

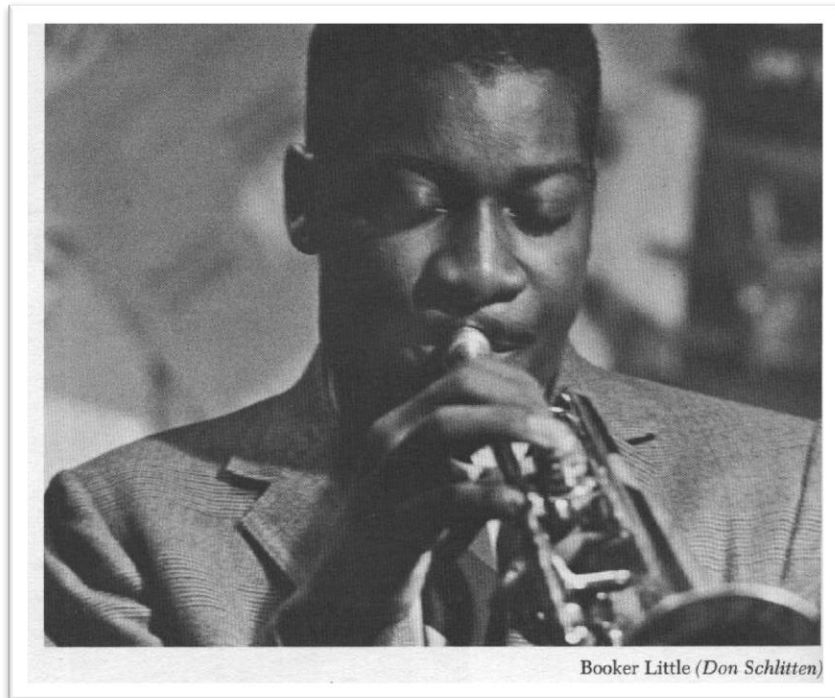
Manassas in the 1950s: Cultivating a Jazz Tradition

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I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment; nor have I witnessed such violation of the honor code

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Memphis has become a city with a national musical identity. When you cross the bridge of the Mississippi River, the sign reads: “Home of the blues and the birthplace of rock n’ roll.” Memphis has always been known for its association with Elvis, the blues, and many different types of music. However, there is a hidden genre in the city, one that has touched all corners of the globe—jazz. The famous and notorious Beale Street has preserved blues and jazz for decades, and Memphis has been the cradle of music geniuses and the witness of many historical moments in music history. But inside the vibrant city of Memphis lies a plot of land on the corner of Firestone and Manassas that played a special role in the story, known to many as the site of the old Manassas High School.

At Manassas, there was a tradition of music that was cultivated for many generations to witness and experience, allowing for a rich musical chronicle at the school. Many musicians came from this particular campus, and their stories are of great interest and raise many questions. For example, how did Charles Lloyd, Frank Strozier, Hank Crawford, Isaac Hayes, Harold Mabern, Booker Little and George Coleman come from the same high school in Memphis, TN? My hope is to illustrate how this tradition was molded into something unique: a fantastic story, full of history, on a street in Memphis at Manassas High School. Understanding all the pieces of the story will allow for a greater understanding of this particular phenomenon, showing how important and influential Manassas was in the 1950s. Thus, the main point is to delve deep into the roots of jazz in Memphis and Manassas High, as well as to provide an account of how this tradition of jazz unfolded in the School. Of the school and the legacy it influence it had on the world of music, jazz legend Miles Davis once wrote:

Before I left New York I had had tryouts for the band and that’s where I got all those Memphis musicians—Coleman, Strozier, and Mabern. (They had gone to

school with the great young trumpet player Booker Little... I wonder what they were doing down there when all them guys came through that one school?)¹

Only three to choose

During the 1950s and early 60s in Memphis, TN, there were “very few opportunities for blacks,”² states Memphis and Manassas musician Sidney Kirk. With regards to education, there were a limited number of high schools for African-Americans to attend. There were three schools to choose in Memphis: Melrose, Booker T. Washington, and Manassas. The methodology behind what school one attended was that of geographical zoning. With regards to Melrose, since its humble beginnings in the late 1800’s, [it] has been the pride of the Orange Mound neighborhood. From its Park Avenue location to its present site, Melrose has been the school of choice for generations of Orange Mound families.³ Booker T. Washington, another school with a long and storied musical tradition, provided its educational services to those of South Memphis students.⁴ Manassas High was the school for the residents of North Memphis.⁵ “The three were very competitive with one another,”⁶ recalls John Cade, a graduate of the class of 1956. While

¹ Miles, Davis Quincy Troupe, and Jure Potokar, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1989), 262.

² Sidney Kirk, Personal interview, 9 July 2012.

³ Melrose High School: Our History, MCSK12.net (Accessed on July 18 2012)
<http://www.mcsk12.net/schools/melrose.hs/site/documents/MELROSEHISTORY.pdf>

⁴ Floyd Newman, Personal interview, 21 June 2012.

⁵ John Cade and James Lynn, Personal interview, 19 July 2012.

⁶ Ibid.

some see this as limited opportunity and as a setback for these particular students—and it was—one could argue that this particular experience was an opportunity for strong communities to be established. Cade continues, “We were unified with one another.”⁷ Therefore, this allowed for all talent (musical talent especially), education and success and all walks of life to be concentrated into just three institutions.

Manassas High School was established in 1899, by Spencer Johnson, J.A. Phillips, J.D Harper, Godfrey Hack, W.F Finney C. McCombs, Rev. Williams Young and Mr. Dunnaway.⁸ Manassas got its name from the first major civil war battle on July 21st 1861, the Battle of Manassas.⁹ Set on the corner of Manassas and Firestone, the institution has become a Memphis icon, being the first accredited [African American] school in Shelby County.¹⁰ “The people of the community built this school,”¹¹ claims historian Earlice Taylor, proving the importance and meaning the school has to the area and to Memphis. With accomplishments and standards set by the school, examining its history will provide a necessary background in order to understand this cultivated musical mystery.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Fifty-Third Anniversary of Manassas School: 1900-1953 Memphis, Tennessee,” Manassas High School Archives, Manassas High School. Memphis, TN. June 2012.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ All information is gathered from a group of papers provided by Earlice Taylor.

