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Jazz On A Horse, the Musical Style of Milton Brown and His Musical Brownies

Beginning in 1932, musicians from America's Southwest produced their own type of jazz that has since been labeled western swing. These jazz musicians were geographically isolated from the jazz scenes in the American urban centers of the East. They made music that mixed jazz with traditional string band styles, using both jazz instruments and folk instruments to create a unique sound. Due to racial and cultural stereotypes, geographical issues and issues of instrumentation, such music has been ignored by jazz historians and left out of the canon of jazz history.

If modern listeners can place the early jazz style into this unique context and concentrate on how the music sounds, it is not so hard to accept western swing as a branch of the jazz tradition. After all, to white people of the rural Southwest, western swing was their kind of jazz. Even though western swing possesses characteristics that seem foreign to modern jazz tastes, a detailed study of how the music was played will demonstrate that it does have credibility as a type of jazz. An appropriate place to begin this study is with the first superstars of western swing, Milton Brown and His Musical Brownies.

The Brownies were responsible for setting the repertoire, sound and playing style for western swing. Through a careful analysis of these characteristics we can illuminate this style as a type of jazz and show how important the Brownies are to American music. While engaging in this study of the Brownies' music, we will also uncover important cultural issues that address race, class, geography, musical transmission and musical culture of the depression era.

Depression Era Texas

Before discussing the style of the Brownies, we must understand the cultural climate in which this music was created. Jean Boyd states,

Western swing, like other styles of jazz, evolved from a mixture of cultural and musical elements. Steel guitar virtuoso Tommy Morrell describes western swing as an amalgam of "jazz, blues, big band, polka music, country music, Mexican music...everything." Because it is a crossroads for diverse cultures, including, Native American, Mexican American, Anglo American, German, French, Cajun, African American, Czech, and Polish, Texas was the birthplace of western swing.¹

Well into the 20th century, Texas remained a mostly rural and working class state. Even those living in cities maintained a connection to the rural culture of the countryside. Many Texans participated in social dancing, both at public dance halls and saloons and private house parties.

Also, liquor laws during prohibition were different in Texas, allowing for individual counties to set their own standards.² These cultural, social and economic conditions

made up the unique climate that allowed for western swing to develop, thrive and spread to other parts of America. 3

When rural Texans around the turn of the century gathered to dance, they employed the fiddle as the instrument of choice. The fiddlers would be expected to accompany the dancing by themselves or perhaps with a banjo or guitar. The accepted style was rhythmic, energetic and included personal variations on the tunes. Their repertoire included ethnic dances such as polkas, schottisches, waltzes and two steps as well as rags and breakdowns.

One of the most famous of Texas fiddlers was Eck Robertson, who was a vaudeville star, won many fiddle contests and recorded between 1922 and 1929. He played both solo and accompanied by his family string band, employing virtuosic variations on simple tunes like "Sallie Gooden" and "Ragtime Annie." Even when the fiddle played unaccompanied, the rhythms were driving and accented and were easily the most important part of the style. This is the local musical culture that Milton Brown and the Musical Brownies inherited, but the technology of the times allowed the Brownies to be exposed to other musical cultures as well.

During the depression, the radio was the cheapest and most popular form of entertainment available. For some listeners, it offered a sense of security and stability in hard times, and way to escape from the tedium of everyday life.⁴ The various programs available on the radio included speeches, advice, recipes, news and music. The most popular times for rural Texas families to listen were during meal times, when everyone would likely gather to eat and relax. These were the important times for local and touring musicians to play live on the air to publicize their local appearances and advertise for their sponsors. At night, powerful border radio stations from Mexico broadcast their unregulated signals all over America. They sold patent medicines and played recorded transcriptions of popular Southern entertainers like the Carter Family and the Chuck Wagon Gang. These border radio stations were an important tool spreading the sounds of string band music all over America.⁵

78 rpm records were also a popular form of media in the depression. Around the turn of the century, the recording business was primarily focused on classical music, marches and opera stars. In essence, the recording business was a continuation of Victorian culture. Around 1900, however, American record companies began attempting to satisfy recent immigrants needs for "ethnic" records.⁶ In 1920, Mamie Smith's recording of "Crazy Blues" awoke record companies to the large audience for African American music. Then the race was on to discover and tap into other untouched markets, including rural Southern listeners.⁷ This, combined with the improvements made by electrical recording in 1925-1926 made a diverse assortment of 78 rpm recordings available to anyone with 35 cents in their pocket. Bob Carlin describes the recording culture of string bands perfectly:

During the nascent days in the 1920s, the American record industry made a startling discovery. Rural dwellers, both white and black, would buy local music (or a commercialized version of it) if offered on the then standard 78 rpm discs. This sparked a wave of recording of southern and rural music. Musicians were brought to northern studios or had portable studios carried to them. Inadvertently, representatives of the business, by deciding what to record

and how to market the resulting discs, aided in shaping the way Americans saw their own music.⁸

This combination of Texas fiddle culture, the popularity of social dancing, daily radio broadcasts of live music and inexpensive 78 rpm records provided Texas musicians with a unique musical upbringing during the depression.

What Is Western Swing?

Western swing has several characteristics that identify it as its own unique jazz style. First, the music is played with a strong dance beat, often more driving and forceful than “traditional” swing music. The Brownies rhythm was so strong that fans referred to it as “the brownie beat.”⁹ Fred “Papa” Callhoun, a jazz pianist who joined the Brownies in 1932, said,

I liked the Brownie’s beat right off because it was the same 2/4 Dixieland beat that I had been playing...We had four guys with the same idea about rhythm...You could check a chorus by the second hand on your watch. We never rushed or dragged in our whole lives.¹⁰

Even if this statement is a little exaggerated, it does emphasize how connected this music was to the dance culture and how much the public loved to dance to the Brownies. This continued the forceful drive of Texas fiddle music but added to it a more syncopated feel that connected it to a jazz beat. When the Brownies were fully formed, they had a four piece rhythm section, three melody instruments and a voice. Big bands like Fletcher Henderson’s or Benny Goodman’s also had a four piece rhythm section, but the Brownies rhythm section made up half of the band! Obviously a strong beat was a priority for them.

Second, the core of the western swing band are string instruments such as fiddle, guitar, steel guitar and double bass. Supplementing this may be accordion, drums, banjo, mandolin or wind instruments. Although many of these instruments were uncommon in jazz bands, Texan musicians who played these instruments were often influenced by jazz musicians such as Joe Venuti, Eddie Lang, Louis Armstrong and others. They learned how to play hot choruses in a style that was idiomatic to their instruments but also connected to the jazz tradition. Many bands copied the phrasing, arranging techniques and harmonic language of horn sections of other jazz bands. It was not uncommon to hear a section of fiddle, steel guitar and accordion playing a harmonized line as if it were a sax section in a big band.

