

NORTH SIDE JAZZ



LESTER “PRES” YOUNG

in MINNEAPOLIS *The Formative Years*

DOUGLAS HENRY
DANIELS

Minneapolis and St. Paul are rarely associated with the history of jazz, yet when legendary tenor saxophonist Lester “Pres” (“Prez”) Young arrived to play at Vic’s Theatre and Lounge on Hennepin Avenue in 1954, the *Minneapolis Spokesman* claimed he was “coming back home.” Older residents remembered the famous “President of the Tenor Saxophone” from his days with Twin Cities band leaders Rook Ganz and Boyd Atkins in the 1930s. Indeed, Young had lived in Minneapolis for nearly ten years, and the city was important in his development. Not only did he hone his talent in local night spots, but it was there that he chose the tenor as his preferred instrument and developed the unique style for which he became famous. Now known as a swing musician of the “Kansas City school,” he was “the sire and dam, almost the man who made bop come true.” Nonetheless, one can search music histories in vain for references to the development of jazz in the Twin Cities region.¹

Reconstruction of Young’s formative years in Minneapolis is difficult, and the transience of his early life

complicates matters. Born in Mississippi, he spent ten childhood years in New Orleans and then lived in Minneapolis, Albuquerque, Phoenix, Oklahoma City, Kansas City, New York, and Los Angeles. He left few written records, so the historian relies on interviews with aged musicians whose memories have dimmed. Young himself was famous for his carelessness with dating events, including stints with different bands. Musicians often contradicted one another on events and their sequence, but by careful sifting of their accounts, a fascinating portrait emerges. Their testimony about Young also reveals that Minneapolis was a vibrant jazz city during the 1920s. This, in turn, indicates how immediately the new music became urban and national, as well as international. African Americans played a prominent role in this local music scene.²

Lester Young was born in Woodville, Mississippi, in 1909, the oldest of the three children of Willis H. Young, a “professor” of music, and Lizetta Young, a schoolteacher and seamstress. Willis Young led bands and read, wrote, and arranged music. He taught school as well as music and gave lessons in

voice in addition to all instruments. Around 1919 his marriage ended, and the professor married Mattie Stella Pilgrim, known as Sarah. Lester, his sister, Irma, and brother, Lee, danced, sang, and played different instruments under their father’s tutelage while traveling from spring to fall every year with minstrels and vaudevillians on various carnivals and road shows. Late in 1926 their show ended the season in El Reno, Oklahoma.³

The professor decided to winter in the North. Why he chose Minneapolis—a large midwestern city with a small black population in a distant state—is not entirely clear. The Young family and traveling shows usually avoided cities of this size. In 1930 Minneapolis claimed 464,356 residents, only 4,176 of them African American. In contrast, Kansas City, already a jazz center, accommodated 399,746 inhabitants, 38,574 of them

Dr. Daniels, professor of black studies and history and chair of the Department of Asian American Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is the author of Lester Leaps In: The Life and Times of Lester “Pres” Young (Beacon Press, 2002). He has just completed One O’Clock Jump: The Unforgettable History of the Oklahoma City Blue Devils (2004).

LEFT: Lester Young, the President of the Tenor Saxophone



The New Orleans Strutters—musicians, singers, dancers, and blackface comedians—in Lexington, Kentucky, 1924. Willis Young is at center, holding trumpet; Lester on tenor sax, wearing knickers, is to his right; Irma, directly behind Lester; Sarah, front row with bass sax; trumpet player Leonard Phillips, front row, second from right; and Lee, in top hat, stands behind his father.

black, and Oklahoma City counted 14,662 blacks among its 185,389 residents. Irma Young maintained that the family moved to Minneapolis because a cousin lived there in a hotel that her relations managed. Lee Young thought that the Theatre Owners Booking Association, which handled the African American circuit, had stranded them in Minneapolis or somewhere nearby. In any case, the family performed at a local dance hall on November 1, 1926. Trumpet player Leonard “Deke” Phillips remembered that they made “ten dollars, which was a lot of money then,” after which they “didn’t have no jobs right then.”⁴

This new setting might have reminded the Youngs of Louisiana. On the banks of the Mississippi, Minneapolis included six large natural lakes, part of a beautiful park system perhaps reminiscent of the blue lakes of their home state. Just like down South, bands performed on river steamers, and free municipal concerts entertained city dwellers at Lake Harriet on summer evenings.⁵

Another reason for the Young family’s sojourn in Minneapolis may have been as simple as its distance from the Jim Crow South. Blacks in East St. Louis, Chicago, and Tulsa, in particular, had suffered considerably during the race riots of 1917, 1919, and 1921, respectively. Minneapolis did not have such deadly outbreaks of lawlessness.⁶

The city’s robust economy also held special appeal for Southerners coming from a stagnant region. Minneapolis grew considerably in the early-twentieth century, dominating a vast agricultural hinterland. Citizens boasted of their fine, paved streets and one of the most modern water-supply systems in the nation.⁷

While its African American population was small, Minneapolis was not lacking in black musical culture, surely part of its attraction for the Youngs. Moore’s Jazz Orchestra and the Famous Rogers Café Jazz Orchestra promised the new music as early as 1920. Jazz

bands performed for moonlight boat excursions, picnics, receptions, and balls presented by various black organizations. These ensembles included Prof. Stevens’ Full Jazz Band, his Jazz Canaries, Moore’s Jazz Knockers, and The New Jazzland Orchestra.⁸

Twin Cities residents also enjoyed the touring big shows such as Noble Sissle’s and Eubie Blake’s *Shuffle Along*, the highly acclaimed black musical that played for a week at St. Paul’s Metropolitan Opera House in 1923. They heard territorial bands and bought popular blues records. They danced to the Nu-Way Jazz Hounds, “an all star seven piece” band from Kansas City.⁹

Minneapolis also possessed a number of nightclubs, especially “black and tan” resorts where white slummers listened and danced to jazz and drank in an interracial setting. There, musicians could earn good money. Some of these nightspots were “chicken shacks” offering down-home dishes; the best known was the Cotton Club, named after its New York counterpart, at 718 Sixth Avenue North. Popular after-hours spots included the Kit Kat Club at Sixth Avenue North between Highland and Aldrich, The Nest, just up the street at 731, the Musicians’ Rest, “a black and tan ribs joint” in an old Victorian building on Sixth Avenue near Lyndale, and Roy Langford’s, where women in the night life gathered. In addition, there were road-houses outside of town and in neighboring counties.¹⁰

The city’s North Side also included white gangsters such as Kid Cann (Harold Bloom) and the black men who fronted for them. Ben Wilson, an African American known as the “mayor of North Minneapolis,” had this part of the city “tied up” with

respect to bootleg whiskey and women, running both The Nest and the Kit Kat Club. His “mouthpiece” was another black nightclub man, Ted Crockett. All of the entertainers at these two clubs were African Americans.¹¹

