landau had been on the inside track of the development of old-style New Orleans jazz in the UK from the mid-1950s onwards. He formed the Salutation Brass Band in London in 1958, which led on to his stint with Keith Smith’s New Teao Brass Band the following year. Doug played trumpet in various New Orleans-style bands around the London area for decades. As editor of *New Orleans Music* magazine from 2002 to 2010, he was able to build further on his talent for exploring the subtleties of different sorts of New Orleans style and continue with the publication of his exceptionally nuanced articles.

The late Mike Pointon was well known as a musician, author and radio presenter who for decades had been one of the most respected UK experts on the New Orleans jazz scene. Moreover, he had presented the acclaimed BBC Radio series ‘Bunk and Bill’.<sup>14</sup> He was also very generous with his musicological expertise when it was called upon.

In addition to his wide-ranging jazz interests, John Whitehorn had worked for years with the music publishers Chappell and Co. in London, and with the EMI Publishing Group, as well as having a short spell at the P.R.S. (The Performing Rights Society). His advice on songs, titles and lyrics was always on hand, as was his expertise on such search facilities as ancestry.com.

Adele Tinman was a long-time London traditional jazz scene member and had spent considerable time in New Orleans. She was to be particularly valuable as a friend of Kelley Edmiston when our work on Ken Grayson Mills began to include work on Kelley’s mother, Barbara Glancey Reid.

In the early years of the Porcupine Society, Robert Greenwood, Doug Landau and John Whitehorn were all working on the indexing of *New Orleans Music* magazine in preparation for its online presence. It should be said, too, that we were meeting in the very room at the Porcupine that had hosted the UK Bunk Johnson Appreciation Society during the 1950s and early 1960s, a stone’s throw away from the Ken Colyer Jazz Club, at 10/11 Great Newport Street.

By 2010, most of the group had their own Facebook pages. These, together with their respective friendship networks, would widen the circle of enthusiasts much further.

In retrospect, what became the Ken Grayson Mills Project had its origin in two comments I posted on my own Facebook wall in August 2010 and June 2011. Both featured a previously unknown photograph of Mills given to Per Oldaeus by Tsar Fedorsky,<sup>15</sup> whom we later learned was Mills’ stepdaughter.

For my first post, I commented:

As a UK enthusiast and record producer of ‘old style’ New Orleans jazz from

the early 1960s onwards, the Holy Trinity of record producers is Bill Russell (American Music), Ken Grayson Mills (Icon) and Barry Martyn (MONO). Bill is widely regarded as a Saint. Barry is well able to take care of himself. It is Ken Grayson Mills whom we should not forget. As Per Oldaeus puts it: ‘Ken Grayson Mills was one of the founders of the Preservation Hall and later the Icon Hall, renamed as the Perseverance Hall, where this photo was taken around 1962.’

By the time of my second post, I had sorted out my copies of the early 1960s American *Jazz Report* magazine and UK magazine *Eureka*. It was principally in these rare specialist magazines that Mills announced his Icon Records recording project in New Orleans and reported on his earliest recording sessions and subsequent LP releases. I drew on selected passages from his *Jazz Report* articles to comment on my June 2011 post headed ‘Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and the Start of Second Wave New Orleans Jazz Revivalism.’ These two posts generated fifty-four comments, mostly from myself, Robert Greenwood, and Bill Bissonnette. They convinced me that Facebook was an excellent way to make contacts within the international social worlds of New Orleans jazz enthusiasts.

US-based Bill Bissonnette was a major figure in second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism, especially as a record producer and author of his book *The Jazz Crusade*.<sup>16</sup> So detailed were his comments on my Facebook wall that I realised that they set the foundation for an almost immediate article. I duly followed up Bissonnette’s Facebook comments with subsequent email interviews with him, that continued irregularly until his death in 2018.

Later, I proceeded to gather material from an ever-widening network of world-wide contacts through a combination of Facebook commentary, Facebook messenger, telephone, and email interviewing, supplemented, as and when the situation arose or was needed, with hard copy material of books, records – vinyl and CD, photographs, letters, and other memorabilia.

However, before I was able to continue with this highly specialised focus on Ken Grayson Mills and second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism, I

had to produce enough academic articles in refereed academic journals to secure further paid employment on a fractional Professorial contract at my university – the University of Ulster.

During this period, in May 2011, I was fortunate that the Swedish musician, author, and New Orleans jazz expert Per Oldaeus had started a Facebook group site called ‘New Orleans Music – for all Genres from that City’. As Per described it, ‘This is a group for all with a profound and serious interest in New Orleans music.’ Accordingly, he kept it as both a private and hidden group, meaning that only members could see who was in the group and what they posted, and only members could find the group. Fairly soon, its membership reached 400 and it later grew to around 500. As a member of Per’s group, I now had access to serious specialists world-wide on a site beyond my own and my Facebook friends’ networks, most of whom were exceedingly generous with their time and expertise.

By this time, the linking of YouTube videos with Facebook was a particularly favoured method of social networking and it became my favourite form of serious research. Simply put, between 2011 and 2016 – before I moved onto the Ken Grayson Mills Project in earnest – I availed myself of Per’s New Orleans site to post selected YouTube videos and to invite comment, specifically geared to academic articles that I was preparing at the time.

This included an article I wrote on the New Orleans trumpet player Kid Thomas Valentine, entitled ‘Social Constructions of “Authenticity” and the Sounds of the Kid Thomas Valentine Band: The Case of “Basin Street Blues” – an Approach from Sociological Musicology and Cultural Studies’.<sup>17</sup> I was thus able to canvas views relating to the relative ‘authenticity’ of two selected Kid Thomas band tracks of ‘Basin Street Blues’, the first from a dance-band-type session from 1957 and the second from a much later concert given in 1971. The core participants who contributed were major figures within world-wide New Orleans revivalist jazz worlds, variously as musicians,

writers, promoters, and record producers. Moreover, the older contributors had been participants within these worlds since the 1940s. In other words, the collective memory of the participants went back to almost the beginning of New Orleans jazz revivalism. This was a method of research I was able to develop later throughout the Ken Grayson Mills Project, supplemented with Facebook commentary, messaging and email conversations relating to photographs, memorabilia, and so on.

Such was the success of Per Oldaeus' site that Fred Eatherton used to joke that it had become the substitute for *New Orleans Music* magazine that had ceased publication in December 2010. Prior to that date, the UK magazine *New Orleans Music* had been the authoritative source of New Orleans music writing world-wide since its inception in October/November 1989.

However, now that my Kid Thomas article was finally published (2016) and after some seven years of Facebook networking (including five years on Per Oldaeus' New Orleans music site) I was free to move on in earnest to the Ken Grayson Mills Project. This was conceived as a specialist New Orleans jazz enthusiasts' project as opposed to a Jazz Studies/Popular Music Studies/Cultural Studies academic project and, in my view, entirely appropriate for publication in *Just Jazz* as it progressed.

I had other reasons, however, for publishing the project in parts as I wrote them, rather than publishing a conventional book much further down the line. I was only too aware of the length of time taken for 'Porcupiner' Mike Pointon, together with his co-author Ray Smith, to get their book on Bill Russell published, due to all manner of hiccoughs with a series of publishers. Indeed, it was only finally published in 2018 by Equinox thanks to its championing by Alyn Shipton. If it took decades to publish such an authoritative book on the great Bill Russell by the established jazz authors of the acclaimed *Goin' Home: The Uncompromising Life and Music of Ken Colyer*,<sup>18</sup> what chance would I have of publishing a book on the little-known Ken Grayson Mills before I died.

But why was the project needed at all?

In brief, the need for the project arose from discussions emerging at our Porcupine Society meetings when we realised that of all the major record producers of New Orleans jazz revivalism, next to nothing was known about Ken Grayson Mills. Several books, book chapters and many articles and interviews had been published on Bill Russell. Barry Martyn's jazz odyssey book was easily available,<sup>19</sup> as were many of his writings for Jazzology publications and the magazines *Footnote* and *New Orleans Music*, among others. Moreover, Martyn was very much alive.<sup>20</sup> No one seemed to know whether Mills was dead or alive. Certainly, he had not been heard of for decades.

The first task was to determine whether, indeed, he was dead or alive and to find out what we could about other biographical details. For this the work of Porcupiners John Whitehorn and Fred Eatherton was crucial. By May 2016 our research of appropriate public records had established the date and place of Mills' birth and death and some basic information regarding his parents, his education, his marital status, and his family situation. I now felt able to announce the forthcoming project.

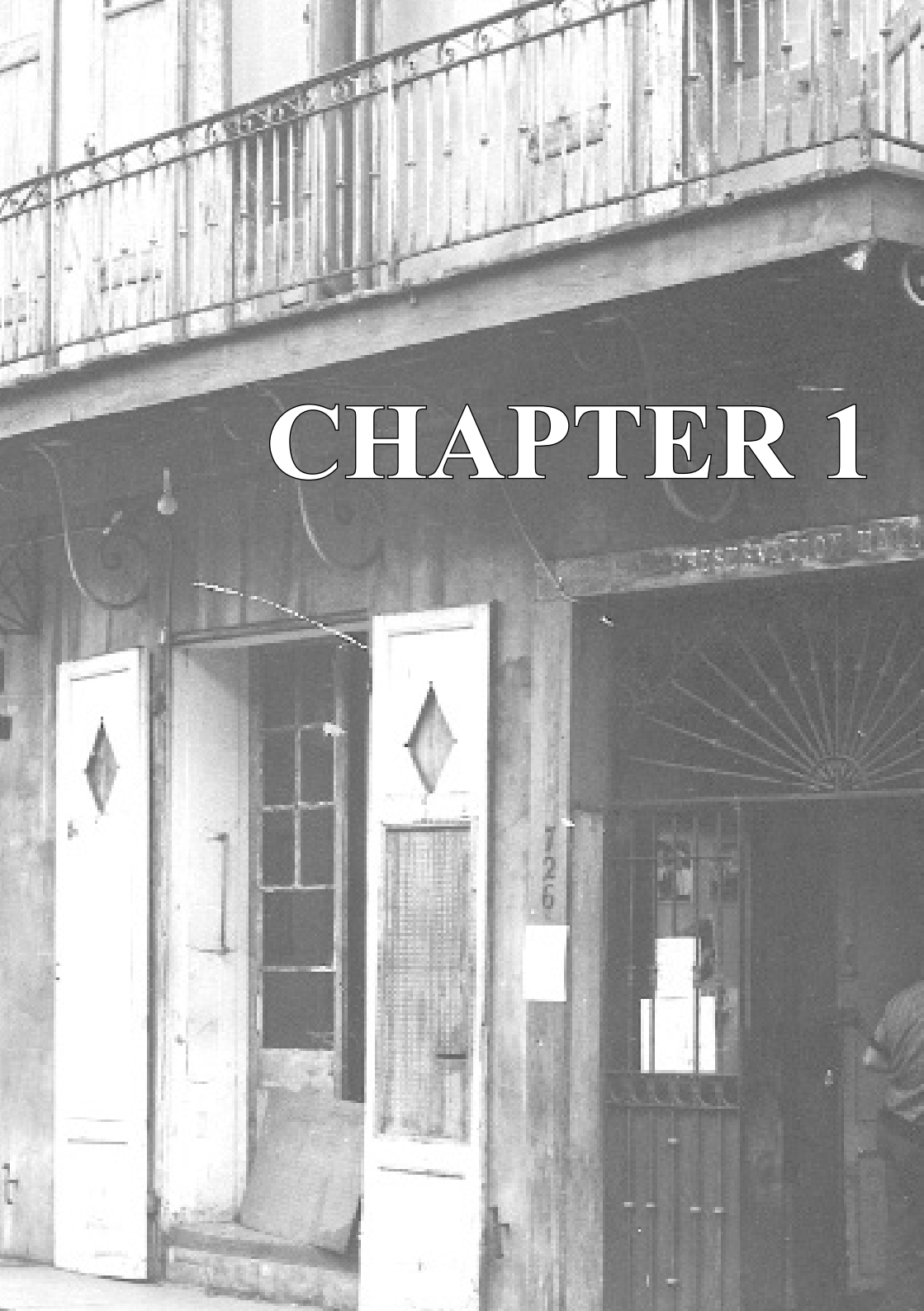
Richard Ekins, June 2023

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6. ‘Preservation Hall – Traditional Jazz Since 1961’, accessed June 12, 2023. *Official Preservation Hall website*, accessed July 9, 2023. <https://www.preservationhall.com/>.
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8. Save through the very dedicated researcher who utilizes Internet Archive – Wayback Machine, <http://web.archive.org/>.
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10. Richard Ekins, ‘The Dan Pawson Project’, accessed May 31, 2023, <http://www.lacroixrecords.com/res.html>.
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14. Bill Russell and Mike Pointon, ‘Bunk and Bill’, BBC Radio 3, 1992.
15. Reproduced in Chapter 3, p. 28.
16. Big Bill Bissonnette, *The Jazz Crusade: The Inside Story of the Great New Orleans Jazz Revival of the 1960s*, Special Request Books, Bridgeport, Connecticut, 1992.
17. Richard Ekins, ‘Social Constructions of “Authenticity” and the Sounds of the Kid Thomas Valentine Band: The Case of “Basin Street Blues” – an Approach from Sociological Musicology and Cultural Studies’, *Jazz Research Journal*, 2016, 9 (2): 107-144.
18. Mike Pointon and Ray Smith, *Goin’ Home: The Uncompromising Life and Music of Ken Colyer*, Ken Colyer Trust, London, 2010.
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20. That was in 2016. Alas, Barry Martyn died on July 17, 2023.

# CHAPTER 1





# Chapter 1

The Ken Grayson Mills project began and was duly announced in *Just Jazz*, quite simply as ‘The Ken Grayson Mills Project: An Announcement.’

I had no firm idea of how long the project would go on for, or, indeed, what form it would take, far less how many parts there would be. All I knew at the beginning was that the Porcupine group had established the basics of Ken’s life and death and I was fortunate to hold a complete set of the relevant issues of the magazines *Jazz Report* and *Eureka*. I also had the collaboration of Bill Bissonnette on Mills. I could at the very least reproduce this introductory material.

Not everyone shared my confidence in this venture. I recall discussing my plans with Mike Dine. He told me that I did not understand the *Just Jazz* readership and that *Just Jazz* would not be interested in such a project. He could not have been more wrong. He also could not understand why I wanted to announce it as a [lacroixrecords.com](http://lacroixrecords.com) project.

The reason was – as I made clear in the opening paragraphs of that first announcement article – because the project was part and parcel of that sub-genre of New Orleans jazz revivalist music, best described as ‘the tradition of old-style New Orleans jazz’, that I had been engaged with since 1961 and had established my La Croix Record label in 1967 to perpetuate.

I had set out the fundamentals of that tradition in the Booklet notes of my 504/La Croix CDs issued up to that point and I repeated the basic points in the opening section of that first announcement, as follows.

## **Lacroixrecords.com and the Ken Grayson Mills Project: An Announcement**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, November 2016

[Lacroixrecords.com](http://Lacroixrecords.com) is dedicated to the tradition of old-style New Orleans jazz as set forth in:

1. *Jazz New Orleans, 1885–1963: An Index to the Negro Musicians of New Orleans* by Samuel Barclay Charters IV, 1963;
2. *New Orleans, the Revival: A Tape and Discography of Negro Traditional Jazz Recorded in New Orleans or by New Orleans Bands 1937–1972*, compiled by Tom Stagg and Charlie Crump, 1973;
3. *On Tour: A Disco- and Tapeography of the Recordings Made by New Orleans Musicians with Local Bands*, compiled by Jempi de Donder, 1983; and
4. *The Song for Me: A Glossary of New Orleans Music and Musicians Plus Others of that Ilk* by Brian Wood, CD Version: Dec. 10, 2007.

La Croix Records, in its vinyl LP years, ran from 1967 to 1972. These were the middle years of the period scholars and enthusiasts often refer to as the second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism of the early 1960s to the mid-1970s. In those days, there was no doubt that the three most significant record labels for old-style New Orleans jazz were American Music, Icon Records, and MONO records, notwithstanding the important, relevant releases by Folkways in the late 1950s and by Riverside in the early 1960s. William ‘Bill’ Russell was producing his American Music label through the 1940s up until the 1950s. Ken Grayson Mills produced and distributed his Icon label from 1960 up until the time he sold his issued material to George Buck, who released it on Jazzology from early 1967 onwards. Barry Martyn’s MONO label ran for a decade from 1961 to 1971.



**Figure 1.1 Ken Grayson Mills, January 1979.**

**On the back of the photograph is a note:**

**‘What he’s saying is: “Make sure you’re in focus” and, of course, the party at the other end tried but failed to handle his Pentax.’**

**Thanks to Tsar Fedorsky for this photograph**

Since those days, the recognition of Bill Russell’s contribution to New Orleans jazz revivalism has progressed apace. Amongst the growing material on Bill Russell, we have Mike Hazeldine’s excellent *Bill Russell’s American Music*, 1993, and Bill Russell’s *New Orleans Style*, 1994, compiled and edited by Barry Martyn and Mike Hazeldine. In 2018 the long-awaited *Bill Russell and the New Orleans Jazz Revival* by Ray Smith and Mike Pointon was published. Barry Martyn’s contribution to New Orleans jazz revivalism awaits comprehensive study, but it would be fair to say that there is adequate material easily available in the public domain for such a study. Mike Burns’ *Walking with Legends: Barry Martyn’s New Orleans Jazz Odyssey*, 2007, provides a good enough starting point to orient the would-be

Martyn researcher. More particularly, Martyn is alive and well, and can be interviewed.<sup>1</sup>

The case of Ken Grayson Mills is, however, very different.

Up until recently, even the most ardent enthusiasts of Mills' Icon label did not know whether Mills was dead or alive. It took the combined [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) and U.S. Social Security Death Indices research by Fred Eatherton, John Whitehorn and me, to determine that Kenneth 'Ken' Mills had passed away at the age of 67 on October 10, 2004, having been born on June 9, 1937. Incidentally, nowhere does the name 'Grayson' appear on any of the official records relating to Mills that we have located.<sup>2</sup>

Mills' active involvement with New Orleans music happened over quite a short period. His major recording activity took place in New Orleans in the summers of 1960, 1961 and 1962. Mills' important early publications were mostly written for journals with limited circulation. His recordings of New Orleans musicians in California are little known except by specialists in the area. Most significantly, although he is known as the founder, or co-founder, and first manager of Preservation Hall by a small circle of scholars and New Orleans jazz enthusiasts, most of the time these facts are erased from the majority of published material. This is the case regardless of whether the literature is advertising blurb for Preservation Hall, New Orleans tourist publicity material, or in many of the more serious sources, such as Shannon Brinkman and Eve Abrams' *Preservation Hall*, 2011.

Specialist New Orleans jazz cognoscenti continue to rate Mills highly. Thus, Barry Martyn, in introducing his 'Icon Project' for G.H. Buck's CD 'American Music' series, wrote in *New Orleans Music*, 3 (3) 1992:

The Icon recordings were the product of a man who gave everything he had in order to document the real stuff. This, together with the American Music label, represents the very best music to be recorded in such volume.

More recently, Doug Landau, editor of *New Orleans Music* (NOM) from March 2002 to December 2010, commented to me:

I think the best of what Ken Mills achieved came close to Bill Russell's output and, like Bill, he brought to light some unknown musicians. Had it not been for Bill, of course, Ken and the rest of us would have led different lives. New Orleans Music, as we came to know it, would likely have been forever undiscovered country.

And yet, Ken Mills remains a little-known and, most usually, an unheard-of figure in mainstream jazz historiography and contemporary jazz studies. This neglect and ignorance calls out to be rectified and it was the purpose of the 'Lacroixrecords.com and the Ken Grayson Mills Project' to make a start on doing just that.

Fundamental to this endeavour was the need for a listing of all the recordings that Mills, himself, made – including those that were made specifically for him – and those that he acquired for the purposes of possible release on his Icon record label. Håkan Håkansson and Björn Bärnheim made a valiant start on this in the early 1990s, notwithstanding the advice they received from Mike Hazeldine in an email to Håkan (26 February 1998):

Icon: no one will ever be able to discover exactly what Ken Mills recorded and in what order the numbers were originally in, as his master tape boxes were in a real mess when I checked them over at GHB for the Icon CD listing (NOM Vol 3, No 3). Many of the boxes were unmarked. Some with writing on the front had no tape inside. In many cases, the tape inside contained numbers that weren't listed and vice versa. Some of the tapes had been edited by Ken with a blunt meat knife or something worse and a few tapes just had one stereo channel (see the Howard CD – AMCD 54 etc.), while others had both channels intact. So what I'm saying is that we will never know exactly how many numbers were recorded at any given session. After the deal was done with George [George Buck of GHB Records], tapes kept turning up. Some were part of the Icon series and others were of weird radio broadcasts that he had recorded – were these recorded over the masters?

Håkansson and Bärnheim drew on a ten-page 'Sales Prospectus – The Ken Mills Sessions', that Mills had prepared, which was topped with a page specifying: 'The Original New Orleans Jazz Styles: The Ken Mills Sessions June 1960 – October 1962'. The pair eventually produced a 30-page 'The

Icon Project,' which forms the basis of the most comprehensive tape and discography of Mills' projects produced to date, albeit unpublished.

For a number of reasons, the project faltered, and it was left to Håkansson and Per Oldaeus to work on it further. In due time, Per passed the work on to me, whereupon I secured the services of discographer, Fred Eatherton, to assist me in working further on the listings and preparing them in a format publishable on my [lacroixrecords.com](http://lacroixrecords.com) website.

The precedent for my working on a single individual in this way was my 'Dan Pawson Project' that led to the releasing of a number of 504/La Croix CDs, booklet notes and articles featuring Dan Pawson. The project was underpinned by an extensive *Dan Pawson - a Discography: Dan Pawson on vinyl, tape, CD and DVD (1960–2002)*, compiled by Fred Eatherton and Richard Ekins, and published online, <http://www.lacroixrecords.com/DP.html>, revised edition 2013.



**Figure 1.2 Photograph of Kid Thomas by Tony Standish,  
Icon LP 3**

A great advantage of publication on the internet is, of course, that work in progress can be updated often and speedily to take account of new information that comes to light. This was the spirit in which Fred and I published the first edition of our Dan Pawson discography.

As I wrote in my ‘Announcement’ article on Mills: ‘It applies even more so to our proposed listing of the Ken Mills sessions.’ The article ended with a request for information:

I would like to hear from anyone and everyone with information, thoughts and memories about Ken Mills and his life and work. In the first instance, please email me at [lacroixrecords@gmail.com](mailto:lacroixrecords@gmail.com).

I view this very much as a collaborative project between those who are committed to paying the proper respect to Mills and, in this spirit, I look forward to hearing from you. Use of your material will, of course, be acknowledged in future publications.

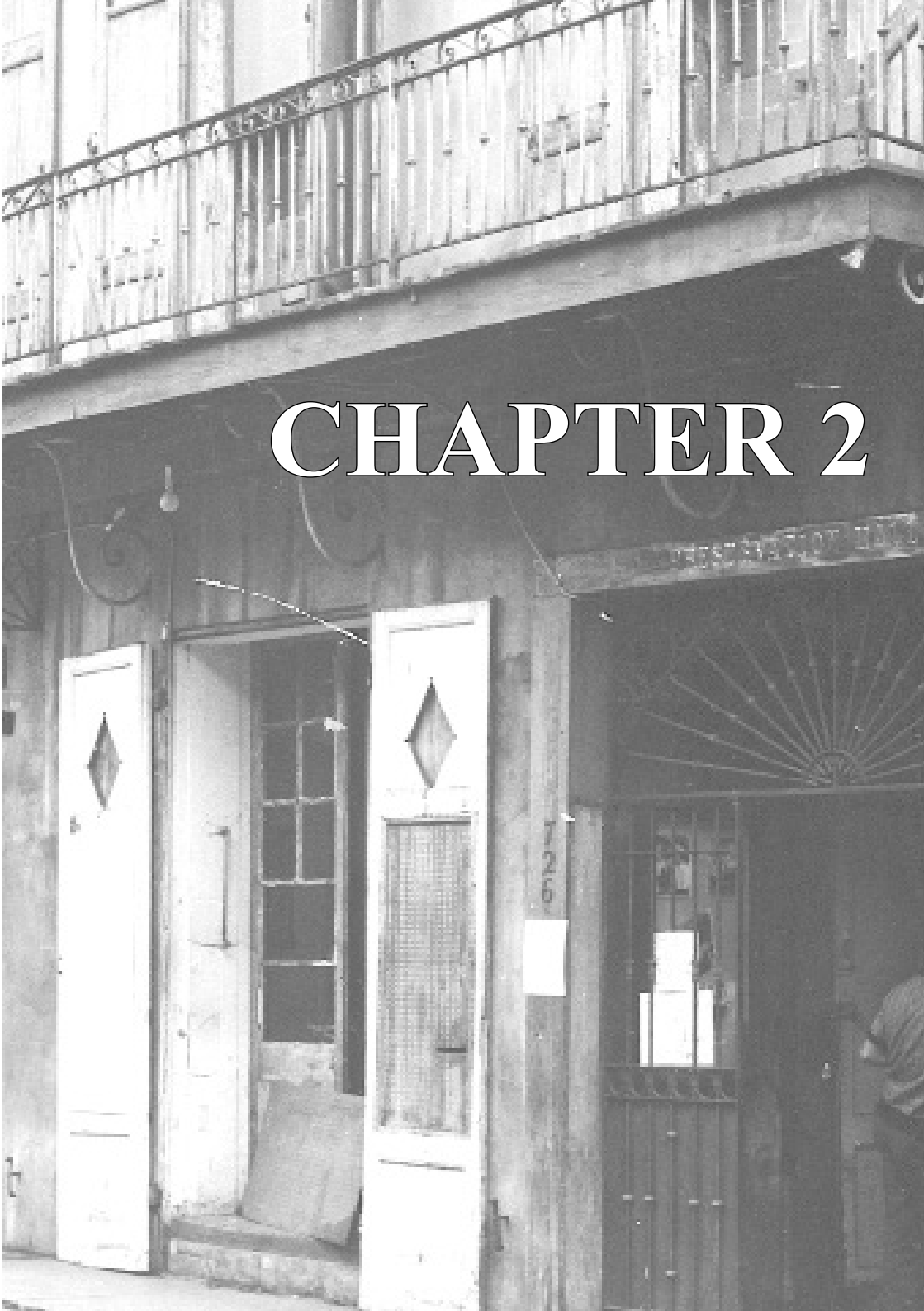
Before publishing such a catalogue, however, I wanted to draw attention to some of Mills’ important and neglected writings. To this end, to launch the Ken Mills project, forthcoming issues of *Just Jazz* featured a series of preliminary articles on Ken Mills, that will be reproduced in the next few chapters.

## NOTES

1. That was in 2016. Barry Martyn died on July 17, 2023.
2. Mills seems to have adopted ‘Grayson’ as a sort of stage name which he used in his earliest writings and for his Icon record label, especially. In these, he mostly referred to himself as Grayson Mills. In personal correspondence, he would sometimes revert from ‘Grayson’ to ‘Ken’. Others referred to him variously as Ken Grayson Mills, Grayson Mills, or just Ken Mills.



# CHAPTER 2





## Chapter 2

One of the most significant and prolific users of Facebook and YouTube was the trombonist, band leader, and record producer/owner of Jazz Crusade Records – Bill Bissonnette. As the Mills project advanced, I developed a particularly close email relationship with him. He was impressed by the fact that I would report accurately and fairly what he told me. Indeed, he wrote to me a year after the project started:

I have followed closely your wonderful articles in *Just Jazz* which Pete has kept on sending me. You have never misquoted me nor ever taken my comments out of context. I wish we had that kind of journalism here in the USA. That is why I am open to your questioning.<sup>1</sup>

Although I had reservations about the fact that so many of his recordings featured himself and his fellow bandsmen, I came to respect his sensitivity, respect and honesty when talking about the New Orleans musicians whom we both loved so much. He was also very much a fan of Ken Grayson Mills and what he had done for the music, as was evident in an early email from him:

I guess you have really established that Ken is dead and gone. I feel sad because I have such fond memories of Icon Hall. Ken introduced me to so many of the ‘lesser’ jazzmen. By that I mean the ones that rarely showed up at Preservation Hall: Charlie Love, ‘Milé’ Barnes<sup>2</sup> [Emile Barnes], Paul Barnes, Alec Bigard, Papa John, Is [Israel] Gorman, Albert Warner, Wilbert Tillman, so many others. And it was in Icon Hall that George Lewis formally introduced me to my idol, the man who become my tutor, my hero, my mentor and friend: Big Jim Robinson. Keep digging my friend. Ken Mills, despite his unfortunate later years and early passing, is worthy of your research if just for those few years that he shone like a laser on this unique folk jazz we all love so much.<sup>3</sup>

Bill could always be relied on for support and help in my information gathering, and my digital conversations with Bill provided inspiration for my second article on Ken Grayson Mills.

This was published in *Just Jazz* in December 2016, and reproduced here in full.

## **Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and the Origins of Second Wave New Orleans Jazz Revivalism<sup>4</sup> Lord Richard [Ekins] in Conversation with Big Bill Bissonnette**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, December 2016

In last November's issue of *Just Jazz*, I launched 'Lacroixrecords.com and the Ken Grayson Mills Project'. I first planned this project back in 2011, when I posted on Facebook a rare photograph of Ken Mills listening to New Orleans jazz musicians playing in Icon Hall – later Perseverance Hall – in 1962 (Figure 2.1). I made an introductory comment that was followed by a Facebook 'conversation' between Big Bill Bissonnette, of Jazz Crusade Records, and myself. This conversation, suitably edited, makes for an excellent introduction to the themes that I will revisit and add to in subsequent *Just Jazz* articles throughout 2017.

**Lord Richard Ekins (LR):** Next year will see the publication of Ray Smith and Mike Pointon's *Bill Russell and the New Orleans Jazz Revival* (Equinox, 2017). For some ten years, the authors' preferred title had been *Bill Russell: Father of the New Orleans Jazz Revival*.<sup>5</sup> It always seemed to me that Ken Grayson Mills might usefully be seen as 'Father of Second Wave New Orleans Jazz Revivalism'. Mills saw himself as ending a nine-year 'famine' of recordings after Bill Russell's American Music closed down in 1951.<sup>6</sup> Mills saw himself continuing Bill Russell's work, albeit in very different circumstances. This latter point is well made both in an early review by Paul Affeldt in *Jazz Report*, of Volume 1 of Mills' 'Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower' series, and by Ken Mills himself, in an article in *Jazz Report* introducing the series.<sup>7</sup>

Paul Affeldt writes: - The review of this LP [Kid Punch Miller – 1960] officially kicks off (for *Jazz Report*) one of the most important recording projects of our time, and this magazine as well as its readers (I'm sure), will be solidly behind Grayson Mills and Bill Russell in their efforts. You will find, elsewhere in this issue (if possible) or certainly next issue, a complete layout on the future Icon releases. There are, to date, six albums laid out and engineered by Bill Russell, and they will probably be pressed in batches of 200 each until advance orders warrant the release of another batch of 200 . . .

Now about this LP . . . [Punch] is one of the best New Orleans ever produced and has never been recorded better than he is here. His fellow band members are equally as venerable and express themselves with nearly as much authority as Punch. I could say all kinds of wonderful and flowery things about this LP and the whole project in general, and they would all be true, but the very fact that they are engineered by Bill Russell makes all this unnecessary. Let his American Music sides of the past speak for themselves. Pressed on virgin red vinyl, with covers printed in England, and liner notes exceptionally lucid and informative by Ken Grayson Mills himself this is a real buy.

A few pages earlier in the same issue of *Jazz Report* Mills had introduced his new series, as follows:

Ends this month, a nine year drought of first-rate, genuine New Orleans Jazz recording activity. It was an inanity setting in with the failure of anyone's taking the ball after Bill Russell was forced to hand it off in 1951, a famine interrupted only, on occasion, by non-Verve, George Lewis re-issues, and 3 anthologies by Samuel Barclay Charters IV. Begins this month Icon Records, an attempt to break the monotony and record the New Orleans Musician in his final flowering. The label is off to a good start with *Kid Punch – 1960* (Icon LP2) already out as this issue of *Jazz Report* goes to press, (See record reviews) . . .

Basically, the objective is to record, and pay fairly for the privilege, as many of the good and the great jazz artists still living, who have something important to say, and want to say it. The label is both a documentary effort and a commercial one, commercial insofar as it must support itself to continue its work. A few of these artists include the clarinetists Polo Barnes, Steve Angram, Emile Barnes, John Handy, Lawrence Dent, Lawrence Duhé, Israel Gorman; the trumpet players Punch Miller, Charlie Love, Pete Bocage, Kid Sheik, Eddie Richardson, DeDe Pierce, Isaiah Morgan; the

tenor saxophonists Manuel Paul and Andrew Morgan; the alto saxophonists John Handy and Harold Dejan; the pianists Louis Gallaud, Joe James, Dave Williams, Manuel ‘Fess’ Manetta; the banjoists Emanuel Sayles, Creole George Guesnon, Ernest Roubleau; the bassists Sylvester Handy, Slow Drag, McNeal Breaux, August Lanoix, Jim Little, Burke Stevenson, John Joseph; the drummers Alex Bigard, Albert Jiles, Cie Frazier, Alfred Williams, the trombone players Eddie Summers, Eddie Morris, Gus Fortinet and Jim Robinson . . .

IN WAITING:

‘Volume II – *Sonnets from Algiers*. . . .’  
[and four additional volumes]<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 2.1** According to Oldaeus, the leader of the band was probably drummer Abbie Williams and the sousaphonist might be Albert Miller; also visible: Joseph Fan Bourgeau (bjo); and Eddie Morris (tbn), 1962. Tsar Fedorsky, Ken Mills’ stepdaughter, now a fine arts photographer, writes (email to Lord Richard, September 11, 2016): ‘I loved seeing the small black and white photo of Ken looking at the jazz musicians. With the plethora of photographic images circulating about these days, it feels as if these precious images carry more weight and somehow demand more attention. Seems to be a metaphor for our times.’

**Photo courtesy of Per Oldaeus and Tsar Fedorsky**



**Figure 2.2 From left to right: Wendy Saunderson, Clive Wilson, Lord Richard, photographed following a discussion on the contribution of Ken Mills to New Orleans music.**

**Photo courtesy of Frankie & Johnny, 21 Arabella St, New Orleans, 2009**

**Big Bill Bissonette (BBB):** I totally agree with your comments except I think the Riverside ‘Living Legends’ series were probably more influential because of their much wider distribution. To everyone’s surprise, the Riverside sessions became a big hit and were in just about every music and record shop in the country, whereas Mills’ label only sold a few hundred copies each. In fact, when I wrote my book *The Jazz Crusade* [1992] and sent Ken the chapter on him, Ken wrote back, that judging on his experience with Icon, I could expect to sell a couple of hundred copies of the book in the first year and then probably a couple of dozen copies a year after that. In fact, *The Jazz Crusade* also became a surprise hit and sold thousands of copies. Before it finally slowed down, I had cleared a profit of almost \$40,000.

**LR:** Bill – very valuable comments and I take on board what you say. Really, this is just a starter to report my ongoing thoughts on Mills. My collection of the *Jazz Report* has been sitting forgotten on my shelves. Now seems to be the time to re-visit *Jazz Report* – and other important publications of those days.

**BB:** Have you tried to contact Mills recently? I would be interested in knowing whether the reports of his death are true. He would be in his 70s, now which isn't that old, but his health and [possibly] drug problems might have led to an early grave.

**LR:** I commented somewhere else on Facebook about this, fairly recently. Barry Martyn was reputedly the source of the rumours that said Ken Mills was dead. People I know who tried to check this out are sceptical. I guess, in the days of the internet it is not easy to die without it becoming public knowledge, fairly soon. It is more than possible that someone is writing a book on him somewhere. Certainly, that book should be written, in my view.

[Only in 2016 did I learn that from the early 1990s onwards, Håkan Håkansson and Björn Bärnheim, later assisted by Per Oldaeus, had been working on a comprehensive listing of all the recordings that Mills, himself, made—including those that were made specifically for him—and those that Mills acquired for the purposes of possible release on his Icon record label. In that same year, 2016, the combined [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) and U.S. Social Security Death Index research of Fred Eatherton, John Whitehorn and myself determined that Kenneth 'Ken' Harold Mills had passed away at the age of 67 on October 10, 2004, having been born on June 9, 1937. 'Ken', it seems, adopted the name 'Grayson' and dropped 'Harold', certainly for most of his writing.]

Bill, on your point about the Riversides, don't forget (as you would well appreciate) that they did nothing in the move towards a more documentary approach to instrumentation in revivalist New Orleans jazz. Here's a

revealing quote from Grayson Mills on his reasons for not ditching Emanuel Paul from his recording *Sonnets from Algiers*, Volume II, Icon Records' Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower series (Icon LP 3A/B), 1960.<sup>9</sup>

**TIN CANS AND BOTTLES:** Whilst setting up the recording date, several of the Brahmins (those white enthusiasts who, as we all know, invented New Orleans music) suggested I use Emile Barnes and drop Manuel Paul. Mili is one of the all-time greats, but that I use is quite a touch. I went to New Orleans with the intention of recording the Thomas band: Manny Paul happens to be great, plus the fact he's been with Thomas for 17 years, and Polo Barnes, one of the great reed men in New Orleans jazz history, was now a regular member – drop them, they said. The woodwork dwellers have always had it that tenor saxes don't belong in a New Orleans jazz group – there is a guitar, by the way, in that picture of Bolden's band, but the Delta division of said enthusiasts had come up with something Thomas and the boys hadn't thought of: Polo is not ROUGH enough. One of those not hip enough to love Polo's playing, too stupid to realise Piron's band was too sweet, that Bob Thomas wasn't assertive enough to fit in with the Lewis band and ad infinitum, I was also too cretinic, I presume to break the news to the band. Fronted with the official word that tenor saxes don't belong in a New Orleans Jazz group, Manuel asserted: "I've played jazz on tin cans and bottles, and it's the music, not the instrument that's important." Could it be put more succinctly?

Relatedly, as you would know, later, Peter Bocage used to get irritated (allegedly) with Sandra Jaffe when she tried to get him not to play so much violin at Preservation Hall.

**BBB:** Rich, the Riversides were not intended to have some 'documentary approach' to anything. They were intended to entertain. But they also served as an important portrait of what was happening at the beginning of the 'Preservation Hall Era.' As I'm sure you know, I recorded the Thomas Band with its regular personnel (except that Joe James had just died & was temporarily replaced by Octave Crosby when the fellow I requested on piano – Lester Santiago – also died!). In the early days at Preservation Hall, at Jaffe's insistence, the Thomas Band always used a clarinet too: usually

George Lewis. I had wanted to add one of my favourite clarinetists to my recording: Israel Gorman, but I didn't have the money for an extra man. I'm sure you would agree that would have added a lot to the session.

Rich, two quick points: (1) you are absolutely right about Pete Bocage. Unfortunately, I never recorded him either because of lack of funds, but he was so great on violin. The audience always liked Pete when he got up and did a violin solo on something like 'I'm Alone Because I Love You'. But, you could see Sandy cringing in the carriageway. (2) One final important thing about the Riversides: with the exception of the few AM tracks, Kid Tom was unknown to us young guys in America who were listening primarily to the Lewis and Barbarin bands on record. When those two [Riverside] Thomas LPs landed, it was like kicking us in the stomach. Thomas and Penn, in particular, set us all back on our heels and changed our whole way of thinking about what we were doing.<sup>10</sup> And when I finally got to record my Easy Riders JB with some guests, they were Manny Paul and Kid Tom. Until I heard Kid Thomas in person, I didn't believe in God. And then I met him!

**LR:** Bill, I think it is well worth posting some of Grayson Mills' comments about the Riverside recordings – all of them indicative of his belief and hope that now, at last, things were looking up for the old-style men of New Orleans. Mills puts it this way:

RIVERSIDE WILL PERPETUATE REVIVAL: Riverside held a number of sessions two months ago, mostly of a jam nature, as work for old-style coloured musicians has been extremely scarce . . . From the documentary stand-point, the recording of clarinet great Louis Cottrell in trio surroundings, and the purchase of Herb Freidwald and Tommy Woods' Love-Jiles Ragtime tape, were clearly intelligent and essential achievements . . . It is very curious that the pendulum of awareness has swung toward New Orleans at this hour. If Riverside is able to powerhouse its way to a market, and if labours of love like Arhoolie, Heritage, and Icon are able to survive in nurturing non-commercial gap fillers, the New Orleans Jazz Man's final hour may be an active one. Wouldn't that be something? If they get those chops in iron-edge form, look out.<sup>11</sup>

We can take it that Mills wasn't at the early Riverside recording sessions because he writes: 'The sessions will bear the advantages of being recorded in a studio, coupled with its defects. Ever work in a **cage**? If they were not held in a studio, I've been misinformed.'

Bill, your comments on Jaffe and clarinets at Preservation Hall confirmed what I always thought about George Lewis and the KT band at Preservation Hall, though, of course, according to Grayson Mills KT was using Paul Barnes at the time of Icon LP3 - *Sonnets from Algiers* in 1960.

Ironically, for the left leaning Mills, he was, I believe, sourcing his project with an inheritance he had received. It is tempting to think that this fed into his 'purism' and his 'idealism'. He was, after all, a very young man. Whatever the contributory causes, they made, in my mind, for the most important New Orleans jazz recording project of all, bar Bill Russell's American Music, of course.

**BBB:** Ken's mother was the source of his funding according to Ken.<sup>12</sup>

I agree that the Icon recordings were second only to Bill's earlier recording. But I still don't know their interpersonal relationship. They were both in New Orleans at the same time but Bill was close to Allan Jaffe and his Preservation Hall project.

**LR:** A few hours ago I re-read the sections in your book [*The Jazz Crusade*, 1992] on Grayson Mills - not before time! Do I take it from what you have said previously that Ken checked and agreed everything you said about him in that book? It would be nice to know. Details on Ken Grayson Mills are sparse, indeed. Here is what *Jazz Report* said about him in the September-October 1962 issue: 'Born June 1937, married and has three stepchildren. His wife is a well-known artist and has a one-man show at his jazz spot, Icon Hall. He has contributed articles on blues and jazz to several known jazz mags. Runs one-man operation label, Icon Records, and has a concert hall in the French Quarter featuring live performances by the surviving greats

of New Orleans. Interest in jazz began with the Kid Ory broadcasts in '44. Started researching and writing on jazz in '57. Had a column in *The Daily Tar Heel* called 'Odes on Music', while at the University of North Carolina. He believes jazz is an immensely elevating music of great social significance and that its content is the poetry of psycho-physiology.' At the very least someone should submit a Wikipedia entry for Mills to start the ball rolling. Hopefully, someone, somewhere, is writing a book about him.

**BBB:** Rich, as I said before, in, I believe, 1989 or '90, I sent Ken the chapter of my book pertaining to Icon Hall. I told him I would change anything he wanted in that chapter. He did make some minor changes. He told me that it was the only truthful account of those events ever written. And he sent me a copy of the Mayor's letter to him re: the opening of Preservation Hall for publication in my book.



**Figure 2.3** Front cover of *The Jazz Crusade*.  
Courtesy of Big Bill Bissonnette

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

August 2, 1961

Mr. Grayson Mills, President  
New Orleans Society  
Preservation of Traditional Jazz  
726 St. Peter Street  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Dear Mr. Mills:

I was very pleased to learn of the inception of the newly formed New Orleans Society, Preservation of Traditional Jazz.

Congratulations on having been named the Society's first president and best wishes for success to enhance the civic and cultural activities of the City. Kind, personal regards.

Sincerely,



Victor H. Schiro  
Mayor

**Figure 2.4** Courtesy of Bill Bissonnette and captioned by Bill Bissonnette: 'Letter from Mayor of New Orleans to Ken Mills congratulating him on opening of Preservation Hall – August 2, 1961.' Part of the Mayoral letter head has been omitted to maximise size of letter content.

**LR:** Thanks Bill, that's just great for now. Is there anything you want to add?

**BBB:** I've often felt sorry for the way Mills ended up. The last time I talked with him, he seemed high and was screaming vulgarities, one after the other. What set him off was that he told me he sold his Icon Records label to George Buck for \$5,000.00. I then said I would have paid him double or even triple that for that amazing group of recordings if he had contacted me before selling it. He seemed desperate for money then, and I guess the thought of selling the label so cheaply set him off. When I knew him back in 1962/3, he seemed like such a nice guy.

## NOTES

1. Email Bill Bissonnette to Richard Ekins, October 5, 2017.
2. Emile Barnes is very often called by his abbreviated / nickname but spelt differently by different people.
3. Email Bill Bissonnette to Richard Ekins, November 15, 2016.
4. I thank members of the Porcupine Society—Fred Eatherton, Mike Dine, Robert Greenwood, Doug Landau, Mike Pointon and John Whitehorn—for their role in generating this article. Special thanks go to Big Bill Bissonnette, Fred Eatherton, Tsar Fedorsky and Per Oldaeus.
5. Email, Mike Pointon to Lord Richard, August 8, 2016: 'We had our working title for about ten years but in the end reluctantly agreed with Shipton/Equinox to use the current one that doesn't convey the same impact but is shorter.' In the event, the book was not published until 2018.
6. 1951 was Mills' favoured date for this 'closing down'. Mills was presumably referring to Bill Russell's last recording session in New Orleans. Ben Wagner writes: 'Russell continued to sell American Music records until 1961. He licensed two firms to reissue his recordings, Dan Records of Japan, in 1960, and Storyville Records of Denmark, in 1972. His label released a few sessions recorded by others as late as 1957, which is why some sources report that Russell recorded jazz bands up through 1957, but he was personally involved in the actual record sessions only through 1953.' Ben Wagner, 'William Russell: Jazz Lover, Collector, Musicologist – An

Annotated Bibliography', accessed May 31, 2023, accessed June 28, 2023. [https://www.hnoc.org/sites/default/files/file\\_uploads/russell\\_biblio.pdf](https://www.hnoc.org/sites/default/files/file_uploads/russell_biblio.pdf).

7. Review of Icon LP2 by Paul Affeldt, in *Jazz Report*, 1960, 1 (4): 15-16, at p.15 - 'Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower. *Kid Punch – 1960*'. Produced by Grayson Mills. [Personnel: 'Punch' Miller, tpt; Eddie Morris, tmb; John Handy, clt, Louis Gallaud, pno; Emanuel Sayles, bjo; Sylvester Handy, bs; Alex Bigard, ds]; Grayson Mills, 'New Orleans Music: Root, Bone and Marrow: A Report on Icon Records' Objectives and Realities', *Jazz Report*, 1960, 1 (4): 11-12.

8. Here Mills details his proposed second LP in the series and the four additional LPs he was intending to produce thereafter. His plans frequently changed. See: forthcoming articles in this *Just Jazz* Ken Grayson Mills series.

9. Grayson Mills, 'The PATNESS SMASHED . . . Some Words on the Kid Thomas Band', *Jazz Report*, 1961, 1 (7): 9-10.

10. BBB is referring to Riverside RLP365 (The Kid Thomas band with Albert Burbank on clarinet) and RLP386 (The Kid Thomas band with Emile Barnes on clarinet). The latter LP (RLP386) had been recorded before Riverside came to New Orleans. Riverside acquired the tapes as part of their project.

11. Grayson Mills, 'Things Looking Up for N.O. Jazz Collectors, and More Importantly, For Its Musicians Too!', *Jazz Report*, 1961, 1 (9): 15-16.

12. According to Mike Dine of 504 Records, Mills told Dine that the source of the funding was a legacy from his grandmother. According to William Carter, 'Mills was determined to use the \$9,000 he had recently inherited from a great aunt to record the music.' This inheritance would be worth some \$72,400 (£58,000) today.



A black and white photograph of a building facade. At the top, there is a balcony with a decorative wrought-iron railing. Below the balcony, the text "CHAPTER 3" is superimposed in a large, white, serif font. The building's ground floor features a doorway with a white door that is open to the left. The door has a diamond-shaped window with a lattice pattern. To the right of the doorway, a vertical wooden post has the number "7260" written on it. Further right, there is a dark doorway with a sunburst design above it. The overall scene is in black and white, with high contrast between the white door and the dark shadows of the building.



## Chapter 3

In the first two chapters there has been no extensive discussion of Preservation Hall. It needs to be said, however, that right from the start of Ken Grayson Mills' first visit to New Orleans in June 1960, his recordings were all linked with 726 St. Peter Street, in the French Quarter of New Orleans, which emerged as Preservation Hall the following year.

During his first trip to New Orleans (June to July 1960),<sup>1</sup> Mills shot a short piece of silent film of a Punch Miller Quartet in Larry Borenstein's Associated Artists Studio, 726 St. Peter Street, possibly in June. He made his first recording of John Handy and his Louisiana Shakers on 1 July, also in Associated Artists Studio. The Kid Thomas Valentine's Creole Jazz Band recording of 3 July, that became Icon LP 3, was recorded in Faisendieu's patio behind Associated Artists Studio.<sup>2</sup>

The session that became *Kid Punch – 1960*, recorded on 7 July and first issued as Icon LP 2, was also recorded in Faisendieu's patio. Moreover, it was a selection of these first recordings that became his first Icon releases in his 13 volume 'Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower' series. There was a reference in the previous chapter to Paul Affeldt's view of the *Punch Miller – 1960* session that Mills used to launch the series. This was accompanied by some of Mills' own commentary on that release and on his subsequent Kid Thomas Band with Paul Barnes, Icon LP.

In this chapter I focus on Mills' own writings and his first releases. However, I feel it important to preface Mills' own words with just how important Mills was as founding father of the second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism of the 1960s and how he saw himself as continuing where Bill Russell had left off in the 1950s. It was Mills who first recorded John Handy, who was to become so prominent as the 1960s progressed, that Tom Stagg and Charlies Crump singled him out as the major 'new' voice of New Orleans music at that time. In the context of the lack of interest shown by the

larger record companies in ‘old style’ New Orleans jazz, Stagg and Crump felt it necessary to write in 1973:

The fact that in over twenty years and only once in each decade, Bunk in the forties, George Lewis in the fifties and John Handy in the sixties, were the only traditional styled New Orleans musicians recorded by major American companies or contracted to record over a period of time, amply demonstrates the lack of interest shown by the larger commercial concerns to what is now a recognised American art form.<sup>3</sup>

It was Barry Martyn and Bill Bissonnette’s championing of John Handy’s saxophone playing, following Mills’ initial recordings of Handy on that instrument, that led to a representative of RCA Victor records hearing Handy at a Connecticut concert and signing him up to an exclusive contract in the late 1960s.

### **In Praise of Ken Grayson Mills (1937-2004): Kid Thomas, Kid Howard and the *Jazz Report* Record Reviews with Notes on the Early History of Preservation Hall <sup>4</sup>**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, January 2017

In 2018 the long awaited book, *Bill Russell and the New Orleans Jazz Revival*, by Ray Smith and Mike Pointon, was published.<sup>5</sup> *The Times* obituary for Bill Russell (1905–1992) rightly notes that ‘Russell was the single most influential figure in the revival of New Orleans jazz that began in the 1940s.’<sup>6</sup> Russell fathered the 1940s revival most notably by his championing of Bunk Johnson, his American Music recordings, and his influence on the emergence to prominence of the various 1940s and 1950s George Lewis bands. This revival, however, had largely run its course by the late 1950s. It was left to Ken Grayson Mills, amongst others, to kick-start what would become the second wave revivalism of the early 1960s to mid-1970s,<sup>7</sup> most notably with his Icon record label and his role in the origins of Preservation Hall.

When Mills launched his Icon Records project in 1960, he specifically stated that he was ending ‘a nine-year drought of first-rate, genuine New Orleans jazz recording activity.’<sup>8</sup> This was nine years after Bill Russell’s American Music releases of the Emile Barnes (LP641) and Kid Thomas (LP642) 1951 sessions, recorded by Alden Ashworth and David Wyckoff. As Mills put it: ‘A surprise George Lewis snuck in here and there, and Sam Charters’ anthologies were on Folkways. That was it.’<sup>9</sup> More generally, Mills saw himself continuing Bill Russell’s work, albeit in the very different circumstances of the 1960s. In a series of ground-breaking articles Mills published in the American jazz magazine *Jazz Report* and the British jazz magazine *Eureka*, Mills introduced his project as ‘an attempt to break the monotony and record the New Orleans musician in his final flowering and announced that ‘Twelve volumes are planned for the ‘Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower’ series.’

With this announcement, Mills effectively laid claim to become the father of second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism.

His first pioneering series of New Orleans recording sessions started in the summer of 1960. They included the first two Icon releases in his ‘New Orleans Music: Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower’ series, namely those of Punch Miller’s New Orleans Band (Icon LP2) and Kid Thomas Valentine’s Creole Jazz Band (Icon LP3). Significantly, Bill Russell was the recording engineer on both these sessions. The Punch Miller session featured John Handy on clarinet. This was Handy’s first record release. The Kid Thomas band featured both Polo Barnes on clarinet and Emanuel Paul on tenor saxophone.

From this trip to New Orleans in the summer of 1960, Mills slated as ‘In Waiting’ an additional four Icon LPs, including, as Mills put it:

Volume III – *The Red Backed Book of Rags* - Charlie Love-Albert Jiles Ragtime Orch’ . . . Not consummated yet . . . Volume IV - *Music at Night* – Billie and DeDe Pierce’, Eng. by Bill Russell – 6/3/60 [American dating] In

N.O. . . . Volume V – *After Many a Summer* – Emile Barnes and his Friends – Not consummated yet . . . Volume VI - *The Viol, The Violet and the Vine* – Paul D. Barnes and his Polo Players’.

In the event, only this latter LP was ever released by Mills himself (Icon LP5).

Especially significant amongst the other recordings Mills made during that first trip to New Orleans was the John Handy’s Louisiana Shakers session with Kid Clayton on trumpet and George Guesnon on amplified guitar, engineered by Mills. Just how far ahead of his time Mills was in recording this session is well illustrated by the following section taken from Barry Martyn’s booklet notes accompanying the CD *John Handy: The Very First Recordings*, eventually issued for the first time in 1993:

These are the very first recordings of John Handy. They were made by Ken Mills for his Icon label. Handy & his Louisiana Shakers had been a major force in New Orleans music in the twenties. In the early 60’s, John was probably the last major ‘undiscovered figure’ of New Orleans jazz. It was my initial thrill at hearing ‘Panama’ from this CD that prompted me to record and issue his first LP on alto. Ken Mills had already, obviously, done this recording but in 1962 it was still unissued and remained that way until one track only (‘Hindustan’) was placed on an LP called *Jazz from the Kitty Halls* on Arhoolie. Of course Mills had recorded and issued Handy, but only on clarinet, not alto, with Punch Miller on his second Icon LP in 1961. Once jazz fans became aware of Handy and his music, the flood gates seemed to open and he was recorded on many labels, culminating in two recordings for RCA Victor.

Barry Martyn was to record John Handy many times on several different labels. Indeed, it was Barry Martyn’s MONO record label that provided the second major sustained input to second wave revivalism. This label was inaugurated in January 1961 following Mills’ lead and included eighteen LPs and two EPs before its demise in 1971. Martyn’s focus on Non-Union musicians of New Orleans and the release of previously unissued New Orleans 1950s dance hall sessions complemented Mills’ work perfectly. At

the same time, in January 1961, Riverside Records came to New Orleans to record their widely sold 'Living Legends' series, comprising twelve LPs.<sup>10</sup> Riverside was less documentary in approach than Icon and MONO and the company declined to use Kid Thomas' tenor saxophone player Emanuel Paul, using Albert Burbank on clarinet instead for their recording of January 29, 1961. Riverside also issued as part of their series two particularly important earlier sessions: The Love-Jiles Ragtime Orchestra recorded on June 12, 1960 (RLP 379), and the Kid Thomas band session featuring clarinetist Emile Barnes and recorded on August 18, 1960 (RLP 386). It should be noted that this latter session, like all the new recordings made by Riverside in this series, took place after Mills had begun his Icon recordings.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever the relative impact of these record labels as they slowly circulated worldwide, the major New Orleans home base from June 1961 onwards became Preservation Hall, 726 St. Peter Street. This, at one time or another, featured most of the musicians recorded by Icon, MONO and Riverside. From June to September 1961, in the Hall's especially productive period musically, it was Ken Mills who was the major force both in founding and managing the Hall.<sup>12</sup> All in all, it is these four contributories (Icon, MONO, Riverside, and Preservation Hall) that provide the major components in the kick-starting, developing and sustaining of what was to become the second wave New Orleans jazz revival of the early 1960s to the mid-1970s.<sup>13</sup>

Yet despite Ken Mills being a lead figure – arguably THE lead figure – in these developments, he remains a neglected figure in the history of New Orleans jazz. It was the purpose of my articles in *Just Jazz* to spearhead a reappraisal of his contribution to New Orleans jazz, from the standpoint of his own writings and his early recordings. I did so by drawing attention to his early contributions to the neglected specialist magazine *Jazz Report*, the magazine in which Mills chose to first publicise the announcement of his Icon Records project.

What follows now is the reproduction of two *Jazz Report* record reviews of Mills' own Icon releases, namely those of Icon LP3 (Kid Thomas) and Icon LP4 (Kid Howard). Embedded within these reviews are numerous arguments that specify Ken Grayson Mills' intended contribution to New Orleans jazz and indicate the extended directions he was taking the music from those of Bill Russell's first wave revivalism, most notably in matters of personnel, repertoire, and instrumentation.<sup>14</sup>

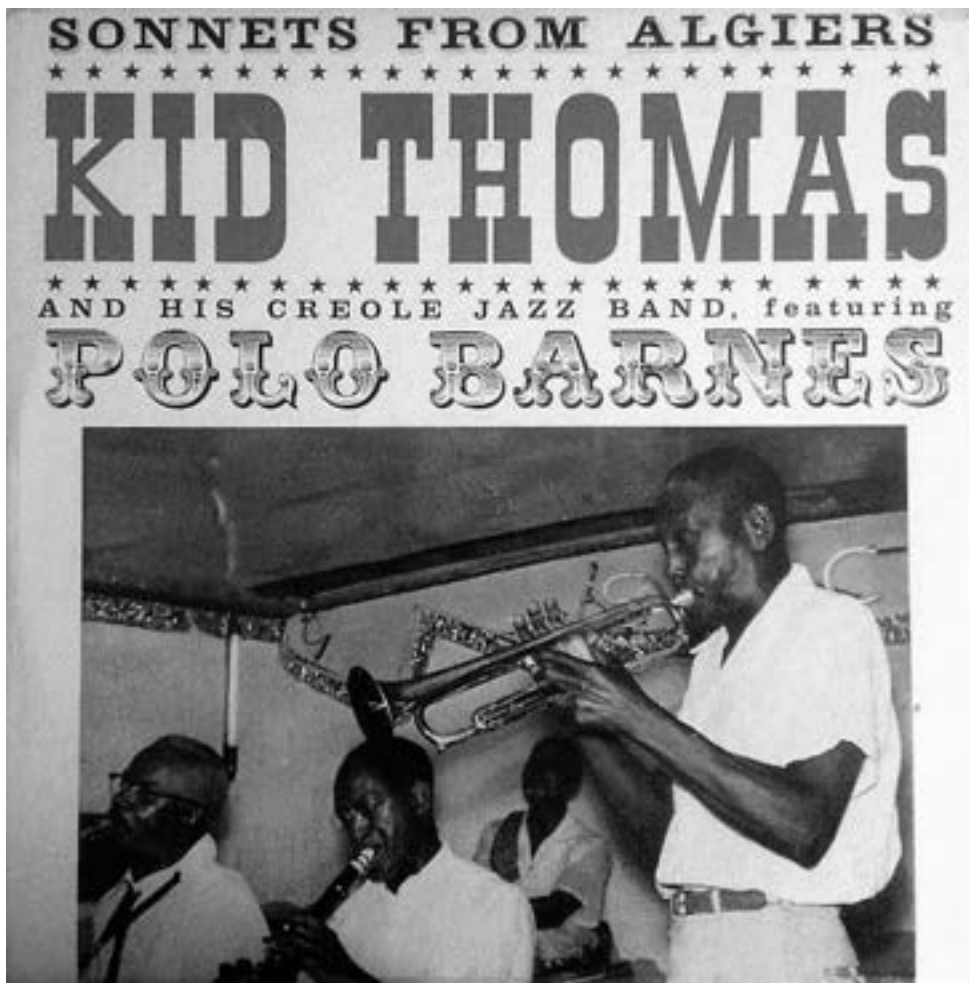


Figure 3.1 Front cover of Icon LP 3, recorded in New Orleans, July 3, 1960.

Thanks to Per Oldaeus for this LP cover photograph

## **THE PATNESS SMASHED . . . Some words on The Kid Thomas Band by Grayson Mills<sup>15</sup>**

PROLOGUE: The kind of subjective and therapeutic kicks available from the common facts of existence in New Orleans' Vieux Carre could cost at least 50 cents every five minutes in California . . . I know of only one place which visually resembles Borenstein's Patio – the mission San Juan Capistrano. That Icon's sessions were, in the main, recorded here seemed very wonderful. Indeed. Perhaps it is overly subjective, but I get the feeling from the men that this is the way they would like to record themselves, if they were doing it.

TEXT: Twice each time were tapped deeply worn and rutted bricks, so well layered that only now began to jut, and almost mystically such gentle authority engendered – without exception – some of the most creative and exultant music the writer has ever heard. Incredibly, this intense and eloquent artistry was being committed to tape, for others to enjoy as we enjoyed.

Kid Thomas' Creole Jazz Band is all that Bill Russell and the others of great sensitivity, who have made the pilgrimage to New Orleans, have said it is; this the reader can discover for himself by buying *Sonnets from Algiers*, a 12 inch LP on ICON.

Thomas Valentine is a man in his sixties; he looks half that, and talks and acts with the sprite eagerness of a man one-third of it. There is not a man in town who can drive a band with as much force, nor anyone who leads with such imaginative surprise and decision. Strangely, HIS band has, for a number of years, been the talk of serious students and lovers of the music in all parts of the world, yet we had to wait until 1960 for a decent recording of them. Two years ago, there was an abortion put out on London's 77 label [77 LP 11], the material of which was promised Thomas would not be released, and which sounded as if it had recorded by trans-Atlantic cable.

Thomas' style seems to have changed little over the years: most of the

musicians I've talked to cannot remember ever hearing another like it. His tone, characterised by a strong, ringing vibrato, and an almost incredible power, has a parallel, that being recorded Wooden Joe Nicholas. In stating the lead he is rhythmic rather than melodic, but behind a soloist, he can whisper as – in the Shakespearian word – symbology – a suckling dove.

One of the reasons for his anonymity, both inside the city, and without, is that his bands have played the off-Bourbon Street, off-Lakefront spots since the early 1920s, hence he has no romantic reference. [Author's note: this is by way of hypothetical explanation and not apologia]. Taking awareness for a coin, and flipping it, we find that with people who have danced to his music for over 35 years, his bands have been on a par with the best groups in the city's history.

His long stay at Westwego (from the mid '40s to the early '50s), and his more recent long run at the Pavilion in Marrero are over, and work is next to non-existent yet the band pushes no panic button – they're a family and close families aren't given to disentangling. This perseverance pays off on occasion, like their being in top form for the Tulane Arts Festival (June of 1960), and for the more recent painting exhibition, the one which was much touted, at the Delgado museum.

TIN CANS AND BOTTLES:<sup>16</sup> While setting up the recording date, several of the Brahmins (those white enthusiasts who, as we all know, invented New Orleans music) suggested I use Emile Barnes and drop Manuel Paul. Mili<sup>17</sup> is one of the all-time greats, but that I USE is quite a touch. I went to New Orleans with the intention of recording the Thomas band: Manny Paul happens to be great, plus the fact he's been with Thomas for 17 years, and Polo Barnes, one of the great reed men in New Orleans jazz history, was now a regular member – drop them, they said.

The woodwork dwellers have always had it that tenor saxes don't belong in a New Orleans Jazz group – there is a guitar, by the way, in that picture of Bolden's band, but the Delta division of said enthusiasts had come up

with something Thomas and the boys hadn't thought of: Popo [sic] is not ROUGH enough. One of them not hip enough to love Polo's playing, too stupid to realise Piron's band was too sweet, that Bob Thomas wasn't assertive enough to fit in with the Lewis band, and ad infinitum, I was also too cretinic, I presume to break the news to the band.

Fronted with the official word that tenor saxes don't belong in a New Orleans Jazz group, Manuel asserted: 'I've played jazz on tin cans and bottles, and it's the music, not the instrument, that's important.' Could it be put more succinctly?

CONCERNING THE RECORD: *SONNETS FROM ALGIERS*,

Volume II, ICON records'

ROOT, BONE AND MARROW, FLOWER series (Icon LP 3A/B)

PENNS AND POTHOLES: The Thomas band is, in a word, incredible. This is 1961. New Orleans Jazz is dead. What's it doing here? But what appears as uncommon and incorrigible tenacity is, for them, the most natural thing in the world. There's no work, little promise of any, one tends to think, why this failing to dissipate? The answer is simple, as well as slightly trite – their music is their way of life.

It is a band with a surfeit of fascinations, and of the things which catches the listeners ear immediately is the pertinence and urgent impetuosity with which drummer Sammy Penn fills the potholes; ta-tut, ta-tut, or clippety-click, pomp bam boom – it's delightful, and it is pajoritive [sic]<sup>18</sup> of, who else, Baby Dodds.

While banjoist Creole George Guesnon, Polo Barnes, and Manuel Paul are from it, except perhaps to moderniks, the band is decidedly rough. Yet, and here is the paradox that was Johnny Dodds, it is at the same time extremely polished. There is no wasted motion, things are altogether spontaneous and, though rough-edged, precise.

In spots, such as the dirty walk in 'Just a Closer Walk with Thee,' and

Manuel Paul's 'Night Train To Memphis' which courses throughout the final strains of 'Sing on', they paint a sound-picture analogous to a colony of beavers, wherein too, there is no wasted motion, wherein all which takes place has natural beauty.

TUNES: Side A – 'Put on Your Old Grey Bonnet,' 'Just a Closer Walk with Thee,' 'Milneburg Joys/Dippermouth Blues Medley,' 'Believe I Can Make it by Myself,' Side B – 'In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree,' 'I Can't Escape from You,' 'Ballin the Jack,' 'Si Vous Plait,' 'Sing On'.



**Figure 3.2 Kid Howard Band at a recording session for Icon LP4. Josiah 'Cie' Frazier (dms), Eddie Summers (tbn), Avery 'Kid' Howard (tpt), and Israel Gorman (clt), 1961.**

**Courtesy of the Ralston Crawford Collection, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University**

***AFRAID TO STAY HERE, AFRAID TO LEAVE THIS TOWN . . . Some words on Kid Howard's new ICON release by Ken Grayson Mills***<sup>19</sup>

The recording of New Orleans jazz continues and leaves prints whereby we reconstruct its path and measure its contribution. Some albums, it follows, enlighten us further than others, increase our susceptibilities to further and more complete enjoyment of the music. One of these most certainly will be Kid Howard's new release on Icon Records, a small label devoted exclusively to delving into the music.

Kid Howard, who was a young protégé of Chris Kelly's was known for a red ribbon he used tie around his cornet, is perhaps now the greatest New Orleans horn man. During the years of the 1930's, there was none better, and as late as 1943, when the Climax sessions were made, there was none who could match his brilliance and facility,

The loss of his wife was hard on Howard, he took to drinking and that habit was intensified by seeing the trumpet relegated to an unnatural role in the George Lewis concert-hallish scheme of things. In 1960 he lay skinny and imperambulate in a New Orleans hospital, death so near that everyone thought he was gone for sure. The will to live was stronger in Howard than his wish to die, and he proceeded to embark on a remarkable physical comeback. His dapper blue suits and large hats again became part of his person, but there was no place to play, no reason to make a musical as well as physical comeback. This appalling state of affairs was to change during the summer months of 1961.

A defunct three month operation called Preservation Hall, a large room where pure New Orleans music could be heard six nights weekly during the summer months of 1961, gave Howard reason to play again, and as most of us had never heard him play, recording him was imperative.

The sides Kid Howard recorded in Cudichaux's department store,<sup>20</sup> more recently an awning factory, and now a warehouse for painting and frames, had more news: his clarinetist was Israel Gorman, a graduate of the 'SS

CAMELIA', Louis Dumaine, Lee Collins, and Chris Kelly bands, whose Mozartian imagination had laid fallow during a seven year retirement; on trombone was the egregiously over-looked Eddie Summers who old-timers say reminds them of Ernest Kelly and George Washington. From the start, the band displayed a rich variegation missing in all of the existing New Orleans style bands. The faster numbers were all the rhythm of the second line, a proud, strutting rhythm which once seen in the street is not to be forgotten. At least its spirit will visit the listener during the band's cuttings of 'Willie the Weeper', 'High Society' and 'When My Dreamboat comes Home'. 'The Blues', 'The Three Sixes' and 'See See Rider', were image-provoking, dream-like rhythms.

Indeed, the La Vida Band was something special from its first appearance at Preservation Hall. In selecting this personnel, Howard broke away from the immediate and the obvious and drew like-minded followers on a campaign of exploration – What they uncovered was not a dead past but living, although forgotten and buried, present. The rhythm section (Emanuel Sayles, banjo, Louis James, bass; and Cie Frazier, dms) was already the most graceful and aware in the city. Their set was cut August 13, Sayles couldn't make a job one night, and Howard used Homer Eugene in his place. Homer, so quickly that most never noticed, was doing strange wonderful little things to embellish Louis James activity. This too, had to be preserved and Homer was used on the second session, September 3<sup>rd</sup>.

It is doubtful if any more such albums will be nurtured in New Orleans. There was hope that Walter Eysselinck and Albert Jiles would carry out the completion of the remarkable ragtime project; that Icon Records would recoup the losses suffered while financing Preservation Hall, and return to carry out its plans for a Sam Morgan style Band; for recording Kid Clayton's Happy Pals, a distinctive blues band whose approach to tune-material was stirring. Those running Preservation Hall when the writer left the city in September, did not seem to be concerned with experimentation, grace, charm

or sensitivity. As usual, the real efforts will have to be done by individualists with guts and money.

The Howard record will serve with other fine ones in capturing the meaning that is New Orleans music – a music which, as it faces its final days, has something far deeper to fear than inadequate documentation and restoration: it is the continued emergence and intensification of the spirit of exclusivity: the death of its few remaining greats, and the growth of Bourbon-Streetism, however posed.

*AFRAID TO STAY HERE, AFRAID TO LEAVE THIS TOWN* – ICON LP 4 – KID HOWARD’S LA VIDA BAND:

Avery Kid Howard, cnt; Israel Gorman, clt; Eddie Summers, tbn; Emmanuel Sayles & Homer Eugene, bjo; Louis James, bs; Josiah Frazier, dms. Side A – ‘Indian Sau Wau’, ‘The Three Sixes’, ‘Willie the Weeper’, ‘High Society’. Side B – ‘In Gloryland’, ‘When My Dreamboat Comes Home’, ‘See See Rider’, ‘Danny Boy’.

The *Just Jazz* article (January 2017) in which the above two Mills’ reviews appears was accompanied by my research on the early history of Preservation Hall, which very much owes its origin to the talents and initiative of Ken Grayson Mills.

In the extract that follows, I outline the main stories concerning the beginnings of Preservation Hall and focus on the major competing ‘definitions of the situation’ without assessing the relative ‘truth’ of these alternative stories.

Only when I was near to completion of both my Ken Grayson Mills and Barbara Glancey Reid Projects did I feel able to tackle the task of trying to make more sense of those competing stories. The text from the article is now reproduced in full.

## Notes on the Early History of Preservation Hall

It will not have escaped the attentive reader that Grayson Mills refers to ‘A defunct three month operation called Preservation Hall’, in the previous record review.

The ‘three month operation’ refers to the time Mills was in charge of the Hall.<sup>21</sup> Much still remains to be written about Ken Mills’ role in the origins and early development of Preservation Hall, run by the short-lived New Orleans Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz (NOSPTJ) with Ken Mills as President and Barbara Reid and Bill Russell as Vice-Presidents. There are a number of origin tales<sup>22</sup> in the relevant literature and publicity relating to what became one of the USA’s most important tourist attractions – the Preservation Hall as we know it today.

