

# JAZZ LEGENDS

For Love, Not the Money,  
These Saints Go Marching On

BY BARRY SIEGEL

W

hat a night it was. Up on the bandstand, Eddie (Lockjaw) Davis coaxed deep, sweet sounds from his tenor saxophone. In the packed Sunset Hyatt's Silver Screen Room, Jaws' friends swayed and nodded.

There, leaning against the back wall, stood Harry (Sweets) Edison, long one of the trumpet kings of Count Basie's band. Over at the bar, John Collins, a guitar master who once backed Nat King Cole. At a table with his wife, Sylvia, Red Holloway, a tenor sax player who booked the talent and led the house band at the Parisian Room, for years an illustrious jazz location at La Brea and Washington. In a corner, Jerome Richardson, a prominent flutist and alto saxophonist who has been featured as a soloist in the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra.

Jaws clearly was motivated by such a choice gathering. "Oh, he's taking care of business," Edison whispered, tapping out the beat

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on his neighbor's shoulder. Next to Sweets, someone could endure no more. "Don't lose your mind, Eddie," he cried out. "Don't lose your mind." It was past 1 a.m. when Jaws finally insisted that the show was over. Dozens clung to their seats or gathered at the bar.

No one wanted to leave. No wonder. A night with such an audience does not happen very often in Los Angeles. Another night was more typical. Composer and tenor saxophonist Teddy Edwards was blowing with probing, soft emotion at Rosalind's West African Cuisine, a restaurant on La Cienega Boulevard that sometimes features live music. Listening to him with eyes closed felt just fine. Step back, glance around, and the feeling vanished. The room was almost empty. As Edwards played, a couple finished eating and rose, leaving half a dozen in attendance. At the break,

Edwards paused by one table. "Thanks for sticking around," he said with a smile. Jazz masters inhabit Los Angeles in

abundance, but they go largely unnoticed.

Besides those who gathered at the Hyatt, they include sax player Marshall Royal, blues player Eddie (Cleanhead) Vinson, pianist Jimmy Rowles, sax player Plas Johnson. There are more generally well-known names of the jazz world living in Los Angeles—such as Ella Fitzgerald and Benny Carter—but these less-heralded artists have high talent and rich histories. Some are legendary innovators in a genuinely American art form, and others are superb craftsmen, their names credited on countless albums by singers from Billie Holiday to Ella Fitzgerald. Most live modestly, in central-city apartments or small suburban houses. They wait by the telephone, or tire of waiting and call the clubs themselves.

They stare out at half-empty rooms with graceful resignation. They pocket paychecks that seem fat if they top \$100.

The problem comes down to limited audience interest and a dwindling number

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*Veteran jazzmen Jerome Richardson, left, and Red Holloway, above, get few bookings from Los Angeles' dwindling club scene, but are treated like heroes when they tour Europe.*

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of clubs for what has been called *mainstream jazz*. Too many listeners prefer whatever's new—fusion, synthesizers—to the best of what's been around.

But these same musicians can climb aboard airplanes and be transformed. In Europe and Japan, some of them are heroes. Lines snake up the street from clubs there. Fans in cars meet them at the station.

It's an odd sort of existence. The musicians slip different identities on and off. Frustrations are balanced by moments of triumph.

The musicians remember past glory.

For Teddy Edwards, 61, that glory was the Los Angeles he found when he moved here in early 1945, a city where something was going on 24 hours a day. He played with everyone—Benny Carter, Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday. He recorded "Teddy's Ready" and his popular "Blues in Teddy's Flat," and wrote his most famous composition, "Sunset Eyes." Central Avenue was full of clubs. The Downbeat Room at 42nd Street was his favorite, but there were others all

all around town. None exists anymore—the Plantation, the Last Word, Jack's Basket Room, the Jungle Room, Casablanca, Streets of Paris, Suzie Q, the Jade Room, Billy Berg's, the Hangover, the Cobra Room, Rendezvous, the Finale Club. "Oh, music all over," Edwards says. "You leave your gig, go to another one. It's been going downhill ever since Central Avenue."

For Sweets Edison, 70, it was the Basie years. He was the youngest in the band, 21, when he joined in 1937. He'd eventually play with everyone from Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald to Frank Sinatra, record solo albums, and join Duke Ellington and Johnny Hodges on the classic "Back to Back" recording.

