

Doin' that

By Donald Challenger

Jazz Talk



Photos from the Jazz Archive collection:
(above) Vocalist Joe Williams H'88 in concert
with Henry Johnson and Bob Badgley; (facing
page) Igor Stravinsky and Benny Goodman
team up in a New York recording studio.



COURTESY OF BOB ROSENGARDEN 1199

LIKE MOST GREAT JAZZ SPOTS, it's a little off the beaten track, away from the crowds and the showcase rooms. You've got an address, but you still have to ask directions. You slip down a stairwell washed in shadow and look for a sign. You listen for a snatch of melody or a lone blue note to lead the way. You turn a corner, stroll down a cool, dark corridor, and there at last is the light.

The light, though, is not the brooding neon of a Chicago honky-tonk but the bleached fluorescence of a research room. Where the bandstand might be, a long, low desk holds neat computer terminals and files. A case along a far wall houses rows of numbered binders lined straight as piano keys. Only the photos on the walls reveal what is at the heart of things here: musicians in motion and repose, classic black-and-white portraits of an American art form in the making.

You've found the Hamilton College Jazz Archive, tucked away on the lower level of the Schambach Center. Among its thousands of vintage recordings and scores of historic photos, top billing here goes to the archive's 250 extended video interviews with both the giants and the unsung sidemen — and women — of jazz. The archive is a composite oral and sonic history of 20th-century music and culture that, like the artistry it documents, celebrates both individuality and community.

Working the door is Monk Rowe, one of the region's most respected jazz musicians, a lecturer in saxophone at the College and the Joe Williams Director of the archive. Oh, and there's no cover. Come on in.

"I remember a time when 'jazz' was a dirty word. It just became respectable in the last 40 or 45 years. ... This was a putdown of black musicians by classical musicians. I have played bar mitzvahs, I've played polkas, I've played waltzes, I've played tangos. I'm a prostitute — I mean, as long as you're gonna pay me, I'm gonna play. So don't label me a jazz musician; I'm a musician."

DAVID "PANAMA" FRANCIS, 1995

"Everybody on the planet does that. Living life is a total improvisational experience."

JIMMY CHEATHAM ON THE LIFE LESSONS OF JAZZ, 1998

"I don't believe that jazz is a contact sport. ... Yes, it's difficult, but it's a beautiful experience if you have this passion and can share it with other people."

JANE IRA BLOOM, 1998

"There was no one in the place but the band, and I was just back there playing (feigns bored nonchalance as he rides an imaginary cymbal). And he turned around and he leaned over the drum set at me, and he said, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'Roy, there's nobody in here.' And he got closer, and he said, 'I'm here.' It was the scariest thing, and it made a difference in me."

EDDIE LOCKE ON ROY ELDRIDGE'S PASSION, 2001

SEEKING A NEW MISSION

THE VISION OF MILTON F. FILLIUS JR. '44, A LIFE TRUSTEE OF THE COLLEGE who died in 2002, the Jazz Archive marks its 10th year in 2005 in a moment of transition. The interviews and oral histories that form the core of the archive's mission now come to a trickle, in part because the collection has accounted for most of the major living figures from the Big Band Era, Fillius' love.

Yet the archive continues to yield new treasures. Last year Rowe shepherded into commercial release a 1964 club performance by vocalist Joe Williams and saxophonist Ben Webster; Rowe had found it on an ancient reel-to-reel tape in a box of memorabilia given to the archive by Williams' widow. "I took it to Joel Dorn, a sort of maverick jazz producer in New York City," Rowe says. "He's got a little label called Hyena Records. I put this stuff on for him, and he literally jumped out of his seat and shouted, 'Do you know what you have here?'"

Among music scholars and serious fans, the Jazz Archive has built that kind of formidable reputation as a resource for music and information. National Public Radio sent a producer to Hamilton to pore over interviews and borrow extensively from the collection when NPR did an eight-segment feature on Count Basie for the 2004 centennial of the legendary bandleader's birth. Copies of all interviews and transcripts are now available to scholars elsewhere through interlibrary loan. And last spring, the jazz writer and activist-journalist Nat Hentoff devoted a glowing column in *The Wall Street Journal* to the "invaluable" archive and the Williams-Webster CD, ultimately released as Joe Williams' *Havin' a Good Time! Featuring Ben Webster*.

