

A Guide to the
**COLLECTION of JIMMIE LUNCEFORD MUSIC & MEMORABILIA, 1934-
1944**

Fisk University Archives

Processed by
Uzoma O. Miller
Archival Assistant
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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Born on June 6, 1902 in Fulton, Mississippi, James Melvin "Piggie" Lunceford emerged in the 1930s- 1940s as one of the world's premiere band leaders of the Big Band era of Jazz. Historical accounts consistently rank the Jimmie Lunceford sound on equal par with the likes of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Fletcher Henderson, and Cab Calloway of the same era. In fact, the same historical record is also consistent on the fact that Lunceford's band's visually choreographed showmanship was rivaled by few, including the aforementioned of considerable more popular notoriety and recognition.

Trained and mastered on flute, guitar, trombone, clarinet, and violin, Lunceford grew up primarily in Denver, Colorado before attending Fisk University from which he earned an A.B. in Sociology in 1925. By all accounts, the student Lunceford was well rounded, possessing attributes that would inevitably contribute to his success as a leader of orchestras. While at Fisk, Lunceford starred in football, track, baseball, was a member of the Orchestra, Glee Club, and president of the class of 1925. Following graduation, he worked as a music teacher at Manassas High School, Memphis, Tennessee, 1926- 1929, from which he developed, nurtured, and honed a popular dance orchestra that he fronted and directed, composed of his students. As most of the students graduated from high school, Lunceford successfully encouraged many to continue their academic studies at his alma mater, Fisk. While eventual Fisk graduates including his brother Cornelius A. Lunceford, road manager, 1931; William M. "Billy" Smith, saxophonist, 1929; and students who attended Fisk, namely Edwin Wilcox, pianist; Earl Caruthers, bass saxophonist; and Paul Webster, trumpet, all attended school, Lunceford worked partially as a waiter in between scheduling band appearances and showcases.

Beginning in 1929 the act became a full-time professional unit by traveling extensively. Their big break came in 1930 with their first recordings "In Dat Mawnin," and "Sweet Rhythm" by Victor Records. Initially billed as Jimmie Lunceford and his Chickasaw Syncopators, the Lunceford sound became distinguishable from its keen since of rhythm and swing. For the remainder of the 1930s and early-middle 1940s, Lunceford's Orchestra was a staple feature act in New York's Lafayette and Apollo Theaters, the Cotton Club, as well as on tours of European cities including Scandinavia, France, Belgium, and Holland. As events of World War II significantly disrupted bookings for big bands, Lunceford was one of the few to partially sustain itself. But the impact was felt as many musicians were drafted and other defections resulted from competitive wages offered by other band leaders. Lunceford died of a heart attack after working a show in Seaside, Oregon, July 13, 1947.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The **Collection of Jimmie Lunceford Music & Memorabilia** contains seven Jimmie Lunceford and the Lunceford Orchestra (often referred to as the Harlem Express) albums, 1934-1944; fourteen undated photographs of Lunceford aggregates on stage, traveling, and in promotional activity; and a copy of the Frank Sinatra forwarded and 1981 fourth edition of *The Big Bands*, by George T. Simon. There is no evidential value because no clear collector is identified. However, significant informational value can be attained through recording liner notes and images of Lunceford with his manager and band members. Though clear ownership of collection material is elusive, approximately one-third of the photographs render "return to Joe Thomas," who was a first tenor saxophonist, featured soloist, and singer with Lunceford's band. The albums, excluding the 1944 *Live at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri* recording, all are 1980 promotional re-issue copies from MCA Records. The copy of *The Big Bands*, by George T. Simon contains a 1988 invoice from the Macmillan Publishing Company addressed to the Fisk University Library. Additionally, an unidentified postage from the Henry Wells Complete Wedding Center Photography Company, addressed to the Fisk University Library appears with a handwritten memo that reads "see Lunceford File." Such informational clues may prove valuable for researchers.

BOX LIST

Box

Folder

Series I: Albums

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|----------|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | <i>Rhythm is our Business</i> , 1934- 1935, MCA Records, Inc., 1980 |
| | 2 | <i>Jimmie's Legacy</i> , 1934- 1937, MCA Records, Inc., 1980 |
| | 3 | <i>Harlem Shout</i> , 1935- 1936, MCA Records, Inc., 1980 |
| | 4 | <i>For Dancers Only</i> , 1936- 1937, MCA Records, Inc., 1980 |
| | 5 | <i>Blues in the Night</i> , 1938- 1942, MCA Records, Inc., 1980 |
| | 6 | <i>The Last Sparks</i> , 1941- 1944, MCA Records, Inc., 1980 |
| | 7 | <i>Live at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri</i> , 1944, Hindsight Records, 1985 |

Series II: Photographs

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| | 8 | "Brass Section, Lunceford Orchestra," n.d. |
| | 9 | "His Pleasure, Jimmie Autographing," n.d. |
| | 10 | "Jimmie Lunceford," n.d. |
| | 11 | "Jimmie Lunceford," n.d. |
| | 12 | "Jimmie Lunceford," n.d. |
| | 13 | "Jimmie Lunceford and Harold F. Oxley," n.d. |
| | 14 | "Jimmie Lunceford and His Orchestra," n.d. |
| | 15 | "Still Going Strong, Jimmie Lunceford and Harold F. Oxley," n.d. |
| | 16 | Unidentified, autographed promotional, n.d. |
| | 17 | Unidentified, group members with airplane, n.d. |
| | 18 | Unidentified, group members with airplane, n.d. |
| | 19 | Unidentified, trombone solo spotlight, n.d. |
| | 20 | Unidentified, saxophone solo spotlight, n.d. |
| | 21 | Unidentified, saxophone solo spotlight, n.d. |

Series III: Collection

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| | 22 | <i>The Big Bands</i> , 4 th ed., 1981, by George T. Simon |
| | 23 | Unidentified Memo |