He talks about the early years, recalling with warmth hard days, one-nighters, being on the road all year. The places where blacks could play were limited. Sometimes, the band traveled two days before finding a place that would serve them food on the premises. Pay was \$9 a night. Then there was New York—Clark Monroe's Uptown House with Billie Holiday, the Birdcage with Art Tatum. They played until 4 a.m., then moved on to the after-hours joints that truly

were joints. "Oh my, oh my," Edison sighs. "I enjoyed making a few dollars like that, more than those who make millions now. I wouldn't have passed it up for anything. It was . . . indescribable."

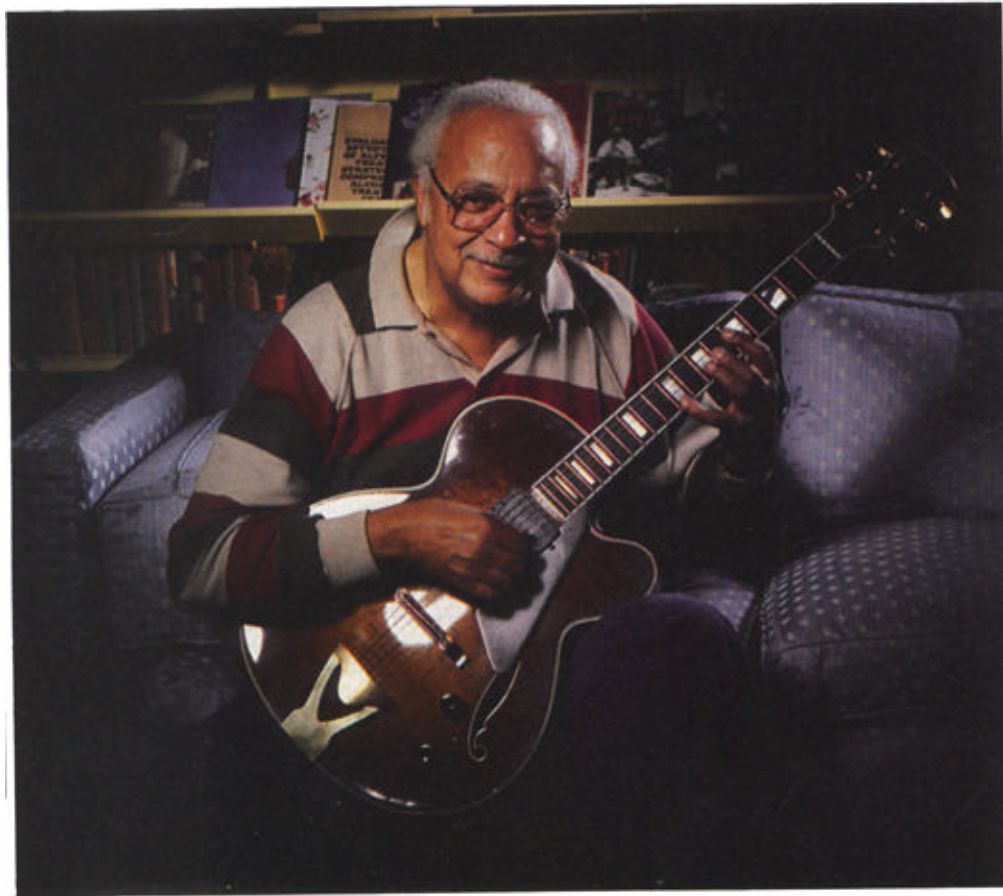
Things are different now.

Red Holloway's day begins early at his small house in Carson. Like the others, he does his own booking, so he's at the telephone by 7:30 a.m. There are people in New York to reach before they leave for lunch. He sends press kits to club managers, waits two weeks, then calls. At 58, he has learned to stick with it. He snared a May booking in Sweden after asking the promoter three times. Last year, he led the band that backed blues singer Joe Williams on the Grammy-award-winning album, "Nothin' but the Blues." When Holloway has two or three months booked, he'll go for a drive, take it easy. Otherwise, he prefers to sit close to the telephone. The look on his face tells his wife, Sylvia, how well the bookings are going. "Red's mood is totally dependent on how many signed contracts he has lined up," she says. "If it's only a few, I hear, 'Get out of my way,' or, 'I can't talk now.' Then when he does get the dates, I'm his sweetheart."