"The importance of the archive is huge," says "Doctuh" Michael Woods, associate professor of music and director of the Hamilton Jazz Ensemble. "Many of these people have passed on. We got statements of great intelligence and insight from

During his 1998 interview, trumpeter Joe Wilder told of a trip to Charleston, S.C., in 1948 with the Lucky Millinder Orchestra, an integrated band known for its showmanship. The musicians had just arrived when a sheriff and his deputy pulled up and confronted them.

"I'm just here to tell you there's not gonna be any mixed band playing here in Charleston," the sheriff said.

"Lucky looked this guy dead in the eye and said, 'This is not a mixed band,'" Wilder recalled. "Now, some of the guys are blond, blue eyes — no way in the world anybody would mistake these guys as being black. But Lucky went down the line to ask each musician, 'Are you colored?' and each one replied yes.

"The sheriff turned to his deputy and said, 'Well, I guess if they all say they're colored, there ain't nothin' we can do about it.' And they got in their car and drove off."

them before they passed. There is a wellspring of dignity, an unspeakable value, in what they left. And we have it at Hamilton College."

Despite its growing national stature, however, on campus the archive has remained something of a secret. Rowe estimates that no more than 10 percent of those who use the archive are students or faculty members. That may be changing, thanks in part to a spring 2005 exhibition at the Emerson Gallery, "The Music Stand: Jazz as a Unifying Social Force." A collaborative effort by the Jazz Archive, the Emerson Gallery and the Department of Music, "The Music Stand" featured video interviews and photos from the archive's collection and a 1996 film documentary on vocalist Williams commissioned by the archive.

"The Music Stand" put jazz in a visible place on campus," says Peter Van Siclen '06, who headlined a performance to open the exhibition and wrote two pieces for the gallery guide that accompanied it. "The exhibit brought pictures and video clips to the eyes of people who would not normally get to see them."

THE STORY BEYOND THE MUSIC

PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANT, "THE MUSIC STAND" EXHIBITION UNDERScored the importance of jazz through the first half of the 20th century as a social and historical force as well as a musical one. In the 1930s, more than a decade before professional sports and the military began grudgingly to integrate, big band jazz would often erase the color line, quite literally. Not only did black and white musicians mingle on the bandstand; ropes put up by local authorities to separate black and white audiences would be pulled down. The music provided a soundtrack to the urban migration north, morphing along the way from the gospel wail of Dixieland jazz to the dance-hall swing of Kansas City to the sonic explorations of be-bop from Harlem to Chicago.

The language, style and improvisational range of jazz emerged as metaphors and outlets for American individuality, countering the regimentation and anonymity of daily life with new possibilities and images — the Swing Era, the hipster and, in Miles Davis' memorable phrase, the "birth of the cool." Decades before Motown, soul or hip-hop, jazz provided African-Americans with a collective artistic voice that also spoke to white musicians and listeners in increasingly powerful ways.

"Black musicians weren't just playing great music," says Woods, who did some of the archive's early interviews. "They were trying to play their future and their dignity and their equality into existence." Jazz became, in a sense, America's story — a transforming narrative of suffering met and transcended, of value in community and the nobility of individual style and accomplishment.



COURTESY OF JOE WILDER '04

It is this extra musical dimension that Rowe sees as the archive's new theme and direction. "I'd say at least half the value of these interviews is non-jazz material," he says. "There's a tremendous amount of stuff related to sociology, American history, the Depression, spirituality, race relations — all firsthand accounts. A lot of these guys served in the military in World War II, and some of them were in the thick of it. I have to find a way to make professors on campus more aware of the archive as a resource, and not just for music courses."