Third, the repertoire of Western Swing is drawn from Texas fiddle tunes (often called breakdowns), blues numbers, jazz standards and popular tunes. As we will explore below, these musicians learned their repertoire from many sources, including, radio, phonograph records, other bands and older musicians. The variety inherent in Western Swing repertoire points to its connection to dance hall culture, where dancers wanted to hear a wide variety of music and bands needed to play long sets to satisfy the dancers.

Fourth, the vocals often sound more “urban” than the instruments, with vocalists like Tommy Duncan and Milton Brown sounding very modern and jazzy for their time.

Before Milton started singing with his father and brother, vocals were not an expected part of Texas dance music culture. As he developed his vocal style, he concentrated more on urban models, such as Ted Lewis and Al Jolson, rather than rural models that he was most likely exposed to.¹¹

Fifth, the music featured hot improvisations in a jazz style, with instrumentalists expected to play virtuosic choruses while maintaining a swing feeling. In other types string band music, most players play the melody or play a variation on the melody when they are featured. In western swing, soloists may base an improvisation off of the melody, but are more likely to use the harmonic structure as a basis for their solo. This was a practice that was adapted from jazz and blues improvisation. The soloists in the Brownies and their influences and style will be discussed below.

All of these features show us that western swing is a type of jazz, albeit one that is noticeably different from the accepted jazz aesthetic and is certainly outside the mainstream. Danceable rhythms in the swing style, hot solo choruses and a varied repertoire set it firmly among more traditional jazz bands of the time. In order to show how this style developed more carefully, we will examine how each of the Brownies developed their own instrumental styles. Due to their unique position as innovators and spokesmen for the genre in the early years, their individual styles had great impact on later players.

Milton Brown and the Beginning of Western Swing

Milton Brown was born on September 8, 1903 near Stephenville, Texas. From a young age Milton showed a talent for singing and grew up performing with his father, a breakdown fiddler, and his brother Derwood, a guitarist, at dances in neighborhood homes. These depression era dances were described by Milton's youngest Brother, Roy Lee Brown.

They would roll back the carpet or linoleum, sprinkle a little corn meal on the floor, hire a fiddle and a guitar player, and they'd have a little dance. Most of it was square dancing, but there were a few waltzes and sometimes a round dance or a two step. Sometimes they called the two steps "rags"...There wasn't too much singing at these house dances, except when Milton came in and sang.¹²

By 1927, Milton was making a living as a cigar salesman and had his own vocal trio that sang at community functions and social occasions. Sometime in 1930, Milton and Derwood attended a house dance where guitarist Herman Arnsperger and fiddler Bob Wills were the entertainment. They met each other and Milton and Derwood performed a few numbers with them. They agreed then to form a cooperative band that would include Derwood when he was not in school. They played for medicine shows and dances and eventually secured a regular dance job at the Eagles Hall in Fort Worth. By the fall of 1930 they had landed a radio show on WBAP sponsored by the Aladdin Lamp Company.

While under this sponsorship, the band took the name the Aladdin Laddies. This was the beginning of Milton Brown's intimate connection to the media of radio.

In January of 1931, the band switched to KFJZ for a program sponsored by the Burrus Mills flour company and changed their name to the Lightcrust Doughboys.¹³

The fan response to the show was enormous and the band soon became full time employees of Burrus Mills, expected to do conventional work for the company as well as perform on the air. Around this time the band began hanging around Kemble's furniture store to hear the latest records and learn them for their dance gigs and radio broadcasts. One favorite of Milton's was "Eagle Riding Papa," a record by The Hokum Boys, which included African American guitarist/singer Big Bill Bronzy. They adapted the tune for the Aladdin Ladies and the Lightcrust Doughboys theme song.¹⁴ Milton also loved the flip side, "Somebody's Been Using That Thing," which he would later perform with his own band.¹⁵ It was through his exposure to recordings at Kemble's that Milton was able to expand his repertoire to include the jazz, blues and pop tunes that were well received by people at dances.

Around this time W. Lee O'Daniel, the sales manager for Burrus Mills, became involved.¹⁶ At first, he did not care for the music of the Lightcrust Doughboys. He thought it was too "hillbilly." He eventually took over the on air announcements for the band, wrote lyrics, gave on air advice and chose the repertoire for broadcasts. He did not like the type of music that the Doughboys played at dances, in fact he did not approve of their dance gigs at all. He wanted them to play slow, sentimental numbers that he thought would appeal to the customers of Burrus Mills.¹⁷ This tension would later cause both Brown and Wills to leave the group. During this time, the Doughboys played their regular broadcasts as well as their popular dances at the Eagles Hall.

In February 1932, the Lightcrust Doughboys made their first recordings. The band for the session included Milton Brown, Bob Wills, Derwood Brown and Sleepy Johnson on guitar. The band recorded under the name the Fort Worth Doughboys, probably because O'Daniel would not have approved of their repertoire selection.¹⁸ They recorded two tunes; "Sunbonnet Sue," a piece that was probably written by Brown, and another piece written by Big Bill Broonzy, "Nancy Jane."

Although the seeds of western swing were present in these recordings, these pieces can not yet be considered jazz. There are no improvised solos and Wills' fiddle playing is very typical of the Texas rural style.¹⁹ However, there are three things that set this session apart from other rural string band recordings. First, the music has a driving syncopated beat performed by Derwood Brown and Herman Arnsperger, both on guitars. Compared to other string bands of the time, it has more emphasis on the off beat and a more forceful energy. Second, both tunes feature Milton Brown with his jazzy vocal style in a prominent role. Before these sessions, Texas string bands were instrumental groups that rarely had a vocalist. When singing was present, it was often in a harsh and untrained manner, a very different sound compared to Milton's urban sound. As Ginell points out,

Thus, the appearance in 1932 of a string band with not only a featured vocalist but one with an uptown, jazzy sound was not just an anomaly, it was unheard of. The effect Milton Brown's vocals had on singers and string bands in the Southwest was nothing short of revolutionary.²⁰

Lastly, the the choice of African American repertoire sets this apart from other recordings of the time. As we will learn later, African American repertoire was instrumental in defining the western swing style. Even though there is no improvisation

on this session, these characteristics point to these two songs as a seed of something new about to flower.