The accounts written during the early period of the development of Preservation Hall mostly do pay the proper respect to Ken Mills as originator.<sup>23</sup> Later tales frequently downplay his role. There is the ‘Bohemian’ tale which emphasises the role of the ‘Bohemian’ Barbara Reid, the original Vice-President of NOSPT, as originator: ‘Preservation Hall emerged out of the bohemian community that had long inhabited the French Quarter.’<sup>24</sup> There are the tales of exclusion and erasure which omit Grayson Mills’ name entirely, mostly moving straight to the roles of Allan and Sandra Jaffe in spearheading the marketing of the Hall, from September 1961 onwards. Some of these tales of erasure give priority to the role of the ‘kitty sessions’ ‘rehearsals’ held by Larry Borenstein at his art gallery at 726, St. Peter Street in the mid-to-late 1950s which eventually morphed into Preservation Hall when Borenstein moved his gallery into the building next door.<sup>25</sup> Finally, there are the tales of retrospective ‘balance’ that seek to apportion the relative contributions of many of the early contributors and helpers.<sup>26</sup> But how could Mills possibly refer to Preservation Hall as defunct?

A clue is provided, perhaps, in the January 1962 issue of *Jazz Report* where regular columnist and reporter on activities in New Orleans, Andy

Lockhart, writes:

Because Allan Jaffe, who presides over the jazz jamborees doesn't like the name Preservation Hall, 726 St. Peter St. in the French Quarter is actually nameless at the moment.

But the place, whatever you call it, is drawing big crowds and competing with the other local jazz outfits.<sup>27</sup>

It would be interesting to know precisely when this period started and how long it lasted for.

However, Larry Borenstein and Sandra and Allan Jaffe had little time for such subtleties. In a very revealing series of 'Letters' published in the following month's issue of February 1962 and headed 'Mills Stoned', Sandra and Allan Jaffe and Larry Borenstein comment on the relevant Mills' article.<sup>28</sup>

Sandra and Allan Jaffe write:

Dear Paul: Understand Ken Mills wrote an article about the dissolution of Preservation Hall, which is just not true. By the way, we'd like a subscription to *Jazz Report*; are not sure of rate, so please let us know and will remit.

Incidentally, Steve Angrum died. George Guesnon is retiring and this time it seems he's really sincere. Let us know if there's any information we can send you concerning the jazz scene down here.

Larry Borenstein writes, in less measured terms:

Dear Paul: I note that Grayson Mills is still affected with diarrhoea of the pen. I am surprised that you have no more respect for truth or coherence than is demonstrated by your printing such nonsense.

My principal objection is the irresponsible reference to Preservation Hall. This hall, located at 726 St. Peter, has not missed a night (except Monday, when they are closed) in presenting a series of informal jazz concerts by the remaining New Orleans jazzmen. There is no likelihood that the operation will become defunct as long as there is an audience for good, authentic traditional jazz, and men able and willing to play it.

I particularly resent Mills implying that he suffered financial reverses. On the contrary, he used some money to live on, which he would have done

anywhere, while amassing a large number of tapes of sessions in the hall, taken without the knowledge or consent of the musicians. The value of this illicitly gathered material is far above any money he spent.

Mills replies:

Mr. Borenstein's claim that I illicitly acquired tapes is simply not true. Under the terms of a verbal agreement made between myself and Louis Cottrell, any such tapes in my possession were turned over to the union to be held in the union's safe until authorized union sessions could be held to cover the material taken in live performance.

Incidentally, at the time the article was written, Mr. Borenstein had informed me he was going to drop the name 'Preservation Hall,' so that he could purge and rid his property of 'the stigma' of myself 'and the NOSPTJ [New Orleans Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz] forever.' As the name was not dropped, the sentence, 'a defunct operation . . .' should have been deleted.<sup>29</sup>

Bill Russell, the father of first wave New Orleans jazz revivalism, is now receiving the honour due to him in contemporary jazz studies and jazz historiography. Entirely appropriately, on his death he featured in a number of widely available obituaries which set forth his major contributions. However, even the most knowledgeable New Orleans jazz enthusiasts and scholars did not even know whether Ken Mills was dead or alive at the time I was writing this article. Only by means of original [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com) and U.S. Social Security Death Indices research were Fred Eatherton, John Whitehorn and myself able to determine that Kenneth 'Ken' Harold Mills was, indeed, dead and had passed away at the age of 67 on October 10, 2004, having been born on June 9, 1937.

Incidentally, nowhere does the name Grayson appear on any of the official records that we have located. Precisely when and why 'Ken' adopted the name 'Grayson' remains to be researched.

Much work remains to be done on the life and work of Ken Grayson Mills if his contribution to New Orleans jazz is to be paid the proper respect in future jazz historiography.

As of now, the burgeoning academic field of contemporary Jazz Studies barely knows that Mills ever existed, let alone considers the claim that he should be considered the father of second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism. This injustice needs to be put right. For as Doug Landau, editor of *New Orleans Music* from March 2001 to December 2010, comments:

I think the best of what Ken Mills achieved came close to Bill Russell's output and like Bill he brought to light some unknown musicians. Had it not been for Bill, of course, Ken and the rest of us would have led different lives. New Orleans Music as we came to know it would likely have been forever undiscovered country.<sup>30</sup>

## NOTES

1. Extraordinarily, William Carter has Mills arriving in the French Quarter in August 1960, when he has been and gone – for Freudians an intriguing slip of the pen. William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1991, p. 141.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11.
3. Tom Stagg and Charlie Crump, *New Orleans, The Revival*, p 4.
4. I thank members of the Porcupine Society – Fred Eatherton, Mike Dine, Robert Greenwood, Doug Landau, Mike Pointon and John Whitehorn – for their role in generating this article. Special thanks are due to Fred Eatherton, Per Oldaeus and Matthew Ekins.
5. Ray Smith and Mike Pointon, *Bill Russell and the New Orleans Jazz Revival*, Equinox, Sheffield, 2018.
6. 'Bill Russell', *Times* [London, England] August 17, 1992, p. 13.
7. On phasing and dating, see: Richard Ekins, 'Authenticity as Authenticating – The Case of New Orleans Jazz Revivalism: An Approach from Grounded Theory and Social World Analysis', *Popular Music History*, 2012, 7 (1): 24-52.
8. Grayson Mills, 'New Orleans Music: Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower: A Report on Icon Records' Objectives and Realities', *Jazz Report*, 1960, 1 (4): 11-12.
9. Grayson Mills, 'The Orleanian: Things looking up for N.O. Jazz Collectors, and more Importantly, for its Musicians too!', *Jazz Report*, 1961, 1 (9): 15-16.

10. Accessed June 1, 2023, <https://www.discogs.com/label/489468-New-Orleans-The-Living-Legends>.

11. Mills says he arrived in New Orleans for the first time in June 1960. Hopefully, further research will reveal the precise date of his arrival and the detail of his involvements, if any, with the occasional old-style New Orleans music recordings being made around that time. Relevant Icon dates are these: John Handy Shakers, Icon unissued (recorded on July 1, 1960); Kid Thomas, Icon LP 3 (recorded on July 3, 1960); Kid Punch, Icon LP2 (recorded on July 7, 1960); Paul Barnes, Icon LP5 (recorded on June 9, 1959 and July 13, 1960).

12. See: Charles Suhor, 'Preservation Hall: New Orleans Rebirth', *DownBeat*, January 17, 1963, and Charles Suhor, 'The Preservation Hall Revival'; both in Charles Suhor, *Jazz in New Orleans: The Postwar Years Through 1970*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, MD, 2001, pp. 150-152 and pp. 179-181.

13. I view Samuel B. Charters, *Jazz New Orleans, 1885-1957: An Index to the Negro Musicians of New Orleans*, Jazz Monographs No. 2, Walter C. Allen, Belleville, N.J., 1958 as the most significant precursor in the jazz literature and Mike Slatter's 'Kid Thomas' Creole Jazz Band' 1959 session, 77 LA 12/9, as the most significant precursor recording. See: also, the prescient Tony Standish, 'Gold in the Junkyards', in Sinclair Traill and Gerald Lascelles (eds.) *Just Jazz 3*, Four Square Books, London, 1959, pp. 22-28.

14. Grayson Mills, 'New Orleans Jazz on Icon', *Eureka*, 1960, 1 (5): 9-13.

15. *Jazz Report*, 1961, 1 (7): 9-10. 'GKM' (Mills) adds the endnote: 'The patness refers to the enormous waste brought on by the widespread belief that the story of New Orleans is all over. Kid Thomas' disc certainly, in the realistic sense, smashes the myth, though it may not scratch the surface of convenience and romance...'

16. The 'TIN CANS AND BOTTLES' section was reproduced in Richard Ekins, 'Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and the Origins of Second Wave New Orleans Jazz Revivalism', *Just Jazz*, No. 224, December 2016. See: Chapter 2 of this book.

17. Emile Barnes is very often called by his abbreviated / nickname but spelt differently by different people.

18. Mostly, for this book, I have corrected typos or incorrect use of words in Mills' published articles. I have left this one as is. Martin Adams and Yves François take the view that Mills meant 'derivative'. I am not so sure. Facebook comment on 'Quiz Time: Ken Grayson Mills', June 1, 2023, accessed June 11, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/richard.ekinslordrichard/posts/pfbid02hBVRC4hQ5ZFYNf>

19. See: *Jazz Report*, 1961, 2 (3): 21-22.

20. In an email of December 1, 2017, Fred Eatherton writes to Richard Ekins: 'I believe that this site had been owned by Godchaux's Department Store, whose main building was in Canal Street, and that 'Cudichaux's' was either the result of an error or had been misread when printed. Bruce Raeburn has confirmed to me that 'Cudichaux's' does not appear in any of the local directories from the 1950s.'

21. This was an error. The three months refers from the time of the official opening of the Hall on June 13th. There was a further month, or so, of sessions preceding the official opening. See: in particular, Richard Ekins, 'The First Four Months of Preservation Hall: Barbara Reid's Notes for a Preliminary Timeline', *Just Jazz*, No. 275, March 2021, pp. 6-8.

22. On 'Origin Stories' in sociology, see: R. Connell, *Southern Theory*, Polity, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 4-9.

23. See: James Asman, 'The Living Legends of New Orleans', *Jazz Journal*, 1961, 14 (9): 2-3 and 40, and Charles Suhor, 'Preservation Hall: New Orleans Rebirth', 1963, op. cit.

24. John Swenson, 'Preservation's Progress: Barbara Reid and the Origins of New Orleans's Most Famous Hall', *Oxford American: The Southern Music Issue*, No. 79, Winter 2012. Mills, himself, sometimes names Barbara Reid as co-founder.

25. Larry Borenstein, 'Preservation Hall and How it Grew', typescript, undated, pp. 1-5, Kelley Edminston Collection, National Jazz Archive, Loughton, Essex, UK. Cf. E. Lorenz Borenstein, 'Jazz: Like No Other Music', *Travel & Camera*, September 1970.

26. William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1991.

27. 'Who Blows There? New Orleans', *Jazz Report*, 1962, 2 (5): 6. See: also, Dick Allen, writing on September 11, 1961: 'The sessions will be continued at the same location, and the name "Preservation Hall," which is distasteful to several people, will not be used.' Cited in William Carter, 1991, op. cit., p. 160.

28. 'The Letter Page', *Jazz Report*, 1962, 2 (6): 2.

29. Ibid.

30. Email, Doug Landau to Richard Ekins, August 8, 2016.



A black and white photograph of a building facade. At the top, there is a balcony with a decorative wrought-iron railing. Below the balcony, the text "CHAPTER 4" is superimposed in a large, white, serif font. The building's ground floor features a doorway with a white door that is open to the left. The door has a diamond-shaped window at the top. To the right of the doorway is a window with a similar diamond-shaped window at the top and a screen below. A small sign with the number "7260" is visible on the wall to the right of the doorway. To the right of the window is a dark, arched entrance with a sunburst design above it. The overall scene is in black and white, with high contrast between the white door and the dark shadows of the building.



## Chapter 4

During the months that *Just Jazz* was publishing these first articles, I was in regular telephone contact with Mike Dine. For some time we had been talking over our irritation with the claim, so frequently made, that the most important long-term innovation of Allan and Sandra Jaffe's management of Preservation Hall was that they instituted tours of the Preservation Hall bands. These tours, initially, were to venues in the United States and, later, to venues world-wide. Many commentators saw this as the big step that ensured the financial viability and, therefore, for all practical purposes, the viability of the whole Preservation Hall enterprise.

Mike and I both knew that it was during the period that Ken Mills was still running Preservation Hall, that he arranged a series of bookings for several different bands of Preservation Hall musicians at what was known as 'The Best Address in Cleveland'. We felt it was important to set the facts out clearly for a *Just Jazz* readership. We both knew, of course, that from the outset of his project, Mills linked his organisation of his bands with his organising of his recording sessions.

We were also struck that it was Kid Sheik's band that featured in the first Cleveland sessions. Barry Martyn, in particular, appreciated the significance of Kid Sheik's personality and crowd-pulling power. He recognised that Kid Sheik provided the ideal New Orleans musician to bring over to Europe to informally tour and record with his own band. A recording of Kid Sheik's band at Cleveland, made while on the Mills' organised tour, was some time later issued by Martyn on his MONO label.

In my next *Just Jazz* article I wanted to emphasise the importance of Mills' initial championing of Kid Sheik, and to draw out the significance of Martyn's ongoing promotion of Sheik through both tours and recording. It would lead to several Kid Sheik visits to Europe and many more Sheik records. Indeed, one particular English trumpet player based his style on

Sheik's, emigrated to New Orleans, and married the Civil Rights' activist Dodie Smith who worked on the door at Preservation Hall for many years. That musician – Londoner John 'Kid' Simmons – is still a working musician and bandleader in New Orleans.

## **Lesser-Known Aspects of the Legacy of Ken Grayson Mills: Preservation Hall Jazz Band Touring at 'The Best Address in Cleveland'**

**The *Eureka Report*, with Notes from Thomas N. Stagg<sup>1</sup>**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, February 2017

Enthusiasts and scholars of second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s frequently forget or, indeed, never knew the role Ken Mills played in initiating what was to provide the major income stream for Preservation Hall and its musicians, namely the Preservation Hall touring bands.

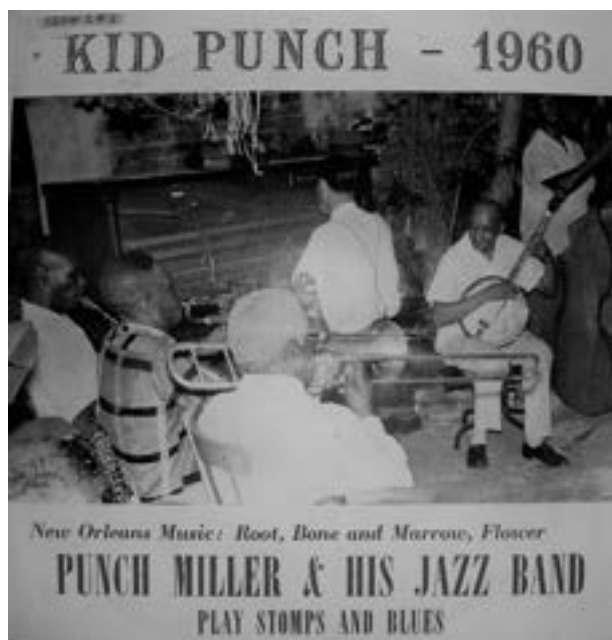
Conventional wisdom has it that while Ken Mills' talents and temperament might have made him suitable for the role of producer of an esoteric record label, namely Icon Records, once questions of the realpolitik of commercialising or marketing 'authenticity' were raised, he was a hopeless case. With this view in mind, it could be seen as sensible for landlord Larry Borenstein to force Mills to hand over the reins of Preservation Hall to Allan Jaffe, who was trained in business studies and commercially astute.<sup>2</sup> The rest, as they say, is history.

Mills would later argue that the depiction of him as naïve and disinterested in business matters was a travesty of the truth. Indeed, in the insert to his Getdown Records cassette, 'Live! Opening Night at Preservation Hall', Mills writes: 'As successor, Jaffe made no substantive incursions of his own cognition. The bookings agency, tours, commission sales, schedule keeping, maintenance, programming variety, regular advertising and union affiliation

were all established by his predecessors.’ However, it would be true to say that in the early pioneering days of his New Orleans recordings and his management of Preservation Hall, such things were not Mills’ main focus.

In Chapter 3 of this book, I reproduced Mills’ own 1961 *Jazz Report* reviews of two of his most important Icon sessions, namely those of Kid Thomas and his Creole Jazz Band, recorded on July 3, 1960 (Icon LP3)<sup>3</sup> and Kid Howard’s La Vida Band, recorded on August 13 and September 3, 1961 (Icon LP4).<sup>4</sup>

Paul Affeldt’s *Jazz Report* was Mills’ chosen American magazine for launching his Icon label. Mills’ favourite British vehicle for publicising his project was *Eureka: The Magazine of New Orleans Jazz*, launched in January 1960, some six months before Mills made his first recording trip to New Orleans. Prior to that trip, Mills had made a number of contributions to *Eureka*, which included a book review of ‘The Country Blues by Samuel Barclay Charters’<sup>5</sup> and an article on ‘Country Blues in Los Angeles’.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 4.1 Front cover of Icon LP 2**

On his return from New Orleans, Mills organised an ILWU Benefit Concert at San Francisco's Longshore Auditorium on October 12, 1960 that featured Amos White and his New Orleans Band. Mills' programme notes for this concert were reproduced in the September/October 1960 issue of *Eureka*.<sup>7</sup> We might, with some justification, call this the 'Grayson Mills Issue', for it also included Mills' article on 'New Orleans Jazz on Icon',<sup>8</sup> a record review of *Kid Punch – 1960* (Icon LP 2 – Mills' first volume in his 'Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower' series) by Tony Standish, together with a full back page advertisement of *Kid Punch – 1960*, duly noting that 'the sales response to Punch will determine how soon Kid Thomas, DeDe and Billie and others are to come out.'



Figure 4.2 Back cover of Icon LP 2



**Figure 4.3 Record label, Icon LP2**

Following the publication of Samuel Charters' *Jazz New Orleans*, in 1958, several people began writing lists of New Orleans musicians they felt should be recorded.<sup>10</sup> Thus the early issues of *Eureka* sought funding for potential recording projects. It was Ken Mills, however, who led the field regarding the execution of such plans on a large scale.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the launching of his ambitious programme more or less coincided with the demise of *Eureka*. What had been a 'bi-monthly' magazine became an irregular magazine marked by 'A Special Pictorial Number', before it came to an end with its last issue in May 1962. Interestingly, however, that last issue may be seen as predicting the next step for the emerging second wave New Orleans revival, namely that of concert tours made by New Orleans musicians and bands. Once again, it was Ken Mills who played the leading role. Fittingly, it is a *Eureka* review which provides the best available account of this development.

## N.O. Jazz in Cleveland: The *Eureka Review*<sup>12</sup>

The year of 1961 has seen many improvements on the jazz scene of New Orleans. Early in the year, a major record company surprised everyone by recording a series of LPs by various bands. A little later, 'Preservation Hall' was opened up, giving the remaining musicians a chance to play, more or less regularly. Thirdly, a series of tours by New Orleans bands to Cleveland, Ohio, was begun. These mark the first tours, apart from the George Lewis band, since Lawrence Marrero's band played Cincinnati.

The actual jobs were arranged by Ken Mills, of Icon Records and the first group to make the trip was Kid Sheik's Storyville Ramblers. They opened on September 16 at the Tudor Arms Hotel in Cleveland. This hotel boasts itself as, 'The best address in Cleveland'. It is situated on East 107<sup>th</sup> at Carnegie.



Figure 4.4 Front cover of MONO MNLP 13



PENN - OHIO SPRING MEETING  
Tudor Arms Hotel  
10660 Carnegie Ave.  
Cleveland 6, Ohio

Figure 4.5 Photo courtesy of the collection: Postcards of Cleveland, and the Michael Schwartz Library at Cleveland State University

The band was made up of six men. Sheik played trumpet, John Handy clarinet, Albert Warner trombone, Louis Gallaud piano, John Joseph string bass and Josiah Frazier on drums. They played from 9pm until 2am for dancing in the 'Empress Room' six nights a week. Sunday was their night off. Although Handy played clarinet for the most part he did switch to alto saxophone, which is his regular instrument, for a few numbers each evening. The bass player, John Joseph, had to hire an instrument when he arrived in time. He would not allow his own bass to be sent up in case it was damaged in transit. At 85, John is one of the oldest New Orleans musicians still playing.

The band arrived in town a couple of days before they were due to start playing and, as September 15 was Sheik's birthday, the management of the Tudor Arms decided to give him a birthday party and combine it with a press reception. On the night, the Empress Room was packed with photographers and reporters. A giant cake with 'Happy Birthday Kid Sheik' marked boldly over the white icing was laid on the table in front of the bandstand. A large figure five and three, surmounted the four tier cake, marking his age.

Sheik was overwhelmed, but he managed to lead the band into a rousing version of 'The Sheik Of Araby' to begin the evening. After a few choruses, he sang the refrain in a guttural voice, much to the delight of all present. During the rest of the evening, the men played a collection of numbers in their own inimitable way, including the 'Saints', 'Some Of These Days', 'John Handy's Blues', 'Shake It And Break It', 'Just a Closer Walk', 'Hey La Bas' and popular tunes like 'I Want To Be Happy'.

Everyone present was amazed to see such a band of 'old-timers' playing with such verve as they did that night, and the local press reports were extremely favourable. Cleveland's *Plain Dealer* called them, 'Six Patriots of Jazz. Still Going Strong'. There were photos in some of the papers and local entertainment magazines carried good reports of the band. Sheik, himself, said, 'The tour was very, very fine. The best time in my life'. The management of the Tudor Arms must have thought the same thing, for the band is booked to reappear for 23 days, starting December 16.

Following Sheik's band was Kid Howard's La Vida Band. They began working on September 30 and played on until October 13. With Howard were Israel Gorman, clarinet, Worthia Thomas, trombone, Emanuel Sayles, banjo, Louis James, string bass and Sidney Montague on drums. Montague is, at present, making a come-back, having been retired for several years. He

was at one time with Sidney Desvigne's Orchestra and has worked jobs with almost everyone in the city of New Orleans. He is also the representative for the Musicians Union in New Orleans. According to reports, both Gorman and Howard excelled themselves. Howard is said to have played with 'enjoyable vitality'.

**EMPRESS ROOM**

Another great JAZZ BAND  
Direct from NEW ORLEANS

**KID HOWARD**  
and his famous  
**LaVida Jazz Band**  
Enjoy an evening of JAZZ with  
*America's Original Jazzmen*

This is the first time these musicians are appearing north of the Mason-Dixon line. Most of them are members of the famous Eureka Brass Band of New Orleans.

CONTINUOUS SHOWS and DANCING NIGHTLY  
DINNERS SERVED FROM 6 P.M.

For Reservations Call Cedar 1-4600

**Tudor Arms Hotel**  
CARNegie AND EAST 107th ST.  
Manager  
SAM W. GERSTNER

Figure 4.6 Courtesy of Eureka, 1962

They played the same hours as Sheik's band and also had a night off each Sunday. The repertoire included a cross section of standards, such as, 'Maryland', 'Panama', 'Climax Rag', 'That's A Plenty' and a few pop songs. 'Sweethearts On Parade' was a popular request. The band had a fine selection of blues in the repertoire, some of these, like 'Wabash Blues', 'Savoy Blues' and 'Memphis Blues' were requested practically every evening. 'We had 500 Dixie arrangements in our repertoire,' added Howard.

The local press received them as warmly as they did Sheik's band and one local paper announced that, 'Almost pure ragtime rhythms are improvised with invigorating spontaneity by these six dusky veterans from New Orleans'.

It is most heartening to see such opportunities given to the musicians who, for many years, have only been known around their home town. Their music certainly deserves recognition. Both Ken Mills and the manager of the Tudor Arms, Sam W. Gerstner are to be complimented on giving these musicians the chance to show Cleveland what an authentic New Orleans Jazz Band really sounds like.<sup>13</sup>

The same issue of *Eureka* also featured a brief notice of the concerts, clearly setting out the links between the Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz, Preservation Hall and the subsequent concerts:

The Empress Room of the Tudor Arms Hotel, riding the crest of a wave of enthusiasm for a unique idea, is currently presenting the third in a series of original New Orleans concerts.

Early in September the Tudor Arms management became interested in a group known as the Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz. Its purpose was the promotion of the original New Orleans jazz and, toward this end, it was presenting nightly concerts at New Orleans' Preservation Hall featuring some of the early pioneers of jazz. If successful in New Orleans, why not in Cleveland? With this thought, the Empress Room made the necessary contractual arrangements and has been setting attendance records ever since.

'Kid' Sheik and his Storyville Ramblers were the first to arrive for a two-week stay. They were followed by the equally popular 'Kid' Howard and his La Vida Band. 'Noon' Johnson and his Bazooka Band opened Saturday, October 14, and are currently carrying on the tradition of the old-time Negro bands that originated the jazz movement.<sup>14</sup>

## **Recording the Music: The Influence of Ken Mills on Barry Martyn**

Barry Martyn's MONO label provided a complementary approach to Ken Mills' Icon label when it came to documenting the New Orleans music of the 1960s. Mills' Icon records had already been established for some six months when Martyn came to New Orleans in January 1961. As Martyn later explained, 'Music of New Orleans Records [MONO Records] was formed in 1961 with the intent of documenting as many as possible of the musicians overlooked by previous companies such as American Music and Icon.'<sup>15</sup> Following his first trip to New Orleans in 1960, Mills had slated the release of Sheik's first dance band record as part of his projected *After Many a summer – Emile Barnes and his Friends* LP release.<sup>16</sup> In the event, this material was never issued on Icon. Rather Martyn, following in Mills' footsteps, recorded Sheik with his 'regular men' in February 1961 and shortly afterwards released the material as MONO LP1.

Sheik had a prominent role in the opening of Preservation Hall in June, 1961<sup>17</sup> and it was this, as we have seen, that led to Sheik's Cleveland tour. Once again, Martyn took over where Mills had left off by engaging Sheik to tour in Europe a couple of years later, in 1963, with Martyn's own band. This tour led to a number of recordings with European musicians. Important in the present context, however, is that it was Martyn who issued on his MONO label (LP 13) the Preservation Hall Kid Sheik in Cleveland tour session that had been recorded on 28 September 1961.

To my knowledge, no recordings of any of Kid Howard's La Vida Band sessions in Cleveland were made. But Mills has given us the clearest indication of what the band might have sounded like with the release of his Icon LP 4 recorded in August 1961, only a short time before the band made the trip to Cleveland. The personnel were substantially the same, although the substitution of trombonist Worthia Thomas for the more old-style Ed Summers no doubt made a considerable difference to the overall band sound.

Regarding the influence the Kid Sheik in Cleveland tour band had on the developments of second wave revivalism, including subsequent tours, I turn to selections from Tom Stagg's excellent sleeve notes, written for the MONO LP13 album in 1966:

### **Kid Sheik in Cleveland by Thomas N. Stagg**

The posters read 'Now Opened, Empress Room of The Hotel Tudor Arms, presenting for the first time direct from New Orleans Kid Sheik and his New Orleans Festival'. The year was 1961, a year which was to become a turning point in the career of George 'Kid Sheik' Cola . . .

The manager at that time was Sam W. Gerstner and the promotional manager was Lee Osborne. It was Lee who visited New Orleans and heard Sheik's band at the Preservation Hall, at that time run by Ken Mills of Icon Records. Hurried arrangements were made and the outcome was that the Storyville Ramblers opened in Cleveland on September 16 . . .

It must be remembered that basically the Tudor Arms visitors were not a jazz crowd. Reports from that time say that the bands drew on personality as well as musicianship. The band's repertoire was seemingly inexhaustible, they played virtually any tune requested the highlight always being 'Sheik Of Araby'.

Kid Sheik, himself, has gone far since 1961. He has made a number of records, leads the Eureka Brass Band and has made two trips to Europe. The Storyville Ramblers still play occasional jobs at Preservation Hall, although sickness and death make a steady personnel hard to keep.

Albert Warner has now passed on. A legend in his own time, Albert first came to prominence on the Bunk Johnson recordings made in 1942. He recorded, on a number of occasions, with the Eureka Brass Band, and also with the Love-Jiles Ragtime Orchestra. Up until his death, he was playing with pick-up groups at Preservation Hall.

John Handy is still one of the most active musicians in New Orleans.

These days, he rarely plays clarinet, and, it is only after the past three years that he has had any of the recognition that he deserves. Cap made a trip to Europe in 1966, with Sheik and was a tremendous success.

Louis Gallaud is another musician who gets very little credit. He recorded with Punch Miller for Icon, and now plays mainly at Preservation Hall. Louis is a very respected musician, and perhaps this album will get him some long overdue success.

Papa John Joseph has now passed away. He was 85 when this recording was made. The Cleveland tour, he played on a hired bass, he would not have his own instrument sent for fear of it getting damaged. During his last years, he recorded extensively and even went on a tour of Japan with the George Lewis band.

Joseph 'Cie' Frazier is one of the last, and certainly the most active, drummer left in New Orleans. Today, he plays with almost all the bands in Preservation Hall, and has also travelled throughout Europe, in early 1966. Of late, he has worked and recorded extensively.

For the men on this recording who are still playing, The Empress Room, Tudor Arms Hotel seems a long time ago. So much has happened over the past five years . . .

## **Conclusion**

Even as the Cleveland concerts were being arranged, Mills' days at Preservation Hall were numbered. According to Dick Allen's memo written on September 11, 1961 (now held in the files of the Tulane University Jazz Archive) the Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz which ran Preservation Hall had been dissolved 'a week or two weeks ago'. The memo states:

The work of the non-profit society will be continued, starting Wednesday, September 13, 1961, by Allan Jaffe and his wife, Sandy, on a profit (or loss) basis . . . The sessions will be continued at the same location, and the name

‘Preservation Hall,’ which is distasteful to several people, will not be used. It will be called simply ‘726 St. Peter Street’. Larry Borenstein will continue as landlord at the same rent.

In the interim, Grayson Mills is continuing to run the place, assisted by Ralph Collins and Allan Jaffe. During his stay, Mills has recorded several more bands under union contract at 1110 Royal Street. These included Israel Gorman’s band and Kid Sheik’s band.<sup>18</sup>

As Mills, himself, puts it:

I held my last concert about the eleventh of September, counted the money, paid the musicians. And then as easily as turning the key on the lock, walking into a going business, Jaffe started fresh, opened the doors, booked a band and held a kitty. It was never rancour, disruption or anything else. The only thing is, Barbara [Reid] and I weren’t there. We were gone.<sup>19</sup>

## NOTES

1. I thank Mike Dine of 504 Records for his role in generating this article. Special thanks are due to Fred Eatherton and Matthew Ekins. On ‘The Best Address in Cleveland’, see: Eleanor Kaiser, ‘Tudor Arms Hotel’, *Cleveland Historical*, accessed January 12, 2016, <https://clevelandhistorical.org/items/show/466>.
2. See: William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1991. Carter quotes Barbara Reid, who ran the early Preservation Hall with Grayson Mills, as saying to a friend: ‘Grayson and I were no business people, and we probably wouldn’t have done as good a job as Jaffe did, managing the Hall.’ Ibid, p. 139.
3. Grayson Mills (1961) ‘Some Words on the Kid Thomas Band’, *Jazz Report*, 1 (7): 9-10.
4. Grayson Mills (1961) ‘Afraid to Leave Here, Afraid to Leave this Town . . . Some words on Kid Howard’s new ICON release’, *Jazz Report*, 2 (3): 21-22.
5. Grayson Mills (1960) ‘A Review of “The Country Blues by Samuel Barclay Charters”’, *Eureka*, 1 (2) March/April: 14-16.
6. Grayson Mills (1960) ‘Country Blues in Los Angeles,’ *Eureka*, 1 (3) May/June: 7-8, 12, 22, and 28.

7. Grayson Mills (1960) 'Amos White and his New Orleans Ragtime Band', *Eureka*, 1 (5) Sept/Oct: 5-7.
8. Grayson Mills (1960) 'New Orleans Jazz on Icon', *Eureka*, 1 (5) Sept/Oct: 9-10 and 13.
9. Tony Standish (1960) 'Punch Miller – Record Review', *Eureka*, 1 (5) Sept/Oct: 14.
10. Most notably, Tony Standish, 'Gold in the Junkyards', in Sinclair Traill and Gerald Lascelles (eds) *Just Jazz 3*, Four Square Books, London, 1959, pp. 22-28.
11. James Asman highlights the scale of Mills' contribution: 'When I arrived in New Orleans towards the end of June [1961] a new and healthy revival had been in operation for about one month and this incorporated both live sessions which offered paid work to forgotten and impoverished musicians, and recording dates on the Icon label produced by Grayson Mills from California. Until then most recording operators like Charters and the Riverside team really believed that the remaining New Orleans pioneers could be numbered on the fingers of two hands. Today no fewer than 75 old-timers have been bought back into the revivalist limelight and some of these have already re-joined the Musicians Union and are hoping once more for jobs. Another latent 125 are known and will slowly be brought back to an active participation in the new jazz scene in St. Peter Street . . . and the quality of most of the jazz presented by these old men is incredibly high.' See: James Asman, 'The Living Legends of New Orleans', *Jazz Journal*, September 1961, 14 (9): 2-3 and 40.
12. 'N.O. Jazz in Cleveland', *Eureka*, 1962, 2 (1): 11-12.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 2. Pete Pepke, 'Cleveland', *Jazz Report*, 1962, 2 (5): 7, gives an indication of what the Mills-Sam Gerstner tour arrangement had started: 'Now the question is why can't other bars, clubs, hotels, dives, joints or rooms follow this lead . . . What about a trial gig for the boys in New York, Toronto, Chicago, Buffalo, San Francisco, L.A., St. Louis or Pittsburgh?'
15. Barry Martyn, 'Booklet Notes', *Kid Sheik's Swingsters, 1961*, American Music, AMCD-91, 1996.
16. Mills originally planned this as Vol. 5 of his 'Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower' series (Icon LP6). See: Grayson Mills, 'New Orleans Music: Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower: A Report on Icon Records' Objectives and Realities', *Jazz Report*, 1960, Vol. 1 (4): 11-12. Later, he planned it as Icon LP16 and 17, but the records were never pressed. It eventually appeared, in 1993, as *Kid Sheik with Charlie Love*

*and His Cado Jazz Band*, 504 CDS 21. The recording engineers were Ralph Collins (session at Louis Gallaud's home) and Walter Eysseleinck (session at Dixon Hall). Barry Martyn has stated that this was the inspirational session that launched Mono records. See: Barry Martyn, 'Record Reviews', *New Orleans Music*, 1993, 4 (2): 25-26.

17. *Live! Opening Night at Preservation Hall*, planned at one time by Mills as Icon LP14, later appeared as a 'Getdown' cassette tape. According to Paige VanVorst to Richard Ekins, email February 24, 2016: 'I'm not sure of the details, but Mills started a new label – Getdown – and put out a cassette labelled *First Night at Preservation Hall*, which I think was a ploy to get GHB to buy the rest of his stuff, as we shortly after that put that item on AM [AMCD-86].' Mills had invited Mike Dine, of 504 records, to issue this material before he released it, himself, on Getdown. For another set from the same live session that Mike Dine did release, see: *First Night at Preservation Hall*, 504/Icon CD60.

18. Cited in William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1991, p. 160.

19. *Ibid*, p. 158.

A black and white photograph of a building facade. At the top, there is a balcony with a decorative wrought-iron railing. Below the balcony, the text 'CHAPTER 5' is overlaid in a large, white, serif font. Underneath that, the title 'Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and the Mike Dine/504 Records Connection' is written in a smaller, white, serif font. To the right of the title, the date 'March 2017' is written in a white, italicized serif font. The background shows a building with several doors. On the left, there are two white doors, each with a diamond-shaped window. In the center, there is a doorway with a window and a cushion on the floor. To the right, there is a dark doorway with a sunburst design above it. A small sign with the number '726' is visible on the wall next to the central doorway.

# CHAPTER 5

## Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and the Mike Dine/504 Records Connection

*March 2017*



## Chapter 5

Once Mike Dine saw how the Ken Grayson Mills project was developing, I was able to persuade him to tell me more about his own dealings with Mills, which had been substantial in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This was a period of Mills' life little known about. Dine never used email, far less Facebook and he never wrote about New Orleans jazz except in his usually short LP sleeve notes or CD booklet notes. His *modus operandi* was scores of telephone calls and letters that linked his twice-yearly recording trips to New Orleans. He also had a very large network of contacts of enthusiasts for the music, through sales of his 504 records, going back decades.

By this time, working with my own material and that sent to me by Per Oldaeus, I envisaged completing the Mills series of *Just Jazz* articles with just two more: one linking Ken Grayson Mills and Icon Records with Mike Dine and 504 Records, and one on Mills and the New Orleans/West Coast connection. Following those articles, I planned to focus on compiling a Mills Discography with discographer Fred Eatherton.

Parallel with these developments, material on Larry Borenstein kept emerging. It became obvious, almost from the very beginning of my research, just how bitter the dispute between Larry Borenstein and Mills had been. And yet it had been my discovery in 2000 of Mike Dine's releases of what he called 'The Larry Borenstein Collection' that re-ignited my passion for the music after a 25-year interval.

Before beginning serious work on the Mills discography, I decided to write an entirely separate article on Mike Dine's Larry Borenstein Collection releases. This proposed article linked with my previous Dan Pawson Project because I had already researched in detail Dan's *New Orleans Music* reviews of the Borenstein collection releases. I knew that Dan considered that these releases put Dine's 504 label on a par with those of Bill Russell's American Music label, Ken Mills' Icon label, and Barry Martyn's MONO label. In

short, it was the Larry Borenstein Collection on 504 Records that guaranteed the label its high rank in the pecking order of record labels specialising in old style New Orleans music.

Then, alas, things took a totally unanticipated turn. On December 17, 2016, Mike Dine died tragically, suddenly, and unexpectedly, following a fall at his home. Shortly before he died, I had one of my many long, enjoyable and educative telephone conversations with him. In this, our last telephone conversation, Mike had finalised and approved two articles I had written on his work as a record producer. The first one, initially scheduled to be the penultimate article of the Mills project, summarised the story of the release history of Mills' thirteen Icon LPs and his sale of them to George Buck in 1967. It went on to detail Mills' discovery in November 1989 of his unissued tapes of the music he recorded on the Opening Night at Preservation Hall back in June 1961.

This discovery in 1989 coincided with the transition being made by record companies from vinyl LP to CD releases. Mills realised that the transition potentially created a whole new market for his own tapes.

Initially, Ken Mills approached Mike Dine with a view to collaborating on a production of the Opening Night session but Dine was wary of going ahead with this project. Rather, he left it to Mills to produce a cassette of material from the opening night and agreed to distribute and sell it.

Mills was playing saxophone in a Californian-based rhythm and blues band at the time and was naturally hopeful that Dine might issue some of this material. However, Dine had a dim view of Mills' talents as a saxophone player and little or no interest in collaborating with him on any proposed record project on rhythm and blues.

Nevertheless, Dine was very interested in releasing material from Mills' unissued collection of tapes of his New Orleans jazz material. To this end he made two visits to California to meet Mills.

Most importantly, their collaboration led to Dine issuing his own 'Opening

Night at Preservation Hall’, a sort of companion volume to material on the cassette tape which Mills sold to George Buck. It also led to Dine releasing the important Charlie Love and his Cado Jazz Band session – the session that had inspired Barry Martyn to launch his MONO records series; and to Dine securing the rights to the Israel Gorman trio session which was the last session Mills recorded in New Orleans before he left the city for the last time in September 1962. (I would eventually release this session as part of my 504/La Croix Lord Richard New Orleans Sessions.) Apart from the above three whole sessions, Dine acquired a number of alternate takes from previously issued Mills’ sessions.

## **Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and the Mike Dine/504 Records Connection**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, March 2017

### **Preamble**

In the year before my second trip to New Orleans in April 1968, I acquired a copy of what I have always regarded as the last Icon LP release, namely Emile Barnes with Doc Paulin’s N.O.L.A. Band – *Too Well Thou Lov’st Too Soon Thou Leav’st*, Icon LP 13. In fact, although the record cover leads us to this conclusion, the label on the vinyl record itself states that the release is Jazzology JCE-23. I learnt later that Ken Mills had sold all his previous Icon releases to George H. Buck in early 1967 and included in the sale this as-yet-unissued Icon LP 13. Buck had simply inserted his own Jazzology release into the previously printed Icon covers. This was fairly typical at the time. As Paige VanVorst told me recently: ‘about the same time George Buck issued Kid Thomas at San Jacinto Hall, which was a San Jacinto LP but it was never issued by Tom Bethell – he sold out to George and the albums just came out as if they’d been done by San Jacinto.’<sup>1</sup> For the Jazzology Icon releases, George Buck launched a new series which he called ‘New Orleans – The Legends Live’ and issued all the Icons as Volumes 1—13 of

the new series, numbered consecutively from JCE-11 to JCE-23. Initially, Buck made tiny changes to the covers, such as replacing the small Icon logo with a small Jazzology logo. Later, Buck slightly changed the layout of the covers and occasionally used different photographs on the back cover. But he always kept the basic look of the original Icons by retaining the distinctive large black-and-white front cover photographs, albeit mostly adding a strip in blue. The Jazzology series remained instantly recognisable as the original Icon series by those collectors familiar with the original Icons. Most importantly, Buck always retained Ken Mills' original sleeve notes. A particular feature of George H. Buck (GHB)/Jazzology records was their stated aim to include all of their releases permanently in catalogue. Thus, from 1967 to the advent of Buck's CD programme, all of Mills' Jazzology Icons remained available in vinyl format.

Moreover, with the passing of time, Buck's 'cover blurb' for the series became increasingly concerned to emphasise the importance of the series. For instance, on one (undated) printing of his covers for JCE-17, featuring Punch Miller's Delegates of Pleasure and entitled *The River's in Mourning*, we are told:

Punch's 'Delegates of Pleasure' *The River's in Mourning* featuring Israel Gorman in Volume VII in the distinguished Jazzology series 'New Orleans – The Legends Live'. Every album in this series is of vital importance as a basic part of every record collection of authentic New Orleans jazz.

However, by the time we have reached the 1981 printing of his covers for JCE-23, we are told:

Emile Barnes with Doc Paulin's New Orleans Jazz Band . . . is volume 13 of the distinguished Jazzology series 'New Orleans – The Legends Live.' This is one of the most important series ever recorded in the history of jazz music and has been acclaimed by jazz authorities as one of the two most important series of recordings of New Orleans jazz since the 1920s. Both Emile Barnes and Doc Paulin have been completely neglected jazz artists during their lifetimes. These historic recordings made by Ken Mills for Jazzology pay tribute to their important stature in jazz.

Once George Buck had acquired a label or a previously issued session, it was his general policy not to acknowledge that fact on his reissue. He ignored the previous issue history and simply released the material in the name of whichever of his record labels he decided on. In the case of his New Orleans jazz releases in the 1960s, most were issued on his GHB label; some, like the Icon series, were issued on the Jazzology label. It is being somewhat economical with the truth to say that Icon LP13 was made for Jazzology. It was made for Icon but sold to, and issued by, Jazzology. Buck does, however, give the series huge prominence by categorising it on the record sleeve ‘as one of the two most important series of recordings of New Orleans jazz since the 1920s’, and he does keep the original Grayson Mills sleeve notes, as has been mentioned. No collector or enthusiast of New Orleans music is in any doubt that it is Bill Russell’s American Music series that is the foremost series being referred to.

By the end of the 1980s, Buck was ready to move to the CD format. August 1989 saw the launching of the GHB ‘American Music’ series with AMCD-1 *Bunk Johnson ‘The King of the Blues’*. There followed another seventeen CDs in the initial releases of Bill Russell’s American Music recordings, all adopting the distinctive yellow colour motif of the original American Music label. These releases then switched to their ‘blue’ American Music series. Numerous important historical releases followed featuring the bands of Kid Ory, George Lewis (*especially* George Lewis), Paul Barbarin, Bunk Johnson, Ray Burke and Kid Thomas, amongst others. By the time the series had reached AMCD-50, American Music was ready to launch its ‘Icon Project’.

Mindful of the fact that by the late 1980s the CD format had provided a market for the reissuing of New Orleans jazz LPs, supplemented with alternative numbers and takes previously unissued, Ken Mills had written a ten-page ‘Sales Prospectus – The Ken Mills Sessions’. This prospectus was topped with a page specifying: ‘The Original New Orleans Jazz Styles: The

Ken Mills Sessions June 1960–October 1962: Unissued and Alternate Takes, Complete Inventory of Good Takes Listed’. In this prospectus he included not only those recordings that he, himself, had made but also those that were made specifically for him and those that he had acquired for the purposes of possible release on his Icon label. There was a wealth of material here, as is evidenced by the fact that his original thirteen LPs have become over twenty issued CDs to date.

Given Mills’ interest at the time in selling this specialist material to a label that would pay it the proper respect, two of the most significant potential buyers were GHB/Jazzology in the USA and 504 Records in the UK. The sale of most of the previously unreleased Icon material to GHB/Jazzology, supplementing their reissue of the Icon LP material on CD, has led, to date, to a nineteen CD series AMCD 50-68, with an additional AMCD-86 and AMCD-87.<sup>2</sup> This is essential listening for New Orleans jazz enthusiasts. As the series producer Barry Martyn makes explicit:

The Icon recordings were the product of a man who gave everything he had in order to document the real stuff. This, together with the American Music label, represents the very best music to be recorded in such volume. The passing of the jazz immortals has left a void never to be filled. This is the music recorded before the chasm was opened.<sup>3</sup>

And again, in relation to the AMCD 50-68 series:

We are also pleased beyond words, to start our 50 series with the Icon material that was so expertly and lovingly handled by Ken Grayson Mills, out of Fullerton, California. No other person, besides William Russell, has approached the honest documentation of true New Orleans jazz with such foresight and expertise in such volume. Now his work, mostly from the sixties, can be fully appreciated, starting with this CD.<sup>4</sup>

For the student of such things, Barry Martyn set out what he called ‘The Icon Project – What is Old is New’ in the March 1992 issue of *New Orleans Music* (NOM). According to Martyn:

Two years ago, Icon’s owner, Ken Mills, sold us what he said was ‘the rest of

the label'. Three huge boxes of tapes arrived at the Foundation [The George H. Buck Jr. Jazz Foundation] and I set about cataloguing everything. It has taken almost two years, but it is now finished.

The plans are this: the existing sessions will be released on CD with many previously unissued numbers added. The new unissued numbers are every bit as good as the issued ones, and I'm delighted that the longer CD playing time now enables me to include them. As a matter of policy, I did not want to include innumerable second takes, nor incomplete numbers, so some of the CDs listed here vary in length. It was possible to extend all the LPs into CDs, except for the *Sam Morgan Re-Visited* and the *Kid Howard Olympic Band*, so I simply coupled these two sessions.

In addition to unissued numbers to be coupled with the LP material, there are several 'new sessions' that have been put together from the tapes we purchased.

Martyn then adds:

All the music issued will have the approval of the original owner, Ken Mills and we are prevailing on him to write the booklet notes for each session. The first CD (AMCD) is out this month (March).<sup>5</sup>

This first CD (AMCD 50) in the series did, indeed, feature excellent and detailed notes on Frank Goudie and gave valuable new insights into Ken Mills himself. However, for these notes, Mills had his previous unpublished interview with Goudie to draw on,<sup>6</sup> together with programme notes he had previously written for the 'Amos White & His New Orleans Band' ILWU Benefit Concert held on October 12, 1960.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, subsequent releases in the series did little more than reproduce Mills' original Icon sleeve notes where these pertained to the original release and, in the case of the previously unissued sessions, no new notes from Ken Mills ever appeared. Rather, Barry Martyn often added brief notes himself.

Worse still, with some CDs that coupled a previously issued session with a previously unissued session, Mills' original notes appeared for the issued session with no notes whatsoever on the 'new' session. A striking example of this is the reissue of Icon LP 13 (Jazzology JCE 13) on AMCD-63 which

couples this *Emile Barnes with Doc Paulin's Band* session (eleven tracks) with the unissued Icon *Emile Barnes with Jane's Alley Six* session (six unissued tracks/one track previously issued on Arhoolie), featuring Eddie Richardson on trumpet. Martyn combines the two sessions in his heading *EMILE BARNES with Jane's Alley Six and Doc Paulin's Band* and then with no explanation or addition whatsoever simply reproduces Grayson Mills' liner notes from Icon LP13 (just changing Mills' word 'LP' into 'CD'), all of which relate to 'Doc's magnum opus' (Icon LP13)<sup>8</sup>. To further confuse the issue, the front cover of the booklet features Eddie Richardson and Emile Barnes playing together. No recording date is given for the Doc Paulin material, except 'Recorded Icon Hall early 60s'; the venues for the two sessions are given, respectively, as '732 St Louis Street'<sup>9</sup> and 'Icon Hall' which are the same venue; and no credit is given to Ken Mills for recording the sessions. An opportunity had been missed.

Martyn's NOM article then provided 'The Icon Reissue Project', a 'Listing Compiled by Barry Martyn and Mike Hazeldine', which detailed the full projected series providing named leader, CD number, band details with full personnel, date of recording and a full listing of tunes. Very occasionally, the venue of the recording was provided. Occasionally, the series included non-Icon material which was stated. Throughout, previously 'issued' and previously 'unissued' material was distinguished.

Given the chaotic state of much of Mills' cataloguing, Martyn and Hazeldine had done a heroic job. Inevitably, though, mistakes appeared. More fundamentally, as Hazeldine was to write later:

no one will ever be able to discover exactly what Ken Mills recorded and in what order the numbers were originally in, as his master tape boxes were in a real mess when I checked them over at GHB for the Icon CD listing . . . after the deal was done with George, tapes kept turning up. Some of these were part of the Icon series and others were of weird radio broadcasts that he had recorded – were these recorded over the masters?<sup>10</sup>

It is no secret amongst those who spoke to and met with Mills during this

period (the late 1980s and early 1990s) that Mills was in a disturbed state of mind much of the time. Presumably, he was in no fit state to write new booklet notes. Alternatively, he may have felt he had already said what needed to be said. Shortly before the sale of the material to GHB/Jazzology he had, himself, issued a cassette of previously unissued material which he released as *Opening Night at Preservation Hall*. This did provide very informative new notes.

### **The Mike Dine/504 Connection**

Before Mills released the above-mentioned cassette tape, he contacted Mike Dine with an invitation to 504 Records to release it. Dine declined, then Mills put out the cassette and later sold the identical material to GHB who released it on AMCD-86 in 1995. This CD does not appear in the Martyn-Hazeldine NOM listing and is a later, additional issue. Prior to the issue of the CD, Mike Dine had bought several cassettes from Mills and then sold them himself. There followed a very interesting review of the cassette by Marcel Joly in the February 1991 issue of NOM that ended with the sentence:

Mike Dine is distributing this essential release here and promised there will be a second volume. I can't wait to hear it.<sup>11</sup>

Dine made two trips to California to see Mills, in 1989 and 1990, with a view to procuring material for his 504 label. A footnote to Martyn and Hazeldine's NOM 'Listing' article adds a relevant note on these two trips:

Mike Dine of 504 Records has also purchased a couple of sessions from Ken Mills and also has an arrangement to issue alternate takes from some of the sessions listed above. But as Mike has not finalised his plans, he would appreciate readers not writing to him regarding details at present. We will publish details as soon as they are finalised.<sup>12</sup>

Way back in 1960, shortly after Mills' first recording trip to New Orleans, Mills had announced the forthcoming release of the LP *After Many A*

*Summer – Emile Barnes and his FRIENDS*, scheduled to be Volume V of his ‘Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower’ series, namely, Icon LP6. Although the ‘In Waiting’ LP was listed as ‘Not consummated yet’, Mills did list the personnel, namely, ‘Kid Sheik-Charlie Love-tp-Albert Warner-tb-Sayles and Ernest Roubelleau [sic]-bj-o-Louis Gallaud-P-Albert Jiles-dm.’<sup>13</sup>

On a later occasion, this session was scheduled as Icon 16 and 17, following the planned Icon LP14 *Alvin Alcorn and his Gay Paree Stompers* and Icon LP15 *John Handy Louisiana Shakers/ DeDe Pierce*.<sup>14</sup> In the event, none of these sessions were ever issued by Ken Mills. Rather, they formed part of his ‘Sales Prospectus’ for future release by a prospective purchaser. By this time, Mills was referring to the band as Charlie Love and his Cado Jazz Band. The ‘session’ actually consisted of two sessions, one recorded in mono by Walter Eysselinck at Louis Gallaud’s home, and the other recorded in stereo by Ralph Collins at Dixon Hall, Tulane University. Mills’ list specifies single takes of seventeen numbers and carefully distinguishes the slightly different personnel on each track. Most importantly, Mills reserves especial praise for these tapes. He adds: ‘This is beautiful, charming music and some flat-out terrific counterpoint – and, more often than not, wonderful improvising.’<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 5.1** Booklet front cover for 504 CDS 21

Mike Dine issued fifteen tracks of this material on 504 CDS 21. The review of this CD by Barry Martyn accords it pride of place in second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism, above all other sessions. Moreover, Martyn specifically states that these were the recordings that inspired ‘my MONO label’.

For Martyn, the session is ‘a parallel with the 1942 Bunk’s ‘Jazz Man’ for those involved in the 1940s revival’. So important is this 504 release and so significant is this review for an understanding of second wave revivalism, that it is worth reproducing in full:

This music has not much to do with the movement of jazz in the grand scheme of things, but it is, in my opinion, the best example of New Orleans ‘folk music’ ever recorded. Every ingredient of local music is embodied here. It transcends all sociological implications and from the first note, enters directly into the timeless world of aesthetics. The music is superb, full of feeling, with a drive and beat completely indigenous to the city from which it sprung.

I have lately been aware, because of certain books and articles, that there was a ‘sixties grand revival’ of New Orleans jazz. This is shared unequally by true New Orleans band recordings and various New Orleans musicians playing outside their native habitat with non-New Orleans musicians and bands of various skills, including my own. The importance, artistically, of the latter group is, at best, marginal. As for the former, this recording is the ‘crème de la crème’. Adjectives pile as one listens to the general ‘feel’ of this session. Emile Barnes is at his best ever, for me here. The stunning simplicity of Gallaud’s piano is overwhelming in its ‘power of restraint’. The totality of the ensemble is magnificent. Simple, down-to-earth and completely overwhelming. That this music was captured at all was a miracle.

I have been ‘mentioned in dispatches’ as having a small part in this, so called sixties revival, with my MONO label. It was because of this session that I started my work. Intending in 1961, to record some authentic New Orleans music, I heard this tape at both the Tulane Archive and at two of the musician’s [sic] homes. On first hearing I knew what I had to do and why. Because of this, my first two recordings featured Kid Sheik, and alternatively Emile Barnes.

This particular session, reviewed here, was for me a parallel with the 1942 Bunk Johnson's 'Jazz Man' for those involved in the 1940's revival. It was the raw seed from which blossomed forth many sessions. All you need to know about New Orleans music is here. If this does not reach you, then your perception either needs time, or attention. This music does not merely conjure up images of lakefront fish fries, the back-of-town chicken and coleslaw parties, the realization of another culture. It embodies it totally.

I am reviewing this CD without seeing the accompanying booklet, etc. But the music is committed to my ears from thirty years ago. Today it is just as beautiful to me as it was then. It is the kind of music one might call for if one was about to enter eternity.

Buy this if you buy nothing else in life. You will not be disappointed in your quiet, reflective moments. It simply IS New Orleans music.<sup>17</sup>

In respect of the second 504 release, the attentive reader will recall that Marcel Joly, in his review of Mills' Getdown cassette tape of the *Opening Night at Preservation Hall*, made reference to a 'second volume' which he could not wait to hear. Having acquired the tapes for what he initially proposed to issue as *Opening Night at Preservation Hall, Vol. 2*, Mike Dine eventually released this 'second volume' as *Emile Barnes and his New Orleans Joymakers – First Night at Preservation Hall – Live June 13, 1961*, in 2011, as 504/Icon CD 60. Joly had had to wait some twenty years.

I find it puzzling that June 13, 1961 is given as the date for 'First Night (and Opening Night) at Preservation Hall', whereas the respected William Carter states:

The official opening night was the night of 10 June, 1961. Mills remembers that the band consisted of trumpeter Kid Sheik Colar, clarinetist George Lewis, trombonist Eddie Summers, banjoist Harrison Verrett, bassist Slow Drag Pavageau and drummer Alex Bigard.<sup>18</sup>

In the above session, dated as 10 June, there is no mention of either Emile Barnes (clarinet) or Emanuel Sayles (banjo) who feature on the 13 June session, let alone a billing of the band as Emile Barnes & His New Orleans Joymakers. According to Mike Hazeldine,<sup>19</sup> Kid Sheik recalled that George

Lewis was featured on the ‘Opening Night’, which points to a 10 June opening. However, Ken Mills later explained:

The first union gig was Tuesday June 13. We held non-guaranteed preps from June 7 to 11. We were closed on June 10. The June 10 misinformation was the result of offering volunteer information without reference to refreshing documents when I was interviewed in 1987.<sup>20</sup>

Either way it seems certain that, between them, AMCD-86 and 504/Icon 60 CD provide one of the historically most significant sessions ever recorded of second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism—the earliest documentation of the first evenings at Preservation Hall. In his Getdown cassette notes, Ken Mills put it this way:

The music played and the crowd participation was preserved. I had intended to bring it out as Icon 14,<sup>21</sup> *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, but sold the label to George H. Buck, Jr.

The tapes lay, unplayed, forgotten, in the attic for 24 years. In a review of my possessions last fall I saw the boxes, noted the date, pulled out the old and I was astounded by the revelation. It was opening night.

It will be recalled, too, that the NOM Icon Project listing had referred to an arrangement for Mike Dine ‘to issue alternate takes from some of the sessions listed’. In an important document dated ‘11-25-90’ and headed ‘GETDOWN – 138 S. Lincoln – Fullerton USA’, Ken Mills has written: ‘504 picked up the following on 11-25-90’. There are then listed a number of tracks from two different sessions: six ‘Charlie Love’ tracks and four tracks plus a ‘balance take’ of ‘Steve Angrum’s New Orleans Footwarmers’. Dine has added to what is, in effect, the contract with Ken Mills, the comment ‘4 tracks to be used on 504 CD 61’ by the side of each of the two sessions.

Mike Dine had other unissued Mills material, including from what Mills entitled his ‘Israel Gorman and his Ponchartrain Pals’ session. Mills’ inventory includes on its first page details of this session and provides some fascinating background notes. On 6 October 1962, two English musicians—Jim Holmes (trumpet) and John Coles (banjo)—had visited Israel Gorman’s

home and made a number of trio recordings featuring themselves and Gorman. In his eight-page article for NOM entitled ‘Diary of a Young Man – New Orleans 1982’, which covers the period 31 August 1962–11 October 1962, Jim Holmes had just this to say as his ‘Saturday 6 October’ entry:

We had dinner at Israel Gorman’s house. Later Warwick [Reynolds] recorded a short session, some of which was issued later by Barry Martyn on his NoLa label. Later we heard a fine session at Preservation Hall with Percy, Willie, Jim, Emma Barrett, Sayles and Cie, then off to hear Andy Anderson’s band at the Harmony Inn.

Holmes is presumably referring to the five tracks from the session Martyn included on his Rhythm LP 7 release, under the name of *Israel Gorman’s New Orleans Thumpers*. Later, three different tracks from the session were issued on both NoLa LP5 and Ponchartrain LP1.



**Fig. 5.2 Israel Gorman in uniform of Camelia Band, 1916  
acquired from Ken Mills.  
Courtesy of the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University**

Mills' account is rather different. After listing the 'red beans and rice, sausage, French bread rolls and red wine' provided, he writes:

Present: Jim Martin [actually Holmes], trumpet; John Coles, banjo; Warwick Reynolds, Icon vice president and now running his own private enterprise environmental watchdog in Britain. Gawd, he was a wonderful friend. Still is, And, Ken Mills [sic] and his trusty Ampex and cheap mikes. Also present, Mrs. Israel Gorman, embroidering in the living room. Their parakeet gets turned on during Israel's Blues and the listener can hear that. Warwick kept me and Icon going full guns. He provided transpo, maintenance skills, intelligent mind and ears, warm friendship.

The only thing I remember about Martin [Holmes] and Coles is that we enjoyed a few beers together and a breakfast at the Bourbon House . . . Martin [Holmes] was sandy-haired, slight and short and I dug him a lot. Coles was equally nice but more reserved in his giving of himself. Barry [Martyn] probably can supply liner material on them.

Significantly, Mills adds:

This session was held to give them a souvenir of their trek to New Orleans and they understood it was Icon property, never to be released without a negotiated deal of some sort.<sup>23</sup>

Mills lists nine tracks. On the whole of the session, as listed, he writes: 'runs about 40 minutes and is wonderful music, no fluffs, no weaknesses'. On individual tracks, Mills writes such comments as 'super fine', 'fabulous', 'Israel is fantastic here'.

### **Ken Mills, Rhythm & Blues and 504 Records**

In Barry Martyn's prefatory notes to the AMCD – *Opening Night at Preservation Hall*, Martyn writes: 'Ken Mills was the founder of Preservation Hall. Of this there is no doubt.' He then adds: 'Mills' first love was rhythm and blues, and it was not until he heard a record of George Lewis' band playing 'Over the Waves' that he realized that a music as good as rhythm and blues existed.'

The biographical details given in the specialist magazine *Jazz Report* in

1962 emphasise the origins and development of Mills' interest in jazz with a brief mention of his writings on blues:

He has contributed articles on blues and jazz to several known jazz mags . . . Interest in jazz began with the Kid Ory broadcasts in '44. Started researching and writing on jazz in '57. Had a column in the *The Daily Tar Heel* called 'Odes on Music', while at the U of No. Carolina. He believes jazz is an immensely elevating music of great social significance and that its content is the poetry of psycho-physiology.<sup>24</sup>

Mills always expressed his great interest in traditional New Orleans jazz. However, in later years, following his disillusionment with his enforced exit from Preservation Hall and Icon/Perseverance Hall, Mills was much more inclined to emphasise his 'first love', particularly his love of the tenor sax 'honkers' so important to rhythm and blues and rock and roll from the late 1940s up until the mid-1950s. This was when the electric guitar increasingly took over from the saxophone as the major featured instrument. Indeed, he would return to this 'first love' time and time again, variously as record collector, musician, and record producer. Mills' contribution to R&B warrants detailed study.

Here, however, I will merely highlight a number of his activities that led Mills to write to Mike Dine in June 1990 with the proposal that Mills and Dine went 50-50 on a new R&B record label, a subsidiary of 504, possibly to be called 'Kicks'.

A particular influence on Mills' early interest in jazz was Norman Pierce who partnered 'Jack' at Jack's Record Cellar in San Francisco. In 1951, Jack thought it would be cool to get a space so that his circle of beatniks and hipsters would have somewhere to hang out. Norman Pierce was a music-loving longshoreman who bought Jack out for \$1.00 in 1961 and moved the store from 400 Haight Street to 254 Scott Street. Mills tells the story about the 'cheapie bin in the store proper where I bought Joe Houston's 1949 [actually 1951] No. 1 R&B hit, *Worry, Worry, Worry* on Mercury - 50 cents.

Pierce said, “If people are unwilling to put out 50 cents for a record they don’t deserve to own it.””<sup>25</sup>



**Fig. 5.3 ‘Listening to Play Backs at Studio’, August 1963.  
Courtesy of Tsar Fedorsky**

Later, in August 1963, Mills is to be seen featured in a photograph with a young white R&B band in the Los Angeles KGGK radio station. On the back of the photo is written: “Listening to Play Backs at Studio”. Mills’ role is uncertain. He is smoking a pipe and has no saxophone attached to his neck strap, though there is a saxophone leaning upright behind him, to

his right as viewed facing the photograph. We do know that Mills played the saxophone.<sup>26</sup> Warren Deacon, who worked as a DJ in 1964 and 1965 at KGGK, commented to me that he did not have any recollection of Mills when he worked there. However, he added: ‘KGGK was a middle of the road pop station when I was there . . . but they did rent out a studio for recording as you suggest so it is likely that he was there.’ No doubt, Mills was there in a record producing and engineering role, whatever else. Mills’ role as a record producer of R&B is undisputed. Two of his productions stand out—one that came to fruition before Mills wrote to Mike Dine in 1990 with his proposal for a new R&B label, and one that followed the next year.



**Figure 5.4 Icon Records LP IC-3301**

In 1984, Mills produced for his Icon label an LP of the R&B drummer Jimmy Wright featuring the honking tenor sax of Chuck Higgins. Mills refers to these 1953–1955 records as ‘15 rhythm and blues masterpieces’. His sleeve note comment on the drumming evokes how he might have spoken of New Orleans drummers:

There was propulsion, nuance and dynamics in his work that drove musicians to their highest states. It was his congenital way of stressing the 1st and 3rd beats on his bass drum and the 2nd and 4th beats on the snare drum and it was patently exclusive to him. The net result was you were constantly and continuously being tensed while you were constantly and simultaneously being relaxed - like the in-and-out pistoning of intercourse, an outering of the same tactual sense.

This Mills Icon is little known and is now a collector's item. More widely available is the reissue on Saxophonograph, released by Jonas Bernholm (BM-1301). According to Per Oldaeus:

In 1987, Mills wrote the liner notes for the Swedish record company Route 66 and for one LP, in particular, namely for Jimmy Wright, Let's Go Crazy Baby, a white rock & roll group from California. Jimmy Wright was a drummer and a friend of Mills.<sup>28</sup>

In 1991, following the sale of his Icon material to GHB, Mills produced a Lorenzo Holden CD for Buck's Southland label. Included in the production was a sixteen-page booklet. In addition to the inclusion of important photographs, Mills writes some ten pages of dense and detailed text to accompany the release. George H. Buck adds the comment:

Southland Records is pleased to present this compact disc featuring the tenor sax of Lorenzo Holden. This is recording of classic rhythm and blues of the early 50's . . . before electronic echo chambers and over dubbing turned this music into what later became known as 'Soul Music.' Southland is well known for its many recordings of rural blues artists and although we have done only a few other sessions which would be categorized as being R&B, such as our Big Joe Turner and C.P. Love sessions, this exciting disc by Lorenzo Holden marks the first in our search for some of those elusive R&B masters of the past.<sup>29</sup>

Once again, Mills was leading GHB into new territory. However, in the year before this release, Mills had written to Mike Dine on 4 June 1990 with the proposal that they should go 50-50 on a new 504-allied Mike Dine record label. Mills wrote:

Dear Mike

What if we were to form a 50-50? Add a Rhythm and Blues line to 504? Everything which has gone before is none of my affair, so maybe Kicks, a subsidiary of 504, produced by Ken Mills. I'd like to bring an LP/cassette out by The Low Riders. We badly need the credibility, the presumptive effect a record has. I want the sermons left in as they supplement the sounds' symbolism.

Chuck Higgins is ripe for a project. He's blowing good, like he did in the 1950s. Big Jay and I want to do a Federal type project, The King Oliver Comeback.

I put on some Gil Bernal at the close of the Low Riders – and he's the cat who blows on the Robin's (aka Coasters) stuff like 'Turtle Dovin', 'Riot in Cellblock #9'. He is a must, hasn't cut anything since 1954. Been blowin' steady at Del Canto's Lomita, for 17 years. Did I send a copy of the Swingin' Honeydrippers. We've got cats and kittens here who would love to see a Preservation Hall for LA's indigenous music. Joe Houston is a monster talent – from Gene Ammons context to Cleanhead Vernon [Eddie Cleanhead Vinson] to HIMSELF. But he is TOO difficult to work with (he's my friend, but I gotta be honest, he's not spontaneously cooperative and talks to his own drumbeat).

Mills included a cassette of the sort of California R&B that he wanted to release. Mike Dine distinguishes New Orleans R&B from West Coast Californian R&B and was not interested in any such new label. Nor was he impressed by the quality of the music of the Low Riders 'with sermons'. Neither, incidentally, was Bill Bissonette of Jazz Crusade records. As Bill put it to me:

It was to try to sell me one of his rock 'n' roll effort tapes why Ken contacted me in the 1990s. He sent me a tape . . . I remember it was pretty awful and I had no interest in it; nor would I have even if it was good. Obviously I hadn't abandoned New Orleans jazz as Ken had.<sup>30</sup>

Mills' proposals came to nothing. However, it is important to call attention to the lifelong consistency in Mills' approach that his letter to Mike Dine illustrates – a consistency that provides a fitting thread to his musical contributions throughout his life.

'We've got cats and kittens here who would love to see a Preservation Hall for LA's indigenous music', says Mills.

Mills always thought along the same lines. When angry with William Carter's 'hallucination' that Preservation Hall 'found its origins in impromptu, irregularly held jam sessions New Orleans art dealer E.L. Borenstein held

at his 726 St. Peter art gallery – years before Barbara Reid-Edmiston and I moulded the business’, Mills would point out that ‘Preservation Hall was the result of a hypnogogic dream flash taking place in conversations (at Jack’s Record Cellar). Frank ‘Big Boy’ Goudie and Amos White were at the ground floor of the inspirations, as producer, Barry Martyn instinctively knew . . . We were considering it as a West Coast operation’,<sup>31</sup> prior to the June 1961 launch of Preservation Hall, New Orleans. Similarly, as Mills’ letter to Mike Dine makes clear, Mills was all set to launch a similar operation for LA’s R&B music, in the early 1990s.

For Mills, this was part and parcel of what he saw as his original conception of a Los Angeles-based Preservation Hall in 1960 which came to fruition the following year in New Orleans.

Alas, by this time, Mills’ health was in serious decline. Less than six months after Mills’ letter to Mike Dine, Dine stayed with Mills at his home in Los Angeles and he found Mills’ behaviour both odd and threatening. As the 1990s progressed, New Orleans jazz enthusiasts found Mills more and more difficult to deal with. Some attributed this to drugs; some to underlying mental health issues. For Bill Bissonnette: ‘(Mills) was obviously into drugs which manifested itself in outrageous outbursts of screaming obscenities. I finally had to tell him to never call me again if he couldn’t be more civil. And he never did call me again.’<sup>32</sup> Other New Orleans jazz enthusiasts tell similar stories.

I will leave people more qualified than me to assess Mills’ contribution to blues and R&B music both before and after his involvement in New Orleans music. In regard to Mills’ contribution to New Orleans music, I will give the final paragraph of this chapter to Bill Bissonnette:

I think it is wonderful that someone is finally giving Ken the attention he deserves. He, unfortunately, was a flawed man (as are we all) but he did us a great service in that brief period, as a young man, when he dedicated himself to recording such an important part of the dying form of jazz that caught his fancy while being ignored and/or forgotten by so many.<sup>33</sup>

## NOTES

1. Email, 8 November 2016. On the history of 'Jazzology', including its acquisition of small independent labels, see: Paige VanVorst, 'Jazzology 60th Anniversary', *Jazzbeat*, 2012, <https://www.jazzology.com/jazzbeat.php?id=73>.
2. AMCD-87 includes Icon LP1 – *The Creole Blues of George Guesnon* – which Martyn had initially planned for release on GHB's Solo Art label.
3. Barry Martyn, 'The Icon Project – What is Old is New', *New Orleans Music*, 1993, 3 (3): 18-24 at p. 18.
4. Barry Martyn, 'Booklet Notes', *Frank Goudie with Amos White's Band & Burt Bales*, American Music, AMCD-50, p. 2.
5. Barry Martyn, 'The Icon Project', 1992, *ibid.*, at p. 18.
6. Ken Grayson Mills, 'Interview with Frank Goudie', Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, Item 25: Frank Goudie, 06-02-1960. Digest available. Digitized Box 14 (ID: 373-376).
7. Grayson Mills, 'Amos White & His New Orleans Ragtime Band', *Eureka*, 1960, 1 (5): 5-7.
8. The sleeve notes for the JCE 23 cover correct 'magnus opus' to 'magnum opus'. The CD booklet notes reproduce the 'magnus opus' as printed on the Icon LP 13 cover.
9. The evidence suggests that this is a mistake for 734 St. Louis Street.
10. Email, Mike Hazeldine to Håkan Håkansson, February 26, 1998.
11. Marcel Joly, 'Review of *Live Opening Night at Preservation Hall* – Getdown Records (no number)', *New Orleans Music*, 1991, 2 (3): 32-33 at p. 33.
12. *Op. cit.*, p 24.
13. Grayson Mills, 'New Orleans Music: Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower: A Report on Icon Records' Objectives and Realities', *Jazz Report*, 1960, 4 (1): 11-12 at p 12.
14. Reprinting of 'Icon Records Flyer' in *Dixieland Catalogue*, New Orleans Jazz Record Society, Anaheim, California, 1966: 18-19 at p 19. I thank Paige VanVorst for bringing this to my attention.
15. Much remains to be written on the relationship between Ken Mills, Walter Eysselinck, Ralph Collins and other 'golden years' enthusiasts. Martyn makes the most salient point: 'He [Eysselinck] came to New Orleans halfway through the

golden years, not as early as Bill Russell or Gene Williams, but around the time of Mike Slatter and Grayson Mills. It was with Mills, in particular, that he became an integral part of Icon Records. He took most of the cover photographs, but of greater importance, provided a sounding-board for the idea of the company. We may suppose that Mills' Icon project impressed Eysselinck and others, so favourably, that they were more than happy to accommodate him with their material. Most pertinently, Eysselinck was very popular with many of the musicians. George Guesnon said of him "When he pounded on my shutter I felt good. See, I could tell it was him. He got me to make that solo record [Icon LP1] I never would have done it. He was the one guy you couldn't say no to". Mills lists Larry Borenstein, Walter Eysselinck, Bill Russell, Herbert Friedwald, and Ralph Collins as his major 'helpers' for his Icon project when he arrived in New Orleans in 1960. In due course, Dick Allen would be added to this list, and Mills would, of course, fall out with Larry Borenstein. For quotations, see: Barry Martyn, 'Dreamer of Dreams', *New Orleans Music*, 1995, 5 (6): 14-15; Grayson Mills, 'New Orleans Jazz on Icon', *Eureka*, 1960, 1 (5): 9-12 and 13.