That, says Couper Librarian Randall Ericson, is the core of the archive's value to students and scholars. It takes them to the music's originators — its primary sources — rather than to the more diluted histories and interpretations of other scholars. Ericson, who as Hamilton's librarian now oversees the archive, points out that the ability to work with such materials is a key to Hamilton's educational mission: "The more that we can make students aware of primary sources and how to use them in their research, the stronger their scholarship will be."

One student who has used the archive as a research tool in this way is Janine Rowe '06, Rowe's daughter. She wrote the cover essay for the gallery guide to "The Music Stand," exploring jazz as a force for social change.

"I studied culture, sociology and history, and for every facet of research, I found relevant primary-source information in the archive," she says. "It was a completely different way of researching and learning. ... The archive gave me much more material than I could ever sift through — and all of it was straight from the horse's mouth."

DOCUMENTING THE JAZZ CONVERSATION

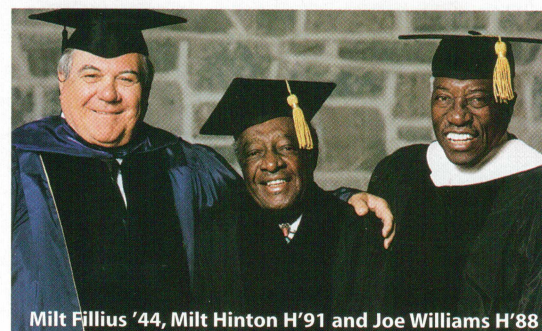
IF THE ORIGIN OF THE JAZZ ARCHIVE CAN BE TRACED TO A SINGLE MOMENT, it would be a dinner at the Alexander Hamilton Inn in May 1991, on the weekend that the College presented bassist Milt Hinton with an honorary degree. Rowe recalls the story as Fillius told it to him: Joe Williams had come to town for the festivities, and Fillius — himself an amateur drummer — had joined the two musical legends to eat. "Milt Hinton and Joe Williams start trading stories, and they're doing that talk, that jazz talk," Rowe says with a laugh. "And Milt Fillius is just

sitting there listening, soaking it all in. And then it hits him: This is what we need." It would take four years to turn that moment of inspiration into a reality, but Fillius was willing to start small, and he stuck with his instincts. Great jazz was a conversation, and the way to save and document its past was as an ongoing conversation with the people who had lived it. Fillius secured initial funding from the Drown Foundation and drew up a list of 30 jazz figures he wanted to interview — most of them associated with Joe Williams or the Count Basie Orchestra. He enlisted Rowe, then a newcomer to Hamilton, and Woods to do the interviews. Accompanied by Tim Hicks, director of audiovisual and classroom services at Hamilton, who handled the cameras and recording equipment, they hit the road in search of gatherings and parties where musicians congregated.

The first stop, in March 1995, was in Scottsdale, Ariz. They logged eight interviews. A Caribbean jazz cruise a few weeks later produced about a dozen more. Subsequent trips took one or both to New York City, San Francisco and Los Angeles. At first they met some resistance, Rowe says. A few musicians feared commercial exploitation; others were afraid they'd be asked to dish dirt on fellow musicians. A small handful "wanted to be paid big bucks" beyond the \$200 honorarium the archive offered.

But Joe Williams himself, long a friend of Fillius and the College, helped pave the way by doing a few of the early interviews. "People started to hear about us," Rowe says. "Yeah, those guys are OK, they would say." Ultimately, he says, common musical experience provided the connection.

"In my career, I've done most of the things that these people did," he says. "I've done some studio work and some road work; I've taught jazz. I know what it's like to be on a bandstand and play with people you're just meeting, the musical etiquette involved in that."



VICKERS & BEECHLER

"We had two navies, you know. We had a white navy and a black navy. Our camp was Camp Robert Smalls, and all of the black enlisted men in the naval services were relegated to this camp. We had a commander who was the most notorious banjo player of that era, by the name of Eddie Peabody. He was still sort of antebellum in those days. And he had the grand idea, since he was surrounded by all these black musicians, to start a minstrel [show]. White gloves and bow-ties. ... We rebelled almost to the point where we were gonna be charged with mutiny."

