

I was conned but I kept on looking!

At Fred's suggestion I delved into the British Newspaper Archives to see if there was any mention of the arrival in Britain of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1919. I didn't draw a blank but was underwhelmed by the lack of coverage, although I did turn up a number of bands that, in name, preceded them as a Jazz Band playing in Britain. Where the "con" comes in is that I was amazed to see an advert, repeated on several days, that The Band of The Coldstream Guards would be playing in a Leeds park to celebrate the end on WW1 and that they would be playing the "Jazz Music of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band", then I read the tag at the end, "or an Al Fresco concert".

* see footnote on last page

David Boulton's book "Jazz in Britain" (Jazz Book Club 1959) covers the introduction of jazz into Britain in great detail; how "The Jazz" was a dance preceding the arrival of the music, how the clergy reacted and such but with advantage of having the internet I am able to add and bit more flesh on the bones of how jazz music arrived here.

First of all it should be noted that as early as December 1899 the South Wales Daily News carried a report of the performance of the Dumond Minstrels at local theatre in Newport where the Dumond Minstrels are referred to as "*those unrivalled Paris musicians*". They probably accompanied Mr Fred Brown, the American comedian and rag-time dancer as they were part of the same company.

From this it is clear that there was an influx of syncopated music entering Britain from the continent of Europe and/or the U.S.A. at least as an accompaniment to dancers. The People in October 1916 reviewed the show at the Coliseum that included La Belle Leonora assisted by Signor Valentino, also gave a series of modern dances to an "*American Ragtime Band, which rejoices in a most active and industrious drummer named Louis Mitchell.*"



"The Magleys" were a well respected couple Americans who toured the halls demonstrating all the latest dances and as early as August 1917 both The Stage and The Era reported on their performances at The Holborn Empire where they were accompanied by The Jazz Band. The reporter in The Stage goes on to describe the music of the jazz band; "*The Jazz Band's speciality is syncopation and who's playing – with eccentric trap-drumming of Hughes Pollard – carries one back to the glad nights at Caro's before the War.*" Whether The Magleys had been influenced by a month long engagement in Paris in June 1916 had been their introduction to the Jazz Band is speculative. A variant on the theme was the appearance at theatres of the "American Jazzbo Singing Band", the Dundee Peoples

Journal of the 2nd February 1918 informs us that *“The full band of Jazz performers were under the careful and talented leadership of Maurice Rais”*

Note: - Raisburd, Moishe Hersh [known as Morris (or Maurice.) ,Rais]; Russia;. Musician; 42, Brownswood Road,. Finsbury Park,. London. 12th June, 1931, ' from THE LONDON GAZETTE, 7 JULY, 1931.

There was adverse publicity on the 27th February 1918, in The Era, when there was a report of the performances at The Bedford Music Hall, *“At the Bedford, a jazz band appears to be a combination of violin, banjos, brass, bones, tin kettles, and Lord knows what beside” and the music emanating is a sort of super-syncopated rag-time, rag-time in absolute tatters”*

The next mention of “Jazz Band” comes in an advert for sheet music where readers were urged to *“Stick Around for the New Jazz Band”* one of several such title to be plugged prior to the arrival of the DJB.

The Sunday Mirror on June 30th 1918 commented that *“Brighton still has dances, and has moreover a Jazz Band for the new dances”*.

Another earlier contender for being the first Jazz Band in Britain are Kay and Stephens’ “8 Hawaiians” who were advertised in The Stage in July 1918 as “The 8 Hawaiians” and who by September that year had emerged from their chrysalis to become a fully formed butterfly going under the title of “The Hawaiians, featuring The Great American Jazz Band” .

Whilst they had been developing, in September 1918 The Leeds Mercury that a baseball match at Headingley involving visiting American airmen *“In all probability would bring with them what is known as a Jazz Band, a feature of musical enterprise known only to Americans, which should constitute a decided novelty to the Leeds public.”*

Meanwhile, not to be left behind in the clamour for this latest novelty and London agent “De Wolfe’s Direction” advertised in The Era for *“musicians, banjo, saxophone, cornet, trombone, violin and trap drummers to join Murray Walker’s famous American Rag and Jazz Bands.”* for possible West End engagements.

At last we come to the earliest recognisable incursion to Britain by a real jazz band, as opposed to local musicians emulating what they thought a jazz band should sound like, The Hampshire Advertiser on the 23rd September 1918 reported on “Entertainment at the American Hut” where, on at a concert given Thursday last in the Y.M.C.A, hut arranged by Miss Margaret Bishop *“Items were given by Mr Miller’s U.S. Navy “Jazz Band”. A Jazz band is the latest sort of ragtime band, which at present creating a furore on the other side of the Atlantic, and these exponents of the new art played wonderful dance music,”*