Manassas High was originally a very modest structure: “a two room frame structure erected on the west side of Manassas Street, north of the Belt Line.”¹² Throughout the years, much must be accredited towards its leaderships, primarily the principals throughout the years. William H. Foote was the first principal of Manassas, who was later on succeeded by one of the most well known educators and a driving force behind the success of Manassas, Mrs. Cora Taylor.¹³ During her tenure, the creation of a powerhouse high school was underway. It was when Mrs. Taylor resumed authority, the school moved in a fast, positive manner. Academics, athletics, and all facets of the school were succeeding, including the expansion of their campus.¹⁴ Mrs. Taylor spearheaded two projects that would put Manassas High School on the map as a school full of excellence and musical tradition: the move to the new campus and the arrival of Jimmie Lunceford. In 1918, the corner of Manassas and Firestone saw the completion of a much larger building, allowing for education and success to launch. This plot of land was given as a donation by one of the founders Spencer Johnson,¹⁵ who gave the school a chance and for room to succeed. Mrs. Taylor continued her guidance as principal and in 1926; and she and Manassas would be changed forever.

¹² Addie Jones, E.A Teague, and Willa McWilliams, "The History of Manassas," Early Educators, Memphis City Schools. (Accessed on June 10 2012)
<http://www.memphistechhigh.com/3-blackeducation/historyofManassas.pdf>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Manassas High School Archives. Manassas High School. Memphis, TN. June 2012.



Figure 1: Old Manassas High School¹⁶

“It was around 1926, however that Mrs. Taylor secured the services of the illustrious Jimmie Lunceford. He came directly from Fisk University. His renowned and famous band had its beginning at Manassas School.”¹⁷ This is where the beginning of the tradition starts. Mrs. Cora Taylor’s decision to bring Mr. Lunceford to Manassas was one of historical importance. Little did she know that Mr. Lunceford would create one of the top musical programs in the country and begin to cultivate the top jazz programs of its time. Lunceford and his creation of the Manassas High School band is an answer to this mystery, one that must be examined in the future.

After Mrs. Taylor’s tenure, J. Ashton Hayes became principal of Manassas (no relation to the future Manassas student Isaac Hayes). Principal Hayes continued and allowed for the success and musical genius to linger through the halls of Manassas during his time. My goal is to examine what Manassas brought to jazz in the 1950s, and show how the tradition of jazz was created and cultivated. As the great Memphis saxophonist

¹⁶ “Early Educators, Memphis City Schools. Web. (Accessed on June 10 2012)
<http://www.memphistechhigh.com/blackeducation.html>

¹⁷ Ibid.

Floyd Newman said, “There were many great musicians over where I was at Booker T. But over at Manassas: Those were the superstars!”¹⁸

The Big City in the Delta

A second factor to examine in the cultivation of the tradition is the location of Memphis. Located in the Mississippi Delta, Memphis has become the city of destination for many who live in the region. In the early years, “the growth of Memphis as a major economic and political center for the upper Mississippi Valley was tied to cotton, slavery, and to developments in transportation.”¹⁹ In the 1920s, Phobe and Vernon Omlie “settled in Memphis to establish the first airport in the mid-south.”²⁰ This allowed for movement to be brought to Memphis, and allow for the continuation of its growth. With the smaller cities in and around Memphis, it has developed as the area of destination. Many families were uprooted from their homes in the Delta and traveled to Memphis, hoping to find jobs, education, and opportunities for the betterment of their lives. Exploring Memphis in the 1950s will further validate the importance Memphis had on the lives of individuals, but more particularly how it influenced the musical tradition at Manassas.

“It was very pronounced,” remembers John Cade, Manassas graduate and long-term Memphian. Referred to as the “fabulous fifties” by Beverly G. Bond and Janann Sherman, Memphis appeared to be the place to be, a booming city during the 1950s. “We

¹⁸ Floyd Newman, Personal interview, 21 June 2012.

¹⁹ Beverly G Bond and Janann Sherman, *Memphis in Black and White* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 26.

²⁰ Bond and Sherman, *Memphis in Black and White*, 97.

had Firestone, International Harvest,” Cade and Lynn both remember.²¹ Memphis was an industrial city, with great opportunities for all. There were jobs and places for individuals to receive an education. Men found work in the industrial sector, while women were nurses or other jobs around Memphis.²² Lynn remembers, “Everyone lived very comfortably back in the ol’ days, it was cheap.”²³ Even though the 1950s brought hardship and turmoil to society due to tense racial differences and social inequalities, there were opportunities for success in Memphis. The launch of WDIA radio in the 1948 helped bridge the gap between races and provided entertainment for all, who “took a giant leap into black programming.”²⁴ A man by the name of Riley King came to WDIA, who gave opportunities for local musicians, including Manassas’ Teen Town Singers.²⁵ With respect to music, Memphis has always been known as a music city. Sidney Kirk comments on the city of Memphis and opportunities for economic growth and success because of music. He recalls, “A lot of people were inspired to do music because it gave them some kind of opportunity to make a living doing what they like.”²⁶ In the 1950s, hard bop, mainstream, and cool jazz crossed the river into the city of Memphis. Beale Street continued to provide entertainment for the city, as well as jobs for the musicians

²¹ John Cade and James Lynn, Personal Interview, 19 July 2012.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Bond, Beverly G, and Sherman, Janann. *Memphis in Black and White*, 120.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Sidney Kirk, Personal Interview, 9 July 2012.

themselves. “Jazz was cool back then,”²⁷ says James Lynn, another graduate of Manassas and Memphis native. There were huge opportunities for musicians in Memphis, ranging from recording contracts to Beale Street to clubs across town. In addition, music in the 1950s for Memphis changed with the rise of Sun Studios. Over time, Sam Phillips, owner of Sun Studios, helped create the international music icon known to all as Elvis Presley.²⁸ Elvis Presley’s first concert was “to a sold-out crowd at the Overton Park Shell on a hot July night in 1954.”²⁹ However, there were more musical careers being built just a few blocks over at Manassas High School. Manassas in the 1950s capitalized on Memphis during this time, allowing for the perfect storm to be created.