CLARK TERRY ON WORLD WAR II LIFE IN THE MILITARY, 1995

Van Siclen '06 notes that many of the interviews spotlight figures who are often pushed to the margins in typical histories of jazz. "Although there might be a few biographies of top jazz artists, there are countless others who have gone before who have been innovators in their own right," he says.

Rowe likens the process of collecting the interviews and building the archive to that of an arranger in the studio or on the bandstand. When Rowe listens to music, he listens for a tone, a groove, but what he really locks into is a sharp arrangement — instruments and voices shaped by alchemy into a whole, the community of the band balanced against the freedom of individual improvisation. "I love arrangements," he says. "That's what first attracted me to music, listening to how it all came together."

REACHING BEYOND BIG BANDS

FOR ITS FIRST TWO YEARS, ROWE SAYS, "THE ARCHIVE WAS LIVING ON TOP OF my piano at home," and in many ways it continued to be a family effort after moving to its current two rooms in Schambach. Rowe's wife, Romy Britell, transcribed all the archive's interviews from video to print and created a keyword database so that the transcriptions can be searched by topic — materials that have turned out to be more valuable to scholars than the video conversations themselves. And long before Janine Rowe developed a scholarly interest in the archive, she knew the faces and voices like old friends. "I've grown up with written, video and audio versions of these interviews in my living room, so I've watched the project grow," she says.

The scope of the archive expanded with its size. Fillius "had very set tastes in his music," Rowe says. "His love was classic big band jazz." When Rowe or Woods had the opportunity to interview someone outside Fillius' sphere of interest, they'd often have to wheedle approval out of the trustee.

War Stories

PIANIST JOHN BUNCH SERVED AS A PILOT IN WORLD WAR II and was shot down over Germany and taken prisoner. He believes the experience deepened his music emotionally. "Sometimes I think I can use the music to remember those days," he told "Doctuh" Michael Woods in a 1995 interview. "I'm not saying it's a necessity, but it probably helped a little."

Pianist Junior Mance heard faint strains of a hot jazz band one night while on guard patrol during the Korean War and followed the sound to a base club — where Julian "Cannonball" Adderley was onstage. Mance sat down on his helmet and began to play. He believes the chance meeting saved his life.

Marian McPartland, working for the USO during World War II, hit France just weeks after the D-Day invasion and entertained troops near the front. She had to learn to play the accordion because pianos weren't always available. "We had helmets and combat boots and everything the guys had but guns," she told Monk Rowe in a 1997 interview.

Onaje Allen Gumbs, drafted into service for the Vietnam War, was unable to pull a trigger but unwilling to flee to Canada. So he sought, and won, conscientious objector status, basing his plea not on religion but on the spiritual nature of his music.

Trumpeter Bobby Johnson, Jr. was working the Blue Room at the Hotel Lincoln in New York City — one of the few white venues to hire black performers at the time — when someone came out of the wings and silenced the band for an important announcement. World War II was over. Johnson spent years looking for a recording of that night but never found one.

Jazz came of age and reached maturity in the more than three decades that encompassed World War II, Korea and Vietnam. The Hamilton College Jazz Archive is rich with war stories, from harrowing tales of combat to barracks humor, from racism in the ranks to struggles with the ethics of killing and the rigors of life stateside. Part of the archive's future mission will be to establish the value of such oral histories outside the realm of music scholarship. They are the narratives of lives fully lived, in uniform as well as on the bandstand.



Jazz pianists Dick Hyman H'02, Marian McPartland H'97 and Roland Hanna.

COURTESY OF JOE WILDER H'04



(left) Monk Rowe, Genevieve Rose, Claude "Fiddler" Williams and Mark Copani performing at Hamilton's Little Pub; (right) Frank Foster, saxophonist, working with Hamilton students.

"I'd say to Milt, 'You know, we should interview that guy.' Or I'd say, 'I'm going to New York, and I might get the chance to talk to this guy.' And Milt would say, (Rowe slips into a fond imitation of the gruff Fillius) 'Arrgh, that guy, I don't think ... Aww, all right, go ahead.'"