16. Martyn, *ibid*. It is worth noting that Tom Bethell of San Jacinto Records specifically cites Mills' Icon LP9 – *George Lewis – Endless the Trek Endless the Search* – as being the recording that convinced him that it was worthwhile to launch his own San Jacinto label. Bethell's label produced excellent 're-creationist' recordings, in the early to mid-1960s. These recordings had, in an important sense, been 'fathered' by Ken Mills' Icon LP9.

17. Barry Martyn, 'Review of "Kid Sheik with Charlie Love and his Cado Jazz Band – 1960"', 504 CDS 21', *New Orleans Music*, 1993, 4 (2): 25-26.

18. William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1991, p. 149.

19. Mike Hazeldine. 'Editorial', *New Orleans Music*, 1991, 2 (5): 4-5 at p. 5.

20. Ken Mills, 'Letters – Opening Night at Preservation Hall', *New Orleans Music*, 1991, 3 (1): 25. There are still puzzles. Larry Borenstein refers to 'the official opening June 10, 1961' in his 'Introduction' to *Preservation Hall Portraits*, 1968, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge. Why should he do that?

21. Mills often changed his mind about projected Icon releases, but it needs to be said that prior to the sale of his LPs to Jazzology in the mid-1960s, there was no mention of this. Indeed, it contradicts the Icon Records flyer which slates Icon LP14 as 'Alvin Alcorn and his Gay Paree Stompers' (see: this chapter, note 14).

22. Jim Holmes, 'Diary of a Young Man – New Orleans 1962', *New Orleans Music*,

2004 11 (4): 6-16 at pp. 13-14.

23. Jim Holmes told Mike Dine that he had paid for the recording.

24. *Jazz Report*, September–October 1962, 3 (1&2): 21.

25. Ken Mills, 'Text', 'Booklet Notes', *Frank Goudie with Amos White's Band & Burt Bales*, American Music AMCD-50, p. 3. Accessed June 28, 2023, <http://hoodline.com/2011/08/inside-jacks-record-cellar>.

26. 'I visited Ken many times at his home. He had a bungalow in his mother's garden where he would play sax. At the time he was keen on surf music, Dicky Dale etc.' Email, Warwick Reynolds to Fred Eatherton, November 30, 2016. Mike Dine adds: 'Ken Mills could not play sax when I stayed at his bungalow.'

27. Email, Warren Deacon to Richard Ekins, November 18, 2016.

28. Facebook message, Per Oldaeus to Richard Ekins, February 24, 2016. 'Mills also wrote the liner notes for Joe Houston's album *Rockin' n Boppin*. See: for example, Saxophonograph BM-1302 and Southland SCD-16.

29. George H. Buck, Jr, in 'Booklet Notes', *Lorenzo Holden, 'Cry of the Wounded Jukebox'*, Southland, 1991, SCD-26, p. 14.

30. Email, Bill Bissonnette to Richard Ekins, November 15, 2016.

31. All Mills quotes are from 'Booklet Notes', *Frank Goudie*, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

32. Email, Bill Bissonnette to Richard Ekins, November 15, 2016.

33. Email, Bill Bissonnette to Richard Ekins, November 14, 2016.



# CHAPTER 6

## On the Larry Borenstein Collection, Second Wave New Orleans Jazz Revivalism and the Origins of Preservation Hall

*April 2017*



## Chapter 6

As I outlined in the previous chapter, just before Mike Dine's death I had completed a second article on Mike Dine and 504 Records. I titled it 'In Praise of Mike Dine (1938–2016): 504 Records, the Larry Borenstein Collection, and the *New Orleans Music* Reviews, with a Note on Second Wave New Orleans Jazz Revivalism and the Origins of Preservation Hall.' I used this article to detail how I had been drawn back into the social worlds of New Orleans jazz having become acquainted with the Larry Borenstein Collection in 2000.

Mills did not accept that Preservation Hall grew out of 'rehearsal sessions' at the 726 St. Peter Street art gallery, as Borenstein referred to them, and it is not appropriate that I reproduce the whole of the article as part of this book. However, it is important to include the last section, which contributes to the chronological account of the Ken Grayson Mills project. This is because it provides my first serious consideration of Borenstein's attempt to erase Mills from his role as founder of Preservation Hall.

### **On the Larry Borenstein Collection, Second Wave New Orleans Jazz Revivalism and the Origins of Preservation Hall**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, April 2017

Astute readers of my article will have noticed how frequently reviews of the Larry Borenstein Collection comment on the sessions taking place at Borenstein's Associated Artists Studio as being the predecessor of Preservation Hall.

In a passage I found somewhat startling when I first read it, Dan Pawson writes: 'He [Borenstein] encouraged the old-style musicians to come and play informally on the premises, and the resulting sessions formed the basis for Grayson Mills' Icon label.'<sup>1</sup>

At the risk of repetition, and out of fairness to Larry Borenstein, I deliberately included many such references in my synopsis of the reviews. If we turn to the booklet notes for the CDs, we get similar material peppered throughout. Typical is the following from Volume 5. Mike Dine writes:

These 1957 recordings made in the Associated Artists Studio illustrate how well and within such a short space of time Punch was able to fit into the informal sessions held at what would eventually become Preservation Hall. Punch together with Kid Thomas Valentine were among the first of the New Orleans musicians to play these sessions which were organised by Larry Borenstein the owner of the St. Peter Street studio.



**Figure 6.1 Emanuel Sayles, Punch Miller and Gertrude Morgan,  
726 St. Peter Street.**

**Courtesy of the Chase Collection, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University**

There are published writings of Larry Borenstein that briefly mention Grayson Mills. Thus, in Borenstein's 'Introduction' to *Preservation Hall Portraits* (1968), Borenstein makes the link between Grayson Mills, Icon Records and the 'fact' that 'Preservation Hall came out from the underground' in this way:

In 1960 Grayson Mills decided to record Punch Miller. Mills wanted nightly rehearsals with an audience and was surprised to find that the kitty collection enabled him to actually pay the band union scale. This led to an agreement with the musician's union, permitting nightly concerts, and Preservation Hall came out from the underground.<sup>2</sup>

In the same account, Borenstein goes on to acknowledge the existence of The Society for the Preservation of Traditional New Orleans Jazz before dismissing it as a 'club' with much 'feuding' and one that had to be dissolved:

A club was formed with the pretentious title of The Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz. Alas, as in most jazz clubs, there was as much feuding as music. I realized that the only hope was to put the activity on a businesslike basis. The club was dissolved, and Allan and Sandra Jaffe undertook to operate Preservation Hall as a business.<sup>3</sup>

Dismissing it as a short-lived 'club' enables Borenstein to ignore consideration of the individuals who painstakingly filed the state charter of the non-profit corporation. This established the 'New Orleans Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz' and was to formally constitute and run 'Preservation Hall'. William Carter notes that 'The minutes of an August board meeting listed Ken Grayson Mills as President; Barbara Reid Edmiston, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President; William Russell, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President; Sylvia Shannon [Larry Borenstein's secretary], Secretary; and William Edmiston, Treasurer.'<sup>4</sup>

The 'club' only lasted for three months. Sacha Borenstein Clay put it this way to me: 'when he (my father) returned from his honeymoon in California he did not like what he saw.' Borenstein made sure that the club was dissolved and as time went by simply erased any mention of Grayson Mills. Two years after the cited 1968 account, Borenstein writes:

In 1960 I and some others decided to record Punch Miller. An agreement was made with the musicians' union permitting nightly concerts and Preservation Hall came out from underground. The Hall has now been open seven nights a week for about ten years. Under the skillful management of Allan and Sandra Jaffe, it has become a must for every visitor to New Orleans.<sup>5</sup>

In numerous later accounts small changes are provided that further cement the claims of Borenstein as originator of Preservation Hall. Tom Bethell's 'Profile: Larry Borenstein' in the *Vieux Carré Courier* is a case in point. Bethell writes:

There's little doubt that Preservation Hall (a name he disliked and would have preferred to change) has been Borenstein's most successful venture in terms of nationwide, and even international, acclaim. His natural parsimony combined perfectly with the public's preconceptions as to the authentic ambience of early jazz – shabbiness paid a handsome dividend, in other words – and the early jam sessions featuring Kid Thomas Valentine and Punch Miller, supported by kitty donations (with the ever-present danger of police raids up to 1960, if white musicians joined in with the blacks) soon blossomed into the most successful presentation of traditional New Orleans jazz in existence.<sup>6</sup>

The respected William Carter, previously cited, states that 'Borenstein's account . . . is compended from articles by him in *Preservation Hall Portraits* (Louisiana State Press, 1968), *Travel & Camera* (September 1970) and *The Outsider* (Spring 1963).'

In a particularly important passage, which is actually a quote from the *Travel & Camera* article, Carter summarises thus: 'The sessions [at Borenstein's art studio] grew in popularity so I moved my gallery to an address next door, and after that the old building was used exclusively for music. This was the birth of Preservation Hall.' In Borenstein's 1968 account, the last sentence ('This was the birth of Preservation Hall') is not added. Nor does the added sentence appear in Borenstein's undated typescript 'Preservation Hall and How It Grew', the opening sentence of which is: 'The phenomenon known as Preservation Hall is one of those unexpected

American success stories and since I was involved in its origins I think I should tell it in the first person.<sup>77</sup>

The additional sentence provides the foundations for a Preservation Hall origin story<sup>8</sup> that facilitates the erasure of the role of Ken Grayson Mills and Barbara Reid.

## NOTES

1. Richard Ekins, 'In Praise of Mike Dine (1938–2016): 504 Records, the Larry Borenstein Collection, and the *New Orleans Music* Reviews, with a Note on Second Wave New Orleans Jazz Revivalism and the Origins of Preservation Hall', *Just Jazz*, 2017, No. 228, pp. 6-13 at p. 9. In footnote 17, Fred Eatherton writes: 'I know this is what Dan says but I don't think the Icons were a consequence of these sessions. I think Mills organized his sessions meticulously, and these earlier sessions were, as Dan Pawson states, informal. I think you and I are one on this point.' I agree.

2. Larry Borenstein, 'Introduction', in *Preservation Hall Portraits*, 1968, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge: 9-14 at p. 10.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

4. William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, p. 147.

5. E. Lorenz Borenstein, 'Jazz Rhythms from Africa helped create a special New Orleans sound', *Travel & Camera*, September 1970, 33 (9): 32-35 and 78-79 at p. 79.

6. Tom Bethell, 'Profile: Larry Borenstein', *Vieux Carré Courier*, February 9-15, 1973, p. 5.

7. I cite the five-page mimeo E. L. B [E. Lorenz Borenstein], 'Preservation Hall and How It Grew' that Kelley Edmiston deposited with the National Jazz Archive, Loughton, UK. Much of this article appears in Borenstein, *Travel & Camera*, September 1970. There is no mention of Ken Mills in the mimeo. Internal evidence suggests that it was written after the *Preservation Hall Portraits* account and before the *Travel & Camera* account.

8. On 'Origin Stories' in sociology, see: R. Connell, *Southern Theory*, Polity, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 4-9.



A black and white photograph of a building facade. At the top, there is a balcony with a decorative wrought-iron railing. Below the balcony, the building has several doors. On the left, there is a white door with a diamond-shaped window. Next to it is an open doorway with a window. To the right of the doorway is another white door with a diamond-shaped window and a mesh screen. Further right, there is a dark door with a window. The address number '726' is visible on the wall between the white door and the dark door. The text 'CHAPTER 7' is overlaid on the upper part of the image in a large, white, serif font.

# CHAPTER 7

## Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and the New Orleans/West Coast Connection

*May 2017*



## Chapter 7

At first sight, this chapter may seem to sit uneasily in a book titled *The Genesis and Exodus of Preservation Hall*. It tells the story of Mills' involvement in the Californian New Orleans jazz scene as a young enthusiast before he came to New Orleans for the first time in 1960 and how he continued that involvement, both during the years he was visiting New Orleans, and afterwards when his passions returned to his pre-Preservation Hall interest in Californian rhythm and blues.

However, I think it is vital to appreciate that Mills' status as a Californian played a major role in the way he was treated in New Orleans. He was always seen as an outsider in New Orleans. It is important to reiterate the point already made, that Mills saw what he was doing in California as all-of-a-piece with what he was doing in New Orleans. He was organising the musicians in such a way that he could carry out interviews with them, have them socialise together and record them.

### **Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and the New Orleans/West Coast Connection<sup>1</sup>**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, May 2017

#### **Preamble**

Enthusiasts and scholars of New Orleans jazz revivalism soon learn that there are important connections between New Orleans and the West Coast of the USA, particularly Los Angeles and San Francisco. During the development of first wave New Orleans jazz revivalism of the 1940s, nowhere are these connections more obvious than in the widely sold 78 Decca Record collection illustrated below. This collection matched two *Bunk Johnson and his New Orleans Band* 78s with two *Kid Ory and his Creole Band* 78s and the set is specifically billed as a 'New Orleans Revival' album: 'a collection of modern recordings by the two New Orleans bands of the 1940's.'



**Figure 7.1 Decca Records Album No. 549, 4 record 78 set, 1947**

Kid Ory had one of the best-known bands in New Orleans in the 1910s. He moved to Los Angeles in 1919 and made the first ever jazz records by a black band at a studio in Santa Monica, California, in 1922. Three years later he moved to Chicago and was very active until the depression years. Ory returned to the West Coast in 1930 and three years after that he retired from music. He re-emerged in 1942–43 and when Orson Welles was looking for ‘a real authentic New Orleans jazz band for a broadcast in March of 1944’ he was directed to Ory.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent performances of the band ensured that Ory became the leading light of the musicians from New Orleans who spearheaded the revival of the 1940s on the West Coast right up until around 1961, the beginning years of second wave revivalism.

Notwithstanding Ory’s long-term absence from the ‘down home’ sounds of New Orleans, some of the earlier Ory revivalist material has been rated

very highly by a number of musicians and enthusiasts. It is thought that this best exemplifies New Orleans music from an earlier period. When Johnny St Cyr was played the Kid Ory Band tracks ‘Panama’, ‘Do What Ory Say’ and ‘Get Out of Here’, recorded in 1944/5 and featured on *Good Time Jazz* (L10), he famously commented: ‘This is the old time jazz – this is what we sounded like 45 to 50 years ago, I could suggest no changes whatsoever – this is it!’<sup>3</sup> These sessions were recorded in Hollywood, Los Angeles.

In the same vein, Bill Russell comments:

That band [Bunk’s] sounded like a million dollars. It wasn’t the perfect band, maybe, it wasn’t the best band even I ever heard in some ways. The best band I ever heard that played together as a dance group was Kid Ory’s back in 1946. It had such a good easy relaxed beat when they played for their dances. They never did get that on record either. When they dropped real soft the music of the dancers’ feet would almost drown out the band . . . This is something you miss in the bands of today.<sup>4</sup>

Most of Ory’s sidemen over the years were originally from New Orleans. These included, among others: the trumpet players, Mutt Carey and Alvin Alcorn; the clarinetists, Jimmie Noone, Albert Nicholas, Barney Bigard and Omer Simeon; bass player, Ed Garland; guitarist, Bud Scott; and the drummer, Minor Hall. Significantly, in the present context, Mills specifically says that his interest in jazz ‘began with the Kid Ory broadcasts in ‘44.’<sup>5</sup> Mills was seven years old at the time.

Following the rediscovery of Bunk Johnson in New Iberia, Dave Stuart, from the Jazz Man Record Shop, based in Hollywood, Los Angeles, came down to New Orleans in June 1942. He produced and recorded Bunk’s first commercial record releases, the famous Bunk Johnson’s Original Superior sides for his Jazz Man label.

Four months later Gene Williams was in New Orleans and recorded another celebrated Bunk session for his Jazz Information label. In 1943 Bunk was invited to California where he was recorded a number of times, variously in Oakland Hills, San Francisco and Los Angeles, playing with

those members of the Lu Watters' Yerba Buena Band who had survived the draft. These recordings included several concerts and informal club sessions. It was Watters who had been largely instrumental in kick-starting the West Coast New Orleans jazz revival in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In May 1943 Bunk played in a concert at the Geary Theater, San Francisco, organised by Rudi Blesh, where he led the All Star New Orleans Band, that included Mutt Carey, Kid Ory and Ed Garland.<sup>6</sup>

The California based pianist, Burt Bales, played on many of the Bunk recordings with the Yerba Buena band and, indeed, he often roomed with Bunk during this period.<sup>7</sup>

In the late 1950s, Ken Mills developed a particular friendship with Burt Bales and in 1958 published the following article in his literary magazine, *The Iconoclast*: 'Burt Bales, A Profile by Ken Mills'. Mills would tell with relish Bales' story of Bunk's visit to a 'Cathouse' in San Francisco:

Burt recalled, 'Bunk was ragging on us about not getting enough nookie. So, we took him to a cathouse on Jackson near Kearney on the way to a gig. The Madam called us every name in the book and told us to get that old goat out of here and don't bring him back again! He had gone through all six of the girls and was trying to go round again'.<sup>8</sup>

The connections between Kid Ory and Mills – both in California – warrant extensive research. Mills has, to my knowledge, not written about hearing Kid Ory live and by the time Ken Mills was starting his Icon Record label in 1960, Ory was coming to the end of his active career.<sup>9</sup>

However, Kid Ory did take over the Tin Angel in 1958, renaming it 'On The Levee'. This establishment was a restaurant and nightclub at 981 Embarcadero, San Francisco. Ory sold it in August 1961 and moved to Los Angeles.<sup>10</sup> Given Mills' interests and location at the time, it might seem surprising that he did not visit the club.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 7.2 Front cover, Good Time Jazz LP L-12024**

More certain, perhaps, are the connections between Ory, the record engineer Cecil Spiller, and Mills. Spiller covered all genres and had issues released on Contemporary Records, Jazz at the Lighthouse, Good Time Jazz, Giants of Jazz and Dawn Club, amongst others.

Charlie Crump, the UK recording engineer, thinks that Spiller may well have engineered the Icons. Spiller lived in the Santa Monica area of California and knew Mills well. In my previous *Just Jazz* article of March 2017, I discussed Ken Mills' R&B productions of Joe Houston's and Lorenzo Holden's LPs and CDs. Cecil Spiller had mastered the Houston material and was responsible for putting together material from the original 45s for the Holden CD. When Mike Dine was on his second visit to Mills in 1990 they

visited Spiller, and Mike believed that Spiller had a stash of recordings that included Ory sessions. Spiller had, after all, been the recording engineer of a number of Ory sessions including those for Goodtime Jazz. Dine declined Mills' invitation to buy the Ory tapes from him.

Some ten years later, towards the end of his life, when Mills was trying to persuade Bill Bissonnette to buy some of his material, Mills sent him some Ory tapes. Unfortunately, by this time, according to Bill, Mills was inviting him to buy tapes that he had already sold to others. Bissonnette was losing patience with Mills and in his final communication with Mills, in a letter dated December 31, 1999, he wrote:

I am returning all of your tapes to you. The only one I might have had an interest in would have been the Gallaud but you've sold it. The Amos White session has already been issued on George Buck's American Music label and I only had time to listen to the first [of] three 'Ory' tapes which have damned little Ory and no complete tracks. I haven't had a chance to listen to the other two.<sup>12</sup>

It is tempting to speculate that Mills had acquired these Ory tapes from Spiller. On the other hand, it is not impossible that they were made by Mills himself, or somebody else,<sup>13</sup> at a public gig.

Matters of ownership and rights to tape recordings are a difficult area to research with accuracy. Much easier to examine is Mills' connection with the Bunk and Yerba Buena session through his friendship with Burt Bales and Mills' connections with New Orleans musicians living on the West Coast, particularly Frank Goudie.

### **Ken Grayson Mills and the Jack's Record Cellar Crowd, San Francisco**

As Mills' interest in blues and jazz developed, he used to frequent Jack's Record Cellar. There he began associating with a heady crowd including the clarinet player and former trumpet player Frank Goudie, who had moved to New Orleans at the age of eight. Goudie started playing there in the heyday of New Orleans jazz before the exodus of so many musicians to Chicago:

Goudie began hanging out there [in Norman Pierce's Jack's Record Cellar]. He joined a tribe that consisted of Burt Bales, poets Kenneth Rexroth and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, anarchist Vic Hauser, lexicographer Peter Tamony, jazz columnist Ralph J. Gleason, record collector Pony Poindexter and many others. I was owning and publishing *The Iconoclast*, a journal of opinion, poetry, jazz focus and reviews of all types . . . Amos [White], Frank [Goudie] and I began chumming. Emanuel Sayles visited his sister and he was trying to locate trumpeters Maurice Durand and Albert Snauer for us, both of whom were living in San Francisco. We showed 'Manny' every sight in the city . . . Pierce met the banjoist on the Collins-Jones Astoria Hot Eight Sides and was thrilled.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to his first trip to New Orleans in June 1960, Mills had interviewed Frank Goudie and later deposited the interview with the Hogan Archive at Tulane University. It is an extraordinary document, tracing as it does Goudie's playing career in New Orleans, Mexico, Paris, Brazil, Argentina, and in San Francisco. In the interview, Mills seems to come especially alive when Frank Goudie's recollections of his times with Bunk Johnson and Charlie Love become the focus of the interview.<sup>16</sup>

Following that first trip to New Orleans Mills had been toying with the idea of managing a West Coast band 'doing its PR and hustling club, dance and concert dates' and 'financ(ing) the guys' way to New Orleans to plug into their roots on Icon sessions.<sup>17</sup> The original plan was to use Clem Raymond and Frank Goudie as co-stars on a touring basis with Amos White. Raymond's wife forbade her husband to join the project and then shortly afterwards Burt Bales was badly injured when an oncoming car hit him as he jaywalked to catch a taxi. With this latter incident, Mills' plans changed. Ken Austin, a correspondent for Coda magazine, had the idea to organise a 'Burt Bales Night' where:

Everybody played for the benefit of Bales. Avant garde, traditional: every cat in town was for the idea. From Brew Moore to the Bay City Jazz Band, every venue, Father Hines, Kid Ory, all the cats, all the joints devoted October 28, 1961<sup>18</sup> to a citywide Burt Bales Night to raise money for his medical bills.<sup>19</sup>

Mills decided to plug into the event by organising his Amos White Band launch as a benefit concert at San Francisco's Longshore Auditorium with Burt, himself, as the star of the show. As Mills wrote:

The band was put on as the focal point of the event, at ILWU Hall,<sup>20</sup> which had a big concert room (with seating). I wrote the programme notes, which appeared in England's *Eureka* Magazine later and the band 'knocked 'em dead'.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 7.3 Booklet back, courtesy of American Music, AMCD-50**

The Amos White Band consisted of Amos White, cornet; Frank Goudie, clarinet; Jimmie Simpson, piano; Al Levy, guitar; James Carter, drums; and Texas J.D. Baton, tenor sax. The band played together alongside Burt Bales, Jesse Fuller, The Bob Ferreira Quintet and the ILWU Big Band.

Throughout his programme notes, Mills is keen to indicate the connections between New Orleans musicians and California, and Californian jazz and New Orleans jazz. I highlight these connections in the passages from the programme notes reproduced in the next section.

### ***Amos White & His New Orleans Ragtime Band***

Tonight's performance by Amos White and his rag-time band is an event of very real historical significance. Firstly, it will reveal the existence of several first-rate practitioners of the unique New Orleans heritage, men whom for some time have been living anonymously here and there in the amassed microcosm of our large coastal cities.

Secondly, part of the former, really, is the fact that this concert is the first real effort to show what those of us in this area, who feel a real spiritual need for this music, have been missing – one does not have to journey all the way to New Orleans to hear the art in its original and genuine state.

AMOS WHITE – Cornet. Born Nov. 6 1889, Kingstree S.C.

Amos was raised in Jenkins' Orphanage, in Charleston, South Carolina . . . He led the 816<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Regiment Band during the first World War . . . and when he was discharged, in 1919, he asked to be landed in New Orleans.

He played a lot of New Orleans style with the Veret Brothers in Cadillac; playing with Papa Celestin's Tuxedo Brass Band, and led it when Celestin couldn't make a job. When Louis Armstrong left Fate Marable's S.S. Capitol Society Syncopators in 1921, Sidney Desvigne moved up to first cornet, and Amos took over as second. Fate recorded for Okeh in 1924, and it is Amos who takes the fine breaks on 'Frankie and Johnnie'.

The apex of his New Orleans career occurred later, in 1924, when A.J. Piron talked him into taking a band into the public pavilion across from Tranchina's restaurant where Piron was playing. Amos organized the New Orleans Creole Jazz which had Barney Bigard and Red Dugie on clarinets, Willie Willigan as second cornet, Sonny Henry on trombone, Ethel Finney as pianist, and Jose Ysaguirres, a bass player from British Honduras. The band enjoyed great popularity in the city, and this was at a time when Celestin's Tuxedo Jazz Orchestra, Sam Morgan, Kid Punch Miller, Buddy Petit, Kid Rena, and Piron, himself, were going great guns.

FRANK GOUDIE – Clarinet. Born in Royville, La., 1905?<sup>22</sup>

Goudie was a trumpet player when he left New Orleans in 1924, and a good one. He played with the Tuxedo Brass Band, the drummer Arnold DuPass, Zue Robertson, Thomas Copland, Jack Carey, One-Eye Ally, and many others. He was in Mexico in the early 1920s, having replaced Charlie Love in Frank Matthew's New Orleans band at the Tivoli in Tampico . . .

He left for Europe in 1925 and settled in France until after the war. Goudie became a favorite over the continent, taking up clarinet and tenor sax early in the 1930s. When the second horror came, he sailed for Brazil, soon to become the hero of every hot club in South America.

When the war ended, he went back to France and later recorded with his own band for German Columbia in Frankfurt. He had always been good friends with Django Rinehart and recorded with both of them. 'Big Boy Blues', which he cut with Django and Bill Coleman, is regarded as a classic; it is a deeply moving tour de force for his clarinet. He has been in San Francisco since 1957 gigging with local groups a la Albert Nicholas.

JAMES CARTER – Drums

Regarded by many local musicians as the most solid drummer in San Francisco, Carter suffers an unjust, consummate anonymity here. He is still revered in New Orleans, whose Alfred Williams he closely resembles in style and good taste. Carter took some lessons early in his career from Abby 'Chinee' Foster, the great drummer for the Tuxedo Jazz Orchestra. He has played with the best: Kid Shots Madison, Mutt Carey, Thomas Valentine, and John Handy, to mention a few.

In the following year, 1961, Mills made his second trip to New Orleans, founded Preservation Hall and ran it from June to September. Before he left for New Orleans, however, he wrote an important and neglected article for *Jazz Report*, published in May 1961.<sup>24</sup>

Here, Mills indicated the recently emerged revival of interest in the jazzmen of New Orleans and also reported on musicians from New Orleans working on the West Coast at the time.

## **‘Things Looking Up for N.O. Jazz Collectors, and More Importantly, For Its Musicians Too!’**

Mills concludes the first section of this article with the comment:

It is very curious that the pendulum of awareness has swung toward New Orleans at this hour. If Riverside is able to powerhouse its way to a market, and if labours of love like Arhoolie, Heritage, and Icon are able to survive in nurturing non-commercial gap fillers, the New Orleans Jazz Man’s final hour may be an active one. Wouldn’t that be something? If they get those chops in iron-edge form, look out. <sup>25</sup>

Sandwiched between this account and a concluding nine-line report on the music being played in New Orleans at the time he was writing, Mills switches to a new heading which he terms ‘THREE LINE HEAD FROM FRISCO’. Mills then moves seamlessly on to news from San Francisco and his proposals for West Coast musicians that should be recorded, including some for Icon records. This is, perhaps, the clearest and most detailed example of Mills’ thinking as to the connections between New Orleans, San Francisco and the West Coast and what enthusiasts should be doing about those connections:

From San Francisco comes the news that fine, old-style trumpet man, Amos White, is leading the house band for the AF of M Talent Shows at Elks Hall. The group, fantastic enough, consists of Frank Goudie (ct); Charlie ‘Peg Leg’ Green (who plays stomps circa Pine Top Smith) (p); and James Carter (dms). All but Green are New Orleans Musicians. ‘We will,’ Amos said, ‘sneak in as many of the preferred numbers as possible.’

That the climate is right for something like this is another indication that a revival is brewing.

There are an outstanding number of Traditional Jazz men living on the West Coast. Many of them have not recorded since the 1920s and haven’t been able to keep abreast of the present financial structure. They got good sums, often, in the old days, but production was cheaper and an investment was easier to get back. One would like nothing better than paying \$850 for the artists and \$415 for the production, but life isn’t like that these days. We’ve made it practically impossible for the existence of an independent who keeps

the scale balanced between commercial and non-commercial.

Therefore, we entreat labels like Goodtime Jazz and Fantasy, Key and World Pacific to give some thought to serious enthusiasts of the music in this field, or to do the legwork for them.

Offhand I can think of Wade Whaley (clt), Walter Fuller, (tp) – SAN DIEGO; Andy Blakeney, Mike DeLisle (tp): George Washington, Woody Woodman, Irving Verret (tb): William James, Joe Darensbourg (clt): Buddy Burns, Welman Breaux, Tudi Garland (bs): Johnny St. Cyr (bjo): Edgar Moseley (dms): Sonny Clay, Alton Purnell (p): – LOS ANGELES; Earl Fouche (as) – SANTA BARBARA; Frank Goudie (clt): Maurice Durand, Amos White, Albert Snaer (tp) James Carter (dms): Pops Foster (bs): Jimmy Archey (tb) Tiny Crump, Charlie Green, Eddie Liggins (p): Clem Raymond (clt) – SAN FRANCISCO; Joe Jordan (p) – SEATTLE. Sessions the quality of some of the A.M.'s await, and, quite literally, under practically every rock. And Sonny Clay is without a peer, to-day, as a stop pianist.

#### INEXCUSABLE:

If the Young Men of New Orleans are not recorded it's going to be totally inexcusable. Is no one among the in group in the SCHJS willing to make a sound investment? I would like to record the following combination for Icon: . . . Andy Blakeney, Mike Delisle – tp. . . George Washington – tb. . . Joe Darensbourg, Willie James – clt. . . Alton Purnell – p. . . Johnny St. Cry [sic] – bjo. . . Edgar Moseley – dms. . . Buddy Burns – bs. . . . . but I've found this such a tight and happy group as to be embarrassed to break in. If any of the officiates of the club feel as I do about the importance of this band, please drop a line to Ken Mills, 427 Maple Street, Brea, California. Johnny St. Cyr is in such a fine period right now, it is time to get this job done. In the opinion of the writer, this band is second only to Kid Thomas Valentine's. It is a cohesive unit of great distinction, and the thought it is going to slip from obscurity to oblivion is unconscionable.<sup>26</sup>

## **Ken Mills, Burt Bales and Frank Goudie**

Back in San Francisco, and following his ousting from Preservation Hall, Mills set about releasing new Icons and, no doubt, making his plans for his third trip to New Orleans in 1962. He did, however, continue to champion Frank Goudie and Burt Bales in San Francisco. In due course he would produce for GHB a CD that combined Burt Bales' solo work at the 108 Club San Francisco, 1947, with a 1961 session recorded at the 1018 Club San Francisco. The latter featured Burt Bales and Frank Goudie with Bob Hodes, trumpet, and Al Conger, string bass, with an additional Burt Bales solo of 'Mr Jelly Lord', recorded on the same day as the 1961 session in Burt Bales' home in San Francisco.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 7.4** Booklet front cover, 'Burt Bales, 1947-1961', GHB BCD-13

For the booklet notes for this CD, Mills had his own sources to draw upon, namely his Burt Bales ‘Profile’ article for his magazine *The Iconoclast* and his programme notes for the ILWU Burt Bales Benefit Program. Mills waxes lyrical about Bales’ New Orleans connections. In fact, Bales had only ever been to New Orleans twice in all his 72 years – once as a big band pianist in the 1930s at the St. Charles Hotel, and again in his final year when, dying of cancer, he took a vacation there. Yet this does not deter Mills from birthing Bales firmly in New Orleans:

For Burt it was a final touch, smelling the smells, feeling the sacred ground of his ‘birthplace’ beneath his feet even though he wasn’t delivered from a womb there. If you don’t think Bales’ spiritual force is in and of itself a natural occurrence of New Orleans and blues resonation just start your needle at his introduction to Sister Lottie Peavey’s ‘When I Move to the Sky’, issued on Goodtime.<sup>28</sup>

For Mills, Bales ‘didn’t LEARN the black New Orleans music styles he was encoded genetically’:

Bales gets intonation and nuance from a piano’s keyboard, hammers, strings, and foot pedals that produces sound as was only gotten by the greatest New Orleans style pianists like Jimmy Blythe, Jelly Roll Morton, Clarence Williams, Frank Melrose, and Luis Russell.<sup>29</sup>

Significantly, Mills’ enthusiasm for Burt Bales’ music came to be shared by Barry Martyn. In the prefatory notes to Mills’ CD booklet notes on *Burt Bales, 1947-1961*, Martyn writes:

The last title, ‘Mr Jelly Lord’ is one of the most moving interpretations of this classic. It demonstrates Burt’s grasp of music, and, at the same time shows his feeling, and the originality that was lost on a generation of Jelly’s plagiarists. I came to appreciate Burt Bales music later in life. I cannot imagine why it never hit me sooner. When he came to New Orleans in 1989 he was old, tired and sick. Dying in fact. When he played with us he showed a power of restraint and depth of feeling that was overwhelming.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to producing the Burt Bales GHB CD-13, Mills provided Barry Martyn with the Frank Goudie material and text that formed American

Music CD-50, the first in the series of American Music's 'Icon Project'. This CD included five tracks with the Amos White Band, recorded in 1960; four tracks with Burt Bales, recorded in 1961; and three tracks with Burt Bales (pno) and Al Conger (bs), recorded in 1961. Barry Martyn set the stage:

This CD heralds the appearance of one of the most fantastic clarinet players to come out of New Orleans. Frank Goudie has never been in the public eye, mostly because he never stayed in one place long enough. He made a few records throughout his touring days, but this is the first time his work can be documented in depth.



**Figure 7.5 Booklet front cover, 'Frank Goudie', American Music, AMCD-50**

Mills takes up the story:

Frank Goudie was an important cornetist in the New Orleans of 1915 to 1925. After taking a few lessons from Bunk Johnson he was good enough to join the popular and long-lived Magnolia Orchestra. Aged 18, Frank was

alongside the legendary Zue Robertson, trombone, Arnold DePass, drums; Louis Keppard, guitar; Tom Copeland, bass; Dave DeFass, clarinet.

Frank later recalled. 'I made it my practice to listen to every note of music all those wonderful musicians played because I was in the Garden of Eden.'

Boogie Woogie pianist John Bentley said he heard Goudie play cornet in the early 1960s, at Pier 23, adding 'It was beautiful. Very sweet. A lot like Bix Beiderbecke believe it or not and the younger Charlie Love.'

When Kid Punch left to join the army in 1917, Goudie replaced him in Jack Carey's band . . . The great clarinetist 'Georgia Boy' George Boyd was in the band and Goudie said that Georgia Boy and John Handy impressed him greatly. He has adopted some of Boyd's playing in his own style . . .

A number of New Orleans musicians played in Royville and Goudie remembered nearing Mutt Carey, Freddie Keppard, Bunk Johnson and a Baton Rouge [sic] musician named 'Little Spider,' who played the best St Louis Blues he ever heard. The family moved to New Orleans in 1915 . . .

Charlie Love was playing the Tivoli club in a resort in Tampico (Mexico) and wanted to go home to New Orleans. Frank Matthews, leader of the jazz band, heard about Goudie . . . Matthews sent for him. Charlie remained a few weeks to pass along 'the ropes' and aid Frank with the band's book. They became steadfast friends. They roomed together and they ran together.

. . . Back in New Orleans he joined trombone-great Yank Johnson's band with Henry 'Dog' Franklin on clarinet, Chinee Foster, drums, Babe Phillip, bass, and Butler Rhapp on banjo. He also played gigs with Oscar Celestin's Tuxedo Brass Band . . .

. . . In 1925 he left New Orleans for good and settled in Paris, becoming one of the earliest first-rate American jazzmen to emigrate to Europe. . . Goudie spent his entire career within the morphyic fields of New Orleans jazz.

Mills details the musicians in Paris that Goudie played with, including, most famously, Sidney Bechet and Django Reinhardt and then the story moves to California.

In 1957 he packed up and left for San Francisco where his sister lived – his only remaining family. 'I decided I wanted to spend my last days playing the original jazz with musicians who knew how to play the music. I yearned for New Orleans but I knew that living in Paris for so long had spoiled me too

much to take all that racism guff. Albert Nicholas told me the scene was pretty good for the old jazz in San Francisco. ‘I came here as a boy and decided I would live in this beautiful city some day. So here I am,’ he told a *Highlight* magazine’s writer.

Published in May 2017, this article ended my first series of five *Just Jazz* articles on Ken Grayson Mills following my initial introduction, entitled ‘Lacroixrecords.com and the Ken Grayson Mills Project: An Announcement.’<sup>32</sup>

I set forth the claims for Ken Mills to be considered as the father of second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism of 1960–1976. Mills’ great importance was to resume where Bill Russell left off. His Icon records never sold in the volume of Riverside’s ‘Living Legend’ series that were recorded shortly after Mills launched the Icon label. However, Icon’s approach was more adventurous, sustained and documentary in nature and, in consequence, more influential in the long term.

As Barry Martyn summarised:

Icon [documented] a phenomenal cross section of most of that city’s [New Orleans] still active musicians. The label succeeded in at least two ways: first by recording many musicians who had seldom, if ever, been recorded, and second by bringing some of the best performances by several of the city’s more internationally known men, to wax. Different songs, different combinations were Mills’ medium and the world was grateful.

Even more important was that he started Preservation Hall. For sure Allan Jaffe took the infant idea and made it into an American institution, but without the founding foresight of Ken Mills, probably it would not have come to pass.<sup>33</sup>

Mills, himself, put it this way in 1961:

By May of 1961, the line of continuity in the music’s history had virtually broken. Most of the surviving greats were in semi or absolute retirement. The music of the dance halls was apparently over for good.

In June of this year a couple of white enthusiasts began an establishment in the French Quarter to alter this nightmarish state of affairs. Preservation Hall

was a stark, bare, hotbox of a room, and there was nothing to sell there but music. Six nights weekly audiences were, for the most part, receiving their initiation into the sounds of pure New Orleans music.<sup>34</sup>

The ‘couple of white enthusiasts’ are undoubtedly Ken Grayson Mills and Barbara Glancey Reid. Mills, here, is giving full credit to Reid as co-founder of Preservation Hall, albeit anonymously. This is in the context of this LP sleeve note which focuses attention on named New Orleans musicians, as opposed to unnamed enthusiasts. Later, Mills would credit the name ‘Preservation Hall’ to them both:

Here’s the real way the name came about. ‘Authenticity,’ ‘Perseverance’ – these were some of the names we were comin’ up with. We were throwin’ names around, me and Barbara. So I wrote down three things. One of them was ‘Preservation.’ ‘I want that!’ she says. The name was never hers, and it wasn’t mine. It was the product of an idea-logue.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, as we have seen, it was Mills who started the tradition of Preservation Hall touring bands.<sup>36</sup> Barry Martyn took up where Mills left off in regard to the recording of Kid Sheik, John Handy and Emile Barnes. Soon this would lead to Kid Sheik’s first European tour with Martyn to be followed by many other tours of the Martyn band with different New Orleans musicians. Martyn, quoted above, comments that ‘Different songs, different combinations were Mills’ medium and the world was grateful.’

Less recognised was Mills’ talent for drawing on the expertise and recordings of different enthusiasts of New Orleans music and combining their work in the service of his Icon Records project. Most notably, Walter Eysselinck and Ralph Collins were happy to entrust Mills with their tapes for release on Icon. Barry Martyn cites one such session: the *Kid Sheik with Charlie Love’s Cado Jazz Band* as being the inspiration for his launch of his MONO record label.<sup>37</sup> Relatedly, Tom Bethell specifically cites Icon LP9 – *Endless the Trek; Endless the Search*, as the record that convinced him that it was worth starting his own San Jacinto record label in 1963.<sup>38</sup>

Bill Bissonnette of *Jazz Crusade* has no doubt of the importance of

Ken Mills and Icon Records for what he calls the ‘Great New Orleans Jazz Revival of the 1960s’. Writing in 1992, he says:

What seemed so insignificant in the context of that historic decade is finally now, in the 1990’s, beginning to be acknowledged for what it was: The Great New Orleans Jazz Revival. It spawned the incredible renewal of interest in New Orleans jazz now sweeping Europe and elsewhere. And it was the doing of a handful of men . . .

There were so few of us that I can easily name them in half a page:

GRAYSON ‘KEN’ MILLS – owner of Icon Records.

ALLAN JAFFE – owner of Preservation Hall; record producer and musician.

BARRY ‘KID’ MARTYN – owner of Mono Records; tour organizer and musician.

GRAYSON CLARK – owner of Nobility Records and Dixieland Hall.

GEORGE H. BUCK JR – owner of Jazzology/GHB Records.

TOM BETHELL – owner of San Jacinto Records.

LEONARD BRACKETT – owner of Center Records.

SONNY FAGGART – owner of Pearl Records.

JOE MARES – owner of Southland Records.

Bissonnette adds:

Those I have listed have one commonality. All were record producers. Recording was what it was all about. Nothing else matters. Nothing else counts. There is no other way to preserve a spontaneous music such as jazz. Unless you lived in New Orleans during the period, almost everything you know about the music of the Great Revival you know through the efforts of these producers. Counting me there were 10. We did it.<sup>40</sup>

It is no coincidence that Mills tops this table. He was the major inspiration to most of the record producers on Bissonnette’s list, as he was for many smaller and less influential independent labels worldwide, including my own La Croix Records in the UK, as it operated between 1967 and 1972.<sup>41</sup>

The history of jazz and the history of recorded jazz are, of course, rather

different things. Englishman Clive Wilson who has lived in New Orleans since the mid-1960s likes to remind me just how different they are and contemporary jazz studies has been increasingly sensitive to this issue for some time.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, in terms of the international reach of global New Orleans revivalism, Bissonnette is correct in his analysis. Mills was the right man, in the right place, at the right time who did the right things, just as Bill Russell was for the 1940s revival.

*I concluded what I thought would be the final article in this series with the following text, which I quote in full below. However, due to new – and extremely important – material emerging, the story about the Origins of Preservation Hall continued.*

It was possible for me to write the series in the length I have, mainly because my articles relied heavily on the publications of Ken Mills, himself. Many of Mills most useful writings are in the early 1960s specialist jazz magazines *Jazz Report* and *Eureka*. Unfortunately, these are very difficult to access. For the researcher in the UK, there is no set of *Jazz Report* in the British Library. The *Jazz Report* set in the National Jazz Archive, Loughton, UK is incomplete. There is a complete set of *Eureka* in the British Library but no currently available set in the National Jazz Archive. I have no reason to suppose that access to these rare publications is easy elsewhere. For this reason, I thought it appropriate to quote Mills' writings extensively. It should be said, too, that these writings have been totally ignored in the literature to date.

Without the help of numerous collaborators, much of the depth and detail of my articles would have been lost. Per Oldaeus, from Sweden, set the series in motion by entrusting me with important Ken Mills material that he held, following extensive preliminary Ken Mills' discographic work carried out by his fellow Swedes, the late Håkan Håkansson and Björn Bärnheim.

There have been a number of key informants, most notably Bill Bissonnette and the late Mike Dine who met Mills in the early 1960s and late 1980s/early 1990s, respectively. For Bill, Mills in the early 1960s ‘was such a nice fellow when I met him in New Orleans and the musicians he featured in the Hall loved him.’<sup>43</sup>

The late Mike Dine and Bill Bissonnette have been very generous in sharing with me what they knew of Ken Mills. Also, Tsar Fedorsky, Mills’ stepdaughter, has been most supportive of the project and has provided a number of rare photos of Mills.

Fred Eatherton did not wish to be presented as a co-author on any of the articles. Nevertheless, he has been a beneficent sounding board throughout the series and has been a co-researcher for much of the project.

Fred Eatherton, John Whitehorn and I established the definite birth dates and death dates for Mills and we unearthed certain material from his student days on [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com). However, these things apart, I have been singularly unsuccessful in obtaining information that would enable me to flesh out the sketchy biographical details that Mills occasionally provides in his own writings. In many ways Mills remains an unknown man.

It must be remembered that Mills was only in New Orleans for extended visits in 1960, 1961 and 1962. Thus it was not surprising that the major scholars and enthusiasts who were in New Orleans in the 1950s, or in 1963 and afterwards, could not help me. I was gratified to receive brief Facebook replies from two of the most respected and knowledgeable elder statesmen of New Orleans social worlds: David Wyckoff and the late Tony Standish. David Wyckoff wrote: ‘I never met Ken Mills, but of course greatly admire most of his recordings, some of which are “island” material!’<sup>44</sup> Tony Standish wrote: ‘Nor did I meet Grayson, but we did exchange letters a bit back in Icon days. Sadly lost. A strange man, overflowing with enthusiasm, who did some great work, even if we sometimes disagreed. I often wonder what became of him.’<sup>45</sup> Also, I had briefly met Chris Strachwitz, one-time friend

and colleague of Mills, in New Orleans in 2009 and mentioned Mills to him. Strachwitz was critical of the uneven quality of Icon record releases. Rather extraordinarily, Barry Martyn never met Mills, although he did ‘spend hours on the phone with him’ and found him ‘very easy to deal with’.<sup>46</sup>

Most disappointing was the fact that I never unearthed any members of his surviving family, other than his stepdaughter Tsar Fedorsky (through Per Oldaeus). Barry Martyn has noted that Ken Mills had been writing a book on New Orleans music, to be called *Penance & Absolution*.<sup>47</sup> I have no way of knowing how far Mills had progressed with this project. I know nothing of what happened to his personal effects, his unpublished writings or, if such there were, his ‘unknown’ recordings. Perhaps they perished with him.

From the evidence we do have, it seems highly likely that Mills’ health continued to decline from the mid-1990s onwards and, as it did so, the possibilities of progressing, far less completing, his various projects declined with his health. For all these reasons, I am a long way off writing the ‘Life and Work of Ken Grayson Mills’ that jazz historiography and contemporary Jazz Studies needs and deserves. I am still hoping that someone somewhere is engaged, or will engage, in such a project.

Meanwhile, the immediate task is to publish as complete a listing as possible of all the recordings that Mills, himself, made – including those that were made specifically for him – and those that he acquired for the purposes of possible release on his Icon record label.

This task was completed in December 2017 and published in limited edition hardback and online as Fred Eatherton, assisted by Richard Ekins, *Ken Grayson Mills’ Icon Records: A Discography*, La Croix Publications, London, 2018; <http://www.lacroixrecords.com/mills%20discography.html>.

## NOTES

1. I am grateful to the late Mike Dine, Bill Bissonnette and Fred Eatherton for their help in writing this article. Thanks are also due to Matthew Ekins.
2. I follow the excellent review in *Walking with Legends: Barry Martyn's New Orleans Jazz Odyssey*, Mick Burns (ed.), Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 2007: 87-91. Burns' review of Ory is written to set the context for his account of Barry Martyn's emigration to Los Angeles in 1972. I like to think that Mills' early 1960s writings on New Orleans musicians living on the West Coast played a role in Martyn's choice of location and musical activity when there. Martyn soon formed the celebrated touring Legends of Jazz that included Andrew Blakeney, Ed Garland, Joe Darensbourg and Alton Purnell, all living in California at the time, and Louis Nelson from New Orleans.
3. Accessed June 28, 2023, <http://www.doctorjazz.co.uk/jstcyrjj.html>; accessed June 28, 2023, <https://www.discogs.com/Kid-Orys-Creole-Jazz-Band-194445-Volume-1/release/4201617>
4. Bill Russell, 'Extracts from a Conversation with Dick Allen', *Coda*, 1979, 167, pp. 14-19 at p. 16.
5. 'Ken Grayson Mills', *Jazz Report*, 1962, 3 (1 & 2): 21.
6. This paragraph draws on the excellent Fred Eatherton, *Bunk Johnson: A Discography*, 2006, Swedish Bunk Johnson Society, pp. 8-15.
7. Eatherton (ibid., p. 8) notes that 'It is rumoured that recordings were also made around this time [April 1943] of Bunk playing duets with Burt Bales, but nothing has come to light.'
8. Ken Mills, 'Burt Bales: Anyone that got next to him knew he was a genius', 'Booklet Notes', *Burt Bales, 1947-1961*, GHB BCD-18.
9. Accessed June 28, 2023, <http://www.fellers.se/Kid/Overview.html>
10. Accessed June 28, 2023, [http://www.fellers.se/Kid/1953-61\\_On\\_The\\_Levee.html](http://www.fellers.se/Kid/1953-61_On_The_Levee.html)
11. Mills lived in Brea, California, before he returned to his mother's place in Fullerton, California. He always used a Brea address on his Icon record covers of the 1960s. Brea and Fullerton are only four miles away from each other – a five hour drive to San Francisco.

Mills was a student at the University of San Francisco, circa 1958-60. Around this time, he hung out at Jack's Record Cellar in San Francisco and produced his first Icons.

12. Facebook message, Bill Bissonnette to Richard Ekins, December 10, 2016.

13. Cf. Barry Martyn's enigmatic statement in his 'Booklet Notes' to *Dancing to Kid Ory at Crystal Pier*, American Music, AMCD-90, 1996: 'It [the 1947 music] came from the archives of a private collection.'

14. 'Snaer' is the usual spelling.

15. Ken Mills, 'Booklet Notes', 'Frank Goudie with Amos White's Band & Burt Bales', American Music, AMCD-50.

16. Accessed June 28, 2023, <http://musicrising.tulane.edu/listen/detail/293/Goudie-Interview>. For the transcript, see: <http://musicrising.tulane.edu/uploads/transcripts/f.bigboi.goudie%206-2-1960.pdf>. See also: Dan Vernhettes with Christine Goudie and Tony Baldwin, *Big Boy: The Life and Music of Frank Goudie*, Jazz Edit, France, 2015.

17. Ken Mills, 'Booklet Notes', *Frank Goudie*, op. cit.

18. This would seem to be a mistake for 1960.

19. Ibid.

20. International Longshore and Warehouse Union.

21. Ken Mills, 'Booklet Notes', *Frank Goudie*, op. cit.

22. Mills gives Goudie's date of birth as 1893, in his 'Booklet Notes', *Frank Goudie*, op. cit. Most sources give 1899.

23. Grayson Mills, 'Program Notes' for 'Amos White & His New Orleans Ragtime Band', *Eureka*, Sept/Oct 1960, 1 (5): 5-7.

24. Grayson Mills, 'Things Looking Up for N.O. Jazz Collectors, and More Importantly, For Its Musicians Too!', *Jazz Report*, 1961, 1 (9): 15-16.

25. Ibid, p. 15.

26. Ibid, pp. 15-16.

27. 'Burt Bales, 1947-1961', GHB BCD-13.

28. Grayson Mills, 'Burt Bales: Anyone that Got Next to him Knew he was a Genius', in 'Booklet Notes', *Burt Bales, 1947-1961*, GHB BCD-13, 1992.

29. Ibid.

30. Barry Martyn, 'Burt Bales 1947-1961', in 'Booklet Notes', *Burt Bales, 1947-1961*, GHB BCD-13, 1992.

31. Barry Martyn, 'Booklet Notes', *Frank Goudie*, op. cit., p. 1.

32. *Just Jazz*, No. 223, November 2016, pp. 27-28. Chapter 1 above.

33. Barry Martyn, 'Booklet Notes', *Opening Night at Preservation Hall*, American Music, AMCD-86.

34. Grayson Mills, 'Sleeve Notes', *Volume III – Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower – Kid Howard 1961*, Icon LP 4, Queen City Album Company, Cincinnati, Ohio.

35. Ken Grayson Mills, quoted in William Carter, *Preservation Hall*, 1991, W.W. Norton, New York, p. 148.

36. Richard Ekins, 'Lesser-Known Aspects of the Legacy of Ken Grayson Mills: Preservation Hall Jazz Band Touring at 'The Best Address in Cleveland' – The *Eureka* Report, with Notes from Thomas N. Stagg', *Just Jazz*, No. 226, February 2017, pp. 6-10.

37. Barry Martyn, 'Review of "Kid Sheik with Charlie Love and his Cado Jazz Band – 1960, 504 CDS 21"', *New Orleans Music*, 1993, 4 (2): 25-26.

38. Tom Bethell, 'Recording at San Jacinto Hall in the 1960s', *New Orleans Music*, 14 (1): 6-11 at pp. 7-8.

39. Big Bill Bissonnette, *The Jazz Crusade: The Inside Story of the Great New Orleans Jazz Revival of the 1960s*, 1992, Special Request Books, Bridgeport, Connecticut, p. xvii. Bissonnette does add: 'Oh there were a few isolated instances of larger record companies going down to [New Orleans] make a few recordings – most notably the superb Riverside 'Living Legends' series.'

40. Ibid.

41. [www.lacroixrecords.com](http://www.lacroixrecords.com)

42. See: for instance, Jed Rasula, 'The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History', in Krin Gabbard (ed.) *Jazz Amongst the Discourses*, 1995, Duke University Press, Durham, pp. 134-162.

43 Facebook message, Bill Bissonnette to Richard Ekins, December 15, 2016.

44. David Wyckoff, Facebook comment, August 26, 2016.

45. Tony Standish, Facebook comment, August 27, 2016.

46. Mike Pointon, 'Barry Martyn and GHB', *The Jazz Archivist*, XXVI, 2013: 10-13, at p. 11.

47. Barry Martyn, 'Booklet Notes', *John Handy - The Very First Recordings*, AMCD-51, p. 2.

A black and white photograph of a building facade. The upper part shows a balcony with a decorative wrought-iron railing. Below the balcony are several doors and windows. The central door is white with a diamond-shaped window. To its right is a dark door with a small window. The overall scene is somewhat faded and has a historical feel.

# CHAPTER 8

Ken Grayson Mills and  
Icon Hall, 734 St. Louis  
Street, New Orleans:

A Reminiscence from Big Bill  
Bissonnette, with Further  
Notes on Icon Records, Icon  
Hall and Perseverance Hall

*July 2017*



## Chapter 8

Little did I realise what was around the corner when I thought I had concluded my initial series of articles on Ken Mills for *Just Jazz* in May 2017.

Almost immediately, Bill Bissonnette was so appreciative of my efforts that he cajoled me further to work with him on his experiences with Mills at Icon Hall, the initial ‘Preservation Hall in Exile’. That would lead to the *Just Jazz* article I include in this chapter.

Then, totally out of the blue, Per Oldaeus sent me a tranche of fascinating material that led directly to another set of articles.

Furthermore, not long after Per’s material arrived, Paige VanVorst sent me a cornucopia of Mills material that would, among other things, enable me to publish Mills’ hugely important ‘rest of the story’, relating to his eviction from Preservation Hall.

Now, the initial series had, indeed, metamorphosed into a long-term project that would take more than three more years to complete.

### **Ken Grayson Mills and Icon Hall, 734 St. Louis Street, New Orleans: A Reminiscence from Big Bill Bissonnette, with Further Notes on Icon Records, Icon Hall and Perseverance Hall <sup>1</sup>**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, July 2017

*For anyone visiting New Orleans, determined to hear as much music and to meet as many people connected to the music as possible, the spring of 1962 was a particularly rewarding time. Suddenly there were more of the older musicians working than at any time since the 1920s.*

Richard H. Knowles, 1993<sup>2</sup>

In 1992, Bill Bissonnette published *The Jazz Crusade: The Inside Story of the Great New Orleans Revival of the 1960s*.<sup>3</sup> As the title made clear, Bissonnette had no doubt that the 1960s revival should be distinguished from the 1940s revival that had run its course by the end of the 1950s. In the foreword to *The Jazz Crusade*, Gene Miller concludes:

The story of jazz is full of gaps. One of these has been the question of what sparked the Great New Orleans Jazz Revival of the 1960s. Those who seek the answer to this mystery will have to rely in part on the recordings made by Bill Bissonnette and the tale which unfolds in this book.<sup>4</sup>

As I have argued in a series of *Just Jazz* articles in late 2016 and throughout 2017, the origins of second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism are to be found in the work of Ken Grayson Mills and his Icon Records; the Riverside ‘Living Legends’ series of recordings; the work of Barry Martyn and his MONO record label; and in the birth of Preservation Hall, New Orleans, initially founded and managed by Ken Grayson Mills and Barbara Glancey Reid. Bill Bissonnette’s book has many merits but particularly important for this article is that Bissonnette provides a brief report of his visit to New Orleans in 1960, followed by a much longer report on his visit in 1962.

Bill Bissonnette first arrived in New Orleans in March 1960 and ‘went to all the tourist spots and heard surprisingly little interesting jazz. . . . The Famous Door featured all white dixielanders who were no better than you could hear any night at Nick’s in Greenwich Village.’<sup>5</sup> After a few nights in New Orleans Bissonnette finally heard the sound he had come to New Orleans to hear: the band playing at the Paddock Lounge that evening, which included Thomas Jefferson – ‘a little too flashy for my taste’<sup>6</sup> – Octave Crosby, Albert Burbank and Bill Matthews. But that was about the height of it.

By the time of his second trip to New Orleans in March 1962, Bissonnette found ‘plenty’ of what he was looking for, in no small measure due to Ken Grayson Mills. Bissonnette’s report of ‘New Orleans – 1962’ is, in effect,

a chapter on Ken Grayson Mills and Icon Hall. Mills was the man who gave Jim Robinson's address to Bissonnette, thereby facilitating a life-changing meeting between the two trombonists that set the course of much of Bissonnette's subsequent life. Here, however, I set forth those sections of the chapter 'New Orleans – 1962' that keep the emphasis firmly on Ken Mills and Icon Hall.

### **'New Orleans – 1962' by Big Bill Bissonnette<sup>7</sup>**

Upon my discharge from the army [in early March], I headed straight for New Orleans . . . We [my wife and I] took a small furnished apartment for three months and I started looking for jazz. I found plenty of it this time.

In 1961 a young man named Grayson Mills had started the first kitty hall in New Orleans at 726 St. Peter Street. He called it Preservation Hall. The building was owned by real estate baron Larry Borenstein.<sup>8</sup> Mills paid \$400.00 a month rent to Borenstein. Mills' goal was to record as many of the oldtime jazzmen as he could. He had some financial support from his mother in California but he was doing it mostly on his own. His own Icon Records had already issued several albums. As a result of a dispute with Borenstein, Mills had been forced out of Preservation Hall. Borenstein then turned the management of the hall over to Allan and Sandra Jaffe. Mills opened a second hall on St. Louis Street. He called this one Icon Hall.

On our very first night in New Orleans we stumbled across Icon Hall. We heard the music drifting out of the side street as we walked along Bourbon Street and we went to check it out. The hall was almost empty. There wasn't even anyone sitting at the door to collect the kitty. The hall had once been a laundry. It was cavernous. The bandstand was on a balcony which was at least eight feet off the ground. You could only see the first row of musicians when you looked up. The music was superb oldtime New Orleans jazz. I didn't recognize any of the players, all elderly blacks.

We sat down to listen. Soon a young fellow came over and introduced

himself as 'Ken Mills'. He apologetically asked us for \$2.00. A buck apiece. We started to talk. I told him about my jazz radio program in Texas and how the station manager asked me if I would continue it on tape from Connecticut. I mentioned that I had come to New Orleans to study jazz trombone. He told me who was in the band: Kid Sheik and Charlie Love on trumpets, Albert Warner on trombone, Alec Bigard on drums, Harrison Verrett on banjo, Papa John Joseph on bass and, to my surprise Milé Barnes<sup>9</sup> [Emile Barnes] on clarinet. I had Milé's American Music and Riverside albums. I was familiar with Warner from his Bunk Johnson and Eureka Brass Band recordings. I didn't know Milé was still alive. He was missing some front teeth and having a hard time playing but he still sounded beautiful. Warner's style was unique; almost tuba lines and very, very powerful.

We got to meet everyone and they were very friendly, particularly Kid Sheik who had an easy and infectious laugh. They seemed at ease with Mills and consequently with us. When I told Sheik that I was a fledgling trombone player he invited me to sit in with the band. What an offer!

. . . We went to Preservation Hall the following night. Compared to Icon Hall it was pretty full. Not like it would be years later, but there were still a lot of people inside and, unlike today, they stayed set after set. . . . We stayed several sets and then walked over to Icon Hall until closing.

. . . We continued alternating nights between Icon and Preservation Halls. They each used a different set of musicians with a few crossovers. At Icon I would hear and meet Israel Gorman, Eddie Morris, John Casimir, Charlie Love, Alfred Williams, Albert Jiles, Sylvester Handy, Andrew Morgan, Wilbert Tillman, Homer Eugene and others. Icon Hall did not have a piano. The bands and musicians represented what I saw as an older dance hall style of jazz. Preservation Hall featured more of a cross-section of jazz. Peter Bocage represented the dance hall variety. Noone Johnson's wonderful bazooka band was almost country jazz. Albert French's Tuxedo and Narvin Kimball's Dixielanders were exactly that: black Dixieland. There were also

the great hot bands: the Kid Thomas band, the George Lewis band, Kid Howard's La Vida Band, Kid Sheik, Percy Humphrey, Sweet Emma Barrett and the Billie and DeDe Pierce band. Every night, two halls, two bands, a dozen or more of New Orleans' finest black musicians from which to choose nightly. It was pretty heady stuff.

Robinson played both halls as did Kid Thomas (although not with his own band) and Creole George. If you didn't find them at one, you would likely find them at the other. Guesnon was the most difficult of all the musicians to get to know. He didn't have many friends, even among the musicians. He did have a few: Alec Bigard, Capt. John Handy, Louis James, Sheik and Thomas. By getting close to them, I was eventually to get as friendly with Guesnon as any white man could. But it took a lot of time, nurturing and many cartons of cigarettes; Guesnon's own form of currency. Jim, of course, was just the opposite. If you couldn't make instant friends with Jim Robinson, you might as well move to Mars. . . .

The time I had allotted for my New Orleans stay was already running weeks over. We were getting ready to leave . . . That same night we were at Icon Hall listening to Sheik's band when suddenly a half dozen uniformed police charged through the door. They told the musicians to pack up and get out. They hustled the few people in the audience out also. We told an officer we were friends of the owner and asked if we could stay. Ken Mills had three cops standing around him as he protested the closing of his hall. They arrested him.

As they took him out, we went over to him and asked him what we could do to help. He was really scared, as well he might be. 'They're taking me to jail! Please do something!' They hauled him away. I asked the cop who was padlocking the door if he could tell me what the charge against Ken was and where they were taking him. He told me Ken had been arrested on a charge of having 'improper egress' from the hall and he was being taken to the station lock-up.

‘Improper egress? You put people in jail in New Orleans for improper egress?’ The cop gave me a look that convinced me it had not been a good question.

‘Get out of here while you still can,’ he said menacingly.

We walked back to Preservation Hall where we ran into Larry Borenstein. ‘So how are things down at Mills place’ he asked. I asked him where the police lock-up was. He asked why I wanted to know. I told him the story of what had just happened thinking he might assist us in helping Mills. Curiously, he didn’t seem surprised at the news. He was uninterested in helping. He asked me why I was going to the police station. I replied that I wanted to try to get Ken out.

‘It seems to me it’s none of your business,’ he said.

Then he casually asked me when I was planning to vacate his apartment. He suddenly recalled that he had promised it to someone else starting in a few days. I got the message.

We finally found the lock-up and asked at the desk about Ken. At first the desk sergeant said he had no record of the arrest. I told him that I had been present when the arrest was made and Ken was dragged out. I insisted that he double-check. He found the warrant.

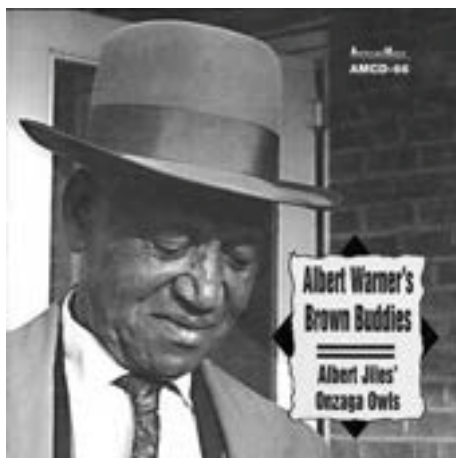
About a half hour later Ken was released and we walked him back to the hall. He saw the lock on the hall and shrugged. ‘Bourbon Street Mafia,’ he said without explanation. I asked him if he had a place to stay. He said he was okay and we left. I didn’t see him again. I understand he later reopened Icon Hall and recorded many more great sessions.

He is one of the unsung heroes of the 1960s jazz revival in New Orleans. He fought against unbearable odds and ended up out of the music and back in California but he blazed the trail that I, and others, would follow. Next to Bill Russell’s, his recordings were perhaps the most important New Orleans Jazz Revival recordings ever made.

## Further Notes on Icon Hall and Perseverance Hall

Mills spent three periods in New Orleans. During the first period, from June to July 1960,<sup>10</sup> Mills focused on the launch of his Icon label and his initial recordings. During his second trip the focus was on the establishing and managing of Preservation Hall with more recordings for his Icon label (May to September 1961). The third trip (February<sup>11</sup> to October 1962) was marked by his opening of Icon Hall, later to be renamed Perseverance Hall, and an extensive recording programme at Perseverance Hall and Jeunes Amis Hall.

In this section, I draw, principally, on the following: the ten-page document prepared by Ken Mills entitled ‘The Original New Orleans Jazz Styles: The Ken Mills Sessions June 1960 to October 1962 – Unissued and Alternate Takes – Complete Inventory of Good Takes Listed’; papers on Mills and Icon Hall held by the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University relating to Icon Hall and Perseverance Hall; and email correspondence with Bill Bissonnette in February and March 2017. I use these sources to supplement Bissonnette’s published account reproduced above. Valuable, too, has been Per Oldaeus’ unpublished paper ‘734 Saint Louis Street 1962 and Various Information on the Musicians Who Played There’ (2003).<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 8.1** Albert Warner, Booklet front cover, American Music AMCD-66

The only known Ken Mills recording made at Icon Hall, before it was renamed Perseverance Hall, was of a live session later issued on American Music, AMCD-66, as Albert Warner and his Brownskin Buddies and dated 'spring of 1962'. On the CD it was coupled with another previously unissued Ken Mills session, *Albert Jiles' Onzaga Owls*, recorded by Ken Mills on September 4, 1961 at Albert Jiles' home. Dan Pawson's review in *New Orleans Music* makes all the pertinent points. I omit Pawson's comments on the Albert Jiles session to focus on the Perseverance Hall session:

Two more seminal sessions from the early days of the kitty halls, plucked from obscurity for release in the AM series. The first one, under Albert Warner's name, was recorded live at Icon Hall and captures perfectly the atmosphere of these largely informal sessions featuring musicians displaced from the dance halls who, were it not for the efforts of men like Ken Mills, would have hung up their horns and faded into oblivion . . .

Albert Warner has sometimes been criticised on the grounds of lack of technique and inventiveness, mostly by people brought up on diets of carefully selected records featuring virtuosity as the ultimate ingredient of good jazz. They fail to understand that Warner represents a functional approach to music development largely from his involvement with the brass band heritage, an approach which reflected Baby Dodds' words, 'playing for the benefit of the band.' Virtuosity, even solos, played no part in this idiom. To quote again, this time from King Oliver, 'I wants you to be band man and a band man only and do all you can for the welfare of the band in the line of playing your best at all times.' Exactly what Warner did, and does, on this recording.

From the opening notes of 'Panama' (abridged to the last theme) one is immediately aware of the brightness and clarity of the ensemble work and a vitality lacking in most of today's music. Although Charlie Love is included in the personnel, very little of him is heard throughout the session, possibly due to under-recording or perhaps his quiet backing behind Sheik's powerful lead. Emile Barnes plays his usual sinewy clarinet lines employing the full range of the instrument. There are some beautiful riff passages from Sheik and Warner, echoing their Eureka background and some wonderful drumming from Albert Jiles who employs the full kit to its best advantage . . .

Another welcome and surprise release from the American Music stables.<sup>13</sup>

Bill Bissonnette was present at this session, which must have taken place sometime between March 6, when Bill first went to Icon Hall, and March 29, the evening before the hall was closed down. Bissonnette estimates the date as near to, or between, March 12 and 18. Bissonnette left New Orleans before the hall reopened.

From the papers in the Hogan Jazz Archive, we can date the incident of Mills' arrest with near certainty. Dick Allen writes:

On Friday night, March 30, 1962, the police took Grayson 'Ken' Mills away from Icon Hall because he was not complying with fire regulations. He hired Punch Miller's band, with Abbey 'Chinee' Foster, for that evening. Punch and Chinee went on around to Preservation Hall and told RBA [Richard B. 'Dick' Allen] about Ken's misfortune.

When I pointed out the seeming discrepancy between Bissonnette's account and Allen's account concerning the musicians present, Bissonnette attributed that to possible faulty memory on his part before adding: 'I'd be surprised if Chinee played that night because I believe the only times I saw Chinee was in Preservation Hall. But again I could be wrong.' More importantly, however, Bissonnette added new material:

When I left NOLA in early April of 1962<sup>14</sup> Icon Hall was closed. I seem to recall that Ken might have left for California but I can't swear to that. I think he said he was going to see his mother about getting some more funds.

This would fit with papers in the Hogan Archive that indicate that, following the police raid, Icon Hall was closed to carry out the necessary work. Dick Allen writes:

Larry Borenstein told RBA [Dick Allen] on 4/11/62 [April 11] that Ken Mills is having to do \$1,000 worth of repairs on his place. Mills says it will take him a couple of weeks to reopen. Larry figures it will be at least a month.

In the classified ad section of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on Sunday, May 27, 1962, there appeared the following advertisement: 'AUTHENTIC New Orleans Jazz being played nightly at Icon Hall, 734 St. Louis Street.

Public invited.’ This, taken with Ken Mills and Barbara Reid’s accounts relating to Icon Hall, suggests that the work had been completed by the end of May and the operation of Icon Hall was in full swing again by early June.



**Figure 8.2 Ken Grayson Mills in front of Perseverance (Icon) Hall, September 1962. Photograph by Eric J. Brown, courtesy of Per Oldaeus**

The name change to Perseverance Hall took place at least by June 6 as is evidenced from the Hall's nine pages of accounts headed 'ACCOUNT NAME (Perseverance Hall) Traditional Jazz Association, 734 St. Louis Street – Jazz Concerts', which together with copies of various IOUs made out to a number of the musicians cover the period from June 6 to July 6. Interestingly, on the IOUs Mills always writes 'Perseverance Hall', whereas the more anarchic Barbara Reid variously writes 'Perseverance Hall', 'Preservation Hall in Exile', 'Preseverance Hall' or 'Perservance Hall'. It should be said that there have been three Perseverance Halls in New Orleans: The Mills Hall; Perseverance Lodge No 4, F & AM/Perseverance Hall, Louis Armstrong Park, at the intersection of St. Claude and Dumaine Streets; and Perseverance Society Hall, 1644 Villere Street, which is the one jazz musicians usually mean when they speak of Perseverance Hall.