On the eve of the Great Depression, teenager Gordon Parks, later a famous photographer and composer, moved to St. Paul and played blues piano in a brothel on Minneapolis’s North Side. He left vivid accounts of its nighttime characters, including the proprietor, who “moved in the manner of one who definitely had everything under control,” and of the sudden violence that resulted in the stabbing of a customer and the end of Parks’s job.¹²

The Young family—Willis, Sarah, 17-year-old Lester, Irma, and Lee—took up residence in this neighborhood at 573 Seventh Avenue North in a “big [two-story] house” with new electric wiring and a maid. Their accommodations suggested another dimension of Willis Young’s business dealings: both Charles A. Haas, the brother of the former tenant, and the property owner, Dorothy Gruman, worked at the Majestic Music Shop in downtown Minneapolis. “Some people who was on one of his shows before, he knew them [the Haas brothers] and they was taking care of the house,” trumpet player Leonard Phillips remembered.¹³

On Minneapolis’s North Side, African Americans resided amongst whites—this was not a black ghetto like Chicago’s South Side. Here Lester met friends who became fellow sidemen in his father’s band, including trombonist Otto “Pete” Jones. Young would stay in this part of town for nearly ten years, only a short walk

from numerous black institutions. Church services and fraternity and sorority dances required songs and the latest in popular music—and the Youngs had plenty of both. The Church of God in Christ met at 622 Lyndale Avenue North; an African Methodist Episcopal church sat nearby at 808 Bassett Place. The Twin Cities’ African American community also included the Railroad Men’s Association, Freemasons, Scottish Rite Freemasons, Elks, and, for women, the Order of the Eastern Star—all of which regularly sponsored social dances.¹⁴

Willis Young enrolled his children in the local public schools, which were integrated and better than those in Louisiana. Indeed, his elder son later claimed, “I was raised mostly in Minneapolis . . . trying to go to school

and all that.” However, this statement contradicts the oral testimony that the family arrived at the end of 1926, when the saxophonist was 17. It is unlikely that Lester had much reason to enroll, given his age; Minneapolis schools, furthermore, have no record of him. Irma and Lee, on the other hand, began attending Blaine School in December 1926, though they resumed traveling the following April. As soon as spring arrived, “Papa would always leave,” Irma said. “Nobody stayed anyplace.” By 1928 the professor had decamped to the Southwest, but 19-year-old Lester stayed on and made the city his home base. He would rejoin his family in Albuquerque and Phoenix for a few months at the end of the 1920s.¹⁵

During the family’s Minneapolis years, the versatile professor con-

One of many ads in the Twin Cities’ black newspapers promoting jazz and dancing; The Appeal, June 24, 1922.

DON'T MISS IT
FREDERICK DOUGLASS LODGE NO. 9005
 AND
Household of Ruth No. 4671
G. U. O. O. O. F.
 WILL GIVE THEIR THIRD ANNUAL
MOONLIGHT EXCURSION
 Red Wing STEAMER And Barge MANITOU
MONDAY EVEN'G, JUNE 26
GOOD MUSIC BY MOORE'S JAZZ HOUNDS
 COMMITTEE OF ARRANGEMENTS
 S. W. Williams, Chairman, E. A. Harris, Sec., Wm. Clark, C. Cain, W. A. Beach, G. A. Davis, P. H. Anderson,
 J. E. Mack, A. Haglund, H. Soutness, E. Harris, Medderson Mildred Johnson, Bevie Eaton, Ella Hillier,
 Florence Morris, Bertha Lewis, Emma Reed, Joseph Granger, John T. Callaway, Floor Manager
EVERYBODY INVITED BOAT LEAVES AT 8:30 SHARP TICKETS 75 CENTS

ducted the band and played various instruments, depending on the occasion. Sarah Young, a banjoist and saxophonist, led the vaudeville troupe of dancers, singers, and comedians for which the band performed. They often booked dates in surrounding communities, going near the Canadian border and sometimes splitting up—the professor taking the dance band to Minneapolis or on the road, and his spouse taking the show in another direction.¹⁶

As the professor's band acquired popularity and respect in the Upper Midwest, the days of minstrelsy were waning. Adapting to the changing scene, Young moved his band toward the newest craze—jazz, played for dancers in halls and hotel ballrooms. While at first they found little work, trumpet player Phillips maintained, "We had a good time. Plenty of good food to eat. We rehearsed. . . . Then [the professor] started booking things, then we started working in Minneapolis, man. We got work. We played all the time. Every weekend we was playing at a place called the

Professor Willis Young, 1920s



South Side Ballroom," a black and tan cafe near Washington Avenue South.¹⁷

Phillips reminisced, "We had a . . . good entertaining band." After a while, "We were a pretty big name in Minneapolis . . . because we got most of the good work." At the time, "There wasn't no big bands there—no big white bands."

The heart of the professor's front line consisted of his elder son on alto and soprano saxes ("He used to play that soprano all the time. That's what he used to take his solos on"), Deke Phillips on trumpet, and Pete Jones on trombone. Despite jazz's popularity, the band also featured waltzes ("You had to play a waltz if you played a dance, or people would think you was crazy") as well as renditions of "Charleston," "I Want a Little Girl," "If I Could Be With You," "Bye Bye Blackbird," "Blue Skies," "My Blue Heaven," and "Melancholy Baby." Jazz pieces included "I'm Coming Virginia," "Stampede," and "Tiger Rag." Such hits as "Baby, Won't You Please Come Home," "Jadda," "Runnin' Wild," "Wang Wang Blues," "Last Night on the Back Porch," and "How Come You Do Me Like You Do?" were part of their repertoire, as well. They sang the lyrics on some of the popular numbers, such as "Ain't She Sweet."¹⁸

In 1927 Willis Young's nine-piece band "played at the Radisson Hotel, St. Paul Hotel . . . all over Minneapolis." These venues were among the Twin Cities' most luxurious. The 12-story Radisson on Minneapolis's South Seventh Street advertised its Flame Room as open for dancing on Saturday evenings from 9:30 P.M. to midnight; the admission price of \$2.00 per couple indicates its exclusivity. It is not clear whether Young's band performed for dancers in the

Flame Room or for cafe patrons in the Teco Inn, Viking, Fountain, or Chateau rooms. After closing, musicians went to play or socialize in after-hours clubs.¹⁹

