

# Traditional Jazz Club has an ear for greats

By ALLAN TURNER  
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Louis Armstrong, King Oliver and Jelly Roll Morton are dead, but appreciation for their music lives on in the 144-member Austin Traditional Jazz Club.

Once every two months, the group congregates at the Dawson Road Elks Club to hear the best of area jazz bands and to exchange insiders' knowledge on the art form.

"Our club was founded by the people who sat at a long table at the Capitol Oyster Co.," recalled the group's president, Eugene Wisdom. "We were all jazz fans — we came to the restaurant almost every Sunday night to hear the John Roberts Jazz Band — and we finally asked ourselves why we didn't form a club."

THAT DECISION was made about a year ago.

Members of the Austin group decided early on that they were more interested in bringing live entertainment to Austin than sitting around discussing their collections of rare jazz 78s. But just how to go about securing a hall led to difficulties for the fledgling group.

At first, jazz concerts were held in a theater on East Sixth Street. But, admitted Wisdom, "our membership is pretty conservative and a lot of people didn't want to go down Sixth Street." The club was also short on money, Wisdom indicated, and the cost of the downtown theater was a financial drain.

Ultimately, the group settled into the Elks Lodge at 700 Dawson Road — a comfortable home for the club, but an unlikely setting in which to hear a music born in the bordellos and dives like Funky Butt Hall in turn-of-the-century New Orleans.

The Austin group isn't unique in its appreciation of traditional jazz. Jazz fans estimate clubs exist in every state, some of which boast more than one. The larger clubs sponsor festivals like the Dixie Land Jubilee held each Memorial Day weekend in Sacramento, Calif.

THE AUSTIN club's primary ac-

tivity is the semimonthly concert. (An annual \$5 fee entitles members to substantial discounts on concert tickets.) But, Wisdom said, in the future a jazz archive may be established. "It may just start with a cardboard box," he said, "but we have a lot of material — tapes and records — that should be preserved."

"Just about everybody in our group at the oyster bar was a jazz fan," Wisdom said. "It just took the restaurant to bring us together."

Wisdom himself, an instructor of actuarial science at the University of Texas, claims to be a frustrated musician. "I played clarinet in my high school and college band," he said.

"I can read chords, I can understand the mathematics of music — anything that's put on paper," he added, "but I've always been fascinated with jazzmen, with how anyone could be so gifted in terms of improvising. It might take the great composers weeks to work out a melody, but the jazzmen could put it together in seconds. It sounded right and it was right — later analysis showed that."

Enshrined in the club's pantheon of jazz gods are Buddy Bolden, clarinetist Johnny Dodds, Kid Ory and, of course, Armstrong. "Armstrong was so inventive," Wisdom said. "Anyone who says music is just mathematical isn't allowing for the creativity of the artist."

BUT THE CLUB'S interest extends to later jazzmen such as Turk Murphy and Lu Watters. "They held a unique role in reviving the music of the earlier jazz players," Wisdom said.

*The club's next meeting is at 8 p.m. today at the Elks Club. John Roberts Jazz Band plays 8-11 p.m., followed by a 1-hour jam session. Club dues are \$5.50 per year; admission tonight is \$2.50 for students and members, \$4 for non-members. Beer, wine, highballs and soft drinks for sale. Call Wisdom at 453-7415 for additional information*

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