In September of 1932, Milton asked O'Daniel for a raise for himself and for Derwood to be hired as an official member of the group. O' Daniel agreed to raise Milton's pay if he stopped playing dances but stated that he would not hire Derwood. Milton, not willing to stop playing dances and leave the now married Derwood without a job, quit the Doughboys and took Derwood with him. He already had in mind an idea for a new band, the Musical Brownies, which was on the air by September 17th on WBAP. As Rich Kienzle states in his book, *Southwest Shuffle*,

In the 1930's, a new type of "fiddle band" music came to be. This new, eclectic sound epitomized the diversity of Texas, mixing all styles of music for dancers. Bob Wills, Herman Arnsperger and Milton Brown, working as the Light Crust Doughboys, pioneered this style. From 1932 until his death in 1936, Milton Brown and his ground breaking band, the Musical Brownies, went even further in defining it.²¹

The Brownies

In general, the Brownies musical style used a simple formula: a hot dance beat, improvised solos and great vocals. Although the soloists did not always stand out as the best, the beat and the vocals were certainly among the best if not the standard for other groups. Also, the Brownies arrangements are carefully crafted, with stop time, solo breaks, ensemble passages, musical quotations, humorous effects and wonderful out choruses.

As other western swing bands struggled to hold on to personnel, the Brownies enjoyed a fairly regular membership. The comfort of playing together regularly is obvious by the interplay of the musicians on the recordings, all of which are of high quality. It is amazing to note that they recorded every tune but one with one take, often 15-20 in a day. Truly the Brownies were a fine band that had the respect of their peers and the admiration of their fans. Their music set the instrumentation, repertoire and playing style for western swing. Bill Malone sums up their importance well,

The Brownies permanently shaped the course of country music history, and they did so without ever abandoning the string band format. Milton Brown's singing was greatly admired and widely copied; fiddlers Cecil and Cliff Bruner featured improvisational styles that still appear in the work of modern instrumentalists; Fred "Papa" Calhoun introduced jazz piano playing to country music; and Bob Dunn pioneered the electrification of the steel guitar while also moving that instrument away from the chorded, Hawaiian style.²²

The classic lineup for the Brownies was Milton Brown-vocals, Derwood Brown-guitar, vocals, Ocie Stockard-tenor banjo, vocals, Wanna Coffman-bass, Fred Calhoun-Piano, Cecil Brower-fiddle, Cliff Bruner-fiddle and Bob Dunn-steel guitar.

Milton Vocal Style

When Milton was a young man, he formed a vocal trio with some friends that performed popular songs and sentimental numbers. This was where Milton learned some of his repertoire and where he first developed as a musician.

Other models for his vocal style include Al Jolson and Ted Lewis, both of which were famous popular singers and entertainers in the 1920s and 1930s.

We also must consider the impact of African American blues recordings on Milton's style. It is clear from his repertoire with the Brownies that he listened to these musicians and it is easy to hear a rougher, hotter edge to Milton's voice on these tunes. For a "hillbilly" singer, his voice was very diverse; able to handle sentimental numbers, hot tin pan alley numbers and rough blues with ease.

One feature of Brown's singing style was his willingness to improvise new melodies and vocal parts in a hot style. He would often sing the same lyrics to a new jazzy sounding line, as in the second chorus of *One of Us Was Wrong*. With Derwood singing harmony on the first chorus and Milton singing by himself on the second hot chorus, it is clear that he was meant to "let loose" with an improvised (or at least improvised sounding) part.

Milton also sang some scat choruses with the band following in a call and response style a la Cab Calloway, as in *Garbage Man Blues*. In the tune *Down by the O-H-I-O*, Milton showed that his vocal style can have the same hard driving swing as his band, as he introduces each soloist with a verse about them and their instrument. He sang lines that hover around one note as he places his rhythms on the front edge of the beat and then lays them back, playing with the beat like a jazz improviser.

One feature of western swing vocals that is immediately recognizable and infamous is the "holler." These are vocal encouragement and shouts that musicians would vocalize during the tune. Bob Wills is the one best known for this, often hollering through musicians entire solo choruses with puns, jokes or just the familiar "AAA HAAAA!" To modern listeners, it can be very disconcerting to hear Wills when he does this, but it was part of his showmanship and appeal to audiences. On the first Doughboy recordings, Wills does not engage in many of these hollers because he is busy playing the fiddle, but the rest of the band vocalizes a bit during the tunes. In fact, the first holler on record belongs to Milton! Throughout his short career, Milton would occasionally vocalize encouragements to his band mates, such as "Papa Caaal-Hoooun" or a jazzy "Yow-Zah" and even the obligatory "AAA HAAA!" But his vocalizations never covered up the music or detracted from the performance, as Wills' later would.²³

It should be noted that the Brownies often featured harmony vocals by Derwood and banjoist Ocie Stockard on many recordings. Sometimes the harmony vocals functioned as responses to Milton's statements, as in *Down by the O-H-I-O* which sound very similar to the "gang vocal" approach that was popular in the swing era. Other times Milton and Derwood sang harmony together. These harmony vocals added a sophistication and polish to the tunes, even when the harmonies were rather simple. It points to the amount of craft and care that the Brownies put into their music and set the standard for later groups to continue to develop sophisticated harmony vocal styles.²⁴

Fiddle

The generation of Texas fiddlers who played western swing added to the traditional repertoire the jazz and popular tunes they heard on the radio as well as classical

techniques that some learned from violin lessons. Many learned the old breakdowns but yearned to do something new and to sound more modern. Jimmy Thompson states, “As a fiddle player, I didn’t want to learn to play “Wagoner” or any of those hoedowns...I was listening to Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli, and I was listening to Joe Venuti and Eddie Lang and Stuff Smith.”²⁵

Milton Brown had three different fiddlers record with him in the Brownies, Cecil Brower, Cliff Bruner and Ted Grantham. Fiddlers Jessie Ashlock and Johnny Borowski played with the Brownies but never recorded. All of these fiddlers possessed different backgrounds and styles, but they all had one thing in common, they could improvise hot solo choruses.²⁶ It is also significant that Brower, Borowski and Grantham were classically trained. It seems that these players were able to handle the many styles and techniques that the Brownies needed. Also, Ashlock, Brower and Bruner were all good breakdown fiddlers, each with a different connection to this Texas fiddle tradition. It is significant that the Cecil Brower, who was the fiddler who stayed with the Brownies the longest, was classically trained, played breakdowns and could improvise hot choruses. He was the first Texas fiddler to really do it all, and therefore was the perfect fiddler for the brownies.²⁷ When teamed with one of the other fiddlers, the Brownies had Milton’s ideal twin fiddle sound, with the fiddlers capable of melody, harmony, counterpoint, jazz improvisation, fills and riffs. This “twin fiddle” sound became a mainstay of later western swing groups like Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys and Spade Cooley and His Orchestra.