Memphis is Music

When the city of Memphis is being discussed, the first word many associate it with is music. A third factor to explore is the influence and theme of Memphis is music. With respect to music in Memphis, the history of music within the city has been vibrant through the decades, although this history is usually thought of in terms of blues and rock n’ roll. With respect to jazz, understanding this style of music during the 1950s will offer perception on music in Memphis, and its role as part of the curriculum at Manassas.

In today’s society, jazz continues its decline in popularity, but this was not always the case. It can be stated that jazz was at its peak during the 20s and 30s, with musicians

²⁷ John Cade and James Lynn, Personal Interview, 19 July 2012.

²⁸ Bond and Sherman, *Memphis in Black and White*, 124-5.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 125.

“spreading the globe as ambassadors of jazz.”³⁰ When jazz reached the 50s, it faced new forms of competition, especially with the evolution of rock n’ roll.³¹ Its success became overshadowed with the formation of new genres. However, there is a hidden success that demonstrates jazz was successful in the 1950s. Celebrated artists such as Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins and a host of others were producing albums and making their important mark on jazz history. The former styles of swing of the 1920s and 1930s and hard bebop of the 1940s fostered the “mainstream, hard bop, cool and bossa nova styles of jazz in the 1950s.”³² Whether it was Rollins’ *Saxophone Colossus* in 1956 or Miles Davis’ *Kind of Blue* in 1959,³³ the impact of jazz in the 1950s was very strong.

When discussing the influence jazz had in Memphis during the 1950s, it must be noted that Memphis has always been associated with the blues and rock n’ roll, while jazz was somewhat of a hidden genre. Manassas alumni and jazz pianist Harold Mabern says it best when discussing the theme of Memphis music and jazz, saying:

There were some fine jazz musicians in Memphis, like Phineas Newborn, Jr., who I’ve always said was a musical genius. But if you wanted to make a living as a jazz musician in Memphis, you were also forced to play rhythm and blues music. At the time, we all thought it was taking away from our time with jazz. But now I realize what a joy it was. It takes a special kind of feel that all great improvisers like Charlie Parker and Clifford Brown understood. In fact, I think of myself as a bluespianist who understands jazz.³⁴

³⁰ "Jazz Timeline," A Passion for Jazz, 1998-2012. (Accessed on July 21 2012)
<http://www.apassion4jazz.net/timeline.html>

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Piero Scaruffi, "Best Jazz Albums of the 1950's." (Accessed on July 21 2012)
<http://www.scaruffi.com/jazz/50.html>

³⁴ Harold Mabern, “Harold Mabern: Legendary jazz pianist.” (Accessed on 24 July 2012)
<http://www.haroldmabern.com/biography/>

The Neighborhood of North Memphis: “The Village”

The fourth factor that must be examined to further explain the formation of the musical tradition was the neighborhood that surrounded Manassas High in the 1950s. Manassas High was located in North Memphis, which was separated into a multitude of smaller areas.³⁵ John Cade referred to the Manassas area as “a village,”³⁶ a term that portrays the area and its relationship to the school perfectly. Describing the different areas of North Memphis, who lived there during the time, as well as demonstrating the village’s importance to Manassas will prove the essential nature the neighborhood is to Manassas’ musical success.

When discussing the area of the neighborhood, it is important to illustrate the unique and different names for the districts. This is where the term “village” is coined, due to the different areas bearing different names, yet working as a cohesive group. Janice Day Pettis, class of 1957, wrote a piece titled “Getting it all together,” a title she defines as one to “create, involve, organize, to interact. To project that which is meaningful and good to a cross-section of individuals.”³⁷ Sharing a portion of her writing shows the atmosphere of the neighborhood and the way people felt about Manassas and the area that surrounded it.

³⁵ All information was gathered by a group of papers provided by Earlice Taylor.

³⁶ John Cade and James Lynn, Personal Interview, 10 July 2012.

³⁷ Pettis, Janis Day, “Getting it together.” Manassas High School Archives. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

Manassas' voice rang out like a cry in the wilderness pleading, "give me your children from Dixie Holmes, Bear Water, Mollentown, New Chelsea, Scuttlefield, New Chicago, Klondike, Binghampton, Douglas, Smoky City, Charles bottoms, and I will create their despair into boundless ambition... The voice of Manassas reached us all... Now we're getting it together."³⁸

In Pettis' piece, she mentioned the different sections of the neighborhood. In addition to the ones mentioned, there were more that should be made known as well. There was Hyde Park and the Firestone area that were both integral parts to the formation of the neighborhood.

Klondyke was the home to many jazz greats and faculty that were at Manassas during the 1950s. Booker Little, Emerson Able, and Earlice Taylor were some of the most prominent musicians to call Klondyke home.³⁹ With respect to Hyde Park, legendary saxophonists Hank Crawford and Frank Strozier lived in Hyde during their days at Manassas.⁴⁰ Other jazz greats occupied the differing areas in the neighborhood, creating a diverse makeup in the area.