Willis Young's band spread the sounds of jazz to communities like Bismarck and Minot, North Dakota, in 1927. The process was not aided by large black populations in these towns—Bismarck counted only 45 African Americans out of 11,090 residents in 1930. Black dance bands appealed not only to whites but also to Native Americans, of whom Phillips contended, "They was into everything . . . they knew what was going on." He observed, "All them bands [Eli Rice, Grant Moore, Andy Kirk, and Benny Moten] played up all through where we [were] playing." He added that there "wasn't many black people up in North Dakota, but they still like . . . to have the black band come and play the dances."²⁰

Young was photographed with his father's band in 1927. All of the men wore tuxedos—like the premier New York bands of Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington. Phillips pointed to that picture 56 years later, maintaining that while he had received a solid musical foundation playing for carnivals, "You don't want to stay that way . . . Look a there, see, that's *me*, I love that, that's the *happiest* [period] of my life right there." This jazz band appears to have existed from the end of 1926 into late 1928—an exciting period when Bix Beiderbecke and Frankie Trumbauer's band, Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven, and Jelly Roll Morton's Hot Peppers recorded.²¹

Lester Young starred in his father's jazz band. In Minneapolis, Phillips remembered, he "was the



Willis Young's dance band, Minneapolis, 1927-28. Behind the seated professor (from left): Otto Jones, trombone; Leonard Phillips, trumpet; Ray Clark, banjo; Ben Wilkinson, drums; "Bo" Wilkinson, alto sax and clarinet; Gervas Oliver, piano; Clyde Turrentine, tenor sax; and Lester Young, soprano, alto, and baritone saxes. Trumpet player Charlie Cyphes is not pictured.

band! . . . That's what people were looking at. They weren't thinking about his reading. They were thinking about them solos he played." By his late teens, if not sooner, Young was a featured soloist on soprano sax, displaying an impressive virtuosity. Phillips described him as a "born musician," a "born genius," who played "ungodly jazz" and was "way ahead of his time." Indeed, the professor's older son managed to amaze listeners so much on soprano and alto that his father insisted he pick up the tenor, hoping it would slow him down. At the time, tenors merely "moaned," while sopranos and altos soloed; Young played all with considerable fluency.²²

Iowa-born musicians Eddie Barefield and LeRoy "Snake" Whyte encountered the Young family at a hotel in Bismarck in 1927. Barefield, who was Young's age, was a saxophonist and clarinetist with the Virginia Ravens. He recalled that Lee Young, wearing a tuxedo, conducted the band, Irma and her father played

saxophones, the stepmother was on piano, and Lester performed on alto and baritone saxophones.²³

The future tenor stylist was acquiring a solid foundation in dance-music traditions. Trumpet player Snake Whyte explained that the Youngs "performed for dances . . . like . . . an ordinary lodge hall." He recalled, "Maybe it wasn't a thousand people in the whole town . . . that's the kind of a band [they were] . . . there was not enough people there to hire a big band." They were versatile and performed audience requests: "You name one of the old pieces, they play it for you."²⁴

Touring in his father's band throughout the northern prairies and Great Plains and into places as distant as New Mexico and Arizona in the late 1920s, Young rode the crest of the Jazz Age. While he sometimes ran away from his father's strict regimen in order to freelance, he also returned from time to time. On his own, he continued to exhibit his saxophone prowess.

Such a dance-band apprenticeship was a way for Lester to advance musically. It also reveals how jazz culture became integral to the national heritage in a more complex fashion than is usually presented. Histories claiming that jazz moved more or less directly from New Orleans to Chicago and New York and then to Kansas City fail to recognize how young performers carried the music and dance to small towns throughout the Midwest, all the way to the West Coast and to cities in distant lands.

While Young learned

from live performances, for his generation recordings assumed an unprecedented role. The new medium allowed him to compare his talents to those of musicians fortunate enough to record. He heard new songs and developed his skills by listening not only to Joe "King" Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and Jelly Roll Morton, but to white performers such as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Ben Birney, Red Nichols, the Coon-Sanders Night Hawks, and Vincent Lopez.²⁵

Barefield befriended the saxophonist in the winter of 1927 while staying in the same hotel annex in North Dakota. As temperatures plummeted below zero, the two young musicians spent considerable time listening to records together. A turning point occurred in that unlikely spot when Barefield introduced Young to the 1927 hit "Singing the Blues" by white performers Leon "Bix" Beiderbecke of Davenport, Iowa, and St. Louis sax player Frankie Trumbauer. After this, Young "used to buy all the Bix and Trumbauer records as they came out." He played along and "copied Trumbauer



Eddie Barefield, who first met Young in North Dakota, as he looked in 1974

er's solos." Barefield contended, "That's where Prez got the basis of his style."²⁶

In later interviews about early influences, Young confided, "I have great big eyes for Bix. I used to be confused between him and Red Nichols, but finally had to put Bix on top." Alluding to his perception of an African American aesthetic, he added, "Bix . . . sounded just like a colored boy sometimes." When giving advice, Young also explained the vital role that records played in his education: "A good way to learn is jamming with records. Find somebody you like and play with his records." Apprentices with sharp ears could also learn key signatures and harmony from their favorite musicians, and "If [the melody] isn't in the key you like, you can slow it [the phonograph] down [to change the key]."²⁷

While Young liked Beiderbecke, it was the C-melody saxophonist Trumbauer who really impressed him. The C-melody was a smaller instrument than the tenor and in between alto and tenor in tone; it was quite popular in the 1920s. Young reminisced, "Frankie Trumbauer and Jimmy

Dorsey were battling for honors in those days. . . . Trumbauer was my idol." Young liked Trumbauer because he "always told a little story"; he also admired "the way he slurred his notes" and the way "he'd play the melody . . . then after that, he'd play around the melody." Young also shed light on his own unique tone, suggesting once again the influence of Trumbauer: "I tried to get the sound of a C-melody on a tenor. That's why I don't sound like other people."²⁸ It may surprise some to learn that black musicians were influenced by whites, but this kind of exchange was central to the development of jazz and the evolution of American culture.

Louis Armstrong was another major influence on Young, who was so impressed that he learned all of the trumpeter's solos by ear. We do not know for certain which records he listened to before Trumbauer, Beiderbecke, and Armstrong, but in the Twin Cities he could purchase record players and the latest jazz and blues recordings. Young and his fellow band members may have had a special arrangement with the Majestic Music Shop, where the people who seem to have provided the family's housing worked. The Majestic dealt in "Columbia, Brunswick and Victor Phonographs, Records and Pantropes and Orthophonic Music Instruments." At stores such as Linehan Phonograph Company in St. Paul, music lovers could purchase Silvertone, Nordica, Edison, and Brunswick machines, and "shop-worn," rebuilt, and demonstrator models were also available for as little as a dollar down and a dollar per week. These record players were so popular among the professor's entourage in 1927, said Phillips, that "most everybody in the band had one."²⁹

Listening to records, along with his father's lessons, advanced Lester's apprenticeship during his Minneapolis years. Of equal importance, he had a superb ear and a phonographic memory. "All he'd do was listen to them once. . . . That cat had a *perfect* ear," Phillips recalled. In Minneapolis, "We used to go to the record store maybe a month later. He'd say. . . . 'Do you remember this?' He'd play it, and I'd forgot what it was. . . . I'd say, 'Yeah, man.' He'd say, 'We gon' learn that.'"³⁰

Young's knowledge of musical terminology did not match his ear, Phillips revealed. "He didn't know what note He wouldn't say, 'Man, you play D-flat. . . . He'd just say, 'You play this note here,' and he'd make it on his horn, 'and you play this note.' Then we'd hit it."