A tune that shows off the twin fiddle team of Brower and Bruner is Tired of the Same Thing All the Time. The piece starts with the fiddlers playing the tune in harmony, staying out of each other’s way by sticking to different registers while playing the tune in a bluesy fashion. Behind Milton’s vocal choruses, they fill with daring glissandos, arpeggios and blues licks that are barely audible but are inventive and virtuosic. Brower takes a solo that is inventive and interesting as a jazz solo for several reasons. First, he makes use of slides and blue notes to produce an almost vocal sound at times, most notably the first six notes of the solo and the gliss from Bb to G and back to Bb in measure 11. Next, he plays with the rhythmic placement of the notes by moving in and out of the triplet based swing fill. Some parts are played very straight while others are very laid back. Lastly, it is clear from analyzing the notes that Brower was improvising with the chord changes, not the melody of the tune, an approach consistent with jazz practice.²⁸

For the last chorus of the piece, the Brownies collectively improvise in an early jazz fashion with both fiddles clearly heard in the polyphonic texture with some hot jazz licks, double time passages, upper register wails and some chromatic playing. The fiddle playing on this tune begins to illuminate the breadth of playing styles and techniques that these fiddlers possessed. These were not simple country fiddlers, but were real improvisers who had a masterful grasp of a very diverse range of jazz, classical and string band violin techniques.

Guitar

The guitar was an important part of early Texas musical culture. It was often used to accompany the voice and the fiddle at rural dances. Guitar playing in this style used ringing open chords with an alternating bass-chord picking approach. This sound was

popularized in the southeast and spread around America on radio broadcasts in the 1920's and 1930's by the Carter Family, Jimmy Rodgers, The Blue Sky Boys and the Monroe Brothers.²⁹ It was the perfect sound for rhythmic accompaniment and was the foundation of Derwood Brown's guitar style.

Instead of playing the ringing, open string "cowboy chords" of rural folk music, most western swing guitarists used chord shapes called bar chords. Bar chords are produced by placing the first finger of the left hand flat against all the strings of the instrument, creating a bar with the finger that stops all the strings. The other fingers of the left hand are then added to create different voicings. This approach allows guitarists to play jazz chords such as dominant chords and diminished chords easily. It also allows guitarists to play in any key by moving the bar to the desired fret. Not only does this make the player more harmonically versatile, but it also changes the timbre of the instrument. The open string chords necessary to play in the common keys of rural folk music of G, C, D and A are ringing and sustained while the bar chord voicings of jazz and western swing are punchy and percussive. This technique, combined with the walking bass and the four string banjo, define the rhythmic sound of western swing.

Derwood Brown, the guitarist in the Brownies, played a hybrid style that used bar chords, but continued the complex bass runs and alternating bass approach to rhythm playing of traditional string band music. This meant that in four beats of music, Derwood would often play a bass note on beat one, a strong chord on beat two, a different bass note on beat three and another strong chord on beat four. In essence, he was playing a combination of the bass banjo parts in a 2/4 jazz style that sounded like "boom-chick-boom-chick." At times this sounds like a simplified version of the type of playing that Eddie Lang was developing in the late 1920s and 1930s.³⁰

Derwood's rhythm on the guitar was so driving that he often broke strings several times per show and had to hire a boy to always have a restrung guitar ready for him backstage.³¹ Although he did sometimes improvise single note melody lines, he was more important in the Brownies as a rhythm player, helping to supply the "Brownie Beat." Later guitar players were flashier and louder, especially when electric guitars became common, but Derwood's contribution to western swing guitar playing is unquestionable.

Bass

Due to its function as dance music, swing and early jazz needed a steady, solid bass line and western swing was no exception. Ragtime and society orchestras around the turn of the century often used a string bass bowed on beats one and three.³² Bands that played brass instruments for parades and funerals usually used a tuba or "brass bass." As jazz developed, many players doubled on both instruments depending on the performing situation.³³ By 1930, the string bass was the dominant bass instrument and often was played pizzicato in a two beats per bar style. The most proficient players, such as Walter Page and John Kirby also played in a highly developed four beat style, the "walking" bass line associated with jazz.³⁴ This four beat technique solidified the swing style by pushing the band along and smoothing over the "up and down" feeling of the two beat technique.

In an effort to be audible without amplification, early jazz bass players often raised their bridges quite high so that the catgut strings were far away from the fingerboard.³⁵ This allowed the player to pull the string away from the fingerboard so that it loudly snapped back into place. The string was also slapped against the fingerboard an additional time for each note, creating a swinging percussive sound that really drove a band when playing for dancing. Brownie bass player Wanna Coffman was asked by Milton to slap the bass as much as possible in order to get a good beat for dancing and can be heard slapping in a highly developed manner on the tune Somebody's Been Using That Thing.³⁶ This highly energetic slapping style would become deeply imbedded in western swing, with all bass players expected to be able to "slap" a solo break. This slap style would remain popular in Western Swing long after other types of jazz bassists had abandoned it. It would carry on in Bluegrass, Honky-Tonk, Rockabilly, Country and early Rock-n-Roll, at least until the electric bass guitar took over as the dominant bass voice.

It was common for Coffman to play the first section of the tune in a two beat feel and the solos and out chorus with a four beat feel. This technique was equally popular in mainstream swing and western swing and helped a piece build momentum all the way to the last chorus. It is easy for our modern ears to hear Coffman's playing as harmonically simplistic, but in the context of the chord changes they supported, Coffman was on par with most bassists of other jazz styles. In fact, Coffman's time was rock solid, his tone (as much as can be heard on these recordings) was good and his note choice was appropriate. Even if he didn't generate the excitement that the other soloists in the brownies did, Coffman was the foundation of the group and was vital for the dance beat that Milton wanted.

Banjo

The banjo was an important part of the rhythm section from the beginning of jazz. It was a perfect rhythm instrument, with its bright sound providing a solid driving beat and the harmonic information needed by soloists to improvise. The banjo's popularity as a time keeper carried over to western swing and remained part of the style even after other types of jazz bands had dropped the banjo from the rhythm section. Part of the reason that western swing was seen as "backwards" and "hillbilly" may have been the prominent role that banjos played in the style.³⁷

The banjos that were used in early jazz groups and in western swing bands were strung with four strings and played by striking the strings with a pick or "plectrum." These instruments were referred to as jazz banjo, tenor banjo, four string banjo or plectrum banjo. During the 1920s and 1930s, the four string banjo enjoyed great popularity, especially among college age musicians due to its close association with the new jazz music that was so popular.³⁸

Jazz banjo is mostly a rhythm instrument that plays chords on two or four beats of a bar. It has a clear ringing sound that is easily heard and combines with the bass in western swing to create a strong swing feeling.