**Figure 8.3 Handwritten Perseverance (Icon) Hall posters.**  
 Courtesy of Warwick Reynolds

**Note the words 'Icon Hall' written above 'July 9-14<sup>th</sup>. Despite the change of name to Perseverance Hall from early June onwards, many people never adopted the new name.**



**Figure 8.4 Handwritten Perseverance (Icon) Hall posters.**  
 Courtesy of Warwick Reynolds

Three more notes by Dick Allen provide additional interesting information. In a note dated ‘Sunday night 6/24/62’ [June 24], Allen writes:

RBA went by Perseverance Hall en route to the French Market, saw Emile Barnes, who is playing there, but did not hear him. Mehly [Emile Barnes] does not play at Preservation Hall. Is he on the Jaffe’s black list, or do the other musicians consider him unreliable?

On June 25 1962, Dick Allen writes:

Grayson ‘Ken’ Mills establishment, Icon Hall, is now called Perseverance Hall. Ken has turned most of the business management over to Barbara Reid.

In a note dated 9 July 1962, Dick Allen writes:

On Wednesday night, July, 1962, RBA and Nesuhi Ertegun heard the following band at Perseverance Hall: Punch Miller, trumpet; Israel Gorman, clarinet; Albert Warner, trombone; Alex Bigard, drums; Wilbert Tillman, sousaphone; Manuel Sayles, banjo.

They were playing softly, more relaxed. This seems to be one of the things Ken Mills and Barbara Reid are aiming for, to get less of the Bourbon Street sound.

The hall was covered with signs, as you would expect from Barbara Reid, about feeding the kitty, “Preservation Hall in Exile”. Kitty was called “Heartbreak Hole.”

There is no minimum charge at Perseverance.

They plan to knock down a partition at the back of the room to allow space for a dance floor.<sup>15</sup>

On Saturday, July 7, 1962, RBA returned to Perseverance Hall. He heard Kid Thomas’s Band with Israel Gorman, clarinet; Eddie Summers, trombone; Manuel Paul, saxophone; Joseph Butler, bass. RBA does not remember whether or not there was a piano.



**Figure 8.5 Kid Thomas Band, Perseverance (Icon) Hall, September 1962. Sammy Penn (dms), Ernest Roubleau (bjo), Joseph Butler (bass), Kid Thomas (tpt).**

**Photo by Eric J. Brown, courtesy of Per Oldaeus**



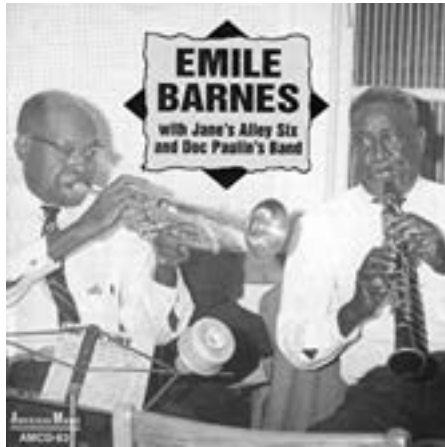
**Figure 8.6 Punch Miller Band, Perseverance (Icon) Hall, September 1962.  
Punch Miller (tpt), Eddie Summers (tbn), Israel Gorman (clt)  
George Guesnon (bjo), Alex Bigard (dms), Papa John Joseph (bass).  
Photo by Eric J. Brown, courtesy of Per Oldaeus**

Finally, in a memo dated 23 July 1962:

On Wednesday night, July 18, 1962, Davis<sup>16</sup> and RBA “made the rounds”.

Perseverance (formerly Icon) Hall: Band consisted of: Doc Paulin, trumpet; Emile Barnes, clarinet; Eddie Morris, trombone; a youngish drummer who used to play at Luthjen’s<sup>17</sup>; Sylvester Handy, bass; Joseph “Fan” Bourgeau, banjo. RBA is not sure who was leader, but it may have been Doc Paulin.

Perseverance Hall is now non-union. Barbara Reid has dissociated herself from this project. She wanted it to stay Union.



**Figure 8.7 Eddie Richardson and Emile Barnes, Booklet Front Cover, American Music AMCD-63**

Barbara Reid's departure probably sounded the death knell of Perseverance Hall and by the end of the following month, August, Mills had switched his main focus to an ambitious recording programme carried out at Jeunes Amis Hall, the location of the celebrated 1961 Riverside 'Living Legends' series. However, while still at Perseverance Hall, Mills recorded three further sessions between July 30 and August 12. The significance of these 'Perseverance Hall' sessions is often overlooked. Barry Martyn is often credited with pioneering the 1960s revival move to what Sam Charters had called 'the rougher non-union bands'.<sup>18</sup>

In point of fact, Martyn was following the lead of Mills in this regard. On July 30, 1962, Mills recorded Jane's Alley Six, which featured Eddie Richardson (tpt); Eddie Morris (tbn); Emile Barnes (clt); Joseph 'Fan' Bourgeois (bj); Sylvester Handy (sbs); and Henry Revel (dms). On August 9, Mills recorded Emile Barnes with Doc Paulin's New Orleans Jazz Band featuring Ernest 'Doc' Paulin (tpt); Eddie Morris (tbn); Emile Barnes (clt); Joseph 'Fan' Bourgeois (bj); Sylvester Handy (sbs); and Henry Revel (dms). On August 12, Mills recorded John Henry McNeil and his Crescent City Crystals featuring John Henry McNeil (tpt); Buster Moore (tbn); Lawrence

Dent (clt); Albert Delone (alto sax); Ernest Roubeleau [sic] (bjo); Sylvester Handy (sbs); and Dave Bailey (dms).

One of the Jane's Alley Six tracks ('Put on Your Old Grey Bonnet') appeared on Arhoolie F. 1013. The Doc Paulin/Emile Barnes session was first released with an Icon LP13 cover enclosing a Jazzology JCE23 record release from GHB. The John Henry McNeil session was unknown even to Tom Stagg and Charlie Crump when they published their *New Orleans, The Revival* in 1973.<sup>19</sup>

Rather it was the John Henry McNeil's Crescent City Crystals session recorded by Barry Martyn on November 13, 1963 (issued as MONO LP 8) that introduced the band to the worldwide New Orleans jazz revivalist scene of the mid-1960s. This release, together with four other Non-Union sessions, formed a three-volume 'Non-Union Musicians of New Orleans' set: MONO LP 6, 7, and 8. The other two volumes in the set were (Vol. 1) The Gibson Brass Band (MONO LP 6 recorded on November 16, 1963) and (Vol. 2) Sylvester Handy's Rhythm Band, Emile Barnes Dixieland Band, and Cal Blunt's Brown Buddies (LP 7) recorded on November 23, 24 and 27, 1963. It was largely consequent to this series that Martyn was credited with shifting the focus to the starker, so-called 'Non-Union' sound. However, as we have seen, it was Mills who took the lead in this during the period of the second wave revivalism of the early 1960s.

Barry Martyn's American Music Icon CD project eventually released material from the three Perseverance Hall sessions as two CDs in 2001 and 2002. The Jane's Alley Six session was combined with the Doc Paulin Icon session on AMCD-63. I wrote about this production in a previous *Just Jazz* article.<sup>20</sup> It made no mention of Perseverance Hall. The details provided on the Jane's Alley Six sides were minimal. There were no separate notes for that session and Ken Mills was given no credit for the recording. The Jane's Alley Six session was said to be recorded at '732 St. Louis Street,<sup>21</sup> while the Doc Paulin session was said to be 'Recorded Icon Hall early 60s'. Both,

in fact, were recorded at Perseverance Hall, 734 St. Louis Street within ten days of each other.



**Figure 8.8 John Henry McNeil at the Harmony Inn, November 13, 1963  
Booklet Front Cover, American Music AMCD-67**

American Music's use of the John Henry McNeil session recorded by Mills is particularly puzzling. Initially, Barry Martyn had intended to issue 'John Henry McNeil – AMCD 67' comprising fifteen of Mills' tracks.<sup>22</sup> In the event, he only used six tracks and combined them with ten tracks from three different sessions he had recorded himself and previously released on his MONO LP7. AMCD 67 was entitled *New Orleans Dance Bands*.

No acknowledgement was made of Mills being the first person to record John Henry McNeil's Crescent City Crystals, far less that they were recorded for his Icon label. Mills had long intended to record the clarinet player Lawrence Dent, who was featured on this McNeil recording. Mills was proud of this achievement and it was another first for him. As Per Oldaeus details:

Clarinet player Lawrence Dent made his sole recording in August 1962 when Mills cut a live session at the Perseverance Hall . . . Lawrence Dent was a nephew of Johnny and Baby Dodds. While in New Orleans in the 1940s, Baby Dodds used to stay with Dent when the drummer came to record for Bill Russell . . . On 14 May, 1945 Dent attended Russell's recording session

in the home of George Lewis at 827 St. Philip Street . . . On the AMCD-67 Dent sounds as something in between Steve Angrum and Andrew Morgan's clarinet playing.<sup>23</sup>

Mike Hazeldine adds the following aside concerning Dent's attendance at Russell's recording session:

Dent, whom Johnny [Dodds] had taught clarinet, borrowed George's clarinet for a few minutes. He hadn't played for years, yet he didn't sound too bad.<sup>24</sup>

Of the non-union musicians of the early 1960s, Sam Charters had commented: 'The music was uneven, but often it was closer to the spontaneous group improvisation of the New Orleans style than any of the more professional bands working.'<sup>25</sup>

Mills would have appreciated the irony that as he was documenting the music of these 'spontaneous group improvisations', the major record label Atlantic Records was recording perhaps the most polished set of 'Jazz at Preservation Hall' band recordings ever made in the 1960s and 1970s. These were the four LP volumes of Nesuhi Ertegun's studio recordings made in July 1962 and featuring, variously, The Eureka Brass Band, Billie and DeDe Pierce, Jim Robinson's Band, Paul Barbarin and his Jazz Band, Punch Miller's Bunch and George Lewis, and the George Lewis Band.<sup>26</sup>

With his last three non-union sessions in the can, Mills concluded his recordings at Perseverance Hall.

He then turned his attention to the finale of his recording activity in New Orleans that would lead to Icon 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. Mills recorded all of these in the Jeunes Amis Hall, New Orleans, beginning 28 August 1962.

*Such is the importance of these final Icon sessions and their aftermath that they will be discussed in a separate chapter.*

## NOTES

1. Thanks are due to Bill Bissonnette for his ‘Reminiscence’ and follow-up; also to Per Oldaeus for providing me with much of the additional material that made this article possible. I am grateful, too, for the contributions of Warwick Reynolds and Matthew Ekins. Fred Eatherton continues as my co-researcher and sounding board. Mills occasionally gives the address of Icon Hall as 732 St. Louis Street. According to Bruce Raeburn of the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, all the Archive’s material in the relevant files give 734. These includes a business card for Mills. Email, Bruce Raeburn to Richard Ekins, April 10, 2017. At different times Icon Hall was called Preservation Hall in Exile or Perseverance Hall.

2. *New Orleans Music*, 4 (4): 9.

3. Special Request Books, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

4. Gene Miller, ‘Foreword’, in Bill Bissonnette, *The Jazz Crusade*, 1992: xv-xvi at p. xvi.

5. Bill Bissonnette, *ibid.*, p 8.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-23.

8. ‘According to Barbara Reid, [Larry] Borenstein leased 726 St. Peter Street from “Beansie” Fauria, who leased it from an old lady who lived out of town. I never heard her name. [Allan] Jaffe sub-leased it from Borenstein. When both Beansie and Larry died, Jaffe bought it from whoever it was.’ Facebook comment, Clive Wilson to Richard Ekins, April 21, 2017. Joseph Edwin “Beansie” Fauria died in 1975. Larry Borenstein died in 1981.

9. Emile Barnes is very often called by his abbreviated / nickname but spelt differently by different people.

10. Ken Mills, ‘Text’, Frank Goudie, 1991, *American Music*, AMCD-50, p. 5: ‘When I’d gotten back from New Orleans in July, with my tapes of Kid Punch, Paul Barnes, Kid Thomas and John Handy we had an audition at my pad in the Tenderloin . . . ‘

11. Sam Charters, *Jazz New Orleans, 1885-1963*, 1963, Oak Publications, New York, p. 110b: ‘then in February 1962, Mills opened up his second hall, Icon Hall or Perserverance [sic] Hall, on St. Louis Street.’

12. Around this period Per Oldaeus and the late Håkan Håkansson were researching for a book on Ken Mills. Later, when the book did not come to fruition, Per generously passed on much of his Mills’ material to me.

13. Dan Pawson, *New Orleans Music*, 7 (4): 24-25.
14. In an email of February 28, 2017, Bissonnette corrected this date and wrote to me: ‘My stay would have been from early March to middle or late May’, which tallies with the three months’ letting of the apartment mentioned in his published account above.
15. This never took place.
16. Curt Davis, in charge of visual arts for National Educational Television.
17. ‘Revel’ is added in pencil.
18. Samuel B. Charters, *Jazz New Orleans, 1885-1963: An Index to the Negro Musicians of New Orleans*, 1963, Oak Publications, New York, p. 110.
19. Tom Stagg and Charlie Crump, *New Orleans, The Revival: A Tape and Discography of Negro Traditional Jazz Recorded in New Orleans or by New Orleans Bands 1937-1972*, Bashall Eaves, Dublin.
20. Richard Ekins, ‘Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and the Mike Dine/504 Records Connection’, *Just Jazz*, No. 227, March 2017, pp. 26-32 at pp. 27-28.
21. See this chapter, note 1.
22. Barry Martyn, ‘The “Icon” Reissue Project: Listing Compiled by Barry Martyn and Mike Hazeldine’, *New Orleans Music*, 3 (3): 19-24 at p. 24.
23. Per Oldaeus, ‘734 Saint Louis Street 1962 and Various Information on the Musicians Who Played There’, unpublished paper, 2003.
24. Mike Hazeldine (compiler and editor), *Bill Russell’s American Music*, Jazzology Press, New Orleans, 1993: 58.
25. Samuel B. Charters, op. cit.
26. *Eureka Brass Band*, Atlantic 1408; *Billie and DeDe Pierce/Jim Robinson’s New Orleans Band*, Atlantic 1409; *Paul Barbarin and his Jazz Band/Punch Miller’s Bunch and George Lewis*, Atlantic 1410; *George Lewis and his New Orleans Band*, Atlantic 1411. According to Chris Albertson, it was Nesuhi Ertegun’s listening to tapes of the Riverside ‘Living Legends’ sessions that led directly to the London Atlantic recordings. [See: http://stomp-off.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/new-orleans-1961.html](http://stomp-off.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/new-orleans-1961.html). Ken Grayson Mills had other fish to fry. Mills (for Icon) emphasised origins; Herb Friedwald (for Riverside) emphasised futures. See: Barry Martyn and Mike Hazeldine, ‘An Interview with Herb Friedwald, Part 2’, *New Orleans Music*, 2 (6): 6-15.



# CHAPTER 9

Mills on Mills and Icon  
Records: The Letters  
of Ken Grayson Mills to  
Alan Solman

*August 2017*



## Chapter 9

While much of the material so far published drew heavily on previously available information, albeit often in very obscure and out of the way places, the next phase of the project drew on material totally unknown to all but the very few enthusiasts and collectors entrusted with it. Its impact for Mills' studies was immense.

It was Per Oldaeus who entrusted me with the letters of Ken Grayson Mills to Alan Solman covering the period January 1962 to June 1969. As I wrote in the article, 'Solman's appreciation (of Mills and what he was trying to do) enabled Mills to open up in a way that provides a unique insight into this "unknown man".'

I was unable to track down what had happened to Solman's letters to Mills. Presumably, like most of the material held by Mills when he died, they were thrown out by his family and incinerated or buried as waste.

However, thanks to the addresses provided in the correspondence, I was able to contact Alan's wife Vera Solman, who provided me with the material I used to conclude the article.

As I note, it was significant that Solman's interest in the music had started as a 16-year-old in 1942, the year of the release of Bunk Johnson's Jazzman session that launched the New Orleans Revival of the 1940s and 50s. And it was Solman who had part-funded Barry Martyn's first visit to New Orleans in 1961, which would lead to the launching of his MONO records that played such an important role in the launch of the second wave revivalism of the 1960s, following Ken Mills' initial efforts.

## **Mills on Mills and Icon Records: The Letters of Ken Grayson Mills to Alan Solman<sup>1</sup>**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, August 2017

I concluded my first series of five preliminary articles<sup>2</sup> - six, including the introductory 'Announcement' – on the contribution of Ken Grayson Mills to second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism (1960-1976) with the following comments:

In many ways Mills remains an unknown man . . . Barry Martyn has noted that Ken Mills had been writing a book on New Orleans music, to be called *Penance & Absolution*.<sup>3</sup> I have no way of knowing how far Mills had progressed with this project. I know nothing of what happened to his personal effects, his unpublished writings or, if such there were, his 'unknown' recordings. Perhaps they perished with him.

No sooner had I completed this first series of articles, than I received from Per Oldaeus a second cache of information on Mills. This included valuable material, in particular a number of letters Mills had written between January 1962 and June 1969 to an English New Orleans jazz enthusiast and record collector who had taken a particular liking to Ken Mills' Icon project.

The enthusiast was Alan Solman who, at the time of the correspondence, lived in Pinner (1954-1964) and Amersham (1964-1988) in England.

I do not have his letters to Mills,<sup>4</sup> but the letters from Mills make it abundantly clear that Mills felt Solman was one of the very few people who understood what Mills and Icon Records were all about. Solman's appreciation enabled Mills to open up in a way that provides a unique insight into this 'unknown man'.

Hopefully, the present article will lead others to share each and every bit of Mills memorabilia they may possess.<sup>5</sup>

Often, I find myself wondering why  
the La Vida wasn't further explored.  
GHS doesn't really seem to be based for  
indiscriminately encouraging precedence, the  
division. But like everyone else, except  
Barry and myself, reflects the original. I  
imagine that if Riverside, Atlantic and GHS  
hadn't left me with so much to do, I  
could have explored the La Vida as Russell  
did Bunk Johnson. It was written in the  
fars when the world was created that the  
La Vida would play together. The band has  
that same eternal sound texture and so many  
nuances I keep hearing ~~new~~ <sup>new</sup> ~~new~~  
everytime I play the music. Gorman was  
the same sort of revelation that Lewis was  
only this time there weren't enough free  
people to create a music. The group

**Figure 9.1 ‘Often, I find myself wondering why the La Vida wasn’t further explored...’ - an excerpt from the fourth letter to Alan from Ken, August 25, 1964.**

**Photograph courtesy of Wendy Saunderson**

It should be remembered that Mills had been ousted from Preservation Hall just four months before his first letter to Solman. He was now back at his home in Brea, California, having completed much of the work on the releases and sales arising from his second trip to New Orleans, from May to September 1961. The following month – February – he was due to return to New Orleans for his third and final visit. He may well have been apprehensive about how he would be received in New Orleans. Would Larry Borenstein cause him further misfortune? Solman’s sensitive appreciation of Mills’ project must have both heartened and fortified him.

The first letter to Solman is dated January 10, 1962, and sets the tone for the correspondence that will follow. I reproduce it in its entirety, as I do with all the letters except the last sixth letter that is lightly edited. In this first letter Mills gives us valuable insight regarding the sound quality he sought, the repertory he was developing, his release plans, and his emerging view of the legacy that he would leave behind. In particular, Mills makes crystal clear his overriding objective to make Icon Records ‘an extension’ of Bill Russell’s American Music records.

Dear Alan

I was to-day in receipt of your wonderful letter. I am at a loss as to how to answer except to express my sincere thanks for your taking the time to send such gladly received encouragement.

There were things in addition to consolation which did my heart good to read. For instance, your opinion that No’s 1 and 2<sup>6</sup> were beautifully engineered. I have been severely criticised for the quality of sound on my discs, and will continue to be criticised, for my sole aim is to represent New Orleans music on wax exactly as it sounds to me in person, at the time of the session. People don’t want the actual sound, I guess. Bill [Russell] used to get it over the head for doing the same thing.

It is my aim to make them an extension of the A.M.’s and I hope to have the ability to maintain this objective. So far so good, but the pressures are tremendous. Everyone has their own idea, and they’re unabashedly vociferous about it. All I can do is keep my ear open, and my objectives in mind, and plow onward.

It is easier said than done, this matter of repertory. They haven’t played those numbers in years, but Howard and Charlie Love were re-educating them last summer and I should be able to get plenty of fresh title material. Punch did a wonderful ‘West Indies Blues’ which will be on the Storyville ICON series, if I can come to terms with them.<sup>7</sup> Howard did ‘The Three Six’s’ (Chris Kelly) and ‘Indian Sau Wua’,<sup>8</sup> and Charlie Love and Emile Barnes did ‘Black Bottom Stomp’, ‘Mama’s Baby Boy’,<sup>9</sup> and so forth. Thus far, I have tried to get them to wax this material all along and hope to be more successful as the series wears on.

I have no idea what 1963 will have to offer, but I will come out with

an LP once every three months this year. The Paul Barnes release will be out in February, then Emile's, then Steve Angram, then Lawrence Dent.<sup>10</sup> Please don't worry about any loss of enthusiasm just hope that I am able to maintain the resources during the next three to five years. There is plenty of wonderful music to be recorded in the future, but nurturing fine documents is painstaking, and slow. I plan on nurturing a Sam Morgan style disc,<sup>11</sup> one based in the old Maple Leaf, and getting Charlie to complete the Red Book<sup>12</sup>

Am glad the Punch Miller record causes you to react as it does me.<sup>13</sup> It's a fantastic session that will be more and more appreciated as the days draw in. I would appreciate you keeping me posted on developments, generally, articles I should read, English releases I should hear, and so forth. Such help would be most welcome and appreciated. I find myself now embarrassed; also I told you I was at a loss to answer your letter. Again, all I can say is thanks.

Warmest regards,

Grayson Mills

The second letter follows over a year later, dated April 3, 1963. Mills has now been back from his third and last trip to New Orleans for some five months. Some of this letter takes on the more aggressive tone that is often associated with Mills' writing. We get a hint of Mills' hostility with what he refers to as 'the pilgrimoisie'.

While there is such a word as 'pilgrimize', 'pilgrimoisie' is a Mills coinage, presumably following Marx's coinage of 'the bourgeoisie'. Just as the bourgeoisie is the social order dominated by the so-called middle class, the pilgrimoisie – those New Orleans jazz enthusiasts who make pilgrimages to New Orleans – take on a dominating position within the social order of New Orleans jazz social worlds. Needless to say, Mills finds himself at odds with them, particularly in the case of this letter, with their veneration of George Lewis at the expense of other clarinet players. Of clarinet players, Mills championed Israel Gorman, in particular, but also Steve Angram, John Casimir and Lawrence Dent, among others.

As with the first letter, there is an emphasis on ‘Bill Russell’s technical tutelage’. ‘The ‘trick’ in getting ‘perfection’ is to eliminate all vestiges of a recording session about the proceedings. Once again, we see a similar preoccupation with ‘the truth’, with ‘authenticity’, with the ‘real thing’ as captured on record.

Dear Alan

So that you don’t think me a complete rude ass I’d better acknowledge your letter of February 13<sup>th</sup>.

Thank you for your many kind words. I agree with you 100%, but surely society would frown on one’s expressing his opinions on his own work, particularly if they resemble our feelings about Icon. Consequently, I just sit and fester when Riverside and the others botch things up. I once wrote an editorial indicating George Lewis was not the consummate manifestation of New Orleans jazz and I have since not been able to break bread with the pilgrimoisie. It hurts business to voice a cause, I now just go along my merry way, recording when I have the loot, writing when I feel something needs saying.

The Icon 7<sup>14</sup> is a great disc. Have you gotten the Howard-Burbank Icon 8?<sup>15</sup> The trick in getting ‘perfection’ is accumulated listening experience plus research and experimentation with the present artists. It requires knowledge, an ear, and Bill Russell’s technical tutelage, then, one has to resort to all manner of subterfuge to eliminate all vestiges of a recording session smell about the proceedings. What I aim for, is to put us outside a window where we are lucky enough to hear them playing inside, playing for themselves. That sounds hokey, but it produces results. Thanks for the J.J.’s last summer. Please write again. You make a person feel worthwhile.

All best wishes, Grayson

P.S. In the future (in the can, at present)

Have LP’s by Casimir; George Lewis w/ Thomas’ Emile Barnes/C. Love/ Doc Paulin; Kid Clayton; sampler;<sup>16</sup> I got L. Dent with John Henry McNeil; Howard exploring the Sam Morgan instrumentation and sound with a group of Morgan veterans. Want to do “Big Boy” Goudie and Andy Blakeney out here.<sup>17</sup>

The third letter is dated just under four months later – August 26, 1963.<sup>18</sup> Mills is now no longer actively engaged in documenting the music. He is, however, still in the process of releasing the final Icons. That he strove for and in considerable measure achieved his aim – the ‘real thing’ – is becoming a solace to him now. There is a tone of sadness, not to say despair, that he endured his difficult pioneering path feeling so alone and unsupported. First mention is made of the record producer who might justifiably be seen as Mills’ principal successor in ‘authenticity’: Barry Martyn.

Dear Alan

I am so sorry for being so impolite.

I won’t be in New Orleans when Barry [Martyn] hits there. I am certain I could be of no real use to him, excepting (perhaps) to lend moral support. He has his own opinions. He seems like a marvelous chap, from his letters. He has told me that he will hit the West Coast this time and I look forward to it. At that time I will discuss with him the prospect of a trade-lease arrangement, an Icon sampler for his Howard-Handy. With only enough in the can for 15 LP’s, I am not eager to lease surplus materials, most of which are as good or better than what has been issued.

Although I will continue to write on the subject, and record when music and finances permit, I am no longer actively engaged in documenting the New Orleans idiom. I’ve gone back to college and am working toward a teaching credential.

I am at nine (the Geo. L. just came out)<sup>19</sup> and hope for ten by late fall or Christmas (the Sam Morgan set) John Casimir, Clayton and Charlie<sup>20</sup> will come out in that succession.

I had a vision when I began, only partially realised. I met with stupidity from the clammy jazzoisie and inferiority complexes among the musicians. To get the real thing I had to be the prick, on occasion. Now that I look at it objectively, I see clearly that I’ve made a contribution. The series is a fine survey, as well as a pedantic library of the music’s last flowering. To be truthful, I don’t really give a shit what anyone thinks of me. It was a rich experience. And I learned much as I stumbled, clawed and crawled. Had I never got involved in pioneering Preservation Hall I might still have good health. But no matter. I listen to Gorman on ‘Shake It’ or Howard on

‘Nelly Gray’<sup>21</sup> and I am serene. Incidentally, I have been told (since I began) that I am wrong, that I don’t know this music, that I was monkeying with musicians who were no good (Steve Angram, Eddie Summers, etc.)

I only wish you and Barry could have been through it. As it is, neither of you were, and I must be the semeio of that nightmare. I had no witnesses for what happened to my heart – only my metabolism.

I sound perfectly paranoid so I’d best close.

Warmest wishes

Grayson Mills



**Figure 9.2 Front cover over of the remastered Icon LP 4**

The fourth letter is dated almost exactly a year later, August 25, 1964. Mills has had more time to reflect on his experiences in New Orleans and this letter is, in many ways, the subtlest in its nuances regarding his recording project. Once again there is the same preoccupation with sound quality. Mills writes more expansively on what he may well have regarded as his best session – the Icon LP 4 Kid Howard La Vida Band. He makes explicit his warmth for Alan, who he feels is that rarity – someone who understands him and his project, unlike ‘the others’ who simply did not get it.

Dear Alan

Once again I find myself deeply grateful for your kindness. It is not that you have nothing to offer me but that I always find myself unable to muster up words I feel would be of interest to you.

I re-mastered #4 and it has good sound now. I'll eventually have #6 done.<sup>22</sup> I am glad you're pleased with the Sam Morgan (I'd be pleased to know the reaction to it in England, generally). I am now getting the sort of mastering that I had in mind from the beginning. Howard Hurtz<sup>23</sup> at Goodtime Jazz is the man responsible. He invents electronic improvements with the ease that we eat breakfast. He has said: "Shit, man, I have to be careful, my ears are my living," So now I relax. The John Casimir sets are out the first of next month. Included is a 'What A Friend We Have In Jesus' which even the mosquitoes stood still for. When I re-did #4, I included three new tracks – 'Clarinet Marmalade', 'When the Swallows Return to Capistrano', 'Closer Walk With Thee' – and dropped two – 'High Society', 'Londonderry Air'. So your copy of #4 is now a collector's item.

Often I find myself wondering why the La Vida wasn't further explored. GHB doesn't really deserve its ass kissed for indiscriminately encouraging precedence, the obvious. Buck, like everyone else, except Barry and myself, neglects the original. I imagine that if Riverside, Atlantic and GHB hadn't left me with so much to do, I could have explored the La Vida as Russell did Bunk Johnson. It was written in the stars when the world was created that the La Vida would play together. The band has that same eternal sound texture and so many nuances I keep hearing new universes everytime I play the record. Gorman was the same sort of revelation that Lewis was only this time there weren't enough free ears to promote a mystique. The group which grew up on a diet of George Lewis had masturbated over him so long and so exclusively that Handy, Gorman, Angrum and Polo didn't stand a chance. Please don't misconstrue this: I'm a bigot for anything that moves me and George moves me too. It's just that I can't see the stultifying stupidity that deprives one of ennobling, exciting experience.

Now and then I have run into pleasant surprises. KEZY, at the Disneyland Hotel, was spinning Icon 8<sup>24</sup> during the Sportsman's Show and piping the sound throughout the grounds simultaneous with their broadcast transmission. One of my girl friends tells the assemblage near the booth that she goes with the guy who went to N.O. and made the record. The other girls in the crowd call her lucky and give her the toothy glom. Another gent, an artist

clearly, confided to Don Brown at Jazz Man<sup>25</sup> that the Steve Angrum is one of the best records ever made. He had no idea who the cat (me) was, standing within earshot. So I agreed with him and we discussed Angrum at length.

I seldom get letters, let alone complimentary ones, so you can understand how I have a secret unspoken emotional carry on over yours. When I do get them, most do not go into the matter very deeply – just expressions such as ‘they’re the pride and joy of my collection,’ or ‘great stuff keep up the good work,’ or ‘refreshing in this world of commercial crap.’ I think everyone can tell Icon are in a class apart but few (as you do) know why. Even Icon’s detractors think Icon is especially shitty. Everyone (who goes into the art of New Orleans jazz deeply) is so deeply opinionated and hypersensitive that discussion on the matter is nearly impossible.

Those with whom I had to come in most frequent contact – Borenstein, the musicians, et. al., never did understand that I was conducting a documentary series, a calculated extension of the AM’s. They would advise me to spend my money on sure fire winners or technical acrobats like Cottrell and Willie Humphrey. I seemed intelligent, why was I wasting valuable monies on inferior subjects such as Israel Gorman and John Handy. I kept saying, ‘Man, I’m making a survey of New Orleans Jazz not tourist music. To me, Israel Gorman’s just as important as George Lewis.’ They finally decided I had the plague and I was left to conduct that last project (Icon 7 through 13)<sup>26</sup> un-molested. No one attended those sets but musicians and Englishmen. I was stubborn, single-minded and I have slow sales to prove it. I also have something over which I am proud.

In fact, it is not stupidity which consumes enthusiasm so much as it is slow sales. I have a horde of plans which will never be carried out.

Please write again. I don’t know if I even thanked you for the “J.J.’s,” but if not, I take this occasion to do so.

All best wishes

Ken

The fifth letter follows three weeks later and is dated September 12, 1964. In it Mills reiterates the importance of the amount of time spent in listening and experimenting involved in his recording sessions.

Now that Mills’ recording project in New Orleans is over, he finds himself turning to comment on the more recent recording work of Barry Martyn

(MONO Records) and Tom Bethell (San Jacinto Records).

Dear Alan

I don't believe I answered your recent letter so please accept my apologies for my bad manners. I find myself again deeply grateful for your kindness, and at a loss to reply.

Since the amount of listening and experimenting that went into the Icon sessions was staggering, I hastily concur with your discerning appraisals. But if what I achieved is worth anything you should have heard 'the fish that got away' – the high cost of union sessions (plus its great snout) plus the factor of death, severely curtailed my objectives. I think we could place great hope in Thomas Bethell, were he not George Lewis' queer, but he is. I cannot understand why I am the only one since Wykoff [Wyckoff] McGarrell, etc. who did things remotely right. I have never fully appreciated the stupidity of the New Orleans Jazzoise.

How is Barry [Martyn]'s last stuff? I have heard only what is on the 'Jazz Crusade' samples, and a couple of tracks are damned interesting. I think he could have sacked that other crap, used a more meaningful drummer and had a classic in his Howard-Handy session, doing enough for a 12" LP with the money saved from not doing the Sheik and Emile sets. I never could see that dull, plodding (heavy and insistent) beat of Joe [Watkin]'s, and it's gotten progressively worse over the years. His attack is a model of monotony. When I was living across the street from P-H [Preservation Hall] Jaffe was using him nightly. Jesus, it was bad. I do get letters but none in a class with yours. The others are 'grand work ol' boy' types. I got one from a Chas. Paine in Australia. To whit: 'As I am very interested in N.O. Jazz, I should be very pleased if you would send me some photographs of the jazz musicians of N.O.' For free, of course. But he did go on to say: 'Your record releases are very good and are giving the enthusiast a chance to listen to other musicians previously unheard of.' And doing most propitious tune materials in most propitious circumstances, if only he knew it.

No, Alan, it is but thou, so far, who has identified the full meaning of Icon (and I should add Warwick Reynolds and Norm Pierce (Jack's Record Cellar) Please write again, there's a new Casimir out.

Your friend

Ken Mills



**Figure 9.3 Front over of Tom Bethell's San Jacinto SJ 1**

The final (sixth) letter is dated June 28, 1969. By the mid-late 1960s, Mills had returned to his previous interest in R&B music. In early 1967 he had sold his Icon LP catalogue to George Buck, 'in a weak moment', as he puts it. In this letter, he is critical of aspects of certain recordings made by Tom Bethell and Barry Martyn. He writes of his saxophone playing and of his interest in R&B. I have edited this final letter in order to omit some of the more florid angry material and a number of Mills' more caustic criticisms of those (then young) white New Orleans-style musicians who are still alive today.<sup>27</sup> In my view, it is best to place the emphasis on Mills' comments on his own recordings and his praise of the American Music releases and the recordings of David Wyckoff, Alden Ashforth and Jim McGarrell. This is the tradition within which Mills situates his own aims, objectives and successes. Here, indeed, is the definitive canon of old-style New Orleans jazz – 'real New Orleans Jazz', according to Mills, within which he judges his own work.

Dear Alan

As a subterranean has-been, I hardly know what to say, except thanks. I should have known the real [underlined twice] Emile Barnes and Doc Paulin would stir you. Your letters are not flattering; they are acknowledgements, subjective test answers – they thrust their way clear into my soul. It is certainly regrettable that you never had the opportunity to document the New Orleans idiom.

Right now, I am listening to Elmo James wondering what sort of questions 24-year old zealots will be asking decrepit Wilson Pickett in 1992. Thank god for indigenous American folk music, contemporary – for all of it, from Picou through James Moody through King Curtis are like the ocean; the universe. Now and for all time. Questions they will be asked. Count on it. And ‘Revivals’ too.

Bad art is bad art and it seems incredible to me that my fellows should make such a botch of it. Like SJ [San Jacinto] no 1. ‘Collegiate’, wow. Bethell’s done it!!! 20 minutes later – Christ, Lewis is feeding the chickens and Howard’s constipated, striving, in the worse sense of the term. Martyn’s Kid Sheik-Handy is my favourite non-Icon session, along with his Howard-Handy. Too bad . . . The main problem is not finding a way to rejuvenate the artists he uses. Like the milieux of mid-twentieth century existing leaves them encrusted with barnacles, oxidation and corrosion. All this must be scraped off. None, not even a now cat, is infallible, perfect nor without need of creative curation. What they are in possession of is the skill for moulding and making beautiful art. But I needn’t harp on what is self-evident to everybody except the general run of session holders, the Preservation Hall in-group, and the public-at-large.

‘Howard,’ says I, after weeks of ostensibly demonstrating my affection and regard for him, person, and artist, ‘everybody in this band thinks Eddie’s<sup>28</sup> indispensable – so you’ll either have to give him a sufficient listening or we’ll call the whole fucking thing off.’ Things like that help in providing some of the groundwork for a good session. They were men and so was I – I drooled over only that which moved me, be it a smile, an aphorism, or a figuration or an ad infinitum. The only feet I sat at were those of my table, as I worked over the tapes. Not that I lacked enthusiasm – Casimir’s warbles or Angrum’s vicious screams into the night put me in a vortex of a tornado, heaven-bent, heaven sent. You know what I mean. God knows what my betters have been up to. Their sessions corroborate them not.

I hope you and your family are well and doing well. I am drudging it; also playing sax when I can. King Curtis, Willis Jackson, Joe Henderson bag. Neat mixture. I don't emulate. I absorb concepts, not ideas. No copying, a la Ian Wheeler, etc. Had I been brought up on their food, in their churches, in their social structure, none of this painstaking soul-searching, intellectualisation and translation would be necessary. I only know that I must move myself as they move me; that I must move [underscored three times] others. That I must cry, laugh, feel. That, ad nauseam.

In a weak moment, I sold to George Buck. Among my reasons was the fact that I was never able to keep anything in print – he is. But no reason really justifies the act. It was a moment of incredible stupidity. Mind you, he paid good money and is an honest, down-to-earth, nice, well-meaning fellow. He is allowing one full run of what is to be issued – will use my liners, etc. I will also write liners for his Negro NOJ [New Orleans Jazz] LPs.<sup>29</sup> See, we all get type-cast. Actually, I'd also like to write about the Beatles, Coleman Hawkins and Eric Dolphy. But all of us have to be bagged, cut off from the mainstream of reality and its manifestations.

I don't think you can expect much from the subsequent issues. The Alcorn – Robinson – Gorman's come see – come saw, but the DeDe Pierce and Charlie Love LPs<sup>30</sup> will be pretty neat. There will also be an issue of additional takes, such as Punch's 'West Indies Blues' and Paul Barnes 'Trouble in Mind'.<sup>31</sup> And Icon alternates were alternates, fortunately.

I have always been amazed at your perception. There is a feeling about the first Punch, Thomas, Angrum & Howard<sup>32</sup> which is totally missing everywhere afterwards. [Mills adds in the margin: 'same feeling as found on AM and on Wykoff [Wyckoff], Ashford and McGarrell sessions']. Preservation Hall, its techisation and taste, obliterated the real feel of real NOJ. This 'feeling' is also found on the Paulin session.<sup>33</sup> There was, however, good, fiercely swinging, often beautiful jazz to be had as Icons 7-12 prove. Only Bethell and the others were too involved with being gapús, with insanely ascribing non-existent mystical virtues to San Jacinto Hall. As if a mere inorganic structure could do their work for them. And they couldn't tell stale George Lewis from fresh George Lewis. . . . Please write again and know how grateful I am for your kind words. And send a JAZZ JOURNAL or two.

All best wishes, Ken



**Figure 9.4** Eddie Dawson (bass), Kid Howard (trumpet), Albert Burbank (clarinet) and George Guesnon (banjo), at the recording session for Icon LP 8, Jeunes Amis Hall, September 4, 1962.

Photograph by Eric J. Brown, courtesy of Per Oldaeus

## **Alan Solman: A Biographical Note**

Alan Solman was born in England in 1926. His interest in New Orleans jazz surfaced as a 16-year-old in 1942, the year of the Bunk Johnson Jazz Man sessions, and never wavered. While at school he played the washboard and combs in a band that included the bass player Micky Ashman.

As an 18-year-old, he was conscripted into the army and went to India, based initially in Delhi, being there at the time of partitioning. After some haggling he was sent to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and joined the British Forces radio station, from where he broadcast jazz programmes. The radio station in Ceylon was Radio SEAC (South East Asia Command). Alan was one of the sponsors for Barry Martyn's first visit to New Orleans in 1961.

Alan realised his ambition and reached New Orleans in the 1970s, subsequently making many visits. He died in 2008. His widow, Vera, scattered some of his ashes in the garden at St. Louis Cathedral, New Orleans.

Vera adds: 'It grieves me to say that I cannot really enlighten you with regard to Alan's interest in Icon and his association with Ken Mills. All I can say is that he was passionate about New Orleans jazz and followed any leads which would increase his knowledge and further his interest.'



**Figure 9.5 Alan Solman courtesy of Vera Solman**

## NOTES

1. I thank Vera Solman for providing me with biographical details of her late husband. I am very grateful to Per Oldaeus for sending me the six letters that he received courtesy of Alan Solman and for providing me with the previously unpublished photo of Eddie Dawson, courtesy of the late Eric J. Brown. Fred Eatherton continues as my principal collaborator on the Ken Grayson Mills project. Finally, I thank Charlie Crump, Wendy Saunderson, Matthew Ekins, Peter Haby and Paige VanVorst for their contributions to this article.

2. *Just Jazz*, Nos. 224-227, December 2016 – March 2017 and No. 229, May 2017.

3. Barry Martyn, 'Booklet Notes', *John Handy - The Very First Recordings*, AMCD-51, p. 2. Later, there were reports of Jazzology Press publishing a book by Mills entitled *Endless the Search, Endless the Trek*, with the subtitle *The Real World of the Real Music in America*. See: for example, Jim Leigh, 'West Coasting', *The Mississippi Rag*, December 1999, 27 (2): 9. No such book was ever published.

4. According to Vera Solman, her husband did not keep copies of the personal letters that he wrote.

5. Please email the author at [lacroixrecords@gmail.com](mailto:lacroixrecords@gmail.com).

6. The context makes it clear that Mills is referring to Icon LP2 and 3. These were Vols. 1 and 2 in the Icon 'Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower' series, respectively the *Kid Punch – 1960* and *Kid Thomas – Sonnets from Algiers* releases.

7. This deal did not materialise. An Icon anthology did appear on Chris Strachwitz's Arhoolie label: *New Orleans Jazz at the Kitty Halls*, Arhoolie F1013. The 'West Indies Blues' from the Icon LP 2 session eventually appeared on *Punch Miller – 1960*, American Music, AMCD-52.

8. The Three Six's appear on two pressings of Icon LP4 – *Kid Howard's La Vida Band*. 'Indian Sau Wua' appears on the first pressing only.

9. 'Black Bottom' (correct title) was issued on the LP *New Orleans Rarities, No. 2* (Tony's Turntable). 'Mama's Baby Boy' is listed as 'Mammies Darling Boy', August 1960, in Staggs and Crump, p. 196, and has never been released.

10. Paul Barnes, Icon LP 5; Steve Angram, Icon LP 6. Mills never released the Emile Barnes and Lawrence Dent sessions he is referring to. In the event, he gave priority to his September 1962 Jeunes Amis Hall recordings, Icon 7-12. Part of Mills' Lawrence Dent session (with John Henry McNeil's Crescent City Crystals), recorded on August 12, 1962, was eventually issued, in 2001, on American Music,

AMCD-67. No acknowledgement was given to Ken Mills or Icon Records – yet another example of the ‘erasing’ of Mills’ contribution.

11. Icon LP 10.

12. Early on, Mills had slated as Icon LP 4 *The Red Backed Book of Rags* – Charlie Love - Albert Jiles Ragtime Orch. See: Grayson Mills, ‘New Orleans Music: Root, Bone and Marrow, – A Report on Icon Records’ Objectives and Realities’, *Jazz Report*, 1960, 1 (4): 11-12 at p. 12. This LP never materialised.

13. Icon LP 2.

14. Punch’s Delegates of Pleasure: *The River’s in Morning* featuring Israel Gorman.

15. Kid Howard’s Olympia Band: *The Heart and Bowels of N.O. Jazz* featuring Albert Burbank.

16. Icon LP 11 – John Casimir’s Tuxedo Jazz Bands: *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow*; Icon LP 9 – George Lewis: *Endless the Trek Endless the Search*; the Emile Barnes/C. Love referred to was not released by Mills; the Doc Paulin was released as Icon LP 13 – Emile Barnes with Doc Paulin’s N.O.L.A Band; Icon LP 12 – Kid Clayton’s Happy Pals: *The Exit Stares*; on the sampler, see note 7.

17. The Laurence Dent with John Henry McNeil session was not issued on Icon, see note 10; Icon LP 10 – Kid Howard’s New Orleans Band: *Sam Morgan Re-Visited*; the Goudie/Blakeney session never materialised.

18. This letter is the only one that makes a reference to the envelope contents sent with the letter. Mills writes in the margin of the first page: ‘The enclosed slides are yours.’ I have not been able to trace these slides.

19. See this chapter, note 16.

20. See this chapter, notes 16 and 17. ‘Charlie [Love]’ would logically have been Icon LP 13 which was Emile Barnes with Doc Paulin. Mills may be referring to the Love-Jiles *Red Book* recording which did not materialise. At this time, Mills had in his possession other unissued material which featured Love, such as the material eventually released in 1993 on 504 CDS 21 as *Kid Sheik with Charlie Love and His Cado Jazz Band 1960*.

21. Presumably, this is the ‘Shake It and Break It’ from the Punch Miller Icon LP7 session on Arhoolie F1013. ‘Nelly Gray’ from the Kid Howard LP 4 session is also on Arhoolie F1013.

22. Icon LP 6 – Steve Angrum with Kid Sheik’s Storyville Ramblers: *Last Testament of Steve Angrum*.

23. According to Fred Eatherton, Howard may have been called ‘Hurtz’ as a nickname but he was actually Howard Holzer. He recorded a number of groups for Good Time Jazz, e.g. Firehouse 5. Later, it seems, Mills used Cecil Spiller at Goodtime Jazz. Mike Dine visited Spiller with Ken Mills in 1990. Charlie Crump adds: ‘All we have to go on in regard to Spiller is what Mike Dine has told us after his visit to Mills in California. It would appear that Mills was searching for the best possible engineer to transfer his Icon tapes for issues to come and possible represses. Howard Hurtz would make sense if he was cutting the Good Time Jazz masters as it appears that he was followed by Cecil Spiller, who also did some cutting for G.T.J. At the time of Mike’s visits in 1989 and 1990 Spiller was probably the most highly regarded independent engineer in that West Coast area and I would guess was a logical follow-on to Hurtz. I know that he did a lot of the all-star recordings at places like the Shrine Auditorium, Sinatra, etc., as well as jazz concerts and it is therefore logical that Mills would gravitate towards him to do his cutting.’

24. Kid Howard’s Olympia Band. KEZY was a popular radio station based in Anaheim.

25. Don Brown was the last owner of the Jazz Man Record Shop, from 1959 to 1984.

26. All recorded at Jeunes Amis Hall, 1477 N. Robertson Street, New Orleans, except Icon LP 13 (Emile Barnes/Doc Paulin) which was recorded at Perseverance (Icon) Hall. I will explore ‘that last project’ in a forthcoming article.

27. This is not the time, nor the place, to publish such comments. Future New Orleans jazz historians might ask such questions as: Did a number of the young white enthusiasts of the music record themselves with the old-style musicians too soon, too often and in too greater numbers for the longer-term maintenance and recording of ‘authentic’ old-style New Orleans music? To what extent did they revitalise the music? To what extent did they dilute it? It should be said, however, that Mills was very favourably disposed towards the private recording he made (with Warwick Reynolds) of Israel Gorman with the two English musicians – Jim Holmes and John Coles – in Gorman’s kitchen at his home on October 6, 1962.

28. The bass player, Eddie Dawson, who played on the celebrated Barnes-Bocage Big Five session in 1954 and on Icon LP 8 – *‘Kid’ Howards’ Olympia Band, 1962*. Dawson is sometimes said to have been King Oliver’s favourite bass player. See: Dave Griffiths, *Hot Jazz From Harlem to Storyville*, 1998, Scarecrow Press, Lanham Maryland, pp. 71-73.

29. Mills wrote the liner notes for some of Buck’s R&B issues.

30. Some of the DeDe Pierce material came out on Jazzology JCE-25.

31. On 'West Indies Blues', see this chapter, footnote 17. 'Trouble in Mind 13.7.1960', appears on Paul Barnes and his Polo Players, American Music, AMCD-55.
32. Icon LPs 2, 3, 4 and 6.
33. First issued on Jazzology JCE-23 with Icon LP 13 cover.

A black and white photograph of a building's entrance. The building has a balcony with a decorative metal railing on the upper level. The ground floor features several doorways. On the left, a white door is open, revealing a diamond-shaped window. In the center, another white door is open, showing a multi-paned window and a mesh screen. To the right, a dark doorway is visible, with a sunburst pattern above it. The number '126' is visible on a pillar to the right of the central doorway. The overall scene is somewhat dimly lit, suggesting an overcast day or a shaded area.

# CHAPTER 10

George Lewis at Home:  
George Lewis, Barbara Reid  
and the Photographs  
of Lyle Bong



## Chapter 10

At the time Mills sold the vast majority of his unissued material to George Buck of GHB/Jazzology records, Buck had engaged Barry Martyn to produce an American Music series of CDs which would eventually grow to over 140 releases.<sup>1</sup>

First, Martyn focused on releasing Bill Russell's original American Music material. After two CDs featuring the Kid Ory band of the 1940s, Martyn moved on to issue fourteen CDs in the George Lewis Band Oxford Series. A miscellany of other material followed until by AMCD-50 Barry was ready to issue the Ken Grayson Mills Icon recordings. At around this time, George Buck sent Mills gratis around two dozen CDs. Mills decided to review some of them and sent his review article to George Buck who eventually passed it on to Paige VanVorst, editor of the Buck in-house newsletter, *Jazzology*.

For whatever reason, Mills' article lay forgotten in a drawer until Paige sent it to me. The value of this article for a book primarily on the Genesis and Exodus of Preservation Hall is that it sets Mills' contributions very explicitly in the context of his view of the way second-wave New Orleans jazz revivalism should proceed, building on the work of the sessions he reviews when they come from an earlier period and indicating his preferred direction for the new work.

### **The New Orleans 'Jazzology' of Ken Grayson Mills: Mills on George H. Buck's American Music CDs<sup>2</sup>**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, September 2017

#### **Preamble**

When I was completing my article on Ken Grayson Mills and Perseverance (Icon) Hall with its related reminiscence from Bill Bissonnette,<sup>3</sup> I approached Bill for some suitable visuals to accompany the article. He wrote to me:

Now I am going to break your heart. I took 8mm silent movies at Icon Hall which featured Big Jim, Kid Sheik and some of George Lewis standing outside the hall among others including Ken himself. When I moved from Connecticut to North Carolina I broke my arm when packing up my jazz stuff so I had two teenagers finish packing up that stuff. They somehow overlooked the box in which I had all of my jazz photos and that film. By the time they got my stuff to me in NC and I realized that the box was gone, I immediately phoned the guy who bought my CT house and he told me he had emptied everything left in the house and sent it to the dump to be burned. So the film and hundreds of valuable photos no longer exist.<sup>4</sup>

At this time, I had located only a handful of photographs of Ken Mills and none of him at Perseverance (Icon) Hall. Bissonnette's email somehow seemed like a metaphor for the erasing of thoughts, memories and feelings about Mills within New Orleans jazz social worlds and his relegation to 'hidden history' in jazz historiography and contemporary jazz studies.

However, as my grandfather would have said, when one door closes another opens. Such it was when, within the space of a couple of weeks, I received a cache of Mills material from Per Oldaeus. This included a diary and photographs of Eric J. Brown's visit to New Orleans in September 1962. The material featured Perseverance (Icon) Hall prominently and, indeed, included an exceptionally good photo of Mills standing outside the Hall. A week or so later I received three unpublished handwritten Mills papers that Paige VanVorst of the George H. Buck Jr. Jazz Foundation had left, mislaid and forgotten, for some two decades. Amongst the gems in this rediscovered material was a review article by Mills that he had entitled 'A Review of Some Early AMCD Releases by Ken Mills New Orleans Jazzologist'. Mills added to the title page: 'Dedicated to the warm generosity of George H. Buck who mailed – gratis – a little more than two dozen AMCDs.'

I was intrigued that Mills called himself a 'New Orleans Jazzologist'. Was he being ironic? George Buck gave the umbrella name of 'Jazzology' to his family of labels. When Ken Mills sold his Icon vinyl LP issues to Buck in the late 1960s, Buck issued them all as a series on his Jazzology label, as

Jazzology JCE – 10-23.<sup>5</sup> New Orleans jazz critic Robert Greenwood adds:

I think that Mills was being flippant in his self-description as a ‘New Orleans Jazzologist’. I guess that when he described himself as such, jazz, especially contemporary New Orleans jazz, had no academic standing, although the term could be used nowadays to deflate and satirise the over-academic approach pursued by some.<sup>6</sup>

### **Bill Russell, Ken Mills and American Music**

Above all else, Ken Mills saw himself as continuing where Bill Russell left off and I have argued this in previous articles in the series. This is not the place to provide the record release history of Bill Russell’s recordings for his American Music label. Suffice it to say that the label came to represent the ‘gold standard’ of 1940s New Orleans revivalist jazz and that with the advent of the CD Russell sold his catalogue to George H. Buck. Buck acquired the American Music name and embarked on a CD issue programme produced by Barry Martyn.

In due time, the decision was made to move the label from its original ‘orange label’ series, presenting the original American Music recordings, to its ‘blue series’, featuring ‘authentic’ New Orleans jazz that could be said to follow in the Bill Russell tradition. Ken Mills’ Icon Records was accorded that status and AMCD-50 launched the ‘The Icon Project’.<sup>7</sup> Following the sale of Mills’ material to Buck, the latter must have sent ‘a little more than two dozen [different] AMCDs’ to Mills as a gesture of goodwill. We can presume this from Mills’ comment on the title page of the relevant typescript quoted above.

Paige VanVorst gave me Mills’ typescript, which reviews ‘some early AMCD releases’. According to VanVorst, the manuscript was originally given to George Buck by Mills. Mills had written the reviews because ‘he was so grateful’ to have received free copies of the CDs. Whatever the motivation, the series of reviews – of four single volume CDs and one double volume CD – provides a fascinating insight into Mills’ ‘Jazzology’. It is a jazzology

that is part jazz criticism, part eulogy, part auto-ethnography and life history, part jazz historiography and part musicology.

**Bunk's Brass Band and Dance Band [1945 Sessions]  
(American Music AMCD-6)**



**Figure 10.1 Booklet front cover, American Music AMCD-6**

The American Music label is now billed as ‘the label to go to for the documentation of **authentic New Orleans jazz** by the legendary pioneers of the form. With greats such as Lizzie Miles, Bunk Johnson, George Lewis, Jim Robinson, Kid Ory, Baby Dodds, Leadbelly, Raymond Burke, Kid Thomas, Kid Howard, Alvin Alcorn, Punch Miller, Kid Sheik, Billie & De De Pierce, etc.’<sup>8</sup>

Of the first fifteen AMCDs, Bunk Johnson’s Band as recorded in New Orleans was showcased on six. It was only to be expected that Mills would select his first review from one of these. Given that AMCD-6 offered Mills the only chance to consider both Bunk’s Brass band and his Dance Band in one review, his selection was particularly appropriate. In light of the

review that follows, it should be noted that Bill Russell makes reference to saxophones in his comment on the Brass Band in the booklet notes that accompany the release.

When Bunk was facetiously asked if he needed a couple of saxophones in his brass band (like all the ‘modern’ New Orleans bands) he was insulted. Knowing Bunk’s concept of beautiful tone, it’s not surprising that he couldn’t stand the sound of saxophones, although he had to double on alto sax one season at the Houston American Theatre, and ‘played the hell out of it.’<sup>9</sup>

And to ‘echo’ in his section on Bunk – 1945 (Dance Band):

In May 1945, San Jacinto Hall, where Bunk’s band recorded the previous year, was not available for rental. When the empty Artesian Hall was used with Wooden Joe’s band it seemed to be a little too alive with its echo. Within a few years recording with echo became somewhat fashionable. For instance, in the early 1950s, when Columbia recorded in their Chicago Wrigley Building studio, they would replay and record their tapes in a 10-story stairwell to obtain an echo. Anyway, a doubtful decision was made to record Bunk’s band under rather cramped conditions in George Lewis’ home.<sup>10</sup>

I reproduce Mills’ review in its entirety, as I do with all the reviews.

**Ken Grayson Mills:**

This is a manifestation of a 1920s funeral and parade band. As a child of oral culture New Orleans Jazz has total recall. Every aspect of ‘second line’ rhythm is present – 6/8s, 4/4 w/accnt on 2 & 4, irregularities such as cross rhythms, anticipations and delays. There are not enough dirges, a high art form in black New Orleans. ‘Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross’, ‘What a Friend I Have in Jesus’, etc.

Bunk’s concern with good tone does not automatically dismiss the sound of a saxophone. How else would you explain the beauty of such tones as Emanuel Paul’s, John Handy’s, Paul Barnes’, Ben Webster’s and Earl Bostic’s . . . ad infinitum? Clarence Ford.

The notes by Bill Russell are wonderful and a combination of these plus Jelly Roll and Bunk’s recollections, plus Charles Edward Smith’s liners for the Eureka Brass Band Paradox LP (Alden Ashforth & David Wyckoff) summarize the entire funeral and parade art form.

Of interest is a modern LP recorded live at the 5-4 Ballroom in LA by the immortal Little Richard. The extensive take is called 'Do You Feel It' and it produces ecstasy in its irresistible mounting, throbbing second line rhythm. It is a righteous, symbolic parallel to the similarity of social role shared by rhythm and blues and black New Orleans Jazz. Before Little Richard clicked in Houston with Peacock Records, he worked at the Dewdrop Inn as a dishwasher, waiter and cleanup man. He even did a tribute to the Dewdrop in a recording called 'Down at the Dewdrop Inn' for Reprise records. His finest work, like 'Jenny, Jenny, Jenny', 'Long Tall Sally' etc. was recorded with New Orleans musicians in New Orleans.

DANCE BAND. The only benefit of recording in a studio is to keep the 'noise' from escaping into the neighbourhood. The multiple mics and the associated use of mixers produce an unnatural product that is the result of meddling and manipulation. The musicians – even with earphones – cannot really sense each other and in 'playing together' rhythmic and sonorous music requires dynamics and feeding off each other. Kitchens, such as used here, are fine. Any place where life is captured in the unfettered act of recurrence.<sup>11</sup>

All this is by way of addressing the magnificent swing and liveliness of the Bunk 1945 session. It has more zest and indigenous charm than the 1944 takes at the San Jacinto Hall – although not the aesthetic, reflective beauty and artistry which characterizes the earlier 'canvases'.

George Lewis is at the top of his game during 'Swanee River'.

The fidelity, although somewhat harsh, is more precise and George, Lawrence Marrero and Baby Dodds are in better focus. Bunk seems more confident in his assertions, bolder and hotter although his tone is less mellow.

The tune selections are refreshing and the solos and ensemble all alive with creativity and shifting dynamics.

The ensembles are outstanding renditions of New Orleans Jazz heterophony. Man do they swing during 'All the Whores Like the Way I Ride.'

## **Kid Howard's La Vida Band (American Music AMCD-54)**

This is the first Mills review of a CD of his own Icon material. As I have made clear in previous *Just Jazz* articles, he probably regarded this session as his most important. Back in 1961, Mills had reviewed the vinyl release of this session on Icon LP 4 in glowing terms.<sup>12</sup> In a letter to Alan Solman, he wrote:

Often, I find myself wondering why the La Vida wasn't further explored. GHB doesn't really deserve its ass kissed for indiscriminately encouraging precedence, the obvious. Buck, like everyone else, except Barry [Martyn] and myself, neglects the original. I imagine that if Riverside, Atlantic and GHB hadn't left me with so much to do, I could have explored the La Vida as Russell did Bunk Johnson.<sup>13</sup>

It should come as no surprise, then, that this review follows hot on the heels of his review of the Bunk Johnson CD. For Mills:

It was written in the stars when the world was created that the La Vida would play together. The band has that same eternal sound texture and so many nuances I keep hearing new universes everytime I play the record.<sup>14</sup>

In particular, reviewing a CD of this band enables Mills to extol the virtues of a revitalized Kid Howard and to champion the grossly underrated Israel Gorman and Ed Summers.

### **Ken Grayson Mills:**

. . . *"Naturally they all play independent parts, it's just that each is conscious of and contributes to the exposition of the tune."* . . .

W. R. [William Russell]

Never was the New Orleans *modus operandi* more resplendent. From the first sound of 'Over in the Gloryland' to the final reverberation of Cie Frazier's cymbal ('Nelly Gray') the sessions are transfixing and impeccable.

I always was puzzled – in listening to the George Lewis band LPs – where the Kid Howard of the electrifying Climax session disappeared. It didn't make sense that such a dramatic power house and blues player could become so demure and deferential.

After Preservation Hall opened, Kid Sheik dropped in to hear the band. I took a double take. My God, it was Kid Howard. Sheik said, smiling, 'Look who I've got here.' I asked Howard if he was in shape and wanted to play. Well, that's why he came.

After Howard almost died of cirrhosis of the liver he convalesced at Mercy Hospital. Sheik sat by his side constantly, bringing their horns and the two would play. Gradually, Howard's lip came back.

When I heard him play with a pickup band I put together for Emile Barnes, I was astonished by the beauty of his tone. It was better than Bunk's. His climax vituperativeness returned with the La Vida and John Casimir's Young Tuxedo Jazz Band (No. 2).

I knew the La Vida would be good because once I heard musicians could play I could 'hear' units in my mind. I had no idea of how fantastic Eddie Summers could be.

Thanks to Alden Ashforth's sound rectification the band is captured in essence, just as it was 'trapped' by Bill Russell's Stephens condenser mic at Royal and Ursuline Streets.

#### NOTE

The wonderful versions of 'When the Swallows Return to Capistrano' and 'Danny Boy' are Preservation Hall routines ventured by Israel Gorman. One night Louis Nelson was visiting and Israel was playing 'Mickey'. Emanuel Sayles turned his head to the right, kept strumming his banjo, looked at Louis and asked, "Recognize that Nelson? Sidney Desvigne."

\* \* \*

In late June of 1961, after he and Charlie DeVore returned north, David Phankuchen<sup>15</sup> wrote me a letter praising the Preservation Hall project. He warned me to stop using Steve Angrum and Israel Gorman because 'they ruin any band they played with.'

In Israel's particular case I didn't agree with Phankuchen and neither did Wooden Joe and the S.S. Camelia, Punch Miller, Chris Kelly, Lee Collins, Louis Dumaine, Kid Howard or Kid Thomas. During the *River's in Mourning*<sup>16</sup> session at Jeunes-Amis Hall I said to Wilbert Tillman, 'Israel sounds good tonight.' Tillman replied, 'Beautiful.' The LP received 4 ½ stars in *DownBeat*.

Gorman had one of the most beautiful tones in the city's history. When he was doing his warm up exercise he sounded like a wood-thrush. He could also swing with volatility and lively, rhythmic imagination. He could call upon the delicacy and restraint of the older Creole style (as he does in 'See See Rider') or the unique accenting of Alphonse Picou, ('When My Dreamboat Comes Home'). His idol was Wade Whaley.

The performances of 'High Society' and 'Willie the Weeper' are the most powerful in the history of recorded New Orleans jazz.



**Figure 10.2 Booklet front cover, American Music AMCD-54**

### **The John Reid Collection (American Music AMCD-44)**

It is no surprise to me that Ken Mills picks this CD as his third American Music to review, given its rarity and historical importance. Bill Bissonnette has commented that of all the US 1960s record producers who ran their own independent New Orleans jazz record labels, it was only Ken Mills and Tom Bethell who had 'a sense of history'.<sup>17</sup> In the opening 'Announcement' on the CD we hear the voice of John Reid, friend and 'number one fan'<sup>18</sup> of Sidney Bechet:

These records were made in New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz. You will hear musicians who have been playing since the beginning of this century,

since jazz was born. A roll call of their names covers a majority of the first jazzmen who are still living and playing. [Paul] Barbarin, [Sidney] Bechet, [Walter] Decou, [George] Foster, [‘Big Eye’ Louis] Nelson, [Louis] Keppard and [Alphonse] Picou.

In the introduction to the ‘Talking Records’, Bechet introduces Reid: “He’s very much interested in our race and our music and he’s here to ask all of us a few questions. Take it John.” Reid focuses on asking the musicians about their ‘experiences’ and ‘remembrances’ in the ‘old days before 1900’, although most of the memories are from a few years later.

Following the ‘Announcement’ are nine tracks of a June 1944 band led by Peter Bocage which included ‘Big Eye’ Louis Nelson and Alphonse Picou on clarinets, with Sidney Bechet on piano for two tracks. Following the Talking Records are two piano tracks by Burnell Santiago who Alton Purnell referred to as ‘the best pianist he had ever heard anywhere.’<sup>19</sup> The CD concludes with various Sidney Bechet items including, as Barry Martyn puts it, ‘Yet another gem among gems’: a ‘duet with Baquet and his star pupil, Bechet. The lineage is apparent here, as it is with another of Baquet’s pupils, Emile Barnes.’<sup>20</sup>

Mills is very brief in his comment, as we shall see. He restricts himself to pointing out that the CD is the best Peter Bocage he has ever heard and that the CD indicates the results of the Creole musicians picking up ‘the Uptown black spirit’. He stresses the historical importance of the talking records without detailing the content of that material. This CD does not fit readily into well-worn ‘revivalist’ grooves.

The comments by former Dan Pawson’s Artesian Hall Stompers trombonist Dave Senior make the necessary relevant points:

As we know Dan was a big Bocage buff. Well, so am I. There is a session which stands out for me, namely the John Reid Collection 1940-1944 which to me represents a wonderful cross-section of sounds which define New Orleans music/jazz. There is one track ‘Olympia Rag’ (doesn’t have a trombone!) which I can’t stop listening to. If I had never heard this before

and someone then presented it to me with the story that it was an old cylinder recording that had just been discovered from around 1905 I would believe it. This is about as close as you could get to the sort of music that one might have heard at that time, in my opinion at least. It's about as close to the truth as you'll ever get. Forget the 'revival'. This beats it into a cocked hat. This number is on the list for my funeral (eventually).<sup>21</sup>

Little wonder, then, that Mills selected this CD to review. Mills is content to make the following brief comment:

**Ken Grayson Mills:**

I found this to be the best Peter Bocage I've ever heard. What a gem this documentary is. It sounds like Creoles who picked up the Uptown black spirit. The collection is of inestimable importance as all the memories of Emanuel Perez, Big Eye Louis and Willie Santiago. It makes me long for 'time travel'. Most intriguing is Willie's recounting of Freddie Keppard running off Buddy Bolden.



**Figure 10.3** Booklet front cover, American Music AMCD-44

## Alvin Alcorn's "Gay Paree Stompers" & Harrison Verret's Fern Dance Hall Band (American Music AMCD-65)



**Figure 10.4** Booklet front cover, American Music AMCD-65

Mills was a Californian. His interest in New Orleans jazz had first been piqued by hearing the Kid Ory band on the radio playing in Los Angeles.<sup>22</sup> However, in accordance with his preference for the ‘down home’ sounds of New Orleans to the slicker variants both in New Orleans and outside of New Orleans, Mills comments critically on Alvin Alcorn’s role in the ‘quasi-dixieland’ bands of Kid Ory’s Goodtime Jazz recordings. The session featured on this CD, in contrast, reveals the ‘true picture of Alcorn’s role in New Orleans jazz history.’ Here Alcorn is with the same band that he had played with before he went to California to join Ory. Moreover, it is a session illustrating two of the markers of ‘New Orleans style’ as set forth by Bill Russell: everyone is playing ‘for the benefit of the band’ and every instrument ‘is a rhythmic instrument’.

The Harrison Verret session features the entirely ‘down home’ sound that Mills was seeking when he established Preservation Hall.

The review of this session is important because here Mills makes it explicit that this band was one of ‘the stalwarts of the embryonic phase of Preservation Hall’s history.’ Indeed, he goes further: it is ‘Only this set of five [tracks] recorded live [that] captures the intrinsic spirit and basic nature of the music heard live in Preservation Hall in those early days.’ Albert Warner is in exceptional form.

**(a) Alvin Alcorn’s “Gay Paree Stompers”**

**Ken Grayson Mills:**

*“It is one of the more interesting of all the Icon sessions because it presents Alvin in a truly ‘down home’ setting.”*

B. M. [Barry Martyn]

And, it was about time, too. The Kid Ory quasi-Dixieland bands of Goodtime Jazz and the Bourbon Street Albert French sound never revealed the true picture of Alvin Alcorn’s role in New Orleans Jazz history. These performances are a revelation of his power, imagination and tone. The sound is superb and Jeunes Amis Hall supplements and serves the energy and beauty of the ensembles and solos.

In his notes Barry Martyn writes ‘Mills originally recorded this session as a recreation of that band (the Gay Paree Stompers) but due to financial problems it was never issued. Here it is at last in its entirety, showing a very strong and powerful Alcorn trumpet and a good ensemble.’ It took 35 years.

It was Alvin who told me this was the band he had when he left for California to join Ory.

Pianist Charlie Hamilton, whose intros sound like Buster Wilson on ‘Kid Ory Live at the Green Room’, plays some good solos despite an out-of-tune piano. It never occurred to me that a classy place like this would have a bad piano. Charlie pulled a miracle in coming through and his filler enhanced the ensembles. He has a very pleasing style, original imagination and sense of touch.

This is yet another fine presentation of what Bill Russell called ‘Playing together’. Jim Robinson sparkles. Every instrument is a ‘rhythmic instrument.’

## ***(b) Harrison Verret's Fern Hall Dance Band***

### **Ken Grayson Mills:**

Verret's band, Punch and His Bunch, Kid Howard's la Vida, John Casimir's Tuxedo Jazz Bands, Kid Sheik's Storyville Ramblers, Kid Thomas' Creole Jazz Band, Billie & DeDe Pierce (w/Emile Barnes and Albert Jiles) and Kid Clayton's Happy Pals were the stalwarts of the embryonic phase of Preservation Hall's history. Only this set of five recorded live captures the intrinsic spirit and basic nature of the music heard.

There was another live Hall session lost in the annals of time. George Lewis was with Punch in the 1920s and he and Albert Warner sounded fabulous together. I asked Bill Russell to record them in performance at the Hall. I arranged with Louis Cottrell to have a union representative present and to put the tapes in the union safe until I could 'cover' them. I was never able to follow up and the tapes apparently disappeared.

Warner is very adventuresome on this CD. John Handy told me that, 'Yank Johnson sounded like Warner. His archetypal style and pulsation were quite powerful and he gave a band a "down home" sound that was very soothing.'

The notes by Barry Martyn are informative and soundly based.

ROSE LEAF RAG: George responds to fresh ground with oldtime flair. The incredible tone is faultlessly captured. His intricate solo and breaks are fresh.

Kid Sheik's leads were full of little surprises and he was deceptively simple. His tone was funky. He comes up with wonderful ideas and emphatic phrases. Of course, he keeps the melody going. I once asked Bill Russell if he liked Sheik's playing. He said, 'Yeah. He has a good sound and a nice simple style.'

SEE SEE RIDER: Nice lyrical lead by Sheik. Warner moans the blues in 3rds & fifths. George sings from treetops in the ensemble. His solo is a work of breadth and lovely construction that finds him using the full range of his instrument.

TIGER RAG: Lewis' breaks are superb. Sheik's terrific lead rides with Warner blowing the Kid Ory countermelody and the Jack Carey riff. George's solo, which cooks in a bold use of all three registers ranks among his most inventive. The whole performance is delightful.

This is the sound of the early Preservation Hall and the purpose for which it was born.