It was during his Minneapolis years, interspersed with touring, that Young adopted the tenor sax as his preferred instrument. In late 1928 he had run away from his father's band, which was heading for Texas and a tour of the South. Young joined Art Bronson's Bostonians in Salina, Kansas; his friends and sidemen Deke Phillips and Pete Jones soon did the same. Young would play in this band through late 1929, return briefly to the family band, and then rejoin the Bostonians in 1930. All accounts, though varying in details, peg this as the time when Young made his historic choice. His own stories may have reflected his ambivalence over whether to play alto, which was better known for its innovators—"stylists," as they were called—or tenor, a relatively new solo instrument. In any case, he shed little light on his choice, preferring to rely on charming anecdotes.

On one occasion, he claimed he had played alto for five years; as for the change, “It was a funny deal . . . [the] tenor player in the band . . . [would] get high and never show up for dates.” Band leader Bronson promised to buy Young a tenor if he would play it. The “beat-up” instrument caused him to hesitate: “When I saw [it] . . . I almost changed my mind. It was an old Pan-American job. But I played it and liked it, what’s more.” The change did not present a problem. As Allan Morrison, the first journalist to interview Young, explained in 1946, “His approach to tenor playing was essentially an alto approach. . . . Before he knew it he was playing tenor, alto style.”³¹

Later Young told the story differently: He played baritone as well as alto with the Bostonians. “I was playing the baritone and it was weighing me down. I’m real lazy. . . . So when

Northwestern Bulletin-Appeal, a local black newspaper, December 13, 1924

the tenor man left, I took over his instrument.” Still later, he returned to the original account: “The tenor player kept grandstanding all the time. So I told the leader, if you buy a tenor for me, I’ll play it.”³²

Other musicians’ recollections of the switch varied. Phillips, who had followed Young into the Bostonians, insisted “With his father, he played tenor . . . and alto,” adding that, “His father put him on tenor, said he played too much jazz.” Phillips claimed that Young “always told me . . . ‘One of these days I’m going to play just tenor. I like it.’” He also maintained, “Lester never did play no alto with Bronson,” because “any time he left his father, his father was taking everything he had . . . all the horns . . . a clarinet, a baritone and an alto . . . and a soprano.” Indeed, Young was without an instrument in Kansas when he left the family band. With Bronson, Phillips recalled, Young “played tenor the whole time.” As for Young’s contention that he first played alto with the Bostonians, the trumpet player noted, “I don’t see how he could say that.”³³

Barefield and Whyte recalled Young as an altoist when they met him in North Dakota in 1927. Barefield maintained that, back in Minneapolis, Young was “playing tenor and he was playing [Trumbauer] style on tenor . . . the first part of ’28.” Whyte recalled that in the professor’s band Young “was [playing] real light on his alto.” Whyte was “surprised when he put it down and went to tenor,” but then, “He still was playing the alto style on his tenor.”³⁴

Others disagreed. New Yorker Benny Carter, a distinguished alto stylist himself as well as composer, arranger, and band leader, heard Young in 1931. “He was a different man with a completely different style



Leonard Phillips and an unidentified pianist, 1944

from his tenor.” In Carter’s opinion, “He was a real flash on alto. Like [Charlie] Parker, what he was playing was entirely different from anything I’d heard.” Years later he reflected: “It was the greatest thing I’d ever heard. . . . He had a definition and a mastery that I don’t think he ever felt necessary to display on the tenor.”³⁵

Tenor saxophonist Albert “Budd” Johnson, a Texan and friend of Young’s from the late 1920s, agreed: “Pres played two different styles at that time. He’d get up and play pretty on alto, and then he would really blow on the tenor, and this would break up the house.”³⁶

One thing about Young’s switch is fairly clear: he could pioneer on tenor at a time when there were few players, compared to alto stylists. Snake Whyte believed Young switched because he was no match for other alto men. Whyte added another insight: “At that time a tenor didn’t have as much a play as Lester made.” Young contributed to the legitimacy of tenors as soulful soloists in the jazz orchestra: “Lester made the way for tenors to blow a

lot. Cause he kept *originating things*.” Deke Phillips, in a separate interview, agreed: “Only cats that played solos on sax then was altos. Tenor didn’t play nothing . . . [it would only] moan.”³⁷

As the popularity of the tenor increased in the early 1930s, several instrumentalists left their mark on young saxophonists. Besides Coleman Hawkins, the star of Fletcher Henderson’s band, there was Bud Freeman, but Young “didn’t care nothin’ about Bud,” Phillips noted. Indeed, Phillips believed that Young was an original who influenced a number of prospective tenor men. “When Les came along, he started playing tenor, there was Herschel [Evans]. . . . That’s when guys started playing tenors.”³⁸

By 1929–30 Young had become a leading tenor stylist. Temporarily reunited with his father in New Mexico, he clearly influenced Ben Webster, a Kansas City, Missouri, piano and violin player who joined up with the professor to learn the coming instrument—tenor saxophone. According to Phillips, “Ben said, ‘I used to hear ol’ Les in the room, man, playin’ that horn, and I’d get in there and try to run over and play, but that cat was *gone*.” Webster eventually joined Jap Allen’s band, where he was “a sensation. Cats wasn’t blowin’ tenor like he was blowin’ then.” Although he modeled his sound on Hawkins, Young had shown him the possibilities of the instrument. Paul Quinichette, on the other hand, became known as “Vice-Pres” because he sounded so much like his mentor.³⁹

Along with traveling jobs, Young performed in different bands and clubs in the city he

regarded as home during the years that he struggled to make it to the big time. Reedman Eddie Barefield fronted a Minneapolis band with Young, Whyte on trumpet, and pianist Frank Hines early in 1931. Young was also in The Nest Orchestra that year.⁴⁰

