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After 100 Years: Still Making a Joyful Noise

UM Jazz Ensemble celebrating centennial anniversary with Dec. 8 concert in Natchez

DECEMBER 2, 2022 BY EDWIN B. SMITH

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The UM Jazz Ensemble performs its first centennial concert earlier this fall at the Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts. Submitted photo

OXFORD, Miss. – What do Reader's Digest, the Lincoln Memorial and the **University of Mississippi** Jazz Ensemble have in common? They each turned 100 in 2022.

The UM Jazz Ensemble will celebrate its centennial with a special performance Thursday (Dec. 8) during the Mississippi Band Directors Association State Band Clinic in the Natchez Convention Center. Showtime is at 4 p.m. in the Mississippi Suite. Admission is free and open to the public.

This is the second centennial performance for the band this year.

"We will give another performance of 'New Blood,' a piece we commissioned from legendary jazz composer John Clayton to commemorate our centennial," said Michael Worthy, professor of **music** and director of the ensemble. "We will also perform some music from the 1920s as a nod to the music that started this remarkable legacy at Ole Miss."

Where It All Started

The jazz ensemble "evolved" more so than being "founded," according to Worthy.

"Our lineage goes back to the 1890s," he said. "A picture of the 'orchestra' appears in the 1897 Ole Miss yearbook. The group adds minstrel singers and the instrumentation slowly evolves into the instruments that were common in early New Orleans jazz."



Early on, the student groups were performing dance music such as cakewalks, marches and rags, all immediate precursors to jazz. The group first appears in the 1922 yearbook identified as the Ole Miss Jazz Orchestra.

This was just around the time that Buddy Bolden and the musicians identified as "the pioneers" of jazz were making music in the 1910s. Jelly Roll Morton was active during this same period, as was the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, which made the first recording of jazz in 1917. Louis Armstrong rose to prominence and Fletcher Henderson's band started organizing in sections like we have today in the 1920s.

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Campus Briefs

Donations Sought for 25th Annual Books and Bears Program

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children's play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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Mayo Lab to Help Combat Substance Misuse, Mental Health Issues

OXFORD, Miss. – Thomas Hayes Mayo, a 21-year-old University of Mississippi student, loved his friends and college life. Described as "a great friend that lit up every room he entered" by fellow students, he died April 14, 2022, from fentanyl poisoning. "Thomas always wore a smile and appeared full of endless joy," said his dad,

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Ole Miss In the News

Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith's Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith's enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith's 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school's first African-American student. "James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier," a

A jazz ensemble first appeared in the Ole Miss yearbook in 1897, identified only as the 'Orchestra.'

"I like to imagine that the Ole Miss students of the 1920s were just as tuned in to emerging musical trends as students are today," Worthy said. "Jazz was just as rebellious, anti-establishment and dangerous in the 1920s as rock 'n' roll and rap were in their beginnings."

Enter the Mississippians

The UM group adopted the name **The Mississippians Jazz Ensemble** in 1927.

"We are certainly one of the first, if not the first, university jazz ensembles," Worthy said. "In their first 50 years, The Mississippians performed at social functions, gave concerts and toured throughout the South."

In the late 1960s, Bob Jordan was the first full-time faculty member to lead the band as an official course, said David Willson, director emeritus of university bands and professor emeritus of music. Jordan's successor, John McCauley, started a second jazz band named The Collegians and reintroduced The Mississippians as the premier jazz band in the spring of 1975.

"Tom Lanardo is a professional drummer and composer that wrote a few tunes for the band about 1970," Willson said. "One was called 'The Dragon' and was published and did well. I have a score and the original price was \$5."

Oxford native Billy Cole was also in the Mississippians. A friend of Andrew Fox, another Oxford native and former UM music theory teacher, Cole arranged many tunes for the band and even composed a few.

"One of Billy's compositions was called 'A Cona Cream,'" Willson said. "The title came from the slang used in late '40s early '50s and meant 'Do you want to go get a cone of ice cream?'"

Kevin Cole, also of Oxford, played in the Mississippians in the 1970s and has been director of The Collegians Jazz Ensemble, the university's second band, for a number of years. The Ole Miss Jazz Alumni group held annual reunions through the early 2000s.

Same Sound, New Blood

Students in the ensemble say they are proud to be continuing the group's tradition and music a century later.

"The most rewarding part of the ensemble is just the art of jazz itself," said Matthew Tidwell, a sophomore and lead trumpet player. "I enjoy the culture and class of jazz. Performing jazz is the most fun I've had since the elementary school playground."

"It may sound silly, but it feels like my own personal rock star saga getting to jam out on stage side-by-side with 16 of the coolest people you will ever meet."

Tidwell said his favorite performance so far was for a jazz honor band in New Albany.

"It was probably one of the smallest that we've done, but my family and some people from my hometown were there," he said. "Afterward, the whole band talked to the high schoolers who were learning how to do jazz."

"I feel like that meant more to that small group of high schoolers than it would have for anyone else. I was glad to be able to be a part of someone's jazz origin story."



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collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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The university's jazz band adopted the name **The Mississippians Jazz Ensemble** in 1927 and appeared in that year's Ole Miss yearbook.