## Kid Ory at the Green Room, Vols 1 & 2 (American Music AMCD-42 and AMCD-43)



**Figure 10.5** Booklet front cover, American Music AMCD-43

Mills was often preoccupied with the connections between the music and musicians of New Orleans on the West Coast and in New Orleans. For many enthusiasts of the ‘down home’ New Orleans sound, the Ory West Coast band recordings sounded too slick, too ‘Dixieland’. Harold Drob sets the scene in the booklet notes accompanying Mills’ review of ‘Kid Ory at the Green Room’:

Before leaving New York for San Francisco, Gene [Williams] and his mentor Bill Coburn, preached the virtues of the Ory band at every opportunity. I was one of those they spent time with trying to get me to understand. I was not an easy convert. I liked the Ory records on Crescent but thought them too slick and over arranged. I much preferred Bunk’s band with George Lewis and Jim Robinson, which had an entirely different sound. Gene and Bill contended that Bunk’s band was not really a band, you had to hear the Ory band to know what a band sounds like. Very esoteric stuff to me! I wasn’t buying it.<sup>23</sup>

All that was to change, however, when Drob heard Ory live at the Green Room. Drob came to appreciate that ‘the second performance of a tune ...was quite different from the first one and I realized that the slick sound

was the result of the great rapport they had for each other, making every performance sound tightly arranged.’<sup>24</sup> For Bill Russell:

The best band I ever heard that played together as a dance group was Kid Ory’s back in 1946. It had such a good easy relaxed beat when they played for their dances. They never did get that on record either.<sup>25</sup>

Russell wrote this in 1979, before the 1992 CD release of the *Green Room* live session. For Russell, perhaps, and certainly for Barry Martyn and Ken Mills, it was this *Green Room* session that has put right the previously recorded wrongs.

**Ken Grayson Mills:**

*“These are, in my opinion, the best recordings of the Ory band captured in the natural environment of a dance hall, the group ranks among the finest in New Orleans dance bands. The down home approach apparent here was never duplicated in their many recordings.”*

B M 1992 [Barry Martyn]

Amen....

Kid Ory’s tailgating and electrifying, ecstatic creativity is captured for the first time. He just doesn’t stop and if you isolate him you will be absolutely amazed at all that is going on.

Ory used a fantastic fusion of funky tone coupled with sonorous beauty and a rhythmic propulsion that was always tied into an exposition of the tune.

He was the master of glissando, lowdown growls, accented or legato clusters (up or down), staccato mini-melodies, legato counter melodies and nobody played trombone lead with such feeling and variations of pitch. Like Bunk Johnson he was a ‘King of the Blues’ (see *Snag It*, Vol. 1)

Surely he was the inventor of jazzy trombone. Jim Robinson always acknowledged, how in the late 1910s, how he would sit and soak in Kid Ory and George Washington.

There is no way of describing the band’s plethora of kaleidoscoping mosaics and the endlessly wonderful sides by Joe Darensbourg. When things really

start to cook, Ram Hall goesos them with urgent, insistent accents on the second and fourth beats. Mutt Carey is subtle in his leads with a powerful and imaginative approach. This is more variegation than was used in the Crescent session.

This is a collection of 34 performances of wonderful black, yellows, browns and tan dance and goodtime music. It is one of the most satisfying releases ever.

WITHOUT YOU FOR AN INSPIRATION DEAR:

(vocal by Ory)

No bird would ever sing,  
No bell would ever ring,  
Without you for an inspiration dear.

No sun would ever shine,  
No words would ever rhyme,  
Without you for an inspiration dear.

My days would be so hopeless  
Without the skies of blue.  
My nights would be so endless  
Without the dreams of you.

No song would be complete,  
No night would be as sweet  
Without you for an inspiration dear.

Done in a slow foxtrot, it is pure poetry. Can you IMAGINE dancing, in dim light, holding your wife or best girl very close with this performance (as it took place). This was Ory's theme song and it served to close his band's performances.

‘All the Girls Go Crazy about the Way I Walk’: Did anyone ever notice that Ory sang exactly as he played trumpet?<sup>26</sup> The same rambunctious spirit and attack.

The CD notes are fortunate occurrences indeed. Harold Drob was there. He lovingly describes how the package was put together by Gene Williams. Williams sponsored and produced the marvellous Bunk Johnson Jazz Information in what he hoped would launch a renaissance. According to Drob, Williams thought that New Orleans jazz is the happiest music in the world and had the power to cure its social woes. Thank God he had the balls to proceed with this session even though Ram Hall blew the whistle upon discovering the secret recording that was going on.

Bud Scott sings ‘You’ll never miss your water until the well runs dry.’ The invention of recorded sound spared us from losing our well.

## **Conclusion**

The release dates of these five CDs span the period of 1992 to 1994. It is possible to read each review in isolation from the others. However, taken as a whole, we can see that Mills is covering the major aspects of New Orleans jazz revivalism available to him on American Music CD at the time he wrote the reviews.

There is one detailed treatment of a selected well-known CD from the foundation period of 1940s revivalism: *Bunk’s Dance Band and Brass Band*. This is supplemented by the unique *John Reid Collection* of 1940 to 1944. Mills gives ample space to consider *The Kid Howard La Vida Band* CD, the session that he probably regards as the best of his Icon material.

His review of AMCD-65 enables him to consider Alvin Alcorn in a ‘down home’ setting and, most importantly to Mills, to give his view on what Preservation Hall was designed for, before Allan and Sandra Jaffe’s management took its toll on the spontaneity of much of the music there.

Finally, as I have written about in previous *Just Jazz* articles, Mills – with his Kid Ory *Green Room* selection – is able to write in detail about some of the connections and relations between New Orleans jazz in New Orleans and in California.

## NOTES

1. 'American Music: Authentic New Orleans Jazz', accessed June 6, 2023, [https://www.jazzology.com/american\\_music\\_records.php](https://www.jazzology.com/american_music_records.php)
2. This article has been made possible by the generosity of Paige VanVorst and Jazzology Records. I also thank Fred Eatherton, Robert Greenwood, Dave Senior, Richard 'Sid' Bailey, Matthew Ekins and Katie Ekins for their contributions.
3. *Just Jazz*, No. 231, July 2017, pp. 24-30.
4. Email, Bill Bissonnette to Richard Ekins, March 2, 2017.
5. The original George H. Buck/Jazzology newsletter was named 'Jazzology' from 1969 to 1974. It was renamed the *CRC* [Collectors' Record Club] *Newsletter* in 1975; the *CRC Jazz Journal* in 1987; and *Jazz Beat* in 1989. It has been *Jazzology* again, since 2011. 'The *Jazzologist*' was the magazine of The New Orleans Jazz Club of California from 1963 onwards.
6. Email, Robert Greenwood to Richard Ekins, March 31, 2017. Similarly, I identify as a New Orleans Jazzologist in a spirit of seriousness, levity and irony. Cf. the 'Mixologist' as presented in 'The Lounge at ODEON Whiteley's Fine Food and Film', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5ZXnfx3ag>.
7. Barry Martyn, 'The Icon Project – What is Old is New', *New Orleans Music*, 1993, 3 (3): 18-24.
8. Accessed June 28, 2023, [http://www.jazzology.com/american\\_music\\_records.php](http://www.jazzology.com/american_music_records.php).
9. William Russell, 'Booklet Notes', *Bunk's Brass Band and 1945 Sessions*, American Music, AMCD-6.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Here Mills adds: 'NOTE (Viz a viz dance halls, kitchens, auditoriums, outdoors, clubs vs. studios) There is a difference between resonance, reverberation and echo. In the first case, the shimmering takes place at the point of origin (simultaneity) (like an aura). In the second, there is a delay and feedback (rebound). The Artesian Hall AMCD 5 by Wooden Joe Nicholas is not echo it's resonance.'
12. Ken Grayson Mills, 'Afraid to Stay Here, Afraid to Leave this Town . . . Some Words on Kid Howard's New ICON Release', *Jazz Report*, 1961, 2 (3): 21-22.
13. Letter dated August 25, 1964, Ken Grayson Mills to Alan Solman.
14. *Ibid.*

15. The correct spelling is 'Pfankuchen'.
16. The fact that Mills uses 'Mourning' here suggests that the 'Morning' spelling on Icon LP 7 was an error. The *Jazzology* reissue, JCE 17, writes 'Mourning'.
17. Big Bill Bissonnette, *The Jazz Crusade*, Special Request Books, 1992, p. 75.
18. Barry Martyn, 'Booklet Notes', *The John Reid Collection from the Arkansas Arts Centre – New Orleans Jazz 1940-1944*, American Music, AMCD-44.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Email, Dave Senior to Richard Ekins, June 19, 2014.
22. 'Ken Grayson Mills', *Jazz Report*, 1962, 3 (1 & 2): 21.
23. Harold Drob (1992) 'Booklet Notes', *Kid Ory and his Creole Band – The Green Room*, Vol. 1. American Music, AMCD-42, pp. 7-8.
24. Ibid., p. 8.
25. Bill Russell, 'Extracts from a Conversation with Dick Allen', *Coda*, 1979, 167, pp. 14-19 at p. 16.
26. Richard 'Sid' Bailey adds: 'It could very well be a typo, but the Kid was a multi-instrumentalist, didn't he play alto for a while with Oliver, and I have a recording of him playing valve trombone that was given to me by Hal Smith, that's not too far from a trumpet? Mills could have caught him doubling for Carey one night?' Email, Richard 'Sid' Bailey to Richard Ekins, April 6, 2017. Christopher Tyle posts: 'I just came across this photo of Kid Ory playing the cornet - a different one from the photo I posted a few days ago. Likely also taken by Ray Avery, it shows Kid, George Probert and Don Ewell.' From Christer Fellers' Kid Ory website.' Facebook, April 24, 2017.

A black and white photograph of a building facade. At the top, there is a balcony with a decorative wrought-iron railing. Below the balcony, there are several doors. On the left, a white door is partially open, revealing a dark interior. In the center, another white door is open, showing a window with a grid pattern and a cushioned seat on the floor. To the right, a dark door is visible. The overall scene is somewhat aged and weathered.

# CHAPTER 11

A Final Flurry: Ken Grayson  
Mills, Icon Records and  
Jeunes Amis Hall, with a  
Footnote on *The Outsider* and  
the Return of  
the Repressed  
*October 2017*



## Chapter 11

In a previous *Just Jazz* article (Chapter 8), I focused on Ken Grayson Mills' activities at his Icon Hall, later to be renamed Perseverance Hall, and referred to by some as 'Preservation Hall in Exile'. I ended the original article with the statement:

With his last three non-union sessions in the can, Mills had concluded his recordings at Perseverance Hall. He then turned his attention to the finale of his recording activity in New Orleans that would lead to Icon 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. Mills recorded all of these in the Jeunes Amis Hall, New Orleans, beginning 28 August, 1962. Such is the importance of these final Icon sessions and their aftermath that they deserve a separate article.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter details those recordings.

At this time, Mills was collaborating with Gypsy Lou Webb on the release of an Icon single release taken from the Punch Miller session of what became Icon LP 8. Gypsy Lou, together with her husband Jon Edgar Webb, were publishing the celebrated bohemian arts magazine *The Outsider* in New Orleans.

The Summer 1962 and Spring 1963 issues featured an extensive set of articles, photographs and advertisements under the title 'the last of the old-time musicians playing traditional New Orleans jazz live at Preservation Hall.' The writings of Larry Borenstein, Bill Russell, Dick Allen and Allan and Sandra Jaffe were all featured. But how were they to deal with Ken Grayson Mills who had been evicted from Preservation Hall the previous year and whom Larry Borenstein had sought to erase from the history of Preservation Hall, indeed, from all history in New Orleans?

I add a long section on this under the heading 'A Footnote on *The Outsider*, Erasing Mills and the Return of the Repressed'.

In my view, it is a very important footnote.

## **A Final Flurry: Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and Jeunes Amis Hall, with a Footnote on *The Outsider* and the Return of the Repressed<sup>2</sup>**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, October 2017

*In November 1962, the flurry of recording activity seemed to have died down and Emanuel [Sayles] was reporting that 'No one has heard from Ken Mills [of Icon Records and Icon Hall] since he left here some four or six weeks ago, I have asked many of his friends about him. Maybe he's busy pressing and printing his albums that he recorded here last summer.'*<sup>3</sup>

David Griffiths, 1998

In this chapter I focus on a three-week period at the end of Mills' final visit to New Orleans in 1962, when he embarked on what he referred to as 'that last project (Icon 7 through 13)'.<sup>4</sup> I will consider each Icon LP release from that period in chronological order, primarily from the standpoint of Mills' position, as supplemented on occasion by the views of selected New Orleans jazz commentators and critics; but first a word on the recording venue.

Mills chose Jeunes Amis Hall as the recording venue for all these final LPs (except LP 13). No doubt he knew of the Hall's origins in the pre-Buddy Bolden, pre-jazz era in New Orleans. In a taped interview, part of the 'New Orleans Jazz Interviews 1949', Leonard Bechet had interviewed his brother Sidney. As the 'Recording Notes' put it:

Leonard Bechet discusses Bunk Johnson and the other 'rough and ready types' his brother Sidney hung around and played with and the musicians who influenced him. He recalls the Creole music scene in the late 1800s ('when I was just a little bitty boy . . . back before even Bolden'), which revolved around a club called the Jeunes Amis hall where Creole music and plays were performed.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 11.1 Jeunes Amis Hall, 1477 N. Robertson Street, New Orleans, 1961.**  
**Courtesy of the William Russell Collection,**  
**Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University**

This Hall had been chosen by Herb Friedwald for the Riverside ‘Living Legend’ sessions recorded by Chris Albertson and Dave Jones in January 1961. Later, Albertson would write:

Herb steered us right when he suggested renting the Soci t  des Jeunes Amis hall. It was a wood-framed 19th century black Creole fraternal headquarter and it proved to have every advantage over a studio; apart from its live sound, it gave the performers familiar surroundings, a place where all had played over the years. Back then, they had no problem climbing to the balcony band area, but in 1961, the ground floor was the right spot.<sup>6</sup>

Mills also used the ground floor of the hall. In reviewing one of his recording sessions there, he comments on the ‘superb sound’ and ‘how Jeunes Amis Hall supplements and serves the energy and beauty of the ensembles and solos.’ Similarly, in his article on ‘Recording at San Jacinto Hall in the 1960s’, Tom Bethell speaks about Mills’ Icon LP 9 and remarks on the excellent acoustics of Jeunes Amis Hall: ‘The Mills recording had a lively dance-hall sound – it was recorded at the Jeunes Amis Hall in the Treme – and I wanted that sound too.’<sup>7</sup> In the event, Bethell followed Bill Russell in using San Jacinto Hall for his recordings but, for the purposes intended, the sounds were broadly similar, as Albertson was to say, later on:

The hall’s acoustical sound was exactly what I wanted to recapture: the same kind of ambience that lent such character to Bill Russell’s 1940’s American Music recordings from San Jacinto Hall.<sup>8</sup>

### **Icon LP 7 and the ‘Problem’ of Israel Gorman**

In the first of the Jeunes Amis Hall recordings (Icon LP 7), Mills paired Punch Miller with the clarinettist Israel Gorman for top billing. Mills specifically subtitles the LP as ‘featuring Israel Gorman’ and is here continuing to champion Gorman. Mills had paired Punch Miller with John Handy on clarinet for the first of his New Orleans band releases, recorded in July 1960. He had coupled Israel Gorman with Kid Howard in what is generally regarded as Mills’ finest Icon, Icon LP4 – *Kid Howard’s La Vida Jazz Band*. Mills was, however, sensitive to the criticism often levelled at him for hiring Gorman. In a 1971 review article of all the Icons, English critic Chris Hillman had this to say about the celebrated La Vida session in 1971:

Icon LP 4 (JCE 14) is one of the great ones. Kid Howard suffered ill health at the end of the fifties but here we have him, with his La Vida Band, blowing with astounding strength and authority, his only concession the use of the less demanding cornet which seems not to restrict him at all. He dominates the session, while Eddie Sommers<sup>9</sup> on trombone and Israel Gorman on clarinet,

neither a particularly strong player, content themselves with providing an obbligato to his inspiration.<sup>10</sup>

However, at the time of the recordings, the criticisms were often much more cutting. Mills makes the essential points in a letter to Alan Solman:

Borenstein, the musicians, et. al., never did understand that I was conducting a documentary series, a calculated extension of the AM's. They would advise me to spend my money on sure fire winners or technical acrobats like Cottrell and Willie Humphrey. I seemed intelligent, why was I wasting valuable monies on inferior subjects such as Israel Gorman and John Handy. I kept saying, 'Man, I'm making a survey of New Orleans Jazz not tourist music. To me, Israel Gorman's just as important as George Lewis.' They finally decided I had the plague and I was left to conduct that last project (Icon 7 through 13)<sup>11</sup> un-molested.<sup>12</sup>

While Handy became highly regarded by many, Gorman has remained of more specialist interest. In my experience, most enthusiasts of old-style New Orleans music rate him very highly, particularly for his emotional intensity, while other New Orleans jazz enthusiasts are critical of his supposed technical deficiencies. Herb Friedwald, the main force behind the Riverside 'Living Legend' series, deliberately excluded Gorman from the Riverside sessions:

I liked players like Steve Angram [sic] and Israel Gorman, but I didn't want any clinkers in the band. I wanted five stars in *DownBeat* and I more or less got them.<sup>13</sup>

... I wanted to make records that would enable the bands to get hired.<sup>14</sup>

Mills' response to those critics who told him he 'was monkeying with musicians who were no good (Steve Angram, Eddie Summers, etc.)' was to say 'I listen to Gorman on 'Shake It' or Howard on 'Nelly Gray'<sup>15</sup> and I am serene.' Bill Bissonnette of Jazz Crusade records came to regret his omission of Gorman from his own recording sessions and remarked that if it hadn't been for Ken Mills, Gorman might have been missed completely.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to placing the spotlight on hitherto unknown or neglected

musicians, Mills was always keen to situate them within the history of the music.<sup>17</sup> Punch Miller recorded under the name of Punch's Delegates of Pleasure for Vocalion in 1929. The Punch Miller band was formed at Icon Hall with the same name and Mills hired them as a regular working unit. In his sleeve notes for Icon LP 7, Mills rightly notes:

There is a unity that comes only of playing together for an extended duration, and the band rocks along with a fine, concerted beat. Leaping from these grooves are some of the greatest individual New Orleans jazz improvisations [sic] ever recorded, but it is a band effort which will make this LP live.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 11.2 Icon Recording Session LP 7, September 2, 1962. Albert Warner, Wilbert Tillman, Punch Miller, Israel Gorman and George Guesnon.**

**Courtesy of Eric J. Brown and Per Oldaeus**

## Icon LP 8 and Exploring Kid Howard

In 1966, when I first went to New Orleans, the most exciting trumpet players I heard were DeDe Pierce and Kid Thomas Valentine. I missed meeting Kid Howard by some four months. Howard died on 28 March 1966. However, when Dan Pawson was there in 1964, he singled Howard out as certainly being the most impressive trumpet player in New Orleans, notwithstanding Pawson's lionisation of his favourite trumpet player, DeDe Pierce. We owe it largely to Ken Grayson Mills that Kid Howard had a musical second life from early 1961 until a year or so before he died in 1966. We owe it entirely to Mills that Howard gave us some of the best recordings of his entire career on the numerous Icon recordings he made.

After the death of his wife in 1960, Howard was within a hair's breadth of drinking himself to death. Following hospitalisation and a recovery nurtured by his own inner reserves and the support of Mills, among others, Howard returned to something approaching his former glories<sup>19</sup> in various down-home New Orleans settings. It was Mills' belief that Howard had been forced into an unnatural role in the George Lewis touring band of the 1950s, with Lewis on clarinet often usurping the traditional New Orleans lead of the trumpet. Mills was determined to rectify this and the Icon LP 4 – *La Vida Band* – was the opening salvo in a series of Howard recordings that Mills made for Icon Records designed to do just that. Indeed, of that session drummer, Cie Frazier had remarked: 'Man that's the best real old-style music you'll hear.'<sup>20</sup>

A major theme running through many of the later Icons is the exploration of Kid Howard in different settings and how Mills used different personnel and different repertoires in these settings.

Icon LP 8 – *Kid Howard's Olympia Band* – combines Howard and Albert Burbank, a combination going back to the mid-late 1920s, with trombonist Jim Robinson who Howard had played with for decades.

Of Icon LP 8, Mills writes:

The whole concern of each member is to enter so thoroughly and deeply into the life of the music that whatever he is supposed to do he will do with his whole being. The effect on Howard is immediate and obvious. Featuring pieces that were part of his repertoire in the 1930s, this LP brings out aspects of his total concept not to be found on any of his previous recordings. The way they throw it at us on 'Don't Give Up The Ship' ranks along with Bunk Johnson's 'Moose March' (GTJ-M12048) and George Lewis' 'Bugle Boy March' (Pdx 4001), as one of the finest performances of sustained, controlled power and grace ever recorded.<sup>21</sup>

Hillman is more nuanced:

All the music is very fine with Albert Burbank's clarinet effectively matching Howard's power and Jim Robinson an effective driving force. The record does not perhaps express Howard's personality as fully as the earlier issue, but the band is more of a unit, possibly the ideal compromise between the classical conception and the looser less inhibited style of functional New Orleans music.<sup>22</sup>

And with Brian Harvey we return to praise for Howard not dissimilar to Mills':

Without any doubt these can be ranked among the great classic jazz recordings like those of the King Oliver Band and the Louis Armstrong Hot Fives and Sevens. Together with Jim Robinson – trombone, Albert Burbank – clarinet, George Guesnon – banjo, Eddie Dawson bass (King Oliver's favourite bass player) and Alex Bigard – drums, they create stunningly hot and exciting versions of unusual titles like 'Don't Give up the Ship', 'You Shouldn't Scorn Your Wife' and better known tunes like 'Climax Rag', 'Bugle Boy March', 'Golden Leaf Strut', and 'How Long Blues' that are spine-tingling. . . I doubt whether any of the men on that session ever played better or more exciting jazz. Howard, in particular, is majestic and on 'Don't Give up the Ship' stakes his undeniable claim to being one of the New Orleans greats.<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 11.3 Icon recording session LP 8, September 4, 1962  
Eddie Dawson, Albert Burbank, Kid Howard and George Guesnon.**

**Courtesy of Eric J. Brown and Per Oldaeus**

### **Icon LP 9 and the Record that Launched Tom Bethell's San Jacinto Records**

As if this exploration of the talents of Kid Howard was not enough, Mills recorded Howard in two further bands, including his imaginative re-creation of the famous 1927 *Sam Morgan* sides. I return to these sessions later. But first I consider Icon LP 9 which featured George Lewis in a band nominally led by Creole George Guesnon. Here I turn to the thoughts of a regular reviewer for the magazine *New Orleans Music* who prefaces his comments with the oft-made made point about the variable quality of Mills' different recordings.

However, all such caveats are cast aside in the case of Icon LP 9 which he couples with Icon LP 4, which we have already discussed. Bob Rowbotham introduces his review with the comment:

The results were always interesting but variable, except in two cases where Mills' achievements were among the finest recordings of the New Orleans revival: *Kid Howard's La Vida Band* (Icon LP 4, AMCD-54) and the one under review (formerly Icon LP 9).<sup>24</sup>

Warming to his task, Rowbotham continues:

What we have here is a situation where Kid Thomas Valentine had been dragged from the cosy environs of his own band to get involved in the polyphonic ensemble approach of George Lewis and Jim Robinson and, without question, he blows the greatest recorded session of his life.

Fortunately, all his colleagues were also at the top of their game on this occasion. Lewis hardly ever takes down, his lines are always swinging and totally inspired. . . Robinson is a power house in support of the amazing antics of the other two members of the front line and the rhythm section just roars its way through everything, led by a mighty performance from Creole George.

These men transform commonplace material. There are no better examples of this than the glorious medium tempos at which they take Bill Bailey and Apple Tree.

. . . Thomas here ranges from the sublime to the outrageous. However, he never loses his ability to contribute the right thing at the right time and his bitter, tearing accents are the stuff of what this music is all about. On 'See See Rider'. . . 'This is the best sustained primitive blue trumpet playing you will ever hear.'<sup>25</sup>

Mills was often critical of those who chose to record George Lewis in preference to other clarinet players and argued that they frequently did not know fresh George Lewis from stale George Lewis.<sup>26</sup> Here, however, Lewis is as galvanised as the rest of the band. So much so that the major Lewis authority Tom Bethell, was led to establish his own record company as a direct result of this record.

He argued that, ‘For a chorus or two [on ‘Milk Cow Blues’], they create one of the great moments in blues recording history’,<sup>27</sup> before continuing:

‘See See Rider’ was in the same class, another great blues moment. It shows just how well Kid Thomas could play at his best. ‘In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree’ was also terrific – surely the best recording ever made of this fine old pop song.

. . . The session is a high point of New Orleans music in the post-war period.

. . . It was this recording, and this record alone, that convinced me that it might still be possible to capture something good, perhaps even excellent in the New Orleans style.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 11.4 Icon recording session LP 9, September 1, 1962  
Cie Frazier, Jim Robinson, Kid Thomas, Papa John Joseph and George Lewis  
Courtesy of Eric J. Brown and Per Oldaeus**

## Icon LP 10: Kid Howard with John Handy



**Figure 11.5 Front cover of Icon LP 10**

Of all the sessions recorded in New Orleans in the 1920s, it was the eight sides by Sam Morgan's Jazz Band that have received the most favourable comment from the New Orleans jazz revivalists of the 1940s through to the 1970s. The sounds of the band, particularly the rhythm section, were seen to resonate closely with the sounds of the old-style New Orleans bands of the revival period; and they were thought to be particularly notable because the Sam Morgan recording included Jim Robinson, the most celebrated trombone player of both first and second wave revivalism.

Little wonder, then, that when Riverside's Bill Grauer wanted to record a band led by Jim Robinson to kick off the Riverside 'Living Legends' series, the question of the Sam Morgan session arose.

Chris Albertson tells the story:

Bill Grauer had heard him [Jim Robinson] in 1945, with Bunk at New York's Stuyvesant Casino, and most truly moldy Collector types were aware of the 1927 Sam Morgan Jazz Band sides he participated on. Did he recall those sides? Yes, he remembered the sessions, but not the music. I was disappointed, because I had wanted the band to record at least one tune from the Morgan date. Noting that, Dick Allen, then Associate Curator of the Tulane Jazz Archives, brought a tape of Morgan recordings to our final session, which again featured Robinson's band.

Having the old recordings gave Dave Jones a great idea. With the band in position and the microphones live, Dave played Morgan's 'Bogalusa Strut' from speakers he had placed behind them. Instruments in hand, Jim and the band listened as the thin, dated sound of the 33 year old recording echoed in the old hall. George Guesnon picked up some chords on his banjo, Jim's had déjà vu written all over his face when that glimmer of recognition lit up his eyes and he raised the trombone to his lips. Slowly, he brought those slides of old into the present and, one by one, the pieces of a puzzle were assembled. I won't even try to describe in words the feeling that came over me when the entire band suddenly burst into full bloom and drowned out the old recording. It was a one-time-only experience, but Dave had captured it all in stereo.

When we heard the playback, we agreed that this wonderful transition had to be included on the album. Sad to say, it wasn't. Columbia Records would not grant us permission to reproduce even that snippet of their Morgan recording, and my close association with that label was a few years in the future. I bet that tape is collecting dust in the Concord vault.<sup>29</sup>

In the event, Riverside had to be content with including two of the Morgan titles on the Robinson band recording – 'Mobile Stomp' and 'Bogalusa Strut'. Albertson conveniently glosses over the fact that much of the distinctive Morgan sound came from the fact that it featured Earl Fouche on alto sax and Andrew Morgan on tenor sax. Riverside had already ruled out the possibility of using any saxophones on any of the Riverside recordings.<sup>30</sup>

Once again, it was Ken Mills who rose to the challenge of re-visiting the Sam Morgan recordings with more 'authenticity'. He conceived the

brilliant idea of continuing his exploration of Kid Howard's trumpet playing by having him head up a recreated Sam Morgan band. Howard's favourite second trumpet man and good friend Kid Sheik was paired with Howard in place of the Morgan brothers, Sam and Isaiah. Andrew Morgan, who had played on the original Morgan sides, was on tenor saxophone. John Handy was the inspired choice on alto saxophone.

Six months prior to Mills' recording, Barry Martyn had recorded his most exciting MONO record, with Kid Howard and John Handy (the latter mainly on alto sax) as the two front line instruments.<sup>31</sup> The pair blew up a storm and did likewise on the Icon LP 10.

Harvey makes the pertinent points:

Further evidence of his [Howard's] return to top form was provided by his intriguing session for Icon on August 29 1962. Together with Kid Sheik, Jim Robinson, John Handy – alto sax, George Guesnon – banjo, John Joseph – bass and Alfred Williams – drums, he cut fourteen titles, including retakes, in a remarkable recreation of the Sam Morgan Band. Six of these tracks [originally on Icon LP10] have been reissued (AMCD-58) and are among the hottest and most exciting examples of New Orleans jazz ever recorded. Howard's playing is possibly even better than on the 1943 Climax sessions, confirming if proof be needed, his status as one of the truly great jazz trumpeters.<sup>32</sup>

The tunes played were all Morgan sides with the addition of the John Handy tour de force, the song 'Ice Cream'. From then on in Handy's star rose exponentially. Barry Martyn featured John Handy's work on 'Ice Cream', again, some fifteen months later.<sup>33</sup> Several European tours and numerous recording sessions later, Handy would sign his exclusive recording contract with RCA Victor.

## **Icon LP 11: John Casimir with Kid Howard and Andy Anderson**

John Casimir's Young Tuxedo Band held a special place in Ken Mills' heart because it was this band featuring Kid Howard on trumpet that was responsible for the first major nationwide publicity for the nascent Preservation Hall. The Associated Press report featured a photo triptych: two images of Howard, respectively playing cornet and singing, and one of John Casimir.<sup>34</sup> Harvey includes an unidentified Cleveland newspaper drawing upon the Associated Press report, dated 22 August 1961.<sup>35</sup> It was probably this report that led to the first Preservation Hall band touring, initially to Cleveland.

As Mills puts it:

In fact, the Howard-Warner-Casimir combine so stoked the Associated Press that the mammoth new organism gave the Hall its first major publicity break. Pictures were taken and action shots of John and Howard were run in dailies from Coast to Coast, together with a lengthy feature.<sup>36</sup>

John Casimir had formed the Young Tuxedo Jazz Band in the early 1950s. In his sleeve notes for Icon LP 11, Mills relates how the formation of the band cemented an association between Bill Matthews, John Casimir and Andrew Anderson. Mills continues:

Whoever amongst them got a job called it his band and used the others. When the sixties arrived, it was one of the handful of really fine older style groups still to be heard in the city.<sup>37</sup>

However, in pursuance of Mills' constant experimentation with new combinations of personnel, Mills established a John Casimir Young Tuxedo Jazz Band No. 2 (JCYTJB No. 2) as a Preservation Hall band in the 1960s. It was this band that featured Kid Howard and Albert Warner and it was this band that caught the imagination of the press.

John Casimir was most known for his searing Eb clarinet work with his Young Tuxedo Brass Band. Casimir played the orthodox Bb clarinet in his dance bands but some found his 'wailing' tone hard on the ears, notwithstanding the shift in instrument.

For Mills, this was because ‘John Casimir dwelt almost entirely in the realm of intonation’.<sup>38</sup>

With the exception of trumpeter Wooden Joe Nicholas (and perhaps a few others whom we’ll never hear) Casimir did more with the use of sound than any man in New Orleans Jazz history. Musically, he was a master of copulation, employing always the correct thrust and the right caress. Listening to Casimir was more than a jazz experience, it was entry into the world of bird song.<sup>39</sup>

Dan Pawson, in his review of the CD version of Icon LP 11, gets to the nub of the issue:

Casimir’s clarinet style is certainly unique. Although it is broadly derived from his mentor Dog Franklin, who himself was largely influenced by Johnny Dodds, Casimir’s playing has a far more primitive sound, directly reflecting his African roots. Ears accustomed to European tuning and timing can find his intonation quite disconcerting. . . but so what? This is the music as it was played by the men who played it and it would be a great mistake to attempt to superimpose extraneous values, rules and judgements upon it. This is the real thing, take it or leave it! I would suggest that any who do not take it are missing out on the whole *raison d’être* of New Orleans jazz. For me, it is an essential CD for the serious enthusiast.<sup>40</sup>

Mills recognised only too well that, in his ‘constantly experimenting with personnels, searching for a variegated program that would increase the scope of the few remaining years New Orleans music had left’, much ‘did not pan out’. But for Mills there were ‘monumental successes’ and this was one of them.

For me, the ‘experimenting with personnels’ paid an exceptional dividend on these recordings. Take, for example, the comparison of the two hymns (dirges) on Icon LP 9. The first, ‘What a Friend We Have in Jesus’, has a front line of Howard, Casimir and Warner (JCYTJB No. 2). The second, ‘Nearer My God to Thee’, features the front line of Anderson, Casimir and Matthews. I had been reflecting on the differences between these two dirgelike hymns when I came across Doug Landau’s excellent article on

Andrew Anderson in which he makes illuminating comparisons between the trumpet playing on the CD and on the two hymns, in particular:

Both had that organic fluency and unshackled timing that distinguished them from the early trumpeters, but then in some ways they were stylistically in stark contrast, no more so than in the matter of tone. This contrast is much in evidence in the hymns. On a moving ‘What a Friend We Have in Jesus’, Howard deploys his remarkable vibrato and double strength tone with a caressing passion. In contrast the lighter approach of Anderson on ‘Nearer my God to Thee’ has a haunting, at times almost mocking quality. This effect can be heard too in the dirges on the Young Tuxedo recording.<sup>41</sup>

I was puzzled by what Landau meant by his ‘mocking quality’ descriptor and wrote to him with my query:

I have to say that the ‘Nearer My God’ gives me the spine chills more. Your use of the word ‘haunting’ strikes a chord with me. I am not sure what you mean by ‘almost mocking quality’. Can you elaborate?<sup>42</sup>

Landau replied:

Now there’s a challenge for me; what did I mean by ‘mocking’? I think ‘aloof’ might have been an alternative. Howard plays with such fierce passion that it detracts somewhat from the essence: Casimir’s soaring ethereal flights. In contrast Anderson, much in the spirit of Casimir, is above such earthly passion, and adopts his own brand of heavenly voice from on high; thus Anderson and Casimir are complementary and free spirits to compelling effect. The more spine chilling track as you say. Does that make any sense?

It does, indeed.

Moreover, it helped me on my way to understanding why Wilhelm Furtwängler’s versions of the later symphonies of Anton Bruckner have much the same effect on me due, no doubt, to their ‘essence’: their ‘soaring ethereal flights, their being ‘above . . . earthly passion’ and their own ‘brand of heavenly voice from on high’.

Thank you, Landau!<sup>44</sup>



**Figure 11.6 Icon recording session, LP 11, 5 September 1962  
Albert Warner, Kid Howard, Wilbert Tillman, John Casimir,  
and Emanuel Sayles.**

**Courtesy of Eric J. Brown and Per Oldaeus**

### **Icon LP 12: Back to Kid Clayton**

Mills' first recording in New Orleans, back in July 1960, had been of Kid Clayton with John Handy on alto saxophone. For whatever reason, Mills never issued this session. The recording quality was not good, and the musical quality uneven. Rather, Mills sold one track to Chris Strachwitz – 'Hindustan' – for issue on an anthology of Icon recordings, namely Arhoolie F.1013.

As Barry Martyn puts it:

These recordings were done mostly to showcase Handy. They are almost impossible to define as they don't fit into any mold. The band seemed to have been organized by George Guesnon, and, while it had a few rough spots, at least it introduced John Handy to the jazz world. His cohort on this occasion was Jimmy Clayton, at best an erratic trumpet player.<sup>45</sup>



**Figure 11.7 Front cover of Icon LP 12**

Mills notes that, ‘As early as 1925, his (Clayton’s) bands were ranking contenders, people’s favorite band division.’<sup>46</sup> He also notes that, by 1927, Clayton began his long association with John Handy and Creole George Guesnon, so once again there is historical precedent for his 1960s recordings.

Extraordinarily, these were the first recordings ever made of John Handy. It was the then unissued track of ‘Panama’ from this session that inspired Barry Martyn to record Handy’s saxophone playing extensively, thereafter. Significantly, the two finest sessions that Martyn recorded of Handy – MONO LP 2, with Kid Howard (1962), and 77 Records, with Kid Sheik (1963) – were Mills’ favourites of all the many sessions Martyn recorded. Indeed, they were his favourite non-Icon session of the 1960s.<sup>47</sup>

For his final Jeunes Amis Hall recording, Mills returned to Kid Clayton although this time placing the focus on Kid Clayton’s association with Albert Burbank. Clayton and Burbank had been recorded together in a dance hall session in 1952 by Alden Ashworth and David Wyckoff. For Mills: ‘In view of his historic and artistic importance, it seems incredible that Jimmy ‘Kid’

Clayton is on 18 issued tracks (including nine on this LP).’ He added: ‘One can’t have everything, it seems.’<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, one cannot. Despite Mills’ best endeavours of putting Clayton with Burbank and a band he had been playing regularly with at Icon (Perseverance) Hall, the overall results are disappointing. This is especially obvious when a comparison is made with the 1952 recording. When Icon LP 12 was issued on American Music AMCD-62, the Icon sides were supplemented by four previously unissued tracks from the 1952 sides.

Mills, again:

George Lewis had once said: ‘The closest thing to Shots is Clayton.’ George was referring to Louis Madison (1899-1948) one of the greatest New Orleans style trumpet players of all time.<sup>49</sup>

And yet, on these 1960 sessions, even the ever-ebullient Mills was forced to admit that:

[Clayton’s] pen was noticeably rusty, but even so his music was closer to the spontaneous group improvisation of the New Orleans style than any of the slicker, ‘dixieland orientated’ bands working.<sup>50</sup>

Just how rusty? I was puzzled that, in his review of this CD for *New Orleans Music*, Tom Sancton had made no comment on the disparity that struck me between the quality of the 1952 and 1962 sessions. I put my query to my co-worker, Fred Eatherton:

I’ve been giving the Kid Clayton Icon a serious listen. As you would know, Barry Martyn coupled it with unissued material from the Alden Ashworth and David Wyckoff 1952 Clayton/Burbank session - to my way of thinking far better! Some very nice stuff on this.<sup>52</sup>

Eatherton responded thus:

I’ve replayed the Clayton and there is little doubt in my mind that although technical problems abound on the 1952 recordings, these are far superior to the Icons. Clayton was far more assertive and technically proficient than Burbank is at times sensational. That said, I think Bill Matthews plays much better in ‘62 than he ever did on the Celestins and I prefer Hamilton’s

banjo playing to Guesnon's single string meanderings. If George Lewis thought Clayton was like Kid Shots he must have been listening to the earlier Clayton. Shots was both tasteful and accurate!<sup>53</sup>

The perceptive Per Oldaeus concludes:

I LOVE the Clayton recordings David Wyckoff and Alden Ashworth did. The band swung like mad, they attacked the songs. The band swung like mad, they attacked the songs. Still fascinated by Bigard's original and complex drumming, very hard to copy. The clave beat seems to be its foundation. Yes, this session is superior to the Icon.<sup>54</sup>

## **A Footnote on *The Outsider*, Erasing Mills and the Return of the Repressed**

### ***The Outsider***

Mills was now set to return to California to issue the remainder of his Icon 'Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower' series which he did over the next couple of years. However, there is an interesting footnote to be considered, relating, in particular, to the 45 rpm single Mills issued from the Icon LP 7 recording session and the attempted early erasing of Mills from the history of the origins of Preservation Hall.

The French Quarter has long been known for its bohemian and colourful characters.<sup>55</sup> One such character in the 1960s was Gypsy Lou Webb who had written the lyrics of 'Long Distance Blues'. Lou had collaborated with Punch Miller to compose a tune with the same title and it was featured on Mills' Icon LP 7. Mills decided to couple an alternate take of the song with an alternate take of 'Saint Louis Blues' and issue it as 45 rpm single under the band heading Punch Miller's Delegates of Pleasure, featuring Israel Gorman.

While Mills had been recording his Icon sessions, Webb, together with her husband Jon Edgar, had been working on their publishing project, *The Outsider*.

Later, in 2007, Jeff Weddle would write a book entitled *Bohemian New Orleans: The Story of the Outsider and Loujon Press*.

The essential points are made in the cover blurb to this book:

In 1960, Jon Edgar and Louis ‘Gypsy Lou’ Webb founded Loujon Press on Royal Street in New Orleans’s French Quarter. The small publishing house quickly became a giant. Heralded by the *Village Voice* and the *New York Times* as one of the best of its day, *The Outsider*, the press’s literary review, featured among others, Charles Bukowski, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov, and Walter Lowefels. Loujon published books by Henry Miller and two early poetry collections by Bukowski.



**Figure 11.8** Cover of *The Outsider*, Vol. 1, No.2  
(left to right), DeDe Pierce, Willie Humphrey, Gypsy Lou

However, for our purposes, what is so significant about *The Outsider* is that two of its four issues – Volume 1, No. 2, Summer 1962 and Volume 1, No. 3, Spring 1963 – featured a two-part series on ‘the last of the old-time musicians’. The first part was headed up with a title thus: ‘Oldest of the Living Old . . . a documentary in pictures of the last of the old-time musicians playing traditional New Orleans Jazz live at Preservation Hall.’ The eight pages of text that accompanied the eight sides of pictures in this first part included four pages headed ‘Preservation Hall, N’Orleans’, followed by sections from ‘Richard B. Allen, the Consultant’, ‘Larry Borenstein, the Landlord’, ‘Allan & Sandra Jaffe, the Mgrs’ and “‘Bill” Russell, the Historian’. These reports were supplemented with numerous diverse pieces ranging from the short blurb taken from the press reports of the musicians to ‘A TYPICAL, TWO-WEEK (different band each night) PRESERVATION HALL MENU’.

The second part was headed up with the following title: ‘Oldest of the living Old. . . a documentary in pictures of the last of the old-time musicians playing traditional New Orleans jazz live’. The nine pages of text that accompanied the twelve sides of pictures in this second part included over four pages from Sam B. Charters and four from Larry Borenstein headed thus: ‘Jazz in New Orleans: 1899 to 1957 . . . by Sam Charters’, and ‘1957-1963 by E.L. Borenstein’.

### **Erasing Mills**

It will be noted above that the titles for the two parts are the same, except that part one adds the words ‘at Preservation Hall’. It will also be noticed that part one of the two-part series (*The Outsider No. 2*) starts with the emphasis on the history of Preservation Hall and that the second part (*The Outsider No. 3*) starts from 1899, with the emphasis on the beginnings of jazz going up to 1957. The second part section – ‘1899 to 1957’ – by Samuel Charters is taken from his major book, *Jazz New Orleans*.

Borenstein then picks up the story from ‘1957 to 1963’, which marks the time he began to hold ‘kitty’ jam sessions in his Associated Artists Studio. There is no mention anywhere in *The Outsider No. 2* of Ken Grayson Mills, nor is there any mention of Icon Records. Both have simply been erased from the history of Preservation Hall.

Richard B. Allen writes:

Beginning the 60s a jazz fan visiting the Deep South had trouble locating early New Orleans jazz as a commodity in the city of its birth, except on records – and these scarce. With luck he might’ve got the nod to a private party or jam session in the suburbs, or hear of a function attended by a brass band.

Today, thanks to art dealer Larry Borenstein, and a young dedicated couple, Allan and Sandra Jaffe (among others), jazz here at an easy-to-get-to-location has been taken back half a century – to where it began. An inspired enthusiast of authentic New Orleans music, Borenstein in May, 1961, converted his French Quarter gallery at 726 St. Peter Street into a concert hall, after a year or so of listening to the best of the native jazzmen at the rear of his shop. He’d decided it was time, before time ran out for them, to give them back to the world – live.<sup>56</sup>

Larry Borenstein states:

The history of jazz concerts at 726 St. Peter Street goes back several years before Preservation Hall became a regular activity. For the most part the sessions were not prearranged, but many of the musicians learned that I would permit them to play in my gallery and that I would help them take up a collection. Since I kept the gallery open until midnight, it was easier for me to invite the musicians in to play than for me to go out hear the music. The fact that an audience developed for the music seem feasible; but no success could have been possible without the efforts of Sandy and Allan Jaffe in organizing and presenting them on a regular basis<sup>57</sup>

The attentive reader will have noted that, at the very best, Ken Grayson Mills has been reduced to an unnamed ‘among others’ by Dick Allen.

The details given of the pictures used in part one (*The Outsider No. 2*) are sparse. After an opener, featuring the Eureka Brass Band in the street,

the second page of photographs features small pictures of Dick Allen, Larry Borenstein, the Jaffes and photographer Florence Mars. Intriguingly, the first photograph of musicians playing in Preservation Hall is almost certainly from the Ken Mills-Barbara Reid era. The text is provided thus:

. . . To his left is . . . Steve Angrum on clarinet. Angrum is the first who played at Preservation Hall to pass away. The ‘kitty’ sign was up last year. Musicians at the hall are now guaranteed full union scale.<sup>58</sup>

The ‘kitty’ sign reads ‘EVERY CENT OF THE KITTY GOES TO THE MUSICIANS’ written, in all probability, by Barbara Reid. Needless to say, there is no acknowledgement of this in the article.

Internal evidence suggests that *The Outsider No. 2* finally went to press in April 1962, just seven months after Ken Grayson Mills’ departure from Preservation Hall – this was after he had founded it and had first managed it for three months. And yet he is mentioned nowhere. As we have seen, all credit for founding and managing Preservation Hall is given to Larry Borenstein and Allan and Sandra Jaffe.

### **The Return of the Repressed**

The ‘return of the repressed’ is the process whereby repressed thoughts and memories preserved in the unconscious tend to reappear, in consciousness or in behaviour, in a distorted or disguised form.<sup>59</sup> My argument is that, despite the total ‘repression’ of Ken Mills in *The Outsider No. 2*, he returns anyway in *The Outsider No. 3*, but now only in the form of a record producer and former unsuccessful manager of Icon Hall.

There is still no mention of Mills’ role as founder of Preservation Hall. Larry Borenstein, in particular, is careful once again to omit Mills from his account of that endeavour. Such was Borenstein’s hostility to Mills that I believe there was some deliberate and conscious suppression of Mills’ importance in the origins of Preservation Hall and some unconscious repression of the ‘facts’, so anxiety provoking were they to Borenstein.

In the section headed ‘Some last-minute Stuff’ in *The Outsider No. 2*, the following notice is given:

Gypsy Lou & Ernest ‘Punch’ Miller (the great N.O. trumpeter and blues man) are collaborating on a ‘long distance’ blues number which Miller will premiere at Preservation Hall May 13 p.m.<sup>60</sup>



**Figure 11.9** Icon 1-45-736

Just three and a half months later, ‘Long Distance Blues’ with a vocal by Punch Miller was recorded by Ken Grayson Mills in Jeunes Amis Hall as part of his Punch’s Delegates of Pleasure session. This led to Icon LP 7 and to the single referred to above.



**Figure 11.10** Ken Grayson Mills and Warwick Reynolds working on the tapes of ‘Long Distance Blues’ with Gypsy Lou, Jeunes Amis Hall, 1962  
Courtesy of *The Outsider*

Ken and Gypsy Lou collaborated on the marketing and selling of this single in *The Outsider No. 3*. The single is featured in several sections of the journal. There is a photograph of Punch Miller going over the words and music for ‘Long Distance Blues’. Included, too, is a picture of Gypsy Lou with the band.

There are also two pictures of Ken Mills and Warwick Reynolds recording the session, with Grayson Mills and Icon duly credited. The 45 rpm single is photographed and offered free with an *Outsider* subscription or for \$1.00 with no subscription. An additional full-page advertisement for the single is included offering a copy autographed by Gypsy Lou. On another two pages, a photograph of Israel Gorman is accompanied by the text:

Israel Gorman . . . born 1896, played with Wooden Joe Nicholas, Louis Dumaine and Buddy Petit; is still good enough to solo throughout a recent LP. *The River's in Mourning*, 4-starred by *DownBeat* this year. Two of the numbers from this '63 Icon release, ‘Saint Louis Blues’ and Gypsy Lou’s ‘Long Distance Blues’ – co-written with Punch Miller – are now on jukes (Icon 45-736) trying to bring some \$\$ in for *Outsider #4*.<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, there is a quarter-page advertisement for all the Icons released to date, namely, Icons LP 1 through 7, each individually listed. ‘Long Distance Blues’ is duly underscored in the advertisement.<sup>62</sup> Grayson Mills gets full credit in ‘the editor’s bit’ section paralleling the Icon advertisement, thus:

Grayson Mills, who owns and records for Icon Records, is the man at the left in bottom photo on the recording session page; next to him is Gypsy; at far right engineer Warwick Reynolds, an authority on jazz from England...<sup>63</sup>

There is, moreover, a photo featured of Emanuel Sayles’ Silver Leaf Jazz Band playing their last engagement at Mills’ ‘ill-fated’ Icon Hall. The sting in the tail is added:

Ill-fated because jazz writer & recorder Grayson Mills, who operated it, is not a business man (his love is jazz) – so the hall folded for lack of enthusiasm for making money.<sup>64</sup>

So how is Larry Borenstein going to deal with Mills in his account of ‘Jazz

in New Orleans 1957-1963', included in the same article of *The Outsider?* He can hardly erase Mills entirely given that Mills is featured so prominently in the rest of the article.

Borenstein starts his account with the sentence: 'To the visiting jazz enthusiast looking for live traditional music in New Orleans the period 1957 to 1960 was a rough one.'<sup>65</sup> After writing about what few gigs there were at this time, Borenstein introduces how music was introduced into his Associated Artists Studio.

The owner, much interested in traditional jazz and other music, welcomed folk singers, gospel groups, jazz musicians, and other buskers as long as the doors were open.<sup>66</sup>

The first date he mentions is that, in 1957, 'Punch Miller started coming round . . . frequently with a pick-up band.' And then: 'Before long Kid Thomas and his band were coming by regularly, usually for Sunday afternoon "rehearsal" sessions. Borenstein then goes on to list other musicians coming to the sessions and 'rehearsals' with no dates given. He adds:

Around this time Grayson Mills, a young Californian jazz devotee, came to New Orleans to record some of the old New Orleans jazzmen. Sessions were held in the patio at the rear of Associated Artists Studio which were later issued as the Punch Miller and the Kid Thomas albums of the Icon series.<sup>67</sup>

This was, of course, in the summer of 1960. Borenstein continues:

After Mills left he realized that he had only scratched the surface, and early in 1961 he returned to audition more bands. With approval from the gallery owner, arrangements were set for a series of nightly auditions during which the customary kitty collections were made. The auditions attracted additional audience-interest, and also a bit of chaos, for listeners shortly were overflowing into the street. Volunteer help was hastily recruited, among them Sylvia Shannon, Aline Willis, Bill Russell, Allan and Sandy Jaffe, Bill and Barbara Reid Edmiston, and others. Within a month the gallery was moved next door and the space given over entirely to jazz concerts under the name 'Preservation Hall'.<sup>68</sup>

Borenstein immediately and seamlessly moves on to add the following:

With the renaming a new arrangement was made for bringing order out of chaos. Responsibility for the Hall's schedule was assigned to Allan and Sandy Jaffe, who lost no time in placing it on a logical sustaining basis.<sup>69</sup>

Mills is thus expunged again.

There is no mention of the 'Opening Night' at Preservation Hall in June 1961. There is no mention of the formation of the New Orleans Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz (NOSPTJ) established to formally constitute and run Preservation Hall. There is no mention of the letter sent by the Mayor of New Orleans to congratulate Ken Mills on being the Society's first president; no mention, indeed, of the raft of pioneering moves made by Mills in the first three-month period in which he managed Preservation Hall before being ousted by Borenstein.

In addition, there is no mention made of the fact Borenstein was out of town during most of these months and, in any event, declined to serve on the committee of the NOSPTJ.<sup>70</sup>

Rather, in Borenstein's account, Mills has become a young devotee from California who came to New Orleans to record some of the old-time musicians and was given permission to use Borenstein's patio at 726 St. Peter Street to make his initial recordings. The 1961 'auditions' at 726 St. Peter Street are then seen to lead seamlessly on to well-attended kitty 'rehearsals'; to a bunch of 'volunteers' helping with the management of the 'rehearsals'; to Borenstein moving his gallery next door to make space for a venue exclusively for music; to the naming of that space as 'Preservation Hall'; and to Allan and Sandy Jaffe 'bringing order out of chaos'.

With such conflation, Ken Mills is obliterated from the history of Preservation Hall.

## Conclusion

It was Mills' belief that, just as Borenstein sought to obliterate Mills as the founder and first manager of Preservation Hall, so did Preservation Hall, under the management of Allan and Sandra Jaffe, eventually 'obliterate the real feel'<sup>71</sup> of New Orleans jazz.

This did not happen overnight, of course. Rather, Mills notices that his Jeunes Amis Hall sessions (Icon LP 7-12) lack something when compared with his earlier recordings. In a letter responding to Alan Solman, a New Orleans jazz fan who had presumably expressed his preference for the earlier Icons, Mills writes:

I have always been amazed at your perception. There is a feeling about the first Punch, Thomas, Angrum & Howard<sup>72</sup> which is totally missing everywhere afterwards. [Mills adds in the margin: 'same feeling as found on AM [American Music] and on Wykoff [David Wyckoff], [Alden] Ashforth and [Jim] McGarrell sessions.'] Preservation Hall, its techisation [sic] and taste, obliterated the real feel of real NOJ. This 'feeling' is also found on the Paulin session.<sup>73</sup> There was, however, good, fiercely swinging, often beautiful jazz to be had as ICONS 7-12 prove.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, according to Mills, by the time of the recording sessions of Icon LP 7-12 in late August 1962, Preservation Hall, as managed by Allan and Sandra Jaffe, was already working its obliterating influence.

In *The Outsider No. 2*, 'the Consultant' Dick Allen had emphasised Allan and Sandra Jaffe's management of Preservation Hall, and had put the matter less personally and within a longer time frame:

Will this historic music be preserved for many more years? Certainly New Orleans jazz of the 60's is different from that of the 20's. The disappearance of the dancehall in the past decade has had its effect in bandstand delivery. Though there is no pressure from management here, stage hokum is bound to creep in . . . when a drop-in audience watches and does not dance. Change, mostly invalid, is inevitable under this modern-day set up.

Our sober advice: better come listen before that 'creep in' becomes audible – 4, 5 or 8 years from now. By that time, though, no few of these 'imperishable'

jazzmen still creating the only bonified New-Orleans-born music in person today – because they are the last of the talented living who started it – will be playing (the later the better for us) their closer walks Up Yonder.<sup>75</sup>

For Mills, however, who had been present from the start of the 1960s, the ‘creep in’ was already audible by the time he was making his Jeunes Amis Hall recordings in late 1962.

But be that as it may, scholars and enthusiasts of second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism (1960-1976) have Mills to thank for an abundance of ‘good, fiercely swinging, often beautiful jazz’ recordings made at Jeunes Amis Hall and recorded before that ‘creep in’ became obvious to anyone who cared to listen for it.

## NOTES

1. Richard Ekins, ‘Ken Grayson Mills and Icon Hall, 734 St. Louis Street, New Orleans: A Reminiscence from Big Bill Bissonnette, with Further Notes on Icon Records, Icon Hall and Perseverance Hall’, *Just Jazz*, No. 231, July 2017, pp. 24-30 at p. 30.
2. I thank Per Oldaeus, Fred Eatherton, Doug Landau and Matthew Ekins for their contributions to this article.
3. ‘Emanuel Sayles: As Told by David Griffiths’. In David Griffiths, *Hot Jazz: From Harlem to Storyville*, 1998, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, and Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers – The State University of New Jersey, p. 35.
4. Letter from Ken Mills to Alan Solman, 25 August 1964. Icon LP 13 (Emile Barnes/Doc Paulin) was recorded earlier at Perseverance (Icon) Hall. I have written about this recording in previous articles in the Ken Grayson Mills series and do not consider it here.
5. Accessed June 28, 2023, <http://research.culturalequity.org/get-audio-detailed-recording.do?recordingId=21323>.
6. Chris Albertson, ‘Stomp Off: New Orleans ’61: The Journey Begins’, 2009, accessed June 28, 2023, <http://stomp-off.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/new-orleans-1961.html>.

7. Tom Bethell, 'Recording at San Jacinto Hall in the 60s', *New Orleans Music*, 2008, 14 (1): 6-11 at p. 8.
8. Chris Albertson, op. cit.
9. Eddie Sommers is variously spelt 'Sommers' and 'Summers'. In the case of a number of variant spellings of New Orleans musicians' names, many writers continued to follow earlier, incorrect spellings even after subsequent research has made corrections.
10. Christopher Hillman, 'The Icons', *Jazz Journal*, May 1971, 24 (5): 12-14 at p. 13.
11. See: this chapter, note 4 above.
12. Letter from Ken Mills to Alan Solman, August 25, 1964.
13. He didn't. The Riverside series mostly received three stars. Its highest was one three and a half stars. Mills' star rating was more variable but he did get one four star (which included Gorman – Icon LP 7) and one four and a half stars (Icon LP 8). This *DownBeat* 1963 achievement was unprecedented and has, to my knowledge, remained unsurpassed in second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism. See: 'Cream of the Crop', *DownBeat's Music '64, 9th Yearbook*, 1964, John Maher, Chicago, pp. 32-33.
14. Barry Martyn and Mike Hazeldine, 'An Interview with Herb Friedwald, Part 2', *New Orleans Music*, 1991, 2 (6): 6-14 at p. 9.
15. The quoted passages are from Ken Mills' letter to Alan Solman, August 26, 1963. The 'Shake It' is presumably, the 'Shake It and Break It' from the Punch Miller Icon LP 7 session on Arhoolie F1013. 'Nelly Gray' from the Kid Howard LP 4 session is also on Arhoolie F1013.
16. Big Bill Bissonnette, *The Jazz Crusade: The Inside Story of the Great New Orleans Jazz Revival of the 1960s*, 1992, Special Request Books, Bridgeport, Connecticut, p. 69. 'Missed' that is, by the 1960s revival. Gorman was on a number of privately recorded dance hall sides of the 1950s that were eventually released on LP and then CD, for example, 'Israel Gorman at Happy Landing', Center CLP-12; American Music, AMCD-114.
17. Carter could not have been more wrong when he suggests that Mills lacked 'historical perspective'. See: William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, 1991, W.W. Norton, New York, p 142.
18. Ken Grayson Mills, 'Sleeve Notes', Punch's Delegates of Pleasure – *The River's*

*in Morning* featuring Israel Gorman’, Icon LP 7.

19. Howard, himself, said he was at his best in the 1920s, at a time when he was sometimes dismissed as an Armstrong copyist. His Climax session of 1943 with the George Lewis band is often cited as Howard at his peak on record, never to be achieved again. Of the sixty-five or so recording sessions that Howard made since then, it is the Icons that come closest to the high standards of the Climax session. Undoubtedly, it was Mills’ influence that facilitated this. See: Raymond Lee, *Avery ‘Kid’ Howard Discography*, 2003, Gerard Bielderma, Zwolle, Netherlands; also Brian Harvey, *The Hottest Trumpet: The Kid Howard Story*, 2007, Jazzology Press, New Orleans. Interestingly, Eric J. Brown, who was at the Icon LP 8 September session, wrote in his unpublished diary: ‘Wonderful stuff, sounding very much like the Climax session, so I suppose this must be the best group so far.’ Eric J. Brown, *First Visit to New Orleans and Some Chicago*, Diary No. 1, 1962, p. 5.

20. Cited by Grayson Mills in his ‘Sleeve Notes’, *Kid Howard 1961*, Icon LP 4.

21. Grayson Mills, ‘Sleeve Notes’, *Kid Howard’s Olympia Band*, Icon LP 8.

22. Christopher Hillman, *Jazz Journal*, op. cit., p. 13.

23. Brian Harvey, *The Hottest Trumpet: The Kid Howard Story*, Jazzology Press, New Orleans, 2007, pp. 101 and 103.

24. Bob Rowbotham, ‘Review of “George Lewis with George Guesnon New Orleans Band, *Endless the Trek, Endless the Search*”’, *American Music* AMCD-59, *New Orleans Music*, 1997, 7 (2): 26-27 at p. 26.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Letter from Ken Mills to Alan Solman, August 26, 1963.

27. Tom Bethell, 2008, op. cit., p 7.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Chris Albertson, 2009, op. cit. For a rather different story about these sides, see: Mike Pointon, ‘DVD Review: Barry Martyn Recalls the ‘Living Legends’ on Film’, *Just Jazz*, No. 229, May 2017, pp. 34-35.

30. Barry Martyn and Mike Hazeldine, 2009, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

31. *Kid Howard, featuring George Guesnon*, MONO LP 2.

32. Brian Harvey, op. cit., p. 101.

33. *Kid Martyn in New Orleans with Kid Sheik’s Band*, 77 LA 12/20.

34. Mills includes the triptych with a reproduction of the article 'Last Stand for Old Jazzmen by David Zinman', in his notes to his cassette release *Live! Opening Night at Preservation Hall – Historic Document*, Getdown Records.
35. Brian Harvey, op. cit., p. 105.
36. Grayson Mills, 'Sleeve Notes', *John Casimir's Young Tuxedo Jazz Band*, Icon LP 11. 'Warner' is the trombonist, Albert Warner.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Dan Pawson, 'Review of *John Casimir's Young Tuxedo Jazz Band*', American Music AMCD-61, *New Orleans Music*, 1998, 7 (5): 31.
41. Doug Landau, 'Andrew "Jug" Anderson: The Quiet Man', *New Orleans Music*, 10 (2): 14-17 at p 17.
42. Email, Richard Ekins to Doug Landau, April 25, 2017.
43. Email, Doug Landau to Richard Ekins, April 25, 2017.
44. Robert Greenwood has recently made the profound point: 'I have a pet theory that what makes New Orleans music so expressive and lends it such emotional depth, gravitas, and sheer humanity is that the New Orleans men and women played every tune, including the blues, as if it were a hymn.' See: Robert Greenwood, 'Review of *Sammy Rimington: A Snapshot of his American Recordings 1995-1999*', Upbeat: URCD274, *Just Jazz*, No. 232, August 2017, pp. 18-19 at p. 19. This 'theory' may well explain why the music of old-style 'down-home' New Orleans is so different from most of its manifestations further afield.
45. Barry Martyn, 'Booklet Notes', pp. 3-4, *John Handy: The Very First Recordings*, American Music, AMCD-51, 1993.
46. Grayson Mills, 'Sleeve Notes', *Kid Clayton's Happy Pals*, Icon LP 12.
47. Letter from Ken Mills to Alan Solman, June 28, 1969.
48. Grayson Mills, 'Sleeve Notes', *Kid Clayton*, op. cit.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Tom Sancton, 'Review of *Kid Clayton's Happy Pals*', *New Orleans Music*, 8 (4): 23-25.

52. Email, Richard Ekins to Fred Eatherton, April 29, 2017.
53. Email, Fred Eatherton to Richard Ekins, April 30, 2017.
54. Facebook comment, Per Oldaeus to Richard Ekins, May 5, 2017.
55. See: in particular, William Faulkner, *New Orleans Sketches*, 1953; Leanne French, 'Tennessee Williams & New Orleans, The City That Was His Muse', 2015, accessed June 28, 2023, [www.biography.com/news/tennessee-williams-new-orleans](http://www.biography.com/news/tennessee-williams-new-orleans).
56. *The Outsider No. 2*, p. 99. Frequently, the grammar seems suspect in the passages quoting Dick Allen. I quote Allen verbatim.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
59. Sigmund Freud, 'Repression', 1915, Standard Edition of the *Collected Works, Volume 14*, Hogarth, London, pp. 141-158. 'Repressed' is the correct term when the process is unconscious. 'Suppressed' when the process is conscious.
60. *The Outsider, No. 2*, p. 91.
61. *The Outsider, No. 3*, p. 127.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
70. I have elaborated all these points, except the last, in my previous *Just Jazz* articles on Ken Grayson Mills. For the last point, see my 2017 *Just Jazz* article, 'Preservation Hall: The Rest of the Story'.
71. The phrase 'obliterate the real feel' comes from a letter from Ken Mills to Alan Solman, June 28, 1969.
72. Icon LPs 2, 3, 4 and 6.
73. First issued on Jazzology JCE-23 with Icon LP 13 cover.

74. Letter from Ken Mills to Alan Solman, June 28, 1969.

75. *The Outsider*, No. 2, p. 100. See note 55 above.

A black and white photograph of a building facade. At the top, there is a balcony with a decorative wrought-iron railing. Below the balcony, there are several doors. On the left, a white door is partially open, revealing a dark interior. In the center, a white door with a diamond-shaped window is visible. To the right, a dark door is partially open, showing a bright interior. The overall scene is a historical or industrial building.

# CHAPTER 12

‘PRESERVATION HALL:  
The Rest of the Story by Ken  
Grayson Mills’, Introduced,  
Illustrated, and Annotated  
by Richard Ekins, with a  
Footnote by Larissa Mills

*November 2017*



## Chapter 12

William Carter's book *Preservation Hall*, published in 1991, is widely regarded as a 'balanced' account of the origins and development of Preservation Hall which pays due attention to the precursors of the music that would be 'preserved', as for instance, the music of 'Those Marvellous Dance Halls'; to 'The Preservers', most notably, Bill Russell, Larry Borenstein, Ken Grayson Mills and Barbara Reid, before moving seriously on to the contribution of Allan and Sandra Jaffe under the chapter heading 'Each One is Right'.

It was this 'Each One is Right' approach that drew the venom of Ken Grayson Mills. Carter's diplomatic response to what he readily acknowledges was 'the Mills-Borenstein turmoil' that led to Mills and Reid being ejected from Preservation Hall in mid-September 1961, infuriated Mills. Whereas previously Mills had focused his wrath on Borenstein as the source of all his anger and bitterness concerning his removal from Preservation Hall, the publication of Carter's book gave Mills a new target for his ire.

In this chapter, Mills makes it quite clear what rankled him most about Carter's *Preservation Hall* book. It is the credit Carter gives Borenstein for running his informal 'kitty sessions' in his art gallery in the mid-late 1950s that Carter sees as leading up to the opening of what would become Preservation Hall at the same 726 St. Peter Street address. This is a widely accepted 'fact'.

For Mills, this interpretation misses entirely the point that in his own mind he had conceived the idea of Preservation Hall **before** he had even arrived in New Orleans for the first time in 1960. The focus for his jazz enthusiasm had been Jack's Record Cellar in San Francisco, where Mills would endlessly discuss his developing tastes in music, meet musicians, and plan interview and recording sessions with them. For instance, on his arrival in New Orleans he brought with him the tape recording he had just made of

his interview with Frank Goudie on 1 June, in Frank Goudie's upholstery shop in San Francisco.

It is in this context that we should consider Mills' point about the idea of Preservation Hall first being conceived by him in San Francisco. There is much evidence to support Mills' claim. In the first place, there are his recordings of those San Francisco sessions which were eventually released on AMCD-50 and GHB BCD-13. They were all recorded between the time of his first visit to New Orleans in 1960 and his second visit in 1961 when Preservation Hall was founded in New Orleans. These sessions were categorised by Mills variously as 'Amos White and his Six Pods of Pepper', 'Burt Bales and Frank "Big Boy" Goudie', 'Burt Bales', and 'Burt Bales Trio'.

In the second place, when it became apparent that Mills was going to have to leave his 726 St. Peter Street Preservation Hall address, his initial intention was to move Preservation Hall 'to a good location on Bourbon Street, across from The Court of Two Sisters'<sup>1</sup> and take the name of Preservation Hall with him. As he puts it diplomatically, this idea 'died for lack of a second'.<sup>2</sup> For all practical purposes it was Barbara Reid's lack of support that meant the idea was doomed.

Barbara and her husband were renting an apartment from Borenstein adjacent to Preservation Hall. Borenstein threatened that he would evict them from their apartment if they did not go along with his plans for Preservation Hall, as opposed to Ken's plans.

Mills had wanted his article to be published in *New Orleans Music* but, at the time, soon after the publication of Carter's book, it was regarded as too hot to handle. Barry Martyn had given a copy to Paige VanVorst who edited George Buck's *Jazzology* newsletter. VanVorst did not use the article for his own or *Jazzology* purposes. Neither did he send the article to *New Orleans Music*. Sadly, it lay forgotten in a drawer until Paige sent it to me in 2017.



**12.1 Photograph by Bill Russell of Barbara Reid ('Protégé to Wm. Russell'<sup>3</sup>) working for American Music Records, Chicago, in the early 1950s. Note Russell's inscription 'Little Record Girl From Chicago'. Afterwards, both Reid and Russell moved to New Orleans where they lived for most of their respective lives. Bill Russell was the recording engineer for Icons LP 1-3 (1959-1960). Reid co-founded Preservation Hall with Mills in the summer of 1961.**

**Photograph courtesy of Kelley Edmiston**

# **‘PRESERVATION HALL: The Rest of the Story by Ken Grayson Mills’, Introduced, Illustrated, and Annotated by Richard Ekins, with a Footnote by Larissa Mills**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, November 2017

## **Introduction**

Amongst the cache of Ken Grayson Mills material sent to me by Paige VanVorst<sup>4</sup> in March 2017 was an unpublished article by Ken Mills entitled ‘PRESERVATION HALL: The Rest of the Story by Ken Mills’. Ken had written the following on the title page: ‘Please send a copy to the editor of *New Orleans [Music]*, incorporating *Footnote*’.<sup>5</sup> In the event, VanVorst never sent the article to *New Orleans Music* and it lay forgotten in his files for some two decades.<sup>6</sup>

The article was headed by a ‘POSTSCRIPT’ about which Mills had written: ‘Note: Read this first as it contains a lot of new information. If this is published . . . it goes to the rear.’ I have followed Ken’s request in this regard.

The trigger for writing the article was the publication of William Carter’s book *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart* in 1991.<sup>7</sup> This book has been widely received as a respected and ‘balanced’ account of the origins and development of Preservation Hall written by a fair-minded writer, editor and photographer ‘with a permanent love affair with New Orleans jazz’.<sup>8</sup>

For Mills, however, the book opened up the wounds he felt he had received at the hands of Larry Borenstein in the early 1960s. Mills and Borenstein became friends soon after Mills first arrived in New Orleans in June 1960. Borenstein facilitated the opening of Preservation Hall, in June 1961, by allowing Mills to use Borenstein’s former Associated Artists Studio at 726 St. Peter Street, for the purposes of holding nightly concerts<sup>9</sup> featuring old-style New Orleans jazz musicians. While Borenstein was out of town, Mills was the leading figure in establishing The New Orleans Society

for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz (NOSPTJ) to found and manage Preservation Hall as a non-profit corporation.<sup>10</sup> When Borenstein returned to New Orleans from his travels,<sup>11</sup> he did not like what he saw and set about making sure that Mills no longer operated Preservation Hall at 726 St. Peter Street. The NOSPTJ was dissolved and Borenstein placed Allan and Sandra Jaffe in charge of the Hall on a profit (or loss) basis and the rest, as they say, is history.



**Figure 12.2** Book jacket of *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, 1991  
by William Carter

Prior to the publishing of Carter's book, Mills reserved most of his anger for Larry Borenstein. However, when Carter bestowed upon Larry Borenstein a major role in the origin of Preservation Hall, Mills felt compelled to channel some of that rage towards Carter and Carter's book. Typical is the following, written for Barry Martyn's Icon Project, which released the bulk of Ken Mills' Icon recordings on GHB's American Music CD series. In the booklet notes for the first of the Icon American Music series, Mills writes:

In his book, *PRESERVATION HALL: Music from the Heart*, author William Carter hallucinates that the hall found its origins in impromptu, irregularly held jam sessions New Orleans art dealer E.L. Borenstein held at his 726 St. Peter art gallery – years before Barbara Reid-Edmiston and I created and molded the business. But Preservation Hall was a concept, a hypnogogic dream flash that rose from the ideas expressed at Jack's Record Cellar. We were considering it as a West Coast operation.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 12.3** Preservation Hall, 726 St. Peter Street, New Orleans, summer 1961. Note the handwritten sign: ‘PRESERVATION HALL – PRODUCED AND MAINTAINED BY GRAYSON MILLS – PSYCHOLOGICALLY SUSTAINED BY BARBARA REID’.