When asking most musicians where they started his or her musical playing or was introduced to music, many reply with the church. Throughout history, the role of the church has played an important part in many facets of life, whether it be politics, music, and religion. With respect to the jazz tradition at Manassas in the 1950s, there were churches in the neighborhood that many students and their families attended; some which started their careers in the sanctuary. Singer Earlice Taylor began in the church at an early age, and still credits gospel music and her musical experience in the church to her

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ All information was gathered by a group of papers provided by Earlice Taylor.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

success. Isaac Hayes and a host of others also were affected by the music of the church, and it is important to know that the churches in the Manassas neighborhood attributed to the creation of the jazz tradition at Manassas in the 1950s.

What was the neighborhood like in the 1950s? “We were proud,”⁴¹ claimed Taylor about the individuals in the neighborhood. Many businesses and individuals supported what was occurring at Manassas,⁴² which allowed for achievement at the School. For example, Frank Strozier’s father owned a drug store in the neighborhood on Chelsea street,⁴³ and had a great relationship with Manassas. There were also many nightclubs and theatres for music and the arts to be present in the neighborhood. Curry’s Tropicana was the famous jazz club in North Memphis⁴⁴ that provided an opportunity to neighborhood musicians (especially those who went to Manassas) to get experience, as well as provide entertainment for all. Many identified the neighborhood as a community, a family one could say, which was why it was very important for Manassas and the musical tradition in the 1950s.

The support system the neighborhood provided for Manassas fostered a great relationship between the School and the suburbs within the neighborhood. It shows “how a community came together to literally build a school,”⁴⁵ and in this case a musical tradition of jazz. There were many musicians that were “produced from our

⁴¹ Earlice Taylor, Personal Interview, 20 June 2012.

⁴² All information was gathered by a group of papers provided by Earlice Taylor.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ John Cade and James Lynn, Personal Interview, 19 July 2012.

⁴⁵ Addie D Jones, *Portrait of a Ghetto School*, Epilogue.

neighborhood,”⁴⁶ Earlice Taylor remembers. “You didn't look at yourself as somebody, but you were.”⁴⁷ The Village made sure you knew you were somebody, and its influence helped produce the jazz tradition in the 1950s at Manassas.

The founder of the tradition: Jimmie Lunceford

The fifth cause for the jazz tradition at Manassas in the 1950s was the legacy of what Jimmie Lunceford left behind. Claimed by many as the first jazz educator in the world, Jimmie Lunceford was the one who started it all at Manassas. Mr. Lunceford created a musical powerhouse at the School. “James Melvin ‘Jimmie’ Lunceford was born June 6, 1902, on the family farm...in the northeastern part of Mississippi.”⁴⁸ With the already mentioned help of Principal Cora Taylor, he arrived at Manassas in 1926, “as an athletics and musical instructor.”⁴⁹ “In 1927, the Chickasaw Syncopators were created of Manassas students, with student bassist Mose Allen and drummer Jimmy Crawford.”⁵⁰ Thinking like an innovator, Mr. Lunceford decided to take high school students and form a band that would later on become one of the most famous bands to play jazz. After time in Memphis, they “took their act to Harlem and performed at the legendary Cotton Club

⁴⁶ Earlice Taylor, Personal Interview, 20 June 2012.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Eddy Determeyer, *Rhythm is our Business: Jimmie Lunceford and the Harlem Express* (Ann Arbor : 2006), 1-2.

⁴⁹ Article on Jimmie Lunceford. Manassas High School Archives. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

with Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway.⁵¹ They later would change their name from the Chickasaw Syncopators to the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra.⁵²

It is almost incomprehensible to imagine that the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra was started by students and a teacher at Manassas High School in Memphis, TN. With such a strong foundation that Mr. Lunceford and his students left, it allowed for the teachings of the trio of directors that cultivated the jazz tradition at the school.

The directors: Garrett, Horne, and Able

When an individual or group excels at an activity or profession, one can attest that teaching played an active role in that success. Without Matt Garrett, Onzie Horne, and Emerson Able, the long musical tradition at Manassas would not be possible. Thus, the seventh factor to explore the importance in the teachings of the directors during the 1950s.

Matthew Garrett

Matthew Garrett was born in 1927 in Newport, Kentucky, where he was introduced to music in high school to the trumpet.⁵³ Garrett moved to Memphis in 1949, where he took over as the band director.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Matthew Garrett, interview by John Bass.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

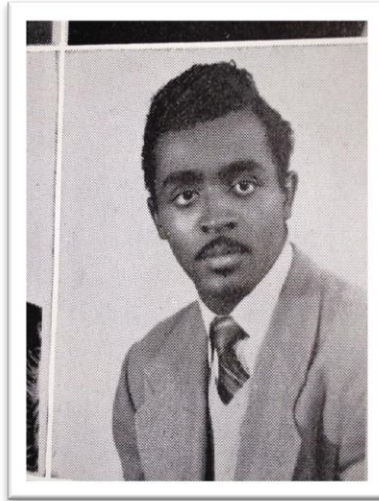


Figure 2: Matthew Garrett listed as band director in the 1952 yearbook

Seemingly unaware of the tradition and legendary Jimmie Lunceford and his works, he brought a unique and more modern teaching to his band, and through this, taught the greats Booker Little, Charles Lloyd, George Coleman, Harold Mabern, Frank Strozier, and many more. “We just did things differently,” claims Garrett. “We would have band practice at lunch time or during homeroom. They just enjoyed that immensely.”⁵⁵ They instantly became the best program around, and it was evident in Memphis. Mr. Garrett was the creator of the jazz orchestra named the Rhythm Bombers. He arranged the tunes for the group, and with their unique talent and teaching, became one of the most famed bands around, with figure three showing one of their performances at the Annual Show, an event put on by Manassas students each year for musical and artistic entertainment.

⁵⁵ Ibid.



Figure 3: Rhythm Bombers performing at the Annual Show in 1955⁵⁶

“They were very special,”⁵⁷ remembers Garrett. Following the tenure of Matthew Garrett, another director kept the tradition growing: Onzie Horne Sr.