The same week Elsie Janis in The Sunday Mirror anticipated that *“Great Britain would shortly be afflicted by a new plague. It is called “Jazz”, and we shall be inoculated with the germ when “Hullo America” is produced on Wednesday at The Palace.”* She went on to describe how the Jazz Band came to New York using derogatory language that I am not

prepared to repeat. There also was a report in The Pall Mall Gazette that the plague had already reached Paris where “*nowadays the Jazz Band is the chief feature of the revue.*”

The “Hello America” show finally opened at The Palace Theatre and amongst the cast was none other than Miss Irene Magley who danced brilliantly. The star of the show was Miss Elsie Janis who appeared in several guises including as leader of the much talked of “Jazz Band”



1. THE JAZZ BAND: MISS ELSIE JANIS AS IRIS (IN THE CENTRE), WITH THE CHORUS OF PALACE GIRLS.

Everyone was getting on the bandwagon. The Era magazine on October 9th carried an advert for new tunes published by Keith Prowse and Co. that included “Honey Lamb”, the new South American Fox Trot played by Murray Pilcer and his Band and also by the Versatile Four at Murray’s Club. (Following from Wikipedia)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EP4YMIUv9Pg>

Murray Pilcer and his Jazz Band



These recordings were the first records released in the United Kingdom by a British band that were labeled as Jazz. It is interesting to note that these records were recorded before the **Original Dixieland Jass Band** first visited England in April of 1919. Pilcer continued to lead bands in England well into the 1930s.

The well-to-do embraced the new craze and the Tatler in December 1918 commented that at Lady Beatty's party at her house had the company of The Yanks Jazz Band "*how they played, what they played – sure it was some music anyway*"

In The Folkstone, Hythe, Sandgate & Cheriton Herald there was a persistent advert throughout the latter months of October 1918 that promised a Jazz Band to accompany the dancing classes organised by Miss Harding of London at various venues covered by the paper but again, it is probably more to do with the dancing than anything else.

WAR ENDED on the 11th November 1918: -

No doubt in a spirit of celebration on the 7th December 1918 the Daily Mirror gave notice that at The Palace Theatre "Sixty three men of the U.S. Navy will present an entertainment which they officially describe at a 'Mush-Up'. They will have their own orchestra and Jazz Band".

On 11th December 1918 another quality paper "The Bystander" made a post-war comment that "*there might already not have been a war! The theatres, the restaurants, the shops, the galleries, the cinemas are crammed with obviously heart-easy, care-free crowds; and every night and every day jazz bands play until, As someone said, even the dead, in their shallow graves, must hear all the dancing feet*". (Not a very thoughtful comment but it is written as it was printed)

On the 11th December 1918 The Tatler reported that: - "*The deck of the U.S. ship New York made a vast ballroom, in which three wonderful wild jazz bands played for the dancing of nearly a thousand guests, who flocked from nearby Scotland to imbibe in the extremely well done U.S. naval hospitality.*"

On the 15th December 1918 The Pall Mall Gazette and The Globe proclaimed: -

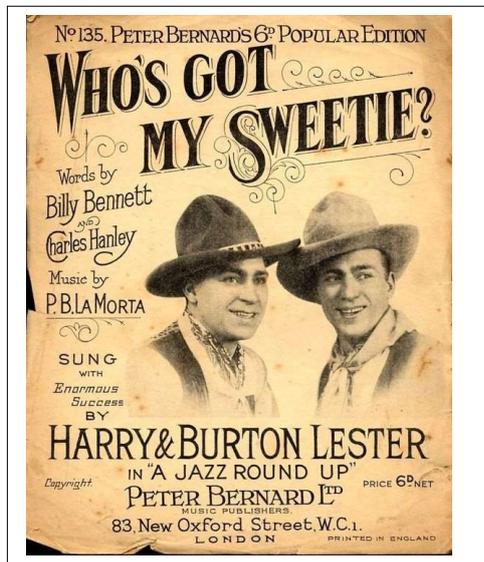
"American troops Joy Parade" the American troops in London will have a joy parade tomorrow, headed by a Jazz Band, with a Buck and Wing drum major. They will march from the American headquarters to Horse Guards Parade, where there will be music from three to four o'clock,"

On the 24th December 1918 it was The Lancashire Evening Post that reported on President Wilson's visit to London for formal visits was followed by a Boxing Night Dance at the U.S. Army Headquarters in London. "*Dance music by the U.S. Navy Jazz Band will no doubt suit the taste of the American Army and Navy officers, who will assemble at Prince's Restaurant with their lady friends.*"

The reviewer of "The Jazz Seven" at Leeds was not impressed when writing up a report in The Stage on the 27th December 1918 neither was the reviewer of the performance of The Frisco Five at The Empire in the Evening Dispatch on the 24th December 1918 even though he gave them credit for being pioneers of jazz in Birmingham.