**From left to right: Mother Mary Margaret Parker, unknown, Louis Nelson, Kid Thomas Valentine, Sammy Penn, George Lewis, Emanuel Sayles.**

**Photograph courtesy of Kelley Edmiston**

Sometimes, Mills' anger would turn to verbal and personal abuse and this occasionally spills over into the article reproduced below. In an earlier draft I edited out such passages. They may cause offence and, in any event, they do not do Mills or his arguments any favours. However, I have been persuaded to publish the article exactly as Mills wrote it,<sup>13</sup> not least to give Mills his final and unexpurgated 'last word' on the origins and early development of Preservation Hall. In this article, Mills makes important points that need to be part of the historical record and his arguments add new evidence for the claim that he should be regarded as founding father of the 'Great New Orleans Jazz Revival of the 1960s'.<sup>14</sup>

## **'PRESERVATION HALL: The Rest of the Story'** **by Ken Grayson Mills**

### **Prologue**

When Bill Carter's book about Preservation Hall was published, he sent me a free copy. I couldn't believe his perspective that Borenstein's sporadic self-indulgent kitty hostings were the starting point. The starting point was my regular rehearsals to get the musicians in shape for posterity (Icon).<sup>15</sup> Carter's tack is that I deserved what happened for pissing off Borenstein and being an unsmiling creep. I didn't know the music but operated out of 'raw instinct'. He didn't reach me for fair comment so that readers could draw their own conclusions. He didn't credit Barbara [Reid] and me for establishing the modus operandi and laying down what [Allan] Jaffe called in the 1970s a 'good foundation'.

Carter didn't say Jaffe learned the ropes by observing the action and listening to the bands' every performance, standing out by the hitching post in front of the carriage way. He didn't say that Borenstein removed us with a crowbar by exercising a loophole in the contract. He didn't say that Borenstein declined an offer to be on the board of directors where he could

assert business-like input, civility. Rather, he [Borenstein] disturbed the waters by carrying on like an asshole. Finally, Carter didn't say the reason Barbara wouldn't support moving is she lived upstairs on the Associated Artists Studio property and couldn't afford to move. Bill Edmiston<sup>16</sup> confirmed that Borenstein threatened to kick her out in the street, furniture and all. After I read the book, I called Carter and asked him if he knew the reason we couldn't move and survive. Carter said, approximately, 'I presume it's because Borenstein threatened to throw her out of her apartment.' Then he wrote me a note saying I was carrying a 'packet of anger' that was no good for me.

It wasn't the loss of the creation from my soul that angered me, it was the book. Presumably, it was intended to be the definitive reference on the Hall. I had long ago made peace with the cruelty of fate and presumed that there was plenty of contemporary source material to establish the record.

Carter dismissed this body of publicity and evidence (news) by saying it was small potatoes compared with the ton of publicity the Hall would receive over the years. That's an amazing conclusion. It was the national press, the local press and local TV live coverage that made people want to get in on it. That and foot traffic and word-of-mouth. The city was proud of it; culturally, and of the good vibration all around.

I have been watching Oprah Winfrey on the tube and was struck by the shows featuring Dr. Phil McGraw, author of LIFE STRATEGIES: Doing what works, Doing what matters.<sup>17</sup> McGraw advises people to give up anger and grudges because it controls who you are. He says, 'Tell him I'm not to let you control my life any longer, I'm not going to give you that power. I forgive you and that's a windfall for you.'

I forgive Carter but I'd like a correction of the record. It won't kill him.

## **PRESERVATION HALL – Music from the HEART by WILLIAM CARTER**

If I'd known he was going to exercise such a lack of the canons of journalism I wouldn't have consented to the interview. He was asking questions Allan [Jaffe] couldn't answer, so Jaffe told him I was out in California and suggested Carter talk to me.

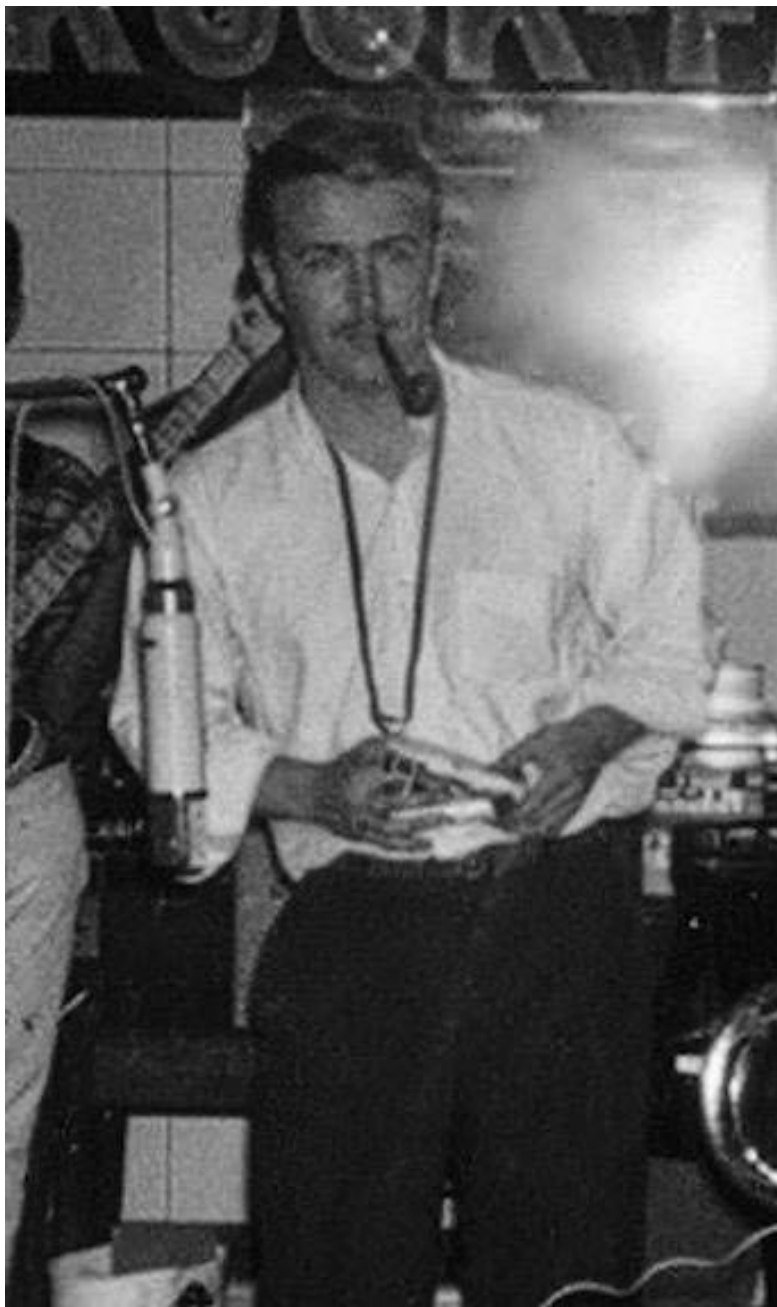
He lionized Jaffe – which was proper – but he didn't address the purpose of inception or the varying contributions to the music's history. There is no musicology. There's no assessment of the hall's impact on the music. (More in a moment.)

This crap is going to survive me and affect the legacy of my heirs – my daughter and three grandchildren.<sup>18</sup> As Steve Allen said on KNBC TV (Ch. 4) Sunday: 'I've been extremely lucky. There is no justice you know. One guy with something to contribute makes it and another equally as talented doesn't.' Somerset Maugham also said that.

Carter didn't get both sides of the story:

When Charlie DeVore says I ordered the bands around, demanding they play 'Bucket's Got a Hole in It',<sup>19</sup> he didn't add that the band was repetitively playing uptempo selections and it was getting monotonous. When DeVore said I didn't smile, Charlie failed to add that when one is involved in-depth with soaking in and assessing the music they are involved with 'aesthetic arrest.' He sums, 'It was a bad scene, man.'<sup>20</sup>

If Carter read David Zinman's *Associated Press* article (which ran nationwide) and Bill Stuckey's piece in the *New Orleans States-Item* he'd have known it wasn't a 'bad scene'.<sup>21</sup> Incidentally, when Bill Russell kindly donated his services in recording Icon sessions and when he dropped in to listen to the bands at the Preservation Hall he never smiled. It wasn't a 'bad scene'. I thought he was in the act of listening. Why didn't Carter exercise 'FAIR COMMENT'?



**Figure 12.4 Ken Grayson Mills in 1963.  
Courtesy of Tsar Fedorsky and Per Oldaeus**

When Carter mentions that I hung up paintings in direct competition with Borenstein's art gallery next door at 734 St. Peter?<sup>22</sup> Well, Borenstein had no paintings of jazz CONTENT. And I hung them to spruce up the barren atmosphere. Additionally, the artists paid a commission which was intended to help the project. For sure, it incensed Borenstein, probably because he hadn't thought it up. Later, he commissioned XAVIER de Callatay<sup>23</sup> to do a series of portraits of the musicians and had Jaffe put them up in Preservation Hall. Why didn't Carter mention this aspect to me during the interview?

Signs 'all over the place': guilty as charged. Barbara loved them. There were two in front, one reading the band's name and personnel and the other saying 'Never on Sunday.' There was one in the exit (the breezeway) saying the band's name and personnel. There were two over the bandstand. One said 'Every cent of the kitty goes to the musicians' because Borenstein was telling everyone who would listen that, 'Nobody knows how much is in the kitty or where the money goes.' He didn't realize Ralph Collins was within hearing distance. The choice of prepositions was wrong: the sign should have read 'for' instead of 'to', also, Borenstein was heard by several audience members (who asked me about it) indicating that he 'owned' the place. He [Borenstein] was there nightly, too, standing on the carriage way. Jaffe, incidentally, was there nightly, too, standing by the hitching post, listening to the music. Both of them observed everything that went on but Jaffe never hassled me. That was Borenstein's 'trip'.

After he flipped out, coming back from his Mexico business trip,<sup>24</sup> I tried to pacify him but it was him or Barbara and that determined my choice – who helped and believed in me and what we were doing and who loathed both factors? asked, 'What will it take to get you off my back?' He said 'Pay me some rent and you won't have to put up with me any longer.' A contract was drawn up and I paid \$400 a month rent, more than twice what such space was getting in the French Quarter (in 1961). Borenstein did not keep the covenant. He kept harassing me almost nightly, embarrassing me

in front of nearby stragglers hanging around during intermission. Not every intermission but every night. He told me, ‘This place is thriving in spite of you not because of you.’

He tried getting the SFTPOTJ<sup>25</sup> board to impeach me and demanded a look at the books. Treasurer Bill Edmiston said ‘It’s the business of the board to know what’s in the books and not the landlord’s.’ The impeachment request (on the agenda) was voted down. I wanted us to move, although we would lose Pat O’Brien’s (a popular hell-raising restaurant/nightclub) located next door to the west. Ralph [Collins] said ‘Larry hates Ken’s guts and is never going to let it rest.’ But Barbara said that although there are much lower rents available the advantages of the present location outweighed the benefits of cheaper rent. That was that. We lasted a little over one more month.



**Figure 12.5 ‘The George Lewis Band: George Guesnon, bj, Emanuel Sayles, bj, George Lewis, cl, and Grayson ‘Ken’ Mills (with pipe), owner of Icon Records and Preservation Hall’, June 1960.**

**Title, description and photo, courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University**

A month's peace was enjoyed. The Hotel Essex sent two envoys down to secure a contract for three bands to play in their Cleveland nightclub.<sup>26</sup> I selected Kid Sheik's Storyville Ramblers, Kid Howard's La Vida and Punch Miller's New Orleans Band. It was Zinman's AP news feature which caused them to think the music would be a big hit in Cleveland.<sup>27</sup> And, boy, was it a smash. Full house every night hearing Gallaud, John Joseph, Sheik, Handy, Warner and CiE.<sup>28</sup> The hotel manager and (CEO Sam Gestner) paid Marge<sup>29</sup> and my way up – free travel and accommodation. The band played a press conference and the reviews were rave notices. We were on Dorothy Fulheim [actually, Fuldheim] and Mike Douglas' TV shows<sup>30</sup> and the band played 'Ice Cream' and 'Hindustan'. Don Marquis, who wrote *In Search of Buddy Bolden* and is currently curator of the New Orleans Jazz museum<sup>31</sup> did a long piece for the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*'s Sunday magazine.<sup>32</sup> This was the start of the Preservation Hall tours.



**Figure 12.6 Marge Mills, probably late 1950s.  
Courtesy of Tsar Fedorsky**

While I was gone (about 3 days), Ralph [Collins] and Barbara [Reid] managed the Hall without missing a beat. Shortly after I returned, I was sweeping the place when Borenstein peeped in, looked both ways, and said he wanted to negotiate a new contract. This was a loophole I had noted in signing but knew he would never transact without such an advantage. He specified twice the rent and first and last month's rent in advance (Plus a 3-year time span).

I told Barbara I couldn't do it, the Hall wouldn't support it and said 'Now will you please move the operation?' She said, 'You could do something if you wanted to. There's nothing Bill and I can do, We don't have any money.' I later found out that she was afraid that Borenstein would throw them out on the street, furniture and all. According to a friend of hers, that was Borenstein's threat when he heard about the motion to move. I did not hear that myself. It makes 'sense'.

The business license and Preservation Hall's fictitious name statement belonged to the Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz. This was awkward for Borenstein and Jaffe. How could they succeed without what Allan called (before he died) a 'good foundation'? They had to build on the name recognition and global publicity. Borenstein asked me to sign an abandonment of the name's possession and he would pay the lawyer's fee and the cost of publication. He didn't offer to pay for the name (what is called 'Good Will') which I thought was rather shabby.

What Jaffe set up was a sole proprietorship with him as owner/manager. What he had to pay the musicians is unknown to me.

Quitting the ownership was anathema to me but I felt it incumbent upon me to put the music and musicians ahead of my self-interest. I signed and retrieved my letter from Mayor Victor B. Schiro 'congratulating me for enhancing the city's culture and arts'.<sup>33</sup> I had it hanging by the entrance door for public consumption. I still have it.

None of this is in Carter's chapter on the origins.

Just exactly why was there a Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz? It is a crucial and overlooked factor.<sup>34</sup>

The union rate at the time was \$24.50 per man/woman, double for leader. Borenstein and I (we were friends at the time) asked Pres. Louis Cottrell to come to the Associated Artists Studio's office and discuss my plans to present oldtime jazz on a nightly basis. I told Louis that \$24.50 was too ferocious, was there anything he could do? He was pensive, then after a few moments he said that the union had a special rate for non-profit/charitable corporations. It was \$13.50 per person and double for leader. Well, all right, as Joe Turner used to shout.

Carter chides me for failing to give Allan my little brown loose leaf notebook. It has the nightly dates, bands and personnel, kitty take and where the proceeds went (usually to pay the musicians – always – and repay my loans, the phone, the rent, the lights and miscellaneous overhead). Obviously that would have been helpful to him but it was none of his business. Allan came down to our apartment, shortly after taking over, and asked for the record of personnels. I told him he was destiny's child, selected as my (superior) successor and should have no trouble making it on his own. Clearly, I was right about making it on his own.

Carter would have done better to research all the press we got. *DownBeat*, *DownBeat Yearbook*, Zinman and Stuckey's articles, British Press (James Asman), city records, John S. Wilson's article in *High Fidelity* and Charles Suhor's work in *DownBeat* (a feature). Also, Samuel B. Charter's book *New Orleans Jazz: 1865-1963*.<sup>35</sup>

I think he was trying to gloss over the discomfort produced by what was so obviously a royal shaft. His failure to exercise 'fair comment' justifies the curious conclusions of fact. In journalism you're taught to 'get the other side' whenever a person is maligned or 'hit'.

He could have said that when Mills was removed with a crowbar – not for failing in business – Allan Jaffe saved the hall from extinction and so did

Mills with his graceful departure. End of story. Nothing served.

What would I like to see done? I'd like to see Carter, in the very next edition, trash that chapter devoted to the origins. It is a hideous injustice. I'd like to see the insertion of a prologue going something like this:

FOR ALMOST 40 YEARS WORLD-FAMOUS PRESERVATION HALL HAS THRILLED THOUSANDS AND BEEN AN AMERICAN INSTITUTION. IT WAS LAUNCHED ON JUNE 13, 1961<sup>36</sup> BY THE SOCIETY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF TRADITIONAL JAZZ, WITH A BOARD OF DIRECTORS CONSISTING OF GRAYSON MILLS, president; BILL RUSSELL, 1st Vice President; BARBARA REID-EDMISTON, 2nd Vice President; Sylvia SHANNON, Secretary; and BILL EDMISTON, Treasurer.

THE HALL ATTRACTED IMMEDIATE ATTENTION AND CHANGED OWNERSHIP IN MID-OCTOBER OF 1961<sup>37</sup> WHEN A MAISON BLANCHE DEPARTMENT STORE MANAGER NAMED ALLAN JAFFE TOOK THE REINS AND MOLDED AN ENDURING TRADITIONAL JAZZ BUSINESS.

THIS IS THE STORY OF PRESERVATION HALL AND THE MAN WHO BECAME ITS SYNONYM.

## **Addendum**

When the Hall was outliving its musicians it would have been apropos for Jaffe to have begun a school for perpetuating the art.<sup>38</sup> The concept might have gone as follows (and provide conscious absorption through conscious volition):

MAJOR FIELD: New Orleans Jazz CURRICULUM:

1. Development of a beautiful, individual tone and style.

Prerequisites – knowing your instrument from the first page; excellent reading skills.

- a. Method book notating the solo and ensemble work by the original.

If you're a trombonist that means Zue Robertson, Eddie Atkins, Preston Jackson, Honore Dutrey, Kid Ory, (et. al.) all the way through to Albert Warner, Jim Robinson, Louis Nelson, Harrison Brazlee, Joe Avery, Eddie Summers and Bill Matthews.

b. Lab work.

Listening to the corollary recordings on 78s and LPs (CDs today) of Freddie Keppard's Jazz Cardinals and Ory's Society Blues, Bernie Young's Creole Jazz Band, King Oliver's Savannah Syncopators and Creole Jazz Band, Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Seven on through to the AMs and Icons. Oscar Celestin's radio broadcasts. Jelly Roll Morton.

Focus on the bands' sound, modus operandi and what your instrument is doing, individually and in relation to the others.

2. The principles and practice of 'playing together', heterophony, every instrument is a 'rhythm instrument.'

Lab work (same as 1b).

Listening to traditional gospel, rhythm and blues (1945 to 1956) and urban electric blues.

Focus on the modus operandi of kaleidoscoping mosaic foundation. Heterophony.

Rhythmic irregularities tuned into the same beat.

How New Orleans style musicians transform basic foxtrots, drags, marches, shuffles and waltzes into avenues of expression.

3. The origins and life span of the music; biological and psychic impact. Its social roles and origin. Bibliography and text book.

4. Thesis. What do you know and how well do you know it?

## Postscript

If Borenstein had taken a post on the board of directors he could have put his objections on the agenda and presented a case based on his business instincts, experience and knowledge. Instead, he acted out of anger and hatred. In a proper and efficient business procedure, the intercourse of knowledge, experience and ideas come into play.

Borenstein loved the music and wanted to make money off of it and provide employment. Basically, that was the ground the society and I were operating on. But Borenstein didn't have the least idea of how to go about it. That's why he got involved in business with me.

When he changed the operation rent he told me he would deal only with me. He repeated that when he came up with the H-Bomb of doubling the rent – He said, 'I'll deal with you. I have no respect for that bunch. They're a bunch of flakes. I don't believe in it and they don't have any money.'

But, if he had been thinking straight, he'd have realized that it was the Society that made the whole thing work. There was no way volunteer contributions could meet \$171.50 six nights a week. The Society paid \$94.50 six nights a week. Overage went to repay loans (mine) and bills.

I don't know what rate the Jaffes paid but I do know they charged a donation of 50 cents at the carriageway entry. Obviously, we intended to enjoy the benefits of management and employee fees eventually (I'm not sure about Barbara, but a few years ago Bill Edmiston told me 'She'd have seen the need.')

I believe the Jaffes paid \$94.50. The union was looking the other way.

From my point of view (the Society was non-profit but could have charged a door donation; sold fan products and started a record label, put out a newsletter, served as an agent for gigs and what-not as forces to serve the music, musicians and city's culture), a door charge had to wait until the musicians had established local, national and international acclaim and enticement. That meant volunteer contributions to facilitate chance discovery

(foot traffic), TV and news coverage, jazz press and word-of-mouth.

That takes time and risk. We were lucky that the music was so powerful it paid the rent, supplies, union fee, join up costs (so people like Louis Gallaud, Emile Barnes, Billie & DeDe Pierce could join the union and participate). I paid their fees and the society repaid me. Many more such actions were planned and phone and electric bills (and rental loans). My money is needed to feed and shelter me and to build Icon records. The music also repaid the incorporation costs.<sup>39</sup>

Borenstein had no idea what was going on and he didn't ask. His assumption was that we didn't know what we were doing. If he had taken up my offer to join the board of directors he could have made an intelligent, organized input and had a vote. His concept of business was sole ownership.

Take the hanging of the paintings for instance, which was intended to identify the Hall (small box of a room actually) and benefit from commission fees which were to go with the general fund. Borenstein could have asked the board why they did that and argued that it was in direct competition with his gallery. I could have told him you have no paintings with jazz content and I have no customary paintings. He could have said he'd commission his stable of artists to do some and we could have those and take the independent street artists down. Also, he'd give the Society a cut for the privilege and we'd get the benefit of a share of the proceeds and the beautification (Preservation Hall was stark and ugly). That's business but it was beyond his mindset.

Consider this: it was Borenstein who declined participation in decision making and policy; it was Borenstein who put himself in the position of landlord; it was Borenstein who made and broke the covenant to mind his own business if he received rent (he said 'I won't bother you any more,'); it was Borenstein who hung out in the carriageway every night, badmouthing the management; and, it was the society that was too stupid to move.

I don't know what Jaffe's rent was – if any – but I sure as hell know he didn't pay \$750 a month for space that was going for \$200 per month in the

French Quarter. He was a businessman as Pickles Jackson, a taxicab driver who played drums said, 'I look around this room and I don't see \$400.00'.

Sandra Jaffe is Borenstein's niece and it is possible the whole thing was a scam in the first place. I was a wide eyed zealot who made a little money and knew the music. I could take the risk, show the way and squander my money. I can't prove it.

In his book about the Hall, William Carter quotes Allan Jaffe saying he was one of the volunteers (handling drinks, for instance) and that he dropped out ' . . . when the politics started.'

The fact of the matter is that Jaffe didn't fall out for that reason. Sandra Jaffe was one of the Kitty handlers and she was making these excruciating, sincere appeals for contributions at intermission. They were maudlin orations about how wonderful the music and the musicians were and how much they needed and deserved support. 'The music will die without your support,' she said. Of course, and all that was true but maudlin speeches were inappropriate and spoiled the good times spirit as people listened, you could feel the tension. It embarrassed the musicians and their music spoke for itself. Who cared about history? People were having fun. I asked Allan to prevail upon Sandra to quit making the speeches and gave my reasons. He got pissed off and said my lack of appreciation didn't deserve their help. They withdrew.

Barbara had these charming handbills printed about 'New Orleans' own original rhythm' and 'No drinking, no gimmicks – just Real music'. She went around the Quarter putting them in store windows. Borenstein got wind of it and then raced around and pulled all of them out. That was right after he returned from his Mexico trip.

I wish to acknowledge the wonderful volunteer Kitty basket handlers who liked the music and wanted to help. They included Ione Anderson, Pat Gordon, Mrs. Harry Oster, Marge Fedorsky, and Patti Hoffman. If I've forgotten anyone, I am sorry.

## **Footnote by Larissa Mills, email to Richard Ekins**

**August 1, 2017<sup>40</sup>**

Hello Richard,

Hope that you are doing well. My name is Larissa Mills, and Ken was my grandfather. Coming across your research on Ken, jazz, and Preservation Hall has brought warmth into my day.

A few weeks ago my siblings and I visited New Orleans. During this trip we stopped at Preservation Hall. When we asked the staff if they knew Ken Mills or Grayson Mills they said no, but to ask the eldest band member. Unfortunately he told us that we were mistaken and it wasn't started by him, and he had never heard that name. It made our hearts heavy to hear this news. So coming across all your documentation, writings, and photos has really lifted our spirits.

I was very close to him growing up. It was hard the day that we lost him, and no day has been the same since. It means the world to me that you are doing this research. Thank you so much.

Genuinely,

Larissa<sup>41</sup>

Enough said.

## NOTES

1. Ken Mills, Booklet Notes, *Opening Night at Preservation Hall*, p. 6.
2. Ibid.
3. This is Barbara Reid's self-description. See: Barbara G. Reid, unpublished CV material, file 'KEd 1071', in 'Edmiston – Barbara Reid' folder, Kelley Edmiston USB pen drive, in National Jazz Archive, Loughton, Essex, UK.
4. Editor of *Jazzbeat*, 1996-2010 and *Jazzology*, since 2011.
5. *New Orleans Music* was a leading New Orleans jazz magazine published in the UK between 1989 and 2010, with its origins in the magazine *Footnote* going back to 1971.
6. VanVorst's copy was a photocopy. I know nothing more about the history of the original manuscript or any copies of it.
7. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1991.
8. According to Kelley Edmiston, Barbara Reid's daughter, William Carter was 'very upset' that Preservation Hall refused to sell the book. Accessed June 28, 2023, <http://www.wcarter.us/bio/>. For Kelley: 'It [the refusal] was the biggest outrage of the universe'. Carter 'had nothing but admiration for Allan Jaffe' and worked closely with him before Jaffe died in 1987. Kelley tells the story of how in the early 1980s Allan Jaffe, Larry Borenstein and Barbara Reid hugged and 'made up' over their various antagonistic histories concerning the origins and development of Preservation Hall. Borenstein died in 1981; Reid died in 1983. It should be said that Ken Grayson Mills rarely evidenced any hostility to Allan Jaffe. Larry Borenstein was the focus of his venom, much of which switched to Carter following the publication of his book on Preservation Hall. I publish this article in the spirit of offering Mills his final 'last word' on the matter. As a sociologist of knowledge, I am not so much concerned with the 'truth' of the various Preservation Hall origin stories as I am with giving a voice to them. I subscribe to the W.I. Thomas theorem: 'If [wo]men define situations as real they are real in their consequences.'
9. Initially, these were sometimes called 'regular rehearsals' by Mills to focus on the idea that Mills was providing many of the musicians a chance to get in shape for future work and making records: Icon records, in particular.
10. Note, however, the very important unpublished document by Barbara Reid dated 24 January 1963. Reid writes: 'May [1961] – Mills discussed rec. sessions with L. B.

[Larry Borenstein] – Mills asked B.R. [Barbara Reid] to assist – Further discussion (L.B. in Mexico) resulted in 3 nights week – B.R. talked Mills into fronting (Pres.) for society & therefore plying more nights each week until – six nights a week – Wm. Russell consented to help B.R. – but not Mills alone (or L.B.).’ Carter (and all the other commentators) can be hazy on precise dates, chronology and personnel. This document by Barbara Reid may be the clearest statement we will ever get on this matter. The hand-written original document was in the Kelley Edmiston boxes at the National Jazz Archive, Loughton, Essex, UK, in August 2017.

11. Borenstein was back in New Orleans from Chicago by June 9. He left New Orleans for California on June 20 in order to marry his bride Pat Sultzer in San Francisco. Pat was with her mother in Eureka, California. Borenstein was in Juarez, Mexico, on June 23; and in Los Angeles on June 26. He married Pat Sultzer on July 1 in San Francisco and headed straight back to New Orleans with his new wife on an unknown date. According to Carter, referring to the Californian trip, ‘Borenstein had returned from Mexico and was leaving for California to get married by a Buddhist priest’, see Carter, p. 146. I do not know the precise dates of this Mexican trip. Mills, in Carter, suggests that it was in ‘early May’ (Carter, p. 143). I thank Sacha Borenstein Clay for giving me copies of the letters her father wrote to her mother in the period leading up to the wedding. I base my dates on the envelope postmarks of these letters.

12. Ken Mills, ‘Text’, Booklet Notes, *Frank Goudie with Amos White’s Band & Burt Bales*, American Music, AMCD-50, 1991, p. 3.

13. Thanks to the arguments of Fred Eatherton, Robert Greenwood and Wendy Saunderson. I regret any offence caused to the Borenstein family.

14. The phrase is taken from the title of Bill Bissonnette, *The Jazz Crusade: The Inside Story of the Great New Orleans Jazz Revival of the 1960s*, Special Request Books, 1992.

15. Crucial in this regard is Mills, as quoted in Carter, op. cit., p. 144: ‘My first session, I paid the guys \$35.00 a man, double for [Kid] Thomas. About the same for Punch.’ When Kid Thomas said ‘All them people you see there workin’ at Preservation Hall? Me and Punch [Miller], we started that’ (ibid., p.119), he may well have been referring to Mills’ ‘first session’. Similarly, Kid Thomas’ comment ‘I gave the original idea to the man in the first place’ may well have been referring to Ken Mills and not Larry Borenstein, as I had previously surmised. See: Richard Ekins, ‘On the Origins of the Larry Borenstein Sessions at Associated Artists Studio, 726 St. Peter Street, New Orleans . . . A Reminiscence from Charlie DeVore’, *Just*

*Jazz*, No. 230, June 2017, pp. 22-23 at 23.

16. William (Bill) Edmiston, husband of Barbara Reid and Treasurer of the New Orleans Society for the Preservation of New Orleans Jazz, established to found and run Preservation Hall.

17. Phillip C. McGraw, *Life Strategies: Doing What Works, Doing What Matters*, Hyperion, Boston, 1999.

18. Within hours of completing my ‘final’ draft of this article, I received an email – totally out of the blue – from Larissa Mills, daughter of Kim Mills-Garcia, and granddaughter of Ken Mills. I was touched and moved and include it as a ‘Footnote’ to close this article. It tells its own story.

19. Carter, op. cit., p. 154.

20. Carter, *ibid.*

21. Carter credits Barbara Reid’s ‘flair for publicity’ for the initial ‘media blitz’ which included a flyer ‘printed up in 15 different typefaces’; her appearance on at least two local radio programmes; and her friendship with local reporter Bill Stuckey [which] led to his writing a long favourable piece for an important local paper, the *New Orleans States-Item* [of July 24, 1961].’ The most influential piece was probably ‘the unsigned Associated Press despatch’. See: William Carter, pp. 149-151. ‘[A] gainst a previous silence reverberating back for decades – the musicians hungry and demoralized, the local jazz establishment virtually decreeing the old music dead – such sudden attention was an inspiring turnaround’, *ibid.*, p. 151. Mills reproduced the article ‘Last Stand for Old Jazzmen by David Zinman’, in his notes to his cassette release ‘Live! Opening Night at Preservation Hall – Historic Document’, Getdown Records. See, also, note 26, below.

22. Carter, op. cit., p. 156.

23. These pictures preceded those of Noel Rockmore, which became well known. Borenstein did not find Xavier de Callatay’s pictures of the musicians satisfactory. See: Larry Borenstein, ‘Introduction’, in *Preservation Hall Portraits*, 1968, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge.

24. See: note 10. It is not entirely clear whether Mills is referring to the time when Borenstein arrived back from his Californian trip or from some unspecified Mexican business trip of which Borenstein took many. See: also, note 9.

25. Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz.

26. In the following section, Mills provides an account of ‘the start of the

Preservation Hall tours.’ It provides valuable supplementary material to my account given in Richard Ekins, ‘Lesser-Known Aspects of the Legacy of Ken Grayson Mills: Preservation Hall Jazz Band Touring at “The Best Address in Cleveland” - The *Eureka* Report, with Notes from Thomas N. Stagg’, *Just Jazz*, 2017, No. 226, pp. 6-10. See, also, Brian Harvey, *The Hottest Trumpet: The Kid Howard Story*, Jazzology Press, New Orleans, 2007, p. 95-99.

27. See: this chapter, note 20.

28. Cie Frazier.

29. Mills married Marge Fedorsky in Clark County, Nevada on October 5, 1961. This occurred during Kid Howard’s residency at the Tudor Arms Hotel, Cleveland, Ohio. ‘After their eventual divorce Marge continued to call herself Marge Mills’. Email, Fred Eatherton to Richard Ekins, July 10, 2017. Carter, op. cit., p. 149, incorrectly, refers to her as Marge Kidorsky.

30. Paige VanVorst, in an email to Richard Ekins, July 10, 2017, adds: ‘Dorothy Fuldheim and Mike Douglas were local TV shows in Cleveland – the sort of show where authors plug their books and they highlight upcoming cultural events. Douglas’ show was later broadcast nationally.’

31. See: <http://medianola.org/discover/place/144>

32. Harvey reproduces an ‘Unidentified Cleveland newspaper article’, dated August 22, 1961, that draws upon the *Associated Press* report. This article is entitled ‘New Orleans Jazz, Ragtime of Old, Makes Last Stand’ and adds material quoting Mills (Brian Harvey, op. cit., p. 105).

33. Actually, Victor H. Schiro, Mayor of New Orleans from July 17, 1961, to May 2, 1970. Schiro wrote to Mills on August 2, 1961: ‘Congratulations on having been named the Society’s first president and best wishes for success to enhance the civic and cultural activities of the city.’

34. Even Marcel Joly, who strives to give Ken Mills and Barbara Reid due priority, fails to grasp this point. Marcel Joly, ‘Reflections on Allan Jaffe’, *Footnote*, 1987, 18 (6): 25-27 at p. 25.

35. See: note 20, above. Also: James Asman, ‘The Living Legends of New Orleans’, *Jazz Journal*, September 1961, 14 (9): 2-3 and 40; John S. Wilson, ‘A Real New Orleans Sound: The Story of Preservation Hall and Its Ancient Jazzmen’, *High Fidelity*, September 1963, 13, pp. 59–63 and 133 ; Charles Suhor, ‘Preservation Hall: New Orleans Rebirth’, *DownBeat*, 30 (2), January 17, 1963, pp. 18 and 44; Gilbert M. Erskine, ‘Traditionalism: The Imperishable Estate’, *DownBeat’s Music*,

1962, *The 7th DownBeat Yearbook*, John Maher, Chicago, pp. 36-38; and Samuel B. Charters, *Jazz New Orleans, 1885-1963: An Index to the Negro Musicians of New Orleans*, 1963, Oak Publications, New York. Most of Mills' Icon LPs are reviewed in *DownBeat* between 1961 and 1963.

36. Most sources, including Carter, op. cit., 149, give June 10, 1961, as the 'official' opening night. Mills stated in 1991: 'The first union gig was Tuesday June 13. We held non-guaranteed preps from June 7 to 11. We were closed on June 10.' Ken Mills, 'Letters – Opening Night at Preservation Hall', *New Orleans Music*, 1991, 3 (1): 25.

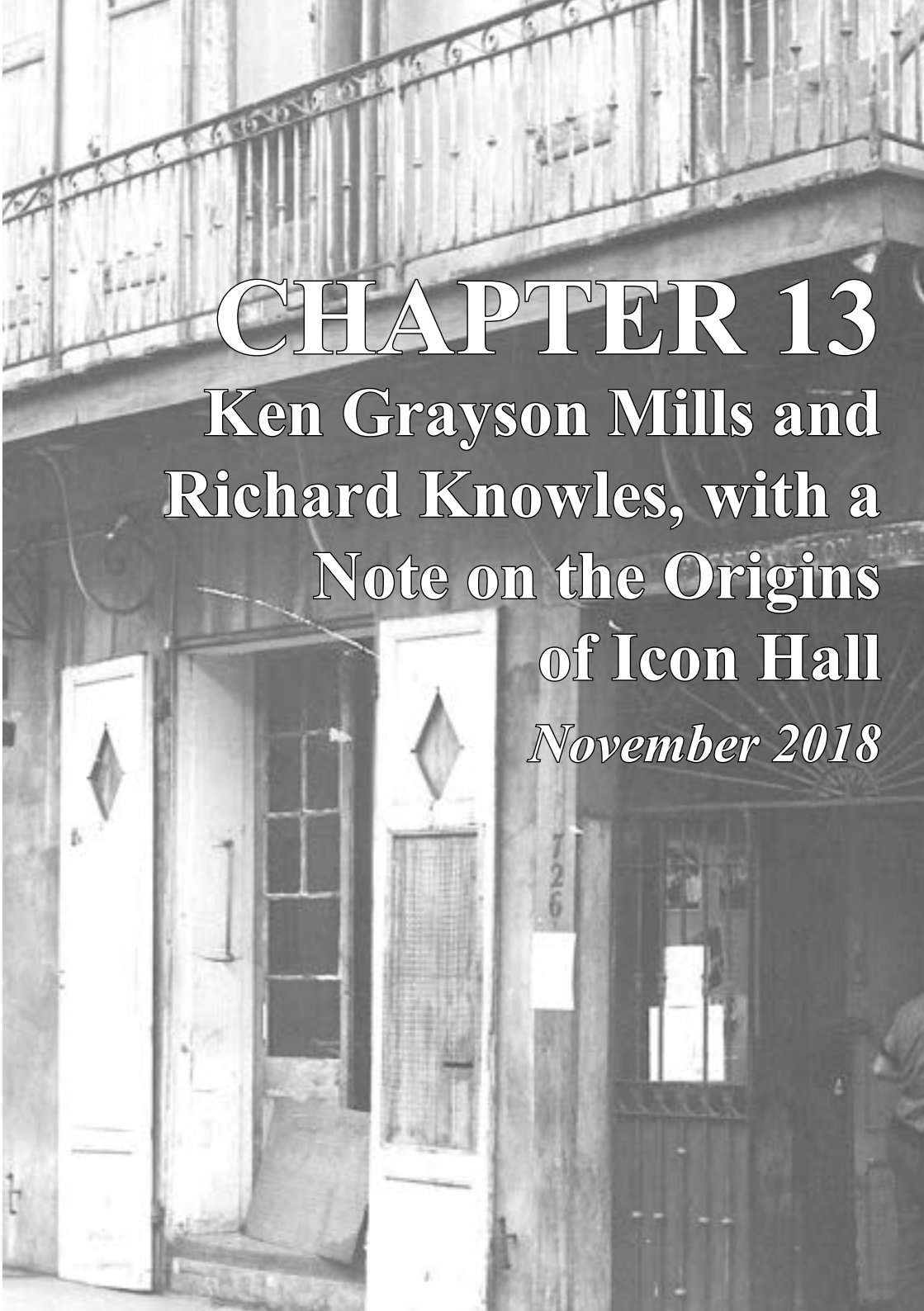
37. Mills gives September 11, 1961, as the date 'of his last concert'. Dick Allen gives September 13, 1961, as the date Allan and Sandra Jaffe took over. Initially, there was no intention to continue using the name 'Preservation Hall'. The venue was to be called '726 St. Peter Street'. See, Carter, op. cit., p. 158 and p. 160.

38. Fred Eatherton comments: 'Ironically, in 2011, Preservation Hall created a Preservation Hall Foundation to 'Protect, Preserve and Perpetuate the musical traditions and heritage of New Orleans', so Ken got his wish eventually, and its objectives would have appealed to him.' See: 'Preservation Hall Foundation', [www.preshallfoundation.org](http://www.preshallfoundation.org).

39. The eccentric punctuation in the previous two paragraphs is Mills'.

40. See: this chapter, note 18.

41. Tsar Fedorsky adds: 'Interesting. Tell Larissa I had the same experience!' Email to Richard Ekins, August 3, 2017. Fred Eatherton concludes: 'I think Larissa's email sums up perfectly why we embarked on this wild Mills-chase, and how successfully history has been subverted.'



**CHAPTER 13**  
**Ken Grayson Mills and**  
**Richard Knowles, with a**  
**Note on the Origins**  
**of Icon Hall**  
*November 2018*



## Chapter 13

Following publication of the article included in the previous chapter, I took the Ken Grayson Mills project in different directions.

Firstly, I published a 48-page Mills's *Discography*,<sup>1</sup> both as a limited-edition book and online; secondly, I published online a hitherto unknown unpublished article by Mills titled 'The Causation, Practice and Power of New Orleans Jazz';<sup>2</sup> and thirdly I produced as Volume 8 of my 'The Lord Richard New Orleans Sessions' a CD titled *Ken Grayson Mills – An Epilogue*.

This 504/La Croix Records CD 98 featured material from four of Mills' sessions. It was organised around groups that featured three of the clarinet players he championed, namely, Emile Barnes, Israel Gorman, and Steve Angram. These various contributions were not suitable for publication in *Just Jazz*, and I do not include them in this book.

I expected that with the issuing of the *Epilogue* CD, my Mills Project would be finally completed. However, as the project became more widely known, more material would continue to emerge and be sent to me.

Mike Dine came across a letter that Mills had sent him that referred to a hitherto unknown recording by Larry Borenstein that Borenstein had, perhaps, loaned to the New Orleans jazz enthusiast and author Richard Knowles. This alleged tape piqued my interest because it was said to feature Punch Miller, Steve Angram and Eddie Morris.

Alas, when I contacted Knowles, it transpired that he had no recollection of the particular recording. But he did provide me with a fascinating short reminiscence of his meeting Mills at the time Mills was running Icon Hall.

I wrote up Mills' letter to Mike Dine and my phone calls and emails with Richard Knowles as follows.

## Ken Grayson Mills and Richard Knowles, with a Note on the Origins of Icon Hall

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, November 2018

Shortly after completing the *Just Jazz* phase of my Ken Grayson Mills project, I received a hitherto undiscovered letter addressed to Mike Dine, 504 Records, from Ken Mills, dated February 4, 1990.<sup>3</sup> The letter included favourable comment on ‘a preview’ of a 504 release of one of the Larry Borenstein sessions featuring the Kid Thomas Band with Ed Washington. Mills writes:

The Thomas set is fantastic. I hear a trumpet so good I figure he can do sides with Dodds and Ory. Washington goes into some Earl Fouche modes. And Sammy Penn, the tune material: fresh! Red Allen was telling people as early as 1938 (*The Jazz Record*) that Thomas had the best band in New Orleans. Didn’t ring any bells, did it?



**Figure 13.1 Ken Grayson Mills, c. 1989.**  
Courtesy of the Mike Dine Collection

Much of the letter repeats information available elsewhere concerning the pending release by Mills of the *Opening Night at Preservation Hall* session. It confirms, for instance, that the celebrated recording engineer Cecil Spiller did the transfer to 15 ips. Entirely new, however, is an additional handwritten note by Mills that refers to a possible unknown recording made by Larry Borenstein. Mills writes:

Perhaps E.L. Borenstein loaned the PUNCH-ANGRUM-MORRIS to Richard Knowles – for possible LP deal. Knowles heard them – E.L. said he had such at his home.

Naturally, I made it my business to contact Richard Knowles and seek his recollections of such an incident. I knew of Richard Knowles through his knowledge and support of New Orleans jazz in the early 1960s. Also, I had long been an admirer of his book on the history of New Orleans brass bands.<sup>6</sup> However, apart from these things, I knew very little about him. During a long telephone conversation reminiscing about the New Orleans scene in the 1960s, I asked him for his thoughts, memories and feelings of Mills, together with his memories of the Borenstein ‘PUNCH-ANGRUM-MORRIS’ tape. Knowles did recall listening to a Steve Angrum tape from the Larry Borenstein collection. However, he thought that Willie Pajeaud was the trumpet player on the session. Also, Knowles thought that there was no trombonist playing on the recordings he heard.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 13.2 Handwritten and coloured Icon Hall poster.  
Courtesy of Warwick Reynolds**



**Figure 13.3 Handwritten and coloured Icon Hall poster.**  
**Courtesy of Warwick Reynolds**

A few days later, I received the following fascinating email that includes new information on the origins of Ken Mills' Icon Hall and provides a useful additional note to what I had previously published about the early days of Icon Hall in *Just Jazz*, July 2017, pp. 24-30:

Firstly I would like to say I liked Ken a lot. Both he and Marge<sup>8</sup>were bitter about the Preservation Hall debacle, I always thought with some justification but there is no doubt he could be pretty difficult. He was also bitter about his disability - a result of polio as a child. After nearly falling over one time I remember him saying "at least I've got a pretty face". I think Marge stayed in New Orleans after the bust up with Larry.

Ralph Collins<sup>9</sup> arrived back in New Orleans in the middle of February 1962 and told me Ken was on his way from California. He arrived in the City on 18th Feb. and he and Ralph immediately set about finding a place to open a new Hall. Once they found a place Ralph did most of the skilled work. He even constructed a balcony bandstand at the street door end of the room. I don't remember them ever using it.<sup>10</sup>

Icon Hall opened on 28th Feb. 1962 with Cal Blunt's Band.<sup>11</sup> On 3rd March he hired Milé<sup>12</sup> Barnes [Emile Barnes] and Punch Miller. When Milé failed to show up on time Ken sent me out to look for him.

By luck I found him a couple of blocks away on Bourbon Street. On 4th March a quartet including Sheik and Milé played there during the afternoon. On the 5th March Sheik's band including Milé Barnes played there in the afternoon and in the evening. On the 8th the Eddie Morris Band including Doc Paulin performed there. Ken was a big fan of Doc Paulin. I have to admit at that stage I wasn't. On the 9th he hired the Kid Howard Band and on the 11th Sheik and Milé were back again. On the 18th the Albert Jiles Band performed there. Interestingly the band had exactly the same line-up as Albert Warner's Brown Buddies AMCD-66. I don't have any notes after that date and within a few weeks I had left New Orleans.

I never saw Ken again after that spring though I did speak to him on the phone many years later.<sup>13</sup>

## NOTES

1. Fred Eatherton, assisted by Richard Ekins, *Ken Grayson Mills' Icon Records: A Discography*, La Croix Publications, London, 2018.
2. Richard Ekins, "'The Causation, Practice and Power of New Orleans Jazz': Introducing an Unpublished Paper by Ken Grayson Mills of Icon Records", 2018, <http://www.lacroixrecords.com/mills%20unpub.html>
3. Received from Terry Peirce, May 17, 2018, with thanks.
4. I surmise that Mike Dine sent Mills a preview tape of the pending release, *The Larry Borenstein Collection, Volume I, Kid Thomas' Dixieland Band 1957 with Ed. Washington*, first issued as a vinyl LP (504 LP 30) in 1990.
5. Punch Miller (trumpet), Steve Angrum (clarinet) and Eddie Morris (trombone).
6. Richard H. Knowles, *Fallen Heroes: A History of New Orleans Brass Bands*, Jazzology Press, New Orleans, 1996. Knowles also worked with Barry Martyn on the release of American Music Video AMVD-2, *Sing On: A Film of New Orleans Brass Bands*. He is well known to cognoscenti as the person who rediscovered the legendary drummer Abbey "Chinee" Foster in Spring 1962.
7. Mike Dine never spoke to me of a Steve Angrum/Larry Borenstein tape. When I approached Borenstein's daughter, Sacha Borenstein Clay, about the tape, she replied: 'Mike helped me listen to and sort through all of the tapes that my mother gave me, but I have no way of knowing if there were other tapes. I don't have other tapes.' Email of June 1, 2018.

8. Marge Fedorsky, Mills' first wife.

9. Further research is needed on the role of Ralph Collins in New Orleans jazz revivalism.

10. Kid Thomas has been credited with building the balcony bandstand in use after Richard Knowles had left New Orleans. When I asked Knowles about this, he added: 'I never saw the balcony bandstand I mentioned used. Nor do I remember Kid Thomas being involved in any building work during those first few weeks. As far as I can remember the bands set up on the floor at the back of the hall for those first few gigs.' Email of June 2, 2018.

11. Cal Blunt's Band was recorded in November 1963 by Barry Martyn and issued as part of his three-volume 'Non-Union Musicians of New Orleans' set, on MONO LP 7 (*Cal Blunt's Brown Buddies*).

12. Emile Barnes is very often called by his abbreviated / nickname but spelt differently by different people.

13. Email, Richard Knowles to Richard Ekins, May 23, 2018.

A black and white photograph of a building facade. At the top, there is a balcony with a decorative wrought-iron railing. Below the balcony, the text 'CHAPTER 14' is overlaid in a large, white, serif font. Underneath the chapter title, the author's name 'Steve Angrum,' is written in a smaller, white, serif font. Below the author's name, the title 'Preservation Hall and the Photographs of Lyle Bongé' is written in a white, serif font. To the right of the title, the date 'April 2019' is written in a white, italicized serif font. The background shows a building with several doors. On the left, there are two white doors with diamond-shaped windows. In the center, there is a doorway with a window and a cushion on the floor. To the right, there is a dark door with a sunburst design above it. A small sign with the number '726' is visible on the wall next to the central doorway.

# CHAPTER 14

Steve Angrum,  
Preservation Hall and the  
Photographs of Lyle Bongé

*April 2019*



## Chapter 14

Quite soon after the start of my Ken Grayson Mills project, the name of Barbara Reid came up more and more. Indeed, as Barbara Reid co-founded Preservation Hall with Mills, this was hardly surprising.

However, it was Kelley Edmiston, Reid's daughter, who more than anyone or anything else was responsible for me completing a Barbara Glancey Reid Project, which in due time would extend to a length similar to the Ken Grayson Mills Project.

My published work on Mills had convinced Kelley that I was the person to be entrusted with working further on her mother and in 2017 she presented me with a USB stick that contained a vast archive of material on New Orleans and New Orleans music that her mother had collected and bequeathed to Kelley. She gave me total and free access to it.

Within this material were a series of photographs included in a file labelled 'The photographs of Lyle Bongé'. It was immediately apparent that the photographs featured in this chapter were taken in Preservation Hall.

Once put together and the musicians identified, it became clear that they were all taken on one evening when Kid Clayton's Happy Pals were playing with Steve Angrum on clarinet. In short, they were exceedingly rare photographs and I was determined to construct an article around them.

Most of the articles I wrote that feature the photographs of Lyle Bongé fit comfortably within my Barbara Glancey Reid project. However, as the content of the following article makes clear, it is the Ken Grayson Mills Project that is best suited to house the Reid material included in this chapter.

Mills championed two of the lesser-known old-style New Orleans clarinetists, Israel Gorman, and Steve Angrum, in particular. The article explains why Steve Angrum was such a pivotal figure in distinguishing those enthusiasts and record producers who dismissed him as not competent enough to record, for instance, for the Riverside New Orleans Living

Legends series, from those like Mills who had great faith in his importance and talents as an old-style New Orleans jazzman.

In this context, it is worthwhile to repeat the passage from Mills' letter to Alan Solman reproduced in Chapter nine.

I have always been amazed at your perception. There is a feeling about the first Punch, Thomas, Angrum & Howard<sup>1</sup> which is totally missing everywhere afterwards. [Mills adds in the margin: 'same feeling as found on AM [American Music] and on Wyckoff [David Wyckoff], [Alden] Ashforth and [Jim] McGarrell sessions.'] Preservation Hall, its techisation [sic] and taste, obliterated the real feel of real NOJ. This 'feeling' is also found on the Paulin session.

## **Steve Angrum, Preservation Hall and the Photographs of Lyle Bongé<sup>2</sup>**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, April 2019

The purpose of this article is to explore further two themes introduced in two of my recent contributions to my Ken Grayson Mills and Barbara Reid projects: firstly, the life and work of the New Orleans clarinet player Steve Angrum<sup>3</sup> and secondly, the New Orleans music photography of Lyle Bongé.<sup>4</sup>

Steve Angrum was one of the New Orleans clarinetists championed by Ken Mills, but largely ignored by other enthusiasts of the music.

Lyle Bongé, mostly known for his photographs of New Orleans Mardi Gras,<sup>5</sup> less frequently photographed musicians but when he did, the results could be striking, as is evidenced in this article by his hitherto unpublicized and unpublished photos taken at Preservation Hall of Kid Clayton's Happy Pals featuring Steve Angrum.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 14.1 Jimmy ‘Kid’ Clayton, trumpet; Steve Angrum, clarinet; Louis James, string bass.**

**Courtesy of Kelley Edmiston**

I argue that the little-known Steve Angrum is an important and influential figure throughout the development of second wave New Orleans jazz revivalism (1960-1976).<sup>7</sup> In particular, he features both in the very beginnings of second wave revivalism and in its later phases when his previously unissued privately recorded 1953 dance hall session was first released in 1971 and then re-released in 1976.<sup>8</sup>

Angrum may also be considered an important figure in understanding the transition from Preservation Hall in its relatively ‘dance hall’ days, when Ken Grayson Mills was managing the Hall, to its ‘concert hall’ days when Allan and Sandra Jaffe took over from Mills. Here, an understanding of the Riverside New Orleans Living Legends series is crucial. For the Riverside series Steve Angrum’s playing – like others such as Israel Gorman – was regarded as insufficiently ‘strong’ to be included.

As Herb Friedwald, who provided the major impetus for the Riverside recordings, puts it:

I picked musicians who were not only very good but were playing strongly. I wanted good reviews. I didn't want the sort of reviews like the one written by Dave Dexter that says George Lewis plays like kindergarten. I liked players like Steve Angram and Israel Gorman, but I didn't want any clinkers in the bands. I wanted five stars in *DownBeat* and I more or less got them.<sup>9</sup>

In short, Friedwald did not consider Steve Angram and Israel Gorman competent enough for his Riverside recordings. Much of this thinking persisted as the post-Ken Mills scheduling developed at Preservation Hall. Mills' priority, on the other hand, was to document the playing of important New Orleans musicians still alive and when they were recovering from illness or out of practice, guide them back to health and strength in their playing. He did this with a remarkable degree of success with the ailing Kid Howard,<sup>10</sup> for instance; and with rather less success with Steve Angram, who died before Mills felt he was able to do full justice to Angram's talents.<sup>11</sup>

The origins and development of Ken Mills' Icon record label are rooted in a correspondence Mills had with the New Orleans banjoist and guitarist Creole George Guesnon in the summer of 1959. As part of this correspondence, Guesnon sent Mills tapes he had made of himself with various New Orleans musicians, including Kid Thomas and the clarinet players Israel Gorman, Steve Angram and Paul 'Polo' Barnes.

According to William Carter,<sup>12</sup> drawing on his interview material with Mills, Mills intended to use this first tape to launch his new Icon label. In the event, he decided to issue a tape recorded by Bill Russell which featured the solo singing and banjo playing of Creole George as Icon LP 1, and explore further the work of Gorman, Angram and Barnes by going on an extended visit to New Orleans from his home in San Francisco, with a view to recording them there.

He recorded Paul Barnes with Kid Thomas' Band on July 1, 1960 (Icon

LP 3) and with Barnes' Polo Players twelve days later (Icon LP 5).

In addition, Mills' focus on this first trip had been making the first recordings of John Handy, both on alto saxophone (American Music AMCD-51) and clarinet (Icon LP 2). He left it to his second trip to New Orleans to record Israel Gorman and Steve Angrum. He recorded Gorman with Kid Howard's La Vida Band on August 6, 1961 (Icon LP 4) and Angrum with Kid Sheik's Storyville Ramblers on August 13, 1961 (Icon LP 6).

In the event, Angrum was to die some three months after this first formal recording session.

Thanks to an error in Stagg and Crump,<sup>13</sup> it has always been thought that the three duet tracks featuring Angrum with Creole George Guesnon and issued as part of Icon LP 6 were made in New Orleans sometime in August 1961. However, it seems most likely now that these three tracks were part of the session that Guesnon sent to Mills in 1959. What we know for certain is that the fourth duet 'Just a Closer Walk with Thee' listed as undated in Stagg and Crump was in fact recorded by Guesnon in the Summer of 1959 and sent to Mills. This has come to light in the papers of Mike Dine, of 504 records, which include a letter from Mills dating the recording of this track and making it available for release by Mike Dine.<sup>14</sup> In the event, Mike Dine did not release it and it remains unreleased.<sup>15</sup>

By the early 1960s, Angrum had been playing regularly with the George Williams Brass Band for many years. As Mills puts it, in his sleeve notes for Icon LP 6, he had become 'a great drawing card for the George Williams Brass Band, but too exclusive work with it to the exclusion of other musical jobs debilitated his range of fluency.'

Mills took it upon himself to provide Angrum with work at Preservation Hall to speed the process along of Angrum re-gaining his fluency in dance band settings and it was one of these sessions that was documented by Lyle Bongé in the photographs featured in this article.

It is not difficult to see why Mills was keen to record Angrum. Mills hints

at this when he writes in the same sleeve notes:

These recordings bring to the listener the warm and delightful style of Steve Angrum. His heartfelt playing was good enough for some of the best bands in New Orleans history, but was not good enough, for some reason, to rate recording until two months prior to his death.

Steve Angrum came to New Orleans in 1907, having been born in New Roads, Louisiana on 4 July 1895. Prior to New Orleans, he played flute with a three-piece field band – bass drum, kettle drum and his flute – and was hired at this very early age to play at picnics and some dances.<sup>16</sup> Once in New Orleans, he bought a clarinet and went to Paul Chaligny for lessons. His fellow students at the time included Joe ‘Brother Cornbread’ Thomas, Albert Burbank and Andrew Morgan. He played in the famed Chris Kelly band, including at many funerals. One time when playing with the Dixie Band the band went to Raceland where they became involved in a rivalry with the Victor Band from Baton Rouge that featured John Handy on clarinet at the time. As the interview digest notes put it:

Handy was playing so well that SA [Steve Angrum] was afraid to get on the bandstand. [Joe] Gabriel [bass?] told him to have a drink, get on the stand and blow. SA took the one drink, got up and played; he says the people liked the band from New Orleans better than the Victor band then. He says Handy remembers the incident and talks about it sometimes.

After he left Chaligny he played with a lot of bands, some bad, some good, but eventually he played with almost all the good bands, including those of Papa Celestin and Kid Howard.

He played clarinet in Kid Thomas’ first band in New Orleans. This previously was the band led by Elton Theodore.

For a period in the 1930s, he played at the lake Pontchartrain every Sunday with Kid Thomas at Manuel’s Pavilion. In answering a question from Ralph Collins, Angrum replies that:

He played a long time, probably the longest of his career, with [Jimmy] ‘Kid’ Clayton; he played with [Henry] ‘Kid’ Rena, but not stationary [not

as a regular member, or for long]. [Ernest] ‘Punch’ Miller (not stationary), and for a long time with Chris Kelly. He liked playing with Kelly the best.

The digest of the interview continues:

SA says he played with Rena every Monday, advertising for Maison Blanche. He says Rena, noted high-note artist, did not bother him with his range, that he would play under Rena until he ‘took down,’ and then SA would come out strong. SA says he wouldn’t ‘buck’ with Rena. SA says that Kid Clayton plays much louder and higher than he used to, that Clayton used to play a lot of soft music and would use his mutes a lot. SA says that the bands on St. Peter Street [Preservation Hall] are the same as they were in the Thirties [meaning that the sound and style are the same].

Angrum contrasts this with the music on Bourbon Street which he does not like. Once, he replaced Willie Humphrey at the Mardi Gras [Lounge] for two nights. He does not like the fast tempos and says that ‘the old-time bands played slower’. In his view, playing at the Paddock Lounge on Bourbon Street wore out a lot of trumpet players, including Lee Collins, Ernest ‘Cag’ Cagnolatti and John Brunious.

Just as Angrum figured right at the beginning of Ken Mills’ recording plans, so was he a feature of the very earliest days of the Larry Borenstein sessions at 732 St. Peter Street: those sessions that preceded the establishment of Preservation Hall. Carter notes how when Punch Miller was in New Orleans ‘back from his long days on the road’, he

started coming around frequently with a pick-up band. Punch usually had with him Eddie Morris on trombone, Simon Fraser [Frazier] on piano, Steve Angrum on clarinet, Ricard Alexis on bass and Bill Bagley on drums<sup>17</sup>

It has emerged recently – again from a letter from Ken Mills to Mike Dine – that Borenstein made a private recording of the Punch Miller band with this front line, according to Ken Mills. The tape went missing or was erased and Steve Angrum missed another opportunity of being heard on record.<sup>18</sup>

What then of Steve Angrum as an important figure in the shift from the dance hall days to the concert hall days at Preservation Hall?

Here I draw, particularly, on the negotiations that took place between Herb Friedwald and Percy Humphrey in deciding on the personnel for their Riverside recording, initially released as Riverside LP 378. I supplement this account with the view of the English New Orleans jazz writer and critic Mike Hazeldine when reviewing the CD version of this release, issued as *Percy Humphrey's Crescent City Joymakers, Original Jazz Classics* OJCCD-1834-2. Hazeldine argues that it was this session that crafted what would become the basic Preservation Hall sound, as the bands gradually shifted from an edgy, sometimes ramshackle, variegated, mainly heterophonic sound to the Preservation Hall clichéd format of opening two ensemble choruses, a string of solos, with closing two semi-rousing ensemble choruses.

In coming to a decision on the style and personnel for his Riverside recordings, Friedwald felt he had to decide whether to aim for a dance hall sound or a concert hall sound. Just before the George Lewis Band went on tour in 1953, Lewis had been playing with Percy Humphrey at the dance hall Manny's Tavern. Percy took over the job and led a five-piece band there, which included Steve Angrum, 'Father Al' Lewis, 'Cie' Frazier and Emma Barrett. This band was recorded by John Bernard in 1953 and although it would not be released until 1971, it played an important role in Friedwald's thinking for the Riverside sessions. As he was to summarize, later, in 1991, with the benefit of hindsight:

There were two things I wanted to do which were not basically compatible. I wanted to make a documentary about New Orleans music in the 50s and I wanted to make records that would enable the bands to get hired. The very first record we did was with Percy Humphrey. I liked the tape that John Bernard had done with Percy at Manny's Tavern with Steve Angrum and Father Al. So I said to Percy: 'Let's do a dance hall tape and we could get Emanuel Sayles to play electric guitar and you can get any bass player you want.' He picked Louis James (I didn't know Louis James). 'And Cie could be the drummer. We won't use a banjo, we'll just have you and Albert Burbank – which would be wonderful. It would be like Steve Angrum was

on the Manny's Tavern tapes only better.' Percy said: 'How am I going to get a job with that kind of band? I want to get a job at the Absinthe House. I want a trombone and banjo.' Percy didn't say it very forcefully but he meant it. So I suggested Albert Warner. Percy would never say anything bad about anybody, but he said he would rather use somebody else. So I said: 'I know who you want – Louis Nelson', and he said, 'Yes.' Sayles ended up playing only a couple of numbers on the amplified guitar; I wish he'd played more. *It finished up more of a dixieland session rather than a dance hall session* [my italics]. It could have been a documentary, but it would have been a phony documentary because the dance hall period had ended. It would have been a re-creation of five years earlier and we were looking towards the future and the Absinthe House possibilities with a banjo and trombone. So I had to make a decision: 'Am I going to do this documentary and play God, or am I going to get these people work?' So I said, 'Forget it Percy, you've got yourself a banjo and you've got Louis Nelson.' That was the end of my dance hall project.<sup>19</sup>

This session which Friedwald describes as 'more of a dixieland session' than 'a dance Hall session' was selected by the authoritative Mike Hazeldine as one of his top ten most important CDs (or CD sets) to include in his chapter on 'The New Orleans Revival' in Barry Kernfeld's edited book *The Blackwell Guide to Recorded Jazz, Second Edition*.

Hazeldine first lists the classic old-style sessions that few cognoscenti would disagree with: the Bunk Johnson Jazzman sides of 1942; The George Lewis Climax session of 1943; the Kid Ory 1944/1945 Good Time Jazz tracks; and the Wooden Joe Nicholas American Musics. More contentiously, perhaps, he then includes the Mutt Carey 1947 Jazz New Orleans two volume LPs, before going on to select Alden Ashforth and David Wyckoff's Eureka Brass Band recording of 1951 and Jim McGarrell's 1954 recording of the Barnes-Bocage Big 5.

Hazeldine continues his selection with Louis Armstrong 'revivalist' recordings from 1947-1957,<sup>21</sup> Mike Slatter's 1959 Kid Thomas session and in that illustrious company concludes with the Percy Humphrey CD. Why? What is so distinctive about this Percy Humphrey session?

Hazeldine's story is somewhat different from Friedwald's:

Humphrey was the strongest and most original trumpeter in the city. He viewed the chance to record for a major company as simply an opportunity to obtain regular work in Bourbon Street. To achieve this, he was prepared to include a trombone and a banjo in his 'joy maker' band, to satisfy Friedwald's preconceptions about instrumentation . . . Trombonist Louis Nelson and banjoist Emanuel Sayles were added, therefore, to Humphrey's group from the pool of musicians that Friedwald had selected for other recordings in this series.<sup>22</sup>

In the subsequent very important paragraph, Hazeldine adds:

Most of the bands that Friedwald recorded appeared content to perpetuate their usual manner of playing, while others strove to recreate an earlier musical tradition. Not Humphrey. He seemed aware that a simplified formula for performance might reach the potential new audience, and the session, for all its faults, is in this sense forward-looking.

The formula is partly based on the success that groups led by Papa Celestin, Paul Barbarin and, to some extent, Lewis had been enjoying on Bourbon Street. Confining themselves mainly to 'traditional' numbers, Humphrey's men opened with a brief statement by the whole ensemble. Then, to the accompaniment of the rhythm section, most of the musicians played a solo, usually two choruses in length, the first chorus sticking closely to the melody and the second offering simple variations. A lively, shouting, collectively played statement would finish the piece.<sup>23</sup>

Pointing to the lack of excitement and potential for routinisation in such an approach, Hazeldine goes on:

This approach may have lacked the excitement of performances offering a greater amount of collective improvisation, but it was easier for the musicians and, more importantly, the customers preferred it and feeling obliged to applaud after each solo, tipped generously.

. . . The fans loved it, and *DownBeat* magazine awarded this Riverside LP four stars. This band, perhaps, above all others, anticipated the opening of Preservation Hall, and the musical policy that made that venue such a worldwide success . . . but the resultant situation, bringing veteran musicians wanting to pace themselves, together with an uncritical audience, often lulled the musicians into set routines, fossilizing the style.<sup>24</sup>

However, Hazeldine, mostly so sure-footed in his analysis, makes the common error of conflating the opening of Preservation Hall and its first months under the direction of Ken Grayson Mills, with the inexorable trend after Mills had been removed.

As is evidenced by my arguments put forward in previous articles in my Ken Grayson Mills series, Mills' constant experimentation with different personnel, different tunes, different formats, and, to a more limited extent, different tempos, during the period of his control – continued subsequently at Icon (Perseverance) Hall – exonerates Mills from the substantive point made by Hazeldine.

More particularly, his championing of such musicians as Steve Angrum, Israel Gorman, Emile Barnes, John Casimir and, later, at Icon Hall, such non-Union musicians as Doc Paulin, gave the lie to the sort of routinisation indicated by Hazeldine.

As we saw, previously, in the series on Ken Grayson Mills, Mills made special mention of the session eventually issued as *Harrison Verret's Fern Hall Dance Band* (American Music AMCD-65) to illustrate 'the sound of the early Preservation Hall and the purpose for which it was born.'

Mills adds:

Verret's band, Punch and His Bunch, Kid Howard's La Vida, John Casimir's Tuxedo Jazz Bands, Kid Sheik's Storyville Ramblers, Kid Thomas' Creole Jazz Band, Billie & DeDe Pierce (w/Emile Barnes and Albert Jiles) and Kid Clayton's Happy Pals were the stalwarts of the embryonic phase of Preservation Hall's history.<sup>25</sup>

Commenting on the Harrison Verret session, Barry Martyn states:

This 'was recorded in the early days of the Preservation Hall as a live session. In fact the band has more the sound of the fifties dance halls than what later was to become the 'Preservation Hall Sound'.<sup>26</sup>

It is no coincidence, perhaps, that Percy Humphrey does not appear in Mills' listing. Moreover, Albert Warner, who Percy passed over for the Riverside

session, was one of the ‘stalwarts of the embryonic phase’.<sup>27</sup>

It is evident from Mills’ listing just how far removed his thinking was from what became the routinized Percy Humphrey Joy Makers/Preservation Hall style – a most pertinent example of the non-routinized style being the Icon LP 6, *Kid Sheik’s Storyville Ramblers with Steve Angram*.

It was a regular practice of Mills to experiment with slightly different combinations of similar personnel in two versions of the ‘same’ named band. He did this, for instance, with his alternate use of Kid Howard and Andy Anderson on trumpets in *John Casimir’s Young Tuxedo Jazz Band No. 2*.<sup>28</sup>

Often, Mills was following historical precedent in choosing certain musicians. There were historical precedents for teaming the clarinets of either Steve Angram or Albert Burbank with Kid Clayton’s Happy Pals. Given Mills’ declared intention to take further steps toward exploring Angram’s ‘unique abilities’ and his practice of using the Preservation Hall sessions as a workshop for subsequent Icon recordings, it seems evident to me that his teaming of Steve Angram with Kid Clayton for the Preservation Hall sessions was a prelude to a planned recording session.

This possibility was denied when Angram died so soon after the Kid Sheik session. In the event, Mills paired Albert Burbank with Clayton for his Icon LP 12, recorded on his final visit to New Orleans in 1962.

Some evidence for what the full personnel might have been had a Clayton-Angram recording taken place is provided by the photographs of Lyle Bongé featured below, all courtesy of Kelley Edmiston and all taken in 1961 at a session in Preservation Hall before Ken Mills was dismissed from the Hall in mid-September.



**Figure 14.2 Jimmy ‘Kid’ Clayton, Steve Angrum and Emanuel Sayles**



**Figure 14.3 Jimmy ‘Kid’ Clayton, trumpet; Emanuel Sayles, banjo. Note the handwritten sign: ‘Preservation Hall, Produced by Grayson Mills, Psychologically Sustained by Barbara Reid’; ‘and Maintained’ [by Grayson Mills] has been scored out.**



**Figure 14.4** Jim Robinson, trombone; Jimmy 'Kid' Clayton and Emanuel Sayles



**Figure 14.5** Jim Robinson



**Figure 14.6 Jimmy 'Kid' Clayton and Louis James, string bass**



**Figure 14.7 Jimmy 'Kid' Clayton, Steve Angram, Emanuel Sayles and Louis James**



**Figure 14.8 Jimmy 'Kid' Clayton, Emanuel Sayles and Louis James**



**Figure 14.9** Jim Robinson, Alfred Williams, drums; Jimmy 'Kid' Clayton



**Figure 14.10** Alfred Williams

## NOTES

1. Icons LPs 2, 3, 4, and 6, respectively.
2. I thank Kelley Edmiston for providing me with the photographic material, all of which is by Lyle Bongé. I also thank Fred Eatherton, Charlie Crump, David Wyckoff and Per Oldaeus for their contributions.
3. See: especially, Robert Greenwood, 'Review of *The Lord Richard Sessions Volume 8: Ken Grayson Mills – An Epilogue*, 504/La Croix CD98', *Just Jazz*, No. 246, October 2018, pp. 12-13.
4. Richard Ekins & Fred Eatherton, 'Barbara Reid, Billie and DeDe Pierce and a Beatnik Film' – The Photographs of Lyle Bongé', *Just Jazz*, No. 251, March 2019, pp. 22-26.
5. Lyle Bongé and James Leo Herlihy, *The Sleep of Reason: Lyle Bongé's Ultimate Ash-Hauling Mardi Gras Photos*, Jargon Society, New York, 1974.
6. These photos were given to Kelley Edmiston by Lyle Bongé on the understanding that she would arrange for their archiving. In April 2017, she deposited them with the Edmiston Family Collection on New Orleans #5750, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I worked from a USB drive that Kelley gave me.
7. Richard Ekins, 'Authenticity as Authenticating – the Case of New Orleans Jazz Revivalism: An Approach from Grounded Theory and Social World Analysis,' *Popular Music History*, 7 (1): 24-52.
8. See: Richard Ekins, 'In Praise of Leonard Brackett (1925-2007): Center Records and the Return to the Music of the New Orleans Dance Halls', *Just Jazz*, No. 214, February 2016, pp. 16-20.
9. Barry Martyn and Mike Hazeldine, 'An Interview with Herb Friedwald, Part 2', *New Orleans Music*, 1991, 2 (6), pp. 6-14, at p. 9. In fact, the Riverside series mostly received three stars, with one four stars given to Riverside 378 – Percy Humphrey, discussed below.
10. As in Icon LP 4 – *Kid Howard's La Vida Jazz Band* and Icon LP 8 – *Kid Howard's Olympia Band*.
11. Icon LP 6 – *Steve Angrum with Kid Sheik's Storyville Ramblers*. Note, however: 'Another gent, an artist clearly, confided to Don Brown at Jazz Man [record shop] that the Steve Angrum is one of the best records ever made. He had no idea who the cat (me) was, standing within earshot. So I agreed with him and we discussed Angrum at length.' Ken Mills, 'Letter to Alan Solman', August 25, 1964.