Though he was a hot jazz soloist and bluesman, Young also adopted a number of popular songs during his Minneapolis years. This no doubt helped to broaden his appeal, as his repertoire included the most frequently recorded songs in the U.S. Some came out shortly after he started on saxophone—“The Man I Love,” “Tea for Two,” and “Somebody Loves Me” all appeared in 1924. Later hits in his repertoire included “Sometimes I’m Happy” (1927), “Love Me or Leave Me” and “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love” (1928), and “Stardust” (1929). More appeared in 1930: “Body and Soul,” “I Got Rhythm,” “Get Happy,” and “On the Sunny Side of the Street.”⁴¹

Young’s musicianship developed in Minneapolis’s night clubs and after-hours spots. The Nest and the Kit Kat were similar to settings in Kansas and Oklahoma cities with larger black populations. The Kit Kat band, like many small jazz combos, played without written arrangements. “It was five, six pieces, it was mostly heads [memorized arrangements],” Whyte recalled. They bought piano scores at the dime store, “then we’d get the melody off of that, and then either fake the harmonies or somebody write the harmonies.”⁴²

The tenor stylist also performed in the Cotton Club band of Minneapolis trumpet player and leader Reuben “Rook” Ganz and arranger Boyd Atkins from fall 1934 to spring 1936. The club was conveniently across the street from the flat where Young

lived in 1935. Ganz’s band, which broadcasted nightly over station WTCU, included the leader on trumpet, Young on tenor sax, Boyd Atkins on alto sax and violin (he also danced), Harold “Popeye” Booker on bass, Walter Rouse on guitar, bassist Adolphus J. Alsbrook, and vocalist Bill Pugh on drums.⁴³

The underworld connections of these three clubs had a distinct effect on Young’s career. Early in 1928, for example, two policemen investigating a brawl at the Cotton Club were shot—one of them seriously. The police chief then ordered all nightclubs and cafes to cease “singing and dancing and the like” at midnight. As a result, Young left Minneapolis with the family band to work. He alone returned, only to depart again after similar crackdowns in 1932 and 1936.⁴⁴

Thus, despite his preference for Minneapolis, Young from time to time joined barnstorming bands in the nation’s heartland. In 1932, a few years after his stint with the Bostonians, the Oklahoma City Blue Devils decided to lure him away after hearing him play with Frank Hines in an after-hours club—probably The Nest or Kit Kat. In fact, Henry “Buster” Smith and other Blue Devils claimed they gave him the honorific nickname “Pres”—President of the Tenor Saxophone—despite the oft-told story that he had acquired it from Billie Holiday in New York City.⁴⁵

When the Blue Devils broke up in 1933, Young joined King Oliver on tour in Joplin, Missouri, and the next year went on to play with Fletcher Henderson in New York. There, he encountered problems with his section mates because his style was so different from that of their hero, the legendary Coleman Hawkins, whom the upstart had replaced. Band mem-



North side jazz, 1934. Members of Rook Ganz's band (from left): Harold "Popeye" Booker, Adolphus Alsbrook, Walter Rouse, Bill Pugh, Boyd Atkins, Rook Ganz, and Lester Young.

bers ostracized him, refusing to tell him the names of tunes, so Young left to play with Kansas City band leaders Bennie Moten and Andy Kirk—all in 1934. After these stints, however, he always returned to Minneapolis. This—not Kansas City—was his home base.⁴⁶

Minneapolis stands out not only as the place where Young adopted the tenor sax and developed his craft but also acquired his distinctive way of holding the instrument out and to the side. He may have started this routine under his father's aegis. Once, when he auditioned unsuccessfully on tenor for a job with Earl Hines, songwriter Charlie Carpenter (much later, Young's manager), complained that the prospect "sounded like [he played] soprano saxophone to me." He was unable to understand Young's conception or why he held his instrument as he did—a trademark that other saxophonists later imitated.

Carpenter realized, however, "He must have been doing something because, man, all the cats were listening to him." Hines observed, "What he's doing is way ahead of our time. The average musician doesn't conceive of what he's doing, because they're all on the Coleman Hawkins thing, but one day. . . ."⁴⁷ Young's unique style would revolutionize jazz, imparting a sweet and soulful sound with a rhythmic complexity that dazzled listeners.

As the Great Depression worsened in the mid 1930s, Young's colleagues Snake Whyte and Eddie Barefield moved on, settling in Ohio and then in Los Angeles and spending more time with their families. Young stayed on until he joined Count Basie in 1936, in part because he, too, had settled into a domestic life. Once again, contradictions and

uncertainty swirl around the details of his personal life. He had married Beatrice Toliver in Albuquerque in early 1930, and they soon returned to an apartment in Minneapolis. From musicians' accounts, Young was devoted to his wife. As Whyte observed, "He was strictly a Beaman" and had no vices.⁴⁸

His Blue Devil sidemen concurred. Buster Smith, his section leader, maintained that Young differed from the usual portrait of the womanizing jazz man: "He didn't pay no woman no attention." Smith recounted how "some of them tried to talk to him, [but] he just stand off and look at them . . . and they'd walk on away from him." Indeed, at this time, he was "a very naive quiet guy. He didn't curse, didn't smoke, he didn't do anything" but play music. It was years later that he became known as an aloof, uncommunicative hipster and an alcoholic.⁴⁹

Nonetheless, his domestic life at this time seems to be more complicated than these memories portray. He may have left Beatrice for a time; in any case, he had a child with Bess Cooper, who died soon afterwards. Beverly, their daughter, was born in July 1931 and raised by godparents. She compellingly claimed that Young married her mother, who was white, and was grief-stricken by her tragic death. He arranged for his daughter's care and gave her the endearing nickname "Baby Girl"—a Bennie Moten song. When touring, he sent money to provide for her and telephoned frequently. He visited whenever he was in town and, when she was about four years old, bought her a baby grand piano. Sometimes she accompanied him on the road.⁵⁰

We cannot easily reconcile Beverly Young's account with the lack of public records and others' memories of Young as a one-woman man. It is possible that the couple never married or wed in a small town. Lee Young doubts the story, believing that his brother would have told him about the marriage and, especially, about his daughter. On the other hand, Lester's concern for Beverly might help explain why he stayed in Minneapolis until the year she started school.⁵¹

The deteriorating black section of Minneapolis in the worsening depression, on the other hand, may have provoked Young's decision to leave the city in the spring of 1936. "The Negro slum on the north side of town" was described by Nelson Peery, a black resident, as "the most destitute part" of the city, where "hundreds of ragged unemployed black men stood up and down Sixth Avenue and Lyndale looking for a drink, to talk, to joke, and to laugh away the hunger cramps." In Young's neigh-



The Pres with the Count: Young in his signature pose, playing with the Count Basie Orchestra, late 1930s.

borhood, pedestrians encountered "whorehouses, broken whiskey bottles, mean cops who fleeced the whores who had money and beat those who didn't, ashes in the streets, rats that walked boldly in front of the skinny alley cats, houses without running water . . . [and] black streetwalkers cursing the white ones for cutting in on their trade."⁵² Basie's and Buster Smith's combo at the Reno Club in Kansas City offered Young an opportunity to leave.

