

## Before Motown: A History of Jazz in Detroit 1920-1960

**Lars Bjorn**

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Although New York, Chicago, and New Orleans have long been recognized as hotbeds of jazz development, other cities have made important contributions. *Before Motown* concentrates on Detroit, a city with a heritage rich in culture and music. Bjorn carefully documents the rise and growth of jazz in the Motor City, and identifies a number of its star players. He also documents the rise of rhythm and blues, a movement that would give birth to soul music in the 1960s.

Bjorn provides more than an overview of Detroit jazz. He includes its social history, noting the effects of African-American migration, segregation in the entertainment industry, and the structure of Detroit's black community. In 1910 there were 5,700 African Americans living in Detroit, or 1.2 percent of the population; by 1930, that number had risen to 120,000, or 7.7 percent. This rapid growth led to housing shortages and racial tensions during the 1920s. Established African-American leaders, among them small businessmen and skilled workers, built institutions to support and protect the incoming migrants. A black entertainment industry that included jazz clubs also developed.

A number of well-known jazz players originated from Detroit. Hard bop guitarist Kenny Burrell began his long, prolific career on the east side of the city, playing in small groups at the Broadway Capital and Crystal Show Bar. Although he was offered other opportunities, he remained in Detroit to finish his degree at Wayne State. When he finally did leave, it was with Detroit pianist Tommy Flanagan. Flanagan began to play professionally in the mid 1940s with Frank Rosolino at the Bowl-O-Drome and continued to develop his technique at the Blue Bird before a stint in the Army. Burrell and Flanagan, along with Elvin Jones, Yusef Lateef, and Paul Chambers, would spread the influence of Detroit jazz as they moved to New York.

Because the book concentrates on one city, it offers a great deal of detail, such as a number of maps showing the location of various venues, and reproductions of advertisements used for club dates. These provide the reader with visual cues to re-imagine Detroit's lively jazz scene between the 1920s to the 1950s. Bjorn has written a knowledgeable book that establishes Detroit as an important player in the rise of modern jazz.

RONALD D. LANKFORD, JR. (January / February 2002)

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