

**Newsletter Date**  
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**From the Doris K.**  
**Wylie Hoskins**  
**Archive On Cultural**  
**Diversity**



## Special Edition: C-U Jazz

This newsletter is the product of a collaboration between a pair of jazz-head graduate students from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. We wanted to take an

appreciative look at the history of the jazz scene in C-U through the resources made available at the Doris Haskins Archive, while providing the resources for people who want to get into the scene, but don't quite know where to begin. We sincerely hope that you enjoy our efforts here, and that it inspires you to

dig more deeply into the deep jazz tradition surrounding C-U.

Sincerely,

Steve and Lee



### The Bridgewaters: A C-U Jazz Dynasty

by Lee Wittenstein

The Bridgewater family has, without a doubt, had a powerfully enduring effect on the Champaign-Urbana music scene for several decades. The generations of influential jazz players and band leaders this family has produced are at the top of everyone's list when it comes to describing the growth of music in Champaign-Urbana. The matriarch of the family, Erma Bridgewater, still lives locally and has become something of a pillar of historical knowledge concerning the Champaign-Urbana African-American community.

Starting with Preston Bridgewater, who played cornet in the Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus Band sometime around 1908, music

seems to have been in the Bridgewater family blood. Preston's son, Cecil Bridgewater, born in Tuscola, Illinois in 1910, continued the family's musical endeavors by playing trumpet in the U.S. Navy Jazz Band on the islands of Curacao & Aruba while serving in the Navy during World War II. He married Erma Scott in 1941, and she, a pianist herself, brought even more musical pedigree to their family. Erma's father, Ray Scott, played saxophone and directed a popular Champaign dance band called "Ray Scott and the Footwarmers." Meanwhile, Cecil's brother, Pete Bridgewater was also going through a stint in the military during WWII and returned home to play bass and lead several local

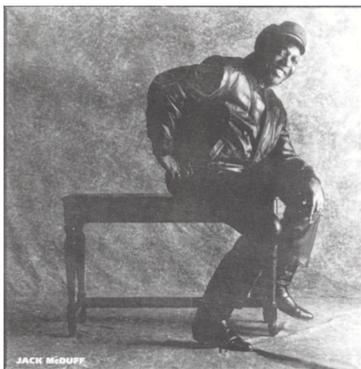
Fifth Annual Fall Festival 1975  
Urban League and the Ambassador Club



Tribute to **COUNT DEMON**

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*Count Demon*



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*Jack McDuff*

## Jazz Messengers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

By Steven Assarian

I went to see a jazz trio play at the Iron Post a couple of weeks ago. The crowd was decent, if quiet, and clapped politely in appreciation of a good show. It was quite fine to see a few jazz musicians having a good time to the beat of clinking glasses and eight dollar steaks.

For a variety of reasons, such a scene is becoming a rarity in this day and age. Finding people who will pay and listen to good music is harder than it was even 10 years ago.

Fortunately jazz has been a well-supported art in C-U, since old time jazzmen came through town on their way to St. Louis, or Chicago. Local musicians performed throughout central Illinois, and others came to town for the U of I jazz band, headed by John Garvey, which performed the world over. Part of the support for this vibrant community came in the form of the C-U Jazz and Blues Association.

The CUJBA was formed in early 1991 as a response to the closing of the Nature's Table, a popular jazz venue/whole foods restaurant that occupied the space across from the Krannert Center on Goodwin, where the UIUC Chemistry Labs now stand. The organization was committed to the progulmation of local music, and contributed heartily to the community clubs of both jazz and blues. They supported an analog jazz hotline that was updated to provide people with the latest updates for jazz and blues performances in the area. They organized annual, day-long music festivals, and printed a monthly newsletter which contains astute commentary pertaining to the development of jazz in the 90's, especially the Japanese scene. Their newsletter remains an impressive record of the local jazz scene from the 90's with thoughtful, well-written

articles from local writers. The Doris Haskins archive carries a nearly-complete run of this resource.

The organization folded in 1998, but fortunately for us, there are still a number of similar jazz resources available to us today. Jeff Machota, the organization's former president, currently runs a jazz listserv that advertises live jazz music sessions free of charge, all around C-U. It can claim hundreds of members, and has been growing since the UIUC instated a Jazz program a few years ago. To sign up, simply go to '<http://lists.shout.net/mailman/listinfo/jazzblues>' and you'll recieve a daily e-mail digest of jazz performances in the area. Another veteran of the CUJBA, horn man Jeff Helgenson runs '[www.cujazz.org](http://www.cujazz.org)' which contains not only listings of jazz performances, but also venue information, links to local jazz websites and albums. It also lists the Nature's Table website: '<http://www.naturestable.net/>'.

Champaign still has annual jazz festivals as well, thanks to the Nature's Table reunions that have been organized the last few years. I caught up with Mr. Machota to discuss jazz and the Table, and he had this to say:

'We've had now three Nature's Table reunions. The first was at Mike & Molly's at the biergarten, but that was a crapshoot because of the weather. (Luckily, it ended up being nice and we sold it out). Then it was at the Canopy Club the year after, which is close to where it was, and then last year we did it at the Iron Post, which worked out really well. We've been able to generate more and more interest in these events. We've got a Facebook presence for Nature's Table ['I used to work, play or hang at Nature's Table' which is an open group, so feel free to join]. We put up a bunch of photos and things like that.'