Years later Young explained, "I left my madam" when he joined the Count Basie Orchestra, but this may have been only a temporary separation from Beatrice. In 1935 the couple had an apartment in Minneapolis at 715 Sixth Avenue North, a two-story building six houses from The Nest and just across from the Cotton Club. In Kansas City the next year, they lived at 1413 East Eleventh

Street. It is significant that he was listed with his wife, suggesting that their relationship endured during his barnstorming period and despite the setbacks they faced.⁵³

No other Minneapolis

musician was as influential in the history of jazz as Young. He ranks alongside Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Charlie Parker. Not only did he have a profound effect on saxophonists but on other instrumentalists, as well. He also composed a number of jazz standards—"Lester Leaps In" being the most famous.⁵⁴

Young's improvisations with the Count Basie Orchestra, the leading exponent of Kansas City jazz, amazed the jazz world and produced legions of musicians who adored him and his playing. Soon Billie Holiday joined the band, which toured the South

and Midwest and performed in black theaters and clubs, luxury hotels, and in name spots such as the Famous Door in New York in 1938 and 1939. Their recordings were often hits; Young and Holiday made beautiful music together on the classic Teddy Wilson-Holiday-Young recordings in the late 1930s. But problems in the band business caused Young to leave Basie in 1940. By May 1941 he had joined his brother Lee's band in southern California and toured until it broke up on the East Coast after their father's death in early 1943. Later that year the saxophonist rejoined Basie. In the famous 1944 jazz short, *Jammin' the Blues*, the top of Young's pork pie hat is the first image on screen before the camera pans down to him blowing a slow blues, "The Midnight Symphony," in what is probably the most famous image in the history of jazz.⁵⁵

Young was drafted in 1944 and became a veritable cult figure after his army court-martial and dishonorable discharge in 1945. After the war, Lester led his own combos—which at

times included such famous musicians as drummers Connie Kay and Roy Haynes and pianists John Lewis and Junior Mance—and toured with Norman Granz's *Jazz at the Philharmonic*. He is considered a founder of the "cool school," a style often associated with Miles Davis and California jazz. But alcoholism and illness led to Young's death at the age of 49 in New York City in 1959. His influence had extended beyond the music world to writers such as Chester Himes, Jack Kerouac, and Al Young and poets Ted Joans, Amiri Baraka, and Allen Ginsberg. After his death, songs by Charles Mingus, "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat," and Wayne Shorter, "Lester Left Town," immortalized him.⁵⁶

Young's early years reveal that cities like Minneapolis played an important role in the history of music. Besides overlooking such places, jazz historians have also failed to acknowledge the resourcefulness of musicians and their willingness to accommodate various audiences,

playing waltzes, popular songs, jazz, and blues as necessary. As Thomas J. Hennessey has argued, jazz had become "nationalized" by the late 1920s. It penetrated remote regions as well as cities such as Minneapolis not traditionally included in its histories. It was influenced by different cultural traditions in different areas, and it consequently became more complex and diverse. Lester Young's formative years demonstrate how jazz musicians adapted and popularized a new art form in regions outside the spotlight of jazz history.⁵⁷ □

Notes

This article is drawn from the author's research for Lester Leaps In: The Life and Times of Lester "Pres" Young (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002). For their help with the sources, the author wishes to thank: Brian Horrigan, Minnesota Historical Society (Minneapolis Spokesman); Maggie Sloss and information services staff, Minneapolis Public Library (Special Collections, city directories); Dr. David Taylor, University of Minnesota (Minneapolis city directories); Dr. Gaye T. M. Johnson (Minneapolis property records); Kansas City, MO, Special Collections library staff (city directories); Dr. Earl Epps (Roland Kirk's music); the late Reginald Buckner and Professor John S. Wright (introduction to the late Beverly Young).

1. *Minneapolis Spokesman*, July 16, 1954, p. 1, July 23, 1954, p. 8. See also "Influences of the Year: Lester Young, Sarah Vaughan, Lennie Tristano," *Metronome*, Feb. 1949, p. 15. "Getz-Young School," *Metronome*, Sept. 1951, p. 16, claims, "The modern tenor sax sound. . . came most from Lester Young."

2. Author's interviews with musicians Eddie Barefield, May 24, 1981, LeRoy Whyte, Aug. 26, 1985, Leonard Phillips, Feb. 22, Apr. 13, 1983, and Charles "Truck" Parham, Aug. 23, 1982, and with Lester's siblings, Lee Young, June 16, 1982, and Irma Young, Sept. 9, 1981, Jan. 4, 1985. All author interviews are transcribed and in author's possession.

3. Information on the Young family is based largely on U.S., Manuscript Census, 1900, Lafourche Parish, LA, vol. 19, ward 2, enumeration district 25, sheet 4A, and author's interviews with Lee Young, Irma Young, and her children Martha Young,

Young Lester (at right) on C-melody saxophone, about 1921. With him (from left) are cousins "Boots" Young, Tom (last name unknown), and "Sport" Young.



Feb. 15, 1982, and Crawford Brown, Dec. 27, 1996. Lester's birth date is from his marriage license, Application #9763, Bernallilo County Clerk's office, Albuquerque. "N. O. Strutters," *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 22, 1924, sec. 1, p. 8, was the first mention of the professor's band and show: "one of the cleverest companies of the kind on the road" and also "one of the hottest."

4. U.S., *Census*, 1930, *Population*, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 1204, 1338, pt. 2, p. 570, 599; Irma Young interviews; Lee Young, Jazz Oral History Project interview, p. 11, Institute of Jazz Studies, John Cotton Dana Library, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ (hereinafter IJS); Leonard Phillips, IJS interview, 121 (quote). Irma, too, mentioned that the booking agency brought the family to Minneapolis.

5. *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1923, introduction. On music see, for example, ads in *The Appeal* (St. Paul and Minneapolis), June 30, 1923, p. 1, 3.

6. Elliott M. Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964); William M. Tuttle Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). A 1920 lynching in Duluth had horrified the state; see Michael Fedo, *The Lynchings in Duluth*, rev. ed. (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000).

7. *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1923, introduction. Southern newspapers published articles providing information for prospective migrants to the North; see, for example, "Minneapolis-St. Paul and Their Differences," *Arkansas Gazette*, July 31, 1929.