Onzie Horne Sr.

The second of the trio of great directors was Onzie Horne Sr. He was a prominent citizen of Memphis, and his experiences make his time at Manassas as band director extremely beneficial. He was the owner of the Living Room, a prominent club and restaurant in Memphis.⁵⁸ Mr. Horne was also an accomplished musical composer and arranger.⁵⁹ His works were played by jazz greats Duke Ellington and Count Bassie.⁶⁰ He

⁵⁶ Manassas High School Yearbook: 1955. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

⁵⁷ Matthew Garrett, Interview by John Bass.

⁵⁸ “Onzie O. Horne, Sr. Feted With Brass Note On Beale Street And Recipient Of W.C. Handy Award.” Manassas High School Archives. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

was also the first African American to direct the Chicago Symphony.⁶¹ During the 1950s, Manassas was introduced to the renowned artist, and his arrival influenced much of the tradition during this time.

With his teaching and experience, Onzie Horn Sr. mentored many jazz greats from Manassas such as Hank Crawford, Charles Lloyd, George Coleman, Sidney Kirk and other Memphis musicians including Phineas Newborn.⁶² Sidney Kirk remembers his experiences at Manassas, directly thinking of Horne. “I was influenced by Horne,”⁶³ Kirk says. Even with his guidance with his students, it was his involvement with Memphis that continued the flame of the musical tradition. He was the musical director at the Palace Theatre, the Old and New Daisy Theatre, the Flamingo, and all Beale Street venues, “featuring the best big band music, jazz, blues and theatrical venues that toured America.”⁶⁴ This was advantageous for his talented students at Manassas, giving them experience and insight into the music world.

Emerson Able

Emerson Able was the last band director to touch the jazz tradition in the 1950s, and his influence can still be felt today. A Manassas graduate himself of 1948,⁶⁵ Mr. Able was aware of the special musical experience at Manassas during his time as a student.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ “Sidney Kirk,” Personal Interview. 9 July 2012.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Thus, he wanted to continue his legacy, and became the band director after Onzie Horn Sr.⁶⁶ He received his Bachelor of arts in music and became a music teacher at Manassas and Westwood for over thirty years.⁶⁷

Mr. Able is most recognized as the teacher of jazz great Sidney Kirk and international star Isaac Hayes.⁶⁸ As a composer, he wrote for Isaac Hayes' *Hot Buttered Soul* album, receiving much fame for this. It was Emerson Able's dedication and care for his students, as well as his ties to Manassas, that furthered the musical tradition. Sidney Kirk said Emerson Able sent over a thousand kids to college, proving as a musical mentor and teacher.⁶⁹ As Henry Adams said, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops."⁷⁰ Because of the teaching and influence of Matthew Garrett, Onzie Horn Sr. and Emerson Able, the jazz tradition was able to have the success it did at Manassas in the 1950s.

Attitude and Atmosphere

The eighth and final factor that must be explored is the attitude of the students and the instructors, as well as the atmosphere of Manassas High during the era. An individual's attitude towards a specific event or issue can drastically effect the outcome

⁶⁶ Matthew Garrett, interview by John Bass.

⁶⁷ Manassas High School Archives. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Sidney Kirk, Personal Interview. 9 July 2012.

⁷⁰ Henry Adams, "Teacher Appreciation: Quotes and quotations on teaching" (Accessed on 26 July 2012)

http://www.teacher-appreciation.info/Quotations_on_teaching/

of the situation at hand. Though, when one has a positive outlook on what he or she wants to accomplish, the end result is more than likely remarkable. What I believe was the final reason for this musical tradition was the attitude of the students and faculty involved and the overall atmosphere of Manassas in the 1950s.

“You were always encouraged to be the best you can be,” recalls Sidney Kirk. The band directors encouraged you to do this,⁷¹ which time has shown, had much success. This created a sense of competition amongst the students, an atmosphere that created nothing but the best.

“When the School song came on, everyone was crying. It made you believe in everything it said. It motivated you to excel,”⁷² states Kirk. To those at Manassas and involved in the construction of the musical tradition in the 1950s, “music was life.”⁷³ And so was Manassas. Without the atmosphere breeding for success and the positive mindset of the students, it would not have been possible. Many wonder how the musical tradition of Manassas was constructed, and I believe it was a combination of factors including (restate all of your factors here)

How to recover and reveal the tradition: A plan for the future

Earlice Taylor and a group of others strive to preserve traditions and histories alive each day. As the president of the Tennessee Cultural Heritage Preservation Society

⁷¹ “Sidney Kirk.” Personal Interview. 9 July 2012.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

(TNCHPS), Mrs. Taylor is keeping the memories of Manassas alive.⁷⁴ She writes, “As an advocate for preservation of African American history and culture...we the alumni of Manassas High School would like to enhance the greater community and preserve our heritage...”⁷⁵ The question arises: what can we all do to keep and recover the tradition of Manassas High School?