The persistence paid off. While the collection retained its focus on big bands and swing, Rowe and Woods ventured outside Fillius' envelope to score interviews with later generations of musicians, from established artists such as Houston Person and Charles McPherson to rising stars. Rowe caught bassist Christian McBride, now one of the music's brightest lights, on the way up in 1996. Woods and Rowe talked to vocalist Dianne Reeves together. Banjo pioneer Bela Fleck, Afro-Cuban innovator Chico Freeman, composer-arranger Maria Schneider, bassist Genevieve Rose and guitarist John Abercrombie all sat down to chat.

The results often have the feel of — well, jazz duets. A scripted prompt or two open the exchange, but as the dialogue warms up it stretches out and turns spontaneous. Joe Williams and Clark Terry slip into a dead-on parody of a minstrel show, at once brutal and hilarious. A combative Panama Francis boasts of "cutting" competitors on the bandstand. Others embark on elaborate solo flights. Joe Wilder unfolds a tale of confrontation with a South Carolina sheriff in 1948, defused by a bandleader's quick thinking. Drummer Eddie Locke, constantly in motion at age 70, mimes each instrument as it comes up in conversation. The best interviews achieve a kind of call-and-response electricity greater than the sum of their parts.

Both Rowe and Woods talk of the experience of interviewing legends in terms beyond sentimentality, in tones approaching awe. "These people are my heroes, at a level so poignant for me that sometimes I hardly knew what to say," Woods recalls. "That's something very private for me. These people made world-class accomplishments against ridiculous odds."

THE FUTURE 'AN OPEN QUESTION'

MANY THEMES RUNS THROUGH THE JAZZ ARCHIVE INTERVIEWS, BUT ONE recurrent melody is the theme of the search — the idea that the music, like the lives that create it, is never fully realized or articulated. Harry "Sweets" Edison describes the lifelong challenge of "finding a note." Dianne Reeves says, "I put myself in positions that are, I don't know, kind of scary — that make you dig real deep and find things." Denny

Zeitlin talks about "getting out of the way" of the music in order to be a part of it. Clark Terry and Bill Charlap describe musicianship as the ability to listen deeply. "Listen to the players around you," Charlap said in an 2000 interview. "Listen to what the space needs." So often billed as the music of high-voltage riffs and technique to burn, jazz is also the music of preparing for the moment and paying profound attention.

The Jazz Archive, too, is in search of its note as it begins its second decade. Ericson says much of the task will involve raising awareness on campus of the archive's value as a resource — a unique kind of special collection that can serve students and scholars in many fields. That task is already under way, he says. Less certain is further expansion of the archive's holdings.

"It has at this point ceased to grow because the grant funding that supported it has come to an end, and we have pretty well fulfilled the original intent of the project," he says. "Whether we should expand it or not is an open question. Is that an appropriate thing to do, and are there funds to do it?"

Rowe agrees that the archive has documented the music and culture of the Big Band Era well, and he finds particular value in the lessons of that time. "In the '30s, jazz was pop music; now it's been elevated to an art form," he says. "There is jazz at Lincoln Center, there is jazz in academia. You can hear jazz in concert halls like you would classical music. On the other hand, the club scene where it fomented and where it was created, life on the road, playing for dances where the response from the audience helped shape the music ... having that sort of visceral connection to your audience is not nearly as apparent any more. So we've elevated the music, but it's also lost ... some juice."

But that's all the more reason, Rowe says, to continue to seek out the innovators who still carry the torch — those musicians who grasp the deep connection between past and future.

Woods agrees. "An archive to me is not just the past. A real archive is the totality," he says. "History doesn't just stop. There are young cats out there playing music of incredible skill and dignity and intellect, and that deserves to be heard and documented. The young cats ain't always gonna be the young cats. Someday they're gonna be the old cats."

Donald Challenger is a regular contributor to the Hamilton Alumni Review. He wrote the cover story on Vivyan Adair's Professor of the Year award for the Spring-Summer 2005 issue.