8. For example, see ads in *Appeal*: May 1, 8, 1920, both p. 4. Abbey's Syncopated Orchestra was one of the first to recognize the new music in the band title; *Appeal*, Mar. 27, 1920, p. 4. For Moore's Jazz Knockers and Prof. Stevens' Full Jazz Band, see *Appeal*, July 1, 1922, p. 3; Stevens' Jazz Canaries, May 20, 1922, p. 2; New Jazzland Orchestra, Dec. 2, 1922, p. 4.

9. Henry "Buster" Smith, interview by author, Aug. 26, 1982; Whyte interview. On *Shuffle Along*, see *Appeal*, Oct. 20, 1923, p. 1, 3; Nu-Way Jazz Hounds, *Appeal*, Oct. 20, 1923, p. 4.

10. LeRoy Whyte, personal communications (including Kit Kat address) to the author; Whyte and Barefield, author interviews; Carl Warmington, "Memories of the Jazz Age," typescript, 1988, p. 3, Special Collections, Minneapolis Public Library.

11. Whyte interview; advertisement for The Nest, with photos, in *Timely Digest* (Minneapolis), Apr. 1931, p. 19.

12. Gordon Parks, *A Choice of Weapons* (1965; reprint, St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986), 19–28 (quote, p. 23).

13. *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1927; Phillips, IJS, 121; Phillips and Irma Young, author interviews. On the house, see Office of the Inspector of Buildings, Document #3167—Permit to Wreck Buildings, City of Minneapolis Department of Inspections. Minneapolis property records indicated that Gruman was the owner.

14. *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1927, for the churches and other social institutions; see also dance ads regularly appearing on page 3 in the *Appeal* and *Northwestern Bulletin-Appeal*.

15. Lewis Porter, ed., *A Lester Young Reader* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 138, 177; Lee Young, IJS, 32–40; Lee Young, Irma Young, and Leonard Phillips, author interviews. Phillips contended that he and Lester attended school in Minneapolis (IJS, 21), but Young could not be located in the school records; Elaine Kottke, Student Accounting, Minneapolis Public Schools, to author, Dec. 30, 1996, Dec. 19, 1997.

Police raids and the temporary closing of several North Side clubs may have cut into the band's business, prompting the Youngs to move on; see *Minneapolis Times* clippings, 1928, vertical file, Special Collections, Minneapolis Public Library. It also appears that their housing was temporary; Document #3167—Permit to Wreck Buildings.

16. Martha Young, Irma Young, and Leonard Phillips, author interviews.

17. Here and below, Phillips, IJS, 121–22. The ballroom was also known as the South Side Dance Hall or South Side Club; see *Minneapolis Times*, P.M. ed., Oct. 31, 1924, Aug. 30, 1928, Sept. 30, 1930, vertical file, Special Collections, Minneapolis Public Library.

18. Phillips, IJS, 82, 71, 21–22, 28, 50, 122. Phillips, author interview, named "Bugle Blues," "Margie," "Shoutin' Liza," "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans," and "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby" as other selections they played.

19. Phillips, author interview; Radisson advertisement in 1928 Metropolitan Opera House Program Book, Special Collections, Minneapolis Public Library.

20. U.S., *Census*, 1930, *Population*, vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 427; Phillips, IJS, 124; Phillips, author interview.

21. Phillips, IJS, 84. The *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1928, lists only two musicians in Willis Young's band: Gurvas Oliver, 509 Lyndale Avenue North, and Clyde V. Turrentine, 3621 4th Avenue South. *Hot Jazz, Pop Jazz, Hokum and Hilarity* (RCA Victor LPV-524), *The King of New Orleans Jazz—Jelly Roll Morton* (RCA Victor LPM-1649), and *Mr. Jelly Lord* (RCA Victor LPV 546) contain such Morton classics as "Wolverine Blues," "Mr. Jelly Lord," "Wild Man Blues," "Hyena Stomp," "Freakish," and "Red Hot Pepper Stomp" recorded in 1927 and 1928.

22. Phillips, author interview; Phillips, IJS, 23.

23. Barefield and Whyte, author interviews; Eddie Barefield, IJS interview, 33–34. In Clinton Cox, "Old Man with a Horn," *New York News Magazine*, Nov. 7, 1976, p. 7, 19, Barefield recalled Lester on alto only and Lee on drums. In Frank Driggs, "Eddie Barefield's Many Worlds," *Jazz Review* 3 (July 1960): 20, the reedman maintained that Young performed on alto and baritone saxes and Lee danced. Whyte placed the occasion a year or two earlier (1925 or 1926). For more on Barefield, see Cox article and "The Eddie Barefield Story" (as told to Albert J. McCarthy) *Jazz Monthly* 5 (May 1959): 11–12, 31, both in Eddie Barefield Vertical File, IJS. On Whyte, "Jazz Tradition, Religious Heritage, and the Transformation of a Blue Devil—LeRoy 'Snake' Whyte," *Jazzforschung* 26 (1994): 143–55.

24. Whyte interview.

25. Whyte, Barefield, and Phillips, author interviews.

26. Phillips, IJS, 83; Barefield, author interview. Young invariably recalled his original encounter with Barefield by playing "Singing the Blues" in greeting whenever they met in later years; Barefield and Phillips, author interviews.

27. Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 133, 162; saxophonist George "Buddy" Tate, IJS interview, 12.

28. Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 158–59; Phillips, author interview.

29. Phillips, author interview; *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1927 (Majestic); *Northwestern Bulletin-Appeal*, Dec. 13, 1924, p. 2. In St. Paul, W. J. Dyer and Bro. sold QRS recordings of James P. Johnson, Thomas "Fats" Waller, and Clarence Williams; see *Appeal*, Sept. 1, 1923, p. 3.

30. Here and below, Phillips, IJS, 61.

31. Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 133–34. It is frequently assumed that Young played



Musicians' reunion honoring LeRoy "Snake" Whyte (at microphone), Perry, Iowa, 1976. Seated second, third, and fourth from left are reedman Eddie Barefield, Basie alto saxophonist Earle Warren, and reunion organizer Ray Marcks.

mostly in the higher register, but close listening to his records from the 1940s indicates this is not the case.

32. Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 138, 159.

33. Phillips, author interview; Phillips, IJS, 80. Indicating that the switch was not a clean break, Phillips also recalled that when Young returned to the Bostonians in 1930 after his brief family stint, "He played alto. . . . He got started playing tenor again" in Minneapolis; IJS, 54, 68.

34. Barefield and Whyte, author interviews.

35. John Tynan, "Reminiscing with Benny Carter," *Down Beat*, May 1, 1958, p. 42; Leonard Feather, "Prez," *Playboy*, Sept. 1959, p. 68. On Carter's distinguished career, see Morroe Berger, Edward Berger, and James Patrick, *Benny Carter: A Life in American Music* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1982).