In order to allow for the flame of the musical tradition at Manassas to continue to burn, awareness must continue to be made to the Memphis and the greater community abroad. The common citizen of Memphis is unaware of what transpired at Manassas, and the opportunity for its story and tradition to be revealed was my reason for undertaking this project. Without the factors that created the tradition, being the selection of schools, the big city in the Delta, the musical influence of Memphis, the neighborhood, the directors, and the attitude of the faculty and students at Manassas, as well as the atmosphere of the school, none of this would have been possible. As a photo reads in the school’s archival room, “OUR LEGACY. OUR HISTORY. OUR FUTURE.”⁷⁶

I have only begun to scratch the surface of what occurred at Manassas. How such a musical tradition of jazz was cultivated is now more lucid, but there is still more to uncover. There are many more individuals to discover and stories to be told. For those left out of this particular narrative, my deepest apologizes. I believe I have opened a portal to allow the musical tradition of Manassas during this time to be pursued and explored. I have confidence that the musical tradition of Manassas will be carried on by its students, alumni, Memphis and the world. As the Manassas High School’s Alma

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Manassas High School Archives. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

Mater states, "Gold and Blue, the emblem of Manassas...Best old school there is in all creation...Each brave heart will answer to her call, Hand in hand we stand to do our duty...We'll show them all...We'll never let Manassas fall."⁷⁷

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⁷⁷ Manassas High School Archives. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

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Appendix

Manassas in the 1950s: A Yearbook of Jazz Legends



Figure 4: Manassas graduate Hank Crawford '51 with Ray Charles⁷⁸

Hank Crawford

Hank Crawford, one of the most prominent jazz saxophonists, was of the many that hailed from Manassas High. Bernie Ross 'Hank' Crawford was born in Memphis, TN on December 21, 1934.⁷⁹ Starting on the piano at age nine,⁸⁰ he later moved on to his most-known instrument, the saxophone. He is identified best as Ray Charles' saxophonist, and is praised all over the globe as one of the most prominent musicians in jazz history. But why would Mr. Crawford choose Manassas High as the beginning of his

⁷⁸ Ray Charles Video Museum. "Ray Charles is in town- Chronology 1961." 21 August 2010. (Accessed on 23 July 2012)
<http://raycharlesvideomuseum.blogspot.com/2010/08/ray-charles-is-in-town-chronology-1961.html>

⁷⁹ Manassas High School Archives. Manassas High School. Memphis, TN. June 2012.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

musical career? One states, “He was drawn to the aura of the rich tradition of the school’s having produced outstanding musicians which began the advent of the great Jimmy Lunceford, who was, for a time the school’s band director.”⁸¹ He transferred from another school to be under Matthew Garrett’s teachings.⁸² “He was just gifted,”⁸³ Mr. Garrett remembers. He wanted to become a piece of the tradition, one of the many that walked the halls of Manassas High.

George Coleman

A member of the class of 1952,⁸⁴ George Coleman was one the most renowned musicians to graduate from the esteemed musical program at Manassas. Born on March 8th, 1935,⁸⁵ George spent his childhood and high school days in Memphis, TN. A self-taught musician,⁸⁶ Coleman made his time count while at Manassas. A member of the memorable Rhythm Bombers, he was recognized as a gifted musician with a bright future. Under the direction of Matt Garrett, George would go on to have a celebrated musical career.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² “Matthew Garrett.” Interview by John Bass.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Manassas High School Archives. Manassas High School. Memphis, TN. June 2012.

⁸⁵ David Wild and Barry Kernfeld. "Coleman, George." *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. Ed. Barry Kernfeld. *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. (Accessed on 25 July 2012)

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J095100>

⁸⁶ Ibid.

After Manassas, Mr. Coleman quickly jointed B.B King's orchestra with fellow Memphis saxophonist Floyd Newman.⁸⁷ Once completing his run with B.B and fellow band members, George continued his musical career, claiming much fame. He is best known as Miles Davis' saxophonist from 1960 till 1962.⁸⁸ Amazingly, Coleman was recommended to Miles by none other than John Coltrane.⁸⁹ When Coltrane was leaving Davis' band, he told his close colleague that Coleman was a "bad cat."⁹⁰ Not a bad reference! Additionally, Coleman also toured with Miles in 1963 with jazz greats Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, and a multitude of others.⁹¹ Mr. Coleman has played on many albums and with many greats, becoming one of the elite saxophonists. As his senior quote in the Manassas yearbook says some sixty years ago, "practice encourages perfection,"⁹² it is safe to say that George Coleman practiced his way into jazz history.

Harold Mabern

⁸⁷ Floyd Newman, personal Interview. 21 June 2012.

⁸⁸ David Wild and Barry Kernfeld. "Coleman, George." *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. Ed. Barry Kernfeld. *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. (Accessed on 25 July 2012)

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J095100>

⁸⁹ "Sidney Kirk," Personal Interview. 9 July 2012.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Manassas High School Yearbook: 1952. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

Harold Mabern, class of 1954, is a celebrated pianist who has taken his music at Manassas across the globe. Born March 20th, 1936 in Memphis⁹³, he soon realized he was in a music city. As his biography describes Memphis, “a city that’s a capital of 20th century American music.”⁹⁴ While at Manassas, he was the piano player for the Rhythm Bombers.⁹⁵ Band director Matthew Garrett describes Harold Mabern: “I remember he had the biggest hands! He was gifted.”⁹⁶ With his hands, Mr. Mabern rose to fame as one of the most prized pianists in jazz.

Mabern was also a member of MJT +3, where his playing in Chicago jumpstarted his career. He has played with all the big names in jazz, some being “Lee Morgan, Hank Mobley, [Sonny Rollins], Freddie Hubbard and Miles Davis, just to name a few.”⁹⁷ Having played on countless records and albums, as well as with the most respected musicians in jazz, he discusses his role as a member of every band he plays in. Mr. Mabern says, “I was never concerned with being a leader, I just always wanted to be the best sideman I could be. Be in the background so you can shine through.”⁹⁸ Harold Mabern was a senior in 1954, and his words for his classmates were, “If you can’t go

⁹³ Harold Mabern Biography. “Harold Mabern: Legendary jazz pianist.” (Accessed on 24 July 2012)

<http://www.haroldmabern.com/biography/>

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Matt Garrett, interview by John Bass.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Harold Mabern. “Harold Mabern: Legendary jazz pianist.” (Accessed on 24 July 2012).

<http://www.haroldmabern.com/biography/>

⁹⁸ Ibid.

over or under, go around.”⁹⁹ His perseverance landed him a spot in jazz history, and still remains an international music icon today.