Once, when Jerome Richardson, 65, booked an evening at Carmelo's, a Sherman Oaks nightspot that's now called the Flamingo, he decided to address the failure of most clubs to promote. "They say we don't draw, but how can we when they don't advertise?" he reasoned. So he paid \$200 to send notices to his own 2,000-name mailing list, a not uncommon practice. Carmelo's was paying precisely that amount for the entire group, so Richardson worked for free and ended up in the hole for the evening. He didn't mind, because he wanted to make a point. Some point. He played on a Tuesday night and could not fill the small room.

There was a time when Richardson, an active studio musician who lives alone in a three-bedroom home in Sepulveda, used to drop by such current jazz places as the Money Tree in Toluca Lake or Donte's in North Hollywood to jam with other musicians. No longer. He cannot forget the night in one club when the manager came over to say how great he played. "Then hire me," Richardson said. The manager walked away. "I got wise and realized that the owners were taking advantage of us. They wouldn't pay us. They know you want to play and will do it free." Richardson sighs. "Thing is, I do want to play. I wanted

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*John Collins once backed Nat King Cole and recorded with Frank Sinatra. Now the guitar master spends his days practicing and calling clubs for dates.*

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to play that night at the Hyatt with Jaws. But I have to recognize this is a business."

Teddy Edwards knows he has to keep moving. Two nights in Oakland, one night in Los Angeles at the Nucleus Nuance on Melrose, two weeks in San Francisco, a week in Scottsdale. The telephone has kept ringing for 50 years and hasn't stopped yet, he observes with pride and wonder. Home, when he's there, is a small, unadorned apartment over a garage in the mid-Wilshire District. Taped to the wall are advertising circulars from his latest gigs, a brief review, a certificate from the University of New Jersey Jazz Oral History Project, another from Rutgers, a third signifying his mention in *Playboy's All-Star Jazz Poll*. He watches a good deal of TV, cooks, washes clothes, swings his golf clubs. He plays at parties and weddings— "just enough to keep busy, and then I get out of town."

He also composes and orchestrates on a weathered upright piano. One Saturday afternoon, he came home to find a message from his lady friend on his answering machine. Her voice seemed to him so beautiful that he sat down and composed a piece that would capture the essence of her sound. "Would you like to hear it?" he asks, heading toward the piano. "Her name is Regina. Can you hear that in the music?" He finishes and stands up, laughing. "Whee! I like that. I played it for her and blew her mind."

The days with Nat Cole bought John Collins, 70, a spacious and comfortable duplex in the mid-Wilshire District. Later, he recorded with Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Frank Sinatra. For six years he and Bobby Troup worked Whittinghill's on Ventura Boulevard, a jazz location, long since converted into a chain restaurant. These days, Collins rises each morning and walks the exercise course at Rancho Park. Then he practices for at least three hours. There was a time when he had to concentrate on technique, on how to make the sound he wanted. Now, finally, that flows easily and he can focus entirely on theme. But there are few places for him to play. He calls the clubs anyway, looking for open dates.

One evening, he and Edison sat in the audience as Dizzy Gillespie, with Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff,

played in concert at UCLA's Royce Hall. Mitchell, on piano, had Collins rising out of his seat. Ruff picked up the French horn and Collins marveled. Then, noise drew Collins' attention from the stage to the audience. People were getting up and leaving—leaving in the middle of the concert. Whole groups.

"I don't know why," Collins said. "Maybe they expected a big band or a singer. They didn't know what they were hearing; they weren't accustomed to it, I guess. I was appalled. I couldn't believe it. There were three giants on stage, three giants. Not just a few were leaving, but lots. They got up and walked out on three giants."

Sweets Edison is among the most celebrated of the local jazz musicians. He lives alone in a small but comfortable one-bedroom apartment near MacArthur Park. He plays golf as often as he can, with pals such as Teddy Edwards. He worked the Parisian Room until it closed in the early 1980s. Carmelo's changed owners and went more for singers. The Baked Potato, where he once packed them in every Sunday night, switched to an emphasis on fusion. Maybe he'll play the Hyatt, he thinks. Not for the money, which barely pays for his sidemen. "I'd play at Carmelo's just to see my friends, to be there, be myself. I couldn't wait to get there."

All in all, though, Edison feels thankful. He has journeyed far from the days in his hometown of Columbus, Ohio, when he had to stand outside the Valley Dale Ballroom, listening to the greats who traveled through town—Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong. Blacks could play there, but not go inside to listen.