The Era issued on 1st January 1919 advertised The Frisco Five featuring Harry and Burton Lester “The Jazz Boys” typify the way in which performers adapted to the new craze for jazz as the following extract from the internet indicates: - *By 1908 the brothers were starring in their aerial act at the San Antonio State Fair, by 1910 they touring theatres in Australia and South Africa. They arrived in England in 1915, made their debut at the Victoria Palace on 20 December, and never went home again. The family quartet (including Mrs Lester) called themselves the Four Aerial Lesters in 1916, then combined their musicianship with the trapeze as 'The Band Upside-Down' in 1917, and when the jazz craze boomed they fell back on their own memories of Southern music and became 'The Frisco Five'. Whether the fifth was another brother or an imported musician is unrecorded.*

The era for 8th January contains a favourable review of the Frisco Five describing them “The Jazz and all about it by five who know” who played “ My Jazz Band Down in Dixieland”. The same edition of The Era also carried an advert for John P. Cole and his jazz band, “The Premier South of England Dance Orchestra”



In The Stage published on the 2nd January 1919 it was reported that Albert De Courtney, the director of musical revues, had returned from the U.S.A and so far as jazz is concerned was to “give us the real thing”. At this stage I went on the net to see what I could find about him and was very pleased to find that I was following in the footsteps of Catherine Parsonage who had published “The Evolution of Jazz in Britain 1880-1935”. An extract from the book is available on line (see short extract and link below) and the full edition may be purchased from ABE Books at about £30.

Albert De Courville, a producer and impresario, was a particularly important figure in the development of the American-style revue in London. As a journalist, **De Courville** had travelled widely, and had seen American revue shows in New York (**De Courville**, 1928:52). **De Courville** was employed by Sir Edward Moss to secure the necessary attractions to ‘make the [London] Hippodrome pay’ (**De Courville**, 1928:77), and he immediately began to import foreign acts and then to commission new musical comedies for the theatre (**De Courville**, 1928:92). Eventually, to reduce costs, he began to write and produce his own material, influenced by American ragtime revues, of which he wrote: ‘The new rhythm fascinated me. It seemed to fit into the atmosphere of revue marvellously, as its tempo was suitable for chorus work.’ (**De Courville**, 1928:97). **De Courville** continued to import American performers, and was responsible for booking African-American musicians such as Joe Jordan’s Syncopated Orchestra for the revue *Push and Go*, Louis Mitchell for *Joyland*, (both in 1915) and Dan Kildare and Harvey White for *Hullo America* (1918). After the War, **De Courville** was responsible for importing the Original Dixieland **Jazz** Band for another Hippodrome revue, *Joy Bells*.

<http://tinyurl.com/ydgc6fts>

Black British Jazz: Routes, Ownership and Performance

By Jason Toynbee, Catherine Tackley has clips available on line but is out of print. This book also seems to cover the same ground I have been finding my way around using the British newspaper archive.

<http://tinyurl.com/ydfuaug5>

The Bystander dated 8th January 1919 has a caricature of a coloured musician and suggests that *“Prime Ministers hardly earn in a year what a black band makes in a season”* probably referring to some of the bandleaders engaged by Albert De Courtney mentioned in the insert from the book.

In late January the Hampshire Telegraph reported on a Victory Ball at Portsmouth where there was dancing to the strains of a jazz band.

Once again the sophisticated magazines were somewhat critical of the O.D.J.B. and of the jazz in general and typical remarks were printed in The Sketch where in April 1919 Phyllis Monkman wrote *“It was a relief to the famous jazz band at the Hippodrome is composed of white men and boasts a wonderfully clever solo dancer, whose performance almost rivals that of the trap drummer in popular favour. When this once time lost band, it got lost on the way, had its press rehearsal at the Hippodrome the noise was so tremendous that people thought that part of the roof must have collapsed. But it was only the drum expert*

I enjoyed having a look at the papers and hope to have uncovered a few “facts”, thanks to the British Newspaper Archives.!

Pete Vickers

25th February 2018

And here it is, the result of all this research The Jazz Band at the 1922 Preston Guild



* Note – Further information supplied by Bob Lamb

Quite a few years ago during some jazz research I sought , and found, at the Liverpool Record Office, the report of the arrival in Liverpool of the ODJB. I obtained a xerox copy of the article from the Liverpool Echo of April 1, 1919. Because of the condition of the original newspaper only a readable but poor copy was possible. I doubt if it would scan although today's technology may prove me wrong.

Readers of your pages may enjoy seeing this report so I will show it below just as it appeared mid-column and sandwiched between ' This Week's Entertainment on Merseyside ' and an advert for 'Clarke's Blood Mixture' a Complete and Lasting Cure ' for piles !

THE ORIGINAL "JAZZ"

U. S. BAND LANDS AT LIVERPOOL TO-DAY FOR LONDON

The passengers on the White Star Liner Adriatic, which arrives in Liverpool from New York today, included the members of the original American Jazz Band. Mr George Manners, the manager of the Empire Theatre, met the party on behalf of the Moss Empires Limited. The band is to appear at the London Hippodrome in the great de Courville revue " Joy Belles"

Liverpool Echo April 1 1919

And the rest really was, as they say, history. Whether or not they stayed in Liverpool overnight is not recorded.

Bob Lamb