Its loud and bright sound made it possible for many western swing groups to avoid the use of drum set, because its fast picking technique can mimic both the ride cymbal pattern and snare drum accents of a swing drum set. An example of this swinging banjo playing is Ocie Stockard's

performance the Brownies recording of Brownie's Stomp from 1934. Stockard plays in a two beat feel through most of the tune, with his bright and clear sound driving the band. His fast right hand often subdivides the beats into eighth notes as well to add rhythmic intensity.

He takes his turn on a solo break and even improvises a chorus using single note lines, chordal melodies and tremolo. This is very similar to the jazz banjo playing of Howdy Quicksell (with Bix Beiderbecke, 1926-1927) or Johnny St. Cyr (with Louis Armstrong, 1926-1927).³⁹

Jazz style banjo playing is quickly being forgotten by the American public. Most of the instruments of western swing have found a niche in other styles of American music, but jazz banjo playing only holds out only in dixieland and western swing revival groups. Due to the folk revival of the 1960's and the recent resurgence of bluegrass and old time styles, the most popular and recognizable banjo in America is the five string banjo. The jazz banjo is quickly becoming a curious relic that is hung on the wall at suburban restaurants or rebuilt to accommodate five string playing.

Steel Guitar

Of all the western swing instruments, the most unique, the most complicated and the most misunderstood is the steel guitar. It had its beginnings in Hawaii when the spanish guitar was brought by cowboys around 1830.

Hawaiians changed these guitars by laying them on their laps, retuning them and using knives and combs on the strings to mimic the glissandi of Hawaiian vocal music.⁴⁰ When Hawaiian entertainers toured the mainland in the 1920's, many Americans fell in love with the smooth, pure sound of this Hawaiian guitar. Mainland Americans ordered these instruments from mail order companies and often adapted the Hawaiian performing style to fit local music traditions. This musical tradition came to fruition in two different places in American music: the "Dobro" or "resophonic" guitar of Bluegrass music and the steel guitar in Western Swing. In the early years, they were essentially the same, but when Bob Dunn recorded his brand of gritty jazz on amplified steel with the Brownies, a new musical path was blazed.

The sound of the acoustic steel guitar was sweet, soft and difficult to hear. In 1934, Bob Dunn, was one of the first to amplify his sound with a magnetic pickup and a speaker.⁴¹ He was also the first musician to record with an amplified string instrument when he recorded with the Brownies in January 1935.⁴² Dunn's recorded sound was remarkably diverse with many shades of timbre. He can play harmonic "chimes" and sweet chords, low register honks and gritty chordal growls. Listening to his playing it is easy to hear that he understood the connection that timbre and musical expression had in early jazz.

Dunn added jazz credibility to western swing in several ways. First, his sound and timbre was very similar to the growling of dixieland brass and the vocal sound of the saxophone. He was able to manipulate his timbres in a way that was very advanced and diverse. Second, Dunn played riffs, fills and chords that mimicked the sound of horn sections in swing bands. This approach later became a staple of the western swing style. Lastly, his melodic vocabulary was heavily influenced by the blues, with blue notes and

glissandi showing his connection to blues tradition. These playing characteristics were the basis for most of the steel guitar playing that was played in the western swing style.

Piano

At first, piano was not part of the Texas string band tradition. Fred “Papa” Calhoun, a jazz pianist, had doubts that he could fit in with the Brownies when he was asked one night to sit in at a dance. The crowd was fascinated by the sound of the jazzy piano in a string band and Calhoun was asked to join the band. He was nicknamed “Papa” because of his affinity for Earl “Fatha” Hines. Calhoun was no virtuoso, but was a solid jazz player who played good solos, kept good time, knew lots of tunes and helped the Brownies learn more about jazz. His presence in the Brownies raised their jazz credibility and may have been the first piano in a fiddle band.

His style was a combination of stride and ragtime figures with blues phrases and block chord solos. In the tune Chinatown My Chinatown, he takes a rhythmic solo that utilized rakes of the piano keys, bluesy descending phrases, an exciting break and showed his dexterity at the keyboard. At times, his playing could be harmonically adventurous, as in his solo on the tune Hesitation Blues and the introduction to Garbage Man Blues.⁴³ After Calhoun, many western swing bands had piano players, many of whom doubled on accordion as they traveled to rural dance halls with unreliable pianos. Calhoun’s simple style, with much debt to stride playing and blues, continued as the norm for western swing for many years.

Repertoire

The Brownies played dances all over the Southwest, often several per week in addition to his radio programs. Long jobs at large dance halls required a large and varied repertoire to satisfy the customers, if the Brownie’s repertoire is any indication. Ginell states,

The key to the establishment of the genre was derivative at first, and then becoming increasingly self-rejuvenating and original...He (Milton Brown) was simply western swing’s first song collector, drawing from his own “oral traditions” (records and radio) much as A.P. Carter assimilated folk songs for the Carter Family.⁴⁴

The Brownies drew upon their collective backgrounds to put together a very diverse repertoire that included hillbilly music, jazz, blues, pop hits and more.

From Ginell’s carefully constructed discography and my own listening work, I have prepared a breakdown of the Brownie’s repertoire by genre. Admittedly, genres such as Tin Pan Alley, blues and hot jazz have a great deal of overlap, but I still chooses to assign each tune a label according to its origin. It must be noted that no matter what the source or genre, the Brownies still played it with their signature sound and jazz approach, with hot improvisations, uptown vocals and the “Brownie Beat.”

*Denotes an Brownie original

+Denotes a tune that would become a western swing standard

() Indicates alternate titles

Of the 104 tunes recorded by Milton Brown and His Musical Brownies,
-22 are from the blues tradition, often learned from recordings made by African American musicians including Big Bill Broonzy, The Mississippi Sheiks, Bill Gaither, Frankie "Half Pint" Jackson, Georgia Tom Dorsey, Bessie Smith, Memphis Minnie and more. These tunes, with simple chord structures, often risqué lyrics, catchy tunes made good material for dance halls when combined with the Brownie Beat.