## Through the Years: Special Music Edition

The fourth reunion is scheduled for July 31<sup>st</sup> and August 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. The two day event will take place Friday the 31<sup>st</sup> at the Iron Post in Urbana, and Saturday August 1<sup>st</sup> at Cowboy Monkey in downtown Champaign.

If you can't wait that long and want to see shows around town, the Iron Post in downtown Urbana has you covered. They run jazz there almost every day of the week, and have a full piano to accompany the music. A newcomer to the area, Picasso's in Urbana, also throws its hat into the ring, having jazz performances two nights a week at least, and the best burgers in town (by my count, mind you). For Champaign, you can't go wrong with Zorba's, which has jazz every Thursday night. If you're looking to get into jazz, and want to see some great live shows Zorba's is the place to go on campus. It's a great vibe, even if your just starting out in the scene.



Alto Vineyard has a good set of jazz performances through the spring and summer months, from May until September. Their 'Music Among the Vines' series boasted some notable acts last year, including Candy Foster and the Eric Jerardi Band.

If you'd like to listen to some jazz in the comfort of your own home, you can find all sorts of excellent jazz on WEFT 90.1 FM. Jazz programming can be found every weekday morning from 9:30 to 11:00 am. Nighttime programming varies by time, but if you miss a show, many of them are available streaming online at '<http://weft.org/>.'

Things wax and wane in every community, including the jazz community. But, living in Central Illinois, we can still find the thriving scene out there- we just have to know where to look!

Pete Bridgewater

### The Rise of C-U Jazz (Continued from p. 1)

bands. He later went on to become a well known jazz DJ for many years on radio station WDWS.

Erma & Cecil, started a family and went on to have three children, Cecil, Jr., Ron, and Cassandra. Both boys showed a musical interest from an early age and Cecil, Jr., has told of how a trip to see Louis Armstrong perform at the Huff Gymnasium at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana when he was 10 years old inspired him to become a musician. The young Cecil's musical aptitude for music on trumpet, his chosen instrument, was obvious even at the grade school level, and he soon began to work with a private music teacher, Haskell Sexton, head of the trumpet division at the University of Illinois School of Music. As a teenager Cecil would sneak out to go and hone his musical skills by playing late into the

night with some of his Uncle Pete's bands. He got to play with some amazingly talented hometown musicians during this period, such as Jack McDuff, Count Demon, Donald Smith, and Tony Zamora. He was also inspired by the music he could hear coming from the AmVets Club, located across the street from the Bridgewater family dwelling, as ace musicians from Chicago jammed on their nights off with local musicians in the vibrant Champaign-Urbana jazz scene. As should be obvious, all of this dynamic music activity was an incredibly fertile environment for a young jazz musician to grow up in.

By the late 1960s Cecil Bridgewater, Jr. was a prime player in Champaign-Urbana's thriving jazz arena. Following in the footsteps of his father, Cecil ended up in the army in Vietnam, again playing in a

military ensemble. After returning to the United States, Cecil re-entered the University of Illinois and rejoined his fellow musicians in the school jazz band. During this period the University of Illinois Jazz Band travelled around the world, winning many musical awards, and established a reputation of excellence for itself. By 1970 Cecil had gotten married to singer Dee Dee Garrett, (Later, even after a divorce, to become famous under her married name as Dee Dee Bridgewater) and had an offer to play with Horace Silver in New York, so he relocated to the Big Apple. After playing with Horace Silver, he went on to play for a few years with the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Jazz Band, and then established a long-running relationship with Max Roach which has extended across many

Continued on page 4

**Continued from page 3**

years and many recordings.

Ron Bridgewater, Cecil's younger brother, was busy establishing his own virtuoso music chops on the saxophone in the University of Illinois Jazz band when Cecil headed out for New York. He soon received a phone call from Cecil when a position for a saxophonist opened up in the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Jazz Band and Ron headed for New York as well and for a time both Bridgewater brothers played together in the same band and toured the world. Since then, Ron has gone on to play with a great many jazz luminaries such as Horace Silver, McCoy Tyner, and Max Roach and has been frequently on call for such Broadway hit shows as *Ain't Misbehavin'* & *Sophisticated Ladies*. Ron has returned to Champaign-Urbana and is now an Associate Professor of Jazz Saxophone at the University of Illinois School of Music where he attempts to pass on the lessons he has learned about jazz to a new generation of musicians.

Both Cecil & Ron continue to play, compose, record, and teach the music they love and they bring a great deal of pride to the Champaign-Urbana community which nurtured them. Dee Dee Bridgewater has also gone on to stardom in Europe and has won two Grammy Awards and a Tony Award. Rarely has so much musical talent been bundled up in one family. The roots that the Bridgewaters developed in Champaign-Urbana have served them well in the music world and beyond and they take true pride in representing a community that holds them dear.



Brewer's Juvenile Band

The Through the Years newsletter is a publication on Champaign County African American history and the result of support from community volunteers and donations by local businesses. Please help us spread the word! Xerox and share this newsletter with others. Visit our website at: [www.earlyamericanmuseum.org](http://www.earlyamericanmuseum.org).

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