

MASONIC MUSICIANS

THE BIG BAND ERA

Music, one of the seven liberal arts and sciences is everywhere and we would certainly be lost without it. We all have our choices in the music we like best, be it Classical - Pop - Country - Jazz - Sweet or Swing.

Musical Masons are many and varied. Just to name a few: Beethoven, Mozart, Lauritz Melchior, John Philip Sousa, Eddy Arnold, Roy Acuff, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Burl Ives, Al Jolson, Roy Clark, Hank Thompson. Some of the Big Band Masonic Musicians were Clyde McCoy, Vincent Lopez, Jan Garber, Tommy Tucker, Paul Specht and Russ Morgan.

Paul Specht was the self Proclaimed Father of the Big Band Era which many music fans regard as the years between 1935 and 1945 but in reality started many years before. The famous big band leaders such as Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, Russ Morgan and many others were sidemen in these early bands and learned the concept of arrangements, musical discipline and the business of fronting a big band.

Paul was born in 1895 in Sinking Spring, Pennsylvania near the city of Reading. His father was a well-known organist and musical instructor in the community. Paul learned to play the violin by the age of six and later the coronet. He studied violin, piano, harmony and theory at Perkiomen Seminary. The next step in his musical education was at Combs Conservatory of Music in Philadelphia from 1911 through 1913 financing it by playing with small classical groups. While at Combs he organized his first band. Paul Specht was a member of Isaac Heister Lodge #660 in West Reading, Penna. receiving his E. A. Degree on December 20, 1916, Fellowcraft on February 24, 1917 and Master Mason Degree on March 31, 1917.

Specht's band was the first to broadcast in September, 1920. He was also the first to feature "band within a band", which became popular a few years later by Benny Goodman's Quartet, Tommy Dorsey's Clambake Seven, and Artie Shaw's Gramercy Five

Paul took credit for making many of the musicians of the day famous by giving them an opportunity to play in his band although he was known to stretch the truth a bit.

Brother Specht passed away on April 11, 1954 in New York City.

Russ Morgan was a gifted trombonist when he joined the Specht organization in 1922 with Specht crediting himself for taking Russ Morgan out of Penna. Nanticake coalmines.

Morgan's band reached its peak in 1936 and 1937 but didn't reach national popularity until after W.W.II. Russ played for three years at the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley, CA. with many road trips interspersed. During this period his radio show "Music in the Morgan Manner" made him a household name and lasted longer than most of the other big bands of the era. In 1955 his sons Jack and David joined the band playing the trombone and guitar. Jack took over the band after his Father's death in 1969. Jack still fronts the band today.

Brother Morgan received his degrees in Wolverine Lodge #484 in Detroit, Michigan being raised on March 24, 1927. He remained a lifelong member.

Tommy Tucker's birth name was Gerald Duppler but later had legally adopted the name by which he became famous. Brother Tucker was a member of Star of the West Lodge #33 at Minot, N.D. being entered on May 24, 1927, crafted in Henry A. Palmer Lodge #30 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on March 12, 1929, taking three years to become a Master Mason due to his constant traveling.

In the mid thirties the words "It's Tommy Tucker Time" followed by six ticks of a clock was the signal that the airways were about to be filled with music by the trombonist and his orchestra. Mostly his music was the slow ballad type but at other times it was strong and aggressive, but always tasteful.

Brother Tucker's orchestra was featured on many radio shows of the late 1930's including "The Lucky Strike Show", "The George Jessel Radio Show", "The Tums Radio Show" and "The Hit Parade". During W.W. II Tommy and his band made sixty appearances as The Spotlight Band broadcasting from military installations. In the mid 1940's he also had his own radio show called "Sing For Your Supper with Tommy Tucker". Over the years he featured many vocalists to sing with the band and among the most successful in later years was Eydie Gorme.

Tommy retired from the band business in the early 1950's and turned to education, teaching English at Asbury Park, NJ high school. In 1959 he became the head of the music department of Monmouth College in NJ where he remained for the next 25 years. He and his wife Virginia then retired to Osprey, FL. to enjoy a life of leisure. Brother Tommy Tucker passed away on July 11, 1989.

Clyde "Sugar Blues" McCoy was born December 29, 1903 in Ashland, KY. into one side of the Famous Hatfield-McCoy feud. Clyde's father was a railroad detective working for the Chesapeake & Ohio in Ashland and later transferred to Portsmouth, Ohio when Clyde was still in his teens. It was at this time he began to play and master the trumpet, playing on the riverboats out of Cincinnati.

In 1920 he assembled his first orchestra when he learned Whittle Spring Hotel had a two week booking for a band. The band was so good the two-week stay was extended into eight weeks. After working the East Coast for about five years the band moved to the West Coast and continued their success by improving all the time.

The band continued to travel and build their reputation and earning a major booking in 1930 at the new Drake Hotel in Chicago. It was at this time Clyde began toying around with a tune called "The Sugar Blues". To get the sound and the effect he wanted, he developed and patented a mute, which produced a sort of talking trumpet, which became his trademark.

Clyde originated the "Battle of the Bands" idea when by a booking error, the McCoy orchestra and the Don Bestor orchestra were to appear at an Indianapolis theater at the same time. The bands would alternate playing. The winner was determined by an applause meter. The idea was adopted by many bands from that time on. McCoy admitted later that it was always rigged to end in a tie.

George Simon a musical critic during the big band era gave Clyde bad reviews in Downbeat magazine because of his Dixieland Style but later recanted when he learned McCoy was one of the owners of the publication.

Little is known of Clyde's personal life due to his modesty. The Bennett Sisters, a well-known vocal trio of the day, joined the band in 1937. He was smitten by Maxine Bennett and the two were married on January 20, 1945.

One night in 1942 at the Peabody Skyway where he was playing, he was introduced to a table of U.S. Navy Brass who invited him to enlist. He did so and took the entire orchestra into the service with him.

After the war the band took up where they left off until 1955. The Big Band Era was on the wane so Clyde downsized and kept on going. Maxine McCoy states that Clyde never really retired. When they wanted a vacation he simply booked the group into Vegas, Lake Tahoe or some other plush location.

Clyde and his "wah" "wah" trumpet made their final appearance in 1985 at Sarasota, FL. He was 81 years old.

Brother McCoy was entered in Daylight Lodge #780 in Louisville, KY on January 9, 1926, crafted May 8, 1926 and raised July 26, 1926. He was a 50 year member when he was inducted in Kosair Temple in 1976.

Brother Clyde McCoy passed to the Celestial Lodge on June 11, 1990.

Presented by Celebrant Kenneth E. Spiess Sr.

May 27, 1999