- Nancy Jane+
- Joe Turner's Blues*+
- Garbage Man Blues (The Call of the Freaks)
- Where You Been So Long, Corrine?+ (Corrine Corrina, Sweet Maggie)
- Talking About You (I'm Talking About You)
- Just Sitting on Top of the World+
- Take It Slow and Easy
- Loveless Love+ (Careless Love)
- Pray For the Lights To Go Out
- A Good Man Is Hard To Find
- St. Louis Blues+
- Cheesy Breeze*
- Crafton Blues*+
- Somebody's Been Using That Thing
- Texas Hambone Blues+ (Blues Is Nothing, Old Weary Blues)
- Easy Ridin' Papa+ (Eagle Ridin' Papa)
- Memphis Blues
- The Hesitation Blues+
- Fan It+
- Tired of the Same Thing All the Time+
- Baby Keep Stealin' (Baby Keeps Stealin' Lovin' On Me)

-31 are pop hits or standards from Tin Pan Alley tradition, probably also learned from recordings. Some of these tunes may have carried over from Milton's time singing in a vocal trio and from Fred Calhoun's repertoire of songs from the 1920's. Models for these recordings include Sophie Tucker, Isham Jones, Bing Crosby, Ted Lewis, Ethel Waters, Vincent Lopez and other pop singers and "sweet" bands.

- Do the Hula Lou
- Loveland and You (I'd Love to Live in Loveland)
- Girl of My Dreams
- I Love You
- Sweet Jennie Lee
- The Object of My Affection
- Love In Bloom
- Chinatown, My Chinatown
- Some of These Days
- Wabash Blues
- Who's Sorry Now
- One of Us Was Wrong
- The House At the End of the Lane

- My Mary+
- You're Tired of Me
- Wheezy Anna
- In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree
- Our Baby Boy*
- I Had Someone Before I Had You (I Had Someone Else Before I Had You and I'll Have Someone Else After You're Gone)
- I've Got the Blues For Mammy
- Am I Blue?
- The Sweetheart of Sigma Chi
- An Old Water Mill by a Waterfall (An Old Water Mill)
- Show Me the Way to Go Home
- The Roseland Melody*
- When I Take My Sugar to Tea
- Right or Wrong
- Chinese Honeymoon (Hong Kong Honeymoon)
- Alice Blue Gown
- I'll String Along With You
- When It's Harvest Time, Sweet Angeline+
- A Thousand Good Nights

-3 tunes were Mexican tunes which were regionally popular. Two of which were vocal numbers sung by Derwood and Cecil Brower in Spanish. The inclusion of these tunes on the recording session speaks to the regional importance of Mexican music.⁴⁵

- In El Rancho Grande
- Cielito Lindo
- La Golondrina

-25 tunes were hot jazz numbers from the early jazz tradition, some of which were taught to the band by Papa Calhoun, others learned from recordings. Possible models for these recordings include King Oliver, Jimmy Noone, Casa Loma Orchestra, Fletcher Henderson, The Wolverines, The Rhythm Kings, Bing Crosby, Ben Bernie, Ted Lewis, Tiny Bradshaw, Al Jolson, Red Nichols and others.

- Brownie Stomp*
- Four, Five or Six Times+ (Four or Five Times)
- Put On Your Old Grey Bonnet
- Copenhagen
- I'll Be Glad When You're Dead You Rascal You (You Rascal You)
- Sweet Georgia Brown+
- Shine On, Harvest Moon+
- You're Bound to Look Like a Monkey When You Grow Old
- Taking Off*
- Darktown Strutters' Ball+
- The Sheik of Araby
- Beale Street Mama (Beale Street Papa)
- Mama Don't Allow It
- Stay On the Right Side Sister
- If You Can't Get Five Take Two

- Somebody Stole My Gal
- Washington and Lee Swing
- Avalon
- Sadie Green+ (The Vamp of New Orleans)
- My Galveston Gal (Dill Pickle Rag)
- Yes Sir! (Yes Suh!)
- Song of the Wanderer
- Goofus
- Ida Sweet as Apple Cider
- Keep A Knockin' But You Can't Come In+

-18 tunes were rural "hillbilly" tunes including breakdowns, cowboy songs, oral tradition pieces and traditional string band music. Most sources for these tunes seem to be local, although some may have been learned from radio or recordings.

- Sunbonnet Sue*
- Oh! You Pretty Woman*
- Swinging on the Garden Gate*
- Get Along, Cindy
- This Morning, This Evening, So Soon (The Crawdad Song) (I Had A Little Mule) (How Many Biscuits Can You Eat)
- Down by the O-H-I-O
- Brownie Special (The Davis Limited)
- Black and White Rag+
- Little Betty Brown
- Going Up Brushy Fork
- Mexicali Rose+
- The Eyes of Texas
- The Wheel of the Wagon Is Broken
- Under the Double Eagle
- When I'm Gone Don't You Grieve
- The Yellow Rose of Texas+ (The Song of the Texas Rangers)
- Carry Me Back to the Lone Prairie
- The Old Grey Mare (Down In Alabam) (Got Out of the Wilderness) (Ole Abe Lincoln)

-5 tunes were waltzes that would have been important to the customers at their frequent dances.

- My Precious Sonny Boy*
- Trinity Waltz*
- Beautiful Texas
- Just A Dream
- The Waltz You Saved For Me

It must be understood that this variety of repertoire became the norm for western swing after Brown's death. Not only was his approach copied, but many of the tunes he recorded (approximately 20) became standards in the style.⁴⁶ It is clear that the Brownie's choice of tunes cross geographical, racial, social and stylistic lines. This points clearly to issues of transmission that were new to the great depression.

Analysis of Recordings

In order to show more clearly that the Brownies music is a type of jazz, I have transcribed and/or analyzed several tunes by the Brownies. The first piece for analysis is *Takin' Off*, written by steel guitarist Bob Dunn. (Appendix I) This is a feature piece for Dunn that may not have had a written out melody but instead may have been viewed as a vehicle for improvisation. It has a 32 bar song form with four 8 bar sections. A harmonic analysis of the chord changes reveals a repeated use of the ii-V-I chord progression, the use of secondary dominants and even some diminished chords. Dunn melodic vocabulary includes chromatic notes, blue notes and cadential figures from Hawaiian music. Rhythmically, the piece is laid back for a Brownies recording, with lots of room for Dunn to show off his swinging style and hip phrasing. His swing feel is partly due to his use of ghost notes, which are notes played with much less emphasis than others.

When combined with other notes that are accented, we see Dunn playing in a highly developed swing style.