Frank Strozier

A name that goes unnoticed, Frank Strozier is one of the most talented jazz musicians the globe has seen, another who started his career at Manassas. Mr. Strozier is a alto saxophonist, flutist, clarinetist, and pianist who was born on June 13th, 1937, in Memphis, TN.¹⁰⁰ During his days at Manassas, he was also a member of the Rhythm Bombers, and was President of the School Band.¹⁰¹ Under the teachings of Matt Garrett, Frank became a star when he departed Manassas as a member of the class of 1954.

Frank and his fellow Manassas musician Booker Little met up with his classmate Harold Mabern and joined Walker Perkins’ MJT +3 in Chicago.¹⁰² Strozier has led an illustrious career, where he has played with many jazz greats, including Miles Davis (along with Manassas friends Harold Mabern and George Coleman),¹⁰³ and a host of others. With his musical legacy in place, there are many events to highlight. However, one in particular exemplifies Strozier’s place in jazz history. Strozier played at Carnegie Hall, giving the world something to remember Manassas and jazz legend Frank Strozier.

⁹⁹ Manassas High School Yearbook: 1954. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

¹⁰⁰ Brian Priestley. "Strozier, Frank." *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. Ed. Barry Kernfeld. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. (Accessed on 25 July 2012) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J432500>

¹⁰¹ Manassas High School Archives. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

¹⁰² ¹⁰² Brian Priestley. "Strozier, Frank." *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. Ed. Barry Kernfeld. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. (Accessed on 25 July 2012) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J432500>

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Booker Little

Another great to surface from Manassas was the trumpet legend Booker Little. Born April 2nd, 1938 in Memphis, TN,¹⁰⁴ Picking up the trumpet at age twelve, he took part in jam sessions with Phineas Newborn soon after.¹⁰⁵ A graduate of the class of 1955,¹⁰⁶ Mr. Little made his mark on jazz with swift action. While at Manassas, Matthew Garrett instructed him during his four-year stay, and still to this day is lost for words to describe Booker. “He was very intuitive and always wanted to learn something. He was just a joy,”¹⁰⁷ recalls Mr. Garrett. Little was also a member of the Rhythm Bombers, and his experience and instruction at Manassas crafted a path for his musical future.

After Manassas, He and fellow Rhythm Bombers Frank Strozier and Harold Mabern teamed together to join the MJT +3.¹⁰⁸ He soon moved to New York to continue his career, where he collaborated with many artists. He was the first to travel to the big city, and took his Manassas friends under his care.¹⁰⁹ Booker met again with Manassas friend Frank Strozier to continue playing with his high school friend. Booker continued to

¹⁰⁴ David Wild. "Little, Booker." *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. Ed. Barry Kernfeld. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. (Accessed on 25 July 2012) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J271500>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Manassas High School Archives. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Matt Garrett, interview by John Bass.

¹⁰⁸ David Wild. "Little, Booker." *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. Ed. Barry Kernfeld. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. (Accessed on 25 July 2012) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J271500>

¹⁰⁹ “Matthew Garrett.” Interview by John Bass.

shine in the spotlight where he also recorded with John Coltrane in 1961, and continued his playing with jazz star Max Roach and Eric Dolphy.¹¹⁰ Booker Little is praised by many, including his dear friend and fellow Rhythm Bomber leader Charles Lloyd. Many claim, “no one can play ballads like Booker did.”¹¹¹ During the clinic at Rhodes College, Mr. Lloyd advocated for the name of Booker Little to be spread for all to hear of his story and music. An author wrote,

His compositions and his playing conveyed a high musical intelligence, an emotional outlook by turns melancholic and suddenly charged, and a keen lucidity—all reflective of the man himself.¹¹²

Sadly, Booker’s life came to a short end at the age of twenty-three, passing away on October 5th, 1961.¹¹³ Booker’s music and legacy will never be forgotten, a proud Manassas alumni.

Charles Lloyd

Internationally acclaimed musician Charles Lloyd was another to walk the halls of Manassas. Born on March 15th, 1938 in Memphis, TN,¹¹⁴ Lloyd has become one of the

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Matt Garrett, interview by John Bass.

¹¹² Johnson, David Brent. “Too Little, Too Soon: Booker Little.” *Night Lights*. 31 March. 2008. (Accessed on 24 July 2012)
<http://indianapublicmedia.org/nightlights/too-little-too-soon-booker-little/>

¹¹³ David Wild. "Little, Booker." *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. Ed. Barry Kernfeld. *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. (Accessed on 25 July 2012)
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J271500>

¹¹⁴ David Wild and Barry Kernfeld. "Lloyd, Charles." *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. Ed. Barry Kernfeld. *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online (19 July 2012)
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J272700>

most accomplished saxophonist jazz has witnessed. Although a Memphis native, Lloyd had not returned to Memphis since 1964 until recently in April of 2012, where he performed a concert at Rhodes College. He recalled his love and gives credit to his alma mater, and it was interesting to spend time with him during his stay. In order to get a better sense of who Lloyd was, I sat down with two of his classmates, Mr. John Cade and James Lynn, hoping to shed light on his experience during and after his days at Manassas.

A member of the class of 1956,¹¹⁵ Charles Lloyd made his mark on Manassas. “We all knew he would be successful,”¹¹⁶ John Cade and James Lynn remarked. Both men attended school with Mr. Lloyd for quite some time. All fourth graders at St. Augustine Catholic School in Memphis in 1946,¹¹⁷ they traveled unintentionally together to become classmates at Manassas. Before they had their reunion at Manassas, Lloyd became involved with music, playing with B.B King and Bobby Blue Bland at the age of ten.¹¹⁸ While at Melrose High, Lloyd heard about the musical tradition being built at Manassas, and transferred.¹¹⁹ Known by many as a member of the wealthy class, Charles

¹¹⁵ John Cade and James Lynn, Personal Interview. 19 July 2012.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Jones, Addie D. *Portrait of a Ghetto School*, 145.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

was always dressed in the finest and classiest clothes. Voted “best dressed boy” in 1956,¹²⁰ his photo illustrates how the jazz legend was in his high school days.