12. William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1991, p. 141.
13. Tom Stagg and Charlie Crump, *New Orleans, the Revival*, Bashall Eaves, Dublin, 1973, p. 7.
14. Letter from Ken Mills to Mike Dine, dated May 1, 1991. Charlie Crump now agrees: 'I suspect the only accurate recording date for the Guesnon – Angrum duets is that quoted in Mills note to Mike of summer of 1959. The S & C date obviously came from the Icon LP which refers to the session being shortly before Angrum's death in November 1951. There is no mention on the Icon LP of the separate Sheik session. It would appear that the American Music CD [AMCD-56] has fallen into the same trap. I can only say that I think the original session you quoted of the Guesnon – Angrum duets is where the missing 'Closer Walk' should be situated (no mention of the Guesnon vocal on this though) and that this was the only duet session. It was done in the summer of 1959 and the four tracks were on a tape sent to Mills.' Email, Charlie Crump to Richard Ekins, November 10, 2018.
15. I did not know that Mills had sold this track to Mike Dine when I released *Ken Grayson Mills – An Epilogue*, 504/La Croix CD 98. If I had known, I would have included it on the CD. It should be issued.
16. My account draws principally on the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University 'Retype' 'Digest' of the interview with Steve Angrum conducted by Richard B. Allen, Bill Russell and Ralph Collins on August 8, 1961. See: also, the probably less accurate brief entries for 'Angram' [sic] in Samuel B. Charters, *Jazz New Orleans 1885-1963*, Oak Publications, New York, N.Y., 1963, p. 61; and 'Angrum', in Al Rose and Edmond Souchon, *New Orleans Jazz, A Family Album*, Louisiana State University Press, 1967, p. 7.
17. William Carter, op. cit., pp. 115-116.
18. Letter from Ken Mills to Mike Dine, dated February 4, 1990. I discuss the details of this letter (sent to me on May 17, 2018, by Terry Peirce) and consider Richard Knowles' alternative account of this tape in Richard Ekins, 'Ken Grayson Mills and Richard Knowles, with a Note on the Origins of Icon Hall', *Just Jazz*, No. 247, November 2018, pp. 3-4.
19. Herb Friedwald, op. cit, pp. 9-10.
20. *Mutt Carey and Punch Miller*, vol. 1, Savoy Jazz Classics SJC 415; *Carey and Miller*, vol. 2, Savoy MG 12050.
21. *Louis Armstrong: the New and Revised Musical Autobiography*, Jazz Unlimited

JUCD 2003, JUCD 2004, JUCD 2005.

22. Mike Hazeldine, 'The New Orleans Revival', in *The Blackwell Guide to Recorded Jazz, Second Edition*, edited by Barry Kernfeld, Blackwell, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995, p. 205.

23. Ibid. Hazeldine might have added that the Humphrey band invariably followed the same order of soloing: clarinet, trombone, trumpet, banjo or guitar, and (occasionally) drums. In one longer number (Milenburg Joys), the same formula is repeated twice. Occasionally, one of the solos is omitted. David Wyckoff adds: 'I found [this article] very interesting, especially the discussion of the transition from 'dance hall' to a routinized Preservation Hall style musical format - in part stimulated apparently by Percy Humphrey, for business, commercial reasons. Too bad, but doubtless very practical, and already, for years, the Bourbon street standard presentation.' Email, David Wyckoff to Richard Ekins, November 25, 2018.

24. Ibid, pp.205-206.

25. Richard Ekins, 'The New Orleans "Jazzology" of Ken Grayson Mills: Mills on George H. Buck's American Music CDs', *Just Jazz*, No. 233, September 2017, pp. 24-30, at p. 28.

26. On the AMCD-65, Martyn erroneously and confusingly gives the recording date of this session as July 1962. It was recorded by Mills on July 13, 1961. See: Barry Martyn, 'Booklet Notes', *Alvin Alcorn's 'Gay Paree' Stompers & Harrison Verret's Fern Dance Hall Band*, American Music, AMCD-65, p. 3.

27. Albert Warner was the regular trombonist in Kid Sheik's Storyville Ramblers (Icon LP 6). He is also the trombonist in one of John Casimir's Young Tuxedo Jazz Bands (Icon LP 11). Later, in Spring 1962, Mills recorded *Albert Warner's Brown Buddies* at his Icon Hall (American Music – AMCD-66). Mills refers to Warner as 'the last purveyor pf the pure Vamp trombone style' in his sleeve notes for Icon LP 6.

28. See: Richard Ekins, 'A Final Flurry: Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and Jeunes Amis Hall, with a Footnote on *The Outsider* and the Return of the Repressed', *Just Jazz*, No. 234, October 2017, pp. 12-22 at p. 17; and Icon LP 11, *John Casimir's Young Tuxedo Jazz Bands*.

29. I have not been able to locate anyone who heard this band at Preservation Hall. However, Charlie DeVore commented: 'I never heard Kid Clayton with Steve Angrum on clarinet, at Preservation Hall, but I did hear him outdoors with the George Williams Brass Band. He was very powerful and loud but not the greatest tone . . . but it was bluesy and stronger than John Casimer.' Email, Charlie DeVore to Richard Ekins, November 8, 2018.



# CHAPTER 15

Kid Sheik, Barbara Reid,  
Ken Grayson Mills and the  
First Television Filming at  
Preservation Hall,  
with an Afterword from  
Larissa Mills

*August 2019*



## Chapter 15

I was very pleased that with the help of Fred Eatherton, Charlie Crump, David Wyckoff and Per Oldaeus, I was able to identify a set of Steve Angrum photographs that to my mind are some of the finest, rarest, and most important photographs ever taken at Preservation Hall. In the process, I was also able to correct a longstanding discographical error. Despite the difficulties of identification, the set of photographs were all taken at the same session by a single photographer, which made my task easier.

I am particularly proud of the main article included in this chapter for the way it corrects all manner of errors and omissions, from all manner of different places, to provide a coherent story centred on what I identify as the ‘First Television Filming at Preservation Hall’.

Mills, himself, in his mystical way, might have referred to the chapter’s tailpiece as an ode to synchronicity. Just as I was in the final stages of writing the article, I received from his granddaughter Larissa Mills an email with a new photograph that enabled me to add a final section, which I headed – ‘Conclusion and an Afterword from Larissa Mills’.



**Figure 15.1** Kid Sheik’s Storyville Ramblers, with George Lewis and Kid Howard. Left to right: Eddie Summers, Kid Sheik, George Lewis, Alex Bigard, Harrison Verret, Kid Howard. Not shown: Alcide ‘Slow Drag’ Pavageau, bass, Louis Gallaud, piano. Courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University

# **Kid Sheik, Barbara Reid, Ken Grayson Mills and the First Television Filming at Preservation Hall, with an Afterword from Larissa Mills<sup>1</sup>**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, August 2019

*This is the band George Lewis should have brought to England!  
This music would have made a million converts.*

James Asman, 'New Orleans in Retrospect'

*Footnote*, 4 (1), 1972, p. 8

*Unfortunately, we have no records of any of this. Hurricane Katrina ruined our whole downstairs media lobby. Even with a library, I don't think there were any records kept or programs on media from the 1960s. There is no one here working from that time as well to ask.*

Kirk Demoruelle, WYES, 'Filming at Preservation Hall'

email to Richard Ekins, May 1, 2019

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this article is to clarify confusions, correct errors and fill in some of the gaps in the literature and material on the official opening night of Preservation Hall and the first television filming at the Hall. Pivotal to this is my acceptance of Ken Mills' re-dating of the official opening night as June 13, 1961; James Asman's dating of the television filming as June 29, 1961;<sup>2</sup> and my reconstruction of events centring around my re-dating and re-describing of a series of photographs allegedly taken in 'early July' or 'during opening week' by the *Times-Picayune* photographer James Pitts.

Firstly, I detail the available inconsistent evidence, the building blocks of my argument. Secondly, I set forth my own view. Thirdly, I select a number of James Pitts' photographs to illustrate the events being filmed. Fourthly, I

provide ‘An Unexpected Bonus’. And finally, I end with a short conclusion and an interesting ‘Afterword from Larissa Mills’, Ken Grayson Mills’ granddaughter.

The article may be read as a free-standing contribution, extending our knowledge of the early months of Preservation Hall when it was co-founded and run by Ken Grayson Mills and Barbara Reid. It may also be read as an addendum to last month’s *Just Jazz* article on Barbara Reid’s ‘Media Blitz’ of 1961.<sup>3</sup>

Insofar as the events described involve both Mills’ main focus in selecting the musicians and Reid’s input in arranging for the television filming and the presence of the *Times-Picayune* photographer James Pitts, I regard this article as both Part 18 of my Ken Grayson Mills Project and Part 8 of my Barbara Glancey Reid Project.<sup>4</sup>

## **Building Blocks**

William Carter combines the Preservation Hall official opening night and the WYES first filming at Preservation Hall, as follows:

The official opening was the night of June 10, 1961. Mills remembered the band consisting of trumpeter Kid Sheik Colar, clarinetist George Lewis, trombonist Eddie Summers, banjoist Harrison Verrett,<sup>5</sup> bassist Slow Drag Pavageau and drummer Alex Bigard. Helping pass the hat were Barbara Reid, Sandra Jaffe, Marge Kidorsky [actually Fedorsky] (Mills’ fiancée) and an off-duty Playboy Club bunny named Pat Gordon. A local television station, WYES, filmed the band playing such tunes as ‘I Thought I Heard my Mothr Pray’ and ‘I Can’t Escape from You’, and interviewed Kid Sheik, Ken Mills and Barbara Reid. One of Barbara’s statements on camera, when broadcast later, seemed to everyone as impressive: ‘We tried to restore the musicians’ old pride in themselves.’<sup>6</sup>

On dating the official opening as June 10, 1961, Carter is following numerous published precedents, including, for example, Noel Rockmore, Larry Borenstein and Bill Russell’s 1968 *Preservation Hall Portraits*.<sup>7</sup> However, following his correspondence and conversations with Carter in 1985-1986<sup>8</sup>

which Carter drew on for his book, Mills corrected that date to June 13, 1961.

Mike Hazeldine noted that Kid Sheik had told him that on the opening night Sheik thought that George Lewis was playing clarinet, whereas on June 13<sup>th</sup> it was Emile Barnes who was featured. Forced to choose between the two dates, Hazeldine favoured the 10<sup>th</sup> on the basis of Kid Sheik's memories of the occasion. For some, perhaps, there was a lingering suspicion that Mills might have re-dated the official opening night to accord with the fact that he had re-discovered the tapes of the music played that night by the band featuring Kid Sheik and Emile Barnes. Accordingly, Hazeldine wrote in 1991:

The publication of the book [Carter's *Preservation Hall*] is timed to coincide with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of Preservation Hall. If you want to have a celebration drink on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, then you have a choice. You can either have it on 10 June (as stated by Ken Mills on page 149 of the book) or on 13 June (as stated by Ken Mills as the date of the 'Opening Night' recording on the recent Sheik/Emile Barnes cassette). Kid Sheik once told me that he thought George Lewis was with him on the opening night. It would seem that the 10<sup>th</sup> is the more likely date.<sup>9</sup>

Mills responded speedily and sought to set the record straight when he wrote as follows:

With regard to . . . the exact date that Preservation Hall opened. The first union contract gig was Tuesday June 13. We held non-guaranteed preps from June 7 to 11. We were closed on June 10. June 10 is misinformation without reference to refreshing documents when I was interviewed in 1987. My diary opens June 16 with Jim Robinson's Back O' Town Band. Earlier records were kept in a sturdily bound Victor Viewer and that source was unavailable until its rediscovery in about December of 1989.<sup>10</sup>

At least three questions then come to the fore. Firstly, why did Sheik think that he had played with George Lewis on the opening night? Secondly, what was the date of the filming? And thirdly, was Carter's detailing of the personnel on the opening and/or filming night correct?

In my previous article on the ‘Media Blitz’ of 1961, I drew on James Asman’s September 1961 *Jazz Journal* piece, ‘The Living Legends of New Orleans’, to note that Asman had dated the filming to ‘towards the end of June’,<sup>11</sup> and pointed out that on the more lengthy and detailed account Asman later wrote up for *Footnote*, we could precisely date the filming to Thursday 29 June.<sup>12</sup> Now is the time to draw on Asman’s article more fully. In his *Jazz Journal* article he writes:

The best session so far luckily occurred the second night we were in New Orleans [29<sup>th</sup> June], and this had been filmed by a local television company earlier in the evening. George ‘Kid Sheik’ Colar, one of Crescent City’s greatest veteran jazz trumpeters, fronted a distinguished group with George Lewis playing at his best, a brilliant and grievously under-rated trombonist named Eddie Summers, Harrison Verret on banjo, Slow Drag Pavageau on string bass, Creole pianist, Louis Gallaud and Barney Bigard’s brother Alex on drums.<sup>13</sup>

Such was the position when I finished my July 2019 *Just Jazz* article. I found Mills’ argument as to the date of the official opening of Preservation Hall persuasive. I also found Asman’s dating of the filming persuasive. Both were drawing on their respective detailed notes taken at the time.

However, as is the way with these things, a short time later I happened to be browsing the Louisiana Digital Library site. I searched for ‘Preservation Hall’ and came across a series of photos, titled ‘Preservation Hall Jazz Band’, almost all dated ‘early July’, with no year given and no photographer given. Rather, the relevant details, most typically, stated ‘Gift of Photographer 1970s’; date: ‘early July’.<sup>14</sup>

It was soon clear to me from the content of the photographs that the year must have been 1961. As I studied the photographs more closely it became evident that all of them were of the musicians specified in Asman’s personnel of the filming. Asman referred to two locations for the evening: ‘the garden patio back of Preservation Hall’,<sup>15</sup> where the filming was done ‘earlier’<sup>16</sup> and the evening session in the Hall itself. In the *Footnote* article, Asman had also

referred to the band as being ‘extended’.<sup>17</sup> The series of photos dated ‘early July’ all accorded with Asman’s depiction of the evening. It became evident to me that the photographs had been wrongly dated. The photographs were in fact taken on June 29, 1961 and they were, indeed, taken on the evening of the filming. Moreover, the smaller number of photographs interspersed with the ‘early July’ photos, labelled ‘during opening week’, I was now inclined to think were from the same date. These photographs, however, were of the audience, with no musicians being photographed.<sup>18</sup>

Although I had accessed all the photographs on the Louisiana Digital Library site, all of those I was interested in were listed as part of the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University site. Naturally, I contacted Lynn Abbott of the Hogan Archive, outlined my ‘findings’ and asked if he was able to identify the photographer. The reply I received was most gratifying:

The Preservation Hall photos you were asking about were taken by *Times-Picayune* photographer James Pitts; all are dated ‘early July 1961 [opening week?]?’ He donated them to the Jazz Archive during the mid-1970s.<sup>19</sup>

## **Contention**

I have no doubt now, therefore, that all the relevant photographs were taken on the evening of June 29, 1961 by James Pitts, including both those labelled ‘early July 1961’ and those few labelled ‘during opening week’.

Given the development of the early Preservation Hall sessions held by Mills and Reid as moving from overt ‘rehearsals’ (May to early June 1961), to ‘non-guaranteed preps’, to the ‘official opening’, to the first television filming, it is, most likely, in my view, that Kid Sheik’s recollection of his playing with George Lewis on the ‘opening night’ was not correct. This recollection seems to be, in fact, a mistake for the first ‘filming night’, a mistake easily made from Kid Sheik’s point of view. In short, Carter is wrong in his dating of the official opening night. Carter is wrong in conflating the official opening night with the filming by WYES. James Pitts and/or the

relevant staff at the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, are wrong in dating the photographs to ‘early July’ or ‘during opening week’. Rather, this series of photographs were all taken by James Pitts of the *Times-Picayune*, either on the garden patio behind Preservation Hall or in the Hall itself on June 29, 1961, on the evening of the actual filming by WYES or later that same evening. It is not impossible that there had been a previous television filming, but on the evidence available this seems highly unlikely. I therefore conclude that this television filming was another ‘first’ for Preservation Hall; another ‘first’ for Ken Mills and Barbara Reid.

### **The Photographs**

The series of photographs by James Pitts consists of 20 images of the musicians designated (wrongly) as ‘early July’ and three images of the audience only designated (wrongly) as ‘opening week’. Most of the photographs of the musicians are taken inside the Hall.

One image shows Ken Mills, Kid Thomas, Emile Barnes, and Kid Howard sitting together outside on the patio. Kid Howard is shown singing with the band in one photograph and sitting with the band in another. It seems most likely that while Kid Howard may have played some numbers with the band in the Hall, Kid Thomas and Emile Barnes did not. Rather they were visiting the Hall for the occasion. Nevertheless, it should be said that one of the patio pictures includes Emile Barnes, ‘? Kid Thomas Valentine’ and Ken Mills as one of the ‘Musicians’. Another photograph includes Ken Mills, Kid Thomas Valentine and ‘Emile Barnes ?’ as one of the ‘Musicians’ performing.<sup>21</sup>

It seems most likely that these descriptions were provided by James Pitts as this information cannot be gleaned from the photographic evidence alone. None of these named people can be distinguished in the photographs, themselves. Moreover, it seems most likely that to describe Mills as a musician ‘performing’ is an error. However, Mills is listed as playing ‘percussion’ in

the May 19, 1961 session ‘Emanuel Sayles and his Conti Street Boys’, a trio comprising Punch Miller, Emanuel Sayles and Ken Mills, so it is not impossible.<sup>22</sup> Conceivably, Mills was performing with the band.

Fred Eatherton immediately recognised James Asman in the picture below. Mills is sitting next to Asman.<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 15.2 Ken Grayson Mills, James Asman, Kid Sheik, Eddie Summers.  
Courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University**

Of the eight photographs that follow, the final picture was Photoshopped to remove a halo of light resting on the top of Ken Mills’ head. The result is an improvement on the original. The other seven photographs were selected to give a representative sample of the band and each musician. I have added my own personnel details.



**Figure 15.3 Kid Sheik, Alex Bigard, George Lewis, Kid Howard  
Louis Gallaud, Harrison Verret.**

**Courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University**



**Figure 15.4 Eddie Summers and Kid Sheik.**  
**Courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University**



**Figure 15.5** Harrison Verret and Alcide ‘Slow Drag’ Pavageau.  
Courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University



**Figure 15.6** Harrison Verret.  
Courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University



**Figure 15.7 Louis Gallaud, Alcide ‘Slow Drag’ Pavageau, Harrison Verret. Courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University**



**Figure 15.8 George ‘Kid Sheik’ Colar, George Lewis, Louis Gallaud, Harrison Verret, Alcide ‘Slow Drag’ Pavageau. Courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University**



**Figure 15.9 Ken Grayson, Mills, Kid Thomas Valentine, Emile Barnes, Avery ‘Kid’ Howard.**

**Courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University**

### **An Unexpected Bonus**

It will be recalled from the opening section of this article that, according to Carter: ‘WYES, filmed the band playing such tunes as ‘I Thought I Heard my Mother Pray’ and ‘I Can’t Escape from You’. In 1973, Stagg and Crump had listed ‘I Can’t Escape from You’ as a single unissued track from *Kid Sheik’s Swingsters*, recorded in New Orleans on June 29, 1961.<sup>24</sup>

A closer examination of the entry in Stagg and Crump reveals that its personnel is identical to the Kid Sheik’s Storyville Ramblers band with George Lewis filmed by WYES. Moreover, as Fred Eatherton and I listed in our Ken Mills *Discography*, we know of three tunes recorded on that same occasion.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Barry Martyn included all three of these tracks on his American Music CD (AMCD-56) under the heading *George Lewis with Kid Sheik’s Band*. Martyn added them as a filler to this CD release of what

had originally been Icon LP 6: *Steve Angram with Kid Sheik's Storyville Ramblers*. However, although we know that Mills sold these three previously unissued tracks to George Buck as part of his sale of the Icon catalogue to GHB/Jazzology, Martyn adds no commentary about them, except to list the personnel, add 'Recd. N.O. 6/29/61', and make a comment in his CD booklet:

We have added three numbers by George Lewis with Kid Sheik's Band. These three tracks have the same exact rhythm section [as the Steve Angram tracks] and so they fit the whole concept of the CD.<sup>26</sup>

From the evidence set out in this article, it is clear that these three tracks were recorded on the same WYES filming occasion. Most likely, perhaps, Mills secured the recordings from WYES, although it is possible, of course, that he, or persons unknown, were recording the session, or part of it, at the same time.

More significantly, thanks to the American Music AMCD-56, all of us now have a portion of the evidence to assess James Asman's lavish praise of the band's playing that evening:

The TV limelight played on Lewis as he jerked his thin legs and joyously wailed his clear high notes through 'Burgundy Street Blues' and I managed to catch some of the proceedings on film. Eddie Summers was the trombonist and the drumming, crisp and reminiscent of Baby Dodds, was by Barney Bigard's younger brother, Alex. Slow Drag plucked his string bass with enormous gusto, snapping a string and, at the same time, showing just how much a band relies on foundation work. George 'Kid Sheik' Colar played in a commanding fashion, proving himself a natural leader among so many star figures and I remember, too, pianist Louis Gallaud, perhaps in some ways the very last of the New Orleans' piano players. Harrison Verret was good but failed on this occasion to give George Lewis the right setting for his solo work. Indeed, when I look at the notes I scrawled at the time I wrote, 'This is the band George Lewis should have brought to England! This music would have made a million converts. Why the hell don't they record a band like this while there is still time?'<sup>27</sup>

## **Conclusion and an Afterword from Larissa Mills**

Ideally, of course, we would have access to the WYES programme itself. We can take it from the quotation from Carter on the filming that it was not broadcast live. Rather, it was broadcast at an unknown time and at a date recorded as ‘later’. It is possible that some unknown person or persons made a recording of the transmission. However, when I approached WYES recently, I drew a sad blank.

As WYES employee Kirk Demoruelle put it:

Unfortunately, we have no records of any of this. Hurricane Katrina ruined our whole downstairs media lobby. Even with a library, I don’t think there were any records kept or programs on media from the 1960s. There is no one here working from that time as well to ask.<sup>28</sup>

I replied that, as I understood it, Bill Carter was infirm and not in a position to respond to queries. I wondered what material or people, if any, he consulted in writing what he did. However, from my point of view, I had done what I could. No sooner had I replied to WYES<sup>29</sup> than an unexpected email arrived from Larissa Mills, Ken’s granddaughter:

Hi Richard, Hope that you are well. I am not sure if I sent this photo to you before, it is attached below.<sup>30</sup>

I replied:

That’s a great pic of Ken. Thank you for sending it. I have just made a great find of photos to do with a particularly important Preservation Hall gig which I’ve dated to the end of June (another article coming - just as I thought I had finished!) [the Ken Grayson Mills Project] So it intrigues me that ‘July’ is crossed out and turned into ‘June’. The photos I have located are also classified as ‘early July’, but I think I have incontrovertible proof that this is a mistake. More later!<sup>31</sup>

In the same email, I added:

The two pics (back and front) you did send are totally new to me. Thank you so much. Pat Gordon is acknowledged by both Carter and Mills as one of the kitty basket handlers.

It would be gratifying if Larissa's photograph was taken on the occasion of the filming on 29 June 1961 and Mills had corrected his own date from July to June, accordingly.

Carter states that Pat Gordon was, indeed, passing the hat around at the WYES recording and/or the opening night.<sup>32</sup> Also, Mills includes Pat Gordon in his list of 'wonderful volunteer kitty basket handlers who liked the music and wanted to help.'<sup>33</sup> However, given Mills' fresh look in Larissa's photograph, together with the pristine state of his white t-shirt – and this does not appear in James Pitts' photographs of the 29 June – it is more likely that the photograph was taken on another day between 9 June and 30 June 1961. Mills' birthday was on 9 June and on that date in 1961 he was just 24 years of age as specified in Larissa's picture.



**Figure 15.10 Pat Gordon and Ken Grayson Mills, June 1961.**



**Figure 15.11 Inscription by Ken Mills on the back of his photo with Pat Gordon, June 1961.**

Courtesy of Larissa Mills

## NOTES

1. I thank Lynn Abbott, Larissa Mills, Fred Eatherton, Thumbs Hughes and Matthew Ekins for their contributions to this article.
2. This is the WYES [We're Your Education Station] filming. Fred Eatherton adds: WYES-TV Channel 12 as it is known today is an independent TV channel owned by the Greater New Orleans Educational Television Foundation. It first broadcast in 1957. Over the years its speciality has been long-running Louisiana cookery programs! It has a studio on Navarre Avenue and its call sign is WYES - 'We're your education station!'
3. Richard Ekins, 'On the Origin of Preservation Hall: Barbara Glancey Reid and the "Media Blitz" of 1961', *Just Jazz*, No. 255, July 2019, pp. 20-29.
4. For Barbara Reid's early 1970s take on the division of labour between Ken Mills and herself, see: Clive Wilson, *Time of My Life: A Jazz Journey from London to New Orleans*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2019, p 133: 'Ken Mills was the manager, I was the idea person and promoter . . . My priority was in getting the musicians working again and getting their music heard by the kids. I think Ken's main interest was in experimenting with different combinations of musicians and then recording them for his Icon label.'
5. 'Verrett' is variously spelt 'Verret' or 'Verrett'. Mills uses both spellings in his sleeve notes for *Steve Angrum with Kid Sheik's Storyville Ramblers*, Icon LP 6. On his tombstone it is 'Verrett', <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/98112119/harrison-verrett>.
6. William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, W.W. Norton, New York, p. 149.
7. In Larry Borenstein's introduction, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, unpaginated.
8. Carter states: 'Grayson 'Ken' Mills corresponded and conversed with the author in 1985 and 1986.' Carter, p. 314. Whereas Mills gives the date as 1987 in his quoted passage on page 298 of this chapter.
9. Mike Hazeldine, 'Editorial', *New Orleans Music*, 1991, 2 (5): 4-5 at p. 5.
10. Ken Mills, 'Letters to the Editor: Opening Night at Preservation Hall', *New Orleans Music*, 1991, 3 (1): 25.

11. James Asman, 'The Living Legends of New Orleans', *Jazz Journal*, 14 (9), September 1961, pp. 2-3 and 40, at p. 2.
12. James Asman, 'New Orleans in Retrospect', *Footnote*, 4 (1), October 1972, pp. 2-20, at pp. 8-9.
13. James Asman, 'The Living Legends of New Orleans', op. cit., p. 3. This is the same personnel as detailed by Carter in the first of the 'building blocks' above, with the addition of Louis Gallaud.
14. Accessed June 29, 2023, <http://louisianadigitalibrary.org/islandora/search/Preservation%20Hall?type=dismax>.
15. James Asman, 'New Orleans in Retrospect', op. cit., p. 8.
16. James Asman, 'The Living Legends of New Orleans', op. cit., p. 3.
17. James Asman, 'New Orleans in Retrospect', op. cit., p. 8.
18. Accessed June 29, 2023, <http://louisianadigitalibrary.org/islandora/search/Preservation%20Hall?type=dismax>. A single photo (of banjoist Harrison Verret) was dated as 'during opening week at Preservation Hall in early July.'
19. Email, Lynn Abbott to Richard Ekins, May 1, 2019.
20. In early May 1961, 'Kid Howard was just coming back from illness. Sheik [Colar] was nursing him, and Sheik had him play second trumpet.' Ken Mills, quoted in Carter, *Preservation Hall*, p 142. Charlie Devore misses the significance of this when he criticizes Mills for using 'inferior' trumpet players: 'but there was a wonderful trumpeter, Kid Howard, who wanted to play desperately, sitting out in the carriageway, kind of wistfully looking in.' Carter, *ibid.*, p 154. The 'nursing' and encouragement from Sheik and Mills led to the excellent *Kid Howard and his La Vida Jazz Band* session of 3 September 1961 first issued as Icon LP 4.
21. I refer to the descriptions provided by James Pitts and/or the Hogan Jazz Archive.
22. Fred Eatherton, assisted by Richard Ekins, *Ken Grayson Mills' Icon Discography: A Discography*, La Croix Publications, 2018, [accessed June 26, 2023, http://www.lacroixrecords.com/mills%20discography.html](http://www.lacroixrecords.com/mills%20discography.html), p 17.
23. Mills often looks very different in photographs taken at a similar time. The consensus of my informants is that this is Mills. Thumbs Hughes adds: 'He seems to be taking notes.' Richard Ekins Lord Richard, Facebook page comment, May 11, 2019.

24. Tom Stagg and Charlie Crump, *New Orleans, the Revival*, Bashall Eaves, Dublin, p. 47.
25. Fred Eatherton, assisted by Richard Ekins, *Ken Grayson Mills' Icon Records: Discography: A Discography*, op. cit., p. 19.
26. Booklet accompanying Barry Martyn, *Steve Angrum & George Lewis with Kid Sheik's Band*, American Music, AMCD-56, p. 3.
27. James Asman, 'New Orleans in Retrospect', op. cit., p 8. Note, also, Asman in his 'The Living Legends of New Orleans Jazz', op. cit., pp 2-3: 'I have been a constant visitor to the club [Preservation Hall] since I have been here in Crescent City and the quality of most of the jazz presented by these old men is incredibly high. Every night has been a magic, live creation of Bill Russell's American Music sessions, even to the benign, white-fringed head of Russell himself bowing appreciatively in the background.'
28. Kirk Demoruelle, WYES, 'Filming at Preservation Hall', email to Richard Ekins, May 1, 2019.
29. Email, Richard Ekins to Kirk Demoruelle, May 1, 2019.
30. Email, Larissa Mills to Richard Ekins, May 2, 2019. Such synchronicity has been a regular feature of my Ken Grayson Mills and Barbara Glancey Reid Projects. Kelley Reid Edmiston, Barbara Reid's daughter, is firmly of the view that the spirits of Ken Mills and Barbara Reid are at work through their respective family members.
31. Email, Richard Ekins to Larissa Mills, May 3, 2019.
32. Carter, op. cit., p. 149, quoted previously.
33. Richard Ekins, 'PRESERVATION HALL: The Rest of the Story by Ken Grayson Mills, Introduced, Illustrated and Annotated by Richard Ekins, with a Footnote by Larissa Mills', *Just Jazz*, No. 235, November 2017, pp. 18-25 at 25. Chapter 12 in this book.

A black and white photograph of a building facade. The upper part shows a balcony with a decorative wrought-iron railing. Below the balcony is a doorway with a white door and a window with a diamond-shaped pattern. To the right of the doorway is a dark wooden door with a small window. The number '26' is visible on the wall next to the dark door. The text is overlaid on the image.

# CHAPTER 16

Preamble to 'Odes on  
Music': Ken Grayson Mills,  
Jazz Journalism and *The  
Daily Tar Heel* – A Concise  
Biography of Ken Grayson  
Mills (1937-2004)

January 2020



## Chapter 16

Mills' earliest systematic forays into jazz journalism took place while he was a student at the University of North Carolina in 1957. I included in my *Just Jazz Mills Project* an article titled "Odes on Music": Ken Grayson Mills, Jazz Journalism and *The Daily Tar Heel*.<sup>1</sup> That article, which set forth his journalistic contributions to the university newspaper, is not sufficiently relevant to the Genesis and Exodus of Preservation Hall to be included in this book. However, the article had been preceded by my *Ken Grayson Mills' Icon Records: A Discography* (also not included in this book). Per Oldaeus considered that the Discography would have been improved had we included in it a concise biography of Mills. To make amends for this omission I started the 'Odes on Music' article with a preamble that did include a concise biography. This is worth including in this book.

### **Preamble to 'Odes on Music': Ken Grayson Mills, Jazz Journalism and *The Daily Tar Heel* – A Concise Biography of Ken Grayson Mills (1937-2004)**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, January 2020

Shortly after publishing Part 12 of my Grayson Mills Project, *Ken Grayson Mills' Icon Records: A Discography*,<sup>2</sup> I received a comment from Per Oldaeus that he regretted that it did not include a concise biography of Mills.

He asked me to write a suitable piece to publish in *Bunk Johnson Information: A Newsletter of the Swedish Bunk Johnson Society*.

I wrote the following:

Ken Grayson Mills (Kenneth Harold Mills) was born in Fullerton, California on June 9, 1937. His interest in jazz began with the Kid Ory broadcasts in 1944. He started researching and writing on jazz in 1957. While at the University of North Carolina, he had a column in *The Daily Tar Heel* called 'Odes on Music'. At Santa Ana College, California, he studied journalism

and hung out at Jack's Record Cellar in San Francisco in the late 1950s and early 1960s. At the same time, he owned and edited the literary magazine *The Iconoclast*. His earlier interests in rock & roll, blues and R & B, turned more exclusively to New Orleans jazz when he heard George Lewis playing 'Over the Waves' and he embarked on a three year period of recording for his Icon Records label in New Orleans, which led to his founding (with Barbara Reid) of Preservation Hall in 1961. After being removed from Preservation Hall, he founded and ran Icon Hall, later renamed Perseverance Hall, in 1962. In 1967 he sold all the issued Icon LP material to George H. Buck who issued them on his Jazzology label. By this time, Mills had returned to his earlier interests in blues and R & B playing saxophone in his own band, the Low Riders. In 1984 he produced an Icon LP featuring the drummer Jimmy Wright and his Rocking Band. In the early 1990s, he sold his unissued Icon material, most of which was issued on American Music CDs. He believed that jazz is an immensely elevating music of great social significance and the content is the poetry of psycho-physiology. He died on October 10, 2004 in California [possibly in Fullerton].<sup>3</sup>

My subsequent research, with Fred Eatherton, has revealed that Mills was born in Huntington Park, California,<sup>4</sup> some 23 miles from Fullerton; that he attended Santa Ana College (1956-1958)<sup>5</sup> both before and after attending the University of North Carolina for the fall semester of 1957; and that he was residing in Fullerton when he died.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 16.1 Ken Grayson Mills, c. late 1950s.**

**Courtesy of Larissa Mills**

## NOTES

1. I thank Larissa Mills, Holly Roper, Fred Eatherton and Matthew Ekins for their contributions to this article. *Just Jazz*, No 261, January 2020, pp. 26-31.
2. Fred Eatherton, assisted by Richard Ekins, Ken Grayson Mills' Icon Records: A Discography, La Croix Records, London, 2018. <http://www.lacroixrecords.com/mills%20discography.html>.
3. Richard Ekins, 'Ken Grayson Mills', *Bunk Johnson Information*, Number 40, 2018, p. 3. This information is derived from my own primary research and from the smatterings of autobiographical material in Ken Mills' own writings. See: especially, 'Ken Grayson Mills', *Jazz Report*, 3 (1 & 2), 1962: 21. Much remains unknown of Mills' life and work, particularly of the circumstances of his death and the disposal of his personal effects.
4. Kenneth Harold Mills in the U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007.
5. 1957 and 1958 Santa Ana College yearbooks. The 1957 yearbook shows him as a student of journalism and feature writer for the campus newspaper, the *El Don*. The 1958 yearbook shows him attending an English Literature class with Dr Henry Chupack. Subsequently, Mills attended the University of San Francisco. Prior to his college education he attended Fullerton Union High School.
6. Kenneth Mills in the U.S., Social Security Death Index, 1935-2014.



# CHAPTER 17

Larry Borenstein  
and the Erasing of  
Ken Grayson Mills

*September 2019*



## Chapter 17

This chapter considers the three main writings that Larry Borenstein published on the origins of Preservation Hall and summarises briefly when, where and how Borenstein sought to erase the contributions of Ken Grayson Mills as founder of the Hall. I included in my *Just Jazz* articles on Larry Borenstein two previously unpublished typescripts written by Borenstein in 1969 and 1970. However, they do not add anything of substance to the Ken Grayson Mills story and I omit them here.

### Larry Borenstein and the Erasing of Ken Grayson Mills



**Figure 17.1** E. Lorenz ‘Larry’ Borenstein by Noel Rockmore, 1963.  
Courtesy of Sacha Borenstein Clay

Three of Larry Borenstein's articles covering the origins of Preservation Hall have entered the jazz studies literature. First came his contribution to *The Outsider*, Vol. 1, No. 3 of Spring 1963 titled 'Jazz in New Orleans 1957-1963'. This was followed by his 'Introduction' to *Preservation Hall Portraits*, a book of paintings by Noel Rockmore published in 1968. Finally, Borenstein published his article 'Jazz: Rhythms from Africa helped create a special New Orleans sound' in *Travel & Camera* in September 1970.



**Figure 17.2** Joan Farrar<sup>1</sup> painting Creole George Guesnon in Larry Borenstein's Associated Artists Studio, 726 St. Peter Street, c. 1960. Courtesy of Barbara Reid and Kelley Edmiston

In his book *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, William Carter draws on these three sources and, as he puts it, 'compended' them to write his own account of Borenstein on Preservation Hall.

Shirley, Rich and Tee Marvin, in *Our Journey to the Discovery of Rockmore*, draw selectively on *Preservation Hall Portraits*, inserting a credit

to Barbara Reid which is not in the original Borenstein material.<sup>2</sup>

In three of my previous *Just Jazz* articles, I indicated how, as the years went by, Borenstein increasingly erased the contribution of Mills. I also illustrated how Borenstein came to increasingly emphasise his own contribution to the founding of Preservation Hall.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 17.3 Associated Artists, 726 St. Peter Street, the art gallery that became Preservation Hall, probably early 1960s.  
Courtesy of Pat Borenstein and Kelley Edmiston**

In his 1963 account, Borenstein sets a context of ‘order out of chaos’, covering the period of Mills’ ‘nightly auditions’ (‘chaos’) to a simultaneous ‘renaming’ and ‘new arrangement’ (‘order’) when Allan and Sandra Jaffe took over the management of the sessions. Borenstein writes:

Early in 1961 he [Ken Mills] returned to audition more bands. With approval of the gallery owner [Borenstein], arrangements were set for a series of nightly auditions during which the customary kitty collections were made. The auditions attracted additional audience-interest, and also a bit of chaos, for listeners shortly were overflowing into the street. Volunteer help was hastily recruited, among them Sylvia Shannon, Aline Willis, Bill Russell,

Allan and Sandy Jaffe, Bill and Barbara Reid Edmiston, and others. Within a month the gallery was moved next door and the space given over entirely to jazz concerts under the name of ‘Preservation Hall’.

With the renaming a new arrangement was made for bringing order out of chaos. Responsibility for the Hall’s schedule and management was assigned to Allan and Sandra Jaffe, who lost no time in placing it on a logical and sustaining basis.

This conflation of events (less charitably, this sleight of hand) can be read to imply that the ‘new arrangement’, the new ‘management’, and the ‘renaming’ were simultaneous, when, of course, it was Mills and Reid who had first adopted the ‘Preservation Hall’ naming and established it within a legal entity.<sup>4</sup>

In 2018, some 55 years after Borenstein’s fusion, Jason Berry goes the whole hog:

After the honeymoon, back in New Orleans, Borenstein fired Reid and Mills, who had worked tirelessly to launch the Slow Drag Hangout [an earlier name for Preservation Hall]. His brusque move left Reid feeling bitter; but Larry couldn’t see two idealists running a business, and if the music didn’t pay for itself, he’d have to swallow the losses before pulling the plug. He was confident in Allan with his Wharton degree. Renamed Preservation Hall, the venue reopened in the fall of 1961 with rustic benches, no beverage sales, no cover charge (donations welcome), and classic jazz for people of all ages.<sup>5</sup>

It defies belief that such nonsense is still being repeated. Far from renaming the new arrangement ‘Preservation Hall’, Larry Borenstein and Allan Jaffe both intended to drop the name entirely and revert to the address name ‘726 St. Peter Street’. The evidence for this is incontrovertible with Mills writing:

Borenstein informed me he was going to drop the name ‘Preservation Hall’, so that he could purge and rid his property of the ‘stigma’ of myself and the NOSPTJ [New Orleans Society of the Preservation of Traditional Jazz] forever.<sup>6</sup>

Dick Allen, Tulane University jazz archivist, wrote in his research notes two days before Allan Jaffe’s first session of 13 September 1961: ‘The sessions will be continued at the same location, and the name “Preservation Hall”

will not be used.<sup>7</sup> Finally, several months later, Andy Lockhart, columnist in New Orleans, reported: ‘Because Allan Jaffe, who presides over the jazz jamborees, doesn’t like the name Preservation Hall, 726 St. Peter St. in the French Quarter is actually nameless at the moment.’<sup>8</sup>

In Borenstein’s account of 1968, five years after his first account of 1963, he does mention The Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz again, albeit in disparaging terms. However, with Preservation Hall now such a success, Borenstein gives himself more credit for its foundation. In a new formulation, he refers to the move from the early sessions that he had held at 726 St. Peter Street in the 1950s, to the Mills and Reid Preservation Hall sessions, as Preservation Hall coming ‘out from the underground’:

In 1960 Grayson Mills decided to record Punch Miller. Mills wanted nightly rehearsals with an audience and was surprised to find that the kitty collection enabled him to actually pay the band union scale. This led to an agreement with the musician’s union, permitting nightly concerts, and Preservation Hall came out of the underground.

A club was formed with the pretentious title The Society for the Preservation of Traditional New Orleans Jazz. Alas, as in most jazz clubs, there was as much feuding as music. I realized that the only hope was to put the activity on a businesslike basis. The club was dissolved, and Allan and Sandra Jaffe undertook to operate Preservation Hall as a business<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Borenstein published his September 1970 ‘Jazz Rhythms’ article. Under the header ‘Preservation Hall saved New Orleans jazz from extinction’, Borenstein now feels sufficiently confident in his own contribution to erase Ken Mills from his account entirely. He takes some twenty lines detailing his ‘rehearsals’ at 726 St. Peter Street in the 1950s before going on to his next paragraph:

The sessions grew in popularity, and so I moved my gallery to an address next door, and after that the old building was used exclusively for music. *This was the birth of Preservation Hall* [my italics].<sup>10</sup>

Here, Borenstein is, in effect, claiming himself as originator of Preservation Hall.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Borenstein now feels able to exclude Ken Mills’ name

entirely from the Punch Miller recording of 1960. There is no mention of The Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz. Rather, Borenstein moves seamlessly on from the Punch Miller recording of June 1960 to Allan and Sandra Jaffe's 'skillful management' of the Hall which actually did not take place until mid-September 1961, as we have seen. The progress of Preservation Hall from June 1960 to mid-September 1961 has simply vanished into the ether. Borenstein repeats his 'Preservation Hall came out of from the underground' mantra. He erases entirely the role of Mills in creating the 'format', giving the Jaffes full credit for 'developing' it:<sup>12</sup>

In 1960 I and some others decided to record Punch Miller. An agreement was made with the musician's union permitting nightly concerts, and Preservation Hall came out from the underground. The hall has now been open seven nights a week for about ten years. Under the skillful management of Allan and Sandra Jaffe, it has become a must for every visitor to New Orleans. This young couple got to New Orleans for their honeymoon and volunteered to help run the sessions. They took over the management and together developed the format which has now seen three thousand performances.



**Figure 17.4** Preservation Hall, 726 St. Peter Street, with large '726 St. Peter' sign and 'Preservation Hall' lettering on the entrance frame, early 1960s.

**Courtesy of Pat Borenstein and Kelley Edmiston**

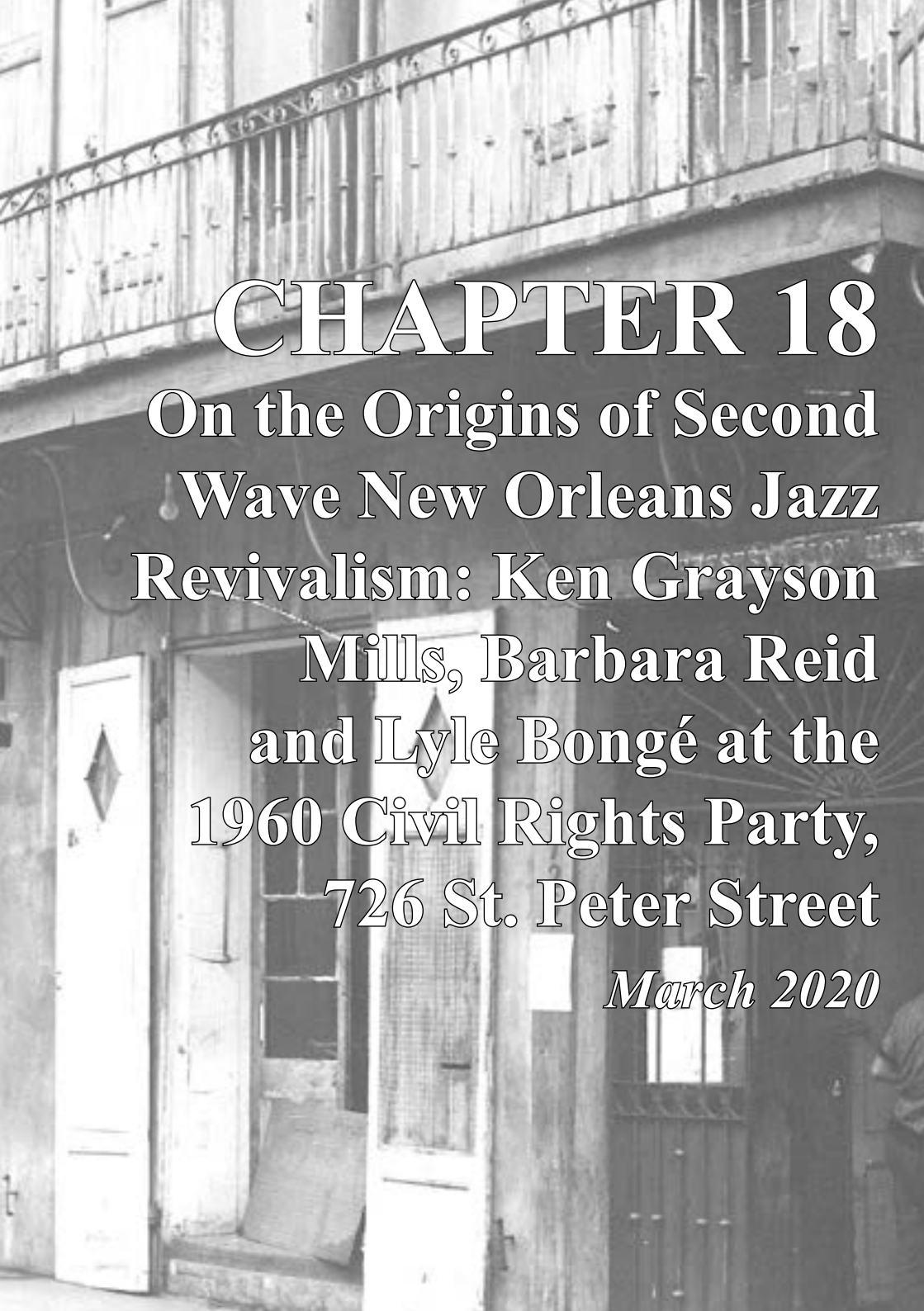
## NOTES

1. Carter features a photograph of Joan Farrar sketching Kid Thomas Valentine but names her Joan Farmer. See: Carter, op. cit., p. 113.
2. Shirley, Rich and Tee Marvin, *Noel Rockmore & Shirley Marvin: Our Journey to the Discovery of Rockmore*, Limited 2nd Edition, GEFQ and Stephens Printing, La Grange, GA, 2013, p. 31.
3. See: chapters 3, 6 and 11 above.
4. Richard Ekins, 'On the Origin of Preservation Hall: Barbara Glancey Reid and the 'Media Blitz' of 1961', *Just Jazz*, No. 255, July 2019, pp. 20-29.
5. Jason Berry, *City of a Million Dreams: A History of New Orleans at Year 300*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, p. 249. The lack of scholarship in this book is extraordinary. Here Kelley Edmiston becomes 'Kelly' and Lars Edegran becomes 'Lars Edregan'. See: pp. 247-249. Mills is said to have recorded trumpet player Ernest Cagnolatti. I know of no such recording.
6. Grayson Mills, 'The Letter Page', *Jazz Report*, 2 (6): 2.
7. Richard B. Allen, 'Memo for Tulane University, Jazz Archive, September 11, 1961'. Cited in Carter, op. cit., p. 160.
8. Andy Lockhart, 'Who Blows There?' *Jazz Report*, 1962, 2 (5): 6. Larry Borenstein thought that the 'Preservation Hall' title was 'demeaning', according to Barbara Reid. Interestingly, in conversation with Clive Wilson, bass player Alcide 'Slow Drag' Pavageau claimed the credit for the 'Preservation Hall' naming: 'I told Barbara Reid: you want to preserve this music? Call it Preservation Hall!' Reid confirmed this in a later conversation with Wilson: 'You know who named it? – Slow Drag [Pavageau] – he gave us the name.' Clive Wilson, *Time of My Life: A Jazz Journey from London to New Orleans*, University of Mississippi Press, Jackson, 2019, p. 42 and p. 134. The genie was out of the bottle and Borenstein had to live with the designation. Allan Jaffe duly 'built upon the name recognition and global publicity.' Richard Ekins, 'PRESERVATION HALL: The Rest of the Story by Ken Grayson Mills, Introduced, Illustrated, and Annotated by Richard Ekins, with a Footnote by Larissa Mills', *Just Jazz*, No. 235, November 2017, pp.18-25 at p. 22.
9. Larry Borenstein, 'Introduction', in Noel Rockmore, Larry Borenstein and Bill Russell, *Preservation Hall Portraits*, Louisiana State University Press, 1968, unpaginated.
10. Larry Borenstein, 'Jazz Rhythms', *Travel & Camera*, op. cit., p. 35.

11. The diplomatic Carter opines ‘If [Bill] Russell was the Hall’s spiritual godfather, E. Lorenz Borenstein was its practical founder.’ Carter, op. cit., p. 109. In my view, origin stories are inherently contestable because what counts as a ‘beginning’ depends on reconstructions of the past, from the standpoint of ‘presents’ rooted in projected futures. I subscribe to G.H. Mead’s view on ‘The Nature of the Past’. See: especially, G.H. Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present*, Prometheus Books, New York, 1982 [1932].

12. Interestingly, Borenstein’s daughter, Sacha Borenstein Clay, wrote to me: ‘My father always gave the credit of starting the hall to the Jaffes’. Facebook Messenger message, May 11, 2019. Cf. Dan Pawson who, in his review of Carter, says: ‘The origins of the Hall were mostly due to the endeavours of the enigmatic Larry Borenstein’, Dan Pawson, ‘Review of *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, by William Carter, 1991’, *New Orleans Music*, 2 (6), 1991, pp. 25 and 27 at p. 25.

13. The June-July 1960 trip to New Orleans was Mills’ first. On this trip Mills and Borenstein became friends and Borenstein allowed Mills to use 726 St. Peter Street to record three sessions for Mills’ Icon Records. These were John Handy and his Louisiana Shakers, on July 1, 1960; Kid Thomas Valentine’s Creole Jazz Band, on July 3, 1960; and Punch Miller’s New Orleans Band, on July 7, 1960. The first session Mills recorded himself. For the second and third sessions, Mills engaged Bill Russell as recording engineer. See: <http://www.lacroixrecords.com/mills%20discography.html>. Whatever preliminary discussion Mills may have had with ‘some others’, there can be no reasonable doubt that it was Mills who decided to record Punch Miller. Ironically, Borenstein had recorded Punch Miller many times previously ‘for his own pleasure only’ as Carter, p. 117 puts it. After Borenstein’s death these private recordings of Punch Miller formed part of the 16-volume 504 Records CD *Larry Borenstein Collection*. See: <http://www.lacroixrecords.com/part5a.html>.

A black and white photograph of a building facade. The upper portion shows a balcony with a decorative wrought-iron railing. Below the balcony, there is a doorway with a white door that is slightly ajar, revealing a dark interior. To the right of the doorway is a window with a white frame and a mesh screen. The overall scene is dimly lit, with a strong light source from the right creating a lens flare effect in the lower right quadrant.

**CHAPTER 18**  
**On the Origins of Second  
Wave New Orleans Jazz  
Revivalism: Ken Grayson  
Mills, Barbara Reid  
and Lyle Bongé at the  
1960 Civil Rights Party,  
726 St. Peter Street**

*March 2020*



## Chapter 18

This chapter, together with chapters 14 and 15, entailed the most amount of detective work to identify the musicians and the event. However, once I had carried out the necessary work in these previous chapters, I did not leave future researchers with obvious channels to explore in the future.

This is not the case with this chapter, which tells the story of Mills' second evening in New Orleans on his first visit there in June 1960.

The evening coincided with the so-called 'Civil Rights Party', the precise nature of which I never did manage to ascertain. But, more importantly perhaps, it sets the scene for Mills' first serious networking in New Orleans and mentions the names of many of Mills' 'helpers', such as Walter Eysselinck and Ralph Collins, about whose precise role in helping Mills we still know all too little. Intriguingly, we are given a brief insight into the time when Mills and Borenstein were favourably disposed towards each other.

### **On the Origins of Second Wave New Orleans Jazz Revivalism: Ken Grayson Mills, Barbara Reid and Lyle Bongé at the 1960 Civil Rights Party, 726 St. Peter Street<sup>1</sup>**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, March 2020

*Old gods almost dead, malign,  
Starving for unpaid dues.*

'Outlaws' by Robert Graves

Quoted by Tony Standish in his 1959 article, 'Gold in the Junkyards', which made a desperate plea for a revival of interest in the old-style musicians of New Orleans<sup>2</sup>

## Overture by Ken Grayson Mills

Arriving in the city not knowing anyone I didn't even have any idea where I could record the men. That was solved when I met Larry Borenstein, who owns the Associated Artists Studio on St. Peter Street and is a great friend of many of the musicians.

There is a beautiful old-world patio on his property, and the second night I was in the city, a wonderful party was held there. Charlie Love was there, and George Lewis, Jim Robinson, Paul Barnes, Emanuel Sayles, Creole George Guesnon, and Slow Drag. Thus the music had to be good. As a setting Larry's patio had it, and the acoustics were splendid. I asked him if we could use it for recording and he gave us the privilege for only the asking.

I had met Walter Eysselinck the previous day and through his friendship with the men and me, we were all able to get together at his place and discuss personnel, tunes, politics, fears, and the musical situation in general. This good fortune was perhaps the significant factor in producing the great music which I now have for release on ICON. Walter also took the photos which are to appear on ICON's covers.

For all my respective considerations we would not have gotten the music at all if it hadn't been for the help and advice, freely given of Bill Russell, Herb Friedwald and Ralph Collins.

. . . In all, about thirty of the greatest living New Orleans jazz musicians were recorded and paid for their labour. If you look through your copy of Sam Charters' *Jazz: New Orleans*, many of the names you've long wanted to hear are represented.

. . . It is rather obvious that something has got to be done, and it must be done under the initiative of the musicians themselves. As I remarked to Polo Barnes, 'You have to be paid to live as well as to die.'<sup>3</sup>

## Preamble

The summer of 1960 marked an advancing sea change in both the Civil Rights movement in New Orleans and in the prospects for the old-style African American jazz musicians to revive their New Orleans careers. Following the visit of the civil rights activist Marvin Robinson to New Orleans in the summer of 1960, a New Orleans chapter of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) was formed. With the chapter's use of student-led non-violent direct-action

sit-ins and boycotts, it soon established itself as one of the leading CORE chapters in the US. Their first New Orleans action was at Woolworth's on Canal Street where they sought the hiring of African American workers by Woolworth's. CORE was also demanding the desegregation of local lunch counters and a week after the Woolworth's action, it held a local lunch counter action at McCrory's, also on Canal Street. More celebrated still was the role of CORE in the beginning of the New Orleans Public School desegregation crisis in November: on 14 November 1960, McDonogh 19 [the school] was integrated by three young first grade African American girls: Leona Tate, Tessie Provost, and Gail Etienne.<sup>4</sup>

In just four more years, the 1964 Civil Rights Act would be signed and with it the end of legal segregation.

Interestingly, Associated Press reporter David Zinman attributes his big break as a journalist to his despatch to cover the New Orleans desegregation crisis and it was he who, a year or so later, would give Preservation Hall its first major publicity.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, a young Dodie Smith, who was an early and active member of the New Orleans Chapter of CORE, became a well-known figure at Preservation Hall, initially in her role as kitty basket handler.<sup>6</sup>

By 1960, the police response was changing to the music 'rehearsals' that would eventually lead to Preservation Hall. From the inception of the 'rehearsals' at 726 St. Peter Street, around 1955, Larry Borenstein had supported the young white musicians in their wish to play with their heroes.<sup>7</sup> However, the sessions were frequently busted by the police for this so-called racial mixing. When the young white trumpet player Charlie DeVore was playing with Kid Thomas at one such 'rehearsal' in early 1957, the police stopped the session and arrested a number of the musicians, including Kid Thomas and Charlie DeVore. At the court hearing that followed, the judge demanded, 'We don't want Yankees coming to New Orleans mixing cream with New Orleans coffee.'<sup>8</sup>

Larry Borenstein heeded this demand for a while, but not for long. By

1960, Borenstein felt able to provide the venue for a Civil Rights party at 726 St. Peter Street, featuring the George Lewis Band with several young white musicians playing with the band. Presumably, by then, the local police had more important fish to fry. Times were beginning to change.



**Figure 18.1 Ken Grayson Mills at the Civil Rights party, June 1960: described by Hogan Jazz Archive as ‘George Lewis Band: George Guesnon, bj, Emanuel Sayles, bj, George Lewis, cl, and Grayson ‘Ken’ Mills (with pipe), owner of Icon Records and Preservation Hall, 1960-06.’<sup>9</sup>**

**Courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University**

## **The Civil Rights Party**

I first learnt of this 1960 Civil Rights party when I was searching for a photograph to illustrate my article, ‘On the Origins of the Larry Borenstein Sessions at Associated Artists Studio, 726 St. Peter Street, New Orleans . . . A Reminiscence from Charlie DeVore’.<sup>10</sup> I was unable to locate any photos of Charlie DeVore playing with any New Orleans musicians in 1957. The most suitable photograph I could find was the one I did use, credited thus: ‘Charlie DeVore (cornet), and George Lewis (clarinet), at a Civil Rights Commission employees’ party, 726 St. Peter Street, patio, June 1960. Courtesy of the Lyle Bongé Collection, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University. Gift of Barbara Reid’.<sup>11</sup>

This was the first photograph I had used from the Hogan Jazz Archive-Lyle Bongé Collection. It was one of sixteen photographs by Lyle Bongé held at the Hogan Archive.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, I would publish three articles specifically focused around Bongé’s photographs held in the ‘Edmiston Family Collection on New Orleans’ at the University of North Carolina. The present article might be seen as the fourth in my Bongé series.<sup>13</sup> In those articles, I detailed the close relationship between Reid and Bongé. It was this relationship that led Reid to have Bongé accompany her to document various aspects of New Orleans and its musicians. I believe this Civil Rights party session should be viewed in the same way.

Barbara Reid had long been a supporter of CORE, since her time in Chicago. She may well have played a major role in networking among musicians and civil rights workers for this gig. We do not know. What we do know is that this session turned out to be especially significant because it gave Ken Grayson Mills, who had just arrived in New Orleans, his first opportunity to network with many of the musicians and their advocates at the same time.<sup>14</sup>

I believe this party provided Mills with an excellent opportunity to make preliminary arrangements for the first recordings of what would turn out

to be his 12-volume ‘Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower’ series for his Icon record label. Moreover, Mills and Reid meeting at this gig would lay the foundations for their collaboration that would lead a year later – on Mills’ next trip to New Orleans – to the founding of Preservation Hall.

I was puzzled by the Hogan descriptor, ‘at a Civil Rights Commission employees’ party’, presumably a reference to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. David Wyckoff, who was engaged in civil rights activism during this period and earlier, comments:

It certainly is confusing! Certainly Barbara and I were enthusiastic supporters of CORE during the time I was there [in the 1950s], and this was probably true in 1960 as well . . . The description of the group involved as ‘employees’ is puzzling, as in both instances they would better be described as representatives or members of the organization referred to. So either of the two organizations might have been the one involved.<sup>15</sup>

I have been unable to shed further light on the confusion, except to say that not only are Hogan descriptors often inaccurate when it comes to these things<sup>16</sup> but also there was, indeed, a United States Commission on Civil Rights visitation to New Orleans that led to hearings towards the end of 1960 going into the spring of 1961.<sup>17</sup>

DeVore knew nothing about Lyle Bongé and was not even sure that Barbara Reid was at the session. He elaborated thus:

My recollection is that in June, of 1960, I drove to New Orleans with my good friend, Dave Pfankuchen where we encountered an informal session in the patio behind Preservation Hall. I’m not sure who organized it, but I recall playing with Charlie Love, George Guesnon, Slow Drag Pavageau, Jim Robinson, Paul Barnes and George Lewis. Dave took quite a few pictures which appeared on page 121 of Bill Carter’s Preservation Hall book. I believe Barbara Reid may have been a spectator but not sure. None of Dave’s pix included her. This was so informal, I don’t believe it had a sponsor.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, Carter included three of Pfankuchen’s photographs from the Civil Rights party in his book *Preservation Hall*.<sup>19</sup> They were on different pages. But no mention is made of the ‘Civil Rights party’ or its precise date.

Rather, the picture on p. 121 is described thus:

An informal session on the patio behind ‘Mr Larry’s Art Store’ in 1960, when fine players were plentiful but jobs scarce, included (from left) trombonist Jim Robinson, bassist ‘Slow Drag’ Pavageau, trumpeter Charlie Love, trumpet student Charlie DeVore, clarinetist George Lewis and clarinetist Paul Barnes.

The picture on p. 55 is described: ‘A patio session behind the carriageway in the early 1960s included George Lewis (left) and George Guesnon.’ The picture on p. 92 is described as ‘Slow Drag Pavageau’. No date or venue is given, rather the naming is followed by various biographical details on ‘Slow Drag’.

There are five more photographs in the Hogan Jazz Archive of the same band with additional musicians – these were taken by Lyle Bongé (none by Pfankuchen) and gifted by Barbara Reid. In the Edmiston Family Collection there are a further 18 such photographs. The additional musicians featured in some of these photographs are banjoist Emanuel Sayles and the young white clarinetist Dick Ramberg from the Barbary Coast, San Francisco.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 18.2 Alcide ‘Slow Drag’ Pavageau, Charlie Love, Dick Ramberg, George Lewis. Courtesy of Kelley Edmiston**

## The George Lewis Band

Close scrutiny of the musicians photographed tells us much about the position of the old-style music during this period, right at the beginning of second wave revivalism in the early 1960s. The George Lewis Band was pre-eminent of the 1950s old-style touring New Orleans bands. However, in late 1961, following his last trip to Cincinnati, Lewis would finally give up his attempts to maintain a regular touring band. Usual trumpet player Kid Howard had been very ill in 1960 and Lewis had used Charlie Love on this gig. At first sight, the fact that Charlie Love is featured with the George Lewis band might seem strange.



**Figure 18.3** Charlie Love. Courtesy of Kelley Edmiston

However, at that time, in the late 1950s leading into 1960, Charlie Love was very active. Stagg and Crump's discography<sup>21</sup> features Charlie Love's Band and/or The Love-Jiles Ragtime Orchestra on over five pages of 1959-1960 listings. Before Mills arrived in New Orleans in June 1960, Walter Eysselinck had been a particular enthusiast of Charlie Love's music and recorded it a number of times. In addition, as I have written about previously, when Mills interviewed Frank Goudie on 2 June 1960 in San Francisco, Mills seems particularly enlivened when Goudie talks of his times with Bunk Johnson and Charlie Love.<sup>23</sup> It would be some years before most of these Charlie Love recordings would be released. It seems that once Mills had arrived in town, set to record a series of the old-style musician for his Icon label, Eysselinck was content to hand over his material to Mills for subsequent release, however Mills chose. Indeed, Mills initially slated one of Eysselinck's recordings – *The Red Backed Book of Rags – Charlie Love-Albert Jiles Ragtime Orchestra* – as Volume 3 of his 'Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower' series.<sup>24</sup>

Jim Robinson and Alcide 'Slow Drag' Pavageau were stalwarts of George Lewis' touring band, so their inclusion in the band is no surprise. But what about the inclusion of Paul Barnes, Emanuel Sayles and Creole George Guesnon?

Both Paul Barnes and Emanuel Sayles had been playing regularly with Charlie Love during the period from 1959 to 1960 – sometimes for private gigs and often at rehearsals with the Love-Jiles Ragtime Orchestra.<sup>25</sup> The rehearsals culminated in a session recorded on the 12 June 1960 that was subsequently to be issued as part of the Riverside Living Legends series.<sup>26</sup> For a short time in the mid-1950s, when Lawrence Marrero had become too ill to tour, George Lewis had used George Guesnon on banjo.<sup>27</sup> But, quite soon, Joseph Robichaux became Lewis' regular pianist, with the piano replacing a banjo in the band. Thus, it might be said that the musicians featured at the party were a combination of selected members of the Charlie Love Band with

selected members of the George Lewis band, with the addition of George Guesnon. As was common in New Orleans at such informal sessions, the fact that there were two clarinet players and two banjo players simply added to the variety and informality of the occasion.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 18.4 Paul Barnes and Jim Robinson.**  
Courtesy of Kelley Edmiston

### **Creole George Guesnon, Emanuel Sayles, Paul Barnes and the First Icon Recording Sessions**

Prior to his arrival in New Orleans in the first weeks of June 1960, Mills had been corresponding with Creole George Guesnon who, I believe, was the single most important New Orleans musician in the founding of Icon Records. Mills had launched Icon Records with an album of solos and vocals by Guesnon.<sup>29</sup> And Guesnon had sent Mills private home-recorded tapes featuring his own playing in duets and trios with a number of old-style musicians, including Kid Thomas and Paul Barnes.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 18.5 Creole George Guesnon and Emanuel Sayles.  
Courtesy of Kelley Edmiston**

According to Carter: ‘When he reached New Orleans, Mills went first to Guesnon’s house where he met [Paul] Barnes . . . among others.’<sup>31</sup> No doubt the upcoming ‘Civil Rights’ session at 726 St. Peter Street was discussed and Guesnon would have been well-placed to introduce Mills to those attending the gig. Guesnon features prominently in a number of the photos. If he did not know it before, Mills would have soon learnt that the bands most responsible for the success and continuance of Larry Borenstein’s ‘rehearsals’ were those of Punch Miller and Kid Thomas.

So, it was little wonder that Mills chose to record these bands for what would become Icon LP 2 and LP 3.<sup>32</sup> Emanuel Sayles, who is featured in the Civil Rights party photographs, is the banjo player on Icon LP 2, but for all the other early Icon recordings it is Creole George who features on banjo – and, in one case, amplified guitar. Both banjo players became particular influences and friends of Mills.<sup>33</sup>

Creole George was the banjoist on the important Kid Thomas Creole Jazz Band recording of May 24, 1959 made by Mike Slatter; similarly on the two unreleased tracks Stagg and Crump list as ‘late 1959, early 1960’;<sup>34</sup> and on the Thomas Valentine/Ray Burke session recorded on March 22, 1960. So it was entirely appropriate that Mills would include him with the Kid Thomas Band on his Icon LP3.

Mills’ very first recording in New Orleans, on July 1, 1960, was also the very first recording of John Handy. It featured Creole George on amplified guitar and John Handy on alto saxophone. We may suppose that Creole George played a major role in the assembling of this band. It was ahead of its time in terms of how New Orleans music recordings were conceived by all the previous revivalist record producers – these producers, in the main, sought to avoid both amplified guitars and saxophones.<sup>35</sup>

On his first trip to New Orleans, Mills was not interested in recording George Lewis. He thought that the over-recording of George Lewis had led to the neglect of other equally important New Orleans musicians. Presumably, for the same reason, Mills ignored Jim Robinson and ‘Slow Drag’ Pavageau for his initial recordings. He thought it was better to give the limelight to less well-known and/or recorded musicians. He added clarinetist Paul Barnes, featured at the Civil Rights party, to the Kid Thomas Band for his Icon LP3 release. Mills was well aware, of course, of the impeccable pedigree of Paul Barnes since the beginnings of recorded jazz, having recorded with the Original Tuxedo Orchestra, with Celestin’s Tuxedo Orchestra, Jelly Roll Morton’s Red Hot Peppers and having toured with many of the later King Oliver bands. In addition, he held Paul Barnes in high regard. Of the 1959 Eysselinck recording of the Charlie Love Band, Mills wrote:

Polo [Paul Barnes] was an extremely superior clarinetist and there is not nearly enough on him in terms of records. This is solid, early-sounding music and Love and Warner sound very good.<sup>36</sup>

Not content with this issue, Mills released as Icon LP 5 a number of the

recordings of Paul Barnes and his Polo Players. These were made at Dixon Hall, Tulane University on July 13, 1960 by Bill Russell and Ralph Collins. Several of these tracks included John Handy on alto sax. Referring to Paul Barnes, Mills writes: ‘He is/was jazz’s first great saxist. An astonishing innovator when he sprang on the scene.’<sup>37</sup> With this album, Mills completed his Icon releases stemming from his June-July 1960 visit to New Orleans. He had been unable to record Kid Howard on this first trip because of Howard’s illness. However, on his next trip in May 1961 he set about – with Kid Sheik’s help, in particular- nursing Howard to good health. This enabled the recording of the exceptionally fine Icon LP 4: *Kid Howard and his La Vida Band*. Mills was now set fair for the opening of Preservation Hall in June 1961 and the completion of his New Orleans recording project on his third and final trip in the Spring, Summer and Autumn of 1962.

Below are four more Lyle Bongé photographs taken at the 1960 Civil Rights party. Two are from the Hogan Jazz Archive Bongé collection and two are from the Kelley Edmiston Bongé collection.



**Figure 18.6** Charlie Love, Charlie DeVore, George Lewis.  
Courtesy of Kelley Edmiston



**Figure 18.7** Jim Robinson, tb, Alcide ‘Slow Drag’ Pavageau, b, Charlie Love, tp, Dick Ramberg, cl, George Lewis, cl, and Charlie DeVore, co.  
Courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University



**Figure 18.8** Creole George Guesnon and Emanuel Sayle.  
Courtesy of Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University



**Figure 18.9 Paul Barnes and Jim Robinson**  
**Courtesy of Kelley Edmiston**

**Conclusion: Barbara Reid, Ken Grayson Mills and the Documentation of Origins**

Barbara Reid had long been an activist for CORE, both in Chicago and New Orleans. She may well have played a major role in networking among musicians and civil rights activists for this 1960 New Orleans gig. We do not know.

What we do know is that it was Reid's practice to have her friend and photographer Lyle Bongé accompany her when she wanted to document the music. Documenting this session turned out to be especially significant because it provides the first photographic evidence that we have of Ken Grayson Mills being in New Orleans for the first time. It would seem that this was his first opportunity to mingle informally with most of those musicians who would be especially influential on him. This was in the early

days of him recording the music and making the arrangements for the first recordings and release of what would turn out to be his 12-volume ‘Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower’ series (Icons LP 2-13).

Origin stories are inherently contestable. They often function as foundation myths. The same can be said for debates concerning preludes, origins and beginnings. For Mike Hazeldine: ‘The [first wave] New Orleans revival began in the mid-1930s, when white middle-class Americans began to collect jazz records made by blacks.’<sup>38</sup> Daniel Hardie identifies ‘the beginning of the [first wave] Revival with the issue of the first Heywood Hale Broun recordings of 1940 by Kid Rena’s Delta Jazz Band.’<sup>39</sup> Barry Martyn distinguishes a ‘Prelude’ – which includes the 1940 Kid Rena session – from the ‘beginning’ proper with the 1942 Bunk Johnson recordings for Jazzman.<sup>40</sup>

I see the prelude to the second wave revivalism of the 1960s as including Sam Charters’ *Jazz, New Orleans*, published in 1958, Tony Standish’s seminal 1959 article ‘Gold in the Junkyards’, the 1959 recordings of Charlie Love by Walter Eysselinck, and the 1959 recording of the Kid Thomas band by Mike Slatter. I see the early Mills’ Icon recordings of 1960, the Riverside Living Legends series of 1961, Barry Martyn’s early MONO records of 1961, and the opening of Preservation Hall in June 1961 as constituting the beginnings of the second wave revivalism of the 1960s.

I see all these developments as being rooted in Mills’ ‘Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower’ series which has its origins in the Civil Rights party of June 1960. In New Orleans (perhaps at the party), Walter Eysselinck was so impressed by Mills’ project that he made available to Mills his own recordings for release if and when Mills wished. In New Orleans (again perhaps at the party), Mills provided the impetus for Herb Friedwald to develop his rather more sophisticated approach that led to the Riverside Living Legends series of early 1961. Meanwhile, back in England, Barry Martyn was reading about Mills’ project in *Eureka* magazine. I believe that this reading was Martyn’s

major inspiration to come to New Orleans in early 1961 and launch his own MONO label of New Orleans recordings with its declared aim of including musicians omitted by Mills and overlooked, previously, by Bill Russell.