36. Stanley Dance, *The World of Earl Hines* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), 208.

37. Whyte interview; Phillips, IJS, 54, 68.

38. Phillips, IJS, 69, 54; Albert McCarthy, "Basie's Other Tenor: The Herschel Evans Story," *Jazz and Blues* 1 (Sept./Oct. 1971): 9.

39. Phillips, IJS, 69. Quinichette had met Young when the Bostonians came to his hometown of Denver. Young liked Quinichette and taught him a few things.

40. Whyte and Barefield, author interviews. *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1930, listed Frank Hines, musician, at 1023 1/2 Sixth Avenue North.

41. Charles E. Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York: Norton, 1979), 487–88. Young first recorded in late 1936; these early recordings can be heard on *The Lester Young Story, Vol. 1* (Columbia CG 33502). Many of the extremely popular songs he recorded had appeared between 1924 and 1935. In order of popularity, they were: "Tea for Two" (2); "Body and Soul" (3); "After You've Gone" (4); "I Can't Give You Anything But Love" and "The Man I Love" (13); "Somebody Loves Me" (20); "I Got Rhythm" and "On the Sunny Side of the Street" (23). Young does not seem to have liked "St. Louis Blues," the most frequently recorded song; Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 487–88. For examples of his repertoire in the 1950s, *The Best of Lester Young* (Pablo PACD-2405-420-2), *Lester Young With the Oscar Peterson Trio* (Verve 314 521 451-2), and *Lester Young in Washington, D.C. 1956, Vol. 1* (Pablo OJCCD-782-2 2308-219).

42. Whyte interview.

43. *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 10, 1934, p. 7. The *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1934, listed Ganz at 248 Fourth Avenue South and Atkins at 3525 Fourth Avenue South; the 1935 directory listed Booker and Pugh at 542 Aldrich Avenue North and Alsbrook, 106 Highland Avenue. Alsbrook identified the band members; personal communica-

tion to author. He also provided the years of Young's stint with the band, though he identified the club as the El Patio. I wish to express my gratitude to the late Dave Sletten for providing a copy of the Cotton Club photo with identifications.

44. On troubles in and closures of these clubs in 1928, 1932, and 1936, see *Minneapolis Times* clippings, vertical file, Special Collections, Minneapolis Public Library.

45. Leonard Chadwick, interview by author, Apr. 18, 1985; Whyte and Smith interviews; Don Gazzaway, "Conversations with Buster Smith, Pt. 1," *Jazz Review* 2 (Dec. 1959): 22; Walter Page with Frank Driggs, "About My Life in Music by Walter Page," *Jazz Review* 1 (Nov. 1958): 12–13. See also Count Basie, *Good Morning Blues: The Autobiography of Count Basie* as told to Albert Murray (New York: Random House, 1985), 3–23, for the band leader's reminiscences of the Blue Devils; Ross Russell, *Jazz Style in Kansas City and the Southwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 133–146, 154–55.

46. Author interviews with Blue Devils Abe Bolar, June 5, 1984, Smith, and Whyte; Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 25, for Young's career in the early 1930s. Jack Ellis, "The Orchestras," *Chicago Defender*, Apr. 14, 1934, p. 9, gives Henderson's line-up when the band battled against Lucius Millinder's orchestra. Charlie Parker had a similar experience with his section mates; see Ross Russell, *Bird Lives! The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker* (New York: Da Capo, 1986), 84–85.

47. "The Battle of the Tenor Kings," *Melody Maker*, May 1, 1954, p. 11; Dance, *World of Earl Hines*, 157–58.

48. Phillips and Whyte, author interviews; Marriage License #9763.

49. Smith and Barefield, author interviews.

50. Beverly Young, interview by author, Apr. 20, 1985; Jim Fuller, "The Pres' Left a Different Set of Memories with His Daughter," *Minneapolis Times*, Aug. 25, 1985, p. 16, vertical file, Special Collections, Minneapolis Public Library. *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1929, listed a Bessie Cooper, cashier, at 1024 Russell Avenue North.

51. Lee Young, author interview. Charles Parham recalled Young's relationship with a white woman in Minneapolis but was vague on details; personal communication to author. All records that his daughter had relating to this part of Young's life—birth,

marriage, death—and photos were destroyed by fire.

52. Nelson Peery, *Black Fire: The Making of an American Revolutionary* (New York: New Press, 1994), 29–30.

53. Porter, *Lester Young Reader*, 177; *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1935; *Kansas City City Directory*, 1936, the only year that Young appeared in this city's book; Adolphus Alsbrook, personal communication. Young did not appear in the Minneapolis directory for 1933 or 1934.

54. "Lester Leaps In" can be heard on many Young records, such as *The Best of Lester Young* (Pablo PACD-2405-420-2).

55. Leonard Feather, "On Coast, You Hop Before You Jump," *Metronome*, Mar. 1945, p. 8, 31; "Jammin' The Blues," *Metronome*, Apr. 1945, p. 14. The CD *Lester Young, Vol. 6, 1944* (Masters of Jazz MJCD 99) includes recordings from the film. Some 1930s recordings are available on *Billie Holiday with Lester Young* (Giants of Jazz CD 0218).

56. Lee Young, author interview; "The Cool School," *Ebony*, Feb. 1955, p. 74; Chester Himes, *My Life of Absurdity: The Autobiography of Chester Himes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 95; Allen Ginsberg, *Composed on the Tongue*, ed. Donald Allen (Bollinas, CA: Grey Fox Press, 1980), 43; Ted Joans, "Lester Young," in *American Negro Poetry*, ed. Arna Bontemps (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), 171–72; Amiri Baraka, "Pres Spoke in a Language," in *Transbluesency: The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka/Leroi Jones (1961–1995)*, ed. Paul Vangelisti (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1995), 171–72; Connie Kay, interview by author, June 10, 1981; Charles Mingus, *Better Git It in Your Soul* (Columbia G30628); Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, *The Big Beat Blue Note* (Blue Note 84029); Joni Mitchell, *Mingus* (Asylum Records 505-2); Rahsaan Roland Kirk, *The Return of the 5,000 Lb. Man* (Warner Bros. Records BS 2918).

57. Leroy Ostransky, *Jazz City: The Impact of Our Cities on the Development of Jazz* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978); Thomas J. Hennessey, "From Jazz to Swing: Black Jazz Musicians and their Music, 1917–35" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1975), 430, concludes: "In two short years, 1929–31, jazz bands, and particularly black bands, had become a major element within the established structure of the national entertainment industry."

The pictures on p. 96, 98, 100, and 107 are courtesy Mary Young; p. 101, Leonard Phillips; p. 102, 103 (top), and 106, Institute of Jazz Studies, Dana Library, Rutgers University; p. 105, Dave Sletten; and p. 108, Ray Marcks. All others are from the Minnesota Historical Society collections.



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