The first chorus of the piece, which features Dunn playing the tune, makes use of three motives that tie the chorus together. The first, labeled A and is a chromatic motive that occurs four times at the original pitch and twice in transposition. The second motive, labeled B is a rhythmic motive of one quarter note and two eighth notes that occurs nine times. The last motive is a cadential figure from traditional Hawaiian music that he plays twice.

This motivic development is characteristic of the best jazz soloists and is part of the jazz tradition.

The chord changes, the laid back swing feeling and the well developed improvisation of *Takin Off* show that it is part of the jazz tradition.

An example of a blues tune played by the Brownies is the 1934 recording of *Where You Been So Long*. This piece shows the special mixture of jazz, blues and folk music that western swing is. Each player on this recording shows

The form of the piece is based on 12 bar blues choruses. Each chorus as a specific spot in the arrangement with a clear orchestration. (Appendix II)

Because of the slow tempo and softer volume than other pieces, we can clearly hear Derwood Brown's guitar playing. It is filled with chromatic and adventurous bass runs that are highly reminiscent of Eddie Lang's accompaniment style. The fifth chorus is so virtuosic that it is difficult to decide if he is accompanying the twin fiddles or they are accompanying him! When he switches to a more straightforward style in the seventh chorus fiddle solo, we can hear him comping in a 4/4 style that includes some chromatic inner voices. This inner voices point to a real knowledge of the harmonic structure, a sense of orchestration and a well developed ear.

Papa Calhoun's piano playing is also among his best on this tune. He plays inventive fills behind the vocals and soloists that add harmonic and melodic texture without getting in the way of the swing feel. Sometimes, when he is playing fills and Derwood is playing his bass runs, they sound like a good dixieland band in the midst of collective improvisation. These were clearly players who had played together enough to know how to stay out of each other's way. His solo is chordally based and includes some nice barrel house blues sounds with a swing feel.

The twin fiddle sound is key to the recording and is an example of the sophistication of the Brownies at the time. Other bands that only had one fiddler (often just a breakdown fiddler) could allow that player to improvise all their parts to a piece without fear of them clashing. When you had two fiddles in the band, however, careful planning and a higher degree of skill are required to get a good musical product. This recording allowed Milton to show off that he had two fiddle players (Brower and Grantham) that could play in perfect harmony together AND improvise. They open the piece with the twin fiddles playing the tune and bring back the same part behind vocal choruses. When the third vocal chorus comes around, they break from the original twin fiddle part and play a series of riffs that heighten the rhythmic energy and sound like the sort of riffs a sax section would play. Brower's fiddle solo exhibits a strong swing feel, a knowledge of the chord changes, stylistic blues phrasing and melodic variation as he develops a riff throughout the solo.

The banjo and bass on this tune exhibit a rock solid sense of time that only comes from playing for dancing. The banjo plays four chords per bar for the entire piece, relentlessly driving it throughout. Ocie Stockard shows a well developed sense of dynamics and orchestration by altering his volume and chord voicings chorus by chorus. Wanna Coffman on bass alternates between a 2/4 and 4/4 feel through the piece, usually playing in four for soloists and two for vocals.

Overall this is a strong performance with good ensemble playing, a carefully crafted arrangement and tasteful solos. It exhibits the jazz characteristics of swing feel, improvised solos, blues melodic vocabulary and hot vocal style. I believe that this tune and others in the Brownies recorded legacy are as viable as any jazz performance of the same period.

Transmission

Scholars of country and folk music have long desired to study "authentic" performances by "real" people.⁴⁷ Wrapped up in these musical labels are values that are often in fact assigned to the culture by outsiders (scholars), including ideas about how string band music could or should have been learned by musicians. The scholarship of Boyd and Ginell has showed us clearly that during the great depression, records and radio figured prominently in the transmission of repertoire and style.⁴⁸ Although there is some evidence in the aural histories of Jean Boyd and Cary Ginell of western swing musicians having personal and musical contact with African American blues and jazz musicians, most western swing musicians seemed to have been more influenced by what they heard on radio and recordings.⁴⁹ In fact, Jean Boyd states in her introduction that every musician interviewed for her oral histories had a close connection to the radio as a learning tool. In his book *American Musical Life*, Crawford discusses the importance of radio for the transmission of music in the 1930's.

By 1930, a previously unheard of variety of music, including classical and even folk, was becoming available to listeners across a wide geographical, ethnic and, economic spectrum.⁵⁰

Not only were “outside” types of music such as jazz and classical available on the radio; but every station featured local talent, thus spreading repertoire, playing styles and techniques quickly through local areas.⁵¹

We have already seen above how much of the Brownies repertoire was learned from media sources, it is obvious that it was vital to the development of their sound.

Not only was the media important for learning material, but it also spread the Brownies music to a wider audience. For most of the time the Brownies were together, they played radio broadcasts and a dance daily! Because Milton had no exclusive sponsor for these programs, he could promote their almost nightly dances at rural dance halls. In the summer of 1935, Milton broadcast his radio shows on the Quality Network, a large radio network that reached all the way to Arkansas, Mississippi and Alabama, along with Texas and Oklahoma.⁵² This not only created a larger audience for his music but spread his style and influence all over the Southwest. Other groups who changed their style after hearing the Brownies include the Hi-Fliers, the Rhythm Aces, Bill Boyd’s Cowboy Ramblers, Leon Chappelle’s Lone Star Cowboys, Doug Bine and the Dixie Ramblers, Leon Pappy Selph’s Blue Ridge Boys, Adolph Hoffner and Hank Penny and the Radio Cowboys. Even if these groups are not currently household names, they were all on some level regionally successful and contained musicians who would later play with the more famous bands of Bob Wills and Spade Cooley, on television and movies in Hollywood and later as staff musicians at recording sessions in Nashville and California. This was one of the ways that the Brownies musical innovations eventually worked their way into musical mainstream of country, honky-tonk and early rock n roll.

The Undermining of Jazz credibility

There are several characteristics of the Brownies specifically and Western Swing in general that have stopped record companies, historians and other musicians from viewing this music as jazz. First, jazz is normally viewed as an urban art form. The traditional urban centers for jazz are coastal: New York, New Orleans and Los Angeles. If we take into account the migration of jazz up the Mississippi in the first part of the 20th century, then we may also include Kansas City, St. Louis and Chicago. Anything geographically between these places is by lack of attention considered a sort of wasteland, not only by jazz historians, but by historians of other genres.⁵³ The Brownies a product of rural musical training and they were from a region that was never considered part of the jazz tradition.