For all these reasons, this June 1960 Civil Rights party may be seen as the source of the second wave New Orleans jazz revival that followed it – through the 1960s and beyond.

## NOTES

1. I thank Kelley Edmiston, Charlie DeVore, David Wyckoff, Dodie Simmons, Fred Eatherton, Lynn Abbott, Charlie Crump and Matthew Ekins for their contributions to this article.

2. In *Just Jazz 3*, edited by Sinclair Traill and Gerald Lascelles, Four Square Books, London, 1959, pp. 22-28 at p. 22.

3. Grayson Mills, 'New Orleans Jazz on Icon', *Eureka*, 1960, 1 (5): 9-10 and 13 at p. 10.

4. Logan Gross, 'McDonogh 19: Desegregation of the New Orleans School System', New Orleans Historical, accessed June 29, 2023, <https://neworleanshistorical.org/items/show/1353>. As Frystack writes: 'Between 1956 and 1960, Louisiana state legislatures worked day and night to prevent desegregation in the state.' Shannon Frystack, *Our Minds on Freedom: Women and the Struggle for Black Equality in Louisiana, 1924-1967*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 2009, p. 81. On the 1960 activities of the New Orleans Chapter of CORE, see: Chapters 4 and 5, 'Little Rock Comes to New Orleans' and 'The Sit-Ins', pp. 76-130. Interestingly, the founding of Preservation Hall a year later occurred at the same time as 'the national CORE planned its most famous campaign – the Freedom Rides – scheduled to terminate in New Orleans on May 17, 1961.' *Ibid.*, p. 131. See: Chapter 6, 'The Freedom Rides and the End of the Beloved Community in New Orleans', pp. 131-156.

5. Katy Reckdahl, 'Fifty Years Later, students recall integrating New Orleans public schools', *The Times-Picayune*, November 14, 2010, accessed June 29, 2023, [https://www.nola.com/news/politics/article\\_c087accd-5bb7-5940-b062-8deadb53d0fc.html](https://www.nola.com/news/politics/article_c087accd-5bb7-5940-b062-8deadb53d0fc.html); David Zinman, 'New Orleans Jazzmen, Staging Last Stand', *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 22 August 1961; David Zinman, *The Day Huey Long was Shot*, Ivan Obolensky, Inc., New York, 1963.

6. On Dodie Smith (later Dodie Smith Simmons) see: William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1991, pp. 204-207. Note, especially, on p. 204: ‘The Hall’s commitment to the black vernacular music of New Orleans included support for the civil rights movement. Lawyers and other activists, fresh from the battle lines, frequently came to New Orleans to regroup and relax. They sometimes used parts of the Hall, and of Borenstein’s other buildings as havens where they could throw down their sleeping bags and confer without fear of being bugged.’ On Smith’s career as a civil rights activist, see: Nayita Wilson, ‘Freedom Rider Reflects on Youthful Sacrifice, Fearlessness’, *The Louisiana Weekly*, 30 June 2014, accessed June 29, 2023, <http://www.louisianaweekly.com/freedom-rider-reflects-on-youthful-sacrifice-fearlessness-2/>. Sherrie Tucker refers to the early Preservation Hall as ‘one of the integrated spaces at which people were arrested in New Orleans for congregating across race.’ Sherrie Tucker, ‘A Feminist Perspective on New Orleans Jazzwomen’, submitted to New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park, National Park Service, 2004, p. 98.

7. ‘I [Borenstein] supplied beer and passed a kitty. These sessions – called “rehearsals” to avoid union trouble – were closed. Only people I knew or who seemed seriously interested were invited.’ Larry Borenstein, ‘Introduction’, *Preservation Hall Portraits*, Paintings by Noel Rockmore, Text by Larry Borenstein and Bill Russell, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1968, p. 1.

8. Richard Ekins, ‘Larry Borenstein on Art, New Orleans Music and the Origin of Preservation Hall, Part 1’, *Just Jazz*, No. 257, September 2019, pp. 28-33 at p. 31.

9. The Hogan Jazz Archive does not give any credit for the acquisition of this photograph, which also features in Chapter 12 (Figure 12.5) because of its pivotal importance in the context of both chapters. Given the angle of the shot and the people photographed, it seems almost certain that the photograph was part of a series that credited Lyle Bongé as photographer and Barbara Reid as donor. The descriptor contains an error. Mills co-founded Preservation Hall (with Barbara Reid) the following year, in June 1961.

10. *Just Jazz*, No. 230, June 2017, pp. 22-23.

11. *Ibid.*, p 22. Subsequently re-classified as ‘Charlie DeVore, co, and George Lewis, cl; at a Civil Rights party.’ Accessed June 29, 2023, <https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane:15159>.

12. As classified by the Hogan Archive, 14 photographs are attributed definitively to Bongé and one is attributed to ‘? Bongé’. I attribute fig. 1 to Bongé as detailed in note 4, making 16 in total. Of these 16, 7 were taken at the Civil Rights party.

13. For this article I have selected from the seven Bongé Civil Rights party photographs in the Hogan Jazz Archive and from the sixteen Bongé Civil Rights party photographs in the Edmiston Collection.

14. It seems more than likely that most, if not all, of those advocates that Mills lists as his major ‘helpers’ on his first two-month trip to New Orleans were at the party. These were Larry Borenstein, Walter Eysselinck, Bill Russell, Herbert Friedwald, and Ralph Collins. Walter Eysselinck became an integral part of Icon Records. He was particularly popular with the musicians and the July/August 1960 issue of the magazine *Eureka* included his article, ‘The Story of Creole George Guesnon’. See: Grayson Mills, ‘New Orleans Jazz on Icon’, *Eureka*, 1960, op. cit.; and Walter Eysselinck, ‘The Story of Creole George Guesnon as told to Walter Eysselinck’, *Eureka*, 1960, 1 (4): 5-11.

15. Email, David Wyckoff to Richard Ekins, January 9, 2019.

16. Other photographs in the same set are described simply as ‘Civil Rights party’. Lynn Abbott, archivist at the Hogan Jazz Archive, emailed me on January 18, 2019: ‘I don’t know where the language about a ‘Civil Rights Commission Employees’ Party’ originated. Perhaps it was a party for members of CORE. If Charlie DeVore can’t clear it up, then maybe Dodie Simmons could be helpful on that account.’ Simmons has no knowledge of the party. Her first visit to 726 St. Peter Street (Preservation Hall) was in 1963 and it was not until October 1965 that she began to work there regularly. Telephone conversation, Dodie Simmons to Richard Ekins, January 20, 2019.

17. ‘Hearings before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Hearings held in New Orleans, Louisiana, September 27, 1960, September 28, 1960, May 5, 1961, May 6, 1961.’ Accessed June 29, 2023, [https://www.si.edu/object/siris\\_sil\\_41424](https://www.si.edu/object/siris_sil_41424)

18. Email, Charlie DeVore to Richard Ekins, January 22, 2019. A day later, DeVore wrote to me: ‘Sorry that I can’t recall the exact date, but probably during the end of the second week in June . . . It took us about 2 days to make the drive from Minnesota.’ Email, January 23, 2019. This would put the gig as within the Sunday, June 12 – Tuesday June 14 period.

19. William Carter, *Preservation Hall*, op. cit., pp. 55, 92 and 121.

20. On Dick Ramberg, see: Emile Cutts, ‘Obituary: Dick Ramberg Knew How to Wow Em’, Forum News Service, March 10, 2013, updated November 5, 2015, accessed June 29, 2023, <https://www.twincities.com/2013/03/10/obituary-musician-dick-ramberg-knew-how-to-wow-em/>.

21. Tom Stagg and Charlie Crump, *New Orleans, The Revival*, Bashall Eaves, Dublin.
22. Ibid., pp. 194-199.
23. Richard Ekins, 'Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and the New Orleans/West Coast Connection', *Just Jazz*, No. 229, May 2017, pp. 6-13, accessed June 13, 2023, <https://musicrising.tulane.edu/listen/interviews/frank-big-boy-goudie-1960-06-02/>.
24. Mills wrote: 'In Waiting . . . Volume III . . . Not consummated yet'. Grayson Mills, 'New Orleans Music: Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower – A Report on Icon Records' Objectives and Realities', *Jazz Report*, 1960, 1 (4), pp. 11-12 at p. 11.
25. At one such session on 6 September 1959, held at Emile Barnes' home, Eysselinck recorded 'Say Si Si' without Love and Warner. Mills issued this track on his Icon LP 5 – *Paul Barnes and his Polo Players*. This rehearsal session (without 'Say Si Si') was later released by David Bennett as *Sounds of New Orleans*, SNO 1. See: also, Walter Eysselinck, 'A Chapter in the History of Ragtime!' *Eureka*, 1 (4) July/August 1960: 19-23 and 30.
26. New Orleans/The Living Legends, *Peter Bocage with his Creole Serenaders and the Love-Jiles Ragtime Orchestra*, Riverside RLP 379. We may suppose that this Riverside LP, released in 1961, dissuaded Mills from issuing his own proposed Love-Jiles album.
27. Tom Stagg and Charlie Crump, op. cit., pp. 166-167.
28. Charlie DeVore explains that he 'encountered an informal session' when he arrived in New Orleans with David Pfankuchen. I therefore consider Charlie DeVore and Dick Ramberg as sitting in with the George Lewis Band.
29. *Creole Blues* by George Guesnon, Icon LP-1. Recorded, New Orleans, November 13, 1959, by Bill Russell, with the encouragement of Walter Eysselinck.
30. With beautiful brevity, Brian Wood writes: 'Grayson Mills used a \$9000 inheritance to go to New Orleans in 1960 and record the music, having previously corresponded with George Guesnon. A tape George sent him of himself and Kid Thomas, etc. was the start of the Icon label. Mills, with Barbara Reid and others, formalised the casual sessions Borenstein held at 726 St. Peter and began Preservation Hall in 1961, though Mills' prime interest was in recording . . . Mills was key figure in the second wave of the New Orleans Revival by virtue of his historic recording sessions of artists who might otherwise have been unnoticed.' Brian Wood, *The Song for Me: A Glossary of New Orleans Music and Musicians Plus Others of that ilk*, CD Version, December 10, 2007, p. 271.

31. William Carter, op. cit., p. 141.

32. *Kid Punch – 1960, New Orleans Music: Volume 1, Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower, Punch Miller and his Jazz Band*, Icon LP-2, recorded July 7, 1960; *Kid Thomas and his Creole Jazz Band, Sonnets from Algiers: Volume 2, Root, Bone and Marrow, Flower*, Icon LP-3, recorded 3 July 1960. In addition, Tony Standish, in his column ‘Outlook’ in the first issue of *Eureka* (1), Jan/Feb 1960: 18-20 at p. 20, had specifically singled out the plight of Punch Miller. Standish wrote that while Punch could have made ‘some good records’ in 1957, ‘Now it’s probably too late’. In the same issue of *Eureka*, pp. 17 and 27, Bill Colyer and Graham Russell announced: ‘Recording in New Orleans – A Project’ by the New Orleans Jazz Society. The Society issued two LPs – Mike Slatter’s Kid Thomas Band recording of 1959 (N.O.J.S. LP 1) and Jim McGarrell’s Barnes-Bocage Big 5 recording of 1954 (N.O.J.S. LP 2). Apart from these two releases, however, it fell to Ken Grayson Mills to put into effect the recording project through his Icon Records, to be followed a year later, in 1961, by Barry Martyn with his MONO Records project.

33. Mills and Sayles met in San Francisco, for instance, on one occasion when Sayles was visiting his sister there. Mills writes: ‘We showed ‘Manny’ every sight in the city.’ See: Ken Mills, ‘Booklet Notes’, *Frank Goudie with Amos White’s Band & Burt Bales*, American Music, AMCD-50. The incident is not dated. Sayles wrote about Mills in his ‘Emanuel Sayles: As Told by David Griffiths’. In David Griffiths, *Hot Jazz from Harlem to Storyville*, 1998, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, and Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers – The State University of New Jersey, pp. 33-37 at p. 35.

34. See: Stagg and Crump, pp. 273-274. The Mike Slatter recording was first issued on the New Orleans Jazz Society label as a limited issue in 1960, before selling more widely on Doug Dobell’s 77 label a year or so later. The Kid Thomas session featuring Raymond Burke was not issued until the late 1970s (Jazzology LP JCE-30).

35. The whole session was not released until *Capt. John Handy: The Very First Recordings*, American Music, AMCD-51, 1993.

36. Ken Grayson Mills, ‘Sales Prospectus – The Ken Mills Sessions – The Original New Orleans Styles: The Ken Mills Sessions, June 1960 to October 1962. Unissued & Alternate Takes. Complete inventory of good takes listed’, undated typescript, pp. 1-10 at p. 10.

37. *Ibid.*, p 9. The Barnes saxophone numbers were not released until *Paul Barnes and his Polo Players*, American Music, AMCD-55, 1995.

38. Mike Hazeldine, 'The New Orleans Revival', in *The Blackwell Guide to Recorded Jazz*, 2nd edition, by Barry Kernfeld, Blackwell, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995, pp. 177-207 at p. 177.
39. Daniel Hardie, *Exploring Early Jazz: The Origins and Evolution of the New Orleans Style*, Writers Club Press, San Jose, p. 273.
40. Barry Martyn, booklet accompanying *Prelude to the Revival, Vol II, Kid Rena 1940, Bunk Johnson, the Very First Recordings*, American Music AMCD-41, p. 1.'

A black and white photograph of a building facade. At the top, there is a balcony with a decorative wrought-iron railing. Below the balcony, the building has several doors and windows. On the left, there is a white door with a diamond-shaped window. Next to it is a window with a grid pattern. In the center, there is another white door with a diamond-shaped window and a mesh screen. To the right of this door, the number '726' is visible on the wall. Further right is a dark door with a window. The overall scene is a street-level view of a historic or industrial building.

# CHAPTER 19

Ken Grayson Mills,  
the Start of the New Orleans  
Kitty Halls, and the Final  
Months at Perseverance Hall

*October 2020*



## Chapter 19

This chapter makes for a fitting summary and endpiece to my entire Mills project. Just as I thought it was finally finished, Howard Rye provided me with the very scarce material by John Thomasson and Ken Grayson Mills that formed the substance of the article reproduced in this chapter. I was able to build upon this by drawing on material from Mike Simpson. Once again, just at the right time, Larissa Mills sent me the Mills photomontage and a hitherto unknown photograph taken at Icon Hall which included Mills.

All this additional rare material makes it crystal clear just how important Mills was to ‘the start of the New Orleans Kitty Halls’ – both to their Genesis and to their Exodus. It will be noted that this material dates from 1962 and 1963 – before the erasing of Mills became widespread.

Normally, in my articles I make detailed acknowledgements in the notes. To conclude this book, it is entirely appropriate that I include my acknowledgements in the text of this final chapter.

I am very grateful to Howard Rye for making available to me the contributions by John Thomasson and Ken Grayson Mills. I am indebted to *Coda* magazine and Mike Simpson for the additional material on Perseverance Hall. I thank Larissa Mills for providing me with the Mills photomontage. Finally, I acknowledge the additional contributions of Len Klikunas, Fred Eatherton, Bill Carter, Alyn Shipton, and Matthew Ekins. The Ken Grayson Mills *Just Jazz* Project was generated by the Porcupine Society, Leicester Square, London, WC2, and enabled by Pete Lay. All Project articles, including the one in this chapter, were peer-reviewed by individual members of the Porcupine Society, with additional assistance from Honorary Member, David Wyckoff, New York. Finally, I thank Bruce Raeburn and Lynn Abbott of the Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, New Orleans, both now retired, for their unfailing support throughout the entire project.

# **Ken Grayson Mills, the Start of the New Orleans Kitty Halls, and the Final Months at Perseverance Hall**

Richard Ekins, *Just Jazz*, October 2020

*Luthjens burned down, leaving a void that was  
to be filled by the kitty hall.*

John Thomasson, 1963<sup>1</sup>

*Ken was passionate about preservation of the art form and the persons who created it. I understood the preservation effort was his life, heart and soul and that it was a very tough decision for him to leave. He literally gave everything he had financially, physically, and mentally to fight to keep his pure vision for Preservation Hall.*

Len Klikunas, 2018<sup>2</sup>

## **Preamble**

In the concluding sentences of my May 2020 *Just Jazz* article on ‘Barbara Reid and the Bourbon House Funeral’, I wrote:

Although there are no known photographs of Dan [Pawson] at the funeral, the Kelley Edmiston Collection does include a photograph of Dan’s soon-to-be wife – Pat – together with Kid Sheik, ‘Slow Drag’ Pavageau and Albert Warner. It seems to be taken outside Buster’s Bar where we may assume many of the band and second liners retired to when the funeral parade was over.<sup>3</sup>

I included the photograph as the final image in the article.

However, as is the way with these things, quite soon afterwards I did, in fact, discover one photograph of Dan Pawson at the funeral. Better still, it was one of a pair with the photo that I had published. The unpublished photograph featured both Dan and Pat with ‘Slow Drag’ Pavageau in the same location, outside Buster’s Bar. When I sent the news to Pat via Facebook Messenger, she speedily replied: ‘Hahaha it’s unending mate.’<sup>4</sup> It is, indeed.



**Figure 19.1 ‘Past, present and future’. Photomontage by Valerie Ramos (April 5, 2020) of Ken Grayson Mills (framed self-portrait, July 22, 1986), gifted by Ken to his daughter Kim Mills-Garcia (December 1986, on T-shirt), gifted to his granddaughter Larissa Mills (holding the self-portrait) in April 2018.<sup>5</sup>**

Just as I thought I had come to the end of my *Just Jazz* Ken Grayson Mills Project, the noted jazz historian Howard Rye uploaded to Per Oldaeus's Facebook site 'New Orleans Music – For All Genres from that City', two short articles of special importance to my Ken Grayson Mills Project.<sup>6</sup> Both articles were entirely new to me. Rye commented:

The . . . articles attached: 'Eyeless In New Orleans' by John Thomasson; . . . 'The Jane's Alley Six' by Grayson Mills appear in Vol. 8, No. 49 of *Record Finder*, essentially an auction list circulated by Don Brown from 2589 [actually 2689] West Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles 6 (i.e. the Jazz Man Record Shop). The copy I have was originally sent in the mail to Roy Morser<sup>7</sup> and I cannot explain how it ended up in Storyville<sup>8</sup> filing, but it did and the articles (originally just the duplicator equivalent of click-bait), seem worth preserving.

The importance of the first-mentioned piece by John Thomasson – 'Eyeless in New Orleans' – is that it places Ken Mills centre stage in the creation of the Kitty Halls in early 1960s New Orleans. The article traces Mills' work as founder, first of Preservation Hall and then of Icon Hall, and then compares and contrasts the music at both venues and with that at Dixieland Hall, all in late 1962.

1962 was a time of an extraordinary resurgence of activity in old-style New Orleans music in New Orleans. Israel Gorman had written the following in a letter to *Jazz Report* published in July 1961:

For about four years now there has been no demand for Dixieland musicians in New Orleans. As all the other old musicians, I still live in hopes that someday the old musicians will be in demand, and whenever and wherever this happens, I am willing to offer my talents as a musician<sup>9</sup>

However, by the May 1962 issue of *Jazz Report*, Emanuel Sayles, who was playing in three of the so-called 'kitty halls' now operating, is able to write:

I must say, with 3 concert halls doing business during our Carnival season [February-March], the traditional jazz musicians of New Orleans never had it so good. I'd say it was almost as good as way back in the early 20s.

Preservation Hall, (Allan & Sandra Jaffe), Dixieland Hall, (Al Clark), and Icon Hall, (Ken Mills).

Because of all this interest I was inspired to compose some New Orleans style tunes, words and music: ‘Struttin Down Bourbon Street’; ‘726 Saint Peter Street’; ‘Eureka Band on Parade’; ‘Manny With The Banjo’; and ‘Gimme That Good Old New Orleans Jazz’. All have been copyrighted in Washington D.C.<sup>10</sup>

**‘Eyeless in New Orleans’ by John Thomasson<sup>11</sup>**

Luthjens burned down, leaving a void that was to be filled by the kitty hall.<sup>12</sup> Ken Mills had gone to New Orleans to record bands that did not exist as units, sometimes employing men who were in retirement. A hall was needed for this congealing process that, it was hoped, would pay for itself. It developed that an admission charge would be impractical (if one operated within the law) so a kitty was positioned at the door. Thus the kitty hall was born.



**Figure 19.2 George Lewis and Emanuel Sayles at Preservation Hall, 726 St. Peter Street, 1961. Courtesy of Kelley Edmiston**

The first was called Preservation Hall, for obvious reasons, and Mills went about the business of the historian. The music progressed, but the business relationship between Mills and a prominent entrepreneur in the Quarter was unhappy. They went their separate ways, Mills to California, to regain his health and the businessman to further rent monies.



**Figure 19.3 Icon Hall, 734 St. Louis Street, 1962.  
Courtesy of Tony Standish and Peter Haby**

### ***No Turistas***

Mills returned in 1962 with Ralph Collins and Icon Hall was born. Over the previous winter, one had seen very little of some of the distinctive musicians who were presented at the new hall (Emile Barnes, Albert Warner, Eddie Summers, Kids Clayton and Sheik, Creole George Guesnon, *et al*). The pair separated amicably and ownership of the hall passed to Mills.

Now the kitty halls are supported by tourists, so it was important that the hall be located where the foot traffic was heaviest, on or near Bourbon, where the streets were well lit, somewhere in the stream of things. Such a place was unavailable and so Icon opened elsewhere, a move that ensured its demise.

### ***The Safe Route***

Preservation Hall was still in business, doing handsomely, employing musicians who had gained fame away from New Orleans. George Lewis, Kid Howard, Jim Robinson, Emanuel Sayles, Joe Watkins, and Slow Drag Pavageau played adequately to overflow crowds. This group, capable of greatness, has not had a reputation for inspired performance in recent years. In fairness, it is true that New Orleans men, as a rule, prefer to play dances. They find an immobile touristocracy a poor catalyst. But others try harder and the results are warm memories in the human experience. John Casimir was one of them, now dead.

### ***He Was Better With Teeth***

Alvin Alcorn is one of those who gives everything. His expression while playing, is one of complete absorption and intensity, his eyes wide open, seeing nothing. I've seen the same expression in pictures of Bunk. Incidentally, Alvin is one of the few who are aware of the significance of the musical form. In conversation behind Dixieland Hall, the third to appear in the Quarter, he expressed concern about being recorded before he lost his lip, saying that Bunk was much better than his recordings, which were made late in life.

Dixieland Hall was thriving too, minus parlor atmosphere, all things transpiring through carnival logic. The bands were more varied than at Preservation but still did not present a fair cross-section of the art. Dixieland didn't have a compulsory kitty, but it did have three Uncle Tom dancers who appeared between sets and succeeded in alienating the affections of

the musicians. More, the proprietor of the hall had an infuriating policy of enforcing a standard program of tunes for each set, all bands. I have seen this man stand before the audience and announce that request tunes would have to be foregone, that the band may continue with its program. He knew his audience well, for I witnessed no violence.

### *A Safe Port*

Icon Hall was more than a place to exhibit a forgotten music. It was a safe port, a clearing house, a club. It was at Icon that this musical heritage truly lived in our time. It was the only place in the Quarter where the musicians dropped in of an afternoon to chat, and laugh, and argue. The warmth of these men was healing salve for the kid who became a man in these affairs.



**Figure 19.4** Israel Gorman, clarinet; George Guesnon, banjo; Ken Mills, pipe. Icon Hall, 22 March 1962. Courtesy of Larissa Mills

### **‘On the Music at Icon Hall’ by Mike Simpson<sup>13</sup>**

Mike Simpson gives us something of the flavour of the music during the early months at Icon Hall in his report from New Orleans to the Canadian jazz magazine *Coda*, May 1962. After noting that ‘February and March . . . have seen a phenomenal expansion in the field of live jazz featured in clubs’,<sup>14</sup> he continues:

More important, from the jazz lover’s point of view, is the formation of ICON HALL . . . In the few weeks it has been running Icon Hall has set itself in a class apart from the competition by the imaginative policy employed. The Kid Howard Band, the most satisfying musical group in the city has been given a greater prominence than a rotating schedule can possibly permit. Fairly successful attempts have been made to reconstruct the personnel of the great early bands and to revive authentic numbers from the Sam Morgan Piron and Celestin repertoires. An extremely interesting session was provided when Ken attempted to capture the sound of the Sam Morgan and King Oliver bands, using Kids Howard and Sheik as a trumpet team, with Jim Crow trombone, Polo Barnes clarinet, Sayles bjo, Lewis James bs, Sidney Montague drms. This was a session to be remembered and provided far more musical content than the superior jam sessions which are favored at the other hall. Sheik gave a surprising glimpse of his true potential soloing confidently and cogently, and affording an effective foil to the baroque flamboyancy of Kid Howard’s late style. Punch Miller, also, is heard to best effect at Icon, where he plays with a quartet: George Lewis, Guesnon, Drag, George. George and Punch achieved a cohesion and sympathy in the front line that has been noticeably missing in his ‘Bunch’ which play St. Peter. The phenomenal swing of the all-time greats Drag and Guesnon renders further additions to the two piece rhythm section superfluous. The acoustics of the Hall are very fine, the walls and floor being of stone.

### **‘On the Music at Icon Hall’ by Charlie DeVore**

Mills had been critical of the use Bill Carter had made of his Preservation Hall interview material with the cornet player Charlie DeVore who also made visits to Icon Hall.<sup>15</sup> However, in an email sent by DeVore to Per Oldaeus on May 1, 2003, DeVore sets the record straight on Mills, Icon Hall and Icon Records:

I did get to Icon Hall (Perseverance Hall) occasionally, but not often. Do recall hearing bands with Eddie Summers on trombone, Alec Bigard on drums and Israel Gorman on clarinet. I think I also heard Wilbur Tillman on sousaphone once too . . . Albert Warner appeared often too, and he was a gas! Really powerful and not unlike a brass bellows . . . He was used to playing in the street so had a very strong tone and attack . . . I should have been paying more attention to what was happening at Icon Hall . . . In retrospect I do recall Bill Russell being very supportive of Ken Mills' recording efforts and speaking highly of Ken's dedication to the music and all the musicians he recorded on Icon. Those recordings are priceless and thank goodness Ken Mills had the foresight to involve so many musicians that never would have been heard otherwise.<sup>16</sup>

### **Don Brown, The Record Finder and Ken Mills by Richard Ekins**



**Figure 19.5** Front cover of *Hot Jazz for Sale* by Cary Ginell, 2010

Don Brown, the owner and manager of the Jazz Man Record Shop, Los Angeles, was a friend of Mills' going back to the latter's earliest involvements in the jazz scene.

His *Record Finder* 'auction list' was an appropriate place, perhaps, to place Mills' somewhat obscure and personal piece.<sup>17</sup>

Given the article's importance in understanding the final weeks of the renamed Perseverance Hall<sup>18</sup> – and the article's obscurity – I have no hesitation in reproducing it for a wider audience now, some sixty years later.

### **'The Jane's Alley Six' by Grayson Mills<sup>19</sup>**

*'The quality of mercy is not strained,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath.'*

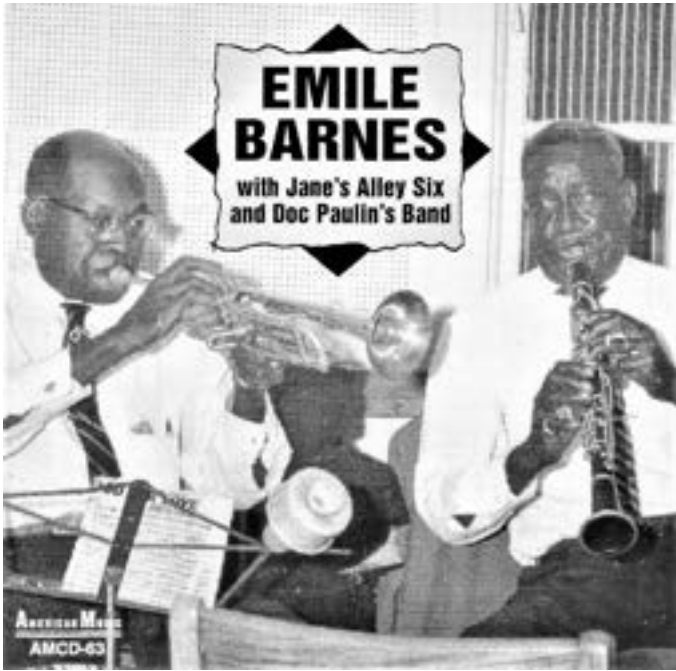
William Shakespeare

Eddie Richardson is an intense swinging trumpet player. He learned the trade worshipping Kid Rena, and knocking around the same Jane's Alley Louis Armstrong discusses in *My Life in New Orleans*.<sup>20</sup>

Within earshot of Eddie's home were such Halls as the Economy and San Souci. He is wrapped in professional cellophane, until he puts a trumpet to his lips: then it's the hunter after the fox.

The artist Marge Fedorsky<sup>21</sup> used to say that it was a good thing for Howard, Punch et. al., that (1) he was out-of-shape- and that (2) he was non-union. There are flashes corroborating her words during a new Arhoolie Anthology called *New Orleans Jazz at the Kitty Halls*.<sup>22</sup>

One imagines that the bands of the tonks (circa 1920) sounded like that, and, indeed, Emile Barnes (an expert on these affairs) ventured that such is the case.



**Figure 19.6** Eddie Richardson and Emile Barnes,  
front cover of AMCD-63 booklet

### *He Thanks You, His Belly Thanks You*

The history of Eddie Richardson and Jane's Alley Six covered two months from July through August of 1962. During that time, I developed a fond need for them which transcended their artistic merits, considerable as those were. They kept me from starving to death.

The only fluctuations in the personnel were the bass player, Sylvester Handy and the great old-style trumpet player, Ernest 'Doc' Paulin. During the second month, they had congealed into the most fascinating group in the city. It was like standing in the Parthenon: one intruded on the privacy of someone else's culture, and marvelled at the beauty. But it was not yours, and you knew it. The odd one who braved the unholy place made a quick escape. Faced with the choice between the facile and the glib, the sincere and

the creative, most will take the former. An innate optimist, I was consumed by the graphicality with which I learned this lesson.

We had dropped \$1700 on fire prevention compliance, \$1000 dollars on un-realised rent, and over \$1000 on artists' fees. (Kitty Halls are big business – featuring six piece bands on a nightly basis, one must gross between \$40,000 and \$50,000 to break even.) I was without job, and sold everything of value that I had, and my former wife's paintings weren't selling.<sup>23</sup>

To save our necks, we went non-union, were promptly blackballed, and the Jane's Alley Six was born.

These eight men (Eddie Morris, tbn; Fan Bourgeau, bjo; Eddie Richardson or Doc Paulin, tpt; Henry Revel drums; Emile Barnes, clt; Sylvester Handy or Carroll Blunt, bass) volunteered to work for kitty only, and later, seeing our plight, shared it with us. It worked well, the musicians averaging between \$30 and \$40 per week, and my family were able to eat.

The gratitude I feel over what they did is indistinguishable. It haunts, and it sustains.

### **Discography of Jane's Alley Six:**

Put On Your Old Grey . . .	Arhoolie fl300
*Oh Lady Be Good	(Un-issued)
*Margie	(Un-issued)
*Sheik of Araby	(Un-issued)
Franklin St Blues	Reject
*I'm Confessin	Un-issued)

\* \* \*

Fortunately, for students of the early history of the New Orleans kitty halls, we have a detailed account of the jazz being played at Perseverance Hall and an account, indeed, which takes us up to the very finale of Ken Mills' thoughts in turning Perseverance Hall into a 'Cooperative Hall, with some of the musicians running the place, organising funds etc.' The following neglected piece was published in the Canadian Jazz Magazine, *Coda*, in September 1962, just before the hall finally closed.

**'New Orleans Jazz at Perseverance Hall' by Mike Simpson<sup>25</sup>**

The last month has seen an interesting and worthwhile attempt by Ken Mills to bring some lesser-known musicians to the attention of the public. Renamed Perseverance Hall,<sup>26</sup> the place now uses only non-union musicians who are content to take the proceeds from the kitty. Although the move was dictated by largely personal reasons, the resulting music has often been very fine indeed, and one always has the feeling that the jazz here is unmarred by any obligation to play to the Bourbon Street crowd, or to adopt the salvationist image created by the sponsors.

The rhythm section used is fairly stable, consisting of Henry Reveille [sic] dms; Joseph Bourgeau bjo; Sylvester Handy sbs. The front line varies nightly, with Emile Barnes the only consistent performer. Alternating on trumpet have been Eddie Richardson, 'Doc' Paulin, and Walter 'Blue' Robertson. Eddie Morris has been the usual trombonist. The rhythm section of Reveille, Bourgeau and Handy is one of the most dynamic in the city. Reveille is a younger musician who is interested in the older style of music and has assimilated it to a great degree; his cymbal work is developed to pinpoint accuracy and has the electrifying swing of Jo Jones at his peak. Bourgeau is a former friend and protege of Jelly Roll Morton, and plays piano as first instrument; the banjo however is in the vein of pure Crescent City swing. Handy is reminiscent of Drag at his peak – with the Bunk band – and far and away the greatest bass in the city right now.

It has been interesting to see Eddie Richardson back in action after a long absence. The ex-leader<sup>27</sup> of the Eureka plays in a very exciting, hot style which stays close to the beat and to the melody. Paulin plays in a slightly older style, and in phrasing and melodic feeling is closer to Bunk. His original melodic line on the lead of St. Louis Blues shows great creative potential. Now, fortunately, the band with Paulin, has been recorded by Mills for Icon Records and posterity. Bill Russell, commenting on the band's sound said that he was strongly reminded of the classic 1944-5 Bunk band. In fact there is in this group an ensemble sound and cohesion lacking in virtually any other group in the city. Blue Robertson, also seen down at Perseverance recently, plays in the style of the Armstrong-Allen generation, making full use of the range of the horn and using many freak tonal effects. Barnes has been playing some of his finest horn in recent years, and is still very moving on the blues. Morris' lip is obviously weak, but his ensemble sense is perfection itself.

The music just described is sincere in its deepest sense. The band is obviously enthusiastic about their music, and the smiles are not fake or Uncle Tom. The pressures that exist at the other establishments based on the pattern of Perseverance Hall do not apply here. One musician summed up the position nicely; 'Down there round the corner (St Peter) they expect a guy to play Saints or Bourbon Street. Parade all evening. Another thing – they put you to work with guys that don't play your style. Now Ken, he let me choose my men to play with, and play the music the way I want to play it.'

As things stand now the hall is threatened with closing down following back-stair pressure from quarter boss Larry Borenstein with the union, on behalf of Preservation Hall. The men playing there are being threatened with union action. Mills is considering running a Cooperative Hall, with some of the musicians running the place, organising funds etc. This would revolutionise the present scene, and give the music a great deal of

independence of the fickleness of audiences and the misguided policies of organisers such as have been met with at the other halls. The musicians are completely disillusioned with the scene, with the circus put on by the Bourbon Street Club and St Peter. The idea of a Cooperative could be the only possibility of saving real, sincere, New Orleans jazz. There is a limit beyond which even a starving Negro will not do an Uncle Tom routine for Southern Gentlemen under the banner of revivalism.

## **Endings**

Following Mike Simpson's report from New Orleans published in the September 1962 *Coda*, nothing more was said about the fate of Perseverance Hall until the November 1962 issue of *Coda*. Now the focus is on Mills' pending release of what became Icons 7 through 12 – these were the sessions he recorded at Jeunes Amis Hall 'in the period August 28 – Sept. 12'. However, there are a few brief words on Perseverance Hall: 'Perseverance (ICON) Hall is again temporarily closed, after operating for a week on a week-end-only basis.'<sup>29</sup>

We can, however, piece the last few sessions at Perseverance Hall together by combining the published diary entries of Jim Holmes<sup>30</sup> with the unpublished diary entries of Eric J. Brown.<sup>31</sup> The evidence from these diaries is that the Hall is open on Friday, 7 September, Saturday 8 September, Thursday 13 September, Friday 14 September, Saturday 15 September, Sunday 16 September, and Saturday 22 September. Eric J. Brown leaves New Orleans on Sunday 16 September. Jim Holmes leaves New Orleans on 11 October. We know from Mills that the Hall did, indeed, close in September,<sup>32</sup> so I conclude that the last known session was the one that Jim Holmes went to on Saturday 22 September.

The details of these sessions as given by Holmes and Brown, however, give the lie to the implications of the *Coda* article that somehow Perseverance Hall disappeared with a whimper of non-union sessions and no money.

Rather, the reverse. Just as Mills' final weeks in New Orleans ended with 'A Final Flurry' of recordings. So, likewise with his Perseverance Hall sessions. The following, from Eric J. Brown's diary entries give the flavour:

Thursday 13 September . . . Went to Ken's Icon Hall.<sup>33</sup> Heard Kid Howard, Andrew Morgan, Jim Robinson, Alex Bigard, Emanuel Sayles, bjo, Eddie Dawson, bass. Wonderful stuff. Howard in wonderful form.<sup>34</sup>

Friday 14 September . . . Icon Hall: Israel Gorman, Punch Miller, Ed Summers, Alex Bigard, Geo Guesnon. Geo played fantastic banjo. Best I've heard.<sup>35</sup>

Saturday 15 September . . . Icon Hall: Kid Thomas Band. Big crowd. Financial success.

Nevertheless, while the music may have remained first rate in the penultimate session, the financial omens were not good. Eric J. Brown, again:

Sunday 16 September . . . Around at Icon Hall was a marvellous band. Sounded like Luthjens. Billie & DeDe + Israel, Albert Warner and Albert Jiles. Nearly the same band that played there for years [Luthjens]. It was a thrilling sound but there was no crowd.<sup>37</sup>

According to Jim Holmes, it was this same band minus Israel Gorman that played at the last Perseverance Hall session he went to on Saturday 22 September.<sup>38</sup> The end was in sight. What the *Coda* article had referred to as a 'temporary closure' now became final. Mills left New Orleans the following month never to return.

The cultural anthropologist and artist Len Klikunas, Mills' close friend for thirty years – from the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s – has no doubt why he left, why he never returned and what his goal had been. I will conclude this section with some thought-provoking snippets from an email interview and correspondence I [RE] had with Klikunas [LK] in 2018:

**RE:** The articles [I have written] on Ken, so far, focus very much on the years 1960-1963. I wonder if you can tell me about Mills in the years after 1963.

**LK:** This would take thousands of words and many hours. Ken was the most compassionate and kind person I have ever met. He usually called me Leonard. After putting on his leg brace in the mornings, he would light up his smoking pipe, make a pot of coffee, and drank the coffee, always with creamer, in a large mug. Ken listened to vinyl records many hours a day, pulling them from what he called his archives. He read books profusely. He was best-man at my wedding, a trusted mentor, confidant, and friend. Let me know more specific questions as to what you think you may need to know.

**RE:** Are you familiar with Bill Russell and New Orleans jazz revivalism generally? Ken, I think, saw himself as continuing where Bill left off. This is important for problems of ‘authenticity’. I believe Ken makes a great case study in what might be called ‘resuming authenticity’. Does this make sense to you in terms of how he talked about music New Orleans music with you?

**LK:** I’m not familiar with Bill Russell. I understood Ken was passionate about preservation of the art form and the persons who created it. I understood the preservation effort was his life, heart and soul and that it was a very tough decision for him to leave. He literally gave everything he had financially, physically, and mentally to fight to keep his pure vision for Preservation Hall.

**RE:** Did Ken speak to you of Barbara Reid? I ask this because I am currently working on a series of articles on her. Ken used to refer to her on occasion as co-founder of Preservation Hall. She had previously worked with Bill Russell in Chicago and teamed up with Ken in New Orleans.

**LK:** He spoke of a Barbara several times in connection with Preservation Hall. I understood he spoke of her with fondness. I don’t

recall her last name. I understood her as being somehow important. I don't recall Ken saying she was a co-founder.<sup>39</sup> I understood Ken was the founder of Preservation Hall and that the only reason he left it was because of unbearable pressure from the crime underworld. He was not specific about the details of the pressure.

**RE:** There should, of course, be a book written on Ken's life and work. However, the forthcoming book on Bill Russell has taken literally decades to come to fruition and find a publisher - and it has just been delayed again.<sup>40</sup> This was one of the reasons that led me to take the approach I have in *Just Jazz*. It meant getting things in the public domain quickly and in ways that would maximise the chances of people contacting me with new information on Ken [as you did].

**LK:** I think your approach is the best given the opportunities of digital technology.

**RE:** The 'wrong' I want to 'right' is to get Ken's importance properly recognised not only in academic jazz studies and jazz historiography, but more widely.

**LK:** Yes. Over all these years it has broken my heart every time I hear or see the words Preservation Hall and there is never a mention of Ken. As one of my friends has written, 'heroes are not heard from' (John Owen). Ken is an example of the promise and cruelty of life. Your herculean efforts have kindled in me the appreciation of the goodness still in the world exemplified in persons such as yourself. I wish Ken were alive to see your wonderful work.<sup>41</sup>

And there, I let the matter rest – almost.

## Conclusion

I now conclude both this article – Part 21 of my *Just Jazz Ken Grayson Mills Project* – and the *Just Jazz Ken Grayson Mills Project*, as a whole.

After I had done preliminary work on the project, it really took off when I received a considerable amount of material from Per Oldaeus that he had collected when intending to complete a Ken Grayson Mills discography begun by Björn Bärnheim and Håkan Håkansson.<sup>42</sup>

It was rejuvenated, again, when Per sent me a second consignment of material a year later, in February 2017. And so on it went. My publications inspired Paige VanVorst to look again to see what Mills material he had. Paige sent me three of Mills' unpublished articles – three buried treasures, indeed.<sup>43</sup> Totally out of the blue, Larissa Mills, Ken's granddaughter, contacted me in August 2017. More material emerged.

Then, likewise, Len Klikunas, contacted me in February 2018. Finally, in the three years that it took Terry Peirce<sup>44</sup> to wind up her brother Mike Dine's estate, following Mike's death in December 2016, Terry would occasionally find material relating to Mills and send it to me.

However, I would be very surprised now if significant new material were to emerge. We know that Mills, when in good health, never tired of new projects. We know he was working on many things, including books, up until the time his health finally failed for the last time. It is a tragedy that this material was not archived.<sup>45</sup>

But, I think, we can be certain that it was not.

Larissa Mills, in effect, confirmed this when she wrote to me on July 10, 2020:

Ken and Mauvis [Ken's mother, maiden name Ankeny] were very close. Mauvis was the glue in our Mills family and when she passed away it was tough on all of us. My mother confirmed that Mauvis passed away 4/20/2000. In regards to his archives and papers, my mother (Kim Mills-Garcia) threw all of that out. After Mauvis passed away Ken could not live alone because of health issues. Shortly after her passing, they had to sell the

house in Fullerton, CA. My mother was left in charge of cleaning out the house to sell it and she threw everything away that was his . . . I regret not knowing that this was happening. At the time I didn't know his things were being thrown out. I wish I could go back and collect his things.<sup>46</sup>

For his book, *Preservation Hall*, Bill Carter 'corresponded and conversed' with Mills 'in 1985 and 1986'.<sup>47</sup> However, I have no way of knowing what materials, if any, Carter has that Mills might have given him. Carter feels that he did what he could to present a balanced picture of the origins and early development of Preservation Hall.<sup>48</sup> He was deeply saddened by the refusal of the Preservation Hall establishment to sell his book at Preservation Hall – for almost thirty years now – and this, no doubt, is a major reason for his unwillingness to re-engage with the project.<sup>49</sup>

What of the future? I like to think I have laid down the groundwork for the book on the life and work of Ken Grayson Mills that remains to be written.

## **Epilogue**

My original intention, to pursue this end further, was to add online appendices to the *Just Jazz Ken Grayson Mills Project* as and when additional material became available. However, apart from a few family photos of Mills with his mother, with his beloved granddaughter Larissa, and a photo of him at a friend's wedding, I have no more Mills material to present.

Rather, I will end this chapter by rising to the challenge of Bill Carter when he wrote to me on August 1, 2019: 'If anyone could diagnose Sandra Jaffe and her efforts to promote her fairy tale version of the Hall, that would be a gift to jazz history.'

The cognoscenti was shocked, though, not, perhaps, surprised when on Sandra Jaffe's death, *The New York Times* obituary and so many others reiterated the nonsense that she and her husband founded Preservation Hall. As the years passed, Sandra Jaffe became more and more insistent in peddling this lie. With Reid dead in 1983 and Mills seemingly vanished

from the scene, Sandra sought to seal their erasure. Her son Ben had less reason not to collude with her after his father's death in 1987.

However, the publication of Carter's book in 1991 made it quite clear to everyone that the Jaffes did not found the Hall. It must have come as quite a shock to her. She simply refused to sell the book at Preservation Hall. For her, it was as though it did not exist, and she did not want it to exist for anyone else. I had several email conversations with Bill Carter about this. They always ended up with Bill saying how hurt and upset he was by Sandra's behaviour towards him and his book and encouraging the psychoanalyst in me to explain her behaviour. Carter sensed that it was not just a simple matter of her wanting to claim kudos and glory for giving birth to Preservation Hall and its subsequent development. He thought there could be deeper psychological reasons.

Wary of diagnosis and analysis of a woman I met but barely knew, I will merely make some general points about what I will call 'birthing' – birthing, that is, as a social process taking place from the time of the initial 'twinkle in the eye', to the conception, to the 'actual' birth and its aftermath.

Following this line of thought, it may be helpful to distinguish the two major meanings of 'conception'. There is conception as the forming of devising of a plan or idea, as in 'the time between a product's conception and its launch'. And there is conception as the action of conceiving a child or of one being conceived, as in 'an unfertilized egg before conception'. Following this distinction, we might say that Ken Grayson Mills 'conceiving' the idea in 1960 was conceiving as a plan or idea. We might say that the actual 'conception' as conceiving a child took place when Barbara and Ken met and consummated the idea of Preservation Hall, and it was born and grew between May and mid-September 1961. Barbara now has a new 'baby' to accompany the birth of her daughter Kelley in 1957. Her new collaborator Mills fathered the new baby. All seems well. There then follows a short period of nurturing the new child – both the space and the place of

Preservation Hall and the musicians, before it is snatched away from her and given to an adoptive mother and father.

Following this analogy, we might say that Larry Borenstein stole the child as conceived and gave it to Allan and Sandra Jaffe in mid-September 1961. We might say that Sandra came to regard it as her ‘baby’, as not only her own baby, but as her own ‘creation’, much as a mother who adopts her baby might wish to suppress (consciously) the real parents of the baby, and then come to repress (unconsciously) knowledge of what had preceded the adoption. Moreover, in Sandra’s case, guilt is suppressed/repressed about the ‘stealing’ of the baby (by Borenstein) that preceded the gift of it to the adoptive parents. Another psychoanalytic approach is to say that Sandra Jaffe ‘disavows’ the adoption. Disavowal (*Verleugnung*), often translated as ‘denial’, denotes a mental act that consists in rejecting the reality of a perception on account of its potentially traumatic associations. So, we might say that Sandra simultaneously ‘knew’ the truth – the reality – and ‘denied’ it. As time passed, she came to deny it ever more persistently, right up to the time of her death at the end of 2021.

It only remains to ponder on the age of the Preservation Hall child when stolen from Ken (and Barbara). I have often heard it said: ‘Well Ken and Barbara only ran it for 4 months, what is the big deal about erasing them from the history of Preservation Hall?’ However, if we follow an orthodox phasing of Western childhood into baby (1-3 months), infant (3-12 months), toddler (1-3 years), pre-school (3-4 years), school (4-5 years) and child (1-12 years), I plump for the theft taking place between the pre-school and school years. Almost immediately after their gift/adoption of the child, the Jaffes began their taming and routinising (schooling) of it. Certainly, this was Ken Mills’ view. Certainly, that is my view. Preservation Hall was no mere ‘infant’ when it was taken from them – the word preferred by Barry Martyn, for instance. Rather it was a pre-school child, if, indeed, not an early-school child.

When Mills was evicted from Preservation Hall, as we have seen, he set up Icon Hall the following year, which he later re-named Perseverance Hall. Whatever name he used, he always saw the 734 St. Louis Street operation as ‘Preservation Hall in Exile’.

Both names marked the Exodus of Preservation Hall from 726 St. Peter Street. Moreover, as Mills continued working on his record releases in California (having left New Orleans in 1962, never to return) his tapes, his memories, and his relevant writings would forever feature as the substance of his Genesis and Exodus. And, in due course, Mills had no doubt that the time would come for Revelation – a revealing to all the truth behind the hidden history of the origins of Preservation Hall.

In my view, this book brings together sufficient evidence to highlight the true significance of Ken Grayson Mills’ role in the foundation of Preservation Hall. This ‘Revelation’ will be further consolidated by a forthcoming companion volume, *The Birthing of Preservation Hall: The Barbara Glancey Reid Story*, also in collaboration with *Just Jazz*.

## NOTES

1. John Thomasson, 'Eyeless in New Orleans', *The Record Finder*, 8 (49): 11-12 at p. 11 (mailing date May 17, 1963).
2. Email, Len Klikunas to Richard Ekins, February 4, 2018.
3. Richard Ekins, 'Fantasy and Reality at Bourbon House: Barbara Reid, The Olympia Brass Band and a Most Unusual Funeral', *Just Jazz*, No.265, May 2020, pp. 6-16 at p. 16.
4. Facebook Messenger message, Pat Pawson to Richard Ekins, June 11, 2020.
5. Courtesy of Larissa Mills. I had reservations as to whether this montage was suitable for a *Just Jazz* readership. Peter Haby, from Australia, allayed any doubts, while at the same time underscoring the international reach of Mills' early work: 'Well, Ken puzzled many of us way back then in Tony Standish's record shop [in Melbourne] in the late 1960s when we read his Icon cover notes . . . sorta adds to the mystic of his character . . . perhaps nice to perpetuate . . . Tony opened his Heritage Record shop late 1963. I got the Guesnon & first Punch Icons [Icon LPs 1 and 2] in early 1964.' Facebook Messenger message, Peter Haby to Richard Ekins, July 12, 2020.
6. Howard Rye to 'New Orleans Music – For All Genres from that City', Facebook site, May 24, 2020. I am not concerned in this article with the third piece that Howard Rye uploaded from the same *Record Finder*: Rugger Ardizoia, 'The Inferiority of Saxophones', *The Record Finder*, 8 (49), pp. 12-13 (mailing date May 17, 1963).
7. Roy Morser is acknowledged in the first article of the first issue of *The Second Line*, the magazine of the New Orleans Jazz Club. See: 'Sixteenths', *The Second Line*, 1 (1), 1950, p. 2. His 'Disc-Counter', 'The Hot Record Collectors Magazine', is referenced.
8. Howard Rye compiled the *Storyville* Index: No. 1 – No. 162 (October 1965-June 1995), accessed, June 29, 2023, <http://www.nojazzclub.org/SecondLine/V01.1.1950/v01.1.1950.2.htm>.
9. Israel Gorman, 'Letter to the Editor', *Jazz Report*, July 1961, Vol. 1 (11).
10. Emanuel Sayles, 'Letter to the Editor', *Jazz Report*, May 1962, 2 (9): 2. Jim Holmes' diary reports similar extraordinary activity during his visit to New Orleans from August 31 to October 11, 1962. See: Jim Holmes, 'Diary of a Young Man – New Orleans 1962', *New Orleans Music*, 11 (3): 6-14.

11. *The Record Finder*, 8 (49): 11-12 (mailing date May 17, 1963).

12. See: ‘Luthjens Burns’, *The Second Line*, 11 (3), 1960: 9-10. ‘A flimsily constructed building which had proved a bastion against the inroads of more “progressive” music is suddenly a thing of the past.’ The burning was on January 30, 1960. Latterly, Billie and DeDe Pierce were particularly associated with Luthjens but ‘for many years (nobody knows exactly how many), this humble little downtown bistro had been steadfast in employing only the oldest, most authentic of the remaining negro jazzmen.’ This article was reprinted in the British *Eureka*, 1 (3), 1960, pp. 5-6. Although the music of the New Orleans dance halls would continue spasmodically for several more years, for many New Orleans music enthusiasts, the burning of the 1200 Franklin Avenue Luthjens came to symbolise the end of the dance halls and the beginning of the kitty halls. Ken Grayson Mills was inspired to fill the void.

13. From Mike Simpson, ‘New Orleans’, *Coda*, 4 (10), May 1962, pp. 11-13 at p. 12.

14. NB Charles Suhor in *Jazz in New Orleans: The Postwar Years Through 1970*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, and Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers, 2001, p. 152. ‘One measure of the local impact of the [Preservation Hall] was its bevy of imitators. I tracked them for the [*DownBeat*] ‘Where & When’ listings. The Dixieland Coffee Shop, Icon Hall [Ken Mills], Perseverance Hall, Dixieland Hall, Southland Jazz Club, (trumpeter George Finola), and Mahogany Hall were all variations on Preservation Hall – some combination of traditional jazz, a kitty or an inexpensive admission fee, little or no drink hustling, a non-night club setting and so on. Many were short-lived.’ Suhor is often inaccurate and/or misleading with both details and dates on Mills and Reid, e.g., he has Mills returning to New Orleans ‘in June’ to initiate ‘Perseverance Hall’ (p. 181). Taken as a whole, however, the Suhor quote does bear out what Emanuel Sayles said of the period: ‘I’d say it was almost as good as way back in the early 20s.’ See: this chapter, note 10. This was Mills’ and Reid’s concept of the Kitty Hall writ large.

15. Richard Ekins, ‘PRESERVATION HALL: The Rest of the Story by Ken Grayson Mills, Introduced, Illustrated, and Annotated by Richard Ekins, with a Footnote by Larissa Mills’, *Just Jazz*, No. 235, November 2017, pp. 18-25 at p. 21. On Charlie DeVore, see: Richard Ekins, ‘On the Origins of the Larry Borenstein Sessions at Associated Artists Studio, 726 St. Peter Street, New Orleans . . . A Reminiscence from Charlie DeVore’, *Just Jazz*, No. 230, June 2017, pp. 22-23.

16. Email, Charlie DeVore to Per Oldaeus, May 1, 2003, as reported in Per Oldaeus, ‘734 Saint Louis Street 1962 – and Various Information on the Musicians Who Played There’, unpublished, undated typescript, c. 2003, pp. 3-4. Oldaeus’ typescript

should be reworked for publication. It provides valuable information on many of the lesser-known musicians that Mills was using at Icon (Perseverance) Hall.

17. Brown was manager and owner of The Jazzman Record Shop from 1959 to 1983. The previous owner Albert Van Court, Jr. ‘felt the shop needed fresh blood ... Brown had become a familiar and respected presence at the Jazzman; *The Record Finder* had earned him a reputation for being honest, savvy, and knowledgeable about the record business.’ ‘*The Record Finder* eventually became an institution and Brown published it [from 1956] until 1977.’ See: Cary Ginnel, *Hot Jazz for Sale: Hollywood’s Jazz Man Record Shop*, Cary Ginnel, 2010, pp. 225 and 221.

18. See: this chapter, note 28.

19. *The Record Finder*, 8 (49), pp. 13-14 (mailing date May 17, 1963).

20. Louis Armstrong, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans*, Signet Books, New York, 1955.

21. ‘Mills married Marge Fedorsky in Clark County, Nevada on October 5, 1961. This occurred during Kid Howard’s residency at the Tudor Arms Hotel, Cleveland, Ohio’ which, as Mills describes it, ‘was the start of the Preservation Hall tours.’ See: Richard Ekins, ‘PRESERVATION HALL: The Rest of the Story by Ken Grayson Mills’, op. cit., p. 22.

22. Mills is referring to the track ‘Put on Your Old Grey Bonnet’ on Chris Strachwitz’s vinyl LP Arhoolie F1013, also included on American Music, AMCD-63. The LP included nine largely alternate ‘takes’ from those on the Icon LPs. In his sleeve note to this LP, Strachwitz makes the important point: ‘Today most of these men still play for parades, funerals, and dances but due to changing trends most of their playing is done for white audiences at the various “Kitty Halls”.’

23. Marge Mills. According to Tsar Fedorsky, Marge’s daughter and Mills’ stepdaughter, Marge kept the last name Mills until her death in 1996. Tsar Fedorsky was very helpful to Fred Eatherton and me, from May 2016 onwards when Fred first contacted her. Indeed, Tsar provided us with several previously unknown photographs of Mills, one of which I used to launch The *Just Jazz* Ken Grayson Mills Project on my Richard Ekins Lord Richard Facebook site on August 26, 2016.

24. I have asterisked the tracks included on American Music AMCD-63. Fred Eatherton adds: ‘The listing of this session – I guess he meant “Discography” – recorded 30 July 1962 – is incomplete. See: Fred Eatherton, assisted by Richard Ekins, *Ken Grayson Mills’ Icon Records: A Discography*, La Croix, London, 2018, p. 25, which includes two unlisted tracks – ‘Call My Baby Back’ and ‘St Louis

Blues’. It also includes an untitled ‘Blues’ that I suspect is the ‘Franklin St Blues’, shown here as ‘Reject’. The Arhoolie record is actually F.1013 which, I believe, was released in 1962/early 1963. Mills must have made this material available very quickly for Strachwitz to have released it so speedily. No doubt he was desperate for the cash.’

25. Mike Simpson, ‘New Orleans Jazz at Perseverance Hall’, *Coda*, 5 (2), September 1962, p. 15.

26. Icon Hall was renamed Perseverance Hall at least by June 6, 1962. However, often the original name continued to be used. Richard Ekins, ‘Ken Grayson Mills and Icon Hall, 734 St. Louis Street, New Orleans: A Reminiscence from Big Bill Bissonnette, with Further Notes on Icon Records, Icon Hall and Perseverance Hall’, *Just Jazz*, No. 231, July 2017, pp. 24-30 at p. 27.

27. I have been unable to date or verify this. It seems most likely Mike Simpson has made a mistake.

28. See: Richard Ekins, ‘A Final Flurry: Ken Grayson Mills, Icon Records and Jeunes Amis Hall, with a Footnote on *The Outsider* and the Return of the Repressed’, *Just Jazz*, October 2017, No. 234, pp. 12-22. The *Coda* article lists the two separate Kid Clayton sessions but does not give dates for either of them. The second Clayton session – the final Jeunes Amis recording – was recorded on 19 September, so the end date of 12 September is incorrect. It is possible that the second Clayton session was scheduled for 12 September but postponed for a week following the death of Chineé Foster on the evening of 7 September and his funeral on 11 September. Foster played drums on the first Clayton session and was replaced by Alex Bigard on the second session. Mills puts it this way: ‘We had to postpone the second session because Clayton was sitting in the hoosegow [prison]’ on a slanderous charge of rape. ‘Then during the period of postponement, the drummer, Chineé Foster, dropped dead.’ Grayson Mills, ‘Sleeve Notes’, *Kid Clayton’s Happy Pals – ‘The Exit Stares’*, Icon LP 12. ‘The Exit Stares’ might refer to the sudden death of Chineé Foster or to the imminent closure of Perseverance Hall and Mills’ departure from New Orleans, or, indeed, to both events.

29. Mike Simpson, ‘New Orleans’, *Coda*, 5 (4), November 1962, pp. 16-17 at p. 16.

30. Jim Holmes, ‘Diary of a Young Man – New Orleans 1962’, op. cit.

31. Eric J. Brown, ‘First Visit to New Orleans & Some Chicago’, Diary No. 1 – Sat 1st September to Sat 8th September 1962; Diary No. 2 – Sat 8th September to Sun 16th 1962. I thank Per Oldaeus for giving me copies of these diaries.

32. Ken Mills, 'I Ran With . . . Fellas Who Knew Music: A Profile of Albert Warner', *Jazz Report*, 3 (3 & 4), Jan & Feb 1963, pp. 9-10 at p. 10. Mills does not specify the precise date of closure.
33. Both Eric J. Brown and Jim Holmes refer to Perseverance Hall mostly as Icon Hall. I have no evidence to suppose that Mills reverted to the previous name; rather that Brown and Holmes mostly stuck with the original name.
34. Eric J. Brown, Diary No. 2, p. 14.
35. Ibid., p. 16.
36. Ibid., p. 17.
37. Ibid., p. 18.
38. Jim Holmes, 'Diary of a Young Man', op. cit., p. 12. It is possible that Gorman was playing but Holmes failed to include him in the listed personnel. Holmes had not listed Warner in the personnel for the previous session, *ibid.*, p. 11.
39. Three days later, Klikunas sent me a copy of a news peg prepared by Mills giving notice of '5 tapes of Preservation Hall's opening night found, November 1989'. In the news peg, Mills writes 'Text by Ken Mills, hall co-founder, New Orleans music scholar'. Accordingly, Klikunas wrote to me: 'I realize now that he saw himself as co-founder.' Email, Len Klikunas to Richard Ekins, February 7, 2018.
40. Eventually published, later in 2018, as Ray Smith and Mike Pointon, *Bill Russell and the New Orleans Jazz Revival*, Equinox, Sheffield, 2018.
41. These snippets, not necessarily in order of questioning, are selected from a series of emails between Len Klikunas and Richard Ekins, all dated February 4, 2018.
42. This was in February 2016. As Oldaeus put it later: 'Håkansson and Bårnheim couldn't co-operate, hence Håkansson asked me if I was interested in the Mills' discography.' Facebook Messenger message, Per Oldaeus to Richard Ekins, July 15, 2020. The task proved too burdensome for Oldaeus. Fred Eatherton completed the discography, with my assistance, in December 2017. We published a limited edition book the following year as Fred Eatherton, assisted by Richard Ekins, *Ken Grayson Mills' Icon Records: A Discography*, La Croix, London, 2018. See: also, <http://www.lacroixrecords.com/mills%20discography.html>. Fred has been my co-worker and sounding board throughout the entire *Just Jazz* Ken Grayson Mills project.
43. This was in March 2017. Mills had sent his articles to Paige VanVorst in VanVorst's capacity as Editor of GHB's house magazine, *Jazzology*.
44. Terry Peirce became owner of 504 Records, and related material, following Mike

Dine's death. Very importantly, I thank Terry Peirce, with Charlie Crump and Tom Stagg, for enabling the release of *Ken Grayson Mills – An Epilogue*, 504/La Croix CD 98, 2018, and the transfer of all rights to that Ken Grayson Mills material to La Croix Records.

45. On older material, Mills writes, tantalisingly, in a 'Letter to the Editor' to *New Orleans Music* of 'My diary' and 'a sturdily bound Victor Viewer' of 'Earlier records'. Ken Mills, 'Letter to the Editor: Opening Night at Preservation Hall', *New Orleans Music*, 1991, 3 (1): 25.

46. Email, Larissa Mills to Richard Ekins, July 10, 2020.

47. William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1991, p. 314.

48. In my view, this present article makes particularly clear how Carter's preoccupation with 'balance' sells Mills short on the fundamentals. Mills, in every ordinary sense of the term 'founded', founded the Kitty Hall and he founded (with Barbara Reid) Preservation Hall. True, a kitty was circulated at the musical sessions held by Larry Borenstein in his art gallery at 726 St. Peter Street, in the mid-late 1950s and into the 1960s. These sessions, however, were private, 'invitation only' sessions, or specifically related to art sales; not 'concerts' held at a musical 'Hall' for tourists or passers-by. True, Mills sub-leased 726 St. Peter Street from Larry Borenstein to run his Hall. However, as subsequent events at Icon (Perseverance) Hall indicated, had Borenstein not offered him 726 St. Peter Street, Mills would have established Preservation Hall elsewhere. Whether Mills (and Reid) would have made the commercial success of Preservation Hall that Allan and Sandra Jaffe made of it is, of course, a quite different matter. Just as the whole Preservation Hall edifice is built upon the musicians of New Orleans, it is appropriate to conclude this note with the words of a New Orleans musician. As Carter reports Kid Sheik saying: 'He [Mills] loved the music more than the money.' So do I [RE]. See: William Carter, *Preservation Hall*, 1991, op cit., p. 160.

49. See: for instance, email, Bill Carter to Richard Ekins, August 1, 2019. 'Shipton can tell you some of her [Sandra Jaffe's] unexplained efforts to ban my book, a sadness I sometimes still encounter in the byways of my own memory.' Alyn Shipton was the publisher of William Carter, *Preservation Hall: Music from the Heart*, Bayou Press, Oxford, 1991. He sold the US rights to Norton. Shipton adds: 'From a bibliographical point of view Bayou was the original edition and we published ahead of Norton but the books are identical apart from title page, verso and colophon.' Facebook Messenger message, Alyn Shipton to Richard Ekins, July 13, 2020.

## Biographies

### **‘Lord Richard’ Ekins**

Long since known as ‘Lord Richard’, Richard Ekins’ history of involvement with ‘old style’ New Orleans jazz is a long and colourful one.

He was ‘christened’ Lord Richard in New Orleans by Joseph ‘Kid Twat’ Butler on July 29, 1966. Butler, bass player with the Kid Thomas Band, was finishing playing a set in Preservation Hall when Richard came sauntering in. Never before having seen such a man in New Orleans – tall, long-haired and heavily bearded – Kid Twat bowed down, then threw up his arms and exclaimed, ‘Here come de Lord!’ The name stuck and, from that moment on, Richard was known as ‘Lord Richard’ throughout his recording career; to the Japanese full ensemble New Orleans parade band that welcomed him on his arrival at the port of Kobe in 1968; and amongst New Orleans jazz enthusiasts around the world, who continue to seek out and exchange the early recordings.

Lord Richard’s love affair with New Orleans music began as a 16-year old schoolboy after first hearing Bunk Johnson’s Nov 1945 recordings for Decca. He played trumpet with his first band the Burgundy Street Stompers in 1964, before teaming up with pianist Bob Barton to co-lead the Crescent City Stompers from 1965 to 1968.

He first visited New Orleans in 1966 and founded the La Croix Record label the following year. Between 1967 and 1972, he released seven albums on La Croix, including his recordings of the Kid Thomas Band and Ernest ‘Doc’ Paulin’s band. He moved to London in 1971, quit playing at the same time, and dissolved La Croix records the following year. His last visit to New Orleans was in 2015.

Memories of New Orleans for Lord Richard live on in his two sons, named Matthew La Croix Ekins (1974-), as in the record label, and after Joseph La Croix ‘DeDe’ Pierce, the trumpet player; and Luke Baptiste Ekins (1977-),

in the style of the French Creole, and after William ‘Willie’ Baptiste, the banjo player.

His 504/La Croix CD series celebrates and shares the best of Lord Richard’s New Orleans recording sessions, adding some material which has remained unreleased until now, and making all these difficult-to-find recordings available in CD format for the first time.

## Ken Grayson Mills

Ken Grayson Mills was born in Huntington Park, California on June 9, 1937. His interest in jazz began with the Kid Ory broadcasts in 1944. He started researching and writing on jazz in 1957.

While at the University of North Carolina, he had a column in *The Daily Tar Heel* called 'Odes on Music'. At Santa Ana College, California, he studied journalism and hung out at Jack's Record Cellar in San Francisco in the late 1950s and early 1960s. At the same time, he owned and edited the literary magazine *The Iconoclast*.

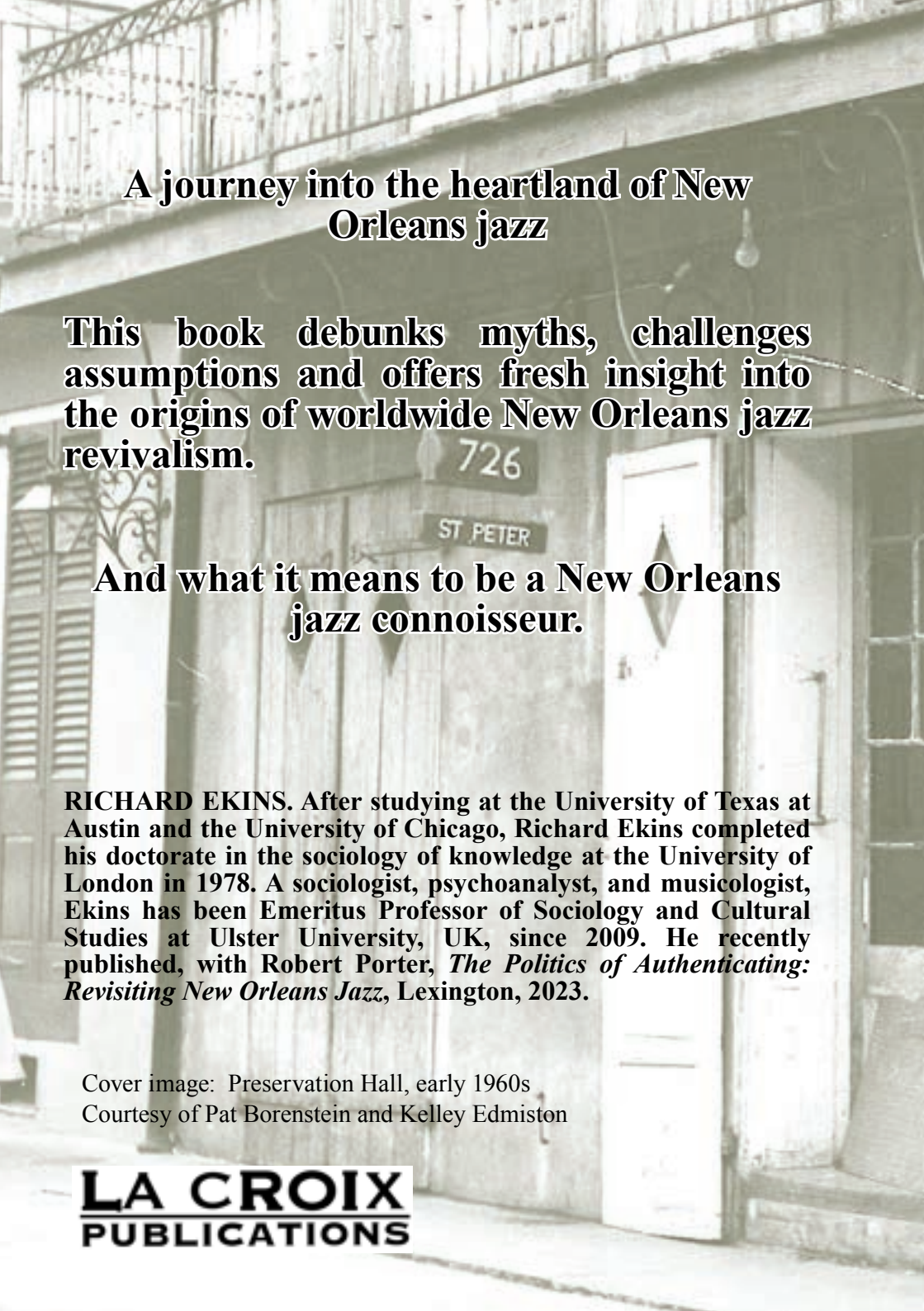
His earlier interests in rock & roll, blues and R & B, turned more exclusively to New Orleans jazz when he heard George Lewis playing 'Over the Waves' and he embarked on a three-year period of recording for his Icon Records label in New Orleans which led to his founding (with Barbara Reid) of Preservation Hall in 1961.

After being removed from Preservation Hall, he founded and ran Icon Hall, later renamed Perseverance Hall, in 1962.

In 1967 he sold all the issued Icon LP material to George H. Buck who issued them on his Jazzology label. In the early 1990s, he sold his unissued Icon material, most of which was issued on George H. Buck's American Music CDs.

He believed that jazz is an immensely elevating music of great social significance, and the content is the poetry of psycho-physiology.

He died on 10 October 2004 in Fullerton, California.



## **A journey into the heartland of New Orleans jazz**

**This book debunks myths, challenges assumptions and offers fresh insight into the origins of worldwide New Orleans jazz revivalism.**

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**RICHARD EKINS.** After studying at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Chicago, Richard Ekins completed his doctorate in the sociology of knowledge at the University of London in 1978. A sociologist, psychoanalyst, and musicologist, Ekins has been Emeritus Professor of Sociology and Cultural Studies at Ulster University, UK, since 2009. He recently published, with Robert Porter, *The Politics of Authenticating: Revisiting New Orleans Jazz*, Lexington, 2023.

Cover image: Preservation Hall, early 1960s  
Courtesy of Pat Borenstein and Kelley Edmiston

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