Oct. 22, 1982, was Harry (Sweets) Edison Day in Columbus. The ceremonies, as it happened, were held in the Valley Dale Ballroom. Speaking to the gathering, Edison tactfully pointed out the irony. Clearly, the moment was treasured: On the walls of his apartment, Edison reveals little of his professional history—only one small photo of Sinatra, signed: "For my man Sweets—Hollar Babe!" and a medalion signifying he was an Ellington Fellow at Yale in 1972. But one whole side of the room is covered with citations from that day in Columbus.

"A pool, a sauna, for \$495 a month—it's nice living in this apartment building," he says, looking

about his living room. "I'm not a millionaire, but how much better does a millionaire live?"

He's disturbed by an exchange he heard recently on television. "I was watching this quiz show. They asked the girl who wrote 'Honeysuckle Rose.' She could have won the big prize if she knew. Know what she said? 'Stevie Wonder.' Stevie Wonder! Why, Fats Waller was playing before Stevie Wonder was born." Edison shakes his head, but can't let it go just yet. "Stevie Wonder! Imagine! She said 'Stevie Wonder.'"

And so, Europe beckons.

The day long ago when Collins first pulled into France on a train, come to play at a now-forgotten small town, fans met him at the station. The man who took him home for dinner had all his records.

Holloway found that Europeans knew more about him than he did himself. They came up with questions about an album cut 30 years before, one that he could not even remember.

When Richardson first played in

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**'I anticipate very much the trips to Europe,' Sweets Edison says. 'I tried to be a pioneer, to be a perfectionist, and they know it. They know your sound. That's what we all wanted, to be individuals musically'**

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Sweden, little children on the streets sang his songs.

Edwards has traveled through England, Germany, Denmark, Sweden. In the Netherlands, he played with the Metropole Orchestra: "They have 9-to-5 jobs, salaries paid by the government. Can you imagine that?" But one of his best memories is of a day spent in a small Dutch town near the German border. When he walked into an elementary school auditorium there, full of 8- and 9-year-olds, they all stood up, clapping, hands over their heads, crying out, "Teddy, Teddy!" Later, back in their classrooms, they wrote him love notes and drawings about the concert. "They knew more

about me than kids here on the next block."

Edison, particularly, has found Europe to be a second home. He plays two weeks early each year at the Meridian Hotel in Paris, which sends him a round-trip, business-class airplane ticket. The free ticket enables him to book other dates in Europe. He writes to club managers and festival promoters, filling out a monthslong schedule. Over the years he has played Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, even Japan.

"I anticipate very much the trips to

place at the right time. You could pick out Billie from 10,000 singers. Same with Ella. In Europe, they see that."

But moving to Europe wouldn't do any good. Wherever musicians take up residence, they have discovered, they become thought of as the local talent and, after time, are taken for granted. So they must stay in motion. They don't mind that, though they'd rather avoid the wearying one-nighters. Red Holloway is gone two or three weeks each month, five or six months a year. "We have to be on the road, but we enjoy it. Things would

zerland. This month, Edison played in Columbus and visited his mother. In coming weeks, he'll play in New York, Sweden, Denmark and Paris.

When Edison showed up for a lunch date one day recently, he was anything but subdued. In fact, he was resplendently adorned in a deep-purple silk crepe de Chine sport shirt; gray-flannel, double-pleated trousers; purple, Italian lace-up shoes to match his shirt; assorted gold rings, a gold Libra necklace studded with diamonds, and a black-faced watch with floating diamonds. Within minutes, the waitress was considerably in-



*When tenor sax player and composer Teddy Edwards moved to Los Angeles in 1945, jazz was a 24-hour-a-day scene.*

Europe," Edison says. "I know I will be appreciated. They know you; they've listened to your old albums. They have more fun than you do. It makes me feel good; it's gratifying. I tried to be a pioneer, to be a perfectionist, and they know it. They know your sound. That's what we all wanted, to be individuals musically. Basie played the right note at the right

get too boring otherwise," he says.

Most of these masters already have European tours booked for this year. Holloway will be heard in the Netherlands, Switzerland and England. Richardson—working the transcontinental telephone lines for two hours most nights—has lined up a three-month tour of Brussels, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Germany and Swit-

trigued by him. Edison credited age and wisdom.

"I've been blessed because I've never been out of work, and I've used my talent the best I could," he said. "The type of musician today making all the big money—well, he can't be everywhere. I'll play where he isn't. The way I feel, someone always is going to hire Sweets." □