Even if the majority of the musicians in the style were from the Southwest, at the height of its popularity, western swing was a larger phenomenon than we give it credit. In the introduction to their discography, Ginell and Coffey state,

During this fourteen year period (1928-1942), the style grew, developed, and mutated, changing its face, chameleon like, from year to year. It began as a representation of Texas dance music with two instruments: fiddle and guitar. Eventually, it grew in size, volume and sophistication, adding uptown vocals and more complex instrumentation.

By World War II it had become one of the country’s most popular musical styles...By this time (1944) the formative years of western swing were over, with dozens of bands recording hundreds of sides from coast to coast. Despite its

popularity and
underrepresented
American life.⁵⁴

durability, western swing has since been one of the most
and ignored of twentieth century musical styles unique to

The most difficult issue in the western swing problem is race. Racial issues figure prominently in every aspect of jazz history, with many jazz styles tied to a racial ideology as well as a musical aesthetic. One common view is that African American musicians are the originators and white musicians are the thieves. Of course, every stereotype does hold some truth, but it may be that jazz historians have undervalued the contributions of white jazz musicians, especially in the early years of jazz. As a product of a segregated Southern culture, Western Swing is a “lily white” tradition, with little documented evidence of African Americans and whites playing together. Western swing’s white southern identity makes its inclusion in the jazz timeline problematic for the jazz scholar that is focused on African American identity in jazz.

We must also consider that string instruments are relatively rare in jazz. Of course there is a rich tradition of guitarists, violinists and banjoists in jazz, but they do not hold the prominent place that horns, piano and drums do. It is easy to see why a record company, a historian or a jazz fan would see a band with mostly string instruments as disconnected from jazz.

When they were active, the Brownies were not called western swing, they were called a fiddle band or even a hillbilly band. Both terms were used by the music industry to describe string bands.⁵⁵

Western swing’s cowboy image has also helped push it away from the jazz tradition. When the Brownies played, they either wore matching suits or sweaters. They look like any other swing band from the 1930s. In fact, they are probably the least western of western swing bands. After Milton died and the focus turned to other bands such as Bob Wills, the cowboy image took over as the dominant one of the style. When the cowboy image gained even greater popularity because of Hollywood, western swing became even more western, until it developed into honky tonk, country western and finally, just country. It is ironic that this cowboy image that alienates western swing from jazz was in fact part of an effort to seem less hillbilly and more sophisticated! Bob Wills once said in Time magazine, “Please don’t confuse us with none of those hillbilly outfits.”⁵⁶ One way that western swing bands distanced themselves is by donning the “cowboy” image instead of the popular “old timer” and “hillbilly” images from barn dance broadcasts.⁵⁷ In fact, western swing was just too rural for jazz and too urban for country.

These issues of race, instrumentation and geography have made Western Swing hard to place in the jazz history timeline, especially if we continue to clutch to the linear, African American centered, neo-traditionalist paradigm popularized by Wynton Marsalis and Ken Burns. This approach shows jazz history as a stream that flows from blues to dixieland to swing to bob etc... Viewing jazz history in this fashion removes the tributaries from the stream, making it easier to study as we ignore cross fertilization with other musical cultures. If we can accept a broader view of American music that allows for musical hybrids, transmission by recorded media and the stretching of racial stereotypes, I believe that we can illuminate the history of jazz and American music as a even richer and diverse than we have previously conceived.

Further Research

While studying western swing generally and the Brownies specifically, many further questions have been raised and several new lines of research have become clear. First, a detailed set of transcriptions of western swing recordings by other groups is necessary in order for a comparison to be made between western swing, early jazz and mainstream swing. Such a comparison could include examinations of form, harmony, melody and improvisational style. Later western swing groups such as Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, Sons of the Pioneers and Jimmy West and Speedy Bryant all had different cultural and musical influences than the Brownies and therefore merit their own analysis. Examples of this could include the effect of the bop style on 1950s western swing musicians, the music written and recorded for the hollywood cowboy culture and the inclusion of winds and brass in the western swing orchestra.

Second, a study of modern groups who are referential to the style, such as Asleep At the Wheel, Riders In the Sky, Asylum Street Spankers, George Strait and Hot Club of Cowtown, could add a more current perspective to the field and could point to a study of the western swing aesthetic materials that are now imbedded in pop and country music. This includes the use of electric guitars, drum sets and steel guitar, as well as certain rhythmic and improvisational elements, therefore illuminating western swings connections to honky-tonk, rockabilly, early rock n roll and other styles.

Third, the oral history work started by Jean Boyd, from University of Texas-Austin, must be continued so that no story is left untold. There are other musicians, especially those active in the 1950s that are still living, some of which can offer insights.

Fourth, the Hawaiian music craze of the 1920s that brought the ukulele and steel guitar into mainland American culture must be more fully explored. The steel guitar in western swing, honky tonk and country music and the resophonic guitar or dobro in bluegrass developed somehow from the Hawaiian style, but much work needs to be done in order to learn how this occurred.

Fifth, the transmission of musical style and repertoire during the great depression must be further investigated. The amazing musical cross pollination that occurred during this time sowed the seeds for American popular music for the rest of the 20th century. The development of other roots music styles in the depression owe an equal debt to depression era media and deserve further study.

Lastly, the history of the African American territory bands of the Southwest needs to be reexamined in a more musically inclusive historical context. Even if segregation kept these black bands apart from white western swing groups, there must be some musical and historical connection between these two dynamic traditions.⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that African American jazz musicians from the Southwest, such as Charlie Christian, the Count Basie Orchestra, Jack Teagarden and Herschel Evans, are generally considered as hard swinging players that show a particular rhythmic drive that is related to their geographical upbringing.

Conclusion

Jazz history has always been closely connected to geographical issues. Styles and musicians are often discussed in reference to the places where they made their careers. Terms such as “dixieland,” “Chicago style,” “west coast” and “Kansas City style” demonstrate this phenomenon. Historians should not separate musicians from the

cultural and social conditions in which they existed; to do so would ignore the humanity and identity of the individual musicians. But, we must not let western swing's unique social context overshadow this music's identity as a jazz style.

So the big question remains, is this jazz? It has a swing feeling, hot improvisation and a repertoire influenced by jazz and blues, all vital characteristics of jazz. Other factors that undermine its jazz credibility, such as the cowboy image, the string based instrumentation and the influence of string band music, are only regional cultural factors that make it different and special. As Jean Boyd stated in her book *The Jazz of the Southwest*, "Jazz is not a type of music, as the Italian Renaissance madrigal is a type of music, but rather an approach to making music that involves personal interpretation, improvisation, and a unique rhythmic method."⁵⁹ If that is true, then western swing must be viewed as a legitimate jazz style, regardless of its hillbilly reputation.