Lloyd was best recognized as the leader of the Rhythm Bombers.¹²¹ After Manassas, Mr. Lloyd took off in the music world and has become an international jazz icon and saxophonist. He was the first jazz artist to be privately invited to perform in the Soviet Union.¹²² In addition, his album and renowned single *Forrest Flower*¹²³ still is acknowledged as one of the greatest songs ever constructed.

Isaac Hayes

Isaac Hayes, an icon for STAX records and international icon, learned his talents at Manassas High in the late 50s and early 60s. “Hayes was born in the rural poverty of a sharecropper's family on August 20, 1942, in Covington, Tennessee, about thirty miles south of Memphis.”¹²⁴ Life was not always easy for Isaac, who came from a poor family that struggled to meet ends meet, where “a sack of flour would last several months.”¹²⁵ Isaac Hayes began his career in the church¹²⁶, further validating the role of a church as a

¹²⁰ Manassas High School Yearbook: 1956. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

¹²¹ Matt Garrett, interview by John Bass.

¹²² Charles Lloyd Clinic. Rhodes College. Memphis, TN. 13 April 2012.

¹²³ David Wild and Barry Kernfeld. "Lloyd, Charles." *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. Ed. Barry Kernfeld. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online (Accessed on 19 July 2012) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J272700>

¹²⁴ "Isaac Hayes Biography." Isaac Hayes Biography. 2008. Web. (Accessed on 12 July 2012) <http://www.isaachayes.com/bio/bio-2.html>

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

factor in creating this musical tradition at Manassas. I recently sat down with a long-time and colleague of Isaac Hayes, Mr. Sidney Kirk. The pianist for blues artist Al Green¹²⁷ and for the legend¹²⁸ gave me an insight of what truly transpired at Manassas.

¹²⁹“When I was in the 9th grade, he was in the 8th grade,” says Sidney Kirk of the late Isaac Hayes. Kirk, a Manassas High graduate of 1961, was the pianist for Hayes’ band, who traveled the nation and globe. “We always knew he would be successful. [Just] “One of those people...I learned a lot from this cat. No college degree. [He was] just a natural.” Since there were multitudes of musicians practicing throughout the school at lunch, Kirk said he, Isaac and friends would practice in the toilet stalls or around the water fountain, as well as after lunch, staying till the janitor kicked them out. Kirk continued to recall: “He always had a positive attitude,” no matter what he did. Sidney recalls a story that has stuck with him through the years, showing Isaac’s drive and positive demeanor. One day in the 9th grade, Isaac told Sidney: “Sidney, *when* we get to Carnegie Hall....” Sidney replied, “Isaac. If. Not when.” Isaac said, “No. *When*.” Sidney went on to chuckle, saying “Well, sure enough we were there some years later!” Even with his tough background, he managed to succeed. He said Isaac would occasionally miss school because he had no money to buy clothes to wear to class. However, Isaac would soon overcome these trials as he went from rags to riches, an illustrious musical career that started to bloom at Manassas. He graduated from Manassas in 1962 at the age

¹²⁷ All information is gathered from a group of papers provided by Earlice Taylor.

¹²⁸ Sidney Kirk, Personal Interview. 9 July 2012.

¹²⁹ All information until further noted comes from an interview with Sidney Kirk. Memphis, TN. July 2012.

of 21, leaving the grounds of Manassas to impact the world of music for generations to come.

Earlice Taylor

A singer and historian, Earlice Taylor has sung her way into a career thanks to her days at Manassas. A graduate of the class of 1961, Earlice is a proud alumnae and an advocate for recognizing the tradition of her beloved school. I had the privilege to hear Earlice Taylor's Manassas experience, Mrs. Taylor began her singing career at the age of three in the church where her father was the minister. A good friend of the illustrious Revered Brewster, her father would take her along with him to rehearsals and the broadcasts on Sunday nights. Earlice and the two other girls, Thelma and Shirley, had the opportunity to sing on Revered Brewster's famous show, and her career began to bloom at the tender age of four. Earlice is proud of her moment when she sang for Elvis when she four, "with his legs crossed during the radio broadcast."¹³⁰

Earlice continued her musical career in the church singing for the Sunshine band and in the choir loft at Keel Avenue Baptist Church. The church played a chief role in her musical role, and it spilled into her time at Manassas. She sang in the high school choir with the great Isaac Hayes. Mrs. Taylor also participated in the annual show, a production discussed earlier that was instrumental to the success and fame of the program at Manassas. Manassas means a great deal to Mrs. Taylor, as she says: "School was my outlet. The teachers were so kind to the students. School was a place that I looked

¹³⁰ All information is gathered from a group of papers provided by Earlice Taylor.

forward to going five days a week. I wished for more.”¹³¹ After Manassas, she traveled throughout the country, singing on riverboats such as the Delta Queen and every venue around. She is also an avid historian, and her presence is much felt in Memphis. Her experiences and words provide a rare and cherishing insight into how the tradition was cultivated and how success was present at Manassas in the 1950s.¹³² However, not only her experiences during the 50s and 60s make her special to the Manassas tradition. She continues to bring awareness to all of the jazz tradition that was created at Manassas High School in Memphis, TN.

“No school’s successes can exceed in importance the desire of students to achieve and even to excel. Space will not permit litany of the outstanding accomplishment of the many Manassas alumni that have made our existence better. Suffice it to ask, “Where would we be without them?” - Arthur Webb¹³³

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Webb, Arthur L. “Manassas forever: The administration of Louis B. Hobson. *Tristatedefender. Memphis Public Library: The Memphis Room*. 4 August 2004. July 2012.